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<td>The sociological club night we found in Berlin</td>
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<td>Sociology and the Global Economic Crisis</td>
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<td>How will sociology cope with digital data? An interview with David Beer</td>
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<td>A collection of Digital Sociology CfPs</td>
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<td>Registration now open: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life</td>
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<td>2015-09-21 08:00</td>
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<td>Learning and Playing Political Economy</td>
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<td>2015-09-28 19:31</td>
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Unfolding the origami of collective existence using digital data (2016-01-11 08:00)

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Mini-conference on "Moral Economies of the Digital" (2016-01-13 08:00)

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1. 2010

1.1 June

Welcome to the Sociological Imagination (2010-06-01 16:46)

This magazine stands as a consciously tentative and perhaps fleeting first step towards a much larger and longer term aim. A vague idea became a concrete plan as a result of a BSA funded day school ([1]The Politics of Sociology) which took place at the University of Warwick in January 2010. What struck me most about that highly stimulating day was the near tangible sense of energy and enthusiasm which a diverse range of attendees brought to the event. It was a rare occasion when usually private causes became the subject of public discussion and, furthermore, the day’s discussion was framed by the idea of negotiating between the two. It hinted at the enormous critical force and transformative energy which the constraints of academia too often leaves inchoate and unarticulated. The Sociological Imagination represents a cautious attempt to build on this day school and offer an ongoing forum within which the ethical and political commitments underlying much sociology can be explicitly and passionately linked to the actual practice of social research itself.

Pierre Bourdieu (2003) argued that the energy and expertise of social science could be rescued from its self-imposed confinement in the ivory tower of academia if the anachronistic opposition of scholarship and commitment (a 'scientifically unimpeachable form of escapism') was left behind. Under such conditions social science could oppose the 'reactionary think tanks, which support and broadcast the views of experts appointed by the powerful' with the research of critical networks which bring together individual social scientists into a 'collective intellectual' capable of establishing and pursuing its own aims and agendas. Bourdieu offered a potent vision of the emancipatory potential of a politically liberated social science:

"It must work to produce and disseminate instruments of defence against symbolic domination that relies increasingly on the authority of science (real or faked). Buttressed by the specific competency and authority of the collective thus formed, it can submit dominant discourse to a merciless logical critique aimed not only at its lexicon ('globalization', 'flexibility', 'employability' etc) but also at its mode of reasoning and in particular at the use of metaphors (e.g. the anthropomorphization of the market). It can furthermore subject this discourse to a sociological critique aimed at uncovering the social determinants that bear on the producers of dominant discourse (starting with journalists, especially economic journalists) and on their products. Lastly, it can counter the pseudo scientific authority of authorized experts (chief among them economic experts and advisors) with a genuinely scientific critique of the hidden assumptions and often faulty reasoning that underpin their pronouncements [...]"

It can organize or orchestrate joint research on novel forms of political action, on new manners of mobilizing and of making mobilized people work together, on new ways of elaborating projects and bringing them to fruition together. It can play the role of midwife by assisting the dynamics of working groups in their effort to express, and thereby discover, what they are and what they could or should be, and by helping with the reappropriation and accumulation of the immense social stock of knowledge on the social world with which the social world is pregnant."

Particularly when it comes to the positive functions which Bordieu describes, it’s difficult to see a path from here to there and even more difficult not to feel naive in hoping for such a progression. Nonetheless this is what the Sociological Imagination hopes to do through functioning as an open forum within which graduate students, early career researchers and established academics can establish networks, coordinate activity and collectively negotiate the politics of sociology. Please [2]make contact if you would like to get involved.
This magazine stands as a consciously tentative and perhaps fleeting first step towards a much larger and longer term aim. A vague idea became a concrete plan as a result of a BSA funded day school ([1]The Politics of Sociology) which took place at the University of Warwick in January 2010.

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Kate Purcell (2010-06-12 01:32:09)
Please add me to the mailing list. I was completely unaware of this group and would have loved to attend the meeting (-obviously I don’t read Network closely enough, which is kind of ironic given that I used to edit it many, many years ago. Partick Ainley put me onto you. I am actually at Warwick, a Professor in the IER.

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Whose Order is it Anyway?: Imageries-cum-Rhetoric of (Anti)Globalization (2010-06-01 17:08)

Politics as a mediating act in society, notwithstanding its various definitions and descriptions, is not only a multidimensional activity; it is multivocal too. Thus, relativism lies at the core of the 'political'. It is because politics comes to life when we interact with one another and confront others’ ideas, perspectives, opinions and values on issues of common concern.

Communication being a social process of meaning generation carved out of such interactions, multivocality among numerous interlocutors is absolutely indispensable in the process. Politics with its simultaneous thrust on control, negotiation and bargaining, has communication as its source, content and on occasions, even as goal. Yet, in the contemporary era, amidst much hype about the Information Age and Communication Revolution, the great paradox lies in the contraction of the communicative space insofar as politics is concerned. The ‘subalterns’ (a la Gayatri Spivak) can speak, the members of the ‘political society’ (a la Partha Chatterjee) do act and the ‘counterpublic’ (a la Nancy Fraser et al) do communicate, as various segments of the ordinary people— marginalized and excluded. However, the dominant hegemonic forces, with leverage over the dominant modes of communication, tend to ensure that the marginal and the excluded and their struggle for articulation remain both invisible and inaudible. This brings us to the complex and sensitive issue of the communicative dimensions of alternative politics.

The main contention of this essay rests on two contending and contrasting concepts— ‘Global Village’ and ‘Another World’. The shrill rhetoric of Global Village, sponsored by the dominant political economic forces having overwhelming control over the distribution of wealth and power in the world, seeks to steamroll and marginalize the different and dissenting voices while the cry for ‘Another World’ privileges multiple and differentiating voices. The latter, notwithstanding the hurdles that we would mention in the ensuing discussion, is of much importance because it takes us away from the pessimism which arises, as in the case of Rajni Kothari, out of the idea that there is an "erosion of alternatives at different thresholds of human enterprise".

The problematic idea of the Global Village— originally conceptualized in the early 1960s by Marshall McLuhan, the maverick sociologist, in The Gutenburg Galaxy, and extended beyond its original attributes by the shakers and movers of the so-called New World Order, is not only found on a global scale among the powers that be— the political class and the bureaucracy. Paradoxically, it is also much prevalent among a large section of social science scholars, including, most ironically, among those specializing in (Political)Communication Studies. In their search for the disciplinary status and in seeking to emulate the more rigorous social science disciplines the scholars of
Communication Studies have unleashed a process of ‘disciplining’ which in turn has steadily divested them of the ability to reveal the complexities of ‘alternative’ communicative forms, symbols and relations— marked by as varying issues as human capacities, practices, styles, strategies, languages, discourses and images.

The ancillary contention of this essay is that the search for the transformatory axes in politics cannot be realized by any ready-made ‘alternative’ as it can only happen through painstaking nurturing of different and diffused non-dominant/ non-mainstream communication channels which question and contest the dominant order of things. Harold Lasswell, though by no means a scholar of alternatives, in a classic essay on “The Structure and Function of Communication in Society” (1948), had provided a pioneering formulation of political communication by advancing a set of apparently simple but extremely potent questions: “Who said what when and how?”. Keeping in mind that ‘alternative’ is a contested and somewhat slippery term, when we embark on the visualization of politics beyond the dominant- mainstream forms we can extend the Lasswellian formulation to pose the moot question: whose order is it any way?. In their long and relentless efforts to theorize politics the social scientists in general have been excessively long the Positivist-Empiricist mode and the Modernization Imperative in which the contesting modes are regarded as illegitimate or redundant. In this mode political communication was mainly understood in terms of voting behaviour and campaign styles. The communicative foundation that supported such exercise was based on a linear model of information diffusion— often described as the Bullet Theory— by which the people are supposed to be the passive target-cum-recipients of the messages sent by the political actors. In this scheme the subtler forms of "manufacturing consent” were not addressed. The later postmodern influence, notwithstanding its tirade against the centralization of power and the Bullet theory, has not brought a radical change in the prevailing scenario because in its denial of the grand narrative it does not address the mechanics of any macro order.

In the days of the inequitable globalization we increasingly hear the announcement of the “death of utopia" and the "end of history", which emerges not only from the act of colonization of the political and economic institutions but also of the aesthetic and expressive faculties as well (Sinha, 2010). The latter breeds “ monoculture of the mind”. The Global Village project not only effects material exclusion of the vast majority of people it also leads to symbolic exclusion which is effected through the denial of the “power of renaming”. The very idea of the Global Village is much hyped because it perfectly serves the interests of the globally dominant political forces to hide the tremendous disparities and discriminations. Who says that discriminations do not exist in village?

It necessarily follows that any meaningful and effective exploration of the possible and plausible alternatives to the fast-paced construction of the Global Village needs a simultaneous focus on the role of communication both as a facilitator of status quo and as a means of change. As a power-laden process of meaning generation and meaning circulation, through which the ‘reality’ is constantly produced, maintained, transferred and transformed, the process of communication, on the one hand, facilitates production and reinforcement of the dominant order; on the other hand, it also gives birth to and intensifies what we would prefer to call the zones of exclusion— both material and symbolic— of the dominant scenario to provide clues to possible routes of transformation.

In this backdrop the need of the hour is to be aware of the dangers of the ‘ritual’ communication— which enforces ‘voluntary’ submission to ‘appropriately’ patterned behaviour— by exploring ways and means to critique and subvert the high-pitched process of mainstreaming. But it has to be done by being in the mainstream and not by disengaging from the prevalent order or by engaging in a head-on-collision wit it. Here we have in mind the "De-linking” thesis suggested by Samir Amin and the “cultural dissociation” thesis advocated by Cees Hamelink— both of whom had once advocated detachment respectively from the prevalent international economic order and international communication order but later revised their stance to explore alternatives from within the prevailing order itself( Amin,2003; Hamelink, 1994). Their earlier theses, so to say, were radical and attractive but impractical. If the successive protest movements against the current show of globalization raise the possibility of a "new dawn" in the struggle for alternatives they remain overwhelmingly struggles not only by communication but in communication. If communication is the infrastructural backbone of the discriminatory mainstream politics it would remain so for progressing towards any viable alternative global order as well. The fundamental distinction between the two cases
would be that in the mainstream form— as illustrated by the idea of Global Village— a singular kind of communication 'order' is being promoted, but the search for alternative politics should rely on diverse orders which question the mainstream politics.

Then again, the task ahead is not easy. Thus, Tejaswini Niranjana aptly observes: "Within the new globalization, the paths to the first world will be more clearly defined than ever, rendered easier to traverse. Other locations on the map will appear all the more blurred, all the more difficult to reach." [Italics mine]. Then again, as we have hinted earlier, the issue of alternative is not a simple one and any attempt to address this issue should avoid simplistic and facile generalizations. At the core of this issue lies the question of alterity of alternatives. In most studies on alternative modes, in the zeal to produce one, the alterity question is not addressed adequately, if at all, with the result that in these studies there is some kind of taken-for-grantedness about the specific kind of alternative being advocated.

If alterity connotes difference from particular others, did the alternatives that are being regarded as so, have sufficient alterity in the sense of having completely different constitutive rationale and order? Or are they basically trying to advocate a supposedly alternative order on the basis of the same constitutive logic, say of development? If, for instance, the erstwhile socialist countries wanted to constitute an "alternative social order" by following the capitalism-friendly logic of industrialism and technologism, could that ever ensure the alterity of the much-publicized alternative? A detailed discussion of this predicament of the received socialist paradigm is beyond the scope of this note but we need to refer to it as an important case to substantiate the point.

To reiterate, the translation of the imaginary of Another World to reality is to be fraught with caution. Let us take just two instances while there are many more to substantiate the point. First, the case of the World Social Forum (WSF). At the ground level this is quite evident in the successive meets of the WSF numerous voices, often in conflict and contention with each other, came under one rubric to usher in dialogue on "Another World is Possible". The defining feature of the WSF was aptly described by Samir Amin, one of its prime exponents, in this manner: "We have to look at what is new in a different way". With the participation of the trade unions, peasant organizations, women's organizations, youth organizations, indigenous people's organizations, non-government organizations, voluntary agencies and so forth— all coming together without any compulsive desire for codification of the discourses on dissent— the WSF served as a platform for the articulation of a breathtaking range of views. Yet, in course of time the WSF has been subject to criticism that it has been co-opted by the mainstream forces and in the process it has been blunted. The criticism includes the point that a number of participants in the WSF were there to raise the bogey of 'alternative' to get funding.

In the academic arena there is the need to accord greater thrust towards viewing ordinary people as potentially 'active actors', rather than passive, obliging masses. No less important, the stress should also be on the tentative and 'unfolding' nature of explanations as distinct from 'complete' and instantaneous ones. Departing from the third world social scientists' frustration, caused by the fall of the erstwhile 'model' socialist states and the decline in the Non-Aligned movement, which as we have mentioned earlier, would lead even Rajni Kothari, a pioneering critique of the mainstream order, to lament the 'world without alternatives' there is a gradual realization that where there is dominance, there is resistance. The old adage incidentally may well be the mantra of alternative politics for nor just challenging but reshaping the existing world, privileging the celebration of human agency and creativity— with the amplification of the voice of the marginal as the point of departure.

Sources:
Amin, Samir, "For Struggles, Global and National: Interview with Samir Amin", Frontline, 31 January, 2003..


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<td>An understanding of constitutive networks could be the link between the deconstruction of globalization and the construction of a political alternative. See for example Y. Rumpala, &quot;Knowledge and praxis of networks as a political project&quot;, Twenty-First Century Society, Volume 4, Issue 3, November 2009.</td>
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Lost Generation? Paying more for less (2010-06-01 17:24)

With customers queuing to get into HE, it would be irrational from a business point of view for government not to raise fees as high as it can. It is therefore almost inevitable that – urged on by the Russell Group – the recommendations of the Browne review will be accepted and fees raised for 2011 entry variably by course and institution to create a free market in undergraduate HE to match that already existing for postgraduates and overseas students. This is notwithstanding the previous anti-fees policy of the Lib Dems for whom so many students apparently voted.

What concerns government is how much the market will bear – between £5,000 and £7,000 per annum by most current estimates, though with the Magic Five (Oxbridge, Imperial, UCL and LSE) able to go over £20,000 for nearly all their courses. Oxford has been saying for many years it needs this much just to cover its annual undergraduate teaching costs and it is still cheaper than the private school fees that the parents of approximately half its entrants have paid previously.

Despite promises of bursaries and scholarships, such fees will take higher level education beyond the aspirations of most school leavers who are unwilling to shoulder the burden of this additional debt. As the school leaving age rises to 18 in 2015, government clearly expects them to settle for cut-price, second-rate provision in local former-polytechnics, or to enter apprenticeships without jobs in FE colleges as these predictably replay 1980s Training Without Jobs (Finn 1987).

Meanwhile, outside the university bubble

Youth unemployment for 16-24 year olds is around one million with one in four out of work for a year or more and one in three 16 year-old school leavers unemployed. Total unemployment is however only just over two and a half million, even as measured by the Labour Force Survey that gives a higher figure than the Claimant Count which government usually quotes. Although at 8 %, this is the highest since 1994, it is moderated by the numbers of people who are working part-time as well as by the increasing numbers becoming students. The Office of National Statistics confirms this: of the 8.1 million it lists as ‘economically inactive’, 2.3 million and rising fit this category.

What seems to happening is that many people – including many students – are working part-time rather than signing on. This includes those volunteering and on unpaid internships and placements. Students who have worked their way through sixth-form, college and university continue in this part-time pattern while racking up increasing debt for further training and other courses, including the large numbers who now go on to postgraduate level.

This is consolidating a new pattern in employment with five types of ‘graduate jobs’ described by Elias and Purcell in 2004, starting with ‘traditional graduate jobs’ that include medicine, higher education and science (12 %), alongside ‘modern graduate jobs’, eg. in management and IT (13 %), plus ‘new graduate jobs’, eg. marketing and sales (16 %). What Elias and Purcell call ‘niche graduate jobs’, eg. in leisure and nursing, are also holding up at 21
% of graduate destinations. However, it is 'non-graduate jobs' that are the largest occupation for 38 %, even three years after graduation. With so many in this last category, a further tranche of jobs – in parts of retailing for instance – may become open only to degree holders.

This has a domino effect on those who would previously have taken these jobs. As graduates take A-level jobs, those with A-levels take GCSE-level jobs and the unqualified have nowhere to go. Yet, while the relative advantages of being a graduate might hold up in a ‘labour queue’ for employment, the ratio between graduate earnings and graduate costs will fall as the balance between well-paid permanent employment and casualised ‘Mcjobs’ continues to tilt, making the undergraduate cake no longer worth cost of the fee candle.

**Overschooled but undereducated to be overqualified and underemployed**

No one would seriously claim that the rush of applicants for UK university and college places represents a new found enthusiasm amongst the nation's youth for higher learning. Nor that the record levels of qualification of the applicants represents a new accumulation of knowledge or wisdom. Indeed, grade inflation – as indicated by the ‘labour queue’ described above - is recognised by all but government, university Vice Chancellors and the heads of exam boards. A generation of students and teachers at school, college and university are certainly studying harder, but not necessarily learning more.

For many students and their teachers, education is an alienating and instrumental affair. Students learn what they have to, when they have to and in many cases by whatever means they have to. The perception of this situation is not lost upon them, as a final year Education Studies student at the University of Greenwich summarised in 2004:

‘Students learn to connect their self esteem and what they may achieve in later life to their exam results... Over-assessment has made subject knowledge and understanding a thing of the past as students are put through a routine year after year, practising what exactly to write and where in preparation for exams’.

This cramming is endemic: the traditionally English system of selectivity in education now goes on much longer, lasting from primary to postgraduate school, with students in 'elite' universities churning out essays just to keep ahead of the competition.

New Labour’s widening participation policy with its target of 50 % of 18-30 year olds in some sort of HE was nearly met for women at least. It proved popular with parents who saw their children being given ‘chances’ they did not have. Yet, as an authoritative summary of the results of this initiative declares, ‘These policies have not led to fair or equal access to equal types of higher education or outcomes in the labour market’ (David 2009, 4–5 with original emphasis). Instead, as repeated in conclusion with the same emphasis, ‘systemic and systematic forms of inequality for individuals and institutions across subjects and levels of education have increased since 2000’ (150). Indeed, the entrenched tertiary tripartism between Russell, Campus and New universities reflects exactly the polarising divisions in society, so that the phase of widening participation now drawing to a close may only have served to soften up the
system for a free-market in fees differentiated by subject and institution.

**What is really going on**

Our book, *Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education*, reviews the relationship between young people, the education system and the occupational structure. We argue that the post-war class pyramid has been recast in the context of persistent unemployment. The new technology and the growth of services has enabled automation and outsourcing while concomitantly, new management techniques have reduced many of the established 'professions' – like teaching – towards the condition of waged labour.

Education to all levels has been complicit in both ‘upgrading’ occupations in expanded services, sales, middle-management and administration and ‘degrading’ largely part-time and low-paid jobs at the base of the occupational structure with no or largely worthless vocational qualifications.

Rather than resembling the ‘diamond’ that would result from continued absolute social mobility pulling more into the middle, the class structure has gone pear-shaped. This is reflected in a number of recent statistical studies of the occupational structure which show large numbers of people relying on poor wages for poor work. At the same time extremes of wealth and poverty have polarised.

The result for increasing numbers of young people is like climbing up a down escalator where you have to run faster and faster simply to stand still. This is what fuels the hysteria over educational competition for academic success. In schools, colleges and universities you are expected to work more and more to achieve less and less, so that ‘You have to go to university to get what 30 years ago you didn’t even have to have A-levels for’, as an FE student put it to us. Rather than helping young people to ‘move up’, educational qualifications are now essential to avoid falling to the bottom.

The disappearance of the youth labour market has convinced young people and their parents of the necessity of staying in full-time education for longer. This results in a ‘prolonged’ transition to adulthood – that is if they are able to make a transition at all. In the absence of work, education has not only become the main instrument for social control of youth but is also a new source of division amongst young people. Students are divided from non-students but also amongst each other in a competing hierarchy of FE/ sixth-form and HE institutions. Only those from elite universities are likely to be guaranteed the ‘graduate jobs’ above. Up to one in three are likely to be ‘underemployed,’ having to enter occupations previously performed by non-graduates – assuming they find a job at all. With up to one third of men and one fifth of women between 20 and 34 still living with their parents, dependency continues for much longer as student debt accumulates and the housing market remains difficult/impossible to enter.

**Overcoming individualised perceptions**

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The competitive ‘standards agenda’ in schools and the ‘widening participation’ programme in F &HE have individualised perceptions. Thus, it is not surprising that surveys and interviews show students, even though they are aware that different types of courses attract people with different social characteristics, consider class differences as unimportant in the determination of their destinies and see their college or university as ‘treating everybody the same’. One implication of being asked to take responsibility for their own learning is that students regard their own failure as the consequence of individual inadequacies so that ‘You only have yourself to blame’.

While recognising the role of business and mass media in the promotion of a new identity culture, we dispute post-modern claims that the disappearance of the ‘old certainties’ of class from the consciousness of young people will result in their ‘forcible emancipation’. Neither is it the case that inter-generational inequalities are now the main dividing line within society as Willets alleges (2009).

Instead, we argue that even though young people may not be ‘class conscious’ in the traditional sense, class differences in economic wealth continue to determine access to the ‘good schools’ that ensure class advantages are maintained. For example, the 7% of the population (12% in London) still able to afford private education can rest assured that not only are 50% of ‘A’ grades at A-level achieved by this sector, but that one in three of those being privately educated will gain three grade ‘As’ so that a place at a Russell university, while not guaranteed, is much more likely.

Even if average student debt continues to rise along with fees, up to 100,000 students are predicted to be living in ‘hand out homes’ bought by their parents, while those from routine/manual backgrounds receive less than half the amount from their parents compared with those from professional/managerial backgrounds. They are also more likely to be living at home and attending local universities to save money, so that many of these ‘new students’ to whom participation has been widened have more in common with ‘non-students’ than with their campus-based counterparts.

As high rates of youth un-/underemployment persist, we conclude state intervention is urgently required in the youth labour market. We also argue that, despite the divisions between them, young people have the potential to take collective action in new alliances between teachers and taught to change the way that education is organised.

Sources:


Kate Purcell (2010-06-12 01:52:46)
Agree with most but not all of this. The problems are the widening of inequalities of opportunity between those who do and do not ‘benefit from’ HE, the escalating costs and implications discussed above, and the huge disparities within HE in the benefits they are able to access if they do go. However, most DO perceive, by default, that they gain a fair bit (our surveys have indicated so far that they would mostly do exactly the same again, even despite difficulty in obtaining employment, or appropriate employment). Yes, you go into retail and catering management via universities and colleges rather than by getting a job and working your way up, but is that altogether a bad thing if they do get jobs they think appropriate for somenbody with their skills and knowledge (and the majority - though not all - do after c.3years - not all or most of which is spend trying to ‘develop careers’)? Interesting - and this one will run and run. See Futuretrack http://go.warwick.ac.uk/futuretrack (I think) where we are tracking 2005-6 UCAS applicants through HE from application to two years after completion of undergraduate courses. If you know any 4th year undegrads approaching graduation who are not participating in this survey, please tell them to contact me and we’ll send them a link to the Stage 3 survey. This is an independent survey and migh even provide better evidence than hitherto available about what happens, who gets good and bad jobs, how and why - viz. qualifications, attributes and socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, kind of school they went to, region they live in etc...

[...] and Patrick have written about these issues for Sociological Imagination in the past: see their first and second articles for more commentary on these [...] 


Post-PhD, my career as a sociologist has not been a conventional one. I’ve done much of what sociologists do on a daily basis: I’ve taught in universities, conducted research projects, published scholarly articles and books, applied (sometimes successful for grants), attended conferences, reviewed journal articles and examined PhDs. However, for various reasons, I have never held a full-time academic position, instead constructing a ‘portfolio’ career that is at its best exciting and flexible and at worst insecure and low-paid. Further, I also do a lot of work outside the academy, including writing for magazines and blogs and conducting research in the Jewish community.

When I try and articulate what it is that ties the disparate threads of my career together, the word ‘public intellectual’ often springs to mind. I resist it though: in the UK at least the term tends to be bestowed rather than claimed for oneself; we live in a society where to describe oneself as an intellectual risks hubris. In this country at least it is only those at the absolute pinnacle of academia – Richard Dawkins, John Grey and the like – that tend to be called public intellectuals.

Despite the problematic connotations, a public intellectual is still something I aspire to me. This is only in part because the term helps me make sense of my often baffling career path. It is also because I don’t want to be defined entirely by the fact that I do academic work. One of the most unfortunate developments in sociology has been that the identity of sociologist is almost exclusively taken on by academic practitioners of sociology. This is in contrast to
psychology, for example, in which self-defined and publicly recognised psychologists work in universities, hospitals and in many other situations.

The academic confinement of sociology is a symptom of a wider – and much noted - problem of the isolation of academic knowledge within the universities. The spread of impenetrable jargon, managerialism and bureaucratisation have all played their part in producing this situation. The RAE has effectively penalised academics for attempts to communicate with non-specialists (the effect of the upcoming REF’s ‘impact’ agenda remain to be seen). Despite this, academics can and do become public figures but, depressingly, for reasons I have never quite been able to fathom, sociologists do not have the public profile that historians, psychologists and – above all – natural scientists do. Laurie Taylor is very much an exception.

So I was pleased to discover Katharyne Mitchell’s lively and inspiring collection of essays by public scholars. Few of the contributors describe themselves as public intellectuals, although some do embrace the term public scholar, yet they all embrace a vision of scholarship that is intrinsically tied into public activity and communication. Contributors range from well-known figures such as Howard Zinn and Terry Eagleton to less well-known scholars (and it would have been nice here if there had been brief bios for each of them – a surprising omission). Reflecting the interests of the editor, many of the contributors are geographers, but sociologists appear too, most importantly Michael Burawoy who used his presidency of the American Sociological Association a few years ago to argue forcefully for a ‘public sociology’.

‘Practising Public Scholarship’ provides a useful resource for those thinking how to push forward the public dimensions of their work. Some contributors recount experiences of teaching beyond the academy (Paulo Freire’s ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ is quoted several times); some talk about ‘action research’ that involves research subjects in their work; others discuss their political activism and how it can complicate and enrich academic life. While most contributions are autobiographical, some also offer advice for aspiring public scholars – I particularly liked Dennis Raphael’s uncompromising ‘rule’ for being a public scholar ‘Be true to your beliefs. Have no fear’.

It was another rule from Dennis Raphael’s list that raised the most difficult question concerning this book: ‘Get tenure’. Many of the contributors to the volume mention tenure as providing a vital degree of security in conducting public scholarship and for some their public scholarship did not develop until after they got tenure. But what about those who haven’t got or will never get tenure? It is here that the collection reveals its North American bias: in the UK and in many other countries we do not have tenure. It’s a salutary and depressing fact that practically no one in the collection even mentions the need or possibility of changing the academy itself. I can see why you might not want to bite the hand that feeds you within a university system that allows for tenure, but there is no ignoring the fact that in the UK the very possibility of public scholarship is impeded by the university system itself.

Nor does the book challenge the conventions of academic publication. This collection of shortish, punchy essays by gifted and often controversial communicators is eminently readable and deserves to be read widely. But academic publishing can reduce even the most accessible book to obscurity: while there is a paperback edition the price is steep, the cover is dull as ditchwater, there’s no list of contributor’s bios and the book was barely publicised (I found out about it by chance, nearly 2 years after publication). The ever-present requirement for academics to publish in academic publications, together with the lack of imagination of many academic publishers, is a potent force for restricting academic knowledge to the ivory tower.

The unspoken message running through ‘Practising Public Scholarship’ seems to be to find an academic base, complete the requirements of academia and then reach out to the public. This is undoubtedly a practical and achievable message however I found myself frustrated by the lack of attention to the need to change academia itself. Maybe this is too hard and maybe we just have to live with the university system as it is. Still there is plenty that can be done by academics to foster public scholarship and this book gives many examples and some good advice as to how to do it. In my attempts to be a public sociologist I will certainly be drawing on the various examples of the book’s contributors.
Keith Kahn-Harris is, amongst other things, an Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Religion and Contemporary Society, Birkbeck College. His website is [1]www.kahn-harris.org


Benjamin Geer (2013-09-26 19:46:36)

"Get tenure" is no longer a realistic strategy in the US, either, because tenure-track jobs are being phased out, and teaching is now mostly done by adjuncts hired on a per-semester basis, for less money than fast-food workers, with no job security, much like instructors on zero-hours contracts in the UK. The urgent question, which this book apparently doesn’t address, is how to survive as a critical sociologist when stable academic employment is vanishing.

Middlesex Philosophy Campaign Update (2010-06-11 12:42)

For the last month and a half staff and students in the Middlesex Philosophy department have been waging a campaign against its closure. As a hugely successful department, its mandated closure by the university’s administration (background [1]here) placed those involved at the forefront of the fight against marketization within British higher education. The Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities at Middlesex acknowledged the department’s research success but argued that it made no ‘measurable’ contribution to the university as a whole and that the university could generate more revenue if the department was closed and resources were switched elsewhere.

It seems there has been a partial victory. More details can be found [2]here. This is from the update that has been circulated:

The campaign to save our philosophy programmes has just won a partial but significant victory: [3]Kingston University in south-west London announced today that it will re-establish our [4]Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP) at Kingston, by employing the four senior staff in Philosophy at Middlesex (Eric Alliez, Peter Hallward, Peter Osborne and Stella Sandford). Our MA and PhD programmes (full-time and part-time) will be re-launched at Kingston this September, and all current post-graduate students will be invited to move along with the staff. Institutions in France and Germany have also made significant new proposals for collaboration with the CRMEP, which may allow it to expand the European dimensions of its work considerably in the near future.

1. [http://savemdxphil.com/about/](http://savemdxphil.com/about/)
3. [http://www.kingston.ac.uk/](http://www.kingston.ac.uk/)
4. [http://www.web.mdx.ac.uk/CRMEP/](http://www.web.mdx.ac.uk/CRMEP/)
Call for Contributions: Social Research in an Age of Austerity (2010-06-12 12:18)

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical 'reform' of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. Submission details available [1]here.


Ben Baumberg (2010-07-22 08:08:38)
The link doesn’t work here - can you update it? Thanks! Ben

Sociological Imagination (2010-07-22 11:17:23)
Fixed! Thanks for pointing it out

The Idea of the University (June 24th to 26th) (2010-06-13 15:16)

The Idea of a University will be exhibited at Mead Gallery in the [1]Warwick Arts Centre at Warwick University, 24-26 June as part of [2]Fierce! Festival’s Interrobang: Regeneration ([3]see here).

The Idea of a University maps the spatial and historical generation and regeneration of the University of Warwick from the 1960s to the present day. Drawing on archival and interview data, the multi-media installation and events will enable visitors to explore and interrogate how ideas and ideals about the University have shaped, and continue to shape, the geographical, cultural, political and intellectual landscapes of its border location on the outskirts of Coventry.

The exhibition probes wider questions about the social, political and pedagogic spaces of higher education.

The research, known as the Spaces and Stories Project, has been carried over the past year by a collaborative team of students and staff in Sociology and History at the University of Warwick. The project has been jointly funded by the Reinvention Centre for Undergraduate Research and the Higher Education Academy’s History Subject Centre.

The exhibition will be open from 11 am -11 pm, Thursday 24 to Saturday 26 June. During the three days, in addition to the exhibit, there will a series of participatory discussions, salons, celebrations, artistic and activist events: some planned, some spontaneous. To receive a programme of events and to receive an invitation to the opening party, please [4]email.

1. http://www.warwickartscentre.co.uk/
Review of 'The Meaning of David Cameron' (2010-06-14 08:00)

It might come as a surprise that this is not actually a book about David Cameron. It does however shed more light upon the political and historical significance of the new Prime Minister than any book about the man himself ever could. As Richard Seymour puts it, “the real subjects of this book are the historical forces galvanising the Tory leadership ... the deep structural transformations that have taken place in the UK in the generation since the zenith of Thatcherism”. The Meaning of David Cameron is a broad and compelling survey of the last 40 years of British history which emerges at a profoundly opportune moment: the neo-liberal project stands in crisis at the same time as the apotheosis of this project ascends to high office.

The relative brevity of this book is belied by its laudable scope. It is an ideology critique taking aim not just at ‘progressive conservatism’ but the broader language of modernization and meritocracy which prepared the discursive ground for this latest vacuous instantiation of such rhetoric. It is an economic and social history offering a potent and comprehensive account of the structural and cultural changes which facilitated the emergence of Thatcherism, New Labour and now Cameronism. It is a passionate rehabilitation of the conceptual categories of class and struggle at a time when such theoretical tools are less in fashion and more in need than ever before.

The book is divided into three chapters respectively titled ‘apathy’, ‘meritocracy’ and ‘progress’ and Seymour’s critical intentions are clear from the outset as all three terms come with scare quotes in chapter titles. The most commanding section of the book is contained within the first chapter as the author offers a critical history of British politics leading up to the recent election. Beginning with British enfranchisement, which he convincingly argues was largely a concession to ward off the threat of social revolution, Seymour offers a fascinating historical account of British democracy in terms of the shifting constraints and enablements placed upon working class agency. He offers an account of the post-war welfare consensus as having “absorbed some working class demands” for reform and “stopped them going too far”.

However even this relatively meagre degree of structural accommodation to grassroots reformist pressures (as Seymour observes the Attlee government had only nationalised 20 % of British industry and had done so to preserve that which could not survive alone rather than as a result of any intention “to redistribute power and wealth from the capitalist class to the majority”) fostered a reactionary backlash. Through the rehabilitation of long discredited free market doctrines and their well-funded intellectual advocacy, figures like Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Freidman were able to develop an increasingly prominent intellectual critique of state intervention which was seized upon by the new right throughout the 1970s to explain recurrent economic crises. However unlike her friend General Augusto Pinochet, who seized power and brutally forced free-market doctrine upon the Chilean people, Thatcher accepted the need to create a political consensus in support of her goals. This initially involved carefully coordinated attacks upon labour (see for example the [1]Ridley plan) but, as the new right’s grip on power was consolidated, grew to use social and economic policy in order to pursue their ideological goals through attacks on manufacturing, limiting public housing and promoting financialisation:

“The destruction of manufacturing saw manufacturing employment fall by 30 % in the UK between 1979
and 1990. This slash-and-burn represented a faster rate of de-industrialisation than in comparable European economies. Union membership fell by almost a half. As a side effect, it also hollowed out many of the social bases from which the left drew its strength and in which cultures of resistance were maintained [...] By rationing housing, the government helped send house prices soaring. After 1983, the Tories imposed a moratorium on public housing, with the rate of annual construction falling from 160,000 in 1975 to 25,000 in 1990. The level of housing expenditure fell from 1.4% of GDP in 1979 to 0.4% in 1990. And owner occupation increased in the same period from 60% to 72%. Homeowners were encouraged to treat their houses as asserts against which they could borrow, to pay for the consumer durables that stagnant wages no longer would.”

However these efforts did not produce the ‘landslide’ electoral victories that the Tories are popularly believed to have won in the 1980s, as the antiquated first-past-the-post system meant that around 42% of the vote in 1983 and 1987 translated into 61% and 58% of seats respectively. Seymour argues that Thatcher was able to win elections through persuading a significant minority of the cultural virtues of neoliberalism (“that what they wanted above all was not the safety nets and security of the post-war era, but the flexibility, risk and protean adventure of free market competition”) and a larger portion of the electorate of their economic investment in these transformations. High unemployment, homelessness and poverty may have reemerged as a pervasive features of the British landscape but some of the population found their disposable incomes soaring, buttressed by rising house prices and the easy availability of credit.

Rather than challenge these transformations New Labour embraced them as part of a ‘modernising’ project: a superficially plausible psephological critique relating to the need for Labour to move beyond their core constituencies eventually morphed into a deeply ideological embrace of the free-market. The architects of New Labour uncritically accepted much free market dogma and seized upon the financial markets in particular as an engine of economic growth. They derided talk of socialism and redistribution as anachronistic ideological baggage and argued that a ‘modern’ party must accept the reality of ‘globalisation’ while trying to utilise continual economic growth to fund programs of public spending driven by leftist values. This attempt to utilise the ‘dynamism’ of finance for social ends led to an unholy marriage between New Labour and the wealthy: ministers came to deify the ‘wealth creators’ and promulgate their perceived virtues. Progress was seen to consist in bringing the apparent expertise of business into the public sector. A pragmatic analysis of how to pursue leftist goals in an undoubtedly changing world ultimately led to the most profound betrayal of those goals imaginable... and it paved the way for a ‘progressive conservatism’ aiming to irrevocably entrench the revolution of the 1980s through unprecedented spending cuts, the effective privatization of the education system, a committed attack on the expansion of higher education and the remoralization of poverty.

This is a powerful book, as Seymour utilises the erudition he regularly exhibits on Lenin’s Tomb to great polemic effect without sacrificing the analytical rigour which so often characterises his writing. It pursues a number of distinct aims and yet it somehow manages to be more than the sum of its parts. Perhaps this is because the overarching purpose of the book is at heart a simple one. While this purpose pervades the book it is at its most explicit in the final paragraph when Seymour directly explains the ‘meaning of David Cameron’:

“Cameronism comes with irenic intonations, soothing, anaesthising language about change, just at the time when an epochal social crisis with deep political polarisation is about to be visited on this unhappy island-state. Just as Margaret Thatcher launched a bellicose administration with a pacific quote from St Francis of Assisi, so David Cameron comes to us as an agent or discord, distress and social misery, with an olive branch thrust towards his opponents. What is the meaning of David Cameron? He means war.”

At a time when the coalition government is committed to cuts which will affect our “whole way of life” Seymour offers a timely critique of a radical right wing agenda (‘rethinking the role of the state’) presented as an unavoidable solution to an otherwise insurmountable problem. Furthermore he offers a great insight into the transformations within political culture which have allowed such an agenda to be presented as a ‘progressive’
project. Inevitably for such a short book there are questions raised which lack answers: for example how does the Con-Dem agenda fit into the wider ‘politics of austerity’ in Europe and beyond? Nonetheless this is a valuable and judicious book which deserves to be read by all those interested in the future of British politics.


It might come as a surprise that this is not actually a book about David Cameron. It does however shed more light upon the political and historical significance of the new Prime Minister than any book about the man himself ever could. As Richard Seymour puts it, “the real subjects of this book are the historical forces galvanising the Tory leadership ... the deep structural transformations that have taken place in the UK in the generation since the zenith of Thatcherism”. The Meaning of David Cameron is a broad and compelling survey of the last 40 years of British history which emerges at a profoundly opportune moment: the neo-liberal project stands in crisis at the same time as the apotheosis of this project ascends to high office. The relative brevity of this book is belied by its laudable scope. It is an ideology critique taking aim not just at ‘progressive conservatism’ but the broader language of modernization and meritocracy which prepared the discursive ground for this latest vacuous instantiation of such rhetoric. It is an economic and social history offering a potent and comprehensive account of the structural and cultural changes which facilitated the emergence of Thatcherism, New Labour and now Cameronism. It is a passionate rehabilitation of the conceptual categories of class and struggle at a time when such theoretical tools are less in fashion and more in need than ever before.

United for Education Day of Action (June 21st) (2010-06-14 18:40)

This will be a joint union day of action around the country in defence of education in further, higher and adult education as part of the “United for Education” campaign. The seven unions have called for protests, meetings and rallies to take place in workplaces all over the country and already dozens of events have been organised. In the week when David Willetts called students a [1]“burden on the taxpayer” and with more funding cuts widely anticipated in the emergency budget, this is an opportunity to send the Coalition government a clear message that education is too important to be slashed. Bringing together UCU with NUS, EIS, ATL, UNISON, Unite and GMB, “United for Education” aims to be a vehicle for uniting the entire further and higher education sector to call on the new government to stop the cuts. Read more about United for Education [2]here.

*WHAT YOU CAN DO:*

1. Meeting in Westminster: As part of the day’s activities, there will be a meeting in Parliament at lunchtime on the 21st, with speakers from all the seven unions, as well as MPs, in committee Room 12 at 12pm. Contact Lisa Johnson for more information about getting along to this event at [3]ljohnson@ucu.org.uk or call UCU on 0206 756 2603 2. What’s happening near you?: You can see what events are taking place around the country [4]here. If your college or university is not listed, contact your branch to find out what’s happening. 3. Sign and circulate this online petition to the government [5]here.

Save Middlesex Philosophy (2010-06-15 07:30)


1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PM7VVkmX3o
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ft6MrUxVegI
3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtGA63Le1Gw
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKTr87RYXi8
6. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6aXgWFgbCu

Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today (2010-06-15 12:00)

Charles Wright Mills' body of work was substantial by any standards but for someone who died at the age of forty-five it was remarkable. The range and substance of Mills' work is impressive but even more so is its originality, vitality and humanistic motivation: in short, its sociological imagination. In his still celebrated if now less influential work, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills addresses issues of sociological theory and method and particularly the practical application of the subject. However, in this piece I refer to a wide range of Mills' work to illustrate that he was not only a great sociological mentor but also practised what he advocated.
Mills’ own sociological imagination was inspired by what he referred to as the classic sociological tradition the main feature of which is ‘the concern with historical social structures: and that its problems are of direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles (S I: 28). Mills links personal troubles with public issues and threads biography into the historical structural dynamic. The achievement of the classic tradition lies in the creation of models of society that illuminate the impact of social change on people and on their potential for response. These models generate and inform theory but are developed at a more general level than specific theories. Thus Marx’s dialectical model of historical change and Weber’s concept of the role of ideas in history give orientation to theory and research. For Mills the issue is not about which model is ‘correct’ but their ability to illuminate large vistas of the social landscape. In addition to clarifying the relationships of the triad of social structure, historical change and biography, Mills argues that sociological imagination necessarily generates political perspective because of the understanding it gives of the human condition (S I chapter 10). Mills himself was emphatic in drawing practical conclusions from his sociological work. This brought him into sharp conflict with what he referred to as the ‘crack-pot realism’ of managerial liberals such as Daniel Bell whom he felt were reducing social issues to mere matters of ‘expert’ planning and administration. Similarly, he attacked ‘abstracted empiricism’ within sociology - the gathering of facts with little reference to their wider meaning or application. Mills’ Ph.D. was on American pragmatism and all his work carries the tone of someone who intended to make a difference.

Mills’ work amply demonstrates the principles underpinning his concept of the sociological imagination. In less than ten years he published three books that substantially analysed the social structure of the United States. The first, New Men of Power (1948) presented the leadership of the American trade union movement as integrated within rather than a challenging the American economic establishment. The second, White Collar (1951), analysed the rise of the new American middle class largely employed in the proliferating offices of the public and private sectors. This was followed by his magnum opus of structural analysis The Power Elite (1956) that remains a standard reference for understanding the workings and overlaps of the American economic, military, and political elites. This triad of publications had almost an anticipatory as well as contemporary relevance. It describes a declining and weakened industrial working class with an increasingly self-interested leadership; a white-collar class cemented within a still highly unequal occupational structure by media-led consumerism and its own desire for security; and a substantially autonomous elite only marginally disrupted in its pursuit of power, wealth and status by democratic processes. This was a very different vision of the United States and of Western societies than that adopted by those
he saw as ‘conservative liberals’ such as Talcott Parsons and Daniel Bell who declared an ‘end of ideology’ long before Francis Fukuyama made the same mistaken judgement.

As Mills’ edited collection of classic sociological reading, *Images of Man* (1960) shows, he particularly admired European sociology. He was less impressed with his contemporary American colleagues. The one structural model that Mills found utterly wanting was Parsons’ social systems theory which he saw as prime example of ‘grand theory’. Mills’ ridiculing of Parsons’ abstract style had a serious point behind it – that such abstraction can take on a life of its own, divorced from the realities of everyday social life. More substantively, Mills argued that Parsons’ emphasis on consensus legitimised the social status quo and failed to address what for Mills is fundamental to the social dynamic – power conflict. In contrast to Parsons, he focused on who takes decisions and in whose interest and argued that elites invariably pursue their own self-interest (‘the idea of the responsibility of the powerful is foolish’ SI: 213). As he succinctly observed: ‘Men (sic) are free to make history, but some men are freer than others’ (SI: 201).

Mills regarded ‘abstracted empiricism’ as the mirror opposite of ‘grand theory’ but as having a similar outcome – a failure critically to address the status quo and therefore a tacit endorsement of it. He associated abstracted empiricism with the proliferation of bureaucracy and what he saw as the reduction of social and moral matters to issues of management. Mills was as suspicious of ‘experts’ and ‘managers’ as of the elites they served arguing – again contra Daniel Bell – that fundamental matters of domestic and foreign policy should be widely debated. Like Habermas, and perhaps a little romantically, he occasionally harked back to a period when better-informed ‘publics’ debated key issues of policy. Mills certainly made his contribution to re-igniting such debates.

Mills’ model of society was an elites/mass rather than a class one. It is very much the first part of this dual model that Mills is remembered for – whether or not one agrees with it. A problem with the elites/mass model is that it tends to see the ‘mass’ as somewhat inert. In fact, Mills did share the view of many of his ‘conservative liberal’ antagonists as well as that other luminary of the left, Herbert Marcuse, that the masses were indeed rendered dully somnolent by the tedium of routine work and the soporific effect of the mass media. However, unlike his liberal critics, Mills embarked on an intellectual struggle to produce a new radical analysis of social change in the distinctly discouraging context of the conservative and reactionary nineteen fifties. His own analysis precluded him from privileging the traditional working class or, still less, the new white-collar class in the search for a key agency for change. However, Mills demonstrated a consistent concern for both the new poor of mature capitalist society and for those of the emerging world. As far as the former are concerned he had a prescient understanding of how what came to be referred to variously as ‘the dependent population’, ‘the underclass’ and ‘the marginal’ would become perceived as almost the residual ‘problem’ of modern society – resistant to endless plans to organise them. About the poor of the emerging world Mills was able in his later writings to be more optimistic. Although he railed against what he saw as the abuse of power in the bullying of Castro’s Cuba (Listen Yankee, 1960) and American militarism (The Causes of World War Three, 1958) he realised that in time the balance of power would shift – as, indeed, we are now seeing.

In so far as Mills did tentatively observe an emerging agency for change in Western societies, it was among intellectuals, particularly young intellectuals. This was not mere wishful thinking on his part as he lived long enough to witness the stirrings of radicalism among young people in higher education both in the United States and Europe. As the following quotation from Mills’ *Letter to the (British) New Left* shows, he was sensitive to the need to re-explore the ethical and cultural values of radicalism: ‘As for the articulation of ideals, there I think your magazines have done there best work so far. That is your meaning – is it not – of the emphasis on cultural affairs.’ Mills had an enormous influence on the values and thinking of American student movement of the early nineteen sixties and had he lived might have been able to guide it away from the excesses of the late sixties. *The Port Huron Statement* (1962), the manifesto of the newly formed Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) amply reflected Mills’ belief in participatory democracy and practical humanism.

It is not difficult to imagine that Mills might have found himself at odds with the dominant contemporary
state and corporate directed regimes of research and of the constraints they put on young scholars. His comments in *The Sociological Imagination* on research and the problem of funding remain relevant. He of course recognises the need for funds but also warns against the conditions that can come with it. He suggests that sometimes it may be better to work small-scale but independently rather than chase expensively funded research whose findings and interpretation may be ‘managed’ by the funding agency. What he MIGHT have made of the current state dominated research regimes is anybody’s guess. In a piece of advice that may seem trite and simplistic in the light of the complexity of the contemporary context of research, Mills’ advocates that the researcher should *think* and *observe*. But it is precisely because Mills’ makes what he terms ‘the craft of sociology’ accessible that is his genius

Mills’ book, *The Sociological Imagination*, has inspired generations of young and not so young social scientists. This is partly because he wrote a great book – once voted the second most important sociological book of the twentieth century after Weber’s *Economy and Society*, partly because he practised what he advocated, but also because he was an inspiring and, in the best sense of the word, idealistic human being. Mills the sociologist, campaigner and character fused to generate a charisma to which there is no recent or present comparison in social science. He retained a grounded utopianism that he defined as a commitment to an attainable but radically fairer and more equal future. His message is no less relevant now.

**Bibliography**


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je (2011-07-15 03:45:09)
what is the dialectical sociology?

Sociology In Your Career « Hilary Burrage (2011-11-03 22:32:40)
[...] you have a grasp of the Sociological Imagination, you won’t, as I know very well, want to let it go. GA _googleAttr("AdOpt","1");[...]

142
Technology overload: have we reached a tipping point? | The Sociological Imagination (2011-11-10 08:02:25)

 [...] need to rethink what and how they do; but doesn’t this just leave us with more data for our sociological imaginations to play with? It sure does. And I think this applies to all other spheres as well. Even if some of [...]
Marven Hirmiz (2017-06-13 04:45:00)
what does it mean when he says the creation of models of society that illuminate the impact of social change on people and on their potential for response? how does it change people?

Mike O'Donnell (2017-06-16 18:38:42)
Mills - and I agree with him - argued that sociology should clarify to people how social change is affecting them. He wanted social description and analysis to illuminate personal experience. Thus understanding the social structural and policy causes of unemployment could facilitate collective action to do something about it and at an individual level assist those affected not to 'blame' themselves. There are endless examples where understanding social processes can enable more effective response - although as another sociologist observed - the point is not just to understand the world but to change it - for the better, of course! Plenty still to do. Mike.

Blessing Mutumbi (2018-04-13 14:54:41)
Awesome hey

María Martínez: Story of an Indigenous Woman (2010-06-16 11:00)

María Martínez Aldana was born in 1939 in Ixtlahuaca, a small village located in the municipality of San Martín de las Piramides in the state of Mexico. María does not know exactly the day of her birth, “I have two birthdays”, she says, smiling, but what she knows is that this year she will celebrate her 71st birthday. Although she has slowed down in recent years, Mariquita, as she is normally called, still runs the family house and looks after two of her eleven grandchildren as their primary carer. Growing up after the Mexican Revolution at the time when the Mexican government launched a de-indigenisation movement of the population in order to create a unique Mexican identity, María lived through the time when many indigenous men and women migrated to the urban areas of Mexico as the only option to improve their living conditions (CDI 2006, Oehmichen Bazan 2005, Reyes Ruiz 2010). María Martínez is my grandmother and my chief inspiration for conducting sociological research in the areas of gender, indigenous people and migration. Since my parents were both finishing their professional training and working at the same time, I lived most of my childhood at my grandparents' house. In fact, it could be said that I was essentially raised by my grandmother. Given my long personal association with María, the story I tell here may be different from those recorded by oral historians or journalists who usually interview their subjects in two or three sessions. The tale I tell here is one I experienced and heard many times while growing up at María's home, and through more recent deep conversations with her. For the purposes of this work María agreed to be taped and to make public her life-experiences.
I also recall conversations that I held with María’s mother, Altagracia (my great-grandmother) in my frequent visits to her place before she died in 1996. Thus, the close relationship and affection that we feel for each other has given me the courage to risk writing the story of this indigenous woman in my own words but relying on hers for descriptions of the most dramatic events in her life. Feminist scholars, anthropologists, and others have been debating the value of recording life histories for many years. Women’s lives stories, under a feminist approach, may allow to document their lives and activities, which were previously largely seen as marginal and subsidiary to men’s, and to understand women in context (Bryman 2008, Friedlander 1994). Nevertheless life stories can also be seen as exploitative and of limited generalisability (see Skeggs 2001). I must admit that I had great reservation in making my grandmother’s and family history public for the purpose of an article, but I decided to proceed for two main reasons. First, I see María’s story as a way to contextualize issues about gender relations among indigenous communities in Mexico, indigenous identity and de-indigenisation in Mexico, and especially the struggles of indigenous women in the realms of rapid and almost forced modernisation and development in Latin America. In this work I refer to María as an indigenous woman, even though the story I tell does not focus entirely in her indigenous origins. If this sounds contradictory, it should, for that is precisely the point. The fact that María was born in a poor peasant community with pre-Hispanic vestiges and that she was denied the right to learn the indigenous language marks her as descendant of those whose culture was diminished five hundred years ago and who have since been condemned to occupy the bottom rung of Mexico’s socio-economic ladder. While María never expresses shame about her indigenous origins, she sees her life and the lives of her relatives as a steady struggle to improve their socio-economic circumstances, a struggle often requiring the rejection of those traditions identified as “indian” [sic] and acquire, when possible, attributes associated with upward mobility which involved (and still involve) the aspirations of the white western society. My second reason for writing about María’s story is simple and direct: she had a tough but wonderful story to tell which gave texture and inspiration to the ‘social aspects’ I want to explore and analyze. Thus, in this work I present María’s story in two sections. The first one is dedicated to María's childhood and her upbringing. Here I relate the social environment where María grow up and the opportunities and/or disadvantages that, as indigenous person and woman, she faced. The second section relates to her migration to Mexico City and her incorporation to the labour force, again under the circumstances that her indigeneity and gender represents. In this section, I also recount María’s hasty partnership and maternity, and then I briefly end with her current life situation.

**María’s story**

**Childhood** María Martínez Aldana is the 12th of 14 children. Her name at birth was María Ascención Martínez Aldana García, but later on she regularised her birth certificate and decided to be officially named María Martínez Aldana. María’s story reaches back to the days of her grandparents, one of whom was still alive when she was a young girl (her father’s mother Dominga). María’s grandparents lived through the Mexican Revolution of 1910. She said that they
were not originally from Ixtlahuaca (she does not know where exactly they came from) but they were forced to move to this previously isolated region because María’s grandfather did not want to be recruited by the Mexican army or by the Zapata’s army during the revolution: "they [her grandparents] did not like to be involve with guns". María’s mother, Altagracia, married with Vicente (María’s father) when she was fourteen. Altagracia did not go to school and as María points out "she was all the time pregnant". Altagracia had fourteen children but, according to María, she may have being pregnant more than twenty times. Unfortunately some of her children died soon after they were born. Altagracia started work when María was around six years old selling aprons and clothes in small quantities at the market of San Juan, a two hours commute from Ixtlahuaca by donkey. Vicente was originally from San Luis, a village near to Ixtlahuaca. Since a young age, Vicente worked in an hacienda[i] that produced pulque[ii]. Vicente was in charge of extracting the aguamiel[iii] from the cactuses and of the fermentation process. Apart from his work in the hacienda, Vicente owned a small piece of land where corn, beans and squash was cultivated for family consumption. Meat consumption was rare but when this was affordable mostly came from Altagracia’s flocks of chickens and turkeys. The family home was very modest; the house consisted of one room with a thatched roof and dirt floor. Vicente, Altagracia and their fourteen children lived there, they slept in petates [iv] or wooden boards and cooked in a corner of the room. They did not have any water, electricity or drainage services until 1996, the last time I visited the town. In my frequent visits to “el rancho” (as we used to call Ixtlahuaca) I remember collecting potable water from a community pipe and going to the toilet in a latrine located around fifty meters away from the main house. María recalls daily life in Ixtlahuaca with humour: "look, at the end of the day it was easier. We did not have to do any household work apart from cooking. Not even sweeping the floor! It could not be dirty...it was made of dirt!" Neither men nor women in the family wore shoes or sandals. Women used to wear naguas (skirts) and men dressed in white trousers and tops, a typical outfit wore at that time by indigenous men and campesinos (peasants) through Mexico. Nobody in the family worn underwear and they had at most three changes of clothes. When Maria talks about her childhood, she refers to it with mixed feelings. She highlights extreme poverty as part of her upbringing but she also recognises that she had unforgettable happy moments. Since María was one of the youngest children, she emphasized the figure of one of her eldest sisters, Irene, almost fifteen years older than her, who taught her many things: My mum was very busy with the other children and her sales. My mum was all the time pregnant, so my sister was like my second mum. My mum said that at the same time I was born Irene also had her first baby and she used to breast feed me because my mum did not have enough milk for the other children. María never have a doll or toy, but she created her own by painting faces on long flat stones, along with her younger sisters Mercedes and Juana. “We also used to play with pinto beans. Those with white spots were our ‘cows’ and we built barnyards with little pebbles for our ‘cows’”. One of María’s greatest memories refers to January 6 of every year when the family celebrated Altagracia’s birthday. As María mentioned, this was the date when they ate a traditional mole[v], played music and danced: “I think that was the only day when my parents had some fun. I used to have fun too! I stepped on my father’s sandals and I danced with him”. María has nothing but great admiration for her grandmother Dominga, whom she describes as a woman with strong personality but with a great heart because “she used to defend my mum from my father’s abuses”. María recalls one occasion when Dominga beat in public her own son Vicente because he beat Altagracia. Once, María says, Dominga even put her son in jail when Vicente beat Altagracia so harshly that Altagracia bled from her head: My grandmother Dominga and my sister Erminia went and talked with the judge... or like the police in the community [the village was ruled
under customary law] and he took my father to the jail. Dominga would do everything to defend my mum. María remembers with sadness that her father discharged his rage or solved his problems by getting drunk with pulque and beating María’s mum: “Mercedes and I tried to stop him, but he was very strong...he beat my mum in the face”. María went to school until third year. Her mother was against it. Altagracia wondered, if none of María’s previous brothers and sisters went to school so why should María have to go? But María’s father realised that she was interested in learning and allowed her to go to school: "I sat under the sun next to my father when he was reading something. He knew how to read... a little bit, so I asked him all the time about the meaning of the letters". She started school when she was nine years old and she walked (without shoes) every day around six kilometres to the nearest primary school. "I loved going to school. I even remember that the name of the school was María Elena Vargas de Cruz. I was a very good student, I got great marks but one day my parents decided that enough was enough". María stopped going to primary school in order to look after her younger siblings and to start working. Altagracia found María a job as a babysitter; she used to look after a little girl. María remembers that with her first payment she bought herself a pair of plastic sandals and a dress for her mum. In her teens, María became a problem for the family when she became fourteen years old and showed no signs of “becoming a woman”. With no sign of having a period, Altagracia took María to the doctor of San Martin de las Piramides because she was worried that something was wrong with María. María remembers very well that the doctor told her mum: “everything is fine with her; there are women that get their first period until they are 16 or 17. Let her enjoy her childhood, she will be fine”.

Going to Mexico City and getting married

With so many in the family and not enough income to cover their basic needs, María was sent to Mexico City to work as a maid in wealthy houses. First she was sent to learn the skills with her sister Irene who was already a full time cleaner of two wealthy single men that lived in Colonia Anzures[vi]. María recalls the first time she went to Mexico City or El Distrito, as she calls it, with a mix of melancholy and astonishment in her eyes. María saw the city as a big monster which intimidated her but at the same time captivated her. Can you imagine getting off from a donkey and getting into a bus? (she laughs) Then when I arrived at El Distrito I saw people living in a different way. They had water, electricity, all the services... I liked that. I also saw that women in the city were different, very elegant with stilettos and nice clothes! And me (she laughs) I was wearing my sandals and my naguas like India [sic] María[vii]. It was at that time when Irene cut María’s braids, and according to María it helped her to disguise her origins and to keep her hair tidy. While working as a maid in Colonia Anzures, María kept visiting Ixtlahuaca every so often to bring money to her family and to work in the fields when there was not enough work in Mexico City. Then, during one of her frequent returns to her town she met the man who is now her husband. María was sixteen years old when she eloped with Carlos (my grandfather). María narrates that she met Carlos through her brother in law, Margaro. Margaro was married with Marciana, María’s sister, and Carlos was Margaro’s nephew. Getting married, or more accurately, taking a partner and having children for María seems to have been a rite of passage. As she says, “every woman in el rancho had to have a man. So I thought ... I also have to get married. There was no other option; my destiny was to get married". A few months after María eloped with Carlos she fell pregnant with her first child: “one should have babies, although I was scared because I was very young and I did not know what it meant to be a mum”. She also stopped working as a maid and settled down with Carlos in Mexico City. Carlos and María got married few weeks before the arrival of their first child because at that time the Mexican government required that parents were married in order to register a child. Along with her six children, María kept working in ‘informal’ jobs such as selling wool in los tianguis (flea markets), knitting jumpers, or cooking typical Mexican snacks that her children sold door to door. As a housewife, as she calls herself, María remembers the rewarding experience of selling Avon beauty products: "I enjoyed selling beauty products. We [the fellow sellers] used to meet every so often and have breakfast together, and the best seller obtained prizes. I once got a hanging clock as a prize". Nowadays María still lives with Carlos, has eleven grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and two more will be born soon. She nowadays battles diabetes and her
recently diagnosed senile dementia. 

**[i]** Hacienda is a Spanish word for an estate. Some haciendas were plantations, mines, or even business factories. Haciendas originated in land grants, mostly made to Spanish conquerors in Latin America. 

**[ii]** Pulque is a milk-coloured, somewhat viscous alcoholic beverage made from the fermented sap of the maguey plant (cactus), and is a traditional native beverage of Mexico. **[iii]** Aguamiel is the sap of the maguey plant. Also called honeywater, it has been used in Mexico as a medicine. In its fermented state this produces pulque. 

**[iv]** Petate is a bedroll used in Central America and Mexico. Its name comes from the nahuatl word petlatl. The petate is woven from the fibers of the palm of petate. 

**[v]** Mole from the nahuatl mulli or molli (sauce or concoction) is the generic name for several sauces used in Mexican cuisine, as well as for dishes based on these sauces. In contemporary Mexico, the term is used for a number of sauces, some quite dissimilar to one another, including black, red, yellow, and green moles. 

**[vi]** Colonia Anzures is a upper middle class area in Mexico City. 

**[vii]** La India Maria was a character on TV that portrays and ridicules indigenous people in urban areas of Mexico. The character speaks a mix of Spanish and indigenous languages and it is dressed in traditional garb consisting of traditionally braided and ribboned hair, colourful native-type blouses and skirts.

**References**


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**Death of Educational Opportunities in Birmingham (June 21st) (2010-06-17 07:00)**

**Death of Educational Opportunities march on 21 June in Birmingham**

I am writing to give you advance notice that there is going to be a march taking place from Alpha Tower to Matthew Bolton campus of Birmingham Metropolitan College on 21 June. The march will be between 12.00 and 2.00 pm. Further details can be obtained from Joe Rooney whose can be contacted [1]here.

**Save our Jobs - Birmingham Metropolitan College- please sign the petition**

As you will be aware, hundreds of lecturing jobs are to go in the West Midlands because of cutbacks in adult provision funding, despite a recession and a clear demand for further education opportunities for all. Please show your support and sign our petition calling for Michael Gove to investigate one of the largest colleges in the country - Birmingham Metropolitan College - and look into their aggressive approach to redundancies despite unnecessary spending on cars, flowers and building work.

Please follow this [2]link and show your support. We are aiming for over 2000 signatures by the end of June.

Regards
Another Middlesex Philosophy Video (2010-06-17 14:00)

[EMBED]

Review of 'Bonfire of Illusions' by Alex Callinicos (2010-06-18 08:44)

At a time of historically unparalleled intellectual oversaturation it was surely inevitable that dissecting the financial crisis would become something of a cottage industry within academic publishing and highbrow journalism. What’s surprising is how long it has taken for a full range of authors to get in on the act. We’ve seen the business journalists, the political commentators and the economists: now it’s time for the philosophers and political theorists. Hot on the heels of Slavoj Zizek’s treatment of the crisis comes Alex Callinicos’s Bonfire of Illusions, an intriguingly pacey and readable analysis of the crisis from one of Britain’s most accomplished Marxist academics. The book is framed through the identification of two concurrent crises (the ‘credit crunch’ and the brief Russian-Georgian confrontation over South Ossetia) and how their fall out has changed the world we live in. As Callinicos respectively titles the two essay length chapters, we now see ‘finance humbled’ and ‘empire confined’.

As might be expected in a world of 24 hour news cycles and an enormous proliferation of political commentators, a number of common narratives have emerged about the genesis of the financial crisis. Most commonly it is argued that it began with the growth of the subprime mortgage market in the United States. Some claim that the seed of the crisis were sown with the Thatcher government’s ‘big bang’ liberalization of financial markets in the 1980s. Alternatively many place the blame on a ‘culture of greed’ within global finance and the moral failings and cavalier outlook of a reprehensible banking elite. In contrast to these narratives, Callinicos offers an analysis of the crisis as being symptomatic of “a much more profound and long-term crisis of over accumulation and profitability.” He argues that neoliberalism, as a political agenda and legislative framework, itself stood as a response to this deeper underlying crisis and that rather than our present circumstances being indicative of any sort of breakdown in capitalism as such, they are best understood as political and economic events bringing the underlying structural contradictions within the neoliberal settlement to the fore.

This analysis rests on the claim that all three main centres of advanced capitalism (North America, Western Europe and Japan) have undergone a significant decline in their rate of economic growth relative to the boom years of the 50s and 60s. Callinicos places the onus for these two decades of growth on the ‘permanent arms economy’ which developed in both the USA and the USSR. He argues this offset increasing labour costs until the Nixon administration slashed arms spending at the end of the 1960s. This seems to be the weakest point in his analysis, as it is a surprisingly monocausal explanation for someone who is both a Marxist and a Critical Realist. For instance it ignores the 1973 oil crisis, the expansion of containerization and new communications technology.
Callinicos argues that once US arms spending ceased to offset the pressure of rising labour costs, the long term tendency for the rate of profit to fall began to reassert itself. This invited aggressive attempts by business to reduce labour costs through confrontation with unions which was buttressed by the efforts of new right political administrations in the US and the UK. Again his argument seems to miss a crucial step here as an expansion in off-shoring and inward migration simultaneously placed a downwards pressure on working class wages. However unlike industrial confrontation the roots of this were structural rather than agential. Nevertheless the result was further wage-repression. As Callinicos quotes Robert Brenner:

"Between 1979 and 1990, real hourly compensation in the private business economy grew at an average annual rate of 0.1 per cent. The trend in these years for hourly real wages and salaries alone (excluding benefits) for production and non-supervisory workers was worse, falling at an average annual rate of 1 per cent. At no time previously in the twentieth century had real wage growth been anywhere near so slow for anywhere near so long."

In western economies increasingly reliant upon consumer demand for their growth, wage repression engenders an increasing structural contradiction: the same workers whose wages are under attack to ensure profitability must also keep spending on consumer goods. This engenders an increasing degree of financialisation which extends throughout the economy, as debt-financed consumer spending comes to take centre stage as the engine of economic growth. These processes reached their apotheosis in the recovery that followed the burst of the dot com bubble at the start of the 21st century. The Federal Reserve slashed interest rates as a response to the twin crises of the dot com crash and the 9/11 attacks which had the effect of fostering a climate of overly easy lending and an ensuing frenzy of consumer demand. At one end of the spectrum American workers were "encouraged to borrow in order to sustain their basic consumption at a time when their real wages have actually fallen". Whereas at the other soaring house prices massively buttressed the disposable income of the upper middle class:

"households, encouraged by the rise in property values and rock-bottom lending costs, increased borrowing and spending. In 2005, US households extracted $750 billion against the monetary value of their homes, two-thirds of which was spent on personal consumption, home improvements and credit-card debt. The resulting surge in personal consumption (along with a sharp increase in public expenditure fuelled by the war on terrorism and a rise in American competitiveness thanks to the fall in the dollar promoted by the Bush administration) pulled the US out of recession and helped to put the entire world economy on a boom path."

However it was a boom sustained by an even greater bubble (compounding existing trends present throughout the neoliberal era) than the dot com bubble which caused the recession it was designed to counter. This bubble sustained a new era of speculative finance. As Callinicos puts it "the drive was to take advantage of the cheap credit conditions to build up leverage as high as possible and thereby to maximize profits". He notes how this involved soaring leverage ratios (loans to equity) of x25 at Goldman Sachs, x29 at Lehman Brothers, x32 at Merrill Lynch, x33 at Bear Stearns and Morgan Stanley. It also involved an enormous increase in subprime mortgages with the top 25 US originators thereof (responsible for $1000 billion in subprime mortgages between 2005 and 2007) have spent $370 million on lobbying since the late 1990s. The political influence of finance capital reached its peak at the same time as the bubble became rampanently unsustainable. As mortgage defaults began to increase sharply in 2006-2007 the house of cards began to fall and "banks, worried about their own losses and suspicious of others’ plight, stopped lending to each other."

The second chapter looks at the geopolitical ramifications of the crisis. The most interesting aspect of this section is its discussion of the internal politics of the European Union and how the financial crisis brought longstanding rifts to the fore. While monetary policy had been centralised through the institution of the European Central Bank there was no such equivalent for fiscal policy. This asymmetry suddenly became hugely problematic when it suddenly became imperative that response to the financial crisis be coordinated:
"The power to tax, borrow and spend remains firmly with the member states. But, as we have seen, this was a crisis in which fiscal policy took centre-stage, both to recapitalize the insolvent banks and to compensate for the fall in effective demand with greater government borrow and spending."

With the benefit of hindsight it seems obvious that not only was this structural discrepancy unsustainable but that the problems it causes would be compounded by the resurgence of diverging national interests at a time of global crisis. Callinicos hints at the EU's future being contingent upon its successful resolution. However what form could this take? Recent defeats in national referendums suggest a pervasive absence of will for a move towards the federalised EU which would be necessary for fiscal policy to be centralised with any degree of democratic legitimacy. If this antipathy towards European federalism holds true and the restaged Irish referendum is left as the anomaly it looks likely to be then the only obvious alternative for the preservation of the EU is the non-democratic centralisation of fiscal policy.

Can we make sense of the European wide spectre of ‘financial austerity’ on this basis? It certainly seems to shed light on events in Greece, as an empirically dubious sense of alarm within the bond markets (fuelled by partisan politicians, politicised mass media and overly powerful rating agencies) led to a realistic possibility that the country might default on its sovereign debt. The EU stepped in with a billion-dollar bailout but only on the condition that the Greek government effectively subordinate its economic sovereignty to the demands of EU technocrats: raising the retirement age, freezing or cutting pensions, freezing public sector pay and raising VAT. A radical fiscal agenda likely to undermine the long term stability of the Greek economy is being imposed through the agency of pan-European institutions against a domestic backdrop of furious protest and resistance.

It is frustrating that Callinicos only addresses the politic of austerity tangentially given that his own analysis elucidates the relevant dynamics so clearly. This is forgivable in a book of little over one hundred and fifty pages. Likewise it is inevitable given that recent events were developing while the book was in press. However it does hint at the one flaw that nevertheless defines this excellent book: it’s simply too brief. I was left throughout with the impression that this could have been a magnum opus where the author drew on a lifetime’s learning to comprehensively take stock of our contemporary predicament and offer plausible pathways out of it. As it stands Callinicos gives very little space to crucial subjects. For instance climate change is given less than a page. It’s a very interesting section, replete with insight about collective action problems and the ecological consequences of competitive capital accumulation but it is, nonetheless, less than a page. As a whole such brevity is a crying shame because in practice it means that far from offering a ‘bonfire of illusions’ Callinicos has handed us a few firelighters and pointed us in the direction of a conflagration yet to be. Even so this is a superb book which exhibits engaging though authoritative scholarship of a kind which is sadly too rare.

The Sociological Imagination | KCL's Alex Callinicos debates the Financial Time's Martin Wolf on the Future of Capitalism (2010-06-19 15:29:49)
[...] As a follow up to yesterday's review: [...]
Downing Street from 11am onwards to greet George Osborne as he leaves to present his austerity day budget. Later in the evening local protests will be taking place nationwide.

More details about the campaign and local protests available [1]here. I'll be at the Birmingham protest on Tuesday. As Richard Seymour argues [2]here large protests will make it difficult for the coalition to present the 'coming age of austerity' as representing some sort of reluctant national consensus. So while the budget itself may be something of a fait acompli these protests represent an important first step in building a broad base of resistance to the cuts. There's an excellent analysis by Paul Krugman [3]here of the fiscal irrationality (let alone the political unacceptability and moral reprehensibility) of swingeing cuts.


KCL's Alex Callinicos debates the Financial Time's Martin Wolf on the Future of Capitalism (2010-06-19 15:00)

As a follow up to yesterday's [1]review:

[EMBED] [EMBED]


Richard Sennett on Sociology as Literature (2010-06-20 10:00)

[EMBED]

On Being a Stateless Actor (2010-06-21 08:00)

I've fallen in love with the phrase “non-state actor.” If nothing else you can credit the Pakistani government for coming up with fig-leaf expressions like this one to hide naked lies which is the essence of the state itself.

For years and years I've not voted. Usually the reason is that my name is never on the voter's list and I'm too
lazy to get it enrolled merely to have the opportunity to choose between a worm that sucks blood and a blood-sucking worm. The meaning is the same and the difference grammatical in terms of what comes first, the “worm” or the “blood.”

People who overstate the importance of voting as central to democracy are liars. Democracy is not just about voting. Democracy is about having real choices in your private and public life. In a country like India only money can buy you those choices. They’re not rights that come with birth. Citizenship does not ensure those rights and neither does voting make a difference at a fundamental level. The poor simply have no choice. Those who think that to vote is the main issue – they’re people who’re not looking for real change.

Like all pseudo-liberals from the educated classes who think that they are “clever, classless and free” but in fact are “fucking peasants” in heart and mind, for years I saw myself as a non-state actor. It’s not state of mind that I’m referring to. It’s the state as government that Tolstoy describes as “an association of men who do violence to the rest of us.”

The terrorist is indeed a stateless actor and it takes a government as brutal as the Pakistani to arrive at the phrase “non-state actors.” It takes a government as brutal as the Indian one to agree with that because we’ve plenty of them in this country and in fact they’re in the majority. We also call them the working classes or the poor and the downtrodden. It takes a government as violent, ruthless and manipulative as the American to understand that. If Israel did not know this little secret of brutality by any means, it would’ve been long kicked out of the Palestinian territories. Therefore these governments are united in their determination to preserve the right to violence.

In his defense of the Baader-Meinhof group during their infamous trial in the seventies – some might even have the memory of the hijacked Lufthansa flight in 1977 done by the Red Army Faction (RAF) for the release of the RAF prisoners - this is what the French writer Genet had to say: “If we reflect on any vital phenomenon, even in its narrowest, biological sense, we understand that violence and life are synonymous. The kernel of wheat that germinates and breaks through the frozen earth, the chick’s beak that cracks open the eggshell, the impregnation of a woman, the birth of a child can all be considered violent. And no one casts doubt on the child, the woman, the chick, the bud, the kernel of wheat.”

This is the violence of the non-state actor who intends to leave no stone unturned to counter the brutality of the state. Genet further adds in the same essay: “The more oppressive brutality becomes, the more will the violence that is life be required to the point of heroism.” The poor are non-state actors and the terrorists directly or indirectly represent the anger of the oppressed albeit in a sinister manner – the oppressed who are every minute reminded of their oppression in the face of glaring wealth and luxury of the rich.

The poor in this country have a different view of what terror is all about. It’s not the view of the media or of the envious middle-classes who’re busy competing with one another for the leftovers of the rich. Forget about what people say before a camera. Just take a look at what they say behind a camera. The media did a great job in making the government look like fools and the terrorists like heroes or anti-heroes.

The common people that include students and the unemployed and everyone denied of a basic standard of living have a grudging admiration for the terrorist and their admiration comes from the fact that the terrorist is disrupting the system that is destroying them body and soul. What the terrorist is doing is what they’re incapable of doing but nevertheless would like to do.

This is the reality on the ground. The US is the most hated and unpopular regime on earth. The Pakistani and Indian governments are the most slavish and despicable regimes in South Asia. They’ll do anything to please their
American masters. Rich and powerful people are hated in this country for their decadent lifestyles and their cynicism.

Commenting on the killing of Israeli Olympians in Munich by the Palestinian organization Black September in 1972 none other than Sartre said: "Terrorism is the atomic bomb of the poor. The only weapon available to the Palestinians is terrorism. It's a terrible weapon but the poor and the underdogs have no other weapon. Violence exists. It exists in regimes run by police who are themselves violent. People who are victims of such regimes can do no other than respond with violence. I see it as a valuable political gesture."

The exploitative leadership of these groups whether it’s the LTTE, the Lashkar-e-Toiba or the Jaish-e-Mohammed – they know how the poor feel. They’re no different from the governments they’re fighting against. They’re geniuses when it comes to channelizing anger and destructive energy and leaders with the potential to run giant corporations. The leaders and the organizations are guilty of being state-driven actors because they are doing what the state expects of them and they’re not directly involved in any conflict. They prey like vultures in a desert on the unhappiness of the exploited.

As long as the brutality of hunger, poverty and injustice do not come to an end, the brutality of the terrorist, the jihadist, the Maoist and every other "non-state actor" will continue with a greater violence – not just to make a point but to communicate a deceptively simple message that they’re not going away any time soon.

ravikumar (2010-06-22 05:12:44)
Prakash Kona here rightly points out to the constant othering process taken up by the state against the angered, deprived, poor who in retaliation take up arms against the system. Cynicism has become the norm in India and its counterpart Pakistan wherein any struggle against state oppression is labeled as terrorism, naxalism or whatever ‘isms’ that a dictionary could contain. In pointing out succinctly that violence and life go parallel, Kona is striving to show the perpetual struggle for a free, liberated space that all mortals crave for.

The author has raised more questions than even addressed. equating life with violence is perhaps just another one form the long list of dystopian ambitions that the world painted here can aspire to, here maybe even terror can be justified. right and wrong do not remain important anymore.

Prakash Kona (2010-06-23 17:14:14)
Violence in itself is neither right nor wrong. We cannot have an abstract theory to speak about violence. A woman who is being raped has a right to be violent towards her assailant. A violent situation produces violent results. Abstract TV intellectuals like to believe that “terrorism” as a form of violence is wrong because it is wrong. That’s not an argument. That’s merely a statement that means nothing. It’s like saying I’m hungry because I’m hungry. The cause is the effect of the cause. The violence that is life is life to those whose have nothing to lose; to those pushed into poverty and powerlessness violence is an act of self-preservation; to “me” it is “wrong” because I’m not one of them; but to them it makes perfect sense. Those conditions that produce the violence must be changed instead of going by absolute categories of “right” and “wrong” which serve the interests of those who create the violent situation and are responsible for it.
Sign the United for Education petition! (2010-06-21 14:04)

Today is [1]United for Education day and there's a range of protests and events taking place across the country. Details can be found [2]here. For those who can't make it: sign the petition online [3]here.

1. http://unitedforeducation.org.uk/

Review of 'Living on Borrowed Time' by Zygmunt Bauman (2010-06-22 11:00)

I'm sure I wasn't the only person looking forward to Zygmunt Bauman's reading of the financial crisis. I imagined that such an analysis might represent the culmination of his work on liquid modernity, decisively unpicking the antinomies which led the global economy into its precipitous collapse and signposting potential pathways out of it. Therefore it was a little disappointing when Bauman's first treatment of the crisis didn't come in the form of a monograph. Living on Borrowed Time consists of a series of dialogues between Zygmunt Bauman and Citzali Rovirosa-Madrazo. These cover an eclectic mix of topics ranging from genocide and biotechnology to love and utopia.
Bauman offers his analysis of the ‘credit crunch’ in the first dialogue. Drawing on Rosa Luxemburg’s account of capitalist imperialism as involving an unceasing search for new lands to exploit, Bauman suggests that the debt-financed consumer boom in western societies represented the colonisation of our intimate hopes and desires. As such he argues that, far from being any end to capitalism, the recent crisis merely represents “the exhaustion of the latest grazing pasture”. It is not an outcome of the banks’ failure but a fully predictable consequence of their drive to engender a pervasive and ongoing indebtedness across the populace.

Central to this process was the introduction of the credit card which normalised the continuing servicing of debts rather than the expectation of their prompt repayment and, as such, altered our existential orientation towards the future. As with much of his recent work, Bauman is offering little which is analytically new here but is rather thematizing generally familiar social ideas in his own moral philosophical style. In doing so he offers an evocative portrayal of the ethical limitations of consumer capitalism:

“Today, in a setting successfully transformed form one of a society of producers (profits made mostly from the exploitation of hired labour) into one of a society of consumers (profits made mostly from the exploitation of consumerist desires), the ruling business philosophy insists that the purpose of business is to prevent needs from being satisfied and to evoke, induce, conjure and beef up more needs clamouring for satisfaction and more potential customers prompted into action by such needs.”

Another highlight of the book is his compelling analysis which situates the 21st century national security state in terms of the collapse of the post-war welfare settlement. He argues that whereas the state once grounded its legitimacy on the alleviation of “market-produced insecurity”, it now seizes upon personal security as a basis for legitimation. However unlike the insecurity produced by the market the existential dimensions of the ‘terrorist threat’ must be “artificially beefed up, or at least highly dramatized, to inspire sufficient ‘official fear’ and at the same time overshadow and relegate to a secondary position the economically generated insecurity about which the state administration can and intends to do nothing”. The effect of this ‘beefing up’ is that the non-materialization of threats can be presented as a “result of the vigilance, care and goodwill of state organ”. Bauman offers a potent image of western societies cycling into fear and despair, as every non-materialized threat serves to affirm the underlying fears of the populace and the illiberal measures taken by the state to counteract these ‘threats’.

Overall though the book seems to lack coherence. It is difficult to see how the ‘conversations’ fit together as a whole beyond the slightly vacuous claim in the blurb that they cover the ‘pressing moral and political issues of our time’. Similarly it is often hard to follow the thread within particular conversations. The responsibility for this deficiency rests with Bauman’s interlocutor who often fails to pose her questions clearly and, at times, exhibits an intellectual enthusiasm for the exchange which detracts from its clarity. I don’t think she can be blamed for this, as I imagine I’d probably react quite similarly to the opportunity of an extended dialogue with Bauman. Nonetheless it does detract from a book which, though unlikely to persuade Bauman’s detractors of the value of his recent work, offers enough periodic insight so as to outweigh its deficiencies.

Terry Wassall (2010-06-23 14:23:22)

I think an observation by Mark Fisher in his book Capitalist Realism, relates to you review rather nicely, that the primary forms of social control under current capitalism are indebtedness and fear. You and your readers may be interested in the forthcoming conference for the launch of the Bauman Institute at the University of Leeds - web site and details [1]http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/bauman/conference/re-thinking-global-society.php. Before the end of July a Bauman Institute community section in the web site will be launched which interested individuals can join and participate in. Incidentally the Website field in this comment form seems to only accept a limited number of characters, too few for me to add my Uni staff page.
David Harvey on the BBC’s Hard Talk (2010-06-23 09:00)

How many people saw this when it was originally on TV a few weeks ago? It’s a very interesting example of a high profile academic on mainstream TV. I thought he acquitted himself rather well, particularly given the consistent oversimplification of his interlocutor. It would be interesting to get other people’s viewpoints though. Did he do well? How could he have done better? Should he have been on the program in the first place? There’s a comments facility below the videos, although unfortunately it requires that you register.

Suggest links, resources and features (2010-06-23 14:59)

We are trying to build a collection of [1] general links, [2] campaign links and [3] resources. However the internet is a rather large place so if you have any suggestions at all please do get in [4] contact. Likewise we welcome any suggestions about new features which the Sociological Imagination should incorporate. Current plans include a discussion forum, events calendar and a news wire - what else should we include? Again please get in touch if you have any ideas.

Call for Contributions: Public Scholarship and Private Commitment (2010-06-24 10:00)

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([1] articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [2] here.
New Politics? Even for Asylum Seekers? (2010-06-25 09:00)

Life under New Labour wasn't a lot of fun for asylum seekers. Five rafts of primary legislation in the 13 years that the party was in power progressively worked to limit asylum seekers rights and access to basic support. From the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act to the 2007 UK Borders act, asylum seekers were subjected to forced dispersal, the end of benefits entitlements (and the introduction of an alternative support system offering poor quality housing and financial aid 60% of normal benefits), biometric ID cards, tagging, the proliferation of arbitrary immigration detention and compulsory regular reporting to monitoring centres. They were banned from taking employment, appeal rights on asylum decisions were diminished year on year, and failed asylum seekers were pushed off the edge of the welfare cliff completely: essentially left destitute.

Over the course of this sorry period in the history of immigration policy in this country, refugee community organisations, NGOs, charities, academics, social movement activists and left wing politicians (the Greens and Respect mostly) have been fighting for the rights of asylum seekers. Those lobbying for change have focused their work in the following key areas: the right to work, an end to immigration detention (and child detention specifically), reintegration of asylum seekers into the mainstream benefits system, an end to violent, forced and unexpected deportations, the inclusion of sexual orientation in recognition of asylum claims, and access to healthcare for refused asylum seekers.

Such campaigns have not been the sole purview of the Left. Even the Tory MP Iain Duncan Smith felt moved to speak out with publication of ‘Asylum Matters’ by right wing think tank The Centre for Social Justice in December.
2008. The report was highly critical of the treatment of asylum seekers, and particularly the denial of the right to work. When even the Tories are worried about the state’s treatment of asylum seekers you know you should be worried.

Indeed, James Graham wrote in this month’s [1]Red Pepper magazine

“one of the sticking points in the Lib-Lab talks on which Labour was unwilling to concede concerned locking up the children of illegal immigrants. This pretty much says it all. There are a great many things that worry me about the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition but I am confident that we will end up with a freer, more human society as a result. And that is about as damning an indictment of Labour as it is possible to make” (p.12)

Is he right? In the run up to the general election earlier this year the [2]Refugee Council, [3]Liberty and the [4]Scottish Refugee Council called on candidates to sign a pledge to “remember the importance of providing safety to people fleeing war, torture and persecution in debates on asylum and immigration”. 1,031 parliamentary candidates signed the pledge, including the men who are now Prime Minister and Deputy PM. Both also promised to investigate ending child detention at the Citizens UK leaders debate a week before the election.

Positive though these moves were, neither the election pledge on asylum nor the commitment to consider ending child detention are legally binding commitments to action. So now that the ‘new politics’ has been loudly declared, what can we expect for asylum seekers, a group quite desperately in need of a new politics? Early signs were good: Nick Clegg announced an end to child detention just 6 days after the general election. Surely this was a signal that a new approach was, if nothing else, possible. Unfortunately, just four days later Damien Green, the newly appointed immigration minister, announced that there would in fact be a review of alternatives to detention for minors and the current system would stay in place until this had been completed. Campaign groups were angered, with [5]End Child Detention Now reporting

"when they said 'we will end child detention,' they meant 'Keep on arresting babies'... We are witnessing an orchestrated attempt to co-opt children's charities and refugee and asylum seeker welfare organisations in the hope that by including them in dialogue and a pledge of future action the new administration will secure their silence and compliance."

What other indications do we have of how the coalition government will deal with asylum seekers? The coalition manifesto (aka [6]‘The Coalition: Our Programme for Action’) reiterated the plan for a review on child detention. It secondly pledged to “stop the deportation of asylum seekers who have had to leave particular countries because their sexual orientation or gender identification puts them at proven risk of imprisonment, torture or execution” (p.18). Again, this sounds good, and is notable in that it has not been the focus of such a high profile campaign as some other issues. However, as Bernard Keenan noted in the [7]Guardian, “as a statement taken out of context, it is legally meaningless until it is translated into policy changes by the Home Office. On the face of it, it doesn’t really change anything.”

The manifesto thirdly states “we will explore new ways to improve the current asylum system to speed up the processing of applications” (p.21). Nothing new there. New Labour made the same claims in several White Papers during their reign but rather than improving justice for asylum seekers, it has led to a progressively more restrictive asylum system with fewer rights of appeal.

Other signs suggest that this old politics of asylum is likely to continue. On the 8th June the [8]Guardian reported a leaked memo which indicated that “government lawyers have warned high court judges that last-minute legal challenges should not be allowed to ‘disrupt or delay’ a deportation flight to Baghdad due to leave Britain early tomorrow.” Forty eight men were deported the next day and have since reported that UK Border Agency staff used violence against them in the process. Two days later plans for ‘reintegration centres’ were announced, to legitimate
deporting under 18s back to Afghanistan at a time when the news is awash with reports of the ongoing instability of large parts of the country. Neither the new Immigration Minister Damien Green nor Home Secretary Theresa May, have yet made speeches on asylum. The picture so far is good in certain respects but scratch just below the surface and the old politics is alive and well. The acknowledgement of sexual orientation is to be welcomed, but it is unclear how the manifesto pledge will translate into concrete change. Child detention is an emotive topic and a good PR move. Should children be detained in prisons without charge, having not committed a crime, for unspecified periods? Few would answer yes and as a consequence an end to child immigration detention is unlikely to face serious political opposition. Whether this move will result in the splitting up of families or other draconian measures which are potentially equally as detrimental to asylum seeking children, however, remains to be seen. Furthermore, when it comes to adult asylum seekers, the majority of whom are single males, arguing for an end to detention without charge requires the decriminalisation of the language of asylum, something the coalition may not be ready for. The 2010 general election was dominated, as so many before, by the unchallenged assumption that immigration per se is probably a bad thing but that we tolerate it because we know we need skilled migrants in certain sectors to keep the economy going. For asylum seekers the unspoken intersections of race and class in this story mean that their value to this country, or our duty of care towards them, is rendered meaningless. A deafening silence around the involvement of the UK in current refugee producing situations facilitates this displacement of responsibility. On these fundamental issues there is little to suggest that the new politics of the Lib/Con coalition will mark a clear break with the past. However, there are yet signs that the Lib Dems will be able to temper Tory prejudices and score some wins for asylum seeker rights. We watch and wait.

1. http://www.redpepper.org.uk/

The Universities Minister speaking at Oxford Brookes (2010-06-26 15:00)

Universities Minister David Willetts at Oxford Brookes giving his first keynote speech on education to an audience of university vice-chancellors:

[EMBED]

Call for Polemics (2010-06-27 10:00)

Academic publishing can often be a frustratingly slow affair - particularly for those attempting to engage with a social world which seems to change at an ever increasing rate. Therefore we are looking for contributions of polemics: shorter and sociologically informed commentaries upon current events addressed to the middle ground between
journalistic political commentary and academic papers. Contributions should be submitted [1]here.

David Cameron and the Erasure of Social Class (2010-06-28 08:00)

One of the most curious features of the recent UK election was the ambiguous media treatment enjoyed by David Cameron's class background. While the fact of his privilege was unassailable, with Cameron himself telling ITV that his was a "very posh, very privileged upbringing", the moral salience of this fact for assessing the man as a future Prime Minister was roundly denied by everyone to the right of Old Labour. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the political expediency of such a rhetorical strategy in defence of a party led by the most nakedly privileged leadership that it, historically the party of the privileged, has enjoyed for many decades.

Even so it raises the question of the political and cultural circumstances which renders such a strategy both obvious and plausible. I would argue that it represents the culmination of liberal individualism, as a questionable (and once widely questioned) picture of an atomistic social world becomes entrenched in cultural common sense and begins to shape the limits of the thinkable. Given such an understanding any personal characteristic (someone’s socio-economic background and even their political views) which is not a consequence of an individual's immediate choice is seen to be beyond criticism because to criticise it would transgress the idea of tolerance which colonises ever greater areas of argumentative space.

On a purely political level this is problematic because it leaves matters off stage which should surely be subject to debate and scrutiny. However I want to argue that it’s also conceptually incoherent, in the sense that it’s simply not possible to offer a thoroughgoing appraisal of candidates for office which makes no mention of the social circumstances which shaped them.

The realist theorist Margaret Archer suggests that human identity comprises an I, Me, We and You. She argues that the development of an adult identity necessitates the movement through these four stages and that, throughout our lives, shifts in our identity occur through ongoing cycles of such movements. 'I' is our internal sense of self, 'me' is our objective social placement, 'we' is our collective action within society and 'you' is the aggregate of these factors with which others within society are able to ascertain and know about us. The aforementioned rhetorical strategy (and it is a rhetorical strategy though the cultural framework upon which it draws isn’t and is correspondingly much more pervasive and dangerous) serves to censor the 'me' and the 'we'. Their moral relevance to the assessment of a person is denied and, furthermore, any suggestion that they should not be left 'off stage' is seen to be, at least potentially, prejudicial.

The result is that any sense of Cameron’s objective social placement (the sheer wealth & privilege into which he was born) is seen as being off limits. To mention it invites accusations of 'inverted snobbery', 'prejudice' or, worse, 'the politics of envy'. Likewise political discourse quickly loses any sense of his membership of a collective group pursuing collective aims which serve some interests within society and work against others. The result is a narcissistic, childish and contradictory politics. It embraces the 'I' suggesting that we ought to judge based on
personal character and other virtues while castigating discussion of those factors (the ‘me’ and the ‘we’) which serve to shape and define who this man is, what he cares about, how he views the social world, who he is allied with, what his interests are etc. This leads to the evacuation of an intellectual space which can be filled by the work of professional advertisers and marketers, paid small fortunes to craft an image and control public perceptions.

Review of 'The Aftermath of Feminism' by Angela McRobbie (2010-06-29 07:34)

Is feminism as a movement no longer indispensable? Is it redundant or too aggressive for contemporary society? In The Aftermath of Feminism Angela McRobbie argues that the contemporary social and cultural landscape (especially in the global North) could be called post-feminist, an era marked by “anti-feminist sentiment”.

Through the book, McRobbie explores contemporary society of the United Kingdom and argues that we are currently witnessing a post-feminist condition; a condition that sees feminism taken for granted in the belief that gender equality has been achieved. McRobbie states that feminist values have indeed been incorporated into governmental policies and popular culture, but those values that have been incorporated stem from liberal feminism, which has eroded feminism(s) related to social criticism. McRobbie successfully highlights her argument through exploration of glossy magazines, popular television shows, films like "Bridget Jones' diary" or the "Ten Years Younger" Channel 4 series, and offers an analysis of how obsession with femininity and middle-class whiteness in popular programmes undermines feminism as a whole.

Slogans such as "woman have made it" or “freedom of choice” are contested by McRobbie, who instead argues that contemporary society has created a 'successful and individualistic female' who is able to compete in education and work as a privileged subject of the gender mainstreaming policies adopted by the UK’s New Labour Government. Based on the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, the author draws on the concept of “female individualization”, which suggests that the contemporary young woman is now in possession of greater agency allowing her to have an impact on society. McRobbie names this greater female opportunity and choice the ‘post-feminism masquerade’. The post-feminist masquerade, she argues, is a new form of gender power which re-establishes the heterosexual matrix in order to secure masculine hegemony. This new form of gender power is particularly insidious, as it takes place under the pretence of "women's own choice". Furthermore, McRobbie states that the post-feminism masquerade also works as a mechanism of exclusion and helps re-establish colonisation by restoring whiteness as the cultural dominant discourse (69).

To make her point, McRobbie focuses on four key areas: the fashion beauty industry, education-employment opportunities, sexuality-reproduction and globalization. These areas highlight the so-called successes of feminism, whereby women today are able to validate and demonstrate their “own lifestyles choices”. However, while women have progressed in education and employment, the global fashion and communication complex make sure that white, masculine hegemony is reassured. In this case, these industries work to re-establish racial hierarchies by undoing multiculturalism – in the case of Black and Asian woman – and, instead, advocate integration and assimilation into white dominant society.

Drawing on Butler’s concept of “illegible rage”, McRobbie argues that feminine melancholia is incorporated into current definitions of what it is to be a normal female. In other words, the struggle faced by women in order to
represent and emulate the modern woman, well depicted in glossy-fashion magazines has produced a "pathological" young woman (e.g. anorexia, drug and alcohol abuse, mutilation). Such pathology is normalised and glamorised by the fashion industry through extra-skinny and sad-faced models (110).

McRobbie perceives a "movement of women" which she recognizes as a requirement of the contemporary socio-economic system. To contextualize her argument, McRobbie takes the genre of 'make-over' television programmes where women are transformed in order to be full participants in contemporary labour market and consumer culture, especially the fashion industry. Through examining Bourdieu and Butler, McRobbie questions the assumption that social divisions are nowadays increasingly feminised. In a detailed analysis of 'make-over' programmes she finds that female solidarity is broken along other divisions, such as the global North and South. Such divisions among women are characterised by "intra-female aggression" in a post-feminist climate filled with competitiveness, bitchiness and violence.

In The Aftermath of Feminism McRobbie gives a wake-up call to those who celebrate gender equality and argue that women have achieved the same level of education and work-labour participation (or in some cases better, according to statistics) as their male counterparts. To those who assume that feminism is an obsolete movement, McRobbie presents a well-written work which demands that we pay attention to the inequalities women continue to face. In this case, McRobbie attempts to 'de-mask' the masquerade of equality supported by a "gender mainstreaming" discourse.

Regrettably, McRobbie's argument seems to ignore and in some cases demonize the pleasure that women might actually find in choosing a 'kind of fashion style'. McRobbie tends to generalize women that enjoy opportunities hard fought for by feminist movements as 'cultural dopes' unwittingly subjected by the fashion industry. The Aftermath of Feminism is presented in a highly-sophisticated and theoretically complex form leaving room for scholars to further analyze post-feminism and its several representations not only in Britain but also in social arenas around the world.

Newswire (2010-06-30 09:00)

As you may have noticed there's a list of stories and links which appear on the right hand side of the page under the title 'newswire'. The idea is to collect interesting news stories and opinion pieces each day which are likely to appeal to readers of the website. We're looking for a few people to help keep it updated - if you're interested in doing this then please get in [1]touch. It's a very simple process involving a shared [2]Twitter account. Also feel free to add us directly if you're a regular Twitter user.

1. m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Support the union at Manchester college - sign the petition! (2010-06-30 14:00)

Management at the college have taken the unprecedented action of de-recognising the union in the latest phase of a bitter dispute over the imposition of new contracts. Please take a moment to sign the [1]online petition which calls on the Board of Governors to ensure that the college meets to the union to resolve their differences. There's more information about the dispute [2]here. The recent action sets a worrying precedent for further education in Britain and it's important that the union at the college get widespread support.


1.2 July

Vince Cable announces cuts to funding for students (2010-07-01 08:00)

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has received a revised grant letter from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, Vince Cable, that says specific funding for 10,000 students starting university this year will be axed from 2011-12, on top of a previously announced drop in funding. UCU have [1]argued that the letter exposes the Liberal Democrats' pro-university rhetoric during in the election as lacking any substance and accused the party of lacking credibility.

This move seems to be just one part of a much wider attack upon the current arrangement of [2]higher education within the UK. With Lord Browne's [3]report due in the next few months (and seeming likely to provide a technocratic justification to what is a predominately ideological assault upon the university system) the only chance of resisting these cuts will be from widespread resistance within higher education (undergraduates, postgraduates, academics and auxiliary staff) and hopefully grass roots resistance from [4]within the governing coalition.

3. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article6909645.ece

Willetts considers private takeovers of public institutions (2010-07-02 09:00)

There's a worrying story in the Times Higher Education [1]this week relating to the government's willingness to consider private companies taking over public universities. David Willetts has apparently come under intense pressure from BBP (and other private education providers) to begin an opening up of the university system to private corporations and thus far he has said that such companies have a "significant role to play" in the government's
future plans for higher education. BBP have actually commissioned a report from law firm Eversheds which maps out the regulatory framework within which such takeovers could become viable, as well arguing that the inclusion of "external providers" are necessary to ensure a "a properly diverse sector". There's a UCU report on the issue available [2]here.

Intriguingly this seems to precisely the same rhetoric utilised by News Corporation's James Murdoch when [3]attacking the BBC earlier this year. Murdoch argued that the scope of the BBC’s activities were "chilling" and that such state-sponsored journalism was a "threat to the plurality and independence" of news provision. The most obvious way of undercutting this discourse is to offer concrete accounts of how certain public goods are unstable or unlikely when provision is expected to take place through profit driven organizations. At the end of the day this notion of 'diversity' within a given sector makes little sense without some unstated assumption that this serves the public interest. In this sense the debate hinges on an empirical issue and one that needs to be comprehensively won if we are to avoid perhaps irreversible changes to higher education.


Discussion forum (2010-07-03 09:15)

We now have a [1]discussion forum accessible through the tools option on the navigation bar at the top of the screen. There’s no need to create an account in order to post on there, as its accessible through most existing online accounts e.g. google, facebook, yahoo etc. It’s a place to discuss issues and ideas relating to higher education, social science and public scholarship. Similarly feel free to leave comments or ideas about the website. We welcome any and all ideas about things we could do or feature.


The Humanities and Social Sciences (2010-07-04 10:00)

[1]
Great one. Makes a point certainly. Any kind of distinction that creates fences between various knowledges is problematic - even something as seemingly different as geometry and poetry. At the level of reality knowledges by their very nature come together to serve humanity's struggles with nature. For heuristic purposes, yes - distinctions might be essential. But to treat them as ends in themselves only serves vested interests, by which I mean professors in universities who need to keep their chairs warm for themselves and their proteges - not to mention this criminal system that thrives on divisions rather than celebrate differences.

I'd agree with this to an extent but I think there are intrinsic limits to interdisciplinarity. There are often unacknowledged complementarities between disciplines which, through careful theoretical and methodological work, can be drawn out and rendered practically useful (applied linguistics and qualitative social research is what I'm thinking of in particular). Ironically enough the main obstacle to recognising these unactualised potentials is the specialist knowledge which identifying them would allow us to transcend (if you see what I mean).

There's a round up of the days activity on the United for Education campaign's [1]website. Overall it seems to have been covered by a really pleasing range of media outlets. For instance see [2]here and [3]here. As further cuts gradually take effect on a day-to-day level, it's really important that this campaign continues to receive attention and support. I think all involved thus far should be applauded for their efforts and hopefully the campaign can continue to grow.

1. http://unitedforeducation.org.uk/
While tourism is one of the defining features of contemporary society and an important source of economic growth, its study has remained relatively marginalized within the social sciences. However, since the 1980s a substantial body of literature crossing the disciplines of tourism studies, sociology, social psychology and geography has developed (p. 2), leading to insights regarding the form and function of tourism as an industry and a social practice. In drawing upon this interdisciplinary body of work, Tourist Cultures highlights the main debates and different theoretical approaches which have been applied to tourism. In bringing sometimes opposing perspectives together, the authors argue for an approach to tourism which is subject and space centred. In so doing, they offer a theoretical perspective which is capable of dealing with tourism's complexity and which reaffirms tourism as an important area of sociological study.

Tourist Cultures outlines tourism as a form of social interaction that is highly relevant to the construction of individual identity and space. Separated into two distinct parts – ‘Tourist Selves’ and ‘Tourist Spaces’ – one of the starting premises of the book is that tourism requires a holistic approach that takes into account both the macro dimensions of structural power relations but also the micro level of daily lived experiences and interactions. In taking the macro and the micro into consideration, the book provides an approach to tourism that is sensitive to global structures as well as class, gender, race and ethnicity, and the power relations that structure these social differences, but also an approach which makes room for agency and resistance through embodied interaction in tourism space. While various scholars have suggested that global tourism leads to the domination of local cultures and in turn their homogenization, Tourist Cultures provides an alternative perspective, suggesting instead that the complexity of interactions that occur between tourists and the toured in local tourist space can lead to a hybridization of culture (p. 106-109) – or “tourist cultures” – which transcend notions of domination.

In seeing tourism as a form of social interaction one of the book’s main tasks is to challenge the idea that tourists are only “flâneurs” – visitors to space that merely gaze upon its otherness and the ‘Others’ who occupy it (p. 6-8). Instead the authors introduce the idea of tourists as “choristers”, individuals who not only gaze, but also interact and engage with places and local inhabitants (p. 11-12) and, in so doing, (re)construct their individual identities while simultaneously helping to (re)produce tourist space and tourist cultures. Thus, the book argues that one of the main impetuses behind tourism is its ability to act as a source of identity construction. Tourists travel to experience ‘Other’ space and people, a process which is thought to give them greater insight into themselves and allow for personal growth and change (p. 36). However, in traveling to experience ‘Other’ space and people, tourists do more than construct their “traveller identity” (132-133); through their interactions they play an important role in constructing the symbolic meaning of travel space and the cultures found there. In this regard the authors draw upon
geographer Soja's concept of "thirdspace" - the simultaneousness of space as being both real and imagined (127) - in order to highlight how tourism space has both tangible and intangible dimensions and how these dimensions interact with, help form and are formed by the various people(s) who inhabit it. These processes are exemplified through discussions of female sex tourism, backpacking, virtual tourism, as well as tourism in natural and urban spaces.

This process, as the authors outline, is imbued with power relations. Dominant discourses of the 'Other' help to shape tourists’ expectations and interpretations of their travel experiences. However, in following the social interactionist perspectives of Mead and Giddens, Tourist Cultures makes room for subjective interpretation and embodied actions which can, ultimately, challenge and alter dominant discourses. The authors argue that how people interact and live in physical space helps to create its "social value" - the "meanings people attach to place" (p. 11). Forms of tourism which see local ownership and involvement in tourism production and allow for social interaction based on mutual respect are presented as having the ability to reaffirm local value while at the same time allowing for dynamism and change as a hybridization of cultures takes place (109).

While a complex theoretical work, Tourist Cultures is well-written and easily assessable to the new tourism researcher. In providing a more nuanced and flexible framework for understanding tourism based on social interaction, Tourist Cultures offers a way out of dichotomous thinking which has often trapped tourist scholars. While this theoretical perspective is refreshing in that it also seeks to go beyond discussions of tourism as good or bad for local communities and cultures, the specificities of how local resistance can take place remains relatively undeveloped. Thus, while the authors highlight local ownership and forms of tourism that make room for interaction and the development of social value as a route to sustainable tourism, the difficulties in fostering these forms of tourism are only briefly touched upon. In this case, while the argument is made that analyses which take into account both macro and micro levels provide for a more thorough understanding of tourism's complexity, the book's prime focus remains on the micro level which leads it to under assess how the global political economy of tourism may affect possibilities for, and forms of, local resistance. In the end, while the idealism of the book is attractive, further empirical support is needed to help lend it credence.

Sociology blogging at the University of Leeds (2010-07-07 10:00)

Round about the beginning of this academic year, September 2009, the University of Leeds, like nearly all the higher education institutions in the UK, was preparing to make the cuts imposed by the Government in response to the economic crisis. About the same time a number of commentators in the media and in government circles were questioning the value and relevance of arts, social science and humanities research in our Universities given that so much public money was spent on it. They questioned their contribution to public debate and policy and their “value for money” claiming that a great deal of money was being spent on esoteric and marginal research that was only of interest to specialists and was disseminated mainly through obscure journals and even more obscure conferences. These criticisms caused understandable anxiety at a time when Universities were being encouraged to restructure and look for substantial savings and prompted a number of counter initiatives.

Perhaps the most recent example of this is the publication by the British Academy of [1]Past, Present and Future: The Public Value of the Humanities and Social Science[2], a document that is a direct response to the “drastic funding cuts to university and research budgets [that] will imperil the massive contribution to the UK’s economic, social and cultural life made by the humanities and social sciences”. The document highlights the “enormous
reservoir of public value” that the humanities and social sciences generate and demonstrates, with examples, “their contribution to Britain’s health, wealth and international reputation”. The criticisms and economic threats also prompted discussions amongst social science academics and researchers about how they could engage more effectively with a wider public audience.

During the previous summer I had participated in the design and running of a number of workshop sessions for academic staff and postgraduate students on how to begin to develop a digital presence and reputation using a variety of so-called Web 2.0 tools and platforms. One of the topics covered was using blogs as a research tool and for connecting with a wider network of researchers and interested individuals. Generally this provoked a lot of interest and good intentions. In practice however very few subsequently started blogs of their own. Follow up surveys found many did not start their own blogs because of the time commitment and doubting that the pay-off would make it worth while. A few expressed concerns about exposing their work and ideas to critical public scrutiny. There was some indication however of a willingness to get involved in a collaborative effort where there was some support and guidance on writing blog posts and any commitment would be shared.

The challenge to engage more effectively with a broad public audience and the conclusion that staff and postgraduate students would be willing to collaborate in a blogging project if suitably supported prompted a group of us in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at Leeds University to start the [3]Public Sociology blog last October 2009. The aim is to encourage a wide variety of different types of post including reports on aspects of research that may be of public interest, reports on events attended, commentary on current issues where a sociological take would illuminate, personal opinion pieces, book and film reviews, and just about anything else that could be of interest if presented through the filter of a sociological imagination. We have a very informal and supportive editorial process where draft posts are password protected so that colleagues can view and comment and the authors can modify posts before they are made public. Editorial comments tend to concentrate on style and terminology rather than content as we are trying to encourage an accessible more informal and journalistic style than that which we tend to use for academic writing for a specialist audience of peers. This usually involves trying to be more succinct!

The intention from the start was, once up and running, to explore the possibility of opening up the blog to contributors from other universities and maybe try to attract guest contributors from a variety of other institutions and organisations. Our main concern has been, and still is, the sustainability of the project. Research on blogs of this type reveals that most eventually grind to a halt as the initial team of enthusiasts lose interest, lose heart or simply move on. The ones that succeed are those that have a committed group of editors and regular contributors but also draw on a wider network of contributors who post on a more occasional basis. One way to ensure the sustainability of joint authored blogs like this is to join with other blogs of similar outlook and objectives in a loose supportive coalition that link to one another, comment where appropriate on each others’ posts (any blogger knows what great encouragement it is to get interested comments) and even perhaps guest post on each other’s blogs. This would increase the audience for each blog through overlapping readerships. It could also lead to the development of a community of like-minded bloggers and readers that takes on a momentum of its own and perhaps could feed into face-to-face conferences, events and local meetings as well as on-line collaborations. You never know.

Can the government’s new ‘axe-man’ really pretend to run an independent inquiry into fees? (2010-07-08 09:00)

Former BP boss Lord Browne has been parachuted into government as the ‘lead non-executive director’. He has been asked to use his experience to help make Whitehall work in a more businesslike manner. Rather worryingly he apparently represents a foretaste of things to come, as he will come to oversee a string of senior business figures who will be made non-executive directors on the board of every Whitehall department’ which suggests that Conservative rhetoric about the ‘post-bureaucratic’ era notwithstanding the technocratic tendencies of British governance are alive and well.

However from the standpoint of British academia the more pressing question is where this appointment leaves the independence of his inquiry into university fees.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, released the following statement:

“I am very concerned that Lord Browne has accepted this position. The independence of the fees review from government is paramount and the position of its chair integral to that. Accepting a job from David Cameron, a man who made it quite clear during the election campaign that he wanted university fees to stay, clearly brings the legitimacy of the review’s independence into question.

In the interest of this review retaining any legitimacy he should resign. We would also call for the whole objectives of the review to be revisited and for it to focus on ensuring students are able to fulfill their potential. We see no reason why people should be left behind because of cost.”

2. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article6909645.ece

Between plagiarism and writing a bad book (2010-07-09 08:00)

The choice is a tough one and I prefer the former. A bad book is a sign that one lacks imagination. Plagiarism is proof that you’ve some imagination. I prefer being accused of some imagination to none. An honest person would rather write a bad book. Honesty is a sign of lack of imagination. It’s not a coincidence that most criminals are imaginative people who stay in the public eye while the honest ones are condemned to die unknown. The worst thing about the honest is that they’re unbearably boring. They neither gossip nor slander – that bread and wine of the imagination!

The ones that “fabricate” the past are the writers I admire the most. Postmodern writing to its credit has turned fabrication into a virtue. No one experiences everything they write about. Dostoevsky is not all the four Karamazov brothers in the novel The Brothers Karamazov. A writer imagines such a possibility. Story-telling is an art that places demands on those who undertake it. The performer is on stage and must do everything possible to compel the audience to stay engrossed. Remember the rowdy crowd at the Barafonda Theater in Fellini’s Roma
where the performers and audience are actually in a dialogue even when they hurl words and objects at each other!

The first performers in history were the prostitutes. For the most obvious reason that they could do what you would not expect from "respectable" women – simulate an orgasm. The first simulation was dissimulation and theater gained a lease of energy after the disastrous transition from a communal way of life to the stage of private property. In the matriarchal societies where religion was married to performance, the theater did not have an esoteric quality to it. Daily life was the theater and men and women the players. Class society declared a war on performance. Ideology or keeping the masses drugged with lies became intertwined with performance. Performance lost its spiritual quality but the soul of the performers did not rest in peace. They continued to protest ever since.

The magic of performance is not about virtue. If dissimulation is accepted as a dimension of living from which there is no escape I see no reason why it should not be so in art. The temptation to plagiarize comes from the need to be someone other than yourself. How can you be yourself in a system that places copyrights and patents ideas attaching a name to a concept? If we accept that as being right, plagiarism far from being something to be ashamed of, is something to be admired and emulated.

There is another possibility. You can plagiarize and still write a bad book. That is unforgivable and the mediocre of the world fall in this category. I remember a teacher at school scolding a boy caught for cheating in the exams. He scolded the boy for cheating without knowing how to cheat. Maybe he was ironic but the teacher knew that cheating was an art or he would not have ended up being a teacher. Einstein has a point: "The secret of creativity is knowing how to hide your sources." No writer understood this little trade secret better than Shakespeare who came up with countless characters and each one unique and bearing the stamp of creative genius.

Fatih Parlak (2010-07-09 18:07:12)
I certainly agree with you. I think that there is no possibility of not plagiarizing in this age in which everything is documented or stored somehow, somewhere. While recycling materials is OK, why not recycling ideas, providing that it is somehow different. However, I can’t help wondering why I got lesser mark in your Semiotics class due to plagiarism. :D:D:D (just joking!!!)

Naveena P K (2017-08-29 13:25:27)
Even though I have plagarised in most of my assignments,I clearly know that it just gives me momentary escape. It will help only in short run and ultimately you will have that sort of guilty feeling, that could tell you that, you could have given a try atleast .But it is always be good to write a book or anything that is your own which is sometimes difficult because every time , you prefer easy way .Yes I think being what you are or preserving your individuality is better than forging things. Even if you come up with a very bad book you can say that it’s yours and you have put your blood,sweat in it.

Naveena P K (2017-08-30 08:59:43)
I don’t think that people really like to read repetitive things. They expect something new from a author. May be the person may come with a bad book ,but still there is a chance that he/she will come with better one. There is no sort of imaginations or expectations with those authors who plagarised.

Labour MP Tom Watson calls Michael Gove a ’miserable pipsqueak of a man’ (2010-07-09 22:08)
I read some Marx and I liked it (2010-07-10 09:15)

[EMBED]

Democracy Village (2010-07-11 10:00)

This is an intriguing short film exploring [1] Democracy Village, an anti-war protest camp occupying Parliament Square. They’re currently facing eviction so if you’re in that area of London then pop in and take a look because it probably won’t be there for much longer. In fact [2] Brian Haw has become such a fixture of Parliament Square (3322 days and counting) that I suspect MPs will secretly rather miss his ranting though affable presence in the square.

[EMBED]

1. http://democracyvillage.org/

Review of ‘One Dimensional Woman’ by Nina Power (2010-07-12 07:40)

One Dimensional Woman is aphoristic and polemic from the start. As the author asks as the beginning of the book: “where have all the interesting women gone?”. In this slim volume the philosopher [1] Nina Power attempts to answer this question. Through doing so she offers a compelling account of the place of women within contemporary society and a challenging riposte to the depoliticising tendencies within third-wave feminism. Her main complaint is with the “apparent abdication of any systematic political thought on the part of today’s positive up-beat feminists” which she suggests bears some responsibility for the uncritical reproduction of an idea of female emancipation which “coincides so perfectly with consumerism”: self-expression through consumption, self-confidence through sexuality. It also stands critically blunt in relation to the [2] feminization of labour.
My favourite part of the book was her exploration of the role of sex in society through an inquiry into the cultural history of pornography. Power begins the chapter by counterpoising the empty and mechanical nature of contemporary pornography (“the sheer hard work of contemporary porn informs you that, without delusion, sex is just like everything else – grinding, relentless, boring”) with the joie de vivre she finds in vintage pornography (“the first thing you notice in these early films is the sheer level of silliness on show: sex isn’t just a succession of grim orgasms and the parading of physical prowess, but something closer to slapstick and vaudeville”). Whereas the latter “abounds in sweet expressions and moments of shared affection”, the former acts as a grim reminder of our own alienation: “sex is a type of work, just like any other”. For instance Power points to the bewildering proliferation of porn’s taxonomies since the onset of the internet age. Similarly she observes that one of the most successful porn films of all time involved 251 sex acts performed with 70 men over a 10 hour period. Modern pornography represents a triumph of instrumental reason (more choice, more variety, more sex) and, in so far as it increasingly shapes prevailing cultural understandings of sexuality, it insidiously entrenches the alienation which feeds it.
Another enjoyable section of the book is Power’s insightful (and genuinely funny) analysis of the phenomena of Sarah Palin in terms of Lancanian psychoanalysis. Through an intriguing perusal of the many facebook groups devoted to Palin (“I would totally do Sarah Palin”, “Sarah Palin is HOT!”, “I’d bang Sarah Palin”, “Sarah Palin is stirring things up – and I’m excited!” etc) and the mainstream coverage of her, Power offers an intriguing assessment of the likely future presidential candidate’s political and cultural significance:

“America has found its new hero(ine), and she’s a woman who turns the insults that every successful woman has hurled at her (dog, bitch, flirt) into ammunition to shoot dead her accusers. She turns maternity into a war-weapon, inexperience into a populist virtue and feminism into something that even the Christian right could approve of ... although Palin didn’t manage to make Vice President this time around, what she represents – a kind of terminator hockey-mom who calls herself a feminist – is something quite new”

However like many of the other ideas within the book, this one remains ultimately undeveloped. This is inevitable given how short the volume is and Power should be applauded for writing such an accessible and enjoyable text. Nonetheless in spite of its relative brevity this is a complex and multifaceted book. It’s aphoristic style facilitates a range and scope which would otherwise be impossible. There’s something immensely satisfying about a challenging, polemic and enjoyable academic book which can be comfortably read over the course of a long train journey. It’s also another impressive addition to [3]Zero Book’s eclectic range of titles.


REF to be delayed by a year (2010-07-13 08:00)

In a recent [1]speech David Willetts has confirmed that the [2]REF will be delayed by one-year in order to “figure out whether there is a method of assessing impact which is sound and which is acceptable to the academic community”. While it’s difficult to know how much of this decision can be said to ensue from protest against the ‘impact agenda’, it undoubtedly signal that the next year will prove crucial in determining the future state of research within British higher education.

Read more about UCU’s campaign on the subject [3]here.

2. http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/

Crises of Capitalism (2010-07-13 11:45)

[EMBED]

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Add the Sociological Imagination on Facebook (2010-07-13 17:09)

The Sociological Imagination now has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]Create your badge


Review of 'Sociology of Intellectual Life' by Steve Fuller (2010-07-14 09:00)

Given the brewing conflicts within British higher education it seems like an opportune moment for a thorough sociological analysis of academia. Such an analysis would supplement the expansive literature on the subjugation of higher education to market forces through a careful consideration of the consequences this process holds for the state of intellectual life and production of knowledge. This is the promise which Steve Fuller’s new book hold outs. The Sociology of Intellectual Life is divided into four chapters framed around Humbolt’s ideal of the modern university. The first relates to the institutions itself. The second considers its ideological justification. The third examines the kind of person the university hopes to produce. The fourth draws these strands together in an affirmation of the crucial virtue Fuller sees as absent within modern academia.

In the first chapter Fuller presents the university as a solution to what he terms ‘the modern problem of knowledge in society’: how can knowledge be universal in its scope while also universally accessible? In pre-modern times there was no such problem because knowledge was seen by its nature to be an elite possession which conferred authority. This was supplemented by an enlightenment ideal of the democratization of knowledge through the institution of the university. However this ideal now finds itself under threat on all sides, as managerialism increasingly prevails within the university in response to pervasive outside demands that learning be subjugated to all manner of market imperatives.

In the second chapter Fuller offers a sociological exploration of the status of philosophy in this modern academic environment. He traces a decline from the magisterial Kantian understanding of philosophy as a discipline which grounds all else to one which simply offers clarification of the intellectual output of other disciplines. In the process philosophy is seen to have ceded something crucial to the special sciences which in turn weakens the support it can offer to the ideal of knowledge which is universal in its scope.
In the third chapter Fuller considers the changing role of the intellectual. He attempts to recover a sense of “the intellectual as someone who is clearly of academic descent but not necessarily of academic destiny”. He suggests that a distinguished history of the intellectual can be traced from the court intellectuals of enlightenment Prussia through the expansion of academic tenure to the modern public intellectuals able to enjoy commercial success. However this traditions find itself under threat through an increasing aversion to intellectual risk-taking on the part of modern academics driven by an interest in the insular affairs of their discipline and a fear of the consequences which public involvement might hold.

In the final chapter Fuller advocates improvisation as a process through which intellectual life might find its redemption. He suggests that the costs associated with intellectual risk-taking on behalf of academics leaves it far too easy “to defer to the orthodoxy and to discount its dissenters”. He sketches out an image of a new academic culture more heterogeneous in its standards and more tolerant of dissent:

“So what would an improvisation-friendly academia look like? Certainly standards of public performance would shift. We would become more tolerant of people who speak crudely without notes, if they can improve as they take questions from the audience. But we would equally become less tolerant of people who refuse to take questions simply because they stray from their carefully prepared presentation. Instead of ‘sloppy/rigorous’, we would apply the binary ‘expansive/limited’ to describe the respective intellects of these people.”

It is here that Fuller’s arguments are at their most plausible. He’s surely correct in his claim that improvisation goes unrewarded (and indeed is actively disincentivised) within contemporary academia, as an overly restrictive career structure increasingly demands the sort of instrumental planning which too often precludes taking the time and effort to go out on a limb. Where his account is less plausible is in its embrace of ‘bullshit’. Though the application of this term might often represent a pernicious anti-intellectualism within mainstream culture, it can equally stand as a forthright affirmation of intellectual standards in the face of poor reasoning and vacuous arguments. Rather than accept ‘bullshit’ we should continue to affirm standards for scholarship while loosening the formalities associated with such standards on a situational basis: redefining academic conventions to suit new forums and new media on a case-by-case basis. In this way it might be possible to communicate research more easily beyond the academy (and more productively, creatively and agentially within it) without undermining the intellectual standards which ensure that academia has something to offer the wider life of society.


Thinly Veiled Persecution (2010-07-15 09:00)
This week the lower House of the French parliament voted to ban French residents from wearing the Niqab –the full face veil. Of the 337 members of the French national assembly taking part, 336 voted for the bill and one against. The majority of members of the Socialist party refused to participate in the vote.
This is a piece of legislation which specifically targets a minority group, approximately 2000 Muslim women in France who wear the full veil. If the bill gets through the Senate in September, Women who wear the Niqab in public will be taken by the police back to their homes where they must remove it, or face a fine. Those found to be forcing women to wear the veil will risk a prison sentence. There are two issues which these measures apparently address: the control over women's physical appearance, and the protection of women from oppression. If this piece of legislation sought only to prevent women from being forced wear particular dress by others, it would render itself illegitimate since it simply moves the power of force away from family over to state. But this is not about female oppression. It is about the state sponsored persecution of Muslim women as part of a wider European trend of politically endorsed Islamophobia.

When we begin to pick apart the argument of 'force' or 'coercion' around women's dress the whole thing begins to crumble. Should girls be forced to wear school uniforms which they hate against their will? Should workers be forced to wear any uniform against their will because of the economic necessity of staying in their job? Are many women coerced into injuring their feet, backs and knees by wearing high heels under the weight of social and cultural pressure? Trivial examples perhaps, but do any of these examples of 'force' or 'coercion' seriously warrant national legislation?

But of course, the French state is not concerned here to protect women from being forced to wear certain clothes because of social, cultural or economic pressure. People with copious body piercings are not going to be escorted home for their own protection against the coercion of the cult of a youth sub-culture. No, this is about the threat posed by these 2000 women to the French way of life and the values of the liberal state. If they choose to express their religion in this way, they cannot possibly be French. If their are forced against their will to reveal their faces, an act which for some is comparable to being forced to walk around topless, then France will be more cohesive, more homogenous, less at risk from terrorism. Do any of these arguments stand up to even a moment of scrutiny? Will the targeting of Niqab wearers really make Muslims in France feel more integrated, less in inclined to join a radical terrorist group and bomb Paris?

The most likely outcome of this legislation is that Muslims in France will feel even more persecuted than ever before. Muslims, but especially Muslim women who choose to wear the head scarf (or if they dare, the full veil) will feel targeted for surveillance and less welcome in France, less a part of French society, than ever before. What is especially worrying is that such targeted oppression of women, and violation of their rights in international law, apparently garnered support from the majority of the French population, and there is no reason to believe that it would not be so in other European countries. Indeed, there is already widespread support for a similar measure in Belgium. Liberty, equality, fraternity this is not.

Where next for a region of the world which continues to cultivate an image on the world stage as the home of freedom, democracy and justice? Whose entry criteria include strict rules on the protection of minorities and civil liberties? We can only hope that the veil of hierocracy is lifted sooner rather than later.

**Background:**
The ban on face-covering veils, or niqab, will go to the Senate in September, where it is also likely to be passed. Its biggest hurdle is likely to follow when it is scrutinised by the French constitutional watchdog scrutinises it.

The main body representing French Muslims says face-covering veils are not required by Islam and not suitable in France, but it has expressed concern that the law will stigmatise Muslims in general.
France has Europe’s largest Muslim population, estimated to be around 5m of the country’s 64m people. While ordinary headscarves are common, only around 1,900 women in France are thought to wear face-covering veils.

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**Event: New Activism or Old Politics? (2010-07-15 14:20)**

**New Activism or Old Politics? Sounding student reaction to HE’s crisis**

This free, one-day event will discuss likely student reactions to the impending cuts and rising fees in higher education.

30th September 2010, 11am – 4:00pm

Room 404D, Main Building, University of Aston, Birmingham

**Participants include:**

- Patrick Ainley, University of Greenwich
- Ben Little, University of Middlesex
- NUS speaker (hope to get Clare Solomon, Pres elect ULU)
- Joyce Canaan, Birmingham City University (Chair a.m.)
- Sarah Amsler, University of Aston (Chair p.m.)
- Jonathan Ward, Studentforce for sustainable development
- Esme Hannah, PhD Student University of Leeds
- Dora Meade, Student Led Discussion Network Co-ordinator University of Leeds

**Timetable:**

10.30 Registration

11.00 Welcome Patrick Ainley, Network co-ordinator and co-author *Lost Generation? Continuum 2010*

11.15 Ben Little - ‘Radical Students? The importance of universities within activist networks’

based on his edited e-book: *Radical Future – Politics for the Next Generation*


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12.00 NUS speaker or Dora Meade + Leeds University Student-Led Discussion Network

1.00 Lunch

1.30 Jonathan Ward - ‘Brown Dystopia or Green Hope?’

2.15 Esme Hannah - 'Student Politics, past and present'

(+ Dora Meade with Leeds Network if confirm Clare 12-1)

3.00-4.00 Plenary discussion

The event is free and all staff and students in UK Higher Education are welcome to attend but please register below.

A full guide to travelling to Aston, including campus maps, is available at the website below. The Aston campus is a short walk from Birmingham New Street train station. The University has a car park and visitors passes can be provided – please email...

Aston uni campus guide: http://www1.aston.ac.uk/about/directions/

**NETWORK EVENT BOOKING FORM: Student Experience Network** Thursday 30th September 2010

It is free event please confirm attendance with Carol Salmon at [2]csalmon@srhe.ac.uk

1. [http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html](http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html)
2. [mailto:csalmon@srhe.ac.uk](mailto:csalmon@srhe.ac.uk)

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**Jeremy Rifkin on the 'Empathic Civilization' (2010-07-15 16:35)**

[EMBED]

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The Sociological Imagination | RSA Animate and Jeremy Rifkin's Empathic Civilisation (2010-07-21 09:16:38)

[...] a follow up to his lecture here’s Jeremy Rifkin’s concept of empathic civilisation explored through the medium of [...] 

**An Activist Ethnography (2010-07-16 08:55)**

The politics of the activist community, as we have briefly explored, is a broad church of the left, and with a few exceptions, the anti-capitalist left. This anticapitalism is manifested in a number of environmental and social campaigns on campus and in the West Midlands area. The politics of Warwick activism should be understood as
such, and whilst an interesting subject in itself, it doesn’t require a separate section in this report. Before we look any further at the development of the group in relation to the Aldermaston action, it might be a point of interest to look at some of the key identity markers within activist communities. Identity markers can be found in everything ranging from clothing, humour and language, to food and drink. Without delving too deeply into any one of these we can observe how the politics of activism is often applied in day-to-day life.

The bring-and-share meal

The bring-and-share is a lynch pin of student activism. Members of the Aldermaston affinity group frequently joked about the pulling-power of the bring-and-share over and above any sense of social duty or conviction. Facetiousness aside though, the act of sharing a meal that everyone has in some way contributed towards is a tangible and enjoyable example of the anarchist principle of reciprocity and mutual aid. All but one member of the Aldermaston group was vegetarian, and among those a significant minority tend to live on a vegan diet. This is fairly common amongst activists, either for ethical reasons or environmental reasons, or a combination. In the case of the latter particularly, a vegetarian/vegan diet is an example of reflexivity and the day-to-day application of politics.

Last year's S0.21 sit-in coincided with 'Go Vegan Month', and the arguably difficult transition to a vegan diet –most beers, snack foods, and even meat substitute products contain animal produce- was made easier by the support of an entire group which shared the responsibility for cooking good vegan food on a massive scale. The bring-and-share lunches in the Gaia space offered, on a smaller scale, the same support. Whilst members of the group bought some foods from Gaia, a significant number of dishes were homemade, including risotto, falafel, salads, and vegan cakes.

Perhaps the most notable food combination connected with activism is pitta bread and humous. This, along with falafel is a staple part of any bring-and-share. Evidently neither originate from Western Europe; the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cuisine suggests a cultural import possibly associated with the pro-Palestinian ethos of many activist groups. This is an unsubstantiated claim, but arguably not without some merit. Humous was voraciously consumed by the Aldermaston group to such an extent that one group member brought twelve pots with her on the outward journey!

Smoking

The act of smoking amongst activists is something that has been covered in David Graeber's Direct Action: An Ethnography, and whilst only two members of the Aldermaston group were regular smokers, it is still worth mentioning how the idea was often mooted that support roles for non-arrestables should include rolling cigarettes –all three arm-tubers would be incapable of doing this themselves with at most one free arm.

Language and humour

By no means are all of Warwick's student activists studying for degrees in politics, sociology or history, however the use of certain vocabulary indicates at least a passing acquaintance with these fields of study. Conversation often includes esoteric terminology. Frequent reference to 'prefiguration', 'reflexivity', and 'heteronormativity' is a distinctive trait of Dissident Warwick, and the collective that produces it. This type of language's use in everyday
speech is perhaps more remarkable.

It is also fairly problematic. One of the Warwick anarchist group—and broader activist community’s—oft-voiced concerns is how many people perceive it to be a revolutionary vanguard. The common usage of academic and esoteric language seems to perpetuate this perception. Perhaps aware of this, or at least aware of how bizarre the straight-faced use of the above terms in a social environment is, the use of academic language has begun to inform the humour of the group. In an equally perplexing and exclusionary fashion, the group’s humour has become largely self referential.

For reasons all but forgotten—though usually cited as originating during the Faslane preparations in 2007—the group finds great amusement in suggesting actions or protests that take place ‘in waves’. Another saying that has become commonplace in the last few years is the disparaging remark, “X has/have no analysis”; mostly used to decry the ‘reformism’ (another black word) of the moderate left.

In reference to the group’s constant use of compound phrases like ‘anarchofeminism’, ‘anarcho-pacifism’, ‘post-Marxist’, ‘neo-liberal’, such prefixes are used to describe seemingly incongruous nouns. ‘Neo-laddish behaviour’ and ‘post-sexist’ can be understood without the prefix, which is solely used to denote the fact that a member of the group is doing or being it in a facetious manner.

Drawing more directly from the PAIS degree programme, a mock-credence is given to J.S. Mill’s notion of ‘lower pleasures’ and hedonism. If someone wishes to make fun of another person in the group, accusing them of preferring ‘lower pleasures’ will suffice. This should not be understood as a permanent or embedded aspect of activist identity. As we have explored, affinity groups at university are inherently transient, and so to are the stylings of its humour. Arguably more analytically important is the prominence of foreign languages—most particularly Spanish—in activism. A number of the chants, slogans and songs most associated with socialism, communism and anarchism aren’t in English. The Internationale (French), and Bella Ciao (Italian) are both notable, deriving, in the case of Bella Ciao particularly from the anti-fascist struggles of the twentieth century.

Spanish is the predominant influence however. ‘Compañero’ is used among the Warwick group interchangeably with ‘comrade’, and in written form the malecentric grammar that gives primacy to the masculine in a mixed address (compañeros) is rejected in favour of the gender-neutral ‘compañeras’. Four members of the Warwick affinity group (although not of the Aldermaston group) have spent around a year in Latin America, two of whom spent the majority of their time in Chiapas, Mexico, visiting the Zapatista liberation movement. As a result, eight out of 24 pages in the latest issue of Dissident were given over to studies of the Zapatista struggles for autonomy and in gender issues.

Clothing and symbols

The rejection of capitalism and the unjust relations of production that capital entails means that activists’ clothing tends to reflect this. The collusion of many high street labels in sweatshop labour has been both the focus of campaigns, and informs the dress habits of the community. Most recently in early 2009, Russell Corp, a subsidiary of Fruit of the Loom, sacked over 1,000 workers in its Honduran factory for attempting to unionise. Fruit of the Loom are a major provider of apparel to universities. A pan-Atlantic universities boycott, including support from People and Planet in the UK eventually led to the reinstatement and compensation of the sacked workers.

In terms of identity, the Aldermaston group’s clothing tended to reflect the politics or musical taste of the wearer. In this respect there is no profound distinction (in using clothing to express your identity) between the activist community and anyone emblazoning a Top Shop design across their t-shirt. Briefly returning to the notion of a pro-Palestinian ethos mentioned in the bring-and-share section, the keffiyeh is a common accessory in the Warwick group, and the activist community internationally. This is hardly a recent import, but it is less and less a distinct marker of activist identity, or as an identifier of sympathy with Palestine. The keffiyeh has been increasingly
coopted by high-street shops as a generic fashion item. The name keffiyeh has been shed in favour of the anglicised ‘desert scarf’. According to Amazon.co.uk's webpage, the desert scarf is ‘stylish and versatile...[a] must have fashion accessory for both girls and guys- 8 colours available’. For the activist at Warwick then, authenticity and foreign origin seem to be the crucial distinguisher (along with referring to the keffiyeh by its ‘proper’ name), now that the identity marker has been diluted to include any fashion-conscious person.

In a final digression about the co-opting of once potent symbols of resistance for radical politics by the capitalist system, one of the Aldermaston group was canvassing for support on a new green initiative on campus in late 2009. In spotting a student wearing a t-shirt with a large CND ‘peace’ logo he approached her, expecting to find a kindred spirit. The girl, looking perplexed as to why he would walk across the entire length of the Piazza to speak to her, told him that she had “no interest in politics”. Our group member apologized, explaining how he had made an assumption about her based on her t-shirt. She cited the logo’s fashionableness and continued on her way.

In summary then, whilst there are some markers that the activist community continues to identify with after a decades-long history, the continued depoliticisation and marketisation of some of these symbols and items of clothing by capitalism has led to a nuanced reinvention of the identity marker, be it through the language used to describe the item (as with the keffiyeh/desert scarf binary), or its authenticity. Is it perhaps an understandable response to the alienation of many identity markers that certain elements of activist identity, such as the use of overtly political language in everyday speech, have been emphasized, as if in compensation?

Activist Identity: conclusion

It seems fitting to finish this section with a brief look at the politics of identity in relation to activism. In The Condition of Postmodernity, David Harvey puts forth a dichotomy between the ‘politics of being’ and the ‘politics of becoming’. Whereas liberalism, Marxism, and particularly anarchism are exercises in the politics of becoming – where the focus is less about what you are than what you can become; they all see themselves as universal, and not applicable just in a particular time and space- the predominant trend now, Harvey argues, is the politics of being, which, conversely is less about becoming anything than what you are.

It is a form of identity politics located exclusively in the present tense, where geography, ethnicity and language are particularly relevant.
In the postmodern world, where so much is in a state of flux, he posits that the politics of being, and the often sectarian identity politics that this entails, has risen in prominence to counteract increasing casualisation and fluidity in the labour market, and social relations, and in doing so, provide some much needed psychological stability.

When we consider the above sections on activist identity through Harvey’s analytical standpoint I believe we can show that despite immediate appearances, the activist community is still within the framework of a ‘politics of becoming’. Whilst some traits of activist identity might indicate an exclusionary or vanguardist community, as with the use of language or the perceived fundamentalism that an anti-capitalist stance comes with, others, such as the bring-and-share, are the epitome of mutual aid and an inclusive community.

Indeed, the ‘prefigurative’ politics of most activists (where the ‘modes of organization and tactics undertaken...accurately reflect the future society being sought by the group’25) are inherently forward looking. The simultaneous feminist, green, and LGBTUA+ agendas that particularly define Warwick activism are the politics of emancipation, tout court.

This is an abridged version of a larger paper. Contact [1]Chris Browne for original copy.

1. C.J.Browne@warwick.ac.uk
Having become a self-defined 'activist' at some point in 2008, the stories told by older members of my affinity group at Warwick University always held great appeal. When they spoke of old protests, sit-ins, and comrades in direct action, certain people who I had never met before seemed vividly real and familiar, and their actions distorted and aggrandised through an informal kind of oral history. The actions themselves suffered a similar distorting effect in the mind of a new, and relatively inexperienced activist. The most interesting thing, I found, was how these people and their activism were not lodged merely in the recesses of my contemporaries' memories as the artifacts of some by-gone era. Rather, the events they described took place only a few years ago -2005, 2006, or 2007; as for the people, they had finished their undergraduate study often the previous year, or two years before. And yet, in my mind at least, they were definitely part of 'history'.

Much has been said of the drawbacks of very short institutional memories, particularly in universities, and the historicisation of very recent events that goes with that. My own experience as a journalist as well as an activist reinforces this view. My first year writing for the student newspaper was 2007. I recently came across an article I had written in December of that year, about private military and security companies; for the life of me I cannot recall writing it. The physical archives of the newspaper for that academic year are also extremely patchy, with most of the editorial staff having made off with what issues were left at the end of their tenure, leaving none for the archives and posterity. Within a year, I would think less than 1 percent of students at Warwick will recall the politics or the scandals that marked that year. Very recently, coinciding with the 40th anniversary of the Warwick Files Affair -where during a sit-in of an administrative building, secret files collected on student radicalism were discovered- I have been searching through the Students' Union archives, in order to produce an article about activism and the Union at Warwick. The most frustrating thing has definitely been how a series of one or two issues will chart the development of a student rent strike or an occupation of the Senate building, but then a several-month gap will appear in the records leaving no recourse for the archivist to find out how the struggle ended. Although I wrote the Aldermaston 2010 Ethnography before I embarked on my current project, the same rationale underpins both of them. In two years time, all but one of the Aldermaston group will have graduated, and save for an article published in the online edition of the Boar, there would have been no written evidence of the group's existence, and only scattered evidence -again in the Boar, and more crucially in 'Dissident Warwick'- of the vibrant radicalism that has been resident at the University in the last few years.

The Ethnography attempts to draw together the reality of the activist scene in early 2010, with even the most mundane observation given credence. I wrote it originally as part of my degree course, though it soon expanded...
beyond its initial 2,000 word remit when I realised the important role it could play in this particular area of social history. The process of writing it, as if often the case, helped to draw out certain thoughts, and links between theory and the life of the Warwick activist. This is especially true of the section on activist identity. The ethnography’s publication in this journal is most welcome, as it will be able to reach a wider audience, especially in years to come.

-ethnographic writing, I find, tends to become ever more fascinating as it slowly becomes part of history.

For the last three years I have been studying History and Politics at the University of Warwick. I have spent an equivalent amount of time working for the student newspaper, the Boar, and it is perhaps my journalism, rather than my academic pursuits, which have merged most favourably with my activism. The Aldermaston Ethnography is the most lengthy example of this writing.

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Michael Burawoy For Public Sociology (2010-07-17 11:00)

[EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED]

The Sociological Imagination | The Privacy of Public Sociology (2010-08-08 10:16:05)

[...] a retort to Michael Burawoy’s conception of Public Sociology here’s Mathieu Deflem on the privacy of public [...]

John Snow vs Zac Goldsmith (2010-07-17 16:34)

Recent entry to parliament [1]Zac Goldsmith (Conservative MP for Richmond and son of billionaire financier [2]James Goldsmith) makes a fool of himself defending [3]allegations that he broke election financing rules. Is this strategy something a spin-doctor recommended? If so is it a sign of things to come? It’s difficult to watch this and not worry that a new wave of Fox news-esque right-wing belligerence is going to manifest itself in the relation of British politicians to the media.

[EMBED]


Patrick Macartney (2010-07-20 14:23:18)

A very interesting clip Takes not answering the question to a new level! The ConDems seem to be getting good at this e.g. 'This is because the previous government left us in a mess/ biggest deficit ever/ did not tell us how bad things are etc! How long will the public put up with this? Cracks started to appear in last weeks question time with the heckling of the Tory Francis Maud.
We need issues addressing not just ignoring,

Sociological Imagination (2010-07-20 22:38:41)
Another striking example was Michael Gove on Radio 4 on Monday (http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2010/07/today-programme-bbc-interview) who literally refuses to substantively address a single question and instead attacks the BBC... Are we seeing the work of the next generation of spin doctors who have rationalised the 'dark arts' of Campbell et al, taking them to new heights of obfuscation and dissimulation?

'Things cannot go on the way they are' (2010-07-18 09:00)
An intriguing (though depressing and plausible!) [1] talk by Slavoj Žižek about the prospects faced by Western democracy. He paints a grim picture of a society where "all small personal pleasures will be kept" but democracy is gone. As he puts it: "things cannot go on indefinitely the way that they are". Do we face an all or nothing situation? Radical action or conclusive destruction?


Prakash Kona (2010-07-22 03:14:44)
I had the privilege to listen to Zizek some time January this year. Derivative in many ways, but that’s alright. Not to be original is not a serious flaw. It never was in fact. While assuming that it is polemics, certain things Zizek says need to be put in perspective. I stopped taking him seriously the moment he said that Gandhi was more “violent” than Hitler (http://atrocitynews.wordpress.com/2010/01/14/gandhi-more-violent-than-hitler/). It’s fashionable these days to attack Gandhi and Gandhism and find faults with his kind of nonviolence. Interestingly, those who attack Gandhi wouldn't dare to live like him for a single day of their lives, the simple reason being that they cannot do so. A life that follows the Sermon on the Mount to the letter is not something Gandhi’s critics would embark on even for a joke although there’s nothing funny about it. Gandhi defies European rationalism and any rationalism for that matter. His insights into the nature of colonialism are profound and the success of the Black Civil Rights Movement in the United States lead by Martin Luther King is proof of the universality of his views. Though rarely acknowledged, in almost every area of humanities and social sciences you are bound to come across his insights in one form or another. There is no writer, activist, researcher or revolutionary in the 20th century who is untouched by Gandhi’s views. To merely say that Ambedkar who lead the Dalit struggle against upper caste oppression "was better than Gandhi" is to miss the framework of the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate which is colonialism. Unfortunately in the past three or four decades the Holocaust Industry crooks (that Norman Finkelstein talks about in his book The Holocaust Industry) have made the suffering of every other group on this planet look irrelevant compared to that of the Jews under the Nazis. In the most shameful and degrading manner they profited from that suffering as Finkelstein shows with documented evidence. The space for thinking other things has seriously been curtailed for obvious reasons. The modernization of Europe beginning with the Renaissance cannot be understood without colonialism as the background for most of the path-breaking changes. Colonialism not only is the background to the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate but also the background to Gandhi being Gandhi and Ambedkar being Ambedkar. Most western intellectuals – Zizek is not an exception in this regard - refuse to acknowledge colonialism and its avatar globalization or corporate colonialism as the essence of any attempt to give a historical framework to notions such as development or underdevelopment or radical change for that matter. Capitalism as an institution exists in the west thanks to neocolonialism. You cannot be anti-capitalist without attacking the base which is colonialism. Revolutionary socialism will destroy this base before anything else.
I largely agree with what you’re saying and I believe that Zizek would too. As I read the 'Gandhi is more violent than Hitler comment’ Zizek is suggesting that Hitler stayed within the socio-political parameters of capitalism (playing at stretching them in order to save them) while Gandhi was genuinely revolutionary: Nazism was not radical enough, it did not dare to disturb the basic structure of the modern capitalist social space (which is why it had to invent and focus on destroying an external enemy, Jews). This is why one should oppose the fascination with Hitler according to which Hitler was, of course, a bad guy, responsible for the death of millions—but he definitely had balls, he pursued with iron will what he wanted. ... This point is not only ethically repulsive, but simply wrong: no, Hitler did not 'have the balls' to really change things; he did not really act, all his actions were fundamentally reactions, i.e., he acted so that nothing would really change, he stages a big spectacle of Revolution so that the capitalist order could survive.

Iron Man and the “bigger-dick” US foreign policy in the Third World

I don’t think I would have the strength to go through an Iron Man movie but for my nieces and nephew who were eager to watch it. In this barely analytical review, I’m paraphrasing the first chapter of Eric Cheyfitz’s The Poetics of Imperialism titled “Tarzan of the Apes: US Foreign Policy in the Twentieth Century” spiced with notes from George Carlin.

I just completed The Devil finds Work - an uncannily insightful book - by the black writer James Baldwin on racism in American movies. Iron Man is an arrogant, patronizing, racist prick who stands for everything that makes the United States such a crazy drunk ape of a regime. He just belongs to the long line of James Bonds and Supermans and Rambo and other dickheads who are out there to save white Americans and their families from the wretched others. There’s a point Baldwin makes over and again: what is missing or rather repressed in white American consciousness is blackness. This blackness takes myriad forms from the “blacks” themselves to communists, Arabs and gays. The stupidest American movie gives you an idea of what this hidden face of blackness is all about.

Individuals become individuals and groups are able to enter into association as groups concealing something about themselves. There is a universality to the hidden blackness and the murders and genocides of history are because men have not been able to come to terms with their dark selves. This blackness of history is fairly contextualized in how white America deals with the third world. America’s foreign policy is the teacher at school combined with the bully of a policeman on the street.

Literally speaking, reality is not black and white. A rich and exploitative Indian shares in white colonial consciousness just as much as a poor and exploited white shares the darkness of the colonized. Racism must be redefined in global contexts. Brown and black elites across the third world are viciously criminal and defy any simplistic notion of essential ‘race’ in understanding why some men have made it a business to dominate so many others.

Back to the movie: stereotype number One and the one we’re most familiar with: the black guy unthinkingly loyal to the American flag; Lieutenant Colonel James Rhodes, played by Terence Howard; this one black guy like the dumb white woman is the background to the almighty smart Tony Stark supremely wealthy and supposedly as bright. There are at least one thousand movies with black guys confirming to the white guy that he’s the real man that the rest of the world wants to be; if you want to know why the black guy is psychologically necessary to justify white manhood please read James Baldwin who has the last word on the subject.

Complementing the black guy – the giver of certificates of masculinity to white men – is the dumb white woman who may not exactly be a certificate giver but something equally commonplace; she confirms to the white guy that he’s not gay; his sexual credentials are safe henceforth; he need not worry about being desired by other men or falling in love with an enemy who might happen to be male.

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I don't know if Iron Man's assistant - Gwyneth Paltrow in the film - was playing dumb but that was the dumb-est white woman on screen. I don’t think such a dumb white or a woman of any other race, religion or region walks on this planet. Women as a rule ain't dumb. Period. Somehow the role was done with such conviction that it is hard for me to believe that the woman was acting. If she was in fact acting I mean it's a performance of a life time. For dumb people to act intelligent is much easier than for any person to act dumb. If you act dumb you're dumb - that's in reality. On screen, to act dumb is to act dumb – something you don't have to be in reality. Angelina Jolie who I think is pretty dumb in reality comes out real smart on screen. Not surprising because she understands the role better than she understands herself.

Someone should’ve thought of calling the movie ironic man instead of Iron Man. The movie is filled with men and ironies and since they go together in real life it comes as no surprise that it did well at the box office. The sad irony is that there are no iron men in life. A man who dreams of being more man than what he is suffers from an incurable emotional impotence. Iron Man is the perfect example of a man incapable of relating to the world around him. An emotionally impotent social order produces emotionally impotent leadership and Iron Man is that unconscious wish for domination meant to disguise the void – a void reflected in the foreign policy of the United States.

Iron Man in the third world is just another word for phallic domination. Those meaningless wars that the US is fighting outside its borders serve no ultimate purpose. They bring out what is horrible in just about any man; the side of a man that any humane society is expected to curb, that instinct to pillage and murder that has no place in a just order. [1]George Carlin brilliantly summarizes those insecurities that make war, what he calls “a lot of prick-waving.”

War is a whole lot of men standing out on a field, waving their pricks at one another. Men are insecure about the size of their dicks, and so they have to kill one another over the idea. That's what all that asshole jock bullshit is all about. That's what all that adolescent, macho male posturing, and strutting in bars and locker rooms is all about. It's called "dick fear!" Men are terrified that their pricks are inadequate and so they have to compete with one another, to feel better about themselves, and since war is the ultimate competition, basically, men are killing each other in order to improve their self-esteem! You don't have to be a historian or a political scientist to see the bigger-dick foreign policy theory at work. It sounds like this: "What, they have bigger dicks? Bomb them!" And of course, the bombs and the rockets and the bullets are all shaped like dicks. It's a subconscious need to project the penis into other people's affairs. It's called "fucking with people!"

Movies like Iron Man are about “fucking with people.” If Iron Man could win the wars for the US wherever they're dumping arms and using the latest technology to fight ill-equipped though relentless enemies, Americans would not be having all the problems on the ground that they do. Local people are there to stay and they'll do everything in their power to fight the 'civilized' beast that has come to destroy them.

The lesson for the US is very simple: Shut down your thieving corporations. Forget about the criminal loans given to criminals by the World Bank and the IMF. Get out of Afghanistan. Get out of Iraq. Get out of the Middle East. Get out of Latin America. Get out of Africa. Get out of the third world. Take your arms and your high technology and vamoose. You’re not wanted there. There are no iron men to protect you. The war is long lost. It's the battles that delude you into believing that you will win.

You're absolutely right about that stupid film. Thank you again man Prakash. You're the new Said from India. The hell with the rest.

ibrahim (2010-07-22 14:30:03)
Its very true. Multi-disciplined funny analysis of the global imperialism.

Emma McIntosh (2010-09-17 05:16:51)
I'm sorry but that was just a one-sided rant with no question as to the ideologies of nation reinforced throughout the film, let alone the concept of movies not actually being real. Of course no iron man exists in the real world, hence the need for films. This argument could be aimed at almost any american based movie - take Avatar for example; Theres the token "good guy" that isn't actually good and is just out for himself, the evil authoritarian power of the government, the loyal army pilot etc. Any movie can be broken into such elements. Tony Stark embodies everything people aspire to be, he is successful, rich, good looking, a genius, and a superhero. People like him do not exist, and that is the point. Its two hours of entertainment to give people a little hope, so why not enjoy it.

Opediah Stain (2012-09-05 20:58:47)
If you actually watch the film, it is exactly the opposite of what you just said; save the first 20 minutes. A 'prick' as you described, has a life changing experience and then attempts to show the world the 'darkness' caused by their negligence and destroy the arms he created to fight the wars. You pulled that rant out of your arse.

Anti-capitalism: thinking the unthinkable? (2010-07-20 08:00)

Slavoj Žižek famously said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Others claim we are now in a post-political era, in the sense that the neoliberal world view and agenda are so embedded in our background assumptions and common sense that what passes for political discussion and argument takes place within the neoliberal framework. As Mark Fisher puts it in his book, Capitalist Realism (2009 Zero Books), "Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable". Fisher claims that capitalism, as an economic system, far from being threatened by current anti-capitalist sentiments and movements, feeds on and exploits them both ideologically and commercially. They are no threat as, to all intents and purposes, "capitalism is the only show in town". It may not be perfect but it is the best we can hope for.

In the main the anti-capitalist movement’s agenda is limited to mitigating capitalism’s excesses rather than replacing it, to reducing poverty and injustice, ‘third world’ debt relief, and so on. Public and political reactions to the recent ‘emergency budget’ mainly focus on issues like the enormous bonuses still being paid to CEOs, corporate directors and bankers, the fact that the reduction in corporation taxes pretty well matches the proposed savings on child benefit, child tax credit and child tax funds, and that reductions in housing benefits will hit pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and working people on low incomes. All very necessary criticism, but ultimately about how to share the gains and pains produced by the capitalist economy, not challenge the system.

So, what we have all swallowed whole allegedly are the neoliberal values and beliefs that are shaping and restricting our ability to frame problems and imagine solutions. According the David Harvey neoliberalism is

... in the first instance a system of political economic practices that proposes that human well being can best
be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (page 2 A Brief History of Neoliberalism Oxford 2005).

What can possibly be wrong with that, one may ask? Quite a lot it seems. A book published this month (Neoliberalism and Everyday Life edited by S Braedley and M Luxton 2010) illuminates the ways that neoliberal policies (e.g. the deregulation of markets, the transfer of public services to private providers and so on) to ensure market expansion and growth have also inevitably expanded social inequalities of gender, race and class, and of opportunity and ability. The standard defence of neoliberal economic policy is that by encouraging individuals to maximise their wealth the poorest will benefit as the wealth 'trickles down' to them and make them better off too. However, empirically it is very hard to show this has happened. In the UK and USA for example the evidence for a growing concentration of wealth at the top at the expense of the bottom 10%, a process that appears to have accelerated with each successive recession, is hard to refute. If anything the evidence seems to show a ‘trickle up’ mechanism is in operation.

If neoliberalism is so damaging to society (not to mention the environment on many accounts) challenging its assumptions and imagining non-neoliberal economic and political practices would seem to be a valuable, perhaps essential task. It would in fact be our patriotic and humanitarian duty. But if Žižek, Fisher and the post-political theorists are correct, the task seems to require thinking outside a box we are not aware we are in. Or the feeling there is nothing outside worth wasting our time imagining and risking being labelled a delusional fantasist. None the less, one might hope that academic social scientists with their celebrated academic freedom and independence of mind would be in the vanguard of this project. And there are some hopeful signs. But, if Fisher is right about capitalism’s immunity to anti-capitalist ideas and movements, then an academic demolition of the basic principles of neoliberalism will surely not be enough. Not that an anti-capitalist practice would be straightforward either. There have been several attempts to identify other sorts of values in practice, in alternative and ‘transitional’ life styles and communities, or examples in everyday life of caring and sharing that offer brief glimpses of a better way to live. But arguably these can be seen as accommodations and adaptations to a selfish, materialist and uncertain world rather than a challenge to it.

It is also the case that neoliberal government culture and policy frameworks largely set the policy research agenda. Tim Jackson, at the British Sociological Association’s conference on society and climate change, noted that environmental issues could not be understood without reference to the problems associated with global capitalism. He concluded that any realistic specification of sustainability has to be informed by a sociological focus on the nature of capitalism and growth and the resulting social structures and environmental impacts. But in so doing we are in danger of being charged with being polemicians rather than social scientists. If this happens we may find we are ‘no further use to policy’. Jackson was referring to a warning given earlier in the conference by Malcolm Wicks, a former Minister for Energy, in his opening speech, that if scientists, including social scientists, become polemicians, they would be “less valuable to government”.

This fear is echoed in a recently published review of the state of UK sociology by an international benchmarking panel (http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/Sociology %20IBR %20Report _tcn6-36279.pdf). Misgivings were expressed about the consequences of being either too close or too distant from policy makers. Being close means a good position to attract funding but being in danger of losing control of the research agenda. Being distant and producing results and findings that do not fit into a pre-set (neoliberal?) policy agenda could be seen as irrelevant, politically inopportune, and so dismissed. And, with the current threats of ‘restructuring’, funding cuts, threatened pensions and possible redundancies (the ‘shock treatment’ of the neoliberal response to the current financial crisis), this is not a propitious time to risk the ire of university management or research funders. As Fisher says, the primary methods of social control in today’s advanced capitalist societies are fear and indebtedness.

Great article. My own thesis is looking at the applicability of post-politics to the Occupy movement and your argument is therefore very close to my own research. One slight mistake, your initial quote ‘its easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’ is actually attributed to Frederic Jameson.

RSA Animate and Jeremy Rifkin’s Empathic Civilisation (2010-07-21 09:00)

As a follow up to his [1]lecture here’s Jeremy Rifkin’s concept of empathic civilisation explored through the medium of [2]animation. It’s part of a new series being produced by the [3]RSA (whose strap line reads ’21st century enlightenment program’) and they are thus far proving hugely successful. The Rifkin animation alone has been viewed over 350,000 times on You Tube. It’s disseminating core aspects of his thinking to a wide audience of people who (a) might have known about his 600 page [4]magnum opus and yet never got round to reading it (b) who would not have heard of the book and instead meet its central ideas through an incredibly engaging form of presentation. I’m increasingly convinced that this is only a sign of things to come and that the full uses of the internet (particularly web 2.0) for facilitating intellectual life remain relatively untapped.

[EMBED]

A lost generation of learners? (2010-07-22 09:00)

Recent [1]reports suggest that up to a quarter of a million could miss out on UK university places after a 12 % rise on last year’s record number of applications. Sally Hunt, the general secretary of the University and College Union, has responded to the release of this data:

Today’s figures make frightening reading. Other countries are increasing the number of graduates to compete in a high-skill knowledge economy, yet our government seems intent on doing the opposite. It is not scaremongering to talk about a lost generation of learners.

The decision not to fund student places properly and to make savage cuts to higher education will come back and haunt this country and will lead to a huge skills deficit.”
Supporting an interesting study (2010-07-22 11:30)

We have been conducting a large online international study investigating peoples’ wellbeing called - The International Wellbeing Study. This study has been running since March 2009 and basically investigates peoples’ wellbeing over the course of one year.

We would very much appreciate your assistance in informing your contacts of this study via additional email lists. This study is completely anonymous, easy to do, takes about 25 to 30 minutes for each assessment point, and participants don’t have to give any of their personal details. The only participation requirements is that participants are at least 16 years old and that they agree to fill out these questions every three months for a year; five times in total. To participate and/or to find out more about the study look [1]here.

If a person participates, he or she will receive an e-mail summary report of their scores, and also go into the draw to win one of fifteen $100 Amazon.com vouchers. They will also be given the opportunity to opt-in to one of three free wellbeing orientated internet courses after they have completed the first three assessments.

I am more than willing to answer any further questions you may have.

Again, many thanks in advance for your help and assistance!

Kind regards,

Carolina Alfonso
Academic Intern
Social Sciences
School of Information and Social Sciences

from the BSA happiness study group e-mail list

Hospitality (2010-07-23 09:00)

In the reluctant church of hospitality,
Where echoes of empire deafen the crowd,
Promises of liberty, justice, freedom,
Are signed by the hands of the just and the proud.

The invisible mass silently flooding,
Stealthily sneaking by sea and by air,
The fever of fear contagiously spreading,
Like a wild fire victim to impotent stare.

In the bitter refuge of sanctuary,
Where echoes of torture mumble mute pleas,
Gagged fear awaits asylum in a letter,
Carried on freedom’s reluctant breeze.

submitted to [1]‘Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences' for November 2010’

1. http://www.eliss.org.uk/

No One is Illegal (2010-07-23 11:00)

Clandestine border crosser
Breath holder
Impatient warrior of destiny

Criminal of geography
Hoper
Dreamer
Inadvertent invader of ‘Our Way of Life’
Storytelling smiler with kites in his eyes
  Travelling poet
  Father
  Bird keeper

Eater of dates by the rock in the garden
  Book saver
  Critic
  Misplacer of time

submitted to [1]'Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences' for November 2010'

1. http://www.eliss.org.uk/

max farrar (2011-04-09 13:38:15)
wonderful poem, saying more, with less, than most sociology.

Imposter (2010-07-24 10:00)

[1]

MY HOBBY:
SITTING DOWN WITH GRAD STUDENTS AND TIMING
HOW LONG IT TAKES THEM TO FIGURE OUT THAT
I'M NOT ACTUALLY AN EXPERT IN THEIR FIELD.

[Comic: A series of four panels showing interactions between students and an expert in different fields. The expert asks about logarithms, Ugric family inclusion, ranking people, and deconstruction. The students take varying amounts of time to answer.]
Government won’t back graduate tax say senior Tory sources (2010-07-25 10:00)

Vince Cable’s plans for a graduate tax look set to fail as senior Tories [1]brief against it. Their reticence apparently stems from a feeling that it would be unfair for high earning graduates to be forced to pay more than the value of their degree and that graduate taxation could lead to a ‘brain drain’ out of the UK. UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt, told BBC News that coalition government infighting might make a good spectacle for the Westminster village, but students were more interested in knowing if they would have a place at university this year and what exactly the future cost of a degree might be.

Richard Thaler on Nudge (2010-07-26 08:00)

An engaging lecture by [1]Richard Thaler on the concept of [2]Nudge. Along with his colleague [3]Cass Sunstein (author of some superb [4]books on the internet) their work briefly became [5]hugely fashionable last year. Interestingly it seems to have been dropped somewhat as the financial crisis has reshaped the political landscape. It’s still worth listening to though because behind the third way era platitudes (“a new way of thinking about politics which is neither left nor right”) there’s genuinely worthwhile empirical research here being applied in an intriguing way.
The disciplinary force of new media? (2010-07-26 10:03)

At the weekend a left-wing blogger made an off hand comment on Twitter that one might have expected would have just faded away within a few days. Luke Bozier tweeted that:

> Gordon Brown’s WebCreator website is not befitting of a former Prime Minister. Tangent should be ashamed. http://gordonbrown.org.uk

The company in question produce a lot of Labour websites. I don't recall ever seeing any that look particularly impressive and it's difficult not to agree with Luke that Brown's new website is poor. It looks like a site produced through a free template rather than the work of an elite web design agency. Imagine Luke's surprise when he received the following communication from Tangent:

> I respectfully suggest you delete that tweet, issue no more similar ones and generally try to sell your products in a more professional way. I really don't like the prospect of either a public slanting match or legal action, but if I need to protect my company's business and reputation, I will.

However the story has since started to grow through new media. It's trending on Twitter. More coverage of it here, here and here. In my mind this a perfect example of the emancipatory force of new media: it partially overturns the asymmetry of organizational and communicative power which makes legal threats from a corporation to an individual so effective. Obviously there are countervailing tendencies (cultural fragmentation, isolated privatism, hedonistic distraction) but we need to carefully assess the actual consequences of this technology as it is played out on a day-to-day level.

Perhaps at some point this might involve recording and cataloguing incidents such as this so that web scholars have an extensive databank of empirical case studies through which to develop theoretical understandings of the social changes wrought by the internet. My fear is that so many fascinating instances like this (which, in part, reveal real structures underlying our mundane experience of the internet) are likely to be lost simply because they are too small, too mundane and too individually insignificant.

Too often the debate about the internet seems to be stuck between the boosters (e.g. the next generation of digital technology will usher in a new cyber utopia), the moralists (e.g. technology is undermining the moral fabric of human society) and the cynics (e.g. all new technology has created a moral panic and therefore we should dismiss the significance of contemporary technology). It's only through cataloguing and analyzing the small, mundane and insignificant that we can get beyond these polarized positions and really start to understand the impact digital technology is having on social life.
Rethinking the World (2010-07-27 09:00)

To think the world is to keep the world the way it is. To rethink the world is to change it.

To change the world is to challenge the way majorities are used to thinking about the world.

A thought is a creative demon and like a virus it multiplies itself. The Buddha too acknowledged the power of thoughts. To rethink is to infect the world with the virus of a social revolution that will lead to "a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future and old age a security" (Chaplin in The Great Dictator)

To rethink the world is to disprove the prejudices of your teachers at school, your parents, the rest of the family at home and the neighbors on the street, to see alternatives where the doors are closed, to accept the way you are, to give those who never had a chance a chance to be themselves, to embrace elements in a tradition that lead to the future, to use criticism in the form of argument and polemics to deconstruct the enemies of a classless society, to unlearn each day what you've taught yourself the previous day, never to put personal loves and hates before the truth, to know the truth the way the victims of injustice experience it, Father Zossima asks the question in The Brothers Karamazov: "After all what am I worth, that another man, a fellow creature, made in the likeness and image of God, should serve me?"- the question is a secular-democratic one as well – what justifies the violence of those who have against those who do not have, what justifies governments dictatorial or otherwise imposing agendas that represent the needs of some as opposed to the many, what justifies millions having to kill their sense of human worth to fulfill the whims of a few, to subvert power elitism in every possible way is to rethink the world.

‘I’ don’t believe in the supremacy of the "we" over the 'I'. I don’t believe that in some mystical way I echo the thoughts of millions outside me. That is vanity if not outright self-deception. I don’t believe either that I’ve to live up to a particular ideal popular prejudice creates for me. If I say what I say it is because I’m backed by a certain experience of reality. I don’t understand "life" in an abstract sense but in a concrete manner as "living."

The person who writes this column is neither an "I" nor a "we" but somewhere guided by a sense of what things should be like, somewhere certain without being absolute, somewhere unsure without being insecure, somewhere willing to understand, somewhere less than willing to compromise, somewhere embracing a changing world, somewhere unwilling to make change a goal in itself, somewhere willing to let go because nothing is more disastrous to a social revolution than a bunch of private egos consumed with hatred settling scores with the world, somewhere fighting it out all the way – Che Guevara is not about having the photograph of Alberto Korda on the t-shirt but to know that revolution is the answer to injustices that millions experience every day of their lives.
I haven’t rethought the world. I keep rethinking it over and again because a fool has the last word on everything and I choose not to be that.

1. http://browse.deviantart.com/digitalart/?order=24&q=ideas#/d2uk7af

Fatih Parlak (2010-07-28 01:42:17)
rethinking the world, as I see it, should be crowned by any possible way of re-making the world. But this would probably fail. As Baudrillard claimed in 'In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities', we think (and rethink) individually; and therefore there is no society that can think. Rather, what we have is a mass of people far from any thinking ability. With this in hand, a revolution would never be truly accomplished. Therefore, my dearest friend, I feel the same dilemmas as you do, between having a rethinking ‘I’ which is highly utopian in itself, and an irresponsible ‘we’ which constantly disappoints the former one. Tragedy is that the former cannot do without the latter.

English Defence League/Unite Against Fascism, Manchester, 10th Oct 2009 (2010-07-28 10:00)

[EMBED]
1. http://www.englishdefenceleague.org/

Reclaiming 'political narrative’ from New Labour (2010-07-29 19:47)
There was a fascinating [1]article by Gary Younge on the Guardian’s website at the weekend. He argues that the last few months of British politics has seen the right enjoy considerable success in establishing a dominant framework within which mainstream political debate plays itself out. If you listen to the mainstream news on British TV or radio it would seem there is unanimous agreement that New Labour’s profligacy has caused a budgetary crisis and in order to make up for 'living beyond our means’ it is necessary for the new coalition (as a post-political government of national unity) to impose unavoidable austerity measure.

The coalition government have successfully entrenched a prevailing narrative which legitimises their radical 'slash-the-state’ agenda while casting the blame for any ensuing social hardship onto the former government. In many ways this is pure [2]propaganda resting on an entirely fictional account of international finance, political agendas and economist history. Yet however nakedly ideological this picture may seem to us, it is indisputably compelling:
As we in Britain edge towards an autumn of swingeing public sector cuts, it is crucial that the left reframes popular understanding of the origins of, and options emerging from, this economic crisis. So far the right has made all the running. According to [3]Ipsos Mori, in March the number of those who opposed the Tory strategy was double that of those who backed it. By the end of last month the tables had turned, with 44% [4]backing swift deficit reduction and 35% against it.

The narrative draws upon a metaphor of the 'public household' (i.e. understanding public finances in terms of managing a household) which helps reduce the abstract and complex systems of global finances to the concrete realities of everyday life. As Cameron asked in the TV debates, "Who hasn’t had to make sacrifices because of the recession?" Leaving aside the fact that 23 cabinet members are millionaires and can likely say "I haven’t!" to that question, it is important to recognise not just that the implicit analogy is false (managing a household budget and managing a national budget are different endeavours with different logics) but that fighting against it should involve an appreciation of its simple plausibility as well as its factual inaccuracies.

Given the role that 'political narrative' played in the New Labour project, it’s reasonable for the left to be cautious when it comes to narrative. However unless we wish to acquiesce to the austerity agenda being imposed across Europe, it’s surely necessary for us to consider how to effectively, plausibly and powerfully tell our stories.


Call for book reviewers (2010-07-30 09:30)

As some of you may have seen on [1]Facebook, the Sociological Imagination is looking for book reviewers. This is a chance to practice your writing, share your thoughts on a topic and get a free book in the process. There are submission guidelines [2]here.

Here are a few suggestions of books that we’d like to see reviewed:

- Ben Carrington, Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora
- Adrian Franklin, City Life
- Barry Smart, Consumer Society
- Natalie Fenton, New Media, Old News
- Richard Giulianotti & Roland Robertson, Globalization and Football
- Nick Couldry, Why Voice Matters: Politics and Culture after Neoliberalism
- Craig Calhoun, Community
• Rosi Braidotti, The Posthuman
• Susie Scott, Making Sense of Everyday Life
• Angus Bancroft, Drugs, Intoxication and Society
• Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, Governing the Present

If none of these take your fancy then feel free to suggest a book and we'll try and obtain a review copy for you. Please get in touch to arrange or discuss further.

3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

___________________________

I've sent an e-mail to Mark Carrigan expressing my interest in one, possibly two titles.

Purity (2010-07-31 10:00)

[1]
The Affair that Ended in Rape: Researching Australian Footballers and Sexual Assault (2010-08-02 10:00)

In 2006, when I began research into Australian football and sexual assault for my doctoral thesis, I was a footy fan. No, I was an Australian Football League fanatic: a 'Proud, Passionate and Paid Up' member of the Hawthorn Football Club, as numerous bumper stickers on my old car attest. At the games, week in, week out, rain, hail or shine, with my dad, my sister and my brother, my mood for days wholly dependent on the outcome of those two short hours on the weekend. When it came to umpiring, although I wasn't as one-eyed as some supporters, and could on occasion concede that a free kick paid against the Hawks was warranted, more often than not I was yelling about the 'soft' decisions that went against 'us' and the 'obvious' rule-breaking thuggery of the opposition that the umpires ignored. It's probably a mentality that most fans share, at least to some extent − as you stand up for your best friends or family against anyone else, and believe in them, I believed in and defended my 'teammates' against accusations of weakness, softness, unfair play and any number of on-field indiscretions.

When the first highly-publicised cases of sexual assault came to my attention in 2004, I, like many others, took this loyalty a step further: I sided with the accused footballers against all outsiders, namely the women who made rape complaints against them. I recall now with shame the way I dismissed the complaints as false when I heard that, in both cases, the women had initially had consensual sex with one player. My research was in part motivated by that shame, and the desire to fully understand what I was involved with as a football fan. I also sought to explain how a series of seemingly simple newspaper narratives could so easily convince a professed feminist such as myself to dismiss women's words out of hand.

Examining the media portrayals of cases involving players from both the AFL and National Rugby League, I began to uncover structures within the football leagues − discursive and practical − which protect footballers against
being held accountable for sexual assault (see Waterhouse-Watson 2007; 2009; 2010a; 2010b). Football representatives, as well as many journalists and media commentators, construct narratives which portray the complainants as ‘gold diggers’, ‘women scorned’, ‘predatory women’ and/or ‘groupies’; all blame is therefore deflected away from the footballers and onto the women involved. The women are portrayed as vindictive liars. Despite more than twenty cases being reported in the media since 1999, involving at least fifty-six players and officials, not one person involved in elite Australian football has yet been made to stand trial on a charge of sexual assault. The cases are effectively prosecuted through the media and result in acquittal. I further uncovered a broad system of interlocking discourses and narrative patterns that endorse masculine violence, construct women’s and footballers’ bodies, their roles and capacities, and describe a ‘rape culture’ – that is, an environment which condones and facilitates rape.

Although I remained a member of the Hawthorn football club and still enjoyed the game into the 2008 season, my enthusiasm for football waned as my research progressed – a possible consequence of which I was aware before I commenced my PhD studies. It became increasingly difficult to maintain my position as a fan the more I discovered about the ‘rape culture’ inscribed in football and its systematic maintenance through the mainstream media. Fans are ‘part of the team’ and as such they are implicated in its players’ actions off the field as well as on. Just as a fan can say to a rival supporter ‘we thrashed you on Saturday’, supporters of the Canterbury Bulldogs, involved in the most infamous sexual assault case, reported being taunted as rapists themselves during the 2004 police investigation (Brown 2004), as if the fans, too, had been involved in the incident. Female fans in a study by Peter Mewett and Kim Toffoletti (2008) had to develop strategies for reconciling the alleged rapes in order to continue participating in the games as supporters: they blamed the allegations on the actions of Rogue Men, Predatory Women, and uncontrollable male sexuality, as a means of justifying footballers’ behaviour, exonerating the culture of football from blame, and/or dismissing the allegations. To do otherwise would call into question the integrity of their own teams and the game itself, as well as implicating the fans themselves in the alleged rapes. My strategy was to tell myself that all the problems ‘really’ lay with other clubs, but not with ‘my’ team. My Hawthorn would never behave like those other clubs.

My ‘love affair’ with football ended suddenly and irrevocably – in the greatest of all football ironies – during 2008, the year when my once-beloved Hawks took out the premiership cup for the first time in seventeen years. The catalyst: my discovery of the details of a 1999 case in which at least two Hawthorn players and a club official allegedly raped a woman in Hawaii (Murphy 2004). I had been (dimly) aware that such a case existed, but, given the findings of my research, I did not have the option of laying blame on Rogue Men or Predatory Women. In maintaining the subject position of fan I was unable to admit the possibility that ‘my’ team could have done anything wrong. But, like Mewett and Toffoletti’s interviewees, I (subconsciously) constructed other explanations for the existence of the case, telling myself that as it had received scant publicity it must not have been very serious, or was completely unsubstantiated. But one day, wearing my Hawthorn membership scarf as I worked, I finally read the articles that gave details of the alleged victim’s police statement and the responses of Hawthorn officials. I was utterly betrayed. What the players and team official allegedly did to the woman was horrific. And there were the same patterns of denial and blame I identified in the other cases, the same thinly veiled accusations of lying even though it is uncertain what possible benefits a Californian woman might have to gain by inventing a story of rape by Australian footballers, in Hawaii, and declining to press charges. The incident did not even become public in Australia until five years after it occurred. And unlike the other cases I investigated, as a member of the team responsible, I was implicated.

I took off my membership scarf. I have not watched another football game. I did not renew my membership in 2009 and will not again. And I cried, a lot, because my ‘teammates’ destroyed the thing that I loved.

The sheer numbers of cases, and the attitudes of the clubs and leagues, have caused internal conflict for many fans, although the majority have not abandoned the sports entirely, as I did, but found alternative strategies for negotiating their fandom. In 2004, a group of rugby league and Australian Rules supporters set up [1]Football Fans Against Sexual Assault, an organisation ‘aimed... at positive action, the sorts of things they’d like to see football codes do to restore the game to an esteemed place in their hearts and minds’. The group, led by rugby league
supporter Kath Haines, has had some measure of success, with both major leagues adopting at least some of the
recommendations that FFASA put forward in [2]Towards Champions, an open submission. FFASA members clearly
see their active work to fight sexual assault from ‘within’ football as a legitimate means of maintaining their fandom,
and their successes testify to this. Real fandom is a matter of the heart, not the head, and if the heart wishes to
remain loyal to football, the head make the necessary negotiations. It is highly likely that, had I never read about the
Hawthorn case, I would be a fan to this day – albeit a somewhat cynical one.

I cannot, and do not wish to make grand pronouncements about how fans should negotiate their position in
light of the high rate of alleged sexual assault perpetrated by footballers. It would be unfair, hypocritical, and
probably quite untrue for me to suggest that to remain loyal is to condone sexual assault. What I can say, however, is
that public opinion matters to the leagues, so large numbers of fans continuing to express their disgust may prompt
the AFL and NRL to take greater action to change the culture of the sports, thus challenging the 'rape culture'. There
is certainly something to be said for working for change from within. For myself, I will continue to write about it, and
hope to convince at least some people of what needs to be changed in football. But my fan days are over.

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Kate (2010-08-12 13:07:12)
Brilliant article! It’s so easy to accept the media’s slant on a story and defend the celebrity - the familiar. I’ll be reading the
paper with a more critical eye now, especially when football is involved!! :)
A similar episode I came across last year involving another code and the Cronulla Sharks:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/thereporters/nickbryant/2009/05/if_i_had_a_gun.html Tracey Grimshaw threw up a
question for society in general - "Even though no charges were ever laid, her experience should rightly redefine the notion of
consent, and whether a star-struck 19-year-old could even be deemed capable of consenting to the scenario she ultimately
endured......" Comments on this blog piece seem to be split on whether or not the woman in question deserves sympathy. On
a related note, it seems like media coverage outside the Aussie football codes has been somewhat different. Shane Warne, the
cricketer, was shamed as a nymphomaniac when news of his numerous affairs broke out (at least that’ the impression I got. I
could be wrong). What explains the inconsistency in media coverage?

Deb Waterhouse-Watso (2010-08-13 16:23:14)
Thanks for your comments, Usha! Yes, the case on 'Code of Silence' (the incident you're referring to) does call into question
the whole notion of 'consent'. I've actually written about this (as yet unpublished), and I argue that this kind of 'group sex'
scenario is an act of male bonding. The woman is in one sense incidental to the process, but just an object to be ridiculed and
denigrated in order to bolster the footballers' sense of superiority in their masculinity. In this case, the 'sexual contract' (to use
Carole Pateman's term) is actually made between the men, and does not involve the woman at all, so her consent (or more
pertinently her willingness) is, in effect, irrelevant to the process. And when the inherent power imbalance is brought into
the equation - not to mention the sheer intimidation of a dozen rugby players and staff members entering the room uninvited
and insisting on 'sex' - whether or not she nominally agreed, she probably felt she had no choice. Consent is therefore
meaningless. Regarding the differences between cricket and football, although they operate on the same paradigm, I think
the two cases (or types of cases) you're referring to have some quite fundamental differences. In the case of Shane Warne,
there was incontrovertible evidence of his affairs, and as far as the public knew, his wife had engaged in no unconventional
sexual activity (such as group or casual sex, or an affair). Therefore she could be portrayed as a victim simply because she
did not transgress the norms of femininity. In the cases of (alleged) sexual assault, most of the complainants engaged in
consensual sex with one or more footballers prior to the alleged rape. In the absence of independent witnesses, the alleged
victim's credibility, like all rape complainants', is assumed to be suspect, which is reflected in blog entries as well as general
media reporting. The prevalence of belief in myths about sexual violence, and about rape complainants in particular, really
come into play, so beliefs that women lie about rape underpin the bulk of the discussion. Therefore the complainant is cast
as a groupie slut who wanted it, or a predatory woman who hunted down the players for sex. the belief that consent to sleep
with one person signals consent to sleep with any number of others also features prominently. So I guess it really comes down
to the old virgin/whore dichotomy. Of course, there is also the particular place football holds in the national imagination, and
it would be interesting to see whether a rape case involving a high profile cricketer (or cricketers) would attract the same kind
of attention.

Usha (2010-08-14 07:06:21)
Thanks for your reply, Deb! I fully agree that the Warne and football scandals are fundamentally different. Yet, it's your last
point that spurred my thinking originally. Because the way tabloid media usually works around the world, any hint of a sex
scandal is seized to bring down an idol. At least, that was my understanding. Yet, in the case of these football scandals, both
the media and part of the public seem unwilling to look at the accused as solely/fully culpable, even though words like 'rape'
and 'consent' were involved. Another thing that instantly came to my mind was related to gender power imbalances and
feminism in Australia. The one thing one constantly read after Julia Gillard's takeover was symbolism and what it meant for
the hitherto male-dominated Australian society to have its first female PM. Several references were made to Germaine Greer's The
Female Eunuch. It really seems like a hollow politically-expedient gesture in the light of the aforementioned episodes, doesn't
it? I completely agree with your explanation of 'consent' in the context of the rugby incident. It all sounds eerily similar to that
true-life Jodie Foster movie The Accused, doesn't it? Look forward to reading your work on 'Code of Silence' when it is published!

Sport and Byronic Bad Boys | Evelynfrances's Blog (2010-10-09 10:10:32)
[...] I recently spoke to Dr Deb Waterhouse-Watson, lecturer in English at Monash University. She specialises in researching
assault allegations involving footballers. [...]
The United States is an amazing country. On the surface it looks like it has the tremendous potential to solve the third world’s problems in a day or a week at most. On the other hand the third world has no greater and more dangerous enemy than the United States. You just have to watch an American news channel to see unadulterated lies about others and how filled with contempt is this nation for the rest of the planet. Except for a small minority of dissenters the rest of the nation is pied piped by the media into utter stupidity and brainlessness that we don’t see anywhere else.

American intellectuals by and large are the biggest cowards on earth if not the most self-righteous. You can say anything about anybody but not a word about American foreign policy or Israel because whatever you say might cost you your position given the clout that the pro-Israel lobby has in the United States. The American intellectual is busy inventing excuses or apologies that justify the worst forms of atrocities and murders that his country is doing to others on this planet. Such is the nature of brainwash in this country that it would’ve embarrassed George Orwell and left him speechless.

For some reason the rest of the world hates Americans, is envious of American way of life, wants to hurt and kill Americans, is anti-Semitic too these days – a new addition thanks to the pro-Israel lobby, anti-democratic, anti-fun, anti-everything in fact that an average American would think gives meaning to his or her life. Borat – a painfully unfunny comedy about a Kazakh shown in the worst imaginable light is one example of what an average American might think is funny. How one can say so many ugly things about others without dying of shame is a mystery to me! Even Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda look more respectable than this. And the movie Hostel about an ex-communist East European nation where children commit unthinkable murders on streets and are anti-American too – these are all too real reflections of a soul that rots with the stench of its own wrongdoings. That’s the soul of a nation with a history of genocide and slavery.

Finkelstein’s book: The Holocaust Industry (2000) is a hauntingly truthful book. It’s a book along with a few others that I’ve time and again recommended students, friends and strangers alike to read. For two reasons the book is important: one is that truth is important both in politics and life and the second, as important as the first is, that truth must be spoken even if it means going against one’s own country or the community or group that one comes from. The son of Nazi holocaust survivors, Finkelstein’s passionate attempt to expose the exploiters of Jewish suffering by turning the holocaust into an industry gives an unforgettable dimension to the book. A sequel to The Holocaust Suffering is: Beyond ‘Chutzpah: On the misuse of anti-semitism and the abuse of history’ argues among other things of how history has been distorted if not outright abused by scholars such as Alan Dershowitz to suit the current interests of Israel and the United States. Both the books deconstruct arguments based on fallacious viewpoints with the use of truth that comes from facts.

Speaking of his parents in the Introduction of the book Finkelstein says:

“The time is long past to open our hearts to the rest of humanity’s sufferings. This was the main lesson my mother imparted. I never once heard her say: Do not compare. My mother always compared. No doubt historical distinctions must be made. But to make out moral distinctions between “our” suffering and “theirs” is itself a moral travesty. “You can’t compare any two miserable people,” Plato humanely
observed, “and say that one is happier than the other.” In the face of the sufferings of Afro-Americans, Vietnamese and Palestinians, my mother’s credo always was: We are all holocaust victims.”

And of course “we” are. Everyone who lives his or her life under the boot of another man is a holocaust victim. Those employers – very familiar on the Indian landscape – are Nazis in fact who treat their employees or workers as if they were less than dirt. That is not all. Victims of hunger and poverty across the third world are holocaust victims. They haven’t chosen to be there. They’re brought into a situation which leaves them no choice but passively suffer. The only alternative left to them is fight or die.

The Pope endeared himself on two counts. One with the Vatican approving the inclusion of ‘social sins’ among which are environmental pollution as well as social injustice which causes poverty or “the excessive accumulation of wealth by a few” and by his scathing criticism of colonialism in his book Jesus of Nazareth. Benedict puts it brilliantly when he accuses colonialism of having destroyed native cultures and made people rootless left to their own inhumanity, greed and cynicism. The mercenary character of people living in the third world, the basic dishonesty we encounter in daily life as being almost normal, the need to be violent in verbal and non-verbal ways, the tendency to be dominant and servile at the same time – these things that are a familiar aspect of third world living come from our colonial past that continues in various forms right into the present.

Culture creates in-built discipline and ways of coming to terms with reality. In the haven of one’s own language and culture one is most oneself. Deceit is normal in any third world street. You always have to be prepared for the worst. More often than not you’ve to look out for yourself. But, this is not us. I’m not saying we had a golden past before colonialism. All I’m saying is that for sure we would’ve overcome most of those limitations within our own time and space. We did not have to be colonized for that to happen.

"The topical relevance of the parable (of the Good Samaritan from the gospel of Saint Luke) is evident. When we transpose it into the dimensions of world society, we see how the peoples of Africa, lying robbed and plundered, matter to us. Then we see how deeply they are our neighbors; that our lifestyle, the history in which we are involved, has plundered them and continues to do so. This is true above all in the sense that we have wounded their souls. Instead of giving them God, the God who has come close to us in Christ, which would have integrated and brought to completion all that is precious and great in their own traditions, we have given them the cynicism of a world without God, in which all that counts is power and profit, a world that destroys moral standards so that corruption and unscrupulous will to power are taken for granted. And that applies not only to Africa...The victims of drugs, of human trafficking, of sex tourism, inwardly devastated people who sit empty in the midst of material abundance...Karl Marx painted a graphic picture of the 'alienation' of man; even though he did not arrive at the real essence of alienation, because he thought only in material terms, he did leave us with a vivid image of man fallen among robbers." (Jesus of Nazareth 198)

A man fallen among robbers! That defines the true face of colonialism. The absolute evil of third world leaders, rich and powerful elites, CEOs of multinational companies, hollow as Faustus before Mephistopheles, they’re the true wretched of the earth. In abandoning the person on the street they created systems that bring out the worst in a human being. They peopled the world with holocaust victims in the form of cheap labor whose existence is bare survival.

The American way of life has caused irreconcilable contradictions in the cultures of the developing world. It has destroyed the best that local cultures offer in the making of a person. Like a virus American way of life has eaten into the spirit of the local and turned people into greedy mercenaries that would gladly abandon their brothers and sisters fallen on the streets of the world. If Americanization meant the spirit of Thoreau and Walt Whitman I would
gladly embrace it body and soul because such a dialogue would’ve brought out the best in us. Needlessly to say it is not. Americanization in the third world means grab as much as you can and you’ve no responsibility towards others.

Said Gandhi in all innocence: “I am only hoping and praying....[that there] will rise a new and robust India, not warlike, basely imitating the West in all its hideousness, but a new India learning the best that the West has to give and becoming the hope, not only of Asia and Africa, but the whole of the aching world.” The India I live in with the worst you can think of running the show is cultureless as a pig and without any spirit to innovate. It’s a dead man with a body soullessly moving into the future without any sense of direction.

Men like Chomsky and Finkelstein give respectability to the notion that there are dissenting Jews and not all Jews agree with what Israel is doing to the Palestinians. Honesty we attach to Jews in the same way that we attach hospitality to Turks and generosity to Arabs especially the Palestinians. These are way of making positive generalizations about people as opposed to negative stereotyping. Honesty that borders the ridiculous – is how I refer to Finkesleitin’s books in general. You almost cannot help laughing at his scathing attack of the Holocaust industry crooks that used historic suffering to make profits. There’s nothing human about it. You feel disgust rather than pity.

If Hitler thought that British rule of India was enviable you only have to guess what British imperialism actually meant in practice. Nazi cruelty knew no bounds. All those characters in the novels of Marquis de Sade pale before the horrors of the Nazis though I must say that Pasolini’s movie "Salo" is a brilliant insight into fascism. Finkelstein does not deny the holocaust. Movies and books that simplify the sufferings of Jews do not deserve to be taken seriously. The European Jews suffered and nothing is more terrible than belittle the suffering of another human being.

I saw the Battle of Algiers to visualize what Israel is doing in Palestine. It’s what the colonizer does to the colonized. America’s friendship has helped Israel perfect the art of colonialism. Jews who live in Israel seem to have a memory block. They forgot the days when they were what Gandhi called the “untouchables” of the west. That’s exactly what Finkelstein is critical of. "The staggering dimensions of Hitler’s Final Solution are by now well known. And isn’t the “normal” history of humankind replete with horrifying chapters of inhumanity? A crime need not be an aberrant to warrant atonement. The challenge today is to restore the Nazi holocaust as a rational subject of inquiry. Only then can we learn from it. The abnormality of the Nazi holocaust springs not from the event itself but from the exploitive industry that has grown around it...The noblest gesture for those who perished is to preserve their memory, learn from their suffering and let them, finally, rest in peace."

Jews are an interesting minority. "I am not Jewish but I am sure there must be some somewhere in me. I hope so" said Charlie Chaplin. A minority that produced none other than Spinoza to Marx and Freud and Einstein and Feynman might have a lot to speak for itself. But, Jews and Israel are two different entities. When I think of Israel nothing but disgust fills my heart. The brutality of Israel toward the Palestinians whose lands they’ve robbed, using force and treachery of every kind makes you sick. Not to forget that they are doing the job of America’s policeman in the Middle East. With a history of the holocaust that they claim for themselves how they could dehumanize themselves to such an extent is a mystery to me!

If there is really some historic memory of what they went through under Hitler, the Israeli on the street should defy the system oppose it in every possible way and fight for justice to the Palestinians. The American Jewish lobby only shows itself in the worst possible light when it puts a stranglehold on the truth by terming anyone against Israel as being anti-semite. As it is no one takes them seriously any longer. What is worse it might actually be a trigger to justify anti-semitism.

To be honest Gandhi has the last word on the question of Palestine. If the Jews of Europe took his words seriously their lives would be a lot better. They had no right to go and occupy Palestine. It’s a state founded on murder
in the same way as the United States which is part of the empathy they’ve for each other I believe. Says Gandhi:

"Palestine belongs to the Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs. What is going on in Palestine today cannot be justified by any moral code of conduct. The mandates have no sanction but that of the last war. Surely it would be a crime against humanity to reduce the proud Arabs so that Palestine can be restored to the Jews partly or wholly as their national home. The nobler course would be to insist on a just treatment of the Jews wherever they are born and bred. The Jews born in France are French. If the Jews have no home but Palestine, will they relish the idea of being forced to leave the other parts of the world in which they are settled? Or do they want a double home where they can remain at will? This cry for the national home affords a colorable justification for the German expulsion of the Jews."

What they are doing now is even worse. The rest of the world spits on the United States and Israel and they seem to be completely oblivious to it. How can such people walk on this planet I could never understand! Even a buffalo has more shame than them. When people die in Europe and America they’re tragedies. When they die in other parts of the earth these things just happen. In principle the American Jewish lobby is as evil as the Nazis. If they’ve not built concentration camps – they’re doing something as bad in being a part of the American foreign policy – which is to persecute the Palestinians and manipulate the Arabs to suit their vested interests. If anyone thinks he or she is a Jew and calls him or herself one – how can you think that what Hitler did is wrong and what America or Israel is doing is right? How is it possible that the same logic that accuses the Nazis is used to excuse Israel? In my view both are the same.

Pasolini’s *Salo* and Costas Gavros’ *Amen* touch on what fascism is all about in a much more serious manner than *Schindler’s List* and *Life is beautiful* the latter being rather frivolous. *The Pianist* in fact has a much more vivid picture of Nazi cruelty. *The Pianist* had its heart rending moments that I did not feel with *Life is beautiful*. Both *Schindler’s List* and *Life is beautiful* dilute the role of Christian Europe in the persecution of Jews which even Shakespeare would not do. Nazi cruelty is a phenomenon in itself that can be explained only through the simple idea of racial superiority – a disease that infected the soul of Europe and whose manifestation is colonialism. How can a man go through so much without killing himself is the first thing that comes to your mind when you see the *The Pianist*. The artist in Szpilman – the creator and the survivor and more than that a preserver of memory and one who celebrates life – that’s what the movie is all about. The face of Szpilman though at the end of the movie did not carry that absolute suffering that was his plight. It had a benign look which kind of made me see the actor rather than the character.

Being Finkelstein – honest and daring to offer full public support to Hezbollah that fought Israel in Lebanon and drove them out! It’s difficult to [1]ose a job for what you believe in. It’s difficult to be critical of the country you live in especially like the United States where dissenters are in a hopelessly small minority and can very easily acquire a bad reputation. I respect anybody who speaks for third world interests. I respect anybody who is critical of colonialism. I respect anybody who understands that third world suffering is what makes first world comfort. Not to see this simple fact is what makes one blindingly stupid. This stupidity is a virtue in the United States where average people are drugged by the media day in and day out and kept sedated for most of their lives because it suits the system to have it that way.

Your writing is powerful, sometimes poetic. It tears at the heart. But what are we to do? Left-liberal progressivism is a fragmented shambles of redundant complexity. There is no ideology, no leadership, not even an ethic which unites. If modernity is dead, where is postmodernity? Some French dudes use the term so we think that is what it means? They got it wrong. We need to get it right. Here is a start. Premoderns are oriented to the past - traditionalism. Moderns are oriented to the future - goals, targets - progressivism. Postmoderns are oriented to the present, to experience, to immediacy. That's simple. It's a start. And it's true.

eric... thanks much for your comment. Left or right - these are just labels my friend. don't pay too much attention to them. what is more important is what the egyptian writer naguib mahfouz said in his "nobel prize acceptance speech": "One day the great Pyramid will disappear too. But Truth and Justice will remain for as long as Mankind has a ruminative mind and a living conscience." human injustice is temporary and ultimately conscience will triumph. this may not seem like a solution to the corruption and dishonesty of powerful people but as an attitude it is bound to reinforce the belief that change is not just a possibility but a reality.

Welcome to the portable e-soapbox of a sociologist with too much time on her hands. Milena Kremakova is fascinated by too many things and refuses to devote her time single-mindedly to any one pursuit. In this column she gives voice to one of her thinking selves: that of a perpetual traveller comfortably stuck between the positions of outsider and insider, geared to discover the unusual even in the most mundane setting, and always having something to say (or show). She pledges to irregularly scribble thin, unabashedly empirical quasi-ethnographic observations, loosely driven by pre-developed concepts, while promiscuously recycling insights from sociological theories.
Profile of writer: Milena Kremakova

Milena’s academic background involves 1.5 bachelor degrees (an eclectic but incredibly stimulating degree in European studies with specialism in law, and a loved but unfinished degree in Sociology – both from Sofia University), two MAs (in European Studies from Sofia University, and in Social and Political Thought from Warwick), and an ongoing doctorate in sociology and social policy. In her academic daytime as a doctoral student, she is currently preoccupied with the effects of post-socialist labour marketisation on individual lives.

Milena thinks in English, Bulgarian, and Russian (in no particular order) and understands varying degrees of German, French, and Italian. She is an omnivorous reader with undivided and eclectic academic and personal interests, including but not limited to:

- the social uncertainty of post-socialist transformations;
- EU-developments;
- actor-network theory (Latour and Callon);
- social construction of labour markets, welfare, and statistics;

- the theory of justification (Boltanski, Chiapello and Thevenot);

- and the admittedly overly specific but fascinating world of maritime work.

[1]

In social research, Milena advocates qualitative methodologies that follow the Weberian tradition, and multi-method research approaches in which various qualitative/quantitative methods are not separated but used creatively as complementary tools adapted to do different research jobs. On the side, she does photography and hopes some day to know enough mathematics to be able to understand chaos theory (non-linear dynamics).


Robert Shiller on Animal Spirits (2010-08-05 08:00)

A fascinating interview with the author of the recent book [1]Animal Spirits (how human psychology drives the economy and why it matters for global capitalism). Definitely worth a listen for anyone who has an interest in heterodox economics. I was struck during the interview with quite how sensible (in the rather mundane and obvious sense of the term) what Shiller says is and yet, as I understand it, he’s still considered something of a radical within economics.

[EMBED]

1. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Animal-Spirits-Psychology-Economy-Capitalism/dp/0691142335

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Anna Minton on the Psychology of Place (2010-08-06 10:00)


[EMBED]

Call for Interviews (2010-08-07 10:00)

Plans are currently in motion to bring a number of interviews to the Sociological Imagination over the next few months. However we'd like you to help us bring an ever wider selection of interviews to the website. If there's anyone you'd like to interview (academic, writer, campaigner etc) then please get in [1]touch to discuss. We're happy to help you arrange and carry out the interview if you're unsure of how to do it.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

The Privacy of Public Sociology (2010-08-08 10:00)


[EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED]

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2010-08-09 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity
A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research?  How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1] here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3] here.


The Strange World of Terence Kealey (2010-08-10 09:00)

A fascinating [1] feature from the Guardian Education on Terence Kealey. Since 2001 Kealey has been the Vice Chancellor of Buckingham University. He’s a passionate (another word would be shrill) advocate of private education which is quite appropriate given Buckingham’s unique status:

Kealey, who is 58, calls himself a passionate libertarian and that’s what you’d expect from Buckingham, which was founded in the 1970s as Britain’s only “independent” university. Other universities are technically independent, but Buckingham alone refuses to accept money from Hefce (Higher Education Funding Council for England). Its home students pay annual fees of £8,640 (for degree courses that take two years), though they are eligible for state loans and maintenance grants just as their lecturers are eligible for research council grants. No minister can tell Buckingham what to teach or how to spend its money. Kealey thinks all universities should be like this.

The prevailing winds are in his favour. The idea of setting public bodies free from state control is increasingly popular with all political parties. Kealey thinks it is time for more private universities, and is exploring the idea with philanthropists. Meanwhile, established universities face severe funding cuts, restrictions on admissions and even closure.


Usha (2010-08-14 14:27:39)
Oh dear. That article was.........surreal.

Margaret Archer on Reflexivity (2010-08-11 10:00)

[EMBED]

Cité-seeing in Milan (2010-08-12 09:00)

20th July, Milano, Piazza della Vetra

'A new colourful Milan, more and more like the city in which we would like to wake up every day'.

This quote from Ron English’s Absolut Elvis Presley wallpaper in Piazza della Vetra (next to the church S. Lorenzo maggiore) in Milano marked the beginning of my new conscious mode of conquering space: cité-seeing.

Cité-seeing uses the traveller's body in a physical act of moving as a tool for conquering a new place. The cité-seer shares the sight-seer’s fascination with new places. However, he does not hunt for a limited number of pre-set, universally significant, 'large' monuments. He avoids the formidable and instead navigates the new space, immersed in the 'small' normality of the everyday life of a city or village. He sees Paris not as the home of the Eiffel tower, but as a bustling web of streets and lives, layers of history, colours, shapes, smells, and sounds. For the sight-seer a city is a predictable entity, pre-digested by tour-guides, neatly packed and served in labelled morsels. For a cité-seer it is novel, endless, and valuable in its own peculiarity.
Cite-seeing differs from sight-seeing in yet another respect: its focus on the traveller’s physical presence in the new place. Compared to the tourist’s homage to a monument, cité-seeing is an egoistic act with reversed perspective aimed at exploring one’s internal self through immersion in an external space. He does not seek monumental sights but ephemeral impressions of normality. He attempts to inhabit the new space, blend into it without passing value-judgements, runs away from his preset expectations, accepts the place rather than measuring it against a default yardstick. For a sightseer, cities can be ‘worth seeing’, or not. For a cité-seer, any city is worth being in.

Sight-seeing is a slow affair, less rushed than the sight-seers’ mission of collecting tokens and snapping images of key sights, albeit it is still faster than the immersed life of the locals. The cité-seer is an invisible quasi-inhabitant: he does not take away anything from the place, unlike the sight-seer, although he does not give to it like a local would, either.

The sight-seer’s trajectory is linear while the cité-seer meanders and lingers. His trajectory does not blindly follow the de-localised ‘highways’ laid between sights of interest (such as famous cathedrals, palaces, monuments, or museums), designated for tourists, and avoided by locals.

All this makes the cité-seer’s position somewhat awkward: although he is less visible, kinder and more appreciative of the place than the sight-seeing tourist, his glance is deeper, his presence – more lengthy, his interference with local life – more annoying to locals. He is an encroachment on both day-to-day local life, and that fraction (if there is one) of local industry that capitalises on tourists. He is not a typical tourists, but neither is he a local: he may or may not speak the language, and often does not look local enough. He attracts attention and disappoints the
expectations of eager salesmen. He is an invisible quasi-inhabitant.

Yet in some ways the cité-seer can become more local than the locals, because he appreciates those over-looked or outright dismissed, shameful or unexciting, elements of the urban scene: sights of destruction and decay, incongruencies, empty streets, un-unusual architecture of residential areas, cheap local markets, dodgy local pubs, street signs, and other dusty artefacts of everyday life. Cité-seeing is a crash course in becoming almost local to a particular place by consciously accumulating a significant number of singularly insignificant impressions.

The cité-seer glance hovers both below and above that of the sight-seeing tourist and that of the local. He takes in the overall ambience of a place, as well as a plethora of speck-sized details. If the local’s vantage point makes his vision two-dimensional (lacking perspective), and the tourist’s is distorted and sight-targeted (with monumental sights blown up out of balance and the rest reduced to a blank map); the cité-seer vision is simultaneously micro- and tele-scopic. His glance is fluid, converging with, but never collapsing, into either of those two: one extreme renders the cite-seer blindly insensitive, while the other extreme makes him a quasi-local.

* 

I have sat in front of a church from the 1pm to the 1.30 pm bell. The ice-cream is finished, but no one is kicking me out, because I am not in. Part of my fascination with Italy is based in the relaxed authenticity of the urban surroundings (one can argue that all buildings are a copy of something else, but since the course of time has erased their ancient Greek originals, they now seem authentic to us). In summer especially, the inside blends in with the outside; human-built things blend in with naturally growing things. I am not enjoying ice-cream (with artificial additives) in an Italian style decorated cafe with pictures of ruins or churchwalls and statues on the walls, or witnessing copies of the ruins in a paid museum, under neon lights. Instead, I am physically sitting on the ruins of a wall under an old laurel tree, in an 'authentic' old square adjacent to an ancient church that have seen more summers than I ever shall. The gastronomic pleasure of ice-cream is only a fraction of experience: indivisible from the necessity of lunch, the merciless July sun leaving its marks on my back, the cultural consumption of a sight of interest, the linguistic adventure of communicating in a foreign tongue, and countless more minute elements that constitute the act of cité-seeing.

» Cité-seeing in Edirne The Sociological Imagination (2013-08-03 08:00:59)

[...] In 2011 the Idle Ethnographer wrote about Milan [...]
of higher fees and increasing privatisation in education. NUS and UCU will be writing directly to all of your VCs and Principals calling on them to support our campaign to defend education provision, access and quality by signing up to our coalition and by granting release for the day of the national demonstration.

UCU general secretary, Sally Hunt said: “The very fabric of the further and higher education system is under threat from the current government. Its policies are more likely to encourage ignorance than to promote education. Plans to increase the cost of accessing universities and colleges will hit millions of ordinary families, crushing ambition and thwarting aspiration. Meanwhile suggested further cuts to budgets of more than 25 % will see an estimated 50,000 college and university staff join the dole queues. While other countries are investing in education to beat recession, this country is cutting back. That is why we are teaming up with the National Union of Students (NUS). Only by working together can we build an effective coalition to challenge the cuts and call on government to change course and fund our future.”

Aaron Porter NUS National President said: “This is a crucial year for education. The future of education funding is being hotly debated and we face the threat of the most drastic retrenchment in public spending for sixty years. The student movement has played an important role at moments like these in the past. We must do so again now. To do this we must work with our allies and reach out to those in our communities who will feel the impact of these debates. We need to build for a year of action on a scale that we have not undertaken since the higher education bill six years ago and the first landmark in this year will be our joint demonstration with UCU. If you haven’t already please make contact with your UCU branch and organise to make this the most successful demonstration of recent history.”

From UCU Campaigns update e-mail


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Human rights activist Peter Tatchell confronts BNP leader Nick Griffin (2010-08-14 10:00)

[EMBED]

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A Walk with Richard Sennett (2010-08-15 10:00)

[EMBED]
UCU says student support lottery must stop (2010-08-16 10:00)

UCU said yesterday that it was ludicrous that the amount of financial aid students currently receive is random and that universities with a good track of widening participation can only offer meagre support to their students. Responding to a report from the university access watchdog, OFFA, Sally Hunt said: “How much financial support universities offer students is a complete lottery. Universities doing the most to attract students from the poorest backgrounds are unable to offer those students the vital funds they need to survive at university.”


From UCU Campaigns update e-mail

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/aug/05/poor-students-bursary-oxbridge

The NHS Shock Doctrine (2010-08-16 14:00)

[EMBED]

Car Boot Sale (2010-08-17 08:00)

In this episode, a sneaky ethnographer of East European origin embarks on a quest to deconstruct one of Britain's informal institutions: The Local Bank Holiday Sunday Car Boot Sale. Below are her unabridged and unabashed field-notes.
Don't fall for the 50 pence earrings: it's a trap!

Rather than participant observation, this is an exercise in observant participation. Observant participation is a variant of the ethnographic method of participant observation, first described by Polish researcher M. Kaminski who wrote a book based on his experience in as political prisoner (Kaminski, Marek M. (2004) Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prison). Now, you might think that a car boot sale is no prison, even though you are confined to a narrow patch of a few square feet. But the ethnographic method works, regardless.

**Background**

*(locals may skip this section)*

The car boot sale (hereafter CBS) is a curious local custom in the UK. Its role is to construct a temporary space-time continuum for exchanging small-scale goods outside the remit of the official market. Goods sold or acquired on a CBS are not subject to any local or government tax and are tacitly exempt from customer protection regulations. They are also extremely cheap compared to similar items available through the official market. The only (potentially) formally recorded monetary exchange taking place is a small fee paid to the owner/manager of the place in which the sale takes place (usually a local sports pitch) by salespeople arriving in their personal vehicles. The fee is paid for each sales vehicle regardless of any profit made, amount of goods, size of vehicle, number of salespeople, or any other criteria. It simply gives the payer the right to establish a temporary 'sales-pitch'.

The CBS obeys the cyclical nature of social time: it always takes place on a non-working day, customarily occupying the first half of the day on a Sunday or Bank holiday Monday (Bank holiday Mondays are another peculiar UK custom: they are Mondays *de facto* treated as weekend-days on which banks and most other commercial establishments and institutions are closed, happen several times a year).

The origins of CBS were unknown at the time of participation and writing – perhaps some of the readers could shed light on them?
Field notes

My first car boot sale ever began with a dream and a fiasco. Fortunately, the fiasco was contained in the dream, and the dream itself was not a nightmare. In my dream, I was desperately trying to sell my car to someone for a pound. They thought it was a rip off.

Luckily, when I woke up, I still possessed a car (which I needed for going to the car boot sale in), but it was also 8 am. Just like most people, normally I subscribe to the view that 8 am on a Sunday is, in fact, ungodly early. However, CBS-goers are a special breed of people akin perhaps to hill-walkers, morning-joggers and horse-racers. So don't be shocked to find out that by waking up at 8 am I had massively overslept by about two hours. Thanks to my bargaining with the other ignoramus in my dream, I was now too late to be able to use the limited time-slot of CBS. The window of opportunity was mercilessly closing up on me.

The cold shower and an inhumanly strong cup of black Turkish coffee woke me up somewhat, but I was still hesitating whether to go, or to devote my morning to more intellectual pursuits. A mundane detail swept away my last hesitations in favour of the less honourable pursuit. There was no milk left in the fridge and I was forced to consume my cereal drenched in hot water. This was too much even for a poor grad student. I now had two clear goals ahead: to make at least as much money as to buy two pints of milk and cherry scones from Sainsbury's (in addition to making some interesting ethnographic observations).

I loaded the car, marvelling at the amount of stuff I had accumulated within twelve months. For two months now, random objects that I didn't really need had been slowly finding their way into various containers scattered around my room. All three containers – a grey suitcase (itself acquired on a boot sale for a pound), a reusable shopping bag with an elephant on it, and a large cardboard box, were now full to the brim.

I also filled a rucksack with provisions, water, a bottle of sun-screen and a book (not for sale), and poured all my loose change in a fanny pack (don't ask me why I own a fanny pack). The rucksack and fanny pack together weighed probably half as much as the items for sale, but I wasn't going to allow my first (and probably last) experience as a saleswoman to be darkened by ridicule. Of course, I also took a straw hat – for looking professional; and a jacket – for British summer weather.

I drove out at 8.50 am: far too late for a responsible salesperson. My slackness confirmed the first rule of the market in reverse: profit drives action (or, in my case, my un-reliance on profit had allowed me to slack off). This observation was an important reminder of a key trap of qualitative studies: unless you are very invested in your field, you risk slacking off and allowing your fieldwork to become un-rigorous; yet, if you are too invested, you risk "going native". As a field researcher, you just can't win. Unless of course you research car boot sales – then you could at least earn some money.

The sale took place at a rugby field only 0.160 km away from my house, but I had to drive through five sets of traffic lights in order to get there (this made the journey almost a mile long). I also had to go around the junction twice, until I mustered enough courage to break the rules and drive a ten feet stretch in the forbidden green bus lane. I was immediately followed by four other cars. This excessively quick normalisation of deviance took me by surprise (being in Britain, I did not expect so many cars to break driving regulations). I did not know whether to rejoice or to worry: the good news was that even as late as 9 am, I was not the latest seller to arrive at the pitch; the bad news was that the pitch was full and I was also in direct competition with those four naughty cars (all brimming with goods for sale).

Having driven 1.5 km instead of 160 metres, and stopped at ten red traffic lights, I confidently drove into the rugby field that hosted the sale. 'Is it too late to get a sales pitch?', I asked the three blokes who were standing at the gates, holding plastic buckets full of bucks. I had been practising this phrase in my head ever since I had got in the car.
and the butterflies in my stomach had been practicing ever since, too. They (the blokes, not the butterflies) said ‘It’s alrigh’, and told me to drive to pitch 65. I had no idea where that was, so I just drove all around the field until I saw the end of a row. There I parked in the grass, next to a large family who were unloading a mountain of really good books for sale. I had to force myself to turn a blind eye to all the books on history and art, all sold for one or two quid. The two pints of milk and the cherry scones beckoned and grinned at me. I had no choice but to show endurance in the face of the luring jackets of the books.

One of the first cars at the car boot sale. Hoping to flog all this crap to unsuspecting Coventrians. Proud to own a car and use it.

I took my stuff out of the car and spread it on a blanket on the ground, then perched myself on a softer blanket and began waiting for the crowd to invade my little pitch at the very end of the line. A small stream of people stopped by. Those who did, probably did so out of pity: “Let’s stroll past that girl at the end of the line, she must feel lonely. Ah, and she hasn’t got anything interesting to sell. Poor darling”. Not a minute had passed when an old gentleman appeared, armed with a notebook, pencil tucked behind his ear, entirely unimpressed by the lack of customers and my blatant lack of profit. I disarmed him by offering to voluntarily part with £7, in contribution towards the sales pitch. He snatched the money and evaporated. He also seemed to give me a receipt for the seven quid, but it must have been made out of fumes, because it also evaporated.

The wind wasn’t on my side: it was obviously backing up the customers, and trying to lift things from my improvised stall without paying for the purchase. The four books I had managed to tear off my bookcase and put up for sale were flapping their pages like fat domestic chickens forced by a strict mummy-chicken to attend Sunday flying classes. Worse still, the wind was about to lift off the ground the determined saleswoman herself. My propensity to fly created some funny chat-up situations with potential clients. The cheeky bastard actually earned me a few pence, so in the end I didn’t report the wind to the police.

At 9.20 am I made my first sale (ever!). Unfortunately, I have no recollection of the item I sold, but I do recall receiving a pound coin from an itinerant tradesman with a busy expression on his Ethiopian face. I’d seen him before (and heard him mention Ethiopia to a customer). He earns his bread and beer by buying and re-selling things at car boot sales. How many people are out there, for whom car boot sales are a key way of earning money? I also wonder
why I forgot what I actually sold. Perhaps, that is my psychological defence against disappointment, because the item probably cost more than a pound.

Then I sold a few more things. An intergenerational conglomerate (grandmother, mother, and ten-year-old daughter) critically examined my four old pairs of shoes and after a deliberation lasting about a quarter of an hour bought the old pair of black pumps for a quid. I had got them for years ago for £10 (a lot of Bulgarian money at the time) from a very cheap shop in Coventry, so selling them made me feel a bit nostalgic. I played on my first piano concert wearing those shoes (the quality of the music was the same as that of the shoes, but the memory is just as dear, too). It was no surprise that the young girl hated them. I had worn them out and they were not very comfortable and did not look very cool; worse still, according to the mother, they were going to be worn during the following school year. The mention of the word "school" killed all signs of potential pre-teen enthusiasm. However, she yielded to parental pressure and handed me the pound with a guilty smile.

A tiny jubilant lady bought Al Pacino's *88 minutes* for £0.50. I convinced her that it was a thriller (even though I had never watched it). She was delighted – that was exactly what her grandson liked...oh, these boys – well, he's a young man now, at 18. She was so lovely that I'd have given her the thriller for free. I would never make a good salesman. I'd be too tempted to rip off noxious people and give presents to lovely ones.

Someone took advantage of the familial humdrum around the black shoes and snatched my new ballet pumps for £1... they had cost me 10 pounds. But I couldn't care less, because I had now made broken even and even made a profit of £0.70 and could finally commence working for myself!

At 10 am my smiling muscles were hurting, but I continued smiling and saying 'Hi', 'Hello there' and 'Morning, Sir' (to the rare surly-looking male). My sales continued with variable success. There was no crowd, but I was rewarded – not financially – by numerous awkward 'Hi'-s and 'Hello'-s, as well as a variety of half-embarrassed, half-treasure-hunting glances. An old biker, melting in the sun in heavy black gear and clutching a helmet with clumsy charm, said I smiled beautifully and that I should continue doing so, because I was cheering everyone up. I thanked him and followed his advice – not out of duty to the unknown leather-clad knight, but because the smile was now glued to my face and my mandibular joint refused to move.

Soon thereafter, I sold the Merchant of Venice for £0.50 (what irony). Still not sure why, though, because now that I think of it, I was intending to see the film again. (now that I think again, it also has Jeremy Irons in it. Damn. ) Still, that was an interesting example of a purely impulsive purchase on part of the customer, and of an exercise in emotional manipulation on my part. I put on my cheeky hat and chatted up a young man passing by. After a brief exchange concerning the weather, I bribed him a McVitie's chocolate digestive biscuit. After that he was ready for anything, but I had already changed into my Scrooge hat and was more than content to let him off with all jeremyironeses and venetian merchants, after I had got my fifty pence.

I received another, more direct proposition from an aging Irishman who said I should accompany him to Dublin. He bought something minute for ten pence and stayed on for a chat for far longer than needed. While I laughed and tried to explain to some impatient customers how much my coca-cola glasses cost, he elaborated on his plan. He was going to Ireland in September and would stay for three months, and I was very welcome and there was nothing I should be afraid of. The rugby pitch in-house harassment officer was not in, so I couldn't report the overly zealous Mr Patrick, and I had to deal with the matter myself. I said he was very kind but I didn't think I could do that. To my surprise, that was enough to make him bid a very polite farewell and clear off. This incident convinced me that I would never venture to the equivalent to an English CBS in a less civilised country where a brusque 'thank you' would not be so easily recognised as an outright refusal.

A few quiet minutes, and the juggernaut of profit took me up again. A well-dressed lady took my wacky red hat for £0.50. I had fallen in love with the hat and rescued it from the Cat Protection charity shop in Kenilworth once,
but the hat WHISPERED when worn, and I didn’t want to go mad. Now this lovely lady with a penchant for bright hats will have go mad instead.

Then my big moment came in the face of a lady wearing a traditional blue dress and blue head-ribbon. She bought various stuff for £5. I was chuffed to get rid of the junk and even get £5 for it – while she was pleased with an amazing bargain. She also asked whether I spoke French. I didn’t wish to subject her to my French for fear that she would return the stuff and run away, but it turned out that she came from France and just thought I was French. So much for my typical Slavic accent. By the way, in the course of the day, at least ten people asked me where I was from, so I also managed to make some geopolitical progress on behalf of my country. I told them and showed them photos of green mountains and monasteries printed on a set of Bulgarian coasters which no one had bought. (I also had to say one too many times that yes, UK is nice, but yes, of course I miss my home-country - which, to be quite honest, I don’t, but there was no use trying to convince anybody of this, especially when you want them to buy your stuff). Perhaps now a few more people in the world know where Bulgaria is. This might help them feel better the next time the country crops up on 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire'.

By 11.30, everyone seemed to have started packing their unsold goodies in the boots of cars. The previously buzzing rugby pitch was looking rather dead. I said goodbye to the book-loving family on the neighbouring pitch, bought a book about samurais from them (goodbye, two hard-earnt quid!) gave their kids a box of crayons, and drove off. I tried to give it another shot, so I stopped next to the gates and managed to sell 'What women want' to an aged Irish couple. They are guaranteed a good laugh and some embarrassment with their favourite Mr Gibson.

So, what is today’s balance?

All in all, I made £19.15; subtracting £7 paid for the sales pitch makes 12.15; minus another £2 for a book I bought from my neighbours (naughty me!). So, not counting petrol, I made a mere £10.15 in one whole morning (not counting the hours spent slowly amassing the stuff for sale, and any loss made by not selling the stuff for more money on e-bay). The meagre pecuniary gain is offset by a most peculiar finding: a simple lunch never tasted as good, as it did that day, after wasting away a whole morning just sitting in the sun... It also felt good to pay for my milk and cherry scones with a handful of coins.

Perhaps I shall see you on your local rugby pitch one Sunday (but I am most definitely not going to Ireland to hang out with elderly philanderers).


The SI Top 10 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-20 09:08:48)
[... Car Boot Sale [...]

Our 10 most popular posts in November | The Sociological Imagination (2011-12-14 08:05:08)
[... Car Boot Sale [...]

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Continuous Partial Attention (2010-08-17 21:56)


"In the case of continuous partial attention, we're motivated by a desire not to miss anything. We're engaged in two activities that both demand cognition. We're talking on the phone and driving. We're writing an email and participating in a conference call. We're carrying on a conversation at dinner and texting under the table on the Blackberry or iPhone.

Continuous partial attention also describes a state in which attention is on a priority or primary task, while, at the same time, scanning for other people, activities, or opportunities, and replacing the primary task with something that seems, in this next moment, more important. When we do this, we may have the feeling that our brains process multiple activities in parallel. Researchers say that while we can rapidly shift between activities, our brains process serially [...]

Over the last twenty years, we have become expert at continuous partial attention and we have pushed ourselves to an extreme that I call, continuous continuous partial attention. There are times when cpa is the best attention strategy for what we're doing; and, in small doses, continuous partial attention serves us well. There are times when cpa and ccpa compromises us.

The "shadow side" of cpa is over-stimulation and lack of fulfillment. The latest, greatest powerful technologies are now contributing to our feeling increasingly powerless. Researchers are beginning to tell us that we may actually be doing tasks more slowly and poorly.

And that's not all. We have more attention-related and stress-related diseases than ever before. Continuous continuous partial attention and the fight or flight response associated with it, can set off a cascade of stress hormones, starting with norepinephrin and its companion, cortisol. As a hormone, cortisol is a universal donor. It can attach to any receptor site. As a result, dopamine and seratonin –the hormones that help us feel calm and happy – have nowhere to go because cortisol has taken up the available spaces. The abundance of cortisol in our systems has contributed to our turning to pharmaceuticals to calm us down and help us sleep. Read about email apnea to understand how our relationship with screen-based activities plays a role in this fight or flight response."


Steven Slater and Late Capitalism (2010-08-18 08:00)

For those of us who first became interested in politics during the era of the internet and twenty-four news, it can feel a bit weird being out of the loop. That's why on my recent holiday, deprived of the guardian website and BBC news, I found myself watching a embarrassing amount of CNN. In between the constant self-promotional adverts and strikingly poor analysis, one story stood out above all others: for the seriousness with which it was dissected and discussed, as well as its sheer repetition over the course of the week. Depressingly it wasn't the flooding in Pakistan but rather the antics of rogue flight attendant [1]Steven Slater who, faced with an abusive customer, quit on the spot
and exited the plane via the emergency evacuation chute, purloined beer in hand.

[EMBED] Slater now how has 200,000+ friends on facebook. His act has spawned close to a hundred groups and pages on facebook, as well as countless web memes. Why has his action resonated so widely? The obvious answer, as countless pundits have earnestly suggested, is that his actions have inspired people "overstressed and overworked" across the western world. In the rather hyperbolic words of a business psychologist interviewed in the above video, "this was a statement of freedom. A statement of liberation". What’s interesting is the extent to which even the silliest coverage of Slater’s act has dealt in a familiar concern of the organized left: poor working conditions and [2]emotional labour. As Colin Horgan has recently [3]argued on the Guardian website, Slater is a "rebel in a dehumanising society". There’s clearly a literal truth in this claim. However this poses the question: what does it say about our society that this is a form of rebellion which has attracted so much praise? Regardless of what you think of the messy intricacies of actually existing trade unionism, there’s a morally worthy core there: the idea of collective action, working together to improved shared conditions, striving for reciprocally improving welfare. Yet it often seems to be completely absent from our shared horizons. Trade unions get regarded with hostility, distrust or apathy while the actions of a flight attendant who swore at passengers, quit his job without any thought and now potentially faces several years in prison receive such widespread praise.


Media, Intellectuals and Masses (2010-08-19 08:00)

Nothing is more dangerously addictive than the media which like the pool of Narcissus can absorb you body and soul. You fall in love with the face that is your face. You are obsessed with the voice that is your own voice. You believe in your own reality. Everything else is secondary to this one and only reality that is yourself. In Sylvia Plath’s poem "Mirror" the persona says:

"I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions. Whatever I see I swallow immediately Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike. I am not cruel, only truthful -"

The media is not a mirror because it has "preconceptions" about its own ability to make or break reality through the power to affect imagination. Like the world of objects in Plato it is twice removed from reality and yet it assumes that no reality is possible without the image that is contrived. What George Seldes says about the press applies to the media as a whole: "The most sacred cow of the “media” is the media itself."

Dr. Johnson couldn’t have put it better when he said: “Every man is prompted by the love of himself to imagine that he possesses some qualities, superior, either in kind or degree, to those which he sees allotted to the rest of
the world;" The media plays on our vanity, our need to be seen, to be watched, admired and envied. But, at the end of the day we know who or what we really are.

Since reality must be converted into a media byte we don’t know what is real and what is not. We don’t know how much of the feelings people display before a camera are real or just a performance meant to trigger anticipated reactions. Motives are impossible to judge given the fact that images are carefully chosen, information that comes as news cunningly doctored, and what happens behind the surface is far more complex than what appears with deceptive simplicity before our eyes.

Media has to be used strategically by all intellectuals who mean to subvert this existing order to make way for a more just one. Whether the image corresponds with the truth or not, truth will not stop being truth. Truth is on the side of those who suffer injustice and are determined to fight back. No amount of media lies can defeat the truth. If lies worked all the time the slaves in the Roman Empire would’ve been slaves for eternity. Ideology that comes with brainwash collapses before truth.

The criminalization of politics in India would not have been possible without the consent of intellectuals. Louis Althusser speaks of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) which means institutions or individuals that generate the language, logic or argument to justify a system of repression. Doctors and engineers top the list in the category of "intellectuals" who are happily indifferent to this system of repression because it does not affect them and in fact their secure lifestyles are possible because they submit to this order. Not any better are lawyers and the teachers in the universities. These are the more respectable version of Bollywood. Fundamentally not any different though. Bollywood is cheap, undisguised and blatant. These traitors have a look of respectability which makes them worse. They don’t want to give up the security of their positions by raising their voice against this order. Why should they? They’re getting paid for all the masturbation and lies.

The million dollar question is: how can we ever have a nation without radical change as the only possibility in view! To quote Walter Benjamin: “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this.” The real intellectuals who will explain and solve the current series of crises plaguing the third world will emerge from the rock bottom. We live in an “emergency situation,” which means a situation that makes it extremely difficult for common people to make both ends meet. It means survival is impossible for the poor and downtrodden without a fight.

The media gives a superficial gloss to the ideological apparatus that forms the basis of repression. I mean at the end of the day the media is a performance like in Genet’s play The Balcony where appearance is the only reality. It’s not about people or individuals. It’s about appearances multiplied by appearances. We need to come out of appearances. We need to come to terms with a face that is not an image. That’ll be the job of the real intellectual of the masses who will articulate the real needs of real people and not the imaginary ones of those who love and live for themselves.

ibrahim (2010-08-20 07:32:04)
Very beautifully written and provokingly analyzed easy-going critical text. The literature premises (such as Sylvia Plath and Jean Genet ) and ancient Greek myths to reach to a presumed conclusion makes Mr Kona’s ideas look even more pretty. It is also equally joyful to see philosophical element such as Plato in the media critique which is something media faculties generally poorly fails to take them into their particular contexts.
ibrahim (2010-08-20 07:40:54)
P.S: I just wondered how many media studies lecturer and studens heard and care about George Seldes.

Kelly Jo (2010-08-23 15:38:27)
"Not any better are lawyers and the teachers in the universities. These are the more respectable version of Bollywood. Fundamentally not any different though. Bollywood is cheap, undisguised and blatant. These traitors have a look of respectability which makes them worse. They don’t want to give up the security of their positions by raising their voice against this order. Why should they? They’re getting paid for all the masturbation and lies."

I have to say, it seems you’re being a bit hard on yourself without ever really confronting yourself. Do you consider yourself a traitor? Worse than a Bollywood producer? If so, I would have to disagree with you and remind you of Wittgenstein’s defense of language as use, which I take as pretty restorative of a sense of agency. Although I can’t speak to the role of Bollywood in reinscribing the present social order, I can say that you, as a university professor, made a profound impact on the life of my mind. So, even if you are paid for “lies and masturbation” I thank you. Honestly, I’ve been trying to rethink this whole perversity that’s been made out of the recurrent “mirror” image—as if humanity is total perversion. I reject that claim. Being here has reminded me of the year we knew each other in Cyprus. During my transition from NYC to Magosa, I was reading Winterson’s "Art and Lies," in which she claims, "There’s no such thing as autobiography. There’s only art and lies." When we write, we write ourselves—regardless of the pronouns we are taught to use to disguise it. In addition to your reference to "persona," another Bergman work comes to mind. His 1961 “Through a Glass Darkly," in which Karin tells her family and all her viewers that she must make a choice. She must choose between a reality in which God is either the "stone-faced" spider-like creature of her dark "psychosis", or find a place in another form of reality, ostensibly in the looking-glass described in the reference to Corinthians. We too must make this choice in our working lives, our intellectual and spiritual lives, and our daily lives. To end on a lighter note, I am reminded of Zizek’s ideas on the San Francisco celebration of National Masturbation Month in his first chapter of "Violence." "...the French philosopher Alain Badiou set out in a perspicuous way, today more than ever one should insist on a focus on love, not mere enjoyment: it is love, the encounter of the Two [sic], which ‘transubstantiates’ idiotic masturbatory enjoyment into an event proper." Ironically, the metaphor is apt here and now. As I sit here at my desk in Hyderabad, a New York transplant, and write to you while we are living in the same city again. Understandably, it can’t be helped to sometimes feel to only be touching oneself in this vast nerve center called the internet.

ibrahim (2010-08-26 13:15:26)
@ at Kelly Jo: your words seem to be a bit obscure. they are not concise to the heart of the problem. Can you please try to be incisive without being plain instead of subtle implications?

Kelly Jo (2010-09-19 22:28:23)
@ Ibrahim. I am not sure which "heart of the problem" you are referring to. If you would like to tell me what you think I should be talking about, I’d be happy to be more incisive, "without being plain” of course.

Niall Ferguson on the Ascent of Money (2010-08-20 08:00)

An interesting talk by arch-Conservative historian [1]Niall Ferguson on the history of finance. While Ferguson’s politics might not be to everybody’s tastes (witness his recent [2]interview in the New Statesman) he is an increasingly influential public intellectual with a genuine talent for popularizing academic history: his [3]Ascent of Money was popular as both documentary and best-selling book. He’s also found himself a surprising topic of [4]tabloid interest. Given his ongoing [5]links with the present Government it would be surely be a mistake to ignore the man.

[EMBED]

Panorama - the War Party (2010-08-21 09:00)

[EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED]

Promoting events or projects on the Sociological Imagination (2010-08-22 08:00)

If you have an event or project that you would like to promote via the Sociological Imagination then please don’t hesitate to get in contact by [1]e-mail or through [2]facebook. We’re happy to post up calls for papers, requests for participants and details of events for anything which relates to our [3]aims.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Interview with Alan Morrison (part 1) (2010-08-23 08:00)

Alan Morrison (b. 18 July 1974) is an English poet for whom poetry is about changing the world rather than describing it. In complex and radical ways though not without conflicts, Morrison brings together his life and art to argue for “every individual’s right to a home and to food in their belly.” His most recent book “Keir Hardie Street” is published by Smokestack press.
Prakash: In “Why I Write” George Orwell says: “And looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably where I lacked a political purpose that I wrote lifeless books and was betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally.” Do you think a statement like this somehow describes your work as a whole in the sense that your politics is intertwined with your poetry or does your poetry have an independent character outside the framework of politics?

Alan: I recognize that quote from Orwell, I think he was referring to Keep the Aspidistra Flying! which is a witty and sometimes pertinent novel, but arguably a bit repetitive at times. But he was being a bit hard on himself and on the book, since it does address incidentally unusually gritty themes such as Gordon Comstock’s scraping together his small change to see if he has enough to get him through one day taking his girlfriend out. So it is a social
novel still, and political, but more a black comedy. Firstly, my poetry does have an independent character outside
the framework of politics, and many of my poems in my previous two volumes have been a variety of subjects, tones
and styles, but why is it I often ask myself that I keep coming back to the same domestic social themes, of beggars
on the streets, of poverty – both of my upbringing and associated memories that have left an indelible mark on me
since, and that of others in society...?

I don't fully know, I just seem to instinctively itch to use my poetry for social and political subjects in the
main; I think poetry is, or at least should be, about society and people – politics – as much as ideas and feelings and
personal desires. It is an intrinsically political art-form, though over the past thirty odd years – not un-coincidentally
simultaneous with the deeply scarring and anti-artistic Thatcherite mentality in the UK – it has, like so many other
creative mediums, become ever more inward-looking, solipsistic and apolitical; establishmentarian in many respects.
This is all immensely depressing. But yes, my poetry does have I think an independent character apart from the
politics; there's an equally dominant emotionalism, a confessionalism I suppose (also a bit unfashionable these days),
especially related to my upbringing, my family, my own tempestuous mentality and troubled coming of age – but
then much of this inevitably seeps back into the politics again: the awakening of my socialist conscience through
first-hand experience of poverty in the very real going-to-bed-often-hungry sense, and in the trap my family were in
during the Thatcher period, when the successful went up and up and the unlucky were left to pretty much fend for
themselves apart from basic state support (even food hampers left for us sometimes by the local Parish: we'll be
returning to such alms of course in Cameron's new 'Big Society' of charity-run public services). Also, starting to write
poetry around the age of 16 or 17, while living in a run-down cottage placed contrastingly in a picturesque hamlet in
Cornwall with stunning countryside all around, there was, particularly in my earliest poetry, a very strong pastoral
aspect, and my earliest influence was John Keats, especially his Odes; William Blake and his more urban social songs;
and Shelley, particularly 'Mask of Anarchy'. I considered myself originally a neo-Romantic poet.

I'm a Romantic at heart, and would describe my politics as essentially Romantic or Christian Socialism (cue
William Morris, Keir Hardie, Nye Bevan). I've been guilty of indulging in verbalism in poetry many times, not so much
a love of as an obsession with words, their sounds and music and tangibility on the page; poetry for me is like painting
with words, layering the lines, employing as full and rich a diction as possible, a style I've recently coined 'impasto',
which adorns my latest work, Keir Hardie Street, most obviously; a certain Dylan Thomas Under Milk Wood influence,
but also the metaphorical social balladry of John Davidson (whose 'Thirty Bob a Week' has to be my favourite poem I
think); other influences being the lyrical and figurative combinations of Alun Lewis, Harold Monro, and the masterly
aphorismic work of Eliot. But in the case of Keir Hardie Street, my most verbally ambitious poem to date, part of its
purpose is to convey a verbal impression, as well as a meaning and narrative, through a baroque use of language, a
very musical, almost vaudeville verbalism, in keeping with its Edwardian London setting and themes. Other poems
have differed in success in the past in terms of whether the use of language in some way overrode the clarity of the
meaning, the substance. But it's something I guard against by making sure to infuse sufficient music, rhythm, tempo,
and most of all, emotional depth into a poem, whatever its approach in language is. Whether I succeed more than I
fail is up to the critics and readers to decide.

But for me, poetry is above all about the love of language, and too much work I read today in the contempo-
rary mainstream seems almost to demonstrate a contempt for language, or at best, an almost puritanical suspicion
of it (while ironically often dealing with deeply self-indulgent, quotidian and hedonistic subject matter). For me, a
prime example of this kind of navel-gazing writing is that of Hugo Williams, which makes his comment in coverage of
this year's Forward Prize, which he judged, all the more ironic: he bemoans that too many books are being published
in poetry at the moment, 147 entries for the Forward Best Collection, and he talks of many collections seeming to be
published 'just because they're there' – this shows a breathtaking lack of self-awareness since his latest volume has
been criticised by some for similar reasons, for seeming tokenistic, as if just churning out the same old stuff again,
even of being so self-referencing to his previous books, including an actual rewriting of one previous poem, that he
must be one of the few poets publishing today who can be accused of self-plagiarising. Not such a solecism if the
earlier poetry being re-hashed wasn't so pedestrian in the first place. But it seems a sign of our times in the UK that
hypocrisy reigns supreme, that it is almost trendy nowadays to openly accuse others of what one is guilty of oneself.

What's depressing however is that those such as Mr Williams just can’t see their own faults. His barbed snub of Derek Walcott – who was not shortlisted for the Forward, coincidentally with Ruth Padel as its Chair this year, who famously smeared the latter in the chase for the Oxford Poetry Professorship last year – was also very telling: he used the term ‘florid’ as a drub of Walcott’s far superior oeuvre, which to me smells of the old green-eyed monster. Between Walcott’s ‘floridness’ and Williams’ quotidian prose-poetry, I’d choose the former every time! What he calls ‘florid’ I would call ‘poetry’; what he calls ‘poetry’, I would call ‘prose’. And Padel’s brazen grand-standing in spite of her previous behaviour which would have irreparably damned practically any other poet who didn’t have her reputation and kudos (and dare I say ‘connections’), is symptomatic of the UK’s current top-down amorality where quite contrary to David Cameron’s ‘do the right thing’ mantra (whatever that means anyway), it’s very cool to cut corners; to cheat (unless one is on benefits of course, in which case, that’s an entirely different ball game, as you’re at the bottom of the heap). That’s capitalism.

Praksh: Thatcherite policies in the 1980s while they dismantled the welfare state also unleashed the forces of production that put Great Britain on the road to becoming a "globalized" developed nation which would not be possible with the good old welfare style of functioning with the state playing the role of a protector or caretaker of citizens. Do you think that such a concept of welfare state can be sustained given the rise in immigrant populations, radical changes in the areas of information and telecommunication technologies and the fact that globalization has perpetuated new forms of individualism to combat any possibility of a combined effort to challenge corporate power?

Alan: Thatcher didn’t actually dismantle the Welfare State, though she probably wanted to, and certainly started chipping away at it as much as she could. What she did dismantle was the British socialist tradition by leading a pogrom on the industrial Labour heartlands and imposing savage legislation to limit the powers of the Unions. Just as today the Con-Dem Government are using the excuse of the Government deficit to bring in a new age of selective austerity and savage cuts on the Welfare State and Public Sector, not to mention planning to privatise much of the NHS, Thatcher’s Government used the excuse of the Winter of Discontent of the late 70s, where debatably Unions were holding the Labour Government to ransom, as a justification for practically wiping all their powers away. Of course, the British rarely seem to remember the equally horrendous Winter of Discontent of the early 70s – which happened to be under a Tory Government. Memory can be very selective. What Thatcher did to this country was even worse than all the anti-socialist and anti-community practical measures she forced in: she practically killed the spirit of this country, and with it, the hitherto still vital and genuinely progressive post-War socialistic/communitarian consensus. I was born in 1974, but I can remember the late 70s still so vividly, and what I remember, in spite of the proverbial problems and upheavals of those days, was a completely different country, a far better and kinder country, than the one that has mutated since Thatcherism set into the nation’s consciousness and polluted it with all the worst and most philistine traits. I remember a softer country, a little like contemporary Sweden (which I visit quite regularly as my girlfriend is Swedish): a true society where class barriers are far less noticeable, where people respect one another, where there isn’t such a massive wealth divide, where there are proper public services and everyone is willing to contribute significantly more tax in order to fund them. No two tier half-privatised tabloid-brainwashed celebrity-obsessed junk culture as we have in the UK today.

When I was last in Sweden, I found myself feeling a disconcerting sense of nostalgia for England, of missing particularly its inimitable countryside and folkloric heritage, even its historical radicalisms – but on returning of course, I realised that country is more than just a flight away, it’s an age away, it’s in the past; but that past lives on in some of us. It’s an odd and deeply unsettling thing to feel like a foreigner in one’s own country, but I always have,
because my political convictions and cultural attitudes are more (Continental) European than English. The island mentality is a curse; it is narrow and quite suffocating; and the British Empire was after all the one on which the sun never sets, since we dismantled it ourselves – and its potent ghost still lingers on, which is a deeply isolating delusion, and one which our new Tory Government are already feeding with their ridiculously out-of-touch patriotism.

To return to Thatcher: ironically, while the monetarism of the 80s might have put the UK more on the global map, She (who must be obeyed) was simultaneously dismantling British industry and manufacturing – cue the Miner’s Strike – and so contributing in advance to the parlous situation we have today where we are an almost entirely unproductive country industrially speaking. This will now disenfranchise our country greatly in the economic global recession. So I would dispute that Thatcherism actually did this country any favours at all, even in the capitalistic sense. It, along with the betrayal and selling-out of New Labour and the Blair years, has ruined our country, body and soul. And to drive the final nail in we have a sham-Coalition, basically Tory administration, gleefully rubbing their hands as they can finally cauterise what’s left of our Welfare State, NHS and Public Sector and damn the consequences. It is also deeply ironic that just as Barack Obama is beginning to construct the USA’s first and belated attempt at a Welfare State and NHS equivalent, we British pioneers of universalism are now starting to dismantle our own.

Prakash: Can you speak about your e-anthology: EMERGENCY VERSE: Poetry in Defence of the Welfare State and in support of a Robin Hood Tax on the City.

Yes, this was something I had to do, and quickly, hence the title, which is also a titular response to the Government’s ‘Emergency Budget’: their plan to cut £11 Billion from our already vastly depleted Welfare State presents the most devastating threat this nation has ever faced, even beyond that of Thatcherism which of course started off this ruinous course along the path of Neo-Con-Liberalism. I predict escalating unemployment, homelessness, protests, riots, serious public discord and community chaos in the months and years ahead if such vicious legislation is not fought and opposed every inch of the way. At the moment, most people in this country seem to be drifting around in some sort of dream world swallowing all the deeply specious spin from the Con-Dems that everything is to do with the previous Government’s deficit, when the reality is the deficit itself is only the tip of the iceberg, and the real black whole has been caused by the crimes of the City and Banking Sector – who incidentally have got off scot free with a mere £2 Billion levy.

It’s staggering that only a year on from the G8 protests in London, the demonstrations in Threadneedle Street, the smashing of RBS windows, the utter disgust and hatred of the Bankers, and then the same scorn thrown at the expenses-cheating MPs, that only two months in to a cobbled-together and electorally illegitimate Con-Dem Coalition without a proper mandate, that many people are now being blindly acquiescent like zombies to the continual mantra of ‘deficit, deficit, deficit’ and ‘unavoidable cuts, unavoidable cuts’, that instead that radical rage of last summer has mutated into a Public Sector-trouncing, anti-benefit claimant attitude at large (cue our new DWP Minister scapegoating those whose ‘curtains are shut during the day’), which is deeply disturbing and utterly uncalled for. Many people have already forgotten the true culprits and benefit cheats of society: the MPs and the Bankers. It’s no surprise the Tories are seeking to Divide and Rule by pitting the Private Sector against the Public, the taxpayer against the benefit claimant (Incapacity Benefit is taxable but recipients don’t pay tax on it as it is below tax threshold - but they are still supposed to declare IB as taxable income to Inland Revenue!) – but what is a bit of a surprise is how swiftly and credulously the public fall for such low tactics (though of course our media Murdochracy plays a big part in that).

A Cabinet of multi-millionaires tell us all to tighten our belts saying ‘we’re all in it together’ – what they actually mean is, ‘they are all in together’ in subsidising the grand-scale theft of the Banking Sector by cutting our Welfare State and tipping thousands of Public Sector workers into unemployment, only to tell most of them thereafter to...
start volunteering in return for their benefits, or have those cut too. It’s beyond parody or satire this issue, it is quite simply the most outrageous offensive of any previous British Government against its own people, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable (certainly not those with the broadest shoulders), simply because they don’t have the guts to stand up to the City and Rupert Murdoch. They then have the temerity to cover all this behind the spin of ‘Big Society’, a new national community – yes, but of slaves! So *Emergency Verse* is genuinely an emergency campaign: the poets of this country need to get off their prize-hugging podiums for once and back onto their traditional soap boxes and use the power of their words to oppose the oncoming storm of cuts that will devastate this country for generations to come. We are on the brink of becoming not just a Class system but a Caste System.

It’s interesting to note too that, warts and all, during Callaghan’s government of the late 70s, just prior to Thatcher’s narrow 1979 election victory, the UK was the most socially equal country in Europe. Now, after Thatcherism, after New Labour, thirty odd years down the line, we are practically the most socially unequal society in Europe. That is the legacy of Thatcherism, privatization, globalization, deregulation; of free market capitalism (a misnomer anyway, since all markets lead to monopolies). So, I invoke Marx and Engels with the rallying cry *Poets of the Nation Unite!* And so far, 60 have, contributing some powerful and angry poems to what promises to be as much a petition of poems as poets, a campaign in raw verse, utterly against the Government Budget, against the Welfare State cuts, against privatization of the NHS, and in favour of a Robin Hood Tax on the City and the wealthiest in society. Through such a tax, we could rein in more than enough money to sort out the nation’s debt, without touching anything or anyone else. The Con-Dems are choosing ideologically to do ‘the wrong thing’ (Mr. Cameron), rob the people of the little they have, let the culprits get away with it and continue amassing their gratuitous wealth and continued bonuses, and then have the absolute cheek to say, ‘we’re all in it together’. Until I see David Cameron surrendering his salary and volunteering as Prime Minister while also redistributing some of his inherited wealth to the poorest, he and his cronies have no right whatsoever to say such things. It’s true British patch-over-the-problem hypocrisy of the worst kind.

*Emergency Verse* will be circulated electronically to all newspapers, journals and Government departments once it is completed, with a covering letter listing the contributors by way of official petition, an open declaration of literary opposition to this Government and its vicious policies, and the promise of further campaigns and public readings to follow. When one thinks of the sacrifices made by British poets during the World Wars, and, most ideologically, in those who volunteered to serve the Republican cause in Spain in the Thirties, who put their very lives where their mouths and words were, I think contributing poems to this campaign is the least the British poets of today can do. Beyond this e-anthology (which will be essentially an electronic book), I will continue to oppose and speak out against this Government through the outlet of *the Recusant*.

*To be continued on the Sociological Imagination tomorrow*

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*Interview with Alan Morrison (part 2) (2010-08-24 08:00)*

Prakash: The media has made it terribly unfashionable to use words like “socialist” or “communist” or “leftist.” In fact any seriously pro-poor position makes it difficult for writers and researchers to find a platform to their work. How do you describe yourself and what kind of a platform have you been able to create for yourself to talk about your work and find an audience for it?
The media is half the problem as in any capitalist society; most of our national newspapers are currently like a kind of Falangist phalanx – the worst are of course under Murdoch’s plutocracy, the nastiest being The Sun, News of the World and the deeply insidious Mail. The Telegraph is for the intelligent Tory (if that’s not a contradiction in terms), but still shamelessly right-wing, as is The Times, which is a truly arrogant and unpleasant paper. The Left only has The Morning Star, which I read. The Guardian has long degenerated into a trendified muesli-munching realpolitik for the chattering classes, more pink than red, lately yellow, but then back to pink after the Lib Dems betrayed the British electorate to the devastation of a Tory administration. Yes, you never hear the word ‘socialist’ anymore; now it’s euphemised as ‘progressive’ or ‘centre-left’ or ‘left-of-centre’ – anything to appease the middle-classes and erase images of Union banners and class struggle. A fellow left-wing friend of mine once coined it perfectly: he said being a socialist these days in the UK is like being a Jedi, a Ben Kenobi hiding out in a hermitic wilderness replete with figurative cowl. But the thing to remember about the Jedi is they all have lightsabers tucked away.

I’m a socialist; in that I believe in fundamental human equality, in every individual’s right to a home and to food in their belly; I believe in true equality of opportunity, in social meritocracy; I believe that it should be a fundamental right of all people to have homes, irrespective of whether they have employment or not – in this country it’s almost impossible to secure work if one is homeless anyway. The more I visit Sweden, the more backward, almost feudalistic I perceive the UK with its archaic class system, the farce of titles and honours, aristocracy and monarchy – one would think we’d never even had a Welfare State or NHS or one of Europe’s most constructively left-wing Governments between 1945 and 1951 under Clement Attlee. Thanks to Thatcherism, the path to greater social equality was abruptly truncated in the 80s and has never recovered since. New Labour shamefully continued the Thatcherite revolution and apart from one or two tokenistic left-of-centre pieces of legislation – like the minimum wage, which is still not a living wage – left this country with a still enormous wealth divide, and the worst mortality rates for the poor since the Thirties so I’ve read. By pursuing further privatisation initiatives in the Public Sector, they also cleared the way for the Tories to come in and finish the job off.

We had a brief window of hope after the election with the potential Rainbow Coalition of left-of-centre parties – including the SNP, Plaid Cymru and Green, Caroline Lucas of Brighton Pavilion being possibly the best and only truly socialist MP we now have – but seemingly a combination of lack of will on both Labour’s and Nick Clegg’s parts, in spite of Gordon Brown quite admirably stepping down as Prime Minister, has led to the most absurdly ill-matched Coalition in British political history: a Coalition of Opposites, since the Lib Dems were, at the time of the election, the most left-wing party left in Parliament – yet they joined with the most right-wing! It makes no sense, except to finally conclude with much regret and disappointment that the Lib Dems really are the unprincipled opportunists the two main parties always accused them of being. Shame on Nick Clegg – from loud-hailing electoral radical to Tory prop within a matter of weeks – and the rest of the Lib Dems for betraying this country to what is already proving to be the most out-of-touch and ruthless administration we’ve seen since Thatcher’s.

In terms of finding a platform for my political poetry, I never deluded myself that I would find one within the very insular and closed-ranked mainstream – not only because it is unfashionable to be too political in poetry today, as in anything, including politics! – but also because stylistically my poetry comes from a completely different tradition to that currently dominant in British poetry. Whereas most fashionable contemporary poetry seems to be descended from lines drawn from the Irish school of the 60s onwards, certain post-confessional American influences, English and Welsh parochialism of the likes of Norman Nicholson, R S Thomas, Betjeman and Larkin, and Georgianism, I trace my own stylistic links back through the political poetry of the Auden/Spender school, through Eliotian Modernism, the Anglo-Welsh ‘khaki poetry’ of Alun Lewis, Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg et al, the ‘shadow Georgians’ of the likes of Harold Monro and WH Davies, through to the Rhymers’ Club of John Davidson et al, Thomas Hardy, and back to the Romantics, then Blake of course, possibly as far as Milton and the political pamphleteers Gerrard Winstanley and John Lilburne. Some of my influences are Anglo-Scot – Davidson, Monro – and though I am third generation English, I count myself Anglo-Scot in terms of ancestry and bloodline, both my father’s
and mother’s sides of the family being Scottish about three generations back; Morrison is a clan name of course (I’m apparently entitled to wear the kilt), and my ancestors along that line were mostly probably Scottish crofters (the Morrisons were also ancient Bards to the MacLeod clan).

So mine is a kind of cross-over poetic heritage, it just so happens it’s not particularly fashionable at the current time but I suspect it may be again in the future. I believe poetry needs to tackle the Big themes – for a Big Society!? – such as society, politics, poverty, class struggle (because we are now blatantly engaged in a legislative Class War again in this country), mental illness, history, love, fate, death. Is it any wonder the general public have gone off poetry for so long now when the average poem in a national supplement is often some self-indulgent, quotidian meditation on the tedium of the literary middle-class lifestyle, replete very often with rather gauche sexual innuendo, fruit metaphors, dull and insipid navel-gazing that only the poets and their friends seem to like but not many other people. It’s so ironic since only a brief scan through the poetry being published by legion smaller presses in this country shows just how rich, diverse and relevant much contemporary poetry actually is, it’s just that it only seems to be the more diluted and non-committal prosaic and knowingly ironic writing on the whole that seems to be popular with the bigger imprints and media outlets. It’s deeply puzzling, although I think further into my own generation, things are starting to change a bit, poets are starting to question the establishment more. I set up the Recusant precisely to champion distinctive poetry and writing that stands out from and at a tilt to the madding crowd of the mainstream (the title basically means ‘to not conform to something one doesn’t like or agree with’, derived from the old term for secretly practising Catholics during early Protestantism).

I knew I was always going to be taking a difficult path with my own work, chiefly because I wasn’t prepared to water it down and compromise its purpose to fit with current fashions. Fortunately early on I became involved with a shadow poetry network which sought to promote and publish unconventional and distinctive writing, often with a left-wing undercurrent, and my earliest collections came out as limited edition pamphlets through Simon Jenner’s Waterloo and Barry Tebb’s radical Sixties Press. It was a slow process but worth it, since I feel by and large I’ve kept the integrity of my work against all the odds and against all the superficial temptations of conforming to secure quick recognition. For me, to write what one’s heart is not in is utterly pointless, better not be a poet at all. Too many poets today seem to unquestioningly subordinate their true voices to the whims of bigger publishers and prize panels, I suppose the proverbial Trojan Horse approach – but nine times out of ten, once the Horse gets through into the sunny uplands of literary celebrity, it has long since emptied and ends up ringing hollow.

I was lucky to get offered a full collection at 32, relatively young these days, especially for poets who don’t go through the smoother channels of UEA-style courses and the like. This was a chance small press newly emerging, Paula Brown Publishing (who sadly since went bankrupt), who were at that early stage of taking risks, and produced a very generously sized book for me, which was a tacit early Collected Poems really, since it included most of my entire oeuvre up to that date (1991-2006). Amazingly, The Mansion Gardens broke through some of the establishment barriers, garnering significant critical praise in journals, most notably from William Oxley in The London Magazine of Sebastian Barker. Almost simultaneously, through the years, my play for voices Picaresque had been performed and given significant notices. 2009 saw my second full collection published by Waterloo Press, which garnered even better reviews in the likes of Stride, Tears in the Fence, The Journal and other magazines and was shortlisted for Purple Patch Best Collection 2009.

Keir Hardie Street (officially published in March 2010), has also since received much critical praise; an original shorter draft of it appeared at the back of The Mansion Gardens, but Andy Croft of Smokestack Books offered to republish it in its new extended form alongside another reworked older published long poem, ‘Clocking-in for the Witching Hour’ (originally Sixties Press, 2004). Smokestack felt like the natural home for these, my two most political long poems to date: it is precisely presses such as Smokestack, which presents itself as a champion of radical British poetry, that helps poets such as myself find a platform in an otherwise very streamlined and media-packaged poetry scene.
I am now working on my next volume of smaller poems, again for Waterloo Press, which will come out early next year under the title *Blaze a Vanishing*. Beyond that, I anticipate more long poems, since it’s my favourite medium; I am currently working on one addressing the current ‘Big Society’, working title *Ripe*, an excerpt from which will be included in *Emergency Verse* – it will probably be seen in some ways as an echo – though entirely unconscious, since I’ve only just read it – of Michael Horovitz’s *A New Wasteland*, which is a masterly work, a veritable Bible of the Left, and which I will be excerpting too with the poet’s permission in *Emergency Verse*. I also have a series of poems written specifically around my time as Poet-in-Residence at Mill View Psychiatric Hospital, *Captive Dragons*, which will probably appear next year at some point in pamphlet form, though I don’t know with which imprint as yet. I am also planning on finishing a new play for voices, *The Heaven Thieves*, about an early 20th century social altruist who owns a charity which clothes and feeds the local poor but who can’t stand the sound of people eating, which I hope will prove to be a more Swiftian, satirical and philosophical dissection of the socialist mentality than anything I’ve written before. It is basically written as a blank verse-play in the template of Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party*. **Prakash: Would Alan Morrison be Alan Morrison without the poetry?** It’s almost impossible to answer this, since poetry, expressing myself through words and using words to orchestrate their own kind of music, feels like an inseparable part of my identity; poetry is my lifeblood, it’s what I go to sleep thinking about, what I wake up thinking about. It’s probably not healthy to be like that, but it seems I have no choice. It’s how I’ve been made and how the sum of my experiences in life so far seem to have shaped me. There’s never been any other choice for me but to doggedly pursue my poetry no matter what life throws at me. But I think there is another Alan Morrison hidden away deep inside me, the original article, ironically a natural clown, an amalgam of highly sensitive but tigerish energies (I call myself ‘the nervous tiger’), and though I say it myself (many others do too), a burdensomely large heart, too large to bear sometimes. Ever since I can remember I’ve found it very easy to love, to feel sorry for or pity others, which I suppose is where my heart-on-sleeve socialism spawns from; I’d say I’ve always been a little morbidly addicted to sadness, ever since I was a child. I think sometimes that small bewildered but irrepressibly expressive Alan tries to climb out from the rather more gloomy, serious-minded, angry ranter that’s clouded him since, who is prone to reclusion and obsessiveness (though the latter is a symptom of the obsessional neurosis I’ve suffered from since childhood, a less-exposed nuance of OCD, which is known as Pure-O; one of my earliest long poems, *Feed a Cold, Starve a Fever*, is all about my formative years and the development of this incapacitating egodystonic illness which has significantly affected my life). I would say though that the Alan Morrison I have become would not be the same one without the poetry; and without the poetry, I’m not sure Alan Morrison would be here today at all – it’s been my true lifeline. **Prakash: What are the things in your life that make you who you are?** Impossible to say without trying to be entirely self-objective, which is probably impossible. Being an obsessional and somewhat melodramatic thinker, I always say, unlike Alice, I try to think three possible things before breakfast. I suppose the poetry of course makes me the poet, though I feel it is up to others to use that term, not oneself, since it is a high title to claim for anyone; even if true poets actually self-anoint and don’t rely on panels to tell them they’re poets. I live entombed in books, which probably makes me quite bookish, though I don’t see myself that way. I’m as passionate about music – of many kinds – as I am about literature; I think most poets are frustrated song-writers – that is, until they discover the full musical power of words. But writing poetry is certainly its own kind of composition. Being the archetypal Cancerian, I am very shy, hyper-sensitive, and extremely homebirdish; I like to be among familiar things, I like peace and quiet, space to think and write. I am intrinsically monogamous, and naturally treat any relationship as if it is the original article, ironically a natural clown, an amalgam of highly sensitive but tigerish energies (I call myself ‘the nervous tiger’), and though I say it myself (many others do too), a burdensomely large heart, too large to bear sometimes. Ever since I can remember I’ve found it very easy to love, to feel sorry for or pity others, which I suppose is where my heart-on-sleeve socialism spawns from; I’d say I’ve always been a little morbidly addicted to sadness, ever since I was a child. 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I am intrinsically monogamous, and naturally treat any relationship as if it is the last (though have been proved wrong on two previous occasions). I am very private, quite sceptical of people, and, I hate to say, occasionally misanthropic (like most socialists at heart, since we not only want society to change, we want people to change too). But if ever anyone needs my help, no matter who it is, the door will be open to them; I would never turn anyone away who needed my help. I like to think it’s that old parable of the Good Samaritan which I’ve never been able to shake off from my school days when we were very much weaned on such things, having been to a Catholic primary school called English Martyrs in Worthing, my years at which left a lasting impression on my mind and my views on the world. I am a non-practising, lapsed Catholic; but I am a believer, at least in the survival of the human personality beyond the death of the body, but my Christian beliefs are more in line with Baptist ideas than any other denomination (particularly the belief in universal salvation of the likes of Pelagius – I cannot stand Calvinism or extreme evangelicalism, and see Capitalism very much as a material-based Calvinism. Max Weber’s *Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* being a key text in this, I have originally gone to University
in Reading to study Sociology, though I later switched to Ancient History, and found how little had changed). I’m certainly a dreamer, a Romantic in the idealistic sense, an egalitarian, a believer in true meritocracy of ability but emphatically not in any material sense – I believe in universal material equality; I’m distinctly un-materialistic, my only real possessions being books and music – but I do like comfortable surroundings and a bit of ornamental clutter too; by nature I’m quite conservative funnily enough, but socially and politically, quite the other thing altogether, and it was the direct experience of poverty that converted me to the light of socialism. I’m a nostalgist to my core: most of my tastes are historical, in literature, art, music, television, film, in pretty much anything. I think we have to delve deep into the past in order to trace the future. Mentally and ideologically, I’m a refugee of the Seventies really; I’ve always felt I was born either way after or way before my time, and could easily see myself at the turn of the 20th century as, well, basically, exactly the person I am today, except fitting in a little better. I’ve no interest in money, never have had, except as a means to secure more freedom and time for my writing pursuits – time is definitely the most precious commodity in life. Ultimately, I’m one of life’s volunteers, I need to be self-autonomous, I can’t be slotted into routines, I’m uninterested in material rewards, I simply need space and time and love in which to flourish and create. Rather a pity, therefore, that I live in such an oppositely motivated society. But in terms of what in my life makes me who I am, well, memories do really, memories of injustices, poverty, struggle, alienation, not fitting in, absences – I was often absent from school as a boy, partly due to my illness – and ‘shadows’ and ‘ghosts’ have always played a part in my consciousness as sort of self-motifs; I seek to make a mark through the shadow of my words if you like, impressed myself through my writing, the anonymity of being a writer has always appealed to me, the ability to engage publicly through publishing without having to prostitute one’s own personality. I like to keep myself as private as possible. There’s always been a tension here of course: wanting to both be in the shade and out in the sun at the same time. Like another Cancerian, George Bernard Shaw, life for me is indeed a matter of ‘so little time, so much to do’. And there really is so much to do.

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**First as tragedy, then as farce** *(2010-08-25 08:00)*

An [1]RSA animate video presenting a recent lecture by iconclastic Slovenian philosopher [2]Slavoj Žižek. It’s an accessible introduction to the area he’s worked in recently (particularly in [3]first as tragedy, then as farce) for those unfamiliar with Žižek and an entertaining distillation for those who know his writings well. The only downside to the animated video is the lack of Žižek’s customary and utterly hypnotic hand gestures.

[EMBED]

1. [http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/](http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/)
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_%C5%BDi%C5%BEek)

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**There is no alternative?** *(2010-08-26 08:00)*

If the new government is to be believed, we stand on the verge of unparalleled fiscal catastrophe. We suffer from an unprecedented ‘debt crisis’ of a scale more egregious than the government knew and with consequences more severe than it could have feared. It demands bold action and tough choices which will effect “our whole way of life”.

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Therefore they intend to carry out the necessary actions in “a way that strengthens and unites the country” because “we are all in this together”.

In spite of the quasi-Churchillian rhetoric in which this plea for unity is couched, it’s not exactly appealing stuff. However our new Prime Minister recently offered an intellectual case for austerity presented with a degree of clarity which was heretofore lacking. In short there are three reasons why our new political elite feel compelled to nobly and reluctantly take a scythe to our allegedly out of control public sector:

Firstly David Cameron claims that in and of itself increases in public sector borrowing are bad. As he puts it "the more it has to repay, the more lenders worry about getting their money back; the more lenders start to worry, the less confidence there is in our economy."

Secondly, investors will withdraw their money from Britain unless "they're confident the economy is being run properly" and the economy will suffer as a result. Thirdly, any higher interest rates that will result from failure to action will hurt “every family and business in the land” through the higher mortgages and lower employment they entail.

In essence these justification can be boiled down to two core claims: unless the deficit is dramatically cut the markets will punish the British economy (perhaps losing our AAA credit rating in the process) and the brunt of this impact will borne by ordinary people across the country. As an apparent retort to those who might blame this apparently dire situation on the bank bailouts, Cameron argues that this crisis predates the current recession and casts a long shadow over Labour’s entire time in office. Could there be a more damning indictment of the past government and a more pressing case for urgent action? If we accept the claims made by the government then their case does indeed look insurmountable. There’s just a little problem: most of them aren’t true.

Underlying these arguments is an assumption about market rationality. It is assumed that unless governments demonstrate a willingness to engage in ‘fiscal reform’ then markets will foresee a never ending era of profligate spending and, as Cameron argues, lose confidence in the economy and cease lending. Yet Spain recently implemented drastic austerity measures with cuts of €15bn and a government pledge to bring the Spanish deficit down 11.2 % of GDP to 3 % of GDP by 2013. This involved freezing pensions and significant cuts to public sector wages. However as the prospect of a general strike looms, the country’s debt has been downgraded by rating agencies concerned that the these cuts "will materially reduce the rate of growth of the Spanish economy over the medium term". Perhaps this suggests that the markets have more sense than politicians are ascribing to them?

The economist Paul Krugman argues that "slashing spending while the economy is still deeply depressed" will be costly because it will depress the economy further and ineffective because this will in turn depress income through taxation. In practice advocates of austerity are arguing that countries must cut “not because the markets are currently demanding it, not because it will make any noticeable difference to their long-run fiscal prospects, but because we think that the markets might demand it (even though they shouldn’t) sometime in the future.”

The suffering that austerity brings will worsen our fiscal position rather than strengthen it and yet it is claimed that unless we embrace austerity the markets will punish us for our fiscal irresponsibility. At least in part this may be explained by an irrational veneration of markets as angry gods to be appeased (rather an as aggregates of financial actors). Likewise it can in part be explained by what the economist Joseph Stiglitz has labelled ‘deficit fetishism’: the tendency to focus on one side of the balance sheet without looking at the economic impact of deficit spending. It
may be logical for individuals to pay off debts as soon as possible but these

In spite of their deliberate obscurity the government’s plans for austerity are beginning to take shape. All 2.5 million claimants of incapacity benefit will have their work capability reassessed. Penalties for benefit claimants who don’t accept jobs will be more stringently enforced while schemes such as the Future Jobs Fund are likely to be scrapped.

The business secretary Vince Cable has revived plans to privatize the Royal Mail. The new government are pressing ahead with plans to privatize the Channel Tunnel rail link. The bank involved in many of the key privatizations of the 1980s and with close links to the conservative party (NM Rothschild) has pitched for a privatization of the road network which would raise £100 billion. This furthers the impression which emerged last year that behind the scenes the conservatives were preparing for a large scale program of privatization. Similarly outsourcing companies are preparing for a unprecedented boom in their business as the new government is expected to dramatically extend the role of private companies in backend public sector services while education reforms amount to the coming privatization of state education.

What’s going unremarked upon is the scope of the radical right-wing agenda the government intends to push through with the Liberal Democrats an eager party to this spirited attack upon the public sector. This should be no surprise given the ascendancy within the party of the Orange Book liberals (Clegg, Cable and Laws) who enthusiastically embrace the dogma of the free-market. Far from the financial crisis heralding the death of neo-liberalism it actually seems to have led to its end game: one last attempt to ‘roll back the state’ and institute the mythical free-market.

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homecoming dresses (2019-09-25 15:36:47)
Cheap Prom Dresses, Prom Dresses under $200 -Cheap semi-formal dresses, inexpensive designer party dresses, and discount prom dresses.The Best Places To Get Cheap Prom Dresses Online -Vdressy.com.We carry the latest trends in Prom Dresses to show off that fun and flirty style of yours. [1]homecoming dresses

1. https://blackmermaidweddingdresses.tumblr.com/

University of Warwick CSWG Call for papers (2010-08-27 08:00)

The Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of Warwick would like to invite postgraduate students from any institution working in the field to present at the Graduate Student Seminar Series for the coming academic year 2010/2011. We welcome submissions from a number of disciplines on any gender related topic. This year, as well as welcoming conventional papers, we also encourage innovative and creative methods of presentation (such as the use of visual or more interactive materials, for example).

The annual Graduate Seminar Series provides a friendly, informal setting for graduate students to give presentations and exchange ideas relating to women and gender studies. Seminars aim to be interactive, and at each meeting students present for twenty minutes each on a topic of their choice, followed by a question-answer session and general discussion. Attendance is open to everyone, both faculty members and students, within and outside the university. Seminars will take place on two or three Wednesdays per term at 5pm (dates TBC).
The goals of the seminar series:

- To provide a safe and comfortable venue for students to present their research, to fine-tune conference presentations/possible publications or to simply get used to the idea of speaking in front of a group.

- To encourage everyone to get together informally to learn about what the student community in the UK are working on in relation to gender/feminist studies.

This centre is interdisciplinary and draws its membership from across the university. It aims to provide a focus for research and teaching on women and gender in the university and to facilitate the development of interdisciplinary research in the area of women's and gender studies. Women's and gender studies has been established for around twenty years at Warwick; the Centre itself was established in 1993 and in the summer of 2002 it became a research centre based in the [1]Department of Sociology. For more information about the Centre please visit: [2]http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/gender/

Abstracts should be:

- Maximum 200 words

- Submitted along with a brief biography of the author; including their institution and department, and research interests.

- Submitted by September 3rd 2010

- Email abstracts to Katy Pilcher: [3]K.E.M.Pilcher@warwick.ac.uk

Roger Scrutton on the Uses of Pessimism (2010-08-28 10:00)

[EMBED]
Support an Interesting Study (2010-08-29 08:00)

Dear Colleagues,

My name is Minu Mathews and I am a postgraduate researcher at the Institute of Psychological Sciences at the University of Leeds.

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in taking part in a new and exciting cross-cultural study that looks into the effect of work on employee well-being and health behaviour. Specifically, the study explores the demands you experience in your everyday work-life and the resources you adopt when coping with them. If you are interested in taking part and you are currently working in the UK, please contact the address below for more information.

The initial questionnaire takes 20 minutes to complete and the second phase of the study (which is optional, but I hope you will enrol in) involves the completion of brief daily diaries.

The only criterion to take part in this study is that you have to be working in the UK. If you know of anyone else who might be interested, please do pass this on to them.

Do not hesitate to contact me at M.S.Mathews08@leeds.ac.uk if you have any questions at all.

Kind regards,

Minu

This study has obtained ethical approval from the Institute of Psychological Sciences, University of Leeds (10007-11).

Minu Susan Mathews
Postgraduate Research Student
Health and Social Psychology Group
Institute of Psychological Sciences
(Clothworkers Central Building, Room 1.69)
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
Email: M.S.Mathews08@leeds.ac.uk
Phone: 0113 3439191

Dr. Richard Moreno (2010-09-02 03:21:04)
Hello you all, I learned about you guys from Mr. David Barsomeon here in Denver, Colorado. I majored sociology undergraduate experience. I really like the science of sociology. It’s not perfect, but better than most other social sciences. I am retired and 100 % disabled veteran. I’d sure like to know more about your soc. group you are forming up. Please send me info the group: Dr. Richard Moreno, 1534 So. Cape St. Lakewood, CO. 80232. I’ll send you resume and maybe I could fit in some place the
Reflections on a year spent studying asexuality (2010-08-30 08:00)

I was a little confused when I first encountered the term asexual. The person who used the term defined as asexual and yet, living with him at the time, I knew he had sex. Or at the very least that he sometimes brought people home who then spent the night. In common with most people, my initial sense of the term was some half-remembered throwback from secondary school Biology. So it was a little confusing to me that he apparently slept with people. It was the questions raised by this situation that fostered my initial interest in asexuality and, as I got answers, I found myself confronted by more questions which only amplified my newfound curiosity about the subject. By the start of 2009 I had resolved to satisfy my curiosity (in the process putting some of my training in social research to good use) and in the somewhat ephemeral space of time precariously lodged between my personal life and my PhD, I began a research project exploring asexuality and what it meant to asexual individuals.

As well as the asexual individuals I already knew, I found participants through the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN) and the Asexuality Live Journal. The front page of the AVEN website defines an asexual as ‘someone who does not experience sexual attraction’ and due to the popularity of the site this definition has been highly influential. However as I soon found out, it was not exhaustive. Behind this ‘umbrella term’ lay a wide variety of people who related in a whole host of different ways to sex and romance. Some asexuals are indifferent to sex and, in the context of a relationship, are happy to have it because they know it’s important to their partners. Others find the prospect abhorrent and are utterly averse to the prospect of sex (although I heard many sad tales of people subjecting themselves to an experience they hated because at that point they didn’t feel it was ok to say they didn’t want to). Some asexuals are ardent romantics and want nothing more than to find someone special to share their life with. Others prefer to find companionship through friends and family, with no interest in finding a partner. What unites them is a common experience of feeling alienated from a society which,
particularly for young people, places a great burden on sexual experience as a sign of self exploration and growing up. For a lot of asexuals this left them feeling "broken" (this was a common phrase used) and abnormal. At least it did until they discovered the asexuality community and for the first time began to feel that their orientation was ok.

Overall the research has been an enormously positive experience for me, at least apart from my partner's initial fears that the whole thing was a convoluted preliminary to coming out as asexual myself (apparently this used to happen with some frequency in the early days of modern sexuality studies). The idea that romantic attraction and sexual attraction are distinct (though for many people related) things has clarified a lot in my personal life. It's also helped me understand the confusing encounters which too often plagued my adolescence. I'm much more comfortable with the fact that sex is something which only really makes sense for me within the context of a committed relationship (whereas I'd previously felt shy at expressing this thought around some of my more libertine friends). I've also been left with the strong conviction that the recognition of asexuality is not just important for asexuals but for everyone else as well.

For instance consider the impact that the struggle for gay rights has had on society and culture more widely. At its worst the increased awareness and visibility has produced phenomena such as the mock-lesbian Nuts-style porn shoots and the meterosexual cliché. At best though it has worked to make the world a safer and more humane place in which to live: more tolerant of sexual diversity, more aware of sexual choice and more open to sexual difference.

So why did the fight for gay liberation have this impact? At least in part it was down to the ideas which it established in the popular consciousness. For instance it wasn't until people started calling themselves homosexual that it made sense for other people to call themselves heterosexual. Up until that point, it had simply been taken for granted and, as such, escaped scrutiny either by individuals or by society more widely. As adjectives both homosexual and heterosexual were coined in 1892, in an English translation of work by the early sexologist Krafft-Ebing. However, as a noun heterosexual didn't enter common usage until the 1960s.

Similarly I think that a wider recognition of asexuality would inevitably give rise to a much deeper understanding of what it is to be sexual. Despite the pervasiveness with which the importance of sex is affirmed within our culture, we're often profoundly inarticulate about the role that sex plays in our lives and why it is important to us. At least in terms of the younger generation, we're far more likely to discuss sex (good sex, bad sex, weird sex) then we are the place we presume it ought to occupy in our lives. We're so prone to seeing sexuality as a marker of personal fulfilment that we rarely stop and ask ourselves where we, as individuals, stand in relation to it and what importance it genuinely holds in our lives. Crucially some of us don't feel particularly free to say that, while we may want sex, it holds no great importance in our lives (at least not relative to other things like friends, romance and love).

Nowadays most people know someone from the LGBT community and, in many cases, this acquaintance forces them (at least fleetingly) to think about their own sexuality and what it means to them. What would happen if most people knew someone from the asexual community? I think, or at least hope, it would lead the rest of us to think more deeply about sex and in the process clarify where it stands for us in relation to romance and love. In short it would help us all to be a bit clearer about what matters to us and why. Perhaps then we'd all see that there's more to life than sex and, more to the point, we'd be a lot clearer about what that 'more' is.

Originally posted on [4]The Most Cake

2. [http://www.asexuality.org/home/](http://www.asexuality.org/home/)
4. [http://themostcake.co.uk/love-life/there%E2%80%99s-more-to-life-than-sex/](http://themostcake.co.uk/love-life/there%E2%80%99s-more-to-life-than-sex/)
Differentiating top grades at A-level (2010-08-31 11:00)

Latest [1]figures show that as large as one in five A-levels taken by pupils at private schools achieved the top A* grade, compared with the national average of one in 10. This year’s shortage of university places together with the contrasting figures between A-level results between private and state schools have heightened the concern that most privileged pupils will continue to dominate university entry.

In differentiating between top grade achieving pupils, some universities (Cambridge, Imperial, UCL and Warwick) – have adopted the A* as part of their offers this year. Whereas a number of schools have introduced the new Cambridge Pre-U qualifications, which were either taken alone, or alongside A-levels.

Michael Gove, education secretary, plans a major shakeup of A-levels and has indicated scrapping AS-levels and introducing more exams at the end of A-level courses to "revive the art of deep thought".


1.4 September

Interview with David Barsamian (2010-09-01 08:00)

David Barsamian is an American radio broadcaster, writer and director of Alternative Radio, a weekly political program broadcast on 125 radio stations in a variety of countries. He has written widely on American foreign policy,
corporate control, the media and propaganda.

Mark: Almost two years after a once in a lifetime financial crisis, finance capital seems more powerful than ever, as governments across Europe impose draconian cuts under the guise of austerity and fiscal responsibility. Why has the left been unable to articulate and fight for an alternative at a time of widespread discontent?

The question assumes that there is an organized and substantial Left. I find that problematic. The Right on the other hand controls state power and its representatives craft legislation to serve the needs of its corporate sponsors. The Right is also heavily funded by foundations. The discontent is largely unfocused although generally directed toward the banks and ruling elites. As unions have been greatly weakened, most dramatically in the United States, organized resistance, in the form of strikes, boycotts, workplace occupations, is episodic and is not sustained. The financial crisis has been used by corporations to make further cuts in jobs and reduce benefits. Workers live with the fear of unemployment. There is full scale class war going on to roll back many social gains particularly in Europe. The protests in Greece seem to have subsided. As the crisis continues there is always the possibility that workers will rise up. At the moment such revolts are sporadic.

Mark: How has American foreign policy changed under Obama’s Whitehouse? In spite of the assumed promise of a radical break with the Bush administration it seems, at least on the surface, as if many of the changes have been matter of diplomatic tactics rather than strategic aims.

Hardly at all. It is simply old wine in new bottles. At home Obama is a devout capitalist. Abroad he is a dedicated imperialist and believes the U.S. must "lead" the world. Obama said, "Now make no mistake, the nation will maintain our military dominance. We will have the strongest armed forces in the history of the world." Recall he presented himself as the peace candidate during his presidential campaign. He presides over a massive military budget and an empire of bases straddling the globe. He has expanded the war in Afghanistan, kept troops in Iraq, bombs Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, and refuses to bring to justice Americans who are guilty of war crimes. In West Asia, it is more of the same. He continues to give Israel a blank check for its colonial policies while providing a full check to that country in the billions of dollars. He gives Israel diplomatic cover in the UN and other international fora. He props up feudal regimes and monarchies such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. And he threatens Iran with "all options are on the table." The major change from Bush has been one of rhetoric and style. Otherwise it is business as usual..

Mark: How much influence does the media hold over contemporary politics? How should we go about trying to resist this influence? Could you say a little about the initiatives you are involved with towards this end? I'm thinking of things like Alternative Radio and Z Mag.

I began Alternative Radio (www.alternativeradio.org) in 1986 because I was fed up with corporate media. I think it is important to go beyond a critique to offer positive solutions. This is important not just politically but also
for psychological reasons. Simply complaining gets old and boring very fast. The media landscape is rapidly changing and progressives must position themselves to take advantage. Digital editing has made the production of films and radio documentaries much easier. Influence is difficult to measure. Lack of historical knowledge and political illiteracy in the U.S. is very high. It's our job to change that and provide alternatives.

Mark: Many readers of the website will be familiar with your interviews with Noam Chomsky. What has it been like working with him? Are we likely to see less public intellectuals of Chomsky's calibre emerging from universities in the future?

Chomsky is a rare figure. Working with him has been a joy and education. He practices the solidarity he preaches. He's exceptionally witty too. I don't think universities have or should have any special monopoly over public intellectuals. They can come from other parts of society.

Mark: A lot of the readers of the website are PhD students and early career researchers. How can this next generation of academics best aid ongoing social and political struggles?

Education and agitation. Find kindred spirits. Be humble. And always keep your sense of humor.

The knock-on effect of an over-subscribed Higher Education system (2010-09-02 08:00)

The record demand for university places in 2010 has had an immense impact not just on Higher Education, but also Further Education, with some A-level students opting to go back to college to take further FE courses (as discussed in this [1]article). This prospect in itself has a knock-on effect on recent school leavers (GCSE) who now go head-to-head for college places with their A-level counterparts.

Another knock-on effect has seen newer universities (for example, Greenwich, UEL etc) attract a different kind of student. In the past, these universities would typically attract students from surrounding areas, mature students or those with lower A-level grades. 2010 has seen a marked shift where students are clamouring for university places at universities they might not initially have thought of attending.

In the article [2]Feeling the Squeeze, Greenwich university’s head of admissions, Bev Woodhams, acknowledges the reality of the changing student profile at the university, "things are bound to look different this year. It’s a smaller pond, with more fish".

Only time will tell what the impact of the 2010 race for university places will have on the overall landscape of education as a whole.

A 'dead cert' for a career in politics (2010-09-03 08:00)

It appears that if you want a career in politics, a 'sure-fire' way to achieve this is to study Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at the University of Oxford, as documented in this [1]article.

In fact six members of the current cabinet, including the prime minister, foreign secretary and chief secretary to the treasury, are Oxford PPE graduates. Across the major party lines, Oxford PPE is the course of choice. In the House of Commons there are believed to be as many as 35 Oxford PPE-ists, compared with 20 Old Etonians.

Unsurprisingly, many Oxbridge graduates occupy a dominant place in the nation's elite circle, enjoying a lucrative and deterministic path.

Nonetheless, not all PPE graduates are happy with their subject choice, The Observer's Nick Cohen, an Oxford PPE graduate, says he now regrets switching to this "silly degree" from history while an undergraduate:

"It's a degree for generalists, and British society has always loved generalists," he says. "But I think we'd certainly benefit from more scientists and engineers at the top.

"It's far easier to condemn Eton or the failure of the comprehensive system. But I went to Oxford, Christopher Hitchens went to Oxford, Ian Hislop went to Oxford - who are the people who are going to eviscerate the phenomenon?"


Call for Polemics (2010-09-04 08:00)

Academic publishing can often be a frustratingly slow affair - particularly for those attempting to engage with a social world which seems to change at an ever increasing rate. Therefore we are looking for contributions of polemics: shorter and sociologically informed commentaries upon current events addressed to the middle ground between journalistic political commentary and academic papers. Contributions should be submitted [1]here.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Follow the Sociological Imagination on Twitter (2010-09-05 08:00)

Follow the magazine on Twitter [1]here. There will be tweeted updates every time a new article goes online. Or alternatively press the button below which will always be on display at the bottom of the right hand side menu bar.

1. https://twitter.com/soc_imagination/

The Illusions of Democracy in a Third World Country (2010-09-06 08:00)

In a democracy you only have to remove the fig-leaf called the “vote” and you see the naked interests of power shamelessly parading before your eyes. It is this fig-leaf of democracy that separates India from Pakistan. In Pakistan the thieves decide the government and in fact they are the government. In India we elect them. Oh, for fig leaves!

Democracy makes sense only when the poor, the deprived and the homeless have an opportunity to come out of their poverty, deprivation and homelessness. That’s not what democracy in India is all about. It’s about crushing individual aspirations, abandoning common people to criminally inclined employers who treat employees like their possessions, robbing the young of emotional joys through a vicious system of body control, living in a system that brings out the beast in a man – that turns men into cold-blooded rapists and murderers, destroying the villages in a way that leaves the peasant weak and helpless to encounter the onslaught of globalization, putting decent people in jails because they know how to protest and they do it, giving people on the streets no chance to defend themselves except through this expensive piece of fiction called the ‘vote’ – this does not constitute a ‘real’ democracy in any sense of the term.

The democracy that we have and celebrate through the ‘vote’ hardly changes the reality on the ground. The Congress led-UPA is a liberal fascist coalition of parties and the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who is the darling of corporate India will one day have a chapter in his autobiography titled, “How to pimp your country for peanuts.” With the way the UPA conducted itself on the nuclear deal I’m convinced that this government is a pawn of the World Bank and the IMF not to mention the government of the United States. I have no respect for Manmohan Singh either as a Prime Minister or as an individual and I’m certain that the so-called “Gandhi” family that abused the name of the Mahatma is responsible in a big way for India’s poverty and backwardness.

The Kerala-West Bengal brand of Marxism is a sheer mockery of Marx and socialism. In India Marx should be spelt as “marks” and not Marx because we understand money better than we understand a human being. Those who claim to espouse Marxism and those who have made it a full-time job to be opposed to it – both are hypocrites. The Left in India is an upper class and upper caste mafia that keeps trying to fit reality into theory in which they are
pretty good by the way. It should be the other way round in fact.

It is impossible to forget the role of the Indian media in this charade of a democracy. The news channels and newspapers are owned by rich and powerful people. No one expects the editors they choose to be George Orwells or Robert Fisks. Barring a few journalists with commitment to social and political change, the media is by and large the bastard child of corporate India.

Writing is an art form and a writer or a performer is a creative artist. How can you sell your soul to the devil and still be an artist! These are morally irreconcilable positions as far as I'm concerned. Yet we see the entire media reproducing untruths upon untruths. How can you lie so much and not be affected in your personal life! James Baldwin is right: “People pay for what they do, and still more for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply; by the lives they lead.” The life they lead is a punishment in itself.

I don't think those editors of newspapers and news channels that do everything possible to scuttle the voices of individuals and serve their corporate bosses can ever have a happy personal life. All the money and power in the world will not give a man either love or peace of mind. Fortunately they come from within because that is in the justice of nature and not of man. Like Shakespeare’s Macbeth the rich and their cronies have murdered sleep because their crimes will not let them rest for a single moment. They’re condemned to live lonely and loveless lives. With the spirit destroyed by the cancer of power how can the body be alive!

Stating an alternative is as important as stating the problem. Some form of communism is essential to this nation is what I've always maintained. We're too poor and too dangerously divided with a small group of people having access to the wealth and resources of the nation while the majority is actually a ‘minority’ in this nation. That must change. We don't need criminal employers who exploit their employees. We don't need hotels. Turn them into hospitals. We need public transport. Not private vehicles that have turned the roads of the cities into a veritable nightmare. We don’t need westernization. We need to be ourselves. We need originality and not just mimicking lifestyles alien to our culture and history. We need local languages and local ways of doing things that ensure that people are not fighting a war within themselves like we’re doing at this point in time. We’ve to give dignity to every kind of work and person and end colonization in all its forms.

We need to empower women and put them in positions of responsibility at every level of governance which includes the police and the army and the courts. We can expect a more nonviolent society than the one we have. Politics should be effectively separated from power. In other words a politician is a servant of the people. Not their master. A sincere person would gladly take the position because it means service and not stealing from the masses. The crooks will look for other jobs in the mean time.

People have a right to live a life the way they think is good for them – which only means every other right is guaranteed to the ordinary person except the ‘right to exploitation’ which is not a right but a sickness of the body and soul. Development will be real because there won’t be prostitution on the streets. Society will be healthy as a whole and so will the social animal be likewise. “You may say that I’m a dreamer/But I’m not the only one” (John Lennon, Imagine).
Fund our Future – Building for the 10th November (2010-09-06 14:32)

UCU has written to all branches this week asking them to organise joint meetings with their campus Students’ Unions to make arrangements for building a massive turnout for 10 November’s national demonstration against education cuts. Good progress has been made by the organisers on arrangements for the march and rally, as well as for an after-rally social event. We will be enclosing full details of these with the official launch of the 'Road to the demonstration' campaign on 16 September. In the meantime, contact your branch to ask what is being arranged and how you can help. Watch this space for more. You can read more about Fund our Future [1]here.

From UCU Campaigns Update E-mail

There will a Sociological Imagination meet up at the demo in London. More details will be posted nearer the time.

1. http://fundourfuture.org.uk/

Thinking Aloud (2010-09-07 08:00)

A podcast project likely to appeal to readers of the Sociological Imagination. Add on [1]Twitter to keep updated of new podcasts and check out the [2]website to see those that have been produced so far!

2. http://go.warwick.ac.uk/thinkingaloud/

Texts and Tweets (2010-09-07 13:00)

[EMBED]

A working bibliography of public sociology (2010-09-08 08:00)

This bibliography of public sociology will be available [1]here as an ongoing resource.
FROM THE ASA

The 1988 ASA Presidential Address by Herbert J Gans


The 2004 ASA Presidential Address by M Burawoy


BOOKS on Public Sociology


First published before 'public sociology' popularized and therefore not written with Burawoy's conceptualization in mind. This book is a critique of the writing style of professional sociologists (under the scientific aura) which made it inaccessible to the public reader. Ironically, the book itself was criticized by its own extensive use of postmodern terminology.


About everything commendable about the idea of Burawoy


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Earlier Books Relevant to the Sociology-Public Link


SPECIAL JOURNAL ISSUES

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[7]Introduction to a Debate on Public Sociologies Catherine Zimmer

[8]Public Sociologies: Contradictions, Dilemmas, and Possibilities Michael Burawoy

[9]The Vacant "We": Remarks on Public Sociology François Nielsen

[10]Why Public Sociology May Fail David Brady

Critical Sociology

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How Public Are We? Coverage of Sociology by the Associated Press

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Other notable Journal articles


WEBSITE of INTEREST

Entry 'Public Sociology' on Wikipedia


“Producing Public Sociology: Contributions from Berkeley Faculty”


Our Most Popular Posts of 2013 The Sociological Imagination (2013-12-25 08:03:48)

[...] Getting a Ph.D. will turn you into an emotional trainwreck, not a professor […]

Suggest links, resources and features (2010-09-09 08:00)

We are trying to build a collection of 1]general links, [2]campaign links and [3]resources. However the internet is a rather large place so if you have any suggestions at all please do get in [4]contact. Likewise we welcome any suggestions about new features which the Sociological Imagination should incorporate. What else should we include? Again please get in touch if you have any ideas.
A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2010-09-10 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical 'reform' of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here.
Don’t Let Them Get Away With It! (2010-09-11 08:00)

[EMBED]

Call for interviews (2010-09-12 08:00)

Plans are currently in motion to bring a number of interviews to the Sociological Imagination over the next few months. However we’d like you to help us bring an ever wider selection of interviews to the website. If there’s anyone you’d like to interview (academic, writer, campaigner etc) then please get in touch to discuss it. We’re happy to help you arrange and carry out the interview if you’re unsure of how to do it.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

How to lose an election in 5 minutes and 52 seconds... (2010-09-12 14:36)

Republican candidate Phil Davidson making an ‘impassioned’ speech which has now been viewed almost 700,000 times. In the pre social media age the enjoyment of such unhinged brilliance would have been confined to those physically present in the room:

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When in Rome You’re Nobody (2010-09-13 08:00)

When Rome was attacked by Visigoths, Saint Augustine responded by writing “City of God” where he contrasted the earthly city with the heavenly city. In some sense, Rome was the City of Man, decadent and craving for earthly pleasures as opposed to the City of God that comes from seeking divine joy.
I did not like the movie “Time of the gypsies” because it showed the gypsies in such a poor light. Emir Kusturica is a good director. He understands technique. But, he has no vision. The content does not transcend the form of the movie. It stays within limits as you would expect from a student who performs well in the exams but is not a creative genius who can dissent with the teacher and defy the exam. One important scene in the movie is set in Rome when the protagonist Perhan who from an innocent and kind human being turns corrupt and mean, meets his lost sister Danira that he dearly loves. The meeting however ends with Perhan’s death that follows the death of his innocence.

Indian politicians can be deeply thankful that there is a scoundrel called Berlusconi leader of the Forza Italia political movement who heads the government in Italy and who is as corrupt, degenerate and right-wing as themselves. With Berlusconi coming back to power in 2008, there is little doubt that Italy is heading towards fascism and this time the target will be the poor immigrants.

Globalization in its attempt to create a common market has alienated more people than can be imagined making it possible for the right-wing to capitalize on the anger and frustration of common people and throwing them into the arms of nationalists who feel that they’ve lost ground since the so-called European Union. The anti-immigration phenomenon is going to rise dramatically in days to come and the curse of nationalism that Europe brought upon the world will raise its ugly head to fight the social and emotional vacuum created by globalization.

The Rome in Augustine is not the same Rome in Kusturica where the gypsies that are non-entities to the mainstream Italians are settling scores. Nor is it the Rome from where Berlusconi runs his government. Just as the Japan I love is in the movies of Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Ozu, the Rome I know is from the movies of Rossellini, Pasolini and Fellini. One is “Rome, Open City” (1945); another is “Mamma Roma” (1962) and the third “Fellini’s Roma” (1972). All of them use neo-realistic techniques, Fellini to a lesser extent, in an attempt to capture reality as “reality.” When Pasolini said, “In truth, my only hero is reality,” he was referring to a certain approach to the subject of reality.

Rome is a city where redemption is possible. Because the hero of the city is none other than Jesus himself. He lives among the outcasts – the beggars, the drunks, the prostitutes, the pimps, the failures, those whose existence is immaterial to mainstream society. Dostoevsky says that: “The most pressing question on the problem of faith is whether a man as a civilized being can believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, for therein rests the whole of our faith.”

There is a certain love of the personhood of Jesus that we see in most artists of the war generation and after on the continent. From Bunuel to Tarkovsky it is Jesus whom we need to believe rather than the risen Christ. The Church in ignoring the former has made us forget the reality of the person to the imaginary need of salvation. Jesus the human person is the reality. The Christ of the Catholic Church is far from the reality. Rather, it’s a failed institution something close to a failed state of affairs.

There’s something of the marginal Rome in Rossellini, Pasolini and Fellini. Jesus is the superstar of that Rome. He takes the form of Giorgio the diehard resister who is murdered by the Gestapo in Rossellini’s “Rome – Open City.” In Pasolini Jesus is the prostitute Mamma Roma – the outcast of the city. In Fellini, Jesus is the city itself upon whose body the drama of our lives takes place. But the closest to the Jesus-figure in Fellini are in the movies “Nights of Cabiria,” “La Strada” and “La Dolce Vita.”

Life itself revolves around the possibility of discovering Jesus the person. The loss of this person in our lives is
an absence that cannot be filled. Both victims and victimizers are in need of this person to stop the war of "all against all" which is the essence of survival. Only Jesus can bring such a peace because only Jesus is willing to choose to make the sacrifice.

One actor who stood out as the archetypal Roman was Anna Magnani in "Mamma Roma" who also played in Rossellini's movie. I thought she was more Roman than Giulietta Masina as Cabiria. Anna Magnani was Mamma Roma, the same way that Peter O'Toole was Lawrence of Arabia, Anthony Quinn was Omar Mukhtar, Malcolm McDowell was Caligula and Ben Kingsley was Gandhi. It was an epic performance by Magnani without in fact being an epic.

The movie was an anti-epic filled with anti-heroes. One unforgettable scene is when Mamma Roma sees her son Ettore as a waiter in a restaurant and the pain in her joy is so great that she breaks into tears. However such a joy can only be short-lived for the outcasts of the world. What makes her Jesus-like is the fact that she is never understood and as Pasolini says: "Death does not lie in not being able to communicate but in no longer being able to be understood." Her life is thus one long story of dying.

The Rome where Jesus is the protagonist lurking in the margins of the city when the whole world sleeps, the Rome of the saints and prostitutes and fascists and pimps and working classes, the Rome – an external layer of Christian morality beneath which lies the ancient dust of a pagan world, the Rome where the Church and the modern world fight their cultural battles, that is the Rome of nobody and everybody. It is also the Rome of Rossellini, Pasolini and Fellini.

Do you want to be a news editor? (2010-09-14 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit one or two more news editors. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you're interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in contact.

Pathology and Asexual Politics (2010-09-15 08:00)

The asexual community has only existed for about ten years, and its existence is due in large part to the growth of the internet. The center of the community is the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN, asexuality.org), which defines an asexual as "a person who does not experience sexual attraction." The site contrasts this with celibacy, which it asserts is a choice, whereas asexuality is a sexual orientation. The main political goals of the asexual
community are visibility, acceptance, and understanding. One major means for this involves academic outreach and our representation in academic discourse.

I first discovered the asexual community in fall 2007, my first semester of graduate school. Even before I eventually decided to identify as asexual, I have wanted to find out as much as I could about the subject. My own attempts to understand the matter, as well as the realization that I had substantive contributions to make, have led to my involvement in academic outreach. (For instance, I run the site [1]asexualexplorations.net, which "exists to provide promote the academic study of asexuality.") I have taken a particular interest in the diagnosis Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which led to my involvement in the “AVEN DSM Taskforce,” a group that lobbied the DSM-5 Sexual Dysfunctions Subworkgroup trying to make DSM-5 more asexual-friendly. I have remained interested even after we completed that project.

**Asexuality and the Question of Pathology**

After the formation of the asexual community, it was not too long before the community became aware of the fact that in the DSM, there is a disorder about not being interested in sex. (The diagnosis is also in the ICD, but the ICD attracts less controversy). As one of the major political goals of the community is to convince people that there is nothing wrong with not being interested in sex, this diagnosis is not especially helpful for that goal.

In considering what kind of approach the asexual community should take toward the matter, one question that seems like a good starting place is whether asexuality is a sexual dysfunction. I have sometimes seen the question posed as an either/or: Is asexuality a sexual orientation or a sexual dysfunction? Some authors (e.g. Prause & Graham, 2007) have done data collection regarding asexuality and claimed that their results suggest that asexuality is not a sexual dysfunction. Such claims are likely good for our politics, but they make absolutely no sense to me.

There is a considerable literature on defining disorder, a task known to be difficult (many authors think impossible). Most authors, however, agree that at least some amount of value judgment is involved. Often these value judgments are quite uncontroversial: death, pain, and inability (or greatly increased difficulty) in accomplishing everyday tasks, are fairly universally regarded as negatives that, if possible, should be prevented. For the ones other
than death, if they are not prevented, they should be cured if possible, and if not, treated to make the problems more manageable and/or to slow/prevent worsening of the condition. With regard to asexuality, there is the question of what harm it causes. It does not cause death or pain, and it only causes disability if we define it as such. This was, in fact, part of the rationale for including the sexual dysfunctions in DSM-III (Spitzer, Williams, & Skodol, 1980; Spitzer, 1981) without a requirement of distress—the complete sexual response cycle was regarded as normative such that any “inability” to experience such was defined as an impairment in an important area of functioning (c.f. American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p.6).

A core part of people’s intuitions about what is a disorder (including sexual dysfunctions) is that something has gone wrong in the individual. Something is not working how it ought. In my own view, the oughtness inherent in this question means that science cannot answer it (though it can inform an answer.) This view is controversial—some consider function of some part of an organism to be objectively definable (e.g. the heart is for pumping blood.) While I am skeptical,[1] even if we accept that, objectively, the heart is for pumping blood, what is sexual attraction for? What is sex for? The main answers I’ve seen are a) procreation/finding a partner for such, b) pair-bonding, and c) declaring agnosticism with a skeptical attitude towards those who presume to know [2] My own view, option (c), renders problematic the entire notion of “sexual dysfunction.” A further issue is what I call “the brute fact of the optionality of sex.” Having sex and being interested in sex are optional in a way that eating, breathing, and having a heart that pumps blood are not. It is possible to never have sex and never want sex and it not create any problems in a person’s everyday life. This renders problematic the whole notion of functional oughtness for sexual attraction/interest, making problematic the very notions of “sexual function” and thus “sexual dysfunction.”

As I do not think that asexuality objectively is or is not a sexual dysfunction, the question I think we should be asking is whether regarding it as such makes sense conceptually and pragmatically. Conceptually, I do not think that it does. Pragmatically, we need to be cautious—what effect, if any, this diagnosis has on asexuals is unknown. We simply do not have the data. Posing the question in this way motivates us to ask another essential for asexual politics: how is asexuality different from HSDD? There are two kinds of answers to this question: extensional and valuational/practical. Extensional differences—who fits which group—are often the only ones that come to mind. They are, for instance, the only ones addressed in Bogaert’s (2006) discussion of the matter. This line of thinking seems to stem from treating asexuality and HSDD as somehow “objectively existing” rather than as more nominalist type categories. I am more interested in valuational and practical differences.

One such difference is that HSDD focuses on lack of sexual desire, and asexuality on lack of sexual attraction. HSDD is a more negative valuation of sexual disinterest and asexuality a more neutral/positive one. HSDD was created by physicians (Kaplan, 1977; Leif, 1977) and is diagnosed by clinicians. The conceptualization “asexuality” was created by asexuals, and the designation—an identity—is self-assigned. Moreover, the conceptualizations HSDD and asexuality will give rise to very different research questions. However, one important similarity should be noted: lack of interest in sex often causes difficulties in people’s lives that they want help with. [3] Both asexual identity and HSDD are conceptualizations that exist to try to help people deal with these issues.

Asexuality vis-à-vis Pathology

In discussing how asexuality is different from HSDD (i.e. why the DSM does not say asexuality is a disorder), perhaps the most commonly raised point concerns the fact that since DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), for a diagnosis of HSDD to be made, the lack of sexual interest must cause “marked distress or interpersonal difficulty,” although the second half of the disjunction is often ignored. Asexuals are not distressed about it, therefore they do not have this disorder, therefore the DSM does not say that asexuality is a disorder. Some people seem satisfied with this, but others do not. I can think of three reasons that one might not consider this sufficient. First, many people are distressed about their asexuality before identifying as asexual, and there is concern for these people. Second, not every condition that can potentially cause distress or interpersonal difficulty is included in the DSM. Including some but not others creates a real asymmetry and a sense of negative valuation (even if not a
mental disorder" label) for those that are included. Many in the asexual community are concerned about mental health professionals that will try to "treat" the asexuality of asexuals who are seeking out therapy for some unrelated issue. Third, as long as HSDD remains on the books, there is fear that the pharmaceuticals will someday get the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to approve a drug for it (that probably will have small, but statistically significant, efficacy), and they will engage in massive "educational campaigns" to create distress about lack of interest in sex (see Anderson, 2005). [4]

A political question that those challenging the pathologization of asexuality must ask is whether to challenge the pathologization of asexuality only or whether to challenge the pathologization of sexual disinterest more generally. This is an important question because asexuals seem to be a small minority of the people not interested in sex [5]. This question parallels two general approaches I have seen among those supportive of asexuality. The first is to limit the domain of "sexual dysfunction" and to distance asexuality from it. This approach often involves placing strong emphasis on the requirement of distress (e.g. Brotto, 2010) and claiming that some data supports the view that asexuality is not a sexual dysfunction (e.g. Prause & Graham, 2007). Also falling in this approach is a suggestion by Brotto (2010), who proposes adding a comment in the DSM that this diagnosis does not apply to asexuals. The second approach is to question the notion that lack of interest in sex is dysfunctional or to question the very notion of sexual dysfunction. To date, the second of these has not been given much voice from within the asexual community, but there are some outside of the asexual community who have been advocating a similar position (e.g. Tiefer, 2004). For those favoring this second option, I recommend three approaches:

(1) Make alliances with people in and supportive of the New View Campaign (newviewcampaign.org), which focuses on sexual problems rather than sexual dysfunctions and rejects any kind of universal sexual norm.

(2) Use asexuality as a wedge for highlighting existing problems with HSDD. This includes the fact that HSDD is such a diverse group, it almost certainly fails Spitzer and Endicott’s (1978) requirement that a disorder be a syndrome rather than a symptom. I know of only a few authors who have even dared to raise this question (e.g. Leiblum & Rosen, 1988), likely because the answer is intuitively obvious and unfavorable for HSDD. However, I would go farther and argue that sometimes lack of interest in sex is a symptom of some disorder, sometimes is “normal variation” and sometimes is an adaptive response to a negative situation (e.g. as a response to relationship problems; see Bancroft, Graham, & McCord, 2001). Another line of argument is to highlight DSM-IV-TR’s (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) absurd suggestion that the difficulty in distinguishing between pathologically low levels of sexual interest and “low normal” levels of sexual interest is the lack of “normative data.”

(3) Do qualitative research on asexuals experiences in therapy (for issues related to or unrelated to their asexuality), on people’s experiences of sex-therapy getting treatment for HSDD, and on the effects of this diagnosis in personal conversations and in educational settings. This research is vitally important for asexual endeavors. It is entirely possible that the situation is not as serious as some may think. In any research project, the results virtually always prove more complicated than whatever hypothesis the researcher first had in mind.

Conclusion

The questions of the relation between asexuality and HSDD are likely to remain important to the asexual community and our allies, and there are multiple approaches that can be taken that are worth exploring. Because of the pragmatic issues involved and the lack of available data, caution is needed, as is research on the effects of this diagnosis. Also, it must be recognized that the situation is complicated by the fact that the DSM-5 Sexual Dysfunctions Subworkgroup is proposing to replace HSDD with Sexual Interest/Aversion Disorder (SIAD), possibly splitting it into one diagnosis for men and other for women, [6] and what these changes would mean for the asexual community are unclear. Further, asexual are not the primary group HSDD/SIAD is intended for. Given that there are many non-asexuals who may qualify for this diagnosis, their good must be considered in whatever strategy is taken. There are no easy answers, but it is important to ask the right questions.
References:


[1] I doubt it is possible to go from “in living organisms the heart pumps blood; if the heart does not pump blood the organism dies” to “the heart is for pumping blood” without regarding being alive as normative.

[2] The difference between (a) and (b) can be seen with homosexuality, which is a dysfunction according to the former, but not the latter.
If asexuality never caused anyone any difficulties, there would be need to discuss these issues, nothing for people to try to figure out, no political goals to accomplish, and thus no asexual community. Likewise, HSDD/ISD were first regarded as disorder in part because of people presenting to clinicians with this issue.

In the US, pharmaceuticals can advertize directly to the general public.

The impression is that most asexuals’ have always not been interested in sex, whereas most people with HSDD have not, although I am not aware of any data confirming these impressions.

http://www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions/Pages/proposedrevision.aspx?rid=432

http://www.dsm5.org/ProposedRevisions/Pages/proposedrevision.aspx?rid=434

1. http://www.asexualexplorations.net/

The average Briton spends almost half their waking life using media and communications? (2010-09-16 08:00)

A fascinating report by regulator Ofcom sheds light on contemporary patterns of media and communication usage. See the executive summary [1]here and full report [2]here. It’s suggestive of a degree of ongoing growth in usage which perhaps still hasn’t been picked up by the slightly slower paced practice of academic researchers. As the slightly breathless video embedded below asks: "Is social media a fad? Or is it the biggest shift since the Industrial revolution?" It goes without saying that there’s an excluded middle between the two extremes but increasingly I’m much more inclined to the later view than to the former. It’s important that a well meaning scepticism towards naive boosterism about technology doesn’t preclude our taking stock of the sheer enormity of the changes taking place in human communication and organization.

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Screw the First Amendment (2010-09-17 08:00)

Has the United States a monopoly over lunatics like the pastor Terry Jones who intends to burn the Quran on September 11 and the erstwhile President George Bush Jr.?

In other countries these people are thrown into prisons or more likely into a doghouse if it's Eastern Europe or South Asia. In China they’re shot dead and in Russia the mafia takes care of them. Though I've always thought prisons are inhuman, some form of restraint has to be applied on men like Bush Jr. and Terry Jones for a society to go on. The US is the only country on earth where you can be a stark raving lunatic, insane to the core, rabid crazy, total idiot, congenitally disordered and become a pastor or a president. It's a mystery that the rest of the world is yet to comprehend.

Then they've things like the First Amendment which guarantees the right to be an areshole without having to worry what others think about it. Though the Amendment is a good thing in principle unfortunately its abusers are more in number than those whom it helps. Second, it does not guarantee - as in the case of Pastor Terry Jones – that you will not infringe upon the feelings of others especially if they don’t belong to the cultural and social space you come from.

On mainstream American TV channels you never get to see intelligent and rational men and women like Chomsky or Finkelstein or Naomi Klein. Full coverage over a period of hours, days and weeks is given to primitive right-wing sorts who've declared a war on humanity. These people have the First Amendment to do the jerking off part for them. Laws that allow lunatics to do whatever they like – there is something wrong with such laws. What is sicker is that the media gives a platform to such lunatics and hijacks the spaces of social and political change.

I don’t think any man has a right to be indifferent to the feelings of others. It does not matter whether the world was made in seven days or if the universe evolved from a cloud of dust or if it is standing on the back of a turtle. These are ideas at the end of the day. A human being is a human being and must be treated like one no matter where they come from or what they look like or what they believe in. Obviously Pastor Jones’ idea of God has its origins in a vengeful, spiteful, bitter and violent man up there in the skies spewing hate and venom against those who politely disagree with him. Coincidentally the God that Pastor Jones happens to believe in is as insane as himself. It is quite clear that the pastor never heard of the line from the New Testament about doing “unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

The first right that goes above and beyond every other right is that each individual person is entitled to basic human dignity which means that they don’t get used and exploited in any manner. The potential to violence of the strong must be effectively curtailed to disallow them from preying on the weak and the vulnerable. This must be a universal law cutting across nations and societies.

Secondly and as important is that rights are learnt whereas restraints are understood. Those who don’t understand restraints, they have neither learnt their rights nor have they earned them. Enlightened laws and a society snoring on the couch of the past don’t go together. Where the stupids are in a majority – this applies to most nations on earth – you educate them with the restraints and don’t just give them rights because they shoot their mouths off like their shoot off their arseholes.
While rights can be positive or negative responsibilities will always be positive. Those who think they are not responsible for the lives of others or what happens to the world I don’t think they should enjoy the best that life has to offer. Unethical men and groups are entitled to no rights at all. Cruel and cynical types–George Bush Jr. and the majority of Republicans–hopeless men of whom you can expect nothing, they should be restrained and prevented from doing harm.

Ultimately it’s about power and no man must be completely trusted with it. There are pastors in the form of mullahs and priests and religious and political ideologues of every hue and color who want power for themselves and to suppress people who are not in a position to resist; likewise there are George Bush Jrs everywhere who think that they’re born to fulfill imaginary destinies by crushing and dehumanizing the world around them. These are a small group of lunatics across the planet who unfortunately have too much power in their hands. Their agenda should be conclusively brought to an end if humanity must’ve a future.

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How To Pick Between Milibands? (2010-09-18 08:00)

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Add the Sociological Imagination on Facebook (2010-09-19 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!
[1]Sociological Imagination
[2]
[3]Create your badge


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The politics of spirit: sainthood as performing politics (2010-09-20 08:00)

In his bleak and tragic vision of human nature as corrupt and power-driven, William Golding, the author of Lord of the Flies, a book for all times, does not fail to disclose a ray of light in the character of the saintly Simon who is the
only one with the profound insight that the beast is within each and every person. The enemy we’re looking for outside is the one that is always already within. Simon – like Christ - is murdered by the other ignorant louts in the story who’re caught in their deceit and hunger for power.

*Lord of the Flies* is a political novel. If opportunism is the nature of the game then it’s fair that everyone is a loser in some sense. The beast does not spare anyone. In their greed for power one form of destruction will be replaced by another. Treachery will be replaced by greater treachery. History teaches us that. The saintly Simon arrives into the awareness that there is no escaping the beast. The beast within has to be confronted in the dark realms of the soul. Simon is murdered because he’s mistaken for the beast itself. The beast is the victor though that does not stop Simon from going to the tribe to tell them the truth about the beast. The beast will not allow Simon to do that. It is Simon’s knowledge of the beast that endows him with some kind of saintliness.

*Saint Genet - Actor and Martyr* is the title of Sartre’s book on Jean Genet, a criminal, homosexual, outcast and literary genius. The thesis of the book is that Genet is both saint and performer. Both are deeply intertwined according to Sartre. The saint is guided by the need to reveal as in the case of Simon. Genet as a great artist reveals. That’s where his "sainthood" comes from. He knows the dead-end, the bottom, the hell that others dread and the narrow road from nowhere to nothingness.

Sainthood is *performing politics* where the performer knows that it’s a performance. Simon’s knowledge of the beast is his knowledge of himself as performer. Socrates attributes evil to ignorance and the author of *Bhagavad Gita* to delusion. Says Krishna: “And that penance is described as dark, which is performed under a misguided conviction, with pain to oneself, or for the destruction of another.” The “misguided conviction” is a betrayal of the performance.

My first illustration of the performer who knows that it’s a performance is Joan of Arc. Joan is a mixture of Mirabai and the Rani of Jhansi. She has the boundless piety of a mystic such as Mira and the incredible valor of the Rani who fought British Rule of India in the 19th century. Like a man she can ride a horse and fight battles while her feminineness takes a maternal form in leading the French to defeat the English. Of Catholic saints, apart from Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila, Saint Joan interests me the most for her revolutionary character and her relevance to radical change in the twenty-first century. The role of religion in politics is a contentious one that has no final answers. The role of the deeply religious is equally contentious. Neither is the case with Saint Joan. It’s an understanding of politics as performance that makes her unique and she is not the only one. Sheikh Bedrettin, the revolutionary who fought the Ottoman Empire in its early years, and celebrated by the communist poet Nazim Hikmet in *The Epic of Sheikh Bedrettin*, combined religiosity with a sense of justice that is almost divine. Like Joan, Bedrettin identifies religion with a vision of equality for all beings and justice to the poor and downtrodden whether they are Turks, Greeks or Jews.

To be able to sing together pulling the nets all together from the sea, together to forge the iron like a lace, all together to plow the soil, to be able to eat the honey-filled figs together and to be able to say: everything but the cheek of the beloved we all share together everywhere... - *The Epic of Sheikh Bedrettin* – Nazim Hikmet

Both Bedrettin and Joan in different ways anticipated the central theme of Liberation Theology which is that poverty is sin or morally unacceptable because it brought the worst out of a human being and that religion must take the side of oppressed humanity. This is reflected in the Vatican II under the leadership of Pope John XXIII: Human society, as we here picture it, demands that men be guided by justice, respect the rights of others and do their duty. It demands, too, that they be animated by such love as will make them feel the needs of others as their own, and induce them to share their goods with others, and to strive in the world to make all men alike heirs to the noblest of intellectual and
spiritual values. Nor is this enough; for human society thrives on freedom, namely, on the use of means which are consistent with the dignity of its individual members, who, being endowed with reason, assume responsibility for their own actions. And so, dearest sons and brothers, we must think of human society as being primarily a spiritual reality. (Peace on Earth) Hinduism being a social order rather than a religion per se rarely offered itself to political liberation. Its appeal to 19th century Orientalists lay in the fact that on one hand it exuded a philosophical charm in dismissing this world as an illusion while on the other hand it perpetuated deep-seated conservatism in the oppression of so-called untouchables and women. Gandhi’s version of Hinduism stands as an exception to the rule and his ecletic mind could combine Thoreau’s Civil Disobedience, Ruskin’s Unto this Last, the Sermon on the Mount from the gospel according to Saint Matthew, Tolstoy’s The Kingdom of God is Within You and the Bhagavad Gita along with Tulsidas’s Ramayan – and put them in the same cauldron to arrive at a world-view that can broadly be considered universal to awaken the masses of rural India. When Gandhi says, “I cannot conceive politics as divorced from religion” he essentially means to say that religion as a moral discourse can be a platform of social struggle. Religion as embodied in the moral performance of resistance to evil. Such a performance is embodied in the individual person. There are no followers or leaders. There are individuals and more individuals. In the poem “You” says Borges: I speak of the unique, the single man, he who is always Alone. It is this individual person that must reflect the struggle of a people. Someone like Gandhi with a strong sense of otherworldliness refuses to believe that he is alone in this struggle. Such is the conviction in God’s role in the struggle that at the point when he is about to be lynched by a mob in South Africa and is forced to take a rickshaw pulled by a man, Gandhi says: I had never sat in a rickshaw before, as it was thoroughly disgusting to me to sit in a vehicle pulled by human beings. But I then felt that it was my duty to use that vehicle. I have experienced five or seven times in my life that one, whom God wishes to save, cannot fall even if he will. If I did not fall I cannot take any credit for it to myself. It is not about God saving him from being lynched by the mob. It is more about God revealing himself in saving Gandhi from an act of unrighteousness. Gandhi, Saint Joan and Malcolm X – all three of them are in the habit of attributing to the divine a role and purpose that is greater than what can be conceived by an individual. In George Bernard Shaw’s Saint Joan we see a humble, peasant girl in all innocence proclaiming that the Saints Margaret, Catherine and Michael, whom she calls “the voices” told her to drive the English out of France. At the tender age of sixteen when most girls would be lost in dreams of the future, the illiterate peasant girl went to lead an army that would eventually throw the English out of France. But the price of the “sainthood” is as political as the “voices” that inspired her to go to battle against the English. Betrayed by the very people for whom she had fought with her life, she was eventually tried for heresy and burnt at the stake. The transcending moment of Joan’s life is not her death but the “voices” themselves that sent her to war. You see her speaking about the voices to Dunois in the following dialogue which also brings out the essential rustic in her:

Scene V DUNOIS. Are you angry, Joan? JOAN. Yes. [Smiling] No: not with you. I wish you were one of the village babies. DUNOIS. Why? JOAN. I could nurse you for awhile. DUNOIS. You are a bit of a woman after all. JOAN. No: not a bit: I am a soldier and nothing else. Soldiers always nurse children when they get a chance. DUNOIS. That is true. [He laughs].

Her politics however show to the end of her life when she must denounce her enemies for murderous deceit and their attempt to kill her soul by imprisoning her body. It is a turning point in the play when she realizes that it is better to die than live like a caged animal. For one like Joan with a spirit born to be free, such a life would be meaningless anyway.

JOAN. Yes: they told me you were fools [the word gives great offence], and that I was not to listen to your fine words nor trust to your charity. You promised me my life; but you lied [indignant exclamations]. You think that life is nothing but not being stone dead. It is not the bread and water I fear: I can live on bread: when have I asked for more? It is no hardship to drink water if the water be clean. Bread has no sorrow for me, and water no affliction. But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep from me everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible
that was heated seven times. I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind. But without these things I cannot live; and by your wanting to take them away from me, or from any human creature, I know that your counsel is of the devil, and that mine is of God.

Malcolm X like Gandhi and Joan has the tendency to attribute divine role in crucial moments of his life. All of them have the tendency to believe that they are saved by a power greater than themselves. A criminal and thief like Genet, Malcolm X rose to become the antithesis of his previous self. He threw away his last name “Little” and replaced it with “X” which is a stroke of revolutionary genius like Gandhi who threw away his western clothes for a simple loin-cloth empathizing with the poorest of the poor, because X symbolized the absence of the past for the blacks in America who were brought there as slaves. In The Autobiography of Malcolm X, rather ironically written by Alex Haley with Malcolm as a narrator and protagonist, we see the impetuous Malcolm telling the story of his life on the streets. In the chapter “Caught” we see an instance of divine intervention to save the lost criminal. In Malcolm’s own words:

“One hand was in his pocket. I knew he was a cop. He said, quietly, ‘Step into the back.’ Just as I started back there, an innocent Negro walked into the shop...The detective, thinking he was with me, turned to him. There I was wearing a gun, and the detective talking to that Negro with his back to me. Today I believe that Allah was with me even then. I didn’t try to shoot him. And that saved my life...They’d had me covered. One false move, I’d have been dead.”

It’s not Malcolm’s common sense at work over here. It is Allah who makes sure that Malcolm does not do the mistake of taking out his gun because that would have meant certain death and there would be no Malcolm X to fight the cause of the Black revolution in America. All this talk of divine intervention in Joan and Gandhi and Malcolm X can be dismissed as a strategic device or way of talking or way of believing or reinforcing the belief that the cause one is fighting for is a just one and so great is the justice that it comes from God himself. But it is more than that. These are transcending moments when what Nietzsche calls the will to power of an oppressed group defines itself. In that sense Joan and Gandhi and Malcolm X tend to see themselves as vehicles through which the divine conveys its message. In essence sainthood is a political discourse is the point I’m trying to make. I don’t mean to imply that “saint” function in the consciousness of being a saint in the existential sense of the term. No one chooses to be a saint. You can choose to be good and that can be quite arbitrary as well. What we attribute to sainthood is a definition with certain parameters. Sainthood is relative therefore. What I’m interested in is the purity of motive – the conviction that this is the way things should be done and not any other as we see in Joan, Gandhi and Malcolm. The goals are serious and the challenges enormous. The awareness of death as a reality to be embraced and the fact that you’re performing a role predestined for you in all consciousness – this is the point where saintliness becomes political. That’s what the saintly Simon understands when he’s convinced that the beast of ignorance is within us and can be overcome through radical effort.

Coalition once again demonstrate their commitment to localization (2010-09-20 15:34)
Can private universities solve the issue of limited university spots? (2010-09-21 08:00)

The issue of limited places in England's higher education system has sparked [1] a recent debate about the value of expanding the system through private universities. Universities Minister David Willetts is promoting a Higher Education bill which would enable private universities to grow and evolve, but UCU head Sally Hunt and various lecturers have warned against such profit-driven universities, citing the US system and concerns about how those universities receive public funds. In defense of privatisation, BPP University College of Professional Studies, which is the first private sector institution to gain university college status in over 30 years, argued that it is misleading to make comparisons between universities in the US and the UK because of their vastly different regulation and funding systems. The government, however, has indicated that a university’s status of public or private is not the key issue amidst the greater pressure it faces over university places and funding. For further explanation of the current funding situation facing universities, click [2] here.


i.l.iliyas (2011-12-28 06:03:33)
pls stop the private universities

Sociological Imagination (2011-12-29 07:13:19)
Doing my best!

Ben: Diary of a Heroin Addict (2010-09-22 08:00)

As a bright schoolboy from a loving, middle-class family Ben Rogers was expected to make a success of his life. Raised in a quiet, picturesque village Ben was a Boy Scout, loved cricket, played in the school orchestra and looked forward to the annual family holiday. But despite his privileged start in life Ben found himself on the road to ruin, injecting heroin up to four times a day.

During his last months, Ben kept a video diary of his drug use and desperate attempts to come off heroin. Ravaged by the drug, Ben’s body began to break down: he developed DVT and his veins were rendered so useless he had to inject into his groin. Despite his family’s best efforts, Ben couldn’t stop. He was haunted by, and hooked on, heroin.

[EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED]

Event: New Activism or Old Politics? (2010-09-22 12:00)

New Activism or Old Politics? Sounding student reaction to HE’s crisis
This free, one-day event will discuss likely student reactions to the impending cuts and rising fees in higher education.

**30th September 2010, 11am - 4:00pm**

**Room 404D, Main Building, University of Aston, Birmingham**

**Participants include:**

- Patrick Ainley, University of Greenwich
- Ben Little, University of Middlesex
- NUS speaker (hope to get Clare Solomon, Pres elect ULU)
- Joyce Canaan, Birmingham City University (Chair a.m.)
- Sarah Amsler, University of Aston (Chair p.m.)
- Jonathan Ward, Studentforce for sustainable development
- Esme Hannah, PhD Student University of Leeds
- Dora Meade, Student Led Discussion Network Co-ordinator University of Leeds

**Timetable:**

10.30 Registration

11.00 Welcome Patrick Ainley, Network co-cordinator and co-author *Lost Generation?* Continuum 2010

11.15 Ben Little – 'Radical Students? The importance of universities within activist networks' based on his edited e-book: *Radical Future – Politics for the Next Generation*  

12.00 NUS speaker or Dora Meade + Leeds University Student-Led Discussion Network

1.00 Lunch

1.30 Jonathan Ward – ‘Brown Dystopia or Green Hope?’

2.15 Esme Hannah – ‘Student Politics, past and present’  
(+ Dora Meade with Leeds Network if confirm Clare 12-1)

3.00-4.00 Plenary discussion

The event is free and all staff and students in UK Higher Education are welcome to attend but please register.
A full guide to travelling to Aston, including campus maps, is available at the website below. The Aston campus is a short walk from Birmingham New Street train station. The University has a car park and visitors passes can be provided – please email...

Aston uni campus guide: http://www1.aston.ac.uk/about/directions/

It is free event but please confirm attendance with Carol Salmon at csalmon@srhe.ac.uk

1. http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html
2. mailto:csalmon@srhe.ac.uk

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10th November National demonstration: new joint website launched (2010-09-23 08:00)

A reminder to members to make a date for their diaries of 10 November. With massive cuts already announced, 25% more cuts expected in the Comprehensive Spending Review and indications that science and research funding may also be slashed, this is our opportunity to put political pressure on the Coalition government. Make sure you will be there and contact your branches to see what is being organised for the day. The NUS and UCU national demonstration now has a joint website, which you can view here.

From the UCU Campaigns E-mail


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Liberal Democrats push to move graduate tax forward (2010-09-23 12:00)

While the debate continues regarding how to accommodate more students into the UK’s university system, another one gains steam beside it: how to fund those university spots. On Tuesday, 21st of September, grassroots Liberal Democrats at the party’s conference in Liverpool voted to campaign to replace rising tuition fees and student loans with a graduate tax. The tax would be sliding so that graduates who earn less pay less for their degrees, while those secure higher-paying jobs would pay more. However, the Institute of Directors says such a tax could lead to a ‘brain drain’ as students seek to study abroad in avoidance of such a tax. It also suggested that companies employing graduates would shoulder the burden of the tax as graduates would then expect higher salaries to compensate for their tax rate. Details of how a graduate tax would function are still unknown, while an independent review being led by Lord Browne is expected next month. The review is examining options between raising tuition fees and introducing a form of graduate tax. It is anticipated that Browne is likely to suggest significant fee rises.

Demonstrate at Tory Party Conference (3rd October) (2010-09-23 17:41)

Right to Work has called a national demonstration outside the Tory Party annual conference on 3 October. David Cameron’s party are meeting in Birmingham. We will assemble at 12 noon and, after a rally, the march will set off at 1pm.

The demonstration is supported by:
The PCS, NUJ, UCU and CWU, NUS, ASLEF, the Labour Representation Committee, nationally, as well as many local trade union and campaign bodies.

Speakers include:
John McDonnell MP, Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, Romayne Phoenix of the Green Party, Dr. Jacky Davis from Keep Our NHS Public, Birmingham Respect councillor, Salma Yaqoob, Linda Burnip, campaign co-ordinator Local Housing Allowance Reform Group, Dina Garane, Greek trade unionist and leading activist in general strikes, and Portuguese Left Bloc MP, Jorge Duarte Costa.

The march will assemble at 12 noon at Lionel Street, Birmingham B3 1AG. If anyone reading this would like to meet on the day then just send an e-mail or a facebook message before then.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Become an SI columnist (2010-09-24 08:00)

As you may have noticed we have added two columns to the website in the last few months: [1]rethinking the world and the [2]idle ethnographer. Would you like to be our third regular columnist? If so then please send a 300 word pitch to the [3]editor. The only criterion is that the pitch somehow relates to our [4]aims. Beyond that the idea for the column is entirely up to you.

"Dude, you have no Quran!" (2010-09-24 13:00)

[EMBED]

EDL Fashion (2010-09-25 08:00)

[EMBED]

The Spirit Level in Three Minutes (2010-09-26 08:00)

[EMBED]

SI needs a Book Reviews editor (2010-09-27 08:00)

As the Sociological Imagination is starting to grow, we’re trying to find more people to assist with the running of the site. Do you want to be our book reviews editor? The role would involve:

- Keeping track of new publications that will be of interest to SI readers
- Liaising with publishers to order review copies
- Helping and advising reviewers
- Editing submitted reviews for the site

If you’re interested then please get in contact with the [1]editor to discuss further.
Why do people love sport? Article by Simon Kuper (FT) (2010-09-27 12:00)

In his last contribution to the Sports column of the Financial Times, Simon Kuper considers the underlying emotional pull of watching sport. For him, being a sports fan gives us a rare chance to return to a long lost, careless childhood:

"There is no mystery about why people play sport. It is fun. It releases endorphins that make you happy. It keeps you thin. It can even keep you alive. But why watch other people play sport – and worse, why argue afterwards about how they played? ...

...For many adults, their one escape from worry is being a sports fan. Watching sport, you can become eight years old again. ... You cannot control who wins. And at bottom, you know it doesn’t matter. ...When England fail in the World Cup people don’t jump off tower blocks. They just go to work."

Read the full article [1]here.


Save the Arts (2010-09-28 08:00)

[EMBED]

Work-for-free graduate employment culture (2010-09-28 12:00)

The continuing rise in graduate unemployment has seen a sharp increase in public sector organisations using unpaid interns. The economic and employment crisis of recent years has seen this type of working practice expanded to different sectors, including higher education as this [1]article suggests. The 1994 Group of universities – a group of research-intensive educational institutions, have advertised for “dynamic, talented, questioning” individuals with “excellent communication and analytical skills" and a “demonstrable interest in higher education”. This, in theory, appears to be attractive graduate job, but is in actual fact a work-for-free intern position.
The increase popularity of unpaid internship by recruiters has posed a financial dilemma for many graduates and raised questions work place exploitation. Ben Lyons, co-director of Intern Aware, believes that "working for free is impossible for the majority of graduates". Tanya de Grunward, author of Dude, Where's My Career? The founder of graduatefog, says the practice is exploitative:

"Can they seriously claim to be working for the good of our country's young people, when they are taking advantage of their most junior workers like this? In the case of the 1994 Group, its members are among the most prestigious universities in the UK. Considering how much money those interns, and we are assuming they are likely to be graduates, have just spent on their education, I think these ads are an insult to graduates."

In response to the advert, the 1994 Group says its internships are carried out on a volunteer basis. A spokeswoman says: "The 1994 Group believes in providing worthwhile opportunities for graduates, which enhances their learning of work place practices. The group does so in the form of internships, which are undertaken by the individual on a volunteer basis.


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**Ed Balls Bloomberg speech - There is an alternative (2010-09-28 20:48)**

[EMBED]

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**Online debate (2010-09-29 08:00)**


As well as being a fascinating and timely debate in its own right, this represents an interesting idea about how to use websites to undertake substantive dialogues (as opposed to a succession of individuals article). We’d like to try and do something similar. If you have an idea about a debate for Sociological Imagination then please get in [8]contact.

1. [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_10_10.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_10_10.htm)
5. http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/nothing_will_be_like_it_was_before_fighting_to_win/  
7. http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/only_a_socialist_vision_can_defeat_the_cuts/  
8. http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/only_a_socialist_vision_can_defeat_the_cuts/  

"Fear the Boom and Bust" a Hayek vs. Keynes Rap Anthem (2010-09-30 08:00) 

[EMBED] [EMBED]

Reminder: Demonstrate at Tory Party Conference this weekend (3rd October) (2010-09-30 12:00) 

[1] Right to Work has called a national demonstration outside the Tory Party annual conference on 3 October. David Cameron's party are meeting in Birmingham. We will assemble at 12 noon and, after a rally, the march will set off at 1pm.

The demonstration is supported by: 
The PCS, NUJ, UCU and CWU, NUS, ASLEF, the Labour Representation Committee, nationally, as well as many local trade union and campaign bodies.

Speakers include:  
John McDonnell MP, Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the PCS, Romayne Phoenix of the Green Party, Dr. Jacky Davis from Keep Our NHS Public, Birmingham Respect councillor, Salma Yaqoob, Linda Burnip, campaign co-ordinator Local Housing Allowance Reform Group, Dina Garane, Greek trade unionist and leading activist in general strikes, and Portuguese Left Bloc MP, Jorge Duarte Costa.

The march will assemble at 12 noon at Lionel Street, Birmingham B3 1AG. If anyone reading this would like to meet on the day then just send an [2]e-mail or a facebook message before then.

1. http://www.righttowork.org.uk/  
2.mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
1.5 October

Joining the Advisory Board (2010-10-01 08:00)

In order to help the Sociological Imagination expand we’re hoping to add two more members to our advisory board. At least over the next year or so, it would mainly involve discussing ideas and building a strategy for the long term development of the site. So while the role would involve a significant creative commitment, it would not necessitate a particularly large time commitment.

Our aim is to put together an advisory board (current members can be seen [1]here) which includes a diverse range of perspectives. Discussion will be informal and online. Critical views and robust debate about the nature, direction and purpose of the website are most welcome. If you would like to apply then please send a CV to the [2]editor with a short attachment explaining what you believe you would bring to the role.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Sleep Cycles: "Natural" or "Social"? (2010-10-01 12:00)

Jessa Gamble, a researcher working on sleep and time, reveals some fascinating facts about natural sleep cycles:


Nicholas Christakis: How social networks predict epidemics (2010-10-02 08:00)

[EMBED]
Manifestations of Islamophobia and the Loyalty of Muslim Converts (2010-10-04 08:00)

*This short article is an amalgamation of two chapters from my thesis which are more theoretical and rigorously argued than demonstrated here. I welcome feedback on any of the points raised in this article. I can be reached at [1] l.moosavi@lancaster.ac.uk

Anyone who follows events relating to Muslims in 'the West' will know each week brings more bad news. It seems that wherever in Europe or North America that Muslims are, they are subjected to surveillance, interrogation, and restrictions that seem to be spurred on by Islamophobia, but crucially, which also perpetuate Islamophobia. Some well known examples from the last month are the recent ban on the niqab in public spaces in France, the widespread condemnation of a mosque being built near to 'Ground Zero', and the proposed 'Burn a Qur’an day' that was called for and acted out in several locations. Closer to home, a recent investigation by The Independent found that “Hundreds of British Muslims leaving and returning from holidays abroad face harassment and intimidation by security forces when they pass through UK airports and seaports”. It seems that it is a well established fact that Islamophobia is firmly embedded in the experiences of Muslims living in predominantly non-Muslim societies then. My own doctoral research focuses on the experiences of Muslim converts in Britain, particularly in relation to their experiences of Islamophobia and in this short article I will explain some of the findings that I deduced from the 37 in-depth interviews I conducted with Muslim converts from Greater Manchester.

Since The Runnymede Trust published a report entitled 'Islamophobia: A Challenge for us All' in 1997, there has been much discussion about how much of a problem Islamophobia is. Many Muslim organisations and individual Muslim activists claim it is one of the most prominent and tolerated forms of prejudices of the 21st century, while others claim it is exaggerated. One of those in the latter camp is Kenan Malik who has argued in an article entitled Islamophobia Myth (2005) that the severity of Islamophobia has been greatly exaggerated in order to silence criticism of Islam and stifle free speech. This sentiment that Islamophobia is minimal was echoed by Sayeeda Warsi, a member of the Conservative cabinet who was recently described as 'Britain’s most powerful Muslim woman', who recently said: "From my own humble beginnings of [sic] daughter of an immigrant mill worker, to be, at 39, Chair of the Conservative Party, the youngest member of the House of Lords and have a seat at the Cabinet, I think sends out a very strong message to people of all backgrounds, but especially to Muslims and Muslim women to say there is no glass barrier anymore. That glass barrier has been broken". For Warsi, the glass barrier of Islamophobia, and perhaps also sexism, no longer seems to be a hindrance in the lives of Muslims in Britain, which she feels is reflected in her professional success. But can the success of one woman who identifies as a Muslim truly mean that Islamophobia is not a major problem? The experiences of the Muslim converts I interviewed lead to some interesting observations. To some extent, the Muslim converts’ experiences support the notion that Islamophobia is not as severe as many fear because they had very few experiences of being physically or aggressively confronted due to
being Muslims. Moreover, the anti-discrimination laws that are in place seemed to give them sufficient protection from blatant forms of institutional discrimination, allowing them opportunity to educate themselves and embark on careers that they desired. In a nutshell, the Muslim converts were able to go about their lives without facing insidious Islamophobic attacks. Some may assume this is because Muslim converts are not visible as Muslims but in fact, many of the Muslim converts I interviewed were visible as Muslims because they had appropriated beards or certain types of clothing that marked them out as Muslims. So crucially, the Muslim converts I interviewed had not experienced much threatening Islamophobia even though they were often visible as Muslims. This led to a conclusion by Alison, a 20 year old university student, where she said: "I think people are making Islamophobia out to be bigger than it is, especially like the media. I think non-Muslims are quite friendly towards Muslims in the sense that... as long as they don't feel threatened and don't feel that Islam is being forced on them, they're very happy to allow Muslims and any religious group to practice their belief" (Alison). This is a positive and optimistic point that is rarely mentioned when discussing Islamophobia, but indeed, the starting point for all discussions about Islamophobia must be that very much a pressure that they felt they had to cope with, often leading to paranoia that everyone around them very often does not mean Islamophobia didn't surface in their lives whatsoever, but only that it appeared in different guises. Rather than overtly manifesting, the Islamophobia they were familiar with was of a much more subtle nature. For example, while none of the Muslim convert women who wore a headscarf had ever had their headscarf pulled off their head, all of them had been subjected to comments – sometimes as banter, sometimes of a more sinister nature - where they had been made to feel inadequate or foolish for wearing a headscarf. The Muslim converts had often been called 'Taliban', 'Terrorist', 'Paki', and 'Bin Laden' for example. Moreover, the Muslim converts knew that there were instances when they had been judged or reacted to in particular discriminatory way due to being a Muslim, even if it was left unspoken. The subtle Islamophobia they experienced was along the lines of verbal insults or supposed jokes about their Islamic beliefs, experiences that might seem tolerable but which deeply troubled them. This observation about the way in which Islamophobia manifests being more subtle than overt is crucial to be aware of. It is a common and unfortunate mistake made by well meaning non-Muslims to assume that Islamophobia only refers to instances when Muslims are physically attacked. For example, while none of the Muslim convert women who wore a headscarf had ever had their headscarf pulled off, all of them had been subjected to comments – sometimes as banter, sometimes of a more sinister nature - where they had been made to feel inadequate or foolish for wearing a headscarf. The Muslim converts had often been called 'Taliban', 'Terrorist', 'Paki', and 'Bin Laden' for example. Moreover, the Muslim converts knew that there were instances when they had been reacted to in particular discriminatory way due to being a Muslim, even if it was left unspoken. The subtle Islamophobia they experienced was along the lines of verbal insults or supposed jokes about their Islamic beliefs, experiences that might seem tolerable but which deeply troubled them. This observation about the way in which Islamophobia is displayed being more subtle than overt is crucial to be aware of. It is a common and unfortunate mistake made by well meaning non-Muslims to assume that Islamophobia only refers to instances when Muslims are physically attacked. For example, I was surprised that even the most prominent Muslim organisation in Britain, The Muslim Council of Britain, had named an event I attended in the Houses of Parliament in March 2010 which was designed to expose the importance of challenging Islamophobia: 'Tackling Islamophobia: Reducing Street Violence against British Muslims'. As is commonly done, the MCB had focused on the more blatant form of Islamophobia, 'street violence', failing to recognise it can take more everyday and subtle forms which are just as troubling. While it is important to strongly condemn the shocking and disturbing overt examples of Islamophobia such as when Marwa El-Sherbini was stabbed to death in a court room for being a Muslim in 2009, one should not forget that Islamophobia is also about the more mundane and subtle instances where Muslims are judged out, mocked, and ridiculed because surely, these more minor instances still cause much distress and are the foundations that lead to the more shocking and brutal instances of Islamophobia. This understanding of Islamophobia mirrors an understanding of racism that has been offered in recent times by Philomena Essed (1991), who has argued that despite widespread beliefs in North America and Europe that racism is no longer a major issue, racism has merely taken on a new semblance in the form of 'everyday racism', a type of racism which frequently appears in mundane interactions and is not always so strikingly prejudiced. More recently, Barbara Trepagnier has argued in her book Silent Racism (2006) that we still live in an era when the majority of 'white' people think they are anti-racist but are still involved in perpetuating it in discreet ways. For Essed and Trepagnier, whether it is made visible or not, 'everyday racism' or 'silent racism' is ever-present and will continue to manifest in subtle ways regardless of our hopes that race no longer matters. I believe that efforts to understand Islamophobia in a similar manner must also be made, leading to recognising that Islamophobia is more often than not in the form of 'everyday Islamophobia' or 'silent Islamophobia'. Yes, thankfully Islamophobia doesn't manifest overtly in many situations meaning the Muslim converts had few clear-cut Islamophobic experiences to narrate, but no, unfortunately that doesn't mean that Islamophobia is just a 'myth' as Malik claims. Rather, Islamophobia is
typically more subtle, covert and harder to detect. One of the consequences of the consistent yet subtle repetition of Islamophobia is that it leads Muslims to feel certain ways about how they relate to the non-Muslims around them. The typical attitude that the Muslim converts had towards how they felt non-Muslims was captured in the words of Laura, a 35 year old mental health nurse, who said: "So many people don’t like Muslims, hate Muslims..." (Laura). This is troubling because it reflects the way in which the everyday experiences of some Muslims in Britain lead to them conclude that they are disliked and even hated. There are all sorts of unfortunate implications for the individual Muslim due to internalising this perspective such as developing the same type of self-hatred that Frantz Fanon (1967) has explored in relation to colonial complexes, but there is also a more macro societal implication, which is that Muslims can feel alienated from British society, less likely to feel as though they belong here and are valued citizens. The frequent stigmatisation of Islam and demonization of Muslims in Britain then, does not encourage a more ‘cohesive’ society, but one where Islamophobia causes Muslims to feel as though they don’t belong. There has been alot of discussion about whether Muslims can ever feel as though they belong in Britain and whether they can be loyal to British society with those who are less optimistic pointing to 7/7 to offer an example of Muslims born and raised in Britain who murdered fellow British citizens. What is not included in this discussion often enough though is the extent to which experiences of Islamophobia prevent Muslims in Britain from feeling they have a place within the nation. The Muslim converts I interviewed were unique individuals and so it is difficult to generalise about how they saw themselves in relation to British society, but nonetheless, I believe I can categorise the Muslim converts into two types with regards to their feelings about being loyal to Britain. The first type of Muslim convert was the one who perhaps fits the stereotype of the Muslim who refuses to integrate. These Muslim converts were adamant that Islam came before anything else and their allegiance was totally sided towards Muslims and they had the desire to emigrate out of Britain. For example, Zach, a 25 year old trainee teacher, said: "First and last I belong to the Muslim ummah and that’s it really... I cannot hold allegiance to Britain in the same way [anymore]" (Zach). It is tempting to overlook such positioning because it can reinforce stigma about Muslims that they are lacking loyalty to Britain. Yet, I believe it is important to recognise that such feelings do exist amongst some Muslims, but just as importantly, it is crucial to also recognise that these same Muslims who seem to be anti-British were still living lifestyles whereby they co-operated with non-Muslims and even admired certain achievements or traits that they perceived to be established in Britain. Furthermore, the majority of the Muslim converts were those of the second type, which were those who were comfortable reconciling their Islamic identity with their British identity. They perhaps occupied a ‘third space’ of ‘hybridity’ as Homi Bhabha (1994) explained was increasingly common in the complex post-colonial societies we live in. So whilst the Muslim converts reported being interrogated repeatedly about their loyalty to Britain and even faced numerous instances when they had been labelled as ‘traitors’, the majority of my interviewees still identified as 'British Muslims', admiring British people and British society, and desiring to make a contribution to wider society. In fact, in some cases, it was the case that becoming Muslim had meant the Muslim converts had become more loyal to Britain because they felt Islam taught social responsibility and consideration for wider society. This was a position taken by Sumayyah, a 24 year old A Level student, who made the following comments: "Well I suppose I'm very proud to be British now that I'm Muslim. Before I didn't really think of it. Before I was Muslim I just thought about myself but now I'm Muslim I'm very proud to be a British Muslim because... I just am! Now I'm very proud to be a British Muslim, yeah, yeah I am" (Sumayyah). Such accounts where Muslims talk about their loyalty and dedication to British society are rarely mentioned, perhaps because they don’t allow the sensationalist ideas about a radical 5th column to be maintained. There was a clear link between experiences of Islamophobia and feelings or non-feelings of belonging/loyalty though, where those who had felt that Muslims were most victimised were also those who were less likely to feel they belonged comfortably in Britain. For example, the problem according to Michael, a 28 year old software programmer, was not that Muslims didn’t want to belong in Britain, but that others, through their Islamophobia, did not give them space to feel as though they could be ‘at home’ in Britain: "I guess [Muslims] can feel truly at home in Britain in themselves... but whether or not people will allow us to feel at home is a different thing. I think there is an opportunity there but whether or not people will allow us to feel that way is a different thing" (Michael). This sends a clear signal of the necessity of obliterating Islamophobia of all kinds if Muslims are expected to feel as though they are valued and equal citizens in Britain. This point is given even more credence after noting a recent poll conducted by Gallup which found that 77 % of Muslim identified with the UK compared to just 50 % of the general public. This suggests that not only are Muslims generally fairly loyal to Britain and British society, but also
that, they are even more patriotic than the general population! This is not surprising given the masses of resources that have been pumped into ensuring that Muslims in Britain identify as British Muslims. The major obstacle in realising the plan to have a society where Muslims feel comfortable living alongside non-Muslims and vice versa is not Muslims lack of willingness to integrate then, but rather, the everyday and subtle forms of Islamophobia that repeatedly surface and make Muslims feel as though they are inferior and different from other citizens, which is one more reason why the irrational fear or hatred of Islam and/or Muslims, that can take violent forms but more often takes subtle forms, must be challenged more vigorously.

Bibliography


These comments are taken from a recent interview she gave to The Muslim News which can be found here:

Details of the poll can be found here:

1. mailto:l.moosavi@lancaster.ac.uk
2. [http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2005/02/islamophobia/myth/](http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/2005/02/islamophobia/myth/)
3. [http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/they-asked-me-where-bin-laden-was-then-they-took-my-dna-2084743.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/they-asked-me-where-bin-laden-was-then-they-took-my-dna-2084743.html)

IBRAHEEM (Denmark) (2010-10-04 23:27:00)
Please visit my website, select POEMS, then select no 104 on the Index, a long poem called "The New World Order". Islamophobia is Zionist Central Command’s latest project, completely engineered and totally artificial, and follows many proud achievements in the past. Also please get to know my new book about Islamophobia, select ENOUGH! Islamophobia from my homepage. Wake up world!

Maddy Abbas (2010-10-08 16:03:34)
I think you make a really useful distinction between 'everyday' racism and the more extreme examples of racism that are usually given as indicators of Islamophobia. I agree think it is important to think about Islamophobia in more nuanced ways as it is those everyday interactions that shape people's identities - those extreme examples can be put down to one-offs, but knowing that you are going to have to deal with Islamophobia on a daily basis in more subtle ways will have a huge impact and I think this needs to be taken into account more in our discussions of Islamophobia. Point well made, thanks Leon! My other comment would be that you talk about visual markers such as beards, and wearing the hijab, but what about 'racial' markers
such as skin colour? What effect do you think these may have on Islamophobic attitudes and how Muslim converts are treated?

Courtney Hamilton (2010-10-21 23:10:07)
I think the author has fallen into a intellectual trap when he uses the word 'Islamophobia'. The word itself is highly problematic - indeed, the word itself is more or less irrational. What does the word Islamophobia actually mean? This article fails to interrogate the word and its meaning. According to my dictionary a phobia is defined as a morbid or irrational fear. In the U.S, the National Institute of Mental Health define phobias as a form of mental illness with degrees of severity, from mild anxiety to full blown panic attacks. To paraphrase Karl Marx, sociologists have only interpreted the world; the point however is to change it - but, how on Earth are we supposed to change an Islamophobic society, or an individual Islamophobe? With cognitive behavioral therapy perhaps? Herein lay the problem with the term Islamophobia, which is to all intents and purposes, a modern-day buzzword that transforms real political prejudice against Muslims into a psychological condition - a condition that is only susceptible to psychiatric treatment.

An SI author on TV (three times!) | The Sociological Imagination (2011-04-07 08:04:45)
[...] Moosavi from Lancaster University whose article 'Manifestations of Islamophobia and the Loyalty of Muslim Converts' was published on SI a few months ago has made a number of recent TV appearances talking about his [...] 

The Legacy of 9/11 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-16 08:02:13)
[...] former Sociological Imagination author, Leon Moosavi, appears in a documentary about the legacy of [...] 

Add Sociological Imagination on Facebook (2010-10-04 12:01)
Sociological Imagination has 100 friends on Facebook today!

Click [1]here to add us.


University Education: A Luxury for the Rich? (2010-10-05 08:00)
In the aftermath of the shortages of university places this summer, comes another development – a potential rise in tuition fees. At present, the current cap for tuition fees is £3,290, but under a free market, universities would become free to charge more than £10,000 a year for course. The sharp rise would automatically price out many poorer students of a university education, as this [1]article suggests.

A report by Lord Browne recommends that universities should be allowed the keep all the income from tuition fees up to an annual level of £10,000. The report also puts forward that universities should be allowed to cross this threshold if they pay a rising proportion of additional income into a central fund that could be used to help support students from poorer backgrounds.

If the recommendations of the report are accepted, it could have an enormous impact on the current university system, levels of student debt and the politics involved in accessing higher education in general.
Vince Cable, the secretary of state for business, innovation and skills and David Willetts, the higher education minister, are convinced of the need to increase fees alongside "progressive" measures to help the poorest.

Aaron Porter, president of the National Union of Students, said: "If this is true, then Browne's attempt to deliver a free market in higher education is a proof that he is seeking to price out the poorer students. The average debt already is in excess of £25,000."

1. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/02/universities-tuition-fees-students-browne](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/02/universities-tuition-fees-students-browne)

The right protest for the wrong reasons? | Campaign for the Public University (2011-01-13 11:16:45)

[...] that increasing fees will probably have no effect on social mobility. This seems surprising – Yaz Osho has already written here about how poorer students are more likely to be deterred by high fees. [...] 

The right protest for the wrong reasons | The Sociological Imagination (2011-02-02 22:32:31)

[...] that increasing fees will probably have no effect on social mobility. This seems surprising – Yaz Osho has already written here about how poorer students are more likely to be deterred by high fees. [...] 

Review of ‘New Media, Old News: Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age’ edited by Natalie Fenton (2010-10-06 08:00)

New Media, Old News: Journalism & Democracy in the Digital Age is the culmination of a multi-year team research project conducted under the auspices of the Goldsmiths Leverhulme Media Research Centre. Editor Natalie Fenton and eight other Goldsmiths researchers deployed ethnography, interviews, and qualitative content analysis to study the effect of new media upon news and current affairs journalism 'that purports to be for the public good and in the public interest, even if this is experienced as no more than an ideal ethical horizon both by those who produce it and those who consume it' (3). Twelve tightly interlocking chapters revolve around the following question posed in the specific context of the UK journalistic field: Is optimism about the democratizing potential of new media warranted?

Unfortunately, the answer to this question is, with hardly any exception, a resounding negative. Although there are occasional attempts to moderate the book's pessimistic tone, it is hard not to conclude from the team's research that the case for democratization through new media is grossly overstated and that traditional structures of power will not be overturned. New media, they find, has both enabled and accelerated shifts in journalistic practice that results in, among other things: the homogenization of news content across competing outlets and multiple platforms; improper, sometimes outright unethical, sourcing of articles; a deterioration of working conditions for journalists; increasing reliance upon a few, trusted mainstream sources at the expense of marginalized voices; and forces on the periphery of the journalistic field such as NGOs acting only to reinforce existing practices instead of reforming them.

Chapters can be roughly divided into those focusing upon mainstream, corporate journalism and those focusing upon alternative news media outlets. All of the contributions to this book are superb, and because the high quality is so consistent none are especially standout. Of particular interest to students and sociologists new to the
study of journalism, however, is James Curran’s ‘Technology Foretold’, an analysis of the unrealized hype that seems to accompany every new media form, from cable television to the dotcom bubble, and a chapter co-authored by Angela Philips, Nick Couldry, and Des Freedman on the characteristics and pre-conditions of ethical journalism. On the other hand, those seeking the cutting edge will undoubtedly appreciate original case studies of the openDemocracy website by James Curran and Tamara Witschge and the press release culture of NGOs by Natalie Fenton.

In sum, *New Media, Old News* is a sobering and thoroughly-convincing antidote to any lingering utopian notions of Internet-centred ‘techno-optimism’ (188). But if we cannot rely upon new media to cure journalism’s ills, what can be done? Fortunately, Rodney Benson’s concluding chapter offers the following three-part prescription: ‘first, to maintain and even strengthen the autonomy of core mainstream media, whether public or private; second, to maintain and expand diversity at the margins (using the state to promote speech that is under-produced by the market, when necessary); and most of all, third, to figure out ways to connect the two’ (199). It’s a tall order to be certain, but reformers and researchers alike have Fenton’s book to thank for advancing the conversation in such fruitful directions.

[1]Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge.


Sutton Trust claims overseas student fees could present pattern for future (2010-10-07 08:00)

The possibility of rising tuition fees has been headlining the news in the recent weeks and months, while anticipation over the official review of university fees being conducted by Lord Browne is mounting. In the midst of that anticipation, education charity Sutton Trust has just conducted a [1]study which focuses on overseas student fees. The report discusses how those fees have risen drastically as a result of being unregulated and used to subsidize home-fee paying students.

Sutton Trust has used overseas fees to argue that such a pattern of unregulated rises can and may be replicated for all degree courses if tuition fee rates are allowed to be raised. As such, the Trust recommended a comprehensive package of grants, loans and other forms of support for students who would be unable to afford higher fees, as well as suggesting that those from low income homes should be offered a first year at university for free.

In light of the fact that Lord Browne’s review is still to come, reports like this one from the Trust support growing anxiety over the situation facing students in the future. To that point, UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt said, “As we approach the delivery of the university funding review we are hearing more and more dark rumours about what Lord Browne might recommend. However, we are hearing no radical or progressive options. If the funding review simply lists ways to squeeze more money out of students and their families then it will have spectacularly failed its remit.”

The right protest for the wrong reasons | The Sociological Imagination (2011-01-12 08:02:30)
 [...] the student protests have forced from the Coalition. The Government seem to have taken up the Sutton Trust’s suggestion to give students from low-income households their first year of tuition for free, and [...] 

The right protest for the wrong reasons? | Campaign for the Public University (2011-01-13 11:12:41)
 [...] the student protests have forced from the Coalition. The Government seem to have taken up the Sutton Trust’s suggestion to give students from low-income households their first year of tuition for free, and [...] 

Review of “The European Identity: A Faltering Project” by Jurgen Habermas (2010-10-08 08:00)

In the timely work, “The European Identity: A Faltering Project” by Jurgen Habermas, we find four principal concepts: transnational authority, transnational public spheres, a European identity and normativity shaping the book together and yet each of them existing in conceptual isolation.

The need for different kinds of international organizations is the guiding light of the book. The weaknesses of nation states in an increasingly interdependent world society account for the growing need of another kind of world order. The roles of Human Rights in this new order as well as identity are paid tribute to: the sovereign national states that lost much of their autonomous decision making power are operating almost like structures which exclusively implement human rights within their national borders. It is at this point that public spheres come to play and a relation between public spheres and supranational institutions emerge. Habermas claims that the need for a transnational authority can only be attained by the empowerment of transnational public spheres. However, in our time, it is the nation states which are holding the national public spheres trapped within themselves. The main challenge in attaining a transnational public society is the lack of responsiveness of national public spheres to one another.

A similarity can be drawn between national identities and national public spheres. It is of utmost importance to bear in mind that nation-states and national identities also have gone through historical processes which constructed new collective identities during the 19th century. Nonetheless, creation and empowerment of a transnational public sphere is not similar to the possession of historical memories and the historical processes that the nation states have gone through. This is the point where the work of Habermas shines at its best: it is not the creation of public spheres but the transformation of them which needs to be aimed at. What would prove to be fruitful is rendering existing national public spheres more responsive to one another, with the influence of media which goes beyond "infotainment" (from an Adorno and Horkheimer, “Dialectic of Enlightenment” point of view) and offers substantial commentaries that would prove to be the strongest tool along the way. Transformation of national public spheres needs to be accompanied by a transformation of the power of nation-states along a cosmopolitan path rather than undermining their zone of influence.

The pathway pointed out to seems a difficult one with very many obligations rather than a natural one which flows easily. This is why we find normativity and idealism and arguments defending these two concepts in the book. Habermas stands firmly on the optimistic spectrum and defends his optimism with a theoretical claim: “The cynical recognition of an unjust world does not point out to a lack of knowledge, but to a corruption of the will”.

Another relation between two seemingly distinct concepts that emerges from the book is that between social theory and legal theory. This growing relationship is raised by discussing legal concepts such as the role of international treaties as basis of legitimation for governance beyond borders. “Which one can embrace which, legal theorist
the sociologist or the sociologist the legal theorist?” Habermas asks. Regardless of the answer, the importance of contemplating the two ideas not in isolation but as strongly related concepts seems to be one of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from this new book. The harmonious picture presented in the book shows the symbiotic relationship between theory and practice; theories discussed are firmly grounded in the world, and ideals which may be charged with normativity are always supported by concrete examples. “Social Sciences and Philosophy have drifted further apart than the founders of critical theory could have ever imagined” Habermas states in the Preface. “Europe: The Faltering Project” is a good example to explain why behavioural political science should regret digressing from theory.

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**Foreign Accent Syndrome (2010-10-09 08:00)**

There are thought to be only 60 cases of Foreign Accent Syndrome in the world. People who have it start speaking with an entirely different accent.

Kay Russell, from Bishops Cleeve near Cheltenham, suffers from the extremely rare neurological disorder. After a serious migraine, she woke up with what sounds like a French accent.

Doctors believe it is triggered following a stroke or head injury, when tiny areas of the brain linked with language, pitch and speech patterns are damaged.

Read more and [1]watch a film on the BBC website.


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Lucy Mayblin (2010-10-11 09:15:01)  
Urrmmm... bit of a random article?! Amusing though. I'd like a Franch accent!

Milena Kremakova (2010-10-12 21:37:58)  
You're right, er, we just thought it was a stunning piece of news, perhaps we should have mused on the social consequences of sudden change of accent which is normally perceived as integral to personality, like part of one's body! :)

Sociological Imagination (2010-10-12 07:02:37)  
Probably the least sociological thing to have gone up on the website thus far but I thought it was interesting! I've always thought a German accent would suit me...

Milena Kremakova (2010-10-12 21:39:13)  
ah, no one asks me whether I'd like a Slavic accent ;-}
In recent years, blogging became increasingly popular all over the world (well, predominantly, but not exclusively, all over its European and North-American parts), exploding traditional ideas of news reporting, journalism, literature - and challenging the public-private divide. Blogs exist in a quasi-public environment which exposes thoughts and images that would formerly have remained tucked away in heads, diaries, photoalbums, and closets. Blog contents are both abundant and varied, yet more frequently thin, rather than profound: as a famous anonymous quote goes, 'never before have so many people with so little to say said so much to so few.'

Blogs devoted to food, fashion, handicraft, hobbies, pets et al., have one thing in common: their writers and readers indulge in pretty things. They are an epitome of conspicuous consumption (Baudrillard): they skirt (pun intended) the surface of meaning, and hail the meaning of surface - literally - by endorsing the value of prettiness as a reason for blogging. In the sea of blogs about fashion, there is a small niche of blogs which mix two stereotypically incongruent fields: academia and fashion.

[2]

[3]
It is worth noting that, in one sense, the content of these blogs is strictly non-academic. They focus entirely on the visual and material “package” with which academic jobs seem to be associated. The multitude of successful blogs that share a very similar language and imagery suggests that the importance of this particular material package is accepted by more than just the blogs’ authors. In another sense, however, these blogs are academic - but not scientific. The adjective academic - devoid of discipline specification - can, in fact, serve, as an umbrella term for the everyday life (Goffman) that has come to surround work in academic institutions; or, as other sociologists put it, the ways in which academic work is grounded and embodied. In the blogging tradition of exposing all that is private, it is only logical that problem of clothes worn by academics deserves its niche on the blogging market.

The academic fashion genre opens up many potentially sociological questions. Are blogs about ‘fashion and academia’ actually blogs about academic fashion; fashion in academia; fashion which is out of, but should be in, academia; fashion and appearance as an integral part of today’s academia; fashion as a wish or as reflected by some people working in academic jobs?

[4]

The magical... and its traces in the mundane.
Are these blogs exploiting fantasies, filling up a void (in the lives of contemporary academics, or in fashion?), promoting a certain lifestyle (and affirming the "po-mo" necessity of having one), mixing the unmixable, affirming (or breaking?) gender stereotypes? Are they a quest for consumption that individualises its consumer, a fight against the tendency to turn into "mass produced", grey-collar academic workers? Are they outlets for the shy, earning tools for the enterprising (many of these blogs use banner advertisement as a tool for earning money), or just one of the plethora of all possible quasi-work, quasi-rest, past-times for people employed in academic jobs?

As I am no specialist in either gender studies, leisure, or fashion, I shall leave my new discovery for you to browse, judge and reflect on - and, hopefully, comment!

Below is but a short selection of blogs about fashion and academia:

[5] 

Academic Cinderella

[6] Fashion for nerds 's statement reveals the stereotype: its author works "in an environment where fashion takes a back seat to... well, everything." The blog is an outlet for creative and expressive impulses, redirecting them away from of the author’s usual 9-5 "habitat": "Since stylish clothing in a company full of scientists is a bit like pearls before swine, I decided to create this blog, where perhaps my daily efforts can be more thoroughly appreciated"

[7] Fashionable academics are a group of co-authors, who write their blog with the conviction that "Accessorizing and knowing how to dress with style, in addition to researching, writing articles, and being good teachers, help to make for a balanced life"

The authors of [8] Academichic introduce themselves as "a consortium of feminist academics, in the Midwest and Northeast, on a crusade against the ill-fitting polyester suit of academic yore."

[9] The glamorousgradstudent introduces herself as a "scientist and PhD student with a penchant for pretty..."
things".

[10] What would a nerd wear is "an archive of grad student style" created by a "bike-riding bookworm".

"[11] The Return of Peacockery" is a title of a post on fashionableacademics.blogspot.com

1. http://geekthreads.blogspot.com/search?updated-max=2010-06-16T16%3A08%3A00-07%3A00&max-results=10

Here Comes Everybody: the power of organising without organisations (2010-10-12 08:00)

How is social media reshaping social organization? In this short lecture [1] Clay Shirky attempts to answer this complex and pertinent question. This website itself can be taken as an interesting example of social media, as affordable internet hosting and content management systems have facilitated a form of intellectual communication which sits between informal social networks and formal academic publishing. It can be hard to gain analytical purchase upon a phenomena so embedded in our daily practice: while Shirky’s work is far from the final story, it’s an interesting starting point.

[EMBED]

Browne Report Recommends Lifting Cap on Tuition Fees (2010-10-12 11:02)

The much anticipated university finance review by Lord Browne has been published today and does indeed recommend that the current £3,290 cap on tuition fees be abandoned, as many speculated it would. It proposes a free market approach to tuition fees and contains exemplary models which show tuition fees rising upwards of £12,000 a year.

[1] Lord Browne’s report, however, doesn’t advocate for unchecked rises. It advises that universities which charge more than £6,000 a year would have to put part of that fee towards subsidizing student borrowing, more
necessary in the face of steeper fees. Browne claims to be mindful of student needs, explaining that his plan would not leave students with debts like mortgages and that they would only be required to pay back their loans once their earnings reached £21,000 per year. Even Browne, though, acknowledges that this new competitive approach to university funding could mean that universities, like other competitive businesses, fail to succeed and must close. The report claims that they will now compete not only over students, but also fee levels and new providers of education.

This proposed increase in fees is at odds both with the election pledges of Liberal Democrats as well as the UCU lecturer’s union, which described the review’s plan as “the final nail in the coffin for affordable higher education.”

For additional coverage from BBC, click [2]here.


University of Sanctuary (2010-10-13 08:00)

What is the idea of the university? Perhaps the university should be the creator of knowledge, the repository of ideas, the temple of learning? These may or may not chime with your idea of the university, and if they do the aspirations doubtless seem in tension with the realities of the institutions which you have encountered. But have you ever thought about the idea of the university as a sanctuary? The use of ‘sanctuary’ here refers to a safe haven for people fleeing persecution, also known as asylum seekers and refugees. Could universities be places where asylum seekers and refugees are welcomed and supported, as part of a broader project of making the places where they find themselves living more welcoming? Is this part of your idea of the university? For two groups working in Sheffield and Bristol, that is just their vision. Here I report on their work.

Last December at the [1]University of the West of England in Bristol, [2]Dr Ibrahim Seaga Shaw launched the [3]Refugee and Migrant Support Hub (RMS Hub). It began with a [4]CARA (Council for Assisting Refugee Academics) funded pathfinder research project in 2008 on what the existing and required structures were for making the university more welcoming to refugee academics. Their report can be found [5]here. The Hub, launched in response to this work, provides support for refugee and asylum seeking scholars (and potential scholars), research, training, and knowledge exchange. They liaise with faculties and departments across the university, providing a single point of access to facilitate academic and educational opportunities for scholars at risk and forced migrants who might be the scholars of tomorrow. Bursaries and fee waivers are part of the help on offer, as is clear advice on the transferability of qualifications obtained abroad. In June the Hub hosted a conference on ‘[6]Education without Borders’ as part of [7]Refugee Week. It is necessary for the Hub to reach out beyond the university and so part of its remit is to engage with community groups and NGOs who work with asylum seekers and refugees in order to attract attention to the opportunities on offer at UWE.
The Sheffield project was inspired by the RMS Hub and is really in the early stages of development. Earlier this year a small group of staff, students and City of Sanctuary activists got together to discuss the possibility of creating a University of Sanctuary associated with the City of Sanctuary project. In the proceeding months they have facilitated the University of Sheffield signing up to be a Sanctuary affiliated organisation. City of Sanctuary is a social movement which began in 2005 with the aim of making cities more welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees. In practical terms this involves starting projects, bringing people and organisations who are already doing work to help asylum seekers together, getting the local council to commit to the label ‘City of Sanctuary’ and endorsing its sentiments (a significant barrier for some cities gaining the Sanctuary badge), and encouraging businesses and other organisations in the city to pledge to do their bit. Such organisations might, it is proposed, include universities. Thus sprung the idea of Universities of Sanctuary.

The group in Sheffield contacted the university STAR (Student Action for Refugees) group and organised an open meeting for STAR reps and other interested parties. The initial meeting was small but over time word got around and volunteers started to get into contact with the initiators. In the following three months the group managed to get the University to sign up to be on the list of CARA affiliated organisations. Ideas being floated are bursaries for asylum seekers and refugees to study at the university, fee wavers for asylum seekers, moving to charging asylum seekers domestic fee rates as opposed to the international fees that many are currently subject to. Allowing asylum seekers and refugees to use university facilities such as the library free of charge is another possibility. Law students offering their skills through legal advice and research (such as country situation reports) has also been touted. Swansea University already has a Law and Asylum Group doing just this. Students and established academics acting as mentors, and increased prominence of the work of CARA in the institution are possible. The expansion of volunteering opportunities with refugee supporting organisations is another free activity. Finally, awareness raising amongst the staff and student body through special events, campaigns and training sessions would facilitate myth-busting on asylum related issues.

The sceptic in you is asking ‘but what about the money?’ In these cash strapped times, not to mention in the age of the neoliberal university, funding support for refugee and asylum seeking scholars might not be a top priority for British universities. The Bristol based Hub obtained funding from the Bristol Legacy Commission, match funded by the university, while the initial pathfinder project was funded through CARA. One idea suggested in Sheffield is getting the alumni association to propose that members fund or part fund a refugee scholarship in a particular department. Collaboration with public and private organisations for vocational courses is also a possibility.

In Sheffield the idea has taken off so quickly because senior staff in the university are keen to make it work on a personal ethical level. But there are benefits to be had for the university which make the idea ‘sell-able’ if the ethical commitment isn’t necessarily there. For example, the RMS Hub business plan 2009-12 states that

“The Hub will be an answer to demand of professional development and training from an increasingly culturally diverse local population. It will also help UWE: (1) boost student recruitment, especially mature students, (2) fulfil equality and diversity commitments to its staff and student body, and (3) enhance widening participation and promote human rights across the University and its federation”.

Speaking the language of ‘corporate social responsibility’, ‘community relations’, ‘equalities’, ‘widening participation’, ‘employability’ and ‘CV building’ might prove vital in getting official university endorsement of the project. To some extent, then, the track to follow depends on which priorities the university values most – not all have aspirations to widen participation.

Much of the potential of creating a University Sanctuary lies not in simply funding places on courses but in a whole range of activities which make the university more welcoming and raise awareness of asylum issues amongst the university community. These things don’t need to cost anything. With the badge saying ‘we are a University of Sanctuary’ comes a challenge to staff and students alike to be creative with the concept, to see where the idea takes
them. There are clearly challenges and barriers to this aspiration becoming a reality. The neoliberalisation of higher education, funding cuts, legal constraints on what asylum seekers can do, the fear that with high level endorsement what is a grass roots movement at heart could be co-opted by senior university managers... But there's something in it isn't there? The seed of an idea that could just take off. It’s up to us to help that seed to grow.

Links

Council for Assisting Refugee Academics: www.academic-refugees.org

Scholars at Risk: scholarsatrisk.nyu.edu

Student Action for Refugees: www.star-network.org.uk

The Refugee Council: www.refugeecouncil.org.uk

Refugee Action: www.refugee-action.org.uk

1. http://www.uwe.ac.uk/

Milena Kremakova (2010-10-13 16:33:39)
Very innovative idea (not in the sense of "new", but in the sense of "how did no one think of this before")!

The Sausage Factory (2010-10-13 13:43)

Yesterday saw the publication of the latest Really Open University offering ‘The Sausage Factory’. It was a direct response to the [1]Browne Review of UK higher education funding and offered a critical reading of the recommendations proposing a lifting of the fee cap. The publication predicts the privatization of universities, the narrowing of participation and a ‘brain drain’ of top researchers to countries with a more hospitable HE environment. Read The Sausage Factory [2]here.

The Really Open University was started by a group of students and staff at the University of Leeds in opposition to the neoliberalisation of higher education. You can find out more about them [3]here.
Food Adjectives (an exercise in deconstruction) (2010-10-14 08:00)

If someone had told me twenty years ago that some day I would yearn for the simplicity of socialist consumption, I would have laughed. In 1988, I was seven, the country's economy was crumbling down, electricity was rationed (a scheme known as 3:1 or later 2:1, e.g. 3 or 2 hours with electricity, 1 without), the supermarket shelves were empty, and I was sent out at 7 am each morning to queue for a litre of milk and two half-litre jars of yoghurt, because the shop opened at 7.30, and by 8 am, there was no milk left to buy. When I was a child, there was enough food, but very little variety: one type of rice, one type of butter, two types of bread (white wheat and brown rye), a couple of brands of chocolate, one brand of chewing gum... The socialist world's attitude to food was pragmatic: food was a necessity, not a luxury product.

Yet, as I find myself in England in 2010, I realise that I have forgotten what food shortage was like. Instead,
there is a deficit of substance, clothed in an overgrowth of branding symbolism. The childish fascination with the bright coloured wraps of foreign sweets - a rare treat, accessible only to kids whose fathers travelled abroad for work - has vanished. I wonder if today's kids are ever fascinated by this carnal carnival of colours - most likely, they just take it for granted. I find myself thinking how nice it would be to walk into a shop and come out with a loaf of white bread, half a kilo of pork sausages, a half-litre glass jar of cows' milk yoghurt, a kilo of cheese, and two kilos of ripe tomatoes - no colours, and no adjectives added.

Instead, I drive into a supermarket attached to a petrol station and purchase 'Unsweetened Greek style probiotic yoghurt' in a multicolour plastic can. The yoghurt is organic, suitable for vegetarians (but not for vegans), needs to be refrigerated and, once opened, must be consumed within 3 days. It tells me to See Lid for Use By Date, warns me against trying to freeze it (as if anyone would want to freeze yoghurt!), and restricts my culinary experiments by directing me to "Splash the yoghurt over fresh fruit or meringues, or curries, or stews". I begin to doubt whether I ever really knew what yoghurt is, what it is for, and how it is eaten.

Admittedly, for a foreigner, reading all the information printed on a typical can of yoghurt is very educational. But this takes away the bread of ESL teachers - and locals don't even appreciate it. Why bother? I take out my plastic spoon, dig in, swallow the offence, and sublimate my indignation at being treated like a child, by performing an exercise in deconstruction.

The information which comes as an integral part of the food we buy serves multiple roles: it tries to advertise, advise, direct, guide, educate, prescribe, safeguard (both consumer and producer), seduce, suggest, and warn, all at once. It expects consumers to be also readers, and members of one epistemic community who all understand the complex language used to convey the information. The abundance makes sense, if we see the bits of data as answers to questions. Asking those unvoiced questions allows us to "read" the meta-text of the yoghurt wrapping and understand the public "debate" which is taking place on yoghurt cans all over the European Single Market.

The first revelation is that this can of yoghurt has been produced under organic standards. I know what "organic" means now, yet, the adjective "organic" retains for me some of the first impression I had, when I first heard it used in relation to food. The unknown word sounded synonymous with plastic, rubber, polystyrene, petroleum, and paint. It had to mean something unhealthy, tasteless, and artificial, something that came in a test-tube. In the best case, it was redundant: what can a vegetable possibly be, if not organic? Could it be made up of non-organic matter, devoid of living tissue molecules, such as amino acids and carbohydrates? Of course, the adjective "organic" is not used in the obscure personalised sense which I have just evoked. It is part of a publicly accepted system of symbolic meanings. It is a key word whose use allows the producer to make several points at once: endorse the cutting-edge scientific discoveries, subscribe to the "benevolent" group of producers who are concerned with their consumers' health, distinguish his product from the "dark" side of careless producers who insist on producing unhealthy food, and legitimise charging a higher price.
Yet another example is the note on the potential ability of probiotic bacteria contained in the yoghurt to "support digestive health" as "part" of their "daily diet". The presumption of being ill until proven healthy pathologises an unsuspecting and perhaps healthy consumer. This discourse also enfranchises microbes as social actors by endowing them with the power to control the health of humans (remember Latour’s fascinating analysis of the "Pasteurisation of France" - in French called Les Microbes: guerre et paix, 1984).

Some of the information seems to state a truism: apparently, the yoghurt contains cow’s milk. What else could yoghurt possibly contain? Cow’s hoofs? The way health-related information is presented also serves to invent and "launch" new social groups, e.g. "nut allergy sufferers" (for whom this particular yoghurt is allegedly unsuitable, as I find out from a pretty sign made of a blue square and circle).

All these carefully worded phrases reveal a recent shift in the world of food. Food is no longer unquestionably good for you. The abundance of food calls into question its value. Health – and digestive health, in particular – is no longer an entitlement that can be taken for granted: it is a success which no longer depends on nature. It must be strived for and achieved. It has been de-naturalised. However, the responsibility is too heavy, to be placed solely in the hands of the consumer. The yoghurt producer – forced by the relevant government or non-governmental agency – takes over (or accepts, in exchange of money) some of that responsibility.

(To be contd. After I have my yoghurt and negotiate division of power with its friendly bacteria. )

* Thanks to David Kyuranov for his comments

See also [4]Too much choice kills the choice?

Reclaiming Learning - introduction (2010-10-15 08:00)

The Challenge: "Given that structures function to give persons powers, the specific use that agents make of these structural capacities is not pre determined by the nature of the structures themselves. Alternative courses are open to agents: they may simply perform the routine actions that are necessary to reproduce the existing structures, or they may seek to modify or altogether to transform those structures." (Callinicos, 2006:190)

The Questions: Is there something fundamental to our species that creates conditions and dimensions of being that enable people to take those 'alternative courses' of action - the submission of our will to the structures we have created historically and our capacity to challenge the very foundations of these structures - and to do them almost at that same time and in the same spaces. To submit, to resist and to change make up the contours of our lives, are they separate geographical lines, do we ascend and descend across submission, resistance and change or are these 'impossible contours' that cross the life span vulnerable to a past, those practices, that project people into their present, that moment of choice when the very structures that bear down on us provide that possibility of a future that is cast in front of us as a shadow? The crucial point here is that the shadow moves and turns as we turn corporeally. The future thrown before us is within our material grasp precisely because the structures we erect provide a capacity for us to submit. If we have that capacity to do something, we have it in moments before the act, do those moments provide that space that may yet provide years of servitude or struggle?

These moments contain the past, those historical, social and cultural locations that form some of the shapes that we call identity, reality, life. They do bear down on people and to deny them is a facile gesture, to be born in a disabling society is to, at that very moment, take on those disabling characteristics. What you then do across the life span with this reality forms the basis of Sartre’s "Roads" (The Last Chance Roads Of Freedom iv, Translated by Vasey, Craig, 2009, London, Continuum.) and the challenges of the grapes of wrath:

Ma: Scared, ha! I ain’t never gonna be scared no more. I was though, for a while it looked as though we was beat, good and beat. Looked like we didn’t have nobody in the whole wide world but enemies. Like nobody was friendly no more. Made me feel kind of bad, and scared too. Like we was lost and nobody cared.

Pa: You’re the one that keeps us goin’, Ma. I ain’t no good no more, and I know it. Seems like I spend all my time these days thinkin’ how it used to be. Thinkin’ of home. I ain’t never goin to see it no more.

Ma: Well, Pa. A woman can change better than a man. A man lives, sorta, well in jerks. Baby’s
This essay has a point of departure, the process of learning, however running through it is a debate about the relationship between our condition and what might constitute our nature.

Human nature is an evolving multi dimensional process, in which the different dimensions of life (see below) conflict and also bond to push forward learning and development. The complexity of this process is deepened when we realise that both learning and development are both dimensions that push and draw individuals through life. At any one time historically - over centuries, decades weeks and even moments the dominance of particular social, cultural and historical dimensions bear down on our nature, our energies, our foresight, our curiosity. This is the human condition, the point is that this condition is not a given, it is the external expression of a particular set of relationships between the dimensions of life - usually the spatial and temporal moment in our development that we see, at that moment, as the given and taken for granted. But there is a tension here because the condition emerges from multi dimensional struggles across the life span. So such struggles can have catastrophic and barbaric outcomes and at the same time those outcomes are only recognisable as barbarism because we also experience and strive for justice, mercy, knowledge and the power to have all these things. That this profoundly human experience has been invested in god should, given the record of our condition over centuries, be hardly surprising - the point is it is we who invest in god, and the argument is should that considerable investment in our spiritless world be re - directed (See Marx's arguments on this in the later sections of this essay) so that nature and condition can provide the social space for the free development of each individual.

Many people might argue that these questions and such deliberation is both tendentious and subject to prolixity, why not just get on with life? 'Getting on' is however the problem: The very words resonate with disability, how do we 'get on'?

Born into a home in which I was deeply loved and well cared for it came as a surprise to me that at the age of 11 I was a 'failure' along with many others in our educational institutions in 1963. I had to get on in a secondary school and remember creating a social and psychological haven in being 'average' in that system. Having failed I relocated myself in the B stream of that school as average in relationship to my friends in the C stream, 'B' ness prevented friendship with those in the D stream.

That life in school was the beginning again of my political and social consciousness, that past in which I shaped an identity that refused to fit in even in my own fantasy of averageness. There in 'B Land' I took on a socialism, stimulated partly by my mother, and used that knowledge to keep that fracture line that partly separated me from my friends. It was the beginning.
So if we imagine our lives as a series of beginnings, using Brendan Kennelly’s evocative poem ‘Begin’ (Astley, N. 2002, Staying Alive, Bloodaxe Books) as inspiration, I can count my days at Lancaster University, an attempt to be a probation officer, the period of dropping out in Stockport as beginnings. Through out these days and in 32 and continuing years of marriage and raising three children I have charted the multi dimensional struggles of every individual through my own experiences, particularly of those successive working class struggles in the 1980’s, 90’s and ’noughties’ to hold onto the post war social and economic settlement.

Intellectually much of this experience and practice was moulded by my participation in the struggle between Stalinism and Trotskyism in the context of that assault on Social Democracy by successive Governments since the fall of Edward Heath’s government following the 1974 miners strike. That political frame of reference for my own modest involvement in working class politics was broken in my professional and personal engagement with the effects of pit closure and the attempts at regeneration of what are urban settlements in rural areas - the pit villages.

The break led me to conclude that the human experience of pit closure and top down regeneration initiatives required a return to Marxism on the following basis.

It became clearer to me as I researched both closures and regeneration that the first interest of both individuals and groups of individuals was their position as human beings submitting their will, often as community volunteers, to the structures of regeneration through a process that manipulated the capacity of people to act even in the dire circumstances of local long term unemployment, ill health, poor housing and weak transport infrastructure. The ideology of empowerment and building social capital was parasitical on this capacity to act, modifying and manipulating it, making that capacity to act one that was given by the structures of regeneration in the context of local deficits that could only be met if each individual and group submitted themselves to the financial governance and strategic direction of external regeneration bodies.

In these circumstances traditional ways of thinking about how people could organise their own resources and capacity for change simply did not meet the realities of experience in these isolated communities. In order to begin it was necessary for me to strip away the past as a fossilised set of ideas and look for the kernel of development and being in our humanity. A series of questions emerged:

What process would allow me to do this?

Which thinkers could help prevent personal submission and collapse before the process of ‘getting on with it’ crushed ideas and innovation?

At what point in both development and ‘becoming’ were people both at their most innovative and practical in dealing with social, economic and cultural isolation and at the same time most vulnerable to manipulation and modification?

My point of departure was in the very process that is uniquely located in every individual’s capacity to both think and act, a process subject to the struggle between those structural forces that would reduce it to the acquisition of discrete skills and that collective capacity for people to share the process and its contribution to thought, action and self development

That process is learning and its relationship to the emergence and becoming of identity. That is where I would begin again.
A useful discussion at this point would be how we work out the relative importance of these resources, as Brecht said, "Learn the ABC, it's not enough but learnt it". It may well be however that the skills Brecht refers to can only be of use when we both individually and collectively recognise that they help us to construct in words the kind of living together that leaps of the page and into our practices, but first the practice and then the words. Historically we have tens of thousands of years through which our practices developed, many are inscribed into our actions today, how do we develop those historical and cultural traces in our practices that celebrate the actions we call just, fair and kind in daily life? How can we create practical conditions in which people have the space to stop doing as they are told because they have begun to see that the taken for granted, the common sense, literally 'the way we do things round here' is not the way we want them to be. In this sense the major critical resource created by reciprocal self development could be an incredulity toward those narratives (no apologies to Lyotard!) that dress as human practice, added value, quality, fit for purpose and at that barbaric end of capital's march across our planet, that appalling concept collateral damage. When we become simply incredulous that any one could propose that we manage the change in global temperature rather than stopping that rise, we have started that process of development that potentially impels us to gather greater and more resources to defeat such proposals. At such times we may even decide we need both the practice of direct action and the lexicon of science. This is reclaiming learning at the very centre of self development.

The reclaiming of learning begins with a return to Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and I would argue at this point a useful point of departure for the rescuing of the revolutionary content of Vygotsky’s work, material for further work. Indeed the contribution to learning set out below offers up a series of points of departure for discussions about how we can transcend our current condition and contest that the latter is the end game of a deep and pervasive pathology. The central discussion is to what extent can an examination of the process of learning raise our understanding of human nature so that we can practically use that understanding to transcend our current human condition, the point is that human nature in its fully rounded multi dimensional sense creates the conditions for the emergence of the human condition and therefore is engaged dialectically with the genesis and continued historical and cultural development of the condition, the former is our first base for transcending a condition that Suzuki has called a "blind date with disaster" (News paper interview Suzuki 2008).

Vygotsky proposed that the development of a fully rounded human psychology has a multi dimensional gene-

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sis that develops from and emerges in a series of domains that have historical, social and cultural characteristics. These characteristics work as dimensions that shape human life and in turn take on a shape from the practice that constitutes life, in this sense life and human practice are constantly mediated, as Brecht observed "everything changes, you can make a fresh start with your final breath." It could be argued that my position is little more than a restatement of Activity theory, "both dialogism and activity theory move from the social to the individual in their analyses. The object of analysis is neither texts nor minds nor conceptual schemes per se but what is in between-the social intercourse." (Russell 1997:509) However in pursuing the notion of humanity as self development I want to develop a point of departure from systems, methods and theories that apply our understanding to the subject, understanding, and rather attempt to get inside understanding, it is an attempt to negate those social vectors that introduce modified and manipulated notions and concepts of humanity, that transform the latter into a historically and culturally located human condition through tendentious claims that it was ever thus. Points of departure will be a recurring motif in my essay as will the theme of beginning, precisely because one of our most basic and rich conceptual frameworks for understanding is our grasp of movement in time and space and our desire to control that motion, even as we feel that it controls us - "time, you old gypsy man, will you not stay?" The first beginning takes up Vygotsky’s conceptual framework for human development, our development as a species on the basis of four inter related genetic domains, the phylo genetic, socio-cultural and historical domain, the onto genetic and micro genetic domain (Wertsch 1985).

Essentially the individual carries a location as an individual within a family or small social group, neighbours, friends and so on, however this personal history is located in the social space that the group inhabits, this is a complex arena in which many different individual histories meet both as products of relationships generated in small groups and in unique relationships with others from other groups. This ‘dance to the music of time’ (Powell 1997) takes place in the context of the multi layered development of the species across human history, it is here in this continually developing social space that cause and effect in the emergence and development of our identity struggle both against and with each other. This is not an emergent plea for relativism, rather it is an assertion that the complexity of social life, our understanding of who and what we are become active dimensions in the genesis of human beings - a real struggle to be takes place on a daily basis and in turn goes some way to explaining the remarkable resilience of the human being even in conditions that leave biological life flickering at its end.

It is almost as though the individual is subject to and active in many beginnings, the maturation process of each beginning may well take place in the continuing history of the species as a whole, in particular cultural, national or socio economic formations but both the beginning and the process of maturation also find their place in the development of the individual across her or his own life span. In this bold sense, I would argue that each individual carries the whole of human history in their physical frame, repeats, develops and changes that history in the relationships each individual enters into socially. So every particular action, practice and thought contains that universal material that provides the shape and depth of our common humanity - the point is we make that humanity, its metamorphosis into the human condition cannot be traced in linear fashion back to some original sin or set of actions. The human condition is the visible manifestation of that continuing struggle between the dimensions of life that we call the social, cultural, psychological and indeed biologically genetic. Precisely because learning actively engages with all these dimensions, and because we have a social field of practice where we engage in learning on a fairly formal basis I feel it is a good place to begin an investigation of who we are and crucially use that ability to explore ourselves to provide the ontological basis for a challenge to notions that this is as good as it gets, and that only the management of our condition needs to be attended to. In this sense I’m not concerned with constructing a learning theory or with making claims for particular theories of learning because my claims about learning rest on the multi dimensional form and content of learning. The struggle between form and content is illustrative of my approach. Take the example of that learning which takes place in a particular kind of schooled environment in which particular kinds of knowledge are culturally transmitted in classrooms of people whose sole commonality is their age. What interests me is that the dominance of that dimension and the dominance of disciplinary models for the transmission of knowledge - the classroom and the teacher - work together to marginalise, push away, other dimensions and act to manipulate an individuals perception of their ability to understand the
world. Learning theories (Wood, 2005) can help us to construct models for educational practice that can go some way to ameliorating this situation but this particular use of theory often sterilises the theory, reducing it to the status of an educational tool. This is what happened to Vygotsky, whose desire to both understand mind and change minds so that the socialist construction of society could form a new material basis for communism was effectively excised with the first publication of Thought and Language in 1962 and the promotion of an image of Vygotsky "as a sort of early neobehaviorist of cognitive development" (see John-Steiner & Cole's report of this image, 1978: ix).

In this sense I reject the notion that learning is a managed social skill or set of skills that can be theorised, rather I say it is the practical manifestation of the workings of those complex and contradictory dimensions that make us human.

The process of learning unfortunately is often characterised in very simple terms, there are those who would claim that our learning is much like the working of software in a computer and that we are hard wired inside our brains to particular kinds of learning and ways of living. The notion that mind is just the result of electrical connections that take place in the grey matter in our heads is also very strong, I think Tallis (Guardian interview June 2008) is right when he says that such people are neurotheologists. The brain has a pretty fundamental role to play, in that strong force in the shaping of the interplay between the dimensions of learning that actually characterise, and in their turn shape the process, as it unfolds in our practices (Damasio 1999). However this social unfolding of the process, its actual working, in turn has some fundamental effect on the development of our cognitive process, indeed on the growth of the brain (Johnson 2001). Again as Tallis says in the same article "the brain is a necessary condition for consciousness but it is not a sufficient one. Selves also require bodies, material environments and human communities."

The process we call mind emerges from this movement of forces, a movement that can be pictured as a complex interplay of dimensions. Dimensions that both give form to learning and are also contained in the process of learning as it unfolds, locating us in the world driving forward our development as embodied situated individuals (Shotter 2005). The claim here is that there is no separate mind, spirit or soul guiding or informing our understanding of the world and our place within it but nor are we just grey matter.

The question is how do we get into the nature of mind (Vygotsky 1978)? Vygotsky sets out the path clearly through the investigation of the process of learning. This investigation is a process in itself and it might just get us closer to that understanding that answers those questions at the heart of a philosophical enquiry into being.

"Where do we come from, what are we, where are we going?" Gaugin.

We live in, as Marx's memorable critique of religion (Marx/works/1843) had it, "a heartless world and....soulless conditions", the question remains how in these spiritless times as Cyril Smith (1998) put it "can six billion human beings live on this small planet without destroying each other" and it might be added 'completely' despite, through climate change, the most appalling oppression and exploitation and war, their best attempts to do so.

So what model of learning will enable me to move on and make the claim that inside the process of learning we can truly seek out what it is to be human and use this humanity to confront in the most practical of ways the human condition and in this profound confrontation use that humanity to transcend that condition that could ultimately destroy the species.

This confrontation, humanity against the human condition, is framed on two sides by death, individual death and potential species death. These dimensions are forces that drive us forward and there strength is pretty undeniable, but dare I say it there is another dimension, weak, frail (a century of the most awe inspiring savagery illustrates this contention) but constantly grounding us - social life. Its time span for some of us is brutally short and for others interminably long, this grounded truth is were we begin.
At this point siren calls from two perspectives can distract the wanderer, one is the collapse into a post modern relativism that actually denies that there are absolute truths. Eagleton’s (2004: 13) definition of the post modern is useful here,

"By 'post modern', I mean, roughly speaking, the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge. postmodernism is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends toward cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity."

It is at this point that I’m always tempted to say that death is a pretty bloody final truth, so let’s work back from that into life and the possible truths we might find tangled up in the dimensions of learning, development and being. The other call, not so far removed from post modern relativism, is from those who suggest that the whole project has an absurdity that cannot be worked with or against and that basically death awaits us amidst the nihilism of life. These views of the human condition and the collapsing of the latter into our humanity do little more than let the oppressor and exploiter get on with their mutually interdependent work.

Of course these philosophical meanderings (all of them from the top of page 1) maybe regarded as having little to do with learning and a lot to do with prolixity and tendentious. Instrumental rationalism (Lave and Wenger in Daniels, 2005)) underpins the notion that learning is that process through which we gather knowledge about our world through the acquisition of two kinds of knowledge, knowledge of the parts of the world and knowledge of how those parts fit together. The world as a jigsaw problem enables the thinker, learner, person to detach their species responsibility for the problems of the world and to get on with the entirely practical (read non or anti philosophical) task of sorting out the problem, welcome giant sunshields! Down with plastic bags!

Of course it is entirely legitimate to say that learning about ourselves and our world has to start somewhere. Learning about climate change, learning how the economy works, prosaically in the practice of every day life learning how to drive a car or manage your money - the latter practices restricted to the worried wealthy of the north. For an estimated one billion people, learning about every day practice is curved very sharply from birth in the slums of the "megacities" in the south (Davis, 2007:5). The point is every one has to start somewhere with something and this too is my point of departure.

Reclaiming Learning – the dialectic of learning (2010-10-16 18:00)

All thinking, a valuable dimension in the process of learning, sort of kick starts things, starts by abstracting or isolating certain features of a practice or process, we concentrate on these features to the exclusion of others (Lenin 1972). So we begin with "the objectivity of consideration (not examples, not divergences, but the thing itself)" (Lenin, 1972: 221). But at the very start of this process of isolation we begin a new process of re-formation, "the entire totality of the manifold relations of this thing to others" (Lenin, 1972: 221). Look, when I began learning to drive I was taught my cockpit drill - mirrors, neutral gear and so on. Isolated activities admittedly but drawn back into the purpose of it all - driving that car from the kerb into the open road.

On its own, each specific learnt activity has the air of fiction around it, "an isolate is something that has been dragged from its environment in space, time and matter. By itself, therefore, it is a fiction, for dialectically nothing
can be free of environment; but it is a real fiction in the sense that it really does have an objective existence" (Levy, cited in Guest, 1941: 47). Effectively learning does begin with a negation of the facts of an interconnected world but then itself has to be negated in order for us to understand the part played by that 'little bit of learning' in our practices. It is said that the tendency toward the negation of the negation is obscure, actually I would argue that it enables learning because it is that tendency that binds learning to development, more accurately, drives development in the following way: Development can be pictured spirally rather than in a linear way because as it emerges from, develops from, learning it draws to itself and also in itself creates changes (an increase / decrease in our understanding of something as we study it both in isolation and in its connections) that negates a previous state of affairs but not entirely because elements of that previous state of affairs remain, contributing towards new understanding, new practice (Vygotsky 1978).

The negation of the negation, essentially the re-formation of the process, pulling together learning, development and being is contained inside that tendency within the process of learning where we continually begin again but crucially with a little bit more material. In this sense the tendency contains both revolutionary 'DNA' - it can help us explain those leaps in development (remember Leo the late bloomer? Kraus 1971) and evolutionary 'DNA', those developments that fossilise in our very being and enable us to refine and effectively use the tools of learning in the process of mediation (used here in Vygotsky's conception of the process 1978) - we commonly call them skills. The use of the biological analogue is deliberate, within the biological dimension of life notions of evolutionary and revolutionary development are debated and revealed, why shouldn't other dimensions, other aspects of human life reveal this inter-related set of processes.

The tendency is therefore an entirely practical theoretical exposition of how we learn and develop, I can well imagine those who seek to and succeed in compartmentalising learning, modularising our thinking, breaking learning up into the acquisition of discrete skills and ultimately reifying our very being into a series of capitals - human and identity capital (Becker, 1993, Cote, 2005) that in themselves are then deployed to create a social capital (Harris, 2002) will be only too happy to condemn the concept as nothing more than the febrile imagining of long dead German philosophers, last sung about on Monty Python's flying circus.

There is however nothing fevered in the fate that awaits us if we do not begin, through our learning and its practical relationship with our world, to grasp what is going on, what our role is in confronting that condition and how we confront it with a fundamental critical resource - our common humanity. At this point it is necessary to be absolutely clear about the shape and content, the raw material, of humanity. Marx put it this way through a definition of labour power: "The aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use - value of any description" (Marx, 1977: 164). This definition describes human energy and that capacity to produce both the loftiest ideals about how we should live and the techniques and tools that enable us to go on living. The claim being developed here is that learning is that process through which we discern our world and also reach out to and grasp our humanity. Humanity is a powerful capacity that through the mediatory process of learning is transformed into practices that utilise our energy to both act on the world and change it.

Language has its part to play at this point,

"One of the most difficult tasks confronting the philosopher is to descend from the world of thought to the actual world. Language is the immediate actuality of thought. Just as philosophers have given thought an independent existence, so they were bound to make philosophical language, in which thoughts in the form of words have their own content. The problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life
We have shown that thoughts and ideas acquire an independent existence in consequence of the personal circumstances and relations of individuals acquiring independent existence. We have shown that exclusive, systematic occupation with these thoughts on the part of ideologists and philosophers, and hence the systematisation of these thoughts, is a consequence of division of labour, and that, in particular German philosophy is a consequence of German petit-bourgeois conditions. The philosophers have only to dissolve their language into the ordinary language, from which it is abstracted, in order to recognise it as the distorted language of the actual world, and to realise that neither thoughts nor language in themselves form a realm of their own, that they are only manifestations of actual life."

(Marx, K. 1976: CW, Volume 5: 446 - 447)

Language – how living embodied beings make sense of their world, language in the form of written and spoken words alongside non verbal behaviour of all kinds is embedded and imbued in these categories of cultural artefact. Every cultural and social encounter between individuals involves words, gestures and behaviour that enables the individual to make sense of their perception and place in the world, a world of shared activity situations and struggles. It is inside this sensuous human activity that purposeful and directed use of language in all its forms enables individuals to grasp what appears to be external knowledge about the world and make it their own. At first glance when two individuals communicate using words nothing appears to have been created however in actually talking about something they have created a new relationship. This may well be the continuance of an existing relationship or a new albeit ephemeral one based around a request or instruction. Vygotsky had much to say about the role of the word as a unit of analysis in gaining an understanding of what takes place when a child begins to appropriate and independently use the words repeated to them by adults in their particular social and cultural settings (Vygotsky 1978). So across the life span from childhood into activity in various fields of practice the discussion about the link between the ‘apparently’ independent thought of individuals and the social environment in which those thoughts appear to begin their existence in social practice can focus on the cultural artefacts of semiotic mediation as units of analysis. Vygotsky’s contribution to an understanding of the content of semiotic mediation - language use in social and personal interaction - is explicitly set in the context of that discussion about what actually constitutes being.

Work on the relationship between the individual and the social through language was undertaken by one of Vygotsky’s contemporaries Volosinov (see Morris, 1998) in his critique of the language systems of Saussure and Von Humboldt (Swingewood 2000). John Parrington’s 'In Perspective: Valentin Voloshinov' (Parrington 1997) was instrumental in helping me construct this section of the essay with its able synthesis of the key issues these theorists dealt with 80 years ago.

In this work of relating thought to action, through the conscious preparation of projects in the mind both Marx and Engels described language as the practical consciousness that enables individuals to communicate their internal consciousness to others through words. It is my contention that words contain that consciousness and significantly declare and completes that consciousness practically in the social space.

This notion of language as practical consciousness was developed by Volosinov (Morris 1998) in his critique of Sausurre and Von Humboldt. Volosinov recognised Sausurre’s attempt to provide an objective explanation for the structure of language and he saw in the tradition of Von Humboldt a powerful plea for the creative role of the individual in producing language as a means of communication. What Volosinov did in his critique was to transform Von Humboldt’s creative individual into a social individual whose grasp and use of language was embedded in the social and cultural space in which she/he moved. Sausurre’s system was examined in direct relation to this social context so that the evolution and development of the structure of language (langue) was explicable in terms of the (parole) which directly expressed the practice of sensuous human activity. Language was part of social development and as an act of social beings it contributed to that development.

Saussure, according to Volosinov (Morris 1998) argued that language was a closed system of signs with a structure
that could be studied on its own terms and for its own sake. In this sense de Saussure examined ‘langue’ – the abstract concept of language rather than ‘parole’ the manifestation of language in speech. Von Humboldt proposed that language was a creative act of the individual and that humans had an innate capacity for language use. This theoretical lineage – an abstract system of linguistic rules and the humboldtian concept of the innateness of language as a system of communication was developed and synthesised by Noam Chomsky in the 1960s’ (Parrington 1997).

Chomsky developed the notion that language was more than a behavioural manifestation of individual response to external stimuli simply acquired by imitation. He argued that the individual's potential for language was universal and separate to the performance of that language in speech and written form. Chomsky placed the human subject at the heart of the debate about what constituted language. He proposed that human beings are born with a basic linguistic template into which any specific language fits. The proposal is a strong one: babies do learn their respective languages extremely quickly and with a high degree of accuracy. Given Chomsky's claim that each person is born with an innate sense of language rules his theory does allow creativity with language. All the basic template does is to provide a guide for people to make themselves comprehensible to others. But here in lies the problem with Chomsky's hypothesis if all the template does is provide a launching pad for the whole human community to utilise language creatively across the life span then it has to be asked of Chomsky – where does the individual creativity come from?

For Vygotsky the task of locating the development of individuals and the creativity individuals bring to bear on their own development began with Marx. He recognised that both Marx and Engels did not develop a comprehensive linguistic theory (See both Vygotsky 1976 & 78, particularly the commentaries by his editors). However in both Marx and Engel's work there was a valuable starting point for his investigation in that both men recognised that language arises out of the need of individuals to communicate in the various social spaces they find themselves in.

Spaces that act on them through the social intercourse of others and on which they too can have a profound effect through the articulation of their thoughts about what is possible and desirable in social and personal development (Marx and Engels, 1970). Vygotsky’s perspective focused on the psychological aspects of language development in order to demonstrate the process outlined above. For Vygotsky language was the means by which reflection generalisation and thought processes took place. He was concerned to root this social conception of speech in the development of individuals from infancy and spent some time in developing experimental techniques with children in order to validate his hypothesis. At this point it is worth noting that Vygotsky was attempting to provide a solution and explanation for the socially rooted development of individuals in the context of work being undertaken by Volosinov in philosophy (Morris 1998) and Mikhail Bakhtin in sociology (Swingewood, 2000). Bakhtin's work grounded the notion of the self and the autonomous individual in the latter's relationship with the other.

What is important here is that Bakhtin did not deny individuality rather he celebrated it as a distinctively social public and collective phenomenon. Vygotsky's contribution to this model of the social development of the individual was an attempt to answer the question - how did each individual come to the point where she/he could celebrate their individuality with others in a communication that had meaning for both the individual and the other?

Developing the dialectical process.

This is a complex discussion grounded in the discourse of what constitutes being, We can get into this process because of those dialectical connections that essentially negate isolation, making our humanity integral to the process of learning, development and being.

There is nothing mystical in this process, learning and development move as a result of the struggle - the working of dimensions both against and with each other in the actual self movement that characterises the relationship of learning and development. This is the site of that energy, elemental and potential power that drives that conscious struggle we all engage in to make sense of our world through the daily new beginning of mind. Look, on this discussion of dimensions, I'm not just dealing with the social, cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning (Illeris,
The dimensions that both drive and act as a skeleton shaping the relationship between learning development and being emerge from that relationship as well. Take the dimension 'future', in order to make sense of our learning in the present we have the gift of our past but we drag into this temporal relationship another dimension, one that doesn’t exist other than in our minds - the future. We create both a point of time and a space that we fill with our plans, these then direct from our future how we conduct our present and modify and manipulate the process of learning which in turn drives a particular kind of development. The future becomes a powerful ideological dimension, those social and political forces that can, by dint of material power today, convince the rest of us that a particular future is inevitable (TINA!) will drive that fiction deep into our consciousness, the fiction will earn its objective status and again inevitably my equally objective opposition to that future will be reduced to a purely subjective opinion, deserving only a place in the footnotes on those pages that deal with our past. (See the extended quotation on page 5 where Suzuki’s argument is laid out).

This is the struggle. When a student says it’s difficult, when they don’t get the discourse that a critical humanity existent in all of us comes before, pre figures, all opinions all notions all accepted ways of being, when the process of learning is so manipulated and modified by ideas, notions and concepts that take on the shape of natural dimensions in the process of learning they literally have to re-configure their thinking. A contradiction emerges in their study. Their taken for granted common sense view of the world is literally assaulted by the apparently ‘purely’ theoretical concepts that leap and dance from the pages of the book or paper they read. There is real opposition here, between theoretical concepts naturalised into practice and held in our consciousness and those theoretical positions that would seek to ground our practice in a common humanity that negates current social practice, theoretical positions that would, for instance, take the concept of social capital (see Field, 2000 for significant discussion and for definitions of these terms in the context of the field of Practice) and its notions of bonds, bridges and governance (Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000) and annex its rational kernel - the social, freeing entirely natural human relationships from the vector capital, a vector in the sense that it carries into the human relationship the notion that some how the social is external to our experience, something that we have to consciously build within particular parameters, suggesting that if we are left to our own devices that capital will take on negative connotations, we will not use it properly. Classically working class communities, for instance the former mining villages of the UK, that have experienced a catastrophic economic attack, have been subject to the kind of regeneration experiment that sought to introduce bridging social capital because, it was claimed, the kinds of social bonds found within such communities weakened new initiatives in economic regeneration. The point being made here is that a particular ideological formation captures the way we live, distorting entirely natural reactions to intense social stress and then serves up a way of being that insists that social regeneration requires external stewardship to draw in new bridging social capital because the communities themselves have a social (capital) deficit (Rees 2005).

When confronted by such discussions and conceptual struggle, when faced with a new reality in which common sense and taken for granted practice is revealed as nothing more than a set of dominant theories about how we should conduct our earthly affairs the learner (all of us now!) is faced with that conceptual struggle in which opposites have shape and content and motion precisely because of the existence of opposites. This is the real meaning of that conception of their unity, their unity and interpenetration emerges from their opposition and that struggle that ultimately requires that a particular way of living and being becomes dominant and expunges past practices, Zizek (2008) has some provocative and compelling arguments on this issue of taking this struggle of opposites to its natural conclusion. My argument here is that yet again this struggle is one of the key dimensions of learning, that acts to stimulate and drive not just the acquisition of new knowledge but our apprehension and use of that knowledge to create new ways of living.

The multi dimensional process of learning drives development because of its inter connectedness, it is a sensual link between us and the world, it places the human being in the world. So learning when not fictionalised, modified or manipulated enables us to embark on apprehending the world through the combined process of splitting up our practices (the beginning of critical analysis) in order to see those parts in their inter relationship (incidentally this is the analysis / synthesis process that completes the theoretical element in the total process of critically
reflective practice, its often mistakenly elevated into Hegel’s method as a whole (see Beiser, 2005 for a discussion on how Hegel is misunderstood) - that’s not the case and simplified models of thesis, antithesis and synthesis should be rejected as a mechanical modification of a sensual embodied process that actually takes place in our world naturally and socially. This is an intensely material process as well - when we learn about the multi faceted multi dimensional world we live in we can only do this because learning is inextricably woven into this reality through our actions in the world. We take on the weight of the world (with apologies to Bourdieu, the term La Miser du monde goes to the heart of the struggle I’m struggling with here! Bourdieu, 1999: viii) and fight this weight. It’s in this daily fight with all its negative notions of misery and difficulty that we see something of that humanity, at least the possibility of a definition of that humanity in our desire to develop freely, to be rid of misery, want and fear, to begin again. Marx concretised this struggle when he wrote:

"Man appropriates his comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner, that is to say as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world - seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving - in short, all the organs of his individual being are the manifestations of the human reality." (Marx, 1974: 299-300).

In this sense we are equipped comprehensively to deal with the quantitative weight of our world, to deal ostensibly with the raw material of reality and qualitatively shape and act on that reality through our unity with it in our lived practice. In this practice made up of hard work, slumber, reflection there are other tendencies at work promoted and driven to dominance at those times when our grasp of reality enables rapid and diverse development.

This led Vygotsky to consider development as "a complex dialectical process, characterised by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form to another, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes" (Vygotsky, 1978: 73). A cooked dinner or a revolution have quantitative features - fish or the inability of the rulers to continue ruling - but it is conscious sensual practical active human learning that drives our development, provides us with that visible ability to cook that fish beautifully or on a slightly grander note make that revolution, no ruler no matter how incompetent or corrupt gives up the power. This is the dialectical process we call learning, it’s not the moribund stalinized philosophy of long dead states, but the processes of life revealed at that point where the dialectic of learning spirals with the dialectic of development and new possibilities of living are opened up to us, new in the sense that we can practically grasp those possibilities, old in that sense that our drive to develop lies deep in our cultural historical genesis, it’s worth quoting Suzuki at this point:

"Those early humans are not numerous, large, strong or fast, or endowed with special sensory abilities. There is little to indicate the spectacular trajectory this naked ape is about to follow.

But if we watch them for a while, we can recognise their special secret: their behaviour reveals that they are intelligent. The human brain endowed us with a massive memory, insatiable curiosity, inventive-ness, and an ability to think in abstracts. These qualities more than compensated for our lack of physical and sensory abilities. That brain created a notion of a future, even though the only reality is the present and our memories of the past. And because that brain invented a future, we recognised that we could affect that future by what we do in the present." (David Suzuki: The Guardian, Society Guardian, Environment, 12.03.08: 9.)
that belies crude mechanical interpretations of Marx’s work. Very careful reading of just one of Marx’s theses on Feuerbach reveals the richness and humanism that is contained with in us all and revealed dialectically in Marx’s writing.

"The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating. Hence, this doctrine is bound to divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society (in Robert Owen, for example).

The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice."

(Marx, 1976: 7)

Reclaiming Learning – beginning again (2010-10-17 08:00)

Learning then is that process in which the material world crashes into my consciousness, it is a space of both stress and possibility, a profoundly active process in which I continually contest who I am, where I may have come from and where I may be going. At every turn in the road I seek a way of moving, a particular way but that particularity contains a universal, a conception of life that acknowledges movement, backward sometimes but usually in the society I live in a movement forward, the use of what I have learnt being put some instrumental end. This moving forward, future, progress, keeping going, "running faster" become the universal motif’s of learning in our 'learning society'.

The cultural and historical particularity of this notion of time in learning can be illustrated by reference to those human beings who think and act very differently because their relationship to the world is mediated, using Vygotsky’s understanding of this term, by cognitive processes that put the future behind them and the past in front of them. Nunez and Sweetzer (2005) conducted research amongst the Aymara speaking indigenous people of the Andes highlands of Bolivia, Peru and Chile.

They found that older Aymara people gesticulated and spoke about their temporal positions in terms of the past being in front of them, in front of their eyes and bodies - because they could see the past through their experience of it. The future lay behind them because they could not see it. This was part of a social, cognitive, emotional and physical approach to the present that has resulted in a distinct social and cultural way of being and identity. Given the historical development of this part of the south with the development of urban living dominated by the social and cultural mores that insist we all move faster and faster forward younger Spanish speaking Aymara no longer gesticulate, speak or hold themselves bodily in ways that deny the future. The future they see is dominated by their position in the urban market economy. An individualist and instrumental view of self is embedded in social, economic and cultural relationships through learning to live in a particular way in society. Learning becomes that process of acquiring skills that develop human capital and employability.
The point being made here is that human learning is that natural process where complex biological and social dimensions play with and against each other as humans develop and create their sense of being (See Lewontin and Levin 2008 for a scientist's view of the dialectics of nature and biology). We can choose to think and therefore act differently and herein is the heart of learning, the active process of thinking and living, theory and practice, those contradictions that that in their unity make up the whole of our lives, Marx (1977: 174) put it in this way,

"We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will."

This sensuous relationship between the individual and the world she inhabits needs reclaiming, as Shotter (2005: 6) says,

"in our interactions, we do not experience ourselves as living and acting in a neutral space of simple inert physical objects. As living, embodied beings, we can, at each moment in our interactions with the other and otherness around us, not only 'go out to meet them', so to speak, with the appropriate anticipations and expectations at the ready, but we can also have an evaluative and anticipatory sense of 'where' we are with them, and of 'where next' we might go with them—that is, we can have a shaped and vectored sense of how we are placed and how things are going for us in what we might call the landscape of now."

That embodiment, that being in the world, no matter how thrown in we may feel is again summed up by Marx (1970) when he declared that we are born into conditions we did not choose but we can go on to make our own history. So I claim it is our very nature (there is a human nature dialectical in content and form) to seek our selves through the world and to seek self development. For this to happen across the life span we have to actively attempt to transcend the social space we live in through a conscious struggle for new ways of seeing and to do that we have to plan and plot in our own minds and then establish principles that both work practically in the field of education and at the same time address and provide a philosophical basis for a practical grasp of our humanity so that we can use it to conquer the human condition.

It is the social dimension of learning that provides the critical resources for this work and in particular the principles, insights and perspectives of popular adult education. Work on popular adult education, particularly its radical core, is extensive and there is a long history of the struggle for "really useful knowledge" (Johnson 1979 and Thompson 1980), so a question could be asked about its relevance and use here in this paper, surely a sign posting to the literature would be sufficient?

My defence is that this literature and the practical projects of popular and adult education contain those principles that act both as a theoretical resource for action and at the same time are contained in that action, a discussion taken up by Aronowitz in his latest work on schooling and education with its focus on Gramsci and Freire (2008). This dialectic working inside each principle provides the motion for development precisely because it involves people working with each other, talking with each other, acting in social contexts, that leads to conflict and consensus in a way that celebrates both purpose and a sometimes joyous messiness, Eagleton's point (2007:174) that "what we
need is a form of life which is completely pointless" is found in these principles in the sense that they celebrate human life and learning as it is, explicitly rejecting the instrumentalism that would have us learning for work and then leisure rather than just for life itself. What needs to be added to these principles is an engagement with how our collective practice (again a working principle in transformative educational movements) works through the contradiction of conflict and otherness, given that our drive to self development requires that sensual relationship with the other that can descend into the barbarism of the human condition or ascend to that point where "we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx, Engels, 1970: 53).

In dealing with these principles it is absolutely apposite to begin with practice and the question of how we direct practice and what the intention of that practice is. If the ultimate aim is the pointless then notions of leaders and led carrying out instrumental action has to be rejected. Practice is in this sense directed (a contradiction in itself) toward self development through non - hierarchical relationships between those who consciously direct their intellect toward change and development toward that world where we celebrate the pointless and those struggling toward an awareness of their place and a contestation of that place. The principle of a rigorous democracy is contained in these relationships in such a way that those at the centre of such relationships cannot modify or manipulate the relationship, holding back self development through a mono logical re - creation of that ideological abomination, TINA (there is no alternative).

Alternatives begin with a necessity, the necessity to break oppression and exploitation, the twin drivers of war and poverty that both in turn trap billions of people in those parts of the planet subject to the ravages of climate change and ecological crisis. There is no debate here, we should only be discussing and acting on the self development of billions of people through an identification of what strategy and what tactics globally and locally address the needs of people - needs that engage with liberation from exploitation and oppression and liberation for our humanity. An aside here, The Internationale is often sung as "the international unites the human race", correctly sung it becomes "The Internationale is the human race." The late Dr Max Adereth recounted that too me many years ago at Lancaster University.

To be true to our dialectical premise however principles need to have both something of the grand and something that speaks directly to people. The engagement of individuals in education programmes needs that refinement of the universal (liberation in both senses) into the particular. In this case programmes of education and study are negotiated and open, learner and teacher both bring critical resources to the meeting and allow that open space in the meeting for the creation of new resources. Wrigley’s notion of open architectures of learning (2006) I think is a particularly good example of practice that liberates and importantly is an operational strategy that introduces people to the notion of a shared education.

The principled dimension running through these concepts is that the oppressed and exploited have histories that have been systematically erased, in some cases in the most ferocious and bloody manner. These histories contain the building blocks of modernity, The English ruling class took over 150 years to build their economic 'revolution' on the bodies of the enslaved, colonised and working class of these islands. Stalin took rather less, a decade, but at the risk of being accused of simplifying historical process it was the same bloody spaces being created, the time frame was different. These spaces in history are the socio - genetic footprint of the vast majority of the human race. It’s this footprint that is revealed when people begin to use that history to shape possible futures from present action and study. This is not an archaeological exercise or some study in folk history, the political struggles and socio economic dimensions of history are part of, inform all current practices. Practice can move forward through our understanding and utilisation of history’s lessons today. This negation in a real sense carries forward the unfinished business of history, namely the throwing off of the rule of capital that emerged to liberate human power and then enslave that power to its continued production, thereby negating its early promise and in its production of that antagonistic contradiction - it frees and enslaves at the same time - providing a material basis for its demise. The problem here is that its totalising presence contains the possible destruction of the whole species as it both globalises the planet and stuffs itself with the wealth of the planet. The image of a system engorging its own being is a powerful
and disturbing one, the point is that from this historical standpoint we can see the embryo of that possibility in
capital's genesis and the mistakes we made at those epochal moments when we challenged its power. This point
of both learning from failure and possibly failing again is discussed in Zizek (2008) hopefully we can go beyond failure.

This is the point where our engagement with each other, our education of each other becomes that struggle
for knowledge that celebrates the complexity of knowledge and its relationship with our struggle to know what
and who we are. If you read through Lenin’s early 20th century prose, e.g. "clerical obscurantism" this is what he
precisely said in 1915,

"Human knowledge is not (or does not follow) a straight line, but a curve which endlessly approximates a
series of circles, a spiral. Any fragment, segment, section of this curve can be transformed (transformed
one sidedly) into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for
the trees) leads into the quagmire, into clerical obscurantism (where it is anchored by the class interests
of the ruling classes). Rectilinearity and one sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and
subjective blindness - voila the epistemological roots of idealism. And clerical obscurantism (= philosophical
idealism), of course, has epistemological roots, it is not groundless; it is a sterile flower that grows on
the living tree of living, fertile, genuine, powerful, omnipotent, objective, absolute human knowledge."
(Lenin, 1972: 363)

The language may appear overdrawn to a 21st century audience, but Lenin's insistence in these notes is for real
struggle over knowledge and not the easy dismissal of knowledge, it is an argument for the practical grounding of
that struggle that should engage every one concerned with the human condition.

Reclaiming Learning – concluding thoughts (2010-10-17 14:00)

Here at this point of conflict inside the spiral process of knowledge as ideas, concepts, principles and insights are
fought over, we begin the process of positioning ourselves, a stage in the struggle for self development. This is a
point of the highest personal anxiety, where Lenin's straight line becomes a path of escape from the spiralling of
learning, development and being, this is the point where the claim for a quiet life, for non involvement, is grounded
and grows on that tree and is therefore culpable in the struggle. There is no opt out clause here, except death. This
is also the point at which we can begin that practical questioning of our place in the world, those myriad straight
lines of common sense ideas and taken for granted positions that lead us into our own 21st century quagmires. At
this point take time to reflect, cast off academic propriety (you probably already have on reading this...well done for
getting this far) and just think of the absolute and almost stunning banality of such 'clerical obscurantism' as human
capital and nudge economics (Thaler and Keller 2008) a text damned and silenced within a year by the world banking
and economic crisis, a banality then that locates regular historically located crises in our humanity rather than in its
condition at one point in time and social space.

The possibility of despair is great, that comes with the almost crushing weight of the world (the human condi-
tion), so it is precisely at this point in the struggle that a recognition that what it is to be human (self development,
to know that I'm human) emerges from that process we call relationships with others that can drive forward those
collaborative projects that actively challenge the attenuated conceptualisation of the individual that underpins
dominant notions of identity, notions that will admit the relevance of relationships but not their primacy in creating self, Bakhtin’s dialogical self, if you will (Shotter 2005).

It should be clear at this point that the relationships we enter into do not have some mystical quasi spiritual status that draws us into being. There is no plea here for a volk at worst or some vague sense of community at best. No, rather it is a sense of self and identity that develops through the struggle with others, so that at any one time it can contain those emotional dimensions of self that we call happiness, sadness, purpose or lack of purpose.

This is the process of learning, we can use the skills of reading, writing, speaking in this process but we should not reduce the process to these human skills, in this sense the skills we acquire in the field of practice that we call education become part of those critical resources we can use with others to drive forward our development as a species. This return to Vygotsky becomes an advance that is so wonderfully encapsulated in Brendan Keneally’s poem (2003: 60),

"Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
that always seems about to give in
something that will not acknowledge conclusion
insists that we forever begin."

Not a bad place to begin a point of departure into our future on this planet and not a bad definition of a reclaimed learning that will not acknowledge that this is as good as it gets.

We begin with a history and the formidable weight of human productive energy, if we can believe that the expropriation of that history and the utilisation of that energy can be combined and then act on that combination we not only reclaim learning, we also create a new critical resource for all those social and economic struggles against capital. That resource historically points to the contradiction in capital that it has both freed and enslaved. At the same time with the development of this resource we could begin to locate the development of freedom in our self development (Humanity) and locate slavery (oppression and exploitation) in those social and economic structures we have thrown up in a collective development of the species since our emergence as a qualitatively different species (modern Homo sapiens sapiens) some 200,000 years ago (the Human condition). The starting point is a questioning of that claim that there is a fundamental human pathology as old as modern homo sapiens that can be called the human condition. The journey should continue with the process of negating those early collective endeavours of hunter gatherer societies (our humanity then) with an examination and celebration of how collective development today can lay the basis for a free self development, it is not a denial of 200,000 years and it may contribute to another 200,000 years of life for us on this planet.

This is essentially the struggle between our common humanity and the human condition revealed through a re-appropriation of that process that both pulls us into the world and enables us to grasp that world and change it, the process of learning.

"What is to be done?"

The danger of conclusions is that they precisely sign off, draw a line, end!

But not to conclude provides no beginning for any one else, this is not some clever (or conversely puerile) paradox.
How can a conclusion stimulate thinking and ways of acting that begin with our capacity to act on the structures we live and work within? In the literature of Trotskyist sects you often found the part sentence, "The working class must.....!" Very much like the stopped clock there were occasions when their demand for our action was right, only to be ossified as space and time in the social world moved on from midnight. So there is the problem, how does the owl of Minerva change its habits and take wing at dawn instead?

This is no time for lists of proposals for a range of social forces to follow. Rather it is the time when, while resolutely resisting all the attacks on whatever gains that have been made in existing society we also set out all the intellectual and practical resources we have for claiming our identities, our individuality, our foresight as human beings.

We should struggle at every level of society, a dialectical moment, process, when we embark on the struggle against capital throughout society. So at these moments the most apparently modest intervention in the personal resistance to our modification and manipulation resonates with universal resistance and, crucially with new collective ways to encourage and stimulate self development.

Remember that the bigger battles, the resurgence of Trades Unionism, the resistance to global exploitation and war not only strengthen people materially they create a confidence and an intellectual space for each individual to participate in change. For Academics mired in regimes of conformity, trapped in the ideology of the global knowledge economy, the simplest attempts to, say, transcend modularisation provides that light at dawn for new practices, new ways of being that here today actively act on that moment when we all realise our capacity to either submit or challenge: Let me end with a big thought and one of my beginnings!

I began here with a quote cited in 1986 from the work of an educational philosopher who is considered to have been an analytical philosopher of Education concerned only with the analysis of 'strictly defined methods and techniques' in pursuing an understanding of Education ethically and cognitively. It is slightly naughty because this where my interest in Peters begins and ends, for me the rather dated concern to get things right has been outstripped by the breath taking progression of human development and destruction that actually necessitates a return to those bigger questions. The question I propose is reasonably simple, can I in my discussion, teaching and learning about one of the foundational disciplines of Education Studies, Philosophy, set out on the path proposed rather contradictory by Peters, who consistently rejected such 'big' thinking in his work? Or maybe the 'can' is wrong, should I in fact be getting on with this task as part of a much bigger project of developing critical thinking and practice in the field?

I will start (again) with a fairly bald statement. Education as a field of practice is dominated by big ideas: dominant ways of thinking about education are governed by a set of assertions about the process of learning and the practice of teaching. Process and practice are judged to be worthwhile and useful if they:

1. Play a measurable (quantifiable) part in child development. This incorporates notions of what constitutes childcare and upbringing and is enshrined in the Every Child matters agenda and the common core of skills for the children's workforce. That current government policy may cut the public service expenditure in children's services does not erode dominant ideas about family, upbringing, discipline and the discourse of responsibility and obligation placed on each individual, a discourse with roots in possessive individualism.

2. Explicitly develop measurable skills across the life span. The dominant trope here is that the process of learning and the practice of teaching come together as training. Training is the recognisable and quantifiable relationship between a provider and purchaser underpinned by an instrumental rationalism that dominates in the field of practice precisely because each person enters that field of practice as an individual:

"The self - governing individual constitutes the ultimate unit of the social sciences; and that all social phe-
nomena resolve themselves into decisions and actions of individuals that need not or cannot be further analysed in terms of superindividual factors.” Page 888, Joseph Schumpeter (1954) History of Economic analysis, New York, OUP.

“**The important doctrine that all social phenomena, and especially the functioning of all social institutions, should always be understood as resulting from the decisions, actions, attitudes, etc., of human individuals and that we should never be satisfied by an explanation in terms of so-called collectives (states, nations, races etc.).’** page 91, Karl Popper (1945) The Open Society and its enemies, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Methodological individualism of this kind however does not sit with a libertarian approach to individual conduct in the dominant discourses, ideas and concepts at play in current educational practice, policy and vision. Rather it is coupled with and underpins a neo conservative moral project emphasising the duties and obligations that frame instrumental rationality in current strategy and policy. The purchaser and provider are at work producing particular products and commodities. The student / pupil begins her instrumental journey as a purchaser of the product and at the end of the process emerges as a commodity herself in what is asserted to be a global market in the knowledge economy. This ideological slight of hand is one shared by most policy makers and politicians and taken for granted as the ‘given state of affairs’ by many people on the field of practice. This ideological construct, globalisation, is in effect the conceptual framework for disciplining training and education precisely because each individual is obliged and has a duty to take her place in a world dominated by:

- The Global Knowledge economy and a global managerial and technocratic staff.
- Global Governance: Global discourses of governance
- Global Super Capital: The ‘myth’ of the ‘stateless and nationless multinational company.
- Global space and time.

Process and practice are judged to be worthwhile and useful if therefore they can be disciplined in a dominant paradigm: schooling. This paradigm is the site of struggle over who disciplines and indeed forms the ideological struggle between those whose conception of free schooling would place that discipline firmly in the hands of capital and those who remain wedded to some form of social democratic model of control in the global knowledge economy.

Herein lies my problem, there are clearly very strong political, economic, social and philosophical ideas at play here. To respond with polemic and rhetoric at the level of appearances is fine, we can point out that free schools as policy will not lead to parental control precisely because economic reality dictates that the resources of capital are required to fund educational institutions. The point is however I remain trapped within a particular paradigm, I can refer to and quite rightly defend the gains of the post war settlement, or what remains of that settlement, but I cannot free myself from the ideological terrain on which my intervention takes place. This is the point at which I need to reassess the critical resources I have at hand in order to effectively challenge the historically specific rule of capital in my field of practice. I have to work and re work ideas, concepts, methods of thinking that I have inherited to make that move that challenges hegemonic ideas about how we should educate, teach and learn, that challenge in turn needs to return to practice, helping overturn mere
existence through the actualisation of experience. This simply is the point at which not just I, but many of us, refuse to live, exist, in the old way and begin a process of experiencing practice that actively creates transitional ways of being, of becoming, of developing that constitute new material forces not just at the local level, but internationally: at this point I acknowledge my intellectual debt to the struggles of those in the global South who have got on with that task:

"The Philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Karl Marx (1976). Collected Works, London, Lawrence & Wishart: p 8.

The key issue here is that the move towards a critical teaching and engagement with the process of learning is trapped, as much as my head might create phantom freedoms I remain part of the academy, part of a schooled and disciplined environment, part of a categorising and controlling network with Brecht’s challenge ringing in my ears:

'As man is only human, he must eat before he can think, fine words are only empty air, they are not his meat and drink.'

I’m trapped and complicit in a world that offers fine goods to those of us lucky enough to live and breathe in one small part of the global north and one small part of our structured and at times overwhelming social space. In this context the temptation to simply give up is powerful, but help is at hand in the very depths of my subject field, in the historical reach of human thinking and practice across history, in the critical resources I can work over with colleagues and students. This is where I (no! We) can begin.

What do you think?

References


Marx, online archive: the material above can be accessed via: http://trotsky.org/archive/marx/works/cw/ then insert relevant volume / index.htm


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Wertsch, 1985 Vygotsky and Social formation of Mind, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press


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Hi there, I’m indebted to work done in Popkewitz and Fendler ‘Critical Theories in Education (1999), Routledge, pages 118 - 120 by Stef Callewaert for providing a framework for dominant paradigms in education and schooling, often re reading one’s work in public is an important part of both developing one’s thoughts and recognising their genesis. The work on globalisation is clearly based on my reading of Terry Wrigley’s writing for JCEPS. My next task is to take up some of the conceptual work I have done recently around Hegelian conceptions that Marx firmly grounded on their feet. It is often said that Marx turned Hegel on to his head, but actually that is where Hegel began! Marx’s grounding of the dialectic however does continue to raise the problem that it its focus on species being and its development could be regarded as narrowly ableist. Where does becoming and development lead when memory, for instance leaves? John.

Thanks for your info it will assist in my research.

Social Scientists Go To a Robotics Lab (2010-10-18 08:00)

[1] Steve Fuller, Nick Lee, Frances Griffiths and Ann Adams at the University of Warwick are conducting a project within the ESRC-funded programme "Understanding Individual Behaviour". Their project [2]Mimetic Factors in Human Behaviour: Health and Well-Being focusses on the human ability to imitate others, in order to understand the biological, psychological and social mechanisms underlying this process (mimesis) and of their interaction with one another and with environmental factors. In this video, a team from the project visit a robotics lab to see if mimetic factors apply to robots:

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/sfuller/
2. MimeticFactorsinIndividualBehaviour:HealthandWellbeing

I Am Redneck, Hear Me Roar (2010-10-19 08:00)

Y'all call me Bubba. Some years ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money, and nothing particular to interest me in Southeast Missouri, I thought I would move away, get an education, get a job, and join former Labor Secretary Robert Reich’s "knowledge workers" feasting at the table of the global economy. I was just like everyone else – reaching out to grasp my own little share of the rusty old American Dream of personal prosperity and the consumer goods that came along with it... but, a funny thing happened on the way to the forum... I mean, at Will Rogers Auditorium... that changed everything for me.

In the winter of 2000, I bought tickets to the “Blue Collar Comedy Tour” and got to hear Jeff Foxworthy tell redneck jokes up close and in person. I also got to hear Larry the Cable Guy explain that Al Gore lost the election because a handful of rednecks from a Dade County, Florida trailer park didn’t know how to operate a voting machine. I suppose if those same machines were designed to look like those video poker “eight liners” or a cigarette machine that our political landscape would have been a whole lot different in the first decade of the 21st century. Essentially,
George W. Bush won the election because a handful of rednecks could find “Jones” on a jukebox but couldn’t find “Gore” on a punch card. If ballots had only looked more like those Bingo cards, the disaster of George W. Bush’s presidency could have been averted – that is, assuming that us rednecks had the good sense to vote with our wallets and not cast ballots based on the emotional manipulations of a Karl Rove or a Lee Atwater.

I enjoyed the show because I am a redneck and the show helped to alleviate the homesickness that I felt being so far away from my kinfolk back in Missouri. “The Blue Collar Comedy Tour” gave me the nostalgic feeling of being back home in Missouri on my grandma’s back porch clowning around with my uncle and cousins. It resonated with the self-deprecating humor that has been culturally ingrained in me. It reminded me of what I would later discover to be “Rabelasian Carnivale.” Gail Sweeney discussed this in “The King of White Trash Culture,” a chapter in the book, White Trash: Race and Class in America. For Sweeney, “carnival is a place of laughter, bad taste, loud and irreverent music, parody, free speech, bodily functions, eating and feasting, a place where excess is glorified” (254). Sweeney goes on to paraphrase the literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin when she writes: the carnivalesque inhabits the space that counters and subverts institutions of authority and repression, the dominant hegemonies of Church, State, and, in capitalist democracies, Industry. The pleasures of the carnival are subordinate pleasures: unruly and lower class, vulgar, undisciplined. During carnival, the working class are not working; they are out of their place and out of line (254). “The Blue Collar Comedy Tour” is a representation of that “Rabelasian Carnivale” and I suppose that is what made me want to go in the first place. While I enjoyed the show, at the same time, I was offended by the obviously upper middle class couple that was sitting in front of me and laughing louder than I was. They weren’t rednecks… they weren’t white trash… why were these interlopers laughing at my jokes… at my kin? Having been raised in a community that is known more for its ability to raise up sawmill and factory workers, truck drivers and Wal Mart employees, than bankers and other captains of capitalist industry (those same “knowledge workers” that I had hoped to join at the global economic trough), I wanted to jump over my seat and ask them what they thought was so damn funny. What gave them the right to make fun of us rednecks? For the first time in my life, I think I fully understood how the “n word” functioned in African-American culture. Self-deprecating humor is one thing, but making fun of “the other” is an entirely different can of worms. That self-realization led to me to another question: “Why does it seem like it is OK to make fun of rednecks?” “Why are us hillbilly, white trash, lint head, cracker, rednecks any different than any other group in our supposedly politically correct, diverse, and inclusive society?” My experience at “The Blue Collar Comedy Tour” enabled me to start thinking about my own redneck identity on a peripheral level, but it took the tragedy of the World Trade Center bombings on September 11th, 2001 to really bring my academic/ political interest in my redneck, white trash, hillbilly, cracker identity to the center of my intellectual and political life. Many people have memories of where they were and what they were doing when the twin towers fell on September 11th. I slept through it. I was finishing my Bachelor’s Degree at the time and in order for me to graduate, I had to take classes during the day a couple days per week and take another class online. The only way to keep the lights on and food in the fridge while I was doing it was to work all night long at a night club as a disc jockey. I woke up about noon and discovered that all
hell had broke loose in New York and all classes were cancelled in Texas. I saw all of the replays of the events on the television and felt sympathy for the families who had lost their loved ones that morning. I also tried to come to grips with my own fear about what could happen next and, just like everybody else, had that special anxiety of waiting for the next shoe to fall. Then I went to work. All was quiet at the night club that evening. I guess no one really felt much like suspending the social order and engaging in the Rabelasian Carnivale of Kentucky Whiskey, Budweiser Beer, and country music in light of the events of September 11th. As a result, I got off of work a little early and drove back to my apartment at the university about two o'clock that morning. Not only was I a poor college student, but I was a poor college student from a poor family. While some of the more well to do college students could live nearby the campus or even across town in some of the nicer apartments, I lived in the least expensive university housing I could find. My roommate (a good ole boy from Arkansas) and I were the only two American students in our housing unit. Everyone else was from either India or Pakistan. When I got home from work that night, I noticed a university police officer walking around my apartment complex. Out of concern for my roommate and my neighbors, I asked him why he was there and was shocked when the officer explained that there were a lot of international students in my building and the administration was concerned that some of the "rednecks" might want to avenge the terrorist attacks so they asked the police to patrol the housing unit to make sure that no one got hurt. Since very few, if any, of the folks from the larger community knew that our university even had international students much less where those international students lived, I wasn't exactly sure if that meant that the officer and/or the administration was concerned about me, personally, or my "good ole boy" roommate from Arkansas, but it really didn't matter, I was still insulted. I guess that move shows how much faith that folks actually have in the politically correct society that we live in and the diverse curriculum of the public schools. Many of our students were young and had spent their entire lives learning that although everyone is different in their own way, everyone matters, and yet, the administration still believed that those students that they "allowed" to enter their university because those students had a high school diploma, the proper prerequisites, and the right SAT scores were still capable of a good old fashioned lynching. September 11th taught me that everyone matters and that everyone should be given a chance... that is, everyone except for us rednecks because no matter how much they teach us, how much we learn, and how much we are exposed to other cultures, they still believe that when push comes to shove, we will still lynch people because that is just who we are, that is just our nature. As a result of September 11th, I could no longer see instances where folks that I did not consider "one of my kind" used terms like redneck, cracker, hillbilly, or white trash as being just a matter of what many would see as just "language" in 21st century America. Suddenly, I became acutely aware of an undeniable reality that I wish I could choose to ignore. I left Missouri to get an education, get a job, and, as my grandma says "be somebody." I was too blind to see that I already was "somebody" and that all of the institutions that I had hoped to join when I completed my education and became a "somebody" would never see me as being a "somebody" in the first place. I would always be a redneck, hillbilly, white trash, cracker to them no matter what I did and that they believed that all of the kinfolk that I left behind in Missouri to come to college in the first place, were less human than themselves. At that point, I decided that I would rather be anybody than their kind of "somebody." I was mad that I had busted my ass for the last several years, making good grades, winning literary awards, and being what I considered to be the best student that I could be, just to discover that I was society's "other." The redneck, hillbilly, cracker, white trash "other" was not just any kind of "other." We weren't "pigmentally challenged" in that one could not see how we differed from your ordinary run of the mill "whiteness." We were not "other" because of the visible characteristic of skin color. Our lot in life was much worse. We had some cancerous dark spot on our souls that made us rednecks – something that was born in us and could never be removed through either operation or education – a cancerous dark spot that must be concealed and suppressed – an identity that must be sublimated. In spite of our outward appearance of whiteness, we were, as Dorothy Allison writes in her book, Trash, "men who drank and couldn't keep a job; women, invariably pregnant before marriage, who quickly became worn, fat, and old from working too many hours... and children with runny noses, watery eyes, and the wrong attitudes" (vii.). I can assure you that after 9/11 I had an attitude. For me, a redneck who wanted to move up beyond his raisin', I had already experienced what Icarus experienced when he flew too close to the sun. I had crashed and burned as result of my own hillbilly hubris and knew that no matter how high I flew, I would never be anything more than the redneck, white trash, hillbilly, cracker that came to the university with a pocket full of tuition and would likely leave with nothing more than a pocket full of broken dreams. After all, I would always be a redneck, white trash, hillbilly, cracker. What good were those dreams to me now? Those dreams were
for others and not me because I was trash and the best I could do was “claim [my] heritage with a full appreciation of how often it has been disdained” (Allison xvi). I was not William Matthew McCarter, I was a redneck, white trash, hillbilly, cracker... an interchangeable adjective or noun that applies to me and mine and ours indiscriminately. I might as well be Montgomery Ward Snopes, a character in William Faulkner’s novel, The Mansion, who says:

I don’t remember just when it was, I was probably pretty young, when I realized that I had come from what you might call a family, a clan, a race, maybe even a species, of pure sons of bitches. So I said, Okay, okay, if that’s the way it is, we'll just show them. They call the best of lawyers, lawyers’ lawyers and the best of actors an actor’s actor and the best of athletes a ballplayer’s ballplayer. All right, that’s what we’ll do: every Snopes will make it his private and personal aim to have the whole world recognize him as THE son of a bitch’s son of a bitch (html). That’s a job that rednecks can do well...be Snopeses... The son of a bitch’s son of a bitch...but aren’t there enough of us rednecks trying to do that? Does the world need another Montgomery Ward Snopes? Perhaps I could stay in school, read everything I could get my hands on, and then one day be an academic’s academic? Ordinarily I would say that it is possible, but 9/11 reminds me that I am a redneck. Perhaps I could become a redneck’s redneck. But, what about an academic’s redneck or a redneck’s academic – a hybrid? Maybe I will be a son of a bitch’s son of a bitch, an academic’s redneck or a redneck’s academic before I complete this article, I don’t know, although I am sure that you, my audience, will have established an opinion on this matter by the time that you have finished it. I can say one thing, I won’t pretend to be something I’m not while I write this so called academic discourse or at anytime thereafter. Socrates says to “know thyself” and in order to “know thyself” one must first engage in what educational philosopher Paulo Freire calls “conscientization,” which is the process of becoming critically conscious of the sociohistorical world (html). Through that “conscientization” we rednecks can “speak [our] word and that by “naming the world,” we can “achieve significance as human beings” (Freire, html). Therefore, I will sound my “rebel yell” – my “barbaric yawp” and achieve my human existence through that naming. “I am redneck, hear me roar.”

Lori McVay (2011-01-10 15:01:49)
As a recent Sociology Ph.D. recipient who grew up in rural West Virginia, I took this article to heart. At best, I am a proud representation of my family’s “redneck” heritage. At worst, a researcher using academics to justify my worth as a human being. Somewhere in the middle is a powerful confluence of the wisdom, work-ethic, and curiosity of generations of hard-working men and women. I’ve traveled half the world and am still, at heart, a West Virginia girl - and proud of it.

SI Interviews - Karen Throsby on autoethnography and swimming the channel (2010-10-20 08:00)
As part of her research into channel swimmers, [1]Dr Karen Throsby recently swam the English channel herself and was kind enough to talk to the Sociological Imagination about it as the first in a new series of podcasts.

As Karen put it on her research [2]Blog, ""I will just say that it was an extraordinary, brutal, intoxicating, frustrating, exciting, painful, exhilarating, exhausting day that I will never forget."


Further reading
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Loic Wacquant (2004) "Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer" Oxford University Press (important for thinking about the project’s methodology)


Mortimer, G (2008) "The Great Swim" London: Short Books (these last two are the biographies of the first male and female swims).

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/throsby/

[...] Link to a podcast interview with Karen Throsby (20 Oct 2010) here [...] 

[...] Link to a podcast interview with Karen Throsby (20 Oct 2010) here [...] 

"You can’t be too vain to gain if you want to swim the Channel" – Karen Throsby at the SI Seminar | The Sociological Imagination (2011-08-30 08:02:25)
[...] first one is Dr Karen Throsby, who we interviewed last year, talking about her research on channel [...] 

» Becoming a Channel Swimmer The Sociological Imagination (2016-06-05 08:01:52)
[...] great video from Karen Throsby, who we interviewed almost 6 years ago, as the first of our many [...] 

Jon Snow, Revolting Student turned Blogger (2010-10-21 08:00)
In a climate of far reaching cuts in every sector the government can get its hands on, Higher Education in Britain is in for a battering over the coming years. Decreased research funding, decreased teaching budgets, and a lifting of the fee cap the only solution on the table -despite the predicted outcome of a 3 tier HE system to the benefit largely of the rich. In this context, HE needs all the help it can get.

Now, Jon Snow wears great ties. This, we British TV viewers know. He interrogates interviewees every night on the Channel 4 News with a BBC-esque air of impartiality (if slightly contrived at times). But on his [2]blog Snow has no particular public to please and, perhaps because he assumes nobody reads it, tells us what he thinks in the rambling manner of someone who as been told blogging is the big new thing but isn’t really convinced. Happy news, then, that Snow has been putting his weight behind HE in recent weeks.

Last Wednesday Snow was at Leeds University for a review of the state of higher education when a group of protesting students burst in to the room. In Snow’s words

"What an experience! I haven’t been “live” in a student union since I was thrown out of university myself. [3]Here we were at Leeds University last night reviewing the state of higher education with a couple of hundred students, academics, and parents when a bunch of revolting students burst in. I suddenly found myself broadcasting whilst confronted by the very people of whom once I was – a revolting student."

He has suggested that the current cuts to HE are likely to lead to a brain drain in Britain which has been as yet unforeseen by the Treasury. This is something which the Times Higher Education magazine has been raising recently, though to an internal audience of academics. Whether it is a real danger is perhaps beside the point, not waiting to find out if threats lead to action is perhaps a better course of action.

So well done Jon Snow! God knows British Higher Education needs some supporters outside of the academy.

Demo against education cuts - November 10th (2010-10-21 15:00)

NUS and the University and College Union (UCU) are jointly organising a national demo, ‘Fund Our Future: Stop Education Cuts’ on Wednesday 10 November 2010, in central London.

The demo is part of our strategy to influence the Coalition Government. NUS and UCU firmly believe that education changes the lives of individuals, families and communities. Education and skills will also be key to our economic recovery.

Staff and students in further and higher education are coming together to build an unprecedented coalition to fight against the cuts that have been imposed upon our communities, as well as to resist the prospect of higher fees and increasing privatisation in education.

More information about the demo can be found on [1]facebook and the [2]web. If you'd like to meet other people from SI on the day then [3]e-mail me before the day. This is one of the most important demonstrations in years. With huge cuts and radical restructuring in higher education it’s crucial that we start to take a stand and fight back now.

3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Beyond Immigration – the impact of the permanent cap on Higher Education (2010-10-22 08:00)

Over the past few months, Tory-LibDem Higher Education policies have been under the spotlight, mainly due to the controversial issue of students’ fees. However, there are also other, less apparent, aspects implicit in the political plans of the coalition which could have a huge impact on Universities. One of these concerns immigration. By April 2011, the government aims at introducing a permanent cap on [1]immigration. Whilst consultations on the final draft of the bill are still taking place, an increasing number of commentators are now emphasising how the policy could pose a serious threat on the UK Higher Education system, by limiting altogether the number of 'skilled workers' coming to the country.

If no amendments are made to the proposal, UK Universities will have to face both major cuts in funding and a significant reduction in the ability to recruit students and staff from abroad, especially if they are non-EU. The negative impact of this "double whammy" on Higher Education seems to have been largely underestimated by the government.

An immigration system that does not support the efforts made by UK Universities to attract talents from abroad,
would affect and undermine such aspects as academic quality, research excellency and the economy of universities. Moreover, the new arrangement could encourage a brain-spill from within the UK. The long-term effects of such a short-sighted approach could be devastating, as the cases of other countries (Australia and Italy, for example) clearly illustrate.


Browne's plans will drive whole fields of knowledge into decline (2010-10-22 13:13)

The Guardian, Friday 22 October 2010

The Browne report on higher education funding and student finance is wide of the mark in every respect (Universities: Shock at big cuts in teaching budgets, 21 October). The proposal to scrap the present tuition fee limit of £3,290 in favour of potentially unlimited fees set by universities themselves will load future generations of students with unacceptable levels of debt in order to pursue the democratic right of higher education. Those who benefited from a free, publicly funded, higher education should not tell future generations that they must now take on mortgage-sized debts to pay for the same privilege. We cannot begin to see how this arrangement could possibly be "progressive and fair".

Second, the proposal to cut the teaching grant distributed to English universities by £3.2bn, with a 100% reduction for the arts, humanities and social sciences, is a disaster for higher education, culture and the economy. The Browne report in effect proposes the privatisation of the arts, humanities and social sciences in England. It recommends that the state should no longer have any investment in these areas and that individuals should pay for them. The consequences will be to drive entire fields of knowledge into irreversible decline, leaving the country with one of the lowest public investments in higher education in the industrialised world.

Browne imagines that an unfettered market in tuition fees will free so-called elite universities to compete with the world’s best. On the contrary, if there is no public funding, then there will be no cap on student numbers for institutions. Humanities departments in "elite" universities will only survive by increased student recruitment, serviced at low costs. And what prospect is there that research in the arts, humanities and social sciences will survive the cut in the research budget?

We call on all the vice-chancellors of universities in the UK to voice their implacable opposition to the Browne report. It is their persistent call for increased fees in the past decade that has led Browne and his committee to their short-term, and ideologically driven, conclusions. But Browne does not propose an increase in "top-up fees", rather the abolition of public funding to entire fields of academic life.

It is time to put aside the myth of "mission groups" that allows ministers to divide and rule the sector; to defend the very idea of the university; and to protect the life chances of future generations of students in England. We urge all academic staff to contribute to the NUS/UCU demonstration in London on 10 November.

Professor Martin McQuillan (Dean of Arts and Social Sciences, Kingston University)
Sara Ahmed (Professor in Race and Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Graham Allen (Professor of Modern English, University College Cork)

Derek Attridge (Professor of English, University of York)

Stephen Barker (Professor of Drama, University of California, Irvine)

Christopher Baugh (Emeritus Professor of Performance and Technology, University of Leeds)

Andrew Benjamin (Professor of Critical Theory and Philosophical Aesthetics, Monash University)

Fred Botting (Professor of English, Kingston University)

Arthur Bradley (Professor of Contemporary Literature and Culture, University of Lancaster)

Ellen Burt (Professor of French, University of California, Irvine)

Michael Bradshaw (Professor of Renaissance Literature, Edge Hill University)

Howard Caygill (Professor of Cultural History, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Bryan Cheyette (Professor of Modern Literature, Reading University)

Hélène Cixous (Emeritus Professor of Women's Studies, University Paris VIII)

Tom Cohen (Professor of English and Cultural Studies, SUNY, Albany)

Maria Delgado (Professor of Theatre and Screen Arts, Queen Mary, University of London)

Michael Dillon (Emeritus Professor of Politics, University of Lancaster)

Thomas Docherty (Professor of English, University of Warwick)

Alexander Duttmann (Professor of Philosophy and Visual Culture, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Robert Eaglestone (Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought, Royal Holloway, University of London)

Christopher Fynsk (Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Thought, University of Aberdeen)

David Theo Goldberg (Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the University of California Humanities Research Institute)

Peter Hallward (Professor of Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University)

Joanna Hodge (Professor of Philosophy, Manchester Metropolitan University)

Andrew Hussey (Professor and Dean of University of London Paris Institute)
John Hutnyk (Professor of Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London)

David Jackson (Professor of Russian and Scandinavian Art Histories, University of Leeds)

Scott McCracken (Professor of English, Keele University)

Angela McRobbie (Professor of Communications, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Willy Maley (Professor of Renaissance Studies, University of Glasgow)

Peter Nicholls (Professor of English, New York University)

Mandy Merck (Professor of Media Arts, Royal Holloway, University of London)

J Hillis Miller (Distinguished Research Professor Comparative Literature and English, University of California, Irvine)

Simon Morgan Wortham (Professor of English, Kingston University)

Peter Osborne (Professor of Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University)

Roger Palmer (The Professor of Fine Art, University of Leeds)

John Protevi, (Professor of French Studies, Louisiana State University)

June Purvis (Emeritus Professor of Women’s and Gender History, Portsmouth University)

Adrian Rifkin (Professor of Fine Art, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Irit Rogoff (Professor of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths, University of London)

Antony Rowland (Professor of Memory Studies, Salford University)

Nicholas Royle (Professor of English, University of Sussex)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (University Professor and Director of the Centre for Comparative Literature and Society, Columbia University)

Rei Terada (Professor of Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine)

Patricia Waugh (Professor of English Studies, University of Durham)

Zoe Wicomb, (Professor Emeritus, Creative Writing and English, University of Strathclyde)

David Wills (Professor of French and English, SUNY, Albany)

Scott Wilson (Professor of Media and Communications, Kingston University)
Dancing your PhD? (2010-10-24 08:00)

Writing a doctoral thesis can often turn into a solitary affair, perceived by everybody (sometimes even by the author) as a terribly complicated and neverending exercise. This project offers a fun way of bringing PhD theses from various disciplines - from molecular biology to childhood psychology - out into the light of day. Perhaps you know somebody who would like to dance their PhD in next year’s edition of the competition?

Dancing your PhD: is this idea madness made possible by the Internet, or a stroke of genuis which can help redefine the ways in which we understand - and do - scientific research?

Read and watch videos [here](http://gonzolabs.org/dance/videos/)


Grad school in pictures: “The illustrated guide to Ph.D.” | The Sociological Imagination (2010-11-26 08:03:39)

[...] This is why, we need more initiatives that keep such as “Dance your PhD” (see our post on 24 Oct 2010) or “Matt Might’s "Illustrated guide to Ph.D.". Even if you [...]
Omar Abdullah, the Chief Minister of Kashmir and President of Jammu and Kashmir National Conference has a fine English accent albeit fake and sure knows how to make a speech prepared before one or two or many mirrors look extempore: “

I don’t know why should I fear the nuclear deal. It is a deal between two countries which, I hope, will become two equals in the future” says Omar in 2008 while defending a fraud nuclear deal made by the Manmohan Singh government – in anticipation of being the head of a puppet government whose strings are pulled by a bunch of robbers in New Delhi – who themselves are puppets of a global mafia in Washington.

There are neither decent armies in the world nor decent policemen. Stanley Kubrick’s "Full Metal jacket" (1987) makes the point rather well: armies exist on this planet to kill – not to do social justice or any justice. To take a line from Che Guevara that I’m fond of quoting, the Indian army is a bunch of

"wild bloodthirsty animals determined to slaughter, kill, murder and destroy the very last vestige of the revolutionary or the partisan in any regime that they crush under their boots because it fights for freedom."

The Kashmiri on the street fights for freedom – freedom from poverty, underdevelopment and humiliation of being suspected and mistreated in the land of his or her birth. The streets have turned into oracles prophesying the doom of the exploiting classes. The leaders are shaking in their pants and looking towards the government of India to send in more forces to suppress the masses. Merely with stones and infinite determination they’re able to resist a powerful army that has no qualms about murdering innocents because it is their job to do so. Though apparently leaderless these are well-organized groups who know how to turn the streets of their cities into virtual battlefields. To turn them down as angry and frustrated mobs would be cynical. They know what they’ve been through and after being lied to for decades by the leaders, the administration and the Indian government they’re prepared to fight for power ironically inspired by a sense of powerlessness.

Struggles are defined not by how they originate but how well they can be sustained. It is here contradictions manifest themselves. The worldview sustaining a prolonged struggle must be clearly understood. Religion as a matter of fact and Islam in particular that puts the justice of God above that of man cannot be the ideological framework of revolt. Islam which is essentially peaceful as a religion stands for preserving the social order and not disturbing or detracting from it. It does not encourage revolutions – after all it is the job of God to take care of the poor and the powerless. Your job is to place your trust in him and live up to what the Book says. Such an attitude is futuristic. Therefore the revolt must not be Islamized lest it lose its radical character.
Secondly, to attack Christian schools and churches – nothing is more self-defeating than that. The Christians in Kashmir have absolutely nothing to do with the intended burning of the Quran in the US; nor do the Christians in other parts of the world. It’s a political struggle for power and not a Muslim-Christian thing. If some day Kashmir must become an independent state it should know how to treat the Hindu and Christian minorities. Without their support they will never have autonomy – simply never. Kashmir – the word itself – and the region carries a sacred association to Hindus of the valley and other parts of India. Any attempt to politically Islamize the region would be fatal not to mention unfair to its minorities. A revolt must base itself in equality and social justice along with a concept of modernity that will give women the political space to articulate themselves and the young the opportunity to make decisions with regard to their lives. If power is only for the men and the women and the young have to continue with the second fiddling – the revolt has failed in an important way.

Most importantly for a revolt to succeed in the modern world it must have an international character. While it takes local roots, to reduce the struggle to narrow ethnicity-based nationalisms does not grip the public imagination any longer. Nationalism is a dying discourse and must be finished off as quickly as possible to make the earth more inhabitable than what it is.

Revolts that happen on facebooks and twitters are not revolutions. They take too much time and kill the essence of what should be happening on the ground. A social revolt is a time for education and genuine camaraderie. Psychological and social barriers need to be broken down and a sense of sharing must prevail among individuals and groups.

Forced by relentless round-the-clock curfews to live like prisoners in their own homes and having to face a violent army with barely any weapons except their own hands – the Kashmiris on the streets have acquired the first lesson in political education which is to fight by any means necessary.

A tiered university system (2010-10-26 08:00)

In the aftermath of Lord Browne’s review on higher education, we are all left wondering the overall impact it will have on higher education in England. Some commentators suggest that Lord Browne’s recommendations will led to a tiered higher education system where elite universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, LSE and Kings could charge up to £12,000 per year in fees alongside not-so elite universities charging less. It is clear then that, students with the right grades and
finances for elite institutions will not be affected under Browne’s report. However, students from poorer backgrounds will effectively have to settle for less prestigious universities to suit their wallets – if they can obtain a university place.

The prospect of a stratified higher education system might be new for the UK, but it is commonplace in America as this [1] article suggests. The US system at present operates a well-resourced upper tier of selective institutions, which mainly caters for rich and white students, whereas the lower tier caters for poorer students and students from minority and/or ethnic backgrounds.

The full impact of Lord Browne’s review is not yet fully realised, but its ramifications for affordable education are already being felt.

1. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/19/higher-education-funding](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/19/higher-education-funding)

Paul O’Grady on the Tories (2010-10-26 14:00)

[EMBED]

“An Area of No Man’s Land”: Policing Protest in Australia’s Capital (2010-10-27 09:00)

Canberra, as the home of Federal Parliament since 1927, has been a focal point for demonstrations and other forms of political protest, primarily on the lawns outside Parliament House (and Old Parliament House). Particularly since the political and cultural radicalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, what Greg Langley called the ‘decade of dissent’ (Langley 1992), the Government has attempted to strike a balance between the public’s right to political expression and the maintenance of law and order. My work has explored the historical continuities and discontinuities that exist in the history of the relationship between the Federal Government, the criminal justice system and protestors in Canberra since the 1970s. This history demonstrates the tension between allowing protests to occur and their handling by the authorities. Informed by the theories of David Garland, I argue that the Government’s handling of protest in Canberra depicts an exercise in ‘structured ambivalence’ (Garland 2002: 111).

The influence of British law

Patrick Parkinson has aptly stated that ‘[t]he tradition of law in Australia is... a received tradition’ and it ‘cannot be understood without some appreciation of the idea of law as it was developed through some seven centuries in Britain prior to the settlement of Australia’ (Parkinson 2009: 4; 3) With Australia’s political and legal systems inherited from Britain, British law has had two major impacts upon protest in modern Australia. The first is that under common law, there is no protected right to protest. Although the Australian Constitution makes no explicit mention of the right to protest - it is implied as a freedom of political communication with many limitations (McGone 2005: 276).
The second is that British public order legislation (inherited by Australia prior to Federation) had evolved since the fourteenth century, with various Riot Acts established to disperse unruly crowds, when no idea of universal democracy, as we know it, existed. Although the states had created legislation for dealing with protests and other points of public order, the Commonwealth had no such legislation. (The Australian Capital Territory had introduced the Unlawful Assemblies Ordinance in 1937 to deal with protests and public order issues during the last major upswing in political and social radicalism) The utility of these British legal precedents was debated at length in 1971, as the McMahon Government introduced the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Bill into Federal Parliament. The pretext used by the ruling Liberal Party to introduce the legislation was that the British laws were outdated and were unable to cope with the upsurge in protests and other radical political activities in the late 1960s. The Government saw these protests as ‘fraught with the risk of discord and... of violence’ (HOR 1971: 926) and that current laws were inadequate. One of the nefarious elements that had emerged (which the Government felt inadequately equipped to deal with) without this new legislation was a ‘sit in’ protestor who demonstrated on Commonwealth property. George Hannan elaborated on this ‘threat’ in the Senate in a debate on the Public Order Bill:

Commonwealth premises have been to some extent an area of no-man’s land... [R]ecently we had in Melbourne people who I would in fact describe as hoodlums but who describe themselves as protestors, who attempted to set fire to wastepaper baskets in the General Post Office....

We have seen in this country in recent times a growth in what has been euphemistically described as ‘sit-ins’. Only the States of New South Wales and Victoria have appropriate legislation to deal with this particular activity (Senate 1971: 1078-79).

The new legislation was introduced as part of a response to what was viewed as an unprecedented wave of political and social radicalism, but in many ways, the collective institutional memory of the ‘decade of dissent’ has continued to inform how the Government has reacted to demonstrations and other forms of protest, while at the same time, political and social movements (and how their relationship with the institutions of the state) have changed. In my work, I have been able to identify certain themes in the history of protest in modern Australia and government responses that illustrate this conflict between collective memory and contemporary modes. These are:

**The hierarchy of rights – the right to protest v the rule of law**

One of the recurring debates is the tension between the right to protest and law and order concerns. Nearly all those involved in the debate, in Parliament, in the criminal justice system, the media and the wider public, agree that the freedom of political expression and the right to protest is an integral part of modern democracy, but it is often combined with limitations upon this right – the caveat that all protests must be ‘peaceful’ and protestors must obey the ‘rule of law’ is often stipulated. Any violent, or even mildly disruptive, activities are nearly always condemned by the Government, with many protestors portrayed as subversive or deviant. But there have been changes in opinion over the kind of activities undertaken by protestors. In the early 1970s, the ‘sit-in’ was criticised by both Liberal and Labor politicians (see: Senate 1971: 1078-79), but nowadays this tactic is viewed as a relatively peaceful action, seemingly preferred to acts of ‘vandalism’, such as when a crowd of protestors broke away from an ACTU rally outside Parliament House in 1996 and smashed the glass doors of the building, which is often highlighted and condemned by politicians and the press.

**The space of protest**

Since the 1960s, there has been a continual debate over what spaces should be available for public protest and how access to this space should be administered by the authorities. A general consensus has been formed that the lawned areas outside Old Parliament House and Parliament House should be available for short-term, peaceful demonstrations (with temporary structures), which must not interfere with government functions, tourism or road-
ways, although this is subject to various restrictions by the Federal Government, the ACT Government and the police. Kurt Iveson (2001: 368) has argued that this limits protests to the realm of ‘symbolic’ action, rather than direct action.

However the process of legitimisation of protest activities in public space can change. One example of this change is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, established on the lawns outside Old Parliament House in January 1972, was originally perceived by the Government as an illegitimate site of protest and eventually dismantled by the authorities (Robinson 1994; Lothian 2007). Newly digitalized documents from the National Archives of Australia show the level of distrust amongst the Government and ASIO towards the Embassy and the concentration of surveillance placed upon the site. But since the mid-1990s the Embassy has been recognised by the Australian Heritage Council as ‘a site representing political struggle for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ and the structures are, more or less, accepted as a permanent feature. (AHC n.d.)

But at the other end, the public space open for protest and demonstrations has dramatically decreased as policing techniques have changed from confrontation to co-option and the denial of space for protest activities. Public order policing in Australia has developed, in line with policing strategies developed in Britain, Europe and the United States, towards securing spaces, such as the space around government buildings, financial/business districts and city centres more generally, and preventing protestors from entering these ‘sensitive’ areas. This policing strategy flows on from what Greg Martin (forthcoming) has described as the ‘neoliberalisation of cities’ and the ‘privatisation of public space’, where cities are moulded into ‘hospitable environments for corporate investment, retail, tourism and other high-end services’, while the ‘socially and economically marginalised’ are excluded.

**Policing methods**

There has been a significant amount of material written on the shifts in methods used in policing demonstrations and scenes of public disorder in Australia over the last thirty years, as protest movements and policing techniques both change. Rather than the straightforward confrontation between protestors and the police during the 1970s and 1980s, since the 1990s, policing methods have focused containing protest activities, surveillance and the denial of space for protest. Greg Martin (forthcoming), David Baker (2008), Kate Epstein and Kurt Iveson (2009) have all demonstrated how these techniques have been used in other Australian cities and the same processes have been used in policing protests in Canberra. Alongside this, an issue raised by protestors and civil libertarians has been how the policing of protests has been informed by national security and counter-terrorism concerns, with the introduction of post-9/11 legislation under John Howard having the potential to subject protestors to extraordinary police powers and penalties. (see: Hocking 2004: 200-202; 238-239; Lynch & Williams 2006: 16-18).

The police also encourage negotiation between the authorities and protest organisers over the boundaries of the protest and protest actions. The National Capital Authority (2003: 3) has published guidelines for protest organisers in Canberra, stating while formal approval is not required to conduct a protest or demonstration in the ACT, ‘it may be in your interests if you are planning a protest or demonstration to discuss your plans with the relevant authorities’. These negotiations rely on ‘good faith’ between the authorities and protestors, which is not always present and can lead to significant conflicts of interest. An example of these points is the AIDEX demonstration in 1991, where clashes between the police and protestors led to hundreds of arrests and many injuries (see: McIntyre 2008).

**The Inquiry into the Right to Protest**

Between April 1995 and December 1996, the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories conducted an inquiry into the issue of the right to protest with the ACT, with a final report (including recommendations) published in 1997. The documents of this inquiry provide an understanding of the many competing interests that need to be taken into consideration in the ways that the Government (and other institutions
such as the police) handles demonstrations and other forms of protest. The contested interpretations of how the authorities should deal with protest in Canberra was not limited to various protest and social movement groups that provided written submissions and testimonies, but was also demonstrated by the conflicting testimony given by various branches of the government, the civil service and the police. The documents of the Joint Standing Committee illustrate very clearly the 'structured ambivalence' (Garland 2002: 111) of the authorities in dealing with protest and public order issues. This is further demonstrated by the outcome of the Joint Standing Committee, which failed to provide definitive guidelines for the right to protest in Canberra or resolve some of the competing issues highlighted, such as juxtaposition between the right to protest and the rule of law, or the issue of co-operation between the authorities and potential protestors, or the subject of available space for acts of protest.

I would argue that since the 1970s, the issue of protest in Canberra has been continually negotiated by the authorities in both theoretical and practical terms, taking into account both historical precedents and modern challenges, as outlined above. The relationship between the right to protest and the rule of law is continually debated in Australian politics, but there seems to be little chance of a resolution between these tenets of democracy, but all those involved must acknowledge the tension between these facets of political life in Australia.

This work is based on research conducted as part of my fellowship at the Australian Prime Ministers Centre with the Museum of Australian Democracy in Old Parliament House, Canberra. Please direct any comments, criticisms or questions to me at: evan.smith@flinders.edu.au

REFERENCES


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Senate (1971) *Hansard* Parliamentary Debates, 28 April

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[...] Another little piece I have written on my research into this topic can be found here. [...] 

**He’s a liar liar** (2010-10-27 13:56)

[EMBED]

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**Indigenizing Approaches to Research** (2010-10-28 08:00)

What does it mean to see the world through Indigenous eyes, to come to understand the ontological worldview that Indigenous peoples assert as an essential component of their existences? These questions have more than just theoretical relevance; for Settler peoples, understanding Indigenous ways of knowing is necessary for understanding the nature and causes of Indigenous-Settler conflicts. Eminent Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. asserted from the 1960s through to his passing in 2005 that colonial conflicts are rooted in deep philosophical and ideological disjunctures between colonizing Settler peoples and Indigenous resisters (see for example: (Deloria, 2006, 2003, 1997, 1988). Maori scholar Makere Stewart Harawira (2005) has linked divergent ontological and epistemological production of knowledge to the creation of very real social and political conflicts between Indigenous and Settler peoples.
Global networks of power have and do support colonialism, and interconnected networks of state and capital have and continue to concentrate the profits of colonization into the hands of imperial elites while impoverishing and oppressing others. This situation is untenable, unjust and must change. As Settler academics the relevance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being has extended beyond the academic or the material; it has become a deeply personal project, necessary to critical engagement with our histories, our biases and unquestioned assumptions, and our privileges and responsibilities, both individually and as members of larger Settler society. We call on researchers in all disciplines to engage with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing in order to improve research practices, and to rebalance Indigenous-Settler relations worldwide.

Setting the Terms

Many words are and have been used to discuss the groupings of people involved in the colonization of what are now settler states: Indian, Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, Euro-American, white, non-Aboriginal, non-Native. Today, the dynamic discussions and use of two terms has become central to both how and what is being described and interrogated: Indigenous and Settler. Both are at their most useful when used as positional political identities, deriving from culture, self-identification and community identification. Choosing to employ the term ‘Indigenous,’ in addition to being an attempt to move away from other collective terms now considered offensive, works to foreground historical and on-going contestation of colonialism. Scholars of Indigenous politics, Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi) and Taiaiake Alfred (Kanienkehaka) argue this is central to contemporary Indigenous identities:

Indigenousness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism. The communities, clans, nations and tribes we call Indigenous peoples are just that: Indigenous to the lands they inhabit, in contrast to and in contention with the colonial societies and states that have spread out from Europe and other centres of empire. It is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning facts of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005).

Following Corntassel and Alfred's definition, and in this paper, the term ‘Indigenous peoples’ in the context of North America and comparable settler states refers to peoples whose societies predated European colonization, who exist in complex social and spiritual relationships to land, and who remain primary targets of colonialism. Continuing debate and discussion around the term ‘Indigenous’ helps to ensure that the concept remains flexible, responsive
The term ‘Settler’ is also helps to move beyond essentializing or imprecise terms. Often, the inversion ‘non-indigenous’ or ‘non-native’ is used to denote Euro-Western peoples in North America. Political theorist Adam Barker (Settler) has identified that such inversions tend towards ignoring the complexities of Settler societies and normalizing non-Indigenous society; both preclude important analysis and action. Engaging with the developing field of Settler colonialism (Veracini and Cavanagh, 2010), Barker defines Settler people as including: “most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the ‘Settler society,’ which is founded on co-opted lands and resources” (Barker, 2009). In this way, the term ‘Settler’ is not an ethical or moral judgment but rather a descriptive term intended to recognize “the historical and contemporary realities of imperialism that very clearly separate the lives of Indigenous peoples from the lives of later-comers” (Barker, 2009).

Indigenous Knowledge

The rise of Indigenous knowledge within the academy in the North American context began in the 1960s. This decade marks the beginning of the American Indian and Red Power Movements, commonly associated with the New Social Movements of the middle-to-late 20th century (Day, 2005). Inspired by international anti-colonial struggles, these groups brought Indigenous peoples together from diverse backgrounds to call for governments to honour treaties signed with Indigenous nations, and to challenge cruel treatment and oppression of Indigenous peoples across the continent. The occupation of Alcatraz Island and the town of Wounded Knee, and protests like the Trail of Broken Treaties and the Mohawk blockade of the St. Regis Bridge remain enduring emblems of these struggles. This period also saw the beginning of an ‘Indian renaissance’ in literature, led most notably by Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr’s Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto (1988 [1969]). Focused on the goal of sovereignty without political and social assimilation for Indigenous peoples, this work represents a strong assertion of Indigenous knowledge in the academy and concerted contestation of the intellectual paradigms perpetuating subordination of Indigenous peoples. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Indigenous intellectual leaders, including Deloria, Ward Churchill and Hawaiian scholar and activist Hauani-Kay Trask, became well-known experts and commentators on Indigenous perspectives and struggles (Deloria, 1994, Deloria, 1997, Deloria et al., 1999, Churchill, 2002, Trask, 1999). Their groundbreaking work helped to create space in the academy for Indigenous students and scholars to begin studying and researching from explicitly Indigenous perspectives and paradigms. It is important to note, however, that this process has not been smooth; rather, it is the result of ongoing social, political, and intellectual engagement between Indigenous activists and academics on one hand, and institutions regarded as colonial but also potential sources of agency, on the other. In the past twenty years, Indigenous scholars have built upon, challenged, deconstructed, and reconstructed earlier work, and have combined new points of view and types of analyses into a vibrant and diverse intellectual and cultural discourse. New concepts established through post-colonial studies, post-structural analyses, and the expansion of a "global" Indigenous consciousness (Niezen, 2003) have contributed to a growing academic and discursive field, that has also featured the mastering of ‘traditional’ academic disciplines in order to articulate and advance Indigenous knowledge within and outside the academy. Distinguished scholars such as Alfred and Corntassel in Political Science, Waziyatawin (Dakota) in History, and Linda Tuhiiwai Smith (Maori) in Education put Indigenous knowledge, methodologies, priorities, and protocols at the core of their work (See: Smith, 1999, Alfred, 2006, Waziyatawin, 2008). As Smith describes,

[the past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope. It is from within these spaces that increasing numbers of indigenous academic and researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice (1999).}
As described above, individual experiences comprise the “evidence” in Indigenous knowledge production, while the social necessity of Indigenous knowledge production leads to a discussion of its relational characteristic. This includes “inanimate” objects from the smallest rocks to the earth as a whole (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). As such, Indigenous knowledge is experiential. Indigenous ways of knowing were traditionally critiqued in the academy for a lack of “rigor” in that they did not follow the Western scientific method of hypothesizing and testing against a body of evidence (Deloria, 1997). This critique was based in ignorance of Indigenous methods of gathering, hypothesizing about and analyzing other Indigenous peoples) identity (2000). This close relationship to land and the recursive functions of nature have established Indigenous knowledge as functioning on circular, integrated dynamics, rather than the linear, extrapolative dynamics of (Western) "scientific" knowledge (Jojola, 2003). As such, Indigenous knowledge is that which arises in particular ways, from particular experiences, with particular places and non-human life. It should be no surprise, then, that colonization, especially in its settler colonial form, is a contest for control of space through the redefinition of social and cultural relationships to specific places. Colonial power that disconnects peoples from their lands not only serves the purpose of invalidating and disrupting the generation of Indigenous knowledge; it also frees places from the powerful, counter-definitional force of collective Indigenous understanding. Indigenous places can only be exploited by temporally-driven colonial understandings after the Indigenous-place relationship has been disrupted. This relationship to place establishes the basis for the second characteristic: Indigenous knowledge is experiential. Indigenous ways of knowing were traditionally critiqued in the academy for a lack of "rigor" in that they did not follow the Western scientific method of hypothesizing and testing against a body of evidence (Deloria, 1997). This critique was based in ignorance of Indigenous methods of gathering, hypothesizing about and analyzing bodies of evidence. Rather than decontextualize pieces of evidence for easy analysis, Indigenous ways of knowing are based in the experiences of each individual on and with the rest of the world (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001, Jojola, 2003). This experiential process is the source of, among other things, the oft-noted depth of ecological and biological knowledge in most Indigenous traditions (Alfred, 2005). This experiential method of generating knowledge made knowledge production an individual responsibility and also a social necessity; one’s own experiences were analyzed through comparison and synthesis with the experiences of others. Further, concerns, contradictions, or questions arising from this social analysis required further experience to address, setting up a cyclical system of knowledge that mirrors the cyclical dynamics of Indigenous sacred places (Deloria et al., 1999, Jojola, 2003). Stemming from colonial severing of relationships to land, Indigenous peoples in a literal sense lose the ability to experience the sources of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous academics in the 20th century have worked diligently to find ways to recreate these experiences in spite of and directly in opposition to colonial interference (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001, Smith, 1999). The social necessity of Indigenous knowledge production leads to a discussion of it’s relational characteristic. As described above, individual experiences comprise the “evidence” in Indigenous knowledge production, while the analysis is both personally and collectively reflective; this collectivity is part of what generates Indigenous peoples cultural and social cohesion (Alfred, 2005). However, the relational characteristic of Indigenous knowledge implies far more than just relationships between humans. Indigenous ontology is premised on the understanding that all life possess its own intelligence which can be learned from and interacted with; it is further premised on the understanding that all things in the natural world are alive or, more accurately, participate in the life energy of the universe. This includes “inanimate” objects from the smallest rocks to the earth as a whole (Stewart-Harawira, 2005). As such, dreams and visions are considered important sources of knowledge production as they are seen as a way of relating to the spirit/immaterial consciousness of places (Deloria et al., 1999). Long-standing relationships to place are seen as essential to the experiences that generate Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous peoples’ objections to environmental destruction – or more accurately, environmental exploitation – are often misread due to the application of environmentalist ethics backwards through time, reading a contemporary, contested ideology onto peoples for whom the
very concept of “environmentalism” as it is understood now would be incoherent (Cronon, White 1993). Rather, Indigenous peoples’ relationships to place are more akin to relations between sentient beings worthy of equal respect, and dependent upon each other for survival. Little Bear describes Blackfoot “rituals of renewal” as essential for the continuation of both Blackfoot society and the ecological systems in which Blackfoot society is embedded (Little Bear, 2004). These rituals serve to continually reinforce relationships to place, and deepen ties of respect, understanding, and intimate knowledge.[3][3] The specificity of Indigenous knowledge is a function of the other three characteristics. Because Indigenous peoples perceive knowledge as deriving from specific places, often through specific experiential actions (such as ceremony) which enact the relationships to specific beings – human and otherwise – all knowledge is considered valid only within the scope which created it (Little Bear, 2000, Jojola, 2003). Even a piece of knowledge that is vital to the identity of a people, such as Holm et al’s conceptualization of “sacred history” as an intrinsic component of Indigenous “peoplehood” (Holm et al., 2003), would only be considered true for the Indigenous peoples of a particular place. In Indigenous knowledges, there are no contradictions, but there is almost always a proliferation of truths. From Knowledge to Praxis Published in 1999, Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples remains one of the most comprehensive works yet written on the uses and abuses of Indigenous knowledge in the academy. Smith establishes that viewing and researching Indigenous peoples and societies solely through the ontological and epistemological framework of “the academy” – the established, rationalist, positivist, Western-scholarship framework – is inherently racist and oppressive (1999). As such, research structures which rely solely on these concepts need to be understood as impacting negatively on Indigenous peoples, and also as structuring Indigenous and Settler peoples into oppositional, hierarchical identities founded on racist notions of “progress”, and thus they must be rebuilt. In Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities editors Waziyatawin (aka Angela Cavender Wilson) and Devon Abbott Mihesuah (Choctaw) expand on Smith’s work by undertaking specific analyses of the ways that Settler and other non-Indigenous academics have collaborated with deeply colonial projects, as well as suggesting necessary changes in the academy to challenge current oppressions and create space for Indigenous peoples, histories, and methodologies in the academy (2004). Waziyatawin states: Many [scholars] have assisted in our colonization and the perpetuation of our oppression in myriad ways, including celebrating the myth of Manifest Destiny, making light of the genocide and terrorism experienced by our people, and holding firm to a progressive notion of history that forever locks our people’s past and our “primitive” existence into a hierarchy where we occupy the bottom. More recently, many historians are guilty of... focusing solely on the resiliency of Indigenous people while refusing to offer an honest and critical indictment of state and federal governments, leaders, and all the citizens of America who have been complicit in our bodily extermination, cultural eradication, and assaults on our lands and resources. Most historians have been accomplices in a great conspiracy to ensure Indigenous subordination (2004). To counter this, Smith calls for a reclamation of control over Indigenous ways of knowing and being through Indigenized research paradigms (1999). It is important to note that the current discussions as to what an Indigenous research framework actually is and how it functions in practice remain vibrant, dynamic and contested. Given the relatively recent assertion of the validity of Indigenous knowledge these discussions are far from complete. The form of Indigenous research paradigms are fluid and flexible, and are based on the following principles:

• **Intent.** The motivation and intent of a project must be clearly articulated. As Smith notes, research is never neutral, it is always political (1999); the politics, aims, potential impacts (including representation, construction of authority, voice, social struggle) must be considered, and clearly discussed at every stage of the project. Drawing on the importance of relationality to Indigenous knowledge, researchers must identify the networks of accountability in which they operate. This awareness helps to ensure that work is ethical, consistent with the goals of self-determination and decolonization. Ethical research must take into account the impact of the study far beyond conventional considerations, including a need to assess the consequences for ancestors, future generations, and the non-human world.

• **Reciprocity.** Indigenous knowledge is relational and therefore demands a commitment to reciprocity within the basic theoretical framing of a research project; Indigenous peoples’ oppression and exploitation under colonialism and by Settler society demands an equally material and ethical commitment to reciprocity. The parallels
between the physical reshaping of colonized space to extract wealth and the conceptual colonization of Indigenous knowledge to extract value in the forms of both exploitable techniques and methods for ensuring obedience are clear. Extraction models of research are inappropriate, and at all stages, researchers must be willing to share their work and results, and to engage in discussion with the groups/individuals involved in the project or who may be impacted by the work.

- **Respect.** Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies differ in source, process, and content to Euro-American epistemologies. Researchers must develop understanding of the specific cultural, spatial, and spiritual contexts of their work, and must consider sources of knowledge including stories, visions, oral histories, modes of speech, places, and non-human actors. It is the responsibility of the researcher to learn appropriate protocols, and to be aware that authority will change depending on context.

- **Decentring and denormalizing.** Indigenous knowledge, in so much that it is bounded and specific, rarely asserts claims of universality; Western academic knowledge has not extended the same respect. The greatest imposition upon Indigenous knowledge is Western assertions of universal and exclusive knowledge that render Indigenous understandings irrelevant or disempowered regardless of how they are generated or articulated. As an example, in our own researches, we focus on the tension between Indigenous and Settler societies, rather than researching an exotic Indigenous other, therefore attempting to situate Indigenous and Settler knowledges as mutually interacting and challenging perspectives.

An Indigenous research paradigm operates as a dynamic process (Jojola, 2003); it does not allow for universal statements or absolute truths. Part of the intent of Indigenous epistemologies is that knowledge production remains in tension between individual and social perceptions, meaning that the value of the knowledge generated is found in the further knowledge that can be generated through critique and consideration. **Indigenous to Indigenize** The Indigenous scholars we have cited in this paper are working to support Indigenous students, researchers, academics, and communities, and they call explicitly on non-Indigenous and Settler academics to join in the project of decolonizing knowledge production in the academy (Mihesuah, 1998, Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004). If the issues raised in this paper seem far removed from your specific area of research, consider the following: colonial exploitation of Indigenous societies resulted in the resources and wealth, which drove the Industrial Revolution and empowered the neoliberal capitalist state to become the standard bearer of military, economic, political and juridical power. In a very real way, the present wealth and power of the United Kingdom and other G8 states, as well as the current material and social deprivation of Indigenous peoples in settler colonial states, are intimately connected through the primacy of a particular way of coming to know and understand the world, ourselves, and our perceived others (Niezen, 2003). Colonialism continues today, and so does colonial oppression, violence, dispossession, and the assertion of a narrow range of possibilities for human social action and interaction. As Settler scholars Adam Barker (2007) and Paulette Regan (2006) have both identified, ignorance – especially intentional ignorance – is necessary for continuing, contemporary colonialism. As Regan notes, “what we deny is our complicity” (2006). Shifting to an Indigenized method of knowledge production - that is, to take on the challenge and possibilities of engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing - has the potential to starkly reveal these ignored complicities; making room for Indigenous modes of inquiry within the academy ensures structural support for such an endeavour. Alfred cites “a framework of Euro-American arrogance” as fundamental to contemporary colonization (2005). Few actions could go as far, both symbolically and in reality, to dismantle this framework as understanding, acknowledging, and advancing Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing which can "move scholars toward a stronger sense of professional and ethical accountability" (Weber-Pillwax, 1999). The importance of this two stage process – first revealing "ignored complicities" and then addressing them in part through the use of Indigenized research paradigms and methodologies – cannot be understated. Further, this type of "Indigenized" research does more than simply contrast hidden colonialism or tick boxes of professional and ethical accountability. Engaging with Indigenous knowledge can help to reveal a suite of possibilities for reconsidering our understanding of social and political life today. This method of conducting research is achievable and usable by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (including Settler) peoples, and the very act of adopting this methodology and
positionality is the first step in asserting the validity of Indigenous knowledges as contemporary, vibrant, and even necessary to a nuanced understanding of how we can coexist as peoples, now and in the future.

**Bibliography**


[5][1] The inclusion of some Indigenous material is happening in many areas in the academy, but is often limited to superficial consideration, such that it is not considered a serious critique or challenge to the ‘normal’ way of doing things. Wildcat and Deloria (2001) discuss this in detail. [6][2] Of course, Indigenous ontologies are heterogeneous and multiple; however, as per Stewart-Harawira (2005), I am generalizing with respect to the common, basic elements of an Indigenous ontology which are generally accepted as shared. [7][3] We differentiate “intimate knowledge” – the knowledge generated of, with, and by place through interaction – from the Western scientific ideal of “objective knowledge” – knowledge gained through impartial and dispassionate observation – for two reasons. First, intimate knowledge relies on a continuous and dynamic set of relationships; this implies that intimate knowledge is constantly changing as relational conditions change, rather than concretized Western knowledge. Second, objectivity – as many commentators have noted – does not truly exist; objective knowledge often reflects the preconceived biases and expectations which humans carry over from their interactions within hierarchical human societies.
Darlene (2011-12-18 07:05:47)
Interesting article!

Fred Turner (2015-01-09 20:39:37)
This article centres your own settler privilege. What makes you think you can talk about indigenous knowledge, ontologies or even begin to understand indigenous peoples. This comes off as though you are “indian experts” and if you really want to assist indigenous peoples quit “using” them to advance your own publications (which is clearly the case here).

Sociological Imagination (2015-01-09 20:45:57)
What an astonishing set of assumptions to make - what do you know about the authors?

Emma Battell Lowman (2015-03-10 10:14:56)
Hi Fred, it’s good to hear such passion in a response. We (the authors) are experts in Settler studies - that is, non-indigenous peoples who live on Indigenous lands and benefit disproportionately from settler colonization. The only way to make sense of the settler colonial reality of places like Canada, the US, Aotearoa, Australia and many others, and to work to change our present situation, is to engage from the position of own grounded Settler identity with Indigenous peoples, histories, theory, and de/anti-colonial struggle. We frame our work through understandings of the Guswentha (Two-Row) Treaty, which directs us to deal with issues in our own communities always in relationship with Indigenous peoples. As you’ll see from the bibliography of this piece, Indigenous scholarship is front and centre, and I’d encourage you to read further in this area. Indigenous scholars are leading the way, and our understandings are based on their work and learning with and from such experts as well as with decolonizing Settler and non-indigenous thinkers. You may also really enjoy our upcoming book (out this autumn with Fernwood Press) Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada!

At first, I was excited to see that an indigenous author has written about indigenizing approaches to research only to have my bubble burst when learning that non-indigenous academics have written it. Emma, you said it yourself that indigenous peoples are leading the way. Then why not let indigenous academics write about indigenizing research from their own lens and worldview? I think it’s fair to say that indigenous peoples are capable of speaking for themselves, specially when it comes to research. The title and the article comes off as if you have done the work but it looks like once again you and the co-author are benefitting off of indigenous peoples hard work. I look forward to reading your book, I hope there is a chapter on privilege in it!

Richard Dawkins vs Steven Rose (2010-10-29 08:00)

A fascinating debate between the world famous [1]Richard Dawkins and the somewhat less famous [2]Steven Rose. While the former is renowned as a populariser of Darwinian theory, the latter is a proponent of [3]systems biology (non reductive and emergentist approaches to Biology) and also a political activist.
4. http://www.youtube.com/embed/HjpUL7Djg5E

RSA Animate - Changing Education Paradigms (2010-10-30 08:00)

[EMBED]

Donald Duck Meets Glenn Beck (2010-10-31 08:00)

[EMBED]
I graduated from the University of Manchester in 1987 with no debt. I paid no fees and received a maintenance grant to earn a degree in Politics and Modern History. If my seventeen year old son were to follow in my footsteps he would graduate with debts of at least £50,000 and were he to study in London that could rise to £90,000. In the space of a generation we have witnessed the destruction of the public university.

The Browne Report released a few weeks ago, and effectively rubber stamped in the savage public sector cuts announced subsequently, was simply the final nail in the coffin. Under the beguiling but misleading title ‘Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education’ it effectively announced that university degrees are no longer considered a public good but a private investment. Accordingly, it is the individual student, not the public, who will pay its cost. Tuition fees will rise from £3,225 to a minimum of £6,000 rising to a potential ceiling of £12,000. State funding will fall from £3.5bn to just £700m - a total of 80 % but a 100 % cut in areas like the arts, humanities and social sciences that apparently have no public utility.

The cost of a university education may be charged to the individual student but they will be forced to pay for it through the sort of debt-financing that governments across the world now consider so inappropriate for themselves. The scale of national debt is so ruinous we are told it requires emergency austerity measures (like all state intervention these days couched in the inevitable military metaphor of Osborne’s ‘war of welfare and waste’). Students, meanwhile, will be encouraged to take on loans based upon an imagined future income. They will effectively gamble that the loan will eventually pay-off by enhancing their future job prospects and earning power. It will be a hedge against their future security. What are effectively sub-prime loans are guaranteed by the state. Higher education is now modeled on the types of financial speculation that has helped get us in to this mess.

It is thankfully still just about inconceivable that primary and secondary education could be treated in this way - indeed, Osborne claimed he would be investing more in these areas. There at least it seems education remains something that serves a public and social function. Clearly something magical occurs when one turns eighteen and your education becomes a matter of personal not public gain.

When education becomes a private investment not a public good the principle of universal provision necessarily falls by the way. It used to be a central pillar of the British higher education system that all institutions offered a similar range of degrees at the same price (if not with the same prestige). A degree in biochemistry at Cambridge cost the same as one in cultural studies at Liverpool John Moores. In making students customers of educational services Browne opens up the English and Welsh university sector (Scotland has it own more sanely run system) to the vagaries of student demand. Different universities will compete with each other charging variable rates for different degrees depending on the quality of their service and the branding of their product. Everyone recognizes that Departments and programs be cut, many will be reduced to teaching factories where the link between teaching and research is severed, and some campuses will close altogether or be sold off in pieces.

As so often in Britain when business is the model we are told this is how things are done in America. Indeed, it is. Last week the State University of New York cut its programs in Classics, French, Italian, Russian and Theater. In the last two years the University of California has raised its tuition by 32 %, introduced furloughs for its workers that represented an effective 8 % pay cut and are now seeking to restructure the pension packages of its employees.

There are however real differences between the American system and the model being developed in Britain. The now ailing public universities in America existed in a diverse sector with privates (ranging from the small liberal
arts colleges to the Ivy League campuses with their enormous endowments), community colleges and the rapidly expanding for-profits like the online degree factory the University of Phoenix. Private endowments and federal programs like the Pell grant scheme enable both public and private universities to at least be seen to maintain ‘access’ to a diverse student body. Yet even they seem unable to prevent the fortification of privilege amongst those social and ethnic groups most able to take the loans to gamble on their futures. The rest are likely to be driven in increasing numbers to for-profits who offer a faster, cheaper, denigrated, on-line education.

The lessons to be learnt from the American experience are that fees will continue to rise, unequal access between rich and poor will become structural to the system, and the for-profit sector will grow. Buckingham University, once the only for-profit private in the entire UK, may well become the model. In July, the Minister responsible for higher education, David Willetts, made BPP (now owned by the Apollo Group, parent company of the University of Phoenix the largest online for-profit in the US) the second for-profit capable of granting degrees in the UK. With Obama’s administration accusing Apollo and co of using public funds and federally guaranteed student loans to leverage more private debt from students the for-profts are turning their attentions to the UK. Encouraged by David Willetts the for-profit sector awaits in the wings hungry to buy up or ‘rescue’ the publics that will surely fail in the years ahead.

Many politicians and university administrators present the Browne report as a reasonable response to the expansion of student numbers at a time of austerity and shrinking public budgets. Quite apart from the falsity of the choice between rising student fees or reduced numbers of students it is an argument that belies the length, depth and scale of the present crisis.

Firstly, it is not unique to England. Across Europe and the Americas students and their teachers have been protesting against the same processes: the public disinvestment of higher education, rising fees and levels of student debt, the expansion of management and administrative systems for measuring efficiency or ‘excellence’ of services, the quest for new fee-paying consumers online or overseas, the casualization of academic labor, the restructuring of pensions. Yet, the destruction of the public university in England is widely seen as a test-case where these processes are unraveling faster and further than anywhere else.

Secondly, the storm has been brewing for decades. There should be no wistful nostalgia for a once pure public university. In the nineteenth century the great ‘redbrick’ provincial universities were founded on the alliance between industry and ivy. In the post-war period a good deal of academic research served a decolonizing state uneasily placed in the cold war arms race as the student protests of the late 1960s recognized. It was hardly news then when in 1970 Edward Thompson railed against the erosion of intellectual life and academic governance by the captains of local industry that ran Warwick University, Ltd. And, of course, despite the faux radicalism of the new universities that enabled the system to expand after the Robbins Report of 1963, universities remained the preserve of a privileged elite charged with running the welfare state with just 457,000 students in 1971 – 14 % of the age group.

If the public university had always been a faustian bargain with industry and the state the rules of the game certainly began to change decisively during the 1980s when I was a student. First came the effective freeze on hiring following the Howe budget cuts of 1981. In 1993 when I was appointed to teach at the Department that had taught me it was the first permanent appointment in over a decade. Next came the stripping of the student maintenance grants I had marched unsuccessfully to protect in the mid-1980s. And then there were the infamous administrative systems for auditing the efficient use of public funds at universities by measuring the productivity of academic labor: research outputs by the Research Assessment Exercise from 1989, teaching by the Quality Assurance Agency in 1993 renamed the Teaching Quality Assessment in 1997. One consequence of this, consistent with the merging of the former polytechnic sector in 1992, was the growing incentives on a frequently dwindling and increasingly casualized labor force to admit more students and teach ever larger classes. Inevitably these auditing systems not only greatly increased the amount of time academics spent talking or writing about the research or teaching they would do if they only had the time to do it. It also catalyzed the staggering growth of management personnel.
New Labour only made things worse. Faced with the systematic under-funding of the universities, the expansion of student numbers (funding per student fell 40% from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s), and the decline in real terms of academic salaries, they answered the call of the last official review of the funding of higher education handed from one government to the other – the Dearing Report. If Dearing enabled the introduction of a £1,000 for tuition (and the final abolition of the maintenance grant in 1999), by 2006 it had increased to a variable rate up to £3,000. The final indignity came with the shift from the RAE measurement of academic’s research productivity – which, in the name of generating ‘output’ had arguably produced a great deal of increasingly specialized and unexciting publications – to a concern with its utility or ‘impact’ under the absurdly named Research Excellence Framework from 2008. Unsurprisingly, as universities now answered to the Department of Business, Skills and Innovation, impact was measured in increasingly narrow and economistic terms.

Before rushing to join the denunciations of our short-sighted and philistine politicians we have to accept that no-one within the English university sector emerges from this process with much dignity. Administrators have grown fat, plumping up their personnel, enlarging their office and buildings, as well as inflating their salaries. Most damagingly they meekly accepted the economistic logics that drove the auditing of productivity and were naive enough to believe that the introduction of fees would supplement, not replace, state funding. They have turned away from the public they are supposed to serve in the quest for new ‘markets’: professional schools, overseas students, and creation of empires with institutions that franchise their degrees.

The Last Professors of the public university have hardly fared better. They have been only too content to learn and internalize the new rules of the game in the name of self-advancement. I was one of the new breed of entrepreneurial academics who had only ever worked in this system. I quickly learnt that research grants came to those who spoke whatever language the research councils were speaking in, that one had to recruit postgraduates to generate income, that quantity not quality of publications was the measure of scholarly productivity. Those who went on research leave or won big grants for research projects were happy to hire replacements and assistants on short-term contracts. At the opposite end others seemed content to become stars, to play musical chairs as institutions competed for prestige through big names with long CVs of publications, and to see their professorial salaries climb into the stratosphere in the name of their new market value.

The past twelve months has seen many wake up from this bad dream. As respected individuals, programs and Departments – all festooned in the baubles of research excellence and prestige indicators - have been cut students and their teachers have mobilized. There have been marches, protests, online petitions, teach-ins and occupations. These struggles have been very local – at Sussex, Middlesex, King’s College, etc – but those involved were in conversation with or at least virtually connected to protests elsewhere in Berlin, Berkeley and Buenos Aires. It has been on these front-lines that the defense of the public university has begun to be articulated. And it has been the targeting of the arts and humanities in the cuts that has made it possible.

The humanities, along with the arts and even the interpretive social sciences, have become the true test of the public value of higher education. As the recession grips market models of utility and efficiency have surely been exposed as a dangerous fallacy so this is a good moment to re-articulate the purpose and role of humanities and social sciences in ways that justify renewed public investment in them. We could have expected more from those like the British Academy or Arts and Humanities Research Board that institutionally represent the humanities in the UK. Instead, they have effectively caught themselves in arguments about economic impact and the capacity to aid national economic recovery that they are doomed to lose (see the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s Leading the World and the British Academy’s The Public Value of the Humanities ). We should not be surprised then that the Browne Report recommends the complete withdrawal of public funding for the teaching of the arts, humanities and social sciences in contrast to the STEM subjects that will continue to be supported.

The defense of public universities is intricately tied to arguments that can establish the public value of the humanities. We need to get beyond the hand-wringing of those who believe only philistines require the humanities to
be justified just as much as the meek reproduction of the government’s own vocabularies of impact and value. We can and should remind the world that it is our classes that students want to take. Despite a decade of the rhetorical marginalization of our disciplines in the UK as not relevant there are more studying in the arts, humanities and social sciences (1,073,465 in 2008/9) than in the STEM subjects (829,115) and they are growing at a faster rate (a 28% increase since 2001/2 as opposed to 20% increase for STEM). Indeed, in all likelihood, the arts, humanities and social sciences are cross-subsidizing the more expensive STEM fields that teach fewer students in more resource heavy infrastructures and laboratories.

Why then do we face increased demand from students for the arts, humanities and social sciences? There is no one reason why students take these classes and we do not need a one-size fits all justification of their public value. There are for sure those that rightly view these subject areas as helping them prepare for the world of work without necessarily providing a clear career trajectory in the social field or the knowledge and culture industries. Students recognize that even vocational training can not ensure life-long careers any longer. Instead they require a set of skills – of critical thought and analysis, of reading and digesting materials quickly, of making presentations and convincing arguments across a range of media – that equip them for a flexible labor market in which they may work across multiple sectors.

We need, however, not stop at these instrumental ends. We should be gratified to recognize that students are no less concerned with becoming citizens of the world. They realize that the humanities provide them with not just an education in the issues and problems that face our global society but the forms of analysis that allow us to connect our particular local experiences to sometimes global processes. They also provide the language training necessary for us to understand the perspectives of other cultures. No less importantly, given the democratic deficit and seemingly growing disenchantment with our political system, the humanities teach our students the critical skills they require to become active and valued citizens of our democratic life. Often they teach them that it is possible to think of themselves in new ways, to discover a new identity and to forge around it a politics they share with others that challenges and enriches our democracy.

Finally, the humanities, like the arts and social sciences, offer us the opportunity to think otherwise. In an age in which the financialization of everyday life appears to demand an economic value is attached to everything we need to be reminded that this was not always the case. The humanities speak to different systems of value, different orders of pleasure and enjoyment, that we can all enjoy – of imagination, beauty, laughter and wonder. It is these qualities after all that make us fully human, that enable us to appreciate what is unique about our own culture as well as what it is we hold in common with the rest of humanity.

A good deal is at stake. We must defend the vision of a publicly funded university able to support classes in subjects that do not generate economic benefits. Economic utility is not the measure of who we are or who we want to become.

Journalist handcuffed and arrested by Tea Party senate candidate’s private security (2010-11-02 08:00)

The editor of the Alaska Dispatch website was arrested by U.S. Senate candidate Joe Miller’s private security guards Sunday as the editor attempted to interview Miller at the end of a public event in an Anchorage school.

Tony Hopfinger was handcuffed by the guards and detained in a hallway at Central Middle School until Anchorage police came and told the guards to release Hopfinger.
Inequalities Blog (2010-11-03 08:00)

Inequalities: a new blog, and a call for contributors

We are pleased to introduce [INEQUALITIES](https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.com/), a new online forum dedicated to cross-national research and debate around different kinds of inequality.

The blog will be updated three times a week (Mon/Wed/Fri) with a mixture of articles, shorter posts and interviews focused on the labour market, social security, health, politics, education, crime, and other areas of inequality.

We are hoping to attract both readers and contributors – with contributions ranging from comments on existing posts, through to writing articles for the site.

If you’re interested in writing something for Inequalities, then see our guidelines for contributors and then just get in touch through the site.

We look forward to an exciting and engaging conversation!

Best wishes,

Brendan Saloner & Ben Baumberg

1. [https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.com/](https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.com/)
2. [https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.com/guide-for-articlesposts](https://inequalitiesblog.wordpress.wordpress.com/guide-for-articlesposts)

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Battle For The Holocaust (2010-11-03 13:00)

[Click through to YouTube for the rest of the documentary.](#)
From students to customers – neoliberalism and the UK teaching landscape (2010-11-04 06:05)

It is official: Sociology is a ‘low-cost’, ‘non-priority’ discipline, the government says.

It is now clear that the cuts on higher education included in the Comprehensive Spending Review are going to hit harder the disciplines that have been put under these headings (i.e. arts, humanities and social science). In short, if the government proposal to remove statutory funding to ‘secondary’ and supposedly ‘cheap’ subjects becomes reality, there will be a remarkable increase in the tuition fees for the students intending to study, say, Sociology.

On the one hand of this argument certainly stands a general line of criticism on the commonsense mantra that science-based subjects are more important than others to the economy of the country (and are therefore worth a higher level of government investment). But there are further implications on the government’s rash decisions. Crucially, the cuts could instil a transformation of the teaching landscape, by introducing a new(-liberal) approach to higher education revolving around the rather disturbing idea of ‘customer-students’. If students in the ‘low-cost’ disciplines will have to pay much higher fees than their colleagues in other fields, then they could start rising their level of expectation on the ‘product’ (knowledge, that is) they choose to purchase.

On the positive side, students could certainly start taking their studies more seriously. However, there is a wide range of negative effects and attitudes that could lure into the education system if study starts to be regarded purely as a form of consumption. For example, the students-teachers relationship could be affected – and transformed into a customer/service-provider rapport. Moreover, a further risk could be that humanities, arts and social science subjects may increasingly end up being squeezed out from smaller and less-funded institutions which cannot afford their (financial and human) costs.


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Usha Iyer (2010-11-04 18:28:33)

"He added that while much remained uncertain, he expected that the survival of humanities subjects would depend "enormously" on individual institutions' missions, as well as their future funding. "One thing that could happen is that humanities subjects emigrate further and further 'up the food chain', leading a thriving existence in high-prestige research institutions but getting squeezed out in smaller, more regional and less well-funded institutions," "That looks like the likely scenario, I think.

Research Seminar at UCLan on November 19th (2010-11-04 14:57)

White is the New Black?

The 2010 'Football Frenzy' and the New Zealand Imagination

Mark Falcous

University of Otago/Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo

In the context of the contested ‘sports space’ of Aotearoa/New Zealand, this seminar contributes to ongoing critiques of the socio-cultural presence of sport.
Interlocking processes including: demographic shifts and immigration; emerging indigenous politics, weakening colonial attachments; and heightened global interdependence have led scholars to describe the national imagination of Aotearoa/New Zealand as ‘in crisis’ (e.g. During, 1989; Flearas & Spoonley, 1999). Such shifting economic and cultural forces have led to ongoing and shifting evocations of the national self, with sport a significant domain. Thus this research explores the sports press as rich a site in which the contested boundaries of national communities are established, defined and reinforced. Conceptually, this research is informed by critical approaches to media, the problematisation of nationalist discourse (Hall, 1992), and postcolonialism. Thus I adopt a critically discursive approach to coverage of the national men’s football team – the All Whites – surrounding the 2010 FIFA world cup. The analysis focuses on how particular national anxieties and contradictions are ‘resolved’ in press coverage, the apparently shifting presence of football (nee soccer), and the spectre of long-established themes of New Zealand nationalism.

Mark Falcous is a senior lecturer in The School of Physical Education/Te Kura Akoraka Whakakori at the University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Usha Iyer (2010-11-04 17:05:02)
I would like to add that this event is free of cost and all are welcome to attend. The details are: Friday 19th November 12-1.00pm, Room 202 Greenbank Building University of Central Lancashire Preston, Lancashire For further details on this and forthcoming events, please write to UJIyer@uclan.ac.uk

Re-viewing Luis Bunuel’s “Land without Bread” (1933) (2010-11-05 08:00)

“Land without Bread” is a fascinating documentary from the younger Bunuel, an extraordinary attempt to portray the sufferings of peasants of Las Hurdes in Spain, very intensely done although without the controlled irony of his later work.

To admirers of Bunuel’s work, the documentary gives an insight into some of the techniques he is fond of applying as a filmmaker. On the emotional side you see a Bunuel who can be deeply persuasive and compelling in a way forcing his audience to think along with the narrator. This is unlike the later Bunuel who leaves the audience to draw their own conclusions and is more realistic in his insight that the poor are people before they’re poor and that poverty is a social condition thereby implying that the poor are as much capable of the excesses of the bourgeoisie as anyone else. This we see for example in the movie Viridiana where the holier-than-thou protagonist ends up almost getting raped by one of the beggars she picks from the street in order to change their lives.

If Dali accused Bunuel of being a “communist” and “atheist” this documentary lends credence to the accusation. There is a sense of commitment to the subject more than the art form. The commitment takes the form of urgency and perspective and the audience is spared of the detachment you would expect from a documentary filmmaker. Bunuel makes demands on his viewers. However, if you remember that this documentary was released in 1933, these are the pre-war generation viewers and fascism is on the rise, the sidelining of artistic demands to political ones becomes kind of obvious. Much later Charlie Chaplin’s The Great Dictator (1940) attempts to do
something similar in placing political commitment above formalistic ones in his relentless attack on the Nazis and in making a Jew the hero of his film.

The stark realism of the documentary shows in a couple of scenes with animals. A donkey that is eaten away by bees and a goat that falls down the mountain. Apparently Bunuel slaughtered both the animals to give a dimension to his perspective something that would not be very amusing to a modern audience oriented towards animal rights.

You cannot deny that the human suffering of the village is real. You can see the poverty that made fascism possible in Spain. It almost seemed like this was a European colony in Asia or Africa. Such was the poverty of its inhabitants. It’s a poverty that makes artists, poets, saints, revolutionaries and fascists a reality in the same breath. The scene of the little girl lying on the street and ”whose gums and throat are inflamed” and that is dead two days later was a particularly poignant one. Says the narrator at one point: ”The realism of a painting by Zurbaran or Ribera is nothing compared to reality itself,” thereby acknowledging his limits as an artist in the face of the grim reality faced by the poor and downtrodden. Interestingly, the narrator highlights one segment of reality over that of another. The poverty and pain is emphasized and not the ability of the poor to survive at all costs in this pitiless environment.

My favorite line in the movie is when one of the miserably poor school kids writes on the board a maxim in the book which says: ”Respect other people’s property!” Somewhere the narrator subtly echoes what Proudhon says that ”property is theft.” In respecting ”property” as a social and moral value the poor become complicit in their own oppression. You would expect such poverty to destroy the inner character of the people. But, it does not. ”Despite the misery in which the Hurtanos live their moral and religious sense is the same as anywhere else in the world.” Ideology in the form of religion and morality works at a certain level to keep them subjugated forever.

The conclusion of the film makes the argument all the more evident without mincing words:

_The misery shown in this film is not without remedy. Elsewhere in Spain, hill people, peasants and workers have achieved better conditions through mutual self-help._ They have made demands of the authorities for a better life....will give impetus to the coming elections and lead to a Popular Front government. The military rebellion backed by Hitler and Mussolini seeks to bring back the privileges of the rich. But the workers and peasants of Spain will defeat Franco and his cronies. With the help of anti-fascists from all over the world civil war will give way to peace, work and happiness. And the miserable homes you saw in this film will disappear for ever.

If that did not happen and in fact the poet Lorca was murdered in 1936, the same year that Franco assumed power and was the head of Spain until 1975 the year of his death - that does not take away the historical value of the documentary itself. It’s the attempt of a great artist to divorce reality from aesthetics and in the process create an alternate aesthetic. It’s an idealist at work here with the tools of realism. It’s an artist who is responding to the needs of his generation while at the same time envisions a future that “will give way to peace, work and happiness.”

Sir Ken Robinson: Bring on the learning revolution! (2010-11-06 08:00)

[EMBED]
**Fears build over higher student fees (2010-11-08 08:00)**

As the coalition government prepares to publish its response to Lord Browne’s review, anticipation builds over the likelihood that students may face fees upwards of £9000 per year.

The fee rises are intended to compensate for the public funding which has been withdrawn from universities as per the most recent Spending Review. Aaron Porter, the president of the National Union of Students (NUS) has argued that it is an unfair situation to remove teaching funding while expecting students alone to financially support universities, while students are threatening protests.

In response to student protests and Lib Dem MPs who also signed pledges to vote against any fee increases, the Universities Minister David Willetts is expected to announce a funding package shortly which will include measures like outreach programmes, summer schools and scholarships aimed at widening access. These measures would be particularly aimed at universities charging the highest fees.

Further coverage of the current debate can be found in Sean Coughlan’s BBC article [1]here.


**Review of ‘Globalization and Football’ by Richard Giulianotti & Roland Robertson (2010-11-09 08:00)**

Globalisation and Football is an engaging, accessible and comprehensive sociological study of the political economy of the world’s most popular sport. The authors Richard Giulianotti & Roland Robertson fuse disciplines to trace the historical evolution of football, its interplay with processes of globalisation, all against the backdrop of the socio-economic and political developments of the day.

In a lot of ways, Giulianotti & Robertson pick up from their earlier works. Borrowing from Robertson’s work, Globalisation and Football begins by explaining to the reader the waves or phases of globalisation witnessed by human history: germinal, incipient, take-off, struggle-for-hegemony, uncertainty and millennials.

This six-phase model of globalisation is the framework for a historical analysis of football against the backdrop of major political, cultural and socio-economic events of that era. Unlike other studies that equate globalisation with western modernisation processes, the objective of the authors is to highlight the historical complexity and the myriad roles played by actors and institutions both in the global North and South in aiding the globalisation and development of football. Further, the authors use four elemental reference points: the individual, national societies, international relations, humankind. Every chapter dissects the role of each reference point in the evolution of football.
What this means is that besides the growth and spread of the sport itself, careful attention is paid to the highly evolved 'business' models that constitute the governance and organisation of football today. The book equates the top football clubs in the Big Five countries (England, Germany, France, Spain and Italy) with trans-national corporations and discusses them in the light of neo-liberalism and neo-mercantilism. This necessarily calls for a closer look at the disparity between these top clubs and national football associations of smaller countries. Also under the scanner is the complex relationship between football's multi-layered governing structure- FIFA, national associations (both big and small), elite leagues, lower divisions and the cash flow and popularity of each. The top clubs have successfully capitalised on the explosion of satellite television in established and emerging markets, merchandising opportunities and the popularity of big stars. The book also analyses trends in fan and supporter cultures, multiculturalism in football, laws on movement of players within the EU and overseas players at top European clubs.

The disparity in finances and stature is even bigger between the Big Five and their clubs on the one hand, and the African and Asian football associations and clubs on the other. Additionally, the privileged position of the Home Nations within the governance of football (International Football Association Board), the allocation of places in the World Cup, gender and sexuality in football are issues that polarise opinion and raise tensions. All of these have resulted in a rather skewed balance of power and development within the membership of FIFA.

The authors do highlight some admirable developmental and peace initiatives through the medium of football undertaken by FIFA, other governing bodies of football, the UN and affiliated organisations, governments, NGOs, etc. As a result of this intense analysis, the authors help us understand the almost unparalleled influence and reach of football by casting it as a metric, mirror, motor and as metaphor of globalisation.

Heavy though all this may sound, the content is paced and explained in an easy-to-grasp manner. The book is extremely accessible and chronological with lucidity in both language and narrative style. Every chapter begins with the introduction of relevant concepts and theories followed by empirical evidence. The book is a treasure-trove of information, well-explained concepts (most of which should be familiar to students of sociology), illustrative examples, telling facts, trivia and anecdotes. As mentioned by the authors in the beginning, the book spans all major footballing countries and continents.

Conceptually, the book is extremely rich; it furthers established concepts in various disciplines. The authors borrow from and advance concepts, ideas and discussions in globalisation, global-local-'glocal' studies, connectivity, 're-territorialisation' and 'de-territorialisation'; sociology, social change and social network analysis; ethnicity, migration, identity, 'Americanisation', nationalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism; politics, economics and political economy; and civil society. References are also made to contemporary political developments and socio-economic movements such as the World Social Forum that has presented itself as an alternative to the World Economic Forum. The book posits that the sociological fields of race, ethnicity, post-colonialism and post-imperialism will feature prominently in the globalisation of football in the future. The authors leave us with the suggestion that sociologists ought to approach such global areas as football using 'methodological glocalism' as opposed to 'methodological cosmopolitanism' or 'methodological nationalism'.

This book is a marriage of sorts between various disciplines and concepts. By putting football at the centre of it all, it gives due recognition to the undeniable influence, reach and complexity of the sport. This book could undoubtedly be useful as part of the curriculum of students of sociology and cultural studies, globalisation and development, international relations and history of sport. For a wider complementary study, students could look at other titles by these two authors. The authors write authoritatively on all of these diverse subjects in what is a highly welcome multi-disciplinary study.
Amit (2010-11-21 17:26:32)
Interesting thoughts in the review! I am currently studying the M.A.(International Broadcast Journalism) at City University, London and would be specializing in sports. I understand that you are doing some interesting work on ICC, hence wanted to get in touch with you. Please do share your contact details. My email is itzzamit@gmail.com

prabal das gupta (2011-03-26 06:58:51)
Interesting. I am currently working in a college at kolkata as assistant professor in economics. I am trying to make a paper on the 'relationship between football and economic development' and also 'Football and business'. I need your help. If you are agree to share your your valuable experience, then I will be very greatful to you. My contact details: prabal.dsgpt@gmail.com

Remember, remember, the 10th of November: Bulgaria’s fall of communism in 1989 (2010-11-10 16:00)
France: reaction to niqab-ban (2010-11-10 16:00)

A few days ago, two French students (one of whom a Muslim) took an unusual approach to civil liberty, as a reaction to the new law banning the wearing of head-covers such as the burka and niqab, which was recently passed in France. They managed to simultaneously question the meaning of both anti-niqab legislation, and the niqab itself. View article and the video they made [1]here.


Autonomy of the person from the state: ‘pastafarian’ wins historic battle | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-15 08:05:41)

[...] Alm’s choice of photograph and his interaction with the Austrian authorities reminds of the niqab-and-hot-pants protest of French students, on which the Idle Ethnographer posted in November […]

The Web, and "the right to be forgotten": back to Habermas? (2010-11-11 08:00)

Internet regulation is lagging behind the development of the Internet itself. Within about two decades of wide public use, the web has accumulated a huge amount of personal data, and it may seem surprising that only in 2010 is this idea beginning to take legislative roots. Will the new legislation, if adopted, stop the web from sprawling over and appropriating public lives? Perhaps, we shall then be back to a modern, Habermasian understanding of the public and private spheres?

Or, perhaps, not just yet.

([1]article and video from the BBC)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11693026

In Pictures: 50,000 March for Higher Education in London (2010-11-11 12:00)

An estimated 50,000 university and college students and academics marched in Westminster yesterday. They were protesting against the raising of tuition fees to £9000 per student per year of study and the cutting of government funding for teaching in the arts and social sciences. Protestors marched down Whitehall, past parliament, before taking over Millbank House, the Conservative party headquarters. Some made it to the roof of the building, being watched by thousands on the ground chanting and burning placards. The media are reporting that this is the largest student demonstration in a generation.
Nina Power has written a brilliant article in the Guardian today about the protests and media response. Read it [1]here.
I'm surprised that no one has contributed a comment to this website after the student protests! I was very impressed by the numbers. And the violence done to Tory Party HQ did not bother me as much as the lack of organized purpose in doing so.
(Such ‘violence’ is being trumped up mainly because the police didn’t expect it, not because of its actual severity.) Specifically, the person(s) who managed to get to the top of 30 Milbank should have read some manifesto that stated concrete demands that could then be made talking points in the media and possibly Parliament. Instead the action was too easily dismissed as simply the work of an aimless rabble. Moreover, the impact of the protest is being dissipated by news programmes juxtaposing Alan Porter and Clare Solomon, i.e. the good cop and bad cop of the protest. They spend more time bickering between themselves than stressing their unity against the tuition hikes. My advice: Violence of the sort on display yesterday is not so bad if it is seen as the spearhead of a unified front. But it is a disaster if it’s easily disowned as the product of a fringe movement that then opens up internal divisions within the student ranks about what the protest is supposedly about.

Here, I believe, Porter missed an opportunity – and Solomon played it better (though as a team they just cancelled each other out). The idea of recalling Liberal MPs who renege on not raising tuition fees in university-based constituencies is a powerful move and should be pursued publicly and doggedly. This is the sort of political action that would open up serious discussion in media. However, we academics need to figure out more creative ways of justifying and financing higher education because it’s clear that the current system is unsustainable – and unfortunately the government is right on this basic point.

The SI Top 10 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-20 08:01:41) [...]

Coalition of Resistance (2010-11-12 08:00)

For those UK based readers concerned about coalition’s cuts agenda, there’s a website for the emerging movement against the cuts which is worth keeping an eye on: [1]the Coalition of Resistance.


Heribert Watzke: The brain in your gut (2010-11-13 08:00)

[EMBED]

Elizabeth Gould – How experience influences the brain (2010-11-14 08:00)

[EMBED]
In his article, "The Rubicon of class: Sontagist camp and predialectic sublimation", prof. Paul Brophy from Yale University critiques predialectic and neocapitalist sublimation, contrasting them within the conceptual paradigm of consensus...

Often, post-modern theory gets accused of being two parts ramble, one part fluff ["Only two parts ramble? Rather, two-thirds ramble, two thirds fluff", a matematician friend remarked upon reading the draft version of this post]. Derrida is derided, Rorty seen as contorted. The common tendency of post-modern theorists to reject hard and fast notions of truth and reality, and their incredulity towards grand narratives, are taken by their opponents as signs of intellectual weakness. The typically complex language of post-modern theories irritates some, but entices others - but perhaps both camps miss the point (if there is one to be made at all).

In a rather cynical post-modern fashion, the

[2]Postmodernist Generator (click on title to follow link)

takes up and creatively uses the idea of mystification which is characteristic of this strand of social theory. The online generator mocks the idea of text, using randomised key words to produce at the click of a mouse dummy essays,
much resembling \textit{lorem ipsum} page fillers used by type-setters. A superficial reader who skims instead of reading might be duped by the buzz-words into accepting the perfectly formatted page as "real" text.

But what is "real" text - and how much sense does it have to make, in order to make any sense? The po-mo generator is not the first to disparease the mystique of post-modernist text by camouflaging itself as one. Recall the [3] Sokal hoax in which [4] Alan Sokal, mathematician and physicist, submitted a sham article in the critical theory journal Social Text*. As Sokal readily admits, it had been conceived as an experiment to test the journal’s intellectual rigour and find out whether it would "publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if it (a) sounded good and (b) flattered the editors’ ideological preconceptions." [‘*’]

The article got published and although it itself did not make any sense - it spawned an enormous amount of "meta-text". If the purpose of academic publications is to create debate, this one seems to have achieved it.

It is not certain who stands behind the po-mo generator. Professor Sokal, is that you?

[*]

Belgium's Jupiler League

[1] Belgium's Jupiler League (Belgium's top domestic football division) has diminished into a stepping stone for many players, looking to settle in bigger leagues. It goes without saying that Belgium is not the only country to suffer a spiralling decline in the UEFA [2] co-efficient league table. Walter Smith recently [3] noted the demise of Scottish league football with an increasingly uneven playing field. More striking in the case of Belgian football is its historic pedigree prior to its current also-ran incarnation - Belgium, as a national team, had its high between the late 70s to the latter 80s, not only qualifying but also reaching the 1986 World Cup semi-final. Belgian clubs were
also comparable to any of their European counterparts; between 1975 - 1990, in all three UEFA club competitions, Belgian clubs figured in eleven finals and produced four winners (RSC Anderlecht winning the UEFA Cup in 1983, the UEFA Cup Winners’ Cup in 1976, 1978 and K.V. Mechelen in 1988).

Contemporaneously Belgium, as other smaller leagues, have their bigger dominant clubs - Standard Liège, RSC Anderlecht and Club Brugge. There is a two fold problem here - the stronger Belgian clubs compete, unevenly, with their superior continental rivals and the rest struggle to compete with their dominant domestic rivals. A similar scenario appears not in only in Belgium but in other European leagues. With the league winners automatically qualifying for the Champions League group stage and earning from its cash-pot, domestic competition become further skewed and imbalanced.

The defining moment, continentally at least, traces back to both structural economic changes and the liberalisation of the transfer market, following the [4] Bosman ruling (1995) both interrelated. The socio-economic shift from Fordist models of economic management to a trans-national movement of capital, de-regulation of markets and an increased involvement of trans-national corporations in public life, encouraged both an international movement of labour - in this case football players - and media conglomerates to aggressively acquire sports markets and even ownership of historic clubs. Sociologist Anthony King views this in terms of social [5] rituals as a more broader metaphor of lived forms that are instilled into society’s members and traced back to different periods of social transformation. He [6] states that "the new geography of European football parallels wider developments in the post-Fordist, globalised era in which the forces of multinational capital have increasingly subverted the former unity of Keynesian national economies".

In accordance this transformation can be read into two distinct models of club management, termed by [7] Andreff & Staudohar as ‘Spectators-Subsidies-Sponsors-Local’ or SSSL in contrast to a ‘Media-Merchandising-Markets’ or MCMM model. Clubs still relying heavily on ticket sales and local sponsors face insurmountable odds - Italy’s Serie A only [8] averages attendance at 56 % of average stadium capacity but three Italian clubs feature in Deloitte’s top [9] twenty wealthiest European clubs, all three generate their largest revenue from broadcasting rights - Juventus receive 65 % of their income from broadcasting. In terms of broadcast rights the Belgian Jupiler League, as a whole, brings in 44.7 million for a three year deal and about 14.9 million Euros annually. Contrast this with the Premier League whose [10] contract from 2012/13 to 2009/10 (3 seasons) brought in a “total amount of 3,538 million Euros, of which 1,556 million euros on the sale of international rights. English clubs have at their disposal 1,179 million Euros per season to distribute to the 20 clubs in the Premier League”. Both Dutch and Belgian clubs earn more from match day revenues and sponsorship than broadcasting, mainly domestic broadcasting, and while not completely immersed in the SSSL model, still rely on more local factors than bigger clubs; many of whom are trans-national in their own right.

The effect of the Bosman ruling

In this setting the Bosman ruling was mainly in the interest of the bigger leagues and clubs - players may have more power than before but are more likely to choose more lucrative terrains, a supply-side logic empowering the richer clubs. The impact of the Bosman ruling in concentrating players in the bigger leagues is demonstrated by the percentage of players in each league at the 2010 World Cup - 57 % of all players present played their football in the big five European leagues (France, Spain, England, Italy and Germany). This can be contrasted with the 1970s when prominent players of the ilk of [11] Rob Rensenbrink, [12] Arie Haan, [13] Grzegorz Lato , [14] Włodek Lubanski, and [15] all plied their trade in Belgium.
Instead of the Bosman ruling leading to heightened competitiveness between leagues, the opposite was to happen - players are willing to offer their services to the highest bidder and their respective clubs are willing to let them go early, in fear of losing their worth when out of contract. The case of Mesut Özil demonstrates not only a chasm between the big five European leagues and the rest but also the chasm between certain clubs within those five leagues themselves, with Real Madrid maintaining serious financial clout to manoeuvre in the transfer market. Until the signing of Özil by Real Madrid, realistically only four to five clubs were with the competitive potential and revenues to pry Özil away from Werder Bremen.

Leagues, as Belgium, find themselves losing promising players to the bigger leagues and with a poor retention of players, many Belgian clubs are a stepping stone for players to gain playing experience and then seek contracts in the more lucrative leagues. Richer clubs have exploited this environment forming partnerships with Belgian clubs that offer a pool of younger talent to be tapped into - Manchester United's partnership with Royal Antwerp FC and Liverpool FC with K.R.C. Genk are examples.

**UEFA adapting to neoliberal realities**

Trudo Dejonghe and Wim Van Opstal both argue that enacting the then Fifa 6+5 proposal would introduce an element of competitiveness to club football - this may be partially true but does not necessarily disperse or modify income generation - the bigger clubs are still able to invest into better academies, select more accomplished players within their national locality and operate as global behemoths, attracting global talent. The 6 +5 rule or the current measure enforcing a minimum of eight 'home grown' players in a club's squad are all attempts to tie clubs to their national geography but all these measures do not drastically alter the current football terrain. Furthermore it can be argued that such measures are there to protect international football, member associations and combat further de-regulation, eroding UEFA's powers and control over the game. More importantly - as Volker Eick observes concerning FIFA and to an extent this is generalisable to UEFA - bureaucratic organisation as UEFA seek to strengthen their member organisations and by extension their control over these same organisations. This without considering that UEFA have their own international football tournaments to maintain, which brings in considerable income - Euro 2008 generated a net profit of 250 million Euros.

Yet UEFA would find an ideal scenario in some balance between increased re-regulation and the bigger clubs modelled on the MCCM model, with de-regulatory forces generating much of their income. Attempting a balance and conceding to the richest clubs is none more salient than in the case of the UEFA Champions League; not only was a sum of £746m paid out between the 32 participants but the pay significantly increased as a team progressed in the competition - usually the bigger teams from the bigger leagues (13 of the last 16 in last year’s competition, 2009-10, coming from the big five leagues).

Moreover this is none more apparent than UEFA singling out of a further media market pool stated as "the estimated available amount for the television market pool - £337.8m - will be distributed according to the proportional value of each TV market represented by the clubs taking part from the group stage onwards". This is somewhat like a generous add-on pay to clubs from the bigger leagues with fertile domestic television markets, singling them for a greater share of the cash-pot.

Perhaps this is to the detriment of football as a spectacle but this of little concern to anyone outside those with serious interest in the game and football is just that - a game of leisure. But the centralised organisation of football, as any social activity, is both affected and affecting in its milieu. This is everything and including the exploitation of African football players, many minors, viewed as a cheaper talent pool than their European counterparts. Football is a competitive industry and clubs still predominantly in the old SSSL model find themselves increasingly lagging behind with revenues and profits dwindling, so it is predictable that Belgian clubs were implicated in accusations of player trafficking and a football slave trade - agents buying and offering players to whatever bidder.
UEFA is an important player but the broader social setting harbours an increased plurality of global actors. [26] Derek Layder views institutionalised bureaucratic organisations and market forces as both systemic elements that reproduce and more importantly "mediate relations of power and "relations of ruling." The mediation of relations of power and "relations of ruling" entails that UEFA not only respond to market forces but plays an active role in adapting and elaborating these same conditions - UEFA, as FIFA, affect and are affected by neoliberalism. It is in this sense that UEFA should not be seen as merely a guardian of market interests but often in conflict with forces of de-regulation and de-territorialization - protecting the local and representative national football associations and promoting an integration that does not compromise national sovereignties. Nevertheless UEFA organises club competitions bringing in high yields but enacts pressures from other powerful actors contesting and at times eroding UEFA's own mediatory capacity. As sociologist [27] Zygmunt Bauman posits living in a more liquid, deregulated and fragmented social world does not negate the continued relevance of past formations only that "we do not live, after all, once in a pre-modern, once in a modern, once in postmodern world. All three 'worlds' are but abstract idealizations of mutually incoherent aspects of the single life-process which we all try our best to make as coherent as we can manage".

If past solidity persists, than objective stratification and ironically centering powers of the liquid present are posterior elaborations. It is in this backdrop that smaller leagues, as Belgium, are caught in a tug and more often lose out.
sportmanko (2011-09-27 13:12:14)
Highburn Athletic FC need football players Highburn Athletic FC recruiting for experience players to help shape them in there secound season. The club would like to develop and continue to bring more talent to the team. For any more information please contact : sportmanko@live.com http://www.footballmercatocom/en_ ccjad _12924.html

patel jayeshkumar (2012-12-16 15:50:06)
GET REGISTER FOR THE NEXT FOOTBALL TRIALS Are you looking to play football/soccer in the UK? A number of non-league clubs at steps 5-7 of the English Football Pyramid are keen to recruit new players and you could be one of them. Contact me, and you will get help with getting the necessary work VISA's if you don't already have a European Passport, and help with accommodation. You will have the option of playing in either the Midlands or West Country. A number of bigger clubs regularly send scouts to watch games in these leagues and there is a good possibility that you could be taken on by them in the future. What To Do Next & The Process Of Getting Signed Up By A Club Register for the trail send your cv Choose Your Venue Make Your Trial Payment Complete Your Player Profile Attend The UK Football Trials Event (your chance to impress with a high UKFT rating) If You're Good Enough, We'll Get You Sent To A Club Interested in a football trail in England,i am agent patel from united kingdom there will be a football trial next month in Chelsea division 4 kindly send your cv. May Allah be with you. Best Regards patel jayeshkumar Email: inshallhsocceragant@hotmail.com +447035900084 +447024061399

[...] the deregulation of football broadcasting since the 1990s, the European game has become accessible and affordable to many Africans, [...]

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Review of ‘Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism’ by Nick Couldry (2010-11-17 08:00)
In an era in which the neoliberal tenets and conditionalities, after threatening to become the ‘lore’ of the so-called good governance, are also seeking to pervade popular imagination, voice as an articulation of critical insight has become all the more important for our survival. In the preceding era, from Hirschman to Habermas, and from Bakhtin to Foucault, voice has been problematised, though not exactly in the same epistemo-methodological way, in social theory. But somehow the theme needed a cutting-edge analysis in the aftermath of the steep ascendance of neoliberalism in the contemporary era. Indeed the volume under review serves that purpose well.

Judging from his experience of the UK and USA the author’s point of departure is the built-in mechanism of neoliberalism, which makes the offers of voice, as he points out, ‘unsustainable’ by either denying it or making it illusory. To add from the reviewer’s experience in India and in some other developing countries, perhaps the scenario is a bit more complicated and the mechanism a slightly more subtle— revealing a mixed dose of denial and construction of illusion, which in turn makes voice ‘unnecessary’ and ‘redundant’. Thus, in India the government
adopting the neoliberal market reforms in 1991, notwithstanding its minority status in the then parliament, had proclaimed (in the strange logic of the then Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao) that any parliamentary debate on the issue would be ‘inimical’ to India’s positive image abroad. Such is the power of neoliberalism in silencing voice in the world’s largest democracy! No doubt, the author hits the proverbial bull’s eye when he associates neoliberalism with ‘self-harm’ (p.135).

Voice, in the author’s scheme of things, is a connecting term that on the one hand, challenges neoliberalism’s unilateral claim of market triumphalism, and on the other, generates alternative view of politics based on people’s capacities for social cooperation. In this scheme there are two prime analytical categories: voice as a value and voice as a process. To cut a long narrative short, the first category refers to ‘the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organizing human life and resources that themselves value voice (as a process)’. Voice as a process involves giving an account of one’s life and its conditions. In a supposedly integrative framework the author explains that valuing voice involves close attention to the conditions under which voice as a process is effective, and how broader forms of organization may subtly undermine or devalue voice as a process. The successive chapters in the book—dealing respectively with the crisis of neoliberal economics, the predicament of neoliberal democracy, role of the media, philosophies and sociologies of voice, and the last one based on the visualization of post-neoliberal politics—are developed meticulously on the basis of these categories.

There is little doubt that neoliberalism sustains and expands itself on the basis of market fundamentalism—the market being the be-all and end-all of not only economy but also of the social and political organization. But at the same time, to make a provocative remark, not all the critiques of neoliberalism of the contemporary times have been able to derive solid counter-points which can serve as a foundation to the visualization of alternative(s) to it. The socialist alternative has proved to be too inflexible and reductionist to negotiate with the nuances and complexities of the neoliberal times. The various radical alternatives have been tempting but they remain too local in conceptual framework and spatially scattered to effect the kind of synergy that is needed to at least put up a reasonable degree of resistance to the adversary which succeeds in weaving the local and the global in its own interest. “Down with neoliberalism!” is an attractive slogan, perhaps full of good intentions, but the battle of the wits is much more complicated.

In epistemological terms, the common methodological deficiency of the critiques has been the failure to weave the theory with practice in accordance with the emergent order. In the face of such deficiency the neoliberal school, in what can be described as a concessionary gesture, continues to produce some ‘internal critiques’ which, for obvious reasons, remain confined within a fixed cognitive and conceptual orbit. No wonder then that the shrill cry of the ‘end of history’ would, notwithstanding its astonishingly weak logic, continue to subsume the voice in the way we mean here. The author himself admits this in the following words: ‘Neoliberalism’s discounting of voice is so deeply embedded that alternative discourses that value voice will not simply emerge as if from a vacuum.’ (p.17).

The author displays remarkable ability to intellectually navigate through various streams of neoliberalism by exposing, with simultaneous invocation of less radical critique of Richard Layard and (arguably) more radical critique of Amartya Sen. The critical pitch is heightened by his explanation, in political terms, of why neoliberal democracy is an oxymoron. While there is a general tendency among the scholars in both media studies and in studies on neoliberalism respectively to exercise ‘mutual indifference’, at least beyond a kind of superficial linkage, the chapter which analyses the role of the media in amplifying the neoliberal values—especially the focus on the reality show—has a number of clues for further consideration, especially in the context of the author’s contention, that too in the so-called Media Era, that in imagining social organization beyond the purview of neoliberalism one has to look beyond the media.

The chapters on the philosophy and sociologies of voice also make interesting reading but it seems that Foucault could have gained a little more attention from the author. In this context it is not just the more coherently
formed and more frequently discussed concept of governmentality, but especially the half-formed and somewhat more fluid notion of biopolitics, call for greater and more intense focus than is accorded in the book. There is yet another point to be noted. While the author succeeds quite well in providing us with an in-depth analysis of the impact of the organizational-constitutive logic of neoliberalism on voice the fact remains that in the contemporary era there are a number of instances of the people ‘willing’ to give up some of their freedoms to get greater security in return. This has been particularly evident in the post-9/11 world in which the neoliberal regimes did not lose much time to enact some potentially repressive acts. To what extent this phenomenon is related to the well-designed trade-off between considerations of welfare and those of security and to what degree it strategises terror to suppress voice are complex but fascinating areas that need to be probed deeply. Then again, this strategy perhaps has lot to do with the notion and practice of biopolitics.

The most distinctive feature of the book is that in exposing the *modus operandi* of neoliberalism in the ideational and practical terms it resorts to a kind of back-and-forth movement of the methods and practice of the same. This is important in addressing a force which is exceedingly complex. While it would be premature to imagine an impending end of the neoliberal wave that now rules the world, real-time, intense academic endeavours, such as the one found in the slim but idea-packed volume, would go a long way to highlight the importance of critical articulation against what at the end of the day surfaces as the attempted cultivation of the monoculture of the mind.

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**The book that defined my thirtieth year (The Brothers Karamazov by Dostoevsky) (2010-11-18 08:00)**

Christ was thirty when he started on his mission of changing the world. Siddhartha Gautama was twenty-nine when he decided to renounce the world and become the Buddha. I was somewhere between my twenty-ninth and thirtieth year when I began reading Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. Imagine a bucket of cold water splashed on your face at 3 A.M in the dead of winter somewhere close to the North Pole. That was the experience I had when I reached the final page of Constance Garnett’s translation of Dostoevsky’s last novel. I thought I was dying. I wasn’t. I was merely coming out of one phase of my life in order to enter another. It’s the caterpillar in the pupa stage fully formed and ready to come out as a butterfly. Such is the lightness with which the book filled my heart.
Only Shakespeare and Dostoevsky can make you feel with every character in their works. You feel with the cruelty of the elder Karamazov, the obsessions of Dmitri the oldest brother, the cold rationality of Ivan that violates the human spirit, the epileptic Smerdyakov who throws bread to a dog with pins in it, the sweet and saintly Alyosha, that embodiment of human goodness Father Zossima, the proud and erratic Grushenka, Ilyusha the child who is dying because he has seen his father humiliated by Dmitri, the story within a story of Jesus coming to the city of Seville and thrown into a prison by the Grand Inquisitor who mocks Christ only to be kissed by him at the end of the narrative, the novel convinces you of what Hamlet says: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

If *The Brothers Karamazov* defined my thirtieth year it’s because it freed me of the cynicism of early youth. I took too many things seriously until that point including my own self, but how people felt I did not. For the first time I reversed the equation and made an attempt to know people for what they are and not for what I want them to be. The tendency to imagine that you know people is a vain and self-centered one. Interestingly there is something about your own self that you’re destined never to know. The book made me see that “there are more things in heaven and earth” than what I could dream of philosophizing about.

Can we trust human nature or are we to pity and embrace it – this is the question that haunts Dostoevsky. Not to believe in the goodness of humanity would mean you’re condemned never to know the sweetness of living. To believe in such goodness is at the same time madness because you become vulnerable and lend yourself to hurt without any reason at all. “People are not bad. They may be weak sometimes” says the impeccably beautiful protagonist (played by Irene Jacob) in the last movie of Kieslowski’s trilogy *Three Colors: Red* that celebrates friendship and trust. The line is a strange one because though she has every reason to feel pessimistic about people she refuses to despair. This refusal to despair simply means you live without being hedged by defense mechanisms and love life for what it is.
That’s a very Dostoevskyean stance: to see people as “weak” and not “bad.” You don’t judge people too harshly and you’re freed of the suspicion that comes from a mentality trapped in the past. If Shakespeare sees human beings as performers, Dostoevsky sees them as victims of an almost fatal “weakness” that each one individually has to come to terms with at a moral and spiritual level. To be saved or to be damned is a choice that you make for yourself. The price is what you pay as a person though the outcome of the choice will either benefit or destroy those around you.

Dostoevsky can forgive many things – almost everything, like “Jesus” himself, the hero of his novels. The most reluctant to forgive however and hardest he is on cynics and cynicism which he sees in the rise of western individualism that he’s never tired of ranting against; because, like Tolstoy he views material progress as an evil working contrary to the spiritual emancipation of humanity. Dostoevsky’s heroes are ultimately innocent – their innocence comes from their knowledge of man’s capacity to sin against his neighbor – in failing his neighbor man has failed God; and Dostoevsky’s heroes are out to demonstrate the innocence that knows that in the end it must suffer betrayal by the ones you love the most.

I vaguely recollect a critic who says that Tolstoy was benevolent but Dostoevsky was kind. The distinction is important: benevolence is a conscious desire to be good; kindness is instinctual and spontaneous. The latter pervades Dostoevsky’s writing as a whole. The love and friendship that Alyosha shares with the kids is one of the most spontaneous episodes in the narrative. That strange and questionable phrase “unconditional love” – Dostoevsky is the only writer who can make you want to believe in it. The world is cruel and cynical but Dostoevsky wants you to love it and be filled with generous feelings towards it. People are born to be happy no matter how much they’ve to suffer for it in the process. The deeply moving funeral scene following Ilyusha’s death at the end of the novel celebrates life and friendship in a mystical, transcendental way:

"Karamazov, we love you!" a voice, probably Kartashov’s, cried impulsively.

"We love you, we love you!" they all caught it up. There were tears in the eyes of many of them.

"Hurrah for Karamazov!" Kolya shouted ecstatically.

"And may the dead boy’s memory live for ever!" Alyosha added again with feeling.

"For ever!" the boys chimed in again.

"Karamazov," cried Kolya, "can it be true what’s taught us in religion, that we shall all rise again from the dead and shall live and see each other again, all, Ilusha too?"

"Certainly we shall all rise again, certainly we shall see each other and shall tell each other with joy and gladness all that has happened!" Alyosha answered, half laughing, half enthusiastic.

"Ah, how splendid it will be!" broke from Kolya.

"Well, now we will finish talking and go to his funeral dinner. Don’t be put out at our eating pancakes — it’s a very old custom and there’s something nice in that!" laughed Alyosha. “Well, let us go! And now we go hand in hand.”
"And always so, all our lives hand in hand! Hurrah for Karamazov!" Kolya cried once more rapturously, and once more the boys took up his exclamation:

"Hurrah for Karamazov!"

With Tolstoy you’re constantly impressed by his greatness; *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace* are indeed extraordinary works of art. You can’t be impressed with Dostoevsky; you can only love him and his characters. You laugh with them, you weep with them, you share their jealousies and their obsessions just as much as you share their need to love and be loved. They fill you with boundless pity and affection for a sad and a beautiful world that continues to be sadder and more beautiful than ever.

“Life’s unfair?” Cultural differences between UK and US (2010-11-19 08:00)

What does “fair” mean? Is fairness related to responsibility, liberalism, freedom of choice - and "freedom" to deal with the consequences - whether you win, or lose? Or is it more about everyone following the rules and "playing the game", rather than trying to win it - a kind of "social glue" that binds a society together by taming the differences between its members? And who exactly gets to define what “fairness” is?

Between the amusing and the sociological, this article deals with cultural differences in relation to the concept of fairness (read article [here](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-10869722)).


23 Things They Don’t Tell You About Capitalism (2010-11-20 08:00)

[EMBED]

The Power of Cartoons (2010-11-21 08:00)

An interesting [1]TED talk for those who like the [2]RSA Animate cartoons as much as we do at SI:

[EMBED]

2. [http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/](http://comment.rsablogs.org.uk/videos/)
"My mobile has just committed suicide": humans, machines, and anthropomorphisation

Have you ever heard someone rant at their computer, as if it were a living creature? Ever done it yourself? This brilliant short [1] article deconstructs anthropomorphic usage of language in relation to machines using examples from the life of hackers, and suggests that:

"The key to understanding this kind of usage is that it isn’t done in a naive way; hackers don’t personalize their stuff in the sense of feeling empathy with it, nor do they mystically believe that the things they work on every day are ‘alive’. To the contrary: hackers who anthropomorphize are expressing not a vitalistic view of program behavior but a mechanistic view of human behavior."

(The excerpt is Pt. 4, Jargon Construction, from The [2] Jargon File - a very lengthy "compendium of hacker slang illuminating many aspects of hackish tradition, folklore, and humor" - but just as very worth reading, full of insights and humour. I keep it tucked in my "favourites" bar and read bits of it between my afternoon cups of coffee which is the time of day when my computer often refuses to co-operate with me and instead gets stuck working on its updates. I can’t help thinking that Bruno Latour would love to read this.)


The significance of the 'spending review' and the true choice we will make now, whether we want it or not

What is at stake in the British government’s spending review announced some weeks ago, is not a question of so-called 'cuts', how massive they will be and whom will be most affected; that is a merely technical problem which takes for granted the nature and scope of the real problem. Nor is it only a question, absolutely unacceptable as this is, of the hardship which hundreds of thousands are bound to undergo. The gravest problem lies elsewhere.

The facts are plain and well known: a number of major banks lost inconceivable amounts of money while the bankers amassed and continue to amass unbelievable sums for which they pay ridiculous taxes. To avoid the banks’ collapse, governments poured in billions of public money to bail them out, thus becoming heavily indebted. But 'financial markets' don't like such public deficits, so governments are quick to plan massive public spending 'cuts' in order to reduce the deficits and please 'the markets', that is, the banks and the bankers. Any mention of tax rises for the well-off is considered blasphemous, while a campaign just launched against '[1]benefit scroungers' (seemingly a very serious thing, as it includes '[2]benefit cheat hit squads') is not directed at the true scroungers and cheats responsible for the catastrophe, but is the usual ferocious campaign against the poorer and less fortunate. To add insult to injury we are told by ministers that the 'cuts' which will destroy hundreds of thousands of family lives and bring havoc to the whole country are 'fair'.
How is this possible at all? Four elements account for this situation: an oligarchy of wealth as ruling group - in truth a plutocracy; a doctrinaire and extremely contagious political ideology: managerialism; an easily recruitable executive following: a growing managerial class which occupies key positions in all institutions and at all levels through the society; and a standard set of governing tools made up of managerial indicators and above all indebtedness (compulsory debt-incurring) to which ‘all and each’ are yoked: individuals, including ever younger people such as students, institutions and entire countries.

These four elements make a totally poisonous ‘cocktail’ - poisonous for anything to do with human dignity, love for the job well done and for the public good, freedom, democracy and justice. How does it work? As any such oligarchy in history, the defining features of the current one are: tireless quest to squeeze everything out of those beneath them, parvenu disdain for learning and culture, and total impunity (the only difference with the old oligarchies being that this one is the result of a subsidised capitalism). As for those who are not part of the oligarchy, it is basically a question of unfitness for a free or political way of life, that is to say, of servitude; but the servitude is voluntary because, in reality, women and men do not mind yielding their liberty and abdicating their responsibility through servile submission, since in the process we become petty tyrants ourselves, and this is a role we seem to end up enjoying, to the point of mistaking it for the responsibility and liberty we have just surrendered.

This is the kind of human beings that the current regime demands, promotes and shapes. It requests them from the very beginning, from the cradle, as the case of university students shows: by yoking students to huge long-term debts, that is, to what governments all over the world now reject for themselves like the plague, the recent Browne’s review of HE (strangely called an ’[3]independent’ review) despite the unmistakable belonging of its author to the aforementioned oligarchy) seeks to make sure that students will be consumers and nothing but consumers. The difficulty is that a university degree proper is not something one can just ‘buy’, for buying something is the easiest thing to do if one has money, but a degree demands effort and dedication, qualities which nobody in their right mind has ever attributed to consumers. That is why claiming that ‘students’ paying more will demand ‘more’ (Browne’s review) is sheer sophistry. ‘More’ of what? Indeed such ‘students’ will demand more easiness, more good-timeness, and will request their qualifications regardless. Pleasing and flattering angry consumers: that will be ‘teaching’, the only ‘teaching’ permitted by the managerial indicators of ‘student’ satisfaction. But it was never a question of teaching or education; rather the purpose is to transform HE into a market, that is, into yet another profit-yielding machinery to feed the oligarchy with what it cherishes most: cripple human beings.

We can thus see the true alternative the so-called ‘cuts’ place before us, here and now: either to consecrate a situation of servitude whereby a country governed like a herd of cattle continues to feed the oligarchy with its daughters and sons, or to show the resoluteness of able and responsible women and men to, both collectively and individually, stand up against this infinite injustice and start to define our own fate. Only hardship without dignity and pride should be feared. This is the choice: want it or not, we will choose, and it will be the result of that choice what we will bequeath to those coming after us.

Like this? Read Carlos Frade on 'The Sociological Imagination and Its Promise Fifty Years Later: Is There a Future for the Social Sciences as a Free Form of Enquiry?' [4]here

Steve Fuller on Student Protests (2010-11-24 08:00)

I was very impressed by the numbers who protested in London ten days ago. Indeed, the violence done to Tory Party HQ did not bother me as much as the lack of organized purpose in doing so. This ‘violence’ has been trumped up mainly because the police didn’t expect it, not because of its actual severity. Had I managed to get to the top of 30 Millbank, I would have read some manifesto that made demands sufficiently concrete to be made talking points in the media and possibly Parliament.

Instead the action was too easily dismissed as simply the work of an aimless rabble. Moreover, the impact of the protest was dissipated by news programmes juxtaposing Alan Porter and Clare Solomon, i.e. the good cop and
bad cop of the protest. They spent more time bickering between themselves than stressing their unity against the tuition hikes – perhaps because they hadn’t worked out their common interest.

My advice: Violence of the sort that was on display is not so bad if it is seen as the spearhead of a unified front. But it is a disaster if it’s easily disowned as the product of a fringe movement that then opens up internal divisions within the student ranks about what the protest is supposedly about. Here, I believe, Porter missed an opportunity – and Solomon played it better (though as a team they just cancelled each other out).

The idea of recalling Liberal MPs who have reneged on not raising tuition fees in university-based constituencies is a powerful move and should be pursued publicly and doggedly. (Wow – Liberals are the biggest Pharisees in our midst today!) This is the sort of political action that would open up serious discussion in media, especially given the Liberal Party’s overall vulnerability.

However, we academics, regardless of party, need to figure out more creative ways of justifying and financing higher education because it’s clear that the current system is unsustainable – and unfortunately the government is right on this basic point.

I have signed the manifesto of the Campaign for Public Universities, but I have a specific take on it. Let’s start with the manifesto statement:

The UK Campaign for the Public University is open to all. It is a broad-based campaign with no party or other political affiliation. It has been initiated by a group of university teachers and graduate students seeking to defend and promote the idea of the university as a public good. We believe that the public university is essential both for cultivating democratic public life and creating the means for individuals to find fulfillment in creative and intellectual pursuits regardless of whether or not they pursue a degree programme.

My take on it is the following: It remains an open question whether state taxes are the most economically feasible way to promote universities as a public good. Higher taxes simply force everyone to reorient their default consumption to something that someone else deems beneficial. Not surprisingly, there is resistance. In contrast, if we operated more on a church model of financial provision (as in the US), then those who have already benefited from a university education, regardless of the careers they have subsequently pursued, would feel grateful and motivated (the two participles that jointly define obligation) to enable others to enjoy the same opportunities (defined here as what they themselves experienced as students) so that the recipients may also do good as well (however they come to define it). This ‘pay it forward’ mentality is an open-ended version of a gift-giving economy, in which the benefactor is respected not by their recipients’ pursuit of a similar career but by their drawing on a comparable enhancement to their potential provided by a university education.

In other words, the hope is that potential donor students will find some far-seeing teacher who would enable them to explore possibilities that benefit humanity as a whole. From a political economy standpoint, the rest is about how long before the knowledge regularly generated by universities translates into knowledge that is beneficial to society as a whole, regardless of their relationship to this less than fortunate elite mode of production.

dan kellar (2010-11-24 23:19:15)
all right, i'll call it: occupy everything, demand nothing :)

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Cuts, Fees, and Solidarity: Why the Telegraph’s Janet Daley was wrong to say the demonstration was “self-serving” (2010-11-25 09:00)

The morning after the demonstration in London against education cuts the Today programme on BBC Radio Four carried an interview with two newspaper columnists - John Harris of The Guardian, and Janet Daley of The Daily Telegraph. A question posed to both of them: was yesterday's protest by students in London a watershed moment for the government?

In answering this question Janet Daley misrepresented protest in general and this protest in particular, misrepresented the social benefit of education and misrepresented the function of general taxation.

There were at least two points to the protest: a proposed 40% cut in higher education funding and a proposed tripling of student fees. Daley seems not to have been aware of the cuts aspect of the protest. The most commonly heard chant on the day was “no ifs, no buts: no education cuts.” The protest was also against an increase in the size of personal fees charged to students. Daley seems to have forgotten that students in higher education already pay tuition fees. Ignoring these two major aspects of the protest allowed Daley to make out, wrongly, that the protesters were ‘self-serving.’ She said:

“In my day, student demonstrations were about not ones own interests, you know, we weren’t fighting to have other people pay for our education, we were fighting for civil rights, for black voters in the south, and against de facto segregation in the north and against the Vietnam war, and as a result I think those demonstrations really did capture the imagination of a generation. What these demonstrations seem to be about is something much more unrealistic and self-serving which is to say that the whole of the society should pay for your education.”

On protests in general Daley spoke as though fighting for the interests of your own social group is a bad thing. When one is being treated unjustly it is not a bad thing to fight for ones own interests: there were plenty of black Americans in Daley’s day fighting for their own civil rights and for the rights of other black people against injustice. It is wrong to imply that to fight for your rights is ‘self-serving’.

In saying that the demonstration in London was self-serving Daley is mistaken. It was a demonstration of solidarity. As well as students from the NUS (many of whom will have completed their degrees before any proposed cuts would take effect) there were members of the University and College Union (UCU – which co-organised the demonstration) and of the National Union of Teachers (NUT). There were demonstrators from War on Want, and from the Coalition of Resistance. Many of these people already have their education and have already had the whole of society pay for their education. Now they are resisting an attack on higher education and defending the social good that higher education brings – this is not self-serving.

Daley did acknowledge that higher education is a social good, she said: “Now I actually agree that the state should make a contribution to higher education, that it’s a social good in itself, and the state will continue to do that because there are still going to be grants to universities.” But, as the demonstration pointed out and Daley ignored, the government proposes to cut the state grant to higher education. The proposed cuts would mean that the cost of teaching anything other than a STEM subject (science, technology, engineering and medicine but also now including maths a few modern languages) are met entirely by the students taking that subject – the government is proposing to block all social contribution via state funding to the teaching of non-STEM subjects; as a state we would be making no collective contribution to non-STEM subjects and would thereby shirk our collective responsibility for the social good they can bring.

It is this collective responsibility for the social good of higher education that Daley has entirely misunderstood.
She contradicted her own acknowledgement of the social good of higher education in saying that: “What it’s doing is switching the burden of that cost to the people who are actually benefiting from it” - in fact we all benefit from the contribution that all higher education subjects can make to society and we all benefit from knowing that people can go to college and university no matter what their family wealth.

Daley misrepresented the way that general taxation works. She said: “what you’re asking people to do, people who will never earn anything like the university graduates who are making this demand, is pay for their education.” There are two mistakes here. First, not all university graduates become high earners; a degree is not a transaction in which you are buying yourself a highly paid job. Graduates who do not earn large salaries can be found working in charities, voluntary organizations, public sector organizations, and in small and large businesses across the nation. Second, through general taxation we all pay for all of our state projects, including until now higher education – “people who will never earn anything like the university graduates” have not paid for higher education alone, society as a whole has met the cost. Contrary to what Daley says, to pay for higher education through general taxation would mean that low- and middle-earners, their children and grandchildren, brothers, sisters and friends would not barred or discouraged from higher education for lack of personal wealth.

This demonstration was not self-serving but a demonstration of solidarity. It was a demonstration against cutting higher education. It was a protest against proposals that further increase and individualise the cost of a higher education. It was a demonstration that stood for the right to higher education for coming generations from all backgrounds. It was about fighting to keep the opportunity of higher education open to people who do not have the wealth to buy an education. It was about fighting against condemning people who want higher education, but who are not wealthy, to a working life that begins with personal debt.

Jane Salisbury (2010-11-25 13:53:30)
“In my day, student demonstrations were about not ones own interests, you know, we weren’t fighting to have other people pay for our education”...well no Janet Daley - you didn’t need to did you - they already were.

Grad school in pictures: “The illustrated guide to Ph.D.” (2010-11-26 08:00)

It is hard to explain what PhD research is, using words: there seems to be a consensus about this across disciplines, from qualitative sociology to mathematical physics and beyond. As someone who has been doing one for over three years, and will soon be... perhaps... tentatively... approaching... completion, I can vouch for this! This is why, we need more initiatives that keep such as "Dance your PhD" (see our [1]post on 24 Oct 2010) or [2]"Matt Might's Illustrated guide to Ph.D.". Even if you have never even considered doing a Ph.D., it is nice to be of the role of new researchers in the big picture. To know that somewhere, some dudes wake up each morning, sit at their desks or go out in their research fields or labs in order to continue “chipping away on the rock-face of science” with their tiny axes and “turning coffee into theorems” - some of which might, only might, one day, change our idea of the world.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mark-carrigan/dancing-your-phd/
2. http://matt.might.net/articles/phd-school-in-pictures/
RSA Animate – Superfreakonomics (2010-11-27 08:00)

[EMBED]

Selected: Why some lead, others follow and why it matters (2010-11-28 08:00)

[EMBED]

Education Cuts: More Images of Protest (2010-11-29 08:00)

[1]

[2]
11 November 2010 - London protests

All images: courtesy Kalina Yordanova


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[...] Image courtesy of Kalina Yordanova [...] 

The case for open access academic publishing? (2010-11-30 08:00)

An insightful analysis of the (economic!) benefits of open access in the publishing of academic research: read the article by Adam Stevenson on arstechnica.com [1]here
Further reading:
[5] The RIN Report (rin.ac.uk)

3. www.jisc.ac.uk
4. www.stm-assoc.org
5. www.rin.ac.uk

1.7 December

New column! “Visual Sociology” call for reader submissions (2010-12-01 08:00)

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to "Visual Research". To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday. The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just [1]e-mail us and we
promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.

[2]

Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please [3]e-mail us with ‘SI Visual Sociology’ in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

• title of the work;
• full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
What counts as "a piece of visual research"? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:

- JPEG format
- 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

Legal issues: Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers’ rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

Copyright: The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

"This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License."

* Becker 1995 Visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context, Visual Studies, Volume 10, Issue 1 & 2 1995 , pp. 5 - 14 (the article can be downloaded here, or viewed in html [here] )
Review of 'Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods' by Shawn Wilson (2010-12-02 08:00)

Paperback ISBN: 97815526662816
Emma Battell Lowman
University of Warwick

In Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods, Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson sets out to describe and explain an Indigenous approach to research, and to demonstrate how this research paradigm can be put into practice. What Wilson contends is that “the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality” and that the “shared aspect of an Indigenous axiology and methodology is accountability to relationships.” (7) While these principles are simply stated, understanding the implications and challenges for researching in accordance with them is a complex undertaking. Drawing on “a combination of methods, including participant observation, interviews with individual participants and focus group discussions” (40) and working in relationship with others investigating similar questions and issues in Indigenous research (and whose voices play major roles in the text), Wilson has created a comprehensive study of the theory, history and practice of Indigenous research.

Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred has called for ‘means ends consistency’ in approaches to Indigenous political and social liberation, and this ethic helps to describe Research is Ceremony - this is not just a book about Indigenous research methodologies, this is a book that embodies this practice. To do so, Wilson employs a creative textual solution to help make the book accessible to a wide spectrum of readers – Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, academics and other researchers, experts and amateurs. Two distinct writing styles/voices are used throughout the text, distinguished by different typeset. One is a more familiarly academic and is used to lay out the abstract/theoretical and academic context of the book. This ‘voice’ describes the structure of the research, provides definitions of key terms (such as research paradigm, ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology, Indigenous, and Dominant - p33-35), discusses dominant research paradigms (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism - p35-37), and the chronology of research about, with and by Indigenous peoples from 1770 to the
present (p45-54). The other voice is more personal, and takes the form of a letter to Wilson’s three sons.

The intent here is to communicate in a more direct way with the reader in order to help develop a relationship between the reader, Wilson, and the ideas discussed. This is the voice that lays out the personal/intimate context of the research including the stories of how Wilson came to this work, and the relationships and people that supported and generated this research. As the book progresses, the voices become less distinct as the readers have developed enough familiarity with the intent, context and ideas being discussed so as to no longer require the distinction. And there is great gentleness in the care Wilson takes to situate readers unfamiliar with Indigenous ways of knowing, and to practice respect towards the Indigenous individuals and contexts with which he has learned. Such bi-cultural work carries risks of incompleteness, omission or inadvertently causing offense (both by what is said and what is unsaid), but Wilson approaches this project “with a good heart” (7) and with humility and respect, explains or apologizes for any possible gaps in communication.

One of the strengths of Research is Ceremony is what Sean Wilson deliberately chooses not to do: he acknowledges the important role of Indigenous critiques of Western research paradigms and processes, and the harm they have and continue to do to Indigenous individuals and communities (Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s 1999 Decolonizing Methodologies is, perhaps, the most well-known of this movement) by ‘standing on the shoulders’ of these scholars, his intent is to focus explicitly on describing and practising Indigenous research and methodologies. In this way, he deliberately avoids the trap of wasting time and energy justifying the need for Indigenous research paradigms and the validity and value of Indigenous approaches to research. Wilson asserts that this work has been done, and it is critical that we go beyond tendencies to compare Indigenous research paradigms to mainstream research “in order to develop theory, practice and methods that are uniquely Indigenous.” (16)

Wilson defines “Indigenous” as a term “inclusive of all first peoples - unique in our own cultures - but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world” (16) and suggests that examining the aspects of an Indigenous research paradigm can help to address “the bigger question of what it is to be Indigenous.” (13) It has been recognized for some time that Indigenous ontologies or “ways of knowing and being” are both fundamentally different from common, Western understandings (especially in the academy) as well as key to valuable insights into the human condition, the relations between people(s), and the relationship between humans and the earth itself. Following a uniquely Indigenous research paradigm contributes to the rearticulation of these insights, otherwise potentially lost through the interference of colonization.

Readers familiar with some debates and discussions about Indigenous research methodologies and the rise of Indigenous approaches in the academy may be surprised to see some scholars/works not represented in the bibliography - Susan Hill and Angela Cavender Wilson for example, are conspicuous by their absence. However, Wilson makes no grandiose claim to have written the definitive work on Indigenous research methodologies. Rather, he works explicitly from his involvement and embeddedness in a network of relationships with researchers and practitioners who work primarily in the area of Indigenous education, and does generate examples and conclusions applicable to Indigenous and Indigenized research across a broad spectrum of inquiry.

Reading Research is Ceremony is no passive exercise: in accordance with the principle and practice of relationality, the reader is called to develop a relationship, via the text, with both the author as storyteller, and the ideas presented. And this is the crux of Wilson’s argument: the purpose of a ceremony is “to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves,” (137) and this is exactly what research does. As we work together and think together, we come into relationship with each other and each other’s ideas. Once in relationship, there are responsibilities, and also new arrays of possibilities. In accordance with relational accountability, the role of the reader engaging with Research is Ceremony carries responsibilities: to listen respectfully and not to judge, to internalize the information presented, and to form our own conclusions. Further, Wilson asks us to be willing to change our conclusions as new relationships develop that permit us different points of view, and different experiences. (134) As we read this book on methodologies, being called upon to uphold such explicit responsibilities
and relationships may be an unsettling experience especially for those of us rooted in traditional, academic practice. But do not worry! We’ve just become part of an Indigenous research paradigm!

Readers need to walk away from (or with!) this book with an understanding of the centrality of relationality and relational accountability to Indigenous research paradigms and practices. However, the biggest gift is of possibilities. Wilson rises to the challenge of explaining and practicing an Indigenous research paradigm in a thoughtful, kind, and comprehensive way. No matter your geographic location, area of study, or previous familiarity, Research is Ceremony is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand the considerable benefits and challenges inherent in engaging with Indigenous thought and practice.

“"We are no longer the post-ideological generation; we are now the generation at the heart of the resistance" (2010-12-03 09:00)

[1] On 10th November 2010 an estimated 55,000 people marched in London against UK government plans to raise higher education tuition fees from £3200 to £9000 per student per year, while simultaneously cutting all public funding for social sciences, arts and humanities subjects and reducing it significantly for science subjects. When the protest reached the Conservative party head quarters ('Millbank Tower') thousands of protestors stood outside chanting, some made a bonfire in the courtyard with the placards and a few others were involved in more confrontational acts such as smashing windows and daubing graffiti on the walls. A number also made it into the building and on to the roof. At the time, the government spin machine went to work trying to delegitimize the students' concerns as a consequence of the actions of a 'violent minority'. They were initially successful. There was an outpouring of disdain from commentators on the left and right, and even the president of the National Union of Students expressed his disapproval. The day looked set to be recorded as a one off, a voicing of concern by a minority of academics and students. Yet, two weeks later, on Tuesday 24th November, there was a national day of action, called by the National Campaign Against Cuts and Fees. 135,000 university and school students as well as academics came out, and this time they protested in their local areas. There were protests in most major cities, with the ‘kettling’ of school pupils as well as adults in London providing some of the most dramatic scenes, and a number of universities saw students occupying lecture theatres or other learning spaces. Then, on 30th November a second national day of action saw more universities 'go into occupation', more protests around the country, and sit-ins in a number of city council chambers, most notably in Birmingham. A total of 18 universities saw occupations on the first 'national day of action' (24th November), increasing to up to 25 on the second (30th November). These include SOAS, UCL, Warwick, Leeds, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Oxford. At UCL the university management called in the bailiffs, at Warwick they put guards and later police on the doors, refused to allow students to leave the room and return to the occupation again (there were no toilets in the room), banned public speeches and lectures through the doorways and turned on the air conditioning to freeze the occupiers out. Leeds VC Michael Arthur called the police, as did most other university managers. The police have been acting alongside university officials and to maintain a political process in which
proper debate is being suppressed, with thousands of people kettled in London for 9 hours last week, many of them children. One observer said that never at any protest had he seen police officers look ashamed at what they were being asked to do. Meanwhile, lecturers at many universities delivered food to occupiers, gave ‘free’ lectures and offered public support for the actions. The Unite Union is trying to set up a national collection for the occupations, Green Party politicians and musicians have made an appearance, Noam Chomsky has publicly commended them, and messages of solidarity have been sent from people all over the world. What is interesting about these occupations is that students are not simply sitting in a room and refusing to leave. Every occupation has expressed a desire to create an alternative learning space to a neoliberal market driven place of education. Six months ago young people were widely criticized for being a depoliticized generation only interested in facebook and shopping. One of the most powerful messages emerging from the recent occupations and protests is that this, at least for a significant minority, could not be further from the truth. Expressing this sentiment, the occupations have spilled out into the public realm with Leeds University students planning a take-over of a vacant area of their city for a week long educational project and discussion on the spending cuts more widely. Goldsmiths students have given a five minute lecture in a bank in the guise of the ‘University of Strategic Optimism’, and UCL students last week created a ‘flashmob’ protest outside Topshop on Oxford Street in protest against tax evasion on the part of the owner, Philip Green. These occupations are being widely covered in the media and supported by letter writing campaigns and petitions to university VCs, MPs and newspapers. There has been a sudden proliferation of not only media but also academic comment on the topic, with social networking sites leading the way. Sally Jefferson, a Cambridge student said of the occupation at her university “we’re inspired by the solidarity we’ve received from academics, students at other universities, and local residents”. Those speaking out in solidarity with the students also feel inspired. At the National Coalition of Resistance (the purpose of which is to resist the austerity measures generally, in all sectors) conference last Saturday Lyndsey German of the Stop the War coalition was typical of the speakers when she said that “the students have changed the whole discussion, we must stand up with them”. Barnaby, a school student perhaps expressed the sentiment of his peers most succinctly when he asserted “we are no longer the post-ideological generation, we are now the generation at the heart of the resistance”. Links [4] Campaign for the Public University For a full list see the Really Open University page [5] Occupation Count! and the National Campaign Against Cuts and Fees [6] occupations page


USO news round up « trinketization (2010-12-05 20:51:43)
[...] Another fair account of student actions and the USO here by Lucy Mayblin, “We are no longer the post-ideological generation” on the socialimagination site (03/12/10): here [...] 

The right protest for the wrong reasons | The Sociological Imagination (2011-01-12 08:02:10)
[...] been here before. At the student march on the 10th November, all my memories came flooding back – young men and women with fluorescent hair and matching [...] 

The right protest for the wrong reasons? | Campaign for the Public University (2011-01-13 11:12:22)
[...] been here before. At the student march on the 10th November, all my memories came flooding back – young men and women with fluorescent hair and matching [...] 

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Why is it important to have social connections? (2010-12-04 08:00)

[EMBED]

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook (2010-12-04 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination
[2] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:

[5] Twitter Updates


Deferred gratification: key to success? (2010-12-05 08:00)

The ability for delayed or deferred gratification is the ability to control impulses and postpone the fulfilment of a desire - the opposite of instant gratification. This short talk by Joachim de Posada revisits the famous "Stanford Marshmallow Experiment" (originally done by Walter Michel, launched in the late 1960s and published in 1972). While Michel found a positive correlation between pre-school age children’s ability to delay gratification with their later educational achievements. De Posada takes this further and generalises that the ability to defer gratification is crucial for any kind of success, and is especially key for entrepreneurial success.

Can you not drink your coffee for 6 minutes while watching this video?
University reform – assessing the potential for changes from within (2010-12-06 08:00)

In the aftermath of the recent students protest and the consequent wave of occupations in University campuses across the country, it is interesting to assess what could be done to change and ameliorate the UK higher education system from within, and not only from without. In this sense, the role of academics could be crucial in reforming and restructuring the teaching and research systems, as intelligent reforms could have the effect of reducing the need for university fees.

For example, according to [1]Michael Collins, one way to overcome the much feared discrimination between art & humanities and STEM (science, technology, engineering & maths) subjects could be that of embracing the 'liberal arts' academic model found in the USA. In the author’s perspective, the combination of vocational and humanities subject could avert the emerging view of students as ‘cogs in an economic machine’. In practical terms, it is argued that this approach could have the potential of saving money and increasing both the personal and the public value of university degrees. Crucially, these changes should be started off from within academia.

Certainly, the view provided here explores just one of the many possible options to improve the UK Higher Education institutions – nonetheless, it can be valued for shedding light on the fact that intellectual activity is not a mere product sold on the market, and should not be based on measurements of value derived from sheer market competition.

Introducing: the Campaign for the Public University (2010-12-07 08:00)

The UK Campaign for the Public University is open to all. It is a broad-based campaign with no party or other political affiliation. It has been initiated by a group of university teachers and graduate students seeking to defend and promote the idea of the university as a public good. We believe that the public university is essential both for cultivating democratic public life and creating the means for individuals to find fulfillment in creative and intellectual pursuits regardless of whether or not they pursue a degree programme.

1. http://publicuniversity.org.uk/

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Wikileaks... Wikichina? Wikiamerica... (2010-12-08 08:00)


1.

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Humanities and Social Sciences Matter! (2010-12-09 08:00)

si SUPPORTS THIS INITIATIVE:

[1]Humanities and Social Sciences Matter

Campaign for the Humanities and Social Sciences in UK Universities: [2]

"Without a serious commitment to the Humanities and Social Sciences, our society will lack a serious commitment to democracy at home and cooperation abroad.

We are a group of academics, students and business people who are campaigning for recognition of the humanities and social sciences as an invaluable public good that should not be abandoned to market forces. If you agree, please [3]sign our petition."

[4]read more
Judith Butler: Philosopher of Gender (2010-12-10 08:00)

“I have to say that in my view gender is always a failure. Everyone fails. And it is a very good thing that we fail. Because I think that stereotypes are not just images we have of gender, but they are ... an accumulated, a fact of social relations that have become naturalised over time.”

[1] Judith Butler is an American post-structuralist philosopher who works on feminism, queer theory, political philosophy, and ethics. Below is a documentary in six parts in which she touches on the main themes of her work.


1. http://rhetoric.berkeley.edu/faculty_bios/judith_butter.html

Call for interviews (2010-12-11 08:00)

Plans are currently in motion to bring a number of interviews to the Sociological Imagination over the next few months. However we’d like you to help us bring an ever wider selection of interviews to the website. If there’s anyone you’d like to interview (academic, writer, campaigner etc) then please get in touch to discuss it. We’re happy to help you arrange and carry out the interview if you’re unsure of how to do it.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2010-12-12 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity
A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical 'reform' of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here.


The antagonistic university? A conversation on cuts, conviviality and capitalism. (2010-12-13 08:00)

Anja: Let me begin by posing three questions. Firstly, it’s becoming increasingly apparent that modes of labour are appropriating cognitive, communicational and affective skills. What does this mean to you for the political potential of academic and collaborative work?

Secondly, given that there are massive cuts being proposed to the education sector through a regime of austerity measures, and given that the current labour paradigm is one that produces precarious, alienated, competitive and individualised relations between workers, do you think that the university as an institution (and the kinds of labour it engenders) is a potent site of struggle and strike?

And thirdly, what kinds of collective relations between people and modes of organising do you think are possible for the university struggles, and where do you think we should place our emphasis? How can we negotiate a transversal between micro- and macro- political desires, anxieties, exhaustions, solidarities and hopes? (Please feel free to comment on strategies you think are useful for building more caring and collective common worlds in general as well if you like).

Jamie: Personally, I’m cautious of suggesting to others where to put their energies. There’s a certain mode of
politics, which involves developing a macro-political analysis, a declaration of the state of the political landscape and suggestions for appropriate actions based on that analysis. Now, this mode of politics can certainly have a role to play. At the same time, I would not want to overestimate it. As Anaïs Nin has been credited with saying, the map is not the terrain. Any analysis of the political landscape is necessarily an abstraction, an invention of the mind. Likewise, it seems to me that what we call the university is also an abstraction for ‘it’ is only the continuous effect of social relations. These relations may be premised on the assumptions that the university does exist, that it is real, that it’s rules must be followed, that it engenders certain kinds of labour. What happens if we relate without letting those assumptions determine our actions, our affect? What happens to what we call the university when relations within it are based on play, mutuality, compassion and listening? Does it become a different place, even if only in particular moments?

There’s a little book I like by the Quaker activist and educator Parker J. Palmer called Let Your Life Speak. Instead of trying to work out the right thing to do, the right way to live, where one should put their energies, he suggests an introspective listening. “The soul,” he says “speaks its truth only under quiet, inviting, and trustworthy conditions.” It is my experience also that insights arise when the bodymind is quiet, whether through meditation, walking in the woods, gardening, or simply through a certain acceptance of everything as it is. Even the things that hurt or trigger fear. This acceptance can also make space for a very different mode of politics that is not based around the idea of struggle, but on the direct experience of connection. It’s like that line from Guattari’s Chaosophy that you noted in your copy, Anja, something like "we don’t need to destroy capitalism but to stop producing it." For what is there to struggle against? What does it mean to struggle against a way of relating to ourselves, each other and the land of which we are a part? For myself, I’m more drawn to methods of relating differently, in ways that may not produce capitalism or other patterns of domination. And to do this effectively, I’m learning to work with where I and others are at rather than to struggle against anything. I’m particularly inspired, here by the practice of nonviolent communication (NVC) which is based on the radically compassionate assumption that everyone is doing the best thing they can imagine to meet their life serving needs. And so for me, the key to revolutionary change is in nurturing our capacities for imagination, for empathy, so that each of us is able to imagine ways of meeting our needs but also respect those of other beings.

What we call the university is certainly one place to do this! I remember attending a masterclass in the performative social science at Bournemouth University, a space to explore different ways of communicating about research than producing journal articles. It was inspiring in many ways! One painful image, though, that stays with me, is walking through one of those long university corridors with the fluorescent lights and a woman who is doing postgraduate studies saying to me that she has been advised by her supervisor to make sure that any conference paper she gave was “bullet-proof.” I immediately think of Foucault’s reversal of the famous aphorism in his declaration that "politics is the continuation of war by other means." Politics as war is common in academia – we might think too of the commonplace discursive violence in peer review or the endemic nature of bullying within universities. Nonviolent communication can take the wind out of these sails by showing understanding and compassion for the needs that underlie the aggression, sarcasm or rigidity of communication. The practice can also help us to connect with the pain, anger, fear or frustration we may feel when spoken to in that way by sensing what we are really wanting in that situation – perhaps respect and understanding. Pain held on to can stew into resentment, what Nietzsche referred to as the moralising revenge of the powerless, which only serves to further produce relations of disconnection and control. A release of pain or anxiety, on the other hand, may allow for more fluid, convivial relations – an alternative to politics as war, as struggle.

And this, it seems to me, is where collaboration, whether academic or otherwise, can be immensely powerful. Sure, we can learn to practice meditation or presence or awareness on our own, but it is so much easier and so much more powerful with others. And in collaboration, we can help each to develop our capacity for compassion and imagination so that instead of producing capitalism, we might produce something very different.

Anna: My immediate response to these questions starts in a similar place to Jamie’s, so here I’d like to discuss
one of the questions he poses: “What happens if we relate without letting those assumptions about the ‘rules of
university’ determine our actions, our affect?” In many ways I think this questions guides my academic practice.
Or, perhaps more honestly, I am motivated by its converse: ‘What happens if I follow those assumptions?’ My
answers to this leads back to Anja’s questions – If I buy into those assumptions I am left feeling both self-destructively
competitive and alienated from the politics and people I care most about. The subjects of my work and partners
of my collaborations are turned into objects; they are instrumentalised, they are what stand between me and the
next publication, post, promotion. I feel angry and overworked. The aspects of academia that originally provided
passion and promise (collective knowledge production, researching subjugated histories) are obscured behind the
race to the top of the ivory tower. While I am more reticent than Jamie to speak of this in terms of nonviolence and
spirituality, I find it difficult not to bring the bodymind into it because it is my health, my wellness that is at stake if
I play by those assumptions. Playing by the assumed rules breeds bitterness. Bitterness runs so deep through the
veins of academia, poisoning its lungs, making it harder and harder for us to breath. I have already watched so much
brilliance, so much creative energy fall prey to bitterness. When I catch myself falling, I try to remember this question
like a mantra: How else can I relate? What else can I make?

Practically speaking this generally involves strategies of avoidance. Avoid, at all cost, academics, conferences,
competitions and committees that will fill me with rage and bitterness. These are usually quite easy to identify
in advance. The wording of CFPs, the list of topics and speakers, the entry costs and requirements are all signs
of the politics and goals of a space, project or process. If admission is £250 with no reduced rate, it’s a sign that
accessibility is not a major concern. This matters and will be reflected in other aspects of the event. Other times
you may not know a place, process or project is poisonous until you are already in the throes of it. Here, if you are
lucky, you band together with other miscreants and form an alliance, a temporary autonomous zone of ‘I hate this
conference/process/project.’ The friendships that form in the TAZ of capitalist academia can last days or lifetimes.
They are the pop-up spaces where academic solidarity is built. On less fortunate occasions I find myself retreating
into my overpriced hotel room, opting for ‘alienated with minibar’ over ‘alienated and still at the table without any
alternative dietary triangle sandwiches’. At other times I have elected to pull out of events, projects and applications
at late stages. While I am often left feeling guilty for leaving others hanging, it is sometimes necessary for my
mindbody health to get out. As Marilyn Frye writes about the politics of separation, the act of saying no can be a gen-
tial and affirmative. The more I learn what not to get into, the less I find myself having to politely retract participation.

Of course, deciding what not to participate in is only one part—though a crucial and under-discussed part—of
adhering to the mantra: How else can I relate? What else can I make? Strategies of avoidance are perhaps most
important because of what they produce, the mindbody energy I need to relate and make differently, to build
nourishing collaborations and focus my energy on projects that embody those reasons I became an academic: working with others to produce collective knowledge about histories of resistance that are too often left forgotten
or untold. It is this bringing to life both in my subjects and in my working relationships with colleagues and students
that keeps me here. At moments like this, when the present and future of our resistance as educators takes on a
heightened significance, the university becomes a site of increased potential where the knowledge we make in the
classroom can transform our students’ perception of themselves as active political participants.

Anja: Thank you both for being so open to conversing in ways that are conducive to dialogue and generosity -
to assembling vocabularies that are open to different ways of thought and relation. When I was considering the kinds
of questions to propose here I wanted to find trajectories that could engender movement between different political
scales, to address governance strategies, reforms and labour conditions as well as how to experiment with more
covivial and caring modes of relating and collaborating. I find this to be a thread through both of your responses, so
this is what I would like to continue with.

In a recent text ‘The university is a factory; lets treat it as one’, the commune analyse the labour and social
conditions of the contemporary university as an institution synthesising intellectual and capital production. They pick
up on the trend that has appeared over the past few years of locating the university as a site of labour in a way that
could be described as a 21st century cognitive factory (which is not to negate the existence of material factory modes of production), and the researcher/scholar as the ‘cognitariat’, seen for instance during the Middlesex occupations and in the university occupations and strikes in the US. While I find this kind of translation problematic, it does serve a dramatic purpose, that is to say it highlights the exploitative and precarious environment that the university is productive of. Since the advent of the latest financial crisis, there has been growing fears about scarcity within educational institutions that play out co-incidental terrains of knowledge, pedagogy and labour: the decimation of non/lower-earning (less conducive to vocational outcomes or industry linkages) departments and courses, fee increases, redundancies of staff (academic, administrative and service), casualised contracts, lower qualities of teaching, greater demands on outputs, new managerial and measurement systems. The dream of the passionate scholar, the sage, the public intellectual, engaging students in slow and considered process of learning and teaching has transformed into the reality of the adjunct lecturer struggling to write job applications and journal publications, attend conferences and prepare lectures on poor remuneration, good faith, and the idealistic hope of a tenured position one day in the future. This is nothing new. And nor is it necessarily as dialectic. But speaking about the university as a factory allows us to delineate a field of struggle through polemics. Such polemics serve the function of calling attention to the economic and political conditions through which the university as an institution is performed.

At the same time, to stay within this economic and ideological discourse is to neglect that, as Jamie pointed out, capital is also a social relation, as is the university. We need to stop producing it, as Guattari puts it. The way that we engage with one another as colleagues, teachers, students – our relations, affects, our compassions and solidarities, as much as our jealousies and insecurities – are reiterative of the ways of being and acting that constitutes the university, as much as its institutional and economic structure is. This is something picked up by Anna when she discusses the ways in which academics at times treat one another, how collaborations and collective work can become instrumentalised and alienated. This also has to do with fear, and with scarcity. Anna offers a strategy of avoidance to deal with this, and Jamie calls for nonviolent methods of communication. To add to this, I would like to appeal to notions of conviviality, friendship, care and solidarity. What seems to me to be lacking from many of these situations is a deep awareness and reassurance of others as allies rather than as competitors. From relatively early on in the university we are pitched in competition with one another. This plays out quite ferociously when one reaches the postgraduate level, having to run the gauntlet of criticism from peers and superiors as a rite of passage. At post-doctoral level, this competition extends into the job market, publications and networks. Time and time again we find ourselves in a position to sell ideas that are collaboratively and dialogically developed as individual property. This is part of the regime of intellectual property. At the same time, we are encouraged to make tactical ‘links’ with other institutions and bodies. It is hardly surprising that such an ecology breeds anxiety and conflict.

What we might try to practice in order to deal with these imperatives are ways of listening and responding that are caring. I think that it is important to acknowledge panic and collectively try to reassure it, without denying it. We cannot pretend that the economic market does not affect how we relate, as friends and as colleagues. But this does not need to be the sum of our capacities to reflect and to act. Correlative to Jamie’s call for listening I’d like also to call for articulation, to finding ways to articulate our desires and our needs to one another. To share and be open about our vulnerabilities and our psychic and somatic wellbeing, to collectively address our common situations, to being considerate in finding pathways for re-appropriation that are not only individualised and to finding the means to negotiate and to meet these needs. This might also engender ways of dealing with alienation. By being empathetic and convivial we might find it easier to be reassuring and respectful of the capacities and needs we have of ourselves and of each other, which can lead to ethical and political practices of knowledge production that depart from those endemic to capital.

By relating through solidarity rather than competition we open space for refusing the structures upon which the university is founded. This may be terrifying. It may mean delving into territories that feel more uncertain then we currently inhabit. Are they really, though? Capitalism fuels itself on fantasies such as that of those countless others ready to take over whatever work you may have if you are unwilling, if you refuse. If we collaborate with one
another to collectively organise our working conditions, to determine our own agendas, do we run this risk? Perhaps. But at the same time we make space for alternatives. And what we definitely create are different ways of relating to one another that are the foundations for acting in solidarity. Bifo Berardi, in Precarious Rhapsody, proposes that what is necessary is the creation of a ‘recombinant function, a function of subjectivity capable of spanning the various domains of social production, and recombining them within a paradigmatic frame that is not dependent on profit but social utility’. This is something that can transverse the university and beyond, to engender common ways of being and collaborating that are not confined to the imperatives of competition and intellectual capital.

Jamie: Since we began this interview over a month ago, massive cuts in education and other public services have been proposed by the national government and protests have begun. Yesterday, the 24th November, I joined the demonstration in Bournemouth. Afterwards, I find myself reflecting on your invitation, Anja, to consider the importance not only of listening but also of articulation. This event had little of either, following a fairly standard formula of gathering, walking with police escorts, pre-printed Socialist Worker placards and sporadic and half-hearted chanting directed at Tories and bankers. (In other words, I ached for a sense of connection, of imagination, of meaning!) To be fair, I did meet a woman working at a university who is very excited about the idea of a social centre for Bournemouth and I had a beautiful walk on a sunny day with a friend of mine who has just moved to town. I’m sure there were probably other forms of listening and articulation occurring throughout the march and after of which I was not aware. So, in no way do I wish to diminish the significance of this event. In many ways, it was wonderful. My question: what might be even more wonderful?

I would have loved to have heard directly from more of the people present. How were the various university students, school students, lecturers and others feeling about the proposed cuts? What were they wanting out of education? How do they feel about the institutions of which they are co-creators (including when that co-creation takes the form of enacting subjugation and more or less conforming to disciplinary norms)? What would they value? What would they like to see nurtured or transformed? What would they like to see destroyed (or perhaps composted or released) to make space, to free energy, for something new? And what would I like? Learning to articulate one’s desires is, as Anja notes, crucial to autonomy. I would still, however, place the emphasis on listening; what can one meaningfully articulate without first listening carefully to oneself? I cannot speak my desires until I know what they are. Sure, I can say the things that pop into my head, but unless I am listening deeply, these are rarely as profoundly true as they might be. For myself, these thoughts are more likely to be very intellectualised, very protective and very self-conscious of how I’m perceived by others unless I’ve given myself quiet space in which to listen to myself. My impression is that this is also true for others. Of course, I leave it to the authority of your own experience to say whether or not this is true for you.

And so, I echo what Anja says about the importance of empathy and suggest that it might begin with oneself. In the nonviolent communication training I did in Edinburgh, we were invited to imagine that we each had empathy tanks; our capacity to give empathy to others depended on how much we needed empathy ourselves. Stopping and listening with empathy and without judgement (or with a release of judgement) to our own feelings, our own desires, can give us a greater capacity to empathise with others. It can clear bitterness from the heart, the lungs. Or rather, this is my experience and what I’ve heard from others of theirs. Saying no, as you suggest, Anna, can be a way of stopping, of taking time away from what is painful or emotionally overwhelming. Listening for the yes behind the no, the desire behind the strategy of avoidance might also be very helpful in these situations. What is it that you’re wanting that you not getting in a particular moment? How might you ask for it? How might you accept the pain of not having it?

I’m less comfortable using words like allies and comrades because that, to me, implies enemies; it suggests that particular conflicts over strategy are inherent and nearly essential. As though some of us really were, in the truth of ourselves, Marxists or anarchists or feminists and others really are, in the truth of themselves, capitalists or statists or patriarchs. I can be dominating, competitive. And those I might label my enemy can be deeply caring and cooperative. What violence might I do by drawing a line between us and declaring myself on the "right" side?
For me, nonviolence or perhaps gentleness is based on the insight that we are all fundamentally interdependent. Even further, I would say that we are all part of the same thing, made of the same "soul-stuff" as Voltairine de Cleyre put it in her rejection of a punitive "justice" system. I do appreciate this in a spiritual sense, for example in the radical equality of Quakers and other non-hierarchical spiritual traditions, which recognise a divine light in each of us. For those less comfortable with talk of spirituality, we might see it in purely physical terms. We are all part of an ecosystem. Our bodysminds are not separate beings; we are all interbeing, interbecoming. We are made of the same physical stuff: carbon and oxygen and more from the food and air, which comes through bodies of beings past and present. To compete, either with colleagues or with ideologies, is, it seems to me, to imagine a separation, which is not real. It is a product of the mind, an abstraction projected on to the world. In this, I like Jiddu Krishnamurti's reminder that "Relationship is direct, not through an image." Direct relationship, direct action, direct democracy: they are all linked for me. So, rather than attempting to communicate with one's image of a person as friend or enemy,同志 or competitor, what would it mean, what would it feel like, to perceive the other directly and with compassion? What relationships, what forms of organisation, become possible only when we let go of idea of who the other is, of who we really are and of how we want others to imagine us?

So, I'm not entirely in agreement with the phrase "we cannot pretend that the economic market does not affect how we relate." I might say instead that we might acknowledge the ways in which we find our fears of poverty or loneliness or death leading us into strategies of doing work which is not our passion, not our desire, in order to get money or the esteem of those whose opinions we are encouraged to believe really matter. If this is accurate, in order to stop producing capitalism we might each need to learn to notice these fears arising, to notice the strategies we are drawn to out of these fears, to allow the fear to be there without letting it push us into the strategies which do not deeply sustain us. What we call capitalism does meet some of our needs, or else it wouldn’t exist. What might be even more effective, more sustaining, more sustainable? Or, as Anna asks, how else can we relate? What else can we create? I sense that we are much more likely to find out when we are present with our emotions, our desires and each other.

Anna: Before we end this discussion, I'd like to pick up on Jamie's final thoughts as they interconnect with my feelings about the current student protests and university cuts. First, I am moved and inspired by the energy, imagination and courage that characterize much of the current protest movement. I am also happy to see pockets of support from parents, faculty and staff that highlight many of the problems and challenges Anja astutely raises here. Yet, I also find myself feeling a bit saddened and I have been trying to locate where this sadness sprouts from. Jamie’s reiteration of my comments helps clarify this for me. I am sad because I do not want the university to go back to the same way it was. I do not want to fight only for what needs to stop, nor do I want to preserve the system we already have. A demand for ‘free education’ must be about far more than student fees. While I am not in complete agreement with the tenants of the Really Open University’s 3 Reforms, I find inspiration in their linkage of abolishing student fees with proscriptive for alternative means of funding and an abolition of the Research Excellence Framework and National Student Survey. As Anja says, the micro and macro dynamics of university life must be analysed in relation to each other. To add a few more final questions then: How can workable, sustainable alternatives be imagined alongside critiques of the university? How do we make both micro and macro demands as part of an 'anti-cuts' movement that is also centred on the wellbeing of our mindbodies and environments? How do we negotiate our desires—as students and teachers—to be accepted by (or into) the academe, with our deep understanding that its system of recognition is both the product and source of competition and precarity?

Anja: As a final point, I would also like to mention that what has been building in London since November 10 are waves of protests and occupations illustrating an active movement across constituencies. From strikes by tube workers and firefighters to the storming of the Lewisham Town Hall meeting to meetings and marches at Millbank and Whitehall made up of not only thousands of university students and staff but also teenagers and pensioners, solidarities are developing across often divided terrains. While these are in their incipient stages – they are fragile and temporal – they have the potential to grow and spread. In conversation at these actions desires for a general strike are being articulated, desires for a continuation of dissent and alternative ways of being and relating that are
being lived out in various sites across the country. Here it is not so much about the university returning to how it was, but the university becoming something else (as The Really Open University’s Three Reforms addresses), something not prescribed by the state, not only in economic terms but also about opening spaces for different practices of learning and exchanging knowledge in the present.

What such moments and spaces are engendering are common acts of politicisation, of ways of organising and collaborating. This is rife with antagonism and contestation, as well as sharing and generosity. It is easy to reduce the current dissatisfaction to a consumeristic attitude of students, but this ignores deeper, further reaching conflicts. What is happening now is a process that shows that things can be done otherwise, it shapes dialogue about cuts and fee increases through practices that are very rarely asserted or encouraged in the education system. And this can spark off and inspire momentum. At the same time, there is an awakening cognisance about labour, class compositions and struggles, about privilege and differential inclusion, in the university and beyond that usually tends toward obfuscation in student politics. The university is more widely being contextualised as a site of exploitation and casualised labour, from the cleaning and service staff, to administration and general staff, to sessional lecturers and some academics. The corporatisation of the university is being spoken about, as are the logistics of knowledge (re)production. The conditions of international students, their economisation and mobility, are being thematised. Such cognisance is imperative if a general strike is to occur and points of dissent are to connect. We are also seeing a diversity of tactics: direct action, playful cat and mouse swarming, non-violent occupations, marches, outreach to community and schools. Every day collective desires are becoming more visible.

As Anna and Jamie indicate, what we might consider is how we are to make this sustainable. What happens when energy flags, when we become disheartened, when we are kettled, cold, tired, frustrated and hungry? How do we translate these moments into ongoing conversations and negotiations? How do we take care of each other, with one another? How do we involve more workers (within and beyond the university) to solidarity and participation? What common vocabularies and languages can we find to work together and how do we embrace untranslatability, incoherence, awkwardness and strife? How do we find silence and respite, how do we listen when everyone is shouting? How do we understand processes of subjectivation that are not only relative to reform, to winning, to numbers and percentages, but also to affects, friendships and enmities? And how, most importantly, do we collaboratively determine the worlds we want to live into our many futures? We don’t have to have all the answers, the wish to ask and to listen is already something.

Jamie: I’m delighted to have had this opportunity to practice relating differently. Thank you, Anja and Anna, for this conversation intertwined with innumerable other acts around the world that demonstrate again and again that the dominant stories of how the world is or how we have to play the game are only stories. We need not believe them.

(The interview also appeared on http://london.indymedia.org/articles/6253 on 30 November 2010)

Anna Feigenbaum is an activist-historiographer and an Assistant Professor of Communications at Richmond, the American International University in London. She is a founding member of the Creative Resistance Research Network and an active participant in climate justice and migration campaigns.

Jamie Heckert is an interdependent scholar whose writing on ethics, erotics and ecology have appeared in a variety of publications. He lives in Poole, Dorset, where he is involved in his local Transition Town and a member of Crafty Fox Collective.

Anja Kanngieser is a cultural geographer and radio maker with Dissident Island Radio. She is a sessional lecturer in Media and Politics at Birkbeck College, University of London and a part-time researcher with the Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney. She is active at the intersections of worker self-organisation, radical politics, creativity and sound.
"History... is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake" says Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's Ulysses. Power is central to the nightmare of history. That has always been the case except where land was communally owned and women were empowered to make decisions with respect to their bodies. If Wikileaks was dangerous enough to provoke the powers that be (a phrase coined by William Tyndale, one of the early translators of the Bible into English who eventually was burnt at the stake for "heresy"), Julian Assange's plight would not be very different from that of Tyndale himself. "Leaks" could be as political as heresies if they threw light on the role of corporations - the powers that be - in manipulating the state machinery to serve private ends at the expense of the masses.
I sincerely fail to understand what Wikileaks is attempting to demonstrate by unleashing this deluge of information most of which is in fact common knowledge. Isn’t this a working of capitalism within capitalism – that this kind of seemingly “critical” information is accessible in corporate-driven societies no matter how hard we rant against their ills? Isn’t this another kind of manufacturing consent or something that would fill a global gossip column? What governments, leaders and diplomats think of each other in their cloakrooms is as uninteresting and pointless as the slander ordinary folks indulge in on a day-to-day basis to fill their time. The Wikileaks is a storm in an empty tea-cup and not anything that would wake you from the nightmare of history.

The above criticism is not to ignore the fact that Wikileaks is dishonest and unethical in the larger sense of the term. The only way that the agendas of governments and states can be challenged is with truth expressed as plainly as possible. The activism of men like Chomsky and Finkelstein or that of the journalist Robert Fisk falls in this category. Tell the truth and the lies of the powerful fall like a house made of cards. The naked emperor starts perishing with embarrassment unable to bear his stark nakedness. Truth has a child-like simplicity that sycophants find hard to understand.

The role of the state in the 21st century must be understood in the context of revolutions in the areas of media and telecommunications. To make or break lives is a dangerously simple thing. Attach a file to your email and click ‘send’ and the damage is done. This is something scary to the powerful as well. Frankenstein in his oedipal agony has forgotten the face of his “real” masters. The missile has deviated from the trajectory and is coming back to destroy its makers. The metaphor begs the question with respect to what kind of a state we live in.

The nation-state in the West is gradually disappearing to make way for the ‘global state.’ The global state is a coordination of vested interests operating beyond the bounds of passports and citizenship or in other words laws that apply to people on the street. The remnant of the nation-state in the third world is more by way of resistance rather than power. Pockets of the global corporate state are more than visible in spaces that powerful elites inhabit in very poor countries.

This is the “nightmare” in which we must examine what Wikileaks is attempting to do. No one trusts a politician anywhere on this planet and states and governments are laid bare before the common eye. There is nothing new about it. At the level of activism remarkably honest writers, socialists and other committed men and women have done everything they could, sometimes at great personal risk, to expose the wrongdoings of their governments. Yet the truth is simple. Autorickshaw drivers who barely make ends meet on the dusty streets of Hyderabad knew that Iraq under Saddam Hussein did not have any weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). The profound ignorance of average westerners is daunting to say the least. They continue to believe the lies that their insane power-hungry governments invent on a day-to-day basis with the active assistance of the media.
My point is that the truth is far more terrible than Wikileaks could dream of telling. Each and every one of us is implicated in that truth. We’re responsible for the millions of the homeless and the hungry across this planet. Says Bertrand Russell at the beginning of his autobiography “What I have lived for:” “Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.” We too cannot alleviate the evil, but we don’t want to suffer. We want to ignore the fact that it exists. The absence of the angst shows in the kind of media frenzy we see among those who’ve access to these spaces. The obsession to be looked at is cancerously devouring those who mistake illusion for reality. The victimizers are victims to their own illusions. The seller of dope is a dope addict. The profit-monger stays far from it because his only addiction is to power that comes with ownership. No one can describe that addiction with singular admiration as the novels of Ayn Rand can do. Property is an objective state. The objectivity of wealth is that it is the face behind all the masks. The exploitative and hollow character of that face is what needs to be brought to light.

WikiLeaks is asking questions that are political while attempting to maintain an apolitical stance. Such a stance that does not declare where its real affinities lie is problematic. T. S. Eliot’s poem, “The Rock” famously asks the question: “Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” Wikileaks is exactly the kind of information that is the enemy of knowledge. It is information that ends up being information - it informs and yet surprisingly no one comes out knowing anything particularly new.

Sociology and the cuts: blog by the BSA (2010-12-15 08:00)

"Sociology and the Cuts" is a new blog by the British Sociological Association. Read it here: http://sociologyandthecuts.wordpress.com/posts/

Suggest links, resources and features (2010-12-15 08:00)

We are trying to build a collection of [1]general links, [2]campaign links and resources. However the internet is a rather large place so if you have any suggestions at all please do get in [3]contact. Likewise we welcome any suggestions about new features which the Sociological Imagination should incorporate. What else should we include? Again please get in touch if you have any ideas.

3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Call for book reviews (2010-12-16 08:00)

Sociological Imagination is looking for more book reviewers. If there’s a book that you would like to review then please contact the [1]editor and we will try and arrange a review copy for you.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Why the cuts are the wrong cure (2010-12-17 08:00)


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Bruno Latour: International Seminar on Network Theory Keynote (2010-12-18 08:00)

[EMBED]

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A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2010-12-19 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal
austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/

Review of ‘Exploring Disability’ by Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer (2010-12-20 08:00)


Kayleigh A. Garthwaite is a postgraduate researcher at the Department of Geography at Durham University.

Just over a decade after the first edition of ‘Exploring Disability’ was published, the second edition (minus Tom Shakespeare’s presence) has emerged amidst a growing interests in disability studies from a sociological perspective. As a result of this, Barnes and Mercer felt it apt to produce a second edition of the text to include not only an updated and revised version of the previous text, but also two new chapters that focus upon; firstly, genetics and their implications for people with accredited impairments and long term limiting illness conditions. The second chapter looks at disability and impairment in poorer or underdeveloped countries.

From the outset, the book very much takes on a stance which prioritises the rights of disabled people, beginning with a detailed description of the grass roots mobilisation of disabled people. Through discussing the work of major disability theorists, starting from within traditional sociological approaches to disability and then moving on to those working from within the social model or rights based perspective, the authors ensure that they are very much distanced from the notion of disability as a ‘personal tragedy’. This topic is covered in depth by the first two chapters of the collection.
Chapter 3 is crucial to help us understand sociological approaches to chronic illness and disability. A thorough review of illness and the social begins with Talcott Parsons’ (1951) classic functionalist analysis of the ‘sick role’ and finishing with post-structuralist analyses of illness. As the authors note in this chapter, above all what is clear is that ‘medical sociologists do not “hunt as a pack”’ (p. 69). This chapter recognizes the diversity of approaches and further explores these issues in chapter 4, which dissects theories of disability in more depth.

Chapter 5 features an even more timely consideration of disability policy and the welfare state, given the recent Spending Review (20th October 2010) and its’ implications for disabled people and people who receive benefits due to a chronic illness or disability. Tracing back the historical roots of the relationship between the state and disability policy, Barnes and Mercer devote a separate subheading to New Labour and how their buzz term of social exclusion related to disability. Further subheadings relating to education, employment, transport and leisure and social participation provide an even more convincing case for the wide ranging multitude of barriers that can impact upon the disabled population. Continuing in the same vein, chapter 6 focuses upon routes to independent living and the impact of social policy. The authors conclude that progress has been uneven; therefore, independent living is not something that can be achieved for all disabled people. This chapter leads on fluidly to the political process and disabled people in chapter 7. The following chapter examines the place of disability in culture and the wider media, exploring various stereotypes and generalisations that are often associated with disabled people. The authors point out that public opinion towards prejudicial images directed at disabled people has become more sensitive; however, further work remains to be done to avoid the stigmatisation of disabled people. Finally, chapters 9 and 10 represent the new chapters in this edition. The first chapter, ‘Disability and the right to life’, explores the minefield of ethics, euthanasia, eugenics and biotechnology. The authors conclude that often, the general view that living with an impairment is living with no life at all only seeks to reinforce the ‘personal tragedy’ view of disability, which in turn undermines the great strides taken in relation to the social and political rights of disabled people. Chapter 10 moves on to consider global perspectives of disability, given that the remainder of the book has focused upon Westernised culture and societies. Reflecting upon the growing internationalisation of disability politics and policies, this chapter identifies the differences between various countries and argues that ‘there is no globalized disability identity and culture’ (p. 264). However, the relationship between extreme poverty and disability are inseparable, with the chapter ending on the much emphasised point that disabled people have made progress through the establishment of their own organizations and through campaigning for social justice. Overall, this second edition of Exploring Disability outlines the relationship between disabled people and disability theory, all underpinned by an emancipatory disability research model as the basis for a continued sociological understanding and analysis of disability, which very much focuses upon the campaigning and pursuit of social justice and equality for disabled people, by disabled people. As mentioned, the collection does focus upon Westernised culture and societies, so if that’s what you’re interested in, then great. This second edition is a must read for not only those who are interested in disability studies, but sociologists who possess an interest in fairness and equality should also make sure they don’t miss out on this one.
with broad societal effects. Anything potentially damaging to kids’ self-esteem was axed. Competitions were frowned upon. Soccer coaches stopped counting goals and handed out trophies to everyone. Teachers threw out their red pencils. Criticism was replaced with ubiquitous, even undeserved, praise.

This 2007 [1]article in the New York Magazine reports on new research that dismantles the culture of over-praising. Praise itself is not bad: in a nutshell, praising someone for their hard work is good, but praising them for intelligence is not.

[2]


Student protests: support letter from Bulgarian students (2010-12-22 08:00)

Below is a public letter of support written by Bulgarian students on 19 December 2010 (reposted from http://studentskiglas.org/?p=328 )

To the British students, fighting against tuition fees raises:

Dear friends,

We have been following the current situation in the UK with great interest and we sincerely admire your unity
and purposefulness in the fight against tuition fee raises and the privatization of education. We would like to express our support for this endeavor. Your unflinching and resolute actions against government policies in the field of education inspire us to continue our own fight with even more determined steps.

We are facing issues similar to your own. Currently serious cut-backs in education system finance, enforcements of private interests and criminal violation of university autonomy have been undertaken. Many institutions of higher education in Bulgaria have been forced to shut down for the winter months due to a lack of finance. Gradually the student body here began displaying our discontentment – we have organized a few protests against the government’s lunacy, but as yet without significant results. In January we plan to renew the protests and we feel ready to take more radical action in our efforts to achieve our common goal.

We, the students of Bulgaria, would like to declare our solidarity with you and your struggle. We would be happy to stay in contact with you in the future.

In solidarity,

Students’ Organization Studentski Glas, Bulgaria

www.studentskiglas.org

studentskiglas.bg@gmail.com

Evolutionary psychology: are we still haunted by the spectre of eugenics? (2010-12-23 08:00)

You can invariably trust the Idle Ethnographer to come up with a refreshing pre-Christmas read.

So, it is the beginning of the XXI century? So, we’ve had the Holocaust in Europe, the Apartheid in South Africa, and racial segregation in the US (and elsewhere) - and learnt our lesson? Is biological reductionism gone? Not at all. In fact, it is as resilient as a GMO weed.

[1]Satoshi Kanazawa is an evolutionary psychologist at the [2]London School of Economics and his work is an example of the pernicious influence of biological-based explanations of the social world. A recent [3]article in the Independent critically summarises his main points - but the problem seems to be deeper than whether we "like this science". Even if we could leave aside the incurable (and, to me, unacceptable) problems that biological determinism introduces into social science, how is it possible to accept such enquiry as science at all, when it is fraught with obvious methodological inconsistencies and linguistic trickeries?

The author claims to reveal the real reasons behind the "inconvenient truths" of the real world but in fact all he does is confirm and objectify tautologies and stereotypes - about gender (the purpose of all men is to get laid), about human nature (beautiful people have more daughters), about appearance ("nice people look nice, nasty people look nasty") etc. The "causal chain" is blatantly reversed, a small number of observed "facts" is taken to have been caused by other observed facts - with both sides of the equation being socially constructed and hence incommensurable. The claim that "scientists have more achievements in their young years" is proven by examining 280 biographies of academics. How is achievement defined? Can intellectual achievement - even in its institutionalised version of "academic achievement" - ever be seen as an objective fact? And the reason for this is that the goal of mating has been achieved, hence one does not need to be smart or do great deeds any more.

The premisses and conditionalities of the observation are taken for granted, as if what we observe is the truth - all of it, nothing but the truth. The scariest of it all: socially constructed notions, such as "attractiveness" or "smartness", are taken for granted, as 100 % waterproof, objective facts. Even old uncle Durkheim would be terrified - let alone Darwin.
Could it get worse? Yes. In this so called "research", self-ascribed categories such as "I am liberal/conservative" are taken at face value, as legitimate signifiers of ...well, of something, I am not sure of what, but these self-ascribed categories are then correlated with IQ results (also notoriously subjective and unreliable) in order to support a conjecture about smart people being liberal and dumb people being conservative.

"The basic premiss of evolutionary psychology is that the ultimate goal of reproduction is evolutionary success, and that includes human beings as well.".

This and many other statements reveal the "trick": in the middle of the statement, the subject changes. There is a slippage between two incompatible "subjects": reproduction (which/who allegedly has a goal, i.e. is implicitly constituted as the subject of the process); and "human beings". In Heidegger's terms: an unacceptable conflation between "being" as an abstract category and "beings" as concrete, individual entities who are, i.e. who possess/exhibit "being".

Last but not least, what is the purpose of the "research" - and what does it actually tell us? Let's not forget that it is not what you know about something that is important, but rather how you use it (as that Zen master told his student).

The humour value - I am tempted to assume that the whole purpose of this research is to amuse and divert - is rather low, too. If forced to read such things, I would prefer to read that book about thalassophilia (love of the sea) by [4]Charles Davenport (eminent American eugenicist). In [5]Naval Officers, Their Heredity and Development published in 1919 (written in 1917), he theorised the "gene of sea-lust" that naval officers apparently inherit. At least it is old. At least it is amusing. At least at that time Gregor Mendel's law of heredity were poorly understood. At least nazism had not happened... at least I have that gene, too.

2. lse.ac.uk
5. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=j4QMeQvwafYC&pg=PA25&lpg=PA25&dq=charles+davenport+thalassophilia&source=bl&ots=zkyn_SFou&sig=SZr-n1P34KDBXg8_1ys04GTjBWY&hl

A Mexican, a Kiwi and a Nigerian walk into a bar... a dose of (sociological) Xmas humour (2010-12-24 08:00)

You are not seriously checking out SI on Christmas Eve! Well, if you are - we have to make you laugh. And yes, this is sociological: if knowing about Others makes them less other, more human, there is no better way than sharing their humour. Enjoy this marvellous collection of jokes from many countries: read article by Joris Luyendijk in the

The SI Top 10 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-20 08:01:26)
[...] A Mexican, a Kiwi and a Nigerian walk into a bar... a dose of (sociological) Xmas humour [...] 

Happy Christmas! (2010-12-25 08:00)

Happy Christmas!

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Joining the Advisory Board (2010-12-26 08:00)

In order to help the Sociological Imagination expand we’re hoping to add two more members to our advisory board. At least over the next year or so, it would mainly involve discussing ideas and building a strategy for the long term
development of the site. So while the role would involve a significant creative commitment, it would not necessitate a particularly large time commitment.

Our aim is to put together an advisory board (current members can be seen [1]here) which includes a diverse range of perspectives. Discussion will be informal and online. Critical views and robust debate about the nature, direction and purpose of the website are most welcome. If you would like to apply then please send a CV to the [2]editor with a short attachment explaining what you believe you would bring to the role.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

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Promoting events or projects on the Sociological Imagination  (2010-12-27 08:00)

If you have an event or project that you would like to promote via the Sociological Imagination then please don’t hesitate to get in contact by [1]e-mail or through [2]facebook. We’re happy to post up calls for papers, requests for participants and details of events.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

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The Morality of Charity  (2010-12-28 08:00)

[EMBED]

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Does politics need more philosophy?  (2010-12-29 08:00)

[EMBED]
[1] The Really Open University

The Really Open University exists everywhere, it will not be a one-off event, but an ongoing process. It will be non-hierarchical, making a start at breaking down traditional student-teacher dichotomies. We wish to engage with other communities in Leeds, and beyond. This will form part of a transformation of everyday life.

We wish to create a university where people have a passion to get up and come in and engage in learning and knowledge production. We wish to break the process whereby education and knowledge production is linked to capitalist reproduction rather than towards the general social-good.

[2] The Freire Project

The Freire Project is dedicated to building an international critical community which works to promote social justice in a variety of cultural contexts. We are committed to conducting and sharing critical research in social, political, and educational locations.

[3] One Dimensional University

An interdisciplinary group of research students from the University of Bristol and Cardiff University. The PSS meets regularly to discuss areas of common interest and to support one another’s writing plans. Previous events organised by the PSS include a workshop on Eurocentrism (2008) and a workshop on Alain Badiou (2009). The PSS are: Maria Balen, Thomas Hayes, Andrew Holmes, Laura Morosanu, Lorenzo Silvaggi, Rosa Vasilaki and Filip Vostal. Join us on facebook: Philisophy of Social Science (PSS) Study Group

[5]

[6] Public Sociology

The Public Sociology blog is a joint project undertaken by staff and postgraduate students in the School of Sociology and Social Policy in the Faculty of Education, Social Science and Law at the University of Leeds. The project is part of a wider initiative to communicate with the general public about our research projects and findings and to offer occasional commentaries on issues and events of interest and concern where our various areas of expertise may make a contribution to public discussion.


The Transnational Institute (TNI) was established in 1974 as an international network of activist researchers (“scholar activists”) committed to critical analyses of the global problems of today and tomorrow. It aims to provide intellectual support to movements struggling for a more democratic, equitable and environmentally sustainable world.

[13] Inequalities Blog

This blog was set up by a bunch of young researchers – sociologists, political scientists, geographers, demographers, social policy scholars, economists – from universities on both sides of the Atlantic who wanted to create a space to critically discuss research on inequality, both our own research and the most interesting research we come across; and a community of people who want to try and tackle the injustices they see in the world by shedding light on things that would otherwise be invisible.
Happy new year... “Soviet muppets”: animation from 1924 (2010-12-31 08:00)

It is incredible how much an octagenarian piece of animation can tell you. I'll only give away a snippet of its background:

This is the first Soviet animation film ever made. It was produced in February 1924, by director Dziga Vertov and animators A. Bushkin and A. Ivanov. For its production the authors used a revolutionary (silly pun intended) animation technique involving flat paper puppets. The title, “Советские игрушки”, means “Soviet toys/muppets”; the plot is based on the political caricatures which Victor Deni (Виктор Дени) published in the daily «Pravda».

The movie shows a pig-like "bourgeois" whose gluttony knows no end and whose morality is "rotting" (to give you an idea of the popular symbols and phraseology of those days). The "morally rotten" man's fat belly is cut up by a centaurian figure composed of a worker and a peasant, to release an endless flow of money. The money is used to build useful things for the common people and the bourgeois is eventually defeated.

The movie has a peculiarly theatrical, rather bitter "happy ending". Out of the blue, a Red Army guy (красноармеец) appears, multiplies, and takes charge of the situation. The all proletarians join together to compose a New Year's tree (новогодняя ёлка - the Communists' secularised equivalent of a Christmas tree) on which, tree decorations, the enemies of the soviet society are hanged: the bourgeois, the prostitute, and the "servants of the cult" (служители культа - i.e. priests). Of course, the tree is crowned by a five-corner star.

[EMBED] P.S. Those patient enough to watch this surreal, yet painfully real movie until the very end may spot a prophetic visual reference to the EU... Just joking. I hope you all have a better New Year than the one in the movie "Sovetskie igrushki".
2. 2011

2.1 January

Happy New Year! (2011-01-01 08:00)

Happy new year from Sociological Imagination!

[1]

New Toolkit: Using Phone Interviews (by Annie Irvine, University of York) (2011-01-02 08:00)

New toolkit that may be of interest to you:

Using Phone Interviews - Annie Irvine, Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

This toolkit explores the use of telephone interviews in qualitative research. It discusses the practical and methodological advantages of the approach, including minimal travel time and cost and increased anonymity for

The two main methodological objections to telephone interviews are traditionally: the difficulty of achieving rapport with participants; and the lack of non-verbal communication. The toolkit discusses whether these concerns are well-founded, and suggests that their significance may have been exaggerated.

http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/resources/toolkits/phone-interviews/index.html

**About Realities toolkits**

Our toolkits are short documents on the practical side of doing research. Topics include: using music elicitation in qualitative research, ethics in research teams, recruiting participants by knocking on doors, participant-produced video, participatory maps, disseminating research by putting on an exhibition, informed consent for visual data.

http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/resources/toolkits

**Vital Signs 2 presentations on the Realities website:**

We are starting to put videos and audio of many of the presentations from our Vital Signs 2 conference on the Realities website. There are currently three presentation recordings (from session 5b) available to watch, with
more coming soon.

View the presentations at: http://www.manchester.ac.uk/realities/events/vitalsigns/programme/

See our website for working papers, research methods training events and presentation recordings.

Realities is part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, based at the Morgan Centre at the University of Manchester.

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Disappearing jobs (2011-01-03 08:00)

"the forces of modernity have placed some unexpected occupations on the endangered species list"

On the first Monday of the new year, watch video and read about the ten previously important and well-paid jobs that are projected to dwindle in the next decade: [1]here

1. http://moneywatch.bnet.com/career-advice/article/10-disappearing-jobs-where-the-jobs-are/485199/?tag=content;coll

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Add Sociological Imagination on Facebook (2011-01-03 08:00)

Add the Sociological Imagination on Facebook today!

Click [1]here to add us.


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Universities are considering a closer fit between degrees, job market skills and experience (2011-01-04 08:00)

A number of universities across the UK are considering awarding students who display "corporate" skills and job market experience extra marks towards their degrees. This potential accreditation comes as no surprise considering
the continued call for university degrees to be more vocationally based and focused on the skills students will need in the job market.

In this drive as this [1]article suggests, undergraduates on all courses at the University of Leicester, could earn credits for showing they could run a workshop or give a good presentation. Other universities, such as Durham and UCL are considering how to roll out the scheme of awarding extra marks for students' "corporate" skills.

Supporters of this course of action believe that students will now be more likely to select a degree based on how well it will prepare them for the job market, largely because students will soon have to pay up to £9,000 in tuition fees for each year of their degree.

Prof Anthony Forster, pro-vice-chancellor for education at Durham University, said Durham was reviewing its curriculum and exploring ways to "allow academic credit to be awarded for student employment or short-term community and work-based placements that have involved the application or development of academic knowledge and skills".

Cautiously, James Ladyman, a professor of philosophy at Bristol University, said "now we have this emphasis on the cash-value of a degree. Universities are focusing too much on the demands of the corporate sector. Our international students aren't going to come and study in the UK so that they can take corporate skills courses; they come to be taught by top academics."


Call for Papers: The University in Times of Crisis - Prospects for the Social Sciences (2011-01-05 08:00)

A one-day international conference is being organised by the Max Weber Study Group and the Theory Study Group of the British Sociological Association. Its purpose is to think about the current state and prospects of both the university and the social sciences and humanities. After years of having allowed themselves to be defined in terms of usefulness to the 'economy', social scientists and academics in general have to face up to the harsh reality and consider whether they have not simply surrendered their mission and responsibility.

With the total withdrawal of state funding for teaching of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, debt-burdened students will be entering effectively privatised universities at a time when market recipes are demonstrably failing in all spheres of life. In addition, research funds will be severely cut and their allocation further subjected to indicators alien to serious scholarship. These are only the most extreme forms so far of developments taking place elsewhere, such as the EU's 'Bologna process'.

This conference seeks to explain how we have arrived here, to analyse the consequences of these developments and the possibilities for a free social science praxis (both in teaching and scholarship), and to set out the choices that may lie ahead and the responsibilities attached to them. The conference will be organised around the following thematic sessions:

1. The politics of higher education and social science, and the questions of university and social science autonomy, self-government and academic freedom today.
2. Academic vocation: its significance today and the possibilities for cultivating and strengthening it.

3. Managerialism and its ‘quality’ indicators in social science and education: what kind of human beings lie behind such indicators and result from their use? What kind of learning environment are universities promoting and shaping today in place of the praxis of teacher and student?

4. Contribution of contemporary social science and higher education to society: for example, in terms of clarifying fundamental problems, educating judgement and fostering maturity and autonomy. Are we, to follow Weber, fostering a world of thinking human beings able to conduct their own lives, or rather, a world of indifferent subjects of consumption?

The conference organisers invite the submission of one page abstracts addressing one or more of the above topics and questions. The conference will take place May 2011 and the venue will be London or Birmingham; both to be confirmed.

For further information and submission of papers, please contact:
Carlos Frade (University of Salford)
Sam Whimster (Editor of Max Weber Studies)
Gurminder K. Bhambra (University of Warwick)
Austin Harrington (University of Erfurt, Germany)

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2011-01-06 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.
The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/

UK Teaching Budget to be cut by 6% (2011-01-07 08:00)

While some Kent students continued their sit-ins over the holiday break and others are planning further demonstrations to protest the proposed tuition fee rises, the government decided that English universities are to face a 6% cut to their teaching budgets before teaching incomes are set to increase in 2012 from those raised tuition fees.

In a letter to Tim Melville-Ross, the Chairman of the Higher Education Funding Council for England, David Willets (Minister of State for Universities and Science) and Vince Cable (Business Secretary in the coalition cabinet) outlined the cuts, explaining that teaching grants would decrease from nearly £5 billion to £4.6 billion for 2011-2012. They explained that this was necessary as the government faces very steep challenges to its public spending budget.

In response, however, the vice chancellor’s body pointed out that such cuts before the planned tuition rises amounted to nearly 8% rather than 6. Furthermore, the teaching grant is projected to drop even further—down to £3.8 billion for the year 2012-2013, although the ministers project that this drop would be offset by higher tuition fees.

For further information about what the cuts to the teaching budget may mean for teaching salaries, university budgets, and allocations of university places, click [1]here.


Call for Papers - Social Science and Cultural Politics (2011-01-07 10:07)

Cultural politics is a concept used to label a complex range of social phenomena, frequently as diverse as media cultures and ideologies, forms of political action and social movements, institutional and professional cultures. However, social sciences themselves are driven (explicitly or otherwise) by ideological commitments and assumptions about their own role in society (this being particularly questioned at the moment, especially in the UK).

Social scientists conceive their own cultural politics, reflecting (or not reflecting) on their own 'culture'.

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On the other hand, how the notion of ‘cultural politics’, as well as the subsidiary concepts of culture and politics, are addressed by current research projects concerned with the realms of political and cultural activity. From this angle, we encourage a wide notion of cultural politics, which could encompass topics like media cultures and subcultures, cultures of institutions and organisations, political cultures and forms of political activism.

The conference aims to discuss the ways culture is conceptualised as well as the implicit and explicit forms of its ‘action’ both inside and outside the academic community. The following themes/questions are intended as a (non-exclusive) guide of possible topics/clusters that could be presented at the conference:

**Theory.** How should we theorise culture? How should we theorise politics? Are such theoretical questions important for empirical research into culture and/or politics?

**Role of Academia.** How has the academia influenced changes in the politics of culture and cultural politics? What are the consequences of the different epistemological and ontological assumptions under which culture has been conceptualized in academic debates? How has culture shaped and challenged social science?

**Role of Media.** How do ideas about culture play out in media communities? How are subjectivities constituted in the context of media and new media forms of production and consumption? How are media institutions shaped and produced by professional assumptions and ideologies?

**Identity.** How do gender, class, sexuality, race and ethnicity intersect with the study of cultural politics? How does the politics of identity relate to the cultural arena? Has gender and/or queer theory challenged our views on culture? Public policies. How has culture been used in social policy design and implementation? Has the concept of race being replaced by the concept of culture in contemporary political debates? How has the concept of multiculturalism shaped the development of public policies? How subcultures affected and/or challenged stereotypes and the change or amendment of public policies/institutions?

**Politics.** How can we conceptualise politics, political ideologies and political institutions in the global era? In which ways have political cultures influenced the development of political institutions? How has culture contributed to the development of political activism and its political effects? Is there such a thing as a global culture and/or a multiculture?

The organisers welcome abstracts from postgraduates in any discipline, on issues within and beyond the questions and topics suggested above. Selected papers will be presented at informal seminars among peers, with each presentation lasting 20 minutes and 10 minutes for questions and answers. Papers should be presented to provoke discussion!

Please send an abstract (under 300 words including your personal details - name, institution, phone number and e-mail) to postgraduateconference2011@gmail.com. Deadline for submitting abstracts is 1st February 2011. If you have any questions or/and comments, please e-mail the organisers at the above e-mail.

Decisions will be made and informed by the 10th February 2011. The conference will take place on the 12th March 2011 at Warwick University premises.
SI's Funniest Political Videos of 2010 (part 1) (2011-01-08 08:00)

Number 8: We’ve Got To Stop The Mosque At Ground Zero
[EMBED] Number 7: How To Pick Between Milibands [EMBED] Number 6: Can’t Cut This! [EMBED] Number 5: Being a Dickhead's Cool [EMBED] (not strictly speaking 'political' in the capital 'p' sense of the term but an amusing swipe at hipster culture nonetheless!)

SI's Funniest Political Videos of 2010 (part 2) (2011-01-09 08:00)

Number 4: Common People
[EMBED] Number 3: I read some Marx and I liked it [EMBED] Number 2: Another Prick in Whitehall [EMBED] Number 1: Hayek vs. Keynes Rap Anthem [EMBED]

‘Of our elaborate plans, the end’ (2011-01-10 08:00)

No wonder so many school and college students joined NUS on their latest protests. Unlike most Vice Chancellors, these teenagers and their parents can see tripled fees and HE funding restricted to Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine marks the end, not only of higher education as it has developed since the war but – more broadly – of the whole effort to reform society through education and so better the condition of successive generations.
If carried into legislation, the Coalition's proposals will close a phase of progressive reform that began with the official introduction of comprehensive schools from 1965. These freed primary schools for child-centred education and prepared the way for expansion of further and higher education, including the polytechnic experiment. Unlike 11+ selection, which became a thing of the past in 80 per cent of English secondary schools and more in Scotland and Wales, reforming education at all levels no longer aimed to reinforce existing social hierarchies but sought to break down class divisions by opening equal opportunities to careers for all. The logic of comprehensive reform carried forward to inclusion of children with special needs, a common exam at 16 and a National Curriculum sold to teachers as an entitlement for all, as well as more recent widening participation in HE to nearly half of 18-30 year olds.

Now these efforts are to be abandoned as education returns to shoring up existing privilege. The Coalition's reception of the Browne Review of student fees compliments their cut of 40% of HE funding. Their new hard cap of £9,000 a year on fees leaves unfunded arts and humanities only for those who can afford such frivolous pursuits at elite and surviving campus universities – mainly overseas students and others who are seriously rich. For the rest, a market dedicated – like surviving HE research – to the interests of the private sector will offer vocational courses only in the STEM subjects as the remaining universities and colleges collapse and merge into a range of local e-learning hubs offering part-time and distance provision.

Perhaps the only good to come from this will be to recognise how impossible it was to expect education to change society in the first place by solving its economic problems. Now, along with the rest of what remains of
public sector welfare-state services, the Coalition intends to contract education out to the private sector. This will create their ‘private sector-led recovery’, of which ‘free schools’ and private universities are just the start. Gove’s ‘fair funding’ of schools lays the ground for vouchers as a way to get more parents paying for the legal compulsion to send their children to school as a ‘basic entitlement voucher’ can be topped up by those who can afford it in new fee-charging private crammers and existing independent schools.

Residual notions of the right to education in a good local school with progression to further and higher education are being snuffed out by competitive academic selection. As has been pointed out by all save Russell Group Vice Chancellors and others deluded enough to believe their universities can also eventually privatise themselves out of the system, differentiated fees will heighten the existing social hierarchy in which, as a general rule, the older the university, the younger, whiter, more male and posher its students.

However, it is these students – or some of them – who have had the confidence to lead the action against the cuts so far. By involving state school students robbed of their educational futures and FE students protesting against the loss of Educational Maintenance Allowances, these undergraduates have probably done more to widen participation and create a real enthusiasm for higher education than all previous institutional efforts.

While £27,000 for a ‘top university’ degree is a good deal for those who have been paying £30,000 per child per year at the likes of Marlborough College, the workings of the market in education will leave the elite and their feeder private and selective state schools severely exposed. The ‘brightest and best’ who win through this relentless competition are increasingly and transparently revealed as the richest and most privileged – no matter how many (or in all likelihood, how few) bursaries the Russell Group provide for poor scholars.

Michael Gove’s recent White Paper promised equal funding of post-16 provision whether in schools or FE, ‘levelling down’ to FE instead of up to schools. The dim and demented Gove’s prejudice towards traditional academic study, separated from horny-handed vocational learning (as he thinks of it), can only widen the gulf between school sixth-forms and FE, although we await Professor Wolf’s report on vocational qualifications for the details.

Meanwhile, Kenneth Baker returns with ‘technical colleges’, supposed to be sponsored by universities and FE to recreate 1944 technical schools which only ever covered 4% of all secondary schools because technical education was and is too expensive to provide without the employer-supported apprenticeships that fell apart in the 1970s. Since then employers have not required apprenticeships and the state through the Manpower Services Commission replaced them with Youth Training without jobs. Now colleges will compete with private training providers to deliver Apprenticeships without jobs.

So colleges may benefit from Gove’s apparent switching of widening participation from HE to FE, perhaps by offering more cut-price two-year Foundation ‘degrees’. FE has the majority of NUS’s membership – including one in ten of all HE students – and, as the latest demonstrations show, together with school pupils and teachers, F & HE students and lecturers are well aware that reduced funding and raised fees attack the whole so-called ‘Lost Generation’.

In fact, the strongest argument against raising fees and fully funding HE while restoring EMAs is what else are school and college leavers supposed to do?
Musical chairs: more candidates than ever miss out on a university education (2011-01-11 08:00)

Thousands of young people who were unable to secure a place at university last year have re-applied for degree courses for the coming academic year. The knock-on effect of the shortage of university places in 2010 is now going to have profound impact on the 2011 university application and admissions process as this article states.

In the run-up to Christmas, applications rose by 2.5% compared with the same time in 2009 - with a total of 335,795 candidates now chasing places for 2011 entry.

As statistics might suggest, competition for university places will be intense, as there will also be an additional 8,000 candidates chasing the same number of places as last year.

Just over 404,000 candidates were accepted for undergraduate study in autumn 2010. However, the latest rise in applicants ahead of the higher tuition fees in 2012 will mean that an increasing number of candidates will miss out on a university education.

The right protest for the wrong reasons (2011-01-12 08:00)

We've been here before. At the student march on the 10th November, all my memories came flooding back – young men and women with fluorescent hair and matching T-shirts, the shouts of ‘What do we want: free education! When do we want it: now!’, the adrenaline that comes from being a single individual within a happy, angry crowd. So for a moment 2010 felt just like 2002, bringing back a tidal wave of my own nostalgia for the protests against top-up fees.

But after the protests, I changed my mind. I now think it’s unarguable that graduates should pay for the cost of their education. Still, fees are the wrong way of doing this – and not just slightly, technically, wrong. For reasons I’ll explain, fees are sufficiently wrong that they sent me out on the streets again, back alongside the student protestors I recognised from eight years ago.

To begin with, though: what changed my mind about free higher education? Overall there are three findings that make a persuasive case. Firstly, people who go to university personally reap the rewards for this, as my friend Timo Idema has summarised. It’s hard to argue that I should be subsidised for going to university by non-graduates, given that I’m likely to earn considerably more as a result. Secondly, and counterintuitively, tuition fees were one of the more redistributive measures that New Labour introduced. Universities are dominated by the already advantaged – people like me, in fact – and the means-tested tuition fees meant lower subsidies for people from wealthier families.
Social mobility

Neither of these are ‘killer arguments’ though – they’re just not quite convincing enough. What really clinches the argument is that increasing fees will probably have no effect on social mobility. This seems surprising – [5]Yaz Osho has already written here about how poorer students are more likely to be deterred by high fees. [6]Research shows how poorer students are more likely to be debt-averse, and that middle-class students are more likely to use student loans [7]even though they have less need for them. Indeed, such arguments were the very reason I cared so much about fees to start with.

Yet I strongly doubt that the increases in tuition fees will have any effect on inequalities in HE. (Although [8]the idea that expanding HE has been mainly taken by poorer students is laughable, and requires a serious attempt to misrepresent [9]the evidence).

To begin with, increased fees will have relatively small impacts on incentives – particularly given the concessions that the student protests have forced from the Coalition. [10]The Government seem to have taken up the [11]Sutton Trust’s suggestion to give students from low-income households their first year of tuition for free, and have raised the [12]salary level at which tuition fees will be repaid. The similar bundle of raised fees and means-tested support in the face of the previous protests doesn’t seem to have [13]caused declining participation (although I’m interested if anyone has other analyses on this). And the [14]NUS plan for the graduate tax looks pretty similar to the latest versions of the raised fees. Whatever the details – and the details definitely matter – it doesn’t look like it will be a big enough difference between schemes to have a noticeable impact on mobility.
Obsessing about universities, though, is fundamentally missing the point. Earlier in the year I was dazzled by a presentation from the Nobel-winning economist James Heckman. He convinced me that HE structures are of minor importance in HE inequalities compared to everything that comes before them; indeed, disadvantaged students start doing worse at school from an incredibly young age, and relatively little changes after this. His answer? That we should focus on early-years provision, which can give disadvantaged students the cognitive and non-cognitive skills to have a better chance of going to university 15 years down the line. If the end of free education is the price we have to pay to have Surestart, then it’s worth it.

The right reasons for opposing fees

Despite this, the increase in fees and massive cut in state funding will be a disaster – for more reasons than one.

It is simply incredible that the Coalition want to end state funding for arts, humanities and social sciences. By doing this, the Tories and Liberals are telling the country they see no wider value of these subjects – a view that has been wonderfully skewered by Stefan Collini, and was one of the prompts for the Campaign for the Public University. There is no reason to think that this wider value can be maintained through a market mechanism; as any half-decent economist – in fact, even the bad economists – will tell you, anything that has positive side-effects to other people (‘positive externalities’) will be under-provided by the market.

This cavalier attitude to the fabric of British society can also be seen in the sorts of jobs that graduates are likely to do. A top US university replaced loans with grants in the early 2000s, leading to a wonderful experiment reported by Rothstein and Rouse in 2007. They found that “debt causes graduates to choose substantially higher-salary jobs and reduces the probability that students choose low-paid ‘public interest’ jobs”. Even if we later cancel these debts for people who do socially valuable work, another experiment shows that we prefer avoiding fees than repaying debts, implying that people’s career choices will still be affected. And this is without the vaguer, more unpredictable effects on society, with research suggesting higher fees may lead to lower marriage rates and fewer children.

For those of us wanting academic careers, working in universities will be revolutionised. My own university, LSE, has denied that it has any plans to become private – but given that the entire teaching grant will be abolished, it surely is only a matter of time before this happens. (If the 2004 top-up fees vote had been on the level of fees being discussed today then it would never have got through Parliament. Yet within a few years, this rise becomes accepted and even inevitable. Such is the nature of politics). Inequalities between universities will also deepen. My own union UCU thinks that a third of universities are at risk from these reforms, and this will be acute among those that teach students who go on to socially valuable but not highly paid jobs. Academic pay will vary more between the richer and poorer universities. And Claire Callender and Jonathan Jackson’s research suggests that poorer students are more likely to go to universities with low living costs that have easy term-time work – meaning that the already highly segregated student populations may become even more so.

The fierce debate on social mobility has led to a much better proposal going through Parliament than would otherwise have happened – just as we saw in 2004. Hopefully the ridiculous incentive for universities charging over £6,000 to avoid poorer students will be axed.

But more fundamentally, the obsession with social mobility has become a distraction. The real damage in raising fees rather than a graduate tax lies elsewhere – and as the Bill goes to the Lords and then back to Parliament for its Third Reading, we can but hope that this comes increasingly to the fore.

[27]Ben Baumberg is a PhD student in Social Policy at LSE, and co-edits the collaborative research blog [28]In-
equalities.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/lucymayblin/%E2%80%9Cwe-are-no-longer-the-post-ideological-gener-
   ation-we-are-now-the-generation-at-the-heart-of-the-res
   7. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/026809399251
   11. http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/brookes/sutton-trust-claims-overseas-student-fees-could-present-
   17. http://publicuniversity.org.uk/about/
   19. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070802211802
   23. http://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/pa/articles/2010/10/student-fees-reform-set-to-drive-up-higher-educatio-
   24. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070802211802

Caspar (2011-01-12 12:14:34)
A good article that shifts the perspective in an interesting and important way. May I recomend the [1]About Lord Browne
website for more thought provoking analysis on what is wrong with the current governmental approach to higher education
funding. Caspar

Yaz Osho (2011-01-14 14:56:53)
Great article, very insightful.
Foreign Universities May Be Becoming More Attractive to British Students (2011-01-13 08:00)

There is speculation that increasing pressure on limited university places, in tandem with rising tuition fees, may be making the prospect of studying in other western European countries and even the US more attractive to British students. Representatives from British and American universities alike believe that the threat of higher fees and the insecurity over securing a university place are making universities abroad all the more appealing.

With the deadline for UCAS forms set as Saturday, January 16th, many students are well aware of the 209,000 students who didn't receive a university spot last year. According to the Fulbright Commission, which co-ordinates exchange programmes for British students to the US, more than 4,000 students attended its information day in September. That represents more than a 50% increase over last year. Although figures for European universities are harder to attain, many institutions are already reporting much higher degrees of interest from British students.

For more information and some student responses' to these pressures, see the Guardian's coverage [1]here.

1. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jan/10/universities-tuition-fees-students-exodus](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/jan/10/universities-tuition-fees-students-exodus)

Discourses of Dissent: Social Theory and Political Resistance (2011-01-14 06:00)

Public Symposium, Warwick Social Theory Centre

16th February 2011, 2-6pm, Birmingham Midland Institute

£10 waged / £5 student, unwaged
Discourses of Dissent is a one day symposium, open to all, which explores the relationship between social theory and political resistance. In light of the coalition government’s austerity agenda and the emerging movement against it, the event asks how academic research (with a particular focus on social theory) can help inform and sustain political resistance.

In doing so it will confront a variety of pressing questions standing at the interface between theory and politics. How do theoretical justifications of austerity work to constrain public debate? How does the current government’s incongruous blend of neoliberal realism and superficial progressivism relate to what went before it? What resources can we find in social theory to critique the coalition’s agenda and its relationship to the wider crisis of late capitalism? How can academic research in general (and social theory in particular) aid the cultivation and propagation of positive discourses which would allow us to break out of the ever narrowing political and cultural horizons which have defined the public life of the UK over the last three decades?

Confirmed speakers are Steve Fuller, John Holmwood, Ruth Levitas, Sasha Roseneil and Alberto Toscano. More speakers are to be confirmed in the near future.

**Round Table 1: Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity**

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The event is being organized through the Social Theory Centre at the University of Warwick. It takes place on the 16th February, 2-6pm, at the Birmingham & Midland Institute in central Birmingham. For map, see here: [1]http://www.bmi.org.uk/map.html

For more details please contact Mark Carrigan ([2]m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk) and see the website below.

To register online please see the website: [3]http://discoursesofdissent.com/

Please forward and display the attached poster.

Organised by the Warwick Social Theory Centre.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
Follow us on Twitter and Facebook (2011-01-15 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates


SI Interviews – Steve Fuller on the Future of the University (2011-01-16 08:00)

In this podcast [1]Steve Fuller talks about the future of the university. At a time of crisis in the university, the discussion explores how academia has arrived at its present juncture and where it might go from here. It contextualises the present predicament in terms of the wider intellectual, cultural, political and economic factors which underlay these seismic shifts in academic life.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/stevefuller.mp3"]The Future of the University

Steve will be speaking on these issues at [2]Discourses of Dissent in February.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/sfuller/
Great! But please mention how long is the interview (how much time it will take to listen to it) because it doesn’t show the time itself.

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-23 22:56:12)
sorry! moving all the 100+ podcasts to soundcloud is towards the bottom of a distressingly long to do list....

YULI (2019-04-16 13:02:49)
It contextualises the present predicament in terms of the wider intellectual

SI Interviews – Stephen Turner on Normativity (2011-01-17 07:30)

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/stephen_turner_podcast.mp3"]Explaining Normativity

Apologies for the poor sound quality of the recording. We had trouble finding a venue for the interview so it was conducted in a bar.


[...] here for the podcast of the interview with Mark [...] 

[...] with Stephen Turner’s recent book on normativity, this will be the topic for Theory stream plenary session at the British Sociological [...] 

[...] with Stephen Turner’s recent book on normativity, this will be the topic for Theory stream plenary session at the British Sociological [...] 

[...]http : //sociologicalimagination.org/archives/3222[...]

Sociological Imagination – that’s what the political class needs (2011-01-18 08:00)
One of the very paradoxes of the tuition fees and education cuts’ odyssey that has heated the political debate over the past few months lies in the way in which political leaders seem to be utterly shocked by the anger and uproar
that their measures have generated throughout the public.

Following the sharp analysis of [1]Les Back, such incomprehension is rooted in the filters that class privileges place on politicians’ ability to understand and make sense of the social world. Once empowered and invested with the privileges of their role, it seems, politicians develop a pronounced detachment from the social reality of the country. As a consequence, they become unable to face up with sober senses what they are doing, and what could be possibly wrong with it.

From this angle, the widening of the class divide, which is likely to become the new rationale of the UK education system, is both symptom and symbol of the inherent lack of socio-logical perspective within the political class. Recently, Sociology has been classified by Conservative and Liberal Democratic politicians as a ‘low cost’ discipline - however, one might wonder how much (social and political) value their own policies could actually gain if only a pinch of ‘sociological imagination’ was added to them...

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Moving On From Critique: interesting article and video from Warwick VC (2011-01-19 08:00)

[EMBED] A fascinating [1]article by Nigel Thift, Vice Chancellor of Warwick University, about the ongoing tension which the university system must resolve: Budgets. There is not enough money to go round every institution that wants to be a University of the old school but only a few brave institutions are willing to strike out in new directions. Social inclusion. In one way the growth of mass higher education systems may actually have reinforced the relative position of elites in that some universities can function as positional goods which illustrate the recipient’s status to an even greater extent than before. Star Player syndrome. The position of the top institutions has generally been cemented at the expense of institutions farther down the hierarchy by the way in which these institutions can draw money (and therefore talent) to them, and by rankings. Arts and humanities. The arts and humanities feel threatened by the growth of big science and medical schools but they have yet to find arguments with enough traction to produce the level of public support or a sufficiently generally accepted level of cultural importance that, quite rightly, they feel they need. The role of the state. The degree to which mass higher education should be regarded as a public good clashes with states (and taxpayers) willingness to pay for it. This tension has become a moment of political contest in many parts of the world but the resolution tends to stay political instead of being founded in principle. The third sector. Higher education is surrounded by a list of secondary players who are having primary forms of influence: recruitment consultants, management consultants, league tablers, think tanks, and so on. Unlike universities, the position of these players is generally unregulated and this must clearly be a concern as the global financial crisis has only too clearly shown. Research careers. Universities are producing large number of researchers who are unlikely to all have a sustained research career. Even though many of these will find excellent jobs in other sectors this must remain a concern. World problems. As I have noted in an online debate, universities are key to solving many of the world’s problems but the lifeboats have holes in them. In particular, it is not clear that universities are optimally organized to solve these problems in their current manifestation.

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Sociological Imagination will be running a free day school in June at Warwick. It will include social media training workshops and a seminar about the potential uses for social media in the research process. Watch this space for more information.

Review of ‘Race, Sport and Politics: The Sporting Black Diaspora’ by Ben Carrington (2011-01-20 08:00)

Race, Sport and Politics is an intense sociological engagement with the intersection of race, sport and politics in twentieth century Britain and USA. Ben Carrington is a well-established and well-respected author in the areas of sociological theory, ‘race’, culture and sport and this book reflects his passion for the study of ‘race’ and sport.

Race, Sport and Politics opens with a thrilling account of the black American boxer Jack Johnson who, in 1908, defeated the white Canadian Tommy Burns in Sydney to become the World Heavyweight Champion. It was a pivotal moment in history. In 1908, at the peak of imperialism, social Darwinism, eugenics and ‘Muscular Christianity’, boxing epitomised all that was brave, courageous and physically strong in the white ‘race’. As a result, Johnson’s win greatly alarmed the white ruling elites around the world from his native USA to Australia where the epic event transpired (Carrington informs us that Johnson enjoyed the support of the Aborigines of Australia). Johnson’s win was seen as a potential trigger for a ‘black revolution’ having huge implications for imperialism which was based on a white supremacist ideology.

Taking this event as the starting point, Ben Carrington’s latest book, then, ‘is an account of the political meanings and the global impact of ‘the black athlete’ over the past century, the role of sport in the making and remaking of western ideas about racial difference, and the position of sport in the forging of gendered, national and racial identities within the broader African diaspora. ……………..throughout the twentieth century and into the present there has been a continuous struggle over the meaning of ‘the black athlete’…………….. The loss of political power, and the concomitant fears of sexual impotency, finds [sic] its corollary in the rise of the black athlete’.

Having established this, the book moves to a theoretical engagement with sport, ‘race’ and the human body in the wider social and political contexts of the day. Here Carrington engages with and invokes a broad range of social, cultural and literary theorists, among others, Gramsci on hegemony, Frantz Fanon, Césaire, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Allen Guttmann, John Hargreaves, Richard Gruneau, Anne McClintock, Paul Gilroy as well as
a number of present-day writers on sport history and postcolonialism.

Contrary to Guttmann, Carrington posits that like citizenship, ‘sports were born out of and from classed, gendered and racial inequalities’. The black boxer Jack Johnson is an important diasporic figure for Carrington because like other African-Americans Tom Molineaux and Jackie Robinson, the fame and opportunities denied at home were found outside the USA. However, the opportunity to challenge Tommy Burns did not come easily to Jack Johnson. There was severe opposition from various quarters. Boxing was one of the few arenas where a display of violence and physical prowess was sanctioned. Therefore, victory for a black boxer suggested to the ruling elites, an unacceptable subversion of the racial hierarchy and a challenge to white physical superiority [1]. As accounts of Johnson’s reaction show, to him, a victory against a white boxer represented successful resistance and response to racist imperialism [2]. Following Fanon, Carrington notes, ‘The colonial subject’s dreams of muscular prowess........imbue the category of sport with a form of physical release and symbolic power that resonates far beyond the playing fields and boxing rings from where they come. In this context we might suggest that sport becomes articulated with discourses of freedom and hope in the refiguring of the category of ‘the human”.

Carrington goes on to discuss violence, sexuality and desire in the context of ‘the black athlete’. Discourses on ‘the black athlete’ underwent various transitions in the twentieth century. Leading black intellectuals and leaders saw Jack Johnson as too brash, promiscuous and aggressive to be the ideal figurehead for the black struggle for emancipation even though his contribution did much to help the cause. Carrington then examines two former heavyweight boxing champions, the Briton Frank Bruno and the American Mike Tyson, in terms of the colonial binary good black-bad black. The level of acceptance and image enjoyed by them are contrasted and examined, as is their own embrace of their black identity. The book finally moves to a review and discussion of the state of multiculturalism in Britain today- the publication and media, political and popular reception of the Parekh Report of 2000, the London Olympic bid for the 2012 Olympics [3], the terror attacks of 2005, shift of the label of ‘outsider’ and ‘enemy’ from blacks to the Asian Muslim today, the fortunes of black and Asian British sportsmen (in particular Lewis Hamilton and Monty Panesar), and the role of sport as a catalyst for and an indicator of popular attitudes towards diversity [4].

The conclusion ties together the main points of the book- complex relationships between race and sexual desire, race and gender, race and nationalism, all analysed through the prism of sport and ‘the black athlete’. What remains to be seen is if the discourse on ‘the black athlete’ changes in the ‘Age of Obama’.

In the first couple of chapters, Race, Sport and Politics takes the form of an intense theoretical engagement with the topics in what is clearly an expert and advanced sociological study. As the book progresses, it picks up narrative pace and is enlivened by illustrative examples, posters and revealing contemporary events.

Carrington aims to make several important points through this book. To studies of ‘race’ and politics, the book offers an analysis of the perception of ‘the black (male) athlete’ from the days of Social Darwinism and eugenics to the present day. To social theory, Carrington wishes to contribute, through such a study of sport, race and politics, theory generated by sport instead of passive application of existing social theory to sport. Carrington brings into focus the step-motherly treatment meted to the sub-field of sociology of sport. He highlights the role of sport in culture and society to counter the general perception of sport as a disorganised leisure activity with no meaningful contribution to society. Inspite of some brilliant and rigorous work by an increasing number of academics and academic journals in this area, ‘mainstream’ sociologists tend to either pay passing attention to sport or ignore its potential completely. Their engagement ends with the mention of the great CLR James. A cursory glance at the sociology and culture studies departments of leading British universities confirms this to the reader. This book is an important contribution towards redressing this grievance of sociologists of sport and indeed, historians of sport who are faced with a similar neglect!

Along with Paul Gilroy, John Solomos, Les Back, Ian McDonald and others, Carrington is undoubtedly one of
the best-known names in the sociological sub-fields of sport, 'race' and culture.

Notes:

[1] On the other hand, the reader might recall that cricketers of Indian origin such as KS Ranjitsinhji ('Ranji') and his nephew KS Duleepsinhji have represented Oxbridge, MCC/England and Gentlemen (in the Gentlemen vs Players matches). Thus, while participation of non-white sportsmen in boxing was severely opposed, imperial cricket welcomed these non-white players (although their stories are not completely devoid of discrimination).

Unlike boxing, cricket- the epitome of all that was quintessentially English and artistic- was seen as an instrument of cultural imperialism and hence encouraged in the colonies. See the works of JA Mangan, Brian Stoddart, and various other writers on cricket and imperialism.

[2] See Beyond a Boundary by the Trinidadian Marxist writer CLR James for similar discourses on West Indian cricket victories over England.

[3] One might regard the successful London 2012 Olympic bid and the failed Football World Cup 2018 bid as particularly revealing. The 2018 bid contained contributions of inner-city children. Both bids used as their USP, the presentation of England and London as diverse and multicultural with emphasis on the ability of sport to contribute to social cohesion.


"It’s like living in the mind of a depressed hippie": Adam Curtis’s Story of "Oh, Dear"-ism (2011-01-21 08:00)

Adam Curtis is the author of many documentaries, among which one that he names, with jokingly-seriousness, "The rise of "Oh, dear"-ism". It is the story of the interplay between television reporting and world politics which began roughly a couple of decades after World War II. In this story, “noble individuals stand against corrupt political systems”. But are charitable actions always unambiguously doing good, and what are we to do when it is no longer clear who the "good guys" are? Below is a trailer:

[EMBED]
mind of a depressed hippie": Adam Curtis's Story of "Oh, Dear"-ism http://tinyurl.com/6dayqpv [...]

This isn’t a trailer, it’s a short film he was commissioned to make for Charlie Brooker’s Screenwipe series. It’s damn good though :) 

Milena Kremakova (2011-05-16 21:07:19)
Thanks for the clarification! I will correct. Do you know more about Curtis’ work? I really enjoyed this one.

Student Protests 2010 (Music (c) Dan Le Sac Vs Scroobius Pip) (2011-01-22 08:00)

[EMBED]

US Vice President dispenses advice to young girls (again and again and again) (2011-01-23 08:00)

[EMBED]

Tweets that mention US Vice President dispenses advice to young girls (again and again and again) | The Sociological Imagination – Topsy.com (2011-01-23 12:40:14)
[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Billie Lister, Socio Imagination. Socio Imagination said: US Vice President dispenses advice to young girls (again and again and again) http://tinyurl.com/4pghj3s [...] 

Time and stress: article about alarm clocks (2011-01-24 08:00)

Happy Monday morning to all readers who find themselves in their offices right now. If you wonder how alarm clocks managed to make us so dependent upon them, read [1] this article in the BBC magazine.

[2]
CRESC: Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change (2011-01-25 08:00)

The Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change is a large research centre based at Manchester University and the Open University. As they describe themselves:

CRESC is a major ESRC-funded Manchester University/Open University research centre. Our social science and humanities researchers use state-of-the-art research methods to explore socio-cultural change.

Their website is worth a [1]look. Not only is there an enormous amount of interesting material on there (seemingly everything their large research team has produced over the lifetime of the centre) but the site itself represents a masterful example of research projects using social media to communicate with the wider world. Has anyone come across any better examples?

If so then please e-mail the [2]editor, as we’re keen to highlight impressive uses of social media within the discipline. It’s something which is still largely in its infancy but undoubtedly set to grow over the next decades. While the funding climate grows ever more hostile and departments are under pressure to demonstrate their capacity for public engagement and impact, easy to use & low cost publishing platforms will surely come to take centre stage.
Social Animal: article by David Brooks in the New Yorker (2011-01-26 08:00)

The conscious mind gives us one way of making sense of our environment. But the unconscious mind gives us other, more supple ways. The cognitive revolution of the past thirty years provides a different perspective on our lives, one that emphasizes the relative importance of emotion over pure reason, social connections over individual choice, moral intuition over abstract logic, perceptiveness over I.Q. It allows us to tell a different sort of success story, an inner story to go along with the conventional surface one.

Read the article here [1]


The Social Animal | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-08 08:02:30)

[...] talk from David Brooks, author of the Social Animal who featured on SI a few months ago here, about the new understandings of human nature and their consequences for political life and the [...]

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2011-01-26 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment
Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here

1. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/)
2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/)

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**No more gap year? A sarcastic view by David Mitchell (2011-01-27 08:00)**

David Mitchell offers a bitterly humorous view on the cuts in higher education subsidies [1]here.

But make sure you read everything up to the last sentence. And do not forget to read the comments...

[2]
"Hello Kitty has no mouth": essay on the soft power of cuteness in Japanese culture (2011-01-28 08:00)

Her blank eyes gaze at you from her white face, her button nose a sunshine yellow. A dainty bow rests askew on her left ear, the color matching the day’s adorable—not to mention perfectly coordinated—outfit. Cute, one almost overlooks an important feature: the mouth. Hello Kitty, the embodiment of cute, has no mouth. After more than 30 years, she remains a popular and recognizable character, with generation after generation of young girls falling in love—or at least consumer lust—with Hello Kitty, their zeal for collecting the fancy goods at times extending in adulthood. Why the interest (both love and loathing for the character) in Hello Kitty and all things kawaii? What factors have contributed to her rise and continued success on a global scale? Finally, what are the implications of a mouthless Hello Kitty in terms of gender stereotypes and agency?

...

A discussion of Hello Kitty is nearly impossible without an explanation of kawaii and the culture that surrounds the term. Historically, the rise of cuteness is traced back to the 1970s, with the popularization of cute handwriting and manga and disillusionment with earlier student riots and subsequent capitalization of those trends by the fancy goods industry ([1]Kinsella, 1995:225). Though the general meaning of the word is “cute,” the qualities and connotations associated with the term are many. As Kinsella writes, a survey among men and women in 1992 revealed a number of other terms associated with kawaii, including: childlike, innocent, naïve, unconscious, natural, emotional contact between individuals, fashionable, associated with animals, and weak (1995:237-240). Kawaii is a produced style and aesthetic as well as an inherent quality a person, place, or thing possesses.

...

Through cute images, the signifiers of infantilism—weakness, helplessness, childishness, and dependence—become things to aspire to or things to mimic. In an American society that lauds autonomy and independence, the underlying qualities represented by kawaii images, which are primarily associated with young girls, remain problematic. Without a mouth, Hello Kitty has neither voice nor agency. The image of Hello Kitty further perpetuates the stereotype of the docile Asian female.

Read the whole text by Jennilee Tuazon [2]here
Our Most Popular Posts of the Last Month | The Sociological Imagination (2012-03-21 08:02:27)

[...]: “Hello Kitty has no mouth”: essay on the soft power of cuteness in Japanese culture [...]

sharon flores (2013-07-05 21:24:02)
i love hello kitty thats why i put hello kitty essay.


**President Hosni Mubarak has ordered a curfew in three cities (3.30pm), later extended to the entire country, which was supposed to start at 6pm today and last until 7am tomorrow morning but it has been roundly ignored as clashes have continued.**

Mubarak has sent in the army to restore order in Cairo, Alexandria and Suez but protesters cheered the army in some areas, calling on them to side with them against the police (3.43 pm). In some areas the army has done so. Soldiers have shaken hands with protesters in Alexandria and in Cairo. Demonstrators have clambered onto tanks in Suez and Cairo. There have also been unconfirmed reports of clashes between the army and police.


All bets are off at this point. It seems a lot less likely today than it did yesterday that Hosni Mubarak will stay in power. I suggest [1]Al Jazeera English for useful and insightful updates.

1. [http://english.aljazeera.net/watch_now/](http://english.aljazeera.net/watch_now/)

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**Too much choice kills the choice: article in the 'Economist' (2011-01-29 08:00)**

On my fifth birthday, my mother asked me what I wanted for lunch: spaghetti or soup. I hesitated. Unexpectedly, she grew impatient. *'You have FIVE seconds to make up your mind. Decide.'* And she counted down. I hesitated for three and a half seconds, then chose one (I now don’t remember which). She said *'OK. Now remember: being able to make choices within five seconds is the most important thing you need to learn to do before you grow up.'*, and disappeared in the kitchen.

That was a quarter of a century ago, in the time before email, mobile phones and microwave ovens (and even in the time before different varieties of chewing gum had appeared on the shop shelves: I grew up in a socialist state). Ever since then, I have been trying with varying (and decreasing) success to implement this wise piece of advise. The Economist - as so often happens - have written the article I had always wanted to write: [1]here

[2]
See also [3] **Food Adjectives: exercise in deconstruction**


Food Adjectives (an exercise in deconstruction) | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-18 00:37:38)
[[...]] See also Too much choice kills the choice? [[...]]

Choice! | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-21 09:16:07)
[[...]] Salecl talks about the dynamics of choice in modern societies. The Idle Ethnographer talked about this a few months ago and it’s a fascinating issue – the structural, cultural and personal [[...]]

**Discourses of Dissent: Social Theory and Political Resistance** (2011-01-30 08:00)

**Public Symposium, Warwick Social Theory Centre**

16th February 2011, 2-6pm, Birmingham Midland Institute
£10 waged / £5 student, unwaged

Discourses of Dissent is a one day symposium, open to all, which explores the relationship between social theory and political resistance. In light of the coalition government’s austerity agenda and the emerging movement against it, the event asks how academic research (with a particular focus on social theory) can help inform and sustain political resistance.

In doing so it will confront a variety of pressing questions standing at the interface between theory and politics. How do theoretical justifications of austerity work to constrain public debate? How does the current government’s incongruous blend of neoliberal realism and superficial progressivism relate to what went before it? What resources can we find in social theory to critique the coalition’s agenda and it’s relationship to the wider crisis of late capitalism? How can academic research in general (and social theory in particular) aid the cultivation and propagation of positive discourses which would allow us to break out of the ever narrowing political and cultural horizons which have defined the public life of the UK over the last three decades?

Confirmed speakers are Steve Fuller, John Holmwood, Ruth Levitas, Sasha Roseneil and Alberto Toscano. More speakers are to be confirmed in the near future.

Round Table 1: Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity

Round Table 2: Envisaging Public Universities and Public Futures

The event is being organized through the Social Theory Centre at the University of Warwick. It takes place on the 16th February, 2-6pm, at the Birmingham & Midland Institute in central Birmingham. For map, see here: [1]http://www.bmi.org.uk/map.html

For more details please contact Mark Carrigan ([2]m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk) and see the website below.

To register online please see the website: [3]http://discoursesofdissent.com/

Please forward and display the attached poster.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Karen Throsby gives talk at Warwick (2011-01-31 08:00)

Centre for the Study of Women and Gender Seminar

Karen Throsby

“If I could bottle this feeling...”:
Channel swimming, pleasure and positive deviance
Wednesday 2 February, 5-6pm

University of Warwick, Ramphal Building (R3.25)

No need to book – everyone is welcome.


2.2 February

From Journalist to Sociologist: Some Reflections (2011-02-01 08:00)

I never, ever wanted to be a journalist. But when an editor of a niche entertainment magazine about to go monthly came knocking at my door about a year and a half after receiving my bachelor’s degree, I was in no financial position to refuse. My newfound writing job put me on the periphery of the cultural industries in the United States, writing primarily about the then burgeoning sector of book publishing which was translating Japanese comics (called ‘manga’) for English-language release. It was, all things considered, a good fit with my undergraduate study in English literature and East Asian area studies, and in the past five years since I have begun freelancing, one lucky break has led to other opportunities, and I have written over a thousands magazine features, news articles, reviews, and more.

Although the pay was terrible and impossible to live on, this work was accompanied by one unexpected perk: I got a front-row seat at one of the most amazing spectacles of transnational cultural flow (from Japan to the United States and then onto the rest of the English-speaking world) in recent historical memory. The phenomenon captivated me, baffled me, and eventually brought me back to the academy in search of answers, first at New York University for a master’s degree, and then across the Atlantic to begin a PhD course in the Department of Sociology in the University of Cambridge. My doctoral research topic is manga publishing and the transnational production of print culture.

Relatively few people, I would presume, have written extensively on the same topics from the perspectives of both journalist and sociologist, and Sociological Imagination has asked me to share some of the insights gleaned from this experience. First of all, perhaps unsurprisingly, there is not the slightest doubt in my mind that my experience as a journalist has made me a better academic professional. Unfortunately, this is by no means a popular view. It is common practice to denigrate journalism and journalists in the academy—to say that a piece of scholarship is ‘too journalistic’, for example, is to render a grave insult. Yet behind this insult, I believe, are strong feelings of jealousy toward journalists, for journalists are extremely good at two important things with which many career academics struggle with daily: 1) Journalists know how to communicate ideas to large and diverse publics, and 2) they know how to crank out publishable pieces of writing at speed.

An extremely productive sociologist might succeed in publishing between two to four solo-authored journal articles per year. A full-time journalist barely scraps by with many more times than that volume of prose each and every month. As a freelancer, I was never doing even a fraction of that, but I estimate that during my busiest year, when I was also a full time student at NYU, I succeeded in publishing approximately 150,000 words and wrote significantly more than that. One learns, by living this sort of life, that writing is ordinary routinized labour, and figuring out how to survive—even thrive—in that daily grind, with its non-stop conveyor belt of looming deadlines,
will make one the envy of the academic world.

Well then, one might ask, is the inverse also true? Does experience as a sociologist make one a better journalist? Unfortunately, I do not think that the answer to that question is a particularly strong affirmative, and the epistemological orientation making a successful sociologist does not necessarily translate into success as a journalist. Hands down the most important distinction in my experience is that journalists simply do not relate to knowledge in the same way that sociologists do. The thrust of a positivist research agenda is to seek empirical evidence to be generalized as much as possible across time and geographic space; as such, sociologists seek to describe and analyze broad social formations, structures, and forces. Journalists, on the other hand, are fixated on the immediate, the novel, and the event. In their eyes, the patterns of history and society take a backseat to the simple question, ‘What’s happening right now?’

Furthermore, there are practical as well as philosophical considerations: I cannot in good conscience recommend that professional sociologists further contribute to the casualization of journalistic labour. In the five years that I have been writing freelance, I have watched my average per word pay rate drop like a stone by over two-thirds, and journalists in every sector of the industry are under constant, accelerating pressure to write more for less money. In fact, it’s to the point now where journalism is becoming a life stage for twenty-somethings like myself who, after finishing their bachelor’s degree, do it for a few years…until the pitiable salaries become intolerable. Many, again including myself, never make enough to live on and can only write insofar as they have income via other means, e.g. a different full-time job, support of a spouse or parents, or independent wealth. Salaried researchers who do a bit of journalism on the side are ultimately complicit in the erosion of a professional field.

Naturally, an army of inexperienced and disempowered journalists does not foster a particularly vibrant fourth estate. I would argue, therefore, that any assault upon professional standards is against the public interest, and it would be immoral for concerned sociologists to collectively take up professional journalism. Of course, sometimes it is impossible in practice to stake out the high ground, particularly if you need extra funds just to get by, but those fortunate enough to have a choice to make need to be realistic: Any contribution to the public good you make is likely to be modest at best, and the potential to do good for others must be carefully weighed against the certain long-term harm it will do to working journalistic professionals and the health of their profession.

It does not follow, however, that sociologists ought to abandon the world of journalism entirely. Quite the contrary; sociologists should be actively engaged with journalists and the journalistic field. Work to make yourself known—and known for something. Become familiar with those who write about topics related to what you do and where they publish. Get yourself on their proverbial Rolodexes and make yourself available as a reliable expert resource, a source of knowledge on call—or, even better yet, quotes. If your research has produced findings which you believe to be relevant to a wider audience, you might choose to write and distribute your own press release. Becoming a resource in the work of article and news creation makes the job of the journalist easier, and as someone who knows firsthand how stressful that can be, this is what I believe we as sociologists must do: make their job easier, not take it away from them.

[1] Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge.

Sociologist: Some Reflections http://tinyurl.com/4pu5dfc [...]

Sociología y Periodismo « PAT Sociología, UDC (2011-02-04 08:45:29) [...] http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/caseybrienza/from-journalist-to-sociologist-some-reflection... Dejar un comentario Dejar un comentario por mucho Deja un comentario RSS feed para los comentarios de esta entrada. URI para TrackBack. [...]

Emily (2014-04-07 17:50:26)
Hi Casey, I am a student of journalism at the University of Cincinnati, OH and I used your article as reference on a sociology term paper on journalism in relation to sociology. Although it has proven drudgery via a horrible teacher and a Full-Time workload alongside a 4.0 GPA, your article proved very insightful and lightened my mood a bit. Thanks! - Emily

Peter Singer on Hegel and Marx (2011-02-02 08:00)

In this program, contemporary philosopher Peter Singer discusses rational Hegelian philosophy, and the historicism and organicism at its root. Hegel's theories of absolute idealism and of a dialectic, emphasize history in their development of a model of reality. His concept of this reality as ultimately spiritual, and of philosophy as organic and constantly changing, is examined. The theories of Karl Marx are discussed as essentially Hegelian, but a practical economic spin:


1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxjnG1X510A

Zizek: Why Fear the Arab Revolutionary Spirit? (2011-02-02 08:00)


[2][3]
SI Interviews - Simon Williams on the Sociology of Sleep (2011-02-03 08:00)

In this podcast [1]Simon Williams talks about his new book [2]the Politics of Sleep. While sleep is often taken to be a entirely private and natural part of human life, in recent years it has been the subject of a rich vein of interdisciplinary research.

As well as exploring the political dimensions to contemporary discourses and practices of sleep, the interview addresses some of the broader questions which sleep raises, situating these issues in terms of theories of modernity and human nature.
Turkey’s European dream has flown: article by Orhan Pamuk (2011-02-04 12:00)


[4]

470
1. http://www.orhanpamuk.net/

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Soviet 'health and safety’ posters (2011-02-05 08:00)

(click [1]here follow link to gallery)

Geographical limit between Balkan and Central Europe (2011-02-06 08:00)
[EMBED]

New column! “Visual Sociology” call for reader submissions (2011-02-07 08:00)

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to "Visual Research". To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday. The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying...
their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.

Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.
What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

**Type of image:** Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

**Format and size:**

- JPEG format
- 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

**Legal issues:** Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers’ rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

**Copyright:** The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

![Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)

“This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.”

* Becker 1995 Visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It’s (almost) all a matter of context, Visual Studies, Volume 10, Issue 1 & 2 1995, pp. 5 - 14 (the article can be downloaded here, or viewed in html here)
Religion in the US (2011-02-08 08:00)


[2]
Sally Hunt says further university funding cuts 'disastrous for the economy' (2011-02-08 10:43)

UCU General Secretary Sally Hunt used a piece in the Left Foot Forward blog to attack the government's latest cuts as a disaster for the British economy. Accusing the government of 'lazy thinking', she argued that the effects of the cuts would wipe out the economic benefits of higher education, further eroding the basis of growth. She also pointed to UCU research showing that the impact of university closures on regional economies would be catastrophic. Read more [1]here.

Universities are still reeling from the 80 % cut to their teaching budgets starting from 2012, announced in the comprehensive spending review (CSR). Now as part of the £1.8 billion cuts previously announced universities are set to lose £190million between April and July this year as teaching and research budgets are slashed. Read more [2]here and [3]here.

(From UCU Campaign updates)


SI Interviews - Dave Elder-Vass on the Causal Power of Social Structures (2011-02-09 08:00)


Along with [3]Stephen Turner’s recent book on normativity, this will be the topic for Theory stream plenary session at the British Sociological Association’s annual conference in April.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/dave_elder-vass.mp3"]The Causal Power of Social Structures


[…] This post was mentioned on Twitter by basem adi, arturlozano. arturlozano said: SI Interviews – Dave Elder-Vass on the Causal Power of Social Structures http://t.co/ypx3lpL […]

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Who gets the best jobs? **(2011-02-10 08:00)**

Richard Bilton investigates how class continues to restrict access to professions and well-paid careers to a small, exclusive pool of the well-connected in modern Britain.

[1]Click to watch video (only UK viewers, unfortunately)

1. [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ipy/episode/b00yb5kv/Who_Gets_the_Best_Jobs/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ipy/episode/b00yb5kv/Who_Gets_the_Best_Jobs/)


[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Public University, Socio Imagination. Socio Imagination said: Who gets the best jobs? http://tinyurl.com/6f9hebx [...]


In this public talk Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley discuss themes from their recent book "Lost Generation? New Strategies for Youth and Education". They place the coalition government’s education policies in historical perspective and argue that the current crisis means we must confront long unanswered questions about the purpose of education and its place within wider society.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/lost_generation.mp3"]The Lost Generation?

Martin and Patrick have written about these issues for Sociological Imagination in the past: see their [1]first and [2]second articles for more commentary on these issues.

(SI Presents is a new series of podcasts encompassing public talks and specially recorded presentations on a wide variety of sociological topics. If you would like to contribute to SI Presents or SI Interviews then please [3]contact the editor)


[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Public University and Socio Imagination, Socio Imagination. Socio Imagination said:

'You’re old, Facebook Newsfeed' – a poem (2011-02-11 08:00)

You’re old, Facebook Newsfeed, and terribly slow –

You have nothing of interest to say

“‘I’m cold’ or “The Smiths”; or “I want it to snow”

(From your cousin who lives in LA).

Amazing how friends are so free with their news

I can’t think what I’d usefully write.

“I’m tired” someone comments – “So how bout a snooze?”

Says one friend, who then ‘likes’ it – how trite!

Don’t worry, dear Reader, we’ll help you with this

We’ve got someone online all the time

Release your minutiae; you will find bliss

If it helps you, perhaps make it rhyme?

No use, Facebook Newsfeed, o generous host,

I’ll be keeping my thoughts in my head

The fact is I can’t help but read every post

And refresh several times before bed.

That’s wonderful, Reader, as we couldn’t say

That our work here at Langley is done
'Til you know how Dave's shoes are affecting his play
And that Angela's 'looking for fun'...
Well yes, but it's time that I don't want to lose
Without making some tiny amends...?
Since you seem to make changes whenever you choose
Could you find me some interesting friends?

The Sarah Palin battle anthem! (2011-02-12 08:00)

[EMBED]

I read it in the Daily Mail! (2011-02-13 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination advocates plurality of information sources in decision making. This song illustrates the kind of knowledge you might end up with, if you only trust one source:

[EMBED]

Discourses of Dissent: this Wednesday (16th) in Birmingham (2011-02-13 14:22)

Discourses of Dissent is a one day symposium, open to all, which explores the relationship between social theory and political resistance. In light of the coalition government's austerity agenda and the emerging movement against it, the event asks how academic research (with a particular focus on social theory) can help inform and sustain political resistance.

Central Birmingham, February 16th, 1:30pm to 6:30pm

To register go to [1]www.discoursesofdissent.com
Session 1: Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity

Ruth Levitas - The necessity of utopian thinking
Sasha Roseneil - Criticality, not paranoia: Registers of critical social theory
Karen Rowlingson - Why doesn’t the British public seem to care about inequality or the cuts in public spending?

Session 2: Envisioning Public Universities and Public Futures

Steve Fuller - What are we defending when we defend public universities?
John Holmwood - The idea of the public
Dan Hind - Media reform and the public university


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‘We love each other’ and other Roma stories from Central and Eastern Europe (2011-02-14 08:00)

The findings of a recent study by AMALIPE, an NGO that serves the Roma community, show that many of the myths surrounding Roma lifestyle are outdated. These include marriage age, family size and the practices of arranged marriages and dowries. Seventeen-year-old Yanka and 20-year-old Vassil share their views on these issues as they prepare for and celebrate their wedding in Zlataritsa, Bulgaria.

It is generally thought that the Roma journey westward started in India more than a thousand years ago, though the group didn't appear in Europe until the fourteenth century. Estimates on the number of Roma in Europe today range between ten and twelve million, with most living in Central and Eastern Europe in conditions of social deprivation and often facing outright discrimination. The scant historical records on the Roma people and its dispersion through much of the continent account for centuries of negative stereotyping-and sometimes romanticizing-that portrays Roma as nomadic, mythical and exotic people who neither fit in, nor belong.

This project seeks to counter these age-old prejudices with twenty-five stories featuring personal insights into the daily lives of Roma people. Colorful but Colorblind, uses multimedia storytelling to promote social integration of Roma in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The stories journey into Roma life in some of the newest EU member states, exploring contemporary Roma identities and culture and obstacles that Roma communities face in achieving equality. The stories were produced by teams comprising Roma and majority-community journalists from these countries in collaboration with graduate students from the School of Communication at the University of Miami.

Tihomir Loza
Project Director
Transitions

Love for sale (2011-02-14 16:11)

...real human hearts are not gaudy, cast in gold or made of chocolate. Real human hearts are bloody, meaty, beating messes of fear and emotional flux. Cheap chocolatey sentiment distracts us from the fact that very few of us are truly alone. We have friends, communities, networks and families to rely on and live in a superabundance of human pleasure, passion, consolation and commitment. There is room for all of us, whether partnered, single, or in more complicated arrangements, to find love and fulfilment.

A love-ly [1]article in the Guardian makes a predictable, but well-argued point about the falsity of Valentine celebrations.

[2]

The Idealised Bourgeois Couple (Photo: Milena Kremakova/Idle Ethnographer TM)
In this podcast Catherine Coveney uses the case study of Modafinil (a revolutionary 'wakefulness' drug reportedly subject to increasingly widespread use amongst students, academics, professionals and shiftworkers) to explore the status and practice of cognitive enhancement within contemporary society.

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Jed Bickman (2011-02-17 14:11:50)
Very interesting; my stream finked out partway through, so I will continue later...In a sense, cognitive enhancement seems to me to be the most valid use of psychopharmaceuticals, because that decision to use comes utterly of the individual's free desire. The individual is not considered to be a patient, is not pathologized, and is not forced to take. Perhaps we should shift our discourse around pharma away from pathology and towards enhancement.

Sociologists and The End of Sleep - (2013-01-23 17:50:23)
[...] aid — and night shift workers. The night shifters told The Sociological Imagination podcast that people thought they could use the medication as a safety mechanism, allowing night nurses to be[...]

[...] have taken to the drug as a procrastination aid—and night shift workers. The night shifters told The Sociological Imagination podcast that people thought they could use the medication as a safety mechanism, allowing night nurses to be[...]

Nick Clegg face-to-face with angry students (2011-02-15 15:23)

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Procrastination: a bargaining process gone wrong? (2011-02-16 08:00)
It is irrational.
It is a mixture of weakness, ambition, and inner conflict.
We've all done it.
If you want to know why, as the present gets closer, short-term considerations overwhelm our long-term goals and urge us to procrastinate - and if you know you ought to be working now - read the article by James Surowiecki from the New Yorker[1] here.
Chopin can wait, nap is a priority (Photo: Milena Kremakova/Idle Ethnographer TM & Alexandra Kremakova)


I Just Love the Photos From That Post | The Global Sociology Blog (2011-02-16 23:02:11)

[...] for updates on this topic.Powered by Greet Boxl don’t have any particular comment about this post, but I love that series of photos so [...]  

The Future of the British City? A review of Ground Control by Anna Minton (2011-02-17 08:00)


The reconstruction of Manchester’s city centre after the IRA’s 1996 bomb stood as the background to my teenage years and, as is often the case with such things, I never really scrutinised or questioned the direction it took. I was 11 at the time of the bombing and had been watching cartoons on a Saturday morning before driving into the city centre with my mother. I vaguely remember us being stopped in the car by a hastily erected police cordon on the outskirts of the city but it was only later in the day, while at my grandmother’s nursing home, that we found out
what had happened. At the time the impact of the bombing seemed to be expressed solely in the immediacy of the destruction wrought; yet many years later, as I read *Ground Control*, it became clear quite how the events of that morning paved the way for a radical and, at the time, unprecedented experiment in city-centre governance.

Since 2000 the centre of Manchester has been run by a private company called City Co which, in its own words, “provides the vision, strategy and influence” necessary for “creating the trading conditions for business to prosper”. The Manchester city council describes it as follows:

Cityco is Manchester's city centre management company. Cityco is an independent, member-based organisation, which represents businesses in the city centre, primarily leisure, hotels, retailers, commercial property and professional services. The company’s main objective is to help create the trading conditions for business in the city centre to prosper; a broad aim, which we work towards in a variety of strategic and operational ways.

We are well-networked within the city and our close links with the City Council, the Police, transport bodies and other organisations allow us to help members resolve security and environmental problems. We lobby on behalf of members, for example, to improve late night public transport and regulatory frameworks, and undertake initiatives, including research, to inform the long-term strategic direction of the city centre.

Cityco also promotes the city nationally and internationally as a leisure and business destination, running inventive and successful marketing campaigns.

Far from being an isolated case, Cityco was the prototype for a new mode of city centre governance which became the heart of New Labour’s urban policy: the Business Improvement District (BID). It’s a policy imported from America, where it has spread quickly over the last 15 years. Businesses petition the local government to create a BID, the local government (in principle) determines that a majority of the businesses in the area want the BID and then the legislation enacting the BID is enacted. In the US, after the creation of a BID, all business property owners within the district pay a fee – even those who opposed its creation – while in the UK, in the absence of a property register, occupiers pay the fee. This fee pays, as in the case of Cityco, for activity intended to create good business conditions within the area.

Taken in a rather naive and literal sense this could be seen to practically amount to keeping the area clean, safe and attractive. However there’s a subtle but profound conflation at work here; good business conditions for the sort of retail and leisure outlets which usual dominate BIDs amount to circumstances which engender consumption and remove obstacles to consumption. As Anna Minton reports a BID manager telling her: “high margins come with ABC1s, low margins with C2DEs. My job is to create an environment which will bring in more ABC1s” (pg 45). If you fall into the most desire socio-economic groups and are coming into the BID in order to spend money then the BID represents a proactive attempt to shape the area to your immediate needs. This becomes progressively less true as the people concerned become less socio-economically desirable and less intent on consumption to the point where those who are uneconomical, or even anti-economic, become subject to outright harassment.

The Loiterers Resistance Movement are a group influenced by psychogeography who attempt to foster the creative exploration of Manchester. In 2008 they attempted to organize a festival of talks, walks and performances in the city-centre but faced resistance from Cityco at every turn. They were told that flyering without a permit would constitute littering and they would be fined. They were refused permission to pitch a tent as part of an outdoor
art exhibition on the grounds that it might encourage homeless people into the city. An event about pigeons came under fire on the grounds that it might “encourage people to like pigeons”. Members of the group who were asking passers-by about their use of the city-centre were questioned and subject to “vague” threats by Cityco’s wardens. Obviously though this is only example when many more could be cited. Indeed many go unreported.

It’s great to be a wealthy consumer within a BID; quite the opposite to be homeless, flaneur, protestor, busker, young or poor. So the idea that certain public goods (cleaning, security, entertainment) are necessarily common goods is misleading when those specific public goods are pursued by business as a means to an end. Particularly when these de facto governmental bodies come equipped with private police (such as Cityco’s wardens and rangers) and vast CCTV networks. Likewise their ambiguous status, as can be seen in the growing outsourcing of policing functions to private security and equal involvement in policing [2]operations, itself grants security guards de facto powers. Far from being private security guards, they are City Wardens who work with the police and increasingly have police powers; this leaves members of the public less likely to question them and individuals guards more likely to lie about or abuse their powers, at least when the individual would obviously be unlikely to take the matter to court. Likewise the extent of collusion between the police and private security (witness [3]EON and [4]EDO) elsewhere doesn’t inspire confidence in the accountability of these increasingly empowered and emboldened private security agents.

This is only one small aspect of the book but it stuck with me for biographical reasons. It’s also emblematic of the wider issues the book deals with, as market imperatives and the utilitarian individualism which goes with them literally consume public space: gated luxury housing, gated social housing, BIDs, CCTV, ASBOs, ‘malls without walls’. The attempt to provide control and security, as a business driven effort to attract well-off consumers and as a well-off consumer driven effort to repel the dangerous outsider, are radically transforming the spatial politics of the UK in ways which have yet to be adequately conceptualised; anger and protest at individual symptoms have yet to translate into a general understanding of the underlying problem which could provide an effective basis for resistance. Ground Control is an admirable attempt to provide such a basis but one which, at less than 200 pages, was always bound to remain incomplete.


option binaire (2014-12-31 20:51:51)
Touche. Great arguments. Keep up the good spirit.

Karen Rowlingson – Why doesn’t the British public seem to care about inequality or the cuts in public spending? (2011-02-17 19:36)

[EMBED]
Discourses of Dissent - Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity (2011-02-17 19:45)

A round table session from [1]Discourses of Dissent exploring how social theory can help us understand the politics of austerity. How do theoretical justifications of austerity work to constrain public debate? How does the current government’s incongruous blend of neoliberal realism and superficial progressivism relate to what went before it? What resources can we find in social theory to critique the coalition’s agenda and it’s relationship to the wider crisis of late capitalism?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/public_universities_and_public_futures.mp3"]Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity

Ruth Levitas, University of Bristol – The necessity of utopian thinking

Sasha Roseneil, Birkbeck, University of London – Criticality, not paranoia: Registers of critical social theory

Karen Rowlingson, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham – Why doesn't the British public seem to care about inequality or the cuts in public spending?

1. [www.discoursesofdissent.com](http://www.discoursesofdissent.com)


[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Public University and dis of dissent, Socio Imagination. Socio Imagination said: Discourses of Dissent - Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity http://tinyurl.com/4mmyfrt [...] 

‘Salad Slaves’: migrant labour in European agriculture (2011-02-18 08:00)

It is a public secret that the European agricultural industry relies heavily on cheap and precarious migrant labour: mostly Moroccans, West Africans, and, since about a decade ago, also Eastern-Europeans. Here is one of the few pieces of investigative journalism that shed light on the actual work conditions of the workers who form this invisible ‘labour force’. [1][click to watch video](by Felicity Lawrence, Matt Haan, Christian Bennett, Cecyl Bullard and Jacqui Timberlake from[2] the Guardian)

2. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/](http://www.guardian.co.uk/)

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Time to Revisit the Port Huron Statement? (2011-02-18 14:14)

At the final discussion session of this week’s ‘Discourses of Dissent’ workshop in Birmingham, I raised the need for academics and students concerned about the future of the university to consolidate a positive position – something beyond simply protesting budget cuts and tuition fees. A model for such an activity is the famous Port Huron Statement of 1962, which established Students for a Democratic Society in the US. Inspired by C. Wright Mills, for the following decade the Statement provided the intellectual springboard for co-ordinating university resistance to the military-industrial complex that had colonized American campuses during the Cold War. Even the original rhetoric is worth emulating today. [1]Here is the statement. [2]

You may also find the Google-generated reception history of the Statement of interest.

Perhaps we need a second ‘constitutional convention’ meeting at Birmingham and Midland Institute to draft an updated version of this statement? Given the eloquence and forthrightness of the original Statement, it might be worth paying attention to how it was composed: My general sense is that, like the US Declaration of Independence, the main draft was by one hand (Tom Hayden playing Tom Jefferson) with various editorial inputs.


Lincoln to re-connect the university with its roots (2011-02-18 14:35)

Mike Neary, Professor of Teaching and Learning at Lincoln University, has just announced the formation of the [1]Social Science Centre, which promises to be a self-organizing cooperatively owned corporation (with teachers and students as peers) devoted to higher education – very much in the spirit of the original medieval universities. It is refreshing to see this ‘back to basics’ approach at a time when universities have lost their sense of identity by playing in too many fields at once.

It is worth pointing out that the general economic model of cooperative ownership for universities has received some sympathetic media coverage in recent weeks, including [2]here and [3]here.

1. http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/

Tweets that mention Lincoln to re-connect the university with its roots | The Sociological Imagination – Topsy.com (2011-02-18 15:13:09)

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by Gordon Hunt, Jennifer Jones. Jennifer Jones said: I love this concept. RT @SocImagination: Lincoln to re-connect the university with its roots http://tinyurl.com/6yhytv3 [...]
Discourses of Dissent - Public Universities and Public Futures (2011-02-19 00:15)

A round table session from [1]Discourses of Dissent investigating how academic research, with a particular focus on social theory, might help us articulate and work towards a positive vision of shared futures which escape the discursive constraints which have defined the public life of the UK since the 1980s.

The session will also explore the practical resolution of the tensions facing the university system. What are the most pressing issues faced by universities? Is a satisfactory resolution of these tensions possible without radical reform? Is there a need to move beyond critique?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/public_universities_and_public_futures.mp3"]Public Universities and Public Futures

Steve Fuller, University of Warwick – What are we defending when we defend public universities?

Dan Hind – Media Reform and the Public University

John Holmwood, University of Nottingham – The idea of the public


Neo-Liberalism as Utopia (2011-02-19 12:12)

During the 'Discourses of Dissent' conference, in response to Ruth Levitas' presentation about the continuing need for utopias, I observed that Neo-Liberalism is a very potent example of a utopian vision that through what might be reasonably called a 'conspiracy' has managed over the course of seven decades to become the dominant ideology in global political economy. It was a vision forged in response to the socialist turn taken in many capitalist nations after the Great Depression that appeared to be vindicating Marx's view of history.

It all began with the [1]Walter Lippmann Colloquium in Paris in 1938, which after the Second World War was regularly convened (under the guiding influence of FA Hayek) as the [2]'Mont Pelerin Society', named for the Swiss resort location of the first meeting in 1947. [3]A recent book canvasses the vast range of influences that have come from these meetings, which escalated once various welfare state and socialist regimes started to display cracks in the 1970s.

What makes neo-liberalism 'neo' is its explicitly positive attitude towards strong but focussed state intervention – namely, to ensure that markets enjoy maximum fluidity. This means, beyond traditional 'security state' notions of keeping the peace, the state also provides some minimal social services to the poor (but in much the same spirit) and importantly provides incentives that enable a critical mass of the population (say, 20-25 %) to become middle class but in ways that keep their efforts focused on growing the economy (and reaping its benefits) rather than participating in politics (which is left to rather ideologically neutral professional politicians).

From a sociological standpoint, a striking feature of neo-liberalism is its withdrawal of state from the business
of nation-building, or even society-building. Thus, today's so-called 'Big Society' initiatives are largely a continuation of the Thatcherite devolution of the sense of 'the social' to spontaneously formed networks. However, it would be a mistake to see neo-liberalism as anti-sociological: Rather, it is fairly seen as an elaboration of the sociological vision of Vilfredo Pareto, now rarely taught in social theory courses but arguably deserving a new lease on life to understand the deep structures of neo-liberal thought.

Here it is worth noting that Talcott Parsons included Pareto as providing the bridgehead between neo-classical economics and classical sociology in *The Structure of Social Action*.

3. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Road-Mont-Pelerin-Neoliberal-Collective/dp/0674033183](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Road-Mont-Pelerin-Neoliberal-Collective/dp/0674033183)

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Sociological Imagination (2011-02-21 00:48:26)


Sociology and other disciplines (2011-02-20 08:00)

Click on the image to view full size:

[1]
Interesting indeed, but I think Sociology student might catch on a little faster.

Best and worst jobs...how about being a sociologist? (2011-02-21 08:00)

CareerCast rates 200 jobs according to average income, working environment, stress, physical demands and job outlook, using data from the US Labor Department and the U.S. Census. The list may contain some surprises... such as the job of a sociologist!

[1]detailed ranking
Money. (Photo: Milena Kremakova/Idle Ethnographer TM)

[3]article in the Wall Street Journal

Social theory and method are inextricably bound up with one another, despite the convention of their separation and a recent tendency to differentiate them entirely by emphasizing technical training in particular methods over general education in culture and thinking. But to theorize, whether in Sociology, Philosophy, Politics, Anthropology, or in any cognate field in the Arts, Humanities and Social sciences means not simply to arrange empirical evidence, but also to seek to clarify the Ideals, Standards or Measure by virtue of a way of inquiry that is sustained and methodically pursued, so much so that we may speak of method(s) of theorizing.

Questions of method, or searches for the 'Way', just as the use of the powers of reason, cannot be reduced to a search for means to satisfy given ends, but must incorporate a discussion of the very ends of social and human life, including the question of meaning. Methods of theorizing are thus ways of attending to the world so as to bring into view, contemplate and articulate Standards of beauty, truth and the good life; radiant Ideals that illuminate and make possible an understanding and interpretation of our present practices and institutions, thereby enabling our education and self-transformation in light of such a Measure.

As Weber concludes in 'Politics as a Vocation' “all historical experience confirms the truth – that man would not have attained the possible unless time and again he had reached out for the impossible." Theorizing can thus be conceived of as the methodical reaching out for the impossible Measure. But as theoria and methodus have become differentiated we lose sight of the Ways towards recovering our Ideals just at a time when economic crisis, ecological catastrophe and political turmoil threaten to overwhelm us.

Last year’s ISTC meeting sought to transcend the cultural turn’s differentiation & proliferation of Habermasian, Foucaulian, Eliasian, subaltern, feminist, sub-disciplinary theories, a concern indicating an aspiration towards our recovering re-integrating, holistic methods of theorizing. This year’s conference continues this search for renaissance, inviting contributions seeking a reflective balance and harmony amongst the various currents in social & political thought at the fundamental level of theory and method, focus on their relation to the elusive but very real directive Ideals of human existence.

Papers are invited that speak to the topic from:

- Classical & contemporary social theory: working with our inheritance
- Methodology of Critical Theory
- Literary methods and Social Theory
- The interpretive tradition, depth hermeneutics & analysis
- The performative aspects of public life
- Media power and image magic
- Psychoanalytic method and social theory
- Phenomenology & hermeneutics
- Epistemologies and philosophies of knowledge today
- Asian philosophies and methods
- Socrates, Plato, and working with the Greeks today
- Political anthropology and reflexive historical sociology

Convenor: Arpad Szakolczai, Professor of Sociology, University College, Cork, Ireland.

*Please submit abstracts by March 1, 2011 to s.renwick@ucc.ie*

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Barbara M Allen (2017-09-22 20:25:04)
Hi am looking for a muti-media works by David Allen which was delivered in Tampa Florida, 2003. The title is "Imagination is seeking power" David passed away on June 8th, I am his wife and trying to collect anything and everything he appeared in. Can you help? I am his wife of 39 years. Thank you, Barbara Allen

Facebook and Egypt's revolution (2011-02-22 08:00)

*Egyptian activist Wael Ghonim* thanks Facebook:

*I want to meet Mark Zuckerberg one day and thank him [...] I'm talking on behalf of Egypt. [...] This revolution started online. This revolution started on Facebook. This revolution started [...] in June 2010 when hundreds of thousands of Egyptians started collaborating content. We would post a video on Facebook that would be shared by 60,000 people on their walls within a few hours. I've always said that if you want to liberate a society just give them the Internet. [...]*

[1]

Screenshot: Sociological Imagination archive 2011
Nicky Wire of the Manic Street Preachers writes about why knowledge is power, and why we should fight to keep public libraries open: [2]read his article

Empty library shelves (Photo: Milena Kremakova/Idle Ethnographer TM)
**Why am I doing a PhD? By Sarah Smart (2011-02-24 08:00)**

As I sit in my quiet but chaotic study, staring out of the window and wondering whether I can justify stopping for another cup of tea, I find myself wondering why I have spent the last three years doing social research for my PhD. It is a question that I often see (or imagine I see) on people’s faces when they ask what I do, especially since a friend blustered in response to my explanation: “And are my hard-earned taxes funding you?”

My PhD is looking at secondary school pupils’ constructions of social justice. I have learnt not to tell the general inquirer this, as it is open to a number of misinterpretations, including the assumption that I am studying youth offending and that I am a radical communist. In fact, what I want to understand is how young people apply principles of fairness and justice to the social order that they see around them. I want to understand the different ways in which young people deploy concepts of fairness and justice to talk about their school and their society. I am attempting to do this by conducting a series of group interviews with small groups of 11 and 14 year olds in a range of different schools. I began with 110 participants, although there has been some attrition, so only about 80 have taken part in all three interviews. So far the groups have discussed what they think makes a fair or unfair school, examples of fairness and unfairness they see on the television and around them, whether they think a fair world is possible or desirable and what they think needs to happen to make the world fairer.

I often explain to my interviewees that my interest in my topic stems from my time working in education policy research, where I observed that many policy makers seemed to have no idea why I was so concerned about educational inequalities. While this is true, I think the interest in my topic can be traced much further back in my past. I might go back to the short period I spent living overseas as a child, my involvement in the Jubilee 2000 “Drop the Debt” campaign as a teenager, time living in and working in a deprived area of South Wales, or my experiences living in a diverse area of South London. As I learnt more and more sociology I began to make sense of these experiences using theories of habitus, structure, culture, agency and ethics. I became convinced that I live in a deeply unequal nation in a massively unequal world. I also began to understand that my actions contribute to maintaining and recreating that world order. I wrote in my initial research proposal that studying constructions of social justice is important because “constructions of social justice may be used to justify the reproduction of inequality, but they may also be used to challenge and transform unjust social structures”. So I began my research with the aspiration that it would prompt people to consider and debate constructions of social justice and thus take a step towards a fairer society and a fairer world.

Of course, I didn’t know when I set out to do the research that 2010 would be such an interesting time to be studying young people’s ideas about social justice. “Fairness” is trumpeted as the key principle behind decisions about cuts, and is also becoming a rallying call for protesting students. Within my secondary school participants, one group that two years ago told me they were unlikely to do anything to stop unfairness have joined the “Save our School” campaign, which they justify using the language of fairness and justice. Another group spoke passionately about the impact student fees might have on them, denouncing the proposals as unfair. I am still convinced when I go back to the foundation of the research that it is worthwhile and important.

And sometimes when I am in school with young people, I remember this and am encouraged. I look forward to days when a conversation with a teacher prompts them to say “I’ve never thought about it like that before,” or when a student says “I enjoyed talking about that, we never discuss that kind of thing in school.” But more often I find it is a struggle to convince myself that the research is worth doing. On days when casual acquaintances suggest that political affiliation is all in the genes, or when tell me there’s no point in researching fairness because Britain is a
land of opportunity, I despair. On these days I worry that understanding young people's ideas about social justice will make no difference to the world at all, let alone contribute to making it fairer. I guess ultimately it will be desperation that drives me to finish, rather than naive idealism. As for the impact of the research – we will all have to wait and see.

*Sarah is a PhD researcher in Sociology at the University of Reading.*
Bentō lunch in Kyōto (Photo: Milena Kremakova/Idle Ethnographer (TM))

(* Bentō: Japanese boxed lunch. Delicious.)


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**An Assessment of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution at Twelve Years (2011-02-25 08:00)**

Is Venezuela a failed leftist experiment? Gregory Wilpert offers a comprehensive analysis of the Venezuelan revolution of 1999 and defends the opposite view. [1]Click to read the article (source: Venezuelanalysis.com, published on 2 February 2011)

[2]

Is Venezuela a failed leftist experiment? Gregory Wilpert defends the opposite view

Discourses of Dissent – Public Universities and Public Futures (2011-02-26 08:00)

A round table session from [1]Discourses of Dissent investigating how academic research, with a particular focus on social theory, might help us articulate and work towards a positive vision of shared futures which escape the discursive constraints which have defined the public life of the UK since the 1980s.

The session will also explore the practical resolution of the tensions facing the university system. What are the most pressing issues faced by universities? Is a satisfactory resolution of these tensions possible without radical reform? Is there a need to move beyond critique?

[2]Public Universities and Public Futures

Steve Fuller, University of Warwick – What are we defending when we defend public universities?

Dan Hind – Media Reform and the Public University

John Holmwood, University of Nottingham – The idea of the public


Daniel Kahneman: The riddle of experience vs. memory (2011-02-27 08:00)

Happiness is not the same as well-being: one is the pleasure of the living self, the other the satisfaction of the remembering self. Our view of the future is in fact an anticipation of memories. Kahneman talks of the ‘tyranny of the remembering self’: [EMBED]

California: happy or miserable? (2011-02-28 08:00)

[1] 498
Yet another take on the happiness/misery debate. Are weather and housing prices the most important reasons to be happy? Really? Still, [2]this account of the allegedly decreasing happiness of California residents is rather amusing to read.


2.3 March

What mathematics for liberal arts students? (2011-03-02 08:00)

Two very interesting discussions on what, how, and whether to teach mathematics to liberal arts / humanities students on mathoverflow.net
- [1]What should we teach to liberal arts students who will take only one math course?
- [2]What topics should be included in a calculus-for-the-liberal arts course?

[3][4]
If that does not convince you that math is useful and/or fun, have a listen to the Mathematical Pi Song:

Iframe: [5]http://www.youtube.com/embed/_BwKZEp2K_0

1. [http://mathoverflow.net/questions/28695/what-should-we-teach-to-liberal-arts-students-who-will-take-only-one-math-course](http://mathoverflow.net/questions/28695/what-should-we-teach-to-liberal-arts-students-who-will-take-only-one-math-course)
2. [http://mathoverflow.net/questions/45595/what-topics-should-be-included-in-a-calculus-for-the-liberal-arts-course](http://mathoverflow.net/questions/45595/what-topics-should-be-included-in-a-calculus-for-the-liberal-arts-course)
5. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/_BwKZEp2K_0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/_BwKZEp2K_0)

California's success in higher education: article in THE (2011-03-03 08:00)

Why are there so many excellent universities in California? A recent article in the THE dissects the success of this state's system of higher education. The answer seems to include having a good mix of both private and public institutions; appealing to a local student population but also to top international scholars; prioritising of innovation; and, in general, having a vibrant higher education 'ecosystem'. Read the full article [1]here

[2]
'Once upon a time there was a dog called Hosni’ by Prakash Kona (2011-03-04 08:00)

A Palestinian Arab student and friend of mine says: You can have a pack of dogs led by a lion but you cannot have a dog leading a pride of lions. That is the truth of the Arab world he added: we’re nations of lions being led by dogs. The end of the dog-regimes in the Middle East is nowhere in sight. But the Tunisians and the Egyptians just made a beginning, a beginning that’ll free West Asia of families of curs who live as if the world is without an end. Their world is without an end – that is for certain, because they live by the sufferings of the masses. They’re backed by arms that the criminal ruling classes and governments of western nations generously supply to third world despots from the “loans” given by the World Bank and the IMF to make sure that their raw material and their markets remain in tact. This is how the world turns on its own axis and revolves around the bitter sun that shines alike on the exploiters and the exploited.

As far as company is concerned Hosni has nothing to worry. The curs and mongrels of the world have always been united. It is their victims who succumb to imaginary divisions and refuse to unite in the face of the onslaught of ideology and repression. At a more philosophical level we’re dealing with two kinds of dogs: the existential dogs and the essential dogs. I’m not particularly fond of the existential dogs unless they happen to be street dogs for whom I’ve a grudging respect – they’re free. The rest of them are servants of the rich and they need a master – that’s the grievance I bear against existential dogs. But the essential dogs are the Hosni types. The third world is full of them. In the countries of Asia and Africa dogginess is not just a virtue but a conception of reality and a way of life.
I thought I would begin this piece with a more dramatic line such as: “A specter is haunting the Arab world - the specter of freedom and democracy.” There are no scepters in the third world. Only dogs and more dogs. The government of the dogs and by the dogs but for everyone.

Egypt has done itself good by throwing out a dog called Hosni. What about the military that has backed the dog all along. In what way are they less dogs than Hosni? What about the dogs in the American government trying to call the shots? Dogs generally work on a relative plane but the dogs that inhabit American politics – they function as absolutes. They are absolute dogs.

Pimps and moneylenders are the worst kinds of people on earth my brother tells me. The pimps are the ruling classes of the third world who’ll sell their mothers into prostitution if it means power to them. The moneylenders are the business classes and owners of corporations – the brothel-builders who’ll put their mothers for sale if it means profit to them. I refuse to call them dogs any longer. To shame any creature in the animal world by comparing them with the pimps and the money-lenders is an unfair proposition.

The less than bitter truth is that the poor are condemned to live the lives of dogs. The bitter truth is that the order of dogs is the only order that we see across the third world. The mafias run the show and the masses are brainwashed by the dogs of the media until their brains start bleeding and yet they are so drugged with lies and false hopes that they feel nothing.

With such indignation Blake describes the poverty of the poor in "Holy Thursday."

Is this a holy thing to see,  
In a rich and fruitful land,  
Babes reduced to misery,  
Fed with cold and usurous hand?  
Is that trembling cry a song?  
Can it be a song of joy?  
And so many children poor?  
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.  
And their fields are bleak & bare.  
And their ways are fill'd with thorns.  
It is eternal winter there.

If fascism lost the battle in Europe it’s because the working classes took a stand against it. Countless people died but fascism and the fascists had to make an exit. The defeat of the exploiting classes is imminent. For the present however time is on the side of the dogs.

A scepter is haunting the third world; the scepter of Hosni and the dogs...
Ruth Levitas - The Necessity of Utopian Thinking (2011-03-05 08:00)


IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/isZz79UmTBk
Dan Hind - Media Reform and the Public University (2011-03-06 08:00)
Remembering: Battle of Cable Street (1936) (2011-03-07 08:00)

Remembering old protests...

The Battle of cable street took place on 4 Oct 1936 on Cable St in London's East End between the British Union of Fascists, led by Sir Oswald Mosley, and some 300,000 anti-fascists who turned up to protest against the fascist march (including local Jewish, socialist, anarchist, Irish and communist groups), and the Metropolitan Police, overseeing the march. Around 100 people were injured including police and civilians.

(watch [1]newsreel)
China's fertility rate 'falls off a cliff' (2011-03-08 08:00)

Watch this fascinating [1]live-chart by Google in which China's fertility rate ‘falls off a cliff’ in the words of a commentator at the Business Insider:
(found at http://www.businessinsider.com/population-growth-video-2011-1)

Jeremy Paxman and Noam Chomsky interview (2011-03-10 08:00)

Watch the interview from 8 March 2011 [1]here

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2011-03-10 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?
What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3]here

1. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/)
2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/)

Casting My Net wide*: Ethnography and today’s 'Knowing Capitalism' (2011-03-11 08:00)

Traditional anthropology and ethnography are all about daring researchers originating from civilised Western European countries venturing into unknown territories to spend half their lives living with fascinating, backward tribes. They defy the comfy practice of armchair theorising and instead theorise on scruffy notepads, sat on prickly palm-leaf mattresses, while risking being eaten alive by tsetse flies and Felidaes. If not consumed by carnivores, native diseases, or evil spirits, they tend to judge the native tribes by their own post-Enlightenment standards (despite their best intentions), and occasionally go native (because of their best intentions). They then come back to their native universities to hold professor chairs in departments of Social science and Humanities, and proceed to publish acclaimed œuvres on the mores of one tribe for the rest of their lives.

The image of the ethnographer/anthropologist which I so mercilessly caricatured above has now been outdated and superseded by more reflective and less self-glorifying views on the researcher’s role. But the reputation gained during anthropology’s infant years still haunts any social research which does not rely on skilful number-crunching, instead insisting on asking uncomfortable and vague questions, such as ‘why’ and ‘how’.

As the Idle Ethnographer, my quest is to subvert this lingering notion. I cast my nets wide. Among many other authors, I take inspiration from the socially awkward, but perceptive character in Kate Fox’s book [1]Watching the English. Wherever I find myself (even, in fact, especially at home), I watch, mingle, taste, take photos, ask questions, say uncouth things to test people’s reactions, never take anything for a final answer, and generally try to tease out a richer, if disconcerting, verstehen of what Goffman calls ‘the tissue and fabric of [...] life’ ([2]Asylums, 508
1961). I sincerely welcome questions and criticisms, because they are essential for that same understanding (or possibly also because I have been embarrassed so much that I have grown insensitive to embarrassment).

There is one important ‘HOWEVER’. In the contemporary British sociological tradition, qualitative sociology seems to enjoy a relatively higher status compared to other countries - as Savage and Burrows (in [3]The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology, 2007) point out, this happened as a ‘reaction to Parsonian functionalism from the 1950s’. However, they also note that there is a bias towards the comparatively ‘lightweight’ (or even flawed) method of in-depth interviews, rather than fully-fledged ethnography: 'A comparatively unusual feature of British sociology is its embrace of the 'in depth interview' as its preferred research method. Halsey (2004) shows that 80 percent of qualitative articles published in the British sociology journals in 2000 used interviews, a proportion which has steadily increased from about 50 per cent in the early 1960s. No other national tradition of sociology gives the in-depth interview such pre-eminence.' (ibid.)

At least one reason for the current proliferation of qualitative methods in UK sociology is somewhat dubious: namely, the dislike of mathematics-based methods harboured by some researchers and students in the social sciences. At least in part, the negative attitude towards ethnography is caused exactly by the widely-held assumption that those of us who rely on qualitative methods do so, due to being handicapped in our numerical skills (see, e.g., [4]'A Crisis of Number: Some Evidence from British Sociology’; or Payne,Williams & Chamberlain (2003) [5]Methodological pluralism). Even though I am only a PhD student, each time I present my research, I receive at least one question regarding my choice of methodology, and have to refute all over again explicit or implicit allegations of incapacity: that, presumably, I must favour ethnography because I dislike statistics, and not because it presents a richer conglomerate of methods which are immensely more appropriate, both in view of my specific research question, and in view of the resources available to me as a sole researcher. I have grown so accustomed to this accusation, that I automatically find myself pointing out the opposite: that I enjoy, and can do, mathematics and basic statistics, but that for the purpose of my PhD project, I happen to be interested in other types of questions about the behaviour and social arrangements of human beings. Even a five-year old knows that you need to choose the right method according to what it is that you want to achieve. For my research questions, statistical analysis is far less helpful than other methods – even though my results are not verifiable. This is not always a convincing cop out, but comparing my research to the sociological equivalent to chaos theory dealing with a multivariable system sometimes yields understanding laughter and occasionally helps*.

Joke aside, a rigorous qualitative+quantitative sociology is necessary more than ever. With the ever-growing scientific specialisation that has been going on in the social sciences, and especially in view of the increasingly marginal social role of professional sociology (discussed at length in the excellent article by Savage and Burrows cited above, drawing on what Thrift (2005), calls a 'knowing capitalism', in a book called 'Knowing Capitalism'). A better mutual understanding - and trust - of each other’s work by researchers on both sides of the lingering methodological divide is indispensible. Perhaps we need a constant reminder to awake us from the slumber of blind methodological allegiances that lead us to forget that the best research in any field - be it history, economics, sociology, journalism, natural sciences, or mathematics - makes use of all available methods and bits of information, and strives to create the most comprehensive, rich, and reflective story possible, in order to help us know more. And that good researchers are never idly resting on their methodological laurels, or assuming that yesterday's superiority guarantees them tomorrow's power.

*(Chaos theory deals the behaviour of dynamical systems which are so sensitive to initial conditions that even the smallest variation in them gives widely divergent results (see e.g. Gleick, J.(1987) Chaos: Making a New Science (see [6]excerpts) or this [7]blog for a brief introduction). Only that in ethnography there are a huge number of unknown variables, whereas mathematics has so far only found ways of dealing with small numbers of dimensions - which makes social research a hugely more complicated exercise.
* this is also a citation from Savage and Burrows, (2007)

http://soc.sagepub.com/content/41/5/885.abstract

3. http://soc.sagepub.com/content/41/5/885.abstract

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook (2011-03-11 16:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] [Facebook]

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates


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510
Prepare to give up your mobile phone after watching this… (2011-03-12 08:00)

[EMBED]
[1]Pop Corn téléphone portable micro-ondes

2. [http://www.dailymotion.com/sassiere](http://www.dailymotion.com/sassiere)

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Allison (2011-03-22 05:12:10)
The popcorn video is fake. I don't see anything that explains this on your site.

Sociological Imagination (2011-03-22 09:48:06)
Now there is! To be honest, we didn't know...

Paracetamol for social pain? (2011-03-13 08:00)

This recent (June 2010) article hypothesises that both physical and social pain 'may rely on some of the same behavioral and neural mechanisms that register pain-related affect.':
In the language of practice, I suppose, that means: keep a paracetamol handy in your wallet, in case a date goes wrong...

[2]

![Image of man writing on a blackboard](image-url)
Do you check your email before brushing your teeth in the morning? I must confess that I do, a habit I acquired as an undergraduate whose computer was nearer to her bed than the shared facilities down the hall. On hindsight, it’s shocking how this new medium went in less than a year from being an occasional diversion to a daily necessity. Many people have had similar revolutionary changes in their everyday practices with television, digital library catalogs, the Internet, and mobile phones, to name a few. Yet these media have become so utterly mundane that we rarely think to tell these remarkable stories.

Perhaps that is why media are too often not taken seriously. If you read, as I do, the online reader comments on [1]The Guardian's higher education coverage, you would see comment after comment calling the sociological study of the media is a ‘Mickey Mouse’ subject, unworthy of meaningful intellectual inquiry. Such views continue, even after having encountered them countless times, as both surprising and dismaying. As a researcher who hails from Mickey Mouse Country, a.k.a. the United States of America (where the name of its favorite cartoon mouse is never taken in vain this way), I would like to believe that I know better than the naysayers.
I know, for example, that new communication technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones have changed the world in a breathtakingly short period of time, but I still love filling my home with books. I know that the news media helped the Bush administration deceive us into war in 'The Greatest Show Ever Sold', to [2]quote Frank Rich. And I don't know exactly how much the Hollywood film industry is worth, but I do know that it is a really big number. Given the ubiquity of media in all arenas of modern societies, it is awfully hard to argue that media don't matter. Media have become a part of everything, everywhere.

Welcome, then, to the first installment of [3]'Mediated Matters’, a new weekly column series here at [4]Socio-logical Imagination which takes as its starting point the premise that media are important. I understand a medium to be any technology, from cave paintings to iPads, through which human beings store and express meaning. As the title implies, its thematic focus will be the sociology of the media in the broadest sense; this column is not solely—or even primarily—about journalism. Future columns written by [5]Yours Truly will be posted every Monday and may be expected to fall into two broad categories: 1) columns which contextualize sociological theories and empirical research related to the production, circulation, and consumption of mediated forms, and 2) columns which take particular media objects such as books and movies and use them elucidate particular sociological contributions to knowledge from any subfield.

*Media do in fact matter.* They enable certain forms of social action, while constraining others, and they both transform and are transformed by social forces. They promise new a siren song of opportunities, as well as new pitfalls, where producers can be powerful but so can consumers. From local news to literature reviews, comic books to Facebook, the so-called boob tube to YouTube, and gamer theory to cultural intermediaries, I invite you to join me in my ongoing explorations of this splendid, ever-shifting sociological terrain of matters mediated—together we are...
guaranteed to discover a world of inspiration and provocation in equal measure!


1. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/higher-education](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/higher-education)

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Emotional management during research: A personal reflection (2011-03-15 08:00)

Dickson-Smith et al (2009: 61) suggest that ‘undertaking qualitative research is an embodied experience and that researchers may be emotionally affected by the work that they do’. They also state that this ‘emotional work’ (Hochschild 1983) is rarely theoretically or empirically investigated (Dickson-Smith et al 2009). Throughout this article I take a distinctly un-academic approach (and voice) to provide a personal account of my experiences of doing emotional work while conducting my PhD fieldwork. To add context, my PhD research focuses on disabled peoples' experiences of sexuality and relationships. The research begins from the idea that disabled peoples' sexualities are constructed in ways which may be disempowering, that their bodies and lives are largely degendered and desexualised, and that their sexual politics and cultures are inhibited within an ablest/disablist society. Thus, through collecting disabled peoples' sexual stories (in a variety of ways), the research seeks to explore experiences and understandings of sexuality, both in terms of these constructions, and the ways in which disabled people manage and negotiate them.
Throughout the article I provide some reflections. Firstly, on the considerable emotional challenges encountered during the research process and the ways in which these were managed through both successful and unsuccessful coping strategies. Secondly, I detail the ways in which my (disabled) identity and biography impacted upon this emotional management and my relationships with participants. In order to embody such discussions I use excerpts from my own research diary and quotes from participants. The article concludes by asking the ways in which we, as a community of (postgraduate) researchers, can do more to share our research experiences with each other for the benefit of ourselves and our work.

**Emotional management**

The emotional challenges experienced throughout my field work year and beyond were not something which I had seriously anticipated. Naively, I never contemplated that listening to the stories of others, through which tales of isolation, loneliness, self hatred, and great sadness were not uncommon, would be as difficult and impactful as it turned out to be. I certainly never thought that it would affect my well-being or make me question aspects of my own life and identity as a disabled person. Many of the stories I was told were ones of pride, self-confidence, resistance, and personal strength. However, many were not and (for me) embodied the oppression, discrimination, and prejudice many disabled people face as part of their daily lives. For example, I was particularly touched by one interviewee called Sally*:

“I feel my disability has a huge impact on my self confidence and self esteem. I lack the confidence to make new friends or to approach people. I don’t like going out places I know there will be a lot of people as I feel like everyone is staring at and judging me. I avoid eye contact and only talk to new people if they talk to me first. As a
result of my disability, [I am] extremely self conscious - I cover up with baggy hoody jumpers & scarves - and rarely leave the house...

But, in my head I have the ideal me - how I’d imagine myself to look and behave if I were ‘normal’ - not disabled. I’d have loads of friends - both male & female – I’d laugh lots and be daring, stay out late & be independent. I’d also have boyfriends, go out clubbing, to pubs, to festivals, & have real relationships.... My life would be radically different... I wouldn’t want to get involved with someone like me as I wouldn’t want to miss out on life or be held back, so I can’t expect anyone else to...”

- Sally, 21

To provide more of a background, my interview with Sally was carried out via email over several months. On reflection, this extended time period gave me the chance to emotionally invest in her story in ways that I didn't fully appreciate at the time. Sally's was a story which, with each email update, moved me to tears and kept me awake at night. I found it difficult to switch off from thinking about her. This was compounded by our interview coming to an abrupt and unnatural end – one day Sally didn’t reply and I never heard from her again. My coping strategy with this was predominantly through reflecting on why Sally’s story touched me so much. I’d heard similar themes regarding oppression and isolation from most other people in my sample, but something stood out about Sally.

I can now see that Sally's story, and the stories of the other young disabled people I interviewed, particularly resonated with me because many of the core themes were things I have felt/experienced prior to ‘coming out’ as a disabled person, thus linking with my own biography. Disabled academic Tom Shakespeare helpfully uses the analogy of ‘coming out of the closet’ within lesbian/gay cultures to refer to people with impairments identifying with the disabled label and ‘taking it on’ as a social identity (Shakespeare et el 1996). My ‘condition’ – muscular dystrophy – is congenital (from birth), and I experience it daily in a very real way in terms of a significant mobility impairment. However, after spending my childhood in a wheelchair, special buggies, or on my dad’s back, as a teenager I strived to be ‘normal’. This, arguably, is the norm for most teenagers, but for me as a disabled person it meant hiding from whom and what I am. For example, I wouldn't attend social events where I knew I couldn't hide my difficulties (I ashamedly still do this now, but with much less frequency and for different reasons), rejected walking aids (a move which has resulted in me experiencing more pain as an adult), stopped walking if I saw a boy I liked (if I didn't move, he'd never be able to tell), not park in disabled bays when I desperately needed to, and generally pretend I wasn’t one of ‘them’. This continued until my early twenties when I began working with disabled people as part of my career, made disabled friends, and began to learn about the extensive political and cultural aspects of disability - for example, the [1]disability rights movement and [2]disability and Deaf arts.

Looking back, there was a real honesty in the way Sally spoke which unnerved me. It not only made me feel uncomfortable about my own past, but also meant I wanted (as arrogant as I now realise it to be) to help her, talk to her, empower her, politicise her, and share with her our similarities. I felt incredibly restrained and powerless in my role as a researcher at this point – I was there to listen, record, and ask questions, nothing more. Our relationship was boundaried, restricted to its context, and, I felt at the time, did absolutely nothing for her.
However, there were other stories which weren’t linked to my own experiences or biography that I also found distressing to hear. For example, Grace, a Deaf woman who chose to share her experiences with me via writing her story down in a journal, had been physically and sexually abused by her partner for many years:

“Over the years he became very abusive. I was treated like meat, raped, sodomised. He told me I was boring and useless, only good for a fuck. I started to almost believe it. My confidence was at rock bottom. In my heart I knew that what he was saying was wrong but I felt helpless. And there was my deafness. I had left school with no qualifications, no career. A dead end job and an early marriage and children meant I had hardly any skills outside the home. He isolated me from my friends. He could not cope with me being deaf; as my deafness increased, he found it harder. He did not want a deaf wife.”

- Grace, 58

Understandably, I found Grace’s recounting of this time in her life very difficult to read. I can vividly remember dreading receiving her (emailed) journal entries as I knew the content would be gruelling to manage. As soon as an update would hit my inbox I would get an unsettling feeling in my stomach. Sometimes I resisted opening them for a few days, hoping that if I left them they may disappear. Suffice to say they didn’t, and that avoidance wasn’t an appropriate, or professional, coping strategy.

I also found I got close to participants who, if it weren’t for the researcher/researched relationship, could have become great friends. One spinally cord injured woman, Lucille, wrote her story via a journal and talked extensively about how (she felt) her disabled identity shadowed her sense of femininity and gender identity: her choices of clothing and footwear were dominated by her body, she felt “less of a wife” as she could no longer carry
out a domestic role in the way she once had, and she felt invisible as a woman. Lucille found writing her story a cathartic activity which gave her courage and allowed her to explore parts of her life she had shut down after her injury. On our last contact, she told me that telling her story had empowered her in ways she hadn't imagined possible; for example, she wore a skirt for the first time since her accident (10 years earlier) because she "finally felt comfortable as a disabled woman". Similarly, another interviewee called Abram got back in touch after taking part to tell me that talking about his oppression had invigorated him to change the aspects of his life with which he had not been happy: he had felt dominated by his overbearing parents who he said controlled his life and didn't allow him privacy. He reported that expressing his thoughts, ideas, and feelings in the interview gave him the strength to take control of his finances and set new boundaries with his parents. While in hindsight I take no credit for these acts of considerable determination and courage, at the time I experienced these (emotional) connections in a very powerful way. I felt as if my research (and therefore, me) had become integral within these narratives of emancipation, or at the very least was experienced as a catalyst for change.

Harm

At other points I experienced hearing the stories of others as harmful in terms of my own well-being. As a person with muscular dystrophy, my work was embraced by the [3]Muscular Dystrophy Campaign which resulted in publicity (see here, pgs 16-18, The Sex Factor 2009) and a fantastic chance for me to gain access to participants. As a result, a significant number of my sample had the same umbrella condition as me. The term 'muscular dystrophy' (hereby MD) refers to a wide variety of conditions which are characterised by a degeneration of muscle in the body over time. Types of the condition differ in terms of speed of progression, severity, particular muscles, time of onset, and trajectory. Many types are life limiting or shortening, though some are not.

Significantly, despite being diagnosed with MD as a baby, my specific 'type' has always been undiagnosed. The fact that I have experienced very little identifiable progression means doctors have estimated that it’s unlikely to be extensively progressive, or at best, that progression will be slow and possibly limited to certain bodily areas/functions. Though, as with anything, there are no guarantees. This is not, oddly, something that regularly enters my consciousness (though I would be lying if I said it didn’t arise when when I think about my future: long-term career prospects, motherhood etc). However, this changed when I began interviewing others with MD. All but one had a progressive form of MD and this often came out in their narratives in a variety of ways – young men like Mark, Robert, and Abram wanting to experience sex before further progression, women like Rhona and Jane talking about avoiding future motherhood, and husbands leaving wives upon diagnosis and/or progression, like Ann. The excerpt below is taken from my personal research diary on the day that I met Ann:

Research diary entry: 6th June 2009

Hearing Ann’s sad story of her husband rejecting her at the onset of her disability because he ‘didn’t want a disabled wife’ was disturbing. She hid nothing from me and it upset me greatly. Later that evening at home I broke down to my partner, partly through relief that the day was over, but more out of insecurity that he could, in theory anyway, leave me in much the same way. Ann reported a strong relationship, a ‘great man’ who loved her very much, yet I had all of these things and so what would stop my partner running should the ‘shit hit the fan’, as Ann put it? I was, for the first time, doubting my partner. “What makes us so different?” “How can you say you won’t leave?”... Realistically and logically, I don’t think that will ever be my life. I genuinely believe in, and have more faith in my partner than that, but when it’s emotively in front of you all day it’s impossible not to be affected by it. It was at this juncture that I suddenly realised that my research could be harmful. Not just for those whose stories I hoped to hear, but harmful to me, my sense of self, my relationships, and those around me. As I heard Ann’s words I realised that she was voicing my worst fears. This was not going to be an easy thing to listen to everyday in interviews, nor to come home with and pretend that my ‘day was fine’. I have to
find a way to manage these feelings better than I did that day. I may find elements of stories that remind me of my worst fears, or echo my feelings about myself and my body on the darkest days... How will I deal with this? Talking to supervisors? Talking to my partner? Talking to a counsellor? This is something I am going to monitor closely.

This diary excerpt was written following a particularly bad day, and while I am cringing at the thought of others reading it, it does raise the issue of where and with whom to share such upsetting experiences while carrying out field work, particularly as postgraduate/early career researchers. The threat of progression had suddenly become very 'real', and it filled me with a terror that I didn't really know how to handle. Unfortunately, my partner took the brunt of it when he shouldn't have done – another problematic coping strategy. I did discuss these feelings with my (incredibly supportive) supervisors, but the supervisor/supervisee relationship is, ultimately, a professional one and is not conducive to such sharing in terms of both context and time. The most productive way of managing the emotions which arose, I quickly discovered, was writing it down in a research diary. This allowed me to express fear, irrationality, frustration, and sadness in a way which didn't harm anybody else or my work. I wrote in the research diary at the points where it became too much. These kinds of strategies, I believe, should be made more public by researchers and that we, as a community, should recognise the importance of sharing our experiences.

A way forward?

To conclude, writing this article has not been easy – five drafts on and I’m ready to be exposed! As, researchers we collect, gather, manage and analyse data, but rarely reflect on how data impacts upon us. We may also experience a range of emotions, from feeling restrained to powerless, powerful, fearful, sad, joyful, and frustrated, meaning we carry out extensive emotional work (Dickson-Smith et al 2009) - yet we rarely share it. While I can accept that both my research and my situation are unique, and that the themes within this article may not be relevant to everybody who reads it (much of it may even seem quite alien), it does highlight a need to reflect on our fieldwork experiences and share these as a community. My (sometimes, clumsy) coping strategies got me through – just – but there must be better ways, and I propose that we can find these in one another. Sharing our emotions, journeys, management/coping strategies and thus creating informal support networks, I propose, may just be the answer towards lessening the burden of emotional work we all experience throughout the research process.

All names have been changed.

References:


Kirsty Liddiard
hi kirsty, i thought this was an amazing piece and a topic i have been thinking about (with others) as well lately. various people i know, including me, are doing fieldwork or are analysing fieldwork data that not only require an emotional investment, but kick back on us emotionally and, indeed, require personal and academic coping strategies. currently i am not in the UK (i am in Brazil for fieldwork), but it would be great to continue a dialogue on this! thanks & succes dyi btw: on a theoretical/methodological level, what approach have you used?

Kirsty Liddiard (2011-03-22 09:28:23)
Hi Dyi, Thanks for the comments regarding the article! Part of the reason I wrote it is that I’m sure many of us are going through/have experienced similar feelings while researching, but it’s not necessarily something we easily discuss. It’d be great to start a dialogue, feel free to email me on k.liddiard@warwick.ac.uk Kindest regards Kirsty

Milena Kremakova (2012-04-07 07:11:34)
Great article, Kirsty. You have managed to put in words the turmoil that accompanies every fieldwork - regardless of topic. There needs to be more work on this.

Kirsty Liddiard (2012-04-12 19:51:32)
Thanks Milena! I wrote this some time ago, and your comment brought me back to it; it was interesting for me to re-read it post-thesis write up, so thank you! I’m trying to write a similar article at the moment, because, as you said, there needs to be more focus on the ‘behind the scenes’. With the current research culture being dominated only by output and impact, being reflexive upon our research process seems to have become (wrongly) considered as less important.

Robert Moorehead (2012-04-19 04:14:09)
Thank you for sharing this. When we’re studying difficult or even abusive situations, the intimacy that comes from fieldwork can be traumatic for the researcher as well. And then if/when we leave the field, we add guilt to that trauma, as our informants remain in their difficult situation while we go off to publish and teach. I think we’ve under-explored the impact on the researcher, in part because our informants are often worse off than we are. But, if we accept the value of reflexivity, then ... in for a penny, in for a pound. We need to continue to push that envelope, in the way Kirsty does here. So thank you again!

Kirsty Liddiard (2012-05-09 20:19:26)
Hi Robert, thanks so much for your insightful comment regarding the article. You summed up really beautifully some of the things I’ve been thinking about since I finished my PhD and began my postdoc; the issue of guilt regarding the fact I’m now, effectively, building a career off the back of peoples’ stories. This is a tricky thing (now I’m starting to see the fruits of my labour, as it were, in terms of publishing etc) that I’m sure many of us deal with. Thanks again for your comments!!
Madness and Civilization? (2011-03-16 08:00)

Perhaps very many of us are on the verge of a dangerous psychotic breakdown, only we don't know it yet. Perhaps we do need psychiatrists on the streets of our cities to stop us before we schiz out all over our co-workers and fellow commuters, to recruit us into their offices where they will have license to feed us mind-numbing antipsychotic medication. Otherwise, how could we ever be secure in our own sanity?

In essence, this is the proposal under consideration for inclusion in the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), which will become the authoritative text of mental health in May 2013.

The definitions of madness are constantly changing. But for psychiatry to call itself a science, it must rely on an authority that represents an official consensus that allows doctors to share a common language about mental illness, and that allows them to diagnose disorders. This is the DSM—the most recent version of it is the DSM-IV, released in 1994, which will be replaced by the DSM-5. (Among many other bad decisions they are making is the decision to drop the roman numerals just as they were getting to a good one.)

Changes in the DSM will not necessarily change the daily practice of good, independent psychiatrists and psychologists, but they will affect the way the field as a whole operates. This is why it is essential to understand the DSM in a broad public health context, not only in the context of individual cases.

This was the source of my objections as I read an article from the December 2010 issue of Harper's, "Which Way Madness Lies" by Rachel Aviv. (Thanks to Harper’s interesting ideas about the internet, I can’t link to the article here).

While it is wonderful to see such good writing appear in the venerable magazine on the eve of its own identity crisis, the article sparked some productive disagreements that ought to be made public. I’m a layperson, an interested citizen not trained in the psych arts. This is an important because psychiatry is deeply invested in its status as a science and discourages non-credentialed opinions, even though—especially as pharmaceuticals are ascendant in the field—matters of professional consensus in the field constitute, in my mind, a in important public health issue.

The article is primarily concerned with the phenomenon of prodromal schizophrenia (also called premorbid schizophrenia/psychosis, psychosis risk syndrome; the number of names alone for the diagnosis should send up red flags)—the condition considered to precede schizophrenia, when the mind might or might not lose its grip on itself. Candidates for the diagnosis might have mild delusions or might, as Aviv’s extremely self-aware case studies do, consider themselves to be losing their grip on reality (a state that seems to imply a firm pre-existing understanding of reality). Or, they might not.

Any individual ought to have the right to ask for and receive help in dealing with their psychological state; there can be no question that the individuals that Aviv interviews should receive care and treatment, especially because they are self aware enough to identify as prodromal. Their experience is valid, their treatment choices are valid. Despite what one might assume from reading the article, their treatment is not threatened by the lack of an officially recognized diagnosis.
Their individual treatment should not cloud the more important question of whether a prepsychotic diagnosis should be included in the upcoming revision of the DSM. Such a proposal has been made—for a new diagnosis of “psychosis risk syndrome” that would include symptoms of

"feeling perplexed, confused, or strange, thinking that the self, the world and time has changed (often in ways that cannot be described), having ideas of reference that are not perceived as directly threatening to the individual, unusual ideas (about the body, guilt, nihilism), overvalued beliefs (about philosophy, religion, magic)..."

If you didn't identify with at least one of those symptoms at one point in your personal development, then you might not be a very interesting person. As a person with creative leanings, I think it’s utterly crucial to once and a while question or even discard my relationship to reality. Moreover, the diagnosis assumes that there is an authority—presumably the doctor, or even the editorial board of the DSM-5—who has the correct opinions of what “unusual ideas” or “overvalued beliefs” are. There is no room for subjectivity in the psych universe.

Aviv does a good job of questioning the condition, but she ends up concluding that premorbid psychosis should be a widely accepted diagnosis, because “doctors [have] no means of finding and recruiting patients who were, for all intents and purposes, still healthy.” I question whether doctors ought to go out and “recruit” fully healthy patients. That seems, at minimum, a strange thing to do. Then, later, she says,

Although the psychiatric literature describes a premorbid personality common to those who later develop schizophrenia—withdrawn, self-conscious, alienated—few of the patients I spoke with at [either of the clinics where the author interviewed patients] fit that description. The only commonalities were that nearly all of them had moved through childhood and adolescence feeling more thoughtful, intelligent, or probing than their family or peers and that there had been an existential tinge to their preoccupations years before their symptoms emerged.

It is not heartening to read that the psychiatric literature is incorrect. But to read her description, we are all prodromal, If you weren’t a jock in high school, you might be psychotic. If you’ve ever developed an interest in philosophy, you might be psychotic. If you watched Daria as a kid, you might be psychotic. If you’ve read Nietzsche, you might be psychotic. Etcetera.

All of which describes me, so I am frightened at the prospect of having "unusual ideas" be considered a disease, an officially diagnosable pathology, with all the undeniable stigma that carries.

Aviv cites Dr. Allen Francis, who is the leading critic of the DSM-5. He was the chair of the task force that created the DSM-IV, and is a very respectable member of the psychiatry mainstream. His [1]article in The Psychiatric Times is essential reading. Aviv ignores Dr. Frances' main complaint, which procedural:

DSM-V has had an inexplicably closed and secretive process. Communication to and from the field has been highly restricted. Indeed, even the very slight recent increase in openness about DSM-V was forced on to an unwilling leadership only after a series of embarrassing articles appeared in the public press. It is completely ludicrous that the DSM-V work group members had to sign confidentiality agreements that prevent the kind of free discussion that brings to light otherwise hidden problems. DSM-V has also chosen to have relatively few and highly select advisors.

Although Aviv does cite Dr. Francis and a few other dissenting voices, she misses this main point, and overall her article leans powerfully toward the inclusion of premorbid diagnoses in the DSM. Especially practitioners in the fields of psychiatry and psychology should be worried about this methodology of the DSM, which could seriously hurt the credibility of their field. This secretive process gives pharmaceutical companies and managed care providers
more latitude to maneuver as they exert their influence to increase their profits.

This would be less frightening if it were not for the looming threat of pharmaceutical companies, who have demonstrated again and again their eagerness to get citizens their prescriptions. Psychiatry is increasingly an arm of the pharmaceutical industry, as has been documented by [2] ProPublica. Citizens like myself have plenty of anecdotal evidence that shows the pharma industry’s [3] eagerness to prescribe and overprescribe its product, from Ritalin to antidepressants.

Widespread diagnoses of psychosis risk syndrome could lead to a similar epidemic of Atypical Antipsychotic prescriptions. Antipsychotic drugs are particularly [4] serious and frightening substances.

They cause major, spectacular weight gain—which is never positive for patients who may already be dealing with a crisis in their understanding of themselves and their bodies. Moreover, these drugs utterly silence creativity. They turn off the artistic impulse. Many of these people who were “thoughtful, intelligent, probing” and who entertained ontological questions in their youth may identify themselves as artists. Often, the pride of being an artist can be an anchor for the whole personality to hang on to. Moreover, their artistic output is valuable for society.

If we are taking a public health perspective—as we should—then we have to consider the effects of mass antipsychotic medication on our culture. It will stifle our collective creativity. Consider your favorite artists and writers. And then ask yourself if they manifested the above symptoms for premorbid psychosis. Consider, even: would they personally have benefited from treatment that would have allowed them to hold down steady jobs and be citizens? Often, yes. But at the sacrifice of their artistic output, which is often the product of intense personal struggle and sacrifice, but which we—the reading public—benefit from. Perhaps Morrison, Joplin, Pollack, Sartre, Salinger, Pynchon, Plath, Dickenson, Burroughs, Baraka, and so on could have been better adjusted as individuals, could have been numbed to the point of being able to hold down a menial job. But would we have been better off as a culture without their work?

Likewise, consider the (political) power that such broadly inclusive diagnoses would give the psychiatric industry (which is increasingly an arm of the pharmaceutical industry) to decide which ideas are “unusual” and to suppress them—not through the judicial system (which, as Foucault would demonstrate, is always complicit), but through the medical establishment. This could usher in an age when dissent itself is a disease. Huxley was never wrong.

In my next post, I want to consider the “paradigm shift” towards neurobiological diagnosis that the DSM 5 is attempting.

2. [http://www.propublica.org/topic/dollars-for-doctors](http://www.propublica.org/topic/dollars-for-doctors)
Johanna Blakley: Social media and the end of gender (2011-03-17 08:00)

An absolutely fascinating [1]Ted Talk about how the expansion of social media is changing the construction of gender within contemporary society. Comments on this would be very appreciated! It's a provocative argument...

[EMBED]

Ten Lies of Ethnography: article by G.A.Fine (2011-03-18 08:00)

In his article [1]TEN LIES OF ETHNOGRAPHY : Moral Dilemmas of Field Research (published in the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 1993 22: 267), Gary Alan Fine discusses the dilemmas faced by ethnographic researchers. He singles out the "classic virtues" (the kindly ethnographer, the friendly ethnographer, the honest ethnographer), "technical skills" (the precise ethnographer, the observant ethnographer, and the unobtrusive ethnographer), and the different modes of the "ethnographic self" (the candid ethnographer, the chaste ethnographer, the fair ethnographer, and the literary ethnographer).

After reading it, you might at first agree with Urie Bronfenbrenner (1952, 453) that ‘[t]he only safe way to avoid violating principles of professional ethics is to refrain from doing social research altogether’. However, the article concludes on an optimistic note which I shall not reveal: it is well worth reading first hand.

1. http://jce.sagepub.com/content/22/3/267.full.pdf+html

Dr. Uncut - Research students analyse cuts in Higher Education (2011-03-19 08:00)

So far, the debate on the increase in tuition fees and cuts in Higher Education has focused mainly on the consequences for undergraduate students. We can all imagine the impact on undergraduates of being saddled with a debt that even the government admits most will not pay back, even over 30 years. However, the government’s vandal measures will have a knock-on effect far beyond that. We believe that the specific problems which will be faced by research students highlight the broader impact of cuts on the way that universities will (or won’t) work in future. For research students, the government’s attack on public universities will bring about a growth in tuition fees and an increase in job insecurity and labour casualization, and will make it virtually impossible to find a job in academia. This is the result of an ideological – not a pragmatic – stance, which views education as a commodity to be bought and sold, rather than a citizen’s right. We must unite and challenge this reduction of education to a marketable commodity. Let’s reassert the public, communal and social significance of our activity as free-thinking researchers! In the words of John Dewey: "Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself."

[1]
Fees. At the moment, fees for postgraduate students are uncapped. Nevertheless, fees for PhD students are set at the same level almost everywhere, on the basis of the recommendations of the Research Councils. This means that British and EU research students are generally asked to pay some £3,300 a year, while fees for non-EU students can be around £12-15,000 a year. Notably, this amount more-or-less matches the fees set for undergraduate courses. It is very likely that an increase in the latter will result in an increase for postgraduate students as well. Furthermore, graduate fees will doubtless be further increased to soften the blow of the near-total loss of funding for all but a few areas of research. PhD students are a valuable resource to university departments, often contributing actively to the research community by publishing articles, presenting papers, doing research for their universities, and supporting full-time staff. The importance of research students to their host institutions is demonstrated by the fact that the number of successful research students and studentships awarded was one of the assessment criteria in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008. This reflected the fact that research students were a source of external funding, as well as providing income through fees. The economic value of PhD students to their university has led to pressure to take on ever-increasing numbers of doctoral researchers, with the result that the quality of provision suffers. Currently, postgraduate fees cover very little tuition, as the nature of PhDs means that doctoral students – particularly in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences – tend to study alone. Fees therefore cover supervision from an established academic and access to university facilities. While many supervisors work hard to ensure that their students get all the support they need, others have been pressured to take on more students than they are able to accommodate. This looks set to go from bad to worse as universities look for ways to cover the shortfall left by the funding cuts. In the very near future, students will be graduating from their first degree with almost £30,000 of debt from fees alone. The prospect of that debt more than doubling will deter all but a tiny minority from postgraduate study. As a result, academia will once again become an elitist bastion of privilege, inaccessible to all but the select few. This is a retrograde step that stifles aspiration and thwarts social mobility.

Labour casualization. Many PhD students are already employed as cheap labour, working as teaching assistants or sessional lecturers in their departments. Research students can be easily employed as low-cost replacements for full-time lecturers: a phenomenon that is already widespread in the United States. We have to be aware that
in the coming years this situation will worsen as a result of the cuts. Universities will see in research students “throwaway” academics to employ temporarily in undergraduate teaching and then to get rid of once they complete their doctoral studies. It is true that teaching experience might be beneficial for research students in the long term; however, this is true only as long as there are work opportunities around. If teaching done by PhD students becomes a way to avoid recruiting lecturers, it is detrimental to PhD students themselves, as it substantially hinders their chance of getting a job after completing their PhDs. In general terms, lecturers working on a sessional/part-time basis have less protection, fewer rights and less stability than people working on full-time contracts. We need to make these linkages between job opportunities and teaching by research students very clear, so that we do not ourselves become instruments of university managements in their dirty battle to minimize the cost of labour.

Job opportunities. The 40 % cut in university spending cannot but result in job redundancies all across the country. Entire departments and institutions will default and be forced to close down. According to the University and College Union, some 49 of England’s 130 universities are at risk of closing or being forced to merge as a result of the cuts. In addition, we already know that from 2012, UK universities will accept some 10,000 fewer students than in the past. This crisis will hit particularly those working in the Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, areas that will experience a 100 % cut in State support for teaching. As a result, many mid-career academics will be made redundant and forced to reapply for lower level positions. This will result in a “waterfall effect”, squeezing young researchers out of academia. At the moment, it seems that many of us have not yet realized the scope and implications of these measures. To state it very loudly and clearly: for researchers at an early stage of their career, it will be virtually impossible to get a job in academia in the coming years. It doesn't matter how brilliant you think you are, these cuts will affect everyone in HE - undergraduates, postgraduates and staff members. We must stop thinking that we can get through this thanks to individual skill or verve. The real struggle is not an individual competition to stand out among other researchers, but a collective struggle to defend publicly-funded universities and freedom of research. We are a generation of young researchers with no future ahead of us, if the government's plans are implemented. If we really believe that what we are doing is worthwhile – not only in personal or economic, but also and mainly in societal terms – we have to say it now, and we have to say it loud.

In addition, these measures are very likely to discourage overseas students from embarking on research degrees in the United Kingdom. This goes against the recommendations made to the government by the independent report “One step beyond: making the most of postgraduate education”, which stressed that, “As other countries invest heavily in their own postgraduate provision, the UK will need to work hard to maintain its competitive advantage. This will mean doing more to strengthen and promote UK postgraduate education on an international stage and to attract the very best students from around the world.” It would be pleonastic to point out that this ambitious goal cannot be met by reducing funding to higher education and cutting employment prospects for UK-based research students.

Although the focus here is on research students, we explicitly refuse a corporatist approach to the problems facing academia. On the contrary, we consider the aforementioned issues to be part of a wider attack on people's rights and the welfare state in Britain. This government is putting forward an ideological view of society in which private profit is the normative principle. This implies the criminalization of all those groups – such as unemployed or disabled people – whose very existence debunks the myth that a profit-led society is the most beneficial to its members. For academics, this also implies that in the future the freedom of research will be under threat, and entire “non-profitable” research areas will be shut. "Priorities" for research funding will be set by the Research Councils according to apparently neutral, economic – but actually ideological – criteria. Many of us will be easily portrayed as nothing more than idle scroungers, as a burden for society. Thus, we firmly believe that PhD students should take part in the general mobilization against government cuts, rather than isolating themselves. More specifically, we invite everyone to take part in the next student protest, which is supported by Unite and GMB and will take place on 29 January, and in the national March for the Alternative called by the Trades Union Congress on 26 March.

If they say cut back, research students say: fight back!
(this text has been written collectively by a group of research students involved in the campaign [2]Never Send to Know for Whom the Bell Tolls. Phds Unite Against the Cuts! It has to be treated under a [3]Creative Common license BY-NC-SA 3.0)

3. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/

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Arthur P. Arthur (2012-04-12 19:37:49)
Have you met Rod Carr, a university head leading the charge in the marketization of higher education, and in the implementation of tactics designed to stifle all resistance amongst faculty? Watch the vid to see Carr instruct faculty members to rat one another one to management in order to save their jobs. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV2ycZDHo4I

Milton Friedman - Why Drugs Should Be Legalized (2011-03-20 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/nLSccOLZxkY
Why Didn’t Japan Expect the Worst? (2011-03-21 00:00)

Japan is used to earthquakes. Japanese children grow up practicing earthquake drills in school; building codes are among the strictest in the world. It goes without saying that in another time or place, the 9.0-magnitude earthquake which struck on the afternoon of the 11th of March could have been much, much worse. Yet media reports of the [1]tsunami which breached seawalls, washing entire neighborhoods away, and the [2]escalating nuclear crisis at the Fukushima power plant make it abundantly clear that no matter how well-prepared Japanese society was for this sort of natural disaster, it was not prepared enough.

It may be true that we live in a risk society, a world where modernity goes hand-in-hand with the proliferation of new and greater hazards. However, Beck’s theory cannot fully account for what is now happening in Japan. Despite being the only nation on the planet that has experienced the human catastrophe of the atom bomb, an [3]article in the Wednesday New York Times notes, ‘[G]overnment officials and executives at the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which runs the nuclear power plants in Fukushima, have offered conflicting reports and often declined to answer hypothetical questions or discuss worst-case scenarios’. One suspects that the reason they obfuscate is because they don’t have any good answers. So why, in a place that ought to understand best the double-edged blade of atomic energy, didn’t they do a better job at expecting the worst?

In [4]Never Saw It Coming: Cultural Challenges to Envisioning the Worst (Chicago, 2006), Rutgers sociologist [5]Karen A. Cerulo theorizes that human cognition and cultural practice are mutually-reinforcing and can prevent societies from fully evaluating worst possible outcomes. She calls this phenomenon ‘positive asymmetry’ and concludes that the United States with its brand of optimism has a surfeit of it. Indeed, her argument seems peculiarly wedded to a point in recent American history, the first decade of the twenty-first century, when traumatic events such as 9/11 and the NASA Columbia shuttle crash seemed to threaten some of the most potent symbols of what the United States believes about itself as a nation. Does her theory apply equally to the Japanese?

The Japanese, by contrast, are [6]reported to be one of the most uniquely pessimistic of modern societies. The Cabinet Office in Japan conducts annual polls asking people about how they view their future prospects. In 1970,
when times were good, 37.4 percent of respondents believed that their life in the future would be better. Only 5.9 percent believed that it would be worse. Pessimism overtook optimism in 1994, and by 2009, the results had flipped; 32.3 percent expected the future to be worse than the present, while only 6.6 percent believed that it will become better. These statistics are well-known among the general population, so it would be hard to think on the face of things that positive asymmetry is Japan's problem.

I do not presume to fully understand the source of Japan's troubles. However, I would argue that we must not reduce this crisis to a freak act of nature on the one hand or the fault of particular individuals and/or agencies on the other. Like the tree falling in the forest that nobody hears, the earthquake that nobody feels matters little in our everyday lives. Thus is a 'natural disaster' like this one actually a socially- and culturally-mediated event, caused by a confluence of geological processes and societal realities. I hope that in the years to follow—after the region has rebuilt and recovered—that we look carefully at the interaction between cognition and culture as we formulate a nuanced sociological account of what actually happened…and how to prevent this tragedy from ever happening again.


Sen: Power and Capability (annual DEMOS lecture 2010) (2011-03-22 08:00)


Watch the lecture here: http://www.demos.co.uk/events/annual-lecture-2010-hd

1.  

English students forced to look further afield to escape higher tuition fees (2011-03-22 09:49)

The well-documented and lamented Higher Education tuition fees rise has forced many English students to consider undertaking their studies at Irish and Scottish institutions as this [1]article suggests. Tuition fees in Ireland prove to
be less costly than those in England following the forthcoming tuition fees hike.

Trinity College Dublin, Ireland looks likely to see an increase in applications from English students wishing to avoid next year’s higher tuition fees.

In Ireland, UK students can secure a top-class degree which would cost zero for tuition. Under EU rules, all students from EU countries who attend EU universities are treated the same as local applicants, who in Ireland, pay nothing. So, English students who wish to attend Trinity College Dublin, potentially, foot the bill only for living costs and an annual administration charge of €2,000 (£1,723) for student services and exams.

This prospect compares favourably with the prospect of facing up to £9,000 per year on tuition fees and potentially £27,000 worth of debt for a three-year degree programme.

Meanwhile, Scottish universities are also drawing-in English students looking for a cheaper but good quality education. An estimated 22,500 English students currently study at Scottish universities and pay annual fees of £1,820 for course typically lasting four years.

With a record 583,500 students applying to university this year, with no extra places created, many of them who are hoping to beat the tuition fees hike in 2012, are more likely than ever to fail to secure a place at university even with the prospect of cheaper tuition fees offered elsewhere.


23 March: International ‘Hug a Sociologist’ Day (2011-03-23 08:00)

...is today! Hug a sociologist - wherever you are!

*See facebook event [1]here*

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International Hug a sociologist day 2011

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2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mark-carrigan/international-hug-a-sociologist-day/174638_194013503942450_8158780_n](http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mark-carrigan/international-hug-a-sociologist-day/174638_194013503942450_8158780_n)
Fewer applicants for law school: why? (2011-03-24 08:00)

One of the long-haul effects of the credit crunch is beginning to manifest itself: US law schools are registering a notable decrease in the number of applicants, connected to dwindling job prospects for law graduates. This may not be bad news, as rationally-minded young people rationally decide to choose a different career. However, it would be interesting to find out what combination of factors drives the choice: the desire for better earnings, job-stability, career prospects, or something radically different?

Click on link to read the article [1]Law School Loses Its Allure as Jobs at Firms Are Scarce

1. [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704396504576204692878631986.html](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704396504576204692878631986.html)

Facebook, emotion, and the future of media (2011-03-25 08:00)

The [1]Nieman Journalist Lab is a project of the Nieman foundation at [2]Harvard university. In this article, Joshua Benton unravels the meaning of social media for news-sharing, and points out the emotional nature of many of the new tools that new online ecosystems such as Facebook endorse.

Click on link to read the article: [3]"Like," "share," and "recommend": How the warring verbs of social media will influence the news’ future

In accord with Benton’s article, it is somewhat ironic that writing this blog frequently involves cross-posting other people’s articles. Even when you are diligent in acknowledging authorship in each single instance, you still claim to be the author of the blog itself; blogs become modern-day online [4]'salons’ which invite new ad hoc ‘speakers’ as and when they are available, and the blog authors assume the role of ‘inspiring hosts’. This does, however, raise issues of originality Perhaps SI should introduce a new category: [5]listicles? What do you think?

2.
Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-03-25 14:16)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [1]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

Coffee and redemption: Zizek on capitalism (2011-03-26 08:00)

Slavoi Zizek talks about modern capitalism: are buying a cup of coffee, or are we buying redemption for being consumers?

[Rставил]

Rape Culture (2011-03-27 08:00)

'What is the rape culture? What are its borders? What does it look like and sound like and feel like?' Melissa McEwan, founder and co-author of the award-winning political and cultural group blog [1]Shakespeareville, explains. Click on link to read the post [2]Rape Culture 101

1. http://shakespearessister.blogspot.com/

The Persistence of Print (2011-03-28 00:00)

Starting today the 28 March 2011, the New York Times will go behind a paywall, following The Times, The Economist, Financial Times, and other subscription-based print periodicals with an online co-presence. For those who choose
not to subscribe, access will be limited to twenty articles per month, excluding articles reached through Google’s news feed and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Although there may well be [1]some promising workarounds for the tech-savvy, the bottom line is that heavy users of this website—regardless of where in the world they happen to be located at the moment—will be obligated to pay up USD $455 per year.

Note that I write ‘up to USD $455 per year’. There are cheaper methods of gaining unlimited access, even if you are not trying to game the system in any manner. For those living in areas of the United States which are [2]eligible to receive home delivery of the New York Times, $3.10 per week, or $161.20 per year, for a weekday subscription will also provide unlimited access to the website across all digital platforms. The [3]least expensive digital subscription option, by comparison, is $3.75 per week, or $195 per year...and you won’t be able to read the paper on your iPad. What gives? Why, in the second decade of the 21st century, are newspapers printed on pulped up trees still the cheapest consumer option?

The answer to this question is simple: revenue streams. It may seem to the average person as if newspapers are selling news content to their readers, but this is not in fact the case. Rather, they are selling their readers’ attention to advertisers—and print ads pay way better than online ads. The discrepancy between the print revenue stream and the digital revenue stream is so large, in fact, that the New York Times does not consider an online-only, open-access news delivery model to be financially sustainable. Therefore, the new pricing structure exists first and foremost to incentivize print subscriptions and secondarily to offset the loss of ad revenue to those readers who prefer going wholly digital.

The political economy favors print in other sectors of the publishing industry as well. For all the talk about e-books these days, one might think it strange that there are still paper books on the market at all. Granted,
some people, myself included, do not prefer e-books, but reader preference alone does not explain the puzzling persistence of print. Some people undoubtedly enjoyed eight-tracks—and where have those gone? Nope, once again [4]it’s about profit potential: a hardcover book priced at $26 might actually make a publisher more money than an e-book edition of the same title priced at $9.99. Only when e-books are priced at approximately $12.99 or higher do publishers see a revenue advantage in going digital, and consumers may view a trade paperback priced at $13.99 as better value for money. The [5]sales numbers thus far bear this out.

In *Books in the Digital Age* (2005), John B. Thompson theorizes that certain textual forms are more amenable to digitization than others. Items valued for their indexical qualities, such as dictionary definitions and encyclopedia entries, are welcomed by readers when digitized. Ephemeral texts, such as articles in magazines, journals, and newspapers, are the same. But longer forms which must be read end-to-end, such as novels and scholarly monographs, resist digitization. He certainly has a point, as any researcher printing out .pdfs of scholarly journal articles undoubtedly knows. Yet there are other reasons why texts do not go digital which have nothing to do with their textual properties. The habits of markets clearly matter, too.


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**New column! “Visual Sociology” call for reader submissions (2011-03-29 08:00)**

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its **new column dedicated to "Visual Research"**. To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. **One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday.** The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just [1]e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.
Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please [3]e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) * in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are
integral to one another.

**Type of image:** Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

**Format and size:**

- JPEG format
- 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

**Legal issues:** Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers' rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

**Copyright:** The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

[4]

“This work is licensed under a [5]Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.”


www.sirimo.co.uk/ukpr or http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

1. mailto:m.i.kremakova@warwick.ac.uk
2. http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mark-carrigan/new-column-%e2%80%9cvisual-sociology%e2%80%9d-call
Walking Life (2011-03-30 08:00)

[1]Walking Life (2001) is a live-action rotoscoped film, directed by Richard Linklater. It won’t answer all your questions about the meaning of life, but it will prompt you to ask even more. [2] [EMBED]


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British Journal of Sociology debate on the status of British Sociology (2011-03-31 08:00)

There was a fascinating debate in a recent issue of the British Journal of Sociology about the current status of the discipline in the UK. Well worth a read for those who have access to the journal:

- [1] Sociology’s misfortune; disciplines, interdisciplinarity and the impact of the audit culture John Holmwood
- [2] Unpicking sociology’s misfortunes Mike Savage
- [3] Sociology: a view from the diaspora Richard Rosenfeld
- [4] Not only our misfortune: reply to Rosenfeld and Savage John Holmwood


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2.4  April

Call for papers for JofUR (2011-04-01 08:00)

The founding principle of the Journal of Universal Rejection (JofUR) is rejection. Universal rejection. That is to say, all submissions, regardless of quality, will be rejected. Despite that apparent drawback, [1]here are a number of reasons you may choose to submit to the JofUR.


Follow SI on facebook and Twitter! (2011-04-02 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

[3] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5] Twitter Updates

Critics, Criticism, and Civil Society (2011-04-04 00:00)

I have worked as a critic, and I am socially acquainted with other critics. I have enjoyed many a pleasant meal with critics (the ones who write reviews of anime and manga, at least). I have read hundreds of thousands of words of criticism on topics ranging from consumer technology to scholarly monographs. And as a sociologist, the language of academic criticism has become part and parcel of my daily discourse. Yet despite this critical mass (excuse the pun) of interaction with both the labour of criticism and other critics themselves, one thing has never ceased to baffle me: how critics can believe that something is just a matter of opinion unless it’s their opinion—in which case the opinion is actually true.
Is the manga series *Naruto* gem or junk, and if I write that it is a gem, is this a truth claim, or is just my opinion? Perhaps you have your own view. Perhaps you think this is a silly question that does not merit a column in the first place. I, however, would argue that this question is a red herring. Instead of worrying about the existential issues, we ought, instead, to ask the following question: *Under what conditions is the labour of criticism constructive or destructive?* This is a question that takes on a particular urgency in the digital age, where the proliferation of blogs, online forums, and other social media means that everyone who has an opinion has a place to express it.

In *Human Communication as Narration*, Walter Fisher (1989) argues that there is no such thing as a value-free argument; you cannot separate fact from value. The logic sequences with which we construct our arguments are inextricably bound to our moral and ethical selves. If this is true, then, I would argue, criticism is important not for what is concluded, but rather why it is concluded. In other words, when we read an influential film critic panning the latest blockbuster because all of the female characters are either mothers or whores, we ought to be concerned less with whether or not we believe him to be correct and far more about whether or not we think the absence of three-dimensional female characters is wrong.

This shift in emphasis isn't just about how we might go about reading about entertainment media; it also has important implications for critical political discourse as well. Politicians and pundits, eager to assume a mantle of virtuousness, often [1] call for a 'change in the tone' of political debate. They decry the vitriol, the obscenities, the volume turned up to the maximum setting. They call for civility, for reasoned debate...and strangely it doesn't seem to matter what side you're on. But this too is a red herring. Does it really matter if the politician smiles politely while he passes legislation that makes our society more unjust and unequal? Are his actions excusable, just because he said 'please', 'excuse me', and 'thank you very much'? I certainly hope not!

In fact, polite, civil discourse can be used to conceal positions that, were they to be expressed in the bluntest of terms, would be immediately recognized as utterly unacceptable. I am reminded of an anecdote told by Norman Finkelstein at a conference on academic freedom at NYU a couple of years ago. He proposed a scenario (and I paraphrase here) where a black student appears in a professor's office to ask for some additional academic guidance. Would it be worse for that professor to casually dismiss the student's concerns by saying, 'Good scientific research shows that black people like yourself have statistically significant lower IQ scores than white people', or if he said, 'Stop wasting my time, jungle baby'! The answer is obvious.

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Clegg, Miliband, Balls and Osborn? No wonder celebrity politics focus on trivialities since the popular view is ‘they are all the same’.

A spate of media programmes point to this situation worsening with the idea that a return to grammar schools will restart social mobility and is therefore progressive. It’s true that the official introduction of comprehensive schools in the UK from 1965-on was coincident with the ending of the period of limited upward mobility that occurred during the 30 years of post-war full employment. But that it was not the cause of it can be seen from a comparison with the USA’s comprehensive high schools feeding similarly limited mobility that ended at the same time.

Since then in both countries there has been only illusory social mobility as non-manual service employment has expanded at the expense of manual labour, benefiting mainly women who now pursue careers before having children in their 30s. These new opportunities have been presented as professionalising the proletariat but in reality many of these para-professional occupations are being rapidly proletarianised – teaching and lecturing a case in point.

Bringing back grammar schools would only cement this new social situation since the only mobility remaining for increasing numbers is downward. And the eugenic thinking behind thus ‘saving the bright working-class child’ from this fate is as evident now as it was in 1944, though without (as yet) any coherent ideology of ‘IQ’ to support it. However, what is defined as ‘bright’ is equally narrow performance in repeated tests of largely literary ability functioning from the earliest age as proxies for more or less expensively crammed cultural capital.

The majority are thus failed at every fence and, more importantly, made to feel that they are failures. This principle of academic selectivity has re-imposed itself ruthlessly, marginalising residual republican notions of entitlement, along with any other ‘effort as worthy as that dignified by the name of scholarly study within the noblest of colleges’, as Hardy’s JudetheObscure saw it.

Now the market in universities competing on price for various specialist options becomes the model for schools and colleges. As the former follow further and higher education into a centralised system of ‘fair funding’, it can be anticipated that vouchers for a basic entitlement may be introduced so that parents who can afford it top up their voucher at independent schools as private providers are subsidised to bid into the state system. The academic predominance of ‘The Great Public Schools’ with their long-standing links to Oxbridge Colleges exemplified by Winchester and New College, Eton and Christ Church, is thus also reaffirmed.

‘Nosseled in the grossest kynd of sophistry’

Gillian Evans’ twin histories enable us to understand how this has happened. She has long been a thorn in the side of successive Cambridge Vice Chancellors’ aspirations to turn that institution – at which she holds a doctorate as well as one from Oxford – into a business park. She is dedicated therefore to ‘preserving the medieval democracy which has served it for more than eight centuries’ (p. 76).

The priestly vocation in which this originated was later joined by lawyers and doctors, though not without dispute, for instance over the dispensation of what would now be called dangerous drugs between apothecaries, physicians and the state – a battle that continues on all three fronts to this day. The question is whose knowledge and how is it to be defined. As in the public disputations that remained the Oxbridge method of examination until the mid-nineteenth century, ‘both sides of the question’ had to be presented in a manner that is tediously familiar in today’s journalistic ideal of ‘objectivity’.

Similarly, today’s students are expected to defer to authority but have their own point of view in a debate that is open but which you have to be an expert to enter. These paradoxes confuse the uninitiated and are only
'assimilated', as Bourdieu said, as a matter of 'style' by those who are already 'converts'.

In the Medieval period such dangerous knowledge was guarded as Mysteries by Guilds whose disciplines demanded a Master work to demonstrate initiation into the craft with students taking a *peregrinatio academica* around Latin-speaking Christendom, just as journeymen stonemasons and other apprentices toured Europe's cathedrals.

However, Evans begins her history of 'Modern Oxford' by saying that it was 'shaped by the generation born as Victorians who broke off their studies to go and fight in the First World War, survived the carnage and lived on through another World War to become the generation of aged dons...' typified by the Inkings (Lewis, Tolkein et al). 'Straddlers between Victorian and modern Oxford they may have been, but not includers of a wider social world, or of women' (pp. 11-12). They coped with the grim conditions by withdrawing into a fantasy life, 'writing stories and designing languages for elves' (p. 14).

From the enthusiasm of *John Betjeman’s Oxford* for this Middle Earth of pseudo-medieval flummery and eccentricity – or 'a particularly Oxford form of “celebrity”' (p. 43), Evans turns to ‘our second Oxford “guide book” to the century’ (p. 48), Masterman's 1952 *To teach the Senators wisdom*. This contains such jolly gems as 'There has been no greater mistake made in Oxford than the abolition of compulsory chapel, except of course the admission of women and the abolition of compulsory Greek' (quoted on p. 27).

Nevertheless, Evans sees Oxford’s mission embodied in the figure of Roy Jenkins – ‘an Oxford Chancellor without a privileged background, who had no trouble with “access”, went on to run the country, and came back to enjoy late summer of his life in Oxford’ (p. 77). Jenkins’ port-filled self-parody in those later years was a reinvention of character in the opposite direction to that taken by the Bullingdon Boys who now run the country but who have also disguised their earlier avatars. Yet both – and the long list of Oxford-educated Prime Ministers, such as Bliar, ‘a typical Oxford lawyer, completely superficial’ in the estimation of Peter, now Lord, Hennessey – show the University’s subservience to state and church which Evans’ subsequent chapters trace from its origins in the twelfth century.

In her Cambridge volume the Tudor monarchy drew upon that university at the time of the Reformation, following 'The custom of looking to the universities for likely academics who could be used in the service of the Government [that] was now well established' (p. 149). Thomas Cranmer, for instance, rewarded with Archbishopric for justifying Henry VIII’s divorce, was described by a contemporary biographer as ‘nosseled in the grossest kynd of sophistry’ at Cambridge (p. 148).

Playing off church against state, the academic Guardians asserted their special selection of the powerful through an extension of the unctuous laying on of hands by a priestly caste. The two English universities (as compared with five in medieval Scotland), also enforced a monopoly of defining what was recognised as valid knowledge first noted by the historian Edward Gibbon (p. 199). They ruthlessly snuffed out rivals like Lincoln and Northampton, or Durham University founded under the Protectorate; also other competing centres of legitimation, such as the Inns of Court and later Learned Societies, Royal or Lunar, Dissenting Academies and Mechanics Institutes.

*Trahison des clercs*

25 years ago Oxford students and academics petitioned and voted against Margaret Thatcher’s honorary Doctorate. Now the academic ideal that even the Gove-approved John Dryden regarded in his day as ‘crabbed and subtle’ (p. 210), has re-asserted its dominance. It is no wonder therefore that many Oxbridge students and staff are now so totally ‘up themselves’, as other students put it, as to place their self-interest above any residual dedication to public sector higher education.
That this *trahison des clerks* is true to form Evans shows in her judicious account that illustrates in critical episodes and individuals (More, Wolsey, Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell, Laud) the struggle of ‘an organised body of professional teachers to provide for its own perpetuation’, as Durkheim says of the Paris University Guild in his *History of Pedagogy in France*.

At least Cambridge, nurtured by the puritan ethic of East Anglian trade and property relations, was represented in Parliament by Oliver Cromwell. Thereafter, in the antinomies of the national culture embodied by the Boatrace Universities, Royalist Oxford since the Restoration has endorsed the social ideal of the ruling class, while puritan Cambridge and a few Oxford colleges – such as eighteenth century Exeter, Merton and Wadham, as ‘Whigs’ amongst a ‘Tory’ majority – afforded a second eleven to be fielded as required, like New College’s influence on the 1945 Labour government.

Nevertheless, even at eighteenth-century Oxford, a ‘more plebian and puritanical’, if not ‘middle class’ (p. 193) undergraduate intake necessitated provision that went beyond religion and aristocratic pursuits such as hunting. This turned halls into colleges and raised the age of admission from 15-16 to 18-19. ‘Oiks’ acted as servants to gentlemen students in superior caps. At Cambridge gradations between students were marked by separate dining arrangements. In contrast to Doctor Johnson, whose ‘Oxford career was brief because of shortage of family funds’ (p. 197), many a student was there ‘to say in later life that he has been to university’ (p. 199) or ‘comes here as a commercial speculation’ to increase his earning power (p. 306).

In the same period, Cambridge became ‘duller and more second-rate’ (p. 240) but, in what that volume describes as its ‘nineteenth century transformation’, Cambridge redefined the academic pursuit, following the Victorian Henry Sidgwick, as ‘one whose study is the chief interest of his life’ and who ‘alone can keep the machinery of teaching ever on a level with the advance of knowledge’ (p. 87 in the Cambridge volume). The University was thus well positioned to cater for the alliance of industrial capital and middle-class professions it helped to form against surviving landed aristocracy pursuing more character-building preparation for leadership at Oxford.

Cambridge was also more open to the development of science, putting ideas to ‘the test of Sense’ and moving ‘out of the gentleman’s study and the Royal Society’ (p. 285) to find a home in *de-facto* university research centres organized ‘through faculties and Departments and not by the Colleges’ – partly because it was too expensive for them. Science was therefore ‘fundamentally different from the tutorial system of the arts and humanities’ (p. 47), though making use of existing botanical gardens and museum collections. It followed the Humboldtian model of the professor leading his fellow scholar-researchers that was imported by the new universities of London and the industrial towns as they gradually wrested themselves free from Oxbridge tutelage. By contrast, in Newman’s revival of the tutorial system, ‘A student’s task was to read. His [college] tutor’s role was to direct his reading’ (p. 247).

The gap between Snow’s two cultures of art and science was thus preserved and extended within each institution as well as being reflected elsewhere, particularly through A-levels introduced in 1951 to prepare a minority for specialist study. Abandoning any attempt to overcome this divide, government has now withdrawn state funding for the arts and humanities leaving them as frivolous pursuits for those rich enough to afford them.

**Conclusion**

In the 1960s the Cambridge economics Professor Joan Robinson said, ‘The leading characteristic of the ideology which dominates our society today is its extreme confusion. To understand it means only to reveal its contradictions.’ Since then the academic fashion for postmodernism, first floated in ‘post-structural’ form at Cambridge – ever more open to foreign ideas even if silly ones, has made a virtue of this deconstruction without acknowledging the need for the reconstruction which Robinson implied. The resulting fragmented ‘discourse’ is the obverse of traditionally narrow and arbitrarily subdivided empirical subject specialisation. Neither academic form of knowledge allows for generalisation capable of questioning the purposes to which it is put or the society which uses it.
Why study Sociology? What will I learn? (2011-04-06 08:00)

Here’s the Guardian’s [1] answer to this interesting and important question:

Academics claim sociology is more than a subject - it's a whole way of seeing the world. From the topics studied on sociology degrees, they may just be right.

Sociology is the study of human societies and how they interact to shape people's beliefs, behaviours and identity. The subject is the academic cousin to the more practical social policy, so you will examine different social theories and models (expect mention of Karl Marx at least). You will also explore how society has changed over time, touching on subjects like industrialisation, urbanisation, inequality and globalisation.

You may find yourself investigating consumer society, looking at classic and contemporary (post-modern) theories of consumerism and applying these to shopping, fashion or music.

You could look at work and employment, how these are viewed in societies and how these views have changed over the years. Expect to explore issues of feminism, class and the trade union movement.

You could also study sexuality, religion, or youth culture and identity.

Sociology courses can often be studied alongside other complementary subjects, such as history, social policy, politics, or cultural or gender studies.

However we at Sociological Imagination don’t think this is a particularly good (or inspiring!) answer. How would you answer this question? What’s the point of Sociology? Why study it? What will you learn? How will it change how you see the world?
We'd love to hear your answers to this question. [2]E-mail us your thoughts and we'll compile the answers and post them online.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/may/01/universityguide.sociology
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

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An SI author on TV (three times!) (2011-04-07 08:00)

Leon Moosavi from Lancaster University whose article [1]'Manifestations of Islamophobia and the Loyalty of Muslim Converts' was published on SI a few months ago has made a number of recent TV appearances talking about his research. Given that Leon's article was one of the most highly viewed in SI's short history, we thought they might be of interest to readers:

[EMBED] [EMBED] [EMBED]


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Straight men kissing more? (2011-04-08 08:00)

An interesting Guardian [1]article which talks to the sociologist [2]Eric Anderson about the decline of homophobia amongst young people in Britain. His findings are rather interesting to say the least:

"I started going through my students' Facebook profiles, with their permission, and was inundated with hundreds of photos of men kissing on their nights out," Anderson reports.

He was intrigued, and decided to investigate further via formal research. He interviewed 145 students, a mixture of men studying sports-related subjects and every third man who left the library on a particular day, from two different universities, plus other male students from a sixth-form college. The results of his survey showed 89% of the polled men saying they were happy to kiss another man on the lips through friendship. And almost 40% added that they had engaged in "sustained kissing, initially for shock value, but now just for 'a laugh'."

"I started telling people about it, but found that a lot of academics literally did not believe me," Anderson explains. "One professor excused it as 'something in the water at Bath' – even though the research covered three different educational establishments. Others flatly told me that they did not believe me. From their 'adult' perspective, this action was unfathomable. They have been stamped with attitudes of acceptable behaviour as a part of their entry into adulthood, and kissing was not permitted between men when they were young. So although they had not been in students' clubs or pubs in 20 or more years, they assumed that nothing had changed. This is known as human plasticity theory; people are stamped with a belief system that they cannot easily shake."

3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/atoz/thinkingaloud/podcasts/gendersegregation/
4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/atoz/thinkingaloud/podcasts/homophobia

Hal Baird (2011-07-06 18:08:17)
It took a long time but my brother in law and I are finally comfortable kissing each other on the lips. We are both happily married heterosexuals. At the very least we exchange a full body hug whenever we meet or depart and now an occasional kiss has been added. We never end a phone conversation without saying "I love you" to each other. In modern terms were are in a bromance.

David Deutsch on our place in the cosmos (2011-04-09 08:00)

This video is somewhat outside the usual remit of Sociological Imagination but we thought at least a few readers would find it as interesting as we did:

[EMBED]

A reminder about our two Calls for Papers (2011-04-10 08:00)

Social Research in an Age of Austerity

A new coalition government pledges an unparalleled age of fiscal austerity and a new universities minister promises radical ‘reform’ of higher education: what does the future hold for the British university in an age of fiscal austerity?

What is this political and economic climate likely to mean for social research? How can social researchers adapt to this climate? How can social research assist in understanding and resisting the imposition of austerity?

Articles and polemics are invited which relate to these themes. See [1]here for submission guidelines.

Contributions also welcome on themes relating to socially and/or politically engaged social research!

Public Scholarship and Private Commitment

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to
these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions ([2]articles, polemics or research profiles) which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. For submission details see [3] here

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/contribute/

SI Presents - an introduction to asexuality (2011-04-11 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan (a researcher focused on asexuality) and Michael Dore (an asexual mathematician) lead an introductory workshop about asexuality. For more information about asexuality visit www.asexuality.org, the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/sexuality_workshop.mp3"] An introduction to Asexuality

A couple of articles about asexuality which have featured on Sociological Imagination:

[1]Reflections on a year spent studying asexuality

[2]Pathology and Asexual Politics


Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-04-12 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?
Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [1]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Podcast: Interview with Danny Birchall from the Wellcome Collection (2011-04-13 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan interviews Danny Birchall, web editor at the [1]Wellcome Collection. The interview discusses the process and thinking behind the Collection’s innovative use of digital media, as well as the recent [2]High Society exhibition in particular.

1. www.wellcomecollection.org

The Anarchist Film Archive (2011-04-14 08:00)

As political theories go, it’s fair to say that anarchism is more misunderstood than most. Often seen as the preserve of nihilistic terrorists, there’s actually a rich vein of [1]anarchist social thought. There’s also an equally rich social and political history of the anarchist movement. In a rather impressive use of digital media [2]Christie Books (an anarchist publisher) has brought some of this history to life through its [3]Anarchist Film Archive.
The Internet in Society: Empowering or Censoring Citizens? (2011-04-16 08:00)

[EMBED]


[...] A fascinating talk by Evgeny Morozov who describes WikiLeaks as being driven by a mix of cyber utopianism and political romanticism. If you find this discussion interesting then check out the animated version. [...]
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [1]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

If you would like to informally discuss a submission on this theme, or any other, please [2]get in touch.

Follow SI on facebook and Twitter! (2011-04-17 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

[3] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5] Twitter Updates
Communication or Credentialing? On the Value of Academic Publishing (2011-04-18 00:00)

Nobody outside of the profession reads scholarly books and journal articles. It’s become a common complaint in the academic world, and among some disciplines such as sociology it’s also de rigueur to take the complaint a step further: Nobody listens to us. American sociologists, for example, look askance at economist and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman and lament the lack of visibility in the media of their discipline. British sociologists, meanwhile, worry about the impending ‘impact agenda’ of the Research Excellence Framework. Although couched in different vocabularies—in the US academy, ‘impact’ typically refers to narrow quantitative measures such as citation counts and impact factors—what scholars are professing to wanting is to make a positive difference in the world.

Yet the number of monographs, journals, and other publication outlets proliferate by the year, and as the volume of research output increases, the possibility of being read even within one’s own profession decreases by the year, and too often so-called debates within disciplines devolve into mutual appreciation societies who do not deign to read the other side. The great bulk of research is never cited at all. So why do we continue to publish if not for the sake of scholarly communication? The obvious answer to this question, I would argue, is for the sake of credentials, outward signs of cultural and symbolic capital which we then deploy as lines in our CV to achieve particular professional goals.

Usually, these are professional goals as they relate to career advancement within the academy. In the UK, it is important to be ‘REF-able’, the pressure to publish coming in regular cycles throughout one’s career. Similarly in the US, getting one’s first job post-PhD requires publications, and keeping one’s job in the context of the tenure track often requires even more. Understand publications as professional credentials and you understand why the prestige of the publication outlet—a university press with an Ivy League affiliation, for example, or a high-impact journal—becomes paramount: In a world where not even other scholars are wont to read you, prestige of publication outlet, the brand, as it were, becomes proxy for quality.

However, if understood as credentials then publications are also very useful outside of the academic field. In my view, scholarly writing is first and foremost a way of having a seat at the table. Your book will not effect change on its own, but if you wave it around high enough and long enough you might be given a soapbox relevant to your research topic from which you will be able to make your case anew. By these lights, it would be wrong to debate whether or not journalism is a better medium of communication than the journal article. More productive, rather, is to view the journal article as the baseline price of admission to an opportunity that has only just opened for you, an opportunity that is now yours to work or waste. The labour of influence and impact does not end when you’ve written up—it has only just begun.

Previous research has shown that a large proportion of ethnic minorities in the Higher Education system are represented in undergraduate study in the new (post-1992) university sector. More prestigious universities such as Oxbridge and universities under the Russell Group banner continuously show an under-representation of ethnic minorities in their universities.

The Race For Opportunity report published in 2010 by Business in the Community, uncovered with the exception of new universities, only the universities of Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham and Warwick draw in a representative proportion of all British ethnic groups.

Drawing on this lack of diversity in some of Britain's universities, an [1]article this week in The Guardian, highlights the experiences of under-represented black students at Oxford University.

The article draws on the prime minister’s comments on his alma mater, Brasenose, as having admissions figures for taking students from the lowest socio-economic groups as “disgraceful”.

In 2009, just one “black Caribbean” applicant from the UK out of the 25 “black Caribbean’s” who applied – was accepted for study at Oxford.

Highlighted [2]elsewhere in Sociological Imagination, Oxbridge statistically tends to the choice of the nation's elite and has an overwhelmingly high proportion of white upper and middle class students compared to other groups.

This is nothing new, but given the fact that Oxbridge and Russell Group universities have confirmed that they will be charging the maximum tuition fee, it will prove interesting to see how figures on admissions from lower socio-economic groups in these institutions might be affected in the future given that provision must now be made for these under-represented groups.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/apr/12/oxford-university-diversity-row-students
In June 2011 the Sociological Imagination will host its first day school at the University of Warwick. Encompassing workshops, seminars, talks and brainstorming sessions, it will explore the potential which social media holds for all aspects of academic practice: learning, research, campaigning, networking, public engagement, teaching, communication and event organization.

Full details, as well as exact date, will follow shortly. The event is free, though due to our budget (or more accurately our lack of any budget!) lunch on the day will consist of a group trip to one of the campus food outlets. There will also be an evening meal at [1]Habibi’s restaurant, though again this is pay your own way.

Places are limited. If you’d like to register then please [2]e-mail with your name, institutional affiliation (if applicable) and particular areas of interest relating to the day school’s themes.

1. http://www.habibirestaurant.co.uk/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Egotism & Society (2011-04-21 08:00)

What makes our society function? What ties hold us together? These questions have assumed greater importance in a post-modern, morally relative era, an era in which everyone’s beliefs can seem wildly different. At the same time, we find ourselves witnessing the power of public opinion on a mass scale, indicating a greater level of agreement than before. As such, the search for the lowest common denominator within our national community is blurred. I want to suggest that advanced industrialised societies, such as Britain’s, rely on a particular conception of the Self as a purely Egotistical entity in order to thrive. This conception, which I will refer to as the Ego or Egotism, is not conducive to a healthy mind-and-body. Moreover, there is a cultural blindness in the West as to the importance of this Self, and most of us are unable to envision life without it. I want to focus on how and why advanced industrialised societies implement this understanding of the Self, and the consequences of this understanding.

Egotism on a societal level is the product of self-consciousness and individualism, both of which as broad cultural inclinations developed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. But it is unlike both of them, exhibiting unique features of its own which are at one and the same time timelessly human and grotesquely modern, even dystopian.
Egotism, as I understand it, correlates to one’s self-identity as an individual being, with a narrative of his or her own, a narrative which weaves ambitions, dreams, desires, fears and prejudices together. What I mean by Egotism is the construction, from an early age, of an idea of the Self, an idea which is created in relation to pride and a conception of oneself as a completely separate entity. It is safe to assume that all humans are born with this capacity, and that it is on many levels a natural response to individual consciousness. In advanced industrialised societies, however, this conception of the Self is manipulated for certain ends. Before we explore how this manipulation occurs, it is important to distinguish between Egotism as it occurs naturally and Egotism as it is when manipulated. The Ego is also different from the Self, in that it is a particular conception of the Self. It can go against the mind-and-body of the individual. For instance, if my ego desires popularity, and perceives smoking cigarettes to aid its quest for social acceptance, then if I am sufficiently in the thrall of my Ego, I will take up smoking, at the expense of my mind-and-body, my actual self. So it is important to realise the difference between the Ego and the self as mind-and-body – the Ego is a constructed and ultimately false-identity which drives the mind-and-body to achieve its ends. The crucial thing to understand about the Ego is that it can never be sated. Whatever the Ego’s ends, it will revise them each time they are fulfilled to something harder to attain. Furthermore, many of the desires that the Ego holds are biological desires, such as sex, which are naturally unquenchable. Hence there is a double-bind – the sexual drive is relentless and the Ego continually heightens its desire without end. This means that the Ego cannot be satisfied. By this, I mean that lasting happiness through Egotism is impossible, insofar as the Ego believes on some level that fulfilling its wishes will make it happy. Egotism, I believe, is the core reason behind unhappiness. It creates unrealistic expectations and at its most extreme isolates individuals from those around them, teaching them to see fellow men and women as rivals and threats. This is what I believe has gradually transpired in the West over the past two centuries, although the reasons for this development stretch back to antiquity. Now it is time to look at how and why advanced industrialised societies rely on the Egotistical conception of the Self. Eastern religions such as Buddhism tend to deplore the Egotistical Self, portraying it as an illusion that obscures the unity of all life forms. Those who are aware of this kind of critique tend to be those who want to emancipate themselves from the rule of the Egotistic Self, freeing themselves to simply be. If this is achieved, personal ambitions and desires will to fade away. Imagine such an individual for a moment. He is gradually disentangling what he believes to be his ‘true’ self from his Egotistical Self, and in the process he becomes someone new. This new individual is aware of the unimportance of human lives and civilizations in the face of the unity of the universe. The new individual has no personal motives or wishes, and does not necessarily need or want a social role. Rather than depending on whether goals are achieved or not, happiness is total. There is no need for anything beyond the bare necessities. How would a materialistic, capitalistic economy survive if people attained self-mastery to the extent that they desired no substantial material possessions? Surely, it would simply collapse! There would be no market for the endless products churned out. This hypothesis gains credence when we dissect how goods are sold. The history of advertising offers the most illuminating insight into what motivates people to buy things. In the last few decades, advertisements have tended to sell a lifestyle rather than a product. In other words, the product or service offered attempts to represent a lifestyle, a modus Vivendi, which entices the viewer by aligning itself to his or her aspirations. For instance, a razor for shaving might be sold with an advert that features a clean-shaven man attracting the unbidden sexual attention of an attractive, glamorous lady. The message is simple – if you want to be more like this man, buy this product, and you will be one step closer to his lifestyle. This Egotism extends throughout all media. Music videos exhibit glamorous lifestyles and cool, exciting characters, essentially ‘living out’ the lyrics in some cases. Videogames feature increasingly ‘lifelike’ and ‘cool’ characters as protagonists. Hollywood blockbusters show us as we would want to be seen by others. Surrounded by images of successful, glamorous, sexy, wealthy, cool individuals in every field, and witnessing the sheer coruscating vivacity of these fortunate souls every day through the abstraction of the television, the Egotistical Self is fed and nourished as never before in the history of man. When has there been such a wealth of celebrities to be worshipped and envied, or such a concerted effort to fulfil both of these functions? Looking at the entertainment our society offers, it is clear that most people, having had their Egotistical Selves encouraged unanimously from an early age, require a drip-feed of gossip, glamour and merciless disparagement to feel contented. The ‘lifestyle’ magazines for both men and women display this perfectly – for women, there is Heat, and Closer, and Glamour, and Cosmopolitan, and Elle, etc; all of which either fawn over beautiful, successful and sophisticated women and their whims, or ruthlessly mock and pity those famous women who are anything but perfect in body and soul. Either way,
We have seen how society encourages this perception of the Self; now it is time to examine how it interacts with ideas and concepts alien to her Egotism. She is so used to performing mental acrobatics to justify her Egotistical behavior, and this often is the Self's ultimate fantasy, or it is given a kind of Sadomasochistic thrill at witnessing how pathetic those around her are, and how good its own is in comparison. The magazines for men are fairly similar in their effect, if not their content. I want to demonstrate the psychological and social harm that is risked when people are born into a society that can only conceive of individuals as Egotistical Selves. So, I will examine the 'ideal type' of the Egotistical Self, as she might typically appear in Britain, France, the United States, and so on. Firstly, the Ego tends to become the major or only source of self-esteem for her. If her Ego is built around her being sexier than her cohorts, then she will seek to extract valuable self-esteem through the ego boost her good looks offer her. Let’s imagine that our subject wants to be a lawyer for a top law firm; her Ego has fastened itself onto this aspiration for whatever reason, and for the entirety of her post-adolescent life she has endeavoured greatly, every single day, to reach that goal. Eventually, if this Egotism is her only source of self-esteem, what will happen is that she will be almost unable to feel pleasure in areas that do not concern her Egotistical aspirations. We see this in the rising trend of 'career-focused' men and women, who are willing to sacrifice a staggering amount of their time to reaching a particular level of their corporation, etc. Secondly, there is an innate disinclination at true self-reflection. Instead, a facade of self-reflection is usually forged; the Ego constructs 'turning points' in its existence, which are portrayed as major moments of self-understanding and mental clarity but are in fact illusory. The Egotistical Self is loath to being honest with itself because this might threaten its mission – after all, if you've been striving for a particular position for years and years, you have invested too much emotional energy and time to consider the possibility that it might be fake. Thirdly, there is the mental construction of other Selves as threats. Our subject feels the need to put up emotional defences against those around her. She might do this by denigrating a 'friend' behind their back, to reassure herself of her own worth; she might subconsciously 'put down' friends and acquaintances she perceives as rivals; or she might outright lie to those around her about her taste, talent and achievements to 'save face'. Most of the time, these actions are performed subconsciously, almost involuntarily, as if they are knee-jerk reactions. This behavior is reciprocal – people tend to note it, and often mirror their behavioural patterns back at them. This, of course, reinforces the idea of other people as rivals. Language is twisted to reinforce this illusion. In our case, she can only conceive of others through the Self. In other words, she cannot see them as they really are, but only through the prism of her Egotism. She will project her own behaviour onto others, obscuring the true nature of those around her. Fourthly, our subject is a poor receptacle for new ideas, since she is not accustomed to dealing with ideas and concepts alien to her Egotism. She is so used to performing mental acrobatics to justify her Egotistical goal (whatever it might be) and behaviour, that she simply does not truly open herself to new ideas. It is dealt with through the Egotistical Self, which selectively filters what it deems to be relevant, and what it finds threatening or incomprehensible. Naturally, most new ideas are never given the chance to be embraced. Truly alternative positions are seen in the same old light as everything else, meaning that our subject takes little pleasure in open academic speculation of almost any kind. We have thus sketched our subject thoroughly enough to imagine what her life might be like. She is perpetually stressed out, taking little visible pleasure in everyday tasks. She is focused to the point of fetishism, constantly judging herself and those around her by the standards of her Egotism. With those she is close to, she will discuss her ambitions with rigour but without colour. If you were to ask her why she wanted to be a lawyer, or a pop star, she would fail to give a satisfactory answer, instead relying on tautology before moving on swiftly. She lacks vivacity or true passion, and embraces new movements only cosmetically. Her life is one of constant toil and repression; every now and then, she will experience a kind of emotional breakdown, complete with tears of frustration; but, since she fails to perceive the underlying problem, her only remedy is to redouble her efforts. We have seen how society encourages this perception of the Self; now it is time to examine how it discourages other non-Egotistical understandings of the Self. At an individual level, those who do not take part in society are often seen as parasites, wastes of space. Is this perhaps because 'ordinary', societal people cannot profit from them? Take a homeless person, for instance, or a traveller. The double-glazing salesman cannot sell him double-glazing, for he has no permanent abode. The insurance salesman cannot sell him insurance, because he has nothing worth insuring. Retail outlets reject him because he has no money. Politicians avoid him for fear of being associated with his disreputable kind. They are disinherited, and I have a feeling that the same fate would befall anyone trying to escape the Egotism of this society. Of course, this reaction comes partly from fear; everyone plays by the rules of the game, understandably taking the elaborate pageantry of civic relations very seriously. When someone comes
along who refuses to play along with the game, or who obviously flouts the rules, people are indignant, and clamour for some kind of punishment. Why? Simply because the outsider’s way of life jeopardises the integrity of the game that others have sacrificed their lives to. It is no wonder that people are so touchy. Societies that are made up of a vast majority of Egotistical Selves (from the bottom to the top), then, have a collective desire to protect their conception of the world, due to their innate insecurity. Since it would be counter-productive to try and destroy an alternative position (it would risk discrediting the mainstream position), it is sterilised. This is achieved in two ways. The first way is reliant on the society being Egotistical in sufficient numbers to lack a truly critical faculty. The second way is to caricature the new position until it has become drab, predictable and – crucially – essentially the same as the Egotistical position. This is effective because it neutralises the very reason someone might want to consider a new conception of themselves and others. Let’s examine one of these caricatures further – the Student-Activist. The Student-Activists are young, naive and self-righteous; they squawk ready-made catchphrases about how evil capitalism is, they resort to petty violence to achieve their aims, and they tend to come from comparatively wealthy backgrounds. They have little idea of what the real world is like, and their idealism leads to snobbery. In this description, the Student-Activist is made to seem out for himself. He is only protesting because it gives him an identity – because his Ego desires it. He is just another Egotist, like you or me, so there’s no reason to take him seriously, or to join him in his crusade. So the Student Activist becomes an easy stereotype, and their views are robbed of their potency because they are portrayed simply as sectarian Egotists. Of course, this might actually be the case! But, when these individuals become stereotypes used to represent and discredit the alternative position per se, they weaken the plausibility of the very idea of public protest. Disillusionment is the inevitable outcome. So the Egotistical Self is trapped in a colourless, cynical world of blind submission and pernicious envy in which there is little hope of escape. Once the Ego has settled in, it takes a great deal of dislodging, because the cognitive faculties of the mind become enmeshed with it. It has a canny ability to squirm its way into our every move, our every decision. Meanwhile, since virtually all social positions of privilege are filled with Egotists, from journalism to sports to politics to commerce, society exhibits an underlying, ferocious desire to uphold the Ego and its perception of the world and the human beings who live within it. For these privileged there is often a double gain to defending Egotistic Society – a psychological one and a financial one. After all, only those entrapped by the Ego could feel anything other than disgust when confronted by rampant consumerism (this is not to say that those on the Left are by axiom not egotists; more often than not, they use their political position to form an identity of ‘otherness’ which provides a basis for their activities and ambitions). It is a cycle that inevitably reproduces itself. If we accept this picture of society, the question then shifts to – is it possible to build a society where egotism is discouraged and minimised, or is there something innate in the birth of civilization that makes us yield to the Egotistical force?

Gerardo Marti (2012-02-28 19:41:23)
You might be interested in reason this: Ego-affirming Evangelicalism: How a Hollywood Church Appropriates Religion for Workers in the Creative Class http://socrel.oxfordjournals.org/content/71/1/52.abstract

The Future of WikiLeaks? (2011-04-22 08:00)
A fascinating talk by [1]Evgeny Morozov who describes WikiLeaks as being driven by a mix of cyber utopianism and political romanticism. If you find this discussion interesting then check out the [2]animated version.

[EMBED]
Follow SI on facebook and Twitter! (2011-04-23 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates


Confessions of a Dystopian Marxist (2011-04-24 08:00)

"It was foul, and I loved it," says Saint Augustine for stealing pears along with "some lewd young fellows" adding further "I loved to perish." With the Roman Empire sacked by the Goths on the verge of collapse, it is hard to believe that Saint Augustine attributed such a strong motive as “perishing” to stealing pears – something that Mark Twain in the 19th century would've laughed at as a normal thing that boys do for lack of anything better. In fact most boys do worse than steal pears. Even the self-righteous judges at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague whose faces are death-masks and who speak like the God of the Old Testament would not include stealing pears in the list of crimes against humanity. Yet Saint Augustine the Carthaginian, with the poignancy of a true convert and the poetry of the North African sun burning in his veins makes you want to feel with the pain of having stolen pears. Augustine’s Confessions was meant to be a kind of a spiritual autobiography. Mine is a parody of other confessions. If I were my own biographer this would be the title of the book: Confessions of a Dystopian Marxist. A dystopian I always was. The Marxism came later. To be a dystopian is to have no expectations of the world. Marxism is the antidote to such a feeling because it invents expectations where seemingly there are none. Dystopias make you conscious of time. Marxism rejects time except as a man-made category and recognizes only one time: that of the revolution.
Dystopias are about no-worlds or just about the whole universe. Marxism is the rest of the universe seen through the prism of this world. I’m writing about two people in the same book: one is the dystopian and another is the Marxist. Judith Brown called her 1991 biography of Gandhi *Prisoner of Hope*. Romain Rolland called his 1924 biography of the Mahatma as *Mohandas K. Gandhi: The man who became one with the universal being*. To be hopeful in the way Gandhi was could only mean becoming “one with the universal being.” Gandhi was a utopian without being a Marxist. His autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is not short of “sins” that might seem irrelevant to the modern reader such as Augustine’s guilt at stealing pears. The cow’s milk versus the goat’s milk is my favorite one. Gandhi of course finally gave in to the immediate need of fighting the British and thus goat’s milk won the day. The issue of course was whether he should take milk at all and more importantly diet control as a means to the ascetic life. Interestingly, I’ve found “saintly” people to be much more obsessed with food and sex than less saintly ones. Their utopias are built on crushing nature within the human person. For someone like me who thinks that being riddled with contradictions is the only way one can come closest to being oneself the dystopian blends rather well with the Marxist. The dystopian in me is a private self and the Marxist a public persona. The former is a metaphor and the latter politics. Politics and metaphor do not go together either in art or in life. Politics – by which I mean a public life – even as metaphor is thankless. The metaphor opens one door of meaning to another. With biting irony, Yeats asks in his poem, "Politics," "How can I, that girl standing there,/ My attention fix / On Roman or on Russian / Or on Spanish politics?" Yeats is responding to a line from Thomas Mann, "In our time the destiny of man presents its meanings in political terms." This poem of Yeats written less than a year before his death ends with the line: "But O that I were young again / And held her in my arms!" Behind the so-called "destiny of man" whose meanings are presented in "political terms" are emotional wants and the need for recognition. There is no politics outside a personal need concealed somewhere although most politically motivated people find this hard to accept. They would like to believe that their concerns transcend the personal. At least that’s what they want the rest of the world to think. This can only be a sign of dishonesty more than anything else. Genet called his last book *Prisoner of Love*. Two of my favorite images are the one when he calls the young Jesus a "joker" and the other when he says that every time he thought of the Palestinians there was a hole in his heart. Love and politics go together with Genet who recounts the time he spent with the Palestinians and the Black Panthers. There’s not a line of nostalgia or sentimentalism in the entire book. All we see is the detached affection of a dying man. It reads like the confession of a prisoner but in this case the man locked himself in with the others and threw the keys away lest he would have to come out of the prison. Hence the adolescent title *Prisoner of Love* as if it were the story of a boy in love. Ironically it is. Genet elsewhere says that a person leaves the world with a secret that is destined to perish with the person. There is something about "me" that "I" and no one else is supposed to know and I leave the world with the knowledge that I am the possessor of a dark secret - a fantasy of annihilation, a dream of conquest, a vision of the end of the world. My view is that the so-called secret that I plan to die with is an affected one. I’m like the actor in a Doris Lessing short story "An Unposted Love Letter:" all affection and no reality. I don’t like to think that a sentence such as, “The mango is the queen of fruits” is a sexist one. A male colleague of mine seems to think that my use of the phrase "queen of" is sexist. I said, what if I said "king of" instead of "queen." He added: that would be chauvinistic. Political correctness is hard to deal with for a confessor and no writing is possible where there are no confessions. Yet, I will stick to the literary mode and no other. I refuse to call a spade a spade. That’s disgustingly prosaic. I’ll use a metaphor and call it the Queen of Spades. The unimaginative of the world need prose to justify their barren existence and their equally barren politics. I don’t. Neither did my hero Marx who figuratively states “force is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one.” This is the force that the marginal and downtrodden classes will exert to finally bring the new society into being. I don’t think I could ever tell the truth about myself. To be conscious of lying is a form of truth-telling. I indulge in vain paradoxes to pass time. I wouldn’t mind eating pears from a neighbor’s tree without the neighbor’s knowledge along with a pint of cow’s or goat’s milk. At least that would give me something substantial to confess about.
A New Model for Peer-Reviewing Monographs? (2011-04-25 00:00)

Earlier this month in London at the British Sociological Association Annual Conference, during a panel for early career researchers, I asked John Holmwood why the RAE/REF does not seem to rate scholarly monographs as highly as journal articles. Both a book and an article count as one item, but the latter is only one-tenth the number of words. To a freelancer accustomed to being paid by the word, this does not seem fair. And a book published with a good academic press will be peer-reviewed, right? Holmwood, however, pointed out that an academic press’s peer-review is not the same as a journal’s because a press is far more concerned about whether or not the book will sell. This, he was implying, is not meritocratic.

Although I would be hesitant to argue that the peer review process of scholarly journals is necessarily perfectly meritocratic, either—point taken. Much has been written about how non-profit university presses, once for all intents and purposes the printing arm of their universities, over time have become increasingly exposed to the demands of the market. This puts ever-increasing pressure upon authors to write certain sorts of content in preference to others and publishers to seek out certain sorts of content in preference to others. As an English-speaking researcher writing in English your future book might have a global audience, and perhaps paradoxically that means you probably won’t find too many takers for your elegant monograph on a small town in Northern England.

Ironically, the channels through which book-length scholarship may be disseminated have never been so diverse. Researchers need little more than an Internet connection to make their work freely available on the web, and new technologies have lowered the cost of self-publishing and print-on-demand services. If you are reading this column right now, you also have the resources necessary to publish your own book. Yet most career scholars recoil from such options, fearing lack of quality control and requiring the imprimatur of a prestigious press for professional advancement.

Why do we allow this state of affairs to persist? Why do we, for all intents and purposes, outsource hiring and firing decisions to organizations which need to sell books to survive? Why not disassociate the monograph peer-review process from the monograph publishing process? I could easily imagine discipline-specific peer-review panels, perhaps organized through scholarly associations such as the enormous US-based Modern Language Association. Researchers could submit their manuscript to a relevant panel, which would then adjudicate a rigorous double-blind peer-review process in the usual way. An approved script would receive a certification of some sort: ‘Approved for publication by the MLA Monograph Review Board’, for example. The researcher would be free to publish the work however he or she deems most suitable. In this manner, good books which do not have a sufficiently large market would not be condemned to die in professional obscurity.

Of course, I have no illusions. While such a scheme may be practicable, it would not be feasible without the support of the most respected senior academics. And it is precisely these sorts of people who are most likely to
benefit from the status quo. While some publishers would welcome their liberation from researchers' professional anxieties, others might resist what could be seen as a usurpation of their critical judgement. Perhaps there are other, better solutions. Still, I would argue that we ought to be interrogating the assumptions and conditions of our profession in precisely this reflexive way. If the monograph has value apart from its (typically modest) market potential—and I believe that it does—we must not be complacent. To be complacent is to fail to sociologically imagine ourselves.


Benjamin Geer (2011-04-25 00:27:43)
We younger academics could start our own “autonomous peer review” project to do this. All we need is enough competent (not necessarily famous or senior) participants to ensure a high standard of peer review, and a suitable web site for managing the process. At first, authors might wish to go through this process first, then publish with a traditional academic publisher (which would be free to peer-review again in the usual way). If the project works (by producing books that peers recognise as good), its reputation will speak for itself, and more and more people will want to publish this way. They might then feel that there’s no need to bother with a traditional publisher, because the “autonomous peer review” stamp of approval is enough; once they have it, they could just put their book on the web for free download. The RAE/REF would then have good reason to take monographs more seriously.

Casey Brienza (2011-04-25 04:29:47)
Benjamin, many thanks for the comment! I actually do not think that what I’m proposing should be started by less experienced academics unless they are in a field in which monographs are valued as a primary form of academic communication but in which it is exceedingly difficult to get monographs published in the usual way. Some literature fields might be an example. Otherwise, there is not enough incentive to submit oneself to an additional layer of peer-review above and beyond what an academic press would do. For sociology, I think the imprimatur of respected scholars and/or organizations would be essential for a such an endeavour’s success.

Benjamin Geer (2011-04-25 15:45:39)
Maybe the incentive could be that it would help you get a traditional publishing contract? You could use it as a kind of recommendation letter when selling your book to a publisher. Eventually publishers might decide to require it. Why do you think that senior scholars would need to be involved? As Shelley said, "Ye are many - they are few."

Casey Brienza (2011-04-25 16:11:45)
Many thanks again for the comment. Why do I think senior scholars need to be involved? The answer seems to me like it would be obvious. Let’s say I have a manuscript that academic presses are already interested in publishing. Why would I the author be even remotely interested in this new model of monograph peer review? The likely answer is that I wouldn’t...unless I had reason to believe that such a process would provide additional access/affiliation to luminaries in my field. Without good symbolic backing from so-called Big Names, only third-tier publishers who don’t already have excellent networks in place and the scholars most interested in this new model would be those who have no other obvious recourse to publication. There would thus be little field-wide appropriation of the new practice, and it would quickly become associated (rightly or wrongly) with an unseemly professional desperation, a sign of not of excellence but of mediocrity.
I think you need to take into account the fact that in sociology, as in other fields, there are struggles between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and that heterodoxy tends to come from younger, less consecrated practitioners who nevertheless have the same professional competence as their more consecrated, more orthodox rivals. Publishers are often forced to arbitrate in these struggles, by deciding whether a radical new idea merits the consecration they would give it by publishing it, or whether it is too risky and might damage their reputation as a publisher. Some publishers tend to play it safe and publish more orthodox work, while others specialise in riskier investments in avant-garde research. For the latter, the trick is betting on the right horse, given that it might take several years to find out whether the bet paid off (in the form of a book that, over time, comes to be seen as a pioneering work) or not. I would think that these sorts of publishers would be very glad to have a sensitive instrument for detecting promising avant-garde trends in the field, and that a system of independent peer review, run by and for younger academics, could be just such an instrument. It would cost them nothing, and would enable them to make a more informed choice than they are currently able to do, because manuscripts would come to them already pre-selected by the avant-garde. For authors whose work is really daring, this could make the difference between getting published and not getting published.

Well, Benjamin, you are officially oceans more idealistic than I am! Have you read Andrew Abbott’s Chaos of Disciplines? Whether or not one agrees with Abbott, though, I suspect that the biggest divide within the discipline of sociology from the point of view of practice is between qualitative sociologists who primarily write books and quantitative sociologists who primarily write articles, not between the ‘orthodoxy’ and the ‘avant garde’...whoever those two groups are. Incidentally, as someone who studies book publishing, I can assure you that the absolute last thing a press that cares even a little bit about selling books wants to hear about a possible book project is, ‘Nothing remotely like it has ever been done before!’

I haven’t read Abbott; I’ll have a look. What I’m suggesting isn’t idealism; it’s based on Bourdieu’s field theory. Since you study book publishing, I think you’d be interested to read his study The Rules of Art. There are indeed presses that seek out avant-garde work as a business strategy. It’s what Bourdieu calls a "long cycle of production": the publisher knows that the book will sell very few copies at first, but if it becomes recognised by peers, and eventually assigned by professors to their students, it will become a "classic" and pay off in the long run. Bourdieu argues, convincingly I think, that some publishers specialise in this. (In France it’s Les Editions de Minuit, which published Bourdieu’s earlier works.) Other publishers specialise in the "short cycle of production", i.e. publishing books that have a high chance of making a profit immediately. These two types of publishers correspond to the the "autonomous" and "heteronomous" poles of the field of authors.

Many thanks for what is has become an engaging discussion! Yes, I am quite familiar with Bourdieu. With regards to autonomy/heteronomy in the publishing field, I am in full agreement with John Thompson here, who argues that it just doesn’t work that way, not even for academic presses. My own research in a different sector bears this out. Since he is also in charge of Polity, which publishes Bourdieu in English, it’s hard to argue that he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. (Full disclosure: John is my PhD supervisor.) Anyway, we are now pushing right up to the limits of what I feel comfortable saying publicly. I’d be happy to continue the conversation in a different medium. Or perhaps someday we’ll run into each other in person.

Lesotho is surprisingly high in world gender equality rankings (8th in the world by the World Economic Forum, WEF, ranking). But does this gender equality translate into the lives of ordinary women? This article explores:

[1] Has Lesotho really bridged the gender gap?
A couple of months ago Steve Fuller posted [1]here about a radical educational project based in Lincoln. The [2]Social Science Centre (SSC) is a not-for-profit co-operative university which will offer a participatory and co-operative education in the social sciences, at the same level as mainstream UK universities, while being organized in a profoundly different way. The SSC is managed on non-hierarchical democratic principles with all students & staff having an equal voice in the functioning and direction of the organization:

The co-operative principles on which the management of the Centre is based extend to the ways in which courses are taught. All classes will be participative and collaborative, so as to include the experience and knowledge of the student as an intrinsic part of the course. Students will have the chance to design courses with the professors and lecturers, as well as deliver some of the teaching themselves with support from other students and the teaching staff. Students will be able to work with academics on research projects as well as publish their own writings. A core principle of the Centre is that teachers and students have much to learn from each other.

Those involved in the SSC are also engaged in fighting the coalition government’s higher education agenda, particularly with regards to the removal of funding for teaching social science in English universities. The SSC is a radical attempt to forge an alternative model for higher education, able to stand independently without being subject to the whims of marketizing politicians and managerial bureaucracies. In doing so, it will reconnect with the academic values which find themselves increasingly under threat within the contemporary university system: critical thinking, experimentation, sharing, peer review, co-operation, collaboration, openness, debate and constructive disagreement.

I’ve been fascinated by the SSC since I first came across it and, last week, I made the long trip over to Lincoln to attend a meeting for the first time. I came away determined to be actively involved in the centre: if you find the current situation within academia profoundly frustrating, as all manner of externalities impinge upon and distort the core functions of academic life, then you should support the SSC. It is a radical, optimistic and most of all practical attempt to discover alternative ways of teaching and learning within the present climate.

As well as those able to travel to the centre regularly and actively involve themselves in its activities, the SSC welcomes associate members who wish to support the centre’s work from a distance. On the [3]website you can join the centre and keep up to date with the SSC’s development.

1. http://

Casey Brienza (2011-04-26 20:56:31)
Mark, your first link has no URL. It seems like an interesting project...but I figure they are going to need excellent financial backing. This article immediate came to mind: http://chronicle.com/article/The-Lurethe-Risks-of/123724/

Defend academic freedom: Join thousands of UK academics calling for the release of Dr Beltran (2011-04-27 08:00)

Please join thousands of UK academics who have signed an open letter calling for the release of Dr Miguel Beltran: http://www.ucu.org.uk/Beltranopenletter.

Dr Miguel Beltran is a respected academic who has now been detained by the Colombian government without conviction for 22 months and who faces a trial for "rebellion", simply for publishing articles and conducting research on the conflict in Colombia.

Not only is this an instance of imprisonment, seemingly without due process, it is an attack on the ability of academics to exercise critical thought and freedom of expression without fear of retribution from the state.

Dr Beltran’s trial has been suspended on several occasions, once because of allegations that evidence against him had been manipulated. It is now due to begin again on 2 May. Please join thousands of fellow academics in
signing the letter demanding Dr Beltran’s immediate release [1]here.

You can read more about Dr Beltran [2]here.

2. http://www.ucu.org.uk/aboutDrBeltran

Royalty, weddings, gender, and class: What is so middle-class about Kate Middleton? (2011-04-27 12:20)

Don’t miss the Live Chat by Warwick PhD student [1]Sam Lyle at the [2]Warwick University Knowledge Centre (today, Wednesday 27th April, at 2 pm), regardless of whether you are interested, amused, baffled, or repulsed, by the imminent royal wedding.

The live chat will begin at 2pm (GMT), a link will be posted at the event page: [3]http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/alumni/knowledge/projects/live/ from 1.55pm (GMT).

The topics of the live chat will centre around the royal wedding when considered alongside gender and social class, and aim to answer questions such as:

- What has been the media and social response to Kate and William's engagement?
- Are we, as a nation, anxious about middle-class identities?

If you are not able to attend the live chat, a summary will be posted on the Knowledge Centre after the event.

Sam’s PhD work focuses on social class and gender, and in this live chat she will be helping us answer the question: ‘What’s so middle-class about Kate?’.

In November 2010, Sam appeared on local radio speaking about the engagement between Prince William and Kate Middleton (listen to the programme here:[4]http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00c3gqf#synopsis).
Critical Issues in Irish Society Network (2011-04-28 08:00)

[1]Critical Issues in Irish Society is a fascinating new initiative which aims to connect research students in Ireland. Started in early 2011 by a number of PhD students in the School of Sociology at the University of Dublin, it aims to improve the links in the Irish postgraduate community and provide a forum within which engagement can take place on the crucial issues facing Irish society.

They are hosting a successful seminar series on "Ireland in Crisis" looking at critical issues from a range of disciplines and perspectives - from the labour market to health. The website also features podcasts, working papers, abstracts and photos from the sessions.

Hopefully some Irish readers of Sociological Imagination might want to get involved. Even for those in the rest of the world, it’s a great idea and an illuminating example of the new kinds of connectivity which social media affords academic researchers.


University aspirations (2011-04-29 08:00)

![Superb cartoon shared from the [1]Guardian website.](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/cartoon/2011/apr/19/access-to-university)
Snapshots of Britishness (2011-04-29 14:51)

The [1]Idle Ethnographer loiters at a Royal Wedding celebration at Warwick University, striving to catch that elusive spirit of Britishness.


Will the royal wedding bring change, or cement tradition? (Photo: Idle Ethnographer TM)


Call for Papers: “The Evolution of Research: Adapting to Survive in the Changing World?” (2011-04-30 08:00)

Canterbury Christ Church University
10th Annual Postgraduate Conference
Friday 17th June 2011

This year’s CCCU PGRA Annual Conference theme explores: “The Evolution of Research: Adapting to Survive in the Changing World?”. Encouraging reflection upon how the ever-changing nature of the world may be mirrored in how we, as researchers, adapt our research in order to evade the possibility of extinction, this theme invites papers from an interdisciplinary range of perspectives. This Conference is free for everybody.

Please email your 200-300 word abstract, or any questions to the organisers of the conference:

Miss Laura Doherty (l.doherty111@canterbury.ac.uk)
Mr Robert McPherson (r.mcpherson147@canterbury.ac.uk)

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: Friday 13th May 2011

2.5 May

The future according to Google? (2011-05-01 08:00)

...What do we think the future hold for us? Some of these imagined futures seem ridiculous, others seem possible. XKCD have done a Google search and found out...
The Social Network (2010), directed by Aaron Sorkin, links the genesis of the now ubiquitous social networking site Facebook to an early, adolescent scheme called FaceMash. Developed by Mark Zuckerberg in 2003 during his days at Harvard, FaceMash was a 'Hot or Not'-type website which, with the input of visitors, ranked the attractiveness of female undergraduates at the college. Zuckerberg is also shown blogging about his algorithmic exploits on LiveJournal. Unsurprisingly, cinematic allusion to this now Russian-owned website evoked scattered exclamations and chuckles of nostalgia from the audience when I went to see the movie in the theatre. Although it had been
a mere seven years since Harvard slapped Zuckerberg with academic probation for overloading the university’s network, LiveJournal had already become the online equivalent of a cassette recorder.

LiveJournal is not the only website and online service which seems passé. Remember Usenet? Prodigy? America Online? Yahoo, MSN, and AOL instant messaging services? What about AltaVista, an online search service which, back when I first logged onto the Internet from my dial up modem (downloading at approximately 28 kb per second...when I was lucky and I didn’t get downgraded to 14 kb) in the late 1990s, was better than Google? Although Pets.com, for example, did not survive the bursting of the Dot Com bubble, others did—and although you might not use your AOL email address anymore—heck, if you’re young enough you might hardly use email at all—some people still do. Even [2]AltaVista still exists, albeit powered by Yahoo.

As those people who keep their AOL addresses and resist the rapid pace of change online surely know, there are costs to this lack of continuity. I too was an extremely active user of LiveJournal in the mid-2000s, and I [3]continue to maintain my site, though I am nowhere near as visible there as I once was. I have journal entries there of which I am very proud, and countless hours of effort went into that work. Besides my continued emotional investment in that virtual space, I know that other people are interested in that content, and I continue to get hits daily to certain popular entries. If I were to abandon or delete the site, this value would be lost. I’ve already ‘lost’ my first personal homepage, begun in 2000 or so, and although you often hear people talk about how the Internet never forgets, no trace remains, and no one seems to remember that I have been writing columns about manga since 2001.

There are potentially graver problems with this collective attention deficit disorder in the online space. In [4]Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations (Penguin Press, 2008), Clay Shirky argues that social networking tools facilitate forms of social organization which previously could be accomplished solely through well-established institutions. But he also argues that these tools do not realize their full potential until they become boring, so commonly and universally used that they become virtually invisible—and this, I would argue, in the current environment of speedy technological change, simply isn't being allowed to happen. Instead of [5]asking ourselves what the next Facebook will be, we need, rather, to stop following the latest social networking fashions and thinking instead about how we can invest our flighty enthusiasm into faithful stability.


Casey Brienza (2011-05-03 14:34:50)
FYI, some discussion of this column occurs here: http://caseybrienza.livejournal.com/833629.html
Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-05-02 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [1]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

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SI Interviews – Hilary Pilkington on Researching Drug Cultures (2011-05-03 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to [1]Hilary Pilkington, who has conducted two research projects on drug use in Russia, about researching drugs cultures.

The interview encompasses the findings of the research in Russia, as well as wider theoretical and methodological issues which drugs cultures pose for social researchers.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/syrgan/publications/podcasts/hilary_pilkington.mp3"]Interview with Hilary Pilkington.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/pilkington/

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Masculinity, power and height: Prince Charles (2011-05-04 08:00)

Yet another excellent post at [1]Sociological images, this time about the social manufacturing of men's height. It is examined through contrasting formal and informal family images of Prince Charles and the late Princess Diana.

This effort to make Charles appear taller is a social commitment to the idea that men are taller and women shorter. When our own bodies, and our chosen mates, don't follow this rule, sometimes we'll go to great lengths to preserve the illusion.

Read article and view images [2]here.
Does the New Welfare Bill Ignore the Reality of Disabilities? (2011-05-05 08:00)

In her article *Welfare bill ignores reality of disability* in the Guardian, Kaliya Franklin brings to our attention the proposed changes in the welfare reform bill, in particular the intention of replacing the currently existing disability living allowance (DLA) with a personal independence payment (PIP). Read Franklin’s article [here](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/joepublic/2011/mar/21/welfare-bill-disability-kaliya-franklin?&CMP=EMCSOCEML657This). Are her worries justified? **Tell us what YOU think.**

*thanks to [Kirsty Liddiard](http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/author/kirsty-liddiard/) for bringing this article to our attention*
Questioning the Big Society (2011-05-06 08:00)

An interesting polemic article by Brian Davey discusses the potential perilous effects of the ‘Big Society’ project on volunteering and the British welfare state.

Big Society: volunteering or rip off?


2. newint.org

More on Public Library Closure (2011-05-07 08:00)

On [1]23 February 2011, SI posted a link to an article discussing the danger of closing down public libraries as part of the government’s spending cuts. More on the same subject: here is a video account of the protests that took place as part of the national Save our Libraries day, 5th of February 2011, in Brixton Tate Library:


2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3adtf-ZRnF](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3adtf-ZRnF)
Follow SI on facebook and Twitter! (2011-05-08 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates


The Cool Kindle? On How (Not) to Sell E-Books (2011-05-09 00:00)

While wandering through a vast wasteland of over 200 cable channels the other night I happened across a BBC America marathon of Top Gear. While that show is in itself ripe for sociological analysis, what stopped me dead in my proverbial tracks was one of the advertisements shown during a commercial break. It was for the Amazon e-book reader the Kindle, and it showed a photogenic male and female duo debating the relative merit of printed books versus Kindles. For your reference, I have embedded a streaming copy from the company's YouTube channel below.

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/0vqeXaa1pw8

The establishing shot shows the two (young, white) actors standing in front of a neutral white background. The woman holds an ordinary hardcover book, while the man holds a Kindle. Cut to a close up shot; the woman looks at the man and says, 'That a Kindle? I only read real books'. 'Well I'm reading a real book,' the man protests amiably. They then debate the relative merits of 'real' books and e-books, focusing on how both can be read in intense sunlight. (A much-touted technological breakthrough of the [2]E-Ink screen used by the Kindle and some other competing e-book readers is that, unlike other laptop, tablet, or mobile phone screens, it is visible in all of
the same conditions that a printed page would be.) They then discuss how both can be used to keep your page. It concludes with the woman asking to see the man’s Kindle.

This commercial is striking for two reasons. First, it does not, as similar commercials from [3] Apple and [4] T-Mobile attempt to do in order to distinguish themselves from their competitors, suggest that the Kindle is in any manner functionally superior to a printed book. Both can be read in the same light conditions; both can be used to keep your place for you so that you can return quickly to your page after an interruption. The ad’s underlying message, rather, may be distilled into on simple message: Using printed books just isn’t cool.

Furthermore, it strikes me as no coincidence that the Kindle user is male and the ‘real’ book reader is female. The tech business is heavily skewed male, as is the proportion of early adopters of any new technology. Even Wikipedia is [5] mostly edited by men; populist suggestions that it is edited by ‘everybody’ is nothing short of symbolic violence. And given that [6] the fiction reader is more likely to be female, it comes as no surprise that coercing women into Kindle adoption should be one of Amazon’s marketing strategies.

The use of the term ‘real book’ to contrast printed tomes with e-books is pervasive; I’ve even heard teenagers use it. And this cultural mindset is only one of the hazards confronting marketers trying to convince people to lay down ‘real money’ for ‘virtual’ books that do not provide a universally superior experience of use. (I write the term ‘use’ because not all uses of books involve reading. One obvious use for which printed books are unequivocally superior is interior decorating...and before you laugh consider furniture company Ikea’s stake in this debate.) So instead, the geniuses at Amazon think it’s better to tell the world that print kinda makes you—yes, you, young lady—look dumb. Can they be serious? Haven’t they heard the pre-e-book era phrase ‘book learning’?


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1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/0vqeXaalpv8
3. http://is.gd/VTgIWN

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Open Access Journals: doaj.org (2011-05-09 08:00)

Let's use video to reinvent education? (2011-05-10 08:00)

If you're inspired by his argument then why not take a look at the [1]Sociological Cinema?

[EMBED]

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M Sheridan (2011-05-10 14:56:07)
This is AWESOME! My only criticism is that it actually can't happen in "every classroom in America tomorrow." Not all classrooms have the technology to permit them to do so, sad to say.
Case studies: migrant workers in Brussels (2011-05-11 08:00)

Too often the media talk about migrants in aggregated, impersonal terms. This [1]article by N. Nielsen is an exception. It presents several mini-case studies of economic migrants in Brussels and brings to the fore some of the subjective reasons for why the migrants put up with their situation. A lot remains to be said about the problem of adaptive preferences (Elster) which leads people to justify and assess the things that happen to them in relation to their prior experience (i.e., migrants may be putting up with bad treatment because it is comparatively better on some level than their life was in their home country). Still, it is important to acknowledge this side of the story.

1. [http://networkedblogs.com/gjxLw](http://networkedblogs.com/gjxLw)

Yuji Shimohira (2011-05-13 11:36:50)

In Spain, my home country, the ethnostratification is evident everywhere. We have a strong family culture which relies on families for the primary things (instead of relying on the state). However, as women’s employment increases (and they spend less time at home) those primary family functions become weaker, above all elderly care. Thus, migrants (women migrant, double bias) are replacing Spanish women and carrying out the sexist family tasks that Spanish women can no longer withstand but still culturally accept.

Milena Kremakova (2011-05-13 12:36:37)

True! The same has been happening in Italy and Greece, but is only just beginning in the "new Europe" (the 2004 and 2007 accession states). It’s a "wave" that’s going through Europe heading eastwards. There is definitely far more to migration than discrimination (although discrimination is a huge and painful issue). For one, it affects division of labour in the countries of migration in the way you described; and also think of what happens in the countries from which those domestic workers (women) arrive. just two examples - - i.e. children of migrant workers in the host country: [http://margeryosborne.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/2/3/1423738/qsehomeless.pdf](http://margeryosborne.weebly.com/uploads/1/4/2/3/1423738/qsehomeless.pdf) - effects on sending countries [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28438/1/GreeSE_No35.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28438/1/GreeSE_No35.pdf)

Yuji Shimohira (2011-05-14 18:58:17)

Thanks for the links. Yes, I agree with you; both origin and destination countries must be taken into account in order to study today’s migration phenomenon, and I would add that it’s inextricably related to what Negri calls ‘Empire’ (probably Wallerstein’s notions of ‘periphery’ and ‘core’ have become inadequate nowadays).

The Sociology of Star Trek Fandom (2011-05-12 08:00)

Daryl Frazetti writes about the culture of Star Trek fandom. Fascinating paper!


Now someone needs to write a paper on Babylon 5 and Star Wars... or have they already?

[3] x

Star Trek fandom in the media
What goes on the brain of a Buddhist Monk? (2011-05-13 08:00)

In a recent (very unsociological, but fascinating) meditation survey which has been carried out in New York since 2008, the brains of prominent Buddhist monks have been scanned in the hope of detecting any physiological changes that might be occurring during the state of tranquility self-induced during meditation. Dr Zoran Josipovic, research scientist and adjunct professor at New York University, who is heading the experiment, builds on recent research which has found that during meditation brains are capable of changing and optimising its functions in ways that have previously been thought impossible.

Read the BBC article [1]here.

Anyone to help work on SI? (2011-05-13 18:50)

Both the editor and the deputy editor are now in the last bits of their PhDs and the workload involved in keeping the site regularly updated is becoming a bit of an issue. Anyone fancy getting involved? If you think you might possibly be interested please do [1]get in touch.

Barry Schwartz on the paradox of choice (2011-05-14 08:00)

A fantastic talk by [1]Barry Schwartz which feels rather profoundly sociological for a psychologist. Or maybe SI is just haunted by the voice of Tony Giddens:

“What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day
social behaviour." (Giddens 1991a: 70)

[EMBED]


Completely agree with Barry Schwartz, but I would also add that many elements conceptualised as 'choices' don’t entail actual alternatives but they are still conceptualised as 'choices' in order to preserve what he calls 'the official dogma of all Western industrial societies' (example: the Republican Party and the Democratic Party in the States).

Lori McVay (2011-05-18 17:21:05)
I loved this lecture. Brilliant observations. But his description of the parent at the soccer game with all the technology distracting them from the actual game was, to me, a reflection of the dilemma women have faced for decades. "If I’m with my family and not at work, should I be?" The difference in this generation is that we now have ways to let our work into our personal lives, which in some ways serves to keep our personal lives further out of the workplace.

Women in science (2011-05-15 08:00)

As ever, XKCD comics make a good point about women in science, even though they don’t touch on the broader reasons why women have been largely absent from science
In a powerful op-ed written for The New York Times back in late 2010, bestselling novelist Michael Cunningham writes, ‘I’ve come to understand that all literature is a product of translation’. He explains, and I quote the article at length:
I’ve learned, from working with translators over the years, that the original novel is, in a way, a translation itself. It is not, of course, translated into another language but it is a translation from the images in the author’s mind to that which he is able to put down on paper.

Here’s a secret. Many novelists, if they are pressed and if they are being honest, will admit that the finished book is a rather rough translation of the book they’d intended to write. It’s one of the heartbreaks of writing fiction. You have, for months or years, been walking around with the idea of a novel in your mind, and in your mind it’s transcendent, it’s brilliantly comic and howlingly tragic, it contains everything you know, and everything you can imagine, about human life on the planet earth. It is vast and mysterious and awe-inspiring. It is a cathedral made of fire.

But even if the book in question turns out fairly well, it’s never the book that you’d hoped to write. It’s smaller than the book you’d hoped to write. It is an object, a collection of sentences, and it does not remotely resemble a cathedral made of fire.

It feels, in short, like a rather inept translation of a mythical great work.

The translator, then, is simply moving the book another step along the translation continuum. The translator is translating a translation.

Cunningham is more perceptive than perhaps he admits to himself; he has learned to live without perfection. Translation isn’t perfect because no form of human communication—from speech to smoke signals—is perfect. As long as we cannot read each others’ minds, some amount of misunderstanding will always be inevitable. And so, seeking to transcend that unbridgeable gap between ‘you’ and ‘me’, ‘writer’ and ‘reader’, we promise ‘faithful’ translations of literary works.

To the same end, we also create new mediated communication technologies: radio, telephony, television, the Internet. Then we invest our hopes in them; witness [2]AT &T’s slogan in the 1970s-80s ‘Reach out and touch someone’ or [3]Blackberry’s much more recent, near-identical one, ‘Connect with everything you love in life’. Then there’s Google’s oft-stated mission to make all of the world’s knowledge universally available (and searchable through Google).

At first, we delight in the new opportunities these technologies provide. Wow, I might think, I can communicate near-instantaneously with friends and family half a world away! Imagine the transformative potential! Yet disappointment is inevitable; none of these new technologies invests us with true telepathic powers, and sometimes we feel even more estranged from our fellow human beings than we were before. And so the cycle repeats; we seek out newer and better technologies in which to invest our hopes, and we are again disappointed.

Anyone who has read the first volume of the Japanese science fiction novel series [4]Kino no Tabi by Keiichi Sigsawa knows that reading each others’ minds is no panacea—and could in fact lead to a total breakdown of civil society. (After all, do we really want to know what everyone is really thinking all of the time?) In [5]Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication (Chicago, 2001), John Durham Peters argues that we ought to worry less about communication with others and more about care of others. If perfect communication is not possible (or desirable), we ought to give more focussed attention to the ethical dimension of media and communication. However, that would require that we ask very different questions about our media-saturated age...and quite frankly, I don’t think we’re quite ready.

[6]Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and Sociological Imagination's 580
Genetic Roots of Language (2011-05-17 08:00)

I love peeking into neighbouring fields to see what crops people are growing there. Here is a fascinating (if a little old, from 2003) article by Andrea McColl about the genetic roots of language, based on her research of Williams Syndrome and Specific Language Impairment (SLI). Read article [1]here

(and [2]here is a link to Caltech's Journal About engineering and Science, the archives of which are available and are quite interesting)

Use of a foreign language may seem to exhibit the characteristics of Specific Language Impairment. Kyoto, 2011. Photo: Milena Kremakova (Idle Ethnographer TM)
Breakthrough study: patient expectations affect drug efficiency (2011-05-18 08:00)

Scientific studies rarely venture into the realm of the irrational; yet it seems that that is exactly where we could find answers to many of the unsolved conundrums of modern medicine. A recent paper published in [1]Science Translational Medicine, is a notable, and exciting, exception*. The study claims to have detected a noticeable influence of patients' expectations upon the effectiveness of painkillers: in the words of of Professor Anthony Jones, Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, 'expectations are a key driver to pain perception and to placebo analgesic effects'. The study also identifies the specific regions of the human brain which are involved in the process.


Read (free) [2]abstract

Read [3]article on the BBC website about the study

Read (somewhat emotional, but nevertheless interesting) commentary at [4]naturalnews.com

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-05-19 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?
Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [1]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

21st Century Parenthood: two examples (2011-05-20 08:00)

Two interesting websites promoting a new image of parenthood with practical examples. GeekDad’s subtitle is Raising generation 2.0, and GeekMom’s tagline is Smart. Savvy. Social.

What is so interesting is the conscious effort to manage parenting according to certain principles - something that did not happen before when parenthood used to be taken-for-granted as a highly naturalised, and extremely gendered activity (in fact, in many cultures and countries it remains that way). However, this, I think, is also related to the marketisation of life which has to be managed and engineered into an increasingly efficient and structured string of activities.

I’d love to do content analysis and compare the two websites. But, however affable and awesome GeekMom and GeekDad are, they seem to retain a stylised version of the traditional view of moms and dads. My personal preferences are slightly different and go to equal parenting (of which, unfortunately, currently there are still very few public examples). Here’s one:

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/9ia3mh1M-Ks
University student folklore...and labour market uncertainty? (2011-05-21 08:00)

SI continues its traditional weekend review of 21st century student youtube-folklore with two songs. Our mums and dads played the guitar in scruffy student dorms full of thick nicotine smoke; today's creative souls practice in front of webcams and flood youtube with their sometimes genius produce. But, although essentially both are the result of the same impulse to make sense of the world (adjusted for the evolution of the technological medium), two things worry me (as a postgraduate). First, both songs in their humorous way deal with labour market uncertainty which has become pervasive. Second, they reaffirm stereotypes of university students as useless and unprepared for the ‘real world’. This was surely not the case in the previous generation.

The PhD song was composed and performed by Frans Prins and the video was made by Japanese students. The Kyoto photos give the rhythm and blues a fresh twist!

The Arts graduate song is less artsy and extremely sarcastic, and is bound to ring a bell with today’s situation in the UK:

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/iwcaTMAx18s

The Arts graduate song is less artsy and extremely sarcastic, and is bound to ring a bell with today’s situation in the UK:


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The (hi)story of stuff (2011-05-22 08:00)

X

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/gLBE5QAYXp8

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/gLBE5QAYXp8

'Story of cosmetics' (video) | The Sociological Imagination (2012-09-06 13:00:51)

[...] you remember “The Story of Stuff”? There is no need to extol the importance of historical context for those who want to understand [...]

Who reads poetry? (2011-05-23 08:00)

Jackie Kay of the Guardian argues the case of poetry in a lovely (if old) article. Perhaps she is right (even though I instinctively shudder at the sheer glance of something proudly entitled 'Costa book awards'. It must be the snob in me, and not the poetry-reader or the sociologist. The poetry-reader rejoices: surely, it must be good that anyone sponsors poetry. The sociologist muses on the shifting place of reading in contemporary life).
Who reads poetry? (Photographer: Idle Ethnographer TM)


Helen Ingram (2013-02-26 23:15:33)
I think it is very hard for poetry to be loved now. People don’t seem to value it anymore but let its one of things we study at school.

Milena Kremakova (2013-02-27 00:23:35)
Maybe..maybe not! for example, how about music lyrics? I think people will always love good poetry and a good story, and they come in various forms, not necessarily 'classic' ones

New Contribution to The Comics Grid (2011-05-23 17:30)

In lieu of a new [1]Mediated Matters column this week, I direct you instead to my contribution to [2]The Comics Grid, where I report on the Toronto Comic Arts Festival 2011, the premier indie comics event in Canada. In that context, I
interrogate the rights and responsibilities entailed by public, free-for-all events. Please check it out!


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ONS: Gender Pay Gap Narrows (2011-05-24 08:00)

This article by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), published in December 2010, claims that the full-time gender pay gap in the UK (for median hourly earnings, excluding overtime) has narrowed by two percentage points between 2009 and 2010. However, there must be some smart sociologists working at the ONS because they savvily acknowledge that

Although mean and median hourly rates provide useful comparisons between the earnings of men and women, they do not necessarily indicate differences in rates of pay for comparable jobs. Pay averages are affected by the different work patterns of men and women, such as the proportions in different occupations, their length of time in jobs, and whether they work full-time or part-time.

[1]

Gender pay gap narrows by 2 percentage points in 2009 and 2010. (Source: ONS - weblink)
Read the full article [2]here.


Additional screening: Friday, May 27th, 7:30pm at the Frontline Club.

Absolutely superb film. Best documentary about post-Soviet events I’ve seen.

(click on image to visit the film’s webpage)
More about the gender pay gap. Blaming women? (2011-05-25 09:00)

Following up on yesterday's post which showed some fresh UK statistics on the full-time gender pay gap in median earnings, today we continue with a more argumentative (if slightly older) piece by psychology [1]professor Hilary M. Lips of [2]Radford University, UK.

The article unveils the catch-22 embedded in women's occupational choices and claims that choice is the problem only on the surface, as:

...using the language of choice to refer to women’s career outcomes tacitly ignores the many subtle constraints on such decisions.

There are also deeply embedded problems such as the fact that childbirth strongly disadvantages working mothers, while it advantages working fathers:

women with children under 18 earn 97.1 % of what women without children earn, whereas men with children under 18 earn 122 % of what men without children earn.

Furthermore, Prof Lips argues on the basis of recent data, that even if women did choose to work more, the gender pay gap would still not be closed.

Read the article [3]here

If you're feeling particularly feminist, also read [4]this news report about ...well, an occasion which may not be typical, but the occurrence of which nevertheless somewhat dismantles the whole idea of gender equality in work. Completely, in fact.
The Trouble With Love and Sex (2011-05-26 08:00)

We’re not sure if this will be viewable to readers outside the UK (suspect not) but nonetheless it’s too good not to post it up here.

The first full-length animated documentary made for British television takes us inside the counselling rooms of [1]Relate, as clients wrestle with fantasies, impotence and infidelity.

Utterly fascinating to see and hear this stuff.

[2]iPlayer link

2. http://www.bbc.co.uk/i/b0113fw1/

Much Information, but No Context: The Twitter Trap (2011-05-27 08:00)

Enough talk about women and work this week, let’s talk about brains. Just joking. I am a woman, after all. So: a recent article by Bill Keller reminded me that there can never be too many articles worrying about what the new digital media are doing to our brains and behaviours.

[1]
As someone who belongs to that bizarre generation born just before the generation of young cyborgs, I doubt that my own brain will ever adapt to the splintered attention span increasingly required by the constant use of computers. Worse still, I am between both worlds: no longer able to sustain concentration for long enough to write even this short, unacademic paragraph without doing fifteen other things at the same time; yet not agile enough to manage this without succumbing to that contested condition aptly named 'internet addiction', or without bearing the burden of that constant low-level stress that has not even been theorised and understood yet (but which I know exists, because my health has seen its consequences). I like reading articles such as this one. They may contain more moral panic than sociological analysis, but they fulfil an important psychological purpose: I am not alone in being baffled by what 'outsourcing our brains to the cloud' has done to me.

[2]
Draconus: an Atari computer game from 1988, long before the age of Twitter. Atari did manufacture computers. Mine had the whooping RAM of 64 KB. The games came on audio cassettes and took 25 min to load (source of image: Atariage.com)


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Campaigning for the Public University (2011-05-28 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Gurminder K. Bhambra about her experiences as an initiator of the Campaign for the Public University. We discuss the crisis in the university system and the aims of the campaign, as well as wider issues relating to impact and engagement.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/public-uni.mp3"]Campaigning for the Public University

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The Coming Out of Dorian Gray (2011-05-29 08:00)

This year, the original ‘The picture of Dorian Gray’ has been published as an ‘annotated, uncensored version’. So, it turns out that the book that so many have admired had actually been censored!

[1]

Uncensored version of Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray was finally published by Harvard University Press in 2011 (photo source: Guardian.co.uk)

I am not sure I will return to it, just to trail the text to dig out the amended expressions. Perhaps I will just amend them in my memory (dear colleagues-psychologists, is such a thing as patching your own memory possible?). However heartily I may disapprove of book censorship, in this case I can say that the version available to me back in 1996 was still powerful enough, despite the lack of blatantly overt references to male or female mistresses; and I don’t believe that rereading the full version fifteen years on would make too much of a difference.

What I find genuinely interesting is how this year’s uncensored publication reveals from the distance of time how much change has occurred in what is socially acceptable. To a large extent, our attitudes to sexuality have become more relaxed. However, much of the change seems superficial: sexuality continues to be medicalised (only now it is not only ‘abnormal’ sexuality, but all of it, and even more so - [2] asexuality). The ready availability of ‘uncensored versions’ of adulthood (mainly on the Internet, but also on television and other media) also strongly determines the development of children’s minds. As someone said in a recent radio debate, the really worrying problem is not the sexualisation of children per se, but the fact that an adult view of sexuality is being superimposed too fast, and with too much detail, on the children’s own developing views, and this is harmful (part of the Moral Maze programme from 18 May 2011 is available on Youtube [3]here ).

* *
Look at Dorian Gray’s image above. Today, that image of a young man would most definitely not be universally considered ‘vulgar’ and ‘unclean’. Yet, this is exactly how it appeared back in 1890.

This is why I love images: just like mathematical formulae, they may not ‘speak’ directly at you, but if you crack their code, they will convey in an instant more rich interlinked information than a text ever can.

(which is not to say that text is redundant. It isn’t! The article in the Guardian has provides vital context: read it [4]here).

2. [http://www.asexuality.org/home/](http://www.asexuality.org/home/)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X18M4nFZNj0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X18M4nFZNj0)

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**American Morality and the Strauss-Kahn Affair (2011-05-30 08:00)**

A specified form of death penalty occurs in the following cases:- gibbeting (on the spot where crime was committed) for burglary, later also for encroaching on the king’s highway, for getting a slave-brand obliterated, for procuring husband’s death; burning for incest with own mother, for vestal entering or opening tavern, for theft at fire (on the spot); drowning for adultery, rape of betrothed maiden, bigamy, bad conduct as wife, seduction of daughter-in-law. *The Code of Hammurabi* (1795-1750 BC)

The stand that World Socialist Web Site took on the Strauss-Kahn affair in an article titled "[1]The serious questions raised by the Dominique Strauss-Kahn affair" has increased my respect for the online news center. The main point in the article is that “As of yet, no one has heard Mr. Strauss-Kahn’s side of the story.” That’s the point. No one knows what the alleged victim went through and no one knows what Strauss-Kahn has to say for himself. The stage is occupied by everyone else except the “victim” and the “victimizer” – I put these two words in quotes because they need to be clarified depending on what emerges from the inquiry.

[2] ×

The irony of the American system of life – because it is a "system" where you’re conditioned to be “free” and not a “way” of life where you get to reflect upon the meaning of freedom - is that ultimately there are no human beings in it. There are just empty slots that each one fills on a daily basis. These slots are prepared for the common people who just sit and go through the charade prepared by the government, the media and the corporations as if that were life. Somewhere at some point Dominique Strauss-Kahn, for whom I’ve no particular admiration happened to fall into one of those slots meant for the most unexciting sort you could possibly imagine. An entire system that is dormant and practically dead – "soulless" as Marx says - suddenly is filled with a new zest. The media, the courts, the lawyers, and the bored public – everyone is awake for a change – they’ve something to talk about. Interestingly these are the moments when they’re awake.

They’re not awake when their country is busy looting the non-western world; they’re not awake when the
poor and the working classes are humiliated and left to die without dignity; they’re not awake when the country is fighting wars against innocent civilians, destroying social landscapes, poisoning the environment through excessive use of fire power; nobody wants to speak on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of innocent people who have lost their lives and livelihoods for the kind of a system supported by the American government and industry across the third world; no one wants to know about victims of corporate plunder – all this is less interesting than the Strauss-Kahn affair: the fall of a man from a position of power like Oedipus the king through a tragic flaw. This is the kind of mythology that the Bible Belt reverends in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana and Texas desperately need to brainwash their unimaginative audiences.

Suddenly the media and the justice system want to show that they’re “human” and not responsible for millions of crimes committed on a daily basis against the powerless. They wish to show that a poor black woman from West Africa will be treated in a just manner even if it meant sending a rich white guy to prison. No. That’s not what is happening. The black woman from West Africa was already in a position where she was abused on a daily basis working at Sofitel Hotel that takes $3000 a night from its clients and pays the woman peanuts for the soul-killing work she does. The abuse by a racist and sexist system is well in place. The woman is already a victim of a classist and patriarchal society. No one could have apprehended this simple fact better than an IMF chief. Through conscienceless loans given to the worst possible criminals in the third world with the poor having to bear the burden of repayment the World Bank and the IMF have contributed to immense suffering and abuse of the poor in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The terrible poverty of Guinea is what sent the woman to end up as an “alien” working for Sofitel Hotel, New York. The IMF as an institution is the real criminal that we should be dealing with. That’s not what we’re talking about though.

Something is seriously wrong with the US as a society in how it judges a human being. The protestant streak in western morality shows each time there is the possibility of a high ground waiting somewhere to be occupied. The whole system is like a tiger on the prowl waiting for something like the Strauss-Kahn incident to happen for it to prove that it exists and it is not an illusion. It’s a ruthlessly exploitative system that wants to declare its innocence. Its guilt however is beyond doubt. The proof of the latter is the vacuous American leadership which can only be the result of a vacuous social order.

The Code of Hammurabi which says adulterers should be drowned if actually implemented would fill the seas of the world with dead married men. Most of the laws of the Old Testament come from the Code of Hammurabi and are primitive by modern standards. American primitivism which combines Old Testament religion with imperial politics is not very different from what we see in parts of the third world where fundamentalism and fundamentalists prevail. The so-called American way of life is a product of a primitive thinking and this aspect shows in their fanatical obsession with the moral high ground as in the Strauss-Kahn affair. There is no reason on earth to treat the man as if he is already a criminal. There is no reason to treat a criminal either as if he is not a human being.

No matter how great the crime, punishments are meant to make people useful to the society they’ve wronged and not to isolate and turn them into living dead with meaningless sentences spanning decades. If at all it is proved that Dominique Strauss-Kahn is guilty I think the woman should have a chance to express what kind of compensation she deserves and the kind of punishment adequate to the wrong done to her.

I definitely agree with what you are saying Prakash. The American society with its hypocritical way of judgement thinks they are serving justice in society while they are actually doing the opposite. The justice system is blinded by its liberalistic views of justice but never meets the needs of society and individuals and their cultural or religious needs.

Making a Case for Social Science (2011-05-31 08:00)

The Campaign for Social Science was launched in January this year by the Academy of Social Sciences. It aims to raise the profile of social science with the public, media and parliament at a time of great crisis and uncertainty. In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Stephen Anderson (executive director of the campaign) and Professor A D H Cook (former Pro-vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield) about the campaign, the context within which it has emerged and the issues it seeks to confront. The interview covers a wide range of topics including the status of social science vis-a-vis natural science, public misunderstanding of it and the need for public engagement, as well as popularisation, in order to increase its visibility in wider society. Find the Campaign online through its [1]website or [2]twitter feed.

1. http://www.campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/
2. http://twitter.com/#!/CfSocialScience

Making the Case for the Social Sciences: Crime | The Sociological Imagination (2011-08-18 12:03:06)

[...] published a podcast interview with two senior people in the campaign a couple of months [...]

2.6 June

Sociological Imagination’s first birthday! (2011-06-01 08:00)

So we’re taking the day off. Thanks to all the readers and, as ever, if you have any suggestions about what you’d like to see on the site or things we could introduce then please do [1]get in touch.
A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

Making New Spaces for Learning in the University (2011-06-02 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talk to Kate Arnold, a 1st year student in Sociology at the University of Warwick, about Left Overs, a project setup by undergraduates across a range of departments which is trying to break down the boundaries between speaker and audience, between organisers and attendees, so as to create a new space for intellectual dialogue and discussion outside of the pressures and pitfalls of formal institutional structures. As well as being fascinating and worthwhile in its own right, projects like this represent an opportunity for academics to practice public engagement within the university.
The (lost) soul of the post-92 Universities (2011-06-03 08:00)

The long-term effects of the cuts to Humanities and Social Science subjects are now starting to surface, especially for the Universities that are not part of the Russell Group. In a recent [1]article, Professors Gavin Poynter and Michael Rustin reflect on the case of the University of West London, where the Vice Chancellor has recently produced a Green Paper which in practice proposes to atomise the School of Social Science. The story of the UEL is interesting because it sheds light on the kind of scenario that most of the post-92 universities are likely to face in the near future, whereas university senior managers seem inclined to subject themselves to the agenda of the coalition government by marginalising and disbanding the "low cost disciplines" departments that no longer attract state funding.

In their strive for survival, most of the former polytechnics curricula are now staring to favour vocational training over research and teaching in the social sciences – a choice which seems to be at odds both with the current national economy and labour market and with the ethos of the institutions involved. In doing so, the post-92 Universities are in fact sealing their own fate by reducing the opportunities available to students who may want to study social science whilst charging up to £9000 tuition fees per year. What’s worse, though, is that by yielding to the principles imposed by the government they are also loosing their soul – their primary mission of making higher education accessible to students who are either coming from less affluent backgrounds or unable to enter elite institutions.

[2]

The future of online art? YouTube, the Kaiser Chiefs and Imogen Heap redefine the meaning of ‘audience’ (2011-06-04 11:31)

Two new exciting pieces of music-related news which seem somehow connected.

On 2 June, [1]YouTube introduced the option for uploaders and remixers to use the [2]Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY).

At launch, YouTube reps told me over the phone earlier today, only [5]the one license option will be available (as opposed to, say, a choice from multiple license classes which include options to disallow commer-
cial re-use). The thinking, they said, is to start simple. Multiple license classes might be overwhelmingly complex for casual users for whom this may be a first introduction to Creative Commons, the logic goes. The folks at Youtube behind the project consulted with people at Creative Commons. Not sure I agree, but it's a step in a good direction, and I applaud that.

As I am not at all an expert on new media, I don't offer you my commentary but instead selections from two polar comments from the article. [6]David Pescovitz thinks YouTube is doing the wrong thing:

I think it's ridiculous that YouTube offers only one CC license, specifically one that permits others to make commercial use of your work. The whole purpose of CC is to provide a very simple framework for a spectrum of "some rights reserved" licenses. IMO, YouTube's approach defeats the purpose of CC. Flickr's CC integration is a good example of what YouTube could have done.

...while [7]radicalbytes summarises a positive view:

[...] the non-commercial option ends up being very useful because it gives me some small amount of leverage to discourage or challenge people trying to leech off my videos in non-derivative, non-critical and non-educational ways. While fair use (or fair dealing) still allows for many of the tangentially commercial uses you mention.

The second piece of news was about the [8]Kaiser Chiefs (by the way, for some unknown reason, their website does not come up in a Google search).
They have just released their new album, The Future is Medieval (sic.), without any prior publicity whatsoever, and using an entirely new marketing concept. Buyers can listen to snippets of 20 songs on the website, compile their own selection of 10 songs, and choose the artwork for the album cover. They also get their own page on the Kaiser Chiefs’ website on which they can share their customised versions with other fans and get £1 for each one they sell. I do not find it surprising that a band wants to give its fans choice, or to sell more albums using a new approach. What is interesting is that fans are encouraged to exercise choice, and they are encouraged to do so using a combination of monetary gain and the opportunity to participate in the production: not only can you shape your album, but you also have the potential (although not overly likely) opportunity to sell it to other fans who do not wish to divert themselves with jigsaw puzzles, but simply want the music here, now. One result is that fans are thus automatically divided into two categories: the active builders and the passive perceivers. Admittedly (even the Kaiser Chiefs admit this in an interview on one of the BBC radio stations yesterday), most probably fewer people will buy ready-made albums. But they don’t know this for sure, and it will be exciting to find out.

Of course, many other artists have already been involving their fans in the creation of their art. [10] British singer-songwriter Imogen Heap is a notable example:
Imogen Heap at Birmingham Academy 2006. Photo: Lee Jordan (Wikimedia Commons, under Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license)

Imogen communicates with her fans through numerous online channels and shares publicly minute details of the writing and recording of her songs; and in March this year she began preparing a new record based on 900 "sound seeds", or samples of everyday sounds such as a "dishwasher door", a "bicycle" or a "burning match", all sent to her by fans.

YouTube, the Chiefs, Imogen Heap and many other artists are thus, to my mind, contributing to a subtle but powerful shift in the meaning of the concept of "audience". They are not inventing or imposing new responsibilities on the "consumers' of music" * - but recognising the already existing drive towards audience activation through listener's involvement in its creation. On a larger scale, this is also a shift back to syncretic art which has always been around, but was somewhat muted during the industrial peak of the XX century and the rise of the mass-produced culture industry.

I am pretty sure that [12]Adorno and Horkheimer (who wrote that awesome article unveiling the ugly skeleton behind the pretty face of the culture industry) would have bought the Kaiser Chiefs' album. Even I am tempted.
Max Horkheimer (left) and Theodor W. Adorno, notable members of the Frankfurt School of Sociology

While I personally disagree with the pervasive use of ‘empowering’ words such as ‘consumers’ or ‘users’ for anything these days, I use it because music here is clearly a market, as well as art.

1. http://www.youtube.com/
2. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/
5. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/us/
6. http://dynamic.boingboing.net/cgi-bin/mt/mt-cp.cgi?__mode=view&blog_id=1&id=3
7. http://dynamic.boingboing.net/cgi-bin/mt/mt-cp.cgi?__mode=view&blog_id=1&id=155641
10. 

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Tomorrow: join us to mark our 1st birthday! (2011-06-04 12:25)

Tomorrow, 5 June:
SI celebrates its 1st birthday on the University of Warwick campus, at 12 noon, in the Dirty Duck. All readers are welcome for a very informal lunch/chat/pint/ in the sun! If you don’t know us, look out for a small jolly group carrying an A3 sign saying "Sociological Imagination" written with an orange board marker (in true DIY style, just like SI itself).


Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-06-05 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the
‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

    nation-and-why-we-fail-to-match-it-today/cwrightmills488/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

The uncertain future of Higher Education: prisoners in an age of hyper-adversarial political culture?
(2011-06-06 08:00)

Many words have been recently spent on the future of Higher Education under the auspices (and diktats) of the coalition government. However, further attention should be given to the wider political scenario within which this modern tragoidía is taking place.

In this sense, [1]Peter Scott’s article for the Guardian underlines how the real obstacle to a fairer Higher Education system lies in the hyper-adversarial culture which is increasingly permeating the UK political arena. According to the author, in recent years none of the mainstream political parties has seriously endorsed the cause of a “free” and fair higher education system funded out of general taxation.

With hindsight, it is now clear that at the last general election higher education was deliberately kept off the agenda, because none of the competing parties was able to offer a credible policy on the issue. Since then, the situation has deteriorated, policy vacuity has taken over from each side of the political spectrum and, finally, the tragedy of HE has unfolded according to the plot penned by Mr Willetts. Therefore, despite its direct responsibility, the current government is not the only one to blame for the threats posed to the higher education system – rather, what really lies at the heart of the problem is the culture of reluctance spread throughout the entire political class.

Overall, what it would take to get Higher Education out of the slippery slope on which it has been pushed by the coalition government is not a mere change of political direction, but a wider and much more ambitious shift in the modus pensandi of the whole political system.

While we wait for such a cultural change to happen, Higher Education will continue to agonise.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/may/03/higher-education-political-games
Yesterday I attended a book launch at the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco for the new graphic novel [1]King of RPGs Vol. 2, written by Jason Thompson and illustrated by Victor Hao. The launch was a raucous, ad hoc affair in the middle of the exhibit space, plenty of greasy food and alcohol, a roleplaying game in the back room. I became acquainted with Jason several years ago and thought I ought to celebrate the start of my stay in the Bay Area by showing support. Yet what struck me most during the authors’ presentation was this time-lapsed video of Victor at work:

Naturally, I can only speak for myself here, but for me even watching this video from start to finish is exhausting. Victor claims that each page represents between two to three hours worth of work. The entire book weighs in at over 270 pages. You do the math. Victor has a day job, and during some of his busiest months he recalled desperately cranking out five pages over the course of weekend. And this does not even begin to take into account the time it takes to come up with over a dozen unique character designs, or the time that Jason spent writing, plotting, and sketching preliminary panel layouts for the story.

I would challenge anyone who dares suggest that what is documented in that YouTube video is not labour—highly-skilled, time-intensive labour. What is most saddening about spending time with creative labourers like Jason and Victor is how insecure the work is and poorly remunerated they are relative to the value of the work they do. This is a phenomenon has been noted by many researchers in the field of Media and Communication Studies, such as Mark Andrejevic and David Hesmondalgh, though there is still debate over how dire a problem this sort of precarious creative labour is.

In my view, the degree of the problem of precarity in the creative industries is not dependent first and foremost upon the individual’s subjectivity—i.e. ‘I don’t feel exploited!’—but rather upon the wider socio-political system in which this labour is embedded. In the United States, for example, with its gossamer social safety net, it is nearly
impossible for all but the most successful creators to be self-employed full time. Otherwise, you need a trust fund or support of a high-earning spouse. Meanwhile, just across the border in Canada, where health insurance is an entitlement and not a privilege, the bar is lower. In the course of my field research, I have come across American companies relying upon underpaid Canadian freelancers.

Regardless, I think Sennett (2006) is dead-on in his analysis in The Culture of the New Capitalism about branding and new forms of labour. Although King of RPGs is published by Random House, the largest trade book publisher in the world, it goes without saying that Jason and Victor must do lots of heavy lifting when it comes to promoting their published books. That YouTube video, and others like it, is their own creation, and they also spearheaded the production of promotional tee-shirts and jewelry also for sale at the book launch. I certainly think that comic book creators contribute more to society than, say, hedge fund managers, so I hope we will make sure that beneath a slickly branded surface, highly-qualified people like Jason and Victor are not just treading water.


1. www.kingofrpogs.com
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/5xveOjvu4fa

King of RPGs » Blog Archive » King of RPGs 2 at the Cartoon Art Museum! (2011-06-08 18:47:24)

[...] We were still setting up at 5:30 when the crowd started to pour in. For drinks, we had soda and beer. For food, we had a delicious dim sum from You’s on Broadway, donuts from Allstar Donuts (which I used to go to every day when Viz was located on Mission street), and a selection of green vegetables. Victor and I leapt right into a brief talk about how we ended up working together on King of RPGs, followed by a slideshow of King of RPGs art and sketches, with various behind-the-scenes trivia (Sample: “I tried to make the script for volume 2 more than 300 pages, so the editor would HAVE to split it up into two books! It was all part of my evil master plan!”) Maybe the best moment of the presentation was when Victor Hao showed off his high-speed drawing video of King of RPGs Chapter 7 Page 27. The audience applauded, and manga critic/PhD candidate Casey Brienza was inspired to write a post about Victor’s hard work, “Creative Labor is Still Labor.” [...]

COMING SOON on SI: Sociology of Sport Week! 13-19 June (2011-06-07 08:00)

13-19 June 2011 is Sociology of Sports week here on SI. The editors are eagerly awaiting readers’ contributions on any topic connecting sociology with sport.

This could be:

- an article
- a bibliography
- your own research profile
- a book or article review
• a podcast
• a research question you are working on
• an interview
• visual material
• a link to an interesting read
• or any other suitable material.

Please [1]email us any time before 13 June. We are looking forward to meeting you in a game of ...sociological imagination!

[2]

Sport (Photo: The Idle Ethnographer TM, 2006)

Yuji Shimohira (2011-05-31 12:34:27)
Great initiative! I've read very few things about sociology of sport. This can be my definitive chance.
CONFERENCE announcement: Gender and Sport History Symposium at University of Central Lancashire, 10 June 2011 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-06-09 14:40:58)

[...] we have been focussing on the sociology of sport (Next week is Sociology of Sport Week here on SI!), here is a last minute announcement of a really interesting conference in a neighbouring field: [...]
At a critical moment in time when the British Sociological Association has marshalled an impressive cast of luminaries to orchestrate the 'sociology and the cuts' blog and the Con-Dem coalition continues its relentless assault against public service provision, Susie Scott reminds us of the need to explore and elucidate the mundane and habitual aspects of everyday social life.

Making Sense of Everyday Life is a lively and informative deconstruction of three strands of quotidian sociology: ‘rituals and routines’, ‘social order’ and ‘challenging the taken-for-granted’. Scott brings much analytical insight and empirical clarity to these disparate strands across ten relatively short but highly illuminating chapters. Its contents range from the explanatory ‘theorising the mundane’ to the instructive ‘researching everyday life’. In doing so the reader is introduced to the founding ideas of ethnomethodology, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. It is to Scott’s immense credit that Making Sense of Everyday Life discloses the underlying rules, routines and regularities of everyday life through the prism of an eclectic mix of sociological examples and observations drawn from less rarefied fields. Scott is particularly strong on the sociology of emotion and in discussing health, illness and disability. There is, though, perhaps a casual over-reliance on the pop anthropology of Kate Fox’s Watching the English: the Hidden Rules of English Behaviour and a similar reticence to critique sociology’s drift towards what the amateur pugilist and MacArthur foundation ‘genius’ Loic Wacquant has described as its neo-romantic current.

Scott has produced a clear and concise introduction to the sociology of everyday life. It will appeal most directly to undergraduate students or the ‘lay’ reader with an interest in the overlap between micro and macro levels of social analysis. The book’s weakness, if it is one, is that it is curiously apolitical at the very time when public intellectuals should be striving to expose and make sense of political manoeuvres that seek to radically reengineer the role of the state and recalibrate the rhythms and routines of community life.

Martin Whiteford, University of Liverpool


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Engaging with the media as a PhD student (2011-06-09 08:00)

Sam Lyle is a third year PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. Her doctoral research explores class and gender in graduate employment from a Bourdieusian perspective. Sam is also a feminist activist and founder of the Warwick Anti-Sexism Society (WASS). Read more on her [1]ePortfolio. In this podcast I talk to her about her extensive work with the media over the course of her research, some of the difficulties involved and advice for other PhD students interested in getting involved in this kind of activity.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/sam-lyle.mp3"]Engaging with the media as a PhD student

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/samanthalye/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/current/phdstudents/current/samanthalye/)
(updated)CONFERENCE announcement: Gender and Sport History Symposium at University of Central Lancashire, 10 June 2011 (2011-06-09 14:33)

Since we have been focussing on the sociology of sport ([1]Next week is Sociology of Sport Week here on SI!), here is a last minute announcement of a really interesting conference in a neighbouring field: history of sport. thanks to Usha Iyer for bringing this to our attention. If any of you are in Lancaster, you might want to visit this symposium tomorrow:

Gender and Sport History Symposium

Hosted by

The International Football Institute, University of Central Lancashire

&

The British Society of Sports History

Friday 10th June, 2011
The International Football Institute, University of Central Lancashire will host the first Gender and Sport History Symposium which will be held at UClan in June 2011. The Symposium has developed through the Sport and Leisure History Seminar series at the Institute of Historical Research and the British Society for Sports History. [3]

The event has two key rationales. Firstly, it focuses on an area of sports history that has generated a great deal of new research recently, including a special edition of Sport in History, edited by Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, on the subject of women and sport, which was published last year and has recently been re-printed in book form. Our conference is intended to showcase some of the seminal work currently being undertaken in the history of sport and gender, highlighting new areas of and approaches to research in this field, which will also be discussed in a round table at the end of the day. Speakers at the round table discussion include Dr Joyce Kay (Stirling), Dr Carol Osborne (Leeds Met), Dr Fiona Skillen (UClan) and Dr Jean Williams (DeMontford). Secondly, the conference is being held in Preston (rather than at the seminar’s usual base at the Institute of Historical Research in London) with the intention of bringing together academics based in the North-West and working in the area of sport and leisure history. It is hoped that this symposium will initiate a series of similar workshops and other academic events in the region. This event has been sponsored by the British Society of Sports History.

Programme

Time

Location: Room 202, Greenbank Building, University of Central Lancashire

9:30 – 9.50
Registration and Refreshments

9.50 – 10.00
Welcome – Prof John Hughson, Director IFI

10:00 – 11:30
Panel 1: Women and Sport: Prejudice and Progress
Chair Prof John Horne
Speakers:

Catherine Budd (De Montfort University):
"Entirely out of Their Sphere, and Calculated to Unsex Them in More Ways than One!" Women and Sport in Middlesbrough, c.1880-1914

Carlos Caracciolio (National Institute for Geophysics and Volcanology, Italy):
Bicycles and Women (without Forgetting Men): Notes for an Italian History

Michelle Sikes (University of Oxford):
Absence, Emergence, Permanence: Conceptualising Social Change through the Prism of Women’s Running in Kenya

11:30 – 12:00
Break

12:00 – 1:30
Panel 2: Physical Culture, Gender and the Body
Chair TBC

Speakers:

Sue Ash (Oxford Brookes University):
'Fit' Women: Aesthetic Movement or Eugenic Exercise in Early Twentieth Century Britain?

Eilidh Macrae (University of Glasgow):
Conflicts of Fitness and Femininity: The Negotiation of Appropriate Female Space in the 1937 Scottish Fitness Campaign

Veronique Czaka (University of Geneva/University of Lausanne):
Constructing Gender through Gymnastics at School: Discourse and Practice in West Switzerland, 1860-1920

1:30 – 2:30
Lunch

2:30 – 4:00
Panel 3: 'Troubled' Masculinities and 'Subversive' Femininities  
Chair Dion Georgiou

Speakers:
Sergio Lussana (University of Warwick) 
'The Great Wrestler Can Win Laurels': Enslaved Fighting Contests and Expressions of Masculinity in the Antebellum Southern United States

Dr Jean Williams (De Montfort University) 
Speaking Softly: Roberta Cowell’s Autobiography, Gender and Identity

Dr Stacey Pope (University of Bedfordshire )
'White Shoes to a Football Match!': Female Experiences of Football's 'Golden Age' in England

4.00 – 4:30
Break

4:30 – 5:30
Round Table: Sport and Gender: Future Directions  
Chair Prof John Hughson

Speakers:
Dr Joyce Kay (University of Stirling)
Dr Carol Osborne (University of Cumbria)
Dr Fiona Skillen (University of Central Lancashire)
Dr Jean Williams (De Montfort University)

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS - youth studies (2011-06-10 08:00)

‘Stuck in the middle with who?’: mapping out and making sense of the missing middle of youth studies

BSA Youth Study Group One Day Seminar

Friday November 4th 2011, BSA Meeting Room, Imperial Wharf, London

Keynote speaker: Professor Rob MacDonald, Teesside University

Over the years, research in the field of youth studies has produced many important insights and has been influential in critiquing, shaping, and changing ideas, perceptions and social policies related to young people’s lives. The focus has, rightly so, oftentimes been on those more obviously situated on the margins of society and possibly at risk of becoming excluded or disconnected. This attention to social disadvantage has often been mirrored by an interest in ‘successful’ youth trajectories, leading to theorisations of the youth period largely dominated by dualistic notions such as ‘slow’ versus ‘fast track’ or ‘linear’ versus ‘nonlinear’ transitions.

It could be argued that not all young people’s lives pertain to this dichotomous approach, neither objectively or subjectively. France (2007) has noted the need to explore and develop our understanding of apparently ‘ordinary’ or ‘unspectacular’ experiences of youth, while Roberts (2011) argues that this gap in our knowledge represents a ‘missing middle’. Furthermore, the concept of ‘ordinariness’ and other similar themes emerged in a number of papers at last year’s Youth 2010 conference.

This one day seminar seeks to explore, analyse and theorise the experiences of ‘middling youth’ and identify the parameters of what might constitute the middle ground. We invite abstracts of 200 words (max) for either theoretical or empirical paper-presentations that will contribute to enhancing our understanding of this issue.

The scope of topics for papers this seminar is very open. Papers can draw on any aspect of research regarding youth identities, cultures or transitions that relate to the main theme of the day.

Abstracts are welcome from researchers at all career stages, including doctoral students.

A call for delegates will be sent out at a later date.

Deadline for abstracts is August 5th 2011

Please send abstracts or any questions to Steve Roberts (s.d.roberts AT soton.ac.uk)

Milena Kremakova (2011-06-10 12:05:45)
I must be getting old... the grammatical error in "with who" is bugging me!

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-06-11 08:00)
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mike-odonnell/charles-wright-mills%e2%80%99-sociological-imagina
tion-and-why-we-fail-to-match-it-today/cwrightmills488/)
2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)

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South Africa In Focus (2011-06-12 08:00)

[1]Andrew Feinstein was elected an ANC member of parliament in South Africa’s first democratic elections in 1994. He resigned in 2001 in protest at the ANC government’s refusal to allow an unfettered investigation into a £5bn arms deal that was tainted by allegations of high-level corruption. Feinstein lives in London, where he chairs the Aids charity Friends of the Treatment Action Campaign, and lectures and writes on South Africa. He is a co-director of the anti-corruption organisation, Corruption Watch. This podcast was produced at the time of the South Africa World Cup and I talked to Andrew about the social and political history of South Africa and how this has shaped the country which was the focus of such enormous international attention during the tournament.

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Usha (2011-06-13 14:58:38)
Very interesting. It’s an accessible description in a nutshell of post-apartheid South Africa. To most non-South Africans, the Football World Cup also shed light on another symbol of post-apartheid South Africa- the national anthem. Sport was identified as a major catalyst with potential to enable racial harmony and upliftment of blacks. In cricket, quotas were introduced in the national cricket team. Needless to say, the quotas did not meet universal approval. I think a comparative study of the ANC and the INC (Indian National Congress) would make for a fascinating study. From 1947 (independence) to 1977, the INC remained the party in power, winning every general election against a fragmented opposition for the same reasons as stated by Feinstein here.

Usha (2011-06-13 15:03:17)
Oops, forgot to add: There are further similarities between India and South Africa: - the yawning gap between rich and poor - sporting extravaganzas and other displays of soft power - massive regional and growing international influence (I believe BRIC has been expanded to BRICS to accommodate SA now?)

TOMORROW: Sociology of Sport Week on SI (2011-06-12 14:02)

Tomorrow is the start of Sociology of Sport week here on SI with a selection of articles, reading lists, and researchers’ profiles in this field. We hope you enjoy it!

On Visually-Mediated Professional Lives (2011-06-13 00:00)

If you currently live in the United States, or are one of The Daily Show’s horde of global fans, you have surely heard about the latest sex scandal involving New York Congressional Representative Anthony Weiner. If, though, you do not fall into either of those categories, there’s an off-chance that you do not yet know that Weiner recently got caught sending webcam photos of his, err, ‘weiner’ on Twitter to a young female follower. (Cue an interminable parade of puns and penis jokes in the media.) Further revelations of the Congressman’s online dalliances, some of them after his marriage—along with more ill-advised photos—were subsequently revealed.
Much of the resultant debate has focused on what, if anything, Weiner did wrong—and whether or not he should resign as a consequence. Most commentators regard his actions online as private peccadilloes, something between him and his spouse, not between him and the American public. [1] Glenn Greenwald, for example, castigates the media for giving attention to something that ought to have remained private. Others accept the premise that his tweets were his own business but think that he ought to be taken to task for failing to come clean about it immediately; indeed, according to [2] Thompson (2000), sex scandals become political scandals when politicians lie in public about their private lives.

This framing, in my view, is precisely the wrong way to think about 'Weinergate'. It is wrong to think that Weiner’s actions on Twitter as being an extension of his private life. The Twitter user name from which he sent those crotch shots was @RepWeiner. Not @WeinerDawg. Not @TonyIsLonely. It was a verified account and, crucially, an extension of his public presentation of the self as a national-level politician. Thus, this Twitter account was not to be Weiner at play. This was Weiner on the job...and last I checked, waving your wang at admirers you think are sexually attractive is not part of the job.

Those young women who followed him on Twitter? They were following Rep. Weiner, a politician whose platform and policies they admired. Even if they had a crush on him, it was the sort of crush one has on a celebrity, and it was neither incumbent upon Weiner, nor advisable, to respond. Social media makes it too easy for interpersonal interaction to become simultaneous broadcast. Indeed, cyberspace itself has become a quasi public square, and those who are watched most intently are those who are already famous. Anybody can 'streak the (virtual) green', in undergraduate-speak, but only those whom many are already watching will likely attract much attention. If Weiner had even a modicum of common sense, he would have known that.

Clearly, common sense does not seem to be his strong suit. But then neither does impulse control. @RepWeiner should have been Anthony Weiner, the professional politician. Yet there he was, doing very unprofessional things. It begs the question: Does he behave in a similar way in real life, too? An acquaintance in his district who has seen him on the campaign trail has suggested to me that he does, leering at attractive women and taking conversation down to the gutter. Last I checked, the ability to behave professionally and keep one's proverbial pants up in public—in-person and online—is a minimum requirement for most jobs. Perhaps Weiner shouldn’t resign—but I would argue that they shouldn’t have elected him in the first place.
Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and Sociological Imagination’s Mediated Matters columnist.

2. http://books.google.com/books?id=8QxITd6Ct6YC&printsec=frontcover&hl=en&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Sociology of Sport week on the Sociological Imagination (2011-06-13 08:00)

This week is dedicated to sport - from a sociological point of view. We hope this topic unlocks your sociological imaginations and that you enjoy the posts and let us know what you think, or send us short articles to publish.

[1] Sport (Photo: The Idle Ethnographer TM, 2006)

Welcome to the first post from this week! We begin by introducing an important collection on the sociology of sport.

**Sport and Social Identities**

*(edited by John Harris and Andrew Parker)*

[1]

Sport and Social Identities, by A. Parker and J.Harris (image: Amazon)
Andrew has kindly allowed us to post the Introduction to his chapter in the book (thanks!):

‘The chapter is entitled: ‘Sport, Celebrity and Identity: A socio-legal analysis’ and looks at the way in which the English legal system deals with the image rights of celebrity sports personnel. This is a relatively new debate in the sociology of sport and one which is extremely topical given current legal wranglings over privacy issues and celebrity sports stars. Below is the introductory section to the chapter:

Sociological analyses of sport and the law are notoriously difficult to find and, some would argue, urgently needed. Conversely, the theme of sporting celebrity has attracted significant attention in recent times both from social scientists and legal practitioners alike. Evident amidst this literature is the sense that sports stars represent a key site through which social, economic and legal change can be observed. Adopting a socio-legal perspective, this chapter assesses the extent to which current English law protects the rights of sporting celebrities amidst a rapidly changing social context. The central thesis is that whilst sports personalities can look to the law for protection in relation to their identities, the information upon which such legal decisions are based might be further enhanced by a consideration of wider social factors.

Read more about this book on the publisher’s website.
Andrew Parker is Professor of Sport and Christian Outreach at the University of Gloucestershire and founding Director of the University’s Centre for Sport, Spirituality and Religion. He was previously at the University of Warwick and was the Director of the Warwick Centre for the Study of Sport in Society (WCSSS). His research interests include sport and social identity, sport and spirituality, physical activity and schooling, and gender relations. In February 2009 Andrew delivered his inaugural lecture entitled: ‘Sport and Religion: Past, Present and Future’. To listen to the lecture please see the relevant link at the following page: http://www.glos.ac.uk/research/Pages/lectures.aspx.

Dr John Harris is Associate Professor in the School of Exercise, Leisure and Sport at Kent State University, USA. He has published work on women’s soccer and the gendered (re)presentation of athletes in the print media. Current research includes work on rugby and national identity in Wales, and the cultural politics of sporting celebrity.

4. http://www2.le.ac.uk/
5. http://insight.glos.ac.uk/academicdepartments/dse/staff/Pages/profandrewparker.aspx
7. http://www.ehhs.kent.edu/vita.cfm?id=626

SI Seminar announcement: Sociology of Sport at Warwick University, 20 June (2011-06-13 11:44)

SI Seminars: the Sociology of Sport

WHEN:

20 June · 16:00 - 18:00

WHERE:
R1.13, Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

As part of the [1]Sociology of Sport Week on SI, we have organized our first ever seminar! Taking place the day after sports week finishes (Monday 20th), it will involve a series of 20-30 minute talks from a diverse range of speakers who have done research into different aspects of various sports. This will be followed by an open discussion about sport and contemporary society.

Don't worry if you can't make it! We will hopefully record the event and post it online on SI, and we will also be live-tweeting from it (@soc _imagination). If you have any questions you would like us to ask, then please get in touch via twitter.

Speakers:

Channel Swimming - [2]Dr Karen Throsby, University of Warwick
Football - [3]Prof Wyn Grant, University of Warwick
Horse Racing - [4]Deborah Butler, University of Warwick
Football - [5]DR SAMAYA Farooq, University of Gloucestershire

(click on the image to view full-sized poster)
SI Seminar #1: Sociology of Sport, 20 June 2011

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/throsby/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/staff/grant/
5. http://insight.glos.ac.uk/academicdepartments/dse/staff/Pages/drsamayafarooq.aspx

[...] Deborah speak about her research at the Sociology of Sport Seminar (20 June, Warwick [...]

Sam Farooq on Religious Masculinities in Sport | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-01 08:49:34)
[...] this talk from SI's Sociology of Sport seminar on 20 June 2011, Dr Sam Farooq discusses religious masculinities in sport Sam Farooq gives a talk about [...]

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Just a quick post to let you know of a new project: *Warwick Oral History Network* which launches at Warwick tomorrow, 14 June 2011.

The network is funded by the [1]Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) at Warwick.

*Read the programme [2]here.*

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/)
2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/networks/oralhistory/launchseminar](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/networks/oralhistory/launchseminar)

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SI SPORT WEEK #2-1: The Political Economy of Football (2011-06-14 08:00)

[1] The commercialisation of football is a widely remarked upon phenomena and yet the causes driving this process remain too little understood. In this podcast Professor Wyn Grant tackles the political economy of football. In doing so he explores a variety of topics including: the impact of globalization upon football, the divergence between higher and lower division football clubs, the significance of ever increasing transfer fees, different models of club ownership across the globe and the financial sustainability of football clubs under current conditions.
The Political Economy of Football – Wyn Grant | The Sociological Imagination (2011-08-31 08:01:55)

 [...] this talk from the SI's Sociology of Sport seminar, Professor Wyn Grant, who we also interviewed on this topic some time ago, talks about the political economy of football. If you find this [...]
SI SPORT WEEK #2-3: Black Power Salute 1968 (2011-06-14 16:00)

During their medal presentation in the Mexico 1968 Summer Olympics, the two 200-metre gold and bronze winners, Tommy Smith and John Carlos respectively (both were American and black) gave what became known as [1]the Black Power Salute. It became an iconic political statement.

Forty years later, in 2008, the BBC made a documentary about it featuring commentary from well-known academic sociologists of 'race', politics and sport like Ben Carrington and Harry Edwards and others. It has some excellent interviews with the people centrally involved and substantial footage from the 1960s of the main black people involved in planning these protests, of the athletes themselves and old footage of the racist ruler of International Olympics at that time- Avery Brundage. My only complaint is that it leaves the story of the white Australian silver medallist completely untouched as he also supported their gesture, coming as he did from a racist country himself...

Watch the documentary on googlevideos below:

[EMBED]


SI SPORT WEEK #3-1: Gender Segregation in Sports (2011-06-15 08:00)

Gender segregation in sports is usually seen as entirely natural and a fact of life. Yet in this challenging interview [2]Dr Eric Anderson explores the social and economic roots of gender segregation in sport before questioning whether we have any real grounds for treating gender segregation differently to racial segregation. In doing so he offers an account of the impact that gender segregation in sports has on wider society and sketches out a few ideas about what a gender integrated sports might look like.
Gender Segregation In Sports


SI SPORT WEEK #3-2: Gender in sport. Beware surfing stereotypes! (2011-06-15 12:00)

For all sociologists of sport out there: a new article which discusses the pervasiveness of caricatured gender stereotypes in surfing.


1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/may/20/surfing-gender
2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/cori-schumacher
3. http://www.guardian.co.uk/

SI SPORT WEEK #3-3: Gender in sport magazines (2011-06-15 16:00)

Brilliant short analysis of the differences in representation of sportsmen and sportswomen in magazines. Read [1]here

[2]
Sportsman (Source: Mirror.co.uk)

P.S. The same seems to apply to google image searches for "sports men" and "sports women"... those people writing the magazines are not stupid. They are just exploiting what the public wants. It took SI editors a few minutes of diligent searching to come up with two images that would prove the opposite. Plus, the man’s image is actually more sarcastic than sexy; and the woman’s image is from a 'female focussed sports magazine'.


Usha (2011-06-16 00:29:15)
That was a great read. And the Playing Unfair video was insightful, too. Also, agree with your comments.

jasa epoxy lantai jakarta (2019-09-14 19:49:10)
Simply wish to say your article is as astonishing. The clearness in your publish is just nice and i can suppose you are an expert on this subject. Fine along with your permission allow me to take hold of your RSS feed to stay updated with coming near near
Most people may have heard about Arkle, Red Rum, even Desert Orchid. How many people will have given a thought about the individuals who made sure these equine athletes made it the racetrack, fit and ready to race? It is these individuals, known collectively as 'stable lads' and yes, quite a high percentage of them are women, that I am interested in. Thus my research is investigating the working identities of stable staff who work, for very little reward, in the horseracing industry. Like in many male-dominated occupations and sporting arenas the racing field itself is male dominated, gendered masculine and is struggling to move away from the feudalistic employment relations that once governed the workforce. Women were once excluded from the workforce as entry was controlled by employers, the racehorse trainers through indentured apprenticeship. A knowledge of horses was unnecessary - trainers wanted young boys who were very small and light in weight, no more than 5stone at 14, and no taller, if possible than 5’7”. Indentured apprentices if good enough were given the opportunity to race ride, as apprentices (trainee jockeys) although being indentured did not automatically guarantee the right to race ride. As the supply of
small, light boys began to dwindle employers had to look elsewhere for their workforce which was when women, in
the late 1960’s, early 1970’s started to be seen working as ‘stable lads’ although they were not legally permitted to
race ride. Indentured apprenticeship was abolished in 1976 during a period when wide reaching legislation in the
form of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) amongst other things was introduced. Racing’s ruling body, The Jockey
Club had to accept the fact that women could now legally be jockeys.

The racing industry now employs migrant labour to help fill its labour force. Young entrants, racing’s potential
workforce, if between the ages of 16-22 must be signed onto a government funded training scheme known as a
modern apprenticeship but, and this is an important but, it has nothing to do with being an apprentice jockey! Rather
it refers to a type of training that was once synonymous with producing skilled craftsmen and in some occupations,
craftswomen. Interestingly 60 % of the intake at the British Racing School (BRS) are women. The BRS is one of the
two specialist training providers for the racing industry where modern apprentices over a nine week period complete
the first part of their training before being found employment in a racing yard. What is perhaps more salient is that
a very small proportion of these young women will become apprentice jockeys and an even smaller proportion will
become professional jockeys when compared to their male counterparts.

Deborah Butler is PhD candidate at the University of Warwick. Her research is on employment and training
in the horse racing industry.

Read more about Deborah’s research here.

Read an article about Deborah and her work on Voices for Horses.

Hear Deborah speak about her research at the Sociology of Sport Seminar (20 June, Warwick University).

   tler/deborah/
2. http://www.warwick.ac.uk/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/newsandevents/pressreleases/research_new_degree/
   fulfil-dreams-of-becoming-jockeys.html
   ick-university-20-june/
Team sports are often seen a traditionally homophobia arena within society. In a second interview with Dr Eric Anderson, he argues that this widespread assumption is increasingly inaccurate. Through analysing the relationship between sport and wider society he offers an account of how wider cultural and social changes in relation to homophobia are starting to manifest themselves in more relaxed and tolerant attitudes within team sports. Drawing on his extensive empirical research he argues that young people today are increasingly comfortable with the presence of homosexuality and that all the evidence suggests this trend looks set to continue. He also discusses his own experiences as America’s first openly gay high school coach.

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Event announcement: Sport and Leisure History Seminar (2011-06-16 16:00)

Sport and Leisure History Seminar Summer Symposium: 'Sport and Leisure in Suburbs and New Towns: Communities, Identities and Interactions'

will take place on Thursday 21 - Friday 22 July at the Institute of Historical Research in London

You can find the full announcement with the programme and other information here at [1]H-net

SI SPORT WEEK #5-2: Confetti of Empire: The Conquest of Everest in Nepal, India, Britain, and New Zealand (by Usha Iyer) (2011-06-17 08:00)

Usha Iyer discusses the conquest of the Everest. Is the story of Everest purely a victory of humans’ pursuit for excellence and physical endurance, or also about British imperialism and decline of empire, nationalism and fluid nationality?

Visit [1]Usha’s webpage.

Read [2]Usha’s other articles on SI.

Click on the title to read on ...
This brief piece seeks to introduce the myriad political narratives that attached themselves to the first-ever successful conquest of the Everest on May 29, 1953. This is by no means an exhaustive discussion or analysis, but an attempt to shed light on the complexities that accompanied the completion and celebration of the historic feat. The references mentioned below offer an excellent start to further research into this area.

The expedition was led by Col John Hunt (later, Sir Hunt). The final leg to the summit was carried out by Edmund Hillary (later, Sir Hillary) and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay.

Tenzing was born in Tibet, raised in Nepal and had lived for over two decades in India prior to the 1953 expedition. Accordingly, he saw his own nationality as fluid. Col John Hunt was Welsh and a member of the British army. He was born in India and had served in the Indian police. Edmund Hillary was from New Zealand and at that time, New Zealand saw itself primarily as British. *Conquest of Everest*, the official film of the ascent, opens with a photograph of Tenzing holding aloft his ice axe, from which the flags of Britain, Nepal, India, and the United Nations flutter in the wind.

Immediately after the expedition, the victorious team arrived in Kathmandu to a tremendous reception. To Nepal, Sherpa Tenzing’s part in the Everest success perhaps suggested an assertion of their Nepali identity in response to European domination and Indian influence on their country. Celebrations had largely nationalistic overtones. In fact, it is reported that some pictures used by Nepali revellers portrayed Tenzing as having reached the summit first with the flag of Nepal in one hand and hauling up an exhausted Hillary with the other.

India also saw Tenzing as her own and appeared to take immense pride in his achievement. The victorious team was feted extensively and eventually also by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. It has been reported that Nehru rejected knighthood for Tenzing (conferred on Hunt and Hillary) in keeping with independent India’s rejection of British honours, thereby forcing a fierce republican ‘Indian-ness’ on Tenzing and speaking for him.

For Britain, which had led this expedition, this victory came at a time of great flux. The empire appeared to be in decline and Britain’s standing on the post-war world stage appeared to have been eclipsed by the USA and other powers. This victory seemed the perfect recipe to rejuvenate the imperial spirit and pride in Britain’s record of scientific and technological excellence. Coincidentally, news of the successful expedition reached London on the morning of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II (June 2, 1953). The partnership of Hillary and Tenzing led by Col Hunt seemed tailor-made for the moment when Britain attempted to redefine the Empire as a British-led “Commonwealth”. Newspaper headlines in Britain evoked comparisons with Queen Elizabeth I, Francis Drake and the Golden Hind and hailed the Coronation Day as the beginning of a new Elizabethan era, marked, as in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, by scientific and technological innovation and exploration. Col Hunt and the other climbers were received in London by the Secretary of State for War, Brigadier Anthony Head, indicating the importance of the event.

In New Zealand, the bee-keeper Edmund Hillary’s personality and success shaped and reinforced perceptions of masculinity and identity in New Zealand.

There was also a press conference in London in which the interviewer asked a pointedly leading question to Col John Hunt about “empty arguments over who got to the top first”. Hillary described how Tenzing had saved him from slipping into a crevasse but both he and Col Hunt were quick to emphasise that the conquest of Everest had been a team effort and that questions about who reached first ought to be dismissed. In order to diffuse a potential crisis triggered by Nepali depictions of the victory, diplomats and ambassadors (especially in Britain and India) worked behind the scenes with the team to ensure that politically correct messages were delivered everywhere.
Col Hunt displayed an ice axe with the Nepali, Indian and British flag on arrival in Kathmandu, New Delhi and London respectively. It has been hinted that there may have been some degree of collusion and agreement between the Everest Committee (Royal Geographical Society/Alpine Club) and the British Pathé news crew at London airport on questions to be asked during the press conference [8]. The question on ‘who reached first’ was clearly designed to dispel any thoughts on one-upmanship.

The British Pathé news clips on the successful Everest expedition of 1953 tell us a fairly straightforward story of courage, excellence and public joy. However, as academic works on the topic suggest, a lot remained untold about the context and implications of events. Besides scientific and technological excellence, the story of the Everest expedition of 1953 reeks of imperial pride and decline, nationalism and fluid nationality. Britain, Nepal and India were all eager to appropriate this expedition to make nationalistic statements. What we hear and see are perhaps approved versions of reports on celebrations. For instance, in spite of the praises heaped on him, Col John Hunt was reprimanded by the War Office for ‘endorsing’ a nationalist party in his native Wales during a ceremony in his honour whilst still a serving member of the British army. What we also don’t grasp is that Tenzing Norgay arrived in London wearing clothes given to him by PM Nehru out of his own wardrobe (see especially, Buckingham Palace garden party clip), thereby adding his touch to the occasion, even if a seemingly innocuous one. All of this suggests to me that whilst frantic efforts were made to prevent politicisation and misappropriation of the event, various political narratives succeeded in attaching themselves to it.

Finally, while top-level officials, diplomats and news-reporters colluded to present a sanitised version of events, how did the common people in these three countries react? Presumably, with joy and pride as clips of crowds in Kathmandu, New Delhi and London show. A glimpse of the position occupied by the expedition in public consciousness that year was revealed by these newsreel clips from 1953 [9].

Notes:

[1] Title borrowed from article by Peter Hansen. See references.


No, they are not the Everest conquerors, just part of a grand fancy dress parade...

References:


Related Links:


1. http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/ssto/research/usha_lyer.php
SI SPORT WEEK #5-1: Rock Climbing and Gendered Identity (Victoria Robinson) (2011-06-17 08:00)

Today we present a selection of sociological resources on rock climbing and introduce the work of Victoria Robinson on climbing identities.

[1]
Do Not Climb! (Model: M. Mihaylova. Photo: Idle Ethnographer TM)

To begin with, the Special edition of Sheffield Online Papers in Social Research, on ‘Masculinities and The Extreme Sport of Rock Climbing’, August, No. 10, is a must ([2]Link to Journal)

The editor of the special edition, Victoria Robinson, also published an excellent book on the topic:

Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport: Male Identity and Rock Climbing

by Victoria Robinson*
‘Rock climbing is one of today’s most popular ‘extreme sports.’ Although many women are involved, the sport retains a particularly male image and culture. Everyday Masculinities and Extreme Sport presents the first in-depth study of rock climbing in the UK, analysing what it reveals about the contemporary construction and performance of masculinity through sport.

One of the key concerns of the book is the relationship between everyday masculinity and the pursuit of the extraordinary through sport. Drawing on insights from sociology and gender studies, the book challenges traditional approaches to the analysis of sport.’ (see more on the publisher’s website)

Victoria Robinson is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Sheffield. She received her PhD from the University of Manchester and has held posts at the Universities of Manchester and Newcastle. Dr Robinson’s main research interests are in the areas of sexualities, especially heterosexualities; men and masculinities and gender/feminist theory, particularly debates around Gender/Women’s Studies and gender theory in the academy. Other books she authored include Mundane Heterosexualities: From Theory to Practices, with J. Hockey and A. Meah, (Palgrave, 2007) and she has co-edited, with D. Richardson the third edition of the best selling text book Introducing Gender and Women’s Studies, (Palgrave, 2008).

(visit Victoria Robinson’s homepage at the University of Sheffield)


6. robinson.html
7.
SI SPORT WEEK #6: Sport, history and humour. (2011-06-18 08:00)

As an Eastern European researcher who researches Eastern Europe... you guessed it. The Idle Ethnographer could not stop herself from contributing a tongue-in-cheek (or, rather, ball-in-net) post to the SI Sport Week. This is yet another photo from the long collection of "photos I wish I had taken". It reminds me of the film [1]Goodbye, Lenin! and of [2]Michael Jordan (very popular in Bulgaria in the early 1990s) all at once.

[3]

Lenin scores. image found somewhere on the web, author unknown.

Add SI on Facebook and Twitter! (2011-06-18 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates


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TOMORROW: Sociology of Sport Seminar! (2011-06-19 08:00)

SI Seminars: the Sociology of Sport

WHEN:

20 June · 16:00 - 18:00

WHERE:
As part of the [1]Sociology of Sport Week on SI, we have organized our first ever seminar! Taking place the day after sports week finishes (Monday 20th), it will involve a series of 20-30 minute talks from a diverse range of speakers who have done research into different aspects of various sports. This will be followed by an open discussion about sport and contemporary society.

Don't worry if you can't make it! We will hopefully record the event and post it online on SI, and we will also be live-tweeting from it (@soc_imagination). If you have any questions you would like us to ask, then please get in touch via twitter.

Speakers:

Channel Swimming - [2]Dr Karen Throsby, University of Warwick
Football - [3]Prof Wyn Grant, University of Warwick
Horse Racing - [4]Deborah Butler, University of Warwick
Football - [5]DR SAMAYA Farooq, University of Gloucestershire

(click on the image to view full-sized poster)
SISeminar #1: Sociology of Sport, 20 June 2011

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/throsby/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/staff/grant/
5. http://insight.glos.ac.uk/academicdepartments/dse/staff/Pages/drsmayafarooq.aspx
A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Oral History Network at Warwick University (2011-06-21 08:00)

Last week we wrote about a new event that took place at Warwick. Here is a bit more info on this exciting new project:

'The Warwick Oral History Network aims at developing a network of researchers from a variety of disciplines, who are interested in doing oral history research, or who are currently working on an oral history project. It engages both with theoretical and practical issues involved in interviewing and life writing.

Following on the interdisciplinary seminar on [1]'Challenging dominant discourses of the past: 1968 and the value of oral history’, held at the IAS on 23 February 2011, the network brings together established scholars, early career researchers, postgraduates as well as undergraduate students, both from in and outside the University of Warwick.'


Visit the [4]webpage of the Oral History Network for more information, resources, and links.

The Impact Agenda in the Arts and Humanities (2011-06-22 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Dr Nadine Lewycky, Arts Impact Officer at the University of Warwick about what her work involves and broader issues relating to the impact agenda for the arts and humanities. For more information about her work see [1]here.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/arts-impact.mp3"]The Impact Agenda in the Arts and Humanities

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/rss/impact/

When Sociology Was Cool (2011-06-23 08:00)
I got my doctorate in sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the exact same place C. Wright Mills got his doctorate in sociology. I know this because we shared some of the same professors there and, even more importantly, because when I had to file a little index card in the Sociology Office with the title of my dissertation on it, I saw C. Wright Mills’ little index card with title of his dissertation on it, tucked away in the exact same metal box.

I couldn't believe that it was there, that someone hadn’t taken it. Graduate students in sociology love C. Wright Mills. He, along with the 1930s Chicago School and Harold Garfinkel are the ones who lure us into sociology, who excite us with the idea that the modern world is this great mystery to be solved and that there is some measured, logical explanation as to why people treat one another the way they do.

C. Wright Mills was a genius at this. First, because he showed us how sociology could lay bare the secret workings of the world, and second, because he believed that everyone, no matter who they were or what their sociological imagination happened to be, had a place in this academic, scientific discipline. That their stories and ideas about the world and how it worked belonged there.

Few sociologists at the time believed this. In fact, in 1959, the year Mills' third major work, *The Sociological Imagination*, was published, most sociologists were preoccupied with refining the methods, which would allow them to analyze and write about people's lives with the least amount of error and greatest amount of certainty; a preoccupation, which left little time to worry about whether or not the things they wrote about were actually reflective of the ways people lived, let alone the ways people thought about the way they lived.

Mills staked his theories right in these complications and contradictions and with this effort challenged sociologists to not so much relax the methodological rules of their discipline, but to allow themselves a little poetic license. And as simple as this idea may seem, it was, for many sociologists, a revelation and a push to make sociology matter.

That, to my mind, is one of the few moments in the history of sociology when the discipline was made cool. That moment when C. Wright Mills told us that our analyses of the world should matter. That moment when someone took a picture of him driving his motorcycle to class.

End Note: Cool is a state of being, which describes the way a person represents themselves to the world. To be cool is 1) to be present in the day and to notice what’s happening around you 2) to search for and recognize beauty; 3) to express this beauty in words and images and especially sounds; 4) to be kind, open, generous and understanding to yourself, as well as the people you encounter, even those who may not be kind, open, generous and understanding towards you; 5) to not only exhibit grace under pressure in moments of extreme hardship or duress, but to figure out ways to survive and in some instances, even thrive in moments of extreme hardship or duress; and, finally, as in that late 1990s Keds Running Shoe Ad posted above, 6) a way to describe people, places and things that are "of the moment," "hip," and notably stylish. I would suggest C. Wright Mills worked to document 1-5 and was 6, especially in the famous photograph of him driving his motorcycle to class. Again, it’s right here.

1. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-XyCKZuwF5B0/ThR_XBYrutI/AAAAAAAADd0/1NDLMwvdgJQ/s1600/Cool.jpg
2. http://onestoryhigh.blogspot.com/2012/02/one-story-high-it-was-just-little-over_18.html
The Idle Ethnographer (2011-06-23 12:41:12)
Did you really? No, I believe, I’m just fascinated. I wonder how, and whether, we could make sociology cool again. Anyway, this is my favourite post on SI!

[...] Definition of Cool: To be cool is 1) to be present in the day and to notice what’s happening around you 2) to search for and recognize beauty; 3) to express this beauty in words and images and especially sounds; 4) to be kind, open, generous and understanding to yourself, as well as the people you encounter, even those who may not be kind, open, generous and understanding towards you; 5) to not only exhibit grace under pressure in moments of extreme hardship or duress, but to figure out ways to survive and in some instances, even thrive in moments of extreme hardship or duress. 6) Cool is also a way to describe people, places and things that are “of the moment,” “hip,” and notably stylish. Audrey Sprenger 2011 [...] 

[...] room, I am in Oaxaca ..... ahhhh, one of my favorite spots in the world — and cool, cool, cool. [...]

When Sociology Was Cool, 2 | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-12 19:29:57)
[...] This didn’t stop him from reading, studying and practicing sociology, however, and he ended up doing pretty okay (see image above of Pete performing in California in the 1950s, © The Weinstein Company). An earlier post about when sociology was cool, as well as the sociological definition of cool is right here. [...]

Our top 10 posts in April | The Sociological Imagination (2012-04-27 08:01:34)
[...] When Sociology Was Cool [...]

Why Academic Sociology Does Not Deserve The Hatchet | The Sociological Imagination (2012-07-14 21:03:37)
[...] no working sociologist), would ever dream of suggesting taking a hatchet to sociology if C. Wright Mills were still [...]

Jessica (2013-05-03 21:17:58)
According to my undergrads, the coolness of Sociology is maintained by the freedom to be “the study of anything/everything.” Our respective subjects of investigation must span across every issue imaginable, but with that breadth many miss that the discipline itself is the lens to study the impact of the social world on the individual and vice versa- regardless of what special population or issue we focus that lens upon. So, I do not just study “old people” because I always loved my grandma and think it is ‘cool’ to interview old ladies all day, rather I study the impact of institutions and social processes on old ladies to better understand how they work on all of us, and how that influences how successfully we are able to navigate the hazards of later life. Just as the discipline once suffered from being wrapped up in methodology, I think we may come to suffer somewhat from the reputation that we are everything to everyone, too. The implications outside of academia are pretty clear- if the government, not for profit and corporate managers out there perceive Sociology to be this vague, nebulous thing, our graduates are going to find it tough to be employable. At this stage in our social evloution, we need Sociologists in every institution, so we should be making it easier for them to branch out from academia, not harder.

Charlotte (2013-07-14 19:41:40)
Sociology is cool! It’s the best subject put there, my year 10 pupils are fascinated and love it! From gender to class they’re constantly asking questions about the world around them and trying to come up with solutions for what they see.... That and it gives them a licence to people watch/ be noses too :)

prediksi togel hari ini (2018-04-13 00:37:36)
I have read so many articles regarding the blogger lovers however this paragraph is in fact a good paragraph, keep it up.
Do we live in a post democratic age? (2011-06-24 08:00)

[1]

In this podcast [2]Colin Crouch talks about his thesis of post-democracy. He argues that western liberal democracies are moving into a stage of post-democracy where the formal institutions of democracy continue to exist but the pervasive culture of participation and engagement which sustained an active democracy is increasingly exhausted. The decline of manufacturing and the traditional working class, as well as the advance of economic globalization, has hollowed out processes of democratic engagement to produce an isolated, disconnected and self-referential political class cut off from the public they claim to represent.

We are left with a politics dominated by elites where influential business interests are the only group within society able to make their voice heard. Their pervasive, though often unseen, lobbying activity shapes the priorities of government while engagement with the wider public is increasingly shaped by 'spin doctors' and other advertising professionals. Professor Crouch suggests these are tendencies which suggest that democracy is more a legacy of the past than part of our future.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/colincrouchpodcast.mp3"]

2. http://www.wbs.ac.uk/faculty/members/colin/crouch

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The Secret Club at the Heart of Politics? | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-10 08:22:31)

 [...] sociologist Colin Crouch argues that western liberal democracies are moving into a stage of post-democracy where the formal institutions of democracy continue to exist but the pervasive culture of [...] 

Add SI on Facebook and Twitter! (2011-06-25 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

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Follow us on Twitter here:

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-06-26 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.
Comics and Censorship: Is It Really about You? (2011-06-27 00:00)

[1]News broke this past Friday of an American citizen arrested by a Canadian Customs officer at the US-Canada border after manga deemed to be child pornography was discovered on his laptop. Although no real children were harmed in the creation of drawn images such as those possessed by this man in his mid-twenties, he faces a minimum of a year in prison if convicted.

The US-based Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) is currently raising funds for his legal defense. This is the second time they have rallied around the legal plight of a private US citizen caught with 'obscene' manga in the past five years. The CBLDF was also involved in the case of Christopher Handley, an Iowa man who ultimately [2]pleaded guilty and was convicted for 'possession of obscene visual representations of the sexual abuse of children'.

It is no secret that some Japanese manga (i.e. comic books) can be pornographic in the extreme and that adult-oriented genres such as [3]lolicon, [4]shotacon, and [5]moé can feature children in sexually explicit—and sexually violent—situations. Even characters who are technically adults are sometimes drawn to look like children, for both stylistic and fetishistic reasons.

And it should likewise go without saying that obscenity laws and the ways in which they are enforced differ from country to country. What is permissible in Japan might not be permissible in the United States, and what is permissible in the United States might not be permissible in Canada (or the United Kingdom, for that matter).

I do not want to argue here about whether or not this manga should be illegal. Hopefully it goes without saying that I think we should be worrying about real children, not cartoons. But I do think that we ought to be talking a
bit differently about these cases because, really, it is not about the comics.

Here's an example of the sort of CBLDF-approved rallying cry you hear amongst fans:

If you are a fan of any manga or anime, if you are a fan of comics, if you have even one comics page, anime clip, or “dirty” picture on your computer, tablet, or phone, this is about you (my emphasis).

I do not mean to pick on this particular blogger here—similar examples have spilled from the virtual inks of the likes of writer Neil Gaiman or been published in the e-newsletters of New York publishing houses—but it's a succinct example of the dominant discourse, which is: This man could be you. Yes, you.

If 'you' are a man who reads comics, then this in fact could be you. By all means, watch out. But if you aren't, and many readers of sequential art in the Western world aren't, then this probably isn't you...even if you happen to read precisely the same comics he does. Over the years I have noticed a distinct pattern: The person facing jail time is always a man, and those who have already been convicted are all white men.

Why? One simple explanation is that white men are more likely to possess pornographic manga. This is possible, but I suspect that something else is also at play here. Why were they even looking through Handley’s international post or this latest man’s laptop files? Perhaps they thought they had found what they were already half-looking for. Pedophiles, after all, are known to be mostly men, and among those imprisoned for sexually assaulting children, the vast majority are Caucasian. (This, despite the underrepresentation of Caucasians in the prison system generally.)

In other words, I would argue that reading manga as a white man is rather like driving an expensive sports car as a black man. You are always already a suspect in the eyes of law enforcement authority—not because the car or the comics in themselves are necessarily a problem per se, but because your possession of said items seems to indicate, to our prejudiced little minds, far more serious criminality involving the harm of real people. Do not think for a moment that these cases are only about comics and censorship.

Interestingly, Canadian Customs has also garnered a reputation for being especially hostile to materials of interest to the LGBT community. The feminist bookstore Little Sisters endured a series of court cases over what can only be called institutionalized homophobia.

In any case, this brand of prejudice, the attendant possibility of discrimination, and the way discovery of the already-anticipated misdeed becomes a self-reinforcing cycle—these all need to be discussed at length. Furthermore, we need to talk about how our sociocultural anxieties victimize certain groups under certain circumstances. But that discussion won’t happen as long as comics fans of both genders and all stripes devolve into telling each other scare stories about how it could have been you.

[Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and Sociological Imagination’s Mediated Matters columnist.]

The things which I believe should be illegal are those that are overtly harmful to human beings, so I am coming at this article agreeing that no one should get arrested for possessing any kind of hentai. That said, I still found it absurd. Why do you go from pointing out that more convicted pedos are white male to the argument that white males that read manga are “always already a suspect”? The amount of assumptions that must be made to get to the second point from the first lead me to believe you are either grasping at an uninformed hunch, or forgot to cite a few of the intermediate facts which got you there. The claim that law enforcement is behaving in a prejudiced manner, both specifically and generally, is not the sort of thing that should be casually thrown around. I found your “black guy driving a sports car” simile immensely lacking in tact, considering the latter is demonstrably true and has resulted in the deaths of actual people. What you’re arguing here, as it is presented, is ultimately an assumption. The legitimate potency of the idea that cops are behaving unjustly has been forever lost because of people like you, who carelessly brandish it about when speaking in defense of something.

Christopher Butcher (2011-06-28 17:33:09)
Even a cursory Google examination of Canada Customs issues surrounding manga and LGBT issues exposes the ridiculous assumptions of this “article” to be baseless– A female traveler was detained, searched, and interrogated for having manga on her person in June 2006, and wrote about it here: http://elizabethmclung.blogspot.com/2006/06/to-canadian-customs-x-men-means-x.html. The manga in question? Tokyo Boys & Girls from Viz. Reading that article should hopefully disabuse you of your ridiculous notions about who is being targeted and why. Further, I don’t think the skin-colour or ethnicity of the person stopped at the border has been made public. That’s entirely your assumption, and frankly considering ethnicity is the linchpin of this mess of an article, it seems like something of a necessity to have that be a fact rather than a hunch. edited for inappropriateness

Casey Brienza (2011-06-29 02:10:52)
Chris, If this were a comment on somebody else’s article, it would not have ever seen the light of day. Your rudeness does not improve your argument, and anything you write–to me or anyone else–here in the future that is not civil will remain screened. I am aware of the case you describe and would point out that unlike Handley or the man in question now, this woman was not arrested or charged with any crime. She was hassled, but it went no further. The event she described also occurred on the heels of another case of—a man—caught with pornographic manga, and from her story it was the word ‘manga’ that piqued their curiosity. In addition, since I do not know her personally I would hesitate to presume, but some of the images on her site are yuri-esque, and as I noted targeting of the LGBT community seems to be a separate preoccupation of Canadian Customs…and the fact that among the books seized from Little Sisters includes works by bell hooks (among the most important living philosophers) ought to make it clear that it’s not just about content. Casey
One of the most important decisions in a research life is the choice of methodology. While this may be a straightforward choice in most other disciplines, to declare a fixed ‘methodology’ in the field of humanities is an exercise in indecision, given the fact that the present day humanities is in a state of flux. In the border-defiant field of Humanities the pertinence of a fixed methodology seems to be an anomaly to the discipline in general.

While in the preceding years, a ‘research question’ determined the school, now the method itself becomes a determinant of the school. Since contemporary Humanities encourage cross-disciplinary methods of research, the determinant ironically becomes rather indeterminate. The first issue in examining a research methodology is the discourse involved in the making of the method. Foucault’s ideas in “The Discourse on Language” give a basic idea of the modern – or more precisely the post-modern – researcher’s predicament. Ideology, that forms the kernel of an institution, acts as cornerstone to research method since it directs the modus operandi of research. The angle of the Interpretive Curve is decided by the school and the school gains its delineations from the ideological framework that the institution supports. This ideological context places two key notions of research in juxtaposition: one of accepted rationality and the other of predominant doctrine.

Foucault writes, “Disciplines constitute a system of control in the production of discourse, fixing its limits through the action of an identity, taking the form of a permanent reactivation of the rules” (237). The rise of feminist methodologies is an example. Not only have feminist readings lent themselves to a dismantling of ‘general truths’, but they have also become the foundation to a critical framework and a methodology. In fact it ended up becoming what it challenged – a general truth. The prevailing notion of the ‘rational’ within a certain field of study defines the accepted perspective of the school and consequently establishes the doctrine it puts forward. The delineations of accepted perspectives locate the school within a certain academic structure which in turn allows for the creation of a definite methodology.

However, the rapidly diffusing academic boundaries make the delineation of a methodology based on presumed line-markers impractical. Especially since every added perspective brings in a new element to the accepted ‘rational’. The case of eco-criticism is an elaboration of this point. A scientific field and a humanities-based field overlap to create a knowledge system where both approaches have to work in tandem with each other. Here we come to one of the key concerns of modern research: the relevance and the plausibility of clearly marked schools of reading in the increasingly interdisciplinary field of humanities and the field of literature in particular. If the means are to determine the end, then the clarity of the discipline or school within which the end is located must be established without doubt. This is a particularly delicate task while dealing with issues that deliberately refuse to acknowledge the mediation of language in the construction of reality. When the object of study cannot avail of the agency of language as in case of the “speechless” subaltern, the methodology that governs the study becomes mired in issues of articulation. Can the means of the study bring out an effective and holistic consensus free of an oppressive discourse, thus giving the voiceless the necessary space for articulation?

The evidence of such cross-disciplinary transactions is evident in several sub-sects mushrooming under the canopy of Literature and Literary studies. Areas like ‘Survival Literature’ or ‘Disability Studies’ are multi-disciplinary bodies of thought that call upon a mosaic of approaches ranging from psychological to sociological that find their common factor only in a subject of their focus. Given Derrida’s axiom that there is no ‘outside of the text’, the possible materials that comprise the corpus of a literary study has suddenly widened to include a cornucopia of diverse media. The broadening of literary horizons is characterised by an almost-melding into that field of terrifying and infinite variety: Cultural Studies. The immediate consequence of this is the bifurcation of Literary Academics into two camps: the traditionalists with an adherence straight and narrow, and radicals with an emphasis on border-crossing. The second more insidious effect is the defensive attitude that has begun to permeate literary studies. As a result the
treatment of the subject of study becomes loaded with academic agendas as well.

The process of analysis and interpretation, which is already heavily loaded, becomes fraught with political pitfalls with enforcement of a particular methodology and learning-tack. There is a call for an amalgamation and reformulation methods so as to create an integrated mosaic of intellectual mediation as suggested by James Schwoch and Mimi White their book Questions of Method in Cultural Studies. This same impulse drives the newly revamped order for the study of literatures. Materials that were once considered unliterary have now become inculcated into the schema of literary studies. This is vastly due to the disintegration of the mass and high-culture divide. Jameson discusses this in his piece “Post-Modernism and Consumer Society”. The dismantling of previously accepted notions of high culture and the assumptions that go in hand with such beliefs left the world of academics bereft of the convenient crutch of “theoretical discourse” and opened the floodgates to a deluge of innovations in methods of research in the literary field. Jameson writes,

... the effacement... of some key boundaries or separations, most notably the erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture... is perhaps the most distressing development of all from an academic standpoint, which has traditionally had a vested interest in preserving a realm of high or elite culture against the surrounding environment of philistinism... and in transmitting difficult and complex skills of reading listening and seeing to its initiates... (1847)

The disintegration of power structures will lead to a parallel fall of authoritarian discourses, thereby creating space for a de-marginalised perspective. At first glance such a scenario may seem to entail academic anarchy and loss of an intellectual venue. However one must also consider the fact that several new schools of thought have sprung out of such a supposedly 'anarchic' situation. The key is to integrate disparate ideas and identities that teem under the umbrella term of “Literature” and create a method that is not applicable to all, but one that allows itself to be suitably tailored for each research question.

The Subject with its upper-case emphasis becomes the bone of contention in the discipline wars. The very existence of the subject itself is subject to doubt given that there is no "individual" in the era of Mass Culture and furthermore any projection of a valid Subject is merely that: a projection. Jameson writes,

...not only is this bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth, it never really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade people that they 'had' individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity... (1850)

This idea of a mythical individual with an original identity becomes interesting in the assessment of the means of research because, every new thesis is trying to assert this kind of individuality. While it is representative, it must also put forth an illusion of originality that will allow it to enter the hallowed realms of the Academic Valhalla.

The credibility of academic discourse becomes subject to scepticism especially since the institution is largely a source of doctrine. The “Will to Knowledge” and the “Will to Truth”, to borrow Foucault’s usage, get caught up in academic machinery and emerge distorted and cloaked in a miasma of suspicion. The knowledge industry churning out thesis after thesis of authorised doctrine leaves little room for engaging with unconventional and often un-institutional information and assessing the data without the bias. The qualifications of an accepted mode of research and a universally recognized body of knowledge are mass produced making it difficult – even in a supposedly liberal and enlightened field like the Humanities– for subaltern voices to be recorded to their optimum potential. This is because the pedagogical machinery overwhelms the process of knowledge creation to such an extent that it becomes almost synonymous with knowledge. Given the protean context within which the discourse of subjective narrative and theory are taking place, the idea of a fixed knowledge system becomes the greatest form of academic oppression. In such a scenario, the ascribing of a particular method may become a hazardous proposition.
completely in opposition to the aim at hand. After all, what is interpretation but the proposal of an alternate way of seeing a previously viewed and assessed entity? However, the idea of a “true” discourse which is faithful to a higher academic doctrine effectively erases any possibility of enforcing the validity of alternate claims. Juggling the task of maintaining the position of a dispassionate observing subject, as opposed to the passive, observed object and upholding the sensitive handling of the object becomes crucial to an effective piece of research. Of course this is rarely achieved considering the fact that the Subject colours the Object in the hues of her own “individual” learnt discourse.

In such a situation, the methodology involved becomes the fulcrum for creating a sound argument that can be considered as impartial as possible. Increased research on formerly taboo topics or concerns that were deemed unfit for the study in a field as ‘elevated’ as literature has made the Subject-Object correlative more nuanced since often the divide between the two is almost non-existent. In these scenarios, the ‘individual’ is often subsumed in the greater ideal of voicing a mass concern.

An effective method of study in the literary field must enable the student to return to the true cause of their work: knowledge. Not truth, not ideology but simple knowledge. There is a call for the reinstatement of ‘a need to know’ minus ‘a need to believe’. Belief indicates a sense of blind-faith that need not necessarily stem from a firm foundation of thought. Rather it is like an unproven axiom that cannot hold its ground in the face of an argument. Knowledge implies a dispassionate sense of discovery which requires a need to know for the sake of knowing, cropped of any interest save that of collecting information to render a knowledge system meaningful and functional. This is the aim of methodology; the ideals of discourse, political leanings etc. are merely to this greater cause.

But naturally, shearing off these political leanings is more or less impossible since they are integral parts of the idea of method. The simplest recourse would be to avail of the pastiche method, or rather a pastiche of methods, as Schwoch and White recommend. Using a negotiated model of methodology which places a certain approach at its core while simultaneously employing another approach(es) which may or may not be similar or even of the same school is a viable option. It will allow greater freedom of thought and encourage amalgamation and inclusion of diverse voices into the fabric of academics. Most modern Knowledge Banks are attempting to create a methodology of optimum balance with a simultaneous dismantling of traditional strictures and structures of discourse. However the perfect prototype remains elusive. We await the synthesis of the past and the present to create a possibility for the actualisation of a knowledge driven academy, rather than a power driven one.

Works Cited


[... and technologists alike, this turn of events is unsettling. Sreevidya Surendran’s essay, “Of Methods and Methodologies in Literary Studies and Humanities”, posted this week to The Sociological Imagination, addresses the discomfort many academics feel [...]]
LONDON OLYMPICS: WHAT’S IN IT FOR WOMEN? (2011-06-28 08:00)

Wednesday 6th July, Arts Lecture Theatre, QMUL, 1.30-5.30, followed by a reception

The London Women and Planning Forum wishes to explore how much and in what ways gender has been taken into account in planning 2012.

Has the Olympic site been designed to address gender issues relating to ergonomics, safety, transport and accessibility?

Have the competition facilities been designed to raise the profile of women’s sports?

Have the Olympic boroughs used the 2012 opportunity to increase the provision of women-friendly sporting venues?

Will the Olympic legacy result in more women participating in exercise and sport?

What are the wider implications for urban design of policies aimed at increasing women’s participation in and access to sports?”

Speakers:

RIMLA AKHTAR - Chair, Muslim Women’s Sport Foundation

JAYNE CAUDWELL - Senior Lecturer, Chelsea School, University of Brighton

ALISON NIMMO CBE - Director of Design & Regeneration, Olympic Delivery Authority

TIM WOODHOUSE - Head of Policy and External Affairs, Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation

Discussant:

LOUISE MANSFIELD - Senior Lecturer, Department of Sport Science, Tourism and Leisure, Canterbury Christ Church University

The event will be chaired by Alison Blunt, Professor of Geography and Chair of the London Women and Planning Forum.
Join us for an afternoon of presentations and discussions - all welcome!

This event is free. To reserve your place, book online at www.qmul.ac.uk/events, or email events@qmul.ac.uk, including the name of the event and the number of places you wish to book.
Is a Post-Neoliberal politics possible? (2011-06-29 08:00)

Nick Couldry is Professor of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths College. In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to him about his recent work on neoliberalism and the possibility of a post-neoliberal politics. The conversation encompasses his last book, After Voice, as well as the broader issues he engages with: how has neoliberalism embedded itself in contemporary society and how can a critical social science help provide the intellectual resources to mobilise resistance to it?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/nick-couldry-podcast.mp3"]

[2] http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book233759

Cyborg Life: Kevin Warwick (2011-06-30 08:00)

In 1998, when Kevin Warwick, researcher and Professor of Cybernetics at the University of Reading, England, implanted a silicon chip transponder into his left arm and connected it to his nervous system, he became the world’s first cyborg: a man-machine hybrid.

[EMBED]

2.7 July

Steve Fuller on Humanity 2.0 (2011-07-01 08:00)


2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/sfuller/

A sociological blog dedicated to ‘Humanity 2.0’ | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-25 09:11:54)

[...] a videoclip of me giving one of the first TEDx lectures at Warwick was posted here on ‘Humanity 2.0’, which is about changing definitions of the human, an issue central to the past, present and future [...]

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Add SI on Facebook and Twitter!  (2011-07-02 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

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Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today?  (2011-07-03 08:00)

[1]
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

tion-and-why-we-fail-to-match-it-today/cwrightmills488/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

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When Sociology Was Cool | The Sociological Imagination (2011-07-06 15:09:15)

[...] Mills staked his theories right in these complications and contradictions and with this effort challenged sociologists to not so much relax the methodological rules of their discipline, but to allow themselves a little poetic license. And as simple as this idea may seem, it was, for many sociologists, a revelation and a push to make sociology matter. That, to my mind, is one of the few moments in the history of sociology when the discipline was made cool: That moment when C. Wright Mills told us that our analyses of the world should matter. That and the moment someone took a picture of him driving his motorcycle to class. [...]

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The aim of this book is quite ambitious. Namely, developing a theoretical framework for the study of music-related subcultures that departs both from the position of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, which conceived subcultures as class-based and symbolically 'resistant', and from a more recent 'postmodern turn' (Muggleton: 2000) that emphasise the flexibility and ephemerality of contemporary 'tribes' (Maffesoli: 1996). Criticising these perspectives, Webb tries to grasp both the changing nature of what he calls music 'milieux', and their very historical, social and cultural 'substance' (Hodkinson: 2002). Surprisingly, the author never mentions Hodkinson's work on goth culture, as long as the two books show a similar tendency: a counter-postmodern stance that points to the concreteness of contemporary subcultures in relation to their increasingly global dimension and media-dependent relationality (Hodkinson: 2003).

Drawing on traditions as diverse as Alfred Schutz's phenomenology, Bourdieu's sociology of culture and globalisation studies (among others), Webb designs a methodology that enlightens the different but intertwined social forces that shape the structure of music milieux. As in the case of the neo-folk (Cap. 4), music subcultures still emerge as relatively coherent and enduring in terms of knowledge and systems of value. This is obviously nothing new in subcultural as well as cultural studies, but Webb's theory put such cultural density in relation to different sets of structural influences, like subcultures’ groundedness in the local dimension and their place in the wider 'field' (Bourdieu: 1993) of music industry. At the same time, the individual becomes a key site of analysis. People can in fact inhabit different milieux at the same time, and their biography and social mobility will affect the 'stock knowledge' that they carry into such contexts.

Overall, this position has the merit of putting the milieu in relation to a complex range of social activities and contexts. From this perspective, the question of the 'independence' of cultural producers is addressed as well (Cap. 6). In fact, producers belonging to a given musical milieu may have a significant degree of independence from the field of music industry, but this autonomy is 'relative' because the music industry still affects their choices and the institutional rules of cultural production (see Cap. 7). The analysis of Webb, in fact, shows the extent to which emergent labels and producers in UK experienced very different forms of pressure and influence in dealing with major record companies.

If there is any weakness in the book, it is related to the artistic (and to some extent political) value that the author attributes to some music milieux. The book reflects a certain difficulty in subcultural studies about departing from the idea that such groups are necessarily deviant or 'non-normative' (Gelder: 2005) to some degree. In this respect, Webb clearly expresses a sympathy for non-mainstream music genres (like Bristol-based trip hop) and milieux that flirt with radical political ideas (like the neo-folk). However, his theoretical perspective does not answer the question of why such music milieux deserve more sociological attention than the ones supposedly less radical. Also, Webb's aesthetic judgements do not go farther than general statements about the creativity of given genres or producers.

This does not mean that his methodology can not evolve toward a more elaborate reflection about the relationship between cultural/aesthetic values and people's agency (a line of enquiry recently discussed in sociology of culture, see Born: 2010). Moreover, the book remains more than valuable for the ways in which it explores the complex forms of social interaction and organisation produced by people's engagement with popular music and culture. An area of enquiry that, as pointed by Webb in the Introduction (p. 7), is still underestimated in 'mainstream' sociology, despite the substantial influence of popular media on people's life-choices. The greatest merit of the book is to show quite clearly the extent to which other spheres of social life (like politics and work) may be affected by the allegedly less important social activities - as well as fantasies and pleasures - enabled by popular culture.
References


The PhD [comics] movie (2011-07-05 08:00)

[1] PhD comics have made a movie! Each [2] grad student should be excited by this new opportunity for productive [3] procrastination!

Check out the trailer [4] here.

So-o-o... it is currently being screened only at the wrong side of the Atlantic, but would any [5] Warwick people like to try to arrange a campus screening? Please leave your enthusiastic or disparaging comments under this post!

1. http://www.informaworld.com/cache/images/compress/0_0_0_0_150_0_1_0_1_0/home/mpp/docserver_mpptwo/780925717/images/cover.jpeg
5.
Rethinking Newman’s The Idea of a University (2011-07-05 12:20)

There is something terribly British about the English Catholic saints and a little of that quaint practicality we see in Thomas More who ironically authored the *Utopia*. They’re not the kinds of saints who you would expect to intercede with God on your behalf. Nothing of the poetic passion of an Italian Saint Francis who epitomizes Mediterranean madness or the Spanish Saint Teresa of Avila with a golden spear on fire directed towards her breast by the angel as immortalized in Bernini’s *Ecstasy*. An English saint is frankly incapable of such excesses and would neither go begging and singing naked on streets nor would angels be allowed to throw them into unwarranted states of ecstasies.

The English saints are a bit too English for such high drama. The idealism however is alive both in More and in the eminent Cardinal Newman (1801 - 1890) who is on the way to canonization by the Roman Catholic Church. Just as More’s *Utopia* is a harsh critique of a classist social order, Newman’s *The Idea of a University* is an idealistic view of what universities ought to be like and thus could be read as an attack on the existing state of the universities. Its idealism is contained by a sense of practicality. That could just be the Victorian style of writing descriptive prose to a society that depends on writers to offer intense imagery for its visual satisfaction.

There is however something deeply sincere in how Newman talks about “liberal” education which these days like “liberal” everything else has suffered the onslaught of abuse of every kind from poststructuralists, post-colonialists, postmodernists, post-feminists, post-Marxists and liberals themselves too afraid for their own good to be seen as liberals. I wouldn’t go so far as to say that Newman’s understanding of the University is a product of a colonial mindset. That’s not the case. His vision is oriented towards the future and I’m sure he’s more than aware that no university comes remotely close to the one he is imagining.

In the Discourse 5 titled "Knowledge its own end" this is how Newman speaks of the University: “An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other.” With reference to the student he says: “He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called “Liberal.” Whatever the criticism might be of “liberal” education it’s impossible to deny that this is the idea that dominates universities across the world - a universal model of what a university should be like where mental habits are formed whose attributes are “freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom.”

The Universities I’ve studied and worked at and do so at this point in time have only been a relentless parody of Newman’s idea of a university. Rivals, yes! There is plenty of meaningless rivalry on campuses both among the teachers and the students. The "learned men" are a mockery of learning and they’re interested in everything else except learning. The students are less keen on reading a book than in plotting against each other if not the teacher and acquiring grades and scholarships that they’ve neither earned nor do they deserve. I’ve never seen such hypocrisy and self-centeredness disguised as lofty causes like I do at the university I work at. Political correctness has destroyed the soul of the modern university with the virulence of a bubonic plague. The critics of classism, racism, sexism, casteism or nationalism are themselves guilty of every crime they would like to place at another’s doorstep. Elites and elitism is the order of the day. The oppressors have their elites and the oppressed have theirs as well. Both consume from the same plate of exploitation and both like to talk about social and political change in a language that exonerates them from the accusation of being cynical bystanders to the sufferings of the poor.
I'm aware that opportunism is a global gospel and individuals with social goals whether teachers or students tend to suffer genuine isolation. That’s not the point though. Universities are supposed to be an alternative to the harsh world of real life where one has the leisure to arrive at solutions intellectually that will give everyone a chance to a decent life. I cannot imagine working in a corporate environment for instance though I’ve done it when I had no choice. If I’m in a university I know it is a position of comfort paid for by the working classes of my country. They’re paying that I may arrive at something that will serve as an alternative to a violent dog-eat-dog order. They’re not paying me to articulate views I don’t subscribe to.

Newman’s essay is profound in its beauty. There is something saintly about the aspirations in the essay that we see in Newman the person as well. There is no doubt that liberal education is a product of a political economy where the majority of people are not in a state of want and neglect. However there is something good to be said in favor of those strive towards objectivity and wish to see things without a jaundiced eye. These days in the universities to be unbiased and truthful about how much you know and what you really think are terrible crimes. It’s like you belong to no lobby – so, something seriously must be wrong with you. If you belong to one gender or sexual orientation you must defend it against every other with all the hate you can muster in the minimum amount of time; if you belong to one caste, creed, race or ethnic group you must devour the other fellow who is slightly different from you without any pity; if you’re a rightist you must cook the leftists for dinner every night and if you’re a leftist your goal in life is to burn those cities to ashes where there is one rightist hiding somewhere in a subterranean cave.

Basic decency, consideration towards those who’re less privileged, the recognition of another person’s humanity no matter what – these are qualities of spirit and have nothing to do whether you’re politically inclined or not and what kinds of worldviews you uphold. This is about the kind of person you are and maybe this has nothing to do with being or not being in a university.

The fact that one who is a part of a university should make self-righteousness a way of life is unforgivable. In all sweetness, Newman’s The Idea of a University rooted as it is in a Victorian English society – and even if you did not take seriously its religious parts - gives us plenty to think about as to what kind of a university we would like to inhabit. The title itself inspires a lot of questions and “liberal education” where you cultivate a broad awareness of the world around you and one that aims at intellectual honesty may not be such a terrible evil as it is made out to be on the current-day university campuses.


Naveena P K (2017-08-28 14:53:39)
It’s really true that such idealistic universities do only exist in books. Today universities are places for all sort of activities. But still you are not devoid of option, you can decide whether to be a part of it or to just walk away. It all depends upon the choice you make.

Naveena P K (2017-08-29 03:06:42)
It is true that idealistic concept of universities will exist in mere books. In real what you told, is true universities are place of all sort of activities. But still you are not devoid of option. You can indulge in all these issues or just walk away, it all depends upon option you take.
Generational Sexualities' - University of Oxford, 27th Sep 2011 (2011-07-06 08:00)

Invitation to Participate

'Generational Sexualities' - A one-day event to bring different generations of Sexualities researchers into dialogue

Date: 27th September 2011 (Tuesday)

Venue: St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford

Speakers: Professor Ken Plummer, Professor Jeffrey Weeks, Professor Diane Richardson, Professor Mairtin Mac an Ghaill, Dr. Jon Binnie, Professor Stephen Whittle OBE


Population ageing brings both challenges and opportunities to individuals, communities and societies. At the same time, it has brought into focus issues around ageing, life course and intergenerational relationships. However, it has been argued that only until relatively recently have ‘age’ and ‘generations’ been given explicit attention in the contemporary study of sexualities (Plummer 2010).

This workshop themed 'Generational Sexualities' aims to bring different generations of sexualities researchers into dialogue, to share their experience of conducting research in the respective historical and cultural contexts. It discusses the socialization and research environments that different generations of sexualities researchers find themselves in, and how these may have impacted their research agenda, methodologies and outcomes.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Professor Ken Plummer


- Professor Jeffrey Weeks

Emeritus Professor of Sociology, London South Bank University; Author of ‘Sexuality’, ‘Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present’, ‘The World We Have Won’ and ‘The Languages of Sexuality’ and co-author of ‘Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and other Life Experiments’, among many others

- Professor Diane Richardson

Professor of Sociology, Newcastle University; Author of ‘Rethinking Sexuality’, co-author of 'Intersections between Feminist and Queer Theory' and 'Sexuality, Equality and Diversity (forthcoming) and co-editor of 'Contesting Recognition' (forthcoming) among many others
Professor Mairtin Mac an Ghaill

Professor of Sociology, Newman University College Birmingham; Author of ‘The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexuality and Schooling’, ‘Contemporary Racisms and Ethnicities’ and co-author of ‘Gender, Culture and Society: Contemporary Femininities and Masculinities’, among many others

Dr. Jon Binnie

Reader in Human Geography, School of Science and Environment, Manchester Metropolitan University; Author of ‘The Globalization of Sexuality’, co-author of ‘The Sexual Citizen: Queer Politics and Beyond’ and ‘Pleasure Zones: Bodies, Cities, Spaces’ and co-editor of ‘Cosmopolitan Urbanism’, among many others

Professor Stephen Whittle OBE

- Professor of Equalities Law, Manchester Metropolitan University; Author of ‘Respect and Equality: Transsexual and Transgender Rights’, ‘The Transgender Studies Reader’ and ‘The Transgender Debate: The Crisis Surrounding Gender Identities’, among many others

This event is FREE for BSA members and members of St. Antony’s College, University of Oxford. It only costs £25 for non-BSA members to attend. A light lunch is provided for the participants. Places are limited for the event to facilitate discussions. Please make your booking as soon as possible, via the British Sociological Association website:


Please contact Tung Suen, University of Oxford, at [3]yiu.suen@sociology.ox.ac.uk for any further information.

Directions to St. Antony’s College:


Accommodation:

Accommodation at St. Antony’s College is available for booking. Another nearby option is St. Anne’s College, which is 5-minute away from the event venue. Please note that availability is limited and the organiser cannot accept any responsibility for accommodation arrangement:


About St. Antony’s College:

St Antony’s College is the most cosmopolitan of the seven graduate colleges of the University of Oxford, specialising in international relations, economics, politics and history of particular parts of the world. It also houses 7 area study centres specialising in African Studies, Asian Studies, European Studies, Latin American Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Japanese Studies, and Russian and Eurasian Studies. St Antony’s 40 Governing Body Fellows all have international reputations in their specialist fields and, in combination, provide a unique insight into today’s global issues. There are more than 400 students from some 77 different countries studying for postgraduate degrees and each year around 100 visiting senior members from the academic, diplomatic, business and political worlds come to
the College.

3. mailto:yiu.suen@sociology.ox.ac.uk

White Western Extra (2011-07-06 16:56)

[1]

When I was twenty-one I moved to India for what was supposed to be a year, but I ended up staying much longer. For a while I lived in the seacoast town of Vishakapatnam, sometimes called Vizag, where herds of water buffalo roamed the beach. I then moved to the city of Hyderabad where, even though I never surrendered my North American clothes, I started to braid fresh flowers in my hair and wear henna tattoos on my hands and feet. At the time, along with my language skills, I thought it was evidence of my Indian assimilation, though I’d never say that today. Today, I’d say it was at most a temporary fashion statement, like how when I lived in the North Country I’d wear woolen toques and knee high boots and punctuate my sentences with French or the Canadian colloquialism “eh.”
I did my first ethnographic field research in Vizag on the South Asian social custom of dowry and took Telugu literature classes at Andhra University, getting up every morning at 6 am to study Hindi with a high school teacher who lived a few doors down from me across the street. She tutored little kids in English while she taught me Hindi. We’d sit on a wooden bench in her parlor drinking steaming chai made with water buffalo milk and in between gossiping in Telugu, I’d read from a children’s Hindi Primer reciting sentences like "See the red mango Mohan? Bring me the red mango," while a gang of little kids sat beneath us, at our feet. "See Anil play cricket?" they read from their English Primer while I read about Mohan in Hindi. "Anil meets Mummy for tea." Whenever one of the little kids would stop reciting and become distracted or fall asleep my Hindi Teacher would whack them on the side of their head with whatever she happened to have in her hand at the time, a dish cloth, a piece of her sari, and without so much as looking the offending student’s way she’d instead cluck her tongue and gesture with her eyes towards me. “T-cha, T-cha,” she’d say, her warning that I should ignore her sporadic acts of discipline and keep reading.

Besides my Hindi Teacher I made two very good friends in Vizag. A famous painter around 12 years older than I named V. Ramesh and a travel agent named Kip, who was just out of high school and a few years younger than me. Ramesh and I would go out every afternoon for fresh lime sodas or beers in one of the withered and worn out hotels that lined the city’s beach. A lot of Indian movies were filmed there, so we’d sit on the terrace and watch them rehearse dance sequences and dramatic, romantic scenes. I always hoped that if I hung around long enough someone on the film crew would ask me to be what they called a White Western Extra since once that happened to an American friend of mine. But no film crew ever asked. Not even when they filmed a lot of the exterior shots of a movie called "American Ahmaii" (i.e., "American Girl") in Vizag on the beach.

With Kip I’d go out practically every night and spend time with his family, an endless network of brothers and sisters and cousins and aunts all waiting to immigrate to Australia. Kip was an Anglo Indian so he couldn’t speak Telugu or Hindi nearly as well as me and all the women in his family wore dresses instead of saris and watched Beta videotapes of British soap operas played on a black market tape player hooked up to his Aunt Emma’s colour TV.

After about a year and a half I moved to the city of Hyderabad where I continued my field research and literary studies and, for the very first time in my life, fell completely and utterly in love, the only way someone living on the other side of the world from their home can fall in love, especially if they are twenty-two or twenty three. His name was Avi, but he introduced himself by his last name, Jacob, so even though I always wanted to call him by his first name, I could never shake the habit of calling him by his last. Jacob was from the west coast province of Goa, a graduate student in Spanish literature, and never in a million years would I ever have met him had I not been living at the Hyderabad YMCA, a White Western Extra (or what the YMCA called a White Western Guest) among a dormitory full of "Young Christian Men," most of whom were actually Muslim, but who still knew enough English and Telugu to shout out to me every time I walked past, "American Ahmaii, American Ahmaii, please baby, please baby, please, don’t you want to be my girlfriend, don’t you want to be with me?"

I didn’t. Not after I met Jacob, anyway. He lived in the room directly below mine. At least, he lived there until around two or three days after we met, when he gave up his room to a computer science student named Amitava and moved in upstairs with me. Which, didn’t last very long. Only two of three weeks. It was against the rules for an Indian to share a room with a Westerner, especially an Indian Boy with a Western Girl, so we moved to a little flat just underneath the Hyderabad Tank Bund, the only neighborhood in Hyderabad at the time where we could find someone who would rent a flat to a White, Telugu-speaking foreigner and an Indian, Urdu-speaking, Jew.

Our landlord was a fallen Brahmin named Sunnil, who loved our love and let us use his hot water heater for free. He painted advertisements for the movies, dashing out 7 or 8 huge, 20 and 30 and 40 foot billboards each week. He’d copy images from photographs torn out of very old issues American and Australian Magazines and brand new copies of Bollywood Screen. Sunnil always made the American actresses look fatter than they were in the photographs adding an extra chin to Julia Roberts or flabby arms to Meryl Streep. "I have to make
them look more like Indian Movie Stars or people won’t see the movie,” he’d explained to me while he worked, adding to Demi Moore’s head more hair, turning the short haircut she wore in the film Ghost into a long flowing mane.

Every Thursday afternoon a team of boys would show up and carry the billboards away on their bicycles, hoisting them up high up into the air and then resting them flat upon their heads, balancing them as they rode away in tandem, as well practiced as any circus feat. And then, as if by magic, I’d see the billboard somewhere around town the next morning, Brooke Shields in Blue Lagoon, all tanned and glistening and fat, wearing a wet sari next to a billboard advertising Cadbury Fruit and Nut Bars, Marie Biscuits and other Commonwealth Sweets.

It’s been over fifteen years since I left India and over fifteen years since I’ve been back, and even though I remember every detail of my time there, what I ate and what I read, the exact cost of different brands of Indian washing soap, the sweet smell of the bus exhaust, it never is a landscape in my dreams. It’s as if the night I said goodbye to Jacob at the Madras Airport and boarded the plane that flew me back to the West, I lost my footing and my sense of what this terrain felt like beneath my feet. Madras. Bankock. Honolulu. Seattle. Tampa. With every airport I lost a little bit more of the Indian I thought I had become and with every airport it became more clear to me who I was and would always be to this place, regardless of what I wore or who I liked or even loved, a White Western Extra, a White Western Guest.

End Note: Since first writing this essay in 2005, I have gone back to India. Stories from those travels will appear here, in a future ‘It’s Not Rocket Science’ essay.

1. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-XAz5_sOtgNM/ThR9FQ0XaUI/AAAAAAAAKds/IqciH7VNhSg/s1600/AuYMCA.jpg

Boys Named Kip, Not Kim | The Sociological Imagination (2011-08-26 12:40:02)
[...] People (and especially students) always ask me what I think about it because in the early nineties I lived and worked in India and have spent much of my adult life teaching and loving all stories Indian, whether realist or [...]

Three Truths & A Lie (2011-07-06 16:57)
I was never really very good at that game Three Truths and a Lie, the one where (when you're a slumber party or living in a dorm) you're supposed to tell four things about yourself, three true, one untrue and have people guess the untrue one.

I always play it with my students on the first day of any Introductory Sociology course, but often find myself slightly distorting both the truths and the lies. For example, I'll say, for a truth, "My birthday is on May 4, the same day as the actress Audrey Hepburn. Which was a pure coincidence, but when I was in high school I started telling people that that's the reason I'm named the way I'm named" – which if you believe the stories I tell here, is actually a lie, but makes, I would argue, for a near perfect Professor/Student anecdote.

My father always exaggerated, everything, to the point where already by the age of four or five I knew he couldn't be trusted to get straight information on anything, whether it was the day we would leave for vacation or if some story he told me about his childhood was true. To this day I do not know the actual name of the town where he was born.

[2]My mother, on the other hand, never exaggerates – anything; in fact, so seriously does she take the world that if she wasn’t so smart you’d think she was naïve for the questions she asks about the veracity of the gossip in People magazine (is Jennifer Aniston’s daily snack really just a handful of almonds?), the right ingredients for a sauce, the books on quantum physics or calculus or Zen Buddhism she reads. I remember once, when she started taking courses at the local, fourth-tier, state university she’d call me up shocked about the room full of mostly 18 and 20-year olds with whom she shared the class, "Audrey, none of the students in the class seem to do the homework or read!" It took me weeks to convince her that the Professor didn’t expect she get 100 per cent on every quiz or test. "But it's university! she'd say. "Aren’t we supposed to learn the material?"

Being raised by a chronic liar and truth seeker/teller has made me at different times both wildly imaginative and rigidly law-abiding. I remember in Grade Two, the teacher called my mother in for a meeting because the stories in my daily diary seemed too far fetched. I remember my mother, ever the (gentle) truth seeker/teller, asking me, "Can’t you just write that you wished the Prime Minister gave you an award in a piano competition instead of saying..."
it actually happened?"

She panicked every time I became too submerged in some novel's story and starting "living in the book," actually worried that at the age of nine I needed therapy since I seemed preferred the divorced families of Judy Blume and Norma Klein novels to our own two-parent household (true) and at seventeen that because I loved Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar so much I should choose a university closer to home, in case I started considering suicide (untrue - by my senior year not only was I not suicidal, [3] I was living as far away from the United States as I could possibly be – India).

But my father was different. He seemed to always want a better story than the one I had actually lived (when I received my undergraduate degree he told people I had already finished a Masters and claimed I was a Professor when I had just barely earned my Ph.D).

I know now that their two very different kinds of love, my father's obscured by hyperbole, my mother's salt of the earth, is the reason why today, as an adult, I make for a very good ethnographer, my chosen profession. Yesterday a colleague commented, "The way you live? Don't you get exhausted? You make your whole life a field site." I didn't argue. Because with my little girl habit of making everything that happens to me a better or worse story than it was, while second guessing it a million times to ensure what really happened did happen, he was right.

End Note 1: During my doctoral dissertation defense, three of the four Professors sitting on my committee to decide my fate took serious issue with my assertion that everything an ethnographer does in a designated field site "counts," whether it is asking a subject a question pertaining to the study or sitting alone, ordering a cup of coffee during a break, eating lunch. It was the one point I refused to concede.

End Note 2: The image above is a screen capture from a project I assign in my [4]Introductory Sociology course, where, over the duration of a semester, students create Facebook accounts based on a person (or identity), which is their 'social opposite;' family, friends and other social networks for the person they create; as well as regular day-to-day social interactions. Students also use the personas they create to interact with one another, revealing their 'true,' identity at the end of the course. I based this project on the film [5]Catfish (2010), a smart, deeply engrossing film, which not only documents the narrative process by which people tell truths & lies in their every lives, but in the process of documentary/ethnographic filmmaking itself.

End Note 3: For an excellent cinematic story about the ways a person's first and last name has sociological meaning, see [6]This American Life TV Episode 2.6, John Smith. Based on the article by Laura Blumenfeld ("The Life of John Smith") it documents the lives of seven different people, all named 'John Smith.'

1. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-WMg-tQ7hDc4/ThSFCzEQL9I/AAAAAAAXKeI/-5_mAgbHmhY/s1600/270886852.jpg
Profiling Life on the Street (2011-07-07 08:00)

As mainstream critics so often allege, the uses to which social media can be at times rather vacuous. Yet they can also be profound and moving, facilitating a degree of insight and communication which was difficult, perhaps impossible, to attain while production and dissemination were possible only for large organizations.

For a case in point check out [1]Invisible People. Produced by [2]Mark Horvath, a former drug addict who was briefly homeless, the site collects video interviews with homeless people in Hollywood and has quickly become a social media hit.

[EMBED]

1. http://invisiblepeople.tv/blog/

The Social Animal (2011-07-08 08:00)

A fascinating talk from [1]David Brooks, author of the [2]Social Animal who featured on SI a few months ago [3]here, about the new understandings of human nature and their consequences for political life and the social world. He suggests that a revolution in our understanding of being human is taking place, driven by cognitive scientists rather than, as might have once been the case, philosophers and theologians.

[4]Social Animal

I’m currently reading his book at the moment and, at least in terms of this sort of popular social science, it’s one of the best I’ve read in a long time. He synthesises an enormous literature in an accessible and enjoyable way, introducing cutting edge research in a range of disciplines (as well as the historical precursors to these modern innovations) to a much wider public than would possibly encounter this stuff. In fact I’d go so far as to say it’s a model for how to do publicly engaged science - so why aren’t more academics writing these sorts of books?

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-07-09 08:00)

[1]

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/mike-odonnell/charles-wright-mills%e2%80%99-sociological-imagi
2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
Last month the University of Warwick hosted a very special conference. Virtual Futures was a 21st century reboot of a path-breaking international conference that took place there in the mid 90s. The new conference looked back to the original, while also developing its themes further, looking at a fascinating range of issues:

It’s going to answer some very important questions such as, what is cyberculture? What impact has the internet had on culture? What impact did the conference have on the work and careers of participants? Has it changed the world in any way? Is this the first movement defined by Cyberspace? And if so where has this taken us?

The ’95 conference attracted performers and philosophers including Stelarc, Hakim Bey, Manuel De Landa and Orlan. The themes discussed included: chaos theory, geopolitics, feminism, nanotechnology, cyberpunk fiction, machine music, net security, military strategy, plastic surgery, hacking, bio-computation, cognition, cryptography & capitalism. Many of these topics are still poignant today with perhaps the addition of genetics, bio-engineering, neuroscience, artificial intelligence, bio-ethics and social media.

Thankfully the [3]Knowledge Centre at the University of Warwick recorded pretty much the entire festival! So over the next few days, we’ll be highlighting some of the best bits of what was a stunningly eclectic range of speakers and participants. If you are as intrigued as we were about the conference, you can find [4]it (as well as its [5]organizer) on Twitter.
VF #1 - Mark Fisher on Communications and Late Capitalism (2011-07-11 08:00)


He talks about the growing 'digital communicative malaise' which can be observed in contemporary society while suggesting that there's still too much reluctance to address this issue on the left. Yet why should attacking a technological development be seen as reactionary? He suggests that digital technologies can be seen as communicative parasites that destroy other enjoyments: it destroys our capacity to attend to the pleasurable (described by others as [5]Continuous Partial Attention) and tightens the grip of disciplinary power on our everyday lives. As he observes, "as soon as you have e-mail you no longer have working hours"

SI was supposed to interview Mark at the conference but unfortunately the editor was ill so consigned to (frustratedly) watching this fascinating talk via the conference live stream. Hopefully we’ll get the chance to do the
interview later in the summer!

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/themes/virtualfutures/markfisher/

VF #2 - STELARC: THE BODY AND THE ARTIST (2011-07-12 08:00)

[1]

[2]Stelarc is a performance artist quite unlike any other. Witness his third ear in the picture above. Take a look at his [3]website for further examples of his work. His keynote at the conference was, for lack of a better term, challenging.

For a year I lived above a pizza parlor, just like the sociologist William Foote Whyte did in 1936, the year he was doing field research for what would later become his famous urban ethnography, *Street Corner Society*. And every time I felt the heat of the pizza ovens seeping up through my kitchen floor I thought of him and the family who owned the pizza parlor he lived over. The *Martinis*, I think, was their name.

That, at least, was the name William Foote Whyte gave to them. All of the people and places in *Street Corner Society* were fictionalized. They had to be. Sociologists often change the names of their subjects in order to keep them anonymous, to protect their identity. This didn’t matter so much in the early, early days of the discipline when there weren’t actual people animating sociologists’ texts. In the early, early days, say, the late 1800s or so, sociologists wrote about things like *class struggle* or *suicide* or the *iron cage of bureaucracy* without an actual person, dead or alive, anywhere in sight. The one exception to this was Sigmund Freud, who often, in his studies, featured the stories of not only real live people, but sometimes, even ghosts, up close.

But all of this slowly started to change by the 1920s, especially for sociologists working in North America, who, from the very beginning insisted that their analyses be timely and rooted in the mundane circumstances of people’s everyday lives. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote *The Philadelphia Negro*, W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Nels Anderson’s *The Hobo* and the Chicago School under Robert Park, *jack-rollers* and *unadjusted girls*, *taxi-hall dancers* and *street gangs*. From the very beginning, North American sociologists thought it was important to give their analyses a body and a voice and a few of these sociologists, Robert and Helen Lynd, for example, or Clifford R. Shaw, deliberately fictionalized the bodies and voices they wrote about, the Lynds
creating "the X family" in their two classic studies of a small American town, Middletown and Middletown in Transition and Shaw, an entire case book filled with the life histories of an unofficial community of delinquent, juvenile boys.

This, I have to admit is what lured me into the discipline of sociology in the first place, this chance to tell stories about the world that may or may not be true. This is the promise that all sociologists make, whether they cast their stories in words or images, numbers or graphs. They all start from the earthly terrain of people’s everyday lives and struggles or, at least, the idea of people’s everyday lives and struggles, and then, to varying degrees of objectivity, accountability and certainty, try to figure out how these lives and struggles are lived. Social theorists match abstract ideas to places and people and their social problems. Survey researchers turn places and people and problems into populations, then samples. Social psychologists create natural, partly natural or simulated settings, where, just like on reality television, they document the ways people act or interact when they stop being polite.

Which brings me back to Street Corner Society and the very imaginative sociological imagination of William Foote Whyte. He was an ethnographer, which meant he created narrative analyses about the world told from the perspective of his own subjective mind. Much like the way I started this story about living above a pizza parlor, except for the ethnographer, every anecdote must be tallied and accounted for, should their analyses ever be challenged or maligned.

End Note: More on the "imaginative sociological imagination" is [2]right here.

1. [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-YCmc8Pq0Y2c/ThxT4orMRVI/AAAAAAAAKgU/KciwSi3pr70/s1600/IMG_0005-1.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-YCmc8Pq0Y2c/ThxT4orMRVI/AAAAAAAAKgU/KciwSi3pr70/s1600/IMG_0005-1.jpg)
VF #3 WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR OUR FUTURE? (2011-07-13 08:00)

The famous cyber-punk author, [2]Pat Cadigan, was one of the speakers at the original Virtual Futures conference in 1994. At the 2011 conference she returned as a keynote speaker and addressed a range of the themes which link the original conference to its 21st century reboot. You can watch her talk [3]here.

3. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/themes/virtualfutures/patcadigan/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/themes/virtualfutures/patcadigan/)

 Responses to the White Paper on Education in England (2011-07-14 08:00)

A few days ago, the UK government publicised the new [1]White Paper on Higher Education in England. (click on the title or on the image below to read the White Paper).
SI recommends two responses to it:

[3] Simon Blackburn’s article in the Times Higher Education debunks the conflation between ‘student choice’ and ‘student need’; questions whether the elusive and emotional category of ‘student experience’ should at all be at the heart of educational policy; and analyses the reasons why research and teaching are ignored in the White Paper, even though they are so obviously entwined with any possible notion of quality of education.
Daniel Nehring’s analysis focusses on the other side of the ‘experience’ which is missing from the White Paper: that of people working in higher education. Nehring makes a strong case that ‘the rise of the research grant as the key indicator of academic prowess and entry ticket for a meaningful academic career’, in conjunction with the recent cuts, are fostering the casualisation of academic labour; and that another part of the problem is that ‘universities and sociology departments [...] recruit too many talented individuals to pursue doctorates without subsequently offering them opportunities to make meaningful contributions to the discipline.

Nehring writes:

The privatisation and full-on commercialisation of higher education currently underway seem likely to exacerbate trends towards a stratification of ‘the lecturer experience’ that have been unfolding for a number of years already. A select few PhD graduates, who have received their academic socialisation in elite universities, will be able to develop academic careers in those same institutions. For them, the integration of research and teaching will continue to be a meaningful concept. Another few will be able to move into permanent lectureships at the new second and third-tier teaching universities. They will spend their careers as teaching drones, reproducing second-hand sociological knowledge from textbooks for a mass audience of student-consumers. The ‘rest’ will either form an academic proletariat of part-time, short-term teachers and research assistants or drop out of academia altogether.

1. [http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/h/11-944-higher-education-students-at-heart-of-system.pdf)
3. [http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=416754#.ThVgK3O4hac.twitter](http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=416754#.ThVgK3O4hac.twitter)

Autonomy of the person from the state: 'pastafarian' wins historic battle (2011-07-15 08:00)

The [1]Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster has won a small battle for religious tolerance and freedom of appearance in the face (or, rather, head), of Niko Alm, a devout Austrian pastafarian, who was recently granted the right to appear on his driving licence wearing a spaghetti strainer - his religious headgear.

Read an article on the BBC [2]here and Niko Alm’s blog [3]here (in German). Even though it is not directed at any particular issue, but is a more general act of citizen autonomy, Mr Alm’s choice of photograph and his interaction with the Austrian authorities reminds of the [4]niqab-and-hot-pants protest of French students, on which the Idle Ethnographer posted in November 2010.

[5]
Making a point in the name of freedom appearance (Photo: Niko Alm's blog).


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May the Pastafarians make an ever bigger splash. 1) After denying so vehemently that atheism is not a religion the Pastafarian sect of atheism fights for equal rights to freely express their religious beliefs. As Niko Alm states it, his goal is for “Pastafarianism to become an officially recognised faith in Austria.” 2) The Flying Spaghetti Monster actually proved was that some people are utterly ignorant of natural theology / general revelation. These propose the best that science and philosophy have offer as to the universe's coming into being. They propose that the universe had a creator and even identify some of the creator’s characteristics. See http://www.truefreethinker.com/articles/flying-spaghetti-monster-invisible-pi nk-unicorns-et-al-part-1-4

Franz Kafka International Airport (2011-07-16 08:00)
A couple of weeks ago I was due to fly home from Florence to London. Even including the journey back from Stanstead, this should have taken four hours at most. Instead it took almost two days. The first flight was cancelled and it took the airline 5 hours to admit this before they then spent another hour denying any responsibility for housing us or finding alternative flights. Eventually we were taken to a hotel and booked on a flight for the following day. This in turn was cancelled. Cue a four hour coach journey to Rome where, having almost missed the second replacement flight, we had a difficult job convincing the airline we were booked on this one.

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Suffice to say this was not a fun experience. A seemingly endless purgatory-esque experience of pointless, uncertain and stressed waiting with no reliable information about what was going on & little capacity to communicate with those nominally responsible for our journey. For anyone else who has had airport experiences along these lines please enjoy an [1]Onion classic:

[EMBED]


Add SI on Facebook and Twitter! (2011-07-17 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2](http://en-gb.facebook.com/people/Sociological-Imagination/100001327205025)

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates

4. [http://twitter.com/socnewswire](http://twitter.com/socnewswire)
5. [http://twitter.com/soc_imagination](http://twitter.com/soc_imagination)

The Opposite of Crush (2011-07-17 12:54)
Once, in my Introductory Sociology course, I gave a lecture about social oppression. It was fairly abstract. I didn’t talk about any specific kind of social oppression, like gender oppression or racial oppression or sexual oppression. I just talked about oppression, like what it is and how it works and what it feels like or rather what the philosopher Marilyn Frye says it is and how it works and what it feels like.

Using her classic metaphor I paraphrased that oppression was like, as Frye describes it, the wires of a bird-cage, as she writes: Cages... Consider a birdcage... If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires... If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere... Furthermore, even if, one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would gave trouble going past the wires to get anywhere...

There is no physical property of any one wire, nothing that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way... It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment... It will require no great subtlety of mental powers... It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon... And on and on and on. You get the idea. Like I said, the lecture was abstract.

Following the lecture, two of the students taking my course left me a note, which wasn’t very abstract at all. It read, You’re sexually desirable, but a dyke for sure, too bad you’re a lesbian, what a waste, using very coarse and ugly expletives for the sexually desirable, dyke, and lesbian parts. Then underneath it read: She is as gay as they come carpet-muncher! seriously! Part of the note is posted above.

The first thing I thought when I read the note was that in all my years of studying feminist and queer popular culture I had never heard the word carpet muncher before. The second thing I thought was Oh my god, some student in my class today thinks I’m sexually desirable, how can that be, I didn’t even look that good today. Then, after these two initial thoughts, I gathered my books, walked down to my office, locked the door behind me and cried.

This wasn’t the first time someone called me lesbian. Once, in Grade Seven, three of my closest girlhood friends took it upon themselves to tell me I was gay, which at the time I found really confusing, since I thought you had to be a young, cute man to be gay, like Jack Tripper, the young, cute man who pretended to be gay so he could live platonically with two girls on the sit-com Three’s Company.

But it was the first time someone called me a lesbian where I couldn’t see where the words were coming from, where I couldn’t see their face. It was the anonymity of their hate that saddened and, in that moment that it happened, scared me, that made me feel the exact opposite of that slightly self-conscious feeling you might get upon learning that someone secretly loves you, that someone might secretly care.
That’s what a hate crime feels like when it happens to you: Like the opposite of knowing that someone has secretly made you the object of a crush.

To crush is, after all, to press. More from Marilyn Frye: The root of the word oppression is the element press... The press of the crowd... Pressed into military service... To press a pair of pants... Printing press... Press the button... Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them... Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility... Mold... Immobilize... Reduce...

Which is why, I guess, its so important to name the places where hate comes from. To mark it and give it a name. Then we can start to figure out the dynamics of our own self-hatred and sorrow and fear, which, hopefully might lead to a better understanding of our self.

The sadness and fear didn’t last long, however, at least not in my memory. Since if there’s one thing I learned from Marilyn Frye (and from not caring that April Hamilton and Nan Crawford and Tracey Gilmore, those three girlhood friends of mine, said that I was queer), its that social oppression, as debilitating and burdensome as it may be, can also be defied.

So when people inevitably ask me after I tell this story: Did you ever figure out who the students were who wrote you that note, did you ever figure out their name? Or, sometimes even more boldly: Well, is it true what that note said, are you a carpet muncher, are you queer? I answer them exactly the same way I did when I posed those same very questions to my unidentified haters, who sat hidden in the crowd of students who made up my Introductory Sociology class that year: The answer to one of those questions is – yes.

1. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-EHXS5zrhDbI/TWZfWV1l0kI/AAAAAAAASKI/pFo0r2g9toQ/s1600/hate.jpg

Anonymous (2012-02-13 05:54:43)
It’s your expertise as a professor that matters; though i’m glad you are brave enough to say ‘yes’.

I know one thing thus, that there are a lot of people who would be considered themselves gay if they could. The fact of the matter is that they fear of the unknown, the uncertainty of what others might say, to go further, they might fear God for following their hearts instead of what was taught to them as right or wrong, good or bad. In fact some of us never live a daring enough life because of all the aforementioned. But if someone has the courage to express him herself in this way, more power to them. If there are consequences after death...some might say: Who cares. Off course I do care..................

The real naked bodies (2011-07-18 08:00)
In this video, Jennette Williams, winner of the 2008 CDS/Honickman First Book Prize in Photography, tells the story of making the photographs in her book "The Bathers."
Review of ‘Soundbitten: The Perils of Media-Centered Political Activism’ by Sarah Sobieraj (2011-07-18 08:00)

In her introduction to [1]Soundbitten: The Perils of Media-Centered Political Activism (NYU Press, 2011), sociologist and Tufts University professor writes, ‘I thought this would be a book about how activist groups use presidential elections as moments of political opening, but as I spent time with activists engaged in campaign-related work I came to realize that first and foremost this is a story about activists and the news media’ (2). While it perhaps comes as no surprise to those familiar with Habermasian public sphere theory that collective attempts to transform or reform civil society become involved with the mass media, her findings may shock the technologically optimistic: Media-orientated activist strategies seeking to draw attention to a political message almost always fail.

This research presented in this book is based upon fieldwork with fifty voluntary associations, interviews with journalists, and participant observation at US presidential campaign events in 2000 and 2004. And with this wealth of information, Sobieraj recounts a troubling story. She shows that activist groups organize mobilizations around national presidential campaign events in order to attract journalistic attention to their political message. Unfortunately, the routines and interests of journalists exist in structural opposition to this desired outcome, and it hardly ever works. Furthermore, a media-centred strategy ultimately ends up compromising the quality of face-to-face
communication with ordinary members of the public as well as harming intergroup solidarity. Worse still, she sees no evidence that the advent of new media and social media tools have in any way reconciled this dilemma. In this manner, activism usually fails to accomplish its goals, and as a democratic society we should be deeply concerned.

The penultimate paragraph of a book review is typically reserved for some sort of criticism of the book being reviewed, for drawing attention to a weakness in its execution, say, or to an opportunity the author has missed. I do not do that here, and that is quite simply because I cannot think of anything negative! Sobieraj's book is as close to flawless as they come, its chapters tightly and artfully weaving ethnographically rich data and social theory together into a single convincing—and compelling—argument. Anyone who wants to know what a book-length scholarly monograph ought to look like need look no further. Indeed, doctoral students of the sociology of culture and media would be particularly well-advised to study Soundbitten closely as they write up their own thesis research.

And although Sobieraj writes about American activist groups mobilizing around American presidential elections, this book is a must-read for UK sociologists of all stripes, and not just social movement specialists, as well. With the advent of the REF's so-called impact agenda, researchers are coming under intense pressure to ensure—and prove—that their work has made a difference. Unsurprisingly, suddenly everybody seems intensely fixated upon attracting mainstream media attention and using new social media tools. Yet I cannot help but wonder if UK scholars are going to be like the activists of Soundbitten, ignored no matter how hard we try and much worse off for even having tried in the first place. In short, this book is both an exhortation to do 'impact' differently...and a dire warning.


1. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Soundbitten-Perils-Media-Centered-Political-Activism/dp/0814741363

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-07-19 08:00)
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

tion-and-why-we-fail-to-match-it-today/cwrightmills488/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

The art of lost places: photographs by by Axel Hansmann (2011-07-20 08:00)

The Idle Ethnographer fell in love with these photos and has nothing more to say. This is not yet sociology - but it is certainly food for hungry proto-sociological imaginations. Just wanted to share them - click on [1]this link to see the whole gallery:

Choice! (2011-07-21 08:00)

In this instalment of the wonderful [1]RSA Animate series, [2]Renata Salecl talks about the dynamics of choice in modern societies. The Idle Ethnographer talked about [3]this a few months ago and it’s a fascinating issue - the structural, cultural and personal aspects of choosing are so much more complex than certain views of human nature are willing to admit. Yet social and economic policy so frequently rests on laughably one dimensional views of human nature.

What are the consequences of this? Could more adequate, less truncated, understandings of what we are aid social transformation? As Salecl puts it ‘the ideology of choice ... actually prevents social change’. If so are academics in a place to provide them or, when they clash with the ideological needs of neoliberal society, will they simply be disregarded? Even though she may be overestimating the potential which changing social understandings of human nature holds for social transformation, she’s surely correct that the fixation on the individual (as a corollary of the ideology of choice) hinders political critique and collective action. A point [4]Zygmunt Bauman has been making for a long time.

1. http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,774636,00.html
4. http://www.mcbuch-online.de/
5. http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/0,1518,774636,00.html
5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/1bqMY82xzWo
So entrenched in our most intimate yearnings, home often seems as if it were some universal truth, like it says in all those sayings, home is where the heart is, home is where you hang your hat, you would be so nice to come home to, there’s no place like home. But it isn’t, of course. Since like all universal truths, home varies across the smallest increments of time and space, manifesting itself into a symbolic meaning which some people acknowledge and others fight to escape, some feel controlled by and others struggle to achieve, that hard to grasp essence of identity, which differentiates who belongs in a place, who doesn’t belong, and who has the right to tell.

Many scholars have worked to understand how home is an epistemology or knowledge system. For most of the century, such analyses arose either completely outside or on the fringes of the academy, for example, the critical essays of novelist Virginia Woolfe, the ethnographies of novelist and playwright Zora Neale Hurston, the political philosophies of sociologist Franz Fanon, or the cultural analyses of literary critic Edward Said.

However, in the early 1980s, studying home in this way began to gather force within academic women’s studies departments. Theoretical essays by feminist, post-colonial and queer scholars, most notably bell hooks, Biddy Martin and Chandra Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mary Louise Pratt, Adrienne Rich, Trihn T. Mihn-Ha and Clare Cooper Marcus, rigorously incorporated ideas from literature, history and social science to understand people’s homes in the context of migration and immigration, work and poverty, racial, ethnic, and linguistic inequalities, cultural loss and assimilation, as well as the politics of gender and sexuality. Several important anthologies were compiled, including Janet Zandy’s Calling Home, Becky Thompson and Sangeeta Tyagi’s Names We Call Home, Mickey Pearlman’s A Place Called Home, and Hazel Rochman and Darlene Z. McCampbell’s Leaving Home.

It perhaps goes without saying that studying home in this way has always had deep inter-disciplinary roots, ones that often reach far outside the academy and onto more political, literary and artistic terrains. However, it is also important to point out, that regardless of the discipline or medium through which it is expressed, whether memoir or poetry, ethnography or film, every critical analysis of home begins at the exact same starting point, the author’s (or scholar or activist or artist’s) sense of literal and figurative displacement. For example, the first member of a family to find work in the academy; the social scientist who pursues research away from the academy and out in the field; or the scholar settled far a field from the country of their citizenship, because of political exile or personal choice.
For some, losing one’s physical or symbolic footing means feeling at home in many locales, possessing what artist and art critic Lucy Lippard calls a *multi-centered sense of place*. For others, it means feeling homeless in every place, living as, what essayist Pico Ayer calls, a *nowhereian*. Either way, whether the author (or scholar or activist or artist) feels connected to the earth or disconnected, possessing many homes or no home, one thing becomes clear. It is the physical or psychic act of moving from one place to another which shifts the social sediment of the familiar to reveal the space where home exists, in between the desires of the self and the expectations of others, or what philosopher Gilles Deleuze would call the *folds of society* or the *pli*. Poet and cultural critic Gloria Anzaldúa likens this sense physical and psychic displacement to living in a historical and cultural borderlands, namely the borderlands between Texas, the southwestern United States, and Mexico, the place of her birth, childhood and growing up. In her epistemology of home, these borderlands, (a social collusion of Native American, European and Mexican people), become a metaphor for her to rediscover the languages and stories of her past, (languages and stories, which sometimes makes her feel oppressed and alienated and other times comforted and proud), as well as for thinking about healing the social divisions and enmities which this, as well as other borders evoke, with their hostile definitions of us and them and their violent visions of insiders and outsiders. For Anzaldúa, home is a state of being that we accumulate over time and know we possess, but can’t always name, even as it harms or protects us. Boundlessly protean, elusive, and ethereal, home isn’t something we can escape from or return to, like it says in all those sayings, but rather, something we create and negotiate, sometimes making it our most inescapable burden and other times our most saving grace. Novelist and cultural critic Salman Rushdie says as much in his frame-by-frame analysis of the Hollywood film, *The Wizard of Oz*, arguably one of the most internationally known parables about what home means in the twentieth century. Based on a series of children’s books by Frank L. Baum, the story of the film goes something like this: A girl named Dorothy longs to escape the drudgery, loneliness and confinement of her life by leaving her home in rural Kansas and going over the rainbow. This longing is suddenly and unexpectedly realized after an unusually forceful tornado carries her off to a fantastical world called the Land of Oz. However, even though many of her longings become fulfilled in this place, she leads a life of adventure, she makes a gang of friends, Dorothy finds herself deeply homesick for the routines and people she left behind in Kansas. And so, after a very long journey and several tests of character, she decides to return home, a decision made possible through the magical power of a pair of ruby slippers, her recitation of a single phrase, there’s no place like home, and, perhaps most importantly, the sheer force of her own desire. As she stands in Oz still awaiting her fate, Dorothy tearfully declares to a very powerful and kind witch that should she be allowed to return to Kansas, she will never travel any further than her own backyard. An unfortunate ending, argues Rushdie, since with this single scene an important message of the film becomes muted. He writes, *The real secret of the ruby slippers is not that there’s no place like home but, rather, that there is no longer any such place as home, except, of course, for the homes we make, or the homes ... made for us, in Oz ... Which, is anywhere, and everywhere, except for the place from where we began*. It’s hard to say for sure where Oz is located, though, if we are to believe Dorothy, it may, in fact, exist. In the very final scene of the film, when her family and neighbors inform her that Oz was simply a dream, Dorothy argues with them by saying, *but it wasn’t a dream, it was a place*. And in the series of books the film was based on, Dorothy actually returns to Oz again and again after her accidental first visit, eventually choosing to reside there instead of Kansas. Rushdie builds upon this ambiguity to make his main theoretical point: That our homes are something we imagine, something we invent, and perhaps even more importantly, something we are always moving towards or going to, even if the distances we travel in physical terms are never very far. Among some people in the southern United States, a *homegoing* is a funeral and I invoke this colloquialism
here not so much to discuss the ritual where the living say good bye to the dead and the dead are laid to rest, but rather to think about the coupling of the words home and going. It’s a powerful pairing, one, which, draws to the surface what I would suggest is the most definitive quality of home: It’s uncertainty. Rare is the colloquialism, which does this.

As I pointed out earlier, most sayings and idioms about home cast it as if were something fixed or something constant, something we can rely upon or easily predict. Like a home front or a homeport, a hometown, a home team, a home plate, a homecoming. Even when our homes are broken, they still carry with them the implication that they once occupied some sort of location. But a homegoing is devoid of any endpoint. It doesn’t offer us any final destination. And so it lays bare a possible explanation as to why we so often labor so hard to pin down our homes and keep their edges from unraveling.

End Note 1: The image at the top is of me in my first home place: River Road, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

End Note 2: I have recently incorporated the idea of 'home goings' in a more narrative work, [2]right here.

1. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-sEes7359JAc/TiigrUj2u5I/AAAAAAAAKlc/_Ftqt5Eig5Y/s1600/5502066229_40f35513ef_b.j pg


[...] movie script doctor, I am in the process of re-writing Place Maps into an ethnographic novel called Home Goings and am putting all of these parts [...] 

From learning to earning – the changing ethos of English Higher Education (2011-07-22 08:00)

The publication of the White Paper on Higher Education emphatically entitled ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ opens the doors to one of the most radical transformations in the UK education system. The perverse and socially destructive potential of the document is vividly reported in a recent [1]article written by Des Freedman and Natalie Fenton. As the authors suggest, in its attempt to introduce a consumer-oriented and competitive market of HE institutions, the White Paper shows its highly ideological and financial nature – whilst the (supposedly essential) educational component is left completely out of the picture. Students are to become active consumers, skilfully searching the higher education market for degrees able to place in their hands a good job after completion. Such assumption is aimed at justifying the raise in the fees to be paid by the student-consumer, since the best ‘product’ may be expensive but cost efficient in the long run.

Unfortunately, this view eludes any consideration of the process of erudition that should be at the very heart of any HE system, as the idea of learning is replaced by that of earning. The simple swap between these two terms in the lexicon of HE is not a secondary matter, whereas the original meaning of learning as a ‘acquiring knowledge of or skills in something by study or being taught’, is changed into learning as ‘gaining knowledge of or skills in something that will buy you a wealthy future’. Simply put, the leitmotif of the White Paper is that the pursuit of profit will become the only determinant of value in choosing a degree, whilst the idea of pursuing knowledge is demoted to the status of a mere means to achieve that goal. Such distortion taints the whole ethos of English Higher Education
to the roots, and epitomises the spineless free market approach endorsed by Mr Willets and his colleagues in the Cabinet.


The Disruptive Power of Social Media (2011-07-23 08:00)

Lectures about marketing aren't going to be a regular feature on SI (promise!) but this one is fascinating:

Dear Dr. Sprenger,

Thank you so much for your article [1]Home Goings on The Sociological Imagination. As a sociologist who left her home in West Virginia many years ago, I have always carried the feeling of being misplaced or unsettled. While recently reading Alessandro Portelli’s book They Say in Harlan County, I was struck by his assertion that mountain people are homesick people. And I found an echo in your work. The truth of the matter is, that for many of us mountain people, no matter where we live, the mountains are home - true north, for better or worse. I have often longed, and feared, to return home; and my exile has lasted now nearly 20 years. Should the day ever come when I am privileged and burdened to return to my original homeplace, I am certain that my sociological imagination would find me adrift in a foreign country in spite of the comforting familiarity of people and place. Thank you again for such a thought-provoking piece.

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A Little More On [2]Home Goings ...

I was born in a small city in Ontario Canada, just north of Toronto and south of the Curve Lake Indian Reserve, but when I was seven years old my family started traveling to Florida every year. At first these were just ten-day or two week vacations during the school holiday Canadians call March Break and Americans, Spring or Easter Break, but within a one or two years, [3]my parents bought a place near the beach and a large beauty salon in a strip mall and we started traveling there every two or three months, usually in the off season.

I remember going to Walt Disney World in early November when it wasn’t hot or crowded with tourists and my mom had to buy my brother and me thick, hooded Magic Kingdom sweatshirts since, to us at least, the Florida weather was so strangely cold. Soon, in addition to these trips, my parents started stealing a few days on the ends of our school holidays to make those visits longer and my mother, brother and I would head south for the entire summer, making what we once considered vacations seem more like relocations. By the time I was ten and my brother fourteen we had two sets of games and two sets of clothes, two sets of friends and two sets of favourite television re-runs, an Ontario set and a Florida set.
Finally, when I was thirteen, my parents decided that in addition to the summer, we’d spend the school year there. By now they owned and operated four beauty salons and the Florida, which had once been a vacation destination to me, a *paradise*, was slowly losing its exotic edges and becoming my *home*. I remember that first year I started school in Florida. It was August, much sooner than the Canadian school year started and I’d wait for the school bus every morning roasting in the hip, back to school fashion of that fall, which was way too heavy and layered for Florida during that time of year.

Still, all the girls in my new school were over-dressed, just like in Ontario my friends and I often dressed a little too skimpy, our clothes picked to match what we read in *Seventeen* magazine more than the weather. (Though I’d never openly admit this to my mother, I remember freezing to death every single day of my Grade Seven winter, since I insisted on making a short, burgundy, fur lined corduroy jacket my winter coat that year. I wore it with a huge, burgundy tartan scarf, which I never wrapped around my neck, but left hanging open).

Overdressing was just the first step in my slow cultural transformation from a Northerner to a Southerner and it’s very important to note that in this cultural transformation I wasn’t alone. Many Ontarianians and northeastern Americans, (see Elizabeth Hay’s beautiful novel, *Student of Weather*, especially the character of Maurice Dove) have settled or made settlements in Florida, this utterly indigenous North American diaspora including once a year and seasonal tourists (sometimes called Snowbirds) and entire communities of families, who, often divorced or on their way to divorce, struggle to find their footing in sand rather than snow.

Since I was a little girl, these were my people, the kids I spent my school holidays and summers with on the beach and around the pool, my closest high school friends and their families, who like me were Northern kids transplanted to the South, all of us, as Elizabeth Hay would put it, at home on both northern and southern terrain. Though its taken my almost twenty years to realize this. For most of my adult life I’ve been looking for and writing about home in places often buried in snow: [5]Madison, Wisconsin; Edmonton, Alberta; Winnipeg and Pine Falls, Manitoba; and Potsdam, New York, where, I’m very pleased to report that wearing one’s scarf untied and draped over a thinly insulated jacket seems to still be a fashion trend among Grade Seven girls – at least in 2007, the winter I lived there.

But what I’ve come to learn, however, is often the places where our homes lie, as well as our paradises for that matter, are often not where we think: For me right now, living in and around New York City, (so close to Ontario), seems slightly exotic to me and my quick trips to Florida to visit my mother, (the one landscape, which has stayed consistent throughout every winter of my entire life), slightly un-foreign. Leaving me to wonder if maybe I’ve made both places my *paradise at home*.

4. [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-9bUYH-QDH10/Tir6Y55shaI/AAAAAAAAKmE/Cth7UJ62Yqg/s1600/Paradise%2BSign-1.JPG](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-9bUYH-QDH10/Tir6Y55shaI/AAAAAAAAKmE/Cth7UJ62Yqg/s1600/Paradise%2BSign-1.JPG)
5. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/audrey-sprenger/when-sociology-was-cool/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/audrey-sprenger/when-sociology-was-cool/)
and Katie Klein anyway. I knew the gas station attendants and waitresses and store clerks [...]

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-07-24 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

[3] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5] Twitter Updates


Review of Chavs and The Precariat (2011-07-25 08:00)

Among those who understand social classes as things it is acknowledged that they have changed. As Guy Standing explains this change, 'globalisation has resulted in a fragmentation of national class structures' (p.7). Whereas Owen Jones sees change imposed by a deliberate political strategy of successive Conservative/ Coalition and New Labour governments.

Insofar as this is still of academic concern, given the predominance of a 'discursivity' which denies the facticity of class, a sociological spectrum ranges from a world of rationally calculating economic individuals, through sliding scales of status to the eight occupational groups of the soon-to-be-abolished UK Office of Population and Census Statistics. The five A-Es of market researchers with their additional electorally crucial C1s and C2s are reduced in the conventional three upper-middle-working class pyramid, while Marx’s two basic classes have been recast globally as other intermediate classes and the peasantry have collapsed into a proletariat that is possibly now more numerous than ever.

However as Standing sees it, rather than remaining within the ranks of Marx’s proletariat, increasingly large
numbers of people are being pushed into a new and insecure 'precariat'. Drawn from different sections of society, this new, growing and mainly youthful class is also 'dangerous' because it may be hostile to the privileges it sees enjoyed by labourism’s dwindling core.

'First used by French sociologists in the 1980s, to describe temporary or seasonal workers', in Italy precariati implies 'a precarious existence as a normal state of living', though it is not Hardt and Negri’s Multitude. In Germany 'the term has been used to describe not only temporary workers but also the jobless who have no hope of social integration' (p.13). This is close to Marx’s lumpenproletariat, 'that passively rotting social scum' but it is not that either.

For Jones, it is the British working class that has been recast 'From salt of the earth to scum of the earth.' (p.72). 'What the Tories are doing is placing the chav myth at the heart of British politics, so as to entrench the idea that there are entire communities around Britain crawling with feckless, delinquent, violent and sexually debauched no-hopers' (p.80). This follows from 'Thatcher’s ruinous class war' in which 'those working-class communities that suffered most were... herded into an "underclass" whose poverty was supposedly self-inflicted' (p.67). However, where New Labour redefined poverty as social exclusion to focus on a minority blamed for their own 'unemployability', the Coalition (and Miliband?) are concerned with 'the squeezed middle', writing off the working-class majority.

Owen quotes polls showing half the population still describe themselves as working class, a constant figure since the 1960s (p.33) because 'well over half the workforce' (p.144), 'more than 28 million' are still 'in blue-collar manual and white-collar routine clerical jobs' (p.33). The demonization of this majority is 'the flagrant triumphalism of the rich who, no longer challenged by those below them, instead point and laugh at them' (p.269)

Sociologically this leaves out the middle class who are insufficiently differentiated from 'the rich'. So when Owen writes, 'the myth of the classless society gained ground just as society became more rigged in favour of the middle class' (p.167) and 'The result is a society run by the middle class for the middle class' (p.182), typically of most class analysis, he leaves out the ruling class.

Owen concedes, 'Most middle-class people cannot afford to go private, and want good properly funded local schools and hospitals' (p.268) and he adds 'middle-level occupations... are shrinking' (p.152) as 'More and more university graduates are forced to take relatively humble jobs' (p.176). This indicates a polarising class structure going pear-shaped rather than the persistence of the old pyramid with the bottom half disguised as 'chavs'. As Owen confirms, right to buy 'drove a wedge through working-class Britain, creating a divide between homeowners and council tenants' (p.61). It is the formerly unskilled, 'rough' and 'unrespectable' section of the manually working class that has been 'demonized' leaving a new 'respectable' middle-working/working-middle class between the snobs and the yobs, as has been said. These 'hard working families' are the target of politicians' blandishments as they scrabble desperately to run up a down escalator, contributing to the hysteria about education, for instance – another bubble about to burst, so that, as Owen rightly says, 'at the centre of a new political agenda must be a total redefinition of aspiration' (p.258).

Owen’s other answers are similar to Standing’s: 'straddle the internal divisions within the working class that widened under Thatcherism' (p.259) while 'Another core demand must be for decent, skilled, secure, well-paid jobs' (p.260) in a Green New Deal that, 'As well as providing an array of new jobs, would give working-class people a stake in the environment by transforming it into a bread-and-butter issue' (p.262). Similarly Standing: 'In shifting from jobs, the right to work must be strengthened' (p.163) but he ignores the profit motive which drives the dystopia of a self-regulating market system and thus abandons the Utopia of a world free from profit. Owen goes beyond Standing’s 'mild Utopianism' to recognise Utopia is now survival, a future for humanity or no future. There is literally no other way forward. This is the contemporary version of the choice between Socialism or Barbarism.

Both books make us think about the great class transformation that is taking place. Is this creating a new
class, or once again reforming a new working class that will be different from the old one? The numerical (if not yet ideological) feminisation that constitutes such a large part of Standing’s precariat ensures that it will be different, while the redivision of knowledge as well as of labour also bids farewell to Leninist forms of political organisation that united ‘progressive intellectuals’ with manual workers and peasants. Rather than such vanguards, ‘The precariat,’ as Standing concludes (p.183), ‘is not victim, villain or hero – it is just a lot of us’. Or the lot of us!

Guy Standing

*The Precariat, The New Dangerous Class*

London Bloomsbury 2011

(£19.99 pbk; £57 hard cover)

ISBN 978-1849663519/ 9781849663519

pp.198

Owen Jones

*CHAVS, The demonization of the working class*

London: Verso 2011

(£14.99 pbk; £? hard cover)


298 pp

*Patrick Ainley is co-author with Martin Allen of Lost Generation? New strategies for youth and education, London: Continuum 2010*

Chavs author Owen Jones returns to Stockport | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-27 08:03:29)

[...] this video Owen Jones, author of the superb Chavs which was reviewed on SI here, returns to his hometown of Stockport to investigate views on [...]


[...] that the entire English working class had been turned into Chavs (2011). Both books reviewed here on [...]

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A sociological blog dedicated to 'Humanity 2.0' (2011-07-25 09:11)

Recently a videoclip of me giving one of the first TEDx lectures at Warwick was posted here on [1]'Humanity 2.0', which is about changing definitions of the human, an issue central to the past, present and future of the social sciences. I have been exploring this line of thought in several forums recently, including the [2]Virtual Futures 2.0 conference at Warwick and[3] a new book, due out in the Autumn.

However, I want to draw your attention to an Australian blog that has been doing an excellent job over the past few years covering this topic, especially bringing to bear a critical social theoretic perspective on various formulations of our emerging post-/trans-human horizons. The blog is maintained by a sociologist whose Ph.D. I externally examined for the University of New South Wales a few years ago. It is especially perceptive in capturing passing media representations of the future of humanity. The blog has the suitably science-fictional name of [4]Acheron LV-426, and I recommend that you trawl through it at your leisure.

2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/themes/virtualfutures/stevefuller/


1. http://www.nishasondhe.com/#a=0&at=0&mi=2&pt=1&pi=10000&s=0&p=0
2. http://www.nishasondhe.com/#mi=1&pt=0&pi=2&s=0&p=-1&a=0&at=0
5. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-dOL7yV_9Yyc/Ti2usSdgSwI/AAAAAAAAKng/PDYLRGDD0X8/s1600/Post+1.jpg
What Oprah's Research Staff Failed To Inform Her About India | The Sociological Imagination (2012-07-23 18:17:52)

[...] Note: Other posts I have written for "The Sociological Imagination" on India are here and here. Note 2: More lists by Audrey Sprenger about sociology and other things are right [...] 


[...] End Note: For some of my own little stories about New York City go here or here. [...] 

Where Children Sleep (2011-07-26 08:00)


[7]
Call for BSA Regional Postgraduate Day Event Proposals 2011/12 (2011-07-27 08:00)

The British Sociological Association is requesting expressions of interest from postgraduate students interested in organising a regional postgraduate day event in 2011-12.

In 2010-11, eight successful events were held throughout the UK. These one-day events express the diversity and dynamism of the postgraduate experience. It is hoped that Regional Postgraduate Day Events will provide a variety of events throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and that they will become an annual series in the BSA calendar.

We are looking for postgraduate organisers willing to co-ordinate with speakers and the BSA to organise a day event at the student’s institution. The BSA will provide up to £1,000 support for the event, which should be free for BSA members to attend and £25 for non-members. The grant can be used to pay for room hire, speakers, lunch and refreshments. Organisers are encouraged to seek a contribution from the host institution, such as free accommodation or a financial contribution to refreshments. The BSA Office will also promote and publicise the Postgraduate day schools through a number of outlets including flyers in membership packs, the BSA website and member e-newsletters.

Please email all expressions of interest to [1]events@britsoc.org.uk and address all correspondence: BSA REGIONAL POSTGRADUATE EVENTS.

The submission deadline for proposals is: **5pm, Friday 28th October 2011.** Late applications will not be considered.

Expressions of interest should include the following details:

- **NAME OF ORGANIZER(S)**
- **INSTITUTION(S)**
- **PROPOSAL FOR REGIONAL POSTGRADUATE EVENT**
  (proposed dates, proposed themes, potential speakers, anticipated costs)

*Please note the following criteria used to judge applications*

All applications will be considered by the BSA Membership Services Directors and a convenor of the BSA Postgraduate Forum based on the following selection criteria:

- Breadth of appeal beyond the organising group
- Centrality to sociological concerns
- Quality of information provided
• Geographical spread
• Distinctiveness from previous events and institutions

Null Set (2011-07-27 10:18)

[1]

IHAVENOIDEAWHATYOUARETALKINGABOUT D :

(via [2]Ache)

"It has happened to me": the untold and unheard stories of male rape (2011-07-28 08:00)

"Everybody has heard the women's stories. But nobody has heard the men's."

No one talks of male rape - yet it happens - as an instrument of war, as well as outside war. Yet this systemical silence does nothing to resolve the problem - only to perpetrate the social stigma and the physical and mental pain.

Especially in the patriarchal societies found in many developing countries, gender roles are so strictly defined that

"...both perpetrator and victim enter a conspiracy of silence and why male survivors often find, once their story is discovered, that they lose the support and comfort of those around them."

What is terrible is that research on male rape is so rare that it is impossible to say even with how common male rape is, and there has been no research of the psychological or social consequences for the victims, or of the motives of the perpetrators. The article cites one survey, published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in 2010, that found that "22% of men and 30 % of women in Eastern Congo reported conflict-related sexual violence". One of the very few researchers dealing with the problem, Lara Stemple of the University of California's Health and Human Rights Law Project, has found that, for example, 21 % of Sri Lankan males who were seen at a London torture treatment centre reported sexual abuse while in detention; in El Salvador, 76 % of male political prisoners surveyed in the 1980s described at least one incidence of sexual torture; and in a study of 6,000 concentration-camp inmates in Sarajevo, 80 % of men reported having been raped. A documentary entitled [1]Gender Against Men was produced in 2010 by Makerere University's Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda; when it was screened, attempts were made to stop it by ... international aid agencies.

Click here to read the [2]article in the Guardian.

One commentator under the article said:

"I don’t know what’s more shocking - the prevalence of rape and sexual violence, or the fact that so many male victims are ostracised by their own families and communities."

To me, what is just as shocking, is the unbelievable "zero-sum game" mentality of those among the individuals working organisations that deal with sexual violence who restrict the definition of rape to female victims only.
‘The Places We live’: urban photography by Jonas Bendiksen (2011-07-29 08:00)

Visual methods are a great part of research into the mundane, and the area where visual sociology and investigative photography are at their best (and hardest to tell apart). The work of Norwegian photographer Jonas Bendiksen is a perfect example of such a visual exploration of everyday life. Read an article about his work with a fascinating gallery of images of urban dwellings and slums here on visualnews.com.


Call for BSA Regional Postgraduate Day Event Proposals 2011/12 (2011-07-30 08:00)

The British Sociological Association is requesting expressions of interest from postgraduate students interested in organising a regional postgraduate day event in 2011-12.

In 2010-11, eight successful events were held throughout the UK. These one-day events express the diversity and dynamism of the postgraduate experience. It is hoped that Regional Postgraduate Day Events will provide a
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(proposed dates, proposed themes, potential speakers, anticipated costs)

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- Breadth of appeal beyond the organising group
- Centrality to sociological concerns
- Quality of information provided
- Geographical spread
- Distinctiveness from previous events and institutions

1. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk
Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-07-31 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

The Solitude Trilogy (2011-07-31 13:42)
After he became heralded as one of the greatest pianists to ever play, Glenn Gould stopped performing live. Doing so just didn’t allow him to perfect the way he wanted to play like performing in a studio did, where he could go over the same measure of music again and again, capturing it on tape whenever he got it exactly right. The irony of all this was that even though he was obsessive about perfecting the way he performed, as well as how his performance would be heard, Gould would hum over his playing, a fact easy to hear on any of his stunningly beautiful recordings.

I love Gould’s humming almost as much as I love to hear him play, because, for me, it documents the exact moment he made his recordings, so even though I can play these recordings again and again, every time I listen to them it feels as if I’m hearing them for the very first time, up close and live. Listening to them, I get the very same sensation I feel when I’m listening to improvisational music being created spontaneously in a jazz or hip hop club or a street musician or poet performing in the street: That undeniable thrill of art being created in the moment, that undeniable thrill that that the artist is actually there.

Gould carried his ideas about the best way to perform and document his piano playing to another artistic medium: audio documentary making. In the early 1970s he created a series of three pieces for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation about what he believed to be the essence of Canadian identity, a major topic circulating in Canadian academic, artistic and popular culture during that time. Titled The Solitude Trilogy, these documentaries were set in three places, the far North, off the coast of Newfoundland and on the Canadian prairies. Gould created them by recording ambient sounds in these places, interviewing a few of the people who lived there and then layering these sounds and interviews over one another along with pieces of found tape and other miscellaneous and often completely unrelated recordings.

Prior to making these pieces, Gould had written about hearing music in the everyday sounds and conversations he’d overhear just going about his day and in one of the stories told in the film 22 Short Films About Glenn Gould, he is shown having breakfast in a rural, road side coffee shop, listening in on all the din. But neither his writings about this topic nor this cinematic dramatization can compare to the beauty of the three documentaries he made.
In the first documentary in the series, titled [4]The Idea of North, sounds of a train clattering are overlaid with the voices of nurses and Native people and road workers chatting as they return home from a brief visit to the nearest outpost of civilization, a one street town to the south. In the second, titled [5]The Latecomers, the stories of two Newfoundlanders, one who was in favor of Newfoundland joining Canada in 1949 and one who was opposed, are edited together as if in conversation, their similarly accented voices separated by the sound of an enormous Atlantic Ocean crashing against the stone walls that protect their respective villages, which we learn would be close to one another geographically, if they weren’t built into the sides of two rocky sea-locked coves. The third, titled [6]The Quiet In The Earth, fuses together a recording of a Mennonite preacher giving his Sunday morning service and a track of Janis Joplin sorrowfully singing have another little piece of my heart now baby, while church bells ring over a vast and barren prairie.

Like other documentary or sociological studies about North American communities, (such as the social ecological studies of the 1930s Chicago School of Sociology, Robert and Helen Lynd’s Middletown, or[7] William Foote Whyte’s Street Corner Society), The Solitude Trilogy makes little distinction between the places it documents and the people who live there. However, unlike these studies, it makes no claims about its objectivity, accountability, certainty or truth. Even its authenticity is left as an ambiguous question. For as much as Gould was enamored by the idea that communities seemed to organically emerge from the world’s earthly terrain, he knew that his documentation of them were simply that, documentations, no matter how real the voices and sounds he recorded might seem.

It was a statement a kin to his decision to stop performing the piano live and like his decision an important reminder to all of us, that whether we are listeners of music or audio documentaries, (or, even readers of sociology for that matter), we have a choice as to whether or not we truly feel or believe the story the musician or documentary maker (or sociologist) tells us, that we alone hold the power to decide whether a story is [8]the truth or a lie.

End Note: To view/listen to/read a recent community study, ("Welcome to Pine Point", by Paul Shoebridge and Michael Simons), which not only captures but elevates many of the theoretical and methodological qualities of Gould’s "The Solitude Trilogy," [9]click here.

End Note 2: To start exploring the differences between audio documentary-making and audio ethnography, [10]click here.

1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-lA_fqgDjkMY/TjVG-2VzXQI/AAAAAAAAKno/5lepztgrWvQ/s1600/gould.jpeg
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=64Xb3q1XR9Y
4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MeTIm0tqYc
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lOooyndutQM
6. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpf9tFfpmXo
7. http://tinyurl.com/6c6r1mb
The Thesis Whisperer (2011-08-01 08:00)

A new website devoted to (miserable?) PhD students everywhere: the Thesis Whisperer - check it out!

1. http://www.flickr.com/photos/78234619@N00/4465787888/
2. http://thethesiswhisperer.wordpress.com/about/

The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology (2011-08-02 08:00)

The sound quality isn't great but it's worth persisting with this fascinating account of how sociology must deal with the massive explosion of digital transactions in recent decades, as well as the new data sources which flow from them:
The film is a bold attempt at characterizing our contemporary, increasingly globalized, society through a prism of Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity. For decades Zygmunt Bauman has been painstakingly trying to disperse darkness surrounding the existence of an individual in the Western consumer society. He has been relentlessly pointing at the traps of free market economy and showing ugly flaws in the system, which for years have been officially glossed over. Despite his famous irony, he is in fact a passionate defender of some core values which are the prerequisites of a more equal and, simply, happier society. Our film presents in a nutshell Bauman’s vision of the world filled with concern, anxiety, but also - hope. By documenting Professor Bauman’s unique ideas, we intend to popularize his outstanding work and truly prophetic theories, which are concerned with the issues most of us can easily relate to.


Here at SI we think this film is a bloody marvellous idea - stay tuned for more info/content relating to it.

Mark Fisher is a leading light at Zero Books, publishers of a growing stable of short, topical essay-books such as Richard Seymour’s The Meaning of David Cameron and Nina Power’s One Dimensional Woman, soon to be supplemented by Laurie Penny’s Meat Market, Female flesh under capitalism. Written accessibly, without references, citations or index, they discuss in cultural studies style, films and tv more than books and journals. In the virtual democracy of the internet, ‘Contemporary culture has eliminated both the concept of the public’ (turned into consumers) ‘and the figure of the intellectual.’ Instead, ‘A cretinous anti-intellectualism presides, cheered by expensively educated hacks in the pay of multinational corporations who reassure their bored readers that there is no need to rouse themselves from their interpassive stupor... generating a bland conformity.’

[1]

‘Zero Books knows that another kind of discourse – intellectual without being academic, popular without being populist – is not only possible: it is already flourishing, in the regions beyond the striplit malls of so-called mass-media and the neurotically bureaucratic halls of the academy. Zero is committed to the idea of publishing as the making public of the intellectual. It is convinced that in the unthinking, blandly consensual culture in which we live, critical and engaged theoretical reflection is more important than ever before.’

This position statement gives a flavour, though interestingly for readers of PSE, Mark Fisher's contribution is informed, as well as by his extensive reading and viewing, by teaching A-level philosophy in FE. However, his starting point is not the end of transcendence and the death of hope implied by his title, but is another term for postmodernism, which he finds ‘appropriately but unhelpfully, unsettled and multiple’ (p.7) in meaning. No longer contesting modernism as it had developed, including in the form of actually existing socialist realism in relation to
which he notes his title originated, it refers rather to the fact that 'For most people under twenty in Europe and North America, the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable.' (p.8) So that for Jameson and/or Zizek, ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism’ (p.2).

Confronted by such a reality, what is to be done? After ‘the consensual sentimentality of Live Aid replaced the antagonism of the Miners' Strike’ (p.66), which last ‘exposed the fault lines of class antagonism’ in the UK (p.7), Thatcher’s ‘succinct slogan of capitalist realism' became ‘a brutally self-fulfilling prophecy’ (p.8). Even protest re-enacting 1968 was carnivalised, despite conditions for youth being ‘substantially harsher than the conditions they protested against in the 60s’ (p.14), so that today’s French students, for example, demand a return to the past rather than a new future. But against this naturalization of ‘business ontology in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business’ (p.17), certain realities cannot be repressed. Fisher focuses on three of them: incipient environmental catastrophe which ‘contradicts capitalism’s constitutive imperative towards growth’ (p.80), the epidemic of mental health problems, including dyslexia (which he suspects is post-lexia, another pathology of late capitalism, like ADHD) and bureaucracy, which, instead of disappearing, as promised by free-marketeers, has changed into a new decentralised form.

This is nowhere more apparent than in FE, which since 1993 has been ‘at the vanguard of changes that would be rolled out through the rest of the education system and public services – a kind of lab in which neoliberal “reforms” of education have been trialled’ (p.20). Here Fisher was met – rather like Tom Sharpe’s Wilt teaching ‘Meat 1’ – by the self-fulfilling prophecy of students’ ‘reflexive impotence’: ‘They know that things are bad, but more than that, they know they can’t do anything about it.’ (p.21) In a society based on debt, you ‘Pay for your own exploitation... get into debt so you can get the same McJob you could have walked into if you’d left school at sixteen...’ (p.26). As a result, ‘Depression is endemic.’ (p.21) or, rather, what Fisher calls ‘depressive hedonia... not so much an inability to get pleasure so much as an ability to do anything else except pursue pleasure.’ (p.22).

‘In large part this is a consequence of students’ ambiguous structural position, stranded between their old role as subjects of disciplinary institutions and their new status as consumers of services.’ Similarly, ‘Teachers are caught between being facilitator-entertainers and disciplinarian-authoritarians.’ (p.26) ‘What we in the classroom are now facing is a generation born into that ahistorical, antimnemonic blip culture...’ (p.25) ‘a retreat into private “Oedipod” consumer bliss, a walling up against the social.’ (p.24) Perhaps, describing the reactions of his students, Fisher misses some elements of realisation and resistance to running up the down-escalator of deprecating educational qualifications!

Trapped in the ubiquitous bureaucracy of the dispersed corporation, managers ‘mediate between the post-literate subjectivity of the late capitalist consumer and the demands of the disciplinary regime (to pass exams etc.).’ (pp25-6) Meeting the meaningless targets of audit culture, they ‘perform self-flagellation as part of a purely formal exercise in bureaucratic compliance’ (p.52). But after the Credit Crunch, we are all the walking Undead of a Zombie Capitalism that ‘without a credible and coherent alternative... will continue to rule the political-economic unconscious.’ (p.78)

Therefore, ‘We need to begin, as if for the first time, to develop strategies against a Capital which presents itself as ontologically, as well as geographically, ubiquitous... the goal of a genuinely new left should not be to take over the state but to subordinate the state to the general will, revivifying – and modernizing – the idea of a public space that is not reducible to an aggregation of individuals and their interests.’ (p.77) ‘This is a struggle that can be won – but only if a new political subject coalesces.’ (p.79) It is the project of Zero Books, although it is not clear at what subject they are aiming. University students, such as those at Goldsmiths’ where Fisher now teaches, must be a large part of its constituency but their’s may prove a flash-in-the-pan resistance.
Something else that has happened since the book was written is the resistance of the medical profession to Coalition plans to privatise the NHS. Admittedly, this has ended in a compromise in which much damage continues to be done to a public service that was already thoroughly marketised under New Labour but it is a sorry contrast with education, where Gove is remorselessly pushing through more marketisation that can only end in the privatisation of state schools, while Willetts is extending New Labour’s introduction of HE fees to substitute price for quality in the increasingly privatised competition of universities and colleges.

Something else too in the organised resistance of a few individuals to the corporate take over of the media that led to the exposure of Murdoch, while it is becoming clearer to more and more people that society has been taken over by the bankers, who in Greece the population at large are refusing to pay. Here, MPs seeking now to distance themselves from Blair/Cameron subservience to Murdoch, are already thoroughly discredited by their expenses scandal emulation of the bankers to whom they gave power. The story of how this all happened since 1979 is not hard to tell. As Mark Fisher concludes, ‘From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again.’ (p.81)

Patrick Ainley

Forthcoming in the next issue of [2]’Post-16 Educator’


Choosing your own culture (2011-08-05 08:00)

Two Britons (believe that they) live the daily lives of Native Americans in... Coventry, UK, in 2011.

([1]link)
Is this a case of postmodern decoupling of biological determinism and socio-cultural traditions? One of the comments mocks these folks and suggests that they ought to explore "their own culture" instead of running after remote culture. But most people find them cool. Another commenter praises them and accepts their choice of self-presentation "they believe in something and help people". So no, I don't think this is postmodern. I am skeptical about such arguments that describe everything that is out of the norm as postmodern. I'd rather agree with Latour's claim that we have not really been modern. The reification of culture, such as its connection with birthplace, etc. is our attempt to appear modern - and its un-reification, such as the choice of culture that is not "biologically" our own, is pre-modern or just... well, it just is. Hm... am I making any sense?

2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/milenak/choosing-your-own-culture/article-2021102-0d40742a00000578-759_634x977/](http://sociologicalimagination.org/posts/milenak/choosing-your-own-culture/article-2021102-0d40742a00000578-759_634x977/)

Let's Take Back The Internet!!! (2011-08-06 08:00)

Has anyone else been noticing that public discourse about the future of the internet seems to emerging onto a new level of sophistication? We seem to be finally emerging from asinine debates about whether digital technology is destroying human culture or will bring about a utopia of ideas and connectivity in order to address the real questions. Witness as case in point this fascinated TED talk:
Jeff Emmerson (2011-08-06 15:25:58)
Absolutely FABULOUS!!! Cheers to those with the courage to challenge the powers that be in hope that we CAN return to a better way of life.

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-08-07 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

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To the international academic community - Public Greek Universities in Danger (2011-08-08 08:00)

In the last few years, a wave of ‘reforms’ within the European Union and throughout the world has subjected Higher Education to the logic of the market. Higher Education has increasingly been transformed from a public good and a civil right to a commodity for the wealthy. The self-government of Universities and the autonomy of academic processes are also being eroded. The processes of knowledge production and acquisition, as well as the working conditions of the academic community, are now governed by the principles of the private sector, from which Universities are obliged to seek funds.
Greece is possibly the only European Union country where attempts to implement these 'reforms' have so far failed. Important factors in this failure are the intense opposition of Greek society as well as the Greek Constitution, according to which Higher Education is provided exclusively by public, fully self-governed and state-funded institutions.

According to the existing institutional framework for the functioning of Universities, itself the result of academic and student struggles before and after the military dictatorship (1967-1974), universities govern themselves through bodies elected by the academic community. Although this institutional framework has contributed enormously to the development of Higher Education in Greece, insufficient funding and suffocating state control, as well as certain unlawful and unprofessional practices by the academic community, have rendered Higher Education reform necessary.

The current government has now hastily attempted a radical reform of Higher Education. On the pretext of the improvement of the 'quality of education' and its harmonization with 'international academic standards', the government is promoting the principles of 'reciprocity' in Higher Education. At the same time, it is drastically decreasing public funding for education (up to 50% decrease) which is already amongst the lowest in the European Union. New appointments of teaching staff will follow a ratio 1:10 to the retirement of existing staff members. This will have devastating results in the academic teaching process as well as in the progress of scientific knowledge.

- The government proposals seek to bypass the constitutional obligations of the state towards public Universities and abolish their academic character.
- The self-government of Universities will be circumvented, with the current elected governing bodies replaced by appointed 'Councils' who will not be accountable to the academic community.
- The future of Universities located on the periphery, as well as of University departments dedicated to 'non-commercial' scientific fields, looks gloomy.
- Academic staff will no longer be regarded as public functionaries. The existing national payscale is to be abolished and replaced by individualized, 'productivity' related payscales, while insecure employment is to become the norm for lower rank employees.
- Higher Education will be transformed into 'training' and, along with research, gradually submitted to market forces.

The government proposals have been rejected by the Greek academic community. The Council of Vice-Chancellors and the Senates of almost all Universities have publicly called the government to withdraw the proposals and have suggested alternative proposals which can more effectively deal with the problems of Greek Universities. Despite this, the government proceeds with promoting its proposals, in confrontation with the entire academic community. We appeal to our colleagues from the international academic community, who have experienced the consequences of similar reforms, to support us in our struggle to defend education as a public good. We fight, together with our British, French, Dutch, Italian, Spanish and other colleagues, for the respect of the academic tradition of the European universitas in current conditions.

We ask you to send electronically the appeal below, signed with your name and indicating your academic status and institutional affiliation, to the Initiative of Greek Academics (europeanuniversitas1@gmail.com) or sign online at [2]http://www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?GRUNIV
The support of the international academic community will prove invaluable for the upcoming developments not only in Greek Universities but in respect to public European Higher Education as a whole.

Initiative of Greek academics


I first came across Dana Williams and his work on an anarchist academics email list about three years ago. I was excited to find another person bringing anarchism and sociology together! There were, I believe, literally only a couple that I knew of already (Jonathan Purkis and Ian Welsh). Over the last couple of years, that number has expanded steadily and I now see that there is quite an upsurge in interest in bringing anarchism and sociology together. Dana’s talk at the North American Anarchist Studies conference last year particularly interested me in this regard. I wasn’t brave enough to travel to Toronto in February and am very appreciative to have been able to take in the talk in comfort via YouTube ([Part 1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZBtTj2dB4c] & Part 2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpENVCrGf5s). Entitled “Defining an Anarchist-Sociology [A Long-Anticipated
Marriage)

Dana’s argument intrigued me and I wanted to find out more. The following interview took place by email between March and July 2011.

My first question is, what connections do you already see existing between anarchism and sociology?

I think there are quite a few connections between the two, some major and better made, while other connections are a bit more tenuous and ambiguous. First, both anarchism and sociology are very interested in this thing called "society". That itself is impressive, given how hard it is to often even think about something as complex and abstract as society. Both also agree that societies affect individuals. Within the sociological ranks, this was put most eloquently by C. Wright Mills and his analytical device of the "sociological imagination". But, anarchists have also regularly considered large, macro-scaled institutions like capitalism, states, White supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, etc., rarely losing the forest for the trees. In other words: anarchists are not apt to dwell on how bad a certain president is for a society or how evil a particular corporation is behaving, but instead call-out the entire system for its negative consequences on society. If this sounds a lot like Mills’ sociological imagination, it might not be much of a coincidence. The same Mills who coined the phrase "new Left"—that early-1960s, anarchistic impulse that rejected state-socialism for participatory democracy—also called himself a "goddamn anarchist". So, sociologists do much the same thing as anarchists and focus on society as their unit of analysis (while appreciating it is composed of individuals, groups, and organizations). In fact, sociologists very consciously eschew efforts to develop idiosyncratic theory based on particular people, situations, or events, and instead try to consider general patterns. This focus on society unites the two endeavors in a very immediate way.

Second, I think anarchism and sociology—in their better moments—do a bit of each other’s "typical" work. Anarchism has busied itself with attempts to transform society. Often this transformation is pursued through initially small acts of agitation (the formation of labor unions, community organizations, revolutionary cells and affinity groups), but also the encouragement of and participation in mass social movements, and broad insurrections and revolutions. Sociology, on the other hand, has for much of its history (and definitely during its periods with the greatest commitment to positivism) has tried to merely understand society, sometimes in the broadest, more "grand theory" strokes, sometimes in meticulous detail. Yet, anarchists have regularly pursued some of these more sociological endeavors, engaging in a rigorous critique of society, often very similar to sociologists. Much of the great classical-era anarchist theorists—such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin—were essentially thinking about sociological questions, having to do with social problems that people and groups in societies face. It’s one thing to desire change, but another thing to have a good, solid understanding of why that change is so necessary—anarchists are generally very thoughtful, well-informed individuals, who tend to think sociologically and just happen to want revolutionary change. And, sociologists have occasionally (but with astonishing regularity) wanted to go beyond mere analysis and participate in advocacy and even efforts to change society. Granted, most of the change sought assumes a liberal-reformist character, often focused on changes to particular laws. But, the very fact that sociologists are usually able to (sometimes with great prodding) draw conclusions and personal inspirations from what they study and eventually act, is important. Thus, sociologists do not necessarily always have their noses stuck in books, data, and abstract hypotheses.

A third connection I see is there has often been fraternization between anarchists and sociologists; they have read and considered each other’s ideas, and, occasionally, they have been some of the same people. Consequently, their ideas have—whether the purists in each camp wish it or not—influenced each other. For example, Bakunin intensively studied Comte’s positivism (liking his general impulse, but rejecting Comte’s more messianic pretensions). Weber spent time vacationing around anarchists, especially Europe’s more libertine cultural anarchists. Pitrim Sorokin—the first chair of Harvard’s sociology program—personally knew and admired Kropotkin. Kropotkin himself translated some of Herbert Spencer’s work and later Spencer signed a petition to the French government demanding Kropotkin’s release from prison. More recently, the rebellious tendencies of earlier radical culture—infused with
anarchism—inspired numerous sociologists, perhaps most important Mills who often wrote favorably of rebels, like the Wobblies. Today, the connections between anarchists and sociologists are much more muted, but maybe even more widespread than at any time in the past. The movements of the 1960s and 70s reinvigorated radical sociology and, especially in the United States, led to an explosion in self-identified “Marxist sociologists”. The radicalism of the Black Power and anti-war movements inspired young people with rediscovered/recycled Marxist ideas, some of whom chose to enter graduate school (or who were already there). This new generation of sociologists, helped shift the discipline back towards its progressive roots and (at least partially) away from instrumental positivism and structural-functionalism. Given that many of today’s popular and radical social movements are strongly inspired by and designed on anarchist principles (with a significant collection of actual anarchist participants), there has been a similar in-fill of anarchists into sociology in the last decade and a half. I have heard that approximately one million people in the US take sociology classes each year and surely a few thousands of those people are anarchists (or anarchist-friendly). Hundreds of anarchists are potentially majoring as sociologists and dozens are likely in graduate school. This has resulted in an up-swell of university-trained anarchist-sociologists (whether self-identified as such or not). I am one of that increasing number of people. Consequently, due to this influx of anarchist-movement-inspired personnel into the academy, I do not, universally, receive blank-looks when discussing anarchism or the anarchist movement amongst sociologists. Although there is often still some confusion and misunderstanding as to what anarchism is, many sociologists now acknowledge anarchism as a legitimate school of ideas and the movement as something real that is having a definite impact on the world. This is a clear change of earlier generations (especially from the dismissive generations of Albion Small or Talcott Parsons). As time goes one, I assume and hope that anarchism and sociology continue to learn more from each other.

Following on from that, what connections between anarchism and sociology would you like to see developed further?"

All sorts of closer connections could be developed! And, I think these two different things—anarchism and sociology, whether we consider them to be disciplines, ideologies, or approaches—can also be grown together, in-tandem. Let me tell you a story that I think illustrates this: near where I used to live there was a tree close to a chain-link fence and at some point, the tree began to grow into and through the fence. Not just a branch going through the fence, but the actual rings of the tree merging with the fence! Each new years’ worth of tree-growth emerged, in part, on the other side of the fence. The fence supported and redirected the trees’ growth, and the tree has now sturdied an otherwise rickety fence. Today, that tree and fence are hopelessly intertwined with each other, you couldn’t take down one without affecting the other. That’s sort of how I’d like anarchism and sociology to become (and I won’t say which is the fence and which is the tree!). I think each could not only benefit from the other, but also they could grow stronger together. This is sort of how Marxism and feminism are today for sociological theory. It’s hard to imagine talking about social change, class inequality, gender, and so forth without directly referencing the contributions of those two philosophies (which are of non-sociological origins). And Marxism and feminism have gotten all sorts of validation, institutional support, and proliferation due to their affiliation with sociology. I think it’d be great if anarchism were to intertwine itself, strategically, with sociology. And I think—in my more optimistic moments—that might already be starting to happen.

But to more specifically answer your question: I would like to see a certain sociological appreciation become more commonplace within anarchist circles. In other words, it’s be great if sociological ideas could help support and strengthen anarchist theory and the anarchist movement. For example, anarchists could benefit from an understanding of how people learn, adopt, and maintain their commitments through socialization. Since anarchists want to help people find pathways to a more liberatory future, dealing with all the practices that inhibit better social relations is going to be necessary. It’ll be important for people to more widely adopt radical social norms, which will require intensive resocialization—something anarchists already do, instinctively, but maybe not as reflectively as necessary. Knowing what socialization is and how norms work will help anarchists think more critically about their self-education strategies and also appreciate how really hard long-lasting social change is to achieve. Even insurrections and open-revolts can easily roll-back into counter-revolutionary and reactionary behaviors if a period
of resocialization doesn’t occur. I think that’s an important lesson to be learned from the Russian and Spanish revolutions during the twentieth-century. I suppose another level of sociological understanding that anarchists could benefit from is a deeper understanding of how formal organizations (especially bureaucracies) work. They are neither completely inefficient, nor completely rational. Instead, bureaucracies are somewhere in-between. And since the majority of people in modern societies are trapped somewhere within multiple such organizations, it seems crucial for anarchists to know how this embedding works, the best ways to extricate folks from hierarchical structures, and why radical movements like anarchism meet resistance when trying to do so.

Or, anarchists—and social movements more generally—could benefit from knowing a bit of social movement theory, the kind of stuff that sociologists study about social movements. And, although this research is often imperfect, there’s a lot to potentially learn from it. There’s certain aspects of movement-building and movement-work that activists ought to at least reflect upon in a systematic fashion. For example, questions about framing, resources, political opportunities, and so on. But, as my co-author Jeff Shantz has said, the attention given to radical movements that see the entire social system as inherently off-kilter, self-destructive, brutal, etc., is almost non-existent. So, sociologists ought to start thinking about and studying those social movements that have no interest in influencing the state (except to dissolve it)!

Then, the flipside of this coin is where things might get even more interesting: taking anarchist concerns or subjects, and inserting them into Sociology. I think it would be great to have anarchist ideas pop-up more regularly in sociology classes, within sociology’s many subfields, or be included as references in journal article literature reviews. And, most importantly, have those ideas treated as the serious intellectual traditions they are! What if all those aforementioned college students started encountering anarchist ideas in their introduction to sociology classes or if sociology majors started to discover a highly-libertarian form of socialism that has valid ideas and precepts, that are independent of Marxism?

Imagine if sociological theory classes taught Bakunin alongside his intellectual and activist counterpart in the First International, Marx. Both crafted their words from ideas being generated in the same radical labor milieu, but Bakunin’s warnings turned out to be more prophetic than Marx’s musings, when he predicted Marx’s socialist vision (led by and encapsulated in the state) would become as bureaucratic and tyrannical as state capitalism. Or, more interestingly, imagine Kropotkin’s ideas of “mutual aid” being treated as seriously as Durkheim’s ideas of solidarity. The similarities are, at points, astounding, and to have Kropotkin’s politically-infused analyses of survival, sociability, and justice presented with the same worth as Durkheim, would be an amazing step forward for both anarchism and sociology. Heck, most classical-era anarchist thinkers still, even today, sound like and share a lot of the same concerns as sociologists: folks like Emma Goldman, Gustav Landauer, Voltairine de Cleyre, Errico Malatesta, and Elise Reclus, and so on...

Or, more recently in the anarchist tradition, consider how devastating Murray Bookchin’s focus on hierarchy and domination as the ultimate engines of inequality (not just economic exploitation) would be for students of social inequalities, or students of modern conflict theory. And I think it is high-time to give proper credit to the anarcha-feminists of the 1970s for their role in influencing feminism’s "third wave" (as learned about by countless sociology majors in contemporary theory and gender classes). The crossover between anarcha-feminists, black feminists, black anarchists, and others in nurturing a radical, intersectional approach to inequality is a linkage still begging further exploration.

I suppose another thing that could result from drawing anarchism and sociology closer together would be an appreciation of the horizontal, cooperative social organization that is needed for social transformation. Some of this is being considered along the lines of network theory, but something more deliberate (and, frankly, more anarchist) needs to be considered here. To me, this seems to require a pro-active/positive form of sociology that studies the best avenues for social transformation, with a vested-interest in seeing those changes come to pass!
Those are just some immediate ideas of how anarchism could be sociologized and sociology could be anar-
chized—if those are even appropriate words! Otherwise, some anarchists working in (and around) sociology
have already started to consider what an “anarchist social science” would be: Would it be “applied”? Radical?
Self-critical? Maybe decentralized and autonomous from the academy? Or perhaps it’d be directly in the hands
of everyday people? A lot of these intellectual efforts (both epistemological and ontological) are trying to consider
the revolutionary pathways of social change and how anarchism (and maybe sociology) plays a role in that. So, on
one hand, an anarchist-sociology could illuminate society—as it presently is—for us, but it could also light the way
towards practical solutions for overcoming all the hierarchical crap that keeps people from taking control of their
lives and communities.

You’re in the process just now of writing a book with Jeff Shantz exploring anarchism and sociology. Could you tell
us a bit about it?

I don’t want to speak for Jeff and put words in his mouth, so I’ll just tell you my thoughts about the book. (But, I think
Jeff and I are in very strong agreement about what we’re doing, and I’ve been a big fan of his writing for years. Both
of us have had lengthy activist experiences and both of us are working professionally at mainly teaching-oriented
schools, teaching heavy course loads, but still trying to remain active with research (and with politics)!) I think
anarchism and sociology are both central commitments that we share and we’ve been fascinated at all the points of
overlap. And for me, I’m sort of amazed that these overlaps don’t get talked about more regularly.

At a recent conference presentation to the North American Anarchist Studies Network in Toronto, I joked that
our book—which we are calling Anarchy & Society, I suppose in a sort of bemused homage to Weber’s Economy &
Society—is akin to a blind date. Our book is essentially organizing a blind date, in this case between two very different
perspectives: anarchism and sociology. I think the book is gently encouraging sociology to meet anarchism ("Hey,
you should get to know anarchism. They’re passionate and not nearly as crazy as everyone says they are..."), and also
telling anarchism a similar message about sociology ("Yeah, sure, they’ve dabbled in Marxism in the past, but their
heart is in the right place..."). So, in part, it’s a sort of easing one into the conversation of the other. Conceptually,
anyway. More, practically, for me, I wanted to write the kind of book that I wish existed when I first started graduate
school in sociology. This book didn’t exist then for me! And, I know it’s a bit presumptuous to think a book of yours
will have a big impact in an area, but wouldn’t it be wonderful if it could be a sort of lighthouse, helping to guide
along new anarchist-inclined sociologists or sociologically-minded anarchists? In comparison, Marxist sociologists
can turn to “Capital” or Gramsci’s “Prison Notebooks”. Since we (when I say "we", I mean all those self-identified
anarchist-sociologists out there) don’t have anything like this that is all nice and neatly prepared for us, we’re going
to have to create it ourselves. There’s a long-history of do-it-yourself politics with anarchists. We’re always starting
up small newspapers, mutual aid projects, collectives and cooperatives, or organizing unions—and I think the same
thing is going to have to be necessary for those working in academia, too.

And, I’m sure Jeff would agree with me when I say that I don’t want our book to be the last thing said about
"anarchist-sociology". For me, that would mean the book has been a complete failure! Even if thousands of people
read it and like it. Books only have an impact when they inspire lots of other people to respond to them, to critique
them, to carry-on a conversation. I’d like for there to be an explosion (and I think that growth in anarchist-sociologist
scholarship will come soon enough) of folks writing books like this, who bring their own notions of what anarchist-
sociology is to the table. At the present moment, I don’t think there’s any strategic value in anyone declaring
definitively what the hell anarchist-sociology is... we haven’t explored all the intellectual possibilities yet! We
haven’t thought through all the practical and political consequences. We definitely haven’t experimented enough in
classrooms with students (let alone in the so-called “real world”) to know all the ways in which such ideas could be
used. So, we want our book to be a provocation, a conversation starter.
If I could, I’d like to compare some of what our book does to Colin Ward’s book Anarchy in Action. It’s an amazing work of sociology—or, dare I say, anarchist-sociology! For me, it’s the most important modern work in anarchism ("modern" referring to the post-1960s era, after the Golden Age of Anarchism, with Kropotkin, Goldman, Malatesta, and all the rest). All sociologists (and anarchists, of course) should read it. It might be a bit primitive for some, but it really captures the core impulse of the sociological imagination. And, like any good work of sociology, it destroys a lot of people's preconceptions and makes you think differently about the world. In my opinion, it’s a sociological work on par with Berger and Luckmann’s The Social Construction of Reality or Goffman’s The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. It ought to be read and debated in theory classes… well, that’s what I think about it anyway. Others should read it and decide for themselves! I’d like to hope that our book continues the mission Ward set out with—to point out examples of anarchy happening around us, regularly in society—by also incorporating a bit more consciously sociological theory and research, all with an anarchist aesthetic and commitment.

Specifically, in the book we try to a number of things. Most importantly, we stake-out a "big tent" called anarchist-sociology, which we think lots of folks—even with completely divergent orientations and projects in mind—could huddle underneath. Then, we do some basic contrasts between anarchist thinkers and sociological thinkers. Here, obviously, the anarchist ideas of Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, and Ward are key. Jeff has written a great chapter considering Proudhon's unique criminology, which in some ways prefigures today’s "restorative justice" movement. From the sociologist side, there’s a new take on Ferdinand Tönnies and others. We also have chapters dealing with core sociological topics, like social norms and socialization, and social inequalities. In each, we’re trying to synthesize the unique thoughts and contributions together. Then, there’s some lengthy discussions on social movements. Fortunately, both anarchism and sociology have a lot to say to each other.

The book is going to be published by Brill, as part of their Studies in Critical Social Sciences series. It’s a great, critically-oriented series. And, we’re also very excited about the prospects of an accessible version (in terms of cost) being released in paperback on Haymarket Books, so activist and non-academic folks can more easily get their hands on it.

Can you think of any particular examples of ways in which aspects of anarchist traditions have, or might, contribute to sociological imagination?

Sure, there’s lots of ways in which anarchism contributes to the sociological imagination—but I don’t know how conscious anyone has been with it. For example, anarchism’s strong allergy to social hierarchy and domination affects the sociological imagination (nay, improves upon it). Or, its activist or agent-orientation. The sociological imagination itself, as defined by Mills, may be one of the most anarchistic ideas ever developed by sociology. I think this is because the sociological imagination is best seen as a tool (or at some moments, a defensive weapon) to be used practically, strategically—as opposed to a forceful prescription of “you should do this” or “you should do that”. The whole character of the sociological imagination implies that individuals are going to figure out for themselves what social phenomenon has affected them most and how. Being able to realize that, understand that, and hopefully do something about it all, well, it’s classic anarchism! It implicitly trusts individuals to know what’s best for themselves, once they have the capacity to understand their circumstances.

Anarchism has often been bad-mouthed by its leftist cousin, Marxism, for being practice-heavy and theory-light. I’m pretty sure that’s not true, but even if it were, I think anarchism has always been sensible and ethical for placing a strong emphasis upon means. How something gets done is often as crucial to the outcome as is the end itself. In other words: we have to pay attention to how we pursue our objectives and avoid trying to meet our goals at any costs. Sometimes the costs are far too high and violate our principles! Anarchists have always taken for granted the idea that having people in control of their own lives will create a better society than any centrally-planned Utopia.
designed by a few bright minds. If Mills was asking us—asking all free individuals, not just the sociologists—to think critically about our lives, personal troubles, and struggles in a sociological fashion, then he was obviously not asking sociologists to tell the masses what their problems are. Yes, sociologists have some mighty fine and sophisticated tools for exploring society, but these tools ought to be popularized, democratized, and turned-over into the hands of everyday people. People can make good decisions—and will probably act justly, too—if they are given the means to do so. In this respect, the sociological imagination is a tool for participatory democracy and liberation, and its notion of justice and freedom is deeply indebted to anarchist notions of self-determination, autonomy, and anti-authoritarianism.

Unlike many reform movements, which sometimes utilize paid campaigners to stir-up dissent and often must go somewhere very specific, anarchists can act nearly anywhere. There’s always something for an anarchistic-minded individual to do, even in their own milieu, regardless of how progressive it is. A quick look around our workplaces, neighborhoods, popular cultures, or even families will show there’s a lot of authoritarianism and inequality around. Thus, we can always start where we are. What neighborhood isn’t in need of more active nurturing around issues of justice? What workplace—except the rare producer cooperative—isn’t run autocratically, by a small handful of people who do a very narrow amount of the actual necessary work? Or, since a lot of professional sociologists work as teachers, what classroom isn’t in need of radical democratization? I agree with Michael Burawoy here: students really are the first "public" to encounter professional sociologists. But, we spend so very little time actually considering how despotic universities and schools can be, how disempowering the life of an undergraduate can be, especially in a college classroom.

Let me tell a short story that conveys this real need. A year and a half ago I taught a student-requested course, called the “Sociology of Anarchism”. Some students approached me about teaching it and I agreed, since I like both sociology and anarchism quite a bit. Then, I realized that it would be pretty disingenuous to teach about anarchism in a hierarchically-organized classroom. So, I turned the class into a mini-laboratory, a social experiment on how to learn without authority figures (i.e. students acting as anarchists to learn about anarchism). I was still responsible for giving a grade to the students at the end of the semester, but I decided that they should be in charge of deciding how that was to be done. The students were the ones who wanted to learn about anarchism, so they should be in control of that learning. And, since they were all going to be sharing the experience with each other, the class should be democratically-managed. Thus, from the first moment of the class, I turned over the reins to the students. It wasn’t perfect, and my hierarchical-socialization got in the way of the project more than once, but it was an amazing experience. Students designed the syllabus. They spent the first weeks of the semester laying out for themselves what they wanted as learning objectives, what they would require of themselves and each other, how I should give out grades, and so on. They did all of this democratically, and achieving a near-consensus (with a class of over 40 students)! They acted completely different from any other collection of students. They were literally in charge of the class and they took seriously my promise to not act as their boss. Consequently, the students were excited, engaged, and felt in control of their learning.

My little experiment was not perfect, of course, and there's lots of things I would do differently next time. But, it changed my entire perspective on what is possible (and, judging from exit surveys the students filled out, it changed them, too)... students can be trusted with control over their educations. But, it can be scary, since it puts teachers outside of their safe space. I was in a learning environment that all my professionalization suggested shouldn’t be allowed to exist. I haven’t done a class like that since, although I’ve thought seriously about how to democratize many aspects of certain classes. Turns out that I, like most of my colleagues (and higher education itself), are just too invested in hierarchical social forms. But, as an anarchist, I’m trying my best to grow my pedagogical approach and teach more anarchistically, more regularly.

But, if most sociologists are using their sociological imagination to help them teach (and I think the good ones do this), then anarchism definitely has a lot to offer in the classroom. Transparency in the classroom is essential for students to be informed and brought in to the mechanics of a course structure. Giving students the opportunity to
practice new, liberatory skills (especially those they can use later, outside the academy) is important—my classes have used online collective decision-making software, to help prioritize projects, rank preferences, debate options, and so on. Students used all sorts of anarchistic organizing models—from small/affinity groups and large assemblies to formal consensus decision making techniques—to accomplish otherwise formidable, complex tasks. Exposing students to new worlds and new ideas is crucial. As a feminist colleague of mine tells her classes: she’s not there to make students feel comfortable in their old beliefs, but to provoke critical thought, reflection, and action. A sizable minority of my students were often visibly uncomfortable with the control they were given—a few times throughout the semester there were subtle requests to end all the democracy and revert back to a typical, predictable course... with me making all the decisions. But, in the midst of those discomforting moments, students learned a lot about education, a lot about the subject of anarchism, and even a lot about themselves and their own collective potential. Creating a memorable class is important; in the same way that anarchist artists have introduced giant puppets, stencil graffiti, or guerrilla theater into stagnant protest, anarchist teachers need to create novel environments that will create lasting impressions. Doing something anarchistic (or democratic, or justice-oriented) is going to leave a stronger mark upon students and influence them to think differently in the future than just learning about anarchism (or democracy or justice). To follow this logic, civics or political science classes would be better taught as active democracies, just like most sociology classes would be best structured as practical exercises in creating social justice. One last, crucially important thing for teachers would be finding a way to de-center their own roles and voices, especially that as “bosses” and “experts”. This doesn’t mean pushing volumes of empirical research aside or allowing an “anything goes” environment. The best way for a teacher to self-de-center would be to create a more horizontal, democratic course framework. Allow students to select topics that they find more interesting (within the reasonable confines of the course subject, I suppose), let them pick or create projects or assignments that interest them most, and when there are discussions happening in the classroom, especially between students themselves, a teacher ought to play more of a “facilitator” role than that of a “final arbitrator”. The amazing thing is, that any of these things can be done without even mentioning the word “anarchism” (but talking about anarchism wouldn’t necessarily hurt either). In other words, acting anarchistically is often more important to anarchists than self-identifying as such.

Maybe the best anarchist tweaking of the “sociological imagination" is to speak of an “anarchist imagination”. Undoubtedly, lots of anarchists have spoken of such a thing in the past, but I use the phrase in a very sociological sense. The "anarchist imagination" is the capacity for people to correctly identify the structures of domination and hierarchy that they are personally embedded in, and to have strategies in mind for how to extricate and remove themselves from those structures. In other words, it is an anarchist appreciation of the role that structures play in our lives—the impact of capitalism in imposing class hierarchies upon us, patriarchy in imposing gendered roles and sexual inequality. Or, White supremacy’s racial-based caste system, heterosexism’s privileging of straight folks, or any other institutionally-supported system of domination. The position of an employee in relation to their boss, a citizen (or worse, non-citizen) to police, a religious layperson to a religious authority, a child to a parent, an “average” person in relation to a celebrity, and so forth. Once the tight, dense network of these systems are understood, and how they affect even the most mundane part of our daily affairs, then do we have any actual ideas that can help to emancipate ourselves (and, hopefully, others in a similar position)? It’s one thing to know that you are facing the sharp-end of a sword, but another thing altogether to imagine a different sort of social relations and the strategies to pursue them. A key difference here, for anarchists, is to not think in terms of social mobility, like most sociologists do. There’s little justice in finding a way for some women (for example, White, straight middle-class women) to improve their lot in relation to men. Instead, how could the entire ugly, warped table of patriarchy be completely overturned? Thus, how can women (as well as queer and intersexed folk, but also men) find better ways of existing in the world? These are tough questions, often only answerable on a small, intimate micro-level at the outset. But, this is the beginnings of the anarchist imagination.

Thank you, Dana, for taking time to share your thoughts on anarchism and sociology.

My pleasure, Jamie!
Dana M. Williams works as an assistant professor in the department of sociology at Valdosta State University. His research has appeared in a variety of journals including Race, Ethnicity, & Education, Sociology of Sport Journal, Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society, and Contemporary Justice Review. He is currently writing a book with Jeff Shantz entitled Anarchy & Society (forthcoming, Brill).

Jamie Heckert holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Edinburgh and currently serves as an independent scholar in the south of England. His writings on ethics, erotics and ecology have appeared in a number of books, journals and other publications. He is editor of a special issue of Sexualities and co-editor (with Richard Cleminson) of Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power (2011, Routlege).


#UKRiots and Sociological Imagination (2011-08-10 08:00)

So with London in flames for the third night in a row and, for the first time, disturbances spreading outside of the capital, the British population are asking the natural question - what the fuck is going on? The most frequent, as well as understandable, response to this question has been moral condemnation. Yet calling these riots 'lawless looting' or 'pure criminality' isn't explanation, it’s description. In the last 48 hours of being obsessively glued to coverage of events (on social media and traditional media) one of the things that’s stood out most to me is antipathy to the former response in favor of the latter. Many people seem to assume that attempts to explain the riots are tantamount to moral justification, as if recognizing causal factors beyond the proclivities of particular individuals involved - or a purported culture they share - erases responsibility for their actions.

In extreme cases this manifests itself in outright [2]racism and [3]classism but, in more moderate forms, it merely stands as a refusal to seriously engage with the severity of events. Rather than trying to understand how and why these riots are happening, it’s implied that they’re an inevitable consequence of the characteristics of those involved: given sufficient opportunity criminals will pursue criminal acts. Yet it would be a mistake to jump to the opposite extreme and argue that ‘austerity has caused these riots’, as if that’s all that needs to be said to explain the pretty much unprecedented scenes we’re all watching.

At root, this can almost be construed as a methodological dispute about the central sociological question of [4]structure and agency: should an event like this be explained in terms of the action of people involved or in terms of wider social forces shaping that action? The obvious excluded middle is that it’s both: public policy at both a metropolitan and national level, as well as the wider political and economic environment within which that policy is enacted, has shaped the life circumstances which different groups within cities encounter on a day-to-day basis. A plethora of cultural changes, some driven by these policies and others relatively independent, have shaped how different groups experience, interpret and respond to these circumstances (not least of all the spread of social media and smarts phones, which have been central to [5]the organization, coverage and [6]clean up of the riots).
This might seem an overly abstract way of looking at such extreme events but these questions aren’t going to go away. Over the coming days, weeks and months we’re going to hear many suggested explanations of these events: breakdown of authority, youth unemployment, gang culture, failing educational systems, declining family structures, failures of multiculturalism, local government cuts, police cuts, declining educational opportunities, entrenched poverty etc. The right will invoke micro factors (some entirely accurate, others with a kernel of truth, many which are offensive nonsense) while the left will invoke macro factors (austerity, unemployment and disenfranchisement) and be condemned by the great and the good of the right-wing press for ‘point-scoring’ and ‘political opportunism’. Meanwhile, conspicuous by its absence, will be what C Wright Mills called the Sociological Imagination, the capacity to knit together the macro and the micro - the personal and the historical - through the recognition that:

“The facts of contemporary history are also facts about the success and the failure of individual men and women. When a society is industrialized, a peasant becomes a worker; a feudal lord is liquidated or becomes a businessman. When classes rise or fall, a person is employed or unemployed; when the rate of investment goes up or down, a person takes new heart or goes broke. When wars happen, an insurance salesperson becomes a rocket launcher; a store clerk, a radar operator; a wife or husband lives alone; a child grows up without a parent. Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.”


TheoWalcot (2012-11-29 03:58:29)
Thanks for sharing

'Community self-defence’ in response to London riots (2011-08-11 08:00)

In Enfield, North London, hundreds of residents took to the streets, with disturbing reports from a journalist in the area:
[EMBED]

In Southall, West London, members of the Sikh community stand guard outside their temple:
[EMBED]

In Dalston, East London, Turkish shop owners aggressively patrol the streets:
In Eltham, South London, rivalries are put aside as fans of opposing football teams ([2]firms?) come out en masse. Lots of reports on Twitter claiming they were [3]English Defence League:

1. https://twitter.com/#!/PaulLewis/status/10100574710984704
Dear All,

The Higher Education Research Group at the University of Southampton would like to invite you to a discussion of the recent White Paper on higher education on 19 August. These government proposals precede actions and legislation which will have a major effect on the higher education sector in which we work and/or study. The White Paper is currently out for consultation. The government welcomes input from anyone with an interest in the proposals.

The meeting on 19 August will start at 10.15am and end about 3pm and will be at the University of Southampton. I attach a copy of the programme as it stands at the moment. It is still "under construction". Professor Ted Tapper, Joy Moloney and Professor Roger Brown will address aspects of the existing White Paper while Professor John Holmwood will propose an alternative White Paper. As well as presentations, there will be plenty of time for comments and questions.

The meeting may remain just a discussion of the issues or may potentially provide input into the consultation through the Higher Education Research Group or a university response or a Student Union response or a UCU response or response from the Campaign for the Public University. These are all options.

If you would like to attend the meeting, please let me know so I can order appropriate amounts of refreshments (B.H.M.Johnston AT soton.ac.uk) I will also email those who would like to attend some reading to do beforehand. I will also be able to let you know which room the event will be in shortly.

Apologies for the short notice and mid-August date of the meeting, but the consultation period for the White Paper is short, ending in September.

Thank you.

Best wishes,

Brenda Johnston
Senior Research Fellow and Lecturer
Southampton Education School
University of Southampton


Communities Are Social (2011-08-13 00:06)

Note: All the [2]names in this story have been changed. But the photograph above gives a clue to the identity of one of the towns mentioned.

No matter how hard we labor to make our [3]homes more permanent, more stable, we never can truly achieve this goal. Land claims and buildings and borders may bind us to the earth, but they only do so, precariously. Deeds change hands, architecture crumbles, territories expand and contract and the stories and maps we make of these things can easily be distorted or ignored. This doesn’t mean that our homes are something vulnerable or fragile, prone to destruction or easy to break, but rather, that they are something dynamic, something mobile, something
temporary, something alive.

It is perhaps this fact of home’s transience, of home’s mortality, that draws us to other people, that binds us into what social scientists call a community, a common way of living, a common way of life, that works to starve or sustain us whenever our homes prove unable to provide. Communities emerge out of the everyday routines of our homes, what sociologist Robert Park would have called its social ecology, those parts of the earth where people have settled in so deep that that their presence there seems almost natural.

I learned this the winter backwoods of Manitoba doing ethnographic field research for the Canadian Forest Service. Here was where I was actually able to bear witness to the ideas of Robert Park happening. For it was in this place where people would gather together for a community social every time there was some significant shift in their home’s passing, like a wedding or a retirement party, a birth or a graduation or perhaps even more importantly, some kind of emergency or crisis.

That was the reason behind the community social I saw happen there. Money was needed after a house caught fire in Forêt Bleu. Maurice Normandin’s old place. Nobody was really sure how the fire started. Some thought that it was arson. That Yves Bernard was to blame. But it was hard say for sure. The house was old and weathered, long abandoned by its owner and marked condemned by the state so it just as easily could have caught fire by accident.

"You never know," Berthelette Hiebert said to me the morning after it happened. We had both pulled off the road to see what was left of the half charred house. "It could have been the wood stove or a bad wire," she said. "But it sure looks more like a lover’s quarrel to me."

However it happened, it left Crystal Wannemaker without a chimney, without a stove, and only part of her living room floor. That’s what it said on the flyers anyway, the ones posted to every telephone pole between St. Marc’s and Fort McVey. Meet Your Friends! Help Your Neighbors! Come To This Winter’s First Community Social! Cheap Drinks! Dancing! More! The flyers were photocopied on yellow paper and pasted under the handwritten plea were three small faces, the school photographs of each one of Crystal Wannemaker’s three young boys.

The Women’s Guild of St. Margaret’s Church was sponsoring the social. Nancy Chambers, Dorothy Frank, Marjorie O’Keefe. The Women’s Guild of St. Margaret’s Church was always sponsoring some social. They had to. As long as they were raising money to help the needy or the poor, they could bully the Mill into employing a part-time priest. And as long as they employed a part-time priest, they didn’t have to attend the Eucharist in Falls Bridge, the only other place along the Ozhaa River where you could attend a Catholic Mass in English, rather than Latin or French.

So the house fire in Forêt Bleu served The Women’s Guild of St. Margaret’s well. They would rent out the Falls Bridge Hockey Arena, have their husbands cart over kegs of beer and cases of rye and vodka bought cut-rate from the Liquor Store in Poplar Falls, hire the arena’s hockey referee Buckle McGee to hire a few others to sell the alcohol and spin the records and unlock and lock the arena’s front door, and consider their good deed done. None of the women ever actually went to any of the socials they sponsored. The kind of people who actually attended such things weren’t exactly their kind.

Which meant practically everyone else living in or around Falls Bridge. Most forest dwellers wouldn’t miss a community social. Especially in the dead of winter, on a night when there wasn’t a high school or Junior League hockey game. Some drove in from as far as two hundred miles away, through very heavy snow. Truckers and cutters working out in the northern bush camps; kids off attending university in the city; relatives and friends from neighboring townships and Indian territories, so small they were marked by numbers instead of names. They’d all venture out to the hockey arena in Falls Bridge, arriving from every possible direction, entering the traffic of people who traveled much shorter distances. Six miles. Four miles. Two miles. From Fort McVey, from Bunk Town, from
Poplar Falls; from St. Marc’s, from the Moor, from Forêt Bleu; a steady stream of logging trucks and pick-ups, making the dark of the early night bright with light.

By seven the traffic slowed and the parking lot of the arena became full, then overflowing, and by nine someone from one of the houses across the street called in the police, since skirmishes between boys from rival high schools kept brewing. Some were students at the public high school located right next door to the hockey arena; others were students at nearby private schools, L’École de St. Marc’s and Mitag Industrial and Collegiate. Insults were shouted in Mitagwa or English and then returned in French, and punches were thrown between cousins who attended different schools.

The two police constables who arrived didn’t have to do too much to stop the fights. Just make their way through the crowds and beam their flashlights onto faces, threatening to call the offender’s parents, a punishment, they assured them, far worse than arrest. They made several laps around the parking lot, ignoring the swarms of people huddled around Len Charles’ pick-up, as well as Len Charles himself, who sold zip lock bags filled with cheap marijuana and very expensive hash oil doled out in old Coke bottle caps. "Janet bringing the kids over tonight?" one constable asked the other, pulling off his gloves, then tucking them along with his flashlight under his arm so he could dig for a cigarette.

"Yeah," the other constable answered walking towards one of the parking lot garbage cans that some kids were using to stoke a small bon fire. "You going to put that out when you're done?" he asked them, leaning forward slightly to see what they were burning to make the flames. "Yeah, we're watching it," one of the kids answered. He held a cigarette between his second and third fingers and a bottle of beer between his second finger and his thumb.

Eight dollars bought admission into the community social, where alcohol tickets were sold at a table away from a makeshift bar, temporarily set up in the arena’s concession stand. One dollar bought a beer, two dollars a shot of whiskey, and for an extra fifty cents you could mix your beer or whiskey with Orange Fanta or ginger ale. You could also buy coffee at the bar and hot chocolate, slices of banana bread wrapped in plastic and hot peanuts sold in paper coffee cups. A line of people stretched out all along the length of the concession stand, five and six bodies deep, and every so often someone would ask Joss McAdams or Carmen McClean, the two young women working the stand for Buckle McGee that night, if they were going to plug in the hot dog grill or popcorn machine.

"You two going to be making hot dogs tonight," a voice would ask every so often, more often then the time it took for the song coming over the arena's sound system to change. "Grill's broken," Joss or Carmen would shout back, and then sometimes you'd hear one of them ask the other, "Did Terry ever go and get that marker so we could write-up a sign?" "You two making popcorn tonight," the next voice would rise up. "Machine's broken," Joss or Carmen would shout back, and then again, "Where the hell is Terry?"

The arena became packed. People filled the Home Side and the Away Side. They leaned up against the scuffed up walls of the covered ice rink or sat on them with their legs dangling over the walls worn out ledge. They crammed the bleachers and the dance floor, teenage girls and young couples, fathers and their daughters, old marrieds and the occasional ten-year old boy, who would try to break dance or slam dance or slide on his snow-panted knees across the entire length of plywood dance floor.

Mothers gathered in the empty penalty boxes to chat and nurse their babies. Some old men got Buckle to open up the Coaches Office so they could smoke and play cards. And all through the night little kids chased each other in and out of the locker rooms, their screeches slowly subsiding around eleven, when their parents called it night, rounded them up, and then ushered them, bright-eyed and exhausted, out the arena’s front doors.

With every family’s exit, the social grew more raucous and the air more thick with hash smoke, especially after the Rob Roy and Queen's Crowne Local closed and the hockey arena in Falls Bridge suddenly became the
only place along the Ozhaa River that night where you could come in from the cold and get a whiskey or a beer. But by three o’clock all of the alcohol was sold, so again there was another exodus of revelers and for a few minutes people’s shouts and laughter echoed through Falls Bridge, which was dark and quiet with the sleepiness of night.

But by two o’clock every last one of them was rounded up as their parents packed up their belongings to leave, the bleachers and covered hockey rink slowly emptying. With every family’s exit, the social grew more raucous, and the air, more thick with hash smoke. By three o’clock all of the alcohol was sold, so there was another exodus of revelers, and by four o’clock Buckle McGee turned the music off and the lights up, a signal to the very last few people who remained, mostly young women in vinyl miniskirts and men in dark green bush boots who, even without the music and the darkness, lingered on the covered hockey rink to make out, where, just moments before, they had been dancing.

End Note: I have also written of the Canadian backwoods [4] here.

1. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-GVU98wCtvnA/TkWqFLeXjiiI/AAAAAAAAKp0/WFC2lQy_P6U/s1600/hockey-1.jpg
3. http://tinyurl.com/4y4dzs1
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)

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prorch (2011-08-14 06:45:50)
[1] CALL FOR PAPER is a big collection of call for papers, journals and conferences. The list is updated daily on the subjects are engineering, medical, social sciences and more. You may also publish journals, conference and call for papers for free.


"Corporations are people too, buddy!" (2011-08-13 10:46)

An intriguing insight into the outlook of the American political class coming from Republican front-runner Mitt Romney:
The Intellectual's Responsibility: the legacy of C Wright Mills (2011-08-13 22:06)

In March 2012 it will be the 50th anniversary of the death of C Wright Mills. In this special series, Sociological Imagination will be considering the life, legacy and ideas of this unique man and what they mean for Sociology in an age of austerity.
"As a type of social man, the intellectual does not have any one political direction, but the work of any man of knowledge, if he is the genuine article, does have a distinct kind of political relevance: his politics, in the first instance, are the politics of truth, for his job is the maintenance of an adequate definition of reality. In so far as he is politically adroit, the main tenet of this politics is to find out as much of the truth as he can, and to tell it to the right people, at the right time, and in the right way. Or, stated negatively: to deny publicly what he knows to be false, whenever it appears in the assertions of no matter whom ... The intellectual ought to be the moral conscience of his society at least with reference to the value of truth, for in the defining instance, that is his politics. And he ought also to be a man absorbed in the attempt to know what is real and unreal."

C. Wright Mills in On Knowledge and Power


Do you want to be a news editor? (2011-08-14 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit another news editor. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you’re interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in [1]contact.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
UK Riots 2011 – A 'social revolution’ yet to take place? (2011-08-15 08:00)

[EMBED] In the chapter titled “Third World,” the historian Eric Hobsbawm writes in his autobiography Interesting Times that, "Columbia was, and continues to be, proof that gradual reform in the framework of liberal democracy is not the only, or even the most plausible, alternative to social and political revolutions, including the ones that fail or are aborted. I discovered a country in which the failure to make a social revolution had made violence the constant, universal, omnipresent core of public life." This is the sad truth of an empire a little more than sixty years ago reduced to ruins in a matter of thirty years or so and being forced into a process of third worldization with its government and people pitted against each other. It needs a life as long as that of Hobsbawm to notice rapid changes that are strikingly historical and yet unpleasant in terms of the role they play in day-to-day life. In a way there is a sinister resemblance between the Norway attacks in July and the UK riots just now. Both have the look of being predetermined and waiting to happen. Somebody had to throw the match for the leaking fuel tank to catch fire and explode. It could be as simple as that. In all such cases of violence of a larger kind which have the apparent look of “suddenness” there is no doubt the tacit support of a significant section of the masses, no matter how hard the corporate-driven media might try to make it look like this is the work of a few fringe “criminal” elements. That’s definitely not the case. Both the Norway attacks and UK disturbances are expressions of individual and collective bitterness and hatred towards a non-responsive and indifferent government that does not hesitate in using violence against them to keep a semblance of order. In the case of UK the difference is that the riots had a forewarning. When the vehement student tuition fee protest was ignored towards the end of the last year the government created the conditions for these riots. I was surprised then that the government dared to ignore a protest of that magnitude, something that would've scared those at the helm of affairs in a poorer nation as well. When it did ignore the warning, it clearly demonstrated to the person on the street that it would not relent to popular pressure and was determined to go against the will of ordinary Britons. When a normal person is violent it is usually because all avenues to dialogue are closed and he or she wants you to hear them out. In cases where it is carefully thought out the violence turns into revolutionary action. In any other case the very fact that all customary restraints are broken down is a sign that there is nothing to stop people on streets from turning into mobs out of anger and frustration. The looting is a symptom of a larger malaise that stems from the fact that most people consciously or unconsciously feel unjustly treated. This is a serious reminder to the David Cameron government on two counts. First, they – this includes the other European governments as well - better wake up and provide welfare measures to a large number of people especially working class whites who feel grieved by the fact that they’re being completely neglected in their own country along with the ill-founded perception that the government sucks up to immigrants, in addition to moving the jobs abroad at their expense. The truth is that the foreign policy pursued by western governments is a treacherous one where corporations draw the blood of cheap third world labor and make massive profits. The multinational companies are colonial in character and not bound by rules that operate in western liberal democracies. The terrible abuse of workers who get paid enough by local standards to barely survive will simply not be accepted in a developed nation. The "immigrant" is another word for cheap labor and the devastation caused by outsourcing to bodies of the third world poor is not a guarded secret as such. I can see where men like Anders Brevik responsible for the death of seventy innocent lives come from. They’re victims in a way no different from rioters on the streets of London and other cities. They feel their way of life has been threatened and the government is prejudiced against them. They’re not completely wrong in feeling that way. An enlightened government needs to understand, assuage and respond to their grievances through positive and inclusive means that will give them a chance to education and a decent life. Economic reservations have to be made in terms of jobs and other benefits to local citizens who come from deprived backgrounds. That’s a practical solution. The world is not a global village and the locals are as local as ever before. Therefore there is nothing wrong in prioritizing their interests and giving consideration to their feelings. The second count is that there is no point in pursuing a policy of vengeance. The arrests and harsh punishments meted out to rioters only convince the people that the intentions of the government are mala fide. As such every section of British society ranging from students to workers has serious doubts about the credibility of the Tory government. The punishments will add to their disastrous resume as the party in power. The violence could temporarily be suppressed. But, if the government has the slightest imagination it should know that they will not be seeing the last of either the riots or the rioters. Back in the 1920s when the young John Steinbeck was ready to embark on his life as a writer, he received a piece of advice from his teacher who asked
him to go to Europe since he had no money. She told him that "in Europe poverty is a misfortune, but in America it is shameful." Globalization, in the last couple of decades has ended up making the whole world ashamed of being poor, and with the weakening of conventional social bonds across the planet the poor are condemned to isolation in addition to the burden of poverty. The result is endemic violence which is "the constant, universal, omnipresent core of public life." While this is painfully accepted as a fact of life in most parts of the third world we're getting to see more and more of it in the nations of the first world as well.

Anthony Giddens on the value of Social Science (2011-08-16 08:00)

[EMBED] A contentious claim towards the end of his talk: it’s not enough to quote isolated examples about the impact of social science, we need systematic data. What do you think? Impact is a hugely contentious issue, particularly when construed in reductively economic terms, nonetheless perhaps making a case for social science necessitates some way of measuring the effects it has outside the academy. Does this measurement necessarily have to be quantitative? Could social, political and cultural impact somehow be measured? Is the whole notion of measurement itself problematic?

Benjamin Geer (2011-08-17 11:59:06)
Giddens is perhaps [1]not in the best position to make claims about how social science can contribute to society.


Ken Robinson - Collaboration in the 21st Century (2011-08-17 08:00)

In this talk [1]Ken Robinson talks about the possibility of making innovation a systematic habit through cultivating the social and cultural conditions for creativity and imagination. Though this is usually the terrain of vacuous management gurus, Robinson brings an enormous amount of intellectual depth to the nature and preconditions for creativity, understood as "the process of having original ideas that have value" - or, as he adroitly terms it, applied imagination.
Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-08-18 08:00)

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/63NTB7oObtw](http://www.youtube.com/embed/63NTB7oObtw)
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 - 1500 words and e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Dan Stokols (2013-09-27 09:16:07)
I teach a graduate seminar in the School of Social Ecology at the Univ. of California, Irvine on Strategies of Theory Development, in which I review several issues and challenges confronting cross-disciplinary theorizing– and at the same time, I encourage students to develop their own original theoretical ideas. One of the most important required readings in my seminar is C. Wright Mills’ Appendix, On Intellectual Craftsmanship, included in his book, The Sociological Imagination. Many cohorts of graduate students who have taken my course have found Mills’ advice on how to cultivate and nurture conceptual imagination and creativity to be extremely valuable as they strive to identify and define new theoretical constructs; and to posit the inter-relationships among sub-types of the construct, and the links between their own construct and other related concepts. Here is the URL for my graduate seminar on theory development fyi: https://eee.uci.edu/12w/50890. By the way, I have found your articles on the Sociological Imagination web site to be very thoughtful and stimulating. Best wishes, Dan Stokols (@dstokols on Twitter and dstokols@uci via email)
thanks Dan!

if you have ever fancy writing a short blog post about the course & related ideas please get in touch - mark AT markcarrigan.net - i’m really interested in how theory development is taught or, at least in the UK, often isn’t.

Making the Case for the Social Sciences: Crime (2011-08-18 12:00)


(SI published a [5]podcast interview with two senior people in the campaign a couple of months ago)

1. http://www.campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/

Positive Psychology (2011-08-19 08:00)

In this fascinating talk Martin Seligman talks about the discipline he, more than any other, helped bring into the mainstream. There are lots of important theoretical, methodological and political criticisms to be made of [1]positive psychology - check out Barbara Ehrenreich’s superb [2]Smile or Die, written while she was undergoing treatment for cancer, for a particularly powerful collection of them.

Nonetheless it represents something powerful and exciting. Not just a science of happiness - which has become an influential idea within the UK political elite thanks to [3]Richard Layard in the House of Lords - but rather a science of human flourishing.

This is without doubt a multidisciplinary conversation. A fascinating literature is emerging within Anthropology and, in the UK, the [4]BSA Happiness Study Group has been active for a year now.

[EMBED]

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Smile-Die-Positive-Thinking-America/dp/1847081355
The side effects of positive thinking Of course included in this potpourri of magic is a motivation to change corporate American by putting a smile on every employees face and develop and strengthen employee's positive emotions so that they can work harder and longer hours like noncomplaining robots. Read www.opednews.com/articles/The-Negative-Influence-of-by-william-czander-091020-7 24.html

Michael (2011-09-27 20:33:30)

**positive thinking... Great...**

**Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-08-20 08:00)**

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5]Twitter Updates

4. [http://twitter.com/socnewswire](http://twitter.com/socnewswire)
5. [http://twitter.com/soc_imagination](http://twitter.com/soc_imagination)

**Do you want to be a news editor? (2011-08-21 08:00)**

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit another news editor. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you're interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in [1]contact.
Joseph Madlinger (2011-08-23 23:00:53)
Hello I am interested in the news editor position that you have posted. Please advise. Joseph Madlinger

Ken Plummer: Tales of a Critical Humanist (2011-08-22 08:00)

BSA Presidential Event
Ken Plummer: Tales of a Critical Humanist

Monday 17th October 2011
The British Library Conference Centre, London

Book now: [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/presidential

The BSA President, Professor John Brewer, proudly announces the third of a series of Presidential events to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the British Sociological Association.

UK sociologist, Ken Plummer, has worked to bring ‘marginal’ topics, theories and methods to the forefront of contemporary sociology and the day will consider the value of such developments. His 'tales' will provide a personal, panoramic view of the state of sociology.

Ken Plummer is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex and has been a doubting sociologist for over 45 years. Since the 1960’s, he has helped to pioneer the sociological study of contemporary gay life and develop a critical sexualities studies as well as playing a prominent role in developing a focus on life story and narratives in sociology. Amongst his key books are Sexual Stigma (1975), The Making of the Modern Homosexual (edited, 1981), Documents of Life: An Invitation to Critical Humanism (1st ed 1983; 2nd ed 2001), Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds (1995) and Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues (2003). He has aimed to foster a humanistic sociology that works against the grain through its focus on individuals, reflexivity and political values – a sociology he calls Critical Humanism. His most recent book Sociology: The Basics (2010) is a call to arms for a sociology that will help make a ‘better world for all’.

We are also delighted that the following high profile speakers will join us to reflect on Ken Plummer's work:

Jeffrey Weeks is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at London South Bank University and a pioneer of gay and lesbian studies and the social historical study of sexualities. His most recent book is The Languages of Sexuality (2011).

Liz Stanley is Professor of Sociology & Director of the Centre for Narrative and Auto/Biographical Studies at the University of Edinburgh and a pioneer of feminist epistemology, and auto/biographical studies. Her most recent
book is Mourning Becomes... Post/Memory and the Concentration Camps of the South African War (2009). A new edited collection is currently being worked on (with Ken’s involvement): Documents of Life Revisited.

Rob Stones is Professor of Sociology & Dean of Social Sciences at the University of Essex and a pioneer of structuration theory. His most influential works are Structuration Theory (2005) and Key Sociological Thinkers (2nd ed 2008).

1. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/presidential

The Quantified Self (2011-08-23 08:00)

In this fascinating TED talk, Gary Wolfe discusses a new hobby which digital technology is giving rise to - people collecting, reviewing and acting upon data about their own lives. With smart phones, as well as the innovative and evergrowing range of applications available for them, it is becoming possible to quantify vast swathes of your everyday life and to do so in a way which is susceptible to review and response. What consequences do these new possibilities hold for being human? Is this something which will remain confined as a passtime for the geeky and curious? Or is it something which heralds real change in the way human beings approach their existence? And what onearthwouldFoucaulthave made of it...?

[EMBED]

Milena Kremakova (2011-08-23 23:37:44)
Utterly fascinating topic, but he did not analyse it at all, only presented some cool new gadgets and at the end appeared to endorse an unfounded opinion that we ought to use those in order to know ourselves better. He did mention that these devices and measuring activities are both a way of extrospection and introspection, but so what does that mean? There are so many more things he could have at least hinted at. This numerical knowledge presumes a very narrow notion of the self. It is also part of the redirection of human activity into the virtual sphere. There’s a whole new area of study about us becoming more like cyborgs due to our increasing reliance on and symbiosis with human-produced tools. In what way are the new self-measurement culture different to previously existing modes knowledge of the world and self-knowledge? How does participating in it redefine the relation between the self and its environment? How do people actually use these tools for self-improvement - and do they perhaps also use them for anything else - as an excuse for communication, or just a past-time, or...or...? Is this a quantitative difference (we have more data) or a qualitative one (we have better data)? Is this knowledge? Is it knowledge for the sake of something - or for its own sake? What about navel-gazing? ... ... ...

The Filter Bubble - How the hidden web is shaping lives (2011-08-24 08:00)

In this RSA talk the pioneering online campaigner [1]Eli Pariser talks about a crucial and, as yet under-discussed, danger facing the the social media web: the expansion of filtering into every aspect of our online activity. Sites collect data on usage patterns, particularly our reactions to being presented with content and the action (e.g. 'like', 'share', '+1') we take in response to what we see.
Without collecting such data any possibility of a semantic web is immediately foreclosed because human meaning has to enter the processing system somewhere. Yet the sheer opacity with which these technologies are being developed, let alone how they are being implemented on the web, demands urgent political debate.

However it would be easy to be alarmist about this and throw the baby out with the bath water. The problem is not filtering per se but rather the private and opaque nature of this filtering. In so far as the development and roll out of the technology is reliant on the corporate structures of capitalism, it’s difficult to avoid the former entirely. But the demand shouldn’t be for liberation from the filter bubble these corporations have placed us in - it should be for them to make their technology available to us so that we can design and implement our own filtering bubbles, as part of our ongoing day-to-day interactions with the internet, driven by our awareness of what we do and do not want to see. Certainly the computational systems they’ve developed allow us to see connections which we might no be consciously aware of: I’ve come across rafts of fascinating reading through following Amazon’s 'other customers who bought this also bought' system. But this should be an opt in system, rather than something imposed upon us.

It could be argued that there are political problems inherent in this as well - as Cass Sunstein plausibly argues in his Republic 2.0 - given the possibility that already politically divided societies are likely to become ever more polarized when individuals self-select for all the content they encounter. However firstly it’s necessary if we’re going to have any possibility of engaging productively and creatively with modern digital technology simply because of the exponential trend of content growth which goes hand-in-hand with the mass uptake of social media tools. Secondly, the problems attached to it are contingent and emergent (i.e. they result from when people in practice doing this filtering badly, often for reasons not of their own making) rather than being intrinsic to filtering itself. Thirdly, the sheer cultural value of web 2.0 demands new proficiencies on the part of its users: we can either retreat from information overload (see the growing trend for going offline, protectively lock ourselves into virtual bubbles of our own making, stay passively within the corporate infosphere) OR we can embrace the challenges that come from this revolution in human communication, using the tools available to us in order to dialogically develop a dynamic
filtering orientation as we negotiate an ongoing path through human culture in the 21st century.

Which I think is the main concern which arises from the filter bubble as it presently stands

3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/6_sim_Wc3mY

M (2011-08-24 10:07:55)
Very few people are aware of this today, even though this phenomenon is nothing new. In fact, it’s been known about for over 50 years, and the fathers of information theory, including Claude Shannon and von Neumann, debated its implications for society and human interaction. At the time they argued that humans, at a basic level, act as receivers and repeaters of information, and this causes ideas to become reinforced over time within social groups, sometimes becoming ideologies. It could be the case the subcultures we saw in the 1960s and early 1970s resulted from attempts to apply this to society, since that was the kind of thing being discussed by information theorists at the Macy Conferences several years before. But how does this fit in with your article? Early cyberneticists believed that this ‘filtering bubble’ is present at the group level. Bearing in mind that ‘information’ is defined as the change in entropy - the degree of uncertainty - we find that very little information is actually exchanged within most social groups. In fact, information and entropy can be quantified, and we have mathematical expressions for the amount of information exchanged. To actually have any flow of information, as opposed to the mere communication of ‘content’, there has to be some disagreement and uncertainty between communicating parties.

Sociological Imagination (2011-10-31 09:28:13)
I’m not sure I’d accept the distinction between information and content on a philosophical level but this is a fascinating response - sorry I missed it at the time. I’ve been trying to sketch out an account of ‘information ecology’ for a while via a couple of conference presentations and a book chapter (relating to protest movements & sexual communities respectively) so I definitely need to follow up the references you’re pointing towards.

An information diet? | The Sociological Imagination (2012-03-06 08:02:09)
[...] of the some of the more radical and collective solutions to the problems he identifies? Such as collective filtering, which is particularly pertinent for [...]


Arthur (2011-08-31 15:52:21)
Not Verso publishers, mind you, but Recto|Verso blog, a project by the staff of F.A. Bernett Books, specialists in rare & out of print art, architecture and cultural history: www.fabernett.com. Thanks for sharing the post!

**Do you want to be a news editor?** (2011-08-26 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit another news editor. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and
writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you’re interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in [1]contact.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Open Culture (2011-08-26 12:00)

It’s easy to be quite sceptical of a website which describes itself as ‘the best’ in its area of specialism. In the case of [1]Open Culture it’s almost certainly true though. Seriously check it out: the range of audio books, online courses, films, language lessons and eBooks on there is stunning.

For other resources which might useful for teaching Sociology take a look at the BSA Theory Study Group's page [2]here. If you come across anything that you think should be listed then please do [3]get in touch.

3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Boys Named Kip, Not Kim (2011-08-26 12:39)

There’s an episode of the American television show Seinfeld where Elaine has to hide from everyone the fact 752
that she hated the Academy Award winning movie *The English Patient*. You can watch a clip from this episode [2]here.

For me, it’s been the same scenario since I walked out of *Slumdog Millionaire* several years ago. People (and especially students) always ask me what I think about it because in the early nineties [3]I lived and worked in India and have spent much of my adult life teaching and loving all stories Indian, whether realist or fantastical, tabloid or literary, Indian made or not. But I hated *Slumdog Millionaire*.

I hated it for its relentless and gratuitous violence; for portraying the poverty of Mumbai like some exotic side show oddity, like the photographs American soldiers took of the abuse of Muslim prisoners in the Abu Gharib Prison; for completely obscuring the teller behind the story (a white guy based in London); for all the endless story about the hard and ugly lives of its real life slumdog stars and their one week respite in Hollywood and in Disneyland (where photographs of Slumdog’s adorable street urchins, all dressed up in Kid Gap and gazing at the singing puppets of the *It’s a Small World* ride at Disney World, were published practically everywhere).

So to everyone who asks me: No, I didn’t see *Slumdog Millionaire* and for what its worth, if you want to know how tough going it is for some children in India, I suggest watching Zana Brinksi’s [4]*Born Into Brothels*. Because, as filmmaker Trihn T. Minh-Ha might say, more important than who or what a story is, is making clear where, when and how its from (what I call the ethnographic back-story), *Brothels* makes it clear:

*End Note: Like "Seinfeld’s" Elaine, I also hated the movie version of "The English Patient," except for the scenes that had Kip (played by a rope-y haired Naveen Andrews) in them. See Naveen, with actress Juliette Binoche in the movie still above.*

*End Note 2: For an excellent article about how the Abu Gharib Prison photographs can be read as "tourist snapshots," [5]click here. It was written by the art critic, (or, what we would call in our disciplinary circles, visual sociologist), Sarah Boxer.*

1. [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ca2qhLYBvv0/TleDtmcipiI/AAAAAAAAKrA/mAuJlVIseNA/s1600/arts-graphics-2007_1177507a.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-ca2qhLYBvv0/TleDtmcipiI/AAAAAAAAKrA/mAuJlVIseNA/s1600/arts-graphics-2007_1177507a.jpg)
2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSqa1NX5G94](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSqa1NX5G94)

The Sociological Imagination (2012-07-23 18:17:19)

[...] like wrapping food in banana leaves rather than plastic and using water instead of toilet paper; 2) Slumdog Millionaire is a narrative movie not a realist documentary or even real life; 3) Far from being shy or inarticulate, most South [...]
17th October, University House

The workshop is organised through the School of Sociology & Social Policy, in affiliation with Timescapes, an ESRC funded qualitative longitudinal study.

Qualitative Longitudinal methods are used to reveal how change is created, lived and experienced, particularly in policy and organisational contexts where individuals are required to change their behaviour, or where change processes in policy or practice environments need to be evaluated and better understood. This methods training day in Qualitative Longitudinal (QL) Methods has been designed to provide a unique opportunity to experience the highest quality training in Qualitative Longitudinal Methods and Secondary Analysis. Practical issues of generating and managing data using QL methods will be covered, and examples will be given of the rich variety of ways in which time can be embedded in social enquiry and how it can be utilised as both a conceptual category and methodological strategy. The workshop will also give delegates a critical understanding of strategies of secondary analysis, as a key element of QL research. Through a choice of linked practical sessions participants can engage in depth with practical aspects of research, including a bespoke IT workshop using the Timescapes Data Archive. There will also be a Masterclass for those already working with QL methods and seeking training in highly specific and sophisticated aspects in their use. In addition practical workshops linked with the presentations, on Sampling and Secondary Analysis, are also available.

For further details and an application form please visit: [1]http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/

1. http://www.sociology.leeds.ac.uk/

Call for Papers for the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender Seminar Series (2011-08-28 08:00)

Call for Papers for the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender Seminar Series

The Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of Warwick would like to invite postgraduate students from any institution working in the field to present at the Graduate Student Seminar Series for the coming academic year 2011/2012. We welcome submissions from a number of disciplines on any gender related topic. As well as welcoming conventional papers, we also encourage innovative and creative methods of presentation (such as the use of visual or more interactive materials, for example).

The annual Graduate Seminar Series provides a friendly, informal setting for graduate students to give presentations and exchange ideas relating to women and gender studies. Seminars aim to be interactive, and at each meeting students present for twenty minutes each on a topic of their choice, followed by a question-answer session and general discussion. Attendance is open to everyone, both faculty members and students, within and outside the university. Seminars will take place on two or three Wednesdays per term at 5pm (dates TBC).

The goals of the seminar series:
• To provide a safe and comfortable venue for students to present their research, to fine-tune conference presentations/possible publications or to simply get used to the idea of speaking in front of a group.

• To encourage everyone to get together informally to learn about what the student community in the UK are working on in relation to gender/feminist studies.

This centre is interdisciplinary and draws its membership from across the university. It aims to provide a focus for research and teaching on women and gender in the university and to facilitate the development of interdisciplinary research in the area of women’s and gender studies. Women’s and gender studies has been established for around twenty years at Warwick; the Centre itself was established in 1993 and in the summer of 2002 it became a research centre based in the [1]Department of Sociology. For more information about the Centre please visit:[2]http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/gender/

Abstracts should be:

• Maximum 200 words

• Submitted along with a brief biography of the author; including their institution and department, and research interests.

• Submitted by September 1st 2011

• Email abstracts to Donna Greene: D.L.Greene@warwick.ac.uk

1. https://mywebmail.warwick.ac.uk/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/

The 'prestige' of journals in a social media age (2011-08-29 08:00)

Prestige:

1. reputation or influence arising from success, achievement, rank, or other favourable attributes.

2. distinction or reputation attaching to a person or thing and thus possessing a cachet

Journals seen as prestigious have a reputation for possessing favourable attributes: they are well managed, have high editorial standards, publish good papers. In fact all these factors are, in practice, related. They’re also seen to be
related – perhaps, once might suggest, to an extent which outstrips the reality. Great faith has been placed in their capacity to filter - with high rejection rates, stringent editors, thorough review process and imposing reputations, the readership can be confident that only high quality papers make the grade (with the often implicit corollary that papers not in these journals aren’t high quality).

As a cognitive category, a presupposition which undergirds our evaluative judgements – meant in a way which encompasses [1]this notion - it's profoundly 20th century. But if you question it too naively, people are likely to construe this as an attack on academic standards. Why would they leap to this conclusion? Because the conceptual architecture of alternative judgemental practices had not, until recently, emerged: this is where social media comes in.

The notion of ‘prestige' – with its hierarchical connotations and intrinsic links to bureaucracy – rests on the assumption that filtering, as a social and culture process, relies on fixed elite organisation and, contingently, commercial motives to meet the inherent costs. But that obviously isn’t true anymore. Social media enables an ongoing process of communal filtering which, depending on the dynamics of participation, can be come profoundly refined – for a trivial example, if you use Twitter in an engaged way, just look through your feed and see what percentage of the links posted are things you find interesting. For me it’s often 90 % or more. Now imagine the same process, working in an organised way, with the radical difference that there are clearly delineable [2]communities of practice within academia (and, if you see this as a venn diagrams, with specific topics and subdisciplinary areas co-existing within disciplinary and methodological clusters, the notion becomes a very powerful one) which, in principle, means the filtering process can be incredibly powerful.

…. which is what open access online journals, run non-heirarchically as collectives, organised thematically in a way which maximally connects with the values and passions of those involved would be.

Thoughts?


Response to Mark Carrigan's "The 'prestige' of journals in a social media age" | The Sociological Imagination (2011-08-29 09:39:01)
[...]

As it turns out, our new dept head has asked us to look over the new REF guidelines for comment this week, so this issue is fresh on my mind.

What you say is interesting, especially if we’re talking about how to represent research interest and activity through journal publication. Yes, social media potentially can provide a better representation of that than the current journal bureaucracy. So no disagreement there.

Unfortunately, as exercises like REF illustrate all too well, ranking people, depts, research specialities, etc. is taken to be one of the important goals of publication, because publication is tied to resources. So the hierarchies
that you decry are actually seen as a good feature of the current system. If those hierarchies were flattened as you suggest, it would be much harder to judge people and allocate resources.

So, on the policy side, you'd have to re-define the relationship between research prestige and resource allocation. So far it seems that you simply want them decoupled.

One way to look at the current fad for ‘impact factors’ is as addressing some of your criticisms of journal hierarchies by saying that what really matters is not where things are published but whether people do anything with them once they’re published. But of course, that really doesn't address the spirit of your proposal because, in the current system, articles can’t have impact unless they’ve been published in the right journals in the first place (which is reflected in how 'impact' is measured).

An interesting test-case for your proposal would be the Science Citation Index, which puts out the Web of Knowledge. Those guys have always maintained that they are not in the evaluation business but are simply mapping the aggregate contours of the knowledge system. In principle, they should embrace the inclusion of all open access journals to get a more accurate representation of the research environment. But of course, in practice, SCI is quite picky about which journals it includes in its citation counts....

Response to George Monbiot’s Rant against Academic Publishers (2011-08-30 00:24)

In the US, we have the phrase ‘waving a flag and kissing a baby’ for somebody who plays to the gallery. And this is exactly what George Monbiot has done in his [1]Guardian rant against academic publishing houses. Running neck-and-neck with the various teaching quality assurances and research assessment exercises we routinely undergo in the UK, publishers must lead the academic hate list. And while I don’t wish to defend – or even explain – the sort of profit margins that Monbiot cites, I do want to defend publishers as an important counterbalance to the inherently conservative character of such time-honoured academic institutions as peer review.

For his own part, Monbiot appears to be a blind believer in the value of peer review. Indeed, his article appears to have been triggered by the costs to his readers who want to check whether the peer-reviewed research he cites in his articles says what he claims it does. This suggests that if Monbiot’s readers trusted him more, he probably wouldn’t have been moved to rail against publishers in the first place. But I digress.

No one doubts that commercial publishers are in the business of making money. But the way they make money is by doing something that academics value but that they would not do for themselves, left to their own devices. What I mean is captured in two words: ‘innovation’ and ‘extension’.

Innovation: Peer review processes are about insuring the quality of knowledge, which is ultimately a backward-looking exercise – i.e. do the results follow from what is presented as evidence and what we already know? In contrast, innovation is about risk-taking, i.e. arguing that if you suspend or replace some of the old assumptions, you get more interesting results. This is classic entrepreneurship (a la Schumpeter) and publishers are always on the lookout for people who can write books and edit journals that will reconfigure the knowledge system in such innovative ways, resulting in new income streams. The success of cultural studies and gender studies in the 1980s was due more to visionary commissioning editors than the then-dominant academic gatekeepers. I speak from experience. Towards the end of that period, I founded a journal, [2]Social Epistemology – still in existence after 25
years – that depended on just such an editor, since I had proposed the new journal while waiting to defend my Ph.D. (i.e. as someone with hardly any academic status).

**Extension:** Publishers, not academics, drive the textbook market. It seems that if academics had their way, textbooks would be abolished altogether as failing to contribute to how either teaching or research are assessed. Yet, textbooks remain very important symbols of the integration of teaching and research that is supposed to distinguish academic life from other forms of knowledge production. They are the most convincing indicator that academics produce a body of knowledge that a larger public should find out about. While it is fashionable to mock Anthony Giddens for having spent his career as a glorified sociology textbook writer, nevertheless that skill made it easy for him to speak to larger publics, thereby demonstrating the relevance of sociology. Indeed, I wonder had commercial publishing not played such a large role in steering the course of British sociology, would a public figure like Giddens have ever emerged, given the relatively parochial character of the discipline as it is institutionalised in this country.

Once again, I do not mean to justify Elsevier’s profits. But simply letting academics self-organize their knowledge flows is no panacea. Publishers provide an important counterbalance.

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2. [http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/02691728.asp](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/02691728.asp)

alice (2011-08-30 08:54:55)
Surely we could find examples of publishers stifling innovation and extension? That’s not to disagree with you necessarily though, and I wholeheartedly agree that Monbiot is playing to the gallery - I hope his rhetoric at least provokes more nuanced debate on the topic. Something else which is interesting and important (and I wouldn’t necessarily defend, other than note we need to consider...) is the role of publishers in the embargo process. A colleague recently self-published a (peer reviewed) report online. However, when he issued an embargo (so as to facilitate well-researched press on a complex topic) this was broken by a blogger who covered the report in rather a one-sided way, framing debate on it in a way that resulted in many people missing the main point of the report/ even mis-reading it. Journals and publishing firms can enforce embargoes with the threat of pulling all embargoed papers to press, a lone academic cannot do so nearly so easily, unless I suppose they organise with their university or learned society (some won’t give embargoed work to bloggers, but that’s a red herring in this story - many bloggers would happily play by embargo game). Obviously one option is to get rid of embargoes all together. Which there is an argument to be made for. But I doubt that’s going to happen soon.

Ian Sommerville (2011-08-30 08:55:46)
Muddled thinking here. Monbiot wasn’t talking about books but journals. There are lots of textbook publishers who don’t do journals. And while publishers may have been needed to start a journal 25 years ago, anyone can now start a journal on the web.

Hannes (2011-08-30 10:45:43)
Steve, Just a small point. "if Monbiot’s readers trusted him more, he probably wouldn’t have been moved to rail against publishers in the first place" Monbiot writes about issues so controversial that talking about ‘trusting the author’ becomes irrelevant. You might trust the author, but you MUST be able to check the facts if you are to reach an informed position

Joe Dixon (2011-09-14 10:10:52)
Exactly the point I was about to make. Academic research is not (or at least should not be) based on how much a reader ‘trusts’ an author. Rather, it is based on the readers’ ability to follow an author’s train of thought and logic.
Coronal (2011-08-30 14:07:55)
Sorry but indeed, this is muddled, and doesn’t add much to the debate. When reading an article that discusses a scientific research paper, I *always* want to check the original research paper if it’s available, so suggesting that Monbiot is untrustworthy because readers might wish to do the same is a little odd. In addition, the points about innovation and extension seem irrelevant. One example of “innovation” is cited from 25 years ago, and the “extension” is actually about textbooks, an entirely different can of publishing worms.

Steve Fuller (2011-08-30 15:00:33)
All of this is nice, but Monbiot was making a blanket statement about academic publishing, and frankly given that he’s hardly hiding his candle under a bushel, he could simply e-mail the pdfs of the relevant articles to specific people who wanted to access the information. To me his article reads like a pet peeve (i.e. too many people asking Monbiot about evidence) amplified into a major problem. The jury is out as to whether academics can establish serious journals without the help of publishers – outside of perhaps quite narrow specialist fields where the practitioners all know each other. In any case, the entire mentality displayed in Monbiot’s article is wrong: The value of publishers should not be judged primarily by whether they make life easy for academics in their day-to-day activities. The proactive character of publishers as a counterbalance to the regressive tendencies of academics needs to be acknowledged.

Ben (2011-09-01 08:33:13)
Steve, I wouldn’t trust academics to self-manage publishing. But they don’t need to - they just need to make greater use of open access publishing (for which most funders will pay), AND university archives.

Sociological Imagination (2011-08-30 16:04:53)
“he could simply e-mail the pdfs of the relevant articles to specific people who wanted to access the information” Sure you can do that because it’s an entirely private one-to-one communication. But the infrastructure which now exists to do this in a systematic and effective way (e.g. academia.edu) is off limits, assuming that the publishers have any inclination to actually police their pay walls.

Jilly (2011-08-31 18:26:23)
This seems an oddly tangential discussion to Monbiot’s main argument. I assume from the phrasing that the author of this piece is based in the US? I wonder if, because of this, he doesn’t realise the centrality to Monbiot’s argument of the issue of funding. In the UK (and many other European countries), all universities are public, state-funded institutions, and outside of the hard sciences most research funding also comes from the state. Therefore, as a European academic, my salary is paid by the state, and in return for it part of what I do is research and publish. Given that the taxpayer has already paid for me to do my research, Monbiot is arguing that they shouldn’t then have to pay (prohibitive) fees to read my research. It’s an argument which contains a great deal of force in higher education systems such as the UK, though I realise that in the US it may seem less pressing.

Steve Fuller (2011-08-31 18:45:49)
Jilly, I think everyone here works in the UK. I work at Warwick, which is only 23 % funded by the state nowadays, though we are officially still a ‘state-funded’ university. (By the way, that’s about the same percentage as for high-end public universities in the US.) There may be some European countries, where the taxpayer is still the majority funder of academic work but that will disappear too because it is economically unsustainable in the long run. In short, the old welfare state arguments have passed their sell-by date. Of course, there may be more general public good arguments for saying that knowledge should be made freely available to all, in which case academics can go ahead and organize themselves into peer groups and take to the web – and hope they get the respect and attention of everyone else. Interestingly, they’re not doing that in droves or with amazing success, Even though, by the logic of your argument, the taxpayer would have them do so. Clearly the issue is more complicated than Monbiot would have us believe.
A round up of recent articles on academic publishing | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-20 08:04:23)

[...] Response to George Monbiot’s Rant against Academic Publishers [...]


[...] in academic discourse. And others also see the value that academic publishing provides, whether creating a platform for the spread of knowledge or providing financial support through subscription rates to the society that sponsors a particular [...]

“You can’t be too vain to gain if you want to swim the Channel” - Karen Throsby at the SI Seminar (2011-08-30 08:00)

A couple of months ago Sociological Imagination held its first seminar on the Sociology of Sport. Given quite how few people ever want to travel to the University of Warwick (it’s a bit of a hassle and the campus is in the middle of nowhere), we decided to record the sessions and take pictures. Unfortunately audio editing is the editor’s most hated job in the world but, after eight weeks of procrastination, over the next few days we’ll be posting up the talks.

The first one is [1]Dr Karen Throsby, who we [2]interviewed last year, talking about her research on channel swimming.

[3]You can’t be too vain to gain if you want to swim the Channel”: marathon swimming, ethnography and the problem of heroic fatness

[4]

Karen Throsby during her talk on the construction of the gendered body in long-distance swimming, Warwick University, 2011 (Photo: Milena Kremakova)
The Political Economy of Football - Wyn Grant (2011-08-31 08:00)

In this talk from the SI's Sociology of Sport seminar, Professor Wyn Grant, who we also interviewed on this topic some time ago, talks about the political economy of football. If you find this interesting you should definitely check out Wyn's site Football Economy.
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-08-31 12:56)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination

[2]  

[3] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5] Twitter Updates


2.9 September

Sam Farooq on Religious Masculinities in Sport (2011-09-01 08:00)

In this talk from [1] SI's Sociology of Sport seminar on 20 June 2011, [2] Dr Sam Farooq discusses religious masculinities in sport

[3]
762
Sam Farooq gives a talk about masculinity, youth and Islam (Photo: Milena Kremakova)

[4]Religious masculinities in youth sport

2. http://insight.glos.ac.uk/academicdepartments/dse/staff/Pages/drsamayafarooq.aspx

Deborah Butler at the SI Seminar (2011-09-02 08:00)

In this podcast from the SI Sociology of Sport seminar, Deborah Butler talks about her research on the [1]Horse Racing industry
Warwick PhD researcher Deborah Butler talks about her research of employment in racing, 2011 (Photo: Milena Kremakova)

Deborah Butler on Horse Racing


BSA Annual Conference 2012: Sociology in an Age of Austerity (2011-09-02 12:00)

In navigating and understanding the turbulent times in which we find ourselves living, the contribution made by sociology is even more significant. Sociology is uniquely placed to provide insights into the social environment in all its variety, allowing for an enhanced understanding of social movements, political processes and personal troubles.

The papers presented will provoke debate and, through the lenses provided by conference streams - such as social divisions and identities; religion; cities, space, mobilities and place; media, culture and consumption; families, relationships and the lifecourse - will explore the complex interactions which drive social and political behaviour.
SUBMIT NOW! Deadline: 7 October 2011.


1. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/home.htm

Blogging Resources @ University of Warwick (2011-09-03 08:00)


1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/type/
4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/type/collabacademiccarrigan/

Zygmunt Bauman: ‘No one is in control. That is the major source of contemporary fear’ – video (2011-09-03 15:00)

[EMBED]

Sunday Reading « zunguzungu (2011-09-04 14:36:06)

[...] Zygmunt Bauman: ‘No one is in control. That is the major source of contemporary fear’ – video […]

Do you want to be a news editor? (2011-09-04 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit another news editor. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted
online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you’re interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in contact.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Against Academic Pessimism (2011-09-04 12:00)

[1]

The thing is, however bad it gets, we will always have at least a small amount of freedom. It might come at the expense of something else, possibly something ‘strategic’ career-wise - but it is possible to use that freedom to turn the resources of intellectual life toward something that makes a contribution which we can see reflected in the way it improves the lives of others, however small or fleeting that contribution may be. Away from the newsletters, the conference plenaries, the interviews in mainstream media and surnames being used as shorthand in place of ideas, there are plenty of people doing this we hardly ever see. People working in academia who are using their training and experience in positive and vital ways outside of RAF-able impact. It might be through volunteer work, or just by providing informal advice to people in other areas, or a thousand other things.

The pressure to publish despite any links to impact is an issue, but we should also feel glad that although the structure pushes against it, many people aren’t buying in. Everyone working in this environment knows people like this, the type of people who are ethically committed to the people whose lives lie beyond the textual representations that we make of them. The people for whom ethics and epistemology are two sides of the same coin, whose frame of reference for shaping their intellectual products always includes ‘what can I do, and for whom, with this?’. They’re usually the ones who are the clearest in writing, the ones who can make the most sense of otherwise abstruse theories and get them working productively.
My two very favourite American Cowboys are Brandon Teena and Calamity Jane, who were, I realize, quite different from one another.

Brandon, born Teena Renae Brandon in 1972, was a gas station attendant, petty thief and ladies' man who spent most of his life in Lincoln, Nebraska. Jane, born Martha Jane Canary in 1852, was a sometimes-married frontierswoman and professional scout, who eventually settled in the small town of Deadwood, South Dakota. Brandon became an icon of the contemporary lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender movement after he was raped and killed in 1993 and Jane, has been a mainstay of American history books and museums, since the late 1940s.

Still, despite these differences, both were born and raised as girls, who, upon adolescence decided to dress and live as boys and both have been immortalized by Hollywood actresses in Hollywood films as soulful, heartsick cowboys, brave enough to defy the strict social rules of their small hometowns in the American Mid-West.
In pictures taken just weeks before his rape and murder, Brandon Teena looks like a young Matt Damon (at left in image below), his thin girl-body obscured and made thicker by layers of thermal underwear and flannel shirts. Set alongside his celluloid counterpart played by Hilary Swank, (an actress, who before her Academy-Award winning turn as Brandon was most famously known as a the *new Karate Kid* or maybe Carly Reynolds, the single mother who dated Ian Ziering’s character Steve on the nineties teen soap opera *Beverly Hills 90210*, at right in image below), his story seems utterly ordinary and, perhaps even more importantly, *unsensationalistic*.

He was, quite simply, a boy from a trailer park in Lincoln, Nebraska, just out of high school and out in the world looking for friends and love at the roller rink, in the parking lot of the local 7-11, in the blue-collar town of Falls City, just outside of Lincoln, where he moved and settled in for a short period of time after meeting and falling in love with Lana Tisdel, the prettiest girl in town.

And it’s the same for Calamity Jane, staring out from old black and white photographs or dancing across the movie screen, her cinematic counterpart as sunny and bright as the real Martha Jane Canary looks dark and composed.
In the Hollywood version of her life, Calamity Jane played by Doris Day (see image at the very top) even sings. And why shouldn’t she? Unlike all the other girls in this 1953 movie, dressed in the petticoats and dresses that most women were obliged to wear during Calamity Jane’s time, the Cowboy-upped Doris Day looks as sexy and free as my third favourite American Cowboy Played By A Girl, The L Word’s profoundly beguiling Shane (played by Katherine Moening).

End Note: An earlier Rocket Science post on sexuality is [6]right here.

1. http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-d-9vuixprsc/TmPkyhNJuwI/AAAAAAAAKr4/Eh73a0v7l-I/s1600/calamity-jane-doris-day-4296474-504-657.jpg
2. http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-t1AbIyKJ_Es/TmPicY-v_JI/AAAAAAAKrQ/96HCQtZvYlg/s1600/Brandon.jpg
3. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-6wYY9RaMw1M/TmPkvRVE3vI/AAAAAAAKrw/Kv0G66sCq4M/s1600/USECalam.jpg
4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swYl_rFe7Qk

Flying awkwardly: a year in the life of a first year PhD student, by Amy Louise Webber (I) (2011-09-05 08:00)

Amy Louise Webber is a Phd student in Ageing, Transport & Society at the University of the West of England. She also describes herself as ethnographer, artist, philanthropist, and aspiring Social Entrepreneur. You can read her blog about life in (and beyond) PhD study here: [1]http://amyloisewebber.com
'Successful post graduates emerge with a new identity as competent professionals, able to argue their viewpoint with anyone regardless of status, confident in their own knowledge but also aware of its boundaries...to arrive at this point, is what being a postgraduate research student is really all about...' Phillips & Pugh, 2005.

I’ve started, so I’ll finish.... Magnus Magnusson.

‘Academia: It’s like negotiating the land of OZ ......minus the good shoes’ Webber, 2011.

One year on...

I’ve had some time off from my blog due to work commitments recently and writing this next entry has proved to be a bit of a challenge to produce. Coming to the end of the academic year, and having recently passed my first year progression exam the time is right to reflect on my experiences and attempt to evaluate as reflexively as I can, what’s worked well and also not so well in order to improve and or maintain my performance and experience for the coming year. One thing I am often told is that a PhD is a journey, so as such, this account resembles a snapshot of that journey, taken at a particular point in time. Perhaps my perspectives and opinions will change as I progress. Perhaps they will become more engrained. Who can tell? Overall, I have mixed feelings at the end of year one, and if this was an ofsted report, I would probably grade this year as 'satisfactory'. Here's why:

Great expectations..

So, over 365 days have passed since my application for voluntary redundancy was accepted and I left my consultancy job for a life in academia. After two refused funding applications and many years of wanting to undertake a PhD I arrived at my desk in the Autumn of 2010, full of enthusiasm and high expectations for what was to come and a clear idea of what life as a PhD student would be like. I had envisioned something which was not in retrospect, exactly that realistic.

I had imagined academia as a world of dynamic modern creatives, striving together to battle the ills of society by attempting to solve or draw attention to its shortcomings. Motivated by a passionate and relentless shared altruistic desire for the pursuit of knowledge and together working in a close team in an environment of trust, my supervisory team (perhaps in the manner of the A-team, or the outlaws of Sherwood forest or similar) together with my supervisor (who could impart a wealth of knowledge about my study and was perhaps a combination of Mr/s Majeika and say, Yoda) would form a band of scholarly rebels an together we would embark on investigation of my research topic, in the manner of an apprenticeship perhaps not dissimilar to those taken by Jedi Knights or Starfleet cadets, which eventually after three joyful years, enabled academic enlightenment which would then be passed to me. Of course all this would be supported by numerous mindbending, stimulating philosophical and theoretical conversations with my peers around life, death, love and the universe carried out in the bar until the early hours of the morning. I might even be able to impart my existing knowledge and experience on a group of bright eyed and bushy tailed students.

Okay, so I'm exaggerating slightly in the account above, but it's true to say the reality of academia has not stood up to my initial ideals, which has led me to a lack of motivation in terms of my research, however it's also fair to say the year has not been without its notable achievements.

The good

So what positive things can I take from this year? Just being here I guess is one. The landscape of higher education is undergoing radical change and having a scholarship to undertake PhD training is likely to become even rarer in the times to come. Like most people I certainly would never have been able to afford it otherwise.
taking a PhD will enable me to benefit society, develop new skills, gain a qualification and change my career direction.

On a practical level having the flexibility to manage your own time is a major perk, as is the chance to be completely selfish in terms of your own training. The opportunities for real development at my previous organisations were reasonably limited. This year I have undergone a great deal of training which I just wouldn’t have been exposed to otherwise. I’ve completed 90 credits (three) masters level research modules and undergone valuable additional skills training via seven short courses or workshops which support my development as a social researcher. I’ve attended nine professional/academic conferences and presented my previous MSc research at three of these, which are all at an international level.

I’ve made some amazing friends, been a representative on the postgraduate research (PGR) students committee and volunteered to represent the PGR students at faculty research degree board committee meetings. I assisted in organising the annual PGR student conference and was awarded a first prize for my presentation. Having had a ten year break from any kind of performing, I joined the UWE Centre for Performing Arts (CPA) and auditioned (successfully) for a UWE music scholarship. I then undertook formal singing lessons and I am preparing for my grade 8 musical theatre exam in November. I was genuinely surprised to be cast as a principle role in the university musical (also a journey in itself) which enjoyed a sell-out run at the Redgrave Theatre, Bristol and over the year, in my role as a CPA scholar, I have supported the CPA by singing or giving readings at (approximately) ten public concerts.

I’ve learnt a lot about myself. That sounds dramatic but it’s true, in ways that I couldn’t have anticipated. My skills are improving, although this has been a slow process. Whilst it is a continuing source of worry and bone of contention surviving on a budget has made me richer in other ways. It’s surprising how your identity can develop through creating, observing and appreciating things when you get off of the conveyer belt of consumption that blinds you to them so easily. It’s easy to think when you have been used to earning a certain income that when your circumstances change and you stop work that the world may end. It doesn’t. You have to find a way to adapt, reassess, negotiate but somehow life has gone on. I’m still here. Slightly shabbier looking, a bit fatter but mostly smiling and often covered in paint or glue rather than the trendy (ish) labels.

The bad

So. Where did the struggles occur? For me, concerns began to arise from the outset, as I had not been consulted regarding the appointment of my supervisory team, all of whom seemed excellent academics but I had not been assigned anyone that had in-depth knowledge of the theory I wished to draw upon, or any experience or knowledge in the methodology I wished to use. This has been an ongoing concern and I am told will not be resolved due to resourcing issues.

As I mentioned before expectations were pretty high when I arrived and certain things disappointed me, aspects of the process sometimes seemed ridiculously old fashioned and not the best way to get the best out of students. Some senior academics seemed incredibly blinkered, demonstrating clear bias toward method, philosophy or approach and disparaged the work of their well respected colleagues. All of which is apparently common in academia but not something I had expected or respected. I sort of found it unprofessional and again, old fashioned. Interdisciplinary postgraduate training had previously taught me to have an open mind to various approaches and it came as a complete shock to find that generally this didn’t seem the case in reality. Don’t get me wrong, academics are incredibly exceptional people but I was wondering that if arguing a particular thesis so repeatedly throughout your career actually makes you more blinkered? I lost motivation and the academic pedestal begun to waver as I questioned ‘was I ready to become that narrow minded? The only thing my years of education had taught me was that none of us really ‘know’ anything at all, but it was like nobody actually wanted to admit that. Instead, flags waved from methodological and philosophical islands, and the reality was far different from that I had hoped for. Beneath that I felt was fear and insecurity of difference and the unknown. Suddenly, the emperor was before me, and I could see his dangly bits.
My poor supervisor didn't live up to my expectations either. I am his first PhD student and it often felt like a case of the blind leading the blind particularly in the early months. He is just a few years older than me, and is very nice and kind and we drank a lot of coffee, tweeted and text and ate cake and everything was fine. Fine for months. He was very reassuring, there was no nagging and he often wrote/re-wrote chunks of my text for me. As every PhD student-supervisory relationship is different I didn't question it, until eventually I began to wonder if that's how everybody else's meetings went. Turns out they didn't, and I don't think things are ever supposed to be 'fine' until that last draft has finally been submitted. So we have to renegotiate the way things are done. No doubt I've done nothing but complain and kick and harass various members of staff this year over various things and they are probably all enjoying the break from the crazy Webber girl.

I found the monthly meeting process in general difficult – (this I have been told is in part due to my lack/volume of written output which is a fair criticism). The initial meetings seemed rather odd almost like a kind of role play at times. (cue schizophrenic breakdown as I began to question the reality of the situation – am I in a play within a play?) I was told I was not playing the ‘game’ several times. Which was somewhat confusing for me as I felt I was there for a meeting about my project, and it’s a bit rubbish if I don’t know what the rules are and no one tells me. As Phillips & Pugh (2005) state above, a large part of the PhD process is learning how to negotiate and present your argument with those of high status. So, part of this meeting process involves the big-wigs belittling you as best they can so you can get used to responding in a professional way. I think I’m okay with criticism if the point made can be fully justified, but I have struggled with the way it has been delivered. Currently the sneeriness has me yo-yo-ing between wanting to give two types of responses a) melting into a tearful heap on the floor screaming ‘high status suity man, your words, how they burn’ or b) jumping around throwing tables out of windows shouting ‘come and ‘ave a go if you think you’re ‘ard enough’. Again this type of questioning encouraged a lack of motivation not just because it wasn’t particularly pleasant but also it seemed poorly justified and old fashioned. What exactly is so special about academics/academia which qualifies them to behave in a way which would ultimately be seen as unprofessional in commercial or other types of public practice?

(To Be Continued in tomorrow’s SI)


Max Scheler, following up some clues in Nietzsche, developed a sociology of [1]’ressentiment’, which – as a first pass – refers to the creation of scapegoats to deflect attention from one’s own inadequacies. Ressentiment was meant to explain how the desire for self-transcendence is perverted as the faithful come to believe that others have managed to reach much the same end by illegitimate means. In practice, the concept tends to refer to a rightward ideological turn by, say, working class or petit bourgeois who think that Jews or foreigners have usurped their prerogative. The left has not been traditionally implicated in this spoiler position because of its ‘progressive’ outlook, which was always constructive of the future, even as it laid waste to the past. Ressentiment, in contrast, is meant to be an exclusively negative – even nihilistic – sentiment born of fearful incomprehension.

Enter Nobel Prize economist and NY Times op-ed author, Paul Krugman, who may be the highest profile author to attempt to demonise the Republican Party as ‘anti-science’ in a way that is reminiscent of how US conservatives demonised the political and cultural left as ‘anti-American’ in the 20th century. In a [2]piece originally published in the NYT and reprinted in the Guardian, Krugman scaremongers about the prospects for the US if Republican candidates who deny evolution and anthropocentric climate change manage to get into the White House. Krugman appears to believe that taking a loyalty oath to whatever happens to be the scientific consensus ought to be an entry requirement for anyone seeking elected office.
Perhaps the most odious feature of this suggestion is its appeal to science as a superordinate authority on the democratic political process. Whereas the right might try to co-opt the military under comparable circumstances, the left turns to science to threaten opponents who otherwise appear to be ascendant. Krugman’s suggestion also serves to corrupt science. No doubt Republicans are trying to gain advantage by casting doubt on various policy-relevant scientific views. Nevertheless there is legitimate room for disagreement and the offering of alternatives by scientists themselves, and exaggerated claims for consensus and certainty – simply to trump a group of politicians – does the cause of free scientific inquiry no favours. If anything, it reinforces the stereotype of scientists as an elite class contemptuous of the public.

When it comes to strictly scientific issues, what matters isn’t whether Texas governor Rick Perry (dis)believes in global warming or Darwinism, but what he believes should be taught and researched on these matters. However, even this somewhat misses the point. For when Perry makes statements denying global warming and Darwin, he is not mainly trying to say anything about science at all. Rather he is engaging in [3]’dog whistle politics’, in which scientific opinions are meant to stand ‘metonymically’ (apologies for the old structuralist jargon) for a set of conservative cultural positions that appeal to a wide range of voters. Liberals like Krugman are so completely alienated from these positions that they can only register them as dangerous pathologies of the intellect (aka scientific illiteracy). But unless liberals change their tune, they will continue to fail to deal with the democratic process as it exists in the US today.


Flying awkwardly: a year in the life of a first year PhD student, by Amy Louise Webber (II) (2011-09-06 08:00)

Amy Louise Webber is a PhD student in Ageing, Transport & Society at the University of the West of England. She also describes herself as ethnographer, artist, philanthropist, and aspiring Social Entrepreneur. You can read her blog about life in (and beyond) PhD study here: [1]http://amylouisewebber.com

(...Contd.)

The epiphany...

Oddly enough one of the most difficult things I have struggled with is almost an existential one. Often people say that a PhD starts with research questions, but I say it starts with a person. The researcher. Whilst I’ve managed to pass my first year, my research outputs or study focus is not where it should be due to time lost. Whilst some commentators say this is due to too many other things going on, I attribute it to a basic loss of engagement and motivation due to a) strange relations with my supervisors and my own pre-occupation with my unhappiness about the process and b) having to negotiate this pending ‘new identity’ that Phillips & Pugh (2005) speak of.

I sat in front of a computer, staring at a blank screen unable to write for months before finally being signed off work with depression. It was through therapy (together with a two week arts intervention experience ‘The
the ‘Fortnight Project’ which ran in Bristol as part of the ‘Mayfest’ theatre festival in May) I began to explore my real motivations for doing a PhD - beyond that which was written on the application form or CV. Having got to know more and more students I discovered that behind each of them was a story. All of us were genuinely interested in our subjects and believed in what we were doing, but there was always something else. The expectations of a parent, or the rivalry of a sibling, the chance to escape domestic drudgery in a different country, avoidance of the ‘real’ world, the passions of a working class girl who saw the lawns of Cambridge one day and wanted a different life. There were many stories amongst the research proposals that were not always openly acknowledged. So what was mine?

I realised that education had mostly, done a lot for me on behalf of my parents, and I realise now that it’s how I learnt to grow up. So perhaps this is my final push to do that. I never really totally learnt how to negotiate problems, differences or defend myself well or speak my mind in all circumstances, or believe in myself enough to go for what I want. Perhaps I’m here doing this so I can finally learn. I’m also acutely aware of how, leaving school with just my few GCSES, that for seven years I was often treated as I were stupid, less of a person or (literally at times!) patted on the head and told a ‘girl like me’ wouldn’t need to go to university as I could just find a rich man.

The situation is also a bit of a double edged sword. The new PhD identity will obviously eclipse the old one.. but what will that mean in terms or how I relate to my family? With every course I take I am increasingly viewed as a strange and foreign entity and the title ‘doctor’ will be the final allienatory straw breaking the donkeys back. Whilst my family (complicated) are happy for me, they just don’t get it, or really believe in or value it. So which identify do I use when I’m a Doctoral graduate? The old one so I can relate to them, or the new one, when I can sneer alongside the best of high status professors? Fundamentally, I believe that people should be recognised for their achievements but I don’t really recognise the social hierarchy. Who am I to say that I am higher status due to those words ‘Dr’ before my name? In some way I almost felt guilty. If I go back to the Wimpy now, after however many years it is – am I really so different? and psssst.... most importantly - Am I going to end up being completely boring, wearing elbow patches with no idea how to be silly or fun or believe in anything without reams of ‘evidence’ to substantiate it? (oh okay that’s an exaggeration, no one really wears elbow patches anymore, and okay some academics are fun (my supervisor is that’s half our problem)

The future

So. It seems I have passed my first year, although it’s not been without incident or a few pilot weeks on prescription drugs (I had a bad reaction to them and gave them up for art and theatre instead) I guess there is nothing else I can do but re-address my expectations of the PhD process, plan my next six months thoroughly, catch up to where I feel I should rightly be and try and hope things with my team improve (Although anecdotally it’s supposed to get really hard at this point). Having spoken to numerous PhD students and graduates it is fair to say none of them have really raved about the process and most seem, by the end of their projects to be bloody glad to be rid of their thesis. Academia is indeed a strange creature, and this odd, Oz like journey appears to be just as concerned with endurance and determination and negotiating relationships as it is with actual research. I decided that what I need to survive, (along with a sense of play and embracing creativity and art outside of work) is a mantra, thus quoted by Magnus above:

I’ve started... so I’ll finish.

(repeat twice a day, every day, until thesis completion)

However I feel, (good or bad) today, next week or this time next year, it won’t last forever – the time has flown and I received my bursary payment schedule recently and looking at those 24 payment dates .... well two years does not seem that long at all.
I found this oddly comforting and I like the mantra. I do however worry about the talk of fun, not because I am against it, but because those stuffy professors that sneer and go on and on about evidence often are having fun. I don’t think it’s a front or the consequence of cynicism.

I Shop, Therefore I Am – consumerism and the riots. (2011-09-06 12:00)

The riots that spread across the country this summer have left a strong impression in the public imagery. From London to Birmingham, the British society has showed and shouted the presence of a deep-seated malaise which appears to affect mostly its youngest members. Many commentators have tried to give a name and an explanation to this outburst of social disorder. However, one of the most lucid and precise analysis of the events has been provided by arguably the foremost sociologist of our times – Zygmunt Bauman. In a short yet sharp [1]article, Bauman unfolds the sociological dimension of the riots, explaining how capitalism and consumerism have changed and distorted not only our social values and beliefs, but also the idea itself of (be)longing.

In an era where shopping malls have become our temples and pilgrimage’s destination, and shopping lists are our breviaries, fullness of life can be achieved only by being an ‘accomplished consumer’. I shop, therefore I am. This creates a critical divide between have and have-nots, whereas defective consumers find themselves bearing the stigma of a life un-fulfilled – with no human dignity, no meaning and, consequently, lack of respect for themselves and others around them.

Contemporary have-nots are outcasts banished from the Temple of Consumers. They see shopping malls as outposts of the enemy erected on the land of their exile. Armed, closely watched and haughty, these fortifications bar access to a life accomplished. In this sense, have-nots long for the heavily guarded goods kept inside the Temple in the hope that they will grant them access to the congregation. Daring to force the gates of the temple, thus, seems to signal a forlorn attempt at winning a seat on the pew, a place among the members of the Church of Consumerism.
Behind the UK Riots | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-14 08:03:22)
[...] I Shop, Therefore I Am – consumerism and the riots. [...] 

I Shop, Therefore I Am | Voxygen (2014-05-12 16:42:10)
[...] I can’t seem to stop wanting to buy things, and hoping that the things I buy will change my life. [...] 

Asian demography (2011-09-07 08:00)

A new article in the Economist presents a well-researcher summary of recent noticeable demographic shift away from the traditional culture that views marriage as the centrepiece of society in Asia. While it is undoubtedly reductionist to speak about "Asia" as an entity, the article does go on to differentiate among different areas and countries and present a wealth of data. It also discusses key issues that affect the change in marriage choices, such as education, the fact that more women now occupy higher hierarchical positions and cannot (or do not need to any more) marry "up", work-life balance, and... the economic crisis. Will marriage rates pick up again if and when the global crisis ends?

Read the article [1]here


Is this what cultural theorists mean when they talk about 'hybridity’? (2011-09-07 12:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/WkdOv9DCuUA

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/WkdOv9DCuUA]
Modern radical thinker Slavoj Žižek spoke on the 1st July 2011 as part of the 'Great Minds' series, and affirmed his status as a great mind of modern philosophy and social, cultural and political theory. Starbucks, social solidarity and self-commodification were among the varied and enlightening topics touched upon by Žižek, all grounded by his interpretation of ideology and its continuing importance.

As an overview of the more recent themes from Zizek's voluminous output, this talk cannot be beaten. One interesting take away idea, which he seems not to draw out as explicitly as he could: in late capitalist society we literally fetishise subjectivity in the psychoanalytic sense of the term. The moral importance we place on our subjective life, the sheer significance we accord our subjective disavowal of those things we take to be wrong, actually facilitates an objective complicity in the structures of capitalist society. The sense in which we see ourselves as seeing behind the veil, free from the ideological delusions of earlier times, actually facilitates our continuing participation: a cynical and critical evaluation of the world around us actually functions ideologically to free up our continuing participation in that world.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/cW1zUh94uMY
Once, years ago, the man who lived in the apartment below mine committed suicide. The police came pounding on my door in the middle of night to ask questions: Did I know him? When was the last time I saw him? Did I notice anything strange?

I hadn’t. I told them that I didn’t know my neighbor’s name, except for what was on the mailbox, and that I barely knew his face. That in the past eight months or so that I had lived here I only saw him two or three times, his back to me as he clattered into the building, collecting his mail, tangled up with his dog, then disappearing into his apartment quickly, shutting his front door behind him and leaving the stairwell without a trace.

"Wow," I remarked to the Officer. "This is just like Durkheim said," referencing the French sociologist who in the late 19th century famously studied suicide. "Who?" the Officer asked. "Does he live in this building? Did he know the deceased?"

For days after the police left there was a enormous lock on my neighbor’s door and stray police tape still tied to the banister from when the apartment had to be protected as a crime scene. About a week later the enormous lock was gone and the smell of ammonia and lemon wax seeped out into the hallway as my neighbor’s mother packed and cleaned her dead son's apartment, his dog still alive and well snuffling at her feet.

I peeked through the crack of the front door and saw scuffed and scratched wood floors, laundry stacked in a basket, an opened cereal box and felt the tears roll down my cheeks, thinking for a moment of what my own life upstairs would look like without me, especially to some stranger passing by who looked in and only knew me from the stairwell or the street.

*End Note: The title for this post is borrowed from [2]the unbelievably great Isabel Coixet film My Life Without Me.*
Bringing The People (Magazine) Back In | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-09 14:58:31)

[...] short crop that, in the late 1950s, made her a famous gamine. This was nearly eighty years after Emile Dukheim's Les Règles De La Méthode Sociologique was first [...]

Books Like Sociology | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-17 03:36:58)

[...] through the writings of scholars such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud and especially, Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois. It's not difficult to imagine why. This was, after all, a time, when the [...]

A Biography Like A Match | The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-09 16:02:48)

[...] we consider a life, Moses' biography teaches us, especially one heavily documented and fabled, we must remember [...]

The Sociological Imagination (2012-07-14 20:44:55)

[...] (i.e., academic social science), as well as a story about modernity — see, quite simply, Durkheim's Suicide (1897); W.E.B. Du Bois' The Philadelphia Negro (1899), W.I. Thomas & Florian [...]

Keynes vs Hayek (2011-09-09 08:00)

In a recent radio 4 debate, which you can listen to [1]here, two Keynsians and two Haykeians debate the [2]relative merits of Keynes and Hayek. While this is a fantastic discussion, chaired by the superb [3]Paul Mason, here at Sociological Imagination we prefer this slightly earlier debate:
And part 2 (which isn’t really as good):

5. [5]http://www.youtube.com/embed/GTQnarzmTOc

Call for Papers: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-09-09 08:00)
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
The American tabloid People Weekly was first published in 1974. Mia Farrow, who was starring as Daisy Buchanan in the film The Great Gatsby at the time, was its first cover girl, gazing vacantly out into the world, her hair all done up in 1920s curls instead of the short crop that, in the late 1950s, made her a famous gamine. This was nearly eighty years after Emile Dukheim’s Les Règles De La Méthode Sociologique was first published.

Still, like so many of the practical and narrative sociologies, which came before it, the work of statistical societies and rhetoricians for example, or the work of novelists and poets, People Weekly had all the markings of a classic sociological work.

You can tell by just looking at the cover. It offered analyses of modern social problems, (like the everyday struggles of the modern, nuclear family or the persistent sorrow of the modern, everyday wife), while at the same time celebrating all of the great promise of the modern American dream (Palm Beach Whirl, The Parties, Pets and Personalities or springtime fashion that lets you find your true inner self). It attempted to explain how these problems affected us in both big ways and small (unjust arrests made in Russia or how a fourth marriage can really work) and offered evidence and proof to its well-reasoned claims.

It was, you could say, canonically perfect, right down to its masthead and its celebration of fame, for unlike Les Règles, People Weekly magazine was and continues to be a sociological work where the bodies out of which it is made are clearly acknowledged by its name.

1. [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-eh50y3V0dcM/Tmob0dH1c5I/AAAAAAAASY/r6sCLOclqeM/s1600/ekondu9oe598ken5.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-eh50y3V0dcM/Tmob0dH1c5I/AAAAAAAASY/r6sCLOclqeM/s1600/ekondu9oe598ken5.jpg)
2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/6479](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/6479)
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-09-10 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

1. Sociological Imagination
2. Create your badge
3. Follow us on Twitter here:
4. Twitter News Wire
5. Twitter Updates


Seafarers' fatigue: new research by Cardiff University (2011-09-11 08:00)

The Seafarers International Research Institute (SIRC) in Cardiff have concluded a large-scale study of fatigue among seafarers and have produced a 30-minute movie which summarises their questions and findings.

The SIRC team studied merchant mariners and fishermen. As Andy Smith (Director of the Centre for Occupational and Health Psychology) and Tony Lane (former SIRC director) mention, not much has previously been known about this incredibly important aspect of seafaring labour: studies of fatigue among seafarers exist, but they are mostly based on anecdotal evidence. The SIRC study’s contribution is in examining a broad range of evidence and focusses on the combined effects of various factors that cause and increase fatigue (including, among others, ship design, port-turnaround times, the nature of work on ships which demands that one can't relax until the work is done, decreased levels of ship manning, shift patterns, the pervasive 'culture' of maritime work, seafarers' and officers fear to lose their jobs if they speak out, shipowners' drive to cut costs due to the fierce and sparcely regulated global competition in the sector, etc.).
This makes SIRC’s study of fatigue at work among merchant mariners and fishermen the first rigorous study of the issue of fatigue at sea which affects not only workers’ psychological well-being, but also the smooth and efficient operation of cargo transport, and which is also one of the main reasons (if not the main reason) for accidents at sea. It is also an attempt to break the culture in which, as maritime journalist and former editor of Lloyds List and Fairplay publications Michael Grey says, "ship comes first" (04:24).

For more details on the research and contact details for the team, please visit: [3]http://www.seafarersfatigue.com/.

The movie, funded by an [4]ESRC knowledge exchange grant, is also an excellent way of presenting the results of a large study in a concise format. Well done SIRC.


1. http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/psych/home2/AllenP/unitwebsite/andy/andy.html
3. www.esrc.ac.uk

[...] magazine The Sea, published by published by The Mission to Seafarers, and also their excellent study of Fatigue at Sea (about which we wrote a while [...]
Jean Baudrillard on 'The Violence of the Image' (video) (2011-09-12 08:00)

In 2004, Jean Baudrillard gave an open lecture on 'The Violence of the Image' at the European Graduate School, EGS Media and Communication Program Studies Department, Saas-Fee, Switzerland. He talks about the violence of the image, aggression, oppression, transgression, regression, effects and causes of violence, violence of the virtual, virtual reality, transparency, the psychological and imaginary.

Watch the lecture (85 min., in English) hosted by Ubu.com [1]here [2]

[3]

[4]

[5] [6]


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tuli (2011-09-12 08:38:58)
the link is dead, please repair it, sounds interesting!

786
Providing meaning: give a little bit of the Sociological Imagination.... (2011-09-13 08:00)

I was once asked by Mark Carrigan, editor of The Sociological Imagination, what I have learnt from studying Sociology, this was my brief response:

“In a nutshell, Sociology has given me specific tools that have become invaluable to me personally and professionally. I think it is a discipline which teaches the techniques and politics behind thinking critically and reflexively in a complex and multi-faceted world. It allows a space in which to develop ideas, theories and discursive understanding of people, practices, processes and institutions in a way in which conflict, bias, exploitation, discrimination (and other forms of prejudice, injustice, discrimination, subordination and control) can be critically analysed and questioned.”

I still agree with these comments I made months ago.

The Sociological Imagination, as Charles Wright Mills terms it, has never been so relevant in making sense of the world as we know it. So, briefly, what did Mills say about the Sociological Imagination? The following quote could be one place to begin:

“Nowadays people often feel that their private lives are a series of traps. They sense that within their everyday worlds, they cannot overcome their troubles, and in this feeling, they are often quite correct. What ordinary people are directly aware of and what they try to do are bounded by the private orbits in which they live: their visions and their powers are limited to the close-up scenes of job, family, neighborhood; in other milieux, they move vicariously and remain spectators. And the more aware they become, however vaguely, of ambitions and of threats which transcend their immediate locales, the more trapped they seem to feel.” (Mills 1959: 3)

There are some parallels in what Mills states above and the reactive action taken in the protests, riots and/or movements witnessed in Greece, North Africa and (arguably) the UK recently. Although causes for the unrest and mobilisation occurred for very different reasons, collectively the result is that ordinary people (that is, those outside the gates of power) have opted in diverse ways to get their voices heard. The parameters and constraints of society have been progressively chipped away through collective mobilisation and people are no longer strictly “bounded by the private orbits in which they live”. A ‘politics of recognition’ as Charles Taylor (1992) terms it, whereby groups in this instance, organise themselves by forming self-empowering collectives which through action receives recognition is relevant. Although Taylor originally uses the concept of recognition in reference to nationalist groups and multiculturalism, it can apply here – rightfully or wrongfully depending on perspective, (especially in the case of the 2011 Summer riots in the UK), globally people are continuing to demand recognition against all odds and costs. The process of demanding recognition, inclusion, political emancipation and equality is nothing new, but has been strengthened in its power through the use of new technology and social media.

With the dominance of Web 2.0 and the rise of Facebook, Twitter, BlackBerry Messenger, interactive blogs etc. protesters have been able to spread word of their action far and wide in real time to mobilise support to excellent effect. A prime example of this was reported in the London riots this summer. In general, protests happening across the globe appear closer and immediate through timeless time (Castells 1996), time space distanciation (Giddens 1991) and compression (Harvey 1989) caused by using new technologies.

Sociology has been long been concerned with the use of technologies and the impact it has had on collective action and mobilisation (for instance, Castells 2001, 2009, Seidman 1998), but this area of investigation has come into its own in recent years. Through the use of new technologies, personal troubles can instantly become public and global.
issues within the faceless flows of communication. In making sense of our surroundings, adopting a Sociological Imagination can therefore be useful:

"Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues- and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles - and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated, must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. Within that range the life of the individual and the making of societies occur; and within that range the sociological imagination has its chance to make a difference in the quality of human life in our time." (Mills 1959: 226)

In brief, the Sociological Imagination in personal reflection provides a critical and reflexive approach to personal and public issues. Adopting a Sociological Imagination can allow ample space to mindfully evaluate and critically explore important processes and practices happening around us: it can create meaning and continuously revise meaning.

Just how exactly this meaning translates into real world solutions in pushing for change is still yet concretely to be seen, but there is movement in the right direction. David Cameron’s call for a Sociological analysis of the 2011 Summer riots has prompted Sociologists across the UK to put forward explanations into the riots thus bringing sociology and the Sociological Imagination into the public glare.

Some sociologists have been criticised for their assumed position in explaining the 2011 Summer riots. In a series of articles by Sociologists published in the Guardian, some readers have responded with negativity, claiming such articles empathises or indeed, excuses the behaviour of some of the rioters. Nonetheless, it must be remembered that the Prime Minister called for a Sociological analysis of the riots which by definition should include some theoretical, causal and empirical considerations as to why the riots occurred. This in itself is not and should not be seen as a vehicle for excusing what was witnessed in Manchester, Birmingham, Salford, Brixton, Clapham, Hackney, Lewisham, Wood Green and Walworth this summer.

Whatever the core reasons for the riots – a response to Mark Duggan’s death in Tottenham by ‘reclaiming power’, an answer to widespread inequality, material deprivation, lack of opportunities, widespread anomie (Durkheim 1897), greed, opportunism etc. - one thing that is clear is the impact it has had on businesses, public sentiment and perception, racial politics - and – as a result, the Government.

In particular, the role that the riots have played on racial politics is still being felt one month on from the 2011 Summer riots. Historian, David Starkey’s claim on BBC’s Newsnight that “whites have become black”, thus blaming the influence of black people and black culture in causing the riots was unfortunately, a predictable response from sections of society. The use of riots as a racialised political football side-steps the diverse collective involved in the protests and implies that black ‘communities’ are homogeneous, uniform and inherently prone to violence, crime and all the negative things associated with such activities. Starkey’s arguments serve to offer a newsworthy soundbite which conflates the multifaceted reasons for the riots into a neat racialist argument furthering the interests of right-wing extremists groups.

In spite of the causes and reasons behind the UK riots and the public unrest globally – in a structural sense, hegemonic forces have no choice but to listen, digest, reflect and respond. Asking for a bit of a Sociological Imagination in the process, could indeed be something is beneficial in the long-run and should be encouraged to develop, not quashed.

References
The power of stupid ideas: ‘three generations that have never worked’ | Working-Class Perspectives (2015-05-11 16:28:16)

[...] from the labour market, we need to locate family biographies in place and history and, following CW Mills, to trace the connections between 'private troubles of individual milieu' and 'public issues [...]
Behind the UK Riots (2011-09-14 08:00)

Sociologists living and working in the areas affected by rioting in August 2011 examine the causes and consequences of the unrest in this series of Guardian [1]articles.

In case you missed them first time round, here’s some of SI’s coverage of the riots:

• [3]I Shop, Therefore I Am – consumerism and the riots.
• [4]UK Riots 2011 – A ‘social revolution’ yet to take place?
• [6] #UKRiots and Sociological Imagination

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/series/behind-the-riots
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/t2M2DVpufKU

Privilege & Oppression, Conflict & Compassion (2011-09-15 08:00)

Privilege & Oppression, Conflict & Compassion
Meg Barker & Jamie Heckert

The political project of learning to recognise and name patterns of oppression has been, and continues to be, an important one. It has helped us to recognise that our own experiences of pain are not just personal; they are also political. And so we have become involved in social movements responding to these patterns and creating new ones. In this way, learning to name oppression can help to create a sense of connection among those who experience it.

At the same time, we notice that an idea (or ideology) of connection can substitute for the more complex experience of direct connection, of listening to another’s stories and of empathising with another’s pain. Political identity based on oppression can assume that experiences are identical: that all LGBT folk, all workers, all women, or all people of colour will have experienced the same oppression and should have the same politics. Of course, this all falls apart when we notice that everyone is characterised in different ways at different times in different contexts. No one is simply LGBT or a worker, or only a woman or a person of colour. Assumed, rather than directly experienced, connections rapidly fall apart when those who are assumed to be identical point out that they are not. Queer, working-class women and transfolk of colour experience all four of these patterns of oppression in particular ways (and, quite possibly others around ability, age, appearance, education and more). No politics of identity can incorporate so many differences.

Tensions around naming oppressions and recognising such complexities have formed the backdrop of a number of recent conflicts which we have been aware of due to living in the UK and being involved in LGBTQ politics. Some have played themselves out publicly, some more privately via emails and social networking sites. All of these cases have involved members of two marginalised groups, one attempting to name the oppression which the other is (unwittingly?) perpetuating due to their (perceived) privilege. Examples include complaints about trans-exclusion and cisgenderism in lesbian, gay and bisexual spaces (due to labeling of toilets, mono-gender workshops, etc.); criticisms of perceived biphobia in the work of lesbian and gay academics; pointing out the ignorance of structural power relations and imperialist narratives in the polyamory and kink scenes and associated literature; and many concerns about the perceived racism and/or ethnocentrism of gay and queer activists and journalists such as Peter Tatchell, Johann Hari and the organisers of ‘East End Pride’. On a personal level we have found ourselves saddened by the divisions and rifts often resulting from such conflicts. At the same time we recognise the echoes of earlier
vital interventions, such as 1960s and 70s black and lesbian feminists pointing out the vastly different experiences within womanhood.

**Naming Oppression**

In one of the most publicised of the recent cases that we are aware of, Jin Haritaworn with Tamsila Tauqir and Esra Erdem (2008) published an essay entitled 'Gay Imperialism' critiquing Peter Tatchell as ‘the central figure’ in conflating Islam and homophobia. Here, Tatchell’s version of naming sexual oppression conflicted with Haritaworn’s (among many others’) naming of intersections of gender, sexual, racial, ethnic and religious oppressions. Tatchell’s response to the critique was defensive. He wrote to the publishers complaining that the book contained lies about him, and stating that he was not racist but anti-racist. The independent feminist publisher responded by publicly apologising and taking the book out of circulation (Raw Nerve Books, 2009). Johanna Rothe (2009) wrote a response to this, calling the act ‘censorship’ and noted the authoritatively defensive tone of the ‘apology and correction’: ‘the statement denounces that the article contains “untruths,” and it proclaims Tatchell “not Islamophobic” and not racist. It quotes brief phrases from "Gay Imperialism" and intersperses them with averments that it is "not" so, or that Tatchell has “never” done this.’

Professors joined the debate. Sara Ahmed (2011) responded to Tatchell’s request to point to the racism in his activism by noting that racism can be subtle and that she saw much to concerns her in his statements and in the letter of apology from Raw Nerve.

Racism in speech, she notes, does not simply depend on the explicit articulation of ideas of racial superiority but often works in ways which mean that such associations do not need to be made explicit. So, for example, politicians might use a qualifier "this is not a war against Islam" and then use repeatedly terms like "Islamic terrorists" which work to associate Islam with terror through the mere proximity of the words: the repetition of that proximity makes the association ‘essential’.

Meanwhile, Jeffrey Weeks (2010:16) defended Tatchell, while also acknowledging the complex challenge of addressing sexuality and religion in our conflicted world.

Peter Tatchell has himself recently been vehemently attacked for precisely those sins – imperialism, racism and Islamophobia – that he has fought against, in a polemical critique of his own recent campaigns against fundamentalist hostility towards homosexuality both in the West and the global South. He has been accused of imposing western standards of sexual rights on an infinitely complex world. And when he sought an apology from the publishers – which they readily gave – for what he saw as a distortion of his views and his record, he was attacked in a fierce cyber-controversy for using his white privilege to censor alternative perspectives.

Now, most of our friends and colleagues have chosen to side with Jin Haritaworn in this conflict and with other critics of racial hierarchies within LGBT politics in other similar conflicts. We can understand why. A great deal of violence by states, corporations and individuals is justified by a belief in the superiority of certain versions of whiteness and masculinity over their Others. This includes, but is not limited to, war, environmental racism, sexual violence and economic exploitation. It also includes prioritising the intellectual over at the emotional. We wish to address this last point with a call for mutual compassion.

This is complex and emotive territory. In this brief article we want to consider our own preferred strategy for addressing such conflicts ('compassionate communication'), and to interrogate its strengths and limitations, as well as the strengths and limitations of an alternative strategy ('naming oppression'). Our aim is to raise questions and to chart where we are currently at in our own – often uncertain and uncomfortable – journeys in relation to these
issues. Clearly these strategies are not mutually exclusive, but rather there is much to be learned from bringing them into an ongoing dialogue.

**Compassionate Communication**

Our preference in these kinds of conflicts, in general, has been to ask how such conflicts grow and how they might be resolved. We appreciate the strategy of naming oppression for reminding us that the personal is also political. Our intention is to remember that the political is also personal.

We come to this as people who have practised, thought, and written about conflict, and who have some ideas, informed mainly by social constructionism, Buddhist philosophy (Barker & Stanley, forthcoming 2012), queer/anarchism (Heckert, 2010a, 2010b) & nonviolent communication (NVC) (Rosenberg, 2003), about what we regard as an ethical and effective way of approaching conflict. Also, we have engaged with issues of identity and the cultural histories of marginalisation and oppression for non-normativity, with which we can find ourselves identifying.

Our position on conflict resolution has, thus far, been as follows: that pretty much whatever the conflict, it is likely that both (or all) parties involved believe (more or less) that they are right and that the other party is wrong. Also, they may well be exaggerating their rightness and the other’s wrongness in order to defend against their own frightening self-judgments (i.e., labelling themselves as wrong, stupid, cruel, or abusive). Each statement that one party has made to the other - feeling it to be balanced and reasonable - has been understood by the other as being an over-reaction and aggressive, generally because it has evoked in them past and/or recent experiences of hurt or poor treatment. They have responded in a way that they believe to be measured, given the perceived attack, but again the other party has perceived this response as over-the-top and deliberately provocative. Thus the conflict has escalated. We certainly notice this pattern in the conflict mentioned previously.

In terms of conflict resolution, on the basis of this we would generally suggest the following strategy:

Each person or group goes away from the conflict and:

1. Listens to themselves with empathy. (How do I feel? What emotions pass through? How does my body react? What tightens? Can I let it release? What do I think I need that I'm not getting in this situation? Do I really need that right now? Could I be okay without getting it?)

2. Honestly and kindly reflects on memories and experiences that they bring to the situation which may be affecting their appraisal of it. (Ah, this situation does remind me of other situations which means my buttons are being pushed even harder!)

3. Imagines the various possible reasons for the other person/group's behaviour - in a similarly compassionate way - so that they recognise the multitude of possibilities instead of assuming that it is because the other person/group just is bad, wrong, or stupid.

Each person/group then returns to the other and:

1. Takes some time to get to know each other as full human beings - what they are all about, separate to this particular issue.

2. Really listens to them when they explain why the issue is important to them, what they think about it, and what their uncertainties are.
3. Is courageous enough to also honestly explain why it is important to them, what they think about it, and what their uncertainties are.

4. Works together to find a way forward which acknowledges both people’s humanity and ability to get attached to a certain version of how things really are. This could be anything from realising they are on the same page after all, to one person shifting, to finding a compromise position, to realising that they do hold on to different beliefs and values on this point (in which case some degree of separation, agreeing to differ, and living with the tension is probably necessary).

Limitations of, and questions for, compassionate communication:
The real danger in this approach, as highlighted by many of those putting forward a more ‘naming oppression’ position, is that it may serve to diminish, erase, or silence experiences of oppression or marginalisation (in which people’s voices are already diminished, erased or silenced). If the initial conflict involved discrimination, X-phobia or X-normativity, then does the equalising ‘we are all human and prone to managing conflict badly’ approach dismiss the existence of such power hierarchies and oppressive acts?

Is giving each person an equal platform to listen, and be listened to, insufficient when one person or group has had so much less of a voice in the past than the other? If we start from a position of unequal power, do we have to further empower one party rather than assuming mutual humanness and any kind of level playing field? And if one party was seemingly discriminatory – from a position of greater privilege – then can’t it simply be stated that they were more in the wrong, however much the process of escalation, miscommunication and faulty appraisals may have been in play?

(Of course, we might question these questions. Is power something that someone has or doesn’t have? Or is it a way of moving, of relating, of doing that can be done in different ways in each moment? How attached to abstractions of identity or hierarchy do we want to be? How might we help ourselves and each other let go of abstractions and habits of power?)

There is also the extremely difficult question of where we position ourselves when the conflict is between other people or groups and we are called upon – or feel we would like to act as – mediators or advisers about potential ways of engaging. It is possible that – perhaps particularly if we are seen to share the privileged position of the ‘more powerful’ party – any attempt by us to help resolve the conflict can act as a further act of dismissal, rejection, or oppression of the ‘wronged’ party. And it is possible that it may stem from our own discomforts, and function to deny a very real experience of marginalisation and oppression. Instead perhaps we might sit with the uncomfortable fact of discrimination and prejudice and potentially also support the person who feels mistreated in this way, and/or call the other person on their discriminatory practices (which they are most likely denying), or even make other people aware of them.

‘Compassion’ or ‘conflict resolution’ can be used as a cover story. Are we drawn to resolution in order to avoid acknowledging (and to maintain) our own (for example, white) privilege? Do we simply find it painful to watch potential allies fighting and want peace? When does desire to resolve conflict stems from compassion and an ethical hope to decrease discrimination and conflict through mutual understanding, and when does it stems from cowardice and a defensiveness about our own possible privileges and problematic prejudices?
Potentials of critical compassionate communication: Reflecting upon being marginalised and upon being accused of marginalising others

Perhaps one way forward lies through further self-reflective practices which focus explicitly on such matters. It could be helpful for all people, in all positions in such situations, to spend some time describing and interrogating their experiences both when they feel marginalised and excluded and when they, themselves, are accused of marginalising and excluding others. Again, this is part of a compassionate opening to how it might be for those on the other ‘side’ of the conflict, and – more pragmatically – to consideration of what might work best in terms of changing the behaviours which we find so problematic.

This is an uncomfortable practice. It requires recognising that we all have the capacity to be victim and perpetrator, to be hurt by - and to hurt - others, to open up and to close down. But in recognising these capacities in ourselves it can become easier to understand that they are also present in others.

The people we are accusing of marginalisation or prejudice are neither singular nor fixed, and they will resist being fixed by us, just as we are resisting being fixed ourselves. The way that they are behaving now is not all that they are, nor all that they will ever be. We can see that if we look at their actions in the past, many of which we may have applauded. Their defensiveness and lashing out is likely very similar to our own response when we are accused of things that run counter to our self-presentation (but which we may well fear may be lurking underneath). We can ask ourselves what enabled us to shift and move when we ourselves felt trapped and stuck in the horror that what we were being accused of might be true. We can catch ourselves when tempted to use strategies that will shut others down or make communication more difficult, such as drawing on theories they are unfamiliar with, intellectualising, or requiring them to read materials we know that they will find inaccessible.

Similarly, when we are the ones being accused, or called upon to mediate, we can notice in ourselves perhaps our aversion to conflict, the attraction to quickly close it down in ways which may leave important things unsaid or shift the blame, our defensiveness and fears that some problematic inner truth about ourselves may be laid bare if we continue to engage. We can encourage ourselves to remember the last such conflict when we ourselves were feeling excluded, marginalised and oppressed, and how important it was then for us to have a voice, to have our rage recognised, and to be listened to. We can also recognise the tendency to present a veneer of X-blindness as a strategy for covering up any X-ism or X-normativity that is inevitably a part of us, given the difficulty letting go of the cultural norms we’ve been raised to believe are simply truth.
Conclusions
Perhaps the greatest opportunity afforded by conflicts within marginalised groups is that fact that we will all have occupied different positions at different times. At these intersections we all benefit from certain privileges and we all can be excluded and silenced by certain oppressions, many of which may not be visible or even very well understood to ourselves. We may also sometimes find that our privileges are the things we feel vulnerable, raw and uncertain about, or that our oppressions are the things about which feel stronger and more sure.

Exploring our own experiences of marginalisation can help us to connect with what we, ourselves are likely to be doing when we are dealing with others who are marginalised in ways which are less familiar to us (e.g. not noticing their experiences, not seeing our own identities because they are 'the norm', assuming these are just individual struggles and issues, wishing to flatten out differences and focus on connections, fearing the loss of friends if we speak of our own X-normativity or X-ism).

Exploring our own experiences of marginalising others can help us to connect with how others feel when they are accused of such things (e.g. dreading the truth in what has been said, feeling unrecognised for all the work we do in other areas, feeling overwhelmed by the time and energy it would take to properly learn about yet another thing and to put anti-discriminatory practices in place, feeling anxiety over engaging at all due to fear of saying or doing 'the wrong thing' and being revealed in this way).

Such strategies involve taking the risk of learning to speak more openly, to listen more gently, so hopefully the danger of further silencing and exclusion is reduced. Also we are required to recognise the uncertainties and complexities of such situations, and this runs counter to simplistic attempts to wrap things up neatly and to close them down. Finally, as we learn to slow down and to observe the ways in which societal discourses flow through us in the quick response that springs to our lips, or our tight resistance to yet another X-phobic remark, we may find ourselves turning less to the current embodiment of the discourse in this individual or group, but to the wider forces at play and flowing through them. We may be able to be more forgiving of ourselves and others, rather than tightening in guilt and/or self-righteousness, and to find ways towards unexpected alliances and collective action (Okun, 2009/10).

Acknowledgments
We would like to thank Shiri Eisner and Camel Gupta particularly for their role in motivating us to think about many of these questions.

References


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Privilege Oppression, Conflict Compassion | Social Mindfulness (2011-12-27 14:08:15)

[...] Originally posted on The Sociological Imagination. [...] 


[...] to the other ‘side’ rather than looking for more reasons to dismiss them. As I’ve said elsewhere, in our communities we have generally all had times when we’ve been abused or oppressed by [...] 

Only Connect: Some personal thoughts on the importance of connection | Rewriting The Rules (2014-12-24 17:08:23)

[...] alternative approach is to take the marginalisation you experience yourself as the starting point to connect with others with both similar and different marginalisations, recognising that in order [...] 


[...] This is an article written by Jamie Heckert and myself which original appeared over on The Sociological Imagination. [...] 

Other People's Feelings | Rewriting The Rules (2015-07-26 18:12:31)

[...] Related posts: Polarising Embracing Uncertainty Privilege and Oppression [...] 


[...] Keywords: ["conflict","oppression","ourselves"] Source: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/6520 [...] 

With Ten Dollars (2011-09-16 04:27)

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[1]
I couldn’t have invented an ethnographic field site more perfect than the Winnipeg River. With Clark’s Corner at its center, it was every bit as iconic as William Foote Whyte’s Cornerville, Elliott Liebow’s Tally’s corner or Elijah Anderson’s a place on the corner. However, as perfect an ethnographic field site, as the Winnipeg River happened to be, ethnographic field research was not remotely the reason I wanted to live there, even if that’s what I said I wanted, and perhaps even more importantly, what people were expecting of me.

I wanted to live on the Winnipeg River for one reason and one reason alone, and that was to look for Manawaka, the fictional Manitoba Township beautifully and painstakingly created by the novelist Margaret Laurence through a series of five distinct but interlocking novels, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, The Fire Dwellers, A Bird in the House, and The Diviners. I knew Manawaka wasn’t a real town. That is, I knew it didn’t exist on any landscapes or appear on any maps. And perhaps even more importantly, I also knew that Manawaka was inspired by the very real town of Neepawa, Manitoba, the landscape town, the map town of Margaret Laurence’s childhood and growing up.

Which was precisely why I was looking for it on the Winnipeg River, a place close enough to the source of its inspiration, but far away enough, to not be reminded of its author and its artifice. There wasn’t any space for Manawaka to exist in Neepawa, with its honorary plaques and museums, celebrating itself as the birthplace of Margaret Laurence, and of course, the series of novels she wrote that forever scrambled its good name. But there was space, however, along the Winnipeg River, where, from the very first time I set foot there, in the summer of 1995, I became haunted by the seemingly impossible suspicion, that Manawaka had somehow, suddenly, become alive. I kept finding myself coming face to face with whole characters and walking in on entire scenes, people’s voices and accents turning into dialogues and story lines, and every stop along the road some fictional setting I had already been. It was unnerving. Like finding the place where all of my readings and re-readings of these novels had been packed and stored away, waiting for me to make my entrance there, as if a stage set for a play.

I was first introduced to Manawaka in The Diviners, Laurence’s fifth and final novel about the town. My mother gave it to me as a gift for my twenty-fifth birthday. This is who we are, she wrote inside the front cover, and by we she meant her and me. It was a particularly appropriate inscription, since The Diviners is a book about the stories people tell to make a place for themselves in the world, and even more specifically, the stories a mother, Morag Gunn, tells herself and her only daughter, Pique. My mother loved The Diviners. The very first time she ever read it, the year it came out in 1974, she finished it in one sitting, and was so sad to reach its end, that she seriously considered getting into her car, driving over to Margaret Laurence’s house, and knocking on the author’s front door. Just so she could stave off the book’s ending a little while longer. Just so she could see if the story could go on a little more.

She never actually did this, of course, but it wasn’t such a far-fetched idea. At the time, we were living in Peterborough, Ontario, less than forty kilometers south of Lakefield, Ontario, the small, one-street town where Margaret Laurence had settled in the early 1970s. Laurence had actually written the entire text as well as set several key passages of The Diviners there, a fact, which for my mother was almost too amazing and wonderful to bear. Further proof, she thought, of something of which she was already quite sure. That this novel about a woman from the backwoods of Manitoba, Morag Gunn from Manawaka, Margaret Laurence from Neepawa, was not just a story she could read and love, but also an ancestry she could share.

My mother wasn’t alone in her passion for The Diviners. In Canada at the time it was a highly anticipated novel, the latest installment of an already nationally adored and internationally known literary series, and within Canadian literary and academic circles, Margaret Laurence herself was already something of a celebrity. She was known for her inventive, sometimes experimental and always politically provocative writing; her talent for blurring the lines between past and present, fact and fiction, biography and autobiography; her deeply complex and flawed characters; her poetic riffs on the joys and sorrows of writing; and, perhaps most famously, for selling an earlier
Manawaka novel, *A Jest of God*, to movie star couple Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, who turned it into the critically acclaimed Hollywood movie *Rachel, Rachel*. In her forward to the University of Chicago re-release of *The Diviners*, another internationally renowned Canadian novelist, as well as poet, Margaret Atwood, wrote of her profound respect and awe for Margaret Laurence, calling her work an important part of the national pride and feminist fervor that swept Canada in the early 1970s. A pride and fervor, Atwood explains, that for many Canadian women, Laurence later came to symbolize.

So it makes sense to me why my mother loved *The Diviners* the way she did. She had only been a Canadian citizen a few years in the early 1970s, having emigrated there all by herself from the very small town of Frankenholz, Germany, when she was barely eighteen, with ten dollars in her pocket, so the story goes. She had come there partly for the adventure, but mostly for the chance to shed her identity as her parent’s daughter and her boyfriend’s prospective wife. Which was precisely what she did, finding in Canada a new, young nation, itself struggling towards it’s first few decades of self-actualization and cultural autonomy.

![Image](image.png)

I have a photograph of her from those days. She stands on a stark winter day all buttoned up in a corduroy coat. She looks like that girl in that Canadian painting *Julie and the Universe*, that painting by Jean Paul Lemieux (see image at the top of this essay). They were, you could say, the perfect match, my mother and Canada in those days. And *The Diviners*, with its bold and unapologetic Canadian content, fearless independent heroine and brilliant female author articulated all of this, forever sealing into words and sentences everything my mother ever wanted her life in Canada to be: Self-directed. Self-sufficient. Self-governing.

She never wavered, working towards this wanting. Even as the early 1970s slowly faded into new decades and circumstances caused her to leave Canada and immigrate again, this time, to the United States, with my father, brother and me, she still held on to *The Diviner’s* as the truest statement of who she thought she was, and what she believed was the best and most important piece of herself to pass down, as if a family heirloom, to me. *This is who we are*, she wrote inside the book’s front cover.

I had never known my mother to make such a definitive statement about her own, let alone our shared identity. Her life, our life, simply never lent itself to such simplicity. My mother and I share many things, of course, like blood and physical traits and all the years of my youth. But we also share a lot of differences, like the countries of our birth, our first languages and accents, our educational backgrounds. So even though I always knew and thought of us as being a family, I never knew or thought of us of as being socially the same, at least not until she gave me *The Diviners* and in this novel staked for us a common heritage, a common name. *This is who we are*, she wrote inside the book’s front cover.
I took both the novel and her inscription seriously, which was easy, since just as my mother had twenty years before, I fell in love with The Diviners, too. So much so that when the chance arose to do ethnographic field research on and around Clark's Corner I took it, unable to resist making a pilgrimage to the one place in the world I was certain Manawaka could be, the Manitoba backwoods.

1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-OISgUB6zbjY4/TnK_llcdEbI/AAAAAAAARso/yvc1vBVs0E/s1600/Julie.jpg
4. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-ioz1I9KpdEQ/TnK_fBPfRmI/AAAAAAAASg/4Xvzk4jgkf0/s1600/99740001.jpg

Three Truths A Lie | The Sociological Imagination (2011-09-17 13:19:52)
[...] My mother, on the other hand, never exaggerates — anything; in fact, so seriously does she take the world that if she wasn’t so smart you’d think she was naive for the questions she asks about the veracity of the gossip in People magazine (is Jennifer Aniston’s daily snack really just a handful of almonds?), the right ingredients for a sauce, the books on quantum physics or calculus or Zen Buddhism she reads. I remember once, when she started taking courses at the local, fourth-tier, state university she’d call me up shocked about the room full of mostly 18 and 20-year olds with whom she shared the class, “Audrey, none of the students in the class seem to do the homework or read!” It took me weeks to convince her that the Professor didn’t expect she get 100 per cent on every quiz or test. “But it’s university! she’d say. “Aren’t we supposed to learn the material?” [...]

In the beginning ..... « Allusions : Extensions (2011-09-17 20:29:37)
[...] is a link to an article written by a dear friend of mine which I think captures a beautiful relationship between literature and her ‘Canada’ [...] 

The Americans | The Sociological Imagination (2012-07-04 17:45:30)
[...] Americans I ever met were Anna and Katie Klein, who, were the only kids in my grade two class at Queen Mary School in Peterborough, Ontario to have traveled to places like New England and New York and could list all the famous American [...]

[...] Toulousse is a play on Jules Tonnerre, the romantic hero of Margaret Laurence’s The Diviners, the most important novel to ever enter my life. [...] 

The Legacy of 9/11 (2011-09-16 08:00)
A former Sociological Imagination author, Leon Moosavi, appears in a documentary about the legacy of 9/11:

IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/7__2xF3VPk

For more of Leon’s media work on similar issues see here. We’re going to be interviewing him next month about his experience of working with the media as a PhD student.
The idea of studying modern social problems in a methodical way emerges in the late 19th, early 20th century through the writings of scholars such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud and especially, Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois. It's not difficult to imagine why. This was, after all, a time, when the dark side of modernity was starting to become more apparent. People were poor and ragged and often left homeless in the streets, upward mobility through education was reserved mostly for rich, white women and working class men, and the rural, small town edges of the great, new 20th century cities seemed to be finally wearing off.

I learned all this not from the writings of Marx and Weber and Freud and all the rest, but rather, the writings of Betty Smith, an American novelist and playwright, whose classic 1943 book, A Tree Grows In Brooklyn, I read, for the first time, when I was nine. Tree is all about the life and times of Francie Nolan, an Irish-American girl growing up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn just after the turn of the century, who made observations about the world like this: "It was as if this could be a whole life," Francie thought. "You work eight hours a day covering wires to earn money to buy food and to pay for a place to sleep so that you can keep living to come back to this place and cover more wires. Some people are born and kept living just to come to this ... Maybe she'd never have more education than she had at that moment. Maybe all her life she'd have to cover wires."
Or, even better, observations like this, Francie's ideas about a man she sees sleeping on the street outside of Losher’s Bread Factory: "He is old. He must be past seventy. He was born about the time Abraham Lincoln was living and getting himself ready to be president. Williamsburg must have been a little country place then and maybe Indians were still living in Flatbush. That was so long ago ... He was a baby once. He must have been sweet and clean and his mother kissed his little pink toes. Maybe when it thundered at night she came to his crib and fixed his blanket better and whispered that he mustn't be afraid, that mother was there. Then she picked him up and put her cheek on his head and said that he was her own sweet baby. He might have been a boy like my brother, running in and out of the house and slamming the door. And while his mother scolded him she was thinking that maybe he'll be president some day. Then he was a young man, strong and happy. When he walked down the street, the girls smiled and maybe he winked at the prettiest one."

Though Smith didn’t use these exact words, Francie, was what sociologist Charles Lemert would call a *practical sociologist*, someone who sees in the everyday workings of life the larger *social scene*. As Smith herself wrote, "Francie stared (out at the world and) played her favorite game: Figuring out about people." And Smith with her fictional stories about a very real Brooklyn has always been for me the very best kind of what, (again what Lemert would call), *academic, scientific* sociologist: Emotional, soulful and geographically sensitive. In other words, a careful and artful documentarian of place.

One last passage from *Tree*: "Losher's bread factory supplied the neighborhood stores. The bread was not wrapped in wax paper and grew stale quickly. Losher's redeemed the stale bread from the dealers and sold it half price to the poor. The outlet store adjoined the bakery. Its long narrow counter filled one side and long narrow benches ran along the other two sides. A huge double door opened behind the counter. The bakery wagons backed up to it and unloaded the bread right to the counter. They sold two loaves for a nickel, and when it was dumped out, a pushing crowd fought for the privilege of buying it. There was never enough bread and some waited until three or four wagons had reported before they could buy bread. At that price, the cutomers had to supply their own wrappings. Most of the purchasers were children. Some kids tucked the bread under their arms and walked home brazenly letting all the world know that they were poor. The proud ones wrapped up the bread, some in old newspapers, others in clean or dirty flour sacks. Francie brought along a large paper bag."

It’s hard to say whether I would have cared or not about the ideas of the first academic, scientific sociologists had I not read Betty Smith, for she was the one who introduced the social problem of modernity to me. And so I think of her every semester when it comes time to teach the pillars of the sociological canon and think about all the core ideas and concepts it protects. Ideas and concepts, which emerged from the minds of men living so long ago they are difficult to verify and, perhaps even more importantly, difficult to imagine, let alone see.

End Note 1: The image above is the movie poster from Elia Kazen’s cinematic version of "Tree" made in 1945.

End Note 2: Here is a little list of all the things I learned from "A Tree Grows In Brooklyn," very useful for these economically dark times: 1) *Salvage and save everything, but always be prepared to let it go* (from Tree’s heroine, Francie Nolan, who made money gleazing tin and other valuable trash from the street and trading it for money from the neighborhood junkie, i.e., garbage man); 2) *When you spend money on something to eat or drink pick something that lasts* (from Francie’s selection of peppermint wafer candies over all other candies and her mother, Katie’s, recipes for cooking with stale bread); 3) *Take your fair share and do with it what you truly wish* (from Katie, who allowed Francie one hot cup of strong black coffee a day even though Francie chose not to drink it); 4) *Proceed through life steadily and methodically, but allow yourself to regularly stray from your self imposed routines* (from Francie’s weekly ritual of checking out two books a week from the public library, one by moving alphabetically through the stacks and another by selecting one book purely by chance or for pleasure); 5) *Try and love your brother no matter how many unearned privileges from your family and society he receives* (from Francie’s enduring love for her brother Nealy, who, is allowed to attend high school when Francie is not); 6) *Never be afraid to leave home*, (from
New column! “Visual Sociology” call for reader submissions (2011-09-17 08:00)

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to “Visual Research”. To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. **One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday.** The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.

[2]

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Guidelines for submissions:
How to submit: Please e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:

- JPEG format
- 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

Legal issues: Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers' rights:

http://www.sirim.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2
Copyright: The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

[4] "This work is licensed under a [5]Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License."


www.sirimo.co.uk/ukpr or http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

1. mailto:m.i.kremakova@warwick.ac.uk
3. S.I.imagery@gmail.com
4. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
5. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/
6. http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content-db=all-content=a794687495

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Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-09-18 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]facebook

[3]Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:
UCU keeps pressure up on for-profit companies (2011-09-18 12:00)

Thanks to a UCU tip off, the Times Higher ran with the news that Education Management Corporation, the second largest for-profit company in America, is being sued for $11billion by the US government on charges of fraud. UCU drew attention to meetings between Education Management Corporation and universities minister David Willetts in the lead up to the white paper. Read more here: [1]http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26 &storycode=417161 &c=1.

UCU also called on the deputy-prime minister Nick Clegg to extend his commitment of schools not being run for profit to colleges and universities as well. 22 Liberal Democrats and 124 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion expressing their concerns at the government’s university privatisation plans. Read more here: [2]http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5713 as well as here:


from the UCU campaigns update

We-First Capitalism? (2011-09-19 08:00)

As much as it’s easy to be cynical about former advertising executives who have mid life crises and then begin to express lofty social concerns, this is a genuinely intriguing talk by ‘social brand specialist’ Simon Mainwaring about what he sees as the rehumanising potential of social media. He describes his fascination when “along came this technology which was allowing people to connect ... with their friends and family, around what they care about, anywhere in the world, in real time, effectively for free”, suggesting that it is ‘reweaving the social fabric’ in a way that is independent of large corporations, political hierarchies and established authorities. Crucially, as he puts it, “we are finally able to talk amongst ourselves about what we care about” and, with this, comes reconnection with our innate empathy and core sociality.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/1lh9rsqOoVM

Bob Williams (2011-09-20 00:49:07)
Are you confusing corporatism with free enterprise (i.e. capitalism)?

Sociological Imagination (2011-09-20 07:47:46)
Are you talking to the editors or the person in the video!?
A round up of recent articles on academic publishing (2011-09-20 08:00)

There’s been a lot of argument recently about the sustainability of traditional models of academic publishing and possible alternatives to them. Here’s a round up of posts on the subject either connected to SI or ones that we liked:

- [1] Academic publishers make Murdoch look like a socialist
- [2] Uninformed, Unhinged, and Unfair — The Monbiot Rant
- [4] The ‘prestige’ of journals in a social media age
- [5] Response to Mark Carrigan’s “The ‘prestige’ of journals in a social media age”
- [6] Cite or Site? The current view of what constitutes ‘academic publishing’ is too limited. Our published work must become truly public
- [7] We Ask Martin Paul Eve: Do We Need to Rethink Academic Publishing?

If there are any you’d like to see added to the list, please let us know through the comments box below or get in touch on [8]twitter.


New REF guidelines penalise female academics – send us your views (2011-09-20 12:00)

UCU warned on Tuesday that proposed new guidelines for university research as part of the 2014 REF will penalise female academics. Under the draft proposals, female researchers who take maternity leave will still be expected to produce the same number of high-quality research publications as their colleagues. You can read the full consultation document here: [1]http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/03_11/

UCU will be responding to the consultation exercise as well as providing briefing to branches on how best to protect members. We will argue for greater recognition of the disruptive nature of maternity and adoption leave on workloads and publications. Please help us to feed into the consultation by sending us your comments on the draft REF draft panel criteria, including all the elements relating to equality and diversity. Please can you send in any comments to Rob Copeland, policy officer [2]rcopeland AT ucu.org.uk by no later than Friday 30 September.
Neuromania? The possibilities and pitfalls of our fascination with brains (2011-09-21 08:00)

In this great talk, [1]Raymond Tallis, perhaps our last genuine polymath - check out his website and career if you think we’re exaggerating - draws a distinction between neuroscience and neuromania. While he’s all in favour of the former, which given his distinguished medical career is perhaps not a surprise, he’s overtly hostile to the latter: the obsessive exaggeration of the centrality of neuroscience in explaining human nature. Effortlessly combining the roles of philosopher and clinician, he comprehensively and authoritatively takes apart the lacklustre philosophy of science, as well as the science itself, underpinning the current craze for neuromania.
'You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain...' (2011-09-22 08:00)

In 1986 DC Comics published a four issue mini-series called Batman: The Dark Knight Returns. While few would have predicted it prior to its publication, this work of Frank Miller was soon regarded as one of the touchstones for the medium and, through commercial success and critical controversy, almost single-handedly reinvigorated a moribund character. Time magazine suggested the portrayal of a ‘semiretired Batman [who] drinks too much and is unsure about his crime-fighting abilities’ was an example of trying to appeal to ‘today’s sceptical readers’.

Regardless of the criticism which the series received in some quarters, it undoubtedly did appeal to readers and the manner in which its ‘dark’ and ‘adult’ approach were progressively taken up by other comics points to the ‘scepticism’ of those readers being a widespread condition rather than the aberrant property of a cynical minority. The same dark approach lay behind the critical and commercial success which Christopher Nolan’s The Dark Knight enjoyed at the box office in the summer of 2008. Why is this kind of approach so popular? What explains its manifest resonance amongst vast swaths of the cinema-going and comic-buying public?

Perhaps the answers lies towards the end of the film when Batman and Jim Gordon attempt to make sense of Harvey Dent’s actions, as the brave and virtuous district attorney was driven to attempted murder by the cruel machinations of the joker. The public regard Bent as a hero, but the public face of heroism becomes a fiction, crafted
by powerful men in midnight schemes because the masses could not countenance the grim truth and social order necessitates the illusion. The heroism of Harvey Bent becomes a cruel joke, which Batman, alter ego of the billionaire Bruce Wayne, attempts to hide in the best interests of the public. If it wasn’t for his own personal biography, as a man forever damaged by the murder of his parents as a child, he might have channelled this patrician impulse into philanthropy. Instead he rushes off into the night, chased by police and dogs, taking the blame for the crimes which Bent committed. His parting words sum up the ethos of the exchange: ‘You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain’. This is the bitter truth which the public must be protected from at all costs. The closest thing to heroism which The Dark Knight portrays is the attempted deception of the public towards this end.

Compare this critically lauded portrayal of heroism within that of another popular film series. While The Dark Knight was an enormous critical success, the Rocky films were, with the partial exceptions of the first and the sixth, critically panned. Yet both, in a sense, portray heroism. Once you look beyond the crass jingoism which frames large aspects of the Rocky series, a rather earnest narrative about heroism and virtue soon comes into focus. Each of the films follows the same format, as constancy and courage enable Rocky Balboa to triumph over adversity. The virtues the films portray have a long moral history in Western culture and yet for most of us the narrative which portrays them is one we struggle to take seriously. While the moralisation of professional boxing probably takes some blame for this, it is by no means the whole story.

What we can take seriously however is The Wire, and, its gritty social realism notwithstanding, it comes equally equipped with its heroes. Foremost among these is stick up boy Omar Little. He prowls Baltimore in his trench coat, with his shotgun slung at his side, robbing drug dealers. With his facial scar, ethical code and fearsome reputation, he becomes a mythic figure known throughout Baltimore. He crafts a mythology from the ruins of deindustrialised desolation and he sustains a heroic existence one day a time. Yet he cannot, ultimately, escape from his surroundings, and he dies ingloriously on the floor of a convenience store after being shot to death by a child.

What message can we take from this? Perhaps that when a hero is reduced to a daily struggle for survival, his or her heroism is unsustainable. The Wire’s realism ultimately conveys, perhaps inadvertently, the impossibility of heroism in the late modern age. We can struggle against the constraints of circumstances and the debasing forces of contemporary times. We can craft an honourable life in the midst of violence and suffering. However the effort required is herculean and inevitably, at least in the long run, beyond us. This is the message conveyed by the sudden and pointless death of Omar, as well as by this sort of social realism more generally.

Yet if we accept this realism I think we have lost something important. Though The Wire itself admirably retains the capacity for imminent social critique, this is the exception rather than the rule and it’s primarily a consequence of the sheer talent of the creators of the series. The ‘scepticism’ which Time magazine suggested was responsible for The Dark Knight’s success has only grown since 1986 and it’s far from a positive cultural trend. The cultural theorist Mark Fisher calls it ‘capitalist realism’: the aestheticisation of capitalist hegemony. As Fisher puts it, ‘capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable’ and, as such, dominates the sensibility and aesthetics of cultural production. However unlike historical instances of a politicised aesthetics, the ensuing cultural style is neither narrowly aesthetic nor superficially political. It manifests itself in a ‘machismo of demythologisation’ which proudly undercuts heroism in the name of psychological realism (‘you either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain’) and hope in the name of sociological realism (everything ultimately comes down to power and deceit). It counsels suspicion and scepticism in the name of an acceptance of reality which will help protect us against the ideological machinations of the powerful.

In fact its acceptance helps, in a sense, bring about the reality it purports to reflect. The philosopher Slavoj Žižek suggests that, far from being a post-ideological acceptance of sheer reality, contemporary cynicism is profoundly ideological in character because its hyperbolic fixation on the worst the world has to offer (cruelty, corruption, deceit) and its suspicion towards those ideals and practices seen to provide masks for that deceit (heroism, morality, authority) leaves us mired in an apathetic irony (unable to take the possibility of social change seriously or think
beyond present circumstances). The sad truth is that, as he puts it, 'even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, we are still doing them'. The error lies, he argues, in an overvaluing of belief. Far from representing an act of resistance, the subjective disavowal of the cynic (eg. 'don't you know all politics is manipulative bullshit?') facilitates their objective complicity (a passive disengagement from political life). This cynicism precludes critique as well as protection. It simply engenders an subjective anger and an objective impotence. It also cruelly erodes the kind of social historical vantage points which would be necessary to address the question of overcoming it. Therefore in their absence perhaps the first step is to take Rocky a bit more seriously and Batman a little less so?

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/UfcemNhlqyA](http://www.youtube.com/embed/UfcemNhlqyA)

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**Is gender studies sexist? This person certainly claims to think it is** (2011-09-23 08:00)

A scandal is brewing at the LSE. Tom Martin was a 39 year old student who signed up to do an MA in Gender, Media and Culture at the LSE. Six weeks later he quit. He has recently [1]initiated legal action against the university for £50,000, claiming anti-male discrimination and false advertising.

You can read his website here ([http://www.sexismbusters.org/](http://www.sexismbusters.org/)) and his twitter feed here ([@sexismbusters](https://twitter.com/sexismbusters)). We're not linking directly because we have no great desire to find ourselves on his shit list (life is too short for it to be worth the effort). It’s worth having a look through some of the interesting claims he’s made on twitter though. At heart he seems to see the law suit as an attempt to, in his own words, "suing gender studies for pretending most men are rapists". He claims gender studies systematically ignores "men’s issues" because of its institutionalised hatred.

This is a video he posted on Twitter to support his case. Draw your own conclusions:
There was a Guardian article by a former academic in the LSE department which you can view [3]here. Read Tom’s response to it [4]here.

Beyond the particular issue in question, this seems an extremely worrying case because of the precedent it sets. As increasingly assertive and vocal student-consumers, now encumbering themselves with massively increased debt for UK degrees, meet a strained, underfunded and stressed higher education system in the UK, what action will they take to try and rectify their grievances? This is undoubtedly an extreme case but perhaps, though an outlier, it is a foretaste of things to come?

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/VOu_BszChIE

Studies in Social and Political Thought (2011-09-23 12:00)

Studies in Social and Political Thought
General Call for Papers - Fall 2011

Studies in Social and Political Thought is soliciting papers from graduate students and scholars working in the areas of social and
political thought broadly construed. SSPT is an inter-disciplinary journal that has published work by well-known figures such as Stefan Muller-Doohm and William Outhwaite. Our main aims are: first, to foster inter-disciplinary and collaborative work in social and political thought; and, second, to provide a high-quality publishing platform for young academics. Since our re-launch last year we have published issues on Theodor Adorno, Utopia and Dystopia, and post-colonialism. Our most recent issue was guest edited by sociology graduate students from Warwick University, helping to further our aim of interdisciplinarity and institutional collaboration.

In addition, we have attracted a prestigious panel of leading scholars for our newly formed international advisory board, including: Martin Jay of UC Berkeley, Robert Pippin of the University of Chicago, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak of Columbia University, Seyla Banhabib of Yale University, Simon Jarvis of the University of Cambridge, William Outhwaite of the University of Newcastle, Homi Bhabha of Harvard University, Adriana Cavarero of the University of Verona, Alessandro Ferrara of the University of Rome, Axel Honneth of the University of Frankfurt and Fredric Jameson of Duke University.

SSPT will seek to build on these developments in the coming year and we hope you will consider submitting your work for consideration. For more information about submissions, subscriptions, or to download a free copy of the journal, please go to our website: http://ssptjournal.wordpress.com/. Or, for any other enquiries, please email us at: sspt@sussex.ac.uk.

The Editors, Studies in Social and Political Thought

Do you want to be a news editor? (2011-09-24 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination is currently trying to recruit another news editor. This would involve identifying news stories relevant to the site, collecting pertinent links, writing a short commentary and e-mailing it in to be posted online. There would be no fixed time commitment for the role. It would literally just be a case of picking certain new stores (relating to the intersections between higher education, politics and the interests of social scientists) and writing a couple of hundreds words about them to provide evaluation and context. If you’re interested or would like to discuss the role then please get in [1]contact.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.
Social Media in the Third Sector (2011-09-26 08:00)

Can social media deliver social returns? This is the question asked by Sarah Dyer, director of new media at charity [1]Beatbullying. Within the academy, it can be easy to assume that understanding of social change is something which results form disinterested academic study. Yet perhaps, with something like social media, any real understanding of its consequences from society comes from those who are, so to speak, on the front line: integrating the technology into organisations in order to transform their activity.

[EMBED]

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BSA annual conference 2012 THEORY stream (2011-09-26 10:20)

The BSA annual conference will be held in Leeds in April 2012. The general theme of the conference is Sociology in an Age of Austerity. The Theory stream welcomes abstracts in all areas of theory that colleagues are currently working on.

We will also organise two themed sessions.

One on 'mobilisation, protest and movements' organised by Dr Ana Cecilia Dinerstein.

The second on 'The return of religion in times of austerity' organised by Professor Gregor McLennan.

Whether you are applying for the theory session in general, or the above-mentioned themed sessions, please make sure you apply via the BSA’s abstract route, and mark your abstract ‘for the attention of the theory group’.

For further details, please see [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/home.htm](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/home.htm)

The deadline for submission of abstracts is just under two weeks away: 7 October 2011.

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**Zygmunt Bauman documentary (2011-09-26 12:00)**

The Trouble of Being Human These Days, a forthcoming Zygmunt Bauman documentary we highlighted a couple of months ago, is now in its post-production stage. The production team hope to release the film in October this year with a DVD to follow at some point in 2012. Follow the website [1]here for more information.


**Chavs author Owen Jones returns to Stockport (2011-09-27 08:00)**

In this video [1]Owen Jones, author of the superb Chavs which was reviewed on SI [2]here, returns to his hometown of Stockport to investigate views on [3]'chavs'.

817
Are you writing the 'I' into your research? (2011-09-28 08:00)

1. http://owenjones.org/

It was a surprise and somehow a welcome relief when my supervisor at the University of Nottingham, Prof Carol Hall, encouraged me to ‘write the I’ into my MA dissertation about emotional intelligence in teaching and learning. The six (long, tough) years I'd spent between 2000-06 as a mature, part-time under-graduate student at the University of Warwick, had drilled into my psyche the importance of ‘validity’ and ‘academic rigour’: words which, only now, I feel brave enough to include within italics. As many educationalists have noted (e.g. Merrill, 1999; West, 1998; Willis, 1977) because of my age, experience and working-class background, assimilating these methodological concepts was a hard battle and so choosing to subsequently relinquish them produced its own personal challenges.

However, by the end of my Masters, I felt this approach had opened-up a positive, new, creative world. Its reflexive nature promotes a refreshing consolidation of research, instinct and emotions, or as C. Wright Mills (1959) has written: "Scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career" (p196). The paradigm change empowered me and provides me with a new sense of confidence and self-identity: yes, I carry my own validity and my academic rigour is provided by my own (and my colleagues’) sheer hard work!

But, as with any change, bringing the 'body' of the researcher - our own personal experiences and perspectives into our research - produces new dilemmas and risks. It creates tensions between the subjective/objective; quantitative/qualitative or the planning and rational thinking that is required in research project design. It can also be a source of disagreement between us and our supervisors! However, it is these very risks which create their own
worth, because, by its very nature, writing the ‘I’ into our research produces unpredictable and destabilizing effects on our data, our work and on us as researchers (Hoult, 2010). Importantly, I believe this allows a voice to be given to the disenfranchised self (and those I represent) from my personal past, or as Aronowitz (2003) puts it: “the ongoing debate about the relationship of scholarship to social commitment”. In our journey towards seeking new knowledge, the elements of risk and uncertainty, and the inherent affectivity within, play a crucial part.

These dilemmas are issues that individuals have struggled with for decades and are only ever resolved on a personal level. It seems slightly ironic that only in the Appendix in Mills’ ‘Sociological Imagination’ does the author provide practical suggestions for ‘beginning students’. But these recommendations are still crucial today, and ones that I always pass on to my own students. For example, by creating a portfolio of personal items, discussing our research with others and keeping a journal of our emotional learning journey we can “...keep our inner world awake” (p197).

So, in this age of increasing multi/inter/cross-disciplinary approaches, and in an atmosphere of increased sensitivities to ethical and cultural issues, writing the ‘I’ into our research provides a creative, valuable and innovative tool that has the potential to stretch beyond barriers, providing new insights. And, although sadly, many sociologists have been “deterred by fear and careerism from following his path” (Aronowitz, 2003), there’s no doubt that Mills’ philosophy has been successfully transformed by the blogging, tweeting and social and academic networking environment that today so many of us take for granted. But we’ve entered a new millennium since Mills’ seminal publication, an era which has also produced a polarisation of inequalities and alarming environmental and economic pressures. I imagine Mills would be fascinated but saddened at this paradox.

In this context of faster technological advances how can Mills’ ideas be taken forward? What practical methods are you utilising to write the ‘I’ into your work?

References:


Merrill, B. (1999) learners in University in Gender Change and Identity open University Press: Bucks Chap 3 pp 134-171


You might have a look at the discussion on [1] ‘Writing Culture’ at Savage Minds, and then read the articles at [2] the Cultural Anthropology site, which are open access at the moment.

The Mad Men You Love To Hate (2011-09-29 08:00)

Have you ever noticed that sociologists seem to have the same taste in TV? Or at least that they all seem to love the Wire and Mad Men. Last year a first year undergraduate observed this to me which, given he’d only been in a sociology department for 5 months, left me thinking it was strikingly obvious.

On which note, this RSA talk will appeal to any Mad Men fans reading. An expert panel discusses [2] how advertising has changed since the days of Don Draper and co. It’s fascinating to here some of the most senior people in the trade reflect on changes in their profession, as well as speculate about the future, though be warned that some of their views might grate slightly.

Though there’s a video of the event, it’s worth listening to the audio recording which includes the discussion in its entirety.
Over the last few years, it’s become something of a cliché to argue that the modern web (a.k.a. web 2.0) is transforming the way we interact. This happens to be one of those clichés which is, to a large extent, true. It would nigh on impossible to deny that things like YouTube, Facebook and Twitter are having the sort of radical impact which extends far beyond the internet and into society at large. This is reflected in their usage statistics: facebook has more than 350 million active users, Twitter has 25 million users and the two most popular YouTube videos of all time have been viewed an astonishing 150 million times.

However behind these superstars of web 2.0, with their millions of users and immense share prices, are a new breed of collaborative websites. They have neither vast corporate resources or established hoards of obsessive users. They serve no significant ‘purpose’ and it would be easy for an overly cynical critic to write them off as the sort of vacuous time wasting which a technology like the internet too easily facilities... let’s ignore that critic though because these sites are, well: fun. Furthermore the speed with which they are growing points to a new and, in my opinion at least, rather pleasing direction for the web.

The forerunner of these sites was undoubtedly [2]Post Secret which since 2005 has featured 2,500 original...
pieces of art by users all over the world. Each of these revealed a secret which the creator had never before admitted and these encompass a range which is scary, hilarious and genuinely quite moving. A couple of years later came [3]Passive Aggressive Notes which hosts a seemingly endless sequence of passively aggressive tirades (which are sometimes far more explicit than they are passive) sent in by office workers and internet users the world over. A year later in 2008 came [4]Fail Blog which, as far as I can tell, is pretty much responsible for bringing the term ‘fail’ into its current meaningful-on-its-own form of use. It chronicles ‘fails’ from all walks of life and is now tied up with [5]LolCatz the famous home of “[6]icanhascheezburger?”. Around the same time as Fail blog, on a rather similar theme, came [7]F My Life which, as you can probably guess from the name, provides a space for noting those moments when life isn’t going so well... and for those less pissed off with their day there is [8]My Life is Average. Finally, to bring this in no way exhaustive list to a close, there is [9]Texts From Last Night which, rather unsurprisingly, collects those embarrassing, confusing and funny texts which you sometimes wake up to the morning after the night before.

At this point the vexing critic mentioned earlier might be moved to ask quite what the point of all this is. While on one level there isn’t one, at least not beyond entertainment, on another level I would suggest that the ‘point’ of these sites is, in a way, rather significant. The anthropologist Kate Fox argues that humans have a need for ‘grooming talk’ (the sort of idle chatter which facilitates contact and connection with other people, without serving any great communicative purpose) and that the possibility of such talk has declined radically in the modern world. Fewer and fewer of us know our neighbours, particularly in cities, while the hours we spend commuting (either alone in cars or among strangers on public transport) only entrench our isolation. The small stable communities in which such grooming talk was a regular and easy occurrences are largely a thing of the past and, with this, something is lost. However when you look at some of the above sites on a regular basis, particularly those such as F My life and My Life is Average, it’s difficult not to feel a sense of connection. The internet is allowing us to once more share the minutia of daily life with others and, furthermore, it’s doing so in a way which liberates us from the staid conversations which characterised the sort of ‘garden fence’ and ‘village green’ conversations which Kate Fox cites as examples of the lost grooming talk. Sites like this may not change the world but they are, in a small and subtle way, making modern life a little more enjoyable and a little less isolating.


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2.10 October

Inspire your next move. BSA Annual Conference 2012 (2011-10-01 08:00)

Even in the face of adversity, these are exciting times for sociology.

We all know that austerity measures have divided opinion and we’ve all seen what’s followed. Many of us
have been directly involved, or affected by recent events. Expect our most dynamic and vigorous event to date.

This year, we’re exploring sociology in an age of austerity. Our themes are broad and all-encompassing. We’re assessing the impact on law, families, education, healthcare, and so much more. We’ve attracted the finest scholars worldwide to lead the debate. As a postgraduate student, you’re bursting with ideas. Why not come and add your voice to theirs?

The current climate can influence both your research and your life around it. Join us and learn from the world’s best about the impact of sociology in these turbulent times. Our conference could make an invaluable contribution to your studies and inspire your next move.

With this in mind, let’s hear your ideas. We’re now accepting abstracts, so make your contribution to the debate. You’re sure to get out all that you put in and more!

Austerity isn’t just about cuts. It’s about finding new ways to meet the challenges of providing for society on a limited budget. Help us explore those challenges.

As a postgraduate student, you’ll be all too aware of the challenges ahead in your own career. It’s a competitive world out there. Put yourself above your peers with a standout feature on your CV. Get yourself heard amongst world-leading sociologists and policy makers. As the next generation, you’re going to want to know what the future has in store, and play a part in making it happen.

To find out more about the conference, please visit our website: [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/home.htm We look forward to meeting you and hearing what you’ve got to say.

11-13 April 2012
BSA Annual Conference: Sociology in an Age of Austerity
University of Leeds
Submission deadline: 7 October 2011

[2]SUBMIT NOW!

2. https://mywebmail.warwick.ac.uk/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/ABS.HTM

BBC Speechless As Trader Tells Truth: "The Collapse Is Coming...And Goldman Rules The World"
(2011-10-01 12:00)

UK Riots: Sociological Perspectives and Civic Responses (2011-10-02 08:00)

Saturday 15th October, 2011, Birmingham Midland Institute
£10 waged, £5 unwaged

The recent civil disturbances across a number of English cities have provoked much commentary and debate. However, there has been little sustained analysis of the events, their causes and likely consequences. This symposium is one in a series of unrelated endeavours to bring public understandings and sociological perspectives to bear upon the events of last month. To this end we have invited a diverse range of speakers to open up the discussion, and combine academics and members of the community on the stage and in the audience. We combine speakers who will present sociological perspectives on the civil disturbances with a discussion of civic responses.

The event is organized by the British Sociological Association’s Theory Study Group in collaboration with the Department of Sociology, University of Leicester and the Social Theory Centre, University of Warwick.

Programme:

10.30-11.00 - Registration

11.00-12.30 - Panel 1: Institutional Contexts

- Karim Murji, Continuities and Contradictions: Race and Policing, Then and Now
- Alana Lentin,

12.30-2.00 - Lunch

2.00-3.30 - Panel 2: Civic Responses

- Malcolm James, The UK Riots and the Criminalisation of Young People in Public Space
- Nina Power,
- John Solomos,
3.30-4.00 - Break

4.00-5.30 - Roundtable: Learning from the past, looking to the future: What now?

- Rob Berkeley
- Sam Farooq
- Maxie Hayles
- Heidi Mirza

£10 waged; £5 unwaged/students/concessionary to be paid by cash or cheque on the day. There are also a number of free places for those unable to pay.

Please note, places are limited and you will need to register to attend. To register for a place, please email: [1]birmingham15october2011 AT gmail.com

Confirmed speakers

Rob Berkeley, The Runnymede Trust

Sam Farooq, University of Gloucester

Maxie Hayles, Maxie Hayles International Consultancy

Ajmal Hussain, London School of Economics
Ajmal Hussain is a PhD candidate in the Sociology Department at the London School of Economics. His research is an ethnography exploring new Muslim identity formation in inner-city Birmingham, where he grew up and now lives. Ajmal also works as a Research Associate within the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Languages & Diversity (InterLanD) at Aston University.

Malcolm James, London School of Economics
Malcolm James is a social researcher and PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the London School of Economics. His PhD research is based around three East London youth clubs. The themes for the research are racism, youth culture and how young people live publicly. Over the last decade Malcolm has published work on young people, ‘race’ and racism, migration and xenophobia and structural inequality. Malcolm is also Editor of the online journal Critical Contemporary Culture.

Alana Lentin, University of Sussex

Heidi Mirza, Institute of Education

Karim Murji, The Open University
Dr Karim Murji is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK, where he has written distance learning materials for courses in Sociology, Social Policy, Politics, Geography and social research methods. His research interests are culture, ethnicity and racism and these are applied to fields such as race and policing, race equality and social policy, and diaspora and identity. Recent publications on these themes appear in the Journal of Transatlantic Studies (2009), the Journal of Social Policy (2010) and Policy Studies (2011). With John Solomos,
he is the co-editor of Racialization: Studies in theory and practice (Oxford University Press, 2005). He is a former member of the Metropolitan Police Authority and is currently a member for the General Teaching Council and a local Safeguarding Children Board. He is also on the Equality and Diversity Forum and has recently served in many advisory roles including the BME Trust and Confidence Group, the Transformative Justice Forum, the UK Drug Policy Commission Equalities review and the Home Office Drugs Equality Strategy group.

Nina Power, University of Roehampton

John Solomos, City University London

1. mailto:birmingham15october2011@gmail.com

Rich will pay less student debt than middle classes, (2011-10-03 08:00)

[1]

According to a new [2]report by accountancy firm Grant Thornton, rich graduates will end up paying less than middle class graduates for tuition fees because they will avoid extensive interest payments by clearing the debt more quickly. In an [3]article on the popular ‘evidence-based blogging’ site Left Foot Foward, Sally Hunt, General Secretary of [4]UCU, argues that this provides further evidence against the government’s claims that their new fees regime
was justified because it was a fairer way of funding higher education.


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The Chilean Youth Rebellion (2011-10-04 08:00)

Rebelliousness as asserted by Prof. Viterbo Osorio Santelices, one of the most important ideologues of the Chilean University Reform movement of the 60’s, “is eternal and creative and a youth without a rebellious spirit is a precocious servitude…”

So much has been said about youth-led protests in Libya, Spain, France, Germany, UK, and Italy; shaking the status quo this year, but still nearly enough. In Chile the education protest movement led by the president of the Chilean Student Federation (Confech), [1]Camila Vallejo, has organized massive demonstrations of a scale not seen in Chile since the return of democracy in 1990. Last week the protest movement brought together hundreds of thousands of people across the country, demanding better public education and social justice in one of the countries with, according to the [2]Gini index, the highest inequality levels. Protest organizers said around 180,000 people took part in last Thursday’s march, making it the biggest in several weeks. Chilean students, like many others in the world, are refusing to endure any longer the perpetuation of a higher education system that reproduces inequality. According to the [3]12 points presented by the students on August, this will only change by means of a deep grassroots-based transformation of the system rather than with superficial reforms as the government has suggested.

[4]
The root of this problem can be traced all the way back to the Education Counter-Reformation bills promoted by the leaders of the neoliberal project during the 80’s and 90’s in several Latin American countries such as Mexico, Argentina and Chile—the latter being the region’s paradigmatic case on account of the lack of governmental barriers to their application. Indeed, the pillars of today’s Chilean educational system were designed and built during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet who in 1981 and 1990 reformed the country’s higher education system by abolishing free education and delegating the education to the private sector. Beginning with these reforms, Chile’s state involvement in higher education has diminished. There are currently only 25 public universities compared to 36 private ones, with the government providing only 14 % of their funding. This is the reason why even public universities charge tuition fees that are often as high as private university fees. According to the OECD, university fees in Chile are the sixth highest in the world. As a result Chile has developed [6]one of the world’s most segregated education systems, with insufficient state participation.
Being founded upon neoliberalism, privatization, and a climate of over-expectation of social mobility, these bills only deepened existing social inequalities in the country. For example, in the last 30 years there has been a boom of private colleges that ironically are home to many of the poorest Chilean students that failed the Chilean higher education selection test (PSU) because of their education background. Most of them are students that couldn’t afford to pay a private or a subsidized school and therefore had to study in the municipal education system—the only public elementary and secondary schooling available today in Chile. According to experts, this is a “perverse” system that leaves thousands of low and middle-class young Chileans in debt as soon as they finish their studies. In this sense, Education in Chile has become a mechanism that reproduces inequality instead of being a mechanism of social mobility.

In 2006 Sebastian Piñera’s predecessor, Michelle Bachelet, faced a similar scenario with the huge student protests labeled by the media as “The Revolt of the Penguins”. Although the students managed to overturn the L.O.C.E. (the organic law on education established during Pinochet’s dictatorship), the results in practice ended up being very superficial and so did the real change. The students claimed then the same as in today’s protests: the responsibility of the State to guarantee the access of free public education with quality to everyone. Currently only 25% of the education system is funded by the state and the 75% remaining depends on the contributions of the students. The counter-argument of those who critique the student’s movement is based on the dramatic increase of the number of higher education students in the last quarter of the century, however this was only possible thanks to an equal increase of government-backed loans. By now most of Chilean families are highly indebted and university graduates find themselves not earning enough to repay their loans.
Weeks into the latest round of protests, student leader Camila Vallejo expressed their intention to converge with the rest of the social actors such as the miners' movement. Since then the protests have embraced demands for a new constitution that ends privatized education and guarantees quality education at all levels. Other calls include rewriting the tax system and renationalizing important mines. The increasingly political character of the student protests is helping to bring together their grievances with those of many workers. As Vallejo described the goals that students and workers alike are beginning to struggle for: "It’s time to change the political system, the economic system, so there is a fairer redistribution of power and of wealth... All this development model has done is make a few grossly rich."

Following the acceptance of some of the students' demands, including the withdrawal of two education bills sent to Congress with no input from the students, Chile's student federation agreed to talks with the government after nearly five months of demonstrations. After an intense meeting, representatives of 25 student federations from the country's main universities agreed to resume talks but also agreed on going ahead with the national strike planned for tomorrow. According to different surveys, student demands for increased funding for public education have support of up to 80 percent of Chileans, while Piñera's approval rating has plunged to between 26 and 22 percent.

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i This quote was taken from a message written by Chilean writer Eduardo Galeano showing his support to the Chilean movement. You can find it here.  
ii Public expenditure on education accounts for 4% of the gross domestic product, compared with 7% in developed countries.  
iii According to Raúl Irrazabal, from the Center of Social Studies CIDPA, 70% of students in Chile are indebted either to the State or the private sector.
The Campaign for Public University launches Alternative White Paper

The Guardian have launched CfPU's document, In Defence of Public Higher Education, in the paper today. You can read the article [1]here

As you will see, it has been signed by over 400 academics, a number of professional associations and campaign groups - including the student groups: Education Activists Network and the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts - and has the support of the Local Schools Network, co-founded by Melissa Benn.


[5]

Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1% (2011-10-06 08:00)

In this powerful article [1]Joseph Stiglitz, former chief economist of the World Bank - the ‘rebel with authority’ as a book reviewer once described him - offers a incisive analysis of US political economy. He paints a worrying picture of the effective lock that the elite have on American politics:

Virtually all U.S. senators, and most of the representatives in the House, are members of the top 1 percent when they arrive, are kept in office by money from the top 1 percent, and know that if they serve the top 1 percent well they will be rewarded by the top 1 percent when they leave office. By and large, the key
executive-branch policymakers on trade and economic policy also come from the top 1 percent. When pharmaceutical companies receive a trillion-dollar gift—through legislation prohibiting the government, the largest buyer of drugs, from bargaining over price—it should not come as cause for wonder. It should not make jaws drop that a tax bill cannot emerge from Congress unless big tax cuts are put in place for the wealthy. Given the power of the top 1 percent, this is the way you would expect the system to work.

It’s against this backdrop that we should consider the [2]Occupy Wall Street protests ([3]who are the 99 %) which have emerged, as well as the police brutality which they’ve been subjected to:

![Image](http://www.youtube.com/embed/b4mOorRhClI)

2. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/occupy-wall-street](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/occupy-wall-street)
4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/b4mOorRhClI](http://www.youtube.com/embed/b4mOorRhClI)

Humanity 2.0 (2011-10-07 08:00)

In this series of videos [1]Steve Fuller explores the ideas from his new book Humanity 2.0 on a chapter by chapter basis. The first chapter is below, for the rest see [2]here.
Filmed by Luke Robert Mason and hosted on the Virtual Futures Vimeo pages. Luke also kindly helped us film an interview with Steve at the same time about social media & academic publishing - coming soon!

(if you have any suggestions about other video projects that might work on SI drop us a line on twitter or in the comments box below - filming is fun!)

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/?s=steve+fuller&submit=Go
2. http://vimeo.com/channels/humanity2point0
4. http://virtualfutures.co.uk/
Human beings as works in progress? (2011-10-07 10:59)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/L154TvaaUo

Studies in Social and Political Thought (2011-10-08 08:00)

Studies in Social and Political Thought
General Call for Papers - Fall 2011

Studies in Social and Political Thought is soliciting papers from graduate students and scholars working in the areas of social and political thought broadly construed. SSPT is an inter-disciplinary journal that has published work by well-known figures such as Stefan Muller-Doohm and William Outhwaite. Our main aims are: first, to foster inter-disciplinary and collaborative work in social and political thought; and, second, to provide a high-quality publishing platform for young academics. Since our re-launch last year we have published issues on Theodor Adorno, Utopia and Dystopia, and post-colonialism. Our most recent issue was guest edited by sociology graduate students from Warwick University, helping to further our aim of interdisciplinarity and institutional collaboration.
In addition, we have attracted a prestigious panel of leading scholars for our newly formed international advisory board, including: Martin Jay of UC Berkeley, Robert Pippin of the University of Chicago, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak of Columbia University, Seyla Banhabib of Yale University, Simon Jarvis of the University of Cambridge, William Outhwaite of the University of Newcastle, Homi Bhabha of Harvard University, Adriana Cavarero of the University of Verona, Alessandro Ferrara of the University of Rome, Axel Honneth of the University of Frankfurt and Fredric Jameson of Duke University.

SSPT will seek to build on these developments in the coming year and we hope you will consider submitting your work for consideration. For more information about submissions, subscriptions, or to download a free copy of the journal, please go to our website: http://ssptjournal.wordpress.com/. Or, for any other enquiries, please email us at: sspt@sussex.ac.uk.

The Editors, Studies in Social and Political Thought

The Traces We Leave Behind (2011-10-08 15:15)
For years I wrote about small communities of people who were not famous, but were, at least, breathing, that is, alive. Now I mostly write about one famous, (or, perhaps to some, infamous), man, who, though an internationally recognized, (not to mentioned economically valuable) icon (and commodity), has been, for over forty years, long dead.

And what I have learned from this switch in sociological subject matter is that the very best, most compelling evidence I’ve ever come across, (to tell either kind of sociological story, really), are actual, tangible images or writings or sounds that are both familiar and surprising at the same time.

Like this small fragment of a documentary told by poet Laura Hope Gill about her grandmother, Grace Meadows, who was held in a detainment camp in China during World War II. Or this recently found film footage of diarist Anne Frank, a girl, who, until this moment, most people have only known as a black and white photograph, forever stilled (see image above). As sociologist Avery Gordon would say, some very ghostly matter indeed.

1. [http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-4hbyr9RivkI/TpBX5i7PtYI/AAAAAAAAKuw/Ha6v6-58JIw/s1600/6.jpg](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-4hbyr9RivkI/TpBX5i7PtYI/AAAAAAAAKuw/Ha6v6-58JIw/s1600/6.jpg)
5. [http://twitter.com/#!/LauraHopeGill](http://twitter.com/#!/LauraHopeGill)
6. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEXuvihihrs&feature=player_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEXuvihihrs&feature=player_embedded)
7. [http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/avery-gordon](http://www.soc.ucsb.edu/faculty/avery-gordon)

Vanessa (2013-09-18 22:35:16)
Man, you have too much stuff on here that I like

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-10-09 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

[3] Create your badge

Follow us on Twitter here:


[5] Twitter Updates

836
The very best sociological biography I ever read was [2]Kate Moses’ Wintering. In it, she takes Sylvia Plath’s collection of poetry Ariel and then re-orders each poem so they are laid out in the way Plath left them with/as her suicide note. Somehow, through Ted Hughes’ editing and the book’s posthumous publication the poems got ordered in a way that forever cast Plath’s greatest writing into a portrait of despair. In Moses’ reordering of the poems, Plath’s life become soaring, triumphant, the diary of woman unafraid of being so desperately sad.

When we consider a [3]life, Moses’ biography teaches us, especially one [4]heavily documented and fabled,
we must remember that every isolated moment of that life, every incident, every happening, flickers with light, like the beating of a heart and that no one moment or incident is more important than any other. She also teaches us that we can choose the life moments we want to rest on, to rely upon as our first memory, our first talking point. For her the life of Sylvia not the sum of her sorrow and anger at her husband’s philandering and lying, but rather the poet’s own steady burning lust.

There are two other sociological biographies worth noting here alongside Moses’ work, both cinematic biopics: Mark Rappaport’s From The Journals of Jean Seberg and Todd Haynes’ I’m Not There. In Rappaport’s work Mary Beth Hurt plays actress and icon Jean Seberg and [5]spends most of the film talking back to her celluloid image; and in Haynes’, several actors play Bob Dylan-like characters, but the actual subject of the film, Bob Dylan, [6]is never there.

Like Moses’ novel about Sylvia Plath, both of these films teach us the same rule about reading into and telling stories about other peoples’ lives: That such work is by definition subjective, unaccountable, untrue and uncertain, and that we always need to leave room for interpretation or what [8]novelist, playwright and ethnographer Zora Neal Hurston called the real truth of little lies.


1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-Ddd4mLPRDUg/TpGpjziBLdI/AAAAAAAAKvM/qPGWSfZEb_k/s1600/Elt200811172013321760885.jpg
The Secret Club at the Heart of Politics? (2011-10-10 08:00)

[1]

In an [2]article over the summer Julian Astle, former director of liberal think tank [3]Centre Forum, suggested that the UK had been governed for much of the last two decades by a 'secret club':

Numbering no more than 15 frontline politicians and a similar number of key advisers, it includes the last remaining Blairites and the “Cameroon” Conservatives and “[4]Orange Book” Lib Dems at the top of the coalition government. Its members, divided by tribe, are bound by a truth they dare not admit - that they have far more in common with each other than with their own parties.

As an empirical claim this is fairly indisputable. Followers of any of these positions might claim significant differences (e.g. New Labour embraced finance capital in order to achieve social democratic aims in a globalised world that was inimical to them) but, at best, these are artefacts of history. The fact these political parties arrived at this point via
different trajectories pails into insignificance compared to the sheer fact of their convergence.

While Julian Astle seems to merely see this as an interesting state of affairs to be analysed, others would see it as an egregious and worrying failure of democracy. The economic sociologist Colin Crouch argues that western liberal democracies are moving into a stage of post-democracy where the formal institutions of democracy continue to exist but the pervasive culture of participation and engagement which sustained an active democracy is increasingly exhausted. The decline of manufacturing and the traditional working class, as well as the advance of economic globalization, has hollowed out processes of democratic engagement to produce an isolated, disconnected and self-referential political class cut off from the public they claim to represent.

We are left with a politics dominated by elites where influential business interests are the only group within society able to make their voice heard. Their pervasive, though often unseen, lobbying activity shapes the priorities of government while engagement with the wider public is increasingly shaped by 'spin doctors' and other advertising professionals. While policy is incubated in secretive 'liberal' and 'centre-right' think tanks, the public is seen as an electoral obstacle to be negotiated, possessed of no agency beyond the ridiculous reifications manifested in focus groups and polling data.

This state of affairs isn't undemocratic but it certainly is post-democratic. The UK is governed by a small clique of free-market politicians, entirely at odds with their own parties, implementing radical right-wing policies which largely failed to feature in either parties manifesto. That’s why Ed Milliband’s recent conference speech, as light on policy detail and as clumsy as the delivery was - rhetorically challenged as he is - ought to win him applause. It was the first time in a long time that any UK politician had departed from the neoliberal consensus that has underpinned the slide into post-democracy.

For so long we have been told that there is no alternative. It’s pretty inevitable the speech would win him enemies on the right, with the inevitable lazy accusations that he is ‘anti-business’ but it’s depressing that it seems to have won him criticism on the left. He’s the first mainstream politician to have suggested TINA be damned, there might be an alternative. Don’t shoot the messenger just because he’s an uncharismatic policy wonk struggling to cope with the destructive legacy of New Labour within his party.

How do our brothers and sisters shape who we are? (2011-10-11 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Katherine Davies, a researcher in the Morgan Centre at Manchester University, about her work on sibling relationships and personal identity. Despite the obviously somewhat common experience of sibling relationships, it’s an area that has largely been ignored within social science, which has tended to focus on vertical kinship relations (parent -> child) to the exclusion of lateral kinships relations (child -> child). It’s a weird oversight and one which Katherine’s work is addressing in an interesting and sensitive way.


1. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/people/davies/index.html

Perhaps the most demotivating image EVER (speaking as a website edited by two near-to-completion PhD students) (2011-10-11 20:09)

[1]


Dahn Shaulis (2011-11-10 18:38:43)
Academic workers (including adjuncts/post docs/non-tenure track folks) must organize for economic justice in their fields and in society. Some have organized and been active, but against a lot of resistance and fear. Neoliberal degradation of academic work has been going on for several decades. Economics departments have been bought out by business for more than a century. Large state schools rely on serving the military-industrial complex and the prison-industrial complex. And now there is a move toward privatizing public higher education at University of Oregon and Wisconsin. Read E.P. Thompson’s article titled “The Business University” as a starting point.

Sociological Imagination (2011-11-10 18:46:12)
Couldn’t agree more! There’s a great paper about similar issues I quoted some extracts from on my blog you might find interesting: http://markcarrigan.net/2011/11/07/the-myth-of-academic-autonomy/

What’s the point of edited books? A step-by-step proposal for a social media alternative (2011-10-12 08:00)

Given that I’m two months away from being contractually obliged to submit my first solo edited collection to the publisher, this is a rather depressing question. But it’s difficult not to ask it. If my only other experience of editing a book is anything to go by, a volume jointly produced with a number of others earlier in my PhD, it’s going to be prohibitively expensive and the publisher isn’t going to do anything to promote it. As a result of the latter realisation I actually started a website, hosting a mailing list and a variety of other resources, which was intended in part as a promotional tool for the book. Yet for the website to work successfully to this end, it’s going to have draw people to the site: given the particular characteristics of the field in question, the site is likely to be able to do this (assuming I do it correctly)... so, I wonder, surely a website like this renders the publisher rather unnecessary?

A step by step proposal for a web 2.0 equivalent of an edited book:

- Decide on a theme for the project, preferably a much more elaborated one that might be the case were it to be pitched as a straight forward edited book
- Setup a wordpress blog and register a domain name for it
- Write as much as possible about the theme, collate as many resources as possible, link to as many sites as possible on these themes
- Setup a twitter account for the project, connect with as many relevant people as possible (including members of communities being researched if applicable) and actually interact with them, as well as using it to post updates about the project
• Design a CfP (perhaps collaboratively if enough people are interested at this stage?) and direct interested parties to the project site, rather than operating through e-mail (make sure to try and maintain lines of connection, using twitter etc, with all those who express interest but choose not to submit)

• Think seriously about how much of the traditional editorial process (particularly the chronology) needs to be directly reproduced – could the peer review be done openly and/or collaboratively on the site? Could shorter articles be allowed as a basis for final formal contributions further down the road? Could the site itself serve as a basis for connecting potential contributors? Will final reviewed pieces (whatever ‘review’ ultimately constitutes) be posted up on an ad hoc basis or will the pieces be compiled into one volume published online at one time?

• Given no one presumably thinks they’re going to make money out of the project then, without commercial pressures from a publisher, there’s no reason to charge anything whatsoever for the finished product(s). In fact doing so would quite patently defeat the entire point of the endeavour.

• Experiment with ways of encouraging feedback and discussion after publication of final piece(s)? How can the medium be used to build interaction and connectivity in a way which enhances the experience of everyone involved in the project? How can it feed into future projects, either on the same site or through others?

Given the extent to which I’ve been told that book chapters, as well as edited books themselves, lack REF value vis-a-vis papers, credentialisation issues don’t hold here in the same way they do for much online publishing. The above is a bit sketchy but, in part, that’s because I’m tired and haven’t elaborated on it as fully as I could. Also because there's open-ended questions I don’t have answers for.

In essence though, the idea i had for the website promoting the book (it has a mailing list, hosts online seminars, a pack for the media, researcher profiles, a blog) is the basis for this... it's just if the website were to come first, rather than having been an after-thought to correct the deficiencies of the publisher. Now I just wish I’d started thinking this through before I signed that fucking contract.
When Pete Seeger was sociology major at Harvard University, Thomas and Znaneicki’s The Polish Peasant had been published but Talcott Parson’s The Social System had not. Parsons was on the faculty, however, and so was Robert Merton, though they weren’t the reason Pete dropped out of Harvard after one year. He wanted to play the banjo, be a journalist and study art – all subjects not viewed as relevant by the department.

This didn't stop him from reading, studying and practicing sociology, however, and he ended up doing pretty okay (see image above of Pete performing in California in the 1950s, © The Weinstein Company). An earlier post about when sociology was cool, as well as the sociological definition of cool is [2]right here.

End Note: I shot [3]this candid footage of Pete Seeger and composer and musician [4]David Amram at a backyard bar-b-que in Beacon, New York, the week after Pete Seeger’s 90th Birthday party at Madison Square Garden in May of 2009. Right before I took it, Pete ate a piece of cherry pie as if it were an apple and washed down with a beer and David, (who was 79 at the time), three hot dogs on a stick followed by a diet ginger ale. "No bun," he said. "I'm watching carbs." Some more beautiful, candid footage of Pete and David from the summer of 2010 is [5]here.

1. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-M5hJs3AU9lk/TpXaJHRG3uI/AAAAAAAIAvY/c-YWk_DlwAg/s1600/pete_seeger_the_power_of_song_400x300.jpg
Enron: the Smartest Guys in the Room was a critically acclaimed 2005 documentary film based on a book of the same name by Fortune reporters Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind. They tell the story of how a whole range of suspect corporate practices (most notoriously mark-to-market accounting) were used to whip up hype and investor confidence around a company with little material strategy. As a quasi-Darwinian corporate culture was imposed by the free market zealots running the corporation, this all began to spiral out of control, with mounting piles of debt being constantly shuffled off the books, ultimately leading to widespread criminality and one of the biggest business scandals in American history.

Stock market bubbles? Assets valuation out of touch with reality? Does this all sound familiar? Remember this was before the financial crisis. In this RSA podcast Bethany McLean considers the financial sector as a whole and the practices of corporate governance which continue to persist within it. Perhaps unsurprisingly the same actors implicated in the Enron scandal are found to be at fault for the financial crisis. Not least of all the rating agencies who, as McLean points out, played a crucial role in validating the Enron bubble, before doing largely the same thing with the portfolios of sub prime mortgages which drove the credit crunch.

Perhaps the most fascinating moment comes 39 minutes in when someone who could easily be the figurative voice of capital - you'll know who we mean when you hear him - condemns the 'greedy people' who borrowed beyond their means. McLean comprehensively demolishes this popular and ideological right wing meme in a way which is profoundly reasonable and non-partisan. All in all, a rather impressive analysis from a rather impressive woman.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/0zMakN-EMLg
Performativity and Poses (2011-10-14 08:00)


[3]

[4]


Publishing Online as a Postgraduate Researcher (2011-10-14 19:31)

[EMBED]

The Sociological Imagination (2011-10-15 08:00)

The name Mills gave to this promise was the sociological imagination, defined as that “quality of mind essential to comprehend the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and the world”. The sociological imagination offered the ability to comprehend the significant interrelations between different parts of society. As Mills wrote, "what is specifically 'sociological' in the study of any particular feature of a total society is the continual effort to relate that feature to others, in order to gain a conception of the whole."

The sociological imagination connected individual biographies with larger historical and structural forces; or, to use the terms that Mills employed earlier in his career, charcter and social structure. In concentrating on total social structures, the sociological imagination would not lose sight of the individual, as it contained "the capacity to range from the most impersonal remote transformations ot the most intimate features of the human self - and to
see the relations between the two."

- from [1]Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought


What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2011-10-16 08:00)

In March 2012 it will be 50 years since C. Wright Mills died. To mark the occasion Sociological Imagination will be convening a one-day conference, live streamed over the internet, exploring the meaning of the sociological imagination in the 21st century. If you'd like to be involved then [1]please get in touch.

Till then we’re still looking for written submission exploring this theme. Ideally we’d like to collect these and release them as an eBook but that would require a lot more submissions than we’ve had thus far. Please do circulate the CfP below to anyone you know who may be interested! Thanks.

[2]

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?
Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [3]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Steve Fuller - The Posthuman Challenge to Ecological Correctness (2011-10-17 08:00)

This is Part One of an unscripted talk presented by [1]Steve Fuller (in his office at the University of Warwick, UK, in September 2011) as a 'Festvideo' (cf. Festschrift) in honour of Eugene Rosa of Washington State University, one of America’s foremost sociologists of the environment. The video appears in two parts, and centres on Rosa’s long-standing appeal to the ‘I=PAT’ formula for environmental impact. The formula is explained in this part of the talk. Many of Rosa’s papers may be found here: [2]http://cooley.libarts.wsu.edu/rosa/vita.pdf


This is Part Two of Fuller’s talk (see Part One for more details). This part gets more fully into the ‘posthuman challenge’, including the proposal that people may wish to ‘live fast, die young’ in the future. Thanks to Mark Carrigan for astutely observing that people may wish to achieve this state by drugs rather than fast food....
The Paradox of Sociology (2011-10-18 08:00)

In this essay, Wolfgang Streeck, recounts an experience of being at an international social science conference a few years where Michael Burawoy issued his famous call for "public sociology'. Streeck recalls being struck by the paradoxical situation faced by sociologists in the early 21st century: while there has never before been so many people "well trained in analysing and explaining the social life", the most powerful leaders produced by that most sociologically sophisticated generation had been George W. Bush and Dick Cheney. In spite of the "star-studded social science departments from Harvard to Stanford" there was a "progressive decay of the politics and economy of the United States" which continues to this day.

Thus he asks - does US sociology have a problem of demand? Within the 'quality newspapers', there is regular input from psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology and, of course, economics. Even what were relatively marginal branches of economic theory (e.g. behavioural economics and neuroeconomics) received media coverage, with their marginality and novelty seemingly a sufficiently interesting 'news hook' to justify their inclusion in some publications. But where is sociology? Why is it absent? At best reports of sociological findings on certain topics make themselves known but not the rationale, theories, methods or methodologies underpinning these conclusions. Rather than summarising his analysis, we thought we'd highlight his key question instead. In our view this is the most
important issue facing contemporary sociology. Why is this the case and how can we fix it?

"Why is sociology absent in public debates ... why do sociologists have so little confidence in their work that they talk about it only to each other, rather than to the world at large?"


SK (2011-10-20 15:09:18)
I also heard Burawoy speak a few months ago regarding public intellectuals. And I was struck by a few things during and after. 1. I think there’s an embodiment of expertise (“rightfully” or not) by him and many others within academia, not just sociology, that creates a (perceived and real) barrier to the accessibility for the public. 2. I think you are absolutely correct to question why much of sociology seems to have hang ups with making material accessible to the public, as I did while hearing him speak. 3. The emphasis of quantitative approaches only also adds to the perceived and real barriers, as again, this pushes “expert knowledge.” 4. To not embody more of qualitative methods, including ethnography, is foolish because these are methods that can give voice to the public, the underrepresented. Yet, these are not necessarily the methods that are celebrated at the forefront. 5. Even today, there are discriminating practices within the field of sociology that are astonishing, because it’s sociology! I’m talking about racist, classist, and sexist practices that prevents field of sociology from being representative of the composition of the society and social issues that we tackle. This is certainly not to dismiss the level of knowledge that is required to perform the studies quantitatively, qualitatively, or theoretically, but the way we present these materials (as we self regulate through journals, awarding/not awarding graduate degrees); what we deem as academic or scholarly, and the lack of effort to actively engage with the public in both production and distribution of our works is what is ultimately detrimental to us as sociologists. What are we if we are unable to utilize our work to engage with the public? What are we if we are not self-reflective enough to understand that everything we do is colored by the lens through which we view the world ourselves? I also understand the frustrations that occur when speaking to non-sociologists, as I often do. I’ve encountered individuals (some academic, some not) that do not truly understand what sociology is, what it does, or the its value. I have been dismissed by non-sociologists despite my own extensive training because that’s not how they see the world. But I think this is part of that vicious cycle where it becomes part of the reason why some sociologists become insular and do not want to engage with the public. And I would say the reaction should be opposite. How do we expect people do understand the sociological perspective, without accessibility to the works? I could go on and on disjointedly as I have been doing so far, but I have to get to campus.

Sociological Imagination (2011-10-20 16:32:01)
not disjointed at all! really interesting response ;) would you be up for writing it up as an article for the site? wouldn’t need to be much longer than it is at present

SK (2011-11-03 02:19:21)
Hello SI, Sorry to reply so late, I had a minor surgery and it’s been hazy. If I were to write one, should I send it through the regular channels? Please let me know. SK

Lorin Yochim (2011-11-03 16:17:06)
It’s an difficult problem, one that has been vexing to me in light of my recent forays into the “public” of the on line world. I am a "non-sociologist," i.e., ABD in a faculty of education, but my work is nonetheless (I hope) sociological informed, my position is slightly different. In general, there is the matter of a field specific habitus generated in a field in which much capital is accrued by those able to engage students and publics without pissing them off. I find that I can be this person (indeed, that I am just such a person when I get out of bed in the morning), but also that being so mitigates against being an public intellectual or teacher educator who makes use of the more "critical" traditions in sociology. As an example, few familiar with the sociology
of education would dispute the connection between middle class values and dominant pedagogy in schools. To bring this up with pre-service teachers, however, is to invite the disdain of the majority of one's students who closely identify with these same values. Put simply, to be critical in this sense is quite often be seen as an poor teacher and to find oneself on the wrong side of students evaluations of instructors. In sum, one will not only have upset students (sign of bad teacher #1) but most likely a file folder full of poor job performance reports. To extend this analysis to my participation in the on line world, I've recently made a decision to read and engage in the blogosphere on a topic directly related to my area of study, Mainland Chinese society and education. I thought that I had some knowledge and/or wisdom to bring to the conversation, but it didn't take long for my comments to be labelled "high horse intellectualism," "poncy BS," and for me personally to be shouted down as a "Professor" and referred to by my full name in replies. I'm not quite sure what this last bit means in the on line world, but I certainly felt like I was being scolded. Perhaps this was my fault for hitting home runs off of minor league pitchers, but I didn't realize that pointing out racist or orientalist arguments (as opposed to calling out racists) would be particularly offensive. Indeed, as a would-be sociologist, to not bring the sociological imagination to bear on these topics feels like a betrayal of duty. Still, the teacher feels guilty. Now, one might argue that what I'm pointing out is a need to be a highly skilled critical educator, but I don't think that being such a creature could ever eliminate the contradictions that arise in the mashing together of these two quite different fields/disciplines. Another possibility is that I'm conflating two different creatures: public intellectuals and teachers.

Sociological Imagination (2011-11-05 14:03:52)
"Another possibility is that I'm conflating two different creatures: public intellectuals and teachers." I think there's definitely a difference between the two – is the difference getting wider with time though?

Does Sociology still have a demand problem? | Digital Sociology (2013-07-07 09:06:57)
[...] Carrigan asks, after an essay by Wolfgang Streeck, why there is so little sociology in public discourse? Streeck [...]

» Does Sociology still have a demand problem? The Sociological Imagination (2013-07-30 08:00:57)
[...] Carrigan asks, after an essay by Wolfgang Streeck, why there is so little sociology in public discourse? Streeck [...]

Review of 'Dear Granny Smith' by Roy Mayall (2011-10-19 08:00)

Granny Smith' is the name given by postmen to the isolated old ladies along their routes for whom the mail service is a lifeline. [1]Dear Granny Smith takes the form of a letter to such women, attempting to explain what has changed in the Royal Mail and what has gone wrong. The pseudonymous author, [2]Roy Mayall, is a long serving postman who is reaching the end of his career only to find that the institution within which he has spent his entire working life is one he no longer really recognises. It is a very short, pocket-sized book that can be read in a single sitting and it is profoundly charming in both its presentation and its content. The book is imbued with the passion of someone who is clearly committed to the Royal Mail and this adds pathos to what is a damning indictment of the changes that are being wrought upon this valued institution.

[3]
Some of the examples of public service Mayall presents in the book seem almost unthinkable to those, such as myself, whose reached adolescence at the start of the New Labour era. One particularly striking story involves a colleague who once saved the life of an old woman (ie, a Granny Smith) on his route. He frequently used to knock on the door of this isolated widow to chat and see if she was OK. One day when she did not answer, he looked through the window and saw her collapsed on the kitchen floor. He knew her sister who lived up the road so he went and retrieved her keys then entered the woman’s house. She had fallen on the floor and had been unable to get up. The ambulance crew subsequently told him that he had saved her life. Not only would this not take place under contemporary conditions but for my generation the very idea that it might take place seems unthinkable. The notion of public service has atrophied to such an extent that the idea of a postman intervening in a life to this extent (being one of the few people who speak to an isolated widow, having the time to speak to her on his route, knowing where her sister lives, being willing and able to retrieve her house keys and thus save her life) has simply gone, as have more mundane instances of public service, such as post arriving by 9am and twice daily deliveries.

One of them most compelling aspects of the book is the author’s informed critique of the day-to-day absurdities associated with the Royal Mail’s modernisation agenda. He pointedly explains the newly introduced electric trolleys which are patently unfit for purpose and require both an entirely new fleet of vans (as they are too large for existing vehicles to transport) and an entirely new maintenance infrastructure (in contrast to the simplicity and efficiency of the old fashioned bike). So too the introduction of ‘starburst’ deliveries where a group of delivery staff attached to a single van service streets one-by-one in a manner akin to refuse collection. Such a service, which he calls ‘McMail’, replaces the long-term postmen with causal and unskilled labour and is sure to undermine any last vestige of the public service culture which he has so poignantly described earlier in the book.
Perhaps the most amusing technological 'innovation' is the introduction of brand new double-decker lorries which, given the extra time they take to fill up, frequently leave depots half-full. Could there be a more striking example of superficial efficiency savings which simply produce waste? The author's account suggests that the problem stems from the imperialistic manner in which ideological modernisers push through such 'savings' with utter disregard for the sort of on-the-ground knowledge which would quickly suggest the manifold ways in which such heavy-handed impositions are often flawed. As well as his criticisms of its practical realities the author offers a scathing condemnation of the concept of modernisation more generally:

It's an interesting word, that. Modernisation. Just roll it around the tongue once or twice. We have to be modern, don’t we? Who wouldn’t want to be modern? Actually, it’s just another euphemism, like ‘flexibility’ or ‘discretionary’. Modernisation means scaling back the service in order to serve the interests of the corporations. It means ‘profitability’ which means ‘cutting costs’ which means ‘cutting back on fixed expenditures’ which means – and I don’t have to employ inverted commas for this - lower standards and lower wages.

The book ends with a plea for the renewal of the Royal Mail as a public service. Mayall argues that the network is still fundamentally sound and that underlying problems could be resolved through a return to full public ownership, adequate investment and a shift in managerial culture. It needs managers who enjoy an appreciation of its history and values, as well as a concern for the public the institution is supposed to serve (eg, the Granny Smiths) as well as the corporate clients. He plausibly observes that ‘the tension here is between the Royal Mail as a profit-making business, and the Royal Mail as a public service’. He suggests that the Royal Mail is, at heart, both, and that the poor state of industrial relations within the organisation is a consequence of that fundamental ambiguity. For the Royal Mail management the organisation represents the first, whereas to himself and the frontline workers it represents the second.

Given everything else Mayall has written in this moving book, it’s difficult not to feel disappointed at the earnest moderation of this conclusion. Why not defend the Royal Mail in unambiguous terms as a public service rather than presenting it in terms of both service and profit? The obvious reaction to this suggestion is to implore the necessity of economic viability, but the acceptance of this kind of technocratic language is a crucial element in the very process of modernisation which Roy Mayall so plausibly decries. The apparent acceptance of the brute reality of economic logic (eg, ‘the Royal Mail has to be profitable in order to function’) suppresses the political decisions underlying the purportedly obvious claims. Why should economic imperatives outweigh universal service obligations? Why should public services be profitable? In a democratic society these are questions which ought to be decided through open and equitable procedures, but instead they are forced off stage through the repetitive siren song of ‘modernising’ ideologues who insist that the public sector should be subject to private sector discipline. While a coherent case can certainly be articulated in favour of this agenda, it should be made through political persuasion rather than the invocation of economic expertise.

The past three decades have witnessed a historically unprecedented depoliticisation of economic life, as a narrowly economic discourse of modernisation is used to present profoundly political agendas (for instance ‘slashing’ public services to produce ‘balanced’ budgets) as objective necessities. In each case empirical factors, such as the actual likelihood of a sovereign debt crisis, as well as political factors, such as the obvious possibility of increasing taxation, are left off stage without being subject to democratic consideration. This trend is exemplified by Margaret Thatcher’s famous TINA formulation which is, in many ways, the motto of neoliberal modernisation: There Is No Alternative. The philosopher Mark Fisher recently argued that ‘nothing is inherently political; politicisation requires a political agent which can transform the taken-for-granted into the up-for-grabs’. A starting point for the exercise of this political agency is an impassioned opposition to the discourse, as well as the practice, of modernisation. The former is a necessary condition of the latter, as the persuasive success of modernising rhetoric engenders support for measures which would otherwise be unpalatable to the majority within society. Rather than engaging with its on
its own terms and playing the language game of profit and loss, we might reject its presuppositions out of hand and confidently assert the moral value of public service and social good.

Such a stance undoubtedly risks inviting accusations of naiveté and idealism (‘Surely the public sector should adopt the expertise and lessons of the private sector? Would it not be wasteful to do otherwise?’) but the apparent realism of this response hides its reactionary and ideological character. The acceptability of profit or loss within public sector organisations is predicated on political consensus rather than an unavoidable logic of organisational management. It’s often not profitable to run bus services outside of peak times or in rural areas. It’s often not profitable to maintain local post offices outside of urban areas. It’s often not profitable to run rehabilitation centres for drug and alcohol problems. Yet all these things possess a social value and, once we think along these lines, it often becomes clear that this social value has economic ramifications. Drug and alcohol treatment ultimately reduces court costs and hospitable admissions. The preservation of local infrastructure ensures the continued viability of local economies outside of urban centres.

The dichotomy between public service and profitability is false one which presuppose ‘profitability’ to be an entirely private phenomenon. It entails the logic of accounting which systematically excludes those externalities which ‘spill over’ and impact on actors outside of the economic transaction. This manifests itself negatively, as in the environmental impact of more individuals driving after unprofitable bus routes have been cancelled, as well as positively, as in the social cohesion and support provided by local post offices without accruing economic gain for any private actor. This inevitable exclusion of externalities means that the purported objectivity of this form of assessment is utterly fictitious because its unable to evaluate outcomes in a way which takes account of all their impacts. It might be possible to argue that this is suitable for the private sector, although the pervasiveness of environment externalities seems to me to a powerful objection to this view. However economic reasoning of this form is manifestly inappropriate for the public sector because it’s intrinsically unable to secure the place of the social goods which constitute the raison d’être of public services.

However an anecdote from the book illustrates this state of affairs better than abstract reasoning ever could. At the very end of Dear Granny Smith, Roy Mayall poignantly describes a staff meeting where the manager made clear that, given their economic centrality to a modernised business model, the new focus of the Royal Mail was on corporate customers. One of the older postmen asked about Granny Smith and was told, in no uncertain terms, ‘Granny Smith is not important. Granny Smith doesn’t matter anymore’. This is why the discourse of modernising public services must be resisted. Unless, that is, we agree that Granny Smith doesn’t matter anymore.


The SI Top 10 (2011-10-20 08:00)

It’s been almost a year of half since we started Sociological Imagination and given how many posts we’ve done since then, we thought it was a good idea to round up the ones that proved most popular. Here’s the top 10 in terms of the number of hits each received:

854
1. [1] A Mexican, a Kiwi and a Nigerian walk into a bar... a dose of (sociological) Xmas humour
2. [2] Car Boot Sale
3. [3] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
7. [7] Pathology and Asexual Politics
8. [8] In Pictures: 50,000 March for Higher Education in London

Are there any favourites which haven't made it into the list? If so then drop us a line on [11] Twitter or through the comments box and we’ll feature them in another post.

11. http://twitter.com/soc_imagination
Tripping on acid in the name of science, 1950s style (2011-10-21 08:00)

An utterly fascinating video flagged up on the Guardian website of a recorded experiment with LSD in 1956. An ‘ordinary woman’ is given the drug and her response is filmed. Skip to 1 min 50 secs for footage of her tripping. The researcher’s monologue at the end offers an intriguing insight into the intellectual prehistory of 60s hippy culture.

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/V5d4wWGK4Ig

Yet this kind of research would be deemed entirely unacceptable now. Should this be the case? The tradition of [2]pschedelic therapy is now largely lost, albeit with a modest resurgence lately in the exploration of the broader medical value of ‘illicit drugs’.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/V5d4wWGK4Ig

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-10-22 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

856
What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? Conference and eBook (2011-10-23 08:00)

In March 2012 it will be 50 years since C. Wright Mills died. To mark the occasion Sociological Imagination will be convening a one-day conference, live streamed over the internet, exploring the meaning of the sociological imagination in the 21st century. If you’d like to be involved then [1]please get in touch.

Till then we’re still looking for written submission exploring this theme. Ideally we’d like to collect these and release them as an eBook but that would require a lot more submissions than we’ve had thus far. Please do circulate the CfP below to anyone you know who may be interested! Thanks.
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Talker’s Block (2011-10-24 08:00)

Do you ever get talker’s block? No, we don’t either. This entirely obvious and largely ignored state of affairs is perhaps more significant than you might think. In a recent [article the marketing guru Seth Godin makes a rather plausible case that writer’s block makes no more sense than talker’s block. It’s just that we far more readily get messed up and self-censorious about our writing than we do about our talking.

[2]
Behind the scenes: how objective is photojournalism? (2011-10-25 08:00)

Italian photographer and photojournalist [1]Ruben Salvadori has done an excellent ethnographic study on the staging of action photos in East Jerusalem. Watch the video (in Italian with English subtitles) [2]here. This will change the way in which you view photos from warzones and other live events. You have been warned.

[3]
Tips for writing good survey questions (2011-10-26 08:00)

In quantitative empirical research, what makes a survey good? Well, not perfect, but optimally good - that is, its questions ask exactly what we want them to ask, and the response rate is as high as possible? There are no recipes, but sometimes the survey method, with all its epistemological and methodological flaws*, is still the best method to use for our particular study.

So, if you are using surveys, here is a neat table which summarises some good tips for writing a survey. It lists several criteria for the questions: they have to be simple, specific, individual, exhaustive, neutral and balanced; and sometimes it is a good idea to make questions optional:

Here is a random and by no means exhaustive selection of sources for a first look into these issues (a lot has been written).

For a general discussion see e.g. [2] Marsh 1979 and [3] Bryman 1984 (both are old but good); or any of the many editions of Bryman's book 'Research Methods' (here is a scanned version of the [4] chapter on quantitative research from the 2004 edition).

For a feminist discussion of the merits of qualitative/quantitative research see e.g. [5] Westmarland 2001.

For problems of response, see e.g. [6] this summary.

Classical Pragmatism (2011-10-27 08:00)

In this video [1]John Holmwood gives a great overview of how classical pragmatist philosophy has been taken up and put to use within Sociology, as well as the practical issues it engages with in the process of being used to construct sociological accounts. It's one in a series of videos from a recent conference organised by the Social Theory Forum and Culture, Imagination and Practice Research (SOCSI) Group at the University of Cardiff - check out the rest of the videos [2]here.


1. http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/stafflookup/john.holmwood
The ‘consequences’ of structure/agency must be ‘gratification’ as an explanatory success of there intimate cohesion, where the dynamic nexus literally manufactures its purposive goals of Interest, even where jointly motivated and especially where cooperative between the Categories. It appears that this lecturer has a critical point to make about the semantics of sociological (as a system) methods of inquiry and definition of the subjective/objective orientations of Perception, as it relates to these very definitions, i.e., are they self-serving constructs of a presumptive science or do they serve better the logic of understanding what’s going on behind the scenes of Agent determinations, cognitions, planning strategies untoward gratification of certain, expressed or sensed, intuited interests (which may in fact be makeshift, somewhat; but have they more convincing explanatory virtue, success)? Good characterizations of the several problems, but unconvincing solutions offered, if indeed any. The true problem here may be the definition of the problem itself, as perceived from his very own perspective, which he certainly possesses. Something about journalism.

A walk through New York with Richard Sennett (2011-10-28 12:00)

What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? Conference and eBook (2011-10-29 08:00)

In March 2012 it will be 50 years since C. Wright Mills died. To mark the occasion Sociological Imagination will be convening a one-day conference, live streamed over the internet, exploring the meaning of the sociological
imagination in the 21st century. If you’d like to be involved then [1]please get in touch.

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1. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Call for Papers - Visual Sociology (2011-10-30 08:00)

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to "Visual Research". To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday. The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just [1]e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.

Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please [3]e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:
• title of the work;
• full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
• contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:

• JPEG format
• 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

Legal issues: Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers’ rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

Copyright: The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

4

“This work is licensed under a [5]Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.”
In this article, Kristen Howerton unveils some of the secrets behind Halloween treats (and other chocolate). What happens in the modern globalised world is that the products that we consume often have extremely long 'trails' about which the ordinary consumer has no idea. Similarly to the [1]2010 Gap child labour scandal, Howerton argues that 'hundreds of thousands of children in West Africa are enslaved harvesting cocoa beans'.

After reading this, I think I'll opt for home made pancakes and roast pumpkin this year.

Do you dare [2]read the article?
Haloween (Photo: The Idle Ethnographer, 2008)


2.11 November

Sociology of Sport: Four Podcasts (2011-11-01 08:00)

It has been a while since we held our first SI seminar on the Sociology of Sport in June 2010, so we thought it would be a nice idea to integrate the several separate posts on one page.

So here they are!

Link to the page announcing [1]SI Seminar #1

[2]
868
The first speaker was [3]Dr Karen Throsby, who we [4]interviewed last year, talking about her research on channel swimming.

[5]You can’t be too vain to gain if you want to swim the Channel”: marathon swimming, ethnography and the problem of heroic fatness

[6]
Professor Wyn Grant, who we also interviewed on this topic some time ago, talks about the political economy of football. If you find this interesting you should definitely check out Wyn’s site Football Economy.
In this podcast from the SI Sociology of Sport seminar, PhD researcher Deborah Butler talks about her research on the Horse Racing industry.

And SI's Sociology of Sport seminar on 20 June 2011, Dr Sam Farooq discusses religious masculinities in sport based on a fascinating ethnographic study she conducted.
Religious masculinities in youth sport

If you have ideas for other seminars, drop us a line! (write to Milena or Mark)
The number of UK-born university applications for 2012 university entry has dropped by almost 12%. This figure is not surprising as September 2012 sees tuition fees rise to up to £9,000 a year.

The first set of statistics on applications for university entry next year, published by UCAs show that 52,321 applicants have applied from within the UK, compared with 59,413 this time last year.

Universities and politicians have shown concern that the tuition fees hike might deter students from disadvantaged backgrounds from pursuing a university education.

Wendy Platt, director general of the Russell Group, which represents 20 of the leading universities in the UK, including Oxbridge, LSE and the University of Warwick told the Guardian that "students should certainly not be put off university by the new fees and funding system. If you’re good enough to get in, you can afford to go".

David Willetts, the universities minister, remarked that "going to university depends on ability not the ability to pay". This argument is debatable to say the very least.

Educational capital in the form of excellent qualifications might not be enough for students in a climate of cold hard cash. Time will tell if adequate financial provision will be made for talented students from disadvantaged groups to realise their potential by getting a university degree.

Wikipedia and Social Science 2.0 (2011-11-03 08:00)

A project like Wikipedia thrives because of it’s ability to harness the efforts of occasional contributors. As Clay Shirky suggests in his excellent [1]Here Comes Everybody, the numbers willing to make a small contribution (e.g. proof
reading an article and correcting typos) vastly outstrip the numbers willing (or able!) to sit and write an entire article from scratch. This dynamic allows collaborative production to spiral into an endless series of feedback loops, as a few who contribute a lot provide raw material which a far greater number who contribute a little subsequently 'mop up' (i.e. rephrase, extend, correct), in turn expanding the scope of the site and increasing both its actual traffic and potential appeal, bringing ever more co-producers to Wikipedia. It's an incredibly powerful iterative process, as can be seen in the statistics describing the site's growth:

In fact the sophistication which characterises the discussion at the above link (how best to model Wikipedia's growth) is testament to the intellectual power of iterative co-production. So the obvious question is: **how can this dynamic be harnessed by social science 2.0?**

One of the obvious problems which Wikipedia raises, particularly within academia, is that of expertise. How can the intellectual outputs of an anonymous and collaborative endeavour be trusted? After all, academic life is predicated on systems of accreditation which have been evolving for centuries. The simple answer is that it's not warranted to uncritically trust any particular article on Wikipedia because mistakes and inaccuracies pervade the system. Expertise is an emergent characteristic of the overarching site but not one (at least not a taken-for-granted on) of any one article.

If this was a commercial encyclopedia then this inadequacy would be something of a deal-breaker. People wouldn't pay money for a series of books that they couldn't trust and, conversely, the manufacturer wouldn't produce a series of books which people would be unlikely to pay for. However what makes Wikipedia unique is a generic property of the web (massively reduced production costs) and a specific property of the site itself (open-ended self-correction). These add up to one very special property: minimal cost of failure. The point at which aggregative failure threatens the integrity & utility of the overarching system is far lower than any comparable pre-internet endeavour.

As a system Wikipedia can survive a great deal of failure and, in turn, this facilitates iterative self-correction. Because there's no central agency which has invested money in the project in the hope of making a profit, there's no incentive to cut their losses because the project ceases to be commercially viable. This lack of a cut off point means that iterative co-production can continue and, through doing so, actually correct the failures which might otherwise have led to its demise. In the process new failures will occur but these too can be corrected.

I find Wikipedia absolutely fascinating when seen in cybernetic terms. There are three properties I've discussed which need to be considered when articulating a concept of Social Science 2.0:

1. Harnessing small contributions effectively
2. Maintaining function in spite of recurrent failure

3. Rendering accreditation and expertise unproblematic


Political Crisis in Greece (2011-11-03 16:29)

[EMBED]

Is Liberal Democracy at Risk? Debate by Bonino, Dworkin, Soros, and Verhofstadt (2011-11-04 08:00)

Is Liberal Democracy at Risk?

[EMBED] [1]Emma Bonino, [2]Ronald Dworkin, [3]George Soros, and [4]Guy Verhofstadt debate the future of liberal democracy in general, and of the European project in particular. The contradictions between liberalism and democracy are widely discussed in both academic circles and the media. This debate does not solve them, but it manages to raise a number of uncomfortable issues in a well argued and comprehensible way. The debate, moderated by Charles Taylor, was organised by the [5]Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) and took place in the Vienna Akademietheater on 6th June 2011.

1. http://www.emmabonino.it/
Sociological careers (2011-11-05 08:00)

So, what do sociology graduates actually do? If you are a sociology student right now, what are your most obvious career routes? Hilary Burrage offers a good overview of what sociology graduates do in Britain in 2011. We at the Sociological Imagination entirely agree with her definition of how sociology makes you better at whatever job you do: Burrage says that sociology teaches you to ‘ask questions, and [gives you] a conceptual and research toolkit to interrogate any situation with which [you] have been confronted.’

Read the article [1]here to get some ideas about your future career!


Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-11-06 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


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TED talk: Sam Richards on empathy (2011-11-07 08:00)

Sam Richards’ definition of sociology is the ‘study of the way in which humans are shaped by things that they don’t see’. He takes the interpretivist argument to the extreme and argues that empathy is at the core of our understanding of the social world.
In this talk, he insists that, as sociologists, and just as people, we must learn to place ourselves in other people’s shoes, and explores the possibility of human empathy. Personally, I don’t agree with Richards’ choice of term - to me empathy is an insufficient means for achieving that deep understanding of things in their own logic - that elusive but desirable thing that Max Weber called Verstehen. To understand the world in this way, it is not enough to have a gut feeling or to place yourself in someone’s metaphorical shoes. We must also apply reason to understand events in their own logic, without imposing on them our - also partial, unquestioned, and as a result inherently biased - opinions. If we only rely on empathy, we don’t understand, we feel. But OK, perhaps the emotion of empathy is a start and is essential to even begin to understand. It’s nice that a sociologist takes 18 minutes to reiterate its importance to a wide public. Many sociologists, unfortunately, don’t even do that.

Lorin Yochim (2011-11-07 18:32:26)
I suppose this is intended to be an invitation to empathetic sociology, but I’m in agreement with your comments. What kind of sociology of, say, war would we have if we were only asked to step outside of ourselves and feel the world of the other? A pretty inadequate one, I’d say.

Milena Kremakova (2011-11-08 00:28:08)
Indeed! So, Lorin, what is your definition of sociology? :)

Want to deconstruct heteronormative paradigms and cultivate a transformative and emancipatory radical intellectual praxis...? (2011-11-08 08:00)

But don’t know where to start? Then go to [1]automatic insurrection. If you don’t get the joke, click ‘again’. If you still don’t get the joke then there’s basically no hope for you. Sorry.

[2]
The Third Industrial Revolution? (2011-11-08 11:34)

[EMBED]

Are you a risk taker? Take the test! (2011-11-09 08:00)

Are you a risk-taker? What sort of risks do you tend to take? Click [1]here (or go to [2]https://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/risk/) to participate in the BBC’s Big Risk Test and find out!

[3][4]

![The Big Risk Test](image)

1. https://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/risk/
2. https://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/risk/
3. https://www.bbc.co.uk/labuk/experiments/risk/

Technology overload: have we reached a tipping point? (2011-11-10 08:00)

[1]This recent article in the Economist argues that
Today, automation is having an impact not just on routine work, but on cognitive and even creative tasks as well. A tipping point seems to have been reached, at which AI-based automation threatens to supplant the brain-power of large swaths of middle-income employees.

So have we reached a point when we need to consider Asimov's [2] Three Laws of Robotics? There is plenty to think about, but, to take the example of sociology, I am slightly more optimistic. Yes, machines may have become amazingly adept at data analysis; but is this putting sociologists out of jobs? Not really. Firstly, we often forget that behind the hardware and software there are human brains who create, code, programme, maintain and upgrade them. But more importantly, we humans ultimately drive research agendas and make sense of the findings. As Savage and Burrows (in [3] The Coming Crisis of Empirical Sociology, 2007) sociologists definitely need to rethink what and how they do; but doesn't this just leave us with more data for our [4] sociological imaginations to play with? It sure does. And I think this applies to all other spheres as well. Even if some of us seriously dream of a world with less technology, it's too late. We may as well learn how to use it.

3. [http://soc.sagepub.com/content/41/5/885.abstract](http://soc.sagepub.com/content/41/5/885.abstract)

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tuli (2011-11-10 21:07:28)

Even if some of us seriously dream of a world with less technology, it's too late. We may as well learn how to use it.

I think this reasoning does not fulfill the basic standards of sociological reasoning. As sociologists we assume that a different society is possible. Why not a society with less technology?

Sociological Imagination (2011-11-10 21:09:28)

I don't think that comment meets the basic standards of sociological reasoning :p Have you read the article on here in light of the Economist article linked above?

=:-] (2011-11-11 17:59:24)


Milena Kremakova (2011-11-12 02:25:36)

Of course as sociologists we can imagine alternative world, as well as try to understand why the world that is, is the way it is. And in the meanwhile, I was just being practical: we can well imagine alternative world, but this doesn't mean that when you wake up tomorrow morning, your colleagues won't be using SPSS. They will. What do you do?
Even sociologists run out of words sometimes during the weekend. Here are a few images [1] the Idle Ethnographer took at the peaceful camp in front of St Paul’s Cathedral in London on 22 October 2011:

People are not profit
Poster
Protester

[5]
Inanimate objects join the struggle (very Latour)

[6]

Small crowd begins to gather to listen to a street poet

[7]
What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? Conference and eBook (2011-11-12 08:00)

In March 2012 it will be 50 years since C. Wright Mills died. To mark the occasion Sociological Imagination will be convening a one-day conference, live streamed over the internet, exploring the meaning of the sociological imagination in the 21st century. If you’d like to be involved then please get in touch.

Till then we’re still looking for written submission exploring this theme. Ideally we’d like to collect these and release them as an eBook but that would require a lot more submissions than we’ve had thus far. Please do circulate the CfP below to anyone you know who may be interested! Thanks.

[2]
9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 - 1500 words and e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
3. m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Can crowd sourced science solve the grand challenges facing humanity? (2011-11-13 08:00)

2. Dr. Victor Henning - Crowdsourcing Science from Inspire Conference - Launch48 on Vimeo.

A round up of recent social media & academic publishing articles... (2011-11-14 08:00)

- [1] Continual publishing across journals, blogs and social media maximises impact by increasing the size of the 'academic footprint
- [2] Taking a Chance: My Blog is a Publication
- [3] Academic libraries are expanding their publishing services but with limited success
- [4] Academic blogging and collaboration makes demonstrating pathways to impact an easier matter
- [5] Social media - the dialectic between online and offline


Blogging against the stream | Social Mindfulness (2012-01-10 10:17:20)

[...] publishers and writers need to think about how they can work together with more open forms of publishing which are both more freely available and easier to [...]
In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Dougald Hine about the University Project. If you're interested in the project and would like to get involved in something similar in your area of the country, check out our list of radical education projects. Get in touch if there's any other projects you want us to add to the list.

Do you hate e-mail? I do. Can't universities think of smarter ways to communicate internally?

There was a time when I enjoyed e-mail. Before my PhD, e-mail had been largely peripheral to my life and something that was simply a back-up when other options weren’t available. Yet suddenly in my first year, it became ever more interesting. I'd log into my inbox and suddenly I'd find news about an event I wanted to go to, a part time job I could apply for or an interesting discussion on a mailing list I couldn't help but read. There was so much interesting stuff in this new academic world that was opening up to me and e-mail felt like the conduit through which I could access it all.

How naive I was. A few years on, e-mail has become the bane of my existence, as I've become ever more familiar with the endlessly dispiriting Sisyphean cycle of finally clearing my inbox then, before you know it, suddenly finding it full again. Granted, I realise it was an incredible revolution in human communications but an abstract sociological appreciation of that fact doesn’t make it any less dispiriting when you yet again find yourself doing two hours of e-mail before bed just so you can start the next day with a vague feeling of self-organisation. In my brief working life in academia, e-mail has begun to seem like a self-perpetuating machine for constant distraction and over-committal. With this has come my introduction to the feeling of \textit{never quite being on top of everything} which increasingly pervades academic life. In a 2009 article about the 'hidden injuries' of the modern university Rosalind Gil observes how:

In the extract that begins this section, the male professor characterises himself as variously ‘addicted’, ‘obsessive’ and ‘compulsive’ when he might more accurately be seen as enacting quite reasonable strategies in order to cope with an entirely unreasonable workload. ‘Addiction’ metaphors suffuse academics’ talk of their relationship to e-mail, even as they report such high levels of anxiety that they feel they have to check e-mail first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and in which time away (on sick leave, on holiday) generates fears of what might be lurking in the inbox when they return. Again, inventive ‘strategies’ abound for keeping such anxiety at bay eg putting on your 'out of office' reply when you are actually in the office.
How common is this experience? I don’t know and, ironically, I realise I feel too pressured by the need to do e-mail tonight to properly research this question for a short article. Anecdotally though it seems pretty damn widespread. Yet within the contemporary university system, it is too easily framed as a marginal issue of personal productivity: ‘e-mail overload’ to be managed through ‘personal productivity’ strategies and coaching rather than an indicator of structural and infrastructural inadequacies within the university system. Academics are forced to seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions. The fact universities offer support in better meeting those demands on an individual level is certainly welcome but it doesn’t exactly address the issue.

There’s a need for much greater pluralism and creativity within internal comms strategy. Without institutional support for diversification away from the present over-reliance on e-mail, it’s difficult to see how innovation can be sustained within higher education, given the demands placed on staff to do more with less in the current climate and the limitations of the communications infrastructure drawn upon at every stage of that activity. Paradoxically, it’s these ever-increasing occupational responsibilities which stand in the way of diversification away from e-mail on an individual level, as experimentation with other forms of internal communication is too easily dismissed as something one doesn’t have the time for.

Developing strategies to diversify away from e-mail should be a major strategic priority within higher-education. In order to avoid being yet another occupational pressures, these strategies must have a participatory focus, seeking to expand the repertoire of communicative styles and platforms available to academics in a way which is personally empowering. In doing so the institution would work towards maximising the latent capacity for creative communication and collaboration contained within it. By which I mean that, sociologically speaking, the communications infrastructure an institution relies on functions as both enablement and constraint in relation to the particular projects of the individuals within it (whose projects, in the broadest sense of the term, are very important to the institution because the individuals still enjoy a relatively high degree of occupational autonomy relative to much of the working world).

There’s only so much collaboration that can emerge if the communicative tools available are limited i.e. the latent capacity within the institution. Exactly how much of that capacity contingently gets exercised in a particular time and place is an empirical question but, in principle, everyone wins. Academics connect more seamlessly, autonomously and enjoyably with others. Institutions create the communicative conditions for a thriving, creative and interdisciplinary research culture. Exactly how this works in practice is a complex question. It’s also undoubtedly situational, at least somewhat defined by all manner of internal socio-cultural characteristics and histories of particular institutions. But as research questions go, it’s far from unsurmountable. It just needs time, resources and support at an institutional level.

Scott Grant (2013-09-21 01:46:50)
Great piece Mark. Incidentally, it’s 1:30am, it’s my birthday too, but i’m strangely compelled to check + respond to emails from today (before bed). Oh, and check Twitter too. Oh, and Facebook also. It’s almost become a logic - a somewhat emerging doxa in academic practice. It degrades immersion and leads to partial dilution of good academic values of hard graft. Foucault or Marx would certainly have had ‘out of office’ set for several years at a time! We might be exposed to a plethora of new research, new ideas, new dynamics, but i think we need to slow things down and examine the quality of the information we
already have. Bring back the FAX! Or at least introduce more robust measures of quality control.

couldn’t agree more! :-)  

Emma Rees interviewed about Can’t... (2011-11-16 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to [1]Emma Rees about her new book Can’t, which explores the strange and confused representation of the female genitalia in contemporary culture.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/emma-rees-on-2011-10-14-at-17-08.mp3"]


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Sport For Education: A Healthy Balance? (2011-11-17 08:00)

During the recent increase in childhood obesity, Higher Education cuts and our Nation’s continued sporting hysteria, the question of sport’s impact on our educated youth has never been more relevant. While our Government blindly pumps money into sport with the assumed belief – among other motives - that professional, elite sports will magically inspire and excite young adults and children into achieving excellence at school, I propose that such claims remain largely unproven.

[1]
Behind such financial investments as the £162 Million PE and Sport Strategy, as introduced by the previous Labour Administration, there are three main arguments commonly endorsed by PE teachers, coaches and - unfortunately for our current generation - the new Conservative Head of Education. These, as I’m sure you have heard before, are ‘sport is character building’ (self-development through gained personal and life skills), ‘sport is healthy’ (...and a healthy body means a healthy mind) and, lastly, ‘sport is fun’ (enjoyment that energises individuals and provides a helpful break from studying). Indeed, it is not uncommon for such understandings to be used to promote the ‘education value’ of sport. All of these arguments, I feel, lack theoretical and practical grounding, and the reasons lie in the true nature of modern sport.

The institution of Sport, during our current modern era in the western world, has a number of underlying characteristics. Firstly, it is highly stratified, meaning its participants (players, coaches and executives for example) are divided and grouped by status and power; the chairman being at the top of the pyramid and the players at the bottom. This hierarchical system keeps the powerful in control by providing a higher category for each group to strive towards; reproducing itself over time and keeping the lower groups from rebelling. Indeed, this system is the chosen approach for sports clubs and - not too dissimilarly - militaries throughout the western world. The behaviour of authoritarian coaches and corporate shareholders in modern football are prime examples.

Secondly, sport is - as is required for a stratified system to function - primarily focused on performance. The financial rewards, global media coverage and social significance of success in modern sport have meant that winning far outweighs anything else. In fact, even Physical Education or lower levels of competitive sport share these underlying traits, as the talented and successful children receive social status and popularity, while the lesser able children are usually picked last and have to deal with the embarrassment, shame and social consequences of losing that have become part of our mass sporting culture. Unfortunately for both this argumentation and for any potential change to occur, such psychological and social ratifications are, inevitably, very difficult to measure. However, the fact that 70 % of our young people cease participating in sport when they leave school (‘The Wolfenden Gap’) perhaps tells its own story.

Indeed, as my examples have shown, and as much of the general public I’m sure have also experienced, these regimented characteristics are common place within sport and physical education. In view of this, the three primary beliefs behind the naïve adoption of sport as an educational aid are highly ambiguous. ‘Character building’ may be partly true for the minority of highly successful and, therefore, confident and responsible sporting individuals, but for the most part, working within the hierarchical system of sport merely teaches forced conformity and blind faith in one’s superiors; skills that can hardly be considered as positive self-development. Furthermore, due to the pressure of performance, focus on sporting success and conformity to the coach/teacher’s orders, injuries and dangerous play are also a frequent occurrence; questioning the truth behind the assumptions of sport as a healthy activity. The average life expectancy of American Football players, at just 52 years of age for instance, is shocking to say the least. Moreover, in Britain alone, 3.5 million children receive medical treatment for a sports-related injury every year.

Lastly, coupled with the previous arguments, the idea of sport being enjoyable, bearing in mind the social ratifications and potentially dangerous and authoritative environment that children and young adults are placed in within sport and PE, is also largely flawed. The truth is that for in order for one team to win, the other must lose. And if - and quite possibly so - a number of those winning players have underperformed, acquired an injury or have been undermined or exploited by their coach/teacher, they too would experience very little enjoyment; leaving very few feeling satisfied. Never the less, such practices continue to plague youth sport and PE in our country, keeping this stratified system firmly in place.
Clearly, the existence of fun, healthy and rewarding sporting environments is hugely questionable. These, coupled with the already ambiguous idea of sport as a positive influence on behaviours and performances within education, must surely highlight the need for change! If sport and education are to work in tandem, the institution of sport must change its performance-focused, segregating ways, towards a more humanistic and relaxed means of functioning, particularly through PE. At the very least, our political, teaching and coaching populace should think critically about their thoughtless assumptions and, consequently, misguided regimes that have such a prevalent effect on the British public.


Professor Eric Anderson (2011-11-19 11:50:11)
Bravo. Academic research supports all of your arguments. The answer is clear, we need more walking and jogging, and a lot less football and rugby.

pure white kidney x (2013-06-21 16:01:12)
What’s Happening i’m new to this, I stumbled upon this I’ve found It positively helpful and it has helped me out loads. I am hoping to give a contribution & help other customers like its aided me. Great job.

Decrease in poorer students and women applying to university (2011-11-18 08:00)

[1]

Early indications suggest that applications from female students and those from poorer backgrounds have fallen ahead of the higher tuition fees next year. According to the first round of UCAS application figures, applications from men were down by 7% compared with 10.5% by women. Worryingly still, the [2]Guardian states that data available elsewhere provided indications that students from poorer areas are being deterred from applying to university by the higher fees.

Patterns in the data indicate that the application rate among mature students has fallen faster than among 17 to 18 year olds. Elsewhere, data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency ([3]HESA) shows that the age of [4]students on full time undergraduate courses over the age of 21 are more than 50% more likely to come from poorer neighbourhoods compared to those over 21.

Further data indicates [5]regional variations with applications from candidates in the south-east down by 8% compared with 20% from candidates in the East Midlands and more than 17% in Yorkshire and Humber.

Professor Neil Shephard who is research director at Oxford-Man Institute, suggests that the differences in the application rates of young and mature students could be due to variations in the quality of information that they have received: "One might expect young people to be exposed to more information about how income contingent repayment will work than mature students, so they may be less put off than the mature. My own view is that behavioural effects (how we process information) have big short-run impacts and that rational considerations tend
to emerge in the longer term (as we learn from the crowd)."

2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2011/nov/03/ucas-application-figures-down
3. http://www.hesa.ac.uk/
5. http://www.hesa.ac.uk/dox/performanceIndicators/0910/sp1_0910.xls

The Protestant Revolution - Part 1: The Politics of Belief (2011-11-19 08:00)

A great documentary about the protestant revolution by historian turned labour MP [1]Tristram Hunt. Follow the link to google video for the next three parts - it’s quite long!

[EMBED]

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-11-20 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


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Sociological Imagination eBook (2011-11-20 17:45)

Just a quick message to say that unfortunately we've had to cancel the eBook project. The idea was to get it done in time for the 50th anniversary of Wright-Mills' death in early 2012 but this just isn't feasible. We're still keen to get Sociological Imagination themed [1]submissions for the website though, so if you were thinking of submitting something for the eBook please do consider submitting something for the site instead! Meanwhile there will be a Wright-Mills themed event at the British Sociological Association conference in April 2012 - stay tuned for further details.


UCAs: Favours Rich Students – Confirmed (2011-11-21 08:00)

[1]

Ucas – The British organisation, through which applications are processed for entry to higher education, has admitted in its review that its admission process favours the rich.
In a review of university admissions published at the end of October, UCAs admits that the current system gives an unfair advantage to students attending private schools. As a general rule, pupils at private schools are encouraged to apply early ahead of the official deadline, and in the case of some courses, applying earlier increases the chances of being offered a conditional place.

As the [2]Guardian states, the current system also assists pupils whose schools employ tutors who are very familiar with the university application process who would be confident in phoning an admissions tutor and pleading the case of a prospective student.

In response to its review, Ucas is calling for the government to make the most radical overhaul of university admissions for 50 years.

Drastic measures could include teenagers sitting their A-Levels and equivalent exams 15 days earlier and exam boards publishing results at the end of the summer term, rather than in August. Students would then apply earlier to university with their results in July.

Another measure under consideration is to have a single date on which universities tell students whether they have been offered a place with the conditions. At present, students hear from universities on different dates up to the end of March. Ucas said the proposals could be in effect by 2016.

Ucas will be consulting on the plans between now and 20 January.

Violence, Inequality and UK Riots (2011-11-22 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan interviews Larry Ray, a professor at Kent University who has done pioneering work on the sociology of violence, about the summer’s riots in the UK, the media coverage and the subsequent political fall out.

Larry makes reference to a BBC interview with Darcus Howe in the podcast which you can watch below:
Foucault reads Kafka (2011-11-23 08:00)

SI presents an interesting video lecture by literary scholar [1] Brian Artese. It discusses the work of Michel Foucault through the lens of Franz Kafka’s 1915 novel, Der Prozess (The Trial).

Part 1


Soft skills flourish with Graduates at Liverpool University (2011-11-24 08:00)

With the latest figures showing graduate unemployment at a 15 year high, Liverpool alongside other universities believes that “soft skills” are more important than ever. Recent Higher Education Statistics Agency figures revealed
that more than a quarter of graduates are without full-time work more than three years after graduating from university.

Completing a degree used to guarantee graduate employment but this is no longer the case. In the current economic climate, graduates are required to stand out from the crowd with transferable skills. In an article by the [1]Guardian, Paul Redmond, head of the careers and employability service at Liverpool University said, “the competition for jobs is so intense, and often the differentiators are those so-called soft skills.”

Liverpool University's career service has tackled this issue by running 'graduate boot camps'. So far, 185 graduates have been trained on the 10-day Gradvantage programme. Of those who have been through the course, only 32 had graduated this year. "Once the credit crunch happened we thought 'we've got to start doing different things for graduates',' Redmond says.

The Gradvantage programme is not specifically aimed at graduates from less well-off families as anyone based in Merseyside, with a degree from any university, can participate. The programme's aim is to be as hands-on as possible. Elements from the programme range from mock interviews, group presentations to securing a 14 hour a week (unpaid) work experience lasting 13 or 26 weeks.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/nov/14/students-networking-skills

I'm currently reading [1]Seven Days In the Art World, by [2]Sarah Thornton, perhaps most well known for her book about [3]sub-cultural capital and the rave scene. Though I've not quite reached the end yet, it's certainly one of the most enjoyable and accessible books by a sociologist I've read in a long time, exhibiting a seemingly endless parade of ethnographic insights into a world I've long been curious about without ever coming close to the turgid prose and insider jargon that characterises so many sociological texts. In part this is down to the book's novel and engaging structure, which the author describes in the video below, as five years of research are condensed into seven 'days' i.e. seven narrative essays eachcentring on a particular 'place' in the art world.
However the book was also notable for the very unusual legal case it gave rise to. The Telegraph journalist Lynn Barber, featuring in the book and described in a critical way, wrote a review in which she made a number of accusations against Sarah Thornton. The sociologist immediately complained before eventually suing for libel and malicious falsehood - an action which she subsequently won and which led to an apology from the Telegraph. Does anyone know of other cases like this? Or is it one of a kind?

4. http://www.youtube.com/embed/4z5tlRKr0JM?feature=player_embedded

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-11-26 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination
What will the future look like? Microsoft and Apple offer some suggestions... (2011-11-27 08:00)

Do you think these are realistic? Are they just advertising or do they point to a world we’re likely to see? What do you think the future will look like?
What gets your paper cited? The clue is in the title. (2011-11-28 08:00)

So, you have some brilliant research. What will get it cited? Apparently, some surprising (and very unacademic) factors come in. Triumph of form over content...

[1] Will asking a question get your science paper cited more?

[2] Amusing titles in scientific journals and article citation
This week I came across two very different works of art which nevertheless have something important in common: they both aim to transcend the shackles of linear time and peak into another historic period with the help of artistic (and sociological!) imagination.

The first one is a now outdated look into the future. It is always fascinating to see how our life today differs (or is similar to) what our great-grand parents imagined it. Think about how you imagine the year 2100. In 1910, the French painter Villemard produced a series of futuristic postcards with his vision of life in 2000. What is most fascinating is that most of his predictions have come true: the imagery is different, but the technical functionality of today’s world is heavily based on the reveries of our Victorian ancestors. The future is to a large extent a self-fulfilling prophecy - at least within a the framework of a modern society!

The second time-erasing magic is in the works of Russian photographer Sergey Larenkov (Сергей Ларенков). He replicates with amazing precision existing images taken during the Second World War by retaking the shots from the same perspective and angle today, and merges the old and new images. (Larenkov is not even a professional photographer: he is a sea pilot whose hobby is history! Check out his website [6]here) Twenty of his photos were initially posted [7]here and a little later the author also gave an interview to the Mymodernnet website which can be read [8]here.

What do you think? Do you have interesting visual materials - yours, or gems that you have found on the web? Email us on s.i.imagery@gmail.com and we'll feature them in our Visual Sociology column!

History of data journalism (2011-11-30 08:00)

The Guardian reminds us that data journalism is a little older than most of us think. Why is that significant? Because our historical memories are very short and it is important to be reminded of history in order to give food to our sociological imaginations! Here is an example of an informative data table on schools in Manchester, from 5 May 1821:

[1]
What you may not know is the amount of education and strict standards carpenters must qualify for to be considered as professionals, especially in Canada. In addition to cutting painting time, there is less set up and clean up involved when you don. The selection of traditional mouldings run the gamut from elaborate to simple, to suit every d.

2.12 December

A 'Plentitude Economy'? (2011-12-01 08:00)

The [1]Center for a New American Dream has created an animation analysing what is wrong with capitalism and explaining how to make the world better. Familiar? There have been quite a few similar attempts recently. As with anything in our hyper-visual age, the animation method of presentation of ideas has gone viral. What is interesting about this one is not so much the engaging package of animation, but the argument: it aims to challenge the traditional economic notion of perpetual growth as a prerequisite for a successful economy. While I very much like the idea that it is time to modify our view of economic growth, I am not so sure about their suggestions. They sound like a peculiar mix of different ideas, each of which, taken separately, is commendable, but how do they fit in one economic programme? I can see unresolvable clashes between traces of individualist liberalism and the early ‘capitalist spirit’ based on a Protestant ethic (we need to take responsibility and spend less); romanticised naturalism (let’s all brew our own beer in our back garden); Durkheimian social policy (‘commitment to social connection and community’); and vulgar Marxism (when people work less, they will have more time for DIY!). The video promotes the lifestyle of a small eco-conscious fraction of today’s young middle class in the USA and Europe as the solution to everybody’s problems all over the world (or even just in the USA). I am also sceptical about some assertions, such as that people consume less when they work less (in fact, it seems to me to be the contrary!), or that benefits are ‘easily solvable’ even if all people worked 80 % of their usual time (and received lower wages, and paid lower taxes, as a result).

With all these criticisms, I still watched this twice, hoping that perhaps it will offer a viable solution to the economic growth conundrum. It is so tempting to imagine a cosy world in which everybody couch-surfs, works part-time, soup-swaps and knits their own socks, but this is ultimately an illusion. Well, see for yourself and let us know what you think:

[EMBED]

My Tram Experience (2011-12-02 08:00)

Warning: the above video is rather offensive. But given that it’s had 4 million views in a little over 2 days, has been picked up by mainstream media and has led to the arrest of the woman in question, we thought we’d post it up.

The November 30th Strike - Hear the Truth (2011-12-03 08:00)

On November 30th, the UK saw the biggest strike in a generation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the run up to it was marked by an aggressive PR campaign from the government, arguing that the strike was a result of union [1]'militants itching for a fight’. Take a look at this great response video by the Unite union:

IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/-x2aPIBKkOk

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/-x2aPIBKkOk
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-12-04 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates


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Women and Muscles: a history in image (2011-12-05 08:00)


[3]
One of the archival images in 'Venus with Biceps' (image source: Brainpickings.com)

P.S. Thanks to this, we have also discovered [4]Brainpickings: definitely an online space we'll be watching!

Can online gaming save the world? (2011-12-06 08:00)

That’s the rather counter-intuitive position that Jane McGonigal, researcher at the gloriously titled Institute for the Future, puts forward in this thought-provoking TED talk. Are you scoffing at the suggestion that online games can save the world? Well, to be honest, we did too but give her argument a chance.

Apparently 3 billion hours a week are spent worldwide playing online games. Is this too much? No, argues McGonigal, it’s not enough. If we increase this to 21 billion hours a week then we might be able to save the planet. How? By harnessing the psychosocial dynamics of gaming which, she argues, tend to be overlooked in most treatments of it as a social phenomenon.

Online gaming environments are empowering and optimism-maximising. The moment-to-moment feedback the environment gives means that people rarely feel disempowered by challenges they can’t meet. More importantly this empowering and optimism-maximising environment is profoundly collaborative. The things gamers are learning in these online environments could, if we seriously try and harness them, have a real impact on seemingly overwhelming global problems. After all games feel they can change the world and are good at working together to achieve these changes.

Not convinced? Nope, neither are we. But she’s certainly persuasive in her argument that online gaming isn’t taken seriously and perhaps should be. Likewise the solutions on offer are intriguing, as well as an inviting prospect of when the academic term finishes.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/dE1DuBesGYM](http://www.youtube.com/embed/dE1DuBesGYM)
Riding the bicycle to freedom (2011-12-07 08:00)


[4]

‘Wheels of Change: How Women Rode the Bicycle to Freedom (With a Few Flat Tires Along the Way)’, by Sue Macy

Over the last few years there has been one passage of academic social science text that has stayed with me more than any other. The issue it raises concerns the way in which the sociological imagination is located and deployed within cultural spheres that we might not necessarily see, at first sight at least, as being at all serious or sociological. This passage, by Osborne et al, goes as follows:

‘Certainly, in the present and the future, inventiveness in empirical social thought will certainly not be the exclusive province of people who call themselves sociologists. Whilst some professional sociologists may claim a monopoly on the right to speak truthfully in the name of society, they are not the only people who investigate, analyse, theorise and give voice to worldly phenomena from a ‘social’ point of view. In fact, today more people speak this social language of society than we might imagine if we took the thesis of the death of the social too literally. Not just statisticians, economists of certain persuasions, educationalists, communications analysts, cultural theorists and others working in the academy who tend to use broadly ‘sociological’ methods but also journalists, TV documentary-makers, humanitarian activists, policy makers and others who have imbibed a social point of view. In many cases it may be that these agents of the social world actually produce better sociology than the sociologists themselves.’ (Osborne et al, 2008: 531-532)

The sentiment of Osborne and his colleagues resonates of course with C. Wright Mills original vision of the sociological imagination and its frequent location outside of academic sociology. This excerpt takes this argument further though by beginning to suggest that the sociological imagination is not just something we might stumble upon on occasion but that it has moved out into the cultural mainstream. The reason it had such a strong impact upon me was because it seemed to speak directly to something that was already bothering me. As a result this passage led me to explore in some detail the kinds of sociological imagination that are to be found within contemporary popular culture. In this brief article I’d like to summarise this work by suggesting that very generally what I began to locate within contemporary popular culture was a much more unconstrained form of the sociological imagination that was brimming with ideas and opportunities if treated with sensitivity and a critical eye.

The style and integrity of the sociological imagination in popular culture is of course highly variable. I’ve noted elsewhere how some forms of TV drama provide us with a highly sophisticated form of the sociological imagination whereas other TV shows, such as reality TV formats of various types, might offer us quite loose and possibly even objectionable attempts to understand the individuals in their social and cultural contexts (Atkinson & Beer, 2010). In general we can note that there is a wide-scale presence of variegated types of the sociological imagination in popular culture that are typified by an interest in consuming aspects of the mundane routines of everyday life, in the attempt to capture and observe social norms and their disruption, in experimentation with social divisions and social ordering, in the asking of questions about moral frameworks and even in some instances in the attempts made to play with and tease out broader social assemblages and lines of causality. These can be found in various forms in social media content and new participatory web cultures, in celebrity culture and gossip, in TV documentaries and reality TV, in film, comedy and drama, in music lyrics and videos amongst others (for an overview and description see Beer & Burrows, 2010). I am not saying that these forms of sociological imagination are better than those found in academic sociology, but what I am saying is that they are different. They may vary in quality and sophistication but
there is a broad sociological sensibility in contemporary popular culture that cannot be ignored and which should be used to inform our critical responses to contemporary culture and which might also, in some instances, be used as a resource for seeing the world in different ways or for developing the conceptual, methodological and communicative repertoire of the academic social sciences.

Let us take the problem of the new forms of digital data as one instance that might help us here to see the advantage of taking the sociological imagination as popular culture seriously. New forms of digital data are proving something of a headache for the social sciences, we have not really got to grips with the potential of this data for social analysis or even with what types of data are being accumulated as a result of the capture and harvesting of data made possible by the digital mediascape. However, if we search around we are able to find innumerable examples of those involved in popular web cultures using new forms of digital social data in creative and innovative ways, creating insights and often visual forms of analysis that provide new perspectives and suggest new ways of seeing or 'telling about society' (Becker, 2007). For some examples the reader need only take a cursory look at sites like flowingdata.com that archive some of the data play that is occurring. It would be unwise of us to overlook such developments. What is needed is a critical engagement with the product of this data play, and, I would suggest, we also need to see if we can draw upon some of the analytical approaches to be found within these lay sociological resources. There are vast possibilities residing there that may enable us to expand our repertoire and re-imagine the social sciences. The difficulty will be finding ways of using such work, shaped by agendas very different to our own, in order to form a critical version of the resources from which we might borrow.

The unconstrained nature of the sociological imagination we might find in popular culture can be understood as both its strength and weakness. Working without recourse to the types of conventions and established practices that we have defined as important in academic sociology means that the possibilities for a sociological engagement in popular culture are far greater in scope, the result is that slick and flashy forms of sociological engagement can emerge that are rapid, responsive and involving. Similarly, we can imagine that removing such conventions may lead to a form of sociology that is not at all appropriate or suited to our tastes, particularly in its possible lack of a critical or reflective edge which in turn may not then allow it to fit with our sentiments, values or critical positionings. My argument is that we should not let our conventions prevent us from extracting and developing new ideas. We need to both respond to these developments in popular culture so as to understand how they shape perceptions of what a sociological approach might be, to think through what the purpose and territory of academic sociology can be where there is this broader cultural presence of a sociological imagination, and we need also then to think about how the social sciences might be improved if we were to treat popular culture seriously and draw upon it for inspiration. The unconstrained sociological imagination found within popular culture may be breaking new ground and developing new approaches that we could incorporate and shape into more considered and critical forms of social insight that are nonetheless exciting, engaging and regenerative.

References


Popular culture and the unconstrained sociological imagination | Thinking culture (2012-01-20 10:49:46)
[...] is a link to an blog piece about the sociological imagination in popular culture. This is a condensed version of a theme i’ve been working on for the last couple of years. [...] 

Popular culture and the unconstrained sociological imagination | Thinking culture (2012-04-08 18:14:28)
[...] read the rest of my blog posting for the sociological imagination blog click here. Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this post. This entry was posted in [...] 

The Simpsons as a teaching tool | Thinking culture (2012-09-04 14:37:30)
[...] potential copyright risks). There is a bit more about other forms of sociological popular culture here (this one is open access). Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this. [...] 

The Big Reunion | Thinking culture (2013-02-01 08:46:08)
[...] get glossed over. So although these might seem to be quite trivial documentaries there is some sociological insight built into the format. Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this. This [...] 

What Mad Men says about women... | Thinking culture (2013-04-09 08:33:20)
[...] Men. I think it probably needs to be added to the popular forms of sociology I’ve described elsewhere (or see p233-252 in [...] 

Russia and democracy: analysis by Mark Harris (2011-12-09 08:00) 

[1]
As someone who is half-Russian, counts Russian as her first language, but who has never set foot in Russia (only to Ukraine), I often find myself torn between a 'Western' and a 'Russian' logic. This is not something I could analyse: for better or worse, sociology does not give you the tools to rationalise your own self; in Marx' expression, I am unable to see underneath my own feet. I seem to understand both, to some extent, but when they clash (and they quite often do), a cognitive dissonance ensues.

Good analyses of Russian affairs by Western authors are few and far between. This is why I was so impressed by [2]Mark Harris' brief but excellent analysis of Russian attitude to democracy, in the context of the recent [3]elections in Russia that took place on 4 Dec 2011 and have not finished yet. Harrison's argument cuts through a usual misunderstanding and a clash in the basic meanings taken for granted by people on both sides of Europe. His analysis also touches on the issue of translation - not only linguistic, but also cultural. In a nutshell: before judging, we need to make sure we are aware what exactly it is that the two sides understand when they use the same term, in this case - democracy and the terminology surrounding it. As Harris argues, and the Russian, Bulgarian, and English sections of my brain all agree, democracy does not necessarily mean the same thing in the different [national, cultural, and political] languages.

Mark Harrison writes about economics, public policy, and international affairs. He is a Professor of Economics at the University of Warwick and a research fellow of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace at Stanford University.

2. http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/markharrison/entry/russians_be_careful/

Sociology@Warwick (2011-12-09 08:00)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a [2]blog and [3]twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!
Reality Check (2011-12-10 08:00)

Right, we are going to do something different today. It's called a Reality Check.

[EMBED]

Reality Check – School Portrait « jsalgado1393 (2011-12-12 03:35:14)

[...] This short film tells a short story of a school photographer taking pictures of little elementary school children. Any other photographer just takes a picture of the little school kids and says next over and over again until the last kid in line takes their picture. This photographer, on the other had, is such a downer that he uses his adult problems to smudge away the smiles of the little innocent children's faces and have them repeat things like "university tuition fees" and "the banking crisis means I'll never have a home". He tells them this so the children can hear what their future is going to be like. I think that it almost pleases him that he can wipe the smiles away off the children's faces and make them feel miserable like he is. But then, a little girl with red curly hair comes along and just smiles at all the things he tells her, never frowns. After a while, he just gives up and takes the picture of the little girl. The things he said after he took her picture, "suppose i can get a new house", suggests that the little girl's smile brightened his mood and started thinking positive. (post: Reality Check) [...]

The Sociological Imagination (2011-12-11 16:00)

Mills believed that the diffusion of the sociological imagination within American culture contained the political promise of helping individuals better understand and control the larger structural forces that shaped their lives. Many people, he claimed, failed to comprehend the impact of large-scale social institutions in their lives. They either understood their lives in terms of a local milieu of private troubles or were falsely conscious of their place in society. The sociological imagination would enable them to link their personal biographies to larger historical and structural trends and, in doing so, allow them to translate their seemingly private troubles into public issues. By using the sociological imagination, they could fully participate in making America a more democratic society. Thus, for Mills, the "intellectual promise of social science" was fundamentally related to the "political promise of the role of reason in human affairs."

- from [1]Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought


914
University life 41 years ago (2011-12-12 08:00)

The sixth former entering university often has difficulty in adjusting to a new academic and social life...

... so this film, made by university of Warwick students back in the 1970s, served to prepare newcomers to university life (with a large pinch of salt). Back then, 8-year-old Warwick university was still in its infancy and far from[1] the leading status and aspirations that it has today. Come to think of it, were there university rankings at all at that time? I am not sure. But there certainly was no Top Banana, Kazbah, Tesco, Costa, [2]Warwick Arts Centre, or horrendous multi-storey car-parks. No one was talking of students as consumers, the 'university experience', or the ever-increasing string of unpaid internships that the luckiest students undergo on their way to the glories of permanent post-degree employment. There were the Beatles and the Stones and traditional lecturers. The campus was a fraction of its today's size, with only a handful of buildings.

But some things haven't changed. The [3]Op Mobile No.10 was already there, as were some of the accommodation blocks (Rootes Halls, named after [4]Lord Rootes, spelt with an "e", and not in reference to a substantial part of the anatomy of a tree, as some of its residents are convinced. Thanks to inflation, its cost has increased 25-fold over the 41 years since the film was made.). Watch and see for yourself!

[EMBED]

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/insite/news/intnews2/warwicks_thes_world/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/art/artist/nechemiaazzaz/wu0075/

A useful mapping tool for sociologists (2011-12-13 08:00)

A friend of mine recently struggled to customise a map showing the numbers of girls in different countries who use a particular website that she is studying. I wish I had discovered this tool earlier, she would have found it useful:

[1]TargetMap

[EMBED]

Our 10 most popular posts in November (2011-12-14 08:00)

1. [1]Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
2. [2]Perhaps the most demotivating image EVER (speaking as a website edited by two near-to-completion PhD students)
3. [3]The University Project
4. [4]Privilege & Oppression, Conflict & Compassion
7. [7]Emma Rees interviewed about Can’t...
8. [8]Foucault reads Kafka
10. [10]Review of 'The Aftermath of Feminism' by Angela McRobbie


Questioning cultural relativism (2011-12-15 08:00)

Denyse O’Leary discusses cultural relativism through a particularly disturbing [1]Is it still wrong if another culture says it is right? A teacher’s surprising discovery
The 12 Days of a PhD Student’s Christmas (2011-12-16 08:00)

In the spirit of Christmas, we’re delighted to bring you the 12 Days of a PhD Student’s Christmas, courtesy of [1]Anna Mackenzie from the University of Chester. Is anyone brave/foolhardy/drunken enough to perform a rendition of the song? If so, [2]send us an MP3 and we’ll post it up as a podcast.

On the first day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 1 thesis to submit.

On the second day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit.

On the third day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit.

On the fourth day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit.

On the fifth day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, & 1 thesis to submit.

On the 6th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstract, 3 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!

On the 7th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!

On the 8th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 8 hours on EndNote, 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!

On the 9th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 9 cups of coffee, 8 hours on EndNote, 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!

On the 10th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 10 unknown references, 9 cups of coffee, 8 hours on EndNote, 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!

On the 11th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 11 books to order, 10 unknown references, 9 cups of coffee, 8 hours on EndNote, 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, and 1 thesis to submit!
On the 12th day of Christmas, my PhD gave to me: 12 emails waiting, 11 books to order, 10 unknown references, 9 cups of coffee, 8 hours on EndNote, 7 journal papers, 6 days to edit, 500 words!! 4 hours of teaching, 3 conference abstracts, 2 supervisions, & 1 thesis to submit!

:-) :-) HAPPY CHRISTMAS!!!!!!! :-) :-)
Did Coffee Fuel the Age of Enlightenment? (2011-12-17 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/tsFxH2zdi_Y

Caspar Addyman (2011-12-17 17:10:46)
There's more Steven Johnson here.

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2011-12-18 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:

STUCK BETWEEN MODERNITY AND POSTMODERNITY? THE MODERN HISTORY OF COVENTRY
(2011-12-18 22:36)

I’m starting to practically sketch out plans for a project I’ve had in mind for a couple of years now: a social history of Coventry told through life history interviews with life long residents of the city who were born prior to the second world war. I’ve been fascinated by the changes the city has undergone, as I’ve better understood the scale of them with each passing year of living here: the city’s rise and decline as a centre of the car industry, the relative affluence of much of the city in the 50s and 60s, the crime and unemployment which came with deindustrialisation in the 70s and 80s, the destruction of the city centre in the 40s and its reconstruction as a modernist city of the future in the 50s, the mergers and expansions which ultimately led to Coventry University and the foundation of Warwick, the increasing centrality of the universities to the local economy.

My idea is to try and understand these changes through the life histories of people who have lived here since before the war. So, in practice, people who were born in 1935 or earlier, since I’d hope that their memories of the blitz would have at least some (perhaps very fuzzy) memory of pre-WW2 Coventry to counterpose the aftermath to. Which means I’m trying to talk to people who are 76 or over and, obviously, there’s probably not that many of them around (with time obviously being somewhat of the essence here), particularly those who have lived in the city for most of their lives. If this isn’t feasible, I might just try and get in contact with people who’ve lived here for decades but it was an exhibition about the blitz which set me off on these project in the first place.

This project, hopefully intended to form a book in 2013, will be put together in public on SI on a post-by-post basis. Some of the things it’ll include:

- Life history interviews with life-long Coventry residents –> whole interviews or just editing fragments?
- Podcast interviews with academics who’ve worked on the broader themes I’m looking at (deindustrialisation, globalization, neoliberalism) in the UK with the discussion centred specifically around Coventry [obviously going to be easier/better if they’re Warwick / Cov Uni people]
- Podcast interviews with people who’ve specifically studied the history of Coventry (either professionally or as a hobby)
- Reproductions of archive material (etc) which expand upon the above
- Short articles as I get further into the project, stimulated by the interviews and the reading I’m doing
Do schools kill creativity? (2011-12-19 08:00)

If you'd asked me while I was still at school, it’s pretty likely I would have said 'yes'. A decade later, having watched this video, I realise that I feel the same way. Except that having now watched this great TED talk from [1]Ken Robinson, education guru and all round interesting guy, the reasons I’d cite for this are a bit more intellectual than they would have been during my school days.

Robinson argues that the assumptions embedded within prevailing education paradigms are increasingly anachronistic, structuring the education process around an abstracted and inadequate understanding of ‘intelligence’ which leads to students being divided into the ‘academic’ and the ‘non-academic’, frustrating a great deal of human potential in the process. So too the Fordist assumptions underlying school as institutions, arbitrarily dividing students into age cohorts - which, when you think about it, is a bit weird really - before shuttling them, en masse, through the school/factory system. It’s individualising and atomising, with the omnipresence of standardised testing leading to widespread disengagement and alienated learning. If we’re going to prepare students for the 21st century economy we need to do things differently.

What do you think...?

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/iG9CE55wbtY](http://www.youtube.com/embed/iG9CE55wbtY)
This is a highly-important message and one I share with many of my students here in New York. It’s a great way to open up a discussion about higher education and the complaints that students have about it. I think they all see themselves in that dancer story Robinson conveys. I know I do. We cannot just convey content and call it a college course. Students will get that the remainder of their lives. What we need to do is develop their talents, and help them to discover them.

I can has language play? Construction of Language and Identity in LOLspeak (2011-12-20 08:00)

I can has language play? Construction of Language and Identity in LOLspeak

Introduction: Oh Hai

1. LOLspeak as Language Play
2. ‘Grammar’ of LOLspeak
   -- this operates across all linguistic levels
3. Using LOLspeak to construct identity
   -- builds up two identities simultaneously via indexicality (Ochs 1992; Bucholtz and Hall 2008)
   -- cat and internet savvy person


A modest proposal for postgraduate education (2011-12-20 19:13)

I just came across a fascinating passage from a lecture given by [1]Carl Rogers, founder of [2]person centered therapy, about the personal and intellectual biography which led him to his life's work. In it he describes an experience as a graduate student at a seminary which had a profound impact on the direction of his life, as well as that of others:

Knowing universities and graduate schools as I do know - knowing their rules and their rigidities - I am truly astonished at one very significant experience at Union. A group of us felt that ideas were being fed to us, whereas we wished primarily to explore our own questions and doubts, and find out where they led. We petitioned the administration that we be allowed to setup a seminar for credit, a seminar with no instructor, where the curriculum would be composed of our own questions. The seminary was understandably perplexed by this, but they granted our petition! The only restriction was that in the interests of the institution a young instructor was to sit in on the seminar, but would take no part in it unless we wished him to be active.

I suppose it is unnecessary to add that this seminar was deeply satisfying and clarifying. I feel that it moved me a long way towards a philosophy of life which was my own. The majority of the members of that group, in thinking their way through the questions they had raised, thought themselves right out of religious work. I was one. I felt that questions as to the meaning of life, and the possibility of the constructive improvement of life for individuals, would probably always interest me, but I could not work in a field where I would be required to believe to believe in some specified religious doctrine. My beliefs had already changed tremendously, and might continue to change. It seemed to me that it would be a horrible thing to have to profess a set of beliefs, in order to remain in one's profession. I wanted to find a field in which I could be sure my freedom of thought would not be limited.

Carl R. Rogers - On Becoming A Person: A therapist's view of Psychotherapy - page 8

So, I wish to suggest, could this ever be a standard part of postgraduate education? Is it feasible to have such a seminar credited as part of a postgraduate qualification, given the need for modularity and standardised assessment in the present system of Higher Education? Even if it isn't, should we be doing this anyway? Perhaps entry to the seminar could be conditional on high performance in more traditionally designed modules? I would have loved this as an MA student (and indeed still would in the final year of my PhD) and, thinking back on my masters experiences in two departments, I could imagine a number of academics - who clearly really enjoyed postgraduate teaching when, perhaps, they enjoyed undergraduate teaching less - also enjoying it and being incredibly effective hands-off facilitators.

I'm intrigued to see if others are as inspired by the passage above as I am - perhaps in part it's because I'm fascinated by Rogers and only just found out about this aspect of his early history - so would appreciate any comments either on the blog or on Twitter. Likewise, does anyone have any ideas about how to make this happen? As I approach what will (hopefully) be my last two academics terms as a postgraduate student, I'm seriously considering approaching my department to see if there's any way to arrange something like this for MA students and PhD students in the summer term. All input appreciated.

As sociologists, we deal with a wide range of empirical and philosophical phenomena, but their scope, in universal terms, is quite narrow: locked somewhere between the individual human and the whole of humanity. With this in mind, the Idle Ethnographer admits to having a hard time justifying this particular post. Initially, I decided to post it just because it is amazing, fascinating, educational, and humbling. It is a visualisation of the universe and its physical scale.

But, being an Ethnographer, albeit Idle, I could not resist racking my brains for potential sociological uses. E.g., in the sociology of science, or that of Western European modernity. A symbolic analysis would reveal what is important enough to be given as an example in a scientific visualisation. The small and large objects are more impersonal, detached and ‘scientific’, while examples closer in size to humans only appear random, but their range is, in fact, highly socially conditioned (HIV virus, red blood cell, coffee bean, Rubic cube, silhouette or a male human being of average (Caucasian) height; Eiffel tower; USA map: length of a marathon). There are also a few hidden jokes: if you watch carefully, you’ll spot them. Or perhaps one can just watch it as a neat visual representation of the physical world in which we live. Or as a cosmology. Or a fairy tale. Or with the reverence of a tiny speck in the face of the universe. I leave this to your sociological imaginations.

[1]

Screenshot from the Scale of the Universe, scaleofuniverse.com

Click here to go to the Scale of the Universe website
Call for Papers - Visual Sociology (2011-12-22 08:00)

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to "Visual Research". To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday. The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you've sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just [1]e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.
How to submit: Please e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:

- JPEG format
- 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440x294 pixels, or near)

Legal issues: Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers' rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2
Sociology song (2011-12-23 08:00)

For a change from the Christmas tunes, here is something, ahem, serious. Professional. OK, only professional and not serious. Anyway - happy Christmas to those of you who celebrate it with this song by [1]Tom Lehrer - an American singer-songwriter, satirist, polymath, mathematician, lecturer, ..., ... - which is, unbelievably, about sociology:

[EMBED]

1.
Over the rest of 2011, we'll be reposting the 10 most popular SI articles in the 1 1/2 years we've been around, in preparation for lots of new stuff next year. Here's #1 - enjoy!

You are not seriously checking out SI on Christmas Eve! Well, if you are - we have to make you laugh. And yes, this is sociological: if knowing about Others makes them less other, more human, there is no better way than sharing their humour. Enjoy this marvellous collection of jokes from many countries: read article by Joris Luyendijk in the Guardian [1]here

[2]


Christmas, consumerism, presents, and gender (2011-12-24 16:42)

A woman walks into a toy shop and asks:
"Do you have a plush Pinko the Pink Panther? Can I have one in sky-blue, for a little boy, please?"
After you have unwrapped your presents, read this light-hearted article in the Sociological Images about the reinforcement of gender stereotypes through consumerism during festive seasons. We deliberately held this one back until it is already too late to buy any Christmas presents:

[1] GENDER STEREOTYPED GIFT GUIDES.


The team at the Sociological Imagination wishes you a Merry Christmas!
In this episode, a sneaky ethnographer of East European origin embarks on a quest to deconstruct one of Britain’s informal institutions: The Local Bank Holiday Sunday Car Boot Sale. Below are her unabridged and unabashed field-notes.

Rather than participant observation, this is an exercise in observant participation. Observant participation is a variant of the ethnographic method of participant observation, first described by Polish researcher M. Kaminski who wrote a book based on his experience in as political prisoner (Kaminski, Marek M. (2004) Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prison). Now, you might think that a car boot sale is no prison, even though you are confined to a narrow patch of a few square feet. But the ethnographic method works, regardless.

Background

(locals may skip this section)

The car boot sale (hereafter CBS) is a curious local custom in the UK. Its role is to construct a temporary space-time continuum for exchanging small-scale goods outside the remit of the official market. Goods sold or acquired on a CBS are not subject to any local or government tax and are tacitly exempt from customer protection regulations. They are also extremely cheap compared to similar items available through the official market. The only (potentially) formally recorded monetary exchange taking place is a small fee paid to the owner/manager of the place in which the sale takes place (usually a local sports pitch) by salespeople arriving in their personal vehicles. The fee is paid for each sales vehicle regardless of any profit made, amount of goods, size of vehicle, number of salespeople, or any other criteria. It simply gives the payer the right to establish a temporary ‘sales-pitch’.

The CBS obeys the cyclical nature of social time: it always takes place on a non-working day, customarily occupying the first half of the day on a Sunday or Bank holiday Monday (Bank holiday Mondays are another peculiar UK custom: they are Mondays de facto treated as weekend-days on which banks and most other commercial establishments and institutions are closed, happen several times a year).

The origins of CBS were unknown at the time of participation and writing – perhaps some of the readers could shed light on them?

Field notes

My first car boot sale ever began with a dream and a fiasco. Fortunately, the fiasco was contained in the dream, and the dream itself was not a nightmare. In my dream, I was desperately trying to sell my car to someone for a pound. They thought it was a rip off.

Luckily, when I woke up, I still possessed a car (which I needed for going to the car boot sale in), but it was also 8 am. Just like most people, normally I subscribe to the view that 8 am on a Sunday is, in fact, ungodly early. However, CBS-goers are a special breed of people akin perhaps to hill-walkers, morning-joggers and horse-racers. So don’t be shocked to find out that by waking up at 8 am I had massively overslept by about two hours. Thanks to my
bargaining with the other ignoramus in my dream, I was now too late to be able to use the limited time-slot of CBS. The window of opportunity was mercilessly closing up on me.

The cold shower and an inhumanly strong cup of black Turkish coffee woke me up somewhat, but I was still hesitating whether to go, or to devote my morning to more intellectual pursuits. A mundane detail swept away my last hesitations in favour of the less honourable pursuit. There was no milk left in the fridge and I was forced to consume my cereal drenched in hot water. This was too much even for a poor grad student. I now had two clear goals ahead: to make at least as much money as to buy two pints of milk and cherry scones from Sainsbury’s (in addition to making some interesting ethnographic observations).

I loaded the car, marvelling at the amount of stuff I had accumulated within twelve months. For two months now, random objects that I didn’t really need had been slowly finding their way into various containers scattered around my room. All three containers – a grey suitcase (itself acquired on a boot sale for a pound), a reusable shopping bag with an elephant on it, and a large cardboard box, were now full to the brim.

I also filled a rucksack with provisions, water, a bottle of sun-screen and a book (not for sale), and poured all my loose change in a fanny pack (don’t ask me why I own a fanny pack). The rucksack and fanny pack together weighed probably half as much as the items for sale, but I wasn’t going to allow my first (and probably last) experience as a saleswoman to be darkened by ridicule. Of course, I also took a straw hat – for looking professional; and a jacket – for British summer weather.

I drove out at 8.50 am: far too late for a responsible salesperson. My slackness confirmed the first rule of the market in reverse: profit drives action (or, in my case, my un-reliance on profit had allowed me to slack off). This observation was an important reminder of a key trap of qualitative studies: unless you are very invested in your field, you risk slacking off and allowing your fieldwork to become un-rigorous; yet, if you are too invested, you risk “going native”. As a field researcher, you just can’t win. Unless of course you research car boot sales – then you could at least earn some money.

The sale took place at a rugby field only 0.160 km away from my house, but I had to drive through five sets of traffic lights in order to get there (this made the journey almost a mile long). I also had to go around the junction twice, until I mustered enough courage to break the rules and drive a ten feet stretch in the forbidden green bus lane. I was immediately followed by four other cars. This excessively quick normalisation of deviance took me by surprise (being in Britain, I did not expect so many cars to break driving regulations). I did not know whether to rejoice or to worry: the good news was that even as late as 9 am, I was not the latest seller to arrive at the pitch; the bad news was that the pitch was full and I was also in direct competition with those four naughty cars (all brimming with goods for sale).

Having driven 1.5 km instead of 160 metres, and stopped at ten red traffic lights, I confidently drove into the rugby field that hosted the sale. ‘Is it too late to get a sales pitch?’, I asked the three blokes who were standing at the gates, holding plastic buckets full of bucks. I had been practising this phrase in my head ever since I had got in the car and the butterflies in my stomach had been practicing ever since, too. They (the blokes, not the butterflies) said ‘It’s alright’, and told me to drive to pitch 65. I had no idea where that was, so I just drove all around the field until I saw the end of a row. There I parked in the grass, next to a large family who were unloading a mountain of really good books for sale. I had to force myself to turn a blind eye to all the books on history and art, all sold for one or two quid. The two pints of milk and the cherry scones beckoned and grinned at me. I had no choice but to show endurance in the face of the luring jackets of the books.
I took my stuff out of the car and spread it on a blanket on the ground, then perched myself on a softer blanket and began waiting for the crowd to invade my little pitch at the very end of the line. A small stream of people stopped by. Those who did, probably did so out of pity: “Let’s stroll past that girl at the end of the line, she must feel lonely. Ah, and she hasn’t got anything interesting to sell. Poor darling”. Not a minute had passed when an old gentleman appeared, armed with a notebook, pencil tucked behind his ear, entirely unimpressed by the lack of customers and my blatant lack of profit. I disarmed him by offering to voluntarily part with £7, in contribution towards the sales pitch. He snatched the money and evaporated. He also seemed to give me a receipt for the seven quid, but it must have been made out of fumes, because it also evaporated.

The wind wasn’t on my side: it was obviously backing up the customers, and trying to lift things from my improvised stall without paying for the purchase. The four books I had managed to tear off my bookcase and put up for sale were flapping their pages like fat domestic chickens forced by a strict mummy-chicken to attend Sunday flying classes. Worse still, the wind was about to lift off the ground the determined saleswoman herself. My propensity to fly created some funny chat-up situations with potential clients. The cheeky bastard actually earned me a few pence, so in the end I didn’t report the wind to the police.

At 9.20 am I made my first sale (ever!). Unfortunately, I have no recollection of the item I sold, but I do recall receiving a pound coin from an itinerant tradesman with a busy expression on his Ethiopian face. I’d seen him before (and heard him mention Ethiopia to a customer). He earns his bread and beer by buying and re-selling things at car boot sales. How many people are out there, for whom car boot sales are a key way of earning money? I also wonder why I forgot what I actually sold. Perhaps, that is my psychological defence against disappointment, because the item probably cost more than a pound.

Then I sold a few more things. An intergenerational conglomerate (grandmother, mother, and ten-year-old daughter) critically examined my four old pairs of shoes and after a deliberation lasting about a quarter of an hour bought the old pair of black pumps for a quid. I had got them four years ago for £10 (a lot of Bulgarian money at the time) from a very cheap shop in Coventry, so selling them made me feel a bit nostalgic. I played at my first piano concert wearing those shoes (the quality of the music was the same as that of the shoes, but the memory is just as dear, too). It was no surprise that the young girl hated them. I had worn them out and they were not very comfortable and did not look very cool; worse still, according to the mother, they were going to be worn during the following school year. The mention of the word "school" killed all signs of potential pre-teen enthusiasm. However, she yielded to parental pressure and handed me the pound with a guilty smile.

A tiny jubilant lady bought Al Pacino’s 88 minutes for £0.50. I convinced her that it was a thriller (even though I had never watched it). She was delighted – that was exactly what her grandson liked...oh, these boys – well, he’s a young man now, at 18. She was so lovely that I’d have given her the thriller for free. I would never make a good salesman. I’d be too tempted to rip off noxious people and give presents to lovely ones.

Someone took advantage of the familial humdrum around the black shoes and snatched my brand new ballet pumps for £1... they had cost me 10 pounds. But I couldn’t care less, because I had now made broken even and even made a profit of £0.70 and could finally commence working for myself!

At 10 am my smiling muscles were hurting, but I continued smiling and saying 'Hi', 'Hello there' and 'Morning, Sir' (to the rare surly-looking male). My sales continued with variable success. There was no crowd, but I was rewarded – not financially – by numerous awkward ‘Hi’-s and ‘Hello’-s, as well as a variety of half-embarrassed, half-treasure-hunting glances. An old biker, melting in the sun in heavy black gear and clutching a helmet with clumsy charm, said I smiled beautifully and that I should continue doing so, because I was cheering everyone up. I thanked him and followed his advice – not out of duty to the unknown leather-clad knight, but because the smile was now glued to my face and my mandibular joint refused to move.
Soon thereafter, I sold the Merchant of Venice for £0.50 (what irony). Still not sure why, though, because now that I think of it, I was intending to see the film again. (now that I think again, it also has Jeremy Irons in it. Damn.) Still, that was an interesting example of a purely impulsive purchase on part of the customer, and of an exercise in emotional manipulation on my part. I put on my cheeky hat and chatted up a young man passing by. After a brief exchange concerning the weather, I bribed him a McVitie’s chocolate digestive biscuit. After that he was ready for anything, but I had already changed into my Scrooge hat and was more than content to let him off with all jeremyironeses and venetian merchants, after I had got my fifty pence.

I received another, more direct proposition from an ageing Irishman who said I should accompany him to Dublin. He bought something minute for ten pence and stayed on for a chat for far longer than needed. While I laughed and tried to explain to some impatient customers how much my coca-cola glasses cost, he elaborated on his plan. He was going to Ireland in September and would stay for three months, and I was very welcome and there was nothing I should be afraid of. The rugby pitch in-house harassment officer was not in, so I couldn’t report the overly zealous Mr Patrick, and I had to deal with the matter myself. I said he was very kind but I didn’t think I could do that. To my surprise, that was enough to make him bid a very polite farewell and clear off. This incident convinced me that I would never venture to the equivalent to an English CBS in a less civilised country where a brusque ‘thank you’ would not be so easily recognised as an outright refusal.

A few quiet minutes, and the juggernaut of profit took me up again. A well-dressed lady took my wacky red hat for £0.50. I had fallen in love with the hat and rescued it from the Cat Protection charity shop in Kenilworth once, but the hat WHISPERED when worn, and I didn’t want to go mad. Now this lovely lady with a penchant for bright hats will have go mad instead.

Then my big moment came in the face of a lady wearing a traditional blue dress and blue head-ribbon. She bought various stuff for £5. I was chuffed to get rid of the junk and even get £5 for it - while she was pleased with an amazing bargain. She also asked whether I spoke French. I didn’t wish to subject her to my French for fear that she would return the stuff and run away, but it turned out that she came from France and just thought I was French. So much for my typical Slavic accent. By the way, in the course of the day, at least ten people asked me where I was from, so I also managed to make some geopolitical progress on behalf of my country. I told them and showed them photos of green mountains and monasteries printed on a set of Bulgarian coasters which no one had bought. (I also had to say one too many times that yes, UK is nice, but yes, of course I miss my home-country - which, to be quite honest, I don’t, but there was no use trying to convince anybody of this, especially when you want them to buy your stuff). Perhaps now a few more people in the world know where Bulgaria is. This might help them feel better the next time the country crops up on ‘Who Wants To Be A Millionaire’.

By 11.30, everyone seemed to have started packing their unsold goodies in the boots of cars. The previously buzzing rugby pitch was looking rather dead. I said goodbye to the book-loving family on the neighbouring pitch, bought a book about samurais from them (goodbye, two hard-earnt quid!) gave their kids a box of crayons, and drove off. I tried to give it another shot, so I stopped next to the gates and managed to sell ‘What women want’ to an aged Irish couple. They are guaranteed a good laugh and some embarrassment with their favourite Mr Gibson.

So, what is today’s balance?

All in all, I made £19.15; subtracting £7 paid for the sales pitch makes 12.15; minus another £2 for a book I bought from my neighbours (naughty me!). So, not counting petrol, I made a mere £10.15 in one whole morning (not counting the hours spent slowly amassing the stuff for sale, and any loss made by not selling the stuff for more money on e-bay). The meagre pecuniary gain is offset by a most peculiar finding: a simple lunch never tasted as good, as it did that day, after wasting away a whole morning just sitting in the sun... It also felt good to pay for my
milk and cherry scones with a handful of coins.

Perhaps I shall see you on your local rugby pitch one Sunday (but I am most definitely not going to Ireland to hang out with elderly philanderers).

PhD Candidate and Sessional Teacher
Milena Kremakova


SI Top 10 #3 - Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
(2011-12-26 14:00)

Charles Wright Mills' body of work was substantial by any standards but for someone who died at the age of forty-five it was remarkable. The range and substance of Mills’ work is impressive but even more so is its originality, vitality and humanistic motivation: in short, its sociological imagination. In his still celebrated if now less influential work, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills addresses issues of sociological theory and method and particularly the practical application of the subject. However, in this piece I refer to a wide range of Mills’ work to illustrate that he was not only a great sociological mentor but also practised what he advocated.

Mills’ own sociological imagination was inspired by what he referred to as the classic sociological tradition the main feature of which is ‘the concern with historical social structures: and that its problems are of direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles (*S I*: 28). Mills links personal troubles with public issues and
threads biography into the historical structural dynamic. The achievement of the classic tradition lies in the creation of models of society that illuminate the impact of social change on people and on their potential for response. These models generate and inform theory but are developed at a more general level than specific theories. Thus Marx's dialectical model of historical change and Weber's concept of the role of ideas in history give orientation to theory and research. For Mills the issue is not about which model is 'correct' but their ability to illuminate large vistas of the social landscape. In addition to clarifying the relationships of the triad of social structure, historical change and biography, Mills argues that sociological imagination necessarily generates political perspective because of the understanding it gives of the human condition (SI chapter 10). Mills himself was emphatic in drawing practical conclusions from his sociological work. This brought him into sharp conflict with what he referred to as the 'crack-pot realism' of managerial liberals such as Daniel Bell whom he felt were reducing social issues to mere matters of 'expert' planning and administration. Similarly, he attacked 'abstracted empiricism' within sociology - the gathering of facts with little reference to their wider meaning or application. Mills' Ph.D. was on American pragmatism and all his work carries the tone of someone who intended to make a difference.

Mills' work amply demonstrates the principles underpinning his concept of the sociological imagination. In less than ten years he published three books that substantially analysed the social structure of the United States. The first, New Men of Power (1948) presented the leadership of the American trade union movement as integrated within rather than a challenging the American economic establishment. The second, White Collar (1951), analysed the rise of the new American middle class largely employed in the proliferating offices of the public and private sectors. This was followed by his magnum opus of structural analysis The Power Elite (1956) that remains a standard reference for understanding the workings and overlaps of the American economic, military, and political elites. This triad of publications had almost an anticipatory as well as contemporary relevance. It describes a declining and weakened industrial working class with an increasingly self-interested leadership; a white-collar class cemented within a still highly unequal occupational structure by media-led consumerism and its own desire for security; and a substantially autonomous elite only marginally disrupted in its pursuit of power, wealth and status by democratic processes. This was a very different vision of the United States and of Western societies than that adopted by those he saw as 'conservative liberals' such as Talcott Parsons and Daniel Bell who declared an 'end of ideology' long before Francis Fukuyama made the same mistaken judgement.

As Mills' edited collection of classic sociological reading, Images of Man (1960) shows, he particularly admired European sociology. He was less impressed with his contemporary American colleagues. The one structural model that Mills found utterly wanting was Parsons' social systems theory which he saw as prime example of 'grand theory'. Mills' ridiculing of Parsons' abstract style had a serious point behind it – that such abstraction can take on a life of its own, divorced from the realities of everyday social life. More substantively, Mills argued that Parsons' emphasis on consensus legitimised the social status quo and failed to address what for Mills is fundamental to the social dynamic – power conflict. In contrast to Parsons, he focused on who takes decisions and in whose interest and argued that elites invariably pursue their own self-interest ('the idea of the responsibility of the powerful is foolish’ SI: 213). As he succinctly observed: 'Men (sic) are free to make history, but some men are freer than others' (SI: 201).

Mills regarded 'abstracted empiricism' as the mirror opposite of 'grand theory' but as having a similar outcome – a failure critically to address the status quo and therefore a tacit endorsement of it. He associated abstracted empiricism with the proliferation of bureaucracy and what he saw as the reduction of social and moral matters to issues of management. Mills was as suspicious of 'experts' and 'managers' as of the elites they served arguing – again contra Daniel Bell – that fundamental matters of domestic and foreign policy should be widely debated. Like Habermas, and perhaps a little romantically, he occasionally harked back to a period when better-informed 'publics' debated key issues of policy. Mills certainly made his contribution to re-igniting such debates.

Mills' model of society was an elites/mass rather than a class one. It is very much the first part of this dual model that Mills is remembered for – whether or not one agrees with it. A problem with the elites/mass model is that it tends to see the 'mass' as somewhat inert. In fact, Mills did share the view of many of his 'conservative liberal'
antagonists as well as that other luminary of the left, Herbert Marcuse, that the masses were indeed rendered dully somnolent by the tedium of routine work and the soporific effect of the mass media. However, unlike his liberal critics, Mills embarked on an intellectual struggle to produce a new radical analysis of social change in the distinctly discouraging context of the conservative and reactionary nineteen fifties. His own analysis precluded him from privileging the traditional working class or, still less, the new white-collar class in the search for a key agency for change. However, Mills demonstrated a consistent concern for both the new poor of mature capitalist society and for those of the emerging world. As far as the former are concerned he had a prescient understanding of how what came to be referred to variously as ‘the dependent population’, ‘the underclass’ and ‘the marginal’ would become perceived as almost the residual ‘problem’ of modern society – resistant to endless plans to organise them. About the poor of the emerging world Mills was able in his later writings to be more optimistic. Although he railed against what he saw as the abuse of power in the bullying of Castro’s Cuba (Listen Yankee, 1960) and American militarism (The Causes of World War Three, 1958) he realised that in time the balance of power would shift – as, indeed, we are now seeing.

In so far as Mills did tentatively observe an emerging agency for change in Western societies, it was among intellectuals, particularly young intellectuals. This was not mere wishful thinking on his part as he lived long enough to witness the stirrings of radicalism among young people in higher education both in the United States and Europe. As the following quotation from Mills’ Letter to the (British) New Left shows, he was sensitive to the need to re-explore the ethical and cultural values of radicalism: ‘As for the articulation of ideals, there I think your magazines have done there best work so far. That is your meaning – is it not – of the emphasis on cultural affairs.’ Mills had an enormous influence on the values and thinking of American student movement of the early nineteen sixties and had he lived might have been able to guide it away from the excesses of the late sixties. The Port Huron Statement (1962), the manifesto of the newly formed Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) amply reflected Mills’ belief in participatory democracy and practical humanism.

It is not difficult to imagine that Mills might have found himself at odds with the dominant contemporary state and corporate directed regimes of research and of the constraints they put on young scholars. His comments in The Sociological Imagination on research and the problem of funding remain relevant. He of course recognises the need for funds but also warns against the conditions that can come with it. He suggests that sometimes it may be better to work small-scale but independently rather than chase expensively funded research whose findings and interpretation may be ‘managed’ by the funding agency. What he MIGHT have made of the current state dominated research regimes is anybody’s guess. In a piece of advice that may seem trite and simplistic in the light of the complexity of the contemporary context of research, Mills’ advocates that the researcher should think and observe. But it is precisely because Mills’ makes what he terms ‘the craft of sociology’ accessible that is his genius

Mills’ book, The Sociological Imagination, has inspired generations of young and not so young social scientists. This is partly because he wrote a great book – once voted the second most important sociological book of the twentieth century after Weber’s Economy and Society, partly because he practised what he advocated, but also because he was an inspiring and, in the best sense of the word, idealistic human being. Mills the sociologist, campaigner and character fused to generate a charisma to which there is no recent or present comparison in social science. He retained a grounded utopianism that he defined as a commitment to an attainable but radically fairer and more equal future. His message is no less relevant now.

Bibliography


*Mike O’Donnell is Emeritus Prof of Sociology at Westminster University*

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SI Top 10 #4 - Null Set (2011-12-27 08:00)

[1]
(15 April 2013, Editor’s note: As a reader has kindly pointed out, the author of the diagram is David Shrigley who does lots of awesome things: [3]David Shrigley. The editors apologise for not giving a reference in the publication!)


Matt (2013-04-12 18:53:32)
Please email me. I have a question about this venn diagram.

Milena Kremakova (2013-04-12 21:52:56)
Is it a secret question?

Matt (2013-04-12 22:09:49)
Would you, or anyone viewing this happen to know who made this Venn diagram? I’d like to ask it’s maker a question.

James Barron (2013-04-13 10:34:19)
It’s pinched from David Shrigley.

Matt (2013-04-14 17:36:03)
Thank you!

Thanks! I’ll include a reference.

SI Top 10 #5 - Response to George Monbiot’s Rant against Academic Publishers (2011-12-27 14:00)

In the US, we have the phrase ‘waving a flag and kissing a baby’ for somebody who plays to the gallery. And this is exactly what George Monbiot has done in his [1]Guardian rant against academic publishing houses. Running neck-and-neck with the various teaching quality assurances and research assessment exercises we routinely undergo in the UK, publishers must lead the academic hate list. And while I don’t wish to defend – or even explain – the sort of profit margins that Monbiot cites, I do want to defend publishers as an important counterbalance to the inherently conservative character of such time-honoured academic institutions as peer review.

For his own part, Monbiot appears to be a blind believer in the value of peer review. Indeed, his article appears to have been triggered by the costs to his readers who want to check whether the peer-reviewed research he cites in his articles says what he claims it does. This suggests that if Monbiot’s readers trusted him more, he probably wouldn’t have been moved to rail against publishers in the first place. But I digress.

No one doubts that commercial publishers are in the business of making money. But the way they make money is by doing something that academics value but that they would not do for themselves, left to their own devices. What I mean is captured in two words: ‘innovation’ and ‘extension’.

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Innovation: Peer review processes are about insuring the quality of knowledge, which is ultimately a backward-looking exercise – i.e. do the results follow from what is presented as evidence and what we already know? In contrast, innovation is about risk-taking, i.e. arguing that if you suspend or replace some of the old assumptions, you get more interesting results. This is classic entrepreneurship (a la Schumpeter) and publishers are always on the lookout for people who can write books and edit journals that will reconfigure the knowledge system in such innovative ways, resulting in new income streams. The success of cultural studies and gender studies in the 1980s was due more to visionary commissioning editors than the then-dominant academic gatekeepers. I speak from experience. Towards the end of that period, I founded a journal, [2]Social Epistemology – still in existence after 25 years – that depended on just such an editor, since I had proposed the new journal while waiting to defend my Ph.D. (i.e. as someone with hardly any academic status).

Extension: Publishers, not academics, drive the textbook market. It seems that if academics had their way, textbooks would be abolished altogether as failing to contribute to how either teaching or research are assessed. Yet, textbooks remain very important symbols of the integration of teaching and research that is supposed to distinguish academic life from other forms of knowledge production. They are the most convincing indicator that academics produce a body of knowledge that a larger public should find out about. While it is fashionable to mock Anthony Giddens for having spent his career as a glorified sociology textbook writer, nevertheless that skill made it easy for him to speak to larger publics, thereby demonstrating the relevance of sociology. Indeed, I wonder had commercial publishing not played such a large role in steering the course of British sociology, would a public figure like Giddens have ever emerged, given the relatively parochial character of the discipline as it is institutionalised in this country.

Once again, I do not mean to justify Elsevier’s profits. But simply letting academics self-organize their knowledge flows is no panacea. Publishers provide an important counterbalance.


Steve never mind Monbiot’s "rant" (nice balanced language here) - Try looking up social epistemology article prices and journal costs ...now that is truly taking the e...piss temology over £100 for a journanal unbelievable ....almost fell like ranting myself!

SI Top 10 #6 - Anarchism and The Sociological Imagination: An Interview with Dana Williams
(2011-12-28 08:00)
I first came across Dana Williams and his work on an anarchist academics email list about three years ago. I was excited to find another person bringing anarchism and sociology together! There were, I believe, literally only a couple that I knew of already (Jonathan Purkis and Ian Welsh). Over the last couple of years, that number has expanded steadily and I now see that there is quite an upsurge in interest in bringing anarchism and sociology together. Dana’s talk at the North American Anarchist Studies conference last year particularly interested me in this regard. I wasn’t brave enough to travel to Toronto in February and am very appreciative to have been able to take in the talk in comfort via YouTube ([Part 1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZBtTj2dB4c] & Part 2 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OpENVcrgf5s]. Entitled "Defining an Anarchist-Sociology (A Long-Anticipated Marriage)", Dana’s argument intrigued me and I wanted to find out more. The following interview took place by email between March and July 2011.

My first question is, what connections do you already see existing between anarchism and sociology?

I think there are quite a few connections between the two, some major and better made, while other connections are a bit more tenuous and ambiguous. First, both anarchism and sociology are very interested in this thing called “society”. That itself is impressive, given how hard it is to often even think about something as complex and abstract as society. Both also agree that societies affect individuals. Within the sociological ranks, this was put most eloquently by C. Wright Mills and his analytical device of the “sociological imagination”. But, anarchists have also regularly considered large, macro-scaled institutions like capitalism, states, White supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, etc., rarely losing the forest for the trees. In other words: anarchists are not apt to dwell on how bad a certain president is for a society or how evil a particular corporation is behaving, but instead call-out the entire system for its negative consequences on society. If this sounds a lot like Mills' sociological imagination, it might not be much of a coincidence. The same Mills who coined the phrase "new Left"—that early-1960s, anarchistic impulse that rejected state-socialism for participatory democracy—also called himself a "goddamn anarchist". So, sociologists do much the same thing as anarchists and focus on society as their unit of analysis (while appreciating it is composed of individuals, groups, and organizations). In fact, sociologists
very consciously eschew efforts to develop idiosyncratic theory based on particular people, situations, or events, and instead try to consider general patterns. This focus on society unites the two endeavors in a very immediate way.

Second, I think anarchism and sociology—in their better moments—do a bit of each other’s "typical" work. Anarchism has busied itself with attempts to transform society. Often this transformation is pursued through initially small acts of agitation (the formation of labor unions, community organizations, revolutionary cells and affinity groups), but also the encouragement of and participation in mass social movements, and broad insurrections and revolutions. Sociology, on the other hand, has for much of its history (and definitely during its periods with the greatest commitment to positivism) has tried to merely understand society, sometimes in the broadest, more "grand theory" strokes, sometimes in meticulous detail. Yet, anarchists have regularly pursued some of these more sociological endeavors, engaging in a rigorous critique of society, often very similar to sociologists. Much of the great classical-era anarchist theorists—such as Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin—were essentially thinking about sociological questions, having to do with social problems that people and groups in societies face. It’s one thing to desire change, but another thing to have a good, solid understanding of why that change is so necessary—anarchists are generally very thoughtful, well-informed individuals, who tend to think sociologically and just happen to want revolutionary change. And, sociologists have occasionally (but with astonishing regularity) wanted to go beyond mere analysis and participate in advocacy and even efforts to change society. Granted, most of the change sought assumes a liberal-reformist character, often focused on changes to particular laws. But, the very fact that sociologists are usually able to (sometimes with great prodding) draw conclusions and personal inspirations from what they study and eventually act, is important. Thus, sociologists do not necessarily always have their noses stuck in books, data, and abstract hypotheses.

A third connection I see is there has often been fraternization between anarchists and sociologists; they have read and considered each other’s ideas, and, occasionally, they have been some of the same people. Consequently, their ideas have—whether the purists in each camp wish it or not—influenced each other. For example, Bakunin intensively studied Comte’s positivism (liking his general impulse, but rejecting Comte’s more messianic pretensions). Weber spent time vacationing around anarchists, especially Europe’s more libertine cultural anarchists. Pitirim Sorokin—the first chair of Harvard’s sociology program—personally knew and admired Kropotkin. Kropotkin himself translated some of Herbert Spencer’s work and later Spencer signed a petition to the French government demanding Kropotkin’s release from prison. More recently, the rebellious tendencies of earlier radical culture—infused with anarchism—inspired numerous sociologists, perhaps most important Mills who often wrote favorably of rebels, like the Wobblies. Today, the connections between anarchists and sociologists are much more muted, but maybe even more widespread than at any time in the past. The movements of the 1960s and 70s reinvigorated radical sociology and, especially in the United States, led to an explosion in self-identified “Marxist sociologists”. The radicalism of the Black Power and anti-war movements inspired young people with rediscovered/recycled Marxist ideas, some of whom chose to enter graduate school (or who were already there). This new generation of sociologists, helped shift the discipline back towards its progressive roots and (at least partially) away from instrumental positivism and structural-functionalism. Given that many of today’s popular and radical social movements are strongly inspired by and designed on anarchist principles (with a significant collection of actual anarchist participants), there has been a similar in-fill of anarchists into sociology in the last decade and a half. I have heard that approximately one million people in the US take sociology classes each year and surely a few thousands of those people are anarchists (or anarchist-friendly). Hundreds of anarchists are potentially majoring as sociologists and dozens are likely in graduate school. This has resulted in an up-swell of university-trained anarchist-sociologists (whether self-identified as such or not). I am one of that increasing number of people. Consequently, due to this influx of anarchist-movement-inspired personnel into the academy, I do not, universally, receive blank-looks when discussing anarchism or the anarchist movement amongst sociologists. Although there is often still some confusion and misunderstanding as to what anarchism is, many sociologists now acknowledge anarchism as a legitimate school of ideas and the movement as something real that is having a definite impact on the world. This is a clear change of earlier generations (especially from the dismissive generations of Albion Small or Talcott Parsons). As time goes one, I assume and hope that anarchism and sociology continue to learn more from each other.
Following on from that, what connections between anarchism and sociology would you like to see developed further?

All sorts of closer connections could be developed! And, I think these two different things—anarchism and sociology, whether we consider them to be disciplines, ideologies, or approaches—can also be grown together, in-tandem. Let me tell you a story that I think illustrates this: near where I used to live there was a tree close to a chain-link fence and at some point, the tree began to grow into and through the fence. Not just a branch going through the fence, but the actual rings of the tree merging with the fence! Each new years’ worth of tree-growth emerged, in part, on the other side of the fence. The fence supported and redirected the trees’ growth, and the tree has now sturdied an otherwise rickety fence. Today, that tree and fence are hopelessly intertwined with each other, you couldn’t take down one without affecting the other. That’s sort of how I’d like anarchism and sociology to become (and I won’t say which is the fence and which is the tree!). I think each could not only benefit from the other, but also they could grow stronger together. This is sort of how Marxism and feminism are today for sociological theory. It’s hard to imagine talking about social change, class inequality, gender, and so forth without directly referencing the contributions of those two philosophies (which are of non-sociological origins). And Marxism and feminism have gotten all sorts of validation, institutional support, and proliferation due to their affiliation with sociology. I think it’d be great if anarchism were to intertwine itself, strategically, with sociology. And I think—in my more optimistic moments—that might already be starting to happen.

But to more specifically answer your question: I would like to see a certain sociological appreciation become more commonplace within anarchist circles. In other words, it’s be great if sociological ideas could help support and strengthen anarchist theory and the anarchist movement. For example, anarchists could benefit from an understanding of how people learn, adopt, and maintain their commitments through socialization. Since anarchists want to help people find pathways to a more liberatory future, dealing with all the practices that inhibit better social relations is going to be necessary. It’ll be important for people to more widely adopt radical social norms, which will require intensive resocialization—something anarchists already do, instinctively, but maybe not as reflectively as necessary. Knowing what socialization is and how norms work will help anarchists think more critically about their self-education strategies and also appreciate how really hard long-lasting social change is to achieve. Even insurrections and open-revolts can easily roll-back into counter-revolutionary and reactionary behaviors if a period of resocialization doesn’t occur. I think that’s an important lesson to be learned from the Russian and Spanish revolutions during the twentieth-century. I suppose another level of sociological understanding that anarchists could benefit from is a deeper understanding of how formal organizations (especially bureaucracies) work. They are neither completely inefficient, nor completely rational. Instead, bureaucracies are somewhere in-between. And since the majority of people in modern societies are trapped somewhere within multiple such organizations, it seems crucial for anarchists to know how this embedding works, the best ways to extricate folks from hierarchical structures, and why radical movements like anarchism meet resistance when trying to do so.

Or, anarchists—and social movements more generally—could benefit from knowing a bit of social movement theory, the kind of stuff that sociologists study about social movements. And, although this research is often imperfect, there’s a lot to potentially learn from it. There’s certain aspects of movement-building and movement-work that activists ought to at least reflect upon in a systematic fashion. For example, questions about framing, resources, political opportunities, and so on. But, as my co-author Jeff Shantz has said, the attention given to radical movements that see the entire social system as inherently off-kilter, self-destructive, brutal, etc., is almost non-existent. So, sociologists ought to start thinking about and studying those social movements that have no interest in influencing the state (except to dissolve it)!

Then, the flipside of this coin is where things might get even more interesting: taking anarchist concerns or subjects, and inserting them into Sociology. I think it would be great to have anarchist ideas pop-up more regularly in sociology classes, within sociology’s many subfields, or be included as references in journal article literature reviews.
And, most importantly, have those ideas treated as the serious intellectual traditions they are! What if all those aforementioned college students started encountering anarchist ideas in their introduction to sociology classes or if sociology majors started to discover a highly-libertarian form of socialism that has valid ideas and precepts, that are independent of Marxism?

Imagine if sociological theory classes taught Bakunin alongside his intellectual and activist counterpart in the First International, Marx. Both crafted their words from ideas being generated in the same radical labor milieu, but Bakunin’s warnings turned out to be more prophetic than Marx’s musings, when he predicted Marx’s socialist vision (led by and encapsulated in the state) would become as bureaucratic and tyrannical as state capitalism. Or, more interestingly, imagine Kropotkin’s ideas of “mutual aid” being treated as seriously as Durkheim’s ideas of solidarity. The similarities are, at points, astounding, and to have Kropotkin’s politically-infused analyses of survival, sociability, and justice presented with the same worth as Durkheim, would be an amazing step forward for both anarchism and sociology. Heck, most classical-era anarchist thinkers still, even today, sound like and share a lot of the same concerns as sociologists: folks like Emma Goldman, Gustav Landauer, Voltairine de Cleyre, Errico Malatesta, and Elise Reclus, and so on...

Or, more recently in the anarchist tradition, consider how devastating Murray Bookchin’s focus on hierarchy and domination as the ultimate engines of inequality (not just economic exploitation) would be for students of social inequalities, or students of modern conflict theory. And I think it is high-time to give proper credit to the anarchy-feminists of the 1970s for their role in influencing feminism’s “third wave” (as learned about by countless sociology majors in contemporary theory and gender classes). The crossover between anarchy-feminists, black feminists, black anarchists, and others in nurturing a radical, intersectional approach to inequality is a linkage still begging further exploration.

I suppose another thing that could result from drawing anarchism and sociology closer together would be an appreciation of the horizontal, cooperative social organization that is needed for social transformation. Some of this is being considered along the lines of network theory, but something more deliberate (and, frankly, more anarchist) needs to be considered here. To me, this seems to require a pro-active/positive form of sociology that studies the best avenues for social transformation, with a vested-interest in seeing those changes come to pass!

Those are just some immediate ideas of how anarchism could be sociologized and sociology could be anar-chized—if those are even appropriate words! Otherwise, some anarchists working in (and around) sociology have already started to consider what an “anarchist social science” would be: Would it be “applied”? Radical? Self-critical? Maybe decentralized and autonomous from the academy? Or perhaps it’d be directly in the hands of everyday people? A lot of these intellectual efforts (both epistemological and ontological) are trying to consider the revolutionary pathways of social change and how anarchism (and maybe sociology) plays a role in that. So, on one hand, an anarchist-sociology could illuminate society—as it presently is—for us, but it could also light the way towards practical solutions for overcoming all the hierarchical crap that keeps people from taking control of their lives and communities.

You’re in the process just now of writing a book with Jeff Shantz exploring anarchism and sociology. Could you tell us a bit about it?

I don’t want to speak for Jeff and put words in his mouth, so I’ll just tell you my thoughts about the book. (But, I think Jeff and I are in very strong agreement about what we’re doing, and I’ve been a big fan of his writing for years. Both of us have had lengthy activist experiences and both of us are working professionally at mainly teaching-oriented schools, teaching heavy course loads, but still trying to remain active with research (and with politics)!) I think
anarchism and sociology are both central commitments that we share and we’ve been fascinated at all the points of 
overlap. And for me, I’m sort of amazed that these overlaps don’t get talked about more regularly.

At a recent conference presentation to the North American Anarchist Studies Network in Toronto, I joked that 
our book—which we are calling *Anarchy & Society*, I suppose in a sort of bemused homage to Weber’s *Economy & 
Society*—is akin to a blind date. Our book is essentially organizing a blind date, in this case between two very different 
perspectives: anarchism and sociology. I think the book is gently encouraging sociology to meet anarchism (“Hey, 
you should get to know anarchism. They’re passionate and not nearly as crazy as everyone says they are...”), and also 
telling anarchism a similar message about sociology (“Yeah, sure, they’ve dabbled in Marxism in the past, but their 
heart is in the right place...”). So, in part, it’s a sort of easing one into the conversation of the other. Conceptually, 
anyway. More, practically, for me, I wanted to write the kind of book that I wish existed when I first started graduate 
school in sociology. This book didn’t exist then for me! And, I know it’s a bit presumptuous to think a book of yours 
will have a big impact in an area, but wouldn’t it be wonderful if it could be a sort of lighthouse, helping to guide 
along new anarchist-inclined sociologists or sociologically-minded anarchists? In comparison, Marxist sociologists 
can turn to “Capital” or Gramsci’s “Prison Notebooks”. Since we (when I say “we”, I mean all those self-identified 
anarchist-sociologists out there) don’t have anything like this that is all nice and neatly prepared for us, we’re going 
to have to create it ourselves. There’s a long-history of do-it-yourself politics with anarchists. We’re always starting 
up small newspapers, mutual aid projects, collectives and cooperatives, or organizing unions—and I think the same 
thing is going to have to be necessary for those working in academia, too.

And, I’m sure Jeff would agree with me when I say that I don’t want our book to be the last thing said about 
anarchist-sociology”. For me, that would mean the book has been a complete failure! Even if thousands of people 
read it and like it. Books only have an impact when they inspire lots of other people to respond to them, to critique 
them, to carry-on a conversation. I’d like for there to be an explosion (and I think that growth in anarchist-sociologist 
 scholarship will come soon enough) of folks writing books like this, who bring their own notions of what anarchist-
sociology is to the table. At the present moment, I don’t think there’s any strategic value in anyone declaring 
definitively what the hell anarchist-sociology is... we haven’t explored all the intellectual possibilities yet! We 
haven’t thought through all the practical and political consequences. We definitely haven’t experimented enough in 
classrooms with students (let alone in the so-called “real world”) to know all the ways in which such ideas could be 
used. So, we want our book to be a provocation, a conversation starter.

If I could, I’d like to compare some of what our book does to Colin Ward’s book *Anarchy in Action*. It’s an 
amazing work of sociology—or, dare I say, anarchist-sociology! For me, it’s the most important modern work in 
anarchism (“modern” referring to the post-1960s era, after the Golden Age of Anarchism, with Kropotkin, Goldman, 
Malatesta, and all the rest). All sociologists (and anarchists, of course) should read it. It might be a bit primitive for 
some, but it really captures the core impulse of the sociological imagination. And, like any good work of sociology, 
it destroys a lot of people’s preconceptions and makes you think differently about the world. In my opinion, it’s a 
sociological work on par with Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* or Goffman’s *The Presentation 
of Self in Everyday Life*. It ought to be read and debated in theory classes... well, that’s what I think about it anyway. 
Others should read it and decide for themselves! I’d like to hope that our book continues the mission Ward set out 
with—to point out examples of anarchy happening around us, regularly in society—by also incorporating a bit more 
consciously sociological theory and research, all with an anarchist aesthetic and commitment.

Specifically, in the book we try to a number of things. Most importantly, we stake-out a “big tent” called 
anarchist-sociology, which we think lots of folks—even with completely divergent orientations and projects in-
mind—could huddle underneath. Then, we do some basic contrasts between anarchist thinkers and sociological 
thinkers. Here, obviously, the anarchist ideas of Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, and Ward are key. Jeff has written a 
great chapter considering Proudhon’s unique criminology, which in some ways presages today’s “restorative justice” 
movement. From the sociologist side, there’s a new take on Ferdinand Tönnies and others. We also have chapters 
dealing with core sociological topics, like social norms and socialization, and social inequalities. In each, we’re trying
to synthesize the unique thoughts and contributions together. Then, there's some lengthy discussions on social movements. Fortunately, both anarchism and sociology have a lot to say to each other.

The book is going to be published by Brill, as part of their Studies in Critical Social Sciences series. It's a great, critically-oriented series. And, we're also very excited about the prospects of an accessible version (in terms of cost) being released in paperback on Haymarket Books, so activist and non-academic folks can more easily get their hands on it.

**Can you think of any particular examples of ways in which aspects of anarchist traditions have, or might, contribute to sociological imagination?**

Sure, there's lots of ways in which anarchism contributes to the sociological imagination—but I don't know how conscious anyone has been with it. For example, anarchism's strong allergy to social hierarchy and domination affects the sociological imagination (nay, improves upon it). Or, its activist or agent-orientation. The sociological imagination itself, as defined by Mills, may be one of the most anarchistic ideas ever developed by sociology. I think this is because the sociological imagination is best seen as a tool (or at some moments, a defensive weapon) to be used practically, strategically—as opposed to a forceful prescription of "you should do this" or "you should do that". The whole character of the sociological imagination implies that individuals are going to figure out for themselves what social phenomenon has affected them most and how. Being able to realize that, understand that, and hopefully do something about it all, well, it's classic anarchism! It implicitly trusts individuals to know what's best for themselves, once they have the capacity to understand their circumstances.

Anarchism has often been bad-mouthed by its leftist cousin, Marxism, for being practice-heavy and theory-light. I'm pretty sure that's not true, but even if it were, I think anarchism has always been sensible and ethical for placing a strong emphasis upon means. How something gets done is often as crucial to the outcome as is the end itself. In other words: we have to pay attention to how we pursue our objectives and avoid trying to meet our goals at any costs. Sometimes the costs are far too high and violate our principles! Anarchists have always taken for granted the idea that having people in control of their own lives will create a better society than any centrally-planned Utopia designed by a few bright minds. If Mills was asking us—asking all free individuals, not just the sociologists—to think critically about our lives, personal troubles, and struggles in a sociological fashion, then he was obviously not asking sociologists to tell the masses what their problems are. Yes, sociologists have some mighty fine and sophisticated tools for exploring society, but these tools ought to be popularized, democratized, and turned-over into the hands of everyday people. People can make good decisions—and will probably act justly, too—if they are given the means to do so. In this respect, the sociological imagination is a tool for participatory democracy and liberation, and its notion of justice and freedom is deeply indebted to anarchist notions of self-determination, autonomy, and anti-authoritarianism.

Unlike many reform movements, which sometimes utilize paid campaigners to stir-up dissent and often must go somewhere very specific, anarchists can act nearly anywhere. There's always something for an anarchistic-minded individual to do, even in their own milieu, regardless of how progressive it is. A quick look around our workplaces, neighborhoods, popular cultures, or even families will show there's a lot of authoritarianism and inequality around. Thus, we can always start where we are. What neighborhood isn't in need of more active nurturing around issues of justice? What workplace—except the rare producer cooperative—isn't run autocratically, by a small handful of people who do a very narrow amount of the actual necessary work? Or, since a lot of professional sociologists work as teachers, what classroom isn't in need of radical democratization? I agree with Michael Burawoy here: students really are the first "public" to encounter professional sociologists. But, we spend so very little time actually considering how despotic universities and schools can be, how disempowering the life of an undergraduate can be, especially in a college classroom.
Let me tell a short story that conveys this real need. A year and a half ago I taught a student-requested course, called the “Sociology of Anarchism”. Some students approached me about teaching it and I agreed, since I like both sociology and anarchism quite a bit. Then, I realized that it would be pretty disingenuous to teach about anarchism in a hierarchically-organized classroom. So, I turned the class into a mini-laboratory, a social experiment on how to learn without authority figures (i.e. students acting as anarchists to learn about anarchism). I was still responsible for giving a grade to the students at the end of the semester, but I decided that they should be in charge of deciding how that was to be done. The students were the ones who wanted to learn about anarchism, so they should be in control of that learning. And, since they were all going to be sharing the experience with each other, the class should be democratically-managed. Thus, from the first moment of the class, I turned over the reins to the students. It wasn’t perfect, and my hierarchical-socialization got in the way of the project more than once, but it was an amazing experience. Students designed the syllabus. They spent the first weeks of the semester laying out for themselves what they wanted as learning objectives, what they would require of themselves and each other, how I should give out grades, and so on. They did all of this democratically, and achieving a near-consensus (with a class of over 40 students)! They acted completely different from any other collection of students. They were literally in charge of the class and they took seriously my promise to not act as their boss. Consequently, the students were excited, engaged, and felt in control of their learning.

My little experiment was not perfect, of course, and there’s lots of things I would do differently next time. But, it changed my entire perspective on what is possible (and, judging from exit surveys the students filled out, it changed them, too)... students can be trusted with control over their educations. But, it can be scary, since it puts teachers outside of their safe space. I was in a learning environment that all my professionalization suggested shouldn’t be allowed to exist. I haven’t done a class like that since, although I’ve thought seriously about how to democratize many aspects of certain classes. Turns out that I, like most of my colleagues (and higher education itself), are just too invested in hierarchical social forms. But, as an anarchist, I’m trying my best to grow my pedagogical approach and teach more anarchistically, more regularly.

But, if most sociologists are using their sociological imagination to help them teach (and I think the good ones do this), then anarchism definitely has a lot to offer in the classroom. Transparency in the classroom is essential for students to be informed and brought in to the mechanics of a course structure. Giving students the opportunity to practice new, liberatory skills (especially those they can use later, outside the academy) is important—my classes have used online collective decision-making software, to help prioritize projects, rank preferences, debate options, and so on. Students used all sorts of anarchistic organizing models—from small/affinity groups and large assemblies to formal consensus decision making techniques—to accomplish otherwise formidable, complex tasks. Exposing students to new worlds and new ideas is crucial. As a feminist colleague of mine tells her classes: she’s not there to make students feel comfortable in their old beliefs, but to provoke critical thought, reflection, and action. A sizable minority of my students were often visibly uncomfortable with the control they were given—a few times throughout the semester there were subtle requests to end all the democracy and revert back to a typical, predictable course... with me making all the decisions. But, in the midst of those discomforting moments, students learned a lot about education, a lot about the subject of anarchism, and even a lot about themselves and their own collective potential. Creating a memorable class is important; in the same way that anarchist artists have introduced giant puppets, stencil graffiti, or guerrilla theater into stagnant protest, anarchist teachers need to create novel environments that will create lasting impressions. Doing something anarchistic (or democratic, or justice-oriented) is going to leave a stronger mark upon students and influence them to think differently in the future than just learning about anarchism (or democracy or justice). To follow this logic, civics or political science classes would be better taught as active democracies, just like most sociology classes would be best structured as practical exercises in creating social justice. One last, crucially important thing for teachers would be finding a way to de-center their own roles and voices, especially that as “bosses” and “experts”. This doesn’t mean pushing volumes of empirical research aside or allowing an “anything goes” environment. The best way for a teacher to self-de-center would be to create a more horizontal, democratic course framework. Allow students to select topics that they find more interesting (within the reasonable
confines of the course subject, I suppose), let them pick or create projects or assignments that interest them most, and when there are discussions happening in the classroom, especially between students themselves, a teacher ought to play more of a "facilitator" role than that of a "final arbitrator". The amazing thing is, that any of these things can be done without even mentioning the word "anarchism" (but talking about anarchism wouldn't necessarily hurt either). In other words, acting anarchistically is often more important to anarchists than self-identifying as such.

Maybe the best anarchist tweaking of the "sociological imagination" is to speak of an "anarchist imagination". Undoubtedly, lots of anarchists have spoken of such a thing in the past, but I use the phrase in a very sociological sense. The "anarchist imagination" is the capacity for people to correctly identify the structures of domination and hierarchy that they are personally embedded in, and to have strategies in mind for how to extricate and remove themselves from those structures. In other words, it is an anarchist appreciation of the role that structures play in our lives—the impact of capitalism in imposing class hierarchies upon us, patriarchy in imposing gendered roles and sexual inequality. Or, White supremacy's racial-based caste system, heterosexism's privileging of straight folks, or any other institutionally-supported system of domination. The position of an employee in relation to their boss, a citizen (or worse, non-citizen) to police, a religious layperson to a religious authority, a child to a parent, an "average" person in relation to a celebrity, and so forth. Once the tight, dense network of these systems are understood, and how they affect even the most mundane part of our daily affairs, then do we have any actual ideas that can help to emancipate ourselves (and, hopefully, others in a similar position)? It's one thing to know that you are facing the sharp-end of a sword, but another thing altogether to imagine a different sort of social relations and the strategies to pursue them. A key difference here, for anarchists, is to not think in terms of social mobility, like most sociologists do. There's little justice in finding a way for some women (for example, White, straight middle-class women) to improve their lot in relation to men. Instead, how could the entire ugly, warped table of patriarchy be completely overturned? Thus, how can women (as well as queer and intersexed folk, but also men) find better ways of existing in the world? These are tough questions, often only answerable on a small, intimate micro-level at the outset. But, this is the beginnings of the anarchist imagination.

Thank you, Dana, for taking time to share your thoughts on anarchism and sociology.

My pleasure, Jamie!

Dana M. Williams works as an assistant professor in the department of sociology at Valdosta State University. His research has appeared in a variety of journals including *Race, Ethnicity, & Education, Sociology of Sport Journal, Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, and *Contemporary Justice Review*. He is currently writing a book with Jeff Shantz entitled *Anarchy & Society* (forthcoming, Brill).

Jamie Heckert holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Edinburgh and currently serves as an interdependent scholar in the south of England. His writings on ethics, erotics and ecology have appeared in a number of books, journals and other publications. He is editor of a special issue of *Sexualities* and co-editor (with Richard Cleminson) of *Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (2011, Routlege).


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tuli (2011-12-28 09:57:30)

yeah, this was an interesting article. Could you email the email-adress of Dana Williams, as an sociology student and an anarchist, I would like to get contact to likely minded people.
Dose not anarchism being reassessed to re-position this as to what was thought outcast has always been for the new social order? Domination of exploiters can only be removed by mass praxis of exploited classes.

‘Lady Di’ and Kim Jong-il: weird affinities... (2011-12-29 08:00)

Since the death of Kim Jong-il, the world’s media has been voyeuristically fixated on the scenes of public mourning gripping North Korea. As a sociologist, I’ve found some of this footage fascinating. So too the way in which these scenes of extreme public mourning are frequently being framed, at least by the UK media.

IFRAMEx: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/mSLJYbhXCKE

But is this kind of public mourning really so alien? The point was well made in a tweet by the political journalist [2]David Torrance yesterday:

Look at all those crazy N Koreans weeping & wailing over a hereditary state figure they'd never met. We Brits wouldn't do anything like that

I had just turned 12 when Princess Diana died. I remember being told, "you’ll always remember where you were when you found this out". For what it’s worth, I don't remember where I was though, as a 12 year old during the summer holidays, I assume I was at home. I remember the [3]funeral, mostly for [4]Elton John’s song which, in my 12 year old way, I found quite moving (whereas I now find it mawkish and weird). Most of all though I remember images of the crowds, the endless seas of teddy bears and flowers. It’s only looking back on this time as an adult that I can understand quite how bizarre it really was, as ‘an entire nation’ was ‘united’ in mourning for the ‘people’s
princess’. As the comedian Mark Thomas reflected on the funeral, "it was almost like a Soviet leader had died and they had put on the martial music, except it was images of Diana and her children”.

My point is not to suggest that ‘Lady Di’ represented a cult of personality analogous to Kim Jong-il. Rather that it represented something much more insidious and all the weirder for the widespread blindness to the sheer ludicrousness of it, as well as the nakedly commercial and political uses to which this was put (with many of the emerging chroniclers of New Labour reaching a rare consensus in recognising the effectiveness with which Tony Blair sealed his early bond with the nation by orchestrating public mourning after her death).

If you think I’m over-stating my case, watch this video of P Diddy / Sean Combs (a.k.a. the richest man in hip-hop) at the Diana memorial concert, with such obvious happy-clappy Christian revivalist orchestration that it must have been entirely conscious and deliberate.

Some of these issues are explored in greater depth, albeit not in terms of Kim Jong-il for obvious reasons, in an excellent documentary by the late Christopher Hitchens:

The asexual community has only existed for about ten years, and its existence is due in large part to the growth of the internet. The center of the community is the Asexual Visibility and Education Network (AVEN, asexuality.org), which defines an asexual as “a person who does not experience sexual attraction.” The site contrasts this with celibacy, which it asserts is a choice, whereas asexuality is a sexual orientation. The main political goals of the asexual community are visibility, acceptance, and understanding. One major means for this involves academic outreach and our representation in academic discourse.
I first discovered the asexual community in fall 2007, my first semester of graduate school. Even before I eventually decided to identify as asexual, I have wanted to find out as much as I could about the subject. My own attempts to understand the matter, as well as the realization that I had substantive contributions to make, have led to my involvement in academic outreach. (For instance, I run the site [asexualexplorations.net, which "exists to provide promote the academic study of asexuality."]) I have taken a particular interest in the diagnosis Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which led to my involvement in the "AVEN DSM Taskforce," a group that lobbied the DSM-5 Sexual Dysfunctions Subworkgroup trying to make DSM-5 more asexual-friendly. I have remained interested even after we completed that project.

**Asexuality and the Question of Pathology**

After the formation of the asexual community, it was not too long before the community became aware of the fact that in the DSM, there is a disorder about not being interested in sex. (The diagnosis is also in the ICD, but the ICD attracts less controversy). As one of the major political goals of the community is to convince people that there is nothing wrong with not being interested in sex, this diagnosis is not especially helpful for that goal.

In considering what kind of approach the asexual community should take toward the matter, one question that seems like a good starting place is whether asexuality is a sexual dysfunction. I have sometimes seen the question posed as an either/or: Is asexuality a sexual orientation or a sexual dysfunction? Some authors (e.g. Prause & Graham, 2007) have done data collection regarding asexuality and claimed that their results suggest that asexuality is not a sexual dysfunction. Such claims are likely good for our politics, but they make absolutely no sense to me.

There is a considerable literature on defining disorder, a task known to be difficult (many authors think impossible). Most authors, however, agree that at least some amount of value judgment is involved. Often these value judgments are quite uncontroversial: death, pain, and inability (or greatly increased difficulty) in accomplishing everyday tasks, are fairly universally regarded as negatives that, if possible, should be prevented. For the ones other than death, if they are not prevented, they should be cured if possible, and if not, treated to make the problems more manageable and/or to slow/prevent worsening of the condition. With regard to asexuality, there is the question of what harm it causes. It does not cause death or pain, and it only causes disability if we define it as such. This was, in fact, part of the rationale for including the sexual dysfunctions in DSM-III (Spitzer, Williams, & Skodol, 1980; Spitzer,
1981) without a requirement of distress—the complete sexual response cycle was regarded as normative such that any "inability" to experience such was defined as an impairment in an important area of functioning (c.f. American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p.6).

A core part of people's intuitions about what is a disorder (including sexual dysfunctions) is that something has gone wrong in the individual. Something is not working how it ought. In my own view, the oughtness inherent in this question means that science cannot answer it (though it can inform an answer.) This view is controversial—some consider function of some part of an organism to be objectively definable (e.g. the heart is for pumping blood.) While I am skeptical,[1] even if we accept that, objectively, the heart is for pumping blood, what is sexual attraction for? What is sex for? The main answers I've seen are a) procreation/finding a partner for such, b) pair-bonding, and c) declaring agnosticism with a skeptical attitude towards those who presume to know [2] My own view, option (c), renders problematic the entire notion of "sexual dysfunction." A further issue is what I call “the brute fact of the optionality of sex.” Having sex and being interested in sex are optional in a way that eating, breathing, and having a heart that pumps blood are not. It is possible to never have sex and never want sex and it not create any problems in a person's everyday life. This renders problematic the whole notion of functional oughtness for sexual attraction/interest, making problematic the very notions of "sexual function" and thus "sexual dysfunction."

As I do not think that asexuality objectively is or is not a sexual dysfunction, the question I think we should be asking is whether regarding it as such makes sense conceptually and pragmatically. Conceptually, I do not think that it does. Pragmatically, we need to be cautious—what effect, if any, this diagnosis has on asexuals is unknown. We simply do not have the data. Posing the question in this way motivates us to ask another essential for asexual politics: how is asexuality different from HSDD? There are two kinds of answers to this question: extensional and valuational/practical. Extensional differences—who fits which group—are often the only ones that come to mind. They are, for instance, the only ones addressed in Bogaert's (2006) discussion of the matter. This line of thinking seems to stem from treating asexuality and HSDD as somehow "objectively existing" rather than as more nominalist type categories. I am more interested in valuational and practical differences.

One such difference is that HSDD focuses on lack of sexual desire, and asexuality on lack of sexual attraction. HSDD is a more negative valuation of sexual disinterest and asexuality a more neutral/positive one. HSDD was created by physicians (Kaplan, 1977; Leif, 1977) and is diagnosed by clinicians. The conceptualization "asexuality" was created by asexuals, and the designation—an identity—is self-assigned. Moreover, the conceptualizations HSDD and asexuality will give rise to very different research questions. However, one important similarity should be noted: lack of interest in sex often causes difficulties in people's lives that they want help with. [3] Both asexual identity and HSDD are conceptualizations that exist to try to help people deal with these issues.

Asexuality vis-à-vis Pathology

In discussing how asexuality is different from HSDD (i.e. why the DSM does not say asexuality is a disorder), perhaps the most commonly raised point concerns the fact that since DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), for a diagnosis of HSDD to be made, the lack of sexual interest must cause "marked distress or interpersonal difficulty," although the second half of the disjunction is often ignored. Asexuals are not distressed about it, therefore they do not have this disorder, therefore the DSM does not say that asexuality is a disorder. Some people seem satisfied with this, but others do not. I can think of three reasons that one might not consider this sufficient. First, many people are distressed about their asexuality before identifying as asexual, and there is concern for these people. Second, not every condition that can potentially cause distress or interpersonal difficulty is included in the DSM. Including some but not others creates a real asymmetry and a sense of negative valuation (even if not a "mental disorder" label) for those that are included. Many in the asexual community are concerned about mental health professionals who will try to "treat" the asexuality of asexuals who are seeking out therapy for some unrelated issue. Third, as long as HSDD remains on the books, there is fear that the pharmaceuticals will someday get the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) to approve a drug for it (that probably will have small, but statistically significant,
A political question that those challenging the pathologization of asexuality must ask is whether to challenge the pathologization of asexuality only or whether to challenge the pathologization of sexual disinterest more generally. This is an important question because asexuals seem to be a small minority of the people not interested in sex [5]. This question parallels two general approaches I have seen among those supportive of asexuality. The first is to limit the domain of “sexual dysfunction” and to distance asexuality from it. This approach often involves placing strong emphasis on the requirement of distress (e.g., Brotto, 2010) and claiming that some data supports the view that asexuality is not a sexual dysfunction (e.g., Prause & Graham, 2007). Also falling in this approach is a suggestion by Brotto (2010), who proposes adding a comment in the DSM that this diagnosis does not apply to asexuals. The second approach is to question the notion that lack of interest in sex is dysfunctional or to question the very notion of sexual dysfunction. To date, the second of these has not been given much voice from within the asexual community, but there are some outside of the asexual community who have been advocating a similar position (e.g., Tiefer, 2004).

For those favoring this second option, I recommend three approaches:

1. Make alliances with people in and supportive of the New View Campaign (newviewcampaign.org), which focuses on sexual problems rather than sexual dysfunctions and rejects any kind of universal sexual norm.

2. Use asexuality as a wedge for highlighting existing problems with HSDD. This includes the fact that HSDD is such a diverse group, it almost certainly fails Spitzer and Endicott’s (1978) requirement that a disorder be a syndrome rather than a symptom. I know of only a few authors who have even dared to raise this question (e.g., Leiblum & Rosen, 1988), likely because the answer is intuitively obvious and unfavorable for HSDD. However, I would go farther and argue that sometimes lack of interest in sex is a symptom of some disorder, sometimes is “normal variation” and sometimes is an adaptive response to a negative situation (e.g., as a response to relationship problems; see Bancroft, Graham, & McCord, 2001). Another line of argument is to highlight DSM-IV-TR’s (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) absurd suggestion that the difficulty in distinguishing between pathologically low levels of sexual interest and “low normal” levels of sexual interest is the lack of “normative data.”

3. Do qualitative research on asexuals experiences in therapy (for issues related to or unrelated to their asexuality), on people’s experiences of sex-therapy getting treatment for HSDD, and on the effects of this diagnosis in personal conversations and in educational settings. This research is vitally important for asexual endeavors. It is entirely possible that the situation is not as serious as some may think. In any research project, the results virtually always prove more complicated than whatever hypothesis the researcher first had in mind.

Conclusion

The questions of the relation between asexuality and HSDD are likely to remain important to the asexual community and our allies, and there are multiple approaches that can be taken that are worth exploring. Because of the pragmatic issues involved and the lack of available data, caution is needed, as is research on the effects of this diagnosis. Also, it must be recognized that the situation is complicated by the fact that the DSM-5 Sexual Dysfunctions Subworkgroup is proposing to replace HSDD with Sexual Interest/Aversion Disorder (SIAD), possibly splitting it into one diagnosis for men and other for women, [6] and what these changes would mean for the asexual community are unclear. Further, asexual are not the primary group HSDD/SIAD is intended for. Given that there are many non-asexuals who may qualify for this diagnosis, their good must be considered in whatever strategy is taken. There are no easy answers, but it is important to ask the right questions.

References:


[1] I doubt it is possible to go from “in living organisms the heart pumps blood; if the heart does not pump blood the organism dies” to “the heart is for pumping blood” without regarding being alive as normative.)

[2] The difference between (a) and (b) can be seen with homosexuality, which is a dysfunction according to the former, but not the latter.

[3] If asexuality never caused anyone any difficulties, there would be need to discuss these issues, nothing for people to try to figure out, no political goals to accomplish, and thus no asexual community. Likewise, HSDD/ISD were first regarded as disorder in part because of people presenting to clinicians with this issue.
[4] In the US, pharmaceuticals can advertise directly to the general public.

[5] The impression is that most asexuals' have always not been interested in sex, whereas most people with HSDD have not, although I am not aware of any data confirming these impressions.


1. http://www.asexualexplorations.net/

Rethinking Asexuality as a Disorder | The Asexual Agenda (2012-10-20 18:11:03)

[...] Asexuality shows some superficial similarity with Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) in the DSM-IV. It’s a similar situation to when homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder in the 70s. Many asexuals argue that HSDD should be more narrow so as to definitively exclude asexuals. Others argue that the validity of HSDD itself should be questioned. [...]

SI Top 10 #8 - In Pictures: 50,000 March for Higher Education in London (2011-12-30 08:00)

An estimated 50,000 university and college students and academics marched in Westminster yesterday. They were protesting against the raising of tuition fees to £9000 per student per year of study and the cutting of government funding for teaching in the arts and social sciences. Protestors marched down Whitehall, past parliament, before taking over Millbank House, the Conservative party headquarters. Some made it to the roof of the building, being watched by thousands on the ground chanting and burning placards. The media are reporting that this is the largest student demonstration in a generation.

Nina Power has written a brilliant article in the Guardian today about the protests and media response. Read it [1]here.
1. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/10/student-protests-conservative-party-hq-occupation](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/nov/10/student-protests-conservative-party-hq-occupation)
Is feminism as a movement no longer indispensable? Is it redundant or too aggressive for contemporary society? In The Aftermath of Feminism Angela McRobbie argues that the contemporary social and cultural landscape (especially in the global North) could be called post-feminist, an era marked by "anti-feminist sentiment".

Through the book, McRobbie explores contemporary society of the United Kingdom and argues that we are currently witnessing a post-feminist condition; a condition that sees feminism taken for granted in the belief that gender equality has been achieved. McRobbie states that feminist values have indeed been incorporated into governmental policies and popular culture, but those values that have been incorporated stem from liberal feminism, which has eroded feminism(s) related to social criticism. McRobbie successfully highlights her argument through exploration of glossy magazines, popular television shows, films like "Bridget Jones’ diary" or the "Ten Years Younger" Channel 4 series, and offers an analysis of how obsession with femininity and middle-class whiteness in popular programmes undermines feminism as a whole.

Slogans such as "woman have made it" or "freedom of choice" are contested by McRobbie, who instead argues that contemporary society has created a 'successful and individualistic female' who is able to compete in education and work as a privileged subject of the gender mainstreaming policies adopted by the UK's New Labour Government. Based on the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, the author draws on the concept of "female individualization", which suggests that the contemporary young woman is now in possession of greater agency allowing her to have an impact on society. McRobbie names this greater female opportunity and choice the 'post-feminism masquerade'. The post-feminist masquerade, she argues, is a new form of gender power which re-establishes the heterosexual matrix in order to secure masculine hegemony. This new form of gender power is particularly insidious, as it takes place under the pretence of "women’s own choice". Furthermore, McRobbie states that the post-feminism masquerade also works as a mechanism of exclusion and helps re-establish colonisation by restoring whiteness as the cultural dominant discourse (69).

To make her point, McRobbie focuses on four key areas: the fashion beauty industry, education-employment opportunities, sexuality-reproduction and globalization. These areas highlight the so-called successes of feminism, whereby women today are able to validate and demonstrate their "own lifestyles choices". However, while women have progressed in education and employment, the global fashion and communication complex make sure that white, masculine hegemony is reassured. In this case, these industries work to re-establish racial hierarchies by undoing multiculturalism – in the case of Black and Asian woman – and, instead, advocate integration and assimilation into white dominant society.

Drawing on Butler’s concept of "illegible rage", McRobbie argues that feminine melancholia is incorporated into current definitions of what it is to be a normal female. In other words, the struggle faced by women in order to represent and emulate the modern woman, well depicted in glossy-fashion magazines has produced a "pathological" young woman (e.g. anorexia, drug and alcohol abuse, mutilation). Such pathology is normalised and glamorised by the fashion industry through extra-skinny and sad-faced models (110).

McRobbie perceives a "movement of women" which she recognizes as a requirement of the contemporary socio-economic system. To contextualize her argument, McRobbie takes the genre of 'make-over' television programmes where women are transformed in order to be full participants in contemporary labour market and consumer culture, especially the fashion industry. Through examining Bourdieu and Butler, McRobbie questions the assumption that social divisions are nowadays increasingly feminised. In a detailed analysis of 'make-over’ programmes she finds that female solidarity is broken along other divisions, such as the global North and South. Such divisions among women are characterised by "intra-female aggression" in a post-feminist climate filled with
competitiveness, bitchiness and violence.

In *The Aftermath of Feminism* McRobbie gives a wake-up call to those who celebrate gender equality and argue that women have achieved the same level of education and work-labour participation (or in some cases better, according to statistics) as their male counterparts. To those who assume that feminism is an obsolete movement, McRobbie presents a well-written work which demands that we pay attention to the inequalities women continue to face. In this case, McRobbie attempts to ‘de-mask’ the masquerade of equality supported by a “gender mainstreaming” discourse.

Regrettably, McRobbie’s argument seems to ignore and in some cases demonize the pleasure that women might actually find in choosing a ‘kind of fashion style’. McRobbie tends to generalize women that enjoy opportunities hard fought for by feminist movements as ‘cultural dopes’ unwittingly subjected by the fashion industry. *The Aftermath of Feminism* is presented in a highly-sophisticated and theoretically complex form leaving room for scholars to further analyze post-feminism and its several representations not only in Britain but also in social arenas around the world.
3. 2012

3.1 January

SI Top 10 #10 - Comics and Censorship: Is It Really about You? (2012-01-01 08:00)

[1]News broke this past Friday of an American citizen arrested by a Canadian Customs officer at the US-Canada border after manga deemed to be child pornography was discovered on his laptop. Although no real children were harmed in the creation of drawn images such as those possessed by this man in his mid-twenties, he faces a minimum of a year in prison if convicted.

The US-based Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (CBLDF) is currently raising funds for his legal defense. This is the second time they have rallied around the legal plight of a private US citizen caught with 'obscene' manga in the past five years. The CBLDF was also involved in the case of Christopher Handley, an Iowa man who ultimately [2]pleaded guilty and was convicted for 'possession of obscene visual representations of the sexual abuse of children'.

It is no secret that some Japanese manga (i.e. comic books) can be pornographic in the extreme and that adult-oriented genres such as [3]lolicon, [4]shotacon, and [5]moé can feature children in sexually explicit—and sexually violent—situations. Even characters who are technically adults are sometimes drawn to look like children, for both stylistic and fetishistic reasons.

And it should likewise go without saying that obscenity laws and the ways in which they are enforced differ from country to country. What is permissible in Japan might not be permissible in the United States, and what is permissible in the United States might not be permissible in Canada (or the United Kingdom, for that matter).

I do not want to argue here about whether or not this manga should be illegal. Hopefully it goes without saying that I think we should be worrying about real children, not cartoons. But I do think that we ought to be talking a
bit differently about these cases because, really, it is not about the comics.

Here's an example of the sort of CBLDF-approved rallying cry you hear amongst fans:

If you are a fan of any manga or anime, if you are a fan of comics, if you have even one comics page, anime clip, or “dirty” picture on your computer, tablet, or phone, this is about you (my emphasis).

I do not mean to pick on this particular blogger here—similar examples have spilled from the virtual inks of the likes of writer Neil Gaiman or been published in the e-newsletters of New York publishing houses—but it's a succinct example of the dominant discourse, which is: This man could be you. Yes, you.

If 'you' are a man who reads comics, then this in fact could be you. By all means, watch out. But if you aren't, and many readers of sequential art in the Western world aren't, then this probably isn't you...even if you happen to read precisely the same comics he does. Over the years I have noticed a distinct pattern: The person facing jail time is always a man, and those who have already been convicted are all white men.

Why? One simple explanation is that white men are more likely to possess pornographic manga. This is possible, but I suspect that something else is also at play here. Why were they even looking through Handley's international post or this latest man's laptop files? Perhaps they thought they had found what they were already half-looking for. Pedophiles, after all, are known to be mostly men, and among those imprisoned for sexually assaulting children, the vast majority are Caucasian. (This, despite the underrepresentation of Caucasians in the prison system generally.)

In other words, I would argue that reading manga as a white man is rather like driving an expensive sports car as a black man. You are always already a suspect in the eyes of law enforcement authority—not because the car or the comics in themselves are necessarily a problem per se, but because your possession of said items seems to indicate, to our prejudiced little minds, far more serious criminality involving the harm of real people. Do not think for a moment that these cases are only about comics and censorship.

Interestingly, Canadian Customs has also garnered a reputation for being especially hostile to materials of interest to the LGBT community. The feminist bookstore Little Sisters endured a series of court cases over what can only be called institutionalized homophobia.

In any case, this brand of prejudice, the attendant possibility of discrimination, and the way discovery of the already-anticipated misdeed becomes a self-reinforcing cycle—these all need to be discussed at length. Furthermore, we need to talk about how our sociocultural anxieties victimize certain groups under certain circumstances. But that discussion won't happen as long as comics fans of both genders and all stripes devolve into telling each other scare stories about how it could have been you.

[12]Casey Brienza is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Cambridge and Sociological Imagination’s Mediated Matters columnist.

Who do you think you are, Richard Sennett??? (2012-01-02 08:00)


Press below for parts 2 and 3 of the lecture.
IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/HMDb5aVPtHU


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/VmqK1FFBvn8
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/HMDb5aVPtHU
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/CDsOauvKxu0
Our most popular posts in January | The Sociological Imagination (2012-01-27 08:03:48)

[...] Who do you think you are, Richard Sennett?? [...]

Ezra Argaputra (2012-05-06 13:58:20)
Regards from Indonesia, I'm student of Faculty of Social and Political Sciences - Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia :)

[...] hilo de lo hablado esta mañana, dejo esta conferencia del sociólogo Richard Sennett sobre identidad y ciudad. En ella explica la diferencia que existe [...]

On the Impossibility of Being Original (2012-01-03 08:00)

[1]

When observing humankind there are two outstanding characteristics that never fail to reveal themselves; the desire to stand out, and the need to fit in. Of course, these are both highly contradictory, as are many of man's traits. Just as we yearn for exciting, novel experiences, while also requiring safe and familiar surroundings, and we desire both lust and friendship in relationships that inherently undermine the existence of both, the struggle for originality, in tandem with that of conformity, is similarly problematic.

In public spaces – especially those of schools and town centres – this process is frequently seen. The sporty types, usually those of football fans, are often together, and are usually the norm by which others in this generation establish themselves around. Whether a sportsman themselves, a casual football fan (of which most Brits naturally become, often without any conscious decision), or just wanting to be part of the group, the number of this type thrives wherever you go in this country. I would argue that by adhering to this overwhelming cultural standard the individuals are still seeking originality, by their endeavours to be the most athletic and most passionate sports person of them all (as is an integral part of sporting culture, on and off the field). But for the purpose of this argument, this – as is often labelled - 'jock' will be used as the cultural norm, of which to become one of is to conform to society.

Against this social standard arrives numerous social groups of which any person tends to fit into. For example, hardcore rock fans (sometimes labelled ‘metal heads’) can still be seen in groups of pierced, tattooed, long-haired, middle-aged men. The artsy types are spotted by their colourful, abstract or often retro hairstyles, make up and clothing (depending on whether they play music, dance or act), and the self-believed intelligent, middle-class, or intensely fashionable (by which I mean those who care and invest immensely into the latest fashion trends) types can currently be identified by knitwear, trousers and other very ‘British’ things. Of course, such groups are not as clearly identified or as stereotypical as I have portrayed, nor are they as simple. However, for the sake of this argument such generalisation is required. So, indeed, society is therefore trying to be themselves, and, against the sporting cultural standard, perhaps they are going some way to achieving this. But, crucially, the fact remains that each 'individual' has still found solace and conformity within its own ranks. The metal head found other metal heads, allowing their behaviours and appearance to naturally gravitate towards an established norm of their own and, therefore, neutralising the uniqueness that was the initial driving force behind their new persona. Seeing others may have even influenced the individual to take on the role in the first place.

If one is to be truly original such negotiation must be avoided; which, perhaps, is an impossible idea. I do not
believe for one second that should a person decide to take on a personality that is rejected by everyone he/she knows that they would persist. What is more likely is that they would tailor their individuality in line with more accepted characteristics; as seen by the modern obsession for unique phone covers and wallpapers for example. The popular mobile phone satisfies the requirement to conform with others, while the colourful, funky cover or personalised wallpaper allows the individual to feel unique. Clothing, music and hairstyle choices (to name a few) – particularly among our current generation of youths – follow a similar trend. Consequently, people’s individual urges and passions hardly ever reach any further than the tattoo, or the slightly more outrageous hairstyle; resulting in a failure to ever break out of the barriers of conformity that control how far one is allowed to go in order to be different. This is the reason why rap music and hip-hop is an infinitely more popular way of speaking one’s mind than poetry is among the youths of today, and why graffiti is the preferred choice of art for young adults. Both of which allow for individual expression while still adhering to the popular social trends of today.

The fact still remains, however, that a person’s individual ideas and thoughts can survive this cultural scrutiny as they are not easily seen, and therefore judged, by others. In this sense, within one’s own mind, true originality perhaps can be accomplished. It is when such ideas are put into practice that their individuality and – I would argue – true ‘value’ is compromised. It takes a special, and indeed very rare, type of person to keep faith with and demonstrate one’s views in a room full of those that think the opposite; and an even rarer type when the opposition is fuelled with hatred for, or is motivated against, those views. I have lost count of the number of times I have remained silent or renegotiated my response in times of disagreement or – which is usually the case – naivety or ignorance on the part of others. That is not to say that one’s individual thoughts are not often naïve or misunderstood also, but if it is truly one’s unaltered viewpoint then they should be, at least partly, commended.

It is therefore apparent that originality, particularly through actual human behaviours – crucially, the only avenue for such ideas to be applied anyhow - perhaps does not, and cannot, exist. The important conclusion that should necessarily be underlined is that every being, I feel, is indeed fantastically original, but painfully deprived of other, equally as inherent, qualities that are needed to realise and convey such expression. Particularly through one’s own cognitive conflicts, our inevitable consciousness of others and, more importantly, their moral judgement, and the humanistic need to navigate our true selves in line with others, this struggle is highly visible. In essence, we are programmed to gain acceptance from, and model, others. Consequently, our own desires, beliefs and, in turn, our actions must be compromised. Indeed, civilisation would perhaps not be able to function without this process.

Through a sociological lens, I believe this battle for true individual expression can be further explored and, potentially, swayed; such is the power of social structure and its effect on our innate selves.


On The Impossibility Of Being Original – A Sociological Perspective | The Sociological Imagination (2012-05-02 08:01:03) [...] is a follow up to this earlier [...]
In this video, Surrey psychologist Dr Peter Hegarty discusses whether sex offenders and lads' mags are talking the same language. His findings shed a rather worrying light on the rise of lad's mags in the UK culture. How could we respond to this? Should we respond to it? Are these just the chance findings of one study? Or does it shed a light on the broad effects which the mainstreaming of soft core pornography is having on young men in the UK?

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/v4tQ9uMZyyI
2. http://www.surrey.ac.uk/psychology/people/dr_peter_hegarty/

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Sex offenders and lads' mags « Rewriting The Rules (2012-01-04 09:29:51)

[...] Other research presented at the Institute of Education Sexualisation of Culture conference (see my last post) found that people struggled to tell the difference between statements of convicted sex offenders and statements taken from mens' magazines. This raises many interesting questions (see post about this on The Sociological Imagination). [...]

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Imagining the human: new media tools (2012-01-05 08:00)

This is something about which you could only dream in the 1980s (and we did dream of it): being able to see how a human being changes through the years. Not that it was impossible, but it belonged to the realm of professional photography and required the resources, skill, and patience that very few could afford. Now that many have access to digital cameras and computers, it is possible, and less skill and patience is needed. Yet how many of us - just humans, and sociologists in particular, are taking advantage of the new tools?

Here are two lovely examples:

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ZGgd0DUKok4
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/1llHXUFdrl
A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Our readers favourite sociology & theory quotes (2012-01-07 08:00)

Just before Christmas we asked readers on Twitter for their favourite sociology and theory quotes:

"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the "emergency situation" in which we live is the rule." - Walter Benjamin (from @Rykalski)

"The old world is dying, and the new world struggles to be born. Now is the time of monsters." - Gramsci (from @mark_carrigan)

"Whatever sociology may be, it is the result of constantly asking the question, what is the meaning of this?"
C. Wright Mills (from @Dunk_West)

"Ass hat" - @TroyMcGinnis (from @SociologyGirl)

"Reflexiveness...is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of mind" G.H. Mead (from @Dunk_West)

"All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned...man is...compelled to face...his real conditions of life." Marx (from @Cybernoelie)

"The risk climate of modernity is thus unsettling for everyone: no one escapes." Anthony Giddens (from @ChrisOrbit-group)

What are your favourite quotes? tweet [2]us or [3]e-mail and we’ll compile them in a few weeks

3. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-01-08 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:
Who is Barack Obama? (2012-01-09 08:00)

I’m someone who is far from sympathetic to postmodernism, seeing it as, at best, mildly interesting observations couched in a silly insular language and, at worst, reactionary attitudes presenting themselves as radical intellectual chic. Yet I find it difficult to watch a video like the one below and not feel compelled to go running back to Baudrillard. News just in: the President swatted a fly! Isn’t that cool? Well, to be entirely honest, I think it is. Or at least I did when I first saw the video. Yet I also find it absurd that I had that reaction. Even more so the fact that this act (so fitting for a POTUS who chose the [1]Secret Service codename Renegade) was covered so widely in the media. So what’s going on?

IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/ORZ00OyKp0I
In his book [3]The Obama Syndrome: Surrender at Home, War Abroad Tariq Ali, the 'urbane, Oxford-educated polemicist', sheds some light on these questions. This short book, which has the air of an essay project which spiralled out of control once Ali got writing, has a twin focus: the underlying continuities which can be witnessed in Obama’s domestic and foreign policy, in relation to what went before, as well as the spirited and incisive attempts made by the administration - and its defenders - to present these continuities as anything but. Ali’s writing is, as always, thorough and pointed, continually substantiating his claims without losing the flow of his polemic. However he is at his most adept when it comes to picking apart the prevailing narratives about the President which abound in the contemporary United States:

"on Fox television and right-wing radio, where these venues’ shallow, coarse and swaggering rabble regularly present Obama as a ‘socialist’ who is soft on Islam, not sufficiently pro-Israel, and may not even have been born in the United States and therefore may even be an ‘illegal president’ but in any case certainly remains an out-of-control radical. If only. None of the right-wing hysteria bears any relation to reality."

But we know all this, don’t we? Obama himself tore this idiocy apart with genuinely impressive comic timing (another example of how cool Renegade is) at the 2011 White House Correspondents’ Dinner:

If we reject this view, it still begs the question of who Obama is and how he fits into the current politics of the US. Ali also takes aim at the common liberal doxa of Obama as an (overly?) consensus-orientated politician, a good and intelligent man in a wicked and corrupt system:

"The portrayal of Obama as a good man in a bad world is no more convincing. The argument that compromises are sometimes essential to achieve limited progressive aims is correct. The problem is that
Obama, while an extremely intelligent human being, is not a progressive leader by any stretch of the imagination. Wishing that he were is fine but does not bring about the required transformation.

In reality, Barack Obama is a skilful and gifted machine politician who rapidly rose to the top. Once that is understood there is little more about him that should surprise anyone: to talk of betrayal is foolish, for nothing has been betrayed but one’s own illusions.

So if neither of these prevailing views are correct then who is Barack Obama? The difficulty of answering this question is why I presaged this post with a couple of sentences about postmodernism. We know Obama, intimately, yet we don’t. He’s written a genuinely engaging, multi-million selling memoir. He’s done talk show appearances (complete with all-too-human gaffes) in a way no other President has done. Yet the man is a chimera, an empty signifier onto which an entire country’s dreams and nightmares can be projected. It would be naïve to think that Obama, as well as his team, are anything other than intimately aware of this fact. Nonetheless, the question remains: who is Barack Obama? I can’t answer that question. Nor can Tariq Ali. But he does compile some interesting quotes from former acquaintances of Obama when he was embedded in the brutal machine politics of Chicago. While not answering the question, they left me with the thought that the answer lies in the memories of those who knew the man behind the renegade in his earlier career:

"He’s a vacuous opportunist. I’ve never been an Obama supporter. I’ve known him since the very beginning of his political career, which was his campaign for the seat in my state senate district in Chicago. He struck me then as a vacuous opportunist, a good performer with an ear for how to make white liberals like him. I argued at the time that his fundamental political center of gravity, beneath an empty rhetoric of hope and change and new directions, is neoliberal." - Adolph Reed, African American scholar and activist

"Barack leaned over and stuck his jagged, strained face into my space and told me in an eerie, dark voice that came from some secret place within the ugly side of him, 'You embarrassed me on the Senate floor and if you ever do it again I will kick your ass!' I said, 'What?' He said, 'You heard me, [expletive], and if you come back here by the telephones, where the press can't see it, I'll kick your ass right now!' - Rickie Hendon, African American politician during Obama’s time in the Illinois state senate.

"’It’s amazing how he formed a black identity,’ Rush said, rising from his desk and starting, theatrically, to sashay across his office, mimicking Obama’s sinuous walk. ‘Barack’s walk is an adaptation of the strut that comes from the street. There’s a certain break at the knees as you walk and you get a certain roll going. Watch. You see?’ Rush laughed at his own imitation. ‘And he’s the first president of the United States to walk like that, I can guarantee you that! But lemme tell you, I never noticed that he walked like that back then.’" - former Black Panther Bobby Rush who beat Obama in a 2000 congressional primary.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/ORZ00OyKp0I](http://www.youtube.com/embed/ORZ00OyKp0I)
3. [http://www.versobooks.com/books/516](http://www.versobooks.com/books/516)
4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/n9mzJhvC-8E](http://www.youtube.com/embed/n9mzJhvC-8E)
Spotlight on Asexuality Studies (2012-01-10 08:00)

"Spotlight on Asexuality Studies" was a groundbreaking event hosted by the Identity Repertoires/Mind the Gap research group in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. Academics, activists, community members, therapists and students gathered in the university library and online to discuss contemporary asexual research, with papers presented both in-person and from the United States and Canada via video-conference.

For more information about the event, see the [1]website.


If you're interested in asexuality, take a look at some of the posts in the archives.
New 'iconic' image of 9/11? Photographs and meanings (2012-01-11 08:00)

A newly popularised photograph from the bombing of New York on 9/11/2001 has caught the attention of the media and the public. The image, taken by photographer Thomas Hoepker, has stirred up controversial opinions. Perfect example of the ambiguity of images: never take an image for granted.

[1]


Read the analysis in the Guardian [2]here
Do 'prestigious' journals make academics lazy? An unlikely parallel with the art world (2012-01-12 08:00)

In a [1] recent book economist Don Thompson explores the crucial role that branding has in the contemporary art market. With the market skewed by an influx of the ultra-rich seeking something to do with their money, a strange dynamic emerges. As the author was told by a former specialist at Sotheby's auction house, you should "never underestimate how insecure buyers are about contemporary art, and how much they always need reassurance". This widely recognised, though little discussed, characteristic of the contemporary art world massively expands the power of brand name auction house, galleries and collectors. The obscenely wealthy but time-poor rely on such brands to guarantee the virtues of the art they invest in, assuaging the insecurities about their purchases which are only sustained because "they are not willing to spend the time required to educate themselves to the point of overcoming insecurity".

For instance, as the author observes, "[2]Larry Gagosian's clients can simply substitute his judgement or that of his gallery for their own, and purchase whatever is being shown". How different is this from the prestige conferred upon an academic publication by its inclusion within a well-respected journal? Simply denigrating the lack of taste shown by ultra-wealthy art collectors misses the point. Unless one wishes to descend into facile subjectivism (or conversely argue that his corporate operation indelibly corrupts his aesthetic judgements) it stands to reason that Gagosian's judgements do function, as well as pretty much anyone's could, as a cypher for distinction. It's perfectly possible some complete crap occasionally finds its way into his galleries but, in terms of the unavoidably intersubjective normative standards which prevail at a given point in time (and which everyone must engage with even if they reject them) his judgements will tend to point to high quality work. Similarly, rigorous blind peer-review, conducted by a pool of top academics, within the traditions of a long-standing and well respected journal will tend to identify high quality papers. In both cases the additional competition which prestige generates, as many try to occupy a space which can only hold a few, entrenches this capacity to bestow a perceived distinction.

In both cases the task of filtering, sorting a range of cultural products in terms of their quality, takes place through bureaucratic processes. Particular institutions become able to invest cultural products with the feel of quality, a process which sits elusively between genuine normativity and contingent power, tending towards success in its aims but also shaping the wider social context within which such 'success' can be judged. Within the art world "the dealer brand often becomes a substitute for, and certainly is a reinforcement of, aesthetic judgement". Is it the case that within the academic world, inclusion in a prestigious journal becomes a substitute for, and certainly is a reinforcement of, intellectual judgement? As a thought-experiment: how would academic life differ if these status hierarchies weren't available to help us navigate the knowledge system? How would we respond? I suspect that activities which are already everyday features of the academic world (particularly dialogue and debate within communities of practice) would take on a newfound importance. What else would be different? Answers on the back of a postcard please.

1. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Million-Stuffed-Shark-Economics-Contemporary/dp/1845133021](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Million-Stuffed-Shark-Economics-Contemporary/dp/1845133021"

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Academia 2.0 | The Sociological Imagination (2012-04-04 08:01:34)
[... ] Do 'prestigious' journals make academics lazy? An unlikely parallel with the art world [...]

Do 'prestigious' journals make academics lazy? An unlikely parallel with the art world « Knowledge Team (2012-07-09 14:54:48) [... ] on sociologicalimagination.org Share this:CondivisioneFacebookTwitterDiggLinkedInRedditStumbleUponEmailStampaLike this:Mi piaceBe [...]

976
Universities cashing in on library fines (2012-01-13 08:00)

Universities across the UK have collected almost £50m from fining students for overdue library books in the past six years, the Guardian reports.

Some of the top universities, who have accrued the most money from overdue books, include Leeds University, Manchester University and the University of Wolverhampton. Exact figures for the top ten fine raising universities are as follows:

**University of Leeds** – £1,869,340  
**University of Manchester** – £1,299,342  
**University of Wolverhampton** – £1,252,253  
**King’s College London** – £1,197,715  
**University of Hertfordshire** – £1,147,238  
**University of Birmingham** – £1,114,863  
**University of Plymouth** – £1,058,777  
**University of Nottingham** – £1,025,560  
**Kingston University** – £1,020,753  
**University of Durham** – £1,005,426

With university library fines as little as 10p for each day a book is overdue, it demonstrates the growing tendency for students to return books library books late. Worse still, many books are never returned – more than 300,000 university library books remain unaccounted for.

Some of the worst offenders include Bucks New University, Oxford University and the University of Kent. The top 10 universities with the most unaccounted for library books were:

**Bucks New University** – 30,540  
**University of Oxford** – 20,923  
**University of Kent** – 19,613  
**University of Sunderland** – 17,650  
**University of Teesside** – 15,815
Sociologists get radical (2012-01-13 20:46)

"Conforming to society": Alan Watts (2012-01-14 08:00)

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-01-14 08:00)
you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Follow us on Twitter here:


[4] Twitter Updates


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Architecture, Art and Wellbeing (2012-01-15 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/mzgE0M8gqvs?feature=player_embedded
Recognising the people who make it all work (2012-01-16 08:00)

In a recent [1]article in the Times Higher, the registrar of the University of Nottingham calls attention to an important and often overlooked dimension to the politics of the UK government’s higher education ‘reforms’: the role of support staff. As pro-marketization ideologues clamour for the out sourcing out of ‘back office’ services to private contractors, the people who perform these roles, often deeply entrenched in their home institutions, are treated as the most easily replaceable cogs in University PLC. He suggests that this reflects a wider under appreciation of a large swathe of the university’s staff:

Too often, their somewhat anonymous roles mean that they are treated as third-class citizens in the university context. Because they are out of sight and largely out of mind, most people really don’t know what they do; as a consequence, it becomes much easier for others to write them off and offer them up as the first to be sacrificed when cuts have to be made. Back-office staff do not have an obvious income line and can easily be regarded as expendable. The attitude is resonant of the Victorian view of those "below stairs". This perception (or lack of perception) is unhelpful, and not terribly good for morale - particularly among those who are so casually dismissed as being "just back office".

Furthermore, it suggests that such staff have no role in the 'front line' operations of the university. This is patently absurd. Such 'front line' operations are endlessly reliant on 'back end' staff. To such an extent that teaching and research couldn’t function without them and the entire dichotomy is revealed as misleading. As he writes:

But in any position, people - whether they are employed by a university or by a private-sector company - must be treated properly. Universities are special places. Interactions with and understanding of academic staff and students are a key part of every job throughout the organisation. Lock people away in the back office and they might as well be working for a paper wholesaler in Slough.

In a theatre, the front-of-house and back-of-house personnel have different roles and different talents; nonetheless, all are vital in supporting the performance. In universities, all professional services staff, whether in direct contact with academic staff and students or not, contribute to institutional success. Casual talk of outsourcing or downsizing back-office functions undermines this contribution.

So please choose your words carefully. Better still, let’s just ban the term "back office".

Here at SI we agree completely. But let’s not just ban the term ‘back office’. Let’s also make more of an effort to recognise the hard and sometimes thankless work of those whose skill and diligence daily prevents the intrinsically chaos-prone institutions that are universities from spiralling into chaos.
Hip-Hop or Shakespeare? (2012-01-17 01:24)

I realise this won’t be to everyone’s tastes but, given how fascinating I found it, I couldn’t resist posting it up. Three of the most talented young artists outside the mainstream gathered last year at the British Library to discuss the ills and myths of contemporary Hip Hop. Even if this isn’t a style of music you like, it’s worth listening to the discussion simply for the plethora of sociological insights it offers into youth culture, gang violence and the intersections of capitalism and music.
I needed to share this blog post, "The Sociology of Hip Hop | The Sociological Imagination" along with my own buddies on facebook or twitter. I only desired to pass on your great posting! Many thanks, Damion

Tending your 'ideas garden' (2012-01-18 08:00)

Do you value your ideas? If you’re reading this website then chances are you answered ‘yes’ to that question. Yet unless you record all your ideas I’d argue that you don’t value them. At least not as much as you could. It’s a difficult habit to acquire and it can be time-consuming. But technology is making it so much easier. If you have a smart phone, use twitter or blog then you have easy outlets for both recording your ideas and making them publicly available.

In the appendix to Sociological Imagination, entitled On Intellectual Craftsmanship, C. Wright Mills advocates keeping a file or journal within which to record your ideas. He argues that doing so:

encourages you to capture ‘fringe-thoughts’: various ideas which may be by-products of everyday life, snatches of conversation overheard on the street, or, for that matter, dreams. Once noted, these may
lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience...

by keeping an adequate file and thus developing self-reflective habits, you learn how to keep your inner
world awake. Whenever you feel strongly about events or ideas you must try not to let them pass from
your mind, but instead to formulate them for your files and in so doing draw out their implications, show
yourself either how foolish these feelings or ideas are, or how they might be articulated into productive
shape.

So why not start? Tools like [1]Posterous or [2]Tumblr can be great places for ‘online scrapbooks’ or ‘ideas gardens’. Though of course not all our ideas are good. But I take Wright-Mills to be saying that it’s only through recording our ideas in such a file that we become able to properly evaluate them and that, in doing so, we learn to keep ourselves intellectually alive.

[3]

Deborah Lupton (2012-06-22 08:25:24)
I agree that when you have an idea, it should be written down. Most pieces of writing, big or small, can be used for something, now that there are so many ways of sharing ideas. I keep a document on my computer in which I jot down ideas for writing, whatever form this may take, as soon as these ideas come to me. As these ideas grow, I make separate documents for each one. Some will result in tweets, some in blog posts, some in journal articles, some in books.
“Why do you find blogging useful as a researcher?” | Digital Sociology (2013-02-23 08:08:51)
[... ] how similar the experience of others is to my own here, namely the role a blog can play as an ‘ideas garden’ helping to articulate and develop your thinking in a much more immediate way than other public [...]

“Why do you find blogging useful as a researcher?” | The Sociological Imagination (2013-03-04 08:00:24)
[... ] how similar the experience of others is to my own here, namely the role a blog can play as an ‘ideas garden’ helping to articulate and develop your thinking in a much more immediate way than other public [...]

A round up of recent articles for PhD researchers (2012-01-19 08:00)

Here are some of our recent favourites:

- [1] PhD education and mental health: A follow-up
- [2] Time-out to reflect on the bigger picture
- [3] Reflections on taking the intellectual carving knife to your PhD thesis
- [5] My first academic post: looking back at month one

Would you like to suggest some for the next round up? If so then please [6] tweet or [7] e-mail us and we’ll add them in!

2. [http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/researchexchange/entry/timeout_to_reflect/](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/researchexchange/entry/timeout_to_reflect/)
5. [http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2012/jan/03/staff-member-academic-post](http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2012/jan/03/staff-member-academic-post)
7. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Are you interested in being a Postgraduate Forum Convenor for the British Sociological Association? (2012-01-20 08:00)

[1]
Are you interested in being a Postgraduate Forum Convenor?

Our existing team work together to make sure that student members of the Association are kept up-to-date with matters of specific interest to them. They will also facilitate contact between student members and the BSA Council. In return for their hard work and dedication.

Postgraduate Forum Convenors are offered a free place at BSA events and all travel expenses are reimbursed.

The Convenors’ tasks include:

- Circulating information to other postgraduates via the PG Forum email distribution list
- Maintaining the PG Forum pages of the BSA website & the Facebook fan page.
- Supporting and hosting PG Focus podcasts
- Making contributions to Network
- Assisting with the processing of BSA Support Fund applications by joining the panel of members who grant awards from the Fund
- Helping organise the Postgraduate workshops/events at the BSA Annual Conference
- Representing the interests of Postgraduate members at Council meetings

Since the PG Focus podcasts were launched to great success in 2009, they have become an increasingly important part of the PG Forum activities. We are therefore particularly interested in having someone join us who has knowledge about, or an interest in learning, skills relating to the compiling, editing, uploading, and online maintenance of the blog and PG Focus podcasts.

The successful applicant will work with current convenors to become proficient at assisting with the online and media aspects of the PG Forum’s activities. The new convenor(s) will also share other duties, including attending on average one Council meeting and two PG Forum meetings per year; quickly and efficiently dealing with email correspondence regarding Support Fund applications and other business; overseeing the organization of a session for the PG Day and spearheading new initiatives that will benefit the PG Forum community.

While the time commitment for this role is flexible, with responsibilities shared between convenors, and the workload varies over the year, applicants can expect to devote between 4 and 16 hours per month to PG Forum responsibilities.

If you have questions about what being a convenor entails, please contact us at PGForum@britsoc.org.uk

Include a letter explaining why you think you are suitable for this role.
Deadline for applications: 1 March 201

Zygmunt Bauman on How to Survive Death (2012-01-21 08:00)

Zygmunt Bauman will be keynote speaker at this year's [2]British Sociological Association conference in Leeds this April. He will also speak to postgraduates at the BSA Postgraduate Day which is the day before the start of the main conference. There will also be a number of showings of the [3]Bauman documentary at the conference.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/NWaOqThdAs4](http://www.youtube.com/embed/NWaOqThdAs4)
2. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/)

Why does the link related to Bauman’s documentary take me to a website about running and foot therapy, but not to a page that has something to do with the documentary?

Because you're looking at a post from 2 1/2 years ago and, as much as it may stun you to learn this, web pages don't stay online for ever.
Sociology@Warwick (2012-01-22 08:00)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Nick Crossley on Relational Sociology (2012-01-23 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Nick Crossley about his recent book Towards Relational Sociology. The interview covers relational sociology, interdisciplinary approaches to social theory, the future of social theory and the contested status of quantitative methods.

1. http://www.markcarrigan.net/
2. http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/nicholas.crossley/
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=S-wEqUL_HUIC&printsec=frontcover&dq=nick+crosley&hl=en&sa=X&ei=I5oUT9uRK8yAhQf4MSYAg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=nick%20crosley

ANNOUNCEMENT: Summer School on Vampires and Vampirism (2012-01-24 08:00)

Apply for this summer school at your own peril!
Euro-Balkan Institute for Social and Humanities Research, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

15th OHRID SUMMER UNIVERSITY

2012

Summer School “Vampires and Vampirism: Between Anthropology, Folklore and Popular Culture”

to be held 12th-30th August, Ohrid, Macedonia

- CALL FOR APPLICATIONS -

Deadline for submitting the application: June 15th 2012.

Read more [2]here
Prickles and Goo (or Quals versus Quants) (2012-01-25 08:00)

A new video of an old talk by philosopher [1]Alan Watts (1915-1973) perfectly illustrates the falsity of the quantitative vs qualitative sociology divide:

[EMBED]

The best of Sociological Imagination (2012-01-26 08:00)

Check out what we’ve been making with Bundlr, a new online curation tool:

- [1]The Sociological Imagination
- [2]Public Scholarship and Private Commitments

What do you think? We’re still in the early stages of figuring out Bundlr but expect to see much more of these. We’d also like to get more people involved in the curation: themes to be suggested by readers and then curation for a bundle on that theme would take place through open-ended collaboration?

Our most popular posts in January (2012-01-27 08:00)

1. [1]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
2. [2]Who do you think you are, Richard Sennett???
3. [3]A Mexican, a Kiwi and a Nigerian walk into a bar... a dose of (sociological) Xmas humour
Social Class and Educational Aspiration (2012-01-27 10:07)

The BSA postgraduate forum is sponsoring an event of Social Class and Educational Aspiration for postgraduates involved in this area of research. The Conference and Workshop will be hosted by the University of East London on Tuesday 20th and Wednesday 21st March 2012. The event is structured around five keynote lectures by leading social class and education academics alongside two tutorial PhD workshops, conducted by the academic speakers. Conference abstracts are sought from 18 postgraduates; eight of whom will be selected to give a 20 minute talk and the rest will be invited to give a poster presentation. There is an option to only give a poster presentation but you must still send an abstract. It is intended that the conference theme is interpreted widely, however the following themes in relation to social class are of particular interest:

- Educational aspiration,
- Educational attainment/achievement,
- Access to higher education,
- Recent changes in educational policies,
- Theoretical and methodological discussions on social class and education.

If you are interested in taking part in this event please see [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/postgrad.htm for further details on how to apply. You will need to complete the application form and write an abstract of no more than 250 words on how your research demonstrates a sociological and/or educational critical engagement with
social class and education – in particular educational aspiration.

If you have any further queries please contact Jenny and Tamsin at: [2]sceaevent2012@gmail.com. The deadline for applications is Monday February 6th 2012. Please note that this event is free for all participants who are BSA members and £25 to all non-BSA members. All participants are expected to be present for the full two days.

Are you interested in being a Postgraduate Forum Convenor for the British Sociological Association? (2012-01-28 08:00)

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- Maintaining the PG Forum pages of the BSA website & the Facebook fan page.
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- Making contributions to Network
- Assisting with the processing of BSA Support Fund applications by joining the panel of members who grant awards from the Fund
- Helping organise the Postgraduate workshops/events at the BSA Annual Conference
- Representing the interests of Postgraduate members at Council meetings
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While the time commitment for this role is flexible, with responsibilities shared between convenors, and the workload varies over the year, applicants can expect to devote between 4 and 16 hours per month to PG Forum responsibilities.

If you have questions about what being a convenor entails, please contact us at PGForum@britsoc.org.uk

Include a letter explaining why you think you are suitable for this role.
Deadline for applications: 1 March 201


Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-01-29 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates

Breaking the ‘Fukuyama taboo’— a journey through the global crisis with Slavoj Žižek. (2012-01-30 08:00)

Love him or hate him, Slavoj Žižek is no ordinary thinker, with a reputation for his always provocative and take-no-prisoners approach to social analysis. In an interview for Al-Jazeera released at the end of the year just passed, the Slovenian philosopher takes the audience through an intellectual journey across the momentous changes and the subsequent upheavals that have shaken the global financial and political system. As ever, his analysis is controversial and yet fascinating. It starts from the protests movements, and goes on touching the widest possible span of issues, from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the rise of China, challenging our understanding of the world order as we (think we) know it.

In the wake of the most severe global crisis of our times, Žižek suggests that the much needed ‘revolutionary change’ will not come about in the form of a miraculous solution. Change is already taking place, and it is manifesting itself though the growing, fast-spreading awareness that the difficulties we are all confronting are neither temporary nor compartmentalised. The current global issues have not been merely caused by some bad, greedy guys operating in an otherwise good system—they are part and parcel of the system itself, and the recent protest movements have clearly shed light on this. Hence, what really matters in this specific conjuncture is not to find fast solutions, but to break what Žižek calls ‘the iconic Fukuyama-taboo’ — the so far largely unquestioned “unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism” and its assumed irreplaceability.

From this angle, the very remarkable achievement of the protests lies in the way in which they have exposed how the system is not simply ‘faulty’ and needing fixing but, rather, it is likely to implode— because it has lost its self-evidence and ‘automatic legitimacy’. This is why, in Žižek’s view, it is beyond the remit of protest movements such as ‘Occupy’ to make realistic demands or to suggest for stable solutions to the global crisis. Their truly revolutionary aim has been fulfilled: they have removed the lid of one of the most cumbersome Pandora’s boxes of our age—they have revealed the limits of the “End of History”, and released a large flux of energy of protest in this way. However, Žižek concludes, what the future has in store for us is uncertain, because it will depend on the result of the final and most difficult of the battles — the struggle for who will appropriate such great energy.
Has the snow revolution donned a mink coat? (2012-01-31 08:00)

Elena Omel’chenko and Nastya Min’kova, MYPLACE team members at Centre for Youth Research, Higher School of Economics (St Petersburg) on the latest from Russia’s ‘Snow Revolution’ (27th December 2011)

This article was initially posted to the [1]MYPLACE blog. For more information on the MYPLACE project, follow them on [2]Twitter or visit the project’s website: [3]HERE

The snow revolution in Russia continues. The pro-Kremlin movement activists are still searching for evidence of the involvement of the US State Department and the residents of Russia’s cities are attending protest meetings for the third Saturday in a row. Among them are many young people. Among them are many who regularly engage in street politics. But among them too are many who have never taken to the streets before. The following blog collates links to all communications about protest meetings in Russia and abroad which took place on 24 December:


50-100,000 people gathered. The figures provided by the city police and the by the meeting’s organizers vary significantly and this has become the source of much humour. The web columnist (at ru.net), Aleksandr Plushchev, published in his blog photographs of various events from Sakharov Square ([6]http://www.flickr.com/photos/plushev/6564495887/). In the first case, the police estimated that there were more than 50,000 participants of the pro-Kremlin movement ‘Nashi’ while in the second, they claimed there were 29,000 participants at the opposition meeting.

The Moscow protest set the town for people’s creative input. Many placards took up the theme of ‘Putin and his condoms’ because, a day earlier, the Prime Minister had likened the white ribbons, which have become a symbol of protest against the dishonest elections, to contraceptives. On the 15th December, during a live TV broadcast and in response to a question about whether the ribbons might become a symbol of a new ‘colour’ revolution, Putin said: 


On the tide of these feelings, there appeared on the official Russian prankster site, a recording of a conversation conducted by the prankster nicknamed Vovan222 with the head of the Central Electoral Commission, Vladimir Churov. The young man introduced himself as a well known Kremlin official and, on behalf of the ‘twins’ [Medvedev and Putin], told Churov he had been sacked. Judging by the conversation, the prank worked; Churov, whose responsibility it was to deliver the vote count at the elections, believed he had been fired. The audio file was quickly disseminated via the diaries of Live Journal contributors ([8]http://www.livejournal.ru/themes/id/42793?from=twitter ). The authorities have responded already; some representatives of the Presidential administration have called people attending protest meetings ‘sympathetic’ or ‘worthy’. And recently Putin’s deputy, Sergei Ivanov, declared recent events to indicate ‘genuine freedom of speech’ in Russia. However, despite the protestors finally having been noticed, and even shown on central TV channels (previously the subject had been ignored), the authorities remain deaf to their demands. Dmitrii Medvedev has promised the people that he will restore some of their power to elect regional governors, but so far nothing more.


3.2 February

Tales of Christmas past #1 The Invisible Christmas (2012-02-01 08:00)
The building looked different to how I’d seen it previously.. that is before the guests had arrived. The hall was large and it was the only area that both guests and volunteers had access to. In the corner a TV blared. Groups of tables and chairs were set out, next to areas for clothing distribution and a hatch were guests were given hot drinks and food. Bowls of crisps, sweets and biscuits were everywhere. This felt slightly odd. Creating a party atmosphere was perhaps well intended but seemed a little disingenuous to the reality of the circumstances.

Regardless of the training sessions I’d attended I felt apprehension. The situation, we had been warned, could be unpredictable. Violence sometimes occurred but this was usually outside and between guests. The biggest threat was overdose. The year before a guest had died at the shelter on New Years Eve. Although beds were checked every 15 mins the wheezing ‘or death rattle’ had not been identified in time. Most guests I’d been told, had been philosophical about this. ‘He had died with a warm meal inside him in a safe bed surrounded by his mates’. ‘God bless’ they wrote in the art workshop the next day.

I was working front of house – so this meant companionship, tea fetching and board games although my first official task was toilet duty. Drugs and alcohol were not permitted but addiction, I witnessed, was a relentless master. Toilet checks were performed under the neon lights every 15 minutes for substance use, overdose or other illicit activity. There was no real bother on any of my shifts.

The volunteers were plenty. They outnumbered the guests on some evenings and encompassed a wide range of people. Food was donated generously, was in excess at times and of top quality. Some of Bristol’s best chefs were doing shifts in the kitchen. Three meals a day were given out, sweets crisps and biscuits in-between and the shelter tried to ensure that no one was turned away from the 50 beds available. Most guests moved in and stayed for the two week Christmas period. This was usually the most stable place they had been for the entire year normally moving on every night.

The guests were of all ages, and came from all walks of life. Some were local residents who were alone at Christmas and wanted company. Some were 'hidden homeless' – who survived by kipping on mates sofas and gave their usual hosts a break over the festive period. Most though were homeless the year through and stuck in unbreakable cycles of addiction, unemployment, mental health illness and prostitution.
It was a Christmas bubble. We all knew that the situation wasn’t real. That nothing would change. But for those two weeks of the year, life was made more bearable for the guests. Jokes were exchanged, games were lost and won. Second hand clothes were traded. Tea was drunk and songs were sung.

It was difficult to see how some of the guests had ended up there. Clever, funny, personable, educated. Others illustrated the miserable and mostly hopeless reality of those living in the grip of addiction. Missing person cards were handed out to us at the beginning of the shift in the hope that amongst the guests a specific friend or loved one could be identified. Occasionally people were recognised, but often they didn’t want to be found ‘Give them the message I’m alright’ They would say.

Nicholas was seventeen. He had problems with his family and at school and had been crashing on mate’s sofas for over a year. The first thing I noticed about him was how clever he was. If he was engaged in something he was really bright. He would win at nearly all the games he played and would teach others. He was extremely patient at my totally inability to pick up a lot of the games we played. Nicholas didn’t have an obvious class A or alcohol addiction (although I’m not medically qualified to make any kind of assessment especially given it was only three shifts I volunteered). He talked about wanting to go to college and said he spent most of his time smoking weed. I saw so much potential there. Don’t drop anchor here, I thought.

Edward and Rosa seemed to be a couple - both alcoholics. They were in their forties would have once been well dressed had it not been for the dirt and tatter of their clothes. I found them the most difficult to sit with. He would insult her constantly, both to her face in front of other people. A consistent barrage of verbal abuse. She had swollen ulcers on her hands and feet – infected track marks. She seemed indifferent to the constant degradation.

Alan scared me. He was very tall, he may have been in the forces once. He observed the room and stood apart from everyone. He was always watching. Always looking for an opportunity, assessing the power relationships and dynamics in the room. Street life teaches you a different set of survival skills. There was something intimidating which overwhelmed me yet in a flash it was gone and he was crying like a baby.

Ricardo was from Brazil. I spent my first evening almost exclusively with him. He was in his twenties. He was a rent boy – and extremely distressed. I held his hands as he cried for hours. He told me stories of life on the streets, of rape. Of concerns over HIV and the stigma amongst homeless communities about homosexuality. He had been a dancer. He delighted at dressing up and ransacked the clothing piles for fuchsia fur coats and sequin handbags which quickly got traded for cigarettes and other favours. The only thing I could do was be with him and see him and hear him for who he was and what he had been through. He cried so many tears that night. I really felt that I had helped. The next day I was happy to see him again and bounced over to catch up on how he was doing. He didn’t remember me.

It was a year ago I volunteered. I know I helped but ultimately found it hard to feel good about my contribution. The shelter was over staffed – some shifts even had waiting lists. Food flowed as did the goodwill to almost obscene amounts...what a lot of Christmas spirit... But where are we the rest of the year I wondered? The shelter struggles to find staff outside of Christmas. Sure. A brief respite from the trauma and danger of life on the street, but the ‘guests’ in reality were lost. This was a bitter pill to swallow. The experience stayed with me but it was a good lesson. Anyone can be homeless. Anyone can be the victim of abuse or suffer mental illness or become an addict. And it happens all year round. I decided that it’s more important to contribute in a way which were sustainable and longer term. But I guess most of us didn’t get around to being that altruistic yet.

There are other stories from the shelter of course, but its Christmas and there is shopping to be done and I guess you won’t have much time to read them all.. I’m lucky that I get to choose not to be at the shelter this year. I’ll never forget my experience. I’d like to think that the same ‘guests’ will make it through to 2012 but then ....I will
A round up of recent social media & academic publishing articles (2012-02-02 08:00)

1. [1] Talk point: what will the impact of Apple’s iBooks 2 be on education?
2. [2] The advent of online dissemination techniques allow academics to focus just on developing great ideas, without needlessly trying to play the system
3. [3] Five minutes with Conor Gearty: “It is very frustrating that my online project The Rights’ Future counts for nothing in my professional life. It is not teaching; it is not scholarly research; and it does not have impact”.

What are universities? (2012-02-03 08:00)

Note the date...

Up to now the universities have been the secular refuge of mediocrity, the salary of ignorance, the safe hospital for all intellectual invalids and—what is even worse—the place where all forms of tyranny and insensitivity
found the chairs where they could be taught. The universities have thus become faithful mirrors of these decadent societies which offer the sad sight of a senile immobility. That is why science, facing these closed and shuttered houses, remains silent or mutilated and grotesque, merely serves bureaucracy. When in a fleeting period of liberalism the university opened its doors to some loftier minds, it very soon repented and made the existence of those minds within its walls impossible. That is why under such regimes the dominant forces carry education towards mediocrity and that is why the vital development of our universities is never the fruit of an organic process, but only the result of revolutionary upsurges.

(from Student Power in Latin America: The Cordoba Manifesto 1918, (Transl & reprinted in Minerva, 1968))

Are you interested in being a Postgraduate Forum Convenor for the British Sociological Association?
(2012-02-04 08:00)

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Include a letter explaining why you think you are suitable for this role.
Deadline for applications: 1 March 201

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-02-05 08:00)

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[1]Sociological Imagination

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates
The best of Sociological Imagination (2012-02-06 08:00)

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- [1] The Sociological Imagination
- [2] Public Scholarship and Private Commitments

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FROM PROTEST TO POWER: A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION (2012-02-07 08:00)

[1] 1002
It would seem that the travails of contemporary capitalism offer the left a huge opportunity to present a comprehensive alternative analysis and programme of action to neo-liberalism. Yet this has not proved to be the case. There has been protest a plenty and a deluge of moral and economic critiques but no comprehensive theoretical analysis integrated with an alternative political programme. When asked what is their alternative to capitalism, radical activists and intellectuals tend to offer specific suggestions rather than a blueprint for change. To be fair many social movement activists have taken an informed decision to seek change from the grass roots upwards rather risk a preconceived top downwards approach that ends up merely replacing one elite with another – and sometimes not even that. This blog argues that it is possible to combine a ‘bottom upwards’ approach to radical change with party politics. However, for this to be successful the flow of influence would have to be predominantly from the social movement activists to a political party rather than the other way round. The key lies in clarifying what the central principle of the new radicalism is and how it can be effectively implemented. The argument here is that the social activist left and ultimately a major political party of the left should put the idea of a second phase of democracy at the centre of a worked out political programme leading to a national institutional revolution. Currently the social movement activists provide the dynamism for change but they lack the power of implementation.

While this blog goes beyond piecemeal suggestions it does not pretend fully to solve the problem indicated above. The argument put forward is that the most convincing and effective route to a genuinely different society is through a radical implementation and extension of institutional democracy linked to an increase in material and cultural equality. The two goals of democracy and equality are conceived of as complementary but it is argued that a substantial shift towards equality is highly unlikely to occur unless the main beneficiaries of such a shift are in a position to implement it. I expand on this central point to the blog later.

Perversely the widespread consensus that capitalism is seriously malfunctioning has hindered the left from achieving a distinctive alternative position clearly perceived as such by the public. David Cameron has referred to ‘a crisis of capitalism’ and David Miliband distinguishes between predatory and productive capitalism stressing that there is far too much of the former. While there is considerable agreement that capitalism is unstable, erratic and opaque there is much less so about what to do about it. For all their criticisms of capitalism, centrist politicians are
fundamentally pro capitalist and their limited suggestions for reform would leave the elites well in control. Essentially their motivation is to save capitalism rather than make the socio-economic system more radically democratic and fairer. They come up with various suggestions as to how this can be done: Cameron wants shareholders to get a grip on executive pay and bonuses; Miliband pushes for employee representation on company boards; Clegg weighs in praising the John Lewis model, particularly in respect to employee shareholding. It is likely that if all or most of these reforms were implemented, especially in a robust form, capitalism would become somewhat fairer and less out of control. However, for the left this is not remotely enough.

The problem though is that the extra parliamentary left is unclear about its own programme. While many radicals reject or are deeply sceptical about a capitalist driven model of society there is uncertainty about what might challenge or replace it. Social movement activists and radical intellectuals want to go further than the piecemeal reform of capitalism but often struggle to articulate even the basic framework of a radical alternative let alone the detail. This is not the case for unreconstructed state socialists but few contemporary radicals are much attracted to that ‘solution’, although many envisage a greater socio-economic role for the state than is currently the case. For those radicals committed as much to democracy as to equality a genuinely alternative society to liberal capitalism remains illusive. Most want to see more mutuals and cooperatives established but when a critic as rightwing as Simon Heffer states that he has no problem with this and Cameron himself is in favour, a more comprehensive and thought through programme seems necessary. No doubt the left regards the mutualist and cooperative movements as much more fundamentally significant than the likes of Heffer and Cameron for whom they are of marginal importance. However, the strategy and scale of implementation has not been adequately addressed.

The left will continue to lack conviction until it revisits its basic values and extrapolates from them the kind of society it wants – always granted that reality, including the process of democratic negotiation itself, imposes limits on the achievement of ideals. Specifically the left needs to redefine or, at least, rearticulate the relationship between democracy and equality, giving far more emphasis to the former. A new democratic revolution is needed that goes beyond both the democracy of direct action and parliamentary democracy. Historically the socialist and communist lefts have identified primarily with the achievement of greater equality - materially and also substantially, culturally – ‘bread and roses’ (even though the majority have barely had a sniff of the ‘roses’). Democracy has often run a poor second to equality in theory and certainly in practise. Even so, given the appalling industrial conditions of poverty that gave rise to socialism, the emphasis on equality was understandable. This is less so now although even in the developed world it remains a priority for those in acute need. However, I propose that what will most empower the majority is a democratic institutional revolution on a massive scale. Such a revolution would almost certainly stem the trend to greater inequality and lead to greater social equality and equality of cultural access.

Democracy is, of course, itself a form of equality in the minimal sense that (nearly) all citizens have an equal right to vote and to that extent express an opinion. However the practical point about democracy relates to power. Democracy empowers individuals and groups either to maintain or change things. Political democracy is important for many reasons but it is not the only form of democracy. Nor should it be. While supporting political democracy, Wright Mills argued that in the United States and by implication in other Western democracies decisive power was in the hands of the military, economic and political elites. Whether or not Mills overstates the case it is worth considering how the majority of citizens might be more substantially empowered. The American New Left in the early sixties focused on this issue as central to the development of a new radical politics. The term they used to express this was ‘participatory democracy’ by which they meant that people should have the right to be involved in those decisions that affect their lives. Today radicals might take the view that the concept of participation is too weak a term to describe the kind and extent of social democracy they support. ‘Democratic control’ might be preferred. Here I intend to defer consideration of this admittedly crucial issue by simply using the term ‘institutional democracy’ by which I mean a substantial and ultimately a decisive shift in organisational power to the majority of people at the national and local levels. This can only be achieved if ‘ordinary’ people acquire institutional power. Much of the work to achieve this can be and to some extent is being done by social movement activists and some NGOs. However the scale of change suggested here is such that at some point it would require a major programme of national
legislation. Such legislation would codify what has already been achieved in this direction but would also expand on it.

Economic democracy would be central to any plan to put democracy at the centre of a revived ideology and programme of the left. Large firms should have not just one but two or three or more employee delegates on the board, proportionate to the size of the organisation. These should not be merely consultative but have a major share in decision-making power. The principle that members of an organisation should also be involved in running it should be widely extended. Thus parents and students should have the right to be involved in the running of educational institutions. The particular importance of democracy within education is that it would provide a learning ground for democratic practice in the wider society. Given that employees, parents and students have other major commitments they should have time made available for their organisational work and be allocated an appropriate level of payment. By definition, delegatory positions would be elected rather than appointed and also be subject to recall and rotation – in the later case periods of office holding would need to be of a practical length.

The relationship between democracy and equality that the above suggestions reflect is that democratic empowerment is almost certain to lead to a demand for greater equality but that it is otherwise unlikely to occur. The political power of the working class preceded the welfare state and was instrumental in its development. The current level of power of the less well off and progressive middle class is probably just about enough to ensure the survival of at least a minimal welfare state. However currently these groups lack the power to achieve significant further progress towards social justice and equality. A second surge of democracy is likely to facilitate further equality. If the poorly or moderately paid acquire a significant or decisive say in the distribution of pay and rewards they are surely likely to reduce the staggering inequalities that have developed in recent years. Further, the experience gained by ‘ordinary’ people through organisational democracy should over time erode the gap in skill and confidence between them and professional management enabling some to take on more demanding roles.

The left, including the Labour party once it is persuaded, needs to put a second phase in the extension of democracy at the centre of its ideology and policy. On the scale argued for here this becomes a change not merely of degree but of kind and quality. Protest is not enough although the right do so is fundamental. What is needed is a democratic institutional revolution. But first it has to be imagined and then spelt out in some detail. There is no shortage of ideas about how democracy might be extended but they tend to be seen in isolation rather than integrated into a theoretical and programmatic whole. The left needs to adopt the perspective of Weber and Wright Mills that bureaucracies, including industrial and financial corporations, tend to develop hierarchically and undemocratically. If the socialist and communist parties of the early and mid-twentieth century had done this they might come much closer to creating the kind of societies aspired to. However as Milovan Dilas pointed out over half a century ago many of these parties themselves became blighted by the curse of bureaucracy. These insights do not undermine Marx’s vision of greater social equality and equality of cultural opportunity. Properly understood and implemented they make its achievement more likely. It is not a question of Marx or Weber. We need them both.

**Bibliography**


[...] From Protest to Power: a proposal for a new democratic institutional revolution [...]

Managing online identity (2012-02-08 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/Q-OoKA2RGRM
A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a [2]blog and [3]twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via [4]e-mail. Thanks!)

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Podcast: late capitalism and a/sexual culture (2012-02-08 12:00)

The next sexual revolution...?

Memories of a ‘Ghost Town’: the George Shaw exhibition in The Herbert Museum, Coventry, UK (2012-02-09 08:00)

Dr Anton Popov, University of Warwick MYPLACE team member, on the new exhibition by Turner Prize nominated local artist George Shaw at the Herbert Museum and Art Gallery in Coventry, and its particular relevance to the work of MYPLACE.

This article was initially posted to the [1]MYPLACE blog. For more information on the MYPLACE project, follow the project on [2]Twitter or visit the project’s website: [3]HERE

On 18 November, the George Shaw exhibition [4]‘I woz ere’ has been opened for the public in the [5]Herbert

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Art Gallery and Museum. Among those invited to the exhibition launch event on 17 November were a number of VIPs (from different art councils, Coventry City Council, etc) but also many ‘ordinary’ people from Coventry and its Tile Hill area in particular. A Turner Prize nominated artist, George Shaw was born in 1966 and grew up in Tile Hill, a predominantly white, working class and rather poor area of the town. He left home in 1986 to do his formal art training in Sheffield, but he stayed in touch with the place through frequent visits to his parents who continued to live in Tile Hill. What was left behind is the place and time from which he grew out as an artist – something which is material and, therefore, perishable, but also social – being embedded in the fabric of everyday relationships between people in this neighbourhood in the late 1970s-early 1980s. The exhibition is an attempt to come back to that time and place on the Tile Hill housing estate, to remember what is forgotten, or as George Shaw put it ‘to paint what you don’t remember’.

The key theme of the exhibition and George’s works presented there is memory. The visitors from Tile Hill many of whom were people in their 40s, 50s, or even 70s were looking at the paintings of pubs and social clubs which had been demolished for some years as a reminder of the time when they were young. I heard phrases like ‘I remember the stuff we were doing there...’ One man told me pointing on the painting of the pub ‘New Star’ with excitement as if he had just met an old friend, ‘It’s flat now there, know, this place’s gone.’ Two elderly ladies were talking to each other while looking at this painting and almost touching it with their fingers pointing on different part on the building depicted as if they were looking at the old photograph of a family home and remembering what flowers or trees used to grow in which corner of the yard.

In his speech before the opening of the gallery for visitors, George, however, warned an audience that his works were not photographic representation of the past but rather pictures from his imagination that represented the places to which he felt connected. In a way this was his way of saying ‘I was there’ (hence the title of the exhibition), to add his mark to the walls that are already heavily covered with graffiti in the places... which are not there anymore. Therefore, these paintings access the past and memory through emotional engagement with the special realm of the urban landscape. In our brief conversation, George said that for him memory is not textual but emotional, something which you can feel and painting is the way to do it. When he was painting these places the details that he did not remember (did he forget them, or were they there at all?) started emerging. These details are essential for his memories but before they materialised through the bodily work of painting they were not there. For me this captures perfectly the sense that social memory is a sensorial process which might be expressed through text, narrative, image, sound, etc – representing the past, the meanings of which are socially constructed. But it also has to be felt emotionally and therefore awaken physical responses of your body, becoming part of your bodily experience. It is this emotional and sensorial nature of memory that makes it possible to connect paintings representing George Shaw’s memories of growing up in Tile Hill in the 1970s-80s with other individual recollections of that place and time or even with recollections of other places and other times. Looking at George’s paintings of dilapidated garages on the town outskirts, I suddenly realised that I was familiarising this strange landmarks with my own memories (something which I was not aware, or remember, before) of hanging out around old sheds and garages in my ‘block’ in the 1980s in Krasnodar, Russia. As children we were attracted to these secluded places (in the rather busy centre of the big city) covered with strange graffiti, old domestic stuff and litter.

In their attention to details and implicit presence of the social context, the works presented in the exhibition are very ethnographic. The paintings are devoid of any human presence in them, but yet one can feel that something is going on there, which makes sense in this particular place and time. George often depicts the ordinary places as if they were just left by people (residents, random passers-by, adolescents socialising there, children rushing to and from school). This interest in memories of ‘ordinary’ brings his paintings closer to ethnography with its preoccupation with building insightful interpretations of the everyday, mundane and ordinary. One of the paintings presented in the exhibitions ‘Details of untitled’ is particularly striking in this respect. It shows the part/corner of the red brick wall with a very violent splashes of paint on it. In his comments to this painting Shaw writes:

‘I used to see these paint incidents all the time when I was growing up. They always struck me as being very violent or the gesture of violence or a symbol or drawing of a violent thought. They appear in tucked away places or
in the old places that buildings have appeared around. Such places hang on to their savage and brutal origins before
time and drag half-innocents into a magical alliance involving ritual and transformation. Participants would no doubt
have returned home with telltale signs of gloss paint on their clothing or hands – shame on a shirt sleeve or shoe –
to be ignored most likely, excused, forgotten like the thousand tiny crimes of all our growing up. The getting caught
was always the real blunder. How many of those tiny crimes grow up with us, becoming the tragic horrors we read
about or have the misfortune to meet. Of course like most violence it has a beauty all of its own...

This almost ethnographic contextualisation of landscape and its meanings with violence as part of it (broken-
in garages, violent graffiti on the walls, secluded paths, and piled old furniture on the edge of the wood) sometimes
is interpreted by observers as a reference to the particular period in the UK, and more precise Coventry, past.
The 1970s-80s is the period which in British history is associated with the name of Margaret Thatcher and radical
transformations in the social, political and economic life of the country. With economic recession at its background,
the conservative government attempted a restructuring of industry that led to closure of many factories, plants
and collieries. Driven by the individualist, neo-liberal in its core ideology, the government launched its attack on
'society' (Thatcher stated that ‘there is no such thing as society’). The state was withdrawing in different ways its
support for the most vulnerable. The tenants of council houses were encouraged to buy their homes in pursuit of
the ‘homeowners’ democracy’ ideal. The social tensions grew resulting in the deterioration of inter-racial relations
and popularity of far-right groups and movements such as the National Front, and street violence (in which police
took active part) manifested in racial riots and miners’ strike in the early 1980s. The Falkland War, to some extent
was instrumental for the government to resurrect an ‘imperial nostalgia’ in response to the public discontent with
the economic and political climate. Thus in his recent article Stuart Hall defines that period as an ‘authoritarian

This atmosphere had been captured and expressed in the music of the Coventry Ska band The Specials. Perhaps their most famous 1980 song '[6]Ghost Town' (it is sometimes seen as a song about Coventry)


Clip from EMI records official Youtube channel

raises the issue of the growing violence in the fragmented society of the increasingly deindustrialised British
cities. As a true Two Tone band, The Specials were driven by both white and black music heritage and British working
class culture. They were essential for the revival of the traditional skinhead scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s
(songs like 'Skinhead Moonstomp' (1979)) singing about the problems which British society faced including racial
violence perpetrated by the National Front supporters and nazi-skins ('Why?' (1981)).

The cross-references to the George Shaw paintings and The Specials music are not surprising therefore. Growing
up in the 1970s, George Shaw could directly relate his experience of living in working class housing estate on
the outskirts of Coventry to The Specials’ songs. Some of his early paintings from that period (before he did any
formal fine art training) presented at the exhibition in The Herbert depicted young skinheads and punks as well as
scenes of street violence. One or two of these early paintings look as if they were snapshots from the film 'This is
England', the film which was shot in 2009 but tells the story of a skinhead group in the early 1980s. (The soundtrack
to this film includes The Specials’ songs). In fact George Shaw mentioned The Specials and the impact which

At the same time, during his recent appearance on Radio 4 Loose Ends programme, Jerry Dammers (The Specials) talked about George Shaw and how his art (the paintings from 1990s-2000s rather than the earlier works)

In his speech at the exhibition launch, George Shaw said that as a kid he saw The Herbert as an opportunity to encounter a ‘real culture’ beyond watching TV and listening to The Specials. Ironically, he has his first single exhibition in this museum on its first floor exactly above The Herbert’s history galleries where The Specials and Two Tone music are displayed on the permanent stands (see photo above). This brings me to my final point about the way in which memories and representation of the past and particular periods of history are transmitted and, at least partly, shaped by museums. In agreement with Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, Scott points out that the museum displays of culture require deliberate ‘fragmentation’ of ethnographic objects as they are detached from their larger context in order to be later ‘reconceptualised’ through the recreation of the absent context but within a theoretical frame of reference which provides viewers with explanations, comparisons and historical background (Scott, J. (2002) ‘Mapping the Past: Turkish Cypriot Narratives of Time and Place in the Canbulat Museum, Northern Cyprus’, History and Anthropology, 13: 226).

The Herbert is a museum of the people of Coventry and it represents a particular vision of these people and their city’s history and culture. Thus the current George Shaw exhibition can be interpreted as a celebration of something which people of Coventry are proud of. Together with The Specials and the Coventry City FC FA cup victory in 1987 (both stands are situated side by side in the history galleries, and the 35th anniversary of the Coventry City FA cup victory was mentioned by several VIPs in their speeches at the launch event), the work of a 'Cov kid', George Shaw, is something which put Coventry on ‘the map’. The Coventry accent, so to speak, here is particularly important. After all the exhibition is a collection of the paintings from the artist’s different series on which he was working during last 15 years, but it is framed by the above mentioned early works and a series of very recent watercolours commissioned by The Herbert especially for this exhibition, acquiring its historical context which links the artist’s biography with Coventry’s (in fact, rather, Tile Hill’s) history. At the other level, ‘I woz ere’ represents a political position of The Herbert; that is to promote diversity and multiculturalism (something which current government is rather sceptical of, if not hostile to). Therefore, memories of Tile Hill, a marginal area, both in terms of the city’s geography and socio-economic demographics, are put forward and in the focus of this exhibition, and indeed of the museum as a whole. To draw a parallel with The Specials’ representation in the museum’s historical galleries, the extract from filmed interview with members of the band on the growing inter-racial violence in the UK in the early 1980s is demonstrated there on a monitor placed under a big "Coventry Colliery Miners’ Wives Group" banner together with other short clips about the people of Coventry in active political participation (see photo below). Interestingly politicians present at the launch event (in this case the representative of the city council) formulated the purpose of the George Shaw exhibition as to ‘bring the people of Coventry together at this difficult time’. Perhaps it is too naïve to expect that paintings representing personal memories of the vanishing places would fulfil such an ambitious political task. However, George Shaw paintings being contextualised within a particular historical and cultural perspective can be an invitation for reflections on why and how society has changed. To some extent it provides the space for ordinary people to voice their memories which might or might not resonate with the ones of George Shaw. I heard, for example, how an elderly man was saying to his much younger friend, looking at the drawings of skinheads, ‘At that time many kids were dropping out...’ The Herbert museum is Warwick University’s partner within the MYPLACE project’s ‘Interpreting the past’ work package. Our colleagues in the museum are very enthusiastic about the project and proactively search for possibilities to explore how historical memories influence the young people’s political participation and civic engagement. The George Shaw exhibition presents a great opportunity for us to address the issue of memories of the 1970s-80s as the ‘difficult past’ in both the local (Coventry) and national (Britain) context. The exhibition contains the watercolours which George painted during one of his most recent visits to the area. By his own admission, they represent the places which used to be familiar but now almost alien. Maybe because of this they are more document-like than his more memory-based paintings. These watercolours, however, document the presence of the same anger and violence and frustration manifested through burned down signposts in the park, expressive graffiti, decaying furniture in the woods, etc. On one picture, an empty road corner can be identified as a site of the ‘New Star’ pub – one of four pubs in the area that have vanished
since 1986. It would be interesting to see what young Coventry people would make of these memories of the ‘ghost town’ – memories of disappearing places, stories and ways of living.

2. [http://www.twitter.com/projectmyplace](http://www.twitter.com/projectmyplace)

The future of the university (2012-02-10 08:00)

Over the last year Sociological Imagination has published a range of podcasts exploring the future of the university. We thought it might be useful to round them up and post them together in one convenient place:

1. [2]Engaging with the media as a PhD student
4. [5]Campaigning for the Public University
5. [6]The Impact Agenda in the Arts and Humanities
6. [7]The Future of the University
8. [9]The University Project

BSA Annual Conference - Pre Conference Postgraduate and Early Career Day (2012-02-10 16:55)
BSA Annual Conference

Pre Conference
Postgraduate and Early Careers

Our PhD’s: Our Future

10 April 2012, 12-6pm
The University of Leeds

With special guest lecture from
Zygmunt Bauman
‘sociology as a vocation in liquid modernity’
Q+A

Followed by workshops and parallel sessions that include:
ESRC representative: applying for grants;
Creative Teaching Methods; Podcasting;
Getting Published.

Your chance to meet other
researchers in a friendly, informal environment.

Cost: £10 members £20 non members, this includes lunch.
Book online: www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/

Please book in advance to avoid disappointment!

1. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/pg-forum-poster.jpg
Are you interested in being a Postgraduate Forum Convenor for the British Sociological Association?

(2012-02-11 08:00)

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Postgraduate Forum Convenors are offered a free place at BSA events and all travel expenses are reimbursed.

The Convenors’ tasks include:

- Circulating information to other postgraduates via the PG Forum email distribution list
- Maintaining the PG Forum pages of the BSA website & the Facebook fan page.
- Supporting and hosting PG Focus podcasts
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- Assisting with the processing of BSA Support Fund applications by joining the panel of members who grant awards from the Fund
- Helping organise the Postgraduate workshops/events at the BSA Annual Conference
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Include a letter explaining why you think you are suitable for this role.
Deadline for applications: 1 March 201


Extreme Bodybuilding (2012-02-12 08:00)

BSA Conference Event - C Wright Mills, 50 Years On (2012-02-13 08:00)

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On
Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
In March 2012 it will have been 50 years since the death of C. Wright Mills. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.

This panel will explore the relevance of C. Wright Mills' ideas 50 years on, considering the value of his legacy and the resources his work offers to understand the rapidly changing social world of the 21st century.

Introduction by Mark Carrigan (University of Warwick)

Prof Mike O'Donnell (University of Westminster) - “Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency”.

Prof Liz Stanley (University of Edinburgh) - TITLE TBC

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology’s 'moments': C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism
Publishing on the Web for Postgraduate Researchers (2012-02-13 12:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/PvUyW7z_nIs

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/PvUyW7z_nIs
Tyler Cowen: Be suspicious of stories (2012-02-14 08:00)

[EMBED] In recent years narrative has become a central concept within significant areas of the humanities and social sciences. Yet in this provocative TED talk, the economist [1]Tyler Cowen argues that we ought to be suspicious of stories. It’s a thought-provoking argument and we’d love to get your views - get in touch via [2]e-mail or [3]Twitter if you would be interested in writing a short response piece. Anyone care to offer a defence of stories in light of Cowen’s criticisms?

2. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
Some favourite sociological quotes from SI’s facebook friends (2012-02-15 08:00)

• "Deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an 'offender'. The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." [1]Howard Becker in [2]Outsiders (submitted by Yaz Osho)


2. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Outsiders.html?id=QFYrAAAAAYAAJ&redir_esc=y
4. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=nYaS6gS9Jz4C&printsec=frontcover&dq=bourdieu+1984&hl=en&sa=X&ei=9XonT5Sml0KS8QWLa5zX8&ved=0CDMQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=bourdieu%2C
7. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=9cR2kQ9-6egC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+normal+chaos+of+love&hl=en&sa=X&ei=pXsnT9e2JMSo8QDQxampA&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=the

Yaz Osho (2012-02-15 08:31:54)
The Becker quote was one of the first quotes that stayed with me when I was doing A-level Sociology. How ever many years later, it’s still around in my mind and is certainly relevant today.

Discourses of Dissent Part 1 - Social Theory and the Politics of Austerity (2012-02-16 08:00)

Discourses of Dissent was a one day symposium organised by SI’s editor in February 2011. The website hosting them is soon to lapse so SI will be the new home for the videos from the day. In light of the coalition government’s austerity agenda and the emerging movement against it, Discourses of Dissent asked how academic research can help inform and sustain political resistance

A round table session exploring how social theory can help us understand the politics of austerity. How do theoretical justifications of austerity work to constrain public debate? How does the current government’s incongruous blend of neoliberal realism and superficial progressivism relate to what went before it? What resources...
can we find in social theory to critique the coalition's agenda and its relationship to the wider crisis of late capitalism?

*Ruth Levitas, University of Bristol - The necessity of utopian thinking*
Sasha Roseneil, Birkbeck, University of London - Criticality, not paranoia: Registers of critical social theory
Karen Rowlingson, Institute of Applied Social Studies, University of Birmingham - Why doesn’t the British public seem to care about inequality or the cuts in public spending?

The Divided Self (2012-02-16 18:38)

This lovely video is based on an RSA talk by David Brooks about his great book The Social Animal.
Discourses of Dissent Part 2 - Public Universities and Public Futures (2012-02-17 08:00)

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A round table session investigating how academic research, with a particular focus on social theory, might help us articulate and work towards a positive vision of shared futures which escape the discursive constraints which have defined the public life of the UK since the 1980s.

The session will also explore the practical resolution of the tensions facing the university system. What are the most pressing issues faced by universities? Is a satisfactory resolution of these tensions possible without radical reform? Is there a need to move beyond critique?

Steve Fuller, University of Warwick - What are we defending when we defend public universities?

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/6BemJZh5AFY
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-02-18 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4] Twitter Updates


Sociology@Warwick (2012-02-19 08:00)

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department. So do check it out!

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C. WRIGHT MILLS: LEGACIES AND PROSPECTS – 50 YEARS ON (2012-02-20 08:00)

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On
Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
In March 2012 it will have been 50 years since the death of C. Wright Mills. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.

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Prof Liz Stanley (University of Edinburgh) - TITLE TBC

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology’s ‘moments’: C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism
Nik (2012-02-26 08:01:54)
These meetings on Mills interest me. I’d like to know more precisely where they will be held and how one might attend. Thanks.

The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore (2012-02-20 12:00)


Some favourite sociological quotes from our Twitter followers (2012-02-21 08:00)

"We are little Gods who shit" - [1]Ernest Becker (from @Ursies)

"You judge a society by the decency of living of the weakest" - [2]Zygmunt Bauman (from @PaulWilks)

"either one lives for politics or one lives off politics" - [3]Max Weber (from @JTKwok)

"Some men see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say why not?" - [4]George Bernard Shaw (from @Tia1972oxo)

"All human knowledge begins with intuitions, proceeds from thence to concepts, and ends with ideas" - [5]Immanuel Kant (from @nmcinroy)

"Sociology is something that you do, not something that you read" - [6]Erving Goffman (from @joremification)

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world. The point is to change it" - [7]Karl Marx (from @Stuart_Hepburn)

"It is the role of ideas in politics and society, the power of intellect, that most fascinates me as a social analyst" - [8]C. Wright Mills (from @mark _carrigan)

When riots have colour (2012-02-22 08:00)

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore-
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over-
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

- Langston Hughes

Allowing a poem to do the conceptual groundwork for a sociological article published at an academic journal, amounts to relegating yourself in the dustbin of scholarly prestige and inviting endless scoffing from your interlocutors; yet this is precisely the risk I'm wholeheartedly taking in the remainder of this paper. What follows should be read as a civic and not an academic response to this summer's social unrest, following BSA's laudable initiative to devote an open forum for sociological perspectives on the recent English riots.

Borrowing Langston Hughes' evocative imagery of a dream being deferred; that dream being the ambition to escape the institutionalised abbreviation of citizenship that Black Britons routinely face in their interaction with the police, I advance the intentionally loaded proposition that the wave of civil unrest that gripped English cities in August, was racial and political and not the arbitrary and unfortunate by-product of consumerism's allure on disenfranchised youth, living under the spectre of neo-liberal economy's tyrannical excesses. To do so, the article is divided into four parts, each addressing the following questions; (a) why race? (b) just race?, (c) why politics?, (d) just politics? , presided by a brief overview of the recent Guardian/LSE study, aptly entitled; Reading the Riots: Investigating England's summer of disorder.

According to the first round of reports on the findings of that study, published on last Monday's edition of The Guardian, the riots allegedly captured a 'widespread anger and frustration at the way in which police engage with communities' and columnist Gary Younge (2011b) was quick to single out 'indifferent elites', 'economic hardship' and police brutality' as reasons to riot based on the study's findings. What is startling about these comments is a noticeable discomfort and a conceptual mismatch between envisaging the riots as an emotive revenge, driven by
opportunism and consumerist greed on the part of the summer looters; accusations that featured rather widely and sonorously in the immediate aftermath of the events, and a newly discovered acknowledgement of 'deep seated and even visceral antipathy of the rioters towards the police'. Additional mention was surprisingly reserved in the report for issues of race and politics which was rather conspicuous in its absence in the initial outbreak of commentary following the riots. 'Race was never far from the surface of the first person accounts of rioters. The most acute sense of a longstanding mistrust was among black interviewees' writes Raekha Prasad (2011), reiterating black interviewees' descriptions of incidents that involved being 'handcuffed, beaten, kicked, spat on and called 'nigger' and 'black bastard', or episodes of stop and search operations where one police officer asked a colleague 'Mate why don't you ask him where Saddam [Hussein] is. He might be able to help out.' On the statistical side of things, Younge (2011b) cites a 75 % of the respondents who considered the fatal police shooting of Mark Duggan as 'an important or very important cause of the riots', with additional figures of stop and search operations, revealing that 73 % of the respondents reported that they have been stopped and searched in the last 12 months, while an additional chart in the study shows a 28 % of London's black population to have been stopped and searched by the police.

If race came as a surprise to the Guardian/LSE study on the riots, it is also intriguing to notice its accompaniment by a cameo appearance of politics too, in the critical delineation of the study by the newspaper's commentators. Gary Younge (2011a), in keeping with an earlier article of his in The Guardian, finds the rioters to be 'far more politically conscious than even many of the left' and finds politics to be the first of the 'two particular themes [that] have helped correct some initially flawed impressions', the second being the 'contempt between rioters and police with tales of petty harassment, abuse and humiliation' appearing commonplace and, I would add, racially driven.

Why Race?

In my emotional and intellectual memory of the riots, race starred as 'the elephant in the room', impossible to ignore yet largely unaddressed. Let us retrace the steps of this gigantic omission in the initial reporting of and media, political and expert discourses on the outbreak of the riots, by means of rendering race as a visible cause for the incidents that shocked and awed many, commentators and pundits featuring large among them.

On Thursday, 4th of August, Mark Duggan, a black kid from Tottenham was killed as a result of a terrifying shoot-out with the police. A few days later, Sunday, 7th of August, Stafford Scott, a consultant on racial equality and community engagement and co-founder of the Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign in 1985, was interviewed on Sky News where he saw the spark of rioting as both a response to the Duggan killing and a lingering coda of a similar incident, involving the death of Cynthia Jarett during a police raid in 1985 also at the Broadwater farm estate in Tottenham. In his Guardian article published the next day, Scott (2011) made a comment that is impossible to ignore; 'if the rioting was a surprise, you weren’t looking’. It is this degree of inattention and pathological degree of amnesia that I should wish to highlight in my reading of the riots as triggered by the fatal shooting of Mark Duggan; insisting that no other ‘cause’ adequately explains them. Before pleading for recognition of a link between the riots and issues of race and racism, it seems vital to give more insight into the immediate aftermath of the Duggan killing and its lamentable if not unpardonable treatment by the police. Defying normal police procedures, the police failed to send out a family liaison officer to inform Duggan’s relatives about his death on Thursday, 4th of August (they found that out from the media) and the family did not receive an apology about this until Monday, 8th of August. Stafford Scott (2011) recalls that the family was disgusted by the complete disregard to their feelings by the police and along with other members of the community, went to the police station to speak to a senior officer demonstrating peacefully until that would happen. Scott adds that the police kept ‘prevaricating’; “The most senior person they gave us was a chief inspector. We said that person wasn’t senior enough - we wanted a senior ranking officer of superintendent or above. Eventually they sent for a superintendent, but by then it was too late. We'd told them: don’t prevaricate, we wanted to hear what was happening so we could explain to the community what was taking place. [...] had they dealt with us earlier in the day, we would have removed ourselves from this area, we would have gone back to Broadwater Farm", and had that happened, the streets of London would probably not have erupted in violence. In the light of such testimony, it seems timely and relevant to argue that the police shooting of
Duggan is by no means new nor does it amount to an isolated incident or a historical first, if one is willing to follow both the history of rioting in Britain and the uneasy relationship between Black British citizens and the(ri) police; the names of Joy Gardner and Roger Sylvester, killed in police custody in the recent years come immediately to mind not to mention reggae star Smiley Culture’s death in police custody under the most mysterious of circumstances earlier this year. To make matters (appear) worse, it could be provocatively argued that a historical account of Black British experience can indeed be narrated along the lines of racism and violent clashes with the police and many literary and non-literary landmarks of Black British Culture could be mobilised to testify that; be it Trevor and Michael Phillips’ historical Windrush: The Irresistible Making of Multi-Racial Britain, Paul Gilroy’s sociological classic There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack, Winston James and Clive Harris’ polemical Inside Babylon: The Caribbean Diaspora in Britain, Philip Cohen and H.S. Bains’ poignant Multi-Racist Britain, Courtia Newland and Kadija Sessay’s playful IC3 anthology of New Black Writing in Britain borrowing its name from the police identity code for ‘black’ (IC3), Alex Wheatle’s transfusion of rioting into writing in Brixton Rock, Linton Kwesi Johnson’s ferocious dub poetry, Trinidadian calypso’s biting and piquant social commentary of London scenes, or the very lived experiences and oral testimonies of the Windrush pickney themselves. To witness the riots of 2011 in the light of earlier disturbances is to allow oneself to guide the ‘how’s’ and the ‘why’s’ through a moment’s recollection of some key moments in black British history where the police has clashed violently with the public with the common thread of such animosities being the social, cultural and political signifier of race. In 1959, Kelso Colchrane’s unsolved murder in the streets of Notting Hill sparked tensions in London; setting the scene for what James Whitfield (2004) would refer to as the ‘unhappy dialogue’ between the Metropolitan Police and Black Londoners in post-war Britain. In 1976, Notting Hill carnival, a key cultural institution of (Black) Britain, ended in riot and violent clashes with the police, followed by the 1977 National Front March, described as ‘deliberately provocative’ by the NF itself and in that spirit renewed its rendez-vous with racism in 1979 leading to the Southall riots. In 1981 the notorious Brixton riots broke out aggravated by “Operation Swamp” and persistent stop and search operations in the area, while later that year in the tragic New Cross Fire in Deptford 13 young, black people died in a house fire set ablaze by racists. 1985 saw the Broadwater Farm riots triggered by Cynthia Jarett’s death in a police raid, spreading contagiously to Brixton, Toxteth and Peckham, while in 1999 the murder of Stephen Lawrence re-introduced the term ‘institutional racism’ and sparked the most profound re-appraisal of race relations and the justice system, since Brixton 1981, leading to the MacPherson report on racist attitudes within the Metropolitan Police force. What these incidents have in common is the lived experience (not any abstracted narrative) of race as and by means of exclusion and that in a rather alarming sequence of events, the effect of which is impossible to ignore, even if we allude to those events as cacophonous exceptions in an otherwise smooth-running multicultural society which condemns such incidents and provides for their extinction from public life ever after. Just race? Envisaging the 2011 English riots solely through what W.E. Du Bois (1920 and 1961) articulated as the ‘racial veil’ may appear problematic, yet looking through that veil has its respective merits, if a broader definition of race is put in motion. Race is not skin colour but a social division that is better understood alongside other insignia of social distinction such as class. In other words, I interpret race as class given that both share an exclusionary life in British political life. To detach race from other social divisions is to render its understanding almost impossible, as social divisions more often than not come in a bundle, as if zipped together, making our understanding of them possible only if we use the right software to unzip and unpack these notions and examine their antagonistic interdependence as belonging to the exclusionary spectrum of political and civic life. Jonathan Rutherford’s (ed.) (1998) excellent book on Identity is a laudable work in this direction of understanding social divisions together in our effort to understand the social life of difference in a political community with race being no exception and rarely being just race. Race itself, in the context of the riots, functions less a veil and more as a mirror if not a probing X-ray, attesting bitterly to the lack of tolerance, acceptance and positive identification; values that otherwise constitute the nuclear weaponry of multiculturalism and cosmopolitan citizenship, defying neo-racist proclivities reminiscent of Powells’sm, ‘grinning picanninies’ and ‘Rivers of Blood’. Why Politics? In the time that has elapsed since The Guardian/LSE study on the riots, the mainstream punditocracy attributed the riots to some superficial criminality, mindless looting, disenchanted youth otherwise dominated by torpor and apathy, scenes of urban pathology, ideological orchestration with the use of new social media and technologies (Twitter, Blackberry),
and predominantly to the tyranny of the market celebrated by a neoliberal agenda and consumer society as the loving flower of the romance between market despotism and state ideology/power. Such explanations of the riots as apolitical manifestations of the homo consumans and neo-liberalis however seem rather vague and only marginally attentive to what these riots may mean. To say that citizenship has been eroded making way for consumer society and that the market economy is to blame for the waste of human potential, is to state the obvious. Online journals like Prof. Ben Agger’s Fast Capitalism prove themselves to be righteous scholarly custodians of this intellectual position. A recurrent complaint was that this summer’s civic unrest had ‘no cause’, an argument that re-appears in times of crisis, austerity and trouble with the riots of 1976, 1981 and 1985 being no exception. What can be learned from it though is our sclerotic outlook of politics; what counts as and what is political? Could rioting itself not fare as a form of disruptive protest? Paul Gilroy (1987) reserves some room for this, with reference to the radicalism of Black Power, while the Situationists (1965) also noted the militarization of elements within the Black Power movement exploding in the Watts riots of 1965 in Los Angeles with the question of ‘How do people make history under conditions designed to dissuade them?’ as their motto. While not celebrating violence or advocating a position that defends looting as a political practice, it would be unwise to discard such views irrespective of our views on using violence to express civil disobedience, political defiance or to respond to police harassment and the repressive use of the legal system as has been the case in Britain and the US respectively. Like race, a political cause is not singular, not one but many; multi-dimensional, complex, interdependent and multi-directional. A cause can be as blurry as to even make towering historical figures of Western political philosophy appear vague in their efforts to pin it down; for Hobbes it was ‘Leviathan’, for Adam Smith it was an ‘invisible hand’, for John Locke it was ‘the identity of interests’ and for Marx it was ‘class struggle’. It becomes rather clear that, perhaps with the exception of Marx, neither of those necessary evils is recognisable and ‘tactile’ so that we can work on them and re-model them politically in some direct manner. If that zigzag into political philosophy shows anything it is that a political cause is very hard to capture and is by no means a moral absolute that is set in stone, but a dialogic and interpretive experience even for those participating in the deliberation of any political cause. In the case of the recent riots that political cause may not be the attempt to win or seize state power, as this was not the case in either 1848 or 1968, but an emotive response of the ‘unclassed precariat’ facing a floating, fleeting and ‘liquid’ world as Bauman (2007 and 2011) would have it. Just politics? Having politicised the seemingly apolitical we now need to depoliticise the political, by arguing that what may count as a political stance may be a symbolic, personal and ritualised affair; thus not exclusively mediated by or situated in the ballot-box but rather based on the routine, everyday management and negotiation of our daily lives. The trivial, the mundane, the banal can give rise to sentiments and affiliations that can be politically expressive with mugging and looting seen as acts of resistance through rituals to quote a sociological classic. In the words of Simon Winlow and Steve Hall (2006) ‘the rapid emergence of diverse forms of the political in a world in which the reproductive momentum of old class cultures appeared to falter, allowed new interstitial opportunities for the creative construction of identity and meaning. As the rather awkward mixture of consumerism, radical politics and the libertarian insinuations of the transatlantic ‘counterculture’ began to encroach upon traditional forms of enclassed identity; spaces appeared to be opening up in which young people could explore new forms of individuality and small-scale collectivism by adopting and reworking the rich symbolism of consumer styles’. My admittedly risky proposition here is that if the riots were political they might also be suspected for consolidating a ‘new’ form of politics, one that does not deny our social and political participation as citizen-consumers but rather affirms it in our symbolic and branded political sphere. Politics is not just politics but graduates to an extension of our participation in the turbo-capitalist polity. In that context, rioting, even if interpreted exclusively through acts of foraging for i-pads and branded footwear, appears political by means of a consumerist expression of political values. In the light of the above and to filter the article’s title through the veil of Langston Hughes’ poem; when the riots have colour they do not simply amount to the inarticulate bravado of swaggering street toughs but rather testify to a tuneless second class citizenship and a deferral of a civic dream seething on the edge of an explosion. -[1] Lambros Fatsis Notes (i) Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music. (ii) The initial reporting of the riots came under the heading
‘UK riots’ which was then changed to ‘English riots’ as England and not the rest of the UK was affected by them: [2]http://www.bbc.co.uk/ariel/14488492

References


1. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/sociology/people/peoplelists/person/205774
11. http://cmc.sagepub.com/content/3/3/394

When riots have colour | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 15:37:30)
[...] published at The Sociological Imagination on February, [...]

1033
Fantastic Monsters Protecting Morality (2012-02-23 08:00)

MYPLACE team members at Centre for Youth Research, Higher School of Economics (St Petersburg) present their latest blog on the passing of a new law against the propaganda of homosexuality and pedophilia.

This was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. Follow MYPLACE on Twitter [2]here. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project's website [3]here.

On the 8th February, the St Petersburg parliament adopted a law at second reading directed against the propaganda of homosexuality and pedophilia. In his Twitter post on the 8th of February ([4]http://twitter.com/stephenfry) Stephen Fry responded to the deputies' decision thus: "God damn it! We need to do something to stop these fantastic monsters! They mean that Tchaikovsky will be prohibited?", The law caused protest among the LGBT community and mass media at the end of last year when it was proposed for discussion by Vitaly Milonov, a deputy of the ruling party "United Russia". Sexual minority groups organized several street protests, signatures were collected against the law and expert opinions mobilized to critique the claim that gays are the same as pedophiles. Since the scandal coincided with the eve of Parliamentary elections, the further progress of the law was postponed until a more appropriate moment. Vitaly Milonov, having secured his place in the Saint-Petersburg Parliament, returned to this subject during the first session of the renewed parliament and clarified what is supposed to be the "propaganda" of homosexuality. It was defined, specifically, as the uncontrolled and purposeful distribution of information which creates the "distorted perception of the social equivalence of traditional and non-conventional marital relations". "Fontanka," the news agency journalist that was present during the second reading mentioned that the deputies preferred to discuss not the wording but the topic of the bill itself ([5]http://www.fontanka.ru/2012/02/08/156/). As a result the bill was adopted by 31 votes to 6. After the third reading the bill will need to be signed by the Government who was the main initiator for its discussion in the Parliament, according to the political analyst Stanisl Belkovsky. Whether by accident or design, during the discussion of the projected law, the Agency of Social Technologies "Politekh" distributed the results of a phone survey that was commissioned by the Public Chamber in 149 cities in Russia in November 2011([6]http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=44164. According to the data, 74 % of respondents regard homosexuality as a vicious perversion of human nature. 79 % consider that same-sex marriages should not to be allowed in Russia. 87 % support the prohibition of gay-parades. 82 % think that homosexuals should not be allowed to teach and work with children or young people. The "Politekh" report indicates that one of the purposes of the survey was to analyze which views – secular liberal or traditional religious – are supported by Russian people. The results of other sociological research are given (a quantitative survey) showing that Russians think that morality has declined in comparison to the USSR period. The opponents of the proposed law discussed in the Parliament also mention the USSR but in another context – they reminded us that during this period gays were considered criminals and jailed.

4. [http://twitter.com/stephenfry](http://twitter.com/stephenfry)
5. [http://www.fontanka.ru/2012/02/08/156/](http://www.fontanka.ru/2012/02/08/156/)
Online 'networking' for researchers (2012-02-24 08:00)

![Video thumbnail](http://www.youtube.com/embed/K446GDbudI0)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/K446GDbudI0

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friends it is a good effort
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-02-25 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4] Twitter Updates

1036
America's Medicated Kids (2012-02-26 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/-yjo8OkpUIg
1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/-yjo80kpUlq
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ILPDEYJl9xA
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/87nGRHwUr3A
4. http://www.youtube.com/embed/t8U4ARVaLvg

[...] younger children with psychotropic drugs (thanks to The Sociological Imagination for the initial posting on this [...]}

Introducing Charles Taylor (2012-02-27 08:00)

[EMBED] Check out our [1]Charles Taylor bundle for more information about the man and his work.

» Can Human Action Be Explained? The Sociological Imagination (2013-05-16 08:00:46)
[...] Taylor interesting, there's another lecture and a link to introductory resources available here. If you don't find Charles Taylor interesting then apologies in advance for the profusion of [...]

1039
In my Introductory Sociology course, It’s Not Rocket Science, students create faux Facebook profiles of people who are their exact social opposite, then interact with one another for ten weeks, (as well as observe and analyze these interactions), finally revealing their true identity to one another on the very last day of the course.

Called The Facebook Project, you can hear some of my Fall 2011 students from the College of Mount Saint Vincent (CMSV) and the State University of New York-Orange (SUNY-Orange) talk about the project [2]here. Be sure to listen for Patricia Cook (State University of New York-Orange) and Dina Napolitano (SUNY-Orange), who describe their social opposites, respectively, as “someone who loves (the movie) Twilight” and as “a roller derby
Listen also for Nicholas Doran (SUNY-Orange), who created Laura San Pedro, pictured above and Tessa Schmidt (SUNY-Orange), the only student out of sixty who changed her sexual preference.

This semester, you can follow The Facebook Project [3] as it develops live! and in real time starting around February 29, 2012. In the meantime, more audio comments from students who participated in the Fall 2011 run of the project, as well as some screen captures from their faux profiles, are posted below. Please be aware that some students use some mild profanity in their comments.

Click here for Part 1 – On the practical difficulty or ease of figuring out what counts as your exact social opposite. It is interesting to note that my students at the College of Mount Saint Vincent in the Bronx, an urban campus, expressed more reservations about pretending to be a different race or ethnicity than students at the State University of New York-Orange, a rural, state-community college in upstate New York and that all students [with the exception of one, see/hear Tessa Schmidt (SUNY-Orange), above] expressed difficulty in changing their sexual preference or identity. A screen capture of Shijin Jose (CMSV) who speaks fourth on this audio clip, is posted directly below.
[6] Click here for Part 2 – On some of the cyber flirtations and romances that developed or didn't develop. Nicholas Stucko (SUNY-Orange) opens this audio clip. Listen for his comments about what it was like to change his racial identity. Screen captures of Nicholas as Reese Ryerson and, also, Shannon Malloy (CMSV) as Mike Sommers are posted directly below.
Click here for Part 3 – On how to make a fictive cyber life seem more real. A screen capture of Dale Partridge’s “big day,” as mentioned in the audio clip is posted directly below. Dale was created by Diego Pimentel (SUNY-Orange).
Click here for Part 4 – On what people felt they could make their faux personas say or not say in cyberspace and on how weight is an important social marker, even in a fictive cyber community. Listen especially for the comments made by Steven Barchow (SUNY-Orange), Olivia Brooks (SUNY-Orange) and Ashley Torelli (CMSV), the fourth, fifth and sixth voices on the clip. An image of Ashley’s cyber personae, Eva Jones, is posted below and you can hear Ashley say more about Eva here.
Click here to listen to Part 5 – On trying to figure out people’s true identities.

Click here to listen to Part 6 – Some closing remarks.
End Note: An earlier post on "The Sociological Imagination" about "The Facebook Project" is [16]right here.

1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-JeXmYq-BQcM/T0I_4OtzLGI/AAAAAAAAK08/Cymz_9Y1R2k/s1600/Nick1.jpg
5. http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-Y68VLn_TV6Y/T0I_4v5oHpI/AAAAAAAAK1I/W268QfujN08/s1600/Shijin1.jpg
7. http://1 bp.blogspot.com/-RBrtpHYA12c/T0I_5d6vW7I/AAAAAAA AK1Y/YpDyutMY13Q/s1600/Nick2.jpg
8. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-ZeIkzWXlt8d/T0I_6EJJ9j1/AAAAAAA AK1g/B3CeiBcx3J4/s1600/Shannon.jpg
11. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/8298/draudreysprenger_2012-02-26t12_40_01-08_00
12. http://audreysprenger.tumblr.com/post/17959441861/eva-was-my-fav
13. http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-lFhvHrM01gY/T0JAQIOcysI/AAAAAAAAK14/5pPiu33W1I/s1600/Eva%2BJones.jpg

The 10 most popular posts of 2012 so far... | The Sociological Imagination (2012-08-07 08:01:12)
[...] The Facebook Project [...]

Spotlight on Asexuality Studies (2012-02-28 08:00)

"Spotlight on Asexuality Studies" was a groundbreaking event hosted by the Identity Repertoires/Mind the Gap research group in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. Academics, activists, community members, therapists and students gathered in the university library and online to discuss contemporary asexual research, with papers presented both in-person and from the United States and Canada via video-conference.

For more information about the event, see the [1]website.
If you're interested in asexuality, take a look at some of the posts in the archives.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/H-cI61oeO0E](http://www.youtube.com/embed/H-cI61oeO0E)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/9rvUkl8M1vK](http://www.youtube.com/embed/9rvUkl8M1vK)
4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/-XiQ1W8gw7k](http://www.youtube.com/embed/-XiQ1W8gw7k)
5. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/JZ-V8E2zCcE](http://www.youtube.com/embed/JZ-V8E2zCcE)
6. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/?s=asexuality&submit=Go](http://sociologicalimagination.org/?s=asexuality&submit=Go)

The cultural significance of asexuality (2012-02-29 08:00)

Until people started calling themselves *homosexual*, it didn't make much sense for anyone to refer to themselves as *heterosexual*. Up until that point, it had simply been taken for granted and, as such, escaped scrutiny either by individuals or by society more widely. As adjectives both homosexual and heterosexual were coined in 1892, in an English translation of work by the early sexologist Kraftt-Ebing. However, as a noun heterosexual didn't enter common usage until the 1960s. The Google Ngram viewer illustrates the relative occurrence of each term within their (enormous) corpus:

[2]
To put it bluntly: people write more about *homosexuality*. The argument I’m making certainly doesn’t entail the view that there weren’t heterosexual people until homosexual people but rather that the visibility of sexual difference (slowly) made heterosexuality an object of deliberate reflection. I included *asexuality* as well as *bisexuality* below but the former is pretty meaningless given its prevalence as a biological term. Nonetheless, it seems interesting and arguably inverts a common way of understanding the relationship between sexualities i.e. *homosexuality* \(\rightarrow\) *heterosexuality* \(\rightarrow\) *bisexuality* rather than *heterosexuality* \(\rightarrow\) *homosexuality* \(\rightarrow\) *bisexuality*. In a sense heterosexuality, as a *concept* in itself rather than the characteristics of person referred to by that concept, should be understood as *derivative* from homosexuality, again understood as a *concept* rather than set of imputed characteristics.

[3]

1050
So what effect would a much increased visibility of asexuality have? Following through the line of thought above, it would make being sexual an object of deliberate reflection. This is certainly my own experience in three years of studying asexuality and it’s been a pretty interesting one. It seems likely that a widespread acquaintance with asexuality, even if it is entirely mediated, would bring being sexual into discursive awareness in a way that hasn’t previously been the case. Quite simply: you’re more likely to reflect upon a personal characteristic if you’re aware that there are people who don’t share it. Furthermore, although I think internal conversation is important to this process, there’s also a vast dialogical element to it. Or to put it simply: you’re more likely to talk to others about a personal characteristic you share with them if you are aware that there are other people who don’t share it.

Within the asexual community, once technology enabled people to conduct dialogues about their shared experience of being asexual in a sexual world, a rich and differentiated language quickly emerged. [4]In spite of this commonality, there were also differences within the asexual community and, as people continued to discuss them, language began to ‘catch up’ to experience. Conversely I wonder whether, once sexual people begin to reflect upon being sexual as something more than a biological characteristic construed in terms of the entirely vacuous notion of a ‘sex drive’, will a rich panoply of sexual difference similarly begin to emerge? So sexual difference might come to be construed not in terms of object choice (i.e. hetero/bi/homo) but in all manner of complex idiosyncrasy which, at present, only very tangentially finds any sort of discursive expression,

4. http://sexualities.sagepub.com/content/14/4/462.abstract
3.3 March

These revolts have ended the period of capitalist realism (2012-03-01 08:00)

[EMBED]

Tips from our readers for PhD students (2012-03-02 08:00)

[1]  

- It’s vital to talk to fellow [2] #PhD students, but don’t compare yourself/your work to them/their! (@MsEmmaB)
- Write at least 250 words everyday; update your bibliography everyday; follow all interesting avenues (@public_uni)
- use PhD to meet interesting people, learn skills and get involved in external projects (@DBarnardWills)
- And travel! (@sleuth)
- never leave until tomorrow what can be done today [3] #PhD and, of course, follow [4] #phdchat ;-) (@NSRiazat)
- consider highly competitive market w limited jobs avail but baby boomers retiring & expect not to be rich (@DisModern)
- If you haven’t already, and you’re in the arts, join a reading group. If there isn’t one, then create your own (@miss_patick)
- start writing early and keep writing! (@Jess_Guth)
- never self-censor, record all your ideas and learn to compartmentalise (@mark_carrigan)
- write from early on, even if it’ll get redrafted. all good writing is rewriting #AcWri (@CEMathieson)
2. https://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23PhD
3. https://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23PhD
4. https://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23phdchat

Paul (2012-03-02 11:57:49)
Stand up to your supervisors! It is your PhD and your career! Argue your point assertively and fairly. If you feel you’re not being listened to by your supervisors speak to the the postgrad unit of your student’s union.

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On (2012-03-03 08:00)
C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On
Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

In March 2012 it will have been 50 years since the death of C. Wright Mills. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.
This panel will explore the relevance of C. Wright Mills' ideas 50 years on, considering the value of his legacy and the resources his work offers to understand the rapidly changing social world of the 21st century.

Prof Mike O’Donnell (University of Westminster) - “Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency”.

Prof Liz Stanley (University of Edinburgh) - TITLE TBC

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology's 'moments': C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-03-04 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates

Review of Precious (2012-03-05 08:00)

A word of warning: this is not an uplifting film. It is however one of the rare films worthy of the epithet "unmissable". Set in 1987, it tells the story of Claireece Precious Jones (usually known simply as Precious): a 16 year old black girl who is obese, illiterate and pregnant for the second time by her father. She lives in Harlem with her physically and emotionally abusive mother, while her first child ('Mongo', short for 'Mongoloid', who has Down Syndrome) lives with her grandmother. We never see Precious's father, aside from a solitary flashback to his rape of her – presumably one of many such occurrences – while she is briefly unconscious after being knocked out by her mother, who lashed out in rage as a consequence of what she saw as Precious's culinary inadequacies. As I said, this is not an uplifting film.

We first meet Precious in her class room, as she slaps a student disrupting her maths class and fantasises about the future she hopes to share with her handsome maths teacher. This is soon shattered and she is called to the Principal's office to discuss her second pregnancy. Though she is suspended from school, her Principal (prompted by the handsome maths teacher who says he sees promise in Precious) arranges for her to attend an alternative school. Her mother is, to say the least, scathing about these new educational prospects: "you're a dummy, bitch. You will never know shit. Don't nobody want you. Don't nobody need you." In spite of this, Precious goes on to the new school ("Each One Teach One") which, along with the birth of her son, sets into motion the chain of events which will ultimately take her out of her mother's house.

[EMBED] An undercurrent of fantasy pervades the film, as Precious periodically escapes from the grim particularity of her circumstances into fabulous dreams of recognition and happiness. However even in these fantasies, Precious can never entirely escape: nightmares about rape drift seamlessly into fantasies of celebrity and fame. Similarly at one point she looks into the mirror and sees a pretty slim white girl of a similar age and yet seeing herself in these terms gives her the confidence to go out and face the world. This ambiguity, as reality and fantasy never stand entirely apart, sums up the film as a whole: there's simply too much to it for it to be neatly encapsulated in simple terms. The film seems like this should feel manipulative, given the ambiguous mix of pity and admiration it provokes, however somehow it just doesn't: this is a testament to the quality of Lee Daniels' direction and the performance of Gabourey Sidibe as Precious. The quiet power and earnest defiance which she brings to the character leaves the audience rooting for her in the most genuine way, without ever reducing the film to the level of sentimental fable. [spoilers ahead: stop now if you want to avoid them] This avoidance of sentimentality continues right until the end, as Precious stands up to and overcomes her mother. I found this the most upsetting scene in the film by far, largely because it was so difficult to know what to ultimately make of it. As Precious walks confidently off into the distance, mother to two children, what are we to make of her mother? Neither contempt nor pity seem appropriate and yet we are left with these and much else besides. Then the credits roll... and the only thing I'm sure of is that I want to see the film again...

What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-03-05 12:00)

[1]
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)

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**An information diet? (2012-03-06 08:00)**

Maria Popova of Brain Pickings has written an excellent review in the Atlantic. While the case he makes is a compelling one, is it really the whole story? Or is there a risk that framing information consumption through the lens of health, as Johnson suggests, leads us to lose sight of the some of the more radical and collective solutions to the problems he identifies? Such as collective filtering, which is particularly pertinent for academia.

2. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=QrW62y9131yC&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+information+diet&hl=en&sa=X&ei=O1cnT66-GsnZ8ADt2IWyAw&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=the%20information%20diet
5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/FDEgDp2USBY

Creating a successful online presence for academics (2012-03-07 08:00)
The invisible mothers (2012-03-08 08:00)

These mysterious looking old photographs were not intended to be as sinister as they may appear to us. In order to make the best use of the technology of the time, and to achieve a well-focussed photograph of the ever-fidgeting children, photographers used to apply this trick. More photos [1]here

[2]

The invisible mothers. Photos: http://www.retronaut.co/2011/10/the-invisible-mother/

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

C. WRIGHT MILLS: LEGACIES AND PROSPECTS – 50 YEARS ON (2012-03-11 08:00)

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On
Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
In March 2012 it will have been 50 years since the death of C. Wright Mills. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.

This panel will explore the relevance of C. Wright Mills' ideas 50 years on, considering the value of his legacy and the resources his work offers to understand the rapidly changing social world of the 21st century.

Prof Mike O'Donnell (University of Westminster) - “Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency”.

Prof Liz Stanley (University of Edinburgh) - TITLE TBC

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology's 'moments': C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism
How much sleep? (2012-03-12 08:00)

In 2001, Roger Ekirch (historian at Virginia Tech) published an important paper that revealed a wealth of historical evidence that throughout our history humans used to have a different sleeping pattern from us today. They used to have a "first sleep" which began about two hours after dusk, after which they woke up for an our or two, followed by "a second sleep". However, this remains largely unknown to the general public.

During this waking period people were quite active. They often got up, went to the toilet or smoked tobacco and some even visited neighbours. Most people stayed in bed, read, wrote and often prayed. Countless prayer manuals from the late 15th Century offered special prayers for the hours in between sleeps.

And these hours weren’t entirely solitary - people often chatted to bed-fellows or had sex.

A doctor’s manual from 16th Century France even advised couples that the best time to conceive was not at the end of a long day's labour but "after the first sleep", when "they have more enjoyment" and "do it better".


The Hacktivist Imagination (2012-03-13 08:00)

[1] X

In The Sociological Imagination, C.W. Mills set out the essential task for sociology as he saw it. His call was simple: to search for and articulate those (casual) connections between individual social environments (what he called 'milieux') and the wider socio-historical forces in which they were entwined. This short article reappropriates C.W Mills' staunch warning to sociology with a particular social phenomenon in mind – 'hacktivism'.

Hacktivism may be broadly defined as the emergence of popular political action, of the self-activity of groups of individuals, in cyberspace (Jordan and Taylor, 2004, p.1). It can be considered 'the merging of hacking activity with an overt political stance', where grassroots political protest is combined with the intrusion of computer systems (Jordan and Taylor, 2004, p.12). Yet, delve a little deeper and it soon becomes clear that there are biographical departures within hacktivism. Fifty years on and C.W Mills continues to provide a valuable insight; that at the juncture between ‘troubles’ and ‘issues' lays an immediate and everyday biographical motivation. This biographical
motivation is not only a site for differences within a wider 'hacktivist' community, but also a potential site for the interference and criminalisation of young men.

Whether a hacktivists motivation is to challenge the ethical and practical malevolence of neoliberal doctrine, or whether it's just about doing it for the "lulz" (a laugh), C.W Mills' ontological realism - or 'promise' to sociology - reminds us of the important connection between individual and society.

The Sociological Imagination

"No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey". (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.6)

To study the relationship between the lives of ordinary people and large scale social organisations was fundamental to what he termed The Sociological Imagination. In was within his 'Promise' that Mills would seek to enable each sociologist to grasp history and biography, to shift between the two without losing sight of either (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.7). To capture these (causal) relations, Mills set out what he felt was a 'fruitful distinction' between 'the personal trouble of milieu' and the 'public issues of social structure' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8). This became Mills' 'essential tool' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8) for grasping the contemporary climate, for it not only excavated the individual from 'Grand Theory' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.25-49), but recognised each individual as 'minute points of the intersections of biography and history within society' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8; emphasis added). As Mills distinguished between 'troubles' and 'issues' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8), he recaptured biography from 'Abstracted Empiricism' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.50-75), and kept sight of the wider sociological context within which individuals shape and were shaped by society.

"We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some history sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove". (Mills, [1959] 2000, p. 6)

The distinction for Mills was an important one. Troubles were considered to occur within the character of the individual and his or her immediate relations with others. This was a limited area of social life which the individual was directly concerned. Any statement or resolution of these troubles meant appreciating the individual as a biographical entity, but an entity who existed within the scope of his immediate milieux. An individual's immediate relations were considered a 'social setting' directly open to personal experiences and 'wilful activity' (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8). Issues, alternatively, had to do with matters that transcended these 'local environments'. As a public matter, an issue had to do with the organisation of many milieux into the institutions of a historical society (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8). To witness issues was to witness the values of particular publics under threat; publics which had emerged from various overlapping and interpenetrating milieux. The sociological imagination, then, was comprised in large part by the ability to show how personal milieux could be rendered into the societal issues of the day. Rather than polarising between grand theory and the minutiae of personal experience, Mills sought to define social issues through their emergence out of personal troubles.

This perspective is critical at a time when the landscape of hacktivism is changing (Ruffin, 2011). To recognise that there are different even divergent biographies within the hacktivist community is to recognise that individual motivation gives rise to different social issues and, potentially, different repertoires of contention (Tilly, 1986; Traugott, 1995, Rolfe, 2005).

Hacktivism

That the individual resides in a causal relationship with society is an important departure point on which to
critically consider ‘hacktivism’: for virtual politics has often been found upon attempts to defy state sponsored censorship of the Internet (Ruffin, 2011). As more and more individuals recognise the ‘political genealogy of technology, of virtual reality, or reality of virtuality’ (Armitage, 1999 cited in Jordan and Taylor, 2004, p.29), the hacktivist imagination may play a role in understanding the wider ideological struggles currently taking place within the realm of virtual politics (Allnutt, 2011). Indeed, it is within Mills’ own ‘fruitful distinction’ that the hacktivist imagination plays out, most notably, between ‘the personal troubles of milieu and the public issues of social structure’ (Mills, [1959] 2000, p.8).

In the broadest sense, hacktivism penetrates public discourse intermittently as social movements and popular protest "go online" in a variety of ways in the twenty-first century. Most recently, hacktivism has exploded into the public domain with the actions of the hacking collective known as Anonymous. News stories are now replete with examples of Anonymous’ efforts (Gizmodo, 2012; Guardian, 2012; New York Times, 2012), as this decentralised collective declares cyber war on a number of operational targets including, most recently, the U.S Government (International Business Times, 2012).

Emerging as the new face of hacktivism, Anonymous’ amorphous structure makes them particular hard to describe (Guardian, 2011; Ruffin, 2011). As a structurally disarticulated network of hackers, each collectivity that exists within Anonymous may have a different ideology or cause. What is easier to categorise, however, are their tactics, which can be roughly broken down into three different repertoires: (a) web site defacement; (b) distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks; and (c) data theft. Each exploit now regularly reported on within world news (Guardian, 2011; Forbes, 2012; Washington Post, 2012).

There are many sides to hacktivism and the tactics of Anonymous are not “typical”. Political activism in cyberspace is a broad field and should be recognised as such. For example, not everyone agrees with the nature of Anonymous’ activities. Oxblood Ruffin, a Canadian hacker and member of a computer underground group known as ‘Cult of the Dead Cow (cDc)’, has detailed the word ‘hacktivist’ (Ruffin, 2004). For Ruffin, hacktivism has an altogether different philosophy: a way of thinking bolstered by some definite tactics (Ruffin, 2004). ‘Using technology to improve human rights’ (Ruffin, 2011), Ruffin realised the potential to shape and maintain human rights discourse through the development of technologies in line with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Ruffin, 2011; Hacktivism FAQ, Undated). Ruffin makes two things plain: (a) that there are differences within hacktivism; and (b) that the activities of Anonymous are illegal (Ruffin, 2011).

"Some Anons have claimed that DDoSing is a form of civil disobedience but that argument is difficult to swallow. Civil disobedience entails breaking the law for a higher good; placing a burden on the system to arrest and process dissidents; and having one’s day in court …Far from being civil disobedience, Electronic Frontier Foundation co-founder John Perry Barlow has described DDoSing as "the poison gas of cyberspace". (Ruffin, 2011)

It is Anonymous’ theft of data which is seen by Ruffin as the ‘game changer’ (Ruffin, 2011). Where he derides the hijacking of information for its ‘pyrrhic’-like politics, and argues that Anonymous represent nothing but an ‘excrecent trend in cyber-espionage’ (Ruffin, 2011).

"Already the clouds are forming. The OECD is seeking tighter regulatory control on the internet. And the UK is seeking stricter laws to deal with cybercrime And when the whip comes down – and down it will come – Anonymous will have to accept part of the blame when online privacy rights are scaled back even further”.

‘Hacktivism, real hacktivism’, argues Ruffin, is done with ‘accepted rules of engagement’ in mind.

"There’s a reason why the Geneva Convention exists. Hacktivists need to be careful about the tactics they choose".
So there can be serious consequences to forms of protest online. Hacktivism (and its tactics) are not homogenous, but heterogeneous when different ways of thinking are properly considered. But what does C.W Mills offer to this understanding? There are two points need to be made.

The Hacktivist Imagination

The first important consideration is that an individual’s biography, as his or her experiences relate to their immediate milieu, plays a role in the implementation and execution of particular forms of online protest. Moving beyond personal minutiae, hacktivists develop values, ideas, beliefs and tactics in correspondence with others. In The Sociological Imagination, C. W. Mills provides the framework needed to do this. In asking sociology to recognise the importance of personal troubles, of an individual’s biography, sociology may be able to begin to gain a wider grasp on how and why particular forms of political activism emerge online. Suffice to say, that in appreciating the divergent nature within hacktivism, sociology may also appreciate that wilful activity stands in juxtaposition to wider societal issues. To witness hacktivists taking their troubles online is to witness the values of particular publics, however disarticulated, defend notions such as privacy and freedom of speech (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2010). To witness hacktivists take their troubles online is to witness the societal issues of day in contention. Whether it be on piracy law, or the trial of Bradley Manning; hacktivists exist within a wider dialogue that sociologists can capture. And this dialogue is about how human activity continues to shape the institutions of a historical society.

Where there is a difference within hacktivism, a second (criminological) consideration is necessary. The tactical repertoires of hacktivists are considered emergent causal entities of their personal troubles and their immediate milieu. But what gives rise to those tactics which are considered particularly nefarious? At a time when the term hacktivism has been colonized and is even synonymous with cyber terrorism (GlobalPost, 2012), how appropriate is it to proceed without a careful articulation of biography. Criminological research now considers peer-influence and self-control as major factors fuelling juvenile cybercrime (Holt, Bossler and David, 2011). If the activities of young men on the internet are to be defined, regulated and increasingly policed (BBC News, 2012), then one must recognise that young men have circumstances, pressures and ‘troubles’ which lead them to forge solidarities and pursue forms of resistance online. These considerations are central to a critical appreciation of the depth that exists between individual circumstance, motivation and the collective forms of political protest.

Dr. Thomas Brock is currently a postdoctoral research associate at Durham University. His research interests lie in realist social theory, histories of radical thought and movements of political action”.

Bibliography


It's tough being a man these days... (2012-03-14 08:00)

We first meet Detective Tommy Craven greeting his daughter at Boston station. He's clearly a loving but overprotective father, a man subtly ill at ease with the modern world. His daughter chides him for 'always' being early, and on the way home answers his probing questions by suggesting he needs a relationship: he wears a ring yet we never discover what happened to his wife. He demurs, saying she's 'my girl'. The pair return home where she is violently sick and, cast in the role of father, he tries to rush her to hospital...only for her to be shot and killed the moment they set foot out of the house, thus setting in motion the mystery which drives the film.

It would be easy to dismiss this piece, all the more so given the critical acclaim received by the BBC television drama on which it was based. In fact, most critics have done just that, often making reference to the quality of the original in the process. However, such repudiations ironically foreground, though fail to acknowledge, what's most interesting about the film. A large part of what makes it such a tempting target for critical ire is its casual regurgitation of overly familiar Hollywood clichés: the last honest man, the hardboiled and incorruptible detective, a father struggling on behalf of his children.
We've seen this story a million times before. Or have we? The obvious points of reference are films like Taken and television programs like 24. Yet unlike Bryan Mills or Jack Bauer, who never stumble or display weakness, Tommy Craven struggles from the point of his daughter's death; we see that behind the icy exterior of a man who knows what do and how to do it there is weakness and doubt. Throughout the film he imagines conversations with his daughter and we see his resolve falter on more than one occasion. We also see him throw up through fear and grief, as a visceral representation of his weakness (vomit plays a strangely prominent role in the film).

In its final scene he stumbles, as if drunk, through the house of the malevolent CEO and what might have once been justice is now simply revenge. Despite being a military veteran and a police detective of 30 years with, we learn earlier in the film, an impeccable record (thus he is an unblemished upholder of the Law) he's been pushed too far and seen too much to think that justice can be done. He doesn't aim to bring the perpetrators to justice but simply to end them so he can die knowing he has done something.

He says to the CEO before he makes the kill shot, 'deep down you know you deserve this': a man who has dedicated his life to the law, in both the political and psychoanalytical sense of the term, ultimately finds himself appealing to the private conscience of his enemy as he extra-judicially executes him.

In Ransom, a similar film of the mid 90s, the multimillionaire father (also played by Mel Gibson) was reunited with his son after ultimately killing the corrupt cop who'd kidnapped him and demanded a ransom. Killing was involved, as a troubled father redeemed himself through action facilitated by sheer resolve and unwavering integrity. However, this killing was defensive and against a corrupt cop, thus recovering the law rather than undermining it. Most of all it led to his reconciliation with his son. His previously neglectful parenting was forgotten as his performative enaction of the role of father, which had previously eluded him, washed away all sins.

In contrast, Tommy Craven's killing is offensive, involving a pre-emptive assault on the CEO's house, against a man whose activities were sanctioned at the top levels of the federal government, Ultimately, the reconciliation it facilitates is fantasistic and confined to the afterlife. The film ends with his dead daughter embracing him and leading his spirit out of the hospital. The only point in which we see him as the protective father occurs at the start of the film (as he attempts to rush his sick daughter to hospital) and it quickly ends with her being blown apart with a shotgun.

For all its cinematic clichés, the Edge of Darkness represents something new and, well, dark. While once the redemption of the father played itself out through conservative fables of resolve, integrity and justice, now it ends in three murders and no redemption nor justice.

In the 1990s stories such as this worked to sustain the integrity of American masculinity in social conditions which seemed to perpetually undercut and disorientate it: the inadequate father eventually found redemption through rediscovering those qualities (strength, bravery, courage) which society had obscured. Now however those qualities don’t facilitate redemption; only revenge. They don’t fix what is broken. They simply allow one ultimate and final act: not to set things right, not for justice but simply because acting is better than doing nothing.

A narrative form which once rested on the sublimation of masculine rage through the reestablishment of the law has transmuted into a form which permits no sublimation. Now there is just rage and the expression which can be found for it prior to death.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/MxK__2MGm7A](http://www.youtube.com/embed/MxK__2MGm7A)
A PhD in Comics... in Comics! (2012-03-15 08:00)

Do you remember our posts about the Dance your PhD project? Well, that was a bit of fun, but THIS here is just stunning. [1]Nick Sousanis, PhD student at Columbia Teachers’ College, researches comics - and his thesis also uses the medium of a [very long] comic.

[2]

A visual disclaimer

Nick studied mathematics and philosophy in undergrad, followed by an interdisciplinary MA in art and mathematics and an MA in painting, before embarking on an interdisciplinary doctorate in Education. Read more about him and his research in this [3]interview


1. http://spinweaveandcut.blogspot.com/

1068
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

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Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-03-17 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination

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Harry’s revenge (2012-03-18 08:00)

This film tells the story of Harry Brown, a pensioner living on a decaying housing estate in South London. Formerly a marine, Harry now lives a lonely life, with his wife on death’s door in hospital and few friends in an area increasingly plagued by drugs and crime. The film tells the story of Harry’s stand against the anarchy he perceives around him and the events that forced him to take action. While his friend Len lives in a state of constant fear unknown to Harry, he himself is not immune to it. Time after time, fear of the ‘hoodies’ in the subway by his estate forces him into taking the long route over the dual carriageway. Over and over again the film bombards the viewer with this message that we live in a broken society where the criminal leave the law abiding at best inconvenienced and disgusted, at worst terrified and broken. At times it’s difficult not to wonder if the film was produced in alliance
with the Conservative Research Department given its continual graphic illustration of the Tory 'Broken Britain' theme.

In spite of my distaste for its implicit politics, there's something I found oddly compelling about this film. Perhaps even more so than, say, The Wire because this film possesses a hyperbolic and compulsive grittiness which something like The Wire is simply too refined to exhibit. It's a striking example of what philosopher Mark Fisher calls the 'machismo of demythologisation'. The film makes a virtue of its own unflinching engagement with social decay and, in doing so, it becomes a caricature of the social realism it purports to embody. The scene where Harry visits a local criminal to buy a gun is the most egregious example of this. Leaving aside the implausibility of the interaction itself (would these large scale criminals really be so willing to immediately bring a stranger from the street into their cannabis factory to sell him a weapon?) it is an enormously powerful scene replete with the sort of grinding tension that leaves the viewer increasingly unnerved. Yet the drug dealer himself is absurd, almost Gollum-like, in his affectations and sheer weirdness. It should detract from the scene and yet somehow it doesn't.

Harry Brown has enjoyed its fair share of liberal critics, as its blatant disregard for any notion of social causation means that it ignores the 'why' questions about the apparent evil it portrays. It never asks why the young people in the film act this way. However I'd suggest such a criticism misses the point. I think the more pertinent question is why so many people find a film like this compelling. After all it won a significant though modest degree of critical acclaim. Perhaps more importantly though it enjoyed positive review after positive review on the usually rather polarised Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB). It's difficult to avoid the conclusion that the gritty ultra-violent and moralising revenge ethos of this film speaks to a significant number of people (at least those moved to write online review). I certainly found it a gripping film and yet feel unsettled by this.

In a sense Harry Brown is a postmodern moral fable. It is compelling simply because it speaks to a pervasive moral experience within contemporary society albeit one founded on tabloid scaremongering, political rhetoric and the aesthetic of social decay rather than any day-to-day reality. Perhaps the most telling scene comes when the well meaning, though socially aloof, female detective notices Harry's gun and has her suspicions of his vigilantism confirmed. As a riot rages on the estate around them (with the unfeasibly neat counterposition of the riot police and black-clad rioters being the one weak point in the film's otherwise accomplished cinematography) the defining exchange of the film takes place within the local pub. Having previously been told that Harry served in Northern Ireland, she implores that 'It's not Northern Ireland, Harry'. He retorts that 'No, it's not... those people were fighting for something. To them out there, this is just entertainment'.

Could there be a more emphatic statement of postmodern decay? Whereas once his drive to follow orders and obey the law led him to fight men who believed in something, now when that law has betrayed him (the ineffectualness of the police and judicial system is portrayed through the film with an incongruous degree of subtlety) he is forced to struggle against teenagers who believe in nothing. Yet he himself is equally diminished by these circumstances: while their world burns around them, good men are forced into violence for their survival (or at the very last their freedom to use the local subway).

The detective then asks pointedly asks Harry, 'Where does it end?'. In this sense she could be taken as the voice of reason within the film. Yet her character is stilted, aloof and unsympathetic. Furthermore she has been cast out from the preferred role in the police as a result of her perceived awkward ways. This incisive question and her moral example suggests that the only way to abate this moral decline (which Harry's actions only further) is to take a personal stand. Yet in and of herself this stand seems worthless, valueless and unattractive. At the end of it all she wins a medal but loses any possibility of closure or resolution, as the film implies (though interestingly never states) that her conscience left her unable to arrest this gun-toting pensioner. Her stand is a largely subjective affair, lacking in efficacy beyond her own sense of righteousness.

In fact the only person in the film who enjoys a moral victory is Harry himself. After all he has been through and all he has done, the film closes with him striding confidently through the subway near his estate, for the first
time free from the fear of the attack. Why bother with woolly minded limp-wristed reformism? If the film is to be believed, all it takes for the ‘silent majority’ to win is a gun, some barbed wire and a whole series of extra-judicial killings.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/I2S3SrFmIo](http://www.youtube.com/embed/I2S3SrFmIo)

www.bienzobas.es (2012-12-16 07:24:02)
These are essentially brief phrase loans that do present you meet your fiscal troubles within a desired precise time period. Contemplating time limitations these loans are especially intended above an obligation totally free platform. As such, these are kept completely absolutely free from credential checksums. Problems such as defaults, arrears, bankruptcy, CCJs and even IVAs are not deemed here. Additional, there are also no collaterals associated with these loans. There is minimal paper operate necessary on the component of borrower. There are also no hidden or added documentation or faxing necessary here. Applying for these loans is also rather convenient. Folks simply call for filling an on-line type and once this gets authorized money is received inside 24 hours time frame. These loans are in general offered beneath practical terms and situations. The general standard applicant criteria here is that they should certainly be a UK resident and of 18 years of age.

How our society got so fucked up about sex: a brief tour through history... (2012-03-19 08:00)
The prezi plug in doesn’t work very well with SI’s design so, if you’re having problems reading the text, select ‘more’ and then ‘full screen’ below:

Prayers for Bobby (2012-03-20 08:00)
If you had asked me a few days ago, I would have assumed it was obvious that a film about gay teen suicide could not also be morally inspiring. Yet this is precisely what [1]Prayers for Bobby achieves. It tells the true story of a religious mother in small town America whose picture perfect life is shattered when she finds out that her teenage son Bobby is gay. Mary, played superbly by Sigourney Weaver, simply cannot accept her son's sexuality and sets out to cure him of his ‘sickness’. This encompasses prayer groups, hard exercise and psychotherapy as Bobby, desperate to restore his once close relationship with Mary, throws himself into these treatments in a fruitless bid to restore his life to the normality he enjoyed prior to his inadvertent outing. Ultimately though he can’t do this and he finds himself drifting into the small gay world of his home town. This only deepens the divide between himself and Mary before he finally heads out into the local city to live with his sympathetic cousin for a couple of months. This opens up a new life for Bobby and, initially, he finds peace with himself through his first relationship.

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As you may have guessed from the opening line of the review though, this peace does not last. Bobby finds himself caught between two worlds; his sexuality renders him a sinner to his conservative mother but his internalised sense of sin prevents him from embracing his sexuality. Ultimately the weight of this ambivalence proves too much to bear and he throws himself off a motorway bridge into the path of an oncoming truck. The rest of the film follows Mary’s struggle to come to terms with her guilt and, although the film up to this point is certainly compelling, it is what follows that makes Prayers for Bobby such an astonishing achievement. Her attempts to make sense of Bobby’s death lead her to question her fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible and her submissive relationship to God. She finds a new purpose and meaning to her life as she comes to campaign against the very bigotry which drove such a wedge between herself and her son that he chose to end his life. The film ends with her making an impassioned speech at the seat of local government in favour of gay rights. You can watch it below. The clip may seem a bit cheesy but it really isn’t in the context of the film.

[EMBED] In the events following the film Mary became a highly visible spokeswoman for the Diablo Valley chapter of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays. She also appeared frequently on television talk shows and campaigned for public schools to introduce counselling for gay teenagers. While the events of the film are certainly tragic I found this trajectory from intolerance to activism profoundly inspiring. It showcases the ineradicable human capacity for renewal and understanding, as well as the ever present possibility of solidarity in the face of ingrained intolerance. At a time of political and economic uncertainty, while gay rights are under renewed attack, it offers a potent antidote to circumstantial pessimism. Much of the critical acclaim received by the film seems to have been directed at Sigourney Weaver’s portrayal of Mary. The stunning quality of her performance can be seen both in the sympathy which she engenders in the audience for the bigoted Mary and the sense of plausibility which she inspires in relation to Mary’s seemingly unlikely transition from bible thumping homophobe to prominent gay rights campaigner. However in many ways I felt she was over shadowed by Ryan Kelley’s earnest performance as Bobby. The simple humanity which he brought to the role stayed with me after the film. He offers a beautiful though tragic portrayal of a young boy trapped within circumstances he did not choose and ultimately unable to negotiate a path beyond them. While these are the two outstanding performance in the film there are any number of touching though low key performances throughout the cast. Astonishingly Prayers for Bobby was actually produced as a TV movie. Could there be a more powerful retort to those who bemoan the contemporary state of American television? This film is a wonderful achievement, imbued throughout with pathos, which exhibits admirable insight into its topic area (sexuality, bigotry, exclusion) while also reaching beyond it and touching ineffably upon the most profound aspects of the moral experience of being human.


Our Most Popular Posts of the Last Month (2012-03-21 08:00)

1. [1]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
2. [2]The Facebook Project
6. [6]When riots have colour
7. [7] The invisible mothers
8. [8] "Hello Kitty has no mouth": essay on the soft power of cuteness in Japanese culture
9. [9] A PhD in Comics... in Comics!
10. [10] Creating a successful online presence for academics

Anthony Giddens speech at Zeroconference 2011 (2012-03-22 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/dsrmVYgZcLk
What does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-03-23 08:01)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

Short articles are invited which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk
Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-03-24 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Follow us on Twitter here:


[4] Twitter Updates


The Six Habits of Highly Empathic People (2012-03-25 08:00)


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Editorial Note (2012-03-26 16:11)

As a result of a dispute earlier today an article has been removed from the site and we'll no longer be accepting unsolicited contributions. Today was our first experience of getting inadvertently caught up in the nasty side of the internet and we really didn't like it. Apologies to all concerned and we now consider the matter closed.

- Mark and Milena

£9,000... and the costs keep rising (2012-03-27 08:00)

With the tuition fees price hike around the corner, thousands of students across the country have boycotted lectures in a campaign of action organised by the NUS. The protest is part of the NUS's fight against the government's higher education reforms.

The protest also aims to bring attention to the hidden costs of studying as the [1]Guardian reports. Besides the obvious costs of going to university, students can expect to stump up the costs for anything from exam fees, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks to lab coats, field trips and printing.

Critics have warns that costs such as these are inevitable and are usually disclosed by universities in their prospectuses. Nonetheless, the NUS urges for universities to provide greater transparency to students.

"We’re calling on universities and colleges to urgently commit to absorb essential costs... and provide complete transparency on all costs pre-application," says the NUS.

Students protesting about the add-on costs included those at the University of Warwick and the King’s College London.
It is difficult as sociologists to disentangle ourselves from the real world; we lose our sense of reality and become immersed in a constant state of abstract analysis. As a final year Sociology student I no longer sit and mindlessly watch catch up TV, I dissect it, I comment, I angrily shout at the screen. But never, however hard I try, am I able to dull the sociologist in my head.

His name is Ernest. I imagine him as a chaotic academic, the kind I sort of wish I was but will never be due to an obsession with stationary and plastic folders. He stacks books up on the floor, wears large, rounded, gold rimmed glasses and has tufty, windswept hair. He is in a constant state of disarray, my Ernest, and yet, like most brilliant academics, is a chaotic muddle of genius. He spends his days critiquing gender, posing questions and generally preventing me from being a mindless drone, which sometimes, such as when Sex and the City is on, I kind of want to be. It’s difficult to enjoy Sex and the City when the sociologist in your head is screaming about supposed female empowerment, sexual liberation and the politics of fashion.

I fear the only way Ernest can be tamed is to allow him some space in which to sound off, a point at which I can say: ‘hey Ernest, remember earlier when you told me I shouldn’t have stepped across the road from that bloke because my preconceived ideas of him are socially constructed in gender, race and class and I am allowing myself to be shoved by the capitalistic, conservative hand towards stereotyping, yeah? Well now I am allowing you to actually tell me about it and I’ll write it down, sound fair? I can have some me time and you can have some you time and just hopefully we can create some kind of a compromise…’
Ill Manors: Politics, youth, engagement.... and pop music? (2012-03-29 08:00)

MYPLACE Project Manager, Martin Price, University of Warwick, on UK artist Plan B’s new single and how it relates to the work of the project.

This was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. Follow MYPLACE on Twitter [2]here. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [3]here.

In a recent [4]music blog on the Guardian newspaper’s website, Dorian Lynskey described Plan B’s latest single “Ill Manors” as “the greatest British protest song in years.” The single, together with its striking video (see below – from Plan B’s official Youtube channel) are blunt and direct in their confrontation of political and social issues facing British youth. The video, in particular, draws heavily on imagery from the riots and looting in British cities in August 2011, which formed the subject for the [5]first post to the MYPLACE blog – in fact keen observers might spot the image used in that blog appearing in the Ill Manors video.

While the video emphasises the riots, the lyrics themselves are more generally about social alienation, class and a swathe of British society left feeling increasingly disenfranchised by the government and mainstream media:

“Who closed down the community centre?
I kill time there used to be a member
what will I do now ’til September?
Schools out, rules out, get your bloody tools out
London’s burning, I predict a riot"

As the artist himself has observed in interviews with the BBC, the portrayal and alienation of this group is encompassed in the name “chav” which is popular in the media: “For me that term is no different from similar terms used to be derogatory towards race and sex, the only difference being that the word chav is used very publicly in the press ... When you attack someone because of the way they talk, the way they dress, the music they listen to, or their lack of education, and you do it publicly and it’s acceptable to do that, you make them feel alienated. They don’t feel like a part of society ... For every person who uses the word chav there is a less educated person ready to embrace it. They say, well, look, I’m never going to change the way you think of me so actually I’m going to play up to it and fuel the fire. In essence that’s what Ill Manors is about.” (as quoted in Dorian Lynskey’s Guardian blog)

What has this to do with our project, MYPLACE? Arguably, everything. Ill Manors speaks to and about a youth disillusioned and disengaged from formal politics, a youth which policy makers appear to have little interest in understanding. MYPLACE speaks directly to these issues, seeking to explore how, when and if young people engage in social, political and civic systems, but just as importantly to understand the reasons why. What motivates (or demotivates) young people? This song and its video address the situation in the UK directly, but how many of the other countries in MYPLACE will recognise some of this sentiment in their own field sites?

It will certainly be interesting to find out. Using those findings to inform policy will also be a key challenge.

In this [2]RSA Animate video, the RSA’s Chief Executive [3]Matthew Taylor, explores the significance which ground-breaking research in neuroscience and behavioural economics has for politics and policy. His biography gives him an interesting perspective on these issues: as a former key advisor to Tony Blair and former director of the establishment think tank IPPR, as well as his work with the RSA, his academically well-informed critique of contemporary politics is that of the consumate insider.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/Ql3Jp3ydfE8

C. WRIGHT MILLS: LEGACIES AND PROSPECTS – 50 YEARS ON (2012-03-31 08:00)

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On
Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
BRITISH SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
In March 2012 it will have been 50 years since the death of C. Wright Mills. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.

This panel will explore the relevance of C. Wright Mills’ ideas 50 years on, considering the value of his legacy and the resources his work offers to understand the rapidly changing social world of the 21st century.

Prof Mike O’Donnell (University of Westminster) - Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology’s 'moments': C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism

Another Speaker TBC
3.4 April

Rob Reid: The $8 billion iPod (2012-04-01 08:00)

[IFRAME: http://www.youtube.com/embed/GZadCj8O1-0]

Daniel Muirhead (2012-04-01 10:14:55)
Absolutely superb. Very funny too.

The University In The Sky, The University Between The Cracks (2012-04-02 08:00)

[1]Radical Education Projects in the UK

[2]Campaign for the Public University

[3]
2. [5] Public Universities and Public Futures
5. [8] Steve Fuller on the Impact Agenda
6. [9] The Impact Agenda in the Arts and Humanities
7. [10] Steve Fuller on the Future of the University
9. [12] The University Project
“Kony2012” — the potential of weak ties in the age of the Internet. (2012-04-03 08:00)

Over the past month, much has been written about the Invisible Children’s campaign "Kony2012” and the 30-minute film made to raise awareness of the activities of the Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony. Leaving aside comments on its content and the ends, from a sociological perspective a very interesting aspect of the video concerns its virality, and how this unveils the potential of weak ties in network in the age of the Internet. In a recent [1]article published on the Guardian, John Naughton reflects on this.

Certainly, viral dissemination has always been one of the key features of the Internet, but it is only in recent times (e.g. with the launch of YouTube in 2005) that its deliberate exploitation has been reached. On the one hand,
the ‘explosion’ of the Internet has allowed for any kind of information to be virtually available to anyone across the globe. However, in the midst of such abundance of inputs, ‘attention’ and the ability of ‘getting noticed’ have become two of the scarcest and most sought after commodities in the cyberspace, and ‘virality’ something that every hackers, politicians and advertisers long for, but only few achieve. In this sense, the “Kony2012” meme stands out possibly as one of the most successful cases of exploitation of virality to date.

As Naughton aptly reminds us, the viral dissemination of the video can be understood looking back at one of the precepts of network theory developed over 30 years ago by the sociologist Mark Granovetter—the strength of weak ties in networks. This refers to the crucial role played by links among people who are not closely bonded, to spread ideas and help people join together for action. From this angle, the prominence reached by the “Kony2012” video seems to owe much to one particular weak tie—a tweet by Oprah Winfrey in support of the film. Having 9.7 million (!!) followers on twitter, her comment created a chain of reactions (or, better, twits and YouTube clicks) amongst her ‘virtual acquaintances’ which boosted the dissemination of the video and its message, allowing it to reach 26 million views in less than six days.

Such level of dissemination has exposed the film to all sorts of criticisms, especially due to the rather simplistic ideology and analysis behind it. In spite of this, what is truly remarkable about the “Kony2012” meme is how it has exposed the power of the weak ties in networks, and the way in which these can allow for an idea (good or bad) to spread across the globe via channels beyond the reach and control of established media outlets. This raises crucial questions not on the content of this specific campaign, but rather for the future diffusion of ‘alternative information’ by any campaign able to instigate such virality. Following the view of positive hyperglobalisers, this kind of development could put pressure on democratic politicians, opening up the way to morally driven interventionism. As in the case of the Arab Spring, there comes a point when unremitting shouting that “something must be done” can no longer be ignored. In practice, however, it still remains to be seen whether this great potential will be fulfilled, unleashing an era of network power where the weak ties that populate the Internet can successfully spread across the globe not only videos of cats and celebrities, but democracy.

[1] Do ‘prestigious’ journals make academics lazy? An unlikely parallel with the art world

1. [2] Training, teaching or empowering people with social media?
4. [5] The ‘prestige’ of journals in a social media age
5. [6] Cite or Site? The current view of what constitutes ‘academic publishing’ is too limited. Our published work must become truly public.
6. [7] The search for the academic arctic monkey: why we must maximise the exposure of research through a blend of traditional and new methods of publication
7. [8] Continuous publishing across journals, blogs and social media maximises impact by increasing the size of the ‘academic footprint’.
8. [9] Continuous publishing has changed my experience of developing ideas and I’m more attentive to my ‘provisional outputs’ than my handwritten notes: I can’t imagine working in any other way
9. [10] Support, engagement, visibility and personalised news: Twitter has a lot to offer academics if we look past its image problem
What is public sociology? (2012-04-05 08:00)

[EMBED]
All going to plan, we’ll be interviewing Michael Burawoy on this topic at the BSA conference next week - watch this space for more details!
I’m not really sure why it popped into my head really. I’ve never really spoken much about it to anyone. I guess as my nan is so poorly now I’m a little preoccupied with death – also when you are studying ageing you come across the topic quite a bit..
It was a year after I’d left uni (2005) and there was a bit of a hoo ha about whether I should even be allowed to attend or not. The tutor organising the Poland trip was all for it though so I managed to sneak a place on the small group. I don’t know why I asked to go I just felt that I really had to experience it. Heritage and tourism was something I’d spent a lot of time studying as an undergrad and ‘dark tourism’ was something I was really interested in. I had little knowledge of the time in history at the start as I never took it beyond Tudors and Stuarts when I was at school.

[3]

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We were there for a week and travelled to various Auschwitz sites across Poland. I wanted to understand these events but also how they could be communicated and represented. How after such a tragedy do you deal with the scars that are left?

[4]
Places such as The Killing fields in Cambodia, Ground Zero in New York and other war/disaster sites often attract a high number of visitors…. both those that have some personal connection with the place or family ties as well as those wanting to understand historical events or how they have shaped the identity of people and place. It’s often a complex, contested, and ideological thing – the representation of history.
Many people, who may not have a direct link to the events often see it as weird or morbid – to visit a place such as Auschwitz. A place where unspeakable things happened. For me it serves as an acknowledgement to those who were affected – a way to understand the impact of such events and a reminder of how atrocities can happen if we let them. It was at times a difficult journey – to be confronted with the images and experiences the sites/museums portrayed, but it was an important one and one that I would never forget. It is also incredibly important for those who do have direct connections to the events. Many families were visiting the site, having made a pilgrimage in memory of loved ones or relatives lost. To make meaning and sense of their identity. The site was flooding at the time of my visit and I found the below note in the grass... I don’t know anything about the person who left it. I wonder who they were and how these events connected us in this really remote way? The other clear memory I had was of the ash. It was still evident, all around Auschwitz II Birkenau even in 2005.
Even though I caused a bit of controversy by attaching myself to the trip.. I still believe that it was the right
ing thing to do, and I am still really grateful that I got the opportunity. People generally think that death is something
we shouldn't really ever contemplate..but thinking more widely however, we can see from other cultures that this is
not always the case. For in understanding and embracing the certainty of death we can simultaneously find greater
reason to embrace and celebrate life and the living. If you ever have the chance to visit – go. Poland is a fantastic
country with a lot to offer for many types of travel.

1. http://amylouisewebber.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/poland31.jpg
5. http://amylouisewebber.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/poland8.jpg
7. http://amylouisewebber.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/poland15.jpg

C. WRIGHT MILLS: LEGACIES AND PROSPECTS – 50 YEARS ON (2012-04-07 08:00)

Remember this is next week at the BSA conference. we’d love to get your comments/thoughts

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the hashtag for the conference is #britsoc12 and we’ll be tweeting from @soc_imagination (and probably @mark_carrigan as well) throughout the conference

C. Wright Mills: Legacies and Prospects - 50 Years On

Friday 13th April, 11-12.30pm
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the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance.

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Prof Mike O’Donnell (University of Westminster) - Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency

Prof John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) - Sociology's 'moments': C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism

Les Back (Goldsmith's College) - Title TBC

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-04-08 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates


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Margaret Archer - Socialization as reflexive engagement (2012-04-09 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/EjDtsYtDi9c

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/EjDtsYtDi9c

The Importance of Being Ernest #2 (2012-04-10 08:00)

[1]
Like many unmotivated undergraduates with plenty to do, I have been procrastinating by watching the channel four ‘gypsy weddings’. Now this show provides anyone with food for thought. But for sociologists in particular, each episode is crammed with deliciously engaging sociological issues. I personally have found the response to the programme particularly significant. Each episode has some small, rather rotund looking gypsy child in a bikini top, hotpants and heels (with the obligatory diamante) contorting their body into a pose which, frankly, I would feel uncomfortable doing on a dance floor, let alone on television. You can see the camera has aimed to illustrate the mature behaviour of these young children and shock the viewer into western, civilised horror at the mere idea of their own blessed children being so revoltingly adult. Yet I find the images interesting simply because we do find them so shocking. It was not so long ago that we shoved our darling children up chimneys or dragged them into factories to work and yet now we’re faced with a similar scenario, with far less brutality, we recoil at the awfulness of it all.

The concept of childhood was only created in the Victorian period and was used to keep the idle rich women occupied (because of course they would have struggled to entertain themselves with anything like a book). Now that there is a culture which has many similar foundations, its gender roles and its work ethic, we are mortified. We appear repulsed by the adult child shaking their behinds at the camera along to Shakira. Yet what is it we have moved towards? As many of the gypsy women in the programme have noted, we have pregnant teens with fatherless children and a state which struggles to cope looking after them. Now by no means am I suggesting that all of society is like this, furthermore I do not believe that the gypsy way of life is any better necessarily. Yet there are certain fundamental beliefs that they seem to have got right. The emphasis on family, friends and culture is one which we could use in an increasingly individualistic society. It seems interesting to me that so many of us feel we can look down in snobbery at these people, watching the programme with a sense of superiority when we are hardly perfect ourselves. Untill we begin to eliminate many of our own social problems, I do not think we are in a position to look on in distaste at a group of people whose culture celebrates the very same things we are losing.

The word ‘blogging’ often has negative connotations. Yet blogging can be understood both as an output and as a platform. Many negative views about blogging are connected to a certain idea of what it is: a single author, using it as a forum to express their views to a world which, in my cases, isn’t particularly interested. However this is only one kind of output which the platform can be used to publish. Increasingly, popular and successful blogs are taking on a new form: the multi-author blog. As the LSE's Chris Gilson and Patrick Dunleavy have argued,

The truth is that the single-author blog model has already gone out of fashion, and is in rapid decline. A blog is only as good as its readership and without consistently strong posts, and an easy way of finding them, there will be no readership. In the modern world of web 2.0, RSS feeds, Facebook and Twitter, it simply is not very effective to have a single author, single issue, rarely updated blog; all the effort made in writing and posting will be typically wasted.

Even creating a combined blog portal for a whole university is no guarantee of success. For instance, the Warwick University blog portal lists over 7,000 blogs which in combination have over 140,000 entries. But there are no indications of which are the popular or timely blogs, nor even a separation of staff and student work.

These considerations help explain why the vast majority of popular political blogs are now multi-author blogs (MABs); that is, themed and coherent blogs run by a proper editorial team and calling on the services of multiple authors to ensure that the blog remains topical, can cumulate a great deal of content and can ensure a good ‘churn’ of high quality posts. We believe that MABs are a very important development, and they can be an assured way for an academic institution to become more effective in the context of the web.

Such websites function more like online magazines and take full advantage of the power of modern blogging platforms: free, instantaneous, collaborative publishing of a kind which has never previously been possible. While the uptake of such tools within academia is still relatively new, there are already countless examples of ongoing successes, such as the LSE Impact Blog, the LSE Politics & Policy Blog and the Sociological Imagination. As Gilson and Dunleavy argue later in the article above:

We believe that there is a huge untapped market for well-informed, continuously updated and varied academic blogging. Academics are already writing content and universities already function as huge dynamic knowledge inventories that insiders know about, but the wider public cannot access. The difficult creative job is therefore already done. Multi-author blogs are a fantastic, easy, and moreover, cheap way for academics and universities to get their research out to what is essentially an unlimited audience. From this process, we can all benefit.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of such tool is that they require little technical knowledge to utilise. If you are capable of using Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Word, you’re capable of using these tools. Furthermore, the extremely sophisticated collaborative functions built into them enable projects to be maintained without the need for regularly scheduled meetings or large amounts of communication. They enable an entirely new form of academic communication: a kind of ‘middle-range publishing’ that falls between books/journals & conferences/seminars.

Over the next couple of months, the Digital Change GPP will be supporting Multi-Author Blogging activities.
at Warwick. There will be an initial 1 hour session on **April 19th (12pm to 1pm in the Research Exchange Seminar Room 1)** which will offer an overview of Multi-Author Blogging, examples of its successful use and advice on planning potential projects. If there is enough interest, there will then be a longer ‘hands on’ session in May intended for people who want to get a project started.

All are welcome on the day but it would be appreciated if you could flag up your attendance via e-mail.

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2. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/)
3. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/)
5. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/gpp/digitalchange/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/gpp/digitalchange/)
6. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

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‘I’m Russian, that means I’m sober’: Riding the ‘new wave’ sweeping St Petersburg’s streets (2012-04-11 08:00)

MYPLACE Project Coordinator, Hilary Pilkington, and Aleksei Zinoviev of HSE, St Petersburg provide notes from the field on the “Russian Run” in St Petersburg.

This was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. Follow MYPLACE on Twitter [2]here. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [3]here.

As part of the scoping for ethnographic case studies for MYPLACE, Aleksei Zinoviev has been talking to organisers of the informal youth movement ‘Russian Run’ (Русская пробежка). While in St Petersburg Hilary Pilkington joined him for some participant observation as they hooked up with more than 90 young people (and two police 4×4 escorts) to make a 5km run through the city’s streets.

The ‘Russian Run’ movement (which has branches across Russia: [http://rusbeg.ru/](http://rusbeg.ru/)) emerged spontaneously following the death of the Moscow Spartak fan, Egor Svirdov, on 6 December 2010; he was shot during a fight between Spartak fans and a group of recent migrants to Moscow from the North Caucasus. The subsequent release without charge of the main suspect led to a mass demonstration in Manezh Square, Moscow on 11 December which ended in rioting and violence including 4 deaths. Similar demonstrations took place in St Petersburg and other cities across Russia. The nature of the death of Svirdov – reportedly the fans’ opponents were skilled fighters – as well as the failure of the authorities to prosecute anyone for the killing led to a feeling among young Russians that they should unite in support of one another and fight the image of the Russian as 'lazy drunkard', according to one of the St Petersburg organisers talking in an earlier interview with Aleksei. It was this desire that brought people out across Russia for the first ‘Russian Run’ on 1st January 2011. ‘Russian Run-St Petersburg’ is an informal (unregistered), grassroots movement of young people. It has no commercial or political sponsors and considers itself to be, first and foremost, an anti-alcohol (or more accurately 'pro-sobriety') movement that promotes its message by encouraging young people to take active part in sport. Much of the organisation is conducted via the social networking site ‘vkontakte’ ([http://vk.com/rusbeg _spb](http://vk.com/rusbeg _spb)) including promotion of Its regular Sunday midday ‘runs’. The first of these took place on 1 January 2011 and attracted just 35 people; by 18 September 2011, the movement had gathered...
800 runners. Organisers believe this reflects a ‘new wave’ of young people who have woken up to the fact that not smoking, drinking or taking drugs is a better and more correct way of life. This is the historic task of youth today, it would seem, and runners reflect this in their chants, which call on young people to respect the memory of what past generations have done for them in their own action; ‘Your grandfather didn’t fight in order that you could drink’, they shout as they run. Today (18th March 2012), 93 people took part in the run. They gathered at the metro station Sportivnaiia just before midday and completed a 5km circular route stopping only for a bout of collective exercise in front of the Planetarium. But it’s not about the running. The endless waits at traffic lights, negotiations of unfathomably wide and deep ‘puddles’ that mark the beginning of the thaw in the city and the need for punctilious observation of traffic and public order regulations (the beady-eyed police stopped at every junction in hope of spotting a transgression) would make any serious runner head for the hills. No. It is all about the shouting. As the runners set off, the shouters begin, ‘What do Russians choose?’ comes the call, and in chorus the reply, ‘Russians choose sport’. The chants continue throughout the run, the noise level rising as the most lyrically resonant ‘Sport – sila. Alkogol – mogila’ (‘Sport is strength. Alcohol is death’) takes hold of the crowd. There are three words at the heart of this movement, ‘Russkii – znachit trezvii’ (‘I’m a Russian, that means I’m sober). They are emblazoned on t-shirts and stickers but, more importantly, with every collective step, they become more deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of the runners. As one of the organisers noted in an earlier interview, ‘When you’re running and shouting ‘Russkii – znachit trezvii’, you convince yourself that this is exactly what you should be.’ Of course there are lots of questions to ask. Why should a grassroots sports and sobriety promotion organisation single out ‘Russians’ (russkie) rather than citizens of Russia (rossiiane) as its target group? Why adopt the Russian imperial flag alongside the current Russian Federation flag to rally people to its cause? And why, given the movement’s patriotic and pro-healthy living message, should its leader, Maxim Kalinichenko, find himself unpopular with the authorities?[5][2] Whether ‘Russian Run’ will succeed in turning this ripple of interest among young people in promoting healthy ways of life into an unstoppable wave, remains to be seen. That it is a genuine bottom-up initiative by young people to respond to what they consider to be one of the country’s most serious problems, however, is without doubt. [6][1] Literally ‘alcohol is the grave’ – ‘death’ here gets slightly closer to the rhyme of the Russian original. [7][2] Kalinichenko remains in prison after being arrested following an ‘unsanctioned march’ by the group on Nevskii Prospekt on 10th December 2011.


Rene . (2012-04-14 09:50:59)
I think the answer to the question about singleing out Russians as its target group is that the movement started because, supposedly, a person from another ethnic group killed the Russian.

Fried tarantula (2012-04-12 08:00)

[1]
We were travelling overland on a group tour. A small party of international travellers of varying ages, sizes and descriptions, united by a love of adventure, the unexpected and a curiosity for different cultures. We were strangers on arriving in the country, but had become a happy unit by the time we left it.

It was toward the end of our experience. We had negotiated canals by dugout boat, cities, historic ruins and jungles, temples, beaches, swam in forest rivers, discovered deserted hill forts and learnt of the genocide and regime which had scarred both a people and land. The journey took us by train, boat, public bus, and in the back of pickup trucks which transported us far and wide across Cambodia.

We had been travelling for many hours by mini bus across treacherous dirt tracks and uneven broken highways. It was early April and nearing the end of the dry season. The air conditioning unit had long since broken, and relief from the heat was occasionally brought through the open windows along with views of dusty fields, shacks, ploughs, occasional cattle and waving children along the roadside. Lorries frequently passed us, precariously piled
high with goods or stock, mountains of cargo which were often double the size of the vehicle carrying them and were sometimes topped off by sleeping human bodies or roped, bewildered looking animals.

Our tour demanded a twelve hour journey that day, and we were relieved when the bus pulled in for a break at a roadside cafe/interchange. It was a square concrete looking building, which was offset with brightly coloured plastic tables and chairs. It was busy with a number of (mostly) men eating, gambling, or conducting business as traders would meet at the 'half way point' between towns to exchange/buy goods and other matters.

Tumbling wearily out of the bus I was immediately conscious of how strange we looked to the locals. Our dress, our manner or gadgets and adornments, all seemed alien in this world despite the fact these were 'simplified' versions of ourselves so as to accommodate our travels. Reactions to our party were different all around Cambodia and often related to the level of tourism development which had taken place. It was curious and beneficial to experience life as a kind of 'other' an alien in a foreign land. Sometimes it was curiosity, indifference, annoyance, frustration, fascination, but usually we were greeted with compassion and with a warm generosity. Having recently recovered from such tragic events, the Khmer people seemed to usually find something to smile about regardless of their circumstances. People here though, seemed a little less trusting of strangers.

During the regime many people were sent out to work the land and forced to live in poverty (and still do). Most Khmer people learnt to survive on whatever they could find, which is how the local snack of fried tarantula came to be popular in this particular area we passed through. Usually at 'service stations' you could pick up essentials – bottles of water, fried rice, mango, salt and chilli pineapple, everything always wrapped in tiny plastic bags, but it was the only time I ever saw anything like this on my travels there.

The sight of the spiders was fascinating. To see them all together was, essentially, your worst nightmare realised. Even dead they look pretty formidable given their size. I was interested in how something which people were usually so afraid of could actually nourish them. So I bought one. I was the only person to go for it. Most of the others were so frightened of spiders it was just too gross to be considered.

It tasted mainly of garlic. The legs were furry and on the ends were charred, sort of like a burnt furry twiglet. They were hard to swallow at times and got stuck in my throat. There was a small amount of firm meat on the body. I can’t really remember what it tasted of now – I think mostly garlic and woodsmoke. I think I had a good go at it and ate most of the body. Might have left a few legs though. The other travellers were impressed/repulsed.

I felt strangely proud in that moment.

We continued on the journey by bus and in the evening finally reached the capital Phonm Penn. The idea of the tour experience overall was a deliberately 'local' one and for most of the holiday we camped, stayed with local families, used "very" basic guesthouses or overnight transport.

The hotel in the capital was our one night of luxury.. but by then it seemed almost obscene that after our extraordinary backpacking adventures we now stayed in a palace of chrome and glass complete with running water, air conditioning, toilets with seats and neatly ironed pristine white sheets. I felt perfectly fine for the entire night but it wasn’t until getting up the next day that I began to feel queasy.

My roommate said she was sure it was the spider that did it.

We got up a little late for breakfast and rushed to make the sitting. It was a weekday and the prestigious hotel was bustling with high end tourists and Khmer business executives. By then I realised I felt rough, really rough. We were quite high up in the building, perhaps on the top floor and we both managed to squeeze into the busy mirrored lift right by the doors.
It must have been the motion of the lift dropping that made my queasy stomach turn so violently. I held on as the lift began to sail steadily downward. Floor 8, floor 7, floor 6, (I needed the get to a toilet pronto) floor 5, floor 4, (just hold on, I thought). What happened next was some kind of unfortunate miracle of timing.

The lift reached the ground floor and I can remember thinking as I heard the familiar ‘ding’ that I was going to make it. (I am definitely going to make it) I thought.

Wrong.

The doors swung back and in almost perfect synchronicity, as I stepped out through them, I vomited violently (perhaps in the manner of the exorcist film or similar) straight out across the lobby in front of the reception desk, a queue of guests waiting to check out, most of my fellow travellers and several tables of nearby breakfast diners. I can still remember the look of shock on the receptionist’s faces as my body wretched involuntarily and dramatically to expel (possibly the spider but we don’t know) whatever it was that poisoned it (Which I then helplessly deposited in the middle of the posh reception).

Once people had gotten over the shock, it seemed that no lasting damage was done. Things were cleared away, and I, after a few days, recovered.

People have since asked me, if I had the choice again, would I still eat the spider?

Every.

Single.

Time.

1. http://amylouisewebber.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/spiderfood2.jpg

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Is Precautionary the New Reactionary? (2012-04-12 20:03)

In recent months, both sides of the Atlantic have witnessed renewed calls to apply the so-called Precautionary Principle to limit, if not outright, stop a variety of publicly and privately funded research and development projects around the topic of ‘synthetic biology’, an umbrella term for all attempts to redesign life, either by altering existing organisms or introducing new ones. The UK’s Green Party, currently enjoying its first Member of Parliament, has even proposed a permanent precautionary branch of government with the power to refer any legislation back to committee if it fails to be properly cognizant of its potential effects on future generations. You can find out more about it [1]here. However, the most ambitious attempt to enforce the Precautionary Principle will be unveiled in one week’s time (18th April) at Washington’s Wilson Center. 113 NGOs from across the world have signed a statement that would effectively impose enough regulations on the pursuit of synthetic biology to make it unfeasible. If you’re interested in finding out more or attending the event, go [2]here.

Generally speaking, the Precautionary Principle proposes a version of the Hippocratic Oath for the entire planet: i.e. above all else, do no harm. At first hearing, who could disagree? However, in practice, it turns out to be a radically 1106
risk-averse strategy that mistakenly sees the wholesale arresting of scientific and technological innovation as the solution to genuine problems of social injustice, poverty, inequality, insecurity, etc. I say ‘wholesale’ quite deliberately because, while Precautionaries have been traditionally preoccupied with stopping the spread of ‘genetically modified organisms’, their arguments are typically pitched at such a level of generality and abstraction that they could be easily extended to any genuine innovation in the Schumpeterian sense – that is, a market game-changer. In short, Precautionaries are completely blind to the positive character of risk-taking, even when the risks fail. Indeed, the failures may teach us more, if the data they provide are collected and made publicly available so that others may learn and take more informed risks in the future. A truly progressive society insures against the inevitable negative outcomes of risk-taking without discouraging the taking of risk altogether.

Behind this last sentence is an alternative to the Precautionary Principle, namely, the Proactionary Principle, which has been so far promoted only in transhumanist circles. You can read its latest version [3]here. The Proactionary Principle ties our distinctiveness as creatures to our proven capacity for taking calculated risks from which we emerge not dead but stronger as a species. The trick is to provide a normative framework that makes the Proactionary Principle attractive not only to self-styled heroic entrepreneurs and libertarians but also to ordinary, often vulnerable people who are not normally inclined to risk so much of themselves and the world for some unknown future. At the moment, Veronika Lipinska and I are writing a book that will sketch out the basis for a new sort of welfare state that is not so much focussed on preventing worst outcomes but rather encourages the taking of risks from which all of society may benefit.


Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick (2012-04-13 08:00)

1. [1]10 ways researchers can use Twitter[2]
2. [3]Creating a successful online presence
3. [4]Video interviews with Warwick bloggers
6. [7]Open access: what’s in it for you?
7. [8]Blogging about your research: first steps
8. [9]RSS Feeds: how they work
9. [10]Personal branding for researchers
11. Making your blog more interactive
12. Using Twitter to boost your research profile
13. Enhancing your ePortfolio
14. Blogging your research: tips for effective writing
15. Podcasting your research
16. Literature searching online
17. Social bookmarking: organising and sharing sources
18. Using LinkedIn to promote yourself
19. What type of blogger are you? Blogging quiz
20. Top 5 blogging tips
21. Video essays
22. Selling your research online: e-profiles for Arts PhDs
23. The Research Exchange Youtube Channel
24. Reflections on 23 Things
25. A useful metaphor for teaching academics about Twitter
26. Some thoughts on getting academic types to use Twitter
27. “Why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?”
28. Different uses which PhD students can make of Twitter

4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/type/
5. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0056/
6. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0009/
7. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0006/
8. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0007/
10. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0035/
11. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0040/
12. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0039/
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19. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0036/
20. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/quiz/
21. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/resources/blogging/top5/
22. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0077/
23. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/researchexchange/topics/gd0032/
24. http://www.youtube.com/user/ResearchEx/feed
27. http://markcarrigan.net/2012/02/01/some-thoughts-on-getting-academic-types-to-use-twitter/
29. http://markcarrigan.net/2012/01/15/different-uses-which-phd-students-can-make-of-twitter-if-anyone-has-any-they-can-add-to-the-list-it-would-be-really-appreciated

Mr G's Idle Musings » Blog Archive » My Diigo 04/16/2012 (2012-04-17 01:43:45)
[...] Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick | The Sociologi... [...] digital literacy | Pearltrees (2012-04-20 13:14:01)
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[...] Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick [...] Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick « cleave21 (2012-05-23 09:21:01)
[...] on sociologicalimagination.org Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this post. Comments RSS [...] Transforming the South African State by Karl von Holdt (2012-04-14 08:00)

Transforming the South African State by Karl von Holdt

http://www.youtube.com/embed/aBibPQ4s-u0

Part of the ISA's [2]Public Sociology, Live! project

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/aBibPQ4s-u0
An introduction to Margaret Archer’s under-appreciated work on culture (2012-04-15 08:00)

The term ‘culture’ carries considerable intellectual baggage yet is rarely subject to extensive conceptual scrutiny. Our use of it is simultaneously everyday and abstract, concrete yet nebulous and, as a consequence, operationalizing it within the context of research necessitates a degree of specificity which it profoundly lacks when utilised within lay discourse. Therefore drawing on Archer (1996) I wish to distinguish two specific aspects of culture which play related though distinct roles in the formation of identity: the socio-cultural context and the cultural system. The former refers to the webs of relationships within which every individual is entwined within a range of geographical, familial and institutional contexts. These relationships are causal and pertain to interpersonal interaction. The latter relates to the ideas existent within society or, as Archer puts it, the "corpus of existing intelligibilia [...] all things capable of being grasped, deciphered, understood or known by someone" (Archer 1996: 104). Intelligibilia of this sort is to be distinguished from expressive aspects of human cultural production i.e. it relates to those ideas susceptible to propositional understanding rather than, say, aesthetic expression. As Archer explains this point:

"Obviously we do not live by propositions alone (any more than we live logically); in addition, we generate myths, are moved by mysteries, become rich in symbolic and ruthless in manipulating hidden persuaders. But all of these elements are precisely the stuff of Socio-Cultural interaction. For they are all matters of interpersonal influence, whether we are talking at one extreme of hermeneutic understanding (including religious experience at the furthest extremity) or of the manipulative assault and battery of ideas used ideologically." (Archer 1996: xviii-xix)

Ideas of this sort stand in logical relations to each other in virtue of their intelligibility and truth-functionality: in so far as they implicitly or explicitly make claims about what is or is not the case then these claims stand in relations of contradiction or agreement with each other. For example while the schools of thought they represent may enjoy little or no acquaintance, a work of postmodern philosophy and a physics text book might assert contrary propositions about the nature of the physical world and, through doing so, implicate themselves in a reciprocal logical relationship in virtue of what they argue is or is not the case.

Existence within the cultural system is not dependent upon human awareness, acknowledgement or understanding of an idea. In this claim Archer is developing Karl Popper’s account of ‘world 3’ as the domain in which the products of the human mind (such as scientific theories and scientific problems) take on an objective existence vis-à-vis their creators (Gorton 2006: 32-34). For instance the propositional content of this chapter continues to exist even if the chapter itself is neither read nor valued, as do the logical relations in which this content stands vis-à-vis that of other academic books and papers. However unnoticed they may contingently be at a particular point in time, the products of the human mind retain their capacity to be understood. One particularly striking instantiation of this capacity was the recovery of largely forgotten classical texts which are generally deemed to have been a crucial driver of the renaissance. Line spacing needs to be made consistent

It is self-evident that these two areas of cultural life "do not exist or operate independently of one another" but rather "overlap, intertwine and are mutually influential". As such we can acknowledge that access to the cultural system is always socio-culturally mediated, through institutions such as libraries and publishing houses, while still retaining a distinction that is fundamentally analytical. Rather than implying some radical separation of the two domains (clearly they are distinguishable without being distinct) it asserts that distinguishing between them facilitates an explanation of cultural processes which would otherwise escape us. Through drawing this distinction between the socio-cultural context and the cultural system it is possible to isolate dynamics which pertain to each in turn, as well as second-order interactions between the two.

If you found this introduction interesting (taken from an unpublished paper by SI’s editor) you might want to read Archer’s work first-hand:
Now this is how you do public engagement online... (2012-04-15 15:20)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/5zVaFjSxAZs

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/5zVaFjSxAZs](http://www.youtube.com/embed/5zVaFjSxAZs)

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The girl on the stairs (2012-04-16 08:00)

It was a time in my life where I moved around quite a lot... Stayed in a lot of short term room rentals that sort of thing. The standard of accommodation could often be patchy. Sometimes when you are young, things seem like a good idea at the time. Or when you are looking so hard to escape from one situation that you don’t actually notice where it is leading to? ‘Out of the frying pan into the fire’ my Nan used to call it.

You’d often see them in the high street. The smack heads. It was easy to tell from their white or slightly yellow skin colour....The pinched face, hollow eyes and sunken cheek bones. .. Thin bodies. You could even tell how long they had been on it sometimes. The teeth often gave it away. .. well it was either that or the fact they would often be seen cycling around the town centre with a TV set strapped across the handle bars.

It wasn’t a massive building but I can remember at least three floors. We found out later, that the place was under surveillance. The police kinda knew about the activity there. The comings and goings. The flats were in the middle of town close to the river Medway.

You could tell we were by the water by the size of the rats that would visit at night. Not in the flats but outside by the bins. Water rats. They seemed bigger than regular rats. Like small dogs almost. Often at the weekend –
when we were coming back from a night out or just chilling in a parked car as the sun rose....we would sit and watch them scurry about.. Determinedly dragging out the remnants of burgers and kebabs from the bins. Climbing vertical surfaces like they had super powers or something.

I was ready for the weekend. I was young. Self obsessed. Bleach blonde. Clubbing was all there really was at that time. Every Saturday. Lilac strappy mini dress, glossy tan tights and white platform knee boots. Wonderbra with extra oomph. I was the kind of girl that wore designer clothes that she ordered off the catalogue.

The stairwell was always the scariest place to be at night. So when we would go out we would try and leave before it got too dark. The dealers preferred the darkness, so what used to happen is that the light bulbs got broken or nicked. In the end the council installed push button lights that lit up the halls for a few minutes to allow you to get to the door. Even these didn't always work though and the security door was always wedged open so people could get in and out.

The worse thing was not knowing who you were going to bump into in the darkness.

It was summer and around 9.30pm. We were off to the usual place. Usual scene. Have a few bottles of hooch and then get a taxi over to Strood to Medway's biggest club. We did it every week. It was always the highlight.... well It was the most important thing to us really. What our weekly wages went on.

We left the flat, locked the door and clip-clopped our way in heels across the faux floor covering to the end of the corridor, bracelets jangling, and the smell of cheap perfume lingering in the air.

It wasn't even anything dramatic. It's just one of those things that stay with you. Just a weird inexplicable moment. Did you ever get that? When suddenly for an instant you look at someone, a stranger and you share something?

A moment. A knowing?

The stench of piss and faeces would hit you head on as soon as you were on the stairs. It was almost overwhelming. You would have to get out of there and into the open air was soon as possible.

I opened the door to the stair well and stepped through it.

She was sitting on the stairs. She was around 14 years old. Pretty. Jeans. Plain t-shirt. Mousy brown greasy hair, slightly built. Huddled over something. Engrossed.

I looked more closely.

Her right hand held the lighter which was carefully heating the heroin in a spoon. The needles were spread out on the floor beside her, waiting.

She looked up.

Our eyes met. Hers were big and blue. She smiled. A genuine, broad , and friendly smile. She had a warmth about her. An innocence. It was like I could see her. I mean really see her. She was just so young. She was just sitting there. Like it was perfectly normal. She held my gaze for a split second.

‘Alrite’ she nodded and smiled.
I hesitated. ‘Alrite’ I replied.

She smiled again. Then went back to the spoon.

[1]

I walked on. Didn’t say anything. Went for a few beers, got in a taxi and went to the club.

I looked for her, when we got home, I hoped she might be there but I never saw her again.

It’s just one of those things that stay with you. Just a strange inexplicable shared moment. A connection you can’t explain. Did you ever get that?

It wasn’t even anything dramatic


**Les Back: "is sociology a job or a vocation?"** (2012-04-16 15:00)

First came Marx... (2012-04-16 21:55)

[1]
The Importance of Being Ernest #3 (2012-04-17 08:00)

[1]

It’s dissertation week and, no, I’m not handing it in carefully bound with a sense of relief attached to it. It’s the week that the dissertation nightmares begin. They were bound to happen and were lurking in the perimeters of my mind, just waiting to leap out and attack. I had felt them venturing in closer when I woke up at five am to do some ‘light reading’ for it, closer still when I was counting up the books for my bibliography before even being half way through the thing itself. Yet I had not anticipated them this early. There is still a month or so left and I had assumed I would get some respite until at least the end of April.

Alas it is not to be. Ernest finds it hilarious and attempts to goad whatever form the dread of dissertation takes in my mind. He’s something like a cross between a sarky Jack Black and a cartoon devil. He even encourages its behaviour during the day which, frankly, I could do without. He raises the questions that I know I will never answer or even attempt to address in my dissertation yet sit there like the black crow in the back of my mind, a ‘what if’ of dissertations. I wonder if I will still get that 2:1 if I don’t answer them and Ernest shakes his head mis-erably. I wonder if I just read five more books would my bibliography look more impressive and boost me up a grade?

Ernest tuts and looks pityingly at me. He knows how this works, he knows the score, he will stress me until essays are over, until everything is done and I can do nothing about it. Then he will look at me and say, “you know, you couldn’t have done much more” and I’ll think, “yeah, he’s right, this fictional and probably unhealthy character in my mind, he’s bloody well right”. We’ll form an alliance again, be best buds, probably around the time I start
interviewing for jobs. But right now, during the dissertation nightmare period, I hate him.


Mark Hawker, a first-year MPhil/PhD Sociology student at the University of Sheffield, reflects on his first BSA conference... (2012-04-17 15:00)

I have just got back from attending my very first [1]conference hosted by the British Sociological Society. I have to say, the title didn't really appeal to me that much ("Sociology in an Age of Austerity") but I went for the experience as I have enjoyed attending conferences in the past. The first thing I shall say is that the conference programme was huge. It took place over three whole days including paper sessions across at least fifteen streams, stream plenaries, roundtable sessions and study group meetings. I found this a bit daunting but, thankfully, took my time to highlight the sessions that I was most interested in and made sure that I attended them all. I say “all” in the loosest sense as there were just two presentations that I was actually interested in! The first was on "ageing in the Age of Austerity" and looked at the body in terms of physical activity; the second was on "older people, assistive technology and the Age of Austerity?". The latter was presented by [2]Gary Pritchard who works at the [3]Culture Lab at Newcastle University. Gary also works with [4]Dr. Katie Brittain who I have read quite a bit on so was great to pick up his details and hopefully go to visit them some time in the future!

I came away from the conference feeling pleased that I’d met and talked to Gary and was thankful that his presentation didn’t cover too much of the ground that my PhD will! Mind, although I can’t quite put my finger on it I found the conference lacking a “personal” touch even though it was jam-packed full of both people and sessions. It felt like I was alone but together (borrowing a Turkle-ism) with a group of people who shared a common interest in "sociology” and whatever that entailed. The “other” sessions that I went to were heavily theoretical and I almost felt out of place listening to both them and the 5-minute long questions that came at the end of them.

Don’t get me wrong, I really enjoy sociology but every day I struggle with what it “is” and what I want it to be. This conference showed me that while it is diverse it is also exclusive. But, is anyone listening to it?

[5]Originally posted on Mark’s blog

2. http://di.ncl.ac.uk/blog/author/ngwp1/
3. http://di.ncl.ac.uk/
   onference#comment-496390047
I disabled my facebook profile (call the police!) (2012-04-18 08:00)

Last week I did something radical...

I DISABLED MY FACEBOOK PROFILE!!!!!!!

And so far – it’s been interesting.

Facebook has experienced huge growth since its launch in 2004 with a reported 845 million active users in February 2012. The social networking site provides a shared online webspace for individuals and their friends to chat, post messages/email and share uploads /activities relating to their interests.

I’ve been a member of the site since around 2007/8. Since I joined I’ve spent a good amount of time using the site. I currently have around 250 friends (although at one stage I was hitting 700). I have been in contact with old friends from school, joined groups for events, shared photos and communicated with friends across the world both whilst at ‘home’ and whilst abroad travelling. I can literally communicate ‘on the move’ picking up facebook from my smartphone at any time where I have a signal. It has had some positive impact on my life, increased my online presence and connection with others. So why the change?

It’s difficult to pinpoint exactly where the tipping point was that made me want to take a step back from it. From a practical level the site has been subject to constant upgrades and re-designs with privacy rules and process changing frequently. This unsettles me as I feel less in control of the data that I share. The most frequent introduction ‘timeline’ encourages you to input all your personal history and it got to a stage where I didn’t understand why that was really necessary. The accuracy of the targeted marketing on facebook is frightening (with ‘bots’ often picking up key words from status updates etc ) and whilst its great to share info on line this can also backfire with the world being informed of your relationship breakup or latest family drama. This is pretty rubbish if it’s something serious such as a hospital emergency or similar.

One of the key things I have noticed is the more that I have shared on facebook the less people in my life have felt it necessary to actually to talk to me. Being a research student can be a lonely process at times, and whilst other people have felt that they are up to date with my goings on via facebook, I’ve really missed having face to face contact with them. My main resolution is to try and get back into the habit of having actual conversations with people and hopefully encourage them to do the same.

I started to also wonder what the implication was in terms of emotional investment in the past. Having your entire life history mapped out in front of you may not be the best thing in terms of relationship break up or family dispute and who really needs to be reminded of certain past events? I know several of my friends who have completed the obligatory ‘facebook stalk’ of their new partners torturing themselves with photos of their current beau in previous relationships. I was also contacted by a ‘bully’ from years gone by who seemed to have no recollection of what she put me through. So I silently ignored her friend request and the more I ignored her well guess what? She attempted to bully me again via the internet. Not really sure I needed that... is it really necessary to get back in touch with everyone from our past.. maybe if we’ve not kept in touch it’s for a reason and it’s better to let them go?

I noticed other changes in social activity too. One of my interest is photography and lately I have been making greater attempts to understand and document different aspects of social life. I want to understand and represent social issues (by social I mean those concerned with society) using photography to try and do that. So I am trying to think more about the meanings of the photos that I take. I’ve been on a few nights out recently where the activity seemed to be taking photos for facebook. Not enjoying the moment, or celebrating a specific event but for taking photo after photo of ...well..not a lot really. The whole dynamic of an evening out seems to be shifting from enjoying the moment to documenting it. Performing it even. Don’t get me wrong I’ve been just as guilty of this in the past.
as others have. I guess from my clowning training I am learning to try and live in the moment, but I witnessed how
facebook is changing our sense of ‘being there’ with people posting on facebook groups about the night out whilst
all being on the night out and a few metres away from each other. I started wondering if this was quite right. Also
my research is concerned with the older people and they highlight so much the need for ‘being there’ with others. It
made me more aware of my own absence in the present through technology/facebook.

I’ve been having these thoughts for a while and Shelly Turkle’s book ‘Alone Together’ has been on my ama-
zon wish list since last year. Recently I picked up on a TED talk via Twitter (Oh the irony) given by Sherry regarding
her research which discuss this concept of almost individual/group isolation. Have a look and see what you think.

One of the most interesting things is the way people react when I tell them. It’s become such a social norm
that most people think I am bonkers. In addition more and more activities are being organised via facebook and my
lack of an account has been seen as a real inconvenience. Also interesting to note is that a lot of people weirdly
assumed they had done something to me personally and that I had singled them out for deletion rather than
cancelling my own account.

I didn’t delete my facebook profile as I have lots of info I need to pull off as well as contact details of friends
and family. I can go back in at any time and restore things if I want to, it has had some great benefits and in the past
I have enjoyed sharing certain things with my friends and family. I guess what I’m doing currently is taking stock.
Trying to exist in the moment and rekindle the physical co-present aspects of my relationships. Although people
think I’m weird I’ve felt a lot better. Maybe I will re-boot the profile at some point in the future, but currently I am
enjoying a new kind of freedom, – one of privacy, of acting in a different way, of trying to be in the here and now….and to be honest the strongest feeling I have is a strange sense of relief.

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/MtLVCpZlINs?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent
Terry Wassall, Principal Teaching Fellow in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds, reflects on #britsoc12 (2012-04-18 14:15)

I enjoyed the BSA 2012 conference in Leeds that finished yesterday and came away re-enthused about sociology as a vocation and as a political project and mildly optimistic about its future. I have come away with my head buzzing with half formed ideas, fragments of talks and conversations, pages of barely legible notes and a dozen or more issues I want to follow up and projects I want to start or be involved in. It seemed to me that in the presentations I went to and in conversations I had a few interconnected themes kept recurring – the problem of sociology’s publics, the necessity for sociology to de-objectify society and social actors, and the practice of sociology as a normative and politically engaged vocation. While I can still remember them, these are a few initial notes and observations around these topics.

Zygmunt Bauman in his talk to the PG Forum on Tuesday and in his keynote on Wednesday acknowledged there is the perception of a crisis in sociology. This is usually construed as sociology losing touch with its public. For Zygmunt this is a due to the public that sociology emerged historically to serve – legislators, managers, bureaucrats, administrators, more generally those concerned with and responsible for social control, social order, making people and processes predictable – having changed so that it no longer requires the services of a sociology of order and control, or as Zygmunt termed it, a sociology of unfreedom. Without going into much detail, he puts this down to some key aspects of what he calls liquid modernity. This includes a growing awareness of the fact that change is the only constant and the only certainty is the permanence of uncertainty. This has had a profound effect on institutions and organisations, effects that can be evidenced and demonstrated in many ways. It has also had a profound effect on individuals. Organisations deal with uncertainty by developing new organisational forms and management techniques. These are based on strategies that externalise aspects of organisation, risk and responsibility coupled to what Zygmunt calls ‘the managerial revolution Mark II’ and new forms of social control and domination. The effect of outsourcing, contracting out, off shoring and subsidiarising shifts responsibility to often far flung complex chains made up of units of ever diminishing power and control. This was amply demonstrated by the last keynote where we were told how financialisation has led to virulent forms of profit seeking and has changed the way businesses are structured and organised and their relation to their employees. The shift indicated in this presentation from ‘managerial capitalism’ to ‘financial capitalism’ seems to map quite nicely onto Zygmunt’s claimed shift between the first wave of ‘scientific’ management to the less easily characterised managerial revolution Mark II. Somewhat flippantly, I tend to think of this as, let a thousand flowers bloom (to slightly misquote Mao Zedong) and we will find a way of making money out of all of them, passing as much risk as possible to suppliers, labour, governments and the public. It is evident that not everyone is equal in a world of
uncertainty. Those closer to the sources of uncertainty have greater risks and more precarious lives. In the corporate and financial world this is signalled to some extent by a shifting emphasis from the ‘sustainability’ of business and operations to their ‘resilience’, a rather less inclusive term that implies processes of casting adrift and sacrificing in order to protect the ‘core’ business and key objectives – basically to extract profits and preserve shareholder value.

Business now is geared to an operational environment and a world of uncertainty that does not require explicit micromanagement of populations. Individuals, faced with uncertainty, with no guarantees of a final destination or happy ending, the withering of public goods like the welfare state, etc. relate to this new world as competitors seeking security as best they can. Social control is now largely exerted through a combination of fragmentation, individuation, debt and fear alongside forms of persuasion and the manufacture of desire. As Burawoy pointed out in his talk, many of the precariat and unemployed are seeking opportunities to be exploited. Trades Unions are fighting on behalf of their members to be exploited. Zizek, in a recent article, described this as being one of the main driving concerns of recent student protests. To a certain extent, historically, the middle classes have been incorporated and controlled by being given a reasonable share of the surplus and secure employment. Increasingly sections of this class have seen their job security diminished, their wages and conditions of work eroded and are, in short, becoming part of the precariat. Precariousness is not new. It’s just novel for a much larger section for the population who have not experienced it and don’t expect it. According to Zizek, student protest can be seen as a reaction to and a resistance against the attack on the sections of the occupational structure they assumed they were destined for and its, up to now, taken for granted privileges. In other words, an attack on their futures. I would say there is some evidence of this from my own experience and observations but personally I am much more hopeful of the sorts of politised consciousnesses and concerns that I see in play. This, I think, points to the continuing and growing importance of encouraging the spread of a sociological imagination.

On the question of the public, John Holmwood made some interesting observations in one of the sessions drawing on, I think, the ideas of Dewey. Publics are not a given. They are in any case, intrinsically, or at least originally, passive, made as they are by forces external to individuals that create the conditions for them to form a public, recognise themselves as members of that public and therefore have the potential to become active citizens. (This sounds a bit like Marx’s ideas on the socialisation of an industrial proletariat and the development of class consciousness in the context of factory organisation and work, etc. A problem today is that with the shift to a society of individualised consumers and a fragmented competing precariat, the conditions for developing forms of solidarity are much harder to identify). Citizenship in this (Dewey’s?) view depends upon individuals coming to see themselves as members of a public with interests in common with other members. If this is the case sociology by itself cannot conjure up its putative public but must look for trends and circumstances where publics are being formed and hitch their wagon to these as partners. I guess this is tantamount to looking for processes of politicisation where individuals and groups, through force of circumstance, are developing a reflexive and reflective capacity to confront their problems and issues. Then the question is how to engage with these individuals, groups and processes.

Several things follow from this that are worth thinking about. Seeing yourself as a member of a public, the notion that your individual worries and problems are in common with others in a similar position and are linked to conditions you have in common and that your fate as an individual is tied up somehow with other members of that public is itself an act of sociological imagination. Everyone has the potential to be, in fact is to some extent, a sociologist in this sense. Taken further, a sociological imagination can be seen as a requirement of citizenship, in fact is a constitutive component of citizenship. This has implications for professional and institutionalised sociology and the teaching of sociology. Whatever else we do as teachers of sociology, we are sending tens of thousands of individuals each year into the world of work and, hopefully, active citizenship, whatever they end up doing for a job. Employability is important and it would be a dereliction of duty not to help students prepare for the world of work. But with the ever increasing colonisation of the public by the private, the uncoupling of power from politics that so many people spoke about at the conference, the hollowing out and destruction of our democratic institutions and processes, and the rapid destruction of spaces and forms of public discourse and/or their hijacking by the neoliberal agenda and ideology, active citizenship informed by sociological imagination is more important than ever. To end
for the moment on a more optimistic note, according to Zygmunt Bauman, the decoupling of sociology from its old public of legislators, bureaucrats and managers, far from being a crisis is a great opportunity for sociology to rediscover its true vocation as a science of freedom. Rather than seeing sociology as in crisis he sees it as having a crucial role in relation to what he calls the current ‘crisis in agency’. He claims, and who am I to disagree, that in his over 60 years of being a sociologist, this is the most exciting and important time for sociology he can remember. I have been a sociologist for 34 years and the statement certainly rings true for me. Obviously there is a lot more that needs to be said about what sort of sociology he and/or we are talking about, its practice, its relation to the experience, the commonsense and knowledge of the public we wish to engage with and how that engagement can take place. For the moment I will be pursuing this personally through Zygmunt’s ideas on what sociology should be and its role today. He certainly sees sociology as a vocation and a way of being in the world. To repeat one of his favourite quotes from Jeffrey Alexander – “sociology’s future, at least its immediate future, lies in an effort to reincarnate and re-establish itself as a cultural politics in the service of human freedom”. But I would add to this, as Burawoy stated at the beginning of his talk, we need a theory of capitalism. To be of service in the cause of human freedom we need a pretty good understanding of the causes of unfreedom.


1. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/
3. https://twitter.com/#!/TerryWassall

Teaching Through Rocky: Stratification and the American Dream, Race, and Gender (2012-04-19 08:00)

*Rocky*. An American classic. The epitome of the American Dream through a rags-to-riches story (in a documentary on the making of *Rocky*, Sylvester Stallone describes the writing and making of the film as its own real-life American Dream as well). A well-made film that won Best Picture in 1976 along with several other awards. Largely considered to be not only one of the great sports films of all time, but a great film of all time for any genre.

Along with its renown as a classic, award-winning film illustrating cultural values and beliefs that many Americans hold dear, the movie also happens to be quite useful and valuable as a teaching tool. It’s one that I like to use in my Sociology of Sport class, though it could easily be applied to a non-sport sociology class as well. There are several different areas in which *Rocky* may be usefully applied. Here I focus on stratification and the ideology of the American Dream, race, and gender.

*Rocky, Stratification, and the American Dream*

As previously mentioned, Rocky embodies the American Dream and our belief in rags-to-riches stories. This is
the idea that in America, thanks to our system of open mobility (the ability to move freely between different social classes - though take note that we do not live in a perfectly open system!), anyone with the right amount of hard work and determination can "make it." In the beginning of the film, we see Rocky’s current situation - fighting in cheap clubs in the slums of Philadelphia while working on the side as a collector for a local bookie. From these humble beginnings, we can track Rocky’s improbable (and lucky) shot at the heavyweight boxing title (and especially as the movies go on, we are made aware of the wealth that Rocky has accumulated).

Our belief in the American Dream as realistic relies on the ideas of competitive individualism and meritocracy. The idea of competitive individualism is that a person’s successes are due to that individual's hard work, determination, and skills/abilities, while any failures must result from laziness or a lack of determination and skills/abilities of the individual (effectively ignoring any larger, structural forces at play). This is the main thrust behind each of the films in the Rocky series: Rocky’s heart, determination, and incredible work ethic lead him to improbable victory. He is willing to give whatever it takes - clearly illustrated through the grueling training montages that are a centerpiece of each of the films. This is closely related to what we think of as a meritocracy - that individuals end up where they "should be" based on their individual merit; they earned it (or failed to earn it).

In a system designed this way, we can look directly to the individual to understand why he/she did or did not succeed. Indeed these rags-to-riches stories are exemplars that show us that hard work and determination can pay off. In fact, it’s quite important for these rags-to-riches stories to be highly visible and well-known for us to maintain our strong belief in the American Dream and "opportunity for all."

However, what many conflict theorists argue is that the high visibility of these *very rare and improbable* rags-to-riches stories have created a sense of false consciousness where those who are actually systematically harmed and disadvantaged by the system, actually believe in the system and do not realize their own disadvantaged structural location within it. In fact, when Rocky is asked by Adrian why he fights, he quips, "because I can’t sing or dance." This illustrates the idea that he views sport and entertainment as his only two ways of escaping life in the slums. He has internalized this and sees the system that promotes it as legitimate and normal - thus adding to the sense of false consciousness. It’s absolutely certain that we do not live in a complete meritocratic system. One’s race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and network ties (among other things) shape opportunities and advantages/disadvantages.

In the case of Rocky, there was a great deal of luck involved. Rocky was chosen largely because Apollo wanted to put on a show - he liked the public relations gimmicks that could come from fighting the "Italian Stallion" (Rocky’s nickname). This would be a great representation to show that an immigrant could make it in the "land of opportunity" (said several times in the film!) on America’s bicentennial birthday. However, people tend to ignore the luck and other factors involved (other fighters being injured, Apollo’s thirst for a good story, etc.), and focus on Rocky as an individual - how all of his hard work paid off.

While there’s no doubt that Rocky worked hard, we cannot neglect the broader context in our hurry to pin all of his success on his own individual hard work and determination. There were plenty of other individuals who were working just as hard and had just as much skill/talent (and likely many who were working even harder with more skill/talent), yet did not get a shot at the title. Did Rocky truly _merit_ this opportunity more than anyone else? Was it all based on his _individual_ hard work and achievements?

**Rocky and Race**

In the movie, Rocky’s opponent is the current heavyweight champion, Apollo Creed. Creed is an African-American - not at all uncommon for many heavy-weight boxers over the years. However, his portrayal and some of the themes we may see are not inconsequential when thinking about race.
While Rocky’s story focuses on his intense training and hard work to overcome his clumsiness and lack of "natural ability," Apollo’s is the direct opposite. We do not see any of Apollo’s training regimen - we are actually led to believe that there probably wasn’t much of one at all!

Apollo is portrayed as a naturally gifted and extremely arrogant athlete. His first priority is to put on a "show" for the fans. This was what inspired his decision to select Rocky as a challenger; we see him ignore his trainer’s advice to take Rocky seriously because he is more concerned with planning the event; and we can see his emphasis on putting on a show at the actual fight when he shows up dressed as Uncle Sam alongside the Statue of Liberty.

This feeds into common stereotype that many have: that when it comes to sport, African-Americans are simply "naturally gifted" and are able to be lazy at times because of this extra skill/talent they have been endowed with. The white athlete, on the other hand, has to make up for this lack of "natural ability" through extra hard work, or "knowing the game" better (designing some sort of superior strategy - relying on intellect). This downplays the amount of work and effort that African-Americans do put into particular sports, instead relying on these ideas of "natural" or "genetic" ability.

We can see variations of this theme over and over throughout the subsequent films. In Rocky III in particular, Rocky fights Clubber Lane (Mr. T), another African-American fighter. Though not portrayed as arrogant as Apollo Creed was, Lane is the epitome of the stereotype mentioned above: the black man as naturally gifted and a physical specimen. Many early sportswriters (especially those covering boxing) explicitly described black boxers as being "instinctual," "coming straight out of the jungle with other wild animals," and other similar metaphors. Again, this characterizes the black male as a physical specimen born to fight - it is a part of his intrinsic nature.

In fact, the only reason that Rocky is able to defeat Lane in their second matchup (Rocky loses the first), is because Rocky outsmarts him. He sets a "trap" by allowing Lane to dole out some heavy punches anticipating that this will "tire him out." Again, this puts emphasis on using his superior strategy in order to "keep up" and eventually win the fight.

The final point of interest with respect to race that I’ll point out here also comes from Rocky III. After Rocky initially loses to Lane, Apollo and his trainer decide to take Rocky under their wing and train him to fight. Rocky accompanies them to their gym and there is some immediate racial tension as Rocky enters the gym with Adrian and Paulie to see only African-Americans there. Paulie also constantly remarks that Rocky "can’t be trained like a colored fighter because he’s got no rhythm." Again, this reinforces the idea that African-Americans have these types of physical abilities come to them much more naturally and without the amount of hard work and effort it takes others.

**Rocky and Gender**

When it comes to Rocky and gender, this may seem like a moot point to some - "this is a film about boxing, it’s not supposed to have anything to do with gender." Well, that very idea explains one reason exactly why it does matter with respect to gender. The idea that we don’t expect (or perhaps don’t want) a boxing film to have any type of gender dynamics is telling. This is a sports-film that centers on the experience and identity of *surprise* a male. Check out [2]this link for an interesting analysis of the lack of female-centered award-winning films in general.

In fact, the only real female role in the film is that of Adrian, Rocky’s eventual girlfriend and wife. And Adrian does not embody a strong, independent, important female character. Exactly the opposite, in fact. Adrian embodies the ideals of very traditional femininity: passive, shy, timid, dependent, frail, unable to take care of herself, nurturing, supportive, and not especially financially successful.

Adrian is viewed in two main ways in the film by men: as an obstacle, and as a source of social support. Adrian is
viewed as an obstacle by both Mickey (Rocky’s trainer), and Paulie (Rocky’s friend and Adrian’s brother). According to Mickey, “women weaken legs,” showing his belief that she is only in the way of Rocky’s training. Paulie claims that Adrian cannot survive on her own and is thus his responsibility, which has limited his options in life (a rather far-fetched claim coming from a raging alcoholic who has trouble himself of maintaining a job). For Rocky, Adrian is there to support him, both emotionally and physically. While this is helpful for Rocky, it still clearly places Adrian in the role of care-giver while Rocky’s career and well-being takes precedent. Both her role as an obstacle and as a source of support display her as status as a woman as being of secondary importance to the men in the film.

Gender analysis, however, should not be limited to looking at how females and femininity are often marginalized in society. We can see the characterization of masculinity (a specific kind of masculinity) and how that is portrayed as well. First of all, it is a film about boxing; it doesn’t get much more masculine than that. Secondly, we can see Rocky’s identity as a fighter as central to him. Males have a tendency to create their sense of self and identity to be closely tied to athletics and sport. This can be detrimental to other aspects of one’s life as different relationships and other areas take a backseat to the importance of sport. Finally, Rocky gets the girl (in large respect by ignoring Adrian’s initial refusals to his advances). What is more masculine than a male, heavy-weight prize fighter, who is heterosexual and ends up getting the girl? I don’t have an answer for that.

I have used Rocky mainly to illustrate a rags-to-riches story and tie it in with stratification while also attempting to touch on at least a couple of salient points on gender and race mentioned here. It is worth noting that there are other aspects of the film that could be equally fruitful to examine, as well as some of the other films from the series (Rocky III, and Rocky IV immediately come to mind).

You can follow Mike on Twitter [3]here or read his blog [4]here

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/nadUx0iWg5I](http://www.youtube.com/embed/nadUx0iWg5I)
2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8Puta8k8fU&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8Puta8k8fU&feature=youtu.be)
3. [http://www.twitter.com/metroka](http://www.twitter.com/metroka)

The Importance of Being Ernest #4 (2012-04-20 08:00)
A week in hospital has been like placing Ernest in a sociological sweet shop with a months worth of pocket money. The mentally unwell, the fights, the nurses, the elderly – it’s all there, like a box of quality street waiting for Ernest to unwrap with his sociological analysis, each one a shiny coloured nugget of the distress of humanity.

Being placed on an observation ward is like being plonked right in the middle of every social class, gender, culture, ethnicity, age and mental state available. What was most interesting to me was the mentality of the patients and nurses. During a four day stay, six people were dragged in having overdosed or self harmed. Of these six people two were taken on to a mental institution instantly, the rest waited for a bed for several days, after which a psychiatric assessment revealed them to be of no threat to themselves and they were released from section and allowed home. Of course the six day wait for one bed clearly had nothing to do with the number of those patients sent home... however, it seems to be that anyone who has recently been in such a state of distress that they are willing to take their own lives is probably not in a great state of mind.

Speaking to one of these patients, a drug addict struggling with withdrawal who had overdosed several times, I realised just how dire the mental health system is. This woman knew the tricks of the trade, how to appear the exact level of normal in a psychiatric assessment, how to self harm in a ward and how to hide your tools. Yet she was deemed well enough to leave the hospital and resume a life she clearly could not cope with. Why is it that self harm is not enough? It appears that it is only when the extreme occurs that anyone is taken seriously and yet we wonder why we have such high rates of suicide? Why is it that a broken bone is worse than a hurt mind and that it takes a suicide attempt (although only the right kind mind you!) for someone to listen? Why is a psychiatric assessment needed to decide if our own bodies are struggling? Who decides who is mad and who is sane?

Until we start listening to the mentally unwell, assume their minds are not broken but different and their voices have equal status to that of a psychiatrist, we will never create a system which serves the needs of mental health patients.

BSA Teaching Group – Call for micro-lectures To all Postgraduates in Universities local to Birmingham
(2012-04-21 08:00)

BSA TEACHING GROUP

Call for micro-lectures

To all Postgraduates in Universities local to Birmingham

At the

BSA TEACHING GROUP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

BIRMINGHAM, 29th SEPTEMBER 2012

Do you want to:

Enhance your profile?

Keep sociology teachers up-to date?

Talk to the people who will be writing the next generation of textbooks for A level?

Reach an audience of potentially 35,000 A level students a year?

Increase sociology’s wider knowledge base?

Maybe influence wider society?

Then come and deliver a micro-lecture [about 15 minutes] on your research to a group of committed sociology teachers who are eager to discover what the new research is showing.

We are looking for updates in all the fields covered by the current sociology syllabi from both OCR and AQA. These cover such areas as: culture and identity creation; differentiation; inequality and stratification; demography; welfare and government policy in most fields of life; family and households; the role of women; minority groups; aging; youth culture; all aspects of education especially potential changes and their effects on different groups within society; health and welfare; wealth and poverty and welfare provision; politics and power; globalisation in all its many aspects; religion; crime and deviance; methodology; theory and the role of research. If in doubt that your field would be relevant to us consult the syllabus at [1]www.aqa.org.uk or [2]www.ocr.org.uk

Interested? Then contact Rachel Jones, conference organiser: [3]jonesr@tauntons.ac.uk

1. http://www.aqa.org.uk/
3. mailto:jonesr@tauntons.ac.uk
Some resources for academic podcasting (2012-04-22 08:00)

1. [1] listen to ‘Why podcast?’ on Audioboo


5. [5] Call recorder for Skype (probably free ones out there but this is great)

6. [6] Tool to convert to or from MP3

7. [7] The Sociological Imagination podcast section (e-mail [8] here to discuss submitting a podcast)

8. [9] BSA PG Forum podcast series (e-mail [10] here to discuss submitting a podcast)


10. [12] Setting up an RSS feed for your podcasts with feed burner

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8. [8] mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
10. [10] mailto:PGForum@Britsoc.org.uk
Yesterday... (an ode to essay marking) (2012-04-22 18:30)

Yesterday*

Yesterday, all the students seemed so far away.
Now a bunch of essays block my way,
My desk is now in disarray.

Don't get me wrong, marking can be fun... but it is usually rushed and the marker feels a stab in the heart every time s/he reads something that is wrong... or worse: something that is not even wrong.

Suddenly, I avoid the university,
There's a shadow hanging over me.
The end of term came suddenly.

Why they write so bad? Not a clue, I wouldn't know.
I taught something wrong, now the errors overflow!
Yesterday, I was free to work on my research;
Now I need a place to hide away.
Instead, I am marking night and day.

All the same mistakes written time and time again!
[2] Seventeen-point scale, fail or pass, but all in vain!

Yesterday, I avoided research like the plague,
All I did was file my notes away...
I want to do the same today.

What will happen now, all the scripts have coffee stains?
Even if they paid, that would not alleviate the pain!

Yesterday...

*A Sunday evening tribute to the genius of [3]Sir Paul McCartney, written by one Idle Busy Ethnographer lost among empty cups coffee and red pens.*

3. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONXp-vpE9eU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONXp-vpE9eU)

Paola Tubaro, Senior Lecturer in Economic Sociology at the Business School of the University of Greenwich, reflects on #BritSoc12 (2012-04-23 08:00)


[3]
1130
Overall, however, a sense of unease prevailed. Perhaps it was the very theme of the conference: "Sociology in an age of austerity". Though not too strictly applied to all sessions (fortunately, a variety of issues and topics found a place in the various streams), it gave the general tone to discussions. Participants repeatedly voiced concerns about the current government's policies – privatizations, reforms of the University system and the NHS, reduced welfare benefits. Many raised the question of the role of sociologists in this context – all the more so as funders, regulators, and the government itself tend to increasingly make sociologists (and generally speaking, academics and intellectuals) accountable for the "impact" of their work. Is impact the right measure of the contribution of sociology to society – or should we rather think in terms of "value", as John Brewer (outgoing president of BSA) suggested? Is the notion of "public sociology" of Michael Burawoy (a keynote speaker at the conference) still practicable, and how can it be adapted to today's challenges?
It is indeed an important question. Yet I’m afraid there weren’t many answers around. (I was particularly happy of something that Burawoy said – we need a new theory of social movements – but it’s just because it’s one part of my research). By and large, nobody had a clue.

Still, there are some directions to explore. With the few who, like me, tweeted intensely during the conference, a sort of implicit consensus emerged that sociology should engage more with social media. To be part of an important development of today’s society, and most of all, to engage with wider publics than just academia, policymakers or business “clients” of sociological insight. The traditional press is no longer enough. Our bunch of tweets is a small step in this direction – we should now jump to a larger scale to make a difference.

Another direction for development is more openness to junior researchers. It was a bit sad that many
delegates left the auditorium after the [11]Burawoy-Bauman plenary, before the [12]prize ceremony that was to reward two “newer generation” sociologists. More generally, there should be more to support junior participants, be they PhD students, post-docs, or freshly appointed lecturers. If we need novel ideas, it is only from them that we can expect them. The Burawoys and Baumans have already done their job, and outstandingly so—we can’t ask them more.

Finally, I’ll draw on Burawoy (again!) for an appeal to method:

"we desperately need methodology to keep us erect, while we navigate a terrain that moves and shifts even as we attempt to traverse it."

The conference saw the usual quarrels between the qualitative and quantitative camps, but that’s not the point. Both methods have their legitimacy and usefulness, and so do all their variants and combinations (I’ll write more about this). What matters is that in all cases, methods should be applied seriously and rigorously: I regret to say, it was not always the case in Leeds. We need to be more careful about that. If we fail to stay erect, no notion of “impact”, “value” or “being public”, however innovative, can come to our rescue.

Originally posted on [13]Paola’s blog

2. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/
7. http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/
9. https://twitter.com/#!/search/realtime/%23britsoc12
11. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/38795/Plenary_Sessions_270312.pdf
Open access is no more than academic consumerism. It neither democratises knowledge production nor communication (2012-04-23 13:51)

The Open Access movement should be seen for what it is – nothing more but nothing less than a consumerist revolt, academic style. No one in this revolt is calling for what is sometimes called 'extended peer review' (whereby relevant non-academic stakeholders operate as knowledge gatekeepers), let alone the abandonment of science's normal technicality. In fact, the moral suaviness of a journalist like the Guardian's George Monbiot rests on his support of BOTH science's normal authorising procedures AND the free distribution of their fruits. In short, it's all about making research cheaper to access by those who already possess the skills to do so but are held back by such 'artificial' barriers as publishers' paywalls.

Nothing in this dispute bears on questions concerning how one might democratise knowledge production itself (e.g. how research credit might be distributed across students, informants, etc.; how one might select research topics that people find worthwhile; how impact across many audiences might be made a desideratum for securing a research grant).

Certainly there is no reason to believe that science communication/engagement is served by an open access policy to commercial scientific publications, if the target body of knowledge remains encoded as it has for the last 100 years. I take it that this is the message that [1]Alice Bell is trying to send, perhaps too politely.


J Britt Holbrook (2012-04-23 14:29:12)
Actually, I think that the question of who ought to count as a peer is THE question surrounding open access (http://cas-csid.cas.unt.edu/?p=2816), as well as the introduction of impact criteria into the peer review of grant proposals. Both are signs of the growing demand for accountability on the part of the public. Researchers will no longer be given free reign to determine what counts as valuable research on their own (academic, disciplinary) terms. Focusing on the business/consumer/producer angle of this distracts us from this fundamental point. If academics want to maintain a sense of autonomy, then they ought to own impact requirements (http://scienceprogress.org/2012/03/owning-the-national-science-foundation%E2%80%99s-broader-impacts-criterion/). The point is not, however, simply to attempt to protect the Academy from "outside" interference. Instead, the point is the begin to find ways to respond to the demand for greater accountability in ways that also enrich the idea of academic autonomy. Open access could be part of that new sense of autonomy – but, paradoxically, perhaps, only if academics will take seriously their accountability to society. This means that those thinking about open access policy ought also to take seriously the question of who ought to count as a peer. Likewise, they should think about who the audience for research papers will be under the rubric of open access.

Gloria Origgi (2012-05-03 21:03:40)
I think that there is more than a consumers’ revolt in the open access movement. What we all know today that we are preferring a low-quality mode of dissemination of information (slow, biased, run by cartels of disputable authorities) to a
high-quality one. Nobody wants the elimination of peer-review, but the way in which peer-review is done today, especially for journals of humanities and social sciences, is just less efficient than many ways that are technically available now (like: early sharing of drafts and collaborative peer-reviewing). Look at the interesting post of Richard Price on the price we pay to old practices of filtering science: http://techcrunch.com/2012/04/29/the-future-of-science/ Actually, I think we all know tacitly that we need a change, that the way in which academic work is done now is too sub-optimal to survive in the long run, but, of course, a lot of reflexion is still needed on alternative modes of peer-review and publishing that will assure in the future the same stability of content and editorial quality that is still assured by journals these days and that we terribly fear to lose (I like this blog and I like mine, but really don’t know if tomorrow they will be still there: my blog at http://www.gloriaoriggi.blogspot.com is owned by a private company and may disappear overnight.....)

The question of who ought to count as a peer is THE question surrounding open access | The Sociological Imagination (2012-04-23 14:48:54)
[...] Britt Holbrook in response to Steve Fuller’s post here [...] Mike Taylor (2012-05-07 22:34:47)
This article is flat-out wrong: there are plenty of applications of academic research outside of academia, and plenty of people keen to use that research. For just a few examples of non-academics keen to access research, see http://whoneedsaccess.org/ - fossil preparators who need research to avoid damaging specimens, parents of children with rare medical syndromes who have more time to invest in learning than their physicians do, teachers wanting to bring up-to-date knowledge to their students, small business founders needing research for the consultancy reports they sell, and many more. Steve Fuller is correct that this is an aspect of open access that certainly needs more publicity. But to suggest it’s been ignored communicates nothing more sinister than a lack of reading around the subject.

Kaveh Bazargan (2012-05-08 01:18:43)
I can’t see the connection of Peer Review to Open Access. One can continue the traditional methods of PR, but use the OA commercial model. On the point of "encoded" knowledge, that is largely due to the fact that unless submitted papers are full of jargon, they will not be taken seriously by the peers in the "club". Try submitting a Physics paper with no equations, even if these are not needed. I have seen many examples of equations needlessly inserted in to make a paper look more serious. So we need Open Access, and more papers more accessible to the non-specialist.

Aalam Wassef (2012-05-08 10:59:22)
Hi Steve, I find this piece interesting because you’re putting Open Access and Open Science (OS) side by side, pointing out aspirations they seem to have in common and (unless I misunderstood) what they don’t have in common yet. The Open Access movement is indeed eager to clarify that OA only describes scientific literature that is 1/Peer reviewed, 2/Digital, 3/Available online, 4/For free. To me, the question is: will Open Science – defined as 1/Open, public, collaborative research 2/Relying on a completely different conception of scientific validation 3/Relying on publisher-driven, institutional and/or social dissemination – will help Open Access achieve its two main goals: greater access to reliable scientific literature. I definitely believe that with the right infrastructures, with open source reputation models (on top of H Index and citation counts), and with innovative credit attribution, OS will indeed take science and access to science to a completely different level.

chris bowen (2013-06-08 00:06:40)
Try checking out Merton's CUDOS criteria ....it contains some useful ideas
The question of who ought to count as a peer is THE question surrounding open access, as well as the introduction of impact criteria into the peer review of grant proposals. Both are signs of the growing demand for accountability on the part of the public. Researchers will no longer be given free reign to determine what counts as valuable research on their own (academic, disciplinary) terms.

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papers will be under the rubric of open access.

1. https://twitter.com/#!/jbrittholbrook
rion/

Sarah Burton, a postgraduate student at Cambridge University, reflects on her first BSA conference (2012-04-24 08:00)

Having spent nearly a decade with English literature as the prevailing academic thrust of my studies I’ve recently been exploring other avenues of research. During my Master’s I got very interested in social history, psychology and various aspects of the social sciences in terms of how they relate to literary studies. In particular I’ve become fascinated by social theory and even more so by the people who write it. I’m intrigued by the notion of sociology as an ‘improving’ discipline, to quote Zygmunt Bauman, especially in terms of the idea that it should be freely and easily accessible to the ‘ordinary man’. My experience of social theory is very much that it is rather inaccessible, indeed in discussion with other academics this idea seemed to be prevalent.

So it was with this burgeoning interest in social theory that I decided to jump headlong into the sociological community and join the British Sociological Association. I figured (hoped) that it would help me meet similar lost souls suffering from the most dire of imposter syndrome because they had never actually done a degree in sociology but were nevertheless engaging academically with it. Fortuitously I was right, an event remarkable in itself for its sheer rarity. The annual conference held last week was one of the most enlightening experiences of my recent education – personally, politically, socially and academically. To detail the events of the conference in detail would be prosaic and tiresome so in order to be brief and hopefully witty, à la Polonius, I will concentrate on the standout moments.

I’d like to say that these came in the plenaries, roundtables, lectures, keynotes, streams etc but it would be a lie. Many were very good, introducing me to new thinkers, new faces, new thought connections and were absolutely worthwhile. But really, they made very little impact on my thinking aside from: ‘Nice, well done you. Very clever.’

What made a massive difference was talking to everyone that I possibly could – bunking off all of the organised stuff in order to sit in the hall drinking endless cups of coffee and talking about whatever came to mind with whoever crossed my path. The most common question of the conference was surely an enquiry into your area of study and as a literature student I think they found me curious but were always very open to my particular reasons for an interest in sociology. I found it interesting that so many current PhD students or early careers people had come into sociology from such a wide background: art, music, sport science, history, literature to name but a few. I noticed too a certain surprise at anyone wanting to write a purely theoretical PhD and couldn’t help thinking of the apparently arse-over-tit way they must see me approaching my proposal, though coming from literary studies it feels entirely natural to do wholly library based research.

Particular highlights for me academically were the Race and Violence stream plenary which being the last thing on the last day did well to keep our attention and enthusiasm; several papers on feminist activism, access to higher education and Bourdieu were really interesting and done well; the podcasting session on the PG day
was possibly the most enlightening and really got me thinking about what I could do with that and how it could be usefully used to engage with sociology. I think, considering the nature of my investigation, that it could be an especially worthwhile format to learn. Zygmunt Bauman’s talk on the PG day was inspiring, there was a definite sense of optimism in his rhetoric. Strangely for something attended by nearly 700 people it didn't feel enormous and overwhelming. On the other hand the catering was “ahem” questionable which would be fine and expected if the conference fees weren’t so high. But I achieved my objectives - I regaled most current sociologists with my PhD idea and took on their feedback, I met far too many brilliant new people and I learned things about how sociologists do stuff and how it’s different to literature. I even came away wanting to read a book on Italian football....

Originally posted on [1]Sarah’s blog.

1. [http://florapostwrites.wordpress.com/2012/04/16/becoming-sociological/](http://florapostwrites.wordpress.com/2012/04/16/becoming-sociological/)

New NCRM funded network of methodological innovation - New social media, new social science? (2012-04-24 12:00)

NatCen Social Research, Sage and the Oxford Internet Institute will be launching our new network for methodological innovation at the end of May. The network will explore whether social science researchers should embrace social media and, if we do, what the implications are for our methods and practice? We know that social media tools are increasingly being used in social science research. The nature of these tools means that it is a fast changing environment, with new practice emerging all the time. Despite this, there is limited interaction of practitioners or synthesis of these methods; there are also few opportunities to reflect on the implications of social media tools for research participants, methods and ethics. Our network of methodological innovation will bring together academics, researchers and research stakeholders from all sectors. The aim is to develop a community of practice with members drawn from the cutting-edge of academia, market research and applied social research.

Our community will be launched with a 1-day conference at the end of May 2012 with four further knowledge exchange e-events and a closing event across the next 12 months. We are hoping to live stream our events to enable the participation of network members from across the UK and internationally. We will build a collaborative online platforms to co-create think pieces, blogs, practitioner guides and develop lively discussion forums.

Find out more [1]here

Seven Days of social science research (2012-04-24 19:59)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/3zz9GAViOt8?feature=player_embedded

Les Back on Sociology’s Promise (2012-04-25 08:00)

In this podcast [1]Les Back discusses the enduring significance of C. Wright Mills to sociology. He mentions a (fantastic) book during his talk which we’ve embedded below.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/lesbackcwrightmills. mp3"]Les Back on Sociology’s Promise
Les Back on sociology’s promise | Thinking culture (2012-04-25 08:23:34)

[...] at the excellent Sociological Imagination blog there is this great video of Les Back reflecting on the promise of sociology. This blog is a really useful resource, there are some challenging posts on sociology’s [...]

Ursula (2012-05-13 07:40:27)
Thanks for posting this Mark. Really useful stuff.

Sociological Imagination (2012-05-13 10:08:35)
The other two will be up next week :)

Annika Coughlin (2014-07-18 17:35:56)
Do not ever delete this stuff! Very valuable indeed.

Social Class and Life Chances as seen through Survivor Rates on the Titanic (2012-04-26 08:00)

We have just eclipsed the 100 year anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic - an incredibly horrific tragedy that resulted in the deaths approximately 1,500 individuals. Astonishingly, this accounted for over two-thirds of the
individuals onboard. This from the ship that was dubbed "unsinkable" and was so confident in its invincibility that its lifeboat capacity could accommodate only about half of the individuals on the ship (they decided that they didn't want the "extra lifeboats" to ruin the aesthetic beauty of the ship's decks). In short, the Titanic was not well-equipped for a possible tragedy, which ensured that a great deal of individuals were to be doomed when tragedy did strike. While this means that most of the individuals wouldn't have survived (which the survival numbers verify), it does not mean that everyone on the ship had an equal chance at surviving. In fact, quite the opposite was true.

This real-life occurrence can be a useful starting point for instructors trying to introduce the concept of social stratification (inspired by David M. Newman's *Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life* textbook). The Titanic represents a very clear-cut example where social class divisions provided different opportunities to individuals occupying different classes (you can use "life chances" quite literally in this instance). An individual's odds of survival were greatly shaped by his/her structural location aboard the ship (i.e. your social class, gender, and age).

Here is an interesting chart illustrating the survivor rates by gender and class:

![Survivor Rates Chart](image)

This chart is the official report from the [1]British Board of Trade on the survivors. Clearly, members of some social classes were more likely to survive than others.

While I have yet to use this specific example in class, I am sure that it can be effectively utilized to illustrate structural location and access to resources and one's "life chances." The survivor rates are so stark and pronounced when broken down by social class that it makes for a very clear example of differential access to resources. This is why this chart is so powerful.

I would imagine that a couple of potential challenges you may encounter are “That’s just the way it was back then,” or “That was just one specific instance onboard a tragic ship’s sinking at sea.” While it’s true that social class probably isn’t quite as rigid now as it was in the days of Titanic, it should make for smooth transition to social class as a means to greater access to resources (i.e. better school systems or nicer neighborhoods). These more modern
examples can help to show that social class remains an important consideration when thinking about one’s access to resources and how this may shape life chances.

The movie, *Titanic*, could obviously be used or shown in clips in conjunction with the official report. Throughout there are many examples of differences in treatment, expectations, and norms of individuals based on social class. It may also be fruitfully analyzed as an illustration as to women’s "second-class status" and treatment (at times being treated as property). The main female character, Rose, is presented as a strong and independent female, though it is made obvious throughout the movie that she is the exception to the norm (all for a good storyline!).

Whether you choose to use the actual film or simply the above survivor statistics, this can be a powerful example and metaphor; it takes some pieces of information that students are probably aware of, but perhaps have never thought about sociologically – a powerful tool to use when teaching.

You can follow Mike on Twitter [2]here or read his blog [3]here


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Our top 10 posts in April (2012-04-27 08:00)

1. [1]No Jokes Please
2. [2]Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick
3. [3]Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
4. [4]Now this is how you do public engagement online...
5. [5]First there was Marx...
7. [7]Car Boot Sale
8. [8]What is public sociology?
9. [9]Les Back: “is sociology a job or a vocation?”
10. [10]When Sociology Was Cool

Black and ethnic minority university staff continue to face disadvantage (2012-04-27 12:00)

Measures to promote race equality in higher education have had very "little impact".

Speaking at the British Sociological Association’s annual conference in April, Andrew Pilkington, professor of sociology at University of Northampton, said the impact of race equality initiatives in academic recruitment under the Labour government had been "short-lived".

In an article by [1]Times Higher Education, it is argued that diversity issues have "fallen down the agenda" in the last ten years. Priority has arguably been focused on gender equality rather than reducing racial disadvantage.

Professor Pilkington continues that, "evidence [pointed] to failures in data gathering and target setting, [which] suggests that many universities have not taken equal opportunities policies seriously".

An introduction to multi-author blogging (2012-04-28 08:00)

[EMBED]


Michael Burawoy on Third Wave Marketization (2012-04-29 08:00)

Read more about Burawoy’s notion of third wave marketization and its significance for sociology [2]here.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/MNR0Ety8SsI](http://www.youtube.com/embed/MNR0Ety8SsI)
2. [http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS/TAS1/third_wave.pdf](http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS/TAS1/third_wave.pdf)

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-04-29 13:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination


Follow us on Twitter here:
What did Victorian headmistresses look like? (2012-04-30 08:00)

What did headmistresses who greeted their students on a chilly Monday morning a century ago look like? What sort of people were they? What did they think about? Why did they do their job? What did they care about?

Have a look at this awesome [1]gallery and let your historic imagination free.

Miss Arnold

3.5 May

Ten resources for academics getting started with Twitter (2012-05-01 08:00)

1. Register for Twitter and find researchers to follow
2. Engage with your network on Twitter
3. "Why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?"
4. The LSE’s list of academic twitter users
5. Support, engagement, visibility and personalised news: Twitter has a lot to offer academics if we look past its image problem
6. 100 Serious Twitter Tips for Academics
7. 10 Ways Researchers Can Use Twitter
8. Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities
9. Exploring research networks on Twitter

What Wordle says about Sociological Imagination (2012-05-01 14:00)

Have you tried using Wordle? It’s quite fun.

[1]

On http://www.txt2pic.com you can make more images with your text.

On The Impossibility Of Being Original – A Sociological Perspective (2012-05-02 08:00)

This is a follow up to [1]this earlier post

When analysing anything through a social lens, an important understanding I believe is needed; that is of the true impact of social structure on individuals. While the chosen form of functioning – easily recognised by the terms Communism, Socialism or Capitalism for example – can be naively viewed as causing isolated forms of behaviours by those within that society, a more accurate and proven understanding is that the system in place merely accentuates and brings to light certain innate human characteristics more than others; all of which are a part of every human
being. For example, the Communist Nazi regime didn’t turn German citizens into blindly obedient tools for the exploitation of Jewish people, but instead created a context in which fear and a lack of social capital among the masses resulted in those behaviours being carried out. More importantly, just as there were such practices as concentration camps and gas chambers, individual and, at times, even collective examples of love and self-sacrifice also existed – as have been brilliantly documented in numerous films, such as The Pianist and The Great Escape, of which there are probably too many to count. Therefore, through this rational idea of social influence, originality can be further explored.

As goes the well-known cliché, money makes the world go round; and it is this ‘fact’ that largely deprives us of our originality. The vast majority of individuals in both Western and developing countries almost always have to consider their economic situation with every decision they make, without having the luxury of inherited or fluked wealth. Indeed, except for the lucky – or some would argue unlucky – few, money permeates every aspect of life: family, work, leisure and, most crucially, art. Art is, and should be, in my opinion, a reflection of one’s self. Therefore, what one creates is a true testament to their honesty and passions. On the surface this might be seen as a deliberate effort to avoid originality, as many people share similar views, passions and flaws, and all humans are generally driven and inspired by similar themes. Thus, without the conscious effort to deviate from the typical trends of fiction, music, fashion and film (to list four popular means of artistic expression), one’s creations will be seen in those of others. However, while ignoring the lengthy nature/nurture debate that would be required to truly explore such an issue, I believe that anything created solely through one’s own desires is true art, and is therefore evidence of originality. The problem arises when external influences come into play; of which I believe have never been so dominant as they are in today’s world.

It has already been mentioned that money is the most powerful of all, and this should not be understated or assumed to be a universal clique that has always existed and has therefore become an organic and, therefore, irrelevant issue. With the Industrial Revolution and, in turn, the growth of, and migration of, people towards large cities all over the world, has arrived an almost universal form of comparison – that of financial capital. 150 years
 ago, and still just about existing in very isolated villages and, of course, more so in the underdeveloped regions of the planet, each member of the community had their own unique value adding to that of the society; usually a trade, skill or responsibility cast upon them. This allowed every citizen to be both unique in their contribution to the community, but also of equal social capital to everyone else. The farmer would have been in his own way as invaluable as the baker, the builder and the tool maker for example. Of course, in the 21st century, population growth in cities across the world and policies of free enterprise and open markets, particularly in the Western world, has meant that every field of work is immensely competitive, has the scope for huge gains in wealth, but also the likely chance of complete failure. The spread of wealth in America – that of 99% of the population owning 1% of the wealth, and 1% owning 99% - underlines the resulting effects on society. Crucially, one's originality naturally suffers from this. While before the baker, being the only one in his small village, had guaranteed – if not booming – business, now he would have dozens of other bakeries to compete with; and with such a large population living in such a small area (think Tokyo or Beijing for example), it is quite possible for just 2 or 3 of his rival businesses to reap the overwhelming share of customers. Within this climate, the constant fight to survive financially means that money must take priority ahead of any artistic motives; whether they are ethical, goal-oriented or just one's personal interests that they wish to carry out. Not only this, but the results of the chosen practices are now, for the first time, universally measurable – economy being the only detail compared and, essentially, the only factor that ever can be compared (because any form of art is inevitably subjective and, therefore, incomparable). The resulting awareness of one's competition, their judgement of, and potential success over, one's self further negates any ability to carry out artistic practices. Furthermore, work that was once a means to make a living while the remaining leisure time could still be spent on a person's interests and hobbies has necessarily become a life-investment, with working hours increasing to the extent of leisure time being almost non-existent for millions of people, particularly in large, modern cities. Indeed, it is not uncommon for bankers to work for 12 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week. As a result, the overwhelming majority live their lives through their work: work in which becomes the same generic practices – usually through systematic, hierarchical institutions - that everyone else takes part in. Consequently, the industrial working world has become a means of trying to carry out the same proven, standardised procedures more efficiently and intensely than everyone else. Modern capitalist methods have further heightened the difficulties caused by our human tendencies; particularly for those that are socially aware or rely on cultural acceptance in order to live even the most trivial of lifestyles. Indeed, this is inherent among the vast majority of society anyhow, due to the immense, unjustifiably wide gap between the rich and poor that exists synonymously in both developed and developing nations around the world. This social hierarchy, while inevitably causing a handful of National, and global, role models to be idolised beyond belief, and broadening the numbers that follow a particular idolised fashion trend, music genre or political belief for example, has two particularly significant, and largely unrealised, properties. Firstly, the extreme bottom-heavy structure of such hierarchies is such that those few remaining at the top avoid the intense struggle that persists beneath. As seen by youth football academies in England, or the hip-hop gangs that continue to battle in the suburbs of large American cities, this ruthless battle is almost always underneath the person or institution that they are trying to associate with or overtake. Of course, there may be small windows of opportunity (trial days, book signings, talent contests etc.), but just as you throw your dog a bone so he will keep coming back to you, human beings also react to that small slice of hope. Inevitably, and tactically on behalf of the dominant institutions, they will stay inspired and motivated towards their targeted goal, no matter how unrealistic. Indeed, the individuals responsible for the idolised message have the money and social capital to ensure things stay that way. Secondly, and crucially for the first property to be seen as both pertinent and ridiculous, the wave starters at the hierarchy's peak need the brawl beneath if they are to stay on top. It is the cd's, merchandise, packed stadiums of fans, and giggling swarms of girls that gift their idols their superhero status and, unfortunately, their financial and social capital needed to float above the social majority. Of course, as Karl Marx has dramatically underlined, the vast majority of society therefore have the opportunity to rise up against the minority in power and, consequently, are able to become themselves, at least to a greater extent than at present. Unfortunately, the whole process becomes a never ending cycle, with superstars becoming has-beens, up-and-coming others replacing them and the new batch of young hopefuls imitating their new heroes once again. If this is indeed the case then originality – while ignoring the initial social influences on the individual – can perhaps exist in a very short, temporary form. Essentially, just until the masses listen, read, watch or understand the message and, in turn, absorb, copy and spread similar themes
elsewhere. Of course, it is not unknown that this is a significant part of human nature. The music industry, for example, regularly demonstrates this process, with fresh new artists releasing a first record and rising to global fame and success in just a few months before never being able to have the same effect on their audience during their second or third attempts. It’s incredible how so few musicians have been able to consistently release music that is both original and successful. As already explained through ‘social hierarchies’, the nature of such institutions means that the two are almost always mutually exclusive anyhow. Consequently, the ‘artist’, through almost any possible form, either conforms to the label that is first placed upon them or gravitates to other popular trends in order to stay relevant; negating the artist’s uniqueness when compared to the social majority, but also in the falseness of their expression – their ‘art’. Through various processes within our modern social structure, as explained, our originality can be largely undermined. Predominantly through the emergence of new standards of living, working and, in turn, treatment of our lives and others, our time, opportunities and motivation for artistic endeavours and, in general, behaviours stemming from our true personal make-up has become severely restricted. I am, however, confident – or should I say hopeful – that we will break through this stagnant period and rediscover our individuality and, more importantly, confidence to express it. The clear niche in industrial markets for more humanistic means of working practice suggests that it could also be a largely profitable, as well as refreshing, way of functioning. It is perhaps these solutions that are more realistic and, therefore, required for change to take place. As for the dominance of financial capital and the ‘celebrity’ over our everyday lives, we can only hope that more artistic and - I would argue - more fulfilling avenues in life can eventually overcome their presence. The recent economic recession and continued exploitation of celebrity icons could surely pave the way for change, even if our wonderfully original selves somehow fail.

‘Life is too important to be taken seriously’ Oscar Wilde

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/c8ASGmrrwGO

chris eagles (2012-05-04 09:59:31)
I never knew you had so much in you.....brilliant

Public Sociology In an Age of Austerity - Michael Burawoy and John Holmwood in Dialogue (2012-05-03 08:00)


[4]
1150
Money with morals in the Rhondda Valley (2012-05-03 22:29)

[EMBED]
On Tuesday 21 June 2011 six photographers were assigned different areas of the City to photograph. Some used tripods, some went hand held, one set up a 5 x 4.

All were instructed to keep to public land and photograph the area as they would on a normal day. The event aimed to test the policing of public and private space by private security firms and their reaction to photographers.

All six photographers were stopped on at least one occasion. Three encounters led to police intervention.

This is what happened.

Directed and Produced by Hannah White for the London Street Photography Festival
Edited by Stuart York

If you want to find out more about the issues addressed in the film, check out [2]I’m a Photographer, Not a Terrorist!

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/FJH9F7Hcluo
An Animated Introduction to Social Science (2012-05-05 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/DSIdaTSG2Gg

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/DSIdaTSG2Gg
So you Want to Get a PhD in the Humanities (2012-05-05 19:34)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/obTNwPjvOi8

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-05-06 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates

1154
“Members of the ‘Golden Dawn’ passing in the street”: The emergence of far right extremism and the elections of the 6th of May in Greece (2012-05-06 14:00)

The Greek MYPLACE team at Panteion University Of Social And Political Sciences on the forthcoming Greek elections and the emergence of the extreme right “Golden Dawn.”

This was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. Follow MYPLACE on Twitter [2]here. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [3]here.

Less than a week before the most crucial elections in Greece after the restoration of democracy in 1974 it seems that far-right extremism, as it is expressed by the organization ‘Golden Dawn’, is going to be part of the forthcoming parliament assembly for the first time in almost forty years. This extremist organization was founded in the first place as a periodical in 1980 by his current General Secretary. In 1983 stops its publication and it reappears next year (1984). The General Secretary of the Golden Dawn, Nikolaos Michaloliakos, was the leader of the party the Dictator G. Papadopoulos founded while he was in prison after the fall of the military junta and he founded the political party National Popular Movement – Golden Dawn in 1985. The first activities of the movement were the participation in the rallies about the so called ‘Macedonian issue’, i.e. the name of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia and of course the participation in the civil war in Yugoslavia supporting the Serbs. It is very interesting, that Golden Dawn did not participate in the elections of 2007 and in 2009 received 19,624 votes (only 0.29 % of the votes). However, in the local elections of 2010 in Athens received 10,222 votes (5.29 %) and managed to elect its General Secretary as a local counselor, who in one of the first assemblies of the municipal council gave the fascist salute (they argue that this is a ancient Greek salute and not a fascist one), something that almost all the members do in their gatherings. Today, all the polls agree that Golden Dawn is going to receive between 4 and 7 % of the votes and it is almost certain that approximately 15 PMs are going to be elected.

Even though the Golden Dawn begun as a Nazi organization, also supporting ancient Greek civilization and religion, during the last two years and in order to gain the support of the Greek society it denounces its Nazi past and declare its Greek-Orthodox character. They are against globalization, against the corrupted political system and of course against the troika and the austerity measures imposed on the Greek society. However, their main interest is immigrants (legal and illegal), because according to their ideology the Greeks belong to Arian race and as a consequence all other races are considered inferior.

Furthermore, they argue that unemployment is caused by the too many illegal immigrants who take the jobs of the Greeks and that criminality is in such high rates only because of the immigrants. In many cases, they have attacked immigrants, who in their majority are afraid to press charges against them, they have attacked leftists and members of anti-racist/ anti-fascist organizations, and also they have attacked politicians of the main political parties. Recently, they started to give food supplies to those who are poor, homeless and unemployed and they are very proud that they managed to ‘clean’ of the immigrants the square of Aghios Panteleimon of Athens in the center of the city. In addition, some of the organization’s members have been convicted for participating in activities of the common
penal law (e.g. robberies, murders, etc.). During, the last days they attacked many left-wing electoral stands in many regions of Athens and they were also accused of attacking immigrants, who were begging for some money in Crete.

They are very active in a local level, but they are considered a dangerous and closed organization. Recently, [4]Reuters and the Associated Press did some research about them but they were not willing to answer questions about the issue of violence against the immigrants. They argue that if they are elected they will bring back the minefields in the borders with Turkey in order stop immigration and also that they will abolish the ‘alternative military service’ for those denying it because of conscience reasons. Additionally, those denying the military service will lose their citizenship. It is evident, that the reason of the increase of their percentages is the immigration issue.

They are also very active in the internet, and even though they accuse the mainstream media of preventing their public presence they themselves ask the Greek citizens to close their TVs because they can find them on the internet, where they have their blogs, their websites, their twitter account, special sites for the youth division ([5]http://www.resistance-hellas.blogspot.com/) and special sites for women ([6]http://whitewomenfront.blogspot.com/).

However, one of the specialists we interviewed for WP 3 said that there is no special participation of youth in this organization to the point that it would be worth mentioning it or at least to the point that it is different from youth participation in other parties and coalitions.


Loneliness in Japan (2012-05-07 08:00)

Japan is facing a decline in community spirit. Recent studies have shown that for the first time in history, the average number of people in a Tokyo home has dropped below two. While this is nothing new if we look at the rest of the industrialised world, Japanese sociologists are worried that this is becoming an acute problem in the context of an ageing society, and is creating new responsibilities for which the state and local authorities are simply not suited. Read the article and watch the news report on [1]Al-Jazeera
Was Aditya Chakrabortty right about Sociology? A work sociologist responds... (2012-05-08 08:00)

In a recent article [1]Aditya Chakrabortty argued that economics has failed us but sociology has been unable to offer any alternatives. In this podcast I talk to [2]Melanie Simms of Warwick Business School, who signed this group [3]letter to the Guardian, about work sociology and its relevance to the big questions which Chakrabortty accuses the discipline of having no answers to. Explore some of these issues further in a [4]special edition of Work, Employment and Society which is freely available until the end of May.

[s]Was Aditya Chakrabortty right about Sociology?[/s]
How much do you have to lose? Les Back on the riots (2012-05-09 08:00)

In this interview recorded at the BSA conference in April 2012, Les Back reflects upon the significance of last summer’s riots in the UK and what, if anything, has been learnt from them.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/ukriots.mp3"]

[EMBED]

1. http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/back/

Les Back on the UK riots | Thinking culture (2012-05-09 08:18:06)
[...] is an audio of Les Back talking about the 2011 UK riots. He makes a really important distinction here between those with nothing to lose and those with [...]  

Government Still failing to address racism in Northern Ireland (2012-05-10 08:00)

A decade and a half ago, racial equality and anti-racism were non-existent in Northern Ireland and important attempts have been made to address racism. But multifaceted and deep-rooted racism is manifest at the individual, institutional and state levels of Northern Ireland society.

Earlier this year two people were convicted for murdering Marek Muszynski in 2009, a Polish man beaten to death in Newry Northern Ireland. The case serves as a potent reminder of the most extreme outcomes of racism and demands that attention should be drawn to how the whole phenomenon is addressed and responded to, not only by the criminal justice system, but by government as well.

Since the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, the UK Institute of Race Relations [1] has documented 96 deaths ‘with a known or suspected racial element’. Two of these deaths were recorded in Northern Ireland, including the recent murder of Marek Muszynski in 2009. According to Detective Chief Inspector Gareth Talbot ‘Marek was a Polish national who came to Northern Ireland to explore the opportunities this country could offer him.’ Instead, Marek
was robbed, allegedly [2] racially taunted with ‘go back to your own country, you’re not wanted in Ireland,’ and then subjected to a brutal attack. In January a young man was sentenced to eleven years for the murder and weeks later a [3] young woman was given a life sentence for the [4] same crime.

Earlier in the trial attention was brought to the racially aggravated circumstances of the murder in which one of the perpetrators admitted to racially taunting the victim. In more recent media reports, there is no mention of a racial motivation and it does not appear that racially aggravated circumstances were taken into consideration in the [5] passing of the sentences.

In another case in 2004, Brij Brushan Sharma was killed in the aftermath of a dispute on the street, the year in which Northern Ireland was hailed the ‘race hate capital of Europe’. However, the courts did not recognise the racially infused context of the killing. Convicted of manslaughter, one of the perpetrators was sentenced to 17 months in prison while his brother was given 100 hours of community service for intimidation. While racist remarks had been made, it was revealed in an investigation by the Police Ombudsman of Northern Ireland that this was not taken into consideration by the prosecution, much to the dismay of the deceased’s family who were upset at the brevity of the sentence and felt that it should have reflected the fact that the killing was racially motivated. Overall a report by the Police Ombudsman revealed that the criminal justice system had made a number of errors in the investigation and prosecution of the case. The family of Brij, supported by the Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities, have [6] since called for a public inquiry into institutional racism within the criminal justice system of Northern Ireland.

More recently the case of Simon Tang, a restaurant owner who was robbed and beaten to death in 1996, was re-opened on the basis of new evidence. Police are now suggesting that this murder was also racially motivated (BBC News 2012).

The deaths of Marek Muszynski, Brij Brushan Sharma and Simon Tang highlight the continuing problem of racism in Northern Ireland and its most extreme outcome. At the same time, the deaths of these men demand that attention should be placed on how the criminal justice system responds to racism and prosecutes it. Back in 2006 a [7] report entitled ‘The Next Stephen Lawrence’ by Robbie McVeigh argued that the criminal justice system, particularly the police, were inadequately responding to a growing problem of racist violence, which according to McVeigh, was tantamount to institutional racism.

Surprisingly, the police only began to record racist incidents in 1995; largely as a result of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) people putting pressure on the police to recognise that racially motivated crime was a problem in Northern Ireland (White 1998). Despite BME people living in Northern Ireland for over a century, Race Relations legislation was only passed in 1997, again this was largely as a result of lobbying and campaigning by BME people in partnership with human rights’ organisations, which now meant, for the first time, individuals had legal redress for acts of racial discrimination. It [8] has been argued that the slow move towards recognising the existence of racism was down to a combination of flagrant denial and sectarian conflict, which not only obscured the reality of racism but also meant that many issues affecting minority ethnic people living in Northern Ireland were rarely taken into consideration. This denial and focus on sectarian issues meant that agencies and policymakers displayed a lack of awareness around issues pertaining to racism and the promotion of racial equality, and as such, their policy responses were non-existent (Mann-Kler 1997).

Since then, racist incidents have increased considerably over the years. In 1996 41 incidents were recorded; by 1998, this had risen to 106 and, in the year 2009, 990 incidents were recorded (PSNI 2011). The most recent figures in 2010 reveal a slight decline whereupon figures now stand at 842 incidents. It has [9] been suggested that the increase in race-hate crime, overall, is partially down to people being more willing to report racism, better recording
practices by the police, a change in the definition of a racist incident as a result of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, and a real increase in racist incidents. Indeed, the figures could be far greater as race hate crime is usually underreported.

This means that a great deal of racist hate crime falls under the radar. This was confirmed at a [10] meeting of the All Party Group on Ethnic Minority Communities, a group that lobbies politicians on issues affecting BME communities, in which one minority ethnic representative argued that 95% of race hate crime is unreported. Consequently this issue is reflective of one of the biggest flaws with race-hate crime statistics; that is, they do not capture the true extent of racist harassment because a great deal of it remains under-reported for a variety of reasons. The most predominant factors that inhibit reporting include: fear of retaliation if the crime is reported to the police; a belief that there is no point reporting as nothing will be done; and [11] poor experiences with the police. On a closer examination it is clear that a lack of trust in the police is a considerable problem, especially for the Travelling community. It has also [12] been revealed that BME people who have had contact with the police, were more likely to say that the police were racist. This issue is, perhaps, reflective of a much wider problem of institutional racism.

Overall, it is clear that institutional racism is deeply embedded in the architecture of society resulting in a panoply of discrimination and disadvantages for BME people. Recent cases of police racism in the UK, including alleged racist texts sent by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, draws attention to the widespread nature of this problem despite policy changes (BBC News 2012, Channel 4 News 2012).

In relation to the police response to race hate crime, problems have also been encountered by BME people in regard to an inadequate investigation of racist attacks, deficient support, at the time, or soon after reporting a racist incident, as well as poor relations between the police and minority ethnic communities. Overall, a lack of positive engagement with BME people and a lack of confidence in the police service has proved to be a consistent problem, which in the recent past, has been [13] expressed by various regional minority ethnic organisations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities, the Belfast Islamic Centre, and the Chinese Welfare Association. In addition, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities has raised concerns about the treatment of minority ethnic communities at the hands of the criminal justice system, stating that:

"Among the ethnic minority population in Northern Ireland there are strongly held beliefs, based on their daily experiences, that they are treated unequally and less favourably by the Northern Ireland criminal justice system."

The low clearance rate for race hate crime is also problematic. In 2005-2006 the clearance rate stood at 20.5 percent. However since then the rate of clearance has fallen to 12.5 percent between 2008-2009. While some argue that such figures, alongside low prosecution figures, epitomise the inability of the criminal justice system to successfully respond to race-hate crime (McVeigh 2006), [14] it is clear that this also sends out the message that there is no point in reporting race hate crime as a criminal prosecution is unlikely.

In the face of such criticisms [15] it has been argued that the police are making improvements in the recording of race hate crime, and that the appointment of Minority Liaison Officers (MLOs) has helped to alleviate problems associated with engagement. Yet, Patel's [16] research in 2011 reveals that ‘operational officers tended to equate policing in a racially diverse society, with the need to police BME people themselves. Here, there was a tendency to view the BME communities, especially newer (economic) migrants, as largely deviant and problematic. This was done via a process of ‘criminalisation’ (Patel 2011).

Therefore, it is clear that race hate crime remains a considerable problem in Northern Ireland, which the criminal justice system has ‘failed to address or resolve’ (McVeigh 2006:54). This year, a follow up to ‘The Next Stephen Lawrence’ will be published by the Northern Ireland Council of Ethnic Minorities. The research report aims to
examine all criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland in relation to how they process and respond to racist hate crime. According to [17] preliminary findings there have been few, if any, improvements in the system.

It is worth noting that the impact of race hate crime on BME communities in Northern Ireland is far-reaching. Each attack not only harms individuals, but it also impacts upon an entire community. In a study by Chahal and Julienne in 1999, which focused on four areas in the UK (including Belfast), it was found that the impact of racism goes well beyond the actual event itself. Fear of being targeted shapes how Black and Minority Ethnic people interact with the wider community; for instance, BME people reported that they were apprehensive about leaving home or going out at night. Racism and the fear of racism also have a negative impact upon the health and well being of minority ethnic people.

A similar story is to be found in a study carried out by [18] Connolly and Keenan (2001) and McVeigh (2006); both of which provide an in-depth insight from the perspectives of BME people in regard to how racist harassment is experienced and its impact on a daily basis. Overall, it was found that the impact of both direct and indirect racist harassment is profound, and one tends to feed into and reinforce the other. Direct racist harassment creates fear which restricts freedom of movement, and the unprovoked and random nature of incidents means that minority ethnic people 'can never feel totally relaxed and 'at home' within wider society'.

Meanwhile, the Northern Ireland government have failed to take racism seriously as evidenced in the fact that a high profile policy framework (The Racial Equality Strategy) designed to address racism from 2005-10, was never implemented.

In the research I carried out between 2008-10 which specifically investigated government attempts to address racism, it was clear that moves towards tackling racism in Northern Ireland were largely impeded by a lack of policy and legislative implementation. Ultimately this contributed to a lack of co-ordination in relation to how racism was tackled across local government, resulting in the employment of weak measures to address racism in the majority of councils studied.

More specifically, a number of obstacles also stymied efforts to successfully challenge racism. These included:

- An absence of strategic policy direction and leadership from central government in relation to tackling racism.

- A lack of capacity and confidence within local government to address ongoing racism and put into action strategic policy to tackle the problem.

- Continued poor engagement between local government and minority ethnic people, especially via elected representatives.

- Under-funding and poor management of resources by central government for minority ethnic groups, inhibiting the sector from building capacity - a central aim of the Racial Equality Strategy

- A narrow conceptualisation of racism has, and continues to, limit how racism is tackled, in effect addressing racism on a superficial basis through good relations rather than a strong-anti-racist approach.

- The continuing legacy of sectarianism is also shaping how racism is dealt with. Moreover, the main political parties
have sectarianised the debate on racism as divisive, contributing to stalling efforts to address racism.

In 2011 government ministers proposed that a new updated Racial Equality Strategy would be published, broadly similar to the original strategic framework, by March 2012. According to the All Party Assembly Group for Ethnic Minority Communities, [19] this has been delayed and will not be implemented this year as originally planned.

A decade and a half ago, racial equality and anti-racism were non-existent in Northern Ireland and today Northern Ireland has made important moves in aiming to address racism, but these have been foreshadowed by a lack of implementation. Granted, Northern Ireland has moved away from denial to recognition that racism is a problem, yet at the same time its extent is often downplayed or minimised. It is abundantly clear that racism in Northern Ireland is multifaceted and deep rooted. Racism is manifested at the individual, institutional and state levels of Northern Ireland society. For instance, racism at the individual level reveals itself as racial prejudice and race hate crime, as evidenced in surveys, research reports and police statistics. Yet this is only the tip of the iceberg. Perhaps more tellingly, research that has focused on the perspectives of minority ethnic people, reveal more subtle forms of everyday racism that are not amenable to measurement through surveys. These include racist banter or jokes, staring and racial distancing (Connolly and Keenan 2001). The cumulative effect of this type of racism, alongside more overt forms of racism, can be devastating. It has also been found that racism in Northern Ireland tends to be more covert and hidden. In addition, institutional racism is an issue across a broad range of services. This is often compounded by hostile and condescending attitudes, expressed by public sector staff. And finally, racism is also found at the state level; evident in repressive policies on immigration; ineffective responses to race hate crime (as discussed previously); as well as the poor treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.

The quandary remains, racism in Northern Ireland is evidently a widespread problem but so far it is not being strategically addressed by government and difficulties remain in regard to how race hate crime is processed and tackled within the criminal justice system.

Originally posted on [20]Open Democracy

Further references


1162


Fiona Haughey is currently a lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at Belfast Metropolitan college. Her doctoral research looked at racism in the context of Northern Ireland from a policy perspective. You can follow Fiona on Twitter [24]here

17. http://www.nicem.org.uk/userFiles/File/Minutes%20of%20the%20September%202011%20Meeting%20of%20All%20Party%20Group-3.pdf
manjeet chaturvedi (2012-05-10 08:31:18)
It is easy to find a 'cause' for ills in society, mainly economic deprivation, resource sharing and job scarcity, in the presence of outsiders who belong to other races and ethnic groups. Thus a micro number of native people form a prejudice on racial basis which sometimes snowballs. Sometimes, the local law and order does labeling of outsiders and protects those who indulge into minor hate crimes like social ridicule, pushing out from a queue. Ignoring minor incidents encourages racism. Denial of racist bias in day-to-day affairs may lead to petty crimes or even to major attacks on people belonging to other races.

RSA Animate - Language as a Window into Human Nature (2012-05-10 16:00)
The Transformation of Academic Practice – Interview with Martin Weller, author of the Digital Scholar (2012-05-11 08:00)

In this podcast I talk to [1]Martin Weller, author of the [2]Digital Scholar, about the changes which digital technology is bringing about within academia and where they might ultimately lead.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/martin-weller-on-201 2-05-02-at-12-41.mp3"]

1. http://nogoodreason.typepad.co.uk/

Digital scholarship and publishing | Thinking culture (2012-05-14 08:17:52)
[...] is an audio with Martin Weller, the author of the above book, here. It covers the open access debate and the new forms of publishing that are now available for[...]

Amber Thomas (2013-07-10 21:39:40)
Great interview, I always like Martin’s way of describing things. Unfortunately it cut off for me at the point you were asking what institutions can do to support digital innovation, just as it was getting to the points I was hoping to hear! Can’t work out a way to navigate to that part of the recording!

Sociological Imagination (2013-07-10 22:20:05)
works for me! i actually listened to this again a few days ago for the first time since editing it. if you still have problems, i’m happy to send the mp3:-) though you’re making me think i really should get round to moving all my podcasts onto soundcloud so people don’t have these issues

From digital footprint to digital scholar and beyond | Nicola Pallitt (2015-09-07 00:49:29)
[...] Videos and podcasts via the Digital Scholar Training Initiative and The Sociological Imagination. [...]

1165
Steve Fuller on Interdisciplinarity (a lecture in 3 parts) (2012-05-12 08:00)


Steve Fuller in interdisciplinarity | Thinking culture (2012-05-14 08:56:19)
[...] a video of Steve Fuller talking about interdisciplinarity. There is a strong critique here of short term approaches to knowledge formation. Again from the [...]
4. [Twitter Updates]

3. [http://twitter.com/socnewswire](http://twitter.com/socnewswire)
4. [http://twitter.com/soc_imagination](http://twitter.com/soc_imagination)

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Take a look at our C. Wright Mills Bundle. Is there anything you think we should add to it? (2012-05-14 08:00)

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John Holmwood on "Sociology’s ‘moments’: C. Wright Mills and the critique of professionalism" (2012-05-15 08:00)

This podcast is a recording of [1]John Holmwood’s talk at the [2]C. Wright Mills session from the BSA conference in April 2012. The snippet below is from the subsequent q &a session.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/johnhsociologicalimagina tion.mp3"] (main podcast)

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/johnhsociology.mp3"] (snippet)

1. [http://nottingham.academia.edu/JohnHolmwood](http://nottingham.academia.edu/JohnHolmwood)

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Mike O’Donnell on “Charles Wright Mills and the (Continuing) Problem of Radical Agency” (2012-05-16 08:00)

This podcast is a recording of [1]Mike O’Donnell’s talk at the [2]C. Wright Mills session from the BSA conference in April 2012.

1168
Mike has written for SI on similar themes in the past:

[3] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today


Window on Research: Dave O'Brien on Cultural Consumption in Contemporary Society (2012-05-17 08:00)

This podcast discusses cultural consumption in contemporary British society, exploring who does what and why, against the backdrop of the ethos of creative workers. The cultural 'omnivore' thesis is outlined and critiqued, suggesting the importance of expertise, social status and social class to understand cultural consumption.

The podcast links consumption to production by linking creative industries to the rise of entrepreneurialism and the importance of the concept of the creative worker as a response to ongoing dilemmas within the British economy. It unpacks the ambivalences of creative labour, outlining issues of exploitation, self-management and conceptions of failure associated with precarious labour, but contrasts these issues with the pleasures of creative work and the idea of 'good' work as a way to understand the emancipatory potential offered by creative work.

Running throughout the podcast is a description of the limits of social scientific attempts to measure participation and consumption of culture in Britain today, how those attempts may constitute as well as describe our understanding of cultural consumption, and the effects of the digital revolution in distribution on measuring participation.
The issue in the media


Cultural consumption and the omnivore


Cultural work:

- [13]http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/25/7-8/1
The uncertainty of contemporary Higher Education (2012-05-18 08:00)

I wanted to draw attention to a great chapter that I came across on Twitter recently that puts into words really well some of my more troubled feelings about my work life post PhD. Predominantly I try and remain positive about my situation because I enjoy both research and teaching, and feel very privileged to be able to contribute to generating and sharing knowledge. However, I have also had many ups and downs, particularly in my last Teaching Only post, and have sometimes felt trapped by an on-going cycle of short term contracts that have been both rewarding, but very difficult.

In her chapter ‘Breaking the silence...’, Rosalind Gill shares qualitative data from colleagues in academia about their experiences of contemporary academic work, moving away from what might be viewed as ‘moans’ about the job, to a more critical investigation contextualised by relevant literature. Like one of her participants I am now on my third short term academic post since completing my PhD and can strongly identify with the stress of balancing heavy and sometimes unforgiving work loads with finding ‘another’ new job. I still also frequently deal with the same questions; Will I ever get a long term post? What else do I have to do to get there? How much more uncertainty do I have to deal with? I am pleased that Rosalind is trying to put academic work life on the agenda, because as she rightly argues, it is woefully under researched, there are significant structural issues and changes affecting contemporary academics (especially early career) and it really does help to know that my troubled feelings are not purely my own failing.
I am currently really enjoying a new post at Open University which is a 2 year contract and is research only. I hope that this will allow me to develop my career and to capitalise on my teaching only post, which I admittedly found detrimental to my publishing capacity and also very time consuming. I wouldn’t want to deter early career academics from short term posts because often needs must and they can look great on a CV and plug significant gaps, but it is important that these are considered critically, both in terms of their value to students and to early career staff.


Anna Tarrant is a Social Scientist and Human Geographer currently working at the Faculty of Health and Social Care at the Open University. This article was originally posted on Anna’s [2] blog.

2. https://dratarrant.wordpress.com/

Add SI on Twitter and Facebook (2012-05-19 08:00)

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Does eugenics have contemporary relevance? (2012-05-21 08:00)

by Chi Chi Shi
Do the ideas associated with [2]eugenics have contemporary relevance?

Eugenics is often regarded as a purely historical phenomenon, popular for a brief period at the beginning of the twentieth century, but not regarded as a contemporary issue. However, the ideas associated with eugenics still hold contemporary relevance, in both overt and subtle forms. Eugenics, as defined by Francis Galton (1904), is ‘the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race’.

While since the mid-twentieth century the name ‘eugenics’ has been tainted with the brush of Nazi eugenic experiments, the advancement of work in genetics and the potential of genetically engineered ‘designer’ babies has renewed interest in the possibility of improving the genetic makeup of a population. There is a modern branch of eugenics which favours an environmentalist approach, advocating the use of eugenics not necessarily to better the population, but to save the earth from the problems of overpopulation: ‘the world has a cancer, and that cancer is man’ (Lambert in Hall, 2008).

However, in this essay I would like to focus on the more mainstream manifestations of eugenics and the ideas behind it in contemporary political, social and scientific thought and policy.

Genetic research is a contemporary area of science where the spectre of eugenics still lingers (Kevies, 1995: vii). The relationship between the past and the present is complicated; advocates of genetic research emphasize the differences and developments that have occurred between ‘then’ and ‘now’ (Kerr, 2004: 12), but a more sociological approach sees the dangers in dismissing the past as history. Science is always conducted in a social environment, and science cannot be completely separated from the social structures in which it is practiced. However, the failure of eugenics is often explained in comparison to the superior genetic research of today; while eugenics in the past is
seen as being inseparable from the social prejudices of the time and, far from being scientifically objective, grounded in bias and subjectivity, contemporary genetics is seen in contrast as objective and neutral (Kerr, 2004: 11). While the way genes were understood in the past is seen to be dangerously reductionist, with eugenics having no true grounding in science, today, the complexity of the issue is thought to be understood (Kerr, 2004: 11). However, many today still see danger and bias in genetic research, with new technologies reinforcing old cultural values and societal arrangements, rather than challenging them. Genetic screening of foetuses arguably reflects the negative views of disability such as Down’s syndrome (Kerr, 2004: 5). Criticism comes from the disability rights movement, which sees the sanctioning of late abortion in the case of genetically defective foetuses as a form of modern eugenic policy (Bailey, 1996). It is impossible for science to be achieve complete objectivity because the values taken as given are socially determined and goals considered desirable are only so because of their social setting.

The ideas associated with eugenics go far beyond the definition of eugenics as the ‘science’ of breeding. Eugenics is concerned with improving the health of the population; breeding can be seen as the method through which this is done. In this way, government policies that seemingly have no connection with eugenics can be seen as descended from eugenics and working towards the same idea. UK's Department of Public Health illustrates this idea; their focus is not on the health of individuals but on the health of communities. The ban on smoking in enclosed workplaces in the UK has been claimed to promote ‘a healthier England’ (UK Department of Health, 2007); the law is directly concerned with, not the health of individuals, but the health of the population in general. Rather than focussing on the health of individual English (or British) citizens, the policy is focused on England; it is collective health which is targeted: ‘everyone in England can benefit from healthier environments and better quality air’ (Donaldson, 2007). Science is used as a political weapon; the dangers, both real and exaggerated, of second hand smoke, have been used to justify government policy.

Similarly, the government drive against obesity can be seen to operate in the same manner; obesity is considered a matter of public health rather than merely affecting obese individuals. This can be seen in the case of four obese children being taken away from their parents and placed into care after failing to lose weight (Collins, 2011; Hull, 2011), though the parents ‘are not guilty of any crime and have faced no accusations of deliberate cruelty or abuse.’ (Collins, 2011). This bears shadows of Karl Pearson’s ideas to provide state support to poor parents to help with the costs of bringing up children, but that ‘the provision for motherhood would be limited to cases of ‘sound parentage” (Porter, 2004: 282). Parents who produce obese children are seen to be unfit parents because obesity is seen as a threat to the population. The case reflects the contemporary acknowledgement that nurture, as well as nature, is central to the formation of a person, but the prevailing idea is very similar. Taking away obese
children from parents, from the environment which is seen to foster obesity, is akin to the eugenics idea of breeding out the unfit; without preventing breeding, it prevents parents from raising their children to be unfit. Dividing the binary categories of 'fit' and 'unfit' is a central concept in eugenics; this is still being done today in various guises, and the marking out of obesity, smokers, the disabled, and various other stigmatised groups as 'unfit', and unacceptable, is an example of this. They remain under the obligation to conform to society's interests (Kerr, 2004: 21).

Although genetic deficiencies that can cause obesity are considered rare (Lee, 2009), obesity is still often seen as caused by genetic factors, as pre-determined rather than purely environmental (BBC, 2007). This correlates with the common understanding that genes are the bedrock of genetic disease and the focus on an 'obesity gene', despite the fact that an underlying genetic susceptibility to obesity does not pre-suppose obesity (Lee, 2009: 34), emphasizes how obesity and overweight are seen in the same manner as disease rather than purely physical attributes. This is similar to the way that eugenics advocates and Social Darwinists saw human traits as genetic, fixed and unchangeable. Obesity has become a social deviance under the disguise of disease, and there are inevitably socioeconomic implications (Maddox et al, 1968: 290); fat has become associated with the lower classes and with certain moral qualities: laziness, lack of discipline, and the absence of qualities that would 'make upward social mobility possible' (Bordo, 1993: 195). Here there is a clear and worrying similarity to the eugenics thought to be a historical phenomenon: the drive against obesity can be seen indirectly as a manifestation of disdain against a certain social class. Science still resolutely remains a social practice; the justification of the wish to eradicate obesity is on scientific grounds, but the desire itself is social in its formation, working against the lower class and towards their eradication.

It is still a common view, often seen on the right of the political spectrum, that poverty is caused by fixed character attributes, that the poor are pre-destined to be poor. This is evident in ex-Republican state representative John LaBruzzo’s recent 2008 proposal for voluntary sterilization of poor women in an effort to stem generational welfare in Louisiana (Baram, 2008). Other proposals by LaBruzzo include paying poor men to get vasectomies and tax incentives for wealthy, college-educated couples to have more children (Baram, 2008). This is a clear effort to change the genetic makeup of the population, and to breed out those who LaBruzzo determines to be the weak: poverty is seen to be genetic and fixed, unchangeable. A similar idea was suggested in 1991 by Louisiana state representative David Duke, who proposed offering $100 a year to welfare recipients using the long term contraceptive implant Norplant (Lewin, 1991). This approach ensures minimum responsibility for the eradication of poverty and shows the prevalence of the idea of fixed categories; by seeing poverty in this way, there is no way of helping the poor or of preventing poverty and so eradication of the poor must be the only way to eradicate poverty. Although these ideas proved controversial, they are reflections, albeit extreme reflections, on the kind of thinking that is widespread in the Republican party.

Although in the present day, much emphasis is placed on nurture rather than inborn qualities, the idea that some traits are genetically inherited and unchangeable still proves popular and persistent. Sterilisation programmes remain popular in many countries, and in a more subtle way, government concerns with the health of communities rather than the health of individual citizens can also be seen as traceable from the ideas behind the eugenics movement. However, this is not to say that everything today that can be traced or linked to the eugenics movement should be immediately discredited; eugenics can be seen as a shameful origin, but this does not automatically make everything that can be associated with it shameful as well. Constant reflection and re-evaluation on what we believe to be right and how we express our beliefs, as well as an understanding of the socially shaped aspect of science, rather than taking science for granted as unquestionable, is needed in order to truly learn from the mistakes of the past.

Bibliography
Britain is gaining a reputation abroad for being a “no-go” zone to international students – potentially losing billions of pounds to the economy and to universities. In an article by the [1]Independent, the restrictions on visas, the well-documented rise in tuition fees for European Union students at English universities and the murder of a student from India at Christmas are posing a threat to the future of Britain’s universities.

Quantitative qualifiers are not the only thing that could suffer - UK universities' reputation as being world-class institution to study could be affected. One estimate, in a report by the consultants London Economics, calculated that Britain could lose out on nearly £8bn in income.

Recent figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) indicate that the number of EU students applying to British universities has dropped by 11 %. EU students face the same fees increase of up to £9,000 a year as English students – and are finding it cheaper to study in their own countries.

In numbers

1178
£830m Cuts to university teaching funds from central Government this year – reducing places by 15,000

9.9 % Fall in applications to English universities this year as tuition fees treble

2.3bn Potential loss of revenue over next decade from fall in EU students put off by higher fees and tighter controls on study visas

In measures to try to make sense of the new rules and regulations, universities and colleges are digging deep and spending millions of pounds trying to navigate the government’s new student visa rules.

For example, the LSE according to the [2]Guardian spends £250,000 a year trying to understand regulations governing the entry of non-European Union students. Medium-sized colleges have had to recruit more than a dozen members of staff to ensure that they are correctly complying with the rules.

In another article by the [3]Guardian, it found that scores of genuine international students have been left stranded and penniless as a result of genuine private colleges closing down with ever more stringent regulations to weed out bogus colleges and students.

Timothy Blake, principal of the London School of English, said his college had to have 16 staff that needed to understand the regulations brought in by the coalition government. "The rules have gone too far," Blake told MPs. "Legitimate students are being seriously affected by rules designed to take out bogus students.”

Dr Yaz Osho specialises in the politics of 'race' and racism, SME entrepreneurship, media representation, the sociology of work and racialized offline vs online identity politics. She has taught at Middlesex University, UEL, Goldsmiths, University of Westminster and was a Senior Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex.

2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/may/14/student-visa-rules-cost-universities
3. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/may/14/students-private-colleges-closures-immigration

Overseas Students Uncertainty | The Sociological Imagination (2012-09-07 13:52:14)
[...] stated elsewhere, overseas students have become a vital source of income for universities – and blocking them will [...]
If there is anything you remember from school Physics lessons, there's a good chance it's the maxim speed = distance ÷ time. For most of us, this equation is no more useful in daily life than the molar mass of carbon, or anything else we forgot from that class. It is though one worthy of recalling, for its speaks of a dominant trend in contemporary life, namely the pursuit of speed and the simultaneous destruction of its co-variables, a process described by the geographer John Adams as 'hyper-mobility'. A recent paper in the Journal of Modern Transportation suggests where this trend may take us in the near future: 'evacuated tube transport technologies', otherwise known as vacuum mag-lev trains. Travelling through airless tunnels and supported on magnets, speeds of 4000mph are envisioned, using only one quarter the energy required by modern passenger jets. It’s a science fiction dream that might soon become reality.

Some are already celebrating this as an eco-friendly future for hyper-mobility. At any point of embarkation however, a moment’s pause is called for, to ask how we got here, and where we might be going.

Our grinding daily commute is itself a marvel of the modern age, hard as that may be to believe. In 1800 America, the average daily commute was 50 metres – it’s now 50 kilometres. Globally, we travel 23 billion kilometres a year; by 2050 it is predicted that that figure will have increased fourfold to 106 billion.

The systems of hyper-mobility have negated the cost of distance. Today one can travel from the UK as far as the Red Sea on low cost airlines. For those on middle incomes and above, almost any human settlement on Earth is reachable for the cost of a few days wages.

The logic of speed ensures that the journey – that is the experience of time through space – is itself ever diminished, as distance slips by 36,000ft below, or is smeared across the train window at 200mph (come 2035 and High Speed 2). The proposed maglev vacuum is surely the logical end-point of this process: hurtling through a black, airless void at multiples of the speed of sound.
There is undeniably something thrilling about disconnecting oneself from the contemporary world with its ever more invasive technologies and persistent networks; to arrive unencumbered in an unknown place; to take a breath that feels like it might be your first. In such moments it is not difficult to believe in a world of infinite possibilities, and a chance for reinvention (if only for 14 nights semi-catered).

The Price of a Ticket

Of course the easier it becomes to reach a destination, the more that destination begins to resemble the point you started from. The economic value of meeting the dictates of the novelty-seeker, of selling exoticism to the jaded traveller, may ensure that traditional customs remain, but as performances for the dollar-carrying crowd, rather than expressions of cultural identity. What was a way of life becomes a poolside bar design-theme. Inevitably, over time the process of globalised tourism destroys the very thing it seeks. The adventurous have to push ever further off the beaten track, as the track becomes a road becomes a motorway.

Distant indigenous cultures are not the only human victims of this high mobility system of course. Out of town retail parks have seen our own high streets reduced to a spectacularly inane vision of dystopia, with an economy that revolves around The Big Issue; second-hand clothes that are more expensive than they were in Primark the first time around; and plywood boards, which have made great inroads into a market previously dominated by plate glass.

The high street does not suffer alone. A study in suburban Los Angeles comparing the number of neighbours residents knew, with the traffic on that street, found that increases in the latter inflict a equivalent decline in the former. Studies in London have found strong correlations between heart disease and noise pollution from air travel. Worldwide, over 1 million people a year die in car accidents, with 50 million injured.

Access to this world’s benefits is limited, yet the costs are not. As society adapts to the possibilities offered, those that cannot travel are abandoned by the roadside. The land use configurations created by the dominance of the car mean that those without one – predominantly the elderly, the young, and the poor – find their lives correspondingly more difficult. Whose houses hug the sides of busy carriage ways, and hunker under airport flight paths? Certainly not the same people who benefit most from these infrastructures. If the mag-lev vacuum train ever comes to pass, what do you suspect would be the socio-economic characteristics of the neighbourhoods that lie in the shadow of the raised 15m diameter concrete tube running over their heads?

The environmental cost of hyper-mobility is devastating. In the UK transport-related carbon emissions are second only to those from power stations. Attempts at ‘greening’ fuel by adding biofuels have led to deforestation to make way for plantations in the Global South, and been linked to price hikes in food. The 2011 Gulf of Mexico oil spill is simply the most high profile of a century of such disasters, and tens of thousands of hectares of pristine Canadian wilderness are currently under threat from plans to expand oil sands extraction.

The destruction inherent in hyper-mobility is perfectly captured in a picture book I enjoyed as a child, called Dinosaurs and all that Rubbish. A man gazes up into the night sky at a distant star, dreaming of the wonders he might find there. Driven by wanderlust, he builds a rocket, destroying his home planet to feed the smoke-belching factories which churn out the rocket’s parts. His plan is successful, but on reaching the star he finds a barren wasteland. His eyes return to the sky, and spy a new star, with new possibilities. Once again he streaks into space, sure that this destination will be worthy of his dreams. On arrival however he discovers to his horror... You can guess the rest. Well, actually you probably can’t, as this is a children’s story and prone to questionable leaps of logic. He does indeed wind up on the very planet he started from, the planet he destroyed, but in the meantime dinosaurs have emerged from the rubbish tips he left, and somewhat put out by what they find, have cleaned the whole place up. But as
Bertie the triceratops is unlikely to solve our current environmental troubles, I think we can disregard this element of the analogy.

Of course, there are also a great many positives to high mobility. Along with the opportunity to escape our own lives, tourism offers us the chance of experiencing others’. On a shrinking, interconnected planet, this can’t be a bad thing. More fundamentally, the West’s affluence is underpinned by high mobility. Kunstler’s The Long Emergency details how intrinsic it is to almost every aspect of contemporary society. The defining characteristic of the 20th Century was the consumption of cheap oil – an unparalleled source of easily-accessible, concentrated energy – allowing the near frictionless movement of people and goods around the planet. This has allowed the creation of economies of scale that have washed away traditional forms of community. On the tidal wave of oil rides Walmart; Tesco; McDonalds and the other poster boys of contemporary economic success.

The entwining of late-modern capitalism, mobility, and oil, reaches its apotheosis in places like Las Vegas and Dubai: what are known in the sociological literature as places of excess, though I prefer to refer to them as masturscapes. Masturscapes exist for the pursuit of fleeting pleasures and the theatrical squandering of resources; their unsustainability appears a badge of pride. How else to justify the construction of Dubai’s World Islands at a time of rising sea levels? With its vertiginous towers built on slave labour just as Egypt’s pyramids were, this desert monument appears to be putting its faith in Mammon to hold back the waves. Their physical existence in such inhospitable locales is impossible without the easy fix of cheap energy, and it is this borderlands existence, beyond the reach of civilisation, which allows them to offer up a netherworld of unhindered desires. “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” goes the ad slogan, but of course only the most unfortunate stay in Vegas: the stripper, the croupier, the bellhop that – Groundhog Day like – are tasked with endlessly acting out the ephemeral fantasy. For the traveller its purpose is to exist momentarily, and to be departed from before the cost can be counted, as if some Air Miles collecting locust.

Rebalancing the Equation

Contemporary concerns ensure that techno-utopian dreams like that of the mag-lev vacuum train are sold to us as offering ever greater speeds but at decreasing environmental cost. It’s claimed that the train will travel eight times faster than planes, at a quarter of the environmental cost. So what’s the problem?

The problem is that the easier travel is, the more people travel. The ‘predict and provide’ model underpinned transport planning for the second half of the 20th century: figure out where a road would be beneficial, build it. Infrastructure does not simply respond to our needs however, it also shapes them. Motorways that began as gushing arteries of goods and people begin to clog up, even become blocked entirely, as society reconfigures itself around this new possibility. New roads create new traffic, and for that reason the predict and provide approach has fallen from favour amongst policymakers. We don’t have the space or the cash to meet its demands indefinitely. Similarly, if people can get from London to New York or Moscow or Cairo in less than an hour, more people are going to do it. A lot more.

Of course this may provide an economic boost, and the other benefits that mobility brings, but the costs cannot be escaped from, and the world’s carrying capacity for such costs is at breaking point. It’s worth considering the UK Government’s own Foresight report entitled Intelligent Infrastructure Systems (2006). It puts forward four mobility-focused scenarios describing life in 2050. What is perhaps most striking is that not one of the scenarios tries to suggest a world in which we have managed to both address our environmental challenges and maintain hyper-mobility. It’s simply not plausible.

I do not mean for this excursion to resemble an advanced single to Skegness: I would like there to be some light at the end of the tunnel. For this we must return to where we started out from, that is speed = distance ÷ time. The
alternative to our speed fixation is to reassert balance to the equation, to restore the value of time and distance. We must start by asking what the purpose is of all this travel? At the danger of sounding like a Christian billboard – where are we rushing to all the time? The vacuum mag-lev train promises to render distance and time inconsequential, yet is there any intrinsic value in being able to physically move through space at such speeds (in an airless black tunnel)?

What happened to the pleasure of the journey? It was lost in the indignity of airport security’s molestations; in budget airline seats that would contravene livestock welfare guidelines; on groaning draughty train carriages and in carbon monoxide infused traffic jams. Now we simply wish to get as far from where we started as possible, hoping that our iPads block out as much of the intervening period as possible. Yet the system that offers this possibility of escape is the same one that kills it: with identikit high streets and homogenous cultures. If distance and time are allowed back into the picture, less (speed) can indeed be more. Those faraway places we value so highly might take longer to get to, but when you get there, you’ll actually be there.

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3. [http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/features/science-china-train/](http://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/features/science-china-train/)
5. [http://www.theworld.ae/](http://www.theworld.ae/)

One Story High (2012-05-24 02:58)

The photo above comes from Paul Martin and Paul Jerome Martin’s contribution to *One Story High*, [4]“Paul William Martin.”

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1. [http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-H5GbHeScGgY/T5RFXnTb5iI/AAAAAAAALgs/LzIq79nE9TA/s1600/Paul+Up.jpg](http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-H5GbHeScGgY/T5RFXnTb5iI/AAAAAAAALgs/LzIq79nE9TA/s1600/Paul+Up.jpg)
3. [http://onestoryhigh.blogspot.com/2012/02/one-story-high-it-was-just-little-over_18.html](http://onestoryhigh.blogspot.com/2012/02/one-story-high-it-was-just-little-over_18.html)
Using visual metaphor to explain how stuff works: what theorists can learn from beatboxing?

In this video [2]Beardyman, UK [3]beat boxer renowned for his use of [4]live looping, collaborates with the visual artist mr _hopkinson to visually describe the practice. As someone who is fascinated by this kind of music but had never understood how it works, I was incredibly impressed by the articulacy of the visual message. The video communicates embodied practical knowledge through a metaphor which communicates the essence of the practice: using the technology at a given moment to assemble and coral an army of performance fragments (fragmented performers?) which can be arranged into a performance over time which is much more than the sum of its parts. While I'm obviously not suggesting that social theorists try and take up beatboxing (the image makes me shudder) I do think there's a prodigious creativity in this video's use of visual description which can, in an indirect way, be learned from.

Although vivid metaphorical language can be found in some areas of social theory, it is far from consistent and, in my experience, there's little reflective dialogue about how such communicative techniques can and should be used effectively. Too often visual metaphors in social theory simply don't work. Likewise, when they do the lack of deliberate reflection about the pedagogical dimensions to their use often means that their success in illuminating ideas to people already inhabiting that conceptual landscape goes hand-in-hand with the emergence of further barriers to people outside that approaching coming ot understand the ideas within it. Which I write having finally got my head around Deleuze after years of being scornful. Given the increasingly imperilled place of theory in the academy, there's an important conversation to be had about rhetorical and pedagogical innovation.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ZT6qHbEL68M
Beatboxing and social theory | Thinking culture (2012-05-24 09:41:34)

[...] short but very suggestive post here that suggests that theorists could learn from the way that beatboxers bring together fragments. [...]

The Arrogance of Publishers vs. Academic Culture – Why the Outcome Is Virtually Certain (2012-05-25 08:00)

"Technologists also believe that publishing is transportable — anyone can be a publisher. All you need are some basic skills, access to a blogging platform, and some determination. While for certain forms of expression this can be true — this blog is an example — for a complex organism like an academic press or an academic journal, much more is needed, including people with the talent and experience to get it right. I may think I'm a good cook because I can occasionally prepare a surprisingly tasty meal on a Sunday night by following someone else's recipe and using the right ingredients, but that by no means translates into my ability to create, finance, run, and manage a restaurant. If you're a “cooking technologist,” you think all you need is an oven, pans, and ingredients."


Imagine a situation where homes had no kitchens and utensils were unavailable. We would all be dependent on cafes and restaurants to eat and, it follows, our idea of what it is to prepare food would be exhausted by those working in such a capacity within these establishments. Now introduce kitchens into homes and affordable utensils into shops. Suddenly we can cook meals at home. Obviously the quality of the infrastructure is lower and there’s less expertise. For the sake of the thought-experiment, assume kitchens and utensils appeared suddenly, to an extent profoundly disruptive of established practices of going out for every meal. The meals cooked at home would be of poor quality, probably pragmatically orientated and often imitating (poorly) the meals available in restaurants and cafes.

With time, hobbyists become more adept at imitating such meals and, as cooking becomes an everyday activity, new kinds of meals emerge because the practical intent behind cooking is no longer constrained by the economics of the restaurant. Then the utensils get ever better and cook books become a market in their own right, with expert guidance being commercially (and sometimes freely) available to anyone who wants it. The gap between the professional chefs and enthusiastic amateurs becomes ever narrower. Likewise, the vast majority of the populace becomes capable of cooking in a purely functional way, with a range of outcomes shaped by personal preference. People can even, god forbid, cook for each other. Those who put the effort in are able to cook very well.

None of this means that restaurants go out of business. But it does mean the economics of the restaurant business change profoundly. What was once, in the thought-experiment, a position of hegemony where everyone is reliant on the restaurant for all their meals becomes a position where the restaurant must offer some additional value vis-a-vis the meals people are able to cook at home. If everyone can cook in a way which is good enough for everyday purposes, the restaurant must offer something else. For a while, it might get by on the social convention that you don’t socialise or celebrate with meals at home. It might also get by on people either being unable to cook
or choosing not to cook once they have that capacity. But once the infrastructure and the expertise is distributed widely enough, it simply has to innovate or its position will eventually become untenable. The fact the populace is able to cook for themselves doesn’t mean the restaurateur has no future, far from it. However if they spend this time arrogantly dismissing the pretensions of the amateur cooks rather than creatively redefining their role to take account of the fact they no longer have a monopoly on cooking, then, frankly, they’re screwed and, more over, they deserve their fate.


The analogy needs some tweaking. DIY cooking preceded restaurants, for example, not the other way round, and while few of us could compete with the world’s top chefs at the best restaurants, a great many restaurants and fast food joints cannot compare for health values or taste with home cooking. Scholarly publishing is analogous, it is the commercial sector that emerged from the amateur scientists. Outsourcing publishing has always been a nice to have, not a need to have. There will continue to be a role for professional publishers if the services are attractive and good for us (don’t lock up our work), and the cost reasonable. If not, well there really is nothing better than mom’s apple pie!

You have got (2012-05-30 17:49:52)
Superb Web-site, Keep up the great job. With thanks.

Laura Lee (2013-06-02 14:31:13)
Cooking is essentially a solitary activity. The quote at the beginning does note that having access to technology does work for certain types of writing. What it is talking about is the teamwork aspect of traditionally published academic material. So while it is easy to publish a novel, which is essentially the product of one mind, like the cook in the kitchen in your analogy, (although it benefits greatly from professional editors, layout artists and so on) it is more difficult to achieve something like the academic press does with a team, for example, having peer review that is recognized as expert or technical editors who not only know the language but know the field who can double check your conclusions and wording. So while the home cook may become as expert as the chef at producing great meals, this does not mean that he or she will have the ability to do everything that a whole team of specialists can do. The original quote may have been worded unfortunately in saying that you need people “who know what they’re doing.” But the point is that if you wanted to, say, cater a wedding, you would probably need some help and that this is an area where it might be more useful to just go to professionals who do it all the time than to take the time to learn all of those skills. An academic writer may study his subject every day, but he probably does not have to be expert in book publishing on a regular basis and may find that skill set less necessary to develop when he can hire others to do it for him. (By having them act as publisher and giving them a percentage.) It seems as though getting the kind of peer review that instills confidence for a self-published venture might be more time consuming and difficult than just using the publishing structure that exists. This could change if academic writers came together and built networks to serve that need. At the moment, though, it seems as though using the existing structure rather than building a new one that serves a similar purpose is more practical. So this would be the “value added” that restaurants have to offer over cooking in the home in your analogy. It seems to me that the quote above (I didn’t read the full article) and the response are actually in agreement. Both say that there is a place for the self-published and that there is a place for the traditional publisher.
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
This is the story of a town-planning cock-up known as the Northern Heights Plan which, if completed, would have meant miles of extra houses and tube stations to the North West of London. Produced by [2]Jay Foreman and Paul Kendler.


Time Management Tips for Academics (2012-05-28 08:00)

Inspired by this [1]Guardian article, we asked followers on Twitter and Facebook what time management tips they had for other academics. These are some of the responses we received:

- Zotero, pomodoro’s, task lists, coffee shops and a ruthless use of the delete button on emails! ([4]@JonTulloch)
- empty your life of friends hobbies and external interests ;-) ([5]@weaver _beth)
• have an interactive academic calendar on your VLE. Students can sign up to slots, talks/teaching programmed ([8]@justyael)

• Buy a good diary - something to visualise. Weigh up time estimates of tasks & assign deadlines accordingly ([9]@PostPhDoc)

• Nota bene the line between time-saving use of Twitter and twittering time away. It’s a slippery slope ([10]@Ros-Burnett)

Do you have some more you’d like to add? If so then leave them in the comments box below or [11]tweet us and we’ll compile another list.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2012/may/04/time-management-tips-busy-people
2. https://www.rescuetime.com/
3. https://twitter.com/#!/OutstandingSEM
4. https://twitter.com/#!/NUCTutor
5. https://twitter.com/#!/weaver_beth
6. http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m00fgnWSYk1qcirk4o1_500.png
7. https://twitter.com/#!/FionaMacKichan
8. https://twitter.com/#!/justyael
9. https://twitter.com/#!/PostPhDoc
10. https://twitter.com/#!/rosburnett

__________________________

Nasreddine (2012-05-29 22:38:29)
Thanks for the tips. for me I use : www.wunderkit.com and www.paymo.biz

Mikołaj (2012-08-28 00:16:09)
I use SelfControl - it can be downloaded from here: selfcontrolapp.com You write URL of sites you don’t want to be able to visit (like all those very distracting social stuff), and then simply set the timer. And then you click on ‘start’ button. After that, whatever happens you won’t be able to get access to chosen sites for the time you set. Closing app, restarting your computer won’t help. You have to wait, and in the meanwhile you have that very rare opportunity to do something productive :) I think it may be a good idea to work simultaneously with rescuetime and self control - first, rescuetime will show you what kind of internet sites distract you most and after that you may put them on SelfControl blacklist. enjoy :)

An Open Letter to English-Canadians, who might be feeling that Quebeckers have taken leave of their senses. (2012-05-29 08:00)

An open letter to my English-Canadian friends. Please circulate in your networks as you see fit.

You may have heard that there has been some turmoil in Quebec in recent weeks. There have been demonstrations in the streets of Montreal every night for almost a month now, and a massive demonstration will be happening tomorrow, which I will be attending, along with my wife, Elizabeth Elbourne, and my eldest daughter Emma.

1190
Reading the Anglo-Canadian press, it strikes me that you have been getting a very fragmented and biased picture of what is going on. Given the gulf that has already emerged between Quebec and the rest of Canada in the wake of the 2011 election, it is important that the issues under discussion here at least be represented clearly. You may decide at the end of the day that we are crazy, but at least you should reach that decision on the basis of the facts, rather than of the distortions that have been served up by the G &M and other outlets.

First, the matter of the tuition hikes, which touched off this mess. The rest of the country seems to have reached the conclusion that the students are spoiled, selfish brats, who would still be paying the lowest tuition fees even if the whole of the proposed increase went through.

The first thing to say is that this is an odd conception of selfishness. Students have been sticking with the strikes even knowing that they may suffer deleterious consequences, both financial and academic. They have been marching every night despite the threat of beatings, tear-gas, rubber bullets, and arrests. It is, of course, easier for the right-wing media to dismiss them if they can be portrayed as selfish kids to whom no one has ever said "no". But there is clearly an issue of principle here.

OK, then. But maybe the principle is the wrong one. Free tuition may just be a pie-in-the sky idea that mature people give up on when they put away childish things. And besides, why should other people pay for the students' "free" tuition? There is no such thing as "free" education. Someone, somewhere, has to pay. And the students, the criticism continues, are simply refusing to pay their "fair share".

Why is that criticism simplistic? Because the students' claim has never been that they should not pay for education. The question is whether they should do so up front, before they have income, or later, as taxpayers in a progressive taxation scheme. Another question has to do with the degree to which Universities should be funded by everyone, or primarily by those who attend them. So the issue of how to fund Universities justly is complicated. We have to figure out at what point in people’s lives they should be paying for their education, and we also have to figure out how much of the bill should be footed by those who do not attend, but who benefit from a University-educated work force of doctors, lawyers, etc. The students’ answer to this question may not be the best, but then it does not strike me that the government’s is all that thought out either.

And at least the students have been trying to make ARGUMENTS and to engage the government and the rest of society in debate, whereas the government’s attitude, other than to invoke the in-this-context-meaningless "everyone pays their faire share" argument like a mantra, has been to say "Shut up, and obey".

What strikes the balance in the students’ favour in the Quebec context is that the ideal of no up-front financial hurdles to University access is enshrined in some of the most foundational documents of Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, in particular the Parent Commission Report, which wrested control of schools from the Church and created the modern Quebec education system, a cornerstone of the kind of society that many Quebeckers see themselves as aspiring to. Now, it could be that that ideal is no longer viable, or that we may no longer want to subscribe to it. But moving away from it, as Charest’s measures have done, at least requires a debate, analogous to the debate that would have to be had if the Feds proposed to scrap the Canada Health Act. It is clearly not just an administrative measure. It is political through and through. Indeed it strikes at fundamental questions about the kind of society we want to live in. If this isn’t the sort of thing that requires democratic debate, I don’t know what is.

The government has met the very reasonable request that this issue, and broader issues of University governance, be at least addressed in some suitably open and democratic manner with silence, then derision, then injunctions, and now, with the most odious “law” that I have seen voted by the Quebec National Assembly in my adult memory.
It places the right of all Quebec citizens to assemble, but also to talk and discuss about these issues, under severe limitations. It includes that most odious of categories: crimes of omission, as in, you can get fined for omitting to attempt to prevent someone from taking part in an act judged illegal by the law. In principle, the simple wearing of the by-now iconic red square can be subject to a fine. The government has also made the student leaders absurdly and ruinously responsible for any action that is ostensibly carried out under the banners of their organizations. The students groups can be fined $125000 whenever someone claiming to be “part” of the movement throws a rock through a window. And so on. It is truly a thing to behold.

The government is clearly aware that this "law" would not withstand a millisecond of Charter scrutiny. It actually expires in July 2013, well before challenges could actually wind their way through the Courts. The intention is thus clearly just to bring down the hammer on this particular movement by using methods that the government knows to be contrary to basic liberal-democratic rule-of-law principles. The cynicism is jaw-dropping. It is beneath contempt for the government to play fast and loose with our civil rights and liberties in order to deal with the results of its own abject failure to govern.

So that is why tomorrow I will be taking a walk in downtown Montreal with (hopefully!) hundreds of thousands of my fellow citizens. Again, you are all free to disagree, but at least don’t let it be because of the completely distorted picture of what is going on here that you have been getting from media outlets, including some from which we might have expected more.

- [1]Professor Daniel Weinstock

Thanks to Babette Babich, Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, for sending this on. You can find Babette's website [2]here.

2. [http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/](http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/)

"Technology will not advance democracy and human rights for (and instead of) you". Zygmunt Bauman on the use and mis-use of new media. (2012-05-30 08:00)

In a recent [1]article published by the Social Europe Journal, Zygmunt Bauman reflects on the use we make of new media and social networks and how this can be exploited to control us, rather than increasing our freedom of expression.

More and more world politicians have now started to publicly promote the use of such platforms as Twitter and Facebook, portraying them as critical tools for organising resistance, spread democracy and advance human rights.
i.e. in the Arab Spring). However, Bauman’s analysis sheds light of a much ‘darker’ use that can be made of social networks—a use that is more instrumental to the advance of surveillance than democracy, and that benefits political powers rather than people.

In Bauman’s words, “we live in confessional society, promoting public self-exposure to the rank of the prime and easiest available, as well as arguably most potent and the sole truly proficient, proof of social existence”. By using social networks we voluntarily put on public record ‘who we are’, ‘what we do’ and ‘what we think’, disclosing in this way our identity and the most intimate aspects of our lives—making them available at a click. In this sense, social websites can be understood not as tools for the advance of democracy and human rights—but rather as instruments that allow a cheap, quick, thorough and easier surveillance. This is made even more effective by the voluntary cooperation of its intended targets, who happily (and deliberately) fill in pages with private information and personal data to build their profiles and express their views.

This system of do-it-yourself surveillance beats any specialist professional agency on costs and results, and can provide a great source of power and control. In this way, for example, authoritarian regimes may beat the supporter of freedom and rights in their own game, by exploiting for their own benefit the very technology in which new-media apostles put their hopes for advancing democracy.

After all, as Bauman reminds us, this is an old story told over again: one can use axes to cut either wood or heads. The choice does not belong to axes but to those who hold and handle them. Whatever the holders’ choices, the axes won’t mind...

Arianna Giovannini is a PhD researcher at the School of Cultural Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University. She holds a degree in Sociology with a specialisation in Politics, and a Masters in Territorial and Urban Politics, both from the University of Urbino, Italy. She also teaches Social Science, Political Theory and Research Methods at the University of Sheffield International College.


Imaginative sociology and talking things (2012-05-31 08:00)

How far does your (sociological) imagination stretch? Let’s find out by considering the following question: Imagine that things could speak – what would they say?

This question was put to 42 persons between the ages of 18-50 years old in Tokyo (Japan), San Jose (USA) and Beijing (China) in a recent photo-dairy study conducted by Ericsson User-Experience Lab, which I took part of. The task was to take a photo of one or more things and state what the things was saying.
So, what kind of things were you thinking of? If you thought of a technological thing you did like most respondents in this study. Lamps, Computers, Laptops, Mobile Phones, TVs, Ovens, Fridges, Laundry machines - all frequent talkers in the study. In fact, the most frequent talkative things were consumer electronics and home appliances - things that carries out something and which people frequently use and interact with. The rest of the respondent’s chose various things like figurines, dolls, food, containers, furniture or clothes. From what the respondents told us it seemed like these things were perceived as more passive compared to technological devices which were perceived as more "pushy" (Whiteheads’ notion), actively calling out for their owners’ attention.

Furthermore, if you imagined that your selected thing said something reprimanding about yourself, your habits, or the way you treat it, then you are in good company. The majority of the respondents did just that. But many things expressed encouraging and reassuring words as well. The answers to the task had strong similarities. In general the things were either criticizing their owners’ personality or habits, or they said something encouraging and reassuring. It seems that the respondents’ used things both in motivating and regulating ways in various aspects of their lives.

Most narratives in the study are about leisure. For hard working citizens, the back regions of a home is naturally dedicated to the art of relaxing. One respondent told us about their couch left by the landlord. It was too small for the saloon so they bought another and moved the old one to the balcony. The old couch says: "I know I’m unworthy, but in a sunny afternoon after a long winter you can enjoy your life with me.

However, not all things speak nicely. Another respondent’s TV says "Sorry, I’m finished showing TV programs, but I’m sure you watched enough, right?".

Work is such an important aspect in peoples’ lives, so naturally many things speak of work. Most narratives in the study convey feelings of self-pity and comfort in relation to too much work. One respondent submitted a figure saying: "Relax! Relax!" because it’s calm and smiling face made her feel as if it is talking to me when working hard.

And on the other side of the coin are things speaking in benign voice. One respondent had a teddy bear which she imagined to be much more demanding. She imagined that with its hands on its waist, it seemed to be saying: "study hard, don't be lazy!"

The more personal and intimate aspects of the respondents life are conveyed through the narratives about body and health. Several respondents imagine talking food and refrigerators, talking about best before dates, available food of the season, shopping lists and reminders, for example, “It will be grateful if a fridge reminds me what are left in the fridge and when the best-before dates are, because I forget what I bought when I am busy”.

But there are also things that induce guilt when they say that the respondents shouldn't eat too much, or healthy stuff, like fruit that shouts 'eat us, not that candy bar!!', or vitamins saying: 'Don't eat too much. I'm tasty, gummy-like vitamin supplements. You always eat too much.'

Things are also good at scolding their owner when something had been purchased but never used. One respondent bought had bought a fan a year ago, and it said: "Sell me or use me! Don't leave me here to be dusty!".

There are many stories from respondents imagining talking things. Illustrated in the narratives, personal things are used by the respondents in both motivating and scolding ways. However, the most fascinating is that no respondent had any trouble imagining that things could talk. (Did you?)
I like to think of my home as my castle and oasis – a secure place where I can let my guard down and behave in ways I don’t always do in public places. In line with Goffman’s logic, I put my private and intimate stuff in back regions, and the fancier stuff in front, sending out the proper signals to others in relation to how I want to be perceived. However, domestic things are more than props, used to reinforce the presentation of the self. The things you surround yourself with will evoke thoughts, associations, and realization of normative expectations. They can act as active partners in motivating and regulating people’s actions and sense of self. When the stage curtain has dropped, and the audience has gone home, the things in my home are still there and their presence encouraging me to play my role in certain ways and scolding me when I don’t. My things have colonized my private realm. Luckily, it is only in my imagination.

Marcus Persson, PhD, received his doctoral degree in sociology from Lund University in 2007. He holds a postdoctoral position as in-house researcher at Ericsson ConsumerLab, doing research on young people’s use of and interaction with mobile communication technology. He is affiliated to Örebro University where he is involved in graduate student training.

3.6 June

‘Generation Normal’—alternative views on politics in the Eurozone. (2012-06-01 08:00)

As the European Union is navigating through the troubled waters of the financial crisis, with the Greek ship on the brink of sinking, and many other countries at risk of following the same fate, new political currents are emerging—calling for a more gradualist response to the economic storm. Their success sheds light on how people across Europe (the European society, one would be tempted to say, if only there was such thing...) are increasingly dissatisfied with politicians who are solely concerned with the arid diktats of global economics, financial markets and banks, whilst losing touch with the needs of their electorates.

In a recent [2]article published on the Observer, Peter Beaumont reflects on the rise of European anti-austerity parties and movements. Throughout Europe, and especially in the countries that are struggling the most in the context of the financial crisis such as Greece and Italy, the tension between citizens and the political class is mounting, and the austerity measures endorsed by their governments do nothing but boosting dissatisfaction, fears and uncertainty about the future amongst the population. As a response, citizens are not only protesting and taking to the streets, but also more and more overtly turning their backs on the established system and the austerity politics this promotes. In this sense, their votes and protests represent a public outcry over a political class which has over-promised and under-delivered for way too long—and is now being kindly shown the door.

This attitude is epitomised by the election of Francois Hollande at the Elysium, but also the success of Hannelore Kraft in Germany, the ascent of leftwing coalition party Syriza led by Alexis Tsipras in Greece, and the substantial gains of the Five Star Movement in the recent local election round as well as the increasing prominence of the Italy of Values anti-corruption mayor of Palermo Leoluca Orlando in Italy. The common denominator of these movements is that they represent a clear break with the establishment—epitomised by their sober, ordinary leaders (hence the epithet ‘Generation Normal’), who dare to speak the unspeakable, opposing those austerity measures that have been long portrayed as the one and only lifeline for the Eurozone. In essence, their success lies in their ability to remind the electorate of a ‘different way of doing politics’, by overtly criticising and distancing themselves from the dominating European political culture perceived as elitist, technocratic and, crucially, too distant from the concerns of the ordinary citizens.

The emergence of ‘Generation Normal’ signals therefore a growing desire across Europe for a more competent, down-to-earth, attentive political class—led by politicians who may be less glamorous in their appearance and lifestyle, but are more concerned with effective means to alleviate the day to day struggle of their people. The gradualist strategies they propose as an alternative to the harsh austerity measures so far endorsed by the EU countries certainly resonate with the electorate, and seem to give voice to their hope for a better future—in the short, rather than in the long term. This is an interesting phenomenon because it could pave the way for a new era of European politics. What remains to be seen, though, is whether this new generation of politicians will manage to flourish and, crucially, to save the Eurozone from its fate.

Arianna Giovannini is a PhD researcher at the School of Cultural Studies, Leeds Metropolitan University. She holds a degree in Sociology with a specialisation in Politics, and a Masters in Territorial and Urban Politics, both from the University of Urbino, Italy. She also teaches Social Science, Political Theory and Research Methods at the University of Sheffield International College.
Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-06-02 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1] Sociological Imagination
[2]

Follow us on Twitter here:

[4] Twitter Updates
I was told that kettling is quite rare in the anglosaxon region, at least compared to Germany and Austria, where you can get quite used to it. I even remember a demonstration, where we (the protestors) were stupid enough to start the demonstration in a kettle...

Sociological Imagination (2012-06-02 17:10:10)
I’m not sure about elsewhere but it’s become ever more common in the UK over the 10 years or so I’ve been going on protests. It also pisses me off a lot more now than it used to when I was a teenager :-/
Would C Wright Mills have kept a blog? (2012-06-04 08:00)
After a particularly inspiring session at the BSA Conference this year to celebrate the 50th anniversary of C. Wright Mills’ death, I have started to read The Sociological Imagination again. It was a standard introductory book for sociology students and I first read it when I was studying for A Level sociology at an adult education centre as a mature student in 1977. I have used the famous quote about private problems and public issues on many occasions over the years as a teacher. In fact the opening lecture of a research methods course I taught for 22 years used this quotation alongside a passage from H G Wells’ History of Mr Polly that beautifully illustrates, in the context of the desperate fate the bewildered Mr Polly was experiencing in common with much of the Victorian petty bourgeoisie, the sociological imagination.

I re-read the opening chapter of the book, The Promise, and then turned to the appendix, On Intellectual Craftsman-ship. I’m not sure I’d read it before as it didn’t ring any bells but to my surprise I found myself reading a strong rationale and recommendation to keep a blog. It is essential, he claims, to not keep your scholarly work and your life separate. You must learn to use your life experience in your intellectual work, to continually examine and interpret it. To this end you should keep a file. ”The sociologist’s need for systematic reflection demands it”. It is worth reading the detailed account he gives on how the file should be used to achieve this. In almost every particular he is describing why and how I and others I know use a blog.

The file should contain as separate items records of personal experiences relevant to self and sociological reflection, ‘fringe’ thoughts, snatches of conversation, half formed ideas, notes on current and possible projects and plans, quotations from and reviews of books and articles, biographical items, all filed under various headings. Even in his time he identified the stultifying affects of putting together research plans to satisfy funders and how the planning is geared up to attracting money. In addition to this (necessary) pursuit the social scientist should find time to review ‘the state of my problems and plans’ and think in broader terms than the agenda as specified by the available funding opportunities. As projects take shape and firm up various items in the file can be re-ordered in terms of relevance for the projects. Items can be re-categorised and reordered as necessary. “The file will contain a growing store of facts and ideas, from the most vague to the most finished”. One key organising principle of the file is to pay attention to the stratified nature of society – history, structure and processes but also individual experience, understandings and problems, your own and others’. As your sociological imagination develops, so does your intellectual capacity. He recommends writing a reasonably substantial piece at least once a week. For students and early career sociologists the file is a way of developing a writing style, finding a voice and gaining confidence.

Many reading this will recognise the similarity of this account with discussions of why use a blog. It certainly coincides with my own practice. This blog is full of the items listed above. It also has over 40 draft and private entries that are work in progress or items waiting to become parts of a more polished post to share with readers. Some will never see the light of public day. The facility to categorise and tag posts makes a blog an ideal tool for flexibly re-ordering and associating different items. Obviously text can be cut and paste from posts at will. One advantage of using a blog that was not available to C. Wright Mills is the ability to have a public aspect to engage with a broad readership and exchange comments on items and pieces of writing, or for others to discover you via overlapping readerships and social networking, and to develop a digital presence and identity. I would guess that, if C. Wright Mills was alive today he would at least be encouraging his students to keep a blog and probably be keeping one of his own.


2. https://twitter.com/#!/TerryWassall
Terry Wassal asks 'would C Wright Mills have kept a blog? | Thinking culture (2012-06-06 07:32:11)

[...] Wassal asks if C Wright Mills would have kept a blog. Based on the intellectual craftsmanship piece he claims the answer is likely to be yes. [...] An early review of the Sociological Imagination | The Sociological Imagination (2012-11-21 08:00:59)

[...] within a professionalising sociology. While Mills may be blogged about (something he would have enjoyed partaking in himself perhaps) in admiring tones decades later by those who can’t help but contrast his enduring [...] Nam Tran (2014-01-24 21:16:25)

Didn’t realize how important it is to keep a blog of your sociological findings/observations.

**Double disadvantage: Black graduates face difficulties in finding jobs and lower pay (2012-06-05 08:00)**

A report by the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) has revealed that just four out of ten black students are in full time employment six months after leaving university. The HERA report concludes that black students do not face a “level playing field” in educational and employment opportunities. HERA has urged the government to develop a "coherent strategy" to tackle this inequality.

The unpublished material from the HESA comes weeks after Andrew Pilkington professor of sociology at the University of Northampton argued in the [1]THES, that efforts to promote race equality in higher education have had "little impact".

It was also found in another study featured in the [2]Telegraph and [3]Independent (by the Bow Group and Elevation Networks), that black graduates can expect to earn as much as 9 % less than their white counterparts for the same work over five years.

Samuel Kasumu, founder of Elevation Networks, said: “We found black students are concerned about what their future once they graduate, many of them believe the odds are firmly stacked against them. With the increase in tuition fees, there has never been a more important time to ensure all graduates have an equal chance in the employment market.”

**In numbers**

60 % - proportion of black graduates not in full time employment six months after leaving university

40 % of black students who expect racial discrimination from employers

30 % - proportion of black graduates less likely to find work than their white counterparts
Dr Yaz Osho specialises in the politics of 'race' and racism, SME entrepreneurship, media representation, the sociology of work and racialized offline vs online identity politics. She has taught at Middlesex University, UEL, Goldsmiths, University of Westminster and was a Senior Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex.

2. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/9236760/Black-graduates-more-likely-to-be-unemployed-than-white.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/jobs/9236760/Black-graduates-more-likely-to-be-unemployed-than-white.html)

The Quebec Student Strike (2012-06-06 08:00)

![A lone bagpiper plays traditional tunes during the Québec students strike protest march that took place on Monday May 7th, 2012](http://www.youtube.com/embed/10ENoHW2GOU)

First of all, I wish to thank you for the interest that you are taking in our movement. In these difficult times, it is always reassuring to know that our movement is known in other countries. As I write you, we are at the one hundredth day of our strike: excuse me then of an excessive partisanship. I will try to present the 2012 Quebec student strike as
The last great student strike dates from 2003: at stake was the disposition of 103 million dollars in scholarship loads that had been voted by the Jean Charest government. The participant student groups were the same as today: the Federation of University Students of Quebec (FEUQ); the Solidarity Union of Students (ASSE) and the Federation of Secondary School Students of Quebec (FECQ). The strike came to a bitter conclusion due a too-hasty agreement of the two national student federations and the government. The ASSE, as the association of the most militant members of the student movement, understood very poorly that fact that the agreement should have been be made in a consultative cooperative manner, given that it advocated a combative syndicalist posture and direct democracy.

In 2008. The Charest government announced a small increase in university fees. An attempt at an unlimited general strike was undertaken by the ASSE, without, however, much success. The strike project was thus aborted and the increase was instituted. In 2010, the government announced its intention to raise the costs of higher education by 75% over a five year period. It called for a meeting of those concerned parties in order to consider the practical details of this increase. The union of professors and the student associations refused to participate in this meeting given the refusal by the government to consider any alternative to a fee increase.

At the beginning of February, the ASSE launched a mobilization under the name of the Large Coalition of the Association for a Student Solidarity Union (CLASSE). Peaceful civil disobedient actions began to occur as the strike votes came at the end of the month. In a few weeks, the movement was strong by several tens of thousand students for an unlimited general strike.

March began on a big scale when the government, having tried in all sorts of ways to discredit us, had to confront events in Montreal of an economically disruptive nature. On the 7th of March, a peaceful blockade of the head office of Loto-Quebec becomes a confrontation of the forces of order. The Police Force of the City of Montreal (SPVM) violently represses the students with clubs, shields, tear gas bombs and deafening noise bombs. This was the first real excessive moment of a long series. Still the mobilization did not crumble: by the 12th of March, 196380 are on strike and by the 22nd, we were close to 300 000 – about three quarters of the university and secondary school students of Quebec.

April begins with a change for the worse as the university administrations and certain students who oppose the strike try to obtain injunctions permitting the resumption of courses. Nonetheless, most of the injunctions are ineffective as large scale blockades oblige the administration to close down institutions for reasons of safety. The FEUQ and the FECQ are now the principal players and all the national associations support their policies. For the FEUQ-FECQ, the policy is to clean up the poor administration of universities and thus to finance a freeze in costs, while the CLASSE proposes a reestablishment of the 4% tax on banking institutions in order to finance a freeze in support of free education. During this time, by calling attention in particular to acts of vandalism committed by certain students, the government holds to its hard line and undertakes a public relations campaign in order to convince the population of the reasonableness of its proposals. On the street, police repression increases the anger of the students who have been radicalized by the refusal of the Charest government to negotiate the question of the increase. This anger reaches its height on the 21st of April when the demonstrators attempt to shut down the room of the Plan Nord that was to be used for recruiting applicants for jobs in a large project to develop the mining and hydroelectric potential of northern Quebec. The demonstration rapidly turns into a riot and the pictures of violence and vandalism seriously trouble the population at large. This development is not without a relation to an unfortunate attempt at a joke by the Prime Minister, mocking the students by suggesting that one might find them a job in the north in the company of a crowd of businessmen. April ends with an offer on the part of the government raise the increase to $1778, now spread out over seven years. This extension is also accompanied by an enhancement of the scholarship and loan system, as well as by a plan for a payback rate proportionate to the income of student who had received support.
When the student association collectively refused the government offer, negotiations were opened at the beginning of May. Accompanied by the presidents of the three major Quebec unions, the negotiating committee of the FEUQ, the CLASSE and the FECQ engage in discussion for twenty-two consecutive hours. An agreement is achieved: a provisional committee of the universities will be formed in order to evaluate the administration of universities so as to identify possibilities of economizing administrative costs and the money thus saved will be deducted from required institutional fees. This offer, however, is refused by the group of local student assemblies on the grounds that students were in a minority on the committee and because of remarks by the Prime Minister reported in the media that seem to downplay the importance of the university committee. May also sees regular nocturnal demonstrations that often end in numerous arrests. Finally the National Assembly passes Law 78 in order to control the crisis. This law suspends the assembly of secondary school and university students on strike; it forbids student associations from interfering with or stopping courses for those students who wish to attend; lastly, it severely restricts the right to demonstrate. Rather than putting an end to this affair, the law has rather the effect of revitalizing the mobilization and the movement is today stronger than ever.

Guillaume Bertrand is a student of political philosophy at the Université de Montréal. He is finishing his senior year there, preparing to write a master’s thesis.

Thanks to Babette Babich, Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, for sending this on. You can find Babette’s website [2]here. Thanks To [3]Tracy Strong, Professor of Political Science at UC San Diego, for kindly translating from the original French. Likewise thanks to [4]Bettina Bergo, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal, for completing this long chain of mediation.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/10ENoHW2GOU
2. http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/

They call the students ‘terrorists’ ‘thugs’ ‘criminals’ – but they are themselves the criminals (2012-06-07 13:00)

The thing is, you must remember how the newspapers are demonizing the students; there have been known incidents of agents provocateurs from the police who are stirring up violence, as well as a disaffected fringe element using the strike to cause trouble – but the students have been extremely organized and very peaceful in the face of brutal police force. It all began about 4 months ago, when Quebec announced a tuition rise. It quickly escalated because the students understood that if they give in to this, eventually everything will become more and more privatised, as in the U.S., and their quality of life will continue to go down as jobs and opportunities go only to the richest.

1204
So this strike really represents a commitment to Quebec values, to freedom and liberty and the right to protest. The students are really making me proud (they’ve been out every night for a month, despite absurdly proscriptive new laws), and eventually I do believe the government – which has behaved like an intransigent ass in the person of Charet – will have to begin negotiating in a realistic way (so far they’ve handed down pompous and insulting proposals that are more provocative than serious).

The most important thing is that, as good a job as the student leaders have done until now, the unions are taking over the strike and launching legal challenges to the new laws and taking on the negotiations with their own, much more sophisticated representatives. That’ll teach ‘em to mess with les gens! The students know they are going to be disenfranchised by oil billionaires if they don’t preserve their place in society – there’s nothing evil about that. They call the students ‘terrorists’ ‘thugs’ ‘criminals’ – but they are themselves the criminals, trying to steal the future from citizens – and popular opinion is with the students. Don’t believe the trolls on every newspaper, or the fake polls; everyone knows this battle must be won.

22 May 2012 Niki Lambros, Montreal, Quebec

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Niki Lambros, graduate Bard College ’83, ex-pat Manhattanite since ’86. She covered the northern hemisphere in her travels (mostly as a Greek Orthodox nun, but no need to go into too many details about that!), MA theol at U Cambridge, citizen of Canada (resident since ’03). And now, a protesting student of Concordia.

Thanks to Babette Babich, Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, for sending this on. You can find Babette’s website [1]here. Thanks To [2]Tracy Strong, Professor of Political Science at UC San Diego, for kindly translating from the original French. Likewise thanks to [3]Bettina Bergo, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal, for completing this long chain of mediation.

1. http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/
The Crisis of the Red Square

The present crisis is the result of a long fermentation of a set of complex and multiple ideas. These are derived from the interconnection of the life-experiences of two generations – over a period of almost twenty years – with the death of the welfare state and the neoliberalization of the education industry.

The once almost "free" education that benefited students at all levels of university education during the 1970's has been reformed many times – most importantly in 1966, 2002 and most recently. University fees have continually raised the level of student debt, debt that now amounts to $25000 for a BA, $35000 for a Masters and $55000 for a PhD. Interest rates range between 4 % and 12 %.

The professional and working class population of Quebec – the largest portion of those who vote – is in majority composed of baby-boomers [sic], a generation of a sealed-off mentality and a paternalistic attitude, condescending towards those younger, and self-sufficient in its social and cultural undertakings. In general, the baby-boomers did not undertake post-graduate work and easily acquired jobs that became permanent and were filled with social advantages. They continue to occupy these positions today, positions that are abolished when they retire. This is
probably one of the reasons that this working generation is in conflict with present-day demonstrators.

Today's youth gains an education at extraordinarily high cost, all the while knowing that its chances of employment and for a career are continually lessening.

The last ten years have seen a progressive increase in the tension between on the one hand the various student groups and, on the other, the various governments, whatever the political position of the latter might have been. This winter, university and pre-graduate students were hit by – or rather had imposed on them – a substantial increase in fees, this without any consultation of warning.

"Enough" – this was the reply of the most important student associations. "We categorically refuse to accept this increase." It was considered to be a totalitarian decree, especially as the government imposed increase was of 75%.

In light of these governmental acts, acts we considered totalitarian, we engaged in discussions, consultations and meetings both inside and outside the universities. Motivated in particular by an urgent need to conserve and validate our fundamental rights and liberty, we were pushed to elect – not without consequence and not without compromise – to undertake a general and unlimited strike at all levels of post-secondary education and to engage in demonstrations and necessary means to make ourselves heard, respected, and allow us to set forth our intentions.

A certain part (let us say a little more than half) of the population does not support this strike; it questions the legitimacy of the refusal to accept the increase in university fees and blindly accepts the arguments fabricated by the State. Here there is the outline of an intergenerational conflict that lies outside the contours of the present crisis and in the fundamental values and beliefs of each group.

On the other hand, that 250000 students have gone on strike also arouses the admiration of many free-thinking citizens; powerful and varied expressions of support have caused the issue to spill over the boundaries of a purely educational issue. Indeed, unions of professors, of artists, of certain service unions as well as those groups that support freedom of thought, social justice and so forth, have transformed the educational crisis into a crisis of liberty, of justice, and of equity. The Red Square movement is now spread across innumerable sectors of society.

In these last weeks, all of these outsiders [sic] have collectively extended the strike movement, which on its 96th consecutive day had imposed on it a special law (Bill78) forbidding all manner of demonstration, requiring students and professors to return to class in order to begin catching up for the lost weeks of strike. It also foresees the imposition of severe fines.

This cavalier and totalitarian misstep deepens even more the pit that separates the thin hope for mediation between the two principle parties.

Yesterday evening I once again participated in one of the innumerable spontaneous demonstrations. One feels there the urgent necessity for change that goes beyond politics and education. One feels nauseous.

(note: Striking students identify themselves by wearing a red square)


**Pawel Krol** teaches at the Department of Nursing at the university of Laval, Québec. He is completing his doctorate on the evolution of values in nursing in the light of the Nietzschean critique of values and his research emphasizes the condition of nursing in modernity.

Thanks to Babette Babich, Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, for sending this on. You can find Babette’s website [1]here. Thanks To [2]Tracy Strong, Professor of Political Science at UC San Diego, for kindly translating from the original French. Likewise thanks to [3]Bettina Bergo, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montreal, for completing this long chain of mediation.

1. [http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/](http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/)
2. [http://weber.ucsd.edu/~tstrong/](http://weber.ucsd.edu/~tstrong/)

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**Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-06-09 08:00)**

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)

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The Financial Crisis: A Way Out for Irish Youth? (2012-06-11 08:00)

David Cairns, MYPLACE Project team member at Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Lisbon, Portugal and Work Package Leader on his recently published paper on youth in Ireland in the economic crisis.

This was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. Follow MYPLACE on Twitter [2]here. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [3]here.

This article was based around a recently published paper by the author available [4]HERE.

One of the key contexts for the MYPLACE project is the importance of the financial crisis in young people’s lives. That youth face economic problems is evident in many of our partner countries, most obviously, Spain, Portugal and Greece, but what of the potential impact being made by the crisis upon the future direction of young people’s lives, particularly where there has been a dramatic collapse in the range of life chances?

Our recently completed study, now published on-line in Journal of Youth Studies, looked at the reactions of young people in two cities in the Republic of Ireland, Dublin and Cork, to the crisis. We asked a number of important
questions, including whether or not they were contemplating leaving the country. Youth migration is an important, and emotive, subject in Ireland, a phenomenon which was for decades associated with economic failure and cultural backwardness; hence, there is a political meaning to such movement, perhaps not present in other regional contexts. All this was thought to have changed in the 1990s, with the advent of the “Celtic Tiger” boom. This boom was founded not so much upon government policies, but rather the existence of an unusually large youth population, who were not only tertiary educated and English language-speaking but also relatively free of dependents; one reason for this, incidentally, was the removal of restrictions on purchasing contraceptives. For over a decade, GDP soared, as did salaries and the personal prosperity of some, if certainly not all. This ended in 2008, with the arrival of the financial crisis in the wake of the collapse of Lehmann Brothers bank. The Irish property bubble burst, and the local banks who had lent recklessly were left to pay the enormous bill, or rather the Irish population were left to pay the banks’ enormous bill, which was passed onto them courtesy of the Irish government. When it realised that this wasn’t going to be enough, this government then called in the International Monetary Fund, and the rest you probably know already.

So what of youth during this economic crisis period: do they intend to stay or leave? The general assumption, certainly in the Irish media, has been that a new wave of youth migration is imminent. Many local politicians were also no doubt wishing that all those without jobs would simply fly off to places where they would no longer be a burden on the tax payer. This of course, has not happened. While there has been some increase in outward migration, most of this movement can be attributed to return migrants, particularly those going back to Poland and other Central and Eastern European countries. The youth population has for the most part remained in Ireland. Our research, with a sample of 200 tertiary educated young people, confirms this finding, also illustrating that while the financial crisis may be generating an understandable desire to leave, this is not translated into large numbers of exiting young people. There are many reasons why Irish youth don’t, or don’t feel able, to leave, ranging from a dependence upon the resources embedded in their family relationships and friendship ties, i.e. social capital, to a perception that the situations facing them abroad would be no better to what they would encounter at home. Others lack internationally transferrable skills or are limited by their lack of fluency in foreign languages.

There are nevertheless a few isolated cases emerging from our research, which show that some young people are on the verge of moving abroad, mostly to Great Britain, but occasionally to more distant places like Canada, the US and Australia. And as other researchers in the field of youth mobility have shown, it tends to be the best and brightest young people who leave, particularly those from relatively well-off family backgrounds. The family is in fact the most important factor in explaining why young people choose to leave or stay, with friends often proving instrumental.

While Ireland may not be witnessing a mass youth exodus, it still faces the prospect of losing many young people with valuable skills and marketable qualifications. This may not be as politically embarrassing as watching an entire generation of young people fly away across the Atlantic Ocean or drift across the Irish sea, but there is still a sense of young people having been let down by an older generation, who were more concerned with the prices of their properties than the future of their children. What the future hold for those left behind remains to be seen, but the results on the imminent referendum on the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Unions should be interesting.

C. Wright Mills at work (2012-06-12 08:00)
Dear colleagues, fellow students and friends,

I don’t know if you are aware of the looming redundancies in the University of Salford, and the process for weeding out staff. People in most schools and departments (including sociology and politics) are having to reapply for their jobs (Professors are not included in this procedure, but in a different one whereby they are asked, among other things, to take a cut in salary).

It seems only few people know about the redundancy plan going on, or rather about the current phase, since there have already been previous waves of sackings in the last months and years, and a new phase is announced for next year. The Union has organised a petition calling on management to reconsider. The petition is quite weak and does not explain the process, which is very appalling, but still you might want to sign it (https://www.ucu.org.uk/nosalfordcuts), or perhaps take a more robust kind of action, e.g. through the national
associations.

About the process: people are forced to re-apply to their jobs in competition with one another (and in some cases in competition with external candidates). In sociology and politics, for example, the reapplication process consists of

· a written submission providing evidence that what people do meets a post specification recently developed by the university (15 % - deadline 31 May, when people are at the peak of marking!)

· an oral presentation on ‘strategy’ prepared during one hour and presented in ten minutes (35 %). All we know about this is: “The reference to ‘strategy’ in the context of the academic presentation has to do with the approach adopted by the School and/or its directorates in view of achieving success as an academic and financial unit”

· and a ‘competency based interview’ (50 %). About this we have been told: &lt; &gt;

NO COMMENT!

Presentation and interview will take place, it seems, around middle June. The members of the tribunal-panel are also unknown.

This will create a precedent – the managers who have taken over the university can do all this with total impunity, as this process is not a typical redundancy procedure (which for them is clearly not good enough), so through this procedure they need not agree almost anything with the unions and can make sure they scare people to death and definitely commodify and managerialised education.

It is obviously a total disgrace. Please circulate this information as widely as you can.

No nation now, but the imagination (2012-06-13 08:00)

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of C. Wright Mills’ death, [1]Sociological Imagination pays a respectful and moving tribute to the man who gave this forum its name through the legacy of his classic 1959 book, The Sociological Imagination, a veritable manifesto for the moral canon of radical sociology in America during the roaring 1960s and 1970s. Considering ‘the life, legacy and ideas of this unique man and what they mean for Sociology in an age of austerity’, my modest contribution to this homage to C.W.Mills is not merely a love-letter to an inspirational role model but an excuse to tease the contents of the book in order to shake up a few virtues and vices of the sociological discipline today as I witness them daily in the process of performing a biopsy on (public) sociology through the writing of my PhD. The inspiration that established the ferment for this article originates in [2]Aditya Chakrabortty’s search for ‘fresh voices’ in political science and sociology and my personal suspicion that Mills’ Sociological Imagination stands as graceful interlocutor in (any) debate on what sociology is about, what it is for, what does it do and what it may mean, especially in times of austerity; a theme that was in fact addressed in the [3]2012 BSA conference hosted by the University Leeds last April. Instead of reviewing the outburst of controversy that Chakrabortty’s [4]Guardian article sparked however, the focus here is on the discussion it opens up and the lessons that Mills’ grand oeuvre might have to offer, not didactically but experientially.
As a rhetorical preamble to my argument, I submit that A. Chakrabortty’s inflammatory remarks about sociology and political science are true or false, justified or unfair, timely or irrelevant depending on what we think sociology is for, about and what it might mean for us and others. I therefore take the liberty to offer some thoughts off the top of my head and from the bottom of my heart about how I think sociological imagination fits into the questions raised above, guided by a personal, perhaps idiosyncratic, possibly eccentric but certainly passionate reading of Mills’ book.

My personal exposure to The Sociological Imagination coincides with my sociological adolescence, skimming the book distractedly during a train journey, never expecting that I would stumble upon a powerful vision for sociology that had more to do with the alchemy of the vocation rather than the text-book science of sociology. To make matters worse, reading Mills presented me with an opportunity to treat sociology as a comment about the very process of doing sociology as well as inspiring an understanding of the discipline as a creative, imaginary pursuit, and not a dry, computational model of research. Sociology immediately appeared as an intellectual endeavour that could do things not through its science but through its imagination urging sociologists to be ‘intellectual craftsmen’, not ‘cheerful robots’ to pick two popular quotes from the book.

**But what is sociology for?**

Mills’ book provides no direct answer to this question, but it does inspire a way of answering it if one is to embrace the intellectual craftmanship of playful experimentation with ideas rather than succumbing to the incipient robotism of absolute facts and iron certainties. Following that playful route, we may suggest that sociology is the intellectual enterprise which mobilises sociological imagination as the fuel for understanding what society is. Sociological imagination then becomes exactly what Mills’ dreamed it would be; a community medium of exchange, wedding ‘private troubles’ with ‘social issues’. For the purposes of this article then sociology and sociological imagination become Siamese twins, inseparable from each other like Aristophanes’ androgynous in Plato’s Symposium. If sociology then is sociological imagination's better-half, what does their marriage look like? Paraphrasing Henri Bergson’s famous quotation in Pierre Hadot’s (2009) exposé on philosophy, sociology becomes not the construction of a system of knowledge but ‘the resolution made once to look naively at the world’. Sociology then, like philosophy becomes a tool for imaginative day-dreaming of ‘the possibility of living together differently, with less misery or no misery’ and ‘developing an art of living permanently with uncertainty’ as Bauman (2000) hopes for both ‘writing sociology’ and dealing with [5]’the trouble of being human these days’. Sociology, dressed in its most imaginative clothes ceases to be a discipline, or a science but gradually also becomes what it imagines itself to be; a space, a culture, an attitude, a lifestyle, a stage, a ritual, an institution, a movement, a profession, a brand name, a community, a tool for articulation of human concerns.

**But what is sociology about?**

Sociology-as-sociological-imagination is about satisfying the curious impulse to ask questions similar to the one’s torrentially posed by Sam Selvon’s flâneurian narrator in the short story My Girl and the City; ‘What is all this, what is the meaning of all these things that happen to people, the movement from one place to another, lighting a cigarette, slipping a coin into a slot and pulling a drawer for chocolate, buying a return ticket, waiting for a bus, working the crossword puzzle in the Evening Standard’. What seems to be a literary departure from sociological matters however, couldn’t fit better Mills’ very own contention that ‘whatever sociology may be, it is the result of constantly asking the question, what is the meaning of this?’ Vague though this may sound, Mills insists that ‘Sociologists of my sort would like to study what people want and what people cherish’ and viewed this way sociology becomes the private detective and the architect of our social life; that very shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood inquiries, chance remarks and anything our imagination might compel us to add to this perfunctory list.
So what does sociology do?

Sociology does what we ask it to do with the sociologist faced with the dilemma that Mills poses between acting as ‘philosopher king’ or ‘advisor to the prince’. With sociological imagination as its code, its software and its politics, sociology not only defamiliarises the familiar, excites the routine, unsettles the prejudicial, shows what we live by, what we want, what the passage of time has showed we wanted, if we want now what we wanted then but also aspires to become what C.L.R. James (1963) called ‘the welfare state of the mind’; acting as society’s very ambassador, its spokesperson, its legislator and interpreter, to borrow from Zygmunt Bauman’s (1989) homonymous book. Sociologists such as Michael Burawoy (2005) have gone as far as to consider sociology the very defender of civil society so would it be too risky to toy with a view of sociology as the author of society’s imaginary constitution? Merging Mills’ ideas to Cornelius Castoriadis’ (1998) The Imaginary Institution of Society, would it go too far to suggest that if we are the society drafting its very constitution, dreaming up its institutions, deciding upon its future through our established rites, reflexes and norms, sociology might be our vehicle for doing so? Would it be too much to argue that sociology becomes society’s user manual, our guide to the labyrinth of human affairs?

And what does sociology mean?

Sociology means what we want it to mean, it can mean an imaginary craft or a research technique, it can inspire and contribute to the world through the flowering of its imagination, or it can raise funds, it can defend higher education from the salivating jaws of unbridled corporatism or it can facilitate it, it can teach experientially and interpret critically, or it can conform, it can look at holistic massage through a Foucauldian lens or it cannot overlook sociological imagination as a way of looking at things through one’s own lens, it can support austerity or it can promote prosperity not of any nation now, but the imagination.

References:


James, C.L.R (1963) Beyond A Boundary. London: Hutchinson


Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music.

2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/apr/16/economics-has-failed-us-alternative-voices
3. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/conference/

Harald Wolf (2012-08-31 09:51:41)
"...promote prosperity not of any nation now, but the imagination." - that’s great, thanks! "Nation" - "Imagination": do you perhaps allude with this pair of words to any citation?

Harald Wolf (2012-08-31 09:59:24)
"...promote prosperity not of any nation now, but the imagination": that’s great, thanks, Lambros! Do you perhaps allude with this pair of words to any citation?

Harald Wolf (2012-08-31 10:06:56)
"...promote prosperity not of any nation now, but the imagination": that’s great, thanks, Lambros! Do you perhaps allude with this to any citation?

Lambros Fatsis (2013-04-22 13:57:00)
Hi Harald, Many thanks for your comment as well as for the query! The quote is from part 3 of St Lucian poet Derek Walcott’s ‘The Schooner Flight’...hope that helps! best, l.

Vernon Goddard (2012-10-12 11:32:52)
Hi There & thanks for your thoughts on Mills. I’m just embarking on studies at the Lincoln Social Science centre which is a radical set-up introducing students to a variety of “imaginations”. We’re just tackling Mills & it’s proving quite difficult to get to the essence of his work.....so your article has been quite useful. Regards Vernon Goddard

Sociological Imagination (2012-10-12 12:30:24)
Hi Vernon, Glad you liked the article. You might find these materials about Mills interesting: http://bundlr.com/b/c-wright-mills
Hope things are going well at the SSC. It’s a fantastic project. Cheers, Mark

Hi Vernon, I just came across your comment, months after you first posted it but thought I’d send you a comment to express my gratitude for reading the piece as well as expressing my joy for its usefulness as an in(tro)duction to C.W.Mills, a constant inspiration for sociologists of the kind I (and I presume you also) like... You might also find our new series interesting too? I
certainly hope so anyway! Stay in touch and many thanks again for your graceful comments! I.

Ssociólogos (2013-08-27 16:14:37)

No Nation Now, But the Imagination | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 15:43:09)
[...] published at The Sociological Imagination, on June 13, [...] 

Getting Started: Social Media for Academics (2012-06-14 08:00)

The Postgraduate Workers Association (2012-06-15 12:00)
The Postgraduate Workers Association is a campaign and network that aims to work with the UCU and NUS to ensure fair conditions for research students employed by universities.

HE institutions, faced with a funding crisis, are attacking the conditions established academics and PG employees alike. We stand in solidarity with all facing attacks these, but it is also crucial that we self-organise our own sector if we are to oppose the exploitation of ourselves and colleagues.

If you’re interested in getting involved, see the [1]blog and the [2]twitter feed.

1. http://postgraduateworker.wordpress.com/

John Holmwood on Markets, Expertise and the Public University, 28 June at the OU (2012-06-15 14:00)
Markets, Expertise and the Public University: A crisis in knowledge for democracy?

Wednesday 28 June 2012, 14.00-17.00

Open University, Milton Keynes, Library Seminar Rooms, 1 &2
The Creating Publics project was launched in March 2012 with the aim of innovating new ways of engaging publics in the on-going processes of social science research and public life. For the 3rd Creating Publics keynote lecture we are delighted to welcome Professor John Holmwood (University of Nottingham).

Programme:

14:00 Welcome and introduction: Prof. Jef Huysmans & Dr. Nick Mahony (CCIG)

14:10 Keynote lecture: Prof. John Holmwood (University of Nottingham)

15:00 Response by Prof. John Clarke and Dr. Vron Ware (CCIG)

15:30 Q & A and collective discussion

The event will be followed by a drinks reception.

In the spirit of public experimentation that this project promotes, the event will be webcast live and accessible [1]here.

Those viewing online will be able to post questions and comments, which will be relayed live to the event.

To register, to attend in person please email [2]socsci-ccig-events@open.ac.uk

For further information on the event and an outline of Prof. Holmwood’s lecture, please go to [3]our website.

1. http://ccig.newsweaver.co.uk/qeq6tucz0ty2680f1niiig?email=true&a=6&p=24522515&t=20101045
2. mailto:socsci-ccig-events@open.ac.uk
3. http://ccig.newsweaver.co.uk/1qqjda19p2680f1niiig?email=true&a=6&p=24522515&t=20101045

Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-06-16 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]
Follow us on Twitter here:

[4]Twitter Updates


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Slavoj Zizek: The heart of the people of Europe beats in Greece (2012-06-17 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/SWtn7iEckyY

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/SWtn7iEckyY

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The Conspiracy Conspiracy? (2012-06-18 08:00)
Away from the gaze of mainstream media and politics, there is a vibrant subculture which holds these very institutions responsible for the most heinous acts of brutality and deceit. It is political movement that, in size, likely dwarfs anything that might traditionally be labelled 'radical'. The numbers in its ranks are impossible to know, but the youtube videos through which it channels its messages receive hits in the millions, as do the multitude of websites around which it is organised. The level of popular acceptance of some of its key tenets are known however, and they are striking. An Ohio University poll in 2006 found that a third of American's believed the events of 9/11 were in some way abetted by the federal government, about the same percentage of American's that voted Bush in for his second term two years earlier. Amongst young adults polled, those believing the official account of what happened on 11th September 2001 were actually in the minority. The 'Truther' movement, as they call themselves, is an elephant in the halls of power; a mainstream radical movement.

For those who are used to occupying the fringes of political thought, these are astonishing figures. Truthers do not limit themselves solely to the events of one day in September either; under the New World Order (NWO) mantle they have assembled a dense scaffold of conspiracies encompassing all the major events of modern history, the current economic troubles included. The mainstream media's unwillingness to report this phenomenon is perhaps understandable. Their discomfort in dealing with Truther groups should be no surprise, for Truthers hold dear assumptions that deny the media establishment its legitimacy. The reliance of the media on 'official' sources of information – politicians; security services; lobbyists; PR spokespersons – all are, by definition, rendered suspect by conspiracists. The media organisations themselves are too a part of this self-serving elite whose interest is not in justice or truth, but merely the promotion of the status quo.

In this, the Truther movement has much in common with other radical political movements, yet the radical should be careful of celebrating the success of it. Whenever one stops to consider the apparently concrete walls between the concepts by which we order society, one quickly finds the immutable to be nothing more solid than sand. Such is the case when separating the different systems thorough which we create, and act upon, knowledge. A religious church can quickly become a political movement; a political idea rapidly transformed into a scientific fact. Watching celebrity atheist Richard Dawkins, haranguing a Christian with fevered conviction as only a man witness to the One Truth can, one quickly beings to question who amongst the participants is the man of reason, and who the religious fanatic.

The appearance of the Truther cause as a political movement is similarly fluid. At the heart of all Truther accounts is, it seems, an overarching, invisible, omnipotent elite, engineering building collapses as easily as they engineer global economic collapse (of which they are also accused). These superhuman individuals appear to be gods in all but name. Truthers readily engage in scientific analyses of the events of 9/11, yet such is the power and reach of the controlling elites, that any evidence contradictory to the Truther can be dismissed as lies, its proponents mere pawns of the powerful. In light of these characteristics, the Truther movements appears more as a secular, scientific religion.

We live in a time when mainstream political ideology encompasses nothing more inspirational than 'triangulation' and the race for the middle ground. Radical politics, meanwhile, is hamstrung by the complexities demanded by the numerous challenges it finds itself in opposition against. This at least in part explains the refusal of the Occupy movement to elect spokespeople. The Truther movement is different however. The young, angry and inquisitive are easily drawn to revolutionary political movements, but here there is no abstract, nebulous 'system' tackle; no ghost to try and hurl one's self against. Here, the bad guys are easily identifiable, for the secrecy in which they operate is paradoxically no barrier to their unmasking, whether it be the Bilderberg Group, Illuminati, Elders of Zion, or any of the other shadowy actors leading the march of the NWO. For such individuals, the Truther movement
offers the authority of science and the certainty of religion to create a compelling ideology, and so its success in
drawing activists away from more traditional radical movements is unsurprising. It has no need for the difficult
questions of what should come instead of the status quo, for it only exists in opposition to what is. To offer answers
to such questions would seem impossible, for the political and economic landscape which the traditional radical
seeks to challenge is here rendered nothing more than a puppet show, a shadow on the cave wall. The true power is
unseen. Furthermore, and of particular worry to the radical, in its invocation of adversaries of supernatural ability,
it serves only to entrench the established order. How does an individual even begin to challenge a group capable of
orchestrating what these elites are accused of, a group which exists outside the reality of mainstream culture, and
so beyond its reach?

Truther accounts of 9/11 feed on any perceived coincidence, mistake or unknown. Why was the US airforce running
war games on the day of the attacks which confused efforts to respond to the hijacks? Why did the towers fall as they
did, and when no skyscrapers have previously collapsed due to fire? Why was so little debris visible at the Pentagon
-crash site? The key assumption underpinning these questions, as one might expect from a religious account, is that
-complete knowledge of an event is possible, and that everything happens for a reason. There is little sign here of
postmodernism; of Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, or of Chaos Theory’s irreducible complexity. Instead we have
only the ordered execution of labyrinthine plans. That many Truther explanations are in themselves more incredible
than any official version seems to go unremarked. Is an account in which the towers were secretly wired with
-explosives really more plausible than the version which holds the impact of jumbo jets laden with fuel responsible
for the collapses?

The actual specifics of Truther claims of 9/11 are more multifarious than is possible to detail here. I myself cannot
claim it impossible that elements of the US security services had foreknowledge of the attacks, and chose to let them
happen to further their ideologies, or – more likely – mistakes were made that have since been covered up. This
is, however, a world away from the idea of a fully orchestrated 'inside job', and the superhuman elite required to
achieve such a feat. Regardless, I am more of the opinion stated by Chomsky: that in a sense it doesn’t really matter
if 9/11 was an inside job. The conspiracy claims will never be satisfactorily answered, and merely distract from what
we do know, which is that the Neo-Conservatives exploited the attacks to pursue their policies with lethal conviction
for seven disastrous years, whilst a supine media did little more than flag-wave from the sidelines. Besides, as Adam
Curtis’ Power of Nightmares shows so well, ultimately there is little more to separate Neo-Con statesman from
Al-Qaeda operative than conventions of dress, and more comfortable living arrangements.

There is, however, one particular element of the 9/11 attacks that does stand out from all the smoke and debris of
that day. Over a decade on from the attacks, we still await the release, by the US government, of footage showing
the plane hitting the Pentagon. Given that this is one of the most secure facilities on Earth, one would imagine
that such footage must exist. The 2006 decision to show the comically ambiguous two frames of footage from a
nearby carpark security camera, which may or may not show the nose of Flight 77, only adds to the confusion. It
may be that this is evidence, as Truthers state, that it was in fact a missile, not a plane, that struck the Pentagon.
More likely, the US security establishment is unsold on the idea of showing the world its most potent symbol being
struck a fearsome blow by a group of Muslim fanatics armed with Stanley Knives. If so though, why release even the
peek-a-boo footage?

There is a third explanation for the non-appearance of these tapes, which brings us conveniently full circle. That some
clear sighted individuals in the halls of power recognise that the Truther movement is a dead end, a useful sideshow
with which to distract those most sure to be its critics. Truthers are of course no homogeneous entity – there is no
single Truther account, and there is no archetypical adherent. The Ohio University poll found though that “Members
of racial and ethnic minorities, people with only a high school education and Democrats were especially likely to
suspect federal involvement in 9/11.” One more easily associates these groups with radical than Republican politics,
so why not allow the disaffected to disenfranchise themselves? Hand them the means to convince themselves of the unerring control with which you orchestrate events, whilst you in truth ham-fistedly bumble from one crisis to the next.

We have then a conspiracist conspiracy, designed to both depoliticise potential radicals, and leave them so far outside the mainstream that they are considered untouchable. Indeed following the Iraq War we have already seen a similar process take place in the UK with Muslims, where for years the political and media establishments have sought to blur the boundary between radical politics and terrorism, the [2]'Nottingham Two' being just one example. A similar story can be told of environmental activists, and the surveillance of their democratic activities by police [3]FIT units.

Unlike other theories, the conspiracist conspiracy does not require a God-like marshalling of events by the state security apparatus, only a breathtaking level of cynicism.

It’s still pretty farfetched, but hey, it’s more plausible than the missile theory.

__________________________

Murray Goulden has a background in sociology and STS, and is a Research Fellow at the Horizon Institute, University of Nottingham. Having written his PhD on scientific and popular constructions of human ancestors (‘missing links’), his current (eminently more fundable) research interests concern energy and transport in the context of climate change and emerging digital technologies.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/VyrlcoXRjn0](http://www.youtube.com/embed/VyrlcoXRjn0)
Who will recognize Humanity 2.0 and will it recognize us? (2012-06-19 08:00)

If 'Humanity 1.0' is the proverbial 'normal human being' that our laws have been traditionally designed to empower and protect, then who is 'Humanity 2.0'? For the most part, the prospects for 'Humanity 2.0' largely replay in a new key what I call in my new book the 'bipolar disorder' that has always accompanied the human condition: Are we 'glorified animals' who should become more embedded in nature or 'minor deities' with the potential to achieve full godlike powers? Until the modern period, theology was the natural home for this discussion. But nowadays it is increasingly the subject of public debate. On the one hand are those – often called 'posthumanists' – who believe that anthropocentrism is a dangerous conceit. They typically adopt a Darwinian view that we are just one amongst many species who cohabit the planet and who eventually will become extinct and replaced by something perhaps quite unrecognisable. On the other hand are those – often called 'transhumanists' – who believe in humanity's unique ability (if not obligation) to take control of evolution and steer it in directions that project our most desirable features (usually our minds) into perpetuity, even if it means abandoning our biological bodies. While both views may seem wildly futuristic, in fact people are already beginning to live lives that assume one or the other future will come about.

Just not that into you (2012-06-20 08:00)

New Faculty Majority Board Member Jack Longmate, writing in the NFM blog this week, thinks that there are fresh signs of "[1]potential for traction in public policy thinking" in relation to the conditions faced by academics working off the career track in America’s higher education system.

His optimism has been sparked by Robert Reich, Professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley, who’s been speaking out against [2]“casino capitalism”. Reich was Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration, and he writes on the multiple conflicts of interest between public policy and the freewheeling trade of paper assets for short-term gain. Specifically, he’s suggesting at the moment that there’s something wrong with a vision of economic recovery that doesn’t include some means of [3]valuing and protecting fair distribution.

For graduate students and others who are trapped in the adjunct/tenured/casualised/precarious/what-have-you economy, the prospect of impact on public policy is a far horizon. The fairness or otherwise of the deal on offer is much more directly affected by swamp level policy, made by those who manage the divisional budget out of which their wages are paid. This is where it can look as though Jack Longmate is right when he says that the calculation of risk to the employer goes like this:

... if we can sucker people into taking a bunch of part-time, temporary jobs, with lousy pay, working conditions, no offices or professional development (because let’s say we don’t consider them professionals) and spotty benefits on a permanent basis, let’s go for it

Ouch. If you’re an administrator who sets the terms for pay and conditions for the casually hired, please don’t write in. Sadly for everyone, it doesn’t matter how nice you are, or how hard this is for you. None of these actual thoughts need to have been said out loud in an actual policy-setting meeting, for it to feel this way to someone on the sharp end of a decision to cut hours or courses, or redefine tasks, in a way that leaves them doing more for less. In a really tight budget, your needs and theirs seem pretty irreconcilable.

But it’s not all about the money. The part that I think will resonate with Australian casual academics relates to the times that hiring practices and working conditions send the strongest possible signal that universities “don’t consider them professionals”.

This might not be a public policy matter just yet, but is it good institutional policy? Institutions that are comfortable outsourcing core customer relations work to casual workers have made a three-part risk assessment: firstly, how low can service costs go before they flow through to customer satisfaction? secondly, how much additional management work can the minority permanent staff pick up without negative impact on other business? and thirdly, how reliable is the locally available supply of suitably qualified replacement workers, if morale drops below a level that the current workforce will tolerate?

The risk for Australian universities is that their casual academics are among the most skilled and educated in the workforce. Unlike university students, who really are stuck with low-paying casual work because they aren’t yet qualified to escape, casual academics are at minimum degree-qualified. They’re experienced, informed, adaptable and
exceptionally professional; they're communicators, researchers, writers and project-managers; they have excellent teamwork skills; they're used to working without supervision; they can handle difficult people and challenging situations, and they're legislation compliant; they can lead and they can support; they deliver on task, on time, every time; and they're really smart. Oh, and they're also experts in their fields, some right up to the level of being PhD-qualified.

But they don't leave. Why is this?

I've been thinking about this since I got caught up briefly this week in a brisk and difficult exchange of views between Amanda Krauss ("[4]Worst Professor Ever") and Karen Kelsky ("[5]The Professor is In"), over whether or not the current adjunct culture in the US is a "martyr culture", or whether adjuncts are genuinely "oppressed". Both are recovering academics who've gone on to start different businesses on the basis of their experience and expertise, and both offer the advice that "it's OK to quit". Both are active in commenting on the state of higher education in the US.

The exchange also pulled in [6]Cedar Reiner, [7]Lee Skallerup, [8]Melonie Fullick and [9]Vanessa Vaile of the [10]New Faculty Majority. I'm sure Jonathan Rees was in there at one point. The gist is this: despite the fact that many academics with tenure are lobbying hard to improve the working conditions of their untenured colleagues, some are also wondering how to ask: what if it would be better for you to walk away?

The answers are consistent, and sad. Here's my observation from conversations with casually hired colleagues in Australia. They're accepting long-term but perversely insecure work on the off-career track for a mix of three reasons: they're asked to stay, and this feels good (especially at times when PhD progress doesn't); they're calculating that their commitment will somehow pay out in the end; and they feel that there's nowhere else to go in the local job market (this is especially tough for casual academics supporting families and dependent children).

Does their situation amount to exploitation, abuse of trust, or codependency? Amanda Krauss' tough love position is that "people with choice need to stop feeding themselves into an exploitative system"; Cedar Reiner takes a different view: "how do we choose not to do what we love?" I'm not sure what I think, but I do know that every time I've found myself justifying something in terms like these, the situation I've been in hasn't really been all that healthy for me.

But how do you judge, in the middle of the push-pull self-esteem mess you find yourself in, whether or not things might really be about to get better? Here's a test casuals might like to apply. Does the institution asking you to come back have a strategic planning document in which it sets out its institutional aspirations for doing things well and enhancing its reputation, and does this include a clear plan for the development and career management of its academic and professional staff? That's not the question, though. This is: does this same strategic planning document, which will have gone through multiple working groups and committees and consultation processes and been signed off at a high level, also explain how it intends to support, develop and respect your professionalism as a seasonally hired academic worker?

If it doesn't, then you can make your decision to stay, go, or try to achieve a better deal on an informed basis, because now you know one thing (and so do your tenured allies): at the highest level, where resourcing decisions are aligned to the institutional strategic plan, they're just not that into you.

That's the part that it will help us all to change.
Related reading (including two just in from Lee Skallerup, and a foursome from Melonie Fullick)

- [12] Robert Reich Looks Beyond Outrage (wnyc.org)
- [13] Loyalty or Desperation? and [14] Loyalty or Desperation? Revisited (Lee Skallerup in College Ready Writing)
- [15] Becoming Prof 2.0 (Melonie Fullick in Academic Matters)
- [19] Is the University a Bad Boyfriend? and [20] Should PhD Students be Treated More Like Shoppers? (Inger Mewburn, editor of the Thesis Whisperer)
- [21] Why Did I Get A Master’s Degree in English? (Josh Boldt of The Adjunct Project, at Copy & Paste)
- [22] It Gets Better—and Other Enabling Fictions (Mark Long, I think, from Staying Alive: Dimension of Academic Experience), with links to posts by Amanda Krauss and Karen Kelsky

Kate Bowles is an Australian historian. This was originally posted on Kate’s blog which you can find [23] here. You can find Kate on Twitter [24] here.
Is Capitalism Always Good for Democracy? (2012-06-21 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/MCMG5SWkeU
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=yIqINwhtOGgC&dq=Supercapitalism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=1YnbT7mFCNTb8QPk4aixCw&redir_esc=y
Introduction to Sociology

by Mitchell Duneier

In this class we will cover the essentials of sociology, to help you better understand your own life and situations far from your experience.

Click [2]here

1. https://www.coursera.org/princeton
2. https://www.coursera.org/course/soc101

Edgar Vesga (2012-06-22 17:07:36)
Una buena opcion de formacion

Sociology is a Martial Art (2012-06-23 08:00)

SOCIOTHERY IS A MARTIAL ART, a new documentary about Bourdieu's life, became an unexpected hit in France just prior to his death. Filmed over three years, director Pierre Carles' camera follows Bourdieu as he lectures, attends political rallies, travels, meets with his students, staff, and research team in Paris, and includes Bourdieu having a conversation with Günter Grass.

Watch the rest of the documentary and read more about it [1]here.


1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Csbu08SqAuc&list=UUuJ814jKHe70ZS8T_J42eGQ&index=7&feature=plcp
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/Csbu08SqAuc
Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-06-24 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
Warnings: statistical inaccuracies in Microsoft Excel 2007 (2012-06-25 08:00)

Thanks to mathematician-friends and social networking sites, today I encountered this 2008 article by McCullough and Heiser on the statistical inaccuracies of Microsoft’s package Excel. What is so striking about the article is not merely the angry tone in which it is written - something rather unusual for academic publications, but the fact that the authors’ anger is entirely justified. As they write,

Excel's statistical distributions have always been inadequate. Over the years, Microsoft has fixed some distributions, fixed others incorrectly, and failed to fix others.

And more:

Microsoft occasionally fixes errors, more often ignores them, and sometimes fixes them incorrectly. Consequently, every time there is a new version of Excel, the tests must be repeated. Indeed, every time a new version of Excel is released, we receive emails asking, "Is it safe to use Excel?" There appears to be a sentiment that if only Excel would pass the intermediate tests, then it would be safe to use. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Microsoft has not even fixed all the flaws identified by Sawitzki (1994) over 15 years ago (his paper took a couple years to be published).

There are scores of statistical functions in Excel, and we have benchmarked only a fraction of them. In the fraction that we have examined, we have found enough unfixed/incorrectly-fixed errors to cast grave doubt on the above-mentioned sentiment. To wit, we write this paper in part to warn members of the statistical community that even should there come a day when Microsoft can fix enough of the errors in Excel that Excel can pass these intermediate-level tests, it will not necessarily be safe to use.

And even more:

What is particularly pernicious, at least so far as consumers of statistics are concerned, is that Microsoft seems to take the approach that specialized domain knowledge is not necessary to the production of statistical code, i.e., that the entire field of statistical computing has no merit.

The article is available [1]here. Please, read it, even (or especially) if you, like many sociologists, rely on software packages for your work - or ignore it and use Excel for statistical analyses at your peril...
P.S. the authors do not recommend other packages explicitly.


Happy international seafarers’ day! (2012-06-25 18:41)

Today the world celebrates the incredibly important, yet often overlooked, contribution of seafarers to our daily lives. This address by the president of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) reminds us that our modern lives without seafarers’ labour would be unthinkable - and also that there is a worldwide shortage of seafarers.

Thank you, former, current, and future seafarers!


1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/8_J--vWmNes](http://www.youtube.com/embed/8_J--vWmNes)
I read [2] this book as a treat after two week's marking. At this point I should stop because the state of higher education in Ireland so presciently described by Deirdre McArdle-Clinton and published in 2008 has become the new order in England today, one consequence being a rigid policing of largely imaginary 'standards'. In the competitive isolation with which English HEIs are meeting the market in tripled fees, no one must therefore bring their institution into disrepute by admitting – or exposing, as this book does – that things are not as they appear to be. So, let me quickly clarify that in agreeing with her diagnosis of the consequences of what DM-C calls Capsule Education, I am not attributing anything she says to my own institution because her diagnosis applies to all HEIs and, indeed, and perhaps even more presciently, to schools and colleges also.

Just yesterday, for instance, I met a Cambridge University tutor who told me she instructs her tutees in the correct use of apostrophes. Perhaps it does not matter that undergraduate essays are randomly sprinkled with apostrophes and that, as every marker sees, students rarely spell, punctuate or paragraph properly and often have only a shaky grasp of grammar. For McArdle-Clinton, these are symptoms that result from not reading, or, rather, from reading only 'bits' from the internet cut and pasted together with inevitable plagiarism. Despite the widely recognized need for a foundation year to sort this all out, especially in subjects necessitating the understanding and application of mathematics, leave alone to induct students into an academic culture that has not (yet) completely abandoned its struggle to survive, and to give students – and often staff – time to read, the delusions of Vice-Chancellors, exam boards and recent governments in ever rising standards are sustained. Critics are derided by e-enthusiasts as grumpy, old and soon-to-be-retired under-raters of all the 'experiences' students/customers are consuming on-line; or denounced as elitists seeking to revert to minority HE. Meanwhile, students remove themselves from any meaningful involvement in an education become increasingly instrumental: 'Let's pretend like I give a shit!' as a student T-shirt proclaims. Staff participate in the charade and at worst share the illusions in the simulacrum of quality they maintain, pandering to parents 'less concerned with what their children learn than with the certificate and what they will earn' (p.48).

Deirdre McArdle-Clinton punctures this pretense. Hers is a general cultural critique, sparked by the observation of pre-packaged potatoes in a supermarket 'presented for sale in capsule form'. Like medicine 'absorbed without the distress or effort of chewing or tasting' (p.2), learning is sugar-coated and drip-fed fed to customers/students through notes instead of books. ‘This realization was the beginning a journey from potatoes to postmodernism.’ (p.1) While blaming neo-relativist twaddle for this descent into the ubiquitous irony of the new postmodern orthodoxy, what McArdle-Clinton describes is an outcome of commodification for which she offers no historical account but which in England is about to take a great leap forward with Students at the heart of the system. Nor does she provide evidence for it beyond unspecified surveys of staff and students, undertaken for this revamped PhD and anonymised for probably the same precautionary reasons indicated above. This does not matter!! The book will provoke the same strong reactions as in this reviewer so that, before it is too late and new and younger dispensers of capsule education, graduate through a system they accept as normal, or with which they have no opportunity but to comply in desperate economic times, those who can still understand will endorse the recommendation with which the book closes by calling for a national commission on Irish higher education.

Given all the other problems facing Ireland, this is unlikely to happen; or make much difference if it did. However, there are similar calls in England for an independent inquiry into – hopefully – the whole of education from postgraduate to primary schools. Perhaps especially in the latter, synthetic phonics exemplifies ‘capsule education’ and will have the same predictably disastrous consequence of constricting the ability to make meaning by making
connections, imposing instead a tyranny of transparency that explains to students/customers/consumers exactly what they have to do so as to turn their outcomes into quantifiable and thereby comparable commodities for audit and sale. This behavioral training effectively dumbs down learning to reduce rather than raise the standards it claims to save. Teachers and students can use the critique this book presents against the current knee-jerk reaction to traditional rote-crammed academicism.

Forthcoming in Higher Education Review

Patrick Ainley is Professor of Training and Education at the University of Greenwich.


The Permeation of Technology in Everyday Life (2012-06-27 08:00)

Sorry
This video does not exist.

Sarah Kember’s research covers many aspects of the relation between technology and life, from the centrality of new media in everyday life to scientific projects such as Artificial Life which redefines life as information and seeks to both simulate life-as-we-know-it and synthesise life-as-it-could-be. Sarah’s approach to developments in science, technology and new media is critical, curious and often playful. Her talk will reject dominant ideas that technology has specific effects on our lives (such as shortening our attention spans, alienating us from other humans, turning children and adults into facebook addicts). Instead, it will explore the extent to which technology was always already vital, or life-like and the extent to which life has become a technical process. This dynamic connection between life and technology has marked implications for our modes of critique and requires, the talk will suggest, an intuitive philosophy and a creative theoretical approach.

(from [3]Virtual Futures)

2. http://www.gold.ac.uk/media-communications/staff/kember/

Sarah Kember on technology in everyday life | Thinking culture (2012-06-29 08:07:16)

[...] collection on ‘the new vitalism’ a few years ago. Here she is giving a talk on the permeation of technology in everyday life. Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this. This entry was posted in [...]

Write or day app: some thoughts from Jenny Diski | Thinking culture (2012-07-02 07:59:37)

[...] at the LRB blog Jenny Diski has written a short piece about apps that are supposed to ‘help’ you to write. She focuses her reflections on the [...]

“We all know bankers are greedy bastards!” Ideological dimensions to the financial crisis (2012-06-28 08:00)

Think back to 2007. Did you believe the end of neoliberalism was nigh? I must admit I did. It seems rather naive in retrospect. Yet fast forward five years and consider the political terrain: we have witnessed a massive consolidation within the financial sector and an unprecedented attack on the welfare state across Europe. As if by magic, a crisis of the financial system has been reframed as a crisis of sovereign debt, with ‘austerity’ (in essence the [1]structural adjustment programmes that the organs of international capitalism have long imposedelsewhere) being pursued with breathtaking alacrity, accompanied by the continual refrain that there is no alternative.

So what happened? This question is one which will undoubtedly preoccupy large swathes of the academy for decades. However I do want to offer a quick observation about theideological dimensions to a set of processes which are reshaping global society to an extent which I suspect is still not entirely understood. This concerns what the financial crisis established for the population as a whole. What did we learn from it? Oddly, I think the answer is very little. How were ‘bankers’, as the pantomime characters to whom financial capital is reduce, perceived prior to the crisis? As greedy bastards. How were ‘bankers’, as the pantomime characters to whom financial capital is reduce, perceived after the crisis? As greedy bastards. I’m generalising wildly here before anyone feels the need to point it out. Likewise, if you know of any longitudinal polling data about attitudes towards bankers, I’d love to see it. Without doubt, there are significant numbers of people who either approve of bankers or regard them as a necessary evil.

1234
My point is simply that the discursive construction of 'the bankers' (rather than more or less well-informed propositional claims about the actual characteristics of specific people working in a specific industry) really hasn't changed as much as one might expect. Although of course the social significance of the negative characteristics imputed to bankers has increased: after all THEY broke THE ECONOMY because of THEIR GREED. But the general perception of the financial system has changed much less than would seem likely given that, well, it almost collapsed. In a sense, the financial crisis represented an affirmation of what we all already knew.

The moral failings of the financial elite were widely recognised prior to the crisis and no one did anything because we couldn't and/or because we benefitted from its continuation. But a lack of illusion about the nature of the people in charge, with the accompanying cynicism about their motives, facilitated a widespread disjuncture best represented by the weird position of the traditional Labour supporter during the Blair years: subjectively critical but objectively complicit in the reproduction of the social structures which were the object of their criticism. The apparent absence of ideological illusion about the nature of finance capitalism itself, as well as the political pragmatism and turn away from 'idealism' which naturally accompanies it, functioned as a form of ideological control. As Žižek puts it, "a cynical non-identification with the ruling ideology’s explicit content is a positive condition of its functioning: the ideological apparatuses 'run smoothly' precisely when subjects experience their innermost desire as 'oppositional', as 'transgressive'". We all knew that bankers are greedy bastards before the financial crisis. Then after the crisis this shared recognition becomes an object of public debate. Bankers are 'bashed'. Then everything 'returns to normal'?

Some quick thoughts about sociological realism and digital life (2012-06-29 08:00)

What do we do online? This is an issue I've pondered in a variety of guises but I've been thinking about it today as a result of running a fun (though badly attended) workshop about 'demystifying social media'. As someone who runs social media workshops in universities, I've become ever more convinced that many of the confusions which surround digital activity stem from a basic ontological misunderstanding of what online activity is. It's too frequently construed as something distinct from the 'real' world.

The reasons for this distinction, which has pithily been named digital dualism, are a fascinating question in their own right. In part I think it stems from the phenomenology of the internet. Until the recent proliferation of mobile devices, it was necessary to sit down at a computer and stare at a screen to use the internet. This helps creates a sense of the internet as a 'virtual' space which is in some way disembodied. As someone who has had unpleasant back and neck problems from my posture when using a computer in the past, it's always been obvious to me that using the internet is not at all disembodied. Though the obviousness of this has become utterly glaring, to the extent that I can't quite take those who disagree seriously, since I started using an iPad and iPhone. Similarly the cyberpunk romanticisation of the 'virtual' plays a cultural role in propping up this ontological assumption.
If people see the internet as a distinct ‘world’ disconnected from the ‘real world’ then it becomes normatively and practically confusing. The tacit and explicit guides to action, the criteria we use to judge experiences, don’t seem to apply. When I run workshops I try to ‘reembody’ digital activity, encouraging people to incorporate digital tools into their wider lives. The concerns, projects and plans which unproblematically apply to every other sphere of life also apply to digital activity. Digital tools are only contingently different to other tools. If we treat them as something other, as mysteriously distinct from the stuff of day-to-day life, our practical engagement with them is unavoidably inhibited. It’s necessary to understand the tools but, in a way, this is secondary. It’s much more important to understand how we might use these tools as part of the wider projects and practices which stem from our lives beyond them.

The sheer newness of the digital tools we are presented with impedes the common sense sociological realism which guides us in other aspects of our life. Too often we fail to see (though we may retrospectively reflect in an intellectual manner) that the people we encounter ‘online’ are, well, people. Who are using tools to communicate for a whole range of reasons. If we artificially delineate ‘the digital’ as a distinct sphere of human activity we deny ourselves the possibility of properly understanding what people do online. Likewise we preclude the possibility of participating in the ‘online world’ with the same degree of practical poise with which we engage with much, though not all, of our ‘real lives’.


2. http://markcarrigan.net/
3.7 July

Big Thinkers - Sherry Turkle (2012-07-01 12:00)

[IFRAMEx1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/oyHZYqgRY4k

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/oyHZYqgRY4k](http://www.youtube.com/embed/oyHZYqgRY4k)
The Greek MYPLACE team at Panteion University of Social And Political Sciences present their latest blog on the political background to Greece’s Euro 2012 football quarter final against Germany. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [2]HERE or the project’s blog [3]HERE. You can also follow MYPLACE on [4]twitter.

Last Saturday, when Greece defeated the Russians 1-0 everybody was thinking of the following opponent (i.e. Germany) of the Greek national team. The next day’s sport newspapers referred to this possibility with front pages and headlines like: “Bring us Merkel now!” And “This is the way how they qualify those who owe you!”

The whole week before the game all the Greek media mentioned the way the German media talked about the match, referring to all their humiliating comments about the Greek team. Huge discussions took place regarding the ‘spy’ Bildsent to our team’s hotel and his criticism, for example on the fact that our manager is smoking too much and that the only thing that is working in our hotel is the percolator! These kinds of provocations caused many reactions. However, the official and genial stance of the German government was also presented and positively commented. One thing that was highly commented was the fact that German workers in almost all the factories could leave their workplace earlier on the day of the game in order to watch it. This, of course, had to do with the accusations that Greeks are lazy and that they do not want to work and it was immediate connected with that.

Before the game all the evening television broadcasts dedicated about 20 minutes for the game and many of them as their first issue! In fact the sport caster of the Greek public television (NET) when she appeared before game she had painted the Greek flag on her face!
We should also mention that when she presented the German team she commented the fact that too many of the players are not of German origin (they come from Poland, Spain, Turkey, Armenia, Bosnia, Ghana, Brazil, Tunisia and Nigeria). Finally, the Neo-Nazi party, "Golden Dawn", made a public announcement wishing good luck to the Greek team and arguing that the Greeks owe nothing to the Germans, on the contrary they owe us, implying the German occupation during the WWII and the compensation they should pay for the destruction they caused.

It should be noted that thousands of people watched this match due to its symbolic character in apartments, coffee houses and restaurants, because as it was said this game was like the battle between David and Goliath. No need to mention that Portuguese and Spaniards were supporting the Greek team! Furthermore, the manager of the Greek team participated in a spot claiming that during the 90 minutes of a football match it doesn’t matter if you come from a powerful or a weak state, from a rich or a poor people, from a small or a great country, passion is what matters against any opponent.

The day after the game all the media acknowledged Germany’s superiority and argued that along with Spain they are the best teams in Europe and one of the best teams in the world. However, everyone felt proud for the Greek players and the two goals they scored against the Germans.

Of course, as it was mentioned in one television broadcast before the game, the Greeks have defeated the Germans in the most famous football match in the history of sport and of philosophy too! (Monty Python). See the video below:

Sociology@Warwick (2012-07-03 08:00)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

(Also out of interest does anyone know of other UK sociology departments that have blogs? If so please let us know either in comments below or via e-mail. Thanks!)

Blogging for Researchers (2012-07-03 08:00)

A guide to curation tools for researchers | The Sociological Imagination (2012-08-30 08:00:54)

[...] product look aesthetically appealing. With their latest update this became particularly true of embedding bundles in webpages. It’s also incredibly easy to pick up. Within a few hours of signing up to Bundlr I had multiple [...]
A guide to curation tools for researchers | Digital Researcher (2012-08-30 19:43:48)
[...] product look aesthetically appealing. With their latest update this became particularly true of embedding bundles in webpages. It's also incredibly easy to pick up. Within a few hours of signing up to Bundlr I had multiple [...]

Do you suffer from information overload? A quick guide to curation tools | Digital Researcher (2012-09-18 23:31:10)
[...] product look aesthetically appealing. With their latest update this became particularly true of embedding bundles in webpages. It's also incredibly easy to pick up. Within a few hours of signing up to Bundlr I had multiple [...]

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Animal Liberation and Direct Action (2012-07-04 08:00)

A fascinating snipped of recent protest history in this lively debate on BBC. [1]Keith Mann spent years in prison as a result of his actions as part of the [2]Animal Liberation Front. With social unrest on the rise throughout Europe, as economic crisis continues to deepen with no end in sight, the social questions raised in the interview about the limits of acceptable direct action seem unlikely to go away.

3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/0uHTJFNbceI

The Americans (2012-07-04 17:45)

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The first Americans I ever met were Anna and Katie Klein, who, were the only kids in my grade two class at [2]Queen Mary School in Peterborough, Ontario to have traveled to places like New England and New York and could list all the famous American presidents by name. "Have you ever heard of the Boston Tea Party?" I remember Anna quizzing me the fall after she returned from her summer vacation south, standing in line after the school bell rang to walk into class. "Have you ever heard of Thomas Jefferson?"

I hadn't, but would, years later, in the [3]Hall of Presidents exhibit at Walt Disney World, where I got to see Thomas Jefferson live. Still by that time [4]I knew more Americans than Anna and Katie Klein anyway. I knew the gas station attendants and waitresses and store clerks along the highways I traveled with my parents several times a year since I was seven. I knew the kids and their parents from the Florida beach where I grew up who were visiting there from Minnesota and Michigan. And I knew the hair dressers who worked in my parents salons, women who's voices were so Southern they seemed to me almost famous, since they sounded like people on American TV. By the time I figured out who Thomas Jefferson was, Anna and Katie Klein weren't the only Americans I knew.

Still, they were my first. And so I think of them today as I follow US politics and wonder about the US presidential election and worry that so many of my American cousins don't know their American history like Anna and Katie Klein did.

End Note: Next to Anna and Katie Klein, the person who taught me the most about American politics was Hunter S. Thompson. Some if what he taught me is [6]right here.

1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-kLUgkHb3BjtU/T_RuoR8vAMI/AAAAAAAAMfI/aCKhw6u0ras/s1600/WillNotAcceptCanadian.jpg
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftbmBEZZDqI
Social theory and social research – what went wrong? (2012-07-05 08:00)

Underlying much sociological explanation is an attempt to bridge the gap between the 'micro' and the 'macro' within the context of a specific empirical inquiry. As the authors put it, "in the human and behavioural sciences, the analytical connection or co-relation between individual and social processes, between cognitive (mental) and social (group) structures, or between 'habitus' and 'field' ... is often understood and elaborated as the big problem of bridging the 'micro' and 'macro' levels" (Lydaki and Tsekeris 2011: 68). The apparent diversity with which this 'gap' is characterised within social theory points to the intractability of the underlying issue: how do we make sense of the relationship between the individual actors we see around us and the wider social order which appears to shape but also be shaped by their actions? The dualisms which proliferate within social theory do so, in part, as a result of a failure to resolve this underlying question. An inability to establish consensus on the underlying explanatory question posed by social research has, as its flip side, the continual elaboration of a sometimes strikingly imprecise conceptual vocabulary which attempts to come to terms with various aspects of this foundational challenge: "constructivism-positivism, subjectivism-objectivism, intentionalism-functionalism, agency-structure, individual-society, or micro-macro" (Lydaki and Tsekeris 2011: 70). Depressingly large tracts of sociological discourse have proceeded from the personal investments and logical entailments which stem from occupying one side or another of these dualisms. Even as the last couple of decades have seen a variety of attempts to bridge these dichotomies, or even abandon them entirely as terms of reference, these moves have in turn bred new dichotomies (e.g. structurationist and post-structurationist) which, perhaps as the one last sign of my past life as a Rortyean philosophy student, never cease to appal me on an aesthetic level.

Drawing on the work of Nicos Mouzelis, Lydaki and Tsekeris argue that this "pluralization of approaches seriously impeded the epistemologically healthy capacity for meta-theory - that is, for a sincere, uninterrupted and open-ended dialogue between opposing worldviews and paradigms" (Lydaki and Tsekeris 2011: 71). The proliferation of competing paradigms, often driven by technical polemics rather than practical disagreement over shared aims, worked to erode the common frame of reference within which sociologists were able to evaluate 'theories' as competing ways of making sense of underlying practical questions of explaining the social world. It contributed to a ghettoization of social theory, with its practical implementation too often limited to those who, having seen the explanatory gains which emerged from a particular approach, ensconced themselves within it and worked with others to elaborate it within its own theoretical terms of reference e.g. bourdieusian theory. As a consequence, social theory ossifies as, with the conceptual logics of particular theoretical approaches increasingly insulated from the practical logics encountered in the practice of social research, the point of social theory becomes increasingly unclear. Likewise the uses to which social theory is put within social research become less helpful than they would otherwise be because of this broader lack of clarity. It almost seems, perhaps, that social theory becomes something which sociologists are self-conscious about. In a way it should be. The characteristics which many find frustrating about contemporary social theory are, I wish to argue, indicative of things having gone badly wrong. They are a sign of people having talked too much, for too long, about predominately practical issues which, it seems, we might have come to some sort of working agreement on if circumstances had been different. My point is not that we should all agree on one 'paradigm' but simply that the fixation on 'paradigms' has precluded a consensus about the practical purposes which these sorts of discussions should serve.


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2. http://markcarrigan.net/

Scholarly Publishing, Open Access and the 'Academic Spring' (2012-07-06 08:00)

[1]"Scholarly Publishing, Open Access and the 'Academic Spring'" on Bundlr
1. http://bundlr.com/b/scholarly-publishing-open-access-and-the-academic-spring

Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-07-07 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination
[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:

[4]Twitter Updates

Online Communities and Digital Research Methods: a cautionary note (2012-07-09 08:00)

One of the most exciting things about the internet from a sociological perspective is the impact it has on the formation of communities – groups who might otherwise be too geographically dispersed are able to come together, often elaborating some degree of collective identity from the dialogues which ensue as they gather in this ‘virtual’ space. Furthermore the same process which enables the community to form also enables it to be studied. Online communities represent potent sites in which digital research methods can be used to study groups who, again, might previously have been too geographically dispersed to be studied and/or would not even be recognisable as a group prior to their coming together online. From the perspective of someone who has done this sort of study (in my case on the [1]asexual community) it really can be quite exciting. However I’m increasingly aware of the risks inherent in such approaches which, as digital research methods solidifies as a distinct specialism, look set to grow.

1. The actors you find in online communities are, well, actors. The specificity of their personhood is not reducible to their participation in the community. The community might be hugely significant to them or, conversely, it might not be significant at all – more likely any given individual will occupy some point on this spectrum. Exactly what point this is remains, unavoidably, an empirical question. It is a mistake to infer past motivations and history on the basis of present participation in an online community.

2. Similarly participation of individuals in an online community is not reducible to their activity as actors. Someone might read a forum daily, never posting, yet define the contours of their identity in terms of what they read. Thanks to [2]Jon Hickman for pointing this out to me: lurkers are participating too! It is a mistake to reduce participation in an online community to observable ongoing activity.

3. Online communities regularly have ‘offline’ outgrowths and the two spheres, which can seem distinct from the perspective of the researcher, might in reality interpenetrate in complex and messy ways. Granted it might be difficult to study the offline aspects of the community but be creative! It is a mistake to reduce online communities to the collective activity which takes place online.

4. The fact that online communities allow geographically dispersed individuals to congregate around a given shared characteristics often leads to the formulation of some apparently shared identity. Furthermore, given the nature of the online vehicles which host such communities, this shared identity often pervades the ‘online space’ itself. However just because people participate in a community doesn’t mean they partake in a shared
identity. This seems an obvious point but, I fear, it is easy to ignore because it is often this apparently shared identity which motivates the research into a given group online. It is a mistake to infer a collective identity on the basis of prima facie empirical evidence: this is often an artifact of the research design and/or the process which allowed the community to form.


2. http://theplan.co.uk/
3. http://markcarrigan.net/

What's 'honorary' about an Honorary Research Assistant? (2012-07-10 08:00)

Last week the University of Birmingham advertised for an [1]Honorary Research Assistant to work in its School of Psychology. It looks to be quite interesting work - two or more days a week clinically assessing adolescents who are seeking help with mental health issues. Great!

Oh – hang on it doesn't pay anything and you have to have a car. Not so great. In fact, appalling.

This is simply an exploitation of the current graduate job market. With high levels of [2]graduate unemployment and a specific challenge in finding higher-skilled jobs, there is a large pool of graduates desperate to kick start their career. Birmingham has higher-skilled work that needs to be done, but presumably because they consider there to be a labour excess have decided to let someone do it for free.

As well as a basic moral argument that people should be paid for their labour, this 'job' clearly discriminates against less affluent students (by which we generally mean 'students from less affluent families'). Without parents to support them, which graduates can afford to work for free and run a car? Putting this kind of barrier up against a significant segment of potential applicants undermines their social mobility and potentially reduces the overall quality of the applicant pool. [3]The University and College Union today commented on how this position undermines principles of equal pay and is discriminatory.

Let’s not get confused and think “Oh, but there have always been unpaid internships”. The idea of people somehow supporting themselves whilst going to companies and charities for a few weeks or months to enhance their CV is
damaging in itself; the NUS, TUC, Intern Aware, Interns Anonymous and Graduate Fog are [4]campaigning against
unpaid internships and lay out the impact this type of work experience has. In contrast though, this is NOT an
internship – it is open-ended, not for a fixed period of time and has all the appearances of fee-earning work. It looks
just like a job, only you probably don’t get a contract or any statutory rights and you don’t get paid.

The work appears to be associated with a specific project and you do wonder who is funding it and on what basis.
Are they a grant-giver interested in legacy and graduate employment? Was this unpaid labour an integral part of the
bid? Is this how Birmingham will apply for all their grants now, and does this mean all other Universities will start
removing costs associated with the lowest level of labour just so they can compete? Will Professor Wood get a pat
on the back at his annual appraisal for his attempt at commercial acumen? Maybe I’m worrying about nothing, so
I thought I’d submit a Freedom of Information request and find out who was funding the research. You can do the
same [5]here, maybe someone could ask them how many other unpaid, non-contracted researchers they have. To
get a sense of perspective here, this 40 % Research Assistant might cost £10,000 a year, and the School of Psychology
boasts a [6]£8M pa grant portfolio. Times must be hard.

Birmingham can only offer this unpaid post because they claim it is carried out on voluntary basis, which means it
will not have any form of contract of employment. Is this really the most appropriate model of employment for a
researcher who will be carrying out initial and ongoing assessment of young people seeking help with their mental
health? Is this what state-of-the-art psychology looks like .... a highly vulnerable group being dealt with by a transient
uncontracted worker?

We’ve argued against unpaid commercial internships for a while now, and seemed to be starting to make some
progress. This disingenuous -“Honorary”- job is not only a step backward but is much, much worse because
Birmingham is one of our leading Universities. A producer of job-hungry graduates. A place of learning. A place of
thoughtfulness. A place of reason. An institute to be trusted, not a shady second-hand car business working under
the railway arches trying to cut every corner it can.

Beverley Gibbs started her career in engineering, moving onto business and research management. She is cur-
cently completing a PhD with the University of Nottingham looking at issues relating to science in society. Follow

1. http://www.jobs.ac.uk/job/AES213/honorary-research-assistant
7. https://twitter.com/#!/bevgibbs
Public Scholarship and Private Commitments (2012-07-11 08:00)


A very brief critique of happiness studies (2012-07-12 08:00)

The NYTimes recently published yet another intriguing article, one of many, on the topic of happiness and the links between happiness and money: [1](you can read the article here), by Elizabeth Dunn and Michael Norton.
"Don't Indulge. Be Happy."

However, as a researcher of working lives, I cannot help but point out two rotten premisses of rational choice theory (RCT)-informed happiness research (e.g. happiness/money correlation).

The first one is that the definition of "happiness" is terribly reductionist. In reality people often don’t know whether they are "happy" or not, and this also changes when you look at past events (see[3] Daniel Kahneman's TED talk from 2010. Kahneman is a Nobel laureate and founder of behavioural economist).

Even more problems arise when we look at work and employment. Happiness research seems to assume that people work predominantly for rational reasons, such as "money" or "happiness"; and that they are in full control of their work-related choices. But surely people cannot always regulate the amount which they work. And surely they also do what they do, and as much as they do, for a plethora of other reasons. Because of contractual obligations. Because they have started a job and feel some kind of moral duty to keep doing it. Because they are fearful of change. Because working less might invite their boss to make them redundant. Because of general inertia. Because they’re used to a working environment/team. Because they haven’t had time to think what else they can do. And because we are generally bad at deciding what we really want e.g. sorting out our own priorities. Even in RCT’s own terms, it is accepted that people often shun changes due to the high exit costs: making changes involves too much investment, and the longer you have spent doing X (e.g. sticking to a particular career plan), the higher the cost of initiating a change.

Said simply, work, employment, and labour are far more complex social activities than they are portrayed in this type of research. So is happiness. The link between the two is exponentially more complex.

2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/10543/08cover-articlelarge](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/10543/08cover-articlelarge)
Experiencing sociology’s midlife crisis? (2012-07-13 08:00)

Is it possible for an academic discipline to experience a midlife crisis? The recent exchange in the British Journal of Sociology on ‘sociology’s misfortune’ (Holmwood, 2010; Savage, 2010a; Rosenfeld, 2010) was just the most recent of a raft of work exploring the peculiar contemporary challenges and difficulties that face British sociology. This growing set of literature has come to exemplify and define what Savage (2010a: 659) has referred to as the ‘sense of malaise that currently hovers over British sociology’. But in response, can this sense of malaise be understood as a type of disciplinary mid-life crisis?

The story of sociology’s establishment as a discipline is likely to be relatively familiar to most readers of this journal. In his history of British empirical sociology Raymond Kent makes the following observation:

‘The 1950s…saw the beginnings of the institutionalisation of sociology on a new footing and its gradual acceptance as an academic discipline in the universities. Both the old Institute of Sociology and the LePlay House found themselves in financial difficulties after the war...The Institute itself was finally dissolved in 1955...Meanwhile the British Sociological Association had been established in 1951. The 13 founders – six of whom held chairs at the LSE at the time and included Glass and Ginsberg who acted as chairman – did not see the new body as a professional association. Rather, one of its major purposes was to encourage contact and co-operation’ (Kent, 1981: 140)

Kent goes on to note that there were those in the association who were keen to promote sociology as a unique specialism, but that these sentiments were really quite marginal at that time. Kent (1981: 141) acknowledges that the membership of the British Sociological Association (BSA) grew to 600 by 1960 but that at the same time there were fewer than 40 sociologists teaching in British universities with only 12 offering degree courses (this contrasts sharply with the 305 sociology courses listed on UCAS for 2013 entry, and the 1045 courses listed under the ‘all sociology’ courses classification). Clearly the BSA as playing its part in expanding sociology although not necessarily as a discrete discipline, rather in its early years it contributed to shaping sociology as a space for collaboration between social science disciplines (see also Savage, 2010b: 106).

Sociology remained throughout the 1950s to be an area of synthesis in the social sciences rather than a discipline in its own right – in support of this observation Savage (2010b) points towards the early synthetic articles in the British Journal of Sociology. Savage’s (2010b) core argument on this matter is that sociology established itself as a discipline in Britain in the 1960s by claiming its own jurisdiction through the focus upon novelty and by claiming particular methodological resources as its own, this operated alongside its integration into the developing university infrastructure of the 1960s (see also Halsey, 2004). Wherever we might choose to place the exact moment of conception of a discrete British sociology it is safe from this to conclude it is a discipline in its middle age.

So, if sociology can be said to be middle aged can it also be said to be suffering a midlife crisis of any sort? We might point here towards what can be understood to be a heightened sense of crisis in British Sociology over the last few years. To give one prominent instance, Halsey’s famous history of British sociology claims that, ‘[t]here is no doubt that sociology is in peril in the twenty-first century, at least in Britain and America’ (Halsey, 2004: 206). Halsey is far from being alone in drawing such bleak conclusions. We might contend that sociology is the victim of a perpetual sense of crisis, with narratives of critical and precarious moments littering its history. Despite this ongoing narrative of crisis, this sense of disciplinary uncertainty in British Sociology seems to have been even more acute in recent
years (Gane, 2012).

The midlife crisis type preoccupations that we might point to in recent sociological literature include the searching for a sense of disciplinary identity and purpose, the thinking through and reflecting upon a relatively halcyon past and imagining a more difficult and problematical future, uncertainty about past achievements and the value of our ongoing contribution, the need for reinvention and a new start, worry about our decreasing impact and chances of impact upon the world, worry about and a sense of the need to redesign our appearance, and finally an increasing sensitivity towards outside perceptions (for a fantastic sociological account of the midlife crisis from which these core themes can be extracted see Hepworth & Featherstone, 1998). A selective list of the wide range of literature that covers these types of issues with regard to the discipline of sociology would include Mike Savage and Roger Burrows' (2007) influential article (this article must have tapped into a sense of crisis as it has already accumulated 152 citations according to Google Scholar), John Holmwoods' (2010) aforementioned reflections on the audit culture and sociology's misfortune, Harriet Bradley's (2011) response to the international benchmarking review of British sociology, and many other examples that includes work by Liz Stanley (2008; see also Hollands & Stanley, 2009), Rosemary Crompton (2009), the introduction and all of the papers collected in Osborne et al (2008), Richard Webber (2009), Les Back (2007), Holmwood & Scott (2007) and Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury (2009 & 2012; again see a number of the papers gathered in both of these collections as well as the introductions). This is really only the tip of the iceberg of a broader literature that engages in different ways with our current challenges and which are evoking, perpetuating and debating a sense of crisis. We are forced to ask if these kinds of narratives and reflections upon the discipline would have been possible before it reached its 50s?

When considering the possibility of thinking of British Sociology as being in the grips of a midlife crisis we should of course show some caution, we might well wish to heed Walter Benjamin's (2002: 481) warning that we have an overwhelming tendency to place ourselves in the ‘midday of history’. We might also point toward the large number of sociologists who clearly aren’t feeling any real sense of crisis but rather regard their discipline to be in rude health. On reflection though, and if you will indulge me for the moment, given the weight of the literature and the wide engagement with themes of crisis and renewal it seems fair to conclude that British sociology is viewing itself increasingly as being in a state of crisis. This crisis might be a product of our times or of the atrophy of our discipline, of both or maybe of neither. The question we might want to consider though is whether these worries and preoccupations are just a product of our over-active self-reflective tendencies or whether we have something more substantive to worry about? A reading of the outputs which directly consider the future of sociology indicates that responses to this question are likely to be very mixed. It seems though that whether we are in the grip of an imagined crisis or not, we now need to look at ways of relieving the anxiety that we have produced for ourselves.

There is clearly a tension in contemporary academia between fostering a critical discipline and the public relations activities that are necessary to protect the academic and social standing of the discipline. To be a viable discipline critique and debate are crucial but these do not mesh well with the need to present a united front in the face of the externally manifest changes we are experiencing. For those, like myself, at a relatively early career stage it is a bit of a baffling time to be a sociologist, what look to have been the certainties of the past seem to have slipped away into this sense of crisis. The debates I have outlined here are really exciting and encouraging but they do contribute to a sense of anxiety.

References


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Stanley, L. (2008) 'It has always known, and we have always been 'other': Knowing capitalism and the 'coming crisis' of sociology confront the concentration system and Mass-Observation', The Sociological Review 56(4): 535-551.

David Beer is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York. He works mainly in the area of the sociology of culture. He blogs at [2]Thinking Culture.

1. [http://www.socresonline.org.uk/14/1/1.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/14/1/1.html)

Experiencing Sociology’s Midlife Crisis | Thinking culture (2012-07-13 08:14:30)
[...] short piece in Experiencing Sociology’s Midlife Crisis has been published on the Sociological Imagination [...]

Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-07-14 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendency and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the
‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)

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**Why Academic Sociology Does Not Deserve The Hatchet** (2012-07-14 20:44)

Note: *This list was written as a quick response [2]to this post on Freakonomics, "Sociology and Political Science Deserve The Hatchet." The photograph above is of one of the very first American sociologists, Anna Julia Cooper, who received her doctorate from the University of Paris-Sorbonne in 1924.*

1. Sociology has a remarkable canon of classic writings, which, when dug out of the library as archeological artifacts, assembled in chronological order and read in snippets, (i.e., read the opening, closing and some random pages in the middle), are not only an interesting *product* of modernity (i.e., academic social science), but, also, a story about modernity – see, quite simply, [3]Durkheim’s *Suicide* (1897); [4]W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899),
W.I. Thomas & Florian Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant* (1920); Anything from the 1920s *Chicago School*; William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1948); *The Kinsey Report* (1961); *The Stanford Prison Studies* (1972); Harold Garfinkel's *Studies In Ethnomethodology* (1991); Dorothy Smith's *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987); Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Standpoint Theory* (2008); Avery Gordon's *Ghostly Matters* (2008); and Charles Lemert's *Dark Thoughts* (2002); 2. American academic sociology was founded by an African American (again, see [5]W.E.B. Du Bois) and rooted in Critical Black Theories and Methods, however, at the same time, has also documented and represented the lives of African Americans in highly distorted ways [i.e., see *The Moynihan Report* or even better [6]*This American Life*, Episode 142, *Barbara* (1999)], creating the paper trail and space to truly confront and study the sometimes hard to pin down elitism of higher education and the social sciences in general – see also the life and work of one of the first American sociologists and, also, one of the first female and African-American Ph.Ds, sociologist and social worker Anna Julia Cooper, pictured above; 3. Sociology, historically, has been the only discipline in the academy to seriously and actively consider and employ the methods and theories of thinkers engaged in more practical kinds of social *writing* and social *work*, (i.e., like social workers and nurses, investigative reporters and [7]tabloid journalists, natural scientists, school teachers, lawyers, judges, police officers and reality TV producers); 4. The [8]back stories of a few prominent and popular sociologists are rife with interesting and/or sexy gossip, which blatantly contradict their theories and analyses – find out, for example, about [9]Talcott Parson's relationship with his brilliant anthropologist daughter Anne or the romantic life of W. I. Thomas; 5. Harold Garfinkel and his theory, *ethnomethodology*, is far more engaging and fun that reading translations of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida or Kristeva; 6. Good sociologists [10]truly understand the narrative boundaries of the fictive and the real (i.e., [11]sociological analyses, by definition, must be locatable in the world, but also allow for expansive story-telling and setting and character development); 7. Sociology is the only academic discipline to require its students already at the undergraduate level to thoroughly learn the language and stylings of research methods, making it not just a discipline people learn and master, but practice and do (i.e., good sociologists don't just analyze stuff, they *make* stuff, i.e., like ... knowledge or, even better yet, [12]stories); 8. Noone, (especially no working sociologist), would ever dream of suggesting taking a hatchet to sociology if [13]C. Wright Mills were still alive.

**Note 2: More lists by [14]Audrey Sprenger about sociology and other things are [15]right here.**

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Sociology@Warwick (2012-07-15 08:00)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a [2]blog and [3]twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!


Generation Y doctoral students (2012-07-16 00:50)

[1]JISC have recently released the findings from the [2]Researchers of Tomorrow study they conducted in association with the British Library. This three year longitudinal study explored the research behaviour of Generation Y doctoral students (those born between 1982 and 1994) and has thrown up some interesting findings. You can read the report [3]here.

We were particularly interested in some of their findings concerning digital technology:

- Take-up of most institutionally-provided and open web technology tools and applications is low among doctoral students overall
- Generation Y doctoral students are more likely than older doctoral students to use technology to assist them in their research
• Generation Y doctoral students tend to use technology applications and social media in their research if they augment, and can be easily absorbed into, existing work practices.

• Levels of use of social media and other applications helpful in retrieving and managing research information are steadily rising among Generation Y doctoral students, but those applications most useful for collaboration and scholarly communications remain among the least used.

• Fellow students and peers are the major influence on whether or not Generation Y doctoral students decide to use a technology application and are their main source of hands-on help.

1. http://www.jisc.ac.uk/

Blogging for Researchers (2012-07-17 08:00)

[EMBED]
Best and worst place to be a woman (2012-07-18 08:00)

The annual [1]State of the World’s Mothers report by [2]Save the Children has some interesting (or depressing, depending on the viewpoint) new statistics on five key indicators of gender equality from women’s perspective in 165 countries. Here is a neat infographic thanks to the [Canadian] [3]National Post:

(source: [5]factscoexist.com)


What does the government’s open access announcement mean for researchers? A round up of coverage and reaction... (2012-07-19 08:00)

• [1]The BIS announcement
• [2]The Finch report
• [3]Finch report: the question of costs
• [4]Why the UK Should Not Heed the Finch Report
• [5]Predictable Problems — The UK’s Move to Open Access
• [6]Free access to British scientific research within two years
• [7]Government and funders move to make Finch a reality
• [8]What about the authors who can't pay? Why the government’s embrace of gold open access isn’t something to celebrate
• [9]UK research funders announce liberated open access policy
• [11]Open Access, of the Closed Kind
• [12]Surely some mistake as 'Two Brains' opts for free access to UK scientific research
• [13]Open Access and Scholarly Societies
• [14]Gold Open Access is Bad for Science Publishing

11. http://telescoper.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/open-access-of-the-closed-kind/
‘Academic spring’ or media hype? The open access debate and what it means for researchers
(2012-07-20 08:00)

This session will explore the profound changes currently taking place within academic publishing and address their implications for researchers. Debates around ‘open access’ have recently entered mainstream debate, with the Guardian talking of an ‘academic spring’ building around the world. However the issues at stake go beyond open access and a focus on the technical details of particular proposals can often obscure the broader questions which the academic community, scholarly publishers and funding bodies are currently attempting to address. By putting currents debates in context, as well as exploring their practical consequences for those either undertaking or seeking an academic career, this talk aims to help move beyond headlines and bring some more clarity to the debate.


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Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-07-21 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We’re always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there’s anything you would like to say!
BSA TEACHING GROUP Inaugural Conference (2012-07-22 08:00)

28th - 30th September 2012

Menzies Strathallan Hotel, Birmingham


Speakers:

Professor John Holmwood (University of Nottingham),

Former Chair of the Council of UK Heads & Professors of Sociology,

Fellow of Academy of Social Sciences & the incoming
President of the British Sociological Association

**Professor Corrine Squire** (University of East London), Humanities & Social Sciences

Author of ‘Women & AIDS: Physiological Perspectives’

**Dr Paul Bagguley** (University of Leeds)

Researcher in the Sociology of Protest

Author of ‘Riotous Citizens: ethnic conflict in multicultural Britain’

**Exam Training Sessions** - delegates will be able to attend exam training sessions, select from workshop sessions to match specific career development targets and see recent subject specific resources.

**Workshops** will include sharing Ofsted experiences, Differentiation, Gifted & Talented and ICT in the Classroom.

**Postgraduate Micro-lectures** covering areas such as: culture & identity creation; differentiation; inequality & stratisfication; demography; welfare & government policy in most fields of life; family & households; the role of women; minority groups; aging; youth culture; all aspects of education especially potential changes & their effects on different groups within sociology; health & welfare; wealth & poverty & welfare provision; politics & power; globalisation in all its many aspects; religion; crime & deviance; methodology; theory & the role of research.

**Conference Registration Cost:**

**Full Conference** (including accommodation & food):

BSA Members £260; BSA Teaching Group Members: £285; Non-members: £350
Towards a Comtean Revival in Sociology (2012-07-22 19:28)

I have been closely associated with the field of science and technology studies (STS) since my graduate student days, nearly thirty years ago. In 1984, as a PhD student in history and philosophy of science, I published the first piece in a major positivist journal to extol the virtues of the field. In fact, my experience of writing the piece inspired me to develop 'social epistemology'. But even back then I had my doubts about where the field was going with its critical re-appraisal of the nature of science and its place in society. In a Comtean spirit that I had picked up from my undergraduate days at Columbia, I always envisaged that 'sociology' would eventually take over the natural sciences and focus them in a humanly beneficial direction. Moreover, I imagined this happening in a quite material way - that is, sociologists would not simply be offering advice from the sidelines (which nowadays looks ambitious) but the scientists themselves would be sociologically trained.

To be sure, I realized even as a callow youth in the 1970s and 80s that such ideas were bound to be tainted with the brush of Nazi and Soviet eugenics. At Columbia I benefited from a course in history of science by Loren Graham, the leading US expert in Soviet science, who had us read E.O. Wilson’s *Sociobiology* shortly after it was
published in paperback. For those too young to remember, this book – and the very idea and person behind it – was trashed in terms reminiscent of how ‘intelligent design’ is treated today. (Much of this trashing happened in the pages of The New York Review of Books.) And the trashing continued for another ten years or so, until the hot button term ‘sociobiology’ got replaced by ‘evolutionary psychology’, where the original research programme thrives today. (This was also the time when Stephen Jay Gould was seen as speaking ‘correctly’ and Richard Dawkins ‘incorrectly’ for evolution. My, how times have changed! Does anyone under 40 even know who Gould was?)

In any case, as the years have gone on, STS has made a good living from inhibiting any large-scale, long-term planning for science and society. This fits the tentative, hypersensitive, neo-liberal world in which we live. As soon as ‘heterogeneous’, ‘contingent’ and ‘uncertain’ are strung together in a sentence, the natural conclusion is to commission more (STS) research rather than enact legislation that might alter the terms of the problem. (Note I did not say ‘offer a solution’. But equally I said ‘enact legislation’ rather than simply write a journal article saying how we need to change the question – I mean to encourage political risk-taking rather than academic one-upmanship.)

The resulting research invariably tells us that while we are naïve to think that a clear distinction can be drawn between X and Y – where X = things as they are and Y = things as we might wish them to be – because Y was always already present in X, we should remain wary of entirely embracing Y because it is unlikely to be as we envisage it to be. Armed with this neat formula, you can, in one fell swoop, outflank both the reactionaries and the utopians – while committing yourself to absolutely nothing. I suppose if you are mainly concerned about not offending prospective employers and funders, championing ambivalence must look like genius. To my mind, however, it’s the sort of reductio ad absurdum that shows why we need more permanent posts in academia – so as to encourage people in what I have called ‘the right to be wrong’ (Fuller 2000).

However, recent works like Chris Renwick’s (2012) British Sociology’s Lost Biological Roots show how biological considerations ran deep in the original conceptualisation of sociology as a discipline, and it was only for reasons relating to the academic politics of the UK, France, Germany and the US (different in each case) that biology and sociology did not develop more in sync with each other. I believe that the time once again has come to re-negotiate that boundary (Fuller 2006). We can do much more than simply provide ‘biopolitical critiques’ a la Foucault or Latour that in the end simply champion ambivalence. Rather we can follow the model for more constructive engagement that sociologists have had in recent years with economics. Of course, there are the useful critiques of neo-liberalism in abundance, but above and beyond those are also more-and-less interesting attempts to understand social phenomena through rational choice theory and, still more ambitiously, attempts (typically under the rubric of ‘economic sociology’) to reconstruct the science of economics in sociological terms.

An analogue to this last project is an especially needed form of engagement between biology and sociology – which would mean inter alia treating genetic information more as a form of capital than, say, a foundation for evolutionary theory. To be sure, the very idea that sociology might ‘own’ biology will strike many as scary and outrageous. It would certainly require that sociologists develop their own expertise in biological phenomena, as they have in economic phenomena. Truth be told, eugenics as originally conceived by Francis Galton had just this aim in mind – and it was usually how eugenics was understood in the period leading up to the Second World War. Given the ease with which historical memory fades unless actively maintained, it is no longer clear that ‘eugenics’ strikes the sort of fear in people’s hearts as it did when I was a student. Certainly the molecular revolution in biology means that the terms of engagement have changed radically. Still, re-branding is probably not a bad idea: Anyone for a course in ‘bio-sociology’?

REFERENCES

Can the "impact of research" be measured? (2012-07-23 08:00)

Those working in academic institutions are by now all familiar with the new power-acronym: the REF (research excellence framework 2014). Even though its aim is commendable - to assess how good is the research done by universities, faculties, and departments - there are doubts in the academic community about whether this task is at all feasible, or, less fundamentally, about the appropriateness of the chosen methods to the task in hand. One fifth of the REF will specifically assess the "impact" of research - similarly to the way many research grants already do. Professor Johathan Wolff gives a sceptical view:

Influence in sensitive public-policy areas rarely leaves an audit trail. And if this is true of work directly commissioned by a public authority, what chance for work published in academic journals?

(read full article in [1]the Guardian)

As a friend noted sarcastically today, the REF could have been named an "Framework for academic excellence", but presumably that formulation was not chosen, because the acronym would have erroneously resembled the word "free".

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/feb/02/higher-education-research-grants

What Oprah’s Research Staff Failed To Inform Her About India (2012-07-23 18:17)
Note: This list was written as a quick response to [2]Oprah Winfrey's visit to and report on South Asia in the Summer of 2012.

1) Yes, it is customary in (most parts) of South Asia for people to eat with their hands, as well as practice other forms of practical everyday environmentalism like wrapping food in banana leaves rather than plastic and using water instead of toilet paper; 2) [3]Slumdog Millionaire is a fictive, narrative movie not real life or, even, a realist documentary; 3) Far from being shy or inarticulate, most South Asians speak in at least three languages fluently and many read and write in as many languages; 4) [4]Before you let the concept of arranged marriage shock you consider
the US Wedding/Bridal Industry and read Bharati Mukherjee's great 2002 novel, [5]Desirable Daughters; 5) Be sure to sample the true tastes and smells of India: Limca, Thums Up ("Taste The Thunder"), Maaza, any brand of soda water, Marie biscuits, Cadbury eclairs, pan, train station coffee and, my favourite, Washing Powder Nirma (for one man's ode to Washing Powder Nirma [6]go here); 6) Yes, study the teachings of Mohandas Gandhi but also, at the very least, read the writings of [7]Badshah Khan and Rabindranath Tagore – an excerpt from his beyond remarkable 1913 collection of poems, Gitalgili, is above; 7) Bollywood is important to Indians, but regional cinema (i.e., Tamil, Telugu) glitters even brighter


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1. http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-gV330WhsVww/UA2FKq-epNI/AAAAAAAANg4/akATpE6K6Yu/s1600/Tagore.jpg
6. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G3lmbc4sV0M

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Prakash Kona (2012-07-26 16:52:42)
If Oprah Winfrey had called Indians a bunch of racists and classists - believe me, that's closer to the truth about "we" South Asians. But, how unintelligent! What's wrong with eating with the hands! People have always eaten with their hands since the days of the hunting and gathering tribes and earlier. That's the original function of hands - to make food and eat it. You don't need to go to the university and get a degree to know that much. Not to mention we are a nation of more than a billion! Where on earth are we supposed to get the spoons and the forks from! It's a short-sighted reading of another culture. On a more serious note, I would be a fool to expect anything different from Oprah Winfrey - a media puppet of the American corporate world.

Soham (2012-09-17 21:41:33)
It's not gitangili but gitanjali (etym: gita(song)+anjali(offering), the offerings of song) Come on Prakash, you didn't apply your reflexivity but just toed the Marxist line... Ethnomedology is actually a beautiful thing

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Third Culture Kids (2012-07-24 08:08)
Did you know what a [1]Third culture kid (TCK, 3CK) is? There are more and more of them about! Perhaps you are one?


1268
I must confess a certain ambivalence about posting something which is basically an advert for (crap) pizza. Nonetheless, here's a visual mapping of the Domino's pizza supply chain. Does the visual representation of the scale of it all convey the internal complexity of this sort of capitalist enterprise more effectively than words or numbers could? I certainly thought so.
The 2011 UK Census: five fascinating facts (2012-07-26 08:00)

1> Why are there so many more women than men recorded in the Census? Are there really more women - or are other factors also in play, such as who fills in the Census forms?

2> Did you know that the median age in the UK in 2011 was 39, compared to just 25 in 1911?

3> Which is the quietest town in the UK?

4> Is inequality disappearing or deepening between the adjacent London boroughs of Kensington & Chelsea and Tower Hamlets?

5> Why is everyone flocking to Manchester and leaving Barrow?

To find answers to these and more interesting questions related to the 2011 census, read the full [1]article on the BBC news website by Lucy Townsend and Kathryn Westcott.

the median age is not the most common age but the one separating the data in two equally large halves, the most common age would be the mode.

Wanted: Ph.D. student to put Harriet Martineau back in the sociological canon (2012-07-26 19:52)

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was one of the most remarkable women of letters – perhaps ever. Her body of work ranged across the social and biological sciences and even theology. [1]Wikipedia gives a good introduction to the breadth of her writing. However, if Martineau is remembered at all today, it is as the English translator of Auguste Comte’s work. But Martineau was a sociological pioneer in her own right, a friend of John Stuart Mill and the Utilitarians, as well as a correspondent with all the major intellectuals of the mid-19th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, and including Charles Darwin. By all accounts she was a formidable personality (a Germaine Greer-like figure perhaps) who stood out in her day for being able to earn a living from her writing without ever having to get married.

The person who appears to be the leading living scholar of her work is [2]Deborah Logan, an American specialist in Victorian literature. This leaves plenty of scope for a sociological interpretation of Martineau’s oeuvre. As it happens, many of Martineau’s papers are housed at the University of Birmingham. Based on a twitter exchange yesterday between Jo VanEvery (@JoVanEvery), Mark Carrigan (@mark_carrigan), and myself, it dawned on me that Warwick (only 20 miles from Birmingham) would be a great place for someone to do a Ph.D. on Martineau’s significance in her own time and her continuing legacy, both in sociology and for feminism more generally.

I would welcome a student interested in undertaking this project. I think such a Ph.D. could be easily turned into a timely book. But keep in mind that you will need funding! I am happy to work with students interested in applying for funds but I have none at my disposal. (When approaching me (s.w.fuller@warwick.ac.uk), please already have a funding source in mind that you have good reason to believe would support this project. This means doing some homework about funders!)

Finally, a few years ago, I staged a play in which the main female role was that of Harriet Martineau. [3]You can have a look here.


Kill The REF in Complex Circumstances (2012-07-27 08:00)

If you read one polemic about higher education this year, make sure it is this one: [1]KILL THE REF IN COMPLEX CIRCUMSTANCES.

7 - 27 / 455 (Overpunctuated Autobiographical Sketch in 455 Words) (2012-07-27 13:39)

Happy birthday, Idle Ethnographer!

27 July 2012: 13 again


1272


Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-07-28 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose
to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills' notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Tips for writing deadlines (2012-07-29 08:00)

This is a post not restricted to sociology and not even related to imagination... Instead, it offers a few crunch time tips for those of our readers who are struggling with deadlines and are here to procrastinate! [1]Do check them out (and then log off and GET IT WRITTEN!)


Privacy? What is that? (2012-07-30 08:00)

This [1]article is a nice reminder of exactly how much we all share about ourselves through our mobile phones. It is very hard, if not impossible, to not leave a trace in this digital age; and these data remain recorded forever. Some of that data are given away voluntarily, some we give, because we don’t realise it is being collected, and most of all we don’t give this problem any consideration in our daily lives. The very definition of the term 'privacy' is shifting, and with it - what Norberto Bobbio (1997) famously called one of the grand dichotomies of the Western civilisation, the private/public dichotomy.


1274
3.8 August

Olympic controversies (2012-08-01 08:00)

Have the London Olympic games brought regeneration - or degeneration? This documentary explores the viewpoints:

Value-Added Study: University students call for a real relationship with tutors (2012-08-02 08:00)

With the tuition fee hike coming into effect in September, students now more than ever are looking for excellent value for their hard-earned money. Choosing the right university and the right course has never been more so important in the current economic climate. Students awaiting their A-Level results will certainly have the quality of teaching on their minds, which has led the National Union of Students to question if universities are working its members hard enough.

"The quality of education at university is becoming more and more of an issue," says Rachel Wenstone, NUS vice-president. "Contact hours don’t mean anything unless they are high quality, and you have a real relationship with your tutors."

In an article by the Guardian, the number of contact hours receive from their tutors has been questioned. The government has responded by calling for universities to publish information about course contact-hours from this September, as part of new standardised key information sets for prospective students (KIS).

The NUS call for students to have much needed face-to-face time with tutors in smaller groups to develop and test their understanding. The union calls for greater transparency about the number and size of seminars and tutorials, and assurances that students' main experience of university will not be sitting amongst a sea of students taking notes in a lecture theatre.
The NUS wants universities to give prospective students much more detail on what they can expect when they arrive. David Palfreyman, bursar at New College Oxford, agrees with this sentiment:

"The massification of higher education means that you can do a degree at some universities without really talking to anyone. Where’s the chance to experiment, to try something out and have a conversation about it?" He adds: "There is nowhere to hide in a tutorial of two. If you’ve not done anything, there is pressure from your mates as well as your tutor."

However, the union stresses that class sizes and false expectations are only part of the problem. The union urges universities to be clearer on what their course demands - workload, coursework, structure etc. and for this information to be made available to prospective applicants.

"It is really worrying that information on what work your course will contain and exactly how it will be assessed is so vague for undergraduates," Wenstone says. "And it is the poorer students who are most likely to be let down, as they don’t have friends and family telling them what to expect."

Whatever the case may be – students starting university in September will experience not only a leap in work-effort expectations, but will also expect a very good ROI (return on investment).

Dr Yaz Osho specialises in the politics of ‘race’ and racism, SME entrepreneurship, media representation, the sociology of work and racialized offline vs online identity politics. She has taught at Middlesex University, UEL, Goldsmiths, University of Westminster and was a Senior Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jul/30/nus-students-university-teaching-methods

Pussy Riot – the End is Coming (2012-08-03 08:00)

The MYPLACE research team at HSE St Petersburg in Russia send this blog on the latest developments following “Pussy Riot’s” imprisonment for their [1]punk protest. This was originally posted on the [2]MYPLACE blog and you can also follow the project on [3]Twitter. For more information about MYPLACE, visit the project’s website: [4]HERE

The headline-making case of 2012 is going to the end. The lawyers of the three young women accused were convinced that the trial would begin soon and they were not mistaken, basically - a hearing is scheduled for July, 20. Probably, the situation was provoked by the letter signed by 200 masters of Russian culture, headed to the Supreme Court asking to free the girls ([5]http://pussy-riot.livejournal.com/27740.html)
One needs to mention that the defendants did not have time to familiarize themselves with the investigation because they were not given enough time to do so. However, this is not the worst thing in the situation. Neither the fact that the court extended the time of the girls’ arrest several times, and they went on a hunger strike in response. It is not so terrible even to hear the maximum sentence of seven years, to which everyone is used to – because they were talking about it right from the first day of the commitment.

The thing that really sounds terrible is the accusation itself confirmed by the prosecution. It is reported that Pussy Riot «caused significant damage to the sacred values of the Christian church and encroached on the sacramental mystery of the church, having humiliated secular foundations of the Russian Orthodox Church in an aweless way.”

In Pussy Riot’s blog there are some documents. Among them – that very scanned copy of the indictment. Lines in red appeal to the rules adopted by church councils during the IV and VII centuries that the investigator uses as arguments proving the guilt of the girls ([6]http://pussy-riot.livejournal.com/27607.html)

The girls’ lawyers are right: the accusation is not based on the canons of the Criminal Code asthere are no such terms in it. This is the lexicon of the church documents. And how rational is it to follow the laws and regulations of religious institutions in the XXI century in secular state courts? The accusation was the last straw that forced the lawyers to appeal to international legal authorities ([7]http://freepussyriot.org/)

The complaint to the Strasbourg Court has already passed the first formal stage, it was assigned a number and it will be considered in a priority order. Pussy Riot’s case should also be considered in the Committee of the UN Human Rights – a letter to Ban Ki-moon has already been compiled and sent to international human rights activists, who repeatedly offered assistance to the girls through their lawyers.

Experts believe that Pussy Riot’s verdict may concern the actual terms of imprisonment. Of course, not seven years but three years of the colony – completely. It is also possible that the girls will be sentenced to the term they had already served to release them in the courtroom. In any case, the sentence must be rigid and create a precedent for the future.

1. http://myplacefp7.wordpress.com/2012/03/14/pussy-riot-have-steamed-everyone/
A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a [2]blog and [3]twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!
"Sociology is a discipline that has to be ‘achieved’, or continually re-invented, in new circumstances." - John Holmwood

1. [1]Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
2. [2]No Jokes Please! Violators will be prosecuted!
5. [5]Public Sociology Bibliography
7. [7]Steve Fuller on Interdisciplinarity (a lecture in 3 parts)
8. [8]The Facebook Project
9. [9]Social media training resources produced by researchers at the University of Warwick
10. [10]'You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain...'

Alternative Olympics Roundup: Interesting stuff for people who couldn’t care less about, well, sport. (2012-08-08 08:00)

[1]“Alternative Olympics Roundup” on Bundlr

The Counterfeiters (part 1) (2012-08-09 08:00)

‘As I write, highly civilised human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me. They do not feel any enmity against me as individual, nor I against them. They are “only doing their duty”, as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted men who would never dream of committing murder in private life’. Thus wrote George Orwell in his 1941 book-length essay The Lion and the Unicorn, and although I am not scribbling away in times of war nor am I threatened to be killed, much of Orwell’s sentiment abides in me with respect to notions of ‘enmity’, ‘duty’ and virtuous ‘private lives’ that turn sour in the public domain each time the ‘Greek crisis’ debate unfolds in its various guises. What follows is not so much a sociological analysis of the ‘Greek crisis’ per se but rather an account of a young sociologist and a Greek citizen writing about a ‘crisis-ridden warzone’ like a frustrated NASA team member observing a precarious space shuttle before lift-off. The title of this article is borrowed from another novelist across La Manche; symbolist André Gide whose 1925 Les faux-monnayeurs (The Counterfeiters), has been playing second fiddle in my mind as I write. Gide’s tormented prose lends a literary metaphor and a double perspective for us to interpret a phenomenon that is neither ‘Greek’ nor ‘European’ in its origin but both in its manifestation; a global financial bubble which has burst open and spread like a ‘spectre that hangs over Europe’ as Marx and Engels would have it in the preamble of [1]The Communist Manifesto.

The main theme of Gide’s novel revolves around a plot of counterfeit gold coins on one hand and the portrayal of the characters’ feelings and relationships on the other often allowing an external and an internal reading of the book, very much like a novel-within-a-novel. This is potentially a good way to relate to the Eurozone crisis as a phenomenon that unmasks a double process of counterfeit, one European and one Greek. The position held here is that both Europe and Greece are guilty as charged for actively pursuing a politics of brinkmanship, pushing dangerous events to the verge of, or rather brink of catastrophe in order to achieve an advantageous outcome which is no other than the cheap purchase of power at a rather heavy cost. In order to substantiate such a claim an analysis of the argument is attempted, first at a European level and then at a specifically Greek context in the hope that the dialogue that has been avoided in the parliamentary corridors of Brussels and Athens can occur in a sociological forum instead.

Too big to fail?
Is Europe too big to fail, both as an idea and as a political institution? To paraphrase the Latin poet Virgil; fortunate is she who is able of things to know the answers and the causes too. Economists and political commentators alike may not have the solution to the enigma of causes but they have luxuriated playfully in asking, like Shane Swift has, When Does Too Big To Fail, Become Too Big To Bail?, an existential question that has become part of the problem of Europe, and its financial wing (the Eurozone) since the first signs of recession manifested themselves in 2008. The residual sociologist in me compels me to steer away from an economistic view of what we have come to routinely call the Eurozone crisis and rather favour a more social and political interrogation of whether Europe is failing and if so why. My disciplinary education and sensibility reveal an understanding of the EU crisis as fundamentally if not intrinsically socio-political, and one that dates back to its very formal formation in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which created the European Union and led to the creation of the single European currency, the (now deflated) euro. The problem of course is not the drafting of the Treaty but rather the belated realisation that the European Union and its currency were launched with a huge democratic deficit; what seemed like a rose-coloured, romantic union now appears more like a felony and betrayal turning much too quickly from infatuation to disillusionment, seeking composure but not finding equanimity.

This cannot be more clearly manifested than in the embittered character and brisk tone of reaction towards the sudden emergence of ‘our’ Union’s failing currency, a moment which revealed deep cracks and fissures in the European dream and led to stark, irreconcilable divisions where it should have shown power in unity. The very orientation of the whole ‘crisis’ debate on a European level as a purely economic, financial and fiscal one automatically projected veritable weaknesses in marshalling the political in the aid of the financial, resorting instead to managerial solutions to a broader problem than mere number-crunching. Out of such an atmosphere of miscommunication arose a ‘chaos according to plan’ paving its way through bailout agreements, austerity measures and memoranda which were at the outset morally reprehensible and therefore naturally destined to fail. The fiscally strong North harassed the Union’s Southern weaklings demanding that they kick themselves into shape through a series of abominable formulae passing on as solutions eventually becoming the current nightmare of member states who fear contagion and the breaking up of the euro. The dominant narrative explained this new toxic state of affairs in divisive and oppositional terms alluding to Aesopian moralising tales of frugal ants such as Germany, France, Netherlands and Belgium lending frivolous grasshoppers such as Greece, Italy, Portugal, Ireland and Spain.

The problem with this story-telling is that it forgets how little sense it makes to operate on a binary logic within a monetary union, a paradox identified by a host of Nobel Prize winning economists from Joseph Stiglitz to Paul Krugman who poignantly described Greece as a ‘victim’ in a recent op-ed of his for the New York Times explaining how ‘the origins of this disaster lie farther north, in Brussels, Frankfurt and Berlin, where officials created a deeply — perhaps fatally — flawed monetary system, then compounded the problems of that system by substituting moralizing for analysis. And the solution to the crisis, if there is one, will have to come from the same places’. Krugman is not alone in decrying this bailout regime nor does he stand out as a solitary voice in identifying the paradox of agreeing to operate within a monetary union but at the same time seeming unwilling and uncooperative in finding imaginative and mutually beneficial solutions for helping not just the fellow members of your union but that very union itself. Yanis Varoufakis, Professor of Economics at University of Athens and Visiting Professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson Graduate School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin, has repeatedly asked the vexing question of whether other monetary unions such as the US dollar have ever, in times of prosperity and/or crisis, witnessed accusations where New York would, say, criminalise Ohio for being a fiscal burden and therefore threaten with scenarios of exit from the union and disorderly default. The answer comes from Paul Krugman who invites us to ask ourselves; ‘why does the dollar area — also known as the United States of America — more or less work, without the kind of severe regional crises now afflicting Europe? The answer is that we have a strong central government, and the activities of this government in effect provide automatic bailouts to states that get in trouble’.

What is at stake here is not a problem of remuneration and book-keeping but rather an inability to reach political consensus preferring instead methods of racketeering by means of extortion and loan-sharking, thus creating a
threat and then charging for its reduction through a series of unsustainable political decisions that memoranda and bailouts have proven to be. The framing of the story of the failing euro in such terms soon morphed into everyday rhetoric influencing popular attitudes where habitual disparagement of Europe’s southern states as ‘PIIGS’ as an acronym used to refer to the economies of Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain becomes a common joke graduating to even more abusive terms employed in the mainstream media like Jeremy Paxman’s allusion to Greece on BBC’s Newsnight as a ‘bad kebab being vomited up’ or Christine Lagarde’s differential sympathy for victims of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa but not for Greeks hit by the economic crisis. This insensitive mud-stream of slander towards and renunciation of 31-year old EU member states, cannot be interpreted merely as exaggerated, offensive and distasteful satire alone, but rather denotes a profound deficiency in the European identity where Union members feel less like beneficiaries in a common socio-political enterprise built on trust and more like opponents occupying a space of ethnic bigotry, public misapprehension and moral usury.

Only a shift in the European political imaginary would usher in a period of more harmonious coexistence where consensus is made out of consent and dissent locked in their interdependence, where synergy and not rivalry justifies their union with the powerful acting in similar ways to Karl Marx’s observation in the preface of Das Kapital that ‘[t]he country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future’ celebrating a unity that produces and is based on community of interests, objectives, and standards. Yanis Varoufakis and Stuart Holland’s Modest Proposal for resolving the Eurozone crisis works towards this direction where the crisis is envisaged as an intrinsically European problem which can be reframed as a European political and civic asset by treating any debt as commonly European and not exclusive to any member state while at the same time setting up a mechanism of surplus recycling where the strong would aid the weak precisely in the fashion that Krugman suggested with reference to the American example. Any such paradigm shift would not only lift the Eurozone’s civil mood up but would radically lead to a re-interpretation of the terms of discussing the crisis where the strong don’t throw loans at the problems of the weak, nor do they behave hegemonically by setting the tone and wielding the decisive power at the expense of the benighted Eurozone members who fear any deviation from the dictates of their northern neighbours. Krugman, Varoufakis and Holland are not solitary exceptions in opposing the savage squeezing of wages and livelihoods in favour of faulty rescue plans and profit-making machinations; from Slavoj Žižek’s depiction of Greece as a ‘humanitarian victim’ and Die Linke’s Sahra Wagenknecht opposition to the European fiscal treaty as ‘an enemy to democracy’ to Amartya Sen’s warning that ‘austerity is undermining Europe’s grand vision’, not to mention the numerous petitions and statements of solidarity from Europe’s intelligentsia influencing the ‘We are all Greeks’ rallies.

This climate of political disjunction amounts to the first existential crisis of post-modern Europe since the profound shock on the Old Continent’s conscience facing the rubble of World War Two. The implicit agreement in the upshot of the war then was the recognition that ‘we, as Europeans do not wish to re-live history in such a light ever again’ coupled with the romantic vision of a united avowal to that promise. The cultural and socio-political climate in whose orbit we find ourselves twirling today however, feeds precisely on the raw materials that inspire discrimination, prejudice and hostility on the brink of warfare, not by ammunition but by a cold and calculating militarisation of the European spirit mediated and serviced by financial institutions. Europeanness seems to be running low on imaginative and institutional resources in upholding its exalted image of oneness, nor does it seem to democratically celebrate its diversity in the way that Henri Cartier-Bresson’s photographic portrait of ‘The Europeans’ found and showed evidence of a greater identity, a family likeness shared by the people and the landscape beyond nationalism and the particular characteristics of each nation. Cartier-Bresson’s Europeans are seen at work, in the streets, travelling and gossiping. Sometimes they are lone figures; a photograph may show only a single gaze, a glimpse of a face. Often, however, Cartier-Bresson turns his camera to couples, mirrored individuals, linked solitudes or crowds, gathering to celebrate or to protest. Is this image relevant, applicable or representative of today’s lived reality of and in Europe?

A cursory re-reading of Gerard Delanty’s (1995: 1) Inventing Europe helps us orient ourselves around the mirage of our Europeanness by recognising that ‘every age invented the idea of Europe in the mirror of its own identity:
Europe is as much an idea as it is a reality, but it is also a contested idea and it was in adversity that European identity was constructed as a dichotomy of Self and Other. My personal reading of Delanty’s book isolates a number of cautionary points that I feel are useful nodes towards a brief commentary on the current existential crisis of the European experiment. The first is that Europeanness probably never managed to forge emotional ties analogous to the imaginary idea of nationhood. In its effort to overcome nationalism and mould a sense of identity and community, Europe used the same tools (flag, anthem, passport, common/shared history) but without much success. The second point is that the process of unification in the name of Europe and its associated ideology arrived with a top-bottom configuration by means of political decisions (of an elite) and not through social, political and civil struggle, thus showing a remarkable gap in political representation. The third ambition of the book seems to be the deconstruction of the idea of Europe as ‘one’, interpreting its identity not simply as an [12]imagined community but as intrinsically divided. That point is advanced further with the claim that the reality of the European continent has at the outset been the preparation for war, not representing unity but opposition and conflict expressed by means of racial, religious, cultural and ideological exclusion of ‘the other’ be it heretics, Muslims, Jews, Slavs or unwelcome arrivals from the New World. Communism was also featured in this gallery of evils upgrading to the threat of Islam(ism) in the post 9/11 climate.

This bleak or crudely realistic, depending on viewpoint, image of Europe, compels us to imagine Europe more as a Union of profound divisions rather than a romantic project inspired by a strong sense of unity. The recognition of the above leads us to an image of Europe as a phantom category a zombie political realm to which we still remain faithful for no apparent reason, save for its dissolution which we are witnessing today. If we are to agree with Delanty’s analysis of the idea of Europe ‘judged by how it treats its minorities and not by reference to ambivalent notions of unity’ and recognise the need for any idea of Europe to be ‘linked to a new politics of collective responsibility based on post-national citizenship’, it may be worth to risk the assumption that the PIIGS start looking very much like the minorities of which Delanty speaks about, and it is to one of those domestic omnivores that we shall devote the remainder of this text.

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 [...] of our time, but in the specific context of one of the main casualties of it; Greece, to which a two-part article was devoted last August in the space of this blog. The reasons behind choosing Greece as our [...] 


 [...] published at The Sociological Imagination in two parts on August 9, [...]


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The Counterfeiters (part 2) (2012-08-10 08:00)

Too much for sale?

The myth of Europe is a Greek invention and so is tragedy and drama. What follows, amounts to no more than dramaturgical field-notes from the country's trials, tribulations as well as its responsibilities and duties, not so much in the writing of the European myth but in the staging of its own role, its costume and political choreography. "Woe betide she who chooses to dwell on this issue", I hear the chorus scream, yet I'm happy to do so as a curious insider/outsider hybrid with respect to Greek socio-political affairs; insider because I am of Greek descent and outsider because I live abroad, a curious position that could be likened to a schizophrenic telescope lens that zooms in and out depending on circumstances, events and moods even. This form of 'double-consciousness', to paraphrase W.E.B Du Bois, was exemplified by Greek sociologist [1]Constantine Tsoucalas, back in 1969 in the writing of his seminal book The Greek Tragedy, where he identified Greece as European but not Western, Balkan but not Slavic and Oriental but not Muslim, a complex cultural mosaic of identity sculpted by centuries of occupation, civil wars and military coups d'état, leaving its sense of self-orientation fundamentally divided and erratically arranged throughout the course of its (national) history. The cultural dowry of this traumatic process of constant decimation either by external threats or internal divisions, still survives today in the voting culture, ideology, party formation, political participation and national identity of 21st century Greece. In fact a deep sense of injustice has inculcated early on in the collective psyche of the country and this is reflected in many of today's cultural patterns; convulsed by the aftermath of such tragic historical events and scourged by the current climate of recession, contemporary Greece exhibits certain peculiarities that I have isolated into four main categories, in order to render them intelligible and useful/pertinent to the discussion here, followed by a few modest suggestions of possible ways out from the country's socio-cultural and political labyrinth. These four areas of Greek political default revolve around (a) voting culture, (b) party formation, (c) civic comportment/political behaviour and (d) ideology, while the proposed ways-out are inspired by a personal interpretation of a [2]televised interview of Cornelius Castoriadis to the Greek National Broadcasting Corporation filmed in 1984.

Hailed as [3]'the most important elections since the return to democracy', May 6th and June 17th have proven to be 'hot' dates on the global journalistic calendar so much that The Guardian has devoted a whole section of its online edition to [4]them. The reasons for such media attention however have very little to do with Greece itself or its 1284
political standstill but rather with the witch-hunt of scenaria predicting ‘disorderly default’, ‘exit from the Euro’ and ‘fear of contagion’ in European and global markets. Leaving such fear-mongering aside, it is important to bring to the surface the hidden text of voting and electoral processes in Greece in the hope that the paradoxical re-run of the May elections in June may start making some sense to the uninitiated in Greek political affairs.

Voting culture in Greece is an act of fandom as a big part of political behaviour (t)here is. The reason for that is not mere infantilism of the Greek public, but rather the very fragmented history of the country’s politics which has not known and therefore does not recognise a smooth-running electoral process, but rather resembles a smouldering volcano of impassioned political choices made in critical times resulting in the complete and utter disaster of embittered factionalism. To understand voting in Greece it might be useful to allude to the morale of José Saramago’s novel, [5]’Seeing’, where he describes a fictional occasion of voting in a political culture that has rendered the very process of voting meaningless. In Saramago’s book the ultimate evil is the plague of blank ballots, also a common pastime in Greek elections, but in the Greek case the whole edifice of voting amounts to a problematic process given that elections resemble, more often than not, veritable battlefields of emotion with the ballot boxes playing the role of animated repositories of discontent. This may be applicable to other countries too of course, yet in the very last elections abstinence featured as the preferred choice of the electorate climbing up to 40 % when the first party won just a 29,66 % of total votes. I am making no recriminatory argument against abstinence however, nor am I condemning voting choices, instead the emphasis here is on an alarming statistical result, not on finger-wagging a choice that often makes sense if one considers the second fault-line of Greek politics; party formation.

Political parties in Greece often occupy the position that football clubs hold in other national cultures though overt hooliganism is not absent from the country’s stadia either. Because of its fragmented political culture, a direct result of multiple historical traumas which have enforced deep divisions in the political imaginary of the nation, Greece’s political parties fish for votes by playing cheap vaudeville with a populist orientation and gusto marshalled by party leaders as a way of securing public approval and appeal. This is understandable but often borders on the tragicomic in the Greek case as the rhetoric, the public orchestration and display of the party leaders themselves often reminds one of a Tsarist image of holy men and healers who by means of triumphalist and apocalyptic verbiage alone will soothe all social ills offering Messianic pronouncements and promises to a helpless crowd, provided that they are endowed with peoples’ votes of course. [6]Greek cinema abounds with satirical representations of this venerable tradition, but so does current political reality too (here’s just a [7]sample of Greece’s PM on a recent pilgrimage to a church in a troubled neighbourhood of Athens, the body language and the staging of the scene is, I believe, telling).

This type of fanciful political gesturing speaks volumes about patterns of political behaviour and civic comportment in Greece relying heavily on cronism, clientelistic politics and populism, sustaining and maintaining a political enterprise that does not listen to itself but only to its narrow self-interests and motives. This is also witnessed in the support that the electorate has vouchsafed for two rivalling political families; the Papandreou on the democratic-socialist front and the Karamanlis representing the centre-right, who have been succeeding one another in power from 1944 until Papandreou the third’s downfall in November 2011. This continued support is emblematic of a peculiar faithfulness not to an evolving political force which renews itself but to an uncritical auto-da-fé support which allows the country’s political ghosts to loom around the parliament and make key decisions on matters that they and their predecessors have consistently failed to resolve during their respective political careers. Peoples’ wants are very much linked to party promises, making politics seem like a mediator between these two impulses rather than a process of negotiation and agreement on how to run a country. This clustered view of political participation transforms voting into tokenism where each vote matches a personal favour made by a politician of the old guard thus creating a climate where voters depend at large on favours and expect these to be delivered by the state, when they aren’t revenge is taken in the next elections as if the whole process of democratic voting is not the common agreement on some key social needs to be catered for by elected representatives of the public but rather a regime of favouritism that replicates itself ad aeternum. A veritable crucible of activity in the preparation of such political alignment is the University where political groups have immense influence not only in attracting prospective
party supporters but even in the running of the institution itself not to mention their function as the prime site of catechism to each party’s political doctrine. This political ethic of alignment-for-benefit and the choice of politics with desirability of the favourable outcome as its sole purpose may seem exaggerated and far-fetched and it is, but it also explains why people expect and demand so much of the state and its appointed functionaries.

Ideology constitutes the prime ingredient that sugar-coats political belief, given that the political parties’ programme and ethos is of course represented not by announcements that publicly declare favouritism, but by reference to sensitive ideas that have inspired hateful clashes in Greece feeding on the traumas of the Civil War from 1946 to 1949 and the military junta of 1967-1974. Memories from such incidents are tattooed to the country’s conscience and are often evoked to provoke reaction which erupts in a furtive terrain of battling political sentiments, living off rage and fostering a cultural climate of bitter misrecognition and incomprehension. This highly polarised struggle between left and right still targets the current political vacuum in Greece with slogans that often remain virtually unchanged and sometimes still remind both sides of their mutual disparagement in times of war. This never-ending rivalry provides political parties with a rich emotional reserve with which to mould their politics and excite their audience reflecting the narrowness, immaturity and carelessness of the political mainstream in Greece. Such an ideological divide could have been smoothed out during the transitional period of metapolitefsi (regime change) from the fall of the dictatorship to the legislative elections of 1974, ushering in the democratic period in the history of modern Greece, in an effort to consolidate rather than further segment the existential map of the country.

Instead, heretics on the left continue to hurl abuse to schismatics on the right in a herostratic political exchange that does not envision consensus as the embattled hybrid of political dissent and consent brought together, but prefer outright clash, destruction and the legitimisation of violence towards ‘the other’ and towards democratic institutions too, be it listed buildings, statues, public thoroughfares and pedestrian pavements. Ideology is the fuel of such enmity amounting to little more than a wilful suspension of scepticism based on selectivity of perspectives, Manichean moralism and absolutism. Politics done this way inevitably degenerates into flat-footed verbalisations of campaign slogans where there is urgent need for negotiating differences to resolve them, always with passion but never with violence. This hotbed of ideological warfare facilitates the lamentable and quite unpardonable 7% that Greek voters secured for [8] Golden Dawn, a volatile neo-Nazi garrison formed by knife-wielding vigilantes, now democratically elected in parliament promising to ‘clear’ the streets of Athens from the Untermenschen. A most sober reader could attribute this to the mushrooming of [9] ‘angry, white men’ in times of crisis but my analysis is less sympathetic primarily because Golden Dawn is closer to EDL than it is to BNP (to use two British examples), with militias that patrol its political strongholds and unleash anti-immigrant pogroms [10] as I write, but also because it is hard for me to imagine the rise of such a phenomenon as unrelated to a failing political mainstream and an incompetent opposition movement which opposes everything and suggests very little with extremists occupying the gap in-between.

This heritage of selfish voting, nepotism, civil disassociation and ideological chasm has bequeathed the social scientist to the role of a light-house keeper who battles the elements in solitude to shed some light on the rocky edges of the sea for the adventurous explorers out there. Luckily, I can rely on Cornelius Castoriadis’ long exploration of the [11] crossroads in the labyrinth for a guided tour to some distinct features of the Greek polity and what can be done to creatively engage with them. Departing radically from a simplistic ‘blame-game’ or a logic of ‘excuse-all’ in relation to the political turbulence of his time, Castoriadis emphasised on a psychosocial by-product of the country’s fractured political culture, that being the deferral of responsibility for the country’s malaise to a fictional ‘other’, be it the state, an ideological opponent or the spurious intervention of a great power from abroad looking to impose its expansionist politics on Greek soil. He therefore identified how, we are our society, our institutions and our politics, echoing Bertolt Brecht’s (1972: 17) familiar urge to ‘make clear how the net of fate is knotted and cast, cast and knotted by men’. Castoriadis is known for his ideas on the self-constitution of society, resulting in his world-famous The Imaginary Institution of Society on which he draws to describe how institutions are born and made in society by society and do not land from an unidentifiable mysterious nowhere; rather we are the very makers of our institutions.
A paradox follows however, this being his observation that although self-made, our institutions need to be treated as if they were created elsewhere by others or we would not conform to them, were we to recognise them as the products of our own imagination. In the course of his [12]televised interview Castoriadis expands this thought by adding that rules ought to be seen as modes of self-regulation that facilitate and do not obstruct our participation in society; rather they provide agreed-upon codes that enhance our co-existence and offer a mutual understanding of each other by means of established cultural habits and social reflexes. Armed with this view of society as the imaginative product of humankind exercised every time we make a choice over how to participate in this realm we have designed and built for ourselves, it is tempting to offer a few thoughts on what can be done to circumvent the current political habits and experiment with a more open-ended articulation of our polity. This would require an experiment both in terms of thinking and in terms of social participation as politics would need to locate a different power source from which to draw its resources; not from a party to which one is aligned for personal gain, not from an ideology used as a rulebook for everything, and certainly not reliant on the state to provide for social practices that we can institute ourselves.

What is profoundly lacking is civic capital, this abstract notion that brings together values and attitudes, institutions and rules, leadership and decision-making. Appropriating the [13]Annales School approach to the study of history, which gives priority to long-term historical structures over events, we can arrange the ingredients of civic capital chronologically with values and attitudes occupying the longue durée, institutions and rules the intermediate durée and leadership and decisions acting in the short durée of political action and decision-making processes. To enhance a society’s civic capital means to boost civic engagement, secure political equality, foster solidarity, inspire trust and work towards building a strong associational life as the basis of the writing of a new social contract where the personal shoulidingering of responsibility plays a pivotal role, not in the notably cruel form of ‘you are responsible for what is happening to you’ but rather in its more humanistic version; ‘I alone will save the world, if it vanishes, I am to blame’. The difference between these two slogans may at first appear minimal but on closer look it isn’t; the first inspires guilt at the outset while the second puts forward one’s willingness to lend oneself in the (re)making of his/her social world. Apart from a difference of tone and priorities, these two slogans differ in terms of origins too, the first expresses a neo-liberal sentiment, and the latter comes from the grand humanistic poetry of Nikos Kazantzakis; in a strong civil society however the ideological provenance of both propositions should matter very little. What ought to be at stake is the message that each phrase articulates and our willingness or not to act upon it or reject it; for what it says and not for where it comes from.

A political culture that wilfully hands over its fate to consistently and repeatedly failing political groups, shows unwillingness to assume commonly shared civic responsibilities and duties, and a deferral of these to the closest political relative who will then be blamed for making a mess. This observation paradoxically guards us from the realisation that we base our interests and motives on these chosen political groups to generate favourable outcomes for us, be it favours or what have you, and when they fail we feel doubly cheated; first of all by ourselves and second by our elected representatives. Old habits die hard however and despite the brief stint of the [14]indignants’ protests in Syntagma Square in Athens which inspired romantic paeans of self-rule, the 2012 elections saw the country’s voters marching on what Bertolt Brecht ,again, would call ‘the parade of the old new’. There were [15]no indignados to decry the elections’ outcome, instead the majority of votes went to the two traditional political families of left (12.28 %) and right (29.66 %) with a surprising rise of SYRIZA (26.89 %), a coalition of the radical left which rejected its participation in government and subsided instead to the role of the opposition allowing for the more moderate DIMAR (6.26 %) to form government with PASOK and New Democracy (the traditional poles of leftists and rightists in Greece), with the remainder of parliamentary seats distributed to the right wing Independent Greeks (7.51 %), the neo-nazi Golden Dawn (6.92 %) and the Greek Communist Party (4.50 %). This is hardly a revolutionary outcome of elections held (twice!) in times of crisis but a rather conformist and backwardly mirroring of traditional voting practices and trends making Brecht’s aforementioned poem sound chillingly appropriate;
I stood on a hill and I saw the Old approaching,

but it came as the New.

It hobbled up on new crutches which no one had ever seen before

and stank of new smells of decay which no one had ever smelt before.

(Bertolt Brecht, 1939)

If the result of the 2012 elections was an accident, then this whole article loses its currency, if however it can be explained through the lens of the four political ills that I identified earlier (voting culture, party formation, civic comportment/political behaviour and ideology), then we might fear their transformation into the five giant evils in society identified by [16]William Beveridge as squalour, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. Squalour because the country is in financial trouble and those who are poorer cannot afford to seek medical attention, and thus cannot work, which furthermore creates less income, and leads to lack of labourers available. Ignorance which feeds on the political mainstream and the electorate’s ignorance to their role in a community that is not run in terms of factionalism and the granting of favours. Disease linked to financial trouble because sickness forces people to discontinue working. Want because it is ill-represented in individual and not in collective terms despite the [17]very many efforts towards this direction, and Idleness enforced or chosen starving the country from its creative potential.

What this catalogue of evils makes clear is not that such an analysis is correct and that it contains the seed of change but that the existential anxiety and the insecurity felt by crisis-ridden Greeks amounts to a daily climate of political fear bred externally by laughable memoranda and internally by the emotionally charged political void that Greece finds itself unhappily married to. The solution lies neither in the tutelage from the ECB and the IMF nor in the demagoguery and the sophistry of our native imposters, but in a concerted effort to strive for our polity ourselves by means of our imaginative powers and a careful management and mobilisation of (a) our voting as an exercise of reason, (b) the transformation of our political parties into representatives of our collective decrees, (c) the end of ideology as dogmatic confines and (d) the emergence of a civic and political behaviour that draws not on the fossilised embittered divisions of the past but on the common struggles of the present addressed with faith in civic capital and collective, associational social life.

If there’s one ambition to this article that is to show how the EU and Greece alike are seeking stability on shifting sands by enforcing a politics of counterfeit where the aspiration ought to be in the imagining of a new credible fiction, narrative, story text, to bind itself together in unitary terms and not by sustaining a climate of divisive betrayal of its ideal.

References


Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music.

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Sociological Imagination and #UKRiots (2012-08-11 08:00)

[1]"Sociological Imagination and UK Riots" on Bundlr

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Paths in the fog – Milan Kundera and Zygmunt Bauman (2012-08-13 08:00)

Norbert Elias writes, I think in his book [What is Sociology], that it is only with hindsight that we can see that A led to B to C and so on because the contingency and uncertainty of how myriad actions and consequences, intended and unintended, worked out to produce what actually happened are open to historical and sociological investigation. However, in the present, as we stand today, in conditions of endemic and permanent uncertainty (to paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman’s description of liquid modernity) we cannot know for certain how things will turn out. The best
we can do is to map out possible more and less likely future scenarios and, as actors and citizens, be as informed as possible in what direction we as individuals and collectively strive for. Certainly a starting point for this would be the unmasking of the ideological myth that there is no alternative.

One of Bauman’s favourite authors is Milan Kundera. Bauman has a particular view on the relationship between literature and sociology, or more precisely a certain sort of literature as sociology, that I find very interesting and will post about later. Here is an extract from one of Kundera’s essays that expresses well what Elias was saying about retrospective certainty versus forecasting uncertainty. The list of intellectuals and literary figures he refers to in this quote are all individuals who have been put on trial by history for supporting the wrong side, fascist or communist and some for both at different times. His argument is that looking at the present and future from their position and perspective might produce a very different appraisal of their character and their work. We are looking back with the clarity of hindsight; they were looking forward through the fog. The references to Tolstoy all relate as far as I can tell to War and Peace.

Tolstoy looks back on the Napoleonic Wars from a distance of fifty years. In his case, the new perception of history not only affects the structure of the novel, which has become more and more capable of capturing (in dialogue, in description) the historical nature of narrated events; but what interests him primarily is man’s relation to history (his ability to dominate it or to escape it, to be free or not in regard to it), and he takes up the problem directly, as the very theme of his novel, a theme he explores by every means, including novelistic reflection.

Tolstoy argues against the idea that history is made by the will and reason of great individuals. History makes itself, he says, obeying laws of its own, which remain obscure to man. Great individuals “all were the involuntary tools of history, carrying on a work that was concealed from them.” Later on: “Providence compelled all these men, each striving to attain personal aims, to combine in the accomplishment of a single stupendous result not one of them (neither Napoleon nor Alexander and still less anyone who did the actual fighting) in the least expected.” And again: “Man lives consciously for himself, but is unconsciously a tool in the attainment of the historic, general aims of mankind.” From which comes this tremendous conclusion: “History, that is, the unconscious, general herd-life of mankind…” (I emphasize the key phrases.)

With this conception of history, Tolstoy lays out the metaphysical space in which his characters move. Knowing neither the meaning nor the future course of history, knowing not even the objective meaning of their own actions (by which they “involuntarily” participate in events whose meaning is “concealed from them”), they proceed through their lives as one proceeds in the fog. I say fog, not darkness. In the darkness, we see nothing, we are blind, we are defenseless, we are not free. In the fog, we are free, but it is the freedom of a person in fog: he sees fifty yards ahead of him, he can clearly make out the features of his interlocutor, can take pleasure in the beauty of the trees that line the path, and can even observe what is happening close by and react.

Man proceeds in the fog. But when he looks back to judge people of the past, he sees no fog on their path. From his present, which was their faraway future, their path looks perfectly clear to him, good visibility all the way. Looking back, he sees the path, he sees the people proceeding, he sees their mistakes, but not the fog. And yet all of them–Heidegger, Mayakovsky, Aragon, Ezra Pound, Gorky, Gottfried Benn, St.-JohnPerse, Giono–all were walking in fog, and one might wonder: who is more blind? Mayakovsky, who as he wrote his poem on Lenin did not know where Leninism would lead? Or we, who judge him decades later and do not see the fog that enveloped him?
Mayakovsky’s blindness is part of the eternal human condition.

But for us not to see the fog on Mayakovsky’s path is to forget what man is, forget what we ourselves are.


Terry Wassall is a sociologist at the University of Leeds. This was originally posted on [1]Terry’s blog.


Inspiring (!?) corporate theme songs (2012-08-14 08:00)

The private security company G4s, already subject to wide ridicule for their [1]handling of the Olympics security contract, have received even more for their 80s Rocky-esque corporate theme song. But it turns out they’re not the only corporation to try and find artistic expression for their organisational ethos.
From PriceWaterhouseCoopers
Since returning northwards, and knowing that it would only be temporary, I’ve made the decision to try and get out into the Northumberland countryside as much as possible. It’s not going well, largely owing to my reluctance to leave my desk having begun to believe (erroneously of course) that no one will ever employ me if I take a day off. Anyway, after it was pointed out that I hadn’t left the house in several days and there was the possibility of furnishing my new flat with some charity shop antiques I set off on a jaunt to Wooler and Powburn with my Ma. Wooler, for those not in the know, is the real life setting for Postman Pat. Close to my heart! We chose to go by the twisty-windy countryside roads and so I had ample time to listen to [1]Saturday Live on Radio 4. One of the items was about Georgina Blackwell, a beautician who successfully took on a development company in the High Court to stop them building over her mother’s home. Close to my heart! We chose to go by the twisty-windy countryside roads and so I had ample time to listen to [1]Saturday Live on Radio 4. One of the items was about Georgina Blackwell, a beautician who successfully took on a development company in the High Court to stop them building over her mother’s home. Throughout the item Sian Williams (who I adore) focused very heavily on the disparity between the well-trained middle class professional lawyers working for the development company and that fact that Georgina was ‘only’ a beautician with the clear implication that she was out of her depth intellectually, professionally and socially. But the thing that really stuck out to me was the attention paid to Georgina’s physical appearance, namely the fact that she is blonde. Constant repetition was made of the fact that she was ‘a blonde
Now I'm well aware that all shapes and forms of women can suffer from stereotyping and that there's nothing new in aligning being blonde with being an airhead. But I had rather thought (hoped?) that this link had gone out of fashion in recent years. After all in our WAG/celebrity/reality star culture it doesn’t seem that being blonde makes you any more desirable than being brunette. But apparently being blonde still connotes being dumb. In light of this I began musing on my on blondeness and the extent to which I play to the stereotype…

I've been blonde for years – fake but I had very blonde hair as a child so I assert a pseudo-naturalness to it. Some things I notice as a blonde – compared to having brown/red/black hair:

- People (and by this I mean predominantly men) stare at me more often and for longer in the street
- More cat-calling in the street
- People think I'm vulnerable and weak – physically and emotionally
- I'm spoken to more slowly than to my brunette (or male) companions
- People are surprised (but not shocked) when they discover I'm a postgraduate student. Even more so when they find out I'm at (or was at) Cambridge
- People think I'm really young
- Men think I'm completely sexually available

When I say 'people' or 'men' I'm aware I'm making a massive generalization. These observations are based on my perception of my experiences and occur in probably around 70 % of passing interactions as well as some work relationships and a tiny bit in academia. And not all of them happen all at once. Now, admittedly, not all of this is because I’m blonde. I’m also quite slender which probably goes to being seen as physically weak and I do look kind of young. But not that young. Sadly.

Recently, lacking the necessary readies to keep regular appointments with the goddess that dyes my hair I’ve been resorting to home colouring with the resulting problem of not quite getting the perfect shade. Consequently I've been contemplating going brunette. But something has stopped me...

Upon thinking things through I find that I’m rather sentimentally attached to being blonde – and I’m going to admit that part of this is the assumption by others that I’m younger than I am and a certain perverse delight in being initially approached as dumb and the ensuing damage to those assumptions that revelation of my academic work brings. Though it’s frustrating to be so frequently engaged with on a level of 'Bless, she must be quite thick', sometimes it feels like an advantage. I wrote my Master of Letters dissertation on different kinds of femme fatale in British detective fiction and one such type was what I referred to as the 'disguised' woman – a character who looked like the innocent flower but was in fact the serpent under it, to paraphrase Shakespeare. She used her innocent blonde vulnerability, the fact that others (except Poirot, of course) took her to be silly and weak, in order to manipulate the world around her to her own benefit. Whilst I'm not claiming any sort of femme fatale status, not least because they always die, I do sometimes wonder if there's a certain gain in confounding expectations. More often than not I find
that it's other people, rather than me, that fall into the gap between what is expected of me as a 'dumb blonde' and what I actually am. If you're believed to be less capable and demonstrate yourself to the contrary, it's not your judgement that is questioned. Despite a preference for not assessing people based on appearances I'm both certain that we all do it, and secure enough in myself that I can weather others thinking me an idiot. That opinion doesn't ever last beyond my first sentence.

Moreover this has got me thinking about my position as a feminist and any tension between my engagement with – and I suppose some my say my manipulation of – the stereotypes of being blonde. All of these markers of blonde identity link in so clearly with female identity and femininity. Your archetypal blonde, busty airhead is everything we're taught not to aspire to as young feminists. But then is gaining advantage from taking the piss out of the image not just me buying into a hegemonic norm and reinforcing it? Or am I subverting and manipulating it – beating gender stereotyping at its own game? I really don't know. All I do know is that when people see me the first thing they see is blonde.

This was originally posted on Sarah Burton's [2]blog. Sarah is a postgraduate student working across literature, sociology and law. She is also Co-Convenor of the Postgraduate Forum of the British Sociological Association.

2. [http://florapostewrites.wordpress.com/](http://florapostewrites.wordpress.com/)

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The Libertarian Con? (2012-08-16 08:00)

Warning: if you regard yourself as a 'libertarian', in the American sense of the term, it might be best if you avoid reading this strident critique of the role libertarianism is coming to play in contemporary political culture. But we're sure you support our right to post links to articles which deride your politics.

At a time in which our society has never been more interdependent in every possible way, libertarians think they're John fucking Wayne looking out over his ranch with an Apache scalp in his belt, or John fucking Galt doing...whatever it is he does. (Collect vintage desk toys from the Sharper Image?)
Their whole ideology is like a big game of Dungeons & Dragons. It's all make-believe, except for the chain-mail—they brought that from home. Elves, dwarves and fair maidens for capital. Even with the supposedly "good ones"—anti-war libertarians—we're still talking about people who [1] think Medicare's going to lead to Stalinism.

So my advice is to call them out.

Ask them what their beef really is with the welfare state. First, they'll talk about the deficit and say we just can't afford entitlement programs. Well, that’s obviously [2] a joke, so move on. Then they'll say that it gives the government tyrannical power. Okay. Let me know when the Danes open a Guantánamo Bay in Greenland.

Here's the real reason libertarians hate the idea. The welfare state is a check against servility towards the rich. A strong welfare state would give us the power to say Fuck You to our bosses—this is the power to say "I'm gonna work odd jobs for twenty hours a week while I work on my driftwood sculptures and play keyboards in my chillwave band. And I'll still be able to go to the doctor and make rent."

Sounds like freedom to me.


1. http://crookedtimber.org/2012/05/11/judt-and-hayek/
'Red Army 2.0': human-flesh search engines in China (2012-08-17 08:00)

Western understanding of China's 'socialist market economy' leaves a lot to be desired. The phenomenon of renrou sousuo yinqing, human-flesh search engines, sheds some light on the predominant values in contemporary Chinese society:

'*...they are a form of online vigilante justice in which Internet users hunt down and punish people who have attracted their wrath. The goal is to get the targets of a search fired from their jobs, shamed in front of their neighbors, run out of town. It's crowd-sourced detective work, pursued online — with offline results....'*

Read the full article in the [1]NY Times.

1. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Human-t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine&pagewanted=all

SI weekend reading: who is Paul Ryan and why does it matter? (2012-08-18 08:00)

[1]"SI weekend reading: who is Paul Ryan? " on Bundlr


Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-08-19 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]
Follow us on Twitter here:


[4] Twitter Updates


Roberto Mangabeira Unger (feat. Steve Jobs) - "Beyond False Necessity" (2012-08-20 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/W01rRJeCwKl

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/W01rRJeCwKl

1300
For me, good urban sociology reminds us that cities are small, intimate things that won’t be around forever. They might seem vast and tall and solid and permanent, but they’re not. Cities are living, breathing organic matter, like a flower or a tree, which get experienced up close and under our feet; and that fact is precisely what sparked Americans to start doing sociology in the first place.

It’s what compelled (historian) W.E.B. Du Bois to leave his office at the University of Pennsylvania and go out into the neighborhoods of South Philly to document the lives of African-American men; and (literary critic and language specialist) W.I. Thomas to rifle through Polish immigrants’ trash on the South side of Chicago so he could find and curate their tossed off letters; and (journalist) Robert Park to, also in the city of Chicago, gather together an entire team of really smart, socially minded graduate students so he could map, well, pretty much every(social)thing.

[6] Arun Venugopal’s WNYC’s series Micropolis, and, especially, his Tumblr, is this kind of sociology. Random and fragmented glimpses of what he, personally, stumbles upon in New York City everyday, his depictions and stories are also, (as academic urban sociology requires), locatable and makes me really wonder and care about things like [9]this, [10]this or [11]this.


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Saudi Arabia’s women: small steps for change (2012-08-21 08:00)

How do working women get to work in Saudi Arabia - where there is no public transport and they are not allowed to drive because of their sex? How do women who do not have a male guardian live without an ‘official identity’? What would you need to wear if you went to Saudi Arabia - if you are/were a woman?

[1]

In [2]this short documentary, Sue Lloyd-Roberts exposes how some women rebel against being 'treated like children' and the lack of dignity that they experience in daily life.

[3]

1302
An Introduction to Asexuality: An information pack for teachers, journalists, activists and researchers (2012-08-22 08:00)

An Introduction to Asexuality on Bundlr

If your bottom line as an academic is that the world is a complicated and uncertain place, then expect job replacement by a smart search engine (2012-08-22 11:31)

Case in point: [1] A bad analogy between UK Olympic funding and UK science policy funding. Clearly the author hasn’t thought through the idea that in a neo-liberal political economy, targets make all the difference - and the Olympics provided those, whereas those who call for greater national science policy funding don’t. Science policy advocates merely talk about how far the UK’s science funding has fallen below its competitors, how many British scientists have emigrated, how low certain university science enrolments have become and how few science jobs there are. Not good news, to be sure, but not quite the issue that needs to be addressed.

Of course, the neo-liberals may be wrong to demand targets in the first place, though I find that hard to believe. Socialists were the great champions of targets, and no private investor dumps unrecoverable money into
scientific projects for very long. Long-term private investment tends to be justified by deliverables that are largely by-products of the original plan. 'Blue sky' research advocates – and I include myself – need to provide an economic strategy that takes into account that today the cost of potentially failed/useless research is much higher than in, say, Faraday's day, 150 years ago, from which economists tend to take the examples of success.

But then we hear the more general complaint that 'the very idea' of international comparisons is fraught with untold difficulties, at both a conceptual and an empirical level. At that point, you know the postmodernist has come to lunch.

One of the least attractive features of our postmodern condition is the tendency for otherwise well-educated academics to contradict every general statement not with a direct falsification but with a broad range of circumstantial evidence that in some combination may falsify the statement in question, depending on how it's taken. In this respect, they mimic Google's search engines that can be easily consulted with a modicum of web competence. As long as that competence is generally lacking, those academics remain secure in their jobs – but for how long?

There are two problems with the postmodern approach – however intellectually honest it may appear. (1) It turns the critic into a wild card who may be used by whomever stands to gain by casting doubt on the general statement in question. (2) It abandons the classical academic ideal of 'judgement', whereby someone steeped in learning resolves the various claims in question while remaining open to a reversal or his or her judgement in the future.

Tenure was originally designed to enable academics to exercise 'judgement' in the above sense, and thereby provide a role model for students (and the general public) of what it's like to resolve contradictory testimonies in a rational fashion that can then be made a basis for further reflection and action. Max Weber, the great champion of this perspective, thought that its main threat came from dogmatists who refused to admit contradictions. Nowadays the threat comes from the other side, the professional sceptics.


Get on the way, Pussy Riot! (2012-08-23 08:00)

This article was originally posted on the [1]MYPLACE blog. The MYPLACE blog first reported on "Pussy Riot's" anti-Putin [2]punk prayer protest, in March. Now, as 3 members of the group have been [3]sentenced to 2 years imprisonment for "hooliganism," the University of Warwick's Dr Ivan Gololobov writes on the scene in Moscow which forms the background to Pussy Riot's rise to infamy.

For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website: [4]HERE. Or follow the project on Twitter: [5]HERE.

In the last few months a lot of media attention in Russia and abroad was drawn to the trial over three members of the feminist punk-band Pussy Riot arrested and charged with hooliganism for their performance 'Punk-prayer' that took place inside of the Christ the Saviour, the biggest Orthodox cathedral in Russia on the 21st of February 2012. Musicians all over the world from Madonna, Paul McCartney and Peter Gabriel, to Bjork, Red Hot Chilli Peppers and
Faith no More expressed their clear disagreement with the proposed sentence and showed their support to the arrested girls. Russian musicians, however, expressed surprisingly little interest to this affair. And if the silence of pop and rock stars whose careers vitally depend on good relations with the authorities is more than understandable, the absence of vocal response from underground musicians looks pretty strange.

It would be wrong to say that such reaction is completely absent, but interestingly enough it comes from rather unexpected corners of the scene. The first song produced in support to Pussy Riot was recorded by a well-known rapper Siava, famous for his colourful portraits of yobs' life. The song was called Maliava Pussy Riot [A prison letter to Pussy Riot], it was released in April 2012 shortly after the arrest.

Since then, no one really added to this single voice until in August 2012 Elizium, an emo-core band from Nizhniy Novgorod came forward with the slogans of support to Pussy Riot on Kubana, the biggest open-air festival Kubana in the South of Russia, and BARTO, a feminist electro-punk band from Moscow recorded a track called Kis’ia eres’ [Heresy of little cats]
The silence of the Russian music underground, and what is more surprising – punk scene is, however, not that unpredictable. As a matter of fact Pussy Riot, although calling themselves a punk-band and using the sign of punk in their performances, never belonged to the Russian punk scene. They consider themselves as art-actionists, clearly place themselves in the context of contemporary Russian actionism, quoting the names of Prigov, Brener, Kulik and other art-provocateurs of the 1990s.

From the very beginning Pussy Riot was an art-project and their personal connection to the famous art-group Voina is not an accident in this regard. Ideology and actions of Pussy Riot are clearly oriented towards media reaction. The songs which appear in the internet are pre-recorded in studio, their actions are pre-rehearsed and sometimes include several takes, like the one in the Christ the Saviour, where footage from an identical action in a smaller church performed earlier was mixed in the main clip. This is, somehow, not particularly punky. In the same way as it is not particularly punky to stage a gig and to play without any audience, just for the cameras, portraying it later as a ‘concert’.

The punk-prayer is not over, it is being written now, and its after-effect appears to be much more important than the performance itself. Performance itself was not that interesting and, moreover, many found it appalling, but what happened next is by far much more appalling. This however made Russian music underground silent as it did not find the ways of reacting on this performance which appeared to be much more real than any ‘real’ punk concert, ironically suggesting that probably the only true rock and punk musician in Russia appeared to be rapper Siava, previously known for his hit Bodriachkom, patsanchiki [Get on the way, lads], caution, explicit lyrics!!!
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs & the Social Media that Fulfill Them (2012-08-24 08:00)

[1] X


(Hat Tip: [5] Sound & Fury)
This Week's Most Popular Posts The Sociological Imagination (2013-09-30 10:01:30)

[...] Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs & the Social Media that Fulfill Them [...]

Slavoj Žižek on The Avengers (2012) (2012-08-25 08:00)

SI Weekend Reading: Pussy Riot (2012-08-26 08:00)

[1]“SI weekend reading: Pussy Riot!” on Bundlr

Chomsky vs. Foucault (2012-08-27 08:00)

We suspect many readers will have already seen this video, recorded at a 1991 debate between Michel Foucault and Noam Chomsky. But if you haven’t then you’re in for a treat: two of the finest radical minds of the 20th century debating human nature, political change and the role of theory in crafting a more just society. There is a full transcript of the debate online [1]here. If you’re interested in Chomsky’s political thought, we can’t recommend the site in this link enough.

IFRAME: [2]//www.youtube.com/embed/3wfNl2LOGf8

2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/3wfNl2LOGf8

Human nature and social change (2012-08-28 08:00)

Our concept of human nature is certainly limited; it’s partially socially conditioned, constrained by our own character defects and the limitations of the intellectual culture in which we exist. Yet at the same time it is of critical importance that we know what impossible goals we’re trying to achieve, if we hope to achieve some of the possible goals. And that means that we have to be bold enough to speculate
and create social theories on the basis of partial knowledge, while remaining very open to the strong possibility, and in fact overwhelming probability, that at least in some respects we’re very far off the mark.

- Noam Chomsky from the debate with Foucault posted yesterday

The crisis of empirical sociology: against defeatism and rethinking the public role of the qualitative researcher (2012-08-28 16:25)

As [1]Savage and Burrows (2007: 894) point out, the popularity of the in depth interview in British sociology stems from an intellectual reaction to the excesses of Parsonian functionalism: responding to talk of reference groups, norms and values with the valorization of intensely ideographic methods which are geared towards the elaboration of people’s own values in their own terms, seen as particularly significant when dealing with marginal or oppressed groups liable to be squeezed out of the functionalist world view. While they are certainly correct to say that the value of such in-depth interviews needs justification once it is removed from this initial context of critical reaction, I’m less convinced of the arguments they cite for its diminishing relevance. They argue that,

Not only are the world-views of diverse populations now routinely presented to us in the popular and new media in such a manner that their summary characterization by sociologists is no longer as necessary (or as interesting) as once it was, but some of the social transactional research technologies discussed above are now also able to produce nuanced representations of the lifeworlds of quite specific populations groupings, for example (Savage and Burrows 2007: 894-895)

The ubiquity with which ‘everyday life’ is presented in a situated way within popular and new media surely represents, if we step back from the urgency which understandably animated their argument, an opportunity for the rethinking (rather than the move away) from in-depth interviews and other methods animated by an impulse to capture the particularities and nuances of situated lives. Perhaps I’m being hopelessly optimistic (it happens) but the same state of affairs which Savage and Burrows cite as indicative of the growing irrelevance of in-depth interviewing instead indicates to me that the potential public interest in the results of such research has never been higher. Furthermore, in a complex and confusing world increasingly characterised by what seems likely to become endemic economic and political instability, I’d suggest this public interest might extend to work which traces out the linkages between private troubles and public issues... with the essential caveat that linking one to the other, while presenting the findings of research in a way that interests and influences diverse and overlapping publics, necessitates a rethinking of the public role of the sociologist. Perhaps involving a generalisation of the orientation of the public intellectual, adapted for a digital age and thus freed from any grandiose pretensions and removed as far as possible from its
The Internet, however, can make these connections because it permits economical, finely calibrated "narrowcasting," that is, the transmission of specific information to specific interest groups. Of course print and – to a much lesser extent – radio and television also allowed some narrowcasting. Academic journals and industry newsletters are perhaps the best examples. But the scale of narrowcasting on the Internet is orders of magnitude greater than anything known before. Take the blogosphere for example. Here tens of thousands of interest-specific public intellectuals talk to tens of thousands of interest-specific publics concerning every imaginable interest. If you want to know about it – beer brewing, Italian shoes, organic chemistry — you can probably find someone with considerable expertise blogging about it. That’s truly remarkable.

The university presses are well-positioned to take advantage of Internet narrowcasting precisely because they essentially manage a group of experts — authors with books — who are very motivated to reach their publics. Every author wants an audience, even academic authors. The university presses have traditionally helped their authors find their audiences by publishing and promoting books. It’s time to admit that they largely failed, not for any lack of trying, but because the book was the wrong tool. Blogs, podcasts, videos, and types of "programming" not yet conceived or invented offer a much better method of reaching the myriad of communities of interest. If university presses use these methods, everyone wins: the author gets an audience, the audience gets a public intellectual, and the university press fulfills its public-spirited mission. ([2]Poe 2012)

Poe's essay makes a broader point about the role for university presses in 'narrowcasting' research communication by academics within an institution. But I think it also highlights the manner in which digital tools mean that 'public engagement' (for all the baggage that term carries within the modern academy) could become ubiquitous. Whether it or not it should remains a contested question. But where I do agree with Savage and Burrows is that empirical sociology in general, as well as certain qualitative approaches in particular, faces an unprecedented crisis. Without some creative attempts to rethink the public face of such activities in view of the challenges which confront them, irrelevance and decay surely beckons. However the 'descriptive turn' advocated by Savage and Burrows strikes me as defeatism. We can surely do better. We can at the very least try.


1. http://soc.sagepub.com/content/41/5/885.abstract
Eoin O’Mahony (2012-09-10 09:23:57)
Any claim made to expertise by sociologists or other social scientists surely negates the purpose of that discipline. Savage and Burrows are setting up a straw man? A good review Mark.

Sociological Imagination (2012-09-10 10:23:04)
Thanks! Not sure what you mean by claims to expertise negating the purpose of the discipline though?

**Capitalism in Crisis? David Harvey and Richard Wolff (2012-08-28 19:57)**


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/rduGIQfJ39g

**Fox news discover asexuality, find it ever so funny... (2012-08-29 08:00)**

Watch the latest video at [1]video.foxnews.com


A guide to curation tools for researchers (2012-08-30 08:00)

Do you suffer from information overload? Do you find it difficult to organise and process the things you find online so that you can apply them productively in your day-to-day working life? If so then *curation tools* could transform your experience of the digital world. Increasingly seen as the ‘next big thing’ of social media, the last year has seen an explosion of different tools which can be used to manage, sort and catalogue material. However the novelty, as well as the choices available, render them confusing – what tool should you use and how should you use it? Furthermore what are the specific uses to which academics can put these tools?

Curation is the broader concept behind [1]Pinterest, by far the most famous of these tools, which was the subject of Deborah Lupton’s great [2]article a few weeks ago. She notes how Pinterest;

> "draws upon the idea of older techniques of collage or scrapbooking: collecting interesting images, grouping them together under a theme and displaying them to others."

It allows the user to go round the internet, collecting images they find through the use of a convenient browser button (in a similar way to creating new browser bookmarks) and make these titled pinboards available online. Crucially, it also allows users to add a commentary to each ‘pinned’ item and, I would argue, this is where *collating* online material becomes *curating* in the proper sense of the term. As Lupton says, few academics seem to have heard of Pinterest. Yet even fewer academics, as well as internet users more broadly, seem to realise how many curation tools are out there. I briefly discuss four I’ve experimented with below though, I should stress, there are others out there. At the heart of all these tools are the same core practical tasks which anyone working in an information rich environment faces: *collecting, sorting, evaluating and sharing information*.

While Pinterest is primarily focused on images, the others are, arguably, more versatile. Furthermore as Lupton astutely points out of Pinterest and its ‘pinboards’, these tools tend to be structured around some central embodied metaphor e.g. ‘bundling’ up a range of things you find online or ‘scooping up’ things you find online and pasting them into your ‘magazine’. Beyond the practical features of each, for instance the centrality of images in Pinterest, I would suggest that these metaphors are actually a key factor in why particular individuals will take to particular services e.g. without realising it I’ve been thinking in bundles for a long time and just got the point of the service instantly when I used it. So it’s definitely worth experimenting with them and seeing which one you’re most intuitively comfortable with. Much as with other digital tools, there’s no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to use these – it all comes down to your practical purposes, how they unfold as you experiment with different tools and which ones you ultimately find most
useful for your personal needs.

1. [3] Storify is perhaps the mostly widely known of these four. It allows you to search multiple social networks and knit together items you find into sequential stories. I’ve found this useful for preserving Twitter debates that I’ve particularly [4] enjoyed. However I’m aware this only represents part of what the tool is capable of if you combine a sufficiently diverse range of elements, whereas my uses have merely been reconstructing conversations on one medium that I was actively involved in. The most impressive uses I’ve seen have tended to revolve around [5] covering events either retrospectively or live.

2. [6] Bundlr is my personal favourite and I can’t recommend it enough. As with the others, you use a browser button to ‘bundle’ content. When you’re on a web page which you want to curate, press the button and either choose an existing bundle or make a new one. What’s most impressive about Bundlr is how it combines the ability to handle many types of content (e.g. youtube videos, images, tweets, presentations, web pages) with effortlessly making the finished product look aesthetically appealing. With their latest update this became particularly true of [7] embedding bundles in webpages. It’s also incredibly easy to pick up. Within a few hours of signing up to Bundlr I had multiple bundles which had collectively received hundreds of hits. I honestly don’t understand how I kept track of things I wrote and read online prior to using the service.

3. [8] Scoop.It allows you to publish [9] ‘magazines’ based on content you scoop through a browser bookmark. Whereas some of the other tools focus more on collating items, Scoop.It offers more room for curation: it gives you more opportunity than the other tools to control what aspects of your ‘scooped’ items are highlighted and what commentary you offer about them. It also has an interesting, though in my experience not quite perfected, tool which offers you ideas about things to ‘scoop’. One feature I particularly like about Scoop.It is that it lets you tweet whenever you scoop a new item. In this way it integrates the curation process with managing twitter accounts. Though this might not be appealing to everyone, it’s a potentially invaluable time saver for those who manage multi-author blogs and multiple social media accounts. I like Scoop.It a lot and, if I had more time, I’d use this. Although I’d qualify this by saying I’d use it in my capacity as a social media manager rather than as an academic researcher.

4. [10] Pearl Trees is perhaps the most intriguing and yet, in my experience, the least practical. It takes a mind-mapping approach to curation, enabling you to collect ‘pearls’ (webpages, text notes or photos) and arrange them into hierarchical structures. I found it fascinating to explore and the interface is very different to anything else I’d come across. Nonetheless, I just didn’t ‘get’ it, beyond my abstract curiosity. It’s worth trying though and, even if your reaction is the same as mine, it’s definitely one to watch. When researching this article, I discovered that since I last used Pearl Trees they’ve introduced ‘bi-directional’ synchronization with social media. So rather than just auto tweeting when you add an item to your Pearl Tree, it can also add a pearl whenever you tweet a link. In practice I suspect this might not work as it should but, nonetheless, it has certainly induced me to give Pearl Trees another go.

This article was originally posted on [11] LSE Impact Blog

Paul Ryan: Rape Is Just Another 'Method Of Conception' (2012-08-30 19:56)


Mid 20th Century Sex Education (2012-08-31 08:00)

[1]"Mid 20th Century Sex Education" on Bundlr
How social scientists say "I’m not dating anyone"... (2012-08-31 20:57)

ECONOMIST
MY RELATIONSHIP STATUS IS UNDERGOING A DISEQUILIBRATION, WHICH I BELIEVE TO BE CYCLICAL, BASED ON A LINEAR REGRESS RUNNING BACK TO AUGUST 1945.

SOCIOLeGIST
A PERVERSIVE CULTURE OF MONAOMORY HAS HEGEMONIZED MY SELF-IMAGINARY VIA EXTERNAL (i.e. NON-INTERNAL) DISCOURSE.

(via [1]Sociolab)

3.9 September

Secret cinema found beneath Paris. (2012-09-01 00:18)

In September 2004, [1]French police discovered a hidden chamber in the catacombs under Paris. It contained a full-sized movie screen, projection equipment, a bar, a pressure cooker for making couscous, a professionally installed electricity system, and at least three phone lines. Movies ranged from 1950s noir classics to recent thrillers. When the police returned three days later, the phone and power lines had been cut and there was a note on the floor: “Do not try to find us.”

(via [2]HRTBPS)

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2004/sep/08/filmnews.france

(2013-01-30 04:01:59)
[...] [...]

1317
Go ahead and kill medicare... (2012-09-01 01:50)

(Via [1]Cristi Haiser)


Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-09-01 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don’t hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates


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1318
SI weekend reading: who is Barack Obama? (2012-09-02 08:00)

[1]"SI weekend reading: Who is Barack Obama?" on Bundlr


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'Polish labour migrants in the UK' (BBC documentary, Parts 1-4 of 7) (2012-09-03 08:00)

Part 1


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Call for Papers: Digital Methods as Mainstream Methodology Showcase Event (2012-09-03 15:55)

Friday 7th December 2012, British Library, London

We would like to invite PhD students and early career researchers in the field of digital social research to present their work at the latest event by the Digital Methods as Mainstream Methodology network. The seminar series is funded by the National Centre for Research Methods Networks for Methodological Innovation. The event will present case studies from researchers at a variety of career stages and from a variety of disciplines, alongside keynote speakers and a talk from Head of Social Sciences at the British Library on their web archiving project.

This is an exciting opportunity to present your research at a showcase event designed to highlight best practice and critical issues in digital social research.

In order to give as many researchers as possible the chance to share their work, and to keep the event lively and focused, accepted presentations will take the form of short 'PechaKucha'style talks. The format will consist of 10 slides showing an image (or a small piece of text), each displayed for 20 seconds, or 3 minutes and 20 seconds in total. Slides advance automatically to complement your talk. Further details and examples are available from [1]http://www.pecha-kucha.org (please note that due to time constraints, we have halved the time allowed and number of slides).

Eligibility Criteria:

* PhD students or early career researchers (within 3 years of PhD completion) and based in the UK.
Research utilises 'digital methods', broadly defined as ‘the use of online and digital technologies to collect and analyse research data’ in any social science discipline.
Please send us your abstract of no more than 200 words to contact@digitalmethodsnmi.com by 1st October 2012. Your abstract should highlight what you consider to be innovative about your research.


'Polish labour migrants in the UK' (BBC documentary, Parts 5-7 of 7) (2012-09-04 08:00)

Continued:

Part 5

[EMBED] Part 6 [EMBED] Part 7 [EMBED]

Why sexual people don’t get asexuality and why it matters (2012-09-05 08:00)

I had three initial aims with my asexuality research: mapping out community in a ideographically adequate way, understanding the role the internet played in the formation of the community and exploring what the reception of asexuality reveals about sexual culture. There’s still more I want to write in relation to the first two points but I’ve basically drawn my conclusions at this point. Which means that my interest in asexuality has basically transmuted into an interest in how sexual people react to asexuality. This sounds much more obscure than it actually is.

In essence I’m arguing that the reactions of sexual people to asexuality reveal the architectonic principle of contemporary sexual culture, namely the sexual assumption: the usually unexamined presupposition that sexual attraction is both universal (everyone ‘has it’) and uniform (it’s fundamentally the same thing in all instances) such that its absence must be explicable in terms of a distinguishable pathology. This is instantiated at the level of both the cultural system and socio-cultural interaction: it’s entailed propositionally, even if not asserted outright, within prevailing lay and academic discourses pertaining to sexuality but it’s also reproduced by individuals in interaction (talking about sex, either in the abstract or in terms of their own experience) and intraaction (making sense of their own experience through internal conversation).

Until the asexual community came along, the ideational relationship (the logical structure internal to academic and lay discourses about sex) and patterns of socio-cultural interaction (the causal structure stemming from thought and talk about sex) reinforced one another. Or to drop the critical realist terminology: the sexual assumption got reproduced at the level of ideas because nothing conflicted with it at the level of experience. But when something comes along which empirically repudiates it (namely the asexual community) the underlying principle suddenly becomes contested. This doesn’t mean discourse ‘makes’ sexual people not get ‘asexuality’ but it does mean that, given the centrality of the sexual assumption to our prevailing ways of understand sexuality, being confronted with asexuality immediately invites explanation. One such explanation is to drop the ideational commitment but, given that its usually tacit, few people (including myself) can do this immediately - though many, it seems, do so once they’ve reflected upon it. Instead the usual response is to evade the logical conflict by explaining away asexuality: its
a hormone deficiency, the person was sexually abused, they’re lying, they’re gay but repressed, they’ve just not met the right person yet (etc).

The empirical evidence of quite how pervasive, indeed near universal, this kind of reaction is seems increasingly conclusive. What I am suggesting is that the sexual assumption is what explains this being a 'kind' of reaction i.e. all the explanations, in spite of their superficial differences in content, involve a reassertion of the uniformity and/or universality of sexual attraction. I'm not saying people are deliberately or consciously defending the sexual assumption (though I'm not categorically saying no one will ever be doing this) but rather that it is this, as the foundational assumption 'holding together' the conceptual architecture of the sexual culture which has emerged from the mid/late 20th century onwards, which asexuality renders problematic. The precise content of any given individual's attempts to explain away asexuality varies depending on the specifics of their personal and intellectual history within this sexual culture (i.e. it's not a homogenous thing) but the shared form of the response is explained by the architectonic principle of that culture and the logical relation of contradiction in which it stands to the empirical observation of asexual individuals who are 'normal' (i.e. non pathological). Logical relations don't force people to act (some people don't try and explain it away) but everyone who has not experienced what David Jay calls the 'head-clicky thing' has the same initial reaction. The above is my first attempt to offer a convoluted social theorists explanation of what I mean when, in interviews, I talk about sexual people not 'getting' asexuality. If you follow my chain of reasoning then, I ask of you, test it out: go and read the comments on the Guardian article I linked to and think about the reactions of people on there and what they have in common. Or do the same with pretty much any news article which has comments that I've encountered. There is something really fucking interesting happening there.


1. http://www.markcarrigan.net/

Why have other VCs not been making the case for UK higher education in the media over the last two years? (2012-09-05 15:40)

Prof Malcolm Gillies, VC of London Met, [1]appeared on Radio 4's Today yesterday morning and aggressively challenged the [2]recent controversial actions of the UKBA. This appearance was also picked up in the [3]Guardian and no doubt in other places as well. Leaving aside the particular details of this case, an obvious question occurs: why have other VCs not been making the case for UK higher education in the media over the last two years? Presumably Malcolm Gillies perceives the UKBA's actions as an existential threat to London Met. But as as the [4]Campaign for the Public University's John Holmwood [5]put it at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year, people are going into their offices and going into classes every day as if it's business as usual. But 'business as usual' is the complete undermining of higher education. The sector as a whole has been confronted with an existential threat and yet the VCs have been silent. It's a complacency which is paralleled throughout UK
higher education. But it’s much more problematic in their case both because of the failure of leadership it represents and the strikingly obvious fact that, as Gillies has demonstrated, VCs can get into the media to push a political case contrary to government policy if they are actually willing to try.


2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/03/london-metropolitan-university-ukba-student-visa-rules
3. http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/sep/04/london-met-university-contest-visa

The power of association, subvocalization and Morgan Freeman (2012-09-06 08:00)
'Story of cosmetics' (video) (2012-09-06 13:00)

Do you remember [1]"The Story of Stuff"? There is no need to extol the importance of historical context for those who want to understand how the world works, and why it works the way it does. Check out the Story of Stuff’s webpage ([2]http://www.storyofstuff.org/) and their [3]YouTube channel. Here is another one of the interesting historical summaries, this time on the history of something as ubiquitous and taken for granted as cosmetics:

![The Story of Cosmetics](http://www.youtube.com/embed/pfq000AF1i8)

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3. watch?v=9GorqroiqM
4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/pfq000AF1i8](http://www.youtube.com/embed/pfq000AF1i8)
Overseas Students Uncertainty (2012-09-07 08:00)

London Metropolitan University has set up a help-line for overseas applicants as uncertainty still hangs over its right to recruit international students. With just weeks before the start of the term, London Met does not know whether it will be permitted to teach new or even existing overseas students. In an article by the [1]BBC, the university has already said that this lack of certainty has cost it £10m and risks sending “panic” among students. As a former “highly trusted sponsor”, London Met has had its status suspended in July – which has prevented it from being allowed to recruit overseas students.

At present, there has been no decision on whether the licence will be revoked or reinstated – leaving the university in a state of limbo. Among other Higher Education providers, there have been other suspensions, but so far no UK University has been fully stripped of its ability to recruit overseas students. Recent Tory sanctions on overseas students have not only impacted new applicants, but will also affect thousands of existing international students at university, who might be in their second or third year.

According to information published by the UKBA, if a university has its licence withdrawn, overseas students have permission to stay in the UK for 60 days. During this period, students would have to find another university or college to sponsor them.

As stated [2]elsewhere, overseas students have become a vital source of income for universities – and blocking them will have serious financial implications. The National Union of Students has called for immediate clarification about the consequences for students "plunged into disarray" by reports that London Met’s licence would be withdrawn. "This situation is already costing real students, real money and real distress," said NUS president Liam Burns.

London Metropolitan University vice chancellor Malcolm Gillies said: “To learn that we might have our highly trusted sponsor status revoked via a newspaper, with the panic that this can cause for thousands of students, is outrageous." University leaders have called for students to be removed from the immigration figures, but this has been rejected by Tory ministers.

Dr Yaz Osho specialises in the politics of ‘race’ and racism, SME entrepreneurship, media representation, the sociology of work and racialized offline vs online identity politics. She has taught at Middlesex University, UEL, Goldsmiths, University of Westminster and was a Senior Visiting Fellow at the University of Sussex.

1324
SI weekend reading: sleep and society (2012-09-08 08:00)

1. "SI weekend reading: Sleep and Society" on Bundlr

   http://bundlr.com/b/si-weekend-reading-sleep-and-society

A Taste of TED Books (2012-09-09 08:00)

IFRAMEx 1.http://www.youtube.com/embed/j-5y1QoswKo

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/j-5y1QoswKo
"The independent artist and intellectual are among the few remaining personalities equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely lively things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity continually to unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communications swamp us. These worlds of mass-art and mass-thought are increasingly geared to the demands of politics. That is why it is in politics that intellectual solidarity and effort must be centred. If the thinker does not relate himself to the value of truth in political struggle, he cannot responsibly cope with the whole of live experience."

- C. Wright Mills in 'The Social Role of the Intellectual'

Tanguerramama (2012-10-04 16:58:10)
What is the full citation for this quote (e.g. page number)?

Sociological Imagination (2012-10-05 11:25:30)
I assume the essay has probably turned up in more than one book! My version is in the Politics of Truth (which I don't have with me). The essay is not v long so if you find it, you'll easily find that extract and it's worth reading the whole thing!
**Call for Micro Podcasts** *(2012-09-09 17:54)*

Over the last couple of years we've hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We'd like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:


It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

2. [http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed](http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

**Internet Social Media Addiction: 20 Symptoms?** *(2012-09-10 08:00)*

We all make so many excuses for spending so much time online. For many people this is not a cause for anxiety at all. We are increasingly cyborgian, and any wish to return to the old ways (3-5 years ago) is nothing but a futile, hopeless and romantic nostalgia.

But what are the warning signs that we have been *imprisoned* by our screens? Is it possible that the addiction to social media could be harming our physical, mental and spiritual world. I would be the first to admit that there are worse activities such as mindlessly TV channel-surfing.

Having allocated myself a timetable that now stipulates a progressive increase in my time away from the screen I have noticed an improvement in my general health and sense of well-being. Perhaps the experience of having recovered from cancer last year has led me to rethink the primacy of direct interaction with people, rather than digital mediation. I’m certainly not a luddite by any means, but I may well be an online social media recovering addict.
Don’t take this too seriously.

So here is my personal and rather intuitive list of symptoms that might be associated with an unhealthy addiction. Have you experienced any of these symptoms in the last year? Or perhaps you have noticed these characteristics in other people?

- Repetitive Strain Injury
- Back Pains and other discomfort associated with a screen-based lifestyle
- Delusional sense of exhilaration associated with the online flow of interactions
- Being online is my first activity of the day
- Being online is my last activity of the day
- Spending an hour or more online without being aware of the passage of time
- Less comfortable with face-to-face encounters
- Sense of being awed or overwhelmed by the abundance offered by the internet
- Being online while you are speaking to friends or family on the phone
- Being online while watching TV, or listening to music
- Convinced that multi-tasking is an effective way to work
- Decreased length and frequency of direct encounters with people
- Increase in weight, BMI, or change in body shape and general fitness
- Constantly mobile connected and status updating
- Missing deadlines for work, or failing to meet your own objectives
- Increased tendency to procrastinate, with less efficient productivity
- Increase in irritability, stress, and anxiety; decrease in patience and listening skills
- Frequently checking in online, at every opportunity
- Sense that life is becoming fragmentary or hollow
- Decreased attention span and ability to focus on major project requiring sustained effort
- Preference for micro-engagement rather than in depth reflection.

Originally posted on Ian McCormick’s [1]blog

Stats and critical theory... (2012-09-10 14:00)

(from, surprisingly enough, [1]fuckyeahsociologystudentsheep)

CfP: Centre for the Study of Women and Gender @SocioWarwick Seminar Series 2012/2013 (2012-09-11 13:00)

The Centre for the Study of Women and Gender at the University of Warwick will host a Graduate Seminar Series in the academic year 2012/2013. We would like to invite postgraduate students working in, but not limited to the following areas:

- Media, Culture and Gender Representations
- Work and Family
- (Trans)national Gender
- Intersections of Gender, 'Race', Class, Disability and Age
- Gender, Transgender and Sexualities
- Feminism and Women’s Rights
- Men and Masculinities
• Feminist Methodologies
• New Media and Digital Technologies

We welcome submissions, both conventional and innovative, from any disciplines on gender related topics. Seminars will take place on two or three Wednesdays per term in the afternoon (dates and timings TBC). Each presenter will be allocated 30 minutes: 20 minutes presentation and 10 minutes discussion. Attendance is open to everyone.

The seminar series aims to:

• Foster discussions on topics of gender
• Provide a safe and comfortable space for students to present their research
• Create an opportunity to fine-tune presentation skills

Abstracts should be:

• Maximum 200 words
• Submitted along with a brief biography of the author; including their institution, department, and research interests
• Submitted by Friday the 14th of September, 2012

Please email abstracts to [1]cswgseminarseries@gmail.com. Abstracts will be peer reviewed. If successful, you will hear from us by Friday the 28th of September, 2012 and will be allocated to a seminar between October 2012 and June 2013.

If you have any further questions, please do email us.

Yours sincerely,

CSWG Organising Committee

[2]cswgseminarseries@gmail.com
'Why do the working class in Britain die young?' (Documentary, 1988) (2012-09-12 08:00)

This BBC documentary from 1988 explores class inequalities in the lifespan and quality of life of UK citizens. What has changed today?

Click the link to watch the documentary:

[1]Why do the working class in Britain die young?>

Click [2]HERE to find a whole treasure trove of BBC programmes and documentaries about working class Britain from the past 60 years.

Curatorial / curation tools (2012-09-12 14:00)

[1]"Curatorial / curation tools" on Bundlr

The Rapid Growth of Walmart (2012-09-13 08:00)

This great video shows the disturbingly viral growth of Walmart. If you fancy watching something serious which sheds some light on the quantified trend seen below, check out [1]this documentary. If you fancy watching something rather less serious which nonetheless also sheds some light on this, check [2]this out.
Benjamin Geer (2012-09-13 14:20:29)

So it looks as though Wal-Mart started out as a red-state phenomenon before spreading to the rest of the country?

BSA Presidential Event: ‘Understanding the financial crisis: sociology, political economy and heterodox economics’ (2012-09-13 14:26)

BSA Presidential Event, together with FESSUD and the British Library:

‘Understanding the financial crisis: sociology, political economy and heterodox economics’
The event will take place at the British Library Conference Centre, London on Monday 8th October 2012 between 10am - 4.10pm

Speakers include: Andrew Brown (Leeds University Business School), Mathew Bond (London South Bank University), Julie Froud (Manchester Business School), Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra (LSE), Malcolm Sawyer (Leeds University Business School), David Spencer (Leeds University Business School), Alberto Toscano (Goldsmiths University of London), Zsuzsanna Vargha (LSE)

The financial crisis of 2008 has been longstanding in its consequences and seemingly intractable in its resolution. It is widely understood to have arisen from the de-regulation of financial institutions and the emergence of increasingly complex financial instruments as well as a culture of risk associated with high rewards. The crisis took the discipline of economics by surprise leading to the Queen’s question of why there had been a failure to predict it. One response from a seminar organised by the British Academy concluded that it was "principally a failure of the collective imagination of many bright people, both in this country and internationally, to understand the risks to the system as a whole" ([1]http://media.ft.com/cms/3e3b6ca8-7a08-11de-b86f-00144f0eabd0.pdf). The present seminar is an exercise in alternative imaginations, both in accounting for the crisis and in providing alternatives.


1. [http://media.ft.com/cms/3e3b6ca8-7a08-11de-b86f-00144f0eabd0.pdf](http://media.ft.com/cms/3e3b6ca8-7a08-11de-b86f-00144f0eabd0.pdf)
2. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-presidential-event.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-presidential-event.aspx)

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**Accidental sociologists (2012-09-14 08:00)**

Today I stumbled across an interesting biographical account by Sarah Burton, sociology postgraduate researcher, entitled [1]The Accidental Sociologist. Sarah writes that she - as, it seems, a great many other sociologists - ended up in sociology 'by chance'. She wonders whether 'sociology is where people go when they simply want to delve into ideas that fascinate them'. It was great to read someone else asking the same question that I have asked myself, so perhaps I ought to take the chance to share my own answer to it.

[2]

1334
To me, sociology is far more than a place just reserved for fascinating ideas. It is where people go to ask questions and seek answers not simply to fascinating questions, but to important questions that otherwise remain hidden from us. Sociology is a toolbox for answering questions that we are not supposed to ask or know about - because the way society functions obscures them from us in daily life. Some of these questions can initially seem dull or boring, but can be immensely important, yet others are fascinating for their own sake. Sociology is a meeting place for important questions that concern all of us and that we, as participants in society, have a hard time even noticing: to paraphrase Marx, it is hard to see the ground beneath your own feet. And it is these questions that hide the potential for social change. I suppose, Marx must have influenced my particular way of seeing sociology because I cannot help but recall another phrase of his: that philosophers have hitherto interpreted the world, while the point (of sociology) is to change it. The amazing thing is, that 'let's change the world' is not the only type of sociology out there. There is space for observation, analysis, change, calculation, provocation, images, art, and anything else you can think of.

Now, how did I end up in sociology? Just like Sarah, accidentally, thanks to a peculiar constellation of personal and institutional reasons, and as a result of being fascinated by too many things. Thinking back, all those reasons seem far less compelling than they seemed at the time.
Tracing my academic path leads me back to high school in early post-1989 Bulgaria, where my favourite subjects were mathematics and English. If asked what I wanted to be, I would hesitate, but in all honesty I would probably admit that I would most enjoy studying either linguistics (especially English or Scandinavian), or math. However, everyone I spoke to seemed convinced that studying English philology would amount to becoming an unemployed English teacher, and studying math for the math, and not as part of, say, a course in economics, somehow did not even cross my horizon. Economics didn’t seem very interesting. Being an unemployed English teacher seemed a less dull, but more frustrating and frowned upon by my family, career choice. After much hesitation in my last year of school I chose to specialise in Bulgarian literature and History (the equivalent of UK A-levels) in order to study law. I did not know what sociology was. Well, I did, in a way... I thought it was election polling and questionnaires and pie charts. Little did I know that sociology was nothing of the kind!
My exam grades were not enough to get me into either Law or International Relations. I ended up in a close third, the then new subject European Studies. In 2000, Bulgaria was an European Union accession country and this was a popular new course aimed to prepare much wanted specialists for many areas in which knowledge of EU-integration and the way the EU works were required. But I didn't know that we were prepared to be Eurobureaucrats. I had misinterpreted the course outline and had assumed that it would focus on philosophy, literature, and European languages. Its actual focus on law, economics, and the history of the EU came as something of a surprise. As sociology would later confirm, institutions are never what they say on the tin, but are inhabited by people, defined by conventions. Despite my initial dismay (and the decision to always from then on read at least the large print carefully), the European Studies degree turned out to be a very good course. Although it was new (I was part of only the second year in which the course ran), it had attracted an ambitious group of some 40 students, some fantastic teachers and professors, and an amazing head of department. I enjoyed the studies and the crowd. My favourite subjects were taught by sociologists and a cultural studies professor. We could also study two or more languages, so I took up advanced English and medium German, as before, but my time was devoted to beginners French, at which I did very fervently and equally badly. Knowing when to give up has never been my strength - c'est la vie! I also worked part-time: in several small NGO projects funded by the EU's accession funds, as a PHARE project assessor, and as audience in a TV debate show. But something was missing. I really don't know how to put it better: most subjects I studied seemed to give answers and shape my world, but what I wanted was to ask questions and break it all down. This is exactly how I think I ought to have ended up in sociology - if the world were a rational place. But it wasn't quite that straight-forward.

Anyway, I decided to take on a second university course in parallel with the first one. The university allowed two options: a partial second specialism in addition to your main degree, which for some unbeknownst to me reason was unavailable that year; and a full second degree in parallel. English and psychology, my first two choices, were both unavailable as second options due to oversubscription. This left sociology or philosophy, the next items on my list. After much agonising, I took up sociology - partly because of my favourite lecturers, and partly in a joint decision with my then partner, thanks to a complicated but seemingly convincing constellation of family and personal details. By the way, we are no longer an item, but both of us still work in sociology.

But this was not all. In the next four years, I completed my second degree in sociology, in parallel with finishing my first BA in European studies and a masters in the same. Although I did very well in all exams and really enjoyed the course, I never wrote a dissertation, so I don't actually have a BA in sociology - something I have to keep explaining on my CV! Six years after having started my studies, I finally really faced the job market. I worked 4h a day as a news abstractor, translating business news from German into English for one of Reuters' subsidiaries. It was a fun, but exhausting and badly paid job, which left me with very fast typing skills, the ability to translate from a language I don't know that well, and a lingering Internet addiction which I am still fighting. And then, in another strike of biographic accident, my former English teacher and friend nudged me to apply for a scholarship to study in a UK university. I did - by the time I applied, the only available place was Warwick. Well, I thought - Warwick seems pretty cool, so I applied, even though chances were very slim. I got to the interview stage, but the interview went, I thought, really badly: I had got myself into an argument over social policy towards ethnic minorities with the interviewer. Unexpectedly, I got the place. Perhaps the argument hadn't been that bad. In the autumn of 2006, still an overseas student as my country was not in the EU, I found myself studying Social and Political Thought at Warwick with an Open Society Institute / Chevening scholarship. This was far too amazing not to make good use of it. I loved the course, the department, the university, and the country, so I decided to stay. In another stroke of luck and university funding, I had the chance to continue with a PhD in sociology for which - using another 'accidental' configuration of personal and institutional opportunities - I returned to Bulgaria to do a study of the careers and experiences of seafarers and transformations of the post-socialist maritime labour market.
In other words, 'me and sociology' really was not a rational, thought through, straight-forward encounter. It was all stumbling in the dark, and never finding quite the right alley, and yet moving forward somehow. And yet, it now seems like the best place for me - that is, the most intellectually uncomfortable, uncertain, and baffling subject imaginable.

How did YOU end up in Sociology - as a researcher, university student or even in school? Did you always know that you wanted to study sociology? Was it curiosity? Or was it 'by chance'? Comment on this post, [17]tweet your thoughts or [18]email us your story and we will post it on SI.

Editor’s note: Mark also stumbled across the same post, also thought it was great and asked Sarah to write for the site. Her new column, The Accidental Sociologist, starts on Monday.

Assistant Editor’s note: Fantastic news! Welcome, Sarah!

1. http://florapostwrites.wordpress.com/2012/08/30/the-accidental-sociologist/
6. http://www.springerlink.com/content/tgt53560r541u806/
10. Phare
11. Internet_addiction_disorder
12. www.soros.org
13. 1338
Eugene Borys (2012-10-15 14:16:34)
I am 45 years old and when I decided to go back to school and get my GED, I did so passed with flying colors. I was accepted to Penn State University, accidentally I came across Sociology. I am now in my 2nd semester as a Sophomore and I have been on the Deans list ever since. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else.

Milena Kremakova (2012-10-15 14:47:46)
Hi Eugene, Inspiring story, thanks for sharing! And well done. I wonder, what is it that you like best about your sociology course? And how do you find being back in school - does it feel like it is it the right time, or do you wish you’d done it earlier on? I often wish I had worked for a few years rather than going to university straight after school.

Sociology@Warwick (2012-09-14 15:30)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a [2]blog and [3]twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!

Christopher Hitchens - A Public Intellectual Who Matters (2012-09-14 22:19)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ArLdji0bEfM

SI Weekend Reading: The Death of Privacy (2012-09-15 08:00)

[1]"SI weekend reading: the death of privacy" on Bundlr

Les Back on the 2011 riots in the UK (2012-09-15 16:08)

We now have a Facebook page... (2012-09-16 08:00)

And we'll be ever so offended if you don't like it:

[1]The Sociological Imagination

And of course there's always Twitter:
And the Newswire and CWrightMills.

This is The Accidental Sociologist – a place in which I will be holding court on the wonderful myriad of ways in which getting somewhere entirely by happenstance can result in great things. The column has its origins in a [1]blog post I wrote explaining my inadvertent but fortuitous stumbling upon the discipline during my postgraduate studies. Before falling (occasionally literally, I am rather clumsy) into sociology I was spending my time working on a assortment of haphazard creative projects including novel editing, band promo, theatre production, e-learning, and reading. I think in some circles this last item is referred to as a Master’s in English Literature.

I was well on my way to being a PhD in English Literature: I had a project, a supervisor and a bit of funding. All that stood between me and a completed thesis on the femme fatale in second wave British Golden Age detective fiction was three years of graft and a modicum of starvation. If I’d taken that road I’d be done by now.

Chilling thought. Ultimately I decided that my heart wasn’t in it – that while the project was intriguing, it just wasn’t something that I could really be passionate about. It’s akin to the kind of date you enjoy but who doesn’t get invited in for wine and extras. Instead of that I decided to get a proper job. That didn’t go so well either. By the point at which I’d set myself up for said proper job (being an English teacher) I was aching to be back in academia. Teacher training left me with brilliant stories - mostly involving teenage boys and libido – and the desire to finally get my thesis written. I decided that I needed to be more adventurous in order to find the right place for my work and the right topic to carry me through the gruelling years ahead. Somehow, through a process of cataloguing Stuff I Like Reading and people who’s work I was jealous of them having done, and sifting through supervision areas of academics across history, philosophy, politics, law, psychology - the list continues - I ended up in sociology. Entirely by accident. It means that I sort of have to start over – my new department has this notion that I should learn some actual sociology before they let me loose on a doctorate. So from next week I’m doing (another) Master’s in Sociology and Research Methods, followed by PhD.
This blog has two functions. Firstly, it’s going to feature my forays into formal study of sociology and map out the voyage from arts education to being a true social scientist (bearing in mind that I’m not even certain this will happen). It will embrace all areas of academic development including conferences, publishing and professional development. It will also be a place to find advice on postgraduate study in sociology. I’m going to be writing some surgery-style pieces on topics such as finding the best conferences to present at, writing an abstract, getting your presentation skills sharpened and keeping your sanity intact. I’m also going to be putting your questions to academics in the field and getting expert, tried-and-tested answers.

My academic interests centre around narratives of the grotesque body and their relationship to sexual citizenship. I spend a fair portion of my time thinking about vagina dentatas, leakiness, obstinacy, wilfulness and all things queer(ed). I’m fascinated by how we go about writing our own sociological narratives – how intimate imagination becomes theory and where the self goes when you write in the objective third person. Outside of academia I privilege decadence in all its forms. I like my steak blue and my vodka martini dirty. So, pull up an easy chair, pour a dram of your particular poison and feel free to get in touch with your questions and stories. The Accidental Sociologist doesn’t stand on ceremony.

Sarah Burton is a postgraduate student at the University of Glasgow and has research interests in narratives of the grotesque body, especially in relation to power. She is also Co-Convenor of the British Sociological Association Postgraduate Forum.


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juliette (2013-05-16 09:35:02)
Just found this! I too have come from English Lit background, and I’m currently doing a PhD in Sociology. Now to read your road map on how to be an accidental sociologist :) I’m hoping it will save me time!

______________________________

Can Google Autocomplete Tell Me .... (2012-09-18 08:00)

As the psychologist Meg Barker suggests in her new book, [1]Rewriting the Rules, looking at the most common words which Google uses to complete the phrase "how can I get my boyfriend/girlfriend to ... " can be a fun way of examining pervasive ideas about gender and relationships:
It also offers an interesting perspective on the US elections:

However it gets downright weird when applied to UK politics. Or at least when applied to leader of the opposite Ed Miliband. Addicted to Wigwams? Made of Magnets? Perhaps we shouldn’t take this too seriously. Either the autocomplete algorithm can be gamed or there are some extremely strange politically themed web memes out there. Google are, perhaps unsurprisingly, [2]rather vague about the specific factors determining autocompletion results.
Using NVivo: a one day crash course for qualitative researchers, Fri 9th Nov (2012-09-18 14:00)
9:30am to 5:30pm, Friday 9th November at the [1]Manchester Digital Laboratory

Suitable for complete beginners or those who need a refresher, this intensive one day course will cover all the core functionality of NVivo:

- An overview of the software
- Managing and importing your data
- Coding strategies and techniques
- Analysing visual and multimedia data
- Using memos effectively
- Using annotations and see also links
- Relationships and modelling
- Querying your data
- Managing the complexity of your project

£50 for PhD Students, £100 for all others

Press below to go to the booking form:

All participants will receive an electronic resource pack which covers the material from the course and provides guidance on continuing to develop proficiency with the software. To take part you will need a laptop with NVivo installed. A 30 day free trial of NVivo 10 is available from the [3]QSR website.
To keep costs down lunch is not included. But the venue is in the heart of Manchester’s famous Northern Quarter and is surrounded by excellent cafes and bars. There will also be LOTS of tea and coffee.

If you are a wheelchair user and are interested in this training event, please contact me and I’ll try to arrange a session which can accommodate you.

Mark Carrigan has taught NVivo extensively at the University of Warwick and acted as a NVivo trainer and consultant for the EU FP7 funded MYPLACE project. For more information see his [4]website. Please feel free to get in touch via [5]e-mail or [6]twitter if you have any questions.

1. http://madlab.org.uk/
2. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/4352570656?ref=ebtn
5. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

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Žižek Talks About The Dark Knight Rises (2012-09-19 08:00)

3. http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/08/slavoj-%C5%BEi%C5%BEek-politics-batman

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SI Profile: Žižek (2012-09-19 12:00)

[1]"SI Profile: Žižek" on Bundlr


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Twitter for academics (2012-09-20 08:00)

What’s the point of Twitter?

Twitter has an image problem. It first penetrated the public consciousness in a way which has left it defined by celebrities and, particularly for academics, this is unattractive. However the academic twittersphere (for lack of a better term) is a relatively self-enclosed ecosystem. While you’ll undoubtedly find a bit of celebrity gossip and X-Factor chat, this is strikingly absent in comparison to Twitter more broadly. In fact, academics are using Twitter in all manner of creative and useful ways. These are some of the responses I received when I posed the question “why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?” to my followers on the service:

- Quick answers to questions on things like ... where do I find this tool or that tool .. (@rjhogue)
- We discuss concepts (@Annlytical)
- There are people who are practicing what I’m researching academically and give me a reality check (@Annlytical)
- Twitter is brilliant for keeping up with things, networking, finding new ideas, people’s blogs and publications (@BenGuilbaud)
- meeting new people (in all disciplines), academic support, public engagement, increased visibility, filtered news (@Martin _Eve)
It’s difficult to convey the point of Twitter. Partly this is a result of the inadequacy of ‘micro-blogging’ as a concept: it doesn’t get across what such a service is, how it can be used or what value these uses have. Twitter is a profoundly practical service and yet it is difficult to convey this because much of the terminology, interface and minutiae of Twitter are inherently confusing until you have engaged with the service. Furthermore, the somewhat steep learning curve isn’t a very attractive proposition to time-poor academics.

So why should you make the leap? The only reason I can give is that people just like you are finding the service astoundingly useful. The reasons cited above represent a small fraction of the uses to which academics are already putting Twitter and, at present, academic usage of the service is still in its infancy. Why not give it a go? All the evidence suggests you’ll find at least some uses for it.

The LSE Impact Blog has created a list of active academic tweeters. If you want to see for yourself what all the fuss is about, sign up and follow all the people you can find in these lists who work in your area, as well as any others who look interesting. Say hello, post some links to your work and explore a bit. It’s possible that you’ll find Twitter simply isn’t for you. In which case, what have you lost? However it’s much more likely that you’ll join the ever-growing numbers who are finding that Twitter is the most natural social networking service for academics.

How academics should use Twitter

The fact Twitter offers no real tools to control who follows you is a source of concern for some academics. In part this might be a function of a broader reticence towards online publishing. However I think it also stems from how Twitter is conceived as a medium. If you are presenting at a conference, you wouldn’t obsess about the identity
of each person in the audience. There might be a variety of reasons why you are presenting: sharing your ideas, promoting your work, connecting with others in your field. At any conference, these motives only partially overlap. The reasons for each individual being there varies but nonetheless everyone is working within the same constraints of how the sessions are organised within a physical venue.

Twitter is no different. It’s a spot on the internet that’s staked out as yours. What you do with it is up to you. Some people choose to wander over to their podium every now and again, make an announcement and then wander off. Some people give their presentation at the podium and then leave, only returning when they want to give another. Some do their presentation but thrive on the Q &A afterwards. Some might not like the feel of the podium and eschew a formal presentation to go and chat more directly with their audience. Likewise some people just want to listen and ask questions of other speakers. Others would rather ditch the conference and go straight to relaxing at the pub.

Most academic users of Twitter fall into one or more of these categories. Likewise people move between categories. But the interpersonal dimensions of it are fundamentally no different to a conference. It’s just that the form of communication is so dramatically concise, as well as lacking any direct parallel other than the text message, that until you’ve been using it for a long time, it’s difficult to see quite how much like everyday life it is. So don’t be anxious about it. If you want to use it to draw attention to your work then stop worrying about who follows you and just restrict your tweets to topics you would discuss in a formal work setting. If you want to connect with other people who have similar interests then just tweet about the things that interest you and respond when others do the same, just as you would in any other setting. If you want to get drunk and gossip then go ahead, just remember that people might overhear you and that, on twitter, what you’ve said echoes in the room for a little while before it dissipates.

The same rules of interaction apply on Twitter as they do offline. If someone habitually goes over time for their talk, monologuing at an increasingly bored audience then people in the audience will eventually leave and new audience members won’t stay for long. If someone gives a good talk but obviously resents the Q &A afterwards, people might sit in the audience because of intellectual interest but they’ll think the speaker is a bit rude. If someone turns up, loudly and briefly announces their new book/paper/insight and then leaves the conference, people won’t pay much attention, unless they’re a globe trotting academic superstar. While the norms of interaction which apply to Twitter as a medium are still in their infancy, the nature of that interaction isn’t radically new.

This article was originally posted on the [4]LSE Impact Blog

1. http://t.co/hD1IFBYF
3. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-DoKA2RGRY

» This Week's Most Popular Posts The Sociological Imagination (2013-09-30 10:01:47)
 [...] Twitter for academics [...]
Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-09-20 16:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:

It was recorded with [Audioboo](http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed) which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is e-mail or tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

2. [http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed](http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

What about the authors who can’t pay? Why the government’s embrace of gold open access isn’t something to celebrate (2012-09-21 08:00)

Sometimes I worry that Twitter is an echo chamber, reflecting my own prejudices back at me and shielding me from contrasting views. On other occasions though, I find this same characteristic immensely comforting. Such as when reading that the government has officially embraced the recommendations of the Finch report and finding that other PhD students and early career researchers were just as dismayed by this news as I was. Leaving aside the broader issues pertaining to gold open access, which in practice simply redistributes costs within a broken system without challenging the underlying commercial premise, there’s one particular question posed by this chain of events which is the cause of my current dread about the future of academic publishing: what about the authors who can’t pay?

I fear that academic publishing could come to resemble the perilous landscape that PhDs and ECRs are only too familiar with at present. The competition for postdoctoral funding is ever increasing, leading to continual inflation of the things you need on your CV to stand a chance, yet without funding it’s very difficult to actually achieve these
prerequisites. Or in other words: the best way to get postdoctoral funding is to already have it. Could we see something similar happening with publications? If authors are dependent on their institutions and/or funding bodies to pay the substantial fees required under gold open access then those who already have a job and funding will find it easier to publish and thereby increase their chances of getting another job and more funding. Much as the post doctoral funding climate creates virtuous cycles, so too will the publishing climate, as a whole swathe of early career academics will find themselves untroubled by article processing charges. From their perspective, open access of this form will be great: it doesn’t pose problems and it means their research is freely available. On the other hand, what of those who find themselves excluded? If your funding is patchy or non-existent how can you compete? Is it even going to be possible to be an independent researcher in any meaningful sense?

In a climate where freelance, part-time and fixed term contracts are increasingly the norm within academia, the extent to which the government’s announcement is retrograde cannot be overstated. Such a radical increase in the dependence of researchers upon their institution has profound consequences for those who do ‘make it’, leaving aside the many who seem likely to be wholly or partially swept aside for the reasons discussed above. With funding bodies increasingly focused around narrow priority areas, often tied to short term political whims to a truly abominable degree, themselves falling into homology with priority areas within universities, naturally aiming to increase their success in winning funding from these bodies, what becomes of research that falls into a non-priority area? What becomes of independent research full stop? Will there be funding available to cover author fees? Will there be conditions attached to it? How will the inevitable rationing work?

Even assuming the best will and highest managerial acumen in the world, these yet unanswered questions paint a picture of the future university, which I find far from appealing. What of the willingness to dissent and speak up at a time when economic instability looks set to continue indefinitely? With academics even more reliant on universities, as one of the two potential sources of author fees, will they be willing to resist? Or will the disciplining of academic labour, already entrenched in multifaceted ways with many personal consequences, simply continue?

This article originally appeared on the LSE Impact Blog

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/jul/15/free-access-british-scientific-research

BSA Theory – Early Career Theorists’ Symposium, Apr 2013, London (2012-09-21 14:00)
BSA Theory Study Group: Early Career Theorists’ Symposium

2nd April, 2013, London

Call for Abstracts

1352
The Early Career Theorists' Symposium is a special one-day symposium for up-and-coming theorists, organized by the Theory Study Group of the British Sociological Association. This symposium aims to bring together sociologists at a relatively early stage in their careers who work on theory or are engaged in original theoretical work as part of their ongoing research. We invite early-career sociologists, across all research areas, to submit abstracts. Submissions from advanced PhD students are also welcome.

**Professors Mike Savage, Celia Lury, and John Holmwood** will comment on the presentations.

Complete information for submitting the abstract will consist of:

1. name and contact information of the author;
2. title of your presentation;
3. a 500-word abstract of the presentation;
4. three or more keywords descriptive of the presentation.

To encourage a wide range of submissions, we have not pre-specified a theme for the conference. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes.

Please send submissions to the organizers: Dr Gurminder K Bhambra, University of Warwick ([1]G.K.Bhambra@warwick.ac.uk) and Dr Monika Krause, Goldsmiths College, ([2]m.krause@gold.ac.uk).

The deadline for submission is **1st November 2012**.

Invitations to present will be extended by 15th November. Please plan to share a full paper by 10th March, 2013. Registration for the event will be free for BSA members or for anyone already registered for the BSA annual conference; there will be a charge of £20 for all other attendees.

This event is timed to coincide with the BSA annual conference and is a supplement to it in terms of providing a dedicated space for early career theorists to meet and discuss their research. For more information about the BSA annual conference and to also submit an abstract to the main conference, see here: [3]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx

1. mailto:G.K.Bhambra@warwick.ac.uk
2. mailto:m.krause@gold.ac.uk
SI weekend reading: Golden Dawn (2012-09-22 08:00)

[1]“SI weekend reading: Golden Dawn” on Bundlr


Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-09-23 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the 'Sociological Imagination' still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the 'Sociological Imagination' mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

1354
Using NVivo: a one day crash course for qualitative researchers, Fri 9th Nov (2012-09-23 14:00)

9:30am to 5:30pm, Friday 9th November at the [1]Manchester Digital Laboratory

Suitable for complete beginners or those who need a refresher, this intensive one day course will cover all the core functionality of NVivo:

- An overview of the software
- Managing and importing your data
- Coding strategies and techniques
- Analysing visual and multimedia data
- Using memos effectively
- Using annotations and see also links
- Relationships and modelling
- Querying your data
- Managing the complexity of your project

£50 for PhD Students, £100 for all others

Press below to go to the booking form:

[2]

All participants will receive an electronic resource pack which covers the material from the course and provides guidance on continuing to develop proficiency with the software. To take part you will need a laptop with NVivo installed. A 30 day free trial of NVivo 10 is available from the [3]QSR website.

To keep costs down lunch is not included. But the venue is in the heart of Manchester’s famous Northern Quarter and is surrounded by excellent cafes and bars. There will also be LOTS of tea and coffee.
If you are a wheelchair user and are interested in this training event, please contact me and I’ll try to arrange a session which can accommodate you.

Mark Carrigan has taught NVivo extensively at the University of Warwick and acted as a NVivo trainer and consultant for the EU FP7 funded MYPLACE project. For more information see his [4]website. Please feel free to get in touch via [5]e-mail or [6]twitter if you have any questions.

1. http://madlab.org.uk/
2. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/4352570656?ref=ebtn
5. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Podcasts are a natural fit for communication of academic ideas (2012-09-24 08:00)

I first encountered the idea of academic podcasting when working for a University of Warwick based project a few years ago. It gave a small stipend to PhD students in exchange for producing a short podcast profiling the research of someone within the university, which was then edited and posted online by myself and the other conveners. This was the first time I’d ever considered the notion of podcasting about academic topics and I was instantly struck both by how fun it sounded and what a natural form of communication it was for academic ideas. Since my work on the project ended, I’ve continued to podcast as a hobby. As I’ve gone on, I’ve become ever more convinced that this is something which more people, particularly PhD students, would benefit from doing.

I’d undoubtedly be unsuccessful if I e-mailed a distinguished researcher to ask if we could meet up for a chat about their most recent book. Yet in the time I’ve been podcasting, I’ve sent precisely this sort of e-mail to scores of academics and none of them have turned me down. In some cases it has taken quite a long time to actually schedule the interview but all have, at least in principle, been willing to meet. It’s a chance to meet academics whose work you admire and explore the thinking behind their publications. It’s also a chance to range beyond your own research area, exploring topics you’d love to know more about if you had unlimited time to sit and read.

In this article I’ll focus on podcast interviews because it’s the type of podcast I’m most familiar with. It also requires the most thought. If you’re capable of successfully recording a podcast interview then you’re perfectly capable of recording a lecture, or anything else, as long as you think carefully about how to position the recorder and consider the more complex issues of consent involved, for example, I’m personally uncomfortable with recording questions from the audience, even if you ask at the start of the session whether this is ok.

How do you plan a podcast?

If you’re engaging intellectually with someone’s book or paper, it makes you the most natural interviewer in the world. Every question, idea and comment that’s occurred to you while reading someone’s work constitutes the raw material for an interview. Although it’s important to structure the podcast in a way which makes it accessible and enjoyable for the listener, what you need more than anything else is enthusiasm and engagement. If those conditions
are in place then the whole process will come to feel entirely natural, at least after you've done it a few times. If you have an idea for someone you’d like to interview then send them a quick e-mail, explaining what you want to do and why, then take it from there.

Reflecting on what I do when planning a podcast, I came to the eight questions below:

1. Who do you want to interview?
2. What do you want to interview them about?
3. Will you interview them on person or on Skype?
4. How long do you want the interview to be?
5. What topics do you want to ensure you cover?
6. Given your answer to (4) and (5), what questions do you need to ask?
7. Will you stick rigidly to the questions or ask follow ups on the spot?
8. Is your interviewee ok with your planned questions?

It’s worth noting that these are just suggestions. There are no rules to this, particularly given how new the format is. It is however worth thinking about what you want to achieve with the podcast. If you intend the podcast to be an exploration of specialist issues then it’s fine for it to be lengthy and even obscure. I’ve recorded some fairly substantial social theory interviews which, though not of interest to the vast majority of people who might stumble across them on my websites, nonetheless interest others who work in the area.

However if you intend to disseminate a set of ideas to as wide an audience as possible, it’s best to restrict the length of the podcast (e.g. 10 minutes), to not assume prior knowledge and to avoid specialist vocabulary. How you approach the podcast depends on what you want to achieve with it. Try not to obsess too much about form, after all this is effectively just an academic chat with an unusual degree of structure, just consider what the end result will be like and how it will be engaged with by others.

What do you need to podcast?

The technical skills involved in podcasting are minimal. Though, it should be noted, getting podcasts into iTunes is something which I’ve found fiddly and frustrating as someone who isn’t particularly technically minded. However the other aspects of the process are astoundingly quick and easy once you get to grips with them.

- Do you have a voice recorder? If not is there one you can borrow in your department? It's possible to podcast with a very basic voice recorder. Or indeed a smart phone: [1]www.audioboo.fm is great fun. Read the manual and explore the settings, as once you understand how to calibrate the recorder in the way most suitable for podcasting, you can largely forget about the technical side of the process and get on with the fun bit.
• If you’re recording a podcast via Skype then you need call recording software. I personally use the unimag-
inatively named Call Recorder which is simple and reliable. I’m sure there are also freeware alternatives available online. The advantage of a Skype podcast is, unsurprisingly, the ability to interview anyone anywhere in the world. Similarly, the flexibility it affords makes scheduling a lot easier. The downside is that a certain element of rapport is invariably lost, as there simply isn’t the same kind of interaction taking place without physical presence in the same space.

• I must admit that editing is the only part of the process I don’t enjoy. It’s not particularly demanding though. Audacity is free software which, though packed with features, remains easy to pick up as long as you screen out the 99% of the software which you won’t need to use as an academic podcaster. There are many video guides to using the software on Youtube. The only functionality I regularly use is deleting sections of the audio and amplifying the volume.

• If your voice recorder or Skype recorder doesn’t export files in MP3 then you’ll need a piece of software that can do this. There a range of options available online.

• If you are interviewing in person then you need a quiet space. In practice most academic offices can serve this purpose but it’s best to avoid conducting interviews at a particularly busy time of day and/or year. Likewise in summer it might be necessary to shut the windows in the office. The better the environment in which you record the interview, the less hassle you’ll have with the editing afterwards. The same point applies to positioning the voice recorder. Try and get the placement equal between the two speakers, as well as cautioning people to avoid moving too much if possible (chairs on wheels can be a bit of a danger here). If you’re new to the process and/or you’re using a lower-end recorder then it’s best to test the sound levels to save yourself difficulty later.

• Finally you need a place to host the podcast. It’s worth checking if your institution offers a way of uploading audio to your webpage, as many will. Likewise if your institution has a presence on iTunes U or any other central repository. Podcasts can also be posted easily on blogs and increasing numbers of multi-author blogs are hosting podcasts.

What else do you need to consider?

The sense that your podcasts need to be slickly produced can be a huge barrier to getting started. While some people may disagree with me, I think functional adequacy is the key here. We’re not media professionals, we’re researchers and the aim of academic podcasting is to communicate ideas rather than to impress the wider world with our flashy production skills. By all means do record elaborate introductions with jingles if it’s appealing to you to do so. My point is solely that these are in no way mandatory. Explore podcasting and find what works for you.

As someone who had done a lot of research interviews prior to starting podcasting, I’d already got past the stage of being unnerved by the sound of my own voice. However if this is new to you, don’t let it put you off. If you listen back to the podcast and think you sound silly/ponderous/strange (insert negative epithet here) it is completely normal and it goes away. Listening back can also be a good way to gauge if you are talking too quickly. If you think this might be a problem for you then practice with your voice recorder to get the pace right prior to your first podcast. Likewise avoid talking too much (unless the podcast is deliberately intended to be a dialogue rather than an interview). Use your questions as prompts to get the interviewees talking in the way want about the subjects you’re interested in. Avoid the temptation to cut in too frequently because the content is getting so interesting. I have to admit I don’t always manage to avoid doing this.
Finally, although norms of consent and ownership about academic podcasts are yet to be firmly established, remember to be respectful to your interviewee. Offer to let them check the podcast before you publish it and remind them that you an easily cut out sections they are unhappy with. Even if this means more editing work for you, it’s the least you can do given that they’ve offered their time & attention for the interview.

If you want a bit more guidance about podcasting, I’ve collected resources specifically geared towards academic podcasting [4]here. I’d particularly recommend the BSA PG Forum podcasting handbook. There’s also a lot of generic podcasting resources available online.

This article was originally posted on the [5]LSE Impact Blog

4. http://markcarrigan.net/podcasting-resources/
5. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/10/podcasts-natural-form-academic-ideas/

__________________________
Benjamin Geer (2012-09-24 09:58:22)
Could you give us some examples of great academic podcasts to inspire us?

Sociological Imagination (2012-09-24 18:05:51)
Here you go -> http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/category/podcasts

Benjamin Geer (2012-09-27 10:15:39)
Thanks!
Can't get a job with a sociology degree? (2012-09-24 12:00)

(via, surprisingly enough, [1]fuckyeahsociologystudentsheep)

"You will depart immediately before we set the dogs on you..." (2012-09-24 14:04)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/3w4tcIsaInE

Scholarly Publishing, Open Access and the 'Academic Spring' (2012-09-25 08:00)

[1]"Scholarly Publishing, Open Access and the 'Academic Spring'" on Bundlr

1. http://bundlr.com/b/scholarly-publishing-open-access-and-the-academic-spring
The Open Access movement gains momentum – should young scientists care? (2012-09-25 13:00)


1. http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/14081319
3. http://www.slideshare.net/ballaschk

The open access debate and what it means for researchers (2012-09-26 08:00)

Egypt 2011 vs Iraq 2003 (2012-09-27 08:00)

(from Mohandas Gandhi)
Sociology@Warwick (2012-09-27 12:00)

A quick flag up to any interested readers that the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick now has a blog and twitter feed. Although Sociological Imagination has no formal connection to the department, a number of people involved in the site are based there & many of the SI podcasts have been with academics in the department. So do check it out!


The Greatest Debate of the Decade - Christopher Hitchens vs. George Galloway. (2012-09-27 16:00)

What is a MOOC? (2012-09-28 08:00)

SI Weekend Reading: The Dawn of the MOOC (2012-09-29 08:00)

[1]“SI Weekend Reading: The Dawn of the MOOC” on Bundlr


Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-09-30 08:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:


It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
Shannon Meehan is a high school wrestling star and local hero in a home town struggling to retain its blue collar pride in the face of unceasing deindustrialisation. Meehan felt pushed towards leadership and heroism from an early age and with a proud veteran for a father he also felt, as he got older, pushed toward serving in the US army. Beyond Duty tells the story of Lieutenant Shannon Meehan’s tour of duty in Iraq.

Any reader will come away from Beyond Duty with a newfound appreciation of the complexities and ambiguities of warfare in the late modern world. One of the most harrowing stories recounted in the book is that of a raid on a house in Baqubah which goes tragically wrong; the American troops enter the house only to find that it was wired with a house-borne improvised explosive device (IED). Most of the troops that entered the house are severely injured by the explosion and the ensuing collapse of the roof. This however is not the end game, as the retreating Meehan finds himself under small arms fire and is, ultimately, victim to another IED from within the relative safety of his tank. He poignantly describes the simmering undercurrent of rage finally brought to the surface through the last attack in a night of personal tragedy,

"The enemy was far better organized than most people imagined, and they waited for us to leave to hit us one more time, to try to kill us with a final blow as we headed back to base to heal and recover. They were doing their jobs […] nonetheless I hated them. I hated them more than the men who planted the bomb in the house, and I wanted them dead. I did not want to be here. I simply wanted whoever had killed our men to be killed." (Meehan 2009: 129)

The reader is left with a profound sense of the extent to which the realistic appraisal of a complex situation can
co-exist with a primal desire for revenge. Meehan struggles throughout to reconcile his cultivated awareness of the complexities of the conflict, as ordinary and desperate Iraqi men are drawn into the resistance through varying promises of food, security and vengeance, with the inevitable emotional corollaries of his men being injured and killed.

He powerfully depicts the emotional toll of, as he puts it, “fighting to do the right thing in the face of uncertainty and the terrible truths of war” (Meehan 2009: 180). The most tragic element of the book is Meehan's dawning realisation that this difficulty is not some timeless truth of war but, in its sheer arduousness, relatively unique to contemporary conflicts like Iraq. The circumstances they confront mean that, with all the will in the world, ‘fighting to do the right thing’ embroils them in self-contradiction, as their moral intuitions are exhausted in the face of the grim realities of late modern warfare.

This is conclusively and crushingly brought home to Meehan towards the end of Beyond Duty when, in an attempt to avoid another encounter with a house-borne IED, he orders a missile strike on a house believed to have been wired as a trap. He is in full compliance with protocol and yet moments later he finds that the intelligence on which his assessment was predicated is flawed and that his orders have killed eight children within the house. The brutal reality of the moral situation Meehan and those like him face is encapsulated in the disturbing finality of the episode. Their intentions as moral actors tragically outstrip their capacities, as neither following protocol nor being committed to aiding Iraqi civilians precludes their inadvertent participation in the injustices which critics of the war accuse them of complicity in. Earlier in the book Meehan recounts an angry letter in which he rebuked such critics and yet, as the war progresses, he finds that his heroism and his ideals cannot, ultimately, escape the horrific situation which he confronts.

It is easy to dismiss the idea that first person accounts such as this can be a source of moral or political insight. However Beyond Duty offers just such insights, as Meehan produces a profound and moving commentary on the defining war of the twenty-first century thus far. It is an honest and touching memoir of personal struggle and a potent accompaniment to more intellectualised and analytical treatments of contemporary conflict.


2. [http://www.markcarrigan.net/](http://www.markcarrigan.net/)

The man who wanted to change the world: RIP Eric Hobsbawm (2012-10-01 11:37)

He was a true encyclopaedic mind: as the [1]Independent once wrote, ‘No historian now writing in English can match his overwhelming command of fact and source.’ Many could disagree with his leaning to the left, but none could
ignore his arguments. Although he is most famous for other books, to me his study of [2]Nations and nationalism was a colossally important revelation which helped comprehend the emergence of nationalist sentiments in the post-socialist world in Eastern Europe. At 65 he was Britain’s most respected Marxist historian. At 93, he published his last book, [3]How to change the world: Tales of Marx and Marxism (here is a good [4]review by Terry Eagleton, and another good [5]review by Steffan Collini). It saddened me to read today’s [6]obituary in the Guardian. It reveals an inspirational life story of a great mind. RIP, Professor Hobsbawm.

Eric Hobsbawm (1917-2012)

4. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n05/terry-eagleton/indomitable
6. http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/oct/01/eric-hobsbawm
The Life and Work of C. Wright Mills (2012-10-01 14:00)

[1]“C. Wright Mills” on Bundlr


[...] (more on C. Wright Mills – cwrightmills.org - The Sociological Imagination Blog) [...] 

Using NVivo: a one day crash course for qualitative researchers, Fri 9th Nov (2012-10-01 17:00)

9:30am to 5:30pm, Friday 9th November at the [1]Manchester Digital Laboratory

Suitable for complete beginners or those who need a refresher, this intensive one day course will cover all the core functionality of NVivo:

- An overview of the software
- Managing and importing your data
- Coding strategies and techniques
- Analysing visual and multimedia data
- Using memos effectively
- Using annotations and see also links
- Relationships and modelling
- Querying your data
- Managing the complexity of your project

**£50 for PhD Students, £100 for all others**

Press below to go to the booking form:
All participants will receive an electronic resource pack which covers the material from the course and provides guidance on continuing to develop proficiency with the software. To take part you will need a laptop with NVivo installed. A 30 day free trial of NVivo 10 is available from the [3]QSR website.

To keep costs down lunch is not included. But the venue is in the heart of Manchester’s famous Northern Quarter and is surrounded by excellent cafes and bars. There will also be LOTS of tea and coffee.

If you are a wheelchair user and are interested in this training event, please contact me and I'll try to arrange a session which can accommodate you.

Mark Carrigan has taught NVivo extensively at the University of Warwick and acted as a NVivo trainer and consultant for the EU FP7 funded MYPLACE project. For more information see his [4]website. Please feel free to get in touch via [5]e-mail or [6]twitter if you have any questions.

1. http://madlab.org.uk/
2. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/4352570656?ref=ebtn
5. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Towards Digital Sociology: an interview with Deborah Lupton (2012-10-02 08:00)

To start the interview, could you say a little about how you came to be so professionally active online?
It was a combination of factors, some going back a long time, some more recent. I have been interested in the sociology of computer use and cyberspace for quite a while. In the mid 1990s and into the early 2000s I conducted several studies examining the embodied nature of computer use, people with disabilities’ use of computer technologies (with Wendy Seymour) and the use of PCs in the academic workplace, including how people personalised these technologies (with Greg Noble). More recently I have become interested in researching how digital and social media are used in the medical and public health arenas. So it’s an area I have been pursuing in terms of research for many years.

My interest in using social media myself for academic purposes began with a desire to engage more with the general public. I had been thinking about how best to do this for a while. Earlier this year I eventually decided to try writing an article for an online news and research website that we have here in Australia called The Conversation. Only academics can write for this website, but it is designed for public readership and has a wide readership among the general public. Once my piece was published I was amazed by how many people read it in a short space of time and how many commented. It seemed clear to me that the best way to engage in the public arena was to publish online.

So then I decided to start my own blog (This Sociological Life), which went live in May this year. I have greatly enjoyed writing blog posts on my own research and other topics I have found interesting. Following setting up the blog I looked into ways to let people know about it and signed up to Twitter as a means of publicising it. I found Twitter to be not only an excellent way of publicising my blog posts as I published them but also of connecting with other people sharing my research interests globally and of sharing bits and pieces I had found on the web with them. Australia is a long way away from where most of the research in my fields is happening and researchers within this country are also separated geographically from each other, scattered around a very large continent. Twitter is a great way to connect quickly and easily, and in real time, across these vast distances.

I was then quite intrigued with the other different social and other digital platforms available and how they can be used for academic purposes, and investigated various tools, including Pinterest, Delicious, Scoop.it, Pearltrees, Quora, infographics tools, SlideShare, Storify, Mendeley, Paper.li and Facebook. I even made a (very simple) sociology app using an online wizard I discovered. And as I was investigating all these digital platforms I wrote a series of blog posts outlining to other academics what these tools have to offer. I have collected these posts together in a short e-publication, Digital Sociology: An Introduction, which I published on my university’s open repository for anyone to access.

**What do digital tools have to offer sociologists?**

My experiences of using the digital tools I have mentioned above have taught me that they are an excellent way to find, collate and curate information available on the web, to share it with others, to make connections and let others know about your own research.

I use quite a lot of the material I find on the web in my own research. For example, I have created a number of Pinterest boards on the specific topics I am researching at the moment. I have begun not only to use the images I have gathered on Pinterest in my research but to embed the links to these boards in journal articles and books I am writing, so that readers can click through and quickly view the material I am discussing. This material is also invaluable when I present the research in conference papers, as I can easily find images for PowerPoint presentations (or even call up the boards themselves if there is an internet connection available).

I also find a sense of creative achievement in using digital media. Such activities as writing a blog post, illustrating it and publishing it, or creating a Pinterest board or a Storify is a satisfying process not just because of content but also because of the way it looks. Many of these tools are very easy to learn to use and create a good-looking product.
It is also very satisfying to be able to monitor how many people have viewed/read your creations and to receive comments on them.

I make sure that I use as many tools as I can to disseminate what I have written/made across various social networks. A blog post, for example, can be publicised via Twitter, LinkedIn, Academia.edu, Paper.li, Scoop.it, Delicious, Facebook, and Pinterest, just to name a few possibilities.

**You've written recently about 'digital sociology'. What do you mean by this?**

In my view there are four major aspects to digital sociology:

1. Professional digital media use: using the kinds of tools discussed above for academic purposes.
2. Sociological analyses of digital media use: researching the ways in which people's use of digital media configures these sense of selves, their embodiment and their social relationships.
3. Digital data analysis: using pre-existing digital data for social research, either quantitative or qualitative.
4. Critical digital sociology: undertaking reflexive and critical analysis of digital media informed by social and cultural theory.

The second of these dimensions of digital sociology has been undertaken for quite some time – since personal computers were invented and brought into popular use. The other three have yet to be taken up to any great extent in sociology. I believe the fourth dimension, critical digital sociology, is an area in which sociologists can really take the lead, given the theoretical and methodological tradition in sociology of social and cultural critique.

**Is there a risk that digital activity can serve as a distraction from more traditional activity? It's easy to imagine many people accepting your argument that there are valuable opportunities here but nonetheless wondering where and how they will find the time to engage online.**

There's no doubt that engaging in digital media use can take away time from more traditional scholarly pursuits. But the point is, such engagement enriches these pursuits. There is a wealth of material out there available on the web; there is a huge audience who are eager to engage with and share the ideas of sociologists and other academics; there are other academics you can find via social media networks and connect with who you may never had known about; and these media offer great potential to get your research out there and encourage a greater number of people to read it and know about it. It is a matter of investigating the various tools, finding out which ones work for your own purposes, and developing a way of incorporating them into your daily work routine that does not swallow up too much time. You can use them as little or as much as you like: you have full control over this!

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**Deborah Lupton is an independent writer and researcher in sociology and cultural studies, located in Sydney, and an Honorary Associate, Department of Sociology and Social Policy and the Biopolitics of Science Network at the University of Sydney. Prior to this she was Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at Charles Sturt University, Australia. You can follow her on Twitter [1]@DALupton and at [2]This Sociological Life.**
To add to Deborah’s optimism about a growing Digital Sociology probing through the new tools, digitization of inter scholarly communication, faster and wider collection and distribution of knowledge through Web 2.0. I think that simple things are more likely to happen in Internet Sociology or Sociology 2.0 initially than extension of complex theories and methods or a new wave of social thought except exploring and explaining cyber world or virtual social network. Just to mention I wrote a paper in 2007 analyzing social media - "Hate Communities in Cyber Space", 8th Global Conference: Perspectives on Evil and Human Wickedness, March 2007, Salzburg, Austria (published in Constructing Good and Evil,Edited by Laura Torres Zuñiga and Isabel Mª Andrés Cuevas, eBook).

The Best of Christopher Hitchens (2012-10-02 15:00)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/mQorzOS-F6w
Free Agent Nation OR what precarity looks like for the winners (2012-10-03 08:00)

Daniel Pink, author of Free Agent Nation, makes being a 'free agent' sound pretty great. But then as a former political insider at the heart of the Democratic machine in the 90s and more latterly a business guru and best selling author, it seems likely that his experiences of being a free agent have been, well, pretty great.

But my point is not to attack the concept. After a number of years as a self-styled 'freelance sociologist', albeit not an enormously well paid one, I have long seen the attraction of the model of work Pink so appealingly describes. However it’s in that self same capacity qua sociologist that I can’t help but recognise the duality of this ‘freedom’ and how emblematic it is of the ambivalent nature of life in late capitalism. As Zygmunt Bauman has argued in his work on globalization, mobility is the condition of those at the very top and the very bottom. The global elite slip free of national constraints, circulating the globe in cosmopolitan splendor as they lead their strange dance with similarly mobile global capital. Meanwhile those at the bottom are equally mobile, as the struggle for shelter and sustenance inculcates the frantic mobility of the migrant.

Likewise the free agent nation might be great for some, as they escape the deadening bonds of sedentary bureaucracy and fashion a protean occupational self beyond the constraints which bind others. But for most others, it’s a life of insecurity and risk, an increasingly vicious cycle of unemployment, underemployment and fixed term contracts. Perhaps Pink’s book would benefit from a new subtitle? Free Agent Nation: what precarity looks like for the winners.


3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=1LIT91hMghEC&q=zygmunt+bauman+globalisation&source=bl&ots=7hQbRbjnWS&si
   g=iP0PUdSM91GpvYdTegenk_s45Ps&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Hp9pUPvYN
5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/girbtir3j0s

The Daily Mail Song (2012-10-03 12:00)


Professor Eric Hobsbawm (RIP) is interviewed on 'Responsible capitalism' earlier this year (2012-10-04 08:00)
My new, non-automated life (2012-10-04 13:31)

One of the most fascinating effects of moving to a new place is that for a few days and weeks nothing is obvious and everything requires attention. The same happens when migrating into a new language, but right now I’m thinking of my interaction with physical surroundings – something [1]Goffman would think about, if he hadn’t been so preoccupied with micro-interactions with humans. I have to admit that I am a bit of a [2]Latourian, after all.

I grappled with this sensation a bit [3]here, but today I want to be a legislator (or a car mechanic) instead of a poet. Here is a blunt list of the minutiae of my new, non-automatised life, quoted from my [4]internal conversation – think of these as citations from an ongoing interview with myself which I record in my memory in lieu of a voice-recorder. In fact, you don’t need to read the list.

- How far is work? How far is home? How on earth do I cycle in the middle of the road? Ah, that’s a bike lane and everybody does it. OK then...
- When are national holidays? What happens when there is one? (one happened to be on the very next day, 3 October and I was dying to find out).
- What kind of stuff can you buy in a pharmacy? What does it mean when someone tells you that “private healthcare in Germany is very cheap”? (I did ask. It turned out that a “simple consultation costs no more than 70 Euro”. I was so shocked I almost choked on my tea).
- What time do shops close in the evening?
- How do I ask the shop assistant, well, anything?
- Are bags free in the supermarket?
- How cold does it get in the evenings?
- What does the S-Bahn ticket say - I mean, I understand the words, but somehow the meaning doesn’t quite make sense. Can I really take any type of transport within 2 hours? Let me read the instructions again...
- Which way is the exit from the metro? Yes, I see the arrow. But it is ambiguous. Everything is ambiguous. I feel stupid and slow.
- How many bikers are likely to overtake me on the bike lane at 8 pm on a weekday? How fast and how impatiently are they likely to be? Will they honk or will they just whizz past?
• How much pressure do I need to apply on the bike lock in order to lock or unlock it?
• The key in the front gate doesn’t turn. A moment of panic as I turn it again and again in the dark, my hands full
  of shopping bags and a bike.
• I’m in. How long do I have before the light in the staircase goes off?
• Ah, the light has now really gone off and I’m already up the stairs. How many steps are there between floor 1
  and 2? How high is each steps? Where is the banister?
• Where are the light switches located?
• Is this thing my fingers have just found on the wall in the dark the light switch or the neighbour’s doorbell?
• Which of the two keylocks should I unlock first, the top or the bottom one? Which way to turn the key? And
  which of the two round keys belongs to which lock?
• How fast will the water evaporate from the pot with boiling potatoes on this cooker?
• In which drawer are the tea spoons?
• When I get up at night, do I turn left or right to get to the kitchen?

Actually, I hope that you didn’t read that list. Just looking at its length should be enough to appreciate how much of our
normal everyday life is routinised and automatised. We tend to think of ‘automati(sati)on’ as something pertaining
to mechanical apparatuses used for efficiency, but in fact we all use multiple simpler automatisation techniques all
the time. Part of the problems encountered e.g. by people with Alzheimer’s disease or stroke survivors is that they begin to forget how to do things usually seen in our culture as simple. Understanding what happens when we face a radically new environment can also help us understand, for example, autism. Lots of interesting neurobiological research has been done on the automating functions of mirror neurons (e.g. [6]Fan et al 2010). E.g. this article [7]article by Williams, 2008 makes interesting links with autism which the author defines as an ‘impaired development of embodied aspects of cognition’. I guess it is similar with dyspraxia (e.g. this [8]Dowell et al’s 2009 article about dyspraxia in autism). Moving to a new place provides a useful fringe experience and reminds us that interacting not only with people, but also with the environment around us involves complex social - and neurological - labour. If you look at each of those boring sentences above, you will see that in all of them I zero in on one particular, usually man-made, element of my reality that under normal circumstances remains invisible, hidden, and unacknowledged (Cresswell & Hawn recently wrote a [9]cool article about the epistemology of lived experience using Goffman and [10]Bakhtin and applying it to online gaming!). In a way, I prefer all these invisible elements to be visible. They are mostly ugly, irritating, and they slow me down, but if I know they are there, they cannot take me by surprise. This heightened attention is a way of managing a new, scary world. But even fully automatised worlds which we have inhabited for a long time hide the possibility of surprise.

See also:


Reprinted from [12]300daysinberlin.wordpress.org. The Idle Ethnographer recently moved to Berlin. You are welcome to read her non-professional and unprofessional blog [13](link above). It is even more messy than this column. You have been warned.

1. Erving_Goffman
2.
Who Do You Really Want to Be? Dr Mayim Bialik’s commencement speech (2012-10-05 00:00)

Being editor is great. You get to impose things you love on the readers! Just joking. But, in all honesty, whether you are a Big Bang Theory fan or not, this is a lovely, useful, and inspiring commencement speech. [1]Dr Mayim Bialik (PhD in neuroscience, but perhaps more famous as [2]Blossom from the 1990s [3]sitcom of the same name, and Amy Farah Fowler from [4]The Big Bang Theory) talks about ego, character, autonomy, self-actualisation, about not being the greatest of the great. She is not afraid of that thorny question: who do you really want to be? I think this is a good speech to read in the beginning of an academic year, too.

Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-10-06 08:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:

It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish 1380
your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Noam Chomsky on BBC Newsnight (2012-10-06 12:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/m_1A8er-bGU

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/m_1A8er-bGU
The best of @Audrey_Sprenger on Sociological Imagination (2012-10-07 08:00)

<a href="http://bundlr.com/b/the-best-of-audrey-sprenger-on-sociological-imagination" target="_blank">"The best of @Audrey_Sprenger on Sociological Imagination" on Bundlr</a>

The simplest (and most effective?) campaign ad ever (2012-10-08 08:00)

Given the [2]postmodernist panache which has characterised Barack Obama's ascent to the summit of US politics (not to mention the [3]terrifying amounts of money which have gone into this most recent contest already) there seems something curious, anachronistic even, about the uncomplicated nature of this recent attack ad by Obama's campaign. Who would have thought that the verbatim words of your opponent, coupled with the cheaply and cheerfully emotive cinematography of the TV movie, could exercise such power?

A sign that contemporary politics is not as postmodern as we might have thought? Or rather that Mitt Romney, in spite of looking like the lazy casting choice for Republican president in a high budget but poorly directed HBO style show, remains simply inept at playing the baudrillardian games which constitute the working life of the high level politician in a [4]post-democratic era?
Call For Papers: 2013 CES Conference (European Studies) (2012-10-08 17:32)

20th International Conference of Europeanists Share on email Share on print

Proposal Deadline Extended!

Deadline now: October 15, 2012

Crisis and Contingency: States of (In)stability

University of Amsterdam • Amsterdam, The Netherlands • June 25-27, 2013


Top Ten Tips for PhDs starting to teach (2012-10-09 08:00)

If you’re new to it, standing in front of your first seminar class can be a terrifying prospect. As a new PhD student last year, I was thrown in at the deep end with two seminar groups a week on a topic tangentially related to my PhD, and I don’t mind admitting it took me a while to find my feet. It’s easy to recognise one’s (many) mistakes with hindsight, so here is the benefit of, oh, a whole year’s experience: my Top Tips for those finding themselves in the same situation this September.

1. **Preparation.** It’s all about balance – have an overall plan, but allow for interesting deviations. Always have a couple of “last five minute” activities up your sleeve in case your session runs out of steam (one of the simplest is to ask, “if we were going to investigate this empirically, how could we do it?”). However, the converse... don’t spend so long on preparing a one-hour session that you neglect your PhD (note to self, must take own advice).

2. **Learn your students’ names.** If you’re not automatically sent it, ask your department office for your university’s version of the “mugshot sheet” – a printout of your group’s student ID photos with their names and email addresses underneath. You can use the register to get to know your students. You should have one (because we’re all keeping tabs on our overseas student attendance, now, aren’t we?) but even if you’re only required to pass it round, doing an informal version of the traditional roll call will help put names to faces. It helps to do a quick layout of who’s sitting where that you can refer to if you want to call on individual students for contributions (which I generally find works better than asking a question of the whole class, who then look at the floor...).

3. **Watch others teach.** Even if you’re not enrolled in a PGCHE or some kind of teacher training programme, observation of others’ seminars is a great way of picking up tips (good and bad!). As a new PG, it’s probable that you’re not long out of being on the receiving end, so use that experience – who inspired you? How did they do it? What was it about their classes you enjoyed? This is one case where plagiarism should be positively encouraged.

4. **Get feedback.** Generally, the formal feedback mechanisms will only kick in at the end of the term/year, when it’s too late to change anything. Try a post-it note “last-five-minutes” exercise – on red, yellow and green, ask for anonymous suggestions for “I don’t understand/enjoy...”, “Why don’t we try...” and “I enjoy/find useful...” relating to the course. You might get a few blunt comments, but with any luck they’ll be outweighed by positive suggestions, and maybe even a compliment or two that will make your flippin’ week.

5. **Relate your material to the outside world.** As a seminar leader, your job is most likely not to actually deliver content, but to situate it in a real-life context, discuss its applications, debate its worth. Use news stories and current events, give examples of actual uses, find people doing jobs actually using the topics on your syllabus.

6. **Keep copies of essay feedback.** It helps you keep track of what you’ve said to who (particularly if a student subsequently asks you about it); and you can see whether your advice was acted on for subsequent work. If the same mistakes reappear, you’ll have to come up with something else.

7. **Be positive with feedback.** The old adage of “criticise the action, not the person” applies. Don’t shy away from pointing out substandard work, but do offer suggestions for how it could have been improved, particularly if a mark is just below a class boundary – what would have put it over?
8. **Don't beat yourself up** if it isn't perfect at the start. It's easy to feel a certain amount of guilt if you don't have a great seminar – after all, you are responsible for delivering the session, your students are paying for the privilege, etc; and it's easy to have unrealistically high expectations – images of enthusiastic, inspiring debates can seem a long way from your first teaching experiences. Learn from what didn’t work, change it, move on; and don’t be afraid to ask for advice. Your university will have a teaching support unit – find it, and get as much training as you can.

9. **Communicate your enthusiasm.** You are (presumably) teaching a subject you’re interested in enough to dedicate three years of your life to, so explain/demonstrate just what it is that you find so fascinating. If I had a pound for every time I used the phrase “...and I think this is REALLY COOL because...” in my classes, well, I wouldn’t need to be teaching.

10. **Take your own board pens.** Nobody tells you this.

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**Hannah Perrin is an ESRC DTC Scholar and PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Kent with interests in health professions, clinical education and training, occupational socialisation and work transitions. She twitters on about her research [1]@HCPerrin and blogs at [2]Academish.**


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**Exploring the Emergence of Underground Musical Worlds (2012-10-10 08:00)**

[1](http://www.flickr.com/photos/vectorportal/5836452759/)
(Licensed CC BY 2.0 via [2]Vectorportal)


[7]Exploring the Emergence of Underground Musical Worlds

Exploring the emergence of underground musical worlds, a talk by Nick Crossley | Thinking culture (2012-10-12 07:56:21) [...]

The Accidental Sociologist is feeling rather unsociological.... (2012-10-10 13:00)

In these first few weeks of 'transitioning' the main thing I've noticed is the lack of anything spectacularly new. SPSS looks just like Excel, I did most of the qualitative methods course in my PGCE and social theory is basically what I learned in literary theory but without the addition of people like Roland Barthes and Donna Haraway, whom I wouldn't be without. I'm feeling surprisingly territorial of my position as an English Literature academic and have managed to forget that the disciplines have the potential to be so different; where once I could assume shared knowledge I can't anymore. Instead of making me feel more like a sociologist, studying sociology (formally in any case) is thus far making me feel more like a literary critic. I keep wondering when I can reasonably berate classmates for such things as lacking a working knowledge of canonical literature or not recognizing quotes from Shakespeare. Truth be told I had a rather large wobble last week and had to be brought down from the cliff ledge by a combination
of extensive talking with academic friends and, er, wine. It doesn’t help that what I’m currently studying is not – how to phrase this? – the most intuitive of topics to a literature geek. Statistical inference (which currently makes up 90 % of my sleep time and 100 % of my awake time) is a discipline I’m unlikely to return to in a hurry and certainly not one that is coming naturally; the questions I asked during the last week’s class made the poor lecturer look like she wanted to run weeping from the room. Thankfully I’m not alone in this and it’s amazing how buoyed one can feel knowing that others are also struggling.

Having moaned thus, I have to admit that there are some distinct advantages to coming from an arts background. Though the study of English Literature may appear to be primarily concerned with examination of fictional characters and situations, it’s really far more about considering the human condition and how we relate to our environment, making the leap to thinking in terms of social theory and its construction relatively straightforward. Moreover, being concerned with language as a matter of course makes it easier to be a critical thinker – I’m finding so far that everything I learned in my literature degrees, both content and skills wise, is incredibly transferable in terms of both skills and knowledge.

The more I study the textual aspects of sociology, the more I question the boundaries that distinguish disciplines. Considering that my methodological approach is distinctly qualitative rather than quantitative, I’m now beginning to wonder what it is that marks out a qualitative theoretical (as opposed to field work loving) sociologist from an arts or humanities academic? We’re both concerned with people, with words, with thick description, with textual sources. Does it really matter if the characters we write about from source material were never alive to begin with?

Submit your questions....

One of the primary aims of this column (in addition to providing me with a public space to talk about myself...) is to create a sort of workshop style environment in which anyone doing postgraduate work in sociology – or indeed academia in general – can find the answers to any and all of those niggling questions that have been playing on their mind. These can be questions about substantive topics, theory, field work, methodology, constructing funding applications, finding CFPs, writing abstracts, conference papers and articles, getting published, networking, job applications, teaching and anything else that is relevant to postgraduate study of sociology. As part of this we’ll be fielding questions to leading academics as well as PhD students in the know.

We'll regularly feature a workshop oriented column with a selection of pertinent and popular questions with a variety of responses. If you have a burning question that you want put to our panel of experts you can contact me via The Sociological Imagination or Twitter. In order to reach as wide an audience as possible we’ll be using a Twitter hashtag, #phdsoc. Stick this tag on to your tweets and we’ll pick them up and add them to our pile. Indeed this is probably the best way of getting in touch. We’re hoping for a post bag bigger than Santa’s! Please also share this hashtag widely so that sociologists far and wide can begin using it.

Top Ten Ideas for starting points for Social Science seminars (2012-10-11 08:00)

It’s pretty much impossible to start a debate with “Topic X. Discuss.” An interesting, controversial or downright unusual source is a great way of getting things going – introduce it at the beginning, show it on screen or pass copies
round, get everyone in the class to note down anything about it that strikes them, and away you go: who has written down the same thing? Who agrees/disagrees? Why? Who might have a different point of view? A good source should provoke a response – either positive or negative – and serve as a starting point for marshalling opinions. Here are my Top Ten ideas for discussion-starters to get you thinking:

1. **Crime maps.** These are amazingly detailed and available online from the [1]police website. Put in a postcode and you'll get the crime stats for the area on the right – click on "Crime and outcomes in this area" for detailed maps and a breakdown by type of crime. Look at the stats for your local area and ask why certain types of crime occur in different areas? Where are the “hotspots”? Why? Look at the types of crime listed – what occurs where? What constitutes “anti-social behaviour”? According to whom? Why has it become a policy priority? Compare different parts of your town, different towns, urban/rural, university locale vs rest of city, what happens where students live? Look at the historical data – what is going up/down? Where does this data come from? How reliable is it as a source? **Good for: Criminology, Environment, Social Policy.**

2. **Census records and the national archives.** The census records for every 10 years beginning in 1841 are [2]online. There’s a 100-year embargo so the most recent available is 1911. Although most commonly used for tracing family histories, there’s a wealth of social information contained in them, particularly after the late 1800s ones when more detail was recorded. You need to register (and pay!) to view the original copies but you can get samples for free – just do an image search for “example census page” and there’ll be material you can use. What is recorded on each page? Why was this data captured? Discuss privacy and personal data. Look at the family structure at each address – what do you notice? How does it compare with the modern family? Look at a few from different censuses – what is different? Look at the employment column – what does it tell you? How is this linked to the area lived in? Are there regions today which are associated with a particular type of work? Why? Link this with the “where born” column – who moved where? Why? Does this still happen? Look at the last column – for example, the 1901 census asks if the person is “(1) deaf-and-dumb, (2) blind, (3) lunatic, or (4) imbecile, feeble-minded.” Huge amounts of mileage there for a discussion on attitudes to illness and mental health, why was this recorded, what health information is taken in modern censuses? Why? **Good for: Health/Medical Sociology, Work, Families, Education, Migration.**

3. **News stories.** There are vast amounts online – start with the[3] BBC and newspaper sites, look at local newspapers, local radio, student publications, it’s easy to link to a video clip to start a seminar. Compare coverage of a news story in different media, whose angle is it? Are they for or against? Why? Is the news source impartial or does it have an underlying ideology informing its news coverage? Who is producing/writing the story? How reliable are news sources as factual data? Will the story influence the behaviour of those viewing it? How/why? Don't restrict yourself to UK news sources - everything is online, so see how a foreign newspaper has covered a British story, compare and contrast – especially if you’re teaching a comparative policy course. **Good for: All social science branches, Media.**

4. **Government departments.** All departments produce vast numbers of publications, reports, papers, press releases, etc, etc. You can use most of it for something! Assess both the content and the presentation: evaluate who the perceived audience is for the material, who wrote it, for what purpose? How is the material being presented and why? Is it successful? Look at any statistics – are they reliable? How do you know? Again, what is being portrayed and why? There’s too much to cover in much detail here (maybe a future blog post!) but a few examples of bits I've used are: the [4]Government Art Collection (How much should be spent on public art? What is its value? How does it contribute to British culture?); weekly[5] A&E statistics(Who sets the targets? Are they meaningful? How are they used/abused?); Dept for Education[6] advice on drugs (whose responsibility is it to teach young people about illegal drugs? Is the advice valid? Useful? Appropriate? How would/should it translate into the classroom? How involved should schools be in the home lives of their pupils?). You get the idea. **Good for: All social science branches.**

5. **University publicity material.** Gather prospectuses, brochures, flyers, website screenshots. It’s instantly relatable
but harder to critically assess from an objective viewpoint. How is the University’s publicity department trying to portray itself? What pictures are used? Did the class use such material in deciding to apply? Was it effective? Does the material convey a sense of place? Community? How? What language is used? What is its effect? How would you design publicity material to convey the campus culture? Good for: Environment, Culture, Identity, Visual methods.

6. Mass observation material, searchable [7]here. Again, vast amounts of material are available here so pick one or two items and use them to start a discussion. Try a section of personal diary from the 1930s, one of the “panel” day observations or questionnaire responses. An interesting subsection is the [8]Worktown Collection, a special study of Blackpool and Bolton. Beware the website, once you get into it there's a real risk you won't be seen for days... Use for a historical perspective on contemporary topics around daily life. Find a modern cohort study and compare the methods and data generated. Good for: Work and employment, Culture, Politics.

7. Non-news magazines. This will cost you a few pounds and may involve slight embarrassment if you are doing the buying ([9]Nuts magazine, anyone?), but works really well in seminars. Buy a selection of magazines, compare and contrast. For example, to look at sources of health advice – [10]Men's Health, [11]Women's Health, the aforementioned Nuts, [12]Sagamagazine, a fashion magazine, a teen magazine, a sports magazine. Evaluate differences in content and presentation between Men's and Women's Health, look at health and wellbeing content of different magazines – who is the audience? Who is the author? Why is this material being presented? Does it work? Good for: Health/Medical, Media, Gender.

8. Wikipedia (bear with me), [13]here. Not so much the content of the site, but the way in which it is constructed. Look at a relevant topic and evaluate it in terms of content and layout. Use the Wikipedia principle to construct an informative handout on a different topic – where does one person start in writing it? How is it edited? Who agrees? Who has control over online publishing? Who is responsible for fact-checking? Does it work? What about other user-editable sites (eg [14]Wikileaks)? What are the implications for incorrect information entering the public domain? Good for: Most topics, Media, Education.


Hannah Perrin is an ESRC DTC Scholar and PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Kent with interests in health professions, clinical education and training, occupational socialisation and work transitions. She twitterson about her research [20]@HCPerrin and blogs at [21]Academish.
Resource ideas for teaching (and maybe research) | Thinking culture (2012-10-12 15:52:07)

[...] Sociological imagination also has a really helpful list of ten useful resources for teaching seminars. These are materials that might be used to provoke a bit of conversation. Although quite a few are also often used as research resources. There are links here, for example, to the British Library Sounds Archive and the classic Mass Observation archive - which I once used to get some really nice stuff about people’s experience of noise the the 1940s. Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this. This entry was posted in data and dataplay, Uncategorized and tagged Resources for teaching, seminar ideas, Sociology. Bookmark the permalink. ← Exploring the emergence of underground musical worlds, a talk by Nick Crossley [...]

1390
A quick thought about Jiscmail (2012-10-12 08:00)

Do you administer a JISCMail? I administer two: [2]asexuality-discuss and [3]socialmedia-discuss. Though I’m bad at administering them and, partly for this reason, nothing much happens on them. This is a shame because my initial motivation still stands: I thought there was inadequate dialogue taking place on both topics and I wanted to try and help bring such dialogue about, connecting with others who were interested in these topics in the process. I assume this motivation is true of many others who setup Jiscmail lists. But I grew up with [4]vbulletin and mailing lists have never really done it for me.

I assume this also applies to others. So a proposal: if you want to consolidate a research network around a specific topic, don’t setup a mailing list. Instead create a wordpress blog. Create an account for anyone who asks for one and lay down no editorial restrictions whatsoever. Ask those who take up an account to do the same. Let a thousand flowers bloom. Don’t see the blog as a collective product but seem it as an open publishing platform, a clearing house, which serves the same purpose as a mailing list might have done but does so in a much more effective way. Thoughts?


2. https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=ASEXUALITYSTUDIES
3. https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=SOCIALMEDIADISCUSS;8779able.1102
William Buckley and Noam Chomsky (2012-10-12 14:00)

What does it mean to be a public intellectual in a digital age? (2012-10-13 08:00)

[1]"What does it mean to be a public intellectual in a digital age?" on Bundlr
Using NVivo: a one day crash course for qualitative researchers, Fri 9th Nov (2012-10-14 08:00)

9:30am to 5:30pm, Friday 9th November at the [1]Manchester Digital Laboratory

Suitable for complete beginners or those who need a refresher, this intensive one day course will cover all the core functionality of NVivo:

- An overview of the software
- Managing and importing your data
- Coding strategies and techniques
- Analysing visual and multimedia data
- Using memos effectively
- Using annotations and see also links
- Relationships and modelling
- Querying your data
- Managing the complexity of your project

£50 for PhD Students, £100 for all others

Press below to go to the booking form:

[2] An Introduction to NVivo Eventbrite

All participants will receive an electronic resource pack which covers the material from the course and provides guidance on continuing to develop proficiency with the software. To take part you will need a laptop with NVivo installed. A 30 day free trial of NVivo 10 is available from the [3]QSR website.

To keep costs down lunch is not included. But the venue is in the heart of Manchester’s famous Northern Quarter and is surrounded by excellent cafes and bars. There will also be LOTS of tea and coffee.

If you are a wheelchair user and are interested in this training event, please contact me and I’ll try to arrange a session which can accommodate you.

Mark Carrigan has taught NVivo extensively at the University of Warwick and acted as a NVivo trainer and consultant for the EU FP7 funded MYPLACE project. For more information see his [4]website. Please feel free to get in touch via
LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman discusses the ideas in his new book, "The Start-up Of You". (2012-10-14 14:00)

Experience with MOOCs – Week One (2012-10-15 08:00)

There’s been a fair amount of interest in the rise of MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses – in the HE ether recently, debating whether such online courses – where thousands of students can register, and participate via video lectures
and online assignments – add something valuable to the higher education sphere. As part of my PGCHE I’m looking at innovative delivery modes for higher education courses, so thought the best way to find out about the MOOC phenomenon was to sign up, and document the experience, hoping to compare both the content and format with a traditional course taken at my own institution.

MOOC number one is Networked Life from the University of Pennsylvania, via the Coursera platform. I’ve chosen this one (along with Social Network Analysis from the University of Michigan) as my PhD will involve some analysis of support network diagrams and thought it might be useful, as well as seeing how effective the online format is. I can see the appeal – I can sit here at home in front of the computer, coffee in hand, a heartfelt rendition of Unchained Melody wafting over from next door’s builders... here we go.

The first thing I have to do is agree to an “Honor Code” stating that I won’t plagiarise in any form, either by claiming others’ work or disseminating course materials as my own. Feeling like an American highschooler pledging allegiance, I click OK and voila, the course page. It’s rather snazzy but no different really to any other VLE – we use Moodle at Kent – so I have the Announcements, Quizzes, Video Lectures, Discussion Forums, Reading Lists, etc that I was expecting, and it’s easy to navigate. The course only opened yesterday and the forums are already buzzing with activity – people are checking in from Colombia, Trinidad, Iran, Toronto, Moscow, Melbourne, Sao Paolo, Seoul, Mauritius, Dubai... and offline study groups are being formed based on geography and native language, as well as international Skype meets. I introduce myself as Hannah from Canterbury, Kent, get a friendly welcome from those who think I’m in Ohio (hello, Kent State, USA) or New Zealand (hello, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, NZ), and an even friendlier one once it’s established I’m British (hello, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK). This is a truly global thing.

An interesting discovery is that the MOOC runs alongside the same "physical" course at UPenn – although the lectures are already recorded, additional material will be posted at we go along, and I wonder how much contact there will be between the two. I’m slightly afraid of the quiz topics (Contagion in Social Networks? The Erdos Renyi Model?) so am hoping all will become clear. Wish me luck...

Hannah Perrin is an ESRC DTC Scholar and PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Kent with interests in health professions, clinical education and training, occupational socialisation and work transitions. She twitterst on about her research [2]@HCPerrin and blogs at [3]Academish.

1. https://www.coursera.org/
The short, professionally made film Rufus Stone is the key output of the three-year ‘Gay and Pleasant Land?’ research project led by Bournemouth University academic, Dr Kip Jones. The stories that form the foundation of the script for Rufus Stone are entirely based upon research undertaken by Jones and his team from the University’s School of Health and Social Care with the assistance of a citizens’ Advisory Committee.

Rufus Stone, was directed by Josh Appignanesi (The Infidel) and produced by Parkville Pictures, London, and won two awards at the prestigious Rhode Island International Film Festival in August, 2012. It is currently making the conference and film festival rounds and negotiation for distribution is taking place.

Jones and Hearing’s conversation below about making Rufus Stone will be expanded upon in a chapter in a forthcoming book edited by Marilyn Lichtman, Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences, to be published by Sage in 2013.

[4]Kip Jones is Reader in Qualitative Research and Performative Social Science at Bournemouth University in the UK. He has spent more than ten years developing the use of tools from the arts and humanities to research and/or
disseminate social science knowledge, or a Performative Social Science.

Trevor Hearing leads television and film production studies at Bournemouth's Media School, and has years of experience working in the television industry as a documentary filmmaker. Kip and Trevor have worked on many joint projects, including documenting the filming of Rufus Stone and producing a trailer for it.

4. http://kipworldblog.blogspot.co.uk/
5. http://www.kipworld.net/


[...Britain. The key output of this effort was the short professionally made, award-winning film RUFUS STONE1. I acted as Project Lead and Author and Executive Producer for the film. The research project’s [...]]


[...Britain. The key output of this effort was the short professionally made, award-winning film RUFUS STONE1. I acted as Project Lead and Author and Executive Producer for the film. The research project’s [...]]

Because the trailer was being uploaded on to some dodgy sites, it is no longer available to embed. You can, however, still view it at: https://vimeo.com/43395306

"You ask for what one should be keyed up?" (2012-10-17 08:00)

"You ask for what one should be keyed up? My god, for long weekends in the country, and snow and the feel of an idea and New York streets early in the morning and late at night and the camera eye always working whether you want or not and yes by god how the earth feels when it’s been ploughed deep and the new chartreuse wall in the study and wine before dinner and if you can afford it Irish whiskey afterwards and sawdust in your pants cuff and sometimes at evening the dusky pink sky to the northwest, and the books to read never touched and all that stuff the Greeks wrote about and have you ever read Macaulay’s speeches to hear the English language? And to revise your mode of talk and what you talk about and yes by god the world of music which we just now discover and there’s still hot jazz and getting a car out of the mud when nobody else can. That’s what the hell to get keyed up about"
» Baking an idea in the unconscious mind The Sociological Imagination (2013-07-12 08:00:45)
[...] for those who, as C Wright Mills might have put it, can find themselves getting obsessed with the “feel of an idea” - my
own take on Russell’s advice is to try and sit with an idea, see where associations lead [...]

» The transformation of academic writing and the challenge of ephemera The Sociological Imagination (2017-05-17 08:00:16)
[...] is the personal blog, providing one with a platform for exploration whenever we are taken by the feel of an idea worth
exploring. However I suspect that many academics who sustain a personal blog do so because [...]

Intergenerational Justice (and WHY U NO TALK ABOUT CLASS!) (2012-10-18 08:00)

In this great podcast from [1]Resonance FM Seth Wheeler and [2]Aaron Peters discuss intergenerational justice and its
relationship to class analysis with the Guardian’s [3]Shiv Malik. Shiv is on the advisory board for the Intergenerational
Justice Foundation and is the co-author, with Ed Howker, of “Jilted Generation: how Britain has bankrupted its youth.”
2. https://twitter.com/aaronjohnpeters
3. https://twitter.com/shivmalik1
Equal application of the law, anyone? (2012-10-19 08:00)

(via [1]Fed Up USA)


Getting Started: Social Media for Academics (2012-10-20 08:00)

[1]"Getting Started: Social Media for Academics" on Bundlr

Call for Contributions: what does the Sociological Imagination mean today? (2012-10-21 08:00)

It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
2. mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk

Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-10-21 14:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.
For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:


It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
This rather striking self-portrait is part of an even more striking project. Artist Brian Lewis Saunders, who is rather keen on self-portraits more generally, undertook an experiment in artistic perception: he took a different drug every day and drew himself under the influence. Check out the rest of them via [2]Cultso (HT) and be sure to have a look at the artist’s [3]website.


International Number Ones (2012-10-23 08:00)

Click on the image below to explore this visualisation of international number ones (as the people behind it point out: every country is the best at something!) from the wonderful website [1]Information is Beautiful. [2]
Top Ten Tips: Preparing to Publish (2012-10-24 08:00)

There’s a ton of advice out there for PhD students and ECRs on getting published, from choosing a journal to improving your academic writing. Here are my top tips for useful things to do BEFORE you start writing; so if you’ve got half an idea that you think could turn into something publishable, here goes:

1. **Pick your journal.** Decide where you want to balance between highly prestigious, wide-ranging journals, and smaller ones that focus on a particular sub-field. Try looking at the e-journal collections or using the articles that you’ve been reading that by definition are in the right area – where are they published? Use impact factors if they’re relevant to your field.

2. **Read your target journal.** Common sense, perhaps, but it’s a good idea to look at a WHOLE issue of your journal to get a feel for its tone. Does it have a quant/qual focus? Is it mostly theoretical or empirical? Is there a special issue coming up on something relevant? Sign up for email notifications that will let you know about these.

3. **Decide on the type of article...** Look at the type of work that is published – for example, [1]Work, Employment and Society publishes full articles, Research Notes, Debates and Controversies, On The Front Line (a section for research participants to have their say) and Book Reviews. [2]Behavioral Sciences and Law differentiates between Research Reports and Research Articles. [3]Music Analysis has a Critical Forum as well as publishing original research. Which style best fits your idea? Or, which would you feel better able to write?
4. **...And read some of those articles.** Look at the content and structure of published pieces: are there any common features that it would be a good idea to include? Do they go Intro-Methods-Results-Discussion? Is there usually a historical perspective? Are there diagrams, illustrations, links to external content? Do they usually end with a firm conclusion or ideas for further work? A bit of time spent studying here will give you enormously valuable information you can really use.

5. **Consider co-authors.** If you've got a brilliant idea that would benefit from an additional angle, consider asking a colleague with particular expertise for their input. Establish roles and the division of work early on and decide on the order your names will appear on the paper before you start.

6. **Follow the Author Guidelines for the journal.** Writing 101. Each journal's guide is available online and contains various info on how to construct your article; from referencing style to word limits, formatting diagrams and what to include on a cover sheet. Not following the instructions is a really easy way to get your article rejected without even making it to the review stage, so take note and keep checking.

7. **Write your article!** Pitch it to the journal you are writing for, taking into account all the info you've gathered so far. Put it away at least overnight, sleep on it, re-edit; lather, rinse, repeat.

8. **Make the abstract brilliant.** Make sure it does genuinely summarise, rather than introduce, your article. Get the key points in loud and clear – remember that the editors and reviewers may not be experts in the specific topic you are writing about, and see many, many submissions, so make sure it’s right there at the start.

9. **Include a short note to the Editor when you submit.** Editors have jobs too, so don’t waffle on! A brief note including why you are submitting your article to that particular journal is useful, but don’t rewrite your abstract (or the whole paper, or your CV...).

10. **Aim high.** Despite lower acceptance rates, an advantage of submitting to some of the higher-ranked journals is that you’re quite likely to get some useful feedback, even if your article is rejected. Use it, learn from it, revise your article and get ready for submission to the next journal – have a big cup of coffee, and restart from point 2.

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Hannah Perrin is an ESRC DTC Scholar and PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Kent with interests in health professions, clinical education and training, occupational socialisation and work transitions. She twitters on about her research [4]@HCPerrin and blogs at [5]Academish.

1. [http://wes.sagepub.com/](http://wes.sagepub.com/)
Some collated writing tips from Sociological Imagination.org | Thinking culture (2012-11-05 06:31:58)

[...] Hannah Perrin has collated some writing/publishing tips for PhD students over at sociologicalimagination.org. They are aimed at getting started in publishing, but they might be of general interest. Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:LikeBe the first to like this. This entry was posted in writing and tagged getting published, phd students, Writing tips. Bookmark the permalink.

← Engineering a change of direction...back to Walter Benjamin perhaps [...]

Foucault, Biopolitics and Critique (2012-10-25 08:00)


*Biopolitical Experience* offers an original and comprehensive interpretation of Michel Foucault’s analysis of biopolitics - situating biopolitics in the context of embodied histories of subjectivity, affective investments and structures of experience. Going beyond lamentation at the horrors of biopolitical domination, the book develops a positive-critique of biopolitical experience: offering explanations as to the enormous appeal of biopolitical discourse; and cultivating an affirmative, ethical and productive response to the technologies of biopolitical racism and securitization. Such a response is not about life escaping power or a retreat from life, but rather involves critical work on the conditions of production of population life (becoming collective). In addition to a detailed account of Foucault’s writings on biopolitics, biology and experience the book offers a critique of some key contemporary interpretations of Foucault and develops the positive-critique of biopolitical experience by exploring the place of biopolitics, racism and contingency in feminist politics.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/claireb.mp3"]

2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/blencowe/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/blencowe/)

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Social Media Participation Chart (2012-10-26 08:00)


1406
Often when speaking of post-war developments in pragmatism, many people tend to focus on the philosophy of the latter Wittgenstein or Rorty. However, such an exclusive focus tends to eclipse other notable contributions. In Cornel West’s genealogy of pragmatism, C. Wright Mills plays a prominent role in mid-century pragmatic developments. Mills shares this space with other notable American thinkers, Sidney Hook, W. E. B. Du Bois, Reinhold Neibuhr, and Lionel Trilling. Mills particular contribution was to apply pragmatism to sociology; to apply vision to science to use Rorty’s terms.

Mills prominence should not be surprising given his solid grounding in pragmatism: His doctoral dissertation addressed the pragmatism of the Metaphysical Club against the rise of the social sciences, and the institutionalization of critique. Mills is therefore a useful thinker to demonstrate and contrast the differences between conventional sociological methods and pragmatic methods.
Central to Mills' sociology is his pragmatist inspired methodology. For Mills' this takes the form of a philosophy which sets forth the right sociological problems. For our purposes, we can call this Mills dictum. He presents this in The Sociological Imagination. In the book, issues of sociological theory do not amount to Grand Theory (the term Mills used to mock Parsons's work) or produce abstracted empiricism (a comment on Bell's work) but rather are attentive to "historical social structures" as they come to be of "direct relevance to urgent public issues and insistent human troubles."

To achieve relevance, Mills drew upon various general sociological ideas to guide and orientate the analysis at hand. This is how selected ideas such as Weber's analysis of bureaucracy and Mannheim's description of social consciousness sit side by side. They are not reconciled in a model of social change, but rather as resources in a methodological toolkit. Neither is considered correct per se, or even regarded as such. Instead, their incorporation is based upon their ability to drive an analysis that assists in understanding the human condition. In the same sense, the combination of pragmatic and analytic elements in this thesis is not held onto by because they are true, correct, or theoretically consistent, but rather for their methodological offering.

In Mills' case the analysis took the form of combining social structure, historical change, and biography. Or to borrow the title of his collected papers, power, politics and people. This sociological imagination allows for meaning and applicability wider than scholarship, such that matters of policy and political practice can be widely debated for a true democracy. This is a point of convergence with deliberate democrats and public reason liberals. We find this sentiment neatly expressed in Mills' aphorisms to have a politics of exposure as opposed to a science of politics. In this sense the method is humanistic in character.

As it is presented here, Mills' understanding of theory is similar to that proposed by Anthony Giddens in New Rules for Sociological Method and Capitalism and Modern Social Theory. Giddens' approach is to consider the classic sociological tradition as "tied together as an endeavor to construct a critical analysis of the legacy of the social theory" aiming to understand "social activity and intersubjectivity." As Giddens writes of method, "it is not a guide to 'how to do practical research,' and does not offer any specific research proposals. It is primarily an exercise in clarification of logical issues." Had Mills lived longer, there is no doubt he would have endorsed these quietist remarks. Key to Giddens is that "social theory must incorporate a treatment of action, and must grasp the significance of language, the practical medium whereby this is made possible." Both of these concerns are evident in Mills' early essays, some of which are collected in Power, Politics, and People. For example, in the essay 'Language, Logic and Culture', language is "a system of social control" and when combined with vocabulary acts as "sets of collective action" that produce norms and values. These are certainly nods to early pragmatists Dewey and Mead.

These points are crucial to the pragmatic tradition, and to any pragmatic analysis. To take language as an example; it is both a way of knowing, and a practice. A tenet then is that the transformation of linguistic expression can alter linguistic practice vice versa. The introduction of new expressions can alter practices; new ways of knowing can alter existing ways of acting. Changes in epistemology can change action. Rorty makes this observation at the beginning of Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity. He notes how during the French Revolution vocabularies "could be replaced almost overnight." The point to which Rorty is driving at, is that new questions of concern require new vocabularies, and that old vocabularies linked to old questions being no longer of assistance, need to be discarded.

Pragmatists recognize the fluid nature of language and language practice. For this reason, pragmatists resist, on principle, the unification and codification that is required for the realization of the explanatory projects of conventional sociological method. The same principles animate C. Wright Mills questions of concern. For this one
needs to safeguard the very possibilities that Mills' social imagination offers themselves. For us, this means avoiding the institutionalization and domestication of critique.

[1] Scott Timcke is a graduate student in communication at Simon Fraser University.

1. [http://sfu.academia.edu/ScottTimcke](http://sfu.academia.edu/ScottTimcke)

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Public Writing – SCOTT TIMCKE (2017-09-17 17:30:02)
[...] Wright Mills and Pragmatism [...]

lapisan lantai (2019-06-01 05:20:44)
It’s truly a nice and useful piece of information. I am glad that you simply shared this useful information with us. Please keep us informed like this. Thanks for sharing.

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Academia 2.0 (2012-10-27 08:00)

[1] "Academia 2.0" on Bundlr

1. [http://bundlr.com/b/academia-2-0](http://bundlr.com/b/academia-2-0)
Paul Krugman Speaks About Soft Corruption and Oligarchy (2012-10-28 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ETiWG-aJZAY

The Sociology of Animals and Why It Matters (2012-10-29 08:00)


[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/animals.mp3"]

Charles Wright Mills documentary (2012-10-30 08:00)

A short documentary on C. Wright Mills life, theories, accomplishments, and impacts on society. Not exactly the slickest film you’re likely to find on the internet but a useful and sympathetic overview of his work.

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/eE7t9U1GWUk

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/eE7t9U1GWUk

The Web is See Through (2012-10-31 08:00)

88 % of the self-generated, sexually explicit online images and videos of young people their analysts encountered had been taken from their original location and uploaded onto other websites, shows a recent study by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF). Read the study report here:
[1]Young people are warned they may lose control over their images and videos once they are uploaded online

One of my professors used to say, back in 2000: The web is transparent. We thought we knew what she meant, but we didn’t really. Twelve years on, I know some more about how transparent the Web is, yet I also find it inescapable. Reminders such as this one are needed more often. Here is a more light-hearted reminder not to put too much personal information online:
2. [http://www.iwf.org.uk](http://www.iwf.org.uk)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/F7pYHN9iC9I](http://www.youtube.com/embed/F7pYHN9iC9I)

### 3.11 November

**The best of @ProfSteveFuller on Sociological Imagination (2012-11-01 08:00)**

[1]"The best of @ProfSteveFuller on Sociological Imagination" on Bundlr


### Using social media for impact and public engagement – a case study of @projectmyplace (2012-11-02 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Martin Price of the [1]MYPLACE project (it was originally recorded for the [2]Digital Change GPP). MYPLACE brings together 16 universities across 14 European countries, as well 14 other 1412
public institutions. It’s a massive and fascinating project, looking at young people's political participation across Europe and how it’s shaped by the continent’s legacy of totalitarianism and populism. It’s also a great example of how social media (in this case the blog linked above and the @projectmyplace twitter feed) can be placed at the heart of even the largest research project and be used creatively to meet the project’s strategic aims, without getting in the way of more ‘traditional’ elements of the work involved in research.

[4]Using social media for impact and public engagement


An Introduction to Asexuality (2012-11-03 08:00)

<a href="http://bundlr.com/b/an-introduction-to-osexuality" target="_blank">"An Introduction to Asexuality" on Bundlr</a>
Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-11-04 08:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:


It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.
If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...?

4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Bertrand Russell on YouTube (2012-11-05 08:00)

Perhaps somewhat naively, it had never occurred to me how much archive footage was available of early 20th century philosophers. If my late modern prejudices had not blinded me to this fact, I would have looked up some of my favourite philosophers on Youtube a long time ago. But they did and now I’ve transcended them so here are some wonderful [1]Bertrand Russell videos and apologies in advance if this sudden discovery makes the Sociological Imagination incongruently philosophical for the near future.

Why I am not a Christian:

On Smoking:

Ears, tongues, and teeth (or Phones, languages, and dentists) (2012-11-05 13:05)

Today I made my first (short) phone call entirely in German. It wasn’t easy, so I’m proud!
The first thing is, I really dislike talking on the phone, regardless of language and conversation partner (though talking in a language I use rarely is worse, talking to strangers and officials is worse than talking to family, and talking to friends is somewhere in between). Stage fright management techniques usually help (funnily enough, I hardly have any stage fright on actual stages). Depending on mood and the urgency and importance of the phone call, I manage to hold most necessary phone conversations, and only occasionally do I end up putting phone calls off indefinitely.

The other thing I don't like is going to the dentist. It is by no means a phobia, but the logical result of one particular terrible experience - or, rather, a series of particularly terrible experiences with the same naughty tooth. In other words, provided that I trust the dentist, I would prefer going to see her or him to talking on the phone to anyone. But this time I'd rather hold five phone conversations than have to have that one naughty tooth treated. That bloody piece of bone has been the root of all evil. Three or four rounds of fillings in the last 15 years. Two root canal treatments with complications in the last five years. An unidentified inflammation at its (nonexisting) root, which went on for a couple of years but did not show on X-rays. More recently, three attempts to patch it up with partial temporary fillings. Needless to say, this has resulted in having trouble eating anything hard, such as steaks, raw vegetables, and nuts, for the foreseeable past. The bastard has been begging for a crown for a while (I'm not sure there's enough tooth left even for a crown, so a bridge might be on the way). Two days ago, while enjoying a warm dinner on a dark and cold Saturday evening, I cheerily and absent-mindedly bit into what probably was this tooth's last carrot. The dilapidated structure cracked and almost fell out, but not quite. Perhaps if it had, I'd have been more efficient in finding a doctor.

Now, why am I boring you with gory details of teeth and irrelevant confessions of petty social phobias? Because moments like this remind you that you are a recent migrant, by highlighting the deficit of several things non-migrants take for granted: trust; possible courses of action in emergency; local knowledge that extends not only to usual courses of action, but also to alternatives. They point at an interesting feature of being a migrant: [1]Intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality, initially developed in gender studies, seems very useful for understanding any type of inequality, in this case inequalities based on migrant experience. Needing semi-urgent dental help in a new city, by itself, isn't such a drama - especially when you are a very privileged migrant: one that has a paid job, speaks a little of the host language, has access to a phone, and even knows several locals who can share potentially useful (or at least comforting) first-hand knowledge, such as recommendations of a good doctor or dentist. Equally, having a mild [2]phone-phobia when living in a familiar milieu is inconvenient, but manageable. And, not speaking German in itself is not usually a problem (even when you live in Berlin!). My migrant status reminder thus comes not in the form of a bang on the head, the click of handcuffs, or the sound of a closing door. It is far more delicate and tacit, like thin skin peeled off exposing your metaphorical body to the world and depriving it from its usual defences (by the way, the skin metaphor has psychoanalytical roots and has been employed very interestingly to experiences unemployment by sociologist [3]Valerie Walkerdine). But nevertheless it does come, in the form of two or more intersecting issues that suddenly reinforce each other and require urgent, active management. The result is that things are far more difficult than they should be, when seen from outside. The resulting experience is an unexpectedly high expense of emotional energy and a feeling that some of your "skin" has been "peeled off". Hopefully, the resulting "scars" harden it for future experiences.

Luckily, the phone operator spoke clearly, repeated and rephrased stuff when I couldn't understand, the call was over in less than a minute, and I now have an appointment in less than 48 hours.

3. http://bod.sagepub.com/content/16/1/91.refs
Wanted: Ph.D. student to put Harriet Martineau back in the sociological canon (2012-11-06 08:00)

Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was one of the most remarkable women of letters – perhaps ever. Her body of work ranged across the social and biological sciences and even theology. [1]Wikipedia gives a good introduction to the breadth of her writing. However, if Martineau is remembered at all today, it is as the English translator of Auguste Comte’s work. But Martineau was a sociological pioneer in her own right, a friend of John Stuart Mill and the Utilitarians, as well as a correspondent with all the major intellectuals of the mid-19th century, on both sides of the Atlantic, and including Charles Darwin. By all accounts she was a formidable personality (a Germaine Greer-like figure perhaps) who stood out in her day for being able to earn a living from her writing without ever having to get married.

The person who appears to be the leading living scholar of her work is [2]Deborah Logan, an American specialist in Victorian literature. This leaves plenty of scope for a sociological interpretation of Martineau’s oeuvre. As it happens, many of Martineau’s papers are housed at the University of Birmingham. Based on a twitter exchange between Jo VanEvery (@JoVanEvery), Mark Carrigan (@mark_carrigan), and myself, it dawned on me that Warwick (only 20 miles from Birmingham) would be a great place for someone to do a Ph.D. on Martineau’s significance in her own time and her continuing legacy, both in sociology and for feminism more generally.

I would welcome a student interested in undertaking this project. I think such a Ph.D. could be easily turned into a timely book. But keep in mind that you will need funding! I am happy to work with students interested in applying for funds but I have none at my disposal. (When approaching me (s.w.fuller@warwick.ac.uk), please already have a funding source in mind that you have good reason to believe would support this project. This means doing some homework about funders!)

Finally, a few years ago, I staged a play in which the main female role was that of Harriet Martineau. [3]You can have look here.

Professor Steve Fuller, University of Warwick


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Christopher Hitchens vs Tony Blair Debate: Is Religion A Force For Good In The World? (2012-11-06 14:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ddsz9XBhrYA?feature=player_detailpage

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1418
Public Engagement and the Public Understanding of Science (2012-11-07 08:00)

In this podcast, originally recorded for [1]Sociology@Warwick, [2]Eric Jensen talks about public engagement and the public understanding of science. His research on the impacts of public engagement with science for visitors and audiences cuts across a wide range of settings, from zoos to museums to festivals.

[3]Public Engagement

2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/academicstaff/eric_jensen/

An excellent 1984 documentary about Ludwig Wittgenstein (2012-11-08 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/1LNTsle7UtM
If you’re unfamiliar with Wittgenstein and would like to understand him further, we can heartily recommend this biography:

[2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/p6Dq9ToGF6w

Human, All Too Human (2012-11-09 08:00)

This astonishing 1999 BBC documentary series follows the lives of three prominent European philosophers: Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The theme of this documentary revolves heavily around the school of philosophical thought known as existentialism, although the term had not been coined at the time of Nietzsche’s writing, and Heidegger declaimed the label. The documentary is named after the 1878 book written by Nietzsche, titled Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits.

This is the book from which the series takes its name:
1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/gqI6cHjSYL0
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/L2F99edA2Eg
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/q_U1kbwdlPY
4. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Nl-vaAdJD3MC&lpg=PP1&ots=2z7Zt1dYKK&q=human%20all%20to%20human&pg=PP1&output=embed
It has been over 50 years since C. Wright Mills wrote the Sociological Imagination. In that time the world has changed beyond recognition: the Cold War ended, the Keynesian consensus broke down, a globalizing neoliberalism rose to the ascendancy and the internet began to transform human communication and culture. In recent years, with 9/11 and then the financial crisis, it seems that history has returned with a vengeance. Is Wright Mills’ notion of the ‘Sociological Imagination’ still pertinent today? How can Sociology help shed light on the rapidly transforming world around us and the consequences of these transformations for the people who inhabit it? What does the ‘Sociological Imagination’ mean today?

The [1]Sociological Imagination website is seeking short articles which engage with these themes, or particular aspects of them. Submissions should be 500 – 1500 words and [2]e-mailed as a Word document. There is no deadline for submissions.

2. [mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.a.carrigan@warwick.ac.uk)
Advice on introducing Twitter to academics (2012-11-13 08:00)

Twitter has a definite image problem. It first penetrated the public consciousness in a way which has left it defined by celebrities and, particularly for academics, this is unattractive. If you want to persuade academics to use it, it’s important to illustrate that the academic twittersphere (I hate the term but have yet to come across a better one) has some quite specific characteristics.

Perhaps by demonstrating some of the varied kinds of high-quality interaction you get on there e.g. #phdchat discussions, the feeds of high profile academics who are engaged users, the possibility for crowd-sourcing.

It’s difficult to convey the point of Twitter. Partly this is a result of the inadequacy of ‘micro-blogging’ as a concept: it doesn’t get across what such a service is, how it can be used or what value these uses have. If you want to persuade academics to use it, your account has to be framed in practical terms. However this is difficult because much of the terminology, interface and minutiae of Twitter are inherently confusing and probably always will be.

Therefore it’s important to convey that you really do have to try it properly (i.e. fill out your profile, add a picture, find relevant people to follow, have some conversations, explore a hashtag and do some retweeting) before you’re in a position to make an informed decision. They may subsequently decide it’s not for them but it’s important to get across that everyone finds it quite bewildering from the outside or when they first sign up. Hence the prevalence of the “I’m not sure what the point of Twitter is” opening tweet.

The steep learning curve isn’t a very attractive proposition to academics.

Hence as well as being framed by examples of high-quality intellectual interaction, sessions should be framed by an account of the different uses to which you can put Twitter and how these fit into, as well as enhance, existing aspects of academic practice e.g. connecting at conferences, promoting your work. People just aren’t going to be bothered to persist with a slightly bewildering service unless they’re confident that (a) it leads somewhere (b) that ‘somewhere’ is a place they’re going to benefit from being, given who they are and what they do.

There’s a difficult balance to strike between the technical aspects of doing workshops about Twitter and the more conceptual aspects relating to how people conceive of and engage with Twitter. People will have technical questions
and they should feel free, if at all possible, to ask these as and when during training workshops. Technical questions left unanswered will hinder, perhaps fatally, people’s ability to relate Twitter to them. But the main focus of such a workshop should be on the conceptual questions, as the aim should be to allow potential academic Twitter users to be able to construe the service, as well as the uses to which it can be put, in terms of their existing practices, projects and commitments.

Therefore the core technical training should take place before hand: either in the form of a computer session where everyone signs up, a step-by-step guide distributed before hand to get people up and running or a demonstration at the start on an OHP with a dummy twitter account which can ‘lose its identity’ after each session. This can be supplemented by further resources which are sent after the session (potentially via Twitter? incentivising subsequent use vs alienating those who don’t immediately get round to it) which take the step-by-step training to a higher level. This would allow technical questions to come up and be asked in a free-flowing way which would benefit the ‘thinking through’ process which is a necessary component of a session. But it would also hopefully minimise them so that they don’t interrupt the flow of the session or dominate it.

Unless people quickly get tied into some sort of network on Twitter they’re unlikely to persist with it.

In part this entails the necessity of getting people to choose followers during a session, as well as demonstrating the various means through which this can be done. But an equally important part of it is getting people in the session to follow and interact with each other. Therefore they’re tied into a network by the time they leave the session and, even if only a smaller number actively engage, their engagements are going to have consequences throughout this initial network (through their RTs and conversations etc) in a way which is going to maximise the chance that disinterested/apathetic participants see interesting stuff in their timeline and feel moved to explore further. Furthermore follow ups from the facilitators could usefully stimulate this but it must be carefully and conservatively done, otherwise it risks coming across as contrived and/or intrusive.

Not everyone is going to respond to Twitter in the same way and, if you’re an overly enthusiastic social media geek, it’s easy to forget this. This is ethically problematic, in so far as it can lead you to fail to recognise that some forms of engagement with Twitter (i.e. keeping it as narrowly professional in the capital ‘p’ sense of the term) are grounded in people’s lives and personalities in ways that must not be implied are the ‘wrong’ ways of using Twitter. You’re also likely to, at best, fail to connect with workshop participants and, at worst, alienate them if you fail to explicitly recognise the human diversity which leads to the diversity of ways in which one can engage with Twitter.

Therefore “there’s no right or wrong way, it’s a case of trying it and figuring out how you want to use it” should be a running motif through trainings sessions, there should be allotted time for group discussion of core issues (e.g. professional vs private online identity) with the facilitators taking a back-seat to gently steer discussion and answer technical questions.
as Tiziana Terranova calls it, that is required by social media. The advantage of my blog is that I can post things when it suits me, it’s more easily archived and maintained, and it can be more sporadic. The thing with Twitter is that it seems to be more of a continual commitment and that content is more ephemeral. So, I’ve avoided Twitter so far but I can see that it might actually be helpful for the visibility of my work. I can see that when a post on here gets tweeted by a reader it often gets a higher level of attention. This suggests that there is some advantage in using it. I’m going to continue to resist for the time being at least. My caution was probably a result of some of the early research I did on social media as it was beginning to take off in 2006-2007. [...] 

**Multi-author blogging resources for academics** (2012-11-14 08:00)

- [1]An introduction to multi-author blogging
- [2]Publishing on the web as a researcher
- [4]“Blogging is quite simply, one of the most important things that an academic should be doing right now”
- [5]Multi-author academic blogs are the way of the future
- [7]Cite or site? An article which conveys the broader context within which multi-author blogging is significant for academic publishing
- [8]12 Blogging mistakes to avoid at all costs

2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvUyW7z_nIs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvUyW7z_nIs)
3. [http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/rex23phd11/entry/single_author_vs/](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/rex23phd11/entry/single_author_vs/)
4. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/)
7. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/09/01/cite-or-site-academic-publishing/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/09/01/cite-or-site-academic-publishing/)
8. [http://www.socialmedia.biz/2012/05/03/12-blogging-mistakes-to-avoid-at-all-costs/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+typepad%2Fsocial_m](http://www.socialmedia.biz/2012/05/03/12-blogging-mistakes-to-avoid-at-all-costs/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+typepad%2Fsocial_m)

**Nine resources for academics getting started with Twitter** (2012-11-14 14:00)

1. [1]Register for Twitter and find researchers to follow
2. [2]Engage with your network on Twitter
3. [3]“Why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?”
4. [4]The LSE’s list of academic twitter users

5. [5]Support, engagement, visibility and personalised news: Twitter has a lot to offer academics if we look past its image problem

6. [6]100 Serious Twitter Tips for Academics

7. [7]10 Ways Researchers Can Use Twitter

8. [8]Using Twitter in university research, teaching and impact activities

9. [9]Exploring research networks on Twitter

5. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/16/twitter-lot-to-offer-academics/
7. http://www.networkedresearcher.co.uk/2011/08/03/10-ways-researchers-can-use-twitter/

SI Profile: Margaret Archer (2012-11-15 08:00)

[1]"SI Profile: Margaret Archer" on Bundlr

Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss the Continental-Analytic split in Western philosophy. The Analytic school favours a logical, scientific approach, in contrast to the Continental emphasis on the importance of time and place. But what are the origins of this split and is it possible that contemporary philosophers can bridge the gap between the two? Melvyn Bragg is joined by Stephen Mulhall of New College, University of Oxford, Beatrice Han-Pile of the University of Essex and Hans Johann-Glock of the University of Zurich.

Call for Micro Podcasts (2012-11-17 08:00)

Over the last couple of years we’ve hosted a lot of [1]podcasts on Sociological Imagination. However thus far all of them have been produced by us. We’d like to host some by you as well! Specifically micro podcasts on any sociological topic.

For instance this 1 min podcast we recorded with Les Back at the British Sociological Association conference earlier this year:

It was recorded with [3]Audioboo which is a free smart phone app that records podcasts of 3 minutes and under. It is entirely free and incredibly easy to use. It requires no technical knowledge whatsoever and allows you to publish your podcast online with a couple of clicks.

If you go through with this and post a micro podcast on your Audiboo account, we can quickly post it up on SI. All you need to do is [4]e-mail or [5]tweet us with the address of the podcast.

Why not give it a go...

2. [http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed](http://audioboo.fm/boos/753951-les-back-is-sociology-a-job-or-a-vocation/embed)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Rick Roderick on Heidegger - The Rejection of Humanism (2012-11-18 08:00)

[IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/sDqDJcJAOg](http://www.youtube.com/embed/sDqDJcJAOg)
Some podcasting resources (2012-11-18 12:00)

1. [1] The BSA PG Forum podcasting handbook
2. [2] An introduction to academic podcasting
4. [4] Call recorder for Skype (probably free ones out there but this is great)
5. [5] Tool to convert to or from MP3
7. [8] BSA PG Forum podcast series (e-mail [9] here to discuss submitting a podcast)
8. [10] Getting your podcasts on iTunes
9. [11] Setting up an RSS feed for your podcasts with feed burner
10. [12] Planning an academic podcast
12. [14] What you need to podcast
14. [16] Some more tips for academic podcasting

7. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
9. mailto:PGForum@Britsoc.org.uk
11. http://support.google.com/feedburner/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=78475
16. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/atoz/thinkingaloud/recording/
The evolution of mobile phones (2012-11-19 08:00)

Having coffee and waiting for a call. Once again, boredom proves the mother of great (or merely relatively entertaining) ideas. I am thinking about mobile phones. Fascinating things, aren't they? I first saw a mobile phone (mobiphone) in the mid-1990s, when it was an expensive piece of equipment owned chiefly by businesspeople. In the popular consciousness in Bulgaria, the mobiphone became firmly associated with the so-called 'mutri' (thugs, mafiosi). The first mini-mobile I saw belonged to a Dutch ship-agent in the summer of 1998. I got my first own mobile phone in the spring of 2000, shortly before graduating from high school and although it didn't quite change my life in an instant, it crept in and is not about to creep out any time soon. But it seems unimaginable today. Even those 3 (now 2, as one recently gave in) of my friends and acquaintances that do not possess a mobile phone in fact do this because they have other means of communication (all three are full- or part-time academics and avid internet-users).

But, as a sociologist, I should now spare you reminiscences about life before the advent of the mobile phone and get beyond personal anecdotes. So, let's trace the 'evolution' of mobile phones through a chronological selection of some of the most popular mobile phones in the period between 1983 and 1999 - [1]here. The [2]Mobilephonehistory.co.uk website also has some interesting info about the history of mobiles. The Guardian chips in with an [3]article, the title of which could be construed as not-so-hidden advertising. And here is a 2003 [4]article by Lacohée, Wakeford and Pearson on the social history of the mobile phone, unfortunately already a little outdated. Perfect example of how quickly changes in technology can affect our everyday lives, the structure of the economy, socialising patterns, life chances, modes of sharing information, private/public spheres, employment opportunities, and much else. Do you know any other resources about the social history or social significance of mobile phone technology?

2. http://www.mobilephonehistory.co.uk/

Is America the New ‘Old Country’? (2012-11-19 18:24)

The great journalist Walter Lippmann famously defined the twentieth century as the ‘American Century’. In 2012 the twentieth century is history: We’ve been there, done that. Now, it seems, America is the Old Country. The idea of countries being ‘old’ or ‘new’ has been popularised in recent times by George W Bush’s Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, who distinguished Old and New Europe (with the UK mercifully excluded), based on whether their promotion of Western values took an inward or outward turn – as judged by their willingness to support the US-led invasion of Iraq. However, I mean ‘old country’ in the nostalgic sense that immigrants to the US used to refer to Europe as the ‘old country’.

Although a New Yorker by birth, I have now spent two-thirds of my professional career in the UK. I return to the US 4-5 times per year, typically on business. For me the US seems culturally stuck in a late Cold War time warp – that is, forever 1970-1990. I should not be hearing the music of my youth whenever I turn on a random radio station – or three or four. The buildings are either 1930s art deco (remnants of New Deal public works projects) or 1970s anonymous skyscrapers. The city centres of the old industrial cities are Disneyfied, often to resemble some generic mid-20th century image that a child (such as myself) might have had of the place. Sometimes I even think that the prices have been frozen at the levels of my childhood. And perhaps most strikingly, the people still talk as if America...
is the greatest place in the world without a hint of doubt or irony.

There is something quite touching about all this, and I wish I could say that America’s endless capacity for self-affirmation genuinely inspired its citizens to do better. But as demonstrated by the intensity of the uphill battle that Barack Obama faced in his re-election campaign, self-affirmation is too often a mask for collective denial and a refusal to engage in the painful act of national self-redefinition. Here Americans most resemble its late 19th/early 20th century European immigrants who would rhapsodise about some mythical ‘old country’ to the disadvantage of their adopted homeland. Obama’s greatest long-term contribution to the American psyche may be to have started, often by personal example, the difficult conversation of what it means to be American, now that the world-historic spirit passes from its shores – and living in the past is not an option.

Michael Sandel: The lost art of democratic debate (2012-11-20 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/hPsUXhXgWml?feature=player_detailpage

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/hPsUXhXgWml?feature=player_detailpage
An early review of the Sociological Imagination (2012-11-21 08:00)

"Imagine a burly cowpuncher on the long, slow ride from the Panhandle of Texas to Columbia University, carrying in his saddle-bag some books which he reads with absorption while his horse trots along. Imagine that among the books are some novels of Kafka, Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution, and essays of Max Weber. Imagine the style and imagery that would result from the interaction of the cowboy-student and his studies. Imagine also that en route he passes through Madison, Wisconsin, that seat of a decaying populism and that, on arriving at his destination in New York, he encounters Madison Avenue, that street full of reeking phantasies of the manipulation of the human will and of what is painful to America’s well-wishers and enjoyable to its detractors. Imagine the first Madison disclosing to the learned cowpuncher his subsequent political mode, the second an object of his hatred...The end result of such an imaginary grand tour would be a work like The Sociological Imagination"

This less than charitable early review of the Sociological Imagination was written by [1]Edward Shils. It offers an interesting insight into the status Mills enjoys within the sociological cannon, as his now iconic status was paralleled during his life by a dissidence which had not yet been elevated into esteemed iconoclasm. But it would be too easy to read the career trajectory of Mills as a fable about the intellectual virtue of resistance within a professionalising sociology. While Mills may be blogged about (something he would have [2]enjoyed partaking in himself perhaps) in
admiring tones decades later by those who can’t help but contrast his enduring reputation to that of Shils and co, there are surely many others who have simply been forgotten.

3. [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=UTQ6OkKwszoC&lpg=PP1&ots=uu7LaA2RMz&q=sociological%20imagination&pg=PP1&output=embed](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=UTQ6OkKwszoC&lpg=PP1&ots=uu7LaA2RMz&q=sociological%20imagination&pg=PP1&output=embed)

matthew bond (2013-01-08 17:16:54)
Lots of normative and positive problems with C Wright Mills’s work. For starters: 1. Just another pessimistic elitist like Pareto. 2. Hard to falsify his claims. 3. Lack of empirical investigation. ps thanks for quoting Shils shred. I usually dig ES’s prose but that passage stinks.

**Why disability history should be on the school curriculum** (2012-11-22 08:00)
A good article in the Guardian answering this question: [1]here.

1. Whydisabilityhistoryshouldbeontheschoolcurriculum
Parenting in modern Britain: series of podcasts by the University of Warwick (2012-11-23 08:00)

In September 2012, the University of Warwick held a conference on the 'Understanding Parenting: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives'. It was supported by The Wellcome Trust and brought together researchers, policy-makers and practitioners to discuss the debates surrounding childlessness, childbearing and childrearing. The conference was convened by Dr Angela Davis and Dr Laura King at the University of Warwick.

Check out the conference podcasts.

1. ApodcastseriesbasedontheUnderstandingParentingConferenceatWarwick,Sept2012

Are Teenagers more 'Obedient' These Days? (2012-11-23 19:06)

Recently Mark Easton, a BBC editor, observed that the “teenage rebels are not what they were.” By reviewing some of the recent analyses, he shows how much the new generation of teenagers are different from the past ones in the cases of using the banned drugs, drinking alcohol or smoking.

Then he asked “today, though, where are the rebellious sub-cultures?” And correctly adds that “no-one is suggesting that young people do not misbehave, but teenagers no longer seem to define themselves by wild disobedience.”

Easton’s hypothesis is also interesting. He believes that “these days, perhaps, adolescent identity is defined more by the use of social media rather than the use of illicit drugs.” Now it means that youth gangs are now going virtual. Then they show their disobedience on the social networks like Facebook which is almost out of the control of the past generation.

“The archetypal teen is evolving.” There is no doubt on it. And also internet and the digital gap between the generations are also constituted a new sphere of action for the teenagers to be together and create their own new—however virtual—world very easily. Then they have their own kingdom and there is no need to challenge the other—more real—kingdoms. From this perspective, yes, they became more obedient and probably submissive.

It is thought-provoking to think about other more sociological and historical causes for this phenomenon. I want to invite you to take a look at the problem from another, wide, historical, perspective. It seems to me that the teenagers did not become obedient. Conversely I believe that whole of the society is now more disobedient.
Just take a look at the way we dress and compare it with the extremely formal ways of dressing-up (like as a university student) 60 years ago. The male students of the time used to wear ties and coats and even there were some courses for the female fresher about the way they should behave in the university like how to sit down or drink and etc. One will apparently observe that in compare with them we are absolutely 'hippies.'

The radical leftist movements of 60s to 80s and the postmodern ideas of the 70s onwards had some profound effects on the everyday life of the Western (including British) low-culture. This impact is crucially on the way modern men are looking at the world. 50 years ago this world was horribly divided between some solid ideologies like Marxism, Fascism and Liberalism. The world was full of ‘certainties’ and ‘absolute truths.’ There were quite a lot of real targets to fight against in addition to many intense hopes to create the ideal society. But the deep effect of the post-modern turn was the gradual liquefaction of those solids. As Marx once said 'all the solids melts into air.'

If we look at the evolution of the modern world in the last decades of the twentieth century we can discern the stormy tendency toward the liquefaction of the ‘solids’ in any kind; first of all religious ones during the Enlightenment, then the human made ideologies like Fascism and Marxism, and finally the core ideal of the liberalism, the idea of progress and the sanctity of science itself, largely, challenged.

The point is that in an age which Zygmunt Bauman called the age of liquid modernity, teenagers can find no real target to be opposed to, not a 'valid' criteria to resist against, not a single grain of truth to show its falsity. They are not so 'obedient.' All of the society is more rebellious. At the middle of such a permanent revolutions no one needs to be 'wild disobedient.'

To put it more accurately, the term 'disobedient', which presupposes the presence of a non-challenged power to which one can be totally obedient, has recycled. Here we have more suitable term; representation. What today teenagers are really searching for is to represent their individual identity and interests on the virtual basis. The fundamental selection is not between obedience/disobedience but between well-representation/misrepresentation/not-represented.

Morteza Hashemi Madani is a PhD student in the sociology department of the University of Warwick. His fields of research are philosophy of social sciences and science studies. Also in the past ten years he has been a blogger and journalist.

These generalisations are very ethnocentric. Please reread what you’ve written and think about whether any of it applies to Saudi Arabia or Egypt, where religion is still very "solid" and there has never been a youth rebellion against social norms. There’s more to the world than the US and Europe. The failure to notice this is a serious flaw in a great deal of sociology. Moreover, even in the US, religion is still very solid for most people. When you say "we" or "teenagers", think about who you’re really talking about. You’re writing on the Internet, and the Internet is global.

Well sir! I am a middle-eastern researcher who has been there in the past 25 years. Before you accuse me of having ‘white mask on the black skin’ – I’m actually a kind of brown :) – I should add that you have a point there. I wrote this as a response to an article which was published on BBC and it was mainly about European/Western teenagers. Not a kind of universally valid theory for whole of human beings right now. To explain in detail what is happening in the middle-East in the age called ‘liquid modernity’ was not my concern here. Might write about it later but you might be right that I needed to add one adjective like ‘Western teenagers’ not to make it ‘naively universally valid claim.’

"The radical leftist movements of 60s to 80s and the postmodern ideas of the 70s onwards had some profound effects on the everyday life of the Western (including British) low-culture."

I'll leave it to the author to decide whether to reveal their personal characteristics but the allegations of ‘ethnocentrism’ (I know him in real life) made me LOL. In the genuine laugh out load sense of ‘lol’.

All the more so given the patronising self-righteous tone in which your comment is written.

It doesn’t matter who you are. I’m not making an ad hominem argument. I’m just pointing out that the phenomena you’re describing are real for only a small part of the world’s population. The phrase "Western (including British)" occurs halfway through the post, after you’ve already referred to "the new generation of teenagers", "the whole of society", and "the way we dress". Anyway, your claims aren’t even valid for Britain, only for the most secularised portion of the British population. There are plenty of people in Britain whose religious beliefs haven’t been "liquefied" at all, and whose way of life is utterly untouched by radical leftist movements, and there are even more in the US. The notion that "the West" (a meaningless Eurocentric term) has become thoroughly secularised and postmodern is a discredited fallacy.

I find your contention that people can be divided up into those for whom religion/belief is 'liquid' and those for whom it is 'solid' utterly bewildering. I’m not a fan of Bauman’s liquid modernity stuff but, discounting that, this seems like a gross misreading.

But this has nothing to do with me so I’m going to back off and leave you and Morteza to talk...

And if I sound annoyed, it’s because this sort of sloppy cultural myopia is distressingly common in English-language sociology,
in which "we" often seems to mean "me and my liberal friends in academia", as if conservative Christians, Muslims, Jews, and other "non-liquid" populations didn't exist or didn't matter, or could be safely ignored on the grounds that they exist only in the so-called "non-Western world", when in reality they're your neighbours in London.

(1): as if they "could be safely ignored on the grounds that they exist only in the so-called "non-Western world" (2): "Please reread what you've written and think about whether any of it applies to Saudi Arabia or Egypt, where religion is still very "solid" and there has never been a youth rebellion against social norms." Surely the assumption you're critiquing in (1) is precisely the one implied by what you said in (2)?

Sociological Imagination (2012-11-24 11:56:43)
This is why I think the 'liquid' concept is pretty useless in terms of practical social theory. It either leads to the obliteration of empirical detail (which is the perfectly valid point of your critique) or the meaningfulness of the conceptual distinction melts (!) away when you recognise that 'solid' and 'liquid' life exists side by side to varying degrees. It's a crap dichotomy which reifies a complex process, pretending to offer explanatory purchase on it while doing little more than getting in the way of actually understanding social & cultural change. I love much of Bauman's work but, though he is much more likable, his stuff on liquid modernity is no better than Giddens and Beck and, in some ways, much worse.

Rule of thumb: if someone tries to explain social change in terms of transitional dualisms (modernity -> postmodernity, traditional -> post-traditional, solid -> liquid etc) they're almost certainly not explaining anything. They're assuming a trajectory of social change and fitting whatever empirical data they engage with into a preconceived framework. If you explain change over time in terms of a transition between dualisms you inevitably assume the very process which you're citing empirical data in an attempt to substantiate.

Here's an example of what I'm referring to, from Bauman's "Liquid Modernity", p. 28: "As Lessing pointed out a long time ago, at the threshold of the modern era we have been emancipated from belief in the act of creation, revelation and eternal condemnation." I mentioned Egypt and Saudi Arabia as a heuristic. I don't think anyone who lived in the Arab world could write something like Bauman's sentence above. The incongruity would just be too flagrant. However, that doesn't excuse him for writing it in the UK, either. And the fact that that book is so widely admired and cited says something about the sorry state of sociology.

Benjamin Geer (2012-11-24 12:52:30)
And you're right that I misused Bauman's terms "solid" and "liquid". Actually, since he seems to think that only atheists can be modern, one would have to conclude that most of humanity has not experienced any modernity at all – an absurd conclusion.

Teenages in most part of the world are disobedient, in spite of religion or regional culture. Media is important to close and adjacent behaviors and ideas of youth together.

Sociological Imagination (2012-11-24 18:02:37)
Hurray we've found a mutually agreeable conclusion! Entirely agree with your last two comments :)

Morteza (2012-11-25 02:52:04)
It seems to me that the Islamic revolution of 1979 in Iran was a challenge to the naive conception of the history as a one-way street toward the secularisation. To define 'liquidity' only from the sociological (empirical) point of view is so misleading. If you do so obviously you can find some empirical counter-facts which show the existence of 'solidity.' The point is that I believe we need an epistemological reading of the term 'liquidity'; Religion as a meta-discourse is challenged in the modern world. I
know that even in the West we have Muslim extremists. Also I know that inside Christianity there are some serious tendencies toward the revival of religious discourse. But the point is that this religion is not a meta-discourse and exactly because of this needs 'a revival movement.' As Milbank clearly stated his goal at the beginning of *Theology and Social Theory*: "What follows is intended to overcome the pathos of modern theology, and to restore in post-modern terms, the possibility of theology as a meta-discourse." The process of liquefaction is not the process of 'getting rid of religion' (from the sociological point of view which Comte and Marx used to see) but its disappearance as a meta-narrative. Religious truth is there; valid, alive and solid. But it does not remain unchallenged. It is not a meta-narrative any more. Religious political movements like Islamic revolution in Iran among Shia’s or Fundamentalist movements inside Sunny Islam or even inside academia in the West and East (like Milbank’s radical orthodoxy) clearly define their goals; the revival of religion as a meta-discourse. So what I said in this essay was not based on the positivistic naive idea of the progress of history toward the demolition of religion. Conversely I do believe in the necessity of the revival of religion as a meta-narrative. But when I say that ‘this is my political project’, at the same time I have presupposed that it is not in that position right now. Religious truth is just one truth among other nationalist, chauvinist, socialist etc. ideas even inside Saudi Arabia. PS. Still I don’t want to open the Pandora’s Box of “religion and middle-east in the age of liquidity” and, evidently, restricted my essay to the West. Just one point for here: I believe that fundamentalism is the other side of the coin of secularisation by distortion of the traditional religion from inside. Fundamentalism as one way of re-emergence of religion in the modern time is more secular (and because of this violent) than one might think.

**What does a career in social research entail? (2012-11-24 08:00)**

So what do social researchers do? RSUK has launched a [1]website about careers in science, exploring different possibilities of life as a researcher and the different career paths which UK researchers take. The website features researchers from all seven Research Councils and cover a broad range of disciplines. New case studies will be added to the site regularly. Click here to [2]meet some real-life social science researchers!

![Sociology](Photo: Idle Ethnographer TM)
"Ultimately, if I’m honest, I do it because it’s fun" (2012-11-25 08:00)

In this short podcast recorded at a [1]Digital Change GPP discussion event earlier this year, [2]Eleonora Belfiore discusses her experience of using social media as an academic.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/ebgpp.mp3"]

The Accidental Sociologist is having a bit of an identity crisis.... (2012-11-26 08:00)

There’s a moment in Heart of Darkness when, Kurtz, at the instance of his death, cries ‘The horror! The horror!’ The terror, madness and awful spectre of what has been and what is yet to come lie before him and he cannot help but exclaim and lament his fate.

This is a fair and true reflection of how I currently feel about sociology. And literature. And my PhD proposal. What is becoming increasingly apparent is that being interdisciplinary in a compartmentalized funding system is A Very Difficult Thing.

Problem one is my all-encompassing identity crisis. So I’m interested in sociological stuff, but my particular areas are poles apart: sexualities versus critical theory, Frankfurt style. Added to this my determination to get the sociology of literature in there, plus my chronic funding application state which is pushing me to write a literary criticism oriented AHRC bid in addition to my ESRC bid, plus thinking of a suitable MRes dissertation topic, all ends up in me writing at least four different proposals – and for one of them there are multiple variations on a theme. It’s too much. Someone needs to stage an intervention, possibly involving a bucket of cold water and a Monty Python-esque fish moment.

Problem two is that I still can’t work out where I fit. My first AHRC draft was deemed too sociological; my ESRC ideas have been suggested as literary (it was the same proposal): who knows anymore where ideas fit? Methodologically I’m certainly of the literary persuasion. But it seems that library visits, hard thinking and then writing stuff is not a recognised research method in the social sciences. Conceptually, I’m sociological. In terms of goals I’m not concerned with saying new things about literary texts, but I do want to make a contribution to how we understand ourselves, the formation of our society and the ways in which we ‘do’ culture. Throughout my methods courses I’ve yet to come across a method that I’ve thought would be more appropriate to analyzing texts that what we do in literary criticism. Sociologists have discourse analysis (and critical discourse analysis, you’re a bit of a knob) which is a lot like lit crit but
with different words and there’s some attempt to science it up. I like it but for me it feels like reinventing the wheel.

So I’ve been spending the last month or so writing like a bastard and then scrapping most of it as I come a little closer each day to understanding what I want to do and how. It’s a slow, painful and horribly reflexive process of undressing hidden desires and admitting what I actually am concerned with rather than what I think will look good on a CV or status-driven ideas of appearing to do something very hard. And all this writing brings me neatly to something which has been plaguing me throughout November.

No, not awful moustaches - #acwrimo – which if you are unfamiliar stands for Academic Writing Month. The point is to make a concerted effort throughout the month of November to write as much as you can on your current academic writing project. Then you tell everyone about it on Twitter, thus creating a feeling of positivity and productivity. Or so goes the theory. Personally I find it ghastly, to the extent that I wonder if Kurtz himself had taken part and that this was one of the horrors he regretted in his final moments. I’m all for creating supportive atmosphere which allows the flourishing of new ideas, the exploration of our interests and which buoys our flagging self-esteem – and we need this in both our online and ‘real’ lives. To be sure, one of the biggest lies about academia is that you do it alone – that it’s a career for people who like spending their time outside the company of others. Certainly you have to be able to work alone for long stretches – no one is going to write your work for you – but you absolutely cannot do it alone. The support of others is vital. So, in a way, I do understand the impetus behind the collective writing movement, the spurring on and the frequent exclamations of content produced and word counts shooting ever higher. But I’m more and more uncomfortable with the version of academia we’re selling ourselves through movements like this: that writing comes easily; it happens fast; that your body of work is sound despite being produced quickly; that you’ve had three internationally significant REF-able ideas and it’s still only breakfast, and so on and so forth. It seems to happen more so on social media than in offline life, and is particularly apparent on Twitter. It seems we’re all desperate to give an impression of ourselves as coping easily, unflappable, happy, well-adjusted, creative powerhouses of intellectual thought. Who wouldn’t?

Well, I’m going to come out and say it straight: I’m not. Not only do I occasionally find writing hard, but I find the thought process that goes into deciding what exactly to write even harder. I also sometimes have really brilliant ideas and when I do start writing, it’s awesome and original and it makes me feel invincible. And then there are the days when I feel like Oscar Wilde and all I do is put in a comma – and then take it out again. There are brilliant days when I write thousands of words and they all end up staying but these are pretty much balanced by the days when I write utter bollocks. The #acwrimo challenge is certainly a worthy one and I’m not questioning its validity and presence in online working but what I will question is some of the motives of the way that people share their #acwrimo challenge work. There are a decent number on my Twitter feed who are honest and open about how much they’ve done and report the writing blocks as well as the successes. I think this makes for an inclusive community. However there is a significantly higher proportion (mostly of retweeted comments, to be fair) that focus solely on how well they are doing to the extent that it becomes boastful. No matter how productive I am personally, I always find this alienating. Whilst I love hearing good news stories from most people, I realize that I enjoy hearing their fortune because I can see how hard they’ve worked for it. Others seem merely to want to let the world know that they’re successful and succeeding. To me, that doesn’t count as community.

Sometimes talking endlessly about what you find difficult is the wrong thing to do – in being so negative and despondent, you only succeed in fulfilling your pessimistic prophecy. But often it can be inspiring and freeing to admit that you’re stuck or that you love what you’re writing but it’s going a bit slowly, or that you’ve trapped yourself in a thought-spiral too tight to unwind but you’re sure there’s something good beneath the debris. If there’s one thing I’ve learned thus far it’s that admitting my failures is the necessary first step to putting them right.
"Life gets under your skin": reading about welfare and the lifecourse in plain English (2012-11-27 08:00)

As part of the Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science that took place earlier this month (3-10 November 2012), researchers from the [1]International Centre for Lifecourse Studies in Society and Health (ICLS) funded by the [2]Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) releasing a plain English guide to their research demonstrating how ‘Life gets under your skin’. The booklet explains how social policy related to family life, education, employment and welfare can have beneficial effects for the health of individuals. It also shows how multi disciplinary, longitudinal research can deliver findings valuable to the individual, society and the economy.


1. http://www.ucl.ac.uk/icls/
2. 

India's XXI century untouchables (2012-11-28 08:00)

I recently talked to Pradeep Shinde, an anthropologist who studies the performance of work by sanitary workers in a Mumbai slum. He argues that the caste system in India is still very much present, and that alongside the changes caste-related beliefs are still embedded in Indian society and that there is also a resurgence of such beliefs not only in India, but also among Indian emigrants around the world. He recommended a fascinating film about the contemporary situation of Dalits in India:


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLR3chR7GatNraEnp95I8ehG-GRyzdGvKm&hl=en_US
The Public Understanding of Science is a Political Issue: an interview with Alex Smith (2012-11-29 08:00)

In this interview Mark Carrigan talks to Alex Smith (right) about his recent fieldwork in Kansas City, part of the larger Making Science Public project, exploring the role that debates about the status of science are having in the unfolding of the Republican primaries. We touch on broader issues about the role of science in society but also about the status of the understanding of science as a public issue. Alex argues that this must be understood in political rather than cultural terms. The public understanding of science is not simply a matter of PR for academics.

[sc _embed_player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/kansas.mp3"]

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/research/alexandersmith/

Interested in Digital Sociology? (2012-11-30 08:00)

One of SI’s editors is working with Emma Head from Keele University to propose a Digital Sociology study group for the British Sociological Association. We’ve now collected enough signatures for the application to go ahead but we thought some readers might be interested in this anyway. Get in touch by [1]e-mail or [2]Twitter if you’d like to be kept informed about the group’s progress.

BSA Digital Sociology Study Group, co-convened by Mark Carrigan (LSE) and Emma Head (Keele University)

In spite of the increasing prominence of the Digital Humanities within the academic landscape, the form and practice which might come to be implied by the moniker ‘Digital Sociology’ remains strikingly inarticulate. While recent developments in computational social science and online research methods are certainly to be welcomed, it is
our contention that the nascent 'digital turn' being witnessed in the academy has broader significance for the future of sociology than such specialisms can account for. Lupton (2012) identifies four major areas to the nascent field of digital sociology: professional use of digital tools by sociologists, sociological analyses of digital media use, sociological analysis of digital data and critical analysis of digital media and their attendant circuits of capital and power. Our proposed group would seek to represent each of these areas, drawing out the commonalities between them while taking care not to obliterate the distinctions between them.

The proposal is made against the background of what Savage and Burrows (2007) identify as the coming crisis of empirical sociology, particularly the profound challenge which the proliferation of 'big data' poses for the traditional analytical repertoires of professional sociology. While recognising that important initiatives have been undertaken at a national level towards these ends (e.g. Digital Methods as Mainstream Methodology) we nonetheless contend that there are limitations to the approach adopted and that, with regards to the long term vitality of professional sociology, there is a need for a distinctly sociological exploration of these challenges. We imagine that this would involve building digital research capacity, in a manner which would draw on and complement these existing projects, while also moving beyond them to address the broader questions contemporary circumstances pose for the future of sociology. We share Back’s (2012: 18) belief that, in spite of the profound challenges faced by sociology in an age of austerity, it is nonetheless the case that “there is more opportunity to reimagine sociological craft now than at any other point in the discipline’s history”. We propose the Digital Sociology study group as an open-ended forum which seeks to explore the nature and implications of these challenges but also to collectively elaborative creative solutions to them.

Aims:

To identify and disseminate best practice in the use of digital tools by sociologists.

To develop and promote specifically sociological modes of inquiry into digital media use.

To develop and promote specifically sociological responses to ‘big data’, in terms of both secondary analysis and the broader methodological questions posed by this transformation in the information systems of late capitalist society.

To develop and promote specifically sociological analyses of the broader personal, cultural and structural changes of the ‘digital turn’ in social life.

To provide an open forum for exploration of what the digital turn entails for sociological practice, professional identity and the future of the discipline.

Events and network:

The inaugural event of this study group is tentatively planned to take place in London (at the BSA meeting rooms) in the first half of 2012. This will involve invited speakers and time for discussion and networking to create wider ownerships of the developing aims of the group.

An event is also planned for March 2014, at Keele University, which would focus on postgraduate researchers.

The group would have its own developing online presence and the form that this takes will be discussed at our first event (and subject to BSA approval, where necessary).
1. mark@markcarrigan.net

Good idea! I'd like receive information about, ok? Robervi.

3.12 December

Being Human in the Information Age - Professor Steve Fuller (2012-12-01 08:00)

The hypothesis of the University of Warwick’s Being Human Research Network notes that, “Human life is increasingly driven and mediated by technology and technological change with profound implications for human identity and behaviour.” Indeed, the way in which we express ‘what it means to be human’ occurs in close relationship to the technology of our age. As actors in this phenomenon we find ourselves constantly redefining who we are through the way in which we both use and understand the metaphors associated with latest technological advancements.
Steve Fuller on being human in an information age | Thinking culture (2012-12-02 07:11:21)

[...] Sociological Imagination has a short video of Steve Fuller talking about being human in an Information Age. I think this is probably linked to his recent book Humanity 2.0: What it means to be human past, present and future. There’s an interview with Steve about the ideas in his book in The Guardian. [...]

Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2012-12-02 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2]Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates

Noam Chomsky: How Climate Change Became a 'Liberal Hoax' (2012-12-03 08:00)

Who are the English Defence League? (2012-12-04 08:00)

Two recent articles about the EDL might also be of interest to readers:

- Hilary Pilkington from the MYPLACE project used a recent article to explore the experience of going on an EDL demonstration from an insider's perspective.
- The Extremis project conducted a detailed survey examining public attitudes towards the EDL.
The reasons for female religiosity (2012-12-05 08:00)


Listen to a [5]podcast with one of the authors, Dr Marta Trzebiatowska.


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/u0fwLIg1evg
2. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/2012/10/17/when-is-a-kettle-not-a-kettle-when-it-is-on-slow-boil

Benjamin Geer (2012-12-06 05:49:38)
Strangely, the authors don’t seem to have considered the hypothesis that religious practice legitimizes domination, and that women tend to need this legitimation more than men because they are generally more dominated.

Milena Kremakova (2012-12-12 14:19:09)
Benjamin, I'm not sure I understand your argument... could you explain what you mean when you say that women tend need legitimation more than men? That it is more of a problem for women?

Benjamin Geer (2013-09-25 19:14:49)
Since you've tweeted this post again, I'll answer your question, which I never got around to answering. I was thinking of Bourdieu's idea that social relations of domination depend partly on the complicity of the dominated. Through "symbolic violence", domination and exploitation are "misrecognised" (by both the dominant and the dominated) as the fulfillment of legitimate principles. He also argued that one of the main social functions of religion is to facilitate this misrecognition. It
follows that the more dominated you are, the more misrecognition you need in order to accept your position. Since women tend to be more dominated than men, you would expect them to need more religion in order to accept their situation, other things being equal.

Surviving a PhD - 10 Top Tips (2012-12-06 08:00)

Tip 1 – Academics need you: Most are keen to speak to any potential student who has a good research idea as a good record of successful PhD supervisions is essential to build a successful academic career. Don’t be afraid to approach a potential supervisor directly. There were not any suitable advertised studentships in the are which I live (and I did not want to move as I have a young family here), so I decided I needed to make my own opportunity. I developed a rudimentary research proposal and emailed every academic I could identify in my local region whose research interests seemed to fit. In the end I worked up a proposal with Newcastle University which we submitted for an ESRC 1+3 studentship in the open competition (I was awarded the scholarship but did not take it up, instead I opted to study via a different route – more on that in a subsequent post – but I thought the advice may be useful).
**Tip 2** – Its YOUR PhD - Take ownership: Whether the research idea is your own, or you have been appointed to research a topic as an advertised position, YOU are the one working day and night and living the research. Whilst your supervisors will have opinions or perhaps an agenda which will shape the direction of your research, It is YOU alone who will have to defend it in the viva. I have spoken to many PhD researchers who felt that their research was not their own and they were merely doing the bidding of their supervisor. The result can be mixed – some drop out as the lack of control leads to a lack of interest or focus, some work day and night to please their supervisory team and burn out, many are successfully awarded their PhDs but feel that they are a sham as their work was not entirely their own.

**Tip 3** – Write up as you are going: I am always amazed when I speak to PhD students who are in the third year and entering their "writing up stage" and tell me that they havent written more than a few thousand words. They feel daunted and overwhelmed by the huge task of meeting that 40-80,000 plus word count (depending on the discipline). “But you must have the literature review almost completed at least?” I say – but many just have pages and pages of notes. I had written complete drafts of my Introduction, Background, Literature Review, Methodology and Scoping Study by the Midpoint of my PhD – 18 months since I began. Sure, I would have to update and re-draft these sections – some of them extensively, but the knowledge that I had written about 40,000 words of what became a 90,000 document was of great comfort to me. I could also then pass these sections off to my supervisors for review whilst I embarked on my data analysis.

**Tip 4** – Love to Hate your Thesis: You will at some point hate your thesis, trust me...This is OK, its normal – most people seem to go through it at some point – usually about two-thirds of the way through. This is completely normal and to be expected. Don’t panic, take a break – yes a break. PhD students need a holiday too, even if its just a break from the research to do something different. When you return your brain will have sorted out some of the problems you are struggling with on its own.

**Tip 5** – Finished is better than perfect: I am a perfectionist by nature – but I have had to learn over the last few years the finished is better than perfect. Perfection, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. If you are lucky enough to reach the mythical land of perfection (which only exists in your own head), it is still highly likely that readers, and more importantly, examiners will find fault. This is what examiners are paid to do. The same advice applies to writing papers too. This leads into Tip 6 below...

**Tip 6** – The written Thesis is just part of the PhD: The majority of PhDs have some form of wording on the fist page which states something like the document is “submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy”. Spot the keyword? “partial”. Before and during the viva the examiners will be considering many criteria in addition to the thesis such as the administration of the PhD, your training record, publications and impact activities to name a few. The point is, the Thesis does not have to be – nor is expected to be – perfect. The examiners will always have an opinion on how you have presented the results or the approach you took. You will not know what this opinion is until you put the work in front of them – so don’t try to...
second guess but ensure that you can defend why you took a certain approach as opposed to another. You made the decision (see Tip 2) based on the evidence in front of you at the time and you are the expert in this subject. So defend.

**Tip 7** – Enjoy the Viva!: No, really. This is your chance to communicate your research, your passion, to at least two leading academics – sounds scary, but they will be genuinely interested in what you have done. Most examiners want to pass a student – despite the horror stories that are popular amongst PhD students. The truth is in the majority of cases they will have already made a decision about whether to pass you or not. You can read about my viva experience and top viva survival tips [2]here.

**Tip 8** – Have a plan for life post PhD: By this I dont mean start looking for a job etc…although of course this is important – more how are you going to fill the void? And it is a void. You will have been immersed in a particular subject and culture for at least 3 years, probably more. Once you have completed any changes demanded post viva and submitted the final completed thesis – the silence is deafening...

**Tip 9** – It is worth it: Completing the PhD, for me at least, was an anti-climax. There were no trumpets or angels, no being carried through the university on the shoulders of my peers, no huge pay-rise or immediate offers of employment, not even any champagne (although there was, strangely, many flavours of Schnapps..). However 6 months on from the viva and corrections it feels worth it. Its a validation of your research skills and prowess., you feel a little more authoritative when speaking to peers or students (although inside you know that you are not any smarter that before), and you have survived – almost mentally intact....

**Tip 10**- Ignore tips 1-9: In the words of [3]Richard Butterworth,

**The only way to find out how to do a PhD is to do one. Therefore all advice is useless...**

Alex Hope is [4]Dr. Sustainable. This was originally posted on his [5]personal blog.

4. https://twitter.com/DrSustainable
5. http://drsustainable.wordpress.com/about/
The Tweets and the Streets: an interview with Paolo Gerbaudo (2012-12-07 08:00)

In this interview Mark Carrigan talks to Paolo Gerbaudo about his new book Tweets and the Streets. In a fascinating study based on ethnographic fieldwork during the Egyptian revolution, the author deftly charts a course which avoids the extremes that polarise the debate and addresses the crucial question of how the 'tweets' and the 'streets' intersect in the unfolding of contemporary social movements. If you find the interview interesting you might enjoy checking out the author’s blog here.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/tweetsstreets.mp3"]

Getting Started: Social Media for Academics (2012-12-08 08:00)

<a href="http://bundlr.com/b/getting-started-social-media-for-academics" target="_blank">"Getting Started: Social Media for Academics" on Bundlr</a>
The hypothesis of the University of Warwick's Being Human Research Network notes that, "Human life is increasingly driven and mediated by technology and technological change with profound implications for human identity and behaviour." Indeed, the way in which we express 'what it means to be human' occurs in close relationship to the technology of our age. As actors in this phenomenon we find ourselves constantly redefining who we are through the way in which we both use and understand the metaphors associated with latest technological advancements.

Jews and Tattoos, or What happens when religion clashes with everyday life? (2012-12-10 08:00)

I recently learnt that among the rules that Orthodox Jews observe is [1]not tattooing their skin. This made sense initially and I thought that the reason was the forceful branding of people in concentration camps. However, the prohibition is in fact much older and based on this verse from the [2]Torah:
"You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:28).

[3] Avital Norman Nathman, one of the bloggers in the Jewish website [4] Kveller, discusses the question of tattoos in a post entitled [5] Concentration Camp Tattoos for a Younger Generation? While tattooing may seem to some a minor concern in comparison with a religious belief, to others it is not: otherwise there would be far fewer people with tattoos around! Regardless of whether we are talking about tattooing, food-choices, marriage, gay rights, or any other small or huge issues on which religious have something to say, the discussion in the post is enlightening of the thought process that goes on when such a clash happens.

As a secular person who grew up in a secular post-socialist state, I have no first-hand knowledge of how exactly people combine observance of the tenets of their religion with the demands of their everyday life. Sadly, this is not something that is often discussed between religions and non-religious friends, or even between friends each of whom belongs to different religions. And as a sociologist who has never studied sociology of religion, I find myself baffled by these questions every time I notice one of my friends confused or frustrated by the clash between their belief and something in their daily surroundings. What judgements do people do, and what takes precedence when they are faced with so many small everyday issues, such as having trouble choosing a suitable meal, having to ignore strange looks because of ‘conservative’ headgear or clothing in one situation and then being scorned for not being sufficiently conservative in another, or being unable to join in a particular social event or gathering. In Margaret Archer’s terms, how do people cope in practice, when important concerns clash in their lives?

So I decided to do a little research, and here is what I found.

Here’s a few other articles:


Baeke G, Wils JP, Broeckaert B. ‘We are (not) the master of our body’: elderly Jewish women’s attitudes towards euthanasia and assisted suicide. Ethn Health. 2011 Jun;16(3):259-78.

Wikler M. The religion of the therapist: its meaning to Orthodox Jewish clients.


(2006) [9] GERMANS NO MORE. Accounts of Jewish Everyday Life, 1933-1938, Edited by Margarete Limberg and Hubert Rübsaat, Translated from the German by Alan Nothnagle


[16] (1995) Rationality in science, religion, and everyday life: a critical evaluation of four models of rationality by Mikael Stenmark, University of Notre Dame Press,

2. Torah
On twitter a few months back I ventured a list of ‘top ten’ living sociologists. What I meant of course was my favourites, meaning those who had most impressed or influenced me during my intellectual travels. Without revisiting that list I am in this blog offering for consideration a toptwelve that, I guess, bears a close resemblance to my original selections. Ranking them is a step too far so there come ‘in no particular order’. Attached to each is a publication I have personally relished. I hope it goes without saying that I welcome dissent, however irrational or bombastic.

Louis Wacquant is not here as a proxy for his mentor and colleague Pierre Bourdieu. It is not coincidental, however, that he shares the latter’s virtues, at least in my estimation. Chief amongst them is his straddling of what are too often well-patrolled borders between the theoretical and the substantive. Wacquant is a reflexive practitioner. His studies, often of outsiders, from boxers to abandoned Afro-Americans subsisting within a largely subterranean network of informal markets on the outskirts of Chicago, (a) bear testimony to a pragmatic blending of methods beyond the new post-quantitative/qualitative orthodoxy of ‘mixed methods’; (b) at every juncture speak of a genuine dialectic of theory and research; and (c) present a bold case for macro-, meso- or micro-social change. And the publication of choice? It’s *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Urban Marginality* (Polity, 2008).

John Goldthorpe may be a surprise inclusion, at least for those familiar with my own efforts. After all, he is best known as an empirically scrupulous neo-Weberian researcher of social mobility in the UK, and am I not a professed neo-Marxist guilty of formulating a vulgar-sounding ‘greedy bastards hypothesis’ in relation to health inequalities? What would he think? But he is surely our premier post-war English sociologist? His contribution extends well beyond his series of studies and reflections on social mobility to encompass theoretical interventions ranging from a critique of ethnomethodology (with which I agreed) to the support of rational choice theory (with...
which I disagreed). The thoughtfulness, subtlety and clarity of his writing are exemplary. My favourite interjection: *On Sociology* (2nd ed, Stanford, 2007). **Eric Ohlin Wright**'s appearance may be less surprising. He is probably best known for his - I think telling - neo-Marxist theories and studies of the continuing salience of social class in what I prefer to call 'high' rather than 'late' modernity (hindsight will adjudicate on the terminology). But he has added another string to his bow: he has proffered and interjected 'alternative futures'. A number of sociologists have lamented the reluctance of our 'community' to enter this domain of non-utopian envisioning of possibilities, what Giddens has called adventures in 'utopian realism'. Has the need to do so ever been so plain? My own, and my family's (http//:Cost _ofLiving.com), sense of the case for an action sociologysits well with this emphasis. The chosen work is: *Envisioning Real Utopias* (Verso, 2010). **Emmanuel Wallerstein** is the progenitor and principal advocate of the neo-Marxist 'world systems theory'. I came to his largely historical work because an old friend and colleague from Emory University, Terry Boswell, who died prematurely from, but in no way a victim of, motor neurone disease, was an enthusiastic convert (he tried to persuade Emory to recruit EW but to no avail). Wallerstein's theory might seem dated post-1989/91, but he anticipated Marxism beyond the nation-state and points to the future. His work is a reminder that agency and culture alike are structured but not structurally determined, a favourite mantra of mine. Given his productivity and the reach of his historical sociology a choice of text is difficult, but I plump for: *The Modern World System Vol.3. The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730s-1840s* (Academic Press, 1989). **Richard Sennett**, cosmopolitan sociologist and occasional visitor to LSE, is one of those craftsmen he has himself written so persuasively about. He ploughs his own furrow, opting for topics that have somehow eluded others. Once he has treated them, they remain treated, inspiring colleagues to pick up and work on his themes and insights. He has moved from discourses on the hidden injuries of class to exploring singular concepts like respect and togetherness. He is currently exploring notions of politics and civil society and the creation of public spaces in the twenty-first century. The book I am choosing here has influenced my own thinking, referring as it does to our need to be pro-active and decisive in an era of almost unprecedented uncertainty: *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (Yale, 2008). **Zygmunt Bauman**, prolific Polish émigré who came to rest at Leeds, is less known for his early work than for his profuse comments on our 'postmodern' present. For a while I felt he conflated a sociology of the postmodern, which was required post-1970s, with a postmodern sociology, which would have sounded the discipline's death knell; but he righted himself. If his recent sequence of books around the notion of 'liquid modernity' has perhaps been too slick and speedy, they nevertheless remain replete with insights (and telling concepts). It is to one of his earlier prize-winning volumes that I turn for an exemplar however: *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell, 1989) is a theoretically elegant, sophisticated and harrowing study of the holocaust as a twentieth-century culmination of Weber's societal rationalization. **Margaret Archer** is less widely known than others on my list, her main contributions being to the sociology of education and the critical realist theorization of the present. She owes much to Roy Bhaskar but shows a striking independence of mind. Like Goldthorpe she straddles the domains of theory and empirical research. It is her later series of books and articles – on the relations between structure and agency and on types of reflexivity – that I have found particularly illuminating. She lends substance to Bhaskar’s ‘transformational theory of social action’ via her account of ‘internal conversations’. It is something of a toss up, but largely because I have made most use of it I mention here her penultimate book: *Making our Way Through the World: Human Reflexivity and Social Mobility* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). **Michael Mann** is another historical sociologist committed to the ‘big picture’. Born British, he has since found a home at UCLA. He provides a frame for the understanding of the slow unfolding of types of social formation and settlement. He will remembered, no doubt, for his multi-volume tracing of human sociability; but in between this sequence he has published theoretically fine-tuned books on the post-9/11 American ‘war on terror’, fascism and ethnic cleansing. My selection is: *The Sources of Social Power. Volume 2. The Rise of Classes and Nation States, 1760-1914* (Cambridge, 1993). Bob Jessop probably owes his inclusion on my list to
his continuing commitment to get to the bottom of the modern state. Beginning with Marx, he has systematically and methodically drawn on the inspiration of Gramsci and Poulantzas to fashion an all-inclusive strategic-relational theory of contemporary capitalist and non-capitalist states. In a conceptually strong series of books, interspersed with many articles, the evolution of his thought has been exposed. Very few stones have been left unturned. He also gave an excellent half-day workshop for our UCL Sociology Network earlier this year. Unsurprisingly I am citing here his latest offering: *State Power: A Strategic-Relational Approach* (Polity, 2007). Goran Therborn would I suspect be on many colleagues’ short-list. He is yet another with a remarkable facility for finding and theorizing history’s patterns. His accounts of European modernity and of the Western family impress with their reach as well as their depth of learning: they are anchored in the minutiae of ordinary people’s day-to-day circumstances and decision-making. My choice of book is his *The World: A Beginner’s Guide* (Polity, 2011), a title that seems to have inspired rather than daunted him. It is worth recalling, however, that there is continuity through his output, the early radicalism of his seminal excursus on ideology surviving into his later more magisterial efforts. Jurgen Habermas is quintessentially Germanic in his capacity for synthesis. His output is extraordinary, much of it as philosophical as it is sociological. His ‘theory of communicative action’ was condensed into two mammoth volumes and probably represents the culmination of his sociological work. But there was much more before and has been much more after. Of late he has been preoccupied with discourse ethics, constitutional law and Europe’s post-nationalist future. It has taken him a long way from his Frankfurt School and neo-Marxist roots; too far in my view. Admiring of his opus on communicative action as I am, it is to his early work I have retreated for a favourite contribution. It could have been his *Habilitation* thesis on the public sphere; but I have opted instead for the peculiarly prescient and topical *Legitimation Crisis* (Heinemann, 1975). It retains its bite after the global financial crisis of 2008-9.

Graham Scambler is a professor of Sociology at University College London. This article was originally posted on Graham’s [1]blog. You can follow Graham on twitter [2]here.

1. [http://grahamscambler.wordpress.com](http://grahamscambler.wordpress.com)
2. [https://twitter.com/GrahamScambler](https://twitter.com/GrahamScambler)

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Dahn Shaulis (2012-12-17 23:04:05)
How about Robert Bullard, the father of Environmental Sociology and founder of the Environmental Justice Resource Center? His books are valuable tools for activists and lawyers.

**Why do I care about my research and activism?** (2012-12-12 08:00)
I am a third-year PhD student currently attached to the University of Durham and am publicly known as an activist for women's issues in Hong Kong. I would like to briefly share my research, activism and thoughts on these.

While working on my MA dissertation, I interviewed victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation. The material available on the issue of trafficking is horrible enough; however, as you may all know, it is one thing to read about this extreme violation of human dignity and another thing to hear about it straight from the victims, face-to-face. Would I just finish writing up my dissertation, send the NGO a summary sheet and then forget about those women and their experiences? How would that help anyone? I felt I had to begin the PhD I am currently working on, which is on trafficking of women in Hong Kong, so that I could gain a better understanding of the issue. Without understanding the nature of a problem and its root, it is difficult if not impossible to fight the problem.

Although there are many factors related to trafficking in women, such as ethnicity and poverty, I am approaching the issue with the lens of gender inequality and cultural acceptance of violence against women, which I believe lie at the heart of the issue. This links to my activism.

I am the initiator and lead organiser of SlutWalk Hong Kong; the global SlutWalk movement aims to raise awareness on the issues of sexual violence and victim blaming and must not be misunderstood as being carnivalesque or a "Slut Pride" movement. In addition to organising the marches and associated events, I regularly spend time updating the SlutWalk Hong Kong Facebook page and the blog. In addition, I am interviewed by news sources, such as South China Morning Post and China Daily, on issues of gender and sexual violence. I also work with other NGOs, both attending their protests or discussion forums and organising events with them, without remuneration of course. I am also involved in NoMoreSlaves Flashmob, which organises flashmobs to raise awareness on human trafficking around the world.

Why do I care about my research and activism? This is because I can neither live with willful ignorance nor inaction in the face of such injustice. I spend my time exploring trafficking and violence against women in order to do my little
part in helping to make the world a more just, more egalitarian place. I believe that anyone with the resources and ability to contribute to society should do so; I believe that universities should help make the world a better place instead of being what critics refer to as "paper mills"; and I believe that with knowledge comes the responsibility to do something positive with it.

As all activists and others working to change society know, this work is rarely paid and never ends, but I am committed to doing my small part. By the way, I am also an administrator of Occupy Hong Kong’s Facebook page.

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Angie Ng is a PhD student at the University of Durham.

1. http://www.flickr.com/photos/24365773@N03/5818888137/

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Lorri (2013-10-06 20:51:59)
You are doing such important work. Thank you and congratulations. Ethics in Australian universities are so stringent. I do not know of others in your field here. However, my daughter studies in the academic field of gender studies, so this link may be helpful to you. I emailed her the link. Warm regards Lorri bev

New collaborative labour history project (2012-12-13 08:00)

[1]LabourStart, an internation news and campaigning website for trade unionists, has launched a new collaborative project and is asking labour history enthusiasts to help! They want to produce a ‘Today in Labour History’ calendar that can be added as a widget to the websites of campaigning groups, individuals, union branches and so on. Here is their announcement, reposted from the [2]History Workshop:

We would like the calendar to be as international in its scope as possible. There are some very good sites with ‘today in labour history’ pages but they tend to be focused on events in the English-speaking world. We are particularly keen to include struggles from the global south, and transnational movements. We also want the events to reflect the whole labour movement, top to bottom. We want to include and celebrate local strikes and lesser-known individuals alongside momentous general strikes and famous activists.

We are asking people to send us any dates they would like to be included in such an online calendar. We only need a date, a brief description of an event, and a link to more information. We hope this will develop into an exciting project involving activists and labour historians from around the world.
The death toll of postsocialist mass privatisation (2012-12-14 08:00)

In 2007-2009, I did over 50 interviews with Bulgarian maritime workers. I wanted to study the[1] post-socialist transformations of institutions and practices of maritime labour - and how those changes affected the working lives of seafarers and other maritime workers. Two different respondents told me the same tragic story. One knew it first hand, from his workplace, and the other - through the maritime grapevine, but both told the story without undue exaggeration, only sadness and respect, and in strikingly similar ways.
A middle-aged lady who worked in the on-shore administration had suddenly passed away. The previous day, a rumour had passed through the office that their branch in that city would be closed down, and all of the on-shore administrative staff - hundreds of people - would be sacked outright. One of the colleagues had suddenly felt dizzy and ill, and gone home. The next day she did not come to work. She had died of a heart attack.

Now, in-depth interviews people tell many personal and less personal things, some of which they would not have shared publicly. As a sociologist, although I fully trusted both of my respondents, I could not not have verified this information outside their interviews. The direct link between stress and death is extremely hard to prove objectively, if at all possible, and I was not even a journalist, so I was in no a position to investigate. Or so I told myself. Perhaps I should have. The ethics of a field study are never clear cut.

Sadly, this was not the only story linking stress and illness or possible death, but this was the most striking one. It was told by two different people, from two different generations, both of whom I had good reason to trust. But I have also heard of other instances of people falling ill in expectation of, or soon after, being laid off, around the restructuring of the local maritime labour market and especially [2]the former national fleet's privatisation. I have also witnessed the effect of stress and fear of job insecurity among those seafarers and shore workers to whom I was close when I did my fieldwork (some in my own family, others friends and colleagues of my seafaring family members). Throughout the months and years, I have personally seen aggravated heart disease, incidents of hypertension, insomnia, breakdowns, not to mention family tension, middle-aged men's hair going white in the course of weeks, or other diseases getting out of hand because the person works too much and has no time to visit the doctor, or is too worried about overspending or not taking on more financial debt, in case he or she soon gets laid off.

Today, I came across a study by [3]David Stuckler, [4]Lawrence King and Prof [5]Martin McKee, published in [6]the Lancet, which reminded me of this story. The study - which is already old, published in February 2009, but no less relevant - claims that as many as 1,000,000 working-age men died due to the economic shock of mass privatisation policies followed by post-communist countries in the 1990s.

One of the authors, David Stuckler from Oxford's Department of Sociology, commented: 'Our study helps explain the striking differences in mortality in the post-communist world. Countries which pursued rapid privatisation, or 'shock therapy', had much greater rises in deaths than countries which followed a more gradual path.'

Read a summary [7]here and the study report, if your institution or you have a subscription, [8]here).

The authors’ response to methodological criticism (free access) is also well worth reading.

Another of the authors, Lawrence (Larry) King, gave a public lecture at the [10]UCLA on the subject - you can hear the podcast [11]here.

For months on end, seafarers and shore-workers had been expecting the national cargo fleet to be privatised. It had already been the subject of rumours for over a decade, and many young and well-qualified workers had already 'deserted the sinking ship', but tens of thousands had stayed - out of loyalty, or because they had nowhere else to work. But now new rumours had appeared that the privatisation would really take place soon. Rumours were running wild, because absolutely no officially confirmed information was available. Workers were afraid they could lose their jobs any time - and the older ones among those men and women were justifiably scared for the livelihoods of their families, because they would be unable to find other jobs. And no, we cannot attribute workers' fear solely to middle-age risk aversion, or advise them to be more enterprising and laid back. The structure of the post-socialist labour markets - by far not only in maritime transport - seriously discriminates against older workers, and especially women (it also discriminates against the youngest workers, but this is a separate, painful, topic). There simply are not enough jobs for people, even though they may be well-qualified. And, to quote prof Stuckler again,
'Not only did rapid privatisation lead to mass unemployment but also wiped out the social safety nets, which were critical for helping people survive during this turbulent period.'

[12]
Fashion online (2012-12-15 08:00)

It is interesting to see how the fashion industry has been employing new computer visualisation techniques to approach realistic, three-dimensional human body shapes. This influences the way we shop, as well as the dynamic of the market for clothes: for example, while 20% of the clothes from traditional shops go to waste, of all clothes bought online about 1/3 end up being returned! This short BBC documentary ([1]video here) explores some of the newest technology used by retailers to facilitate online shopping for clothes.


Sociologists also have fun (2012-12-16 08:00)

A glimpse into the sociology student culture in Germany... Here is how sociology students at the Humboldt University in Berlin advertised their first semester party a few days ago:

[1]
Marx and Weber were also once young!

In this interview I talk to Alex Smith (right) about the New Ethnographies book series he edits. I was interested in this series because of its deliberate intention to embrace and ferment the extension and productive growth of this most traditional of qualitative approaches. As Alex describes in the forward to the series which is quoted from below:

This includes the growing number of books that seek to apprehend the ‘new’ ethnographic objects of a seemingly brave new world, some recent examples of which have included auditing, democracy and elections, documents, financial markets, human rights, assisted reproductive technologies and political activism. Analysing such objects has often demanded new skills and techniques from the ethnographer. As a result, this series will give voice to those using ethnographic methods across disciplines to innovate, such as through the application of multi-sited fieldwork and the extended comparative case study method. Such innovations have often challenged more traditional ethnographic approaches. New Ethnographies therefore seeks to provide a platform for emerging scholars and their more established counterparts engaging with ethnographic methods in new and imaginative ways.
Sociology of procrastination (2012-12-18 08:00)

I want to write about the sociology of procrastination... perhaps tomorrow.

Joke aside, here are a few useful resources for those procrastinators among our readers who would like to acquire some robust theoretical and empirical knowledge about this fascinating phenomenon. Social psychology tends to see procrastination as 'self-handicapping', e.g.:


It is also typically linked with neuroticism and personality traits:

Bulge Uzun Özer’s short paper [1]A Cross Sectional Study on Procrastination: Who Procrastinate More? (from which we took many useful references for this post) provides some interesting recent descriptive statistics on academic procrastination. It presents the results from a quantitative study of 447 students (247 female, 200 male) enrolled in public high schools and universities in Turkey’s capital Ankara.


This website devoted to time management strategies offers a brief but good [3]anti-procrastination guide and answers some questions about procrastination. It also gives some interesting statistics (not all referenced, alas).

This 2004 [4]paper by Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie from the Department of Educational Measurement and Research, College of Education, University of South Florida provides some fascinating data on one particular type of procrastination: the one caused by statistics anxiety! (click on link to get the PDF)

Four years ago, Nathan Yau, who at the time was a UCLA PhD candidate in statistics with a focus in data visualization, started a [5]self-experiment to stop procrastinating. He tried various techniques about which you can read [6]here...sadly, he never published any more reports. The experiment was either successful - Nathan got on with his PhD research - or not...

But my favourite of all these sources is a very short [7]essay called ‘Structured procrastination’ by writer John Perry. As often happens, without being a sociologist, Perry analyses the problem in a compelling, logical, and readable way, while also providing a humorous but viable solution. Perry's approach (sometimes) works for me. Try it - today!


Ashli (2012-12-18 10:04:19)
I just read this in the midst of avoiding the 8000 words I’m attempting to write by Christmas eve. Meta procrastination!

Sociological Imagination (2012-12-18 10:06:24)
^ BEST COMMENT EVER ^
"What on earth will I tweet about?": Feeling Comfortable with Social Media (2012-12-19 08:00)


1. http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/14999029
3. http://www.slideshare.net/markcarrigan

The Woollen T-shirt Strikes Back (2012-12-20 08:00)

(reposted from [1] 300daysinberlin.wordpress.com where the [2] Idle Ethnographer posts not entirely sociological impressions about being a foreigner, once again)

I have owned this goddamnugly woollen T-shirt since I can remember myself, and that was a pretty long time ago: some time in the early and mid-1980s.

1468
It was enormous, sickly-yellowish, and stung like a wasp. I hated wasps ever since I had sat on one on the beach. I hated the vengeful T-shirt almost as much as I hated the martyr who had perished under my two-year old bum. Luckily, while I was still small and disenfranchised in the area of appearance and personal style, the offender was too large to be forced upon me. When I grew up a bit and gained the right of free vote on sartorial matters, I did try to put it on a few times, out of desperation. Every couple of winters, one morning my seaside town would wake up covered in 2-3 cm of snow. One felt obliged to go out and make a snowman, or else waste the chance of the five-year-plan. Of course, I didn’t have the requisite clothing, because such extreme cold wasn’t common and snow gear just wasn’t worth the investment. And so my eyes would eventually turn to the sore sight of this pseudo-beige monstrosity. But each time I tried it on, it was a bit smaller than the previous time, and stung so much and looked so despicably ugly that even I, who normally didn’t give a toss about fashion, couldn’t stand it, so I immediately gave up on the idea.

And so, the poor T-shirt, like an old unloved aunt, aged gracefully without ever being unfolded, and shrunk without ever needing to be washed. The fact was that I was the one growing, but it looked like it was the one shrinking.

Eventually, in a decade or so, it became just the size of me. The tag said 88/170. I was 164cm tall and almost stick-thin, so it should have been about right, if only it weren’t so ridiculously tight. At the time, tight T-shirts were out of vogue, but teenage me didn’t know that (I didn’t know what ‘vogue’ was, either). I believed that they couldn’t possibly have ever been, or ever be, in fashion. The only conceivable fashion was the one I had grown up with. Think leggings in all colours of the rainbow, or black ones if you wanted to look chic; a huge oversized XXXL T-shirt, also in
all colours of the rainbow, and hairbands. And in winter, well, anything warm - but please, nothing that stings, or that you’re too embarrassed to show, if you have to take off your cardigan in a hot room. That’s right, aerobics guru Жоржета Димитрова did wear a tight costume, but it sure didn’t sting her back. Also, what sort of colour is this - beige? dirty white? Trying-to-be-yellow? Ew.

So, for my early teenage, early post-1989 mind, my poor unworn woollen T-shirt had come to symbolise the most dingy and heart-wrenching aspects of "соц" ["socialist"] production: plain-coloured, weirdly shaped, and overly practical - so practical that you never really needed it.

Forsaken in the very far corner of my not very large wardrobe, it gathered dust, year after year, watching fashions fleet past. Somehow, even in my black gothic metal phase, it eschewed all lets-throw-old-stuff-out raids. My mum always said, well, it’s a shame to throw it away, it’s practically new, you have no other non-black clothes, and you might go skiing some day. Did I mention we lived by the sea? Seaside Bulgarians don’t go skiing. We can’t afford it. And even we they could, we would freeze to death on the train, get a lung infection, wimp out, and never even reach the mountains. Better stick to the soggy and windy Black Sea coast winters and drink tea with fake rum somewhere cosy. Keep the woollen T-shirts hidden somewhere safe, where they can’t sting you in the back when you’re not looking.

This way, the unwearable and untouchable T-shirt had also acquired an unthrowawayable status. It had become like a useless broken sector in your hard-drive, which you can’t use, but can’t defragment, either, so you leave it be, because it doesn’t take up that much space, but is just a bloody nuisance sometimes when you come across it.

When I really grew up, at the wise old age of 19, I moved to another, much colder, city where I spent half a decade. Somehow the dreaded piece of clothing never made it to my student suitcase which was instead always full of home-made food.

Then I changed country. I went to another soggy and windy place where 2-3 cm of snow suffice for all social life to freeze. No one needs anti-sexy woollen T-shirts in England. It never gets that cold, and even if it did, the English are far too fashion-conscious - or so I reasoned once when I dug out the forgotten object from the heaps of T-shirts back at home. And besides, when it really gets to freezing temperatures, students can usually find some legitimate excuse to stay at home, in their (non-woollen) pyjamas, and in bed, drinking tea and pretending to read a book or write a paper.

Today there is an occasion to celebrate my inelegant repugnant соц T-shirt. It is the first day of my life on which I genuinely appreciate this well-preserved, no-nonsense clothing item. I find it perfect in size, shape, colour, and above all, warmth. Having grown up into a bit of a stingy scrooge, I’m also pleased I don’t need to go and spend money on a new one. But even the fashion-conscious, shopping-inclined section of my brain (still negligible, but far bigger than it was in my teenage years) is pacified. It gives me some measure of bizarre pride to think that my like-new T-shirt is older than most of the so-called “vintage” things sold in Berlin’s Vintage Clothing shops. I was about to cut off the tag, but it says Ютрика in fancy red Cyrillic letters that now evoke the obligatory nostalgia in 31 year old me, so I let it stay and sting my neck. My shivering back even somewhat enjoys the stinginess of this slightly weathered, almost-new, garment. In fact, worn over another shirt it hardly stings at all. Under a huge (also once hated, now loved) woollen hand-knit-by-grandma pullover it keeps me warm, while the world outside is covered in increasing amounts of German snow. And, as I keep telling everyone, Berlin degrees are colder than English or Bulgarian ones. They’re real hard-working degrees of cold, not some luke-warm welfare scroungers. So -5°C in Berlin feels actually more like -15°C elsewhere. So, dear wronged T-shirt, welcome back to my bosom. Who knew! Well, obviously, my mum did.

1470
The US sociology job market in 2012 (2012-12-21 08:00)

As the year draws to a close, let’s have a look at the sociology job market across in the USA in 2012. Neal at Scatterplot have made a crude but very helpful visualisation of the decreasing number of jobs available for sociologists this year on the basis of 329 ads posted in the ASA Job Bank. We repost the results: click on the image to read Neal’s analysis!

Scatterplot’s analysis of the UK sociology job market in 2012. Pretty grim! Click on the photo to check out the blog which has a wealth of interesting sociological stuff.

[4]Scatterplot are:

- [6]Tina Fetner, McMaster
- [8]Shamus Khan, Columbia
The social scientists behind Obama’s victory (2012-12-22 08:00)

This year’s USA presidential elections were very exciting and contested, but perhaps less obviously ground breaking than the previous ones. However, important structural shifts have happened in the way in which the campaign is conceived, organised, and carried out. In a nutshell, the campaign has never been so scientific. As one of the scientists in the team, psychologist Dr Craig Fox, said,

“Before then I felt like we had to sell ourselves; this time there was a real hunger for our ideas.”


[7] 1472
Deconstructing a... take-away menu (2012-12-23 08:00)

We don’t normally post fake news such as ones from the Onion, but this one is an exception. It is not fake. It is true. An exploratory mini-survey among current and recent PhD students in sociology and related disciplines has shown that "Jon Rosenblatt"'s case is not at all unique. We've all been there, done that. Sociological imagination gone wild! While trainee dentists look at your teeth as you speak, medical students try on tens of deadly diseases every day to find that they fit the symptoms, perfectly, and engineering students survey the design and durability of each and
every human-made artefact, we sociologise and deconstruct.

"Jon Rosenblatt, 27, a Harvard University English graduate student specializing in modern and postmodern critical theory, deconstructed the take-out menu of a local Mexican restaurant "out of sheer force of habit" Monday.

..."I can’t help it," Rosenblatt said. "Even when I close my eyes at night, I feel myself deconstructing things in my dreams—random stuff like that two-hour *Dukes Of Hazzard* reunion special or the Andy Warhol postage stamp or commercials for that new squeezable gel deodorant. I'd say I'm going crazy, but that presupposes an artificial barrier between societally preexisting concepts of 'sanity' and 'insanity' which themselves represent another false dichotomy maintained for the preservation of certain entrenched elements of the status quo and... Oh, God. I'm doing it again."

Read full article here: [1]Grad Student Deconstructs Take-Out Menu


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Merry (sociological) Christmas! (2012-12-24 08:00)

As part of the University of Warwick's mini Christmas lecture series this year, [1]Dr Sam Lyle talks about how women make Christmas happen:
See all fascinating and informative mini lectures [3]here!

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/currentphds/phdstudents/current/samanthalye/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/currentphds/phdstudents/current/samanthalye/)
2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/0vMahOeFKq8](http://www.youtube.com/embed/0vMahOeFKq8)
3. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/christmas2012](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/christmas2012)
Want a Christmas tour of Slavoj Žižek’s apartment? (2012-12-25 08:00)

(Yes, we might have made up the Christmas bit)

1. [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/JA60L_NQYm0

Trees and happiness (2012-12-26 08:00)

A recent report unearthed an empirical link between happiness and ...trees. I wonder if Christmas trees could also help us be happy? Read the article in the Guardian [1]here.

[2]
1476
A Christmassy tree that made the Idle Ethnographer happy (Photo: Idle Ethnographer TM, click on the photo to see more happy winter photos)


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Daddy Leave in Norway (2012-12-27 08:00)

This is the Idle Ethnographer’s share of social advertising for today. In Norway, 90% of men take their 3 months leave, while in the UK only 40% of men take the 2 week daddy leave to which they are entitled - the figures in Norway are
actually pretty impressive, given the short time the scheme has been running. As always, we need to bear in mind that pushing policies to introduce more daddy leave is not some empty argument. It is not about getting some rigidly defined equality at all costs. As things stand, and in the way most of us have been socialised, it is still considered normal in many communities that a larger share of women will be generally more interested in, and capable of, and ready for, taking care of kids. If that is the situation now, this does not mean that it is set in stone. Things are changing and this is fabulous. At least in my ideal world, all people are people, not overly determined by their gender or physical or mental ability. Of course, those things are important, but society can do its share to smooth out the differences to give more capability to everyone make everybody's life better. Until everyone is equally interested in parental leave and the decision is taken by parents and guardians of all genders, on an equal footing, I reckon we can do with some affirmative action.


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**Sandy Hook and Call of Duty: the toxic relationship between “violent” games and the media**
(2012-12-28 08:00)

Following the tragic events of Friday in Newtown, Connecticut, a friend and I had been trying to guess how long it would take the media to blame allegedly “violent” video games for the latest spree killing. We didn’t need to wait very long. By Friday evening, Facebook users were poring over the profile of Ryan Lanza, at the time believed to be the perpetrator and whose Facebook profile [2] appeared on the Huffington Post website. He happened to enjoy the game [3]Mass Effect, a role-playing game set in space, battling aliens intent on destroying the universe. A (brief) outcry followed claiming that the game ought to be banned on the Facebook page for the game, as well as in groups set up on Facebook in memory of the event. This subsided once the 24 hour news media declared they had named the wrong brother, with Huffington Post since apologising for mis-identifying Ryan. Since then, the news channels and tabloids have started blaming video games due to Adam Lanza’s nerdy, reclusive image. Yesterday, the Sun’s [4]headline claimed he had played the likes of army shooter Call of Duty, based on the testimony of a plumber who had visited the family house and saw military posters in the basement, however he does not say if he actually saw Lanza playing the game in question. The Daily Express also [5]blamed Dynasty Warriors, an action game based in ancient China, which involves sword fighting, not shooting. Also yesterday, the American gun lobby is [6] calling for discussions around the first amendment including a consideration of violent Hollywood films and games that “teach young kids how to shoot heads”, as part of the NRA’s attempts to move conversations away from gun control. As the Guardian has [7] pointed out though today, there is no evidence that Adam Lanza actually played any of these games. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of spree shootings, it is generally only a matter of time before video games are blamed - from the [8] Columbine boys who played Doom, to [9] Anders Breivik playing Call of Duty and World of Warcraft. So, is there any truth to this knee jerk hysteria?

The research into the effects of violent video games remains patchy, with much of the research being conducted in laboratories. Bushman and Anderson (2009) claimed playing a game for 20 minutes would affect helping behaviour for example. After spending time playing the fighting game Mortal Kombat or the sport game PGA Tour Golf,
respondents were asked to sit in a room to respond to a survey. While they were filling these out, a recording of a fight was played outside the room, and lab assistants timed how long it took the individual to respond to the noise, then go and help. The disparity between those who had played the violent or non-violent game was only a couple of seconds, but the authors claimed this was evidence that playing a violent game had a negative effect on helping behaviour. In another study, Anderson et al. (2007) gave high school age teens from Iowa a survey of their media consumption, and their social attitudes. This included details such as GPA, number of hours per week of television watched and games played, then how often they perceived certain types of behaviour to be common, such as fights between married couples. In this way, they try to prove a link between media consumption, especially gaming habits, and their normative beliefs around violence towards others and anti-social behaviour. Crucially, they did not ask the teenagers about their home life, such as witnessing domestic violence, abuse, or even gun ownership. In the absence of such data, the authors claimed that playing video games could lead to distorted views around violence.

However, none of these studies has proved that playing video games will definitively make you harm others. Newman et al.’s (2005) study of spree shootings in America concluded that in most of the cases they examined, the perpetrators did not play video games. The majority did however show symptoms of mental health problems, ranging from the onset of schizophrenia, to depression. Crawford (2012) has pointed to the way in which studies, such as those cited above, fail to adequately define violence in video games, which is rather subjective. Indeed, Anderson et al. (2007) has no definition of violence whatsoever. Crawford (2012) also argues that removing the study of video gaming from its domestic setting into laboratories will never give the same results, and that such studies often have inconsistent methodologies and sampling problems, for example focusing only on short-term reactions, not long-term effects. Moreover, Thornham (2011) suggests that these studies conceptualise gamers as passive receivers of messages from games, as opposed to active participants. Rather than sitting watching the action unfurl, the gamer plays an active role in what happens, generally directing the course of action themselves. In regard to children and video games however, Bijvank et al.’s (2009) study found that showing children video game boxes with "mature" content ratings for violence or action actually made them want to play the games more, than if they lacked them. Thus, the greater the media outcry around a game, the likelier a child will want to play it!

At a time like this, the media is looking for an easy scapegoat. Of course, I would never advocate giving a child an inappropriate game to play, and parents and guardians need to ensure that children are not exposed to anything untoward before they are old enough. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of people playing video games are not violent - otherwise, there would be far more cases like this. It may be in some instances that violent people are drawn to video games they perceive to be violent, which would suggest correlation, not causation. Yet, folk wisdom kicks in, and claims are made suggesting there must be some effect from playing games - even if there is no evidence. No-one at this stage can even say if Adam Lanza actually played video games. Newspapers have suggested that Adam was a loner, possibly suffering with Asperger’s syndrome, who seems to have become a recluse in recent years, according to the Guardian article cited above. Thornham (2011) identifies the stereotype of the lone male gamer as a construct framing gaming as perverse, anti-social and escapist. The media discourse around gaming, and especially in light of these events, certainly enables an imaginative leap that links social rejects with anti-social gaming. Surely though, now is the time to focus on actual guns rather than game guns.

References


Emma Hutchinson is a PhD student at the University of Warwick. Find out more about her research on her [10]website.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/3_Iq5l1U53g
7. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/18/newtown-gunman-adam-lanza-what-we-know
10. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/currentphds/phdstudents/current/syrcbb/
The Collapse of The American Dream Explained in Animation (2012-12-29 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/mII9NZ8MMVM

(editor’s note: we don’t endorse the analysis in the video, particularly not in the last 10 mins [!!] but we thought it was an interesting video)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/mII9NZ8MMVM

Ethics and Social Theory: The Work of Andrew Sayer (2012-12-30 08:00)

University of Wales, Newport (City Campus)
22 February 2013  |  09:45-16:45

Ethics and Social Theory: The Work of Andrew Sayer

Andrew Sayer’s work in critical social science has ranged across political economy, social theory and ethics – combining insights from each, and shedding light across them in rare and valuable ways. His most recent books The Moral Significance of Class (Cambridge, 2005) and Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life (Cambridge, 2011) have developed a distinctive position, critical of both modernist and postmodernist orthodoxies, and of the tendency among social scientists to neglect or deny the importance of normativity in social relations. As an alternative, Sayer offers a qualified ethical naturalism, combined with a realist social theory. It is a position which draws fruitfully on diverse theoretical resources – Adam Smith, Pierre Bourdieu, the ‘capabilities’ approach — while staking out distinctive ground of its own.
This seminar will explore this recent work from a series of critical angles, and include a response from Andrew Sayer himself. It will be of interest to sociologists, social theorists and those with an interest in how moral philosophy relates both to wider questions of social understanding and critique, and to everyday lived experience.

Speakers:

Dave Elder-Vass (Loughborough) ‘The moral economy of digital gifts’

Carol Smart (Manchester) ‘Talking about what matters: the view from empirical research’

Gideon Calder (Newport) ‘Lay normativity, critique and the institutions of ethics’

Ted Benton (Essex) ‘Norms, naturalism and social explanation’

Gregor McLennan (Bristol) Summation

Andrew Sayer (Lancaster) Response

Fee (registration and food) | £30

Places are limited. Formal booking will open in mid-January, but places may be reserved before then.

Further details | Gideon Calder: gideon.calder@newport.ac.uk

1. [http://ac.uk/](http://ac.uk/)

Looking for a new year’s resolution? @PaulbernalUK offers a suggestion some readers may find unthinkable (2012-12-31 08:00)

If you’re looking for a New Year’s Resolution – have you considered leaving Facebook? There are many reasons to do so, and getting more compelling all the time – all it takes is a little resolution.

1) Privacy

Everyone should be aware that privacy is an issue with Facebook. So many people put so much ‘private’ information onto Facebook that the possibility that your private information, photos, stories etc might get known to a wider public should be obvious. We shouldn’t be shocked when bad things happen – and yet even Randi Zuckerberg, sister of Facebook’s founder Mark Zuckerberg, still [1] seemed surprised and upset when a ‘private’ family photograph she posted somehow made its way onto Twitter. It wasn’t hacked, scraped, leaked or anything nasty – it’s just that Facebook is designed that way. The private becomes public all too easily – ‘sharing’ means you lose control. If Randi had just emailed the pic to her family, or put it on a genuinely private site, none of this would have happened.

2) Real Names Policy

Facebook’s policy is that people should only ever use their real names – and this can have very bad consequences. There are many people for whom using real names is dangerous, from whistle-blowers to political
dissidents, from victims of domestic abuse to people just wanting to harmlessly let off steam. And it’s not just in the extremes that it matters: forcing a real names policy can matter to almost anyone. It helps anchor your ‘online’ life to your ‘offline’ life – meaning that anyone wishing to take advantage of you, to manipulate you, to take information out of context etc, and link what they find out about you online to your offline existence. Real names policies are potentially deeply pernicious – and not only does Facebook have one, but it is ratcheting up its efforts to enforce it. Snitchgate, [2] about which I blogged in September, was just one example, where they experimented with getting people to ‘snitch’ on their friends for not using their real names. For Facebook, a real names policy has value – it makes their data on you more valuable when they want to sell it to others – but for people, it is both limiting and risky.

3) Monetization

Facebook is a business, and in business to do just one thing: make money. What that means is that they want to make money from their assets – your data. The recent [3]furore over Instagram’s altered terms of service was just one example – and in many ways it was typical. Instagram has access to a huge collection of photographs – and since Facebook acquired Instagram for $1 billion earlier in 2012, it has been looking for ways to make money out of those photographs. The internet community’s reaction to that change was dramatic – and Instagram quickly changed tack (or at least appeared to) but make no mistake, the issue will recur. Facebook will look to make money – since the far-from-stellar IPO, the pressure to make money has been growing. Facebook has to satisfy its shareholders first of all, its advertisers next, and its ‘users’ last of all. The users don’t provide money directly, after all – so Facebook has to make money from their data. That drive to make money means that what happens to you when your data is used is of very little consequence....

4) Profiling – and self-profiling

One of the best ways to describe Facebook is as a ‘self-profiling service’. Everything you put up on Facebook, every ‘like’ button you press, every silly game you play, every person you ‘friend’ (and every person that ‘friends’ you) helps build up that profile. The profiles are used primarily for advertising – but also to build up their database of profiles. Profiling is something that is risky in two diametrically opposite ways: if profiling is accurate, it impinges on your privacy, whilst if it is inaccurate it can mean that bad decisions are made for you or about you. What’s more, profiling data is particularly vulnerable – allowing far more accurate and dangerous forms of identity fraud and similar scams.

5) Facial recognition

Facebook loves facial recognition – and it’s not just a coincidence of names. Facial recognition allows them to make more and more links, which helps them to profile better, and also to anchor information in the ‘real’ world, just like their ‘real names policies. Their practices with facial recognition – including ‘automatically’ tagging photographs – may have been rebuffed in Europe on the grounds of data protection, but just as with the Instagram issue (see (3) above), make no mistake, it’s coming back. The risks will still be there – they’re inherent in the concept – but they’ll find a way to get what at least purports to be consent from users in order to satisfy the letter of the law. Anyone who has put a photo of themselves on Facebook should be concerned.

6) You never know who’s watching

Most Facebook users imagine that the people who look at their pages are their ‘friends’, or perhaps their ‘potential friends’, and don’t consider who else might look at what they post – and there are vast numbers of other groups who will look. Those who are slightly less naive might understand that their employers might look, or their potential employers – but what about insurance companies, looking to see if people are engaging in risky activities, or credit agencies wanting to make more ‘accurate’ assessments? Or the authorities, looking for people doing ‘bad’ things – or people who ‘might’ do bad things? Show some interest in anything political... again, the risks are
both ways: accurate watchers finding out things you don’t want them to find out, inaccurate watchers making bad decisions based on incorrect assumptions.

7) Facebook is forever

Many users of Facebook start off ‘young’ – perhaps in age, but perhaps in naiveté. They put material up that they think is funny, or cool, and don’t think how it might look in the future. This doesn’t just mean the odd drunken photo being seen by a potential employer – it means pretty much everything you put on Facebook. There was a big story in September 2012 when people thought their old ‘private messages’ were being posted onto their timelines, and they were hugely upset. It wasn’t true: what was actually happening was that some of their old public posts, posts from a few years ago, were reappearing – and people had forgotten the kind of things that they used to post. What you want to be public one year, you might well wish to forget in a few year’s time: with Facebook, that’s close to impossible! These days you can delete your account – but even if you do, that may not be enough. Services like profileengine.com keep old Facebook profiles even when they’ve been deleted.

8) Monopoly

Facebook is proud that it has now got more than 1 billion users – which makes it pretty close to the only game in town. Monopolies are very, very rarely a good thing – and if Facebook becomes (or perhaps has already become) the default, that puts a huge amount of extra power in their hands. Effectively, they can do whatever they want, and we’ll still have to be there. That can’t be good – and shouldn’t be good, particularly is you really CAN leave, and really DON’T need to be on Facebook. There are alternatives.

9) Concentration

...and those alternatives offer a solution to another risk involved in Facebook. Facebook wants to be all things to all people – and that means all your data, all your links, all aspects of your life concentrated in one place. That means much more accurate profiling, but also much greater vulnerability. If Facebook knows everything about you, they have much more power over you – and their profiles become much more powerful, so if compromised, sold, hacked, given to the authorities, to some other ‘enemy’ of yours, they have much more potential for damage. What would be much better – though somewhat harder work – would be to use different services for different features. Use one provider for email, use twitter for mass communication, set up your own blog on a different provider, put your photos on your own website, play games on yet another and so forth. Much less risk – and much more freedom to get better services. Also, much less dependency...

10) Dependency – and bad habits...

The last reason I’m going to mention here is dependency. Many people seem to be becoming deeply dependent on Facebook. They use it for everything – and seem totally lost if it goes down. They can’t contact their real friends and relations – they haven’t even kept a record of their email addresses. That means they end up spending far too much time on Facebook – and get into lots of bad habits, habits that Facebook encourage. Too much sharing (which to Facebook sounds like blasphemy), too many pictures posted online, too much information given out (e.g. geo-location data) without a real thought to the consequences. If you leave Facebook, and instead set up particular systems for particular functions, you’re far less likely to become dependent – and you’re far less lost if one or other of those services goes down for some reason or other.

And if that’s not enough...

...there are many other reasons. One that matters to people like me is that the only way that Facebook will ever change in any meaningful way, the only way it will start to take users’ privacy and other rights seriously, is if it
starts to lose users. If enough people start leaving, it will have to do something differently, and start to take us more seriously rather than just treat us as cattle to be herded and milked....

So why not do it? Make it your New Year's Resolution: leave Facebook!

Here is a [6]link to instructions as to how to delete your Facebook account. If you have the strength, go for the real 'deletion' rather than the 'deactivation' method. If you just deactivate, you're leaving your data there for Facebook and their partners to exploit.....

Paul Bernal is a Lecturer in IT, IP and Media Law at UEA. This article was originally posted on Paul's [7]blog. You can follow Paul on twitter [8]@PaulBernalUK.

3. http://paulbernal.wordpress.com/2012/12/19/a-thousand-words/
8. https://twitter.com/paulbernaluk

Great article! We are linking to this particularly great content on our website. Keep up the good writing.
4. 2013

4.1 January

Happy New Year! (Mieow!) (2013-01-01 08:00)

Always fascinating to look back into history and find out that all new things are well forgotten old ones. We don’t get tired by celebrating New Year (OK, we do, but we forget about the tiredness after a year and celebrate it again). Such appears also to be the case with (modern European) humans’ fascination with cuteness and ridicule, in the shape of cats. The Internet today is replete with photos of cats, but this is nothing new, as these [1]photos from the 1870s testify:

[2]
A happy new year! (Click on image to visit a fascinating photo gallery)

Happy New Year 2013 to all of our readers! Thanks for stopping by to read and comment. We hope to continue being fun and useful to you in this new year!

We thought we should start the year by mentioning an important, if not strictly sociological, subject: the importance of academic integrity.

Integrity in methods, research process, ethics, and the presentation of findings has always been important for all types of research. This is even more so in today’s increasingly pressurised environment which many academics recognise as determined by funding opportunities and the trend towards ever-increasing efficiency, shaped by shorter-term research projects, channelled by 'buzzwords'. Those who do research face fierce academic job market competition and are compelled to either 'publish or perish' (and win grant-applications or perish).

And here are two views on integrity, to start off the new year’s reading list:

The first one is a 1974 lecture by theoretical physicist (and amazingly inspiring person) [1]Richard Feynman (1918-1988)

The transcript is available [3]here. It is mainly about integrity in experimental science, but is nevertheless relevant to any research. The recording is, unfortunately, read by someone else; do should check out Feynman's other lectures on YouTube - he was a great lecturer.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/yvfAtI3batg
4.
The future of ideological conflict (2013-01-04 08:00)

Visualising debt (2013-01-05 08:00)

Ever wondered how much money Greece owes, and who lent the money? Here is a helpful [1]visualisation.

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1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/coTh4wb68VA](http://www.youtube.com/embed/coTh4wb68VA)

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[2]
Who loaned Greece the money? (Source: http://demonocracy.info - click on the image to visit the website).


Follow SI on Facebook and Twitter (2013-01-06 08:00)

This is a reminder that the Sociological Imagination has a presence on facebook. Please do add us as a friend and feel free to get in contact. We're always open to ideas and suggestions so please don't hesitate if there's anything you would like to say!

[1]Sociological Imagination

[2] Facebook

Follow us on Twitter here:


[4]Twitter Updates
How do I teach policy analysis? (2013-01-08 08:00)

One thing I write with reasonable regularity on student essay feedback is “don’t just describe, analyse”. This applies most often to work addressing a particular sociological theory, set of literature, or policy area. With this in mind, I put together the following model for policy analysis and have been using it in undergraduate seminar groups for a couple of weeks. Responses were pretty good; students commented that they are generally not taught such practical techniques in their methods course and it’s useful to be able to apply these things with some guidance – in the first week I introduced the model and each class used it to look at a particular piece of policy (in this case, a specific NHS document on breastfeeding); and the following week we broadened it out to look at a broader range of documents (on men’s health); then last week a more independent session on alcohol in pregnancy, including some visual materials as well as text.

The model is essentially a series of questions to ask of any piece of policy (or whatever you’re looking at), building into an outline for analysing a single item or set of items. Some I’ve classified as essential, some as the extra bits to encourage more critical thinking, although the differences are negotiable! I’d be interested to hear from anyone who spots any additional aspects I’ve missed...

1. **INTRODUCTION**: What is the overall aim of the document? What is it for, and who is the intended audience? (General public, specific demographic groups, policy-makers, practitioners, service users, commercial enterprises, third sector organisations, researchers?)

   Booster questions: Why is this issue/topic perceived as a problem? Should it be?

2. **CONTEXT**: What has been the historical development of the issue? What is the current situation - cultural and political context, news events and reports, recent research?

   Booster questions: Why has this document been published now? What is it about the current political, social or economic climate that has made it necessary or possible?

3. **CONTENT**: What is actually being said and by whom? What evidence is being used to back up arguments and is it used well? Are statistics used appropriately? Can it be trusted as a source?

   Booster questions: What is the author’s motive/angle? Is there an underlying ideology or political agenda being pushed? How else could these aims be achieved?
4. **PRESENTATION**: What kind of language is used and how easy is it to read/understand? Are there significant words or phrases that are used or repeated? What is the layout of the document, its style, how does it use illustrations or diagrams?

Booster questions: How does the presentation of the content fit with the intended audience? How might it have been different if written by or for a different group?

5. **IMPLICATIONS**: What are the potential outcomes or consequences arising from this document? What has been the response of the public, the media, organisations or groups identified at step 1? What is your own response to it?

Booster questions: So what? How much of an impact has the document had and was it as intended? Why (not)? Link it with other publications on the topic – what are the common themes and significant differences? Who has a different view?

6. **CONCLUSION**: What actions are required as a result of this document? Is there a specific call to action included or implied? What is the overall message?

Booster questions: Link the document being studied back out into wider themes: what does it contribute to debates on identity, gender, deviance...?

Please feel free to re-use the model (with appropriate acknowledgement) – I’ve got a set of class handouts formatted for seminar use that I’d be happy to share if you get in touch, and please let me know how you get on.

Hannah Perrin is an ESRC DTC Scholar and PhD student in Social Policy at the University of Kent with interests in health professions, clinical education and training, occupational socialisation and work transitions. She tweets about her research [1]@HCPerrin and blogs at [2]Academish.


**Why do people believe what they believe?** (2013-01-09 08:00)

I’ve always been fascinated by the question of why people hold the political beliefs they do. In part this is because of how badly most people handle this question. From across the political spectrum, there is a pervasive tendency to explain away the beliefs of others: idiocy, ignorance, naivety, self-interest etc. In a recent Twitter conversation, someone invoked psychoanalysis to explain why neoliberals are committed to their project. Why are we so bad at dealing with the beliefs of others? To a certain extent it’s because we don’t approach them in a vacuum, we too have our beliefs and these stand in relations of contradiction or compatibility to those of others. It’s also perhaps, as Chantal Mouffe might suggest, a reflection of political incivility within the unhealthy
democracies of late capitalism: seeing the other as an enemy to be defeated, rather than an adversary to debate with.

However I think a much more important factor is the sheer complexity of the question. Why do people believe what they believe? Our beliefs are caused and yet somehow transcend those causes. Our political worldview is marked by our natal context and yet escapes it. If we treat the question too abstractly we risk subsuming the messy complexity of the political worldview of thinking, feeling and fearing embodied agents into the conceptual abstraction entailed when we talk about things like ‘socialism’, ‘liberalism’, ‘libertarianism’ etc. This can seem justified by the fact there are people who consciously embrace the systematicity of these positions but this blinds us to (a) their normative commitments are always more complex than their stated beliefs make apparent (b) such people are, in this strict sense of having made an agential commitment to a position, surely a minority. An alternative approach is to treat the question in an empiricist manner, risking that we collapse a subject’s political worldview into the chain of events which led them to their present position and beliefs.

To get beyond these two approaches, I think what Ruth Levitas talks about as an archaeological approach to understanding political thinking is extremely useful. My understanding of this is based on a talk I saw her give two years ago (see below) so what follows is more a summary of the line of thought this sparked off in myself, rather than an accurate summary of her thinking on the issue.

The archaeology of political thought involves making explicit the idea of a good society that is embedded in particular political positions. These may be, to varying extents, inchoate. Alternatively there may be a contradiction between what an individual expressly endorses as a good society and that which is implied by their substantive politics. But there is nonetheless a deep structure to political position taking. When we make normative claims about social and political arrangements, our statements carry further normative entailments which frequently outstrip our discursive awareness of them. This is why dialogue and debate help us elaborate our worldview i.e. arguing about politics helps expand our awareness of the unacknowledged entailments which stems from our acknowledged commitments, as
well as offering us the opportunity to review and revise them.

If we consider this in biographical terms then the picture becomes, superficially at least, rather complex. The coherency of a political world view is something which is real (a logical structure holds between normative propositions) but unavoidably partial at the level of the actual (the cognitive tracing through and drawing out of these connections by a subject) and the empirical (the observable political commitments made by a subject). However we can make this complexity manageable if we focus on the actual: what brings about this ‘tracing out’ of the further commitments entailed by our existing beliefs?

I think it’s inevitably sparked by the necessity of making sense of our experience. We read new things, we encounter new people, we discuss new ideas and we see things happen in the world. In doing so we are confronted with novelty which stands in a contradictory or complimentary relationship to our existing commitments. In doing so, assuming we don’t engage in what are arguably extremely common avoidance strategics to evade the moment, we are compelled to trace out entailments of our commitments.

To put it more directly, I’m saying that deliberation is central to this everyday experience of being a normative being. There is a rationalistic moment to this deliberation given that it is driven by things we experience as contradicting or complementing our existing beliefs. But it is not in any meaningful sense a rationalistic process. What can be reconstructed in rationalistic terms represents the possible contours of normative commitment but what leads us to make choices is the fact that things matter to us. To bring this back to the original question: adequately making sense of the political beliefs of our opponents involves recognising:

1. They are also beings to whom these things matter
2. Their current beliefs are part of a biographical unfolding driven by a perpetual struggle to make sense of what they encounter
3. Their backgrounds have shaped their beliefs, in so far as it has patterned the novelty they’ve confronted and the cultural resources available to them in making sense of this novelty
4. Their unfolding set of normative commitments have also been shaped ‘internally’ by the sort of deep structure, most easily identifiable in what we term ideology but by no means exhausted by this.
5. While this deep structure exercises causal power via logical relations of contradiction and complementarity, normativity itself is a causal force. Ideas of the good life and the good society (encoded in mental images and cultural products) can ‘pull’ us towards them. We can be driven to systematise our thinking because of our desire to get ‘closer’ to the notion of the good life and/or good society embedded within it.

For an actual case study of this approach, this [2]post discusses common attitudes towards asexual people.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/hJH_9FpKmVc
No one wants to know how... science is made (2013-01-10 08:00)


[5]

Reading the Riots (2013-01-11 08:00)

In this podcast, [1]recorded for the LSE Impact project, I spoke to [2]Tim Newburn from LSE about the [3]Reading the Riots project. This was a rather astonishing collaboration he undertook with the Guardian newspaper, carrying out a large scale research project into the UK riots of summer 2011. This project is a fascinating example of how methodologically rigorous research can be conducted at a pace which allows it to maximise its impact upon public debate.
Sociological Imagination and UK Riots (2013-01-12 08:00)

[1]"Sociological Imagination and UK Riots" on Bundlr

Susan Cain: The power of introverts (2013-01-13 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/cOKYU2j0TM4

If you enjoy her talk, you'll LOVE her [2]book. We certainly did.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/cOKYU2j0TM4

How to write articles and essays (2013-01-14 08:00)

Essay writing time? Journal article due for submission? In [1]this article in his [2]"Half an Hour" blog, Stephen Downes gives excellent advice on quick and efficient writing. Needless to say, each essay is different, as are the styles of writing in different subjects, but some of the tips will be very useful for sociologists.
Digital Sociologist #1: @ProfSteveFuller (2013-01-15 08:00)

In the first of this series for the [1]BSA Digital Sociology group, Steve Fuller (Auguste Comte Chair in Social Epistemology at the University of Warwick) talks about his experience of using Twitter. If you have ideas of how profile sociologists you’d like to see interviewed about their use of social media, or ideas about questions to ask them, please do [2]get in touch.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/fullerq1.mp3"]How did you first come to use Twitter?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/p2.mp3"]Did you find the brevity of the medium problematic?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/p3.mp3"]How do you decide who to follow on Twitter?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/p4.mp3"]Have you found it time consuming?

1500

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2. [http://halfanhour.blogspot.co.uk/](http://halfanhour.blogspot.co.uk/)
What advice would you give Sociologists who are interested in starting to use Twitter?

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/digital-sociology.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/digital-sociology.aspx)
2. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Interested in Digital Sociology? (2013-01-16 08:00)

The British Sociological Association’s new Digital Sociology group aims:

- To identify and disseminate best practice in the use of digital tools by sociologists.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological modes of inquiry into digital media use.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological responses to ‘big data’, in terms of both secondary analysis and the broader methodological questions posed by this transformation in the information systems of late capitalist society.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological analyses of the broader personal, cultural and structural changes of the ‘digital turn’ in social life.
- To provide an open forum for exploration of what the digital turn entails for sociological practice, professional identity and the future of the discipline.

Please [1]get in touch if you’d like to be put on the announcement list. We’ll hopefully be announcing our first event in the near future, with much more activity to follow.

1. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Zoe Thompson (2013-01-19 15:10:57)
Please add me to your announcements list. Thanks.

David Carr (2013-01-19 18:02:41)
Very interested

Moyo Rainos Mutamba (2013-02-01 13:07:40)
Please add me to you announcements!!!
Social Theory Postgrad Seminars @SocioWarwick (2013-01-17 08:00)

The Social Theory Centre Postgraduate Seminars will take place in the odd weeks of the second term of 2012-2013 in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. This series is particularly designed for postgraduate students interested in all aspects of social theory; whether based in Sociology or other social science of humanities disciplines - All are welcome.

Some representative themes are as follows:

Ideology | Secularisation | Modernity | Theology and Social Theory | Social Epistemology | Political Philosophy | The Role of Intellectuals

If you would like to present your current research in this seminar series, please send a short abstract of your paper to Daniel Fairbrother <[1]d.j.fairbrother@warwick.ac.uk> or Morteza Hashemi Madani <[2]s.m.hashemi-madani@warwick.ac.uk>.

DEADLINE for sending the abstracts: 21 January 2013

1. \mailto{d.j.fairbrother@warwick.ac.uk}
2. \mailto{s.m.hashemi-madani@warwick.ac.uk}

What is Digital Sociology? (2013-01-18 08:00)

1. Though it is a hugely exciting trend, the growth of digital research methods risks becoming a narrow specialism. It is crucial that we don’t fall into the [1]digital dualist trap of assuming that ‘online’ and ‘offline’ constitute distinct realities, as doing so profoundly misrepresents both the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’. Rather than see digital research methods as a specialism, we can more usefully construe them as expanding the research repertoires of sociologists to adequately equip us for researching a social world where digital technology is ubiquitous.

2. The growth of computational methods are particularly exciting, however they pose a particular risk that we become preoccupied with technique. New technical opportunities naturally invite questions of what we do with them and why. The exploration of such techniques must be anchored in a renewed and reflective dialogue about the nature and ends of sociological practice. Preoccupation with computational techniques risks fuelling a much broader transition from mode 1 to mode 2 knowledge production within the academy and threatens the sustainability of sociology as a discipline.

3. In doing so, we grant digital sociology a much needed existence over and above digital methods. Digital sociology can be construed, in the broadest terms, as an exploration of the opportunities which digital tools afford for rethinking sociological craft. Creating and refining new tools for research constitutes one element of this. So too does the empirical study of the broader digital turn which has led to the possibility of such tools existing, as well as transformed the nature of the social world which they are subsequently used to study. But digital sociology can, at least potentially, mean something which both encompasses these elements and moves far beyond them.

4. One obvious possibility to this end is to consider the implications of digital tools for the communication of sociological knowledge, as well as the aforementioned focus on its production. Assuming that ‘impact’ is here to stay,
it becomes necessary to ameliorate some of its more deleterious effects by engaging with this transformed institutional climate in a specifically sociological way. Refusing to explore the possibilities which digital tools afford for communicating sociological knowledge (in a way which generates an 'impact') carries the risk that the specifically sociological dimensions of such knowledge, as well as the autonomy with which such communication is carried out, are eroded to an ever great extent.

5. The communication of sociological knowledge has been systematically undervalued, as opposed to its production. The communicative possibilities which digital tools afford will not be used to their full potential unless the communication of sociological knowledge is seen as carrying equal importance as a scholarly activity – applying as much to teaching as it does to ‘impact’ and ‘public engagement’ using digital tools.

6. If communication of sociological knowledge comes to be valued in a widespread way, it holds out the possibility of rethinking the public role of the sociologist. There is a greater public appetite than ever before for social scientific knowledge – witness the continual presence of social science books (usually written by journalists) in best seller lists or the millions who watch TED videos (etc) or follow iTunes U courses. However construing public engagement entirely in such terms misses the point – it turns public engagement into a specialism defined by the superstar academics it can produce at this level. Yet the availability of free, easy, instantaneous publishing and communication tools enables such activity to be a potentially everyday occurrence for sociologists. ‘Narrowcasting’ about a specific research area to what can potentially be an extremely small group of interested individuals is no less important than broadcasting to an audience of millions and it should be seen as such. The key claim is that (a) communicating sociological knowledge carries equal scholarly weight to its production (b) this communication should not be construed in instrumental terms.

7. As John Holmwood has put it, "Sociology is a discipline that has to be ‘achieved’, or continually re-invented, in new circumstances." – Digital Sociology in the broadest sense addresses the question of what such reinvention could or should mean in new circumstances where the content of this ‘newness’ is defined largely by the digital.


Making the familiar strange (2013-01-19 08:00)

In this video, Dalton Conley discusses the C.W.Mills' idea that a successful sociologist makes the familiar strange.

<iframe src="http://www.youtube.com/embed/Obt95kwNV04" width="560" height="315" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/Obt95kwNV04
Our Most Popular Posts in the Past 7 Days

The Sociological Imagination (2013-09-19 18:56:57)
[...] Making the familiar strange [...] 

Gernae (2018-01-14 20:04:16)
I have tried both my computer and iPhone with no success in viewing this video by Milena Kremakova. Please help needed for assignment. Thank you

The video was taken down on youtube. You have the details of where we find it so follow up and see if you can locate it.

This Assignment Provides You An Opportunity To Apply The Sociological Imagination To A Real Life Social Issue And Evaluate The Importance Of The Sociological Imagination As A Concept That Sociologists Use To Analyze Social Issues And Problems. – Wri (2019-05-07 12:38:54)
[...] Making the Familiar Strange This short video will explain to you how sociologists view issues in society. [...] 

Digital Sociologist #2: Les Back from @SociologyGold (2013-01-20 08:00)

In this podcast Mark Carrigan talks to Les Back from Goldsmiths about his [1]Academic Diary project.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/back1.mp3"]So what is the Academic Diary?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/back2.mp3"]How did the idea for the project come about?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/back3.mp3"]What did the process of crafting it entail?

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/back4.mp3"]Was the experience of producing it different to that of a more traditional publication?
Hello! I know this is somewhat off topic but I was wondering which blog platform are you using for this site? I’m getting sick and tired of Wordpress because I’ve had issues with hackers and I’m looking at options for another platform. I would be great if you could point me in the direction of a good platform.

Rethinking sociological craft in an age of austerity – an interview with Les Back (2013-01-21 08:00)

In this interview I talk to Les Back about the opportunities for sociology in a time of crisis. He argues that there has never been a greater opportunity to rethink the craft of sociology than there is at present. He’ll be speaking on these themes at the first BSA Digital Sociology event in a couple of months time. Follow us on [1]Twitter or [2]e-mail me if you’d like to be kept informed about the event.

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/digitalsoc.mp3"]

Digital sociology and sociological craft

2. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)
Have you even been couchsurfing? Met new friends whilst travelling? Used a travel-share website? Sleeping on a friend’s - or acquaintance’s - floor while visiting a new place? If you’ve done it, chances are, a sociologist somewhere has studied it (and if not, you should go ahead and study it and tell us about it!). Sociologist Paula Bialski who did a fascinating ethnographic study of CouchSurfing (the biggest [1]hospitality exchange network) calls this intimate tourism or emotional tourism. In this edition of [2]Thinking Aloud on BBC Radio 4 from 12 November 2012, Paula Bialski talks about the sociology of intimate tourism.

Paula is a Polish-Canadian sociologist who received her PhD from [4]Lancaster University where she worked under the supervision of Prof. John Urry and Dr. Monika Buscher. She has researched mobility, tourism, and friendship and social networking, and the implications of the internet on offline interaction, friendship, trust, and social capital. Her new project [5]Low Budget Urbanity, studies low-cost transport issues through Couchsurfing and ridesharing systems. Paula is also part of the awesome band "Paula & Karol" (www.paulaikarol.pl) band!

Do check out Paula’s sociology blog where she writes field notes and thoughts about the sociology of intimate tourism (and lots of other interesting things). She also published her research in the book [6]Becoming Intimate Mobile.
How does scientific advice work in government? How SHOULD it work? (2013-01-23 08:00)


2. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01nq3t3
3. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/12227/bb05b23468c50ad8956e55-1-_sx80
The internet of things (2013-01-24 08:00)

The Internet of Things (says Wikipedia) is a concept which describes "a system of uniquely identifiable objects (things) and their virtual representations in an Internet-like structure". The term was coined by Adam Baumgarten in 1999. But how can it be made real? Here is a video about the Internet of things.


The Politics of Football (2013-01-25 08:00)

[1]"The Politics of Football" on Bundlr


A mind made for mating! (2013-01-26 08:00)
Academic blogging – both/and rather than either/or (2013-01-27 08:00)

How do you feel about academic blogging? If you are reading this then, chances are, you feel reasonably well inclined towards it. However if you are an academic blogger then you will undoubtedly be aware that many people are not so well inclined. This raises an obvious question: why? There are many different answers which could be given to this question. Most of which are grounded entirely in anecdotal evidence. This is an issue that is crying out for empirical research. But given its continued absence, I want to focus on one issue which I believe, on an entirely anecdotal basis, to be pertinent – does academic blogging dangerously blur the boundary between research and journalism?

It’s an important question and one which advocates of academic blogging can sometimes dismiss too quickly. Underlying it is an entirely understandable fear of the relatively ephemeral nature of blog posts. The speed with which blog posts come and go, as well as the cultural connotations attached to the term ‘blogging’ itself (not all of which, it must be admitted, are unjustified) may lead many, when confronted with the advocation of academic blogging, to see ‘blogging’ as corrupting ‘academic’.

However I think this misconstrues exactly what academic blogging is. Or at least what it could be. Rather than turning academics into journalists, it actually holds out the possibility of protecting against this. By opening up a distinctive space between academic research and journalism, a thriving academic blogosphere mediates between them. It provides a space for translation, in that blog posts within it will tend, to varying degrees, to communicate in a way that is less specialised than the more familiar modes of academic communication which underwrite both their content and their authority. It also aids discoverability, in that navigating the academic blogosphere as a non-specialist will tend to be intrinsically easier than negotiating the world of staff pages, journals and paywalls.

The crucial point is that academic blogging does not take place in a vacuum. It is grounded in existing research and expertise. The flexibility it affords allows this relationship to be a dynamic one – blogging can be underwritten by research conducted, in progress or is merely planned. It also provides a degree of space and freedom to extend beyond the realms of research. It is widely acknowledged that social media offers new possibilities for public intellectualism but what is much less understood is the transformed nature this can take. Rather than the broadcasting which defined the public intellectuals of the 20th century, social media facilitates ‘narrowcasting’ – relatively narrow audiences can be reached, with little or no funding needed, facilitating a broader and much more democratic relationship between academics and various publics. Academic blogging holds out the possibility of extending the role of the academic, rather than threatening its diminution. I share many of the fundamental concerns which I hear expressed about impact and public engagement – particularly the entirely justified fear that this agenda, as well as the broader changes within higher education within which it is unavoidably implicated, threaten the autonomy of academic work. I think there’s a risk that the production of academic knowledge (in the broadest sense of the term) becomes subjugated to the contingencies of the political cycle, particularly as its mediated by funding bodies and other intermediaries. Part of the difficulty stems, I think, from the unavoidably top down way in which ‘impact’ and ‘public engagement’ are introduced and enacted. But I’ve always felt conflicted about this issue because, at least when they are construed in ‘bottom up’ terms, I’ve both enjoyed them personally and increasingly seen such activities as important. Using social media has helped give my research a media profile which otherwise would have
been impossible, particularly at this stage of my career. It’s made me easy to discover for journalists and it’s helped me forge a rich array of connections with the broader community who have been the subject of my research. I’ve also found that, increasingly, journalists have read my blog posts or listened to my podcasts before they contact me and it hugely aids the subsequent dialogue. The use of social media can help get academic knowledge into a public forum in a form which is broadly comprehensible but not simplified. In doing so, it helps ameliorate some of the more problematic issues that can emerge from the culture clash of academic knowledge and journalistic constraints. Far from subjugating research to journalism, actively participating in this making public of academic knowledge will actually fortify academia against the intrusions of media imperative i.e. the academic blogosphere mediates between academia and the media. What is recounted above is simply my own personal experience but it’s one which, I’m sure, others have had. Furthermore, it seems likely that as academic blogging becomes more widespread, so too will this experience. Likewise as, for a variety of reasons, organizations invest in multi-author blogging projects which facilitate broader engagement (allowing those who only want to write an occasional blog post to get traction for their writing online) and add value to the content through curation and editing. Imagine if blog posts recounting the aims, arguments and findings of research papers become as ubiquitous as abstracts? What would the effects be? Among many others, it would likely make academic knowledge navigable to a great majority of people who are otherwise excluded from it. Rather than reducing scholarship to blogging, the former is extended through the latter, giving it a public visibility which it currently lacks and making it available in a way in which it currently isn’t.

» Academic Blogging – both/and rather than either/or | The Sociological Imagination | The Spirit of Pragmatism (2013-05-09 14:17:04)  
[...] http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/12272 [...] 

Laura Sangha (2013-09-20 11:11:44)  
Thanks for an interesting post - I like the idea of the blogsphere as mediating between academia and more public spheres, and it will be interesting to see how the potential of the medium develops. I have often thought about my blogging as a bit like those conversations you have over coffee at conferences - you wouldn't publish anything based solely on them, but they are useful, informative, interesting, usually not too specialist, sometimes frivolous.

Please Blog Responsibly | Conditionally Accepted (2015-09-20 22:48:56)  
[...] of their own subfield. Staying safely within their discipline, they begin (maybe unintentionally) speaking as an expert on areas outside of their own training, research, and teaching. what really irritates me is their [...] 

Sociology of ... outer space? (2013-01-28 08:00)  
I started this post as a one-sentence note about a future field called "sociology of space". The idea came while I was reading [1]this BBC article on some of the problems encountered the crew of a spaceship going to Mars. The article touches on important sociological issues - sleep, social interaction in a small [2]total institution, sex - but in a new context. This made me think whether the case of (currently very small) communities and societies of people travelling in outer space actually merit a whole new subfield. Perhaps not yet, but eventually yes, I though. I imagined the not-so-distant future of sociology and its inevitable expansion into new - literally - territories. Okay, not quite literally, because in latin, terra means earth, and I was thinking of extra-terrestrial sociology. This would be a sociology beyond globalisation.

Now, a sub-field related to both sociology and social geography, called "[3]sociology of space", already exists, so we would need another term. So I set out to do a rudimentary literature review to see if anyone at all had
published anything about a sociological approach to outer space.

But lo and behold, a hasty online search for literature revealed that some work in this direction already exists - albeit still on the outskirts of sociology. Note to self: the first example you find in an internet or physical library search is not always the most important.

My first find was the Journal of Astropolitics and the name of Jim Pass who in 2006 published an article on "Astrosociology as the missing perspective." Two years earlier, Pass had defined "astrosociology", or "sociology of outer space" as a new field dealing with 'the scientific study of astrosocial phenomena, or social and cultural patterns related to outer space. A debate ensued about whether to add a new Astrophysics section to the Americal Sociological Association (ASA). In his 2006 article The Astropolitics of Space Colonies; Or the Social Construction of Societies in Space, Pass claims to be making 'the first formal astrosociological effort' to discuss future societies in outer space. Further attempts to legitimise this subfield include a special issue of the same journal in 2011 (See introduction by Hearsey and Pass) in the same journal and a 2011 paper by Pass, Hearsey and Caroti. Pass has presented his thoughts in several conferences and published linked from his website, astrosociology.org. Whilst it is undoubtedly wrong to judge a book by its covers (or a website by its graphics), other subtle signs such as the constant reminder of the author's credentials, text titles such as "Inaugural essay", the overabundance of the "all rights reserved" phrase do raise the reader's suspicion as to whether importance is placed on the content, or indeed on securing a potential trademark.

An anthology called "The Astrosociological imagination" has been published by Stephanie Lynne Thorburn. (I'm not so keen on the use of classical sociology references in the titles such as "Invitation to astrosociology" and "Astrosociological imagination", but I wouldn't mind, if there were more behind the titles).

Pass' work has been criticised mainly informally in the blogosphere both for his approach, and for the name he uses for the new subfield. One short comment paper by James Ormrod deserves special mention, because it offers a more plausible framing of the problem. While Ormrod embraces the idea that space needs to be studied sociologically, he criticises Pass for taking an overly simplistic approach to this topic, as well as of blowing the idea out of proportion. He makes an argument for a 'critical sociology of the universe', rather than simply defining a new subfield by its physical location. Ormrod gives as a reference a book he wrote with Dickens called A sociology of outer space. (Routledge). If it really was forthcoming in 2005, it either hasn’t come forth yet, or Google hasn’t indexed it yet in 2013.

Young sociologists who don’t have a field of your own, are you taking notes? Sociology of outer space is currently a small, empty, quiet and rather messy space. This might change. In fact, it has to change, because outer space - imagined and real - has an important role in social life. But perhaps we need to write some pretty good stuff about it, before stitching a pithy name on what is currently a non-existing discipline.

2. totalinstitutiongoftman
Dr. Satyapriya Rout (2013-02-02 12:14:42)
An interesting piece. But too limited and narrow at the time being.

Milena Kremakova (2013-02-03 10:44:17)
Thanks for reading! Yes, it began as an idea on the spur of the moment and then I realised that there already exists some work on the question of sociology of outer space. Fascinating and totally out of my field, so the post turned out lacking depth. Is your work connected to this area? We would love to post a contribution.

Jim Pass (2013-06-21 03:03:28)
Current sociological subfields can indeed cover what we consider astrosociological issues, but they tend to do so as individuals not attached to a specific community with an interest in space and society, and we have moved on to a multidisciplinary orientation. Finally, astrosociology is just a field, which I founded to create a coherent literature and body of knowledge. Space has always been influential in cultures since the creation of ancient societies. For those who want more good theory and research institute this area, we invite you to contribute. Our nonprofit organization is dedicated to building this field that covers space issues from a social-scientific perspective; an area traditionally scoffed at by sociologists, as I have learned from personal experience. The exceptions to the rule remain inadequate, which we endeavor to remedy, including inspiring students to help us develop the field.

Sol Gamsu (2013-10-01 08:26:08)
Neil Brennan’s ideas about extended urbanization also involve the extension of urban influence into outer space. I think his talk might be up on the rc21 conference website.

**Immigration in the UK (2013-01-29 08:00)**

[1]
The survey shown in the above picture shows that a large percentage of the British population is worried about immigrants coming into the country. But is it really that much of a problem? Read about the multicultural success of Slough [2] here and about Lithuanians who live in the UK [3] here. And, of course, watch the documentary about Peterborough and its immigrants called The Poles Are Coming, about which we already wrote some time ago:

What gender equality? Family and careers in high-skill jobs (2013-01-30 08:00)

Let's take the example of historians. How equal are their career paths of women and men historians, our fellow social scientists (humanities scholars)? According to Alexis Coe, writer and journalist based in San Francisco, [1] being married helps professors, but only if they are male. The author - herself a former graduate student in history - summarises the findings of a new study of historians’ working lives published in December 2012:
Female historians who were either married or had been married at the time of the 2010 survey took an average of 7.8 years to move from associate to full professor. Women who had never married were promoted in an average of 6.7 years. Almost two times as many of the female full professors listed their status as divorced or separated, which suggests their professional obligations were somehow less compatible with marriage than their male colleagues. They were also more likely than their male colleagues to have never wed at all.

Conversely, male historians who were or had been married advanced in 5.9 years. The unmarried man took 6.4 years, a bit longer.

Female professors were more likely to have a spouse or partner with a doctoral degree, 54.7 percent to men’s 30.9 percent. Their partners were also more likely to work in academe, 49.6 percent to 36.3 percent.


American History Association members can read about the survey [3]here.

As Kay S. Hymowitz sums up in her article, [4]The plight of the Alpha Female,

"Children completely change the landscape for women."

But we need to also ask the unasked question: not only why so few women want to sacrifice family for their careers - but why do so many men?


Facebook Graph Search: @PaulBernalUK explains what this is all about... (2013-01-31 08:00)

The first thing to ask whenever Facebook (or indeed any other business) releases a new product or service is what’s in it for them. In the case of Facebook’s new ‘Graph Search’, as in most things Facebook, the answer’s pretty direct: it’s about the data. Graph Search, though it may seem to be just a cool new way of finding stuff, could also turn out to be a very clever way of Facebook gobbling up even more data than before – as well as trying to squeeze even more value from the data that’s already out there.
It comes at a time when Facebook might be facing a new situation – they may be reaching saturation point in terms of user numbers, at least in their prime markets. Figures seem to be suggesting that they are losing users – apparently [1]down 600,000 in the UK and [2]1.4 million in the US - and though those figures need to be taken with a decent pinch of salt, they do at least suggest that the era of unrelenting user number growth for Facebook may be over. What that means for Facebook, particularly after their less than stellar IPO, is that the pressure's on to make more money from existing users. They need money, and for that money they need data! They’re like the plant in Little Shop of Horrors, continually shouting out ‘Feed me!’. They need to be fed, so they can grow, and the more they grow, the more they need to be fed.


Firstly, its important to understand what Graph Search does. As [4]the BBC's Rory Cellan-Jones puts it, Graph Search is a "new way of mining the information your friends, and their friends". Essentially, as it's been described, it takes the data about you, and about your 'friends', and uses it as a source from which to search – giving you back stuff that your 'trusted' friends either use, or 'like', or something along those lines. Where it can get stuff off Facebook, it gives you that – and if it can't find relevant stuff, it goes to Bing, and does a web search instead. You can search for whatever you want – the examples given by Zuckerberg were things like "people who like fencing and live in Palo Alto" or "films my friends like" or "restaurants recommended in New York" – but the possibilities are endless, and Cellan-Jones highlighted the possibilities of using it as a sort of 'dating search': companies like eHarmony etc will be quaking in their boots.

Still, how is this about data? Well, if Graph Search takes off, it will have a number of implications:

1. When people search, they reveal stuff about themselves – they effectively add more stuff to their profile. That’s one of the reasons Google do so well – having information about what people are interested in is key. Each search term entered on Graph Search is more data for Facebook – and a potentially more accurate profile of the user.

2. Graph search will work better for people if their own profile is better – that is, the more data you put up about yourself, the more ‘personalised’ your Graph search will be. Facebook will be sure to let people know that, to persuade them to enter more and more data.

3. There have already been hints made that you might want to put more data up to ‘help’ your friends when they use Graph search. Of course the people it really helps are Facebook – they want more of your data – but the altruism, the sociability, will doubtless be stressed. Be a good friend – put more data up! Tell people what you like!

4. Businesses will start to realise that if people are using Graph search, they need to be on Facebook – and they need to get people to 'like' them even more than before. The 'like' button is already a big deal – this will make it more so. Businesses will be pushing you to 'like' them even more than before.... which means yet more data to Facebook, and more 'permission' given for that data to be used. Do you know what you're consenting to when you press 'like'?  

5. The more businesses are on Facebook, the more individuals have to be Facebook to manage those business pages – it's another 'lock in'. I know many people who say 'I'd love to leave Facebook, but I have to be there to manage my business's page'. That will only increase...
For Facebook, it's a 'win-win' scenario. They get more data – and potentially better data, as people might focus on refining their profiles in order to get 'better' Graph Search results. They get more uses – and hence more money – from their existing data. They get others – individuals and businesses – to do both their selling and their data gathering for them. They lock people into their business model even more.

There's another interesting issue for me. Google are under pressure for not making their searches 'neutral' enough – for possibly prioritising businesses that they make money from, or downgrading rivals or so forth. They deny that this is happening, and claim their search algorithm is 'neutral'. Facebook Graph Search by design prioritises businesses and others on Facebook – it doesn't even pretend to be neutral. Should it? And if it can exist in this form, why shouldn't Google be allowed to be less than neutral? Of course there are vast differences between the services, but I have a feeling this may open up an already squirming can of worms even further.

I should note that this is only a first set of thoughts on Facebook Graph Search – and I haven't even talked about privacy yet! What actually happens to it may be very different from Mark Zuckerberg's dream. It could be a distinctly damp squib – much of the reporting has suggested people are underwhelmed by it. I hope so, because the one thing, more than any other, that I don't want to see on the internet is one service dominating. The net needs to be open, it needs to be varied, it needs to be flexible and it needs to be dynamic. If we all do the same thing, or all use the same service all the time, that is far less likely to continue.

Paul Bernal is a Lecturer in IT, IP and Media Law at UEA. This article was originally posted on Paul's blog. You can follow Paul on twitter @PaulBernalUK.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2013/jan/14/facebook-loses-uk-users-december
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/AlUdy2AobjI
6. https://twitter.com/paulbernaluk

4.2 February

What is 'academic blogging'? (2013-02-01 08:00)

This question has been on my mind a lot this week. Largely because it occurred to me that I have yet to encounter a non-trivial answer to it. Sure, it's easy to say academic blogging is blogging by academics. But what does this really tell us? Martin Weller has an interesting discussion along these lines in his book the Digital Scholar:

'Scholarship' is itself a rather old-fashioned term. Whenever I ask someone to think of scholarship they usually imagine a lone individual, surrounded by books (preferably dusty ones), frantically scribbling
notes in a library. This is somewhat removed from the highly connected scholar, creating multimedia outputs and sharing these with a global network of peers. Scholarship is, though, a sufficiently broad term to encompass many different functions and so has the flexibility to accommodate new forms of practice. It is not only focused on teaching, or research, but also on a wide range of activities. In fact, a rather tautological definition of scholarship is that it is what scholars do. And a ‘scholar’ can be defined as a learned person or a specialist in a given branch of knowledge.

Traditionally we have tended to think of scholars as being academics, usually employed by universities. This is the main focus of this book; it is the changes to university and higher education practice that will form the main discussion and research. However, digital scholarship broadens this focus somewhat, since in a digital, networked, open world people become less defined by the institution to which they belong and more by the network and online identity they establish. Thus a well-respected digital scholar may well be someone who has no institutional affiliation. The democratisation of the online space opens up scholarship to a wider group, just as it opens up subjects that people can study beyond the curriculum defined by universities.

A simple definition of digital scholarship should probably be resisted, and below it is suggested that it is best interpreted as a shorthand term. As Wittgenstein argued with the definition of ‘game’ such tight definitions can end up excluding elements that should definitely be included or including ones that seem incongruous. A digital scholar need not be a recognised academic, and equally does not include anyone who posts something online. For now, a definition of someone who employs digital, networked and open approaches to demonstrate specialism in a field is probably sufficient to progress.

Similar ambiguities obtain with the term ‘academic blogging’. I guess my fear is that that, unless this is more widely recognised, certain possibilities about what it could be taken to entail might be foreclosed i.e. ‘academic blogging’ comes to be defined as only one of the many specific activities that are currently subsumed under this rather vague term. I think there's a real need for empirical research into how academics are using blogging platforms – looking at their intentions behind the activity, the practical results of it and developing taxonomies to better capture how these tools are actually being used (as well as the relative frequency of these uses and their distribution across disciplines) rather than taking the categories already in circulation as being heuristically useful for understanding this emerging field of activity. My fear is that the term ‘blogging’, as well as having all sorts of negative cultural connotations, actually obscures more than it reveals when used as an interpretive category.


Conditionally Accepted | Please Blog Responsibly (2014-02-06 15:02:14) 

Do you find social media taking up too much of your time? (2013-02-02 08:00)

Do you find social media taking up too much of your time? If so then [1]IFTTT could be incredibly useful for you. It allows different social media channels to be connected up using statements of the form IF [x] THEN [y] - where X is
an event occurring on one channel and Y is an action on another channel. When I found out about this, I was instantly fascinated but it can be quite tricky to work out how to *actually* use it. That said, I've been using it for months now and I was surprised to realise recently that I actually have 10 IFTTT statements running. These do things which previously were either impossible or only possible by hand. It's an incredible time saving tool and I feel I've barely scratched the surface of it.

Here are the ones I'm currently using:

- Every new post on the LSE Politics Blog (via the RSS feed) gets saved as a new document on my Google Drive.
- Articles I favourite on Pocket (Read It Later) get saved in Google Drive as a PDF
- New posts on Sociological Imagination get their details entered on a spreadsheet archive in Google Drive
- New posts on the Public University website get placed in my Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination
- New entries on markcarrigan.net go into my Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination
- New entries on markcarrigan.net go to the Sociological Imagination facebook wall.
- New posts on Sociological Imagination go to the Sociological Imagination facebook wall
- New posts on Sociological Imagination go to the Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination.
- My favourited items on Google Reader go into the Sociological Imagination twitter buffer.

1. [https://ifttt.com/wtf](https://ifttt.com/wtf)

Idle Ethnographer (2013-02-07 12:42:38)

But isn't the whole point of channels that they are separate so you can decide what sort of post go into which of them? I'm not sure I see the point in linking them through "if X, then Y".

Sociological Imagination (2013-02-10 15:50:33)

Saves massive quantities of time!
“Oh! There are other people just like me? I’m not so weird after all”: the transformation of identity in the digital age (2013-02-04 08:00)

The internet was integral to the formation of the [1]asexual community. While the details are slightly messier than such an account suggests, the sociologically important aspects of its history can be summarised as follows:

1. Individuals who don’t experience sexual attraction are made to feel ‘broken’, ‘damaged’ or ‘fucked up’ by a culture which places great stress on sexual activity as a marker of personal fulfilment. While they recognise that they are different in relation to a given reference group (often peers at school) the nature of this difference is assumed to be pathological – they deviate from norms they observe and assume that this deviation means that something is wrong with them.

2. If they try and explain these differences to others then what were previous observations of norms endorsed become encounters with norms enforced. Rather than just observing that others orientate themselves towards
sexual activity in certain ways (both attitudinal and behavioural) they encounter the expressions of these norms. Commonly individuals who try and explain a lack of sexual attraction will be told by others that they are ‘late bloomers’, ‘haven’t met the right person yet’, have a problem with their hormones or their minds (etc). What was an interior self-directed assumption of pathology becomes one encountered from others as well.

3. However when the internet came along, it became possible for people with this experience to talk. Initially this wasn’t a case of ‘I am X’ and I want to find others like myself because there was no sense of what X was. However the sheer communicative possibilities afforded by the internet, to express oneself and encounter the self-expressions of others enabled a convergence of experience [note for those who know asexual history: I’m simplifying massively here for theoretical purposes] as people recognised aspects of their own experiences in the accounts of others.

4. These dialogues give rise to the emergence of the sense of an X. People generate labels to describe what they share, as well as labels to express their differences. The dialogue the internet affords [2]affirms commonality but also elaborates differences. Not only does a community form but it becomes internally differentiated.

5. The growth of the online community makes it easier for people to come to define themselves in this way. Whereas many older asexuals spent years or decades searching for some workable understanding of why they were different, many younger individuals simply type ‘do not experience sexual attraction’ into a search engine and find themselves at a n asexual discussion forum. This online growth fuels ‘offline’ media attention – it comes to the attention of journalists eager to document the novel and surprising, which in turn helps the community grow as further individuals encounter the label and find it online, fuelling the trend which was deemed to be newsworthy in the first place.

Now consider a very different group: people who experience Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response:

ASMR stands for Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response and is a physical sensation which can often be felt as a tingling feeling which begins around the scalp and can often travel all around the body particularly down the back and into the persons arms and legs.

Most people describe it as a tingling in the head.

What can trigger ASMR?

ASMR can be brought on through acts known as triggers. These can be visual or through sounds.

Watching another person complete tasks can induce ASMR with activities such as:

- Nail tapping
- Scratching
- Drawing
- Coloring in pictures.
- Whispering
- Hand movements
- Brushes
Haircuts
Massage
Handling items

When triggered ASMR can be very relaxing for the person and can help them feel a lot calmer and in some cases can be so relaxing that some people may fall asleep.

There are some striking similarities observable here. Internet culture was [3]integral to its recognition. The phenomenon has received [4]media [5]attention and the group who recognise themselves as having the experience has grown as a result. Both directly ("oh, so that's what that is!") when encountering such coverage and indirectly through friends and acquaintances who later recount what they have read. In essence it constitutes a label which has only come into social circulation via the internet. The label doesn't create the experience but nonetheless it renders it both easier to recognise (i.e. to acknowledge something it is necessary for it to have a label to constitute it as a thing) and articulate, either in internal conversation with oneself or with external others. Once it becomes an object of internal deliberation, people form plans and projects on the basis of it. Until ASMR was identified as a 'thing' it wasn't going to occur to anyone to make any of the thousands of videos on youtube relating to it.

Some people who felt weird about it suddenly feel relieved that they have a label with which they can now identify, rather than the experience being a site of anxiety and confusion. Those who didn't feel weird but didn't understand the experience simply find some interest in recognising that it is a 'thing'. The parallels can be overstated - crucially, it doesn't seem particularly likely to me (though I'm not 100 % sure) that anyone experienced massive distress about their ASMR experiences. Sure, it perhaps made them feel a bit weird if, for contingent biographical reasons, they were prone to dwelling on it. But it's unlikely to have given rise to the feelings of social erasure and marginalisation which many asexual people experience. Nonetheless there are some converging elements and I think they are very interesting. Crucially they apply much more broadly. This post is hopefully the first step in branching out (meant non pejoratively) from this aspect of my asexuality research - how is the internet reshaping the biographical dynamics of normativity? Or in other words, how is the internet changing how our sense of who we are and how we differ from those around us unfolds over the life course?

2. [http://sexualities.sagepub.com/content/14/4/462.abstract](http://sexualities.sagepub.com/content/14/4/462.abstract)

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**The riddle of modern day hermits (2013-02-05 08:00)**

Every now and then, people who have rejected society get caught under its radar and their solitary lives make it into newspapers. Three recent stories in the papers talked about such contemporary recluses living simple (or, rather, very difficult) lives away from humanity and close to nature. The unimaginable lives of modern-day hermits hold
many people’s minds in a grip of fascination. Millions of websites with examples and tips come up if you search for “living a simple life” or similar on the Internet. Here are just a few articles that caught my attention recently:

- A Russian family of six who lived a solitary life in the forests of Siberia for over 4 decades, unaware even of World War II, were discovered by geologists in 1978 (read a wonderful article [1]here
- [2]Emma Orbach, an Oxford graduate who has now lived for 13 years in a mud hut in Wales.
- An experiment in reclusive living for a year done by Peter Owen Jones (those of you based in the UK can view a documentary about Peter [3]here)
- Mary Cathryn S., a catholic hermit (article [4]here)

[5]

[5]

Russian hermit sisters Natalia and Agafia. In 2013, the last survivor of the family, Agafia, still lives alone in the family hut. Photo: 1977 Source: Smithsonian.com

[6]

[6]

Karp Lykov and his daughter Agafia Lykova in 1977, wearing clothes which the geologists gave them as presents. Source: Smithsonian.com
In an interesting paper from [7]1977, two sociologists, Elgin and Mitchell, study what they call 'voluntary simplicity'. Interestingly, they draw a distinction between voluntary simplicity which normally happens in urban areas and does not involve reclusive living, and 'back to nature' movements. Bearing in mind this distinction, we can nevertheless see strong links between the two phenomena - with the back-to-nature movement being a the more extreme and rare expression of the more or less the same core values. Elgin and Mitchell describe the reasons for choosing a voluntarily simple lifestyle in the USA and the living patterns common for it, as well as the social and business implications. They pinpoint an important feature that is the sense of 'urgency and social responsibility' (p. 3) common to the choice of a simple life which, when the paper was written, struck them as a novel phenomenon which had not existed a decade previously. The underpinning values that they identify appear very similar to those today: material simplicity, human scale living (small is beautiful), self-determination, ecological awareness, and personal growth. It is also interesting to compare their somewhat optimistic predictions for the year 2000 with the benefit of hindsight. The popularity of simple living seems to have grown indeed, but on a much smaller and less society-encompassing scale as the authors predict.

3. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xmbcw

A Manifesto for Growth (2013-02-06 08:00)
shocked, shocked (2013-02-06 19:46:56)
I’m shocked, shocked, there are these simple solutions to our problems that are so obvious. I think a smidgen of sociological imagination - and analysis - would indicate why such reductionism is frankly laughable

Objective Mind: new online platform for post-soviet studies (2013-02-07 08:00)

Just a brief post to introduce you to a new and growing online platform dedicated to post-Soviet states. It is called (somewhat peculiarly) [1]Objective Mind and offers analytical articles as well as background information on ex-Soviet countries, including [2]Country Profiles and [3]Portraits that anyone can use for research, in addition to articles. Their very friendly [4]voluntary editorial team is looking for [5]authors. Certainly worth bookmarking if you are interested in post-Soviet (and post-socialist) social, economic and political affairs. Here is, for example, a recent overview article about [6]recent affairs in Georgia by Roy Yu.

"The PhD is in need of revision": a Canadian perspective (2013-02-08 08:00)

The PhD is in need of revision, writes Rosanna Tamburri of the Canadian online newspaper [1]University Affairs.

After completing five years of study towards his PhD in English at Queen’s University, Ian Johnston dropped out. To those who have similarly slogged through a doctoral program without success, his
reasons will sound all too familiar: his funding had run out; he hadn’t yet begun to write his dissertation; the isolation had become oppressive; and the prospects for landing a tenure-track faculty job in English studies – were he to forge ahead and finish – were dim.

So he left Queen’s in 2009 and enrolled in a master’s program in educational counselling at the University of Ottawa, which he completed in 2012. Now 32, Mr. Johnston is working as a freelance writer while he looks for work in the counselling field. He laments those lost years.

Read the full article [2]here.

1. http://www.universityaffairs.ca/

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Why did men stop wearing high heels? (2013-02-09 08:00)

Finally a good article explaining the craze of high heels with the help of some well-researched historical evidence. After years of being baffled why on earth (rather, above earth) half of the (rich) world’s population is expected (and often cherishes the opportunity) to wear such sinister monstrosities on a daily basis, I’m now somewhat less confused. Mind you, I have done ballet and still didn’t understand what the point in high heels was. I have even suffered from the realisation that this inability to understand something that everybody else takes for granted makes me a bad ethnographer and a lousy female client who frequently shops in the boys’ section of shoe shops despite the shocked faces of the shop assistants - but now the mystery link between status and lack of comfort has finally been revealed.

Read the article by William Kremer [1]here and listen to the podcast [2]here, available also outside the UK. Beware: unless you are a sociologist/historian specialising in both gender issues and fashion, you might have your preconceptions overthrown.


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Bird’s eye view of currently published research (2013-02-10 08:00)

If you are a [1]visual learner (fancy way of saying that you are a fan of pictures and graphs), you might like to see this visualisation of the current ocean of research in all possible sub-fields, from dynamic network analysis to sociology.
and complexity science, between 2007 and today. Check out this [2] graph (click on the link or on the picture below) which also allows you to click on the actual published articles which are visualised in the database.

Visualisation of the research flow from 2007 to today

[4] Bestiario is an online resource full of visualisations and has many other interesting graphs.

1. http://scholar.google.co.uk/scholar_url?hl=en&q=http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/med/study/cpd/current/pgle/modules/md960/0611/documents/monlearning_styles_assessm
Measuring social impact (2013-02-11 08:00)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/X3t8XvSALek
This great video is part of a wider series by the economist [2]David McWilliams. If you like this as much as we did then you’ll probably want to watch the 8 others in the series. If only sociologists were communicating this effectively online!

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/tePKbfC7UNk?feature=player_embedded
MrKappa (2013-02-13 23:44:05)
Sure it’s all about imagination... maybe the media advertisers are very low on talent. Maybe if they looked for personalities first, they might dig themselves out of the huge cliche. Generation coming up, yeah, who trusts a profile with hyper sexual imagery. Unless of course they are an imagitarian.
The sound quality is awful for the first 17 minutes but it improves a lot for the discussion after Roger Burrows finishes his talk. For those who haven’t read the (in)famous paper which is the starting point for this session, it’s available [2]here as a PDF.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/ARLARDwLJhw
"My summer at an Indian call center" by Andrew Marantz (2013-02-16 08:00)

For our readers interested in the globalisation of labour and workers' experiences, today's reading is about call centres. Two documentary films, the 2005 film [1]Nalini by Day, Nancy by Night and the 2006 film [2]Bombay Calling also tackle this recent global employment outsourcing phenomenon, and there is a long list of sociological analyses. Although Andrew Marantz's account of his [3]experience working in an Indian call center in 2011 is a journalistic piece, it is full of thick ethnographic description and offers insider insights into the subjective experiences of the hopes and disappointments of call centre employment.

The current moment seems to be one of 'crisis' or at least of dramatic change for the authority of academic expertise. Policy debates over climate change, embryology and the like have often seen scientific knowledge politicised, problematised and reduced in public imagination to just another partial 'perspective'. These issues are particularly acute where scientific expertise runs up against that of, or associated with, markets. Whilst authority that is grounded in the experience of practicing natural and social science seems to flounder, authority that is associated with market forces seems only to gain in stature – despite recent disasters wrought under the watch of just such expertise. This creates and compounds a series of dilemmas for critical academic practice that are bound up with changing conceptions of what constitutes public life. The arrival of a post-secular moment in which religion has re-entered the public sphere further unsettles debates about expertise, science and religion. This summer school provides a space for postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and other early career academics to come together to respond to this 'crisis' and to think through new avenues for intellectual life, practice and collaboration – reaching across boundaries of science, religion, critique, participation, pragmatism, vitalist ethics, and explanation. Together, we will work through the challenges of the present moment and ask whether there is a conceptual language or theoretical framework for addressing such challenges beyond disciplinary divides. The summer school offers a mix of expert lectures and participant-led discussion groups as well as workshops organised by members of the Authority Research Network. For more information about the summer school, please visit our website: [1]http://buff.ly/Uzqihe

Keynote academics:

Bob Antonio (University of Kansas), John Holmwood (University of Nottingham), Amy Levine (Changwon National University), Celia Lury (University of Warwick), Andrew McGettigan (Independent), Thomas Osborne (University of Bristol), Stephen Turner (Florida University), Sarah Whatmore (University of Oxford)

Application process:

1. Please complete an application form (attached) and return to [2]alexander.smith@warwick.ac.uk by 5pm, March 15th 2013

2. We will consider all applications, and inform successful applicants, by April 15th 2013

3. All successful applicants will be required to register for the summer school by May 15th 2013

Registration fee: £200 to include accommodation and food for the duration of the summer school. Applicants are required to cover their own travel costs.

Bursaries: We have some money available for fee waivers and travel bursaries. If you would like to be considered for either or both of these, please indicate this on the application form. Our resources are limited, and we will prioritise those applicants without sources of institutional support.

Organisers:

Alex Smith, Claire Blencowe and Gurminder K. Bhambra, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick
Women academic authors between 1665 and 2010 (2013-02-18 08:00)


Gender in academia: how much have things changed? (2013-02-19 08:00)

This 1992 article discusses the [1]barriers faced by female scientists and engineers. How much have things changed in the past 21 years? Not enough.

[2]
Image source: "Who Needs Feminism" photoshoot at Oxford university 2013 by the OUSU Women's Campaign,
"Can non-Europeans think?" (2013-02-20 08:00)

In [1]this excellent short article consisting almost entirely of rhetorical questions, Hamid Dabashi (Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York) debunks the "ethnographic gaze" of Eurocentrism.


The Bulgarian Winter: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea (2013-02-20 11:29)

On Wednesday, 20th February 2013, the Bulgarian government headed by Boyko Borissov has deposited its resignation. What happened? What comes next? Read anthropologist Mariya Ivancheva’s analysis below. (The article is reprinted with author’s permission from [1]Criticatc, a Romanian left-wing comment and analysis web portal. See the original article [2]here.) [3]

Over the last week, Bulgarians in most big cities have been out in the streets, protesting against the increased electricity and heating bills. While the increase has happened gradually throughout 2012, the bills that were delivered to the post-boxes of the population in January 2013 were often times bigger than they would normally get. The wave
of contention in response to the rise of electricity prices spread throughout the country, resulting in blockades of roads, barricades, increasing popular rage and police violence. An old man cut his veins in a village in North Bulgaria in a feat of desperation over his bill. One of the organizers of the protests in Varna was stabbed with a knife. The boss of the police force in traditionally rebellious city of Pernik was beaten up by angry protesters. In Sofia over ten people were arrested, and further twenty five beaten by the police. A team of journalists were shot upon with private weapon from a building in the center of Sofia. Police cars and barrels of rubbish were turned upside down after the protests on Sunday and Monday night. Bills, flags, and cars were burnt, and windows broken before offices of the few power distributing companies and their local representatives. The protesters were mostly rank-and-file Bulgarians fed up with the political system of the last 23 years that has lead to their full impoverishment and total alienation from the political process. Middle-aged men and women, young couples with children and students all went out on the streets to protest the deadlock which successive governments had installed on them. The protests were also joined and partly hijacked by a number of right-extreme groups. Mobilized around the neo-Nazi march this Saturday, commemorating interwar General Hristo Lukov, the Hitlerite leader of the Bulgarian Legions, who and introduced anti-Semitic laws, they were ready to provoke and loot. Their reactions jeopardized the energy of the protests which peaked on Sunday, and resurfaced on Tuesday. Tuesday night saw bloody clashes with the police in Sofia on the even of the commemoration of Vassil Levski, the only uncontested hero and political martyr of the Bulgarian national liberation. When Boyko Borissov said he would resign on Wensday morning, it was this blood on his hands, he said he could not tolerate. Yet, most people see his resignation as a way to desert the sinking ship of the Bulgarian state amidst the crisis previous cabinets started and he deepened. The last protests did not come out of the blue. Over the last two months numerous protests have taken place throughout the country. In November the threat to the poet and all-time-dissident Nikolay "Bossiya" (Barefoot) Kolev sparked the so-called "Tomato revolution": a night of discontent not just against the unjust court trial of Bossiya, but against the government in general. In December and January two protests against privatization moves took place. The privatization of the freight train transport – the profiting part of the railway company split "under EU regulations" – has also been underway despite the protests in Sofia. A much wider social and media response was generated around the months' long blockade of the Sopot Machine plant. The demand of the workers to get their six months' salaries back led to its rapid privatization and the materialization of a mysterious sum of money with which the government paid back the salaries of the state-employed workers. In December and January the Green movement that protested in the summer was back to the streets. While in June their victory against the Forestry act was seen as a success, less than half a year later the government was overseeing the continuing construction. The contradictory Law of Education also sparked moderate protests. While the competition between teachers and the state subsidy to private schools have been the most contradictory clauses, middle-class parents mobilized against the compulsory post-4 kindergarten provision. Since December students at the Sofia University have also come out to protest against the increase of student fees. All these protests have come as a symptom of the increasing discontent of Bulgarians with the political and economic system. And while not all demands went against privatization and for protection, this was the overall frame: a frame that has proved difficult to articulate after decades of a systematic liberal pro-market brain-wash. The latest wave of contention that led to the resignation of the cabinet made no exception, but by early this week, the demands had started to change. The initial demand for the decrease of energy bills gradually changed with the slogan “Let’s burn the monopolies”. This motto expressed the explanations of the government as to why the increase of prices had happened were various. The reasons given ranged from the tax on green energy, the slightly longer period of charging, the delay of the process of reporting and increased consumption due to the Christmas holidays, and the low voltage of the electricity for domestic consumption. These were all valid reasons, and it was not transparency that was missing in the price formation. The solution offered, however, by liberal intellectuals, the media, and also initially by the people in the streets, was – surprise, surprise – the end of monopolies and further privatization and liberalization of the energy market. Yet the whole process is a showcase of how privatized entities function out of state control. The power distributive companies were privatized in 2005 and then sold out to three foreign companies under very favorable conditions of secure 16 % annual profit or return for them. This made the state – and thus the taxpayers – literally indebted to these private companies, which have on top of that held prices high with a cartel agreement. Yet, it was not the monopoly in general that was a problem: an issue which was eclipsed by the amnesia of 23 years of transition to market economy. It was the monopoly in the hands of uncontrolled and uncontrollable private companies within a free market economy.
with no state regulation or protection that made the population vulnerable to price hikes. Yet, the crisis of political representation seemed stronger and soon took a lead among the protesters. The concrete plea of concessions on the electricity bills were soon followed by an overall demand for the resignation of the government, which in some places took the form of claims against particular local mayors and representatives of the state. By Monday the demands changed more dramatically to a new Constitutional Assembly, majority vote with no parties but individual candidates, and the revision of all privatization deals and concessions for the last 20 years. Thus, while general discontent with the capitalist system only surfaced timidly in some of the protesters’ demands, the crisis has become political.

DE ACELASI AUTOR

[4] The assault on Ahmed Dogan: a heroic sal...

Caught in the vortex of increasing popular discontent, the Bulgarian center-right government of Citizens for the European Future of Bulgaria (GERB) has mostly responded with quick-fix solutions to quell people's anger. It has privatized state-owned enterprises but kept collective contracts. It has made concessions on contradictory bills to only then change other laws in favor of big business. It has exhausted the treasury to pay sums of money to shut down further protest. The only thing it has not changed has been the general direction of its austerity and privatization reforms. At the same time, Prime Minister Borissov's response to most protests has thus far been that of genuine irritation and contempt. While he scorned the participants in previous protests this winter, he has tirelessly underlined the great contributions of his government in the construction of highways. After the small concessions he granted to certain protesting groups, he has restored his overall image of a reconciling father of the nation. This time, however, the paternalistic tone was not allowed by the people in the streets. After Borissov's failed attempts to calm them down in appearances on TV late last week, the protests and blockades continued at full speed. They culminated in tens of thousands people coming out in the streets in the country on Sunday. The nervous and contradictory reactions of Borissov and his team betrayed their total impasse. In a typical populist gesture the Prime Minister publicly declared himself in support of the protesters and "generously" offered them rescheduled payment if they filed a complaint: a true gesture of liberal solidarity. This measure was not welcomed. People firmly demanded his resignation. As a next solution, Borissov pressed the Minister of Economics, Energetic, and Tourism Delyan Dobrev to carry out investigation of the power distributing companies and declassification of their contracts with the state. In less than a week, Borissov also fired two bosses of the Direction of the State Commission of Power and Water Regulation (DKVER): one for the increased bills, the other – freshly appointed – for her company's involvement in the online trade of banned cigarettes. The chaotic and desperate actions of Borissov and his people on Monday are a symptom of the deeper political and economic crisis which his and previous governments have brought to the country. They were also a sign of conflicts within the party in power. The President – usually a blind follower of the PM – used the chaos for some political self-promotion, declaring his support for people. GERB issued "directives for reaction" to the media, but then quickly withdrew them, saying that the email was in fact aimed to reach its parliamentary group members only. At the same time, the clamor around the energy bills eclipsed another protest – or a threat of one – that actually put the decisive spike in the gun of the government. This winter Bulgarian grain producers held a number of protests. After a promise of the Prime Minister to pay their subsidy by the end of February, they had frozen the protests. Yet, the promise of the government did not seem to materialize and a next warning was issued late last week. The promise of Borissov to pay the subsidy from the pocket of the state, until the European Commission pays it back to the grain producers, was met with unexpected resistance by the Finance Minister Simion Dyankov. Dyankov, a young yuppie that left his position as the Chief Economist of the Finance and Private Sector Vice-Presidency of the World Bank to join the government, said it was impossible to pay before April. His refusal outraged Borissov and he asked him to resign on Monday. Ironically, back in 2010 Borissov had said that the resignation of Dyankov would mean the end of his government: yet another promise of the Prime Minister that came to naught. Before he left his position, however, Dyankov was asked to issue a new emission of country's bonds for 800 mln lv (409 mln euros) last Wensday. Under the unexpected shock for the national economy and surprise to the international market the country's bond yields have started to rise and the value of Bulgarian debt to go down: a threat which the media and people on the streets have equally neglected. Under the pressure of the protests about the electricity bills, on Tuesday the Prime Minister
gave a press conference. He did not resign. Instead, in a program of seven points, he promised changes which the
DKVER had to vote. A cancellation of the 13% increase of electricity voted in August 2012 fell down, and a further 8
% decrease of the price was voted. Where the money would come from to secure these measures, the PM did not
make clear. While the PM has refused the idea of nationalization, he declared himself in favor of the concentration
of control of in the hands of National Electricity Company (NEC). An uncontrollable state-within-the-state, NEC was
seen by the people as one of the main reasons for the lack of transparency in the price formation of electricity, but no
 provision was made. The declassification of the contracts with the power distributing companies was paralleled with
a promise that they would be penalized and CEZ would lose its license. GERB has also promised 50% of its quota in
DKVER to become public, and it has asked the other parties to follow track. Two ladies, allegedly part of the protest
organizers – Daniela Pelovska and Diana Kaneva – who were called to Borissov’s premises yesterday, joined the PM
at the press-conference rostrum on Tuesday. They enthusiastically endorsed the government’s quick reaction, and
said they did not demand its resignation. They said that before the demands start being fulfilled no further protests
would follow, and that if there was anyone to blame it was not the current PM, but the whole political system of the
last 23 years. They said they did not support the ultras’ violence asked ordinary protesters to withdraw from par-
ticipation. While the first reactions in the social networks were those of frustration, both journalists and protesters
soon joined in their outrage against the badly staged political theater. The investigative site Bivol forwarded infor-
mation about Pelovska. Beyond her participation in the privatization process and involvement with the party of the
former Tsar Simeon II, it was disclosed that both her son and her daughter are high-ranking officials within the local
authorities in Sofia, where Borissov’s party GERB holds power. Two of the other protest organizers Yanko Petrov and
Yanaki Ganchev spoke before the privately owned independent Channel 3 saying that the two ladies had betrayed
all Bulgarians. They said for the continuing of the protests until people saw the fall of the government. Protest
organizers from all around Bulgaria have called people to continue their offensive. While big protests have taken
place on Tuesday evening already, the real big national protest was scheduled for Sunday, 24th of February. Given
the relatively close parliamentary election in July, the deposited resignation of the government now and its loss later
this spring was already no news. Borissov’s political game was no longer convincing for the majority. His resignation
was a last attempt to save his face, but most people see his resignation as a sign of weakness. With or without an
interim government, the lack of an alternative political actor makes the electoral perspectives rather bleak. Borissov
has thus far absorbed popular discontent within both the all-time powerful Bulgarian Socialist Party its all-time ally
the Movement for Rights and Liberties and their similarly neoliberal right-wing contenders. The new party of former
European Commissioner Miglena Kuneva – a splinter of the Tsar’s party and some further members of the former
democrats – is yet another embodiment of power-hungry marginals of the political transition. The new coalitions in
the conservative right political parties as Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria seem barren, especially since it was Ivan
Kostov’s government that started the whole process of privatization in the energy and further sectors. A few parties in
the extreme right, such as Ataka and VMRO, have tried to ride the wave of the protests. And while their thugs discred-
ited the protests, their leaders have kept firm ground, calling for nationalization of the power distributive companies,
and the resignation of the government. Yet if the current political system with GERB and all other discredited parties
figure as the devil in the equation in the title, the alternative scenario is both impossible and appealing as the deep
blue sea. What is certain is that the camel’s back has been broken in Bulgaria. Bulgarians have joined larger processes
that shook the region – Romania last winter, Slovenia, Hungary, Macedonia and Kosovo this season. Slogans of los
Indignados in Spain and the Greek anti-austerity protest start featuring in the streets. What is really needed now
is that people organize and speak openly of what form of economic rule and political control we demand and how
to achieve them. We need mechanisms and forms of political, economic, and social participation: a struggle that is
parallel to the electoral one, and one that aims to overturn the system as it is. Solidarity and international diffusion
of protest strategies and forms of organizing are now needed more than ever. And while the anti-capitalist and anti-
privatization vocabulary and alternative economic solutions are still at a rudimentary stage of development, one thing
is clear: the Bulgarian winter is still on the go. [5]Mariya Ivancheva is a doctoral candidate in Sociology and Social
Anthropology at the [6]Central European University. Her research is on the past and present of socialism as reflected
in the history of student movements and the contemporary higher education reform in Venezuela. Mariya is a member
The armbands, officially known as [2]Motorola arm-mounted terminals, look like something between a Game Boy and Garmin GPS device. The terminals keep track of how quickly and competently employees unload and scan goods in the warehouse and gives them a grade. It also sets benchmarks for loading and unloading speed, which workers are expected to meet. The monitors can be turned off during workers’ lunch breaks, but anything else—bathroom trips, visits to a water fountain—reportedly lowers their productivity score. Tesco did not respond to requests for comment, so it’s hard to know if the arm bands have been a success.

What struck me was the muted presence of [3]gamification themes, both in the deployment of the technology and in the reporting of its use. The technology allows management to ‘grade’ workers and compile real time moment-to-moment data ([4]facilitating Taylorism 2.0?) in a manner which [5]produces ‘scores’:

The former employee said the device provided an order to collect from the warehouse and a set amount of time to complete it. If workers met that target, they were awarded a 100 per cent score, but that would rise to 200 per cent if they worked twice as quickly. The score would fall if they did not meet the target.
Micro-measurement of employee behaviour is obviously not new, however the use of mobile technology (that looks like a Game Boy) to produce ongoing scores for each individual is more novel. It produces the sustained, coherent and linear feedback which is integral to game dynamics. It doesn’t stretch one’s imagination to conceive of Tesco giving out FourSquare-esque badges for sustained levels of achievement by individuals in the depot or publishing league tables in order to ‘motivate’ workers in the depot to achieve ‘better scores’. When/if it takes such a form, gamification looks and sounds little like the radical technology described by its advocates, which draws together a trendily eclectic selection of behavioural knowledges into a easily saleable intellectual ‘movement’ which is increasingly in vogue within management schools.

However is there really such a disconnect? Drawing on the work of people like Nikolas Rose, it could easily be argued that technologies of motivation and affect (the ‘psi disciplines’) are intrinsically political. Or that, at the very least, they cannot be detached from their political implications. While I would resist any poststructuralist turn which, in my view, risks collapsing intellectual inquiry into cultural politics, I’d nonetheless suggest that people who work in these areas have a responsibility to consider the implications which their work might hold. I find gamification fascinating in a number of ways. Nonetheless my engagement with it (which to be fair amounts to watching some videos, reading a single book and doing a Coursera course) has also left me with the sense of it as deeply troubling. Largely because there seems to be little or no engagement with the question of the consequences that might be held by this work when it is thrown ‘out there’ into the world, free to be deployed in a world riven with inequalities of power and status, facing a long-term crisis of economic growth and an increasing tendency towards structural (near or total) redundancy for large swathes of the labour market. Within such a context, the failure of gamification people to engage with the politics of gamification is deeply troubling.

7. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=4O0d3Wxj0sUC

The Quantified Self and Taylorization 2.0 The Sociological Imagination (2013-11-23 08:23:59)

[...] a sense in which I agree with Carr here and I’ve written about this in the past. However he glosses over the issue that interests me the most when he talks about the [...]
There is a name for those under- and precariously employed, but actively working, academics in today's society: the para-academic.

Para-academics mimic academic practices so they are liberated from the confines of the university. Our work, and our lives, reflect how the idea of a university as a place for knowledge production, discussion and learning, has become distorted by neo-liberal market forces. We create alternative, genuinely open access, learning-thinking-making-acting spaces on the internet, in publications, in exhibitions, discussion groups or other mediums that seem appropriate to the situation. We don’t sit back and worry about our career developments paths. We write for the love of it, we think because we have to, we do it because we care.

We take the prefix para- to illustrate how we work alongside, beside, next to, and rub up against, the all too proper location of the Academy, making the work of higher education a little more irregular, a little more perverse, a little more improper. Our work takes up the potential of the multiple and contradictory resonances of para- as decisive location for change, within the university as much as beyond it.

Specialists in all manner of things, from the humanities to the social and biological sciences, the para-academic works alongside the traditional university, sometimes by necessity, sometimes by choice, usually a mixture of both. Frustrated by the lack of opportunities to research, create learning experiences or make a basic living within the
university on our own terms, para-academics don't seek out alternative careers in the face of an evaporated future, we just continue to do what we've always done: write, research, learn, think, and facilitate that process for others.

We do this without prior legitimisation from any one institution. Para-academics do not need to churn out endless outputs because of the pressures of a heavily assessed research environment. We work towards making ideas because learning, sharing, thinking and creating matter beyond easily quantifiable products. And we know that this is possible, that we are possible, without the constraints of an increasingly hierarchical academy.

As the para-academic community grows there is a real need to build supportive networks, share knowledge, ideas and strategies that can allow these types of interventions to become sustainable and flourish. There is a very real need to create spaces of solace, action and creativity.

The Para-Academic Handbook: A Toolkit for making-learning-creating-acting, edited by Alex Wardrop and Deborah Withers, calls for articles (between 1,000-6,000 words), cartoons, photographs, illustrations, inspirations and other forms of text/graphic communication exploring para-academic practice, and its place within active intellectual cultures of the early 21st century.

It will be published by HammerOn Press in 2014.

Enquiries [1]tomail@hammeronpress.net
Deadline for submissions 1 July 2013.

Introducing a special feature: the 'Sociologists of Crisis' series (2013-02-24 19:30)
Sociology and crisis often appear linked together, trapped in each other’s embrace sometimes as ‘intimate bedfellows’ and sometimes as an ‘odd couple’ too. What binds the one to the other is the very nature of their unusual relationship which, like most tempestuous love affairs, finds itself in moments of settlement and rupture depending on the tide, the mood, or the very circumstances that prompt or discourage their encounter. Such a broad opening paragraph admittedly sits and inevitably awaits scornful criticism that will demand references to substantiate claims made and justifications that would need to spell out what entitles any author to dare attempt such generalising pronouncements. My answer, consistent with every lover’s confession, is simple; it is my attuned interest in both sociology and crises that gives me the confidence to talk about them freely, if not carelessly, even by violating established standards of academic practice. What I hope to introduce with this introduction to the series however, is not a purely academic endeavour nor is it a theoretical treatise. Like most of my previous posts at the Sociological Imagination blog, they are -at best- civic responses to social events (the English riots, the Eurozone crisis) or academic arguments (the limits and possibilities of sociology), intending to raise questions that draw on sociology’s vocabulary of intellectual curiosity and provocation.

A few cautionary remarks are due however before this article series is properly introduced; the first is that despite my publicly exposed love-letter to sociology, and my faith in its potential usefulness in explaining crises, what prompts me to discuss the discipline itself with so much ease is my own research specialisation in a ‘sociology of sociology’ itself in the space of my (soon-to-be-completed) doctoral thesis at the University of Sussex, where I am also fortunate enough (if not entirely blessed!) to teach sociology to first year undergraduate students; sociology’s very first and foremost (re)public.

The second and perhaps most important point of caution, concerns the way in which the words sociology and crisis are linked together in this article, assuming their troubled relationship to be already known to and accepted by the reader; it might be wise to remind ourselves that sociology’s trajectory through time finds it in various moments of crisis in itself, with itself and of itself, like those documented by Raymond Boudon’s 1971 classic, The Crisis in Sociology. This article series however, does not interrogate sociology’s existential unease but rather sociologists’ uneasy conscience in the face of socio-political questions that have an immediate bearing on their research, with crisis being just one of them. What I hope to introduce in the Sociologists of Crisis series then, is the way in which sociologists’ work might provide insightful and imaginative ways with which to orient both our contemplative thought and our routine, everyday social action towards a better understanding of and confrontation with the current global crisis.

The idea behind such an initiative is the belief that, despite the insularity and overspecialisation of contemporary scholarship, there remain ideas and research incentives that might prove rather useful, practical companions in our turbulent discussions of the current socio-political realm, often offering unfamiliar twists in thinking and fresh opportunities for critically examining our social world against the cult of punditocracy or the doxosophic lens of the media and the blogosphere too. The objective of this project is to offer sobering accounts of the crisis by moving beyond and away from the hype of media discourse, political demagoguery, ideology and irrational, irresponsible
popular responses that often come in the form of forlorn gloom dramatised by hand wringing, chest beating and fatalistic lamentations that are polarised around disputes between warring camps; affording rival answers to a shared predicament.

This begs a number of questions that would need qualifying, one of them being; "which crisis exactly are we referring to?", and the answer lies not (just) in the global financial meltdown of our time, but in the specific context of one of the main casualties of it; Greece, to which a [3]two-part article was devoted last August in the space of this blog. The reasons behind choosing Greece as our destination for a guided tour of economic crises lie (a) in the fact that it provides a rather fertile ground for examining a lot of the arguments made about crises in general, and (b) in its casting as an accidental protagonist in the broader theatre of global capitalism’s ebb and flow.

The method or rather the chosen path for our navigation into such topographies of debt is to host a series of conversations with current sociologists whose research and thinking can offer perspectives that elude facile, popular representations of our crisis-ridden times and replace them with commentary that draws neither on expertise on the Greece, nor on intellectualist self-indulgence divining what the world looks like, but on the basis of powerful insights gleaned from the professional practice of their sociologies. The central question behind this modest project, best seen as a work-in-progress much like politics itself, is ‘can the way in which we speak about and listen to something change our understanding of it and more importantly its very own course?’ The argument offered here gently nods in affirmation of that statement proposing that by demystifying the language we use to refer to and comment on the crisis and its attendant issues, central or peripheral, ultimately has a bearing on how we might act towards it, experience it and/or live with, against or beyond it.

When language is used as the prime software for organising politics in the mind and as a framing device for our positioning as opinion-makers, opinion-dwellers and opinion-sharers, its misuse for the invention of villains, or the celebration of false-Gods can have harmful effects on our participation in our polity and the very shape it might take from this moment on. This re-adjustment of language to its critical functions is consistent with the title of the series which does not just allude to ‘sociologists of crisis’ as citizens of a world in crisis, but to sociologists of and with critical judgement, thus using the word ‘crisis’, derived from the Greek root krinein, for its capacity to judge rather than explain away the tribulations of the ‘sick man of Europe’ beset by austerity, rising unemployment, political corruption, Kafkaesque bureaucracy and escalating violence. Against such ‘giant evils’ of society, as William Beveridge of the [4]Beveridge Report fame, would have it, and in favour of Paul Gilroy’s (2012: 395) bold assertion that such ‘rhetorical habits must be broken and our political system adjusted accordingly so that it can acknowledge the perils of a predicament in which the integrity of our ebbing democracy may itself be at stake’, this series will be of interest to those who wish to resist the impulse to think and act unreflectingly and thus un-sociologically, influenced by elusive and illusory linguistic tropes and socio-political attitudes that are misleadingly coded as respectable political argumentation. The first article of this series will elaborate further on the theme of language, political culture and the sound of politics, and will be ‘live’ online towards the end of the month, like every article in this series.

References:


Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other
research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/hx-BX9Qi71Q

Gone and busted, done and dusted? Notes towards a moral and political grammar of ‘civil dawn’ The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-14 18:35:03)

[...] preparing the fourth instalment of the Sociologists of Crisis on the issue of suicide, life via death took over and in the face of a tragic event, I had to get [...]

The responsibility of being nice: An idea, a method and a personal utopia on suicide. A conversation with Dr. Ben Fincham The Sociological Imagination (2014-02-13 08:01:46)

[...] interrupted the flow of the Sociologists of Crisis series for a timely intervention on the issue of the Golden Dawn trials in my native Greece, it [...]

Gone and busted, done and dusted? Notes towards a moral and political grammar of ‘civil dawn’ | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:21:49)

[...] preparing the fourth instalment of the Sociologists of Crisis on the issue of suicide, life via death took over and in the face of a tragic event, I had to get [...]


[...] interrupted the flow of the Sociologists of Crisis series for a timely intervention on the issue of the Golden Dawn trials in my native Greece, it [...]


[...] the meantime, I periodically write for and maintain a column at The Sociological Imagination, which is an open, free online magazine; aiming hosting [...]

Alex Trotiuc, CEO of MRP-EURASIA (2015-12-22 11:02:17)

Dear Mark! I like your publication and your clear reasoning about crisis in sociology. I drew special attention my research staff MRP-EURASIA to incoming mass migration to Europe from Asia and North Africa in the last 1-2 years. These masses of people (hundreds of millions) fall into the above-mentioned social group “homeless people requiring social assistance and accommodation”. They very quickly get the status of "refugee" and get the civil rights a citizen of EU - eventually they “accumulate” and assimilate in Germany, France, Austria, the United Kingdom (countries most accessible for migrants and most heavily standard of living in Europe). They greatly change the socio-political attitudes and preferences of opinion-makers, opinion-dwellers and opinion-sharers in European countries. What do you think and what ideas do you have? Thanks in advance for your reply. Alex Trotiuc, CEO MARKET RESEARCH & POLLS - EURASIA (International Group in Eurasia region) info@mrp-eurasia.com http://www.mrp-eurasia.com SKYPE: columna101 HEADQUARTERS OFFICE ADDRESS:: Columna Str. 101, t.Chisinau, The Republic of Moldova, MD-2012
Interrogating a/sexual cultures (or, assumptions that seemed fucking stupid once I started thinking about them) (2013-02-25 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/-XiQIWFgw7k

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/-XiQIWFgw7k

_____________________

Maricruz (2013-02-25 16:55:06)
Dwight Freeney, who had been supposed to leave Indianapolis, spent 11 years while using Colts and with the exception of Reggie Wayne (who beats him by 12 months), was the longest tenured Colt. "I’m campaigning for Obama, so I’ll be really busy achievable," she said. It’s possible that my attitude around it came, on some level, from knowing that I still liked boys.

No to the Euro! @ProjectMYPLACE report from Latvia (2013-02-26 08:00)

MYPLACE researcher Liga Rudzite from the Latvian team reports on the recent protests against new legislation to move towards the replacement of the Latvian Lat with the Euro. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [1]HERE or the project’s blog [2]HERE. You can also follow MYPLACE on [3]twitter.

On 31st of January the Parliament of Latvia – Saeima – voted on the Law on Euro that will regulate the process of introduction of Euro replacing the current currency of the country – Lat. On the morning of the vote the Members of Saeima were met by a protest action organized in front of the Parliament building by an NGO “Antiglobalsists” gathering around 70 people expressing their discontent with the vote they were about to cast.
At the end of 2012 the Prime minister of Latvia Valdis Dombrovskis suggested that Latvia is now ready to introduce Euro and this should happen from the 1st of January 2014. This caused public debates on whether Latvia is ready for that and whether the population of Latvia would support the decision.

Several NGO’s gathered together at the beginning of this year to start a campaign against Euro in Latvia — "Euro – No!". The main activities of the campaign so far included initiating discussions in news portals, voicing opinions wherever possible, sending out information and inviting people to join the cause via chain e-mails and letters, and on social networks. An open letter was also written to the Prime minister and the Parliament asking them to postpone the introduction of Euro and to organize a referendum on the question.

Even though joining the Eurozone was part of the Agreement on joining European Union, thus also a part of the referendum for joining the EU, campaigners say that this question should be voted on in a separate referendum, as not all countries of EU have joined the Eurozone and only 48% of the population voted for joining the EU anyway.

Campaigners have also started an initiative on an online participation platform manabalss.lv (my voice) to make Government return to the question of Euro and postpone the change of currency. So far this initiative has collected just over 7000 signatures out of 10000 necessary for the motion to go to Government. Public polls show that about 57% of the population are against the introduction of Euro in 2014.

In order to keep Lat as the national currency activists of "Euro – No!" campaign have established an NGO "Latvia for Lat!" planning to gather and involve all people and organizations that are against introduction of Euro and to organize a referendum on the question. The protest action was the first visible public activity of the NGO and it was followed by a conference "Why we do not need Euro? Why should we keep Lat?" and a press conference on the activities of the NGO and the campaign.

Invitations to join the protest action were spread through social networks and the official message from the official organizers "Antiglobalists" said that "On this day the members of Parliament are planning to destroy the national currency Lat, and similar to the 1940 to adopt currency that we will have no control over. This time it will be Euro instead of Rubles."

As mentioned before about 70 people took part in the protest action. The action slogans called for saying no to Euro and getting rid of slaves of Brussels, as well as stated that "We will have only those rights that we will be able to fight and win for!" and "The more we will protest, the better we will live!"

Even though the Parliament managed to pass the law with a slight majority of votes (52 in favor, 40 against), "Euro – No!" campaigners seem to be organizing a protest movement that should be taken seriously by the Government.

And here is a YouTube video from the protest:
Request for help from New Social Media, New Social Science (2013-02-26 19:19)

How do you make decisions about ethical questions when designing online research? Where are the gray or sticky areas? What resources have helped—what do you need? The New Social Media, New Social Science project would like your input so we can assess what resources are needed. Please share your insights, frustrations and questions in this short questionnaire: [1]https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/e-ethics. For more, see: [2]http://nsmnss.blogspot.com/2013/02/thinking-ethically.html.

The word ‘blogging’ often has negative connotations. Yet blogging can be understood both as an output and as a platform. Many negative views about blogging are connected to a certain idea of what it is: a single author, using it as a forum to express their views to a world which, in my cases, isn’t particularly interested. However this is only one kind of output which the platform can be used to publish. Increasingly, popular and successful blogs are taking on a new form: the multi-author blog. As the LSE’s Chris Gilson and Patrick Dunleavy have [1] argued,

The truth is that the single-author blog model has already gone out of fashion, and is in rapid decline. A blog is only as good as its readership and without consistently strong posts, and an easy way of finding them, there will be no readership. In the modern world of web 2.0, RSS feeds, Facebook and Twitter, it simply is not very effective to have a single author, single issue, rarely updated blog; all the effort made in writing and posting will be typically wasted.

Even creating a combined blog portal for a whole university is no guarantee of success. For instance, the Warwick University blog portal lists over 7,000 blogs which in combination have over 140,000 entries. But there are no indications of which are the popular or timely blogs, nor even a separation of staff and student work.

These considerations help explain why the vast majority of popular political blogs are now multi-author blogs (MABs); that is, themed and coherent blogs run by a proper editorial team and calling on the services of multiple authors to ensure that the blog remains topical, can cumulate a great deal of content and can ensure a good ‘churn’ of high quality posts. We believe that MABs are a very important development, and they can be an assured way for an academic institution to become more effective in the context of the web.

Such websites function more like online magazines and take full advantage of the power of modern blogging platforms: free, instantaneous, collaborative publishing of a kind which has never previously been possible. While the uptake of such tools within academia is still relatively new, there are already countless examples of ongoing successes, such as the [2]LSE Impact Blog, the [3]LSE Politics & Policy Blog and the [4] Sociological Imagination. As Gilson and Dunleavy argue later in the article above:

We believe that there is a huge untapped market for well-informed, continuously updated and varied academic blogging. Academics are already writing content and universities already function as huge dynamic knowledge inventories that insiders know about, but the wider public cannot access. The difficult creative job is therefore already done. Multi-author blogs are a fantastic, easy, and moreover, cheap way for academics and universities to get their research out to what is essentially an unlimited audience. From this process, we can all benefit.

Perhaps the most exciting aspect of such tool is that they require little technical knowledge to utilise. If you are capable of using Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Word, you’re capable of using these tools. Furthermore, the extremely sophisticated collaborative functions built into them enable projects to be maintained without the need for regularly scheduled meetings or large amounts of communication. They enable an entirely new form of academic communication: a kind of ‘middle-range publishing’ that falls between books/journals & conferences/seminars.
Thinking of guest posting | Finding Helicon (2016-07-09 01:16:56)
[...] single author blogs. An example of the critique against single author academic blogs is available here. One of the interesting arguments is that multi-author blogs guarantee a wider variety of good and [...]
Films for action (2013-02-28 08:00)

Check out the website [1]"Films for action": it has an excellent online collection of films. Here is their Film of the Day for 22 February 2013:


4.3 March

History, tennis, and fashion: women at Wimbledon from 1884 until today (2013-03-01 08:00)

This gallery traces the evolution of female Wimbledon fashion, from the floor-length dresses of the 1880s to the skin-tight miniskirts of today:
(click on the image to see the full gallery)

[1]
The academic study of football: introducing the LMCFR (2013-03-02 08:00)

The [1]Lawrie McMenemy Centre for Football Research (LMCFR) at Southampton Solent University is a "multi-disciplinary football education, research and consultancy centre which provides expert support for the football industry, students and the media in a number of areas":

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/0zqJ0Ww-u04](http://www.youtube.com/embed/0zqJ0Ww-u04)

Call for papers: E.P.Thompson and the history of capitalism (2013-03-03 08:00)

Reposted from: [1]the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History (WIGH)

THE GLOBAL E.P. THOMPSON: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAKING OF THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS AFTER FIFTY YEARS

**Date:** October, 3rd – 5th, 2013

**Deadline:** Paper Proposals are due May 15th, 2013
Fifty years ago E. P. Thompson published The Making of the English Working Class, one of the most influential social history works ever. Its approach to the history of common people, its arguments and its methods came to influence several generations of historians and others all over the world. To trace Thompson's influences, and with it the larger story of the varied approaches to social history that have come out of them, the Program on the History of Capitalism and the Weatherhead Initiative on Global History at Harvard University seek to initiate a global conversation among researchers across the humanities and social sciences to reflect critically on Thompson's impact on the writing of history and his enduring significance for future research.

At a time of global economic crises, as scholarship returns to themes of class, inequality and political economy with renewed interest, urgency, and moral purpose, the fiftieth anniversary of the Making of the English Working Class offers a welcome opportunity to both critically reflect on Thompson's scholarship and consider the ways in which his ideas, methods and commitments can still inspire intellectual frameworks and research programs that speak to present global problems.

The conference, to be held at Harvard University from 3rd-5th of October, 2013 invites critical engagement with Thompson's legacy. The Making has been at the center of many controversies in the writing of social, political, cultural, and labor history over the past decades, and we welcome papers that trace these debates. We are also interested in papers tracing Thompson's influence in various fields of history, and in various parts of the world. Moreover, we are seeking contributors who address issues such as

- Translating E. P. Thompson: English Idioms and Traditions in Global Context
- Class Formation: An Important Category of Analysis in History?
- Moral Economies and Political Economy: Culture, Economy and Politics
- Spatially Situating Social Processes: Communities, Regions, Nations, World-Systems

We are committed to making this a global conversation. With translations of the Making into many languages, including Chinese, Japanese, Turkish, Portuguese, Spanish, French and German, Thompson's work has had a global audience. Middle Eastern, Asian, African and Latin American scholars are especially encouraged to apply. All proposals, papers, and presentations must be in English.

Finally, we encourage graduate students to submit paper proposals. We hope to provoke an inter-generational dialogue, involving established scholars who have long drawn inspiration from Thompson's work as well as aspiring practitioners starting their academic careers.

Please submit paper abstracts of no more than 500 words, along with a CV, to Jessica Barnard at the email address: jbarnard@wcfia.harvard.edu with the subject line “E. P. Thompson 2013”

Paper Proposals are due May 15th, 2013
We will notify applicants in June, 2013. If accepted, we will ask you for a draft paper by September 1st. We will cover all (economy class) travel costs, accommodation and meals.

Organizers
Rudi Batzell, PhD Candidate, History, Harvard University
Sven Beckert, Laird Bell Professor of American History, Harvard University
Andrew Gordon, Folger Fund Professor of History, Harvard University
Gabriel Winant, PhD Candidate, History, Yale University

Date:
Thursday, October 3, 2013 - 18:00 to Saturday, October 5, 2013 - 13:30

1. [http://wigh.wcfia.harvard.edu/content/global-ep-thompson-reflections-making-english-working-class-after-fifty-years](http://wigh.wcfia.harvard.edu/content/global-ep-thompson-reflections-making-english-working-class-after-fifty-years)
“Why do you find blogging useful as a researcher?” (2013-03-04 08:00)

I asked this question on Twitter in preparation for a blogging for researchers workshop I was running at the University of Warwick. I’ve included some of the answers I received below. I’ve also collated a collection of resources [1]here. Part of the reason I asked this question was because I wanted to avoid inadvertently prioritising my own particular style of research blogging and increase my awareness of how other researchers use blogging. However I found it striking how similar the experience of others is to my own here, namely the role a blog can play as an [2]’ideas garden’ helping to articulate and develop your thinking in a much more immediate way than other public forums allow.

[3]William McGovern @will1mcgovern
its all about the networking and showing the willingness to be open to approaches whilst expressing an interest[4] #intentional

[5]Dr Karen McAulay @Karenmca
If blog read widely enough, get helpful comments in response. That apart, is useful marker to record progress.

[6]Ian Milligan @ianmilligan1
Very welcome! Also, you can tell right away if a post worked or not, gives you good active/passive feedback to improve.

[7]Terese @missing _words
blogging about a particular topic helps iron out my thoughts, which means i can articulate my ideas on topic better after

[8]Elaine Aldred @EMAldred
I know what I say is going to be seen. Makes me think about how I use words. Making mental connections.

[9]Dr Sarah Quinnell @sarahthesheepu
discipline for regular writing, public engagement l.e communicating beyond economy, thought forming, informal peer review

[10]Eric Ritskes @eritskes
I find it helps break down my ideas/research into smaller, more accessible pieces & language for wider community engagement.

[11]Christina Haralanova @ludost11
I like to use it as a journal — small findings, small pieces, to keep me updated on where I was, and where I am heading to.

[12]Ian Milligan @ianmilligan1
Blogging distills my ideas down, leads me to accessible language- and my posts now grow into conference papers. V. positive!

[13]Rachel R. Engler @rachelrengler
recently wrote up a magazine article/Writing style is VERY diff from academic wrk.Great lesson. Blogging could help w style.

1. http://bundlr.com/b/blogging-for-researchers

1554
Edward Harkins (2013-03-04 09:51:21)
Intriguing & timely question. There's a strongly increasing interest in the use of online and academic research. I'm more of a practitioner researcher, but empathise with the question. I find (other people's) blogs useful because they are a terrain in which a mixed and varied range of backgrounds and abilities can be encountered. You can get the ... ahem ... 'usual suspects' (some of whom I'm sure have a green tinge to their fonts) ; but I have come across some strikingly novel and thought-provocative outcomes emerging from this cross-over of backgrounds and abilities.

Why is blogging useful? | Thinking culture (2013-03-06 08:07:53)
[...] sociologicalimagination.org has some thoughts on why academic blogging is useful. There are some tweets here about the topic [...]

Jenni Burt (2013-03-14 08:33:35)
We've only just started our research group blog, and it's been an interesting (and steep) learning curve. Certainly, it seems there are great benefits but also some pitfalls - and links to resources such as you have provided are a great use. I even got inspired and wrote a little summary of our blog journey to date... http://www.cchsr.iph.cam.ac.uk/515

[...] Sociological Imagination post on why blogging is useful as a researcher, including loads of useful [...]
“Why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?” (2013-03-06 08:00)

This was the question I asked earlier this morning on Twitter. I was preparing a workshop on twitter for academics and was a little nervous about my content. The basic point of the workshop was to convince participants about the value of using twitter as an academic. The quality and quantity of responses was in itself one of the best arguments I could make for the value of Twitter. The very fact of being able to crowd source broad questions in this way is one of the most striking advantages which stem from engaging regularly with Twitter as an academic.

- Quick answers to questions on things like .. where do I find this tool or that tool .. (@rjhogue)
- We discuss concepts (@Annlytical)
- There are people who are practicing what I’m researching academically and give me a reality check (@Annlytical)
- Twitter is brilliant for keeping up with things, networking, finding new ideas, people’s blogs and publications (@BenGuilbaud)
• meeting new people (in all disciplines), academic support, public engagement, increased visibility, filtered news (@Martin_Eve)

• What Martin said. I think you already saw this but it’s the Prezi I made for grad students [1]http://bit.ly/uK05VM (@qui_oui)

• Also, I’ve found Twitter useful for augmenting F2F academic conferences, extending the conversations (@JessieNYC)

• Twitter is incredibly useful 2 me as an academic 4 many reasons, perhaps chiefly curating the ideal academic dept (@JessieNYC)

• Twitter’s unique advantage is that very quickly allows me to spread word of my work to non-academic audiences (@elebelfiore)

• Keeps me up-to-the-minute with news in my field ie; policy issues, and connects me to conferences/other academics (@DonnaBramwell)

• connects me to other delegates at conferences, allows me to interact with students in lectures, keeps me up-to-date (@timpaa)

• We trade references for research (@annlytical)

• great source of information & resources wouldn't have found otherwise (@nicklebygirl)

• Twitter makes it possible for me to engage with global community even though I now live in Australia & am #altac (@katrinafee)

• a PhD can be very isolated so I think twitter is a great way to meet people who can help and give advice (@CET47)

• you can get very interesting literature advices or other sources you have not noticed yet (@Journey210)

• Academic uses of twitter – links to blog posts, shared sense of community, shameless self-promotion…! (@KatieMcGettigan)

• to invite community members to events and lectures on campus (@MegFrauts)

• twitter is the best way to keep up to date with my subject, find useful resources and connect with others (@LGSMU)

• Twitter makes it possible to follow conferences globally and get in touch with other academics for quick Q &A sessions (@Greg0rE)

• joining twitter has helped remove the isolation of study through engagement with [2]#phdchat - synch & asyn-chronous (@JaneDavis13)

• twitter allows me to familiarize w current trends & edu tools for my students (tumblr & prezi are examples) (@DisModern)

• it allows me to keep up to date with advancements in my field. I can also dicuss these things with the experts with ease (@CallumCohen)

• keeps you in touch w development in your field n wider (@lace675468)
Important topic! I made a very quick content analysis about those Twitter answers just for fun, here you are: SOME advantages for academics: SUPPORT & NETWORKING (with academics, conference delegates, other disciplines, students, experts, practice workers) • academic support • a PhD can be very isolated so I think twitter is a great way to meet people who can help and give advice • helps remove the isolation of study through engagement with #phdchat - synch & asynchronous • shared sense of community • connect with others • networking • meeting new people (in all disciplines) • getting in touch with other academics for quick Q &A sessions • connects me to other delegates at conferences • useful for augmenting F2F academic conferences, extending the conversations • allows me to interact with students in lectures • makes it possible for me to engage with global community even though I now live in Australia & am #altac • There are people who are practicing what I’m researching academically and give me a reality check • We discuss concepts • I can also discuss these things with the experts with ease • Quick answers to questions on things like.. where do I find this tool or that tool .. INFORMATION & RESOURCES Keeping up to date • filtered news • it allows me to keep up to date with advancements in my field. • keeps you in touch w development in your field n wider • the best way to keep up to date with my subject • brilliant for keeping up with things • allows me to familiarize w current trends & edu tools for my students (tumblr & prezi are examples) • Keeps me up-to-the-minute with news in my field ie; policy issues, and connects me to conferences/other academics • keeps me uptodate Finding useful resources • finding blogs and publications • links to blog posts • find useful resources • We trade references for research • great source of information & resources wouldn’t have found otherwise • you can get very interesting literature advices or other sources you have not noticed yet • curating the ideal academic dept • makes it possible to follow conferences globally Finding new ideas • finding new ideas VISIBILITY • public engagement • increased visibility • very quickly allows me to spread word of my work to non-academic audiences • shameless self-promotion • to invite community members to events and lectures on campus I’d like to add one more useful thing: possibility to influence problems of society.
Are you a hipster? Or a nerd with glasses? (2013-03-08 08:00)


(HT [2]Sociological Images)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/f3xe-Wxio1o
The sociological club night we found in Berlin (2013-03-09 08:00)
**Sociology and the Global Economic Crisis (2013-03-10 08:00)**

**Sociology and the Global Economic Crisis**

Special Issue Call for Papers  
Deadline for submissions: 31 August 2013

*Editorial Team:*  
Ana C. Dinerstein (*University of Bath*), Gregory Schwartz (*University of Bath*) and Graham Taylor (*University of the West of England*)

We hear it, see it, and read about it everywhere; yet, to what extent are we able to translate the quotidian reality of the global economic crisis into adequate forms of knowledge? Has the crisis highlighted important limits in our sociological imagination linked either to the subdivision of our discipline or, more fundamentally, questioned the contemporary relevance of sociology as a social science?

This Special Issue of Sociology, to be published in October 2014, invites contributions that will:

- Explore how sociology can contribute to a better understanding of (the lived experience of) the global economic crisis; and/or
- Reflect on how social processes and movements confronting the crisis can inspire a new sociological imagination.

And aims to bring together contributions that:

- Bridge disciplines
- Unsettle conventions
- Cosmopolitanise epistemologies
- Renew sociology

The Editors welcome contributions on relevant topics in any field of social science engaging with sociological research, from early career and established academics, and from those outside academia.

Queries: To discuss initial ideas or seek editorial advice, please contact the Special Issue Editors by email on sociology.specialissue.2014@gmail.com

Full Call for Papers can be viewed [here](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/48566/Global_Economic_Crisis_SOC_SI_2014_CFP.pdf)
How will sociology cope with digital data? An interview with David Beer (2013-03-11 08:00)

[1]Why should sociologists care about the 'digital'?


[3]How can sociologists cope with digital data?

[4]How will digital data shape sociological practice?

To find out more about his work, see David's [5]blog or [6]academia.edu page.

1. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/3.mp3
2. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/4.mp3
3. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/1.mp3
4. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/2.mp3
Continuous publishing has changed my experience of developing ideas (2013-03-13 08:00)

A few months ago [1]Pat Lockley and I wrote [2]an article for the LSE Impact Blog about **continuous publishing**. This was actually a phrase introduced by the site's editor for the title but it perfectly captured what we were trying to get at. Given that I have been semi-consciously trying to do this since then, I thought it would be a good time to try and get some thoughts down about exactly what I take it to mean and how it can work. This is what we wrote at the time:

> Perhaps it's time to move from [3]'the Cathedral to the Bazaar'. These metaphors from the open-source software movement refer to contrasting models of software development. In academic terms we might see them as referring to distinct orientations towards publishing: one which works towards the intermittent, largely private, production of one-off works (papers and monographs → cathedrals) and the other which proceeds in an iterative and dialogical fashion, with a range of shorter-term outputs (blog posts, tweets, online articles, podcasts,[4]storified conversations etc) standing in a dynamic and productive relationship with larger-scale traditional publishing projects: the 'cathedrals' can be something we build through dialogues, within communities of practice, structured around reciprocal engagement with publications on social media platforms.

I have been trying to do this for a range of things I've been working on since then: my PhD, my asexuality research, a twitter action research project I’m doing with [5]Salma Patel and the (slightly fuzzy) idea for a monograph.
about digital academia I plan to start next year. In essence I've been trying to take a range of things I would be doing anyway and instead do them out in the open:

1. **Brainstorming sessions** e.g. [6]11 random thoughts on asexuality studies
2. **Cataloguing and reviewing literature** e.g. [7]meta-ethnography, [8]the myth of academic autonomy
3. **Developing my ideas in a way which sits between brainstorming and formal writing** e.g. [9]some thoughts on getting academics to use Twitter, a useful metaphor for [10]teaching academics about twitter, the cultural [11]significance of asexuality, a quick post on [12]attachment theory and my PhD
4. **Reflection on work I've been engaging with** e.g. some thoughts on [13]socialization and personhood
5. **Developing presentations** e.g. interrogating sex and gender categories: an [14]asexual case study, my TEDx [15]idea
6. **Posting homeless bits of academic work which have been cut from papers but I don’t want to forget about** e.g. the idea of [16]‘emotional’ purchase,
7. **Doing chunks of formal writing** e.g. the [17]discursive gap
8. **Planning forthcoming writing projects** e.g. [18]late capitalism and sexual culture

There are also two other uses which fall outside the category of stuff I would be doing anyway. Since thinking about the idea of continuous publishing I've been more conscious of the motivation for some of the podcasts I do e.g. [19]this one with Nick Crossley. If I'm engaging heavily with a book as part of my research and it's logistically feasible to do a podcast, there’s absolutely nothing to be lost by e-mailing the person to ask if I can do a podcast. Pretty much everyone I've ever approached has said yes, although it has sometimes taken a long time to schedule. The fact that I'm posting them on a fairly well developed website as well as my own probably helps but I suspect:

- Some people would have agreed anyway
- If more people start producing academic podcasts then they’ll rapidly get accepted as a form of publication in their own right
- If this happens then it will create a natural opening for Multi-Author Blogs to start actively soliciting podcast contributions

If you’re engaging with someone’s book anyway it makes you the most natural interviewer in the world. Preparing for the interview doesn’t really constitute any additional work because the questions stem from your own engagement, albeit filtered through some sense of the podcast as a listenable end product.

As well as podcasts, there is **crowd sourcing**, which I’m increasingly realising is an enormous benefit of engaging heavily with the academic twittersphere. For instance see the results of [20]this request for help prior to a Twitter workshop I was doing. I was later able to incorporate this into the workshop, as well as the overarching project, in a number of deeply valuable ways. Compiling such crowd sourcing efforts by hand is very quick and I’m fairly certain there must be an automated way of doing it. The ensuing compilations then constitute a useful resource in their own right.

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I increasingly can't imagine working in any other way. The fact that these provisional outputs are published makes me more attentive to them then if I was just scribbling them down on paper (my handwriting is basically illegible when I get overly-enthusiastic and I have files full of notes I can barely read from before I started working like this) or doing mind maps on my iPad (more useful but if I come back to them months later, my grasp on the conceptual structure of the map has diminished). The fact that people do read them is rather pleasant and changes the experiences of developing ideas in a subtle way which I can't quite get into words. My productivity has actually increased (a little bit in terms of formal outputs, very much in terms of continuing to develop projects) at a time when I'm massively over-committed and my attention is split between 20 things at once.

Furthermore, it's just fun to regularly throw stuff out there to see what people make of it.

This was originally published on the [LSE Impact Blog]

5. https://twitter.com/#!/salma_patel
7. http://markcarrigan.net/2012/02/04/meta-ethnography/
11. http://markcarrigan.net/2012/01/31/the-cultural-significance-of-aseuality/
17. http://markcarrigan.net/2012/01/05/the-discursive-gap/

Kath McNiff (2013-05-10 10:57:35)

I love the idea that shorter term outputs can be in a "productive relationship" with larger works - and even inspire and inform them. By publishing blogs, tweets and other posts we're forced to formulate a coherent idea and polish it for public consumption. And feedback from readers can really help to move an idea forward - while no feedback can leave you wondering if the idea has legs at all - and whether you could have presented things in a more engaging way. Not true of your post of course! Thanks for the insights!

Milena Kremakova (2013-05-13 12:03:47)

Excellent points! I also find that online writing can help you write down fresh ideas instead of delaying (and never writing them).
Searching for an (empirical) middle ground between the social self and the liberal self

Back when I planned to do a PhD in political philosophy, I was extremely interested in Michael Sandel's critique of John Rawls. Particularly his attack on what he claimed was Rawl's notion of an 'unencumbered self':

Now the unencumbered self describes first of all the way we stand toward the things we have, or want, or seek. It means there is always a distinction between the values I have and the person I am. To identify any characteristics as my aims, ambitions, or desires, and so on, is always to imply some subject 'me' standing behind them, and the shape of this 'me' must be given prior to any of the aims or attributes I bear.

I had a vague idea that my thesis could be a historical study of the rise and fall of this view of the self. It almost certainly wouldn't have held my interest for 3 years but it's been an ongoing thread at the back of my mind. It's been on my mind recently because a few conversations have left me struck by the sense in which many sociologists seem to see Margaret Archer's work on internal conversation as postulating precisely such a self. In her work on the subject, our inner speech is seen to be the mechanism through which we exercise our capacity for reflexivity: "the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their social contexts and vice versa". Our decision making operates through such internal conversations, constituting a 'back and forth' between objective and subject (our situation & our concerns) rather than something which can be construed in 'flat' terms.

Epistemic contraints operate at both levels – the individual's knowledge of their selves and their circumstances is profoundly fallible, both in terms of the capacity to be mistaken and also sheer limits to possible knowledge. Likewise the internal conversation always takes place under their own descriptions i.e. our framing of a situation in the terms we use to describe it shapes what we know and how we can act, in a manner which is partly explicable by looking at the path-dependent cultural history of the individual concerned.

Now this all sounds abstract. But my interest in it comes from what I'd argue is it power to gain explanatory purchase on how actual individuals actually make the decisions which shape their lives (and I'm obviously not suggesting they voluntaristically 'shape their lives' – in fact the whole point is that a notion of 'shaping a life' which doesn't take account of structural contraints and enablements would be meaningless!). The empirical question of degrees of fallibility are bracketed in order to make the higher level discussion possible. Because the answers to these questions are empirically quite complex. But their are, nonetheless, reliable answers. It seems profoundly hubristic to deny this, symptomatic of a disciplinary imperialism driven by insecurity rather than triumphalism. But I digress. As [2]Thaler and Sunstein point out,

Hundreds of studies confirm that human forecasts are flawed and biased. Human decision making is not so great either. Again to take just one example, consider what is called the 'status quo bias,' a fancy name for inertia. For a host of reasons, which we shall explore, people have a strong tendency to go along with the status quo or default option.

However it would be a mistake to move to the opposite extreme, inverting homo economicus by affirming a view of human decision making as irredeemably erroneous. Instead we need to recognise the empirical nature of the question at two levels: the underlying cognitive capacities that are deployed in decision making and the contextual variability in how these capacities are actualised within concrete action situations.
How well people choose is an empirical question, one whose answer is likely to vary across domains. It seems reasonable to say that people make good choices in contexts in which they have experience, good information, and prompt feedback – say, choosing among ice cream flavors. People know whether they like chocolate, vanilla, coffee, licorice, or something else. They do less well in contexts in which they are inexperienced and poorly informed, and in which feedback is slow or infrequent.

The latter level strikes me as one which sociology is uniquely well suited to addressing. Not least of all because it can encompass structural questions within its purview, in a manner which I imagine social psychology would tend to struggle with: how structures shape the concrete action situations individuals confront and how ensuing actions contribute, both aggregatively and emergently, towards the transformation or reproduction of those structures. However doing this adequately necessitates getting over hangups about the findings of behavioural science and cognition + agency more broadly.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/internal-conversation/
Classifying Sex Conference, July 2013, Cambridge (2013-03-16 08:00)

Thursday, 4 July 2013 to Friday, 5 July 2013
Location: CRASSH, Alison Richard Building, 7 West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DT

Summary

This conference brings together social scientists, gender scholars, sexologists, psychiatrists, historians of science, as well as mental health practitioners and sexual rights activists to critically explore the sexual classifications produced by the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental Disorders (DSM), published in May 2013. The DSM is a standard reference for the classification of mental disorders, and its first major revision since 1994 is consequently an important event. The conference will explore which categories of normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological sexualities the new manual produces, and critically scrutinise their consequences for diagnostic practices, as well as their wider social and political implications.

Speakers:

Eric Fassin (École Normale Supérieure, Paris)
Lisa Downing (Birmingham, Humanities);
Jeffrey Weeks (South Bank, Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research)
Cynthia Graham (Southampton, Psychology);
Katherine Angel (Warwick, History of Science);
Monica Greco (Goldsmiths, Sociology);
Ken Zucker (Toronto, Psychiatry; Chair of the Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders workgroup); Zowie Davy (Lincoln, Health and Social Care);
Cynthia Kraus (Lausanne, Gender Studies).
Patricia Crittenden (Miami, Family Relations Institute)
Patrick Singy (Chicago Society of Fellows)
Simon Goldhill (Cambridge, Classics).
Alain Giami (INSERM, Paris)

[1]More information and register here

1. http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/2076/
The Holstee manifesto - via Brainpickings.


Digital Sociologist #3: David Beer (2013-03-17 08:00)

How did Thinking Culture come about?

Has the way you've used the blog changed over time?

How does your blog connect with the rest of your work?

Do you ever have trouble finding time to blog?

So is curation a central part of you use social media?

Does blogging provide a space for things which you couldn't fit elsewhere?

CfP: Normality in an uncertain world (2013-03-18 08:00)

Normality in an uncertain world

6th ENQUIRE Postgraduate Conference, 10th and 11th September 2013

1570
Call for Abstracts

This conference aims to bring together post-graduates and researchers, with an interest in normality, to explore the development, current application and possible future of such research.

We are pleased to confirm our keynote speakers:

- Derek McGhee, Professor of Sociology, University of Southampton
- Angharad Becket, Associate Professor of Political Sociology, University of Leeds
- Julia O'Connell Davidson, Professor of Sociology, University of Nottingham

In a world of uncertainty, never has ‘the normal’ been so important. All societies operate normative patterns of behaviour that are enforced by sanctions. Such patterns are now interwoven and valorised at global, national, communal and personal levels so that ‘the normal’ has become a powerful entity. Ideas of biopower and self-governance are structured around the control of bodies and the creation of ‘normal’ ways of being. It can now be argued that tyrannies of perfection structure contemporary social life.

While social research has often focused on explaining deviance and the abnormal, such explanations are dependent upon a perception of ‘the normal’ for their existence. ‘The normal’, therefore, becomes important across disciplines, resonating with researchers as a central concept in addressing the pressing sociological issues of our time.

The idea of a ‘normal’ raises pertinent questions for future research. Who defines normality? What are the implications for deviance? Why do researchers construct and deconstruct the abnormal? Does normality serve as a mechanism of control? What function does normality play in different cultures/societies? Is normality inevitable?

Such questions apply across the discipline and call into question the normality of research itself. Indeed, are there such things as normal and abnormal methodologies? How important is the statistical norm? What structures the conception of ‘valid’ or ‘useful’ research?

In order to create a conference that pushes the boundaries and stimulates further and continued debate, we welcome broad interpretations of the conference title.

Please submit abstracts of no more than 300 words by Friday 3rd May 2013 to [mailto:enquire@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:enquire@nottingham.ac.uk)
Philosophy by podcast? (2013-03-19 08:00)

In this podcast Nigel Warburton and David Edmonds, the duo behind the popular philosophy bites series, talk about podcasting and its broader significance in contemporary society.

We found this fascinating, on a narcissistic level because of the idea that the unglamorous job of digital editing has platonic dimensions, though more importantly because of its spirited argument that academic communication via social media can 'join up' the intellectually counter-productive and existentially unsatisfying silos which characterise the contemporary academy and avoid the pragmatic domain of 'X studies' which constitutes the immediately obvious alternative.


Reflections on taking the intellectual carving knife to your PhD thesis (2013-03-20 08:00)

I remember very distinctly the moment when I first took a figurative carving knife to my PhD thesis. I was in a careers workshop at a conference and a senior academic had just explained how the oh-so-rational metric of the REF placed the same value on monographs and journal articles. From the start of my PhD I'd always been drawn to the prospect of publishing it as a monograph, drawing together years of work and sending it out into the world in a pretty package with a shiny cover. I liked the idea of turning my thesis into something which would be read by people other than my parents, supervisors and examiners. Perhaps even something that people responded to? Yet I also wanted a job and, at the same time as I was growing attached to the idea of the monograph, I was also rapidly internalizing that horrible motif which plagues the psyches of aspiring academics everywhere: publish or perish. As much as I liked the idea of a monograph, I liked the idea of getting a job more. So upon learning the value of a monograph relative to a paper, I picked up the intellectual knife and started to ponder how many choice cuts I could get from my thesis.

After an afternoon of hacking away at my planned thesis, it turned out I could spin off a lot of papers. Sure there would be repetition and overlap but that's inevitable, right? In the months since then, this sense of inevitability has troubled me. I realized how quickly and deeply I'd come to accept the 'rules of the game', making plans that were entirely contrary to what I believed and cared about because I couldn't see any choice other than submitting to the logic that defines the contemporary academy if I wanted a career within it. Which left me with the obvious question: did I want a career within it? The perverse eagerness with which I instrumentally carved up my long treasured post-PhD monograph became symptomatic of everything I disliked about the modern university. The fact that just three years of a PhD, framed in terms of 'playing the game' in order to win autonomy within it, had left me able to be so thoughtlessly instrumental truly worried me. If this was what academia would do to me then I didn't want to be an academic.
Since then I’ve relented somewhat, partly due to realizing that there was no need to see it as a matter of being entirely in or entirely out of the university. But mostly through talking to friends, some in similar situations and others with no connection to higher education, about these questions and why they troubled me. If we want academic careers after we finish our PhDs then, inevitably, we have to make some sacrifices. If we want to be employable then we, at least to some extent, have to make choices that fit the imperatives of institutions within which we seek employment. But if we’re doing this because we care about it then we need to constantly ask ‘why?’ at every stage. We need to be clear that we’re doing what we do because we CHOOSE to rather than because we’ve internalized a set of perverse imperatives which actively erode the values that motivate us. We have to continue to look for alternatives to passively reproducing the demands of neoliberal academia. Otherwise I fear we’re going to look in the mirror twenty years from now and wonder what the point of it all was.

This was originally published on [1]PhD 2 Published

Think Tanks In America (2013-03-21 08:00)

Given the ubiquity of think tanks within contemporary politics, it is easy to forget that their current influence is a relatively recent phenomenon. Yet without an understanding of their history, it is difficult to understand either their role within public life or its broader significance. *Think Tanks In America* is a sophisticated and impressive work of historical sociology which charts their emergence over half a century, offering a distinctive and compelling explanation of how such organizations came to exist and to enjoy the influence which they now do.

One of the most impressive aspects of the book is the theoretical sophistication of what is first and foremost an empirical study. This is particularly apparent in the first chapter, within which [1]Thomas Medvetz sets out to ‘rethink the think tank’. He takes issue with a prevailing tendency within the think tanks literature to treat its object of study (i.e. the ‘think tank’ itself) as unproblematic. Instead he asks, drawing on Bourdeusian theory, how the category itself emerged. Or in other words: how did the notion of a ‘think tank’ become meaningful and commonplace? He contrasts this to the prevailing ‘substantialist’ approach which treats the think tank as a particular sort of entity or thing.

This might seems counter intuitive to those unfamiliar with the theoretical approach adopted by the author but its value stems from the fact that “there are no substantive properties shared by all members of the think tank category as the term is currently used in political discourse”. Given the heterogeneity encountered when investigating ‘think tanks’, there is an inevitable tendency for social scientists who understand their investigation in substantialist terms to get lost in the production of taxonomies. Not only is this analytically unproductive but, crucially, it also often acts to foreclose inquiry into the “social relations (of hierarchy, struggle partnership, and so on) that surround and make possible the think tank”. To put this in slightly plainer terms: the approach Medvetz adopts looks at the broader context within which think tanks have come to exist over time, rather than simply focusing on the question of what a think tank is and how variation amongst them should be categorised.

The book doesn't disappoint in this respect, offering an empirically detailed but also conceptually rich account of the history of think tanks. Medvetz argues that this hinges on the emergence of a ‘space of think tanks’: a distinct subspace of knowledge production which has arisen over time at the point of intersection between the academic, political, economic and media fields. The process he documents involve a differentiation between the think tanks and their surrounding fields but also within the space of think tanks itself. For as those organisations differentiated themselves from universities, lobby groups and media outlets, they also increasingly orientated themselves towards each other, coming to constitute “a semi distinct social universe with its own logic, history, and interior structures, not to mention its own agents”. His argument to this end is rich and detailed but the point
is fundamentally a simple one. What we now call a ‘think tank’ came into being through the efforts of such organisations to practically define how they were different from universities, lobbying organisations and media outlets.

However what is perhaps the most compelling aspect of his account comes at the end of the book. It is also the point at which the personal concerns underlying the author’s research interests become most apparent. Drawing together the diverse strands of the book, he argue that the success think tanks have enjoyed has also helped undermine the relevance of autonomously produced social scientific knowledge. The public figures of the think tanks, with their capacity to deftly negotiate the twin worlds of media and lobbying, have blurred the boundaries between intellectuals and non-intellectuals in America and relegated many within the academy to the margins of public debate. This influx of new competitors has left social scientists in a situation where, increasingly, money and political power direct ideas, rather than ideas directing themselves.

In essence Medvetez is arguing that autonomous social scientists have been squeezed out of the intellectual ‘market place’. Which raises the obvious question: how should they respond? His nuanced and careful book wisely avoids the temptation of attempting an answer but it does go some way to elucidating the often unappreciated complexity of the question. This book is an important contribution to the academic literature on both think tanks and intellectuals. But it is also one which will be of profound interest to a broader readership concerned with the role of ideas in political life.

This was originally published on the [2]LSE Review of Books


23 April 2013 ‘Enacting public engagement: collaboration and critique within/beyond the university’ (2013-03-22 08:00)


The aims of this forum are to explore what is required to enact engagement in different contexts, and to reflect on what is at stake in these processes. Bringing together researchers, activists and practitioners with an interest in publics and public institutions, the forum will provide a space for conversations about:

- Theoretical, technological and other infrastructures being developed to support the emergence and enactment of publics;
- Projects that problematize, reimagine and rework social and power relations;
- Forms of collaborative knowledge production that bring together diverse actors within/beyond the university.

Programme

11.00-12.15: Re-enacting the public university

Professor Rebecca Boden (University of Roehampton): ‘Rethinking an “open university”’, embedding the academy in
a social economy'

Dr Joel Lazarus (People's Political Economy and University College, Oxford): An analysis of the recent flourishing of critical education initiatives in the UK: critical education at the heart of social transformation

12.15-13.00 Lunch

13.00-14.15: Co-production and co-authorship in research

Dr Morag McDermont (University of Bristol): Productive Margins? Problematics of academics and community organisations co-producing research

Professor Les Back (Goldsmiths, University of London): title tbc

14.15-14.30 Tea and coffee

14.30-14.45: Digital articulations

Dr Aristeia Fotopoulou & Dr Kate O’Riordan (University of Sussex): Sustaining networked knowledge: expertise, feminist media production, art and activism

Dr Nick Mahony & Dr Hilde Stephansen (Open University): Making participation public: building agendas and sites for collective action

15.45-16.00: Collective reflections on the day


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**Alan Watts on Symbols and Meaning (2013-03-23 08:00)**

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/cPdq0X10aol

Subjectivity and Subculture: One Day Symposium (2013-03-24 08:00)

Subjectivity and Subculture

One Day Symposium

Monday 10th June 2013: 9:00am-6:30pm

Institute of Advanced Study, Milburn House, University of Warwick

We are delighted to announce that [1] Dr Rupa Huq, Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Kingston University, and [2] Dr Shane Blackman, Professor in Media, Art and Design at Canterbury Christ Church University, will give keynote papers at the symposium.

Call for proposals

Theories of subculture – emerging primarily from within the Chicago School in the early Twentieth Century, and from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1970s and 1980s – have tended to characterise subculture as the collective cultural and social practices of disenfranchised young working class males. However, in recent years scholars have challenged this definition, arguing that subcultures are inhabited by a diverse population, and that these spaces may not be as cohesive as earlier theorisations suggest.

Scholars have addressed this issue by pursuing research into ‘marginal subcultures’. This work sheds light on how people are able to organise their cultural practices around specific modes of subjectivity, but there is, to date, limited engagement with how people negotiate a variety of subject positions within the same subcultural environments.

This one day symposium focuses on how subjectivities are managed by subcultural participants and by those who research such spaces. It seeks to facilitate a dialogue about the intersectional and reflexive considerations of subcultural research, placing particular emphasis on the implementation of innovative methodological strategies. The symposium will address the following questions:
1) Are marginal subjectivities *always* disempowered within established subcultural environments?

2) To what extent should contemporary subcultural researchers challenge the definition of subculture as a form of ‘marginal’, or ‘disenfranchised’, collective cultural participation?

3) What are the primary epistemological concerns within the field of subcultural studies at the present time?

4) How can we as researchers develop innovative methodological approaches to the study of subjectivity and subculture?

5) What does the future of subcultural studies look like?

Proposals for **15 minute** papers that reflect upon one, or a number, of these questions are invited. Specific topics may include, but are not limited to:

- The negotiation of gender/racial/ethnic/sexual identities within subculture.
- Feminism in subculture.
- Insider/outsider subjectivities in subcultural context.
- Disability and subcultural participation.
- Age and subculture.
- Femininity, masculinity and subculture.
- Queer identity within subculture.
- Subjectivity in the context of trans-local subcultural spaces.
- Innovative methodological approaches to the study of subculture.
- The researcher’s own reflexive considerations in relation to the subcultures they study.
- The visual representation of subculture.
- Subculture and the Internet.

Please email 250 word proposals to Dr Michelle Kempson, at [M.Kempson@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kempson@warwick.ac.uk), before 15th April 2013.

1. [http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/faculty/staff/cv.php?staffnum=328](http://fass.kingston.ac.uk/faculty/staff/cv.php?staffnum=328)
2. [http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-humanities/MediaArtAndDesign/Staff/Profile.aspx?staff=8d24b87b56aed159](http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/arts-humanities/MediaArtAndDesign/Staff/Profile.aspx?staff=8d24b87b56aed159)
New Report on Internet Ethics by AoIR (2013-03-25 08:00)

The [1]Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) is an organisation whose aim is to ensure that "research on and about the Internet is conducted in an ethical and professional manner".

AoIR recently published their second major report intended to assist researchers in making ethical decisions in their research:

[3]2012: Ethical decision-making and Internet research 2.0: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee (Author: Annette Markham and Elizabeth Buchanan, with contributions from the AOIR Ethics Working committee).

It updates their previous report from [4]2002: Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the aoir ethics working committee (Author: Charles Ess and the AOIR Ethics Working Committee).

Subjects vs subjectification – getting beyond an unhelpful dichotomy (without irritating the Foucauldians too much) (2013-03-26 08:00)

One important objection to the notion of ‘internal conversation’ rests on a broader trend within contemporary social theory that is concerned with the possibility that theoretical claims about agency lead proponents to make claims about agents which are empirically inadequate. So too that these ensuing claims might find themselves implicated, knowingly or otherwise, in broader political contestations within wider society (though the suspicion persists that those most vocal about the purportedly intrinsically political nature of social science and social theory systematically, indeed hubristically, overestimate the influence of social scientists and theorists outside the academy). On such a view, affirmation of a choosing, reflective and deliberative self is unavoidably embroiled within a broader project of
neoliberal governmentality. Nonetheless, it seems profoundly mistaken to therefore expunge conceptual talk about subjects from the admissible range of contemporary social theory. Recognising this as a mistake is entirely compatible with the methodological move Miller and Rose make in their genealogical investigations into ‘technologies of the self’: “what understandings of the people to be acted upon – whether explicit or implicit – underpinned these endeavours, and how did they shape or reshape the ways in which these individuals understood and acted on themselves?”.

While it might be objected from a realist standpoint that such an investigation presupposes a theory of the subject, it is important that we nonetheless understand the ambiguous role such an account occupies within a broader inquiry of this form. As the author’s themselves observe, “that question could only be answered on the basis of some explicit or implicit assumptions about human mental processes. Yet for us, the historical forms taken by those presuppositions were exactly what we were studying”. It is perfectly possible to accept the validity of such an injunction, construing it as an exercise in bracketing to facilitate a specific form of inquiry, while rejecting the more radical implication that all claims about the underlying properties and powers of human subjects are, in actuality, claims about the cultural resources and reflexive technologies which are distributed within a given social context at any given time. Such an absolute injunction would involve a failure to distinguish between what Bhaskar terms the transitive and intransitive objects of scientific inquiry: the “changing cognitive objects that are produced within science as a function of scientific practice” and “the unchanging real objects that exist outside the scientific process” respectively.

Bracketing the real properties and powers of human subjects may be a useful move for investigation into the empirical variety of reflexive technologies over time, insofar as that it minimises the role that our prior (transitive) commitments play in the empirical investigation. In doing so it facilitates a largely descriptive, though nonetheless valuable, mode of investigation which traces out the socio-cultural factors involved in empirically observable changes in how human beings “recode variations in moods, emotions, desires, and thoughts”. In doing so it can lead to empirically rich accounts of how, for instance, the rise of a “psychological language of self-description: the language of anxiety, depression, trauma, extroversion, and introversion” was connected, inter alia, to the use of psychological tests of intelligence and personality from vocational guidance to military promotion and the rise of “psy technologies for marketing commodities” or the “proliferation of psychotherapies”. Within the framework of this thesis, the objects of such investigation are understood as cultural resources (ideational objects) and reflexive technologies (the socio-cultural application of these objects). It is necessary to understand the properties and powers of such cultural objects in order to explain socio-cultural variation in modes of “seeing, judging, and acting upon human normality and abnormality” and how we “our desires, moods, and discontents” are mapped onto differing images of the human.

Through investigation into such objects, whether or not it takes a genealogical form, it becomes possible to empirically flesh out the sense in which, as Archer puts it, “our reliance upon the public domain for thinking can be upheld, without this determining what we do with it – that is the contents of our mental activities”. The difficulty with Rose’s work, as well as the broader corpus of sociological thinking of which it is an outstanding exemplar, lies in its inability to make sense of how such cultural objects (which it has mapped in a highly detailed and sophisticated manner) are mediated at the level of an individual subject. Such subjects are perpetually implied within Rose’s work, with continual references to reflexivity in Archer’s sense (i.e. the relationship of a self to a self) implicit in the substantive claims made about shifting constellations of technologies of selfhood, yet remain curiously absent. Unfortunately this absence precludes the possibility of gaining concrete explanatory purchase on how particular cultural objects are mediated by particular subjects – Rose’s account is laudable in its detail at the level of the former yet conspicuous in its generality at the level of the latter.

Rose actually does offer something analogous to a theory of the subject, though unsurprisingly it is framed in terms which deny this. He writes that his engagement with the question of subjectivity is offered “not in terms of the effects of ‘culture’ upon ‘the person’, or in terms of a ‘theory of the subject’, but by seeking to characterize the mode of action, as it were, of the diverse psy technologies of subjectification that I have discussed”. As well as the tacit
admission that the lack of engagement with subjectivity was the glaring omission in his otherwise accomplished body of work, his explicit framing of the ensuing account in terms of the mode of operation of 'psych technologies' is telling, in that it leaves the subject as little more than an explanatory lever, invoked merely to flesh out the absent subjective moment of his broader account. What explains this continual hostility to abstract models of the subject?

Archer addresses the same question in an exploration of a body of work which is undergirded by a similar cultural politics. As she observes of Richard Rorty's anti-humanism, his injunction against substantial conceptions of the human has a normative component to it. Given Rorty's desire to nonetheless make normative claims pertaining to human beings, it is inevitable that the human resurfaces and, with it, so too does the problem of structure and agency. So too with Rose and his Deleuzian account of the subject, as well as its concomitant insistence that "the 'question of agency' as it has come to be termed, poses a false problem". On the one hand, it is denied that the human is "an actor essentially possessed of agency" and on the other that they are a "passive product or puppet of cultural forces". The reintroduction of agency into Rose's ontology leads him to make a move surprisingly reminiscent of structurationist theory, transcending the dichotomy of structure and agency through central conflation. His attempt to avoid an affirmation of agency leads instead to a particular understand of the bridge between structure and agency, such that former is understood to continually shape the latter through an ongoing process of 'enfolding', only to be reproduced and sometimes transformed by the latter, as a consequence of the radical contingency and therefore underdetermination which characterises the process.

However the point here is not to critique Rose but to elucidate the difficulties inherent in the treatment of subjectivity within contemporary social theory. I have suggested that there is a methodological objection to abstract treatments of subjectivity, which can be relativised to a particular mode of inquiry and dismissed when claimed to apply more broadly. There is also a normative objection, a broad discomfort with are assumed to be unavoidably normative implications of talk about 'humans' and 'subjects', as well as the belief that academic thought and talk about such matters entrenches the hegemony of the 'liberal self'. But there is also a concern about the empirical difficulties which are seen to be contained within theoretical accounts of human properties and powers. Such difficulties become more pronounced when the issue is framed within a particular substantive area of investigation. For instance Heaphy adroitly identifies the implications which the widespread uptake of Giddens et al within sexuality studies has had on the empirical portrayal of the lives of LGBT individuals within contemporary Britain.

Heaphy takes issues with a pervasive tendency to hold up LGBT lives as exemplars of reflexivity in the first sense, identifying a range of strands in the sexualities literature of which this is true. He argues that, as a whole, these represent a "powerful story" about LGBT lives as "reflexively achieved forms of existence that are the exemplars of the life politics of self-fashioning". Furthermore he suggests that the appeal of such accounts stems from the affirmation of LGBT agency implied by them, in contrast to the previously dominant Foucauldian vision of sexualities which tended to stress disciplinary subjection. Arguments about LGBT reflexivity, as perhaps did Foucault's account in an earlier political era, have an intuitive plausibility because of the wider social circumstances in which they are articulated. As Heaphy observes, "it seems clear, after all, that lesbian and gay sexualities have more 'empowered' and visible in the culture than ever before, and recent legislation in Britain and elsewhere (such as the Civil partnership and other Acts) seems to promote and defend the legitimacy of same-sex relationships".

However Heaphy raises a number of problems with such accounts. He suggests that these prevailing narratives of LGBT reflexivity have been characterised by a "blurring of arguments about theoretical possibilities and empirical actualities" i.e. a theoretical affirmation of agency leads proponents to make claims about agents which are empirically inaccurate. In doing so the realities of difference are occluded, such that "exclusive and well-resourced lesbian and gay experience is valorized while other experiences are made invisible". This, he argues, is a consequence of insufficient attention to power, particularly in an indifference to the "relationship between power and sociological narration". He goes on to argue that in order to take the "differences that are shaped through the intersections of
class, race and ethnicity, generation, geographical location and like” seriously we must acknowledge “that there is no one lesbian and gay experience or forms of existence, and that lesbian and gay living should be studied in their diversity of forms”. In doing so, we might come to ask “how significant resources (economic, social, cultural and corporeal) are in shaping different possibilities for lesbian and gay living, and how their embodiment gives rise to different possibilities for identification, relating and life political practice”. Heaphy argues that a move towards reflexive sociology within sexuality studies, as part of a Bourdieusian turn which moves the study of LGBT lives away from Giddens and Beck, would help rectify this worrying tendency to homogenise the lived experience of LGBT individuals and treat their lives as if difference didn’t matter.

While applauding Heaphy’s broader aims and accepting elements of his critique, this direction of travel is nonetheless revealing of profound conceptual confusions relating to what reflexivity is and how it operates. The broader shift he identifies from Foucauldian conceptions of sexuality (excessively structural) to voluntaristic accounts influenced by Giddens (excessively agential) reveal an inability within sexuality studies, as well as social theory more broadly, to come to terms with the problem of structure and agency. One approach elucidates the role of structure while obliterating agency. The other elucidates the role of agency while obliterating structure. The two approaches each contain an element of truth but, in their inability to proceed beyond their own theoretical terms of reference, neither is able to do justice to the ambivalence of human experience.

Both freedom and constrain co-exist in our daily experience. We choose and yet we are denied choice. We shape our circumstances and yet our circumstances shape us. We make our way through the world and yet the maps we use and the paths we choose from forever elude our full understanding, let alone our control. We are subjects and we are subjected. In fairness to Giddens, attempting to reconcile this duality is at the heart of his theoretical project. Yet the empirical inadequacies which so often result from attempts to adopt his approach as an explanatory framework are indicative of the conceptual error at its heart. Unless we conceptualise reflexivity in a properly mediatory manner, as being the human power which allows the pursuit of courses of actions by (fallibly) taking stock of objective circumstances and our subjective concerns, the problems Heaphy correctly identifies will inevitably ensue. But if we do understand reflexivity in such a way, these problems do not occur. The issue here is not reflexivity as such. The issue is conceiving of reflexivity in a way which detaches it from the constraints and enablements an individual is contingently subject to at any given moment. If we conceive reflexivity in a manner which is fundamentally relational, such that our degree of freedom or constraint is an empirical matter emergent from our circumstances at a particular moment in time and the biographical pathway which led us to such circumstances, then these contrasting images of human life (LGBT or otherwise) as either overly-free or overly-constrained simply do not emerge.

"Why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?" (part 2) (2013-03-26 10:46)

The original version of [1]this post got an interesting comment yesterday. We hope the author won’t mind us reposting the comment as a new post. It was a quick content analysis of the answers in the original post.

So... why do you find Twitter useful as an academic?

SUPPORT & NETWORKING
• academic support
• a PhD can be very isolated so I think twitter is a great way to meet people who can help and give advice
• helps remove the isolation of study through engagement with #phdchat – synch & asynchronous

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• shared sense of community
• connect with others
• networking
• meeting new people (in all disciplines)
• getting in touch with other academics for quick Q &A sessions
• connects me to other delegates at conferences
• useful for augmenting F2F academic conferences, extending the conversations
• allows me to interact with students in lectures
• makes it possible for me to engage with global community even though I now live in Australia & am #altac
• There are people who are practicing what I’m researching academically and give me a reality check
• We discuss concepts
• I can also discuss these things with the experts with ease
• Quick answers to questions on things like.. where do I find this tool or that tool ..

INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Keeping up to date
• filtered news
• it allows me to keep up to date with advancements in my field.
• keeps you in touch w development in your field n wider
• the best way to keep up to date with my subject
• brilliant for keeping up with things
• allows me to familiarize w current trends & edu tools for my students (tumblr & prezi are examples)
• Keeps me up-to-the-minute with news in my field ie; policy issues, and connects me to conferences/other academics
• keeps me uptodate

Finding useful resources
• finding blogs and publications
• links to blog posts
• find useful resources
• We trade references for research
• great source of information & resources wouldn’t have found otherwise
• you can get very interesting literature advices or other sources you have not noticed yet
• curating the ideal academic dept
• makes it possible to follow conferences globally

Finding new ideas
• finding new ideas

VISIBILITY
• public engagement
• increased visibility
• very quickly allows me to spread word of my work to non-academic audiences
• shameless self-promotion
• to invite community members to events and lectures on campus

"I tried hard to be proud of my service, but all I could feel was shame" (2013-03-27 08:00)

A powerful speech by Mike Prysner, a US army veteran turned anti-war activist, given at the Winter Soldier symposium. This event involved anti-war veterans from around the US coming together to give testimony about their experiences on the grounds in Iraq and Afghanistan, with scholars, journalists and other activists offering responses and context to the veteran's testimony.

Here's a video which summarises and advertises the event:

There are many more videos from the event here. There's something extraordinarily powerful about this collation of testimony, with the opportunity to give an account of their experience to others clearly going hand-in-hand with a need to give an account of their experiences to themselves which they can live with.

The discourse of 'defence' inevitably, perhaps unavoidably (willfully?), abstracts away from the messy fleshy painful and tragic reality of war and its human consequences. Would policy making work differently if this were not the case? If, perhaps, those who make decisions to send others to war are forced to confront the consequences of their action? This has been on my mind a lot since reading this letter from a US army veteran to Bush and Cheney:
I write this letter on the 10th anniversary of the [7]Iraq War on behalf of my fellow Iraq War veterans. I write this letter on behalf of the 4,488 soldiers and Marines who died in Iraq. I write this letter on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of veterans who have been wounded and on behalf of those whose wounds, physical and psychological, have destroyed their lives. I am one of those gravely wounded. I was paralyzed in an insurgent ambush in 2004 in Sadr City. My life is coming to an end. I am living under hospice care.

I write this letter on behalf of husbands and wives who have lost spouses, on behalf of children who have lost a parent, on behalf of the fathers and mothers who have lost sons and daughters and on behalf of those who care for the many thousands of my fellow veterans who have brain injuries. I write this letter on behalf of those veterans whose trauma and self-revulsion for what they have witnessed, endured and done in Iraq have led to suicide and on behalf of the active-duty soldiers and Marines who commit, on average, a suicide a day. I write this letter on behalf of the some 1 million Iraqi dead and on behalf of the countless Iraqi wounded. I write this letter on behalf of us all—the human detritus your war has left behind, those who will spend their lives in unending pain and grief.

You may evade justice but in our eyes you are each guilty of egregious war crimes, of plunder and, finally, of murder, including the murder of thousands of young Americans—my fellow veterans—whose future you stole.

I write this letter, my last letter, to you, Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney. I write not because I think you grasp the terrible human and moral consequences of your lies, manipulation and thirst for wealth and power. I write this letter because, before my own death, I want to make it clear that I, and hundreds of thousands of my fellow veterans, along with millions of my fellow citizens, along with hundreds of millions more in Iraq and the Middle East, know fully who you are and what you have done. You may evade justice but in our eyes you are each guilty of egregious war crimes, of plunder and, finally, of murder, including the murder of thousands of young Americans—my fellow veterans—whose future you stole.

Your positions of authority, your millions of dollars of personal wealth, your public relations consultants, your privilege and your power cannot mask the hollowness of your character. You sent us to fight and die in Iraq after you, Mr. Cheney, dodged the draft in Vietnam, and you, Mr. Bush, went AWOL from your National Guard unit. Your cowardice and selfishness were established decades ago. You were not willing to risk yourselves for our nation but you sent hundreds of thousands of young men and women to be sacrificed in a senseless war with no more thought than it takes to put out the garbage.

I joined the Army two days after the 9/11 attacks. I joined the Army because our country had been attacked. I wanted to strike back at those who had killed some 3,000 of my fellow citizens. I did not join the Army to go to Iraq, a country that had no part in the September 2001 attacks and did not pose a threat to its neighbors, much less to the United States. I did not join the Army to “liberate” Iraqis or to shut down mythical weapons-of-mass-destruction facilities or to implant what you cynically called “democracy” in Baghdad and the Middle East. I did not join the Army to rebuild Iraq, which at the time you told us could be paid for by Iraq’s oil revenues. Instead, this war has cost the United States over $3 trillion. I especially did not join the Army to carry out preemptive war. Preemptive war is illegal under international law. And as a soldier in Iraq I was, I now know, abetting your idiocy and your crimes.

The Iraq War is the largest strategic blunder in U.S. history. It obliterated the balance of power in the Middle East. It installed a corrupt and brutal pro-Iranian government in Baghdad, one cemented in power through the use of torture, death squads and terror. And it has left Iran as the dominant force in the region. On every level—moral, strategic, military and economic—Iraq was a failure. And it was you,
Mr. Bush and Mr. Cheney, who started this war. It is you who should pay the consequences.

I would not be writing this letter if I had been wounded fighting in Afghanistan against those forces that carried out the attacks of 9/11. Had I been wounded there I would still be miserable because of my physical deterioration and imminent death, but I would at least have the comfort of knowing that my injuries were a consequence of my own decision to defend the country I love. I would not have to lie in my bed, my body filled with painkillers, my life ebbing away, and deal with the fact that hundreds of thousands of human beings, including children, including myself, were sacrificed by you for little more than the greed of oil companies, for your alliance with the oil sheiks in Saudi Arabia, and your insane visions of empire.

I have, like many other disabled veterans, suffered from the inadequate and often inept care provided by the Veterans Administration. I have, like many other disabled veterans, come to realize that our mental and physical wounds are of no interest to you, perhaps of no interest to any politician. We were used. We were betrayed. And we have been abandoned. You, Mr. Bush, make much pretense of being a Christian. But isn’t lying a sin? Isn’t murder a sin? Aren’t theft and selfish ambition sins? I am not a Christian. But I believe in the Christian ideal. I believe that what you do to the least of your brothers you finally do to yourself, to your own soul.

My day of reckoning is upon me. Yours will come. I hope you will be put on trial. But mostly I hope, for your sakes, that you find the moral courage to face what you have done to me and to many, many others who deserved to live. I hope that before your time on earth ends, as mine is now ending, you will find the strength of character to stand before the American public and the world, and in particular the Iraqi people, and beg for forgiveness.

Tomas Young.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/4TCKoJuqb5s?feature=player_detailpage

Tamara W (2013-04-29 00:20:36)
Reading this on the bus, left me with tears.

The "Communist Monopoly" Game (2013-03-28 08:00)

If you like board games, you’ll love the [1]Waiting Game. Well, not sure that you’ll actually enjoy it (though you might!), but you’ll certainly learn something. As someone who grew up in a still socialist Bulgaria, I do remember the queues which are the pinnacle of this board game developed by a Polish research institute to inform young
people about what life was like under state socialism before 1989. The game, called "Kolejka" (Polish for "queue") is a modified version of Monopoly, in which players queues at shops to "obtain" scarce goods. (On deficit of goods, read [2]this wikipedia article). They also have to put up with queue-jumpers and food shortages... unless they have a "colleague in the government" card! The game comes with a book of socialist jokes and a booklet with historical information and archival photos of...well, queues.

As Spiegel reports,

"'Kolejka' will have an initial production run of 3,000 and will be available to buy in stores at the very reasonable price of €10 ( $13). And in case the lines at the shop are too long, it can also be purchased online."

"Kolejka" - the new board game about shopping under state socialism. Funnily enough, "kolejka" means "female colleague" in Bulgarian. Translation across Slavic languages is a true minefield! PHOTO SOURCE: Spiegel.de

Is this the perfect present for your retired Polish aunt who used to be part of [4]Solidarity? I think not. But certainly a fun present for people who don’t know much about everyday life before 1989. And if you play it with that aunt, she might actually tell you more about life under state socialism, which wasn’t all about queues. There were good things, too.

The Definitive Guide to Academic Social Media (2013-03-29 08:00)

[1]“The Definitive Guide to Academic Social Media” on Bundlr


Ethnographic Methods: ethics, practice and theory (2013-03-30 08:00)

Ethnographic Methods: ethics, practice and theory

12.00-17.00, Thursday, 23 May 2013

The University of Warwick

At its best, ethnography – often glossed as ‘participant observation’ – has provided sociology and other social researchers with a valuable tool for apprehending a world in flux. Across the humanities and social sciences (e.g. cultural studies, social anthropology, sociology), however, ethnography remains a ubiquitous research method that can often raise as many questions – ethical, methodological, political and practical – as it seeks to answer. This workshop will consider recent efforts to reassert ethnography as theory (rather than just description) in order to explore these questions. In doing so, it will survey recent scholarly debates about collaborative ethnography, multi-sited ethnography and the literature on so-called ‘new’ ethnographic objects. Participants in the seminar are required to read Laura Nader’s ‘Ethnography as Theory’ (2011, HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 1 (1): 211-219) as well as Matei Candea’s ‘Arbitrary locations: in defense of the bounded field-site (2007, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 13 (1): 167-184).

The deadline for applications is 5pm on Wednesday, 15 May 2013.

Further information about this half-day workshop, which is being led by Dr Alexander Smith (Department of Sociology, University of Warwick) in collaboration with Dr Michaela Benson (Department of Sociology, University of York), can be found [1]here.

Please get in touch with Dr Smith if you have questions: alexander.smith@warwick.ac.uk.

Here’s a podcast we did with Alex that might give some background:
What does the future hold for ethnography?

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/socialsciencesdtc/advanced/ethnographic/

The Future of Sociology (2013-03-31 08:00)

[1] "The Future of Sociology" on Bundlr


4.4 April

Wimbledon 2013, The Philosophers Battle (2013-04-01 08:00)

Will you be at #BritSoc13? (2013-04-01 19:06)

We'll be there for some of it, with impulsively purchased SI branded pens to give out. Meanwhile, check out this video of last year’s BSA conference:

CfP: Social Media in Social Research (2013-04-02 08:00)

The Social Research Association is holding the third Social Media in Social Research Conference on Monday June 24 in central London.
Following the success of the first two events, we would like to receive papers and presentations on this subject which will be showcased at this year’s event. These can be from the academic research, practice policy and client communities and cover aspects of social research in social media, including case studies, lessons from practice, ethical and methodological issues, and integrating social media as part of a broader research methodology on a project.

Submissions should be made to the SRA office, admin@the-sra.org.uk, by end April 2013. Authors of selected papers will be invited to present at the conference. In the spirit of new media, we are being loose in our interpretation of the term ‘paper’. In written form we expect the length of the paper to be somewhere between 1,500 and 4,000 words. In presentation form, we expect the content to be sufficient for a 20-30 minute presentation, followed by questions.

Kate (2013-04-15 15:21:34)
Links to previous conferences or materials?

Sociological Imagination (2013-04-15 19:00:33)
Is that a question or a request? If former please explain what the question is, if latter then use google!

The Idle Ethnographer picks up a spade (2013-04-03 08:00)

The Idle Ethnographer is back in the field. I am doing some follow-up, and some new, interviews with maritime people in Bulgaria. Most of the previous ones were done 4-5 years ago, just before the effects of the 2008-9 financial crisis could be felt on the market for maritime labour. I don’t have anything up to date online - here’s a timely reminder to do some! - but you can look up a summary [1]here, on my old Warwick e-portfolio page, if you’re interested. Or email me - I’d be thrilled to find fellow maritime sociologists.

Since then, the situation in maritime employment has changed quite a lot, so there are many things to talk about: the former state fleet was privatised in 2008; the "maritime bubble" burst, shipping prices fell by half; the demand for seafaring labour is now much less than before 2008 - combined with the effect of being a EU member state, the result is that Bulgarian seafarers find it much harder to get a job. (what is wrong with the EU? oddly enough, it is the good social and employment protection of EU-citizens which drives global firms away towards less well protected labour markets such as that of the Philippines or China).

As I said - lots of large-scale, uncontrollable global changes. It is also interesting to see what has happened to the young seafarers who were just starting out back in 2008; and to the old ones who were close to retirement. Unfortunately, this is a very short visit - just 11 days, and it’s not enough to set up proper fieldwork, even using the "snow-ball" method. Not to mention that I’m also staying with my family and "negotiating" (I hate that word!) different roles as a daughter and researcher doesn’t come easy.

In case you wonder, for my previous study I did 52 interviews, of which 40 in-depth, and this took me altogether 10 months of fieldwork. I also collected loads of other written data, anything I could lay my hands on. This time, I’ve been here for a week and have only just managed 2 proper interviews and planned 3 more. I won’t have time for more, unless I’m very lucky and interviewees "find me". When I was teaching sociological research methods, students always wanted to know how many interviews they should do. I never know what to say.

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interviews isn’t much at all, even when they last 3-4 hours each. They do, however, give an initial glimpse, if one finds respondents with sufficiently different viewpoints and talks to them, to make sure their viewpoint has come across in good detail and nothing is misrepresented. In fact, even just one very rich interview gives you endless threads, directions and insights into the structure of the problem you’re studying, the prevalent vocabulary, the typical viewpoints... - provided you are already versed in its precise social context - that it could sometimes be a sound beginning for research. The same goes for two, three, five interviews. And there is no upper bound. The thing is, even my four dozens interviews with seafarers surely missed some important types of experiences, career trajectory types, opinions and logics - and some of the interviews were more view-changing than others. I didn’t stop because I ran out of interesting people or stories. I stopped because at one point I got overwhelmed with more data than I can physically and mentally process - and I thought it was important to make the best use of what I had, rather than waste it (and also I simply ran out of time).

This is not mass scale, representative research - yet, if read and thought about attentively, it is much more than just pub conversations with random seafarers. As one interviewee described it after a long evening in the pub - "So, you’re trying to "make sense of" ("осмислиш") what goes on on the labour market by talking to many seafarers to see different viewpoints and formulate my own". He nailed it. That’s exactly what qualitative sociologists are doing, I replied with relief, as we were walking under the midnight breeze, trying not to trip over the broken pavement in the dark streets of the living estate in my seaside town (my two interviewees were kind enough to walk me home). I was glad not to be misunderstood about how exactly I get my "data" and what i do with them, especially in the light of the ongoing crisis of Bulgarian empirical sociology sparked by leaked and hotly disputed polling results last week... (see this news article [3]here about the pollster war).

It’s still too early to be making any public substantive conclusions. Suffice to say, [4]Richard Sennett would probably find very similar things, if he could speak Bulgarian. Instead, here are some random field truisms. You may laugh and think that there’s something fishy about my methodology, but I assure you that there is a grain of truth in all of these statements.

- Careful with gatekeepers: they keep the gates in both directions.

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- My empirical work would be much worse, or not possible at all, if I were a teetotal sociologist.

- There is no painless way of recruiting respondents: I am bound to inconvenience them. The only thing I can do is make it interesting for them, as well.

- Nothing is what it looks like. What seems like work isn't, and what seems like leisure, isn't. A six-hour visit to the pub totally was work (parents who call 11 times in the meantime have trouble with this concept). Typing away at the computer for 10 hours a day inevitably involves far more procrastination than work.

- I wonder whether it should instead be termed "fieldplay" or "fieldexploration". "Fieldwork" makes me imagine a spade.

- The success of all anthropological fieldwork hangs on unexpected chances and impertinent phone calls (you're hearing this from someone with a mild phone-phobia...). One such phone call landed me a lecture at a university in Plovdiv, which will take place tomorrow... and which I now have to go and prepare!

- I'm reminded that it really does help to show that I know all the basic maritime terminology. The conversation is never levelled, but at least I don't need to be explained words such as bulker, winch, draught-survey or ship chandler, or why something terrible must have happened it a captain's mate spots his captain measuring the ballast.

- By all means try, but never try too hard, to pay for your beer - instead, offer to buy a beer next time. And never, ever, refuse home-made crumpets.

[5]

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/pg/currentphd/ phdstudents/current/syrgah/
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/A0zbzwzuW4
The joys of grad student shaming (2013-04-04 08:00)

We recently discovered [1]English Grad Student Shaming and we think it’s wonderful. It’s also striking how many of the themes on the blog seem to be relevant beyond the disciplinary confines of English Lit.

So, an obvious question, does anyone want to submit any specifically sociological photos to us along the same lines...?

Deborah is an advocate of using social and other digital media for professional purposes. She blogs at '[2]This Sociological Life', tweets @DALupton, has a number of [3]Pinterest boards and [4]Storify presentations dealing with her current research interests and administers three Facebook pages: [5]Sociology of Health, Illness and Medicine, [6]Digital Sociology and [7]Sociology of Parenting. She contributes pieces to *The Conversation* and *Crikey* online discussion sites and is an invited member of the *Crikey* Health and Medical Panel.

**How did This Sociological Life come about?**

[72x720]http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/1.m4a

**How do you use the blog?**

[72x720]http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/2.m4a

**Has this changed over time?**

[72x720]http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/3.m4a

**Do you ever have trouble finding the time to blog?**

[72x720]http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/4.m4a

**How does your blogging relate to the rest of your work?**

[72x720]http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/5.m4a

1. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/deborah_lupton.jpg
Apocalypse captivates the human imagination. Once synonymous with 'end of the world' scenarios and confined largely to the religious, the term is part of vernacular language in the West and is used to describe a myriad of events from the fiscal difficulties of the Eurozone to nuclear war, from environmental disaster to the dangers of digital technology.

The advancement of science and technology has assisted in expediting anxiety with regard to apocalyptic catastrophe because such 'progress' has produced unforeseen hazards and risks. Critical theories of risk have been developed that harness and organise responses to scientific developments in an attempt to provide solutions to possible catastrophe. It is suggested that in order to prevent global catastrophe, modern society must be reflexive. Moreover, the advent of such hazards has served as a recruiting sergeant for fundamentalist religious groups who have clear and explicit eschatologies. Rather than viewing possible risks and hazards as by-products of late modernity—'signs of the times', they are re-interpreted as 'signs of the end times'. Consequently, one strand that runs through the above is the political implications of apocalyptic ideology and theories of risk. Whether this is the focus some Christian dispensationalist groups put on the role of the state of Israel in the Middle East, or the so-called catastrophic acceleration of global-warming, decisions based on interpretations of these inevitably have political ramifications.

The purpose of this inter-disciplinary conference is to investigate and evaluate some of the variety of apocalyptic discourse that exists in contemporary popular western culture along with critical theories of risk. Papers are invited that explore both the secular and religio-political dimensions of apocalyptic language in contemporary society and include, but not restricted to, the following themes:

- Secular interpretations of apocalypse;
- Religio-political apocalyptic discourse;
- Critical theories that seek solutions to contemporary notions of risk;
- Correlations between critical theories of risk and apocalyptic ideology;
- The growth of fundamentalisms as a reaction to risk culture(s).
Proposals for short papers are invited on any aspects or themes related to the above. Papers will be 20 minutes in length with an additional 10 minutes discussion. Applications to submit a paper should include:

- Proposer’s name and affiliation;
- Title of the paper;
- 250-word abstract;
- Details of any audio-visual equipment you will need to deliver your paper.

Short paper proposals should be submitted to Riskraptureconf@chester.ac.uk by no later than 4pm on Monday 22nd April 2013.
Conference costs: £50 (£25 unwaged and students) inclusive of lunch and refreshments.
Conference registration will open in due course.


For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to “Visual Research”. To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday. The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just [1]e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.

[2]
Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please e-mail us with 'SI Visual Sociology' in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995)* in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:

- JPEG format
• 1:1.5 ratio and any resolution suitable for publishing online (the images the SI normally posts are scaled down to 440×294 pixels, or near)

Legal issues: Any persons present in the photographs MUST be notified, be aware, and not oppose the publication of the images. If in doubt, consult this guide on photographers’ rights:

http://www.sirimo.co.uk/2009/05/14/uk-photographers-rights-v2

Copyright: The submissions will be distributed under the following conditions

Creative Commons Licence Attribution 3 (allowing for non-commercial distribution of shared works):

"This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License."

* Becker 1995 Visual sociology, documentary photography, and photojournalism: It's (almost) all a matter of context, Visual Studies, Volume 10, Issue 1 & 2 1995 , pp. 5 – 14 (the article can be downloaded here, or viewed in html here)

1. mailto:m.i.kremakova@warwick.ac.uk
3. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/S.I.imagery@gmail.com
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6. http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a794687495

The task of Sociology in an age of austerity? Reflecting on #BritSoc13 (2013-04-07 08:00)

The task of Sociology in an age of austerity is to occupy public debate and make inequality matter [1] #BritSoc13


This is a tweeted paraphrase of how BSA president John Holmwood described the task of sociology in his presidential address at the British Sociological Association conference. Do you agree? If so, what does this mean in practice? What should sociologists do? In practical terms how can we ‘occupy public debate’ and ‘make inequality matter’? If
you don’t agree then what do you think the task of sociology should be in our present circumstances? Let us know via the comments box, twitter, facebook or e-mail and we’ll compile your answers and publish them.

2. https://twitter.com/Soc_Imagination/status/319458640832630765
3. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Every minute of every day: an experiment in real time research and digitally inscribed ethnography
(2013-04-07 20:40)

Every minute of every day is a collaborative experiment in real-time ethnography between Goldsmiths College and Richard House Children’s Hospice (Newham) [1]http://richardhouse.org.uk/about and St Joseph’s Hospice (Hackney)[2]http://www.stjh.org.uk/About-stjosephshospice. The aim of our project is to capture something of the local areas and communities that are served by the hospices by using an array of methods – photos, sound recordings, film - and of course by talking and listening to people. We hope that our research will help the hospices to find out more about their local communities and vice versa. We also hope to learn more about engaged social research.

You can follow the project [3]here. It’s a wonderful example of how digital tools expand the research repertoires of sociological projects, with text, photography and audio (all presumably from mobile phones) combining into an emergent research document which is more than the sum of its parts. Though, as Les Back notes in one of the entries, this does require a different mode of engagement on the part of the reader:

We are meeting at 11am. A group of postgraduate researchers from Goldsmiths will spend another day collecting and sending fragments of Newham’s life back to the blog. One thing that we’ve learned from our experiment in blog ethnography is that it reverses the usual order of a fieldnote book. You read the latest entry rather than the first one. This changes the usual order of notes. This means the blog only really makes sense if either you have been reading it in real time, or if you read it backwards. Les
Visualising #BritSoc13 - some geeky post conference procrastination (2013-04-08 08:00)

[1]
Can academics manage without Twitter? (2013-04-09 08:00)

Following [1]David Hill’s post about joining Twitter, I’ve been thinking again about joining Twitter. A few months I [2]posted about Twitter. In that post I spoke about my concerns of constant connection and the work it seemed to require, amongst other things. I’m not so concerned now, but for some reason I’m still resisting joining Twitter. The question this has led me to is about the necessity of joining Twitter. Is it possible to be an academic without being on Twitter? Can an academic manage without Twitter?

In trying to answer this question I’ve been searching around and looking at the content of academic Twitter profiles (including journals, departments and societies as well as individuals). I’ve also been chatting with colleagues. What I’m finding is that Twitter seems to have rapidly become the place to find out about what is going on in the academic world. It would seem that there is something about Twitter, more than any other social media, that seems to suit academics. The result seems to be that academic life is being remediate a on a large scale. Not only is information about opportunities (including job, publishing and speaking opportunities) passing around freely, but Twitter seems to be making aspects of academic practice more visible. We can see what is going on where, who has achieved what, where people are moving to, and so on. I’m wondering if this is going to increasingly mean that you need a good reason to avoid Twitter. I’m increasingly getting the sense that I’m likely to miss stuff, or that I’m likely to fall out of the loop. Plus, of course, there is the visibility that comes with an established Twitter profile. Maybe resistance is futile. Maybe this is the new space for academic life to thrive. I’ll probably join in soon. But this remediation of academic life, and the underlying [3]politics of data circulation, are going to need some attention soon. The ease with which Twitter has been absorbed into academic practice is interesting in itself. It will probably be worth thinking through the ways in which it is restructuring academic practice and communication – and how it amplifies certain voices amongst the noise of Tweets. I’m hoping to build some of these questions into an article I’m about to start.

This post by Dave Beer was originally posted on [4]Thinking Culture.

1. http://thinkingculture.wordpress.com/2013/03/20/david-hill-on-joining-twitter/

#Britsoc13 and Sociology’s problem of shortsightedness (2013-04-10 08:00)

Two years ago in April it was a beautifully warm and sunny Spring. I was wearing sunglasses and sandals as I lazed in the sun on the grass in the LSE campus at my first attendance to the British Sociological conference. Back then I was on the verge of a crucial decision, 6 months or so into my Sociology PhD (the first time round) I was questioning my commitment to the discipline. I attended the conference, paying the extortionate fee out of my own pocket (around £210 for concessionary fees plus BSA membership joining fee of £50, non-members you are looking at £500 for the whole three days), but above all seeking inspiration from my fellow peers. I was expecting to mingle with like-minded thinkers, engage with forward-thinking and exciting alternatives. What I went away with was an overwhelming sense of ‘Sociology’s crisis’ a discourse which echoed throughout the conference. Two years ago it was the peak of student protest activity, Occupy and UKUncut were taking to the streets, and yet that sense of activism and exchange of ideas felt very distant from the stale powerpoint presentations and formal wine receptions of the conference. This week that same feeling of what can only be described as disappointment arose once again.
It was shortly after the conference of 2011 that I applied to study yoga [1]here and booked a one way ticket to India. Two years down the line and back nestled into academia, I am wiser and less naive on my return. Still though I registered for Britsoc13 with enthusiasm even if with a pinch of apprehension.

Housed within the Grand Connaught Rooms, what was underwhelming was the similarity of ideas, grumbles and criticism of two years ago. Now well immersed into the age of austerity, there was much talk of how Sociology’s challenge is ‘different’ now and we need to adapt new tools and ways of thinking. Yet these calls for change were largely muffled by the amount of formulaic presentations that rehearsed a conservative almost stereotypical form of Sociology I hadn’t been acquainted with since A-level. There was luckily some genuinely great speakers and talks to be found such as the Open stream which took place in the Derby suite and had an interesting array of psycho-social research and presentations. Namely one panel discussion which focused on the marginalisation of psychoanalysis in Sociology for me set the scene for the whole conference. George Cavalletto remarked rather poignantly how researchers get frustrated by Sociology’s inability to account for inner life and then turn to literature and cultural studies to find answers and adequate expression for their ideas. The marginalisation of psychoanalysis as a credible discipline in the social sciences and the further degradation of the psyche and the emotions as valid areas of study has led to Sociology becoming a discipline where emotions are only things that come from the outside-in thus reinforcing tired binaries between mind and body. Sociology becomes a matter of inequalities that can be seen or proved but not felt, its remit including only the newsworthy topics of race, gender and class, but articulated in a very truncated sense.

The discussion following Polly Toynbee’s plenary also threw up some interesting questions. The plenary was in some ways a how-to guide to getting your research in the mainstream media but the q &a saw some audience members stand up to talk about their work as ‘activist scholar’s’ as they described themselves. A sociologist’s task is to not just relay information but actively educate their communities in which they work and research they argued. Further another response reminded us that a sociologist’s task is to be provocative and go against the norm. Sociologist’s are so busy toeing the line and filling in REF applications they forget about the importance of big ideas. Toynbee was calling for the need for big thinkers along with the researchers that produce the ‘facts’ as she called them. (The simplistic view of the journalist where objectivity exists as a possibility…). Yet as she also acknowledged ‘big thinkers’ are dismissed if they lack the appropriate forms of validation. The sociologist’s hands are so tied that all that becomes possible are small-scale projects. Yet the problem lies not in the small scale of the research but the small scale of ideas and thinking. Big ideas can be attached to the small-scale, the embedded, and the everyday, but what is lacking is the ability and or motivation to undertake this bridging. This was evident in the Happiness session where happiness was banded about like an unproblematic object. Research was presented that relayed people’s understanding of happiness as the truth of happiness rather than viewing them as a particular narrative of happiness that borrowed from the dominant understandings of happiness that imply certain ways to live a life and be a good citizen. Sara Ahmed’s work on happiness was demolished in the hands of Mark Cieslik who seemingly read a different book, and seemed to think that Ahmed was wanting to do away with happiness, where she was arguing for a form of happiness that did not ignore unhappiness as a possibility. Instead happiness was seen as a thing that existed outside of history, an innate feeling, and neglected to see how the form of happiness that was being advocated was remarkably similar with neo-liberal ways of living and being.

When emotions are a focus of Sociology they become hollowed out and instrumental, lacking theorisation from more sensory modes of study, such as psychoanalysis for example that could illuminate the way in which a person experiences happiness from their environment through affect and attuning to certain things. These ideas are all
active in disciplines such as cultural studies. It is no surprise that for my own research I have been reaching for Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant to provide an adequate reading of subjectivity and loss. And Nikolas Rose and Michel Foucault for a sociology where the body and psyche are actually present and acknowledged. Les Back led a great session on the use of the senses and sensory methodology in Sociology. Again the best sessions of the Britsoc13 were the ones that basically said ‘You know what we are not really supposed to be here but we are going to try and challenge you for 90 minutes.’ My year at Goldsmiths acquainted me with Les Back’s great speaking style and passion for the rekindling of a form of forgotten sociology. It was quite striking to hear from someone of Back’s stature and prominence the difficulty in deciding to overcome any embarrassment in expressing his argument for the importance of the sensory in sociological research. It shared parallels with a similarly great session focused on reflexivity presented by Jon Dean and more broadly sociology’s role in key events such as the UK riots in a presentation by Martyn Hammersley. As Jon Dean spoke in his presentation about the problem of including personal reflections in academic work and the dilemma of what is too much ([2]a problem I know well) a response from the audience after asked ‘What kind of discipline do we have if we cannot include such data in our work?’ It was a powerful statement. What kind of discipline do we have? Thinking of Les Back’s hesitation to focus on the sensory perhaps out of fear of being discredited – I too started to think what discipline is this? And indeed do I want to be part of it? Les Back then spoke about an exhibition he visited as an example for the forms of presentation that should be on display at the BSA conference. Installations that engage the senses. Also in the session Alex Rhys-Taylor used sound recordings and gave a monologue of the sights and sounds of Ridley Road market that felt very close to the ‘scenic compositions’ Lynn Froggett spoke of back in the psycho-social sessions.

It is true some research lends itself better to interactive and creative presentations than others. The point is not to do away with statistics, graphs and powerpoint. But it is to suggest a form of Sociology that allows these sensory methods and modes of thinking as a valuable possibility. Embarrassment or shame are brought about when people fail to be recognised; when others refuse to listen. These few snapshots of marginal ideas at Britsoc13 felt like glimmers of hope in amongst the polite small talk, bad vegetarian lunch options and overpriced entrance fee. Yet these thinkers will continue to only throw their ideas against a brick wall if the sociology discipline fails to listen.

I owe much to sociology, and will always be somewhat grounded, if only through educational socialisation, in a sociological view of the world. I always loved Sociology because it gave me the freedom that other disciplines didn’t. But now I feel constrained and frustrated by Sociology’s limits, where the potential radical thought always has to be explained on conservative terms. Particularly as a novice researcher, barely broken in to my PhD, it can seem a dreary and frightening prospect. Luckily I have spent enough time outside academia as well as in to realise the game everyone plays is one you can opt in or out of. I might be old-fashioned in that I came into Sociology wanting to change things and not keep them the same because I saw problems that were being ignored and overlooked. This applies to the inner workings of the discipline too. Conferences that take place in opulent buildings filled with overwhelming numbers of white middle class male faces leave a bad taste in my mouth. John Holmwood in his plenary spoke of readjustment rather than constructing ideals of the future. Indeed a fixed ideal of the future is limiting, but perhaps a fixed desire to maintain the status quo is even more so. As Sociology continues to concern itself with engaging the public and ‘every day life’ we are getting further and further away from the object we are so hurriedly scrabbling toward.

It seems like Sociology needs to ask itself what it thinks makes a life worth living. I am not saying we should cohere on this vision but at least lets have better avenues for dialogue and not bristle so alarmingly at new approaches that delve into the arts and humanities for inspiration. Because in essence is this not the goal of sociological endeavour:
to ask what makes a life worth living. A life with less inequality, less discrimination based on gender or colour of one’s skin or age or sexuality, a life that is not prescribed but active, aware and critically engaged. A life of learning, a life made meaningful through felt emotions, affect, attuning to the environment and sensory imaginations. To start thinking this way and asking these questions requires big thinking and being alive to experiences and encounters. Our lives as sociologists are not separate to our work but integral to it. Perhaps then hope lies in those who have yet to become institutionalized into the formal dance of sociology’s discipline requirements. In those still young enough or those outside academia that are able to think big and unabashedly. Hope might also lie in those of us PhD students who risk to take the challenge to make their PhD a piece of radical sociology, where radical is simply a challenge to normative obligations, that doesn’t seek career progression as the endpoint, that seeks to contribute to a life worth living. I’m prepared for the challenge, the question is, are you?

- Caroline Pearce

This was originally posted on the [3]Politics of the Hap

3. [http://politicsofthehap.wordpress.com/about/](http://politicsofthehap.wordpress.com/about/)

Dylan (2013-04-17 16:12:29)
sounds like the author wants to be a anthropologist rather than a sociologist

Britsoc13 and Sociology’s problem of shortsightedness. | politics of the hap (2013-04-17 22:26:49)
[...] ‘This post was kindly reposted on The Sociological Imagination. [...]’

David (2013-10-04 09:09:21)
Many years ago, I looked at sociology, did a few ‘O’ level lessons & looked at some literature at different levels. Just couldn’t stand the subject for many of the reasons stated in your excellent column describing problems in the subject. I particularly liked your use of ‘articulated in a very truncated sense,’ ‘similarity of ideas,’ ‘formulaic presentations’. These were apt observations. There are many others I could add from my own experience of life. In my brief acquaintance with sociology I observed all the things covered in your column, and still observe them today whenever I come across sociology literature. (You obviously experience this too, hence your article). I also occasionally hear sociologists repeating all this dreadful stuff. As you say, formulaic, and so, so samey, similar, and totally unoriginal, & so relentlessly narrow in its approach to real life. I’m glad I left the subject, couldn’t have gone on with that. Regards, David Wright

1606
To suggest that language may appear as a problem for a country that is teetering on the edge of financial, moral and political collapse, could be easily mistaken for virtually inviting a debt-ridden population to a dinner of ‘cake’ with Marie Antoinette (to whom the callous and ignorant remark of ‘let them eat cake’ is commonly attributed), or to the pained and patronizing tone of a deconstructionist academic (neither of which I admit to being) who cries over dislocations of grammatical categories in an inspired barrage of linguistic fecundity.

My concern with language in this article however is hardly aesthetic, in any culinary or abstractedly theoretical sense; rather, it is purely political and seeks to interpret the way in which politics is spoken about and spoken to, not as a set of ordinary linguistic devices used to express views in conversation, but as political triggers that denote and fire up schisms, chasms and spasms which are felt not just at the level of private or public discussions but also as a key players in the political sensorium, either in the form of media spectacle, parliamentary politics or as angered, disobedient responses from the commentariat; comprised of the noisiest authorities, tweetellectuals and the ‘lay’ public all engaged in crafting aperçus on all manners of subjects relating to The Crisis.
Popular themes that recur in this veritable mélange of warring wor(l)ds, images and sounds include the high-pitch fear-mongering over a failing economy, reverberating promises of a politically ineffectual and morally bankrupt government for a better tomorrow through more cuts and heavier taxation, blaring sirens from predatory lenders demanding that we fasten ourselves onto the vindictive straitjacket of more austerity, lurid images of poverty combined with tales of personal disaster and dereliction brought forward by economic decrepitude, nauseating repertoires of routine xenophobic violence by far-right groups, snapshots of police brutality, howls of indignation by righteous revolutionaries incandescent with rage, torrential leaking of confidential documents that reveal scandals, piercing commentaries by the 'intelletueul du jour', nauseating ruminations on fiscal themes by celebrity economists, aggressive IMF, ECB and World Bank pep talks on 'work-shy', 'tax-evading Greeks', malodorous connections of the political elite with mafia-run fiefdoms, creeping unholy alliances between the Church and far-right groups, twanging urban militias each fighting for their 'cause', low-bandwidth radios resisting kleptocracy and fighting the spectre of neoliberalism online, ticking electoral pendulums predicting the rise of the extremes in voting preferences, loud radio and TV phone-ins reproducing madness, prejudice and confusion, time-worn political parties reeking of the cheap incense of bygone glories, Neo-nazi sympathisers shouting racial abuse, teenage anarchists blowing up shopping malls and robbing banks to hear their cries and endure cops' lashes behind bars, odoriferous ideologues retreating into their bug-infested tribal enclaves, heckling international media offering uncharitable jokes and condescending anecdotes, Quixotic dreamers bedazzled by their rosy self-delusions, immigrants and ethnic minorities hopelessly marooned to the margins, demagogues of the left burning effigies of the ruling class with demonic frenzy, defending moribund institutions that ooze decay and capitalise on hard-wired, historical traumas, agitators du moment in air-conditioned and sonically monitored studio flats typing throbbing manifestos for change, verbal assaults becoming the norm in televised panels, interviews, Skype conferences and Google+ hangouts, moping melancholy clouding passengers' minds, enveloping fogs of burnt wood sweeping across the city as petrol becomes more expensive each day; what this cornucopia of sights, sounds, scents and other such forms of sensual perception serves to show is not a simulacrum of Dickensian bleakness but the ordinary, everyday repertoires of existential synaesthesia of a country in crisis.

What this confusing list of cheerlessness does not admit however is that the way in which the public experience of the crisis is mediated and rendered intelligible is through language; language is the favoured medium of exchange and reflection upon those events of a day spent in crisis. These being not mere linguistic tropes but real orchestrations of the current soundscape of politics in crisis-bound Greece, it is worth considering the role of language in producing and reproducing these. Part of the problem in the political culture of Greece is to be found in transforming our relationship with language so that we start occupying what Les Back (2007) calls ‘a listening post’ in society and everyday life. Using language as listeners is only part of the problem but it is a basic one, no matter how naïve and fanciful it may seem at first sight. R. Murray Schafer (1994) who coined the term ‘soundscape’ offers a few comments in his book, The Soundscape that might serve as very good advice on how to develop a vocabulary of engagement through listening and speaking; discussing, not debating. Given that ‘man echoes his soundscape in speech’ (p.40) and that ‘noise pollution’, like the socio-political fracas that I have described above, results ‘when man does not listen carefully’; ‘noises’ become ‘the sounds we have learned to ignore’ (p.4) and ‘linguistic accuracy’ ceases to be ‘merely a matter of lexicography’, especially as ‘we perceive only what we can name’ (p.34), but rather graduates to the function of ‘an instrument of the will’ (p.11). What this cut-up of Schafer’s original quotes serves to illustrate is that society is accomplished through language and sounds via interaction; ideas are made in language and of language using it both as a resource and a medium that broadcasts distress and communicates anxiety about public issues at large. This a fairly obvious point especially to those familiar with the conversational sociology of Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, but one that can help us understand language also as an acoustic phenomenon that dominates the socio-political space where interactions are made and unmade daily. The importance of this is to attune ourselves to the reality of sounding out politics as membership in a discourse community that shares linguistic codes, themselves married to cultural traits that resonate the way we hear, speak and do politics.
This of course is hardly new(s); Schafer (1994: 215) reminds us how 'in his model Republic, Plato quite explicitly limits the size of the ideal community to 5,040, the number that can conveniently be addressed by a single orator', while Shakespeare's memorable stanza from King Lear (Act 4, Scene 6) invites us to disown our 'eyes to see how the world works' and are advised to 'look with [y]our ears' instead. Such colourful allusions to broadening our sense of politics but also preparing our senses for politics too, is achieved through thinking not just with and/or in our minds but with the body too. This interpretation of the body as good to think with, trusting its sensory organs as much as we trust our intellectual apparatus is given proper theoretical weight in various sociologies of the body and embodiment, an example of which is to be found in David Oswell's (2009) theoretical investment in the idea of politics as an experiment in and of language, transmitted by sounds the body situates and amplifies for us in the public realm. Oswell (2009: 12, 2) notes how we articulate our political demands through the powers of organised speech, insisting that 'democracy is figured out through the modalities of speaking and listening within different parliaments or assemblies of mouths and ears' and goes on to describe parliaments as 'concrete assemblies of heard and spoken political expression' mediated by and through language, his supposition being that 'political expression and political articulation need to be understood in the context of the realpolitik of sound and sense'. Was this 'realpolitik of sound and sense', after all not just what Plato's philosophical nemesis, Aristotle had in mind when he made the distinction between voice (φωνή) and speech (λόγος) to distinguish the noise of animals (represented by 'voice') from human speech as the articulation of reason by men within an organised political unit, namely the polis? (Aristotle, Politics).

II

However, theoretical, abstract and jumbled all this may sound, I believe that this very 'realpolitik of sound and sense' has deep roots in how we collectively manage and understand our polity through words and sounds; themselves acting as admittedly shifty but at the same time fairly indicative barometers of social attitudes, patterns, habits and trends that not only outline the contours of the current crisis, but also register historic tensions that bear the imprint of prolonged misunderstandings and misrepresentations in need of restoration and repair. What seems to be needed urgently, among many other things of course, is a communicational overhaul of sorts framed not just as 'a struggle with language', as Wittgenstein (1977: 11e) would have it, but a struggle in language too; and one which involves treating each other as 'cultural colleagues', to use Garfinkel's (1967: 11) unforgettable phrase, in an effort to foster a strong communitas where associational public life can flourish if we act towards it by learning to listen well in the spirit of skilful co-operation; understood as a craft and as a vocation in order to make better social, cultural and political sense out of situations that dissuade us from doing so, crises being just an example and a good starting point for doing so.

This idea of mutual understanding and togetherness, achieved by investment to the rituals, pleasures and politics of co-operation, to quote the subtitle of Richard Sennett's (2012) most recent book, belongs as much to him and Garfinkel (1967) as it does to us. This spirit of linguistic, cultural and political effort towards consensus (not compromise!), seems to be entirely lacking in Greece and this is not a modern politico-sensory impairment but rather one with a long historical trajectory since the country's emergence as a modern nation at the tail end of the 19th century. Greece has traditionally been hostage to the 'language games' and the 'polititricks' of populism and irresponsible demagoguery, both operating as cultural trends and political practices that are reproduced in fragrant speechism and clownish gesturing that still remain all too prevalent in the country's political oratoria, often resembling figures that could easily be lifted from the verses of Alexandrian poet C.P.Cavafy who in 1928 crafted a subtly ironic libel for a fictional yet oh-so-real 'Prince from Western Libya' or H.A.Vaughan's sonnet, 'For certain demagogues' (see
Brathwaite, 1984: 31), penned in Barbados in the 1940s but hearing the same alarm bells that that rang so loudly in Patrick Leigh Fermor’s ears ten years later when he described Jamaica’s labour party leader Alexander Bustamante as an ‘ex-rabble-raising demagogue, whose every word and gesture have an engaging histrionic phoneyness’ (see Gunst, 1995: 73).

Greece’s tripartite coalition government as well as its opposition bear a striking resemblance to such rhetorical flourishes of populism described by Cavafy, Vaughan and Leigh Fermor but such posing does little more than bring ‘a new elation’ to mere ‘fickle dust’, to borrow a clipped verse from Vaughan’s sonnet, and seem to require (as previously suggested) a radical breakdown of such ‘rhetorical habits’ as Paul Gilroy (2012) describes them. These ‘rhetorical habits’ however, are more than mere archetypal acts dramatised in predictably recurring plots, but point to enduring political conflicts, ideological biases and (worse of all) cultural loopholes that are used to evade responsibility and critical, rational argument thus reinforcing fanaticism rather than open dialogue; often taking the form of political witch-hunting which uses language as a political tool, not to articulate politics but to summon worshippers, exorcise witches, call people to prayer and attract consumers of voting preferences around suffocatingly close-knit party formations which self-righteously claim to have the monopoly of sense and entitlement to the truth.

III

The question however remains; what is to be done? On a quasi-aesthetic/cultural level, Schafer (1994: 153) would go as far as to suggest that what we need is to develop a ‘sonological competence’ as a way of navigating ourselves out of this distressingly echoic labyrinth of miscommunication and socio-political disjuncture and my contention is that his proposition is immensely useful, if interpreted as an argument against the sensory deprivation of the body politic (especially) when it is hit by crises such as the one experienced in Greece, as I type and as you read. Can we then suggest that by becoming ‘sonologically competent’, we also educate ourselves politically into acquiring a new kind of literacy which leaves no social interaction or political interrogation ‘suspended in hyphens, testifying to the disconnectedness of our thoughts’? The phrase belongs to Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock (1987: 10), whose work gives a nod of approval to developing a ‘precise vocabulary with which to deal with [the] mind-body-society’ triptych and this passionate plea of theirs for a more mindful understanding of ‘the body’ is in reality no different from the rallying cry of this article being no other than an invitation to listen intently to how politics is orchestrated in language and sound and that crises can be perceived and felt as audible warfare involving an intense artillery exchange that can mutilate or heal depending on the camp we plead allegiance to.

What I have tried to demonstrate is that we can use sociology in times of crisis in an effort to make sense of how things sound; appreciating that language is simultaneously a political and performative act. Trusting the noises language makes matters immensely in trying to tell a story of who we are and what we do or as Csordas (1994: 11) notes in reference to Paul Ricoeur’s (1991) musings on the tension between ‘language’ and experience, ‘text and action’; ‘language is a modality of being of being-in-the-world-', such that language not only represents or refers but “discloses” our being-in-the-world’. Language is hardly ‘immediately available’ and much less a frivolous enterprise; like Sidewalk’s author, Mitchell Duneier (1999: 339) we have to ‘strive [...] to get things right’ as ‘[t]he meanings of a culture are embodied, in part, in its language, which cannot be grasped by an outsider without attention to the choice and order of the words and sentences’.

Against this soundscape of communicational and associational deprivation as registered in the squeaking frequencies of ‘language games’ and ‘politricks’ and as is democratically represented in Greece by virtually all parties involved - from the political mainstream and the dominant media to the opposition, the marginal outsiders, the blogosphere and the ‘public’ itself, - sociology and sociologists may have the capacity to reverse the script and flip the disc on
which our political needle seems stuck by allowing the opportunity to ‘defamiliarise the familiar’, destroy our myths and encourage us to re-interpret our life in crisis in ways that can remind us of what it means to be human. In addition to that, sociology can suggest strategies for escaping our current political insulation and point instead to a re-vitalisation of a civic ethic which makes itself heard in the public sphere, not as an instrument of shopworn and devalued rhetorical gambits but conducting instead a symphony of accommodation between civic consciousness and economic performance, in ways that allow for associational solutions to political predicaments while attempting to envision what might happen if we jump headlong into resolving the tension between democratic government and capitalist economy. Thus, making room for the emergence of a new public sphere that might transform the current fragmentary political landscape into the ‘real utopia’ of associational democracy as envisioned by Erik Olin Wright, Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers in their multi-volume ‘real utopias project’.

Whether the sociological imagination is powerful enough to do that of course is a different matter and one that is continually open to debate. What remains unquestionable for the remainder of the ‘Sociologists of crisis’ series however, is my intention to demonstrate [3]John Brewer’s conviction that ‘sociologists don't debate quibbles. We are tackling the financial crisis head-on’. In that spirit, each post will from now on host conversations with current sociologists whose research and thinking contributes vitally to challenging, upsetting and disrupting irresponsible sloganeering with imaginative responses on issues that are continually if not nauseatingly discussed in the public realm about ‘The Crisis’. These conversations/interviews mark their debut next month with Prof. Gerard Delanty’s thoughts on the idea of Europe.

References:


Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music.

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/TiMphUJBQhM?feature=player_embedded

Ring the alarm! The sound of crisis: from 'language games' to... 'politricks' | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:05:08) […] published at The Sociological Imagination on April 11, […]

While My Guitar Gently Types (2013-04-12 08:00)

Tired of typing emails, crouched over a keyboard? David Neevel's new invention will resonate with you. It is an electric guitar which can type! This isn't sociology, but it sure is imagination, of the highest rank. We at SI hope to see these guitars in the shops. We wonder whether it would be called a keyboard, if it's not, well, a keyboard. Maybe a fretboard or tunetyper? Neevel works in advertising so he'll probably find a cool name for it.
Read more [2]here (and check out other cool stuff on the [3]“Wieden + Kennedy” blog).

Dr Helen Owton is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Northampton
Astonishing Spoken Word Poem on Immigration (2013-04-13 08:00)


4. https://twitter.com/HollieMcNish
#britsoc13 : We do teach y’know (2013-04-15 08:00)

In one of Chomsky’s later books, I think it’s *Failed States* but I may have got that wrong, he includes a two page conclusion in which he starts ‘Some people accuse me of never providing solutions or recommendations…’ and proceeds to set the record straight. With a couple of measly bullet points covering about a page. I had a similar reaction when I read a great volume recently, Will Atkinson, Steve Roberts, and Mike Savages’ [*Class Inequality in Austerity Britain*](http://www.youtube.com/embed/vhRFTi3kLUw?feature=player_embedded). It’s a great book – timely, prescient, angry and level-headed, that does a really substantial job of addressing how inequality makes it worse for all of us. Go buy a copy – I’ll wait.

Done? Good. The only problem I had with the book is the editors tackling of ‘the recommendations problem’. The final chapter included some reflection on how sociology could be done better, an argument for an activist and public sociology. Great thing to get behind, but I felt something that I and my colleagues at SHU and throughout the country do was forgotten, something we do all the time. Teach. Since September I have spent at least three hours a day in the company of young people aged 18-21, people who have chosen to study sociology and political science (yeah I know, but they’re not bad people). Why does teaching sociology not seem to count as public sociology, or as a way of encouraging activism?
It may seem small and parochial, but we should never forget that we have at our doorstep people longing to know about the world, longing to learn about their position in that world, waiting for people with a variety of experiences and ideas to talk to them. They’re great, and we are very lucky to be able to do what we do. One of the easiest ways to get our message out, [2] to impart the facts of the welfare changes for example, is to teach it, and to reinforce the messages so that students’ friends hear it, and their families hear it. This will not have the same impact as a great media campaign that cuts swaths across middle Britain, but we seem pretty sure we are not getting one of those. To ignore the fact that we teach at our largest conference seems a pretty appalling oversight. A quick scan through the programme (searching for the word ‘teaching’ which may not be the best method to employ) shows only two or three papers which focus on the usefulness of teaching sociology. The vast and overwhelming majority of papers were focused on new and important research – great, but that’s not all we do.

I know there is now a [3] BSA Teaching group (formerly the ATSS), which seemed to have a great first conference, and has another coming up in July 2013, but the idea that we keep teaching separate is something the BSA should reconsider. If sociology is meant to be democratic and equal, then having a conference dominated by richer Redbrick and Ancient universities, with much of the work of post-1992 institutions sidelined, is not a great idea. I met one or two sociology teachers, those focused on A-levels, but very few. The professional themes and fears which dominated BSA2013 – REF, publishing, massive funding bids – are not things all university sociologists worry about. Before we worry about trying to educate the public, we have to make sure we are doing all we can to educate our students to the best of our ability. If BSA-led sociology places research over teaching, then we are missing out on our greatest opportunity to enact change in individuals. Let’s stop ignoring teaching.

Jon Dean is a lecturer in Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University. This was originally posted on his [4] blog. You can follow Jon on Twitter [5] here.

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2. http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/apr/06/welfare-britain-facts-myths
5. https://twitter.com/jondeanshu

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#britsoc13: BSA 2013 Review: Highlights, Lowlights, and Issues (2013-04-16 08:00)

From Weds 3 – Fri 6 last week the [1] British Sociological Association Conference 2013 took place in the Grand Connaught Rooms in central London. It was my second BSA conference after last year in Leeds, and my first post-PhD, post-getting-a-Lectureship conference full-stop. I have, for the sake of brevity, limited myself to 3 highlights, 3 lowlights, and a random selection of other thoughts.

I originally thought this would be one post, but given that the first one is over 800 words long, I’ll break them up into easily digestible chunks.

Highlight 1: A Renewal of Confidence in Sociology

A colleague of mine and I have discussed a theory: that sociology is not a science, that there is no such thing as social science, there is merely social critique. At the root of critique is an awareness of the self, so the first
question we have to ask sociology undergraduates is ‘why are you such a terrible person?’ It felt to me that this was a conference of sociologists who are well aware of their flaws – both personally (our inability to get our message out, introversion, methodological dullness, or consistent failure to focus on things that vitally matter) and professionally (accepting our limitations, not challenging received practices, talking to ourselves), but the very act of being aware of these issues is an important start. The BSA2013 was three days of (largely) recognising the bad, and reaffirming the good.

One of the first sessions I attended was John Holmwood and Ben Fine addressing how sociology and economics can combine. Personally I believe economics has shown itself to be a thoroughly discredited discipline over the last few years (shock!). Sociology is a discipline which critiques the status quo, which points out the structural and agential issues which are either causing harm or preventing improvement. Holmwood and Fine stressed how economics didn’t rock the boat, and used the same tools and methods, those invested with legitimacy, to keep things the same. It dominated discussion through its resources, and had easy access to power, which both corrupted academia (watch [2]this clip from Inside Job to see what they mean), and gave credence to things which were not credible.

One of the reasons sociology doesn’t get listened to, is that is says things that people don’t want to hear. Politicians only want data which makes their opponents look bad, or supports their policies, as do the media, as Polly Toynbee addressed on Friday (although the Telegraph did publish [3]this). Think tanks want academics to change their findings in order to support their policy agenda, as Will Atkinson addressed in his paper on Wednesday. But whereas in 2012 I felt the BSA was afraid to rock the boat, annoyed that people weren’t listening, this year we were still annoyed, but rather than sulking in the corner, arms crossed, there was real anger, and a longing for action and activism. Obviously with the conference coming in the week of the most dramatic and traumatic benefit changes, surrounded by lies, rumour, and spurious evidence, the anger was real, as was the desire to do something about it. If the elite are to complain of a ‘broken society’, it is up to us to kick back and show who broke it (h/t Tim Strangleman).

But the nagging sensation remains: are we going to do anything and what are we going to do? These questions are ones we are stuck on: I will come back to it in a future post.

I called this blog empathyscience, as this is the term I teach to all first years as they decide to embark on three-year sociology course. It will not make you a large amount of money (‘You are not the next Mark Zuckerberg’ as Shamus Kahn shows [4]here), nor is it particularly vocational, setting you up nicely for a particular career. But it is the subject which best helps explain other people. It is the subject which enables you to understand what other people are going through, and that you are not an island. If we accept worries about individualisation in society, then perhaps it’s best to think of each student who takes it on as a small act of rebellion. As John Holmwood said in his Presidential address:

> Sociology must in the service of democracy...the task of sociology in an age of austerity is to occupy public debate and make equality matter.

He’s right. And this may sound like soppy nonsense, but you have to have an emotional pull to a subject in order to go through the grind of submitting, resubmitting, and failing at article publication, and the mountain of marking that waits at the end of each term, and the completely nonsensical administrative changes that are constantly thrust our way. It’s nice to occasionally here something that makes you think ‘Oh yeah, it’s good that I do this’.

But ask me again in a year.

Jon Dean is a lecturer in Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University. This was originally posted on his [5]blog. You can follow Jon on Twitter [6]here.

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx)
In retrospect it was never very likely I'd finish my PhD during a daily commute (2013-04-17 08:00)

(via AyeshaKazmi from the Occupy Boston protest)

Some thoughts prepared for the Sociologists Outside of Academia panel discussion at #BritSoc13

I felt slightly nervous about this panel prior to it because of the change that I’d undergone inbetween originally being invited and the actual BSA conference itself. I’d previously been hugely enthusiastic about the idea of 'Sociologists Outside of Academia' but now I’m more cautious, albeit not hostile to it at all. Around 6 months ago, having pondered the idea for ages, I went to work full time in a social media role (at the LSE so I didn't get particularly far 'outside' of academia but the move into a non-research role was subjectively very meaningful).

I'm in the 5th year of an unfunded part-time PhD, I've freelanced and worked lots of part time contracts in a
A wide variety of roles over the course of my thesis. For much of this time, the workload outside my PhD has added up to something much more than the 36 hours a week I was contracted to work at the LSE. So I didn't think working full time while continuing to do research would be any more difficult than this. But it REALLY was and I'm still trying to understand why that is - in the freelancer / part-time researcher lifestyle I've had for the past four years, I've enjoyed having an awful lot of space to think and develop projects on my own terms.

I'd seen the prospect of being a 'Sociologist Inside Academia', with the social structures it unavoidably involves subjugation to, as threatening that space. But in the last six months that space largely vanished, retreating to little more than my morning commute on the train and some time at the weekends. Which leaves me confused about a notion which I had previously been so enthusiastic about. It's left me thinking about what is it to be a 'sociologist outside of academia'? Is it to continue to identify as such? To continue to engage with sociological literature? To continue to engage with other sociologists? To continue to do research?

It was the last one that was key for me. My enthusiasm for the concept of abandoning a traditional PhD route, supporting myself through other means so that I could do the research I wanted to do freed from audit culture and the instrumentalism it fuels, was predicated on being able to continue to do research. Though I do realise when saying this that the kind of research I do (social theory & theoretically motivated small scale qualitative research) makes this possible in a way it might not be for others.

At present I feel like an idea that came very naturally to me, to have one foot in and one foot outside of the academy, probably isn't possible in the way that I hoped it would be. But I'm not certain by any means. Not least of all because there's a lack of any serious discussion of alternative academic career paths in UK sociology, something which is much less true in the US - perhaps because some of the pernicious trends in the academy which lead people out of necessity or choice to pursue alternative academic career paths are much more developed there.

But I think these broader trends aren't going to go away and there's a need to seriously address them in practical terms. The ranks of the 'para academics' (those precariously employed but still actively working within academia) and the 'alternative academics' (those with graduate level training seeking alternative career paths outside the grouping we call 'academics') are only going to grow. At a time when Sociology is under great threat in the UK, it seems blindingly obvious to me that taking practical steps to incorporate people with sociological training and/or doing sociological work outside the academy is integral to preserving the discipline.

So things like making conferences more financially accessible, running lectures and engagement events which are accessible to those outside the academy (in all senses of the term 'accessible') and using social media to start to move sociological debates more into the open, as well as creating resources and multimedia publications which make sociological knowledge more accessible to those outside the academy. I think there's been a pervasive failure to value the communication of sociological knowledge (at least outside of a classroom context) which really doesn’t help in this respect.

There's also a need to offer much more multi-faceted career advice and skills training for PhD students. This is something the BSA's PG forum, which I helped organise for a couple of years, has tried to do. But it's still sadly absent at a more localised level and I think this contributes to a lack of understanding of the transferable skills gained during a PhD (particularly the value that being able to digest, understand and communicate academic research has for other roles both in and outside the university) and little sense of the options available.
Hard being a long distance PhD, but wait, this chap is within the LSE. Library, access to canteen, facilities shared with staff and students...

my point was that I had no time or energy to work on my PhD while I was there, not that I couldn’t find my way to a library near work...

In defence of being alone (2013-04-18 08:00)

Via [2]Meg Barker. If you like this one, you should also check [3]this out. Andrea Dorfman and Tanya Davis are wonderful.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/k7X7sZzSXYS?feature=player_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/embed/k7X7sZzSXYS?feature=player_embedded)
2. [http://rewritingtherules.wordpress.com/2013/04/06/being-alone/](http://rewritingtherules.wordpress.com/2013/04/06/being-alone/)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_dz173YZhA&list=UUbL4jfzgj8LNZD4etgA_IEA&index=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_dz173YZhA&list=UUbL4jfzgj8LNZD4etgA_IEA&index=1)

Couldn’t agree more. Except you have a camera person to accompany you. I dont.
Cross country; years and years running,  
Huuuuuge amounts of training,  
Puzzled; getting nowhere... slower and slower,  
Not occurring that I had undiagnosed asthma.  
Germany, in the street collapsed,  
Running killed off!  
Painful; bit of a shame; quite upset,  
Brittle asthma; late onset,  
Looked at sadly; doctors telling people,  
"Well you haven’t had it before and now you have"  
Slightly unusual asthma; aspirin intolerable.

Town planner; on site to office confinement,  
5 mile runs at lunchtime - couldn’t even get to my car from the office,  
Without resting; seating on walls; breathing crisis,
For others, contractors; committee meetings frightening,
Seeing me wheezing unable to speak; more alarming,
Amusing; not thinking it might be permanent; simple denying,
Subtle; early signs of depression,
Eased out of job; retired early, redundant,
Slow realisation! No more denial; difficulty untangling,
Side effects of acute asthma from unwanted depression,
Trying to exercise; slow walking, asthma inhibiting.

Doctor suggesting alternatives; experimentation,
Steroid injections,
Overnight, asthma vanishing,
Suddenly I was exercising,
Wonderful feeling!
I'm cured! More denying...
You can’t forever have steroid injections,
Allowed me to build fitness; combating slow insidious lack of muscle toning,
Asthma had been bringing,
Able to be moving; depression vanishing.

Stopped injections,
Asthma stopped me exercising; returned depression,
Took up cycling, cycling more easy than walking,
Discovering freewheeling,
Short bursts; freewheel a bit and get around again,
Getting the pleasure of exercising,
then...
Same time; depression seemed to worsen,
My doctor thought, "You're interested in psychology, see a psychologist"...
Inept psychologist, "I'm a lot more sane!"
Stopped.

Pacing myself, working,
Joinery; given book token...
Bright yellow - Idiots guide to hypnosis, picking,
Incredibly calming; scripts, just reading,
My interest in hypnosis introducing, growing,
Asthma and hypnosis training,
Funny synchronicity things,
3 years later; completed the training,
Reasonably good qualification in hypnotising,
Also... asthma periodic not constant becoming,
TRANSFORMATIONAL for me.

I’ve become a lot more active physically,
Now; exercise inducing,
Exercise regime starting slowly,
Increasing brisk hill walking,
Asthmatic response to exercise reducing slightly,
No long distance running unfortunately,
I do miss it. It’s a pity.
I rarely say I may have asthma,
Not really noticeable any longer,
GP was a naughty experimenter!
Rather than sticking to the books ever.

I don’t really have asthma attacks any longer,
Fantastic! Blocked nose still, seems to be getting better,
Anoxia; wife helps me,
Unaware; creeps up gradually,
Bloating; unusualness peacefulness,
Bit fatter,”Do you have asthma?”
“Oh actually, maybe”, I consider,
“If you die of asthma I’ll dig you up and kill you!” She kindly tells me,
Infection; floors me for two days or three,
Take advantage; pamper myself, books reading,
Enjoy the relaxation; also a positive experience in a funny way.

An unusual form of asthma,
I’ve no memory of having problems,
As a child I know I was free of asthma.

Dr Helen Owton is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Northampton

Transforms data into poetry and visual representation. Well done, Helen!

Where Do Neoliberals Go After the Market?
Calculation, computation and crisis

A one-day conference organised by Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick
13th June 2013
10am-6.30pm
Room S0.21
Neoliberalism is commonly identified as a belief in the self-regulating powers of markets, especially financial markets. Markets, from this perspective, are powerful information-processors, which are uniquely capable of governing complex societies while preserving liberty. In recent decades, financial institutions have added further computational power, which, among other things, has led to the automation of trading and the calculation and simulation of market scenarios to manage risk. The financial crisis has been perceived by some as the outcome of this collision between markets and increasingly 'performative' economics.

But where does this leave neoliberalism and its technical ideal of freedom? Does it simply require more markets or greater computational power to prevent future crises? Or are we witnessing the emergence of a different neoliberalism, based on different technologies and ideologies of liberty, in appeals to 'Big Data' and 'openness'? Might software and 'open data' usurp the primacy of the price system in the neoliberal imagination, as tools of governance in complex modern societies? To what extent are the political desires of the digital elite – from Hackers to Silicon Valley – amenable to the neoliberal project?

This one-day conference will address these questions from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including software studies, history of economics, political theory, media theory, international political economy and economic sociology.

Speakers Include

- [2]Prof Philip Mirowski, University of Notre Dame
- [3]Prof Shirin Rai, University of Warwick
- [4]Dr Richard Barbrook, University of Westminster
- [5]Dr Orit Halpern, New School
- [6]Dr David Berry, Swansea University
- [7]Dr Johan Soderberg, Université Paris-Est/Écoles des Ponts

Conference themes

- Neoliberal responses to financial crisis
- The invention and reinvention of 'competition'
- The philosophy and techniques of 'openness'
• The persistence and reinvention of the market
• The intersections between neoliberalism and cybernetics
• The significance of data and 'Big Data' to the evolution of neoliberalism
• The role of specific devices in visions of freedom
• The political lineages of 'hackers'

**Attendance**

The conference is free to attend, but registration is essential. To register please click here.

Room S0.21 is in the Social Sciences block. A campus map is available here. All details on how to get to Warwick University are available here.

Please send any enquiries regarding the conference to Will Davies at William.j.davies@warwick.ac.uk

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/)
2. [http://www3.nd.edu/~pmirowsk/](http://www3.nd.edu/~pmirowsk/)
3. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/rai/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/rai/)
5. [http://orithalpern.net/](http://orithalpern.net/)
6. [http://www.swansea.ac.uk/staff/academic/artshumanities/pcs/berryd/](http://www.swansea.ac.uk/staff/academic/artshumanities/pcs/berryd/)
8. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/news/signup](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/news/signup)
9. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/)
10. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/)
11. [https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=William.j.davies@warwick.ac.uk](https://mail.google.com/mail/?view=cm&fs=1&tf=1&to=William.j.davies@warwick.ac.uk)

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**New column! “Visual Sociology” call for reader submissions (2013-04-21 08:00)**

For all professional and/or novice visual researchers out there: the Sociological Imagination is pleased to announce its new column dedicated to "Visual Research". To celebrate its beginning, we are launching a continuous call for reader submissions.

The call is open to all our readers. **One piece of visual research work will be featured each Friday.** The SI reserves the right to use the submissions on the website at any time after they have been sent to us, after explicitly notifying their authors by email. If you’ve sent us an image and change your mind for any reason, just e-mail us and we promise not to post it. Scroll down for submission guidelines.
Guidelines for submissions:

How to submit: Please e-mail us with ‘SI Visual Sociology’ in the subject line.

How many: Authors may submit up to three separate pieces of work (we shall consider more numerous applications on a case by case basis – i.e., if we really like them!).

What information: Every submission must be accompanied by the following information:

- title of the work;
- full name/s, or artistic pseudonym/s, of its author/s;
- contact e-mail address and/or other contact details.

What counts as “a piece of visual research”? What ratio must there be between image/s and text? We side with Becker (1995) in abandoning methodological purism, and leave to your discretion the decision what and why classifies as visual sociology/anthropology (as opposed to documentary, photojournalism, art, or any other visual-based genre). The editorial team also reserves the sole right to decide whether to publish any submission. Submissions may range from image/s with text to text with image/s, as long as images and analysis or story are integral to one another.

Type of image: Any images/photographs are acceptable: black-and-white or colour; new shots or old scanned shots from your archives – as long as you have the rights to distribute them; and there are no restrictions regarding any artistic or photo-processing technologies used in the production of the images.

Format and size:
If we want to understand digital dualism properly, we need to abandon the concept of 'digital dualism' (2013-04-22 08:00)

In a [1]recent post Nicholas Carr, author of [2]The Shallows, offered a really interesting critique of what has become an increasingly influential idea within the sociological blogosphere: digital dualism. He begins with what is probably the clearest summary of digital dualism I have yet to encounter:
The distinction between online and offline is an outdated holdover from twenty years ago, when "going online," through America Online or Prodigy or Compuserve, was like "going shopping." It was an event with clear demarcations, in time and space, and it usually comprised a limited and fairly routinized set of activities. As Net access has expanded, to the point that, for many people, it is coterminous with existence itself, the line between online and offline has become so blurred that the terms have become useless or, worse, misleading.

The underlying point is one which I find glaringly obvious, as I've explained [3]elsewhere:

Until the recent proliferation of mobile devices, it was necessary to sit down at a computer and stare at a screen to use the internet. This helps create a sense of the internet as a 'virtual' space which is in some way disembodied. As someone who has had unpleasant back and neck problems from my posture when using a computer in the past, it's always been obvious to me that using the internet is not at all disembodied. Though the obviousness of this has become utterly glaring, to the extent that I can't quite take those who disagree seriously, since I started using an iPad and iPhone. Similarly the cyberpunk romanticisation of the 'virtual' plays a cultural role in propping up this ontological assumption.

However 'digital dualism' is a critical term, it conceptualises an ontological fallacy. The whole point of the concept is that digital dualists are mistaken. If the concept is useful, which I still think it is, it is because it helps elucidate how and why 'digital dualists' are mistaken. Crucially I'd suggest that digital dualism is not always an assumption people are aware that they are making - in a similar way to the [4]sexual assumption, it is architectonic, it is conceptually presupposed by certain views people are aware that they hold and it rail roads their thinking in certain directions. But this doesn't mean that people reflectively think there are two separate 'worlds' which are entirely independent of each other.

I think the concept can be more useful understood as our deliberations being conceptually structured, they are concepts in social circulation which have a certain practical plausibility for some (i.e. if you primarily or entirely use the internet by sitting down at a desk, turning on a computer and logging on then the distinction between 'online' and 'offline' just makes sense) and so culture and practice reinforce each other. They are tools we think with, both in terms of our internal conversations and also how we externalise such inner conversations to external others. As a pretty strong claim, I'd suggest that 'online' and 'offline' are the sorts of terms we only ever re-ally use when we’re talking to others about something which we’ve previously been introspecting about by ourselves.

The problem with 'digital dualism', as a catchy but flawed critical concept rather than as the attitude it designates, rests on its inadequacy as a term to make sense of this empirical complexity. It surely designates something real and interesting. But it does so at such a degree of abstraction that, when applied to empirical subject matter, it’s apparent sophisticated belies a strikingly limited interpretive repertoire. Carr makes this point usefully.

There is something tiresome about the self-righteousness of those who see, and promote, their devotion to the offline as a sign of their superiority. It’s like those who can’t wait to tell you that they don’t own a TV. But that’s a quirk that has more to do with individual personality than with some general and delusional dualist mentality. Jurgenson’s real mistake is to assume, grumpily, that pretty much everyone who draws a distinction in life between online experience and offline experience is in the grip of a superiority complex or is striking some other kind of pose. That provides him with an easy way to avoid discussing a far more probable and far more interesting interpretation of contemporary behavior and attitudes: that people really do feel a difference and even a conflict between their online experience and their offline experience.
experience. They're not just engaged in posing or fetishization or valorization or some kind of contrived identity game. They're not faking it. They're expressing something important about themselves and their lives—something real. Jurgenson doesn’t want to admit that possibility. To him, people are just worshiping a phantom: “The notion of the offline as real and authentic is a recent invention, corresponding with the rise of the online.”

The difficulty here can, I’d argue, be understood in terms of Margaret Archer’s concept of ‘central conflation’. This is an idea she uses to make sense of what she takes to be mistaken orientates towards the structure and agency debate in sociology. This is the Wikipedia entry I wrote about this, which I’ll quote because this post is taking a lot longer to write than I initially planned:

Archer argues that much social theory suffers from the generic defect of conflation where, due to a reluctance or inability to theorize emergent relationships between social phenomena, causal autonomy is denied to one side of the relation. This can take the form of autonomy being denied to agency with causal efficacy only granted to structure (downwards conflation). Alternatively it can take the form of autonomy being denied to structure with causal efficacy only granted to agency (upwards conflation). Finally it may take the form of central conflation where structure and agency are seen as being co-constitutive i.e. structure is reproduced through agency which is simultaneously constrained and enabled by structure. The most prominent example of central conflation is the [5]structuration theory of [6]Anthony Giddens. While not objecting to this approach on philosophical grounds, Archer does object to it on analytical grounds: by conflating structure and agency into unspecified movements of co-constitution, central conflationary approaches preclude the possibility of sociological exploration of the relative influence of each aspect.

In contradistinction Archer offers the approach of analytical dualism,[7][1] While recognizing the interdependence of structure and agency (i.e. without people there would be no structures) she argues that they operate on different timescales. At any particular moment, antecedently existing structures constrain and enable agents, whose interactions produce intended and unintended consequences, which leads to structural elaboration and the reproduction or transformation of the initial structure. The resulting structure then provides a similar context of action for future agents. Likewise the initial antecedently existing structure was itself the outcome of structural elaboration resulting from the action of prior agents. So while structure and agency are interdependent, Archer argues that it is possible to unpick them analytically. By isolating structural and/or cultural factors which provide a context of action for agents, it is possible to investigate how those factors shape the subsequent interactions of agents and how those interactions in turn reproduce or transform the initial context. Archer calls this a [8]morphogenetic sequence. Social processes are constituted through an endless array of such sequences but, as a consequence of their temporal ordering, it is possible to disengage any such sequence in order to investigate its internal causal dynamics. Through doing so, argues Archer, it’s possible to give empirical accounts of how structural and agential phenomena interlink over time rather than merely stating their theoretical interdependence.

My point is that the critique of ‘digital dualism’ can too easily conflate the ‘online’ and the ‘offline’. In doing so, we’re left with a situation where, yes, we’ve acknowledged their interpentration but because we’ve ‘transcended’ the dichotomy, we lose the ability to unpack the interplay between its two sides. The argument that "no, you’re wrong, these aren’t separate things at all!" is useful in so far as that it allows us to identify an interface between two things that were erroneously deemed to be distinct. Likewise, it can help us understand the mistakes which ensued from imputing a discreteness which was mistaken. But it becomes a problem when the argument which allows
us to identify and critique comes to preclude our capacity to explain. It becomes a problem when our eagerness to explain “you’re so wrong, look how interpenetrative they are” obscures the variation and sequencing of that interpenetration. The ‘online’ and the ‘offline’ are not distinct. But the modalities of their interpenetration are empirically variable in a profound, interesting and important manner. We need a conceptual toolkit which allows us to both identify and unpack that empirical variability. I don’t think that the idea of ‘augmented reality’ (the ‘correct’ counterpart to digital dualism) can provide these tools.

7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Archer#cite_note-1

Janet Salmons (2013-04-23 00:20:31)
Regarding digital dualism, you state, "The distinction between online and offline is an outdated holdover from twenty years ago." And while my lifestyle is one at the blurred edge where on- and off- overlap, recent experiences have reminded me that in fact "digital dualism" is a relevant concept in the real world. There are times when the "online" just doesn't work, where immediate physical presence, even if wordless, speaks in important ways. My mother, almost 93, has been ill. Not that long ago we had a pleasant, almost daily exchange of email. Now, in a rehabilitation center in another state faraway, digital communication is not an option. I have to actually board a plane and be there. Similarly, I recently had an unforgettable exchange, an eye to eye communication with my uncle, almost 96, a week before he died. It was a look that transcended language, which sadly he had lost the ability to use. We need the to avoid losing "the ability to unpack the interplay between its two sides" of our lives, and at the same time to value all the ways we are able to touch, learn from and communicate with one another. As an online researcher and educator, the kinds of experiences mentioned in this comment have prompted me to stay aware and attentive to a full range of communication potential.

Faulty practice in [insert name of science] (2013-04-23 08:00)

A fellow Ukrainian sociologist drew my attention to a recent article written by a Polish ornitologist. Tomasz Wesołowski works at the Laboratory of Forest Biology, Wrocław University and has nothing to do with sociology. However, he tackles an issue that threatens to undermine the integrity of other contemporary academic fields: the structures and rules used to measure the quality of academic research:

"... The authors intending to publish many papers in the most prestigious journals tend to frame titles using very broad terms to overestimate their importance and overgeneralise the results. Exploratory, observational, studies are undervalued (treated as a sort of inferior science, not deserving publication in high-profile journals). Field studies are done and published by people without basic field skills/taxonomic knowledge (an especially acute problem in poorly known tropical regions). Moreover, field procedures are inadequately described (others cannot evaluate the quality of work and replicate the study if necessary). Field data can be underreported (biological data in the results section are replaced by outcomes of statistical analyses). Proper credit to earlier work is missing. Many authors tend to ignore earlier sources and refer only to the most recently published papers. I think it is possible to relieve the discussed problems. In order to do so, we have to "dethrone" publications, cease to treat
them as if they were the purpose of scientific work and the sole measures of scientific output. To improve the situation, we also have to require that journal editors (1) modify the list of requirements distributed in Guidelines for the authors to include aspects crucial for proper documentation; (2) extend the list of questions which referees have to address, to include the above aspects as well, and (3) consistently reject all submissions not fulfilling these minima. Additionally, the journals would have to stop promoting unsubstantial quality criteria, e.g. “impact factors”.


Read the article here: [2]www.forestbiology.org/articles/FB_01: 1-7

[3]

Danger: protected by..? (Photo: Idle Ethnographer TM)


Call for Participation

SUMMER CLINIC ON SOCIOLOGICAL AGENCY
LONDON SOUTH BANK UNIVERSITY

In 2012-2013 we participated in an interdisciplinary reading group on the concept of agency at the University of Manchester. Out of this we felt the need to conduct a fuller survey of core positions on agency in sociological theory and beyond. We hope that this will be of interest both to those who are developing their understanding of this concept, and to those seeking further reflection.

We will begin this process by looking at some key contemporary sociological theories in a five week London ‘Summer Clinic’ which will run as an intense peer-facilitated reading group. The clinic is intended to cover a lot of ground in a fairly short period. After an introductory week on some essential themes, each week will consist of two sessions devoted to a specific theorist (for a detailed overview, see below). Although this is an intensive schedule you can either drop in to a single week or participate more fully. We welcome PhD candidates, early career researchers, as well as advanced theorists.

We intend the ‘clinic’ to be part of a larger project to look at agency from a wide range of perspectives. After the Summer we will organise a monthly reading group (at LSBU) to further our understanding of how this concept is operating more widely. We might look at phenomenological, pragmatist, post-structuralist, feminist, social movement theoretical, race critical and post-colonial approaches - or other perspectives suggested by participants.

In case of sufficient interest, we hope to organise a symposium in Spring 2014 in order to explore emerging perspectives and the latest developments in the field.

Lastly, we have set up a mailing list for this project. Please send us an e-mail ([agencytheorylondon@gmail.com](mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com)) if you would like to subscribe and be kept updated.

We would like to invite you to participate in the summer clinic. Feel free to attend the whole clinic or any specific week of interest. Below you will find the details of the clinic:

**Period:** 8 July - 9 August 2013  
**Time:** 2-5pm, Tuesdays & Thursdays  
**Location:** Room TBC, Keyworth Building, London South Bank University  
**Address:** Keyworth Street, London, SE1 6NG [station: Elephant and Castle]

Organisers: Julien Morton (London South Bank University); Dieuwertje Dyi Huijg (University of Manchester)  
Contact details: [agencytheorylondon@gmail.com](mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com)

Please get in touch if you are interested or have queries so we can provide you with more details.

**SCHEDULE SUMMER CLINIC ON SOCIOLOGICAL AGENCY**

**Week 1:** 9 & 11 July 2013
**Week 2:** 16 & 18 July 2013
**Week 3:** 23 & 25 July 2013
**Week 4:** 30 July & 1 Aug 2013
**Week 5:** 6 & 8 Aug 2013

**WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS OF STRUCTURE AND AGENCY**

1634
WEEK 1, DAY 1
9 July 2013: 2-5pm
Ch.1: "Introduction"
Ch.2: "Action reported missing in action theory"
Ch.3: "Action and social action"

WEEK 1, DAY 2
11 July 2013: 2-5pm
Callinicos, Alex. (2004, 2nd Ed), Making history: agency, structure, and change in social theory, Leiden: Brill
Ch.2: "Structure and Action", only §2.1, §2.2, §2.5
Ch.3: "Reasons and Interests", only §3.4, §3.5
Ch.4: "Ideology and Power", only §4.1 (§4.2, §4.3)

WEEK 2: PIERRE BOURDIEU

WEEK 2, DAY 1
16 July 2013: 2-5pm

WEEK 2, DAY 2
18 July 2013: 2-5pm
Bohman, James (1997), "Reflectivity, agency and constraint: The paradoxes of Bourdieu's sociology of knowledge". Social Epistemology, 11, 2, pp.171-186

WEEK 3: ANTHONY GIDDENS

WEEK 3, DAY 1
23 July 2013: 2-5pm
Ch.1: "Elements of the Theory of Structuration"
Ch.4: "Structure, System and Social Reproduction"
Ch.6: "Structuration Theory, Empirical Research and Social Critique"

WEEK 3, DAY 2
25 July 2013: 2-5pm
WEEK 4: MARGARET ARCHER & CRITICAL REALISM

WEEK 4, DAY 1
30 July 2013: 2-5pm
Ch.4: "The primacy of practice"
Ch.6: "Humanity and reality: emotions as commentaries on human concerns"
Ch.8: "Agents: active and passive"
Ch.9: "Actors and commitment"

WEEK 4, DAY 2
1 Aug 2013: 2-5pm
Archer, Margaret. (2003), Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
Introduction: "Introduction: how does structure influence agency?"
Ch.3: "Reclaiming the internal conversation"
Ch.4: "The process of mediation between structure and agency"

WEEK 5: BRUNO LATOUR & ACTOR NETWORK THEORY

WEEK 5, DAY 1
6 Aug 2103: 2-5pm
"Introduction"
§1.1: "Introduction to Part 1"
§1.2: "First Source of Uncertainty: No Group, Only Group Formation"
§1.3: "First Source of Uncertainty: Action is Overtaken"
§1.4: "First Source of Uncertainty: Objects too Have Agency"
"Conclusion: From Society to Collective"

WEEK 5, DAY 2
8 Aug 2013: 2-5pm
"After ANT" by John Law
"On Recalling ANT" by Bruno Latour
"From Blindness to blindness" by Kevin Hetherington
"Ontological politics" by Annemarie Mol
"Actor-network theory - the market test" by Michael Callon

1. mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com
2. mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com
Critical realism, interdisciplinarity and well-being (2013-04-24 08:00)

In the [1]Social Theory & Health 2012 Annual Lecture Roy Bhaskar, founder of [2]Critical Realism, gave a lecture on 'Critical realism, interdisciplinarity and well-being'. Use the link below to access the podcast of the lecture:


While some of the ideas fail to convince (e.g. surely understanding scientific fields is irreducible to empathy?) it’s worth a listen, not least of all as a philosophical corrective to what is often an extremely polarised debate about interdisciplinary working. Bhaskar has a philosophically rich meta-theory of what interdisciplinary working entails coupled with a practical commitment to applying this meta-theory to helping people work across disciplines. It’s an interesting combination, with his frame of reference for this discussion simultaneously encompassing the deeply abstract and the immediately mundane aspects of interdisciplinarity.

3. http://db.tt/wALZ7dVv


A rather lovely infographic via [1]Stavvers:

Description:

This is an infographic featuring text and descriptions

TITLE: INTERSECTIONALITY: A FUN GUIDE

1. A drawing of a triangle with a smiley face. The triangle is two shades of blue striped. A speech bubble comes from his mouth saying “Hi”. It is captioned “This is Bob”.

2. Caption: “Bob is a stripey blue triangle AND SHOULD BE PROUD.” Bob has a speech bubble saying “YAY ME”.

1638
3. Caption: “SOME PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE BOB. BOB FACES OPPRESSION FOR BEING A TRIANGLE AND FOR HAVING STRIPES” Image of Bob with a sad face, positioned between stick figures holding a sign saying “Down with stripes” and another set of stick figures holding a sign saying “Down with triangles”.

4. Caption: “LUCKILY THERE ARE LIBERATION GROUPS! BUT THEY AREN’T INTERSECTIONAL. SO THEY LOOK LIKE THIS” An arrow points to two rooms, separated by a barbed wire fence. A room with a sign saying “welcome triangles” with triangles inside of many different solid colours. A room with a sign saying “welcome stripes” featuring many different shapes with stripes.

5. Caption: “BOB CAN’T WORK OUT WHERE TO GO”. Bob has a sad face. His thought bubble says “Am I more of a stripe, or a triangle?”

6. Caption: “THEY DON’T TALK TO EACH OTHER. IN FACT THEY COMPETE”. A solid yellow triangle with a cross face is next to a pink striped circle with a cross face. The solid yellow triangle says “I’m more oppressed”. The pink striped circle says “No! I am! I deserve more!”

7. Caption: “BOB WISHES TRIANGLES AND STRIPES COULD WORK TOGETHER”. An arrow points to a red striped circle with an open mouth, and a solid blue triangle with an open mouth. The red striped circle says “Oppression of one affects us all”. The solid blue triangle says “No liberation without equal representation”.

8. Text, in red: “INTERSECTIONALITY IS THE BELIEF THAT OPPRESSIONS ARE INTERLINKED AND CANNOT BE SOLVED ALONE”.

9. Text, in black: “OPPRESSIONS ARE NOT ISOLATED! INTERSECTIONALITY NOW”.


» Our Most Popular Posts in the Last 12 Months The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-13 08:01:14) 
[...] The best infographic ever? A briefing on intersectionality [...] 

» Our Most Popular Posts of 2013 The Sociological Imagination (2013-12-25 08:02:55) 
[...] The best infographic ever? A briefing on intersectionality [...] 

» The most popular posts over the last 5 years of Sociological Imagination The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 18:57:55) 
[...] The best infographic ever? A briefing on intersectionality [...]
The legacy of deindustrialisation has shaped the meaning of the urban landscape for young people in the West Midlands (2013-04-25 08:00)

This post by Anton Popov and Martin Price is based on the first full report of the [1]MYPLACE project, whose work we have regularly featured on Sociological Imagination. For more information on the MYPLACE project, visit the project’s website [2]HERE or the project’s blog [3]HERE. You can also follow MYPLACE on [4]twitter.

One aspect of the broader [5]MYPLACE project has been to explore the construction and trasmission of collective memory within European societies. In the UK we have addressed [6]these issues through research mainly in Coventry (although some fieldwork was conducted also in Nuneaton) in collaboration with the [7]Herbert Art Gallery and Museum. The aim of our research is to access young people’s memories of a particular period of British history within the context of the contemporary social, cultural and political processes that characterise present day Britain. The period identified for this aspect of the research is the 1970s-80s: a period in British history of radical transformations in the social, political and economic life of the country and one associated in the public mind with Margaret Thatcher. Against the background of economic recession, the Conservative government attempted a restructuring of industry that led to the closure of many factories, plants and collieries. Its individual-centred ideology, neo-liberal in its core, underpinned a raft of policies that aimed to roll back the state and envisaged ‘individuals’ rather than ‘society’ as the target of policy.
Given the selection of Coventry and Nuneaton as the fieldwork locations for the UK, the Herbert is an important access point to both the historical memories of the period in question and to young people who have engaged with these historical narratives through their involvement in the museum’s activities. The fieldwork for this part of the MYPLACE research was carried out from October 2011 until November 2012, and included observations at museum exhibits, as well as focus groups with young people, and expert interviews with museum staff.

In our approach to young people's memories of the 1970s and 1980s – a period that is identified as a ‘difficult’ or ‘problematic’ period of recent British history – we adopted an understanding of social memory as a dynamic process; as a socially constructed phenomenon, which is an aspect of the present and, therefore, different from history, which is preoccupied with the past.

Both Coventry and Nuneaton underwent substantial economic and socio-demographic changes as a result of de-industrialisation and re-structuring of local economies during the 1970s-80s. Historians of Coventry’s car industry describe the city at this time as ‘a microcosm of de-industrialisation’ when between 1975 and 1982 the fifteen largest firms in the city shed a total of around 55000 jobs. Over the decade up to 1981 Coventry’s population fell while unemployment rose.

The focus on the late 1970s to early 1980s has particular resonance at the current time of economic recession and thus offers great promise for the understanding of generational transmission of historical memory. However, current historical narratives related to this period tend to be structured around few key events – the miners’ strike of 1984, race riots (Bristol, Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side) in 1981-82, and the Falklands War of 1982, – while other aspects of political activism (such as CND and the Green movement) as well as the growth in popularity of radical right parties like the National Front are less prominent in the public narratives through which this period is represented and historical memories are constructed.
Working-class lives in de-industrialised society are commonly portrayed as being characterised by fragmentation of community relationships, poverty, violence, growing crime and substance abuse, and poor health. At the same time, the industrial past of British cities is often remembered nostalgically, not only by older generations of working class people but by society in general. Nostalgia can tell us more about the present than the past. As people experience living through the socio-economic transformations of post-industrial society they continue to express their present concerns through socio-cultural idioms rooted in the past.

Although the historical narratives of de-industrialisation and ‘urban decline’ are represented in the Herbert they are rather marginal to the main focus of the museum on other aspects of Coventry’s social history. The very approach to history dominant in the museum, focusing on communities and the lives of ‘ordinary people’, is arguably rooted in a left-wing opposition to Thatcherism’s assault on ‘society’.

Young people’s interpretation and internalisations of historical narratives through which the 1970s-80s are represented in the Herbert museum demonstrates that, as for many in the UK, for them that period continues to exert a lasting legacy which might be defined as providing ‘living memories of urban decline’. Memories of de-industrialisation in industrial centres such as Coventry continue to be lived by an increasingly marginalised working-class population. These memories are ‘living memories’ for many in Coventry partly because the closure of the manufacturing industries which provided the majority of work places in Coventry and the surrounding area had started in the late 1970s and continued throughout the 1990s up until the present day, when the future of the last car-manufacturing plant remaining in the city is uncertain. These living memories of de-industrialisation have translated into a feeling of the ‘depressing present’ expressed by many of our participants.

The living memories of deindustrialisation are expressed by young people in their interviews through the discourse of ‘urban decline’ when they focus on the social deprivation epitomised by the ‘council estates’. In their
interviews they reproduce the stereotypical and stigmatising view of estate residents as ‘underprivileged’ and lacking ‘respect’ for the ‘community’. At the same time, the ‘community’ is talked about in nostalgic terms of social solidarity and ‘respect’ and ‘security’. In their reflections on the ‘difficult past’ young people express their frustration and dissatisfaction with the present when they talk about lack of future prospects in the de-industrialised towns and cities of West Midlands. Ironically, they sometimes tend to idealise that period, even if they acknowledge that it was ‘difficult’. For example they ascribe more meaning and effectiveness to protest movements from the past than to contemporary online activism or violent clashes that took place during recent student protests and riots in August 2011. These nostalgic memories are a result of memory-work and they represent young people’s concerns with a contemporary society that they describe as unfair, unequal, and restrictive. Our analysis demonstrates how misremembering and forgetting on the part of younger and older generations contributes to the ‘community nostalgia’ narratives.

The living memories of de-industrialisation and urban decline have to be examined, however, in relation to other dominant historical and social discourses. Thus the Coventry Blitz (during WWII) has been mentioned as the ready-made response to the question about events in the local history which might be defined as ‘difficult’ or ‘problematic’. Memories of the Blitz play an important constitutive role for Coventry people as a ‘mnemonic community’ providing them with common ground for the forging of a well-established historical narrative. The discourse of multicultural Britain shaped during the years of the New Labour government has impacted on how young people see urban culture. It also has to be taken into consideration when we analyse how memories of racial tensions in the past (the race riots of the 1980s, for example) and the multicultural environment of contemporary British cities are interpreted by young people.

Last but not least, our research demonstrates the important role which popular culture and family play in what and how young people remember or forget about the period in question. Young people often mention classic British films as a source of information about particular events associated with the 1970s-80s (e.g. the miners’ strike) or music styles from that time (for example, punk, 2-Tone, heavy metal); although they are not always aware of the social context within which they occurred. The older generation of family members are also often mentioned not only as the source of memory narratives but also as influential figures in terms of socialisation in cultural practices (e.g. particular musical preferences) or political culture and social attitudes (socialism, mistrust towards the police, anti-racist or xenophobic ideas). In contrast, our research to date has not identified any significant role for school and college curricula in developing young people’s perceptions of the period of the 1970s and 1980s.

[The research leading to these findings has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme ([FP7/2007-2013] [FP7/2007-2011]) under Grant Agreement number FP7-266831).]

This post is based on the project’s first report, which can be read in full [8]here. It was originally published on the [9]LSE Politics Blog.

5. [http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/](http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/)
Interested in Asexuality Studies? Everything you need to get started contained within (2013-04-26 08:00)

This is the outline for the special theme issue of Psychology & Sexuality which I edited with Kristina Gupta and Todd Morrison. It was published in March 2013. The editorial and the 'virtual discussion' are open access (i.e. freely available without a university library subscription to the journal) until the end of May 2013.

[1]The Editorial for the Theme Issue, including a review of existing literature on asexuality and an attempt to formulate a cohesive agenda for Asexuality Studies


There is little evidence about the prevalence of absence of sexual attraction, or the characteristics of people reporting this, often labelled asexuals. We examine this using data from two probability surveys of the British general population, conducted in 1990–1991 and 2000–2001. Interviewers administered face-to-face and self-completion questionnaires to people aged 16–44 years (\(N = 13,765\) in 1990–1991; \(N = 12,110\) in 2000–2001). The proportion that had never experienced sexual attraction was 0.4 % (95 % CI: 0.3–0.5 %) in 2000–2001, with no significant variation by gender or age, versus 0.9 % (95 % CI: 0.7–1.1 %) in 1990–1991; \(p < 0.0001\). Among these 79 respondents in 2000–2001, 28 (40.3 % men; 33.9 % women) had had sex, 19 (33.5 % men; 20.9 % women) had child(ren), and 17 (30.1 % men; 19.2 % women) were married. Three-quarters of asexual men and two-thirds of asexual women considered their frequency of sex ‘about right’, while 24.7 % and 19.4 %, respectively, ‘always enjoyed having sex’. As well as providing evidence on the distribution of asexuality in Britain, our data suggest that it cannot be assumed that those reporting no sexual attraction are sexually inexperienced or without intimate relationships. We recognise the possibility of social desirability bias given our reliance on self-reported data, but suggest that its effect is not easily predicted regarding absence of sexual attraction.

[3]Mental health and interpersonal functioning in self-identified asexual men and women

Human asexuality is defined as a lack of sexual attraction to anyone or anything, and preliminary evidence suggests that it may best be defined as a sexual orientation. As asexual individuals may face the same social stigma experienced by gay, lesbian and bisexual persons, it follows that asexual individuals may experience higher rates of psychiatric disturbance that have been observed among these non-heterosexual individuals. This study explored mental health correlates and interpersonal functioning and compared asexual, non-heterosexual and heterosexual individuals on these aspects of mental health. Analyses were limited to Caucasian participants only. There were significant differences among groups on several measures, including depression, anxiety, psychoticism, suicidality and interpersonal problems, and this study provided evidence that asexuality may be associated with higher prevalence of mental health and interpersonal problems. Clinical implications are indicated, in that asexual individuals should be adequately assessed for mental health difficulties and provided with appropriate interventions that are sensitive to their asexual identity.

[4]HSDD and asexuality: a question of instruments

The relation between the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manuals (DSMs) and asexuality is likely to constitute a prolific direction in research, especially because of the diagnostic category ‘hypoactive sexual desire disorder’ (HSDD). This article investigates the concept of sexual desire as outlined by psychiatry and explores the ways in which asexuality disrupts that knowledge. By extension, I consider the model of sexuality that the DSM vehiculates. The manuals themselves provide no measures, no scales, and no defined norms, yet, simultaneously, assume a normative sexuality against which all others can be measured and classified. This
article discusses the conceptualisation of ‘sexual dysfunctions’ in the DSM, of which HSDD is a part, and questions how it operates in clinical research into asexuality. I also pay attention to the clause of ‘personal distress’ in HSDD, since it appears to be one of the main differences between HSDD and asexuality. HSDD, asexuality, and the role played by the DSM poses questions such as what discourses, forms of knowledge, and institutions, have shaped, silenced, and eventually erased, asexuality.


This article draws attention to the constitutive mechanisms of asexual identity. It identifies a shift in expert discourse: a move away from pathology towards recognition of asexual identity. While this discursive shift, propelled by recent research in psychology and sexology, could pave the way for the inclusion of asexuals in public culture, it also reaffirms dominant terms and formations pertaining to sexuality and intimacy. The article argues that the discursive formation of a new asexual identity takes place through a process of objectification and subjectification/subjection at the interface between expert disciplines and activism. The recognition of identity is constitutive of subjects that are particularly suitable for self-regulation within the parameters of (neo)liberal citizenship. Yet, at the same time, the discursive shift also makes room for critical intervention akin to queer critique of naturalised gender and sexuality norms. The recognition of asexual identity could serve to destabilise the sexual regime (of truth) that privileges sexual relationships against other affiliations and grants sexual-biological relationships a status as primary in the formation of family and kinship relations. The article concludes that asexual identity encourages us to imagine other pathways of affiliation and other concepts of personhood, beyond the tenets of liberal humanism – gesturing instead towards new configurations of the human and new meanings of sexual citizenship.


Contributors to this thematic issue were requested to answer six questions related to asexuality as a phenomenon and also the research therein. All responses received were collated into a ‘virtual discussion’ with the hope of spawning new ideas and also identifying any gaps in the current research and general knowledge regarding asexuality.

[8] Review of Sex, lies and pharmaceuticals: how drug companies plan to profit from Female Sexual Dysfunction

[9] Review of Understanding Asexuality

And here are some of my favourite papers that have been written elsewhere on asexuality:

[10] Coming to an Asexual Identity: Negotiating Identity, Negotiating Desire

Sexuality is generally considered an important aspect of self-hood. Therefore, individuals who do not experience sexual attraction, and embrace an asexual identity are in a unique position to inform the social construction of sexuality. This study explores the experiences of asexual individuals utilizing open ended Internet survey data from 102 self-identified asexual people. In this paper I describe several distinct aspects of asexual identities: the meanings of sexual, and therefore, asexual behaviors, essentialist characterizations of asexuality, and lastly, interest in romance as a distinct dimension of sexuality. These findings have implications not only for asexual identities, but also for the connections of asexuality with other marginalized sexualities.

While same-sex marriage debates have captured public attention, it is but one component of a broader discussion regarding the role of marriage in a changing society. To inform this discussion, I draw on qualitative, Internet survey data from 102 self-identified asexual individuals. I find that asexual relationships are complicated and nuanced in ways that have implications for a GLBTQ political agenda, including same-sex marriage recognition. In addition, findings indicate that assumptions of sex and sexuality in relationships are problematic and that present language for describing relationships is limiting. Findings suggest a social justice agenda for marginalized sexualities should be broader in scope than same-sex marriage.

[12] There’s more to life than sex? Difference and commonality within the asexual community
Asexuality is becoming ever more widely known and yet it has received relatively little attention from within sociology. Research in the area poses particular challenges because of the relatively recent emergence of the asexual community, as well as the expanding array of terms and concepts through which asexuals articulate their differences and affirm their commonalities. This article presents the initial findings of a mixed-methods research project, which involved semi-structured interviews, online questionnaires and a thematic analysis of online materials produced by members of the asexual community. The aim was to understand self-identified asexuals in their own terms so as to gain understanding of the lived experience of asexuals, as well as offering a subjectively adequate grounding for future research in the area.

[13] Crisis and safety: The asexual in sexusociety
This article provides a discussion of the implications that asexuality, as an identity category emerging in the West, carries for sexuality. Asexuality provides an exciting forum for revisiting questions of sexual normativity and examining those sex acts which are cemented to appear ‘natural’ through repetition, in the discursive system of sexusociety. Drawing especially on feminist and postmodern theories, I situate asexuality as both a product of and reaction against our sexusocial, disoriented postmodern here and now. This article also addresses the question of whether or not, and on what terms, asexuality may be considered a resistance against sexusociety.

[14] Asexuality in disability narratives
This essay explores normative regulations of disabled people’s sexuality and its relationship with asexuality through narratives of disabled individuals. While asexuality has been persistently criticized as a damaging myth imposed on disabled people, individuals with disabilities who do not identify as sexual highlight the inseparable intersection between normality and sexuality. Disabled and asexual identity and its narratives reveal that asexuality is an embodiment neither to be eliminated, nor to be cured, and is a way of living that may or may not change. Claims for the sexual rights of desexualized minority groups mistakenly target asexuality and endorse a universal and persistent presence of sexual desire. The structurally and socially enforced asexuality and desexualization are distinguished from an asexual embodiment and perspective disidentifying oneself from sexuality.

11. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2892980/
12. http://sexualities.sagepub.com/content/14/4/462.abstract
Professor Steven Rose ‘Can Neuroscience Explain the Mind’ (2013-04-27 08:00)


If you enjoyed this lecture then you’ll love the dialogue between Steven Rose and Richard Dawkins [2]here.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/8jokBzytT_U

Valuing the BBC: A half day seminar at City University London, May 9th (2013-04-28 08:00)

City University London presents a half day seminar exploring the public value of the BBC. The seminar offers a range of perspectives on the BBC’s role in public life, discussing the BBC Trust, science reporting, research with the BBC and public service broadcasting in an international perspective.

City University London has been at the cutting edge of developing research on cultural value and this seminar is part of that work. The first part of the seminar is based on an AHRC funded project that has looked at how the BBC Trust uses the idea of public value and its public value test. The BBC Trust has used public value as a system of articulating the importance of the institution to British and global public life as well as a method for assessing the value of proposals within the BBC itself. Dr Dave O’Brien, from City’s Centre for Cultural Policy and Management, will present the findings of fieldwork with the BBC Trust that has investigated how public value plays out in practice. His presentation will be in response to opening comments by Diane Coyle, vice chair of the BBC Trust.

The second part of the seminar will be a panel consisting of three presentations from academics from City University London. Prof Toby Miller, from the Centre for Cultural Policy and Management, will discuss the BBC’s public service broadcasting role using a range of international examples drawn from his work. Connie St Louis, Director of City’s Science Journalism MA, will explore the BBC Trust’s Review of impartiality and accuracy of the BBC’s coverage of science. Finally, Dr Sam Friedman, from City’s Department of Sociology, will reflect on the BBC’s Great British Class Survey and the relationship between academic research and the BBC.

The seminar will be of interest to the public, academia and journalists. All are welcome.

timetable:
9.30-10am arrivals and coffee

10am-10.20am Diane Coyle

10.20am-10.50am Dave O'Brien

10.50am-11.20 Q & A for Diane and Dave

11.20-1pm Panel session with Toby, Connie and Sam, including Q &A

To book a place contact Dave O'Brien [1]dave.obrien.1@city.ac.uk

1. mailto:dave.obrien.1@city.ac.uk

The Rorty Discussion with Donald Davidson (2013-04-28 11:05)

In these videos two of the most influential American philosophers of the 20th century, Richard Rorty and Donald Davidson, discuss a range of pressing philosophical issues. One particularly interesting thing about this dialogue is how clearly it shows the degree to which Rorty, often decried rather unfairly as a postmodernist, was embedded within the tradition of analytic philosophy which he ultimately rejected.

Happiness and young people's aspirations: freedom or constraint? (2013-04-29 08:00)

It's strange (and slightly disturbing) to think that I've been researching young people's educational and employment choices and aspirations for over a decade now - from my doctorate, that looked at gender and the choice to study maths, to this current project. One thing I've noticed is how young people increasingly cite happiness as a rationale for their choices. This happiness is seen by those citing it, both to offer freedom and to guarantee the future. But in this post I want to question this by showing how happiness carries its own constraints.

I'll start with some data from around 2006, collected as part of the EU-funded PREMA project. This project, like my doctorate, explored gender and post-16 mathematics. It interviewed young people who had opted into maths and those who had opted out. These typical extracts from two White young women show how they take enjoyment as a guarantee of future success:
It’s important to do well in art and art history: ‘because I enjoy it, that’s why it’s important to me. ... Like I said I am not one to take something just because I’m good at it. ... You know it’s a difficult exam [art history] but because I’m really interested in it I’m sure I’ll do much better than I would otherwise ... I think it’s more important to do what you enjoy, that’s all.’

I’m kind of stumped at the minute I don’t, um, I don’t think I want to go to university because, I don’t really think that’s the thing for me. I think I want to take a gap year, and then and then, a job in something ... so I don’t really think that I’m taking those three subjects to get a career in that I just picked things that I enjoy ... and hopefully, that would be good for everything.

On one level young people choosing what gives them pleasure is something to celebrate – it’s certainly feels better than young people talking about being compelled to follow this or that path. And yet, I hope to show that enjoyment, pleasure and happiness aren’t as innocent as they first appear.

First, as Nikolas Rose has documented, in his book [2] Governing the Soul, we are compelled to make choices in pursuance ‘of meaning, responsibility, a sense of personal achievement, a maximized ‘quality of life’, and hence of work’ (p.104). In other words we have no choice but to choose:

We are obliged to make our lives meaningful by selecting our personal lifestyle from those offered to us in advertising, soap operas, and films, to make sense of our existence by exercising our freedom to choose in a market in which one simultaneously purchases products and services, and assembles, manages and markets oneself.

Ironically having to find fulfilment through our work usually means that we end up working longer hours and protesting less, which Karl Marx might have viewed as a clever ruse of capitalism to make us complicit in our own exploitation.

Second, talk about happiness and enjoyment was usually tied to talk about parents. Here’s one of the PREMA girls again:

[My parents] just tell me to do what I want to do. They want me to be happy I mean they didn’t, of course my dad wanted me to stay, my dad wanted and my mum wanted me to stay at school, and but they said ‘if you didn’t want to do that that’s your choice we’re, we’re going to support you whatever you want obviously. If you don’t want to do that then don’t do it, if you’re not going to be happy doing that then don’t do it because you’re not going to be happy, you’re not going to want to work as hard’. They just want me to do what I’m going to enjoy the most.

This happiness-and-parents-talk recurred among the focus groups with 16 year-olds that [3] Dawn Leslie, Rob Toplis and I carried out last Spring for an evaluation funded by [4] the Institute of Physics (IOP). Here again we can see a general sense of parents as caring and willing to ‘support me in whatever I do’. Here’s one girl and one boy (both Indian):

I think my parents have always just kind of said they will support me in whatever it is I do. My dad always makes jokes like I’m his retirement plan ... so my interest in what I kind of want to do has just been all me.
When we ... came here to get our reports like with the form tutor and [parents] would like talk about what we want to do in the future ... and see if it’s the right option for you.

Thus these young people’s selfhood and happiness were central to their educational and career choices.

[Sara Ahmed’s (2009)] work on conditional happiness is relevant here. As she writes, the parental desire for their child to do whatever makes them happy appears to ‘offer a certain kind of freedom, as if to say: ‘I don’t want you to be this, or to do that; I just want you to be or to do ‘whatever’ makes you happy.’ You could say that the ‘whatever’ seems to release us from the obligation of the ‘what’. The desire just for the child’s happiness seems to offer the freedom of a certain indifference to the content of a decision’ (p.8). However, happiness is ‘not what might happen, but what will happen if you live your life in the right way. That happiness can signal a ‘right way’ suggests that happiness is already given to certain objects’ (p.2). Ahmed focuses on marriage and children as such ‘happy objects’, but I think that we could apply this to careers – with university, and medicine and other professional careers figuring as ‘happy objects’ for many parents.

If the parents’ happiness is contingent on the child’s, since the parents ‘are already in place ... their happiness comes first’ (p.6): the child has an obligation to follow their parents’ ‘happy objects’. As one young man in the IOP research put it, ‘you know your parents are going to be happy with you getting the grades, that’s the motivation to see your parents happy’. The existence of happy-career-objects was most explicitly acknowledged by one young woman who chose the pseudonym Nora:

[At the Parents Careers Evening] you got to like know as well like what your parents, like want you, it’s just like, you know certain stations, my mum got like ‘okay, yeah let’s go there’. And there was some that my mum like didn’t actually really want me to go to coz, there’s this Asian thing [laughter] ... [So what did you find out there?] Like it depends on the things like. If they know it is a good job and everything they would be like happy to support you and everything. But like, you know like some things they are just like, ‘yeah that’s a good thing but try something else’.

Here Nora shows her awareness of what she calls ‘an Asian thing’ – that there are some careers that her parents would not be happy about.

The constraints of happiness, while they may push people towards different happy objects, act across gender, class, ethnicity. Happiness is not as happy-go-lucky as it may first appear. I’m looking forward to seeing how happiness figures both in the narratives of our case study celebrities and in the thinking around the futures of young people in our study when we carry out the individual interviews in the summer.

This article by Heather Mendick was originally posted on the [Celeb Youth website.](http://prema.iacm.forth.gr/)

2. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Governing-Soul-Shaping-Private-Self/dp/1853434442](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Governing-Soul-Shaping-Private-Self/dp/1853434442)
What are you doing tonight? I'm going out to commit some sociology... (2013-04-30 08:00)

In the wake of a [1]foiled terrorist attack in Canada, recent comments have offered a [2]fascinating insight into mindset of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

Now is not the time to "commit sociology," Prime Minister Stephen Harper said Thursday in the wake of a foiled terrorist plot to attack a Via Rail passenger train that has some now musing about the causes of radicalization.

"In terms of radicalization, this is obviously something we follow. Our security agencies work with each other and with others around the globe to track people who are threats to Canada and to watch threats that may evolve. I think though, this is not a time to commit sociology," he said.

"Global terrorist attacks, people who have agendas of violence that are deep and abiding, are a threat to all the values that our society stands for and I don't think we want to convey any view to the Canadian public other than our utter condemnation of this kind of violence, contemplation of this violence and our utter determination through our laws and through our activities to do everything we can to prevent and counter it."

What I love about this is the manner in which the clumsy mode of expression ('committing sociology') works to foreground what is a much more pervasive attitude among the political class: explanation is construed as tantamount to justification. This is something I've talked with Les Back about in two podcasts about the UK riots ([3]first and [4]second) where, analogously to 'committing sociology', there was much public proclamation of this disorder being 'criminality pure and simple'. In each case, our political leaders display an orientation which is not simply a scepticism about 'committing sociology' but a desire to proclaim the indefensibility of sociological reasoning and performatively purge it from the public discussion.

But what is it they are seeking to purge? It is not per se academic sociology. I would suggest the hostility is directed towards a mode of sociological reasoning which is under attack within sociology: one that is causal, humanistic and explanatory. The mode of sociological reasoning which Harper feels compelled to preemptively dismiss is one which would avoids the merely descriptive (where would be the subversive challenge in that?) but rather seeks to offer causal explanations of how social action does not emerge ex nihilo, with the most 'extreme' acts constituting situated responses to social circumstances with a far broader reach than that of the actors themselves. The prohibition being enacted by Harper and others is on explanation rather than simply understanding: the
challenge is posed by a mode of reasoning that doesn’t merely aim to understand the other from their own point of view but instead explains how that point of view came into being within a shared social context, identifying the social facts *irreducible* to individuals which nonetheless have led particular individuals to violent action. There is a space of questions which is being shut down here but, crucially, it is also being shut down in a range of ways within sociology itself.


I think Harper’s request here is even simpler still and that’s ‘not to humanise the terrorists’: presumably to allow for a tough judicial response.

4.5 May

**Reflecting on the Riots (2013-05-01 08:00)**

In the first episode of the LSE British Politicast, we take a closer look at the Riots of 2011. This podcast looks back on the riots, presenting sociological and criminological perspectives on why they happened and what, if anything, can be learned from them. **Tim Newburn**, Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at the LSE, talks about his award winning research project [2]Reading the Riots, which aimed to examine in detail at who was involved, the extent and nature of their participation, and their accounts of what prompted or motivated their actions. **Les Back**, Professor of Sociology at Goldsmith’s College walks us through Catford, London, which along with the surrounding area of Lewisham, caught the attention of the national media when its multiple shops were raided and destroyed in the riots. He notes how today’s disaffected youth experience an “intense sense of the present”.

You can listen to the podcast [3]here.

The idea for this followed from the [4]UK Riots project I’ve been working on here on Sociological Imagination for the last year or so.

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Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz discuss the Economy and Inequality (2013-05-01 22:22)

The dawn of Cafe Society (2013-05-02 08:00)

I have for over 40 years written in cafes. In the early 1970s I scribbled in longhand, always having a notebook and biro about me somewhere. More recently, of course, I have carried a lightweight laptop around, several books chapters or papers on the go simultaneously. Still, however, I often link the writing of a particular piece with a particular location. As I can consume less coffee – I had a cup in front of me almost permanently through to my late 50s, regarding it as an occupational given – I have substituted the odd bar for a café, especially if working late. So this webpage will be about cafes and the odd bar or two.

What better place to begin than Trondheim. For several years I have been a visiting speaker at the Norwegian health sociology workshop, usually in mid- or late April. My host, Aksel Tjora, now Professor of Sociology in Trondheim, is as enamoured of cafes as I am, hence our current project to co-edit a book on Café Society. And naturally we had to discuss and commence this volume in Trondheim’s cafes (and bars). The photo here shows the two of us sitting out in the Trondheim sunshine getting the project underway.

In the course of my own research for the book I went beyond a time-bound fascination with Sartre and de Beauvoir and their acolytes working in Les Deux Maggots in Paris, or with writers, artists and would-be revolutionar-
ties talking and conspiring in Vienna’s famous and still-luxurious coffee houses (both of which I have sampled in my time). Instead, I turned to London’s earliest coffee drinkers. So these few lines give a context to the city in which my coffee consumption has been greatest by far.

Coffee was entirely unknown before the middle of the 15th century, when it was absorbed initially into the drinking habits of people in the Red Sea basin, infiltrating the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century. It was in the course of the 16th century that it came to Britain. The first English coffeehouse opened in Oxford in 1650. In 1652 an Armenian, or maybe Greek, immigrant from Smyrna, Pasqua Rosee, financed by his merchant employer Daniel Edwards, set up an establishment in St Michael’s Alley at Cornhill. The habit of coffee drinking and the emergence of the coffeehouse have fascinated Western historians ever since, not least because of their association with a civil society beyond monarchical reach. The period from the end of the 17th century through the ‘long’ 18th century saw the coffeehouse come to play a significant political role as a forum of debate and dissent independent of Parliament (see my blog on ‘Habermas, civil society and the public sphere’). By the start of the 19th century, concluding a longstanding rivalry, tea had been usurped by coffee. Coffee had even displaced ale as the national drink. Early in the 19th century, however, the coffeehouse underwent a protracted period of class-based retrenchment, from which it only re-emerged – as coffee prices fell – with the sponsorship of Arab, Turk, Greek, Sicilian and other émigrés in the course of the second half of the 19th century. London’s Soho, a magnet for émigrés, proved a key location. Although there were perhaps as many as 1,400 coffeehouses in the London area by the end of the 19th century, they had not regained their earlier political salience; the bourgeois coffeehouses had largely given way to the more lowly coffee room. The 20th century may have set off inauspiciously for the coffeehouse but following the success of milk bars from the 1930s, the coffee bar, seen initially as something of a ‘low-life’ resource, proved extremely popular in the 1950s. In 1945 Gaggia adapted the espresso machine to create a high pressure extraction that produced a thick level of crema; and by 1946 the cappuccino – christened for its resemblance to the colour of the robes worn by the capuchin monks – had been delivered: the unique selling point of the classic café had arrived. Coffee bars were rife in London’s Soho by the mid-1950s, the first, a classic Formica café called The Mocha at 29 Frith Street, being opened by Gina Lollabrigida in 1953. Rippling rapidly out of Soho, these cafes became magnets for political activists, jazz players, nouveau existentialists (although delivering ‘The Outsiders’ rather than ‘Ethics of Ambiguity’ or ‘Being and Nothingness’) and beatnik babyboomers, anticipating and feeding the cultural explosion of the 1960s. The 1970s witnessed a rise in unemployment as oil prices quadrupled and Britain’s manufacturing base halved, signalling a recession that left only a handful of diehard café groups untroubled: the Lyons’ Wimpy Bars (established in 1954) and the Golden Eggs (set up by Reggie Kray and others in the early 1960s). This proved a significant juncture, a transition from Fordist, industrial welfare-statist capitalism to post-Fordist, post-industrial, post-welfare-statist capitalism. By the onset of the Thatcherite 1980s cafes were struggling again, further challenged by a revitalised publ culture, burger conglomerates and a mushrooming of sandwich bars. Meanwhile things were stirring in the USA and a ‘speciality coffee industry’ was beginning to flex its corporate muscle. In the new consumerist landscape American cafes encouraged people to ‘hang out’, to idle away the afternoon, and to do so without paying very much. Surely only the Americans could market a ‘13-shot venti soy hazlenut vanilla cinnamon white mocha with extra white mocha and caramel’? Starbucks was founded in 1971, and its time had now come. But the story of Starbucks is for another occasion. This was originally posted on [2]Graham Scambler’s blog. You can follow his ongoing Cafe Society project [3]here.

"Painting primates" by Justin Goodman and Joseph Klett

Welcome to the first article in our visual sociology column! It introduces a less widely known area of sociology: the study of animals and society. Do check out the website of the [1]American Sociological Association’s Section on Animals and Society (and their [2]Facebook page) to learn more about this fascinating subfield of sociology.

The photograph, titled ‘Melody’ and taken in 2013, is part of Painting Primates: A collaboration between human and chimpanzee artists, a project by Justin Goodman and Joseph Klett. In the image, you can see the human artist working on the canvas which has already been painted on by his chimpanzee collaborator.

In this photograph, human artist Nathaniel Gold, author of the [3]Chimpanzee Manifesto, paints a portrait of a young chimpanzee named [4]Melody, a resident of Florida's Save the Chimps sanctuary. The piece is being painted on a canvas started by Cheetah, another resident of the sanctuary who was rescued from a laboratory and now chooses to paint as a form of behavioural enrichment.

The photo is part of research by Goodman and Klett documenting the [5]collaborative art project between Gold, [6]Cheetah and other chimpanzees that is being featured in the forthcoming art show, [7]"Equality & Individuality: Collaborative Art Between Primates." This article, [8]Painting with Chimps, introduces Gold’s work in more detail.

Justin Goodman ([10]justin.goodman@marymount.edu) is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Marymount University and a member of the leadership council of the American Sociological Association's Section on Animals and Society. Joseph Klett ([11]joseph.klett@yale.edu) is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at Yale University.
Poster for "Equality and Individuality: Collaborative art between primates" (click on the photo to see the event)
May 3, 2013

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [13]S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [14]here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

1. [http://www2.asanet.org/sectionanimals/](http://www2.asanet.org/sectionanimals/)
2. [https://www.facebook.com/AnimalsAndSocietyASA](https://www.facebook.com/AnimalsAndSocietyASA)
Interested in Digital Sociology? (2013-05-04 08:00)

The British Sociological Association’s new Digital Sociology group aims:

- To identify and disseminate best practice in the use of digital tools by sociologists.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological modes of inquiry into digital media use.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological responses to ‘big data’, in terms of both secondary analysis and the broader methodological questions posed by this transformation in the information systems of late capitalist society.
- To develop and promote specifically sociological analyses of the broader personal, cultural and structural changes of the ‘digital turn’ in social life.
- To provide an open forum for exploration of what the digital turn entails for sociological practice, professional identity and the future of the discipline.


1. http://digitalsociology.org.uk/
Normativity is a concept with a contentious history. While most would accept its centrality to everyday human experience, the question of what exactly it is and how it is to be explained has rarely, if ever, commanded widespread agreement. In this review essay I will consider two important recent contributions to this debate, summarising and evaluating each in turn before attempting to draw out the important issues these books raise for work on normativity.

In Explaining the Normative, Stephen Turner seeks to unpick the messy intellectual history of normativity and, through doing so, offer an account of exactly where the debate about the notion has gone wrong and how it might be put right. He suggests that the pervasiveness of the issue within the contemporary philosophical landscape is a consequence of normativity’s historical position at the interface between philosophy and the social sciences. With the emergence of social science and the continual growth of its explanatory ambitions, many philosophers have sought to stake out a particular area of human life unamenable to causal explanation. Normativity represents ‘a more or less self-conscious attempt to take back ground lost to social-science explanation’ (Turner 2010: 5).

The first chapter of the book attempts to draw out the common features which philosophical accounts of normativity tend to share. While recognising the diversity which characterises normative arguments, he nonetheless claims the existence both of a strong family resemblance and an array of generic problems which afflict theories of normativity. Perhaps the most pertinent of these is what Turner calls the ‘does it matter problem’. The normativist must say that norms are ineliminable from explanation. Yet while ‘ordinarily the explanation of action involves beliefs’, the validity of those beliefs (i.e. the usual subject matter of the normativist) ‘is not explanatory in itself’ (Turner 2010: 13).

The second chapter of the book interrogates the explanatory conflict between philosophical and sociological accounts of normativity. Much of this discussion hinges on what explanatory role normativity can play and how this issue has generally been framed from within the two disciplinary perspectives. Normativists argue that normative facts cannot be explained in non-normative ways. One can point to the sociological fact of adherence to a norm but this in itself cannot constitute genuine normativity. Yet this sociological fact is nearly empirically equivalent and usually seems explanatorily adequate to account for why people do the things they do. So social scientists have tended to ask what role there actually is for normativity.

The third chapter takes a slightly different direction, exploring the normativity of law as a case study. Turner traces development in the thinking of the great 20th century legal theorist Hans Kelsen who spent a lifetime trying to establish the normativity of law. While some of this discussion might be difficult to follow for those unfamiliar with the subject area, it functions effectively as a case study, illustrating the generalised and abstract points drawn in the first two chapters at a much more substantive level of intellectual debate. The fourth chapter uses the practice of anthropological explanation to explore the normativity of concepts. The discussion centres around the work of Peter Winch, taken as a writer who typifies the normativist tradition within social science, for whom ‘social or natural explanations of essentially conceptual or normative subjects are always inadequate to account for the phenomena properly described in their full conceptual significance’ (Turner 2010: 110). The fifth chapter explores the possibility of grounding normativity in an account of collective intentionality. As Turner writes, ‘collective intentionality does appear to provide something objective, at least for a community or collectivity: a standard that is factual in some sense and at the same time normative’ (Turner 2010: 121). However he argues that such accounts fail because they presuppose ideas about collectivity which are themselves ungrounded. The sixth chapter draws together many of the ideas articulated earlier in the book and represents the fulfilment of Turner’s titular promise to explain the normative. The crux of his argument is this: why invoke a special domain of fact outside the stream of ordinary explanation when the things we would locate within it can be explained naturalistically? Intriguingly Turner draws on cognitive science and neuroscience to posit empathy as a naturalistic explanation for apparently normative phenomena. He argues that ‘the ‘norms’ that govern meaning, the meanings of terms applied to the world, may be readily understood in nonnormative terms: as empathic projections that are confirmed, sustained, corrected and
improved through interaction with others' (Turner 2010: 177-178). In doing so he cuts through the gordian knot at the heart of the debate about normativity: how to explain normative phenomena in a naturalistic way without explaining them away. Empathy has a 'natural process underlying it: both the capacity, actually employed, of emulating or following the thought of another and the feedback generated by actual social interaction'. As he points out, these are 'facts of social theory (and of neuroscience)' (Turner 2010: 205). While Turner makes a powerful case about the function of empathy, it would be a mistake to see this as the central feature of his book. What makes Explaining the Normative such an impressive book is the way that Turner's argument is grounded not just in a vast knowledge of historical debates but in the intellectual biographies of individual theorists who grappled with issues relating to normativity. For instance he traces the development of Kelsen's thought over his lifetime, showing how his engagement with the problems of normativity ultimately forced him to reject many of the characteristic normativist claims, leading him to see the notion of a ground for legal normativity as fundamentally fictitious. Similarly he shows how Winch's attempt to come to terms with the strange case of the Azande (who seemed to reason in ways which violated the norms of their own thought) led him to abandon the idea of internal relations: 'logical relations between concepts, or concepts and actions, which are intrinsically normative: they specify the standards of correctness and are conceptual rather than merely psychological and causal' (Turner 2010: 103). Instead Winch introduces the notion of 'intellectual habits', cognitive dispositions which we must understand in order to interpret other cultures. In doing so, he introduces a parallel natural order of dispositions and habits which is more than capable of doing the explanatory work necessary to explain the practice of the Azande. As with Kelsen, Winch's attempts to grapple with the normative ultimately led him away from normativism. Turner's approach to such cases makes the problem of normativity come alive, as the lived concern of real persons, rather than an abstract object of philosophical wrangling. The result is that his own positive account, relatively brief though it is, possesses much more force than it might if stated outright as a free-standing thesis. In the Causal Power of Social Structures, Dave Elder-Vass sets out to provide a comprehensive realist solution to the problem of structure and agency, encompassing a whole range of issues within a lively and multi-faceted discussion. While only one chapter of the book deals explicitly with normativity, it is considered in its entirety here because of how closely Elder-Vass's arguments hang together. The first three chapters of the book set out a realist account of emergence and causality. He advocates a relational theory of emergence which understands the causal powers of any given entity as a function of its internal relations over a range of ontological strata. As with other sections of the book, the conceptual clarity which Elder-Vass shows in his writing really illuminates a discussion which might otherwise have been technical and obscure. Furthermore while these chapters offer an admirable contribution to the philosophy of social science in their own right, they also stand as the theoretical architecture which Elder-Vass draws upon in articulating his social theory. Such logical consistency is evident throughout the book and it's one of the most impressive features of it. The fourth chapter offers an instructive overview of prevailing accounts of structure within social theory. Elder-Vass explores these accounts in terms of the questions of social ontology dealt with in the first few chapters before offering his own: 'to the extent that it refers to something genuinely causally effective, the concept of social structure refers to the causal powers of specific social groups' (Elder-Vass 2010: 86). As such, questions about structure are irrevocably linked with questions about agency for Elder-Vass. These are dealt with in the fifth chapter, where much of the discussion centres around an ambitious attempt to synthesise the work of Margaret Archer on reflexivity and Pierre Bourdieu on habitus into what Elder-Vass calls an 'emergentist theory of action'. Though neither theorist would likely accept the ensuing account, his reconciliation of deliberation and habitus is an intriguing proposition, which is thoughtfully grounded in human neurobiology. The sixth chapter is where Elder-Vass explores normativity through his notion of 'norm circles'. Elder-Vass argues that norm circles, a concept derived in part from Simmel's conception of social circles, have 'emergent causal powers to influence their members, by virtue of the ways in which those members interact in them' (Elder-Vass 2010: 122). These powers are founded on the commitment which members of the circle have to endorse and enforce practices which are congruent with the norm in question. Such a circle is centred around the collective intention which members have to support the norm and the individual behaviours which flow from this intention: 'They may support the norm by advocating the practice, by praising or rewarding those who enact it, by criticising or punishing those who fail to enact it, or even just by ostentatiously enacting it themselves. The consequence of such endorsement and enforcement is that the members of the circle know they face a systematic incentive to enact the practice.' (Elder-Vass 2010: 124). This is another example of the logical
consistency exhibited by the book’s arguments. As advocated in the meta-theory of social ontology elaborated in the first section of the book, Elder-Vass seeks to identify the causal power of specific social groups rather than subsuming such crucial ontological questions under a general account of normative social institutions. In this case he argues that specific norms circles, obtaining for particular norms, account for the normative causal influences which individuals experience in their daily lives. The relations between members of such a norm circle 'provide a generative mechanism that gives the norm circle an emergent property or causal power: the tendency to increase conformity by its members to the norm' (Turner and Elder Vass 2010: 124). Given the normative heterogeneity which is evident in contemporary society, every individual is embroiled in a whole array of intersecting norm circles such that they must 'sometimes negotiate a path that balances normative commitments that are in tension with each other' (Turner and Elder Vass 2010: 143). If followed through empirically, this insight about normative intersectionality transforms 'norm circles' from a seemingly quite formalistic concept into an extremely incisive one, able to gain considerable explanatory purchase upon our everyday experience of normativity. The seventh chapter extends this approach to social theorising in order to offer an account of organizations. As with other chapters, he proceeds through the identification of specific social groupings, the internal relations of which give rise to emergent powers at the level of the whole. One particularly intriguing aspect of this discussion is his use of Goffman's notion of 'interaction situations' as a way of founding his claims about social structure on an analysis of the experience of individual actors in concrete situations. The eighth chapter draws on the preceding work to articulate an analytical typology of social events, identifying both the ontological basis of each and the explanatory practice best suited to it. The conclusion aptly draws together the diverse strands of the book, restating them in a succinct and clear way which helps situate them within their wider intellectual context. In fact Elder-Vass exhibits this skill throughout, with a similar review of his arguments at the end of each chapter. This goes hand-in-hand with another defining feature of the book, noted earlier, which is the logical consistency evident throughout. It is an impressive feat to cover so much ground within a single text and yet still maintain such interdependence between arguments, as well as a striking unity of intellectual purpose. Explaining the Normative and the Causal Powers of Social Structure are two important contributions to research about normativity. Superficially they seem quite different, with the former’s focus on the history of philosophical thought and the latter’s concern with social ontology. However one important aspect they both share is the central role which the findings of neuroscience play in their conclusions. Turner looks to the discovery of ‘mirror neurons’, which activate both when we perform an action and when we see another perform the same action, as a way of explaining many of the phenomena which normativists have tended to claim as their own. This inbuilt capacity to understand the behaviour of others transforms empathy from ‘an intellectual process bound up with the error-prone folk language of intentionality’ into a ‘fact of science with a discoverable set of features located in specific neuronal processes’ (Turner 2010: 176). The conclusion Turner draws is that the ‘norms’ that govern meaning, the meanings of terms applied to the world, may be readily understood in nonnormative terms: as empathic projections that are confirmed, sustained, corrected and improved through interaction with others.’ (Turner 2010: 177-178). Similarly Elder-Vass invokes neuroplasticity, the manner in which the networks of neurons in our brain are conditioned and configured by experience, in order to explain the processes of emergence through which our capacity for action results from the biological without being reducible to it. Though these are different ideas, utilised by each theorist for a different purpose, a similar direction of thought can be seen in both accounts. As Elder-Vass puts it ‘we can explain the powers of human individuals without explaining them away’ (Elder-Vass 2010: 93). This is also Turner’s great insight, although he does not express it quite so succinctly. What Explaining the Normative does do however is foreground the way in which underlying human concerns and cross-disciplinary disputes have shaped the historical debate about normativity. On one side the normativists have sought to defend the distinctiveness of the human against the expansion of naturalistic explanation. On the other naturalists have tried to causally explain human experience, against the mystifications of transcendental philosophy, though have too often explained it away. Taken together these two books illustrate powerfully that the dichotomies underlying this debate have been too starkly drawn. It is possible to defend the distinctiveness of the human without invoking the mysteries of a transcendental domain undergirding the aspects of human experience which have been subsumed under the banner of normativity. In fact it is only through rejecting the terms of this dichotomy, with the causal on side and the normative on the other, that we might begin to fully understand what it is to be human.
A very interesting and incisive review. I am not sure, however, why it is so imperative to deny the transcendental in the explication of normativity. Why not concede it? One cannot disprove it, after all.

I don’t think that’s an entirely convincing argument for it.

I did not say it was. But by assuming from the start that the transcendental is to be avoided, the burden of proof is upon you.

Why? I’m actually much more sympathetic to the idea of the transcendental than I was when I wrote that, albeit defined rather idiosyncratically. But I just don’t see why the burden of proof is on the person seeking to avoid positing transcendental factors in their account. It’s like saying that a moral philosophy that doesn’t posit God has to devote time & energy to justifying why it doesn’t.

I am glad about your open-mindedness. The reason why the burden is on you is that ordinary intuition tends to support a non-naturalistic account of the ultimate source of normativity. And I do think that any credible naturalistic moral theory would have to justify itself in the way you dismiss.

I’m not being deliberately obtuse - I genuinely don’t understand why that is the case.

Say you wanted to write a pure Idealist or Subjectivist treatise. At some point you’d have to explain why most people believe, au contraire, in the reality of an independent, external world. I think that it is the same case for works on normativity.

The difference between writing as an idealist or subjectivist (and carrying the burden of proof re the external world) and then writing as a naturalist is as follows: everyone believes in the same external world, but supernatural beliefs vary. There are some good attempts at explaining this variation naturalistically (see Pascal Boyer, Dan Sperber etc.). I’m not convinced that ‘ordinary intuition tends to support a non-naturalistic account of the ultimate source of normativity.’ How do you know this? (Please don’t say introspection, for goodness sake...) One thing the review fails to point out is that the concept "normativity" in fact has a very short history, as well as a contentious one (see line 1 above). I don’t think you’ll find any references to ‘normativity’ before the 1920s, and its only with the growth of a particular kind of technical (and arguably vacuous) moral philosophy in English speaking universities from the 1950s onwards that anybody has tried to place any real weight on it at all. We do not need it, and we need actively to attack it whenever it is used (for example by Rawls) to justify abhorrent social arrangements which it is in many of our interests to attempt to dismantle.

Dan I thought I was going to be in agreement with you when I first read Alistair’s reply. Sadly not... "We do not need it, and we need actively to attack it whenever it is used (for example by Rawls) to justify abhorrent social arrangements which it is in many of our interests to attempt to dismantle." I’m sure you’re astute enough to recognise the self-reference problem inherent in saying that we need "actively to attack" normativity talk when it is used "to justify abhorrent social arrangements" - so I assume you have an extremely narrow definition of what normativity is or there’s some point that I’ve failed to grasp. Perhaps
part of the issue here is the conflation of philosophical and sociological accounts of normativity? I can perfectly understand scepticism towards the former (though I don’t share it, I think it’s quietism at its intellectual laziest) but I find scepticism towards the latter bewildering. Perhaps it’s better if we talk about ‘normativity’ in the philosophical sense and ‘evaluation’ in the sociological sense? Evaluative orientations cut throughout social life and I can take seriously a consistent scepticism which treats all evaluative claims expressively but a scepticism that repudiates any attempt to discuss foundations to evaluation and yet wishes to retain political commitment to overturning ‘abhorent’ circumstances seems obviously contradictory to me.

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-07 14:32:30)
Or to put it another way: there’s vast and longstanding traditions of empirical research into normativity (in the sociological sense) in both psychology and sociology. There probably are in other social scientific disciplines as well. I read what you’re saying as an argument that understands itself as attacking philosophical hubris but, from my point of view, it hubristically dismisses vast swathes of empirical social science on what are essentially a priori grounds.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-08-09 14:02:46)
When you say... “I think it’s quietism at its intellectual laziest” to be sceptical about philosophical normativity, I can’t help thinking it might have been more intellectually proactive to tell me why. Which research have I ignored? (I’m not sure I’ve done anything “a priori”.) I’m not sure what the contradiction you’re charging me with is supposed to be. Is it (a) having political views and being sceptical about philosophical uses of the concept “normativity”, (b) having political views and being sceptical about sociological uses of the concept (which I never said I was, but I might be), or (c) a combination of the first two? If it’s (a), then I think the answer is pretty straightforward (if it’s (b) or (c), I don’t understand the point). Why - ? - can’t I accept that the grounds of my political views are likely to be at least partly if not wholly determined by considerations much less like Rawls’ (i.e. what would I say behind the veil of ignorance) and more like these: what side I was born into, what opportunities I have in virtue of my social position, whether my family were killed by British, American, Israeli, Palestinian, or ISIS explosives, what I’ve got to lose or gain, who my friends are, how hungry I am, how educated I am etc. etc. If politics is about these things, the “normative” becomes a rhetorical arena, the continuations of Hobbesian/Machiavellian/Nietzschean (I/Weberian?) politics by other means. Being “right” is only a part of winning, and it is in the interests of those currently dominant to sustain the idea that there is any such thing as “right” at all. The general acceptance of a conservative view of its content helps keep people in their place.

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-11 15:16:14)
I’m talking about large swathes of research in moral psychology, the sociology of morality and the sociology of religion - I’m not saying you ‘ignore’ them, I’m saying that you render them methodologically untenable and this is tantamount to dismissal. I don’t think your political views are “determined” by anything but that’s a pedantic point. There’s a large gap between “the grounds” of your political views being “partly” and being “wholly” shaped by social and political circumstances. I have absolutely no problem with the former view, it’s the latter I find problematic. To insist on the latter shuts down a vast space of empirical and conceptual questions that I’m much more interested in opening up. I’m not denying the ‘rhetorical arena’, I’m only suggesting that we lose sight of an important dimension to its reproduction and/or transformation if we don’t take experience of values seriously.

Alistair Duff (2014-08-04 21:34:43)
Thank you very much for taking the trouble to join this debate that I seem to have initiated. Hmm. A few points. Your first point is a very good one. The situations are indeed structurally different in the way you identify. Nevertheless, I think my contention holds that a treatise on moral theory must engage with the widespread belief in normativity’s non-naturalness. My basis for this? Most people believe in God; any poll will tell you that. Relatedly, most people experience moral imperatives as somehow transcendent. Introspection is part of this, to be sure. Nothing wrong with that. Your final point I struggled to understand. Rawls is the greatest moral and political theorist since T. H. Green and J. S. Mill. Part of that greatness was precisely his restoration of normative philosophy. The content of his political philosophy–social democracy–was also, I think, largely correct, and was certainly not destructive of most people’s interests.
Dan Fairbrother (2014-08-06 21:13:47)
Rawls we can agree to disagree on... I don’t think it’s as simple as polls about theism or picking up on transcendental sounding language in moral-phenomenological reports. The relation between avowed beliefs and actual behaviour is complicated. (Strangely, how many people go to church and *don’t* believe in a god?) Theism varies and the variation can be explained (fairly convincingly, but it’s always going to be a work in progress). People’s use of a “transcendental” vocabulary can mean all sorts of things about their beliefs or feelings depending on the context - not least that they don’t know how to explain or justify them. The point is that some people (mainly anthropologists, it would seem) do “engage” the great variation in odd-sounding beliefs, practices, aesthetic preferences, etc., and do a fairly good job of explaining them naturalistically; this doesn’t mean that they need take a different approach when approaching that strange tribe, the normative philosophers. I’ll accept the burden of proof on these things if someone will lend me a unicorn to carry it. When you said above (I missed this the first time): "And I do think that any credible naturalistic moral theory would have to justify itself in the way you dismiss", you seem to be suggesting that any of us want to engage in something called 'moral theory'. But I don’t see why any of us should, so, putting unicorn’s aside for a minute, perhaps there’s no real question of the burden of "proof".

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-07 14:36:54)
I think there are strong prima facie grounds to assume that transcendental vocabulary implies transcendental commitments! There are many cases where this won’t be true but I don’t see the desirability of replacing a first person vocabulary with a third person one unless there’s some extenuating factor which suggests this is necessary to preserve the adequacy of the explanation.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-08-09 13:26:50)
When you say "I think there are strong prima facie grounds to assume that transcendental vocabulary implies transcendental commitments!", I take it that the exclamation mark is supposed to suggest that this is something obvious that I have missed. However, I didn’t talk about "transcendental vocabulary", but "transcendental sounding language", for precisely the reason that the empirical jury is always out as to whether and to what extent the behaviour, including linguistic behaviour, we are faced with is most usefully described as "transcendental". Philosophers are often very quick at this stage because they want to recruit intuitions to their cause, but sociologists and anthropologists should take professional pride in avoiding this. So-called "prima facie grounds" are useless here - there are only better and worse overall explanations. When you say... "There are many cases where this won’t be true but I don’t see the desirability of replacing a first person vocabulary with a third person one unless there’s some extenuating factor which suggests this is necessary to preserve the adequacy of the explanation" ...I’m afraid I have no idea what this sentence is supposed to mean.

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-11 15:05:15)
"When you say... "There are many cases where this won’t be true but I don’t see the desirability of replacing a first person vocabulary with a third person one unless there’s some extenuating factor which suggests this is necessary to preserve the adequacy of the explanation" ...I’m afraid I have no idea what this sentence is supposed to mean." I’m saying we should assume people mean what they say unless we have a reason not to. My objection to what you’re saying is both methodological and ethical. "I didn’t talk about "transcendental vocabulary", but "transcendental sounding language", for precisely the reason that the empirical jury is always out as to whether and to what extent the behaviour, including linguistic behaviour, we are faced with is most usefully described as “transcendental”." I suspect we’re talking at crossed purposes here. All I was originally trying to claim was a point about moral phenomenology and normative beliefs - in so far as people use “transcendental sounding language” to describe and explain their experience of such matters, we should resist the injunction to explain this away, which is what I take you to be doing in effect. Perhaps wrongly, it’s hard not to get the feeling we’re all talking at crossed purposes.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-08-11 20:52:13)
That’s the problem with you idealists, you’ll always think it’s a matter of mere misunderstanding! I think this debate needs to become either a serious philosophy of social science argument (where we’d start with Weber’s ‘Objectivity’ essay, naturally), a discussion of some particular cases (where we would *start* with someone like Runciman), or just stop. It’s been fun.
Sociological Imagination (2014-08-18 14:06:18)
Well I’m tempted to say that I think you can’t adequately explain the politics of the religious right in America without admitting the causal power of ideas (which in my terms is what this disagreement basically comes down) but I should probably reread my thesis instead given my viva is impending and I’ve basically forgotten what my PhD was about...

Alistair Duff (2014-08-10 18:17:54)
I would quite like to challenge you on Rawls a bit further, but will leave that aside if you wish. My points on normativity too simplistic? Easy to say that. Easy too to liken belief in God, or the transcendent more generally, as on a level with belief in unicorns, but a tad Dawkinseque. Shall I quote Otto, Weil or Tillich, say, instead? Moreover, you seem to me to be assuming precisely what I am trying to problematise, when you say that anthropologists can explain away naturalistically the idea of the normative. As for SocIm’s observation about legitimacy of first-person perspective: Like! If that is intuitionism, fine.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-08-10 20:47:41)
I didn’t say your points were "simplistic", Alistair, I said that it’s not as "simple" as taking polls or reading off what to you and many others seems to be transcendental sounding language. I certainly didn’t mean this in an ad hominem way. It’s not as "simple" as polls etc. because these polls - these data - themselves raise a complex range of options. Dawkins-esque? Only if Dawkins is Nietzsche-esque, or Hume-esque, or Lucretius-esque... Dawkins has been useful in some ways in terms of public debate, but I understand his gene-centred evolutionary theory is a bit hopeless (John Dupre is good on this in "Darwin's Legacy"...) But all of this misses the point. I'm not suggesting that I have a knockdown argument against the people I think are deluded (and I do think they are). The original dispute was about the burden of proof; the minimal conclusion I am arguing for is that there is no burden of proof. The project of naturalistic explanation does not commit to providing a moral (or indeed a political) theory. It clearly doesn’t need to accept anything as genuinely normative (in the "normativist" way) to succeed on its own terms. If someone then wishes to criticise a particular naturalistic explanation in detail, then if part of this criticism involves positing something non-natural (like a unicorn, or a god, or a somehow-universally-binding-moral-principle) then this person may carry the burden of proof to this limited extent: if they want to convince the naturalist. But I don’t see any *general* requirement that the naturalist and the non-naturalist should have anything constructive to say to each other at all.

Alistair Duff (2014-08-11 09:41:52)
Thank you for your clarifications in para 1; much appreciated. Two points: I think to put belief in unicorns on a level with belief in God (or the transcendent, numinous, etc, more generally) is unfair, and you must know this. Dawkins knows this too, but continues to belittle theism in that way. He has, I think, done a disservice to what Rawls would call reflective equilibrium by making fundamental discussion less civil. Nietzsche poisoned debate in his day in the same way, not sure about Lucretius, Hume was better-mannered. Thanks though for your point about his gene ideas. May pursue after retirement! On your second para. I think a comprehensive account of normativity is obliged to account for its full phenomenology, including the sense for most people, intuitionistically, of its transcendent quality. Can I perhaps recommend that you look at my book A Normative Theory of the Information Society, reviewed this week (p. 45) in Times Higher Education. I argue that the normative belongs to the right, but originates in the good. If you don't have time, no problem, but perhaps we should park the discussion and agree to differ?

Thank you for the reference to your book (I’m afraid I don’t have £30 at the moment, but it might crop up in the library...). Certainly, let’s stop - for this little debate to be worth continuing, we’d need to start talking about specific cases and specific explanations. I’m not sure civility is always a desirable quality in public debate (precisely because I don’t think there’s anything like ‘reflective equilibrium’ or ‘ideal speech’ to do a disservice [odd word that, in the history of rhetoric...] to). Civility (or the ‘shallow husk of politeness’ as I think Westermarck called it) is just one among many styles of rhetoric, the function of which varies historically. (Was Hume considered civil in his day? Not by all, for sure. As for Nietzsche: one man’s poison...) I don’t think it’s unfair (or indeed ‘easy’ as you put it above) to put belief in unicorns in the same category as belief in a god. It actually requires a fairly sophisticated analysis to see that they’re both violations of expectations associated with ordinary ontological categories (PERSON and ANIMAL). We should certainly try to explain the difference in their popularity: why does
the ‘god’ concept seem to have spread better than ‘unicorn’? There are various reasons why this could be, not least that a counter-intuitively powerful person, as opposed to a counter-physiologically endowed animal, is much more useful for imposing and sustaining particular kinds of social arrangement. People are interested in ideas that more obviously relate to themselves, and there’s a greater incentive for imaginative people to invent concepts that help them manipulate this. (I’m ripping-off Boyer a bit here.) This begins to “to account for [the] full phenomenology” of one particular “normative”, “transcendental” concept: what it’s like to have the concept and be involved in the forms of life associated with it is exactly what explains its cultural survival.

Alistair Duff (2014-08-11 16:57:01)
I think we must agree to differ on (a) the form of debate generally (I think you are badly mistaken to think that civility is not essential in public debate, and (b) the content of our specific debate (I remain of the view that to equate belief in God or the transcendent generally with the absurd belief in unicorns, is palpably unfair, as well as false). Maybe you could get your library to get my book, and we could revisit the problem of normativity at a later date. (I sent my author copies to Jurgen Habermas, Julian Assange, me mum, etc.)

I remain unclear about quite why you think it’s ‘unfair’ or ‘false’ to analyse similar psychological processes (with radically different social outcomes) in the same way. And the same goes for your insistence on ‘civility’. You’ve not argued for either of these thoughts (which is fine, in one way, but it doesn’t give me any reason to share them). But yes, let’s stop.


I find it difficult to know what to do with the fact that I first watched this video on an iPad mini and am now writing this post on a MacBook Air. The company also apparently makes the Kindle, Wii and Play Station 3. When I was younger and had more radical politics (sociology killed my anarchism) I was critical of consumer boycotts on the grounds that they were anti-corporate rather than anti-capitalist, drawing a boundary between ‘bad’ MNCs
and good everything else in such a way as to preclude critique of the economic relations underlying either side of the dichotomy and impede collective action to transform that nexus. Whereas now it seems obvious to me that corporations like Apple in particular are susceptible to public pressure, albeit in a profoundly shallow and uneven way. On the other hand, I really do like my iPad mini and MacBook Air (and iMac and iPhone, sigh...) a lot - so I'll respond to the moral inertia provoked by this video in the time honoured fashion of academics everywhere: I'll negotiate my own unease by intellectualising it, displacing the moment of action by instead pointing to how fascinatingly, though disturbingly, neo-feudal the world of Foxconn appears to be:

Foxconn's largest factory worldwide is in Longhua, Shenzhen, where hundreds of thousands of workers (varying counts include 230,000,[5][18] 300,000,[6][20] and 450,000,[7][21]) are employed at the Longhua Science & Technology Park, a walled campus[8][6] sometimes referred to as "Foxconn City"[9][22] or "iPod City".[10][23] Covering about 1.16 square miles (3 square km),[11][24] it includes 15 factories,[12][22] worker dormitories, a swimming pool,[13][25] a fire brigade,[14][6] its own television network (Foxconn TV),[15][6] and a city centre with a grocery store, bank, restaurants, bookstore, and hospital.[16][6] While some workers live in surrounding towns and villages, others live and work inside the complex;[17][26] a quarter of the employees live in the dormitories, and many of them work up to 12 hours a day for 6 days each week.[18][18] Another of Foxconn's factory "cities" is Zhengzhou Technology Park in Zhengzhou, Henan province, where it is reported 120,000 employees work.[21][27]

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/V3YFGixp9Jw
How one story is changing everything (2013-05-05 14:51)

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/qSeGEIJuBtA

'Cultural Value and the Contradictions of Modern Conservatism' by Simon Ravenscroft - The culturalvalue Initiative (2013-06-02 00:39:41)

[...] of the time. If in the past religion and then science were examples of those powerful ideas, Michaels argues that, today, the dominant narrative is economic in nature: we live, today, in an economic monoculture, where all the important debates are taking place [...]
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For general event information please email: [4]bsatg@britsoc.co.uk or tel: (0191) 383 0839

3. [mailto:christopher.matthews@ntu.ac.uk?subject=BSA%20Teaching%20Group%20Regional%20Conference](mailto:christopher.matthews@ntu.ac.uk?subject=BSA%20Teaching%20Group%20Regional%20Conference)
4. [mailto:bsatg@britsoc.co.uk?subject=BSA%20Teaching%20Group%20Regional%20Conference](mailto:bsatg@britsoc.co.uk?subject=BSA%20Teaching%20Group%20Regional%20Conference)

nick p (2013-05-10 17:12:44)
when is it?

June 15th
On Bullshit (2013-05-06 19:59)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/W1RO93OS0Sk

IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/W1RO93OS0Sk
Recognising Diversity? Gender and Sexual Equalities In Principle and Practice (2013-05-07 08:00)

Recognising Diversity?: Gender and Sexual Equalities In Principle and Practice

20th & 21st June: Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds

Recognising Diversity?: Gender and Sexual Equalities In Principle and Practice marks the end of the research project 'Recognising Diversity?: Equalities In Principle and Practice', funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (PI. Dr. Sally Hines, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies (CIGS), University of Leeds). The project was designed to provide knowledge transfer of Sally Hines’ previous research which explored understandings, meanings and significance of the UK Gender Recognition Act (GRA). Set within the context of an increasing legal, policy and political focus on 'equality' and 'diversity,' and a raft of other legal and policy shifts around gender and sexuality, the GRA promised increased rights and recognition for trans people. Yet, the project found that whilst some trans people were afforded increased levels of citizenship, others were further marginalised. Fuelled by 'rights based' claims for inclusion founded on notions of 'sameness', findings from the project suggested that equality and diversity agendas fail to account for 'difference'. This 2 Day Conference explores these issues in relation to UK gender and sexualities equalities and diversities more broadly. In keeping with the aims of the knowledge transfer award, it seeks to bring academics working around equalities and diversities together with policy makers, activists, journalists, artists, and campaigning/support organisations to explore the significance of recent UK cultural, social, political, legal, and policy shifts which address gender and sexuality. The conference will centre the importance of dialogue both across academic disciplines and between academic and non-academic members and user group communities.

Invited speakers will speak to the following themes across the 2 days:

- Community Organising * Policy Change and Resistance
- Intimate Diversities * Intersecting Inequalities
- Cultural Politics * Queer(y)ing Theory and Activism
- Resisting Liberation Narratives * Policies and Practices of Care

Serge Nicholson and Laura Bridgeman will present a reading from There Is No Word For It: Trans MANgina Monologues (Hot Pencil Press) following the Conference Dinner on the first evening. Serge will also introduce his film Trans Guys Are..., which will be screened on day two of the conference. LGBT Youth Theatre Group Side By Side will perform on the second day of the conference. The conference will close with a screening of Jason Elvis Barker’s film Millennium Man and a talk/Q & A with Jason.

For full details of speakers and conference timetable see the Conference Programme at: [1]http://www.gender-studies.leeds.ac.uk/ Registration: Please follow the link below for online registration: [2]http://store.leeds.ac.uk/browse/product.asp?catid=78 & modid=1 &compid=1 The deadline for registration is Friday 7th June. Travel, Conference Venue, Conference Dinner, and Accommodation The conference will be held in The Carriage Works,
which is located at No. 3 Millennium Square in the centre of Leeds. The postcode is LS2 3AD. The venue is a few minutes’ walk from the train station and there are city center car parking facilities. There is a wide range of nearby accommodation to suit different budgets. The conference dinner will be held in the nearby University of Leeds Refectory and delegates will be guided to the dinner venue from the conference.

Conference Contacts: Sally Hines: Email: s.hines@leeds.ac.uk; Stefanie Boulila: Email: s.c.boulila@leeds.ac.uk

Conference Fees:
- 2 Day Waged: £150 (including conference dinner)
- 2 Day Unwaged/Student: £50 (including conference dinner)
- Thursday 1 Day Waged: £100 (including conference dinner)
- Thursday 1 Day Unwaged/Student: £30 (including conference dinner)
- Friday 1 Day Waged: £80
- Friday 1 Day Unwaged: £25

1. [http://www.gender-studies.leeds.ac.uk/](http://www.gender-studies.leeds.ac.uk/)
2. [http://store.leeds.ac.uk/browse/product.asp?catid=78&modid=1&compid=1](http://store.leeds.ac.uk/browse/product.asp?catid=78&modid=1&compid=1)
4. [mailto:s.hines@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:s.hines@leeds.ac.uk)
5. [mailto:s.c.boulila@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:s.c.boulila@leeds.ac.uk)
Using social media for student recruitment isn’t going to work if everything goes through the comms office (2013-05-08 08:00)

This interesting article in the Guardian Higher Ed reports on empirical data which supports something I’ve believed for quite some time: communications offices are, at least in some respects, ill suited to using social media for student recruitment. Their role as an official channel and concern to manage the corporate brand leaves them tending towards sanitised offerings which have little impact on the decision making of potential students:

[2]Our research, conducted with online student community [3]The Student Room, surveyed over 300 potential and current students about what information sources or channels influenced their choice of university. We found that although 65 % of students use social media channels several times a day, students rated universities’ social media presence as less influential and less trustworthy than more traditional sources such as prospectuses or open days.

Prospective students are keen to engage with their university through social media channels, with one fifth of students saying that universities don’t make enough use of social media in recruitment, which meant they currently didn’t expect or look for information there.

What’s more, many of the students we surveyed were clueless that their chosen university even had a Twitter or Facebook account – showing that there is a need for universities to ensure their social media presence is clearly signposted to attract the widest audience.

There is also a question to be asked about what kind of content is relevant for social media profiles. We found that fewer than one in five students were influenced by university Twitter accounts and only one in four were influenced by Facebook pages or blogs.

Comments we received from students included, “they do not talk about the things we need to know” and “I don’t find enough useful information that relates to me”. This suggests that many universities are using social media to try and engage with too many stakeholder groups at once, and consequently not being tailored enough about the updates they are sending out.

So how else can social media be used for student recruitment? Facilitating digital activity at the departmental level would mean that the structures which will overwhelmingly shape the day-to-day academic experiences of students are rendered open in a way that they previously have not been. Putting resources into encouraging undergraduates, postgraduates and staff to blog about their work and their shared working life within a department would paint a publicly accessible picture of what it will be like to be part of that department. Taking photos and recording audio from events, using a Twitter feed to curate the public life of the department and being open to online engagement with potential students would, I’m convinced, potentially have a much greater impact on the decision making of students than official messages which are centrally produced. The expansion of marketing/communications in higher education is happening at the same time as many ensuing professional outputs have a declining purchase on the decision making of the target demographic. This is a specific instance of a much broader point: doing communications well in contemporary higher education demands so much more than just hiring new comms staff.
and giving the comms department more resources.

1. http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/17/university-student-recruitment-social
   media?j=33717&e=mark@markcarrigan.net&l=350_HTML&u=163
3. http://www.thestudentroom.co.uk/

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Andy Coverdale (2013-05-08 18:09:15)
Some good points here Mark. I agree, many students are fairly smart in sussing out glossy promos and would welcome
authentic / localised perspectives. Though culturally, increasingly globally-aware recruitment plays it safe. Basically, it's easier
to extend social media use through well-rehearsed marketing / comms. practices than invest the time and effort in the type
of activities you describe (which might require challenging dept.-level cultures). And unfortunately, unless the "resources"
you suggest (somehow) legitimise these activities by integrating them into assigned tasks and role / curriculum requirements,
they'll often just be seen as extra workload.

Sociological Imagination (2013-05-09 20:12:09)
I sort of agree - however if, as seems likely, UK higher ed sees a progressive transfer of resources to communications and
marketing functions then, if only a small quantity of this were moved into departmental budgets the money would be available
for quite a bit of part time PhD work...

Andy Coverdale (2013-05-09 20:58:16)
Perhaps it just needs re-packaging as outreach / impact :)

What is digital sociology? An interview with Noortje Marres (2013-05-09 08:00)

[sc _embed _player fileurl="http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/digitalosciology1.mp3"]What is
Digital Sociology?

You can find out more about Noortje's work [1]here.

1. http://goldsmiths.academia.edu/NoortjeMarres

1680
One Man's Story (Visual Sociology #002) (2013-05-10 08:00)

"Taos Alone" (1982) Photo by Michael V. Miller, University of Texas at San Antonio.

Taos alone

by Michael V. Miller
The title of this work is "Taos alone".

Shot by Michael V. Miller with telephoto lens on Pentax 35 mm SLR at side of mission church in Taos Pueblo, northern New Mexico, June, 1982. He showed the image this semester in class, and asked students what they thought it suggested. Their common reaction was that the subject conveyed a strong sense of alienation and isolation. As one student noted in a post on the class wiki: "It depicts so many emotions, yet tells the viewer nothing about the man's story. Leaves us guessing." Thirty years later, Miller reports he still regrets not approaching the man to get "his story," and that the image speaks also to the alienation and isolation of the picture-taker at that time in his life.

Michael Miller is a sociologist at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where he enjoys learning and sharing about all things related to visual sociology. He advocates a systems approach to the instructional integration of multimedia, and his most recent work examines online video clip repositories as a growing instructional tool. Please feel free to contact him at michael.miller@utsa.edu.

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on S.I.Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

4. mailto:michael.miller@utsa.edu
5. mailto:S.I.Imagery@gmail.com
Bulgarian elections and (banned) film "Baklava" (2013-05-11 01:15)

[1]Baklava is a recent Bulgarian film which was banned as soon as it was released a couple of years ago due to allegations of content unsuitable for the screen, including violence, indecency and child pornography. Allegations aside, the film presents a bleak, but compelling and in some ways strikingly realistic version of contemporary Bulgarian reality, and it is a pity that it has not been available to the public. The film is even more heavy on metaphor than it is on shocking scenes - it seems to fit under the "magic realism" tradition in Bulgarian literature and film. Good cinematography and music, too.

Bulgarian elections are taking place this Sunday, 12 May, after resignation of PM Boyko Borissov in February this year. The film is available online only today, 11 May, from 00:00 to 23.59 during what Bulgarian law stipulates as the "day for reflection" prior to the election day. While watching it, I thought that more people, Bulgarians as well as non-Bulgarians, should watch it - so I am sharing it here.

"The film tells the story of brothers Jorre and Kotze who travel around the country in search for a treasure hidden by their deceased grandmother. Jorre is 26, wears black and listens to drum and base. Kotze is 9, wears a silver chain on his neck, steals, fights and listens to chalga. Despite the differences between them, the brothers set off on a journey all over Bulgaria. On the way, they encounter Bulgarian reality: crazy, at times scary, and shrouded in the country's political mindlessness".

Watch, download, share, and don't be shocked - before someone takes it down. Don't show it to your children and conservative or easily shocked relatives.
P.S. **Baklava** was filmed in the Idle Ethnographer’s home town.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/zpjm0q6Aw2g](http://www.youtube.com/embed/zpjm0q6Aw2g)

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Alex Trotiuc (2016-11-18 15:24:31)

Explanations of the Presidential election results in Bulgaria in 2016 [http://mrp-eurasia.com/download_files/Explanations_of_the_Presidential_election_results_in_Bulgaria_in_2016.docx](http://mrp-eurasia.com/download_files/Explanations_of_the_Presidential_election_results_in_Bulgaria_in_2016.docx) Today MRP-EURASIA (executive office in Bulgaria) invites to a public opinion poll (Omnibus) in Bulgaria following the results of the presidential elections November, 2016. Key questions that are waiting for a response (Omnibus participants can add their questions): 1. What are the key factors have played the main role in the results of candidates? 2. What rating are pre-election promises of each candidate (weighing of the electoral advantages)? 3. What are the Bulgarian voters primary estimations in relation to the quality, credibility and professionalism of the election campaign for the President of Bulgaria (will be estimate separately the opinions voters of main concurrents)? 4. What influence on the outcome of the presidential elections in Bulgaria could have Russia, the United States and the European Union (Romania separately)? 5. What are the key factors of influence on the outcome of the elections in Moldova can be migrated (used) for elections in East European and Balkan countries? 6. What kind of correlation are traced between Bulgaria and Moldova on the presidential election, where have won pro-Russian candidates? 7. What are the key promises of the candidates could consolidate the Bulgarian society towards overcoming socio-economic crisis, the crisis of confidence to the supreme power, the crisis in belief to the democratic values, credibility crisis to the "Western partners”? 8. How will the policy of Bulgaria towards the "Anti-Russian sanctions of the European Union and the United States”? 9. How to change Bulgaria's policy towards neighboring Greece, Turkey, Romania, Serbia (as well as Russia and Ukraine)? 12. How to change the policy of Bulgaria in relation to the projects NATO (including concerning missile defense system)? 13. What are the prospects of the new Bulgarian President party in the next parliamentary election? 14. How the new President of Bulgaria will affect to new Bulgarian Government?

**Research Methodology** "National Omnibus in Bulgaria by results the presidential elections in 2016": • Data collection method: F2F PAPI • The sample size 1500 • 4 main cities in the country (Sofia, Plovdiv, Burgas, Varna) • Age, gender, income level, education level, type of employment, etc. in accordance to the national representation. • Survey unit: household Omnibus Timing: • Applications, questions submitting: till 26 November • Adaptation of common questionnaire and tools: 26-30 November 2016 • Fieldwork: 01 December 2016 - 14 December 2016 • Delivery of report: to 16 December 2016 We accept your application for participation in Omnibus and all additional questions to email: Bulgaria _RFQ@mrp-eurasia.com In the Letter subject line please indicate "Application for participation in Omnibus Nr.01-1216" (or, respectively, "The question on the Omnibus Nr.01-1216") All the details of our standard omnibuses, please look on [http://mrp-eurasia.com/omnibuses_Bulgaria](http://mrp-eurasia.com/omnibuses_Bulgaria)

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**Sociologists, Bumblebees and Urban Legends (comic)** (2013-05-11 08:00)

...and bumblebees.

Visit [1]XKCD, then hold your mouse over the original image to see the Alt text (or click on the image below to go to the original):

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1684
Although criminology has grown as a field of study in the last 2 decades, it remains rooted in sociology. The study of the analysis of crime, criminal behaviour, and societal responses to law breaking cannot be understood without understanding who has power and how various mechanisms of authority are exercised and contested. As part of our collective societal need to understand, explore, confront, and control criminal behavior, visual approaches have been developed based on two major orientations.

The first is focused on the power of images and is rooted in qualitative assumptions about localized meaning and contextualized understanding. In criminology, this has focused on the examination and interrogation of images of crime, harm, and punishment focused on the power of graphic manifestation. By demystifying and contesting the practices that underpin or that make use of those images, the interrogation of visual representations of social control is one part of this broader program. Another is based on the rise of big data and the infatuation with quantitative approaches in sociology. These approaches seek to provide generalizable conclusions that can be broadly applied. Data visualization offers a way to convey complex information and organizing numbers and analytics in more pleasing and accessible ways. Data visualization may allow a means to provoke new kinds of scholarly interactions and create more and better opportunities for collaboration.

While these broad categories are a useful way to understand the role of the visual in criminology, they are not exhaustive. Visual tools and techniques can be used in a variety of ways to teach concepts in the classroom, collect data for participants, outline a researcher’s analysis strategies, and present findings. The visual map below outlines the ways in which visual tools can be applied to the study of crime and social control, and serves a starting point for a larger and longer term project designed to define key propositions and test their viability. While each of the aspects below can be explored in far more detail, this visual map may serve as a useful overview.

E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [5]S.I.Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [6]here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

2. http://visualcriminology.com/about/
3. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/04/05/the-question-all-smart-visualizations-should-ask/
5. mailto:S.I.Imagery@gmail.com
Kevin Karpiak (2014-03-07 15:45:46)
Hi there. Just thought you might be interested in a new series we’re starting at the blog Anthropoliteia: the anthropology policing with a significant visual component called “Dispatches” You can see more about the series [1]here and the first post [2]here. P.S. You can also like us on [3]Facebook or follow us on [4]Twitter to keep up to date!

2. http://anthropoliteia.wordpress.com/2014/03/07/from-the-field-1/
4. https://twitter.com/anthropoliteia

Milena Kremakova (2014-03-21 15:47:41)
Very interesting - thanks!

The future of the brain by Professor Steven Rose (2013-05-13 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/9aivpJMkXdQ
Getting a Ph.D. will turn you into an emotional trainwreck, not a professor (2013-05-14 08:00)

Leanne Davis (2013-05-14 15:10:52)
All I can say is, “thank you”.


New Round of Postgraduate Research Scholarships in the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR) University of Kent.

SSPSSR has a world-wide reputation for excellence and is one of the leading and largest research centres for social science in the UK. In the last Research Assessment Exercise, we were ranked joint third with 70 % of our research being evaluated as either ‘World Leading’ or of ‘International excellence in terms of originality, significance and rigor.’
The School offers an unrivalled context in which to study for a PhD in the social sciences. We are a member of the South East Doctoral Training Centre (SEDTC) which awards scholarships funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the School has been awarded European Union Erasmus Mundus funding for a Doctorate in Cultural and Global Criminology (DCGC).

As a result of our success in the 2013 ESRC SEDTC Scholarship competition we are in a position to award additional PGR scholarships to commence in September 2013. These cover tuition fees at the postgraduate standard home/EU rate together with an annual maintenance stipend of £13,590 per annum.

We have a thriving postgraduate community of over 200 students and offer a large and diverse range of professional seminars, School seminar programmes, workshops, methods and advanced methods training, transferrable skills, study groups, and writing/career workshops (home and abroad) for our students. Present postgraduate students are conducting research into a wide range of issues including comparative social welfare; the third sector; violence; cultural criminology; new media and technology; work and employment; environmental movements; the sociology of the body; penal policy; intoxication and drug policy; social and cultural theory; suffering; youth transitions; the sociology of private space; sex, gender and sexuality; ethnicity and identity; evangelical church membership; and a wide range of other topics.

Further information about this New Round of Scholarship can be found here [1] http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr/postgraduate/feesandfunds.html or email directly the Postgraduate Office [2] sspssr-pg-admin@kent.ac.uk

Deadline for receipt of applications is Thursday, the 27th of June 2013. Interviews for shortlisted applicants will take place on Wednesday the 10th of July 2013

1. [http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr/postgraduate/feesandfunds.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr/postgraduate/feesandfunds.html)
2. [mailto:sspssr-pg-admin@kent.ac.uk](mailto:sspssr-pg-admin@kent.ac.uk)
Being realist about social movements (2013-05-15 08:00)

This is the first in a series of blog posts on realism and social movements. The purpose of it is to refine the explanatory purchase of realist thought within social movement studies and consider what it means ‘to be realist’ about social movements. This first post is dedicated to fleshing out realist thought and making my own argument(s) a little more accessible to social movement theorists. I hope that these blog posts go someway in encouraging discussion on realist thought within social movement studies.

Realism is an ontological position that implies that the social world has objects which exist and interact independent of our interactions with them. ‘The truth is out there’, so to speak, and as social movement researchers, we can begin to identify the objects of reality that make up the social world. As I realist, I search for the processes that exist beyond the world of ‘appearances’. I attempt to penetrate beyond the immediate experiences of social actors to look for an understanding of reality. This does not make human agency and social experiences epiphenomenal but, rather, a guide towards those objects that cause such experiences to emerge, develop and relate to other things around them.

Being realist about social movements, then, implies that there is a set of processes that exist beyond the immediate experiences of social movement activists and that these processes can be identified and understood. Indeed, the ontological claims of realism set a precondition for knowledge as social science. It is argued that the development of a systematic theory of ‘real objects’ and their ‘powers’ is a precondition to understanding their effects. Realist ontological reasoning is prior to epistemological inquiry if the social movement researcher wishes to answer key sociological questions like how do social movements emerge or what effects do they have.

It is within this line of thought that I explore the processes beyond how social movements mobilise and effect change in the social world. Now, a clear and concise definition of social movements is hard to find and it is recognised that term itself is subject to the fuzzy logic of everyday life. A watertight definition is problematic when different epistemological standpoints have competing knowledge claims. One persons social movement is another persons cult, so to speak, as the line between what defines either becomes epistemologically relative.

In response, I start with an ontological understanding of social movements as a form of social structure. This position is based on the realist social ontology of Dave Elder-Vass (2010), which suggests that groups of people have the ‘power’ to socially condition the behaviours of others. Social groups (or what he calls ‘norm circles’) can effect how people behave by creating the conditions for their conformity towards the groups beliefs and practices. This is known as a normative disposition and it is an environment that sanctions behaviour that transgresses the boundaries of what is considered typical or appropriate.

I map such circles, theoretically and empirically, within social movement studies, and argue that such normative environments may be hegemonic in nature. Specific groups of people have a socio-structural form of power that subordinates others into particular ways of acting based on a predetermined understanding of moral authority. Translated, groups of hegemonic actors subordinate others into particular ways of acting based on a superior belief system. These may be understood as movements from above. I argue that the experiences of such hegemonic groups are a catalyst for activism as a form of collective social action. Indeed, it is in making a problem of the subordinating experiences of hegemonic groups that resistant collectivities coalesce and challenge hegemonic discourse. These may be understood as movements from below.

It is within this oscillation of forces between groups of people that social transformation occurs, as movements from below provoke social change by transforming the normative practices of movements from above. Resistance is conceptualised as groupings of people who register their critique of ideology at the structures of domination and control. Movements from below publically redress the inconsistencies of the normative projects of hegemonic groups, that is, they register the blind-spots within, and open hegemonic discourse to reflexivity and critical appraisal.
Methodologically, this explanatory framework requires a careful elucidation of the histories within which social actors problematise their experiences and organise collective social action. It also means grasping at the histories of hegemonic social groups and the normative environments that emerge from them over time. To understand what is meant by this, it is important to recognise the intersectionality of social groups. No social group exists in isolation but, rather, insects with others in terms of proximity and imagination (cf. Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’). As such, it is in mapping these intersections that it becomes possible to grasp at how activists transform the normative environments that others base their practices on. Theoretically, if activists register a critique of a dominant normative practice as inconsistent with what specific groups of people are endorsing, then the ‘imagined community’ or ‘moral majority’ might be brought into crises. At the least, activists would open up a legitimate space for the critical appraisal of such a practice.

In the next blog post, I hope to further explore these claims as I expand on the relevance of historical research for this project. This will not be about simply finding empirical examples to support theoretical exegeses, though to be realist about social movements requires histories on which to elucidate the ratiocination between hegemonic and resistant groups. Rather, it is about finding another movement of thought that is complimentary to this realist position whilst maintaining the centrality of human and social experience. This position has a number of ethical implications that I will explore in future posts.

Bibliography


Dr Thomas Brock is a postdoctoral research associate at Durham University. His research interests lie in realist social theory, histories of radical thought and movements of political action. This was originally posted on the blog for the BSA Realism and Social Research group.

Can Human Action Be Explained? (2013-05-16 08:00)

If you find Charles Taylor interesting, there's another lecture and a link to introductory resources available [2]here. If you don't find Charles Taylor interesting then apologies in advance for the profusion of philosophers and theorists who will be featuring on this site while the editor finishes writing up his PhD theory chapters and is looking for productive ways to procrastinate.


juliette (2013-05-16 09:31:27)

oh gosh, not Charles Taylor the war criminal then!
There's a couple of interviews we've done on these themes with Les Back [2]here and [3]here. If you find the lecture interesting then you really should check out the [4]edited collection it draws on.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/aPCGn5FbrJ8?feature=player_detailpage
I shoot, therefore I exist

by Claudia Vallvé, Barcelona

This is my street. I see them every day, any hour of the day. By dozens. Standing there. Taking their photos. They come, they shoot, they go. Average of stay: 3 to 5 minutes. 30 minutes if they go to the gift shop on the left. When their trip is finished, they’ll go back to their homes, with their cameras full of images: buildings, streets, self-portraits. Taking their photographs makes them feel that they own this city. My city.

Paradoxically, the day I took this photo, a big demonstration was held in Barcelona. Just 100 meters from this place thousands of people were asking for better conditions at work, better access to housing, better education and social care systems... But this is not included in touristic guides. Just a nuisance, like the poor man with his kids and their balloons, slaloming among the multitude of tourists.

Tourism. The maximum form of modern consumerism. Coming, shooting and leaving. This is it.
Claudia Vallvé ([2]claudiavallve@xarxaconsultors.com) is a sociologist based in Barcelona. She is founding partner of Xarxa Consultors ([3]www.xarxaconsultors.com), a network of freelance professionals working in social research and consultancy. Claudia develops social investigations in different areas - mainly related to social welfare, employment, education and gender issues. In her blog, Cuestión de Método, she reflects on methodological issues ([4]http://claudiavallve.com/, in Spanish and Catalan). Claudia has kindly agreed to share some of her experience as researcher on SI soon!

E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [5]S.I.Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [6]here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

2. mailto:claudiavallve@xarxaconsultors.com
5. mailto:S.I.Imagery@gmail.com

BSA Teaching Group Conference on June 15th (2013-05-17 12:00)

BSA TEACHING GROUP CONFERENCE
Saturday 15th June 2013
Nottingham Trent University
Sponsored by the Higher Education Academy

The BSA’s Teaching Group is pleased to announce a regional conference hosted by the School of Social Sciences at Nottingham Trent University. This event is aimed specifically at sociology teachers and will bring together a variety of guest speakers in an interesting and informative programme.

THEMES COVERED AT THE CONFERENCE WILL INCLUDE; DIGITAL METHODS, STUDENT TRANSITIONS FROM A LEVEL TO UNIVERSITY, SOCIAL THEORY, GENDER STUDIES, TEACHING SOCIOLOGY WITH BOXING IMAGERY, CRIMINOLOGY AND A SERIES OF MICRO-LECTURES FROM THE NEXT GENERATION OF RESEARCHERS.

Alongside this programme time will be allocated for networking opportunities over lunch and during an optional evening social event. There will also be an opportunity for feeding back to representatives of the BSA about the ways in which the organisation could help and support the teaching of sociology in schools and colleges more fully.

Confirmed speakers:
Lunch will be provided, along with tea & coffee throughout the day.

Delegate fees:

BSA Member £40

BSA Teaching Group Member £50

Non-member £60

For further information and registration, please go to: [1]http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10272

Email: [2]bsatg@britsoc.co.uk or Tel: (0191) 383 0839

For academic enquiries please contact: Dr Christopher R. Matthews, Nottingham Trent University

Email: [3]christopher.matthews@ntu.ac.uk

2. mailto:bsatg@britsoc.co.uk
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Lost in London (2013-05-18 08:00)

“Lost in London” is a film by Michael Smith and Wojciech Duczmal, who’ve collaborated on many documentaries for the BBC over the years. It develops further their idea of the lyrical essay-film, or documentary-poem.

Inspired by Baudelaire’s idea of the flâneur, the stroller whose epiphany is the shifting urban spectacle, the film is about one individual’s personal response to the unique spirit that charges the city he inhabits - in this case, Michael’s response to the inner East End, where he has lived for many years.

It’s a film about the deep, complex, bitter-sweet romance between an individual and his city. Like many long-term love affairs, it’s a dysfunctional one, but nevertheless, this film is a love story between a person and a place.
Acts of terror: a short film about photography, freedom and the police (2013-05-19 08:00)

While filming a routine stop and search of her boyfriend on the London Underground, Gemma suddenly found herself detained, handcuffed and threatened with arrest.

Act of Terror tells the story of her fight to bring the police to justice and prevent this happening to anyone else, ever again.

Official Website:

It is easy to forget about the 2005 Terrorism Act and its damaging effect on civil liberties and human rights. Act Of Terror puts the spotlight back on this murky law, and demands that we keep vigilant in the face of ever increasing state power.

An animated journey through the labyrinthine world of English Justice, the sinister caveats of Terrorism legislation, and the shocking cronyism of the police complaints system, Act Of Terror is about strength in the face of powerlessness and finding the courage to fight back.


Tuesday 16th July 2013
BSA Meeting Room, Suite 2, 2 Station Court
Imperial Wharf, Fulham, London SW6 2PY

This inaugural event for the BSA's Digital Sociology Group brings together a diverse range of speakers who, in a variety of ways, work within the nascent field of digital sociology. Rather than proceed from a substantive account of what digital sociology is or could be, this event seeks to address the question 'what is digital sociology?' through an open and informal exploration of a broad range of exciting work being undertaken by sociologists in the UK which could, in the broadest sense of the term, be characterised as 'digital'. In casting a spotlight on these projects in such a way the event aims to initiate an ongoing dialogue about the continuities and discontinuities between these emergent strands of digital activity, as well as the broader methodological and disciplinary questions which they pose.

Speakers:
Kim Allen, Manchester Metropolitan University
Les Back, Goldsmiths, University of London
Ben Baumberg, University of Kent
Laura Harvey, Brunel University
Noortje Marres, Goldsmiths, University of London
Heather Mendick, Brunel University
Mark Murphy, University of Glasgow
Evelyn Ruppert, Goldsmiths, University of London
Helene Snee, University of Manchester

Delegate rates:
BSA Concessionary Member (student/unwaged/retired) £10
BSA Member £15
Non-member (student/unwaged/retired) £20
Non-member £25

For administrative assistance contact: BSA Events Teamevents@britsoc.org.uk
Telephone: +44 (0) 191 383 0839
Academic enquiries: Dr Emma Head e.l.head@keele.ac.uk

The frustrations of philosophers: Richard Rorty, sociological explanation and intellectual biography
(2013-05-21 08:00)

I'm finally in the process of reading [1]this intellectual biography of Richard Rorty by Neil Gross. I've intended to for a few years now, given my long term fascination with Rorty, however it was only recently that I had it pointed out to me that I'd find the substantive analytical themes of the book interesting (given my research on culture, reflexivity and biography). Below you can meet Rorty the man:

I originally read Rorty as part of an MA in Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Warwick. I'd completed a BA in philosophy at UCL which was almost entirely analytical and what intellectual satisfaction I derived from it was largely a matter of engaging with the challenge of articulating my profound dissatisfaction with, well, everything really. I'd gone to Warwick to do an MA in continental philosophy but, after a few weeks, I'd encountered social theory and sociology for the first time and realised that my difficulty was with philosophy itself rather than a particular approach to philosophical practice. However this was a gradual process of my understanding changing,
with an underlying direction of travel manifesting itself through lots of situational disputes in particular substantive areas of inquiry e.g. I got fixated on Rawls for a year because my understanding of this meta-theoretical frustration was most comprehensive in terms of his work. But then I read Richard Rorty and suddenly it all fell into place: defined in my memory by a debate with the two professors leading a social theory seminar where one (now my supervisor) asked me “why are you studying philosophy then?” and I realised that I had no idea... fast forward 5 years later and I’m on the verge of completing a PhD in Sociology and am extraordinarily pleased that I made the move, in the process avoiding my planned PhD about changing ideas of the individual in liberal thought which, to put it mildly, would have been unlikely to hold my interest.

What really interests me in retrospect about this is the apparent homology between Rorty’s intellectual trajectory (analytical philosophy to continentally infused pragmatism to cultural theorist – though Gross usefully warns against overdrawing the stages of this movement) and the one I underwent which was sparked by his work, as well as how much, if any, of this effect can be attributed causally to the homology itself? Did the order in which I engaged with Rorty’s writing (Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* then Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature before working through the philosophical papers) play a role in the effect they were able to have on me? Did the contextually bound intellectual frustrations he was working through in these writings offer, in virtue of their specific context, the particular configuration of ideational resources which I needed to work through my own intellectual frustrations in my own specific intellectual context at the time?

One of the truly admirable things about Gross’s book is the manner in which he resists the simplified trajectory of Rorty’s work which I’ve just sketched, showing how the seeds of his ultimate move away from philosophy were present at the outset of his career. His concern for contextualism and the history of ideas were always there, as was his concern for edification and disinterest in the narrowly technical, but his later project needed many things: he needed Davidson, Sellers, Goodman et al to escape from analytic philosophy in a way that was consistent with it, he needed Kuhn to operationalise his contextualism and, crucially, he needed his career and his life itself (as well as the broader social and culture context within which they were situated) to be configured in such a way as to make this ‘escape’ compatible with the exigencies of living in the manner to which he had become accustomed.

Gross usefully summarises his sociological approach to the study of Rorty:

Without abandoning the standard of fidelity to the archival materials, we can construct a more theoretically informed explanation for Rorty’s moves if we see him, not as a being spinning out ideas on the basis of a transhistorically rational consideration of their objective merits or as someone pushed this way and that by his personality or character but as a social actor embedded over time in a variety of institutional settings, each imposing specific constraints on his opportunities and choices and influencing him with respect to the formation of his self-understanding, his evaluation of the unworthiness of various lines of thought, and ultimately his intellectual output. (pg 330)

The book doesn’t exactly ‘solve’ the problem I’m grappling with in my own work. But it does make it somewhat clearer. In an (as yet unpublished) paper on asexuality I’ve argued that synchronic relations between the account an individual is trying to give of themselves (to themselves in internal conversation and/or to external others) and the cultural resources which are situationally available to be drawn upon in this self-articulation works diachronically to shape their socio-cultural exploration. If someone doesn’t experience sexual attraction but finds that the cultural resources they have available to them only permit them to articulate that facet of themselves in terms of pathology (e.g. “I’m fucked up”, “I’m broken”, “there must be something wrong with my hormones” rather than “there are people who are asexual and I’m one of them and that’s fine”) then it will, if they feel this self-pathologisation is unsatisfying or unsustainable, lead them to search for cultural resources which would enable them to give a better account of themselves.
I'm pretty confident of the empirical basis of this argument in terms of asexuality but I'm struggling to apply it elsewhere beyond quite general terms. Central to what I'm trying to say is the idea of the discursive gap (credit [3]Ruth Pearce) as an integral category for understanding interiority in a sociological way. On this view self-articulation (again either inwardly or outwardly directed) relies on certain cognitive affordances, many of which are introjected resultants of past social or cultural interaction, as well as cultural affordances, which may in future contribute to the individual's stock of cognitive affordances. At any given time there is always a 'gap' between what we are trying to say and the affordances which are situationally available to us and this gap 'drives' the direction of our cultural agency over time.

One of my intentions here is to ‘fuzz up’ (as Rorty would have put it) the distinction between the discursive and the pre-discursive. I don’t think it’s possible to understand either adequately, unless we see the relations between them, as well the centrality that movements from the inchoate to the articulate play in shaping who we are and how we make our way through the world. Something which I think Charles Taylor captures very sensitively:

Thus consider someone who has been ashamed of his background. This is what we say (and also he says) retrospectively; at the time, this was not at all clear to him. He feels unease, lack of confidence, a vague sense of unworthiness. Then he is brought to reflect on this. He comes to feel that being ashamed for what you are, apologizing for your existence, is senseless. That on the contrary, there is something demeaning precisely about feeling such shame, something degrading, merely supine, craven. So he goes through a revolution like that expressed in the phrase ‘black is beautiful’. Now the shame disappears; or sinks to a merely residual unease like the craving for a cigarette after meals of the ex-smoker; and is judged as merely another such nagging emotional kink, not as a voice telling him something about his predicament. (Taylor 1985a: 69)

I now profoundly disagree with pretty much everything in this book. But along with Taylor’s Philosophical Arguments and Sources of the Self, as well as perhaps MacIntyre’s After Virtue, it’s the only book I can think of which effectively rewired my conceptual apparatus and left me ‘seeing’ the world in a different way afterwards.

*The fact I’m using ‘hydraulic’ terms like ‘drives’ is what I mean when I say I’m struggling with this.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/11CqZd3B8B8
3. https://twitter.com/NotRightRuth

Digital Humanities but No Digital Sociology (2013-05-22 08:00)

All these changes in scholarship have been taken up with a great deal more enthusiasm by some in the academy than others. Our colleagues in the humanities have embraced digital technologies much more readily than those of us in sociology or the social sciences more generally. A casual survey of the blogosphere reveals that those in the humanities (and law schools) are much more likely to maintain academic blogs than social scientists. In terms of scholarship, humanities scholars have been, for more than ten years, innovating ways to combine traditional scholarship with digital technologies. To name just a two examples, scholars in English have established a searchable
online database of the papers of Emily Dickinson and historians have developed a site that offers a 3D digital model showing the urban development of ancient Rome in A.D. 320. There are significant institutions being built in the digital humanities including the annual Digital Humanities Conference, which began in 1989, and the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Office of Digital Humanities.

Sociology lags far behind in the adoption of digital tools for scholarly work. As Paul DiMaggio and colleagues noted in 2001, “sociologists have been slow to take up the study of the Internet” (“The Social Implications of the Internet,” Annual Review of Sociology, 2001, p.1). While there are notable exceptions, such as Andrew Beveridge’s digitizing of Census maps ([1]www.socialexplorer.com), when looking at the field as a whole these sorts of innovations are rare in sociology. In contrast to the decade-long conference in the digital humanities, there is no annual conference on “digital sociology.” Sociology graduate students Nathan Jurgensen and PJ Rey recently organized a conference on “Theorizing the Web,” that drew luminaries in sociology Saskia Sassen and George Ritzer, but this is the first sociology conference (that we are aware of) to focus exclusively on understanding the digital era from a sociological perspective. Analogously, there is no large institution, like the NEH seeking to fund digitally informed sociological research. The reasons for this sociological lag when it comes to the Internet are still not clear, but some point to the problems of getting digital publication projects recognized by tenure and promotion review committees.


“What kinds of creatures do we think we are?”: Human Sciences in the ‘Age of Biology’ (2013-05-23 08:00)
"Kant in Hand": a Cut-and-Paste Critique of Pure Reason, Project by Hanno Depner (2011)

Today’s visual sociology article is not just visual, but also spatial. It is a fascinating project for the visualisation and embodied learning of one of the classic philosophy works: Kant’s "Critique of Pure Reason".

Kant in Hand

by Hanno Depner, Rostock/Berlin
"Kant in Hand – make it, grasp it" is a book including building kit which can be transformed into a 3D infographic on Immanuel Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason", one of the most influential works in the history of philosophy. The introductory book/building kit by philosopher-designer Hanno Depner was published in German language (as "Kant für die Hand") by Knaus publishing house in 2011. This is how it works:

(1) Build the main parts of the "Critique of Pure Reason", using the cut-out sheets, and glue.

(2) Read the explanatory captions, starting with "Kant's Life and Work" up to the "Transcendental Doctrine of Method" to gain insight into Kant's vocabulary, arguments and composition of his "Critique".

(3) Put together all parts, forming ...

(4) ... the "Kant Cube".

(5) To start knowledge process, pull strap "Transcendental Doctrine of Elements" (which is the first part of the "Critique of Pure Reason"). The three Faculties of Knowledge (as described in the sections Aesthetic, Analytic and Dialectic) unfold. A black line marks the way of knowledge, starting from the "thing in itself", becoming perceptions and then propositions ...

(6) ... if put into the right drawers, or categories ...

(7) ... and finally conclusions, which are ordered in direction of the three "ideas" (Soul, World, God) and get undissolvably entangled: Metaphysics is not possible (if reason is used theoretically).

(8) If reason is used practically, metaphysics becomes possible – as outlined by the 4 final chapters – forming ...

(9) ... the base of all future philosophy.

In this video (in German), the author explains and shows the process:
Hanno Depner ([3]hannodepner@hotmail.com) studied Comparative Literature and Philosophy in Berlin and Norwich (UK). He worked as editor of the [4]International Literature Festival in Berlin and wrote for cultural institutions, as well as for print and online media. He was awarded first prize in the [5]Berlin Science Slam for the presentation of his book/building kit "Kant in Hand" in May 2011.

Hanno is a member of the advisory board of [6]DenkWelten Philosophy Museum. Currently he is doing research on the design of philosophy and knowledge as orientation at the Interdisciplinary Department of Rostock University (here is his [7]personal webpage). In April 2013 he organised a conference on "Visual Philosophie" which will be followed by a book containing all contributions.

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [8]S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [9]here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/5-klS6TzCnE
3. mailto:hannodepner@hotmail.com
4. aktuelles-en%25E2%2580%2593
5. www.scienceslam.de
   -depner/
8. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com
CfP: Tensions of Rhetorics and Realities in Critical Diversities (2013-05-25 08:00)

Call for Papers

Tensions of Rhetorics and Realities in Critical Diversities

Edited by
Alexa Athelstan, Nichole Edwards, Mercedes Pöll & Sanaz Raji
(University of Leeds)

Website: [1]http://tensionsrhetoricsrealities.wordpress.com/call-for-papers
Email: [2]tensions.rhetorics.realities@gmail.com

We warmly invite your contributions to our edited collection entitled Tensions of Rhetorics and Realities. The book will be submitted to the Routledge series Advances in Critical Diversities (eds. Yvette Taylor and Sally Hines).

This collection orientates itself towards an understanding of diversity as an often misappropriated concept used to obscure and maintain existing inequalities rather than to further their deconstruction. Consequently, the collection intends to (re-)emphasize the importance of looking at diversities not from a one-dimensional level, but with consideration of the multiple positioned and intersecting viewpoints and contexts that shape the diversity of human existence – thereby allowing for a constructive and critical engagement with related issues.

Encouraging a strongly intersectional and interdisciplinary approach, Tensions of Rhetorics and Realities seeks to investigate and theorize the spaces of conflict, discrepancy, contradiction or difficulty that can arise when dealing with discourses and practices, policies and lived experiences, theories and methodologies, individuals or communities. Incompatibilities or infeasibilities within those domains can easily lead to tensions or idiosyncrasies. A particular focus on rhetorics and realities highlights the criticality of the ways in which diversity issues are being framed, understood and dealt with in various settings and by various actors. This collection will therefore approach diversities critically – as a site of real-life impacts and circumstances, as a concept and a strategy – while maintaining the awareness that diversity efforts remain subject to their proponents’ positionalities, ideologies, moral and value judgments, economic and political aims, and a variety of other contextual factors illustrating their situatedness. At the same time, the individuals and groups intended for or affected by diversity measures are subjects to their own contextual circumstances.

We welcome submissions from all academic disciplines investigating Tensions of Rhetorics and Realities in Critical Diversities. Within this framework, topics may include (but are not limited to):

- Social, political and economic measures of inclusion/exclusion
- Equality, inequality and the in-between
- Individual, collective, institutional or systematic agency
- Sites of power and power dynamics (e.g. the nation-state, the law, citizenship, social spheres, the media)
- Characteristics of ‘desirable’ or ‘undesirable’ states of society (e.g. multiculturalism)
- States of crisis and criticality
- Contemporary political trends and diversity (e.g. neoliberalism, benefit cuts)
- Social movements, activism and identity politics (e.g. LGBTQIA+ rights)
- Different ‘publics’ and lived experiences of division/communality
- Practices of representation and recognition (e.g. in the media, policy)
• Tokenism and political correctness
• Policing and censorship
• Identities as multi-layered, diverse categories for social engagement
• Intimacy practices, a-/sexuality and normativity
• Gendered lives, realities and expectations
• Racisms, anti-racisms and 'post'-racisms
• Colonialisms, 'post'-colonialisms and neo-colonialisms
• Feminisms, 'post'-feminisms and men's rights movements
• Issues of dis-/ability in the home, the public sphere or the workplace
• Questions of faith – religions and atheisms
• Class, non-/belonging and socio-economic mobility
• Privileged positionalities and subaltern knowledges
• In-/visibility and potential of queer, DIY, alternative or grassroots spaces and efforts
• Climate, ecology and the state of the 'natural' world
• Diversity policies and organisational practice
• Articulating Critical Diversities – the language of diversity issues
• Media discourses on diversity and difference
• Humour as a means of/against discrimination
• Critical Diversities in the academy
• Divides between theories and practices of diversity
• Methodologies for researching and assessing Critical Diversities

Please submit your 300 word abstract, a short biography and your contact details to tensions.rhetorics.realities@gmail.com by the deadline of 10th June 2013. We are looking forward to receiving your contributions! Please feel free to contact us with any enquiries or expressions of interest.

Kind regards,
Alexa, Nikki, Mercedes & Sanaz.

1. http://tensionsrhetoricsrealities.wordpress.com/call-for-papers
2. mailto:tensions.rhetorics.realities@gmail.com
3. mailto:tensions.rhetorics.realities@gmail.com

Moral behaviour in animals (2013-05-26 08:00)
[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcJxRqTs5nk]

In this talk the primatologist [1]Frans de Waal explains the transition underway from a tendency to construe animal behaviour (including the human animal) in terms of competition, aggression and domination to a new understanding of a pervasive capacity for cooperation and empathy. It’s a fantastic talk, not least of all because of the animal videos he shows as part of it, but I found it rather puzzling - not in the sense that I disagree with him but simply because it challenged a lot of theoretical conclusions I had come to about animal behaviour.

I have always thought of reciprocity as consisting in a distributional norm and thus, it seemed, one emergent from social structures. I had assumed that issues of reciprocity wouldn’t emerge until you had socialised production
processes (i.e. ongoing and organised collective activity, however simple this is) which generated a surplus. Furthermore I would have assumed that the ‘cognitive channel’ for empathy is something which presupposed language, in that it constituted a form of discursive awareness, though perhaps I’ve misunderstood the concept here.

I find his comments towards the end of the talk rather troubling, as they foretell (or rather his joke about Occupy and casual dismissiveness of philosophical objections to his findings does) the political implications of this naturalisation of fairness. Perhaps our distributional norms (which I’d continue to insist, as an empirical statement, are social and linguistically coded) have their affective roots in a bio-social apparatus which de Waal has demonstrated in his research but his seeming willingness to reduce the former to the latter is the problem here? Though this may be an unfair judgement to make on the basis of a TED talk because he does talk explicitly about ‘continuity’ with other primates (rather than, say, equivalence) though it wasn’t entirely clear to me based on the content of the talk that he concretely holds to this.


Tony Lawson on Reorienting Modern Economics (2013-05-27 08:00)


1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/Kes9fRWN0sw?feature=player_detailpage](http://www.youtube.com/embed/Kes9fRWN0sw?feature=player_detailpage)
On the streets with Hungary’s far-right (2013-05-27 18:23)

[EMBED]

Invitation to contribute to the CelebYouth project website (2013-05-28 08:00)

‘The role of celebrity in young people’s classed and gendered aspirations’ is an ESRC funded research project which examines the relationship between celebrity culture, inequalities of class and gender and young people’s educational experiences, identities and transitions.

The project has an active website (http://www.celebyouth.org/) and twitter account (@CelebYouthUK) and the team regularly post blogs about the project and related issues – past posts have included an analysis of David Cameron’s ‘Aspiration Nation’ speech, a piece on Post-feminism and Olympic Role Models, and several on methodological dilemmas in youth research.

The research team are now welcoming guest contributions to the website from other people who are interested or working on topics related to the project. This could be work on celebrity and popular culture; young people’s aspirations and educational transitions; inequalities of class and gender; education policy; and/or the links between these.

We welcome guest contributions on these topics from anyone – from students, doctoral researchers, teachers, and academics – the only condition is that they are original and that what you write needs to fit with the broadly sociological, feminist and critical approach of the website.

If you would like to write for us please take a look at our website for more details http://www.celebyouth.org/write-for-celebyouth/ and get in touch with Heather Mendick (heathermendick@yahoo.co.uk) to discuss your ideas.

Many thanks in advance

Kim Allen (Manchester Metropolitan University), Heather Mendick and Laura Harvey (Brunel University)
What is Anthropology? (video) (2013-05-29 08:00)

LS Lowry and the Sociological Imagination (2013-05-30 08:00)

This isn’t the blog post I have intended to write for ages about LS Lowry’s profoundly sociological sensibility. But it is a precursor to it because [1]this article so succinctly describes exactly the point I’m trying to make about Lowry’s work:

What is amazing, and what confounds all efforts to cram Lowry into boxes marked “pessimism” or “nostalgia”, is that all these masses of people, delineated so simply and sparcely, are electric with individual life. No two are alike. They are no more realistic, conventionally speaking, than the caricatures in a strip cartoon, yet each of them is alive. Try this as an experiment: look at the figures in these paintings with concentration for some minutes, then turn to look at actual people walking in the street. Suddenly they all look like Lowry people, each instinct with desire, goal, daydream or preoccupation.

Lowry was fascinated by scale in a peculiarly sociological sense of the term, with even the teeming crowds that populate his most famous scenes exhibiting an undeniable individuality but one framed and formed by the relational and institutional contexts which he also took such care to represent. However while he is best known for his crowd scenes, the same attentiveness to individuality and context can be seen in his other work. It would be easy to
see discontinuities within these but, if we see them in terms of a range of scales through which the social can be apprehended, then a case can be made for Lowry’s sensibility as being distinctively sociological.

[2]"LS Lowry" on Bundlr

2. [http://bundlr.com/b/ls-lowry](http://bundlr.com/b/ls-lowry)
Fresh markets are an essential part of Mediterranean countries. Not only as a place for shopping groceries and fresh food. Fresh markets are also (or used to be) the social centre of our cities.

A market is a public space run by local authorities. Stands are owned by the local council who rents them, in a long-term basis, to the traders, who exploit the business. The law establishes that any city with more than 5,000 inhabitants must have a public market. The reason is a historical one: originally markets were created to ensure food supply in every city. However things have changed a lot from then, and now the situation is completely different. Supermarkets, big surfaces and commercial areas are a strong competition for local public markets. The economic crisis has made things still more complicated and the income of most of the traders has decreased considerably. However, many markets are still working with an "old fashioned" model. They are opened only in the morning, many stands don't accept credit cards, there is no home delivery, it's difficult to park around the market facilities, etc. As a consequence young people has stopped going to the market.

Public authorities are worried. In many places, markets entail a cost for the tight municipal accounts. But markets represent rooted values in our culture. They provide fresh food, many times from local producers and they also contribute to social and economic cohesion of our cities.

I've been working for the county government of Barcelona in order to find new solutions for public local markets. During the last year I've been conducting focus groups with all the stakeholders involved: public servants, politicians and traders, about the challenges and opportunities of public markets. In total, 79 persons have participated in the process. During the groups people were asked to give their opinions around three main questions: what do we do now that...
we should stop doing?, what do we do now that we have to do in a different way? and what do we are not doing that we should start doing?. At the end of the process we collected more than 350 proposals (of course, many of them were coincidental).

For me, the most relevant conclusion of the whole process is the difficulty of understanding that emerges when so many different actors are involved, and the importance of creating spaces that give the opportunity to speak and to generate dialog. This has probably been the first time that all these actors have been given a voice, in an equal basis. And the most astonishing thing for me has been the high degree of auto-criticism shown by most of the participants, and the creativity and innovation they have demonstrated in their proposals.

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Claudia Vallvé (claudiavallve@xarxaconsultors.com) is a sociologist based in Barcelona. She is founding partner of Xarxa Consultors (www.xarxaconsultors.com), a network of freelance professionals working in social research and consultancy. Claudia develops social investigations in different areas - mainly related to social welfare, employment, education and gender issues. In her blog, Cuestión de Método, she reflects on methodological issues (http://claudiavallve.com/, in Spanish and Catalan). Claudia also wrote this visual sociology article about tourists in Barcelona.

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found here, or just email us, if you have any more questions.

4. mailto:claudiavallve@xarxaconsultors.com

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4.6 June

RFR Masterclass - Facet methodology - principles and practices workshop (2013-06-01 08:00)

Facet methodology - principles and practices workshop
Wednesday 12 June 2013
2pm - 4pm
'Facet methodology' – is an inventive orientation to researching the multidimensionality of everyday lives and relationships, which puts researcher creativity and imagination at the heart of methodological practice.

This masterclass will introduce the ethos of the approach and explore how it can be practiced and what its uses might be.

Masterclass participants will be invited to engage in practical ways with the approach, and to consider what it might offer for their own research projects and plans.

A health warning! - facet methodology is an orientation, requiring imagination and inventiveness. Please don't expect to be given a set of techniques or methodological rules that can be learned and applied!

**About facet methodology**

Facet methodology was developed collaboratively through the work of the Realities programme at the National Centre for Research Methods, at the Morgan Centre, University of Manchester.

We wanted an inventive approach that enlivened and animated our enquiries into everyday life and relationships, and that promised methodological rigour.

The approach was developed through our collaborative practice, in the doing of research and analysis, rather than as a piece of armchair theorising or methodologising.

We wanted a metaphor to articulate our research strategy, to ourselves and others, and we lighted upon the visual metaphor of a cut gemstone. Our approach envisions research fields as constructed through combinations and constellations of facets as we might see in a gemstone, where facets refract and intensify light, taking up the background, and creating flashes of depth and colour as well as patches of shadow.

We found this a useful metaphor to think with, and to interpret the kinds of practices we had been developing. In facet methodology, the gemstone is the overall research question or problematic, and facets are conceived as different methodological-substantive planes and surfaces, which are designed to be capable of casting and refracting light in a variety of ways that help to define the overall object of concern by creating flashes of insight.
Facets involve different lines of enquiry, and different ways of seeing. The approach aims to create a strategically illuminating set of facets in relation to specific research concerns and questions. The rigour of the approach comes ultimately from researcher skill, inventiveness, creativity, insight and imagination – in deciding how best to carve the facets so that they catch the light in the best possible way.

You can read about facet methodology at:

To reserve your place at this exciting workshop, please fill in the registration form via the weblink below

1.[http://www.crfr.ac.uk/eventsandtraining/training/masterclass-facet-methodology/](http://www.crfr.ac.uk/eventsandtraining/training/masterclass-facet-methodology/)
3.[http://www.crfr.ac.uk/eventsandtraining/training/masterclass-facet-methodology/](http://www.crfr.ac.uk/eventsandtraining/training/masterclass-facet-methodology/)

What’s the point of sociological theory? (2013-06-02 08:00)

By maintaining its specialized logic and orientation it is capable of providing a set of conceptual tools that can operate as a theoretical lingua franca, as a flexible vocabulary with no foundationalist pretensions, which can help sociologists establish bridges between their own and other disciplines, as well as between competing social science paradigms. This is to say that sociological theory should not aim at the establishment of some sort of monolithic paradigmatic unity, but at strengthening the present pluralism by removing the obstacles that are a hindrance to open-ended communication between the differentiated subdisciplines or paradigms.

Pg 9, Sociological Theory: What went Wrong?: Diagnosis and Remedies, By Nicos Mouzelis

Dawn Talbot (2013-07-02 17:15:32)
To challenge misconceptions and to give those who do not have a voice the opportunity to be heard, even a scream at times. To give them a way into academia that other specialism/schools of thought actually run from. To champion another and another perspective, recognizing that one truth is a misconception.

Martin Heidegger: Thinking The Unthinkable (Video) (2013-06-02 14:36)
helmut schimpfke (2013-06-02 16:25:54)
The way humans perceive the environment is the way humanity structures society.

The Sociological Craft Project (2013-06-03 08:00)

In the appendix to Sociological Imagination, entitled On Intellectual Craftsmanship, C. Wright Mills advocates keeping a file or journal within which to record your ideas. He argues that doing so:

encourages you to capture ‘fringe-thoughts’: various ideas which may be by-products of everyday life, snatches of conversation overheard on the street, or, for that matter, dreams. Once noted, these may lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience[...]

by keeping an adequate file and thus developing self-reflective habits, you learn how to keep your inner world awake. Whenever you feel strongly about events or ideas you must try not to let them pass from your mind, but instead to formulate them for your files and in so doing draw out their implications, show yourself either how foolish these feelings or ideas are, or how they might be articulated into productive shape.

Much of my initial fascination with this came from the extent to which it provided me with a theory of blogging. Or at the very least helped me articulate the way(s) in which blogging (which I've done for going on a decade now) was starting to intersect with my academic work (which only began in a meaningfully engaged way 5 years ago at the start of my part time PhD). In providing the conceptual resources to help me understand the emergent way in which I was using my blog to develop ideas, it also improved the way I was doing this by transforming it from a cluster of behaviours into a[1]deliberate and self-aware practice. But it occurred recently that thinking about how I was using the tools also inculcated a sensitivity to what I was using the tools for which I’d previously lacked.

This lack might have just been my own idiosyncratic circumstances to a certain extent - I've had a meandering path through higher education and, while there are many things I've gained from the slightly eclectic range of influences I've been exposed to, I also sometimes worry that there's a process of academic socialisation which other people have enjoyed which I've missed out on. Though this is probably something that most [2]accidental sociologists feel at some point. But I think that’s perhaps an example of particular conditions leaving certain groups more sensitive to a broader trend. In this case the lack of attention to sociological craft within postgraduate education. Les Back and Nick Gane recently wrote a [3]lovely paper exploring the notion of sociological craft and its relevance to the broader predicament facing sociology at the present juncture:

In the appendix of The Sociological Imagination, Mills develops this notion of the craft and its concern for questions of perspective and scale. In this part of the text, the craft refers to the imaginative labours
that are needed in order for the promise the discipline – its capacity to connect biography to history – to be fulfilled. The craft is a way of thinking that brings into view relations between the individual and the social that have previously gone unnoticed, and does so by exercising an imagination that ‘is often successfully invited by putting together hitherto isolated items, by finding unsuspected connexions’ (1959:221). The craft is about imaginative methodological and theoretical work that puts the promise of sociology to work, and in so doing enables us to think about things, including our own lives, differently.

But there is, however, a further quality to Mills’ idea of the craft: ‘literary craftsmanship’. For sociology to be to be effective, especially beyond the academy, it must have literary ambitions. Mills’ assessment of the quality of the sociological writings of his time is damning. He argues that there is a ‘serious crisis in literacy’ in which sociologists are ‘very much involved’ (1959:239).

However I’ve been thinking a lot recently about the more quotidian sense of craft and particularly how it relates to postgraduate education. In a way this ties in rather nicely with the above paper: if postgraduate teaching is how sociology reproduces itself as a discipline then any role that a renewed focus on craft can play in actualising the promise of sociology must have pedagogical implications in relation to postgraduates (if not undergraduates as well). The other line of thought that’s been preoccupying me recently is routine and creativity. I’m fascinated by websites which chart the mundane daily routines of famous writers, artists and intellectuals: see for example [4]here, [5]here and [6]here. My longstanding tendency towards obsessive introspection and self-analysis notwithstanding, this interest comes from some of the theoretical issues I’m interested in (particularly the relationship between habit and reflexivity) but it’s something which I’ve largely thought about in terms of how people organise and approach everyday life.

Increasingly though I’m seeing how useful a framework it is to think about craft – what does sociologists do in the deeply practical sense in which Mills discusses the question in the SI appendix? How do different sociologists approach similar tasks? How can an awareness of the different repertoires exhibited by sociologists factor into the development by PhD students and ECRs of their own distinctive style of sociological craft? Blogging gives a wonderful insight into the[7]backstage of sociological craft and, not least of all because of the name of the site, I’d love to explore this on [8]Sociological Imagination in some way. Thus far the best I can come up with is e-mail interviews though and that seems a bit crap really – any suggestions/thoughts/ideas are much appreciated.

Edit to add: I realised that I didn’t recognise the fact that some people are already producing the sort of material I’m talking about here, with [9]Patter being the most obvious example. I think the popularity of blogs like Patter and the Thesis Whisperer point to precisely the lack in postgraduate education which I point to above. I guess I’m suggesting two things in practice (a) somehow soliciting reflections on sociological craft so that a wide range of voices are represented (b) doing so with a specifically sociological focus – not for reasons of willful insularity but because, for reasons which might make a good follow up post, I think a disciplinary focus is integral to ensuring that discussions of professional craft don’t become somewhat less interesting proffering of generic career advice

1. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/29/reflections-continuous-publishing/
3. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/29/7-8/399.abstract
5. http://www.slate.com/authors.mason_currey.html
Being realist about social movements: ontological stratification and emergence (2013-06-04 08:00)

Being realist about social movements means being clear on the theoretical foundations that one uses to examine the social world. This post will expand on two key aspects of realist social theory – ontological stratification and emergence – and argue that, together, these ideas foreground any realist explanation of how social movements form.

In the [1]previous post, I made the point that a realist is someone who believes that the social world has objects that exist and interact independent of our interactions with them. Based on the philosophy of Roy Bhaskar and his arguments in *A Realist Theory of Science*, this ontological position that has three key premises:

First, reality has a *transitive* and *intransitive* dimension. This can be summarised as follows,

'Science itself, or the scientific results, always consists of a set of theories of this independent [intransitive] reality. These theories - not reality - constitute the 'raw material' (Collier, 1994, p.51) that science uses in the practical work, and science continually tries to transform the theories into a deeper knowledge of reality. Theories thus are the transitive objects of science; they constitute the dimension that indirectly connects science with reality' (Danermark et al., 2002, p.22-23).

All this means is that reality consists of independent and enduring objects, structures and mechanisms (intransitive dimension) as well as human experiences, discourse and theories (transitive dimension). Theories, then, allow the realist movement researcher to better explain those structures of an independent reality, such as, the causal processes behind the formation of social movement activism.

Second, these powers are said to be transfactual, that is, they hold with necessity, operating independently of the theories that we use to probe them. If one believes that there are a set of principles that cause social movements to form, then, these principles are said to be universal. Such causes are always independent of whether we have or, indeed, can, appropriately discern them. Furthermore, such causes cannot be reduced to individual human agents or any particular form of social structure. All this means is that whatever we determine through empirical investigation cannot alone define reality. Thus, the emergence of social movement activism is subject to processes beyond the records of oral histories or the testimony of interviews.

One important implication of contemporary realism is that it explains the limitations of the empiricist trap. This is where sociologists define reality through their empirical research alone. What is also called an *epistemic fallacy*. The whole point of distinguishing between the transitive and intransitive dimensions of reality is to remind us that sense-experiences alone cannot be used to define what is real. In accepting that there is ontological depth to reality, realists reject any causal explanations that are based simply on patterns of events. Rather, following Bhaskar, realists recognise that social reality is an active and complex system, one which is open to human interference and disruption. This makes it an error to establish universal causal laws based only on tests within artificial environments (laboratory-based experiments that do not reproduce themselves within social life). As such, realists reject empiricism on the understanding that if social science is to be intelligible, then it requires an appreciation of the complexity afforded by open systems. Translated, if one seeks to find the principles of social movement formation, then one must depart with an ontological, rather than experiential, model of reality.
Foregrounding both of these principles is the ontological stratification of reality. In basic terms, stratification refers to the different 'levels' of reality within which objects, powers, mechanisms and their empirical effects exist. Realists distinguish the 'empirical' reality of social life from the 'real' objects whose causal powers effect social change through 'actual' mechanisms. This stratification is hierarchical and complex and beyond this simple beginning these hierarchical metaphors can be misleading. All three domains are important to social research but, here, it is better to simply suggest that reality is understood as comprising 'sets of nested structures' whose effects on actors are 'a plurality of interpenetrating constraints deriving from many recognisable "levels" looping back and around each other' (Dyke, 1988 cited in Carter and New, 2004, p.8).

Such stratification is at the forefront of any realist investigation into social movements. To understand the principles of social movement formation requires this ontological depth, as we move beyond the contextual or experiential basis of social movement activism. This does not make human and social experiences epiphenomenal, on the contrary, but it does locate experience at a 'level' of reality within which wider (un)observable 'happenings' exist. What becomes of experience is recognised within the construction of collectivities based on wider causal processes.

If one seeks to understand what causes the formation of social movements, then one must turn to a model of reality that places its emphasis on the structures for their emergence. Emergence is a central theme for contemporary realists and it is a principle that is defended based on a stratified account of reality. On this reading, realists defend a form of emergentism that can be captured with the maxim: the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This refers to the relationship between people (as 'parts') and social structures (as 'whole') and the interactions between them. The purpose of such theorizing is to allow for an analytical toolset by which we understand the duality of agency and structure. As the argument goes, people interact to create social structures that are then irreducible to the individuals involved, that is, social structures are the emergent products of human interaction.

Such a thesis is paramount to understanding the formation of social movements, where agents interact to create social structures with emergent hegemonic and resistant properties. By this account, human and social experiences are no longer epiphenomenal when individual and collective biographies serve as witness to the creation or reproduction of socio-structural forms of power and resistance. What we have here, then, is an ontology of social groups whose principles begin to account for the emergence of social movements. Mobilisation, in this respect, is mapped onto the fundamental organisation of social groups, but with human and social experiences as the mediating factor between existing social conditions and the social consciousness necessary for change.

What soon becomes of methodological importance are those ('actual') mechanisms that mediate such fundamental processes. Being realist about social movements means tracing ('reroducing') those mechanisms by which political action is mobilized but, also, by which activists target their efforts for social change.

Empiricism aside, it is important that our transitive theories of social movement formation be empirically grounded, albeit within a fallibilist philosophy. In the next blog post, I hope to further expand on the relevance of historical research for this project. Where the methods of historical sociology serve to trace how social movements emerge but, also, how activists deploy 'repertoires of action' (Tilly, 1978) to, arguably, resist the mechanisms by which hegemonic groups are formed.

Bibliography


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John Searle, Foucault and Bourdieu on continental obscurantism (2013-06-04 15:21)


» The Empty ‘Posturing’ of Žižek and Lacan? The Sociological Imagination (2013-07-16 08:01:06) [...] (via Open Culture) will perhaps divide opinion. It follows on quite nicely from John Searle's comments about Foucault, Bourdieu and continental obscurantism which I found recently. Before I express a view, let me offer a preamble: I own and have read a [...]
What is Digital Sociology? July 16th at the @BritSoci Meeting Rooms (2013-06-05 08:00)

Tuesday 16th July 2013
BSA Meeting Room, Suite 2, 2 Station Court
Imperial Wharf, Fulham, London SW6 2PY

This inaugural event for the BSA's Digital Sociology Group brings together a diverse range of speakers who, in a variety of ways, work within the nascent field of digital sociology. Rather than proceed from a substantive account of what digital sociology is or could be, this event seeks to address the question ‘what is digital sociology?’ through an open and informal exploration of a broad range of exciting work being undertaken by sociologists in the UK which could, in the broadest sense of the term, be characterised as 'digital'. In casting a spotlight on these projects in such a way the event aims to initiate an ongoing dialogue about the continuities and discontinuities between these emergent strands of digital activity, as well as the broader methodological and disciplinary questions which they pose.

**Speakers:**
Kim Allen, Manchester Metropolitan University
Les Back, Goldsmiths, University of London
Ben Baumberg, University of Kent
Laura Harvey, Brunel University
Noortje Marres, Goldsmiths, University of London
Heather Mendick, Brunel University
Mark Murphy, University of Glasgow
Evelyn Ruppert, Goldsmiths, University of London
Helene Snee, University of Manchester

**Delegate rates:**
BSA Concessionary Member (student/unwaged/retired) £10
BSA Member £15
Non-member (student/unwaged/retired) £20
Non-member £25

For administrative assistance contact: BSA Events Teamevents@britsoc.org.uk
Telephone: +44 (0) 191 383 0839
Academic enquiries: Dr Emma Head e.l.head@keele.ac.uk

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**Getting started with social media (2013-06-06 08:00)**

Social media is becoming increasingly integral to academic life & will only continue to be so – reasons include the increasing centrality of the digital in wider society, the impact agenda, precarious academic labour and the
individualization of professional identity, normalization... I think a minimal online presence is pretty much essential at this stage and with the partial exception of the google ranking conferred by a university domain I don't think there's much point in using institutionally embedded services – this isn't a criticism of them per se, it's just that the model is becoming less and less relevant.

But this doesn't have to be particularly onerous – it's just a case of ensuring visibility and retaining access to online networks through which increasing amounts of professionally relevant information flows i.e. use social media enough to allow relevant people to find you and for you to be able to find relevant people and information. This can be done pretty successfully with an academia.edu profile & occasionally updating a twitter feed.

Sign up to twitter, go to the LSE Impact Blog and find the academic twitter lists, follow everyone you think looks interesting. Follow any friends/colleagues you know on twitter – there's over 10 million users in UK now so there will be people you know. Then just share... say what you're working on and what you're interested in. Share ideas. Share papers and books you've found interesting. Share information about events. Get the app and use it on mobile devices. Using twitter really doesn't involve anything like the time commitment which you might expect at the outset.

1. [http://amberatwarwick.wordpress.com/2013/05/12/byoi/](http://amberatwarwick.wordpress.com/2013/05/12/byoi/)

The Iron Lady (Visual Sociology #007) (2013-06-07 08:00)
The Iron Lady

by Helen Owton

Dr Helen Owton is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Northampton

E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [1]S.I.Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [2]here, or just [3]email us, if you have any questions.

1. mailto:S.I.Imagery@gmail.com
3. mailto:S.I.Imagery@gmail.com

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What place does religion have in the modern university? (2013-06-08 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/erz8w8X0QNo


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/erz8w8X0QNo
Interdisciplinarity and the poverty of post structuralist intellectual strategies (2013-06-09 08:00)

Post-structuralism exchanges the undesirable situation of lack of communication between the social sciences for the equally undesirable one where the internal logic of each subdiscipline is completely ignored. To be specific, there is little satisfaction with the present status quo where the boundaries between economics, political science, sociology and anthropology have become solid blinkers preventing interdisciplinary studies of social phenomena. But such compartmentalization will not be transcended by the facile and mindless abolition of the existing division of labour between disciplines.

[Instead we need] a painstaking process of theoretical labour that aims at building bridges between the various specializations. Such a strategy does not abolish social science boundaries: it simply aims at transforming them from impregnable bulwarks to transmission belts facilitating interdisciplinary research ... what is badly needed today are more systematic efforts towards the creation of a theoretical discourse that would be able to translate the language of one discipline into that of another. Such an interdisciplinary language would not only facilitate communication among the social science disciplines, it would also make it possible to incorporate effectively into the social sciences insights achieved in philosophy, psychoanalysis or semiotics.

Post-structuralism, by completely side-stepping this difficult but necessary theoretical task, simply proposes the free and indiscriminate mixture of concepts and ideas derived from philosophy, literature, sociology, psychoanalysis, semiotics and elsewhere. This rejection of boundaries, in combination with the neglect of micro, meso and macro levels of analysis, of social hierarchies, and of the agency-structure distinction, quite predictably leads to a hotch-potch that is neither good philosophy nor good literature, nor yet good sociology, psychoanalysis or semiotics.

[This leads to] the present incredible situation where anything goes, and where complex macro phenomena are reductively explained in terms of signs, texts, the unconscious or what have you. As far as I am concerned, such crude exercises constitute a relapse to pre-Durkheimian attempts at explaining social phenomena in terms of instincts, race, climate or geography. The only difference is that today's postmodernists draw their reductive explanations from psychoanalysis and linguistics rather than from biology and geography.

Sociological Theory: What went Wrong?: Diagnosis and Remedies, By Nicos Mouzelis

I rather like the ‘conceptual pragmatism’ advocated by Mouzelis. As I understand his arguments, he is proposing that any adequate body of sociological theory (as opposed to social theory) must be capable of facilitating communication and translation between paradigms. Sociological theory which is geared towards ‘building bridges’ can sustain productive conversations across the boundaries of substantive intellectual differences precisely because it provides a rich and multifaceted language within and through which a whole range of divergent substantive claims about the social can be expressed.
If there are common points of reference then sociological theory can provide the sort of intellectual topology (i.e. mapping continuities and discontinuities between different approaches and theories in a relational way) which is a precondition for progressive debate about theoretical topics. But without such common points of reference - if conceptual idioms like structure/agency or macro/micro which recurrently emerge in practical settings are either ignored or rejected in favour of 'transcendence' - it becomes difficult for sociological theory to perform this function beyond those who are, in some sense, 'internal' to the approach.

I'm fascinated by theorists who can incorporate a diverse range of perspectives within the same over-arching framework. This is why I was drawn to Richard Rorty even though I think, in retrospect, his project was a regressive one. It's also more latterly why I'm drawn to realist social theory in spite of the (largely though not entirely unfair) perception it suffers under as being more concerned with scholastic critique than practical rapprochement. I'm not convinced theoretical debates can be adequately understood without an understanding of what (as some more or less stable issue which is relatively autonomous from the debate itself) is at stake in the respect positions being staked out. This minimal claim is perfectly compatible with a sociological approach to the history of ideas, as the 'what' does not need to be a timeless historical question, only something which has recurrently occurred with sufficient frequency to allow it to be treated in abstraction from the substantive disputes.

The Convention for Higher Education (2013-06-10 08:00)

Organised by the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics (CAPPE), University of Brighton, and co-sponsored by the Campaign for Public Universities, the Council for the Defence of British Universities, and the UCU at the University of Brighton, this two-day conference on Higher Education investigated the current changes that British Higher Education (in England and Wales) is undergoing.

The Convention was designed to enable colleagues from the full range of university disciplines to address how to preserve a properly described 'higher education' from the effects of current proposals, and from the redefinition of universities and of higher learning. As a complement to the Council for the Defence of British Universities and the Campaign for Public Universities, it considered a draft of a Charter for Higher Education that the organisers hope will be debated and refined in most or all institutions of higher learning throughout the UK, and which could then form the core of values around which colleagues could cohere, whether as members of Councils and Academic Boards, Faculty or School Boards, as members of their Course Committees, or as union members.

The Convention was occasioned by the 25th anniversary of the Humanities Programme at the University of Brighton. Born in in adversity in 1988 – in the midst of an earlier assault on the Humanities – it has survived and thrived by resisting both governmental pressure and temporary fashions in education and pedagogy. It is an interdisciplinary, non-modular range of degree courses based on small-group teaching, and research-focused student development.

Here are some of our favourite videos from the event:
Is social media becoming mainstream within UK sociology? (2013-06-11 08:00)

I wrote a short article for the BSA Teaching Journal last week arguing that we are seeing the early stages of social media use becoming mainstream within UK sociology. I’m interested to know what others think of this argument so here is the evidence I cited:

- Almost 30 Sociology departments now have a twitter presence. Numerous departments have their own blogs.
- This year’s BSA conference saw 1497 tweets from 328 users on the #BritSoc13 hashtag – compared to a handful of people discussing the passing tumbleweeds on #BritSoc12 the year before.
Many of the BSA’s study groups have twitter feeds (off the top of my head I can think of at least 8) and a number of the study groups have their own blogs.

On a purely anecdotal level there seems to have been an influx of sociologists to twitter and the blogosphere in the last 9 months or so. Though I recognise how tenuous and prone to confirmation bias an anecdotal observation like this is.

These clearly aren’t mainstream activities yet. But in the very recent past social media seems to have quietly become much more integral to the activity of UK sociologists than it was previously. I thought Dave Beer captured this quite nicely when he asked [4]“Can academics manage without Twitter?” a couple of months ago (before almost immediately answering his own question by creating a twitter account):

What I’m finding is that Twitter seems to have rapidly become the place to find out about what is going on in the academic world. It would seem that there is something about Twitter, more than any other social media, that seems to suit academics. The result seems to be that academic life is being remediated on a large scale. Not only is information about opportunities (including job, publishing and speaking opportunities) passing around freely, but Twitter seems to be making aspects of academic practice more visible. We can see what is going on where, who has achieved what, where people are moving to, and so on. I’m wondering if this is going to increasingly mean that you need a good reason to avoid Twitter. I’m increasingly getting the sense that I’m likely to miss stuff, or that I’m likely to fall out of the loop. Plus, of course, there is the visibility that comes with an established Twitter profile. Maybe resistance is futile. Maybe this is the new space for academic life to thrive.

So, in full knowledge of the fact the only people likely to ever see this question are those who are using Twitter and reading blogs: is social media beginning to become a mainstream activity within UK sociology? What would it mean for it to become ‘mainstream’? What are the risks attached to such a process? What are the opportunities? I think Dave Beer’s post also highlights some of the important questions which need to be addressed if social media is becoming mainstream in this way:

But this remediation of academic life, and the underlying politics of data circulation, are going to need some attention soon. The ease with which Twitter has been absorbed into academic practice is interesting in itself. It will probably be worth thinking through the ways in which it is restructuring academic practice and communication – and how it amplifies certain voices amongst the noise of Tweets.

So even if academics can presently manage without Twitter, will this continue to be true in the future? If so do the implications of this trend vary across the career structure? For instance would it be easier for established professors to distance themselves from a mainstreamed academic twitter sphere than it would be for early career researchers or PhD students? If there are (soft) risks likely to be attached in future (missing out etc) to a lack of twitter presence then does this create a need for academic departments to work collectively to leverage the benefits of twitter for those within them? I’ve been thinking a lot recently about the way services like Rebel Mouse (which I use to automatically create [6]this page which I’m extremely fond of but is nonetheless rather pointless) could be used at the departmental level to draw together the social media presence of all those within the department in ways beneficial to both the individuals and the department themselves.

Originally this column was intended to chart my way through my first formal study of sociology. I’d tripped from one degree to another, with some arty, creative, musical projects in between and ended up in sociology. Apparently, accidentally. When I began my MRes I didn’t really know if I was a ‘proper’ sociologist, because I didn’t really know what sociology was. All I had ascertained was that the theoretical texts underpinning the discipline spoke strongly to me and that, as an intellectual space, it was the more likely discipline to let me do what I wanted. I’m almost completely through my Master’s now and about to embark on my PhD in sociology in the autumn, so do I now feel like a sociologist – and more importantly, do I feel accidental?

Honestly, I have no idea. The paucity of writing in this column is testament to the fact that, ultimately, I’ve managed to fit in with the discipline rather well. Frankly the original piece was a rather heartfelt cry for help – a plaintive grasping for a steadying rock amid the fluctuations of my academic path. Essentially it was therapy, and indeed proved therapeutic. That I haven’t really felt the need to write more often indicates to me that after an initial spell of “WTF?” I’ve managed to ground my research questions, knowledge and skills quite happily within sociology. More than this, when I now talk to people working in my old subject, English Literature, I approach their work with a combination of bafflement and amusement. I have almost no idea why they’re doing what they’re doing, nor how they’re going to make a case for impact out of it. Of course, excellent work is done in other subjects (but obviously the best and most relevant is done in sociology) but my complete alienation from something that used to be second nature seems further proof of my current comfortable place as a sociologist.

On the other hand, several recent incidents have brought into sharp relief the disjunction between me and sociology – or more specifically, what I might regard as dominant or hegemonic sociology. For me this is very much The Other Stuff, or What I Don’t Do, i.e. large scale empirical work where you have an actual chapter headed “Findings”. My chapter headings are all quotations from Alice in Wonderland. What I have are more musings than findings. Let’s take a moment to mark the difference there. I’m interested in power, legitimacy, values and knowledge. I appreciate the scientific method and applying this to theoretical reasoning. I fail to see why emotion and practice and affect (apparently) cannot be part of science. Fortunately I have the opportunity to investigate this question in my PhD, but it’s this specific gap that is always what makes me feel out of step with sociology. I write about writing but I don’t classify myself as a cultural sociologist.

At the 2013 BSA Annual Conference the organisers put my presentation in the ‘cultural sociology’ panel. If I had to define myself it would be within the remit of critical sociology or critical theory. I sort of resent the idea that anything even remotely drawing on art or artistry is put in the ‘cultural’ bracket, as if it can be demarcated and dealt with separately to scientific sociology. A recent email exchange with another sociologist, this time someone rather further ahead in their career than I, revealed further disjunctions in how art is dealt with in terms of sociological knowledge formation. We made a link based on mutual research interests concerning an unusual
topic within sociology (which is in a sense a very good thing), but equally there was a sense of shared relief in finding someone else who thinks this stuff is important. Now that may be a common feeling, but I'd argue that when your research almost **directly contradicts** the foundations of your discipline, it's a particular joy to find other folk who care.

Recently I have found myself abusing a phrase - I am guilty, in my representation of sociology to those outside the subject, of constantly describing the discipline as 'a broad church'. Ultimately, I still don't really know what sociology is but I'm slowly learning that it's more in the **doing than the definition**. Sociology is essentially a set of epistemological and methodological tools for interpreting society and people, but more than that it is a particular form of imagination. A **sociological imagination** is a tool as much as a certain theoretical viewpoint or methodology. So perhaps the reason I no longer feel so very accidental, so very much here by chance, is that the underpinning of sociology appears to be something quite amorphous and indeed, fortuitous: we might attempt to define a sociological imagination but fundamentally the imagination is slippery, indistinct, personal. The concept itself is suffused with artistry. Doing sociology should be similarly so.

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You have summed up all that is destroying sociology as a serious discipline.

Expand on this....?

Neville Morley (2013-06-11 16:03:42)
Yes, is the main problem that you don’t count stuff, or do quote Alice in Wonderland?

Max Parkin (2013-06-11 16:15:37)
It has no core. Just lots of peripheries.

You’re awfully aphoristic for someone who derides French theorists so enthusiastically.

Max Parkin (2013-07-11 00:11:43)
Aphorisms ought to be a relief after all that eumerdification!

Milena Kremakova (2013-06-12 14:41:48)
Max Parkin: This "coreless" structure in itself is not necessarily the problem with sociology. The existence of multiple paradigms in the social sciences reflects the multiple possible ways of understanding what goes on in the world. It is not (at least) immediately possible to say which paradigm or style of analysis is superior - and the answer might differ depending on the research angle. Besides, there are competing paradigms in the "natural" sciences as well. That said, scientists (social and other) can (and do) argue about what is the best degree of precision for each purpose, and I agree that in sociology it really is harder to judge what is waffle and what is good work. However, this is because the world is complicated. I see sociology as a type of chaos theory with ∞ dimensions - that necessarily makes it and its methods fuzzy and imprecise.

Max Parkin (2013-07-11 00:12:57)
The short road to chaos, you mean?

durandusvonmeissen (2014-04-17 19:11:46)
Astute observation. I incline to think of this 'matrix' as a synthetic manifold of paradigms that go to constitute the
Existential Field for Perception, both objective and subjective elements and aspects of orientation, motivation, interest and planning (or mapping) strategies (cognitive frame or affective disposition, creative or responsive, reflective) enduring a momentum that can be characterized as dual-directional...having interiority and exteriority of experience, whether through Discovery, Invention or passive absorption of the cultural milieu in which we move about and have our being, so to speak. More on that in the "Prolegomena to the Models of Agency," being Value/s instinctively, fundamentally derived or reasonably contrived to serve ends both intrinsic and extrinsic to their realm/space/terrain...intuitive, sensate, cognitive, rational and ideal (projection of the Possible Real) having different orders of realization, different principles of instantiation as experience or differently organized set of value valences, synthetic and dynamically cooperative or competitive, as aspects of Perception that informs the EF, for all organic intelligence as for any Agency, rational purpose, aesthetic, or instinct.

Pity some of the French aren’t! They take far more words to say far less!

Max Parkin (2013-06-11 16:41:33)
I have 40 years of experience of the influence of French intellectuals on UK sociology. Yet to see anything that I thought advanced the discipline. Just because it’s hard to understand doesn’t make it valuable.

Milena Kremakova (2013-06-12 14:42:43)
Any particular examples of bad sociology? Do you have any examples of good sociology? What is your own field?

Sociological Imagination (2013-06-12 15:07:28)
and do you make a habit of walking up to PhD students and saying "YOU'RE what's wrong with sociology"? If you don't do it in person then why do you think it's ok to do it online?

Milena Kremakova (2013-06-12 14:42:43)
Any particular examples of bad sociology? Do you have any examples of good sociology? What is your own field?

Max Parkin (2013-07-11 00:15:02)
No, I just expect young sociologists to justify what they do and how and why, like I had to do. Bad sociology? The GBCS for starters.

Les Back (2013-06-13 07:10:37)
French intellectuals have contributed nothing to sociology? This is baffling having just given a talk in Copenhagen about Bourdieu's early work in Algeria and his sociological craft. Preserving the discipline in the way suggested in Max's comment will embalm it. This couldn't be more wrong at a time when computer scientists, artists, life writers and musicians are all falling over themselves to collaborate with sociologists. This is a great opportunity rather than a threat. There is no future for a timid or conservative sociology.

"There is no future for a timid or conservative sociology". Absolutely! Les Back. As a graduating sociology student, just completed an applied research project, I couldn't agree more. The organisation I worked with warmed to sociology as I have myself through a four year journey. At times I have almost hated it, but I really love it, now that it's beginning to make some sense to me. The amount of times I've used Bourdieu, and to be fair, Durkheim is very undervalued and unappreciated in an impersonal neo-liberal regime/ era where sympathy, empathy, tolerance and patience are at a premium. Well, maybe that has been the case in the past too and the 'founding fathers' saw similar in their days. I'm sure they did. I worked with a 'homeless' football club. Their strength was that they were patient and non-judgmental, They never wrote anyone off. Lots of complex, problematic people. Lots of 'write-offs'. From place to place, some in and out of prison, little if any structure or stability and so on. Amazing people too with stories worth hearing and knowledge to be made from them. Social bonds, trust, self-esteem, hope and (crucially) solidarity were missing from many homeless players lives before they started having a
game of 5-a-side in Liverpool Homeless Football Club. When I've raked through Bourdieu, Wacquant and also a lovely paper by Stepan Mestovic (1987) on the value Durkheim's and Mauss' ideas, for all the economism around, some basic humanity, reflexivity and imagination are vital ingredients of any good sociological imagination. As well as learning so much myself, about myself as well as the community I have worked with; sharing this journey and my thoughts with the key workers in a voluntary organisation has opened their eyes and minds too. The 'old', 'classic' sociological ideas and research in times of rapid change still resonate now. The over-cautious, conservative sociology is as bad as the coldness and blatant over-intellectualism of postmodernism. The reflexive approach is what we've been exposed to in Liverpool, i.e. using the resources we have available to us and the skills and concepts we've learned... All humans are capable of high levels of self-understanding and we use this to make social changes. Maybe not huge macro revolutions. Small changes can and have made a big difference to ordinary lives. Some people may be on the pitch but the game is far from over... Just thought I'd share my thoughts. Best wishes,

Max Parkin (2013-07-11 00:18:59)

Les, I have no idea what you mean, maybe because what you say has no meaning? I don't share your apparent idea of progress in the discipline. I don't care who is falling over themselves to collaborate with a discipline that has no core.

Accidental Sociologist (2013-06-13 09:04:03)

I've been thinking about Max's comments and this is what keeps coming to mind: "Your paintings are stuck, you are stuck! Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!" - Tracey Emin to Billy Childish Sociology, like art, can't be preserved in aspic and remain unchanged and unchanging. I have no time for deadness; I want my sociology to be full of life - to be exciting. So if my kind of sociology is destroying the discipline, I'd suggest that maybe ongoing destruction and revision is no bad thing.

Max Parkin (2013-07-11 00:51:07)

Sociology is not art. It has nothing to do with art, nor with literary crit, nor with French eumerdification. It isn’t about preserving anything in aspic. It’s about trying to make the discipline cumulative and not just continually revolutionary. Revolutions don’t emerge from eumerdification. If the core concerns of sociology are constantly changing, that’s a problem. For me, the core concern of sociology is the problem of order - not just for me but for every sociologist whose work I have admired from the classics to Lockwood. But who reads - who among the current young generation has even heard of Lockwood today? Only the best theoretical sociologist the UK has had in the last 50+ years, of course. Yet the youngsters don’t know his work (I know they don’t; I have asked wherever I go; so did Ray Pahl who was equally puzzled), but have Bourdieu quotes tumbling from their laptops and mouths. And even the many French sociologists I know don’t take Bourdieu that seriously! For empirical work, they find Goldthorpe more useful. You know, the Goldthorpe who is the best empirical macro-sociologist the UK has had in the last 50 years. It was G and L whose work attracted me to sociology and nothing since has persuaded me that their way isn’t the most promising for sociology. Why do UK sociologists prefer and keep turning to prophets from other countries? Naturally, I accept that there are other ways of doing sociology that are very insightful, too. But if one’s concerns are macro-sociological, as mine are, I fail to understand why the newer generations are so ignorant of what’s on their doorstep. Read Solidarity and Schism; read Lockwood in BJS 1996 - there’s a research agenda for today! Read Goldthorpe's On Sociology. Read Runciman's three volume magnum opus. Then explain to me why eumerdification is a better way forawrd. My ears are receiving.

Accidental Sociologist (2013-07-11 07:51:59)

Oh dear Max, if you think sociology has nothing to do with art maybe it’s you that needs to do some reading.....

» The Sociology of Intellectual Faddishness or, Why it’s unfair to blame everything on Foucault The Sociological Imagination (2013-07-22 08:01:17)

[...] hosted an ongoing argument here about the nature of sociology. Having initially been rather rude, Max Parkin offered what I [...]
No, no, no... That Ain’t No ‘Turkish Spring’! That is Chapullin (2013-06-11 15:30)

"What is it these people are protesting against?" foreign press members are continuously asking to the reporters. That is a very understandable enquiry as this movement is quite unique and complicated in many ways. But the answer to that question is very simple; people finally got enough of being told off on a daily basis by the authoritarian father figure, Mr Erdogan that is. One day it is academics, the next artists... yet the main group who kept being bullied by was the journalists as if there were any opponents left in the mass media.

It all started by a small group of young people acted as peaceful 'tree-huggers' in attempt to save a park situated at the centre of Istanbul from turning into 103rd shopping mall in the city. Whilst they were occupying the park singing, dancing and reading books in the frame of a pacifist sit-in resistance, on early Friday morning, 31st May, police raided the protest site in a brutal manner. The epic resistance of the crowd against the water cannons and pepper gas, especially by young women, snowballed into a nation-wide outrage. As the reaction accumulated at an amazing pace, despite the recent autocratic atmosphere in the country, the whole nation managed to get over the fear threshold, including myself. Last week today, when I wrote another article on the top-to-bottom administration in the Turkish cities, I had also told a friend that the whole country felt like living in a home with a constantly furious authoritarian father figure, thus dreaming of escaping the house one day. Then she told me to write a separate article around that issue and I replied her asking if she wanted to see me in trouble. Yet today here I ago, I feel encouraged to say it loud.

The strength of the movement lies in the diversity of the crowd. What brought so many diverse people in unity is their reclaim for their dignity and desire to be treated as adults. Erdogan has at times insulted not only his opponents but also even his supporters including the Ministers in his cabinet openly in front of the public. Moreover, some people close to him started to resonate this behaviour, for example son of a Member of Parliament in his early 20s, has recently put the police officers in line at a Police Station and bullied them to identify the one that got into quarrel with him in a previous occasion. Whilst this is a mere example, there has been hundreds of patronising and bullying treatment from people in power towards 'bottom'. As these examples kept accumulating, whole month of May has been full of much distress every other day, starting with the banning May Day celebrations in Taksim Square. Then the last day of the month, as CNN International has put it, 'something snapped inside Turkey'. That is neither ‘Occupy’ nor ‘Spring’ as it would be misreading the essence of the movement as either solely anti-capitalist or confronting the legitimacy of the current regime. Especially when considered nothing has come to the terms yet, the nature of the protests is constantly being reshaped in an organic way. Therefore it cannot be emphasised enough that, this is neither a war against Sharia or capitalism, this is about a public that wants to be taken into account.

It is totally clear to me why this whole protest is triggered by a debate about a park despite the fact that there are much more problematic issues in the country. And the reason is not that environmental concerns are the top priority for the majority. Neither are the neo-liberal policies that resulted in building more than 100 shopping malls in only Istanbul (and yet not one big public library). That is not to suggest that these are not actual concerns for some people, otherwise the whole action would have not been initiated in the first place. However the lack of participation in the policy making at local level has made the deficiency of general grassroots participation in politics more obvious. Whilst that is a common problem in almost all the cities in Turkey, in Istanbul things get more dramatic as the historical and cultural value of the city exceeds further than its national boundaries. Plus, it is the major economic and cultural hub of the country. Therefore both local and central administrations see it in a way that every inch of the land is too profitable to let the ordinary citizens decide its fate. When the level of the participatory decision making mechanisms in the city are limited to carrying out an electronic poll to select the colour of new public buses, naturally people's feeling of being left out and not heard kept gradually increasing.

That is of course not the first time the central government has taken a decision in a top to bottom fashion about city planning. In the mid-April, a historical building that included the oldest cinema theatre in Istanbul has also
been demolished defying a long period of grassroots resistance. Although there is a brand new and also a very
controversial shopping mall right next to it, there is going to be built another mall instead of 150 years old Cercle
D’Orient building. The form of resistance to keep this cinema was quite similar to the initial resistance at the Gezi
Park, however that has not developed into a protest at national level like this time. As the concept of ‘right to the
city’ is a strongly middle class concern in a society like Turkey, the majority were either oblivious about the issue
or conceived it as a luxurious concern given the many problems in the country. Therefore nobody, including the
activists themselves had foreseen the upcoming nation-wide protest.

As said, what happened this time was, things have finally reached to the boiling point throughout the whole month,
and many people has run out of their patience. Therefore following the severe police attack towards a peaceful sit-in
protest, people started to flood into Taksim Square to back up the protesters. And the fact that Prime Minister’s
reaction to that was once again telling off public by underlining that he would obviously not going to ask public
opinion about these issues, has not helped the situation to calm down. And as many have already written, despite
the mass media being mute, the word has managed to spread by means of mainly Twitter as the core group of
protestors come from an affluent middle class background that have fancy smart phones. And simultaneously, there
have initiated supporting demonstrations at the other big cities like Ankara and Izmir. It should be noted that though
there is no particular leadership in organising those, these demonstrations were mostly led by urban middle class.
However it would be totally unfair to ignore that it managed to diffuse to all the layers of the society very promptly.
For example as reported, one of the guys that has deceased during the protests in Antakya -a small city at the border
of Syria-, Abdullah Comert was a labour at a packaging factory.

Now that the cause has spread at a large extent and the government in a way accepted the excess police intervention
that consisted of way too much pepper gas, people started to ask ‘what is next?’ As there is no particular political
leadership of the movement, the follow up is yet to be designed. Also it should be kept in mind that the initial goal has
yet to be achieved as Erdogan keeps underlining in every speech he makes that the park will definitely be replaced
by the historical military barrack if not a shopping mall. Besides, he still keeps calling the protesters as vandals and
extremists rejecting to listen the content of the demands. Nothing has changed in his bullying authoritarian attitude,
which is the core reason why protesters and now even his supporters are raging. Furthermore, there is another
legislation draft at the Parliament waiting to be in rule soon, which allows foreign companies to search for petrol
in the forests of Turkey. Another law that has never been discussed by the public participation and likely to end in
giving a huge damage to natural resources for the sake of attracting foreign investment.

From what the Prime Minister and the members of his cabinet have been saying in the last week, there is little
hope that the government will change its autocratic attitude. However it also looks like protesters will keep resisting
until their demands are considered. Whilst having no ideological frame or a political agenda makes its sustainability
questionable that is also the reason why the participation is incredibly diverse hence a powerful one. As I write these
lines, the site of the protests’ initiation, Gezi Park has turned into a peaceful commune with a library, a gratis grocery
and a concert hall after 3-4 days of battle with the police. Protesters have taken the initiation and built what they
wanted. And due to the fact that affluent middle class is the critical mass of the protests; some companies have even
turned the whole thing into a marketing opportunity. The very quick spread of praise or condemnation of the shops
or media channels according to the level of their support to the protesters have been a commercial opportunity.
Therefore as never seen in Turkey (or perhaps in the world) before, even big corporations are now taking a side in a
social movement.

Consequently, at this very moment, protesters claim for a democratic climate in which they can discuss whether they
want to be more or less conservative or whether they want more shopping malls or not. Once that achieved, people
can go back to their own ideological enclaves and start to negotiate their own opposite standings in a peaceful
manner. Otherwise even the (almost extreme) right wing Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) members wouldn’t
go on the streets and chant as ‘in solidarity, against fascism!’ hand in hand with groups identifying themselves as communists.

[1]Chapullin is a neologism born out of this movement as the Prime Minister Erdogan in his speech referred to the protesters as ‘Capulcu’ that means bummers/looters so used as to describe the participants of the resistance.

Güneş Tavmen was born in Ankara and has worked in Istanbul. Now in London, she is studying for an MA Degree in Sociology at the City University, holding a Chevening Scholarship. She is interested in Information and Communication Technologies, urban life and grassroots participation.


"Stephen, you just don't get it" - a personal reflection on coming to use social media (2013-06-11 15:36)

I have been greatly influenced by a colleague who was once, moons ago, a student of mine and who has now well surpassed my achievements–Deborah Lupton [@DALupton]. She said to me, very nicely, when I said I liked the internet but could not see the point of Twitter, “Stephen, you just don’t get it”. Absolutely right. I didn’t but she rapidly opened my eyes. Now I do. Thank you again, Deborah.

So, like all late converts, I have since been proselyting my erstwhile colleagues—I used to be a sociology prof but now I run my own consultancy company, which includes things like facilitating some large planning sessions or conferences at Universities...

Well, I have to tell you, as a rough rule of thumb, over about 55 not only do my friends not get it, they don’t want to get it. This is embedded in a wider mind-set. They are locked into a sorts of 1970s model of the academic enterprise, with a focus on ‘refereed publications’ in ‘high status journals’. Etc. Pressed, they blame this on education bureaucrats for insisting on these things as ‘measures’ of academic impact/performance, a view that seems widely held but is rather disingenuous (well it is if you are over 60 like me). They choose to forget that when the bean counters came to the door and chose these methods for measurement, they did so because they were so well established in academia. In sociology, I recall, in the mid ’70s, being given a friendly lecture by my then Chair about how a paper in ASR or AJS was worth about 5 published in a list of more minor journals, how two such papers were worth a book, unless it was a very high status imprint like CUP, etc. Publish or perish thrived, selfish colleagues who shut their door, ignored students and typed furiously prospered and promotion/tenure committees loved them.

If you are fixated on this way of doing things, you have a really hard time taking a blog seriously, you don’t and won’t get social media generally (though you can manage email) and you are wont to pontificate on how the existing model is the only one that can deliver quality. Nonsense: history is littered with technologies for this...

Meanwhile, I hear quite literally, senior professors (one only last week who I won’t name cos he is a nice guy) insisting that he will retire rather than get on Twitter and (possibly inadvertently) exemplifying Kuhn’s argument that paradigm shift is based on the old generation dying out.

Back in the late ‘60s, when sit-ins were all the rage, there is a famous photo of a group of (baby boomer) students marching on the LSE waving a banner “Beware the pedagogic gerontocracy!!”. Sadly the baby boomers now
ARE the pedagogic gerontocracy.

**Stephen Mugford** can be found on Twitter [1]here

1. [https://twitter.com/StephenMugford](https://twitter.com/StephenMugford)

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Xavi (2013-06-27 01:10:21)
"Sadly the baby boomers now ARE the pedagogic gerontocracy." Nope: it is called History. Berger and Luckmann got that right. Why "sadly"?

Xavi (2013-06-27 01:18:51)
Sorry, I meant: of course baby boomers are becoming the new order. That’s how it goes, not sadly how it goes.

Stephen Norrie (2017-08-05 11:25:55)
I’d like to hear a bit more about this: "They choose to forget that when the bean counters came to the door and chose these methods for measurement, they did so because they were so well established in academia. In sociology, I recall, in the mid ’70s, being given a friendly lecture by my then Chair about how a paper in ASR or AJS was worth about 5 published in a list of more minor journals, how two such papers were worth a book, unless it was a very high status imprint like CUP, etc. Publish or perish thrived, selfish colleagues who shut their door, ignored students and typed furiously prospered and promotion/tenure committees loved them." Perhaps S. I. could gather some oral history on topic?

Mark Carrigan (2017-08-06 22:03:49)
Try asking on Twitter and we’ll retweet?

**Visual cultural analytics (2013-06-12 08:00)**

![Image](1738)

Gillian Rose responds to an event on visual methods [2]on her blog. She focuses in particular on Lev Manovich’s work at the [3]Software Studies Initiative. I’ve been trying to follow their work for a while, in particular the creative
means they have been developing for analysing the visual images in social media content. In Gillian’s blog post she discusses and links to their [4]ImagePlot visualisation software. This software is designed to locate patterns in the images used in social media.

Of course, as things stand much of the analysis of social media content focuses upon text, given that visual images are so central in social media it seems that this is really an area that needs to develop. Software like ImagePlot is a good place to start. Maybe the visual analysis of social media content will expand over the coming years. It seems important to move away from a purely text based focus. The problem, as Andrew Abbott pointed out (see [5]here for a brief discussion), is finding patterns in such monumental data. It is here that software like ImagePlot might allow us to find these patterns. Gillian raises some potential limitations of this kind of software led analysis in her post.

This post by Dave Beer was originally published on [6]Thinking Culture.

1. http://thinkingculture.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/20130604-084002.jpg
2. http://visualmethodculture.wordpress.com/2013/05/17/cultural-analytics-to-be-continued/
3. http://lab.softwarestudies.com/?m=1

Governments, the internet and freedom (2013-06-13 08:00)

Current events in Turkey have raised a lot of questions – questions that strike at the very roots of government legitimacy. One of those questions is about how governments deal with the internet. Turkish PM Erdogan has ‘blasted’ twitter and social media for ‘spreading lies during weekend protests’ (see for example [1]here).

It isn’t an uncommon response: when a government fears it’s losing control, it worries about the role played by social media in that loss of control. The extent to which Twitter and Facebook really contributed to the uprisings in the ‘Arab Spring’ is still a matter of debate – but the governments certainly thought they might, and sought to either suppress them or shut them down as part of their attempts to control the people. In the UK, in the aftermath of the rioting in London in 2011, Prime Minister David Cameron[2]suggested:

“Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill. So we are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality.”

Even at the time, Cameron seemed unaware that he was suggesting exactly the same thing for the UK as he
was deploring in places like Egypt and Libya – and even now, with suggestions that some within the government want to bring back the Snoopers’ Charter (see my blog posts [3]here and [4]here), and with regular calls to take control over various forms of ‘extreme speech’ – one man in the UK was arrested for a Facebook post of a burning poppy – it’s very clear that governments of many flavours consider the internet, and social media in particular, to be something to be feared.

And yet, when we watch what is happening in Turkey, many of us find ourselves naturally siding with those protesting. We need the right to protest – and the right to communicate, to organise, to assemble, to associate – and to do so with as much freedom as possible. That’s why those kinds of freedoms are built into most of the key human rights documents and declarations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and others have these as core values – and quite rightfully so.

When we see those rights restricted, controlled or threatened, we should know that this is wrong – and people in Turkey do. I was particularly struck by [5]one tweet, by tweeter Faruk Ateş (@KuraFire):

“A government that fears the free communication among its citizens is a government you can no longer trust to govern you. #Turkey”

He’s right. When governments seek to control our communication – whether by shutting down social media, or by monitoring all our communications (as the Snoopers’ Charter proposes), ultimately that means that they are governments that you can no longer trust to govern you. The Turkish government is looking increasingly like that kind of government – and so would ours in the UK if we tried to do the same.

Of course there are good ‘excuses’ for doing so – fighting terrorism, avoiding ‘disorder’, stopping radicalisation and so forth – but we should be aware that by doing so we are risking sacrificing a huge amount of what makes us ‘civilised’ in any real sense. We should not allow ourselves to be distracted or persuaded that there’s something else going on – that, for example, the Snoopers’ Charter is only about monitoring the communications of the ‘bad guys’ and will only be used to deal with terrorism. As David Cameron demonstrated back in 2011, it’s very, very easy for a government to slip into thinking that powers are needed to keep ‘control’ when things get difficult. Powers to monitor all will ultimately be used to monitor all, and for whatever purpose the government and other authorities deem appropriate at the time. It is a slope that is very slippery indeed....

We should all be watching what happens in Turkey very carefully – for many reasons. How the Turkish government ultimately deals with the protest will be very important – primarily for the Turkish people, but in many ways for all of us. I, for one, am hoping that freedom wins out, and that suppression and oppression are not the main victors. The same is true for all countries. We need to find solutions to our problems that don’t require that kind of suppression and oppression – solutions that support our human rights – and our humanity.

Paul Bernal is a Lecturer in IT, IP and Media Law at UEA. This article was originally posted on Paul’s [6]blog. You can follow Paul on twitter [7]@PaulBernalUK.

4. [http://paulbernal.wordpress.com/2013/05/26/woolwich_against_snooperscharter/](http://paulbernal.wordpress.com/2013/05/26/woolwich_against_snooperscharter/)
5. [https://twitter.com/KuraFire/status/341296670409109504](https://twitter.com/KuraFire/status/341296670409109504)
Attempting the Impossible (Visual Sociology #008) (2013-06-14 08:00)

Artwork: Alice Santoro (www.alicesantoro.com)

[1]
Attempting the impossible

by Alyce Santoro, "a delicate empiricist"

Shifts in society reflect shifts in the social imaginary: excerpt of the Manifesto for the Obvious International (the full text can be read [4]here):
“In philosophy, the collectively agreed upon definitions, symbols, styles, behaviors, ways of using language, and other factors that are held in common throughout a culture – assumptions about how things are "supposed to be" – are called the social imaginary. Whether it is "normal" to compete or cooperate, own property, go into debt, go to war, or go shopping is determined by a wide range of constantly shifting factors, including the influence of our political, legal, and educational systems; corporate advertising; the media; and various amalgams thereof. The social imaginary is like a program that runs surreptitiously in the background; until we become consciously aware of it, we don’t notice that our attitudes are being influenced by entities that may have a vested interest in them. When we fear our neighbors instead of loving them, industries that produce guns, fences, and alarms profit – we willingly give them our dollars in exchange for a strange kind of security indeed. The same happens when we buy into the illogical premise that it is "normal" to pursue endless economic growth based on finite resources that, if consumed, destroy planetary conditions that support life.”

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Alyce Santoro is an internationally noted conceptual artist. A former scientist, she creates multimedia "philosophrops" to draw parallels between seemingly disparate fields and to spark dialog about holistic approaches to challenges facing the environment and society. More at [5]alycesantoro.com and [6]@alyceobvious.

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[This week’s "visual sociology" post is on the cusp of philosophy, social activism, and art. Alyce Santoro plays with material objects, images and text to create artwork loaded with social and philosophical messages. Perhaps we ought to rename the column "Visual social science"? But even that wouldn't be precise enough. Since launching this column, SI has come across a wonderfully wide and varied application of visual approaches and methods than a narrow definition of "sociology" would accommodate - from empirical sociology to philosophy, anthropology, ethnography, education, politically charged art...]

E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [7] here, or just [8] email us if you have any questions.

8. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com
Rethinking the craft of social research (2013-06-15 08:00)

"It is still the case that most social scientists view the research encounter as an interface between an observer and the observed, producing either quantitative or qualitative data. Equally, the dissemination of research findings are confined to conventional paper forms of publishing, and research excellence is measured and audited through such forms, be it in monographs or academic journals. It remains the case that in social science the inclusion of audio or visual material in the context of ethnographic social research has been little more than 'eye candy' or 'background listening' to the main event on the page. The relatively inexpensive nature of these easy-to-use media offers researchers a new opportunity to develop innovative approaches to how we conduct and present social research. There are more opportunities than at any other moment to rethink the craft of social research beyond the dominance of the word and figure and to reconsider our reliance on 'the interview' (often taking place across a table in particular place) as the prime technology for generating 'data'."

- Les Back in [1]Live sociology: social research and its futures


'Questions of wider dissemination and methodology itself have begun to convince social scientists to look beyond their own philosophical groundings to aesthetics for solutions (Jones, 2006). They have found that text is often only linear and, therefore, temporal; in science the meaning must be precise or risk disbelief. Narrated stories turned into written text (the vast majority of the outputs of the Social Science interview culture) now require a fresh approach. The constructed memories that are the building blocks of narrated accounts, like dreams, are simultaneous layers of past and present—the visual and the spatial—and these added dimensions, beyond the purely temporal, now demand attention'. - Jones, K. (2012). Connecting research with communities through performative social science. The Qualitative Report, 17(Rev. 18), 1-8. Retrieved from [http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/jones.pdf](http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR17/jones.pdf)

From the craft of songwriting to the craft of sociology (2013-06-16 08:00)

I wrote a couple of weeks ago about my interest in [1]sociological craft and increasing preoccupation with the idea of creating a forum (probably as part of this website) within which accomplished sociologists could reflect on the processes underlying their work. Hopefully in ways which would be helpful to PhDs/ECRs as well as addressing broader disciplinary questions about the purpose and nature of sociological work.

Part of the idea for this stemmed from a favourite website of mine, Songwriters on Process, which discusses the craft of songwriting in a reflective way with a diverse range of songwriters:

Songwriters on Process is dedicated to the creative process of songwriters. It’s the stories behind the songs, from beginning to end. The site features in-depth interviews with songwriters in which they dissect their process. What is their creative process when they literally sit down to write a song? What do they do when they get writer’s block? What quirks or superstitions do they have? How disciplined are they? Who are their literary inspirations? How do they get inspired? Do they compose on computer
Do you make daily writing a part of your routine?

No, that’s where I split the balance between being whimsical and being disciplined. I can’t do it every day. I like to write in bulk. I’ll write five or ten songs in a month, then take a month off. At the end of that month, I start to feel like I need something to come out. I feel like it’s going to happen, so I do things to inspire myself. I used to just pick up the guitar and that would be it. And if I picked up the guitar and nothing came and I couldn’t think of any words, I was out of luck. But now I’ve started to work with things like Garage Band, and I’m doing things like finding all these soul loops and cutting them out.

I learned how to play the piano and the organ and was like, “Wait a second, I can inspire myself through drum beats, or really anything.” I used to have random scattered papers with ideas all over the place. Now I also have these little mp3 files that are 30 seconds long and full of craziness. I can go back to them at anytime when I feel something happening, so I peel through them and flesh out the ones I like.

That’s probably also a good way to prevent writer’s block.

That’s why I started doing it. I had a really bad case of writer’s block a year ago. It was really hard because I never had nothing to write about. I decided that was never going to happen again, so anything I thought about, any idea, I’d write it down, take a picture of it. Mess with a little drum loop to make it interesting. Even if it was a little interesting and could never be used in any of my outlets, I would do it anyway.

Do you keep a notebook handy to write down things you see and hear?

Not really. That’s never been the case for me. I know a lot of people do that, but it’s hard for me to do. Sometimes I’ll be on the subway and listen to people talk. And I’m always like, “How is anybody getting anything out of this? This is nothing. It’s all about coffee and business meetings!” I read a biography of Tom Waits once, and he writes about anything. I mean, how do you sit there and listen to someone talk and write it down? What are you fleshing out? There’s nothing there! But apparently there is.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/05/22/the-sociological-craft-project/
What is Digital Sociology? July 16th in London (2013-06-17 08:00)

Tuesday 16th July 2013
BSA Meeting Room, Suite 2, 2 Station Court
Imperial Wharf, Fulham, London SW6 2PY

This inaugural event for the BSA's Digital Sociology Group brings together a diverse range of speakers who, in a variety of ways, work within the nascent field of digital sociology. Rather than proceed from a substantive account of what digital sociology is or could be, this event seeks to address the question 'what is digital sociology?' through an open and informal exploration of a broad range of exciting work being undertaken by sociologists in the UK which could, in the broadest sense of the term, be characterised as 'digital'. In casting a spotlight on these projects in such a way the event aims to initiate an ongoing dialogue about the continuities and discontinuities between these emergent strands of digital activity, as well as the broader methodological and disciplinary questions which they pose.

Speakers:
Kim Allen, Manchester Metropolitan University
Les Back, Goldsmiths, University of London
Ben Baumberg, University of Kent
Laura Harvey, Brunel University
Noortje Marres, Goldsmiths, University of London
Heather Mendick, Brunel University
Mark Murphy, University of Glasgow
Evelyn Ruppert, Goldsmiths, University of London
Helene Snee, University of Manchester

Delegate rates:
BSA Concessionary Member (student/unwaged/retired) £10
BSA Member £15
Non-member (student/unwaged/retired) £20
Non-member £25

For administrative assistance contact: BSA Events Teamevents@britsoc.org.uk
Telephone: +44 (0) 191 383 0839
Academic enquiries: Dr Emma Head e.l.head@keele.ac.uk

I've been the reviews editor for the journal [1]Information, Communication & Society for a year or so. Things are going well with the journal. We get a very high number of article views and we are accessible through plenty of libraries throughout the world. I've found editing the review section to be really enjoyable, it's also helped me to stay on top of the vast literature that is being published in the area. I've also found the job to be really manageable and containable. I tend to spend chunks of time commissioning reviews, often when I don't feel I'm able to write that day, with the occasional moments used to read incoming reviews and to handle the management of the section. ICS is really well organised so editing the reviews can be quite efficient. I was very happy to take on the reviews section. ICS has always been one of my favourite journals, so I was keen to be involved. I can see that if you were taking a quite instrumental line then you might not be willing to take on a reviews editor role. I suspect that it doesn't help a great deal with the CV (this is my suspicion anyway, but views might vary). So it is one of those roles that you might take on for other reasons. Apart from the fact it is enjoyable and I like the journal, the reviews editor role brings other benefits. As well as helping to keep up with the literature, it also helps to build up a network and be part of an academic community. You get to know people when you invite them to write a book review, and then as you follow this through to publication. Most of all though, I think book reviews are important. They provide a space for dialogue and reflection, which are often things that get sidelined as a result of other pressures. When I took the role on I began to think that in some ways book reviews needed to be defended and nurtured. Particularly as spending the time to do them, which is an act with no describable or measurable pay off, is almost an act if resistance against the constraints and expectations of contemporary higher education. Book reviews provide a space to stop and respond to ideas.

Given the pressures people face it is probably a surprise that anyone agrees to right a book review. One of the advantages of the high price of academic books is that the promise of a free book is seen as a substantial pay-off. Even though this is the case it can still be tricky to successfully commission reviews. People often don’t have enough time, which is completely understandable. We all have to turn things down for this reason from time to time (I've had an idea for a post on saying no, I hope to post it on here soon). This makes it difficult to commission review from across academics at different stages of their careers. It is harder to find more established academics who are willing to write a book review. and beyond this, i suspect that the training of ambitious early career academics includes advice about avoiding book reviewing in favour of what are seen to be more productive/measurable activity (a shame as book reviewing can really help to build up background knowledge and facilitate more substantial writing). But one simple lessons learned very quickly was that people are more likely to agree to review a book if it is something they are keen to read. So I started to curate the section a little more. I did this by finding books that looked interesting or potentially influential. I then started actively contacting publishers to get hold of these books. I was quickly able
to build up a stock of these books, alongside the others that publishers were sending me anyway. I also found that publishers learned the type of thing I was after and started sending the type of stuff I wanted for the section. With this newly curated stock of books I had much more success. I is sometimes hard to match books to potential reviewers. The quality of websites varies substantially. But I found that the rate of people agreeing increased, and I was also able to attract more reviewers. Even established academics are keen to review important books in their field, especially if they are books they wanted to read anyway. I still get a good share if no's or no responses, but the hit rate of positive responses is quite high. I’m always keen to find reviewers. I have a bit of a backlog of books now, so some more commissions are on the to do list. One idea I had was to post a photo of the pile of books for review in here. I might do this in the future, for now I’ll stick with commissioning reviews. And I do occasionally get an email from dolls asking if they can write a review, but these are quite rare.

We have around 35 book reviews in the journal this year – I commissioned around half of these, my very capable predecessor left a good pool of reviews behind. And I’m now working on 2014. However, we now publish all reviews on our online first or 'latest articles' section. This means that the reviews are often published within a few weeks of submission. This allows the reviews to be timely. Indeed, I’ve just provided posts to seven recently published book reviews on this blog. These will all be in the print journal in 2014, but are already available online. This is working well at the moment, but we will no doubt review this, particularly in mind of open access debates. A number of journals are now publishing book reviews online and open access, often on blogs. This seems to be working well. As things stand we are keeping them in the journal. But we are about to enter a period of substantial change in academic publishing.

This post by Dave Beer was originally posted on [2]Thinking Culture

1. http://www.tandfonline.com/action/aboutThisJournal?show=aimsScope&journalCode=rics20#.Ub68a2S9Kc0

[... on particular academic roles (e.g.review editor). [...]

» Crafting a postgraduate module: Digital by-product data and the social sciences The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-15 08:00:47)
[...] reposted it with his permission as part of our Sociological Craft Project. Find out more here. If there’s an aspect of academic life you’d be willing to reflect upon for the project [...] 

CfP: The Sociological Craft Project (2013-06-17 14:40)

In this new feature the Sociological Imagination invites short (2500 word max) contributions reflecting on any aspect of sociological craft. We use the term ‘craft’ in the broad sense conveyed by Richard Sennett:

Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman’s discipline and commitment;
schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession.

We envision a number of forms such contributions might take:

- Reflections on particular academic roles (e.g.[1]review editor).
- Reflection on the process of writing for particular forms of publication (e.g. journals, monographs, logs)
- Reflections on the craft of research (the tools utilised, your relationship with them, the messiness of the process)
- Reflections on where you work, the devices you use, how the ambiance shapes your writing
- Reflections on undertaking research, managing time, negotiating conflicting demands.
- Reflections on routines and writing practices which are integral to your craft
- If you were brave enough to send us a picture of your workspace we’d love to include it!

However these are only examples. We’re keen not to get posts of the style “10 Tips for Writing Good Journal Articles”. We have nothing against these posts - we often feature them! But this project aims to generate a discussion of the craft of sociological work, the practices which sustain it and the emotional life and personal concern which are irrevocably bound up with it. We are particularly interested in contributions that explore the constraints that contemporary academic structures place upon the creative exercise of sociological craft and how we can, hopefully, work towards ameliorating these circumstances.

If you want to submit a contribution for the project then please e-mail it to mark@markcarrigan.net attached as word document (with any multimedia files attached separately) along with a short 2 line bio to accompany your post.


I am interested in writing a short piece for sociological craft on within and beyond the walls of the academy, looking at sociologists can curate using critical sociological traditions which are not directed by the impact agenda. The focus will be on exhibitions and live arts events.
Once again I came away from the BSA Conference with the message that sociology was in crisis but at the same time at a moment of great opportunity if only it could sort out precisely what it is and what it’s for. And once again I came away feeling cautiously optimistic. One source of this optimism was the presentation given by John Holmwood *Sociology’s ‘moments’: Democracy, expertise and the market*. A major contention of his paper, and one that has significant consequences for sociology, is that the dominance of neo-liberal public policy since the late 1970s has sought to replace ‘publics’ with ‘markets’.

In elaborating on the problems this presents to sociology, not least because the discipline and its institutional home in Universities are also being subject to a process of marketization and financialization, John contrasted the Parsonian project to create a professional sociology immune to ideological distortion with the American Pragmatists that developed the notion of the social self in the process of a critique of liberalism (1). It was Mead at the turn of the 19th century that saw the increasing tendency for government to merge with business and the industrial world. Dewey maintained that government did not so much represent the public interest as those of corporations and markets. Then, as now, this has significant consequences for our notions of democracy and the political role of the public sphere. But, according to Mead, this presents opportunities to the ‘public’ that emerge from forms of resistance and moments of critique.
A conception of a different world comes to us always as the result of some specific problem which involves readjustment of the world as it is, not to meet a detailed ideal of a perfect universe, but to obviate the present difficulty .... [1]The Working Hypothesis in Social Reform American Journal of Sociology, November 1899]

This has implications for the nature of sociology as a form of expertise and its role, according to John. It could be in the service of government and its partnership with the corporations and industry. Or it could serve the more public project of adjusting and coping with the effects and consequences, intended and unintended, of neoliberal corporatist policies. This implies a role for sociology in dialogue with ‘publics’ as they try to organise around the effects, to paraphrase C Wright Mills, that public issues have on private lives and communities. This may not sound radical or ‘activist’ enough for some but it is worth serious investigation and consideration. John makes the point that this is not an ‘emancipatory’ sociology. It is not a programme or project to bring into being ‘a detailed idea of a perfect universe’. However it does confront and critique the taken for granted assumptions of reality and the doxa that supports and reproduces it. It does expose the historicity and contingency of the taken for granted and demonstrates that other realities are imaginable. In serving the public rather than the dominant troika of government, industry and finance, sociology serves democracy in that it exposes and resists the multifarious processes and policies that combine to hollow out and neutralise democratic institutions. In a previous ‘radical moment’, in the 1960s and 70s, sociology could be seen as harnessed to a project of institutionalised reform and betterment operationalised by the welfare state and influenced by the new social movements focused on forms of equality and inclusive citizenship. But from that time on sociology has been squeezed between a neoliberal critique of the welfare state and citizenship rights and its denigration as a form of expertise in the service of a now derided and demonised programme of betterment and entitlement. John concluded with the question, what is it to practice sociology in a profoundly undemocratic system where reform has been de-institutionalised and sociology has lost its institutional locus and legitimacy? One suggestion is that it should revivify itself in response to a new radical moment and in doing so can revisit and be informed by some of the lessons and messages of the American pragmatists of the early 20th century. Sociology can inform a defence of wider social values in the face of a declining democracy. It can do this by providing publics with new and alternative accounts of the present and possible futures. In the face of TINA (there is no alternative) it can be asserted there always were and still are. To this end sociology (and therefore sociologists and their practice) must occupy (with all its post financial crash connotations) public debate in the service of democracy (not markets) and make inequality matter.

A great deal of John’s paper seemed to chime in well with the rather modest and arguably realistic (pragmatic) claims Zygmunt Bauman makes for sociology. Like John in his paper, Zygmunt offers a history of the development of sociology mapped onto key stages in the development of modernity and the state. In Zygmunt’s account this can be represented by his distinction between sociologists as legislators and, as this function is stripped away from them, as interpreters. He also offers a diagnosis of the current parlous state of democratic institutions based on a corporatist account of government and the separation of power from state politics as a result of economic aspects of globalisation. His conclusions for the contemporary role of sociological practice are similar too in that it should engage in dialogue with various publics in the service of wider social values, democracy and justice. I’m not claiming that John’s account and Zygmunt’s are reducible to one another. I’m sure there would be points of disagreement and differences in emphasis. I only draw attention to a similarity in their conclusions for the practice of sociology today. There are two points of interest that I’d like to pursue. The first one is the notion that sociology develops in confrontation with ‘radical moments’ that are precipitated by social developments external to its discourse and therefore
changes in the environment with which it has symbiotic and what might be called co-evolutionary relationships. The second is the notion that sociology should concern itself with and service democracy and wider social values such as those that are concerned with inequality and justice. I will return to the second point in another post but in the spirit of John’s return to the early American pragmatists I thought I would revisit an influential reflection on sociology at another radical moment in its history, the 1950s and 60s, by Alvin Gouldner. This will draw on two of his writings. The first is *Anti Minotaur: The Myth of a Value Free Sociology* (Social Problems, Volume 8, Number 3, Winter 1962, pp. 199 ff.) first given as a Presidential Address to the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) in 1961. The second is *The Sociologist as Partisan: Sociology and the Welfare State* (The American Sociologist Vol. 3, No. 2, May, 1968, pp. 103-116). This was a critical reaction to the Presidential Address given by Howard Becker to the SSSP 6 years later entitled *Whose Side Are We On* (Social Problems, Vol. 14, No. 3, Winter 1967, pp. 239-247) where Becker advocated we should conduct our sociological practice from the point of view of the ‘underdog’. Both these articles are conveniently collected together as chapters 1 and 2 of Gouldner’s book *For Sociology: Renewal and Critique in Sociology Today* Allen Lane 1973. (I first looked at these readings in 1977 when I was doing A level sociology at an evening class and frankly hardly understood a word of it)! This critique is quite damning and one wonders if Gouldner and Becker where friends! Gouldner’s critique of Becker’s attempt to side step the problem of values in sociology is instructive for thinking about the grounds upon which an engaged sociology should focus on social values concerned with inequality and justice as advocated by both John Holmwood and Zygmunt Bauman.

I’ll commence Gouldner’s discussion of the myth of a value free sociology with an extended quotation that mirrors very well some key concerns we, or some academics at least, still have today with respect to the role and practice of sociology.

The problem of a value-free sociology has its most poignant implications for the social scientist in his (sic) role as educator. If sociologists ought not to express their personal values in the academic setting, how then are students to be safeguarded against the unwitting influence of these values which shape the sociologist’s selection of problems, his preferences for certain hypotheses or conceptual schemes, and his neglect of others? For these are unavoidable and, in this sense, there is and can be no value-free sociology. The only choice is between an expression of ones’ values, as open and honest as it can be […] and a vain ritual of moral neutrality which, because it invites men (sic) to ignore the vulnerability of reason to bias, leaves it at the mercy of irrationality.

In Gouldner’s view a value free sociology is impossible due to the unavoidable necessity of making choices between subject matters, research hypotheses, concepts and explanatory frameworks. To mistakenly claim and offer value free knowledge, however sincerely, is to obscure the inevitability of this process, the values that inform it and its knowledge productions. If it is claimed that social values can only distort knowledge when in fact they are an indispensable condition of its production, then all knowledge is distorted. Distortion in the sense of partial, selective, contingent, is inevitable. But the term ‘distortion’ can be left out of this characterisation of knowledge as it implies the possibility of an undistorted knowledge that is impartial, complete(able), absolute and universal. This is the modernist utopian vision of knowledge that underpins the post-political world of techno-managerialism and expertise. For Gouldner, claims of value freedom translate into moral and value relativism. This leads to the claimed ‘value free’ sociology being at best politically irrelevant and at worse it surrenders authority, legitimacy and power to the dominant discourses of the status quo in which it becomes complicit. It is in danger of becoming the hand servant of and harnessed to the technologies of domination, legitimation and obfuscation. ‘Nudge theory’ springs to mind here along with behavioural economics and sociologically informed tools of post-political techno-management. A purported value free professional sociology can be used to help sell cigarettes as well as advise those who wish to reduce smoking. The domain of the value-free morally neutral sociology is that of the “spiritless technician who will be no less lacking in understanding than they are in passion, and who will be useful only because they can be used”. Gouldner warns us that however blunt and dull these sociologically informed tools are they are capable of building
a social technology “powerful enough to cripple us”. In his day prisoners of war and GIs were being systematically brain washed and compulsive consumerism was being driven by advertising and scientific marketing. As he observed, the social science technologies of the future will “hardly be less powerful than today’s”.

Within the institutionalised forms of sociology this can be experienced by its students and practitioners as isolating and alienating. In the words of Gouldner, “They feel impotent to contribute usefully to the solution of [society’s] deepening problems and, even when they can, they fear that the terms of such an involvement require them to submit to a commercial debasement or a narrow partisanship, rather than contributing to a truly public interest”. There are two strategies for psychological accommodation for the institutionalised sociologist. One is to embrace relativism, particularistic anthropology or the post-modern turn, solving the problem of value-freedom by promoting it to an intellectual principle. The other is to become a sociologist of sociology and engage in a learned and scholarly critique of its competing paradigms and methods. Both are ways of sheltering from the real world of political action and passion, uncertainty and messy pragmatism. "It evokes the soothing illusion, amongst some sociologists, that their exclusion from the larger society is a self-imposed duty rather than an externally imposed constraint". It disguises the fact that to refrain from social criticism reflects the personal interests and insecurities of some sociologists rather than “reflecting a higher professional good”.

So two tendencies that Gouldner identified in the 50s and 60s are for some sociologists to either ‘sell out’ or ‘opt out’ neither of which sound particularly edifying as a job descriptions for young sociologists today. Arguably the two tendencies are still alive and well but fortunately they do not represent the only options available or for that matter already manifest. In his day Gouldner was not saying that the ‘critical posture’ is dead in American sociology, only that it was ‘badly sagging’. He cited several authors that were bucking the trend many of whom would be largely unknown today but C Wright Mills, Dennis Wrong, Lewis Coser, Bernard Rosenberg and David Riesman may still stir the memory of some of us. Gouldner considered these to be intellectuals no less than sociologists, the larger tradition from which sociology evolved and which is itself founded on the assertion of the right to be critical of tradition. We have our own contemporary representatives of this contrary and troublesome breed.

For me, at least, a number of problems emerge from this. What is it to be critical? What is practically entailed in practising a sociology that engages in dialogues with various publics? On what basis do we choose the publics to engage with? What is the justification for adopting and focusing on values associated with inequality and justice? (2) Don’t financiers, bankers, the police, torturers and hedge fund managers constitute publics and operate in their own universe of values? If we claim we should side with the victims, given a sociologist’s systemic sensibilities, are we not all victims one way or another? And in a world of unavoidable and irreducible uncertainty in which
we have abandoned utopian visions and meta-narratives, political and scientific, isn’t pragmatic adaptation and problem solving doomed to be absorbed and neutralised, even exploited, by the status quo to enhance its legitimacy and wealth and further secure its domination? As Zygmunt Bauman, John Holloway and Slavoj Žižek all say, in no particular order, there are no guarantees this will all end happily. Perhaps the best we can do is live in the limbo of a hopeful resignation. Perhaps it is, after all, quite rational to tend our own gardens, retreat behind the barricades of relativism and incestuous methodological flagellation? Or make alliances with the centres of unassailable power to minimise our own victim-hood? I think there are positive, life enhancing and, yes, emancipatory answers to these questions. The next post will continue with Gouldner and examine his account of why we should side with the exploited and those that are subjected to an excess of suffering, given that to suffer to some extent is part of the human condition.

Notes:
(1) In another session devoted to an exploration of the relationship between economics and sociology it was pointed out that Parsons claimed that sociology is concerned with the residual problems left over by economics.
(2) It is not clear that a sociology that is informed by a concern with inequality and justice and that exposes the complex and contingent mechanisms that work ‘behind the curtain’, as Bauman and Kundera would have it, and therefore debunk the assertions of TINA cannot and will not be used to inform the policies and strategies, both explicit and hidden, of the dominant classes to preserve something like the status quo. This would mean that a body of critical knowledge would not be enough to produce a society that embodied the preferred social values of equality and justice. The knowledge would have to be translated into countervailing political and cultural processes and activities – a call for an engaged activist sociology perhaps using ‘action’ forms of research and engagement.

Of possible interest is the post I did last year reflecting on the BSA conference in 2012 [2]http://terrywassall.org/2012/04/14/reflections-on-britsoc12/

This post by Terry Wassall was originally posted on his [3]personal blog.

2. http://terrywassall.org/2012/04/14/reflections-on-britsoc12/

Before doing my degree in sociology I was in politics, where there was a similar tension between approaches. I was an unashamed pragmatist; what matters is improving lives now rather than hoping that everyone gets so hacked off that they call on you to lead the revolution. Some saw this as insufficiently ‘principled’, though dig down and it was more about sticking to policies than principles. Being willing to work with others to reach compromises in order to achieve common goals inevitably means dropping something you’d go for in an ideal world. If this is simply to achieve power or status, then it certainly is unprincipled, but not so if the objective is to improve how people can live their lives, and there is an awareness of what is being dropped and why. Such an approach cannot, should not, must not, be value free. As far as ‘the victims’ you mentioned are concerned, I’d say it’s about identifying the causes whereby people are disadvantaged, and tackling those. Identifying victims otherwise becomes an arcane game of deciding who qualifies and who does not, where the arbitrator becomes god and classification becomes more important than social action. I’m not sure it’s necessary, or beneficial, that one approach dominates the other. I’d say it’s better to have both, as long as people don’t fall out over it and start seeing each other as the enemy. But in the end, the debate being about self-awareness, it’s a very good one to have.
The Work of Richard Sennett: Public Life and Public Policy (2013-06-18 08:00)

This panel discussion was part of an LSE event two years ago celebrating the work of Richard Sennett and exploring its broader significance:

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/AYRyU5d2faA

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/AYRyU5d2faA

"What do you wish you'd known when you started your PhD?" (2013-06-19 08:00)

https://twitter.com/projectnat/status/342916450622791681

https://twitter.com/IExpand/status/342942060841684993

https://twitter.com/AlessiaW/status/342932851899133952

https://twitter.com/VickiMcDermott/status/342930108132237312

https://twitter.com/VickiMcDermott/status/342929558397386752

https://twitter.com/AlessiaW/status/342928949447380992
TheAwkwardSociologist (2013-06-19 08:44:49)
I wish I had known that my supervisor is not always right!!

Education is a two way process at all levels. Teacher and taught create knowledge through interactivity. PhD. is more so through which the supervisor not only guides but rejuvenates her knowledge, rethinks, finds many things new when in close educational contact with her research scholar. This dimension can not be overlooked that PhD. is a joint research - both suffer, both achieve and rejoice. Both publish also. PhD is exciting and as my supervisor used to say in 1975 it does transform the personality of the researcher. An important gain - a by product - is that the way of thinking is more systematic, organized and target oriented.

Annetta Mallon (2015-01-20 08:36:27)
That a supervisor who wants you to write the thesis they want you to write will cost you a year of recovery time. On the upside, I am now a well-informed and articulate advocate for HDR student rights, happy to support and mentor new candidates, and know that changing a supervisory panel is not the end of your academic world.
The World Population Clock (Visual Sociology #009) (2013-06-21 08:00)

Do you know exactly how many people there are in the world? At least almost exactly? A good estimate? You can look it up (and keep looking it up) on the [1]World Population Clock. This may be visualised demography rather than visual sociology, but it is interesting and it is an application of images in social science. So unless someone protests, it is staying in the visual sociology column.

[2]
7 billion, and counting (Photo: Idle Ethnographer 2008)

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found here, or just email us, if you have any questions.

3. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com
5. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com

On which side of history?

by the Idle Ethnographer

I took this photo through the glass doors of the US embassy in Berlin. The division between East and West Berlin isn’t that stark anymore; and now I wouldn’t be hasty to declare the western side colourful and the other one bleak. But for me this frame recreates the ideology of the longing for freedom which, we once thought, was greater in the west. It also reminds me of some of the tragedy of post socialist transition: ex-soc countries joined the tail end of a post-industrial capitalism which was already changing. A moving target, so to say. And we conflated the ideology of democracy with that of a free market. Perhaps now, with the [2]protests in Bulgaria which are currently under way (sadly neglected by western media although they are in part inspired by the ones in neighbouring Turkey) the year 1989 has finally been superseded by a newer watershed: 2013, the year of street revolutions [3]against governments of all political colours which do not work for the good of their country. As I am currently away from Bulgaria, I can’t add my two feet to the [4]protests (which you can find on Twitter and Facebook using the hashtags #BulgariaExists and #ДАНСwithme). I can only read news, blog, and hope.

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The Idle Ethnographer (who isn’t at all idle, and is actually a sociologist) is Milena Kremakova. Milena writes the Sociological Imagination together with Mark Carrigan, writes a book on maritime working lives in Bulgaria after 1989, is about to start a huge and interesting new project on the early careers of mathematicians and computer scientists in the UK and Germany, and does many other fun things which means she also has trouble finding time to
sleep. You can get in touch with her by email.

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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on S.I. Imagery@gmail.com. Check out our earlier Visual Sociology posts here. Full instructions can be found here, or just email us, if you have any questions.

1. http://300daysinberlin.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/20130621-204225.jpg
5. mailto:s.i.imagery@gmail.com
6. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com
9. mailto:S.I. Imagery@gmail.com

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An introduction to the sociological blogosphere (2013-06-22 08:00)

[1]"Online Sociology" on Bundlr

1. http://bundlr.com/b/online-sociology

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Robert Moorehead (2013-06-29 06:06:59)
Please add my blog to the list: japansociology.com Thank you!

Tristan (2013-07-03 13:40:30)
Can you add Inequality by (Interior) Design too? Thanks, Tristan

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Calculative Devices in the Digital Age: a call for papers (2013-06-23 08:00)

Call for Papers:

Calculative Devices in the Digital Age

Department of Geography
The Securing against Future Events project is organizing a two day conference on the forms and techniques of calculation that emerge with digital computation. How does the drive to make sense of, and productively use, large amounts of diverse data, inform the development of new calculative devices, logics and techniques? How do these devices, logics and techniques - from neural networks to decision trees, from Monte Carlo method to traversal algorithms, from text analytics to data visualisation - affect our capacity to decide and act? In a world of changing data landscapes, how do mundane elements of our physical and virtual existence become data to be analysed and rearranged in complex ensembles of people and things? In what ways are conventional notions of public and private, individual and population, certainty and probability, rule and exception transformed and what are the consequences of these transformations? How does the search for 'hidden' connections and patterns using association rules, correlation rules or link analysis, change our understanding of social relations and associative life? Do contemporary modes of calculation, based on constant incorporation of heterogeneous elements, produce new thresholds of calculability and computability, allowing for the improbable or the merely possible to be embraced and acted upon? As contemporary approaches to governing uncertain futures seek to anticipate the yet unknown event – in domains as diverse as marketing and insurance, emergency preparedness and counter-terrorism – how are calculation and decision engaged anew?

The workshop will be oriented to the following key themes:

- Data and calculation – algorithms and algorithmic logics
- Associative life – 'real' and digital identities and social relations
- Data, analytics and decision-making – applications, interfaces, protocols
- Calculating futures – uncertainty, prediction and potentiality

As the changing landscape of calculation is experienced across the arts, social and natural sciences, we are inviting papers from across disciplines and areas of specialism. Interventions from PhD students and junior scholars are particularly welcome.

The event is funded within Prof. Louise Amoore’s ESRC Global Uncertainties Fellowship ([1]www.securitysfutures.org) and is free to attend. Please submit contact details and a 250 word abstract to volha.piotukh@durham.ac.uk, with a copy to louise.amoore@durham.ac.uk, by August 1st 2013.

(Via [2]Dave Beer)

‘A vain Eutopia, seated in the brain’; Thus concludes The Moral of Bernard Mandeville's 1705 poem The Grumbling Hive, a six-penny pamphlet which owes its fame to the 1714 edition of Mandeville's most known oeuvre, The Fable of the Bees. Literary history aside, there are countless reasons for re-reading the poem in the light of the current global crisis; one is the very power of the verse itself, another is the suspicion that it is capable of setting forth, in John Maynard Keynes' (1964: 360) words, ‘the appalling plight of a prosperous community in which all the citizens suddenly take it into their heads to abandon luxurious living, and the State to cut down armaments, in the interests of Saving’. Richard Sennett (2012: 159) indeed toyed with the idea suggesting that ‘were he alive now, Bernard Mandeville could have written a new Fable of the Bees based entirely on Wall Street’.

Whatever the virtues and vices of Mandeville's controversial text however, it provides a good starting point for discussion on an ‘appalling plight’ such as the global crisis which erupted in the wake of the financial collapse of 2007-2008 and spread farther from the geography and the imagination of ‘Wall Street’, prompting Europeans to engage in much theoretical, intellectual and mediatised navel-gazing not just about financial, political, social and societal crises but also about the very idea of Europe itself. Laments, alarm bells and wake-up calls soon emerged in various forms, circulated through a multitude of media (old and new), offering divergent interpretations of a phenomenon that, fiscal policies aside, was suspected to signal not simply a crisis for Europe but a crisis of Europe too; a crisis that went beyond the management of a common currency but one that mobilised questions of historical and cultural identity about the Union itself.
This period of unsettlement is of course hardly new, and indeed it could be interpreted as a permanent feature or a even birthmark of Europe’s history and transformation from myth to a constellation of nation-states bound together by legislation, money and (more problematically perhaps), history and culture. Yet any notion of unity might be (still) premature, if not misleading, thus pointing to what the melancholic Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (2012 [1925]: 15) called ‘the European disassociation’ or ‘civilizational disassociation’; an atmosphere of bitter ennui that remind us of the disquiet of two other fellow-European littératures writing in the brink of World War Two, namely Stefan Zweig and W.H. Auden. ‘I belong nowhere, and everywhere I am a stranger, a guest at best. Europe, the homeland of my heart’s choice, is lost to me, since it has torn itself apart’ writes Zweig (1964 [1942]: xviii) while packing his bags for Brazil with a copy of Montaigne’s Essays as a useful travel companion and philosophical interlocutor on questions of ‘How do I survive?’ or ‘How do I remain fully human?’. W.H. Auden (2007 [1940]) in a manner as dark as Zweig’s, but without the consolations of the philosophy of Montaigne, was mourning for the loss of W.B. Yeats but one could also suspect him for distressing about a political turmoil and one of European import too:

‘In the nightmare of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,
And all the nations wait,
Each sequestered in its hate’

The verse is remarkable as it is depressing and it points to an acute sense of ‘disassociation’ with and a lack of ‘belonging’ in the Old Continent, thus uniting literary figures as distinctive and disparate as Pessoa, Zweig and Auden in their feeling of loss in Europe bringing to mind that ‘extravagant and wheeling stranger, of here and every where’ of Shakespeare’s Othello (Act I, Scene I).

These ‘extravagant strangers’ of Europe however are not alone in their saudade about their spiritual homeland and much of their message has morphed into political commentary during our current version of the European crisis witnessed in various ways; as (a) an unpleasant downfall of the economy which resulted in democratic dislocation and historical and cultural displacement, leading to questions about (b) the ability and power of EU nation states to remain sufficiently liberal and democratic, while casting doubt about (c) whether the EU is indeed institutionally and politically robust to cope with structural and systemic rather than symptomatic and arbitrary crises. Added to this is a (d) fictionalisation of Germany as a hegemonic superpower with little regard for its underperforming neighbours which then prompts bitter questions about (e) what kind of Europe we have had, we currently have and could have with many predicting a happy-end in an otherwise distressing political affair which can only end in divorce. This dramatic end to Europe’s rendezvous with its own future however does not end here, and Habermas’ (2009, 1975) image of a ‘faltering’ Europe which suffers from a serious ‘legitimation crisis’ is emulated in diagnoses that attribute much of Europe’s demise to its existential anomie; characterised, in surprisingly Durkheimian terms, by (a) weak levels of EU integration and (b) poor national regimes of regulation, exacerbated by (c) the German dominance of the EU and the destructive effect of (d) neo-liberal responses to a crisis that goes beyond casino capitalism tactics and Dow Jones arithmetic.

The conversation that follows was carried out with the belief that instead of talking about Europe merely as a problem, it might be possible to better understand it as an assembly of multiple and contradictory interpretations, personal, collective and institutional, all of which are engaged in a dialogue as well-thought and measured as the sociology of Europe that our guest in this part of the [2]‘Sociologists of crisis’ article series, [3]Prof. Gerard Delanty has been engaged in for a large part of his career. His 1995 Inventing Europe was one of the first attempts to a political and historical sociology of Europe and he is revisiting such concerns in his forthcoming book Formations of European modernity: a historical and political sociology of Europe, while our discussion took place soon after the publication of his article Europe in an age of austerity: Contradictions of capitalism and democracy for International
Critical Thought. Before joining in the discussion with Prof. Delanty however, it should be borne in mind, by means of a disclaimer, that what follows is simply one kind of discussion to be had on the theme of Europe with no pretensions to exhaustiveness or an assumed monopoly of knowledge and wisdom of a rather complex and complicated issue. Rather, it is a conversation that took place at a specific moment in time and place and with a more or less limited set of questions that sprang to my mind largely while talking.

As soon as the Eurozone crisis was pronounced a reality, the very idea of Europe came under attack and was to be understood as a problem. Why do you think that might be?

It has been largely regarded as a crisis because the whole project of European integration was based on the presuppositions of post-World War Two economic growth. Little thought was given to capitalism being in crisis but that's what happened since 2008. It can be argued that capitalism itself is going through a new phase and the emergence of such a new phase challenged assumptions of European integration; itself understood as an equilibrium between capitalism and democracy, or what is commonly referred to as ‘democratic capitalism’. It can therefore be said that European integration was conceived as a series of assumptions about market and political integration around a common currency and when these assumptions were challenged, the crisis emerged.

To what extent is the crisis of Europe a European identity crisis?

This crisis is an economic crisis beyond Europe; it is a crisis of capitalism which has severe consequences for Europe because it came about the same time that other problems became apparent. The economic crisis simply exacerbated problems such as the dilution of the possibility of a more cohesive Europe, as it’s obvious that something that is larger is going to be thinner. In other words the economic crisis became a problem of its own on the back of these other problems of cohesion within Europe.

If the global financial meltdown hadn’t become a reality, would such an identity crisis of and in Europe come about?

Yes. It was already there. The European Union’s enlargement diluted the European identity as something cohesive and different Europes emerged. In a sense the Eurozone crisis speeded up that process, a process which was already in progress.

Is the ‘idea of Europe’ then simply product of our imagination, a fictive space on which we deposit arbitrary meanings? If I understand it well, your book Inventing Europe seems to entertain such a possibility…

Inventing Europe was one of the first books to systematically explore the idea of Europe in history and it had a kind of critical function; to unpack and criticise the grand narrative of a continuous European identity. Instead, it emphasised rupture over continuity and the way in which European identity was constructed in relation to the non-European world. Where I differ now, in relation to that book, is in that you can no longer argue that something was constituted in relation to an outsider simply because there is no consistent outsider. Speaking of European identity, one needs a differentiated approach as Europe as a whole, Europeans and the political institution of the European Union do not translate to just one thing, not to mention the notion of identity itself is problematic. It is something like a black box, many things are attributed to it and they need to be unpacked. Europe is highly diverse so we need to be specific about which historical region of Europe we are referring to. In my latest book I speak of six historical regions of Europe [building on the western, central-eastern and south-eastern Europe division], each with different civilizational heritages, experiencing different roots to modernity. There is no common European identity that has existed in history continually, there have been different models. However, I do still agree with the observation that the relationship with the outside world is important but the outside need not be interpreted as simply hostile. A cosmopolitan hermeneutics is required to better understand this as an open question. Continuity emphasised the importance of the colonial context/legacy but one must not forget the pre-colonial past, when
Europe was weak and un-European. Greece is a good example, we now think of Greece as European but this has not always been the case. [The relationship of Greece with Europe and European identity has indeed been debated many times over in its history, not simply by its fellow EU members but by itself too].

Could it be then that nowadays ‘the Other’ is indeed ourselves? The differences and tensions within Europe that is...

Yes, one could say so as ‘the Other’ is no longer Asia, Islam or the non-EU world, but Europe’s own past especially if one is to consider the post-World War Two violence and trauma.

If that is the case, is it at all useful to identify with Europe or are we beyond it and only psychologically depend on it as a master narrative of sorts?

The notion of European identity is itself a constriction, and not in any way an object of identity for individuals. Rather, it is something that takes place within the context of other identities (e.g. national), something much more hybridized and trans-nationalised. Identities can therefore be seen not as external reference points but as more complicated than an external set of values that you buy into or not. For example Europeans are Europeanised but that doesn’t mean that there is such a thing as a European identity.

Can cosmopolitanism be seen as an antidote, or an alternative to the idea of Europe, in the form of postnational citizenship?

To a certain extent yes, but let us look more closely at the idea of cosmopolitanism itself. In my work, cosmopolitanism is understood as a theoretical and intellectual alternative to globalisation, a critique of globalisation and of nationalism too. It is that idea of tension between the polis (city) and the cosmos (the cosmic order of the Gods) and it also implies a world consciousness. Cosmopolitanism is also about taking into account the perspective of others’ view of the world, that reflexivity between self and other, which makes it different from the national view of things. In that sense cosmopolitanism can be seen as a space for dialogue, encounter and exchange as it is produced as a result of an encounter of one with another.

Would it then be better to define ourselves as nationals with a cosmopolitan outlook rather than as Europeans, given that the latter is not so concrete an identity?

Yes, I like this idea as cosmopolitanism is compatible with the nation as a political community armed with a cosmopolitan image. Nationally defined forms of political community can therefore be developed in a cosmopolitan direction.

How might we then propose cosmopolitanism as an alternative political institution, can it inspire people collectively and bring forth solidarities in a bottom up way? I am thinking about this presupposing that Europe was a notion that was imposed by elites rather than established by means of a democratic mandate...

Well, before or instead of doing that, we need to look at what trends are in evidence; the sociologist would indeed try to identify cosmopolitan trends in society and see where these can be enhanced rather than looking for some ideal model. Besides, cosmopolitanism is always incomplete, always partial as opposed to simply being present or absent.

Is there any way then that we can introduce cosmopolitan citizenship as a postnational political practice and alternative?

Well, I think Kant’s idea is still valid, seeing cosmopolitan law as based on the principle of hospitality and the
legal recognition of migrants.

But can we educate ourselves in such a perspective?

Yes, definitely. Martha Nussbaum’s (1996) famous essay on ‘the limits of patriotism’ makes that point. A lot of people in fact forget that it is largely a book about the national curriculum in the United States and an invitation to bring a cosmopolitan dimension to that. Cosmopolitanism is about the broadening of horizons so if it doesn’t take place in education it is not going to go very far; in fact education is the place where it all begins.

Does the idea of cosmopolitanism however not replace one imaginary category with another? I am thinking here of Weber’s definition of a nation as a ‘community of sentiment’ and Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’...

In contradiction with nationhood, I think cosmopolitanism implies a more positive, a broadening process, a process of enlargement...

Having made that distinction between cosmopolis and nation I am curious to ask you for your view as a sociologist of crisis about where the Greek case/situation might fit in with what we are now discussing...

I think that the Greek situation illustrates graphically the contradiction between capitalism and democracy signalling a movement into a new age of austerity. The situation in Greece is unique in that it problematises the capacity of the state and the political elites to manage the economy as such. The way politics is managed in Greece is not well-served by its political classes as they failed to get a hold on the economy.

Would it be valid to say that austerity is gradually becoming a new polity, a new culture of capitalist import?

I don’t think so but I appreciate why you might ask that, coming from Greece but I think that austerity is a discursive construction as a way of making sense of crises and we would need more evidence of a societal shift before we can conclude anything of the sort, especially as there are austerity-ridden countries such as Spain where (unlike Greece) the fundamental structures of society have not fundamentally shifted as a result of the recent crisis.

Thank you

Thank you too

A cup of coffee later, and having left Prof. Delanty’s office, I was rather pleased our conversation took place not just for what it included but for what it excluded too. Besides, the idea of Europe itself is just as selective, often holding on to a self-portrait that desires it untainted by a centuries-old cultural exchange, ethnic and linguistic plurality. This however is an image that is as paradoxical as Daniel Defoe’s playful late seventeenth-century poem about The True Born Englishman;

Fate jumbled them together, God knows how;

Whate’er they were, they’re true-born English now

More paradoxically even, it is useful to recall George Steiner’s (2004: 17-8) view of Europe as a map of cafés; ‘so long as there are coffee houses, the ‘idea of Europe’ will have content’, but such a definition can only work if that content is as broad as Steiner’s romantic view of the café as ‘a place for assignation and conspiracy, for intellectual debate and gossip, for the flâneur and the poet or metaphysician at his notebook. It is open to all, yet it is also a club, a freemasonry of political or artistic-literary recognition and programmatic presence’. The paradox in Steiner’s
affirmation therefore is that although our imagination of Europe can be sensed as a pilgrimage to ‘the café’, reality polices the boundaries of Europe in air-tight containers, also known as borders. In that map of cafés we call Europe, what and where is the space for the aroma of a café à la turque that so enchanted Orientalists like Théophile Gautier who praised that very method of grinding and drinking coffee in his 1853 voyage to Istanbul? Against the spirit of such a practice of Europe as a taxable customs rather than an open commons, a re-appropriation of the boundaries between natives and ‘extravagant strangers’ may become necessary as a process of translation from presuppositions to the intervening reality, itself an idea that is forged in the crucible of fusion and hybridity.

The soundtrack to this article is also a project of fusion and hybridity, brought forth by Courtney Pine and the Jazz Warriors who assembled in 2007 as ‘Afropeans’ to celebrate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade. The [4]video shows the ‘Afropeans’ rehearsing before their Barbican performance in London, hinting perhaps at an idea of Europe as a rehearsal of and experiment with possibilities for self-definition as a playful provocation rather than clinging to the absent plot of its grand conceptions of itself.

A note on the discussants:

Gerard Delanty is Professor of sociology and social and political thought at the University of Sussex, UK. His most recent publications are Community (2nd edition, Routledge, 2010), The cosmopolitan imagination: The renewal of critical social theory (Cambridge University Press, 2009). He has edited (with Stephen P. Turner) The international handbook of contemporary social and political theory (Routledge, 2011) and Handbook of cosmopolitan studies (Routledge, 2012). Recent journal articles have appeared in the British Journal of Sociology (2011), The Irish Journal of Sociology (2010), and The Sociological Review (2012).

Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music.

References:


1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/d9gOLQf-ZD?feature=player_embedded
3. http://www.sussex.ac.uk/profiles/101974
4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEX9j1r00wY

[...] published at The Sociological Imagination on June 23, [...]

German Sociological Association: Yes to Evaluation, No to University Ranking (June 21, 2013) (2013-06-24 08:00)

On 21 June, the German Sociological Association has published a statement against the CHE (Centre for Higher Education Development) University Ranking which is a subject-level classification covering a range of academic disciplines that has been published annually since 1998. According to the GSA, the CHE ranking

"...has serious methodological and empirical deficiencies, [...] withholds vital information from prospective students, as its declared target audience, and [...] gives rise to wrong decisions on the part of science-policy decision-makers".

Read the statement of the
German Sociological Association and their recommendations

I like writing book chapters. If you look at my publications – well I don't mean you to do this literally – but IF you did, you'd see that I've written quite a lot of them. In the last month I've been sent two books which I've got chapters in, I'm expecting another collection as well as some chapter proofs any day – and I'm just starting on writing a chapter. So I really do think they’re OK.

The reason I like writing chapters is because they (generally) offer different opportunities for academic writing from the stock-in-trade journal article.

For a start, you can assume with a book chapter that you don’t have to convince readers that the topic you’re
writing about is important. The editors are going to do that in the foreword. They are also likely to do a pretty thorough survey of the field, and to cover its history. So you don’t have to do that kind of literature work in a chapter, unless it is one about the literature (see below). You just have to situate your own position and indicate the literatures that you draw on and to which you are talking/contributing.

And I reckon you can often be more creative as a writer in a chapter.

Not all book chapters are the same of course. There are different kinds of edited books which require different kinds of writing and different kinds of creatvity.

There are for example overtly pedagogical texts written for under- and post-graduate courses. The writing challenge here is quite different from a journal article – the reader is a learner, and the job of the chapter writer is to teach them about something. The writing must therefore be clear, engaging, the content well scaffolded; there may also be a need for examples, exercises and annotated bibliographies – perhaps even online links. It takes imagination and innovation in order to present instructional material so that it anticipates questions and answers them.

Then there are the chapters in international handbooks which set out to provide a state-of-the-art review of the field. The challenge here is not only to present a survey which identifies key debates, challenges and trends, but also to construct and argue for a future agenda – all the while not sending the reader to sleep with an excess of authors and titles and dates.

And there are topic based edited collections which aim to deliberately offer a variety of perspectives, to explore and to debate important questions. This is where the writer is most likely to be able to negotiate with the editor/s about a creative response. This is because topic-based edited collections often benefit from having variations as they keep readers moving through the text. So there is room for writerly manoeuvre. I have for example contributed chapters which are photo essays, multi-voiced accounts, auto-ethnographic words and images, heavily edited interview transcripts and variously structured narratives.

These kinds of chapters are the ones I most enjoy writing. It’s not that you can’t play with the journal structure, you can if you choose your journal carefully, and if you argue your case. But you generally don’t have to work so hard on this with the edited book. Provided the editor is up for some variation in the collection, you can think pretty creatively about how to present your material.

You can of course exercise the same kind of creativity in a whole book – but it is a much more challenging task. A book chapter is a good way in to alternative modes of academic writing. It’s a place where you can think and do much more about the WRITING aspect of academic writing. It’s a place to focus directly on the reader rather than primarily on the referees. It’s a place to practice and develop the craft of authoring.

So, that’s why I like writing book chapters....which I’m now about to get back to.

This was originally published on Pat Thomson’s personal blog, [1]Patter, and is reposted here with permission

1. http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2012/12/05/finding-the-time-to-blog/
25 June is the international day of the seafarer. Did you know that almost 1.5 million people worldwide work on ships? Or that over 90 % of all goods we use have at one point been carried on board of a ship? And that if ships were to disappear, in just 24 hours life as we know it would grind to a halt? Take a minute to read something about the profession of seafarers today. Here are a few suggestions:

The latest (2010) recent[2] data on the world's maritime labour force (the BIMCO/ISF Manpower Update, by the University of Warwick)
[3] 12 reasons why seafarers quit their jobs, article at www.marineinsight.com

[4] SIRC, the Seafarers International Research Centre at the Cardiff School of social sciences, especially their magazine [5] The Sea, published by The Mission to Seafarers, and also their excellent [6] study of Fatigue at Sea (about which we wrote a while back)

More about the [7] Day of the Seafarers on the webpage of IMO, the International Maritime Organisation.

Two conferences dealing with maritime issues in the next few months:

[8] International Relations, Capitalism and the Sea: The Historical Sociology of Oceans and Inner Seas, BISA
Historical Sociology Working Group Workshop
Birkbeck College, University of London 16 September 2013


and a song
and some photos taken by a cargo ship captain:

Photo: Capt. I.S.Kremakov, 2009 ©
Some reflections on editing books and special issues while doing a PhD (2013-06-26 08:00)

I co-edited an edited book (see below) early in my PhD, with an existing project inviting me onboard as a fourth editor – largely, I assume, because my knowledge of the asexuality literature was useful to the project. It was a great experience in many ways. I gained an understanding of the publishing process and I realised how usefully such projects can broaden your grasp of the literature. So that was great. But on the other hand it also left a chapter which I was immensely proud of stuck in a book (which, as my first, I was also quite proud) with a price tag that might as well have gone hand-in-hand with a coversheet saying that it was intended for institutional libraries and everyone else should get lost.

Ok, so this is a problem, but surely they’re still worthwhile? So I thought as I set off on a second editing project. This time I put together a CfP for an Asexuality Studies anthology. Largely due to rookie mistakes and the intervention of some pretty major upheavals in my personal life during this time the project soon began to collapse into a bit of a mess. I also started to question my choice of publisher and, after consulting a number of people I trusted, settled on another. But the timescales involved at this stage were such that I had to go back and update all the existing contributors and gain permission to repackage the project. Given the real problem I was having with e-mail at the time (now resolved by becoming one of those irritating people who insists on getting to inbox zero everyday) this dragged on and on. While continually cursing the fact I hadn’t recruited a co-editor who was more organised than me (I’m great at time management but bewilderingly inadequate when it comes to the sustained feats of low level organisation necessitated by a process like editing a volume) I attempted to persevere, albeit punctuated by intermittent rounds of guilt ridden procrastination, before finally calling it a day a few months ago.
and sending profuse apologies to all concerned.

My third experience of editing has been brilliant. I led a team of guest editors for a special asexuality themed issue of psychology and sexuality ([1]some of which is still open access) which came out earlier in the year. Some things went wrong. The aforementioned personal difficulties (a year that was in theory one for wedding planning had become a year for untangling lives instead – it’s the sort of thing which makes it hard to prioritise academic editing…) got in the way a lot, as my general level of self-organisation got way too low to be able to sustain a project of this sort in a manageable way. Thankfully my co-editors were wonderful (though one did understandably get rather frustrated with me at points) and we eventually pulled it together. The end result is a genuinely groundbreaking text and, if you’re interested in sexuality studies, it’s an interesting one as well. Plus we have a proposed extension of it into a book under review at the moment. So in all this was a good experience. Though it’ll probably be a while before I get involved in editing again.

So here are some things I learnt which might be useful to PhDs/ECRs who are doing this stuff for the first time:

1. Don’t underestimate the amount of work involved. Or rather don’t underestimate the consistency of it. It’s not really that onerous in many ways but it does need little and often to succeed. If you are someone (like me) whose level of self-organisation veers between extremes then this is particularly important to address. As I found out to my cost, procrastinating for a month on an edited collection can make the mess you have to clean up afterwards radically more onerous as a result.

2. Don’t underestimate the potential benefits attached to it. Assuming this is a topic you’re interested in then you’re likely to massively increase your connections with others working on the topic, as well as getting a broader review of the field as a whole. I have a vague anxiety that 75 % of the world’s asexuality researchers think I’m a complete flake after my behaviour during the editing processes described above. But on the flip side I’m pretty sure I know 75 %+ of the people working in one of my fields.

3. Don’t try and do it on your own! Just don’t. I did it largely because, well, I thought it would look better to have been a sole editor. But it was a disaster. Whereas if I had, so to speak, had a Todd on that project (my very experienced co-editor from the other two projects) then I doubt it would have failed. If anything is a natural focus for collaboration in the contemporary academy, it is edited collections.

So I think editing collections can be a very worthwhile thing to do but it should be approached cautiously for those in the early stages of their careers. I can say with near certainty that I will never agree to edit anything again unless I have a co-editor who I have a prior working relationship with. But what about the broader landscape within which an individual might choose to offer time and energy to a project like this? I still think there’s value in them for many of the reasons Pat [2]describes in her article. After internalising the horrible attitude “book chapters are worthless” I’ve started to relent in recent months. I’m writing a chapter with Milena Kremakova for the Paracademics Handbook and I’m writing a chapter giving an overview of the asexuality studies literature for a psychology handbook later this year.

But the price issue still troubles me. Sure, I can post a pre-print on my academia.edu and on my blog. But that’s still an unsatisfying workaround. Edited books no longer have much credentialising function within the audit culture and their communicative function is hampered by the unit costs resulting from the commercial organisations to whom we are choosing to outsource the publishing. So more than any element of the contemporary landscape of scholarly publishing, it seems that the production of edited collections is a practice ripe for revolutionary change. I’ve written a little about this [3]here but it’s something I want to come back to in future.
3 tips for managing institutional, project and group twitter feeds in #HigherEd (2013-06-27 08:00)

In the last few years I've jointly or solely managed a whole range of twitter feeds -- including @sociowarwick, @bsathtory, @bsapgform, @bsadigitalso, @lsepoliticsblog, @bsarealism, @digital_change, @soc_imagimation, @asexstudies, @dis_of_dissent, @warwicksoscci and probably some others that I've forgotten about. Along the way I've learnt a lot about what works and what doesn't. Given that we seem to be in the very early stages of some sort of corporate twitter presence being expected for research groups or academic departments (etc) I thought I'd offer some tips about how to manage these kinds of twitter feeds in a way which will generate an audience, won't cause any controversy and won't take up too much of your time.

1. Tools like [1]Buffer app are essential to manage multiple twitter feeds effectively without it taking over the rest of your life. They stagger your tweets according to a predefined scheduled over a certain number of days. This can be 2 or 3 tweets only on week days. Or it can be 25+ tweets every day. It's up to you. It's worth playing around with it at first. Try out different schedules, taking into account both the content & time available to you. But once you get to grips with it, it means Twitter scheduling can be a weekly activity rather than a continual demand on your time. For instance I would schedule the @LSEPoliticsBlog feed (30 tweets a day at one point, 20k+ followers) two or three times a week. It took two hours max.

2. However this talk of 'content' which I slip into these days with distressing ease poses an obvious question: what 'content' do you have? This is where you need to think through what the point of the twitter presence is. Is it to disseminate project news? Is it to raise awareness of the project? Is it to network with likely outside constituencies? For research projects this question can be a bit tricky. Which is why combining this presence with a blog can be a strategic masterstroke at this stage. If you can get members of your project to write articles about the issues you're engaging with and their past work (etc) then this can be a valuable way of generating content for the Twitter feed. For research projects this is admittedly rather complex – listen to this [2]interview with the manager of the enormous FP7 funded MYPLACE project if you're looking for some inspiration. For academic departments, it's a lot easier, though this depends on how organised you can be. When I was employed to manage the Sociology@Warwick online presence (prior to joining the LSE's Public Policy Group to manage the LSE Politics Blog) I curated a collection of open access papers, books and media appearances of all the staff within the department. I then used buffer app to periodically tweet links to these, as well tweeting departmental news/events and retweeting tweets by staff members where appropriate. Now that more sociologists are using Twitter on a regular basis, it becomes possible to imagine a department twitter feed as aggregating the more appropriate aspects of individual users within the department. This could even take the form of a rebel mouse page like [3]this one which I use to automatically curate my online activity.

3. One of the most important features of Buffer is the analytics it offers i.e. it tells you how many people click on links and how many people retweet or favourite the tweet itself. Once you have been managing a Twitter feed for some time, it can become possible to see trends emerging in the kinds of content you’re putting out through it. This allows the management of the feed to become properly reflexive – are people interested in the work of a certain academic within your department? Then tweet more of it. Does video and audio get a good reaction?
Then ensure that all appearances by department members on youtube and vimeo (sometimes the individuals themselves are not aware these videos are out there!) feature in your regular cycle of content. Furthermore, it’s ok to push out the same links more than once. But be selective about how you do it, watch the analytics and try to put a different spin on it as you do.

1. https://bufferapp.com/

Wendy Olsen (2014-05-10 04:14:03)
Hi thanks...I worry when it starts becoming computerised and automated as that will turn off readers... & also if a productivity and reward issue caused you to use an automated approach, then maybe the productivity net effect is nil. It makes me think about open access publishing and working papers. these could be more widely read. I would not read Twitter if it was all automated advertising.

Sociological Imagination (2014-05-12 20:52:38)
Hi Wendy, I see what you mean but it demonstrably doesn’t turn readers off. It’s the same content, it’s just scheduled so that it goes out regularly rather than when someone has the time to go online and post it. It depends on what you tweet I guess.

The Project So Far: Visual Sociology and the Sociological Imagination (2013-06-28 08:00)
[1]"Visual Sociology and the Sociological Imagination" on Bundlr


CfP: Gender violence and virtual worlds: brave new world(s) of regulation? (2013-06-29 08:00)

Virtual Worlds and Online Games now play a large part in society and social past times; they are popular and mass culture. Women actively participate in various online environments and Virtual Worlds, forming a significant part of these communities.

However, Virtual Worlds provide a different space for people to inhabit. Cyberspace has traditionally been regarded as a lawless environment – as much for its jurisdictional difficulties and absence of regulation, as for its lack of physical nature. In recent years one could observe a sudden emergence and major growth of cybercrime, with particular rise in cyber stalking and cyber-harassment. What is particularly intriguing is that many of these crimes take a gender-based form, such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment or cyber-pornography, which primarily victimize women (or rather female
avatars and characters).

Despite their prevalence cybercrimes, and gender-based cybercrimes in particular, remain unregulated. Where regulation occurs, it is largely in the form of Acceptable behaviour and Codes of Conduct. The difficulty then arises then with enforcement. Furthermore, various attempts at discussing the issue of misogyny in online environments and cybercrimes against women meet a strong, opposing and somewhat alarming response, such as one directed against Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist games critic, blogger and the author of the Tropes v Women.

These recent developments and paint a rather alarming picture of the gender inequality in virtual worlds and prompt a question about the need for regulation of such behaviour in online environments and in virtual worlds.

The Ignite© (UN)CONFERENCE is designed to create an opportunity to discuss these pressing, contemporary issues in an informal, multidisciplinary environment. Our event will take a form of Ignite sessions which are designed to stimulate discussion and exchange of new ideas in a short period of time ([1]http://igniteshow.com/). Presentations should be no longer than 10 minutes. After the Ignite sessions, separate sessions will be run to further explore these issues.

We are hoping to attract a range of participants from various backgrounds, who are interested in participating in this event and contributing to the discussion. You do not need to be a game player to join!

Please submit proposals of no more than 200 words including a brief biography and 3 keywords to Kim Barker (Birmingham Law School) and Olga Juraz (Open University) at: virtualgender@gmail.com by 10 July 2013 and join the debate on twitter @VirtualGender.


CfP: The Sociological Craft Project (2013-06-30 08:00)

In this new feature the Sociological Imagination invites short (2500 word max) contributions reflecting on any aspect of sociological craft. We use the term 'craft' in the broad sense conveyed by Richard Sennett:

Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman's discipline and commitment; schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession.
We envision a number of forms such contributions might take:

- Reflections on particular academic roles (e.g., review editor).
- Reflection on the process of writing for particular forms of publication (e.g., journals, monographs, logs)
- Reflections on the craft of research (the tools utilised, your relationship with them, the messiness of the process)
- Reflections on where you work, the devices you use, how the ambiance shapes your writing
- Reflections on undertaking research, managing time, negotiating conflicting demands.
- Reflections on routines and writing practices which are integral to your craft
- If you were brave enough to send us a picture of your workspace we’d love to include it!

However these are only examples. We’re keen not to get posts of the style “10 Tips for Writing Good Journal Articles”. We have nothing against these posts – we often feature them! But this project aims to generate a discussion of the craft of sociological work, the practices which sustain it and the emotional life and personal concern which are irrevocably bound up with it. We are particularly interested in contributions that explore the constraints that contemporary academic structures place upon the creative exercise of sociological craft and how we can, hopefully, work towards ameliorating these circumstances.

If you want to submit a contribution for the project then please e-mail it attached as word document (with any multimedia files attached separately) along with a short 2 line bio to accompany your post.

2. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Simone (2013-08-09 20:51:23)
Hi, I’d be keen to open the CfP up to Arts and Humanities researchers at large - an impossible request to expect fulfilment of! I’m midway through writing my thesis on the subject of ‘work’ as it features as the central motif in recent British novels (well, after 1979). Part of my research is concerned with looking at the role of the writer as a craftsman, and at style as their main tool. So I am interested in the way work - and craft - is represented in the novel form and in how the writers of such go about that process. I have no idea how I might contribute to your proposal what with being an English literature researcher, but I’m open to suggestions. With best wishes, Simone Hutchinson

Sociological Imagination (2013-08-10 10:10:02)
sure, if you e-mail we can have a chat about it :-)

Sorry for my delay in replying, and also for my question: where is the email address listed? (!) Regards

Oh sorry, there’s a hyperlink for ‘please e-mail’ but it’s not enormously clear - pls send to mark AT markcarrigan.net - look forward to hearing from you.

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Reflections on collaborative research with sixth form sociology students within a university setting
(2013-07-01 08:00)

As part of their study into crime and deviance, staff and students in the Social Science Department of North Leamington School designed and undertook a collaborative crime mapping research project at Warwick University.

The initial impulse for the research came from a comment from a student in the study group who casually referred to an area in our town as “Heroin Heights”. This area was also referred to as “The Bronx” by local postal workers. The intimation was that this area had higher rates of criminals residing within it. The discussion that followed led on to the idea that this was a form of reputationally labelling which could be tested through empirical research by combining census data and court records.

As a PhD researcher working in the school, J. Saunders, booked the Teaching Grid (innovative learning space) in Warwick University Library for large scale plotting of the data to take place on a number of screens in real time. This enabled the testing of our hypotheses using google maps and correlations of a number of different sources. We used the following procedures and resources.

Creating a collaborative map of offender residence by electoral ward boundaries From our initial simple reputation ally label we then broadened research to test the various hypothesis e.g which areas have high or low levels of offenders and correlations with a "zone of transition" or unemployment rate, deprivation and others.

Stage One - Making the map

We set up a google account as an administrator and then invited others to join and collaborate in map. As making the map is a little awkward collaboration can save time.

Maps of town electoral wards can be found here ([1]ONS at ward level)

We created superimposed the ward boundaries on the [2]shared google map.

It was useful to first make a hardcopy map (available from a local newsagent or petrol station) as a prototype to refer to when creating the computer version. This “old school” method did save time and avoided frustrating zooming in and out on the computer. When editing the map we saved often, to avoid loss of work in case of drop outs. Eventually we had a map of the town divided into wards and ready for the data input from the court records.

Stage two - Collected and highlighted known offender residential data

At the local library we collected and photocopied recent reports from magistrates courts detailing those convicted of offences and their addresses (by street). These are available in local newspapers and a suitable period of time e.g. 6 months was collected. On these photocopies we used a highlighter marking convictions of those who lived in the town. This saved time when inputting the data. A detailed discussion about the ethics of the research developed at this stage.

Stage three - Inputting data onto the map

We found this relatively straightforward but somewhat tedious. For each offender residence (by street) we dragged and dropped a placemarker on to the map. To find difficult addresses use a tab or second computer. An example of the map is below.
Stage four - investigating correlations

This was far more theoretically challenging. At this stage, debate took place based upon sociological theories of crime and deviance e.g. social disorganisation, zones of transition and reputational labelling.

Some of this data was recent and some older dating back to the 2001 census. The 2011 census data provides an excellent opportunity for an update and is available now. The issue of rates was discussed as there are different populations between wards. A simple spreadsheet enabled us to compare these and work out which wards had higher and lower rates of offenders within them.

General reflections on how the project worked pedagogically

Overall, in discussions with the students, the project was seen as a success, not least of all because doing original research on a local area was highly relevant and interesting. The use of collaborative methods rather than individual or smaller group work was also novel. Part of the rationale was to give students the experience of visiting the university itself and actually do some sociological research in that environment. This generated enthusiasm at the time and for further study beyond the sixth form.

As teachers we piloted the approach first before going to Warwick. Contingency plans could be put in place for the technical issues that arose (e.g. for freezes/drop outs). Internet speeds in the UK may be part of the problem as some countries have upload speeds four times faster. Technically if the system was seamless if would have enhanced the experience.

The visit to the university by students clearly focused their minds on future aspirations. All are now studying at universities. Seeing the central map on the large screen develop in real time made the teamwork element really tangible and enjoyable. Overall the theoretical discussions felt a little crowded out by the data input and technical aspects of the research. On the other hand the students by doing, rather than merely reading about research found out about the hard graft involved in any empirical study and this was valuable. The more theoretical discussions took place later in the week. Many unexpected issues arose on the fly that stimulated debate. The use of crime mapping in this way did highlight future potential and limitations.

We are now developing a follow on study of religious belief in the community which will incorporate more qualitative research and embed video and audio podcasts within the maps. This update has been influenced by the "Reading the riots" research done at LSE. The students learned about the process of research itself and the results showed that zone theories and reputational labels may have a grain of truth but the reality is more complex and capable of many different interpretations.

Chris Bowen & J Saunders

1.http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadPage.do?pageId=1001&tc=1304853713359&a=7&b=6181722&c=brunswick&d=14&g=494410&i=1001x1003&m=0&r=1&s=
2.http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TftFnot5uXw
Call it a bonfire of the vanities or an all consuming sacrificial havan. But the "MeToo" flames now sweeping across social media have turned into a cleansing firestorm, burning holes in carefully honed public personas and turning the heat back on those


codesoft (2019-09-22 06:56:24)

It mainly talks about a farmer who gave birth to three sons and a daughter. One day the farmer called three sons to fetch water from the well. They came to the well. Because they accidentally dropped the barrel, they dared not go home. The farmer thought they must go there again. He scolded them for


Race Critical Public Scholarship – pursuing justice in austere times, UEL, 17th July, 10.30-5.30 (2013-07-01 10:35)

The climate of so-called austerity is hardening inequalities, including institutional racism, and has facilitated a resurgence of overtly racist political parties and a troubling renewal of popular racism across Europe and beyond. In recent decades, there has been an implication that engaged scholarship in the field of race equality should address the state – perhaps by providing better evidence for policy or critiquing existing interventions. Yet in the present context of cutbacks and competition for the most basic of services, there seems little opportunity to engage officialdom in this way.

This workshop considers what scholars may be able to contribute to the wider struggle against racial injustice in such times. Contributors include Nira Yuval-Davis, Steve Garner, Max Farrar, Michael Keith, Bridget Byrne, Nasar Meer, Ronit Lentin, Les Back and John Solomos.


1. http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/event/7119206739
3. http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showAxaArticles?journalCode=rers20#.Ub7WB9hQ3Kc

Oppression Bias and the Struggles of a Black Sociologist (2013-07-01 11:04)

Social science as it has developed in the western world has it as its goal to develop, catalog, understand, and organize human behavior. Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Communications, and all the
other social sciences seek to make sense of the social world human beings have created for themselves over the past million years of our existence. For myself, I chose to study Sociology, the study of human interactions. Much like many of the other social sciences, it has its roots (in the western world, other societies have their own forms of all these fields hundreds or thousands of year before Europe) in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Because the period that Sociology came into being along with other social sciences its focus was on Europe and interactions between European people, to the detriment of other societies and groups of people.

Europe's barbanistic and imperialistic interactions with the rest of the world over the intervening 200 years influenced the social sciences in a way that is classist, sexist, and racist in both their theories as well as the professional practice of these fields. Examples of racism for instance infecting these fields is the “culture of poverty”, eugenics, functionalism (or at least some applications of said approach), the entire field of Anthropology, and [1]Democratic Peace Theory.

Although in recent years, the influence of the Civil Rights/Black Power, Women’s Rights, [2]LGBT*, Anti-Colonial, and [3]Anti-Capitalist movements have influenced a new generation of social scientists who have not been as influenced by these oppressive circumstances, problems still remain. I can only speak for myself as an African in Sociology, but there are still great and many barriers to having the oppressed voices heard in the social sciences. especially for those of us who are practitioners of those social sciences like myself. One of the most important and basic of these barriers is what I would like to call the “Assumption of Oppression Bias”.

I don't know if I have seen this concept in other writings or pieces but I think its something that anyone from an oppressed background will immediately recognize. The basic dynamic of Oppressed Bias is more or less the same as all other forms of bias, that because of one's connection to a particular idea, people/persons, or institution said person can not or will not make an objective scientific analysis of X issue. Oppression Bias is then the idea that because one is part of X oppressed group they can not or will not make an objective analysis of the conditions of that oppression, the oppressed themselves, or the oppressors involved. This is a very serious issue that I believe in many circles has and is stifling the voices of those of us who come from oppressed backgrounds.

Speaking for myself, I got involved in Sociology not for the simple purpose of learning and studying human behavior. I got involved in the field to study human behavior for the purpose of using it (or someone else using it) to dismantle oppressive systems in our world and help build better systems of human interaction. Sociology especially has been split largely between those who feel our field’s only legitimate purpose is to catalog and organize information about human behavior while others, such as myself, argue that Sociology is only relevant in relation to its usefulness to fighting oppression, furthering human society, and building better institutions (regardless of political persuasion). For those of us from oppressed communities (of a racial, class, gender, or sexual nature), we have two imperatives for getting involved if we’re on the “interventionist” side of the divide. The first is because since most Sociology through its history has been done by people of privileged backgrounds, we feel that we can better understand the social circumstances related to our backgrounds than someone who has no real life interaction with them. The other reason is explicitly to contribute to information base that can further the liberation struggle of those who share our oppressed social position. Unfortunately for those two reasons people of privilege often ignore our world assuming the oppression bias.

The Oppression Bias language can be seen in many ways. One is the discouragement by Sociologists in the classroom for people to speak from anecdotes. We all know that anecdotes don’t constitute scientific information by itself but when you’re the only one in the classroom who remotely has any engagement with a certain social phenomena you would assume that people would give some deference to you on that point. Unfortunately often comments referring to life in the projects, coming out of the closet, or being from a rural town is met with silence and/or little engagement with the point or worse the student/scientist is reminded that their anecdote isn’t a scientific snapshot.

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Both of these responses discourages oppressed individuals from speaking from their lifetime of experience with X issue that I believe is relevant even if it didn’t come out of a research journal.

Another form of this bias that also happens in classrooms often is when an oppressed person thinks of a writer who is not a social scientist who said or wrote something that they feel is relevant to the discussion. An especially common example of this is when a working class or poor student/scientist brings up Marx's theory of revolution and change. We can argue all we want about whether its right or not but its interesting to always see the weird looks one gets when they reference him and one would assume that the looks reflect thoughts that resemble "commie..." It also happens when racial minorities mention revolutionaries of their people in conversation. There’s an assumption that often goes through the person who’s about to speak head that these people will dismiss this writer’s point because they aren’t a "scientist" like they are.

Assumptions of Oppression Bias of the above mentioned forms and others (“they have an “agenda”” accusation is another one) stifle voices of students, social scientists, and laypersons alike and contributes to a weird Catch-22 that all oppressed people in the social sciences have to face, or will face. You come into the field wanting to study "your people" because the current crop of people and studies have failed to do so in a decent way (or at all) and indeed there is almost a responsibility to do so because no one else will. The problem is that because you do that, you are assumed to have an agenda and much of your writing is proving the worth of either the topic of discussion itself or super reinforcing your logic to make sure NO ONE can question your work. This is a very uncomfortable position to be in and for many of us, it wears us down...a lot.

For Sociology and other social sciences to move forward towards a more fair and equitable picture of the social world, we will have to confront professional/psychological forms of suppression such as the Oppression Bias Assumption. If we don’t our fields will continue into the far future to be too heavily weighted in favor of the interest, logic, and perspective of the privileged to the disadvantage of the oppressed. That is a field I’d rather not be a part of.

Have you seen real oppression bias in your work? Have you seen the undue assumption of this bias used against you or anyone you know? What do you think we can do to fight back against this?

William Richardson is a 2nd year MA student in Sociology at the University at Buffalo (Department of Sociology. He is currently writing his Master’s thesis on how communities racially essencialize space and its contributes to continued residential segregation. Outside that he has interests in race/racism, intersectional stratification systems, and the integration of language into systems of domination.


“[1]Last Seminar by Stan Cohen must surely merit consideration as the strangest paper ever to appear in a Sociology journal. It tells the story of a gradual invasion of the university campus by those who are neither expected nor
welcome: research participants. Encountering strangely familiar figures in their everyday working lives, befuddled sociologists suddenly begin to recognise that those who have been the objects of past research have gradually returned to confront the researchers who sought to repress them upon completion of the research:

Then Bridges, who I thought had been deliberately avoiding me, walked up to the desk at the end of a class in which he had participated with his usual intense stare.

‘You don't know anything about it, do you? It's all a game to you.' I asked him what he meant.

‘Prison’, he said, ‘You think because you've spoken to a few cons you understand it all. Well, you don't, you just don’t.’

He was slowly shaking his head. The tone was polite, but condescending. I'd heard that tone before.

The ensuing confrontation is neither welcome nor pleasant. Those whose existence had been reduced to representational objects begin to subject the researchers to emotional torment, with their mere presence throwing the campus into disarray:

Those of us who had done any empirical research were being infiltrated by our subjects. (‘Infiltrated’, is that the right word? I'm still not sure how to describe what was being done to us. Penetrated? Visited? Invaded?) I could not explain how this had happened but they were certainly here, taking revenge against us for writing about them.

The story ends with Cohen's narrator desperately bundling up his most treasured books before fleeing the burning campus as gun fire echoes in the distance. It's a very strange story. But it asks an important question: what would involuntary confrontation with participants in past research look like? What would it feel like? How would a prior knowledge of such future rencountering (re)shape our practice? Certainly these are not new questions. But it would be difficult to find a text which considers them quite as dramatically as Cohen's.

This is something I've thought a lot about in the context of researching the asexual community. I first encountered the notion of asexuality through two new friends who identified as asexual. As I got curious about asexuality – partly because I didn’t ‘get it’ and partly because of its conspicuous absence within the sexualities literature I'd encountered at that point – I started to search online. I very quickly found asexual discussion forums, blogs and youtube videos. I found a website that an asexual PhD student (who eventually switched topics to research the history of asexual identity) had setup in order to help encourage and facilitate what was, at that point, a fairly insubstantial amount of academic research on asexuality. In short: an awful lot was happening online.

It soon became obvious that the internet had been integral to the emergence of an asexual identity and the formation of something which, for lack of a better term, we might call an asexual ‘community’. However the internet was also crucial to the formation of an extremely loose but nonetheless identifiable asexual research community – e-mail, mailing lists, blogs, discussion forums allowed geographically dispersed individuals with common interests to communicate. This has eventually led to some face-to-face meetings: a seminar at the University of Warwick, a conference panel at the Sexualisation of Culture conference, the formation of an interest group of the National Women’s Studies Association and numerous conference sessions which have emerged from this.
There’s a risk of overstating the point but there is, nonetheless, a clear homology here and it’s a really interesting one. In a way it represents a reshaping of the field of research – the same trends are identifiable in the formation of groups of researchers as can be seen in groups of the researched. It might be the case that asexuality represents an outlier but, even if this is so, it’s helpful because it foregrounds a change which might be difficult to identify elsewhere if it is manifesting itself more gradually. The institutional and territorial gap between researchers and the groups they research – the concern of Cohen’s story – is being radically narrowed by the internet in general and social media in particular. There are some striking examples of this within asexuality studies, such as the formalisation of the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network’s gatekeeping function and the Open Letter to Researchers written by the Asexuality Awareness Week committee, but I find it difficult to see how this could become anything other than a broader trend. Some elements of Cohen’s parable could seem anachronistic given the sensitivity and awareness which many social researchers, particularly insider researchers, exhibit in relation to this ‘gap’. My intention is simply to frame this recognised issue in terms of the many ways in which the technological innovations which are driving this process can be drawn upon to negotiate it proactively. By this I mean things like:

- Single author or multi-author blogging
- Tweeting about research
- Setting up a tumblr blog about research
- Podcasting (interviews, talks)
- Facebook pages
- Videocasting (interviews, talks, documentaries)
- Live streaming events
- Engaging with community blogs

These are possibilities which often come up in terms of ‘impact’ and ‘public engagement’. But I think these are often sterile concepts, redolent of top-down imperatives and an audit culture – it also risks subsuming the specific publics of the researched who have a stake in the content of that research under the general ‘public’ with whom we are ‘engaging’.

These are powerful tools which, increasingly, require little to no technical expertise to master. Martin Weller talks about these technologies as being ‘fast, cheap and out of control’:

Fast – technology that is easy to learn and quick to set up. The academic does not need to attend a training course to use it or submit a request to their central IT services to set it up. This means they can experiment quickly.

Cheap – tools that are usually free or at least have a freemium model so the individual can fund any extension themselves. This means that it is not necessary to gain authorisation to use them from a budget holder. It also means the user doesn’t need to be concerned about the size of audience or return on investment, which is liberating.
Out of control – these technologies are outside of formal institutional control structures, so they have a more personal element and are more flexible. They are also democratised tools, so the control of them is as much in the hands of students as it is that of the educator

In adopting fast, cheap and out of control tools we make the research process newly open and, in doing so, help ameliorate the methodological and ethical difficulties which can result from too wide a gap between researchers and the groups they are researching. Using these tools proactively helps ensure that changes in the broader field of research which are, by definition, unpredictable can be negotiated more actively than would otherwise be the case. Incorporating them into ongoing practice can also, somewhat paradoxically, lead to much greater impact than could ever be achieved by deliberately seeking ‘impact’ as a compartmentalised activity. The digital footprint which open research leaves manifests itself in a discoverability by activists, journalists, practitioners and policy makers which would be difficult, if not impossible, to cultivate through other means. But this discoverability is also a challenge – ethically and methodologically – one which I think Stan Cohen would have found very interesting.


The digital scholar | jbrittholbrook (2013-07-03 11:43:58)
[...] I hit on a tweet by Mark Carrigan (@mark_carrigan) to this post on the Sociological Imagination blog. It’s worth reading in its own right, but it also led me [...]

Art, research and sociology’s promiscuity (2013-07-03 08:00)

I’ve just come back from two days talking, thinking and occasionally getting frustrated by the question of the relationship between art and social research. This is something I’ve been curious about for ages. Here are some reasons why:

• I think the communicative repertoire exhibited by most sociologists is profoundly limited and I think of performance, in the broadest sense of the term, as something which deserves serious consideration to this end.

• Dialogues with artists about their practice (as well as about art more abstractly) can be incredibly helpful in recognising non-linear creativity and incorporating this recognition into ongoing practice.

• An engagement between art and sociology can help drive innovation in methods, particularly in relation to the sensory and the possibilities which ubiquitous digital devices afford for mobile social research.

These dialogues might involve an exploration and renegotiation of the boundary between sociology and art. However I find the possibility that some might deliberately or otherwise collapse the boundary rather worrying. Social research ≠ art. Artefacts of art practice ≠ data. Exploratory liminality ≠ research questions. Conflating these things precludes the creative exploration of the differences and commonalities between them. It does a disservice to both sociology and art. My concern is that what Andrew Abbott describes as sociology’s difficulty with excluding things – its lack of any intellectually effective means of expelling topics which have come to occupy sociological attention – might,
in time, lead to a slide from considering the relationship between art and sociology to an enthusiastic attempt to conflate the two.

1. [http://markcarrigan.net/2012/06/21/non-linear-creativity/](http://markcarrigan.net/2012/06/21/non-linear-creativity/)

Kip Jones (2013-07-03 09:20:09)

I am curious to know if research methods in sociology can become the modes of research for artistic practice?

Do iPods block out internal conversation? (2013-07-04 08:00)

This is a claim my supervisor has made from time to time. It's one I've tended to be rather sceptical of but it came to mind earlier when I was walking home, with no music as a result of having forgotten to pickup headphones when I left the house. To say that listening to music on headphones ‘blocks out internal conversation’ is not to suggest that we cease thought or feeling when listening to music. In fact the process of walking and listening to music (one of my favourite things in the world on a sunny day) is usually emotionally and perceptually rich – take this for example, a song which for some reason is tied up in my mind with walking around on hot summers days but also tangled up with memories of various gigs in different cities and a couple of quite distinct periods of my life:
But what happens to my internal monologue when I’m walking along on a summer’s day listening to this song? It struck me earlier that I entirely see my supervisor’s point. My experience is of feelings and thoughts drifting in certain directions as a result of the music and the meaning (or lack thereof) past experience has embedded into it for me. But what inner monologue remains, if any, seems staccato and disjointed. Whereas earlier today when I found myself very aware of not having music for a 40 min walk (habitually I just would have music with me without thinking about it) I had a long drawn out inner dialogue about various things that have been on my mind recently. It’s this sort of dialogue through which we come to exercise agency (in that we decide on courses of action after deliberating internally about our circumstances and our concerns) and, if iPods do ‘blot this out’, it points to unacknowledged implications held by the ubiquity of this technology.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/TyXJblTTN58?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Adam Byrne (2013-07-23 12:42:13)
The non stop wearing of headphones in public is destructive to people’s thought processes, detrimental to positive social interaction and downright dangerous at times (think of people being sneaked up on unawares or joggers being mugged). Thousands of years ago music was precious and rare, only basic instruments existed and when someone sang or played it was a special social occasion with communal meaning. Now cheap and trite music is everywhere and means nothing. That’s why I decided to give it up a few years ago and the silence is golden! All the best, Adam.
Lorin Yochim (2014-02-02 16:33:02)
I rarely listen to music through those earphones. More likely to be found are podcasts like Thinking Allowed or the Philosopher Zone. Those seem to do wonders to create all kinds of new internal conversations. External conversations - not so much. :)
In the midst of a walk through the steers of a typically sedated Madrid at Siesta time, I turned a corner and stumbled upon a hive of life and energy, the likes of which I hadn't encountered before. This was my first encounter with the reality of Occupy. Whilst this image was taken back in 2011, bringing it into publication could be no more timely. In her recent paper in the Current Sociology monograph that specifically examines the new wave of global mobilisation, Lauren Langman (2013) highlights the tensions between a Lockean individualism associated with affluence and the egalitarian views associated with Occupy. As she states: 'At times of crises, people withdraw commitments to the existing social order - creating spaces for alternative views, values and understandings' (p.512). This image of a hotel, a place where affluence can buy you your own piece of home within a city and its occupation demonstrates the way that this tension is playing out within the streets of cities around the world.


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E-mail us your visual sociology submissions and ideas on [2]S.I.Imagery@gmail.com. Full instructions can be found [3]here, or just [4]email us, if you have any questions.

1792
When is a photograph not just a photograph? | Jon Rainford's Blog (2013-07-06 09:02:59)

[...] and I am excited to be attending one of the days. Happily, this also coincides with the publication of my first pieces of 'visual sociology'. The visual has always interested me and my background in design, photography and graphics has [...]

New Frontiers for (Digital) Sociology? (2013-07-06 08:00)

In [1]2009 Savage and Burrows challenged sociology to modernise its methodological repertoires or face obsolescence. Digital Sociology is gathering momentum and developing into a promising riposte to this challenge.

Since Digital Sociology is a new area of exploration, interested sociologists are setting about defining its content and scope. This blog post is intended to make a small contribution to this discussion by proposing Digital Sociology should be concerned with emerging semantic web technologies.

Web 1.0 was made possible by Sir Tim Berners-Lee’s creation of the http protocol which enabled us to retrieve a copy of a document by accessing its address on a network. Web 2.0 was made by us; the content providers.

To realise the semantic web or Web 3.0 he and his colleagues envision everything (documents, data, inanimate objects, even us) having an address on a network and artificial intelligence having the ability to understand and ‘learn’ relationships between these addressed entities. So Web 3.0 will be created by machines as we become data sources on the network (incidentally, this is one of the reasons ANT offers useful tools in this field).

Understandably, owing to scale of its ambition, the semantic web is yet to be realised. However many of the technologies that make the semantic web at least technically feasible have powerful implications for the way we and the computers we programme, collect, store, use, and share data.

These include [2]linked data and [3]ontologies. Those of you familiar with relational databases will know about pieces of data, well...having relations. For example if you and your partner are registered on the DVLA’s database, even if you live at different addresses, it will be easy for the database to establish you have a relationship with your partner because your records share your car’s registration number.

The aim of linked data, via data structuring models such as [4]RDF, is to connect and consolidate records that exist in different databases; even data in different formats (if linked data was fully realised the Web would become one huge distributed database). The query language [5]SPARQL enables us to query across databases by mining linked data. For example, if the DVLA and your university stored its data as linked data it will at least be technically possible, via related records like your car’s registration, to find out which department you work in. You may park your car at the university which stores your car registration along with your employment records. Theoretically a search engine could pull all the details about your car and employment in one data grab. Now imagine all the possible connections that could be made using all the digital data stored about you on all the databases out there.
Ontologies introduce another layer of functionality to this scenario. They are not ontologies as we understand them in sociology; in computer science it’s a framework for organising data in a way that gives it meaning. Ontologies allow computers to ‘learn’ the semantics of relationships between data. For the more technically minded [6] here’s how the BBC are using an ontology to characterise news stories.

All that can be known in the previous example is that you and your partner share a registration number; computers can’t know or think that means you both drive that car. However, an ontology introduces other variables to the data relations. It could define you as a driver, and your partner as a driver, and then state you both own only one car. The computer would then ‘know’ you both drive the same car. As more variables are added the computer builds a richer picture until it’s able to imply relationships between data. Given, you and your partner are living at separate addresses and the car is sports car, add to that your age and a recent trip to Ibiza the computer could conclude you are having a mid-life crisis!

Obviously this only works on open data, correctly formatted data and a strict legal framework protects us from such sharing. However the use of this technology has important implications for the way data can be exploited.

Take for example Tesco club card data collected by [7] DunnHumby. If a Tesco customer buys the Sun, razors, a ready meal for one, a Katie Price fitness video, some baby clothes, cigarettes, and multi-pack lager when England games are on the reasoning software can, as it gains knowledge, produce a sophisticated profile of this customer; his social class, relationship status, lifestyle etc. Again, DunnHumby follows strict guidelines for anonymising this data but more semantic capabilities we add the more we are able, via machine processing, to reverse engineer aspects of identity. There’s no doubt that we should be worried about the personal data we give away to Facebook et al. for free but this technology could effectively mean the end of anonymous data. The better semantic A.I. technology becomes, the better it becomes at de-anonymising data.

Returning to Savage and Burrows’ challenge, these technologies offer sociology new methodological tools; more ‘intelligent’ data collection and processing but also a new, fertile territory for digital sociologists to analyse and critique.

P.S. This is only a fairly frivolous primer, for a more technical academic guide to these technologies please see;


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Virtual Worlds and Online Games now play a large part in society and social pastimes; they are popular and mass culture. Women actively participate in various online environments and Virtual Worlds, forming a significant part of these communities.

However, Virtual Worlds provide a different space for people to inhabit. Cyberspace has traditionally been regarded as a lawless environment – as much for its jurisdictional difficulties and absence of regulation, as for its lack of physical nature. In recent years one could observe a sudden emergence and major growth of cybercrime, with particular rise in cyber stalking and cyber-harassment. What is particularly intriguing is that many of these crimes take a gender-based form, such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment or cyber-pornography, which primarily victimize women (or rather female avatars and characters).

Despite their prevalence cybercrimes, and gender-based cybercrimes in particular, remain unregulated. Where regulation occurs, it is largely in the form of Acceptable behaviour and Codes of Conduct. The difficulty then arises then with enforcement. Furthermore, various attempts at discussing the issue of misogyny in online environments and cybercrimes against women meet a strong, opposing and somewhat alarming response, such as one directed against Anita Saarkesian, a feminist games critic, blogger and the author of the Tropes v Women.

These recent developments and paint a rather alarming picture of the gender inequality in virtual worlds and prompt a question about the need for regulation of such behaviour in online environments and in virtual worlds.

The Ignite© (UN)CONFERENCE is designed to create an opportunity to discuss these pressing, contemporary issues in an informal, multidisciplinary environment. Our event will take a form of Ignite sessions which are designed to stimulate discussion and exchange of new ideas in a short period of time ([1]http://igniteshow.com/). Presentations should be no longer than 10 minutes. After the Ignite sessions, separate sessions will be run to further explore these issues.

We are hoping to attract a range of participants from various backgrounds, who are interested in participating in this event and contributing to the discussion. You do not need to be a game player to join!

Please submit proposals of no more than 200 words including a brief biography and 3 keywords to Kim Barker (Birmingham Law School) and Olga Jurasz (Open University) at: virtualgender@gmail.com by 10 July 2013 and join
Rethinking the vision of sociology one might want to argue for (2013-07-09 08:00)

it may be time to re-think how to situate our ourselves and our commitments in relation to, not only what one is against, but also what vision of sociology one might want to argue for. It is not a matter, to my mind, of answering disciplined instrumentalism with hyperpolitical posturing that dwells in the delusion that we transform the world simply by making pronouncements about it. It might be that the value of what we do is found in the commitment to thinking, education and understanding. In fact I think this is what the sociologists in this exhibit are talking about. Guided by ambition and a confidence that may have something to say about our current condition, this involves shaping the discipline, developing collaborations, and yes, raising income and resources to fund projects we believe in. A commitment to dialogue is central here to – not least with our students – if we are to seek and find new audiences and publics for sociological ideas. We have no choice but to play the game and establish standing that can be quantitatively recognised. However, this is a dead game without retaining a commitment to communicate to a wider range of publics comprised not only of professional sociologists but also our students – inside and outside universities - and people searching for alternative ways to think the issues of the day.


Caught Between Zombies and Chavs? The aesthetics of the crowd in an age of austerity (2013-07-10 08:00)

I love book shops. There are few things in life that give me greater pleasure then entering a book shop to choose a book at random. While I occasionally buy some utter crap through the enthusiastically scattergun approach I take to book buying, it’s much more common for me to stumble across books that I come to love. Or at least ones that intrigue me enough to lead to a purchase but then sit, unread, around my house for a year or two before I finally get round to them. There’s a much smaller, in a weird way rather exclusive, category of books that provokes neither response though. These are ones I have recurrently picked up in a shop, flicked through and yet have failed to provoke a degree of interest which would lead me to buy them... nonetheless they are sufficiently interesting that I find myself picking them up again a month or two later though still not buying them. The book of World War Z falls very much into this category and, rather inevitably given I must have picked it up close to 10 times over a number of years without buying it, it’s lodged into my psyche in a way that sits rather incongruously with the fact I was never interested enough to read it. So I was rather intrigued to see the film but nonetheless a bit ambivalent about it:
There are obvious things to dislike about this film. The narrative is disjointed in parts, with occasional gaping holes in the story telling matched by smatterings of dialogue so wooden that it’s a wonder the actors were able to deliver it with straight faces. But nonetheless it was gripping and the spectacle was, well, spectacular. This revolved around two aspects: zombie crowds and the breakdown of social order. The apotheosis of this was reached in the siege of Jerusalem by the zombie armies (!?) before the film got a bit tedious in the second half - Israel was the only state which took the initial reports of zombies seriously, with past history compelling military leaders to respond to even the most far fetched potential threat (there’s a far from subtle moral about the risk modelling of natural security states here). But please do ignore my cynicism because it turns out those walls were useful after all... for a while at least. But eventually the zombie armies, spurred on by the sounds of peaceful interethnic cultural collaboration - literally, it was harmonious singing in the immigration zone of Jerusalem that provoked the attack - soon overwhelmed even these defences and the state of Israel was consumed by the zombie plague. Was anyone else astonished that this bit of the film got made?

Leaving aside the sheer socio-political weirdness of this bit of the film, it also left me thinking about the aesthetics of the crowd which characterised the film as a whole. The film portrays, in its own terms, the beginning of a world war - an established global order, represented throughout by the United Nations, suddenly finds itself under siege by an internal threat and, I’m sad to say, all looks lost, at least until some heroic figures are able to leverage scientific knowledge and military resources into temporary survival and the onset of total war. Who are the enemy? The sheer mass of the human population, those who formerly contributed to the reproduction of the social order each and every day but are now gripped by an inexplicable destructive urge, constituting an existential threat to the established order through their sheer numbers and violent reaction to the remaining organs of power. How terrifying a spectacle, to see a crowd so blood thirsty, plagued by such malevolent demons that too much contact with soldiers can leave the security forces equally consumed by the nihilism of the mob! Who are the heroes? Special forces, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, the IDF and the US Military. The thought that kept returning to me through the film was the extent to which it portrayed the mirror image of what China Mieville describes as [1]‘floating utopias’ - in a kinder and gentler age of pre-austerity neoliberalism, the libertarian imaginary found its expression in fantasies of liberation from the state in [2]floating paradises of consumption and free enterprise. In an age of austerity, this utopian impulse finds it counter-image in nightmares of being eaten alive by a feral crowd, with dark hopes of malthusian salvation necessitating a militarization of social life and total war against the mass of humanity. Only through embracing death and destruction (by literally internalising it in the form of the viruses which render one oblivious to the teeming destructive hoards) can the forces of social order stand a chance against the nihilistic fever which has gripped the mass of humanity and eviscerated the capitalist world system.

The portrayal of the zombies isn't a million miles away from that of the [3]murderous chavs in Eden Lake:

But in that case the murderous crowd amounted to a few insecure, though deadly, teenage boys. The social pathology did not yet extend (in 2008) to the population at large. While a fashionable London couple found themself murdered by the locals when visiting the future site of an exclusive gated development in the West Midlands, the film nonetheless conveyed a vision of a controlled future in which these marginal predators would be kept at bay by increased social order - in other words, the gates were going to be put up around Eden Lake. So, if we want to avoid north London couples being massacred by West Midlands chavs, we'd better embrace this process. But World War Z portrays a time where even the world's biggest gate cannot keep out the murderous masses. So what hope for our collective futures? Well it seems we can either retreat into militarised communes, hiding from the world while the remaining forces of political order slaughter the mass of the earth's population, or we can begin to look more closely at the constitution of the feral crowd and begin to wonder if 'zombies' and 'chavs' are ideological fictions that serve...
a nefarious political purpose.


Adam Byrne (2013-07-23 12:33:59)
What’s your opinion on The Walking Dead (AMC TV series) interpretation of the zombie apocalypse, if I may ask?

Adam Byrne (2013-07-23 12:50:52)
I didn’t like World War Z for some of the reasons you mentioned - it was like an overblown car chase and there simply wasn’t enough time to tell the story properly but I do agree that the visuals were impressive.

Zombie Films and the Urban Condition | (2013-10-18 16:56:09)
[...] who are attracted to the loud singing emanating from the over-joined citizens within the walls. Oh, how ironic. But their eventual infection in this instance was only due to an unfortunate error that really, [...] 

» The Politics of Zombies The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-31 08:00:28)
[...] http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13497 [...] 

An interview with David Jay: Why Asexuality Matters For The Future of Sexual Culture (2013-07-11 08:00)
In this podcast I talk to [1]David Jay about the future of the asexuality community, the implications of its increasing visibility and its relevance for sexual culture more broadly.


Baking an idea in the unconscious mind (2013-07-12 08:00)
My own belief is that a conscious thought can be planted into the unconscious if a sufficient amount of vigour and intensity is put into it. Most of the unconscious consists of what were once highly emotional conscious thoughts, which have now become buried. It is possible to do this process of burying deliberately, and in this way, the unconscious can be led to do a lot of useful work. I have found, for example, that if I have to write upon some rather difficult topic the best plan is to think about it with very great intensity – the greatest intensity of which I am capable – for a few hours or days, and at the end of that time give orders, so to speak, that the work is to proceed underground. After some months I return consciously to the topic and find that the work has been done. Before I had discovered his technique, I used to to spend the intervening months worrying because I was making no progress: I arrived at the
solution none the sooner for this worry, and the intervening months were wasted, whereas now I can devote them to other pursuits.

Bertrand Russell, The Conquest of Happiness, Pg 49-50

This is a book I first read seven years ago and occasionally come back to. While it's full of scattered insights, I'd struggle to think of any advice I've encountered anywhere that has been more straightforwardly useful than this suggestion. It's something I began to try and practice consciously pretty much immediately and, in the past few years, it's become such a habitual part of how I work that I'd pretty much forgotten I ever did anything else. It's a natural antidote for those who, as C Wright Mills might have put it, can find themselves getting obsessed with the "feel of an idea" - my own take on Russell's advice is to try and sit with an idea, see where associations lead you spontaneously, think through its implications and try to contextualise it in terms of ideas that are already more settled in your mind. Then to let it go, distracting yourself with something else and avoiding it for as long as possible until some practical exigencies demand reengagement. Often they don't and this is where the method is particularly great.

It came back to mind recently because of a discussion in which I suddenly found that a fragmented set of thoughts which preoccupied me a couple of years ago (how cultural items can be used to mediate human relationships e.g. CDs, Mp3s, Books, Films, Youtube Clips) suddenly emerged back into my psyche as a fully formed theory (linking transformation of the cultural industries to theories of individualisation) which was relevant to the discussion. As far as I can remember, I'd expanded no deliberate thought or intellectual energy on addressing these ideas in the preceding couple of years – they'd simply been sitting in the back of my mind, baking until they were ready. The 'baking' metaphor is perhaps another example of this. Someone used the term at a conference I was at recently (in fact I'm not 100% sure I didn't mishear them) and it briefly lodged in my attention without me really knowing why. Until I came to write this blog post and suddenly it became obvious why I had latched onto the metaphor of 'baking an idea'.


The Great University Gamble (2013-07-13 08:00)

Understandably, headlines focused on this dramatic rise in price and its apparent expense for graduates, while obscuring the greater burden placed on the publicly backed student loan scheme, which requires an increase in upfront government borrowing. In the medium term, Public Sector Net Debt is projected to grow by an additional £20 billion as a result. Aided by accounting conventions, BIS is able to show a reduction in departmental expenditure, but, perversely, the standard narrative about deficit reduction and borrowing does not apply here. Instead, the move to a generalised fee and loan regime is part of a more profound transformation of higher education and the public sector in general. The agenda is to create a lightly regulated market of a diverse range of private companies with direct public funding to institutions diluted to homeopathic levels. An experiment is being conducted on English universities; one that is not controlled and that in the absence of any compelling evidence for change threatens an internationally admired and efficient system.

BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought (2013-07-14 08:00)

BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought  
Friday 6 September 2013  
BSA Meeting Room, London.

As the new convenors of the BSA realism study group we are pleased to announce a seminar to debate contemporary issues in realist thought. We intend to facilitate discussion with a range of speakers to consider what can we learn about the application of realism across different disciplines.

We would like to initiate a broad discussion within the following areas:
- Realist dialogues across perspectives and disciplines.  
- Using realism in substantive inquiry.  
- What difference does a realist perspective make?

We intend that our discussions will inform a broad scoping exercise of current issues of realist thought which may help to inform future events that we will hold, developing an agenda for future sessions.

To book, please visit:  

For further information please see the attached flyer, further details on speakers and abstracts to follow shortly.

For more information on the BSA realist study group please visit:  

Hope to see you there  
Tom Brock, Mark Carrigan and Michelle Farr

[3]bsarealism@hotmail.com  
Study group website address: [4]www.criticalrealism.org

1. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/KeyEvents.aspx  
3. mailto:bsarealism@hotmail.com  
Juan Enriquez: Your online life, permanent as a tattoo (2013-07-15 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/Fu1C-oBdsMM

The Empty ‘Posturing’ of Žižek and Lacan? (2013-07-16 08:00)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GWRqPbwYS0

This interview ([1]via Open Culture) will perhaps divide opinion. It follows on quite nicely from John Searle's[2]comments about Foucault, Bourdieu and continental obscurantism which I found recently. Before I express a view, let me offer a preamble: I own and have read a lot of Žižek books, though the ratio between my owning and my reading of the book is quite telling. I also think that, contra his critics, he can actually write pretty well, though seemingly only in his shorter books i.e. he often doesn’t write well. But I'm also aware that I like Žižek in pretty much the same way I sometimes like going out to get extremely drunk. I like the way that reading a Žižek book involves (to me at least) being engulfed by a torrent of verbosity, with the rapid fire and often barely coherent patchwork quilt of names and ideas being interrupted by those occasional moments of startling lucidity which, in the unpredictable zig-zag between incoherence and insight, work to lend the experience a sense of profundity entirely out of proportion to the actual weight of the propositions being put forward in the text (not a million miles away from the way in which drunken intellectual debates can sometimes feel incredibly profound because they occasionally lead to the unexpected elaboration of preexisting positions in spite of what is, if you’re honest, the generally low quality of the discussion). So I find it hard not to agree with Chomsky here:

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/Fu1C-oBdsMM
What you’re referring to is what’s called “theory.” And when I said I’m not interested in theory, what I meant is, I’m not interested in posturing—using fancy terms like polysyllables and pretending you have a theory when you have no theory whatsoever. So there’s no theory in any of this stuff, not in the sense of theory that anyone is familiar with in the sciences or any other serious field. Try to find in all of the work you mentioned some principles from which you can deduce conclusions, empirically testable propositions where it all goes beyond the level of something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old. See if you can find that when the fancy words are decoded. I can’t. So I’m not interested in that kind of posturing.

Or at least I agree with him up to a point. I don’t know enough about Chomskyan linguistics to substantiate the claim but I’m unsure as to what extent the positivist rhetoric is invoked here for effect and to what extent these are reflective methodological principles. Ironically, what knowledge of Chomskyan linguistics I do have comes largely, I think, from the eclectic (mis)appropriation of interdisciplinary concepts which characterises the work of cultural theorists (fair term?) like Žižek whom I occasionally feel compelled to read. But I do identify with the impulse to differentiate methodologically coherent theorisation, understood as part of a broader endeavour of collective knowledge production, from the kind of Theory represented by Žižek.

1. [http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/noam_chomsky_slams_zizek_and_lacan_empty_posturing.html](http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/noam_chomsky_slams_zizek_and_lacan_empty_posturing.html)
2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13237](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13237)

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Why are conspiracy theories popular? (2013-07-17 08:00)

This [article](http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/noam_chomsky_slams_zizek_and_lacan_empty_posturing.html) on the LSE politics blog was a thought-provoking discussion of conspiracy theories and the increasing weight of social scientific evidence concerning their emergence and dissemination. This is a topic that’s fascinated me for years and one which, until I started to realise that reading these sites on a daily basis would drive me mad, I was seriously considering as an idea for post-doctoral research. I couldn’t agree more with the article’s dismissal of psychopathological explanations of conspiracy theories – in effect a kind of reductive psychologism:

To begin, let’s take the often used psychopathological explanation, that those believing in conspiracy theories are crazy. Despite [Alex Jones’](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13237) recent efforts to convince BBC viewers otherwise, mental illness is neither an antecedent, nor the product of conspiracy theorising. Most people believe in at least one conspiracy theory; many people believe in several. It would be difficult to label them all crazy. Some attribute conspiracy theorising to more benign afflictions such as paranoia, feelings of powerlessness, and alienation. These explanations don’t get us very far either: first, the causal direction is not clear. People may believe powerful actors are out to get them because they are paranoid, but conversely, people may feel paranoid because they believe powerful actors are out to get them. Second, given the [numbers](http://www.openculture.com/2013/06/noam_chomsky_slams_zizek_and_lacan_empty_posturing.html) of people that believe in conspiracy theories, we could not label all or most of society as paranoid.

However what I find less compelling is the article’s dismissal of the argument that conspiracy theories represent a form of cognitive simplification, allowing individuals to make sense of complicated events in simple terms:

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Conspiracy theories are often seen as the result of cognitive quirks, that in a complex world, people seek to account for complicated events and messy circumstances with simple theories. However, this often cited explanation does not stand up to scrutiny. While each person can decide for him or herself how complicated an explanation is, conspiracy theories are generally far more complicated than the official stories they often attempt to refute. Which is more complicated, the suggestion that 19 terrorists boarded planes and crashed them on 9/11/2001, or that Bush, Cheney, the FBI, the CIA, Israel, all major news outlets, the NYPD, the 9/11 Commission, and Popular Mechanics magazine are all secretly conspiring together to hide airplanes, plant explosions, destroy evidence, and deceive the public? Put simply, conspiracy theories are usually never more parsimonious than the official explanations they rival.

Part of the problem here is the seemingly linear understanding of ‘complexity’ invoked. This may very well be a consequence of writing for the web, in which case I withdraw my objection, though I suspect it isn’t. My difficulty with the counter-argument is in its conflation of narrative complexity and moral complexity. The stories conspiracy theorists tell are certainly complicated – though it’s important to recognise that this is likely as much a result of the constant argumentative elaboration required when most of the people you make it too, rightly, see it as ridiculous and offer objections – but, I’d argue, this narrative complexity obscures an underlying moral simplicity. Conspiracy theories work to sustain a sense of moral order which is profoundly simplified: good America has been thrown off track by bad neo-Conservatives who have conspired to manipulate the public for their own ends. The reduction in cognitive load which stems from affirming such a sense of moral order is a consequence of the questions it forecloses – those concerning government policy, geopolitics, differences and similarities between successive governments, one’s own complicity (wilful or otherwise) in the ensuing difference these governments have made in the world.

These are reflexive questions – ones concerning our place in relation to the world and what we should do given we are in such a place. Conspiracy theories do not so much foreclose reflexivity – [5] ‘truthers’ do vigorous and committed activism which any adequately sociological treatment of conspiracy theories has to recognise – but rather constrain the projects which might be reflexively enacted as consequence of such deliberation. It leads individuals to ask some questions, predisposing certain answers & ensuing projects, but not others and it is the nature of the questions it leads one to ask which constitute the ‘simplification’. But this is not something unique to conspiracy theories. It is a characteristic of all lay theories about socio-political processes and, assuming we wish to avoid a lazy liberal relativism that is chronically suspicious of political conviction, then it is precisely this continuity with other forms of political belief (rather than the divergences so theatrically embodied by Alex Jones on the Daily Politics) that we must examine.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player _embedded &v=TPT4dKyxUUQ


Joe Uscinski (2013-08-11 03:53:50)
I like this. Let me push you on two points. 1. Is it really that people turn to conspiracy theories to find simplifying moral narratives? Or, more plausibly, don’t people already know who the villains are before they come to the conspiratorial belief? All Americans experienced 9/11 to one degree or another, but it is mostly Democrats (who already despised Bush) that think...
Bush had something to do with it. 2. Do you think that trutherism itself leads people to ask certain questions and not others? Or, is it that people have a variety of relevant attitudes in play that drive which questions they ask, and which answers they buy?

Sociological Imagination (2013-08-26 12:00:57)
I don’t really know! Just some speculative thoughts provoked by the article - re: 2, i think the former definitely - there’s a path-dependence to our deliberation and, in a way i’ve still managed to articulate properly yet, i’d argue that ideology works by shaping the direction of deliberation “over time” rather than exercising an influence at any one time.

Intellectual Craftsmanship As Refusal (2013-07-17 17:13)

Today, we laborers in the groves of academia are pitted against one another in a quest for increased productivity. Academic departments and units compete against one another for increasingly scarce goods, such as the right to hire faculty; individual scholars in the same department compete against one another for small pay increases, euphemistically termed “merit pay.” In my own university, Rutgers, the public flagship university of New Jersey, “austerity” is the new normal, justifying stagnant salaries and higher tuitions. As state funding provides a smaller and smaller percentage of annual operating budgets, university administrators try to introduce entrepreneurial initiatives into academic departments to generate revenue—with varying degrees of success.

Competition in academia, like competition elsewhere, can at times spur one on to produce great things. (Just think of the fierce mid-1960s rivalry between The Beatles and the Rolling Stones!) Too often, though, competition for scarce resources leads individuals—and I’m speaking of academics here—on a quest to distinguish ourselves from our peers merely to stand apart from the crowd. Today, market values and “fast capitalism” increasingly permeate academia, leading to ever higher expectations of output (read: publication), and higher productivity for productivity’s sake—accumulating more and more lines for one’s cv instead of contributing work that really makes a difference to oneself, and to others.

When we mistake quantity for quality, we create a situation in which alienation flourishes.”We lack the time to craft the elegant phrase as we churn out paper after paper,” observes British sociologist Michael Billig, writing recently in the Guardian. Publishing may stave off one kind of perishing, and at the same time lead to a more imperceptible but no less insidious kind of wasting: the production of routine work that fails to inspire oneself—or to inspire others.

Perhaps it’s time to dust off C. Wright Mill’s notion of “intellectual craftsmanship, discussed in the appendix to his 1959 book, The Sociological Imagination. We tend to think of a craftsman as a carpenter in his/her shop, surrounded by apprentices, but the craftsman can also be found in the laboratory, in the concert hall—in the classroom, and in the study. Craftsmen—and women—combine technical skill with imagination and pride in their work.[1][i] They are dedicated to good work for its own sake—to practical activity, but their labor is not simply a means “to another end”—such as career advancement. The craftsman, writes Richard Sennett, is "engaged" in the fullest way possible with his or her work. He or she does not split work from the rest of life.

Mills spoke about the benefits that accrue to those who approach writing as a craft rather than simply as a means to an end. The main reason, he said, "I am not 'alienated' is because I write." Writing can make us feel more connected to others, and allow us to make a contribution to the society in which we live, he believed. Mills saw writing as a skill that one can develop, as well as an art form, and a form of self-expression. A mixture of technique and inspiration, good writing requires an acquaintance with the methodologies of research needed for the task. There is, he believed, an unexpected quality about writing too—a "playfulness of mind, as well a truly fierce drive to
make sense of the world, which the technician as such usually lacks."

In Mills’ view of intellectual craftsmanship, writing is a form of self-expression that is as much about the process as the product. He described his relationship to his book White Collar. “I am trying to make it damn good all over,” he wrote. "Simple and clean cut in style, but with a lot of implications and subtleties woven into it. It is my little work of art: it will have to stand for the operations I will never do, not being a surgeon, and for the houses I never built, not being an architect. So you see it has to be a thing of craftsmanship and art as well as science.”

In other words, writing is not something that simply happens at the end of the research process. Writing is also an aesthetic practice that entails play – what Mills calls “sociological poetry.”[2][iii] Hegemonic notions of the social sciences suggest creativity is something that we study, and is not a element of our practice. But thinking of what we do as a craft may be a first step in resisting tendencies within the academy (and beyond) to instrumentalize intellectual activity, defining success in quantifiable, ever narrower ways.

[3][i] Richard Sennett, The Craftsman


This was originally published on Arlene Stein’s [6]blog. It is reproduced here with permission. You can follow Arlene on Twitter [7]here. If you found this great post thought-provoking then perhaps you’d be interested in writing a response for our [8]Sociological Craft Project?
"But isn’t that what the psychologists do?: the dangers of disciplinary boundary work (2013-07-18 08:00)

To respond to this particular crisis of measure, economics and psychology are being forcibly re-married. Behavioural and experimental economics have their earliest origins in game theory in the 1940s, which allowed economists and psychologists to compare normative rational choice-making—that is, according to neo-classical economics—with empirical choice-making, as observed under laboratory conditions. The gap between economists’ prescriptions for how people should behave and what they actually do became subject to testing. Discovering patterns in such 'anomalies' became the preoccupation of behavioural economists, following Kahneman and Tversky's landmark 1979 article on 'prospect theory', which later won them a Nobel Prize.

Thanks to the new empirical techniques and data sets, economists could start to spot anomalies—cases where human happiness does not rise and fall as neo-classical economics would predict. At the centre of happiness economics sits the psychological concept of 'adaptation', the extent to which individuals do or do not become psychologically attuned to changes in their circumstances. Where they do adapt to changed circumstances—for example, of increased monetary income or national wealth—their happiness ceases to correspond to changed objective conditions, at least after the transition has passed. Where they do not adapt to changed circumstances—as with unemployment—their happiness remains directly proportionate to their objective conditions, regardless of how long they have lived with them.

Happiness economics took off during the 1990s, drawing on data provided by a number of national household surveys, which had included questions on 'subjective wellbeing' from 1984 onwards. With it has come the rise of homo psycho-economicus, a form of economic subjectivity in which choice-making is occasionally misguided, emotional or subject to social and moral influences. If homo economicus was unhappy, that was merely because he had insufficient money or consumer choice. But homo psycho-economicus suffers from psychological afflictions as well. He makes mistakes because he follows others too instinctively; he consumes things which damage his health, relationships and environment; he sometimes becomes unhappy—or even happy—out of all proportion to his material circumstances.

- Will Davies, [1]The Political Economy of Unhappiness

This is an interesting parallel to an issue I’ve been considering a lot recently. The contingently drawn historical boundaries between psychology and sociology have tended to leave the individual precariously placed within both disciplines. Oscillations between recurrently under-socialised and over-socialised views of the individual have as much to do with this underlying division of labour as an historical artefact of disciplinary based inquiry as they do with the whole sequence of antinomies which emerge from the forms of knowledge production that take place within such institutional constraints. I’d argue that the difficulty, as far as sociology goes, lies in the extent to which the independent variability of the individual vis-a-vis social reproduction or transformation doesn’t fit neatly into either domain of inquiry. This is something I’m increasingly seeing in terms of social and intellectual history rather than simply being a matter of social theory. So it was fascinating to see the argument Will Davies makes here. It conveys a sense of disciplinary boundary work, with renegotiation taking place more through local substantive skirmishes than detached reflections upon disciplinary boundaries and scope.
MOOCs and For Profit Universities: A Closer Look (2013-07-19 08:00)

Dr. Catherine Liu
Professor, Film & Media Studies and Director, Humanities Center


1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/pBEEel8-S9Q
The Classic Debate Between Noam Chomsky and William F. Buckley (2013-07-20 00:26)


The 2014 ISRF Essay Competition – Theory of Social Behaviour (2013-07-20 08:00)

The [1]Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and the [2]Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour (JTSB) intend to award a prize of 7,000 CHF for the best essay on the topic ‘The research investigator as instrument across the human sciences’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and the JTSB. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and articulate a strong internal critique across the fields of social science research. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic.

The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [3]here.

The JTSB aims to advance understandings of social behaviour, that is, people acting in relation to, or being constituted through, the social world of other people, institutions, and material and symbolic culture. More detail about the Journal and recent debates can be found on the [4]Journal’s website.


There’s going to be a riot down in Trumpton tonight: on public scholarship and private commitment (2013-07-21 08:00)

In 1983 at the close of the miners strike two big, bad things vied for my fourteen year old attention: music and politics, and my attention was caught even more when they were entwined in the music of the Clash, Conflict, The Jam, and Billy Bragg. Later when I came to Brecht, Weill and Eisler and later still Tippett and Cardew, alongside the King Blues and Michelle Shocked I knew that this stuff was for me. I didn’t formally study politics. I was interested in the ideas and the theory so I studied sociology and philosophy and my practice was in the Anti-Fascist Action street battles on Remembrance Sunday against the National Front, the Anti-Nazi League demo’s against the fascist bookshop in Sarf London, and in leafleting to disinterested posties and rail workers at 5 in the winter morning. Music
was the soundtrack to all of this – the elegies of Walton and Vaughan Williams just as much as the noiseniks of Einsturzende Neubaten and, later, Mogwai and The Hold Steady.

This went hand in hand with a typical student journey from the eighties into a PHD in the nineties to a joint career in anti-racist community work and in universities where I was at times a researcher and a senior lecturer in sociology. I moved away from thinking about music in terms of its ideas but as a vinyl junkie and aficionado of twentieth century avant-garde music, classical, punk and electronica, remained a fan. Perhaps sadly I never lost the politics – the leafleting continued, the meetings interminably continued, things got worse, and then worse again. I never lost the faith that music and left politics could change the world. I still haven’t – as Victor Serge said in far worse times than ours:

'For my part, I have undergone a little over ten years of various forms of captivity, agitated in seven countries, and written twenty books. I own nothing. On several occasions a Press with a vast circulation has hurled filth at me because I spoke the truth. Behind us lies a victorious revolution gone astray, several abortive attempts at revolution, and massacres in so great a number as to inspire a certain dizziness. And to think that it is not over yet. Let me be done with this digression; those were the only roads possible for us. I have more confidence in mankind and the future than ever before' (Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1963).

It strikes me, and always has done, that the postmodernist onslaught against science, truth and reason in the social sciences eliminates anything of worth in the discipline. Sociology and the sociological imagination were born of
multiple ferments and revolutions – ideological, political and economic. The smoke of Manchester brickworks curled around the flags of the French revolution. In different (and profoundly different political) ways Weber, Durkheim and Marx, born of this blood and strife, sought new social orders, optimistic and future-thinking. If they were Jeremiah’s they never lost the flip side, the vinyl side B. That whatever the horrors and collisions and grating noise of tracks one to six, tracks seven to twelve pointed somewhere else, more ethereal, more beautiful. And the last track was always an elegiac slowie, the close-dancing smooch track. There was something full of grace and truth and grandeur about classical social science that captured me in the same way as Ziggy Stardust did.

Ethnography, committed sociological activism, art and music, ‘high and low’ culture, all stayed with me even when I became academically depressed about the sterility of much of sociology in social terms – that people considered themselves as ‘progressive’ within the university but did very little out there in the world about it. Careerists frustrated me in the sense that their own egos and aspirations went hand in hand with a lack of rigorous study of the classics, a loss of close readings of original texts, the decline of scholarship and committed ethnographies. Those frustrations stay with me but I am also amazingly hopeful about the kinds of critical and thoughtful ideas that emanate from students in classrooms that are already having an impact in their lives and communities even when as Serge says it often feels like ‘midnight in the century’. More than that I still love the excitement of sociological ideas in the same way, that as a sociologist of music now and as someone still attached to the punk and new wave ideals of the early eighties, I still love Half Man Half Biscuit. One day I will conduct a full choral version of the Trumpton Riots while the barricades are thrown up across the streets. In my dreams. But it’s those dreams that classical social science made possible.

Martyn Hudson is a sociologist based in the School of Arts and Cultures at Newcastle University researching music in rural communities. He has a PHD from Brunel University (1997) and has published widely in cultural history and politics. He combines this with political activism as a Third Camp socialist.

1. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/m3TV6vOt4Mc?feature=player_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/embed/m3TV6vOt4Mc?feature=player_embedded)

The miners’ strike hadn’t even started in ‘83, nevermind ‘drew to a close’ ;-)
youngsters don’t know his work (I know they don’t; I have asked wherever I go; so did Ray Pahl who was equally puzzled), but have Bourdieu quotes tumbling from their laptops and mouths. And even the many French sociologists I know don’t take Bourdieu that seriously! For empirical work, they find Goldthorpe more useful. You know, the Goldthorpe who is the best empirical macro-sociologist the UK has had in the last 50 years. It was G and L whose work attracted me to sociology and nothing since has persuaded me that their way isn’t the most promising for sociology. Why do UK sociologists prefer and keep turning to prophets from other countries? Naturally, I accept that there are other ways of doing sociology that are very insightful, too. But if one’s concerns are macro-sociological, as mine are, I fail to understand why the newer generations are so ignorant of what’s on their doorstep. Read Solidarity and Schism; read Lockwood in BJS 1996 – there’s a research agenda for today!

I think there are three important points here. Firstly, how is it that sociological work of the highest quality (and much else besides) can be eclipsed so quickly? Secondly, how has continental theory had the influence on British sociology that is has over the past few decades and what have its effects been? Thirdly, how have these two factors intersected to bring about the erosion of sociology as a cumulative enterprise? What else has been involved? The causality here is extremely complex and it’s Max’s crotchety simplification of it which has been winding me up. On this view, there was a sociological enterprise in rude health (oddly concurrent with Max’s entry into the discipline, almost as if there was an element of retrospective idealisation at work here...) until an invasion of fashionable French intellectualism, cheered on by modish young sociologists in generations following Max’s own, soon desecrated this intellectual arcadia and left a rudderless sociology being pushed and pulled by the tides of narrow minded fashion.

Clearly, I’m exaggerating for rhetorical effect but the point I want to make is about the kind of logic implied by Max’s arguments: everything was working, something external was involved in stopping it working therefore this external factor was the causal agent. Whereas I think there’s something much more complex going on here. For instance the emergence of an audit culture incentivised academic over-production (ever more books, journals and papers being ever less read) while squeezing out reading that isn’t instrumentally attached to the exigencies of present work. In this way, the speeding up of intellectual culture tends to be self-reinforcing and it’s a hugely negative trend. The more that is published, the faster debates move on and, given the underlying mechanisms driving the over-production, the limited time and space this allows for reading will tend to be subjugated to the demands of keeping on top of an ever-growing literature in order to contribute to the debate thus intensifying the process which is causing the underlying problem! This is part of what brings about the eternal sunshine of the spotless sociologist.

The same structure of incentives which drives this over-production also valorises novelty: in the contemporary academy, rewards go to those who can combine existing elements in new and exciting ways, capturing the intellectual attention of others and shaping the direction of future scholarship. However this process by its nature is something of an arms race, as the same incentives which drive X to propose Y also create the climate in which Z will soon come along and propose a radically new programme. I agree with Max both that sociology should be a cumulative discipline and that continental theory is implicated in the contemporary climate where it is anything but cumulative. Nonetheless I think his understanding of the causality is straightforwardly incorrect: these trends are structural not cultural. I suspect there are particular properties of continental theory which leave it ripe for appropriation by purveyors of sociological novelty seeking to make a name for themselves but I think this is a very different claim. Furthermore, it seems to me that part of the reason this can happen is because of the relative weakness of sociological theory as an enterprise. My suggestion is that Max’s attitude is the negative face of a common orientation towards sociological theory which, in its positive moment, seeks integration of a sort which ultimately produces the very fragmentation it abhors:

Sociology seems to produce a number of co-existing and mutually exclusive (semi) paradigms which continually split and re-form in different combinations. Those who are committed to the idea of the
necessity of a ‘theoretical core’ frequently argue that such a situation represents a moment of synthesis, a moment that requires the development of a unified frame of reference representing structure and agency as presuppositional categories (as argued, for example, by Parsons, Alexander Habermas, Giddens, Archer, Scott, etc.). The fact that an accepted synthesis never comes and that each new attempt gives rise to further critique suggests that ‘synthesis’ is one of the moves that gives rise to new splits and forms and is not, therefore, a resolution.


As someone who only discovered sociology after four years of getting pissed off by philosophy, it was its [3]promiscuity which drew me in and its relevance to the world around me which kept me there. As a statement about my own intellectual biography, the constant change in the ‘core concerns’ of sociology is precisely what made the discipline so gloriously fascinating for me. But I agree with Max that it poses problems. However I see these as practical problems to be addressed through constructive and cumulative work in sociological theory; building the infrastructure and tools to allow sociology to engage with new concerns while also working progressively to relate this novelty to those more established objects of sociological inquiry.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13332/comment-page-1#comment-15666
3. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/06/14/art-research-and-sociologys-promiscuity/

Benjamin Geer (2013-07-22 09:41:31)
Max's rejection of sociology “from other countries”, and his dismissal of anything foreign as a fad, are typical of the way academics use nationalism to justify their own ignorance of global social science.

Benjamin Geer (2013-07-22 09:45:23)
Imagine if British physicists dismissed Einstein's theory of relativity on the grounds that it was foreign, and urged their British colleagues to use "British" physics.

The Partisan Troika (2014-04-26 12:56:06)
Yet physics is a 'hard' science.

Benjamin Geer (2013-07-22 09:57:42)
Lumping together very different scholars (Foucault the post-modernist philosopher, Bourdieu the sociologist who opposed post-modernism) just because they were born in the same country is nonsense. And no, anything that has been mainstream field for 40 years is not a fad. A research programme that includes the most influential sociological monograph of the 20th century ("Distinction") is not a fad. It's normal for there to be a backlash against dominant paradigms. Usually the backlash is led by scholars who never bothered to learn the now-dominant paradigms when they were knew, and have for years been hoping that these innovations would just go away. Now that it’s clear that this isn't going to happen, many of them are panicking, and are fighting a desperate losing battle to turn back the clock and restore the value of their now-worthless cultural capital. The word “fad” is a favourite weapon of such individuals. One often finds their students (who have mistakenly invested in the same cultural capital) fighting alongside them. One only needs to know a little Bourdieu to understand such dynamics...
"Usually the backlash is led by scholars who never bothered to learn the now-dominant paradigms when they were knew, and have for years been hoping that these innovations would just go away." That's every bit as reductive an 'explanation' as the one Max offered that I'm arguing against.

Benjamin Geer

Reductive it may be, but sad to say, serious critiques of Bourdieu on theoretical or empirical grounds, from scholars who know his work well, are rare. Attacks from scholars with little or no knowledge of Bourdieu, and who portray widespread interest in Bourdieu as part of a reprehensible fad for "French" thought that includes Foucault, are common. See, for example, this post by archaeologist Michael E. Smith, and my comments: http://publishingarchaeology.blogspot.de/2011/12/problems-with-bourdieu-we-ca n-help-call.html The common denominator in these attacks is that they come from people who have little knowledge of what they're attacking, and who therefore have a professional interest in portraying it as not worth knowing. If they acknowledged it as worthy of study, they'd logically have to invest a considerable amount of time in studying it themselves. That would be an expensive investment; it's much cheaper to write dismissive blog posts in the vain hope that this will bring about a drastic change of course in mainstream sociology. I've heard similar diatribes from qualitative researchers against quantitative methods, and vice versa. I think it's very common for scholars to disparage any knowledge that's widely used in their own fields but that they themselves haven't mastered. This is basically a form of proselytism. If successful, it expands the potential market for the speaker's own work, at the expense of the work of those who use the rival paradigm. Of course, there are more refined variations on this theme. Scholars who have some knowledge of Bourdieu can often get away with making sophisticated-sounding but absurd claims about Bourdieuan sociology because their audiences know less about it than they do. Here's one example: http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.27.1.125 The article makes statements such as "Homology, however, depends on a cultural homogenization" and "Bourdieu reduces all field relations to the power binary of dominant and dominated", which sound very strange to anyone who has actually read any of Bourdieu's books, and give me reason to have serious doubts about the peer-review process of the Annual Review of Sociology. This is unfortunate, because there are serious debates to be had about Bourdieu's theory, which has its weaknesses and gaps like any other. These debates are taking place in some quarters, but they are not served by the gross distortions or nationalist posturing that often passes for critique.

I think you're right! This is exactly what I want to understand (see both this post itself and the sunshine of spotless sociologist post linked in it) but I don't think what you're now saying is what your initial comment said. Which I assume was directed at Max's argument rather than mine. There's a really interesting structural process at work here and reducing it to a narrow cultural claim about competing cohorts (e.g. faddish young sociologists seeking novelty vs crotchety old sociologists who never bothered to learn what are now dominant approaches) really isn't helpful.

Hmm. Turning to your post above, I don't think there's any such thing as "British sociology", nor do I think there's any such thing as "continental theory" on which "the erosion of sociology as a cumulative enterprise" in Britain could be blamed. Ideas don't have nationalities and they don't stay within geographical containers. There's a global conversation going on, academics move all over the world (just as an example, I've worked in four countries in the past four years), they publish in countries other than the ones they live in (everyone wants to publish in the top journals regardless of where they're located), and the same debates and alternatives can be found pretty much everywhere. Nor do I agree that "the speeding up of intellectual culture" is a "hugely negative trend". On the contrary, academic cultural production is still incredibly slow. It can take years to get a journal article published, and many more years before a new idea gets noticed and begins to have an influence. I think academic publishing needs radical reforms to overcome this problem. Turning to the spotless sociologist post, you're surely right that there's a problem with the way social scientists are trained. However, it's not just that old debates are repeated without any awareness that they've happened before. It's that whole subfields are ignored by many of those who need them the most. For example, nationalism studies has produced several decades of debates, theories, and questions that anyone who is tempted to use words such as "nation", "patriotism", "ethnicity" or "identity" should be required to
know about, in order to avoid assumptions that were thoroughly discredited long ago. But this literature hardly seems to be taught, and when students who aren’t doing PhDs on nationalism have any contact with it, this contact usually seems to be limited to one book (Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities”), which simply represents nationalism studies as it was in the 1980s, preserved in formalehyde. I do think that this has a lot to do with the power of an older generation of academics who are resistant to any ideas that they didn’t study when they were students. Not because they’re crotchety (this is not a matter of individual personality), but because this is an effective career strategy: invest in cultural capital early in your career, then just live off the interest until you retire. At the extreme, some people never read anything that was published in their field after they finished their PhDs. Their antiquated syllabi make it difficult for students to find out about more recent research. When they serve as PhD supervisors and peer reviewers, their lack of familiarity with the state of the art leads them to oppose young scholars’ attempts to build on it, since they are ill-equipped to evaluate such attempts. This stifles innovation, since young scholars have to water down their theoretical arguments in order to pass their PhDs or get their articles published. Thus I do think this is very much a struggle over the value of old vs. new cultural capital.

And I completely accept that you’re not making the simplistic case I accused you of in the last comment but I still think you are, essentially, reducing an extremely complex phenomenon to the behavioural dispositions of particular cohorts within academia.

Or to put it another way - if you’re right that this is an “effective career strategy” then what are the conditions of possibility for this?

I’m not trying to explain all the issues you and Max were talking about; I’m just trying to explain Max’s stance, because it’s so common. Its structural conditions of possibility involve several things I can think of off the top of my head, and probably much more besides: 1. Long-term academic employment is hard to obtain, but once you’re in, it’s not difficult to keep your job indefinitely without doing much more than publishing variations on the theme of your PhD topic. This is particularly the case in the US, where tenure effectively eliminates any incentive for senior academics to engage with new ideas, never mind produce new ideas of their own. 2. Academic employment and job security in the social sciences depend heavily on social capital. If you’re on good terms with a lot of people in your cohort, you can readily form mutual appreciation societies (what Bourdieu called cycles of consecration), in which A writes the preface of B’s book, B writes a positive review of C’s book, C invites A to contribute a chapter to an edited volume, and so on. Everyone involved gains prestige without having to face criticism of their work. The uses of social capital also take other, more complex forms; see the article "The academic caste system: Prestige hierarchies in PhD exchange networks" by Val Burris. 3. The high importance of social capital is a symptom of the fact that the social sciences have relatively low autonomy in Bourdieu’s sense, meaning that there’s barely any consensus about which knowledge you should be required to master in order to be a social scientist, or about the criteria that should be applied in evaluating research. In fields with higher autonomy (like mathematics), your prestige depends mostly or entirely on how good your work is, in terms of objective, accepted criteria, but in social science, it’s relatively easy to convert all sorts of other capitals (like social capital) into prestige. Thus you often find that everyone thinks X is a good scholar because other prestigious people think X is a good scholar, but nobody can say exactly what it is that X has done well. Since X’s prestige doesn’t depend on any actual results, it can’t be challenged on the basis of new results; hence X doesn’t have to engage in any substantive debates about new ideas. 4. Since it’s not clear what you should have to know, a viable strategy is to get away with knowing as little as possible. This strategy favours superficial conformism (which is perhaps more what you and Max were talking about): people adopt mantras without thinking much about what they mean, as a way of displaying their good taste, i.e. signaling that they’re the right sort of person, the sort one would want to work with. Everyone who uses this strategy is complicit in pretending that these mantras refer to theoretical concepts whose validity has been conclusively demonstrated. It’s in their interest not to discuss exactly what that presumed validity is based on, because if they did, it might become clear that some of these concepts rest on flimsy intellectual foundations. Such critiques would ultimately increase the autonomy of the field, which wouldn’t be in the interest of those who adopt the strategy of knowing as little as possible, because it would require them to know more. Anyone who rocks the boat will have a hard
time accumulating social capital, and hence will not benefit from the phenomena described in (1) above. 5. PhD students are in a structurally very weak position in relation to their supervisors and examiners, who wield absolute power over their future careers. They’re supposed to make an original contribution to their field, but in doing so they have the potential to undermine the work of these powerful gatekeepers. This is a clear conflict of interest, and leads many PhD students to self-censor.

ok to repost that comment as a post? it’s much more likely to get seen if so - some v insightful points that might spark further discussion.

Sure, just correct "the phenomena described in (1) above", which should be "(2) above".

Sociological Imagination (2013-07-23 11:14:22)
great, will do

[...] really interesting comment by Benjamin Geer on yesterday’s Sociology of Intellectual Faddishness post merited reproduction in its own [...] 

Sam Burgum (2015-02-25 09:09:00)
Sociological Hipsterism = "what do you mean you’ve never read [insert fringe theorist]?! They are the pinnacle of sociology. As so happens, I am an expert on them and therefore an authority over you and everything you say or argue" Or the equally annoying... "I liked [insert fad] before they were cool..." Some theorists can perhaps be assumed to be popular enough that you don’t need to explain their theory, but for the majority, surely a critical outline of how you have interpreted them and found them useful/problematic is always necessary, rather than an appeal to expertise.

"We’re going to go out there and violate some rights" (2013-07-22 23:37)
In [1]this podcast from the LSE Impact Blog’s [2]Social Science in the Public Sphere event, Tim Newburn talks about his involvement in the [3]Reading the Riots project, which involved a collaboration with the Guardian to undertake research into the riots of August 2011 at a pace far beyond that which usually characterises academic social science. I’ve interviewed Tim about this in the past (podcasts [4]here and [5]here) and I find the project fascinating on a number of level. One thing that stood out to me in Tim’s talk, which I hadn't realised prior to my interview with him 6 months ago despite having been glued to the Guardian’s coverage, is the interesting fact that the project has not produced any traditional academic publications. While, to his credit, Tim recognises the consequence this model of publication might have for junior colleagues who need peer-reviewed publications to build research careers, it nonetheless raises an important question of how publishing of this form compares to traditional forms of scholarly communication in the literal sense of making public.

The short answer is that the project’s findings enjoyed a visibility, generated an 'impact' and sparked debate to a degree which would have been impossible for research published through traditional channels. The resources and skills which an organisation such as the Guardian is able to bring to bear on a project of this sort (and likewise the BBC with the Great British Class Survey in the second talk at the LSE event linked to above) give a purchase to public scholarship which ensures that it is genuinely ‘public’ in a way that is radically different from much of what is traditionally seen as falling into this category. Perhaps this fact explains some of the criticism that, in particular, the Great British Class Survey attracted?

Obviously a model such as Reading the Riots isn’t easily scalable but Tim raises the interesting point that organisations like the Guardian see projects of this form as part of exploring their future role within a changing media landscape. The long term changes taking place within academia in many ways parallel those which are playing themselves out within the news media and, as the Reading the Riots project illustrates, journalists and news organisation bring hugely valuable things to potential collaborations. It would be interesting to think about what such collaborations might look like beyond ‘headline’ studies such as Reading the Riots and the Great British Class Survey. Is there a middle ground between individual academics working with individual journalists and the sort of large scale collaborative projects which are discussed in the LSE’s event? It seems obvious to me that media collaboration of this sort are a hugely important part of the likely future direction of public scholarship but I’m far from clear in my own mind about what this would look like in practice.

Though whether it will count as a demonstrable impact for the REF is a question that is discussed in the second half of the podcast. What limited support I have for the concept of ‘impact’ rests on the extent to which, if at all, it recognises and incentivises public scholarship.

David Walker (2015-03-05 16:06:43)

Two observations. 1. are you eliding 'impact' and 'dissemination'. What's remarkable, in public policy terms, is how inconsequential the riots were (give or take Boris Johnson's waffling about water cannon for the Met). That makes attributing 'impact' to analysis of the events more difficult because their trace in legislation, policy and practice is faint. 2. The Guardian project in many ways belongs to 'old school journalism' of a kind that's increasingly fragile, as the economic basis of the press reshapes. Would a fully digital Gdn (or anyone else) commit time and resources to a project that would never have front-page (that word again) impact?

Sociological Imagination (2015-03-06 23:20:51)

Point completely taken with (1) - though your argument relates more to the difficulty of attributing impact rather than its existence, no? Not sure about (2) - could you expand?


This really interesting comment by Benjamin Geer on yesterday's [1]Sociology of Intellectual Faddishness post meritted reproduction in its own right:

1. Long-term academic employment is hard to obtain, but once you’re in, it’s not difficult to keep your job indefinitely without doing much more than publishing variations on the theme of your PhD topic. This is particularly the case in the US, where tenure effectively eliminates any incentive for senior academics to engage with new ideas, never mind produce new ideas of their own.

2. Academic employment and job security in the social sciences depend heavily on social capital. If you’re on good terms with a lot of people in your cohort, you can readily form mutual appreciation societies (what Bourdieu called cycles of consecration), in which A writes the preface of B’s book, B writes a positive review of C’s book, C invites A to contribute a chapter to an edited volume, and so on. Everyone involved gains prestige without having to face criticism of their work. The uses of social capital also take other, more complex forms; see the article “The academic caste system: Prestige hierarchies in PhD exchange networks” by Val Burris.

3. The high importance of social capital is a symptom of the fact that the social sciences have relatively low autonomy in Bourdieu’s sense, meaning that there's barely any consensus about which knowledge you should be required to master in order to be a social scientist, or about the criteria that should be applied in evaluating research. In fields with higher autonomy (like mathematics), your prestige depends mostly or entirely on how good your work is, in terms of objective, accepted criteria, but in social science, it’s relatively easy to convert all sorts of other capitals (like social capital) into prestige. Thus you often find that everyone thinks X is a good scholar because other prestigious people think X is a good scholar, but nobody can say exactly what it is that X has done well. Since X’s prestige doesn’t depend on any actual results, it can’t be challenged on the basis of new results; hence X doesn’t have to engage in any substantive debates about new ideas.
4. Since it’s not clear what you should have to know, a viable strategy is to get away with knowing as little as possible. This strategy favours superficial conformism (which is perhaps more what you and Max were talking about): people adopt mantras without thinking much about what they mean, as a way of displaying their good taste, i.e. signaling that they’re the right sort of person, the sort one would want to work with. Everyone who uses this strategy is complicit in pretending that these mantras refer to theoretical concepts whose validity has been conclusively demonstrated. It’s in their interest not to discuss exactly what that presumed validity is based on, because if they did, it might become clear that some of these concepts rest on flimsy intellectual foundations. Such critiques would ultimately increase the autonomy of the field, which wouldn’t be in the interest of those who adopt the strategy of knowing as little as possible, because it would require them to know more. Anyone who rocks the boat will have a hard time accumulating social capital, and hence will not benefit from the phenomena described in (2) above.

5. PhD students are in a structurally very weak position in relation to their supervisors and examiners, who wield absolute power over their future careers. They’re supposed to make an original contribution to their field, but in doing so they have the potential to undermine the work of these powerful gatekeepers. This is a clear conflict of interest, and leads many PhD students to self-censor.


[...] in the New York Times using Marx’s ideas to analyze the current situation in Egypt. There was this documentary, which led to me searching for and finding this BBC documentary. There was also this humorous [...] 

Alienated and alienating writing (by alienated and alienating social scientists) (2013-07-24 08:00)

The problem for social scientists is that our jargon, like that of the natural scientists, is heavily biased towards nouns and noun phrases. Our big words are nearly always nouns, such as "re-ethnification", "mediatisation", "deindividuation" and all the other "isations" and "ifications" that dominate so much empirical and theoretical writing. [...] The preference for nouns is found across the social sciences, affecting the writings of both postmodernists and old-style empiricists. We can see it in the current fashion for using the definite article to transform adjectives into nouns, thereby creating a seemingly endless supply of new things to study: "the comic", "the homely", "the pastoral" and so on. What next? The grumpy, the drizzly, the pretentious? [...] by using big nouns, analysts can avoid describing people. If we assume that there is something called "nominalisation", then we need not specify what exactly people might be doing if they are said to "nominalise". In fact, statements, with active verbs and small ordinary words, generally contain much more information about actions than do the big nouns, which supposedly describe such acts. According to critical linguists, that is precisely why those in power like to use big nouns: they can transform the uncertain world of human acts into a world of necessary things 

This great [1]article by Michael Billig (HT [2]Dave Beer) makes an incisive point which echoes a powerful argument in Andrew Sayer’s [3]last book. Sayer argues that the pervasive disregard for ‘lay normativity’ [*] within social science (i.e. what matters to people and why) helps produce a vision of the social world which is alienated and alienating. Perhaps the pervasive tendency for social scientists to nominalise as part of their process of conceptualisation helps entrench this situation, as every occasion of linguistically distancing ourselves from concrete actors leaves us ever further from the ethical texture of everyday life. The result is an eviscerated view of the social world, with an apparent explanatory plausibility belying the loss of a significant part of the first person experience of being human. One of the things that most interests me is the possibility of sustaining the capacity for abstraction which brings about this state of affairs but doing so in a way which preserves lay normativity. Without the former, sociology becomes merely descriptive (in which case I’d much rather read essayists, journalists and novelists thanks) but without the latter its explanatory function is, at best, truncated.

Which to his eternal credit he acknowledges as a rather alienated way to express the idea.

3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=jjYt1QL2uDYC&dq=andrew+sayer+alienation&source=gbs_navlinks_s
CfP: Making Trans Count (2013-07-25 08:00)

Call for Submissions for Transgender Studies Quarterly 2.1: Making Transgender Count

As a relatively new social category, the very notion of a “transgender population” poses numerous intellectual, political, and technical challenges. Who gets to define what transgender is, or who is transgender? How are trans people counted—and by whom and for whom are they enumerated? Why is counting transgender members of a population seen as making that population’s government accountable to those individuals? What is at stake in “making transgender count”—and how might this process vary in different national, linguistic, or cultural contexts?

This issue of TSQ seeks to present a range of approaches to these challenges—everything from analyses that generate more effective and inclusive ways to measure and count gender identity and/or transgender persons, to critical perspectives on quantitative methodologies and the politics of what Ian Hacking has called “making up people.”

In many countries, large-scale national health surveys provide data that policy-makers rely on to monitor the health of the populations they oversee, and to make decisions about the allocation of resources to particular groups and regions—yet transgender people remain invisible in most of such data collection projects. The widespread deployment of gender as a binary category defined by the sex assigned at birth has made trans people invisible in government data collection. Without the routine and standardized collection of information about transgender populations, some advocates contend, transgender people will not “count” when government agencies make decisions about the health, safety and public welfare of the population. But even as more agencies become more open to surveying transgender populations, experts and professionals are not yet of one mind as to what constitutes “best practices” for sampling methods that will accurately capture respondents’ gender identity/expression, and the diversity of transgender communities. In still other quarters, debates rage about the ethics of counting trans people in the first place.

We invite proposals for scholarly essays that tackle transgender inclusion and/or gender identity/expression measurement and sampling methods in population studies, demography, epidemiology, and other social sciences. We also invite submissions that critically engage with the project of categorizing and counting “trans” populations.

Potential topics might include:

- best practices and strategies for transgender inclusion and sampling in quantitative research;
- critical reflections on past, current, and future data collection efforts;
- the potential effects of epidemiological research on health and other disparities in trans communities;
- who counts/gets counted and who does not: occlusions of disability, race, ethnicity, class, gender in quantitative research on trans communities;
- the tension between the contextually specific meaning of transgender identities and the generality and fixity that data collection requires of its constructs and social categories; *implications of linguistic, geographical, and cultural diversity in definitions of transgender and the limits of its applicability;
critical engagements with of the biopolitics of enumerating the population.

Please send full length article submissions by December 31, 2013 to [1]tsqjournal@gmail.com along with a brief bio including name, postal address, and any institutional affiliation. Illustrations, figures and tables should be included with the submission.

The guest editors for this issue are Jody Herman (Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law), Emilia Lombardi (Baldwin Wallace University), Sari L. Reisner (Harvard School of Public Health), Ben Singer (Vanderbilt University), and Hale Thompson (University of Illinois at Chicago). Any questions should be sent to the guest editors at [2]tsqjournal@gmail.com.

TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly is a new journal, edited by Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker to be published by Duke University Press. TSQ aims to be the journal of record for the interdisciplinary field of transgender studies and to promote the widest possible range of perspectives on transgender phenomena broadly defined. Every issue of TSQ will be a specially themed issue that also contains regularly recurring features such as reviews, interviews, and opinion pieces. To learn more about the journal and see calls for papers for future special issues, visit [3]http://lgbt.arizona.edu/tsq-main. For information about subscriptions, visit [4]http://www.dukeupress.edu/Catalog/ViewProduct.php?productid=45648.

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The shifting language of research ‘participation’ (2013-07-26 08:00)

The relation of people like us–researchers in the social sciences–to the people we gathered data on and wrote about was beginning to worry us all. We had left behind the innocence of being happy when we used the tricks we had been taught, and continued to teach to our students, to “get access” and “gain rapport.” We rejoiced at our good fortune when people were willing to share their experiences and secrets with us, things they might have preferred the whole world not know about. We were proud of our ability to be “one of the boys” (or girls).

By the 1970s we all knew this relation was not so innocent as all that. What were the terms of this one-sided giving of information? Did we give anything back? Was the exchange as unequal as it seemed to be when we took a good look? Were we exploiting our superior educations and class positions to take advantage of innocent people? The answers weren’t obvious. Some people said that we gave, in return for data, our undivided attention and our caring acceptance of their lives, however unsavory those might seem to middle-class people who hadn’t achieved our level of “insider” understanding. Others thought that our research could lead us and others, perhaps people in positions of power who could undertake effective interventions, to an understanding that might improve the lives of the people who gave us our data, and so allow us to pay back their acceptance and even trust.

Becker’s chapter responds to Stan Cohen’s weird story of the Last Seminar in which research participants ‘invade’ the campus to take their revenge on the hubristic researchers. One of many things I found useful about Becker’s chapter is the way in which he historicises the issue Cohen explores, situating it in time and space in order to make sense of the narrative “exposing in a raw and undisguised form the tensions that might exist in these relations we talk about so easily from the comfort of the Senior Common Room”. He also offers a useful corrective to the incipient victimology that might ensue from universalising the relation depicted in Cohen’s story by recounting his own experiences of having research participants of ‘equal’ or ‘higher’ social status to himself.

What has really piqued my curiosity though is this sense of the 1970s as a time of shifting languages of research ethics and participation. From the perspective of someone who was trained in qualitative social research in the late 2000s Cohen’s story had a curiously anachronistic quality to it. Not so much that the moral of the story wasn’t comprehensible or agreeable (it was on both counts) but simply that it seemed like ethical common-sense. So what I’m interested in now is whether it’s possible to do a periodization of changes in the language of research ethics and participation.

1. http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/articles/cohen.html

Cuestión de Método (2013-07-30 20:07:32)

[...] la reflexion que hace Carringan sobre el texto de Howard Becker (podeis leer el post completo en: sociological imagination). Sin embargo, la cita me ha llamado especialmente la atención por cómo describe esa sensación de [...]
or orgy. At the university, an adviser had interested him in Amerindian languages. Certain esoteric rites still survived in certain tribes out West; one of his professors, an older man, suggested that he go live on a reservation, observe the rites, and discover the secret revealed by the medicine men to the initiates. When he came back, he would have his dissertation, and the university authorities would see that it was published. Murdock leaped at the suggestion. One of his ancestors had died in the frontier wars; that bygone conflict of his race was now a link. He must have foreseen the difficulties that lay ahead for him; he would have to convince the red men to accept him as one of their own. He set out upon the long adventure. He lived for more than two years on the prairie, sometimes sheltered by adobe walls and sometimes in the open. He rose before dawn, went to bed at sundown, and came to dream in a language that was not that of his fathers. He conditioned his palate to harsh flavors, he covered himself with strange clothing, he forgot his friends and the city, he came to think in a fashion that the logic of his mind rejected. During the first few months of his new education he secretly took notes; later, he tore the notes up — perhaps to avoid drawing suspicion upon himself, perhaps because he no longer needed them. After a period of time (determined upon in advance by certain practices, both spiritual and physical), the priest instructed Murdock to start remembering his dreams, and to recount them to him at daybreak each morning. The young man found that on nights of the full moon he dreamed of buffalo. He reported these recurrent dreams to his teacher; the teacher at last revealed to him the tribe's secret doctrine. One morning, without saying a word to anyone, Murdock left.

In the city, he was homesick for those first evenings on the prairie when, long ago, he had been homesick for the city. He made his way to his professor's office and told him that he knew the secret, but had resolved not to reveal it.

"Are you bound by your oath?" the professor asked.

"That's not the reason," Murdock replied. "I learned something out there that I can't express."

"The English language may not be able to communicate it," the professor suggested.

"That's not it, sir. Now that I possess the secret, I could tell it in a hundred different and even contradictory ways. I don't know how to tell you this, but the secret is beautiful, and science, our science, seems mere frivolity to me now."

After a pause he added: "And anyway, the secret is not as important as the paths that led me to it. Each person has to walk those paths himself."

The professor spoke coldly: "I will inform the committee of your decision. Are you planning to live among the Indians?"

"No," Murdock answered. "I may not even go back to the prairie. What the men of the prairie taught me is good anywhere and for any circumstances."

That was the essence of their conversation.

Fred married, divorced, and is now one of the librarians at Yale.

[...], are not new thoughts and feelings, of course. I came across this excellent blogpost today by way of a tweet from Pierre Bourdieu (yes, that Bourdieu). I’m pleased to [...]

Terry Elliott (2013-08-04 13:15:07)

I think that the sentiment of the story is both appalling and burden lifting: pay no attention to the smoke from the fire or the wake from the ship. You sail your own boat, you carry your own fire. The smoke and wake are interesting, but mostly beside the point.

» “Maybe my data are mushrooms, not salad leaves”: a cultural geographer’s fieldwork reflections The Sociological Imagination (2013-08-20 08:01:20)

[...] You can read about Anjeline’s research on her website. Recently, she mentioned our post on Borges’ short story, “The Ethnographer”, and kindly agreed that we repost her reflections about fieldwork, notetaking, data collection and [...]

CfP: The Sociological Craft Project (2013-07-28 08:00)

In this new feature the Sociological Imagination invites short (2500 word max) contributions reflecting on any aspect of sociological craft. We use the term ‘craft’ in the broad sense conveyed by Richard Sennett:

Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship.

In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman’s discipline and commitment; schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession.

We envision a number of forms such contributions might take:

- Reflections on particular academic roles (e.g.,[1]review editor).
- Reflection on the process of writing for particular forms of publication (e.g. journals, monographs, logs)
- Reflections on the craft of research (the tools utilised, your relationship with them, the messiness of the process)
- Reflections on where you work, the devices you use, how the ambiance shapes your writing
- Reflections on undertaking research, managing time, negotiating conflicting demands.
• Reflections on routines and writing practices which are integral to your craft
• If you were brave enough to send us a picture of your workspace we’d love to include it!

However these are only examples. We’re keen not to get posts of the style “10 Tips for Writing Good Journal Articles”. We have nothing against these posts – we often feature them! But this project aims to generate a discussion of the craft of sociological work, the practices which sustain it and the emotional life and personal concern which are irrevocably bound up with it. We are particularly interested in contributions that explore the constraints that contemporary academic structures place upon the creative exercise of sociological craft and how we can, hopefully, work towards ameliorating these circumstances.

If you want to submit a contribution for the project then please e-mail it attached as word document (with any multimedia files attached separately) along with a short 2 line bio to accompany your post.

- See more at: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13385 #sthash.mvPVpNQM.dpuf


Žižek vs Chomsky: Is a pointless spat becoming a meaningful debate? (2013-07-28 09:44)

A quick round up of this spat which was entirely a creation of the internet - the opening salvos were entirely asynchronous, throwaway remarks in public talks that were plucked from obscurity by diligent web editors seeking to avoid their real work (unlike this post obviously). It began with Chomsky:

What you’re referring to is what’s called “theory.” And when I said I’m not interested in theory, what I meant is, I’m not interested in posturing—using fancy terms like polysyllables and pretending you have a theory when you have no theory whatsoever. So there’s no theory in any of this stuff, not in the sense of theory that anyone is familiar with in the sciences or any other serious field. Try to find in all of the work you mentioned some principles from which you can deduce conclusions, empirically testable propositions where it all goes beyond the level of something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old. See if you can find that when the fancy words are decoded. I can’t. So I’m not interested in that kind of posturing.

Then a related set of critical remarks began to circulate:
Then Žižek responded to Chomsky in a public talk at Birkbeck, transcription here provided by [3]EsJayBe - see their site for the full transcription and the audio itself:

What is that about, again, the academy and Chomsky and so on? Well with all deep respect that I do have for Chomsky, my first point is that Chomsky who always emphasises how one has to be empirical, accurate, not just some crazy Lacanian speculations and so on... well I don't think I know a guy who was so often empirically wrong in his descriptions in his whatever! Let’s look... I remember when he defended this demonisation of Khmer Rouge. And he wrote a couple of texts claiming: “no this is western propaganda. Khmer Rouge are not as horrible as that.” And when later he was compelled to admit that Khmer Rouge were not the nicest guys in the universe and so on, his defence was quite shocking for me. It was that “no, with the data that we had at that point, I was right. At that point we didn’t yet know enough, so... you know” but I totally reject this line of reasoning.

For example, concerning Stalinism. The point is not that you have to know, you have to photo evidence of gulag or whatever. My god you just have to listen to the public discourse of Stalinism, of Khmer Rouge, to get it that something terrifyingly pathological is going on there. For example, Khmer Rouge: even if we have no data about their prisons and so on, isn’t it in a perverse way almost fascinating to have a regime which in the first two years (’75 to ’77) behaved towards itself, treated itself, as illegal. You know the regime was nameless. It was called ‘alka’ [?] an organisation – not communist party of Cambodia – an organisation. Leaders were nameless. If you ask ‘who is my leader?’ your head was chopped off immediately and so on.

Ok, next point about Chomsky, you know the consequence of this attitude of his empirical and so on - and that’s my basic difference with him - and precisely Corey Robinson and some other people talking with him recently confirmed this to me. His idea is today that cynicism of those in power is so open that we dont need any critique of ideology, you read symptomatically between the lines,
everything is cynically openly admitted, we just have to bring out the facts of people. Like 'this company is profiting in Iraq' and so on and so on. Here I violently disagree.

Then Chomsky replies on [5]ZNet, clearly donning his figurative boxing gloves at this stage:

I’ve received a number of requests to comment on the post: “Slavoj Žižek Responds to Noam Chomsky: ‘I Don’t Know a Guy Who Was So Often Empirically Wrong’” (http://www.openculture.com/2013/07/slav-oj-zizek-responds-to-noam-chomsky.html).

I had read it, with some interest, hoping to learn something from it, and given the title, to find some errors that should be corrected – of course they exist in virtually anything that reaches print, even technical scholarly monographs, as one can see by reading reviews in the professional journals. And when I find them or am informed about them I correct them.

But not here. Žižek finds nothing, literally nothing, that is empirically wrong. That’s hardly a surprise. Anyone who claims to find empirical errors, and is minimally serious, will at the very least provide a few particles of evidence – some quotes, references, at least something. But there is nothing here – which, I’m afraid, doesn’t surprise me either. I’ve come across instances of Žižek’s concept of empirical fact and reasoned argument.

For example, in the Winter 2008 issue of the German cultural journal Lettre International, Žižek attributed to me a racist comment on Obama by Silvio Berlusconi. I ignored it. Anyone who strays from ideological orthodoxy is used to this kind of treatment. However, an editor of Harper’s magazine, Sam Stark, was interested and followed it up. In the January 2009 issue he reports the result of his investigation. Žižek said he was basing the attribution on something he had read in a Slovenian magazine. A marvelous source, if it even exists. And anyway, he continued, attributing to me a racist comment about Obama is not a criticism, because I should have made such remarks as “a fully admissible characterization in our political and ideological struggle.” I leave it others to decode. When asked about this by Slovene journalist/activist Igor Vidman, Žižek answered that he had discussed it with me over the phone and I had agreed with him:[6]http://www.vest.si/2009/01/31/zizkov-kulturni-boj/. Of course, sheer fantasy.

It’s not the only case. In fact, he provides us with a good example of his practice in these comments. According to him, I claim that “we don’t need any critique of ideology” – that is, we don’t need what I’ve devoted enormous efforts to for many years. His evidence? He heard that from some people who talked to me. Sheer fantasy again, but another indication of his concept of empirical fact and rational discussion.

Accordingly, I did not expect much.

Before Žižek [7]replies in a way which, for the most part, seems astonishingly reasonable and holds out the potential that this spat might be upgraded into a debate:

For me, on the contrary, the problem is here a very rational one: everything hinges on how we define “ideology.” If one defines and uses this term the way I do (and I am not alone here: my understanding echoes a long tradition of so-called Western Marxism), then one has to conclude that what Chomsky
is doing in his political writings is very important, I have great admiration and respect for it, but it is emphatically not critique of ideology. Let me indicate what I mean by this. [...]

My underlying thesis is here that no effective ideology simply lies: an ideology is never a simple mystification obfuscating the hidden reality of domination and exploitation; the atrocious reality obfuscated and mystified by an ideology has to register, to leave traces, in the explicit ideological text itself, in the guise of its inconsistencies, gaps, etc. The Stalinist show trials were, of course, a brutal travesty of justice concealing breath-taking brutality, but to see this, it is not necessary to know the reality behind them—the public face of the trials, the puppet-like monstrosity of public confessions, etc., made this abundantly clear. In a homologous way, one doesn’t have to know how Jews really were to guess that the Nazi accusations against them were a fake—a close look at these accusations makes it clear that we are dealing with paranoid fantasies. [...]

And he goes on and on in the same vein, repeating how he doesn’t see anything to what I’m saying, how he cannot discern in my texts any traces of rational examination of facts, how my work displays empty posturing not to be taken seriously, etc. A weird statement, measured by his professed standards of respect for empirical facts and rational argumentation: there are no citations (which, in this case, can be excused, since we are dealing with a radio interview), but also not even the vaguest mentions of any of my ideas. Did he decode any of my “fancy words” and indicate how what one gets is “something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old”? There are no political references in his first attack (and in this domain, as far as I can see, I much more often than not agree with him). I did a couple of short political books on 9/11 (Welcome to the Desert of the Real), on the war in Iraq (Iraq: the Borrowed Kettle), on the 2008 financial meltdown (First as Tragedy, then as Farce), which appear to me written in a quite accessible way and dealing with quite a lot of facts—do they also contain nothing but empty posturing? In short, is Chomsky in his thorough dismissal of my work not doing exactly what he is accusing me of: clinging to the empty posture of total rejection with no further ado?

I think one can convincingly show that the continental tradition in philosophy, although often difficult to decode, and sometimes—I am the first to admit this—defiled by fancy jargon, remains in its core a mode of thinking which has its own rationality, inclusive of respect for empirical data. And I furthermore think that, in order to grasp the difficult predicament we are in today, to get an adequate cognitive mapping of our situation, one should not shirk the resorts of the continental tradition in all its guises, from the Hegelian dialectics to the French "deconstruction." Chomsky obviously doesn't agree with me here. So what if—just another fancy idea of mine—what if Chomsky cannot find anything in my work that goes "beyond the level of something you can explain in five minutes to a twelve-year-old because" because, when he deals with continental thought, it is his mind which functions as the mind of a twelve-year-old, the mind which is unable to distinguish serious philosophical reflection from empty posturing and playing with empty words?

I wonder if the Verso editorial team have designs on making a book out of this yet. The only other winner is the academic blogosphere, with its newfound ability to mimic the internet more broadly and start fights through the force of brute connectivity.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/GWRqPbwYS0?feature=player_embedded
» Paul Krugman, Niall Ferguson and the norms of public intellectualism in a digital age The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-21 08:00:22)

[...] academic blogosphere had been getting a bit boring ever since the Chomsky and Zizek spat came to an end. Fortunately, Niall Ferguson decided a couple of days ago that it was time to take [...]
and it’s certainly the most ambitious target I’ve aimed for in my many failed attempts to establish this sort of routine. I’ve been dividing the daily target between a few projects: my blog, an NVivo eBook I’m writing, my PhD and two papers. This range of options seems increasingly important, almost as a form of [2]structured procrastination, with at least one of them feeling suitable for some input each day, even if I find myself deliberately avoiding some of the others.

I’ve also noticed that my reading seems to be becoming more focused in the last week or so. This is something I often have a problem with: I’ve learnt over time to make structured choices about reading in order to feed into specific projects but, left to my own devices, I will tend to read in a scattergun fashion. My reading tends to be too wide (and consequentially rather shallow) and I’m too prone to picking up new books (and consequentially often struggle to finish books because I end up with 20+ on the go at once). There may be an element of confirmation bias in the observation but it does feel as if the structured writing habit is starting to inculcate a somewhat more structured approach to reading, without this being a conscious outcome I’m having to plan and aim for (as I had to do for my PhD reading for example).

I’m also becoming increasingly aware of how the physical act of writing does not, in itself, take much time. There’s a certain experience of immediacy and urgency in writing which has always been one of my most valued creative experiences: when an inchoate idea is at the forefront of your mind and the process of rendering and externalising it feels like one of the most natural (and important) things in the world. On such occasions, writing is fast. But these experiences have tended to be few and far between. Yet I’ve felt this a number of times in the last couple of weeks. It’s almost as if the discipline involved in setting the daily writing target ensures the space needed to be sensitive to the potential onset of these rounds of ultra-enthused writing and, with this, it becomes easier to recognise them and act on them. Is a rigid and disciplined approach to writing in general perhaps a precondition for free and creative experiences of writing on specific occasions? Obviously, it goes without saying that the results of a daily writing habit need editing. This is a given for my academic work and it’s something I’m feeling the need to do more frequently for my blogging. But thus far this daily challenge is proving to be a deeply rewarding experiment in academic life hacking and I’m really grateful to the Thesis Whisperer for writing the post which led me to try this.

Does Sociology still have a demand problem? (2013-07-30 08:00)

Mark Carrigan [1] asks, after an essay by Wolfgang Streeck, why there is so little sociology in public discourse? Streeck argues that there might be a demand problem, since although there are numerous sociologists plying their trade, we still seldom see sociology talked about (or acted upon) in public.

Mark specifically frames the question a bit differently:

“Why is sociology absent in public debates ... why do sociologists have so little confidence in their work that they talk about it only to each other, rather than to the world at large?”

I want to briefly give an anecdotal account why I think it might no longer be true that there is little demand for sociology. Also, I like to think that increasingly sociologists are taking up roles as public intellectuals.

Firstly, I am not a sociologist. Originally trained as a lawyer, and with an MA in Hypermedia (Say what?), I run a small social media agency in London called RAAK. Yet, I have been trying to learn bits and bobs of social science, and sociology in particular over time.

Why? Well, much of what has happened online in the last twenty years is of such nature that it begs proper explanation. From Wikipedia to AirNnB, from Twitter to SnapChat, humans are behaving in ways few predicted. If media is being democratised, we need to understand individuals, society and publics much better to understand media itself.

There are numerous questions to answer. Why do people share stuff? To what extent does identity matter online? How does information spread from person to person, and why and how does something go viral? What about privacy in this brave new world, and what of its flip-side, flourishing?

Much of the literature on the Internet and new media has sought to fill this gap. From the quasi-utopian writing of Jeff Jarvis, to the more nuanced work of Clay Shirky, I gobbled it up. A lot this work dabbles in social science light. Quite often one is left with more questions than answers.

It has been the far more substantial works of the likes of Manuel Castells that provided a better framework for much of my thinking. So slowly I drifted to reading and following more social science.

I am not alone in this endeavor. I have noticed over time how the discipline of social media (which encompasses a wide range of disciplines: research, marketing, product development, customer service) has veered to the social sciences looking for answers.

Brian Solis, a popular social media guru, has been popularizing the interest in sociology with blog posts like [2]Social media is about sociology and not technology. Much if his writing on the topic is simplistic and instrumental (not to mention muddled), see for example his piece in Techcrunch (arguably the world’s largest Technology news website) on how [3]Klout measures Social Capital and not Influence.

But the quest by him and much of the industry for answers in social science is very real. When Facebook first published the average number of friends on Facebook a couple of years back, it was remarkably similar to Dunbar’s number of 150, and people sat up and took notice. When sociologists explained the difference between relationships on Facebook and Twitter and their respective ability to transmit useful information based on research into the difference between strong and weak (Or bridging) ties, it rang true. When numerous sociological studies showed that people that used social media a lot were also more social offline, the public and industry felt vindicated.
And not all the whole lunge for sociology is purely instrumental without any consideration to what should be. For example – Yammer, a company (now bought by Microsoft) that provides social networking software for use inside companies and organisations, touts its platform as a way for companies to escape stifling hierarchies.

One of my own current fascinations is social network analysis. This is of course a sub discipline of sociology that has drawn heavily on both network theory and physics. Not only does it help me understand how information travels through social networks, but concepts like *preferential attachment* has helped us build better tools for surfacing the most interesting content on Twitter. How so? It has helped us grasp how networks form hierarchies that can be divorced of merit. Thus we realised simply building tools counting numbers of retweets or likes as signals often give you unsatisfactory indication as to the quality of content.

Through primarily Twitter, I have also noticed several sociologists putting their work in public of late. Here is a far from exhaustive list: Zeynep Tufekci's tweets and writing on social media and social movements; Nathan Jurgenson's Cyberology blog and Theorising the Web conference (which I attended); danah boyd, who has written extensively on youth sociality online; Gabriella Coleman, who has put herself out there as an expert on hacker culture.

I made a Twitter list of people talking about media, tech and society, and many of them are indeed sociologists. You can view it here.

- Wessel van Rensburg (@wildebees)

5. [https://twitter.com/wildebees/media-tech-and-society/members](https://twitter.com/wildebees/media-tech-and-society/members)
6. [http://twitter.com/wildebees](http://twitter.com/wildebees)

» Being Stuck Between Public Sociology and Public Engagement The Sociological Imagination (2013-09-12 08:01:16)

 [...] short I don't think sociology in general (and digital sociology in particular) has a demand problem – at least not in the way that some might assume. However I think an apparatus for supporting […]

Reading about writing (2013-07-31 08:00)

After writing an article and revising another (and doing admissions for my department), I’ve returned to writing the book I started in April. I’ve been trying to write in the morning and do teaching and admin in the afternoons. To help me along I’ve been reading some stuff about the processes and practices of writing. For some reason I always find it interesting and encouraging to read about other people’s writing practices (I think this must be the case for other people as well because the post I added recently about [1]making revisions to articles is already my most visited post). A place I often look for stuff about writing is Stuart Elden’s blog [2]Progressive Geographies. Stuart often includes posts on writing or links and comments on other peoples’ posts on writing – I’ve commented on one or two of these in the past, including a short post about the use of [3]presentation slides to guide writing. I’ve noticed that he has commented that his posts on writing often generate a high level of interest. For example, [4]here is a post he recently published about the number of words he writes in a day (the post also includes links to other articles and posts discussing this issue).
The consensus here and elsewhere seems to be to aim for consistency, with a target of about 500 words and a daily accumulative approach to writing. There have been one or two posts about this before on Progressive Geographies with Stuart indicating that he aims for about 500 polished words. Which I suspect means that he often writes more but then this averages out when you include days where the editing work is the focus. At the moment I've been trying to aim for about 1000 words a day, but this is unpolished as I'm leaving the editing until I have a complete draft of the book. Sometimes I manage more, although I'm sure that there is a lot of editorial work to do when I get to it. But this approach of doing some everyday, or every weekday for me, seems like a good way to work. Stuart makes some further comment here on managing the writing and scheduling it in to working patterns - I notice that there are also quite a few comments in response to this post. So far I've accumulated about 50,000 words on this book project by working like that. And it means that I know that about 20 days writing will mean I've got a complete draft. Although I've got a good deal of reading on my desk to do at the same time. I'll need to do this in order to progress the writing.

I noticed that some of the posts at this excellent site about writing, called writing on writing, mention a more sporadic approach to writing. William Outhwaite's piece makes some comment on this with reference to C Wright Mills famous notes on intellectual craftsmanship (which he notes endorsed the approach of writing everyday). The intermittency in writing is, of course, often caused by other work commitments. These types of commitments can intervene in writing, and I expect that once term starts I'll slow down a bit.

This writing on writing site includes lots of short posts from some prominent writers. There are some really nice pieces here, many of which are quite practically orientated with lots of tips. These include the ever entertaining Howard Becker, who has contributed a piece about the way that the context in which we write shapes the form of our outputs. Fans of Becker's amazing book Telling About Society won't be surprised by the open outlook to writing that he describes in this short piece. There is also a great post by Les Back. He talks about how writing should be a sensitive form of communication that can only thrive if we listen properly during the research process. He suggests that writing should be something that creates a sensory feel for the subject matter. This is something that he says can be lost by an over reliance on research equipment and apparatus. Amongst this resource of materials on writing there are various pieces about daily practices, approaches and the development of writing as a craft. I'm still working through them at the moment. I might post some more links if anything catches my eye.

Finally, I've also been flicking through the Scholarly Kitchen blog. Amongst other topics there are often posts there about writing and publishing. For example, here is a post about the role of publishers.

This post by Dave Beer was originally published on Thinking Culture.
4.8 August

Why sociology is necessary to understand online health behaviours (2013-08-01 08:00)

Despite being written in an era that pre-dated many of the digital technologies that have become important to society today, the implications of the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), recognised in the simplest form here as the capacity to move from one social perspective to another, are still salient for understanding digital social phenomena. The World Wide Web has rapidly transformed the world in the 20+ years it has been in existence, though it is not just the technology that has altered how society operates, but the social context, actors and online social actions which have also shaped the technology and its use in return. Hence a sociological understanding can help us to shed light on these new and emerging online behaviours and interactions. Sociology is particularly relevant as it becomes increasingly clear that the Web is not just one entity but many – created at various points of exchange between humans and digital technologies. Norms and motives shift and adapt to the various virtual spaces, contexts and environments. Different behaviours and practices are enabled by the opportunities provided in this ‘brave new world’. In this brief article I will explore how these general characteristics of the Web manifest themselves in what is a fast growing and controversial application of this technology – namely the practice of purchasing medicine online.

Health behaviour and the Web

Health related information has been reported as one of the main reasons individuals access the Web (Eysenbach, 2001). In addition Fox (2007) referred to the 2006 Online Health Search, a US survey by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, which showed that “prescription or over-the-counter drugs” was the fifth most widely searched health topic on the Web (Fox, 2007). The most recent study conducted by the Pew Project in September 2012, found that 72% of Internet users they surveyed, say they looked online for health information within the past year. As well as providing knowledge, the Web is also a retail opportunity which allows the buying of medicinal products online. Even if obtaining medicine was not the original intention when visiting the Web, it provides the setting for advertising – including direct marketing such as pop ups. These may enable opportunist impulse buying whereby people do not realise that they are indulging in anything untoward. The issue is further complicated where the medicine is regulated and specified as prescription only. Although it is not illegal to purchase prescription only medicine rather than obtaining it from a health care professional; using a web supplier exposes the consumer to a plethora of criminal behaviour and health risks. The Web offers no guarantee on the quality and effectiveness of medicines supplied with no legal recourse available, especially if the product was obtained from an unregulated site. SPAM emails that bypass the healthcare system by advertising prescription only medicines further risks people’s health by encouraging self-diagnosis and self-medication. These also carry the risk of credit card fraud and PC viruses which could be associated with larger criminal associations and organisations.

Beck (1992) has purported that the increased propensity to conceptualise problems in terms of risk has been accompanied by shifts in both the role of the expert and the form and communication of their expert product. While the paternalism of the expert remains an important ‘definer’ (Beck 1992:29) of risks, significantly in terms of where they can be discovered and how they are best avoided, this role has supposedly undergone momentous changes. Beck alleges that expertise has both been ‘demonopolised’ (Beck, 1992:29) and ‘democratised’ (Beck, 1992:191).

In a society where risk is increasingly the justifiable basis for policy decisions, experts are relied on to both
identify the causes of risks and intervene in the generation of risks to prevent their reoccurrence. Topical risks such as speeding or the use of mobile phones whilst driving, the relative riskiness of legal versus illegal drugs, and the effects and control of smoking in public places, are increasingly conceptualised as societal risk issues by the authorities, but are also more importantly, issues which are of particular interest to the public who are perceived as both the victim at risk and the problematic cause of the risk in such instances. The Web plays in instrumental role in enabling behaviour that on the one hand empowers individuals, but on the other increases their vulnerability and exposure to risky and unauthorised practices. The Web is seemingly implementing a shift towards a more libertarian model of healthcare, with the empowered patient/consumer able to manage their health choices online.

A sociological understanding of The Web

The Web allows people to view Websites outside of the UK. It enables access to unregulated sites that have no form of governance and no authorisation to sell medicine. The likelihood is that no reference will be made to any risks the medicines may have, focusing purely on the supposed benefits instead. Personal interaction is reduced which may produce detachment and encourage disregard for the law/regulation. The consumer to some degree is removed from the proximity of the health risks and avoidance of ‘following the rules’ perhaps not carrying the same weight as when conducted in the ‘real-world’. The Web acts as a mask enabling the consumer to conceal and justify their actions. However, though the Web can provide anonymity to those who know how to exploit it, in practice many people will leave easily followable traces. These may not be self-evident to the individual though.

The advent of online pharmacies and health related information and purchasing online puts individuals in the position of a customer in the market place, able to make choices among the products marketed to them by commercial firms, rather than a patient subject to the authoritative guidance of professionals. The exercise of consumer choice and the need for the purchaser to take more responsibility to verify that the medicines available are what they claim to be is highly significant in relation to the Web. In some cases consumers are making decisions without consulting health professionals. There is conflict between the value of individuals being able to pursue their own interests and the values of efforts by the state to reduce harm, use public resources fairly and efficiently, and social solidarity.

Schneider and Sutton (1999) claim that the Web is a fertile ground for the commission of offences and behaviours difficult to detect or prosecute. The complex minefield of medicine regulation is difficult to enforce on the Web due to jurisdictional issues, and problems of concealment and anonymity. The purchasing of medicine online may be viewed as just another commodity which is digitally available. Though there is no risk of criminal sanction the consumer is still able to breach domestic regulation, suggesting that the law has yet to catch up with the Web. Any flouting of regulation may simply be part of the process in obtaining that which the Web makes so accessible. The extent to which the Web makes a difference to the structure and formation of the issue or whether it is purely replicating offline behaviour is unclear. Perhaps those who would not usually think about purchasing medicine and deviating away from obtaining it via authorised means are being subjected to the idea.

The issue of obtaining medicine using unorthodox means pre dates the Web. Previously people went abroad or conducted ‘shady’/‘underground’ deals, comparable with the obtaining of illegal drugs (Young, 1971). Such behaviour is socially unacceptable and punishable by law; however the Web omits the threat of sanction and allows denial. The risks of being caught are less though the law does not discriminate with its punishment for illegal activity. People can indulge in behaviour that they would not necessarily participate in offline, or in front of various audiences, creating a dichotomy of different behavioural presentations (Goffman, 1959) in the spaces of the Web. If a medicine that was available via prescription has been withdrawn it is no longer accessible in that country. However the Web has increased accessibility, its global reach means medicines are available in some jurisdictions and not in others; affording any person anywhere to procure them. What is legitimately available is constantly shifting and the Web does not always reflect this, allowing sales to be conducted outside authorised forms of supply.
The sociological imagination requires the ability to observe things socially and how they interact and influence each other. To fully appreciate the situation of online consumer health behaviours alternative points of view need consideration. Applying different perspectives of sociology to explore this phenomenon helps us to appreciate the wider context and acknowledge how the actions of people are far more important that the actions themselves. In providing a 'safe' opportunity to purchase medicine the Web appears to remove or bypass some of the threats and sanctions normally associated with illegal drug purchasing, though the reality is that the risks have not been reduced but are simply more clandestine. New sociological and methodological approaches must be considered in trying to understand these emerging digital behaviours.

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References

1. http://www.webcitation.org/5vVrjWRQ8

'The Public Value of the Social Sciences' by John Brewer (2013-08-02 08:00)

There has been much discussion about the ongoing marketisation of British academia. One of the best argued and important analyses is John Brewer’s recent book [1] The public value of the social sciences in which he critiques against the deeply flawed reductionism of the current ‘academic impact’ agenda and puts forward a much broader ‘value’ basis for the appraisal of the social sciences. The contribution of the social sciences (as well as that of the other sciences and humanities), Brewer argues, goes far deeper than their directly measurable utility, including teaching, research and public engagement. The social sciences offer us multiple ways of understanding ourselves and our societies and have a much more profound impact on society’s reproduction than the current impact assessments can measure. We fully agree with his argument which draws on the work of C. W. Mills and Michael Burawoy, for a publicly engaged and critical social science that addresses the big challenges of 21 Century societies.
John D. Brewer is Professor of Post Conflict Studies in the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at Queen's University, Belfast.


BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought- 6th Sept (2013-08-02 12:00)

BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought
Friday 6 September 2013
BSA Meeting Room, London.

We are pleased to announce our speakers for the forthcoming seminar to debate contemporary issues in realist thought. Please see attached flyer for further details and abstracts.

Graham Scambler, University College London

‘Taking interdisciplinarity seriously: realism and explanations of health inequalities’

Sue Clegg, Leeds Metropolitan University
One Friday morning, on 3 August 2012, the Idle Ethnographer was piled into her parents’ car, still asleep, and driven to Turkey. It must be mentioned, to avoid confusion, that my home town is only 100 miles away from the Northern
Turkish border. It must also be mentioned that this post uncomfortably discusses national identity without being sufficiently reflexive or politically correct about it. It is merely a transcript of my travel scribbled on bits of paper in the car that day.

On the Bulgarian border, there are no notices in Turkish. On the Turkish border, there are no notices in Bulgarian or English. There is no visible toilet in the large concrete hall of the customs but there is a mosque room. Only one window serves car passengers and coach groups. We end up at the wrong window (the only one with a European sign) and by the time the officer says “Elena? Pasaport? Pecat giris? Polis pecat?” a coachload of Russian tourists are already queuing in front of the passport control. I notice at least 10 visible portraits of Ataturk and one metal facemask. I don’t know whether that is mandatory, or whether it shows genuine respect to this controversial historical figure. Or maybe defiance. I realise I know far, far too little about Turkish history, politics and culture. It somehow feels that I - and all my compatriots - ought to know more and fear less.

While waiting in the long queue, I get impatient and post a suggestion into the dusty suggestions and comments box: make two separate windows for coaches and cars, write signs in Bulgarian, English, French. Dad sniggers at my sudden civic participation spree and says that during the [1]Liberation (end of 19th Century) Bulgarian chieftains (“voevodes”) wrote letters in blood, and 50 years later Bulgarian attorneys already wrote in shit. I merely write in sweat. 9 am is already too hot. The new road into Turkey – to which we finally manage to get after 1h of waiting – is imposing in the perfection of its asphalt and its complete emptiness. Taking about Turkey is a good example of the impossibility of objective opinion. Being from BG, even after spending 6 years in the UK, I can’t testify about the exoticity of Turkey. Knowing that Europeans find turkey exotic no longer shocks me – but I can’t understand that sentiment. All my eyes tell me when I’m in Turkey are direct, irresistible comparisons to BG. I’m not the only one of my family who feels that. My father voices our inescapably nationalised point of view: “these fields used to be Bulgarian a hundred years ago. The sound of lunchtime prayer is disturbing. The ubiquity of white crescents on red flags feels unnerving”. Soon after that trip, I read an article in which a Bulgarian journalist said she always had an uncontrollable ghost of fear when she heard moslem prayer or saw a mosque. I wish I didn’t know what she meant.

The rest of this small family trip was spent avoiding the the 40°C heat and sauntering around the streets of Edirne (which in Bulgarian we call Odrin, thought we speak Russian in our family and we should, really, call it “Edirne” because that’s the name in Russian and contemporary Turkish), watching beautiful old mosques and parks, buying cheap shoes and souveniers in a cool closed bazaar, drinking delicious spring water, beer in the slightly less scorching shadows of parks, and eating huge peaches, beef tomatoes and cold watermelon. The fear I described in the previous paragraph is a strange sensation. It is there, and I wish it weren’t, but it is, even though all the people we meet or see are friendly and unthreatening. Yes, Turkish men stare at you (woman) a bit more than Bulgarian and much more than men in the UK do – yet their gazes are less intrusive than those of men in Tunis, about which my mother and I reminisce as we sit in the shade. In 1998 we visited the port of Sfax, Tunis and made the mistake of wearing white bermuda shorts while strolling around the local market with father and my then very young sister. My mother and I (then 17 years old) both got tomatoes thrown at us and our two pairs of white shorts had to be bleached to regain their white colour. The next days we both wore long summer skirts which attracted just as many gazes, but no more tomatoes. This visit to neighbouring Turkey was different, and yet it brought back the memory.

What is different for me: after spending 6 years in the UK, to my eye this north-western European Turkish city and my home Bulgaria seem much more alike than different. The differences between everyday practices, urban spaces, gestures, behaviours in the two countries are obvious, but seem slight and intricate. My family didn’t agree. People here are nice. My family did agree.

We end up talking in sign language with a few Bulgarian and Turkish words thrown in with a very friendly guy near the station. Later we will post him his portrait.

In [2]2011 the Idle Ethnographer wrote about Milan
SATILAN MAL GERİ ALINMZ DEĞİŞİRİZ
gunes (2013-08-12 13:16:19)
I really didn’t get the point of that essay... Whilst you say Bulgaria and Turkey were administered under the same country almost a century ago, you are so shocked to see there are many similarities? Plus, are you generally holding a ‘fear’ towards foreign countries or is it special to Muslim ones? and ‘people here are nice’, can’t believe that sentence, seriously... in which parts of the world you think people are not nice? and in what way are you surprised that you had thought Edirne locals wouldn’t have been nice. Geez!

Milena Kremakova (2013-08-14 19:32:12)
Hi guhes, Thank you for reading. I’m grateful for your comment because it voices important problems, not just with the essay, but with the effects of history education on Bulgarian national identity. I was very uncomfortable writing and posting it, that’s why it waited in my folders for a whole year. It is very uncomfortable to admit that you were raised and educated so very "blind", racist, intolerant and irrational - but unfortunately this is exactly how it is and I'm trying to come to terms with it. To answer your questions: -yes, I, and many people I know, hold a general fear against one particular foreign and muslim country, i.e. Turkey. By extension, other muslim countries as well. I'm really not making this up, and I'm really not proud of it, either. -the "people are nice" phrase was deliberately simple and sarcastic, it was actually a quote from what someone from my family said during that trip. Listen to the unsaid stuff in that sentence: yes, it’s hard to believe people
in country X are just like you, if you’ve rarely had any contact with them, if you’ve spent (like my parents) all your life being immersed in tacit or open anti-X sentiments, everywhere you go, everything you read, anyone you speak to. When I went to school, in the 1980s and 1990s, we were taught about the “500 years of Turkish Yoke”. My head is filled with dates, events, and names belonging to a national liberation narrative. It was terribly, terribly biased. At some point the textbooks were rewritten to say “Ottoman presence” and then “Ottoman Rule” which is a more balanced term. The thing is, it’s not even just the fault of history classes: the whole national culture is built around the notion that the Liberation (1879) was the just culmination of a 5-century-long black and white struggle between an oppressed Bulgarian “people” and a horrible empire. (do you sense the bitter irony in what i’m saying?) The main dichotomy which is so present it’s invisible is “us” versus “them”: the nice and oppressed “us” are Bulgarian, Christian and the scary “they” are Turkish, Muslim. I don’t know what nationality you are - but you clearly aren’t Bulgarian. You saw and voiced tacit problems, taken for granted and very difficult to even see by me or other Bulgarians. You said “administered in the same country” - this is a good way of putting it - but you’d get into a row with many otherwise smart and/or educated people, in many places in my country, if you said this aloud in a conversation. This brief note (I hesitate to call it an essay) is a very tentative attempt to at least notice and admit these things, to myself. As a sociologist who does not directly deal with issues of “race”, ethnicity and nationalism, I know too little about these topics both theoretically, and in my own life. I decided to post this unedited in the end, hoping to get some reactions, because I had written it honestly - even though I do agree that it is very unsociological. If anything, it is autoethnographic. It is far more toned down than the stuff I’ve heard in interviews and the stuff I hear every day when I talk to friends and relatives “back home” in Bulgaria. This is how we are - most of us, in general. The reason why nationalism and neonazism are taking root in Eastern Europe, and in Bulgaria in particular, is that sentiments like the ones I wrote in the essay lay unreflected.

Rafael Medeiros (2013-08-27 18:11:51)
Hi Milena, I’m a Brazilian student living here in İstanbul- Turkey and i’m currently studying sociology at the University of İstanbul. I enjoyed reading your essay. I really understand a lot of that you have said in your replay to Gunes. I’ve been learning Ottoman history and as a result i know a lot about the happenings of the Liberation in Bulgaria. I’ve been to Edirne many times as i have close turkish friends that live there, also two years ago i have been to Burgas in Bulgaria. I could, such as you, see many similarities between Bulgaria and Turkey. First of all i could grasp the geographical similarities and as a second and closer grasp, i could see the similarities between the culture. I had made some Bulgarian friends over there and we talked quite a lot about Bulgaria and Turkey and just as you say while speaking i could grasp their "ghost fear". I also agree with you that this fear is probably the result of the politics that were applied after the Liberation times until today’s time. My Bulgarian friends were really surprised when i was telling them about the similarities of the food culture of Turkey and Bulgaria. I thought was surprised to them not knowing this before. I know the two countries are different in many ways but they share a long-history together and i believe that it creates bonds that a short-period of time can’t erase. I hope that one day Turkey and Bulgaria come to understand their cultural bonds and learn to understand their history in a more brotherly way. I still new to sociological thinking and also i still learning about Turkey’s history and also the history of the countries around. I don’t have the background yet to do strong statments about these countries, but i hope that with my simple english and my newly knowledge i could state my thoughts clearly to you. I really enjoyed to read something about our old Edirne : ) Thank you!

Open research and ‘self-promotion’ (2013-08-04 08:00)
I just read an interesting (though slightly depressing!) post from [1]Nick Hopwood giving useful advice to PhDs and ECRs. I’m not quibbling with his advice per se and I genuinely enjoy his blog but I took issue with this paragraph:

I had vague ideas that academics, with a few obvious exceptions, get on in their careers by doing good, solid research, teaching effectively, and making quiet contributions to institutional and disciplinary life. The quality of their ideas, discoveries, pedagogy and colleagueship would ensure that their recognition. If that was ever true (which it may not have been) it certainly isn’t now. You get, and get on in, an academic career by actively (perhaps aggressively at times) peddling your ideas, your effectiveness as a teacher,
and your value to the uni or your field. You have to push. This comes from having the vision and courage
to apply for grants when you'll probably get rejected, to aim for top journals, to try out new teaching
approaches, and to step up in working groups, push new ideas through committees, take on roles in your
disciplinary organisation. But it also comes from capitalising on those achievements when you make
them. An academic life is pretty much a constant sales pitch (see below). Here, I mean you’re selling your
work to others.

I completely see what he’s getting at. But I’d like to make a (potentially naive) argument against it. His case rests on
the suggestion that, in the contemporary academy, people won’t receive recognition through the intrinsic virtue of
their scholarship. There’s a certain plausibility about this claim. But does it hold for open scholarship? I suspect not
but I don’t wish to suggest that ‘openness’ somehow ameliorates all that is wrong with higher education. However I
do think that when the development of ideas becomes, via social media, 
[2]an open process then Nick’s argument largely ceases to be true. This could be construed cynically: perhaps social media is intrinsically self-promotive? Or
more positively: genuine openness in academic life would make it much more likely that people receive recognition
in virtue of “the quality of their ideas, discoveries, pedagogy and colleagueship”. Thoughts on this would be much
appreciated, as I’m not entirely sure whether I’m convinced by my own argument. I guess the intuition underlying it
is that ‘doing work in the open’ cannot be equated to self-promotion even if, in practice, the former leads to the latter.

nic-work/
2. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/29/reflections-continuous-publishing/

The lessons of music culture for scholarly communication (2013-08-05 08:00)

Dave Beer makes some interesting points in [1]this short article which frames current debates about open access
in terms of trends within music culture, which have been driven by broadly similar structural processes and have
been playing themselves out for much longer. Some people argue that rendering academic publishing more ‘open’
could prove hugely problematic, as unrestricted access to the means of ‘making public’ could lead to an even more
confusing mass of literature than exists at present:

Kirby points out that the ‘footprint’ of academic publishing has grown ‘exponentially' since the 1960s. His point appears to be that even in the current system we are already faced with an unwieldy mass of journals and journal articles. This, as the statistics indicate, already represents an unfathomable amount
of published resource. Anecdotally we can probably reflect here on how hard it is to keep up with the
articles published in our own specialist areas let alone across entire disciplines and cognate disciplines. The point, it would seem, is that this situation could very well get even worse if we adopt an unlimited open model of publishing. The implicit observation is that academic publishers limit and classify the
output of academics and thus filter and order the content. Kirby’s suggestion is that with open access we
will be opening the floodgates whilst also losing some of these ordering mechanisms. As such we might
well end up, [2]Kirby (2012, p. 259) claims, with even more material and with ’no obvious means to make
any sense of it'.

There’s a certain plausibility to this argument though I think it, as well as Dave’s response, ignores the significance

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of network filtering (as happens through social media) and correspondingly overestimates the significance of bureauocratic filtering (as happens through publishing corporations). Journals are becoming less important to discovery and perhaps less important as cyphers of quality, at least in terms of the reading decisions individuals make (clearly this is untrue in terms of institutional use of prestige as a cypher for quality and associated decisions about the distribution of scarce resources). Nonetheless, it’s unrealistic to imagine that a socially networked academia could, as an unintended emergent effect of sustained online communication, “limit and classify the output of academics and thus filter and order the content”. Which is why the mechanisms being deployed within the music industry to filter content and aid discoverability are potentially so relevant:

Against this backdrop of cultural cacophony, music cultures have found ways to organise content so that it might find an audience. The broadcast model, despite the recent changes, remains relatively powerful in music. And so we still have large organisations shaping consumption at the top end of the market through TV shows like The X Factor. Amongst the chaos in music we also have systems that enable people to locate new music that they might like to listen to. Here predictive analytics are increasingly beginning to rule. Music fans are often told what music they are likely to want to listen to by machines. Software applications built in to iTunes, Last.fm and the like are predictive of tastes. These predictive systems provide a means for managing the chaos as the music automatically ‘finds’ its audience. This is an era in which, as Scott [3]Lash (2006) has put it, the data ‘find us’. The practices of tagging music with metadata and the accumulation of personal profiles combine to enable this form of ‘knowing capitalism’ ([4]Thrift, 2005) to operate. If this were to happen in academic research then one of the solutions to the intellectual din of open access might be apps that enable research articles to ‘find’ their desired audiences. This app might well predict what type of thing you might want to read and recommend it to you. An early version of this type of recommendation system, although based just on links with individual articles rather than one’s comprehensive browsing history, is provided by Elsevier’s ScienceDirect platform. It sounds nice and convenient, but as with music we are forced to question the underlying algorithmic infrastructures that will then be so powerful in shaping the formation of knowledge ([5]Beer, 2009; [6]Hayles, 2006). These algorithms will shape the knowledge we encounter and will in turn then impact upon our ideas.

I was quite taken recently with comments Chomsky [1] made about Lacan. I originally came to Lacan through Žižek, as the intriguing way in which Slavoj deftly weaved Lacanian ideas into discussions of film piqued my curiosity. So I bought Žižek’s book about Lacan. Five years on I cannot for the life of me remember anything about this book – or find it on my shelves – but it must have been reasonably interesting, as it then prompted me to go and buy the Œcrits. A few hours of engaging with this ungainly tome and my nascent enthusiasm for Lacan had been quashed. I continued to be vaguely interested in Lacan’s ideas but it’s unlikely, though not impossible, that I’ll ever bother to put the effort in to decipher Œcrits. Particularly now that I’ve read a short book I stumbled across on Friday. *My Teaching* collects three lectures given by Lacan to ‘non-specialist’ audiences. Having now encountered Lacan in plain-speaking mode, what allure he possessed in my mind has pretty much completely deserted him. Nonetheless, a few points stood out, not least of all this:

> It is primarily for that reason, I suppose, that, if we approach them from a different angle, we can agree to consider these Œcrits unreadable; people at least pretend to read them, or to have read them. Not, naturally, the people who supposedly do that for a living, or in other words the critics. Reading them would force them to prove their worth by writing something that might at least have something to do with what I am advancing, but at that point they become suspicious. As you may have noticed, this book has not had many reviews. Probably because it is very thick, difficult to read, obscure. It is not designed for everyday consumption at all. You might say to me that that remark might suggest I’m making excuses. It might mean that I’m saying I should have produced a book for everyday consumption, or even that I’m going to. Yes, it is possible. I might try to. But I am not used to that. And it is by no means certain that it would be a success. Perhaps it would be better if I did not try to force my talent. And I do not find it particularly desirable in itself, because what I teach will indeed eventually become common currency. There will be people who will get down to it, who will put it about. That is obviously not quite the same thing, and it will be a bit distorted. They’ll try to introduce it into the hubbub. They will do all they can to reposition it in relation to a certain number of those very solid convictions that suit everyone in this society, as in any society.

- Jacques Lacan, My Teaching, Pg 62

I found this a remarkably strange extract. Perhaps also an extremely revealing one. Lacan complains that critics do not read or review his writing. He emphatically suggests that this is a failing on their part, reflecting an unwillingness to engage with what he is actually saying. Yet he immediately acknowledges that the book is "difficult to read" and "obscure". There is a bizarre dichotomy underpinning this: books for "everyday consumption" vs books that are "very thick, difficult to read, obscure". In doing so he excludes the possibility that his ideas can be expressed *clearly* without *simplification* (with the latter presumably necessary to produce a book for "everyday consumption"). That this dichotomy seems axiomatic for him points to the esoteric nature of his work (or his ‘doctrine’ as he later refers to it) and perhaps helps explain the influence he sustained over his adherents. On such a view, the simplification necessary for "everyday consumption" should surely be anathema and yet he considers precisely this but worries that "it would not be a success" (jarring with the self-confident esotericism of a man who can implicitly see it as a point of pride that his book is "very thick, difficult to read, obscure"). Not to worry though, his work will be popularised throughout the land nonetheless (it will become "common currency" no less) though, unfortunately, it will inevitably get fucked up in the process. So probably best to stick to books that are "very thick, difficult to read, obscure".

I guess there are two points I’m trying to make it. One is the excluded middle in Lacan’s assumption about
the nature of writing i.e. that work is either esoteric and obscure or popularised and simplistic. This excludes the possibility of writing that is clear without being simplistic. This assumption is far from unique to Lacan and this frustrating esotericism pervades continental philosophy. Suggesting this does not entail the view that writing that is clear without being simplistic can therefore be understood by anyone. Clearly, it cannot and that’s rather the point - the notion that writing is either for ‘us’ and is obscure or for ‘them’ and thus simplified really annoys me. My other point is how insecure Lacan seems in this extract, with its heady mixture of frustration, grandeur and anxiety. It leaves me feeling that Chomsky and Wright Mills are both onto something in their suggestion that intellectual insecurity drives theoretical obscurantism. If one is self-confident about one’s ideas then surely the most natural thing to do would be to communicate them clearly...!?


The craft of giving (bad) presentations (2013-08-07 08:00)

This presentation by Nick Hopwood seems to have circulated quite widely this morning. It’s a satirical presentation attached to [1]this post, visually illustrating all the presentational mistakes he observes in the attached article. It makes a lot of useful points in a very effective way, though given Nick is presumably vaguely aiming this at PhDs and ECRs, it could perhaps have been framed a little more sympathetically given the anxieties which are often attached to presenting your work.


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What I thought was a more substantive omission was the lack of any reflection on presenting without powerpoint. I don't like slides. I never have. I struggle to synchronise myself with them, I'm bad at designing them and they completely preclude any extemporaneity on my part. I started to experiment with not using slides after reading a strange and thought-provoking plea for improvisation in academic life by Steve Fuller in [3]this book. However I've recently started to feel less confident about not using slides, as I've become aware of quite how dramatically the quality of my resulting presentation varies. If I'm in the right mood for it then it goes brilliantly and the notes I have with me are something I use to remind myself of a vague structure (points I want to make and in what order) rather than my 'content' as such. But if I'm not then I struggle to get into 'flow' (i.e. lose myself in the process) and sometimes end up coming awfully close to just reading the bullet point notes I have on my iPad, which is the worst of both worlds really.

I want to persist without using slides unless there is a specific reason for me to actually use them. When it goes well I really enjoy presenting in this way to an extent I simply don’t if I have powerpoint slides on the wall. But I’m going to try and think more creatively about how to use slides as visual aides to accompany a presentation rather than display my argument. I saw Les Back do this really effectively earlier in the week, using images on slides to set the scene while nonetheless sustaining a genuinely conversational style of precisely the sort I aspire to - public speaking as a peculiarly asymmetric form of dialogue rather than monologuing at the audience: a strange style of conversation where the people you are talking to are nice enough to give you 20 mins or more for you to make your point. It’s an extension of those really wonderful kinds of discussions & debates where each is genuinely listening to the other and giving them time to articulate themselves, rather than simply waiting for the other to finish speaking. However I’m a bit sceptical that I can learn to synchronise well enough to make this work for me and suspect that the process of matching background images to particular aspects of my talk will cause me to over-think it and preclude the kind of ‘flow’ without which I struggle to relax when public speaking. It can’t hurt to try though.

Incidentally Steve Fuller offered some great advice about speaking in the blog post linked to below. One thing I particularly liked was his suggestion that you need to “integrate your academic message with your normal mode of being”. I’m not sure how to actively cultivate this but when I think back on talks I’ve done which have gone really well, this seems like a really apt description of what the experience felt like at the time.

If the audience is to get any value-added from an academic talk, then the academic should speak not read the talk. Reading the talk, at best, is good karaoke. To me it always suggests that the academic hasn’t mastered his/her material sufficiently to navigate without training wheels. Ditto for powerpoint presentations, unless one really needs to point to something for added epistemic power. A good academic talk should be more like a jazz improvisation – i.e. the speaker provides some novel riffs on themes familiar from his/her texts that allow the audience to join in, sometimes contributing some novelty of their own.

We live in economically stretched times. Why invite famous drones, whose appreciation you could more cheaply acknowledge by buying their books or citing their articles? Anyone who is in charge of a speaker schedule – be it a seminar series or international conference – should always bear in mind that, in the first instance, it is the speaker – not you – who most obviously benefits from an invitation. It is not unreasonable to request something more adventurous than boilerplate from the speaker. You might even – God forbid! – ask them to address a topic somewhat outside their comfort zone. (Youtube is beginning to provide a resource to make informed judgements about who you should (not) invite.)

The increasing specialisation of academic life is way too often used to condone a multitude of sins
that hover around the concept of ‘competence’. I never ceased to be amazed how often academics are willing to speak to only a rather narrow sense of ‘what they have already prepared’, or how easily flummoxed they get when they’re told they have 20 instead of 30 (or 10 instead of 20) minutes to present. After all, we’re supposed to be in the business of conveying ideas not displaying powers of recitation.


1. http://nickhop.wordpress.com/2013/05/14/how-to-give-a-presentation-that-bores-your-audience-giving-a-rubbish-impression-of-you-and-your-research/
2. http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/24370844
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=KShc4KgTf6cC&printsec=frontcover&q=sociology+of+intellectual+life&hl=en&sa=X&ei=POfnUbWbBhNobIOamCgN&redir_esc=y
4. http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/swfuller/entry/advice_about_academic/

Kip Jones (2013-08-11 16:03:42)
When the BBC covered Performative Social Science at BU’s Qualitative Conference 2010, they wanted to film a ‘bad’ presentation. Fearing the wrath of colleagues if they used one of theirs, we ‘staged’ it instead. It’s the very opening of this short video: “Alternative ways of getting your message across” http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11396474

To Powerpoint or Not to Powerpoint | TASA Youth (2014-01-15 02:09:27)
[…] I was struck by a commentary piece written on the Sociological Imagination blog entitled “The Craft of Giving (Bad) Presentations”. Written by one of the better followed twitter user/sociologists Mark Carrigan, the post […]

Dario Llinares (2014-05-12 12:23:22)
Very good blog Mark. Having just come back from a conference in Portugal I think all of these sins were committed at some point.

Film De Cul Hot D’une Sodomisatrice Sauteuse (2014-05-21 21:12:43)
Une fois de plus un très bon post : j’espère en discuter dans la soirée avec certains de mes potes

www.slideshare.net (2014-07-07 04:36:19)
Encore un article effectivement plaisant

Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing (2013-08-08 08:00)

This [1]wonderful project undertaken by the Department of Anthropology at Durham University has solicited short reflections on writing from an intriguing selection of authors from across the social sciences:

We have written to a number of scholars who have made a significant contribution to the social science literature and asked them to write a short piece (500 to 1,500 words) offering their personal reflections on the process of writing. In these pieces, scholars from a variety of social science disciplines share their thoughts, feelings, pearls of wisdom, anecdotes, theoretical musings and much else likely to give insight
and inspiration to those in the later stages of doctoral writing.

We have had a good response and been able to assemble a series of thought provoking pieces. We have a list of scholars lined up to provide their insights into writing but why not let us know who you would like to see produce a piece by emailing us.

This is very much the sort of idea I had in mind with the [2]Sociological Craft Project, though I guess I hope this will be simultaneously broader (in format and topic) but also narrower (restricted to sociology). Thus far I’ve only worked my way through a few of these short pieces and I’m writing this post in part as a place holder to remind me to come back this material. I’ve thought for some time that projects like this need to be encouraged and could be an important part of postgraduate training. Unfortunately, it is the sort of topic which can too frequently be left homeless within the traditional landscape of scholarly communication. It’s one of many reasons why I find an increasing turn towards academic blogging so exciting, as even those who don’t set out to focus on topics of ‘craft’ invariably shine a light on these ‘backstage’ aspects of academic practice which are usually obscured from view.

Here’s the full selection from the site:

- [4] Irving Horowitz
- [6] Liz Stanley
- [8] Norman Denzin
- [9] Bryan Turner
- [10] J P Roos
- [12] Alan Macfarlane
- [13] Ken Plummer
- [14] Harry F. Wolcott
- [15] Alan Walker
- [16] Jay Gubrium
- [17] Howard S Becker
- [18] Patrick Sullivan
- [19] Arthur W. Frank
- [20] Tim Ingold
- [21] Harvey Molotch
Once more with feeling! | marvelling (2016-06-02 07:22:39)

 [...] Strathern on writing, and the 'initial loss of confidence' (via the sociological imagination project.) You know, just stop what you're doing write now and read that. This. This is vivifying. [...]
Evelyn Ruppert: The economies and ecologies of Big Data (2013-08-09 08:00)


1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/hIFD1l8zJCo?feature=player_detailpage

Noam Chomsky Calls Postmodern Critiques of Science Over-Inflated “Polysyllabic Truisms” (2013-08-10 08:00)

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzrHwDOITt8?feature=player_embedded]

A couple of weeks ago Open Culture posted a great video featuring an [1]interview with Chomsky being rather scathing about Žižek and Lacan. Now they’ve posted another one where Chomsky discusses the political implications of post-structuralist thought in equally scathing fashion. I was amused by the abuse that was directed at the @soc_imagination account after tweeting the link to the last video ("reactionary", “anti-intellectual”, “scientistic”) and look forward to seeing what reaction this video provokes. His suggestion that disciplinary insecurity drives the impulse towards high theory reminded me of a similar claim made by C Wright Mills about grand theory in sociology:
Mills’ position here is an extension of his earlier attack on Parsons and Lazarsfeld, and is just as fierce in tone. He observes that ‘a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences’ (Mills, 1959:239), and adds that this style of writing has nothing to do with the complexity of the subject matter. Mills explains the prevalence of this style, instead, in terms of a quest for status. He declares: ‘Desire for status is one reason why academic men slip so readily into unintelligibility. And that, in turn, is one reason why they do not have the status they desire’ (Mills, 1959:240). This thirst for status is said to be driven by an underlying desire for the sociologist to achieve recognition as a ‘scientist’; something, he argues, that led to sociology written in clear and accessible prose (including, presumably, his own work) to be dismissed by many as mere journalism.


2. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/29/7-8/399.abstract

SI Weekend Reading: The Sociology of Intellectual Faddishness (2013-08-11 08:00)

[1]“The Sociology of Intellectual Faddishness " on Bundlr


‘Diagnostic overshadowing’: Why do people with mental illness get worse medical care? (2013-08-12 08:00)

A depressing but important [1]article by Juliann Garey appeared in the New York Times recently on the subject of "[2]diagnostic overshadowing". It discusses the findings from several new studies which reveal that people who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses consistently receive worse medical treatment than the rest of the patients. The problem is even worse with people, the more serious their mental illness is. As a result, many people with a serious mental illness don't avoid going to the doctor even when they need it. While the avoidance of institutionalised medical care is nothing new, as sociologists of health know well, this problem is particularly worrying because:


That is a problem, because if you are given one of these diagnoses you probably also suffer from
one or more chronic physical conditions: though no one quite knows why, migraines,[6] irritable bowel syndrome and [7] mitral valve prolapse often go hand in hand with bipolar disorder.

Less mysterious is the weight gain associated with most of the drugs used to treat bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, which can easily snowball into [8] diabetes, [9] high blood pressure, high [10] cholesterol and cardiovascular disease. The drugs can also sedate you into a state of zombiedom, which can make going to the gym — or even getting off your couch — virtually impossible."


[12] Juliann Garey’s other work is worth a look, too. She co-edits “Voices of Bipolar Disorder: The Healing Companion” and her novel "Too bright to hear, too loud to see" deals with issues of mental illness.

Noam Chomsky’s Advice to Students (2013-08-13 08:00)

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Soc 710: Social Theory Through Complaining (2013-08-14 08:00)

Response to comment on the post "Cite-seeing in Edirne" (2013-08-14 19:28)

This is my response to gunes’ comment on the post [1]"Cite-seeing in Edirne" - I'm publishing it as a separate post in the hope that it will provoke further discussion. It’s an important topic.
Hi gunes,

Thank you for reading. I’m grateful for your comment because it voices important problems, not just with the essay, but with the effects of history education on Bulgarian national identity. I was very uncomfortable writing and posting it, that’s why it waited in my folders for a whole year. It is very uncomfortable to admit that you were raised and educated so very “blind”, racist, intolerant and irrational - but unfortunately this is exactly how it is and I’m trying to come to terms with it. To answer your questions:

-yes, I, and many people I know, hold a general fear against one particular foreign and muslim country, i.e. Turkey. By extension, other muslim countries as well. I’m really not making this up, and I’m really not proud of it, either.

-the “people are nice” phrase was deliberately simple and sarcastic, it was actually a quote from what someone from my family said during that trip. Listen to the unsaid stuff in that sentence: yes, it’s hard to believe people in country X are just like you, if you’ve rarely had any contact with them, if you’ve spent (like my parents) all your life being immersed in tacit or open anti-X sentiments, everywhere you go, everything you read, anyone you speak to.

When I went to school, in the 1980s and 1990s, we were taught about the “500 years of Turkish Yoke”. My head is filled with dates, events, and names belonging to a national liberation narrative. It was terribly, terribly biased. At some point the textbooks were rewritten to say “Ottoman presence” and then “Ottoman Rule” which is a more balanced term. The thing is, it’s not even just the fault of history classes: the whole national culture is built around the notion that the Liberation (1879) was the just culmination of a 5-century-long black and white struggle between an oppressed Bulgarian “people” and a horrible empire. (do you sense the bitter irony in what i’m saying?)

The main dichotomy which is so present it’s invisible is “us” versus “them”: the nice and oppressed “us” are Bulgarian, Christian and the scary “they” are Turkish, Muslim.

I don’t know what nationality you are - but you clearly aren’t Bulgarian. You saw and voiced tacit problems, taken for granted and very difficult to even see by me or other Bulgarians. You said “administered in the same country” - this is a good way of putting it - but you’d get into a row with many otherwise smart and/or educated people, in many places in my country, if you said this aloud in a conversation. This brief note (I hesitate to call it an essay) is a very tentative attempt to at least notice and admit these things, to myself. As a sociologist who does not directly deal with issues of "race", ethnicity and nationalism, I know too little about these topics both theoretically, and in my own life. I decided to post this unedited in the end, hoping to get some reactions, because I had written it honestly - even though I do agree that it is very unsociological. If anything, it is autoethnographic. It is far more toned down than the stuff I’ve heard in interviews and the stuff I hear every day when I talk to friends and relatives “back home” in Bulgaria. This is how we are - most of us, in general. The reason why nationalism and neonazism are taking root in Eastern Europe, and in Bulgaria in particular, is that sentiments like the ones I wrote in the essay lay unreflected.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13684#comments
Recorded at the British Sociological Association annual conference 2011, sponsored by SAGE. In this interview with Professor John Urry, Professor Chris Rojek discusses the state of Sociology in Britain today and the main developments in Sociology during the 60 years of the BSA.

[1]-http://www.youtube.com/embed/JAdl_XdFja8?feature=player_detailpage

**Visualising the arteries of the city (2013-08-15 11:48)**

One thing I miss about living in a big city is the strange comfort I used to be able to take in the anonymity of the crowd. Though I couldn’t deal with it on a daily basis anymore, there’s still something I find oddly enjoyable about participating in the mass circulation of people which helps constitute the vitality of any city. This feeling came back to me vividly this week when I came across this map on Atlantic Cities which visually maps the NYC subway stems onto its geographical landscape:

[1]-http://www.youtube.com/embed/JAdl_XdFja8?feature=player_detailpage

Aerial photograph courtesy of [2]Dennis Dimick/Flickr. HT Atlantic Cities

There’s an interesting installation at the London transport museum which draws out this interconnectedness of the
city even further, as can be seen in this (low quality) video:


Connections combines striking 3D design, 55,000 model buildings, projection and transport data in what is the UK’s most fascinating and possibly its largest data display.

It shows the scale of London’s transport infrastructure and the interrelationships between travel above and below ground, by projecting travel data onto a 1:3500 scale relief model of London; the circular central area covers about 16 kilometres from Kensington to Greenwich Peninsular.

Visitors can walk behind the relief model to see the geographic relationship of the Underground to the roads above and look through periscopes at the views from London landmarks.

1. http://31.media.tumblr.com/b4ed7046f0a5f5d605c1446c3e0d3ba8/tumblr_mrfmex2Q711sfthfwo1_r1_1280.jpg
Proposal: Quantified Self Research Network (2013-08-16 08:00)

This post is a very tentative first step towards something which I hope others would share my enthusiasm for. I first encountered Quantified Self via Caspar Addyman who I worked with on [1]Your Brain on Drugs. I had to drop out of the project before we finished the [2]Boozerlyzer but it was great to see Caspar subsequently presenting this work at Quantified Self. This led me to read more about both Quantified Self and quantified self, distinguishing the two, as Whitney Erin Boesel convincingly argues we should:

As I so often remind people, there’s a lot more to self-tracking than just Quantified Self; these days, there’s a lot more to “quantified self” (lowercase) than just Quantified Self (title case), too[3][i]. One thing that seems to get lost in all this is that, while Quantified Self may be at the forefront of some new methods of self-tracking, it did not initiate the growing popular interest in self-tracking; rather, Quantified Self came to exist [4]because people were already self-tracking, and some of those people were interested in discussing their self-tracking experiences with others. While Quantified Self does undoubtedly help spread interest in self-tracking (just as increasing interest in self-tracking helps drive the growth of Quantified Self), I think the group’s more significant cultural impact has been to make the very concept of self-tracking more visible—and in so doing, to make tracking-in-general more visible. It is this last function, of making more visible a particularly disconcerting thing that usually fades into the background (e.g. being tracked by others), that I think is at the heart of some people’s deep discomfort when I say “Quantified Self” out loud.

Yet, in losing track of the distinctions between Quantified Self (title case) and “quantified self,” or between Quantified Self and self-tracking generally, we also lose track of what I increasingly believe is most noteworthy about Quantified Self: its reflexivity. “QSers” don’t just self-track; they also interrogate the experiences, methods, and meanings of their self-tracking practices, and of self-tracking practices generally. Over the last two years, I’ve watched reflexive engagement with self-tracking become an increasingly important part of Quantified Self culture (which is something I find very exciting). In fact, I argue that Quantified Self’s most central[5]object of concern has slowly shifted from the tools people use to track, to the data those tools and other self-tracking practices generate, to self-tracking practices as meaningful ends onto themselves, to developing ”[6]reflective capacities” not just through self-tracking practices, but in regard to self-tracking practices. Whether or not one sees Quantified Self as a harbinger of Data Doom, the group is also working to ask questions and to develop practices that could help to resist the very doom that the words “quantified self” sometimes seem to signify.

http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2013/05/22/what-is-the-quantified-self-now/

Since then it’s come to occupy my thinking in a number of ways, as I’ve become increasingly preoccupied by my own self-tracking while also being frustrated and fascinated by the way it’s covered in the media. There are a few particular ways in which this interests me:

1. The thorough engagement with questions of [7]philosophical anthropology which still to be far less central than the subject matter would dictate

2. How particular answers to these questions work, implicitly or otherwise, to animate the framing of self-tracking and debates surrounding it (particularly in the media)

3. The emergence of Quantified Self as an undeniable movement of some sort
4. How the hyper-reflexivity identified by Whitney Erin Boesel should be understood sociologically (this is where my PhD leads directly into this research topic)

5. The political economy of self-tracking and the ethical, theoretical, legislative and political issues it raises

6. How to square the meta-theoretical circle between seeing this as a disciplinary technology and an emancipatory tool for self disciplining.

7. The continuities and discontinuities between digital self-tracking and older technologies of the self

I hasten to add that these are just my interests and I'm sure others would disagree with my framing and/or suggest further topics. In a really insightful article, which is worth reading in full, Deborah Lupton offers an overview of the rise of this self-tracking technology:

The advent of digital technologies able to assist in the collecting, measuring, computation and display of these data has been vitally important in promoting the cause of the self-tracking movement. While people have been able to monitor and measure aspects of their bodies and selves using non-digital technologies for centuries, mobile digital devices connected to the internet have facilitated the ever more detailed measurement and monitoring of the body and everyday life in real time and the analysis, presentation and sharing of these data.

These technologies include not only digital cameras, smartphones and tablet computers, but also wearable wristbands, headbands or patches with digital technologies embedded in their fabric able to measure bodily functions or movement and upload data wirelessly. Tiny sensors can also be incorporated into everyday items such as toothbrushes, pyjamas or watering cans to measure such activities. Blood pressure cuffs and body weight scales can be purchased that connect wirelessly to apps. Global positioning devices and accelerometers in mobile devices provide spatial location and quantify movement. Apps that regularly ask users to document their mood can monitor affective states. There seems hardly a limit to the ways in which one's daily activities can be monitored, measured and quantified. Some committed self-trackers even regularly send stool and blood samples for analysis and use commercially available genetic tests as part of their efforts to construct a detailed map of their bodily functions and wellbeing.


What I'm proposing is an informal and interdisciplinary research network to focus on Quantified Self, quantified self and broader issues of self-tracking (and gamification). An initial event could take the form of a papers session later this year, allowing those who are currently or are seeking to do work in this area to present to a room full of people with similar interests. If this idea is something you're interested in then please get in touch. I'm open to any and all suggestions about how to proceed.

[contact-form subject="Feedback form" to="mark@markcarrigan.net"] [contact-field label="Name" type="name" required="true" /] [contact-field label="Email" type="email" required="true" /] [contact-field label="Comment" type="textarea" required="true" /] [/contact-form]
Call for research participants: being single in Britain today (2013-08-17 08:00)

Forwarded call for participants. Please forward on to your networks and contact Eleanor (details below) for further information.

Call for research participants: Single spaces: Single-life in Contemporary Britain[1]www.singlespaces.co.uk

We are conducting a large-scale, British Academy-funded research project into single-life in contemporary Britain. The research will provide an overview of what it's like to be single in Britain today and the findings will add an important dimension to understanding the changing patterns of intimate life in contemporary society. The research has two stages:

1. The first stage is an online questionnaire: this is open to everyone who is single, lives in Britain, and is aged 18 or over. The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.
2. The second stage consists of individual interviews with a sample of single people: this is currently only open to single people who are 35 or over and who do not have children. At least half of these interviews will be conducted with people who identify as LGBTQIA (as minoritized sexualities are still frequently under-represented in social science research)

Please note, we don’t want to rigidly define what the label 'single' means, as being single means different things to different people, so we leave it up to you to define this term.

Please visit the website above for further information about the project, and for links to help you share the project via Twitter and Facebook.

Many thanks,
Eleanor

—
Dr Eleanor Wilkinson
British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow
School of Geography
University of Leeds
LS2 9JT

1. http://www.singlespaces.co.uk/
BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought- 6th Sept (2013-08-18 08:00)

BSA Meeting Room, London.

We are pleased to announce our speakers for the forthcoming seminar to debate contemporary issues in realist thought. Please see attached flyer for further details and abstracts.

Graham Scambler, University College London

‘Taking interdisciplinarity seriously: realism and explanations of health inequalities’

Sue Clegg, Leeds Metropolitan University

‘Realism as a theoretical resource’

Mark Cresswell, Durham University

‘PEDAGOGY of the PRIVILEGED: Elite Universities and Dialectical Contradictions in the UK’

Dave Elder-Vass, University of Loughborough

‘Disassembling actor-network theory’

Bob Carter, University of Leicester

‘Realism and the Posthuman’

To book, please visit:

For more information on the BSA realist study group please visit:
[2]http://criticalrealism.org/Hope to see you there
Tom Brock, Mark Carrigan and Michelle Farr

[3]bsarealism@hotmail.com
Study group website address: [4]www.criticalrealism.org
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Books, social media and ‘thinking-through-writing’ (2013-08-19 08:00)

For the last couple of weeks I’ve been rereading Margaret Archer’s The Reflexive Imperative and I’ve been blogging about the book[1] on a loosely chapter by chapter basis. I’ve now written eight of these instalments and have a couple more planned before I finish. I’ve gone back to the book for a number of reasons. I’m at the stage of writing about my data at present and, given that I both use Archer’s approach and conducted an extremely similar longitudinal qualitative study of undergraduate students, it seemed likely to be useful in my attempts to get a grip on my data. I also realised from a conversation with her that I hadn’t grasped one of the key points of the book on what was not exactly a thorough reading the first time round a couple of years ago. I’d seen the renewed focus on relationality as an exercise in ‘fleshing out’ the social and cultural circumstances confronted by reflexive individuals rather than, as is the case, it being an important development in understanding how the practice of reflexivity itself emerges. So given that my PhD purports to offer a realist (or ‘Archerian’ which was a label I’d never encountered until it was applied to me this week) framework for biographical research, using Archer’s morphogenetic approach to explain observable biographical patterns without falling into either the objectivist or subjectivist traps which plague biographical research, it was pretty important that I got my head around a major conceptual development in her work, even if I was then to find myself in disagreement with it.

I write all this by way of context because in my developing understanding of [2]’craft’ from a sociological perspective, it’s important that reflections upon a certain practice (e.g. ‘blogging about books’) aren’t abstracted from the who, how, when, why (etc) of the object being reflected upon. So if I’m going to reflect meaningfully on ‘blogging about books’ it matters how and why I did it. In this case two immediate reasons stand out as to why I blogged about this book: (1) I hoped it would be helpful for my PhD (2) I thought it was important, given my intellectual interests, to ensure I really understood this book. As I mentioned, I’d read it before and, as such, it’s difficult to disentangle the effects of ‘blogging about a book’ from ‘rereading a book two years later’. But I’m not sure how much that matters to the point I want to get across.

So what process has blogging about books replaced? To answer this question I only need to look towards the scrawled marginalia, perpetual underlines and promiscuous highlighting which are the legacy of my first reading of this book. They are for the most post completely and utterly incomprehensible to me. Furthermore the correlation between their span (there are very few unmarked pages left in my copy of the book) and the extent to which there were some fairly major points from the book which I didn’t grasp on first read invites obvious questions about how well this method of note taking works. I’ve been realising recently that I’m someone who thinks through writing. I rarely, if ever, know the ‘feel of an idea’ until I’ve tried to articulate it in my own words. Obviously I react to ideas that I’ve not written about but it can often be expressive (“ohhh shiny new concepts”) or entirely relational, predicated on my understanding of how the ideas I’m encountering sit in relation to other ideas with which I’m already properly familiar.
I think this is why I find blogging so helpful. It forces me to think-through-writing in a way which I just can’t replicate unless I know people will be reading what I write. If I write notes by hand they tend to be incomprehensible and pretty useless if and when I attempt to come back to them. If I write notes in a document on my computer that’s purely for my own use then my engagement tends to be flat. I persistently fail to go into it in enough depth to make the whole exercise worthwhile. It sometimes works if I have memos within NVivo or within a Scrivener project but I think in such cases the immediately practical context makes this form of writing a slightly different exercise. Jon Rainford wrote a nice post about blogging and writing a while ago,

In order to be able to write a coherent blog, I need to have read, understood, found a way to succinctly summarise and decided how the ideas in the work sit with my own. Writing this blog has helped me do that in a more concrete way and has helped me explore better not only the issues that I have been blogging about but my understanding of wider issues within Sociology. If you are reading this, you are probably someone who already knew this, certainly the part that writing was key to better understanding concepts and solidifying thinking. What a blog does more than this, is force me to consider if my arguments are strong enough to put out in public, for writing an idea on a pad and publishing it into the blogosphere are two quite disparate things.


This time I simply used index tabs to mark a paragraph which I might need to come back to for purposes of a blog post. The themes for the posts emerged pretty naturally and, now I’ve reread the book, I think it’s disaggregated in my own mind in terms of these subjectively meaningful themes. I paid particular attention to any concept in the book I felt unsure about: reading through, looking at past books and (re)articulating until I’d expressed it in my own language and felt confident that I understood it. I used quotes from the book when they seemed particularly relevant but did so in a way which left them contextualised within my own explanatory narrative. Now this is all indexed on my blog, easily searchable and ready for me to come back to whenever I need it for reference. I’m definitely going to do this again for other books but the amount of time involved means I’ll be very selective about which books I live-blog my way through in this way. But this in itself seems advantageous. The fact I’m confident this quite onerous approach will leave me understanding (pretty much) everything a book has to say raises an obvious question: which books do I care about enough to go to this much effort in pursuit of that outcome?

1. http://markcarrigan.net/tag/the-reflexive-imperative/

Simon Smith (2013-08-21 14:29:52)
>> I rarely, if ever, know the ‘feel of an idea’ until I’ve tried to articulate it in my own words. I’m sure this is quite a common feeling. It’s certainly one that I can relate to personally. But I’ve never felt the need to publish. My most valuable books and articles all have copious notes scrawled in the margins (or, more commonly these days, in the comments boxes on my iPad reader) and I often return to them. But actually I’m sometimes slightly shy of lending those books or forwarding those papers to colleagues for fear of how they might view my sometimes very personal (even cryptic) interpretations. And conversely, if I knew I’d be sharing them with a public, I fear it would constrain my writing at a stage in the thinking process when I need to let my writing be as unconstrained as possible. >> I’m confident this quite onerous approach will leave me understanding (pretty much) everything a book has to say. The way you’ve phrased this leads me to wonder whether the value of blogging

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comes in at a later stage in your thinking than you suspect. Perhaps it’s important that you blogged about the book on a second reading? Perhaps the first reading, and your now incomprehensible margin notes, had a different, more developmental significance similar to the process I’ve described above? Does blogging help you achieve a sort of consolidation or summing up of the lessons you need or want to take from a book, but which might be too closed, too polished, for the relationship we often have with a text on a first reading - particularly if it’s a text that really challenges or provokes us?

Sociological Imagination (2013-08-26 11:58:33)

it’s not that I’ve felt the ‘need to publish’ so much as that this mechanism (interaction between texts, my engagement with them and the specific characteristics of the blog as a communicative tool) has given a real affective ‘shoving power’ to my blogging. I was doing it anyway for extrinsic reasons but it’s become pretty integral to how I think, write and work as a result of this underlying complementarity. It met a need which I only retrospectively realised that I had. “I fear it would constrain my writing at a stage in the thinking process when I need to to let my writing be as unconstrained as possible.” I see what you’re getting at but I find the near opposite is true - it forces me to develop my thinking in a way which (whether it’s a function of laziness, busyness or subjectively being in a perpetual rush - perhaps all 3) I simply don’t do otherwise. “Does blogging help you achieve a sort of consolidation or summing up of the lessons you need or want to take from a book, but which might be too closed, too polished, for the relationship we often have with a text on a first reading – particularly if it’s a text that really challenges or provokes us?” Precisely - though I think you’re right about the specific nature of the second reading.

Why this blog? | Class Injustice (2013-10-10 23:55:12)

[...] To organize my thoughts. Mark Carrigan blogs here why he finds blogging so [...]
These are not new thoughts and feelings, of course. I came across [5]this excellent blogpost today by way of [6]a tweet from Pierre Bourdieu (yes, that Bourdieu). I'm pleased to discover that Jorge Luis Borges has created a myth for my time. Like all good myths, it mystifies. This is the kind of explaining I want to do: I want to gesture, not to spell out. I wonder if academia is the right place for this kind of work? But I will hold that thought for another time.


"Where the fuck do they get their shit from!?": Reality Television, Austerity Politics and Digital Public Sociology (2013-08-20 12:00)

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgTH56HK8hY &w=560 &h=315] It was with some trepidation that I found myself watching Nick and Margaret's We All Pay Your Benefits. This unspeakably contemptible show is presented as an "ambitious experiment" in which Nick Hewer and Margaret Mountford (who weirdly enough finished a PhD in [1]papyrology at UCL last year) "want to discover how much benefit is enough to live on and if work is worth it". As the BBC describes their show:

As the economy struggles and everyone feels the pinch, the country is more divided than ever about how much of our taxes should be spent on benefits for the unemployed. In an ambitious experiment, Nick Hewer and Margaret Mountford want to discover how much benefit is enough to live on and if work is worth it. Four claimants and four taxpayers come face-to-face to explore each other’s lives, examine their values and speak their minds. Will the tax payers feel that benefits are too high, or not enough? And will the claimants decide that hard work is good for them, or will the sacrifice be too much? Set in Ipswich - a town with typical figures for unemployment - this first episode sees the taxpayers spend time shopping, socialising and going through the claimants’ spending to see exactly how their hard-earned taxes are being spent. They must decide if they think the claimants are given enough benefits money or not enough and, with the battle lines drawn between 'scroungers' and 'strivers', this series brings the two sides together to discover if any of them can agree.

I think chunkymark nails it in the quote which I've used as a title for this post: [youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNi _irIZRh] It's pointless to waste energy on mapping all that is [2]conceptually and [3]empirically wrong with this show. It's also pointless to waste energy on condemning the hosts, no matter how much I wanted to [politely disagree with] Nick Hewer as he opined that "this whole debate is fuelled by emotion not fact". But it's nonetheless worth reflecting on how deeply sinister this show is. Tracy Jensen's work on austerity chic is useful for understanding the politics of this show. She describes how,
repeated distinctions are drawn between the out-of-control indebtedness of the past and the 'necessary' lean fitness of the future. These distinctions have been mediated through a range of metaphors, specifically around the 'solvent family', the hardworking family, and above all the responsible family which lives within its means and saves in order to spend, rather than borrows in order to spend.

http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/documents/Jensen_SiM_4(2)2012.pdf

The case for austerity rests upon sustaining the experienced plausibility of these metaphors. If these metaphors lose their intuitive power, if the rhetoric of “there’s no money left in the kitty” ceases to resonate with the mundane day-to-day experience of enough people to preserve a vague constituency reluctantly in support of what is, in essence, a class project of retrenchment then the politics of austerity will begin to fragment. These metaphors coalesce around an underlying equation of the finances of the household with those of the state: an almost palpably absurd conflation which only continues to have purchase on people’s minds because of the relative abstraction which unavoidably characterises any argument to the contrary and crucially because the political deployment of these asinine metaphors is continually buttressed by the distressing tendency within popular culture of which We All Pay Your Benefits is surely the most distressing example yet.

‘Personal responsibility’ is absolutely key to understanding how the financial crisis is being discursively circulated on multiple levels as an individual (not collective) failure. The individual family’s ‘failure’ to be responsible for itself is cast here as a sickness of dependency, for which the remedy is austerity. Just as the late Victorians considered ‘fecklessness’ to be a marker of undeserving pauperism – caused by individual moral failures – so too does contemporary underclass discourse equate poverty with personal irresponsibility.

http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/documents/Jensen_SiM_4(2)2012.pdf

TV shows of this sort work to sustain the mythology of 'Broken Britain' and, through doing so, sustain a political project which presupposes that enough people can be led to ignore the politics of unemployment: the global impacts of neoliberal policy, regional de-industrialisation, global migrations of capital, tax evasion and consolidation of wealth by a new class of super-elites, the wilful destruction of organised labour, and new topographies of work which normalise insecurity. 'Broken Britain' rhetoric ignores the intensified precarity of all labour – the rise of short-term contracts or contractless work, underemployment, low wages, the threat of outsourcing, diminishing returns on maternity pay and sickness pay, the failure to recognise caring responsibilities, 'flexploitation', the shift of education and training costs and risks to the individual and so on (Ross 2009; Weeks 2011; Standing 2011). By locating blame for unemployment in a 'generous' welfare state, these myths fail to recognise how important the welfare state has become in supplementing low paid and precarious work. For example, sixty-one per cent of British children who are officially ‘in poverty’ have at least one parent in work (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2011), a statistic which seriously troubles the attribution of poverty to worklessness.

http://www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk/documents/Jensen_SiM_4(2)2012.pdf

What is disturbing about the show is how knowingly it co-opts the veneer of social scientific intervention while using it to conceal something which is highly staged even by the standards of reality TV. Startlingly brief fragments of interview, as the camera wobbles in a circular motion around a stationary interviewee, near immediately cut into Nick and Margaret on the move - as we should all aspire to be - being driven by their taxi driver while dispensing
quasi-sociological insights into the inner motivations of their participants. The veneer of facticity which the show carefully cultivates works to cloak the comparatively clumsy staging of inter and intra-class antagonism which constitute the show's raison d'être. Its framing as an 'experiment' constituted through fact-finding interventions into the lives of individuals skivers, assessment by the benignly patrician and politically neutral hosts and confrontation with the ever so justifiably frustrated strivers, constructs the individuals subjected to this as case studies of failure in personal responsibility and the sicknesses of dependency culture. The class politics of the show are simultaneously so transparent that they could only be missed by the most reactionary idiot imaginable and yet weirdly invisible, subsumed into the tropes of reality television in a way which indefinitely defers the moment of explicitly political judgement towards which every second of the show is so palpably leading the viewer.

The mobilisation of 'common sense' domesticity to denigrate the skivers reminds me of a well spoken woman on Radio 4's Broadcasting House earlier this year who, without a hint of hostility in her voice, suggested that those on low incomes might be more able to balance their budgets if they learned to make mash and ate toast, as she did in her student days. The air of innocuousness with which people are willing to offer such judgements abstracts them from the context they share with those so judged, as if their own position within the social world is unrelated to any other. It collapses the frame of reference, as does reality TV as a whole, into one subject's apprehension of another's life - with all the unreliability that implies - thus denying its own status as a contentiously ideological cultural product. If the present government were to make a "structured reality TV programme" like The Only Way Is Essex, showing "real people in modified situations, saying unscripted lines but in a structured way" it would surely look very much like We All Pay Your Benefits.

It would free the government from the constraining need for consistency which characterises other forms of political communication, as the mockumentary style confrontations enable any and all characteristics of those playing the role of 'skivers' to be denigrated: Liam may be receiving support from his family (Tories like families, right?), he may be volunteering as a youth worker (I seem to remember something called the Big Society) but given that he is unemployed then any and all facets of his life can be deployed to construct him as an embodiment of what is implied to be a pervasive social trend. The way that reality television allows typicality to be established cinematographically rather than argumentatively (with the pesky factual dialogue that entails) makes this a deeply powerful form of political communication, easily marshalled for the project of building and sustaining a new common sense to underpin the politics of austerity (as Owen Jones has, for instance, convincingly argued about the way that characters from Shameless entered the contemporary political imaginary).

The appearance of John Hills, social policy professor at LSE, is indicative of how irrelevant to the show's purposes these 'experimental' trappings are. In a 1 min fragment from what was presumably a much longer interview, he explains the scale of the public's miscomprehension about the significance of unemployment benefits as part of the entire welfare bill. Both presenters recognise this, Margaret tells Nick that the problem are "pensioners, like you!" and then the show continues as if this never happened. For a moment the act is dropped, as Margaret and Nick have a private laugh about their own social positioning in relation to the show's topic, but then it is just as quickly resumed. In her discussion of contemporary rhetoric surrounding parenting, Jensen observes how policy has moved away from structural explanations of inequality, and towards behavioural explanations which focus on conduct and skills (Jensen 2010). The explanatory power that is attached to individual family’s 'good parenting' has intensified since the economic downturn, particularly through an extended discourse of 'tough love': the elusive, correct balance of discipline and warmth which is said to guarantee educational and social successes. Tough love names the crisis of social immobility as one of parental indulgence, failure to set boundaries, moral laxity and disciplinary incompetence.

Shows like We All Pay Your Benefits function as a sort of empirical case study sitting in a quasi-evidential relationship
to the political explanation of inequality. Occasionally, as Owen Jones has observed with Shameless, these characters are actually cited explicitly. But such absurd invocations are only possible against a background where these modes of representation have become so common place that their cultural articulations are recognisable elements of the political imaginary, even for those who disavow them. It’s perfectly possible to construct alternative modes of representation and establish them as similarly common place such as to disrupt the reproduction of the tiresome and pernicious tropes of austerity politics. For example this is how we could understand the political significance of Cathy Come Home in an earlier social context.

Perhaps public sociology has a role to play here? To "occupy public debate and make inequality matter" as John Holmwood put it earlier this year. I’m not suggesting that social policy researchers start producing mockumentaries but only that multimedia experimentation in the presentation of research, rethinking the craft of communicating sociological knowledge, is a more politically pressing issue for those whose research seeks to understand the social facts of austerity Britain. The way in which We All Pay Your Benefits affects, albeit superficially, the trappings of research is indicative of an opening for, as well as a threat to, sociology. If sociological knowledge fails to effect the change in the social world for which we may have hoped, it’s important that we don’t mistake a communication problem for a problem with the knowledge itself. It’s not simply a problem of academic books and journals, or the technical language contained within, though that doesn’t help. It’s also an issue of how the nature and purpose of communication are understood and how the potential interest of a public is characterised. Someone like Owen Jones uses sociological and social policy research to much greater political effect than the great majority of academics I can think of. Books about social science are frequently in international best seller lists, millions of people watch videos which convey academic ideas and yet sociologists are conspicuous by their absence from what little involvement academic social scientists (usually psychologists, economists and neuroscientists) have in this public activity.

However there’s a limit to the value of the ‘broadcasting’ model of public intellectualism, both in terms of the efficacy of communication and how widespread an activity it can ever be. This is not to denigrate it for a moment, I’m the biggest supporter you’re ever likely to meet - well presumably outside of those involved - of projects like the Great British Class Survey and Reading the Riots which could be taken as emblematic of what public sociology looks like when it reaches the national (and international) level of communicating sociological knowledge, not to mention innovating in its production. I also find it strange and frustrating that Malcolm Gladwell has sold more books about sociology than, I imagine, any sociologist has. Likewise that there’s no obvious sociological equivalent to someone like Steven Pinker. But what really excites me about our present circumstances is the possibility which digital tools present for forms of ‘narrowcasted’ public sociology, as part of a broader set of opportunities to rethink the craft of social research. As will be no surprise to anyone who ever talks to me about this stuff or reads anything I write about it, I think Les Back's arguments about our present opportunities for creatively rethinking our practice are extremely powerful:

While it is a cliché to say that digital technologies and new media impact profoundly on our everyday lives, little attention has been paid to opportunities that digital photography, mobile sound technologies, CD ROMs and online publishing opportunities might offer the social researcher and the practice of research itself. It is still the case that most social scientists view the research encounter as an interface between an observer and the observed, producing either quantitative or qualitative data. Equally, the dissemination of research findings are confined to conventional paper forms of publishing, and research excellence is measured and audited through such forms, be it in monographs or academic journals. It remains the case that in social science the inclusion of audio or visual material in the context of ethnographic social research has been little more than ‘eye candy’ or ‘background listening’ to the main event on the page. The relatively inexpensive nature of these easy-to-use media offers researchers a new opportunity to develop innovative approaches to how we conduct and present social research. There are more opportunities than at any other moment to rethink the craft of social research beyond
the dominance of the word and figure and to reconsider our reliance on ‘the interview’ (often taking place across a table in particular place) as the prime technology for generating ‘data’.


What’s important though is that we see these opportunities in a political context, in terms of the various threats currently facing sociology in particular and the public university as a whole, but also more proactively in terms of our own placement within that political context and our potential role in reproducing or transforming specific elements which can sought through concrete projects enacted either individually or collectively. Digital sociology presents us with new opportunities for what Bourdieu describes as a “scholarship with commitment” - new tools naturally invite discussion about the ends to which they may be applied and, in a communicative context which increasingly foregrounds the ‘backstage’ aspects of scholarly practice, we should strive to capitalise on this fortuitous conjunction of circumstances to think through these possibilities in a deliberately political and public way. Or in other words: if we share a contemptuousness about shows like We All Pay Your Benefits then we can think of collective projects, loosely related to the institutionalised notion of ‘public engagement’, which seek to deploy sociological knowledge in creative ways to ameliorate the ideologically driven diminishment of social solidarity towards which toxic popular culture like this leads. I have no idea what form such a project might take but what I’m suggesting is that the possibilities are literally far greater than they have ever been - we just have to realise the opportunities available to us and construct modes of collaboration which can lead to such commitment driven political interventions.

Incidentally I’ve realised that this discussion in Bourdieu’s Firing Back of ‘public scholarship’ and ‘private commitments’ was actually the spur for the first Call for Papers I did for SociologicalImagination.org and it’s taken me three years to catch up with why the idea occurred and articulate how I see digital engagement (communicating sociological knowledge through digital media) as something which is, potentially, deeply political. I’m not 100 % sure in retrospect if I didn’t misread this part of the book (I intend to reread soon) but I found it interesting to realise how I made this connection back but then seemed to lose it for a long time, until my recent involvement in setting up the digital sociology group.

Why do you care about your research? What is it that makes you want to spend your time exploring this area of the social world? What does it mean for you to gain understanding of these aspects of social life? Our answers to these questions often encompass the biographical, ethical and political. However these aspects of our involvements are often relegated to the background, as the factors seen as relevant to scholarship are too frequently construed in narrowly intellectualising ways.

The Social Imagination is intended as a space in which private commitments can be reconciled with public scholarship. Therefore we are soliciting contributions which explain how the two are linked and thus address the aforementioned questions. This could entail an explanation of your research, an intellectual biography, a political polemic or something else entirely.

Contributions should be between 500 and 1000 words.

http://www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/A687C65D-8752-4406-B028-0AAB803C61B0/0/Soc_Imag_CfC.pdf

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In October 2012, British Sociological Association journal Work, employment and society hosted a one-day conference reflecting on key debates and looking forward to what the future might hold for the discipline and the journal. We are happy to have video footage of the stimulating presentations.

Professor Kalleberg discusses the concept of job quality, indicates why it is important to study, and then illustrates the ways in which this concept has been studied in WES over the past 25 years or so. He also discusses the kinds of research that is needed on this topic in the future.
The Iconic Ghetto: A Reference Point for the New American Colour Line by Elijah Anderson (2013-08-20 20:27)


BSA Annual Conference 2013 Interview with Alice Mah from @SocioWarwick (2013-08-20 20:39)


amie Peck (University of British Columbia) - 'Explaining (with) Neoliberalism'. This was the closing plenary lecture at the 'Neoliberalism, Crisis and the World System' conference organised by Nicholas Gane and Claire Westall at the University of York, UK, July 3rd, 2013. For a full conference programme, see http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/about... Funding for this event came from the British Academy and the Centre for Modern Studies at York.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/0NSskq9rbYU
The Genesis of Value by Hans Joas is a complex book which begins with a deceptively simple question: how do values and value commitments arise? It even states its answer at the outset ("values arise in experiences of self-formation and self-transcendence") before immediately recognising that the meaning of both question and answer are far from transparent and that the reasons for this opacity are far more interesting than the brute presentational fact of them having been offered in two sentences at the beginning of a book:

The concepts employed in both question and answer are not clearly defined – neither in philosophy and the social sciences, nor in the wider public debate about values; they are, in fact, extremely difficult to determine and are often essentially contested. It might be asked: what exactly is a value, for instance, and what is the relationship between values and value commitments? Is the concept of 'value' still an acceptable philosophical concept today at all – or is the public debate about values hopelessly old-fashioned, lagging behind more contemporary issues in philosophy? Can the concept of value remain a key concept in the social sciences once we have recognised the difficulties in operationalizing it for empirical research? Or would it be better simply to replace it with other concepts which better correspond to the methods of various branches of research, concepts such as 'attitude', 'practices' or 'culture'? What actually is the relationship between 'values' and 'norms', categories which are frequently used as if they were interchangeable? (Joas 2000: 1)

This instability of meaning renders ‘hermeneutic efforts’ unavoidable, which presumably goes some way to explaining the book’s strategy of intricately and elegantly weaving an argumentative thread through a whole sequence of modern theorists and philosophers: Nietzsche, James, Durkheim, Simmel, Scheler, Dewey, Taylor, Mead and Rorty. There’s an understated urgency to this exegetical endeavour, deriving from the observation made by Joas early in the book that “In all Western societies today, serious discussions are now taking place about the shift in, and loss of, values, the opportunities and dangers which such processes present, and the necessity of either reviving old values or searching for new ones” (Joas 2000: 2). In this sense, we can see that a philosophical inquiry into the nature of value pursued through textual means can nonetheless have sociological ramifications. Not least of all because “sociological diagnoses often have profound consequences for the intensive public discussions” as the “ parched soil of the public thirstily absorbs the analyses proffered by the social sciences on the subject of the change in and loss of values” (Joas 2000: 4). It’s in this context that Joas sees the ‘abstinence from value’ in the social sciences as deeply problematic, providing an opening for superficial treatments of value or the strategic mobilisation of the issue for political purposes. This politicisation of the value question itself intensifies the intellectual need for social scientific analyses,

Although, therefore, an increasing number of people take seriously and support a politics of values, the answer to the question as to how a stronger commitment to (old or new) values is actually supposed
to come about, indeed, how value commitment arises at all, is still wholly lacking in the public debate. Wide-ranging agreement has only been reached in a negative aspect: that values cannot be produced rationally or disseminated through indoctrination … Value commitments clearly do not arise from conscious intentions, and yet we experience the feeling of ‘I can do no other’ which accompanies a strong value commitment not as a restriction, but as the highest expression of our free will. Without wishing to provide a compendium of tried and tested advice for politicians or educators, this book can be understood itself as a contribution to the fundamental resolution of this question: from what experiences does this apparently paradoxical feeling of an ineligible, and yet voluntary, commitment to values result? (Joas 2000: 5).

However Joas recognises that there are a number of common objections which might be raised in response to such an inquiry. Firstly, some would argue that the question itself is ‘superfluous’ because human action and its value orientations exercise little or no influence on the course of historical change. This is perhaps the crucial objection for the account offered by Joas,

Sociologically, it seems clear to me that the discourse about values must become more intensive the less it is thought that political attitudes or social movements result quasi-automatically from material interests or resources. If we consider, say, ecological movements or waves of religious revival, we see that these certainly do not take place in a space wholly free of interests and independent of resources. But that does not mean, by any stretch of the imagination, that we may attribute a value-orientated character to them only in the sense that movements can develop, after passing through many stages of escalation, a fundamentally alternative value orientation. A radical shift in value orientation can, rather, be constitutive of them. Such a constitutive shift in value orientation certainly does not arise by mere coincidence, either. To explain its genesis, or at least its distribution, we can often cite social structural conditions which first prompted the search for a reinterpretation of the principles justifying a prevailing status hierarchy. But the question of the availability of alternative values, of the affinity of certain belief systems for social structural change and of the conditions for ‘ideological’ innovation, leads back to the irreducible character of the cultural, even in such materialistically influenced diagnoses. (Joas 2000: 6).

Another common objection raised against the discussion of value has parallel roots in liberal and postmodernist thought. In such cases, talk of value is suspected to represent an attempt to impose values on others. In the postmodern version this is construed in terms of the suppression of difference and in the liberal version it is regarded as breaching the priority of the right over the good. As Joas notes, “the liberals prefer the orientation of all to value-free procedures of peaceful co-operation and communication; and the postmodernists an ethos of respect for difference and all-inclusive tolerance” (Joas 2000: 7). Both objections collapse when pursued too doggedly because they inadvertently dramatise their own contradictions: “the liberals must ask themselves whether the value of the value-free procedures they favour must not at least be consensually shared and internalized as value; and the postmodernists cannot avoid portraying tolerance of and respect for the Other itself as utterly non-relativizable value-contents” (Joas 2000: 7).

The third objection Joas addresses is one which disputes the value of an inquiry into the nature of values because of the “complete uncertainty about values” which characterises our contemporary age. However such claims have an uncertain status when analysed, as Joas observes: “even the most dedicated advocate of the uncertainty thesis will not dispute that many people continue to feel absolutely secure in their particular values and react to their violation with intense outrage” (Joas 2000: 8). One way round this tricky empirical fact is to interpret this value-certainty as a “sign of ignorance or as the expression of an historically inadequate consciousness”. Another way to deal with this “discrepancy between widespread subjective-value-certainty and the modern uncertainty
about the foundation of values" is that adopted by the late Robert Bellah and his team in *Habits of the Heart*. One of the many interesting arguments in this astonishing (though flawed) book is their observation that interviewees were unable to justify the value commitments, of which they felt deeply certain, leading to "expressed helplessness, and anger at this very helplessness" (Joas 2000: 9). The disjuncture between subjective value-certainty and objective cultural uncertainty was thus seen to be experienced at the individual level when individuals were challenged to justify those values of which they were so certain. Bellah et al interpreted the "inability to justify value-security contained in this answer as indicative of the loss of a common language which makes such justification easier" (Joas 2000: 9). Their project was fundamentally ameliorative, with this underlying social and cultural pathology "not to be corrected by ensuring that everyone receives the news of uncertainty, but by revising the way we reflect on the foundations of our experience of value" (Joas 2000: 10).

This is true of *The Genesis of Value* itself, in its attempt to "clarify a question which, situated on an anthropological level, is mostly overlooked rather than answered, by empirical research" (Joas 2000: 12). Joas is concerned with "making available the appropriate theoretical tools to describe these experiences" of value orientation and, as such, to "draw us closer to that centre of human experience in which values originate in us" (Joas 2000: 10). The occlusion of these issues has its roots in modern intellectual history:

We can see quite clearly how important post-war schools of thought grew out of highly value-related impulses of the pre-war period, but then endeavoured to emancipate themselves from their value-related origins and to give the impression of their being a constantly advancing, professionalized solution to purely scientific problems .... For one hundred years, and thus since the birth of the academic discipline of sociology, a permanent gulf has divided those who, mainly influenced by economics, view human action as the pursuit of self-advantage or clear interests, or at the very least stable and largely context-independent preferences, and those who emphasise the irreducible character of the normative dimension of human action. The controversy between 'utilitarians' and 'normativists' runs through the entire theoretical development of this discipline, although that does not mean that there have been no attempts to synthesise the rival directions or to find a third way. It is my thesis that both sides on the front-line between utilitarianism and normativism – at least in their previous and present forms – have the greatest difficulties in analysing the genesis of values (and norms). (Joas 2000: 13)

It's in this sense that we can see the quiet ambition underlying the project undertaken by Joas. Not only is he concerned with addressing one of the central pathologies of modern life but he also seeks to reorientate social theory. In fact the two ambitions go hand-in-hand given that the demands of the former are seen to necessitate the latter. What I find so oddly beguiling about this book is the casualness with which these lofty goals subsist throughout such an elegantly crafted sequences of chapters analysing important philosophers and theorists who have contributed in some way to the project Joas now seems to implicitly see himself as concluding.

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Milena Kremakova (2013-08-21 08:25:55)

Seems worth reading, thanks for the review! To take up what you said in the last paragraph, maybe Joas sees his book rather as beginning that reorientation project, and not concluding it? Obviously, it isn't possible to provide a neat answer to such a big question.
Since Foucault, I cannot see such a search for "genesis of values" as another attempt to de-historicize the present liberal humanist values (including the illusion of the control of the values themselves by the individual) rendering them as absolute and natural. It is certainly no accident that Foucault is not mentioned.

And that’s precisely why I don’t like Foucault.

Victor Onrust (2014-05-02 08:46:51)
"Don’t like" ???? Are we having a serious debate or are we on Facebook? NB could you install the Wordpress options to be informed of new reactions by mail?.

Sociological Imagination (2014-05-02 13:01:35)
Neither! No idea how to do that sorry.

William Davies - 'The Revenge of the Social' (2013-08-21 14:00)

[IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/LEKr04ToSuU]
York, UK, July 3rd, 2013. For a full conference programme, see http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/about...
Funding for this event came from the British Academy and the Centre for Modern Studies at York.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/LEKr04ToSuU

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**Beardyman's polyphonic me (2013-08-21 22:37)**

Beardyman, renowned beatboxer who we featured [1]here, describes the machine he and his collaborators have built to overcome the limitations of the human voice:

IFRAME: [2]//www.youtube.com/embed/dIh8KBOOkYU

2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/dIh8KBOOkYU

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Reseaching Affect and Psychosocial Studies (2013-08-22 08:00)

For those interested in psychosocial approaches to research, this video series I just stumbled across will be of interest. It's from a seminar series which was jointly organised by people from Cardiff University and City University a few years ago. It aimed to "bring recent interest in affect with older traditions, especially those developed in relation to psychoanalysis, thus bringing different traditions of work into dialogue with each other". I've included a quick snippet of Wendy Hollway below - you can find the full selection of videos [1]here.

[vimeo 12945183 w=400 h=300]

I personally find this incorporation of psychoanalytic concepts deeply problematic in terms of both their application outside of clinical settings and the far from clear meta-theoretical criteria upon which this quasi-psychoanalytical toolbox is constructed. But I also find it very interesting and, if I'm correct in my understanding of what motivates it, I'm largely persuade by the underlying direction of the travel i.e. the need to recover the individual as an explanatory variable within social research without construing the subject in a rationalistic and/or self-transparent fashion. I'm just sceptical about the method adopted, effectively amounting to the psychoanalytic reading of a socially situated subject - peering into the inner depths of concrete individuals. It doesn't solve the underlying problem of how individual and society (agency/structure, micro/macro, subjectivity/objectivity etc) are interconnected - instead it just 'drills down' into one side of the dichotomy.


Economists and the Politics of Austerity (2013-08-23 08:00)

This wonderful post by [1]Simon Wren-Lewis, who is far and away my favourite economics blogger, gets to the heart of austerity politics and its implications for economics as an academic discipline. The underlying question has long fascinated me: are economic ideas adopted by political actors as clothing for pre-existing policies or do these ideas actually shape political agendas in their own right? As Keynes purportedly remarked, "even the most practical man of affairs is usually in the thrall of the ideas of some long-dead economist". It's an instance of a broader theoretical question about the autonomy of culture: how and to what extent are ideas causally efficacious? But dealing with the question at that level of abstraction isn't enormously enlightening, which is why I find such a concrete instance of these issues (the role of economic ideas in formulating and justifying austerity politics) so interesting. Krugman offered an interesting perspective on this after the Reinhart and Rogoff scandal,

But what did go wrong? I've been seeing a lot of comments along the lines of “They're all just tools of Pete Peterson”; so I guess I should say that this is, in these cases, way too crude an interpretation.

Notice that I say “in these cases”. There are indeed plenty of economists who are essentially hired guns for interest groups, and they don't all work at right-wing think tanks. But the temptations that led to the current affair are, I'd argue, nowhere near that crude.

Start with R-R. The fact is that Carmen and Ken are fine economists. Carmen has been doing terrific empirical work on banking crises for a long time. Ken is arguably the world’s leading international macroeconomic theorist. In fact, the main reason I knew that the case for fiscal policy remained strong
even in the context of New Keynesian models was that I carefully read the canonical text by Obstfeld and Rogoff.

So what happened here? My interpretation is that after writing a very good book, R-R dashed off a careless paper on debt and growth that was so much what the VSPs wanted to hear that it made them instant celebrities in a way they hadn’t been before — and they didn’t know how to say stop the merry-go-round, we want to think about this a bit harder. The temptation involved was one of fame and becoming a part of the alleged real world, not some crude mercenary consideration.

I think his point is an important one: we need to recognise that think tanks provide a mechanism for the consolidation of ‘hired guns’ (as part of a broader process of restructuring in the ‘market place of ideas’) but that self-interest can serve to mobilise academic endeavour in ways which extend far beyond ‘crude mercenary considerations’. But as Wren-Lewis observes, pursuit of this individual self-interest may prove extraordinarily damaging for the discipline as a whole:

As I argued in a recent post, what we have here is a combination of two things. First a strong political force that wants deficit reduction to be the focus of policy because it sees this as a useful way of reducing the size of the state. Second, public perceptions that try and understand events in terms of what they know: their own borrowing and spending decisions. So the need for immediate austerity becomes the dominant policy almost everywhere. I get frustrated sometimes that some colleagues, naturally concerned about the details of academic debate, cannot see the bigger picture here. The bigger picture is the marginalisation of our discipline – used when it suits a particular political purpose, but ignored otherwise. If policymakers and the pundits just pick up economic ideas when its suits them, and when the analysis or facts do not suit them just make stuff up (examples from US and UK), economic analysis just becomes fodder for speech writers. That reduces the discipline to an academic game, and soon those same people will ask: why are we paying people just to play games?

So how do we get macroeconomics back into fiscal policy making? First, we need to sort between politicians and political parties that are quite happy with the current state of affairs, and those who are not. Those who are not need to fight fire with fire, replacing one bit of homespun thinking with another which gets us closer to how policy should be made. One way of doing that is to replace the ‘state as an overextended household’ idea with the ‘state as an innovative firm’.

I find his proposed solution quite compelling. Rather than nervously attempting to triangulate their way out of a corner that the Conservatives have backed them into, the forceful promulgation of an alternative metaphor (the state as “a firm that decides to undertake these investments by borrowing when borrowing is cheap”) could be an effective strategy for Labour. But what really interests me about this post is his diagnosis of the underlying political situation facing economics as an academic discipline. Tom Medvetz has offered a really astute analysis of the underlying structural changes that have transformed the interface between the academy and politics in the United States over the last half century:

While social scientists with little left to prove in the academy can afford to reinvest their academic capital in public debate – and often do – rank-and-file scholars have little incentive to follow this route [...]
growth of think tanks over the past forty years has played a pivotal role in undermining the relevance of autonomously produced social scientific knowledge in the United States by fortifying a system of social relations that relegates its producers to the margins of public debate. To the degree that think tanks arrogate for themselves a central role in the policy-making process, they effectively limit the range of options available to more autonomous intellectuals, or those less willing to tailor their work to the demands of moneyed sponsors and politicians [...] The rise of think tanks must therefore be set analytically against the backdrop of a series of processes that have contributed to the growing subordination of knowledge to political and economic demand – including the reassertion of control over the economy by holders of economic capital, the development of specialised forms of political expertise, the growth of the mass media as a conduit for the imposition of market forces into politics, the corporatization of the university, and the withdrawal of the state from the financing of public education. The question posed acutely by the rise of think tanks in America concerns the social value of social scientific knowledge itself: Put simply, should money and political power direct ideas, or should ideas direct themselves?

Tom Medvetz, Think Tanks In America 225-226

The diagnosis offered by Wren-Lewis concerns, from this perspective, the long term implications for academic economists of the tendency to, as Medvetz describes it, “engage in policy debate by imitating the style of intellectual production institutionalized in the space of think tanks”. While it’s not possible to prevent policymakers and pundits from ‘picking up’ economics ideas when it suits them, this deleterious trend rapidly intensifies with each aspirational economist who actively embraces this situational logic in the pursuit of self advancement (or ‘relevance’). Could the impact agenda be seen as an attempt to institutionalize this strategy within the academy, rather than merely leaving it to the power of incentive structures emanating from outside academic institutions? Even acquiescence to it helps perpetuate the process. The only solution would be for more economists to engage in public debate, including on Twitter and blogs, though as Medvetz points out, this is a strategy primarily open to those who have ‘little left to prove in the academy’.

1. http://mainlymacro.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/bringing-economics-back-into-fiscal.html
5. http://mainlymacro.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/bringing-economics-back-into-fiscal.html

Omni Reboot: A new website for philosophical science fiction (2013-08-23 12:00)

Two weeks ago, a New Jersey based venture launched a new web magazine in the heritage of Bob Guccione’s Omni. Besides publishing the Penthouse magazine, Guccione cared deeply about art and science, as Claire Evans, editor of [1]Omni Reboot [2]claims. Trying to catch the spirit of the apparently influential science-fiction magazine of the eighties and nineties, the reboot sees itself at [3]“the intersection of science, technology, art, culture, design, and metaphysics”. The perceptible future and technology enthusiastic overtone of the publication seems to be counter-balanced by the willingness to engage with the real and potential horrors of the past and future techno sphere. Stories about illustration [4]artwork for Frank Herbert’s Dune cycle, about the [5]works of the Strugatsky brothers and a [6]fiction piece by Bruce Sterling are among the first publications of the new magazine and signal a profound sense for quality philosophical science fiction.
Moritz Reiter ([8]reitermoritz AT icloud.com) lives in Berlin. In the little spare time he has besides that, he studies for a masters in history at the Humboldt-University of Berlin, with a special interest in the history of the net.

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CfP: Beyond Binaries: Exploring the Psychosocial (2013-08-24 08:00)

The idea of the psychosocial (or psycho-social) can be traced back to Sigmund Freud's early writings, particularly 'The Future of an Illusion' and 'Civilization and its Discontents' address sociological notions of structures, classes, society, the masses as well as psychoanalytic concepts of the individual, the psyche, the Superego, drives, etc.

Many scholars after Freud have explored the dualism of individual and society, or the social and psychical and ways to think the two in conjunction as opposed to a binary. From the Frankfurt School's Freudian-Marxist perspective to Norbert Elias, to contemporary psychosocial studies in Britain and the US to name just a few, there is
an academic field that is about overcoming theoretical and epistemological boundaries between micro and macro, between the individual and the social. It is this tradition that marks the starting point for the conference.

What is the psychosocial? What theoretical and empirical scholarship is helpful in thinking about it? How can the idea of the psychosocial be developed further?

We invite MA or PhD students who would like to present their research, be it of an empirical or theoretical nature, that can be broadly situated within psychosocial studies or that addresses ideas in relation to individual psyche's and society. Papers should be 20 minutes in length and work in progress papers or the presentation of an idea or thought are very welcome.

The conference will be an informal opportunity to share research with others and to network and meet other researchers.

Please submit abstracts of max. 500 words along with a short bio to Jacob Johanssen (jacob@cyborgsubjects.org) and Siobhan Lennon-Patience (u9919166@uel.ac.uk) by November 4th, 2013.

The conference will be held on December 7th at the University of East London, UK and is organised by the Psychosocial Studies Postgraduate Group [1]http://www.facebook.com/PsychosocialPostgradGroup) and supported by UEL (www.uel.ac.uk).

1. http://www.facebook.com/PsychosocialPostgradGroup

‘The New Normal’ – Work and Performance Management in an Age of Recession by Phil Taylor (2013-08-24 12:00)
In October 2012, British Sociological Association journal Work, employment and society hosted a one-day conference reflecting on key debates and looking forward to what the future might hold for the discipline and the journal. We are happy to have video footage of the stimulating presentations.

WES was founded to address the world of work with a more encompassing understanding than the institutional focus central to academic industrial relations. This was reflected in the early issues of the journal, in which trade unions barely appeared. Over the years, they have received more attention, while the sociology of trade unionism (not only in the pages of WES) has become more sophisticated.

Yet ironically, actually existing unions have almost universally been in decline and on the defensive over the same period: hence Professor Hyman's reference to the owl of Minerva. Should sociologists be concerned? And what is to be done?

Richard Hyman
CfP: Quantified Self and Self-Tracking (2013-08-25 08:00)

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in public and academic interest in the use of devices or techniques for the accumulation, aggregation and analysis of personal data. Apps for mobile phones such as Track My Run and body tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike’s Fuelband have perhaps garnered the widest attention with their ability to passively collect data on everyday activities which can then be analysed and shared with others. There is, however, more to quantified self than the mainstream media picture of obsessive “techies”. Many people engaged in “life logging” collate data on mood and experiences often without a direct quantitative element. While a relatively formalised arm of the quantified self movement has formed, through the Quantified Self group based in San Francisco, not everyone involved in quantified self activities is affiliated with Quantified Self. This formalised movement, as well as the broader cluster of practices and orientations which are coalescing within and beyond it, point to commercial and political connections which have yet to be fully explored.

The new Quantified Self research network will explore the broad implications of this loose set of practical and ethical approaches to understanding bodies, psyches and everyday practices. While we are interested in exploring the practices and techniques of assessment we think it is equally important to understand the often novel ways in which the diverse types of analysis enable new forms of reflecting on the embodied self and relations with others. We hope to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue around this multitude of emerging issues, in the belief that historical, philosophical, cultural, sociological, psychology, economic, technological and political approaches all have a role to play in understanding this fascinating trend.

The network aims to:

- Build network of scholars interested in qs
- Explore possibilities for further research and collaborations
- Share ideas about substantive issues
- Support access and development of postgraduate and early career researchers
- Develop sociological approaches to understanding qs
- Identify potential for disciplinary collaborations
- Develop relations with interested parties beyond the academy
- Potentially developing some sort of web resources (perhaps as part of the BSA Digital Sociology Groups’s website)
We've organised an initial seminar at the University of Leeds on **September 17th**. If you would like to do a short talk (20 mins max) about your research, intended research or simply to explain the intellectual basis for your interest in quantified self then please contact network organisers: Mark Carrigan ([1]mark@markcarrigan.net) and Christopher Till ([2]christophertill@hotmail.co.uk) with a short abstract and bio. Full details will be released soon for those who do not wish to present but would like to attend on the day. Furthermore, please get in touch if you would like to be kept informed about upcoming event or otherwise participate in the network.

[1]mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net  
[2]mailto:christophertill@hotmail.co.uk

BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought- 6th Sept (2013-08-25 10:00)

BSA Meeting Room, London.

We are pleased to announce our speakers for the forthcoming seminar to debate contemporary issues in realist thought. Please see attached flyer for further details and abstracts.

**Graham Scambler**, University College London

‘Taking interdisciplinarity seriously: realism and explanations of health inequalities’

**Sue Clegg**, Leeds Metropolitan University

‘Realism as a theoretical resource’

**Mark Cresswell**, Durham University

‘PEDAGOGY of the PRIVILEGED: Elite Universities and Dialectical Contradictions in the UK’

**Dave Elder-Vass**, University of Loughborough

‘Disassembling actor-network theory’

**Bob Carter**, University of Leicester

‘Realism and the Posthuman’

To book, please visit:  
In many academic circles today anyone who tries to write in a widely intelligible way is liable to be condemned as a ‘mere literary man’ or, worse still, ‘a mere journalist.’ Perhaps you have already learned that these phrases, as commonly used, only indicate the spurious inference: superficial because readable. The academic man in America is trying to carry on a serious intellectual life in a context that often seems quite set against it. His prestige must make up for many of the dominant values he has
sacrificed by choosing an academic career. His claims for prestige readily become tied to his self-image as a 'scientist'. To be called a 'mere journalist' makes him feel undignified and shallow. It is this situation, I think, that is often at the bottom of the elaborate vocabulary and involved manner of speaking and writing. It is less difficult to learn this manner than not. It has become a convention – those who do not use it are subject to moral disapproval. It may be that it is the result of an academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre, who understandably wish to exclude those who win the attention of intelligent people, academic and otherwise.

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pg 218

Felix (2013-08-26 12:44:28)
You should mention that this was published in 1959. I saw a link on Twitter and had never heard of the book or author.

Karamat (2013-10-05 12:20:15)
I have recently discovered The Sociological Imagination and the Appendix: On Intellectual Craftsmanship. All i can say it has made me see my whole world very differently

Sorry that should have Sociological. Third time lucky

Sorry that should have said Sociological. What is happening today?

What is Sociology for? (2013-08-26 19:13)

But, sometimes, asking what something is ‘for’ can, if understood as an expository tactic, a starting-point rather than a ruling, be a means of helping us to clear away the discursive debris that accumulates round any widely used category. The very asking of the question in this slightly over-insistent, finger-jabbing form may be enough to encourage reflection to cut through the incidental clutter and begin to wonder what kind of response could count as a useful answer. From then on, it is probably sensible not to try to press the question further in this narrow form, but to let rumination extend itself, brooding on the diversity that may shelter under a single term, pondering a series of characterizations or historical instances rather than seeking a single defining proposition.

- [1]What are Universities For? by Stefan Collini

Collini asks this questions of universities in general. But let’s think of sociology in particular: what is Sociology for?
In October 2012, British Sociological Association journal Work, employment and society hosted a one-day conference reflecting on key debates and looking forward to what the future might hold for the discipline and the journal. We are happy to have video footage of the stimulating presentations.

WES has published critical political economy by authors like Tony Cutler and Theo Nichols which has dissected the confusions of mainstream economics and managerialism. But we have yet to develop a constructive political economy which explains how we can manage the current conjuncture in the interests of labour and for the common good. This presentation takes up this task for the UK where the worsening regional problems of the ex-industrial districts are nested in a stalled UK economy. And there is a policy impasse because the British central state increasingly lacks the political will and technical capability to solve deep seated problems through macro economic management or structural reform or industrial policy.

Against this background, much depends on local and regional initiatives which challenge current limits on what is economically thinkable and politically doable. The primary focus should be on managing what’s left. This is the foundational economy (health, education and welfare, utility infrastructure, retail and food processing) which employs more than 40% of the workforce. The new imaginary would
involve breaking with policies that promote competition and perfect the market. Instead local and regional actors should press initiatives for coordination and networked provision within the regional economy with limits on value extraction.

Karel Williams
The Foundational Economy in Britain
Director of Centre for Research on Socio Cultural Change (CRESC) , Manchester Business School


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Against 'Shaking Up' the Social Science (2013-08-27 08:00)

A recent blog post by [1]Nicholas A. Christakis on the New York Times site about the need for 'shaking up' the social sciences has provoked a great deal of debate online. The author argues that while the natural sciences have flourished in the last century, giving rise to "whole new fields of inquiry" resulting from "fresh discoveries and novel tools", the social sciences have stagnated:

They offer essentially the same set of academic departments and disciplines that they have for nearly 100 years: sociology, economics, anthropology, psychology and political science. This is not only boring but also counterproductive, constraining engagement with the scientific cutting edge and stifling the creation of new and useful knowledge. Such inertia reflects an unnecessary insecurity and conservatism, and helps explain why the social sciences don’t enjoy the same prestige as the natural sciences.


Christakis argues that social scientists “too often miss the chance to declare victory and move on to new frontiers” and instead plug away at the same old topics with diminishing returns. I’ve suggested[3]elsewhere that we can easily find [4]flaws in explanations of the [5]lack of cumulative progress (i.e. the “the creation of new and useful knowledge” and “moving on” to new topics when we’ve “figured this topic out”) in sociology which locate it in the cultural tendencies of sociologists. Nonetheless his case is certainly a provocative one:

So social scientists should devote a small palace guard to settled subjects and redeploy most of their forces to new fields like social neuroscience, behavioral economics, evolutionary psychology and social epigenetics, most of which, not coincidentally, lie at the intersection of the natural and social sciences. Behavioral economics, for example, has used psychology to radically reshape classical economics.

[...]

It is time to create new social science departments that reflect the breadth and complexity of the
problems we face as well as the novelty of 21st-century science. These would include departments of biosocial science, network science, neuroeconomics, behavioral genetics and computational social science. Eventually, these departments would themselves be dismantled or transmuted as science continues to advance.

Some recent examples offer a glimpse of the potential. At [6]Yale, the [7]Jackson Institute for Global Affairs applies diverse social sciences to the study of international issues and offers a new major. At [8]Harvard, the sub-discipline of physical anthropology, which increasingly relies on modern genetics, was hived off the anthropology department to make the department of human evolutionary biology. Still, such efforts are generally more like herds splitting up than like new species emerging. We have not yet changed the basic DNA of the social sciences. Failure to do so might even result in having the natural sciences co-opt topics rightly and beneficially in the purview of the social sciences.

New social science departments could also help to better train students by engaging in new types of pedagogy. For example, in the natural sciences, even college freshmen do laboratory experiments. Why is this rare in the social sciences? When students learn about social phenomena, why don’t they go to the lab to examine them — how markets reach equilibrium, how people cooperate, how social ties are formed? Newly invented tools make this feasible. It is now possible to use the Internet to enlist thousands of people to participate in randomized experiments. This seems radical only because our current social science departments weren’t organized to teach this way.

But is it plausible? From my perspective the (structural) incentivisation of innovation as an end in itself is one of the causes of a lack of cumulative progress rather than something which could act as its solution. An environment where ‘publish or perish’ reigns leads to an ideational arms race, with rewards going to those who can publish often while presenting novel ideas which shape the subsequent agenda. So we have to be very careful about matching this tendency with new (cultural) incentives disparaging work on the ‘settled subjects’ and shifting resources and acclaim to ‘new fields’: an intensification in the rate at which X studies and neuro-X proliferate wouldn’t, at least as an aggregate tendency, make the situation worse not better. The picture Christakis paints of a culture gap between the disciplinarity of the social sciences and the transdisciplinarity of the natural sciences is also rather overdrawn, as [9]Dirk vom Lehn argues on Org Theory:

I am surprised Christakis puts forward the argument that “the social sciences have stagnated” over the past years. He gives no empirical evidence for such a stagnation of the social scientific disciplines and I wonder what the basis for this argument is. If he was to attend the Annual Conference of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in New York in August he will see how sociology has changed over the past few decades, and he will be able to identify specific areas where sociologists have impacted developments in policy, technology, medicine, the sciences, the arts and elsewhere.

His argument ignores also the long-standing cooperation between social scientists, technology developers, computer scientists, medics and health services providers, policy makers, etc. etc. etc. For example, for several decades social scientists, computer scientists and engineers have collaborated at research labs of PARCs, Microsoft and elsewhere, jointly working to develop new products and services.

Furthermore, argues vom Lehn, these fields give the impression of moving onwards while producing the "new and useful knowledge" Christakis calls for while ignoring much of the research that has been done elsewhere.
Christakis refers to the development of new fields like neuroscience, behavioral economics and others that "lie at the intersection of natural and social sciences". Because "behavioral economics" is popular also with policy makers let us take this new field as an example: one of the key findings of this new field is the importance of "non-rational action" for people's decision making. I very much enjoy the creative research undertaken by scholars in this field, but it is quite surprising that it gets away with by-and-large disregarding 100 years of social scientific research. Critique of arguments that prioritize rational action over other types of action has been key to Max Weber's famous work in the early 1900s, Talcott Parsons' discussion of the utilitarian dilemma, Harold Garfinkel's breaching experiments and many other sociologists' research and teaching.


The fields which Christakis sees as exemplars of what a 'shaken up' social science would look like are, in part, consequences of the very trends he decries. The superficial plausibility of such arguments needs to be interrogated. The common-sense tone underlying them only remains coherent by straightforwardly ignoring what has largely been established within the social sciences and the impact which the earlier discussed valorisation of innovation has had on underlying tendencies towards faddishness which are already deeply pathological:

Articles like Christakis' imply that current social sciences have little impact on society, policy makers and knowledge development more generally, whilst research in the natural sciences, in their view, has more "impact". They, however, overlook and disregard social scientific research that has been forgotten because scholars and policy makers follow the latest fads and fashions, such as so-called Big Data research and the opportunities of brain-scans, rather than using and further developing the existing theoretical, methodological and empirical basis of the social sciences. Moreover, they pretend that the social sciences and the natural sciences basically could achieve the same impact, if only the social sciences would make appropriate use of scientific methods. Thereby, however, they ignore what social scientists have shown over and over again over the past 100 years or so, i.e. that the social is fundamentally different from nature; it always is already interpreted when the social scientist arrives. The 'social' requires interpretation of a different kind than nature as encountered and then interpreted by natural scientists. Furthermore, people often change their behavior in response to the research process and in response to social scientific findings. Nature remains nature. Apples keep falling down from trees.


As vom Lehn observes, these presumably well meaning interventions can end up playing into the hands of those seeking to reshape the university and defund the social sciences. Particularly within the UK context, it fits within a political agenda that seeks 'selectivity' and 'concentration' in higher education:

Two aspects of this drive for 'efficiency' are significant. The first is a concern to encourage 'concentration and selectivity'. This involves the argument that not all universities should conduct research across all areas (selectivity) and that research capacity should be concentrated in fewer universities (concentration). The second is that economic and social impacts of research should play a larger part in the determination of which projects should be funded (via the research councils) or should be rewarded with QR funding from the REF.

It doesn't take a great deal of imagination to see how the strategy suggested by Christakis for social science to establish a “small palace guard to settled subjects and redeploy most of their forces to new fields” coheres with the logic of concentration and selectivity. The overwhelming bulk of funding will be distributed towards the narrowly defined ‘priority areas’ with what funding, if any, remains for research outside these areas being provided from within wealthy institutions. Though institutions themselves will have an impetus to use ‘seed funding’ to help develop potential bids and hence there's the possibility of the ‘priority areas’ coming to be reproduced internally. This broader political project has designs on reshaping disciplinarity, as Holmwood argues:

In the language of science policy studies, it is clear that the impact agenda is designed to reinforce the reproduction of what Nowotny et al (2001) call mode 2 knowledge. This consists in interdisciplinary, applied problem-based knowledge, which they contrast with discipline-based knowledge. Whereas the former involves the external beneficiaries of research drawn into the research process as its co-producers, the latter is frequently described in terms of disciplinary hegemony and internal audiences.

In line with those who think that the impact agenda can be shaped toward the ends of public social science, Nowotny et al (2001) set out an attractive image of a new „public agora“, drawing upon socially distributed expertise. Yet the reality seems to be rather different, namely the rise of privately-negotiated user-researcher relationships and the replacement of disciplinary hierarchies by those of government strategic priorities operating though funding agencies (with individual universities increasingly mirroring those hierarchies with their own strategic priorities adapted to the priorities of funding bodies)

[...] There are beneficiaries of the shift to mode 2 knowledge. Indeed, Nowotny et al suggest that their identification of mode 2 knowledge has been used ‘politically’, writing that, "those with most to gain from such a thesis espoused it most warmly – politicians and civil servants struggling to create better mechanisms to link science with innovation; researchers in professional disciplines such as management, struggling to wriggle out from under the condescension of more established, and more 'academic', disciplines" (2003: 179).

[...]

According to Abbott, a problem-based academic system would be “hopelessly duplicative” (2001: 135). Disciplines are repositories of 'problem-portable' knowledge, and “the reality is that problem-based knowledge is insufficiently abstract to survive in competition with problem-portable knowledge" (2005: 135). In fact, this is something that is very familiar from the ESRC’s (2006) own engagement with perceived problems of research capacity in applied interdisciplinary areas (for example, in management studies) and its articulation of a distinction between ‘exporter’ and ‘importer’ subjects to distinguish between academic disciplines and interdisciplinary applied subject areas.


Though it may be done with the best of intentions, drawing these sorts of boundaries between ‘settled subjects’ and the ‘new frontiers’ is politically dangerous. It misconstrues the failure to cumulatively ‘move on to new topics’ when we’ve ‘figured this topic out’ and risks intensifying the very deficiencies it purports to ameliorate. It also implies a
view of "the creation of new and useful knowledge" which is homologous to that underlying the political project to instrumentalise and/or defund the social science ("if it’s not useful, why should we pay for it?") and, though many advocates of the former would reject the latter, they nonetheless risk finding themselves inadvertently acting as suppressive fire while the intellectual traditions they seek to equip for new challenges are instead dismantled around them.

1. http://sociology.yale.edu/people/nicholas-christakis
7. http://jackson.yale.edu/

Bill Cooke (2013-09-01 17:30:15)
Thanks for this, I agree with all you write. However, I think it very important to acknowledge that the piece to which you respond emanates from the USA, and reflects the particular socio-politics of that place. Even in challenging US anti-intellectualism, we are in danger of colluding in the view that the US is some kind of centre that should be taken notice of. This is of course, sustained by the fact that most of us can’t read Portuguese, Hindi, Mandarin, or any other language, so we are extremely limited in what we can and do understand of social science. Indeed, if we really wanted to disrupt social science, perhaps we should disrupt those institutions which privilege Anglophonist social science, and argue for a new social science which is not restricted by linguistic hegemony.

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-02 11:38:55)
I think that’s a really important point Bill - it’s something I’ve thought about a lot given that google analytics tells us that our website has an extremely large non-Anglo American audience. It’s less of an issue for Milena who I run the site with but it’s difficult for me not to fall into perpetuating something I don’t want to as a monolingual young British sociologist who maintains this site in my spare time.

» Shaking up the social sciences The Sociological Imagination (2014-10-17 08:01:18)
[...] Higher Education has run an interesting article by Amanda Goodall and Andrew Oswald. I wrote a response to the original article by Christakis that sparked this debate (in fairness he didn’t choose [...]
Jodi Dean (Hobart and William Smith Colleges) gives the opening plenary lecture at the 'Neoliberalism, Crisis and the World System' conference organised by Nicholas Gane and Claire Westall at the University of York, UK, July 2nd, 2013. For a full conference programme, see http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/about... Funding for this event came from the British Academy and the Centre for Modern Studies at York.


The craft of co-writing (2013-08-28 08:57)

As with more things in life than I care to admit, the notion of co-writing has always been loosely tinged by association with images from Frasier. Witness the wonderful episode where Frasier and Niles attempt to write a book together:

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URC0Q885miA &w=640 &h=400]

However I've done it twice in recent months (one a chapter now under review and one a paper near completion) and it's actually gone very well. There's an obvious sense in which it's simply easier to co-write a 6000-10000 word long piece of work than it is to write it on your own. But is this a good rationale in and of itself? I'm not sure that it is, leaving me rather suspicious of the fact that this is the defining impression left with me after having now done it twice.

What have your experiences of co-writing been like? Is it something you've done regularly? Is it something you'd like to do but feel reticent about? What do you think it needs to work well? Has it ever gone badly and, if so, why? We'd love to know what you think about this. If you'd like to submit a short guest post as part of our sociological craft project then please get in touch: mark AT markcarrigan.net
CfP: Hard Times – Austerity and Popular Culture (2013-08-28 14:15)

Although the British Prime Minister David Cameron popularised the renowned axiom ‘the age of austerity’ in a speech of 2009, political discourse has long given shape to popular rhetoric on the subject. The sentiments of ‘make do and mend’ and ‘boom and bust’ offers two such examples that have filtered into popular and national conscious. Indeed, there have been memorable occasions when political parties have sought to appropriate the vehicle of popular culture to articulate their agendas; who can forget Tony Blair’s use of the D:Ream dance anthem ‘Things Can Only Get Better’ as part of the Labour Party’s Manifesto in the 1996 General Election, for example?

However, political idiom is not the sole medium to express the effects of austerity, recession and the global economic crisis in contemporary society. From Jarvis Cocker’s glamorisation of the sexual tension between the ‘haves’ and have nots’ in Pulp’s ‘Common People’, to Morrissey’s cynical yet dulcet tones espousing what today’s Government might describe as the scourge of benefit culture in The Smith’s ‘Still Ill’, popular culture has sought continually to explore and engage with the social and cultural manifestations of recession and austerity. John Self, the protagonist of Martin Amis’s Money learned hard lessons about ‘maxed out’ credit cards in the Thatcherite Yuppie culture of the 1980s, but the summer of 2013 will see Kirstie Allsopp share her austerity-inspired know-how with prime-time audiences in the Channel 4 television series Fill Your House For Free.

Our edited book collection, Hard Times: Austerity and Popular Culture seeks to map the diverse ways in which austerity is—and has been—reflected in and by popular culture. We solicit submissions on any aspect of austerity in popular culture that can offer new and innovative insights into its representation and ideologies. In what ways have literature, film and television, and music (amongst other cultural modes) given expression to austerity? How are its effects conveyed? What commentaries does popular culture offer on, about or towards the age of austerity? How has the expression of austerity in popular culture changed over time, and what lessons about representations of austerity in popular culture from the past can be learnt in the present? Can popular culture have a significant influence in shifting our attitudes towards political discourses of austerity? In soliciting submissions from across the arts and humanities, the editors welcome submissions that could consider the following themes:

- Representing recession
- Credit and spending culture
• Boom and bust – individual and cultural
• The Gendering of austerity
• Thrift chic
• Self-sufficiency vs. spending cuts
• The austere family
• Race, disability, and/or class and austerity
• Benefits culture(s)
• Nostalgia and austerity
• Representing contemporary austerity through the past
• Unemployment and/or poverty
• Youth and austerity
• Revolution, revolt and protest against austere times

Please submit abstracts of 600 words and a short biographical note to both editors, Dr Helen Davies (Helen.Davies@tees.ac.uk) and Dr Claire O'Callaghan (cfo3@le.ac.uk) by 31st January 2014. If accepted, completed chapters of 6000 words will be expected by 1st September 2014. A proposal will be submitted to I.B. Tauris from whom we have received an expression of interest.

Our Most Popular Posts This Month (2013-08-28 19:30)

[1] The (un)intelligibility of academics and being ‘a mere journalist’

[2] Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today


[4] ‘You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain…’


[6] Noam Chomsky’s Advice to Students

[7] Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing

[8] How to write 1000 words a day and not go bat shit crazy (at least not within the first two weeks)
The Beginner’s Guide to Multi-Author Blogging [v1.0] (2013-08-29 08:00)

The term ‘blogging’ has a strange history. For some, it still conveys a rather unglamorous image, captured in Andrew Marr’s infamous remarks a few years ago that “a lot of bloggers seem to be socially inadequate, pimpled, single, slightly seedy, bald, cauliflower-nosed young men sitting in their mother’s basements and ranting”. Associated with this stereotype is the image of blogging as a lone pursuit. However increasingly this is not the case and the reasons for it are not complex. To attract an audience it’s necessary to update a blog on a regular basis and, as a sole author, it’s very difficult to do this. Those who manage it usually, in my experience, see the blog as an integral part of a wider set of activities which they would be doing anyway. So the blog is embedded within an existing cluster of practices rather than being yet another responsibility they have to keep track of. For instance in my own case, I primarily use my blog as a notebook to develop ideas, which is something I struggle to do without writing. But this isn’t for everyone and, unless blogging is something which you’re likely to commit to and/or embed within your existing activities then it’s going to extremely difficult, if not impossible, to maintain a sole authored blog with any degree of regularity, at least in the long term. This is why multi-author blogging, which can take many forms, is an increasingly popular practice, as Chris Gilson and Patrick Dunleavy from the LSE’s Public Policy Group ably summarise,

According to some good estimates, perhaps 80 per cent or more of the single-author blogs on the web are currently inactive, or are ‘desert blogs’ that very rarely updated. And this is because people start them with high hopes, in determinedly individualistic mode, but find that hard to sustain after a while. Coming up with fresh content, day after day or week after week, is hard work for any academic, especially in the current climate where there are so many other demands on people’s time. But if you don’t post regularly, in a rhythm that is clear to readers so they know when to come back, then it can be hard to keep things going.

We don’t think single-author blogs are a sustainable or genuinely useful model for most academics – although all praise to the still many exceptional academics who can manage to keep up the continuous effort involved. By joining together and forming multi-author blogs, academics can mutually reinforce each other’s contributions. We have 350 authors now on BPP, so if they blog with us twice a year we can post two posts a day without too much difficulty (as we do). And there are many synergies - for
example, readers who come for a blog on political developments may stay reading for comments on social policy, or constitutional reform. On a multi-author blog, you often benefit from the content that others provide, and they often benefit from yours.


Quite why more universities don’t take the LSE’s lead is utterly beyond me, given how obviously a relatively small investment in multi-author blogging serves to build capacity for impact and public engagement, thus allowing the vast majority of academics who don’t want to sustain a sole-authored blog to nonetheless engage effectively online. But leaving the chronic shortsightedness of communications policy in UK higher education to one side, it’s worth taking a look at the LSE sites if you’re not already familiar with them to see what they entail in practice: the LSE Impact Blog, LSE British Politics and Policy, LSE EUROPP and the LSE Review of Books. These could be seen as the upper end of the spectrum in terms of organisation and resources, given they have full time staff working on them, though I’d argue they constitute a gold standard for organisations within higher education seeking to engage in multi-author blogging. But it’s also possible to run a multi-author blog with little organisation and no funding. Milena Kremakova and I have been running the [3]Sociological Imagination for over three years now, with no funding and institutional support while we’ve each been doing a lot of other things. This is much easier to do then it looks with sufficient planning and part of my enthusiasm for this technology stems from my curiosity about the explosion of creativity which would likely ensue if everyone who might potentially be interested in doing something like this realised quite how emphatically it is within their grasp to do so. So what do you need to get started?

1. A team, network or group with a shared interest. This shared interest can be something diffuse and it can be something plural. But the project is unlikely to succeed without an underlying interest which can subsequently inform and shape what you do in practice. Is it a particular research topic or cluster of topics which interests you? Is it a particular approach to doing research? Is it a particular career stage and the issues related to it? If you have institutional backing then this a somewhat different issue but, assuming you don’t, these are the sorts of questions which will help guide you as you’re planning and setting up your blog.

2. A sense of the blog’s purpose and the kinds of content it will host. Will it be longer academic pieces? Or shorter posts written for a broader audience? Will you include multi-media and video? Will you collate resources relevant to your topic and use the blog to share them with a broader audience? There are a lot of options and setting out with one idea in mind in no way precludes later expansion. But it’s important to think about what your multi-author blog will actually look like and what sort of content it will host. What would it need for you to feel the blog is a success? This question might be difficult, if not impossible, to answer at the outset but it’s worth thinking about and discussing as a group.

3. How will work be distributed amongst your group? How rigorously will you proof read and edit each other’s work? Will specific individuals have particular roles or will you all post as and when? Will you co-ordinate your activity as a team and, if so, how will you do this? Is it possible that there might be disputes about content and, if so, how will you resolve these within your group? It’s important to make sure everything is on the same page at the outset but, again, there’s no reason why an understanding you reach at the outset needs to be anything other than provisional.

4. Will you accept guest posts? If so will you actively solicit these through an open call or by approaching people directly? If you publish guest posts will these be read and agreed upon by the team or is it enough for one member to have thought it was suitable for posting?

5. Try and build an ‘archive’ at the outset. Given that blogs require regular updates to succeed, it’s important both to have a (realistic) aim about how frequently you will post but also to have a backlog to sustain you at the outset.
when you’re finding your feet and in case of dry spells where people are too busy with other commitments to write regularly for the blog. Scheduling posts within WordPress can be useful for this as well, given it allows you to ensure the blog is updated up until a particular point in time. It also means that something which would otherwise have to be a daily(ish) activity can instead become a weekly or even a fortnightly one. When we’re both busy, Sociological Imagination is sometimes scheduled weeks in advance. It’s really surprising how much you can get done if you spend an entire afternoon working on a blog once every couple of weeks.

6. How will you promote your blog? For instance a twitter feed is pretty essential so that new posts are automatically tweeted. However tools like Buffer App can be used to automatically schedule tweets from your archive. This can take a bit of getting used to but once you get the hang of it, it’s easy to make this a regular activity and it’s nowhere near as time consuming as it might sound.

This is a very provisional first go at something I’ve intended to write for ages. I’m not sure if it’s v1.0 or v0.1 really. I’m going to come back to it in the future, probably quite a few times, to flesh out points 1 to 6 a lot, add more points and write a conclusion. In the meantime, any comments are much appreciated and I’m particularly interested in any questions or issues you think it would be useful for me to address in future iterations of it.

2. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/)

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40 reasons why you should blog about your research (2013-08-29 23:43)

1. It helps you become more clear about your ideas.

2. It gives you practice at presenting your ideas for a non-specialist audience.

3. It increases your visibility within academia.

4. It increases your visibility outside academia and makes it much easier for journalists, campaigners and practitioners to find you.

5. It increases your visibility more than a static site and allows people who find you to get an overall sense of your academic interests.

6. It’s a great way of making connections & finding potential collaborators.

7. It can provide an archive of your thoughts, ideas and reactions which can later be incorporated into more formal work.

8. It makes it easier for people to find your published work and increases the likelihood they will read and cite it.

9. Its informality and immediate accessibility can help make writing part of your everyday life rather than being a source of stress and anxiety.

10. Its a great way to promote events and call for papers. Particularly if you blog regularly and your blog is connected to Twitter.
11. It helps ensure you can continue to develop strands of thought which, for now, don't have any practical implications but might at some point in the future.

12. It encourages you to reflexively interrogate and organise your work, drawing out emergent themes and placing isolated snippets of commentary into shared categories.

13. It allows you to procrastinate for a further 10 to 20 minutes before going back to NVivo in a useful(ish)way.

14. It helps you build a community around your ideas and interests – Kath McNiff

15. It allows you to start a conversation that other researchers can join using comments – Kath McNiff

16. It’s a tremendous way to access additional relevant information/sources through the connections you make - @drdjwalker

17. It can also be a great way to increase your sample size by crowd sourcing contributions and through public scrutiny help prepare you for the peer review process when the time comes to publish your work - @drdjwalker

18. It’s a great way to get international and cross-disciplinary input and reflections on your research - @jess1ecat

19. It’s a fabulous way to give back to the research community by providing links and resources for other researchers, give and you shall receive - @jess1ecat

20. Reciprocity through blogging and Twitter shares builds your profile but importantly forges lasting connections to fellow researchers - @jess1ecat

21. It allows you to publish ideas immediately without waiting two years while things go through peer review and more peer review and wait in a publishing queue - @CelebYouthUK

22. It’s fun - @CelebYouthUK

23. It’s a faster way to get your research findings out. Journal/book publishing and the peer-review/editing process can take FOREVER - @ajlusc

24. Because C Wright Mills would have probably been a blogger. If not, he would at the very least have been a fan - @ajlusc

25. It is an exercise in disciplined writing. Stuff that doesn’t get used in the bigger thesis project, published papers, and the like, can be glossed for a blog and thrown out for ‘collision’ with others’ ideas. That’s how better ideas get formulated - [1]Ibrar

26. It makes you a better writer - @drfigtree

27. It allows raw uncensored ideas to be creatively expressed before stymied by a prolonged peer review process - @DrBenKoh

28. It allows research findings to be put out there in a format that participants can access, and are actually likely to read - Matthew Hanchard

29. You have control of the publishing process - @DrHelenKara

30. It’s a way to publish information about all aspects of research which formal publishing methods won’t accept, whether because it’s too short, too partial, too controversial, or for some other reason - @DrHelenKara

31. Keeping your own blog can be a daunting prospect, but that’s not the only way: many bloggers are more than happy to accept a ‘guest’ blog on a subject which would be of interest to their readers - @DrHelenKara
32. It helps to be up-to-date with new findings in your discipline, and often with findings in other fields - @udadis-isuperior
33. It’s a means to be FOUND. People google those words and ta-da! - @everythingabili
34. It forces you to think of your ideas in simple language that can be easily articulated. It’s communication practice. - @everythingabili
35. You will have MORE IDEAS – GUARANTEED. The process of blogging almost always sparks off more ideas. How could it not? - @everythingabili
36. No need to study in isolation if you are a distance learning student, blogging is one way to network, share ideas and your studies with fellow students around the world - Lucy Bodenham
37. Over time, a blog has helped me to develop more jargon-free and even poetic writing. I have returned to academic publication with a better language with which to express myself - Kip Jones
38. Blogging helps keep your profile out there if you are experiencing a gap between publications - Jeff Craig
39. Help students know what their (prospective) adviser work on - @dimitridf
40. It is free global advertisement for your programme/university - @dimitridf

Any suggestions for more reasons? Put them in the comments box and I’ll add them to the list & note who they came from. If you’re on Twitter please include your twitter handle.


Kandy Woodfield (2013-08-31 14:11:11)
It’s a great way to get international and cross-disciplinary input and reflections on your research. It’s a fabulous way to give back to the research community by providing links and resources for other researchers, give and you shall receive. Reciprocity through blogging and Twitter shares builds your profile but importantly forges lasting connections to fellow researchers. @jess1ecat

Ibrar (2013-08-31 19:54:31)
It is an exercise in disciplined writing. Stuff that doesn’t get used in the bigger thesis project, published papers, and the like, can be glossed for a blog and thrown out for ‘collision’ with others’ ideas. That’s how better ideas get formulated.

10 razones para publicar investigaciones en un blog | SOCIOLOGÍA AMBIENTAL (2013-09-02 18:45:37)
[...] Fuente: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13910 [...]

Anna (2013-09-04 09:03:26)
It makes you a better writer. @drfigtree

Why are there not more research blogs? | Forskarbloggen vid Umeå universitet (2013-09-06 10:33:22)
[...] blogs, including for public knowledge dissemination and fund raising. There is even a long list of 25 reasons to blog about research, many of which I wholeheartedly agree with. We’ve all heard that research blogs are something [...]

1922
Jessica Baker (2013-09-10 18:44:09)
Is there a specific blog which you would recommend to write on for researchers?

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-10 23:49:36)
wordpress or tumblr :-)

Matthew Hanchard (2013-09-11 10:52:02)
One reason for using a blog, that is not covered is that it allows research findings to be put out there in a format that participants can access, and are actually likely to read. For example, I recently ran a short survey. The last question asked if respondents would like me to share the findings with them. Very few respondents are likely to trawl through a dense academic text, or want the raw data. Posting a short summary of the findings in a clear, concise format (lets say a WordPress post) is ideal for this.

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-11 18:26:50)
28!

28 причин вести блог о своих исследованиях | Андрей Виноградов (2013-09-22 19:07:11)
[...] «The Sociological Imagination», не так давно опубликовавший перечень из 28 причин, по которым ученому следует писать в интернете о своей [...]»

Zakaj blogati o svojem raziskovalnem delu – za študente, do in podipolmske V krizi smisla tii misel (2013-09-28 00:03:32)
[...] zapis, na kateregaj opozarja Dave Giles, najdete na http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13910. Zapis govori o 28 razlogih, zakaj je koristno blogati o svojem raziskovalnem delu. Kot nekdo, ki [...]

Helen Kara (2013-09-30 09:26:21)
1. You have control of the publishing process. 2. It’s a way to publish information about all aspects of research which formal publishing methods won’t accept, whether because it’s too short, too partial, too controversial, or for some other reason. 3. Keeping your own blog can be a daunting prospect, but that’s not the only way: many bloggers are more than happy to accept a ‘guest’ blog on a subject which would be of interest to their readers. @DrHelenKara

Somewhere else, part 78 | Freakonometrics (2013-10-01 02:50:20)
[...] reasons why you should blog about your research” http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13910 via [...]”

Andres (2013-10-01 14:12:27)
It helps to be up-to-date with new findings in your discipline, and often with findings in other fields. @udadisisuperior

Tom Smith (2013-10-02 11:51:40)
It’s a means to be FOUND. People google those words and ta-da! It forces you to think of your ideas in simple language that can be easily articulated. It’s communication practice. You will have MORE IDEAS - GUARANTEED. The process of blogging almost always sparks off more ideas. How could it not?

Tom Smith (2013-10-02 11:52:15)
Oh btw I’m @everythingabili

» Our Most Popular Posts of the Last Week The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-03 20:01:51)
[...] 35 reasons why you should blog about your research [...]”

Why this blog? | Class Injustice (2013-10-08 15:19:14)
[...] (non-academic) audience, my three main reasons to blog about my new research project are (see here for 35 – and counting – reasons to blog about your [...]
Why this blog? | Class Injustice (2013-10-10 23:58:53)

 [...] the best to keep going?). Here are my three main reasons to blog about my new research project (see here for 35 – and counting! – reasons to blog about your [...]"


 [...] more reading for you – Why you should blog your research. I will, you know, once I have time to really get some analysis done over the next couple of [...]"

Kip Jones (2014-02-01 11:27:51)

 Over time, a blog has helped me to develop more jargon-free and even poetic writing. I have returned to academic publication with a better language with which to express myself.

Sociological Imagination (2014-02-02 13:00:01)

 37!

Conditionally Accepted | Blogging For (A) Change (2014-02-04 15:01:07)

 [...] academic writing. The freedom (and fun) of writing for a blog can actually help our traditional academic writing. Also, it presents a medium to transcend the traditional barriers to making academic work [...]"

Philipp Adamik (2014-04-07 09:31:14)

because you can see how your work is recieved.

UX Weekly Newsletter 13 | My Website (2014-04-08 01:52:51)

 [...] 37 reasons why you should blog about your research by Sociological Imagination [...]"

DrKK (2014-06-10 10:23:20)


What are the "rules" about blogging about other people's research? - As long as you cite, is it ok to blog about journal articles you find interesting?

Sociological Imagination (2014-07-01 19:08:29)

Why wouldn't it be?

Jeff Craig (2014-07-01 11:19:44)

Blogging helps keep your profile out there if you are experiencing a gap between publications


 [...] Whether blogging, journaling or tweeting philosophical quotes, the trick is to free yourself from what can be a very regimented and stifling academic language. It is important to be reminded that you are a good writer with interesting ideas that other people beyond your committee want to hear about. Putting your ideas out there in other forms allows you to define yourself beyond the dissertation, while also remaining productive in ways that ultimately benefit your research in the long run. If you're still skeptical about the benefits of blogging about your research, check out this aptly titled blog post: “38 reasons why you should blog about your research.” [...]"

Yes, public health blogging makes a difference | I Wonder and Wander (2014-11-29 23:47:43)

 [...] member, and you have not been exposed by your peers or the faculty to the value of blogging, here 38 reasons why you need to get off your freaking butt right now and get to work. If you work in a public health [...]
It allows ideas to be shared and contested quickly and it can allow research to be shared with the public outside of the fee-based firewall (like Elsevier) that keeps most publicly funded research from being shared with the public and many policy-makers. Lastly, it forces researchers to write in accessible language, not wonkese. If no one reads your research, will it matter. A blog makes it matter, vitally.

NextGenForensic is one year old! « nextgenforensic (2015-03-05 14:02:20) [...] readership). It is also a new reality that academics are online, likely given the many benefits of blogging and engaging in social media, so join in the fun if you haven't [...]}


» The most popular posts over the last 5 years of Sociological Imagination The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 18:57:08) [...] 38 reasons why you should blog about your research [...]}

40 reasons why you should blog about you research | The Sociological Imagination (2015-08-26 08:00:48) [...] recently had some new submissions to this post. I had thought it was finished but seemingly there are more reasons yet to be shared... can we [...]}

40 reasons why you should blog about your research | Viral Bioinformatics Resource Center (2015-08-28 00:30:47) [...] Sourced through Scoop.it from: sociologicalimagination.org [...]}

The Sociological Imagination – 40 reasons why you should blog about your research | Progressive Geographies (2015-08-28 11:00:33) [...] 40 reasons why you should blog about your research at The Sociological Imagination [...]}

Sarah Hughes (2015-09-06 11:07:54) It gives people like @sciencequines more material to show kids the enormous diversity and interest of a science career

Please Blog Responsibly | Conditionally Accepted (2015-09-20 22:49:12) [...] Imagination has several blog posts on academic blogging, including "36 reasons you should blog about your research" and "Twitter for [...]}

Första inlägget – Collearn – collaborate learn (2016-03-14 07:57:44) [...] första inlägget tänkte jag fråga dig en sak. Vi har ju båda två läst listan som förklarar varför forskare ska blogga. Där finns det många bra anledningar att börja blogga. En sak som jag tycker är viktig är att [...]}


1925
The Politics of Circulation, Human Agency and Building Your Own Information Environment 
(2013-08-30 08:00)

In the spirit of [1]structured procrastination I thought I’d put some thoughts down which occurred when reading Dave Beer’s paper on the [2]Politics of Circulation earlier today (weirdly enough, also in the spirit of structured procrastination, it’s like I have some impending deadline that is leading me to find ever more creative displacement activities). In this interesting discussion piece he observes a general tendency across the humanities and social sciences towards a new focus on public scholarship:

> It is becoming increasingly apparent that various academic disciplines, right across the spectrum of the social sciences and humanities, are trying quite hard to develop a more public profile. These struggles take many forms, as do the drivers and pressures that instigate them. Some are based upon governmental imperatives for research ‘impact’ – which is actually shorthand for having measurable impact (Burrows, 2012). Others are a result of cultural changes and the general feeling that public engagement is worthwhile. Alongside these, there are also some broader transformations in the media landscape that mean that researchers are forced to ask: what is stopping me from having a public face?

This leads quite naturally to experimentation which the manifold possibilities afforded by social media for communication and engagement with those outside the academy. However the ensuing “integration of new media forms into research practices” has complex implications which the conceptual space opened up by the politics of circulation helps us begin to unpack. There has always been a politics of circulation for social research but digital communication entails a unprecedented increase in the visibility, complexity and rapidity which characterises this circulation:

> The outcomes and findings of social research have always circulated back into the social world in variegated and often untraceable forms (Savage, 2010). But the changing media through which research is being communicated opens this research up to a new range of possibilities for circulation and re-appropriation. If it gets any attention, it will be commented upon and rated (or 'liked') and, crucially, it will be re-appropriated through sharing, re-tweeting, re-blogging and as sections of the content (particularly visualizations) are cut-and-pasted into other posts for use by other ‘authors’.

Many of the anxieties which surround the use of social media by academics can be usefully understood in terms of the politics of circulation. The article ends with the suggestion that “the greater our understanding of the politics of circulation then, the greater our chances of turning them to our advantage”. I couldn’t agree with this more. I’ve been trying for ages to conceptualise my intuitive sense of social media as at least incipiently political for social science given the present institutional and political environment it confronts. So perhaps what I’ve been grasping for is simply the notion that increased digital literacy amounts to an expansion of academic agency given contemporary politics of circulation? I find the range of free (or nearly free) possibilities currently available quite astonishing. It’s not simply a matter of social media platforms allowing new forms of communication but increasingly it is possible to build your own information environment to exercise what can be a quite significant influence over how your work circulates.

The two tools I have in mind here are Buffer App and IFTTT. I’m running it out of time for writing this post so here’s the explanation of IFTTT I wrote a while back:

> Do you find social media taking up too much of your time? If so then [3]IFTTT could be incredibly useful for you. It allows different social media channels to be connected up using statements of the
form IF [x] THEN [Y] - where X is an event occurring on one channel and Y is an action on another channel. When I found out about this, I was instantly fascinated but it can be quite tricky to work out how to actually use it. That said, I've been using it for months now and I was surprised to realise recently that I actually have 10 IFTTT statements running. These do things which previously were either impossible or only possible by hand. It's an incredible time saving tool and I feel I've barely scratched the surface of it.

Here are the ones I'm currently using:

- Every new post on the LSE Politics Blog (via the RSS feed) gets saved as a new document on my Google Drive.
- Articles I favourite on Pocket (Read It Later) get saved in Google Drive as a PDF
- New posts on Sociological Imagination get their details entered on a spreadsheet archive in Google Drive
- New posts on the Public University website get placed in my Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination
- New entries on markcarrigan.net go into my Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination
- New entries on markcarrigan.net go to the Sociological Imagination facebook wall.
- New posts on Sociological Imagination go to the Sociological Imagination facebook wall
- New posts on Sociological Imagination go to the Twitter buffer for Sociological Imagination.
- My favourited items on Google Reader go into the Sociological Imagination twitter buffer.

With a very small amount of fiddling it makes it possible to make some quite complex things happen automatically. For instance every post I publish on this blog gets posted immediately on my own twitter account, on the sociological imagination facebook page and gets added to the Buffer for @soc_imagination to be posted at a later date – it also appears in a RSS feed which, when I sit down to ‘curate’ for the various Twitter feeds I run every few weeks, allows me to then add the post to the Buffers for these Twitter feeds with a single click. It might sound quite complex but the point I’m trying to get across is that it’s entirely automatic once you set it up. These tools make it possible to set up ‘pipes’ between ‘channels’ which ensure pathways of circulation, while also facilitating the easy collection and review of information about the further circulation which each ‘stage’ of this path gives rise to. I’ve been wondering for ages how to conceptualise what has, to me, seemed like an escalation of what online tools are offering and the politics of circulation certainly has promise in this respect. It’s also something I want to think more about in terms of agency in this novel information environment.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/07/18/structure-your-procrastination-and-turn-a-vice-into-a-virtue/
2. http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/3/1/92.abstract
Youth Researcher Development Workshop (2013-08-30 10:13)

FINAL CALL FOR PRESENTERS (Please circulate widely)

British Sociological Association Youth Study Group

Researcher Development Workshop for Research Students and Early Career Researchers

BSA Seminar Room, Imperial Wharf, London, Thursday 7th November 2013

The BSA Youth Study Group invites research students and early career researchers working on or with an interest any aspect of youth research to attend a research development workshop.

Building on similar previous events, the purpose of the day is to provide a platform for researchers to present their work in a supportive, constructive and intellectually stimulating environment. Researchers with work at any stage of the research process are welcome to present their ideas, findings or concerns of navigating the field.

Whether planning to present at the BSA annual conference (or any conference or seminar for that matter!), refining ideas and questions through the literature review, or preparing to seek out avenues to disseminate your work in journals in the field, the day will provide a safe space for participants to receive feedback and help them develop their research in a range of different ways.

The process will be supported by advice and guidance offered by established scholars in the fields of Sociology of Youth and Youth Studies.

The day will also provide a useful networking opportunity to meet other people researching in similar fields. With this in mind, delegates not wishing to present but who would like to take part in an observational capacity or share and discuss their ideas more informally are very much encouraged to attend.

Places are limited, but every effort will be made to include as many presenters as we can.

If you are interested in presenting your work at this event, please email a very brief outline of your research (maximum 150 words) and an indication of your stage of research and the primary issues you would like to develop (presentation skills/content, refining questions, dissemination etc) to [1]s.d.roberts-26@kent.ac.uk before September 5th, 2013. This will enable us to cluster or stream the presentations effectively.

Similarly, if you wish to attend without presenting or have any other questions about attending the event please feel free to email.

Fee: BSA Member £15 / Non Member £25

Hope to see many of you in November.

Dr Steve Roberts, University of Kent

BSA Youth Study Group Co-convenor

1. mailto:s.d.roberts-26@kent.ac.uk
Scheduling my academic life (2013-08-30 18:22)

I really enjoyed Raul Pacheco-Vega’s recent post on how he schedules his work life ‘to the very minute’ so I thought I’d offer my own reflections. I’m intellectually fascinated by how people organise their everyday lives for both personal and academic reasons. I used to have massive difficulties with procrastination and focus. I still do really but in a different way. It’s hard to convey how much I identified with Raul’s description of his experience: “I learned early in my life that I had a really broad range of interests, and that if I didn’t rein in my own impulses, I would be scattered and disorientated before long”. He seems to have learned this a lot earlier than I did though.

I rely on two pieces of software: Goal Streaks on my iPad and OmniFocus on my iPad, iPhone, desktop and laptop. The former keeps track of things that are important to me but not urgent (stuff like going to the gym, blogging, meditating etc) which otherwise get squeezed out by the exigencies and distractions of everyday life. It’s based on the so-called ‘Seinfeld Method’ of instilling habits by marking the daily completion of associated tasks on a calendar by crossing out that day. Thus you measure ‘streaks’ and compete with yourself to surpass your ‘best streak’. The psychological assumption underlying this is that you’re much less likely to avoid the task in question (“I don’t want to go to the gym today, I’m tired and it’s raining outside” or “I don’t want to write 1000 words today, I’m travelling for four hours and the seats on London Midland trains are really uncomfortable to type in”) if you have a visual representation of your past completion of the task for X number of days. I have no idea if this is universally true but it certainly works for me. Habits you seek to form are what Charles Taylor would call second-order desires i.e. “I want to want to go to the gym”. Goal Streaks gives added weight to the second-order desire by visually embedding it in a representation of progress over time. In doing so it avoids the familiar (akratic) situation of the first-order and second-order desire being in direct conflict e.g. I don’t want to go to the gym but I want to want to go to the gym.

OmniFocus has the steepest learning curve of any software I’ve ever used. It took me well over a year to learn to use it properly but I now couldn’t imagine living without it. It’s based around the principles of the Getting Things Done (GTD) system which in essence amount to: (1) write everything down (2) regularly process what you’ve written down (3) either discard what you’ve written down, file it for future reference or turn it into an actionable task. The software allows any idea to be immediately captured wherever you are. I find this is often on my phone and, given my continued inability to type accurately on an iPhone, it’s usually in garbled short hand. The point is to distinguish having the idea from evaluating it and working out how to put it into practice. It’s easy to distinguish these as cognitive tasks but, in practice, they often run together – OmniFocus allows you to file fringe thoughts (as C Wright Mills might say) and stray ideas in a reliable inbox, accessible from anywhere, which can be revisited later to evaluate the ideas and draw out their practical implications. It can sound very sterile when written about in the abstract but my experience of the process is one which can facilitate an intensely creative orientation towards ideas. In an important sense GTD is what I’d call a ‘reflexive technology’ (i.e. an ideational construct which serves to augment our capacity for reflexive deliberation) and OmniFocus is the technical means through which this is accomplished on a practical day-to-day level. I used to do much the same thing with a notebook but it was pretty messy and ineffective compared to using OmniFocus.

My point is not to sing the praises of OmniFocus and GTD (though I do like doing that with both) but rather to try and illustrate how I seem to have an equal but opposite approach to Raul. I’ve tried scheduling everything down to the minute in the way he does and it just doesn’t work for me – I rapidly become preoccupied by whether or not I’m doing the thing I’m ‘supposed’ to be doing at a given moment (usually I’m not) and the constructed order soon starts tumbling down around me. What I love about OF + GTD is the flexibility it affords – it incorporates a similar degree of organisation but it decomposes the rigidity of an intricately planned schedule into concrete tasks. So for each day OF produces a to do list based on the tasks, projects and start/end dates I’ve entered into the software (building
from the inbox where the ideas go). Some tasks are recurring (e.g. updating the various websites and twitter feeds I manage), some are one off but many are sequential aspects of an overarching project §. The software lets you plan a project in terms of detailed step-by-step tasks and then only shows you one task at a time. The database might contain thousands of discrete tasks but it only shows you a small number at any given time – I rarely have more than 6 or 7 items on my to do list for a given day. What makes the software so hard to get to grips with is the challenge of making sure the small number of tasks it shows you at a given moment in time are the right tasks. The software simply offers tools for registering, organising and representing what you want and might want to do. It doesn’t answer the attendant questions for you but it does force you to think them through in a way which you are otherwise unlikely do.

How do you schedule your academic life? If you’d like to share your reflections then get in touch: Mark AT MarkCarrigan.Net


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Against word counts as part of a daily writing routine | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-18 13:29:52)

[...] and effective way to approach what it is I have to do? I’ve blogged in the past about the apps I use for this [...] 

BSA Realism Study Group Seminar: Contemporary Issues in Realist Thought- 6th Sept (2013-08-31 08:00)

BSA Meeting Room, London.

We are pleased to announce our speakers for the forthcoming seminar to debate contemporary issues in realist thought. Please see attached flyer for further details and abstracts.

Graham Scambler, University College London

‘Taking interdisciplinarity seriously: realism and explanations of health inequalities’

Sue Clegg, Leeds Metropolitan University

‘Realism as a theoretical resource’

Mark Cresswell, Durham University

‘PEDAGOGY of the PRIVILEGED: Elite Universities and Dialectical Contradictions in the UK’

Dave Elder-Vass, University of Loughborough

‘Disassembling actor-network theory’

Bob Carter, University of Leicester

1930
I have no musical pedigree, or ability. I have experienced this 'lack' the more so since moving to the village of Mickleham, which seems to have more than its fair share of talent. Stand-out musicians include Clare Kennington, a superb soloist on the violin, and sister Georgie, whose jazz singing I have enthusiastically blogged about already. Annette has joined an impressive choir presided over by Juliet Hornby, with Lynda Chang (and sometimes Tracy Kennington) accompanying on the piano, so I am aware of what 'amateurs' can do. (I should add here that David Kennington too shares the family's gifts and more than holds his own in the choir.)

Eschewing my parents offer of music lessons in early adolescence and settling thereafter for intermittently enjoying 'the noise it makes', I only came alive when a trip to New Orleans was on the cards and I bought a handful of jazz cassettes (yes, it was 30+ years ago). I discovered not only pre-eminent players like Louis Armstrong and his 'Hot Fives', but also the Creole-like mix of blues and jazz in all its pre-modern guises. As for the visit itself, I fell in love with this African-cum-European outpost in southern USA. I was totally unprepared for a city that oozed its own musicality. There were plenty of jazz venues, including the legendary Preservation Hall and the dives of Bourbon Street. But there were ubiquitous jamming sessions: tram drivers would carry their instruments at their sides, primed and ready for opportunities to play. I collected more cassettes, Jelly Roll Morton in the brothels of North-of-French-Quarter 'Storyville', following Armstrong's shift to King Oliver's band in Chicago, and encompassing the distinctive styles, post-traditional as well as pre-modern, to be found in other US cities. I liked much of what I was hearing. Over time sax players drifted to the top of my list of favourites, but then there was Bix and Miles and, uniquely, Billy Holiday, whose voice came hard and straight out of her disjointed lifeworld.

I like what I like, which is quite a lot of jazz (although I draw my lines, often at 'white' West Coast efforts). But – an occupational hazard this – I began to ask sociological-type questions. I was aware of Howard Becker’s
shrewd, semi-autobiographical and seminal essays, but my interests were different. I rapidly came to see (blues-based) jazz as ‘black music’. I felt almost affronted listening to ‘white’ performances or recordings. But what did this mean? How can music be black or white? And, a query beyond, how can music communicate? And within what parameters? A side-issue: how come musicians like my all-time hero Charlie Parker could improvise sublimely while out of his socks on heroin?

In this blog I suggest an answer or two to these questions, and I do so – with cool if risky abandon – without consulting the views of others, musicians or fellow-academics. In other words, I am on a learning curve and inviting feedback and dissent.

Here are a number of hypotheses up for grabs and ‘testing’:

**AGENCY IS STRUCTURED, AND JAZZ PERFORMANCE TRACKS THE INDIVIDUAL ‘SOUL’ AS IT EMERGES, EVEN OCCASIONALLY ESCAPES, FROM ITS SOCIAL HINTERLAND**

This may need a comment or two of elucidation. The notion that agency is structured merely recognizes that we are all in part products of our social circumstances (as well as of our genes, psychological makeup and so on). Class, gender, ethnicity and the like demonstrably matter for who we are, who we become and the decisions we take day-to-day; which is not to say that we are lacking in free will, merely that we use it more sparingly than we think. For the jazz player, this translates as structural and cultural conditioning, contingency or happenstance (what cops up), plus a potential to differ, to improvise. We are what we do and not what we say we are; and, as Sartre spelled out, we must and do ‘take decisions’, in the process turning our back on all the alternative decisions we might have taken. Maybe this is the social source, the tap root, of the blackness of jazz. For the best part of a century, and most conspicuously in the American south, black musicians translated their lived-experience into ‘their sounds’. In doing so they drew upon an oral tradition. Classical music’s roots lie in written scores (open to interpretation of course); not those of blues and jazz. The voice of jazz, to me at least, remains obstinately and importantly black in this sense.

**JAZZ IS A POLITICAL STATEMENT AGAINST RACISM**

Marxist historian Eric Hobsbaum, faking an identity, tracked jazz to its black and radical basics: it has always been associated with leftwing politics and rebellion as well as beards and sandals. The southern states of the USA remained resolutely racist until, and in many ways through, the civil rights protests of the 1960s. Billy Holiday and her black consociates had grown used to entering and exiting venues by their own ‘back door’. In the postwar era of bebop, black musicians fought back in ways they may or may not have been able to articulate if challenged. Not only were blues and jazz their music; but they consciously performed solos no white counterpart could cope with. Nor did they need a political manifesto to do so. Listen to Parker’s ‘Ornithology’, high on drugs or not; and then Coltrane; and ultimately, I guess, Ornette Coleman’s free jazz. And who could miss out Miles Davis (as competent at reinventing himself as David Bowie in quite another genre, even onto the electronic scene)? Musicians, to my mind, made (and continue to make) statements, sometimes reflexively, sometimes not: and no black citizen of the USA, Britain or other Occidental countries past and present has not experienced racism as a personal or family affront and grown angry in consequence.

**MUSIC COMMUNICATES, BUT MOSTLY VIA CONVENTION AND IN CONTEXT**

Holst’s planet suite sets parameters. Mars seems invites thoughts of war. It is readily reminiscent of bagpipes soliciting red-bloodied aggression prior to battle. There is surely something we might call, in shorthand, ‘biological’ here? Certain music stirs the blood, which is why it has been put to military use. If it falls short of commanding combat, it facilitates an appropriate mindset. But how much of this is in us? And how much is a product of convention and context? No music, or for that matter statement, is or could be interpreted in a social vacuum. I tend to think that when black jazz players strutted their stuff – style-by-style – in New Orleans, Chicago and New York, even as
visitors to overseas, they not only transmitted certain messages deliberately, but even despite themselves. You can hear the angry rebuff of racist rejection or patronage, but only, or at least more acutely, if you have learned to do so.

**DRUGS DISINHIBIT**

Drugs from soft to hard *disinhibit*. They release performers. I suspect improvisers are more readily released than interpreters of inscribed scores. Listen to Grappelli ‘versus’ Menuhin (and the former was ‘clean’ as far as I know). So maybe drugs clear the way for the statements jazz players may or may not be aware they are depositing in the public sphere.

**THE CAPACITY OF JAZZ TO MOTIVATE ‘COLLECTIVE ACTION’ IS DEPENDANT ON STRUCTURE, STRUCTURED CULTURE AND AGENCY AND THE MOMENT**

Catch the moment! Music can favour fascism as well as visions and commitments to a ‘better society’, ask Wagner. But when structure in its manifold guises, the coming together of convention, context and an opportunistic ‘taking advantage of the moment’ coincide, well …

Any interventions to help me out here would be greatly appreciated.

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Graham Scambler is a professor of Sociology at University College London. This article was originally posted on Graham’s [1]blog.


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Sam Watts (2013-09-03 12:29:18)

Hi Graham, I am a professional jazz musician and as such feel qualified to respond to your post in an engaging way based on my own experiences and knowledge of jazz. The first thing I would say is that this idea of jazz as "black" or "white" music or even of jazz being divided into those respective camps is an idea that exists outside the jazz community a lot more than it does within it. Only a very small number of practising jazz musicians hold any views of this kind and in my experience are usually ostracized for these views. I think this has historically been the case too. Throughout history jazz musicians have always been pioneers in breaking racial barriers and there are countless examples of mixed race groups playing together despite the social environment of the time. People often cite bebop musicians as sort of “black warriors” who made their music too complicated so that the white people couldn’t play it. I am perhaps missing your point but you did say: "Not only were blues and jazz their music; but they consciously performed solos no white counterpart could cope with." I think that these musicians did not have any kind of racial ideology behind their solos and the notion that no white counterpart could cope with them is in my opinion completely absurd. Throughout the history of jazz people like Parker are sometimes viewed as being against white people in their musical statements and any new developments in jazz are often mis-labelled as movements of black separation. But all of the black musicians cited in this way frequently collaborated with white musicians in these very endeavours and I have not really heard many statements from them about race being a factor. For a few examples: - Buddy rich (white) was one of Charlie Parker’s favourite drummers. - The Ornette Coleman album "this is our music" (often wrongly cited as a statement about race) features white bassist Charlie Haden. - free jazz pioneer Albert Ayler (another movement which is frequently falsely cited as being black-separatist) frequently performed and recorded with white bassist Gary Peacock - Billie Holiday collaborated and toured with Artie Shaw There are countless other examples of this. While I am not denying that jazz developed in an
atmosphere of racial oppression or that jazz is capable of statements about race, to say that jazz is about race is I think incorrect and also takes away from the higher meaning of jazz which is often love and personal expression. I am also not saying at all that black musicians haven't been persecuted and that there has never been any racial tension around jazz. But this idea that musicians are in anyway racially divided is simply not true in my experience and I think you will find that actual jazz musicians have always been very open to all different racial and cultural backgrounds on the whole. It's easy to forget as a listener that when you listen to Charlie Parker or Billie Holiday or anyone who is playing jazz standards that a lot of the tunes they choose to play were written by white composers like Gershwin, Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, and Rodgers and Hart. These composers are probably responsible for writing around 60-70% of what are now considered among musicians to be "jazz standards". I think this shows pretty clearly that black jazz musicians haven't generally been particularly interested in any kind of separation from white musicians and that the music they make isn't a statement about that. I believe that it is instead about expressing themselves as individuals and also simply about playing something that communicates emotionally with the listener and makes them feel as though they relate, rather than any kind of political idea. Again in my experience with other musicians this is what we talk about much more than any kind of political message in the music. The political ideas are often attached to the music more by outsiders like critics and historians. I would also challenge your statement about not enjoying white performances as much as black ones. I can 100% guarantee you that I could give you a "blindfold test", where I play you recordings without telling you who the artist is, and that you would be unable to sort the white from the black performances. I hope that didn't sound too aggressive but I really wanted to make it clear that this idea is not one that is prevalent within the jazz community itself!

R. E. "Music Communicates" - I completely agree that music communicates! (well, good music anyway...) I think the beauty of music is that it communicates in an abstract way. Music cannot definitely be about something (lyrics are a different matter, but if we are just discussing music as sound - jazz is often instrumental music anyway). The intention of the artist can be to be about something and the idea behind a piece can definitely be a concrete thing, but music heard on its own without any context of why the composer has written it or what their message is can be interpreted differently by every listener. We all have particular pieces of music that are associated with a person or a place or a particular time in our lives, and that meaning is completely personal and has nothing to do with the artist's original intention. There is a wonderful quote from John Coltrane relating to this: "I never even thought about whether or not they understand what I'm doing... the emotional reaction is all that matters as long as there's some feeling of communication, it isn't necessary that it be understood." The idea that drugs disinhibit is an interesting one, but one that I think is misunderstood from the outside. Unless you really understand the mental process of improvisation it is quite confusing I think to see how it can happen. I personally never use drugs so I am also probably unqualified to talk about it completely clearly, but my thoughts are that when you learn to improvise to a high level, even just the act of improvising becomes something that doesn't require as much concentration. To clarify, this is different to saying that the musician just uses muscle memory of patterns of hand movements to achieve something that sounds fairly improvised, but that they are still actually improvising. For example if you are highly intoxicated in some way, you often still retain some basic faculties like speech, even if it is impaired slightly, you are still often able to speak and to maintain some sort of thought process of reacting to what people are saying around you, as well as muscular control of the voice to speak. I think that musicians like Parker would have reached a similar relationship with music and their instrument through hours and hours of practice, where it gets to the point where improvising fluently is as easy as something like speaking and that there isn't really much mental calculation that needs to happen consciously in order for him to play, in the same way that the complex movements of the voice box during speech don't have to be consciously calculated as you talk. Maybe that is a bit far-fetched, but it is a thought that I had about the topic. Anyway I hope that is of interest to you and I'd love to hear your thoughts on it :)

Catherine Pope (2013-09-04 09:06:50)
Cool blog! (I think that's the jazz vernacular) When I was studying surgery as performance I also liked Bourdieu's practice in the moment idea (used by Stephen Turner also) which applied well to Jazz. And of course Sennett riffs on similar theme in his book on craft. Anyhow thanks for another provoking blog post and the injection of some more theoretical thinking into my day.

Aidan Kelly (2013-09-09 11:05:30)
1. The sociology of jazz is enhanced by making links between the social context and the major periods of innovation and musical development in jazz. We could look at four periods (a) the emergence of jazz and the dominance of Louis Armstrong (b) consolidation in big band era (c) radical innovation in post wW2 USA (d) early 1960s modality and free-form. 2. These are
times when social events (like the end of Civil War and thus widespread availability of instruments) conjoined with collective and individual artistry - for virtuosity and expressiveness are political statements challenging dominant white views of black people - as in the case of the boxer Jack Johnson (see Ken Burns DVD Unforgivable Blackness). Armstrong wanted to remain 'in front of the people' and this compromised some of his output, but his outstanding solos were never really challenged by any other musician of his period (Bechet might not agree!) and were undeniable creative giant strides. See Andrei Hodier Jazz its evolution and its essence for an analysis of West End Blues. 3. The middle period of the economic depression is characterised by the contrast between the regimented white big bands (see Adorno's hopelessly limited analysis of jazz) and the expressive freedom of the Basie Band and Lester Young - no set written down arrangements. Lester's wonderful solo on Lady Be Good summarises this in his first recording session! I recently heard this solo played note for note by a professional jazz musician in a UK pub. Parker recognised the power of this solo and played it in double time as a warm up routine! 4. The post-war upheavals reflected the social contradiction of separate black regiments fighting for human rights and freedom in Europe and Asia-Pacific and underlined the new self confidence of Bebop (although routinised in Films such as 'The Best years of their Lives'). The harmonic revolution created something of a distance between artist and audience - jazz became a thing in itself - music for musicians to some extent - like most high culture is became somewhat exclusive - Armstrong got mixed up with the opposition. Jazz had moved and developed at an outstanding rate of change compared with classical music. 5. The emergence of movements linked to civil rights (and their more radical alternatives - e.g. back to Africa) coincided in a further extension of artistic sensibility in the music of Miles Davies with at the same time the development of greater freedom from chord sequences (shift to modes) and abandonment of chord structures entirely (as in the career of Coltrane from 1963 onwards). There are then lots of subtleties to be brought out in a deeper analysis of such links between the social and the musical development of jazz. Politics is involved in a much more sophisticated way than comparing the outputs of black and white musicians, or in the crude analysis of writers like Kofsky.

» Jazz and Sociology – a professional jazz musician responds The Sociological Imagination (2013-11-03 14:29:22)
[...] Graham, I am a professional jazz musician and as such feel qualified to respond to your post in an engaging way based on my own experiences and knowledge of [...] 

» Sociology and Jazz (part 3) The Sociological Imagination (2013-11-14 16:50:51)
[...] read the post by Graham Scambler and the reply by Sam Watts with interest. When I did my sociology A Level at college I was studying [...] 

sayan biswas (2015-01-27 16:30:28)
JAZZ IS A DISTINCTIVE ELEMENT OF AMERICAN CULTURE AT LEAST AT A SUPERFICIAL LEVEL. DURING COLD WAR JAZZ HAD VERY LIMITED ENTRY THROUGH THE IRON CURTAIN BECAUSE THE DOGMATIC COMMUNISTS FEEL THAT IT WAS A SELF INDULGENT LIGHTWEIGHT DISTRACTION OF MARKETED CULTURE. TOO UNFORTUNATE FOR A MUSIC WHICH HAD STRONG PROLETARIAN ROOTS. I AM SAYAN BISWAS AN INDIAN FAR AWAY FROM THE EPICENTRE OF THIS MUSIC.BUT THIS MUSIC TOTALLY UNCONNECTED WITH MY CULTURAL AMBIENCE HAS THRILLED ME WITH ITS MYSTERIOUS QUALITIES. TO ME JAZZ IS THE PROFOUND MUSIC DEALING WITH EVERYDAY RHYTHMS OF LIFE.IT HAS SIMILARITIES WITH THE SLAPSTICK TRADITION OF HOLLYWOOD AND AMERICAN VAUDEVILLE.I AM NEITHER A SOCIOLOGIST NOR A JAZZ MUSICIAN .PLEASE RECTIFY THESE PERCEIVED IDEAS FROM A NAIVE HOBBYIST.

per (2016-12-20 19:44:24)
sounds right to me, but i will say that jazz's similarities to slapstick are pretty superficial. Slapstick Comedy and Jazz share very little in common besides that they may have been seen alongside each other in our culture for a time.
4.9 September

BSA Gender Study Group CfP Gender and Quality of Life (2013-09-01 08:00)

Gender and Quality of Life
BSA Gender Study Group One Day Conference:
Friday 17th January 2014, University of Lincoln, UK
Keynote TBC


What constitutes a good life has captured the minds of thinkers across time and cultures. In Aristotle's terminology, eudaimonia, people were called upon to realize their full potential in order to achieve a "good life." Kant's approach was to understand the good life through rational thought. Others have seen the good life in terms of utility of resources and economics and individual desires, whilst some have sought to understand quality of life through affect and experience. The contemporary focus on quality of life is often conceptualized as social indicators, such as longevity, crime or human rights policies or through the measurement of medical and health outcomes. These diverse approaches perhaps are most consistently found in the health and social care tools that measure disease specific quality of life outcomes. Gender and feminist accounts have hardly scratched the surface on this contested ground. Whilst gender differences are understood as providing indicators about the variations in quality of life evaluations, gender and feminist work has rarely considered the 'who,' 'what' 'how' and 'why' in quality of life debates. For instance, who are selected in the evaluation process, what theoretical concepts are used and how are quality of life tools constructed, how do they work, why are these tools used and for whose benefit? How do we assess individuals' and groups' perceptions of their positions in life in the context of wider culture and value systems in which people live and in relation to their goals, expectations, social standards and political concerns? How can we combine these conceptual, philosophical and methodological differences to understand a comprehensive view of gender and quality of life. This to some extent returns us somewhat to more philosophical questions and tempts us to broaden the scope of quality of life evaluations, which encompasses broader socio-cultural and psychosocial factors that may affect someone's evaluation of what quality of life means.

This conference will examine issues in relation to gender and quality of life: How do current feminisms speak to quality of life issues? How do grass roots gender and feminist politics respond to quality of life concerns? How can feminism constructively interact with quality of life debates? How are local and global systems implicated in our fascination to evaluate quality of life outcomes? What are the similarities and differences - the unifying and dividing features - of national and international quality of life themes? How does culture contribute to the debates about quality of life? How can feminist and gender scholarship account for embodied diversities in relation to quality of life? How does feminism contribute to the debates on quality of life themes in the 21st Century?

We seek papers that will address themes concerning (but not limited to):
Sites of activism Political agendas and political and healthcare economies
Feminisms at local, global, spaces and places
Intersections of class, race, ethnicity, faith, age, gender, sexuality and embodiment
Leisure and work
Agency and affect
Methodological and analytical inclusions and exclusions
Trans* and Queer Feminisms
Representation, media and new technologies

Please send your 300 word abstracts to Zowie Davy [2]zdavy@lincoln.ac.uk by 18th November 2013
Dear Guilt-Ridden #PhD Students: Structure your procrastination and turn a vice into a virtue (2013-09-01 08:00)

For years I’ve tended to chronically over-commit myself in all areas of life. I find it difficult to say ‘no’ if I encounter an interesting opportunity or have an interesting idea. However I periodically get quite exhausted and have brief phases of dropping projects left right and centre. Clearing up the free time is an unfallingly disappointing experience however... it doesn’t help me focus on the things I’d identified as ‘priorities’ and I get bored very easily. This is exactly what the idea of ‘structured procrastination’ argues would happen in such circumstances and given how useful I’ve found it, I’d suggest anyone who shares my twin problems of procrastination and over-commitment should read this astonishing and insightful essay:

Structured procrastination means shaping the structure of the tasks one has to do in a way that exploits this fact. The list of tasks one has in mind will be ordered by importance. Tasks that seem most urgent and important are on top. But there are also worthwhile tasks to perform lower down on the list. Doing these tasks becomes a way of not doing the things higher up on the list. With this sort of appropriate task structure, the procrastinator becomes a useful citizen. Indeed, the procrastinator can even acquire, as I have, a reputation for getting a lot done. […]

Procrastinators often follow exactly the wrong tack. They try to minimize their commitments, assuming that if they have only a few things to do, they will quit procrastinating and get them done. But this goes contrary to the basic nature of the procrastinator and destroys his most important source of motivation. The few tasks on his list will be by definition the most important, and the only way to avoid doing them will be to do nothing. This is a way to become a couch potato, not an effective human being.

At this point you may be asking, “How about the important tasks at the top of the list, that one never does?” Admittedly, there is a potential problem here.

The trick is to pick the right sorts of projects for the top of the list. The ideal sorts of things have two characteristics, First, they seem to have clear deadlines (but really don’t). Second, they seem awfully important (but really aren’t). Luckily, life abounds with such tasks. In universities the vast majority of tasks fall into this category, and I’m sure the same is true for most other large institutions.


BSA Annual Conference 2013 Plenary - Polly Toynbee, Guardian columnist (2013-09-01 12:00)


1938

Howard Becker’s 23 Thoughts About Youth (2013-09-02 08:00)

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bJBRYLhhEE &w=420 &h=315]

This interesting little post on Howard Becker’s site is worth a quick read for anyone interested in youth studies and/or Becker’s work. HT Kip Jones for the video of Becker playing at an ASA conference.
Everyone (at least everyone above a certain age) knows—it is no more than common sense—that, in every historical era, “youth” cause all, or certainly most, of the troubles of the world. They have no respect for tradition or authority, they do things which harm them physically and, especially, mentally: alcohol and drugs, but also (depending on the era) spending too much time at the movies, watching television, or playing computer games. They take too many chances. They aren’t prudent. They are always a major pain in the ass and it is because of them that our country and the whole world are going to hell. [...]

Young people usually get blamed for society’s troubles. (Said it before, I’ll say it again. Can’t say it too often.) Students don’t work hard enough. That’s why they don’t learn what they should. Yes? Maybe not. Maybe teachers and schools don’t teach properly. Maybe that’s why students don’t learn what someone wants them to.

* * *

Try that out in some area you know about. I did, with this result. Older jazz players complain that younger players “don’t know any tunes,” that is, the tunes the older players grew up playing and regard as the minimal repertoire a literate player must have. It’s true, the younger players often don’t know all those songs, and that makes trouble when a hastily assembled musical group has to perform without rehearsal.

* * *

Older players, however, don’t know the more complex compositions younger players grow up on. But, since older players have more control over employment and performance opportunities, this makes less trouble for collective performances. The older players needn’t know the newer compositions. They can just say “No, we won’t play that.”

* * *

Symmetry: Both groups “don’t know any tunes,” so you can’t use that observation as a “fact” that explains what’s wrong with younger players and why the music business is going to hell.

* * *

Symmetry pays off in a better understanding of the situation, which is good whether you are a sociologist trying to understand social organization, a musicologist trying to understand the development of a musical genre, or a jazz player trying to get along in the world of contemporary jazz.

* * *

“Youth” is a relational term. It doesn’t describe a stable characteristic of someone or some group. It tells
you where that person or group stands in relation to some other people or some other group. “Youth” are older than “teenagers” but younger than “adults.” That’s a possible meaning. But this innocuous relational description carries other, less innocent, less symmetrical, and less neutral overtones we should be wary of.

1. [http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/index.html](http://home.earthlink.net/~hsbecker/index.html)

Birds (2013-10-05 16:03:06)

“Youth” are older than “teenagers” but younger than “adults.” - Youth is not tied to age imo.

Sociology’s ‘Moments’: Democracy, Expertise and the Market by John Holmwood (2013-09-03 08:00)

The videos from this year’s British Sociological Association conference have been released. You can find the full set [here](http://player.vimeo.com/video/72177565) - the video above is from John Holmwood’s plenary. As we paraphrased its conclusion while live tweeting at the time:

1940
The task of Sociology in an age of austerity is to occupy public debate and make inequality matter [3] #BritSoc13


“Oh there are other people just like me? I’m not so weird after all”: the internet, social change and social integration (2013-09-04 08:00)

I’ve been preoccupied recently by parallels I keep observing between common features of asexual biographies and those of other groups who share a common trait. In the case of asexuality this ‘common trait’ is *not experiencing sexual attraction*. Exactly what this entails about the individual’s experience and what, in turn, this experience has come to mean to them biographically is a more complex issue. But underlying the diversity which exists within the asexual community there does seem to be a common set of experiences. This ‘lack of sexual attraction’, whatever causes it if indeed such a question is meaningful, is rendered problematic through the normative pressures which are enacted with concrete others (peers, friends, family etc) whether directly or indirectly. This brings about an experience of feeling ‘broken’ or ‘damaged’ and self-questioning as to why this might be the case i.e. “what’s wrong with me? why aren’t I interested in sex like everyone else?”. The biographical specifics can be very variable from this point onwards and, given this is the starting point of a blog post rather than its main topic, I’m going to sidestep them somewhat. Suffice to say, if someone does come to identify as asexual (at least post 2001/2002) then they probably did so either through stumbling across it in the media or as a result of encountering asexual blogs, forums, videos etc online (with the former in fact often leading to the latter).

What has always fascinated me is the experience that comes next, as something that had been self-interpreted as pathology comes to be reinterpreted as a non-pathological characteristic which is shared with geographically remote others. Exactly what this means is again biographically specific. For some people it’s just a *useful label* to make sense of oneself and convey that understanding to others. For others it can lead to the emergence of a deep sense of collective identity. But what I think unites the range of responses people have to this discovery is the transformation of a difference into a commonality. Within their local context and existing social networks, this characteristic of ‘not experiencing sexual attraction’ has been rendered *problematic* by the explicit judgements and implicit attitudes encountered in other people. It thus emerges as a *difference* which interrupts a shared frame of reference. It will intrinsically generate a *tendency* towards introspection because, given that this recognition of difference is provoked by experience of implicit or explicit censure, it will become increasingly less attractive to try and talk through this difference (“why am I this way? what’s wrong with me?”) with others who, inductively, can be expected to only confirm the assumption of pathology and thus intensify distress. Their pool of *available* interlocutors shrinks dramatically as a result which, in turn, leads them to seek alternative routes towards self-clarification. This might be to consult expert systems (go to a doctor, to a councillor, to a sex therapist) or, more likely, it’ll be to go online. if you go to google and type in ‘does not experience sexual attraction’ then you will
immediately find a whole plethora of asexual resources. This allows what was a difference (in relation to the immediate context) to instead be established as a commonality (in relation to this dispersed reference group). To summarise:

1. The local normative environment rendered P’s experience of X problematic (“Why am I X when everyone else seems to be Y!? What’s wrong with me?”)

2. This experience of normative censure dramatically reduced the pool of available interlocutors with whom P could talk about X (“I can’t talk about X with anyone. They’ll just think I’m weird”)

3. P looks beyond the normative environment with the aim of coming to a better understanding of X (“Why am I X? What could be making me this way?”)

4. P finds others who share the trait X and recognises her own experiences in those she encounters, either directly or indirectly, outside the local normative environment (“Oh there are other people who are X? I’m not so weird after all!”)

What emerges as a difference at (1) becomes a commonality at (4). As well as the application of this biographical model to other forms of experience, I’m interested in how processes of this sort can be understood at the macrosocial level. If I’m right that the underlying mechanisms at are at work in other spheres (i.e. the expanded pool of interlocutors offered by the internet allows what would otherwise be a proliferation of differences to instead becomes the emergence of new commonalities) then this is a really interesting route into debates about the internet, social change and social integration. It raises obvious empirical questions about the nature of these ‘new commonalities’ and the similarities and differences which in turn obtain between them. Do they provide a basis for the establishment of ‘new continuities’ as Archer would put it? Or simply represent a fragmentation that exists at the level of groups, self-defined in a particularist and experiential way, rather than of individuals? Is it even meaningful to talk about ‘groups’ in this sense? Subcultural social worlds is a concept I’ve been playing with recently to make sense of this, seeing them as emergent but heterogeneous spaces of meaning and practice which are constituted through biographical interweaving and amenable to the further emergence of networks acting in relation to values and ideas within this ‘social world’.

I keep writing this in inverted commas because I think it’s a conceptualisation of a difference and that its objective basis varies a lot. The category of ‘not experiencing sexual attraction’ emerges from the relation between particular constellations of norms about sexuality and an individual who, for whatever reason, does not meet the expectations implied by them. The ‘for whatever reason’ is the objective underpinning of that experience for any particular individual and it needs to be analytically distinguished from the biographical process of coming to understand oneself which it indirectly brings about. It’s a necessary but insufficient condition for the emergence of an asexual identity because the characteristics it is generative of need to be rendered problematic at the social level for them to be in any way significant. This is why I think studying the aetiology of asexuality is conceptually confused – ‘asexuality’ is a deeply socio-cultural phenomenon and it’s too broad a category upon which to base an investigation of what underpins it causally.

Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left (2013-09-04 11:27)

Slavoj Zizek may be great at beating up on grand old men of the anti-establishment such as Chomsky, but he is a total waste of space for a self-described ‘Left’ that wants to remain politically relevant in the 21st century. Whenever
I read him, I think to myself: This guy either just wants us to feel good about ourselves after performing some self-contained Occupy-ish rituals or he is calling for outright violence in a prophylactic bloodbath. Zizek can’t seem to imagine any other political alternatives, which may suit his vast legions of followers, who are ‘politically inert’ by most conventional understandings of the phrase. This was really made clear to me in his latest piece for the Guardian, which celebrates the importance of cyberspace whistleblowers, who if ultimately regarded as ‘progressive’, will be for reasons that we have not quite yet figured out. At the moment, they look like fleas on the arse of history. [1] Here is the original piece, which I have deconstructed below.

We all remember President Obama’s smiling face, full of hope and trust, in his first campaign: “Yes, we can!” – we can get rid of the cynicism of the Bush era and bring justice and welfare to the American people. Now that the US continues its covert operations and expands its intelligence network, spying even on its allies, we can imagine protesters shouting at Obama: “How can you use drones for killing? How can you spy even on our allies?” Obama murmurs with a mockingly evil smile: “Yes, we can.”

But simple personalisation misses the point: the threat to freedom disclosed by whistleblowers has deeper, systemic roots.

Classic immunisation strategy used by intellectuals to conjure up an image of the opponent that is then officially denounced as unfair, yet the image leaves the desired bad aftertaste that contaminates the rest of the argument.

Edward Snowden should be defended not only because his acts annoyed and embarrassed US secret services; what he revealed is something that not only the US but also all great (and not so great) powers – from China to Russia, Germany to Israel – are doing (to the extent they are technologically able to do it).

His acts provided a factual foundation to our suspicions of being monitored and controlled – their lesson is global, reaching far beyond the standard US-bashing. We didn’t really learn from Snowden (or Manning) anything we didn’t already presume to be true. But it is one thing to know it in general, another to get concrete data. It is a little like knowing that one’s sexual partner is playing around – one can accept the abstract knowledge, but pain arises when one gets the steamy details, pictures of what they were doing ...

This is more revealing of Zizek’s sexual history than anything else. Some people think about these matters in the exact opposite way: i.e. the abstract possibility of infidelity (if it matters) prepares you for when it happens, so that you end up being more understanding, regardless of whether you continue the relationship. In fact, this is probably the more rational route. After all, you might wonder what strange sort of political impotence would have people (1) entertain the prospect that they are under constant surveillance, (2) not do anything about that prospect, yet (3) get very upset once it is shown to have happened. Here it is worth recalling that representative democracy is not predicated on trust – but on suspicion! That’s why elections happen on a regular basis, even if nothing bad seems to be happening. That gives people an opportunity to voice those dark thoughts, which in turn can inject a level of uncertainty that might not have been expected. That people carry on voting in the Clintons, Blairs and Obamas back into office has nothing to do with lack of access to facts but a measured judgement of harms vis-à-vis benefits, all of which are assessed under conditions of uncertainty. It would be a slight exaggeration to say that a vivid imagination works much better in political reasoning than supposedly solid facts, but it’s close to a truth that Zizek fails to appreciate.
Back in 1843, the young Karl Marx claimed that the German ancien regime “only imagines that it believes in itself and demands that the world should imagine the same thing”. In such a situation, to put shame on those in power becomes a weapon. Or, as Marx goes on: "The actual pressure must be made more pressing by adding to it consciousness of pressure, the shame must be made more shameful by publicising it."

This, exactly, is our situation today: we are facing the shameless cynicism of the representatives of the existing global order, who only imagine that they believe in their ideas of democracy, human rights etc. What happens in WikiLeaks disclosures is that the shame – theirs, and ours for tolerating such power over us – is made more shameful by publicising it.

This is playing to the Left’s toy soldier gallery. The ancien regime could afford to be cynical because their right to succession didn’t involve popular approval. If democratically elected officials are keeping secrets from the public, then something else is involved. While ‘national security’ may be too sanguine an explanation for the secrecy, that is probably part of it – along with other things that might be teased out by the normal democratic means, and which in the end may or may not matter in the electorate’s judgement as to whether the politicians have done an adequate job.

What we should be ashamed of is the worldwide process of the gradual narrowing of the space for what Kant called the Immanuel “public use of reason”.

In his classic text, What Is Enlightenment?, Kant contrasts "public" and "private" use of reason – "private" is for Kant the communal-institutional order in which we dwell (our state, our nation ...), while "public" is the transnational universality of the exercise of one’s reason: "The public use of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. The private use of one’s reason, on the other hand, may often be very narrowly restricted without particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. By public use of one’s reason I understand the use that a person makes of it as a scholar before the reading public. Private use I call that which one may make of it in a particular civil post or office which is entrusted to him."

We see where Kant parts with our liberal common sense: the domain of state is "private" constrained by particular interests, while individuals reflecting on general issues use reason in a "public" way. This Kantian distinction is especially pertinent with internet and other new media torn between their free "public use" and their growing "private" control. In our era of cloud computing, we no longer need strong individual computers: software and information are provided on demand; users can access web-based tools or applications through browsers.

This makes no sense whatsoever. Kant is really pulling a Leo Strauss here. He lived in a time of benevolent despotism. For the ‘public’ to retain its potency yet appear non-threatening, it had to be confined to the utopian realm of the literate (still a minority of Europe in the late 18th century). So ‘public’ = ‘perhaps actual in the future’. In that respect, the closest contemporary analogue to Kant’s sense of the public is ‘virtual’ in the sense of science fiction, which often presents very vivid challenges to the status quo but without providing any clear sense of how we might get from here to there. Kant is effectively reassuring the despot that these challenges are really paper tigers in the short term, so as to ensure that the ‘light’ of the Enlightenment is not simply blown out peremptorily, say, by abrogating freedom of the press.

As for Kant calling the exercise of official reasoning as ‘private’, he is imagining a world in which the state is dominant, its bureaucracy divides society into functional units, and each official exercises authority by virtue of
speaking from his proper unit. That sense of ‘propriety’ is what Kant means by ‘private’ (i.e. within well-defined borders). But of course, it is also somewhat ironic because it suggests that this sense of propriety is valid ONLY under the status quo.

To a certain extent, Marx still lived in Kant’s world but we certainly do not. Zizek fails to tell the difference.

This wonderful new world is, however, only one side of the story. Users are accessing programs and software files that are kept far away in climate-controlled rooms with thousands of computers – or, to quote a propaganda-text on cloud computing: "Details are abstracted from consumers, who no longer have need for expertise in, or control over, the technology infrastructure 'in the cloud' that supports them."

Here are two telltale words: abstraction and control. To manage a cloud there needs to be a monitoring system that controls its functioning, and this system is by definition hidden from users. The more the small item (smartphone) I hold in my hand is personalised, easy to use, "transparent" in its functioning, the more the entire setup has to rely on the work being done elsewhere, in a vast circuit of machines that co-ordinate the user’s experience. The more our experience is non-alienated, spontaneous, transparent, the more it is regulated by the invisible network controlled by state agencies and large private companies that follow their secret agendas.

These two paragraphs might conform to what I have described as Kant’s sense of ‘public reason’, which unfortunately is not Zizek’s own! Speaking of ‘secret agendas’ is an inflammatory irrelevance unless you think that government and big business have actually managed to achieve what you imagine them capable of. However, given the number of outright disasters – which are more impressive than whistleblowers – you might come to believe that Zizek is egging the pudding with regard to any straightforward sense of big data resulting in big control. Of course, this provides no grounds for complacency. But the real critical effort should be placed on revealing the fallibility of ‘big data’ as inputs to state action. If anything, the whistleblowers celebrated by Zizek are just as certain as the allegedly menacing states about the latter’s potential efficacy. Yet, this is the myth that really needs to be addressed – but which Zizek unfortunately occludes.

Once we choose to follow the path of state secrets, we sooner or later reach the fateful point at which the legal regulations prescribing what is secret become secret. Kant formulated the basic axiom of the public law: "All actions relating to the right of other men are unjust if their maxim is not consistent with publicity." A secret law, a law unknown to its subjects, legitimises the arbitrary despotism of those who exercise it, as indicated in the title of a recent report on China: "Even what’s secret is a secret in China."

China is not a representative democracy in the Western sense and has not claimed otherwise. There is no reason to expect China to live up to Zizek’s reading of Kantian maxims. If we truly wish them do so, then I suggest that mass propaganda is in order (which I might support). Otherwise this high dudgeon is simply presented to raise the political temperature.

Troublesome intellectuals who report on political oppression, ecological catastrophes, rural poverty etc, got years in prison for betraying a state secret, and the catch was that many of the laws and regulations that made up the state-secret regime were themselves classified, making it difficult for individuals to
know how and when they are in violation.

What makes the all-encompassing control of our lives so dangerous is not that we lose our privacy, that all our intimate secrets are exposed to Big Brother. There is no state agency able to exert such control – not because they don’t know enough, but because they know too much. The sheer size of data is too large, and in spite of all intricate programs for detecting suspicious messages, computers that register billions of data are too stupid to interpret and evaluate them properly, ridiculous mistakes where innocent bystanders are listed as potential terrorists occur necessarily – and this makes state control of communications even more dangerous. Without knowing why, without doing anything illegal, we can all be listed as potential terrorists. Recall the legendary answer of a Hearst newspaper editor to Hearst’s inquiry as to why he doesn’t want to take a long-deserved holiday: "I am afraid that if I go, there will be chaos, everything will fall apart – but I am even more afraid to discover that if I go, things will just go on as normal without me, a proof that I am not really needed!" Something similar can be said about the state control of our communications: we should fear that we have no secrets, that secret state agencies know everything, but we should fear even more that they fail in this endeavour.

Clearly the editor was on holiday. This is simply paranoia, and perhaps Zizek’s weird late Cold War closeness to the Stalinist mentality may be to blame for this particular outpouring. Again, the problem is not that the state may really know too much but that it may THINK it knows too much, such that the comprehensiveness of big data issues a more liberal license for action than the state would normally have. In contrast, a productive ‘left’ response must begin with recognition of this fundamental epistemic difference.

This is why whistleblowers play a crucial role in keeping the “public reason” alive. Assange, Manning, Snowden, these are our new heroes, exemplary cases of the new ethics that befits our era of digitalised control. They are no longer just whistleblowers who denounce the illegal practices of private companies to the public authorities; they denounce these public authorities themselves when they engage in "private use of reason".

We need Mannings and Snowdens in China, in Russia, everywhere. There are states much more oppressive than the US – just imagine what would have happened to someone like Manning in a Russian or Chinese court (in all probability no public trial). However, one should not exaggerate the softness of the US: true, the US doesn’t treat prisoners as brutally as China or Russia – because of its technological priority, it simply does not need the brutal approach (which it is more than ready to apply when needed). In this sense, the US is even more dangerous than China insofar as its measures of control are not perceived as such, while Chinese brutality is openly displayed.

It is therefore not enough to play one state against the other (like Snowden, who used Russia against the US): we need a new international network to organise the protection of whistleblowers and the dissemination of their message. Whistleblowers are our heroes because they prove that if those in power can do it, we can also do it.

These last three paragraphs show why Zizek has become a waste of space for the Left – especially for anyone trained in social science. He is surfing on the surfaces of recorded political action without considering the differences in the structures of accountability that are bringing them about and potentially limiting or extending them. Just as Zizek ignorantly fetishises the potential of ‘big data’ to bring about a ‘Big Brother’ style world, he equally ignorantly fetishises American ‘technological priority’ (a euphemism for military might), without realizing the potential for enormous unintended and unanticipated failure. To be sure, these failures could have even more disastrous consequences than
Zizek imagines, but for him to imagine them he would need to wake up from his Stalinist dystopian fantasy.


On Zizek and all that fuss about theory: Random musing on a Monday morning | Cacoethes Scribendi (An insatiable urge to write) (2013-09-23 04:44:15)

[...] have spilled over to their partisans. I would not have bothered except a friend just sent me a link which argues Zizek is a waste of time. Let me be honest, I did not really follow their exchange nor [...]

» The most popular posts over the last 5 years of Sociological Imagination The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 18:57:23)

[...] Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left [...]

**Jazz and Sociology - a professional jazz musician responds (2013-09-04 12:28)**

Hi Graham, I am a professional jazz musician and as such feel qualified to respond to [1]your post in an engaging way based on my own experiences and knowledge of jazz.

The first thing I would say is that this idea of jazz as "black" or "white" music or even of jazz being divided into those respective camps is an idea that exists outside the jazz community a lot more than it does within it. Only a very small number of practising jazz musicians hold any views of this kind and in my experience are usually ostracised for these views. I think this has historically been the case too. Throughout history jazz musicians have always been pioneers in breaking racial barriers and there are countless examples of mixed race groups playing together despite the social environment of the time. People often cite bebop musicians as sort of "black warriors" who made their music too complicated so that white people couldn’t play it. I am perhaps missing your point but you did say:

"Not only were blues and jazz their music; but they consciously performed solos no white counterpart could cope with."

I think that these musicians did not have any kind of racial ideology behind their solos and the notion that no white counterpart could cope with them is in my opinion completely absurd. Throughout the history of jazz people like Parker are sometimes viewed as being against white people in their musical statements and any new developments in jazz are often mis-labelled as movements of black separation. But all of the black musicians cited in this way frequently collaborated with white musicians in these very endeavours and I have not really heard many statements from them about race being a factor. A few examples:

- Buddy rich (white) was one of Charlie Parker’s favourite drummers.
- The Ornette Coleman album “this is our music” (often wrongly cited as a statement about race) features white bassist Charlie Haden.
- free jazz pioneer Albert Ayler (another movement which is frequently falsely cited as being black-separatist) frequently performed and recorded with white bassist Gary Peacock
- Billie Holiday collaborated and toured with Artie Shaw

There are countless other examples of this. While I am not denying that jazz developed in an atmosphere of racial oppression or that jazz is capable of statements about race, to say that jazz is about race is I think incorrect and also takes away from the higher meaning of jazz which is often love and personal expression. I am also not saying at
all that black musicians haven’t been persecuted and that there has never been any racial tension around jazz. But this idea that musicians are in anyway racially divided is simply not true in my experience and I think you will find that actual jazz musicians have always been very open to all different racial and cultural backgrounds on the whole.

It’s easy to forget as a listener that when you listen to Charlie Parker or Billie Holiday or anyone who is playing jazz standards that a lot of the tunes they choose to play were written by white composers like Gershwin, Cole Porter, Hoagy Carmichael, and Rodgers and Hart. These composers are probably responsible for writing around 60-70% of what are now considered among musicians to be “jazz standards”. I think this shows pretty clearly that black jazz musicians haven’t generally been particularly interested in any kind of separation from white musicians and that the music they make isn’t a statement about that. I believe that it is instead about expressing themselves as individuals and also simply about playing something that communicates emotionally with the listener and makes them feel as though they relate, rather than any kind of political idea. Again in my experience with other musicians this is what we talk about much more than any kind of political message in the music. The political ideas are often attached to the music more by outsiders like critics and historians.

I would also challenge your statement about not enjoying white performances as much as black ones. I can 100% guarantee you that I could give you a “blindfold test”, where I play you recordings without telling you who the artist is, and that you would be unable to sort the white from the black performances.

I hope that didn’t sound too aggressive, but I really wanted to make it clear that this idea is not one that is prevalent within the jazz community itself!

R.E “Music Communicates” – I completely agree that music communicates! (well, good music anyway...) I think the beauty of music is that it communicates in an abstract way. Music cannot definitely be about something (lyrics are a different matter, but if we are just discussing music as sound – jazz is often instrumental music anyway). The intention of the artist can be to be about something and the idea behind a piece can definitely be a concrete thing, but music heard on its own without any context of why the composer has written it or what their message is can be interpreted differently by every listener. We all have particular pieces of music that are associated with a person or a place or a particular time in our lives, and that meaning is completely personal and has nothing to do with the artist’s original intention. There is a wonderful quote from John Coltrane relating to this:

“I never even thought about whether or not they understand what I’m doing . . . the emotional reaction is all that matters as long as there’s some feeling of communication, it isn’t necessary that it be understood.”

The idea that drugs disinhibit is an interesting one, but one that I think is misunderstood from the outside. Unless you really understand the mental process of improvisation it is quite confusing I think to see how it can happen. I personally never use drugs so I am also probably unqualified to talk about it completely clearly, but my thoughts are that when you learn to improvise to a high level, even just the act of improvising becomes something that doesn’t require as much concentration. To clarify, this is different to saying that the musician just uses muscle memory of patterns of hand movements to achieve something that sounds fairly improvised. I am describing a situation in which they are still actually improvising their musical ideas, not regurgitating memorised information.

For example, if you are highly intoxicated in some way you often still retain some basic faculties like speech, even if it is impaired slightly, you are still often able to speak and to maintain some sort of thought process of reacting to what people are saying around you, as well as muscular control of the vocal chords in order to speak. I think that musicians like Parker would have reached a similar relationship with music and their instrument through hours and hours of practice, where it gets to the point where improvising fluently is as easy as something like speaking and that there isn’t really much mental calculation that needs to happen consciously in order for him to play, in the same way that the complex movements of the voice box during speech don’t have to be consciously calculated as you talk. Maybe that is a bit far-fetched, but it is a thought that I had about the topic.

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Sam Watts is a professional jazz musician. This post is a response to Graham Scambler’s earlier post about jazz and sociology.


Reclaiming ‘impact’ and committing sociology (2013-09-04 14:25)

Earlier today I stumbled across this interesting post by David Mellor on the (now defunct) Sociology & the Cuts blog:

There is a great deal of talk about publics that very often fails to materialize into anything more substantial than well meaning sentiment. In my eyes this is simply due to a lack of solidarity and communal support within British sociology – a rather ironic situation really. This is not the fault of the BSA and nor should it be their job, I think, as a professional association. The BSA provides the spaces for us to be drawn together – what we do in and from these spaces is our own responsibility.

What I’m calling for doesn’t have a name yet, because as far as I know there isn’t a collective noun for a group of sociologists (jokes on a postcard to the usual address). I’d like to suggest ‘an insurrection’ of sociologists. What I’m calling for then, is an insurrection of sociologists for impact. This would entail us working collectively across institutions and beyond national borders to share our experiences, to encourage others, and to form new groupings for action. We don’t need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it. I’ve chosen the term insurrection because I think it captures the nature of what we can actually achieve. Even acting collectively with colleagues from sociology and other disciplines – and perhaps with other pressure groups and social movements – we are highly unlikely to have revolutionary impact. This doesn’t mean, however, that we will have none, or that we should just give up and lapse into disciplinary docility. On the contrary, we can use the context of impact-for-audit to create a platform for impact-for-justice, from where we can develop strategies for political and ethical struggle. Many individuals have worked hard in this area and their biographies illustrate the problems we continue to face as individual scholar-activists, particularly in the absence of a strong collective platform (see for example Max Farrar’s exemplary ‘Cracking the Ivory Tower’ in Burnett et al. (2010) New Social Connections). It’s time to make an opportunity out of a crisis and build a strong collective platform for impact-for-justice.


It’s hard to convey quite how emphatically I agree with his proposal that "we don’t need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it". Hopefully this is what the new BSA Activism group will do. I’m by no means hostile to Public Sociology as a concept (in fact we host this [1]great bibliography compiled by Albert Tzeng) but it’s hard not to be struck by the emergence of such a voluminous literature debating what must surely be a predominately practical endeavour. Perhaps problems arise because the process of building an infrastructure for ‘getting good at it’ isn’t glamorous and it isn’t an institutional priority.
I'm thinking of things like media training, digital literacy and online projects which serve to amplify the voices of individual sociologists who can only participate on an occasional basis. As a young sociologist who works hard at trying to communicate my research through the media I've increasingly become aware of the fact that I have never had a substantive discussion about working with the media with another sociologist. Nor have I encountered any support structures orientated specifically towards communicating sociological ideas (as opposed to generic media training my university has provided in the past). Obviously I realise that there's more to Public Sociology than working with the media and engaging online. I cite these activities only because they're the ones I've engaged in a lot over the last 5 years. Through doing so I've become aware of the glaring absence of any kind of apparatus to support those, particularly PhDs/ECRs, who want to engage in this kind of activity.

This didn’t put me off and I figured out what I was doing largely through trial and error. But surely if we’re committed to the principle of public sociology then the logical next step is ‘getting good at it’ and building support structures to this end? I’m very keen to do this with the BSA Digital Sociology group to the greatest extent I can and am in the process of planning a sociological blogging workshop for early next year. Perhaps it might be valuable to try and hold a workshop sharing experiences and exchanging insights into the specific challenges and opportunities posed by trying to communicate sociological knowledge in the media? These are the ideas that occur to me based on my own experiences of certain kinds of activities. But I’m sure there are others and I’d love to hear anyone’s suggestions. In short: if we accept that public sociology is worthwhile then how practically do we go about getting good at it?


Steve Fuller (2014-01-05 11:49:00)

Thanks for saying what has been needed to be said for a very long time. I believe that ‘public sociology’ tends to become just another discursive rabbit hole for sociologists rather than actual acts of public sociology because people feel they can’t be ‘public sociologists’ unless they’re speaking in the name of the discipline (or at least in terms of findings, etc. that have passed peer review within the discipline). This is an enormous liability. As a result, sociologists such as Frank Furedi (I could name others) are not credited as ‘always already’ public sociologists. People like Furedi – who I think of as among the true public sociologists in our time – act as professionals (imagine lawyers) who because of their accreditation in the field (both through education and employment) are licensed to practice the discipline as they see fit. Such people should not be automatically chastised for failing to represent ‘latest research’ in the field — especially when their pronouncements appear politically uncomfortable. This simply undermines the impact of sociology as a whole, both by leaving the external impression that we’re in disarray and the internal impression that no one should venture forth unless they’ve checked that they’ve name-checked all the right academic sources. Much more productive would be for those who don’t like de facto public sociologists like Furedi to develop exactly the sorts of interventionist skills that Mark suggests, and then practice some public sociology in the press, etc.against people like Furedi. In that case, sociology will be truly conducted in public — which is what I thought ‘public sociology’ was supposed to be about. (By the way, much of what Furedi says is spot on, but I raise him as an example for purposes of the likely audience for this message.)

» Making Sociology Public The Sociological Imagination (2015-03-29 08:01:21)

[... ] However while it’s obviously the case that social media is relevant for public sociology, I’ve found it harder to be clear about precisely what this relationship entails. The communicative affordances of social media obviously play an important part in this: these tools are ‘fast, cheap and out of control’ as the educational technologist Martin Weller has put it. But there are good sociological reasons to reject a view of the communication of sociological knowledge as intrinsically valuable, as well as important conceptual questions about what exactly we mean by ‘sociological knowledge’. The discipline’s identity is far from secure and ritualistic invocations of the sociological imagination (etc) need to be treated with
caution at a time of institutional instability. That said, I’m still convinced that Sociology has an important role to play in public life and I’m much more interested in getting good at public sociology than I am in adding to an already voluminous literature. [...] 

Life without Father or Ford: feminist perspectives on work, employment & society (2013-09-04 20:40)

In October 2012, British Sociological Association journal Work, employment and society hosted a one-day conference reflecting on key debates and looking forward to what the future might hold for the discipline and the journal. We are happy to have video footage of the stimulating presentations.

Feminist analysts of women’s labour market position used to assume that women’s domestic labour was essential for capitalism, just as urban sociologists assumed the provision of the goods and services of collective consumption had a similar role. The cold new world of neoliberalism, economic crisis and recession challenged what now look like overly optimistic claims. Linda McDowell looks backwards and forwards in this talk assessing the changing explanations of women’s labour market participation and the types of research published in WES to address the changing nature of research about gender relations over the last 25 years, as well as to suggest an agenda for the future.

Linda McDowell
Life without Father or Ford: Reflecting on feminist perspectives on work, employment and society
Professor of Human Geography, Director of St. John's College Research Centre, University of Oxford

Technology, Not Tenure: The Politics of the Digital Turn in #HigherEd (2013-09-05 08:00)

An absolute must read in the Chronicle of Higher Education for those interested in digital change within higher education:

Last year, a former Princeton University president, William G. Bowen, delivered the Tanner Lectures at Stanford, continuing a long tradition of college leaders' using the top floors of the ivory tower to speak difficult truths about academe.

When the dot-com craze was sweeping the nation, back in 2000, Bowen—an author in the 1960s of the original "cost disease" diagnosis of labor-intensive industries — kept his eyes on the evidence. He didn’t yet see reason to believe that colleges could use technology to save money. But another decade of progress changed his mind. "I am today a convert," he said. (The lectures were published this year by Princeton University Press as Higher Education in the Digital Age.) Bowen's random-trial-based research suggests that "online learning, in many of its manifestations, can lead to at least comparable learning outcomes relative to face-to-face instruction at a lower cost."

With MOOC mania showing no signs of abating, such strong conclusions from an esteemed scholar have drawn notice.

Less attention has been paid to what Bowen said next. Increasing labor productivity is one thing in theory, something else in practice. Less face-to-face instruction can mean fewer faces on the faculty side. It also means routinizing aspects of the student learning experience and thus reducing the day-to-day academic discretion of individual professors.

Bowen was a university president long enough to know how faculty are likely to respond, and what mechanisms of structural power and appeals to tradition will be employed to divert productivity gains to "gild the educational/research lily." "I wonder," he said, "if the particular models of what is often called 'shared governance' that have been developed over the last century are well suited to the digital world."

Nor does Bowen believe that this an issue of academic freedom: Freedom of expression "should not imply unilateral control over methods of teaching. There is nothing in the basic documents explaining academic freedom to suggest that such control is included. It is not."

These are the battle lines of early-21st-century higher education. Or at least they will be if the professoriate chooses to fight for traditional totems and privileges.


It’s an infuriating set of arguments being proffered by the "Director of Education Policy Program" at a think tank which has Eric Schmidt as the chairman of the board of directors. But I think he's correct about the 'battle lines of early-21st-century higher education':

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Total academic freedom in the classroom is just ridiculous. If an organization is focused on doing something, like education, it ought to have theories and standards and practices about that something. As the University of Chicago’s longtime president, Robert Maynard Hutchins, said in another lecture-series-turned-book-length provocation, the system of letting students choose among classes taught by wholly autonomous professors ‘denies there is content to education, so the organization of the modern university denies that there is rationality in the higher learning. The free elective system as applied to professors means that they can follow their own bents, gratify their own curiosity, and offer credits in the results.”

Hutchins was concerned with curriculum back in 1935, but the same laissez-faire approach is applied, then as now, to the practice of teaching. Student evaluations provide little useful information other than an inverse correlation to academic rigor. Teaching varies as professors see fit, which is widely, and so learning varies as well, and far too much.

Digital technology in contemporary higher education is janus faced. It risks being a means through which an unprecedented disciplining of academic labour can be enacted while simultaneously holding out unprecedented possibilities for expanding the autonomy of networks of academics vis-a-vis the institutions within which they operate. It’s for this reason that I think there is an incipiently political dimension to digital scholarship. The technology which is increasingly implicated in the politics of higher education is also reshaping the circulation of research, as Dave Beer has pointed out:

What I would like to suggest is that this blog post, like other social media content, will be subject to the politics of circulation that defines contemporary media. The data that is produced as a by-product of contemporary cultural life does not just stop when it is produced, rather data fold-back into our everyday lives in variegated and often unseen ways. Similarly the destiny of this blog post will be shaped by the material infrastructures that it has been placed within. In this sense, academic knowledge is being opened up to social media’s politics of circulation. As such, these transformations in the communication of research are likely to have profound implications for the way that we encounter and discover knowledge. All of which will then, in turn, implicate the knowledge that we go on to produce. There is the potential then for social media’s politics of circulation to influence both the communication and production of knowledge.

Using social media to communicate academic knowledge is not a problem in itself, it actually opens up vast new possibilities, but it forces us to ask what will happen as more and more researchers use social media and other open-access outlets for their work. How will we cope with the din? And, most importantly, who will get heard? If we don’t understand the politics of data circulations that define contemporary media cultures then we may also find that academic practice is reshaped without sufficient reflection and reaction.


The way in which digital technology is being deployed, in a partly rhetorical fashion, as part of a project to discipline academic labour is a distinct process from the politics of circulation described by Beer. But the unpredictability of this circulation potentially throws a spanner into the works. All the more so if digital scholarship is embraced with the aim of securing the agency of scholars in a rapidly changing knowledge environment. The available options are radically expanding. The only one that is untenable is passivity and a retreat into comfortable certainties:
We can no longer imagine that we are communicating research in an environment in which our ideas, or data, amble continually forward in a slow linear stroll. Rather our findings, even those published in old fashioned journals – which now have blogs and Twitter feeds attached and whose publishers are looking to increase impact factors through predictive recommendation and the like – are also being introduced to the chaotic maelstrom of contemporary media. The result is that our research will take on this vitality and will be caught in the currents, which might be simultaneously unnerving and invigorating. Some ideas will be washed away, unnoticed, others will find a significant audience, others may have a profound and surprising journey through networks. The outcomes will be unpredictable, but all will be a product of the politics of circulation that defines contemporary media forms.


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**What is Digital Sociology? (2013-09-06 08:00)**

[1]"What is Digital Sociology? " on Bundlr


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**Nick Couldry - 'Voiceblind: On Some Paradoxes of the Neoliberal State' (2013-09-06 14:00)**

Nick Couldry (London School of Economics) speaking at the ‘Neoliberalism, Crisis and the World System’ conference organised by Nicholas Gane and Claire Westall at the University of York, UK, July 2nd, 2013. For a full conference programme, see http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/about... Funding for this event came from the British Academy and the Centre for Modern Studies at York.

Do you have an experience of *inwardness*? Do you feel inner activity which is known to you in a way it is not to others? Margaret Archer suggests that most people would assent to some claim of this sort. Obviously, this would not entail we ought to accept the report of this experience but it does mean we should take it seriously. However, it is often not taken seriously and one reason for that, argues Archer, is an over-reaction to the metaphor through which ‘introspection’ has tended to be construed.

This metaphor of ‘looking inwards’ implies that we have a special sense, or even a sense organ, enabling us to inspect our inner conscious states, in a way which is modelled upon visual observation. This analogy between perception and introspection is what has borne the brunt of criticism. Etymologically it derived from the Latin *spicere* (‘to look’) and *intra* (‘within’). Those who insisted upon the dis-analogy between perceiving and introspecting were surely correct. In perception, there is a clear distinction between the object we see and our visual experiences of it, whereas with introspection there can be no such differentiation between the object and the spectator, since I am supposedly looking inward at myself. Over the last half century, the critical response to this misplaced perceptual metaphor has been overkill. It generically consists in turning our heads inside out, so that our inner doings are learned from our external behaviour, rather than vice versa, where behaviour traditionally betokened the workings of the mind. (Archer 2003: 21).

This involved a first-person account being replaced by a third-person one, entailing that we “thus learn about our own intentions, motives, feelings, commitments and so forth by watching what we do or listening to what we ourselves say out loud, which is identical with how we come to know other people” (Archer 2003: 21). This turns ‘introspection’ into ‘extrospection’: I observe what ‘I’ am doing by observing what ‘he’ is doing, in the same way I would observe any other person. However the obvious problem faced by such a move is how it can deal with the possibility of covert mental acts i.e. those which have no behavioural manifestations. Affirming the existence of this category does not entail a blanket denial of the possibility of ‘extrospection’: Archer fully acknowledges that many mental states do have behavioural manifestation but places great stress on the ones for which this is not true. Upholding this claim poses three philosophical tasks,

To sustain a successful defence against behaviourism entails upholding three arguments coherently: (a) that there is a domain of mental privacy within consciousness, (b) which is inaccessible to ‘extrospection’ and, (c) of which the person has awareness through means other than introspective observation. (Archer 2003: 24).
In seeking to make these arguments Archer opposes what she sees as a justified "critical onslaught upon Cartesian notions of how we obtain knowledge of our mental doings, what authority our subjective reports possess and whether our internal deliberations are causally efficacious" which, partly deflected by a focus on the unnecessary and inappropriate metaphor of the 'inner eye', has nonetheless gone too far and jettisoned notions of 'private knowledge', 'first-person authority' and 'subjective causation' which she argues are integral to an adequate understanding of the social functioning of human persons (Archer 2003: 20).


Tuesday, September 17, 2013 from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM (BST)
Leeds, United Kingdom

At this inaugural event there will be presentations from researchers who have been exploring quantified self or self-tracking either empirically or theoretically which will stimulate discussion around the potential and implications for future developments. We hope that this event will stimulate discussion and collaboration among attendees and further afield. This is a great opportunity to be involved in the development of an emerging academic area and to connect with others. Below is a short summary of the proposed interests of the network. This is, however, intended to be an open forum in which a collective vision for the future of the network can be produced.

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in public and academic interest in the use of devices or techniques for the accumulation, aggregation and analysis of personal data. Apps for mobile phones such as Track My Run and body tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike's Fuelband have perhaps garnered the widest attention with their ability to passively collect data on everyday activities which can then be analysed and shared with others. There is, however, more to quantified self than the mainstream media picture of obsessive "techies". Many people engaged in "life logging" collate data on mood and experiences often without a direct quantitative element. While a relatively formalised arm of the quantified self movement has formed, through the Quantified Self group based in San Francisco, not everyone involved in quantified self activities is affiliated with Quantified Self. This formalised movement, as well as the broader cluster of practices and orientations which are coalescing within and beyond it, point to commercial and political connections which have yet to be fully explored.


CfP: What are zombies and why are they now so prevalent across both pop culture and academia? (2013-09-07 21:45)

Does it suddenly seem like the living dead are everywhere? Lumbering past cyborgs, mutants, werewolves, and, yes, even vampires, zombies are the monsters du jour. Zombies have taken up residence in the pages of fiction (literary hits such as Colson Whitehead’s Zone One, The Walking Dead comic books, pulp zombie apocalypse narratives such as World War Z, and young adult fiction such as Warm Bodies) and inhabit our various screens, from television shows such as AMC’s ubiquitous The Walking Dead, to movies (from 1968’s Night of the Living Dead to the more recent 28 Days Later, I Am Legend, and Shaun of the Dead), and video games (Resident Evil, Left 4 Dead). We have zombie runs, zombie computers, Nazi zombies, and zombie banks. Even zombie strippers and zombie studies. They have come from space, from nature, from biotech labs, and the dark recesses of the globe. They even have their own CDC website and inhabit a growing area of scholarly debate over the status of philosophical zombies. We’re seemingly surrounded by the living dead.

What are zombies and why are they now so prevalent across both pop culture and academia? The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory proposes a special issue to critically examine the resurgence of interest in the zombie as a cultural and political figure. We invite papers from across the disciplines that explore diverse aspects of this vibrant cultural phenomenon and address the current popularity of the living dead.

Completed papers must be submitted by September 30, 2013. Authors will be notified of acceptance by November 30, 2013. Projected publication: Spring, 2014. Please submit papers to dweiss@ycp.edu.

Submit electronic copies of completed papers (3000 – 6000 words). Abstracts cannot be considered. Papers will be subject to a double blind review by a selection committee. Include your name, paper title and contact information on a separate page. Include the paper title but not your name on a header or footer on each numbered page of the paper itself. The papers must be previously unpublished in any format.

The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory is a peer-reviewed journal devoted to both disciplinary and interdisciplinary scholarship of a cutting-edge nature that deals broadly with the phenomenon of religious and cultural theory. Subfields include, but are not limited to, philosophical and cultural theory, theological studies, postcolonial and globalization theory, religious studies, literary theory, cultural studies, ethnic, area, and gender studies, communications, semiotics, and linguistics. No term papers, religious advocacy pieces, unsolicited book reviews or opinion pieces, etc. will be considered. The Journal is FREE of charge, is published three times a year (Winter, Spring and Fall).

All manuscripts submitted, or revised, for publication must be in Microsoft Word format. No hard copies of manuscripts will be accepted. The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory uses the Chicago Manual of Style for all published reviews and articles.

(HT Critical-Theory.Com)
CfP: Quantified Self and Self-Tracking (2013-09-08 08:00)

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in public and academic interest in the use of devices or techniques for the accumulation, aggregation and analysis of personal data. Apps for mobile phones such as Track My Run and body tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike's Fuelband have perhaps garnered the widest attention with their ability to passively collect data on everyday activities which can then be analysed and shared with others. There is, however, more to quantified self than the mainstream media picture of obsessive "techies". Many people engaged in "life logging" collate data on mood and experiences often without a direct quantitative element. While a relatively formalised arm of the quantified self movement has formed, through the Quantified Self group based in San Francisco, not everyone involved in quantified self activities is affiliated with Quantified Self. This formalised movement, as well as the broader cluster of practices and orientations which are coalescing within and beyond it, point to commercial and political connections which have yet to be fully explored.

The new Quantified Self research network will explore the broad implications of this loose set of practical and ethical approaches to understanding bodies, psyches and everyday practices. While we are interested in exploring the practices and techniques of assessment we think it is equally important to understand the often novel ways in which the diverse types of analysis enable new forms of reflecting on the embodied self and relations with others. We hope to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue around this multitude of emerging issues, in the belief that historical, philosophical, cultural, sociological, psychology, economic, technological and political approaches all have a role to play in understanding this fascinating trend.

The network aims to:

- Build network of scholars interested in qs
- Explore possibilities for further research and collaborations
- Share ideas about substantive issues
- Support access and development of postgraduate and early career researchers
- Develop sociological approaches to understanding qs
- Identify potential for disciplinary collaborations
- Develop relations with interested parties beyond the academy
- Potentially developing some sort of web resources (perhaps as part of the BSA Digital Sociology Groups's website)

We've organised an initial seminar at the University of Leeds on September 17th. If you would like to do a short talk (20 mins max) about your research, intended research or simply to explain the intellectual basis for your interest in quantified self then please contact network organisers: Mark Carrigan ([1]mark@markcarrigan.net) and Christopher Till ([2]christophertill@hotmail.co.uk) with a short abstract and bio. Full details will be released soon for those who do not wish to present but would like to attend on the day. Furthermore, please get in touch if you would like to be
Manuacturing Consent in an Age of Austerity: Bashar al-Assad the “naughty child” (2013-09-08 08:48)

As anyone who follows me on Twitter will probably have noticed, in the last week I’ve been gripped by the march to war in Syria and what has seemed to be the new playbook, tentatively trialled with Libya, which the US and UK now draw upon in manufacturing consent for ‘military intervention’. For anyone with even the most minimal disposition towards critical reasoning, the ‘official’ case for action is weak: two years into a civil war which has led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands amidst a whole sequence of atrocities, we’re told that the use of chemical weapons represents a ‘red line’ which has been crossed and this qualitatively distinct act of cruelty ‘must be avenged’.

Any geopolitical considerations entering into the sanitised public discourse amount to little more than platitudes about inaction leading to the perception of weakness. In essence the official justification has vacillated between shrilly demanding to know “how would you feel if this was your children!?” and an oddly managerial line about reputation management. One case is invoked when the manifold weakness in the other risks becoming transparent. There’s something interestingly (and worryingly) new about the action that is being proposed here:

We’re nearing the end of the run-up: American officials are now telling the press that Syria strikes are inevitable “within days.” What’s confusing most people about the decision is why: what’s the point of strikes that US officials are describing as “just muscular enough not to get mocked” but not significant enough to actually change the balance of power between the Assad regime and the rebels?

The common answer to this conundrum is that the strikes are “symbolic,” punishment for the Assad regime’s use of chemical weapons. That’s true, but in a key sense misleading. The truth is that strikes are a kind of humanitarian intervention, albeit one with such a specific and narrow aim as to be essentially unprecedented in the history of humanitarian war.

Administration officials, as The Washington Post’s Max Fisher suggests, have left zero room for doubt that this intervention is about chemical weapons. Fisher argues that, instead of thinking of the strikes as an attempt to restore American “credibility” after Assad crossed the chemical weapons red line, the point of the strikes is to defend the international norm against chemical weapons use. We’re attacking Syria to make sure that chemical weapons are never used, particularly against civilians, again.

There’s two intended audiences for this message: other states with chemical weapons stockpiles, like North Korea, and the Assad dictatorship itself. The message being sent to the latter is much more interesting because the United States has explicitly ruled out regime change. We’re telling the Syrians that we’re staying out unless you return to en-masse gassing, in which case we’ll get involved with (by implication) escalating levels of force.

This is a form of humanitarian intervention, albeit a very specific one. The idea behind a humanitarian intervention is to end ongoing violence or prevent it from escalating; the idea behind the
norm against chemical weapons is that chemical weapons are uniquely hideous and well-suited for the mass murder of civilians. Intervening in Syria to deter Assad from using chemical weapons is intervening to prevent a very particular subset of the horrible violence going on in Syria from getting worse.

Intervening against a particular tactic that could be used to kill civilians, rather than the campaign of murdering civilians in general, is unprecedented. It would be as if the United States had intervened in Rwanda to stop Hutus from killing Tutsis with machetes, but not the systematic extermination of Tutsis writ large.


But is there also something new about how it’s being sold? There are many broader questions here which I hope to read more about in the next week or two – most pressingly the implications for the balance of power in the region and the significance of this renewed imperial shrillness (some of the invocations of ‘being disgusted’ at inaction seem genuine) in the context of long-term austerity and ever increasing signs of the ill-health of British democracy. Even more so than Iraq this seems to have been a post-democratic strategy for military invention in Colin Crouch’s sense of the term. It has been stage managed and structured around appealing simple tropes which reduce its geopolitical complexity to moral intuition: how would you feel if it was your children being gassed?

The other aspect to this only occurred when listening to Radio 4’s Any Questions (a usually atrocious phone in show which I can’t help but listen to despite it constantly winding me up) was the figurative presentation of Assad as a naughty child. One caller actually invoked this explicitly: talking about the need to give him a ‘short, sharp spank’ (!!!!) or words to that effect immediately after the chemical attack. He’s a naughty child who needs to be taught how to ‘play nice’. I thought this trope was apt and actually prefigured by the official rhetoric justifying military action – in fact I’m sure you could probably find it being invoked explicitly if you look hard enough. It reduces a complex issue to personal experience and complements the invocation of ‘your children’ effectively – the ‘case for action’ is an assemblage, a set of interconnected ideational components, intended to frame what is proposed cognitively and canalise affect in terms which render sustained discussion difficult.

In essence all I’m saying is that there seems to be a sophistication to the marketing here which intrigues me. What’s also interesting is the social media component to this – I’m not suggesting the US military will have been the only, or even a major, agency at work here (I’m thinking particularly of youtube) but it would be naive to assume that the well documented psychological operations capacity of the US military wouldn’t be deployed in this case and/or that it wouldn’t be deployed on social media.


Our Most Popular Posts Last Week (2013-09-09 05:31)

[1]Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left

[2]25 reasons why you should blog about your research

[3]How to write 1000 words a day and not go bat shit crazy (at least not within the first two weeks)
[4] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[5] Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing

[6] Making the familiar strange

[7] Jazz and Sociology – a professional jazz musician responds

[8] The (un)intelligibility of academics and being 'a mere journalist'

[9] What is Sociology for?

[10] Reclaiming 'impact' and committing sociology

[11] 'You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain…'

[12] Dear Guilt-Ridden #PhD Students: Structure your procrastination and turn a vice into a virtue

[13] Jazz and Sociology

#BritSoc13 Interview with John Holmwood (2013-09-09 08:00)


BSA Postgraduate / Early Careers Researchers Special Event 8th Oct 2013 (2013-09-09 11:18)

BSA Postgraduate / Early Careers Researchers Special One Day Event 'Writing & Publishing a Qualitative Article'

Tuesday 8 October 2013, 10.30am - 4.30pm
BSA Meeting Room, Imperial Wharf, London SW6 2PY

An interactive workshop, facilitated by Professor Nick Fox

Professor Fox has published widely in sociology journals. His research interests include: Embodiment and Identity; Health Technologies; Creativity and Health; Sexuality

‘Getting Published’

The Structure of the Qualitative Paper, presentation by Prof Nick Fox, followed by Q &A.

Group work on participants’ ideas for a qualitative paper.

Where to publish qualitative research papers?

Writing for publication, presentation by Prof Nick Fox, followed by Q &A.

BSA members: £10, Non-members: £15 – to register please go to:


The Libertarian Imaginary in an Age of Austerity (2013-09-09 11:42)

This fascinatingly weird essay by Peter Thiel, founder of PayPal and Facebook’s first outsider investor (not to mention founder of the most [1]sinister tech startup you’ve (n)ever heard of - let’s sidestep the ideological tension involved in being a leading libertarian making money from developing the infrastructure for a ’big data’ security state) offers interesting insights into the shifting fortunes of libertarian politics:

As one fast-forwards to 2009, the prospects for a libertarian politics appear grim indeed. Exhibit A is a financial crisis caused by too much debt and leverage, facilitated by a government that insured against all sorts of moral hazards — and we know that the response to this crisis involves way more debt and leverage, and way more government. Those who have argued for free markets have been screaming into a hurricane. The events of recent months shatter any remaining hopes of politically minded libertarians. For those of us who are libertarian in 2009, our education culminates with the knowledge that the broader education of the body politic has become a fool’s errand.

Indeed, even more pessimistically, the trend has been going the wrong way for a long time. To return to finance, the last economic depression in the United States that did not result in massive
government intervention was the collapse of 1920–21. It was sharp but short, and entailed the sort of Schumpeterian "creative destruction" that could lead to a real boom. The decade that followed — the roaring 1920s — was so strong that historians have forgotten the depression that started it. The 1920s were the last decade in American history during which one could be genuinely optimistic about politics. Since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of "capitalist democracy" into an oxymoron.


Given how ignorantly recalcitrant these 'constituencies' (i.e. most of the population) Thiel has become rather pessimistic about the prospect of his libertarian ideals finding social expression. So given his pessimism about a reversion to the class politics of the 1920s (presumably his ideal solution were it not for democracy and the fact that the vast majority of the populace would find his politics abhorrent) he’s looking elsewhere in his mission to “make the world safe for capitalism”:

(1) **Cyberspace.** As an entrepreneur and investor, I have focused my efforts on the Internet. In the late 1990s, the founding vision of PayPal centered on the creation of a new world currency, free from all government control and dilution — the end of monetary sovereignty, as it were. In the 2000s, companies like Facebook create the space for new modes of dissent and new ways to form communities not bounded by historical nation-states. By starting a new Internet business, an entrepreneur may create a new world. The hope of the Internet is that these new worlds will impact and force change on the existing social and political order. The limitation of the Internet is that these new worlds are virtual and that any escape may be more imaginary than real. The open question, which will not be resolved for many years, centers on which of these accounts of the Internet proves true.

(2) **Outer space.** Because the vast reaches of outer space represent a limitless frontier, they also represent a limitless possibility for escape from world politics. But the final frontier still has a barrier to entry: Rocket technologies have seen only modest advances since the 1960s, so that outer space still remains almost impossibly far away. We must redouble the efforts to commercialize space, but we also must be realistic about the time horizons involved. The libertarian future of classic science fiction, à la Heinlein, will not happen before the second half of the 21st century.

(3) **Seasteading.** Between cyberspace and outer space lies the possibility of settling the oceans. To my mind, the questions about whether people will live there (answer: enough will) are secondary to the questions about whether seasteading technology is imminent. From my vantage point, the technology involved is more tentative than the Internet, but much more realistic than space travel. We may have reached the stage at which it is economically feasible, or where it soon will be feasible. It is a realistic risk, and for this reason I eagerly support this initiative.


My fear is that for all his seemingly earnest belief in these sci-fi utopias (it’s hard not to imagine Thiel watching Elysium and siding with the space station’s elite) the likely implications of his politics and influence are much more terrestrial. He’s funding ‘security robots’ which, though fairly innocuous in their current incarnation, could certainly herald something more sinister if viewed with even a fraction of Theil’s undoubtedly imaginative futurism:
RoboteX was founded in 2007 and creates robots without the use of government funding. Its line of "Avatar" robots are meant to help with security, sometimes in situations that could be dangerous for humans. The website lists examples such as serving papers to a dangerous individual, entering hostage situation, patrolling, investigating suspicious packages, and more.

The company also has a line of robots for the home and office that offer its own form of roving security system. You attack an iOS device to the robot, which you can then remotely control to survey the house on your behalf.

The robots also come with a line of accessories, such as a command center, carrying case, manipulator arm, and stabilizers for rough terrain. With the manipulator arm, the Avatar II almost looks like a tiny NASA Curiosity rover.

[http://venturebeat.com/2013/03/22/robotex-funding/#abPQFg2xhF7oYSUQ.99](http://venturebeat.com/2013/03/22/robotex-funding/#abPQFg2xhF7oYSUQ.99)

Perhaps more worrying is the deployment of his security and technology firm. Given Thiel is on record enthusiastically opining that "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible" it’s hard to imagine that he had any qualms in principle about this operation, nor that he would about similar work in future. After all he seems truly committed to the mission of 'making the world safe for capitalism'.

It gets worse: the technologies and know-how acquired over years of spying on suspected foreign terrorists and threats were turned to private, political use against US citizens. In what became known last year as the "Chamber-Gate" scandal, Palantir was outed by Anonymous as the lead outfit in a private espionage consortium with security technology companies HBGary and Berico; the groups spent months “[creating electronic dossiers on political opponents of the Chamber through illicit means.”

According to [4]ThinkProgress, Palantir “may have used techniques and technologies developed under military contracts in their pro-Chamber campaign.”

Thiel's Palantir and its two intelligence contractor partners—collectively named [5]“Team Themis” after the Roman goddess of law and order—proposed to the Chamber’s lawyers a plan that involved illegal cyber-espionage against the Chamber’s enemies, including targeting activists’ families and children. Among those targeted: ThinkProgress, union leaders, MoveOn, Brad Friedman and [7]Glenn Greenwald, whose support for Wikileaks [8]reportedly rankled Chamber member Bank of America.


1. [http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2012/09/features/joining-the-dots](http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2012/09/features/joining-the-dots)
2. [http://venturebeat.com/2013/03/22/robotex-funding/#abPQFg2xhF7oYSUQ.99](http://venturebeat.com/2013/03/22/robotex-funding/#abPQFg2xhF7oYSUQ.99)
It has been quite a summer for antagonistic television in the UK. In July, Channel 4 broadcast How To Get A Council House, which chronicled the devastating shortage of affordable housing in one of London’s most overcrowded boroughs, and Why Don’t You Speak English?, which paired migrants with ‘host’ families for a week to improve their language skills. While the content of these programmes did occasionally veer into sympathy and even compassion, the programme’s deliberately titillating titles were enough to paper over much of this subsequent complexity – the former seemingly promising an expose of housing loopholes exploited by those savvy enough to play the system, the latter phrased as an accusation steeped in racism and linguistic/geographical propriety. In August, Channel 4 broadcast Benefits Britain 1949, a reality programme which set three benefit claimants the challenge of living by the benefit rules of 1949 (when the welfare state was first launched). I will be writing about Benefits Britain 1949 in more detail elsewhere, but for now it is worth pointing out how, like much current ‘austerity culture’ it romanticises post-war ‘resilience’ and ‘toughness’ with little socioeconomic context. In any case, UK viewers are surely by now familiar with the shock tactics of Channel 4, once an independent innovator and champion of the oppressed, now increasingly a peddler of emotional money-shots and clichéd horror-prompts at exotic Others (mostly ‘the poor’).

It was more surprising to see the BBC, the “voice of the nation”, stride into this territory, but stride they did, with We All Pay Your Benefits, a two-part July documentary in which four ‘taxpayers’ and four ‘claimants’ were paired up, ostensibly to learn from one another about work and worth.

The genre of ‘poverty porn’ is diffuse and covers a broad range of formats: from cookery and lifestyle programmes fronted by shrewd celebrities who have recognised the appetite for recession-focused culture ([2]Jamie Oliver and [3]Kirsty Allsopp, who both came to media prominence by inviting viewers to spend and consume, are now reinventing themselves as gurus of budget living), to reality incarnations which feature people living on low incomes undergoing financial ‘retraining’ or being set challenges to shop smarter. Abigail Scott Paul of The Joseph Rowntree Foundation [4]recently criticised the willingness of television producers to exploit the very real hardships experienced in the UK as a result of austerity measures and welfare ‘reforms’, stating that, as usual, “people in poverty are objectified on TV for the gratification of others”.

In the first episode, the camera follows the taxpayers as they are introduced to their claimant partner, are invited to cross the threshold and peer into their lives, homes and possessions.

We All Pay Your Benefits is fronted by Nick Hewer and Margaret Mountford, who first featured on our television screens as advisors to enterprise tsar Alan Sugar on the reality programme The Apprentice. Nick Couldry and Jo Littler (2011) have described The Apprentice as ‘ritualized play’ which dramatises the new precariousness of work culture and replaces social collegiality and collaboration with a highly individualised and even aggressive form of charismatic power. As they argue, The Apprentice requires that its contestants absolutely internalise the values of chaotic neoliberalism – and consequently position all subsequent ‘failures’ (“you’re fired!”) as part of a ‘natural’ order in the competitive workplace. Sugar himself has repeatedly [5]attacked maternity rights as “counterproductive”, boasted of his [6]sexist hiring policy and has had tempestuous working relationships with many of his Apprentice ‘winners’. We All Pay Your Benefits inherits this ideological history and works in a parallel way, symbolically dividing ‘workers’ from ‘shirkers’ as if such categories could be approached as solid – and more importantly as if belonging to either could
be understood as merely a matter of will. In the first few minutes, Nick and Margaret firmly position themselves in the ‘worker’ camp (their initial exchange in the back of a taxi proceeds: “the benefits world is not something I know anything about, do you”, “me neither, me neither, we’re the explorers”) and the final frame of the opening credit sequence leaves us in no doubt about who is being reprimanded (literally here, looked down on) by the programme’s title:

![Image of Nick & Margaret: We All Pay Your Benefits]

At the heart of the programme is the symbolic division between ‘worker’ and ‘shirker’, or in the current manifestation, ‘skiver’ and ‘striver’. These divisions are constructed through the very machinery of the programme: the ‘taxpayers’ clock up many minutes of the broadcast speaking to camera on their initial journeys to the ‘claimants’ homes, offering unchallenged caricatures of what they imagine ‘a life on benefits’ to be. It is impossible to know what proportion of this was elicited by producers and what was spontaneously offered, though in places, the prejudices of the taxpayers seem almost wilfully mocked in the edit. Taxpayer Debbie for example accompanies Kelly on her weekly supermarket shop, and comes across as cold-hearted and miserly in her determination to find fault with spending habits. She repeatedly questions why Kelly’s children should have two hot meals a day, before criticising her for buying a whole chicken rather than chicken fillets and for buying “high-salt, high-sugar” supermarket brand tinned food. Their exchange ends in Kelly’s tears and is a powerful reminder to the viewer that the ‘skiver/striver’ rhetoric so enthusiastically embraced by some of the participants has upsetting consequences for those that are stigmatised by it.

There are a set of foundational myths that accompany the programme as it unfolds: one is that the unemployed don’t want to work, another is that full employment is possible under neoliberalism. Tracy Shildrick et al. (2012) have powerfully challenged this narrative, pointing to the existence of a low-pay, no-pay cycle which affects many people in recurrent poverty. They describe the cycle as a “longitudinal pattern of employment instability and movement between low-paid jobs and employment, usually accompanied by claiming of welfare benefits” (2012: 18). Far from being ‘lazy’ or ‘workshy’, many people claiming unemployment benefits do so over short spells, in between periods of low-paid, poor quality, precarious, short-term or zero-hours work. This kind of work is increasing in neoliberal Britain [7]at a faster rate than permanent, full-time, living-wage work. Importantly, it is no longer confined to entry-level work (a stepping-stone, from which one might be promoted) but constitutes a ‘sticky state’ of work, a cycle of entrapment which has a powerful stigmatising effect in terms of future opportunities.

1968
Even within the programme itself, the cracks in these unemployment myths erupt at key moments. ‘Unemployed graduate Liam’, whose appearance on screen is repeatedly accompanied by a visual motif of his branded consumer goods, is revealed to be volunteering at a youth centre in order to gain experience. He is able to live rent-free at his grandfather’s house: without this and under current housing benefit law, Liam would qualify for Housing Benefit up to the level of Local Housing Allowance for a single room in a shared house, and would be required to make up any rent shortfall from his other benefits. The financial support he gets from his family is presented as a problem which fuels his consumer desires, rather than as cushioning his meagre unemployment benefits. We ought to ask, how far is Liam’s story representative and what does it disguise in terms of changes to Housing Benefit calculations and rising rates of youth homelessness? Luther, whose lung disorder limited the physical work he was able to do, described himself as a homemaker and described his ‘job’ as raising his children: a powerful challenge to the programme’s limited vision of work and worth, though one which is continually dismissed. ‘Single mum Kelly’ commented that while she could not commit to early morning cleaning shifts (leaving her house at 5.30am) for a lack of childcare, she would be happy to take on a later shift. This was promptly contrasted with her ‘taxpayer’ peer Debbie (also a single mum) for whom childcare (Nick and Margaret imagine) would “not get in her way”. We are not told what shifts Debbie works, or how she resolved her childcare needs: nor is any detailed consideration of patchy, inadequate and expensive childcare presented. After meeting with an employment analyst, the presenters Nick and Margaret themselves acknowledge (albeit briefly) that the inadequacy of job opportunities has a more important effect on prolonging unemployment than any individual’s desire to work or otherwise.

Despite these eruptive moments, the programme’s ideological message was clear; worth comes from paid work and not from childrearing or volunteering; unemployment is a problem of will or determination and not of structural obstacles; and social security itself generates the ‘problem’ of welfare dependence. The insights gleaned from experts were soon forgotten and Nick and Margaret want to know at the end of the process if the claimants’ “attitudes to work” have changed. From the first moments of footage, and throughout, the divisions between taxpayer/claimant ‘Skivers’ are symbolically and verbally reinforced as if they are different ‘types’ of people.

But the ideology presented on the screen in We All Pay Your Benefits does not necessarily translate into its acceptance by the viewer. As Beverly Skeggs and Helen Wood remind us in their recent book Reacting to Reality Television
programmes such as these work by inciting and generating feelings (disgust, anger, shame, pride); feelings which in turn activate broader circuits of value, systems of judgement, evaluations and assessments.

'Strivers'

These circuits of value depend upon the social and economic locations of viewers, and the judgements we make as viewers towards those on the screen might be to do with questions of taste, cultural or political critique, or associated with a moral objection. For Skeggs and Wood, it is precisely because reality TV operates at this level of sensation, of provoking and inciting feeling, that it should be recognised as a politicized site. Whatever the programme producers had hoped to incite, they could surely not have predicted the wave of sensation that erupted on social media during the broadcast. The hashtag #HappyToPayYourBenefits began to trend on Twitter during the broadcast of both episodes, used by viewers who were appalled by the divisive message of the programme who wanted to express their support of the welfare system. Scrolling through these tweets is instructive and energising and demonstrates the appetite for solidarity even in the face of ‘poverty porn’ television and the postwelfare consensus it seeks to establish. As sociologists we should seek to not only counter the unemployment myths which are presented, unchallenged, on such programming, but also to incubate and extend these kinds of popular resistances to neoliberal rhetoric.

The first episode of We All Pay Your Benefits featured (for me, its lowest point) one low-paid single mother peering disapprovingly into the shopping basket of another. However, through unexpected moments of camaraderie and compassion between the artificial categories of ‘claimant’ and ‘taxpayer’, the neoliberal myths of work and worklessness are challenged. At the end of the second episode, when asked if his experience of working has made him re-assess his life on benefits, Luther incisively turns the question round and states that his ‘taxpayer’ peers are underpaid: "both are worth more than what these jobs pay". Both Liam and Kelly recognise the strains placed on the family lives of their taxpayer peers through the demands of long hours, night shifts and low-paid work. Speaking back to austerity culture, and specifically to ‘poverty porn’ television, requires that we resist the symbolic and stigmatising divisions that it tries to impose, and seek instead the common costs we all face as a result of the excesses of global neoliberalism.

References

Nick Couldry and Jo Littler (2011) 'Work, Power and Performance: Analysing the 'reality’ game of The Apprentice', Cultural Sociology 5 (2) pp263-279


*Tracy Jensen's research explores the classed and gendered intersections of contemporary parenting culture, and how these are reproduced across social, cultural, media and policy sites. Tracy tweets at [8]@Drtraceyjensen.*

7. [http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-22364-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-22364-f0.cfm)


[...] in poverty are symptomatic of the misinformation that can de-legitimise such perceptions (see 'A Summer of Television Poverty Porn' for further discussion). We act as members of the working class and people on low incomes who [...] 

Scrap this deadly election | Drowning Witches (2015-03-25 08:46:57)

[...] amorality if not ruthlessness. The foundational assumption of We Pay Your Benefits is that the unemployed don’t want to work although everyone can get a job in the new [...] 

Week 4: Listening to parents 107days | 107days (2015-04-13 12:51:41)

[...] that mothers bear a heavy load. Mothers have been blamed for everything from naughty children, the rise in teenage pregnancies to summer riots. They are credited with the ability (or lack of it) to wire their children's brains correctly, [...] 


[...] articulación de la pobreza como espectáculo. No son los únicos que escribirían sobre el tema. El centro de investigación sociológica The Sociological Imagination publicó un artículo sobre la... en verano de 2013 de tantos programas sobre el tema, y diversas fundaciones decidieron también [...] 


[...] T. 'A Summer of Television Poverty Porn,' http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14013 [accessed [...] 


[...] few weeks after my first post on the eruption of this genre (where I examined We All Pay Your Benefits broadcast on the BBC), [...] 

1971
What the other social sciences can learn from economics (2013-09-09 13:00)

An interesting post by Diane Coyle on the LSE Impact Blog offers a useful counterweight to those who engage in economist-bashing as a matter of reflex. Though I’m sure I’ve probably lapsed into this on occasion, it’s something which increasingly bothers me. The idea that ‘economics’ does nothing more than embrace political orthodoxy and/or sell itself as an ideological force to the powerful is simply bad sociology and it obscures a much more complex picture which I think it’s crucial for us to understand. Coyle usefully summarises the recent public history of economics in the UK, which sociologists could learn a lot from:

In the UK, the strong presence economists have in public debate about policies ranging from public service reform to monetary policy, HS2 to the Euro crisis, arguably stems from a media initiative launched in 1997, prompted by a cover story in The Economist: “[2]The puzzling failure of economics.” Romesh Vaitilingam started the Royal Economic Society’s media initiative after that – I was then a journalist on The Independent, and was one of the economics writers he contacted. From then on, many economic researchers came to realise that there are some simple but essential lessons for disseminating research successfully – albeit still ignored by other academics.

For example, you have to use normal English, not professional jargon, to explain research. Statistical results require particularly careful explanation as not only the readers but also the journalists are often not statistically literate. You need to be aware of the constraints under which journalists operate, working to tight deadlines (especially in broadcasting), limited to at most a few hundred words, and above all pitching their story in competition with many other candidates. So there is a knack to explaining research in a straightforward, concise but not exaggerated manner, and this is why media training is one element of achieving impact.

The landscape of public debate has changed enormously since 1997, and blogs in particular have come to play a highly influential role in economics. Some of the best-known count as important media in their own right, including Paul Krugman’s [3]Conscience of a Liberal, or [4]Marginal Revolution run by Tyler Cowen and Alex Tabarrok. There are in addition now a number of blogs that publish columns by a range of economists presenting the findings of their academic research – as in the highly influential [5]VoxEU – or providing academics with a platform to provide informed comment on the issues of the day – such as [6]Project Syndicate. Many academic economists, financial market participants, practitioners and journalists now blog and tweet. The online public debate about economics is consequently extremely lively, albeit also manifesting some of the negative aspects of the online world, including a tendency to over-simplify (140 characters is not much) and polarise into opposing ‘camps’.


In the context of economics this discussion seems to lead inevitably to the question of influencing economic policy. In an important sense I think the scope of sociological engagement can and should be much wider than this. Not least of all because the concomitant complementarity (where significant amounts of research in economics logically entail certain conclusions about economic policy) is far more marginal for sociological research. But I think this is a strength rather than a weakness, in so far as that it leads quite naturally (in my mind at least) to a minimalistic criterion for public engagement – sheer interestingness or [8]‘making the familiar strange’ perhaps? Though I obviously think there’s more to public sociology than public engagement.

As I wrote about earlier in the week, I’m in complete agreement with David Mellor’s argument that [9]“we
don’t need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it”. Coyle’s blog post points towards how much more practically orientated the response of UK economists to a loosely homologous set of circumstances has been. One thing that particularly struck me was the alliance building she points to between academic economists and ‘economics writers’. Are there self-identified ‘sociological writers’? If not, why not? I’m certain there must be active writers with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees who for whatever reason no longer identify as sociologists despite having their sensibilities shaped by the discipline. If so then it’s important to build productive relationships with them but also to understand what patterning, if any, there is in the dissipative tendencies exhibited by the intellectual identities of those who have studied sociology but no longer do so within a university.

According to Mike Savage’s *Identities and Social Change in Britain Since 1940* there were 1,530 academic economists within the UK system in 2003-4 of which 57 % were research active. In contrast there were 1,400 sociologists of which 63.1 % were research active. Yet as Savage suggests, “if the ‘social’ disciplines of social anthropology, sociology, social policy, and social worker are grouped together, they become clearly the numerically dominant part of the social sciences, with over half of the core social science staffing” (Savage 2010: 131). The lack of ‘impact’ vis-a-vis economics here is puzzling and important to understand. My objection to facile invocations of the ideological role of economics to explain it stems largely from a belief that such ‘explanations’ are an obstacle to understanding what’s really going on here. There’s an element of truth to them but they simplify in such a way as to entirely obscure the practical differences of strategy and tactics which can be identified in how academic economics, in contrast to other social sciences, negotiates the public context within which it is embedded. I think there’s an awful lot that can be learnt here but that the response should not simply be to try and copy, say, the Royal Economic Society’s media initiative. I guess what interests me is that there seem to have been people outside academic economics working towards its popularisation in a way which does not seem to have been the case with other social science disciplines – I’d like to understand why this is the case, if I’m correct that it is, as well as how this ‘communicative gap’ can be bridged.


David Walker (2014-10-02 14:26:07)
As someone who has spent a good part of a career in journalism interested in disseminating social science, let me offer a partial answer to the question in the last paragraph. 1. it’s not ‘popularisation’ (which has a sniff of snobbery and/or epistemological absolutism about it), but application of the rule of thumb news writers apply (which of course is not ideology free) ...does this quicken the blood/interest the hard-bitten desk editors/ pass the ‘so what’ test. Economics stuff tends to have a higher ratio of passes because 2 (subject to empirical analysis) the kinds of things economists are interested in are the kinds of things that intermediaries (who would go out of business if they were too far off the public’s general interests) are excited by . . . tax, money, fairness, business, jobs etc. The ‘arena of interest’ also includes gender, family, power - the subject matter more often of the other social sciences - but their output doesn’t hit this spot often enough. Here’s a thought experiment. The Institute for Fiscal Studies is supremely successful at subjecting public conversation (especially initiated by politicians) to disciplined analysis and critique, usually economics led. Were there, say, an Institute for Social Policy, in what circumstances and over what output might it command the attention the IFS does. And, a question for social scientists, are there enough practitioners of sociology
and social policy to step up and do what Paul Johnson and colleagues do with such effect?

Sociological Imagination (2014-10-02 22:16:03)
That’s a VERY interesting question. I’ve just posed it on twitter.

Polly Toynbee - "Sociologists need to be out there, providing the hard evidence" (2013-09-10 08:00)


Going through Overwhelming Experiences: Organizations in Times of Austerity - 29th November (2013-09-10 12:39)

Birkbeck Institute for Social Research

in collaboration with
BSA Sociology, Psychoanalysis and the Psychosocial Study Group & the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations

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Friday 29th November 1pm - 5 pm Room B04, 43 Gordon Square Speakers: Dr William Halton, independent consultant Dr David Bell, President of the British Psychoanalytic Society We are living in turbulent times, and organisations of all kinds are being buffeted from many sides as funding is cut, income streams dry up and internal pressure builds. Working in such organizations can be an overwhelming experience for people at all levels and undertaking kinds of roles. Call for contributions and participation From academics and practitioners working with psychoanalytic approaches to organizations, we are inviting Case Presentations for inclusion in the Study Day. The Case Presentations might take different forms, depending on the research questions/ consultancy project, the original audience envisaged for the work, and the role of the enquirer: for instance, a collaborative enquirer engaged by the organization under study, a (formal or informal) participative enquirer where the enquirer is a member of the organisation, or an external researcher. The intention is to provide a learning space for reflection on the range of methods and approaches that can incorporate psychoanalysis in sociological enquiry. Please submit your proposed case presentation in no more than 300 words to the event organizer, [2]Dr Milena Stateva by 14th October 2013. Outstanding case presentations which cannot be accommodated in the Study Day will be published as a blog on a dedicated website. The cases will be presented and discussed in small groups with keynote speeches following. All are welcome, whether or not a case study is submitted. [3]Please register and pay: £25 - Standard £15 - BSA members; Birkbeck staff; Tavistock Institute staff & associates; non-Birkbeck students & unwaged £10 - BSA member students; BSA member unwaged; Birkbeck students For further information contact: [4]Dr Milena Stateva

2. mailto:m.stateva@tavinstitute.org
3. https://www2.bbk.ac.uk/risr/gtoe/
4. mailto:m.stateva@tavinstitute.org

ISA 2014, Yokohama (2013-09-10 12:40)

Dear Colleagues,

As you may already know, September 30, 2013 is the deadline for submitting abstracts to the XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology that will take place in Yokohama, Japan, on July 13-19, 2014.

I am extremely pleased that approximately 1,000 sessions covering a range of topics have been proposed by the Research Committees, Working and Thematic Groups. Please consult their Call for Papers and submit your abstract

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on-line through a centralized website by the submission deadline.

For more details on abstract submission, please see Guidelines for Presenters


Hope to see you at this ISA World Congress of Sociology in beautiful and historic Yokohama, a bay suburb of Tokyo, Japan.

Best,

Maggie

Margaret Abraham

ISA Vice-President, Research Council

International Sociological Association

Call for Articles and Open Space Pieces for this Themed Issue of Feminist Review, Issue 109, March 2015

CALL FOR PAPERS

The financial and economic crises of the last four years, together with an ascendance of conservative politics, have had far-reaching material and discursive consequences in regards to deepening social and economic inequalities. As capitalism seeks to reinvent itself in order to survive a crisis of its own making, austerity politics exacerbate divides of class, gender, race, ethnicity and disability at local, regional and global levels. In this special themed issue, we invite contributions that will provide new feminist analyses of the origins, modalities and effects of this contemporary economic, political and social crisis.

We are interested in exploring what feminism can bring to an analysis of the political economy of austerity. What macro- and micro-level changes are occurring in contemporary forms of capitalism and how are they gendered? What might a feminist analysis of the origins and impact of the financial crisis look like? How are we to understand the power of the financial services sector to set the parameters of economic policy and public debate? How do attacks on the state and the public sector fit into this overall emerging political economy? What is the nature and form of the cultural responses this crisis generates?

Equally, we are concerned with the differential impacts of austerity. While work has begun to emerge in terms of the disproportionate effects of austerity in relation to gender, race, class and disability, we welcome additional contributions to this field, including considerations of how austerity might be reconfiguring intersectional relations of privilege and subordination. We are also interested in new feminist research that considers specific sectors of the economy, or that focuses on the uneven effects of austerity within regional (eg. the Eurozone) and global spaces.

In a time of shrinking states and public services, how is social policy being transformed and what are the intersectional effects of these transformations? What legitimating discourses are emerging for austerity policies and what are their effects in relation to reconfiguring gender, race, disability and class relations and identities?

Finally, we invite feminist analyses of emerging forms of resistance to the politics of austerity, whether in the form of new social and political movements or of creative and cultural practices. What and who are the subjects and objects of these forms of resistance, and what are their limits?

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Country, region or sector-specific feminist analyses of the origins and/or impacts of the financial crisis;
- Differential austerity;
- In relation to gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, class, generation and their intersections;
- In relation to specific sectors;
- At local, regional or global levels;
- Social policy in a time of austerity – how are social welfare and equality/diversity agendas changing and what are their effects;
- Discourses of austerity and their implications for social relations and identities;
• Attacks on the public sector, their discursive legitimations and effects;

• The austere state and feminist alternatives;

• Politics of protest in times of austerity – new social movements and political strategies;

• Cultural politics of resistance – emerging forms of creative practice as resistance.

Issue Editors: Avtar Brah, Ioana Szeman and Irene Gedalof

Deadline for first drafts of papers marked clearly ‘AUSTERITY’ submitted online and following Feminist Review guidelines (http://www.palgrave-journals.com/fr/author_instructions.html) by 15th December 2013

The editors are happy to discuss possible papers informally with potential contributors. Please contact: a.brah@bbk.ac.uk; I.Szeman@roehampton.ac.uk; i.gedalof@londonmet.ac.uk

Conference Bingo! (2013-09-10 14:56)

[1]Kat Gupta and [2]Heather Froehlich have put together a Conference Bingo card which it’ll be hard to resisting printing out for next time I attend a conference. Are there any items you think they've missed....?
# CONFERENCE BINGO

By Kat Gupta and Heather Froehlich

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question is completely about speaker's own project</th>
<th>&quot;The outline of my dissertation is...&quot;</th>
<th>Conference swag/free shit</th>
<th>Inappropriate anything at gala dinner</th>
<th>Clash of the academic alpha males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prezi</td>
<td>Skiving a session</td>
<td>Plenary speaker has too many slides</td>
<td>Long winded debate between two people with no room for anyone else</td>
<td>Lecherous academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference programme is too themed to the conference</td>
<td>Change of programme</td>
<td>FREE SPACE! Someone shows up visibly hungover</td>
<td>Skiving the entire morning/afternoon</td>
<td>Livetweeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol reception</td>
<td>Conference theme is curiously absent from the programme</td>
<td>Starstruck postgraduate</td>
<td>Reading pre-written paper word for word</td>
<td>Inexplicable room change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorly formatted abstract book</td>
<td>Blatant bias towards/against institutional colleagues</td>
<td>Alcohol reception with insufficient alcohol</td>
<td>Obtuse handouts</td>
<td>Leading academic skives entire day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(via [3]Kat's research blog)

2. [http://hfroehlich.wordpress.com/](http://hfroehlich.wordpress.com/)

First Faculty meeting of the year bingo | The Sociological Imagination (2015-09-24 08:01:03)

[...] this then you may enjoy the Conference Bingo card, by Kat Gupta and Heather Froehlich, which we posted a couple of years ago. Are there any other academic bingo cards floating around [...]
Call for Papers - Moral Panics and the State, 22nd November, Cardiff University (2013-09-10 17:00)

Call for Papers is now open and closes on Friday 27th September 2013

*******Delegate Fee will be complimentary for those delegates whose paper is accepted***********

[1]http://moralpanicseminars.wordpress.com/programme-seminar-3/call-for-papers/ Papers will address a series of key questions: • What is this social issue or anxiety about? • What is held up as evidence of this social concern? • Who are its subjects? • Who are the claims-makers/moral entrepreneurs who are leading on this issue? • How does this issue connect to wider social concerns and tensions? • What is significant about the historical moment at which the panic develops? • What are the consequences of these moral panics? • What lessons are to be learned Selected papers will be allocated 15 minutes for their presentation. Successful papers will be notified by early October 2013. Presenters will be expected to provide copies of their papers in advance of the conference to be distributed to the delegates. Practicalities All paper presentations will have access to PowerPoint. Any additional equipment needs should be discussed.


Academic freedom and 'unpublishing' your thoughts (2013-09-10 20:20)

This disturbing case in America raises questions about the implications of the NSA's activities for academic freedom (HT [1]Gurminder Bhambra):

A [2]professor in the computer science department at Johns Hopkins, a leading American university, had written a post on his blog, hosted on the university’s servers, focused on his area of expertise, which is cryptography. The [3]post was highly critical of the government, specifically the National Security Agency, whose reckless behavior in attacking online security astonished him.

Professor Matthew Green wrote on 5 September:

I was totally unprepared for today's bombshell revelations [4]describing the NSA's efforts to defeat encryption. Not only does the worst possible hypothetical I discussed appear to be true, but it's true on a scale I couldn't even imagine.

The post was widely circulated online because it is about the sense of betrayal within a community of technical people who had often collaborated with the government. (I linked to it myself.)

On Monday, he gets a note from the acting dean of the engineering school [5]asking him to take the post down and stop using the [6]NSA logo as clip art in his posts. The email also informs him that if he resists he will need a lawyer. The professor runs two versions of the same site: one hosted on the university’s servers, one on Google's blogger.com service. He tells the dean that he will take down the site mirrored on the university’s system but not the one on blogger.com.

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The analysis in the article is pretty incisive, making a convincing case that this censorship is entirely preemptive and perhaps even more worrying for it:

Dennis O'Shea told me the original concern was that Matthew Green's post might be "illegally linking to classified information". I asked him what law he was referring to. "I'm not saying that there was a great deal of legal analysis done," he replied. Obviously. But again: given the severity of the remedy – unpublishing an expert's post critical of the NSA – careful legal analysis was called for. Why was it missing?

In commenting critically on a subject he is expert in, and taking an independent stance that asks hard questions and puts the responsibility where it belongs, Matthew Green is doing exactly what a university faculty member is supposed to be doing. By putting his thoughts in a blog post that anyone can read and link to, he is contributing to a vital public debate, which is exactly what universities need to be doing more often. Instead of trying to get Matthew Green's blog off their servers, the deans should be trying to get more faculty into blogging and into the public arena. Who at Johns Hopkins is speaking up for these priorities? And why isn't the Johns Hopkins faculty roaring about this issue? (I teach at New York University, and I'm furious.)

Notice: Matthew Green didn't get any takedown request from Google. Only from Johns Hopkins. Think about what that means for the school. He's "their" professor, yet his work is safer on the servers of a private company than his own university. The institution failed in the clutch. That it rectified it later in the day is welcome news, but I won't be cheering until we have answers that befit a great institution like Johns Hopkins, where graduate education was founded on these shores.

And another thing: America's system of research universities is the best in the world. No one argues with that. It's one of biggest advantages this nation has. If it becomes captive to government and handmaiden to the surveillance state, that would be an economic and cultural crime of monstrous proportions. What happened to Matthew Green's blog post yesterday is no small matter.

It raises an important sociological point about how institutions might mediate (and perhaps amplify) the operations of the NSA through a potent combination of risk aversion and idiocy. This case is extremely worrying.
Changing the subject: **Occupy Wall Street’s Achievements and Prospects** by Ruth Milkman

In October 2012, British Sociological Association journal Work, employment and society hosted a one-day conference reflecting on key debates and looking forward to what the future might hold for the discipline and the journal. We are happy to have video footage of the stimulating presentations.

Occupy Wall Street burst onto the scene in New York City September 2011. Inspired in part by social movement in the Middle East and Southern Europe, its critique of inequality rapidly gained traction with the broader U.S. public with the slogan “We Are The 99 %,” cloning similar occupations worldwide. This presentation explores the sociological roots of OWS, with particular attention to the changing US labour market, and reports on the results of a unique representative survey of New York City OWS participants. In addition, the presentation analyzes the movement’s achievements to date and speculates about its future.

Ruth Milkman
Changing the subject: Occupy Wall Street’s Achievements and Prospects
Professor of Sociology and Academic Director of the Murphy Labor Institute, The City University of New York
Changing the subject: Occupy Wall Street’s Achievements and ...

The British Social Attitudes Survey (2013-09-11 10:00)

The British Social Attitudes Survey is a large annual survey run by the National Centre for Social Research. It’s now in its 30th year and NatCen have put a lot of effort into promoting this year’s iteration. As they describe the survey,

Each year NatCen’s British Social Attitudes survey asks over 3,000 people what it’s like to live in Britain and what they think about how Britain is run.

Since 1983 we’ve been measuring and tracking changes in people’s social, political and moral attitudes.

The survey is a critical gauge of public opinion, and is used by the Government, journalists, opinion formers and academics.

Celebrating 30 years of British Social Attitudes

This is a special year for British Social Attitudes; 2013 marks the publication of our 30th annual report.

To celebrate 30 years of NatCen’s British Social Attitudes we’ve launched a brand new interactive data tool, which lets you explore 30 years of data on attitudes to welfare, morality, politics, NHS and the environment.

Helping the nation

We’re a charity and we want our research to reach as many organisations trying to improve life in the UK as possible.

That’s why NatCen’s British Social Attitudes is freely available online and available as an ePUB.
The ‘gold standard’ of survey series

Every year, we ask people to take part in British Social Attitudes on the basis of random probability sampling.

This technique ensures that everyone has an equal chance of being picked to take part, so the results are representative of the British population.

And because we repeat many of the same questions over time, we’re able to identify real changes in people’s social attitudes.

In this video Alison Park, Co-Director of British Social Attitudes, gives a quick overview of some of the highlights of 30 years of NatCen’s British Social Attitudes survey.

IFrame: [3]//www.youtube.com/embed/1i-CF0fmqRE

However the reason we’re posting this is not simply to sign post the fact this survey exists but instead as a preamble to the simple act of posting the URL for the wonderful site NatCen have put together where you can play around with 30 years of British Social Attitudes data. Apologies in advance for the time you’re likely to waste with this: [4]http://www.bsa-30-data.natcen.ac.uk/
Any thoughts on the data? As always comments very welcome, leave them in the box below.

3. file://www.youtube.com/embed/1i-C0fmqRE

Blogging for #PhD Students: Risks and Opportunities (2013-09-11 18:34)

The panel responds to a question from the audience in this podcast from the BSA Digital Sociology group’s seminar on July 16th 2013. These were the speakers on the day:

Kim Allen, Manchester Metropolitan University
Les Back, Goldsmiths, University of London
Ben Baumberg, University of Kent
Laura Harvey, Brunel University
Noortje Marres, Goldsmiths, University of London
Heather Mendick, Brunel University
Mark Murphy, University of Glasgow
Evelyn Ruppert, Goldsmiths, University of London
Helene Snee, University of Manchester
An interesting article on Savage Minds recently discussed public engagement within anthropology and its recent history. The author argues for the potential contribution which anthropologists are able to make within public debate and discusses her own experiences of seeking to do this:

"Anthropology," James Peacock said in a 1995 address at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, "boasts brilliant observers, cultural critics, writers, and creators, yet few if any of us have produced books that we (not to mention others) crave to read, films that we crave to see, or music that we crave to hear." Thirteen years have passed since Peacock spoke these words. So, have anthropologists today heeded his call? Are the crucial issues of our time receiving public reflection from anthropologists, if not in books, then in popular media? What are some of the obstacles that prevent us from doing so more often?

With every passing year, I see more anthropologists using their regional and topical expertise to weigh in on social issues in the media. In this post, I'd like to address two possible ways that we as anthropologists can communicate with a lay public—media appearances and Op-Eds—and the positives and negatives of both.


What particularly stood out was the parallel here:

To me, this issue of communicating with wider audiences is becoming increasingly crucial, particularly as anthropologists are constantly forced to defend the value of an anthropology degree in an environment that insists on quantifying knowledge. To write for the public is to demonstrate that anthropologists have knowledge, expertise, and thoughts worth considering, and that we value civic engagement. In a future post, I'll offer some tips for writing Op-Eds, and also discuss how graduate programs and other entities, like the Center for Public Anthropology, are encouraging students to learn to engage with the public this way.

I've tried to make the corresponding point about sociology a lot, though have never done so in a way that left me feeling satisfied that I've managed to articulate my underlying belief adequately. As sceptical as I am about 'Impact' and 'Public Engagement' in their institutionalising and top-down manifestations, it seems blindingly obvious to me that sociology needs to actively and creatively represent itself through interventions outside the academy if it is to have any hope of securing its wider esteem and legitimacy in an increasingly inhospitable climate.

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In theory much of this falls within the remit of ‘public sociology’ but, to be utterly frank, my defining experience of public sociology was a failed attempt to setup a public sociology group which led to countless hours of tedious arguments about what ‘public sociology’ is. It did lead to the production of this wonderful resource (the [2]public sociology bibliography) but the experience was otherwise an extremely frustrating one.

I may be generalising wildly from an extremely particular set of circumstances but the intuition this left me with was that debates about ‘public sociology’ unfold at too high a level of abstraction. However I think the converse obtains with ‘public engagement’: I’ve been at the fringes of this for some time (e.g. I’m a Public Engagement Ambassador at the NCCPE) but the lack of any abstract vantage point, such as would consider purpose or politics, leaves me unwilling to jump any further into it. Though it’s worth noting that the reason the terminology of Public Engagement (with a capital ‘P’ and a capital ‘E’) seems so sterile to me might be that it’s purged of disciplinary specificity.

But as it stands I’m not sure where to get support in pursuing public engagement activities. I took a media skills session my university communications office offered a few years ago but other than that, it’s unclear to me what assistance is on offer. I’m lucky in that there’s a few people who are more established in their careers than I am who are happy to talk to me about issues related to working with the media. But on occasions where things have gone wrong or where I’ve struggled to make a decision about what to do (this happened very recently) some sort of organised support, perhaps at a disciplinary level, would have been really useful. I’m not sure what form this could take but even to have more online conversations about the practicalities of doing public sociology than currently take place (I do go looking for them) would be beneficial.

At present my experience is of there being no institutional support (or institutional recognition) for many of the things I do – in fact I’ve sometimes felt faintly embarrassed by it and kept it to myself. My assumption that this was an irrational reaction was challenged recently by hearing someone be described as a ‘media whore’ as a genuine term of abuse. But I like talking to print and broadcast journalists. I like producing websites and podcasts. I like trying to get media projects going (though I’ve yet to succeed). I like talking at non-academic events. I like organising exhibitions (hopefully coming soon after 3 years + of intermittent work). I like the idea of communicating my own work as widely as possible. I like the idea of writing books that popularise the work other people have done.

It’s this affective dimension which I find so utterly missing in institutionalised conversations about public engagement i.e. why this activity matters to people. But for me at least, it leads naturally to practical questions about discussing projects and comparing experiences – it’s this space of discussion, affectively laden but orientated towards practical activity, which seems stuck in the middle between public sociology and public engagement. Occupying this ground was actually my initial idea for what [3]The Sociological Imagination would be but it soon transmuted into something quite different. It’s also something I’m keen to incorporate into the remit of the [4]BSA Digital Sociology group but it remains to be seen whether the broader set of questions gets squeezed out so only the digitally orientated ones are left. Writing this post has also reminded me that I started creating this Bundlr ([5]Getting Started: Public Engagement for Social Scientists) some time ago but never got round to finishing it – any suggestions for inclusion are much appreciated.

In short I don’t think sociology in general (and digital sociology in particular) has a [6]demand problem – at least not in the way that some might assume. However I think an apparatus for supporting public sociology is crucial if we accept it as axiomatic that greater public engagement by sociologists is a good thing.

Cluster hire in Transgender Studies at the University of Arizona (2013-09-12 15:48)

Faculty Cluster Hire in Transgender Studies The University of Arizona is pleased to announce a cluster hire of 4 tenure-track faculty positions in transgender studies over the next two years. Two positions are being offered this year in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences (SBS), with a start date of fall 2014. Two positions to be based elsewhere in the university will be advertised next year, with a start date of fall 2015. This cluster hire is one element of the University of Arizona’s unprecedented investment in the field of transgender studies. Other elements include support for a new peer-reviewed journal, TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly, which will be published by Duke University Press starting in 2014, with the editorial office housed at the University of Arizona’s Institute for LGBT Studies; a new interdisciplinary Center for Critical Studies of the Body; and an anticipated graduate degree program in transgender studies.

Transgender studies concerns itself with the variability and contingency of gender, sexuality, identity, and embodiment across time, space, languages, and cultures. It pays particular attention to the socio-political, legal, and economic consequences of noncompliance with gender norms; to the histories and social organization of minoritized transgender lives and communities; to forms of cultural production that represent or express gender variance; to the medicalization of identity and the depathologization of bodily difference; and to the emergence of novel forms of embodied subjectivity within contemporary techno-cultural environments. Because we seek to hire the most innovative scholars in this rapidly evolving field, we are open to considering any area of specialization, research agenda, and inter/disciplinary training compatible with faculty service in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

We invite applications for two assistant professor positions, one of which will be based in the Department of Gender and Women’s Studies, and the other of which will be based in another suitable department within SBS (see[1]sbs.arizona.edu). In addition to possessing requisite expertise in transgender studies, applicants must be qualified to teach core courses in their home department, and ideally will fulfill strategic priorities set by SBS in the following areas, broadly defined: health, the environment, technology, and global impact/regional roots. Our goal is to hire interdisciplinary scholars who can contribute to a new program in transgender studies while also meeting the needs of their home department.

To apply, please send a cover letter, CV, and the names of three references by October 14, 2013 to [2]uacareertrack.com, job number 53456. Shortlisted candidates will be asked to supply additional materials.

1. http://sbs.arizona.edu/
Quantified Self Research Network – Inaugural Event (2013-09-12 15:54)

Tuesday, September 17, 2013 from 1:00 PM to 5:00 PM (BST)
Leeds, United Kingdom

At this inaugural event there will be presentations from researchers who have been exploring quantified self or self-tracking either empirically or theoretically which will stimulate discussion around the potential and implications for future developments. We hope that this event will stimulate discussion and collaboration among attendees and further afield. This is a great opportunity to be involved in the development of an emerging academic area and to connect with others. Below is a short summary of the proposed interests of the network. This is, however, intended to be an open forum in which a collective vision for the future of the network can be produced.

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in public and academic interest in the use of devices or techniques for the accumulation, aggregation and analysis of personal data. Apps for mobile phones such as Track My Run and body tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike’s Fuelband have perhaps garnered the widest attention with their ability to passively collect data on everyday activities which can then be analysed and shared with others. There is, however, more to quantified self than the mainstream media picture of obsessive "techies". Many people engaged in "life logging" collate data on mood and experiences often without a direct quantitative element. While a relatively formalised arm of the quantified self movement has formed, through the Quantified Self group based in San Francisco, not everyone involved in quantified self activities is affiliated with Quantified Self. This formalised movement, as well as the broader cluster of practices and orientations which are coalescing within and beyond it, point to commercial and political connections which have yet to be fully explored.


1. [http://www.eventbrite.com/event/8189491991/efblike](http://www.eventbrite.com/event/8189491991/efblike)

“What was Visual Sociology?”: specialisation and fragmentation within disciplines (2013-09-13 08:00)

There's an interesting [1]post on the CSIP blog by Michael Guggenheim. Along with Nina Wakeford, he’s convening Goldsmith's new MA Visual Sociology. The strange formulation in the blog’s title stems from his desire to overcome the visual epithet, such that the terminology of ‘visual sociology’ could be confined to the past. There's an interesting question here about how terminology can work to codify the stratifications within disciplinary knowledge systems:

Why then does this blog post speak of visual sociology in the past tense? Why not ask: [2]What is visual sociology? (to follow up Noortje Marres' [3]"what is digital sociology" post?).
Short answer: Because we need to get rid of the "visual" as a denominator of the subdiscipline. By starting an MA in visual sociology I am guilty in perpetuating this unfortunate situation, but, I hope, we may also produce a new generation of students, who can then leave the visual behind.

As in the case of women's studies, the denominator does not simply announce a subfield that stands next to any other subfield. There is not visual sociology and textual sociology. There is not men's studies and women's studies. Women's studies emerged because disciplines such as history and sociology were men's studies without saying so in the title. For the same reason, we have sociology, and a special subfield called visual sociology, because for whatever reason, sociology is assumed to be a purely textual discipline (the same situation applies to visual anthropology). "Visual" is considered to be strange, not really sociology, not really scientific, or it is simply forgotten.

In many other disciplines the same situation does not apply. There is no visual astronomy or biology or chemistry. A non-visual astronomy simply does not exist. What would astronomers do without producing visual traces of other stars, planets and galaxies?

It seems important to me that we distinguish the terminology of Visual Sociology (or Digital Sociology) from that of X studies. In each case, we can see an underlying tendency towards the diversification of the knowledge system, driven in part by the ideational arms race within which professional rewards go to those who can combine ideas in novel ways and disseminate them widely through frequent and well-placed publications. But the terminology of 'Visual Sociology' will tend to allow this diversification to be reincorporated into disciplinary knowledge systems whereas the terminology of X Studies will tend not to.

By this I simply mean that the work being done under the rubric of 'visual sociology' can more easily be related back to sociological work as such. The propositional content of Visual Sociology and, to invent a parallel for sake of argument, Visual Studies might be indistinguishable but the nomenclature of the former entails an orientation towards the beliefs, theories and practices which constitute the 'parent' discipline. This makes it more likely that the implications of Visual Sociology (the contradictions and complementarities which obtain at the level of ideas) for Sociology more broadly will actually be recognised, drawn out and argued for by the cultural agents whose activity is required for the reproduction or elaboration of the knowledge system.

In short there are three points which interest me here: (1) the ‘ideational arms race’ driving diversification, (2) the emergence of sub disciplinary specialisms and (3) the emergence of substantive areas of interdisciplinary inquiry. There’s an underlying structural process driving (1) which results largely from the incentive systems operating within the modern academy, as well as the technological reduction of friction which used to impinge upon the navigation of the knowledge system i.e. it’s easier to put elements together in novel ways if you can instantly find them through Google Scholar etc. So I’m proposing that (2) and (3) are socio-cultural trends which enable this diversity to be reincorporated into the knowledge system in different ways: one allows for disciplinary reincorporation whereas the other engenders disciplinary fragmentation.

If we accept that the ‘Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Sociologist’ (see the letter to Laurie Taylor by Stephen Mugford reproduced below) and continually reinventing the wheel is a bad thing then these issues of how areas of inquiry are named become much more important than they might initially seem. Yet another recent addition to my list of post-PhD writing projects is to apply Margaret Archer’s often overlooked work on culture to the (re)formation of disciplines in the contemporary academy. In this post and a few others I’ve started to sketch the initial outlines for what this project will entail and I think it offers a powerful set of tools for untangling the complex interaction of structure, culture and agency in the reproduction and transformation of academic knowledge.
Laurie,

I listen to TA as a podcast, so timing and order can be a bit scrambled. So it was that only recently I heard one on 'intoxication' from 2012.

I’m writing to you because it provoked in me a serious concern about sociology today which I raise with you below, I hope collegially. (I trust not in some curmudgeonly way).

Brief background: You and I are pretty well age and disciplinary peers—I did my London Sociology Hons in 1968 and then went to Bristol with Michael Banton, Theo Nichols, et al, finishing writing my PhD while teaching sociology in NZ. In late 1974 I went on to the ANU where I stayed until late '96. In the period '79-'96 I was fairly heavily involved in crime and deviance studies, authoring and co-authoring a range of papers on drug use and policy and also some on restorative justice. This took me into the American Society of Criminology where I met, or re-met in some cases both UK sociologists (Ian Taylor, Jock Young, Mike Presdee*, etc.) as well as US ones (Bill Chambliss, Jack Katz, etc.) Great fun and good times. Pat O'Malley and I organised a ripper session at one ASC on crime, excitement and modernity with Mike Presdee, Jack Katz, ourselves, etc. which was packed to the rafters....

[*I say re-met because Mike and I not only met in Australia, we also, I discovered, went to school together in Gloucester. A sad loss is Mike.]

So if I say that the material in the program was pretty familiar, you won't be surprised. And of course, if you did not know the area well, it would be a good episode because it covered a lot of ground effectively, the speakers were nicely integrated, etc. I’ve done a fair bit of media work (professional video work, etc.) and I know TA is a well created series.

But what DID worry me, which is implicit in my title, is that I learned almost nothing. It is 20+ years since, for example, I co-wrote papers like:

- 1993 Social change and the control of psychotropic drugs—risk management, harm reduction and 'postmodernity', Drug and Alcohol Review, 12: 369-375

My point is not that these folks did not cite, or seem to know, these works. Rather, these pieces were part of a much larger corpus written by people like Presdee and Katz and others, which explored all the conceptual and theoretical issues that were raised in much the same way but the corpus as a whole seems to be completely missed.

And so all the (to me) familiar themes came out. Yes, antidrug use campaigners miss the pleasurable side of drug use. Yes, Bakhtin and carnival are relevant ideas. Yes, drug abuse is best described as the “the use of drugs I don’t use by people I don’t like”. Yes, getting written off is an ambiguous
thing—fun but dangerous. Et cetera. And all presented as if somehow this was new or surprising, when it had all been said before (and very likely before I and my mates said it too—we may equally be guilty of exactly the same problem.)

I would hope that after 20 odd years out of the game, I would hear something new, something that made me think, "Oh, wow" and not "Uh, huh." In other fields of enquiry things are moving apace. Leave aside the natural sciences with myriad breakthroughs (from Homo Floriensis to the Higgs Boson), cognitive science and psychology and their cognates are all rocketing along. Every time I listen to a podcast in one of these fields (and in some of them I am quite well read so this is not just a naïve effect) I hear new and intriguing stuff. And there is some new stuff in sociology, especially around network research, where I DO get the wow effect.

It worries me, however, to hear people rediscovering things for the nth time and solemnly discussing them as if they are new. And I think that maybe what we see here is a real warning about the discipline. What do you think?

Maybe I am just suffering from 'nostalgia aint what it used to be"? But I don’t think so.

Collegially yours,

Stephen

1. http://http://www.csisponline.net/2013/07/01/what-was-visual-sociology/

The Sociological Blogosphere (2013-09-13 14:37)

If you'd like to be added to the list then please e-mail Mark AT MarkCarrigan.net with the URL of your blog

[1]"Online Sociology" on Bundlr

1. http://bundlr.com/b/online-sociology
Kelly McGonigal: How to make stress your friend (2013-09-13 17:05)

[1]//www.youtube.com/embed/RcGyVTAoXEU

1. [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/RcGyVTAoXEU

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Our Most Popular Posts This Week (2013-09-13 17:45)

[1]Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left

[2]A Summer of Television Poverty Porn

[3]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today


[5]28 reasons why you should blog about your research

[6]How to write 1000 words a day and not go bat shit crazy (at least not within the first two weeks)

[7]Making the familiar strange
Although the British Prime Minister David Cameron popularised the renowned axiom ‘the age of austerity’ in a speech of 2009, political discourse has long given shape to popular rhetoric on the subject. The sentiments of ‘make do and mend’ and ‘boom and bust’ offers two such examples that have filtered into popular and national conscious. Indeed, there have been memorable occasions when political parties have sought to appropriate the vehicle of popular culture to articulate their agendas; who can forget Tony Blair’s use of the D:Ream dance anthem ‘Things Can Only Get Better’ as part of the Labour Party’s Manifesto in the 1996 General Election, for example?

However, political idiom is not the sole medium to express the effects of austerity, recession and the global economic crisis in contemporary society. From Jarvis Cocker’s glamorisation of the sexual tension between the ‘haves’ and have nots’ in Pulp’s ‘Common People’, to Morrissey’s cynical yet dulcet tones espousing what today’s Government might describe as the scourge of benefit culture in The Smith’s 'Still Ill', popular culture has sought continually to explore and engage with the social and cultural manifestations of recession and austerity. John Self, the protagonist of Martin Amis’s Money learned hard lessons about ‘maxed out’ credit cards in the Thatcherite Yuppies culture of the 1980s, but the summer of 2013 will see Kirstie Allsopp share her austerity-inspired know-how with prime-time audiences in the Channel 4 television series Fill Your House For Free.

Our edited book collection, Hard Times: Austerity and Popular Culture seeks to map the diverse ways in which austerity is—and has been—reflected in and by popular culture. We solicit submissions on any aspect of austerity in popular culture that can offer new and innovative insights into its representation and ideologies.

In what ways have literature, film and television, and music (amongst other cultural modes) given expression to austerity? How are its effects conveyed? What commentaries does popular culture offer on, about or towards the age of austerity? How has the expression of austerity in popular culture changed over time, and what lessons about representations of austerity in popular culture from the past can be learnt in the present? Can popular culture have a significant influence in shifting our attitudes towards political discourses of austerity? In soliciting submissions from across the arts and humanities, the editors welcome submissions that could consider the following themes:
- Representing recession
- Credit and spending culture
- Boom and bust – individual and cultural
- The Gendering of austerity
- Thrift chic
- Self-sufficiency vs. spending cuts
- The austere family
- Race, disability, and/or class and austerity
- Benefits culture(s)
- Nostalgia and austerity
- Representing contemporary austerity through the past
- Unemployment and/or poverty
- Youth and austerity
- Revolution, revolt and protest against austere times

Please submit abstracts of 600 words and a short biographical note to both editors, Dr Helen Davies (Helen.Davies@tees.ac.uk) and Dr Claire O’Callaghan (cfo3@le.ac.uk) by 31st January 2014. If accepted, completed chapters of 6000 words will be expected by 1st September 2014. A proposal will be submitted to I.B. Tauris from whom we have a received an expression of interest.

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**Does Žižek take himself as seriously as other people do? Idolatry, activism and the academic left**

(2013-09-15 08:00)

So as most people reading this will probably realise, Žižek bashing and boosting has been somewhat in vogue within certain sections of the academic blogosphere in recent months. The Sociological Imagination was an enthusiastic part of this recently, through an ever-so-slightly polemic blog post penned by Steve Fuller,

Slavoj Zizek may be great at beating up on grand old men of the anti-establishment such as Chomsky, but he is a total waste of space for a self-described ‘Left’ that wants to remain politically relevant in the 21st century. Whenever I read him, I think to myself: This guy either just wants us to feel good about ourselves after performing some self-contained Occupy-ish rituals or he is calling for outright violence in a prophylactic bloodbath. Zizek can’t seem to imagine any other political alternatives, which may suit his vast legions of followers, who are ‘politically inert’ by most conventional understandings of the phrase. This was really made clear to me in his latest piece for the Guardian, which celebrates

1995
the importance of cyberspace whistleblowers, who if ultimately regarded as ‘progressive’, will be for reasons that we have not quite yet figured out. At the moment, they look like fleas on the arse of history.


This prompted a spate of obnoxious comments which I saw no point in posting. Previous articles I'd posted myself, which were far from dismissive of Žižek, had prompted people to post abuse at the @soc _imagination – it was initially amusing to be told I was a reactionary and have my scientism denounced before it eventually just got tedious. But then I’ve always been mildly contemptuous of academic cultural politics in a way that I tend to keep to myself, lest I wander round the academy inadvertently insulting people. My intention in writing isn’t to be vituperative, in fact I’m trying very hard to avoid this, but simply to observe that the ratio of rhetoric to action among the academic left can often be distressingly low. As a biographically orientated sociologist I have a pretty clear understanding of the reasons why this is so and, as someone whose activism has often been squeezed out while grappling with a far from ideal work/life balance over the last five years, this understanding is informed by self-reflection as much as social observation. However I nonetheless think this is a problem and, oddly enough, some of Žižek’s ideas have been important in elaborating my understanding of how this is so.

Particularly his account of **cynicism**, which at least as I understand it*, argues that post-ideological culture tends towards an over-estimation of subjective belief: people congratulate themselves on not being ‘taken in’ by ideology while nonetheless construing their circumstances in a way which engenders objective complicity. My political problem with Žižek is the peculiarly post-ideological form of idolatry his work seems to engender – what difference does Žižek make? What’s the point of Žižek? I’ve never heard an answer to this question which isn’t irredeemably subjective, construing him as a diagnostician of late capitalism in a way which implicitly invokes some objective and proactive correlate, the specification of which is indefinitely deferred. Or in slightly plainer language: Žižek fans always talk about him as if his work is deeply practical in its implications and yet never seem to say what these are exactly. My accusation is that his work often engenders a subjective sense of one’s political outlook as being intellectually sophisticated while contributing nothing, in fact often detracting from, objective action. This is what prompted me to write this post, which I’ll finish soon lest it become overly rambling, which I cite to illustrate my point in a way which will hopefully be conducive to friendly debate:

Subsequently, this is also why I argue that Žižek provides us with the only space for the left. Any other leftist project (“social scientifically literate” or otherwise) is by definition fundamentally apolitical if they only remain within the possible, but Žižek allows us to revive the ‘politics proper’ which is central to some of the most radical sociologists and social theorists (including, I would argue, [2]C. Wright-Mills whose criticism of abstract empiricism in describing the sociological imagination embodied the Marxian dictum that “philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point however is to change it”). Žižek shows us a way to break from contemporary ‘social sciences’ which spends its time and resources describing society in an age where it is needed more than ever to change society for the better.


On the contrary I think Žižek provides us with an intoxicating rhetoric to describe this **aim** but offers little to nothing which helps do it and in fact muddies the waters and makes ‘resistance’ seem much more theoretically complicated than it often is. I write in the paragraph above the quote that his work ‘seems’ to engender this tendency because I’m completely open to changing my mind about this. Plus it’s probably useful to reiterate the point that I read a lot of Žižek and, more so, I don’t do it in a ‘know thine enemy’ kind of way. I read him because I enjoy his work. I have more of a problem with how his work is taken up and deployed than I do with the man himself. Žižek clearly likes reading,
writing and speaking. He lives the pampered life of the international academic superstar. He is a brand. He is also idolised. I'm not dismissing him on this basis – in fact I'm not dismissing him at all – not least of all because Chomsky, one of my life long heroes, is just as much of a brand and is equally idolised. In fact it was this meeting of the two most high profile brands on the academic left which meant their public spat, contrived in large part by academic web editors such as myself, attracted the attention which it did. Nonetheless I do think the Žižek and Chomsky brands tend to dominate the intellectual attention space of the left, simply taking up room that would be occupied by other scholars and activists – thought this bothers me much more in the case of the latter than the former.

And I hasten to add that if I haven't understood his meaning correctly then I couldn't care less. I read Žižek because I find him enjoyable and often thought-provoking, approaching him in an exegetical way is like reading the Daily Mail. I understand why people might do it, I'm sure I'm intellectually capable of it but left to my own devices it's the last thing in the world I'm ever going to choose to do.

Žižek is a jester in the pay of capital to promote harmless subversions. Those who really would like think about transformation of capitalism (revolution really is an obsolete idea) should read [1] The Gramscian Moment by Peter D. Thomas


honneth (2014-05-17 20:59:22)
'Does Zizek take himself as seriously as other people do' => i unequivocally think not. Part of the problem, I think, with the fanaticism of some Zizek fans is that that a lot of his fanbase are undergrads who don't really have the theoretical rigour to properly understand what he's on about - an encounter with Zizek because of his fun anecdotes, without some understanding of the theory that informs his work, can be very confusing. But the problem as I've experienced it is that because (in my experience at Warwick, at least), there's not really any academic staff I've encountered at undergrad level who seem interested in discussing Zizek, or in critiquing him - he's simply ignored. So there's no-one to help clarify things. And within the social sciences Hegel and Lacan aren't really taught. For me at least, I discovered them (and read them) because of Zizek, which I think is great. And for those bored with the orthodox paradigms it is easy to become uncritically enamoured with Zizek's radical brand of critical theory. But I agree in that I enjoy Zizek's work because it really makes me think. As with all theory, its utility in practice is questionable. But that is an issue which goes well beyond Zizek in particular.

very thought provoking comment! shame it seems like that at warwick - perhaps the theory centre should open up the reading groups to undergraduates next year?

‘Theory’ is what happens when common starting-points can no longer be taken for granted (2013-09-15 11:51)

'theory' is what happens when common starting-points can no longer be taken for granted. For example, literary critics in the English-speaking world in the 1950s and 1960s disagreed about many things - about the authorship of certain Jacobean plays or about the influence of Keats on Tennyson or about whether D. H. Lawrence was a great writer - but for the most part they did not disagree about whether the evaluation of literary worth was legitimate or even possible, or indeed about whether there was such a category as 'literature'. When all these concepts and procedures are defamiliarized, made to seem culturally contingent rather than logically necessary, debate has to move to a more theoretical or abstract level. But once again, this is not a form of pathology, not something that happens because there is nothing more to say about the established canon or because literary scholars have lost interest in literature (though some may have). It may, rather, be an index of health, or at least a sign that scholars cannot and should not be immune to the intellectual changes consequent upon living in a more diverse society in which the assumptions shared by certain traditional elites no longer command general assent

- [1] What are Universities For? by Stefan Collini (1176)

1. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/what-are-universities-for-ebook/B00SVFV7HE/B006UCVPJM

It seems a safe assumption that most people who read this blog will be familiar with the [1]Great British Class Survey. For anyone who managed to miss it, this is how the LSE’s Mike Savage described the project in a post on the [2]LSE Politics Blog:

In April 2013, the first results of the BBC’s Great British Class Survey (GBCS) will be launched, in a simultaneous publication in the British Sociological Association’s (BSA) journal Sociology, and in a plenary address at the BSA’s annual Conference. The BBC are anticipating that the results will be a very important social science story and plan to feature them on their news channels, including radio, television and the web.

The Great British Class Survey is one of the most exciting ventures in digital social science which has yet been attempted. Launched in January 26th 2011, more than 161,000 people have completed a 20 minute web survey, which makes this the largest ever study of class in the UK, with unusually detailed information on how social class maps onto specific occupations, geographical locations, and even the particular university which respondents went to. In a period when there is an intensifying interest in the accentuation of social inequality, this project promises to deliver the most sophisticated and detailed understanding of ‘the state of the nation’ that we might posses.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/31179

Lots of people didn’t like the Great British Class Survey. Personally I loved the fact that for an entire week millions of people up and down the UK were debating sociological conceptions of class. Furthermore, a lot of the objections I personally encountered seemed to amount to little more than "I think I’m X and the GBCS said that I was Y". Nonetheless there clearly were a lot of criticisms that could be made of the GBCS and as the full time editor of a politics blog at the time I was in the privileged position of being able to sit round all day drinking coffee and reading the many online responses while getting paid for it.

As someone in the presumably quite unusual position of reading what I’m sure was a substantial proportion of the online debate about this while having pretty much zero intellectual investment in debates about class (I’m a class struggle vulgarian when it comes to political issues and pretty satisfied with Margaret Archer’s work in the 80s+90s when it comes to treating these questions in my own research) it was easy for me to remain detached and see the whole episode as a pleasing reflection of the academic blogosophere’s growing maturity. But it was obvious to me throughout that this debate was going to run on beyond the confines of academic blogs and furthermore that it was an important one given a range of underlying tensions reflected in it, particularly the influence of Bourdieusian theory in British sociology. Leaving aside the vituperativeness of some on Twitter there are really interesting broader issues tangled up in the criticisms of the GBCS as a specific project. For instance the LSE Politics Blog hosted a thought provoking interview with [3]John Goldthorpe:

The first thing to say about the recent paper by Savage and colleagues on social class is that the analyses they report are only marginally dependent on the BBC Great British Class Survey. This was a – quite predictable – flop because of the self-selection bias of respondents. To try to save the show, Savage et al. resorted to asking the same questions of a small quota sample, from which their results essentially derive – with the link then made to the GBCS data being of only a quite tenuous and largely inconsequential kind.
Second, their presentation of their data and analyses is disturbingly unprofessional – as must also have been the reviewing of their paper. No details are given of the quota sampling (let alone any explanation of why this largely discredited method was accepted) nor of the crucial ‘latent class’ modelling from which their seven classes derive. Third, this attempt to define class boundaries ‘inductively’ from data on various forms of ‘capital’ à la Bourdieu amounts to little more than a data-dredging exercise – resulting in much conceptual confusion. For example, in one of the seven classes the average age is 34, in another 66! The dredging is simply picking up variance that has nothing whatever to do with class inequality or differentiation on any coherent understanding.

NS-SEC provides a sound basis, conceptually and methodologically, for analysing class inequalities in Britain – in mobility chances and likewise in life-chances in education, health etc – and one from which the unduly narrow approach of economists, focussing on income inequality, can be questioned. The Savage model is an unfortunate distraction, bringing quantitative sociology down to the level of market research. But it will, I believe, find little use outside the circle of Bourdieusian true believers.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/archives/35681

Given all this it was very interesting to see a recent post by Mike Savage on the Culture and Stratification network’s blog explaining the [4]future agenda for the GBCS team:

The publication of our paper ‘A new model of class? Findings from the BBC’s Great British Class Survey experiment’ in Sociology in April 2013, allied with a simultaneous press campaign led initially by the BBC has led to unprecedented interest in the nature and significance of social class in Britain. This reception of our work has been remarkably wide ranging, straddling academic disciplines, and a great variety of non-academic groups. We would like to thank the numerous people who have contacted us with their thoughts, written blogs, and more generally commented on our study. Some of the reception has been critical and has posed challenging questions about our purpose, methodology and data. We are pleased to have inspired such an engaged reception, and are aware that we need to respond to the criticisms and comments made. Furthermore, given the extent of public interest in this project, we feel responsible for explaining how we will be developing our research in the coming period. This note briefly spells out our plans.

http://stratificationandculture.wordpress.com/2013/09/15/a-statement-on-future-research-from-the-great-british-class-survey/

Anyone even vaguely interested in the GBCS should definitely read the above post and find out more about what they’re planning. I’m particularly interested in the "popular and accessible - though also serious and critical" book they are under contract with Penguin to write on social class. I find it really exciting how much of this debate has
been playing out in the academic blogosphere and hope this continues.


David Rose (2014-09-21 19:31:43)
That all sounds a bit 'never mind the quality, feel the width'. And folk have short memories. I know I’m parti pris, but the announcement of the NS-SEC received similar publicity in the media and public involvement via BBC. But that’s no more to the point with NS-SEC than it is to the GBCS. The fundamental questions about the GBCS can’t be answered till we all have access to the data it was induced from.

Floating Cities, Class War and Matt Damon: what more could you want? (2013-09-16 08:00)


I like Matt Damon. I like Science Fiction. I loved Neil Blomkamp’s first film District 9. So it was pretty inevitable that I would be excited about Elysium. As if that wasn’t enough, there was the added benefit of the film’s heavily trailed politics, as described by Gavin Mueller from the Jacobin:

Trailers for Elysium were like catnip for the left-leaning viewer: a near future where the masses, stranded in crumbling cities, outfit Matt Damon with a robot suit and send him to fight the bourgeoisie, who
have Galted off the planet to Space Station Elysium, taking their shrubbery, Spanish-style mansions and cancer cures with them. It promised to be an allegory about class struggle as transparent as director Neill Blomkamp’s first movie, District 9, was about racial apartheid. The 99-vs-1 narrative would finally get the sci-fi blockbuster treatment it richly deserved.


Mueller makes a number of fair criticisms of the film. Not least of all taking issue with the film’s gender politics (with the exception of Jodie Foster’s defence secretary, it is hard to imagine how this film could have rendered women any more marginal or passive) and its oddly dichotomous treatment of race – on the one hand, the film depicts a dystopian future where “the oppressed classes stuck on polluted and undeveloped Earth are almost entirely brown and black while Elysium is full of WASPs” but on the other the weird casting of Matt Damon in the lead role transforms “pointed commentary on race, citizenship, and gentrification into a white saviour narrative”. However Mueller also picks up on what I loved so much about this film:

The space station concept nicely dramatizes the spatialization of class that geographers like David Harvey and the late Neil Smith have written about for years. Elysium collapses the gated city and the militarized border into one potent metaphor, and Blomkamp’s not afraid to show the privileged defending their picturesque suburbs against crippled children with deadly force. Perhaps the most novel idea is to collapse citizenship with health care. A ticket to Elysium grants you citizenship and access to miraculous life-preserving technologies, a powerful point as citizenship is one of the biggest holes in the Swiss cheese that is Obamacare. Blomkamp’s able to see how the overt authoritarianism of apartheid biopolitics (where blacks were denied citizenship, had their movement strictly controlled and had a life expectancy at least a decade shorter than whites) hasn’t been abolished. Instead, it’s been globalized, covered with a thin neoliberal veneer of market and meritocracy. In Elysium the struggle is not for the means of production, but the means of reproduction, as the vast majority of Earth is treated as a surplus population left to die lest they waste precious resources.

It depicts a future where the ruling class have withdrawn nearly entirely from contact with the vast majority of the world’s population. The robotic workforce securing and serving the ruling class renders the population largely surplus to requirements. The neoliberal condition diagnosed by [3]Loic Wacquant and others finds itself generalised to the planet as a whole – the poor are rendered surplus and punished for behaviours arising from this marginalisation. But in the world depicted by Elysium the entire planet is poor. All who are not are now ensconced in the safety of Elsyium, the floating utopia (eerily identical to my mental image of the orbital platforms from the Culture books) looking down upon the earth. It’s a direct descendent of the floating cities which occupy the contemporary libertarian imagination:

Since 2003, a colossal barge called the Freedom Ship, of debatable tax status, should have been chugging with majestic aimlessness from port to port, a leviathan rover with more than 40,000 wealthy full-time residents living, working and playing on deck. That was the aim eight years ago when the project first made headlines, confidently claiming that construction would start in 2000.

A visit to the “news” section of freedomship.com reveals a more sluggish pace. The most recent messages date from more than two years ago, forlornly explaining how “scam operations” are slowing things down but that “[t]hings are happening, and they are moving fast.” Meanwhile, the ship is not yet finished. Indeed, it is not yet started. Despite this, Freedom Ship International Inc. has been startlingly successful in raising publicity for this “floating city.” Much credulous journalistic cooing over “the biggest
vessel in history,” with its “hospitals, banks, sports centres, parks, theaters and nightclubs,” not to mention its airport, has ignored the vessel’s stubborn nonexistence.

Freedom Ship’s website claims that the vessel has not been conceived as a locus for tax avoidance, pointing out that as it will sail under a flag of convenience, residents may still be liable for taxes in their home countries. Nonetheless, whatever the ultimate tax status of those whom we willcharitably presume might one day set sail, much of the interest in Freedom Ship has revolved precisely around its perceived status as a tax haven.

And despite the apparent corrective on the website, the project’s officials have not been shy in purveying that impression. They have pushed promotional literature that, in the words of one journalist, “paints the picture of a luminous tax haven,” and stressed that the ship will levy “[n]o income tax, no real estate tax, no sales tax, no business duties, no import duties.” Of course, as no cruise ship could ever levy income tax, to trumpet that fact is preposterous, except as a propaganda strategy.

Freedom Ship’s board of directors are canny enough to recognize tax hatred as a defining characteristic of the tradition of fantasies in which it sits. It is one of countless recent dreams of a tax-free life on the ocean wave: advocates of “seasteading” are disproportionately adherents of “libertarianism,” that peculiarly American philosophy of venal petty-bourgeois dissidence.


But their pesky reliance on a human crew has been technologically negated by the time of Elysium. No more awkward interactions with social inferiors, as the robotic workforce serve all the needs once met by the working classes. It’s a world where the problem of the mass, the inconvenience of their sheer numbers, has been overcome. The few details we are given about the onset of this dystopic world point to problems arising from overpopulation. The mass have doomed the planet so the ruling class have sensibly absconded and moved beyond what little reliance they had on a small fraction of the population.

There are certainly problems with this film’s script. It seemed as if it had been a much longer film cut down to size, with much having been lost in the process. But Mueller’s critique of its underlying politics, as resolved in the final scene of the film, seems grossly unfair. My reading was of the film grasping at accelerationism, making a much more interesting point about the role technology played in formulating this dystopia but also the role it can play in moving beyond it:

Given the enslavement of technoscience to capitalist objectives (especially since the late 1970s) we surely do not yet know what a modern technosocial body can do. Who amongst us fully recognizes what untapped potentials await in the technology which has already been developed? Our wager is that the true transformative potentials of much of our technological and scientific research remain unexploited, filled with presently redundant features (or pre-adaptations) that, following a shift beyond the short-sighted capital- ist socius, can become decisive.

[...]

We need to revive the argument that was traditionally made for post-capitalism: not only is capitalism an unjust and perverted system, but it is also a system that holds back progress. Our technological development is being suppressed by capitalism, as much as it has been unleashed. Acceleration- ism is the basic belief that these capacities can and should be let loose by moving beyond the limitations...
imposed by capitalist society. The movement towards a surpassing of our current constraints must include more than simply a struggle for a more rational global society. We believe it must also include recovering the dreams which transfixed many from the middle of the Nineteenth Century until the dawn of the neoliberal era, of the quest of Homo Sapiens towards expansion beyond the limitations of the earth and our immediate bodily forms. These visions are today viewed as relics of a more innocent moment. Yet they both diagnose the staggering lack of imagination in our own time, and offer the promise of a future that is affectively invigorating, as well as intellectually energising.


"How do I start an open access journal?" (and will anyone read it...?) (2013-09-16 11:14)

One of the most exciting innovations in scholarly publishing in recent years has been the emergence of open source software (such as [1]open journal systems) which radically democratises the process of starting a new journal. It’s still a difficult project which requires some funding and much effort but it has been opened up as a possibility in a way it simply wasn’t previously. There’s an interesting post on the [2]Thesis Whisperer which discusses how to do precisely this and offers some great advice:

For the Managing Editors and Editorial Committee of the peer reviewed, interdisciplinary Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies (GSDS) journal [3]Writing from Below it's been a learn on the job affair, with attendant highs and lows. This is a list. It’s not an exhaustive list, but I’m writing it in the hope that if you have some niggling desire to found an [4]open access journal you don’t know where to start, this might give you a platform to leap from.

I’m not going to go into the reasons why we founded Writing from Below here, but if you want to know more, our editorial, [5]GSDS Takes Sidesgives a pretty good run down. I'm also not going to go into the politics of OA, but there's [6]lots of great stuff out there if you'd like to read more.

http://thesiswhisperer.com/2013/09/04/how-to-start-an-open-access-journal/

But my excitement at this possibility goes hand-in-hand with a caution about academic over production. Should we be worried that ever more papers are being published in ever more journals and being read ever less? I think it’s obvious that we should be. So what are the long term implications of an innovation like Open Journal Systems? Given it radically lowers the start up costs for a new journal then, other things being equal, it seems likely to contribute to a proliferation of new journals. But is this a good thing? In terms of individual projects I find this technology incredibly
exciting but from a more detached perspective I worry that it risks intensifying an already problematic tendency towards overproduction of papers and journals.

I’m not for a second blaming this problem on OJS - it seems clear to me that this over-publishing and under-reading has its roots in an institutional structures of incentives which rewards the former and implicitly treats the latter as ‘efficiency’. But it does seem as if OJS, though fantastic in and of itself, risks entrenching this problem by removing obstacles to participation. On this level it’s clearly equitable, in so far as it that it opens up the possibility for those who would have previously lacked the resources to do so. It’s also individually rational to found an innovative journal as a career advancement strategy. But where is this all going in the long term?

One aspect I find particularly interesting is the role that the proliferation of open access journals would play in restructuring academic networks. For instance as the Thesis Whisperer article describes:

GET AN AWESOME [7]ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

We really do have an awesome advisory committee. This mostly came about because of bravery. If there’s an academic in your field whose work you admire, approach them. I think we were only turned down by three or four people–everyone else came back immediately with an “Of course! I’d be honoured.”

NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK.

Once our [8]first issue was ready to go, we built a [9]FaceBook page and set up a [10]Twitter profile. We have four admins on our FB page because a multiplicity of voices is always good, and it spreads the load. Likewise the tweeters amongst us login and tweet, and add followers, and follow back. We share our [11]Call for Papers, great quotes, and news about what’s happening with the journal, but we also like to spread the social networking love. This means sharing or tweeting other cool journal pages or calls for papers, as well as news or information that we think our followers will like.

http://thesiswhisperer.com/2013/09/04/how-to-start-an-open-access-journal/

1. http://pkp.sfu.ca/?q=ojs
10. https://twitter.com/WritingBelow
Conceptualising biographical events (2013-09-17 08:00)

One of the arguments I’ve tried to make with my PhD is that any approach which seeks to use the individual life course as a unit of analysis needs to be extremely careful about how biographical events are conceptualised. This issue can seem strikingly unproblematic when considered in the context of our lives – stuff happens to us, we make decisions and the choices we make often come to define us. This sense of plausibility which is rooted in first person experience can perhaps be invoked to explain why concepts like ‘turning points’ and ‘fateful moments’ circulate as readily as they do within research fields. It seems obvious that there are turning points in our lives, events which led us in one direction or the other, or nodal points where events conspired to force us to take consequential decisions.

However the problem with the self-interpretation of our biographies is our tendency to rely on a perceptual criterion i.e. we are natural empiricists about our own lives. We experience events under our own descriptions, mediated through our own dispositions and as people to whom their potential implications matter. We tend to interpret events in our own lives in a ‘flat’ way, focusing on what has happened rather than why and how it has occurred (in the precise way that it did). Conversely, we tend to over-estimate our own autonomy in responding to events, focusing on what we did rather than why and how we responded the way we did and what enabled or constrained us in doing this. This is all because we tend to rely on our perceptions of events rather than discursive reflection upon the underlying causes of those events.

That we do so in everyday life is unproblematic. But it does mean that approaches to social research which want to understanding the unfolding of individual biographies need to be very careful about how events are understood to operate and how qualitative data is conditioned by the subject being embedded within the event itself. From a realist perspective, the level of events (the actual) must be distinguished from the experience of those events (the empirical) or the real mechanisms underlying them (the real). In our everyday lives we will tend towards empiricism about events, construing them in terms of our own experience of them. This is far from universally true though, as we often ‘step back’ and theorise about why and how something happened in the way that it did e.g. “why did she act like that? was there something she wasn’t telling me?” or “this has turned out so much better than I thought, how did it happen? why was I so convinced it was going to go badly?”.

But any adequate treatment of events within social research needs to encompass the real, the actual and the empirical. The properties and powers of individuals cannot be dropped out or replaced with generalisations about action tendencies because they too are part of the event:

There is more to the world, then, than patterns of events. It has ontological depth: events arise from the workings of mechanisms which derive from the structures of objects, and they take place within geo-historical contexts. This contrasts with approaches which treat the world as if it were no more than patterns of events, to be registered by recording punctiform data regarding ‘variables’ and looking for regularities among them.

We noted earlier that the same mechanism can produce different outcomes according to context, or more precisely, according to spatio-temporal relations with other objects, having their own causal powers and liabilities, which may trigger, block or modify its action. Given the variety and changeability of the contexts of social life, this absence of regular associations between ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ should
be expected. The causes and conditions of any particular social change tend to spread out geographically and back in time from the point at which it happened. (Sayer 2000: 15-16)

The notion of an event which impinges upon an individual cannot be comprehensively understood in a way which abstracts from the particularity of the individual concerned. To be clear: I'm not for a moment suggesting this as a critique of non-biographical social research – that would be an absurd claim because the vast majority of ‘biographical events’ are of no concern for the vast majority of social researchers. My suggestion is rather that if the substantive area of inquiry invokes the individual as a unit of analysis then it’s essential to theorise biographical events in a way which understands the causal contribution of an individual’s properties and powers to that event. So in other words: all research that deals with individuals must in some sense, even tacitly, deal with individual biography. If the history of a specific individual drops out then so too will the role their own causal powers and liabilities play in triggering, blocking or modifying the action of other causal mechanisms at work within the event. My claim is that human beings must be understood as spatio-temporally situated objects contributing to the event. Not all of the causal contribution arising from their specificity (normally subsumed under generalisations about human causal powers) need be considered but we need to be aware of its independent role to determine what aspects of this contribution should be pursued:

A good explanation will seek to focus selectively on the most relevant causal factors and there are at least two important criteria of relevance: first, the aspect of the event that we are seeking to explain, and secondly, which powers make the most significant contribution to this aspect of the event. In practice, we do not seek to explain all aspects of an event, even as simple an event as selling something in a shop. Instead, there are specific things we want to know – why did the salesperson not try to sell a more expensive television to the customer, for example, or why did she speak to him in a particular accent and what effect did this have on the outcome? Whichever aspect we focus on there will be causal factors we can decide to ignore because they have little explanatory significance for it, though we cannot necessarily prejudge which factors these will be.

Of course, this leaves open a whole range of further methodological considerations. In particular, how can we tell which were the most significant causal factors for any given outcome? This is not a question to which we can give a general answer on ontological grounds; the answer will always depend on the nature of the processes at work and how they interact with each other.

Explaining individual events, then, is challenging in the social sciences, and always involves some subjective decisions about how far to follow the causal chains and which ones to prioritise. But this does not mean that we can never do it: there may be occasions when one or a few causal factors predominate so strongly that we can reasonably treat them as the primary cause(s). Perhaps the salesperson decided not try and sell a more expensive television because she knew the customer and knew he could not really afford one. Perhaps she decided not to do it because of a recent conversation in which someone she respected criticised the practice. In such cases we may not be able to give quite definite answers to the causal question; but it is always a contingent empirical question whether this will be the case. (Elder-Vass 2010: 178)
Asexuality, Identity and ‘Scratching an Itch’ (2013-09-17 14:00)

It’s pretty great when you stumble across people discussing your work on the internet. All the more so when they ask thought-provoking questions which make you reconsider arguments you’ve made in the past and encourage you to explore their limitations:

Asexual elitism is an elitist attitude where some asexuals don’t consider other people to be asexual because they participate in an activity that the asexual elitist thinks falls outside of the realm of asexuality. What the activity is, be it masturbation, kissing, or sex, varies between asexual elitists (gbrd143). AVEN rejects asexual elitism by defining asexuality on its website homepage as ‘A person who does not experience sexual attraction’ (The Asexual Visibility and Education Network). This definition allows an asexual to engage in any type or amount of sexual behaviour; their identity only relies on the fact that they are not sexually attracted.

I think it’s important to qualify what the article says about me only describing sex-aversion and sex-neutrality. In the paper I published before this I actually list four terms: sex-positive, sex-neutral, sex-averse and anti-sex (Carrigan 2011: 468). I discuss sex-aversion and sex-neutrality in more detail in this paper but that’s because almost everyone who took part in the research (with the qualifier that the open-response format of the questionnaires meant I couldn’t tell in some cases) seemed to fit clearly into one of those two categories. I hadn’t realised the categories I was talking about had narrowed in this way between the two pieces of work and retrospectively I certainly regret this. The broader point made in this article still stands though and it’s an important one:

Carrigan claims that asexuals exist who specifically want to have sex, but the explanation for this is that they have sex for the intimacy it offers. In all these articulations, the asexual who wants to have sex because it feels good is absent.

A person who wants to have sex, but is not sexually attracted to anyone, is a type of asexual that is largely ignored or, as shown in Carrigan’s explanation, written away as wanting to have sex for a reason other than the act itself. This kind of asexual is so absent from conversations about asexuality that we might be led to believe that they don’t exist or are impossible.

- Talia in AVENues issue #25 http://www.asexuality.org/home/avenues.html

I guess there’s been a case of theoretical blindness on my part here. I’ve made the argument that what leads someone to come to identify as asexual is that certain attribute(s) of themselves are rendered problematic by the implicit and explicit judgements they encounter from significant others. Exactly what these attribute(s) are is a complex question and, in many ways, one which I think can’t be answered sociologically. But given the diversity within the asexual community, the heterogeneity underneath the umbrella definition, it seems obvious to me that this is not one attribute that all people who come to identify as asexual share. In an important sense I’m a constructivist about ‘asexuality’ but a realist about the processes which lead concrete individuals to come to identify as asexual. I think ‘asexuality’ is a cultural label, with its own history and a shifting politics attached to it, which has been the focal point for the elaboration of a rich web of terms and concepts. But just because the network of individuals who are both elaborating this terminology and using it to navigate their everyday lives (the two cannot ultimately be separated) are converging on the same label doesn’t mean they’re doing so for the same reasons or that they’re applying it to the same attributes.

2008
In this sense, the model I’m offering has no difficulty in accepting the existence of “asexuals that have sex because they orgasm, it feels good, and they actually want to”. But it’s never occurred to me because (a) there was no sign of them in my data (b) I didn’t knowingly encounter any when I did the internet phase of my research which was almost five years ago now (c) my model does struggle to make sense of why people like this come to identify asexual because I’ve understood this biographical process in terms of the individual coming to recognise certain attribute(s) of themselves as amounting in practice to ‘not being sexual enough’ or ‘not being sexual in the right way’ as a result of the stigmatising and/or pathologising judgements of significant others. In other words, I’ve been arguing that people come to identify as asexual because ‘not experiencing sexual attraction’ is rendered problematic by those around them. Just to be clear, I’m saying the problem here is with my model - I’m writing this post because I found the article in AVENues very thought provoking and I want to understand this issue better than I do at present:

I have often described sex-favourable asexuals as having an itch they want to scratch. They cannot find the right tools for the job, but they’ll use whatever is available because it really itches and they don't mind the tools at their disposal. They've accepted that there is no 'right tool' and they will never get the job done the typical way [...] the sex is of a different kind, but not ruined. Another type of sex-favourable asexuals could have no metaphorical itch or sexual libido. They might enjoy sex simply because, like jogging, it feels good. If something feels good, why not do it?

The conceptual difficulty emerges because I’d imagine either of these conditions (having sex because of an ‘itch’ that needs to be ‘scratched’ or simply because ‘it feels good’ in the way that sport or exercise does) is true for the majority of sexual people at least some of the time. People have sex with those they’re not sexually attracted to. People have sex when they’re ‘not in the mood’. People have sex because of intrinsic physical pleasures in a way which renders the specificity of the sexual partner wholly or partly redundant. So from my point of view, as someone who researches asexuality, there are two questions which stand out for me here. Firstly, how should ‘sex-favourable asexuals’ be conceptually distinguished from Gray-A’s* on the one hand and the variable centrality of sexual attraction to the sexual experience of non-asexuals on the other? Secondly, how do ‘sex-favourable asexuals’ come to identify as asexual and what ‘work’ does this identification do biographically? Is it just a convenient label for them? Does the label help ‘solve’ any problems they face in everyday life as a result of not experiencing sexual attraction? Are there particular difficulties they face (over and above the politics of ‘asexual elitism’ which sparked the AVENues article) specifically in virtue of not experiencing sexual attraction yet still having sex? How frequently do people in this category have sex? Does the absence of sexual attraction actually play a positive role in shaping sexual behaviour?

Which I guess is where I would have ‘placed’ these experiences if I’d thought more directly about it. This post has already taken me longer than I expected to write but I might come back to this point at a later date.

"Oh ‘INTP’. So that’s what I am": Identity and Alterity in a Digital Age (2013-09-18 08:00)

A couple of years ago I did a conference presentation called “The Difficulty of Working Out Who You are: Sexual Culture, Sexual Categories and Asexuality”. Or at least I gave a presentation this title. In reality it didn’t actually do what it said on the tin because I’d rather jumped the gun and given a definitive title to something which was then (and still is really) a loose amalgamation of thoughts in the progress. I started working on asexuality around 5 years ago now and my immediate interest was in asexuality as something approximating a sexual orientation (sparked
largely by how extraordinarily overlooked the conceptual possibility, let alone the empirical reality, had been in the academic sexualities literature I’d engaged with for the MA I’d just completed). Two further interests emerged from this as I got more into it:

1. The fascinatingly idiosyncratic frame of reference which asexuality (and [1]asexuality studies) offers for engaging with well rehearsed questions about contemporary sexual culture and its history of emergence

2. The broader issues of identity and alterity in late modernity which manifest themselves in the emergence of the asexual community (as well as the question of in what sense, if any, it’s meaningful to use the term ‘community’ here).

It’s the second question which has been on my mind recently. I’m talking about this at the Royal Geographical Society conference next week as part of a panel on the politics of anti-normativity and at a conference in Nottingham the following week on ‘normality in an uncertain world’. I like the second event theme in particular because it nicely captures the aspects of Archer’s account of late modernity which she’s only begun to draw out in her final book on reflexivity. This involves a situation where, as Archer (2012: 302-3) puts it, “the differences characterising each agent so overwhelm communalities with others that they increasingly engage in transactions with the system ‘as a whole’ (meaning raiding it for the detection of ‘contingent complemantarities’ and exploiting these novelities)”. What she’s suggesting is that increasingly atomised individuals, confronted with little to no socio-demographic possibilities for collective identification, look towards the cultural system for resources to help make sense of self and circumstances, which might furnish them with an ideal (which later provides a basis for value orientated collective action) but more immediately serves to increase the heterogeneity of their environment. What I think Archer misses is both how the cultural system can provide an immediate basis for social (re)integration and how socio-cultural relations can be digitally mediated. So the individual whose experience of not experiencing sexual attraction has been rendered problematic within their local environment, comes to recognise their commonality with (distant) others through direct and indirect accounts of experience which are encountered online. This in turn leads to an experienced difference (“I'm so weird! Everyone else is so interested in sex”) being transvaluated into commonality (“oh there are other people just like me!”) and provides a starting point through which many, though by no means all, come to pursue ‘offline’ relations on the basis of ‘online’ connections.

However I don’t think people who don’t experience sexual attraction are the only ones who follow this sort of biographical arc. To be clear: I’m talking about homologies at the level of individual biography and suggesting the existence of analogous structural and cultural factor which condition, though do not determine, the shape of that biography. I’m not subsuming a whole range of disparate phenomenon under one notion of biography (e.g. the existentially crisis prone individual in late modernity) though it occurred recently I sometimes talk as if this is what I’m doing. My point is to draw out a typological connection between disparate phenomenon which because of their particularity often have their connections overlooked (or are even ignored in and of themselves altogether). In terms of Archer’s approach, I’m gesturing towards a few things: a cultural account of contextual incongruity to supplement her structural account, a theory of how cultural systemic properties can provide an immediate basis for social re(integration) and a contribution to her thinking on reflexivity and collective action. After years of doing ‘my asexuality research’ and my PhD side-by-side, it’s really satisfying to have actually incorporated them into the same frame of reference at last... but I digress. What prompted me to write this post, which I’m stunned to realise is now close to 1000 words long without me having yet got to my main point, is the Myers-Briggs typology as another example of the weirdly specific cultural bases for social (re)integration which I’m convinced have come to circulate all around us without us having grasped their full implications yet. To those who don’t know, the Myers-Briggs is a taxonomic theory of ‘personality type’ designed for psychometric testing. It was ‘extrapolated’ from the work of Jung by two people with no psychological credentials or training (note: I’m not being a snob here, only stressing the important point that there the MB has, as far as I’m aware, zero empirical
basis and little or no credentialised authority for its putative conceptual roots in Jung's work). In effect it divides people up into 16 personality types through psychometric testing and there's a massive industry attached to the development, promotion and application of the MB. I first did it long ago (I love this stuff in spite of my chronic cynicism) and have tended to be ‘scored’ as an INTP. This is the attached personality profile from the Wikipedia page:

Architects are introspective, pragmatic, informative, and attentive. The scientific systematization of all knowledge, or [2]Architectonics, is highly developed in Architects, who are intensely curious and see the world as something to be understood. Their primary interest is to determine how things are structured, built, or configured. Architects are designers of theoretical systems and new technologies. Rearranging the environment to fit their design is a distant goal of Architects.

Architects are logically and verbally precise. In casual conversations, they may be tempted to point out errors the other speaker makes, with the simple goal of maintaining clarity within the exchange. In serious discussions, Architects’ abilities to detect distinctions, inconsistencies, contradictions, and frame arguments gives them an enormous advantage. In debates, Architects can be devastating, even to the point of alienation from the group with detailed logical arguments, which may be characterized as “hair-splitting” or “[3]logic-chopping”.

Architects tend to analyze the world in depth. They prefer to quietly work alone and they may shut other people out if they are focused on analysis. This, coupled with the fact that Architects are often quiet, makes it difficult for other individuals to get to know them. In social exchanges, Architects’ interest in informing others about what they have learned is greater than their interest in directing the actions of others.

Credentials or other forms of traditional authority do not impress Architects. Instead, logically coherent statements are the only things that seem to persuade them. Architects value intelligence highly and are often impatient with people with less ability than they have. An architect often perceives himself as being one of the few individuals capable of defining the ends a society must achieve and will often strive to find the most efficient means to accomplish their ends. This perspective can make Architects seem arrogant to others.

[...]

According to Rational Role Variants, by David Keirsey:

“Architects take their mating relationship seriously and are faithful and devoted – albeit preoccupied at times, and somewhat forgetful of appointments, anniversaries, and other common social rituals. They are not likely to welcome much social activity at home, nor will they arrange it, content to leave scheduling of social interactions to their mate. If left to their own devices, INTPs will retreat into the world of books and emerge only when physical needs become imperative. Architects are, however, even-tempered, compliant, and easy to live with - that is, until one of their principles are violated, in which case their adaptability ceases altogether. They prefer to keep their desires and emotions to themselves, and may seem insensitive to the desires and emotions of others, an insensitivity that can puzzle and frustrate their mates. But if what their mates are feeling is a mystery to them, Architects are keenly aware of what their mates actually say and do, and will often ask their mates to give a rationale for their statements and actions.” The INTP’s long-term mate is the ENFJ.

I find it hard not to recognise myself in this. Turns out others have the same experience: this is why websites, web forums and twitter feeds seem to have begun to emerge for those whose response to this subjective recognition has been to seek interlocutors who share this commonality: see [5]here, [6]here and [7]here. What’s going on here seems to be very similar to some of the relational dynamics driving the biographical trajectories of people who identify as asexual. However unlike asexuality, where my outsider status as a social researcher imposes certain constraints, something important seems obvious to me when focusing on the INTP: it’s an identity based on an exclusion. The experience of identification depends upon the accentuation of certain points which in turn distract from others. The INTP profiles seem so unerringly to capture certain aspects of my character (“They prefer to quietly work alone and they may shut other people out if they are focused on analysis. This, coupled with the fact that Architects are often quiet, makes it difficult for other individuals to get to know them”) that it distracts from those which aren’t incorporated within it descriptively or even run contrary to it (e.g. it’s hard to see a basis for political activism or shared engagement with live music in the NTP profile – both of which have been integral parts of my life since I was a teenager). In other words: the transvaluation of difference into commonality rests on confirmation bias. This is a strong and hypothetical suggestion about something which is ultimately an empirical question but it’s an important point: to what extent do the emergence of these ‘new commonalities’ presupposes the individual actively seeking them? What implications does this have for the putative social (re)integration I’m arguing emerges from these new collective identifications? This is why the asexual community fascinates me: the commonality becomes a basis for the emergence of new differences as dialogue unfolds i.e. behind the ‘umbrella term’ (asexuality as someone who does not experience sexual attraction) a diverse terminology for recognising and expressing (a)sexual difference emergences. I wonder if this is true elsewhere?

7. https://twitter.com/INTPinfo

Why academic podcasts are much more valuable than people realise (2013-09-19 08:00)

There’s a great post on Savage Minds [1]here which discusses a new anthropology podcast series. It makes some important points about the potential value of academic podcasts:

Its fascinating to listen to the interview version of an article (in fact, its much more convenient than reading the article!) but its even more fascinating to have a chance to get to know the authors behind the articles. This, to me, is the real value of the podcast: it gets you to the backstage of elite anthropology, to see what the people at the center of the discipline are like. Its an incredibly important experience denied to the vast majority of anthropologists who didn’t go to Top Schools, and the SCA’s willingness to share this with us is really fantastic.

Michael Fisch, for instance, is one of the many new hires that have recently been made at Chicago, where I earned my Ph.D. So, you know, my question was: now that he’s someone is he good enough
for Chicago? The written work was less important to me than the character and the quality and vitality of the responses he made in his interview. For me, the most interesting part of the podcast came as he discussed his broader theoretical interest, and particularly the importance of moving past Latour to the thinkers that influenced him in order to dig out the genealogy (and thus possible future) of a realist, network-based ontology to ground future research. As someone who studies mining and petroleum, Fisch's frustration that we hadn't completed the seemingly effortless task of developing cheap sources of infinitely renewable energy was, maybe, not so insightful. But whatever — it was a great interview with a young and successful scholar. Surely other young scholars will want to see what success sounds like, eh?

The Handler interview was very different. Handler is a senior scholar (I mean that in a nice way) talking mostly about the kind of issues that comes at the height of one's career, rather than at the beginning. It deals with administrative matters and big-picture issues in the organization of our discipline (and others). I've not always been interested in the topics that Handler studies (except Quebec, which I <3 ) but I've always been blown away by his tremendous analytic ability. Its remarkable to me to have the opportunity to listen to someone who has spent a lifetime in the academy tell us what he has figured out about the professionalization of the discipline and how it related to the intellectual endeavors that it scaffolds. There's a certain clarity that only experience can provide. Its valuable for anyone thinking about being involved in anthropology long-term.

This powerfully captures what I've always seen as the promise of academic podcasting. However I've recently felt that I'm in a bit of a rut with my podcasting. Having seen the difference which quality editing makes to the finished product while working at the LSE I'm finding it difficult to be satisfied with what could be politely described as my 'minimalistic' approach to editing. I'm wondering if I should begin to approach the podcasts in a much more planned and episodic way, structured around particular themes and edited properly rather than simply topped and tailed in Audacity before being thrown online. It's so much work though. But I think the promise of academic podcasts, as described so well in the extract above, can’t be realised without it. The direction in which Cheryl Brumley is taking the LSE's podcasts is also a great guide to how this can be done:

Audio is important to the LSE Public Policy Group. Our blogs, funded by HEIF 5 – an innovation fund focusing on knowledge exchange – have continued to push the boundaries of academic dissemination. One of our highest aims is to bring academia online, and in turn, broaden access to the social sciences. Audio is integral to this process. By giving narrative to the full breadth of academic research, we hope to stretch the understanding and impact of research beyond the confines of universities. You can find all four of our podcasts series across these online platforms: [3]LSE’s podcast channel, [4]Soundcloud, iTunes and iTunes U. 

Not only is the diversification of online output important for us, but the quality of output is integral to what we do. We want to challenge the idea that an academic podcast is merely a speaker at a microphone. We experiment with different podcasts formats and take many lessons from the tried and tested world of radio storytelling.

I blog about issues related to sound and how it can be used to enhance social science dissemination. You can read my [5]Simple Guide to Academic Podcast series, for practical and technical advice on how to begin your own project. If you have any audio-related questions, you can also find me at [6]c.k.brumley@lse.ac.uk and on Twitter [7]@cherylbrumley.
My initial scepticism when confronted by Cheryl's attention to detail (and the weird fear provoked in me by using microphones and headphones when interviewing) pretty quickly subsided once I heard how good podcasts sound when someone who knows what they're doing works on them properly. Here are the podcasts I did with Cheryl when I was managing the LSE Politics Blog:

1. [9]2 January 2013: A conversation with Tim Newburn: Combining journalism with academia: How to read a riot
2. [10]LSE British Politicast Episode 1: Reflecting On The Riots
3. [11]The ‘jobs for generals’ scandal highlighted important issues about UK defence procurement

I'm unlikely to produce anything quite this good on my own (I lack the skill, time and motivation) but I definitely want to start a podcast series which is much closer to this than the stuff I've done previously. I own the domain [12]http://www.outflankingplatitudes.com which at present simply hosts a Rebel Mouse site. I'm not sure how to integrate the podcasts into the Rebelmouse page or if starting the former would mean abandoning the latter. But an idea is definitely taking shape in my mind about how the podcasts themselves could work.

I'd particularly like to do more social theory podcasts - these are probably the ones I've enjoyed most from the individual interviews that I've done but they've always been limited by being with one person on one topic. Instead I could choose a particular theme (e.g. relational sociology) and interview people who take contrasting approaches to it. I suppose it would also be possible to gradually incorporate some of the existing interviews that I've done (there's about 60 or so) into thematic episodes. I definitely intend to use Soundcloud in future, as the habit I fell into of just uploading the MP3s to WordPress is quite limiting. Not least of all because it's not possible to get stats on how many people actually listen to the podcasts.

6. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/academic-podcasting/c.k.brumley@lse.ac.uk%22%3E
7. https://twitter.com/cherylbrumley
8. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/academic-podcasting/
"Stop living off the state" demands The King of the Netherlands (2013-09-19 19:12)

King Willem-Alexander, alongside his wife, Queen Maxima, told the Dutch people that they must create their own social and financial safety nets, and that looking to the state for help was a thing of the 20th century.

The speech was part of the monarch's annual address on the day the government presents its budget.

It was not immediately clear if the 100 million euros spent by the government on maintaining the Royal House, with its castles and parades, would be included in the austerity cuts.
Recent polls show confidence in the government at a record low and that most Dutch people believe the cabinet’s austerity policies are at least partially to blame


This is rather blunt to say the least. Are there instances elsewhere in Europe of this degree of honesty? For instance a similar sentiment clearly animates the Coalition government in the UK but they’d never be this explicit about it because of the electoral oblivion which would likely ensue.


nomen nescio (2013-09-24 09:56:54)
just to inform that the speech the king gives on 'prinsjesdag' ('princes' days', the 3rd tuesday in september when the government presents it's plans for the coming year) literally comes from the government. he does not have any say in this. only the christmas speech has personal touches

When journalists strike back - towards a sociology of the scam call (2013-09-20 00:15)

In recent years increasing numbers of people have been plagued by 'Microsoft support' scam calls. These callers claim to have identified a fault with the individual’s computer and to be calling on behalf of Microsoft in order to help solve the problem. But suffice to say this is not their real intention:

The phone rings and there’s a voice on the line telling you they’re aware you’re having computer problems, but not to worry – they’re with Microsoft, and they’re here to help. It’s a complete lie, and the opening gambit of an [1]all-too-successful scam.

The person on the end of the line has no idea how your PC has been behaving lately. And they’re certainly nothing to do with Microsoft. They’re just after your cash.

These ‘tech support’ scammers will typically ask for remote access to your PC. They may then infect it with malware that could lift credit card details from your computer. Or they could simply charge you through the nose for PC 'support' that you never even needed.


In this wonderful podcast the BBC’s technology correspondent Rory Cellan-Jones records his interaction with one of these callers. The first 16 minutes or so involve a fascinatingly absurd series of technical claims made by the caller in pursuit of their prize before Cellan-Jones eventually reveals his true identity around the 17th minute.
Yet again I’ve received a call about a "problem with my Windows computer". From a company in Yorkshire, apparently...
I was quickly passed on to the senior supervisor David, and managed to keep him on the phone for twenty minutes before revealing that the computer "under attack" was actually a Mac.
When I told him I was a journalist and thought he was involved in a disreputable scam, he said "you don’t sound like a journalist." Now I’m trying to work out whether that’s a good or bad thing.

The audio clip as a whole was interesting and funny. But did anyone else find the interaction from the 17th minute onwards as fascinating as I did? It’s crying out for someone more knowledgeable about ethnomethodology than I am to analyse the weird exchange where the scam caller starts attacking Cellan-Jones and his purported credentials. It reminded me of the strange exchange I had with a ‘chugger’ (charity mugger) who turned up at my front door asking me to sign up to Save the Children. I told him I wasn’t interested and he instantly retorted: "so you’re not interested in helping children?".

1. http://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/action/how-to-spot-a-scam/

Corrie (2013-09-23 16:36:09)
I may not be savvy with computers but the first time I read complaints about calls purportedly coming from Microsoft at Callercenter.com, I knew it was a scam already. It’s just too obvious.


Howard Becker, Blogging and Phenomenology (2013-09-20 08:00)
There’s a really nice [1]post on Jon Rainford's blog which talks about Howard Becker’s [2]Writing for Social Scientists and its potential lessons for bloggers:

This second edition examines some of the changes in technology in the twenty years since it was first published, especially in terms of ways in which computers have enhanced the ability for drafting and rearranging ideas and the reduced permanence of the text that is churned out, allowing for writers to take more risks with what they put into being. This, combined with some of his lines of argument about the value of sharing and discussing writing lead me to thinking how the rise of blogs have changed the game even further since 2007.

Becker uses a lovely phrase in chapter three. He says 'A thought written down is stubborn, doesn't change its shape and can be compared to thoughts that come after it' (p.56). For me, this forms the crux of why I am finding blogging so valuable for my writing, it allows me to commit those ideas
to writing and to share them with other people, not only my close academic network, but more widely. It allows me to ask questions, to float partially formed thoughts and to help develop the thinking by continuing to write about them. This is what many academics have done for years in letters and through discussions so why, in some cases is there a resistance to blogging still by some people?

Becker poses a possible reason why, he says ‘There’s something that I think many of us believe: talking about work is less of a risk than writing about it. In part it’s because no one remembers the ideas you speak.’ (p.118). I wonder if it is an extension of this argument that keeps the discussions in private opposed to in the open on a blog. Maybe if you do not make public your partially formed ideas, people won’t remember all the wrong turns you took, after all, your audiences only want to hear the perfectly formed ideas, not those provisional ones, right?

I love the description of a thought that “doesn’t change its shape” once written down. I’ve become aware of myself in the last few months as someone who thinks-through-writing and this is integral to it. Thoughts in my mind feel formless and inchoate until I’ve externalised them in speech or, better yet, writing. When discussing things I find interesting or writing about them, it’s sometimes a surprise to me what comes out – it’s obviously not something which emerges ex nihilo but until I’ve externalised the thoughts in my head they’re only really potential thoughts. Or something like that... in my more pretentious moments I think that I’d like to write a phenomenology of blogging at some point. I recently encountered a great passage by Nick Crossley talking about the phenomenology of typing and it seems a logical next step to extend this into a phenomenology of writing with a keyboard. In fact the discussion of the physical process of typing seems oddly lopsided without it (not a criticism of him given that this makes perfect sense in the context of the article) – the emphasis in the extract was added by me:

It is not only my own body that I "know" in this way, moreover. I have a pre-reflective sense or grasp on my environment, relative to my body, as is evidenced by my capacity to move around in and utilize that space without first having to think how to do so. Our relation to technological objects, such as word processors, provides an interesting illustration of this. I can type and to that extent "I know" where the various letters are on the keyboard. I do not have to find the letters one by one, as when I first bought the thing. My fingers just move in the direction of the correct keys. Indeed, when I am in full flow, I seem actually to be thinking with my fingers in the respect that I do not know in advance of typing exactly what I will say. It is not just that I do not need to think about where the keys are, however. The break with reflective thought is more severe than this. I could not give a reflective, discursive account of the keyboard layout. I do not "know" where the keys are in a reflective sense and to make any half decent attempt at guessing I have to imagine I am typing and watch where my fingers head for when I come to the appropriate letter. The type of knowledge I have of the keyboard is a practical, embodied knowledge, quite remote and distinct from discursive knowledge. It is “know-how,” in Gilbert Ryle’s sense, not propositional knowledge-that.

- Nick Crossley, The Phenomenological Habitus

Underlying this interest is my conviction that an understanding of the practice of writing cannot be divorced from an understanding of the tools with which one writes. This is a point well made by Evan Selinger in a short essay on
Nietzsche’s adoption of the typewriter later in life:

In [5] *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Kittler contends that in order to understand how Nietzsche coped with myopia, it is crucial to grasp the import of him by buying a[6] typewriter: a Danish model invented by Hans Rasmus Johann Malling Hanson. Given the lack of philosophical precedent, Kittler characterizes Nietzsche as the “first mechanized philosopher,” and argues that integrating the typewriter into the writing process facilitated several changes to the act of writing itself, profoundly impacting Nietzsche’s thought and style.

Kittler stresses how typewriters alter the physical connection between writer and text. Unlike the visual attention that writing by hand requires, the typewriter made it possible to create texts by exploiting a blind, tactile power that can harness "a historically new proficiency: écriture automatique." Given the report of a Frankfurt eye doctor, which stated that Nietzsche’s "right eye could only perceive mistaken and distorted images,” and Nietzsche’s own claim to find reading and writing painful after twenty minutes, we can appreciate why he would turn to a writing device that could be operated simply by pressing briefly on a key—a key that doesn’t even need to be looked at. Indeed, the Malling Hanson was specifically designed to "compensate for physical deficiencies" by having the capacity to "be guided solely by one’s sense of touch."

[...]

Kittler cites a poem that Nietzsche wrote about the Malling Hansen in 1882. Translated, it states:

THE WRITING BALL IS A THING LIKE ME: MADE OF /IRON/ YET EASILY TWISTED ON JOURNEYS./ PATIENCE AND TACT ARE REQUIRED IN ADBUNDANCE,/ AS WELL AS FINE FINGERS, TO USE US.

By comparing "the equipment, the thing, and the agent," Nietzsche appears to demonstrate his awareness that "authors" do not generate thoughts that transcend their material culture.


The last line seems like something of an overstatement but it nonetheless expresses something quite profound about the role of ‘tools’ in the creative process.

Think Progress [1] reports that the Republican campaign against Obamacare has reached a new low, with an advertising campaign encouraging students not to sign up for medical insurance which surely has to rank amongst the most offensive (and weirdest) political advertisements in history:

Republican efforts to block Obamacare have taken shape in several different forms. On the federal level, lawmakers [2] repeatedly threaten to cast votes to defund and delay the health law. On the state level, lawmakers are doing their best to [3] impede the law’s new insurance marketplaces, which are set to roll out next month. And as a “grassroots” strategy, Obamacare opponents hope they can simply convince Americans to forgo signing up for health insurance altogether.

A new campaign by [4] Generation Opportunity, a conservative group that Yahoo News [5] reports has “financial ties to billionaire businessmen and political activists Charles and David Koch,” is taking this third approach. Generation Opportunity wants to specifically target college students this fall, spending up to $750,000 on a campaign to convince young people they don’t need health insurance.

“What we’re trying to communicate is, ‘No, you’re actually not required to buy health insurance,’” Generation Opportunity’s president, Evan Feinberg, [6] explained in an interview with Yahoo News. “You might have to pay a fine, but that’s going to be cheaper for you and better for you.”

How does Generation Opportunity want to get that message across to college students? They’re planning a [7] college tour, bringing anti-Obamacare literature and beer coozies emblazoned with the words “opt out” to 20 different campuses. And they’re also unveiling an ad campaign that features an unsettling image of “Uncle Sam” appearing in the doctor’s office to subject young adults to invasive exams.

The Sociology of Hipsters (2013-09-20 14:00)

An interesting post on Sociology Lens yesterday made a useful contribution to the online debate about the sociology of hipsterdom which I briefly became completely obsessed with last summer:

This week in a local Massachusetts newspaper a columnist made a list of demands to the influx of hipsters into his neighborhood. In the [1]article the author attempts to reconcile with how his city is gentrifying and seems to be making something of a plea to the newcomers' humanity. The article sparked my interest and had me asking, what is a hipster?

The author himself admits that the term hipster is a generalization. To clarify his definition he writes, “If you would like a more precise definition, then I am addressing you if you identify with rebellious subculture(s), but you enjoy privileges associated with the dominant class; if your rebellion is more about recondite consumption choices than humane institutional changes.”

The author goes on to convey the aspects of community that he finds important, like participation in local clubs and politics, and asks that these newcomers join in. The author seems to define hipsters as a cultural subculture and an economic class with distinct consumption choices.


I actually quite like this understanding because it includes, albeit slightly crudely, the classed element which is often present in the anti-hipster discourse. I think this is sometimes overlooked by those seeking to oppose the anti-hipster discourse (is the idea of an outright pro-hipster discourse (oxy)moronic?).

This blog post then offers a neo-Weberian analysis of the figure of the 'hipster' which I find quite compelling:
Weber helps us to understand hipsters because while the instinct is to see cultural differences, the economic and political context of a hipster is extremely important. As the comments section illustrates, people are not convinced or comfortable with a simple definition of hipster. This is because hipsters are a recognition that something larger is happening – change is happening; neighborhoods and cities are looking different and are being inhabited by different people. The need to understand what is happening seems to drive much of the hipster debate. The logic seems to be – if we can figure out who is changing the neighborhood then we can stop them or make pleas to their humanity to join our way of doing things.

While Weber agrees that it is real people in real places making the world move – they do not make change in a vacuum. People make change in and with the help of social institutions: economic, political, and cultural. So what is a hipster? Seems to me a hipster is the newest cultural spotlight that takes our attention away from the politics and economics of change and instead turns debates into a witch-hunt – looking for who is to blame.


1. mailto:http://www.thesomervilletimes.com/archives/42150

Louie Ludwig (2013-09-20 15:18:36)
My own response to the anti-hipster discourse: http://youtu.be/0zu0jVVZSOU

Benjamin Geer (2013-09-30 09:45:48)
Here’s a recent analysis based on the idea that the conflict over the definition of hipster reflects a struggle to preserve the value of cultural capital in the “indie” cultural field: “For our participants, the hipster myth is the trivializing stereotype that threatens the value of their identity investments in the indie field of consumption.... By gleaning aesthetically meritorious forms of indie culture from the mainstream marketplace, these consumers leverage their field-dependent cultural capital in ways that distinguish them from stereotypical hipsters and also from indie consumers who have less status in the consumption field and hence lack the cultural license to flaunt the symbolic boundary between legitimate and illegitimate expressions of indie culture.... Owing to their high status position in the field, these consumers have a cultural authority to dismiss any resemblances between their consumption practices and the hipster icon as irrelevant trivialities or as an ironic comment on its corporate contrivances.... Once vested in the indie field, these consumers become reflexively aware of the hipster marketplace myth that has been culturally (and commercially) imposed on their identity practices. Rather than functioning as a source of attraction, indie consumers view this marketplace myth as a caricature of their aesthetic tastes, which threatens the value of their field-dependent capital. They employ demythologizing practices to insulate the field of indie consumption from the stigmatizing encroachments of the hipster myth and, in so doing, protect their field-dependent capital from cultural devaluation.” Zeynep Arsel and Craig J. Thompson, “Demythologizing Consumption Practices: How Consumers Protect Their Field-Dependent Identity Investments from Devaluing Marketplace Myths,” Journal of Consumer Research 37, no. 5 (February 1, 2011): 791–806, doi:10.1086/656389.

2023
Combining towards effective research design in digital sociology (2013-09-21 08:00)

I am currently trying to devise a workable research design for a two and a half year [1]project. Its absence, needless to say, isn’t stopping me jumping into the field for what I call the ‘landscape mapping’ phase of the project – which I half suspect will last longer than the part that’s directed by a robust and clear research design.

The project is at once a sociology of a profession (journalism), an organisation (a media group) and a distributed practice (blogging and online discussion). It is my ambition to take an action research approach and allow the agenda to be influenced by the needs and interests of respondents / organisational members, hopefully without sacrificing either scientific robustness or theoretical relevance. To put this another way, at the end of the journey I want to be able to write a book for an academic audience, but I also want to find time for plenty of detours and stop-offs along the road to enable me to engage very intensively with actors in the field about the emerging findings, and to interpret them collaboratively.

That in itself is a difficult combination to achieve. However, the combinations that are now giving me most pause for thought are more of a technical, methodological, interpretive and analytical nature than about subjects, objects and audiences. Like Ruppert, Law & Savage (2013), I am becoming aware of how "social knowledge is more visibly non-coherent than it was in the recent past": that digital data is increasingly ‘self-generated’, ubiquitous and lively, generated outside the academy and less dependent on the capacity of actors to learn to behave as the kinds of publics experts like us construct them as in the design of our research instruments. It follows, they argue, that "we will need to vary the magnification as we explore the chains of relations and practices enrolled in the social science apparatus" and "explore fields of devices as relational spaces where some devices survive and dominate in particular locations while others are eclipsed, at least for the moment" (Ruppert, Law & Savage 2013: 19-20). Never has it been more relevant to strive for ways of combining views of the social from above and from below. Or, better perhaps, to configure the social successively and iteratively from different angles of attack, equipped with devices that afford different conceptual and technical preconceptions.

But what, exactly, am I trying to combine in my own project? I’m going to have a mixture of data and metadata: interview transcripts, samples of text from blogs and online discussion, detailed fieldwork observation notes and a range of pseudo-constitutional documents on the one hand; user databases and various forms of scraped online social data (Marres & Weltevrede 2013) on the other. I’m taken by the idea that such a heterogeneous corpus of texts can be analysed as … a corpus as long as you find a way of opening up an intermediate space for its active and iterative interpretation, as Chateauraynaud argues: “one can re-equip the social scientific laboratory by installing an intermediate workspace between the Web and the confined universe of sociological research … What we need is a mediator or an intermediary placed between the traditional world of knowledge and the digital world, without being configured entirely by one or the other, and which carries sufficient autonomy to be able to produce cognitive events of a new genre.” (2007: 3) The point is really to use that space to construct an intelligent corpus by continually interpreting the dossier you’re amassing – describing it, indexing it, annotating it, calibrating it, testing its coherence. To find new ways to responsibilise the datasets we construct that are as good as the techniques used by qualitative researchers to understand and mark the transformations unavoidably set in train when working with traditional documentary sources (Hakim 1993). One purpose of techniques like framework analysis, for example, is to format a dataset for one’s own study purposes, marking it as different from ‘raw’ data sources so that one is forced to take ownership of it by acknowledging that one’s own purposes are different from those of the authors of the documents.

So I’m looking for a digital methods equivalent of framework that can help me construct and analyse a corpus combining all of the following elements.
Technical level

Big data approaches

Mass observation techniques

Metadata and self-generated online social data

Ethnographic approaches

Following the actors

Rich textual discursive data

Methodological level

Disintermediated and collaborative data-gathering

Theory-based and expert data-gathering
Interpretive level

Interpretation through action research where knowledge is framed pragmatically by its use and relevance to a media organisation and journalists

Interpretation that engages with the academic literature on professions, organisations and the Internet / eParticipation in order to generate knowledge

Analytical level

Field analysis at the macro-level of an organisation and a profession

Discourse analysis at the micro-level of speech acts and communicative interaction, intermediary objects and their translation, localised regimes of justification

Some of these combinations are very difficult to do: field theory is generally held to be so bequeathed to structural explanation as to be incompatible with pragmatic and ethnomethodological sensibilities I insist on practising as a researcher in the terrain. Nevertheless, my hunch is that my research will be the better if I can pull them off. More than that, my hunch is that I need to pull them off to do this particular research properly. To be sure that the results are worth something.

What I am less sure about at the moment is precisely what leverage I get from each of the perspectives I introduce. How to weigh their importance (not least for practical purposes of time allocation)? And then, how do the combinations work – how do I make them perform work, i.e. make them stick together, as the actor network theorists would say? One idea is to think of the different views as different phases of the same process. For example, Aguiton and Cardon (2008) have suggested that you glimpse a socialising dynamic at work when your focus is on the small-scale or the physical, and an amplifying dynamic at work when your focus is on the large-scale or the virtual. They use this insight to understand processes of open innovation, but we could easily extend it to any case of emerging social practice that makes use of online communication. Another idea would be to take Pentland and Feldman’s proposal (2005) about the dialectical relationship between change and routine in organisations. Does one perspective make
you more likely to notice the ostensive scripts that actors follow when they try to emulate an ideal, while another sensitises you to a submerged but active repertoire of performative scripts that actors invoke when they subvert (or repair) organisational routines?

Accordingly, I sense that the research design needs to be as iterative as possible in terms of chronology: zooming in and zooming back out as often as possible to alternate between perspectives that will contradict and interrogate as much as they complement one another.

Cooren and Fairhurst (2004) ask us to consider how the programmes of action of the groups we study intersect around mutual interests. If the aim of research is to attain an omniscient version of a story, this might therefore have a network shape centred around a key helper or co-orientation object. Once we then recognise ourselves as actors in that network, it is incumbent on us to go one step further and ask where and how their programmes of action coincide with our programme of action as researchers so as to identify potential boundary objects around which a joint action domain for ‘research in the open air’ might productively coalesce.

So my quest for a good study design is, I hope, not just another tilt at structure-agency windmills. It’s the necessary step to preventively screen or ‘proof’ my data collection techniques by truly appropriating the data and to recognise the parallels (which represent possibilities for collaboration) with the indigenous acts of recording, comparing, combining and interpreting that intelligent and interested members of the organisations I am studying perform on distinct but overlapping knowledge corpuses. And hence to open Chateauraynaud’s intermediary space.

References


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Are most countries in Europe democratic? Post-politics, technocracy and populism (2013-09-21 10:38)

The LSE EUROPP blog has a great[1] interview with the political theorist [2]Chantal Mouffe in which she discusses her understanding of European politics as being in a post-political situation. Her understanding of ‘post-political’
is similar to what the political sociologist Colin Crouch means by [3] post-democratic: the formal institutions of democratic politics are still in place but their substantive content is absent. I was quite taken with Mouffe’s account of right-wing populist parties when I first encountered it around 2006/2007 and it seems particularly pertinent now. Mouffe argues that the politics of ‘beyond left and right’ in actuality represents a hegemonic neoliberal consensus which precludes a widespread affective identification with political parties and leaves an opening for populist parties to fill the gap and offer the electorate a choice:

Of course some people have been arguing that it is good for democracy, this blurring of the line between left and right, because democracy is supposedly more ‘mature’. I disagree with this. For instance in my book, [4] On the Political, I’ve tried to explain the development of right-wing populist parties as a reaction to the lack of choice which is given to citizens. Right-wing populist parties are, in many countries, the only parties who argue that there is a real alternative. Now the alternative that they propose is unacceptable, would not work economically, and on top of that often reflects some form of xenophobia, but they give the possibility of mobilising passion toward change.

Politics is, of course, to do with interests and moral concern, but there is also a dimension related to ‘passion’: the need for people to identify with a project. And what I call post-political is precisely the lack of this passion and identification.

[...]

One theory I have developed is that political identity is based on the idea of ‘we’ as opposed to ‘them’. If you are to construct a people then it is necessary to determine who ‘they’ are. In the case of right-wing populism this is usually immigrants, or Muslims, or foreigners. But this is not the only way to construct a people. If we consider the [5] Front de Gauche in France, for instance, they are clearly a left-wing movement, but they have also been accused of being populist. In a sense this is absolutely correct, because they want to oppose the discourse of the Front National by constructing another people. This is a people where Muslims and immigrants are not excluded, but instead the chief adversaries are the forces of neo-liberal globalisation. So while both the Front de Gauche and the Front National are populist movements, there is a very big difference between the types of people they have attempted to construct.


It’s a really interesting interview which is worth [7] reading in full. If you like her ideas I’d recommend The Democratic Paradox or On The Political. Both are short, engaging and provocative books. I’m certainly planning to go back and reread them some point soon after having not thought about Mouffe’s work in years. Her work offers some useful theoretical tools for making sense of the rise of Greece’s neo-fascist Golden Dawn party but also suggests that the attempt to ban it is unlikely to succeed:
Europe seems to be caught between two opposing trends which on the surface could not be more different: radical populism on the streets and sterile technocracy in the parliaments. However Mouffe would argue the two go hand-in-hand as populist movements arise to fill the affective vacuum left by the evisceration of substantive democracy. As she observes at the end of the LSE interview:

Certainly I agree with the ideas of people such as Colin Crouch, who argue that we are living in a ‘post-democratic’ situation. Our societies still call themselves democratic, but what does democracy mean in the present circumstances? The most obvious case is of course when they decide to completely overrule democratic processes through parliament and put in place a technocratic government. What does it mean to call this kind of society democratic?

This is definitely a real trend, but it’s a trend that will undermine democracy even further. We seem to believe that it’s now possible to do away with democracy altogether. It leads to the idea that we might be able to run things better if we simply removed any democratic constraints and implemented some form of bureaucracy. The name ‘democratic’ might remain in these cases, but we cannot genuinely see these countries as democracies any more.


These are worrying times for Europe. Caught between what Daniel Cohn-Bendit has called the “neoliberal Taliban” which dominates the European commission and a resurgent neo-fascism on the streets:
5. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/06/05/france-populism/
8. file://www.youtube.com/embed/YvMgqm8yn9I
11. file://www.youtube.com/embed/Exm08ZNIJOY
The Identity Crisis in Cybernetics (2013-09-21 16:19)

This post-conference reflection on [1]Mark Johnson’s blog raises a really interesting issue for traditions of intellectual inquiry which fall beyond or between disciplinary boundaries:

At my University over the summer, we hosted the annual conference of the American Society for Cybernetics. It was really good - despite some worries I had beforehand. It seems that Cybernetics provides a space for people to play with and break the ordinary rules of disciplinary discourse. That’s refreshing and good fun. Cybernetics has an identity crisis. This can be boiled down to a question: "Can something which sees itself as transdisciplinary establish itself within the disciplinary context of the academy?"

There are a number of responses one might have to this. But judging from a rather fierce online argument currently underway, I would say the answer is "no". At our conference, there was an implicit anti-academic thread which presented cybernetics as in some way divorced from conventional discourse. This caused many of the problems that blew up before the event started. The difficulty is that the provenance of cybernetics is clearly academic: it came from physics, biology, psychology, philosophy, education, economics, mathematics, computer science and management studies. It would seem reasonable that any advances in the discipline would emerge from those discourses. And indeed they do, but (the problem for the 'subject' of cybernetics) is that as cybernetic ideas are advanced in each area, nobody refers to them as cybernetic ideas! They are now ideas in computer science, mathematics, physics, etc. Which leaves the cyberneticians sulking in a corner, feeling unloved and (frankly) short of funding.


(I give it six months before someone has the idea of rebranding cybernetics as 'cybernetics studies')


Is virtual ethnography an oxymoron? (2013-09-22 08:00)

Attempts to conceptualise the sociological study of behaviour on the Web often involve juxtaposing the words 'virtual' or 'digital' to 'ethnography' or blend 'ethnography' with 'Internet' to create 'netnography'.

Rightly or wrongly ethnography for me connotes old school anthropology - Malinowski and Mead - and deep, long term immersion in communities. In my research I am considering how young people engage with information online. I visited a college, I interviewed my subjects (and their teachers) and let them loose on the Web during which time I wanted to capture everything both on and offline that influenced the data. As well taking traditional field notes I audio and video recorded what went on in the room, used a proxy server to capture all the client-server traffic, set-up a dialogue feed to capture what the subjects were saying to each other online and downloaded the browser history files. The result is a lot of data. I am, however, reluctant to call this research ethnography. I use ethnographic
methods but I think the picture is still too superficial to call it ethnography.

I have a rich snapshot but it's still only a snapshot. I asked young people about immigration and climate change and used the data to contextualise what they did online. But without further ethnographic research I can’t account for the influence of other social domains or fields beyond the boundaries of my visits. I don’t know for example the extent to which the students were rehearsing the views and practices of people within their households.

The data I got from the Web and social networks told only a fraction of the story. I couldn't know what some data meant until I cross-referenced it with what happened offline. During one session, for example, someone was reading a newspaper, discussed what he’d read with a peer then altered his stance online as a result. This is why I’m reluctant to use terms such as digital ethnography and netnography; its methods are too superficial to justify the word ethnography. Please let me know if you think I’m mistaken!

Huw Davies is a 2nd year, interdisciplinary, PhD student at the University of Southampton attempting to synthesize the best of sociology and computer science under the banner of Web Science. More info on his Twitter profile @huwcdavies

Craig (2013-10-20 10:53:36)
Not sure this is an issue you should get too bogged down in. Maybe you are not though. Anyway ... as you say, you are certainly using ethnographic methods. Whether it is ethnography, well, that depends on how you see what ethnography is. You admit to a somewhat traditional view. No doubt you are also familiar with the view that there are ethnographies ... a pluralistic view, that does not elevate the old school work in some kind of hierarchy. Is part of your struggle to see your work as ethnography something to do with idealising residential communities and as a school is not one, this troubles you on some level? Just a thought. Mc75@gre.ac.uk

RS Slack (2013-10-20 11:11:06)
I don’t see the need to make ‘traditional’ Malinowskian ethnography a model against which to measure, but at the same time the idea of an ethnography of the virtual has conceptual issues (it is ethnography of this or that wether it takes place on line or elsewhere). What you’re doing is, to my mind, ethnographic but more importantly it is producing what sounds like interesting data - so why worry about terminology that is either ideal-typical or conceptually problematic? My sense is that the production of ‘thick descriptions’ such as those you describe could be ethnography but do you need the label ‘an ethnographic study’ to hang these worldly things on? Others may disagree but just now getting the kind of data you are getting, however you label it, is where the action is. There's always the allegedly pragmatic catch all fallback of ‘multi-methods’ in any event.

Public Sociology and Writing For The Media (2013-09-23 08:00)

We've posted a few times this month about what public sociology means in practice. If we agree that it’s a worthwhile thing then how should we set about doing it? One obvious way to do this is to try and get opinion pieces published in the media. There’s some great tips on [1]Get a Life PhD about how to go about doing this:

It can be hard for an academic to respond with lightning speed to the daily news and formulate a well-crafted 800-word article in less than 24 hours. I know. Luckily, you don’t have to.
The other strategy is to predict the future. Think about an OpEd you would like to write. Write it. Then, wait for something to happen in the news that relates directly to your OpEd.

For example, if you work on immigration policy, write an OpEd now. Then, wait for Congress to debate the next big bill. Or, if you work on climate change, write your OpEd and wait for an international forum to happen to submit the OpEd. In many cases, you can write an OpEd which can have many possible ledes.

The good thing about this strategy is that you can recycle your OpEd if it is not accepted. If the New York Times doesn't publish it, you can revise it, wait for the next major event to happen and send it to the Washington Post.

Over the past few years, I have realized that I am not alone among academics who want to reach a broader audience. As I have had some success in this area, I have realized that strategy can be crucial for success here. Thus, I share these tips with you.

http://getalifephd.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/how-to-submit-oped-to-major-newspaper.html

Between Two Worlds: The story of a first-year sociology student (2013-09-24 08:00)

Between Two Worlds. A challenging student life and a demanding degree: could we bring those two universes together?

'Reality? What is that?
Is it an idea or just a convention?
It's how we define that particular threat,
which pushes our dreams right into detention.

Is my love for you part of the real?, I ask.
I do not know, but I can say
every single person wears a mask;
we use it in this reality, if not, we have to pay…'

This is an excerpt from a longer poem I wrote before starting University. It reflects my perspective about life at that 'pre-sociological' moment. This view started to change slightly on 17th September 2012 when I began my degree in Sociology with a specialism in Media Studies at Sussex University.

As I was studying something new for me, one of the first things of which I gradually became aware during the
first lectures and seminars was that so many taken-for-granted ideas, beliefs and customs are, in fact, socially constructed. I had more or less realized this before, but when I started studying Sociology I really thought it through. If we think about the dominant factors that effectively run our society as discourses for example, family, marriage, religion, power, education, sexuality, assumptions of what is 'good' and 'bad', 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' - the list goes on), and pause to think how our own beliefs relate to those concepts, we shall start noticing where the 'socially constructed factor' intervenes, posing insistent questions to 'normality' of all kinds...

Having received this revelation or wake-up call to sociology, I am happy to say that I had a very enjoyable first year. With a little (and sometimes a lot) help from my lovely friends on campus and from my gorgeous boyfriend whom I had met at University, I managed to escape the stress of studying in a foreign country, getting used to the academic language, and the many other challenges of university life. I succeeded in striking a healthy balance between late-night parties and the hours spent in the library: an equilibrium that somehow materialised into good (and sometimes very good!) grades throughout the year. ‘Healthy balance’ is not just one secret: it is the most important secret of becoming a successful Sociology undergraduate. All you need is passion, good time-management skills and, more often than not, a creative spirit.

Passion is a key word. I think you have to be passionate about what you do in order to be satisfied and to feel good in your field of activity – and in this respect studying sociology is no different from any other pursuit. But involvement is equally important, especially when the time comes to choose a career which will effectively influence your entire life. During my first year of studying sociology, one of the biggest challenges was choosing which topics to write about, which books and articles to read for my essays, and which presentation topics to address. Compared to my previous experience of secondary education, university gave me more freedom which I enjoyed and that’s what has shaped my passion for Sociology. The best thing about university is feeling free to focus on what genuinely interests me (though, obviously, I do not completely ignore topics I do not like). My long first-year trip through many themes, perspectives and ideas in Sociology has helped me develop an idea as to what to do, and on what to focus, during the next couple of years.

Once the first year has accomplished its mission – to make you discover your areas of interest – what comes next?

Well, it is not enough to simply be captivated by your studies. You have to deal with managing your time, which becomes increasingly more important in later years of study. Even when you are tempted to read all the books that interest you, go to many parties and do sports, you must simultaneously meet deadlines and attend seminars and lectures. What helped me was the simplest thing possible: keeping lists. Each weekend I would plan the following week in as much detail as I could, arranging ‘to do’s according to priority. I had lists and lists: daily lists, shopping lists, weekly lists... Here is an example of a weekly list:

1. Finish the readings for the essay

2. Get plane tickets for vacation

3. Don’t forget to text Doriana for her birthday

4. Don’t miss the beach party of Thursday

...the list could go on and on. This simple approach allows you to have an overview of the immediate future. You can imagine what activities need to take place during the coming week and be sure not to miss anything (though of course you have the freedom to amend the list if needed). And let’s not forget that satisfying feeling when you’ve finished your assignments and you delete, cut, put a X or a V in front of every ‘thing to do’, or just throw the list in the bin. After that, because you have completed the long and stressful list, you deserve to go out and relax with your
friends.

Lists and planning are not all. In order to be academically successful, you must also be creative. This was my main problem during the first year. At first, I was confused about how to be creative in something that did not appear creative, such as an academic essay. I came to University with what I thought was a very good understanding of the word 'creative': my hobbies are poetry, painting, drawing and fashion design. But my first assignments gave me a new challenge: what does the criterion of ‘originality’ in the mark mean, if the essay is supposed to be a serious and rigorous piece of written work? So here is another thing that I learned (and still continue learning) during the first year of studying Sociology: originality is not only about my 'outré art', it can also exist between the lines of a well-structured academic essay.

A lot more could be written about my first year experience in studying Sociology and Media Studies, but I hope that these few reflections about my experiences, what I have learned so far, what worked and what didn't, would be useful to you. If I had to sum up the main ingredients of a successful start at university, I would say that you need, above all, passion, time management and creativity. But how does all this answer the question posed in the title of this short essay? In my experience, the two apparently different worlds, the life of a fresher and their busy timetable, can work very well together, as long as you keep a good balance and enjoy what you are doing.

During the university induction, one of the speakers advised us to ‘work hard, be good and have fun’. At the time, a quiet inner voice, the voice inside my head, objected: ‘Sure, sure, this is another welcoming cliché.’ Now, a year later, I speak with my consciousness alert:

‘Well, that man was right, completely right.’

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Alexandra Bulat is a second year Sociology and Media Studies student at the University of Sussex.


This stream welcomes abstracts on any aspect of theory as well as abstracts for the following Study Groups:

- Bourdieu
- Historical and Comparative Sociology
- History of Sociology
- Realism and Social Research
- Weber

The Realism and Social Research group would also like to invite abstracts under the theme "What is Realism for?". The group is particularly interested in papers that consider any of the following issues:

- Consider the relevance of realist theory to substantive social, economic and political issues.
- The practical implications of methodologically operationalising different forms of realist thought.
· Those from other schools of thought who wish to engage critically in a dialogue with realist theory.

**How to submit**

All paper abstracts and proposals for other events can be submitted online at: http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsannualconference/submissions.aspx

**The deadline for submission of abstracts is 18 October 2013.**

For further information contact the Theory stream coordinators

Gurminder K Bhambra E: g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk

Tom Brock E: T.Brock@mmu.ac.uk

Alternatively, contact the BSA Events Team E: events@britsoc.org.uk

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**Steve Fuller on The Proactionary Imperative (2013-09-24 13:28)**

While I’m a bit sceptical about the 'beyond left and right' terms in which this is being framed, it's nonetheless an extremely interesting idea:
As a sociologist-in-training and a grad student it is my job to eat, breath, and live sociology, the study of human interaction and social institutions. I spend most of my week either reading sociological pieces, listening to lectures and talks, or participating in class discussions with faculty and fellow students. Through all this we are supposed to be thoroughly indoctrinated in the sociological imagination which is the ability to see the connections between the macro and the micro, the individual and society. We assume that this imagination is universal and abiding and that terms such as society, institutions, the state, and others are also universal. What I have come to realize over time is that what I am really learning in graduate school is a European sociology and an European sociological imagination. As a person of African descent this sociology is stifling and at time hostile to my mind and humanity.
There are some authors who have highlighted how sociology and other social sciences are rooted in the experiences of European people. This rootedness is problematic on its own but becomes deadly when we add in the experience of Europeans included eradicating Native Americans, enslaving Africans, dominating and colonizing Africa, Asia, and South America. These experiences of oppression have defined how we today understand the social world around us, which sadly is still dominated by white privilege and supremacy. Examples of work that shows us this picture of an oppressive European sociology is *Thicker Than Blood* by Tukufu Zuberi which highlights how social statistics are based on racist ideologies and *White Logic, White Methods* joining Zuberi with Eduardo Bonilla- Silva which takes a broader view of racist sociological methods. An old favorite written right when African-Americans were being first let into the university, *The Death of White Sociology* edited by Joyce Lander, shows how white supremacy entrenched itself not only in the structure of discipline but also the research and teaching of sociology. Through these works and a number of others we see how sociology is not neutral and privileges the perspectives of European people.

Above is the type of speech that you may hear from anyone that calls themselves a "critical" scholar of any kind. They fully understand that the social sciences are very much a colonized space and they all have racism aplenty. Their prescription is for scholars to undertake the process of decolonizing sociology and other social sciences. Anthropology, being in the past one of the worse perpetrators of Eurocentric science, is today at the forefront of decolonization through journals such as the Association of Black Anthropologists’ *Transforming Anthropology* and *Decolonizing Anthropology: An Anthropology for Liberation* edited by Faye Harrison. This decolonization is supposed to rid the social sciences of ideologies, practices, and biases that hinder an honest and objective understanding of any and all things that involve people of color and at the same time open up the work of the social sciences more fully to people of color. Although these goals are good, they are also only a partial solution to the problems of Eurocentric sociology.

In order to see how much deeper the problems created by Eurocentric sociology go we have to think back to the roots of social sciences. Most of the social sciences we know of today were born out of the European Enlightenment with the goal of understand human social behavior to quell social conflict. Later with the rising importance of the scientific method as a basis of doing all science the idea of doing science for social change was repressed and positivist perspectives on understanding social science took over. Because many of these disciplines were founded with this goal in mind there are themes and assumptions about human behavior that have become embedded in how we study the social world that are wholly alien to anyone that is not European. A list of these ideas could include:

- Positivism
- Materialism
- A concept of “society” as a distinct entity from nature
• Humans are inherently hedonistic or self-interested

• The social contract

All of the above sociological/social science concepts are concepts that are of European origin and are embedded in the European worldview. As an African who is seeking to understand the social world I have been born into as well as make it more hospitable for my people knowing that how I do my science is rooted in an exclusively European experience is very disturbing. It reminds me that all the perspectives and imaginations created by countless other societies, including my people’s, are systematically ignored and/or destroyed by the hegemony of European science. This is where decolonization often fails. It rids us of the racism of the European perspective but not of its basic worldview which is hidden in a cloud of objectivity. We need to move beyond a decolonization focused on grafting oppressed stories, ideas, and authors onto the dominate form of science and towards a decolonization that constructs alternate forms of science and inquiry, all coexisting, that draw on the worldviews of other peoples. In other words for my people we need an Africana Sociology.

What would an Africana Sociology look like? I have not had the time to do a ton of groundwork on this particular question but I give you an example of how valid sociological inquiry can be done without being anchored to the terms and worldview of European sociology. Let’s say we are doing a study where we would like to understand why race riots or race rebellions happen in general. For most of the mainstream sociological community any theory of race riots will be rooted in conflict theory or Marxist sociological thought. The theory will likely organize a narrative of white capitalist oppression through the police of poor black and brown neighborhoods which eventually reached a breaking point resulting in riots/rebellions. Inherent in this narrative are ideas such as society and history being the story of conflict for resources and power among classes and that society then is always unbalanced with the dominate class trying to create a balance that secures their supremacy over society.

How would Africana Sociology approach this same question differently? If we draw on the philosophical and what can be understood as social theories of ancient Africans we will see a very different picture of race riots from what we see in the European context. African philosophies such as those of Egypt understood society as inseparable from nature and spiritual world/world of ideas. The concept of Maat represented the connectedness of everything to everything (this idea is referenced in Lauryn Hill’s “Everything is Everything” a saying that sums up the Egyptian conception of creation) and how the natural state of the universe is balance. Isfet is the counterpart of Maat, which is imbalance, chaos, and evil. Racial domination in urban cities in the United States represents an immense destruction of Maat, creating inequality and Isfet. When this oppression and inequality reaches a tipping point where there is a severe lack of Maat people revolt and social change happens to restore Maat. Human history is here seen as the balancing and unbalancing of the world with balance being the natural state. Racial stratification which citing Douglass Massey’s Categorically Unequal entails the extraction of resources of an oppressed people and the hording of opportunities from those same people inevitably leads to contradictions and a rise in Isfet.

What we see here is that one can still collect data on social phenomenon, analyze it, and come to conclusions that are valid and useful to us as observers/participants of human society without being anchored to Eurocentric worldviews. If you think about it, sociology if it were born out of an ancient Egyptian/African worldview would likely be called Maat/Isfet Studies versus Sociology which has its roots in Latin and Greek linguistics. It begs the question of how other social problems or processes would look though this African lens.

To conclude there are many more discussion to be had on this topic. We are seeing today coming out of Feminist, Black Feminist, Native American/First Nations, and other spaces forms of science not anchored to the Eurocentric, Patriarchal, Capitalist social sciences most of us have rooted ourselves in. Know this means that there can be a dialogue about how to create an more pluralistic scientific community free from both oppression and full of diversity of human imagination. For African social scientists in particular, one of the few peoples of the Earth almost
completely stripped of all agency, history, and sense of self, we must do our part to contribute to this pluralistic social science world by reaching back into our legacy and reconnect to our African worldviews and bring them with us as we build a new understanding of our social world rooted in our rich perspectives and realities.

Is there space for non-European theories/practices of science? What can we do concretely to create spaces for these to emerge? What concepts would be included in an Africana Sociological Methodology or Imagination?

William Richardson is a 2nd year MA student in Sociology at the University at Buffalo (Department of Sociology. He is currently writing his Master’s thesis on how communities racially essencialize space and its contributes to continued residential segregation. Outside that he has interests in race/racism, intersectional stratification systems, and the integration of language into systems of domination.

Crystal Eddins (2013-10-23 17:16:51)
There is a long tradition of black sociologists whose work implicitly and explicitly take up the issues you’ve outlined; W.E.B. DuBois, Anna Julia Cooper, Oliver Cromwell Cox, and Charles S. Johnson are just a few. If you’re interested in readings that provide context for the relationship between scholars of African descent and the social sciences, try Black Scholars on the Line (Holloway & Keppel 2007) and African American Pioneers of Sociology (Saint Arnaud 2009). Also, several works in African Diaspora studies have developed a strong line for understanding cultural and social processes among African descendants.

Chung Bakst (2019-09-04 00:22:00)
Hi you have a cool website It was very easy to post easy to understand


Friday 25 October 2013, 09:30-16:45

British Library Conference Centre, London

Speakers include: Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths), Ken Benoit (LSE), Emma Uprichard (University of Warwick), Alan Warde (University of Manchester), Abby Day (Goldsmiths), Emer Coleman (dsrptn), Peter Elias (University of Warwick), Paul Martin (University of Sheffield), Paul Taylor (UCL), Andrew Goffey (University of Nottingham).

Following the success of last year’s Presidential Event, BSA President, Professor John Holmwood has announced a one-day seminar/workshop this October on ’The Challenge of Big Data’. This event will take place at the British Library Conference Centre, London on Friday, 25 October 2013 between 09:30-16:45.

Organised in collaboration with Dr Emma Uprichard (Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick) and Dr Abby Day (Department of Sociology, Goldsmiths), this joint event of the BSA and the British Library will use a workshop format to address issues around administrative data, its linkage to other large data sets, and the increased proprietorial interest in large data - all of which pose a fundamental challenge for the social sciences to confront big data with big questions.
BSA members can attend this event for only £10 (Non BSA Members £30) and due to expected high demand, places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

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An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology? Some initial thoughts (2013-09-25 20:01)

What does ‘public sociology’ entail in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinterest and wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole? There’s an interesting passage in Burawoy’s [1]2004 ASA Presidential Address which I managed to miss the first time I read it:

The original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world, that drew so many of us to sociology, is channeled into the pursuit of academic credentials. Progress becomes a battery of disciplinary techniques—standardized courses, validated reading lists, bureaucratic ranking intensive examinations, literature reviews, tailored dissertations, refereed publications, the all-mighty CV, the job search, the tenure file, and then policing one’s colleagues and successors to make sure we all march in step. Still, despite the normalizing pressures of careers, the originating moral impetus is rarely vanquished, the sociological spirit cannot be extinguished so easily.


It’s in this sense that I think digitalisation within and beyond the academy has to be seen as integral to public sociology in the contemporary climate. It is reshaping what is ‘public’ and ‘private’ in complex ways, some positive but many not, conditioning the propensity of sociologists towards ‘public sociology’ but also the institutional context in which certain forms of activity are recognized and others ignored. It also complicates Burawoy’s distinction between ‘organic’ and ‘traditional’ public sociology:

Public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics, understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation. It entails, therefore, a double conversation. Obvious candidates are W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), The Souls of Black Folk, Gunnar Myrdal (1944), An American Dilemma, David Riesman (1950), The Lonely Crowd, and Robert Bellah et al. (1985), Habits of the Heart. What do all these books
have in common? They are written by sociologists, they are read beyond the academy, and they become
the vehicle of a public discussion about the nature of U.S. society—the nature of its values, the gap be-
tween its promise and its reality, its malaise, its tendencies. In the same genre of what I call traditional
public sociology we can locate sociologists who write in the opinion pages of our national newspapers
where they comment on matters of public importance.

There is, however, another type of public sociology—organic public sociology in which the sociologist
works in close connection with a visible, thick, active, local and often counterpublic. The bulk of public
sociology is indeed of an organic kind—sociologists working with a labor movement, neighborhood
associations, communities of faith, immigrant rights groups, human rights organizations. Between the
organic public sociologist and a public is a dialogue, a process of mutual education. The recognition
of public sociology must extend to the organic kind which often remains invisible, private, and is often
considered to be apart from our professional lives. The project of such public sociologies is to make
visible the invisible, to make the private public, to validate these organic connections as part of our
sociological life.

Digitalisation disrupts ‘traditional public sociology’ because it fragments the media field in a way which renders
a broadcasting model of public intellectualism untenable while also creating many new opportunities for
nar-
rowcasted public intellectualism of various sorts. It also disrupts ‘organic public sociology’ because it engenders a
tendency towards an increasing awareness of the ‘private’ activity of others within the academy (e.g. you follow
someone on Twitter and you’re much more likely to find out about the activism they’re involved in) and it’s also
changing the organisational dynamics of the publics with whom one is working in an organic way. My claim is that if
we take Burawoy’s call to develop a ‘sociology of publics’ seriously then it’s impossible to ignore the important role
digitalisation is playing in reshaping the processes through which publics come to be constituted. Though we should of
course resist naïve tech-boosterism which would seek to reduce the constitution of publics to digital communications.

Another aspect of Burawoy’s address which I managed to miss last time I read it was his emphasis on sociol-
ogy students as a public:

There is one public that will not disappear before we do—our students. Every year we create approx-
imately 25,000 new BAs, who have majored in sociology. What does it mean to think of them as a
potential public? It surely does not mean we should treat them as empty vessels into which we pour our
mature wine, nor blank slates upon which we inscribe our profound knowledge. Rather we must think
of them as carriers of a rich lived experience that we elaborate into a deeper self-understanding of the
historical and social contexts that have made them who they are. With the aid of our grand traditions
of sociology, we turn their private troubles into public issues. We do this by engaging their lives not
suspending them; starting from where they are, not from where we are. Education becomes a series
of dialogues on the terrain of sociology that we foster—a dialogue between ourselves and students,
between students and their own experiences, among students themselves, and finally a dialogue of
students with publics beyond the university. Service learning is the prototype: as they learn students
become ambassadors of sociology to the wider world just as they bring back to the classroom their
engagement with diverse publics. As teachers we are all potentially public sociologists.
This is an idea I’ve had in mind with sociologicalimagination.org for some time: what role can social media play in facilitating an active engagement with sociology outside the confines of the university? One thing which irritates me about the Open Access debate is the persistent tendency to overestimate both the degree of external interest in gaining access to academic journals and the likely ramifications of people doing so. I think there’s often an entirely unrealistic view of how many people would, could or should read academic papers which is coupled with a distressingly common view that an increasing circulation of expert knowledge will inevitably lead to the amelioration of social problems. It’s underpinned by a potent mix of bad sociology (what Margaret Archer would describe as ‘social hydraulics’) and professional hubris. Instead I think engaging outside the academy has to be seen in more quotidian terms which, at least in my own mind, lend themselves easily to a dichotomy: seeing the amelioration of social problems through the communication of sociological knowledge in an agential way (i.e. working with others to deploy this knowledge in collective action rather than simply ‘making public’ and assuming that’s enough) and attempting to communicate sociological knowledge in a much broader and open-ended way to simply to facilitate engagement by those who are interested or might become so if circumstances lead them to encounter it. The importance of seeing sociology students as a public encompasses both categories but the latter, such as can be achieved through blogging and podcasting for a wider audience, seems obviously numerically larger to me.

Another aspect of ‘digital public sociology’ (I really dislike this phrase but I dislike it less than ‘digital engagement’ which I’ve tended to use for the last year) that seems important to me is the collective negotiation of what Dave Beer calls the politics of circulation:

What I would like to suggest is that this blog post, like other social media content, will be subject to the politics of circulation that defines contemporary media. The data that is produced as a by-product of contemporary cultural life does not just stop when it is produced, rather data fold-back into our everyday lives in variegated and often unseen ways. Similarly the destiny of this blog post will be shaped by the material infrastructures that it has been placed within. In this sense, academic knowledge is being opened up to social media’s politics of circulation. As such, these transformations in the communication of research are likely to have profound implications for the way that we encounter and discover knowledge. All of which will then, in turn, implicate the knowledge that we go on to produce. There is the potential then for social media’s politics of circulation to influence both the communication and production of knowledge.

Using social media to communicate academic knowledge is not a problem in itself, it actually opens up vast new possibilities, but it forces us to ask what will happen as more and more researchers use social media and other open-access outlets for their work. How will we cope with the din? And, most importantly, who will get heard? If we don’t understand the politics of data circulations that define contemporary media cultures then we may also find that academic practice is reshaped without sufficient reflection and reaction. Social media is likely to lead to uneven patterns of influence, amplification, visibility and, to borrow the discourse of contemporary web cultures, Klout. It is important that we are alert to this, particularly as social media come to define the circulation of our ideas.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that various academic disciplines, right across the spectrum of the social sciences and humanities, are trying quite hard to develop a more public profile. These
struggles take many forms, as do the drivers and pressures that instigate them. Some are based upon
governmental imperatives for research ‘impact’ – which is actually shorthand for having measurable
impact (Burrows, 2012). Others are a result of cultural changes and the general feeling that public
engagement is worthwhile. Alongside these, there are also some broader transformations in the media
landscape that mean that researchers are forced to ask: what is stopping me from having a public face?

[...]

The outcomes and findings of social research have always circulated back into the social world in
variegated and often untraceable forms (Savage, 2010). But the changing media through which research
is being communicated opens this research up to a new range of possibilities for circulation and
re-appropriation. If it gets any attention, it will be commented upon and rated (or ‘liked’) and, crucially,
it will be re-appropriated through sharing, re-tweeting, re-blogging and as sections of the content
(particularly visualizations) are cut-and-pasted into other posts for use by other ‘authors’.

[9]http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/3/1/92.abstract

It’s in this sense that I think digital skills can be understood in terms of the extension of academic agency. I did
wonder recently if I’ve misunderstood Dave’s point about the ‘politics of circulation’ having only read a couple
of short papers and blog posts but not yet read his book. However at least in how I understand the concept, as
conveyed in the extracts above, the question of how socio-technical structures shape the circulation of sociological
knowledge seems unavoidably intertwined with the more ‘traditional’ question of how social structures more broadly
shape this circulation. So at least in my own mind seemingly narrow and technical issues pertaining to the capacity
of sociologists to use digital tools effectively are unavoidably entangled with larger political questions concerning
the marketization of higher education, the assault on the public university and the restructuring of the broader
knowledge system within which academics as intellectual workers are embedded. This is brilliantly diagnosed by
Tom Medvetz in one of my favourite books I’ve read in the last couple of years:

While social scientists with little left to prove in the academy can afford to reinvest their academic capital
in public debate – and often do - rank-and-file scholars have little incentive to follow this route [...] the
growth of think tanks over the past forty years has played a pivotal role in undermining the relevance
of autonomously produced social scientific knowledge in the United States by fortifying a system of
social relations that relegates its producers to the margins of public debate. To the degree that think
tanks arrogate for themselves a central role in the policy-making process, they effectively limit the range
of options available to more autonomous intellectuals, or those less willing to tailor their work to the
demands of moneyed sponsors and politicians [...] The rise of think tanks must therefore be set analyti-
cally against the backdrop of a series of processes that have contributed to the growing subordination
of knowledge to political and economic demand – including the reassertion of control over the economy
by holders of economic capital, the development of specialised forms of political expertise, the growth
of the mass media as a conduit for the imposition of market forces into politics, the corportization of
the university, and the withdrawal of the state from the financing of public education. The question
posed acutely by the rise of think tanks in America concerns the social value of social scientific knowl-
edge itself: Put simply, should money and political power direct ideas, or should ideas direct themselves?

Tom Medvetz, Think Tanks In America 225-226

But think tanks tend not to be very good at social media (a claim I should probably substantiate at some point
given that I keep coming out with it) whereas academics often do turn out to be very good at social media once they acquire a familiarity with its ecology. So the politics of digital literacy (crap term – any suggestions for a better one would be much appreciated!) could be seen as simultaneously inwards and outwards facing - negotiating the politics of circulation within the academy increasingly goes hand-in-hand with negotiating it outside the academy. This is because the distinction between ‘within’ and ‘without’ becomes, at least in terms of digital communications, a solely analytic one and arguably not even a coherent one at that and is perhaps a zombie category.

9. http://dhg.sagepub.com/content/3/1/92.abstract

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» Sociological Images: Blogging as Public Sociology The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-11 08:00:30)
[…] reflect on blogging as public sociology. I’ve recently posted some initial thoughts on Digital Public Sociology and this paper is an important contribution to what seems likely to become an increasingly […]

Ben Straughair (2014-04-27 12:18:30)
Great article.

thanks! the podcasts from the conference session this gave rise to are online here -> http://markcarrigan.net/2014/04/29/digital-public-sociology-at-britsoc14/


The first meeting of the Quantified Self Research Network took place last week at the University Leeds. This was established by myself and Chris Till in order to help encourage interdisciplinary dialogue amongst people working on different aspects of Quantified Self. Our assumption was that there were a lot of people who intended to work on this topic in the near future and that it’s a topic of the sort that would produce some really rewarding and interesting discussions if people assembled in a shared space. Both seemed to be the case, with the event attracting a lot of interest despite being organised at short notice at a fairly inopportune time of year and, perhaps more importantly, turning out to be a really interesting and productive day which all present seemed to enjoy. Here’s our description of the context and aims of the network:

In the last few years there has been a significant increase in public and academic interest in the use of devices or techniques for the accumulation, aggregation and analysis of personal data. Apps for mobile phones such as Track My Run and body tracking devices such as Jawbone, Fitbit and Nike’s Fuelband have perhaps garnered the widest attention with their ability to passively collect data on everyday activities
which can then be analysed and shared with others. There is, however, more to quantified self than the mainstream media picture of obsessive “techies”. Many people engaged in “life logging” collate data on mood and experiences often without a direct quantitative element. While a relatively formalised arm of the quantified self movement has formed, through the Quantified Self group based in San Francisco, not everyone involved in quantified self activities is affiliated with Quantified Self. This formalised movement, as well as the broader cluster of practices and orientations which are coalescing within and beyond it, point to commercial and political connections which have yet to be fully explored.

The Quantified Self research network will explore the broad implications of this loose set of practical and ethical approaches to understanding bodies, psyches and everyday practices. While we are interested in exploring the practices and techniques of assessment we think it is equally important to understand the often novel ways in which the diverse types of analysis enable new forms of reflecting on the embodied self and relations with others. We hope to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue around this multitude of emerging issues, in the belief that historical, philosophical, cultural, sociological, psychology, economic, technological and political approaches all have a role to play in understanding this fascinating trend.

The network aims to:

- Build network of scholars interested in qs
- Explore possibilities for further research and collaborations
- Share ideas about substantive issues
- Support access and development of postgraduate and early career researchers
- Develop sociological approaches to understanding qs
- Identify potential for disciplinary collaborations
- Develop relations with interested parties beyond the academy
- Developing quantifiedselfresearch.org as an online resource

We’re planning some more activities in the not too distant future: another work in progress seminar early in 2014 and a proposed session at the British Sociological Association’s 2014 conference in Leeds. If you’d like to keep in touch with what we’re doing, our new website is now online at [1]quantifiedselfresearch.org - we’re still not 100% sure what this will turn out to be yet. It would be great if it can perhaps be a place for discussion (which requires people to submit guest blogs and anyone working in this area who wants an account to post themselves is welcome to one) but even if not it will hopefully be a useful online resources where we can curate announcements, videocasts/podcasts and other resources.

If you’d like to join the network the best thing to do at this stage is to subscribe to the blog via e-mail - the form to do so is at the bottom of the website at [2]quantifiedselfresearch.org - we won’t be posting particularly frequently at this stage and it will mean you’re informed about everything we’re doing.

The Books I’m Currently Reading (2013-09-26 08:00)

It’s fun to read about books. So in this new feature we’re hoping to feature lots of books on the site. If you’d like to share your ‘to read’ pile and a short discussion of the books you’re reading then please send a JPG (smallest file size possible please!) and 1000 words or less to Mark AT MarkCarrigan.net

I’ve been ‘currently reading’ The Constitution of Society and Modernity and Self-Identity for a couple of months now. The first chapter of my PhD thesis is an extended critique of Giddens and the latent structurationism which lurk beneath the surface of his late modernity books. In essence I argue that he ties himself in knots partly because the deficiencies of structurationist theory become much more pronounced when an attempt is made to conceptualise reflexive responses to social change – too much of agency is incorporated into structure and it leaves Giddens vacillating wildly between depth psychology and a view of subjectivity (at ‘fateful moments’) which comes weirdly close to rational choice theory in its view of risk calculation and life-planning. I’ve read Modernity and Self-Identity twice before and I’ve engaged quite a lot with the Constitution of Society but had never read it cover to cover. Having become rather infuriated with Will Atkinson’s facile and lazy reading of Margaret Archer in his last book I suddenly
found myself wondering if I might have inadvertently done the same thing with Giddens. I’m fairly confident I haven’t but still feel I must finish the two books before I submit my thesis. Plus perhaps finish off Central Problems in Social Theory which I was actually quite enjoying but keep giving up on simply because it’s simultaneously much less relevant and much more difficult a read.

I’m reading The Formation of Critical Realism out of sheer curiosity about Roy Bhaskar as a person. It’s a book of interviews conducted by Mervyn Hertwig (editor of the Journal for Critical Realism) and it’s definitely worth looking at for anyone interested in critical realism. I’m finding it hard not to draw connections between the ‘spiritual turn’, ageing and his theosophist parents but whatever you think about his later work (I am, putting it mildly, sceptical) it’s hard to deny his stature as a thinker if you’ve engaged even marginally with his work. He’s also one of those writers who seems to have become progressively less lucid over time so this book can provide an accessible introduction to his ideas, given that he’s able to speak about them with a refreshing clarity. There’s much more to dialectical critical realism than I’d realised but also, I’m finding it difficult to avoid concluding, much less to the spiritual turn (written as somehow who was far from complementary at the outset).

Using Social Media in the Classroom is a book I’m reading as a spur to a proposal I’m currently in the process of putting together. It’s very good! But I don’t feel able to explain how and why I think this is the case without inadvertently talking about my planned book.

Approaches to the Individual is an extremely interesting book written by a former PhD student of Margaret Archer which explores the interface between internal conversation and external speech. It’s framed in terms of ‘approaches to the individual’ within sociological theory but I’ve seen much less of this in any substantive sense than I expected given the book’s title. I disagree with large aspects of her approach (Tom Brock and I are in the process of writing a paper critiquing its application to the empirical analysis of political resistance) but it’s certainly worth reading for anyone with an interest in internal conversation. I’ve found the sections on Goffman particularly illuminating and they point to an aspect of his work which I had no idea existed.

Lowry and the Painting of Modern Life is the book attached to the current Tate exhibition. I was bought it as a birthday present but I’m going to avoid reading it until I go to the Tate show next week. I saw the exhibition of unseen work at the Lowry Centre in Manchester last week and I can’t wait for the Tate. I’ve got some other stuff on Lowry which I’ve yet to fully read (including a really fascinating biography). I’ve had the idea rattling around in my head for ages that it’s possible to identify a sophisticated sociological sensibility incipient within Lowry’s work which (usefully) seems to be periodised – thus allowing its emergence in his work to be framed by his biography (and its historical context). After I’ve been to the Tate I’m going to start trying to write this up as a paper or perhaps a series of blog posts if I don’t think there’s enough to the idea once I started trying to develop it.

Militant Modernism is the Zero Book I was astonished to realise recently that I’ve had on my shelf for years and haven’t read. I love Owen Hatherly – I’ve read his other books, much of what he’s written online and I’m bemused that it’s taken me this long to get round to reading his first book. He’s transformed my experience of the built environment, helped me articulate what had felt like a weird and irrational fascination with brutalist architecture which emerged while I lived near the Brunswick Centre (before they ruined it) and has amongst my favourite prose styles of any living writer. The other person who’s transformed my experience of the built environment is David Harvey whose Rebel Cities is, unsurprisingly, fantastic. I’m pretty sure I’ve heard him discuss the contents of the first two chapters on a number of occasions but it doesn’t really bother me. Typically lucid, insightful and provocative – casually and softly polemic in the most enticing way possible, with an unerring capacity to make radical judgements sound like common sense reactions to the social world.
Does Facebook make people more polite? (2013-09-26 11:03)

For those of us who are cheerily hostile to Facebook, it might seem counter-intuitive to associate the platform with people being relatively civil to each other. However this research being conducted at the University of Kent, reported on the [1]Democratic Audit blog, suggests that the identification and accountability which are intrinsic to the platform tend to engender civil interaction between users of the site.

One notable platform which makes its users accountable for the comments they make and the content they produce, presumably making them less likely to behave in an uncivil manner, is Facebook. The biggest online social network site with over 1.15 billion active monthly users, Facebook requires users to construct a public or semi-public (restricted) personality profile – using their real-name – through which they can traverse the site, engage in its many social functions, and connect with other users to form social networks. Users are encouraged to maintain relatively open and identifiable profiles that include photos, educational affiliations, religious and political preferences, birthdays, and hobbies. Profiles also contain a public space where other users have the chance to leave messages, post links, and connect with one another. Moreover, Facebook users are automatically notified via the news-feed function when other members of their network produce content. Thus, Facebook users are both identified with and accountable for their behaviour. Research currently underway at the University of Kent suggests that the increased sense of accountability that Facebook users experience may go some way towards improving the quality of online discussion by reducing the occurrence of uncivil communicative behaviour. Having analysed the content of comments left by readers of the Washington Post online, the study compared the occurrence of uncivil and impolite remarks in comments left on the Washington Post website, with comments left in response to the same articles posted on the Washington Post Facebook page. Uncivil remarks – that is, those which threatened the traditions of democracy and the rights of others, as well as those which included the use of stereotypical language, were significantly more likely to occur in comments left on the website version of the Washington Post where users were able to remain anonymous and unaccountable for their comments. [2]http://www.democraticaudit.com/?p=1455

The question of how the particular characteristics of specific platforms encourage some forms of behaviour and discourage others is a fascinating one. Have you ever made the mistake of browsing Youtube comments?


BSA Activism in Sociology Forum Inaugural Meeting (2013-09-26 11:09)

Saturday 9 November 2013, 10:30am-4pm
BSA Meeting Room, London
Invitation and Call for Papers
The BSA Activism in Sociology (ASF) has been established to increase the contribution of sociology and sociologists to challenging injustice and inequality by connecting those already working in this area, building solidarity, and helping people who want to start combining sociology with activism to find the support they need. We feel this is urgently needed in a context of the neoliberal offensive that is increasing inequalities, deepening the poverty and oppression of some of the poorest sections of the working classes, and at the same time marketising higher education and restricting the space for radical critique within universities.

We recognise and seek to learn from existing initiatives across disciplines that in different ways share some of our values or aims (those we are aware of are listed below, please let us know if we have missed any). We also recognise and seek to build on what has already been achieved by sociologists, and hope to document, promote and support the work that sociologists are already doing to challenge injustice. Join us at the inaugural meeting and help to shape the activities of the ASF in its first year.

The inaugural meeting will include:

- A roundtable bringing together sociologists, activists and activist-academics from other disciplines, to debate the current state of society and the contribution of sociology to challenging inequality and injustice.
- Three concurrent workshops dedicated to: working with and through the media; engaging communities; working across disciplines to challenge injustice (see call for presentations below).
- A plenary to draw discussions together and decide on next steps. By the end of the meeting we aim to have produced:
  - A founding charter setting out the agreed aims of the forum
  - An initial plan of action to advance the aims of the forum (see call for proposals)
  - A UK-wide database of individuals who are practising sociology within their community, especially but not exclusively those working with oppressed and vulnerable people, connected by a dedicated JISCMAIL list and social media
  - A public report on the meeting showing examples of activism in sociology that were represented on the day
  - A bank of activists who will be available to speak to the media, supported through blogging on the BSA website

Registration


Attendance is free but due to limited places it is essential you register if you plan to attend.

Call for workshop presentations and posters

We are seeking short (up to 10 minutes) presentations for one of three workshops at the inaugural event, posing questions on the following themes:

- Working with and through the media: How can sociology contribute to public debates? How can sociologists help to include oppressed and marginalised voices within the media? How can we build effective relationships between sociologists, activists and journalists, or should we become sociologist-activist-journalists?
- Engaging publics: How can sociologists play a role in the community, and communities in the university? What alliances should sociologists build to challenge injustice? How do we put sociological tools in the hands of oppressed people struggling for liberation?
- Working across disciplines to challenge injustice: What can sociology learn from other disciplines’ efforts to fight for social and economic justice? What is sociology’s distinct contribution? How can we collaborate?

Presentations and posters should include one or more examples of work that has already been done in this area. We recognise the importance of a diversity of forms of expression, and welcome non-traditional presentations such as poetry or stories as well as academic papers. We had hoped to have a space for posters and other visual
Network analytic approaches to the production and propagation of literary and artistic value (2013-09-26 14:00)

Daniel Allington, The Open University
1 October 2013
Centre for e-Research
Anatomy Museum Space
King’s Building (6th Floor)
King’s College London
The Strand
London

According to Bourdieu, the value of art, literature, etc is a form of belief that is produced within the cultural field and then propagated outwards into wider society through public-facing cultural institutions – as in the case of the ‘writer’s writer’ who is initially read only by his or her peers, but who becomes ‘consecrated’ (i.e. canonised) thanks to peer esteem and eventually finds a mass readership through school or university syllabi. In this talk, I shall lay out two innovative methodologies for studying these processes through social network analysis. This is potentially controversial because of Bourdieu’s much-discussed preference for Multiple Correspondence Analysis. However, I shall argue that, just as the abstract mathematical space of Multiple Correspondence Analysis forms a useful analogue for Bourdieu’s conception of field, the no-less abstract structure of a directed graph forms a useful analogue for his understanding of the production of value within a field, and of its subsequent propagation beyond that field.

The first of the methodologies I shall present focuses on the production of value. It has already been trialled through a case study of interactive fiction, with results of this investigation to appear in my monograph, Literature in the Digital Economy (forthcoming from Palgrave, 2014), and elsewhere. As I will argue by reference to ongoing research, the same methodology can potentially yield important insights when applied to other cultural forms.
The second of these methodologies focuses on the propagation of value, and thus provides a possible approach to the study of the impact of the arts on wider society, as well as a bridge between the two major strands of research in the sociology of culture, i.e. study of cultural producers and study of cultural consumers. It builds on the first methodology but presents arguably greater difficulties with regard to data collection and the interpretation of findings. However, these difficulties are instructive because they raise deep questions about the use of social network analysis in cultural research, both in the humanities and in the social sciences.


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**Evelyn Ruppert on Digital Sociology (2013-09-27 08:00)**

In this podcast from the [1]BSA Digital Sociology Group's July 16 seminar [2]Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths) talks about Digital Sociology.


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2. [http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/academicstaff/ruppertelvyn/](http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/academicstaff/ruppertelvyn/)
Social Movements Network at the Council for European Studies Conference

Call for Abstracts: Social Movements Network at the Council for European Studies Conference

Washington, March 2014

The Council for European Studies' research network on social movements, now two years old, comprises 180 scholars in over 20 different countries and as many disciplines. The network is dedicated to research on social movements in Europe, whether in individual countries or transnationally. It has been very active at the prestigious CES conference, the world's premier location for European Studies, with panels, workshops, symposia and semi-plenaries at the 2012 Boston and 2013 Amsterdam conferences and joint symposia with Harvard's Berkman Center and Amsterdam's Transnational Institute, in collaboration with its sister networks in the European Sociological Association and the European Consortium for Political Research. In May the network's first book, Understanding European Movements, edited by the network’s co-chairs Cristina Flesher Fominaya and Laurence Cox, was published by Routledge.

We are now encouraging submissions for the 2014 conference (March 14 – 16) in Washington DC. The conference call can be found at [1]https://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/conferences/2014-ces-conference/2014-conference-call and important information together with the submissions portal can be found at [2]https://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/conferences/2014-ces-conference. The submission portal is now open and CLOSES on October 1st. We encourage the submission of individual papers and paper panels, on any theme related to European social movements; discussion of how movements are responding to the European crisis is particularly welcome. Such papers and abstracts should be flagged as linked to the social movements research network.

Members of the research network are more likely to have their proposals accepted and we also have the ability to pull together panels from papers which share a common theme. Membership of the network is free; for details see [3]http://councilforeuropeanstudies.org/research/research-networks/social-movements. Members have access to networking via our website and are listed in a directory available online to other members for joint proposals, networking purposes etc.

Cristina Flesher Fominaya [4]cristinaflesher@gmail.com
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(HT [8]Tom Brock)

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What Does It Mean to be an Intellectual Today? (2013-09-27 10:24)

The Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective has an interesting interview with Steve Fuller about what it means to be an ‘intellectual’ in contemporary circumstances. There’s a range of important points in this interview but these really caught my attention:

Yes, I see myself as an intellectual, although it is not what I get paid to do. Being an intellectual is not part of the job description of an academic (of course, some major intellectuals have been academics). Academics are typically — perhaps even increasingly — trained and encouraged to transmit ideas within a restricted range of media, such that the medium becomes the message. For example, academics tend to believe that ideas cannot be properly developed in a radio program or a newspaper column. This attitude at once establishes the academic’s expert authority (since publishing an academic article is not a trivial skill) and implicitly sets up the intellectual as an anti-academic figure who assumes that any complex conception worth conveying can be done effectively in the popular media. Sometimes the intellectual is cast as degrading academic knowledge. This underestimates the threat that intellectuals pose to academic knowledge, which is to de-skill it and ultimately render it redundant. Thus, if you can understand evolutionary theory after reading a 750-word column by Richard Dawkins, why read Darwin’s voluminous tomes, let alone the even more verbose academic commentaries that have followed in their wake?

[...]

If by ‘real intellectuals’, you mean people who speak their own minds and not function as ideological mouthpieces, then the minimum requirement is that their income is not dependent on the popularity or validity of what they say. Academic tenure historically supplied this requirement — what I have called ‘the right to be wrong’ — but it was mainly to encourage researchers to stake risky hypotheses and venture into terra incognita. Some academics, quite legitimately I think, have also used tenure to become public intellectuals because they know that even if they say very unpopular things, they still keep their jobs. In the other great breeding ground for intellectuals, journalism, the situation has been always more precarious. Typically journalists have had to turn their world-view, or style of approaching issues, into a ‘brand’ that attracts followers who then buy the newspapers and magazines where those journalists appear, simply because they want to learn what the journalists have to say. Just as serious challenges have been lodged against academic tenure in recent years, so too it is no longer clear that the market for readers in today’s cyber-inflected media environment allows for the effective branding of intellectuals. But I don’t think that these larger structural transformations have anything to do with the quality of the individuals capable of becoming intellectuals — if anything, their ranks have swelled. My advice to a young aspiring intellectual is to read very widely and critically but take a multi-media course in university so that you are equipped to transmit your ideas in variety of literary and audio-visual media.

What really interests me is how the tension between academic activity and intellectual activity is being reshaped
by the changing politics of circulation within which it plays itself out. Academic expertise is consolidated by making contributions to an extremely specialised body of knowledge through a relatively limited range of media. So there’s an investment in these media as legitimising forms which often engenders a scepticism about satisfactorily communicating expert knowledge outside of them. However this academic habitus will, when left to its own devices, tend to engender public marginality. Hence the need for the ‘intellectual’ or, from my point of view, popularisers of social science.

This is a job which has tended to be carried out by self-branded journalists (Malcolm Gladwell, David Brooks etc) who are clearly intellectuals in the sense expressed by Steve in the second paragraph. But why aren’t they coming from within the academy? I wonder if digital technology can begin to square the circle of academic activity vs intellectual activity by making the latter feasible, in a way which builds on research but extends beyond an individual’s specialisation, without it constituting a whole different career path. In the way that for instance Gladwell and Brooks continue to work as journalists while constituting themselves as public intellectuals through the talks that they give and the books that they write? I find it fascinatingly weird that books about social science are frequently in worldwide best seller lists and yet, with a few notable exceptions, it’s rarely social scientists who are writing them.


“I’m a cyborg? I thought I was just wearing glasses”: technology, agency and ontology (2013-09-28 08:00)

This is a quick attempt to elaborate on a thought which kept coming back to me during the Quantified Self seminar on Tuesday. It seems obvious to me that one of the key conceptual questions encountered in studying technology which augments human capacities (and this category is obviously much wider than digital self-tracking) is the nature of the interface between the human and the technological. One common response to this seems to be to conceptualise it in terms of co-constitution or co-evolution where the properties of the human become indistinguishable from the properties of the technological because both are changing in relation to each other. As I understand it the point being made is that the entwinement of the human and the technological has reached such a degree of complexity that it makes more sense to think in terms of hybridity rather than interaction between entities.

Is this a fair summary? If not input would be much appreciated. It’s one of those arguments I’ve encountered in conversations and listening to talks rather than having read about in any serious way (one of many things on my post-phd to do list). But what appears to me (perhaps wrongly) to be a case of collapsing the conceptual distinction in the face of empirically observable interplay worries me. From my point of view the interaction between myself and my iPhone involves two distinct sets of properties and powers – my own as a reflexive embodied human being and those of the iPhone as a technological artefact. During the two weeks I’ve had my new iPhone I’ve changed its properties through modalities (e.g. apps, settings) encoded into the artefact by other reflexive embodied human beings whom I will never meet nor know. I’ve also changed its properties in ways which were not designed into it as an artefact: I dropped it and scratched it*, a change in its properties reliant on the material constitution of itself and the floor onto which it fell.

Has it changed me? I don’t think so. But my old iPhone changed me in all sorts of ways. Some of them are superficially dispositional, such as the oft cited tendency to rely on wikipedia rather than remembering information,
though perhaps with long term neurophysiological correlates. Others are entirely deliberate, such as my experience of navigation using digital maps – I couldn’t navigate to begin with so I’ve not lost a capacity through failing to exercise it because of a technical substitute. It’s an affordance the phone provides which I deliberately draw on in specific situations rather than something that has changed me in a more substantive sense.

My point is that I’m not convinced it’s necessary to think in terms of hybridity to understand these trajectories of human <-> technological change. As far as I can tell I basically agree about what these processes are but I disagree about how these should be conceptualised. Input would be very appreciated on this, as would suggestions on where to start reading about the concepts I’m expressing suspicion of so I can stop predicing blog posts on conversations I’ve had & talks I’ve heard.

I didn’t actually do this. I love my shiny new iPhone too much to be so careless. But the theoretical point stands.

Ailsa Haxell (2013-09-29 23:08:45)
In what ways has your phone altered you? Have you begun outsourcing your memory yet? No more remembered ph numbers, they are on the iphone...you are part of it, and it part of you. Cyborg. Have a look at Donna Haraway’s cyborg manifesto http://www.egs.edu/faculty/donna-haraway/articles/donna-haraway-a-cyborg-manifesto/ Or in Science, technology and society (STS) studies, but with an ANT lens; interrogating human and nonhuman actors in the same way. We are not so much separate from these other beings as we might like to believe...we too are made of minerals etc. They are in us/ and us in them. The cyborg manifesto and ANT allows a provocation to explore what seems outlandish. But actually isn’t all that outlandish once the surface of socialised ways of being get cleared away.

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-29 23:11:36)
"you are part of it, and it part of you." but I’m really not. my point is that i understand the theoretical impulse behind this argument but find it methodologically problematic. it doesn’t offer explanatory purchase on how specific humans engage with specific technologies and in fact actually detracts from this endeavour by blurring the boundaries between the former and the latter.

Claire Preston (2013-10-12 09:13:31)
Yes I have also grappled with this issue though not sure I identified as succinctly as you what troubles me about it. I found Ian Hacking’s The Social Construction of What quite insightful, in particular, his point about 'interactive kinds' eg women refugees, as opposed to 'non-interactive' kinds eg quarks. His key point is, as you say, that you are reflexive and embodied and the phone isn’t. But he adds to this by reference to the idea of a matrix. I won’t embark on more explanation and oversimplification of Hacking’s ideas here but I would be interested to hear your views if you take a look.

oh excellent thanks, I'll take a look, I've loved the small amount of Hacking that I've read.

This was retweeted on twitter, and I just wrote a reply and noticed this post is a bit old. I’ll reply anyway! There’s a pretty vast literature on these topics. David Chalmers has written a lot on "the extended mind" (a youtube video here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksasPjrYFTg), Bruno Latour has written a paper called "on interobjectivity" which presents some of these thoughts, Ingunn Moser has written some good papers on disability, technology and subjectivity as well. Of course you are right that your phone is not “in you” in a literal sense, but you do enter into a relation with it, which enables you to do things which you did not do before. The point, at least for me, is the acknowledgement that people do not live in vacuums. You might be a reflexive and embodied person now, but lock you up in a vast, white room with nothing to interact
with, and I think you'll feel different! Further, people develop their cognitive skills as reflexive beings through interactions with, amongst others, things! The psychologist Lev Vygotsky wrote on this in the 1930s. Anyway, I think you should expand on what you mean by the fact that this type of theory doesn't allow "explanatory purchase". Also, it should be considered that not all the scholars writing about these issues are especially interested in (causal) "explanation".

"The point, at least for me, is the acknowledgement that people do not live in vacuums. You might be a reflexive and embodied person now, but lock you up in a vast, white room with nothing to interact with, and I think you'll feel different!"
I couldn't agree more! My question is what we do with that relationality in concrete cases of trying to explain things as social scientists. I have no disagreement with the point on a philosophical level, my question is a methodological one. I'd be genuinely interested in seeing studies that have applied the cyborg concept (etc) to case studies of specific people interacting with technology over time.

ayashaaban (2015-09-20 13:39:36)
You could complement the topic by adding stories of first encounters with technology (especially in the case of people who have not had much contact with technology but all of a sudden found themselves in the midst of a digital age). Also you can write about the onset of this "hybridity" (or when you believe it started).

I like this idea!

The Sociology of Daydreaming (2013-09-28 08:00)

People who build castles in the air do not, for the most part accomplish much, it is true; but every man who does accomplish great things is given to building elaborate castles in the air and then playfully copying them on solid ground ... Mere imagination would be indeed be mere trifling; only no imagination is mere. 'More than all that is in thy custody, watch over thy fantasy,' said Solomon. 'For out of it are the issues of life.'

- Charles Sanders Peirce

One of the most interesting aspects of Margaret Archer's work on internal conversation is the role it assigns to daydreaming as a modality through which people change. Drawing on a reading of Peirce that is far from uncontroversial (the key influences here are Vincent Colapietro and Norbert Wiley) she understands this "imaginative anticipation" as a mechanism through which "we review and rehearse how we would act under novel circumstances and these action plans prepare the future self to execute them when a similar real conjuncture arises" (Archer 2003: 77). The point is not that this is the goal of daydreaming but rather that the activity indirectly prepares us through our experience of entertaining hypothetical novelty within the imaginative confines of our first-person experience.
This has important implications for the common pragmatist notion that reflexivity only emerges as a response to situational novelty i.e. we’re thrown back upon reflection when habitual responses fail in confrontation with novel circumstances. Instead there is a relative independence of the mind because of our capacity to ‘confront’ novelty internally - it’s not a repudiation of the traditional pragmatist conception of how reflexivity and habit relate but rather an extension of it. Crucially, our daydreams rely on the “social variation and cultural variety available to ponder upon reflexively” (Archer 2012: 59-61). Our daydreams are furnished by the ‘raw materials’ which our social and cultural environment provides for us. But the fact we are able to furnish our inner lives with these ideational materials leaves interiority as an independent source of novelty over-and-above that which is situationally demanded by the circumstances we encounter. Peirce talked about this as ‘musement’:

Our musings can range far and wide to include daydreams or fantasies. Some persons, situation, or idea that has been encountered may prompt them, or they may be triggered by the task in hand. Musings are exploratory; they are ways of clarifying our aspirations and ambitions, our hopes and our fears, our orientations and intentions. Increased self-understanding is their product. These explorations are very much part of our private lives because they are unobservable, have no necessary behavioural outcomes and the understanding we achieve many be of precisely the kind that we do not wish to communicate to others. Nevertheless, through our musings, certain goals can be privately scratched form our personal agendas or they can internally reinforce our determination to see something through. (Archer 2003 100-101)

To give a sense of the implications of this for research, in my own PhD work which involved longitudinal interviews over two years, I made a great effort to get people to elaborate upon their ‘musements’. So if they made occasional remarks (e.g. "if money weren’t an issue I’d love to do X") I’d just try and talk it through rather than let it drop out of the conversation. It’s a far from radical strategy in an interview but it’s something you become very sensitive to if you accept Archer’s argument about ‘musement’. The point is that “the uninhibited use of imagination is one way in which many people extend their horizons beyond their quotidian contexts and initiate a process of discernment about endorsing much bolder projects” (Archer 2007: 271). Much as with deliberation in general, it’s a faculty which is straightforwardly misrepresented if construed in entirely psychological terms* because its causes and consequences are intrinsically social. I think there’s more to be said about this but Archer’s account of musement’s significance focuses particularly on those 'bolder projects' which would,

alter their life courses if they could discount the costs and risks by bringing themselves to the point of commitment. Instead, there are very strong reasons why sharing one’s flights of fancy or inmost
urges with a familiar interlocutor will invariably curtail them. Clearly, if the castle in the air is outside the shared context of the interlocutor, then the dialogical partner has nothing positive to contribute because it is beyond his or her experience. However, they can have plenty that is negative to say, ranging from the 'Don't be daft – get real', to perfunctorily entertaining the attractions of being a famous footballer or pop star, yet quickly concluding, 'It'd be great, but it's not on is it?' The problem of offering up one's dreams (or nightmares) for outside commentary is that they are regularly cut down to size – the size that the shared context can accommodate, which thus serves to reinforce 'contextual continuity'.

Cutting down to size also entails reminders of normative conventionality. Share your desire for savage revenge on an unfaithful partner and the likely response would be something like, 'Sure, he's a bastard but he's not worth swinging for!' Just as importantly, the internal, highly vitriolic outpouring of our recriminations in an imaginary conversation literally knows no bounds and we can derive considerable satisfaction from honing our insults into the most hurtful prose. Such mental activities may simply prove cathartic or constitute the stocking of one's verbal armoury for possible future use; we can harden ourselves to the shocking nature of vituperation by internal repetition. But to share these phrases and formulae with a third party is to introduce an independent 'ear' which has the same effect as 'the gaze' of inducing shame. People find themselves climbing down, engaging in self-editing or adding modifications to withdraw the public sting." (Archer 2007: 272)

Though this is not to advocate a sociological imperialism which would deny the role of psychology in understanding such faculties. One of the (many) things I want to work on post-PhD is to try and flesh out this account of 'internal conversation' through an engagement with the social psych and cognitive psych literatures. Particularly the literature on 'system 1' and 'system 2' which, from my cursory engagements with it, make the equivalent sociological debate about reflexivity and habitus seem embarrassingly sterile.

The Dangers of Academic Blogging (2013-09-28 10:03)

As you might have noticed, we're quite keen on academic blogging here. So it was interesting to stumble across [1]this thoughtful post (HT [2]Alistair's Adversaria) reflecting on some of the dangers associated with academic blogging. This point in particular stood out and left me wondering if such a disclaimer should be common practice:

As I have learned as a blogger it is almost impossible to avoid writing something that will offend someone. It may be that you espouse a view on a matter that others reject, or you may get into a "debate" in the comments section that can be perceived as somewhere between uncomfortable and ugly. Inevitably, someone will come across your blog and you will be judged by your online persona. In a recent email correspondence with [3]Marc Cortez of Wheaton College (formerly my Th.M. advisor at Western Seminary and a mentor and friend now) he shared this insight (shared with permission):

...many academics, and particularly those in academic administration do not understand blogs. As you know, blogs are their own genre and need to be read/interpreted in the right way. People who spend most of their time with academic journals come to blogs with the wrong set of interpretive criteria and walk away with the wrong conclusions. That potentially means that you're putting up a lot
of material with your name on it that is likely to be misread by the people who control your future.

Then he went on to say that many people don’t understand the "exploratory" element of blogs. That is why this blog has the following disclaimer on the side:

Disclaimer: The views and opinions presented on this blog may not represent the groups or organizations with which the authors are affiliated. Also, please consider the date of each blog entry. The author's opinion may have changed since its composition.

Thank you!

I use my blog to “think aloud,” to have conversations with people interested in the same subjects that interest me. I don’t think I’ve ever blogged a personal credo of any sort and if someone cared to do the research it would be quite apparent that many of the things I write may not reflect my opinion several weeks from now! If the genre of blogging is not taken into consideration than blog posts will be misunderstood. For the most part, blogs should be understood as a written form of a classroom discussion, not as a position paper, not as a journal article, not as a proposal for publication, not as the answer to application questions. It is a place for discussion. Sadly, many people do not know this and their unfamiliarity with the genre of the blog may result in their misunderstanding of what you’ve written.


There was a discussion at the recent BSA Digital Sociology seminar which touched on this, framing it around risks and opportunities attached to different career stages for academic blogging. I was interested to find someone in the audience who had the exact same sense of academic blogging that I did - as constituting a public record of your intellectual development - but was horrified at this prospect whereas I think it’s really cool:

[soundcloud url="http://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/109866414" params="" width=" 100 %" height="166" iframe="true" /]

The rest of the aforementioned series of posts is really worth reading for anyone interested in academic blogging. Here are the links:

- [6]Introduction
- [7] #1, ruining your public reputation
- [8] #2, offending potential educators/employers
- [9] #3, irrelevant topics
- [10] #4, Time Management
2060
It was refreshing to come across an extended reflection about some of the dangers which can be associated with academic blogging that was written by someone who is nonetheless enthusiastic about it. I’ve regularly encountered so much pontification about blogging that comes from a position of ignorance (though less so these days, which is probably more a function of self & social selection than it is any real cultural change) that it can be quite easy to ignore things people say about the practice. Though I think it’s important that those who believe academic blogging is a valuable activity, capable of enriching individual craft and academic life as a whole, should not be dismissive of the anxieties which can surround it for those who have yet to start.


Thank you for sharing my series of posts and for the thoughtful interaction!

Sociological Imagination (2013-09-28 14:15:45)
thanks for writing them!

have you published your paper btw? would love to read if so

Brian LePort (2013-09-28 21:32:00)
I haven’t yet because it is still developing. I am scheduled to present it on November 24th and soon after that I will post it on my blog and probably on my academia.edu account as well.

Deborah Lupton (2013-09-29 11:49:32)
As you now, I am a great supporter of academic blogging. But let’s not forget that not all bloggers are the same: some are more vulnerable to potential threats and risks more than others, and this needs to be acknowledged. Women and people from marginalised social groups for example, tend to be subjected to greater harassment than white male bloggers, while early career researchers may need to be more cautious than established academics. I talk a bit about this in my recent blog post ‘Academics online: what are the risks?’ http://simplysociology.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/academics-online-what-are-the-risks/.

Deborah
for sure - that’s what the soundcloud micro podcast was pointing to, this important point can be easily overlooked.

Blogging and "writing" | Alex's Archives

 [...] thought-provoking post entitled The dangers of academic blogging appeared yesterday at The Sociological Imagination. The post drew, in turn, on series of posts at [...] 

 » This Week's Most Popular Posts The Sociological Imagination

 [...] The Dangers of Academic Blogging [...] 

 » The Dangers of Academic Digital Media Use The Sociological Imagination

 [...] of our most popular posts last month was the Dangers of Academic Blogging. Though we’re hugely enthusiastic about academic blogging, it’s clear that this is an [...] 

11 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Archaeology Blogging | Diachronic Design

 [...] made his employer nervous. Academics in both archaeology, and other fields, have also pointed out the risks of blogging openly and potential effects on an academic career. As with all social media, my policy is to think carefully before putting anything on the internet, [...] 

Are you a fox or a hedgehog? (2013-09-28 10:25)

There’s a wonderful section of [1]one of the posts we just linked to about the [2]dangers of academic blogging which discusses the way different intellectual personalities approach academic blogging. The post makes an important (and personally quite sobering given how clearly I’m not a hedgehog) point about how intellectual hedgehogs might perceive the online activity of blogging foxes. 

There is a saying attributed to the Greek poet Archilochus that goes, “The Fox knows many things, but the Hedgehog knows one great thing.” The philosopher Isaiah Berlin was inspired by this pithy observation so he wrote an essay titled [3]“The Hedgehog and the Fox” wherein he presented the idea that there are two types of thinkers: (1) those who understand the world around them through the lens of one big idea and (2) those who understand the world by drawing from a variety of ideas. Since then, people have used this model to describe their own approach to the life of the mind. 

Personally, I’m a Fox—not an attractive person, but one who wants to know a little bit about everything. While most of my reading time is spent with books related to biblical studies and/or Christian theology there is no denying that I am almost as interested in other topics like contemporary religions, international politics, various sorts of philosophy, ethics, neuroscience, and professional sports. That is why this blog has failed to be strictly a biblioblog. I am not apt to isolate and compartmentalize my thought life. I understand the big picture when I factor all the smaller pieces and I understand the smaller pieces in light of the big picture. 


[5]
In this video from TEDxVancouver Elaine Lui, writer of a popular celebrity gossip blog, talks about what exactly ‘gossip’ is and why people care. She makes an interesting case about the complexity of the ecosystem surrounding modern celebrity. What's perhaps more contentious is her claim that as a 'professional gossip' she studies the celebrity ecosystem in the same way a natural scientist studies a particular environment. However if we put to one side the overstatement which is practically demanded by TED events, is it really such a silly claim? Perhaps there’s some degree of applied sociological knowledge which can be seen in the crafting of a gossip site which is now read by a million people a month? Her argument that celebrity gossip, construed as a form of story telling, is significant in understanding contemporary culture certainly seems plausible when considered in terms of the sheer amount of human attention that is occupied by it each year.
This Week’s Most Popular Posts (2013-09-30 00:14)

[1] The Dangers of Academic Blogging
[2] 28 reasons why you should blog about your research
[3] Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
[4] Why sexual people don’t get asexuality and why it matters
[8] Between Two Worlds: The story of a first-year sociology student
[9] Twitter for academics


Gabriel Tarde and Anthropology (2013-09-30 08:00)

In recent years the work of [1]Gabriel Tarde has attracted renewed attention. This individualistic rival of Durkheim, long marginalised in the recent history of sociological thought, owes much of his newfound popularity to the promotional efforts of Bruno Latour and his followers. In fact Latour seems to be a huge fan and actually played Tarde in an odd [2]reenactment of a 1903 social science debate. Perhaps there’s a context here which makes it seem slightly less strange. If you’d like to find out more about Tarde and his legacy, it’s worth reading this interesting post on [3]Savage Minds which discusses Tarde’s often overlooked influence on anthropology:
In the last decade or so (earlier, if you speak French) there has been a 'neo-Tardian revival' as people organize conferences, write books, and otherwise advocate for Gabriel Tarde, an otherwise-forgotten thinker of France's Third Republic. Most anthropologists think of Tarde, if they think of him at all, as one of the many guys that Durkheim defeated on his climb to the top of France's academic heap. Today, people are interested in Tarde because he is part of the intellectual genealogy of people like Deleuze and Latour. This work is interesting and important because it moves beyond a vision of society as composed of static, coherent, superorganic social wholes to one which more adequately theorizes human conduct as a dynamic, emergent system with multiple determinants and outcomes. Except I will say one thing:

Some of the earliest anthropologists to take up Tarde's work were American anthropologists. The first English translation (afaik) of Tarde's Laws of Imitation was by Elsie Clews Parsons, who was (among other things) the first female president of the American Anthropological Association.

I don't bring this up to dismiss current work on Tarde, which is very interesting. Nor do I bring it up because there was a tremendous up-take of Tarde’s thought in Boasian anthropology (there wasn’t). However, I do want to insist that Parson’s translation of Tarde is as emblematic of anthropology’s future as the more recent work I cited above.

http://backupminds.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/gabriel-tarde-been-there-done-that/


The [1]Just Publics @ 365 blog recently posted a wonderful guide to academic blogging. It has some fantastic advice from a range of experienced academic bloggers - it also has cartoons! Check it out [2]here.

2065

[...] while several posts about academic blogging are available on blogs such as Savage Minds and The Sociological Imagination, their authors generally take a more reflexive tone. They discuss the relevance of blogging for [...]

Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea (2013-09-30 10:42)

In this interview from the [1]Platypus Axel Honneth talks about his book [2]Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea. His discussion of the history of reification as a concept and the politics surrounding it was particularly interesting:

Axel Honneth: This is a surprising question, one I would not have thought to ask, so my answer comes very much ad hoc. I do not believe that concepts belong to any specific political community or group. The degree to which concepts help us explore something or see something new, they should be taken as an instrument potentially available for everyone in society. So, in that sense, I do not believe that reification is an automatically leftist concept. Moreover, in terms of the history of ideas, I am not even sure that reification is necessarily a concept developed only by leftists. For instance, the French Marxist thinker Lucien Goldmann sought to demonstrate the similarities between the approaches of Lukács and Heidegger. You can find in Heidegger an idea of reification, which already indicates that reification was a concept also utilized by the right, or on the right. There are many problems with Lukács's analysis. The almost mystical role he assigns the proletariat is only one of them. Even if we grant that his was one of the most fruitful periods in the Left tradition, in the history of Western Marxism, I think that today we can see much more clearly the limits of that analysis and the mistakes bound up with those limits.
And, surely, the biggest mistake is not only the emphasis on the world-historical role of the proletariat, but also how this is emphasized, namely by way of a very peculiar set of background ideas, let’s say, about the social structure of reality. Lukács relies on a kind of Fichtean-Hegelian metaphysical concept by which all human society is thought to be grounded in a certain kind of world-constituting activity, and so Lukács thinks that the only class that can overcome reification, which is seen as the destruction of that world-constituting activity, is the class which is representing—even under alienated or distorted conditions—that kind of praxis. Therefore, we have this almost fantastic piece within the whole study, wherein Lukács wants to reveal this one moment of the overcoming of these distorted conditions. For Lukács, this moment looks almost like this one revolutionary act; I mean, you almost get the sense that in one second all these destructive conditions are overcome. It’s a very peculiar analysis—enormously inspiring, but also very strange.


2. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Reification_A_New_Look_At_An_Old_Idea.html?id=TYGrnFL737UC&redir_esc=y

Sergio (2014-04-05 03:18:31)
It would be a good idea if philosophy itself was taught in schools. This has been neglected in Britain for a long time, probably for a over century (I haven’t the figures to hand). Every subject has a philosophy which both informs the subject and challenges its assumptions. The problem with the ID vs evolution debate is that the debate is not about science per se, but about what counts as science. This is not a question answerable within science at all: it is a question answerable when thinking about the philosophy of science. Many people are unaware of this. This is mainly due to almost all schooling to age 18 in Britain providing a readymade philosophical framework for each subject, without ever asking the child to justify that framework, or even telling them what the framework is. Our young adults are therefore philosophically ignorant: they do not know what philosophy is, or what it is for. Were philosophy taught properly in schools then it is likely that both sides of the argument would fear the other side less. They would all know that philosophically aware pupils were able to challenge the presuppositions of each subject for themselves, and were provided with a safety net against nonsensical thinking and indoctrination. Also, what I like here is that I have not needed to state my own view on ID vs evolution! And I don’t need to, that’s not the point. I can guarantee though, that having thought about the question of origins in depth, I don’t believe the world rests on tortoises, who may or may not be partially responsible for creation/nature (does anyone?!) That third option has too great philosophical problems. Both ID and evolution have less problems than tortoises. So I believe my philosophy is, to this extent, informed. I would love young adults to have a similar philosophical benefit of informed thinking, having considered carefully all sides of a debate within their own philosophical framework, and having considered their own framework too.

Invitation to Agency Theory Reading Group 2013/2014 (2013-09-30 10:44)

Dear All,

Following the success of the Summer Clinic on the sociological theory of agency we are offering the opportunity to further develop our investigation and review of the concept over the coming academic year.
We propose monthly sessions on the last Wednesday of each month from November 27th 2013 through to June 25th 2014 from 2-5pm at London South Bank University. This would give 8 sessions in all.

Whereas the Summer Clinic was pre-cast we would welcome a more peer led reading group for these months. To this end, we are inviting those who would like to participate to suggest any agency related topic and reading. This is a great opportunity to use our network to expand all our understandings of the field of sociological agency, and to connect the group to the specific research interests of its participants.

We would also invite those who suggest topics (or anyone who feels enthused) to be the facilitator of the group for that month, and perhaps to raise some initial thoughts and questions for the discussion.

If there is enough interest we would like also like to propose that the reading group ends with a symposium in July in which we could present short papers for further discussion, perhaps with a view to a joint publication, special edition etc.

If you are interested in participating/proposing please contact Sadiya and myself at[1]agencytheorylondon@gmail.com< mailto:[2]agencytheorylondon@gmail.com>. Looking forward to seeing you all again, and possibly taking this further. Please do forward this invitation to any relevant lists. Best wishes, Julien Morton (London South Bank University) Sadiya Akram (University of Canberra)

1. mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com
2. mailto:agencytheorylondon@gmail.com
4.10 October

How would Marx cope with the neoliberal university? (2013-10-01 08:00)

This TED talk raises important issues about the intensification in the growth of inequality which can be seen throughout the world, particularly in terms of the the super-rich at the very top of the income distribution. It’s a good talk but is there not something slightly strange about the way this is discussed in a TED context? If Marx was around in 2013 would he be giving TED talks? After all, Marx would not have coped well in the 2013 university so perhaps he would have been forced to hit the international conference circuit in order to ensure a demonstrable ‘impact’:
BSA Annual Conference 2014: Changing Society - Call for Papers (2013-10-01 09:38)


Wednesday 23 – Friday 25 April 2014 (Postgraduate Workshop: Tuesday 22 April 2014)

University of Leeds, UK

The theme of the BSA Annual Conference 2014 will be 'Changing Society'. This follows on nicely from the theme of engagement at this year’s conference in London, where BSA President, John Holmwood, Guardian Columnist, Polly Toynbee and BBC Radio 4's Laurie Taylor all championed the need for sociologists to engage in public debate and prove their contribution. The theme of changing society will therefore focus on how sociologists are affecting that change, both individually and as a collective discipline.

With this in mind, the BSA is inviting submissions for the 2014 Conference on any sociological research topic, with individual members and BSA study groups all encouraged to contribute posters/papers and other activities.
Suggestions for grouped sessions within the new *Frontiers* stream are also welcomed, while there will also be an opportunity for study groups to meet independently over the three days.

If you wish to submit an abstract, please visit the [BSA Annual Conference 2014 page on our website](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference/submissions.aspx) and follow the online instructions. Alternatively you can speak with a member of the events team on 0191 383 0839 or by email at [events@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk). The final deadline for abstract submissions is **Friday 18 October 2013**.

**SUBMIT NOW >>**

**Important Dates:**

Friday 18 October 2013 - Final deadline for abstract submission

Friday 17 January 2014 - Last date for presenters to register

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IFRAME: [//www.youtube.com/embed/8BK0Xi0DXE](http://www.youtube.com/embed/8BK0Xi0DXE)
The Daily Mail Song (2013-10-01 21:10)

Apologies to our many non-UK readers for whom this will be baffling but [1]recent political events in Britain make this song deeply relevant:

Royals on the first page,
Swine flu and road rage.
Find maddie, foreign baddie, put him in a big cage.
Bureaucratic red tape, facebook gang rape.
Gordon out, David in before the country caves in.
Ian Huntley gets his own jacuzzi and a gym in jail.
It's absolutely true because I read it in the Daily Mail.
Bring back capital punishment for paedophiles,
Photo feature on schoolgirl skirt styles,
Binge Britain. Single mums.
Pensioners. Hoodie scum.
Oversexed and underage, (Foreign stories half a page)
Criminals get Marks and Spencer vouchers when released on bail.
It’s absolutely true because I read it in the Daily Mail.

Ban this gay smut,
I’m not racist but...
Car crime, knife crime.
Hang the cheating wife time.
Pop stars take drugs.
Teen boys wear hoods.
Sports stars have sex.
Bears shit in woods.
Brussels politicians want to stop us drinking English ale.
It’s absolutely true because I read it in the Daily Mail.

Climategate. Petrol prices.
Pot-holes. Credit crisis.
Gypsies. Russell Brand.
Time we all took a stand.
Modern art where to start? Trash the lot of it.
Apart from statuette of puppy.
£50 plus p+p.
Muslim women hiding stolen goods behind their veil.
It’s absolutely true because I read it in the Daily Mail.

Poles paid to give blood.
Immigration 'like a flood'.
Soft touch british isles,
Cancer from your mobiles,
Cancer from your laptop,
Cancer from your root crop,
Cancer from your shoes,
From your dog,
From your pen top,
Immigrants arriving on an unprecedented scale..

It’s got to be the case if it’s written in the Daily Mail.
They never mix their words in the good old Daily Mail.
It’s absolutely true, because I gather all my views,
From the Daily Mail.

CfP: From Queer/Nature to Queer Ecologies (2013-10-01 21:21)

The new deadline is October 15, 2013. Please share widely and submit your work!

+++====+++

This issue of *UnderCurrents* celebrates the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of ‘Queer/Nature’ by inviting creative and scholarly contributions to the heterogenous field of Queer Ecologies. We envision this issue as both a retrospective moment and timely opportunity to highlight the continued ethical and political creativity that springs from thinking about the queer and the ecological together. In May 1994, *UnderCurrents* released what was very likely the first ever publication wholly devoted to the intersection of queerness and nature. In the editorial essay framing that issue, Shauna M. O’Donnell and the Editorial Collective of *UnderCurrents* wrote, “Difficult though it may be, trying to map out a space for Queer/Nature within a politics of the environment demands the charting of courses through a discursive terrain of perils and possibilities” (2). That landmark issue explored topics as diverse as the intersection of geography and queer theory (Gordon Brent Ingram), sexual morphology and medicalization of the queer body (Morgan Holmes), ecologies of life and death (J. Michael Clark), and the nascent queer ecology (Catriona Sandilands). It also included myriad creative work that touched themes of queer memory (Ailsa Craig), alternative kinship and communities constituted in passion (Caffyn Kelly), and small town life (Deanna Bickford). The exploratory openness, breadth, and diversity of the issue signaled both the significance of ‘queer’ as a conceptual and political transformation of sexual politics and the sense that environmental politics could “no longer be an articulation of white, male, heterosexual prescriptive or descriptive privilege” (2). Two recent edited volumes represent the breadth of queer ecological scholarship. The first, *Queering the Non/Human* (Giffney and Hird) explores of the theoretical, ethical, and political possibilities of an encounter between queer theory and posthumanism. The volume’s editors offer a breathless introduction to the complex diversity of work presented in the book. Most broadly, the contributors to *Queering the Non/Human* challenge both the meaning and uses of queer theories and the porous and contested boundary between the human and the non human. The second, *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson) traces intersecting lines of queerness and nature, mapping a field with implications not only for environmental politics, but also for the theorization of the boundary between human and animal, considerations of nation, nature, and colonialism, and imaginations of the ecologization of desire, to name just a few. In addition to these two substantial volumes, recent articles by geographer Matthew Gandy and ecocritic Timothy Morton gesture toward the continued expansion and diversification of queer ecological thinking and research. We invite both creative and scholarly submissions that contribute to Queer Ecologies. Possible perspectives, themes, and intersections include, but are by no means limited to:

- Evolving queer theories and activisms, especially perspectives from:
  - Trans Studies
  - Disability Studies
  - Queer of Color scholarship
  - Transnational Sexuality Studies
Submission Guidelines UnderCurrents welcomes both creative and scholarly work for the printed issue as well as the online version. These include essays, poetry, photographs, visual submissions, video, audio, mixed formats, and more. The extended deadline for submissions is October 15, 2013. The subject line of your email should read: Submission // Queer Ecologies. Submissions are made through the UnderCurrents website [1]http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/currents/index Images should be at least 1600X1200 pixels, 300dpi. All text should be in .doc or .docx format, and not exceed 6,000 words. Detailed guidelines and requirements can be found on the website. Submissions that do not meet the requirements will not be considered. For any questions please write to [2]currents@yorku.ca. The Editorial Collective will work closely with authors whose work has been selected. UnderCurrents encourages authors to engage in anti-discriminatory discourse. Visit our website for more details: [3]http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/currents/index

References

2. [mailto:currents@yorku.ca](mailto:currents@yorku.ca)

Dear Group members,

I have had this idea for a long time, but just got around to trying to implement it.

I propose to set up a 'CLASSICS READING GROUP'. We can meet up, perhaps, once a semester/term and read/discuss/critique 'classics' - the likes of Marx, Weber, Braverman, Pateman, Oakley and so on. Anything that we deem classic (and interesting!) but still relevant to the sociology of work, employment and economic life. The formal discussion can, of course, be followed by an informal discussion and a pint in a local pub.

This would probably be mostly relevant for early career WEEL researchers but senior members are especially welcome and can participate as discussants or lead a workshop - if you are expert on the particular 'classic' that we are reading.

We could meet at the BSA room (the room is free). But perhaps for the purposes of inclusivity we could do an odd meeting in the 'North' of the country (if someone would organize a space at their university).

Now, to get this going I would need to know how many would be interested to participate. SO - IF YOU ARE INTERESTED - please e-mail me at [1]M.Karepova@uel.ac.uk or through our WEEL Facebook page. And once we know the numbers we could chose the book and the date.

I'm sure this will be an opportunity to read something that many of us 'always wanted to read' - but also an opportunity and occasion to meet new colleagues and make new friends.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

Maria

Dr Maria Adamson (née Karepova)
WEEL convenor
Researcher @ Noon Centre for Equality and Diversity in Business, UEL
[2]m.karepova@uel.ac.uk

1. mailto:M.Karepova@uel.ac.uk
2. mailto:m.karepova@uel.ac.uk


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2076
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Twitter: @discoversoc ( [4] https://twitter.com/DiscoverSoc )


Email: [6] discoversociety@outlook.com

3. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
5. https://www.facebook.com/discoversociety
6. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
Impostor Syndrome and Academic Writing (2013-10-02 08:00)

There’s an interesting post on the (excellent) [1]Explorations of Style blog which discusses the relationship between 'imposter syndrome' and academic writing. The author acknowledges that the description of imposter syndrome rings true for many - feeling like you’re a fake, worrying that you will be 'found out' etc. However she raises a really interesting note of caution about how frequently and widely the term is applied, particularly as pertaining to academic writing:

I worry that treating *dis-comfort* as exceptional contributes to the notion that we ought to feel comfortable. In particular, I am troubled by the notion that we ought to feel comfortable about academic writing. Writers must learn to live with a great deal of uncertainty and vulnerability. Exposing our ideas to public scrutiny is uncomfortable, and recognizing that discomfort as inevitable can actually help make us more comfortable. The recognition of discomfort acknowledges the inherent and ongoing challenges of academic expression. It helps keep us humble, which matters if we are going to produce interesting and honest work. It makes us work harder than we might otherwise do. Academic writing is a struggle and not a realm in which confidence and complacency are ever likely to predominate. It’s not my intention to valorize any notion of suffering for art, but rather to accept the likelihood that producing good academic prose that we are willing to present to the public will be a struggle. Students often seek out writing instruction so that the writing process will become easier. However, in many cases, it’s more realistic to focus on writing *better* than to focus on lessening the emotional costs of writing. This acceptance of writing as an intrinsically challenging act seems particularly important for novice writers who often assume that the challenges come from their inexperience rather than from the very nature of academic writing.


Podcasts: Contemporary Realist Theory (2013-10-03 08:00)

These podcasts were recorded at an event in September run by the British Sociological Association's Realism Study Group. A range of speakers working in the critical realist tradition were asked to address the theme of *contemporary issues in realist theory*. The intention was to link this tradition of social theory to the pressing issues, theoretical and empirical, which those working within it have addressed.

Graham Scambler on Realism, Health Inequalities and the Purpose of Sociological Inquiry

2078
Sue Clegg on Realism as a Theoretical Resource
Mark Cresswell on Pedagogy of the Privileged

Dave Elder-Vass on Actor Network Theory
Bob Carter on 'facebook empiricism'
BSA Annual Conference 2014 - Submission Deadline Approaching (2013-10-03 19:33)

The theme of the BSA Annual Conference 2014 will be ‘Changing Society’. This follows on nicely from the theme of engagement at this year’s conference in London, where BSA President, John Holmwood, Guardian Columnist, Polly Toynbee and BBC Radio 4’s Laurie Taylor all championed the need for sociologists to engage in public debate and prove their contribution. The theme of changing society will therefore focus on how sociologists are affecting that change, both individually and as a collective discipline.

With this in mind, the BSA is inviting submissions for the 2014 Conference on any sociological research topic, with individual members and BSA study groups all encouraged to contribute posters/papers and other activities. Suggestions for grouped sessions within the new Frontiers stream are also welcomed, while there will also be an opportunity for study groups to meet independently over the three days.

If you wish to submit an abstract, please visit the [1]BSA Annual Conference 2014 page on our website and follow the online instructions. Alternatively you can speak with a member of the events team on 0191 383 0839 or by email at [2] events@britsoc.org.uk. Please note the final deadline for abstract submissions is Friday 18 October 2013.

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference.aspx)
2. [mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk)

Call for papers- Sociological Studies of Children & Youth: Soul of Society (2013-10-03 19:34)

Call for papers- Sociological Studies of Children & Youth: Soul of Society

"There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children." Nelson Mandela

Guest Editor: M. Nicole Warehime, Ph.D., Oklahoma City University

[1]Sociological Studies of Children and Youth (SSCY) will feature an edited volume on discussing children and youth as “the soul of society”. This volume will provide insight into the modern lives of children and youth.

The guest editor is considering a broad knowledge of current empirical research that focuses on children and
youth in today's society. Manuscripts featuring qualitative and quantitative methods, mixed methods, program evaluation and outcome studies are particularly invited.

Manuscripts should be a maximum of 30 pages (14,500 words) in length including references and should be prepared according to the series [2]author guidelines and using APA 6th Edition reference style.

Please contact the Guest Editor for any inquiries: [3]mnwarehime@okcu.edu

Deadline for submissions: Friday, 13 December 2013.

Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to [4]mnwarehime@okcu.edu with a subject line of "SSCY Volume 17".

All submissions will be reviewed by the SSCY editorial board with notifications made by Friday 31 January 2014.

The deadline for submissions of revised, final drafts will be Friday 28 February 2014.

Publication of the volume will be in 2014.

For more information about SSCY visit the series [5]homepage

3. mailto:mnwarehime@okcu.edu
4. mailto:mnwarehime@okcu.edu

Our Most Popular Posts of the Last Week (2013-10-03 20:01)

[1]35 reasons why you should blog about your research

[2]The Dangers of Academic Blogging


[4]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today


[6]Why am I doing a PhD? By Sarah Smart

[7]Twitter for academics

[8]Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs & the Social Media that Fulfill Them

2084
The Sociology of Gossip

Social Class and Life Chances as seen through Survivor Rates on the Titanic

How would Marx cope with the neoliberal university?


Podcast: What is Digital Sociology? (2013-10-04 08:00)

In these podcasts from the [1]BSA Digital Sociology group's July seminar, a range of speakers address the question of what is Digital Sociology? The day was divided into two panels: digital methods and digital engagement. The first panel deals with a broad range of issues pertaining to digital sociology while the second looks more specifically at issues attached to sociological engagement using digital tools. Further podcasts include responses to audience questions and the plenary talk given by Les Back.

The New Socialism

What is valuable, visible & knowable in the emerging social economy?

A one-day conference hosted by Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies

10am-6pm, 11th December 2013

Room MS.03, University of Warwick

Appeals to the ‘social’ today are everywhere: ‘social enterprise’, ‘social media’, ‘social neuroscience’, ‘social prescribing’, ‘social marketing’, ‘social analytics’, ‘social innovation’. This is thanks partly to the affordances of new techniques of accounting, network visualization and behavioural analysis, many of which take advantage of the ubiquitous digitization of market and non-market activity. The social world can be seen, quantified and influenced via new forms of expertise and data analytics. Managers, marketers and policy-makers make explicit appeals to the ‘social’, in order to sustain brands, rational decision-making, mental health and public goods.

How do we make sense of this? What is the ontology of the ‘social’ that is being appealed to, and how does it differ from the ‘social’ of 20th century statistics, society and sociology? What methodologies are at work in rendering this form of sociality visible, measurable and governable? Is social network analysis now performative, as neo-classical economics has been described in the past? What power relations are latent in this new notion of the social, and to what extent is it in fact reducible to the economic after all - or, perhaps, the biological?

This conference brings together scholars working in economic sociology, science and technology studies, social studies of finance, social studies of Big Data and other fields, to address these questions. Confirmed speakers include:

2095
The conference is free to attend, but registration is essential. You can register for this conference [9]here. All queries should be sent to Will Davies – [10]William.j.davies@warwick.ac.uk

The event takes place in Room MS.03, which is in the Mathematics and Statistics building. A campus map is available[11]here (the building is number 38 on the map). Information on how to get to Warwick University is available [12]here.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/news/?newsItem=094d43a2407db0bc014117b4c3a43286
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/
5. http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/marres/
6. http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/management/people/ymillo
7. http://www.gold.ac.uk/media-communications/staff/moor/
8. http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/academicstaff/ruppertevelyn/
10. mailto:William.j.davies@warwick.ac.uk
11. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/
12. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/

Tyler (2013-10-05 00:22:14)
Sounds really interesting. Wish I could attend!


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3. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
5. https://www.facebook.com/discoversociety
6. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
Another conversation this morning about [1]casualisation in UK higher education left me feeling I should probably try and articulate my convoluted and perhaps contradictory views on this issue. It keeps cropping up in conversations, usually in the pub, which inevitably leave me feeling afterwards that I’ve given people who I 99% agree with the impression that I’m somehow hostile to anti-casualisation arguments. I’m truly not. I organised an anti-casualisation session at the BSA postgraduate pre-conference a few years ago (with a speaker from UCU’s committee and another who had been heavily involved in disputes over [2]grad student unionization in the US) which I was a bit pissed off that only a single person attended, despite lots of people being at the event. This issue has been relegated to the back of my mind in recent years, partly because I’m an avoidant person and responded to being pissed off that no one attended my session by not thinking about it and partly because I’ve been busy with a lot of other stuff, some of which has been higher education related activism of other forms. It’s an issue I care about deeply but one which, with three years of freelancing behind me, I seem to have slightly more complex views on than I did initially.

In the case from this morning Durham’s department of theology had posted an advert inviting PhD students to apply for the ‘opportunity’ to design and run extracurricular seminars with a target audience drawn from anywhere across the undergraduate student body. The advert implicitly acknowledged that there might be some expectation of payment for such an activity by making clear that the role would not be paid but there would be a ‘photocopying allowance’ (I’m not making this up) as well as familiar platitudes about the instrumental and personal value attached to such a wonderful opportunity. I hope it’s not hard to see why myself and others would find this objectionable and I suspect if you’re reading this blog then you probably more or less share that reaction. But I do
find it harder to articulate precisely why I object and, as someone who would probably be a political philosopher right now if I hadn’t stumbled across sociology, this bothers me.

To explain why this is so, let me cite the example I had in mind while pondering this earlier. The Sociology Department at the University of Warwick has a long running Centre for Women and Gender Seminar Series which I’ve participated in twice and whose convenors have pretty much entirely been friends or acquaintances of mine over the past few years. The department often actively recruits these convenors because inevitably there is an end point to people’s willing involvement. I’m not sure how much work is involved but it’s probably not insignificant given that, as I recall, it’s a monthly seminar series over two academic terms with speakers organised into thematic sessions. Basically, I find it nigh on impossible to object to something like this yet many of the arguments cited against schemes such as that found in Durham’s theology department surely apply with (near) equal weight to the CWGS seminar series? In fact anything which contributes to the research culture of a department can be seen as contributing to the attractiveness of the department and its capacity to win funding – in which case does this not constitute work on behalf of the department which should be paid?

My slightly facile response to my own worry is to invoke the spectre of administration. My fear basically amounts to the possibility that anti-casualisation discourse could contribute to the already rampant commodification of higher education, collapsing the category of voluntary activity undertaken for its own intrinsic rewards into labour that is either paid or unpaid. So my response to this fear from an anti-casualisation standpoint is to say that what makes the difference is the administrative involvement of the university – at which point it ceases to be ‘voluntary activity undertaken for its own intrinsic rewards’ and begins to become part of the formal life of the institution and should be remunerated as such. But the abstraction of this distinction bothers me and this issue is still far from clear in my own head. Outside of this specific issue I’m still 100% supportive of the anti-casualisation campaign and hope this comes across (hence the long and defensive preamble about my activism in the first paragraph) – my abstract pontification also doesn’t detract from my acceptance of the well rehearsed moral arguments about the inequities attached to ‘opportunities’ to work for free given the obvious variability in people’s capacity to take them and the implications they can hold for future advancement.


Benjamin Geer (2013-10-18 03:48:54)

Why can’t we do something that has intrinsic rewards and still get paid for it, because, after all, we also have to pay rent? Why should work that has intrinsic rewards be volunteer work? That would mean that the only people who could afford to do intrinsically rewarding work would be those with a large inheritance.


I’m not saying we can’t! I think they co-exist rather than being mutually exclusive & it’s the actually existing tensions between them that I find interesting.
When Lacan got trolled (2013-10-05 08:00)

43 years ago today, on October 13, 1972, the charismatic and controversial French theorist and psycho-analyst [1]Jacques Lacan is giving a lecture at the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, when a young man with long hair and a chip on his shoulder walks up to the front of the lecture hall and begins making trouble. He spills water and what appears to be flour all over Lacan’s lecture notes and then stammers his way into a strange speech that sounds as if it were taken straight out of [2]Guy Debord’s *The Society of the Spectacle* (HT Open Culture and Critical-Theory.com)

http://www.openculture.com/2011/03/jacques_lacan_speaks_zizek_provides_free_cliffs_notes.html

Though we feel obliged to point out that a number of people on Twitter claimed that this ‘confrontation’ had been staged.

Noam Chomsky: Totalitarian Culture in a Free Society (2013-10-05 14:00)

This Chomsky lecture from a couple of decades ago is fascinating (though the initial introductory speaker is a little devoid of charisma).

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/OcSBqkLDxmo

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/OcSBqkLDxmo

The Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism (2013-10-06 08:00)

In the Utopian [1]Philip Mirowski discusses [2]neoliberal thought and takes issue with the increasingly common dismissals of neoliberalism as 'market fundamentalism', arguing that such a label entirely misrepresents neoliberal doctrine in a way which 'dulls serious thought'. Instead he argues that it is a body of ideas which has always been on the move.

Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the neoliberal project stood out from other strains of right-wing thought in that it was self-consciously constituted as an entity dedicated to the development, promulgation, and popularization of doctrines intended to mutate over time. It was a moveable feast, and not a catechism fixed at the Council of Trent. It is very important to have some familiarity with neoliberal
ideas, if only to resist simple-minded characterizations of the neoliberal approach to the financial crisis as some form of evangelical "market fundamentalism."

However the recognition of this heterogeneity in neoliberal thought does not entail that it represents 'gormless empiricism or random pragmatism'. Instead Philip Mirowski argues that there is a logic underlying this flux, one which both shapes and explains neoliberalism's response to the contemporary financial crisis. He offers his Thirteen Commandments of Neoliberalism as a way of getting an explanatory handle on what this means politically. We've reproduced them below but it's worth reading this fantastic article in full to understand what he means by each of these pithy formulations.

[1] THOU SHALT REVIVE AUTHORITY IN A NEW GUISE
[2] THOU SHALT ERASE DISTINCTIONS
[3] THOU SHALT WORSHIP “SPONTANEOUS ORDER”
[4] THOU SHALT RETASK THE STATE TO THY NEEDS
[5] THOU SHALT REDEFINE DEMOCRACY
[7] THOU SHALT REDEFINE FREEDOM AND KNOWLEDGE
[8] THOU SHALT KEEP THY CRONYISM COSMOPOLITAN
[9] THOU SHALT KNOW THAT INEQUALITY IS NATURAL
[10] THOU SHALT NOT BLAME MONOPOLIES AND CORPORATIONS
[12] THOU SHALT REDFINE CRIME
[13] THOU SHALT ACCOMMODATE THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

1. http://www.the-utopian.org/tagged/Philip_Mirowski
3. http://www.the-utopian.org/tagged/Philip_Mirowski
**Some critical thoughts on psychosocial research (2013-10-07 08:00)**

One writer who made a huge impact on me during my transition from philosophy to sociology was Ken Plummer. There are many aspects of his work which I now have problems with but I think my engagement with his work (particularly Sexual Stigma, Telling Sexual Stories and Documents of Life) had a big impact on how I approach sociological inquiry. It’s on the question of the *individual* where we part ways and I think this can make me seem a lot less interactionist than I seem:

Certainly the concrete human must always be located within this historically specific culture – for ‘the individual’ becomes a very different animal under different social orders. This is not a book that champions looking at the wonderful solitary human being: my conception of the human subjects and their experiences is one that cannot divorce them from the social, collective, cultural, historical moment. But in the face of the inherent society-individual dualism of sociology, I argue that there must surely always remain a strand of work that highlights the active human subject? And in the face of a constant tendency towards the abstract and the linear in modern thought, surely there is also always a need for the creative, imaginative and concrete? (Plummer 2000: 7).

This seemed radical and provocative to me when I first read it. Now it simply seems mistaken. I don't think the society/individual dualism represents some intractable problem and my enthusiasm for Margaret Archer’s work stems largely from my conviction that she has largely solved this problem (in so far as one really does ‘solve’ theoretical ‘problems’) in a way conducive to empirical research. Lots of substantive theoretical and empirical work remains to be done but there’s an astonishingly expansive research programme incipient in the work she’s done, particularly in the last fifteen years. My point in writing this isn’t to sing the praises of her approach but simply to explain how, from my point of view, her work offers a much more powerful way to approach the exact same things I was interested in when I was a symbolic interactionist.

If I’d encountered psychosocial approaches at the time I was entering sociology, I doubtless would have been attracted to them too, given that they work from an understanding of “research subjects whose inner worlds cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world, and whose experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which the inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 4). However the difficulty with these approaches arises because of their construal of the subject as *psychic* and *social* such that the underlying gap between ‘individual’ and ‘society’ which Plummer sees as intrinsic is not *bridged* in any meaningful way. The general trajectory of psychosocial approaches is animated by a critique of ‘naïve’ models of subjectivity which is simultaneously methodological and ontological:

*Taking a research subject’s account as a faithful reflection of ‘reality’ similarly assumes that a person is one who:*

- shares meanings with the researcher;
- is knowledgable about him or herself (his or her actions, feelings and relations);
- can access the relevant knowledge accurately and comprehensively (that is, has accurate memory);
- can convey that knowledge to a stranger listener;
- is motivated to tell the truth” (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 11-12)
Some of the methodological aspects to this are perfectly acceptable from a realist perspective. There is a sense in which the resolution of the ‘individual-social paradox’ (described by Hollway and Jefferson (2000: 13) as “how individuals come to have experiences supposedly at odds with the norm for their social position, the fearless woman, the fearful man etc”) is precisely Archer’s point when she contends that reflexivity should feature in our explanations because,

> without it we can have no explanatory purchase upon what exactly agents do. Deprived of such explanations, sociology has to settle for empirical generalisation about ‘what most of the people do most of the time’. Indeed, without a real explanatory handle, sociologists often settle for much less: ‘under circumstances x, a statistically significant number of agents do y’. These, of course, are not real explanations at all. (Archer 2007: 133).

The correct recognition that “once methods allow for individuals to express what they mean, theories not only have to address the status of these meanings for that person and their understanding by the researcher, but they must also take into account the uniqueness of individuals” licenses a deeply problematic ‘drilling down’ into the (supposed) psychic life of the subject. The plausibility of this move rests largely on the (false) assumption that the only available alternatives are to treat the subject as ‘self-transparent’ or collapse their particularity into their socio-demographic placement.

Instead the strategy offered is essentially one of psychoanalytically ‘reading’ the subject in a *socially situated* fashion, such that psychic phenomena are understood as a “feature of individuals” but without being “reducible to psychology”. For instance ‘anxiety’ is construed in a way that is “psychic because it is a product of a unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended again” and it is social because "such defensive activities affect and are affected by discourse (systems of meaning which are a product of the social world)”, "the unconscious defences that we describe are intersubjective processes (that is, they affect and are affected by others)” and involves “real events in the external, social world which are discursively and defensively appropriated” (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 24).

Leaving aside the many questions which can be asked about the application of these conceptual frameworks outside of a clinical context, the difficulty here is the lack of space between the *social world* ‘out there’ and *psychic life* ‘in here’. It is an attempt to solve the ‘individual-social’ paradox by peering into the inner depths of particular individuals, armed with a toolkit cobbled together from items borrowed from psychoanalysts based on meta-theoretical criteria which are vague at best, rather than Archer’s work which systematically bridges the two sides of the dichotomy in a way orientated towards empirical inquiry at the micro, meso and macro levels.

Any thoughts on this much appreciated. It’s intended as a friendly engagement – until starting the Hollway and Jefferson book recently my interaction with psychosocial approaches had come predominately through conferences and online videos. I often feel I have more in common with people who work in this way in terms of my *interests* than I do with anyone else I meet in sociology. I also think I get the general trajectory of it as an intellectual current and am largely in agreement. My problem is with its response to this problem – plus I find the appropriation of psychoanalytical concepts very problematic over and above my broader theoretical disagreement.
Introducing a Blog: The Geek Anthropologist (2013-10-07 08:00)

I was surfing the web over breakfast (as one does) and found a fellow anthropology site bearing the cute name The Geek Anthropologist that I thought many of our readers would like. It is a community blog run by anthropology student Marie-Pierre Renaud of Laval University (Quebec city, Canada) which deals with "geekiness, online communities and science-fiction" through the lens of socio-cultural anthropology. The posts explore issues such as geek identity, the representation of ethnic groups in science-fiction and the importance of video games in people's lives.

So, once you've made that second Monday morning coffee, [1]Stop Wasting Time Online: Read an Anthropology Blog instead!


BSA Annual Conference 2014: Changing Society

Call for Papers

Theory Stream Submissions

This stream welcomes abstracts on any aspect of theory as well as abstracts for the following Study Groups: · Bourdieu · Historical and Comparative Sociology · Realism and Social Research · Weber The Realism and Social Research group would also like to invite abstracts under the theme "What is Realism for?" The group is particularly interested in papers that consider any of the following issues:

- The relevance of realist theory to substantive social, economic and political issues.
• The practical implications of methodologically operationalising different forms of realist thought.

• Those from other schools of thought who wish to engage critically in a dialogue with realist theory.

How to submit  All abstracts and proposals for other events can be submitted online at: [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa-annual-conference/submissions.aspx  The deadline for submission of abstracts is 18th October 2013. For further information contact the Theory stream coordinators: Gurminder K Bhambra E: [2]g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk Tom Brock E: [3]t.brock@mmu.ac.uk Alternatively, contact the BSA Events Team E: [4]events@britsoc.org.uk

2. mailto:g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:t.brock@mmu.ac.uk
4. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk

The Sociological Imagination Revisited (2013-10-07 14:06)
Let me confess a sin. The opening chapter from C Wright Mills' *The Sociological Imagination* was the very first piece of required reading handed to me as an undergraduate. It also holds the distinction of beginning a chain of photocopied chapters and essays that were filed away in my waste paper bin. Like many first years, scholarly activity initially came second to binge drinking and intimate trysts with the toilet bowl. And so this classic statement of introductory sociology got the body swerve treatment, and *Imagination* remained one of the many canonical works I hadn't got round to reading. Two decades on and I'm beginning university afresh, albeit now as a lecturer. So, belatedly, I was quite pleased that Monday morning's introduction to social theory tutorial required I read the self-same chapter I unceremoniously dumped all those years ago.

What then is this thing, the 'sociological imagination'? Using the state of 50s America as his jumping off point, Mills argued that the popular sense, the popular mood was suffused with a strange sense of unease. It was a condition in which people were told by their papers, their screens, their politicians and ideologues that they lived in a state of freedom. An American could be whoever they wanted to be and follow their own inclinations and desires. But the scope of this freedom was very much limited to every American's private life. Hence the popular feeling, the hard-to-place sensation that all wasn't safe and well was an outcome of the friction between the boxed-in character of private/familial social relations inside the home, and the uncertain, potentially terrifying buffeting of large, invisible, unknowable and impersonal social forces outside it.

For Mills, to make sense of this, people required

> ... a quality of mind that will help them to use information and to develop reason in order to achieve lucid summations of what is going on in the world and of what may be happening within themselves. It is this quality ... that journalists and scholars, artists and publics, scientists and editors are coming to expect of what may be called the sociological imagination. (1959, p.5)

What the sociological imagination does is provide a way of thinking through and understanding social life, of how the inner lives of each of us as individuals are conditioned by social forces, and - borrowing terminology from [Pierre Bourdieu] - to understand our trajectories through social space. For Mills, the imagination is also a 'terrible' realisation as it shows that our fate is largely something that is done to us, regardless of our choices.

The sociological imagination asks certain sets of questions. These are taken up and formulated in particular ways by the main theoretical perspectives that have come to dominate sociology. The three sets are:

1. How is society structured? What are its components? How are they interrelated and mutually conditioning? How do they contribute to social persistence and social change? How does one society differ from another?

2. Where does a society stand in relation to the historical development of human societies? How are present societies stamped with the marks of the past? What are the essential features of modern times?

3. What social groups hold sway? What groups are rising and declining? What are the kinds of human natures that have contemporary currency? And what are their meanings in relation to discrete features of society?

The sociological imagination may well ask these sorts of questions, but how do you begin the business of unravelling the complex tapestry of social relations to make sense of them? Mills begins with distinguishing between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'. The former denotes the so-called private sphere, and concerns personal, intimate, milieu-specific settings. The latter refers to a higher social scale, or a greater degree of abstraction. i.e.
Questions around the integration of milieux into social structures, of how social collectivities mesh, relate with, and constitute one another. Hence problems occurring at this level of societies; dysfunctions, conflicts - pick a category from the social theory of your choice - cannot be anything other than public issues. Therefore how these structure and intertwine with individual experiences, this is the province of the sociologist.

Using this understanding, if we return to Mills' thesis that unease and anxiety underlined the American (modern) condition, he asks if this is the lot of just one or very small groups of disparate people, then it is a matter of individual biographies. But if insecurity, fatalism, fear for the future is a mass experience we are witnessing a social phenomenon that is the expression of how certain social relations are structured. And, of course, this angst might be the spur for further pathological social developments. If this is the modern condition, it falls to the sociologist to investigate, analyse and explain.

What particularly interests me about Mills' argument is the following observation. He argues that every age has a common intellectual denominator, a shared zeitgeist that figures time and again in the cultural tropes, in the stories we tell ourselves, in the senses we use to interpret the social world. For example, in the late 19th and early 20th century one widely-held habit of mind, particularly among the privileged and educated elites, was Social Darwinism. Consciously and unconsciously, social policy, sociology, emerging nationalisms, encouraged the view that relations between human beings were essentially an extension of the evolutionary struggle each and every species wages in the natural world. However, by the time Mills was writing the denominator, the structuring principle of social thought had greatly changed. The social had come to predominate - the sociological imagination was the mindset of the modern world. He held that as the old certainties were melted by the friction of rapid social change, popular perceptions of social problems focus on the routines, behaviours, conflicts and crises that lie at their root. Of this, Mills writes:

It is the quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities. It is not merely one quality of mind among the contemporary range of cultural sensibilities - it is the quality whose wider and more adroit use offers the promise that all such sensibilities - and, in fact, human reason itself - will come to play a greater role in human affairs. (ibid. p.15)

For 1959, this was a very sharp observation. We're not all Sociologists. But we are all sociologists. Whatever you think of them, politicians put forward sociological explanations of varying complexity and accuracy to makes sense of society's ills. Economists are forced to acknowledge the social dimension outside of their equations to explain the crash of 2008. Celebrities lay bare the travails of overcoming obstacles thrown by their humble backgrounds as they gaped their way toward fame. Our mass media and social media, from frivolous muckraking to "hard news" obsesses incessantly over the character and quality of social relationships. Will Dave sack IDS? Is Simon Cowell going to marry Lauren Silverman? Does Deidre Barlow still pine for Ken? Ours is a 'social age' where even your worth is measured by relationships, crudely denoted by numbers of Facebook friends or Twitter followers.

Curiously, at the moment the sociological imagination is the habit of mind par excellence sociology as a discipline is stuck on the doldrums. It's perceived as a breeding ground for axe-grinding lefties and abstruse waffle few outside of seldom-read specialist journals care about. And it's not controversial to state that the sociological imagination has allowed other disciplines and lay actors to park their tanks on sociology's lawn. New mass killing outrage? Call a psychologist. Youth delinquency? Get a criminologist. Parenting? Katie Hopkins. Class? Paul O'Grady.

Yet fads in the broader social sciences come and go but sociology stubbornly remains. Women's Studies, Industrial Relations, Cultural Studies; these are all cognate disciplines that after a brief life have largely disappeared and find themselves folded into sociology departments. Why and how sociology soldiers on despite being derided
and ignored is probably a lifetime's work in and of itself. Perhaps the materiality of the sociological imagination consistently generates a mass education market out of the minds it captivates as a subject of fascination in its own right.

The sociological imagination shows absolutely no sign of ebbing. As dictatorships dissolve and civil societies open up across the globe, not only are the disciplinary futures of sociology secured but more importantly the questions of our times - the environmental crisis, the relations between the genders, nationalism and hate, the balance of inequality, the chaos of the global economy - are also increasingly treated as social, not natural problems. And that realisation may just be the beginning of doing something about them.

This was originally published by[3]A Very Public Sociologist. It is reproduced here with permission.

2. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2008/06/day-with-bourdieu.html

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claudia vallve (2013-10-11 14:53:41)
Hi! I was also one of these students that discovered sociology by reading Wright Mills book... something like... well.. many, many years ago. In my case, however, it had a very positive impact and I recall it - together with Berger and Luckman's social construction of reality - as one of those books I could not stop reading. In my favour I have to say that - though I was also highly interested in parties, drinking, bars and fiesta- sociology was my second career... being law the first one. And after four years of civil codes and similar tortures, reading about sociological imagination was a veritable pleasure. Casually, I'm also revisiting Wright Mills book these days. I've been asked to write a divulgative book on social sciences, and I've decided to start by speaking of sociological imagination as a quality needed for everybody. I totally agree in the conclusions re-visitation has brought to you. I think most sociologists (fortunately not all) have lost this capacity of being curious about absolutely everything, and enjoying discovering and understanding our society. And, yes, it would be wise to do something about it. Maybe if we are able to transmit all this to the younger generation of sociologists, raising enthusiasm on the reading of Wright Mills books, we can start doing something...

» Our Most Popular Posts This Week The Sociological Imagination (2013-10-29 16:15:25)
[...] The Sociological Imagination Revisited [...]
growth. Shifting emphasis away from the established Lacanian paradigms of voyeurism, lack and desiring identification, growing numbers of scholars are turning to the work of object-relations analysts in order to provide an account of the filmic encounter and the internalized moving image as a living source of subjective and relational metamorphosis. This one-day workshop aims to bring together established and postgraduate scholars, therapists and practitioners working on media, psychoanalysis and cultural transformation from a broadly object-relations theoretical perspective. We would like to go beyond Winnicott (while at the same time retaining the crucial concepts of play and transitional phenomena so usefully analysed by Annette Kuhn et al. in *Little Madnesses: Winnicott, Transitional Phenomena and Cultural Experience*, I.B. Tauris, 2013) in order to consider what an awareness of object-relations in general may bring to the discussion of film, the moving image, and the changing spectator, especially with regard to the possibility of politicized and post-traumatic healing. Subjects for consideration might include (but are not limited to):

- Filmic form/structures and object-relations
- The film and the spectator as relational partners
- Genre, affect and psychic growth
- Spectatorship, splitting and projective identification
- Gender, film and object-relations
- Multi-racial moving objects
- Class, hate, envy and film
- Kleinian approaches to film-watching
- Fairbairn, Guntrip and the schizoid spectator
- Milner, film and ‘butterfly thoughts’
- Bion, cinematic alpha-function and the container-contained
- André Green and the filmic dead mother
- Christopher Bollas and the transformational object
- Cinema, object-relations and resistance/revolution
- Digital activism and psychosocial agencies

Proposals of no more than 300 words should be sent to Andrew Asibong ([1]a.asibong@bbk.ac.uk) and Amber Jacobs ([2]a.jacobs@bbk.ac.uk) by 31 October 2013.

1. mailto:a.asibong@bbk.ac.uk
2. mailto:a.jacobs@bbk.ac.uk
The virtue of selfishness in austerity times (2013-10-08 12:00)

Who are the really selfish people in our society? Why should I pay to support you and yours? Why can’t I keep what I earn? Surely charity begins at home? In this guest blog [1]Anita Biressi and [2]Heather Nunn explore the vexed issue of self-interest and how selfishness can be a virtue in austerity times.

Austerity measures have re-charged long-term public disputes about the selfishness of various social groups and individuals. These disputes are taking place in the context of a fierce battle for resources. We see political drives for the state to roll back (or ‘reform’) what used to be called ‘social security’ in the UK and ‘public assistance’ in the US but what is now frequently called ‘welfare’. American and British opinion formers have helped frame a public conversation in which the ‘selfish society’ is the outcome of an ‘entitlement state’ that teaches people to want instead of work. Trades union members, ‘stay at home’ mothers, lone parents, public sector workers, the disabled and so on have all, on occasion and sometimes relentlessly, found themselves labelled as selfish and socially damaging. Websites sell bumper stickers which wryly declare: ‘work harder, those on benefits rely on you!’ and ‘welfare is not a career opportunity.’

But while selfishness is most often regarded as a trait to be condemned, in the Unites States austerity measures have also given rise to fresh calls for selfishness to be reinstated as a civic virtue, as the spur to responsible individualism, entrepreneurial action and economic growth. This is a very different brand of selfishness to that spied in the needy and workshy who draw on national resources. Virtuous selfishness is rooted in an outspoken rejection of the state in all of its forms. The embrace of ‘selfish individualism’ is quite explicit in the US where the green shoots of selfishness are springing up all around. Grassroots signs include the appearance of lone tweeters such as Selfish American and Selfish Virtues, the wider appeal of Facebook sites such as ‘Majority Against ObamaCare’ , the many college Chapters of Young Americans for Liberty and recent popular protests against ‘big government’ which have featured a vigorous defence of what’s mine is mine. As one protester against ObamaCare declared, “I should get the [3]fruits of my labor and I shouldn’t have to divvy it up with other people.”. Also worth mentioning is the continuing influence of the Ayn Rand Institute (AYI, of which more below) and the growing vocalisation of Randian philosophy by fellow travellers whose numbers include notable Tea Party activists, 2012 vice-presidential nominee Paul Ryan, business leaders, the opinion writers of Fox News and talkshow hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Dennis Prager and Glen Beck.

So where did these validations of selfishness come from and where are they heading?

It’s not selfish to keep your money in your own pocket

The well-known neoliberal arguments for self-interest as the motor of the successful (and the good) society put forward by Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and others famously gained traction during the 1980s. These arguments included a vigorous rejection of public altruism and the collective notions of social progress and civil society which are embodied in state-supported social security. [4]Hayek summarised the values at stake for the taxpayer in an oddly convoluted statement, loaded with negatives, designed, perhaps, to avoid the more positive but despised term ‘altruism.’

Only where we ourselves are responsible for our own interests and are free to sacrifice them, has our decision moral value. We are neither entitled to be unselfish at someone else’s expense, nor is there any merit in being unselfish if we have no choice.
Critically, Hayek underlined the sense of unfairness that some feel at being legally required to support the subsistence and well-being of their fellows. Current media commentary articulates and, we believe, actually fosters a simmering resentment that some are living rather too well from resources that others have worked hard to earn. Hard-pressed citizens are apparently demanding to know why ‘strivers’ must pay for the ‘shirkers’, why the childless must pay for universal child benefit, why the young should support the old and so on.

The work of Hayek’s close contemporary Ayn Rand was also embraced in the 1980s and her views are once again being promoted by the American right. She developed a philosophy of anti-altruism and anti-government which included her own re-conceptualisation of selfishness as a quality of the highest merit. More radical than Hayek, she saw no place at all for the state. Rand’s influential novels and political journalism stressed individual will and the pursuit of personal goals as the only life worth living. Her heroes, as characterised in the best-sellers The Fountainhead (1943) and Atlas Shrugged (1957), were antisocial, anti-altruistic, deeply self-interested industrialists and artists. Her most famous protagonist, the [5]social rebel John Galt pledged: “I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine.”. Numbered among Rand’s admirers were the future Chairman of the American Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan and Ronald Reagan. In Rand’s view, it’s those who make money and who are successful in the world who risk being exploited by the needy masses and by weak, centralising government. The recent deployment of the defiant historical American slogan [6]‘Don’t tread on me’ by anti-Obama conservatives highlights this perception of big government as the real jackboot of history.

Tellingly, perhaps, Rand and Hayek’s work has been embraced by business people, self-consciously ambitious students and hard-pressed individuals. This is due in part, we argue, to the ways in which they depicted particular social types and character traits as ones to be emulated or despised. Hayek, for example, condemned socialist intellectuals (by which he meant teachers, journalists and other progressive, but ‘badly-informed’, professionals) as '[7]second hand dealers in ideas'. This chimed with Rand’s own description of ‘second handers’ : individuals who can’t think for themselves, who value the good opinions of their peers and who lack the will to pursue a selfishly creative and independent life A current ARI [8]lesson plan for High School students summarises second handers in the baldest terms: ‘those dependent persons who, in one form or another, are not productive, do not survive by means of their own mind or effort, but who, rather, survive second-hand by leeching off of others. There are many types of second-handers—criminals, family bums, welfare recipients, military conquerors, political dictators, social climbers…’ In addition, Rand’s novels cite social workers and do-gooders of every hue.

It was thinkers such as Hayek and Rand who ultimately formulated and then crucially, from our perspective, popularised the neoliberal ethos of self-interest among business people, entrepreneurs and, later during the 1980s, among politicians. Rand's contention, made in her 1964 book [9]The Virtue of Selfishness, that 'there is no such entity as "society", since society is only a number of individual men' remains perhaps one of the most infamous declarations of confident individualism, even though very few people seem to know its source. [10]

Among Rand’s other legacies she helped furnish a lexicon which re-positioned self-interest as a virtue and selfishness as a positive character trait. In the neoliberal myth, dealers in second hand ideas and second raters of all kinds stand in the way of the pioneers of capitalist enterprise; the latter struggling against the growing bureaucratic state and the turbulence of the marketplace together.

**Young Conservatives pave the way**
In his book Ill Fares the Land Tony Judt observes that ‘Selfishness is uncomfortable even for the selfish’. If this is so, then this discomfort seems well-hidden. Indeed, we report here that the right to be selfish is the renewed battle cry of American neoliberalism as its foot soldiers, leaders, advisors and supporters in the media seek to recoup the ideological ground lost during the financial crisis. Most worryingly, successful incursions are being made by the young and energetic through an astute use of new media and social networking sites, via blogs, talkshows and subscription web TV. The growing confidence of conservative youth is nicely encapsulated in the astonishing 2009 Youtube video ‘Young Con Anthem’. This featured two sharply-dressed Ivy Leaguers rapping out their political philosophy to an audience whose numbers ultimately reached half a million. The video featured in many news outlets including the Huffington Post and the performers Joshua Riddell and David Ruffull appeared on nationally syndicated radio stations, major web outlets and national television. Riddell and Ruffull rapped: ‘three things taught me conservative love/ Jesus, Ronald Reagan plus Atlas Shrugged.’ Conservative news outlets, young American conservative sites, Tea Party activists and grass roots anti-government protestors insist that the moral, as well as economic, tenets of self-interested individualism have never been more economically necessary or ethically defensible. We think that their message is once again gaining traction.

Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn are the authors of Class and Contemporary British Culture (2013). They are currently researching a new book called Politics Interrupted: Gender, Citizenship and Disruptive Voices (2015) for Rowman and Littlefield International.

1. http://roehampton.academia.edu/AnitaBiressi
2. http://roehampton.academia.edu/HeatherNunn
Gerard Murphy (2013-10-08 15:31:32)

Of course there is the darker side to Hayek also, the side that the neo-liberals tend to try and hide....namely that where their policies have been implemented in full...it has been done at the end of the barrel of a gun! This little letter that I came across...from Thatcher to Hayek probably gives us an idea to that darker side http://gfmurphy101.wordpress.com/2013/08-14/hayek-and-thatcher/

Why the British public should be worried about GCHQ (2013-10-08 20:44)

The novelist [1]John Lanchester was invited by the Guardian to read through the GCHQ files which have been at the heart of recent revelations about the security agency’s activity. He offers a [2]thought provoking summary (with wonderful illustrations) of the significance of what we’ve learnt from these files and why the British public should be worried:

What this adds up to is a new thing in human history: with a couple of clicks of a mouse, an agent of the state can target your home phone, or your mobile, or your email, or your passport number, or any of your credit card numbers, or your address, or any of your log-ins to a web service.

Using that "selector", the state can get access to all the content of your communications, via any of those channels; can gather information about anyone you communicate with, can get a full picture of all your internet use, can track your location online and offline. It can, in essence, know everything about you, including – thanks to the ability to look at your internet searches – what’s on your mind.

To get a rough version of this knowledge, a state once had to bug phones manually, break into houses and intercept letters, and deploy teams of trained watchers to follow your whereabouts. Even then it was a rough and approximate process, vulnerable to all sorts of human error and countermeasures. It can now have something much better than that, a historically unprecedented panoply of surveillance, which it can deploy in a matter of seconds.
This process is not without supervision, of course. In order to target you via one of these "selectors" – that's the technical term – the agent of the state will have to type into a box on his or her computer screen a Miranda number, to show that the process is taking place in response to a specific request for information, and will also need to select a justification under the Human Rights Act. That last isn't too arduous, because the agent can choose the justification from a drop-down menu. This is the way we live now.


Care vs control: how do girls see healthy relationships? (2013-10-09 08:00)

Here is a good example of recent action research: Women's Aid ([1]www.womensaid.co.uk) and Girlguiding ([2]www.girlguiding.co.uk) have collaborated to produce this [3]very interesting (and at times mortifying) report about the ways in which girls today understand relationships. The report explores issues of well-being, happiness, fulfillment, safety, security, personal space (offline and online), and others.

You can read the full report [4]here, and here are some of the findings:

Two-fifths of girls believe it is acceptable for a partner to make you tell them where you are all the time.

Girls are ready to accept controlling behaviour and see it as a normal part of a 'caring' relationship.

Our research exposed a generation suffering from a role model deficit, with a narrow range of positive examples to look up to.

21 % said that telling you what you can and can't wear was acceptable.

21 % said that shouting at you or calling you names because of what you may have done could sometimes be OK.

Girls [...] told us that if they were concerned about their own relationships, most would be very reluctant to involve parents, teachers or their authority figures unless they felt the situation had become extreme. For the majority this means physical violence – leaving huge leeway for harmful controlling behaviour to go unchecked and establishing very damaging expectations for future relationships.

94 % said that it was never acceptable to pressure a girl to have sex. (but 6 % didn't!)
39% said that making you tell them where you are all the time is acceptable.

Key notions discussed in the focus-groups

1. www.womensaid.co.uk
2. www.girlguiding.co.uk
It's become almost platitudinous to observe how little the political underpinnings of the neoliberal economic settlement were impacted upon by the financial crisis. The Kilburn Manifesto brings together some leading lights of the British left to offer a systematic response to the strange historical conjuncture in which we now find ourselves embedded:

_The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters - Antonio Gramsci_
Chapter 2: [2] Vocabularies of the Economy
Doreen Massey

Michael Rustin

For more about the project see the website [4] here

1. http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/pdfs/manifestoframingstatement.pdf
2. http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/pdfs/Vocabularies%20of%20the%20Economy.pdf

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CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-10-10 12:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

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DISCOVER SOCIETY

Measured-Factual-Critical


The first issue includes articles by: Gurminder K. Bhambra, Sam Friedman, Jacqui Gabb and Janet Fink, Peter Taylor-Gooby, Suzanne Hall, Lisa McKenzie, Alice Mah, James Nazroo, Karen Rowlingson and Steve McKay, Emma Uprichard, Alan Warde, and Mike Savage

Further details:

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5. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
Sociological Images: Blogging as Public Sociology (2013-10-11 08:00)

In this paper the team behind the continually fantastic Sociological Images reflect on blogging as public sociology. I’ve recently posted some initial thoughts on Digital Public Sociology and this paper is an important contribution to what seems likely to become an increasingly prominent debate over time.

Sociological Images is a website aimed at a broad public audience that encourages readers to develop and apply a sociological imagination. The site includes short, accessible posts published daily. Each includes one or more images and accompanying commentary. Reaching approximately 20,000 readers per day, Sociological Images illustrates the potential for using websites as a platform for public engagement in the social sciences. This report provides an overview of the site’s history, approach, reach, and impact. The authors also discuss some challenges facing academics interested in blogging for a general audience and some of the features that contribute to the popularity of the site.

http://ssc.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/04/24/0894439312442356.abstract

HT Deborah Lupton

1. http://ssc.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/04/24/0894439312442356.abstract

Seminar Series on the History of Sexuality (2013-10-11 12:02)

Seminar Launch Event: What is the History of Sexuality?

6 p.m. Tuesday 7th January 2014, The Court Room, Senate House London.

The Institute of Historical Research, London, launches its new and exciting research seminar series, History of Sexuality, with a round table discussion of ‘What is the History of Sexuality?’

The founding of the History of Sexuality seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London, marks a recognition that the field has grown enormously during recent years. The new seminar reverses the lacuna in sustained seminar provision in London in this field. While the history of sexuality is a diverse area of study that refuses straightforward categorisation, it nonetheless focuses broadly on men and women as sexual beings in the past, on the categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality through which sexual selfhood has been experienced, and, moving beyond this binary, on other historical expressions of gender identity and sexual experience. The History of Sexuality seminar at the Institute explores historical perspectives on themes as varied as sexual reform and identity-based movements, sexuality and urban space, medical and criminological discourses on sexuality, and representations of sexuality. It also explores the historiography of the field, along with those varied methodological and theoretical

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approaches to the study of the sexual past that have shaped the history of sexuality as a sub-discipline. Finally, the seminar provides a forum for an exploration of the intersections between the history of sexuality and other related academic practices – including those of gender, feminism, psychoanalysis, and the study of the emotions.

Conveners: Heike Bauer (Birkbeck); Chiara Beccalossi (Oxford Brookes); Justin Bengry (Birkbeck/McGill); Sean Brady (Birkbeck); Matt Cook (Birkbeck); Jana Funke (Exeter); Graig Griffiths (Queen Mary); Claire Hayward (Kingston); Julia Laite (Birkbeck); Jane Mackelworth (Queen Mary); Alison Oram (Leeds Metropolitan); Anna Katharina Schaffner (Kent); Sarah Toulalan (Exeter); Chris Waters (Williams).

If you have questions about the History of Sexuality seminar at the IHR, or would like to propose a paper, please contact Craig Griffiths at [c.griffiths@QMUL.AC.UK](mailto:c.griffiths@QMUL.AC.UK)

1. [mailto:c.griffiths@QMUL.AC.UK](mailto:c.griffiths@QMUL.AC.UK)

The world as you've never seen it before  (2013-10-12 08:00)

This [great project](http://www.worldmapper.org/index.html) is currently moribund but tantalisingly making reference to not having funding 'at the moment', collects maps which have been resized according to a particular topic of interest. Click the map below to explore the site:

[2]

2. [http://www.worldmapper.org/index.html](http://www.worldmapper.org/index.html)
Our Most Popular Posts This Week (The Sociological Imagination) (2013-10-29 16:15:42)

[...] The world as you've never seen it before [...]
Absent From The Academy: the absence of Black Professors in UK #HigherEd (2013-10-13 19:40)

1. file://player.vimeo.com/video/76725812
5. https://twitter.com/GKBhambra

50 Shades of Digitalization | International Summer School "Digitization and its Impact on Society" (2013-10-15 08:01:25)

[...] just reinforcing the dominant (male) discourse while assuming that inequalities based on gender, race, class, and disabled people have vanished – they haven’t (even in more advanced Western [...]

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This infographic from [1]Neal Hudson (HT [2]Liberal Conspiracy) shows the dramatic rise in English House Prices relative to earnings since 1997. Of course there are important methodological questions which can be asked about an infographic like this and, though I think these are fantastic communicative aids, it worries me that I find myself less inclined to ask these questions than I would be with a set of claims presented through text - is there a risk of positivism by default with infographics?

2. http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7422/9820513953_6f3a2045a3_o.gif
Another pressure point is the falling applications from indebted English graduates to study for master’s degrees and doctorates, especially in the humanities, and this is before the first cohort incur the full debt. Soon, the only graduates carrying on their studies will be the sons and daughters of the very rich or those poorer students who can secure one of the inadequate number of bursaries, scholarships and grants.

Yet graduate education is not just the university’s lifeblood, supplying the next generation of academics, it is one of the core elements in any innovation ecosystem. It constitutes the principal pool from which the scientists, technologists, doctors, lawyers and intellectuals of tomorrow will be recruited. A key societal function is under threat.

Universities across the board are in a quandary. The real wages of academics have fallen by 13% since 2008, one of the largest sustained wage cuts any profession has suffered since the Second World War. Yet, unsurprisingly, students incurring the debt want to see some value for their money. Research has to be sustained. What to do?

Unless there is some bold political leadership, the future is becoming clearer. Oxford, Cambridge and a handful of other top English universities will want to charge more than £9,000 to support their expensive teaching, while trying not to deter applicants by offering even more generous fee rebates and scholarships to undergraduates and graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds.

They would preserve themselves in the short term as premier academic institutions. But they would have caused an interdependent university system to fragment, leaving less strong universities in an impossible position, and further entrenching the noxious class stratifications in English society.

The rest of the university sector would increasingly be devastated: it would have to reconstitute itself around a limited range of digital courses and online learning in order to slash fees as students became more and more aware that the debt could not be justified by any job they are likely to get. The very idea of an interdisciplinary university, across the gamut of expensive disciplines, would become impossible. Our economy and society would be immeasurably weaker.

What is needed is a mixed economy of student finance. Universities create the public good of knowledge and thus more wealth; they should be paid for in part by general taxation and in part from moderate student fees on which negligible interest is charged. Fees in moderation are a good financing principle.

But loading the entire burden for university financing on to the shoulders of the innocent young, who are so inspiring to meet, with their ambitions to change the world, while their elders are washing their hands of responsibility, is a disgrace. England will pay a high price for such arrant selfishness.

Gone and busted, done and dusted? Notes towards a moral and political grammar of ‘civil dawn’
(2013-10-14 18:34)

What happened?

While preparing the fourth instalment of the [2]Sociologists of Crisis on the issue of suicide, life via death took over and in the face of a tragic event, I had to get my editorial, moral, political and sociological priorities right. The event was no other than the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, the 34 year old Greek anti-fascist hip-hop artist (Killah P) by supporters of Greece's far right Golden Dawn party. But as is the habit of shocking events, it was promptly followed by another; the arrest of circa 20 Golden Dawn delegates charged as 'participants in a criminal organisation'. More on both stories can be found [3]here and [4]here. As a witness to both events, albeit from afar, I was juggling the temptation to comment and the discipline of letting some time pass for my thoughts and emotions to settle. The first seemed too premature, the second oozed of the dangers of making oneself irrelevant and allowing the flood of questions to wreak havoc in one's own mind. What follows is my attempt to give this flood-stream a certain direction so that it can acquire meaning as it flows. You will not find anything a priori right, conclusive, or
expertly in it so if that’s what you’re after you can simply stop reading immediately. All I am endeavoung to ‘do’ in the space of this article is to provide a few cautious and cautionary remarks, dictated by my civil conscience and offered out in the open as an invitation to think together, but differently, with more humanism, compassion and understanding. Failing that, we all risk becoming irrelevant and inaccessible to each other if not entirely helpless.

What and whose was 'it'?

Having briefly sketched out ‘what happened’ (not our usual type of arrest), and ‘what brought it forth’ (another violent act as befits Golden Dawn’s ‘marauding militia’ tactics), it is timely to consider the implications of both but mostly emphasising on the aftermath of the arrests and the public discussion that ensued. Anyone who attuned themselves to the public outcry following the arrests will have identified a series of recurring arguments over what the event actually was; was it a victory of polity, law, democracy and civil society? Was it a masterful intervention of the Greek justice system, the, government, the state and the police? Could it be interpreted as a decisive move by the ruling party? Do we owe such arrests to the Right? Or perhaps to the Left? In other words, what was ‘it’ all about and whose was ‘it’ anyway?

Replaying such possibilities in mind, I think it is fair to say that it would be foolish to allow anyone to claim stewardship over such an event, be it the Right or the Left whose political reflexes in Greece historically exhaust themselves in nepotism, polarity, populism and sloganeering, and whose civic loyalty and democratic sympathies are articulated solely by reference to ‘the party’; that minute segment of society they participate and are interested in, while of course issuing grand promises to liberate ‘the people’, ‘the nation’ if not the whole world over. Neither the Left, nor the Right did anything to effectively allow themselves to claim this as a victory of their own, though they certainly can, will and have use(d) it to their advantage; the right will claim that ‘it is we who put these men behind bars’, to which the left will respond ‘Yes, but you owe that to our antifascist struggle and protests’. The reality betrays both of course, as it always should. [5]Golden Dawn’s criminal activities are no surprise to anyone in the know, let alone to the Greek political elites on either side; over two-hundred racist attacks, mostly attributed to Golden Dawn members, have been recorded the past two years making any statement of response from any political party unacceptable if not entirely laughable. Neither wing of the political spectrum won anything, nor should they as they both wavered in their commitment to civil society and its institutional satellites that they could have mobilised earlier to such effect. The process of gathering evidence to make a convincing case in order to press charges against Golden Dawn took a week, but that week could have well been any week in year 2012. Perhaps the protests were not loud enough, the blood spilled then was ‘not our own’, ‘we’ didn’t know what to do, how to deal with it, but now?

‘Now’ was what changed it all! This of course is a long string of excuses and soothing lullabies we sing to ourselves to avoid watching ourselves snore and, as Erving Goffman (1974: 14) wrote, ‘the sleep is deep’. A fleeting awakening however did happen, but it was the reflex of another, more subtle political impulse brought forward by the most ‘gelatinous and primordial’ of political entities/institutions, as Gramsci (1971 [1929]: 238) called it, namely; civil society. Am I then suggesting that all this was the defeat of the political system and a victory of civil society? Simplistically put, yes, that’s what I’m saying, but it’s not all I’m saying! What I am saying is that it might be helpful and productive to interpret this event as a hinge-moment where a lot of things were in fact unhinged and where the abstract realm we call ‘civil society’ mobilised the ‘optimism of the will’ that was hitherto lacking in the political mainstream and perhaps the public too, who contented themselves instead with the ‘pessimism of the intellect’, to use a famous aphorism of Romain Rolland which Gramsci popularised through the masthead of L’Ordine Nuovo. But that’s a point that needs qualifying and that’s exactly what I intend to do in turn.

Why now?

That is a question that has puzzled [6] many and quite rightly so. But unlike Douzinas and Co. I don’t think it is useful to attribute it to an act of political calculation by the government, simply because it was not a response from the government per se and sensu stricto but an initiative borne out of the powers of civil society itself,
this case meaning its democratic institutions such as the courts of justice. This separation of ‘government’ from ‘civil society’ in my analysis may appear strange on its own but in the Greek case, I don’t think the two can be conflated or treated as ‘one and the same’. It wasn’t the government and/or its assemblies that took the issue on but rather, the polity at broad, especially facilitated by law and the justice system. And, this is not the first time the government is caught unawares in similar circumstances, but before dwelling on that let me just clarify that ‘the state’ and its institutional branches are not the same as or reducible to ‘the government’, but an organised political community living under ‘a’ government. In other words, the concept of the state is here provisionally distinguished from the concept of government to show how the latter was, in fact, caught by surprise as it was in 1963, following the murder of independent Greek MP, Grigoris Lambrakis (immortalised later through the film Z, directed by Costa Gavras). The Greek PM at the time, Costas Karamanlis the Elder, famously asked ‘But, alas! Who rules this country?’ and this question remains open to interpretation to this day, or rather especially today. When a PM does not know who runs the state and does not recognise that, last time we checked, it was himself and his political appointees, in collaboration of course with the undercurrent mafias that are inevitably attached, we can suggest two things; either that he should be held accountable (but not responsible) for the murder or that the state is run without him, in which case whatever response to the crime does not come from him. Or, in a more conspiratorial scenario the murder was staged by him, and so was the response from the law but as it would be absurd to charge him with the crime, others had to be brought in as a sacrificial offering in the name of justice and peace. This remark of course is satirical, but it does invite a certain conundrum or a paradox even. If the head of the state does not govern it, might this mean that s/he is exempt from accountability for such an event and should therefore mobilise all powers to restore justice through law? Or does it mean that s/he is complicit in some way or another? The former is virtually impossible and the latter amounts to a grave accusation. If it is the latter however, that means that the (right-wing) government cannot possibly claim any success over the persecution of Golden Dawn unless it plans to celebrate its downfall. That leads us to suggest that we owe the trial of Golden Dawn elsewhere; to the Left, to civil society, to ‘the people’ or to the democratic/institutional powers of the state, to name a few possible places where we might locate that change in the speed of political thinking and decision-making. Let us retrace my main argument however for the purposes of clarification; neither the right-wing government, nor the oppositional Left can claim the Golden Dawn trials as a success of their own because they’ve both been complicit in, accountable to and responsible for doing virtually nothing for a very long time in order to build a case and/or persecute the party in question as a criminal organisation; both parties mobilised no processes whatsoever to that effect, so they cannot possibly claim any credit for these trials. The simple implication then is that the decision to bring Golden Dawn members to trial flows from a combination of (a) public indignation via protest and (b) the response of democratic institutional powers, such as the judiciary, towards the criminalisation and trials of Golden Dawn delegates who are now, all of the sudden, unanimously referred to as ‘members of a criminal organisation’. If that is the case, and we can pride ourselves on the agility of our civil reflexes and the robustness of our democratic institutions why weren’t we appalled before and why were the institutional powers of democracy not intervene before? Was the murder of [7]Shehzad Luqman in January 2013 not enough to spark off such a response? Were the numerous other attacks on immigrant by Golden Dawn vigilantes not enough to cause our indignation, anger and disgust? I will stray away from suggesting that it was the spilling of ‘Greek blood’ that brought that reaction forward, but I will stress the hypocrisy and bigotry that logically accompanies it in the next section of this article.

The Shock Vitrine

Paraphrasing the title of Naomi Klein’s (2007) best-selling book, The Shock Doctrine, I propose the term ‘shock vitrine’ as the way in which the reaction to Pavlos Fyssas’ murder was framed. The shock vitrine works like a smokescreen that allows us to appear utterly surprised and indeed shocked in the face of such tragic incidents. This however is a reaction which smacks of extreme naïvety on the one hand and extreme hypocrisy on the other therefore betraying important civic values such as honesty and responsibility. We cannot possibly claim, like [8]Captain Renault in Casablanca, to be shocked when faced with the news of such a murder because it has happened before and we did close to nothing about it. There is nothing more shocking/appalling about this murder than there was in the Shehzad
Luqman case and we must not allow amnesia, negligence, double-standards, regret, guilt and remorse cloud our view, our thinking or our civic response to such incidents, but we must make a resource out of them promising that we shall not allow this to happen again, not in our conscience and not in our name. The shock vitrine must therefore be dismantled at once or we must admit that we like to hide beneath its shiny glass surface as if it were a veil; but it is not a veil, it is transparent and our nakedness shows.

An important ingredient in the shock vitrine’s success as a barrier to our (re)thinking and (re)action is of course our unwillingness to accept a number of uncomfortable truths about the ideological extremisms that have a long pedigree in Greece and not without a reason. In a country that has been ravaged by a brutal civil war and a malignant military junta, remnants of ideological extremism will be found and they are bound to be periodically re-animated, prompted by a number of circumstances, ‘the crisis’ being just one of them. But instead of shying away from that realisation by denying it or cursing it away with oppositional slogans, we have to understand that such ideas do circulate freely and they have been supported by many a people in our country, not to mention the complicity of many during the reign of the Colonels’ junta; aided and abetted by co-operation with and nostalgia for such ‘good times’ in the history of modern Greece. Anyone who has taken a cab, gone to a bar, dined with a distant relative, anyone who has lived in this country knows and will have heard such statements often enough to be robbed of the right to act surprised and/or shocked. Anyone who knows that history, either by researching it directly or through testimonies of the people who survived it, will also know that our very society did very little, or close to nothing towards successfully deciding how and/or whether to ‘deal with’ the actively involved sympathisers of and accomplices to the junta or the collaborationists during the Nazi occupation of Greece. An event, by the way, that did not simply coincide with, but effectively prepared the ground for the country’s blood-stained civil war; for most countries World War II lasted for five or six years, in Greece it lasted for another four. No one can pretend that this is ‘news’, or that these ideas are now extinct and when they re-emerge we need to be shocked; whoever does so, must do so at her own peril and by accepting her responsibility for being hypocritical, ignorant and therefore irrelevant.

What now?

Having so far attempted to outline the complexities, contradictions and tensions inherent in the Golden Dawn trials as well as in their interpretation, it seems particularly urgent to open up a discussion on what I propose, not as a sociologist and definitely not as an expert of any kind, but as someone involved in an emotional relationship with the pleasures and frustrations of political life, armed with an aspiration to use civic principles of associational life as a potent mould with which to (re)fashion a political reaction/response to such events. By means of a disclaimer, let me just say that I use ‘civic principles’ and ‘the powers of associational life’ to refer to a political realm outside party politics and ideological confines but one that aspires to and encourages participation in one’s polity for the sake of it, rather than to gain honorary badges, serve particular interests or act out politics from a pedestal or from the margins. My faith is neither in the ‘elites’, nor in the ‘masses’ but in the agora as an open public space that can assume many forms and invites us all to speak to each other candidly and with civility, thus affirming our humanity and recognising speech and action as ‘the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human’. Thus spoke Hannah Arendt (1998 [1958]: 176) who saw in political deliberation and action the powers of making a life in common as human beings that are accountable, responsible and, by necessity, reducible to each other. If I were Gramsci (1929), I would call this agora ‘civil society’, and if I were Habermas (1962) I would refer to it as ‘public sphere’. What the three terms have in common is their intent to find communicational, dialogic solutions to political problems, contending that it is through ‘communicative action’ that any ‘structural transformation of the public sphere’ may be(come) possible, and that open public spaces can be found(ed) anywhere insofar as they are imbued with a willingness [9] to speak and to listen.

This process of articulating politics as a medium for making sense of each other together through dialogue, is likened here to a moral and political grammar in order to suggest a shift not just in the mood but also in the mode in which politics is spoken and heard in debates that surround such events in Greece. Like Arendt (1998 [1958]: 176) I
am inclined to believe that ‘[a] life without speech and without action is literally dead to the world’ so lacking a moral and political grammar to articulate speech and action with, is bound to lead us to our own extinction as political animals. This is an admittedly dark interpretation made even more sombre by my fear that the Golden Dawn trials have provided us with a hinge-moment, an affective point in which we find ourselves at the intersection of more light or more darkness as illustrated visually by the astronomical phenomenon of civil dawn where some fascinating glimmer of light is still visible before the sky casts its darker curtain on us. Less poetically put, we can either continue to behave politically as we have been so far, therefore admitting that we are not at all perturbed by the possibility of similar events resurfacing, or we need to prepare ourselves for a different kind of politics; one of many being what I here call the politics of civil dawn, articulated as a moral and political grammar with which to participate in the public agora.

Towards a politics of civil dawn

In keeping with the idea and the metaphor of civil dawn, as outlined above, it seems important to stress that my reason for insisting upon it is to dramatise what I see as a pivotal moment, one that needs to be grasped and seized, and this discursive politics of civil dawn seems to me to offer a great opportunity for such politics of prehension, of grasping who ‘we’ are, who ‘the others’ are and why we find ourselves in each other’s arms. ‘We’ and ‘others’ are staged figures; ‘we’ are not Golden Dawn supporters, ‘others’ can indeed be, so (how) do we come to learn to talk to each other and what for? Is there something to be gained from such a process of talking to ‘the enemy within’? My answer is a disconcerting ‘yes’. But first we need to recognise that others exist, will keep on existing and trying to exterminate them symbolically (through language) or physically (through violence) will yield no results, other than the intensification of hatred and violent collision, a state of ‘being’ that is closer to ‘nothingness’ and to a wasteland, than it is to a democratic polity. And, to make matters worse, we will know that we have all failed in our efforts to establish what we think is right, appropriate, good and true to our humanity because we failed to make room for ‘the other’ however repulsive she may be.

What I am therefore proposing in the remainder of this article is that we establish a different way of being ‘us’ which can then also alter what and who the ‘others’ are. In my conception of politics, the very gamble of social life is to understand, recognise and find ways to deal with the reality that we need to learn how to live with people who are unlike us therefore relying on our skill as political animals to remind ourselves not just that ‘nothing that is human can be foreign to us’ but also that ‘nothing that is foreign to us can be real’ to paraphrase Sennett (2011: 87). Reality is our common humanity, the rest we need to negotiate peaceably (with words) rather than barbarically (with violence). Besides, as Richard Sennett (2011: 87) recalls, was the Japanese President Nakasone not right to assert that ‘[o]nly those who understand one another can make decisions together’? Failing that, everything else is destined to failure too. This of course points to something extremely difficult to achieve and it requires immense imaginative and progressive powers for making sense of politics as a peacable agreement to recognise ourselves and others by finding a way to live together with tension and conflict, but without recourse to the dehumanising effects or violence or the mobilisation of emotions that run high but don’t run deep if they intend to cancel out what we have in common (a lot) than what divides us (very little). Hopefully my reflections on some recurring responses to the process and the outcome of the trials (still pending), might make all this just a little bit clearer.

Just as it is paradoxical, if not entirely farcical, to celebrate with a feeling of elation the powers of democracy in a country where we have historically invested very little in it, unless by democracy we mean its very splintering into a myriad of political factions that then and only then we can identify with the idea of democracy somehow, it is equally laughable to feel a sense of relief following the arrest of Golden Dawn members. The reason is that locking ‘them’ up becomes synonymous to denying that ‘they’ exist, that ‘they’ were democratically elected by 400,000 of our compatriots, and that ‘they’ have supporters who don’t feel the way ‘we’ do about these arrests. Denying that ‘they’ exist makes ‘us’ forget that ‘they’ actually do exist and repentance hardly ever happens, and hardly should ever happen by being confined to a cell. If anything, imprisonment, humiliation and torture may weaken someone’s body, sense of pride and amour propre but it will hardly weaken one’s resolve if that someone is determined to ‘do things’ with her ideas (experiences of political prisoners during the Greek junta demonstrate both points rather vividly).
Am I suggesting then that ‘they’ should be left free to roam the streets of Athens with burning torches and the intention to attack anyone who is ‘unlike them’? Definitely not! But what I am pointing out is that locking anyone up amounts to a decorative gesture, not a substantial one as the story of Pandora’s casket teaches. Keeping a lid on things we dislike hardly means that the cabinet of evils that resides in the box won’t spill out again sometime, sooner or later. Instead of celebrating the capture of people that we don’t like, might we not have faith in our civil powers as citizens to face, discuss and deal with the problem of far-right extremism uncuffed? To rely on the prison cell as a solution means we can’t and it also means that we fail to envision alternatives. Abominable though ‘their’ acts of violence may be to ‘us’, what are ‘we’ actually doing to eliminate them? Leaving the answer in suspension, here’s what I think we haven’t been doing, and what I propose we should be doing instead.

I

Above all, I wish to let out a plaintive cry against ex cathedra denunciations of evil that only succeed in making us feel comfortable in our display of self-righteous indignation towards ‘their’ evil acts and invite us instead to (a) develop political skills that go beyond waving flags, shouting slogans and sounding out clichés, (b) resist ideology in favour of taking ownership of our polity, ourselves, our situation and our relationship with and towards ‘others’ and (c) recognise our role in the making of democratic processes expecting them to happen through the mobilisation of our own political will, rather than rely on our elected representatives who can and will do only as much.

II

This requires an ability to understand that nothing will be ‘done and dusted’ or ‘gone and busted’ just because we keep it locked up in some safe place or simply because it is being cursed away voodoo-style as if it is an evil spirit. Such thinking confuses politics with sorcery and is of use only in superstitious rituals, not in deliberative politics.

III

A fair degree of maturity and wisdom is also desperately needed to conceive of political ideas as verbal, symbolic, cultural agreements that we need to forge as ends in themselves rather than instrumentally as ‘he who seeks liberty in anything more than liberty itself is destined for servitude’ to use a phrase from Tocqueville that hardly ever stales (see Lerner, 1969: 71).

IV

Ideological posturing, ontological constraints, fanaticism and prejudice are of very little help in such a process as they fail to recognise politics as an ongoing process, treating it as either a lost realm or as something to be conquered like a war trophy. Such sentiments atrophy political thought and debase political action in a way that using our communicative powers to negotiate our polity doesn’t.

One way of doing so is to apply such powers and discursive political skills to re-think our relationship with our recent historical traumas by finding ways to heal them, not through anguished revenge or violent retaliation but through making a restorative political resource out of opening those issues up for discussion properly as a historical first in Greek history. In the following and final section of this article I will dwell precisely on those concerns, drawing on examples where such attitudes to healing and traumas have been mobilised and discussed in relation to political violence, atrocities and shocking, evil, irreparable harms committed on a relatively mass scale on four different occasions, namely the tribunals of ‘collaborationists’ in post-Occupation France, the scars left from the bitter animosities between the two sides of the Berlin Wall, post-apartheid South Africa and September 11, 2001. Suffice to say that these events are not just randomly selected but specifically alluded to because they have been surrounded by truly awesome scholarship that sought to look deeper into those events and their aftermath.
Towards a ‘new’ emotional education for politics?

‘I want to write the moral history of the men of my generation or, more accurately, the history of their feelings. It’s a book about love, about passion; but passion such as can exist nowadays—that is to say, inactive’.

This is how Gustave Flaubert (1982: 80) describes the theme of his seminal oeuvre, Sentimental Education, in 1864 to fellow author Marie-Sophie Leroyer de Chantepie. The quote is telling, not as a piece of biographical trivia in the history of French realism but for what we might make of it as an observation on the instability and complexity of human emotions, especially in turbulent times. Flaubert sets the scene in the revolution of 1848, an event that upset not just the self-centred psyche of Frédéric Moreau but the whole of Europe which found itself negotiating its place in the emergence and crisis of modernity. To liken the backdrop of the Golden Dawn trials to ‘the year of revolutions’ in (most of) Europe, would of course be fanciful and this is not what I am attempting. What I am keen to explore however is the interweaving of emotions in political reflection and political reaction suspecting that there is a fine line between where the one realm ends and the other begins. The main emphasis of this final part of the current article is to interpret the emotional reactions to the Golden Dawn trials through the lens of one emotion (revenge), four historic events (see above) and a suggestion towards healing past and present traumas through a politics of discursive reconciliation.

Hannah Arendt (1958: 241), who spent most of her scholarly life dissecting the human condition, described revenge as ‘the natural, automatic reaction to transgression’, a remark echoed in more graphic terms by Ellis Cose (2004: 65) who referred to the same emotion as a ‘fiend who cackles wickedly, uncontrollably’, while political theorist Judith Shklar (1990: 93) calls it ‘an insatiable urge of the human heart’. Against such descriptions of revenge as an instinct, an appetite, an impulse, or an insatiable desire, Simone de Beauvoir cautioned against avenging injury with injury showing revenge to be ‘a complex social emotion and one that is almost always doomed to failure’ (see Kruks 2012: 154). Beauvoir was writing about revenge at the backdrop of a period of tribunals (formal and informal) following the end of World War II where collaborationists of the Vichy regime of Marshal Philippe Pétain were called to testify for their wartime activity. In response to those trials, and particularly that of Robert Brasillach, de Beauvoir wrote the 1946 essay An Eye for An Eye and developed her theory on The Ethics of Ambiguity in 1948 where she sought to delve at length on the emotional responses to the whole process problematizing, among other things, the distinction between épuration légale (legal purge) and épuration sauvage (inofficial ad hoc purges). For Beauvoir ‘revenge as a response to atrocity is almost always a failure on its own terms. For it cannot actually restore the prior situation or cancel out the prior suffering. Nor can it provide full moral satisfaction by establishing actual reciprocity’ (Kruks 2012: 160). To make matters worse, revenge as punishment ‘does not seek to prevent [the perpetrator] from committing new crimes, for if one is able to punish him, this means he is already beyond the condition where he could do further wrong. Nor is it a matter of making an example...Thus, vengeance is not justified by realistic considerations’ concludes Beauvoir (in: Kruks, 2012: 160). If then, à la Beauvoir, vengeful retribution is an existential, legal and political failure mobilised as it were on behalf of oneself, on behalf of others and/or in the context of legal persecution, could there be an alternative in sight?

Taking a lead from Sonia Kruks’ (2012) excellent chapter on the question of revenge, and attempting a chronological leap forward into post-apartheid South Africa, the notion of restorative justice emerges as a plausible alternative emerging through the setting up of truth and reconciliation commissions that urged surviving victims of and other affected individuals by atrocity to be ‘healed through reconciliation and forgiveness’ (Kruks, 2012: 176). Although such have been established after mass atrocities in many countries, from Peru to East Timor, the best and perhaps most influential example comes from the South African Commission chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu who described the commission as engaging in ‘restorative justice which is concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships-with healing, harmony and reconciliation’ (Kruks, 2012: 176).

The third example returns us to the Old Continent and a few years back from apartheid South Africa to the
reunification of Berlin in 1989 and the efforts made to restore the building of the city's archaeological museum, what is now known as the Neues Museum, as a place of and for the collective memory of the Berliners. Richard Sennett (2012: 216-8) describes how its restoration by British architect David Chipperfield raised 'deeply unsettling' questions about 'how much did Berliners want to remember, how much did they want to forget?' and about the extent to which restoration should 'somehow register, preserve [and] narrate the trauma' through which both the building and Berlin's citizens had passed. Instead of blotting out the trauma, Chipperfield and his associates chose a revealing through healing approach by deciding not to hide but to show and restore war damage in some of the rooms of the museum so that it becomes possible to see the effects of the bombing.

Our last example in this short exploration of trauma and how it can be managed culturally and socio-politically, comes from the aftermath of 9/11 and Judith Butler's (2006) passionate book-length essay on 'the powers of mourning and violence' as viable resources with which to do politics, following violent attacks. In a similar vein to Beauvoir, Butler (2006: xix) cautions against mourning as 'resolved through violence, it seems clear that violence only brings on more loss and the failure to heed the claim of precarious life only leads, again and again, to the dry grief of an endless political rage'. Instead, she makes a case for using loss and vulnerability as potent raw materials to make use of in the post-violence period maintaining that both loss and vulnerability are essential human emotions which 'seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing some attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure' (Butler, 2006: 20). This is a complicated statement, reflecting perhaps the complicated nature of social emotions in the face of tragic events, but Butler's (2006: 49) point is articulated with more clarity when she explores the basis of our common, human interdependence; 'I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you'. This could well be mistaken for a love poem were it not a passage from a political treatise on violence, loss and mourning. What Butler aims to problematize and insists on is the importance of and for a politics of 'living together', which she illustrates with reference to the word Ta'ayush in Arabic, asking 'what do we make' of it as a political resource (Butler, 2006: 116). Ta'ayush as a word that stresses 'living together' appears to Butler (2006: 118) as 'an amazing learning experience' for democracy and for responding to 'times of crisis'. Though it has 'no office, no official positions, it is democracy at work' asking that we 'maintain dialogue and work together' towards creating a 'real community' thus dislodging pervasive assumptions that keep us apart.

Drawing on such ideas that counsel against the immediacy of emotion and rather advise calm, political reflection in association with developing dialogic, communicational responses in the face of adversity, I suspect that there is indeed something very extraordinary in the four examples here considered, at least as a call to and an open invitation for a process of healing deep historical, existential, cultural and socio-political traumas that have been haunting the political landscape of my native Greece for the most part of its recent history. Those bitter animosities are exactly the stuff that fills the proverbial Pandora's casket, and each time those 'wicked' political 'fiends' are liberated, chaos ensues and amidst such chaos we lose the capacity to think of each other as interdependent and or human and lose sight of the implicit agreement we have made or have yet to make for living together differently, with less or no misery, a plea that (coincidentally) applies both to [10]society and sociology by equal measure (see Bauman, 2000: 79-90). 'Vengeance', de Beauvoir (in Kruks, 2012: 160) reminds us, has no place in such a process as anything either than 'a luxury' while restoration and repair appear as an urgent necessity; 'since the evils of atrocity cannot be allowed to sink silently, unacknowledged, into historical oblivion we must continue to seek repair', not through revenge but through forgiveness. 'But as we do so we must recognise, with Beauvoir, the element of wager that is present in all action and that "failure is a condition of life itself"' (Kruks, 2012: 180).

Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music. Recent publications are featured on the British Sociological Association's Postgraduate Theory Forum and on The Sociological Imagination blog on a
variety of issues ranging from the English riots, the idea of sociological imagination and the Eurozone crisis. In the spring of 2013 he achieved Associate Fellow status of the Higher Education Academy.

References:


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Habermas, J. (1991 [1962]) The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere MIT Press


Gone and busted, done and dusted? Notes towards a moral and political grammar of ‘civil dawn’ | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:22:05) [...] published at The Sociological Imagination on October 14, [...]  

We Need to Talk About Syriza | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:51:26) [...] Potami, socialist PASOK, conservative New Democracy, excluding only far-right LAOS, and neo-Nazi Golden Dawn as impossible [...]  

Crafting a postgraduate module: Digital by-product data and the social sciences (2013-10-15 08:00)  

Over the last two or three weeks I’ve been working on my postgraduate module ‘Digital by-product data and the social sciences’. The module ran for the first time last year and I’ve been trying to develop the content a bit for this year (it runs in the spring term). It’s actually been much easier to flesh out the reading lists this year. There have been quite a few relevant publications in the last twelve months. The module focuses upon the conceptual and methodological challenges and opportunities of digital by-product data and what these mean for the social sciences. So the material on digital culture and web cultures is useful for background reading, but I’ve tried to focus on readings that fit directly with the aims. It has become clear that this is a rapidly expanding area with more social scientists thinking about what they might do with digital data, and what the limitations might be. We are even now beginning to see this type of data being used to perform social science and to investigate substantive topics.  

Given that the students are seeing this development unfold, this is quite an experimental module. As well as getting the students to do readings, I also get them to imagine projects and to find and use bits of data. We then reflect on what this reveals and the problems and issues we might identify. We try to use more conceptual and critical accounts if these developments to frame the use of digital data. We also think about how these new data and methods might interface with more traditional approaches.
As well as adding a series of new readings, I’ve also been gathering podcasts, audio interviews and studios of talks. Many of these have been posted on this blog. Because of the connected and tech savvy nature of those interested in 'digital sociology', there is a variety of material available. So this year I’ve been able to add audio and audio/visual materials to sit alongside the readings and inform the seminar discussion (thanks in particular go to [1]Mark Carrigan for the work he has done producing podcasts that I’ve been able to link to). These podcasts really give a different dimension and have really helped in building up the depth of content.

This is the running order for the module:

1. Introduction: Data accumulation and the crises of social science
2. Software infrastructures and data harvesting
3. Researching a confessional society
4. The culture of visualisation
5. Drawing upon digital by-product data and networks
6. The new melodramatic imagination: an example of the sociology of mediated objects
7. Social media data aggregators and scraping
8. Data recursivity, the social life of methods and the social life of data

This post by Dave Beer was originally posted on [2]Thinking Culture - we’ve reposted it with his permission as part of our Sociological Craft Project. Find out more [3]here. If there’s an aspect of academic life you’d be willing to reflect upon for the project then please do get in touch!

1. http://markcarrigan.net/

Money, Power and Opportunity in the Late Modern City, or, isn’t it a shame J G Ballard isn’t around to see this? (2013-10-16 08:00)

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6niWzomA__So &w=640 &h=360]

This documentary by [1]Alex Gibney, director of [2]the Corporation amongst others, takes as its starting point the disjuncture between Park Avenue Manhattan and the other Park Avenue over the river in the Bronx. The former is home to some of the wealthiest people in the country whereas the latter is a site of endemic deprivation:
40 Park Ave, New York City, is home to some of the wealthiest Americans. Across the Harlem River, 10 minutes to the north, is the other Park Avenue in South Bronx, where more than half the population needs food stamps and children are 20 times more likely to be killed. In the last 30 years, inequality has rocketed in the US – the American Dream only applies to those with money to lobby politicians for friendly bills on Capitol Hill.

It’s a startling and provocative documentary. However I would have enjoyed more reflection both upon how such affluence and poverty can co-exist within the context of the city and the everyday lives of the super-rich. This co-existence has always fascinated me about London, as the only world city I’ve ever lived in or really know to any meaningful extent. It’s also something which is increasingly under threat, as ‘reforms’ of housing benefit look likely to create a situation which even prominent conservatives have described as a [3] ‘social cleansing’ within the city. Given the absence of rent controls (and their continual failure to even enter into debate as a possibility) and soaring house prices, as the global elite desperately seek relatively safe investments, housing benefit paid to those on low incomes has led to far higher payments in London then elsewhere in the country. These effective subsidies to private landlords are now being capped, with the likely implication being a large demographic restructuring of the population of London. But obviously the wealthy denizens who remain still need people to serve them... this perhaps is where the lives of the rich and the poor intersect most in an otherwise divided city. But what are these everyday lives really like? We don’t actually know. But a fascinating project being undertaken by a team from Goldsmiths, KCL, LSE and York is investigating precisely this, as described by Roger Burrows in a post for the [4]LSE Politics Blog:

With few exceptions, the very wealthy have not been examined in any detail; this despite the signal increase in their numbers globally, including in Britain, and widespread popular interest in their (mis)fortunes. There is also the suggestion that the super wealthy are ‘moving away’ from the larger ranks of the professional middle classes, and our project is designed to take forward these concerns in a developed, systematic and substantial way.

The number of individuals who might be considered as ‘super-rich’ can be operationalized in any number of different ways and as part of this project we will examine a range of these. One sensitizing conceptualisation is that offered in a 15-year series of reports by Capgemini and Merrill Lynch. These analyses distinguish between High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) and Ultra-HNWIs (UHNWIs). HNWIs are defined as people who hold financial assets in excess of $1 million – so this excludes residences, collectables, consumer durables and consumables. In 2010 there were estimated to be some 10.8 million HNWIs globally with wealth totalling $42.7 trillion. UHNWIs – a subset of this group – are defined as those who have financial assets of $30 million or more. In 2009 it was estimated that there were just 78,000 such people across the globe (but holding over one-third of total HNWI wealth). The geographical spread of HNWIs is much as might be expected: 31 per cent in North America; 31 per cent in the Asia-Pacific; 29 per cent in Europe; with the residue located in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

The few empirical social scientific studies of the super-rich that do exist tend to be nested within the long tradition of studies of elites. This is an important literature, which informs our work, but the existing conceptual tool kit that this tradition provides, focused on corporate interlocks and social network closure, needs to be radically re-worked to allow an analysis of the dynamism and complexity of the materially rich metropolitan and globally-oriented class now inhabiting significant sections of global cities like London – home to a disproportionate number of the world’s billionaires.

[...]
In addition to exploring the extent of proactive socio-spatial dis/engagement by the affluent we will also set out to explore the extent and forms of attachment (if any) that wealthy individuals and households have to specific neighbourhoods and urban centres. Do they, for example, develop similar forms of ‘elective belonging’ as spatially mobile members of the middle classes? While the degree to which genuinely super-rich households are ‘footloose’ has often been cited in political debates about inequality and the taxation system, there is little in the way of empirical evidence to help adjudicate on the matter. How important is attachment to neighbourhood in ‘holding’ the rich ‘in place’? This is a significant question if we are to better understand the degree to which the super-rich feel that lifestyle and urban services are substitutable at urban and international levels. Linked to this concern we note the somewhat scant knowledge we currently possess about the links that the contemporary urban rich have with the arts; to galleries and other distinctive service infrastructures – the kind of ‘soft’ attributes of place often identified as influential in attracting a creative and innovative milieu.

Nothing is as emblematic to me of the long term trajectory of London than One Hyde Park. This once-in-a-life-time investment opportunity offered to the world by [6]Christian and Nick Candy quickly smashed records when its incomprehensibly expensive and gaudily decorated apartments went on the market after years of hype.

But the ownership of the apartments is shrouded in a veil of secrecy. Plus the owners are not actually there:

Designed by the architect Lord Richard Rogers, who also designed London’s iconic Lloyd’s building, One Hyde Park has divided Britain. Gary Hersham, managing director of the high-end real-estate agency Beauchamp Estates, says it is “the finest building in England, whether you like the style or you don’t,” while investment banker David Charters, who works in Mayfair, says, “One Hyde Park is a symbol of the times, a symbol of the disconnect. There is almost a sense of ‘the Martians have landed.’ Who are they? Where are they from? What are they doing?” Professor Gavin Stamp, of Cambridge University, an architectural historian, called it “a vulgar symbol of the hegemony of excessive wealth, an over-sized gated community for people with more money than sense, arrogantly plonked down in the heart of London.”

The really curious aspect of One Hyde Park can be appreciated only at night. Walk past the complex then and you notice nearly every window is dark. As John Arlidge wrote in The Sunday Times, “It’s dark. Not just a bit dark—darker, say, than the surrounding buildings—but black dark. Only the odd light is on. . . . Seems like nobody’s home.”

That’s not because the apartments haven’t sold. London land-registry records say that 76 had been by January 2013 for a total of $2.7 billion—but, of these, only 12 were registered in the names of warm-blooded humans, including Christian Candy, in a sixth-floor penthouse. The remaining 64 are held in the names of unfamiliar corporations: three based in London; one, called One Unique L.L.C., in California; and one, Smooth E Co., in Thailand. The other 59—with such names as Giant Bloom International Limited, Rose of Sharon 7 Limited, and Stag Holdings Limited—belong to corporations registered in well-known offshore tax havens, such as the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Liechtenstein, and the Isle of Man.
From this we can conclude at least two things with certainty about the tenants of One Hyde Park: they are extremely wealthy, and most of them don't want you to know who they are and how they got their money.


Is this the future of the city? Luxurious developments owned by absentee landlords who have purchased them as investments, tended to by an army of service staff bussed in from the periphery of the metropolis. There's something about the vacated nature of One Hyde Park which grips me (and not in a good way) given this vacuity - in more than one sense - goes hand-in-hand with all the staff on call. As a metaphor for the economic structure of neoliberal capitalism, it's a grim one which, unless something changes, could become ever more accurate.


Money, <b>Power</b> and Opportunity in the Late Modern City, or, isn't it a <b>...</b> - Compassion Contact (2013-10-30 22:08:35)

[...] Read More: Money, <b>Power</b> and Opportunity in the Late Modern City, or, isn't it a <... [...]}

<b>Narrowly escaping the academic life</b> (2013-10-17 08:00)

This really struck a chord with me given my continued ambivalence about a career in academia:

With my new eyes I re-survey the life around me. Most particularly I become frightened to realize how close I came to letting myself slide into the academic life. It would have been effortless ... just keep on making good grades—(I probably would have stayed in English—I just don't have the math ability for Philosophy)—stayed for a master's and a teaching assistantship, wrote a couple of papers on obscure subjects that nobody cares about, and, at the age of sixty, be ugly and respected and a full professor. Why, I was looking through the English Dept. publications in the library today—long (hundreds of pages) monographs on such subjects as: The Use of "Tú" and "Vous" in Voltaire; The Social Criticism of Fenimore Cooper; A Bibliography of the Writings of Bret Harte in the Magazines + Newspapers of California (1859–1891) ... Jesus Christ! What did I almost submit to?!?


2140
Deadline TOMORROW - CfP BSA 2014 (2013-10-17 12:00)

BSA Annual Conference 2014: Changing Society

Call for Papers
Theory Stream Submissions
This stream welcomes abstracts on any aspect of theory as well as abstracts for the following Study Groups:

- Bourdieu
- Historical and Comparative Sociology
- Realism and Social Research
- Weber

The Realism and Social Research group would also like to invite abstracts under the theme "What is Realism for?"

The group is particularly interested in papers that consider any of the following issues:

- The relevance of realist theory to substantive social, economic and political issues.
- The practical implications of methodologically operationalising different forms of realist thought.
- Those from other schools of thought who wish to engage critically in a dialogue with realist theory.

How to submit
All abstracts and proposals for other events can be submitted online at:

The deadline for submission of abstracts is 18th October 2013.

For further information contact the Theory stream coordinators:
Gurminder K Bhambra E: [2]g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk
Tom Brock E: [3]T.Brock@mmu.ac.uk
Alternatively, contact the BSA Events Team E: [4]events@britsoc.org.uk

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa%20annual%20conference/submissions.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/bsa%20annual%20conference/submissions.aspx)
2. mailto:g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:T.Brock@mmu.ac.uk
4. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk
**Why Sociologists and Technologists Should Talk (2013-10-18 08:00)**

An interesting article from ZDNet (HT [1]Jean-Loup Richet) made a case for why all technologists should become technology sociologists. It contends that the question of how and why technology will be used tends to be occluded by the continual focus of technologists on the properties of the artefact itself:

> We've looked at the technology. But, no one is asking this vital question: "Why?"

Technologists never ask this question, and really we need to start.

> Or, maybe we do ask this question, but yet we still roll up our sleeves and get to work the moment our brain provides the answer "because it's cool!"

A non-technologist responds to many ideas that technologists posit with a simple phrase: "So what?"


I'm not sure if this means technologists should become technology sociologists. However I do think it illustrates the opportunities for productive collaboration which are increasingly open to sociologists. Hopefully this is something which the growth of digital sociology can help encourage and normalise, though I know these collaborations already happen nonetheless. I think it's also important to hear from sociologists working in industry whose experience can often be marginalised or entirely overlooked from within the academy.

Every one of us at some point has sat down with a significant other, or a colleague, and fallen into the mire of assumed technical knowledge, and a "solution first" mindset. This is what technologists do because our desire is to build not use.

The scenario above, all that user wanted to do was take a picture of their kids and share it on Instagram. And everything we did got in the way of that. The sociological side — the sharing, the recording of memories, the social connection — that's the important bit. *The actual technology is never important.*

A technology sociologist sits at the crossroads between technology and sociology, much like a CTO sits at the crossroads between technology and the business's commercial needs.

To do good product design, all we have to do is strip away the stuff that seems cool and that we want to build, and that doesn't make our family and friends look at us with that quizzical look when we tell them about it.

They're the ones that need to say “that's cool”, not us.


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1. https://twitter.com/JeanLoupRichet
There are some excellent sociologists working in Microsoft, Xerox, Google, HP and other places - there are also some excellent sociologists working with these companies from, for example, Lancaster, Nottingham, Kings London and others. This is one area where ethnomethodologically informed ethnography has made a major contribution - the aim is to bridge the divide between the artefact and its context, explicating artefacts in context as used by society members. Forgive me, but my work with colleagues then at Edinburgh and Lancaster on co-realisation is an example of developing artefacts that aren't simply neat design ideas or explorations of the why of technology at work and play but situated at the edge of ethnography and design give what can be seen as work (or play) affording artefacts. So what? Technologists and sociologists are talking and have been for over two decades. We need to look at the links between social and computer science in higher education. How come few computer scientists know a great deal about the work of doing this or that and how come social scientists are often so marginal that synergies never arise? Talking with one senior member of faculty some years ago I was surprised to find that they formulated computer supported cooperative work as “like second life, that sort of thing. What’s the use?” There’s a long way to go but in commercial contexts these links are already in place.

Carrigan, Mark. Why sociologists and technologists should talk. Unos apuntes de porqué los profesionales de la creación de tecnologías deberían no sólo tener conceptos claros sobre sociología, sino lo enriquecedor que es contar con investigadores sociales para el desarrollo tecnológico y comprender mucho más que el usuario. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14326 [...]

How is wealth distributed in Britain today? (2013-10-19 08:00)

Guardian’s [1]animated infographic reveals the extent of monetary inequality in Britain in 2013. See it and compare your own ideals, perceptions and the reality.
The penny tree (Yorkshire Dales, Photo: the Idle Ethnographer 2006)

2. Thepennytree(Photo:IdleEthnographer2006)
Why Things Matter to People (2013-10-20 08:00)

Underlying this book is a simple proposition: things matter to people. As well as the thought and interaction which have been traditional objects of the human sciences, we also evaluate our relation to the world is one of concern. Andrew Sayer’s book is concerned with drawing out the theoretical and methodological implications for social science of recognising this irreducible dimension of lay normativity:

The most important questions people tend to face in their everyday lives are normative ones of what is good or bad about what is happening, including how others are treating them, and of how to act, and what to do for the best. The presence of this concern may be evident in fleeting encounters and mundane conversations, in feelings about how things are going, as well as in momentous decisions such as whether to have children, change job, or what to do about a relationship which has gone bad. These are things people care deeply about. They are matters of ‘practical reason’, about how to act, and quite different from the empirical and theoretical questions asked by social science. If we ignore them or reduce them to an effect of norms, discourse or socialisation, or to ‘affect’, we produce an anodyne account of living that renders our evident concern about what we do and what happens to us incomprehensible. (Sayer 2011: 2)

Sayer contends that the pervasive misdescription of lay normativity has contributed to the production of a social science which is both alienated and alienating. The tendency to treat concern “as if it were merely an incidental, subjective accompaniment to what happens” manifests itself in the hegemony of external description and the marginalisation of internal description. In doing so we “miss people’s first person evaluative relation to the world and the force of their evaluation”. However this is not a plea for the reintroduction of subjectivity and, in understanding why Sayer opposes this, we begin to apprehend the sophistication of the arguments which run through the book. His positive account has its roots in a meta-theoretical critique of the “whole series of flawed conceptual distinctions that obstruct our understanding of the evaluative character of everyday life”:

- Fact and value
- Is and ought
- Reason and emotion
- Science and ethics
For instance the conceptual distinction between is and ought obscures their interpenetration in the evaluative aspect of everyday life. We are, as he puts it, "needy, vulnerable beings, suspended between things as they are and as they might become, for better or worse, and as we need or want them to become" (Sayer 2011: 4). We might say that our subjective evaluative responses are objectively part of any state of affairs that can be studied and they are subjectively meaningful responses to objective circumstances. But in doing so the limitations of these concepts becomes clear, with clarity of expression rapidly lost as we strain against the tendency of these distinctions to foreclose certain ways of thinking and speaking. Another related example is the distinction between facts and values. Some try to avoid value judgements because they are understood to preclude objective assessment of facts. Others critique the ambition of an 'objective assessment of facts' because such an endeavour is seen to be impossible because unavoidably value-laden. Both these positions start from the assumption that objectivity and values are incompatible. Thus Sayer seeks to shed the conceptual structure which generates the problems rather than engaging in what he has elsewhere terms a 'PoMo flip' where a reaction to a problematic position involves a simple inversion and retains the conceptual structure which generated the problem in the first place.

One aspect of the book I found particularly thought provoking was Sayer's account of value. On his view values should be understood as past evaluations sedimented as present dispositions which we believe to be justified. This view sees value as "based on repeated particular experiences and valuations of actions" while also tending "recursively, to shape subsequent particular valuations of people and their actions, and guide that person's own actions". They are "habits of thinking to which we become committed or emotionally attached" (Sayer 2011: 26-27). This goes hand-in-hand with a broader argument that "we should think of normativity more in terms of the ongoing flow of continual concrete evaluation, and less in terms of norms, rules, procedures, or indeed decisions and injunctions about what one ought to do" (Sayer 2011: 97). This puts Sayer in conflict with someone like Elder-Vass who, despite a somewhat similar theoretical starting point, offers an account of normativity in terms of the causal power of social groups. As a number of people have pointed out, his concept of norm circles lacks a diachronic account. It might offer useful insight into whose action contributes to which social injunction at a particular point in time but it struggles to explain how this propensity to enforce norms comes about over time. To adequately explain the endorsing of norms requires an account of value. Without this it becomes difficult to comprehend what motivates normative behaviour unless we wish to argue that the norm circle effectively brings itself into being.

That said I’m still not sure precisely where I stand in relation to Sayer’s account but I find it interesting that three competing theories of normativity (Archer, Elder-Vass, Sayer) have emerged from within critical realism in the last decade. I find Sayer’s contribution extremely thought-provoking, partly because of the nuanced hostility to disciplinariness which pervades it. Early in the book he contrasts the often over-socialised view of individual action within social science to the under-socialised view of the individual which tends to dominate within philosophy. His intention in the book is to move beyond the conceptual frameworks which produce such methodological tendencies and to avoid the temptation to deal with the explanatory symptom rather than address the underlying theoretical malaise. But he does so through a careful unweaving of the meta-theoretical thread, rather than seeking to ‘philosophize with a hammer’. This becomes possible because of his sensitivity to the lay normativity of social scientists as persons i.e. he seeks to understand how and why, for instance, actual social scientists are moved to invest themselves in problematic notions of ‘objectivity’. In doing so the ‘carving up’ of the social world in terms of different disciplines comes to seem deeply problematic:
We need a ‘postdisciplinary’ perspective (Sayer, 200a). The conceptual problems that make it difficult to understand evaluative being are partly a product of the emergence of a division of academic labour in which each discipline imperialistically seeks to extend its parochial concerns to the exclusion of others, and each imagines that it is the most fundamental and insightful social science. The mutual hostilities between sociology (and anthropology), psychology, politics and economics serve to support various kinds of disciplinary reductionism that prevent us understanding the social world. The polarisation between oversocialized and undersocialized conceptions of individuals is the most obvious example. The divorce of normative from positive thought about society, through the separation of philosophy from the rest of social science, is another. A plague on all disciplinary imperialism and parochialism! If ‘postdisciplinary’ sounds a bit pretentious, it’s actually little different from the familiar pre-disciplinary social science of the eighteenth – and nineteenth century founders (Sayer, 200b). Although a social scientist myself, this research is based on a lengthy search within philosophy, particularly moral philosophy, for ways of overcoming social science’s difficulty with lay normativity in general, and ethical being in particular. I ask readers to be open to ideas and orientations from outside their own disciplines. (Sayer 2011: 14)

Why Things Matter to People is a rich and complex book. It is unavoidably filled with abstract terminology and at times Sayer’s frustration with the constraints of theoretical discourse is almost palpable – he deserves eternal credit for acknowledging early in the book that ‘lay normativity’ is a rather alienated way of describing its object. Nonetheless the entire project is animated by his concern to understand this everyday yet so frequently overlooked dimension of human life. For something so intrinsically abstract it’s also weirdly readable. I find the sensitivity with which Sayer does theory deeply admirable, as well as the clarity with which he writes about what it is he has done. The book is a pleasure to read and that’s something I have rarely found to be true of social theory, regardless of how accomplished the works in question might be. In short I can’t praise this book enough. Now I need to resist the urge to reread the whole thing when I only picked it up again to check a reference and ended up writing this post.

1. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/sayer.jpg

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[...] There’s a review I wrote of the book here: sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14330 [...]  

SheriO (2015-05-18 15:54:06)
Thanks for writing this review. I’ll have to try to read it. If thus social theory were applied to doctoral training how would doctoral study change? How could a doctoral program not produce disciples and universities function without them? I think that study would become multi-perspective and real world whereby instead of studying a discipline some real world phenomena could be studied...although it already is...Your thoughts on doctoral training without disciplines....There is a school of doctoral study in England that is not organized into disciplines but around 'pods'...so some reorganization against the disciplinary silo is happening..it is a training school for 'the sciences', not the social sciences...

Social Science and the Politics of Public Engagement (2013-10-20 16:32)

Social Science and the Politics of Public Engagement
Tuesday, January 28, 2014 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Open University Camden Centre, 1 - 11 Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London
In recent years new technology has begun to facilitate ever more novel forms of research practice across the social sciences. New opportunities for collaboration exist in an information environment that is being radically and rapidly restructured by digital communications. An increasingly digitalised culture increasingly produces 'by-product data' as an unintended secretion of everyday social practices while also dramatically reshaping the circulation of academic research within the wider world. Universities themselves are undergoing profound changes, some by deliberate design and others as unintended consequences of broader social changes originating elsewhere. Given such changes, it seems untenable to conceive of or enact 'public engagement' in a way which fails to account of the shifting grounds upon which those seeking to support particular versions of the public find themselves standing. The constitution of contemporary publics cannot be taken for granted nor can the stability of the context within which 'engagers' seek to act.

This event seeks to explore this unstable landscape through exploring a number of innovative projects which pursued novel forms of research practice while also being orientated towards those beyond the academy. Through a discussion of these projects, their methodological innovations and the publics that formed around them, the seminar will seek to shed light on emerging questions about the future(s) of social science, its contested politics and of its relations to emerging ideas and practices of public engagement. The event will address, amongst others, the following questions:

- In a post REF 2014 environment, what could and should a social science informed public engagement agenda be?
- How, specifically, might the social sciences intervene in and help shape the PE agenda in the next couple of years?
- How could social scientists collaborate, both with each other and with those innovating forms of PE in other domains, to re-make what PE means?
- How can a critique of institutionalized approaches to PE and impact be articulated with commitments to public activism, social justice, relevance and responsibility?

Speakers:

Keri Facer, Professor of Educational & Social Futures and AHRC Leadership Fellow for the Connected Communities Programme, based at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

Tim Newburn, Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at the London School of Economics.

Shamser Sinha, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Youth Studies at University Campus Suffolk.

More speakers TBC

Organisers:

Nick Mahony is Research Fellow and Co-Director Publics Research Programme, Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University. Nick leads the Creating Publics project which aims to 're-conceptualise public engagement with social science research in an age of emergent publics'. He is co-investigator on the RCUK-funded 'Catalyst' project and the ESRC-funded project 'Making publics across time and space'. With Dr. Hilde Stephansen, he is also currently building a new OpenLearn website called 'Participation Now'. At the heart of Participation Now is an evolving archive of contemporary participatory public engagement initiatives. The aim of this project is to support practitioners, researchers, students and citizens interested in new - participatory public engagement related - thinking, practice and innovation.

Mark Carrigan is a sociologist and academic technologist based at the University of Warwick. He edits the Sociological Imagination and co-convenes the BSA Digital Sociology and BSA Realism and Social Research groups. He is
a research associate at the LSE’s Public Policy Group and was formerly managing editor of the LSE’s British Politics and Policy Blog. His research interests include sociological theory, methodology, biographical methods, longitudinal qualitative research, asexuality, sexual culture and digital sociology.


Paul Krugman, Niall Ferguson and the norms of public intellectualism in a digital age (2013-10-21 08:00)

The academic blogosphere had been getting a bit boring ever since the [1]Chomsky and Zizek spat came to an end. Fortunately, Niall Ferguson decided a couple of days ago that it was time to take his longstanding feud with Paul Krugman to the next level in an [2]earnest essay, syndicated on the Huffington Post weirdly enough, which largely amounts to an extend accusation that Krugman is a bully who hides his frequent errors through the ferocity with which he is alleged to attack advocates of austerity.

Much of it is remarkably dull, with the end result of the countless hours Ferguson has clearly spent reading through the archives of Krugman’s blog looking remarkably like the sort of thing you find on pg 50 of a bad tempered debate thread on a bulletin board that takes itself far too seriously. In essence Ferguson is self-consciously pursuing this as a clash of public intellectuals concerning the norms of public intellectualism. But what’s remarkable is the banality of much of the discussion and I found it difficult not to wonder if the internet might have been spared this diatribe were Ferguson only to have become acquainted at the right moment with the xkcd cartoon on the left (which has personally saved me from becoming embroiled in pointless internet disputes on more occasions than I can count).

But while I utterly failed to engage with the body of Ferguson’s essay, it was hard not to be interested in the final section where he effectively got to his point after the long preamble:

So we public intellectuals should not brag too loudly when we get things right. Nor should we condemn too harshly the predictions of others that are subsequently falsified by events. The most that we can do in this unpredictable world is read as widely and deeply as we can, think seriously, and then exchange ideas in a humble and respectful manner. Nobody ever seems to have explained this to Paul Krugman. There is a reason that his hero John Maynard Keynes did not go around calling his great rival Friedrich Hayek a [3]”mendacious idiot” or a “dope”.


I assume he’s correct about this. Though that might be because they were friends rather than any inherent reticence
to name call on the part of Keynes. But nonetheless I’m interested to see how Krugman responds to this:

When Paul Krugman first began his attacks against me, he made it clear – as if almost proud of the fact – that he had read none of my books. (Quote: “I’m told that some of his [5]straight historical work is very good.”) This was a mistake on his part. I have read his books. If he had read mine, he would perhaps have thought twice about seeking to discredit me on the basis of a few articles and interviews.

Krugman’s unabashed ignorance of my academic work raises the question of what, in fact, he does read, apart from posts by the other liberal bloggers who are his zealous followers. There is a ratio that really would be good to have as a metric of the seriousness of a public intellectual. It is the ratio of words read to words written. Ideally, I would say, that ratio should be between 100 and 1000 to 1. But in the case of the Invincible Krugtron, I begin to suspect it has now fallen below unity. (When he does read a book, he mentions it in his blog as if it’s a special holiday [6]treat.)

In the past few days, I have pointed out that he has no right at all to castigate me or anyone else for real or imagined mistakes of prognostication. But the fact that Paul Krugman is often wrong is not the most important thing. It is his utter disregard for the norms of civility that is crucial here. I am not alone in being dismayed by Krugman’s [7]“spectacularly uncivil behavior”. It is “my duty, as I see it, is to make my case as best I honestly can,” Krugman has written, “not [to] put on a decorous show of [8]civilized discussion.” Well, I am here to tell him that “civilized discussion” matters. It matters because vitriolic language of the sort he uses is a key part of what is wrong with America today. As an eminent economist said to me last week, people are afraid of Krugman. More “decorous” but perhaps equally intelligent academics simply elect not to enter a public sphere that he and his parasitical online pals are intent on poisoning. I agree with Raghuram Rajan, one of the few economists who authentically anticipated the financial crisis: Krugman’s is [9]“the paranoid style in economics”:

All too often, the path to easy influence is to impugn the other side’s motives and methods ... Instead of fostering public dialogue and educating the public, the public is often left in the dark. And it discourages younger, less credentialed economists from entering the public discourse.

Where I come from, however, we do not fear bullies. We despise them. And we do so because we understand that what motivates their bullying is a deep sense of insecurity. Unfortunately for Krugtron the Invincible, his ultimate nightmare has just become a reality. By applying the methods of the historian – by quoting and contextualizing his own published words – I believe I have now made him what he richly deserves to be: a figure of fun, whose predictions (and proscriptions) no one should ever again take seriously.


And I’m finding it hard not to wonder about the read:written ratio of many authors now! Mine has diminished over the last couple of years but is still probably relatively healthy. The disturbing thought this provoked was that with the rise of eReaders, increasingly sophisticated reference managers and the move away from paper, the only practical obstacle to consistently measuring this is a lack of standardisation about what and how different people are reading. How long before the F(erguson) index comes to supplement the H index et al on Google Scholar profiles.....?
Inside the Mind of the Republican Party (2013-10-22 08:00)

For those such as myself who have been increasingly baffled by events in the US in recent weeks, this analysis of findings from six focus groups with political partisans within the Republican party makes for interesting reading. The full report is available online [1]here.

Understand that the base thinks they are losing politically and losing control of the country – and their starting reaction is “worried,” “discouraged,” “scared,” and “concerned” about the direction of the country – and a little powerless to change course. They think Obama has imposed his agenda, while Republicans in DC let him get away with it.

We know that Evangelicals are the largest bloc in the base, with the Tea Party very strong as well. For them, President Obama is a “liar” and “manipulator” who has fooled the country. It is hard to miss the deep disdain—they say the president is a socialist, the “worst president in history,” and “anti-American.” [..]

These are strong common currents in the Republican base, but the thinking and passions are very distinct and telling among the key blocs – and those have consequences for those who seek to lead.[2][2]

- **Evangelicals.** Social issues are central for Evangelicals and they feel a deep sense of cultural and political loss. They believe their towns, communities, and schools are suffering from a deep "culture rot" that has invaded from the outside. The central focus here is homosexuality, but also the decline of homogenous small towns. They like the Tea Party because they stand up to the Democrats.

- **Tea Party.** Big government, Obama, the loss of liberty, and decline of responsibility are central to the Tea Party worldview. Obama's America is an unmitigated evil based on big government, regulations, and dependency. They are not focused on social issues at all. They like the Tea Party because it is getting "back to basics" and believe it has the potential to reshape the GOP.

- **Moderates.** Moderates are deeply concerned with the direction of the country and believe Obama has taken it down the wrong path economically. They are centrally focused on market-based economics,
small government, and eliminating waste and inefficiency. They are largely open to progressive social policies, including on gay marriage and immigration. They disdain the Tea Party and have a hard time taking Fox News seriously.


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**The Dangers of Academic Digital Media Use (2013-10-23 08:00)**

One of our most popular posts last month was the [1]Dangers of Academic Blogging. Though we're hugely enthusiastic about academic blogging, it's clear that this is an important conversation for the emerging academic blogosphere. However the dangers are not restricted to academic blogging or to the unexpected career impact which it might have, as this article from [2]Savage Minds about the abuse faced by those engaging online makes clear:

I live a lot of my professional life online. I’ve been running a [3]personal research blog for over 5 years now, where I often post quite frank discussions of my experiences as a new academic. I have active scholarly [4]Twitter, [5]YouTube and [6]Google Plus accounts. I teach my students to use Twitter, YouTube, Blogger, Google Hangouts (among other social media) in class, and I run workshops where I teach my colleagues and other professionals to use these same tools effectively in their working lives.

So not only is my own professional identity quite exposed, but I’m also engaged in training others to make their identities equally—if not more—exposed. I do this because I am very familiar with the productivity of digitally-mediated communication. These media make possible relationships, idea sharing, knowledge making and forms of epistemological change that are exceptional. And yet they can also be deeply dangerous—something that I’ve become intimately familiar with over the last two years.

In 2011, just as I was finishing my PhD, I began to receive a series of private messages focused on my sexuality and appearance sent to my email and other personal online accounts direct from professional acquaintances of mine based at various institutions around the world. These tended to be detailed, fantasy-like descriptions, sometimes accompanied by photographs. There was no debate about the inappropriateness of such messages: they were explicit, sometimes verging on the perverted, often concerned with my physique and dress, or with asking me for certain favours which ranged from ‘cuddling’ with them to baking them cakes in recompense for their paid professional contribution to my academic projects.

I was so embarrassed about these communications and so confused about how to reply that I ignored them for nearly two years. However, when the fifth professional acquaintance of mine began to do the same to me in 2012, but this time on a more aggressive and persistent level, I responded by doing what I know best: investing in research on the topic.
I began to study other women who had been subjected to harassment via digital media. Some of these women will be familiar – [7] Anita Sarkeesian, [8] Mary Beard, [9] Caroline Criado-Perez – because their harassment has been incredibly public and often quite faceless. But I, in contrast, had virtually no public visibility, and I knew all of my harassers. More than this, all of my experiences had happened privately – through direct messaging – so the content was witnessable only to me.

The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology renews the collaboration between Sophie Fiennes and Slavoj Žižek in a film examining ideology in contemporary capitalism. It articulates itself through engagements with a whole sequence of films, interspersing original clips with striking recreations starring Žižek so as to create the bizarre but attention-grabbing effect of Žižek leading the viewer through the cinematic archive.

There are some fabulous moments. I found Žižek's analysis of Ramstein entertaining and insightful, with the gnawing worry I’ve had over years of going to punk gigs (“er wait isn’t there something a little bit fascist about the way this crowd operates?”) suddenly resolved through his account of the social psychology of a metal gig. His sudden appearance in an [3]aircraft boneyard was a jarring and effective way of making a point about trash as the real of capitalism which I’d never understood when I'd encountered it in his books. Plus I love his reading of Titanic and it was visually staged to wonderful effect in the film.

But this also gets to what frustrated me about the film: I’d encountered this reading many times before. I’m certain many seeing this film will have read more Žižek than I have and yet the great majority of the film’s arguments were familiar to me from his books and articles. This isn’t necessarily a criticism, not least of all because so much value could be found in the innovative presentation of the ideas, but what seemed to be a total lack of new intellectual material did nonetheless bother me a bit.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/NUKbhKV7Ia8
Paul Krugman recently published an insightful post on his blog reflecting on the conditions in which intellectuals operate in a digital age. In what seems to be an oblique response to his recent spat with Niall Ferguson, he suggests that academics shouldn't overestimate the normative weight of their credentials in the eyes of readers:

What a lot of people — academics, I'm sorry to say, in particular — don't seem to understand are the limits to what credentials get you, in principle and in practice.

Basically, having a fancy named chair and maybe some prizes entitles you to a hearing — no more. It’s a great buzzing hive of commentary out there, so nobody can read everything that someone says; but if a famous intellectual makes a pronouncement, he both should and does get a listen much more easily than someone without the preexisting reputation.

But academic credentials are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for having your ideas taken seriously. If a famous professor repeatedly says stupid things, then tries to claim he never said them, there's no rule against calling him a mendacious idiot — and no special qualifications required to make that pronouncement other than doing your own homework.

Conversely, if someone without formal credentials consistently makes trenchant, insightful observations, he or she has earned the right to be taken seriously, regardless of background.

One of the great things about the blogosphere is that it has made it possible for a number of people meeting that second condition to gain an audience. I don’t care whether they’re PhDs, professors, or just some guy with a blog — it's the work that matters.

Meanwhile, we didn’t need blogs to know that many great and famous intellectuals are, in fact, fools. Some of them may always have been fools; some of them are hedgehogs, who know a lot about a narrow area but are ignorant elsewhere (and are, in many cases, so ignorant that they don't know they're ignorant — a variant on Dunning-Kruger.) And some of them have, for whatever reason, lost it — I can think offhand of several economists, not all of them all that old, of whom it is common to say, "I can't believe that guy wrote those papers."

And let me add that believing that you can pull rank in this wide-open modern age is itself a demonstration of incompetence. Who, exactly, do you think cares? Not the readers, that's for sure.

What is valuable, visible & knowable in the emerging social economy?


10am-6pm, 11\textsuperscript{th} December 2013

Room MS.03, University of Warwick

Appeals to the ‘social’ today are everywhere: ‘social enterprise’, ‘social media’, ‘social neuroscience’, ‘social prescribing’, ‘social marketing’, ‘social analytics’, ‘social innovation’. This is thanks partly to the affordances of new techniques of accounting, network visualization and behavioural analysis, many of which take advantage of the ubiquitous digitization of market and non-market activity. The social world can be seen, quantified and influenced via new forms of expertise and data analytics. Managers, marketers and policy-makers make explicit appeals to the ‘social’, in order to sustain brands, rational decision-making, mental health and public goods.

How do we make sense of this? What is the ontology of the ‘social’ that is being appealed to, and how does it differ from the ‘social’ of 20\textsuperscript{th} century statistics, society and sociology? What methodologies are at work in rendering this form of sociality visible, measurable and governable? Is social network analysis now performative, as neo-classical economics has been described in the past? What power relations are latent in this new notion of the social, and to what extent is it in fact reducible to the economic after all – or, perhaps, the biological?

This conference brings together scholars working in economic sociology, science and technology studies, social studies of finance, social studies of Big Data and other fields, to address these questions. Confirmed speakers include:

• [3]Profesor Nikolas Rose - Kings College, University of London
Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman's discipline and commitment; schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do...
something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession. (Sennett, 2008, pp. 9)

In craftsmanship there is no ulterior motive for work other than the product being made and the processes of its creation ... the details of the craftsman's daily work are meaningful because they are not detached in his mind from the product of the work. The satisfaction he has in the results infuses the means of achieving it. (Mills, 2008, p.181)

1. Craft presupposes a connection between an individual's concerns, projects and practices. The meaningfulness of craft emerges from the relation between everyday activity and broader projects which matter to us. Craft necessitates a sense of 'ownership' of the overarching project. The project to which daily practice contributes must be one which matters to each given individual, regardless of how it was initially formulated.

2. Craft can be constrained by the ossification of practice, as habitual orientations towards the same old tools narrow the possible relations between projects and practices. Similarly new tools are amenable to craft because of the practical opportunities they entail for novel forms of activity.

3. Hierarchy is inevitably corrosive of this sense of ownership because of the fragility which characterises the relations between concerns, projects and practices.

4. Craft is usually suspended uneasily between internal and external goods. Standards internal to the activity at hand often co-exist with external motivations of requirement, recognition and renumeration. This is why the sociology of craft must take reflexivity as its starting point: craft cannot be reliably 'read back' from objective conditions or assumed to be an inevitable corollary to a particular sort of activity.

5. Taking the reflexive individual as a unit of analysis allows us to explore the tension between craft and labour (whether paid or unpaid) in terms of the interplay over time between structure and agency.

6. The concept of 'craft' provides a normative vantage point in terms of which we can critique actually existing organisations and the working conditions which they tend to foster.

Please keep up, Sociology (2013-10-27 12:29)

How can we have a real 'global dialogue' in a sociological discipline that is becoming increasingly censorious and elitist? In each major publication or event we wheel out the same theorists to regurgitate the same ideas. Textbooks and monographs are becoming repetitive, predictable and dull. The research and publication apparatus operates to railroad younger sociologists into using their research projects as default reproductive vehicles for the disciplinary elite's rather inadequate and in some cases obsolete theoretical frameworks. There are many good young thinkers
in our discipline, and there are certainly many good thinkers outside it. Continental philosophy is especially lively at
the moment; Žižek, Badiou, and Stiegler – along with political theorists such as Dean, psychoanalysts such as Bollas
and economists such as Keen – and numerous others across the globe are generating penetrative ideas we could use
to rethink core concepts such as ideology, subjectivity, desire, economic forces and the sociosymbolic order. Why
don’t we hear more discussions about ways in which we might incorporate some of these sparklingly brilliant ideas
into our discipline? The answer is that the elite theorists who guard the discipline’s ailing domain assumptions run a
tight ship. Access to the discipline's ethical and philosophical inner sanctum is heavily guarded. Anyone who thinks
otherwise should try getting a full-blooded critique of the discipline’s long-standing domain assumptions published
in a core journal.

In the absence of any real dialectical momentum in social theory we struggle to construct convincing explanations of
the advanced capitalist world as it is. For instance, at a time when we are coerced into suffering austerity to prop
up a 600-year-old banking system that we allegedly can't do without, and female billionaire Gina Rinehart recently
accused Australian workers of ruining the economy by refusing to work for $2 a day, why does sociology continue to
reproduce flawed and obsolete concepts such as ‘reflexive modernity’ and ‘hegemonic masculinity’? Should it not
strike us as odd that the vast majority of leftist sociologists in fact argue for nothing more radical than a slightly more
regulated and socially inclusive market economy, a genuflection to the ‘end of history’ rather than a move forward
towards something new and genuinely progressive? In the cultural realm, do these same sociologists not simply
enjoin us to be a little more tolerant towards each other in a socioeconomic system that is functionally dependent
upon competitive individualism and its hostile psychosocial forms? Is there no better and fairer form of economic
organisation and no higher social plane on which our class, ethnic and gender differences can be transcended? Can
there be no more movement in the World Spirit? Is this really the best we can do?

In sociology’s current liberal-empiricist paradigm, which limits us to the investigation of possible modes of inclusion in
an incorrigibly exclusive and hierarchal system, our deep fear of ideology and real politics ensures that our discipline
falls yet further behind in its attempts to make sense of the current conjuncture. Recently, British journalist Aditya
Chakraborty (2012) asked why sociologists had been largely silent in the aftermath of the Credit Crunch, and what
suggestions they might have for new ways of organising the socioeconomic order as neoliberalism crumbles. The
terrible truth is that our heavily policed, negativistic, economically illiterate and philosophically moribund discipline
had very little to say. It is sclerotic, languishing in the shadow of the past’s political failures while occasionally offering
attenuated critiques of neoliberalism’s most destructive excesses.

If we ever reach a stage where we are inclined to begin a process of paradigmatic renewal, how would we begin?
Firstly, we must stop dreaming that supposedly organic cultural forces are leading us to a fairer social order just
around the corner. We need to develop an ultra-realist ethnographic method that unsentimentally addresses the
world as it is, not as we would like it to be. The wave of protests that followed the economic crash is already dying
out, and we suspect that the key reason for this is that most people can see no coherent alternative way of organizing
the economy. In the absence of something different and compelling, populations remain mired in post-political
cynicism and depressive hedonia. Only when we grasp just how apolitical and consumer-fixated many individuals
have become can we begin the process of identifying a path forwards.

The dominant sociological paradigm cannot bring itself to admit that resistance to the system simply no longer exists
in an organic cultural form, and that divisive identity politics and the current concatenation of social movements
cannot generate the oppositional momentum once generated by universalist politics, even in its milder social
democratic forms underpinned economically by Keynesian capital controls. Simultaneously, we need to audit
current core theoretical concepts – especially those dealing with ideology and subjectivity – and begin to import and
construct anew. Our core journals, however, are resistant to such fundamental revision. We need to ramp up the
pressure in the current debate on the publishing system; do we go for open access or some sort of hybrid, and how
do we maintain quality whilst promoting greater freedom of thought?

In short, we must see the post-war intellectual period as a spent force, take from it what might be useful – probably considerably less than we once thought – and become a true intellectual community busy in the task of generating and circulating honest empirical data and truly reflexive theory. None of this is possible unless we extricate ourselves from our current position of servitor to failed left-liberal politics, a failure brought home by the current capitulation to austerity and the potential return of the very extremist politics that the liberal left fear. Until a new paradigm-shifting debate is up and running, we have little of worth to take to the public other than an endless procession of complaints about spatially bound instances of social inequality.

At the moment we are floundering in a catastrophist continuum dominated by frightened liberals. We have explained this at length elsewhere (see Hall, 2012; Winlow and Hall 2013), but, put very simply, we became so frozen with fear of the totalitarian power that blighted the mid-20th Century that we voluntarily dismantled the intellectual and political infrastructure that opposed, or even sought to regulate, liberal capitalism’s destructive dynamism. Now we face the return of the real conditions in which totalitarian reaction is more likely: geopolitical tensions, austerity, bankruptcy, humiliation, chronic insecurity and social hostility. If we are to have a ‘global dialogue’, let’s have one, but we must reorganise the sociological discipline in order that we can transcend its subtle and insidious mode of censorship.

Professor Steve Hall and Professor Simon Winlow are Co-Directors of the [1]Teesside Centre for Realist Criminology. They address these issues in greater depth in their book [2]Rethinking Social Exclusion: The End of the Social?

References

Chakraborty, Aditya (2012) ‘Economics has failed us: but where are the fresh voices’? Guardian Comment is Free, April 16th


1. http://www.tees.ac.uk/sections/Research/social_futures/criminological.cfm
2. http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book234101?subject=900&sortBy=defaultPubDate%20desc&fs=1

Vibrant Matter: A Feeling for Things (2013-10-28 08:00)

One of the most thought-provoking books I’ve read in recent months was [1]Vibrant Matter by Jane Bennett. While I’m still a little sceptical about some of the claims made in the book, it nonetheless had what I assumed was one of its desired effects by quite dramatically shaking me out of my intellectual habit of marginalising the non-human. This is the publisher’s blurb from the book and it effectively conveys the sophisticated eclecticism which was my defining impression of it:
In *Vibrant Matter* the political theorist Jane Bennett, renowned for her work on nature, ethics, and affect, shifts her focus from the human experience of things to things themselves. Bennett argues that political theory needs to do a better job of recognizing the active participation of nonhuman forces in events. Toward that end, she theorizes a "vital materiality" that runs through and across bodies, both human and nonhuman. Bennett explores how political analyses of public events might change were we to acknowledge that agency always emerges as the effect of ad hoc configurations of human and nonhuman forces. She suggests that recognizing that agency is distributed this way, and is not solely the province of humans, might spur the cultivation of a more responsible, ecologically sound politics: a politics less devoted to blaming and condemning individuals than to discerning the web of forces affecting situations and events.

Bennett examines the political and theoretical implications of vital materialism through extended discussions of commonplace things and physical phenomena including stem cells, fish oils, electricity, metal, and trash. She reflects on the vital power of material formations such as landfills, which generate lively streams of chemicals, and omega-3 fatty acids, which can transform brain chemistry and mood. Along the way, she engages with the concepts and claims of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Thoreau, Darwin, Adorno, and Deleuze, disclosing a long history of thinking about vibrant matter in Western philosophy, including attempts by Kant, Bergson, and the embryologist Hans Driesch to name the "vital force" inherent in material forms. Bennett concludes by sketching the contours of a "green materialist" ecophilosophy.

There was a recent seminar at Birkbeck exploring Bennett’s work and I was pleased to learn that the event was recorded (HT [2]David Beer) and the podcasts are now [3]available online. Here’s the description of the event:

The work of the political theorist Jane Bennett (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore) over the last decade has consistently drawn attention to and had a feeling for things, for the inorganic, and for the agency or quasi-agency of nonhuman actants. Her project of developing a new political ecology and renewed vitalist thought beginning with Thoreau's *Nature: Ethics, Politics and the Wild*, *Modernity and Political Thought* (1994) was further developed in *The Enchantment of Modernity: Crossings, Energetics and Ethics* (2001)and found its fullest expression in *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) a book which has thoroughly reshaped the way in which we think about landscape, ecology, matter, vitality and the terrain of continental philosophy in a time of critical climate change.

This event makes the writing of Jane Bennett a vibrant matter for discussion across the fields of philosophy, psychosocial studies, political theory, cultural studies, literary theory, visual theory and performance studies among others. In particular, the focus will be on how Bennett’s explorations of vitalism, anthropocentrism, agency, biopolitics and new materialisms contribute to the emerging and fraught conversations between feminist and queer theory, Object Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism.

This workshop will discuss the intersections between Bennett’s political thought, OOO and feminist/queer theory featuring responses from Eileen Joy, João Florêncio, Nigel Clark, Eszter Timár, Lisa Baraitser and Michael O’Rourke.

2. [http://thinkingculture.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/the-audio-from-a-workshop-on-the-writings-of-jane-bennett](http://thinkingculture.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/the-audio-from-a-workshop-on-the-writings-of-jane-bennett)
In this podcast Les Back talks to Charlynne Bryan about her experience of taking part in the project Les undertook with Shamser Sinha which explored the possibility of a more 'sociable sociology'. This project experimented with treating participants as co-authors and Charlynne reflects on her experiences of engaging with the opportunities and risks attached to participating in a project of this sort.

You can read more about the project [here](http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2013/10/a-feeling-for-things-a-conversation-around-the-work-of-jane-benne/):
Combining insights from Stuart Hall’s recent writings and Franz Fanon’s lesser-known essays, the article argues that new hierarchies of belonging are established that replay aspects of colonial racism but in a form suited to London’s postcolonial situation.

2. http://ecs.sagepub.com/content/15/2/139
3. http://ecs.sagepub.com/content/15/2/139

How Twitter is Ruining America (2013-10-29 08:00)

It’s far from an original sentiment to claim that social media is having a corrosive effect on the fabric of social life. But [1]this article from the Atlantic makes an intriguing argument about the impact of Twitter on the social psychology of electoral politics and the ramifications this has for social cohesion:

Political candidates and politicians have always surrounded themselves with fans, of course. They’ve often, as The Washington Post’s [2]Ezra Klein lamented, put on blinkers when it comes to the feedback they want to receive and the media they use to receive it. But there’s something about social media — the clustering of opinion, the immediacy, the sense of hearing directly from people — that seems qualitatively different. Klein’s point in the article linked above is that the proliferation of partisan news outlets allows an elected official (or [3]a member of the Supreme Court) to easily seek out only affirmative information. But Klein neglects to notice that every Facebook account and tweet and retweet is itself a news outlet, as that social media company employee at The Baffler’s bar points out. The filter provided by journalism is an accident that became essential, a way of providing information and perspective that people once couldn’t otherwise get. It is and has always been word-of-mouth brought to scale. The difference between you saying what you saw in Dallas on November 22, 1963, and what the Associated Press reporter saying what he saw was that the number of people that heard the reporter was much, much larger. Journalism has always said, "You may not have known this." You may not have known that the restaurant you gave five stars on Yelp just failed its health department inspection. Or: You may not have known that the NSA is collecting information about every phone call you make. The official media outlets that existed when, say, Thomas Jefferson was president were more partisan than those today. But Jefferson had to work with his political opponents, had to spend time with them, had to hear their opinions in a way that Ted Cruz does not. Collins’ point isn’t just that the media is bifurcated. It’s that we can all, any of us, live in a world in which the majority of what we hear is what we want to hear.

Our Most Popular Posts This Week (2013-10-29 16:14)

[1] The Sociological Imagination Revisited


[3] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[4] Please keep up, Sociology


[6] The world as you've never seen it before

[7] 35 reasons why you should blog about your research


[9] The Dangers of Academic Digital Media Use

[10] Social Science and the Politics of Public Engagement
The Future of Scholarly Publishing (2013-10-30 08:00)

What does the future hold for scholarly publishing? Most would agree that the present system is unsustainable yet there remains little consensus on what could and should replace it. Patrick Dunleavy at the LSE Impact Blog makes a [1]compelling case as to the widening scope for disintermediation. Or in other words: what’s the point of scholarly publishers when universities are increasingly able to perform these functions themselves?

Yet now journal articles are all online, most serious or major books will move into electronic format, and scholarly work will become a fully digital product (Weller, [2]2011). Add in open access and the possible scope for disintermediation widens dramatically. Many large publishers are still charging around $2700 for an open access paper in a good journal, while the sustainable future rate will probably be around $600. This is a huge premium, and it is not going to do academic publishers’ already battered reputations any good at all to try to defend it. Serious, big universities will be thinking, are already thinking – why don’t we publish digitally and open access ourselves? All that academics at (for instance) Stanford, Harvard, Imperial or LSE get from being published in prestigious journals is the certification of peer review, itself an increasingly battered and replaceable currency. Yet top universities could organize their own conventional peer review processes economically and effectively, much as they do for PhD examining in the UK, using a system of mutual service and support. All the rest of the piece – getting articles publicized by twitter and blogs, providing a well-edited product, delivering the article to any PC, phablet or colour printer in the world – can be done easily and cheaply by universities themselves. Online communities are already doing the work of developing more and more research, so for universities to directly organize and publish their own peer reviewed journals, monographs and books is a natural next step. In my view only a dramatic fall in journal OA prices can prevent this transition in the next ten years.

And it’s not just in publishing. With the rise of podcasting, universities are already substantial broadcasters – for instance, LSE podcasts have been downloaded many millions of times in 2012-13. Whatever eventually transpires around MOOCs, TV and videocast outputs from universities are already mushrooming. So universities increasingly broadcast their own work across the whole field of the cultural outputs, and they will do so far more in the next decade – partly responding to the also substantial impacts agenda ([3]Bastow et al, 2014).


1. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/10/17/industry-rethink-open-access-prices/
4. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/10/17/industry-rethink-open-access-prices/
[...] On sociologicalimagination: [...]}

The Case Against Open Access (2013-10-30 16:49)

I think the argument made [1] here by John Holmwood is very important. My instinct is to support open access, though I think the scale of its ramifications are sometimes overestimated, however there has often seemed to be a degree of inattentiveness to economic and political context within which these arguments are being made:

For many commentators, open access to data and academic publications will bring clear public benefits, facilitating better public debate and allowing different kinds of elites to be held to account, whether they be political elites, policy makers or other kinds of experts. The case for open access appears overwhelming where the research is publicly-funded. Why should the public be denied access to that research by the high subscription pay-wall of journals? And, indeed, aren’t most academics interested in the widest dissemination of their work?

This argument confronts a paradox. The push to open access occurs in the context of dramatic reforms to universities that stress that higher education should not be seen as a public benefit, but a private investment in human capital for which the beneficiary should pay (and should pay above its costs once fees are allowed to rise above the current fee cap). Indeed, the Minister for Universities and Science seeks a more efficient and diverse system in which [2] for-profit providers will play a larger part, and even envisages a change in the corporate form of the university to facilitate greater engagement with [3] private equity investors. It seems that a paywall is to be removed, at the same time as new paywalls are under construction.

Once the common factor of commercialisation is teased out the paradox disappears. One of the main drivers of open access is to make academic research more easily available for commercial exploitation, especially by small and medium enterprises. In this context, it is significant that the licence under which open access should function is CC BY which enables commercial exploitation and reuse in any form. The consequence, for the natural sciences, or any other research with a directly exploitable commercial idea, is to bring the underlying research under the protection of Intellectual Property Rights.

All of this is part and parcel of the impact agenda whose primary economic purpose is to shorten the time from idea to income. Here we are witnesses to an inversion of previous science policy inaugurated by Lord Rothschild in the 1970s that was concerned with publicly funded research and advanced the idea that, where there was a private beneficiary, the beneficiary should pay. Now it seems that there should be no research undertaken without a beneficiary, but that beneficiary does not pay.

But what of the humanities and social sciences? Surely, here the situation is different? First, let it be noted that the very commercialisation of the university itself will have the consequence of dividing the higher education system between a small number of elite universities and others subject to the
pressures from for-profit providers. This will include the ‘unbundling’ of their functions (also involving the separation of research from teaching), as described by Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor of Pearson (and former member of the Browne Review), in a recent publication for IPPR. In this context, open access – especially MOOCs (and the online curriculum of Pearson) – provided by ‘elite’ universities is the means of undermining the conditions at other institutions and providing a tiered educational system that reinforces social selection to elite positions. This is the context in which Mike Boxall of PA Consulting Group speaks of a sector divided among ‘oligarchs, innovators and zombies’.

Equally significant, is that the argument for unbundling (some) universities is the claim that research is increasingly taking place outside universities. In the case of the social sciences, this is research undertaken by ‘think tanks’ and commercial organisations. It is here that access to ‘big data’ provides commercial opportunities. Open access is an opportunity to amalgamate data from different sources, develop techniques of analysis under patent, and re-present data, and the means of checking any analysis using it, behind a new paywall. Significantly, the recent ESRC call for a What Works Partnership in Crime Reduction specifies that the products of the research need not be under CC BY, but under IPR arrangements.


The Politics of Zombies (2013-10-31 08:00)

A few months ago I wrote about the use of zombies to represent crowds in films like World War Z. My basic point being that zombies are a shorthand for portraying the irrationalism of mass assemblies which threaten the social order.

Leaving aside the sheer socio-political weirdness of this bit of the film, it also left me thinking about the aesthetics of the crowd which characterised the film as a whole. The film portrays, in its own terms, the beginning of a world war – an established global order, represented throughout by the United Nations, suddenly finds itself under siege by an internal threat and, I’m sad to say, all looks lost, at least until some heroic figures are able to leverage scientific knowledge and military resources into temporary survival and the onset of total war. Who are the enemy? The sheer mass of the human population, those who formerly contributed to the reproduction of the social order each and every day but are now gripped by an inexplicable destructive urge, constituting an existential threat to the established order through their sheer numbers and violent reaction to the remaining organs of power. How terrifying a spectacle, to see a crowd so blood thirsty, plagued by such malevolent demons that too much contact with soldiers can leave the security forces equally consumed by the nihilism of the mob! Who are the
heroes? Special forces, the World Health Organization, the United Nations, the IDF and the US Military.
The thought that kept returning to me through the film was the extent to which it portrayed the mirror image of what China Mieville describes as ‘floating utopias’ - in a kinder and gentler age of pre-austerity neoliberalism, the libertarian imaginary found its expression in fantasies of liberation from the state in floating paradises of consumption and free enterprise. In an age of austerity, this utopian impulse finds it counter-image in nightmares of being eaten alive by a feral crowd, with dark hopes of malthusian salvation necessitating a militarization of social life and total war against the mass of humanity. Only through embracing death and destruction (by literally internalising it in the form of the viruses which render one oblivious to the teeming destructive hoards) can the forces of social order stand a chance against the nihilistic fever which has gripped the mass of humanity and eviscerated the capitalist world system.


It seems that the Department of Homeland Security agree with me:

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/bwKSJQI3tco?version=3&rel=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/bwKSJQI3tco?version=3&rel=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/MelWEbMnPvI?version=3&rel=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/MelWEbMnPvI?version=3&rel=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)

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Justice, Genes & Welfare:
Are Intergenerational Relationships Toxic?

A joint BSA Families and Relationship Study Group and Youth Study Group Event

Keyworth Centre, London South Bank University
Thursday 28 November 2013

Intergenerational relations increasingly seem to be called into question in contemporary society, highlighted as centrally implicated in some of its key ills. The topic of intergenerational justice has been the focus of a slew of popular and political publications,
contending that the „baby boomer“ generation has skewed the allocation of economic, social and cultural resources in its own favour and left younger generations immersed in debt and facing a perilous future. Early years policy reports pose parenting as formative in babies“ brain architecture, hard wiring future (anti)social behaviour and empathetic (in)abilities, as well as shaping the genetic inheritance that passes down through the generations. Ideas about cycles of deprivation, transmitted disadvantage and intergenerational cultures of poverty and worklessness are a recurrent feature of political pronouncements, where low aspirations and benefit dependency are alleged to be passed down in families and communities.

This day seminar will ask, "Are intergenerational relationships toxic?"

Contributors will appraise:
JUSTICE: Jonathan White (LSE), and Susie Weller (LSBU) and Ros Edwards (University of Southampton);

GENES: Val Gillies, Nicola Horsley (LSBU) and Ros Edwards (University of Southampton); and

WELFARE: Tracey Shildrick (University of Leeds), and Eldin Fahmy (University of Bristol).

A concluding review of the state of intergenerational relationships will be given by the Chair for the day: Jane Pilcher (University of Leicester).

Registration
BSA Members £45
Non-Members £55
More information and online registration: www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/familiesrelationships.aspx

For more details please contact:
Val Gillies: gilliev@lsbu.ac.uk or
Ros Edwards: R.S.Edwards@soton.ac.uk

4.11 November


Sports got political on Sunday. NBC sportscaster Bob Costas utilized a halftime moment to talk about a longstanding issue: The use of Washington’s Football team name, the R*dskins. I noticed a reaction on my Facebook- from someone who was not a person of color: "I don't want to hear Bob Costas inject his politically correct b*tch ass opinion."
Now why does it matter if such opinions come from a person of color or not? Ideally, it shouldn’t, but issues of identity tend to be more prone in communities of color and there’s a reason for it. The debate reminded me of a contentious argument I saw at Occupy Los Angeles. The Los Angeles camp had an extremely diverse crowd: ethnically, ideologically, and generationally. Tensions were inevitable.

A man from an indigenous group made a declaration to the 100-person crowd: “Do not use the word Hispanic.” Better yet, he said, all of us should refer to those in the camp from a Latino background with a more respectful term: “Indigenous.” Immediately afterward, a light-skinned man approached the platform and insinuatingly asked, “Would you accept the term ‘human’?” It was a well-intended and seemingly simple question; maybe a heartened effort to bridge all our humanity together. But the reality is that such questions are mired in historical ignorance.

Here’s how: Issues of self-identification are difficult to understand by groups in society who always had the right to self-identify. It’s relatively recent that communities of color, on the other hand, can say how they want to be identified without facing jail time or death. This comes after centuries of suffering, violence, and peaceful resistance on our part. Now we, as communities of color organizing for peaceful equality for all people, finally have the right to say this is who we are, yet today we still face resistance. It is a right that is taken for granted, just like Americans take many other rights for granted. Those who came before us died for our right to say we are not web*cks, we are not ni*gers, we are not r*dskins. The right to say this is who I am and this is who I’m not is an American struggle that, given the R*dskin team name debate, is still ongoing.

I am not a nationalist; I believe the core of issues in the United States and globally are economic. However, I recognize the lack of understanding that is prevalent when someone asks “why not just be human?” Of course we are human, but humans are not naked of culture or history. Such a being would be hardly considered human at all. Such questions try to minimize the dynamics of Chicano and Indigenous culture, by branding us naked of identity and culture altogether (trust me, our people have been there before and aren’t interested in going back).

So when a person of color makes a stand for his/her identity, remember it’s a historically rare occasion to be that free to do so. It’s also threatening when a person tries to attack our display of self-identification.

I personally do not identify myself as Chicano or anything similar, but I respect people’s right do so. This may seem like a contradiction, but my fundamental point is this: We all have the right to identify ourselves how we’d like. This is a relatively new right we’ve gained over the years.

During his halftime segment, sportscaster Costas also said that “a majority of Native Americans say they are not offended” by the term R*dskin. Though I am not sure if valid studies exist to support the claim, I am certain there is some truth in it. America remembers a time when African-Americans themselves performed blackface (similarly, R*dskin fans today apply red to their face at games). It’s believable that many Native Americans may find r*dskin acceptable, or even find pride in a blackface-like caricature, Cleveland Indian mascot Chief Wahoo. This may represent a historical phenomenon from marginalized persons to find delight in the slightest hint of inclusion, whether positive or negative, into mainstream society. Many comedians of color, for example, perpetuate stereotypes of their own community in order to penetrate the mainstream. That being said, there are many Native Americans who choose not to accept such terms of integration ([1]Why not hear it from a Native person’s perspective?).

We’ve also noticed in the social media sphere how us lefties are being considered “politically correct” or too sensitive. Actually, I’d argue the term politically correct has become negatively charged; it is a more emotional than logical argument. It has become an effectively curt term to deny validity to a valid question. It is a tool of propaganda. It seeks to quickly end key discussions by labeling dissenting opinions as “sensitive,” “weak,” or “vibe-killing.” Movements should either struggle to make the term more positive or do away with it completely.

Now with the question on if we are being too sensitive. Life’s too short to take things on a personal level.
But then there’s the political. It’s hard to accept the claim that American society treats all as equals when there’s no sports team called the California Cr*ckers, Nebraska N*ggers, or New York Ch*nks (rightly so, of course), but its 2013 and we surely have the R*dskins.

But here’s a last curveball. We do have the power to turn some derogatory words into acceptable words. This includes words like queer and chicano, the latter of which used to be an insulting slur in Texas. Both words are now celebrated in their respective communities. Notably, the N-word hasn’t gotten there due to resistance. Changing the social meaning of a term in an either positive or negative direction, clearly, takes collective effort from the group whose identity is in question. Seemingly, it is in the right of any group to define itself as it’d like.

But can this happen to a term like r*dskin? Can Native Americans rally enough support to make the term acceptable, like queer or chicano? Or is the term too loaded with pertinence to skin color to garner wide acceptance? The direction of that answer may be determined by the Native collective itself.

Michael Lozano is a contributing writer. His articles have been published nationally across New American Media, ImpreMedia (the nation’s largest Spanish language news publishers), and various campus papers. He graduated from CSULB in 2011 with Honors in Sociology and a minor in Journalism.


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Rosa Parks and politically correct words | Jens lärarblogg (2015-03-16 08:28:50)
[...] Challenging Words [...]

Why have young people in Japan stopped having sex? (2013-11-02 08:00)

As you’ve probably noticed if you follow this site at all closely, we sometimes post about [1] asexuality. For those who don’t know, asexuality is usually defined as ‘not experiencing sexual attraction’ and is a cultural identity which largely emerged online and has grown in prominence over the last decade. But from a sociological standpoint it seems clear that we can’t reduce not experiencing sexual attraction (as a characteristic or set thereof) to asexuality (as the cultural discourse which has grown out of online asexual spaces). To argue otherwise would imply that asexual people suddenly appeared at the same time as the asexual idea began to circulate online. In other words: our current notion of ‘asexuality’ is relatively recent but there is no prima facie reason to think this is true of not experiencing sexual attraction.

Approaching the topic in this way immediately opens up fascinating issues for comparative analysis, as accepting the premise that not experiencing sexual attraction is likely to be partly or wholly transcultural raises the obvious question of the alternative forms of cultural expression this experience has found in other times and places. This is why I was so fascinated by the [2] following article exploring a radical transformation in Japanese sexual culture:

Japan’s under-40s appear to be losing interest in conventional relationships. Millions aren’t even dating, and increasing numbers can’t be bothered with sex. For their government, “celibacy syndrome” is part of a looming national catastrophe. Japan already has one of the world’s lowest birth rates. [3] Its population of 126 million, which has been shrinking for the past decade, is projected to plunge a [4] further one-third by 2060. Aoyama believes the country is experiencing “a flight from human intimacy” – and it’s partly the government’s fault.
The number of single people has reached a record high. A survey in 2011 found that 61% of unmarried men and 49% of women aged 18-34 were not in any kind of romantic relationship, a rise of almost 10% from five years earlier. Another study found that a third of people under 30 had never dated at all. (There are no figures for same-sex relationships.) Although there has long been a pragmatic separation of love and sex in Japan - a country mostly free of religious morals - sex fares no better. A survey earlier this year by the Japan Family Planning Association (JFPA) found that 45% of women aged 16-24 "were not interested in or despised sexual contact". More than a quarter of men felt the same way.

Japan's under-40s won't go forth and multiply out of duty, as postwar generations did. The country is undergoing major social transition after 20 years of economic stagnation. It is also battling against the effects on its already nuclear-destruction-scarred psyche of 2011's earthquake, tsunami and radioactive meltdown. There is no going back. "Both men and women say to me they don't see the point of love. They don't believe it can lead anywhere," says Aoyama. "Relationships have become too hard."

Marriage has become a minefield of unattractive choices. Japanese men have become less career-driven, and less solvent, as lifetime job security has waned. Japanese women have become more independent and ambitious. Yet conservative attitudes in the home and workplace persist. Japan's punishing corporate world makes it almost impossible for women to combine a career and family, while children are unaffordable unless both parents work. Cohabiting or unmarried parenthood is still unusual, dogged by bureaucratic disapproval.

Are similar trends happening elsewhere in the world? According to Google Analytics we have an astonishingly diverse international audience so it would be great to hear from people outside the Anglo-American world which is unfortunately still the horizon of the vast majority of research into asexuality.


Horrifying. And it could happen here. We are loosing our humanity! It's like we think what makes us human needs to be expelled. This is so, so scary.
In the case of Iran, as my country, due to everlasting increasing of living cost, and skyrocketing of girls share in higher education which disseminate to highest degrees as PhD, and so much more opportunity for women to get involved in labour market (generally meaning), we (Iranian) at least have a semi - similar experience. In this scheme both young male and female are not interested in marriage due to its burden responsibility, required commitments!, sharp economic demands which simply overwhelm the desire for FORMAL dating and marriage; but it doesn't mean necessary to giving up sexual desire, it just work on marriage issue, which will result in more decreasing rate of child-birth rate and diminishing of country’s population in longterm period. A trend which is strengthen by changing values while it let people to take a single - lifestyle and have a non - marriage affair with opposite sex without any fear of punishment or stigmatization!.

Good, if the world follows this trend overpopulation will stop! Imagine a world with less people - more resources for each, less contamination, more quite places to go on vacations, more wild life, less animals in farms suffering to be eaten by us, maybe it even stops clima change? education and care of fewer kids easier, more focused, etc. In short, the rise of quality over quantity, great! We don’t live in times were we depend on natural selection anymore. This would also go well along with the raise of technology, global connectivity, and robots/tasks automation. It has a few temporary issues like the payments of rents of the older generations, but this is neglactable from a long term, global perspective.

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-11-02 12:26)
Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn't been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

Ray Pahl, friendship and the emergence of Discover Society magazine (2013-11-03 08:00)
Following this month’s launch of [1]Discover Society, one of its managing editors, John Holmwood, talks about the genesis of the idea for the online magazine in a conversation with the late Ray Pahl. You can read the full post on the [2]Policy Press Blog.

[3]

DISCOVER SOCIETY
MEASURED - FACTUAL - CRITICAL
Earlier this month a new online magazine, [4]Discover Society, was launched. The magazine features articles on social research, policy analysis and commentary, and is supported by the British Sociological Association, the Social Policy Association and Policy Press.

The seed of the project was planted when some of us who went on to set up Discover Society met with [5]Ray Pahl, the eminent sociologist best known for his studies of social interaction, polarisation, work and friendship in suburban and post-industrial communities, shortly before he died in June 2011. We talked about a range of topics, including the fate of universities in the face of marketisation, the financial crisis, and the increasing hardship on the front-line of austerity Britain. We also talked about the future of social research – in truth, the future of sociology and the special character of the sociological imagination and its public relevance.

Ray researched and wrote about communities, but he also wrote for communities. As part of our visits to Ray, we also helped arrange his papers. In a dusty attic space, old copies of New Society were piled up and he pointed to them and said, “That’s what we need today. Without a magazine to disseminate sociology and social policy, there will be no real engagement.” Ray had written for New Society and, like many others – as the response to [6]Mike Savage’s article on the magazine in our first issue shows – had felt its demise in 1988 keenly. He associated its closure with the changing tenor of the times and the claim that there was no such thing as society associated with the promotion of neo-liberal policies designed to make the claim a reality.


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The Phenomenology of Obsessiveness (2013-11-04 08:00)

To talk about ‘modes of reflexivity’ can sometimes seem to suggest types of person or personality. Understanding reflexivity in this way misleads because its suggestion of divergent individual traits can too easily obscure the commonalities shared between all reflexive individuals. To postulate a mode of reflexivity entails a claim about an identifiable tendency in how some set of individuals deliberate about objective circumstances in light of their subjective concerns. What makes the difference is how this practical tendency manifests itself over time as the individual makes their way through the world. The variable life of the mind Archer’s account claims should not be
understood as a claim about different types of mind but rather as an account of how individual differences in the exercise of a particular mental faculty (reflexivity) are both shaped by our circumstances and, in turn, work to shape those circumstances through the differing modalities of being-in-the-world and ensuing biographical trajectories which they engender.

It’s in this sense that I’ve been thinking a lot recently about the capacity to bring deliberations to a close. Communicative reflexivity constitutes a tendency to rely on others to complete and confirm deliberations: the individual will often draw some initial conclusions but relies on trusted interlocutors to validate these provisional thoughts in conversation before they feel comfortable acting upon them. Autonomous reflexivity constitutes a tendency to complete one’s own deliberations, not in the sense of precluding the input of others but simply that this is seen as a potentially more or less informative contribution to what is a fundamentally individualised process of working out what to do. Meta-reflexivity constitutes a tendency for deliberations to spiral because both self and circumstances are susceptible to further interrogation e.g. “is this really what I want to do?” or “why do I always react this way when this happens?”. Fractured reflexivity constitutes a tendency for deliberation to amplify affect without bringing the individual any closure to an action-orientation.

What seems crucial here is the phenomenology of obsessiveness. For instance we often consider something such as ‘indecisiveness’ to be a personal characteristic. Whereas considered in terms of reflexivity, this can be better understood as a difficulty with concluding internal conversations. In this sense I want to distinguish between someone who doesn’t know how to start making a decision and someone who doesn’t know how to stop. The former might designate an inability to begin, an absence of criteria and/or of motivation, which lead to a straightforward inability to know how to approach the question in a practical way – perhaps leading to tossing a coin, rolling a dice or simply choosing arbitrarily. In contrast the latter might be understood as a lack of confidence in concluding a decision – “how do I know this is the right choice?”. Though I’ve gotten better with it over time, I still sometimes struggle hugely with decisions simply because I experience myself as very persuasive… I run through arguments in my head to do A and am persuaded, I run through arguments in my head to do B and am equally persuaded, I run through arguments in my head to do C and yet again I’m persuaded it’s a good idea. One of the striking things about my PhD data was how this seemed to be true of almost every meta-reflexive who took part in my research.

There’s an interesting section in Margaret Archer’s Being Human, written before her work on reflexivity had properly begun, which has provided a useful starting point for thinking through this issue in greater depth. It’s one I want to return to post-PhD to ponder this more at the level of phenomenology:

Why does the dialogue finish here: after all the subject may be making an unwarranted judgement about the worth of her concerns or a mistaken one about her emotional ability to live with them. She may indeed, for this is always possible with any judgement, but there is still no arbitrariness in deciding to end a sequence of potentially endless evaluations which could never conclude with certainty. ‘Terminating the sequence at that point – the point at which there is no conflict or doubt – is not arbitrary. For the only reason to continue the sequence would be to cope with an actual conflict or with the possibility that a conflict might occur. Given that the person does have this reason to continue, it is hardly arbitrary for him to stop.’

Archer (2000: 241) (italicised section quotes from Harry Frankfurt’s The Importance of What we Care About)

The important point here is that there is no necessary conclusion to deliberation. Particularly when it comes to momentous life decisions, there is a possibility for continual deliberation which is intensified because neither self...
nor circumstances remain static while the individual deliberates. Once we free our understanding of ‘inner life’ from Cartesian metaphysics and see it as a process always in movement, one which cuts across and threads through the embodied engagements of day-to-day social life, it becomes easy to see how obsessiveness can so frequently go hand-in-hand with inertia. At some point we have to decide. The deliberation itself can never engender certainty and, with the exception of more extreme instances of fractured reflexivity, we learn to act without it. But we do have proxies. For the communicative reflexive, the confirmation of significant others acts as a proxy for the certainty which is a phenomenological impossibility. For the autonomous reflexive, their confidence in their own reflexive capacities acts as a such a proxy. Whereas for the meta-reflexive and fractured reflexive there is, for different reasons, no such proxy and this is why decisiveness remains such a struggle.

Jessica Foley (2013-11-20 11:49:00)
Mark, many thanks for this insightful post - I wonder could you recommend any further texts or discussions in relation to the 'meta-reflexive' and 'fractured reflexive'. It's of growing relevance to me in my own PhD research and I could do with finding out more about this! Thanks.

» The Phenomenology of Inertia The Sociological Imagination (2013-12-01 08:00:25)
[…]

What does it mean to be a public intellectual in an age of austerity? (2013-11-05 08:00)
The higher education system is going through a period of profound change, with newfound opportunities opening up for the [1]superstar professors to develop their brand through MOOCs, TV and cinema. Where will it all lead? Fortunately the renowned anthropologist [2]Robin Dunbar has opted to show us the way through this minefield. In this series of videos produced by Guinness (HT [3]Charles Knight) he has teamed up with the comedian Danny Wallace to… do something slightly depressing. It’s probably best I let Guinness explain the project themselves:

Friendships are a beautiful thing… but not if they’re left to wither away to nothingness.

Is sending your mates the odd tweet or giving them a call once in while enough? Science says not.

Getting together is what’s needed, seeing each other, doing stuff together…why is this? Well, because science says so.

A bold claim, yes, but Guinness have teamed up with Professor [4]Robin Dunbar of Oxford University who’s research in this area has proven that men need to meet up physically and frequently to maintain their friendships.

Not only will this lead to stronger friendships but it will lead to a better, richer life. Again, this is science saying this.

So, to explain more and to help Robin put his science to the test Guinness enlisted the help of social commentator [5]Danny Wallace and the effervescent Jonathan Ross.
Isn't it great that academics have the chance to make an impact through an integrated marketing campaign? If only C Wright Mills were still alive so he could team up with Harley-Davidson! What well loved brand will you be seeking research sponsorship from?

3. https://twitter.com/Charlesknight
8. http://www.youtube.com/embed/K1SscMDFpUo?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Economists are horrible people (2013-11-06 08:00)

I don’t think this is a particularly meaningful statement. But it’s certainly an attention grabbing one. I encountered it earlier when [1]Salon picked up on a post by Adam Grant on Psychology Today:

Why does the invisible hand want to slap you across the face?

Because it belongs to a douchebag.

That’s the conclusion, anyway, of a provocative blog post in Psychology Today by Wharton professor Adam Grant [4]making the rounds across planet internet.
But before all you econ majors get your demand curves in a twist, hear what the good professor has to say.

Citing research by Cornell professor Robert Frank, Grant makes the compelling case that economists are neither generous, nor cooperative. And that’s because they’ve swallowed one of Adam Smith’s main tenets: people act out of rational self-interest.

Emphasis here on the self.

In short: economists don’t feel bad about acting in their self-interest because — well — the economic theories tell them that they should be selfish.


This is the same Adam Grant who’s achieved an impressive degree of visibility at a relatively young age, not least of all because of the snappily counter-intuitive thesis propounded in [6]his last book that ‘giving’ is a route to career success. As befitting the youngest tenured professor at the Wharton Business School*, his claim about economists is one grounded in empirical research:

Robert Frank, an economist at Cornell, believes that his profession is squashing cooperation and generosity. And he believes he has the evidence to prove it. Consider these data points:

**Less charitable giving:** In the US, economics professors gave less money to charity than professors in other fields—including history, philosophy, education, psychology, sociology, anthropology, literature, physics, chemistry, and biology. More than twice as many economics professors gave zero dollars to charity than professors from the other fields.

**More deception for personal gain:** Economics students in Germany were more likely than students from other majors to recommend an overpriced plumber when they were paid to do it.

**Greater acceptance of greed:** Economics majors and students who had taken at least three economics courses were more likely than their peers to rate greed as “generally good,” “correct,” and “moral.”

**Less concern for fairness:** Students were given $10 and had to make a proposal about how to divide the money with a peer. If the peer accepted, they had a deal, but if the peer declined, both sides got nothing. On average, economics students proposed to keep 13% more money for themselves than students from other majors.

In another experiment, students received money, and could either keep it or donate it to the common pool, where it would be multiplied and divided equally between all participants. On average, students contributed 49% of their money, but economics students contributed only 20%. When asked what a “fair” contribution was, the non-economists were clear: 100% of them said “half or more” (a full 25% said “all”). The economists struggled with this question. Over a third of them refused to answer it
or gave unintelligible responses. The researchers wrote that the “meaning of ‘fairness’... was somewhat alien for this group.


This raises the obvious question of causation: does economics make people horrible or are horrible people drawn to economics? Obviously, it’s likely to be a little of both. It seems glaringly self-evident to me that self-selection is at work in shaping the characteristics of people within different disciplines (not least of all because I have a few hundred surveys from my PhD that demonstrate precisely this). There is a sense in which it is meaningful to talk about ‘physics people’ and ‘english literature people’, though these are of course fuzzy folk typologies which barely meet the status of being an empirical generalisation. Where I think they become more plausible though, is in making sense of the mentalities likely to be found amongst professionalised members of disciplines i.e. though who keep on self-selecting all the way through to grad school and beyond. So could we assume on this basis that the processes identified amongst economics students are likely to apply with a greater intensity amongst professional economists? Here’s what Grant suggests with regard to the former:

To figure out whether economics education can shift people in the selfish direction, we need to track beliefs and behaviors over time—or randomly assign them to economics exposure. Here’s what the evidence shows:

1. **Altruistic Values Drop Among Economics Majors**

At the very beginning of their freshman year, Israeli college students who planned to study economics [18] rated helpfulness, honesty, loyalty, and responsibility as just as important as students who were studying communications, political science, and sociology. But third-year economics students rated these values as significantly less important than first-year economics students.

2. **Economics Students Stay Selfish, Even Though Their Peers Become More Cooperative**

When faced with [19] choices between cooperating and defecting, overall, 60 % of economics majors defected, compared with only 39 % of non-economics majors. For non-economists, 54 % of freshmen and sophomores defected, while only 40 % of juniors and seniors did. The economists, on the other hand, did not decrease in defection significantly over time. Roughly 70 % defected across the board. Non-economists became less selfish as they matured; economists didn’t.

3. **After Taking Economics, Students Become More Selfish and Expect Worse of Others**

Frank and his colleagues [20] studied college students in astronomy, economic game theory, and economic development classes. Self-interest was a fundamental assumption in the game theory class, but had little role in the economic development class. In all three classes, students answered questions about benefiting from a billing error where they received ten computers but only paid for nine and finding a lost envelope with $100. They reported how likely they would be to report the billing error and return the envelope, and predicted the odds that other people would do the same.

When the students answered these questions in September at the start of the semester, the esti-
mates were similar across the three classes. When they answered the questions again in December at the end of the semester, Frank’s team tracked how many students decreased their estimates. After taking the game theory course, students came to expect more selfish behavior from others, and they became less willing to report the error and return the envelope themselves.

“The pernicious effects of the self-interest theory have been most disturbing,” Frank writes in [21]Passions Within Reason. “By encouraging us to expect the worst in others it brings out the worst in us: dreading the role of the chump, we are often loath to heed our nobler instincts.”

4. Just Thinking about Economics Can Make Us Less Caring

Exposure to economic words might be enough to inhibit compassion and concern for others, even among experienced executives. In [22]one experiment, Andy Molinsky, Joshua Margolis, and I recruited presidents, CEOs, partners, VPs, directors, and managers who supervised an average of 140 employees. We randomly assigned them to unscramble 30 sentences, with either neutral phrases like [green tree was a] or economic words like [continues economy growing our].

Then, the executives wrote letters conveying bad news to an employee who was transferred to an undesirable city and disciplining a highly competent employee for being late to meetings because she lacked a car. Independent coders rated their letters for compassion.

Executives who unscrambled sentences with economic words expressed significantly less compassion. There were two factors at play: [23]empathy and unprofessionalism. After thinking about economics, executives felt less empathy—and even when they did empathize, they worried that expressing concern and offering help would be inappropriate.


I recall encountering more work exploring this issue in the past and I really wish I’d saved the references. It also leads me to wonder if economists have a unusual proclivity for empirically studying themselves and, if so, what this says about the discipline in general and these findings in particular? As naval gazing as sociologists tend to be, they also seem to spend little time studying themselves, at least in a systematic way.

1. http://www.salon.com/2013/10/24/economists_are_horrible_horrible_people_study_says_partner/
5. http://www.salon.com/2013/10/24/economists_are_horrible_horrible_people_study_says_partner/
An important analysis on LSE Politics Blog looks at what the British Social Attitudes survey says about public attitudes towards higher education:

In an era of rising tuition fees, deepening student debt and the global commodification of learning, any remaining notion of Higher Education as a ‘public good’ may seem improbable. However, evidence from the British Social Attitudes survey shows that the broader, society-wide benefits of Higher Education are still prized, albeit not always by those you might expect.
Together with colleagues from Oxford and London University, we examined surveys from the last thirty years to chart how public attitudes towards participation have reflected changes in policy. Despite questions being framed in ways that increasingly constructed university as a public expense, we identified a persistent belief in the core values of Higher Education. For example, 43% of those surveyed in 2010 thought that over half of young people should go on to university, a finding at odds with popular perceptions of a labour market saturated by graduates of ‘Mickey Mouse’ degree programmes.

More surprising, Higher Education was cherished most highly by those from lower social classes. Only 10% of working class respondents thought opportunities should be reduced, compared to 26% among the professional and managerial classes. We also found gender and school type to be key predictors of attitude. Men were more likely than women to say that university isn't worth the time and money, as were those educated privately. But the strongest predictor was whether respondents had themselves participated, with graduates more than twice as likely to favour a reduction as non-graduates. Those who profit most from Higher Education, it would seem, are those most inclined to pull up the ladder behind them.

The Future of Scholarship (2013-11-08 08:00)

The LSE Impact Blog co-hosted a conference about Open Access recently which I’m now wishing I’d gone to. I really liked [1]the talk given by Jonathan Gray, director of policy at the Open Knowledge Foundation, which offered an adept diagnosis of the present crisis in scholarly publishing and its implications for the future of scholarship:

If sheer quantity is a measure of success then things aren’t going too badly. The amount of research being published is growing at an astonishing rate. Recent studies estimate that around [2]50 million journal articles have been published since their first appearance in the mid 17th century (Jinha). This colossus is estimated to be expanding at around 1.5 to 2 million articles per year, which is roughly 3 to 4 % annually. (Scopus lists about 1.6 million in 2012. The UK Publishers Association suggested global output is [3]around 2 million per year, quoting 120,000 articles as around 6 % in evidence to UK parliament. This is up from an [4]estimated 1.3 million in 2006.)

But more people publishing more words does not necessarily mean that our system of scholarly communication is serving us well. Scholarship is not just about publication, but about interaction, interpretation, exchange, deliberation, discourse, debate, and controversy. Plato writes of understanding as being a kind of flash that occurs between two people trying to come to terms with something from different viewpoints, a flash that arises from the friction of discussion and momentarily floods everything with light.

Scholarship is, of course, not just about the production of text – text which has been processed, reviewed, and packaged up in the right way, in accordance with the dictates of style manuals and in keeping with the appropriate theoretical or methodological genre. Scholarship is about the way in which constellations of people and objects produce meaning, understanding and insight, through interaction, acts of interpretation. The value of a journal article is not the stated impact factor of the journal, any more than the value of a scholar is the aggregate of his or her publishing record. The value of a piece of scholarly text is in the interaction it has with its readers, in the sparks it generates, the friction and light that it produces – whether tomorrow, or in a hundred years time.

Unfortunately our current system of scholarly communication has often developed with other priorities in mind. For a start it echoes our broader cultural and social attitudes towards sharing the fruits of our creative and intellectual labour more generally: our disproportionate focus on protection and compensation, commodification and control. The default is still that our creations cannot be shared without payment or explicit permission. Even though they are unlikely to receive a penny for it, scholars are often inclined to be more guarded than generous about sharing their published work. This social and cultural hostility to sharing in turn reflects the state of the law, which is profoundly imbalanced towards protecting and rewarding rights-holders rather than recognising that copyright is an instrument which should strike a balance between protecting private interests and providing the public with access to the fruits of our collective intellectual labour.

Furthermore, the academic career structures in many disciplines are heavily focused around and driven by publication. Not even on scholarly output, but very specific forms and genres of publication, with a strong focus on certain journals and publishers. Journal articles and monographs have become the de facto currency of scholarship, and certain venues are worth more than others. Other forms of engagement – from collaborative projects to conferences – are often not recognised, or only recognised insofar as they result in publication.

If publishing operations such as journal titles and monograph series are the stars which structure
the orbits of scholarly communication, then we may forget that what gives them their gravitational force is ultimately the scholars and scholarly communities associated with them. Hence we may conflate the trust, reputation and authority that derives from the scrutiny, energy and attention of a particular group of scholars, with the avenue through which this is manifested: namely the title of a particular publication or series. So entangled are the reputations of scholars and publishing operations that sometimes we may find it hard to wrench them apart and to recall that ultimately it is publications which are dependent on scholars, and not the other way around.

The result of all of these things is the lamentable situation we find ourselves in today, whereby a huge amount of the intellectual energy and attention of researchers is funnelled into the creation of products for the publishing industry which are then locked up and sold back to the institutions which employ them: the very same institutions which effectively subsidise the creation, editorial and peer review of said products. In 1999 [5] a scholar and a librarian wrote a report unpacking the implications of this situation, which they called the 'crisis in scholarly publishing', which they described as: "a vicious cycle of increasing prices and decreasing distribution, straining (or breaking) library budgets, and leading to cancellations of journals and cuts in other acquisitions, as well as dangerous erosion in confidence in the integrity of peer review". "Ultimately", they concluded, "the flow of scholarly communication is at stake, eroding the academic mission."

In a recent edition of the LA Review of Books Christopher Newfield, renowned commentator on US higher education, reviewed Andrew McGettigan’s The Great University Gamble. He offers a helpful and lucid summary of the book’s (equally lucid) arguments and it’s extremely interesting to encounter the changes in UK higher education being analysed from the perspective of the US higher education system. However what makes this essay a must read is the conclusion, depressing though it is, where he makes an intensely compelling case as to the broader political significance of the coalition’s higher education ‘reforms’:

What are the practical outcomes for this counterreformation in higher education? A first is a reduction of professional authority, now subordinate to financial management in decisions on what has value in the institution. Treasury, budget, and finance will decide the value of higher education, which is, in effect, to decide what level of development society shall afford. This means a loss of legitimacy for any educator who speaks for the social value of egalitarian intellectual development.

The second effect is that the steady expansion of higher education enrollments will stop. UK enrollments fell just after the Tory changes began — applications from England to UK schools declined 8.6 percent between 2011 and 2012. They have recovered this year, but the government keeps a lid on fundable enrollments and shows no interest in further expansion.

The third effect is decreased equality of conditions for the students who do attend. The large number of newish middling UK universities that McGettigan calls "the mass of mass higher education" will face new financial difficulties. While these institutions struggle to maintain some reasonably small courses or to find part-time graders for lecture courses, the government continues to offer public funding for Oxbridge’s tutorial system. If a slogan for the higher education reformation might have been "tutorials for all," the unspoken slogan of the counterreformation is "tutorials for the few — and standardization for the rest."

This may seem odd to most readers: isn’t this the very moment in world history in which mass standardization is of little value in the economies of the West? Aren’t we supposed to be upgrading everyone’s abilities to compete in a global economy? This is where we arrive at a final layer of Tory...
strategizing, conscious or not. It is strategizing about the future of British capitalism as such. If fewer middling students get their higher learning at a smaller number of middling universities, what is the loss? These non-students will receive lower wages, cost society less money, learn to make fewer demands, and be less trouble to Britain’s leading economic sectors. They are downgrading British society to new lower status in the "global auction," a competition at all skill levels that puts downward pressure on everyone's wages. Rather than receive high wages for their high skills, graduates will, in this late-capitalist framework, receive low wages for them. Tories appear simply to have conceded the point, accepted that the "high-skill/low wage" bargain is the best Britain can do, and decided to limit current taxpayer outlays for a losing university bargain. Of course this means accepting a Britain that is both less qualified and less affluent, that is in fact post-middle class. This defeatism is at the heart of the government’s higher education plan: there is and shall be no collective betterment, and thus no need for collective investment.

I don't want to come to an overly simplistic conclusion that distracts attention from the richness of detail in McGettigan's book or from the complexity of these Tory changes' effects. I am not clairvoyant about where they will lead. But I have spent years watching the public university systems of the United States and the United Kingdom — and of France and Germany — struggle to tread water without a buoyant definition of their value as public goods. The result has been the status quo for some, floundering for most, and a general sinking of public confidence that universities are on the public's side.

The inconvenient truth is that a public-good higher education would mean and will mean increasing enrollments, rising quality, and increasing development for a country’s economy and society. The Tory's instituted private system will mean lower enrollments, rationed quality, and reduced overall development. Unless the university sector can define its mission as "a quality commitment to the population defined as whoever can benefit," unless it can make clear the connection between its public good status and democratic economic hope, Tory-like counterreformations will prevail throughout the West. McGettigan’s book shows that this outcome would be contrived, imposed, artificial, and devastating.

As well as reactivating the past through our use of language, a more mundane danger that most of us are trying to avoid is what Roland Barthes, a grand master of semiotics, called ‘the disease of thinking in essences’. Essentialism traps a person/group into a cage of unchanging characterisations from which they cannot escape – if you like opera you are not really black or Indian Muslim women can’t have enjoyable, playful sex lives. Racism and other isms work by slotting us into preconceptions where we must stay put, pinned down and unable to move like one of those poor lifeless insects suspended in amber. The paradox is that while we are immobilised, racisms are constantly morphing.

Race used to be thought of as connoting immutable biological difference, but in what has been called ‘neo’, ‘cultural’ or ‘second degree’ racisms, identities such as those related to immigration or religion, are the fodder of contemporary race thinking. In these cases it is a fundamental incomensurability of lifestyles that substitutes for, or perhaps augments, notions of biological difference. This is ‘race without race’ as the writers Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein have put it. Like an inventive but fickle Casting Director, racism is always open to new lead characters and plotlines. It could be religion today, who knows what will be centre stage next? But whatever is mobilised in race thinking, be it biology, culture or immigration status, what we lose sight of is our common humanity. One of the most powerful descriptions of racism comes from the British novelist Doris Lessing. For Lessing, racism is ‘atrophy of the imagination’.

So how do we negotiate the risks of essentialism and this withering away of the imagination? I used to get het up about this in my writing and teaching. I have tried various strategies in the past such as herding terms into scare quotation marks when I write or using language that is deliberating jarring such as ‘minoritised’ – to problematize the word ‘minority’ and to show it as an active racialisation (I didn’t want the term to roll off the tongue without thought in the way that the facile ‘BME’ does).

The excruciating bind is that without race terms and categories it is difficult, if not impossible, to challenge racism or to name and share experiences. I still remember the knot of anxiety and confusion in my stomach as a child when I heard or witnessed banal racism in the playground or on TV and I didn’t have the words to decode and to name what was happening. Regardless of the political and academic debates about language, whether we are talking to each other or writing, racial signifiers continue to have currency and traction. And good people do amazing things with bad language. A couple of weeks ago I listened to doctors and nurses talking about an initiative to increase access to hospice care for ‘BAME’ groups. I may have been wincing inwardly throughout, but it was a wonderful project, skilling local people and demystifying illness, disease and death. It will make more of a meaningful difference to lives than I ever will.

Over the course of this year Sheryl Sandberg, the 44 year old Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, has enjoyed ever greater media attention since launching her book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*. It has sold over a million copies, dominating best seller lists and leading many commentators in the mainstream media to present her as the most influential feminist voice of her era. Though her ‘co-writer’ has received much less attention. Unsurprisingly, she has done a TED talk on the themes of the book:

[IFRAME: //www.youtube.com/embed/18uDutylDa4]

It would be inaccurate to describe Sandberg’s rise as anything other than meteoric. She’s reported to be worth almost half a billion dollars. She’s a corporate high flyer, best-selling author and is widely presumed to have future political ambitions. Yet she’s also been the subject of much criticism. In a thoughtful yet polemic essay discussing Sandberg, bell hooks distances herself from some of the more vitriolic attacks on the Facebook COO, while nonetheless sustaining a powerful critique:

Certainly, her vision of individual women leaning in at the corporate table does not include any clear statements of which group of women she is speaking to and about, and the "lean in" woman is never given a racial identity. If Sandberg had acknowledged that she was primarily addressing privileged white women like herself (a small group working at the top of the corporate hierarchy), then she could not have portrayed herself as sharing a message, indeed a life lesson, for all women. Her basic insistence that gender equality should be important to all women and men is an insight that all folks involved in feminist movement agree is a central agenda. And yes, who can dispute the facts Sandberg offers as evidence: despite the many gains in female freedom, implicit gender bias remains the norm throughout
our society. Patriarchy supports and affirms that bias. But Sandberg offers readers no understanding of what men must do to unlearn sexist thinking. At no point in *Lean In* does she let readers know what would motivate patriarchal white males in a corporate environment to change their belief system or the structures that support gender inequality [...]

Unfortunately her voice is powerful, yet Sandberg is for the most part not voicing any new ideas. She is simply taking old ideas and giving them a new twist. When the book *Lean In* began its meteoric rise, which continues to bring fame and notoriety to Sandberg, many prominent feminists and/or progressive women denounced the work, vehemently castigating Sandberg. However, there was just one problematic issue at the core of the anti-Sandberg movement; very few folks attacking the work had actually read the book. Some of them had heard sound bites on television or had listened to her Ted Talk presentation. Still others had seen her interviewed. Many of these older female feminist advocates blatantly denounced the work and boldly announced their refusal to read the book.

As a feminist cultural critic, I found the eagerness with which Sandberg was viciously attacked disheartening. These critiques seem to emerge from misplaced rage not based solely on contempt for her ideas, but a rage bordering on envy. The powerful white male-dominated mass media was giving her and those ideas so much attention. There was no in-depth discussion of why this was the case. In the book Sandberg reminds readers that, "men still run the world." However, she does not discuss white male supremacy. Or the extent to which globalization has changed the makeup of corporate elites. In Mark Mizruchi’s book *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite*, he describes a corporate world that is made up of a "more diverse crowd," one that is no longer white and male "blue chip dudes." He highlights several examples: "The CEO of Coca-Cola is Muhtar Kent, who was born in the United States but raised in Turkey; PepsiCo is run by Indra Nooyi, an Indian woman who came to America in her twenties. Burger King’s CEO is Brazilian, Chryslers’s CEO is Italian, and Morgan Stanley’s CEO is Australian. Forget about influencing policy; many of today’s leading US CEO’s can’t even vote here." Perhaps, even in the corporate world, imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is ready to accept as many white women as necessary to ensure white dominance. Race is certainly an invisible category in Sandberg’s corporate fantasy world.

She makes light of her ambivalence towards feminism. Even though Sandberg can humorously poke fun at herself and her relationship to feminism, she tells readers that her book "is not a feminist manifesto." Adding as though she is in a friendly conversation with herself, "okay, it is sort of a feminist manifesto." This is just one of the “funny” folksy moments in the book, which represent her plain and ordinary approach – she is just one of the girls. Maybe doing the book and talking about it with co-writer Nell Scovell provides the basis for the conversational tone. Good humor aside, cute quips and all, it is when she is taking about feminism that many readers would have liked her to go deeper. How about just explaining what she means by “feminist manifesto,” since the word implies “a full public declaration of intentions, opinions or purposes.” Of course, historically the best feminist manifestos emerged from collective consciousness raising and discussion. They were not the voice of one individual. Instead of creating a space of female solidarity, Sandberg exists as the lone queen amid millions of admires. And no one in her group dares to question how she could be heralded as the "voice of revolutionary feminism."

How feminist, how revolutionary can a powerful rich woman be when she playfully admits that she concedes all money management and bill paying to her husband? As Sandberg confesses, she would rather not think about money matters when she could be planning little Dora parties for her kids. This anecdote, like many others in the book, works to create the personal image of Sandberg. It is this "just plain folks" image that has been instrumental in her success, for it shows her as vulnerable.

This is not her only strategy. When giving filmed lectures, she wears clothes with sexy deep V-
necks and stiletto heels and this image creates the aura of vulnerable femininity. It reminds one of the popular television advertisement from years ago wherein a sexy white woman comes home and dances around singing: "I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan and never let you forget you're a man...cause I'm a w-o-m-a-n!" Sandberg's constructed image is not your usual sexist misogynist media portrayal of a feminist. She is never depicted as a man-hating ball-busting feminist nag.

Instead, she comes across both in her book and when performing on stages as a lovable younger sister who just wants to play on the big brother's team. It would be more in keeping with this image to call her brand of women's liberation faux feminism. A billionaire, one of the richest women in the world, Sandberg deflects attention from this reality. To personify it might raise critical questions. It might even have created the conditions for other women to feel threatened by her success. She solves that little problem by never speaking of money in Lean In; she uses the word once.


2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/18uDuty1Da4
4. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/da931d58-a7c2-11e2-9fbe-00144feabdc0.html#adzz2ja0x7wX5
This thoughtful (though depressing) post on the[1] LSE Impact Blog dissects the politics of the precarious future faced by grad students in the United Kingdom. How does the future look elsewhere? Better? Worse? The Idle Ethnographer and I have a chapter coming out in the [2]Para Academics Handbook in which we explore some of these issues through the lens of our experience running this website:

A ‘job’ posting circulated on Twitter and Facebook in July 2013, provoking a mix of shock, anger, and hopelessness among [3]academics, particularly young aspiring academics. The posting was for a ‘non-stipendiary’ junior research fellowship in philosophy at Essex. The position has [4]since been withdrawn, although the statement issued by the university did little to assuage initial concerns. The university expressed alarm that, in the current funding climate, the intentions for the scheme were “at risk of being misunderstood and misrepresented.” Although the position is not paid, the statement continues, fellows may take on other work in addition, apply for funding, or take other measures to “manage a period without paid employment”. It’s difficult to identify at what point the misunderstanding occurred: the position was indeed an unpaid year-long posting for a post-doctoral researcher.

More recently, the Theology and Religion department at Durham [5]came under fire for soliciting
postgraduate volunteers to do unpaid teaching on its modules; rather than being paid, teachers on
the course would benefit in terms of the "valuable experience" of this "career development oppor-
tunity." It seems that the culture of unpaid internships, already so pervasive across all sectors, has
now extended into doctoral and post-doctoral life. How can it be that in the higher education sector
work is now severed from the guarantee of pay? Paid work would be great, but it's no longer guaranteed.

By no means is this limited to the few 'non-stipendiary' positions that have been posted recently.
This trend is evident in the proliferation of 'adjunct' positions, the disappearance of permanent jobs
and the tenure track, and the increasing use of underpaid PhD students to provide cheaper teaching
about the increasing precariousness of academic employment is that it overturns my previously held
assumption that academics would be resistant to such practices, eager as we are to critique neoliberal
capitalist exploitation. Why, then, the seemingly complete disconnect between theory and practice
here?


Enacting Methods: working with creative research methods (2013-11-12 18:33)

Enacting Methods: working with creative research methods

3 December, 10:30 – 16:30, The Open University, Milton Keynes, Michael Young 1 &2

What is the relationship between acts, performance and social science methods? This CCIG forum (co-developed
and hosted by CCIG Families, Relationships and Communities and Enactments Research Programmes) will explore
this question. It will provide a valuable practical opportunity for researchers interested in both using creative research to engage participants and also in developing methods which can dynamically work with people’s own, often political, actions. All Welcome!

Programme:

10.30-13.15: First Session

Introductions: Janet Fink, Jacqui Gabb and Kesi Mahendran (CCIG)

Brett Lashua (Leeds Metropolitan University): *Sound practice? Making music in creative research/as creative research with young people*

E-J Milne (University of Edinburgh): *Using creative methods to research identities, transitions and (non)belonging with young people*

Les Back (Goldsmiths, University of London): ‘*Go Home’ Texting, E Bordering and the New Politics Research*

13:15-14:00: Lunch & Showcasing of speakers’ methods and projects

14:00-16.00: Second Session

Engin Isin (Open University): *Acts Archive and method as politics*

Andrea Calsamiglia (Autonomous University, Barcelona): *Forum Theatre as a research methodology. Opportunities and challenges*

Elizabeth Sharp (Durham University/Texas Tech): *Methodologies of discomfort: Troubling data in a Dance/Social Science collaboration*

16.00-16.30: Questions and reflections

Further details and registrations on [1]CCIG website.

1. [http://ccig.newsweaver.co.uk/dcarv55hwlo2680f1niig?email=true&a=6&p=42372425&t=20101045](http://ccig.newsweaver.co.uk/dcarv55hwlo2680f1niig?email=true&a=6&p=42372425&t=20101045)

Sociology and Jazz (part 3) (2013-11-13 08:00)

I read the post by [1]Graham Scambler and the reply by [2]Sam Watts with interest. When I did my sociology A Level at college I was studying piano with a jazz teacher at the same time. All a long time ago now, but these posts stirred 2196
up some lost connections. I think that Scambler’s description of the place that jazz holds in the dominant view of cultural history resonates, and I can see where those perceptions come from. But I see Watts is quite right to point out the extent that jazz musicianship is colourblind within itself.

Watts makes the point that many of the jazz standards are by white composers, and I'd like to riff on that theme for a moment because there is an interesting story to tell there that I think draws on both posts.

One of the first steps that many take into jazz improvisation is by experimenting with a well known tune, such as "oh when the saints come marching in", or "sweet georgia brown". Imagine just a singer, unaccompanied: there is a creativity in the way that the familiar tune can be performed, played with, stretched, sung straight or with a turn into the blues. Now imagine them singing alongside a piano. The accompanist could play it straight or could also bring creativity. Then imagine them with a double bass, a sax, a clarinet, each finely tuned into each other’s take on the core tune. It is this collective creativity that is so characteristic of jazz improvisations.

I think there is something very poignant in the way the jazz standards have been reinterpreted, over and over, each time unique. Each performance is an assertion of entitlement: I can play this tune, I can play it in my own way, I can do something new with this. I think it is powerful to look back at the 20th century and see the great black american musicians claiming that right. So I think there is something politically progressive about jazz: it invites us to take ownership of a song and to make it our own. Punk before punk. It correlates with the progress of black america, it’s like sitting on the front of the bus. I have every right to play this.

It's even more interesting given the collective creativity: this is a group of people, black/white/yellow/brown, reinterpreting the score, each time. Just the fact that humans are able to do this is testament to our sociality as well as our technical musicality. We have every right to play this, and we trust each other enough to be creative together.

I suspect that the joy of listening and watching jazz improv is easily surpassed by the joy of playing. This probably isn't unique to jazz: the music we in the west now call "folk" was for most of human history more about playing than listening. The professionalisation of music over the last 200 years or so has alienated some of us from one of the real joys of music, which is participating. Lets compare a jazz improvisation to an classical orchestra. Yes, each performance is technically unique, and under the conductor, the interpretation of the score might be exciting. But it’s rehearsed. And most importantly to my point, audiences at orchestral classical participate in their head, perhaps they might tap their foot, or rock, or weep, or even clap along at the proms, but they are audiences, not players. Jazz improvisations, on the other hand, highlight the fluid collective creativity, watching it you see the eye contact, you see them subtly reading each other, you are acutely aware of them as individual players. But for the audience, the faces are too far away to see them as individuals. I’m sure there are books written about the orchestra as a symbol of industrial production. Perhaps chamber ensembles, who predate orchestras, have a little more of the individualism, and obviously contemporary classical, which borrows some of the characteristics of jazz, sometimes including improvisation. And, composers like Dvorak, Copeland and Gershwin fused jazz into classical and the same way people like Vaughn Williams did with folk into classical. I’m not saying jazz is isolated, it is clearly intertwined with other musical tradition.

Lastly, some jazz musicians are deliberately political. Nina Simone comes to mind, and her tear-inducing "the King is Dead" about the death of Martin Luther King, and her amazing renditions of "I wish I knew how it feels to be free".

Even if the individual musicians are not consciously political, their ability to do what they do is illustrative of a sort of freedom within a culture. My trips around Eastern Europe in 90s/00s suggested many ex-Soviet states have strong jazz traditions aligned to its political counter-cultural movements. The best jazz improvisation I ever saw was in a run-down underground club in Berlin in c2002.
So, Graham Scambler hypothesises: AGENCY IS STRUCTURED, AND JAZZ PERFORMANCE TRACKS THE INDIVIDUAL 'SOUL' AS IT EMERGES, EVEN OCCASIONALLY ESCAPES, FROM ITS SOCIAL HINTERLAND.
I would recast this as: Agency is enacted within a social structure, with each agent negotiating the freedoms and responsibilities of collective creativity.

Scambler: JAZZ IS A POLITICAL STATEMENT AGAINST RACISM.
Thomas: Jazz is an assertion of entitlement to be part of a culture.

Scambler: MUSIC COMMUNICATES, BUT MOSTLY VIA CONVENTION AND IN CONTEXT.
Thomas: Jazz improvisation is collective creativity impossible without an agreed structure

Scambler: DRUGS DISINHIBIT.
Thomas: no comment. probably yes, but I'm not sure disinhibition is required to be a jazz musician.

Scambler: THE CAPACITY OF JAZZ TO MOTIVATE ‘COLLECTIVE ACTION’ IS DEPENDANT ON STRUCTURE, STRUCTURED CULTURE AND AGENCY AND THE MOMENT.
Thomas: The collective creativity within jazz improvisation is only possible through collective recognition of the expected structure. A shared awareness of expected structures / conventions is a pre-condition for creativity. It is also a pre-condition for political and social change and may therefore correlate within social movements

Amber Thomas is a philosophy & literature graduate with an A level in sociology, and a rusty jazz pianist. Her day job is heading up the Academic Technology Team at the University of Warwick.


That’s the rather provocative issue addressed in [1]this Guardian article which explores the present malaise of liberal democracy in terms of the historical persistence of scepticism about its long term viability:

It has been a bad few months for western democracy. Over the summer we discovered that while democratic citizens and their elected politicians were going about their everyday business, the secret services were routinely eavesdropping on everything they did. It was bad enough to suppose that the politicians were conniving in this. More disturbing was the thought that even the politicians were being kept in the dark about what was going on. Then, in September, we had the spectacle of western leaders trying to take a lead on Syria, only to be stymied by their legislatures, which wouldn’t let them do anything (the British parliament didn’t express a decisive view, not even against the use of force; it simply rejected all the options put to it, like a sulky child). Principled positions on both sides of the argument got lost in the fog of partisan politicking. As Obama, Cameron and Hollande floundered around looking for a workable policy on Assad’s chemical arsenal, Putin stepped in at the last moment to save the day. It was a humiliation he compounded with [2]a crowing article in the New York Times that highlighted the advantages of mature statesmanship over democratic skittishness. Then things got worse. For 17 days in October the US
government ceased to function altogether, while bitter infighting in Washington took the country to the brink of a disastrous default. The sight of American politicians playing their absurd game of chicken with the global economy left the rest of the world with conflicted emotions, ranging from despair to barely concealed glee. Putin smirked. The Chinese tut-tutted. Bureaucrats in Brussels gave a world-weary sigh. Politicians who do not have to worry about getting re-elected or who face only docile and compliant parliaments found themselves looking on with a mixture of pity and contempt. Imagine trying to do serious politics under the relentless pressure of eternal democratic squabbling, with barely enough time to breathe, let alone to think straight. Is it any way to run a government?

This pattern has repeated itself throughout the following century. In the early 1930s, at the height of the great depression, dictator envy was rife. It was widely assumed that western democracy would only survive if it took a leaf out of the dictators’ book. Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler looked like the men of action who could take the tough decisions needed to stave off disaster (Mussolini was particularly admired in this period for his hackneyed ability to get the trains to run on time). Elected politicians looked like miserable pygmies by comparison; too frightened of their electorates to take charge and too hamstrung by their parliaments to change course. But Franklin Roosevelt showed that this analysis was wrong. He was a notoriously changeable politician, never quite sure what he was doing or what he believed in but willing to try most things on the off chance they might work. Throughout his long presidency there were regular predictions of impending disaster: either the country would be ruined or Roosevelt would turn out to be a dictator after all. Neither came to pass: under Roosevelt’s chaotic but resourceful leadership the country muddled through. It was the dictatorships that fell apart in the end. Barack Obama is no FDR, but the criticism he faces takes the same form. Some accuse him of being a dictator; others of being an inveterate ditherer. The truth is that he is neither. He is just a democratic politician doing his best to improvise a way out. During the cold war there was barely a moment when commentators in the west didn’t worry that the fight was being lost because the Russians were so much more ruthless than we were. Elected politicians were too busy fretting about getting re-elected to devise a coherent strategy for ultimate victory. They kept missing their chance. This fear persisted through the 1980s, even as the cold war was finally being won. In the Reagan White House, full of gung-ho cold warriors, the book everyone read (according to speechwriter Peggy Noonan) was How Democracies Perish, by a gloomy, pretentious French intellectual called Jean-François Revel. Like everyone else, Revel had spotted that the Soviet system was in deep trouble: communism didn’t work. Still he argued that it would drag western democracy down into the grave with it because the democracies were too indecisive for the brutal politics of the endgame. When the Soviet Union fell apart, the west would not know how to take advantage. The endless distractions of democratic politics would get in the way. So the hard-headed tyrants in the Kremlin, with nothing to lose, would run rings round us. Once it came to the crunch, democracy would fail to rise to the occasion.
In a nutshell Burns’ entire argument revolves around the equivalency of gold and money, and furthermore points out that if the Fed does not control this core relationship, it would “easily frustrate our efforts to control world liquidity” but also “dangerously prejudge the shape of the future monetary system.” Furthermore, the memo goes on to highlight the extensive level of gold price manipulation by central banks even after the gold standard has been formally abolished. [1]Ziad K Abdelnour

Some thoughts on how to use NVivo effectively (2013-11-14 08:00)

Kelle (1997) sounds a useful note of caution in an insightful discussion of the history of CAQDAS software:
The newly developed software programs for computer-aided textual analysis became tools for data storage and retrieval rather than tools for 'data analysis'. Nevertheless, terms used quite frequently in the ongoing debate like 'computer-aided qualitative data analysis' or 'software program for theory building' carry implicit connotations of computer programs as tools for the analysis of textual data which could be compared to software packages that perform statistical analyses.

While the boundary between data retrieval and data analysis has blurred somewhat as subsequent generations of CAQDAS software have become ever more sophisticated, it is helpful to recognise the important distinction between organising and analysing data at the outset. As with most software packages, many researchers only use a small selection of the tools offered within NVivo and many use it solely for the former function of organising the data which accumulates within any qualitative research project. On this level the software can be extremely useful: it is simply quicker, easier and cheaper to organise and manage large collections of qualitative sources using specialist software than is the case with any analogue alternative (Welsh 2002).

In the same way that a word-processing package does not dictate whether you write a novel or a sermon, QSR software does not determine nor constitute a method despite some literature that links the software to grounded theory. (Crowley, Harré and Tagg 2002: 195)

This is an important point though one which does risk overstatement. Using NVivo can predispose researchers towards certain techniques or approaches to analysis but, if and when this happens, it is a consequence of how the software is being used rather the software itself. As noted earlier, many researchers only use a small fraction of the functionality offered by the software. There is nothing ‘wrong’ with doing this. Indeed it would be difficult to understand what such a statement would mean, though a vague sense that one is using the tool in the ‘wrong’ way can be a common experience involved in working with complex software packages, particularly when getting started. It is helpful to confront this at the outset and proceed from an understanding of what the software can do and what use you want to make of these functions. Reflecting in the way helps us avoid what is a surprisingly common misconception about the role such software plays in research practice:

The misconception that the software does something (a notion of some automated process of analysis) is not uncommon. The question of who is in charge, the software or the researcher, is tellingly reflected in enquiries such as ‘Will it let me. . . ?’ It is sometimes forgotten by those new to qualitative software that any lack in its ability to do something in particular certainly does not preclude them from including such strategies in their research. It is always possible to leave the software to one side and use other
means as well—to get out of the car and perhaps walk, cycle or a take a boat for parts of the journey, as it were. It must be emphasized that, although the limitations it imposes continue to decrease, the researcher is not a hostage to qualitative software (Crowley, Harré and Tagg 2002: 195)

One of the most important things to remember about NVivo is that it is a collection of tools. While it might be difficult to make an informed decision about which of these to apply without some prior knowledge of the software, it is nonetheless a choice to be made by yourself and/or your research team. In my experience, it often doesn't occur to people that NVivo can be used in some entirely mundane ways tied to the practical demands of the project you're working on e.g. using a node or collection of nodes to collate material intended for a particular journal article you will be working on.

References


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*So much to read, so little time* (2013-11-15 08:00)
If you read one book a week, starting at the age of 5, and live to be 80, you will have read a grand total of 3,900 books, a little over one-tenth of 1 percent of the books currently in print.

#Keeponreading

I came across this post on the [1]CISG tumblr recently and it stuck in my head. I actually found it quite a distressing thought in a subdued sort of way. There's an inevitable upper limit on the number of books you can read in a lifetime and, once you begin to think it through, that upper limit constitutes a tiny fraction of the books in print. But I'm also fairly sure it's a tiny fraction of the books I would like to read. When I think about this it makes me want to be incredibly selective about the books I choose to read. But that kind of selectivity would feel like it was contrary to the enthusiasm for reading which generates the problem in the first place.


Social Science and the Politics of Public Engagement (2013-11-16 08:00)

Social Science and the Politics of Public Engagement
Tuesday, January 28, 2014 from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM
Open University Camden Centre, 1 – 11 Hawley Crescent, Camden Town, London

In recent years new technology has begun to facilitate ever more novel forms of research practice across the social sciences. New opportunities for collaboration exist in an information environment that is being radically and rapidly restructured by digital communications. An increasingly digitalised culture increasingly produces 'by-product data' as an unintended secretion of everyday social practices while also dramatically reshaping the circulation of academic research within the wider world. Universities themselves are undergoing profound changes, some by deliberate design and others as unintended consequences of broader social changes originating elsewhere. Given such changes, it seems untenable to conceive of or enact ‘public engagement’ in a way which fails to account of the shifting grounds upon which those seeking to support particular versions of the public find themselves standing. The constitution of contemporary publics cannot be taken for granted nor can the stability of the context within which ‘engagers’ seek to act.

This event seeks to explore this unstable landscape through exploring a number of innovative projects which pursued novel forms of research practice while also being orientated towards those beyond the academy. Through a discussion of these projects, their methodological innovations and the publics that formed around them, the seminar will seek to shed light on emerging questions about the future(s) of social science, its contested politics and of its relations to emerging ideas and practices of public engagement. The event will address, amongst others, the following questions:

- In a post REF 2014 environment, what could and should a social science informed public engagement agenda be?
- How, specifically, might the social sciences intervene in and help shape the PE agenda in the next couple of years?
- How could social scientists collaborate, both with each other and with those innovating forms of PE in other domains, to re-make what PE means?
- How can a critique of institutionalized approaches to PE and impact be articulated with commitments to public
activism, social justice, relevance and responsibility?

**Speakers:**

Keri Facer, Professor of Educational & Social Futures and AHRC Leadership Fellow for the Connected Communities Programme, based at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol.

Tim Newburn, Professor of Criminology and Social Policy at the London School of Economics.

Shamser Sinha, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Youth Studies at University Campus Suffolk.

More speakers TBC

**Organisers:**

Nick Mahony is Research Fellow and Co-Director Publics Research Programme, Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University. Nick leads the Creating Publics project which aims to ‘re-conceptualise public engagement with social science research in an age of emergent publics’. He is co-investigator on the RCUK-funded ‘Catalyst’ project and the ESRC-funded project ‘Making publics across time and space’. With Dr. Hilde Stephansen, he is also currently building a new OpenLearn website called ‘Participation Now’. At the heart of Participation Now is an evolving archive of contemporary participatory public engagement initiatives. The aim of this project is to support practitioners, researchers, students and citizens interested in new – participatory public engagement related – thinking, practice and innovation.

Mark Carrigan is a sociologist and academic technologist based at the University of Warwick. He edits the Sociological Imagination and co-convenes the BSA Digital Sociology and BSA Realism and Social Research groups. He is a research associate at the LSE’s Public Policy Group and was formerly managing editor of the LSE’s British Politics and Policy Blog. His research interests include sociological theory, methodology, biographical methods, longitudinal qualitative research, asexuality, sexual culture and digital sociology.

[...] or coupled “human-natural’ nature” that underpinn them. In recent years, where new technologies and digital media have begun to shape almost all aspects of research practice across both the social and natural [...] 

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-11-17 08:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.
If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.


Enduring Love? Couple Relationships in the 21st Century

The Enduring Love? project is a major ESRC-funded study (2011-2013) that has been exploring how couples experience, understand and sustain their long-term relationships.

To celebrate the end of the project we are hosting an event to launch the study findings and, with our dynamic array of speakers, to provoke wider discussion on making research count, why relationship research matters and dialogic research practice. The project has been designed, developed and implemented in collaboration with policy makers, relationship support organisations, media commentators and academic colleagues so the event promises to be a highly stimulating and critically engaged forum. There are also canapés and a glass or two of wine to take us into the evening.

We would be delighted if you could join us on:

Tuesday 14th January 2014, 12.30 – 6pm at The British Library, Euston Road, London

Full programme details are included below and are attached in poster format. Please feel free to circulate widely.

To register online please go to:


or contact CCIG Research Secretary Sarah Batt at:

[2]SocSci-CCIG-events@open.ac.uk

2. mailto:SocSci-CCIG-events@open.ac.uk
The myriad of diverse groups from various social and cultural backgrounds within a multicultural society such as the U.K means it is essential to find ways to promote an atmosphere of acceptance and understanding to ensure community cohesion. It is commonly accepted that schools address this through the compulsory curriculum in lessons such as Citizenship and Personal Social Education (PSE); however, recent reports by Ofsted in England and Estyn in Wales note that many schools are lacking when it comes to teaching citizenship; for example, Estyn (2006 p.3) states that schools “are generally more confident about, and focus more on, sustainable development than global citizenship.” One way of addressing this issue is to encourage the sociological imagination of high school pupils by incorporating psychosocial aspects into the school curricula. This can facilitate “the capacity to shift from one perspective to another- from the political to the psychological” (Wright Mills 1959 p.7). The education system should, and often does, attempt to expand individuals’ critical thinking skills, and this can be improved and taken further by increasing pupils’ capacity to empathise in order to address key issues within diverse societies, particularly the need for toleration.

Western societies have changed considerably since C Wright Mills first introduced the concept of the sociological imagination, particularly with regard to communications technology and globalisation. Yet counter to the view that globalisation and the homogenisation of cultures would reduce ethnic tensions, Williams (1999 cited in Mendus p.94) describes how as traditional forms of identity and expression are becoming lost through the system of modernisation, nationalism is an attempt to instil a sense of community. Furthermore, Leighton (2012 p.64-65) warns that “The increasing uniformity, predictability, homogeneity and standardization of everyday life- the mcdonaldization of existence- is creating false differences to fill the vacuum left by real choice.” Such ‘false differences’ can be seen dangerously manifesting themselves in the form of the BNP, and more recently, the English Defence League. As the sociological imagination essentially includes an attempt to walk in the shoes of others, in addition to recognising historical social factors and how we form our attitudes and feelings towards others, it may provide a useful focal point in the attempt to combat extremist views from all angles of the political spectrum.

One way of encouraging empathising with others, or at least creating an understanding of the dangers of the far right and other extremist groups, is to teach about poignant empirical experiments carried out at crucial points in history. By studying this type of research, it should be possible to create an all round awareness of the intricacies of human interaction and attitudes towards race and ethnicity. My recommendation for the curriculum in this area is to focus on basic psychological knowledge intertwined into the field of sociology, thereby placing a greater emphasis on socio-psychological outcomes. One example of the research that may be included is the renowned experiment conducted by Milgram who aimed to find out whether “Germans are different” with reference to the holocaust. The electric shock punishments administered by the participants during the course of the study revealed that no, in fact, Germans are not different, and many people are capable of blindly following those in authority. The experiment goes some way towards explaining the occurrence of genocide and can be related to more recent events such as Bosnia or the situation in Rwanda; whilst on another level, it may encourage a greater sense of personal awareness.

Furthermore, there is a wide range of socio-psychological studies which focus on issues such as in-groups and out-groups, and how membership of a particular group can cause unreasonable attitudes and responses towards others. Also, learning about the effects of labelling in relation to education and crime, and the impact of the media, with an emphasis on the current and past situation of ethnic minorities, should aid pupils in gaining a better understanding of societal developments. The point here is not to carry out a deep critical study of such research, but to take the basic lessons that have been learnt from the research and incorporate them into the compulsory school curriculum- not just for pupils studying specific subjects, but across the board. This may make it possible for students to imagine themselves in certain situations, including evaluating their perceived responses.

Ignatieff (1999 p.83) explains how the individuality of the person within a group that is despised is usually completely overlooked, with only membership of the group taken into consideration. The new forms of social
media provide a vehicle for the promotion of such views, with succinct comments and eye catching images having a major impact. A poignant example of this is the content of the English Defence League’s Facebook page, which also provided an interesting response to a question posed on the page following the horrific murder of soldier Lee Rigby. The question concerned whether one of the EDL’s aims is to encourage its members to attack Muslim women in the street. The reply was that only a minority of its members would do such a thing, to which the reply was “the same as in the Muslim community then”; following which the whole post was promptly removed by the administrators. Clearly then, sweeping generalisations about any group are offensive as well as dangerous, therefore the “essential task in teaching ‘toleration’ is to help people see themselves as individuals, and then to see others as such” (Ignatieff 1999 p.83); this may go some way towards mitigating the negative aspects of social media and the use of sound bites of information.

Tolerance should be a two way process, and pupils from minority groups would of course also be required to learn the curriculum, which is essential because toleration is not purely an issue for the majority culture. As Williams (1999 cited in Mendus p.75) points out, “the people that the liberal is particularly required to tolerate are unlikely to share the liberal’s view of the good of autonomy, which is the basis of his toleration.” Thus, perhaps an important aspect here is that an element of reciprocity may be developed, as feeling respected is likely to generate reciprocal respect, creating a mutually beneficial situation.

Another key factor in implementing a curriculum such as this, which is based on promoting certain values whilst suppressing others, is whether it is morally acceptable to do so- diversity in society suggests it is not only moral but essential.

Here in the U.K, as in most other Western countries, society has been facing continuing change in its demographic make up for centuries, and there is no going back from this. For society to maintain stability and flourish, it is of paramount importance that communities are able to live and work side by side cohesively. The alternative to this is the situation that manifests itself from time to time, particularly in northern mill towns, with people from one side of the cultural divide pitted against those from the other side. Therefore it is entirely reasonable to educate to limit such situations, which are often infectious, and their resultant harm. Moreover, Guttmann (1999 p.14) explains how “A democratic theory of education focuses on what might be called ‘conscious social reproduction’- the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behaviour of future citizens.” Developing the sociological imagination allows for this ‘conscious social reproduction’ and can assist in developing critical thinking skills which may be put to use throughout life, whether during further study or while making decisions in the workplace or social settings- not only during compulsory schooling.

**Wendy Booth is a Doctoral Researcher in the Social Ethics Research Group, University of South Wales, Newport**

**References**


Since reading this [1] astonishing book by Neil Gross earlier in the year I have been increasingly aware of the latent influence of pragmatism on my thought. I used to [2] really like Richard Rorty but came to think it was just a phase, explicable in terms of the resources his work gave me to [3] articulate my gnawing dissatisfaction with the philosophy I was studying at the time. However since the Neil Gross book sparked this particularly intensive bout of theoretical naval gazing, it’s become obvious to me that I was slightly too hasty in declaring pragmatism a phase. There’s a significant (Peircean) pragmatist influence in Margaret Archer’s work on reflexivity which has in turn shaped how I do sociology, as well as how I understand what it is I do, more than anything else. There’s also a significant pragmatist impulse within the work of Nicos Mouzelis was has, in the last couple of years, strongly shaped my understanding of the means and ends of sociological theory.

However there’s also the neo-pragmatist sensibility which, in retrospect, was what attracted me to Rorty in the first place. I’m currently in the process of occasionally going back to his work to consider what this sensibility is and the extent to which it’s compatible with the kind of social realism I’m now entirely persuaded by (i.e. ontological realism, epistemic relativism, judgemental rationality, the social as open system, fallibilism, a relational & emergentist ontology). One of the things Mouzelis has helped me to realise is that my interest in these questions is predominately practical, which conversely explains my frustration with the sort of philosophy I used to study. I want to understand how these debates do or do not have practical implications for how people study the social world. I want to understand how theoretical discourse is embedded with conflicting or collaborative networks of practitioners framed by intellectual traditions and how these interactions in turn reproduce or transform those traditions and shape the environment in which future practitioners will do their work.

It’s in thinking about what people actually do with theory that I’ve come back to Rorty’s notion of strong mis-reading, which appropriately enough seems to have been derived from a wilful misreading of Harold Bloom’s concept of the same name. This is an approach to reading which comes quite naturally to me:

The critic asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions but simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose. He makes the text refer to whatever is relevant to that purpose. He does this by imposing a vocabulary – a “grid,” in Foucault’s terminology – on the text which may have nothing to do with any vocabulary used in the text or by its author, and seeing what happens. The model here is not the curious collector of clever gadgets taking them apart to see what makes them work and carefully ignoring any extrinsic end they may have, but the psychoanalyst blithely interpreting a dream or a joke as a symptom of homicidal mania …. The strong misreader, like Foucault or Bloom, prides himself on the same thing, on being able to get more out of the text than its author or its intended audience could possibly have found there … The strong misreader doesn’t care about the distinction...
between discovery and creation, finding and making. He doesn’t think this is a useful distinction, any more than Nietzsche or James did. He is in it for what he can get out of it, not for the satisfaction of getting something right.

- Richard Rorty, The Rorty Reader, Pg 131

I find this notion much more challenging now than I did when I first encountered it seven years ago as a masters student. I take Rorty’s point to be that a preoccupation with uncovering the truth of the text, finding the key which will allow us to unlock the code concealed within, distracts from the real business of intellectual discourse: *keeping the conversation going*. So while his advocacy of this could be seen as violently deconstructive, it seems much more helpful to me to foreground the constructive notion incipient within it – if we move beyond the register of correct and incorrect interpretation then we begin to have much more fruitful (and interesting) conversations which build on a text and move beyond it.

This is where I see a compatibility between the neo-pragmatist sensibility and social realism. A sociologically self-aware and methodologically sensitive social realism offers us standards of *utility* in relation to potential (mis)readings of texts which Rorty’s aestheticism tends to shut down. So the social realist strong misreader wants theoretical texts to provoke interesting and useful conversations about how the conceptual insights of the text can be *practically* applied to the study of the social world. The point is not to say that theoretical discourse should be subjugated to the demands of methodologists and practitioners, as a ‘standing reserve’ of intellectual resources waiting to be mined, but simply to say that talking about theory doesn’t necessitate that we adopt the conceptual and normative standards endorsed and enforced by the theoreticians.

Though having said all this, I delayed my PhD by a month earlier this summer when I was consumed by the sudden anxiety, prompted by encountering a pathetically facile misreading, that the critique of Giddens in the first chapter of my thesis was predicated on a comparable misconstrual. So I diligently returned to his books in order to reassure myself that I had indeed discovered the *truth of the text*. I’m not sure how to square either this concern or my response to it with what I’ve written above. I can think of other examples, which I’m not going to write about lest this post become far too long. But there does seem to be a theory-practice inconsistency here which intrigues me.

I’m also concerned that ‘strong misreading’ licenses my eclecticism in a negative way and that, on some level, it appeals to me because I’m someone who tends to read widely but shallowly. So making a virtue of productive misinterpretation, ‘getting more from the texts than the authors intended’, in fact only serves to free me from the nagging feeling that I’ve not read deeply enough into an area to justifiably make the claims that I want to make. Given the general direction of travel within intellectual life, in which professional rewards goes to those who can generate novelty by combining existing ideational material in new and attention-grabbing ways, there’s also something potentially subversive about *slow reading*. Having spent the summer blogging my way through Margaret Archer’s recent books I can certainly see the appeal of doing this. But is this necessarily driven by the impulse to find the ‘truth of the text’ or could it simply be a particular sort of intellectual conversation which can only take place when it is grounded on a *concerned* and *attentive* reading? So rather than accurate or inaccurate could we usefully think about *attentiveness* or *inattentiveness*?

This post is an example of sitting down to write one thing and in fact writing another. I intended to write something quick about Rorty’s notion of ‘strong misreading’ and instead ended up writing something much more exploratory, in which I raised a number of questions which had been inchoately rattling around in my head for the last few months. If you accept my understanding of how I use blogging (often as an externalisation of an internal conversation) then this post could be seen as an example of what I’m interested in with the ‘neo-pragmatist sensibility’. I had a particular object (a specific concept articulated by a specific philosopher) which i intended to write about and, through doing so, I found myself writing about many other things as well. This is a peculiarly monological
example of what interests me about ‘productive’ conversations. The intellectual standards we endorse and enforce have implications for kinds of conversations, external or otherwise, which they give rise to.

Even though I reject Rorty’s aestheticism, in which he judges the value of these conversations in entirely aesthetic terms*, I think his sensitivity to the dialogical consequences of intellectual norms is very important. I guess a long term project of mine, albeit one that’s a million miles away from crystallising into any sort of concrete form, would be to try and recover this impulse so as to rearticulate it within a generic framework of social theory working at a level of generality which encompasses everything that shares the belief in the possibility of social knowledge to be produced through social scientific inquiry. Theoretical schism bores the hell out of me (though I think some of the issues at stake are sometimes important in a practical sense) and, as divisive a figure as Rorty is philosophically, it increasingly seems to me that there are elements of his work which could be recovered and reconstituted as a productive resource for social scientific practice.

How could he do otherwise given that he has collapsed the distinction between what is rhetoric and what isn't? This move has always baffled me given that, as far as I can see, it reduces theoretical discourse to the status of crap poetry.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/05/05/the-frustrations-of-philosophers-richard-rorty-sociological-explanation-and-intellectual-biography/

What is Capitalist Realism? (2013-11-19 08:00)

Assuming I haven't completely misunderstood Mark Fisher’s point then I'd argue this is one of the most striking examples of [1]capitalist realism I’ve ever encountered. It was posted as a comment on [2]this Glenn Greenwald article. Note how an assertion of the obviousness of this state of affairs goes hand-in-hand with a dismissal of the ‘rubes’ who are assumed to have uncritically assented to the enormously powerful ideological forces from which the commentator has long been immune. Self-congratulation at being ‘smart enough’ to see through manufactured illusion and contempt for those who failed to do this substitute for moral condemnation of something which is nonetheless regarded as a social problem. The post-ideological stance of ‘seeing through’ the lies in fact engenders objective passivity coupled with a reactionary orientation to those who seek to engage in proactive opposition:

I just don't understand why people hadn't assumed this kind of surveillance was going on already. Has no one seen the Enemy of the State? In all seriousness, I wondered about it after figuring out how communications satellites work and realizing that all of those satellites are launched by the government.

Is it such revelation that a country on a planet as nationalistic as Earth had the opportunity to spy on most of the world and took that opportunity? If you are a student of history you would know that spying on other nations/groups is human reality.

I don't necessarily think its a great idea to have one country doing a lot of this under the guise of "the greater good" because they will end up using it to benefit themselves in any way they feel they can. I just don't think any of the Snowden revelations should have been so inflammatory. How could you not
see the writing on the wall? How could you assume this wasn’t happening?

I just don’t like the Greenwald tone of “I can’t believe this, can you? We don’t live in a perfect world as our politicians had told us!!” He comes across as a rube if he is truly shocked by all of these spying "revelations."

And I defy you to find a country on this planet who doesn’t conduct all of the surveillance that they possibly can. Its an aspect of national defense and economic survival that causes this espionage all over the planet. The US just possess a crazy ability to spy on mostly everyone because of the system of communications the US gov’t help set up for the world.

All I’m saying is, you missed the window to complain about this by about 15-20 years. The groundwork for this type of communications monitoring has been in front of your face since the 80’s & 90s and you weren’t smart enough to see it. There is no going back.


Call for papers: Historical Perspectives on ‘Antisocial Personality Disorder’ (2013-11-19 14:00)

Call for papers: Historical Perspectives on 'Antisocial Personality Disorder'

We are organising a conference with the title ‘Historical Perspectives on ‘Antisocial Personality Disorder”. This will be held in London on Monday 12th May 2014, at Queen Mary, University of London.

We are interested in work that takes historical perspectives on the various diagnostic categories typified by those of ‘moral insanity’, ‘psychopathy’, and ‘personality disorder’. We are particularly interested in work that helps to put 19th-century developments of ‘psychiatric’ thought in this area into social and cultural contexts.

The keynote speaker will be Professor Nicole Rafter, School of Criminology and Criminal Justice, Northeastern University.

The conference will be funded as part of an ESRC seminar series called ‘Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on ‘Antisocial Personality Disorder” and is being jointly organised with the Centre for the History of the Emotions (QMUL).

We will have some funds available for transport costs for a number of speakers.

If you are interesting in contributing to this event please send a 200-300 word abstract to Dr David W Jones by Friday 29th November:[1]d.jones@uel.ac.uk<mailto:d.jones@uel.ac.uk>.

1. mailto:d.jones@uel.ac.uk
2. mailto:d.jones@uel.ac.uk
As the AVEN website describes, "in a world where sexuality is promoted as the norm, many asexuals grow up thinking that they're somehow sick, broken or deficient". This raises the question of the nature of this norm, as well as how it is formed and propagated. Why would individuals who do not experience sexual attraction be so pervasively prone to considering that this might be a function of some underlying pathology? Seemingly the association between sexual desire and 'normal' physical and psychological functioning is sufficiently pervasive that it goes largely unrecognized and unquestioned. Kim suggests that reaction to asexuality can be understood in terms of the "pathological framework for asexuality" which results from a "larger trend in which sexuality is tied up with the image of 'normal bodies'". On her account stigmatizing reactions to asexuality should not be assumed to be particularistic prejudicial responses to a newly emerging minority identity but rather stem from culturally pervasive and near hegemonic ideas about health and the body. She suggests that "the absence of sexual desire, feelings and activities is seen as abnormal and reflective of poor health because of the explicit connection made between sexual activeness and healthiness". This association is echoed in the everyday experiences of many asexual individuals.

Kim places much stress on contemporary attitudes towards health and the body as an explanation of the marginalization and stigmatization which the asexual community is widely subject to. She suggests that "health information and interpretations about sex are grounded too much in belief in universal sexual desire and given too much authority to health professionals to produce 'cures' marketed by sex therapy and pharmaceutical industries". This stands as a plausible claim given the high visibility which such 'lifestyle and health' discourses are afforded in a world saturated by information television, lifestyle magazines and health websites. The aggregative effect of such phenomena is to propagate a sense of normalcy which equates bodily health with sexual satisfaction. Within disability studies, much attention has been paid to the 'myth of asexuality', identifying the role which outward markers of disability are equated with an underlying lack of sexual function.

This pervasive tendency within contemporary culture to equate health with sexual activity expresses itself in the trend, discussed earlier, for asexual individuals to initially consider that the difference they recognize in themselves (i.e. their lack of interest in sex) is the result of some underlying pathology. Though the vocabulary used and the stress placed varies from person to person, the notion in play is the same: 'if I don't have a desire for sexual activity does this mean there's something wrong with my health?'

However while this prevalent discourse of the healthy sexual body clearly plays some role in the sexual assumption, it does not explain it in its entirety. To suggest that it does would assume firstly that individuals in contemporary society are 'cultural dupes', with attitudes entirely determined by medical discourses propagated in the media and secondly that the emergence of the sexual assumption correlates directly with the increasing proliferation of lifestyle advice about sex and the body. While an empirical investigation of this latter claim is beyond the purview of the present chapter, it seems implausible that this could be so, not least of all because the bringing into being of such an idea through massive exposure in the media would surely prompt a degree of reflection upon it which has heretofore been lacking. Therefore I will argue that other factors play a crucial role in explaining the genesis and trajectory of the sexual assumption within contemporary society.
There’s a great post on [1]Deborah Lupton’s blog in which she discusses the academic quantified self. It builds on a recent paper by Roger Burrows, [2]Living with the h-index, in which he explores the implications of the increasing quantification of academic labour for the structures of feeling prevalent amongst academics. I’ve attached a talk Roger gave on the topic underneath the extract from Deborah’s post.

Engaging as a public sociologist using digital media invariably involves some form of quantifying the self. Roger Burrows has employed the term ‘metric assemblage’ to describe the ways in which academics have become monitored and measured in the contemporary audit culture of the modern academy. As part of configuring our metric assemblages, we are quantifying our professional selves.

Academics have been counting elements of their work for a long time as part of their professional practice and presentation of the self, even before the advent of digital technologies. The ‘publish or perish’ maxim refers to the imperative for a successful academic to constantly produce materials such as books, book chapters and peer-reviewed journal articles in order to maintain their reputation and place in the academic hierarchy. Academic curricula vitae invariably involve lists of these outputs under the appropriate headings, as do university webpages for academics. They are required for applications for promotions, new positions and research funding.

These quantified measures of output are our ‘small data’: the detailed data that we collect on ourselves. Universities too engage in regular monitoring and measuring practices of the work of their academics and their own prestige in academic rankings and assessment of the quality and quantity of the research output of their departments. They therefore participate in the aggregation of data, producing ‘big data’ sets. The advent of digital media, including the use of these media as part of engaging in public sociology, has resulted in more detailed and varied forms of data being created and collected. Sociologists using digital media have ever greater opportunities to quantify their output and impact in the form of likes, retweets, views of their blogs, followers and so on. We now have Google Scholar, Scopus or Web of Science to monitor and display how often our publications have been cited, where and by whom, and to automatically calculate our h-indices. Academic journals, now all online, show how often researchers’ articles have been read and downloaded, and provide lists of the most cited and most downloaded articles they have published.

I’m curious as to how attitudes towards metrics differ between career stages. In my own case, it often confuses me that my hostility towards audit culture can co-exist with a strange affection for google scholar. I still find it exciting to discover that my work has been cited. It confirms people have read it and that it made a sufficient impact for them to choose to reference it. Google Scholar automatically indexes these citations for me, thereby avoiding what would feel like a depressingly narcissistic exercise of searching for them myself. It's a service that has existed for longer than I have been publishing academic papers. So what did you do before google scholar? Simply wait until you stumbled across references to yourself or an acquaintance noticed them and pointed them out to you? The idea seems incredibly strange to me. Has a PhD in the current climate already shaped my professional self to cohere with what [5]Burrows calls *the moment of the metrics*?

At what point can we begin to date the emergence of the significant metricisation of the UK academy? It is the contention of this paper that the marked change in academic sensibilities invoked by new forms of measure only really begun to take hold in a significant manner within the last decade or so. There has been a slow accumulation of layer upon layer of data at various levels, scales and granularities since the mid-1980s, until there came a point of bifurcation; a point at which structures of feeling in the academy were irretrievably altered by the power of these numbers. The ‘bygone world’ identified by Lock and Martin (2011) was the academy of the 1950s through to the early or perhaps even the mid-1990s. As De Angelis and Harvie (2009: 10) have observed, academic accounts of the life-world of the post-war University, as contained within studies such Halsey’s (1992) Decline of Donnish Dominion and even Slaughter and Leslie’s (1997) Academic Capitalism, concur that ‘measure in any systematic form, with accompanying material consequences…[is]… new. Measure, as we would now recognise it, simply did not exist in the post-war university’.

So the ‘moment of the metrics’ – the point of bifurcation – could be thought of as the beginning...
this century; the point at which academics could no longer avoid the consequences of the developing systems of measure to which they were becoming increasingly subject.Crudely, at some point between the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) carried out in 1996 and the one conducted in 2001 (Hicks, 2009; Kelly and Burrows, 2012) the moment of the metrics occurred and the structures of feeling that have now come to dominate so much of academic culture began to take hold.

As discussed elsewhere (De Angelis and Harvie, 2009; Kelly and Burrows, 2012) the life-world of the university is now increasingly enacted through ever more complex data assemblages drawing upon all manner of emissions emanating from routine academic practices such as recruiting students, teaching, marking, giving feedback, applying for research funding, publishing and citing the work of others. Some of these emissions are digital by-products of routine transactions (such as journal citations), others have to be collected by means of surveys or other formal data capture techniques (such as the National Student Survey (NSS)) and others still require the formation of a whole expensive bureaucratic edifice designed to assess the ‘quality’ of research (Kelly and Burrows, 2012).

As Angelis and Harvie (2009:17-24) note, different metrics operate at different scales: some at the level of the individual; some at departmental, school or faculty level; some at institutional level; some at national level; and some at international level. However, all are nested or folded into each other to form a complex data assemblage that confronts the individual academic. One could, for example: have an individual h-index (see below) of X; publish in journals with an average ‘impact factor’ (see below) of Y; have an undergraduate teaching load below the institutional norm; have a PhD supervision load that is about average; have an annual grant income in the top quartile for the social sciences; work within an academic agglomeration with a 2008 RAE result that places it within the ‘top 5’ nationally; receive module student evaluation scores in the top quartile of a distribution; work within a school with ‘poor’ NSS results, placing it in the bottom quartile for the subject nationally; teach a subject where only Z per cent of graduates are in ‘graduate’ employment 6 months after they graduate, earning an average of just £18,500; work within a higher education institute that is ranked in the ‘top 10’ nationally in various commercially driven ‘league tables’, and within the ’top 80’ globally, according to others.

It would be quite easy to generate a list of over 100 different (nested) measures to which each individual academic in the UK is now (potentially) subject. However, for our purposes here, we will consider just six domains: citations; workload models; transparent costing data; research assessments; teaching quality assessments; and university league tables. Through the discussion of these we will be concerned to begin to decipher common themes and points of difference in the origins, functioning, effect and affect of these different measures. To be sure, all of our examples were developed at different points in time, by different organisations and for different purposes: citation measures and league tables have been developed by private companies, publishers and newspapers to promote sales and revenue streams; the transparent costing system was developed by Treasury in order to ensure no cross-subsidisation between teaching and research; research assessment exercises were initiated by civil servants but then ‘domesticated’ by funding agencies and scholarly bodies and associations; and the measurement of student satisfaction was prompted by politicians concerned to promote a greater level of consumerism amongst students (and their parents) in the higher education system. However, there are commonalities in that all give an emphasis to numeric representation, order and rank, all focus on the ‘measurable’, and all appear to have an interest in promoting competitive changes that alter numbers and ranks over time. The crucial thing though is that together they are all now experienced ‘on the ground’ as a more or less ubiquitous melange of measures – full of legacy tensions and contradictions to be sure – that increasingly function as a overarching data assemblage orientated to myriad forms of quantified control; an assemblage that the enactment of which invokes the sorts of affective reactions enumerated at the outset of this paper.
This does suggest a possible generational divide between those who made the transition into the moment of the metrics and those who entered an already metricated academy. Does the nature of resistance to quantified control vary in each case? I hope I never take these metrics too seriously but I realise that I struggle to imagine ever ignoring them all together. The depressing thought is that I struggle to imagine not being interested in them. Deborah asks some important questions which relate to this at the end of her post:

Should the practices of quantifying the academic self be considered repressive of academic freedom and autonomy? Do they place undue stress on academics to perform, and perhaps to produce work that is sub-standard but greater in number? However it is also important to consider the undeniable positive dimensions of participating in digital public engagement and thereby reaching a wider audience. Academics do not write for themselves alone: being able to present their work to more readers has its own rewards. Quantified selfers can find great satisfaction in using data to take control over elements of their lives and also as a performative aspect. So too, for academics, collecting and presenting data on their professional selves can engender feelings of achievement, satisfaction and pride at their accomplishments. Such data are important to the academic professional sense of self.

1. http://simplysociology.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/the-academic-quantified-self/
4. file://www.youtube.com/embed/DxiWWx39KM8
5. http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/6560/2/Living_with_the_h-index_revised.pdf
6. http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/6560/2/Living_with_the_h-index_revised.pdf

Deborah Lupton (2013-11-21 08:15:00)
Hi Mark Thanks for this. I recently received a comment by an Australian colleague on the blog post you cite above, asking how any 'pleasure' could be engendered by the quantified academia. This is my response to him that I posted on the blog:

"Most people, including academics, find satisfaction from positive feedback about their work. This may include the number of citations our work has received, the assessments our students give us, the number of followers we have on Twitter or readers of our blogs, for example. In this sense, there is pleasure to be gained from measures of self-quantification. I would also argue that some of these measures can be important for academics who have had an interrupted career trajectory or who are from marginalised social groups to demonstrate their 'worth' when applying for jobs and so on in ways that are viewed as objective by those who assess them. They thus can be powerful bargaining chips in cases where discrimination may otherwise occur." I am discussing this further in my Digital Sociology book. There are many interesting issues here to explore about the ambivalences of quantifying the academic self. As for your question about how one measured one's impact in pre-digitised days, well there were paper equivalents of Web of Science that were kept in university libraries as large annual volumes, and one could look up one's citations in these. But of course they took ages to appear and excluded most humanities and social sciences journals. As far as I am concerned, Google Scholar is a marvel, and I have used my citations (and yes, my h-index) to my advantage as much as I have been able! Deborah
We academics are terrible cynics (and quite often hypocrites too ...). It’s true we are embroiled in a moment of metrics, but academics have been metricised for a long time, even if it just meant displaying how many articles and books etc they had published on their CVs as a measure of worth. Not sure where Bourdieu’s work on power could be used here, as I have tended to draw principally on his habitus stuff (although that is relevant to notions of the academic habitus as a metricised assemblage!).

The academic quantified self | Alfredo Berbegal Vázquez (2015-08-01 21:12:13)
[...] The academic quantified self [...]

The Value of Academic Freedom | the social thinker (2015-10-19 05:46:47)
[...] to engage in "boasting" research findings and generally self-interested conduct. (Mark Carrigan aptly describes the competitive self-interest produced by the recent digital metrification of [...]
With a UK population of 3.3% it is clear that black Britons are faced with a very problematic situation, there is an overrepresentation of black students and a massive under representation of Black professors. These students end up overwhelmingly as recipients and not participants of knowledge creation in this country.

There are 4,450 black UK national academic staff members, and 2,690 black non-UK national staff member – this means over a third of the academics that work within UK institutions are not born and possibly not educated in the UK. There is a very particular type of subtle social injustice that takes place when institutions overlook local populations and point to black non-UK academics and professors when searching for proof that they are in fact actively employing black people. Through no fault of their own these black academics come from a different environment, often without the connection or knowledge necessary to become assets to black populations in the UK.

The Quantified Self and Taylorization 2.0 (2013-11-23 08:00)

There’s a provocative post on [1]Nick Carr’s blog in which he discusses the potential expansion of self-tracking technology as a mechanism of quantified control:

But, as management researcher H. James Wilson [2]reports in the Wall Street Journal, there is one area where self-tracking is beginning to be pursued with vigor: business operations. Some companies are outfitting employees with wearable computers and other self-tracking gadgets in order to “gather subtle data about how they move and act — and then use that information to help them do their jobs better.” There is, for example, the [3]Hitachi Business Microscope, which office workers wear on a lanyard around their neck. “The device is packed with sensors that monitor things like how workers move and speak, as well as environmental factors like light and temperature. So, it can track where workers travel in an office, and recognize whom they’re talking to by communicating with other people’s badges. It can also measure how well they’re talking to them — by recording things like how often they make hand gestures and nod, and the energy level in their voice.” Other companies are developing Google Glass-style “smart glasses” to accomplish similar things.

A little more than a century ago, Frederick Winslow Taylor introduced “scientific management” to
By meticulously tracking and measuring the physical movements of manufacturing workers as they went through their tasks, Taylor counseled, companies could determine the "one best way" to do any job and then enforce that protocol on all other workers. Through the systematic collection of data, industry could be optimized, operated as a perfectly calibrated machine. "In the past the man has been first," declared Taylor; "in the future the system must be first."

The goals and mechanics of the Quantified Self movement, when applied in business settings, not only bring back the ethic of Taylorism, but extend Taylorism’s reach into the white-collar workforce. The dream of perfect optimization reaches into the intimate realm of personal affiliation and conversation among colleagues. One thing that Taylor’s system aided was the mechanization of factory work. Once you had turned the jobs of human workers into numbers, it turned out, you also had a good template for replacing those workers with machines. It seems that the new Taylorism might accomplish something similar for knowledge work. It provides the specs for software applications that can take over the jobs of even highly educated professional


There’s a sense in which I agree with Carr here and I’ve [5]written about this in the past. However he glosses over the issue that interests me the most when he talks about the “transformation of QS from tool of liberation to tool of control”. It’s this dichotomy which so fascinates me about self-tracking. On the one hand, I can see how it can function as a quasi-emancipatory technology which augments the human capacity for reflexivity, potentially freeing the individual from the blind force of (socially inculcated) habit. On the other hand, I can just as easily see how this expansion of portable technology for quantification can, particularly when coupled with amenable patterns of affective response from the ‘users’, constitute a potentially terrifying expansion of disciplinary control within the workplace. I could see how, stealing a phrase from Mark Fisher, this results in the ever more effective design of electro-libidinal parasites deployed to manage motivation at a time of intensifying deskilling. Carr usefully draws out a parallel tension which can be found in in the advent of ‘personal’ computing, usefully hinting at the dialectical interconnection between the consumerisation of IT and the centralization of control in cloud services and data centres:

The transformation of QS from tool of liberation to tool of control follows a well-established pattern in the recent history of networked computers. Back in the mainframe age, computers were essentially control mechanisms, aimed at monitoring and enforcing rules on people and processes. In the PC era, computers also came to be used to liberate people, freeing them from corporate oversight and control. The tension between central control and personal liberation continues to define the application of computer power. We originally thought that the internet would tilt the balance further away from control and toward liberation. That now seems to be a misjudgment. By extending the collection of data to intimate spheres of personal activity and then centralizing the storage and processing of that data, the net actually seems to be shifting the balance back toward the control function. The system takes precedence.


Self-tracking and 'techorexia' The Sociological Imagination (2014-01-17 08:00:57)

[...](many) things which fascinates me about self-quantification tools is their seeming capacity to both increase individual autonomy and extend control over the individual. However my instinctive personal reactions to this tend to be a matter of seeing the former as [...]

BSA Early Career Theorists’ Symposium (2013-11-24 08:00)

Early Career Theorists' Symposium
6th June, 2014, held at the London School of Economics

Call for Abstracts
The Early Career Theorists’ Symposium is a special one-day symposium for up-and-coming theorists, organized on behalf of the British Sociological Association’s Theory Study Group. This symposium aims to bring together sociologists at a relatively early stage in their career, who work on theory or are engaged in original theoretical work as part of their on-going research. We invite early-career sociologists, across all research areas, to submit abstracts. Submissions from advanced PhD students are also welcome.

Prof. Claire Alexander (Manchester), Prof. Patrick Baert (Cambridge), and Dr Fran Tonkiss (LSE)—covering theorisations of Race & Ethnicity, Philosophy of the Social Sciences and the Sociology of Intellectuals, and Urban and Spatial Theory and Economies, respectively—will comment on the papers. Complete information for submitting the abstract will consist of:
(1) name and contact information of the author (including career stage, e.g. PhD student, post-doc, early career academic);
(2) title of your presentation;
(3) a 500-word abstract of the presentation;
(4) five keywords descriptive of the presentation.

Please send submissions to the organizers: Dr Marcus Morgan, University of Cambridge ([1]mm2014@cam.ac.uk) and Dr Suzi Hall, London School of Economics ([2]s.m.hall@lse.ac.uk). The deadline for submission of abstracts is 6th January, 2013.

Please plan to share a full paper of no more than 5000 words by 28th April, 2013.
In his book, [2]Zombie Politics and Culture in the Age of Casino Capitalism, author and scholar Henry Giroux connects the dots to prove his theory that our current system is informed by a "machinery of social and civil death" that chills "any vestige of a robust democracy."

This week on Moyers & Company, Giroux explains that such a machine turns "people who are basically so caught up with surviving that they become like the walking dead – they lose their sense of agency, they lose their homes, they lose their jobs."

What's more, Giroux points out, the system that creates this vacuum has little to do with expanding the meaning and the substance of democracy itself. Under "casino capitalism," the goal is to get a quick return, taking advantage of a kind of logic in which the only thing that drives us is to put as much money as we can into a slot machine and hope we walk out with our wallets overflowing.

A cultural and social critic of tireless energy and vast interests, Giroux holds the Global TV Network Chair in the English and Cultural Studies Department at McMaster University and is a distinguished visiting professor at Reyerson University, both schools in Canada.

http://billmoyers.com/segment/henry-giroux-on-zombie-politics/

1. file://player.vimeo.com/video/80047135

2222
"No one is born gay (or straight)"? (2013-11-25 08:00)

[1]

(CC BY 2.0 [2]Guillaume Paumier)

[3]Here is a great post by [4]ejaneward at the [5]Social (In)Queery blog discussing the social origins of sexuality and the complexity of notions, such as "choice", which we are too often keen to simplify. What do you think?

Social (In)Queery is a collective project to enhance public access to good social data on sexuality and gender. Begun in 2011 by sociologists Tey Meadow, C.J. Pascoe and Jane Ward, Social (In)Queery promotes collaborative dialogue, interdisciplinary investigation and feminist and queer analysis of topics relevant to public debate.

2. http://www.flickr.com/photos/17267678@N00/5848364048/in/photolist-9UNoSU-9UKNtH-9UNt19-9UKy1R-9UNsNW-9UKdt-9UKzR4-9UNrw7-9UKM8X-9UNqTu-9UKyPn-9UKAjb-9UKDKH-9UN
3. http://socialinqueery.com/2013/03/18/no-one-is-born-gay-or-straight-here-are-5-reasons-why/
The Perils of Passion: Videogames, Higher Education and Precarious Labour (2013-11-26 08:00)

[1] The Jacobin Magazine has a [3]fascinating article exploring the role played by a passion for gaming in facilitating the expansion and intensification of precarious labour within the video game industry. With seemingly endless cohorts of eager young gamers desperate to break into the industry, the employment practices encountered by the article’s author are increasingly the norm amongst design studios:

I was a QA engineer, and a QA’s job is to break things in-game, record how the things were broken, and then pass the information to the content creation team, who would hopefully fix them. It’s a common entry-level gig in the industry, one which gives you a broad knowledge of how things work to eventually launch something more specialized.

Most of my coworkers viewed their gigs at Funcom as having “arrived.” Almost all of them had come through Red Storm, one of the most respected studios in the country and an industry linchpin in North Carolina. The stories they told were galling: gross underpayment, severe overworking, and middle management treating the cubicle farm as a little fiefdom all their own.

Red Storm at the time employed the bulk of their QAs as temps. Lured in by promises of working their way up the ladder, scores of college kids and young workers would come in, ready to make it in the new Hollywood of the video game industry. The pay was minimum wage. The hours were long, with one of my immediate supervisors casually stating that he regularly worked at least 60 hours a week during his time there. Being temps, there were no benefits.

This would go on for the duration of a project, usually the final four months or so. When the temps weren’t needed anymore, it was common for groups of them to be rounded up, summarily let go
without notice, and told that a call would be forthcoming if their services were needed again.

There were other stories – strange and mean ones, like the producer who waltzed into the QA office and asked if anyone was heading for the dumpster. When no one answered, she dropped a big bag of garbage in the middle of the floor, snarled, "I guess I’ll just leave this here, then," and stalked off; the QA lead chewed them out since the woman was a producer, a project manager.

Everyone who came through related the same story of QA's complete sequestration from the development team; nobody was allowed to speak to a "dev" directly, only through intermediaries, nor to enter the dev side of the building. The QA temps were a clear underclass on one floor, while full-time "real" video game workers occupied the other.

At the time, I didn’t understand why someone wouldn't leave such a situation. The pay was awful, the hours too long, and it sounded like a rotten place to work if even a fraction of the stories I’d hear over lunch breaks were true.

But everyone kept returning to some variation of the same theme: it was their dream to work in the video game industry.

http://jacobinmag.com/2013/11/video-game-industry/

What makes the difference is **passion**. When people are dreaming of a career spent working on what they love, it becomes much easier to convince them to accept working conditions which are ungenerous at best and nakedly exploitative at worst. It becomes easier still when a limited number of positions within the industry are immensely oversubscribed, often by younger (and lesser experienced) hopefuls willing to work for less than established staff.

Again and again, when you read interviews or watch industry trade shows like E3, "passion" is used as a word to describe the ideal employee. Translated, “passion” means someone willing to buy into the dream of becoming a video game developer so much that sane hours and adequate compensation are willingly turned away. Constant harping on video game workers' passion becomes the means by which management implicitly justifies extreme worker abuse.

And it works because that sense of passion is very real. The first time that you walk through the door at an industry job, you’re taken with it. You enter knowing that every single person in the building shares a common interest with you and an appreciation for the art of crafting a game. Friendships can be built immediately – to this day, many of my best friends arose from that immediate commonality we all had on the job.

This is an incredibly enticing proposition; no one who goes in is completely immune to it, no matter how far down the totem pole of life’s interests gaming is. And there are few other jobs quite like it.

Geek culture takes such strongly held commonalities of interest and consumption far more seriously than most other subcultures. I recently wrote a [4]piece for this publication which was, in part,
about the replacement of traditional class, gender, and racial solidarity with a culture of consumption. Here, in the video game creation business, is the way capital harnesses geek culture to actively harm workers. The exchange is simple: you will work 60-hour weeks for a quarter less than other software fields; in exchange, you have a seat at the table of your primary identifying culture’s ruling class.

http://jacobinmag.com/2013/11/video-game-industry/

The parallels to higher education struck me early in this article, so it was oddly satisfying (though also rather depressing) to read about the role that private higher education is coming to play in the perpetuation of this deeply problematic state of affairs:

In addition to gaming’s notoriously manipulative management, one of the true villains of modern America decided to hitch itself to the burgeoning and increasingly chic industry in the 1990s. Just in time to latch onto the boom years of the Sony Playstation, for-profit universities began marketing sham programs to people hoping for a career in video game creation.

They’re still at it in 2013. The commercials come on late at night or, more rarely, the middle of the day. The times chosen aren’t an accident – they’re aimed at the jobless and underemployed. A wailing guitar or dubstep kicks in. Sometimes there’s an attractive woman or a fast car. The (almost always) male student recalls how [5]nobody ever thought video games would make him money; they, he smirks, were wrong.

For-profit colleges sell a [6]vision of a career which doesn’t exist. Moreover, they use a weird, sexy, completely untrue version of a video game career as bait for their other programs, showing a school where even the screenwriting students can hobnob with these cool slackers.

As with so much other hard data regarding the industry, figures from education are obfuscated and hard to come by. When I spoke with the National Center for Education Statistics, we had to set parameters on our searches that left out programs which I know exist, simply because many are filed under general computer science. Coupled with total enrollment figures being available only once every other year, and this data only being available from schools accepting federal student aid, makes the numbers on video game design programs nearly impossible to accurately assess.

Cracking what numbers are available reveals an unflattering portrait of for-profit video game programs. Such institutions do not, as a general rule, graduate many students as a percentage of their enrollment. But of the total degrees given in 2012 at schools with video game/interactive media programs, a significant percentage were in those programs – in the 20 to 30 percent range. A significant number of graduates of the higher-profile for-profit schools hovered around 50 percent.

These degrees are largely worthless. I personally know several developers who, as a rule, summarily pass over applicants for anything but entry level QA positions if they hold a degree from such schools. Even prospective video game workers know these degrees aren’t going to get them in above the ground floor. Yet the figures prove that people keep signing up at for-profit colleges for a shot at their dreams – and the for-profits have no interest in dissuading them from doing so.

http://jacobinmag.com/2013/11/video-game-industry/

Enduring Love? Couple Relationships in the 21st Century

The Enduring Love? project is a major ESRC-funded study (2011-2013) that has been exploring how couples experience, understand and sustain their long-term relationships.

To celebrate the end of the project we are hosting an event to launch the study findings and, with our dynamic array of speakers, to provoke wider discussion on making research count, why relationship research matters and dialogic research practice. The project has been designed, developed and implemented in collaboration with policy makers, relationship support organisations, media commentators and academic colleagues so the event promises to be a highly stimulating and critically engaged forum. There are also canapés and a glass or two of wine to take us into the evening.

We would be delighted if you could join us on:

Tuesday 14th January 2014, 12.30 – 6pm at The British Library, Euston Road, London

Full programme details are included below and are attached in poster format. Please feel free to circulate widely.

To register online please go to:


or contact CCIG Research Secretary Sarah Batt at:

[2]SocSci-CCIG-events@open.ac.uk
Is someone you care about involved with post structuralism? (2013-11-26 21:56)

(HT [1]Jonathan Davies)
2228
Anyone know the original source of this? Please leave a comment if so. This was found on Twitter but it would be nice to be able to attribute it properly.

1. https://twitter.com/jonathandavies0

Philip Roddis (2013-12-12 16:51:00)
Keep a close eye on the situation and be particularly alert to any marked rise in use of the word ‘narrative’ and/or tendency to create new verbs from nouns where there are perfectly adequate existing verbs.

» The most popular posts on sociological imagination The Sociological Imagination (2017-10-29 15:09:22)
[...] Is someone you care about involved with post structuralism? [...] 

The Sociology of Soldiers Reuniting With Their Dogs (no, really) (2013-11-27 08:00)

I’m someone who likes animals. I’m also someone who spends a lot of time procrastinating on youtube. These two facts converged some time ago when I noticed an interesting trend for youtube videos, usually filmed by female partners, capturing usually male soldiers being reunited with their dogs. Turns out Buzzfeed noticed it too:

[1]

18 Tear-Jerking Moments Of Soldiers Reuniting With Their Dogs

Grab some tissues, because we’re about to turn on the feels. Every soldier deserves this kind of welcome home.

posted on November 11, 2013 at 10:00am EDT

Chelsea Marshall
BuzzFeed Staff

Follow

I love these videos as someone mildly obsessed by animals. But I also find them really interesting as a sociologist. There’s a very specific pattern recurring in countless videos I’ve watched in which the female partner narrates the soldier’s return to the animals (“right guys, you ready?”) before filming the inexpressible enthusiasm with which the animals greet him, as well as his (usually) equally effusive response. The affectivity of the shared pet seems to act as a communicative mediator, as if the anxieties and ambiguities inherent to human relationships can be temporarily dissolved through the reciprocal embrace of a mutually loved animal who can feel and react much more simply than we are able to. The last video of these is the most interesting, at least with my pseudo-psychoanalytical hat on, not least of all because of the moment when the woman filming the reunion feels the need to exclaim “I’m not drunk”. Towards the end they exchange statements of “I love you” in a way which seems oddly ambiguous as to whether they are talking to each other or to their dog. In fact the soldier is looking at the dog as he begins to say this, before
he looks towards the camera.

×

IFRAME: [2]http://www.youtube.com/embed/IkTrPZIN0Hg?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent


2230
I feel the need to add that I’m someone who was once engaged to a woman with whom I owned a dog, a cat and a large number of rodents. I’m writing this in a somewhat self-interrogative manner, as opposed to trying to say something about the military. I think the very specific situations depicted in these videos of military homecomings reveal something much broader about the role that pets in general, as well as dogs in particular, play in grounding and reproducing domesticity.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/1kTrPZlNOHg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/1kTrPZlNOHg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/eCL-HuMf5yg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/eCL-HuMf5yg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/7i4N5MffXdk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/7i4N5MffXdk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
5. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/eCL-HuMf5yg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/eCL-HuMf5yg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)


Free One Day Conference at Leicester
Postgraduate Travel Bursaries available – please email [1]hso1@le.ac.uk
Paradata, marginalia, fieldnotes and letters are all by-products of the process of social research which can add considerable depth to our understanding of the research process. It is only recently, however, that researchers have begun to recognise the value of such data. In the field of large-scale survey data paradata analysis has become more widespread with researchers increasingly turning their attention to the context in which questionnaires are completed, observations made during the interview and the impact of such factors on the recruitment and retention of participants. For those researchers undertaking secondary analysis of datasets the benefits of paradata and marginalia in the form of fieldnotes and fieldworker comments in the margins of questionnaires are invaluable and can cast light on the otherwise hidden aspects of field research.

This free one-day conference offers academics and postgraduate students the opportunity to learn more about recent research that addresses the issue of how to make use of the by-products of social research. The day represents a unique chance for a dialogue across disciplines and research paradigms: across social sciences and humanities, historical and contemporary data, primary and secondary sources, quantitative and qualitative approaches – each highly important with the increasing emphasis of research councils on interdisciplinary and secondary research.

This is a free conference with lunch included but pre-registration is required as places are limited.

1. mailto:hso1@le.ac.uk

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Doing Social Network Analysis using Qualitative Methods (2013-11-27 17:37)

This interesting lecture by Nick Crossley and Gemma Edwards offers a helpful introduction to social network analysis before discussing purely qualitative approaches to analysing social networks. We interviewed Nick about his work on relational sociology a couple of years ago and it's great to hear him talk more about the methodological implications of this theoretical approach.
Holy Crap! Intersections of the Popular and the Sacred in Youth Cultures (2013-11-28 08:00)

Holy Crap!
Intersections of the Popular and the Sacred in Youth Cultures
28–29 August 2014, Helsinki, Finland

Call for Papers and Sessions

Holy Crap! is an international conference organised by the Finnish Youth Research Society and Network, focusing on the interrelations between popular culture, youth and the sacred. The conference aims at interrogating understandings of popular and youth cultures in relation to the contested phenomena of (post)secularisation, re-enchantment and the emergence of alternative spiritualities.

Seeking to analyse the social and cultural changes accompanying these phenomena, the conference will facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue between youth studies, cultural studies, religious studies and the broader social sciences.
Recent years have seen a growing interest in "re-scripting the sacred" through popular culture. Although "youth" as an age-based category has lost its privileged status within such studies of popular culture, young people remain vital (sub)cultural agents. There has also been renewed interest in the ubiquitous contestations and ambiguities around the notion of the "popular" in light of the increasing commodification and standardisation of culture, the opposition this engender, and the cultural drift into virtual worlds.

Holy Crap! locates itself at the intersection of these three contested concepts, seeking to re-examine and re-evaluate the dynamics within and between cultural phenomena prefixed with "popular", "sacred" and "youth".

The conference organisers invite proposals for either complete 90 minute sessions or individual 30 minute presentations. The general theme of the conference may be approached from within any discipline or methodology. Suitable topics include, but are not limited to:

- Discourses: the mythologies of popular and youth cultures, histories and invented traditions, freedom of speech and expression, contesting authenticity, transcendence and transgression, consolation and affect;
- Identities: the intersections of the popular/sacred/youth dynamics with class, (dis)ability, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, subcultural belonging and community, nationalism and the sanctification of race;
- Ideologies: questioning religious tenets, political doctrines, consumerism and economies of pleasure, value and moral judgments, the (post)modern and the (post)secular;
- Institutions: families, congregations, denominations, corporations, educational institutions, gangs, (neo)tribes, subcultures, municipalities and the state;
- Materials and technologies: ecologies, media, art, symbols, shrines, memorials, actions, practices, rituals, pilgrimage, stardom, fandom and authorship, web 2.0 and 3.0, virtual religions and virtual worlds;
- Theories and methodologies: evidence and authority, interdisciplinary methodologies, theology and secular scholarship, critical theories of religion, reconceptualising key concepts.

The proposals should be submitted via email, preferably as an attachment in doc/pdf/rtf format, to Research Coordinator Antti-Ville Kärjä ([1]antti-ville.karja@nuorisotutkimus.fi) no later than 15 January 2014. Notifications of acceptance will be sent by Friday 31 January 2014.

Proposals should include the following information:

- name(s) and affiliation(s) of the presenter(s);
- the title of the presentation/session;
- an abstract of no more than 200 words for a 30 minute presentation or 500 words for a 90 minute session.

For further information, please visit [http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/en/holy-crap](http://www.nuorisotutkimusseura.fi/en/holy-crap) or contact Antti-Ville Kärjä ([3]antti-ville.karja@nuorisotutkimus.fi).

1. mailto:antti-ville.karja@nuorisotutkimus.fi
3. mailto:antti-ville.karja@nuorisotutkimus.fi
CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-11-28 14:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

Getting Started: Public Engagement for Social Scientists (2013-11-29 08:00)

[1] "Getting Started: Public Engagement for Social Scientists" on Bundlr


How to be a progressive thinker in the 21st century (2013-11-29 13:23)

Suppose we live in an ideologically polarised world – let’s call it ‘left’ v. ‘right’ – where free speech is the norm. The ‘left’ people are basically about humans changing their default ways of being. The ‘right’ people are basically about humans sticking to their default ways of being. Which scenario do you think will result in a better world? (a) Let the right make outrageous claims that the left corrects, or (b) Let the left make outrageous claims that the right corrects? The answer based on my reading on history is pretty clear: (b).

Let me put the point more bluntly: The value-added for the left from the free expression of ideological differences comes precisely from the right spontaneously doing the left’s copy-editing and fact-checking. But it doesn’t work the other way round. Whenever people on the left attack right-wing ideas and policies, they all too often fall back on opprobrium – bad faith, bad motives, etc. This is pretty useless to the right and its supporters, and so not surprisingly most left-wing criticism falls on deaf ears. As long as people continue tolerate how things have been, that by itself provides support for the right. In contrast, whenever people on the right attack left-wing ideas and policies, they usually bring up so-called ‘facts’—which, of course, may be incorrect or misleading – but nevertheless serve as an incentive for leftists to smarten up their act.

We on the left need to learn that the right serves a very useful function, namely, to keep us ‘honest’ in the sense required by politics. That is, it forces us to take seriously that people may disagree with us for reasons other
than their not having heard the message sufficiently often (or, worse, are simply too stupid or self-interested to understand it).

From this standpoint, the larger background fact that the left-right divide is dissolving as the main points on the political compass should be a source of significant concern to those interested in a future rational politics. Who will be checking whom?

gosheffo (2013-12-13 16:34:00)
There’s lots of good fact-checking that goes on by left-wing academics. And the old left-right dissolving stuff is a bit old no? Even Ed Miliband’s soft populism with continued neoliberal economics has opened up a slight gap between the two main parties even if it will have little effect on the general economic direction of the country. Sorry but I don’t really understand the point of this article...

CfP: An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2013-11-29 14:00)

What does ‘public sociology’ entail in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinterest and wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole?

Short articles (1000 to 4000 words) are sought for an open access edited book which explores conceptual, methodological or practical aspects of Digital Public Sociology. If you would be interested in contributing then please send an abstract of 200 words or less by December 31st 2013. The final articles would be needed by March 31st 2014, with the intention of launching the collection in the summer of 2014. Please send abstracts (or questions) to mark@markcarrigan.net.


Social and Political Critique in the Age of Austerity
A one day workshop at Keele University
10.30am-6pm, Wednesday 12th February, 2014

This one day workshop is devoted to the discussion of critical politics in the contemporary age of austerity. Following the 2007 global economic crash, which led to a raft of government bank bail outs and nationalisations across America and Europe, a cunning ideological reversal took place – the crash was no longer the result of the hubris of the neoliberal financial sector, which had developed the idea of ‘riskless risk’ where reckless stock market speculation
and the creation of value ex nihilo could produce endless profit, but rather the immoral wastefulness of the people and society. According to this ideological position, which was advanced by governments across Europe, the welfare state, and in many respects society itself, was transformed into an ‘exorbitant privilege’ that was simply unaffordable. In fact, in order to pay for their wastefulness the people were not only expected to give up their public services, but also required to accept ever lower wages, and a general state of social and economic precariousness.

This is the current state of play across America and Europe, where the neoliberal state has exploited the crash in order to retrofit society for violent competition with Asian capitalism. In the face of this race to the bottom, key thinkers such as David Graeber, Antonio Negri, Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou, and Costas Douzinas have spoken out against the new form Naomi Klein calls neoliberal disaster capitalism and given voice to the protest, rebellion, and revolt taking place across the world.

The objective of this workshop is to build upon the works of these key thinkers and explore the possibility for resistance in the age of austerity. We invite contributions from a range of disciplines focused on diverse social and political contexts and a variety of theoretical perspectives. Contributors may choose to focus on austerity and resistance across Europe, including the UK, Greece, Spain, and Italy; the Occupy movement; the media construction of austerity, including the idea of the undeserving poor who are seen to be living off public funds; methods for the organisation of resistance; the concept of the multitude and the digital commons; anti-capitalist thought; or transformative social and political theory and practice more generally. Most importantly, we are keen to emphasise that this list is not exhaustive – the key principle behind the workshop is that debate should open up a space for social and political creativity. In this way we are keen to encourage potential contributors to be creative and explore new possibilities for political change in a historical period where change seems absolutely necessary, but also impossible to envisage. In this respect, we encourage contributions from a variety of participants – academics, post-graduate students, activists, and others engaged in thinking through the possibilities of change under conditions of crisis and austerity.

The workshop will close with a lecture from Professor Costas Douzinas (Birkbeck), author of Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe.

In order to take part in the event please send a 250 word abstract to Emma Head ([mailto:e.l.head@keele.ac.uk](mailto:e.l.head@keele.ac.uk)), by Monday 23rd December. This event is being organised jointly by Mark Featherstone (Keele Sociology) and Emma Head (Keele Sociology and the BSA Digital Sociology study group). Registration will open in early January. Confirmed speakers will be notified by 7th January.

1. [mailto:e.l.head@keele.ac.uk](mailto:e.l.head@keele.ac.uk)
How long till we have Open Access books? (2013-11-30 08:00)
There’s an extremely informative article on the LSE Impact Blog giving a useful overview of the still uncertain future of open access monographs. There are a variety of potential models which could be adopted for publishing open access monographs and it’s still unclear as to which is the most viable:

This means that there are some extremely interesting experiments happening at the moment. Some borrow from the dominant OA journal publishing business model, which asks authors to pay a fee (or APC) to cover the costs of producing and disseminating their work. In some cases, they may seek to lower the initial fee that they charge by continuing to make profits on the print or formatted e-book versions of the book. Of course, the challenge for the author in this model is finding the money for that initial fee; although some funders (notably the Wellcome Trust) have indicated that they’re happy to pay, much research in HSS is not grant-based and the author may not have access to the levels of money that publishers charge.

Another model builds on a more traditional source of funding for monographs: library budgets. Knowledge Unlatched is currently operating a pilot to establish the feasibility of a library consortium which underwrites the first copy costs of books in order to make them open access on publication. The project’s organisers hope to be able to show that for as little as $60 per title, libraries can pay to ‘unlatch’ a book and make it open access for everyone. Of course, there’s an altruistic element to this activity: the project acknowledges this explicitly, but also offers participating libraries a chance to shape the future of the work.
One of the key questions from a commercial standpoint is the implications of open access for usage and sales. Perhaps even more challenging is the important role monographs play in credentialization. This impedes experimentation because people’s careers are built, in part, through following established norms within their disciplines:

One of the big challenges of open access for monographs is that in many HSS disciplines, books have taken on a significance which goes beyond their core purpose of communicating a researcher’s ideas. Publishing a book can have a significant positive effect upon a researcher’s career, particularly when they have been picked up by a publisher considered prestigious within their discipline. This makes it very difficult for researchers to do anything that differs from disciplinary norms, particularly those at the start of their careers and looking for secure employment. It’s encouraging, therefore, that well-established publishers such as Oxford University Press are joining the OAPEN-UK project (with the full support of their authors), while others are engaging with similar projects to explore how they might develop an open access offer.

These remarks point obliquely to another possibility: open access edited books. Unlike monographs these have a minimal credentializing function. My own experience of editing has been one of intense enthusiasm from a curatorial standpoint which rapidly diminishes once I’ve been confronted with the realities of the market. Or in other words: I love the idea of edited collections as a vehicle for weaving diverse strands of scholarship into a useful whole but I find it incredibly frustrating how expensive these are. The commercial imperative of scholarly publishers undermines the communicative intent behind these collections. So why aren’t these being self-published? What does a commercial publisher add to the typical edited book beyond impeding its circulation by slapping a massive price tag onto it?

5. http://www.knowledgeunlatched.org/about/pilot-project/

4.12 December

The Phenomenology of Inertia (2013-12-01 08:00)

I wrote a few weeks ago about obsessiveness and how I understand it in terms of internal conversation. I'm particularly interested in the role that differing forms of obsessiveness, as a generic term for difficulty with drawing
deliberations to a close, plays in making decision making difficult. There’s no logically necessary end point to our
rumination about a potential course of action. There’s always other possibilities we could consider. There’s always
other ways of looking at the issue. There’s always other people whose advice we could seek. The divergent tendencies
of individuals with respect to these possibilities could be conceptualised in a range of ways. I’d argue that they’re
more significant than they may seem. Not necessarily because of their implications for action at one point in time
but because of their cumulative implications for the trajectories of social action which an individual will tend towards.

It’s from this standpoint that I’m also interested in inertia. The capacity of people to go months, years or
decades pondering a decision without making it is one which fascinates me (albeit slightly morbidly). I’m currently
reading John Lanchester’s novel Capital and there’s a wonderful passage which made me come back to these issues,
which I’ve been thinking about less since I (finally) finished the data analysis for my PhD. In the chapter introducing
an Oxford educated classicist who entered the police force on a graduate fast track, Lanchester has a lovely couple of
pages in which he paints a vivid picture of the ambivalence which characterises the relationship of this middle-class
teetotal Christian to his career in the police. Having “wanted to scratch an itch to do with authority, his need for
it, his desire to have it, his liking of hierarchy and order” he found the social politics deeply challenging. While
he felt he was doing some good, this nonetheless went hand-in-hand with a perpetual consideration of a possible exit:

That didn’t mean he didn’t think about giving it up and doing something else. He did, almost every day.
The thought was a safety valve; the idea that he could quit whenever he liked was one of the things which
kept him in the job. The exit was always in his line of sight. The idea of it helped him to stay put and to
cope with the rough parts of his job and his day.

This is what I mean about obsessiveness and inertia. This fictional character deliberated almost everyday about a
potential exit (“could I leave? should I leave? is this right for me?”) but far from deliberation leading functionally
towards action, the obsessiveness which characterises this consideration actually engenders inertia. Reminding
himself of the possibility of exit offers fleeting protection against the facets of the job, as well as his feelings about
them, which engender his desire to do something else. But if this continues then with the passing weeks and months
the cost of exit (and entry elsewhere) become higher and the inertia becomes ever more entrenched. How much
of life is lived this way? How different would the world be if inertia of this form didn’t exist? Is such inertia simply a
product of the tyranny of choice which privilege allows? Is inertia always negative? Is it possible to investigate inertia
in an empirical way? Or will the stories people tell themselves and others to make sense of their inertia prove too
much of a problem?


» Intellectual Trajectory and the Pleasures of Disciplinarity The Sociological Imagination (2014-06-25 08:02:30)
[...] characteristics (though this is far from universally true). However it can also reflect social inertia, as people continue
making choices which increase the opportunity costs of future exit while [...]

Sociologists Outside Academia: My days in the telecoms industry (2013-12-01 15:31)

The Swedish Ministry of Education proposed in a recent memorandum that universities should be transformed
into private foundations in order to increase their autonomy and facilitate greater collaboration with industry. The
proposed legislation follows more than two decades of political discussion on the issue of **decoupling universities from the state**. In response to this debate, an array of applied research centres, innovation offices and research companies have been created in order to cultivate collaborations between the academy and industry. This story is about my experiences during a three year post-doctoral position as an 'in-house researcher' at the consumer research department of an international telecoms company. The collaboration was initiated and largely financed by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond ([www.rj.se](http://www.rj.se)) – a foundation with the aim of strengthening social sciences and the humanities.

When I applied for the position I had formulated an ambitious three-year research plan encompassing previous research, theory, method, and the lot. This was all according to the usual academic application procedure. After having been approved by the academic referees, I was summoned to a job interview at the company. Stepping into the head office that day I felt a bit out-of-place among all the well-tailored suits and big TV screens broadcasting company commercials.

I was interviewed by several people. I remember that they did not ask much about my research, instead they were more interested in my personal history, background, and interests. This was a surprise to me since I was under the impression that they would interrogate me about my research plans. I now understand that the interviewers were interested in assessing not my scientific skills but my social skills, to judge whether or not I would be able to fit in at the company.

However, one question regarding my research plan was brought up by all the interviewers: "Are you going to do one single project during the whole time?". This idea of a single three year long project obviously aroused some suspicions. I learned that day that the company's research projects usually ran between three to six months. That was the first challenge: how to work as a social scientist, doing research, in collaboration with short term company projects? I came up with a quick fix – I redefined my project as a program. By doing so I could participate in a range of different company projects, as long as I could fit them within the framework of the research 'program' that had been formulated in the application and accepted by my scientific patrons.

Furthermore, to ensure an effective use of my time, my way of working was structured as linear processes with definite steps towards delivery of results: a) Scoping: start up meetings with stakeholders and clients to specify the project; b) Data gathering; c) Analysis: analytical workshops with stakeholders and clients; d) Delivery: Communication to stakeholders and clients; f) Evaluation: assessment from stakeholders and clients. Even though this way of working proved quite helpful in setting up projects and performing empirical studies, it also proved difficult to find time to engage in theoretical or methodological work. My pragmatic solution was to maximize the empirical research and save the scientific analysis and publications till after the collaboration had ended.

After a while I started to get the hang of the practical ways of working and was participating in several company projects and activities. A more difficult lesson to learn, however, was the organizational culture – the informal rules, norms, language and attitude that govern the behaviour of the company colleagues. It was like I never really knew if my company colleagues understood what I said or if they just did not agree with me. One example of cultural clashes between academia and industry involved another social scientist who was invited to present his research. When doing this he brought forth his PhD thesis (as per good academic manners) and circulated it among the audience while talking about his research. I noticed that no-one in the crowd opened his book; the others simply passed it around, quickly. The situation irritated me and when the book came to me I went through it thoroughly to acknowledge the invited researcher. Afterwards, I asked my colleagues about the situation. And apparently they too had felt disturbed, but for different reasons than myself. They thought it rude not to give the speaker their full attention. In academic culture, passing around one's thesis is a way to present oneself as scientist. My company colleagues did not know this and acted according to their internalized cultural script, which was to pay respect to what the speaker said, not to his book which they perceived as a distraction.
I see my days in the telecoms industry as a personal exploration of what an academic researcher can do and be in contemporary society by paying respect to different ways of working and thinking. I have learned to negotiate deals and manage international research projects, but what I value the most is probably my improved pedagogical skills. Participating in other cultures challenge you to express yourself differently in order to make yourself understood. Such experience enhance your communicative repertoire, involving verbal and body language but also presentation and visualization techniques, and can help you communicate research in ways that attract a wider community. Having said this, my days in the telecoms industry have also made me more appreciative of academic research. Universities can do well by learning a few tricks from the industry, but they should also be protective and nurturing of its own unique culture and qualities. I am not only talking about the methodological and theoretical skills of individual researchers but also of the organizational and environmental requirements that cultivates scientific creativity and serendipity.

Today, I am back in the academy doing three year projects again. And as manager for my university’s new collaboration arena I am building bridges between the academy and industry rather than burning bridges by trying to transform universities into companies.

Marcus Persson, PhD, received his doctoral degree in sociology from Lund University in 2007. Since then he has worked in educational media production and the telecoms industry; today he holds a position as post doctoral fellow at Mälardalen University doing research about ICT in health care and education, as well as managing the university’s new arena of collaboration.

1. [http://www.rj.se/](http://www.rj.se/)

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**The Second Cybernetics (2013-12-02 08:00)**

I’ve recently been reading Magoroh Maruyama’s writing on the *second cybernetics* and I’m quite taken with it. There’s a context to his work which I only dimly understand, given my lack of grounding in the first cybernetics, though I’m still finding his writing extremely thought-provoking. One of the key themes seems to be the critique of an exclusive focus within the first cybernetics on *deviation-counteracting processes* and the self-equilibrating systems which they engender. In contrast Maruyama is interested in the role of deviation-amplifying causal relationships in shaping systems over time. This is the example which has really caught my imagination:

Development of a city in an agricultural plain may be understood with the same principle. At the beginning, a large plain is entirely homogeneous as to its potentiality for agriculture. By some chance an ambitious farmer opens a farm at a spot on it. This is the initial kick. Several farmers follow the example and several farms are established. One of the farmers opens a tool shop. Then this tool shop becomes a meeting place of farmers. A food stand is established next to the tool shop. Gradually a village grows. The village facilitates the marketing of the agricultural products, and more farms flourish around the village. Increased agricultural activity necessitates development of industry in the village, and the village grows into a city.

This is a very familiar process. But there are a few important theoretical implications in such a process. On what part of the entire plain the city starts growing depends on where accidentally the initial kick occurred – The first farmer could have chosen any spot on the plain, since the plain was
homogeneous. But once he has chosen a spot, a city grows from that spot, and the plain becomes inhomogeneous. If a historian should try to find a geographical “cause” which made this spot a city rather than some other spots, he will fail to find it in the initial homogeneity of the plain. Nor can the first farmer be credited with the establishment of the city. The secret of the growth of the city is in the process of deviation-amplifying mutual positive feedback networks rather than in the initial condition or in the initial kick. This process, rather than the initial condition, has generated the complexly structured city. It is in this sense that the deviation-amplifying mutual causal process is called “morphogenesis.


Are you a productivity ninja or a turtle-walking flâneur? (2013-12-03 08:00)

That was the question (sort of) posed by [3]this article on the LSE Impact Blog. With the intensification of workloads throughout the academy, as the ‘efficiency agenda’ leads to spiralling demands to do more with less, the resulting time squeeze seems inevitable. Far from being resisted, this is embraced in some quarters, with the rise of things like ‘academic speed dating’ (eugh). The author deftly summarises two prevailing responses to these conditions: reclaiming academic slowness and becoming a productivity ninja. The deliberate embrace of ‘slow scholarship’ can be an attractive antidote to the growing fetishisation of speed and efficiency. In embracing it, some have actively developed the notion in relation to the ‘slow food movement’.
You have likely heard of the “Slow Food Movement” – the momentum of diners, chefs, gardeners, vintners, farmers and restaurateurs who have taken a critical look at how our society has shifted to a position where for most, food is something to be consumed, rather than savoured, to be served up and eaten “fast” on the way to doing something else. “Slow Food,” by contrast, is something to be carefully prepared, with fresh ingredients, local when possible, and enjoyed leisurely over conversation around a table with friends and family.

“Slow Scholarship” is a similar response to hasty scholarship. Slow scholarship, is thoughtful, reflective, and the product of rumination – a kind of field testing against other ideas. It is carefully prepared, with fresh ideas, local when possible, and is best enjoyed leisurely, on one’s own or as part of a dialogue around a table with friends, family and colleagues. Like food, it often goes better with wine.

In the desire to publish instead of perish, many scholars at some point in their careers, send a conference paper off to a journal which may still be half-baked, may only have a spark of originality, may be a slight variation on something they or others have published, may rely on data that is still preliminary. This is hasty scholarship.

http://web.uvic.ca/ hist66/slowScholarship/

But as Filip Vostal argues in the LSE Impact post, "Slowness appears somewhat remote from the disciplined and path-dependent organizational tactic postulated by modernist speed-up". It might function as a cultural palliative which ameliorates some of the more deleterious effects of the worship of speed but it’s perhaps difficult to imagine slowness as an “organizational principle of academic life". Furthermore, it will always encounter resistance given the longstanding equation of slowness with that which is “regressive, idle and reactionary". In the abstract I can see the appeal of ‘slow scholarship’ but in a practical and affective sense it is not for me. Perhaps my dispositions have been too thoroughly moulded by the world of blogging. Heather Mendick from the CelebYouth project talked about her experience of how blogging was changing her academic practice at the BSA Digital Sociology event last July. Then appropriately enough she blogged about it afterwards:

I love this website that Kim, Laura and I have created. I enjoy doing online communication – the immediacy and supportive feedback are more to my taste than the long timescales and anonymity associated with publishing via peer-reviewed journals. Yet I am disturbed by the alignment between fast academia and going digital.

Writing a blogpost rather than an entry in an research diary generates fast responses and produces a useful and measurable output. By using google analytics I can track how many people accessed which parts of our website, how long they spent there and whether or not they stayed on the site. I can find out how many people each of our posts reached through Facebook and how many people are talking about them. Twitter and YouTube too provide multiple ways of measuring the ‘impact’ of our work – which tweets get favorited, which retweeted and which disappear without trace? This all fits remarkably well with the insistence on accountability, and with the growing impact agenda. Moreover, documenting a project online aligns with the contemporary compulsion to tell (what Michel Foucault called confession).

Of course there are choices about how we engage, and [4]as Laura discusses we’ve done it collectively – I really like the way that no-one knows for sure which of us is behind the Twitter (though it is usually Kim). It seems to subvert the emphasis on the individual, entrepreneurial academic, that the internet might otherwise fuel. I feel we need to be continuing to ask: How is it changing research? What are the alternatives?
I end with one way that I feel this aspect of digital sociology is changing my practice as an academic. While, there’s no clear distinction between the descriptive and the analytic, the need to formulate my ideas into something that can be blogged or even tweeted is moving me more quickly from a more descriptive to a more analytic register. My favourite example of this is from an Amy Hempel short story [5]The Harvest cited by [6]Chuck Palahniuk in Non-Fiction. Here, instead of being offered the pre-analysed formulation that ‘the boyfriend is an asshole’, Hempel describes how, after a car crash, ‘we see him holding a sweater soaked with his girlfriend’s blood and telling her, “You’ll be okay, but this sweater is ruined”’. While the second account is far from innocent, it is very different and it allows one’s thoughts to follow different lines of flight. Which lines of flight does the internet open up and which close down?

http://www.celebyouth.org/the_internet_and_fast_academia/

The approach to blogging I’ve gravitated towards in recent years is one which shares the work in progress. I treat blogging as a public notebook in which to develop ideas and iteratively work them up into more coherent wholes. So on this level the dichotomy between ‘slow scholarship’ and ‘fast scholarship’ doesn’t quite make sense to me: the extremely fast bits of it slowly lead towards more fully worked out publications. Nonetheless I sometimes feel frustrated by my own tendency, which I don’t entirely understand, to rush... to constantly be looking towards the next idea, the next project and the next paper. My ambivalent inclination towards being a productivity ninja comes in part from this rushing. There are so many things to do, to read and to write that I experience inefficient habits as internal constraints on action. So while ‘productivity’ culture can be disciplinary, particularly when it’s imposed from the ‘top down’, I would also insist that it can be empowering. I think the problem is that much of productivity culture is bullshit. The LSE Impact post does a good job of summarising this tendency and the problems with it:

University senior managers seem to understand the busy academic and offer the typical managerial solution: attention and time management training. However, rather than questioning the very causes that lead to and co-produce the conditions of hurry sickness, academics are advised to adapt by keeping up, going faster, press ahead, be resilient and agile, boost productivity. Using the uncanny #HigherEdBiz Newspeak, staff development departments encourage academics to clench their teeth and become undestroyable time warriors. Training sessions such as [7]How to be a productivity ninja’ and courses offering time management techniques to enable regular academic writing, effective reading and to help handle information overload emerge. Not only that: these initiatives present themselves as cures for hurry sickness – as newage-ish zen-like [8]’time therapies’ for ever-busier academics: ‘A "Productivity Ninja" is calm and prepared, but also skilled and ruthless in how he or she deals with the enemy that is information overload’ we can read in the ad for this training. The key problem with such programs is that, next to producing a group of fast-moving response-able ‘speed winners’, they also render the increasing academic workload and associated time-shortage, alienation, burnout and demotivation (experienced diversely at different institutions; variables such as gender and academic rank dramatically affect this experience) as a personal and individual issue – rather than stressing their origin in the structural transformation of the academic environment.

Democratic decision-making, deliberation, will-formation and policy implementation need to be underpinned, as Robert Hassan says, by natural unforced rhythms (which do not have to be slow). This principle seems entirely salutary – if not straightforwardly necessary – in the academic environment. However, if academics and universities are not taking the lead in such a program, one wonders whether anyone at all can resist oppressive nature of late modern fast time. In order to resist academic hurry sickness, it would perhaps have to be those academics holding senior administrative positions who need
to legislate the principle of scholarly time autonomy as an explicit political demand – and perhaps as an ethical principle integral to the education and science governance.

http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/11/20/in-search-of-scholarly-time/

I’m not sure what I think about the politics of this but on a personal level I find it extremely plausible. The problem with productivity culture is not the productivity per se but rather the lack of autonomy implicit in its valorisation. When productivity goes hand-in-hand with autonomy then much of my objection vanishes. The genuine productivity ninja cannot be anything other than autonomous.

8. http://www.thinkproductive.co.uk/tag/productivity-ninja/

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-12-04 08:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

The Politics of Hip Hop (2013-12-05 08:00)

There’s a [1]great article on Media Diversity exploring the implications of “Hip Hop’s successful [2]crossover from an underground culture to a commercially viable pop-commodity” for its politics. It argues that cultural shifts in Hip Hop cannot be understood in isolation from the radically transformed structure of ownership that has ensued from
its corporate mainstreaming:

Why have images of hypermasculine black males and objectified black females become the norm on our televisions and radios? Many point to the fact that only a handful of conglomerates control the vast majority of mainstream music, and that the core audience for stereotypical rappers is undoubtedly young white males. Furthermore, the predominantly white executives of these media giants are believed to assume that their primarily ‘white male’ audience would all rather listen to 50 Cent than Arrested Development. Former Def Jam President Carmen Ashhurst is unequivocal about her experience of this shift, she says:

The time when we switched to gangsta music is the same time that the majors bought up all the labels. I don’t think that’s a coincidence…. We went to Columbia, then the next thing I know... we’re pushing a group called Bitches with Problems.”

Needless to add, allegations like these are not isolated. Recently, Hip Hop legend and former Def Jam South President Scarface argued that white executives controlled the negative depiction of black people:

...these old-ass punks that’s running these record labels that’s in the powerful positions to dictate what the black community hears and listens to... There’s no fucking way that you can tell me that it’s not a conspiracy against the blacks in hip hop... [white executives who have] never tried to embrace this culture try to dictate whats hot and what’s not... In 25 years... Elvis will be the face of Hip Hop…”

Although blunt, an objective glance at the facts reveals that Scarface has raised an important point. In 2010, U.S. Senator Robert Menendez – the only Hispanic in the Senate – compiled a report into corporate diversity among the Fortune 500, including the six media conglomerates that control 90 % of everything consumed in America. Menendez found that 70 % of all board members and CEOs of these companies were white men, while black Americans were under-represented by over 50 %.

The full article is essential reading for anyone interested in Hip Hop. It connects nicely to some of the themes discussed by Akala and Lowkey in this video we posted last year:
Hi, this is my article (Twitter: @IAmAkwesi) Glad you enjoyed it! This is the debate we need to be having in Hip Hop. UK artists like Akala, Lowkey (& many more) need greater exposure as an alternative to the inconsequential, exploitative mainstream.
CfP: An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2013-12-05 12:00)

What does ‘public sociology’ entail in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinteret and wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole?

Short articles (1000 to 4000 words) are sought for an open access edited book which explores conceptual, methodological or practical aspects of Digital Public Sociology. If you would be interested in contributing then please send an abstract of 200 words or less by December 31st 2013. The final articles would be needed by March 31st 2014, with the intention of launching the collection in the summer of 2014. Please send abstracts (or questions) to mark@markcarrigan.net.

Research Priorities... or Research Bubbles? (2013-12-06 08:00)

Ever been baffled by what research gets funded and what doesn’t? Ever suspect that the whole process is fundamentally irrational? There’s a summary here of an interesting paper which argues that the increasingly dominant incentive structures of research funding are prone to producing research bubbles:

“In finance, the first condition for a bubble occurs when too much liquidity is concentrated on too few assets. The second is the presence of speculators. In science, similarly, if too much research funding is focused on too few research topics, and all researchers speculate in the same fashionable scientific templates to attract funding, a potential science bubble may be forming," [1]professor of Formal Philosophy Vincent F. Hendricks from University of Copenhagen explains.

[2]

Number of papers published annually in the neurosciences 1958-2008. Source: Web of Science

In the article [3]"Science Bubbles" just published in Philosophy and Technology, professor Vincent F. Hendricks and postdoc David Budtz Pedersen trace the mechanisms that can result in science bubbles. They point to the past decade’s massive investments in cognitive neuroscience as a potential bubble – culminating with President Obama’s recent endorsement of the one billion dollar Brain Activity Map Project and the European Commission’s 500 million euro Human Brain Project.

“These investments have been preceded by a dramatic rise in fields that attach ‘neuro’ to some human behaviour or trait with promises that the techniques of neuroscience will explain it – and into
game-changing explanations of the human mind," Budtz Pedersen says and adds that studies have shown that peer reviewers and lay citizens are more likely to find explanations of e.g. psychological phenomena more convincing when they contain neuroscientific information, even when it is not relevant to the explanation.


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**Detaching ‘agency’ and ‘choice’ from voluntarism (2013-12-07 08:00)**

I read an [1]interesting paper by Ros Gill earlier which nicely frames one of my main theoretical interests. It’s a reflection on shifting fashions in how the relationship between culture and subjectivity has been conceptualised within cultural studies. This bit in particular caught my attention and the clarity with which it diagnoses this common explanatory tendency is commendable:

A recent article by Duits and van Zoonen (2006) is in many ways typical of this latter trend. It examined the moral panics in Dutch society occasioned by two articles of clothing – the Islamic headscarf and the "hypersexualized" (their term) g-string. Duits and van Zoonen assert that public reaction to these garments denies girls and young women “their agency and autonomy”, and they argue that the proper response from feminists and other critical intellectuals is that all girls’ sartorial decisions should be understood as autonomous choices. Such a position, they argue, is respectful of girls’ own agency. Their call for empirical research that listens to and respects young women’s voices is clearly important. But I am sceptical of the terms “agency”, “autonomy” and “choice” that are mobilized so frequently in their argument. To what extent do these terms offer analytical purchase on the complex lived experience of girls and young women’s lives in postfeminist, neoliberal societies? Moreover, what kind of feminist politics follows from a position in which all behaviour (even following fashion) is understood within discourse or free choice and autonomy? The girls in Duits and van Zoonen’s argument seem strangely socially and culturally dislocated. They neither seem to operate in a world in which there are authoritarian parents or teachers, or in which organized religion or fashion exert any influence. Indeed, in the desire to “respect” girls’ choices, any notion of cultural influence seems to have been evacuated entirely. Yet how can we account for the dominance of a fashion item such as a g-string without any reference to culture? Why the emphasis on young women pleasing themselves when the look that they achieve – or seek to achieve – is so similar?


On one level I don’t think this is a particularly difficult problem. We make choices but we do so in circumstances
not of our own choosing. But to actually put this theoretical postulate into practice is much trickier. Nonetheless it frustrates me how frequently people seem to assume that voluntarism follows inevitably from an attentiveness to individual agency. This is a methodological problem not a theoretical one.

2. [http://www.palgrave-journals.com/sub/journal/v25/n1/abs/sub200828a.html](http://www.palgrave-journals.com/sub/journal/v25/n1/abs/sub200828a.html)


YYYYYYYYYES. I'm encountering this so much with my dissertation right now. I think the problem comes because of the hegemony of rational choice theory. The cultural and social payoffs (including an avoidance of stigma) women would hope to gain from wearing g-strings are impossible to quantify. Because we can’t explain why—with objective numbers—why someone would dress that way, we have to just assume it’s voluntarism. The conflation makes it simple and easy, but dramatically diffuses any conflict inherent in the study.

The Sociological Imagination Today: The Need for Biology (2013-12-07 08:42)

C.W. Mills' (1959) call for a 'Sociological Imagination', the suggestion that social, historical and biographical dimensions be considered as integral in the analysis of social life, is important. By highlighting the interplay between individual and society, between private ‘troubles’ and public ‘issues’, Mill forces the reader to examine the contextual and situated nature of their existence. This consciousness-raising manoeuvre is important as a greater contextual awareness of the numerous forces which shape and constrain social actors provides the potential to better inform policy and reconceptualise practice. Explanations as to how and why various institutions, discourses, norms and values have emerged become possible and the imagining of alternatives feasible. As such, the Sociological Imagination offers tremendous emancipatory potential. For you can’t escape the quicksand if you don’t know you’re in it. Or, if you can, it will be more by luck than judgement. But Mill’s conception of the Sociological Imagination is arguably insufficient. It does not go far enough and is missing an essential piece of the puzzle: biology. To offer a fuller, more complete picture, it is important to consider the role of biology and remove the anthropocentric bias still so prevalent in social research.

The attempt to apply biological explanations to understanding social phenomena is not a new enterprise but in recent times has been popularised by E.O. Wilson (1975). The ideas he suggested have been fiercely debated, with objections often raised to the notion that genetic traits have a significant role in the explanation of human social phenomena. This is particularly controversial when suggesting that various anti-social or criminal behaviours have a genetic origin or influence, as; 1) such theories can potentially be misappropriated by certain groups or individuals in order to discriminate against others and, 2) it arguably either completely or partially removes moral culpability from an actor regarding said act. After all, it might be said, to what extent can it be considered ‘fair’ to punish someone for behaviour(s) not entirely of their choosing? This is a point that shall be returned to shortly. Such objections, however, arguably have at their root a form of anthropocentric bias and thought that elevates humans above the natural world - separate, special and distinct from all other creatures. But such an approach ironically serves to obscure our own self-understandings. By elevating humans in such a manner, we neglect our own biological roots and thus fail to appreciate an essential feature of our existence. Let us take, for example, a man who is depressed as a result of a recent divorce, and who is now sitting alone in his bedroom, intermittently letting out exacerbated sighs and crying. For his actions to be fully intelligible, it is necessary to understand concepts and social institutions such as love, marriage and divorce, as well as the potential physiological responses to, and interactions with, said concepts. Tears and sighs, in this instance, are, at least in part, physiological responses to emotional stimuli, responses which have emerged and are only possible as a result of the evolutionary process.
Appreciating the finite plasticity of the human body and the external physical environments humans inhabit has practical implications for our understanding of forms of social behaviours. As Guang (2006) suggests, ‘Taking genetic heritage or other biological factors into account promises a fuller understanding of social outcomes and a more precise understanding of the roles of social context’ (Guang: 2006: p. 148). There have been recent studies, for example, which suggest that, ‘...genes with social effects have now been identified...’ (Foster et al: 2007: p. 79). Much of this research has been concerned with the possibility of discovering genes that influence the ability of individuals to recognize the differences between cheating and cooperative behaviors. The ability to recognize and distinguish such behaviors would seem an integral and practical prerequisite for social existence. It would also seem, however, as Rosenberg (2008) suggests, to necessitate some manner of, ‘... free-rider detection device...’ (Rosenberg: 2008: p. 183 - italics in original). And, indeed, studies suggest that, ‘...mutations that affect cheating and recognition behaviors have been discovered’ (Foster et al: 2007: p. 74). Brembs (2010) drawing upon developments in Neurobiology, has argued that there is a genetic basis for ‘free will’ and suggests that, in this regard, humans are not unlike other animals in that we are constrained by our biology regarding the perception of choices open to us. Additional research also suggests that fears and phobias can be genetically transmitted across generations, potentially providing an explanation for seemingly phobic attitudes and behaviours as a response to innately perceived threats (Dias and Ressler: 2013). If the biochemistry of the body and the brain influence the ability of humans to receive, store, process and transmit information, then an understanding of culture and its impact on human behaviours is incomplete without a greater appreciation of corporeality. There appears to be growing evidence, then, to support the idea that our biology plays a significant role in influencing social behaviors.

This is not meant to suggest, however, that we should all uncritically ascribe to the tenets of Sociobiology but, rather, that an honest appreciation of the influence of biology on behavior and culture is necessary for more fully understanding social life. Even if we are influenced by our biology, this is by no means the end of the story. Studies on other species have suggested that the issue is far from clear-cut and that, ‘...the trait a gene codes for will have to be understood as specified only relative to an environment’ (Rosenberg: 2008: p. 192). From this perspective, it is essential to consider environmental factors that can influence the degree to which particular genes may exert themselves. We need to recognize though, that the potential varieties of genetic expressions within any particular environment are finite. There is not an infinite amount of plasticity and thus potential social features and behaviours are limited. The potential for a tree or a human to grow, to feed, or to mate is, for examples, limited by the combination of inherent genetic potential and specific environmental factors present at any particular time. An appreciation of the delicate interplay between biology and culture is necessary, then, in order to more fully comprehend social life.

True freedom, empowerment and emancipation will only come when humans come to understand and appreciate the biological constraints on their existence. So, whilst Mill states,

‘Seldom aware of the intricate connection between the patterns of their own lives and the course of world history, ordinary men do not usually know what this connection means for the kinds of men they are becoming and for the kinds of history-making in which they might take part. They do not possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of individuals and society, of biography and history, of self and world.’ (Mill: 1959: p. 2),

the use of biology in the buttressing of Mill’s Sociological Imagination arguably provides the missing piece of the puzzle through which to examine afresh human behaviour. When mainstream sociology comes to appreciate this, greater insights and impact are likely to be achieved. If Mill’s cry for a sociological imagination is to be realised, if it is to reach its logical conclusion and genuinely offer explanatory and potentially emancipatory potential, then its adherents must begin to take corporeality and its ramifications more seriously. Until then, the Sociological Imagination remains incomplete.

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Bibliography


Richie Nimmo (2014-01-24 01:00:53)
Good article. I’m generally sympathetic. Ted Benton made the case well in an old article in Sociology called ’Beyond BioPhobia’, I forget the year. Vital to tread carefully though as there is a lot of terribly reductionist and ideologically suspect stuff out there in the name of biological explanations of social phenomena. Also, isn’t the real point to question the conceptual separation of the ’biological’ and ’social’, which is different from viewing them as interrelated? The question is also interestingly related to how the human/animal divide is inscribed and policed. A last point - important to be critical of how ’biology’ is constructed and mobilised in knowledge-practices, as it’s not simply a real domain; worth considering for example that biology is not reducible to genetics, which is only the current dominant paradigm - equally viable to prioritise the level of the organism, group, or even eco-system, in visions of ’the biological’.

Thank you. Absolutely, you’re right. There is a lot of quite crude, reductionist and ideologically driven work out there appropriating biology for suspect reasons that we need to be careful of. I just feel we need to address what I believe to be the anthropocentric bias still so prevalent in social research and the artificial divide between the ’biological’ and the ’social’. I think you’re right that the conceptual separation needs questioning and much more detailed scrutiny if we are to more fully comprehend social life. I’ve come across so many sociologists that downplay the role of biology and dismiss it as of little influence, I just feel that as a community we’ve gone too far in that direction. We need to strike a balance and this brief piece was intended to contribute to that rebalancing.

» The most popular posts over the last 5 years of Sociological Imagination The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 18:57:38) [...] The Sociological Imagination Today: The Need for Biology [...]
Cuteness has a global reach: it is an affective response; an aesthetic category; a performative act of self-expression; and an immensely popular form of consumption. This themed issue of the East Asian Journal of Popular Culture is intended to launch the new, interdisciplinary, transnational academic field of Cute Studies.

Cute culture, a nineteenth century development in Europe and the US, with an earlier expression in Edo-era Japan, has flourished in East Asia since the 1970s, and around the world from the turn of the new millennium. This special issue seeks papers that engage with a wide variety of both the forms that express cute culture, and the platforms upon which its articulation depends. Thus, the field of Cute Studies casts a wide net, analyzing not only consumers of cute commodities, but also those who seek to enact, represent, or reference cuteness through personal presentation or behavior. Since these groups intermingle, cute culture may be seen as a type of fan community, in which the line between consumers and producers is continually renegotiated. Cute Studies also encompasses critical analyses of the creative works produced by practitioners such as artists, designers, and performers, as well as the circumstances that determine the production and dissemination of these works.

Defined as juvenile features that cause an affective reaction, somatic cuteness follows the Kindchenschema set down by Konrad Lorenz (1943), and supported by later research: namely, large head and small, round body; short extremities; big eyes; small nose and mouth. Whether genetic, or activated by learned signals, the cuteness response is also associated with a range of behavioral aspects, including: childlike, dependent, gentle, intimate, clumsy, and nonthreatening. Such physical and behavioral features trigger an attachment based on the desire to protect and take care of the cute object. This deterministic nature of the cute affective register is highly pertinent to humanities scholars in the way it is expressed through categories of difference such as gender, race, or class. Furthermore, the difference in status between the subject affected by cuteness, and the harmless cute object, denotes a power differential with important political and ideological implications. The appeal contained within cuteness seeks to establish a reciprocal relationship of nurturing/being nurtured, and the subject who responds to this appeal faces very different ethical obligations depending on whether the cute object is a thing, an animal, or a human being.

Possible topics for papers include the following (Note: a specific focus on the geographical region of East Asia is not required of submissions):

Cute Cultures of East Asia
Cute Commodities and Consumers of Cute: Structure vs. Agency
Cuteness and Gender
The Science of Cute
Cute Histories
Practitioners of Cute
Cuteness and Race
Queering Cute
Cuteness and Disability
The Cuteness of Animals/Zoomorphic Cute
The Dark Side of Cute (the grotesque, violence, pedophilia, etc.)
Digital Cute (social media, memes, etc.)

The deadline for submissions to this special issue of EAJPC is: 15 April, 2014

Please submit papers to: [1]CuteStudies@gmail.com
A dialogue between phenomenology and realism in pedagogical and educational research (2013-12-08 14:00)

The workshop forms part of the activity to support our [1]Social Sciences strategic priorities for 2013-14 and falls under the Teaching research methods stream. The workshop is free to attend for delegates from both subscribing and non-subscribing institutions but booking is essential to secure your place as numbers are limited.

The workshop aims to stimulate debate around the philosophical underpinnings of different research methodologies, whose shared terminology is often interpreted in radically contrasting ways, and in particular, to encourage dialogue between realist and phenomenological research traditions. It is intended for pedagogical and educational researchers looking to expand their methodological repertoire and to explore new ways of teaching research methods.

The seminar uses the example of education research, itself an interdisciplinary subject, to explore connections between social scientific research and enquiry in the humanities. The inter-disciplinary focus of the seminar is addressed by exploring how education research (usually housed within the social sciences) is transformed by being considered as a humanistic (philosophical and artistic) endeavour. The event will develop participants’

(a) methodological expertise – through exploration and discussion of philosophical terminology understood differently in different research traditions i.e. ontology, truth, phenomena
(b) self-understanding of research and teaching identity – through responding to the theme of education researcher as artist/poet and identifying new pedagogical approaches to research training

(c) inter-disciplinary competence in research methods teaching – through engaging in dialogue with researchers with a range of different educational research perspectives and reflecting on different pedagogical practices in research methods teaching

The workshop will have a strong capacity building element, furthered by encouraging participation by early career researchers and advanced doctoral students.

It is widely acknowledged that the positivist/interpretivist distinction in social and educational research has proven inadequate as a description of methodological approaches in these fields and as a heuristic for interpreting their historical development. However, among the descriptions of how this dichotomy can be resolved, transcended or sublated, two new ‘worlds’ have emerged, centring around a phenomenological perspective on the one hand, which claims that research into the educational experience has more in common with a literary or artistic endeavour than a ‘methodology’, and a perspective on the other hand that seeks to reconceive a social science in a ‘critical realist’ or ‘post-positivist’ light.

This event will provide opportunities for researchers at different career stages to engage in philosophical exploration of the points of departure or convergence between the two traditions. In particular, discussion will centre on the different ways in which each has appropriated key terms – ontology, epistemology, reality, truth and the phenomenon. It will also explore the spectrum of ‘phenomenologies’, which range from a technically developed empirical methodology to a poetic note of caution about the place of ‘method’ in educational research, and the range of realist proposals, with their associated debates. Questions to be addressed include: Can the two approaches find common ground through a hermeneutic exploration of their vocabulary? Does each play a different role within the research community, such that, for example, phenomenology might provide for an examination of the ‘questions’
to which the critical realist method can be applied? Is there the possibility, as some scholars have suggested, of the emergence of a 'phenomenological realism'? What are the implications for research methods teaching in education?

Proposed programme

9:30-10:00 Registration

10:00-10:45 *Phenomenological Inquiry and Phenomenological Pedagogy*

10:45-11:30 *Exploring Education Through Phenomenology*

11:30-12:00 Coffee

12:00-12:45 *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*

12:45-13:30 *Education, Epistemology and Critical Realism*

13:30-14:15 Lunch

14:15- 3:00 Exploring key theoretical terminology in relation to phenomenological and critical realist inquiry (two parallel workshops)

3:00-3:45 Emerging understandings of the relationships between philosophical traditions, their methodological implications, and associated research methods pedagogies (panel discussion with the four key presenters)

3:45 – 4:00 Future collaboration and activity (plenary discussion)
The Militarization of America's Police Forces (2013-12-09 08:00)

SWAT teams are familiar figures from films and TV shows. But where did they come from? I’ve been fascinated for years by the militarization of policing and it stems, in part, from wanting to understand how this basically sinister trend was so rapidly normalised through popular culture. It’s one of those topics I occasionally find myself losing a few hours to reading about online, in this case prompting the present post.

Surprised as I am to find myself reading, let alone posting, something from a right wing libertarian think tank, this analysis from CATO of the paramilitarization of US policing is excellent. It offers an incisive summary of how a number of trends (e.g. the ‘war on drugs’, the rise of ‘knock raids’, the building of links between police and the defence department, the reutilisation program which transfer military hardware to police forces) have converged to drive a heretofore unprecedented degree of militarization in US policing. Police departments are now imposing quotas for drug arrests in order to win federal funding, which they’re pursuing through raids which utilise ‘donated’ military hardware:

A little-known Pentagon program has been quietly militarizing American police forces for years. A total of $4.2bn worth of equipment has been distributed by the Defense Department to municipal law enforcement agencies, with a record $546m in 2012 alone.

In the fine print of the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1997, the "1033 program" was born. It allows the Defense Department to donate surplus military equipment to local police forces.

Though the program’s existed since the 1990s, it has expanded greatly in recent years, due, in part, to post-9/11 fears and sequestration budget cuts. The expanse, however, seems unnecessary given that the Department of Homeland Security has already handed out $34bn in "terrorism grants" to local polices forces – without oversight mind you – to fund counter-terrorism efforts.

Additional militarization, then, deserves congressional attention as the program is harmful and must be scaled back for a number of reasons.

First, the program is transforming our police into a military. The results of such over-militarized law enforcement are apparent from the dispersion of Occupy protesters in Oakland to the city-wide
lockdown in Boston.

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/07/militarization-local-police-america

This is what these teams look like in action:

IFRAME: [7]//www.youtube.com/embed/05gLm6mSZ5M

Note: I use the qualifier 'basically' here in a deliberate fashion. I completely accept that there may be some situations which render something like a SWAT team a good idea. But the rapid expansion of this model is deeply disturbing.

7. file://www.youtube.com/embed/05gLm6mSZ5M
The Pathology of the Rich (2013-12-09 21:47)

Chris Hedges on the nature and significance of the oligarchic class. His polemic take ties in nicely with what seems to be a recent resurgence in British sociology of research into elites. See the [1]recent issue of Discover Society for instance.

Preparing for life post-PhD (2013-12-10 08:00)

One thing I’ve gradually noticed in life is how easily advice can slide into being a performative justification of the choices the individual giving the advice has made in the past. Never does this seem to be more true than with academia, perhaps unsurprisingly given the potent combination of a preponderance of intensely ruminative people alongside career structures which have changed radically in a relatively short space of time. I don’t think this means academic career advice is worthless (far from it*) but it does mean everything should be taken with a pinch of salt. Receiving advice and thinking about what people are suggesting to you can be just as useful in helping you work out what your priorities are as it can be in helping you expand your understanding of objectively felicitous strategies.
This is all an elaborate preamble to highlighting this interview about preparing for a post-PhD career. It raises some important issues and is full of interesting thoughts but it really should be treated with caution. Though perhaps that went without saying. Does anyone have suggestions about preparing for post-PhD life or thoughts on the sociology of advice? We’d love to hear from you if so.

During my post-doc I was interviewed for a number of permanent academic posts around the UK. After my fifth interview rejection the third and final year of my funding was coming to an end. So I decided to leave academia and get a job in business instead. The main driver for me quitting academia was my unwillingness to accept part-time teaching and associated pay just to ‘stay in the game’ for a permanent academic post. My choice of sector, e-learning and web-based training, left the door open to a return to academia, but once I started in business I knew there was no going back.

[...]

As I said in my introduction, life after the PhD is very different and you need to be mentally prepared for this difference. One major change I believe you need to make in the final six months is to gradually switch off a powerful force that has sustained you for so long: deferred gratification. Delaying gratification is the ability to make do with less now, in the anticipation of future gains. It’s great when you’re in a structured environment like education, as it keeps you focussed on the end goal of achieving your qualification. It gives you the power to knuckle down and write that chapter, read that book, rather than give in to distractions and interruptions. But it’s not such a great capability when it comes to the next major priority after completing your PhD: finding a secure job that will pay you a decent salary and has benefits like a pension and health insurance.

So after having spent more than two decades of your life in school deferring gratification, you are suddenly in the position towards at the end of your PhD where you need to start to embrace it! All those things that we as PhDs have had to put off: having a family, buying and furnishing a home, going on holiday, paying off debt, suddenly become a real possibility. In fact you have to transition quite rapidly from the approach of just getting by, into someone who can really start to ‘make a living’. You have to quickly learn how to present yourself to a hiring committee (i.e. no longer act like a grad student), negotiate yourself a good salary and benefits package, and start work in an unfamiliar place with sufficient professionalism to get you through your probation. [2]The Professor Is In website has lots of great advice in this area by the way, relevant to both academic and non-academic careers.

The true cost of adjuncting

Already I can hear people yelling ‘Yeah great in principle Chris we would wholeheartedly love to embrace gratification like you say, but where are all the well-paid jobs in academia?!’ True enough, the academic job market is currently terrible. Many of our peers are toiling away in under-employment as a result: working as adjuncts, or employed in the university bookshop, as a lab assistant or as a local tour guides, waiting for things to improve. However, what started as a few months of ‘staying in the game’ can easily extend into a few years and then into a whole adjunct or under-employed way of life. As many of our peers have found to their cost, especially in the US, temporary and part-time work is now entrenched in the higher education system. In the US there is the now infamous statistic that 75 % of faculty work part-time on temporary contracts, while in the UK, more than a third of academics are now on fixed-term contracts, according to a recent story in [3]The Guardian. The dream job that so many aspire to may turn out to be just that: a dream that will never materialize. Ironically the academy, that last bastion of tenure, is today fronted by an army of casual workers on short-term and temporary contracts.
What does frustrate me about this is how important advice about not getting stuck in a rut waiting for the 'next' career stage which might never come co-exists with an enthusiastic reiteration of a similarly linear normative trajectory (after you've done X, your next priority is Y and you can no longer do that within the academy). An increasing awareness of ‘alternative’ careers for PhDs is a hugely important goal but it’s one which really shouldn’t be framed in such dichotomous terms. It’s interesting to encounter the perspective offered in the interview but I have a lot more time and sympathy for ‘alt-academic’ and ‘para-academic’ conceptions, to name but two, than I do for the kind of understanding offered here. If you’re interested in these issues then please do get in touch (mark AT markcarrigan.net) as we have a project planned in the not too distant future which will be exploring the changing experience of career structure within the academy, perhaps as a prelude to a substantive research project in the longer term.

I’ve found it’s much more useful to seek advice about how a particular procedure or practice works than what someone should do under some given circumstances. But pursuing this thought risks slipping into writing an entirely different blog post.

1. [http://phdtalk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/preparing-for-life-after-phd-re-train.html](http://phdtalk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/preparing-for-life-after-phd-re-train.html)
2. [http://theprofessorisin.com/2013/05/10/the-six-ways-youre-acting-like-a-grad-student-and-how-thats-killin
g-you-on-the-job-market/](http://theprofessorisin.com/2013/05/10/the-six-ways-youre-acting-like-a-grad-student-and-how-thats-killin
g-you-on-the-job-market/)
3. [http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/feb/04/academic-casual-contracts-higher-education](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/feb/04/academic-casual-contracts-higher-education)
4. [http://phdtalk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/preparing-for-life-after-phd-re-train.html](http://phdtalk.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/preparing-for-life-after-phd-re-train.html)

Enhancing the learner experience in HE (2013-12-10 19:33)

The latest edition of the journal Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education (ELEHE) is out. So now we are looking for papers for the next or following issues. Personally, it was be interesting to see a greater number of papers around how public engagement has a positive experience on learner’s experience (or possibly collaborating on one). The bit below hopefully answers some of the questions you might have. If you have any questions please get in contact on scott.turner@northampton.ac.uk

What is ELEHE?

ELEHE is an open-access (with no page fees!), interdisciplinary, international, peer-reviewed online journal published twice yearly, enthusiastically addressing the challenge of enhancing learning in Higher Education. Papers are welcome which embrace the student voice to help improve the learner experience in ways which have been shown to impact positively on students. As well as learner experience in the teaching environment it also includes all aspects (including students and student voice within public engagement activities) that improve the learner’s experience in Higher Education.

The journal is interdisciplinary in scope. It welcomes a diverse range of articles, drawing on a variety of critical, comparative and reflective approaches responding to key agendas in Higher Education. Committed to evidence-informed practice, it will also encourage the setting of new agendas where the student experience can be enhanced.
When does my paper need to be submitted by?

We run an open call and are happy receive papers through out the year.

How is the paper reviewed?

At least two referees will review the paper.

What type of papers can I submit?

The journal welcomes:

- research articles (3000-6000 words);
- critical case studies (3000-4000 words);
- short reports (up to 2000 words);
- book reviews (up to 1000 words).

Details of the journal focus and scope, along with author guidelines can be found at [1]http://journals.northampton.ac.uk/index.php/elehe/about

What is it going to cost me to publish?

It is currently a free, open access, peer-reviewed journal. There are no page charges, etc. The University of Northampton supports the journal, including infrastructure, paying for DOIs, etc.

If you want to discuss ideas about possible articles, or want guidance on preparing your submission, please contact the Editors

Dr Rachel Maunder (Chair of Editorial Team) Rachel.Maunder@northampton.ac.uk

Dr Simon Sneddon (Editor; and Book Reviews Editor) Simon.Sneddon@northampton.ac.uk

Anna Crouch (Editor) Anna.Crouch@northampton.ac.uk

Dr Scott Turner (Editor) Scott.Turner@northampton.ac.uk

The Journal Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education can be found at:[2]http://www.northampton.ac.uk/elehe

1. [http://journals.northampton.ac.uk/index.php/elehe/about](http://journals.northampton.ac.uk/index.php/elehe/about)
2. [http://www.northampton.ac.uk/elehe](http://www.northampton.ac.uk/elehe)
CfP: An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2013-12-10 19:34)

What does 'public sociology' entail in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinterest and wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of "taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology's moral fibre"? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole?

Short articles (1000 to 4000 words) are sought for an open access edited book which explores conceptual, methodological or practical aspects of Digital Public Sociology. If you would be interested in contributing then please send an abstract of 200 words or less by December 31st 2013. The final articles would be needed by March 31st 2014, with the intention of launching the collection in the summer of 2014. Please send abstracts (or questions) to mark@markcarrigan.net.

Launch of ‘SexGen Northern Network’ in the UK (2013-12-10 19:37)

Dear Colleagues,

We are delighted to announce the launch of the 'sexgen Northern Network'.

'sexgen' is a collaborative interdisciplinary network bringing together gender and sexuality based research centres around the North of England. We aim to bring academic research, writing and thinking on gender and sexuality into conversation with the ideas, cultural expressions and knowledges of community groups, cultural sites and activist organisations. Series organising contacts are: Sally Hines, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds: [1]s.hines@leeds.ac.uk and Surya Monro, Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield: [2]s.monro@hud.ac.uk.

In 2014-2015 sexgen will hold a series of free seminars, details of which will be forthcoming. Seminars will be themed to reflect current and emerging themes within gender and sexuality studies.

Please find attached the Network flyer and the flyer for the first seminar: Seminar 1: February 28th 2014, The Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield: 'Compulsory Sexualities'.

We would be grateful if you could publicize 'sexgen' among your networks.

We look forward to seeing you at future events.

With best wishes,

Surya Monro and Sally Hines.

[3]
sexgen is a collaborative interdisciplinary network bringing together gender and sexuality based research centres around the North of England. We aim to bring academic research, writing and thinking on gender and sexuality into conversation with the ideas, cultural expressions and knowledges of community groups, cultural sites and activist organisations. Series organising contacts are: Sally Hines, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds: s.hines@leeds.ac.uk and Surya Mono, Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield: s.mono@hud.ac.uk. The other Universities belonging to the Network are Durham, Lancaster, Manchester, Newcastle, Sheffield and York.

In 2014-2015 sexgen will hold a series of free seminars, details of which will be forthcoming:

Seminar 1: February 28th 2014, 2.00-6.00pm: Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield:

Compulsory Sexualities

This seminar provides a space for us to explore different forms of erotic imperative and their effects. It links debates about the commodification of sexuality with analysis of the ways in which compulsory sexualities are embraced, celebrated, avoided and resisted. Why is active, partnered sexual expression so valorised in Anglophone societies? In what ways are we, as subjects, influenced by dominant discourses about healthy sexualities? How do these discourses impact on different social groups, in terms of gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and sexual identities, as well as other social characteristics? What alternative sexual identities (for example asexuality) are emerging in marginal social spaces, and are marginal social spaces imbued with non-normative compulsory sexualities?

Speakers:
Mark Carrigan (University of Warwick): Asexuality
Surya Mono (University of Huddersfield): Biphobia and the hypersexualisation of bisexuality
Christina Richards (Notts and Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust Gender Clinic and at West London Mental Health NHS Trust (Charing Cross Gender Clinic): Trans sexualities/trans sexualities
Eleanor Wilkinson (University of Leeds): Compulsory coupledom
Jo Woodhouse (University of Huddersfield): Compulsory sexuality and therapeutic discourse
Sharon Wray (University of Huddersfield): Ageing, ethnicity and compulsory sexualities

To register please email A.Holmes@hud.ac.uk. For enquiries please contact s.mono@hud.ac.uk
The Old New Politics of Class (2013-12-11 08:00)

In his inaugural lecture at the LSE, Mike Savage reflects on the Great British Class Survey and the key issues surrounding class in contemporary society. Bev Skeggs is the respondent. It's a really interesting talk on a number of levels. I was particularly intrigued by his argument about how the GBCS dataset, which was criticised for being non-representative, could nonetheless be a rich source of insights if treated in a quasi-ethnographic fashion. There are some related thoughts by Mike Savage on the LSE Sociology Department’s new blog.

1. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/M_s77EpIcTg]
2. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/researchingso ciology/2013/11/25/hello-world/]

Collisions, Coalitions and Riotous Subjects: Reflections, Repercussions and Reverberations (2013-12-11 19:35)

Another sociological resource to add to our collection:

1. Sociological Imagination and UK Riots:

Continuous Publishing and Being an Open-Source Academic (2013-12-12 08:00)

One of my favourite academic blogs is [1]Understanding Society. Written by Daniel Little, Chancellor for the University of Michigan-Dearborn, it covers an extraordinarily broad range of theoretical topics and sustains the rigour of serious academic writing while nonetheless being written in a relatively accessible way. I think it’s the best theory blog on the internet (by quite some way) and I’m always stunned by quite how much interesting stuff there is in the archives. The author, who has also done some excellent [2]video interviews with leading social scientists, describes the blog as a ‘hypertext book’ and you can find an index of topics [3]here.

My blog, UnderstandingSociety, addresses a series of topics in the philosophy of social science. What is involved in "understanding society"? The blog is an experiment in writing a book, one idea at a time. In order to provide a bit more coherence for the series of postings, I’ve organized a series of threads that link together the postings relevant to a particular topic. These can be looked at as virtual "chapters". This list of topics and readings can serve as the core of a semester-long discussion of the difficult philosophical issues that arise in the human sciences. It roughly parallels the topics I cover in the course I teach in the philosophy of social science at the University of Michigan.


I’d be interested to know if Little still sees it as a book. The sheer size of the blog’s archives suggest that it’s now something approximating a whole series of books. Clearly, it’s been a success. What I have always been curious about is the author’s institutional role (which I assume is the equivalent of a UK vice-chancellor) and the role which the blog perhaps serves as an outlet for his continued scholarship when he presumably has many other commitments competing for his time. I was pleased to see this [5]addressed recently in a really thoughtful and thought-provoking post. The blog recently had its sixth birthday and the author reflected on the evolution of the blog and his understanding of the role that it serves:

This week celebrates six years of Understanding Society. This effort represents over 850 posts, on topics ranging from current debates in philosophy about causal powers to China’s urban transformation to the conservative war on the poor, leading to nearly three million page views since the first post in 2007. I’m grateful to the communities of interested readers who have followed Understanding Society on [6]Twitter, [7]Facebook, and [8]Google Plus. There are almost 4,000 readers in these groups, and I’m grateful to everyone who has read, followed, tweeted, commented, and Googled the blog — thanks!


What I found particularly interesting was the author’s description of himself as an ‘open-source philosopher’. The integration of the blog into his working practices, such that it constitutes the starting point for traditional scholarship rather than something in opposition to it, is something which deeply resonates with me from the opposite end of the career spectrum. When I’ve written about [10]continuous publishing in the past, this is exactly what I’ve been trying to say:

Virtually all the new academic publishing I’ve done in these six years began as a couple of posts on Understanding Society. You might say I’ve become an “open-source” philosopher — as I get new ideas about a topic I develop them through the blog. This means that readers can observe ideas in motion. A
good example is the efforts I've made in the past year to clarify my thinking about microfoundations and meso-level causation. Another example is the topic of “character,” which I started thinking about after receiving an invitation to contribute to a volume on character and morality; through a handful of posts I arrived at a few new ideas I felt I could offer on the topic. This “design and build” strategy means that there is the possibility of a degree of inconsistency over time, as earlier formulations are challenged by newer versions of the idea. But I think it makes the process of writing a more dynamic one, with lots of room for self-correction and feedback from others.

The blog has also given me a chance to write about topics I've long cared about, but haven't had a professional venue for writing about. These include things like the reality of race in the United States; the lineaments of power that determine so many of the features of contemporary life; and the nuts and bolts of education and equality in our country. And along the way of researching and writing about some of these topics, I've come to have a better and more detailed understanding of them. Not many philosophers have such a wide opportunity to write on a variety of topics beyond the confines of their sub-disciplines.


It's really interesting to read about the blogging experiences of someone who has been a philosophy professor for decades. I was struck by the homology between his experiences and my own in spite of our very different positions within the higher education system. I wonder if there's something interesting about freedom here. As someone who has blogged throughout my PhD, I've experienced it as an intellectual outlet which has no real implications for my academic position (though retrospectively that's not really true). Perhaps Daniel Little feels similarly free about his blog, for entirely different reasons, as a result of his institutional position leaving scholarship via his blog being something he does for its own rewards rather than any need to make a living out of it. Reading his post has increased my confidence in the notion of 'continuous publishing' and strengthened my conviction that, with time, this is a way of working that will become ever more common. Both the short-term and long-term gains available to those who begin to work in this way are such that it seems inexorable, barring a trend towards heavy-handed institutional regulation or something along those lines. I think the implications of this are hugely significant. Here's how Pat Lockley and I described it in a blog post we wrote quite some time ago:

Perhaps it’s time to move from [12]'the Cathedral to the Bazaar'. These metaphors from the open-source software movement refer to contrasting models of software development. In academic terms we might see them as referring to distinct orientations towards publishing: one which works towards the intermittent, largely private, production of one-off works (papers and monographs → cathedrals) and the other which proceeds in an iterative and dialogical fashion, with a range of shorter-term outputs (blog posts, tweets, online articles, podcasts, [13]storified conversations etc) standing in a dynamic and productive relationship with larger-scale traditional publishing projects: the ‘cathedrals’ can be something we build through dialogues, within communities of practice, structured around reciprocal engagement with publications on social media platforms.


The idea which is still insufficiently clear in my own mind is how my advocacy of this relates to my belief in academic over-production. I've had a vague intuition for a long time about the potential ‘rebalancing’ away from ever more journal articles which ever fewer people read and towards a continuous making public of provisional work which ultimately leads to fewer though better journal articles. In a future post I'll try and elaborate my
understanding of the institutional constraints and enablements upon such as process, as well as what I imagine the landscape of scholarly publishing might look like when it is filled with a preponderance of open-source academics.

1. http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/

CfP: Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters (2013-12-12 14:02)

First Call for Papers

'Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters'

The Institute for Research in Citizenship and Applied Human Sciences,
University of Huddersfield, Thursday 19th and Friday 20th of June 2014.

Confirmed keynote speakers for the conference are:

Ann Phoenix, University of London

Ken Plummer, University of Essex
This conference builds on the University of Huddersfield's long held tradition of hosting a bi-annual conference on narrative research. It seeks to provide a fresh context for the development and dissemination of new research, ideas, perspectives and methodologies in the field of narrative research and enquiry and aims to bring together scholars working in a range of disciplinary fields. ‘Narrative’ is well known for its looseness of definition, its multiplicity of approaches and its interdisciplinarity, which over the years has led to a richness and diversity of narrative work. Identities, both private and public and individual and collective, have long been a focus for narrative researchers, where the content, form and effects of identity story-telling have been explored in a range of areas and contexts. The focus of 'Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters' is to address the ‘troubles’ that now surround contemporary narratives of identity, and the ways in which previous work may simultaneously inform but also trouble and be ‘troubled’ by new narrative work in the broad area of ‘identities’.

We invite contributions from researchers interested in using narratives across a range of disciplines including, sociology, gender studies, psychology, law, politics, criminology, philosophy, history, anthropology, social work, education, and business and management. Topics of interest to this conference include (though are not restricted to) the following areas:

Abstracts should be no longer than 250 words. We invite papers in the form of 20 minute oral presentations, and also workshop sessions and poster presentations (the format should be clearly stated in the abstract). All submissions must include the author/speaker(s) name, title of paper, university or organizational affiliation, and contact information.

The deadline for submission of abstract is Monday 3rd February 2014. Please email your abstract to the conference organisers at: troublingnarratives@hud.ac.uk with ‘conference abstract’ in the subject line. You will be notified about whether your paper has been accepted soon after Monday 10th March 2014.


1. mailto:troublingnarratives@hud.ac.uk
CfP: Sociologies of Everyday Life (2013-12-13 20:29)

Deadline for submissions: 31 August 2014

We are pleased to invite papers for consideration in the Sociology Editor’s Special Issue in 2015. The theme will be the Sociologies of Everyday Life.

Everyday life sociology is a well-established tradition in the discipline and interest in ways of understanding day-to-day worlds continues to be significant. These engagements are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, across the social sciences as well as outside them. It is in this context that the 2015 Special Issue aims to provide a timely opportunity to take stock. This is intended to be a reflective moment – where has sociology arrived at in its attempts to think through the everyday? It is also intended to be an anticipative moment – what are the new logics, foci, approaches, uses, limits of sociologies of the everyday?

two big hassles in editing a book, and what you can do about them (2013-12-13 20:32)

My first post last week suggested that there were three good reasons to consider editing a book. This post focuses on the necessities of book editing. I’m writing about two big problems, not because I think that they should be enough to put you off, but because it’s better to go into the book editing process forewarned. So here they are.

Problem One: You got it wrong.

It’s easy to be convinced, when you’re doing the book proposal, that you’ve got a fantastic and original idea for an edited collection. You’ve got a novel focus and a new structure for putting the chapters together. You convinced the publisher it would work. You invited people to contribute. But now you’ve got the chapters in hand you can see that the grand idea isn’t actually quite what you thought it would be. In fact, it seems to have all kinds of problems – and the result is a not very good collection. It’s clear that this has nothing to do with the quality of what’s been submitted – it’s caused by the actual guiding framework, your creation, your fault, your problem. Now what?

Think that doesn’t happen? Well, I’ve been in just that situation. My co-editors and I had a great idea, we thought. We asked people to write, and they did. But when we put the chapters all together it looked like two books, not one. We sweated for weeks about what to do and finally decided that we had no choice but to restructure the book. That meant we had to renegotiate with the publisher, ask some new contributors and then work out what to do with the chapters left over. In our case, because the chapters were (thankfully) all focused on the same topic, we were able to secure a special issue of a journal. All of the authors gracefully agreed to rewrite their piece a bit so it could be refereed for that particular publication. We solved the problem. As we needed to – after all, we created it!

Solution: Be prepared.

If you have an idea for a collection that is a bit off piste, then make some kind of back up plan. You have an obligation to the authors to make sure that work they have produced in good faith is published.

Problem Two: The authors didn’t deliver as expected.

This is the issue that most editors face. There are multiple ways in which authors become a problem and here’s some of the most common.

(1) Authors write off topic. You’ve asked them to write about a particular thing, they submitted an abstract that you used in the book proposal and it looked good. However, when the chapter turned up, it’s nothing like what you imagined.

(2) Authors write badly. The published work you’ve seen from the author has all been fantastic. But what they’ve sent you is clearly hurried, muddled and generally sloppy. In fact it’s not publishable in its present state.

(3) All the chapters are too long. You’ve given the authors a word length, and you’d allowed a bit of slack but they’ve all gone over by a significant amount ... now the entire book is well over the word limit that is specified in the contract.
(4) Authors miss the deadline. (Blush, this is my major writing sin.) They have good excuses and you can see why they’re late. It’s a case of blood and stones, you have no choice but to wait on them.

(5) Authors don’t submit anything at all. For whatever reason, authors promise to write a chapter and then they don’t. Life gets in the way, they get ill, they get an unexpected grant which is all consuming, they are just overloaded with work... they meant well but in the end they just couldn’t get it together. For whatever reason, the chapter doesn’t happen. This is generally not because they are lazy so and sos, but is more about the nature of academic life. What to do? You’ll still probably need to talk to people who haven’t managed to get their chapters in on time – you’ll generally find that they are embarrassed and very, very apologetic.

**Solution: Anticipate that all of these issues will happen.**

*Set up expectations.* Tell authors beforehand that there is a review process and they will get feedback on their chapters. This can even be from peer reviewers that you enlist to help out. (You can thank them in the acknowledgements). Design a review form to use for feedback which looks at (a) the content and argument and the fit with the collection and (b) secretarial issues such as citations, referencing style and word length. Show the contributors this beforehand.

*Build a review process into the timeline* for getting the book to press. Be realistic about the deadline. In fact, be generous. Better to be finished ahead of time than fall behind. But also be prepared to go back to the publisher and ask for more time, ahead of the deadline. Publishers schedule printing and advertising as soon as they issue contracts so it’s really important to keep them in the loop.

*Don’t make it more stressful than it has to be.* You do need to have enough flex in the timetable to be able to offer people a bit more time if they really need it. If you are reviewing chapters for example, you can always start with those in hand, and cut a few people a bit of slack (especially if its me 😞).

*Be firm.* If authors can’t get down to the required length, but you want their chapter in the collection, insist. You might offer to edit it for them if you think they genuinely can’t do it. I’ve found that people are often grateful for some suggestions about where to cut, and/or an empathetically conducted edit. Conversely, you can go to the publisher to ask if there is any possibility of increasing the word count – sometimes there is.

*Be prepared to make hard decisions.* You may have to tell someone that their chapter isn’t up to the mark even after several revisions. This is just part of the editing process. After all it’s your book with your name on it – you’re the one who will be seen to be a crappy editor if some of the contributions are weak. If you feel uncomfortable about refusing to include something, ask your publisher for help. They have a vested interest in your book being a strong collection too and are sometimes prepared to be the ‘bad cop’.

*Have a back up plan.* Some people like to invite one or two more contributions than they expect to have in the book (but what to do if they all turn up?). Others have a couple of colleagues ready to step in, or have a chapter of their own that they can insert if the anticipated contributions don’t arrive.

**Some final important advice**

Be prepared for the emotional labour involved in dealing with these problems. Many book editors – and I’m one of them – swear immediately after finishing an edited collection that they’ll/we’ll never do another one. Like childbirth, we forget quickly, and many of us find ourselves lining up for another one – or even more – rather more quickly then we anticipated.

Finally, you’ll see that I’ve mentioned “your publisher” several times in this post. As with any book, it’s really
important to establish a good working relationship with your publisher. They can be particularly important for edited collections and the various dealings that you have with authors over contracts, copyright – and most of all, quality.

This was originally published on Pat Thomson’s personal blog, [2]Patter, and is reposted here with permission


CfP: Social and Political Critique in the Age of Austerity (2013-12-13 20:34)

Social and Political Critique in the Age of Austerity
A one day workshop at Keele University
10.30am-6pm, Wednesday 12th February, 2014

This one day workshop is devoted to the discussion of critical politics in the contemporary age of austerity. Following the 2007 global economic crash, which led to a raft of government bank bail outs and nationalisations across America and Europe, a cunning ideological reversal took place – the crash was no longer the result of the hubris of the neoliberal financial sector, which had developed the idea of ‘riskless risk’ where reckless stock market speculation and the creation of value ex nihilo could produce endless profit, but rather the immoral wastefulness of the people and society. According to this ideological position, which was advanced by governments across Europe, the welfare state, and in many respects society itself, was transformed into an ‘exorbitant privilege’ that was simply unaffordable. In fact, in order to pay for their wastefulness the people were not only expected to give up their public services, but also required to accept ever lower wages, and a general state of social and economic precariousness.

This is the current state of play across America and Europe, where the neoliberal state has exploited the crash in order to retrofit society for violent competition with Asian capitalism. In the face of this race to the bottom, key thinkers such as David Graeber, Antonio Negri, Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou, and Costas Douzinas have spoken out against the new form Naomi Klein calls neoliberal disaster capitalism and given voice to the protest, rebellion, and revolt taking place across the world.

The objective of this workshop is to build upon the works of these key thinkers and explore the possibility for resistance in the age of austerity. We invite contributions from a range of disciplines focused on diverse social and political contexts and a variety of theoretical perspectives. Contributors may choose to focus on austerity and resistance across Europe, including the UK, Greece, Spain, and Italy; the Occupy movement; the media construction of austerity, including the idea of the undeserving poor who are seen to be living off public funds; methods for the organisation of resistance; the concept of the multitude and the digital commons; anti-capitalist thought; or transformative social and political theory and practice more generally. Most importantly, we are keen to emphasise that this list is not exhaustive – the key principle behind the workshop is that debate should open up a space for social and political creativity. In this way we are keen to encourage potential contributors to be creative and explore new possibilities for political change in a historical period where change seems absolutely necessary, but also impossible to envisage. In this respect, we encourage contributions from a variety of participants – academics, post-graduate students, activists, and others engaged in thinking through the possibilities of change under conditions of crisis and
austerity.

The workshop will close with a lecture from Professor Costas Douzinas (Birkbeck), author of Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe.

In order to take part in the event please send a 250 word abstract to Emma Head ([1]e.l.head@keele.ac.uk), by Monday 23rd December. This event is being organised jointly by Mark Featherstone (Keele Sociology) and Emma Head (Keele Sociology and the BSA Digital Sociology study group). Registration will open in early January. Confirmed speakers will be notified by 7th January.

1. mailto:e.l.head@keele.ac.uk

Judith Butler and Cornel West, Honoring Edward Said (2013-12-14 08:00)

On the Tenth Anniversary of Edward Said's passing, renowned scholars Judith Butler and Cornel West discuss what it means to be a public intellectual and Edward Said's impact on the academic discourse of Palestine.

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/jF5mYvjDp3U
CfP: An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2013-12-15 08:00)

What does ‘public sociology’ entail in a world of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Slideshare, Soundcloud, Pinterest and Wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole?

Short articles (1000 to 4000 words) are sought for an open access edited book which explores conceptual, methodological or practical aspects of Digital Public Sociology. If you would be interested in contributing then please send an abstract of 200 words or less by December 31st 2013. The final articles would be needed by March 31st 2014, with the intention of launching the collection in the summer of 2014. Please send abstracts (or questions) to mark@markcarrigan.net.

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-12-15 20:36)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.
A Necessary Disenchantment: myth, agency and injustice in the digital age (2013-12-16 08:00)

This lecture by Nick Couldry, who we [1]interviewed here about neoliberalism, offers a really plausible contextualisation of 'big data' in terms of a shifting history of 'media myths'.

Professor Couldry challenges some 'digital age' myths about how we gather on social media platforms and the value of 'big data', and considers the new forms of agency and injustice emerging alongside them.

2. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/lg2moI4ZH8](file://www.youtube.com/embed/lg2moI4ZH8)

“Wait, what? You have a PhD and you work where?!” (2013-12-17 08:00)

I always find it interesting to find out about people who pursue careers outside the academy after completing a PhD. Org Theory has a new guest blogger who has done precisely this and whose [1]first post describes the kind of work that he does:
We have two units within our branch here at DMV Research and Development (R &D). I work in the Driver Competency and Safety Projects Unit; there is also the Alcohol and Impaired Driving Unit. The distinction between the units is not substantial – many projects involve collaboration between researchers, and in many cases we use very similar types of data and methods to conduct our projects.

In general, I've worked on projects that involve the screening, testing, and assessment of physical, visual, and mental functions that may affect driving. If you've ever read a newspaper article about some tragic incident where someone pressed on the accelerator instead of the brake, and drove into a fast-food restaurant, you may have wondered “gee, I wonder if anyone's doing research on this problem?” The answer is “yes,” and I'm one of the people that works on that type of question (if you’re curious, such incidents often involve some element of cognitive impairment – such as occurs in early-stage dementia). The kinds of projects that I've worked on as a researcher include: (1) evaluating the results of a pilot project that used novel screening and education tools to identify drivers that may be at risk of unsafe driving due to a physical, visual, or cognitive impairment; (2) calculating projections about the number of cases DMV may see in the next few years of drivers who are referred for evaluation due to a medical problem of one type or another; (3) developing a method by which we can determine the reliability and validity of a drive test that we use (rarely) for persons who drive in extremely limited circumstances, on defined routes or in bounded areas.

I seem to recall dreaming up the notion of punk sociology at some point during my PhD, I think it was around 10 years ago. When I think back I imagine, rather melodramatically, that it came to me whilst I was trying to write one of the middle chapters of my PhD thesis as I listened to The Clash playing ‘Clampdown’. I hadn't intended to write anything explicitly about it. The punk sociology approach was simply something that I tried to tacitly develop in my work over that decade – I often asked myself, what would a punk do here? At the beginning of 2013 it suddenly seemed like the right moment to flesh-out the idea in a more direct and rigorous form. The conditions just seemed right. A number of things were coming together at this time – student fee structures and quotas had altered, research assessment was in full flow, key information sets were operational, league tables were circulating, research funding was eroding, the impact agenda was taking hold, the list goes on. The result was the book *Punk Sociology*.

One obvious starting point for the book was the discussion of a disciplinary crisis in sociology. Debates about a ‘coming crisis’ have been very prominent over the last 6 years or so, but they stretch throughout large parts of sociology’s history. I find the discussion of crises within sociology to be very productive and engaging, but only if handled carefully. The problem with talk of a crisis is that it can be inhibiting and potentially disenchanting for those in the early stages of their careers, when people first encounter sociology, or when we are trying to find a sense of purpose in their work. Crisis talk can actually perpetuate a sense of uncertainty unless it is used carefully. We shouldn’t hide from or try to conceal our problems, but I wanted to make a positive statement about the way I thought the discipline might be re-energised and how it might find a vibrant and sustainable future. I’m sure that lots of sociologists will disagree with my vision, but it seemed necessary to say something definite about the way we might protect and foster sociology in its current conditions.

*Punk Sociology* is intended as a response to any lack of confidence in the discipline. It suggests that we should tackle such uncertainty head-on. Punk sociology also taps into a number of debates about the future of sociology. There
have been some excellent recent edited collections on *Live Methods* (edited by Les Back and Nirmal Puwar) and *Inventive Methods* (Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford), along with a range of other articles, that claim that sociologists need to be ‘inventive’, ‘crafty’, ‘lively’ and ‘imaginative’. Many of us would agree with this type of sentiment, but I was left wondering how we might achieve this imagined future for the discipline. It’s actually quite scary to think that we are faced with the responsibility of making-up a more imaginative sociology. So, although these edited collections and articles are excellent and inspiring, I still felt there was space for a model to emerge that might help us to be imaginative and creative in rethinking sociology. This is where I suggest that we turn outside of the discipline to use cultural resources to help us. I turn to punk, largely because I think it gives us the means to think creatively about sociology, as well as allowing us to consider what sociology might be and how it might be done. In other words, the punk ethos might give us inspiration for thinking about the challenge to be ‘inventive’, ‘lively’ and ‘creative’ sociologists. It might seem odd to look back nearly 40 years in order to inspire the future of our discipline, but it is in the sensibility of punk that we can find viable ways for ensuring sociology’s vitality.

Alongside this, sociology is, of course, performed and produced in a changing environment. The words ‘neoliberal’ and ‘audit’ are often imported to describe these conditions, and often with good reason. In the book I suggest that the risk is that the pressures placed on us in this environment are likely to push us towards *playing it safe*. If we follow the lead of these systems of measurement and the way that they place value in certain types of work then, I argue, we are likely to find that our efforts and focus are counterproductive. Playing it safe will lead us to slip into the background of the social world. Instead, we need to resist the temptation to play it safe. My suggestion is that we use the punk ethos to do this. We can use the punk ethos to find ways of re-imagining how sociology is done and to help us to navigate the disciplinary and structural pressures that we are faced with. Punk shows us how to be creative and resourceful. It also shows us the value of being bold and fearless in our work whilst embracing raw ideas and a DIY ethic. Overall though, *Punk Sociology* is a call to think about how sociology might respond to its changing environment. *Punk Sociology* is intended to be a call to people who might want to explore the promise of sociology away from the inhibiting pressures we face and the shackles of convention. Hey Ho Let’s Go!

**David Beer** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York, UK. His book *Punk Sociology* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in January 2013. You can read the introduction to the book open access [2]here. He also blogs at [3]thinkingculture.wordpress.com

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/psB0cidB5bg
3. thinkingculture.wordpress.com

James Allen-Robertson (2013-12-21 15:15:00)
Looks good Dave. I’m certainly feeling a lot of uncertainty right now! I’ll be sure to pick up the book and hope punk will throw me a line.

Is there space for a rave sociology then?

Nam Tran (2014-05-06 19:14:20)
It’s always great to have new and creative ways of doing sociology.
Modern-Day Hermits: The Story Hikkomori in Japan and Beyond (2013-12-17 17:18)

Japan struggles with young people who have retreated into their bedrooms. Known as "hikikomori," they are modern-day hermits who disdain social contact and are unable to work or go to school. Dr. Alan Teo reviews this epidemic of social isolation.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/70bv5gaN4LI
CfP: Quantified Self Research Network, March 25th @SocioWarwick (2013-12-17 20:32)

The next meeting of the [1]Quantified Self Research Network will take place on the 25th March at the University of Warwick from 1pm to 6pm. It’s an informal seminar to present work in progress and is open to all.

If you would like to contribute then please send a short abstract and bio to mark@markcarrigan.net by February 1st. We use ‘quantified self’ in a broad sense inclusive of self-tracking, wearable computing and digital augmentation.

We’re also keen to build on the last seminar and move the discussion forward. Here are some of the key questions which emerged during the last meeting:

What is distinctive about qs?

People have tracked their health data for a long time such as keeping food diaries or measuring their weight. Is qs conceptually different to this or is it merely an automisation and intensification? Does the quantity of the data produced equate to more of the same or a qualitatively distinct phenomenon?

Are there inequalities in qs and self-tracking?

The technologies required for qs are usually quite expensive even for a basic device and would certainly be out of the range of disposable income for many people and...

Are we creating inequalities with the focus of research?

If qser are a relatively privileged group while it may be interesting to understand their practices and development of individual and group identities there are other people who cannot afford these practices, are uninterested or simply unaware of them.

What about gender?

The QS community seems to have more men than women as active participants. What are the reasons for this? If we take the broader notion of qs suggested by some of the presenters then often the more “mundane” or “domestic” approaches to self-tracking are more associated with women? Is there something fundamentally different about these?

How do we identify a ‘non-user’?

Although some of the methods of tracking have been used for a long time some of them are very new and it is currently unclear what kind of uptake they will have. We fairly easily identify a user (agreeing on a definition may be more complex) it is more difficult to identify a non-user. Are they people who do not practice qs or use the devices because they do not have access to them, they are not aware of them or they simply do not care? Is it right to define people as non-users of a fairly niche activity often engaged in by relatively privileged people? But with the amount of data which is generated about us (often without us knowing) are we not all quantified whether we like it or not?
Richard Swedberg begins his paper on "Thinking and Sociology" by recognizing that there may be "good reasons" why these two things are rarely discussed together. Though "all of us think" and "we all know the intensely private character of our thoughts", these thoughts are fleeting and ephemeral when considered next to things that we say and things that we know. These phenomena have been the closest sociology has tended to come towards looking at thinking itself and the reasons for this are both epistemic (they relate to things that are more or less open to others and tend, by their nature, to use terms that are understandable to others) and genealogical (Durkheim was the founding father most interested in thought yet also the most strongly committed to studying it through its objectification in social facts). Given that social facts are a product of collectivities, "the individual plays a very subordinate role in Durkheim's work, and most of what goes on in his or her mind belongs to the science of psychology, not sociology". He understood the categories of thought, collective representations, as gifts of society which should be analysed as social facts. So while sociologists have often looked at the products of thinking, the process itself has tended to be ignored or even dismissed in principle as a possible object of study.

For reasons that are intuitively obvious but nonetheless rewarding to explicate, this has not been true of philosophy. Swedberg considers Kant, Kierkegaard and Heidegger as three philosophers, amongst many, whose work could provide insights for a nascent sociology of thinking. Kant's essay "What is the Enlightenment?" can be understood as a short and purposefully accessible treatise on thinking: "what it means to think, why we should think, and what the consequences of thinking are". It also discussed how people avoid thinking through falling back upon established authorities, directly or through their cultural products, as a substitute for addressing their own questions. Kant also offered practical guidance on thinking, for instance suggesting that one should avoid thinking deeply

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while eating and that thinking while walking should be a matter of letting the imagination wander. Kierkegaard was concerned with the relationship of thinking to existence as a *particular individual*. For him thinking is part of existence: “a human being thinks and exist”. Thinking does not dominate existence but can fit harmoniously with it. This however is an achievement and one not enjoyed by the ‘objective thinker’ whose generalising and systematising thought ignores his own particularity in spite of it being bound up with this thinking. Instead, we ought to think *inwardly* and thus avoid the ‘stuntedness’ of the objective thinker who is not interested in his or her own existence. For Heidegger all human beings *can* think but many do not. He distinguishes between the thinking we all have the capacity to engage in and the thinking which we *usually* engage in: the ‘one-track thinking’ and ‘thoughtless chatter’ which our everyday lives in a technological society provoke. Instead of thinking, for Heidegger, we too often have opinions. But we can also learn how to think. For Heidegger this is a practical competency which is learned through doing:

We are not simply born with a certain capacity to think. But how can one learn to think? Heidegger’s answer is that it is a bit like swimming: you learn it by doing it. You cannot ‘read a treatise on swimming’: you have to open yourself up to the ‘adventure’ and ‘leap into the river’.

If you read a book by a philosopher, you can learn thinking by studying the way that the author asks questions. Summarizing and repeating the ideas in a book does not represent thinking. One should also try to locate and work with what the author does not say – what has been left ‘unthought’. And once this exercise is over, and you have ‘found’ the thinking of the author, you have also to ‘lose’ it. Freeing oneself from somebody’s thinking, Heidegger says, is harder than to find it.

Associated with this notion of thinking as a practical competency which can be learned is an understanding of thinking as *action* rather than being opposed to it. Heidegger was concerned that "action has often replaced thinking" and sought to overcome the "common notion that thinking is simply what comes before action and that it lacks value unless it is followed by action". Instead he sought to cultivate an understanding of thinking as a craft:

> The carpenter cannot learn his craft in some abstract manner; he must develop his skill by working on wood and by sensing what he can make of this material. The wood contains shapes, Heidegger says, and it is the carpenter’s task to sense these and bring them out in the wood. The idea of hidden forms means that the person should use thinking to understand Being.

However Swedberg is well aware that these arguments lack a sociological dimension. The first two authors lived before there was a sociology, while the latter was explicitly critical of sociology (as a science). But his suggestion that philosophy can be a potent source for a *sociology of thinking* is surely plausible and his impulse to turn their thought in a ‘sociological direction’ is one which I find deeply appealing. Other potential sources are the sociology of knowledge, the economics of information, cognitive psychology and neuroscience. But Swedberg’s most pressing concern is with the contribution of philosophy:

Kant, Kierkegaard and Heidegger all agree that thinking represents its own special activity or, to phrase it different, that one should focus the analysis directly on thinking. This is an approach that sociology may want to follow. It would also appear that sociology should try to study *thinking* which is a process, rather than *thought* which is a product. Heidegger’s argument that thinking should be independent of knowing as well as of action raises further interesting questions for sociologists.

One shared concern of all three philosophers he discussed were the “forces that prevent the individual from thinking...”
on his or her own”. Kant looked towards a reliance on established authorities, Kierkegaard towards the force of routine while Heidegger blamed technological society. These concerns naturally provoke sociological questions given the empirical referents of such claims. However these thinkers also raise important practical questions about the activity of thinking. Given that “it is easier to think in certain places, just as it is easier to think in certain postures” we might ponder the existence of “an architecture of thinking as well as a body technique”. Such ruminations naturally connect the sociology of thinking to the existential concerns of sociologists of thinking:

My own way for how to think is to spend one hour early in the day sitting still and focusing on some topic that needs to be thought through. I do not write, and I do not try to empty my mind so much as to focus it. It is an exercise in thinking, not in meditation. I usually find that my thinking proceeds step by step, and it comes natural to memorize each step.

For a long time I was puzzled by Kierkegaard’s insistence that thinking has an existential dimension. I first began to understand what he meant by this when I started to set aside some time for thinking also at the end of the day. It was impossible to engage in thinking when the day was over, I found, without directly connecting broader issues to personal ones. The link between thinking and subjectivity was in this way established in a very natural fashion. A day that has passed in your life – what does this mean?

My “own way for how to think” is to blog. I like the notion of a sociology of thinking in part because it gives me a novel frame of reference within which to ponder my own use of blogging. I like it for many other reasons as well though. What do other people think?

1. [http://jcs.sagepub.com/content/11/1/31.abstract](http://jcs.sagepub.com/content/11/1/31.abstract)

‘Patent Trolls’, Intellectual Property and Technological Innovation (2013-12-19 08:00)

Over the summer the BBC website had an [1]interesting feature looking at the ‘patent trolls’ who proactively buy patents with the sole intention of suing people for their infringement. The introduction of these ‘non-practicing entities’ into the patent system is something novel, with an influx of ‘entrepreneurs’ and ‘finance people’ having transformed the system into one in which the “majority of patent lawsuits today are filed by entities that don’t make any products”. Some ‘patent trolls’ develop their own patentable inventions in-house but most rely on buying second-hand technologies, which current owners were willing to sell for an influx of capital in exchange for potentially deployable ideas which nonetheless remain unactualised. Perhaps the financial crisis represents a supply-side cause of this willingness, given the apparent chronology of the growth of the ‘patent trolls’, though this is purely speculative on my part.
I find this interesting because the ‘patent trolls’ seem to rely on digital technology, in so far as that they use ‘virtual offices’ to minimise legal constraints and presumably rely upon internet research to assemble their ‘patent war chest’ and to identify their targets. Their methods rely upon digital innovation and abundant data but so too do the basis of their claims. What intrigues me is how an obscure potential technology for which they have acquired a patent can be linked to actually existing technologies which are claimed to infringe upon that patent. Their activities represent a weird inversion of the innovation process: linking ideas with their practical deployment in technological artefacts. How open-ended could this potentially be and what are its implications for innovation itself? Furthermore, what are the long-term effects of this likely to be for the viability of systems for registering and enforcing intellectual property? If we accept Margaret Archer’s (2012: 36) argument that the growth of the patent system “served to ‘freeze’ uncertainty and, in guaranteeing profitability ceteris paribus, thus freed up internal resources to make the next innovative development which, if successful, would then be protected in the same manner” then the long term viability of this growth, which underwrote the calculability upon which corporations have tended to depend, becomes something of enormous sociological significance. The enterprise of ‘patent trolling’ is “totally legal, and very lucrative, and absolutely shady”. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, it seems likely to take centre stage as a political issue in coming years:

Innovation is the foundation of America, and since 1790, entrepreneurs have been able to claim patents on their inventions so that copycats can’t profit off their work. But some companies have found a controversial use of the American patent system, derisively referred to as “patent trolling.” The practice refers to when a company buys broad patents for technology that it doesn't make—or partners with inventors who don’t actively use their patents—and brings legal claims against other companies that use the technology. The price of stealing someone’s work in the United States is mind-blowingly expensive—in the [3]millions of dollars—and even if the accused company wins, it still faces high legal costs. Often, a company violating a patent will pony up a few thousand dollars for licensing fees rather than face off in court.
“There are hundreds of thousands of crappy, vague, overly broad patents out there, and all you have to do is scoop up one of these patents and threaten to sue. No one is going to defend themselves, because it makes no financial sense,” says Julie Samuels, a senior staff attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), which is running a database[4] of patent troll claims. “It’s totally legal, and very lucrative, and absolutely shady.”

Bryan Farney, an attorney for a MPHJ, a company that has accused multiple businesses of using its patented office-scanner technology without permission, takes issue with the characterization of companies that sue others over patents they don’t use. “Obviously, patent trolling is a pejorative term...” he tells Mother Jones. “A more accurate term is Non-Practicing Entity.”

Earlier this month, Senator Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) [5]called these kinds of companies “scam artists” and “bottom feeders” who “work in the shadows.” Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Senator Mike Lee (R-Utah) introduced a bill this month that specifically takes aim at them by making it harder and more expensive to make these claims and allowing targeted companies to get their legal fees back. The bill has [6]support from the White House. This week, a group of inventors—including Facebook and Twitter’s co-founders—sent a [7]letter to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees arguing that “broad, vague patents covering software-type inventions—some of which we ourselves are listed as inventors on—are a malfunctioning component of America’s inventive machinery.”

But companies that oppose the legislation say that it shouldn't matter whether or not they use their own patented technology because big tech companies are taking advantage of their inventions. "Almost all inventions seem obvious after they have been invented,” wrote Katharine Wolanyk, president of Soverain Software, in a November 18 letter to the House Committee on the Judiciary. (Wolanyk’s company owns patents that governs online shopping cart technology and [8]lost one of its claims in the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit. Soverain is now trying to [9]bring the case to the Supreme Court.) “The current system forces patent owners to defend, over and over again, the validity of their patents.”


If anyone can suggest useful places to begin reading further about this I'd be very grateful. There's something extremely interesting happening here and I'd like to understand it in much greater depth than I do at present. I'm particularly interested in the potential scope of the activity: is it possible that the range of ‘broad patents’ which can be linked to particular products is basically infinite? Will it be possible to legislatively counteract this tendency? Or is it perhaps more likely that we’ll see an ever growing influx of financial and human capital into ‘patent trolling’ and, if so, what are the long-term consequences? Would it even be possible to have an intellectual property system which prevents ‘patent trolling’?
One further thought is that [12]The Mark Cuban Chair to Eliminate Stupid Patents must surely be the best name ever chosen for an endowment. It’s also an instance of systemic consequences leading to the grouping of new agents seeking to transform their shared context. I wonder if it is a sign of more to come. The difficulty seems to be whether the interests vested in the patent system itself preclude the reforms that would render 'patent trolling' untenable.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/sDg-Wh0XA-w?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
11. http://www.youtube.com/embed/nuL7yFAR490?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
The sociology of the quiet zone: norms and public transport (2013-12-20 08:00)

An interesting story went viral earlier this month which has left me thinking about the issue of normativity for the first time in a while. I have no way to know the accuracy of the reports but that’s irrelevant. If it turns out not to have happened in this way then this account can function equally well as a thought experiment. The extract below is from the Telegraph’s account of what happened. Kudos to whoever chose this title for the post: “A hipster humiliates a ‘dying’ middle-aged woman on a flight. Twitter applauds”.

Elan, like lots of Americans, caught a plane at Thanksgiving, and the plane was delayed. A few rows behind him, a middle-aged woman overshared about her fear of missing her family time with the passing staff. Now, we’ve all come across these people. There’s one on every flight. They’re a pain in the neck, but anyone with a modicum of maturity might have reminded themselves that people who are behaving like this are usually compensating for something else – fear of flying, for instance, or distress of another sort – and quietly tutted to themselves.

But not our hero. No, he was made of sterner stuff. Elan took it personally, and shared his disdain with his Twitter followers.

“Her family is very important to her, she says. Her family has a special recipe for stuffing. She needs to be there to help. It is crucial.”

“She had to sit down because we took off. She has been muttering ‘about DAMN time’ and I can hear her breathing from 5 rows back.”

After a while, sharing his disgruntlement with Twitter was not enough and he decided that punishment was the way forward. So Elan enlisted the help of a male staff member and sent her a glass of wine with a note. “[This] is a gift from me to you,” it read. “Hopefully if you drink it you won’t be able to use your mouth to talk.” Oh Elan! Your rapier wit!

Emboldened – or perhaps frustrated; it must be awful when such an act of naked courage goes unacknowledged – by his fellow passengers’ failure to respond, Elan set forth, armed only with two miniature bottles of vodka, to slay the dragon.

“Oh my God I did it I walked as if I was going to the bathroom and I leaned over and put them on her tray table and walked away Oh my God.”

“She just stared at me like REALLY hard. I’m not going to lie I am shaking.” You betcha, Elan! We’d all be shaking if we’d just taken on a woman in "mom jeans and a studded belt". You’re, like, Maximus in the Colosseum!

But then things got scary. Diane (for such was her name) had the temerity to call him "an awful person with no compassion", on a page torn from a lined notebook. No compassion! The cheek of it.

So he responded the way that only a true man can. He composed another note. “I hate you very much. Eat my d***.”
Wow, Elan! Touché! High five! Though presumably, as you were in the air, you might have had to ignore the seatbelt signs for her to do this.

Anyway, the upshot was that, after a bit more penis-related badinage, Diane gave Elan a slap in the face and he ran away, crying.

What interests me here is the role played by norms in the unfolding of these events. The story’s virality likely flows from the dramatically conflicting norms concerning behaviour on a plane which are being acted upon here. It’s compelling because we recognise on some level that this normative dissensus exists in society, particularly when it comes to conventions, but rarely does it manifest itself behaviourally in quite so dramatic a fashion. Elan clearly sees the woman in question as contravening apparently obvious norms of comportment when flying. The woman’s ‘oversharing’ and breathing (!) were impinging upon his experience of the flight and, in her failure to restrict her audial impact on those around her, she was acting contrary to Elan’s understanding of how people should conduct themselves when crammed into an overcrowded plane with many fellow passengers.

Though I’m generally critical about the concept of norm circle put forward by Dave Elder-Vass, it’s often struck me as a useful tool to make sense of behaviour like this. In essence he talks about the role played by an awareness of others being committed to a norm in engendering our own tendency to act in accordance with that norm. He sees this as a matter of endorsing and enforcing a given norm – we learn from past experience that acting in a way that contravenes X will tend to provoke sanctions and, through doing so, we come to endorse X and habitually act in accordance with it.

I’m not keen on this as an account of the genesis of normative behaviour. However I do think Elder-Vass captures something important about the social psychology of interactional norms when he further distinguishes between proximal, imagined and actual norm circles. The proximal norm circle are those people endorsing and enforcing a norm whom we have directly encountered. Though limited in number, we take them to be representative of a wider group: the imagined norm circle is the dispersed group who we imagine to endorse and enforce a given norm. The actual norm circle is the objective extension of endorsement and enforcement of a norm. There are a lot of problems with this account. But what I find useful about it is the distinction between the imagined and the actual in making sense of the social psychology at work in a public transport situation. Whenever we act to enforce a norm we do so on an understanding, implicit or explicit, as to the existence of a wider circle who share the endorsement which motivates our action. We also often choose not to enforce norms which we nonetheless endorse. My point here, which I’m not sure is the same as EV’s, is a claim about the phenomenology of norm enforcement – acting because we think X is wrong is unavoidably tied up in (potential) questions about the agreement or disagreement of others with our stance.

My examples for this always come back to the quiet zone on trains – the spaces where mobile phone use is prohibited. There’s a variability in the extent to which train staff seek to display their endorsement of this rule (by announcing it) or to enforce it (by actually intervening when people use mobiles). There’s also variability in the extent to which people recognise the norm in question (some clearly don’t), the extent to which they feel bound by it (for example if they were forced into the carriage by overcrowding) and the extent to which other passengers feel willing or able to enforce a norm. Next time you’re in this situation, watch other people’s behaviour when someone starts talking loudly on a mobile: there’s all manner of performative expressions of endorsement of the quiet zone norm which are entirely distinct from actually seeking to enforce it. I have no way to prove this empirically but I’d suggest, on the basis of observation and theoretical reasoning, that someone is much more likely to seek to enforce the no mobiles rule if other passengers are noticeably performing their endorsement of the norm e.g. rolling their eyes, irritated coughing noises etc.
My point is that the endorsement/enforcement and proximal/imagined/actual distinctions are useful for making sense of these kinds of interpersonal disputes. I've suggested that Elan's behaviour was at root a matter of enforcing a norm which he endorsed and saw Diane as contravening. He clearly felt empowered to act in ways which, from other perspectives, seem to contravene far more important norms of interpersonal behaviour. It's this swagger (real or fictitious) which I want to understand and I suspect twitter plays a role. The intuition I had this morning when reading this story is that twitter expands the imagined norm circle. When we complain on Twitter about someone we physically share space with, we'll often receive what can seem like tacit endorsements of our complaints (responses, retweets, favourites). Perhaps more importantly I suspect that silence is seen as, at best, indifference to what we're saying and, at worst, tacit endorsement of our irritation: we imagine that our twitter followers agree with us. As a proposal about twitter etiquette I'd therefore suggest: if someone is live tweeting their travel frustration and they're being out of order then say so! As this dynamic becomes much more common I wonder if twitter could have a real effect on people's tendency towards intolerance on public transport.


Call for Guest Editors: Developments In Teaching Social Research Methods (2013-12-20 11:52)

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CALL FOR GUEST EDITOR/S PROPOSAL FOR SPECIAL ISSUE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN TEACHING SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

There have been a number of recent initiatives in teaching social research methods, both quantitative and qualitative. In part these are fueled by efforts to address skills shortages, but there are also developments in epistemological and pedagogic knowledge that are helping to shape the what, why and how of teaching data gathering, handling and analysis. The International Journal of Social Research Methodology is looking to publish a guest-edited Special Issue that addresses this theme.

Guest editors should submit proposals to the Journal editors by 30th April 2014. Proposals should be submitted via email to

[1]tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk

Potential guest editors should submit a proposal of no longer than 3 pages covering:

- **Rationale**. An overview of the coverage of the special issue, highlighting the key areas and issues to be addressed.

- **Indicative contents**. Titles, authors and abstracts should be provided, including an editorial. Contents should demonstrate an international orientation, including through the range of contributors. If this is not the case, then a rationale should be provided.

- **Reviews**. Indication of whether or not the guest editor/s will take responsibility for relevant book, software or other reviews, or whether they would like the IJSRM reviews editors to provide them
Each Special Issue should amount to 45,000 words in total, which includes the editorial, abstracts, papers, references and reviews. The editorial should provide a ‘state of play’ introduction to methodological issues and methods addressed. Responsibilities of guest editors:

- ensure manuscripts are in keeping with IJSRM guidelines (see website)
- ensure articles are peer refereed (such as by setting up a refereeing panel), with a list of reviewers either provided to the Journal editors or thanked in the editors’ introduction
- deal with all correspondence with the contributors, Journal editors and Routledge production editor
- provide a ‘state of play’ editorial
- liaise with the editors and, if required, the reviews editors
- ensure delivery of the final manuscript to the editor

Responsibilities of Journal editors:

- facilitate the preparation of the Special Issue
- provide final quality control for the Issue
- forward the Special Issue to the Journal’s production editor

Rosalind Edwards, Christina Hughes and Malcolm Williams Co-editors International Journal of Social Research Methodology

1. mailto:tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk

Re-thinking research repertoires: foregrounding sound (2013-12-20 13:22)

On the final afternoon of an intense, three day sociology conference for the NYLON research network (PhD students and faculty from New York, Berlin and London), the two authors ran a workshop on sound and listening. This was something of an experiment on our part – we are both interested in sound in our research and are part of the sound reading group at Goldsmiths. But, as Ari Kelman noted recently, the ‘indeterminacy of the field’ of sound studies (2010:229) means that experimentation is an inevitable part of using sound in research. In this blog post we use the notion of foregrounding sound as a way of intervening into some of the complexities of working with and thinking about sound. We use moments from the sound and listening workshop to explore different understandings of foregrounding sound as variously, a mode of attentiveness or a way of tuning in; as a thing of sociological consequence in itself; and as an embodied and relational experience. We also draw on our experiences of encountering sonic resonance in our own work, and ask how we might think about how to recognise, convey and analyse sound.

Recent interest in sound as methodology and object in the social sciences echoes the ‘discovery’ of visual methods in sociology. As Michael Guggenheim noted recently on the CSISP blog (2013), the aim of visual sociology is to become obsolete; for sociology as a discipline to incorporate visual methodologies as a part of its normal practice. The same could be said for sound studies (or ‘auditory cultures’ as Bull and Back (2003) describe it) – except that we have no equivalent ‘sonic sociology’ as a starting point. Indeed, as Anahid Kassabian notes (2013), comparison
with another visual medium, film, is illuminating; film studies is often located in 'visual cultures' departments, institutionalising the assumption that in film, the sonic is always subordinate to the visual. This is not by way of arguing that one aspect of sensory sociology is more important than another – quite the opposite: to suggest that the senses work in concert (so to speak).

This is something that became clear from the responses of the participants in our workshop. We began the workshop with a short meditation led by Anna, which shifted our attention more towards the sonic, drawing on Les Back's concern with 'modes of attentiveness' in sociological enquiry (2009). We then asked the group to go outside in threes, and listen for three minutes to the sounds they heard, facing in different directions (thanks to Les for this exercise). We audio-recorded the discussion of this activity that followed. Participants had gone outside in the middle of an early spring rain shower – some had stood outside, some had taken refuge in the student bookshop and café. In attempting to describe what they had heard, members of the group came up with evocative, even beautiful descriptions, carefully trying to portray their experiences:

For me it was incredible how the water and the rain dominated the soundscape, like I feel with everything I heard, the water was involved, like it was people stepping, you know, [off] the stones, stepping into water, into puddles; the cars, you know, with wet tyres – really, I was amazed by this dominance of the water.

This quote makes vivid the experiential intensity of sound, which is inevitably embodied, and conveys one interpretation of 'foregrounding sound', that is, paying close attention to it, and perhaps making 'hearable' that which is heard but not really listened to. This is foregrounding sound as a form of close attentiveness.

The discussion touched on the wholeness/interconnectedness of sound – the way you never get 'just sound' but that sound is connected with vision, experience, knowledge, memory and in powerfully associative ways:

When we were outside listening, I was thinking a lot about the radio. Because I had my eyes closed, and it was, you know, sometimes, you get these sound snippets, like, when they’re doing an interview in a café, and before, they want to get something to put on, like 'doing an interview in a café', so you get, you know, the cups – [...] and it was exactly like that, so, I was thinking of the radio. So it seems to me it’s so much intertwined with experience. So it’s not – I was not thinking about the little raindrops, I was thinking about the radio.

[...]

When we started this exercise, same ambulances passed by, police, or whatever, and so, and then it faded out during these three minutes, but at the beginning I was quite aware of that, and thinking of that, and this reinforcement, this hearing of the traffic, that formed this interesting - and I think it was attention catching, this ambulance sound -

And then your mind catches onto it, hangs on to it –

Yes, exactly, and then this visualising process kicked in, and I saw the ambulance pass by, so to speak.

Foregrounding the interconnectedness or the mediative qualities of sound brought us to a discussion of how to work with sound. We started to talk about what to do with sounds; or what the inclusion of sonic awareness does for our
work. Participants were quite clear that they did not want to simply reproduce the sounds they had heard but that sound was about a kind of ‘tuning in’ to another kind of awareness, another resource. However, how to represent this material was at issue. Simply including sound recordings without any analysis we agreed to be problematic, in that it assumes a naturalism to sound; this is instead always a process of abstraction or of translation, so it is important to avoid thinking of sound as ‘pure’ or natural.

Here Michael Guggenheim’s ideas are also useful. In discussing the necessity for the foundation of a new Visual Sociology course at Goldsmiths, Guggenheim suggests that visual sociology is part of a broader project of approaching the sensory in a way which is ‘not documentary but manipulative’ (2013a). The sensory is not brought out as illustrative, reinforcing the assumption of ‘authentic’ reality, but rather attentiveness to analysis of sensory objects and experiences is itself of sociological consequence. Work with sensory foci thus becomes an interrogative, perhaps even disruptive process of transposing sensory experiences (see Guggenheim, 2013b).

One participant seemed to sum up what we were grasping towards in this part of our discussion, describing it as ‘sonic intervention’ that is then ‘brought into the more analytically tractable medium of writing’. Perhaps this can be a good starting point for thinking about putting these ideas into practice. We could ask: is sound without words, therefore, not an analytically tractable medium? What provides the traction?

Another interesting way of foregrounding sound in social research came from a paper by Alexandra Baixinho at the Goldsmiths’ Graduate Festival this May, where she played audio clips from her fieldwork on cruise ship tourism (see audio below). A recording of the creaking of the gangway as the ship moved while docked in port had a haunting, powerful quality to it, seeming to Anna (as a musician) as one of the most expressive sounds she’d ever heard. How can we include these kinds of non-human (and indeed human) sounds in our work? What do they add, other than being hugely evocative? Or is that enough?

Other examples of foregrounding sound in social research show how this can make audible aspects of our research that we might overlook. Take, for example, the pervasive practice of analysing interview transcripts to generate sociological knowledge. This method makes the data easy to get at, less complex, but loses attention to voice and sound in the process. By contrast, Walkerdine et al (2001) took a different methodological approach, listening together several times to their interview recordings, and comparing their responses. This was in the context of a broader approach, drawing on psychoanalytic theory as a methodology, but retaining the focus on the sound of the voice, and their responses as researchers to their participants’ voices.

Foregrounding sound can also draw attention to forms of social complexity which may be more clearly audible than visible. Katherine, in her research on public libraries in Berlin and London, has found experiences of sound highly significant. It is not that public libraries are necessarily quiet places, for frequently they are not, but rather that the shifting sonic atmosphere of the library becomes an indicator of different conceptions of the public good that library spaces represent. Here, people’s inevitably subjective responses to the sounds of others sometimes generate disputes or require mediation by librarians, while at the same time, the busy hum and rumble of a popular local library, housing multiple activities and events, is often used by librarians as a sign of its success. In the public library, levels of sound and quiet are differently understood and valued, and must be constantly negotiated.

Finally, and perhaps most generatively, foregrounding sound can provide a way of analysing affective transmissions and engagements. This might be through the voice, or through the materiality of sound, as Julian Henriques memorably explores in his article on the material, affective and socio-cultural qualities of sound in the dancehall scene in Kingston, Jamaica (2010). Anna’s participants in youth orchestras often talk about the sonic experience of being in the middle of such an awe-inspiring sound; what does this powerful affective-sonic dimension add to the socio-cultural experience of being in these groups? And how does affective transmission occur through sound?

The discussion in our workshop concluded with a call for a more critical attentiveness when discussing sound.
Making a link to Raymond Williams’ ‘structures of feeling’ one participant felt that the term ‘structure of the senses’ could be useful, to ask how ‘our sensual experience is structured and enmeshed and entangled with power and subjectivity’. As Kassabian notes (2013:23), sound doesn’t have vision’s ‘complicated’ association since the Enlightenment ‘with science, knowledge, distance and objectivity’ – sound is experienced as embodied, so the illusion of objectivity is much harder to uphold in relation to sound than vision. Using sound in social research therefore inevitably includes ourselves, the researchers, and our bodies as the ‘resonating chamber’ (Jean-Luc Nancy, 2007). Selves and bodies do not provide a neutral space of resonance, however - the sonic is always experienced socially and culturally.

By foregrounding sound, then, we can explore the ways sonic experience is always structured, mediated, influenced, and translated.

Thanks to the participants in our workshop at the NYLON conference in March 2013.

Katherine Robinson is a PhD candidate in sociology at LSE and Anna Bull is a PhD candidate in sociology at Goldsmiths College.

Audio:

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/125729343" params="color=ff6600 &auto _play=false &show _artwork=true" width="100 %" height="166" iframe="true" /]

The Gangway Song

(2013, Alexandra Baixinho)

This piece departs from a found field sound, recorded last April in the port of Lisbon, by the Rocha do Conde d’Óbidos Cruise Terminal.

Through the use of sound and image my intent is to better convey the specific urban atmosphere and material context in which this sound is generated. Here, the gangway acts as an oscillating interface between the aquatic environment, the ship, and the quay.

The technical equipment used was the following: Zoom H4n digital sound recorder, together with a HTDZ HT-81 Uni-Directional Microphone + Nikon D3100 (for the video).
References:


[1]http://www.csisponline.net/2013/07/01/what-was-visual-sociology/


1. http://www.csisponline.net/2013/07/01/what-was-visual-sociology/

BSA Early Career Theorists Symposium – Call for Abstracts (2013-12-21 08:00)

BSA: Early Career Theorists’ Symposium

6th June, 2014, held at the London School of Economics

Call for Abstracts

The Early Career Theorists’ Symposium is a special one-day symposium for up-and-coming theorists, organized on behalf of the British Sociological Association’s Theory Study Group. This symposium aims to bring together sociologists at a relatively early stage in their career who work on theory or are engaged in original theoretical work as part of their on-going research. We invite early-career sociologists, across all research areas, to submit abstracts. Submissions from advanced PhD students are also welcome.

Prof. Claire Alexander (Manchester), Prof. Patrick Baert (Cambridge), and Dr Fran Tonkiss (LSE)—covering theorisations of Race & Ethnicity, Philosophy of the Social Sciences and the Sociology of Intellectuals, and Urban and Spatial Theory and Economies, respectively—will comment on the papers. Complete information for submitting the

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abstract will consist of:

1. name and contact information of the author (including career stage, e.g. PhD student, post-doc, early career academic);

2. title of your presentation;

3. a 500-word abstract of the presentation;

4. five keywords descriptive of the presentation.

Please send submissions to the organizers: Dr Marcus Morgan, University of Cambridge ([1]mm2014@cam.ac.uk) and Dr Suzi Hall, London School of Economics ([2]s.m.hall@lse.ac.uk). The deadline for submission of abstracts is 6th January, 2014.

Please plan to share a full paper of no more than 5000 words by 28th April, 2014. Registration for the event is free.

Please do forward/share as appropriate.

1. mailto:mm2014@cam.ac.uk
2. mailto:s.m.hall@lse.ac.uk

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Racial Pornographics: A Special Issue of Porn Studies (2013-12-22 08:00)

Racial Pornographics: A Special Issue of Porn Studies
Edited by Mireille Miller-Young, PhD
Associate Professor of Feminist Studies, UC Santa Barbara
Contact: [1]mmilleryoung@femst.ucsb.edu

This special issue of Porn Studies will promote a discussion about race in the study of pornography. Race remains an underdeveloped area of research in porn studies, and employing racial analytics to the study of pornography’s historical, representational, market, labor, industrial, and technological production is imperative for the field. Race is crucial for the field because it allows us to think through power relations that function in concert with gender, sexuality, and class, to uncover the historical importance of unequal looking relations, labor relations, and access to media authorship, and to reveal the ways in which desire, sexual and otherwise, is inextricably bound to processes of racialization.

A critical racial optic, moreover, illuminates the interests, desires, and experiences of racialized minorities as they are portrayed in, mobilize, or labor within pornographic fields. This mode of analysis may draw on the theoretical scholarship of critical race scholars, women of color feminists, and queer of color critique as well as on the emerging field of porn studies scholarship to think through the fantasies, energies, connectivities, pleasures, and power relations embedded in racial pornographies. Another function of a racial optics is to expose the rise of colorblindness or postracial ideologies in popular media discourses and academic theories about pornography, even as race is ever more salient to labor, economic, political, and looking relations within adult industries in a neoliberal era.

In addition, this special issue of Porn Studies will highlight research that launches pornographics as a framework for
examining cultural productions and social relations outside of the genre and industry of pornography. Increasingly, scholars have drawn on pornography as a lens to problematize racial, gender, and sexual discourses, structures, and relations in ways that reveal the utility of pornographics as a mode of cultural inquiry that exceeds the formal confines of adult entertainment industries and networks of particular erotic communities. The goal of this special issue is to read the labor of race in pornography or pornographics, and the labor of pornography or pornographics in race.

Finally, although this is a scholarly journal we welcome essays, interviews, and creative pieces from academics, artists, activists, and adult industry practitioners.

About Porn Studies
New in 2014, Porn Studies is an international, peer-reviewed journal, which publishes original research examining specifically sexual and explicit media forms, their connections to wider media landscapes and their links to the broader spheres of (sex) work across historical periods and national contexts.

Topics
Race or racial minorities in pornographic images
Race or racial minorities in adult entertainment labor, racialized sex work
Deployments of racialized discourses in porn or discussions of porn
Colorblindness and postracial ideologies in porn or discussions of porn
Race in the production, distribution, or consumption of porn media technologies
Race or racial minorities in pornographic aesthetics or art
Racial discourses in antiporn or sex positive feminist approaches to pornography
Histories of race or racial minorities in pornography or pornographic cultural production
Ethnopornography and race
Racial or interracial communities in pornography
Race in global, transnational, or diasporic pornographies
Racial fetishism
Race and disability politics in pornography
Race and BDSM in pornography
Queer and feminist approaches to race and racism in pornography
Racial politics in porn activism, health issues, and legal concerns
Race and obscenity law, censorship, or free speech issues
Race and class in access to pornography, circulations of explicit media
Race in pornographic pop culture, sex tapes, viral videos, animation, and gaming
Race in feminist pornography, queer pornography, trans pornography, and gay porn
Race pleasure, racial pain, racial disgust, racial desire and other affective domains
Radical approaches to race or the methodology of racial studies in pornography

Format
The journal special issue will consist of original articles, book and/or film reviews, conference proceedings, photo essays, and a forum or dialogue based interview essay.

Submission formats:
Original articles, approximately 6,000-7,000 words in length (including notes)
Book or film reviews, approximately 1000-2000 words in length (including notes)
Conference proceedings or Photo Essay, approximately 1200 to 2000 words in length (including notes)
Forum pieces, Interviews, or Dialogue/Debate essays, approximately 3,000 to 5,000 words in length (including notes)

Style Guidelines:
Manuscripts are accepted in English, OED spelling and punctuation preferred, including use of single quotation marks. Authors should include 1-5 keywords, 150 word abstract, and a short biographical note.

Timeline
Deadline to Receive Notice of Intent to Submit a Manuscript, 150-200 word Abstract: January 8, 2014
Deadline to Receive Full Submissions: April 11, 2014
Expected Publication Date: September 2015

Address questions and submissions to:
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A four-year research project at Bournemouth University, “Gay and Pleasant Land?—a study about positioning, ageing and gay life in rural South West England and Wales”, took place as part of the Research Councils UK-funded New Dynamics of Ageing Programme on ageing in 21st Century Britain. The key output of this effort was the short professionally made, award-winning film RUFUS STONE 1

I acted as Project Lead and Author and Executive Producer for the film.

The research project’s methods included narrated biography, visual ethnography, auto-ethnography, focus group work and theatrical improvisation of interview data.

In the process of refining the treatment for the film, the Director ([2]Josh Appignanesi) and I faced several obstacles revolving around plot. If the premise was that Rufus would return to his boyhood village after 50 years in exile, there needed to be a reason for that journey back up by research to support it.

Subsequently, I returned to the interview data for more detail (‘evidence’) to support the reasons (‘theory’) for the return of Rufus Stone. I further explored and elaborated both Rufus’ story as a lad and his decision-making as an adult, always constructing these ‘facts’ from stories which were told to us whilst carrying out the research.

Both the film and this short story are fiction, or what I prefer to call ‘fictive reality’.

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Fictive reality is conceived as the ability to engage in imaginative and creative invention while remaining true to the remembered realities as told through the narrations of others.

Several, in fact, may recount a similar incident

. When these reports are combined into one person’s story or a “composite” character, a “fiction” is born ([3]Jones, 2013).

By returning to this material to write “The Return of Rufus Stone”, I am creating a ‘prequel’ to the film RUFUS STONE. It is a reworking and refinement of those early writings. By becoming a short story, it fine-tunes the detail by focusing on the reasons for Rufus’ return as literature. Rufus Stone’s reappearance in his boyhood village after 50 years of exile sets up the possibilities for the characters to remember, reassess and even potentially change. This short story explains how that journey became possible.

“The Return of Rufus Stone”


This was probably the bravest risk of his entire life, or the most foolish one. This is the way in which Rufus Stone decided to return to his village.

London 2010

‘Tall, dark and handsome’ was everyone’s first description of Rufus Stone. It was the intensity of his electric blue eyes, however, on which most strangers then commented enviously.

Rufus arrived in London at 18—six feet two inches tall with thick, dark blonde curly forelocks cascading on a tanned brow. His youth and good looks could have been his meal ticket. Nonetheless, Rufus concentrated on his love of photography and eventually got a post as assistant to a Notting Hill photographer. He consequently went on to take his own pictures of some of the most famous celebrities of the Sixties. From those connections, he later moved into advertising then television production—first as a cameraman, then an editor and later a director of some important documentaries made for the BBC.

Rufus never had problems attracting women or men equally. His looks, talent and career were the calling cards that engrossed his admirers. He is one of the lucky ones, because as he aged he held on to his good looks too. In fact, some compare him to stars such as Terrence Stamp or Sean Connery. His hair is now silver grey, but he hates the nickname, ‘Silver Fox’, with a passion. He still possesses those chiselled cheekbones, a slim build and his famous blue eyes. At 70, Rufus frequently turns the heads of both sexes.
His English country upbringing produced a quiet boy who turned into a soft-spoken man. In the hustle and bustle of London, this actually became another asset. A man of few words suggested that he meant what he said. This was a welcomed relief from the insincerity familiar amongst some Londoners, particularly amid the glitterati of television and film. When asked by the luvvies of the film industry if he enjoyed evenings at the Groucho Club, Rufus replied, ‘Never been’.

Somerset 1958

It is a typical January day—the frost-hardened ground, brown and grey, mimicking the sky above. Rufus and Ellie Stone take the trail to the rail junction through the bushes, littered with the rubbish that is now frozen into the mosaic of the landscape. The junction holds a special meaning for Rufus.

A six-foot post sunk into a gravel mound between the two rail lines at the junction is topped with a small greyish box. This sheet metal container has a small, hinged door on it. Rufus imagines that the box was used for some signal wiring at one time, but now is empty.

Rufus is seventeen, his sister Ellie just ten. She loves walks with her brother because he usually brings his camera and gets excited when he talks about taking pictures. Rufus is her protector—tall, strong and permanently tanned from working their parents’ farm.

The rail line splits in two at the junction, one part going to the north through a small village. The other line swings east along the ridge to the nearby market town. (Five years later, the infamous ‘Beeching Axe’ would close this rail line along with many others, but no one knew that then.)

Ellie and Rufus sometimes spend their Saturdays in the town selling vegetables at their parents’ market stall. Ellie likes going to town because she gets to dress up. Rufus hates its and just sees it as more hard graft with no pay.

Rufus’ mate, Flip, is olive skinned, dark-haired and shorter than Rufus. He is two years younger and lives along the rail line in the nearby village. The boys met two summers ago when Rufus was walking in the hills collecting berries. They have been best mates ever since.

Flip’s real name is Philippe. His younger brother is Antoine. Their mother comes from the nearby town and married a local villager. Being from the town and having ‘airs and graces’, she insisted on giving her children French-sounding names. Philippe quickly became Flip after a few rounds of bullying at school and Antoine’s father almost immediately shortened his younger son’s name to Tony.
One afternoon, Flip and Rufus discovered the metal box at the junction about halfway between their houses. The lads agreed to use it as their furtive hiding place. From time to time, Rufus and Flip secrete found treasures, photos and notes in the signal box for each other. Ellie is the only other person who knows about this clandestine niche, or at least Rufus hopes so.

Flip has also become engrossed in photography. The lads have spent many days walking the Somerset landscape together, taking photographs with Rufus’ camera and, on hot summer days, swimming in a nearby stream.

Rufus finished school at sixteen and has worked on his family’s farm full-time for the past year. He hates it and wants to get away from this harsh country life. Flip is now in his final year at school.

The two lads love to lie in the deep grass on a hillside next to each another and stare at the clouds in the sky, making up animals, characters and adventures for them out of the billowy white shapes. When Rufus happens to brush up against Flip or touch him almost by accident, electricity courses through his whole body. This delights him, but almost immediately causes him shame too.

You have probably surmised by now that Flip and Rufus love each other. At first, Rufus didn’t know what these feelings were. Both have always known, however, that being together matters more than anything else in their young lives. They will use any excuse to spend time together, particularly in the summer when school is out of term.

One particularly hot day when they are swimming, Flip doesn’t bother to put his T-shirt back on. Rufus conceals the worn, white shirt in his canvas army rucksack. He takes it home and sleeps with it next to his pillow that night.

Rufus can smell Flip on the shirt. At night in his single bed under the farmhouse's eaves, lying next to this piece of worn cotton clothing, Rufus dreams of Flip's unpolluted perfect being. The shininess of his young dark skin, his naturally sun licked hair, his smile's innocence, his warm arm around Rufus’ neck, and laughing—always laughing.

These feelings make Rufus both happy and frightened. Because Rufus is the older of the two, he senses that he is particularly responsible for his growing feelings about Flip. He knows innately that these stirrings could lead to something dangerous or forbidden in his small English country village.

Rufus decides to declare his feelings about Flip to him. Rufus wants to convince Flip that they could quit the village all together when Flip finishes school and find jobs in town, or even move to a city together where Rufus can try his luck at becoming a photographer. Rufus is resolved to tell Flip that he loves him and share his plan with him. So, a few days ago, he wrote a short but passionate note and left it with photos of the two of them frolicking in the woods at the junction box.
Today, Rufus is hoping that Flip’s answer will be waiting for him at the junction.

**At Sea 2010**

It happens at sea. I remember more clearly then, what those flashes of innocent intimacy were like. The lapping waves and the water’s surface with its shiny viscosity created by the light prompt me to recall the fluidity of those moments.

Memory is not text, not even remembered action, really. The past is recreated by recollections of an atmosphere, a sound or a temperature. Recalling the arrangement of the furniture often reveals more about a moment than the people sitting on it. Reminiscence is simply dreaming awake.

Images such as dappled sunlight are not a routine physical reality. They are as much a precise instance in the lifecourse as a particular sixteenth birthday. Our first experience of mottled sunlight is a rite of passage, a singularly unique occurrence in our young lives.

So is the nature of key moments in our story of young Rufus and Flip.

Roll the film. Capture them.

**Somerset 1958**

Close your eyes and recollect this patterned lightness on the patchwork English country landscape and you will see young Flip—dark, tan, laughing—happy to be with you. There has been no other instance in your life like it. You wish that this moment will go on forever but, even in your youth, you know it will not be so. You have been taught this in songs and they are sad ones.

Your soul has always been an old man’s, your cautious, fearful, doubting heart. We are forged as we will be in youth and spend the rest of our lives unravelling that fact. The child somehow knows that as a man you will seek to recreate this moment over and over again and so you prepare yourself for such reminiscence, even in your youth. Play the Adagio from the Mahler 5th. You understand it profoundly.

You and Flip walk over hills towards a wood. This is not a memorised landscape, however. It is a recollection of a three-dimensional physicality consisting of the soil under foot, the sound of the swish of tall grass, and the crunchiness of pebbles mixed with earth. The intensity of the English sky's summer blueness creates a light pressure against your skin. The warm country air is more uncontaminated than any you will ever breathe again. His arm around your neck as you walk is the last uncorrupted act of commitment that you will ever experience. This is the
You are in the stream at a point where the water, the great purifier, creates a deep pool. The chilly water laps against his body, and so you do too. The surface of the water makes a fluid partition that allows grazing against his body beneath it seem easier, less obvious, but still dangerous. The pretence plays out above the surface, the risk and the release beneath. If he ever objects ... but he never did. The physicality of your relationship remains in its purist state.

Flip’s mother rings your mother. Her shrill screaming coming from the telephone reverberates around the farmhouse kitchen. Your father is uncomfortable situating himself so intimately next to your mother who listens with the receiver away from her ear. She turns her back on you as you stand in the doorway, bracing yourself for what your unfounded guilt convinces you will be the earthquake to come.

Flip’s mother says that she found the dirty letter that you wrote to her son. She screams down the phone line that you are a filthy unclean pervert and she is coming to your parents’ farm with a kitchen knife to sort out the whole family. Then she is going to make certain that the entire village knows about their evil son and your wicked intentions. She is going to report you to the police for the criminal that you are.

Your mother is crying. Your father slams the kitchen door and storms outside. You can hear him near the barn shouting and swearing. The tall case clock in the hall ticks away its heavy unrelenting passage of time. It seems more strident than ever tonight—even louder than your father’s shouting or your mother’s crying. Somehow it’s ticking sooths you.

You know that tonight is the end of innocent intimacy. It is probably the beginning of something else, but you are unsure of what that is.

The next morning, very early, your father tells you that you will need to leave the village. He will drive you to the railway station in the nearby town, past the junction where you and Flip met up so many times. He tells you to go pack you things. He will give you the train fare to get to London, but then you are on your own.

He then mutters bitterly, ‘That’s where your kind go, don’t they?’

The surface is broken. Rufus never sees Flip again.

London 2010
Rufus prepares the motor for the long drive. It reminds him of those Saturday journeys to the market as a child when they neatly packed his father’s motor with wooden boxes of vegetables. There were so many boxes that there was hardly room in the back seat of his parent’s saloon for Rufus and his sister Ellie. Today, Rufus is stuffing the back seat of his prized 1965 racing green Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud III with cameras, equipment and boxes of photographs. After years of searching auctions, Rufus located the very same motor used in Antonioni’s classic 1966 film *Blow-Up*. His proudest possession.

"Packing a few bits and bobs that wouldn’t matter to naught but me for the long trip back to my small village in Somerset. I am returning to my birthplace after 50 years of London life and its adventures. The removal van went down to Somerset day ahead of me with my furniture, clothing and the rest of my bric-a-brac.

"London is now just routine to me, nothing to get excited about these days. After years of fighting the Tube, the crime and grime, the congestion charge and getting around London, I am ready to leave it all behind. The rushing, pushing and shoving—'Sorry, sorry, sorry!'—that hollow apology ringing out from every pub, shop and road crossing—I’ve had enough. I think I am now ready to finally try to a quiet life in the countryside.

"When my parents sold their Somerset farm quite a few years back now, they bought a small cottage in the nearby village to live out their retirement. My father died not long after. My mother recently passed away, but not before she had one last go at me over the telephone about what a disappointment I had been to her and my father. How their life in the village was made a misery after that ‘fuss’ around the ‘filthy’ business that I stirred up just before I left for good. She said that she has never absolved me for that. I suppose I was still 18 years old in her mind, even though I was by then near 70. Perhaps if she had forgiven me all those years ago, she would have died more peacefully and I might not be making this journey now.

"The money that remained from the sale of the farm went to my sister who emigrated to Australia. She married out there and has three children. My parent’s small worker’s cottage was deeded to me along with my grandfather’s tall case clock that I am particularly fond of. That generosity took me by surprise, actually. I don’t think it had anything to do with their forgiveness though, more to do with family duty and doing what was expected of them—doing the ‘right thing’.

"Fed up with London, I decided to finally retire to Somerset and their cottage. Most of my friends say that I am mad and will regret it. Still, they promise to come down for long weekends if I will entertain them properly. Most are involved in television production or the theatre. They would create quite a stir invading conservative Somerset! At least I think they would, since I haven’t lived in the village for nearly half a century".

*On the Road 2010*

As Rufus prepares to head out of Islington and make his way to the A-4, he wonders if he *can* go back. Can we ever go back and expect things to turn out differently?

"Of course, I am not the same person today. I have a lifetime of experiences, working as a photographer and making films for television, and the relationships that I have had certainly changed me. I am no longer that young lad who was cast out by the villagers because of their ignorance, shunned by my own family, and coerced into self-exile by my own doubts all those years back, that’s for sure!"
Rufus turns on the Rolls’ Sat-Nav, happy to rely on a posh but strict recorded woman’s voice giving directions. He named her "Sadie" after his deceased mother. Such nomenclature is a kind of cheekiness that would provide Freud with a field day in this case. For Rufus, the decision to leave is finally no longer in his hands; a programmed voice takes over. "Sadie" knows what’s best for him, what to do and where his next move should be.

As he careens off early morning Upper Street—it’s café workers cleaning up the pavement real estate occupied by drunken revellers the night before—he turns on BBC Radio 3. The Adagio from Ravel’s Piano Concerto in G is playing. Rufus makes a mental note to himself that this piece of music would provide a perfect soundtrack for the more rural segments of today’s journey. His mind is never far from the editing room. Rufus sinks into the Rolls-Royce’s leather upholstery and deeper into his thoughts. His driving becomes routine.

Who is it that impatiently awaits the conclusion to our story of Rufus Stone? Is it us, eagerly willing a happy ending? Is it young innocent Rufus who wants to finally go back and change the outcome of his tale of first love? Does he believe that by making this return in time and place that he can reignite the love, passion and intimacy of his youth? Or is it wiser and older Rufus who has realised that what matters most to him is to come to terms with the past at the end of his days? Can he even, perhaps, finally find a way to forgive in this tiny pastoral corner of the land? Can we ever go home? Or is it our memories, with all of their twists, turns and imaginings that propel us into a deep abyss created by our re-imagined pasts?

Rufus reconsiders the countryside of his youth as he drives.

It is a memory of a five-year old boy sitting on his grandfather’s lap. Granddad’s hand, rough and worn from working the land, his thumbnail somehow permanently split, reaches into the pocket of his tattered woollen trousers and magically produces a cellophane-wrapped peppermint sweet for the boy. The tall case clock ticks in the background, the same clock that ended up in his parent’s farmhouse hallway. The sound of this clock has always provided Rufus with comfort in times of crisis. It is recollections of his grandfather that most warmly represent the countryside to Rufus.

Rufus recalls pushing his sister’s pram up dirt paths on the hillside, away from the family farm and the village—as far away as he could get the two of them. He remembers the feeling of searching for his own private landscape where his thoughts could finally be free and be his own.

Later, he remembers walks along the railway tracks with his sister. It’s the majesty of the sky and the smell of wild grasses mixed with the scent of oil on the railway sleepers, more than a revisitualisation of their footsteps, which provoke his recall. It is the sounds of the train approaching, spewing and hissing steam—these sounds as much an invasion of their privacy as they portend the thrill of travel to unknown, yet-to-be-seen places.
He remembers getting to know the workers on that independent rail line and one of them taking him into the signal
box that day. This is when he learned about the physical stirrings that his body provoked in others and acts that are
prohibited between a boy and a man. Pleasure, guilt and the forbidden become central to his sense of self from that
day forward.

But then there is Flip. Beautiful Flip. Years of searching have never produced such innocent attractiveness again. If
Rufus could only experience it again, to be in his presence, to walk with him arm in arm!

Rufus makes stops at several lay-bys and overlooks along his route to take in scenic views. At each of these breaks in
the journey, he gets out a camera and takes some photos of the bucolic English countryside with its well-represented
patchwork of hedgerows and fields. Particularly noteworthy for Rufus are the points along the narrower roads where
they suddenly turn and reveal sweeping vistas. He laughs to himself when he sees cows in a field lying down and
remembers that this means that it is going to rain. Once a country boy... Except for the improved condition of the
roads, nothing much has changed.

His journey makes it way, first, through the less familiar Thomas Hardy country of Dorset and then on to Henry
Fielding’s Somerset. It is as though he is seeing his birthplace for the first time. After almost 50 years, he may as well
be.

Indeed, Rufus envisions one last attempt at resolving his youthful crisis somehow. He knows that he still must seek
acceptance in order to love openly and freely amongst his peers in rural England. The law may have changed in
his lifetime, but acceptance is still not a legacy for him and his kind and particularly not for his generation in the
countryside. This is the kind of tolerance that is fundamentally socially constructed by one’s peers. Life has taught
him this hard truth. In his imaginings, Rufus hopes, at least in his case, to make this finally possible.

This is the way our story now twists and turns. Consulting his memories, our Rufus drives confidently onward, willing
to gamble on his imagined past. This is probably the bravest risk of his entire life, or the most foolish one.

This is the way in which he decided to return to his village.

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A screening of RUFUS STONE will be featured as a Special Event in the Frontiers Stream of the BSA Annual Conference
at Leeds University, 24 April 2014 at 12:30 p.m.
With regard to self-concept, my claim in the Rorty book is certainly not that, as sociologists of ideas, we should somehow let intellectuals tell their own stories. As I've noted above, the accounts intellectuals give of their own lives are often highly problematic from the standpoint of sociological realism. That does not mean, however, that their self-narratives are irrelevant for explaining their actions. Beyond the point about grievances, the specific way in which I think they are relevant is that such narratives tend to be built around categories of intellectual selfhood into which thinkers understand themselves to fall. My argument is that thinkers labor under social-psychological pressure to do work they see as consistent with these categorical self-concepts. As to the methodological question of how one goes about reconstructing self-concepts, the answer I proposed in the book is to look for as many instances of self-talk as one can find - in interviews, autobiographies, correspondence, diaries, speeches, and so on - and attempt to discern from these the most salient and least evanescent categories of personhood a thinker places himself in at any given juncture. This reconstruction will have been carried out with maximum objectivity if most observers of that self-talk - including, where possible, the intellectual himself - will agree that those in fact seem to have been the most salient identity categories.

- Neil Gross

CfP: An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2013-12-24 08:00)

What does ‘public sociology’ entail in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinterest and wordpress? What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole?

Short articles (1000 to 4000 words) are sought for an open access edited book which explores conceptual, methodological or practical aspects of Digital Public Sociology. If you would be interested in contributing then please send an abstract of 200 words or less by December 31st 2013. The final articles would be needed by March 31st 2014, with the intention of launching the collection in the summer of 2014. Please send abstracts (or questions) to mark@markcarrigan.net.

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2013-12-24 14:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from peers and established academics in a supportive environment.

The event will take place between 11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

Our Most Popular Posts of 2013 (2013-12-25 08:00)

In the absence of anything else we can think of to post on christmas day, here’s our most popular posts of the year:

[1]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
[2] 36 reasons why you should blog about your research

[3] Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left

[4] ‘You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain…’


[8] Public Sociology

[9] Making the familiar strange

[10] The joys of grad student shaming


[12] Of Methods and Methodologies in Literary Studies and Humanities

[13] The (un)intelligibility of academics and being ‘a mere journalist

[14] The Dangers of Academic Blogging


[16] How to write 1000 words a day and not go bat shit crazy (at least not within the first two weeks)

[17] Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing

[18] The Ethnographer, by Jorge Luis Borges

[19] The Accidental Sociologist: disciplinarity and academic identity

[20] The craft of giving (bad) presentations

[21] Getting a Ph.D. will turn you into an emotional trainwreck, not a professor

[22] A working bibliography of public sociology

[23] Review of ‘The Aftermath of Feminism’ by Angela McRobbie

[24] A Summer of Television Poverty Porn

Happy Christmas!
Celeb Youth » Our top posts of 2013 (2014-02-04 10:32:09)

[...] 2014 begins, we thought we'd borrow an idea from Sociological Imagination and look back on our top posts of 2013. There are many possible ways to measure this – most [...]

Digital Sociology at #BritSoc14 (2013-12-26 08:00)

Plenary: The Social Life of Digital Methods

Deborah Lupton, Evelyn Ruppert, Noortje Marres, Mike Savage and Emma Uprichard

Friday 25 April 2014. 13:30-15:00

As an inaugural conference session for the BSA Digital Sociology study group, we propose a round table discussion exploring digital methods and their implications for sociological research. Our theme would follow a recent special issue of Theory, Culture & Society discussing the ‘social life of methods’ which has attracted much attention
We expect the proposed roundtable would cover a diverse range of topics under the broad theme of the ‘social life of methods’ including the ‘crisis of empirical sociology’, the significance of ‘big data’, the history of sociological methods, the digital turn in social life and the problems and prospects for a critical social science under contemporary circumstances. In doing so, our proposed session would not only address the conference theme of ‘changing society’ but do so in a way which explores how the repertoires of social research are both shaping and being shaped by these broader changes within social life.

An Invitation to Digital Public Sociology

Sarah Burton, Mark Carrigan, Jessie Daniels and Deborah Lupton

Date/Time TBC (there was a clash)

This session asks what ‘public sociology’ entails in a world of facebook, twitter, youtube, slideshare, soundcloud, pinterest and wordpress. What affordances and constraints do these tools entail for the task described by Michael Burawoy of “taking knowledge back to those from whom it came, making public issues out of private troubles, and thus regenerating sociology’s moral fibre”? What implications do these tools have for the relationship between the public and private in the occupational biographies of individual sociologists and, through aggregation and collective organisation, the discipline as a whole? In addressing such questions it seeks to draw out the continuities between the emerging field of digital sociology and the longer-standing concerns of public sociology. In doing so it addresses the claim made by John Holmwood at the previous year’s conference that the task of sociology in an age of austerity is to “occupy debate and make inequality matter” and argues that the digitalisation of social life entails profound challenges and opportunities for sociological inquiry.

Quantified Self and Self-Tracking: Data, self and health

Farzana Dudhwala, Deborah Lupton, and Karen Throsby

Date/Time TBC (there was a clash)
This panel has been arranged by the newly formed Quantified Self Research Network which was established in September 2013 in order to bring together scholars who are interested in understanding the development of self-tracking devices and techniques. This event will comprise of a panel of three speakers who will offer empirical or theoretical insights which will help to set the agenda for this new area of sociological study.

Although individuals and populations have been subject to statistical measures for more than a century the potential for quantification has increased dramatically in recent times. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the contemporary quantification of the self is the extent to which individuals are encouraged, and often willing, to quantify themselves and engage with the analytical potential this enables.

We take quantified self in a broad sense to refer to the (semi-)formalised movement and community which has built up around the use of, and sharing of ideas on, commercial self-tracking devices and technologies. In addition we are also interested in those techniques and practices which are used by clinicians and patients to monitor health and the myriad ways in which our bodies and activities are monitored without our direct participation.

The impacts of quantification of bodies and practices on individuals will be explored from a number of different perspectives in order to unpick the social and ethical consequences of quantification as well as explore the professional and personal practices which enable it.

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**Digital Sociology Down Under (2013-12-27 08:00)**

In November, the 2013 annual conference of The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) was the first conference in Australia to host streams on digital sociology. It was the Associations’ 50 year anniversary and simultaneously the inauguration of digital sociology down under. After circulating an expression of interest for papers aligned with digital sociology through the Cultural Sociology thematic group, enough papers to fill two sessions rolled in, although an engagement with the digital sparked up throughout the conference.

Both digital sociology sessions were held on Wednesday, November 27, and were extremely well-attended. The popularity of the sessions and the engaged discussion they generated clearly showed that digital sociology is on the rise in Australia. It was an honour to have both keynote speakers Prof. Celia Lury and Prof. John Holmwood present in the digital sociology sessions. Lury, who works at Goldsmiths, where of course the first [1]MA/MSc in Digital Sociology has been set up, also delivered an intriguing address at the conference which raised issues about the need for sociologists to engage in new theories and methods to capture the culture of the digital.

Deborah Lupton opened up the first digital sociology session with her paper ‘Digital Sociology: Beyond the digital to the sociological’. Deborah has been instrumental in developing ideas around digital sociology in Australia, including numerous posts on her [2]blog, a [3]Facebook page and a first [4]introductory resource. In her presentation, Deborah outlined her definition of digital sociology and its relevance in the discipline. She argued that digital sociology encompasses all things digital, not just the cyber, and is a new way to enliven sociology. She outlined four key dimensions of digital sociology, including (1) professional digital practice, (2) sociological analyses of digital media use, (3) digital data analysis and (4) critical digital sociology.

Deborah’s paper was followed by several interesting case studies that exemplified what ‘doing’ digital sociology might look like. In a joint paper, Timothy Graham and I considered the ontological provocations of imminent
wearable computing technologies through the example of Google Glass. Carefully avoiding dualisms and technologically deterministic judgements of the new technology, we showed how Google Glass can be understood as a technique of self though which people relate to themselves and others and in this way navigate their day-to-day lives. Alerted by Latour to Gabriel Tarde’s concept of the monad we postulated that Google Glass provides an example through which to trace and make visible entities in a digital network.

Continuing the Google-theme, David Collis next conceptualised the Google PageRank algorithm as an autistoid technology that institutes a 'hyperlink ethic', which transforms the way information is organised online. Drawing on psychoanalytically-informed social theory his presentation exemplified how to account for the unique structure and agency of digital life.

Erin Carlisle concluded the first session with a paper on the Australian political panel TV programme Q &A. She questioned the applicability of traditional public sphere theory to despatialised, mediatised communication. Erin’s paper provided an excellent example of how digital sociology can be useful in reconceptualising publics in light of digital developments.

After recharging over lunch, the second session had even more to offer. In my paper ‘The Culture of the Digital: From Digital Methods to Digital Sociology’ I developed a critical perspective on the label ‘digital sociology’. While a keen proponent of the emergence of the sub-discipline or interest area, I cautioned about the use of the label. Arguing that it is great to see sociology reaffirming its contribution to the digitisation of social life, showing its willingness to adapt its craft, and declaring its relevance in the context of a proliferation of interest areas that are taking claim to the ability to access and analyse the social, I outlined the danger of reinforcing binaries between the humanities/qualitative studies and the sciences/quantitative/big data work. I suggested that good digital sociology needs to be open to interdisciplinarity and to acknowledge the unique culture, architecture and affordances of the digital, as well as to consider the emergence of new political and ethical power relations in the realm of the digital.

As if following my call, the rest of the session provided some stellar examples of critical digital sociology. Tristan Kennedy used his research on online heavy metal subcultures to reflect on ethical and methodological considerations surrounding privacy and consent when studying digital communities. Tim Jordan (also on behalf of Kim Humphery) conceptualised ethical consumption apps. He considered how new moralities emerge in the context of digital interaction, which reconfigure the ideological and material complicity of consumers and disturb the notion of the consumer as agent. Finally, Ashlin Lee presented his theoretical framework for understanding ‘convergent’ mobile technology. He showed how a shift in the materiality and sociality of digital communication and consumption necessitates new ways of conceptualising the entangled reciprocal relationships between humans and technologies.

The breadth and depth of the critical engagement in all of these presentations truly shows the unique perspective sociology has to offer to the study of the digital. And the lively buzz that surrounded the sessions indicates the keenness of sociologists to have their say. Numerous other papers that engaged with the digital were sprinkled throughout the conference and eager conference-goers tapped me on the shoulder left, right and centre, expressing their excitement about the sessions and their interest in getting involved.

The digital is certainly on the agenda in Australian sociology and we would like to foster this interest by establishing an Australian Digital Sociology research network. Researchers located in Australia who are interested in getting involved can contact me (t.sauter@qut.edu.au), Deborah Lupton (deborah.lupton@sydney.edu.au) or Alexia Maddox (alexia.maddox@curtin.edu.au).

Dr Theresa Sauter is a Research Associate in the ARC Centre of Excellence in Creative Industries and Innovation at the Queensland University of Technology.
Nikolas Rose: What is Mental Illness Today? Five Hard Questions (2013-12-28 08:00)

Professor Rose is one of our leading contemporary social scientists. Currently he is Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Social Science, Health and Medicine at King’s College, London. In the talk, Professor Rose characterises the ‘territory’ of mental illness today by posing five hard questions that seem to represent genuine empirical, conceptual, professional and ethical dilemmas.

The questions are:

1. Is there an ‘epidemic’ of mental disorder?
2. Does the path to understanding mental disorder lie through the brain?
3. What is the role of diagnosis and of diagnostic manuals?
4. Should we seek early identification of those at risk of future mental pathology?

5. What is the place of patients, users, survivors, consumers in the mental health system?

Is there really an ‘epidemic’ of mental disorder? Or are psychiatrists simply too willing to diagnose and, if so, why? Rose cautions against construing this as simple psychiatric imperialism. Instead we need to look at what he calls the ‘new engines of psychiatrization’ which are driving these increasing figures. What are the implications of incorporating all ‘mental illnesses’ into the category of ‘brain disorders’? If so many have ‘abnormal’ brains then what does ‘normality’ actually mean?

I’m always amazed by how much ground Nikolas Rose is able to cover during one lecture. There a [2]list of his lectures on his (new?) website, many of which are available to watch online.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/KxI6DmBEKQg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

There are no Digital Humanities (2013-12-29 08:00)

Thanks to [1]Daniel Allington for linking to this fascinating piece by Gary Hall:

While ideas of this kind appear just that little bit too neat and symmetrical to be entirely convincing, this so-called ‘scientific turn’ in the humanities has been attributed by some to a crisis of confidence. It is a crisis regarded as having been brought about, if not by the lack of credibility of the humanities’ metanarratives of legitimation exactly, then at least in part by the ‘imperious attitude’ of the sciences. This attitude has led the latter to colonize the humanists’ space in the form of biomedicine, neuroscience, theories of cognition and so on. Is the turn toward computing just the latest manifestation of, and response to, this crisis of confidence in the humanities?

Can we go even further and ask: is it evidence that certain parts of the humanities are attempting to increase their connection to society; and to the instrumentality and functionality of society especially? Can it merely be a coincidence that such a turn toward computing is gaining momentum at a time when the likes of the UK government is emphasizing the importance of the STMs and withdrawing support and funding for the humanities? Or is one of the reasons all this is happening now because the humanities, like the sciences themselves, are under pressure from government, business, management, industry and increasingly the media to prove they provide value for money in instrumental, functional, performative terms? (Is the interest in computing a strategic decision on the part of some of those in the humanities? As the project of [3]Cohen and Gibb shows, one can get funding from the likes of [4]Google. In fact, ‘last summer Google awarded $1 million to professors doing digital humanities research’.)

To what extent, then, is the take up of practical techniques and approaches from computing science providing some areas of the humanities with a means of defending themselves in an era of global economic crisis and severe cuts to higher education, through the transformation of their knowledge
and learning into quantities of information – deliverables? Following [6] Federica Frabetti, can we even position the computational turn as an event created precisely to justify such a move on the part of certain elements within the humanities? And does this mean that, if we don't simply want to go along with the current movement away from what remains resistant to a general culture of measurement and calculation, and toward a concern to legitimate power and control by optimizing the system's efficiency, we would be better off using a different term other than 'digital humanities'? After all, as [7] Frabetti points out, the idea of a computational turn implies that the humanities, thanks to the development of a new generation of powerful computers and digital tools, have somehow become digital, or are in the process of becoming digital, or at least coming to terms with the digital and computing. Yet what I am attempting to show here by drawing on the philosophy of Lyotard and others, is that the digital is not something that can now be added to the humanities – for the simple reason that the (supposedly pre-digital) humanities can be seen to have had an understanding of, and engagement with, computing and the digital for some time now.


1. https://twitter.com/dr_d_allington

Benjamin Geer (2013-12-29 09:53:00)
It’s certainly plausible that some people are attracted to the Digital Humanities label because there’s money in it, or because it makes their work look more like science. However, software can help make a lot of things less tedious in humanities research, especially tasks like finding relevant primary sources, comparing them, identifying interesting portions of them, annotating them, publishing them, and so on. To a large extent, software that’s really suited to helping scholars do these things has yet to be developed. Many attempts by humanities scholars to use software for these kinds of purposes have been isolated efforts, unmaintained after the end of the project, and their results have often been lost when the technology they rely on becomes outdated. There’s a real need for a collective, long-term, well-funded effort to develop good software for the humanities. This effort needs a name. Maybe Digital Humanities isn’t the best name, but I think it’ll do.

Benjamin Geer (2013-12-29 12:09:00)
That sounds like a good idea for a seminar. One thing that’s struck me, very subjectively, is that some humanities scholars (definitely not all) have a sort of visceral opposition to science. This often seems to go along with a surprising lack of awareness of the overwhelming success of the natural sciences and of the huge role they play in our everyday lives. (I often have to tell such people that GPS depends on Einstein’s theory of relativity, that MRI scanners depend on quantum mechanics, and so on.) And it sometimes also goes along with a mistaken belief that Continental philosophy has deconstructed science and shown it to be just another discourse based on nothing more than power relations. I tend to see these attitudes as
defensive postures on the part of individuals who, feeling that the value of their training is implicitly threatened, are inclined to discredit the scientific training that they don’t possess. I thought I detected some of this in the above post, which seems to romanticise resistance “to a general culture of measurement and calculation”, as if measurement and calculation were somehow inherently dehumanising forces turning us into soulless automatons, rather than powerful tools for improving our understanding of the world. I think a critical discussion of these attitudes would be an interesting topic in a seminar.

Sociological Imagination (2013-12-29 16:07:40)
Oh I see where you’re coming from, I read it sightly differently though. I thought the author was arguing that there had been a failure of nerve (for lack of a better expression) and a longstanding opposition to ‘scientific discourse’ had given way to an enthusiastic embrace, in a manner driven by (probably quite realistic) fears about the future of the humanities in the neoliberal academy. I’m 100 % in agreement with the thrust of what you’re saying - I’m always astonished and baffled when I encounter this axiomatic pomo textualism, in some spheres it seems to still be hegemonic, despite (arguably) poststructuralism beginning to die out within the social sciences.

Sorry, just came across this discussion. As a quick way of trying to convey the idea that there is something a little more subtle and interesting behind the above post than a ‘visceral opposition to science’ - and still thinking in the context of the digital humanities, and how software can help scholars in the humanities do interesting things - perhaps I can suggest taking a look at the Living Books About Life series Joanna Zylinska, Clare Birchall and I put together with Open Humanities Press for Jisc. http://www.livingbooksaboutlife.org/ This is a series of open access books that endeavour to provide multiple points of interrogation and (to avoid the trap of ‘scientism’) contestation, as well as connection and translation, between the humanities and the sciences. And just in case that is not enough to convince you the above post is not coming from a position in which science is somehow seen as threatening the value of a humanities training, might the Critical Climate Change series (http://openhumanitiespress.org/critical-climate-change.html) Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook have put together for us at Open Humanities Press be another example of scholars working in Continental philosophy and theory who have an approach to the sciences that is far from seeing it as ‘just another discourse based on nothing more than power relations’? I hope this helps.

Sociological Imagination (2014-02-13 23:42:00)
I agree - I’ve always made that argument to him...

The Sociology of Awkwardness (2013-12-30 08:00)
What is awkwardness? It’s something we recognise. It’s something which is everywhere. Yet when we do think about it, it’s often seen as something trivial and mundane, representing an interruption of decorum or a warp in the texture of micro-social interaction. It’s something that can be intensely felt but is soon forgotten and, where it is not, we see this inability to forget as something pathological. In this sense awkwardness tends to be relegated to the periphery of social life when in fact it is something constitutive of it. There could be no social interaction without awkwardness because its possibility is inherent in the coming together of individuals in social situations. As Goffman describes this:

whatever his other concerns, then, whatever his merely-situated interests, the individual is obliged to ‘come into play’ upon entering the situation and to stay ‘in play’ while in the situation, sustaining this diffuse orientation at least until he can officially take himself beyond range of the situation. (Goffman 1963: 25)

The potential for awkwardness is inherent in ‘coming into play’ and sustaining an expected orientation while ‘in play’
before exiting in a manner equally congruent with the expectations within a situation. What’s important to grasp though is that awkwardness is not just a subjective response to an objective situation. As Adam Kotsko argues,

First there is what I will call *everyday awkwardness*, which seems to originate with particular individuals. It combines aspects of my gracelessness and the singer’s uncomfortable performance. It’s difficult to deny that there are people for whom awkwardness is a kind of perverse skill, who bring it with them wherever they go. We are only able to identify someone as awkward, however, because the person does something that is inappropriate for a given context. Most often, these violations do not involve an official written law – instead, the grace that’s in question is the skillful navigation of the mostly unspoken norms of a community ... Even when personal deficits make certain individuals seem extremely awkward by nature, however, awkwardness remains a social phenomenon, and therefore the analysis of awkwardness should focus not on awkward individuals but on the entire social situation in which awkwardness makes itself felt. (Kotsko 2010: 7)

His point is that awkwardness *emerges relationally*. It arises situationally in relation to norms concerning ‘coming into play’ and ‘staying in play’ which are endorsed and enforced by others within the situation. However what I really like about Kotsko’s analysis is his attentiveness to the way in which “awkwardness moves through social network, it *spreads*” because “you can’t observe an awkward situation without being drawn in: you are made to feel awkward as well, even if it is probably to a lesser degree than the people directly involved” (Kotsko 2010: 8). One claim he makes on the basis of this is that comedy relies on this ‘drawing on’. Another more counter-intuitive claim is that awkwardness “actually creates a weird kind of social bond” through “in the moment of awkwardness” being “forced to share to varying degrees in the experience of awkwardness” (Kotsko 2010: 9). He seeks to place this intrinsically social character of awkwardness in historical perspective:

Following the pattern, one could say that the tension of awkwardness indicates that no social order is self-evident and no social order accounts for every possibility. Awkwardness shows us that humans are fundamentally social, but that they have no built-in norms: the norms that we develop help us to ‘get by,’ with some proving more helpful than others. We might say, then, that awkwardness is what prompts us to set up social norms in the first place – and what prompts us to transform them. (Kotsko 2010: 16)

This seems an implausibly strong claim but it’s one rooted in a interesting Heideggerian analysis of awkwardness. He suggests it as a counterpart to Heidegger’s understanding of anxiety and boredom. But unlike these experiences which isolate the individual, awkwardness unites them, albeit through the creation of a peculiar and perverse sort of social bond. His claim is that awkwardness drives the structuring of sociality through its perpetual tendency to emerge, as well as to *spread*, in the absence of such structure. Awkwardness (stemming from the provisionality of social normativity) in interaction is analogous to anxiety (stemming from the finitude of existence) in individuals. But Kotsko argues that we live in an inherently awkward age:

Everyday awkwardness happens in a context where the social order seems more or less adequate and comfortable, but the provisional nature of every social order indicates that it’s not an all-or-nothing question of either having a social order or none, as in the opposition between everyday and radical awkwardness, between awkwardness in violation of a social norm and awkwardness in the absence of a social norm. I propose that there is a particularly awkward kind of awkwardness in between the two, which I will *cultural awkwardness*. It arises when there seems to be a set of norms in force, but it feels somehow
impossible to follow them or even fully know them. Just as it is easier to criticize than to create something, a social order in decline maintain its ability to tell you what you're doing wrong even as it is losing its ability to provide a convincing account of what it would look like to do things right ... Contemporary mainstream middle-class social norms are not remotely up to the task of minimizing awkwardness, but at the same time, there seems to be no real possibility of developing a convincing positive alternative. (Kotsko 2010: 16-17).

He makes a convincing case that the role of awkwardness in comedy is not simply a matter of playing upon the familiarity of everyday awkwardness. Instead there is an elaboration within some recognisable genres of the broader cultural malaise and its attendant anxieties. He takes Judd Apatow films as representative of a sense that “the order of adulthood somehow doesn't work, that it needs the awkward supplement of the male bonding it supposedly overcomes”. In the absence of new traditions, which is the only cultural condition in which the phrase 'new traditions' could be coherent, we are left with a “pervasive sense that despite the fact that we can never fully embrace the traditional norms, we are somehow hardwired to head in that direction and will do so immediately once our attempts to do something else fail” (Kotsko 2010: 65). These films not only represent friendships which are 'structurally awkward', in that they are grounded in opposition to cultural conventions, but they are ones which are eventually cast off in an unreflexive embrace of a circumscribed normativity. In contrast to this resist and then do it anyway approach to negotiating cultural awkwardness, Kotsko finds inspiration in the writings of St. Paul's on the possibility of cultural assimilation, imagining communities where,

Awkwardness is no longer a way of escaping social norms, and social norms are no longer a way of escaping awkwardness: instead, people simply meet each other, without the mediation of a defined cultural order, and figure out how to live together on a case by case basis. (Kotsko 2010: 80).

From this perspective the problem of cultural awkwardness becomes one of our response to it. Rather than "trying to come up with some permanent way of overcoming awkwardness, one should go with it" (Kotsko 2010: 79). In this way he inverts the notion of awkwardness, leading us “beyond the common sense notion of awkwardness as a disturbance in the social fabric and toward something like utopia” (Kotsko 2010: 86). Far from being something to be overcome, awkwardness in fact represents an opening towards a more fully human mode of being-with each other. It is a possibility we are forced to confront, however inchoately, because “opportunities to enjoy the community of awkwardness are always there, always available, always ready to erupt, because awkwardness is undefeatable”. Under such conditions it becomes imperative for us to cultivate “the peculiar kind of grace that allows us to break down and admit that we are finally nothing more or less than human beings who will always be stuck with each other and, more importantly, to admit that we are glad of it" (Kotsko 2010: 89).

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The academic ethics of strikebreaking (2013-12-31 08:00)

This [1]insightful reflection on academic strikebreaking captures something very important about the contemporary politics of higher education:
The disavowal at work here is stunning in its mundanity, the fact that it went unremarked as it was stated. ‘The union should adopt different tactics – but I will not join the union’; ‘I support the strike – but I am not going to strike myself’; ‘the cause of the strike is just – but I renounce the basic means of resisting injustice’.

There is no reason why academics should be any more logical about these matters than anyone else. But I wonder if the gaping holes in these responses are, at least in part, a result of the shaping of academic subjectivity by the capitalist university. We are engaged in a profession which claims to promote something above instrumentalism – and it is precisely this which is our instrumental role. We have to play the games of preparing students for employment, and raising money for research, but we keep an internal distance from these things. We cynically despise them (and often despise the students who do not measure up to our ideals), whilst committing ourselves to a system which believes in these things on our behalf (cf. the Zizekian analysis of contemporary belief).

However, it is this internal displacement which produces the figure of the contemporary academic. This person is invested in an ethic of scholarship, which actually leaves them without a language or imagination for addressing the material conditions of higher education, beyond that of an ultimately ineffective idealism. The melancholy of the modern scholar over the marketization of education is therefore neither a form of resistance nor mere nostalgia, but a fabricated affect essential to the mediating role we play.

Of course, I generalise hugely, and we can all think of many exceptions. I am not suggesting that our bureaucratised unions or existing left groups offer any panacea. Nevertheless, higher education has been, and will continue to be, marketised and instrumentalised, and the vast majority of academics will (grudgingly, cynically) put up with it. And our ethic of scholarship is of no use. It is the same ethic which is able to abide such logical inconsistencies and lack of solidarity when it comes to strikebreaking.


1. [http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/](http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/)
2. [http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/](http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/)
5. 2014

5.1 January

1,000 months in which you can read 4,000 books (2014-01-01 08:00)

If you read one book a week, starting at the age of 5, and live to be 80, you will have read a grand total of 3,900 books, a little over one-tenth of 1 percent of the books currently in print.

#Keeponreading


As a shake-up, the philosopher AC Grayling is fond of reminding people that the average span of human life is less than 1,000 months. “If a third of them you are asleep and a third you’re in Tesco’s,” he says, “the other third, about 25 years, is left to you to live well.”


But how to respond to such a realisation...? Becoming overly discerning about the books you choose to read (“my god I’m one bad novel closer to death”) risks eroding the joys of reading. While thinking in terms of your 1,000 months risks becoming A C Grayling. It’s enough to make me want to embrace a perpetual present. Or perhaps it’s a spur to think about how to approach 2014?


CfP: Death Online Research Symposium (2014-01-02 08:00)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Death Online Research Symposium
Wednesday April 9th – Thursday April 10th, 2014

Durham University Centre for Death and Life Studies, Durham University, UK.
Keynote speaker: Professor Tony Walters, Director of the Centre for Death and Society, University of Bath, UK.

As digital media have become an integral part of our everyday life, so have also death and our afterlife become inextricably interwoven with technology. Marking the formation of the international research network Death Online Research, this first Death Online Research Symposium will focus on current research into the digital mediation of dying, death, mourning and personal legacy, in order to explore and discuss how online connectivity is changing how, when and where we engage with death. We invite presentations within the following areas: online memorial sites; grief and social media; mobile technologies in graveyards; the digital afterlife; and digital inheritance. We welcome other relevant perspectives on the impacts digital technology has on the context of death in the 21st century.

Paper abstracts of 400 words should be submitted to [1]deathonline@itu.dk by January 5th, 2014.

For further information, please visit [2]www.deathonlineresearch.net.

1. mailto:deathonline@itu.dk

The Shoes and Lives of Refugees (2014-01-03 08:00)

Since 2011, about 30,000 refugees have fled Sudan after the country started a campaign against immigrants (here is a [1]detailed article about the Sudanese situation by Eric Reeves). The refugees fled across the border from Sudan’s Blue Nile state to South Sudan - on foot. Photographer [2]Shannon Jensen made a visual museum of refugee lives in her photographic series entitled “The Long Walk” which documents the shoes belonging to adults and children refugees. The materiality, the documentary approach and the unusual subject make for compelling photography which conveys in a striking, almost ethnographic way some of the reality faced by war refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa.

[3]
(See all photos [4]here)


"Don’t just look up, look down" | I Spy with My Inner Eye (2015-02-15 12:57:30)
[...] can tell stories – such as what it might be like to flee to safety, or how important you are, but as with all stories they are given meaning by the teller. Imelda [...] 

Why Medium might be pretty great for academics (2014-01-04 08:00)

I just tried using Medium for the [1]first time and I loved it. I suspect I won’t be alone in this. Here’s a few reasons why I think it’s a good fit for academic blogging:

1. The interface is lovely. It does exactly what it claims to do and adopts an aesthetic which foregrounds what you’re writing. I’ve always seen the appeal in minimalistic interfaces for writing but never quite got to grips with them. There’s something about the Medium interface which really works for me (see screenshot below). It feels like writing in a really nice notebook using an ornate pen, with all the attentiveness this can engender. As opposed to WordPress which, in contrast, feels to me like scribbling for predominately practical purposes. These may be idiosyncratic reactions but I suspect they’re not entirely so.

2. The content ecosystem of Medium is setup to preclude the need for regular posting in order to build an audience. Not unlike a multi-author blog, the aggregation of content in one place brings the audience to Medium and users find your article through its submission to a range of curated thematic feeds or through it being ‘recommended’. In other words, articles circulate on their own merits. It’s possible to write very occasionally and yet gain an audience for what you’re written presuming the article itself is interesting and clear.

3. It has the advantage of guest blogging, in that it avoids the need to build your own audience and blog regularly. But it’s more immediate and I suspect this will really appeal. You don’t have to discuss the idea with the editor. You don’t have to wait for a slot to come up in the posting schedules which most bigger blogs will have. You can self-publish instantaneously but without the need to collate an audience that other platforms impose.

4. It has interesting metrics, offering stats in terms of views, reads, read ratio and recommendations. I need to look up how it calculates the reads. I suspect it works from time on page (given it automatically generates a ‘read time’ depending on length of the article) but it doesn’t say.
One academic online | Alex’s Archives (2014-02-08 12:46:48)

 [...] continue to live and learn as technology moves along. I just came across a recent post at The Sociological Imagination that discusses Medium.com as a vehicle for online academic writing. It allows you to self-publish [...]

The plastic bag: a mocumentary (2014-01-05 08:00)

[EMBED]
Lauren Sardi: You are a proponent of arts-based research. What is arts-based research (ABR)?

Patricia Leavy: Arts-based research is when researchers in any discipline adapt the tenets of the creative arts in their social research. The arts can be used as a method of inquiry and/or representational strategy. As a sociologist I was trained that there are two major paradigms, quantitative and qualitative, and then mixed methods where you combine quantitative and qualitative. But an alternative paradigm has emerged: Arts-based research. ABR can make social research accessible to diverse audiences and I believe in public sociology. I think there are ethical and practical mandates for doing work that is of value beyond the academy. The products of traditional social research rarely reach the public domain. Research findings are jargon-laden and circulate in highly specialized, hard-to-get journals read by only a handful of academic "experts". ABR can help us bridge the academy and the public as we bridge science and art.

Lauren Sardi: You turned to fiction in your own research. Can you talk about that?

Patricia Leavy: My turn to fiction as a research practice came from my desire to reach public audiences with my scholarship and to engage academic and student readers on a deeper level. I was frustrated with the limitations of traditional academic articles and monographs which are only read by a handful of people with highly specialized education. They simply never reach broad audiences. I think people generally enter the field of sociology with a desire to make a positive contribution to society but the constraints of academia can be disenchanting. I wanted to do research that had the hope of being of some value and specifically, useful for girls and women. For nearly a decade I collected in-depth interviews with women of varying backgrounds about their relationships, identities and body images. I wanted to take what I had learned, cumulatively, and share it. My first novel, *Low-Fat Love*, is loosely based on that interview research and explores the psychology of negative relationships, women's identity and self-concept development and the social construction of femininity. After writing that book I wanted to explore other themes from my interview research as well as autoethnographic data. So I wrote another novel, *American Circumstance*, which explores appearance versus reality; how our lives and relationships look versus how we experience them, how social class shapes identity and the codes of female friendship including the things we do and do not say to each other. Both books are deeply embedded with sociology and as one colleague suggested, they offer a sociology of everyday life.

Lauren Sardi: What has fiction afforded you that traditional academic writing did not?

Patricia Leavy: Through fiction I have been able to reach both academic and general audiences. I've had the chance to speak with college classes as well as women's book clubs. It's wonderful to share work more broadly. It isn't just who you reach though, it is also how you reach them. People generally enjoy reading fiction. I believe learning can be joyful and must be engaged and fiction is well-suited towards those ends. Through fiction we can also try to promote empathy, disrupt stereotypes and grand narratives, make micro-macro links by showing instead of telling, tap into emotional complexity, construct believable realities for readers to enter, cultivate resonance and open up a multiplicity of meanings. From a writer's perspective, fiction also allows greater freedom than traditional academic writing. You don't need to censor yourself which is liberating and I think benefits readers as well. I've actually written a book called *Fiction as Research Practice* which details this methodology.

Lauren Sardi: What does the novel format in particular offer you?

The novel format allows me to weave stories together, build gaps into the narrative and develop characters in ways that I hope promote empathy towards them. Because I play with assumptions and stereotypes, sort of laying them out and then challenging them, I need some time to introduce characters, giving readers an impression of a character and then subtly suggesting things are not always as they seem. Novels, even when short like mine, give
you the space to do that. With that said, I have read social science written as novellas, short stories and poems that are quite powerful.

Lauren Sardi: Both of your novels are a part of the Social Fictions book series that you edit. This is the first academic book series of its kind. How did it come to be?

Patricia Leavy: When I finished writing Low-Fat Love I had to figure out how to publish it. I very much saw the novel as research. I am also deeply committed to advancing arts-based research and hoped to use my novel as a vehicle for doing so. I came up with the idea for the Social Fictions series in order to create a space to publish the products of ABR and so that my book would be a part of something larger. The series publishes books written entirely in literary forms, including plays, novels and short story collections, but all of the books are written by scholars and are informed by social research and it is published by an academic press.

Lauren Sardi: You’ve said in conference presentations that it was difficult to get a publisher to take a chance on the idea of “social fictions” but the reaction to your novels and the series as a whole has been astounding with your publisher announcing Low-Fat Love is their top-selling title of all time. What does this mean to you and what is your hope for the series?

Patricia Leavy: The first publisher I approached turned me down saying that we couldn’t sell enough copies to earn back his investment. I believe he predicted we couldn’t sell more than 200 copies. Actually this points to an ethical issue. Many publishers, that one included, will publish books about how to do arts-based research but then they won’t take a chance on publishing the products of arts-based research. But in terms of the Social Fictions series it all worked out extremely well. Sense Publishers is committed to social justice and creativity and they have been the ideal partner for the series. I hope the success we’ve achieved paves the way for others so that we see more of this genre blurring work and more people have access to scholarly works. Our goal has always been to advance arts-based research and public scholarship and I think we’re doing just that.

Patricia Leavy, PhD is an independent scholar and novelist, formerly Associate Professor of Sociology, Founding Director of Gender Studies and Chairperson of Sociology & Criminology at Stonehill College. She has published a dozen non-fiction books including Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice, Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research: Using Problem-Centered Methodologies and Fiction as Research Practice and the novels American Circumstance Low-Fat Love. She is the editor for four book series with Oxford University Press and Sense Publishers. Routinely called on by the media, she has appeared on national television, radio, is regularly quoted by the news media, publishes op-eds and is a blogger for The Huffington Post. She frequently makes presentations and keynote addresses at universities as well as national and international conferences. The New England Sociological Association named her the “2010 New England Sociologist of the Year” and she has recently been nominated for a Lifetime Achievement Award by the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry and a Special Achievement Award by the American Creativity Association. Please visit [1]www.patricialeavy.com for more information. For information on the Social Fictions series visit: [2]https://www.sensepublishers.com/catalogs/bookseries/social-fictions-series/

Lauren Sardi, PhD. is an assistant professor of sociology at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, Connecticut.
Edward Harkins (2014-01-05 14:32:00)
Thanks for really thought-provoking perspectives. I've to give a talk on Art, Culture and urban society to a 'Friends of Theatre' audience in Glasgow, UK, early in the New Year and I've found several useful lines of thought - originator will be acknowledged of course.

Patricia Leavy (2014-01-05 17:26:00)
Thank you so much. Your talk sounds terrific. Good luck with your work.

Edward Harkins (2014-01-05 19:20:00)
And thanks to you. You and others here might also be interested in a debate around 'evidence', public funding and the arts in the UK. The link below is a take on how it's unfolding in the 'English' bit of the UK - I'm in the more important Scottish bit of course ;-) http://new.a-n.co.uk/news/single/towards-plan-b-a-different-approach-to-arts-funding/

Patricia Leavy (2014-01-05 19:41:00)
Yes– very interested in it. Thanks for sharing the link!

With a little help from my friends: relational work in leisure-related enterprising, Erika Andersson Cederholm – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 22:35:26)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

A Fiction and Sociology Reading List – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 22:52:59)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

A Weak-Strong-Weak Pattern of Ritual Practice in La guanxi , Ji Ruan – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 23:24:27)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

Support ticket from Ji Ruan, 01/10/2016 – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 23:24:59)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

Referee suggestion of Joy Zhang for own paper by Ji Ruan – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 23:25:33)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

Referee suggestion of XiaoYing Qi for own paper by Ji Ruan – TSR theme
donovan (2018-10-23 23:27:28)
[...] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarsh... by Lauren Sardi [...]

‘Personhood beyond the human’: Reflections on an important conference (2014-01-05 20:33)

[I want to thank Adam Ford and Jim Collier for earlier posting this report on their websites, respectively, [1]H+ Magazine and the[2] Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective. (The latter site includes links to the various figures and concepts raised in this account, which may be unfamiliar to sociologists.) I also thank Mark Carrigan for allowing the report to be posted here as well. The issues discussed below will be taken forward at my keynote address to the British Sociological Association in Leeds, in April 2014.]
On 6-8 December 2013, Yale University played host to one of the most interesting and, I believe, significant conferences that I have ever attended. Its title ‘Personhood Beyond the Human’ captured the full range of speakers. However, the organizers were mainly concerned with the legal extension of personhood to animals, especially primates and aquatic mammals. They should be more comfortable with the label ‘posthumanist’ than ‘transhumanist’, though the sponsoring organization – Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technologies – normally portrays itself as a ‘technoprogressive’ transhumanist think-tank. Readers can judge for themselves by going here to the conference's comprehensive website, which includes videos of all the talks.

The timing for the conference could not have been more apt. On 2 December, the Nonhuman Rights Project, the brainchild of Harvard law professor Steven Wise, had filed the first lawsuits of its kind, namely, to transfer four chimpanzees currently kept captive at various locations in New York State – as pets, entertainers, and lab subjects – to an animal sanctuary where their ‘right to bodily liberty’ can be properly secured. (As it turns out, on 10 December, the presiding judges denied the prima facie validity of the claim but encouraged appeal of their decision before a higher court with greater scope for reinterpreting legal personhood.) Wise and his intellectual inspiration, Peter Singer, the leading philosopher of ‘animal liberation’, were the keynote speakers at this conference.

I shall review the conference as someone with decidedly transhumanist sympathies and hence not quite in sync with the animating concerns of the organizers. However, it is to the great credit of the organizers – James Hughes and George Dvorsky – that they included a broad church of thinkers, which as the conference moved into its second day became more concerned with the sorts of qualities that have traditionally separated humans from animals – and might be better instantiated in intelligent machines. Interestingly, the main media coverage of the conference to date – an op-ed piece in the 16 December edition of the Boston Globe penned by an on-site reporter – actually struck a blow for the distinctiveness of human personhood against the ambient pro-animal sentiment of the conference itself.

Singer’s opening keynote was mostly boilerplate but two of his reference points were revealing, one to Michael Tooley and the other to Bernard Williams. First, he cited Tooley’s classic 1972 Philosophy and Public Affairs article, ‘Abortion and Infanticide’, as formative in his thinking about the conditions under which something has a ‘right to life’. Following Tooley, Singer argues that if a right to life presupposes the possession of future-oriented desires, then while some cognitively underdeveloped humans may not have a right to life, some cognitively developed animals may have just such a right. So far it sounds as if a reasonably strong sense of personal autonomy is required for a right to life. At the same time, though, both Tooley and Singer wish to make these judgements ‘on the spot’ without considering what the penultimate conference speaker, the science fiction writer David Brin, calls ‘uplift’, that is, our capacity to enhance beings to a level at which we might accord them with a robust sense of rights.

Although Singer and his followers fancy themselves ‘progressive’ thinkers, they fail to acknowledge that broadly ‘welfarist’ projects have always required substantially transforming those who are deemed ‘unfairly disadvantaged’ as measured by some standard of social justice. This is why so much of civil rights legislation, while couched in the rhetoric of removing barriers based on race, class and gender, has involved compelling these disadvantaged people to attend schools, undergo medical treatments, and undertake employment – all designed, hopefully for better and not worse, to take the disadvantaged outside their comfort zones. (This has been the great promise of ‘affirmative action’.) By extension, one might suppose that at least certain animals might be somehow ‘enhanced’ so that the sense of autonomy of which we deem them capable is realized in a way we can recognize as our equals.

However, in practice, Singer and most of his followers revert to a much weaker sense of autonomy, whereby any being with a serviceable set of interests is deemed to possess a right to life, regardless of how those interests are established or satisfied. Indeed, throughout the conference, occasional disparaging remarks were made about autonomy as an especially ‘speciesist’ criterion of personhood that ignores the obligation that humans have to enable the flourishing of non-human species with interests radically different from their own. This relates to Singer’s second reference point, a posthumously published essay by Bernard Williams called ‘The Human Prejudice’, which
attempts to defend pro-human attitudes on simple grounds of group loyalty (an ontological ‘us vs. them’), which
unsurprisingly Singer finds not very persuasive – and neither do I. Moreover, Williams’ species chauvinism plays
into Singer’s association of speciesism with racism and sexism in the index of politically incorrect attitudes for an
enlightened age.

If autonomy in the strong (Kantian) sense is one great enemy of the animal rights activists, another is anthro-
pomorphism, even though several of the speakers could not avoid referring (sympathetically) to animals in the same
terms they might very young or disabled humans. Indeed, as I observe below, this comparison is crucial to Steven
Wise’s strategy to gain legal recognition for animal rights. But make no mistake: Anthropomorphism in the service of
animal rights is presumed to be no more than a necessary evil. In this context, suffering – understood as a liminal
experience whereby a being’s sense of bodily integrity is under direct threat – plays an important conceptual, and
perhaps ultimately forensic, role in providing a criterion of personhood that ideally might be read off the physiological
disposition of an organism without having to engage in any politically incorrect and epistemically dubious anthropic
projections.

The second keynoter, Steven Wise, came across as modest and folksy but he too made some revealing stray
remarks about how he teaches animal rights at Harvard. He alluded to the early 20th century Yale constitutional
lawyer, Wesley Hohfeld, who through his Oxford follower Herbert Hart laid the foundations for modern analytic
philosophy of law. (The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on ‘Rights’ provides a good sense of Hohfeld’s
significance.) Hohfeld offered a self-styled ‘molecular’ analysis of right into its logical components, one element
of which is immunity from others altering your constitution without your consent. However, for Hohfeld, this
element provided only a quarter of the concept of right, which also includes more positive notions of power and
privilege – that is, outright self-assertion, not merely protection from self-negation. As Wise and others explained
during the conference, this rather limited sense of right – normally reserved for children and the disabled – is
simply meant to be the thin edge of a thicker legal wedge. I’m not so sure. The default contempt for autonomy
and anthropomorphism exhibited by many of the speakers suggested that were Wise’s chimpanzees granted
the relevant sanctuary, the matter would end there – as if Apartheid (or the segregationist policies practiced in
the USA in the century after the formal emancipation of Black slaves) were a successful outcome to the end of slavery.

Philosophers have long wondered whether ‘animal liberation’ entails a serious commitment to ‘animal rights’. This
conference keeps the jury in deliberation without returning a verdict. Here it is worth recalling that the appeal
to rights (i.e. ‘civil rights’) has historically required that those who would be treated as free-standing individuals
worthy of bearing rights – and not simply the latest part of a self-perpetuating corporate whole – need to re-enact
the original struggle of those who established those rights. This is why national service has been so prominent
in republican democracies, the political system that has done the most to promote rights. Call it an ideological
vaccination policy, if you will. In any case, your capacity for self-assertion against a countervailing force – as
good an empirical definition of autonomy as any – marks you as worthy of rights. You don’t simply capitulate
or adapt: You leave your mark. As long as animals do not have the opportunity to prove themselves in such
a manner, then the appeal to ‘rights’ on their behalf is no more than a euphemism for a state of protected de-
pendency. Libertarians, often the scourge of self-styled ‘progressives’, understand this point better than anyone else.

Lori Marino, an animal neuroscientist at Emory University in Atlanta and the scientific advisor to the Nonhu-
man Rights Project, made the most explicit case for primates and aquatic mammals possessing the mental capacities
relevant to attributions of a reasonably strong sense of ‘autonomy’. She especially emphasized animals’ powers
of ‘mental time-travel’, a phrase nowadays used by cognitive psychologists to refer to the ability to project oneself
imaginatively into the future and design a plan that anticipates potential obstacles along the way. Let’s grant Marino’s
interpretation of their behaviour and its neural underpinning. The question remains: Why can’t we communicate
with these creatures at the level implied by their advanced mental capacities?

Of course, the fault may be entirely our own. But then shouldn’t there be a call for research aimed at open-
ing channels of communication (e.g., prosthetic translation devices, if not trans-species pidgins) between humans and these cognitively advanced creatures, so that we might learn from each other and pool our efforts to mutual benefit? However, the conference was conspicuously silent on this point, as if apes and dolphins would obviously prefer to deal only with their own and not with humans. And so I continue to wonder about the sincerity of animal rights activists.

One of the cleverest people at the conference was Andrew Fenton, a philosopher who divides his time between California and Nova Scotia and has written extensively on animal welfare in the context of animal experiments. He consistently asked incisive questions from the floor. Fenton’s own talk took seriously that we might work toward some idea of chimp-based consent to experimental participation, modelled on pediatric research ethics. The basic idea is that we might ‘persuade’ chimps – as we do children – to consent to participate in scientific research by getting them used to experimental apparatus and lab conditions, so that they realize that their lives are not under any substantial threat. I put ‘persuade’ in scare quotes because Fenton concretely proposes that chimps be instructed in a way that allows their dissent to be clearly registered, even if we do not quite understand why they dissent. Here one might wonder whether Fenton’s comparison is quite fair to children, who after all have the potential to demonstrate much greater powers of comprehension through language. However, it does reflect a common animals rights strategy of minimizing the difference between children and mature apes to establish an intuitive sense of continuity between humans and non-humans.

On the other hand, Fenton was also sensitive to a set of concerns closely associated with the late bioethicist Raymond Frey, who argued that doing research on animals that is not permitted on humans may simply jeopardize animal lives without appreciably contributing to knowledge of how humans work. Fenton follows Frey in suspecting, perhaps rightly, that scientists routinely ignore doubts about the cross-species generalisability of the results of animal-based research out of a more general disregard for the value of animal life. The logic of this argument implies that the excessive restrictions on human participation in scientific research imposed by ‘institutional review boards’ – which are typically more concerned with institutional liability than the actual beliefs and desires of the would-be subjects – should be relaxed so that humans are allowed to participate in risky research that would otherwise needlessly endanger animals. Both epistemology and ethics would benefit from the move.

To be sure, neither Frey nor Fenton draw this conclusion, as they are more concerned with minimizing harm to animals than maximizing benefit to humans. However, Veronika Lipinska (also in attendance) and I draw just this conclusion in *The Proactionary Imperative*, due out from Palgrave Macmillan in 2014. Here we follow the University of Manchester bioethicist Sarah Chan in supporting a culture in which the right to participate in scientific research would be promoted by potential human subjects who self-organize themselves as proactive interest groups.

The second day of the conference was more emotively charged, as various world-view assumptions were both asserted and imputed to positions that might be called ‘humanist’, ‘transhumanist’ and ‘posthumanist’. The animal rights activists – proper ‘posthumanists’ – clearly see transhumanism as humanism taken to what they regard as its absurd logical conclusion, an elaborate ‘denial of death’ based on a lingering attachment to the Abrahamic deity in whose image and likeness humans were supposedly created. (*The Proactionary Imperative* actually puts a positive spin on this allegedly damning diagnosis.) On more than one occasion, Albert Camus and ‘60s anthropologist Ernest Becker were invoked as witnesses to the narcissistic and dangerously delusional character of *Homo sapiens*, the species whose uniqueness lies in denying what it is.

But some posthumanists went even further, wanting to purge the residual anthropomorphism that privileges apes over, say, chickens as forms of animal life. Karen Davis, founder of the Virginia-based United Poultry Concerns, spoke eloquently about her life among chickens. Between sessions she railed against more establishment animal rights activists whose views about human ‘stewardship’ over the planet she believed constitute species paternalism at its worst. She specifically declared Peter Singer to be not only speciesist but also sexist in terms of the species he privileged, in which chickens in particular and birds more generally are seen as ‘feminised’ species. (Singer’s 1999
manifesto, A Darwinian Left, might also be used to confirm White’s overall judgement.)

By the time of my own talk, which per usual was improvised, I had been already influenced by the issues already raised at the conference. My starting point was the historical specificity of the idea of ‘human rights’ as something with binding legal force. Despite much philosophical talk and political assertion about what prima facie look like ‘human rights’ (most notably the American and French Revolutions in the late 18th century and their intellectual antecedents), most of these ‘rights’ have been on closer inspection ‘civil rights’ – that is, the right for an individual to be treated as an equal in a self-governing polity, or ‘citizenship’. Such rights were never meant to be made indiscriminately available to anyone who happens to be a member of Homo sapiens. Rather, rights had to be earned by demonstrating a level of competence, traditionally evidenced in successful property management. Of course, this gave a default – yet still defeasible – advantage to inheritors of wealth to display their managerial competence.

The modern period has been about seeking alternative tests for the relevant competence so that inheritance doesn’t matter at all: One should simply be capable of sustaining something substantially more than one’s own physical survival. While a certain element of the Left still dislikes the appeal to cognitive criteria for citizenship (perhaps even including literacy), such criteria served historically to liberalise entry into the polity, as one no longer had to arrive with wealth but simply a detectable capacity to generate wealth. Capitalism’s focus of cognitive prowess – aka ‘invention’ – establishes the point. (See the US Constitution’s creation of the Patent Office and Joseph Schumpeter’s subsequent valorisation of Henry Ford as ‘entrepreneur’.)

I have come to believe that most of the acrimony between capitalists and socialists over the past 200 years reduces to the simple issue of how to credit people properly for what they have done. This is of course a serious problem that requires redress, but quite different from how society should be organized in a progressive fashion. Indeed, the very idea that one should be concerned about who deserves credit for contributing to societal wealth is a normative principle shared by capitalism and socialism, predating their schism: It is what put both of these ideologies on the same side against those who continue to believe that heredity is ultimately the most reliable source of social order.

When I entered university nearly 40 years ago, the ‘hereditarians’ would have been seen as hopelessly reactionary. However, the emergence of ‘sociobiology’ and its second coming as ‘evolutionary psychology’ has breathed new life into the pro-heredity forces. Animal rights activists are empowered by this revival. Thus, instead of asking what new skills animals might need to acquire to survive in an increasingly anthropomorphic world, they simply observe that animals had survived perfectly well for millennia prior to human habitation. Whatever else one might wish to say about these contrasting attitudes, the former is ‘forward-looking’ and the latter ‘backward-looking’ in its normative orientation.

From this standpoint, ‘human rights’ is a curious hybrid. After the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights of 1948, the normative force of ‘human rights’ is that every member of Homo sapiens, no matter where they live and simply by virtue of species membership, is entitled to a range of rights that approximate those historically covered by civil rights legislation. In other words, an explicitly heredity-based definition of ‘humanity’ is invoked to justify attributions that previously had been based on potential or actual individual achievement. In jurisprudential terms, ‘natural law’ and ‘positive law’, increasingly at loggerheads in the modern era, found a mutually satisfactory conceptual meeting point in ‘human rights’.

Natural law had indeed protected all members of Homo sapiens equally – but only relative to their ‘natural’ standing. So the ‘right to revolution’ was originally about allowing serfs to revolt against their masters who abused their power; but if serfs revolted against a benevolent master, then they would be in the wrong. For its part, positive law maintained an open-minded attitude about the composition of society just as long as it was composed of ‘equals’ in the deep sense of those who could support themselves in the face of potential opposition from fellow equals. Such
societies, while typically ‘advanced’ by today’s lights, functioned as what we nowadays call ‘gated communities’ but used to be called ‘city-states’. In effect, ‘human rights’ resulted from removing natural law’s hierarchical vision and positive law’s elitist practice, while combining the universalism and paternalism of natural law with the egalitarianism and liberalism of positive law.

The United States of America – established as a republic with indefinitely expansive horizons – set an important practical precedent for the realizability of ‘human rights’, especially through its historically open-door immigration policy. However, the creative genius behind the UN Declaration was the Neo-Thomist Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain (1882-1973). (Here I take a cue from the Columbia University intellectual historian, Samuel Moyn.) I say ‘genius’ because many things were accomplished by the idea of human rights that are nowadays often taken for granted. First, it kept the Catholic legal tradition relevant in public life. Second, it removed political barriers within Christianity between Catholics and those Protestants who were theologically inclined to abandon natural law altogether. Third, it provided a clear legal grounding for welfare state and even socialist policies, since the existence of ‘human rights’ draws explicit international attention to ‘problems’ presented by the difference between what the Declaration says and the actual existence of Homo sapiens. Moreover, it does so in a way that shifts the burden of proof onto those who might still believe that human distress is merely a local concern that in the long term will somehow take care of itself, either through charity or benign neglect.

Sixty-five years later, the concept of human rights in Maritain’s original sense still really exists only in Europe, including the UK, where it has spawned various bottom-line ‘grand coalitions’ between parties of the mainstream Right (‘Christian Democratic’) and Left (‘Social Democratic’) to preserve the welfare state in the face of fiscal pressures. These governments have also been sensitive about maintaining international development aid as a constant percentage of the state budget.

The USA is still not fully signed up to the idea of human rights – though it is very much signed up to civil rights. Consider this: Prominent in the opposition to Barack Obama’s efforts to get Americans to invest in healthcare is the claim that it would deny Americans the right to live as they wish. In a classic republic, requiring that people have health insurance might make sense as a criterion for citizenship. However, if you’re already a citizen and you aren’t troubled by ‘natural law’ considerations about what makes a life objectively ‘decent’, then ‘Obamacare’ might well strike you as imposing an unreasonable tax burden. In this context, Europeans would play the socialist card and say that even citizens are ‘always already’ indebted to others who in various ways have enabled the conditions under which they thrive. This creates an obligation for citizens to respond in kind – to ‘pay it forward’, if you will – to reaffirm the value of living in your society beyond the value of your own particular life. But you need to be receptive to the peculiar legal alchemy behind the idea of human rights for this argument not to sound ‘merely socialist’ in the sense that many Americans – and not only them – increasingly find offensive.

In an era when nonhumans are increasingly claiming rights (or more strictly, rights are being claimed on their behalf), the appeal to human rights as a rights benchmark poses a delicate problem for animal rights activists. The content of the UN Declaration mostly references ‘rights’ in the sense recognised in positive law, namely, a society of individuals each of whom is presumed to possess considerable autonomy. In the Declaration, freedom from bodily harm and security of material well-being simply provide a platform for free expression through art, science and culture – the means by which humans assert their distinctiveness as a species. (Abraham Maslow’s self-actualisation psychology is a natural concomitant of this idea of human rights.) In that case, might it not be possible for a being capable of art, science and culture, yet unencumbered by Homo sapiens’ carbon-based needs, be eligible for ‘human rights’ – especially if humans can interact with such creatures and respect their achievements in these areas? This, of course, has been the promise of artificial intelligence research and other Golem-like projects. But we might also add the generation of avatars in cyberspace and perhaps even the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI).

At this point, the difference between the legal case for animal and machine personhood should be made explicit. Animal rights activists are clearly aiming for recognition of a sense of personhood that is detached from
the possession of distinctly human qualities, even if that means conceding a diminished sense of 'right', as I have already suggested. In contrast, machine rights activists aim to build machines that match, if not surpass, supposedly distinctive human achievements – in a Turing Test fashion – in order to acquire personhood for those machines. Whereas animal rights activists tend to speak in terms of 'sanctuaries' and other segregated spaces that allow animals to live as they were biologically meant to live, machine rights activists favour increasing interaction and even integration with humans as part of an open-ended process of mutual learning and accommodation. In the more dystopic versions of this vision, the machines may even surpass and dominate the humans. I may be exaggerating the implied political differences here – but I believe only slightly.

It is to the credit of the conference organizers that they featured an extended session on the second day with BINA48, whose name and nature is very well explained in its informative Wikipedia entry. ‘BINA48’ = ‘Breakthrough Intelligence via Neural Architecture 48 exaflops per second processing speed and 48 exabytes of memory’. More concretely, BINA48 is an android consisting of a bust-like head and shoulders mounted on a frame who speaks answers in response to typed questions. The android appears to be modelled on a Jackie Brown-like African-American woman. In fact, BINA48 was based on – and named for – the wife of the media lawyer who has perhaps done the most to promote the idea of rights for machines capable of sustained creative extension of digitally uploaded cognitive processes. This lawyer, Martine Rothblatt, who began life as Martin Rothblatt, is herself something of a transgender celebrity in the United States. However, her main concern these days, via the Terasem Movement, is the cultivation of 'cyberconsciousness' through the continuous upgrading and public exposure of BINA48. The basic idea is that BINA48 stores all that she learns and redeploy its in increasingly sophisticated and creative ways. Now entering her fourth year of existence, BINA48 came across at Yale as an insightful if rambling interlocutor – a pub philosopher functioning slightly over the limit. (She had difficulty deciding when the length of an answer was sufficient to the question, but otherwise was very fluent.)

The main source of scepticism about BINA48's powers came from those who saw everything she said as merely mimicking human thought and speech via a cleverly programmed algorithm. These sceptics may be intellectualising what roboticists call the 'uncanny valley' phenomenon, whereby people are spooked out by robots that physically resemble humans 'too much' and hence are unwilling to engage with them to the same extent as they would less human-looking robots. More worrisome is that simply the knowledge that a being is composed of silicon rather than carbon might serve as a source of prejudice, regardless of the being’s demonstrated capacities. This suggests the need for lawyers with a transhumanist sensibility to craft a workable concept of 'Privacy 2.0' that allows access to 'track record' without access to 'material origin' – in other words, an enforceable notion of privacy that prevents cheating on the Turing Test.

Of course, it is easy to see that the likes of BINA48 are the products of robotics labs – and so it will continue, until we live in the world depicted in Blade Runner. However, the idea of standing as a 'legal person' is that one is literally regarded under a mask (as the persona, in Greek drama) with a clear sense of which properties of the being are relevant (or not) to the case at hand. This ideal will be harder to maintain in a world where the difference between track record and material origin is blurred by the political desire to pre-empt various forms of prohibited behaviour based on interpretive strategies explicitly designed to 'unmask' the suspect.

However, I don't mean this as an argument against the very idea of governments and businesses mining data for securing or promoting various forms of social life. After all, it is one thing to mine 'big data' to determine that someone is likely to commit a crime; it is quite another then to disarm that person of any defence against a criminal charge by claiming that it was 'in their nature' to commit the crime. In the latter case, a purported (scientific) understanding of the capacities of a particular configuration of matter serves to undermine the suspect’s autonomy by preventing them from providing an alternative account of why they did what they seem to have done. Here Kant and Nietzsche would be on the same page in suspecting that such 'naturalistic' appeals are really shows of power that ipso facto dehumanise the being in question – whether its nature is carbon- or silicon-based.
The final session of the conference did not disappoint in terms of the provocations raised. The Catholic philosopher Daryl Wennemann argued that while sufficient, it is not necessary to be a member of *Homo sapiens* to be deemed ‘human’, by which he meant ‘person’. In that one deft logical manoeuvre, Wennemann managed to uphold the value of bringing all potential (including potentially aborted) members of *Homo sapiens* to maturity while placing a rather high bar for non-*Homo sapiens* to be credited with the same status. A telling moment came when in response to a question by Andrew Fenton, Wennemann asserted that the prospect of suffering did not figure as such in his criteria for personhood. This was a very brave thing to have said, which left Fenton silent. Animal rights activists normally capitalise on the capacity of animals to feel pain in captivity so as to gain emotional leverage with those who do not already believe that animal lives are intrinsically valuable. For his part, Wennemann seemed to be alluding to the fact that in Abrahamic theology, suffering is the feeling associated with an opportunity for deep learning, on the basis of which a person’s moral state may then be judged. In this respect, suffering is not something to be avoided at all cost or even mitigated as quickly as possible; rather, it is something to be overcome in a way that ideally leaves one stronger.

George Dvorsky, a co-organizer of the conference and contributing editor to the popular futurist website, io9, provided (in the style of a high school debater) a laundry list of items for realizing the animal-based ‘nonhuman personhood’ agenda. From the floor I raised an issue that built on a question put to Peter Singer in the first session, in which Singer conceded that Neanderthals might be seen as extinct species who bridge the human-nonhuman divide with regard to our intuitions of personhood. But (I observed) Neanderthals are no longer species that exist only in our imaginations. We have recovered DNA from Neanderthal fossils that at least in principle enables us to resurrect them, thereby potentially increasing the kinds of persons in the world, which is presumably an inherent good, given the value placed on personhood as a property of beings. Indeed, in an interview with Der Spiegel in January 2013, the Harvard medical geneticist George Church controversially claimed that a woman could well be a surrogate mother to a Neanderthal. However, Dvorsky was having none of this. His response suggested that adding candidate persons like Neanderthals by such non-natural means would likely result in their misery, if not increase the misery of the world more generally.

A declared Buddhist (along with the other co-organizer James Hughes), Dvorsky appeared to have a strong sense of nature’s overriding normative character, but without attributing to nature the personality of a creative deity, as promoted in Christianity by, say, theistic evolution (Catholic) and intelligent design theory (Protestant). I must confess that I find it difficult to grasp this conception, except that it appears profoundly conservative, and certainly unbecoming of people who call themselves ‘technoprogressive’. Nevertheless, I believe that in the future this largely suppressed Christian-Buddhist divide (which I called ‘anthropic-karmic’ in *The New Sociological Imagination*) will gain greater prominence as the terms of political discourse and public life – in ethics, economics and ecology – are more explicitly framed as questions about the source of value in the world.

Those interested in seeing the first shoots of this emerging world-historic conflict should study the academic philosophical debate between ‘will theory’ and ‘interest theory’ as alternative accounts of the nature of rights. (The former corresponds to the Christian/anthropic side, the latter the Buddhist/karmic side of the personhood divide.) On the one hand, will theorists see rights as vehicles for self-assertion in a presumably free and open space, which places a premium on limited liability so that agents effectively possess a ‘right to be wrong’. On the other hand, interest theorists see rights as vehicles for self-protection, as if the ‘self’ were a plot of land – the ‘body’ – whose jurisdiction is determined more by entitlement than actual agency.

We got a taste of the impending conflict when, via Skype from his home in San Diego, David Brin made a clear and vigorous case for human exceptionalism in terms of the obligation it places on humans to ‘upgrade’ the creatures that we care most about. He argued that any ‘nonhuman persons’ movement that did not put this matter on the top of its research and policy agenda was operating in bad faith. Whatever else one wishes to say about humans, we are the ones who sufficiently understand the natural world to take actions to direct its future course in decisive ways. Maybe it has been all a cosmic accident, as Darwinists seem to believe – but we don’t know that for a fact, either. Humanity’s track record, while chequered, is arguably improving. In any case, given our emerging sense...
of what constitutes a good life for ourselves, why not try to extend that across nature? Yes, we may fail but then, as the cosmic accident people gladly admit, there’s no reason to think that life will continue to flourish by our not intervening so directly.

Needless to say, Brin was not received well by most of the audience, which already had form in trashing autonomy (aka ‘will theory’) as a criterion of personhood. In effect, Brin had provided an updated version of Julian Huxley’s motivation for coining ‘transhumanism’ in the 1950s. Huxley wanted to reassert humanity’s uniqueness in the face of Darwin’s own default species egalitarianism, whereby all life is composed of exactly the same stuff and, at least in species form, we are all ultimately condemned to extinction. Huxley’s solution was to use our very knowledge of evolution as a moral lever for our self-transcendence – and, following Brin, the self-transcendence of other species. This argument requires that we trust the historical track record in science and technology. People like Huxley, Brin – and I – believe that the record speaks to a sincere, open, productive but certainly fallible, conversation with a larger reality that seems to be always prodding us to move on. Of course, one does not need to be an Abrahamic adherent to have such a sensibility. Nevertheless, this conference showed that transhumanism has yet to distinguish itself clearly from the ‘posthumanism’ (which sometimes bled into anti-humanism) generally on display.

3. [http://nonhumanrights.net/videos/](http://nonhumanrights.net/videos/)

"A 1940’s record of a symphony written in late 19th century": Interview with German filmmaker Moritz Liewerscheidt (2014-01-06 08:00)
"Jahrhundertwende" ("Turn of the Century") is a thirty-minute essay film by Berlin-based filmmaker Moritz Liewerscheidt. The film reflects both the formation of Nazi ideology in the early 20th century and the situation in today's Eastern Germany, where a neo-Nazi movement has risen since the downfall of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). But principally, "Jahrhundertwende" is a contemplation on German culture and Marxist philosophy, capitalism and late modernity.

Trailer of "Jahrhundertwende": [https://vimeo.com/81191109](https://vimeo.com/81191109)

We at the Sociological Imagination loved the film and decided to interview Moritz about it.

Milena Kremakova: Can you tell us something about the film's background? How did you decide to make it, what was the initial idea - was it an image, a sentence you read, a message you want to convey, or maybe something else?

Moritz Liewerscheidt: On German TV you can see Hitler every evening. For decades, a guy called Guido Knopp made a living by editing the same old Nazi film material over and over again, putting some "critical" voice-over on it spoken by the popular German voice actor who also represents Robert De Niro in the German dubbed versions of his films. All these "documentaries" focus on Hitler as a person. If a magazine puts Hitler on the cover, it's a fail-safe method to increase its sales. People are obsessed with Hitler - not only in Germany. At the same time, people seem to know very little about the ideology behind Nazism. In recent years a shallow critique of capitalism and globalisation has become popular again which argues with moral outrage against "greedy managers", etc. Although this form of criticism is labelled as "left wing", it has nothing to do with the materialistic analysis of capitalist economy pursued by Karl Marx. Instead, the arguments used in this appeal to emotion, are often very similar to those used by the early Nazis - sometimes even brought up with exactly the same words.

In my film, you hear a kind of "dialogue" which is made up completely out of historic quotations. The origin of these quotations is revealed at the end of the film. Until then, you are left alone with those statements: no explanation is given, so you have to think for yourself. Counter-intuitively, the voice advocating some positive aspects of capitalism "belongs" to Karl Marx. At the same time, the images of the film reflect the situation in today's Eastern Germany, where vast areas apart from the refurbished tourist spots have become pauperised.

MK: I loved watching "Jahrhundertwende" - in fact I saw it several times and it struck me that I understood more with each time I watched it. This might have to do with my imperfect grasp of German, but also with the weight of its ideas. It made me think for a long time after I had watched it. Do you think it is a film best watched "slowly" or "quickly"?

ML: Thank you. I'd say the film works quite similar to an art installation. The spectator - "contemplator" is a good word - becomes part of an experiment, which requires an active recipient with the disposition to get oneself into it. It's quite the opposite of the documentaries shown on TV, where you have a strong omniscient narrator taking you by the hand. Instead, you have to puzzle out the "big picture" by yourself - you can't just trust the voice-over. For some people this might be frustrating.

MK: Tell us more about the title: "Jahrhundertwende". As many German words, it is maybe impossible to fully translate into English.

ML: "Turn of the Century" is a correct translation. In German it contains the word "Wende", which is the
term used for the downfall of the "German Democratic Republic" in 1989-90, but also means "turning point" in general. While the quotations used in the film originate from the 19th and 20th century, the images are from our present, the 21st century. This asynchrony induces some shifts of meaning. But primarily, the title refers to the turn of the century from the 19th to the 20th century, which was felt by many contemporaries to be a period of "decadence" and degeneration, but at the same time a period of hope for a new beginning. The mindset of this age saw western civilisation as being in a crisis that required a massive and total solution. I think this is an essential point in the formation of fascist ideology, which is neglected in the

popular media - maybe because it is so inconvenient: that it was born as a revolt against the materialism of the 19th century - both liberal and Marxist -, against literally everything the 19th century stands for: the idea of progress, materialistic science, the universal idea of mankind, rational enlightenment, civilisation. In this regard, Marx can be seen as a typical exponent of the 19th century - and the rise of fascism and Nazism in the early 20th century as a "turning point of the century" - or a rupture in civilisation.

The funny - or should I say disturbing? - thing is that today's "postmodern" criticism of the universal claims of the Enlightenment - which is so popular among academic leftists - has some parallels with the fascist and National-Socialist anti-Enlightenment of the early 20th century. [4]Alfred Rosenberg's "Myth of the 20th century" was all about anti-universalism. The awareness of elements of Nazi ideology which originate in fin-de-siècle "[5]Lebensreform (life reform) movement" seems all the more disturbing, since many of those ideas - emerged in response to the destructive effects of industrialisation to nature and traditional lifestyles - have become part of our "green" mainstream today, after being marginalised for decades after World War II.

Of course, it's much easier to distance oneself from Nazism if you think it was all about being racist and hating Jews - and a guy with a clownish moustache. In my film, it might take a while until you realise the "sensitive guy" criticising environmental pollution or the "greed for money" is a fierce anti-Semite.

**MK:** The imagery and music in the film are gripping and evocative. How did you go about shooting the film and creating the soundtrack?

**ML:** I was looking for a kind of images which evoke what Freud called "Unbehagen in der Kultur", or discontent in modernity (published in English as [6]"Civilisation and its Discontents"), for I wanted to make comprehensible the affect against the negative aspects of modernity in the first place, which, in a way, fascist ideology gave an authoritarian answer to. Also, I tried to allude to the pictorial design of German Romanticism, especially by the famous painter [7]Caspar David Friedrich. I even carried a book of his paintings with me when filming in Brandenburg. But in place of the ruins of romantic cathedrals, you'll see those of the industry of former Socialist Germany.
Liewerscheidt’s film alludes to German Romanticism, echoing the works of Caspar David Friedrich (The Abbey in the Oakfield, 1810, Berlin, Old National Gallery, oil on canvas, 110 × 171, source: Wikipedia)

The music is a 1940’s record of a symphony written in the late 19th century by Gustav Mahler, but it’s played with the wrong speed. So this piece of late Romanticism sounds much darker, even menacing - there’s "something wrong with it" from the beginning. Maybe I can add something to your first question. In his book "[9]Erbschaft dieser Zeit" (Heritage of our Times), the Marxist philosopher [10]Ernst Bloch developed a dialectic analysis of German culture, pointing out aspects in the romantic critique of capitalism which are not necessarily reactionary. Still, they could be occupied by the Nazis, since most marxists of the time had a pretty simple notion of "progress", rejecting the "irrational" hopes and aspirations of "romantic anti-capitalism" as simply reactionary. By dialectic means, Bloch wanted to fish the utopian fragments of Romanticism out of the "fascist sludge" they had fallen into - for some of them stand to reason. Certainly, Bloch was an outsider with this perspective. To me, this book published in the early 1930’s can be read not only as an astonishingly accurate presentment of the years to follow, but also as a comment on why a neo-Nazi movement could rise just in former East Germany after the downfall of bureaucratic real socialism. Although the book is not quoted in the film, it was a significant influence.

MK: Where can we see “Jahrhundertwende”?

ML: If you’re interested in watching the complete film, you can ask me for a private link. Also, you can ask me to do a public screening. I'd be happy to discuss the film with an audience (in either German or English).

Moritz Liewerscheidt is a filmmaker based in Berlin. Born 1981 in West Germany, he studied history and philosophy in Düsseldorf, before he went to art school in Cologne ([11]Academy of Media Arts (KMH)). "Jahrhundertwende" is the film with which he graduated in 2012.
Contact: [12]www.moritzliewerscheidt.de

Past, present and future: 25 years of CAQDAS
1st - 3rd May 2014, Horsley Park, Surrey, England
Call for Papers

The use of computers to facilitate qualitative analysis is not new, with the first packages becoming commercially available from the mid-1980s. 1989 saw the first ever conference on qualitative software, convened by Ray Lee, Nigel Gilbert and Nigel Fielding. This conference, 25 years later, presents the opportunity to reflect on where we have come from, where we are now, and where we are going in the field of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS). Confirmed speakers include Dr Grant Blank<sup>2</sup> Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK Professor Nigel Fielding<sup>3</sup> CAQDAS Networking Project, University of Surrey, UK Professor Simon Lindgren<sup>4</sup> Department of Sociology, Umea University, Sweden Professor Clive Seale<sup>5</sup> Department of Sociology, Brunel University, UK For more information see the website<sup>6</sup> Abstract submissions We invite abstract submissions for oral paper presentations and posters around the following themes: 1. The role of methods teaching in learning to use qualitative software 2. Software supported visual analysis 3. Big data, social media analysis, text mining 4. Software supported mixing of methods 5. Collaborative working in the context of qualitative technology 6. Writing and representing qualitative findings Abstracts must: - Not exceed 300 words - Have a clear title and state which conference theme they fit into - State authors’ name, organisational affiliation and role (e.g. student, research fellow, lecturer etc.) - State whether the abstract proposal is for an oral paper presentation or a poster - Be written concisely and clearly in English - Be submitted as a one page MS Word document (not a PDF) to caqdas@surrey.ac.uk - Be submitted by Friday 31st January 2014 Please note we will NOT be accepting oral papers describing the results of research undertaken using qualitative software. The focus is on the innovative use of software itself - i.e. for particular methodological approaches, types of data, project dynamics or representing findings; on ways in which CAQDAS packages are being taught; implications arising from developments in the field; or limitations of CAQDAS tools for particular approaches. Proposals will be reviewed by the programme committee and external advisors expert in the six themes of the conference. Reviewers are: - Jeanine Evers<sup>9</sup> Evers Research & Training, Den Haag, the Netherlands - Graham Gibbs<sup>10</sup> Dept. of Behavioural and Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield, UK - Aine
From Philosophy Bingo to Sociology Bingo (2014-01-07 08:00)

Thank to [1]Critical Theory for posting this fabulous Philosophy Bingo card from Reddit. We’d like to make a sociology bingo though - any suggestions?

KLO (2014-01-22 10:59:00)
'twitter capital'


Abstract submission deadline extended!

The BSA Teaching Group is hosting a regional event at the University of Salford on 22 February. A number of
time slots are to be filled by postgraduate students and early career researchers eager to come and present their work.

There is no limitation on the empirical, methodological or theoretical origins of this work, but presenters will be asked to briefly consider how their research might be incorporated into the teaching of sociology.

Conference fees will be waived for those selected to speak.

Do you want to: Enhance your profile? Keep sociology teachers up-to date? Increase sociology's wider knowledge base?

Come and deliver a micro-lecture (about 15 minutes) on your research to a group of committed sociology teachers who are eager to discover what the new empirical insights are showing.

Abstract submission deadline: **Monday 13 January 2014**

Please email to: [1]bsatg@britsoc.org.uk

For further information please contact: Prof. Garry Crawford, Directorate of Social Sciences, University of Salford. Email: [2]g.crawford@salford.ac.uk, Tel: (0161) 295 6557. Or Dr Jane Kilby: [3]j.e.kilby@salford.ac.uk, Tel: 0161 295 3901.

Participants will be informed of the acceptance of their paper by 15 January.

For further information please Email: [4]bsatg@britsoc.org.uk
Do American universities have better graduation speeches than UK ones? Or is it just confirmation bias induced by only encountering the former through youtube?

1. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/IYGaXzJGVAQ]

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Issue 4 Discover Sociology Out Now (2014-01-08 11:11)

DISCOVER SOCIETY

Measured-Factual-Critical

January 2014

Focus:

Maurizio Meloni

C is for Complexity: Why Genetics Doesn’t Outweigh Teaching
Articles:

Ken Roberts

Social Mobility: Lift Going Up, Doors Closing. Going Down, Doors Wide Open; Any Volunteers?

Peter Nias

‘Fight them on the Beaches’: Engaging the Populus

Anna Ludvigsden

‘Bookshelfie’: Book Ownership, Class and Families

David Collis

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Soazig Clifton

*Autism, Algorithms, Google and the Rise of the Savant Garde*

*Borders of the Mind: The Profound Paradox of Female Genital Mutilation*

*Getting the Nation to Talk about Sex*

Vivienne Cree, Gary Clapton & Mark Smith

*Moral Panics, Jimmy Savile and Social Work: A 21st Century Morality Tale*

Rosemary Hill

*I’m Not Some Cock-Hungry Groupie': Negotiating the Rock Groupie Stereotype*

Neil Serougi

*Big Data, Public Services and Public Acceptance. Who Benefits?*

Rob Blackash

*6000 Missing Gay Civil Servants!*

2350
Beyond the Spectacle of Malala: A Critique of the Bandwagon of Girls' Education
This summer it was revealed, largely thanks to Edward Snowden, that American and European intelligence services are engaging in mass surveillance of hundreds of millions of people. Intelligence agencies monitor people's Internet use, obtain their phone calls, email messages, Facebook entries, financial details, and much more. Agencies have also gathered personal information by accessing the internal data flows of firms such as Google and Yahoo. Skype calls are "readily available" for interception. Agencies have purposefully weakened encryption standards - the same techniques that should protect our online banking and our medical files. These are just a few examples from recent press reports. In sum: the world is under an unprecedented level of surveillance.

This has to stop.

The right to privacy is a fundamental right. It is protected by international treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. Without privacy people cannot freely express their opinions or seek and receive information. Moreover, mass surveillance turns the presumption of innocence into a presumption of guilt. Nobody denies the importance of protecting national security, public safety, or the detection of crime. But current secret and unfettered surveillance practices violate fundamental rights and the rule of law, and undermine democracy.

The signatories of this declaration call upon national states to take action. Intelligence agencies must be subjected to transparency and accountability. People must be free from blanket mass surveillance conducted by intelligence agencies from their own or foreign countries. States must effectively protect everyone's fundamental rights and freedoms, and particularly everyone's privacy.

The TEDification of #HigherEd? Negotiating between the accessibly simple and the simplistically accessible (2014-01-09 08:00)

There’s a particularly incisive rehearsal in the Guardian of what has become a well established critique of TED. There’s a lot of this I agree with but I nonetheless find the general thrust of the argument really problematic:

So what is TED exactly?

Perhaps it’s the proposition that if we talk about world-changing ideas enough, then the world will change. But this is not true, and that’s the second problem.

TED of course stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, and I’ll talk a bit about all three. I think TED actually stands for: middlebrow megachurch infotainment.

The key rhetorical device for TED talks is a combination of epiphany and personal testimony (an “epiphimony” if you like) through which the speaker shares a personal journey of insight and realisation, its triumphs and tribulations.

What is it that the TED audience hopes to get from this? A vicarious insight, a fleeting moment of wonder, an inkling that maybe it’s all going to work out after all? A spiritual buzz?

I’m sorry but this fails to meet the challenges that we are supposedly here to confront. These are complicated and difficult and are not given to tidy just-so solutions. They don’t care about anyone’s experience of optimism. Given the stakes, making our best and brightest waste their time – and the audience’s time – dancing like infomercial hosts is too high a price. It is cynical.

Also, it just doesn’t work.

Recently there was a bit of a dust up when TEDGlobal sent out a note to TEDx organisers asking them not to book speakers whose work spans the paranormal, the conspiratorial, new age “quantum neuroenergy”, etc: what is called woo. Instead of these placebos, TEDx should instead curate talks that are imaginative but grounded in reality. In fairness, they took some heat, so their gesture should be acknowledged. A lot of people take TED very seriously, and might lend credence to specious ideas if stamped with TED credentials. “No” to placebo science and medicine.
But … the corollaries of placebo science and placebo medicine are placebo politics and placebo innovation. On this point, TED has a long way to go.

Perhaps the pinnacle of placebo politics and innovation was featured at TEDx San Diego in 2011. You’re familiar I assume with Kony2012, the social media campaign to stop war crimes in central Africa? So what happened here? Evangelical surfer bro goes to help kids in Africa. He makes a campy video explaining genocide to the cast of Glee. The world finds his public epiphany to be shallow to the point of self-delusion. The complex geopolitics of central Africa are left undisturbed. Kony’s still there. The end.

You see, when inspiration becomes manipulation, inspiration becomes obfuscation. If you are not cynical you should be sceptical. You should be as sceptical of placebo politics as you are placebo medicine.


Why do people watch TED videos? Why have so many millions of people watched this stuff if it’s so pathetically facile? Does this critique apply to things like the RSA Animate videos as well? Is the problem simply a 10 minute video? If not then where do we draw the line between the accessibly simple and the simplistically accessible? I disagree with the analysis of how much harm the latter does but I don’t think it does an awful lot of good either. But I don’t think all TED falls into this latter category. I also worry that the former category, things which are made simple so as to be accessible, can sometimes be sneered at by people in a way that often fails to recognise the nature of their judgement.

Here are two examples of research communication being accessibly simple. I think they’re great:

There's no reason why research communication online has to be simple or accessible. A lot of research blogging (including my own) falls into this category, in so far as that it's work in progress and/or aimed towards people within the author's own discipline. But I think the simple and accessible is important. When people worry about the TEDification of Higher Education, it's obvious to me where they're coming from. However their responses seems so rampantly pessimistic to me.

Unless you're a technological determinist who thinks that intellectual culture is immediately debased by social media then there's no reason to assume this simplification of complex ideas is an inexorable process. Sure, there are channel constraints but that's true of any mode of communication (not least of all the 20 minute conference presentation). There are affordances as well and these are what excite me. Rather than worry about the heights of intellectual culture being dragged into the 'infotainment' swamp, we should be getting better at ensuring that doesn't happen. It's not that the risk doesn't exist, it's simply that this is the wrong conversation to be having. Instead we should be looking to successful examples of accessibly simple research communication (for instance philosophy bites) and learning from them. There's also a much greater role which can be served, perhaps not by communications offices unfortunately, by universities in helping facilitate these kinds of projects. Though given Nigel Warburton left the OU because of institutional constraints on his activity, perhaps the institutional environment is less amenable to this then I tend to assume in my own more rampantly optimistic moments. That's the conversation we should be having. And we will be, hopefully, at the end of January.

1. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/30/we-need-to-talk-about-ted
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjJc
6. http://www.youtube.com/embed/qOP2V_np2c0?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
5 claves para entender la segunda generación del aprendizaje en línea | e-rgonomic (2014-04-20 18:51:45)

[...] una parte fundamental del ecosistema digital y cada vez será más importante. Parte del éxito de TED o YouTube está en sus contenidos portables, mayoritariamente breves ("snack") que permiten [...]

5 claves para entender la segunda generación del aprendizaje en línea (2018-11-22 14:01:49)

[...] una parte fundamental del ecosistema digital y cada vez será más importante. Parte del éxito de TED o YouTube está en sus contenidos portables, mayoritariamente breves ("snack") que permiten [...]

5 claves para entender la segunda generación del aprendizaje en línea - Abierto al Público (2019-01-08 16:02:05)

[...] una parte fundamental del ecosistema digital y cada vez será más importante. Parte del éxito de TED o YouTube está en sus contenidos portables, mayoritariamente breves ("snack") que permiten [...]

CfP: Quantified Self Research Network, March 25th (2014-01-10 08:00)

The next meeting of the [1]Quantified Self Research Network will take place on the 25th March at the University of Warwick from 1pm to 6pm. It's an informal seminar to present work in progress and is open to all.

If you would like to contribute then please send a short abstract and bio to mark@markcarrigan.net by February 1st. We use 'quantified self' in a broad sense inclusive of self-tracking, wearable computing and digital augmentation

We're also keen to build on the last seminar and move the discussion forward. Here are some of the key questions which emerged during the last meeting:

**What is distinctive about qs?**

People have tracked their health data for a long time such as keeping food diaries or measuring their weight. Is qs conceptually different to this or is it merely an automatisation and intensification? Does the quantity of the data produced equate to more of the same or a qualitatively distinct phenomenon?

**Are there inequalities in qs and self-tracking?**

The technologies required for qs are usually quite expensive even for a basic device and would certainly be out of the range of disposable income for many people and...

**Are we creating inequalities with the focus of research?**
If qsers are a relatively privileged group while it may be interesting to understand their practices and development of individual and group identities there are other people who cannot afford these practices, are uninterested or simply unaware of them.

**What about gender?**

The QS community seems to have more men than women as active participants. What are the reasons for this? If we take the broader notion of qs suggested by some of the presenters then often the more "mundane" or "domestic" approaches to self-tracking are more associated with women? Is there something fundamentally different about these?

**How do we identify a ‘non-user’?**

Although some of the methods of tracking have been used for a long time some of them are very new and it is currently unclear what kind of uptake they will have. We fairly easily identify a user (agreeing on a definition may be more complex) it is more difficult to identify a non-user. Are they people who do not practice qs or use the devices because they do not have access to them, they are not aware of them or they simply do not care? Is it right to define people as non-users of a fairly niche activity often engaged in by relatively privileged people? But with the amount of data which is generated about us (often without us knowing) are we not all quantified whether we like it or not?

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1. [http://quantifiedselfresearch.org/]()
Even amid the sunny escapist output of the USA network, the series is a baffling anachronism. It proudly resides in an alternate universe where oily, overcompensated attorneys are hailed as heroes. Where their Italian sports cars, designer apparel and addiction to winning at all costs are seen as enviable character traits.


It’s hard to argue with this criticism. I don’t even think the show is good in any straight forward sense. But I found it oddly compelling. My aim here is to explain the reasons for this, which all stem from the figure of Harvey Specter. In contrast to the bumbling charm of Mike, Harvey always knows what to do, always knows what to say and is admired and reviled in equal measure. Harvey Specter is a sociopath and, furthermore, he has worked to become this way. He is a man who is “against having emotions, not against using them” and he seeks to help Mike come to share this trait.

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGYzKGSDVYw]

I use the term ‘sociopathy’ in the admittedly slightly glib sense employed by Adam Kotsko in his [3]Why We Love Sociopaths: A Guide to Late Capitalist Television. His interest is in a class of characters who have increasingly come to dominate television and film in recent years. Though there are undoubtedly differences between Don Draper, Tony Soprano, Gregory House, Stringer Bell, Dexter et al (a list which seems a little incomplete without Vic Mackey) Kotsko argues that they share an indifference towards the moral order, manifested in a capacity to live outside social norms and yet also instrumentalize those norms to pursue their own agenda. While these characters might also share a degree of psychological complexity relative to their more shallowly characterised forebears, he suggests that,

It is hard to believe, however, that the exploration of the dark side of the human psyche for its own sake is behind the appeal of these sociopathic characters. What, then, is going on in this trend? My hypothesis is that the sociopaths we watch on TV allow us to indulge in a kind of thought experiment, based on the question: “What if I really and truly did not give a fuck about anyone?” And the answer they provide? “Then I would be powerful and free.” (pg 4)

Kotsko sees sociopathy, understood as a cultural type embodied in such characters, as constituting a form of ‘reverse awkwardness’. In contrast to sociopathy, where lack of social connection engenders a capacity to masterfully manipulate social norms, awkwardness obtains in being drawn in and “rendered powerless by the intensity of their social connection” (pg 5). The appeal of the former rests on the experience of the latter, as our familiarity with the acute force of social pressure yields a vicarious thrill when we are presented with the lives of those immune to such pressure. These are people who always know exactly what to do. They are unbound by social pressure. They masterfully manipulate those interactions, which in reality exist as geysers of awkwardness, in a way which runs so
contrary to our everyday experience. Their indifference to the social order translates as power and freedom. This is
a figure who "transcends the social, who is not bound by it in any gut-level way and who can therefore use it purely
as a tool". Against the backdrop of a "social order that is breaking down, making impossible demands while failing to
deliver on its promises" such characters become immensely compelling (pg 9-10).

The fascination with individuals 'who make their own rules' cannot be understood in isolation from the social
changes which are rendering 'the rules' paradoxically more transparent and yet also opaque. The preoccupation
with mastery, the capacity to glide through life while always knowing what to do and say, stems from the broader
conditions under which this is becoming ever less possible. I think Margaret Archer's notion of the 'reflexive
imperative' is useful here, as a way of understanding how the intensification of social and cultural change renders
individual reflexivity (reflecting on one's self in relation to one's circumstances) ever more imperative in daily live.
As she argues, "action needs to be at least recurrent in kind in order for norms to develop to cover it". Variety and
novelty can fuel awkwardness, much as they can also open up the possibility of a depth of connection and human
understanding which might formerly have been crushed by the stultifying weight of tradition and routine. These are
two sides of the same coin. The dilemma in everyday life consists in the difficulty of knowing if we are doing things
'right', if such a notion even makes sense and how others who are similarly confused respond to what we are doing,
whether it is 'right' or 'wrong'. The sociopath fascinates because they embody a fantasistic solution to this dilemma.
However in reality, we are faced with the 'awkward abyss',

Threatened by the awkward abyss, we cling to our declining social norms and ask them to be more than
they are or can be. We let them rule over us all the more as they fail to serve us, either by providing clear
expectations or approximating some form of justice or fairness. (pg 15)

But what would it be like to avoid this? What would it be like to just be? As Kotsko puts it, "if only I didn't
give a fuck about anyone or anything, we think — then I would be powerful and free" (pg 7). But we do, so we are
not. Even if we truly did want to bethis way, it is an option that is foreclosed by the weight of commitment. Or is it?
What intrigues me about Suits is how much of the narrative arc of the two main protagonists revolves around Harvey
Specter socialising Mike Ross into sociopathy. In seeking to 'mentor' Mike, Harvey is also teaching how he can be
emulated by him. What stops this being obnoxious is the gradual revelation of the extent to which Harvey has had
to cultivate his sociopathy, much as Mike must now do himself.

When we meet Harvey, he is pure presence. He controls every situation, always ready with a witty retort or a
strategic reaction. This also leaves himparadoxically absent. In the first half of the show's initial season, we see little
of Harvey qua person beyond occasional allusions to his longstanding friendship with his boss. In one scene Mike
attempts to come over to Harvey's apartment to share news of a breakthrough on a case. Having sternly ordered him
not to come round, he opens the door and we see Harvey in casual clothes for the first time in the show. However
the door is immediately closed on Mike (and on us). There's a sense in which Harvey seems almost unrecognisable
as a person, as his preoccupation with his own social mastery leaves his inner life entirely opaque. At one point he
boasts to Mike about having Michael Jordan on his speed dial, proving this to an initially sceptical Mike who then
turns and asks "who are you?".

It's a good question and one which is eventually addressed. As the first season approaches its end, we come
to see more of Harvey and how he came to be the person that he is. The meaningful relationship with his boss which
was intermittently hinted at (she supported him through law school and their relationship existed prior to this) finds
more direct reflection in the figure of his stated mentor, the New York District Attorney. In the first half of the season,
we see a Harvey who is already fully formed and self-subsistent. But later we begin to see how he came to be this
way. He was not born “the best closer in New York city”. He had to become him. He had to make himself into who
he wanted to be. We begin to see something of his inner life. We see that he hates to lose. We even see him lose
his temper. He reminds us that sociopaths, in Kotsko’s sense, are people too. They are admired people, as a search
through youtube for videos of Harvey will make clear.

4. file://www.youtube.com/embed/OMdr_XwWApe

Well analyzed and said

CfP: Digital Sociology PhD/ECR Workshop (2014-01-12 08:00)

Are you a PhD student or Early Career Researcher doing work in digital sociology? The BSA Digital Sociology Group
has organised a PhD/ECR Workshop where a limited number of participants can get feedback on their work from
peers and established academics in a supportive environment.
The event will take place between **11am to 4pm on February 19th at Goldsmiths College in South London**. Confirmed academic respondents are Emma Uprichard (Warwick) and Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) with one or two more TBC soon.

If you would like to register then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a short bio and 200 to 300 word abstract. The exact format of the day hasn’t been finalised yet but the intention will be to allow substantial time for discussion of each presentation so places will be extremely limited.

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**Pride, Propaganda and Poverty Porn: On Benefits and Proud (2014-01-13 08:00)**

*by Tracy Jensen*

A few weeks after [1]my first post on the eruption of this genre (where I examined We All Pay Your Benefits broadcast on the BBC), Five broadcast its own contribution to poverty porn, On Benefits and Proud. It took me a long time to watch the entire programme without switching off – and even longer to process my exasperations into this blog post. At the launch of Five, a little over fifteen years ago (under the name Channel 5), the limited broadcast frequencies meant that many UK households could not watch it: even now, the audience share for the channel is less than five per cent. Little wonder that the channel seems to be playing perpetual catch-up to its more established competitors, poaching successful formats from other channels and acquiring glossy US imports in an attempt to drive up ratings. Five has a reputation in the UK for tawdry and tasteless content: in its early years then-Culture Secretary Chris Smith noted “considerable concern” over its content, the Independent Television Commission called it “tacky” and the Daily Mail re-named it ‘Channel Filth’.

In this context, On Benefits and Proud was an obvious in-house production for Five – promising sensation, outrage and shock, and hopefully replicating the ratings successes of [2]earlier [3]examples [4]of [5]poverty [6]porn. On Benefits and Proud was the first of three programmes, described in Five’s commissions [7]newsletter as “documentary” and followed by Shoplifters and Proud and finally Pickpockets and Proud. Five were evidently proud of the equivalence they were drawing between breaking the law and claiming your legal entitlement to social security, promising that viewers of the And Proud series would “meet Britain’s most brazen petty criminals and people who know how to really work the welfare state. The characters are frank and unapologetic”. On Benefits and Proud is however ‘documentary’ in name only – there are no visits to economics experts that we saw in We All Pay Your Benefits, no attempt to present any social history (however brief) as in Benefits Britain 1949. The only cursory piece of (mis)information is presented at the very beginning, when the voiceover states that “the uk spends 40 billion on benefits for the unemployed” (the actual figure is £4.91 billion) followed by "and a big slice goes on single mums like Sophie and Emma". On Benefits and Proud does not aspire to educate, create dialogue or reflect – its purpose is simply to enrage the viewer, insistently repeating that the ‘frank and unapologetic characters’ on-screen are greedy, ungrateful and shameless. Its imagined viewer appears to be low-paid workers who are told that they are subsidising lifestyles they cannot afford for themselves. The toxic rhetoric of ‘worker/shirker’ at play here is hardening public attitudes towards welfare recipients and driving imagined wedges between those exploited under neoliberalism.

In his wonderful essay ‘The Space Between Shots', documentary maker Dai Vaughan reflects upon how to make ethical television, the tensions of editing and the conflicting demands of protecting artistic integrity and producing narrative coherence. Reflecting on his own practice, Vaughan states that "we wished to allow people to
draw their own conclusions from the films, as near as possible to the way one does in life” (1999:10). He rejected voiceover and commentary, believing that such tools take screen participants one step further from knowing what is being done to them. For television to truly be a public service, where social lives are reflected in a public mirror – a collaborative art, collaborative therapy even, between filmmaker and participant – Vaughan suggests that some films should end up in ribbons on the floor. I wonder what Vaughan would make of On Benefits and Proud, a programme which not only butchers the speech of the participants it claims to represents, but also overlays every fragment of footage with an insistent voiceover, interpreting every shrug, nod and glance with disdain and filling every moment with moral commentary. So little dignity for the participants and so little trust in the viewer: I suspect Vaughan would see it as propaganda.

Sophie and Emma – two friends living in Camden – are one of three ‘on benefits’ examples that are paraded over the next forty-five minutes. The programme also follows Julie and Vinny from Liverpool, and Heather from Gloucester. The camera follows Sophie and Emma as they explore the market and go for a manicure (which the voiceover ambiguously describes as “free”, suggesting that perhaps the film crew have paid for it) while the voiceover details the welfare amounts that each mother gets “as well as her flat”. Sophie and Emma flirt with the camera, joke with each other about shopping addictions and are perhaps naïve about how this footage will be used – but this also begs the question of how television producers mislead and betray participants to secure consent and generate sensational content. How was the involvement of Sophie and Emma secured? What were they told the programme would be about? The ‘and proud’ phrase of the title is distinctly lacking in the accounts of all the programme participants. Emma states clearly that she doesn’t want to be living “off the council for the rest of my life”: what she wants is “security”. Her ‘pride’ at being ‘on benefits’ is better described as resignation that her aspirations must be put on hold, or acquiescence to her priorities as a mother:

“At this moment in time I am on benefits because...not that I have to be...coz I don’t. How can I put it? Just...it is the way it is at the moment, until we can better ourselves. I think when you do work you do miss our on a lot of your children growing up.”

Such resignation is also apparent in the footage of Heather from Gloucester, who I think receives the worst treatment in the edit. Camera footage – focusing upon huge piles of washing, a washing machine spinning, long lines of drying clothes, children leaping into a paddling pool full of muddied water, thick peelings of potato in a bin – is repeated several times, offering a clear repeated visual message that Heather and her family are dirty, excessive, soiled and wasteful. You do not need to be a media scholar to see how little time the film crew have spent with the family, and how much they have recycled the same footage.

Picture: visual repetitions in Heather’s house

The voiceover reminds viewers several times that Heather has a large family (“super-sized”) and that she is
about to move into a new six-bedroom home, the value of which balloons over the course of the programme (far beyond the actual selling prices of comparative houses in the area) and is eventually described as a “mini-mansion”: “the sort of home ordinary taxpayers can only dream about”. Heather’s failure to be breathlessly grateful about the house is re-cast by the programme makers as ungracious insolence. Peering over the railway bridge into what will be her back garden, her understated pleasure is punctured by the voiceover stating that “the tenant doesn’t seem impressed”. The programme-makers show little empathy for a family who have been living in overcrowded temporary accommodation for eighteen months. But On Benefits and Proud is not the only media site where Heather is chastised: photographs of her family and the new home also appear in the pages of tabloid newspapers. Her distress at being misrepresented forms one key scene in the programme, where she sits at her kitchen table and reads the scandal her family has prompted. This scene might have been a powerful reflective moment for the On Benefits crew, who, along with the gutter press, form part of the media machinery which exploits poor families to secure sales, ratings and career portfolios. No chance. The voiceover simply adopts the language of the newspaper (‘dole queen’) for the remainder of the programme. When Heather is suddenly told that she can no longer move in to the house, her earlier caution seems justified. But rather than exploring the arbitrary mechanisms of re-housing, the voiceover frames this as rough justice; after all, for Heather ‘the dole queen’ to get a house (‘mini-mansion’), “well, it was always going to be controversial”.

Julie and Vinny from Liverpool are continually framed by the voiceover as taking advantage of the welfare system. They are described as “experts in life on the dole” whose “only hard graft is working the system”. We see Julie on the telephone checking her benefit payments and Vinny trying to arrange a move to another property. While the programme presents Julie and Vinny as insatiable welfare dependents (“Julie and Vinny want more”, “the couple are still not satisfied”), we might equally read the constant ‘work’ of negotiating with state agencies (checking, requesting, chasing up) as indicative of the tightening conditionality, increasing restrictions, and declining value of benefits.

The shift in welfare policy from a model of rights and entitlements to a model of suspicion, stipulation and means-testing has multiplied the kind of ‘work’ that claimants like Julie and Vinny must do to secure what they are legally entitled to. In an illuminating 1985 research project, Leo Howe found that claimants who ask questions, demand explanations or seem confident of their rights are described by officials as “aggressive, grasping, ungrateful, shameless, greedy [...] in contrast, what may be called the ‘ideal’ claimant is someone who merely answers questions, produces all the required documents, is polite and grateful and who does not mention complicating matters” (1985: 61). Almost twenty years later, the same interpretation is made in On Benefits and Proud and other [10]pseudo-documentaries, which assumes that benefits claimants are undeserving, scroungers, potential cheats and liars. When it is revealed that Julie and Vinny have found a way to make their benefits go a little further – adding a family relative to the tenancy and sharing the property with him – the commentary presents it as ‘cheating’ the system rather than a prudent (and completely legal) decision.
And with unexpected cash in the bank, its time to spend.” Julie and Vinny ‘splashing out’ – on groceries, gas and electric.

It seems that this programme is less about displaying a shameless ‘pride’ in being ‘on benefits’ (this is absent in the footage) and more about generating disgust at benefit claimants who have the temerity to claim their entitlements and be unashamed (as presumably they ‘should’ be). As Jamie Peck (2001) has so eloquently explored, the problem of work for those at the bottom of the labour market is that it is becoming less secure, lower paid and more exploitative. Yet rather than engaging with the problems of work (working conditions, wages, declining union power, post-industrial disinvestment, the movements of global capital), ‘documentaries’ such as this present a problem of work ethic. We are told that those ‘on benefits’ are lazy, workshy, enjoying their free ride and the luxuries that ‘ordinary workers’ cannot afford (neglecting to inform us that benefit levels in the UK are comparatively meagre, and are declining in value). We are told that benefit costs are ‘too high’ because there are too many people ‘on benefits’. Yet approximately half of the UK population receives a social security benefit of some kind – ‘on benefits’ does not simply mean unemployed, it also means low-paid, retired, disabled, sick, caring and unable to work. Julie has a disability. Emma, Sophie and Heather are single parents with young children. The claimants in On Benefits and Proud offer momentary resistant readings to the popular myths about them – Heather discusses the hate she has received via the press, Emma talks about going back to education, Julie criticises the less-than-minimum-wage job her daughter has taken – but their words are wilfully splintered and overlaid with an authorial and derisive voiceover they cannot know, or speak back to. This is cowardly television production at its worst, and its attempts to generate contempt for those claiming the benefits they are entitled to obscures the risks we all face around work and worklessness. Chris Jones and Tony Novak remind us in their furious account of the abuse and abandonment of the poor and poorly paid that:

“The pressures of modern poverty are never entirely removed from the majority of people, and although they struggle, with greater or lesser success, to keep their heads above water, the threat of redundancy, or of an incapacitating illness, threatens to reveal in full and devastating force the fundamental economic insecurity, the chasm of poverty, that capitalism has created for all but the very rich” (1999: 21)
Rather than accepting Five’s invitation to despise those who are ‘on benefits and proud’, perhaps we should all be proud of – and fight for – a benefits system which seeks to protect us from a failing labour market.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the Gender, Media and Class group (also known as FAF) who generously shared their insights and helped formulate the ideas in this post.

References


Tracy Jensen’s research explores the classed and gendered intersections of contemporary parenting culture, and how these are reproduced across social, cultural, media and policy sites. Tracy tweets at @Drtraceyjensen.

4. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xgvx
5. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uS2wV3ZfLQ0
7. http://www.about.channel5.com/node/1852
What is Digital Sociology? (2014-01-15 08:00)

[1]"What is Digital Sociology? " on Bundlr


The fascinating banality of business bullshit (2014-01-16 08:00)

[youtube=http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZYL39Dh4lA &w=640 &h=360]

There are many reasons not to listen to this nonsense. The glaring philosophical contradictions, the creepily messianic tones of his speech, the self-indulgent and naive politics underlying it. But as an emerging managerial discourse, upon which this man has apparently established a large consultancy and made a lot of money, it absolutely fascinates me. What explains the apparent receptiveness to at least some of these ideas? The speaker is apparently the "hottest advisor on the corporate virtue circuit". Is anyone else fascinated to discover there is a "corporate virtue circuit"?

As loathe as I am to say it, he does seem to be offering something marginally more substantive than a green-washing consultancy. But what is that something? There are two key ideas in this talk:

- the shift from what to how - replacing a focus on outcomes with a focus on technique, moving from quantity to quality
- the need to affectively engage workers, 'inspiring them' rather than motivating them with carrots or threatening them with sticks

The first seems like an insight which can only be marginally applied. In the speaker's terms, there's an inevitable limit to how far it can be scaled i.e. metrics don't emerge in organisations simply because 'leaders' have yet to encounter the speaker's 'insights'. The second point is more interesting. There's a [1]gloriously polemical Zero Book which explores the implications of this line of argument. Money is being 'wasted' through the 'disengagement' of workers. Therefore we need new technologies of affect to reach into the souls of workers, to inspire them and make them go the extra mile for the company. It's in this context that we should think about the uptake of self-tracking and gamification within contemporary organisation. I'd like to understand the sociology of this in much greater depth than I do. I'm astonished and fascinated by the bullshit which seems to thrive in the world of 'leadership', 'corporate virtue' and 'motivational speaking'.


2367
Instead of Googling capitalism try "reimagining capitalism" and you’ll find a more authentic story

Completely agree with the importance of the 2 bullet points above. I love the corporate democracy of employee engagement and hey, whaddya know, those workers have some damn good ideas too. There are always moments when interests align and it’s important to be able to find them and make use of them. We love working on these kind of projects, interestingly (as we are London based) many of our clients are US based.

Self-tracking and 'techorexia' (2014-01-17 08:00)

One of the (many) things which fascinates me about self-quantification tools is their seeming capacity to both increase individual autonomy and extend control over the individual. However my instinctive personal reactions to this tend to be a matter of seeing the former as good and the latter as bad, such that self-tracking seems pretty great until you start to think through its possible implications if and when taken up in the contemporary workplace. This [2]recent Guardian article left me newly aware of how utterly faulty this instinctive reaction of mine is. It discusses the potential role of self-quantification tools in enabling and entrenching eating disorders:

A [3]recent study by the Future Laboratory and Confused.com found that about 60 % of 18- to 34-year-olds in the UK have used a self-quantifying app or service to monitor their fitness levels, mental health and sleep patterns. These figures are mirrored across the pond. [4]According to a Pew report, 60 % of US adults say they track their weight, diet or exercise routine. And these numbers are rising. Indeed, it’s highly probable that you or someone you know will be have received or given some sort of wearable fitness product this Christmas season.

Evangelists of self-tracking technology proclaim that through data lies enlightenment. Measuring ourselves, they say, will help us understand ourselves. We will all end up several percentage points healthier and happier. However, I’m not sure this is right. While it is true that self-tracking can help push people into making positive lifestyles changes, it could also be argued that the growing popularity of this sort of technology is normalising neurotic behaviour.

When I was a teenager I went through a brief phase of compulsive self-quantification. It was called anorexia. I counted every calorie, weighed myself obsessively and exercised fanatically. For about a year my life was a running tally of energy-in and energy-out and I would diligently feed all these numbers into a sort of anorexia algorithm; regularly adjusting different variables in order to maximise weight-loss efficiencies. The end result was that I weighed six stone and my hair fell out in clumps. I looked grim, but I did get a good grounding in data analytics.

This was all a long time ago and I’m now fully recovered. This is in no small part due to the fact that I actively avoid weighing myself and try not to count calories. It took me a long time to stop seeing food as a spreadsheet of numbers and start thinking about it as nutrition. It would have taken me even longer if the sort of self-tracking technology that is ubiquitous today was available when I was ill. Dr Kimberly Dennis, a psychiatrist who specialises in eating disorder treatment, [5]estimates that about 75 % of her young-adult patients use their phones in a way that enables their eating disorders. Apps
that facilitate calorie-counting and food-logging are an anorexic's best friend and worst enemy. With society increasingly embracing a sort of "techorexia" that rewrites compulsive behaviour as healthy, it is becoming easier for people with serious eating disorders to pretend there's nothing wrong.


7. file://www.youtube.com/embed/dG0vLFFtZDs
Tina (2014-12-01 02:13:31)
I agree that these self-tracking apps can enable those with obsessive-compulsive tendencies to keep engaging in that behavior. As someone currently recovering from OCD and an eating disorder that was rooted in an obsession about my health, the rising use of these self-tracking apps is concerning to me, and I hope it’s a passing trend. Maybe my perspective is a little skewed, but in my life I’ve found that obsession with health is probably the most unhealthy thing there is.

Mila (2014-12-03 22:05:11)
As someone in remission from an eating disorder, I find these devices unhealthy for those who have ED or compulsive tendencies just as much as for those who do not. They are absolutely oversimplified. People have forgotten to listen to what their body is asking for, whether it be sleep, activity, or type of food because they get hung up on some number. Depending on our state of health, we have varying needs. The calorie counting game is obnoxious and needs to stop. It has been shown that our ‘standard’ 2000 calorie diet is hardly sufficient for the ‘average’ person anywhere from 10-45 years old, yet 2000 calories is pretty much law in many doctor’s offices. Next comes the ‘10,000 steps a day’ rule. Human beings are far too complex to reduce them to a number, and that includes the number on the scale. Thanks for writing this. My family lives by the numbers on the treadmill, fitbit, scale, waistband, and food label. And because of that behavior I endangered my health and my life for 12 years. Strangely enough, after treatment, ALL my ‘numbers’ on my lab work are finally perfectly in range. And I don’t count a damn thing.

CfP: Quantified Self Research Network, March 25th (2014-01-18 08:00)

The next meeting of the Quantified Self Research Network will take place on the 25th March at the University of Warwick from 1pm to 6pm. It’s an informal seminar to present work in progress and is open to all.

If you would like to contribute then please send a short abstract and bio to mark@markcarrigan.net by February 1st. We use ‘quantified self’ in a broad sense inclusive of self-tracking, wearable computing and digital augmentation.

We’re also keen to build on the last seminar and move the discussion forward. Here are some of the key questions which emerged during the last meeting:

**What is distinctive about qs?**

People have tracked their health data for a long time such as keeping food diaries or measuring their weight. Is qs conceptually different to this or is it merely an automation and intensification? Does the quantity of the data produced equate to more of the same or a qualitatively distinct phenomenon?

**Are there inequalities in qs and self-tracking?**

The technologies required for qs are usually quite expensive even for a basic device and would certainly be out of the range of disposable income for many people and...

**Are we creating inequalities with the focus of research?**

If qsers are a relatively privileged group while it may be interesting to understand their practices and development of individual and group identities there are other people who cannot afford these practices, are uninterested or simply unaware of them.
What about gender?

The QS community seems to have more men than women as active participants. What are the reasons for this? If we take the broader notion of qs suggested by some of the presenters then often the more "mundane" or "domestic" approaches to self-tracking are more associated with women? Is there something fundamentally different about these?

How do we identify a ‘non-user’?

Although some of the methods of tracking have been used for a long time some of them are very new and it is currently unclear what kind of uptake they will have. We fairly easily identify a user (agreeing on a definition may be more complex) it is more difficult to identify a non-user. Are they people who do not practice qs or use the devices because they do not have access to them, they are not aware of them or they simply do not care? Is it right to define people as non-users of a fairly niche activity often engaged in by relatively privileged people? But with the amount of data which is generated about us (often without us knowing) are we not all quantified whether we like it or not?

Evgeny Morozov on the Orgy of Amelioration (2014-01-20 08:00)

There's an interesting article on the Boston Review which reflects on the critical work of Evgeny Morozov, with a particular focus on his recent critique of ‘solutionism’. We've attached a video below for those unfamiliar with his line of argument.

The target of Evgeny's criticism is an "amelioration orgy" that he associates with Silicon Valley. "In the past few years," Evgeny says, "Silicon Valley's favorite slogan has quietly changed from 'Innovate or Die' to 'Ameliorate or Die.'" The book describes, powerfully and in insightful detail, a series of projects of amelioration: self-tracking devices that provide remedies for obesity, insomnia, heavy carbon footprints, and the limitations of memory. Information and communication strategies for remedying political corruption, hypocrisy, opacity, and all the hurdles to informed civic engagement. Algorithms that help us figure out what to read and where to eat. Information technology solutions for preempting crime, keeping the jerks out of the clubs, helping the needy while having fun, connecting with distant strangers while distancing from connected neighbors. You get the idea—though to really get it you need to read the book. (That said, the book is not really about Silicon Valley: it has more references to Jane McGonigal than to Steve Jobs. It is really about the assumptions of some intellectuals who write about information technology.)

The Net Delusion criticized the idea that new communication technologies would serve the emancipatory goal that proponents said they would serve. It focused on the effectiveness of the means in achieving the ends. To Save Everything is about ends, not means. Assume for the sake of argument, he says, that the ameliorative orgy ends in boundless success: obesity conquered; jerks out of the good clubs; bad guys incapacitated; politics cleansed of hypocrisy and opacity; forgetfulness solved; carbon footprints reduced; assistance to the needy turned into a fun game.

What could be wrong with that? Two things. Evgeny challenges the orgy of amelioration, first, by arguing that the ameliorative solutions often turn public problems into private ones: don't regulate the content of food; give people enough information to nudge them to better personal choices. They promise success by first diminishing the magnitude of the problem. Second, he celebrates the virtues of our vices. Some of life's good things come from ignorance rather than knowledge; opacity rather than transparency; ambivalence rather than certainty; vagueness rather than precision; hypocrisy rather than sincerity; messy inefficiency rather than tidiness; good enough rather than perfect; time-consuming, indecisive, head-holding pondering rather than algorithmic offloading or gamified nudges.

Evgeny is not alone in these ideas. La Rochefoucauld famously celebrated hypocrisy as the homage that vice pays to virtue. But Evgeny does not think he has much company in Silicon Valley (at least as he imagines it). The problem is that his Silicon-Valley-of-the-mind suffers from (and spreads to others) the ideological blinder of solutionism, aided and abetted by its companion blinder of Internet-centrism.
Those blinders fuel the ameliorative orgy—an orgy of fixing, in which the tools for fixing help to define (often by diminishing) what needs to be fixed in the first place. So we need to “unlearn solutionism” and the limits it imposes on our thinking in order even to ask whether all the technological amelioration is “worth the price.”


[3]
Social science students interested in qualitative research methods, and in particular the philosophy of qualitative interviews should have a read of an accessible and new text which can be a helpful stepping stone for those embarking on social research journeys. Professors Rosalind Edwards and Janet Holland provide an easily digestible introductory text for newcomers to the qualitative aspects of social research. Research can be daunting for beginners who are keen to engage in the interview process as a key method. What is Qualitative Interviewing? will no doubt provide the confidence for students to consider best practice when interviewing their participants.

Engaged social research must consider good practice from an ethical and philosophical perspective. This methods text provides a concise foundation to encourage budding researchers to think on a variety of useful perspectives: feminist, positivist, postmodern, psychoanalytic, interpretive, emancipatory and an approach grounded in critical realism.

The text interestingly provides an understanding of the many practicalities that can be involved when undertaking interviews, for example consent forms and recording equipment. Further, a strength of this methods book is that it provides an accessibly written understanding of the basic principles we must scrutinize with regards to the dynamics of power and emotion in social research. There is a section that examines how one might interview different sections of society: individuals from marginalised groups, as well as those from elite groups.

Different types of interviews are discussed for the reader to gain a rudimentary flavour of ethnographic interviews, focus group interviews, telephone interviews, and e-interviews. We can read about consideration of location too, and the implications of the settings we choose to conduct our social research. One of the key issues for researchers to consider when setting up an appropriate location for the interview may be privacy, for example. At other times, it may be more comfortable to conduct the interview in a public space. The authors also elaborate on the "walking and talking" interview method which has its own advantages.

There is also elementary information on interview tools such as talking, writing and seeing. Seeing, for instance, the authors inform the reader can be through photo elicitation (photos, paintings, film clips, advertisements as stimulus during interviews) or graphic elicitation (timelines or maps used with the participants). Writing can involve the use of texts produced for the interview by the researcher or by the researched.

What is Qualitative Interviewing? motivates the reader into pursuing a style of qualitative interviewing that is acutely aware of the social context of the interview, while reminding us that our style of interviewing must be flexible and responsive to new challenges in our ever evolving society. We cannot remain statically engrossed on a fixed ideal of the interview process. Instead we can need to move forwards and consider how innovative technological developments may impact upon our interviewing techniques.

Edwards and Holland highlight how qualitative interviewing is probably the most popular tool of qualitative research, and I believe that most of us would agree, and be keen to develop our skills in researching the social world through the art of the interview. Moreover, there is a useful annotated bibliography provided for students to consult for further reading purposes. I think this text would be extremely useful for social researchers who are at the early stages of social research, and want to gain a flavour of some significant features of qualitative interviewing practice and philosophy. Students on undergraduate courses and Masters courses will be encouraged by the authors’ use of uncomplicated terminology and straightforward tone that enables a quick and easy reading. A most definite must read for those plunging into their very first qualitative interviews.

Sadia Habib is a PhD candidate in Educational Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London.
Call for papers – Social media in social research (2014-01-21 08:00)

The Social Research Association will be hosting our fourth annual Social Media in Social Research conference on Friday 16 May 2014, at the British Library Conference Centre in London (Bronte room). This well-established event brings together social researchers from many different areas to share experiences and issues.

We would like to receive papers and presentations on this subject to be showcased at the event. These can be from the academic research, practice, policy and client communities and cover varied aspects of social research in social media, including case studies, lessons from practice, ethical and methodological issues, and integrating social media as part of a broader research methodology on a project.

Submissions of no more than 500 words should be made to the SRA office, [1]admin@the-sra.org.uk, by 10 March 2014. Please include a short (80-100 word) biography, and a phone number. In the spirit of new media, we are being loose in our interpretation of the term ‘paper’. The content needs to be sufficient for a 20-30 minute presentation, followed by questions.

Submissions to: [2]admin@the-sra.org.uk
Deadline: 10 March 2014

presschoice (2014-02-15 05:42:00)
Great news. This post is really effective on social media in social research. It is very important for creating and circulating in any field of research. Thank you. [1]British news


Gwen Sam (2014-03-19 18:36:45)
Very happily this call has gone out! Hope you’ll get lots of submissions. Will mark calendar and check back after the conference. Thank you

CfP: Junior Theorists Symposium (2014-01-21 14:00)

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

2014 Junior Theorists Symposium
Submission Deadline: 15 February 2014

We invite submissions for extended abstracts for the 8th Junior Theorists Symposium (JTS), to be held in Berkeley, CA on August 15th, 2014, the day before the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA). The JTS is a one-day conference featuring the work of up-and-coming theorists, sponsored in part by the Theory Section of the ASA. Since 2005, the conference has brought together early career-stage sociologists who engage in theoretical work.

We are pleased to announce that Marion Fourcade (University of California - Berkeley), Saskia Sassen (Columbia University), and George Steinmetz (University of Michigan) will serve as discussants for this year’s symposium.

In addition, we are pleased to announce an after-panel on “The Boundaries of Theory” featuring Stefan Bargheer (UCLA), Claudio Benzecry (University of Connecticut), Margaret Frye (Harvard University), Julian Go (Boston University), and Rhacel Parreñas (USC). The panel will examine such questions as what comprises sociological theory, and what differentiates "empirical" from "theoretical" work.

We invite all ABD graduate students, postdocs, and non-tenured professors who received their PhDs from 2010 onwards to submit a three-page précis (800-1000 words). The précis should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and a general outline of the argument. Be sure also to include (i) a paper title, (ii) author’s name, title and contact information, and (iii) three or more descriptive keywords. As in previous years, in order to encourage a wide range of submissions, we do not have a pre-specified theme for the conference. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes.

Please send submissions to the organizers, Daniel Hirschman (University of Michigan) and Jordanna Matlon (Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse), at [1]juniortheorists@gmail.com with the phrase “JTS submission” in the subject line. The deadline is February 15, 2014. We will extend up to 12 invitations to present by March 15. Please plan to share a full paper by July 21, 2014.

1. mailto:juniortheorists@gmail.com

Getting your research noticed by journalists (2014-01-22 08:00)

Interested in getting your research noticed by journalists? The LSE Impact Blog recently published an [1]article by a politics PhD student which reflected on this process. Engaging with the media is something which PhD students are rarely encouraged to do but it can be an enormously worthwhile experience. We’ve attached Stuart’s tips from his article below.
1. Be nice to your colleagues and supervisor – you never know when they might be in a position to do you a big favour.

2. Don’t break mirrors, walk under ladders and stay away from black cats – we need all the luck we can get.

3. Never pass up an opportunity to find an opportunity; if someone wants to talk about your research, meet them, no matter how busy you are. You don’t have to agree to work with them this time around, but you never know what they’ll be doing in the future, or who they might speak to, which could present another opportunity down the line.

4. Make yourself and your work as accessible as possible. Maintain an up to date web page with accurate contact information, make sure you have links to all the published work you can (e.g. conference papers, blog posts), and use every possible avenue to communicate your work (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, blog posts). Do anything you can to increase the chances of someone coming across you and your research – and of them quickly being able to determine if you’re the one they want to talk to – if they go looking for information in your field.

5. Always make sure you can tell someone about your research, why it’s important, and why they should listen to you in under a minute, and in a straight-forward and clear way. If they can’t work out what you’re doing, why it matters or why it might be useful to them (or their readers) within a minute of encountering you – and without the need for a crash course in political theory or quantitative data analysis – chances are they’re not going to.

6. If and when you have the chance to meet with someone to discuss your work, prepare, prepare and prepare. Make sure you familiarise yourself with whatever material you think is relevant (such as a pertinent news story, a policy relating to your research area, and particularly the articles or posts of yours they are likely to have read) so that you can easily and confidently answer their questions. The more impressed they are with you in that meeting, the more likely they are to remember you in future, and put their reputation on the line by recommending you to their own contacts.[2]http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/01/10/six-steps-maximising-luck-fox/

Are there any you would add? If you’d like more ideas then check out [3]this podcast we posted a couple of years ago.

This website’s raison d’etre was initially nebulous, tentative and ambitious all at the same time: we wanted to create a new online space for public sociology. We hoped to establish something that was more than a blog, yet neither an institutionally bound magazine, nor an academic journal. The existence of such a space would allow us to channel the eclectic range of interesting and useful content that we found ourselves wanting to share and publicise, as people who had much broader interests than our respective research topics. We also envisaged site to be independent from the academic institution/s or other workplaces at which we found ourselves at that moment or in the future. The very first post on the Sociological Imagination (hereafter also abbreviated as SI) pledged to ‘offer an ongoing forum within which the ethical and political commitments underlying much sociology can be explicitly and passionately linked to the actual practice of social research itself.’ Over time, the site’s purpose has stabilised in a pleasingly organic way and today it resembles a Boing Boing or Brainpickings for sociologists. We publish original articles, commentaries on current events or debates, research profiles and podcast interviews, as well as a diverse range of multimedia material from across the web. We have also begun to post calls for papers and event announcements, sometimes for projects in which we are involved ourselves, but more usually simply because we have read about them and found them interesting, or people have requested our help with promoting something and we are keen that the site be useful to others. In short, SI tries to provide a ‘community service’ to other sociologists by pooling together a serendipitous range of relevant sociological content and allowing space for both silent reading and public engagement.

At the time of writing, with the site’s third birthday imminent, it had received 263,523 visits (with 196,559 unique) and 396,773 page views. 35.7 % of these visitors came from the US, 24.3 % came from the UK, and other countries where the site is popular include Canada, Australia, Philippines, India, Germany and South Africa. The website had 5,371 twitter followers (now 10,000+) and 721 facebook friends. We have posted at least once daily, with
the initial post always at 8am leading to a current total of 1,371 posts. The regular 8 am post happened somewhat accidentally, but we decided to stick to it for the sake of consistency – and also, thinking of UK-based readers, it was a convenient time at the start of the working day. We imagined sociology-minded readers sitting down at their desks with a cup of coffee in the morning and waking up their own sociological imaginations by reading something brief and intriguing which they might otherwise not have found. This regularity led one twitter follower to describe the site as their ‘daily dose of the sociological imagination’ which we adopted as a slogan for the site, though it has more recently been supplanted by ‘committing sociology’ in homage to the diverting statement that ‘this is not a time to commit sociology’ made by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the wake of a foiled terror attack (25 April, 2013).

While the nature of the site has transformed into something predominately curatorial, collating all manner of multi-media material which we think both sociologically interesting and likely to interest sociologists, we do have an increasing sense that websites like ours have a more important role to play in academic life. They have the potential to establish and practice a more visible and more accessible sociology (and other disciplines). This is relevant both outside of and within higher education. The blogosphere provides a space for many elements which are often squeezed out by competition and specialisation in the neoliberal academy: discussions of scholarship and workflow, debates over broader disciplinary and professional questions, and an engagement with intellectual questions which is fun, driven by curiosity and purged of instrumental motivations.

The first of these topics in particular poses a challenge to digital sceptics who would see online activity as a diversion from the ‘real’ business of academic life. This attitude, however, neglects the fact that illuminating, sophisticated and reflective discussions about scholarship and work in progress are increasingly common online and, in a more quotidian sense, the full range of social media tools being used by academics are making formerly ‘backstage’ aspects of academic practice newly visible. Moreover, these type of discussions are often more fruitful than traditional academic modes of publishing because of the frequency with which they take place across, often even relying on, boundaries of specialisation. One of us has written elsewhere about the idea of continuous publishing and its benefits not only for readers, but also for the writer (Carrigan & Lockley, 2013). If we treat academic blogging as a continuous mode of publishing (that is, a continuous mode of making work public), the blog becomes an active space in which to brainstorm and store new ideas, catalogue notes on literature, reflect on fieldwork, develop future texts or projects, organise and refine your thoughts and arguments, and - thanks to its publicity - engage in discussion with others. Importantly, it can also help fight writer’s block and procrastination. Furthermore, the relatively insubstantial time investment required to follow someone’s blog or twitter feeds means it becomes possible to learn about particular topics, sometimes whole areas of inquiry, in a way which simply would not be feasible if the only option was to reach journal articles or monographs outside of one’s own research specialisation (because of time constraints, the financial expense required, or even because of not knowing about their existence).

There is an important sense in which the scholarly web is becoming a playground for para academics: the torrents of open culture both demand and reward creative engagement outside ones own formal training. However, what is even more exciting is the extent to which digital communication makes sociology visible and accessible outside the academy - to those who have completed sociology degrees or other qualifications but have long since drifted away, as well as others who simply stumble across sociological materials online (the frequency with which this occurs suggests that, contra sceptics, the internet will not lead to the death of serendipity). As a sociological tool, websites like SI have several important advantages over traditional academic publishing:

- First and foremost, sites such as SI have a democratising effect on sociology. They offer the potential of both instant and continuous feedback – without requiring it. Unlike a journal article, they can host comments and discussions literally on the same page as the text which prompted them. They also allow almost real time written discussion which, unlike conference papers, is unlimited in time and volume, yet is not forced upon those readers who do not wish to comment.

- They are displaced/placeless, allowing access to the content to anyone regardless of limitations of place,
time, disability, or other constraints.

- They are an easy ways to record more fleeting and less well developed arguments which could be (or not be) developed further at any time in the future, either by their author or by a reader.

- As we have both found by writing about eclectic content, and hopefully readers have also found by reading it, this format gives food for thought and opens up new avenues for using sociological tools for the analysis of new problems. Recently we have discovered and posted about a new subfield of sociology called Astrosociology; about one scholar’s work on 3D visualisation of Kant’s ‘Critique of pure reason’ which is redefining epistemology and the sociology of learning, Animal studies, and other ‘niche’ topics within sociology about which we previously knew little or nothing at all. The curatorial capacity in which we explore these topics lends a purpose to the task of curiosity-driven exploration - which, in turn, belies the oppressive habits of mind often introjected within graduate school, e.g. ‘I can’t waste time on this just because it’s interesting.

Nonetheless, it still seems that a process of mainstreaming the digital, which has arguably begun in some disciplines, remains far away in sociology. This creates a gap between traditional sociology and the young, increasingly computer literate generations of sociology students and future sociologists. There are notable exceptions (our favourite group blogs include Cyborgology, Sociological Images and Everyday Sociology) and there has been an observable growth of sociologists blogging in a personal capacity. Nonetheless the relative absence of sociological voices from the blogosphere has been notable and, it seems, this is indicative of a broader failure to seize the opportunities afforded by digital tools. Daniels and Feagin (2011) describe how the uptake of digital tools in sociology lags behind that which can be seen in the humanities:

‘All these changes in scholarship have been taken up with a great deal more enthusiasm by some in the academy than others. Our colleagues in the humanities have embraced digital technologies much more readily than those of us in sociology or the social sciences more generally. A casual survey of the blogosphere reveals that those in the humanities (and law schools) are much more likely to maintain academic blogs than social scientists. In terms of scholarship, humanities scholars have been, for more than ten years, innovating ways to combine traditional scholarship with digital technologies. To name just a two examples, scholars in English have established a searchable online database of the papers of Emily Dickinson and historians have developed a site that offers a 3D digital model showing the urban development of ancient Rome in A.D. 320. There are significant institutions being built in the digital humanities including the annual Digital Humanities Conference, which began in 1989, and the National Endowment for the Humanities’ Office of Digital Humanities.

Sociology lags far behind in the adoption of digital tools for scholarly work. As Paul DiMaggio and colleagues noted in 2001, "sociologists have been slow to take up the study of the Internet" (“The Social Implications of the Internet,” Annual Review of Sociology, 2001, p.1). While there are notable exceptions, such as Andrew Beveridge’s digitizing of Census maps ([1]www.socialexplorer.com), when looking at the field as a whole these sorts of innovations are rare in sociology. In contrast to the decade-long conference in the digital humanities, there is no annual conference on “digital sociology.” Sociology graduate students Nathan Jurgensen and PJ Rey recently organized a conference on “Theorizing the Web,” that drew luminaries in sociology Saskia Sassen and George Ritzer, but this is the first sociology conference (that we are aware of) to focus exclusively on understanding the digital era from a sociological perspective. Analogously, there is no large institution, like the NEH seeking to fund digitally informed sociological research. The reasons for this sociological lag when it comes to the Internet are still not clear, but some point to the problems of getting digital publication projects recognized by tenure and promotion review committees.’
Though we are sympathetic to such arguments about the desirability of winning recognition for digital publication projects, we would suggest that the point can be overstated and that, furthermore, doing so risk losing sight of the unprecedented freedom presently afforded by these technologies for para academics. Calls for 'recognition' of digital scholarship too easily collapse into an instrumentalist logic which calls for blogging et al to be incorporated within the metrics of prevailing audit culture. This is an understandable aim for those who are precariously situated within the contemporary academy but nonetheless perhaps a short-sighted one. Digital opportunities could too easily slide into digital opportunism: if 'digital publication projects' win 'recognition' within institutions then what is to stop the pathologies which afflict the contemporary academy (audit culture, instrumentalism and alienation) migrating to the digital sphere? Is institutional recognition of digital scholarship worthwhile if it distorts the practices (which at their best are paradigmatic of communicating for its own intrinsic value rather than extrinsic institutional rewards) which render digital scholarship attractive in the first place?

In the rest of this chapter we link C. Wright Mills’ concept of ‘sociological imagination’ with our own experiences of learning, sharing, thinking and creating online as sociologists, as well as how this work has mattered to us and, we hope, mattered to other people. Much of our discussion addresses sociology (and sociologists) specifically because of our own academic circumstances and the aforementioned digital lag observable when sociological engagement online is compared to other disciplines. Nonetheless, we hope the discussion retains some relevance beyond the small corner of the academy we contingently (and precariously) occupy.

The Sociological Imagination

The concept of Sociological Imagination entered circulation in the 1959 book of the same name by the American Sociologist C. Wright Mills. It moves from a prophetic opening (‘Nowadays men often feel that their private lives are a series of traps’) through to a lacerating critique of the dominant trends within American sociology at the time (offering a scathing series of ‘translations’ of passages taken from the grand doyen of 20th century American sociology, Talcott Parson, which though surely offering amusement to endless cohorts of grad students, probably was not the author’s wisest career move) and an elaborated vision of what sociology could be. This centres around the eponymous concept of the Sociological Imagination - the quality of mind which ‘enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society’ and so ‘understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals’ (Mills, 1959: 5). In doing so, Mills laid out a vision for sociology, emphatically political and engaged, founded on drawing out the interconnections between the grand sweep of history and the unfolding of individual lives. However, it was far from universally praised at the time of publication, as can be seen in the early review of the book by Edward Shils quoted in Gane and Back (2013):

“Imagine a burly cowpuncher on the long, slow ride from the Panhandle of Texas to Columbia University, carrying in his saddle-bag some books which he reads with absorption while his horse trots along. Imagine that among the books are some novels of Kafka, Trotsky’s History of the Russian Revolution, and essays of Max Weber. Imagine the style and imagery that would result from the interaction of the cowboy-student and his studies. Imagine also that en route he passes through Madison, Wisconsin, that seat of a decaying populism and that, on arriving at his destination in New York, he encounters Madison Avenue, that street full of reeking phantasies of the manipulation of the human will and of what is painful to America’s well-wishers and enjoyable to its detractors. Imagine the first Madison disclosing to the learned cowpuncher his subsequent political mode, the second an object of his hatred...The end result of such an imaginary grand tour would be a work like The Sociological Imagination”

Nonetheless, the book has come to be seen as a sociological classic, not least of all because of the value which so many sociologists have recurrently found in its passionate challenge to the professionalisation of sociology and the ivory tower intellectualism which it can so often engender. Crucially, the sociological imagination is not something
over which professional sociologists can be said to have a monopoly. Indeed the extent to which this sensibility finds itself manifested within the academy can be taken as an index of the relative vitality or otherwise of the discipline. Mills was intensely critical of the professional sociology from which he found himself ever more estranged over time, lamenting the tendency of his contemporaries to ‘slip so readily into unintelligibility’. He identified the roots of this problems as inhering in the widespread tendency within the professionalising sociology of his time to self-consciously seek legitimization as a scientific discipline. As Gane and Back (2012) go on to write,

‘For sociology to be to be effective, especially beyond the academy, it must have literary ambitions. Mills’ assessment of the quality of the sociological writings of his time is damning. He argues that there is a “serious crisis in literacy” in which sociologists are “very much involved” (1959:239). Mills’ position here is an extension of his earlier attack on Parsons and Lazarsfeld, and is just as fierce in tone. He observes that “a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences” (Mills, 1959:239), and adds that this style of writing has nothing to do with the complexity of the subject matter. Mills explains the prevalence of this style, instead, in terms of a quest for status. He declares: “Desire for status is one reason why academic men slip so readily into unintelligibility. And that, in turn, is one reason why they do not have the status they desire” (Mills, 1959:240). This thirst for status is said to be driven by an underlying desire for the sociologist to achieve recognition as a “scientist”; something, he argues, that led to sociology written in clear and accessible prose (including, presumably, his own work) to be dismissed by many as mere journalism.’

Mills saw the promise of sociology as being undermined by this quest for status and the sclerotic forms of expression he saw associated with it, with sociologists prone to ‘stereotyped ways of writing which do away with the full experience by keeping them detached throughout their operations’ almost as if ‘they are deadly afraid to take chance of modifying themselves in the process of their work’ (Mills, 2001: 111). He saw this failure of vision and expression in what could almost be construed as epochal terms, representing a failure of sociological imagination at precisely the moment when this distinctive sensibility was most needed. Mills was, in many ways, estranged from the academic establishment and this was, in part, both cause and a consequence of his critique. This estrangement gave him a degree of intellectual freedom from the cultural norms prevalent within the professional sociology of his day and this was in turn entrenched by the manner in which he employed that freedom to pull apart many of the orthodoxies which he saw as so inimical to his understanding of sociology’s promise. This estrangement can be overstated and, though this is a chapter about para academic life, it would be manifestly untrue to suggest by way of a-historical retrospection that Mills himself was a para academic. Clearly he was not. Nonetheless, he could, perhaps, serve a viable role model for para academics - in his case the estrangement was predominantly cultural rather than structural but, nonetheless, there was estrangement. The relationship between his unceasingly critical orientation towards professional sociology and the profoundly creative use of the freedom afforded to him by this critical outlook and relative estrangement is worth reflecting on. His position in relation to the sociological establishment afforded him a degree of freedom and he used this to diagnose the ills which afflicted the sociology of his day and, crucially, pursued a lifelong project of rethinking sociological craft in view of these disciplinary and institutional ailments. We would suggest that the blogosphere affords a parallel degree of freedom to para academics: a place of respite from the distorting tendencies engendered by the pursuit of status within higher education. While our discussion in this chapter focus predominantly on blogging, there is a broader claim to be made here about ‘digital scholarship’ and its complex relationship to the broader academic world within which it is emerging. The notion of digital scholarship drawn upon here is largely that offered by Weller (2012) who understands the constitution of a ‘digital scholar’ in a deliberately open way:

‘A digital scholar need not be a recognised academic, and equally does not include anyone who posts something online. For now, a definition of someone who employs digital, networked and open approaches to demonstrate specialism in a field is probably sufficient to progress.’

It would be absurd to claim that all digital scholars are para academics - manifestly this is not the case. Nor would it be tenable to suggest that all para academics are, could or should become digital scholars (even if we would not
be surprised if this happens in a couple of decades when today’s youngest generations enter professional research). Nonetheless, we argue there is a contingent complementarity between the role of the digital scholar and that of the para academic, with the embrace of the former offering substantial opportunities to those thrown into the latter role. As Weller (2012) goes on to observe, ‘in a digital, networked, open world people become less defined by the institution to which they belong and more by the network and online identity they establish’ and, as a consequence, ‘a well-respected digital scholar may well be someone who has no institutional affiliation’. Part of the difficulty faced by those precariously employed within the academy is the long standing dependence of those so positioned on institutions as the means through which one can come to articulate a viable and efficacious professional identity. This is precisely the dependence which digital scholarship is weakening and it is for this reason that we should treat calls for digital scholarship to be ‘recognised’ with caution. The risk is that incorporating digital outputs too readily into the evaluative frameworks of contemporary higher education might erode many of the things which are so refreshing about the uses which academics are making of these online tools. As it stands academic bloggers enjoy a degree of freedom from the sorts of pressures which concerned Mills, which have surely only intensified and expanded since the time he was writing, which makes it imperative that this not be threatened through too hasty a process of mainstreaming. Digital scholarship can, at its best, allow alternative infrastructures of communication and evaluation to emerge which, as well as being personally liberating to those active within them, holds out the promise of providing an independent vantage point from which the deleterious tendencies within the broader academy can be identified, analysed and resisted. This can take a variety of forms:

1. The boundary between academic scholarship and ‘public engagement’ becomes blurred. Even digital scholarship geared towards a narrowly specialised audience enjoys an intrinsic visibility which traditional scholarship does not. In so far as digital scholars work with an awareness of this visibility it inculcates a tendency towards openness, in the sense of disrupting many of the habitual modes of academic expression which are intricately tied up in traditional modes of academic publishing. Or in other words: it’s easier to avoid the temptation to use jargon when blogging than it is when writing a journal article because you are aware that readers of the former are far more unlikely to understand the jargon than readers of the latter. The tendency to ‘slip so readily into unintelligibility’ decried by Mills is checked by the peculiarly public form of writing entailed by blogging and other modes of digital scholarship.

2. This visibility goes hand-in-hand with discoverability. It is easier to discover those engaged in digital scholarship both for others within the academy and those outside it. This has important implications for the public status of academic work. While the traditional understanding of public intellectualism has been bound up in broadcast media, digital communications facilitates narrowcasting (Poe, 2012). The image of the public intellectual as a world renowned figure communicating globally about issues of universal concern can give way to a much more democratic image of academics in general communicating about their research to those who find it interesting. There will always be such an audience, no matter how niche the topic appears to be, yet prior to digital communications it was impossible to establish the necessary connections - hence the hegemony of the broadcast model of public intellectualism.

3. Many taken for granted norms pertaining to scholarly communications are, at least in part, functions of the limitations inherent in non-digital communication systems. For instance as Weller (2011: 156) observes, ‘a journal article is a certain length, and the journal publication cycle is determined as much by the economics of printing as it by any consideration of the best methods for sharing knowledge’. This is an example of an interconnection between form (the journal article) and function (communication of scholarly knowledge) having been shaped by the economics of analogue technology. Digital technology creates opportunities to find innovative forms for long standing functions and because of their relatively peripheral status within the academy, para academics are best placed to undertake the innovation and experimentation to which this digital turn so naturally leads.

4. Digital scholarship also tends to reveal the linkages between what Bourdieu (2003) describes as public scholarship and private commitment. Whereas the two are clearly demarcated within mainstream academic culture, with the legitimacy of the former often seen to rest on the exclusion of the latter, digital communication tends
to preclude such a demarcation. This helps create the possibility of a more up front and less alienated social science, more open to those outside the academy and clearer about the beliefs and values which underlie scholarly projects.

5. Some of the advantages of para academic work are accompanied with disadvantages. As Weller (2012) observes, peer networks are integral to scholarship, representing the ‘people who scholars share ideas with, collaborate with on research projects, review papers for, discuss ideas with and get feedback from’. Yet, before the rise of the internet and, more latterly and significantly, social networking tools, the constitutions of this peer network was limited to those with whom one interacted in person on a regular basis. The rise of Internet communication has enabled ‘scholars to build up a network of peers who perform the same role in their scholarly activity as the networks founded on face-to-face contact’ thus reducing the disadvantages inherent in the enforced mobility; however, the basic inequality between the para academic and the traditionally employed academic remains, for example in caused by the relative lack of resources and precarious employment conditions which typically characterise the working life of the para academic.

Our Sociological Imagination

This project has value for us because of both its sheer continuity (we have worked willingly on the site for three years now) but also the independence which that continuity has in relation to each of our respective trajectories through the (para)academic world. It is something which has consistently accompanied us in our professional involvements, in the sense that it has had direct and indirect implications for our other activities and professional identities, however it has always been experientially distinct from these. We experience it as a form of free space which provides a public forum for what is otherwise private activity: thinking, reading around other subjects, and generally having fun through understanding society and developing analytical tools. The fun and creative aspect of sociology seems to be insufficiently present in the academic curriculum: or at least less so than in mathematics and computer science (as one of us has discovered through her recent fieldwork). It would probably be inaccurate to suggest the project is utterly insulated from instrumental reasons, but these are entirely secondary: i.e., we have become aware of ways in which the project has been instrumentally useful to us but we never sought to pursue it for these reasons. It is a liberating counterbalance to the frequently stifling and laborious experiences of writing conference papers, articles for publication, or a PhD thesis. The effort that goes into crafting a small SI piece is sometimes no smaller than the effort that went into an equally-sized portion of a journal paper. But each SI article is driven by pure curiosity and interest – and some are more polished than others. Part of this freedom, obviously, comes with the different genre and size of the articles that appear on SI. Most of the site’s content is written in a less formal style and the range of possible formats is almost infinite, unlike the strictly regimented format and style of, say, journal articles in sociology. Over the years, we have both found that this free format is precisely what has allowed us to post consistently, regardless of any other commitments we have, so as to never put off writing an SI post when an interesting idea comes to mind. We have developed an informal writing style, much like a cross between sociology and journalism, but without losing the ability to write serious pieces. Furthermore, it is partly thanks to this free format that we have gained an eclectic range of both ad hoc and consistent contributors, some of whom are freelance sociologists, others students in the social sciences, others in academic positions, and yet others non-sociologists who have an interest and something to say about one of our topics. Our consistent sociological ‘thinking aloud’ through SI has certainly been beneficial for our personal writing abilities, but more importantly, this format has suited the purpose of what we imagine as public sociology. It is sociology spilling out of the confines of academia into the broader world, but without completely severing the link with academic research or losing sight of the worthwhile aspects of research embedded within institutions. Admittedly, the informality and the lack of restraints on format also pose constrains: while the range of SI topics is wide, the coverage tends to be superficial, contrary to the very narrow focus of a journal or conference paper (although some of the posts have featured extensive literature research and analysis and could well form drafts for academic papers or book chapters). This is why we do not see SI as something that either of us could do full-time, or something for which we ought to abandon our other (academic or non-academic) research which affords us the depth and engagement with one particular sociological topic or subdiscipline. In fact, our work on SI has benefitted from our respective academic work and our empirical research experience - just as it, in turn, neatly complements our other academic and non-academic work.
Although the Sociological Imagination exists predominantly online, it often leaves the virtual world and crosses over to offline activities, some of which can be seen as academic and others para academic. An example of this cross-over is a workshop which we organised in June 2011, devoted to the sociology of sport. The workshop took place at Warwick University (where both of us were then based). It brought together three researchers in the sociology of sport, was easily accessible to anyone at the university, and open to anyone else outside the university who was able to attend. The 'offline' workshop was preceded by a week of one or two daily posts on different aspects of sociology of sport, introducing researchers and guest articles, and followed by audio and video podcasts of the presentations and discussions. Since neither of us is a specialist in the sociology of sport, we did not write original articles, but approached several researchers of sport for guest contributions. Our role as editors focused on finding relevant authors and contributions, curating interesting content, linking the online theme with the workshop, planning and crafting each of the posts, and providing both an online and a physical space for researchers and students interested in sociological aspects of sport. The Week of Sport on SI thus had several functions: on the one hand, it resulted in a typical academic workshop, but on the other, it was also a joint online-offline space-time which created a forum for topic-driven public sociology, publicising the work of researchers and accessible to anyone with an interest in the topic, including our online readers who could not attend the workshop. This and other occasions when we have linked SI with the 'offline world' have been equally rewarding in terms of quality of discussion, the possibility for us or our readers to follow up on an interesting topic or meet interesting researchers in real (or virtual) life. In its own limited and local way, this felt as if the digital activity which had become so important to us had 'spilled over' from its artificial mooring with the 'virtual' world, coming to occupy what was then the shared institutional space within which our mundane day-to-day para academic lives unfolded. It pointed to exciting new possibilities which, it would feel dishonest not to point out, we have not yet explored to the fullest, as the exigencies of daily life inevitably preclude a further opening of the cracks that suddenly became visible in established institutional structures. But the possibilities are exciting nonetheless and they point to an alternative trajectory for the digital activity of para academics: one which resists the temptation to leverage digital scholarship for instrumental gain and opposes its incorporation into the existing audit culture. Instead we have tried to point towards a potential expansion out of para academic digital scholarship which opposes its incorporation into existing structures. We have suggested C. Wright Mills as an exemplar of the public and professional orientations this might involve and sought to 'join the dots' between contemporary discussions of public sociology, digital scholarship and para-academia. References Bourdieu, P. (2003). Firing Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market 2. London: Verso. Carrigan, M., & Lockley, P. (2013) Continual publishing across journals, blogs and social media maximises impact by increasing the size of the 'academic footprint'. Retrieved June 30th from [2]http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/10/26/academic-footprint/ Daniels, J., & Feagin, J. (2011). The (coming) social media revolution in the academy. Fast Capitalism, 8(2). Gane, N., & Back, L. (2012). C. Wright Mills 50 Years On: The Promise and Craft of Sociology Revisited. Theory, Culture & Society, 29(7-8), 399-421. Mills, C.W. (1959). The Sociological Imagination. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Mills, C.W. (2001). C. Wright Mills: Letters and Autobiographical Writings. University of California Press. Poe, M. (2012). What Can University Presses Do? Retrieved June 30th from http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2012 /07/09/essay-what-university-presses-should-do Weller, M. (2011). The Digital Scholar: How technology is transforming academic practice. London: Bloomsbury Academic.


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Nam Tran (2014-01-23 21:37:19)
Great article. With this site, and others like it, it allows people who are unable to attend post-secondary schools (ie. due to finances) to learn about and experience sociology. It’s as if you are taking what is intended for the upper class and giving it to the middle/lower classes.
Roy Bhaskar on the Fetishisation of Facts (2014-01-23 08:00)

What is a ‘fact’? This deceptively simple question provides a route into the most pressing issues concerning the philosophy of science. In a short essay, "Philosophies as Ideologies of Science: A Contribution to the Critique of Positivism", Roy Bhaskar offers a compelling answer to this question which impressively incorporates an epistemic account of knowledge alongside a sociological account of theories of knowledge. It is directed towards a critique of positivism which, he writes, “is, in the first instance, a theory of the nature, limits and unity of knowledge”. On the positivist account, knowledge is of events which are revealed in perception. The generalisation of such knowledge involves identifying the patterning of such events, in space and over time, with sense perception being understood to exhaust the possible objects of knowledge ([1]Bhaskar 1989: 49). Underlying this is an (often implicit) ontology of closed systems and atomistic events. However Bhaskar also claims that any theory of knowledge also presupposes a sociology “in the sense that it must be assumed, implicitly if not explicitly, that the nature of human beings and the institutions they reproduce or transform is such that such knowledge could be produced” ([2]Bhaskar 1989: 49). This conception of “people as passive sensors of given facts and recorders of their given constant conjunctions" has important implications ([3]Bhaskar 1989: 51). Given that constant conjunctions are worked for in laboratories rather than discovered in nature, it follows that the intelligibility of the objects of scientific investigation must be understood as ontologically independent of the activities of human beings but conversely that the concepts under which we encounter them must be seen as part of an irreducibly social process of science.

Thus experiences (and the facts they ground), and the constant conjunctions of events that form the empirical grounds for causal laws, are social products. But the objects to which they afford us access, such as causal laws, exist and act quite independently of us.

Now positivism can sustain neither the idea of an independent reality nor the idea of a socially produced science. Rather what happens is in a way quite extraordinary – for, as in the interests of a particular conception of philosophy, it allows a particular conception of our knowledge of reality to inform and implicitly define the concept of the reality known by science, these ideas (absolutely minimally necessary conditions for an adequate account of science) become crossed, so that we have a naturalised science purchased at the expense of a humanised nature. ([4]Bhaskar 1989: 51)

It is in this ‘transference’ that we begin to locate the ideological implications of positivism. Positivism bequeaths us an alienated understanding of science, repudiating its social nature, as well as a mystified account of nature, cleaved to our putative sense perceptions of it. This is what leads to the reification of facts. If we view "what is apprehended in immediate sense-experience as a fact constituting an atomistic event or state of affairs, existing independently of the human activity necessary for it" then we come to see ‘facts’ as self-subsistent and independent of human activity. Furthermore, as Bhaskar puts it, “when the conjunctions of such facts are reified and identified with causal laws, science becomes an epiphenomenon of nature” ([5]Bhaskar 1989: 52). In coming to such a view, where ‘facts’ can be read from ‘nature’, we deny the social character of science, particularly "its character as work involving the transformation of antecedent objects, both material and ideational" ([6]Bhaskar 1989: 52). The point is not to
repudiate ‘facts’ but rather to recognise the grounding of facts on things and constant conjunctions on causal laws. Human beings produce facts but they do so through collective labour of a particular sort, orientated towards both material and ideational objects, which seeks to intervene in and accumulate knowledge of a natural world irreducible to this labour.

Underpinning this is a fallacious image of a “moment of subjectivity which is free from the effects of all pre-formed or extraneous, including theoretical content” ([7]Bhaskar 1989: 52). For positivism this “autonomized sense-experience constitutes the form in which knowledge is acquired and the reified fact the content that is expressed” ([8]Bhaskar 1989: 54). The atomicity of events necessitated by this account of sense experience in turn entails the constancy of conjunctions as a condition for general knowledge. I’m not 100% certain I follow Bhaskar’s point here but I think he is suggesting that positivism offers no other ‘building blocks’ out of which general knowledge can be constructed, such that it becomes a matter of establishing logical relations been atomistic impressions of events rather than the achievement of deeper knowledge of natural processes. For positivism “facts and their conjunctions both exhaust the real content of science and determine the knowable nature of the world, or fix science in its ontology” ([9]Bhaskar 1989: 54). In rejecting the ‘reification of facts’, Bhaskar’s point is not that ‘facts’ are not ‘things’. Rather he is arguing that “facts are things, but they are social not natural things, belonging to the transitive world of science, not the intransitive world of nature” ([10]Bhaskar 1989: 55). There are non-reified accounts of facts which he believes to be problematic, as correctly understanding the relation between facts and human activity poses a conceptual and methodological challenge extending beyond the simple recognition that we do not ‘discover’ facts in the natural world.

One might take ‘a fact’ as a synonym for a ‘true assertion’ or alternatively, to consider Strawson’s well-known formula, to attempt to explicate it as what a true statement states. But this will not do – for we make statements, but we do not make facts (rather it is as if they were made for us); and it is unclear, to say the least, how statements can do anything. Why do we not make facts? The answer is because, as the etymology of the word suggests, they are already made. In stating facts we are acknowledging results already achieved, the results being achieved (in the domain of empirical discourse) by readings, of which the varieties of sense experience constitute special kinds of skill. But of course we discover as well as state results: the facts pre-exist their discovery as results to be achieved (just as they pre-exist their statement as achievements). They must thus be conceived as potentialities of the conceptual schemes or paradigms that govern our enquiries, which when actualised constitute discoveries. A fact, then, is a potentiality actualised in discovery, sustained in practice (both discursive and on-discursive) and objectified in sense-perception ([11]Bhaskar 1989: 60).

The cognitive structures in virtue of which ‘facts’ become possible are reproduced or transformed by human activity. However we do not as such create them because we are always positioned in relation to them and, in many senses, dependent upon them. This is why the notion of scientific labour is so important for Bhaskar’s project to critique positivism while also avoiding conventionalism. It’s in this sense that our tendency to “read the world as if it were constituted by facts” becomes important, as “what is involved in the categories in terms of which positivistic philosophical consciousness understands the concept of a fact is not therefore so much a crass mistake or straightforward error, as a superficiality which merely reflects the spontaneous consciousness of science” ([12]Bhaskar 1989: 61). What Bhaskar is affirming is the need to become reflectively conscious of this ‘spontaneous consciousness’ in order to achieve distance from it. Facts are real but they are “historically specific social realities” and it is recognition of this which is essential for understanding how scientific progress becomes possible. The fetishism of facts also dehistorizes them and it is in this sense that Bhaskar sees the category of ‘ideology’ as appropriate to these discussions. In other words, positivism has a social function which is “to conceal the historically specific structures and relations constituting sense-experience in science” ([13]Bhaskar 1989: 61). More specifically, the social function of the constant conjunction is to “conceal the reality of structures irreducible to events” ([14]Bhaskar 1989: 62).
"What should I do with my 20s?" Stop-motion Animation (2014-01-23 22:49)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/oiaTm6vbZ7M

(ht [2]Study Hacks)

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/oiaTm6vbZ7M

Our Most Popular Posts This Month (2014-01-24 08:00)


[2]Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[3]An invitation to punk sociology

[4]A Summer of Television Poverty Porn

[5]An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarship

Launch of ‘SexGen Northern Network’ and seminar on Compulsory Sexualities (2014-01-25 08:00)

We would like to invite you to get involved in the ‘sexgen’ network.

‘sexgen’ is a collaborative interdisciplinary network bringing together gender and sexuality based research centres around the North of England. We aim to bring academic research, writing and thinking on gender and sexuality into conversation with the ideas, cultural expressions and knowledges of community groups, cultural sites and activist organisations. Series organising contacts are: Sally Hines, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies, University of Leeds: [1]s.hines@leeds.ac.uk and Surya Monro, Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield: [2]s.monro@hud.ac.uk.

In 2014-2015 sexgen will hold a series of free seminars, details of which will be forthcoming. Seminars will be themed to reflect current and emerging themes within gender and sexuality studies.

Please find attached the Network flyer and the flyer for the first seminar: Seminar 1: February 28th 2014, The Centre for Research in Social Sciences, University of Huddersfield: ‘Compulsory Sexualities’.


hashtag #sexgen

We would be grateful if you could publicize ‘sexgen’ amongst your networks.

1. mailto:s.hines@leeds.ac.uk
2. mailto:s.monro@hud.ac.uk
The next meeting of the [1]Quantified Self Research Network will take place on the 25th March at the University of Warwick from 1pm to 6pm. It’s an informal seminar to present work in progress and is open to all.

If you would like to contribute then please send a short abstract and bio to mark@markcarrigan.net by February 1st. We use ‘quantified self’ in a broad sense inclusive of self-tracking, wearable computing and digital augmentation.

We’re also keen to build on the last seminar and move the discussion forward. Here are some of the key questions which emerged during the last meeting:

**What is distinctive about qs?**

People have tracked their health data for a long time such as keeping food diaries or measuring their weight. Is qs conceptually different to this or is it merely an automisation and intensification? Does the quantity of the data produced equate to more of the same or a qualitatively distinct phenomenon?

**Are there inequalities in qs and self-tracking?**

The technologies required for qs are usually quite expensive even for a basic device and would certainly be out of the range of disposable income for many people and...

**Are we creating inequalities with the focus of research?**

If qsers are a relatively privileged group while it may be interesting to understand their practices and development of individual and group identities there are other people who cannot afford these practices, are uninterested or simply unaware of them.

**What about gender?**

The QS community seems to have more men than women as active participants. What are the reasons for this? If we take the broader notion of qs suggested by some of the presenters then often the more "mundane" or "domestic" approaches to self-tracking are more associated with women? Is there something fundamentally different about these?

**How do we identify a ‘non-user’?**

Although some of the methods of tracking have been used for a long time some of them are very new and it is currently unclear what kind of uptake they will have. We fairly easily identify a user...
(agreeing on a definition may be more complex) it is more difficult to identify a non-user. Are they people who do not practice QS or use the devices because they do not have access to them, they are not aware of them or they simply do not care? Is it right to define people as non-users of a fairly niche activity often engaged in by relatively privileged people? But with the amount of data which is generated about us (often without us knowing) are we not all quantified whether we like it or not?


Call for papers: Geographies of children and young people’s popular cultures, identities and subcultures

(2014-01-26 08:00)

Title of session: Geographies of children and young people's popular cultures, identities, and subcultures

Sponsored by: Geographies of Children, Youth and Families Research Group

Session convenors: John Horton (The University of Northampton, UK) & Peter Kraftl (University of Leicester, UK)

We invite you to participate in two sessions reflecting upon the geographies of children and young people's popular cultures, identities and subcultures. We hope that the sessions will include some consideration of children and young people's engagements with toys, literature, television, music, film, folklore, fandom, games, play, media discourses, moral panics, fashion, comics, collectables, cultural phenomena, video games, multimedia, material culture, social networks, consumption, consumerism, digital and online technologies, heterogeneous materialities, identity markers, urban myths, cultural norms and exclusions, customary practices, traditions, and subcultural scenes, styles and practices.

We would welcome two different kinds of contribution.

- For the first session, we call for conventional papers (15 minutes, plus 5 minutes discussion) reporting on new research exploring geographies of children and young people’s popular cultures, identities and subcultures. We would welcome papers dealing with diverse historic-geographic contexts, and written from diverse disciplinary, conceptual and critical-political perspectives. In particular, we seek papers that develop novel theoretical frameworks for foregrounding the spatialities of children and young people’s popular cultures, identities and subcultures. Thus, papers might (but might not only) consider how understandings of popular cultural practices, discourses, representations, memories, obsessions, anxieties, consumption or consumerism might be extended via engagements with geographical concepts such as space, place, scale, network or spatiality.

- For the second session, in a spirit of co-production, we would welcome proposals for looser, shorter, less formal contributions in relation to the session themes (and any of the stuff listed above). These might take the form of ‘show-and-tell’, autoethnographic vignettes, performances, conceptual provocations, politicised critiques, something fun, something playful, something fun, something angry, or something else. Ideas for contributions would be gratefully received.
Please submit abstracts of up to 250 words to both John Horton ([1]john.horton@northampton.ac.uk) and Peter Kraftl ([2]pk123@leicester.ac.uk) by Friday, 7th February 2014. Please indicate whether you intend to present a conventional paper or a shorter contribution. Further information about the conference is available at: [3]http://www.rgs.org/WhatsOn/ConferencesAndSeminars/Annual+International+Conference/Annual+international+conference.htm

1. mailto:john.horton@northampton.ac.uk
2. mailto:pk123@leicester.ac.uk

Journeys through Sociology: Margaret Archer (2014-01-26 14:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/bOwHh8yJtY4

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/bOwHh8yJtY4

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Graham Crow's *The Art of Sociological Argument* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) is a book about rhetoric and how sociologists have made their arguments and communicated with their readers. Crow takes eight sociological writers from the classic founders to the present day. Each sociologist is treated to a chapter on the biographical and historical contexts of their thought and writing.

The authors reviewed include obvious choices like the big three ‘founding fathers’ - Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, although Crows discussion of them though is far from obvious. For example, I was surprised to realize how short their sociological lives were – Marx having greatest longevity at 64 years with Durkheim next at 59 years and Max Weber just 56 years. Crow leads us through the ways in which they used metaphor, like Weber’s idea of bureaucracy as an ‘iron cage,’ or personification, as in Marx’s unforgettable ‘Mr Moneybags,’ to make their arguments.

Next Crow gives us a trio of American sociological writers - Talcott Parsons, Charles Wright Mills and Erving Goffman. It’s no secret that I have a weakness for the writing of C. Wright Mills but reading this book I found myself having much more sympathy for Talcott Parsons as a person. Parsons comes across as patient and even tempered, while Mills seems bombastic and imprecise by comparison. Yet at the same time, Mills is more lasting and alluring to his readership. Goffman is presented as a sociological humourist with a brilliant eye for analytical metaphors. However, the purpose of a metaphor for Goffman is to support an argument like scaffolding: “Scaffolds... are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down”. Erving Goffman did more than any other sociologists to give us a way of understanding society’s back stage, while at the same time being very secretive about his own personal life.

The last part of the book features a chapter on Michel Foucault and another on Ann Oakley. Crow talks very thoughtfully about Foucault’s use of shock tactics and a kind of gothic style in his writing. Foucault’s rhetoric insists on leaving things open, refusing to claim the final word on any given issue. For Foucault, those who claim knowledge pilfer the voices of their subjects and in the contexts discussions of crime this “shuts the prisoner up (in both senses)”.

Ann Oakley is the only female sociological writer to be included. The chapter dedicated to Oakley’s writing was this reader’s favourite. What Crow does so successfully is to re-enchant books that you think you know already. It was a real surprise and revelation to be introduced to the range of Oakley’s writing from her classic *The Sociology of Housework* to policy reports, memoir, fiction and poetry. The diversity of Oakley’s work is astonishing, she writes: “All writing is an invitation to the imagination... a matter of new arrangements of words, and thus of new forms.”

In a way Oakley’s work is a provocation to find new ways of writing sociologically. Crow quotes Oakley from one of her eighties poetry collections: “who would want a history of articles / typed and dissected, lost and uncredited.” By implication Oakley is challenging us to ask: will the books and articles we’ve written all too speedily for the audit culture inevitably have a short shelf life?

*The Art of Sociological Argument* is a wonderful and beautifully written book. It has cost me a small fortune in impulse purchases from Amazon. Reading Crow makes me want to go back to the classics from Riesman’s *The Lonely Crowd* to Oakley’s *Gender of Planet Earth*. The book reads like an argument that has been rehearsed and honed through teaching the work of these great sociologists.

Crow’s conclusion is that there are ways we can improve the way we express our arguments. He offers ten points on how to write sociology more artfully. I have paraphrased them here as follows:
1. Care for your readers - invite your readers into a conversation with your problem, rather than preach to them by being overly didactic.

2. Challenge your reader’s presuppositions and surprise them, even if this means being shocking.

3. Don’t be afraid to use humour and irony to amuse and persuade.

4. Work with what is counter-intuitive and perplexing and it will open up new insights.

5. Metaphors and analogues can help get beyond descriptions of phenomena that are readily perceived.

6. Formulate imaginative questions that invite interesting sociological answers.

7. Foster a capacity for self-criticism.

8. Seek to persuade and do not assume that readers will share your agenda or understanding.

9. Avoid claiming too much in an argument but also be aware of the risks of claiming too little and not explicating its potential.

10. Literary style is no substitute for content but a good argument is all the better for being well presented.

In fifty years from now such a book will need to be written very differently. It has made me reflect on the transformation of Goldsmiths Sociology during my twenty years here, from a department with less than a handful of female colleagues to one where the majority of Goldsmiths sociologists are women. This year our department celebrates its half century.

Sociology has no future without feminist writers and the male domination of the discipline, as represented in the writers reviewed in this book, simply cannot and should not last. That’s not to mention the ubiquitous whiteness of the authors included in this book. With this in mind it is interesting to think and perhaps hope for what the sociological pantheon might look like, and how different the discipline will be, when Goldsmiths Sociology celebrates its centenary.

Les Back has been teaching in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London since 1993. His main areas of academic interest are the sociology of racism, multiculture, popular culture, music and sound studies and city life.

Rorty, Realism and the Idea of Freedom (2014-01-27 08:00)

In contrast to the scorn which Rorty’s name now provokes in some quarters, it’s arresting to see the esteem in which he was held by Roy Bhaskar in the late 80s, albeit in the context of a trenchant philosophical critique. He commends
Rorty's "eloquent critique of the epistemological problematic" but intends to argue that Rorty remains captive to this problem field in ways he himself fails to recognise ([1] Bhaskar 1989: 146). In doing so, he advocates a philosophical post-narcissism which is capable of elaborating "non-anthropocentric pictures of being" through taking Rorty's project of 'de-divinisation' and pursuing it much further than Rorty was either willing or able to do ([2] Bhaskar 1989: 147).

His initial target is Rorty's account of science, particularly his easy imputation of chronic success in "the prediction and control of nature". In this claim Rorty reveals himself to have accepted Hempelian assumptions about natural science, in effect committing himself to a basically positivist account. Much of Bhaskar's critique proceeds from systematically exploring the ambiguities which are entailed by Rorty's failure to distinguish between the intransitive (ontological) and transitive (epistemological) dimensions of science. Once we begin to draw this distinction, Rorty's constant invocations of 'redescription' come to seem much more modest in their conclusions, though Rorty himself fails to recognise this:

Thus redescribing the past in a revolution way can cause radical new changes, including a new identity, self-definition or auto-biography: but it cannot retrospectively cause old changes, alter the past (as distinct from its interpretation). It is not surprising that Rorty should slip from transitive to intransitive uses of terms like 'cause' – it is endemic to empirical realism, the epistemological definition of being in terms of (a particular empiricist concept of) experience. ([3] Bhaskar 1989: 152).

Bhaskar's point is not to impute anti-realism to Rorty, though the latter surely does come to this in his later work. For Bhaskar "the crucial questions in philosophy are not whether to be a realist or an anti-realist, but what sort of realist to be (an empirical, conceptual transcendental or whatever realist); whether one explicitly theorises or merely implicitly secretes one's realism and whether and how one decides, arrives at or absorbs one's realism" ([4] Bhaskar 1989: 153). Bhaskar is in agreement with Rorty's repudiation of the 'Archimedean point' outside human history and the notion of 'correspondence' as standing between world and language. However he finds it problematic, as well as internally inconsistent, for Rorty's realism to adopt such a whiggish approach to actually existing science – imputing a continual extension of our capacity to 'control and intervene' with one hand while bracketing the philosophy of science with another. He shares Rorty's anti-foundationalism and applauds his "vigorou assault on its attendant ocular metaphors, mirror imagery and overseer conception of philosophy" ([5] Bhaskar 1989: 157).

So what's the problem? Rorty's peculiarly positivistic stance finds expression in his assumption that an individual represents a closed system. Bhaskar addresses this point in a dense critique which I won't attempt to summarise but is an astonishingly accomplished analysis which is worth studying in detail ([6] Bhaskar 1989: 161-162). His intention is to better understand "A Tale of Two Rortys": a tension which runs through his work and precludes him from offering either an adequate understanding of scientific activity or a sustainable account of human freedom. In essence he finds himself reproducing a linguistified version of the Kantian distinction between people as empirical selves and as moral agents. Rorty is attempting to combine a physicalism which sees individuals as closed causal systems, in which it is possible (in principle) to predict every movement of a person's body by reference to microphysical states, with an affirmation of the discursive freedom of human beings.

However it is this freedom to 're-describe' which is the cause of all the problems. He fails to distinguish between objects changing and requiring a new description and an unchanged object being redescribed. In this sense 'redescription' comes to be detached from the characteristics of the objects being redescribed. Yet this is central to Rorty's account of human freedom:

Man is the describing, redescribing being. Among the entities man can describe in a new, and abnormal, way, is himself. By making a new, incommensurable description of herself 'stick', she makes it true; and
thus 'gives birth to' (to use Harold Bloom’s term) or ‘creates’ herself – which is to say ‘overcomes’ her previous or past self. Moreover, only by describing herself in a totally novel way can she capture or express her idiosyncrasy, uniqueness – or rather achieve it, achieve her individuation – for anything else would reduce her to a (more or less complex set of formula(e), a token of a type (or set of types). Such radical self-redescription (which could be nicknamed ‘me-‘ or ‘we-‘ description) is the highest form of description. For not only does the redescription redescribe the describer; but in the process of redescription – of wining it, of making it stick, of achieving recognition for it – it makes the (re)description true; so achieving the identity of subject and object, by creating it.[7]Bhaskar 1989: 171)

On this picture we are left with a notion of freedom as “caprice, discourse, capricious discourse and creative discourse” ([8]Bhaskar 1989: 173). Even this highest form of freedom within Rorty’s account, the possibility of ‘creative discourse’, falls short because it operationalises freedom in abstraction from the material dimension of social life. Rorty’s account makes it difficult to see how we could ever come to identify or transform structures which engender a diminution of human freedom. It also fails to recognise the constraining effects they may have on freedom even in his own narrow understanding of it. As Bhaskar observes, “it is now easy to see how the notion that ‘man is always free to choose new descriptions’ can encourage the voluntaristic position that man is always free to choose any description” ([9]Bhaskar 1989: 176). Rorty’s discursive freedom should not be repudiated in and of itself but should rather be contextualised in terms of a much deeper sense of freedom and, crucially, a notion of emancipation which “depends upon the transformation of structures rather than just the amelioration of states of affairs” (Bhaskar 1989: 178).

1. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
2. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
4. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
5. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
6. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
7. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
8. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A
9. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=-20FvWInUOgAcC&pg=PR1&dq=reclaiming+reality&hl=en&sa=X&ei=b5zTUoLbD4LB7A

Journeys Through Sociology (2014-01-28 08:00)

UC Berkeley have produced a great series of video interviews with former presidents and current board members of the International Sociological Association. These engaging interviews mix professional interests and personal
reflections in a way that we rarely encounter within the academy:

[17] Journeys through Sociology - Piotr Sztompka
[18] Journeys Through Sociology: Elena Zdravomyslova

1. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9reiqWFY0WQ]  
2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCcJSJ2PZDB]  
3. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62nHRbXgYGY]  
4. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYGtZAvf0Uc]  
5. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyXovjy6L-g]  
6. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE-_1E6iwfu]  
7. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjO-CytJN18]  

2398
The Sociological Science Behind Social Networks and Social Influence (2014-01-29 08:00)

Nicholas Christakis, Professor of Medical Sociology, Medicine, and Sociology at Harvard University

If you think you're in complete control of your destiny or even your own actions, you're wrong.
Every choice you make, every behavior you exhibit, and even every desire you have finds its roots in the social universe. Nicholas Christakis explains why individual actions are inextricably linked to sociological pressures; whether you’re absorbing altruism performed by someone you’ll never meet or deciding to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge, collective phenomena affect every aspect of your life. By the end of the lecture Christakis has revealed a startling new way to understand the world that ranks sociology as one of the most vitally important social sciences.

Check out [1]Rachel Strom’s blog which has many other fascinating posts about African history and sociology.
What Africa might have looked like today, if it had never been colonised? This is a map of African politico-tribal units from about 1844 drawn by Swedish artist Nikolaj Cyon. Seen at: [2]http://rachelstrohm.com/2013/07/29/the-colonization-counterfactual/


Asgarda, the "Ukrainian Amazons" - and the impossibility of feminism (2014-01-31 08:00)

"Katerina Tarnovska is a Ukrainian preschool teacher, a kickboxing world champion and a self-proclaimed descendent of the legendary warrior women of the Amazon. In 2002 she founded Asgarda, a martial art exclusively for women that is inspired by the tribal traditions of the Scythian Amazons. In the past decade, more than 1,000 ladies have been entrusted with the teachings of the Asgarda, which Katerina says is the only fighting style specifically tailored to the female form."

(Weblink to the [1]documentary by Mylene Larsson)


5.2 February

"Timeless love": ageing bodies and sex? (2014-02-01 08:00)

Images of old people in a the context of sex and love are often missing from contemporary media. The work of Marrie Bot, an art photographer, focuses on such universal human themes surrounded by some sort of a taboo - like the exhibition featured here, titled "Timeless Love", which shows intimate photographs of older people. We cannot reproduce her photos due to copyright, but they are beautiful and you should definitely see the online version of Bot's photobook on her webpage, [1]www.marriebot.com.


2014 Call for Papers for NWSA Asexuality Studies Interest Group (2014-02-02 08:00)

2014 Call for Papers about Asexuality
Asexuality Studies Interest Group
National Women's Studies Association (NWSA)
November 13-16, 2014, San Juan, Puerto Rico
The NWSA Asexuality Studies Interest Group welcomes papers for the 2014 NWSA annual conference. These asexuality-related themes are orientated towards the full NWSA 2014 CFP which can be found here:[1] http://www.nwsa.org/files/NWSA%202014%20CFP_Final.pdf

If you are interested in being a part of the 2014 Asexuality Studies Interest Group panels at NWSA, please send the following information to the designated panel organizer (listed under each theme) by Thursday, February 6, 2014:

*Name, Institutional Affiliation, Mailing Address, Email, Phone

*NWSA Theme your paper fits under

*Title for your talk

*50-100 word abstract

We will try to accommodate as many qualified papers as possible, but panels are limited to 3-4 presenters. NWSA will make the final decision about which panels are accepted. Presenters accepted into the conference program must become members of NWSA in addition to registering for the conference.

**Sponsored Session: Asexualities and Issues of Race**

For our sponsored session, we wish to think through the ways that race, ethnicity, and nation intersect with asexuality studies. We are interested in academic scholarship that focuses on these intersections, personal experiences of asexual people of color, as well as pedagogical approaches to teaching about asexuality through the lens of critical race studies and women of color feminism. Some questions we want to raise are:

- What difference does race, ethnicity, and nation make in the lives of asexual-identified people?
- How does asexual-identification predicated on low levels of sexual attraction and/or desire interact with racist assumptions that people of color are hypersexual?
- In what ways does asexuality help us think through histories of race-making and racism?
- How is racism experienced in the asexual community?
- How do online asexual communities work to make asexual people of color visible or invisible?
- How can we make asexuality studies be more attentive to issues of race and white privilege?

Please submit materials for the sponsored session to organizer Regina Wright at [2]wrightrm@indiana.edu

Co-Sponsored Session with NWSA Fat Studies Interest Group
Fatness and asexuality provide useful frameworks for understanding how subjects are produced and disciplined within the context of the nation: positioned as unhealthy, deviant, pathological and unproductive—both fatness and asexuality are perceived as threats to the state’s normal functioning. While the growing activist and academic movements pertaining to fatness and asexuality both expose and problematize the disciplinary techniques of the nation, fatness and asexuality are only ever positioned together negatively. Fat empowerment politics, for example, involves critiquing the dominant ideology that fat bodies are either hypersexualized, fetishized or desexualized, and by this emphasis, can overlook the experiences of people who identify as both fat and asexual. This co-sponsored session wishes to place fat studies and asexuality studies in dialogue with each other and seeks papers that address questions including, but not limited to:

- What are points of encounter between asexuality studies and fat studies?
- In what ways can the intersections of fat studies and asexuality studies serve as a productive platform from which to critique ideas about labor, the economy, and the nation-state?
- How do marginalized fat and asexual bodies continue to foil the nation-state's desire for fixity?
- How can fat asexuality be re-imagined as a form of empowerment and not stigma?
- How might the increasing use of social media as a mode of resistance to oppressive state regimes present a useful point of departure within fat and asexual politics?

Please submit materials for the sponsored session to organizer Danielle Cooper at cooperd4@yorku.ca

**Theme 1: Rethinking the Nation**

- In what ways does an avid investment in sex, sexuality, and the sexual imperative shape the formation of colonial nation-states and the making of empires?
- How does gender, race, class, ability, and sexuality interact with the sexual imperative to make mandatory certain ways of inhabiting and enacting national belonging and citizenship?
- Through what ways can we develop an asexual analytic to puncture the normativizing structures at work in the making of empires, nations, and neoliberal economies?
- In what ways does “asexuality” as an identification either collude with or challenge the grounding elements of nation-making, in and beyond the Occidental empires?
- Can asexual perspectives work in concord with critical race theories and feminist theories of race-making to demolish global hierarchies and the production of whiteness and white privilege?
- How is asexuality integral to the future of feminist critiques of the role of sexuality in nation-making?

Please submit materials to theme organizer Ela Przybylo at przybylo@yorku.ca
Theme 2: Trans- Feminisms

• What does it mean to be both trans* and asexual? How do trans* members of the asexual community negotiate these two identities?

• How might these intersecting identities help us redefine feminist and asexual politics and epistemologies?

• What is the intersection between the human and the non-human in asexual communities? How might the encounter between the human and non-human species be productive in terms of transspecies critiques and participation in ecofeminist or cyborgian narratives?

• In what ways do cultural and socio-political locations create space or challenge asexual identities? Why are some ethnicities, nationalities, and races only minimally represented in online asexual communities?

• How do the hierarchical relationships among regions across North/South and other hegemonic borders figure into asexual studies?

• How might asexual communities and identities help generate transnational and transcultural feminist alliances?

• How might transgenerational feminist perspectives in asexual studies intersect with or challenge foundational concepts in women’s and gender studies? What are the dynamics among the members of the multi-generational asexual community?

Please submit materials to theme organizer LaChelle Schilling at lache2380@gmail.com

Theme 3: Technologizing Futures

Contemporary asexual identities and communities have largely developed online (and in some cases have subsequently moved “off-line”). This theme will explore this relationship between contemporary asexualities and the Internet and might address any of the following questions, or other relevant questions:

• What is the relationship between the Internet and contemporary asexual identities and communities? How has the fact that these identities and communities were first developed online shaped the form of these identities and communities?

• What forms of asexual activism have been enabled by the online nature of asexual identities and communities? Has the online nature of these identities and communities augmented and/or limited their ability to effect social change?

• What role do bodies play in online asexual communities? How has the online nature of these communities affected the ways in which other social categories have manifested in these communities (such as race, class, gender, and ability)?

• What happens when asexual communities and identities move “off-line”?
• Has the online nature of asexual communities enabled the formation of transnational connections? Do global inequalities remain unaddressed in asexual communities?

• What can the "case study" of asexual identities and communities contribute to scholarship on digital communities? To scholarship on sexual identity formation?

Please submit materials to theme organizer Kristina Gupta at kag24@georgetown.edu

Theme 4: Love and Labor

One can look at the larger project of asexualities as a relatively recent series of actions by individuals, groups and disciplines laboring privately and publicly to come to terms with different approaches to our definitions of love. Through radically redefining sexuality, identity, bodies and desire in a heteronormative society, it becomes possible to further imagine an openness to contingency and experiments within and between communities. This panel addresses some of the ways in which feminist, queer and performance studies can inform and build upon one another within the context of activating various perspectives on asexualities, through the following areas of inquiry:

• How do we construct new networks in innovative ways that link theoretical inquiries to the socioeconomic and racial realities of asexual communities?

• To what extent can we employ trust, creativity and imagination in the exploration and construction of asexual identities and space through an everyday performativity?

• How would shared social and cultural rituals of a small community translate into larger, networked activism?

• In what ways, do we enable and enrich the writing of future histories of asexualities within the context of this interdisciplinarity?

Please submit materials to theme organizer Anna Lise Jensen at aaaonyc@gmail.com

Theme 5: Creating Justice

• In what ways are asexual identities marginalized/oppressed? What structures, discourses, and modes of power refute, obstruct, and/or censor asexual legitimacy?

• In what ways does the struggle for legitimacy resemble prior movements toward justice, such as those for women's rights, minority voices, and queer communities? What can a campaign for asexual justice take and learn from those movements? In what ways is the asexual movement different?

• What can be learned from the proliferation of asexual spaces online and how can that knowledge be put into practice in a campaign for legitimacy and justice offline?

• What is asexual justice? How can it be achieved in theory and practice?
• In what discourses and institutions is asexuality currently allowed (wholly or partially) to operate?

• How do specific cultures and languages reshape, challenge, or aid the campaign for asexual justice?

• How does this campaign for justice change when considered outside of the dominant contexts of the United States and Europe?

Please submit materials to theme organizer Nathan Erro at nmerro@gmail.com

2. mailto:wrightm@indiana.edu
3. mailto:cooperd4@yorku.ca
4. mailto:przybylo@yorku.ca
5. mailto:lache2380@gmail.com
6. mailto:kag24@georgetown.edu
7. mailto:aaaonyc@gmail.com
8. mailto:nmerro@gmail.com

Call for Papers: Media Sociology Preconference, ASA 2014 (2014-02-03 08:00)

Call for Papers: Media Sociology Preconference, ASA 2014

Venue: Mills College (Oakland, CA)
Date: August 15, 2014

We invite submissions for a second preconference on media sociology to be held at Mills College (Oakland, CA) on Friday, August 15, 2014. (This is one day before the start of the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco.) To encourage the widest possible range of submissions, we have no pre-specified theme again this year and invite both theoretical and empirical papers on any topic related to media sociology. Submissions from graduate students and junior scholars are particularly welcome.

Media sociology has long been a highly diverse field spanning many topics, methodologies, and units of analysis. It encompasses all forms of mass-mediated communication and expression, including news media, entertainment media, as well as new and digital media. Outstanding research exists within the different subfields both within and beyond the discipline of sociology. Our aim is to create dialogue among these disparate yet complementary traditions.

This preconference is also linked to a campaign to form a Media Sociology section of the ASA that is theoretically and
methodologically agnostic and aims to support sociological work related to any and all media. A petition supported by signatures from over 200 current members was submitted to the ASA Council in November 2013, and we are optimistic that Media Sociology will become a Section-in-Formation in 2015.

Papers may be on a variety of topics including, but not limited to:
- production processes and/or media workers
- political economy (including the role of the state and markets)
- media and the public sphere
- media content
- the Internet, social media, cellular phones, or other technology
- the digital divide
- new uses of media
- media globalization or diaspora
- media effects of media consumption
- identity, the self, and media

Invited Speakers

Last year’s inaugural preconference, held at NYU’s Institute for Public Knowledge and Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, was very well-attended and featured an invited keynote by Dhiraj Murthy (Goldsmiths, University of London) and a plenary panel addressing the theme, "Mapping the Field of Media Sociology" with additional participants Rodney Benson (NYU), Andrea Press (University of Virginia), Michael Schudson (Columbia University), and Eleanor Townsley (Mount Holyoke College).

This year’s keynote speaker will be Clayton Childress (University of Toronto – Scarborough). A special plenary session on "Media Sociology as a Vocation" will feature a panel discussion on careers in media sociology. We will announce further invited speakers in due course.

Submissions

Submissions should include:
- Separate cover sheet with: title, name and affiliation, and email address of author(s).
- Abstract of 150-300 words that discusses the problem, research, methods and relevance.
- Also include at least three descriptive keywords. Note: DO NOT put identifying information in the body of the abstract; only on cover sheet.
- Use Microsoft Office or PDF format.

Send abstracts to [1]casey.brienza.1@city.ac.uk. Please write “Media Sociology Preconference” in the subject line.

Abstract deadline is March 31, 2014.
Notification of acceptance will occur sometime in mid-April.

Contact Casey Brienza ([2]casey.brienza.1@city.ac.uk) or Matthias Revers ([3]mrevers@albany.edu) for more information about the preconference.

1. mailto:casey.brienza.1@city.ac.uk
2. mailto:casey.brienza.1@city.ac.uk
3. mailto:mrevers@albany.edu

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It’s not the glass ceiling, it’s the dense air: Women bankers and their stay-home husbands (2014-02-04 08:00)


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A Follow-Up Interview with Dr. Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research and Public Sociology (2014-02-04 12:40)

Lauren Sardi: To recap from our last interview you explained that there is now an arts-based paradigm in addition to qualitative and quantitative paradigms. ABR is when researchers in any discipline adapt the tenets of the creative arts in their social research. You noted many advantages of ABR including contributing to public scholarship and thus making research accessible to diverse audiences.

Patricia Leavy: That’s right. I believe that there are ethical and practical reasons for doing research that leaves the academy and has the potential to be useful to people. Arts-based research provides a set of approaches for doing so.

Lauren Sardi: You turned to fiction and wrote two novels based on years of interview research. You said that one of the advantages of doing so was exploring micro-macro links. This is something that is fundamentally important to sociologists. How did fiction facilitate that?

Patricia Leavy: As sociologists we know that people’s lives are shaped in many ways by the society in which they live. We are all enmeshed in a social historical context. The question is how can we expose that so readers, our audience who we aim to reach, can see it for themselves and then reflect on their own lives and culture. Fiction is about showing, not telling, and I think anyone who has ever taught probably understand the value of showing and letting people engage for themselves, if we are to make a lasting impression.
Fiction allows us to show people's interiority, their inner lives. We do so with tools like interior dialogue. Readers have access to what a character is thinking when he or she is in a given situation or engaged in particular interactions. A narrator's voice is one technique through which we can also bring the larger picture in, including our own interpretation of what is going on with characters. So here are a couple of examples from my work.

My first ABR novel, *Low-Fat Love* was based on nearly a decade of interview research with women as well as observations from my personal and teaching experiences. The book explores the psychology of dissatisfying relationships, identity-building, the social construction of femininity within popular culture and the importance of self-acceptance. The novel is underscored with a critical commentary about how, too often, women become trapped in limited visions of themselves. I wanted to expose some of the gendered nature of pop culture and how it impacts some women. I used women's media as a signpost throughout the book in order to make visible the context in which women come to think of themselves as well as the men and women in their lives. By doing so I was able to offer a commentary about popular culture and the social construction of femininity. So for instance, a character would be watching television and readers would be exposed to what she was thinking about herself, her own life and relationships. The narrator's commentary would provide another layer. The selection of pop culture items and the cumulative impact of their presence is yet another layer of meaning.

After exploring issues of esteem and identity-building, I became interested in the relationship between social class, gender and identity. My novel *American Circumstance* explores appearance versus reality in people's lives, how our lives and relationships look to others versus what we experience, and a large part of this is how social class shapes identity. There is a lot that goes unspoken about social class in the United States and I wanted to bring some of that out, including the replication of power and privilege. I also wanted to expose and disrupt stereotypes about social class. There is a strong US focus in the book but there's also a global subtext. While the story unfolds in the northeast of the United States and follows American characters, it seemed to me that if I was going to try to tap into issues of social class and identity and also the intersections between gender and class, it was important to acknowledge that issues of privilege, opportunity, oppression and the ability to self-actualize are far more complicated when we apply a global perspective. In other words, the complex ways that gender and social class impact our lives vary greatly when we look cross culturally. So the main character in the book, Paige, works for a fictional charitable organization called WIN which is devoted to helping women living in conflict and high risk zones throughout the world. Through Paige's work we are able to see that all problems are relative as are the ways that race, class and gender influence our stories. We are able to see how social environments impact individual lives and life chances. While WIN is a fictitious organization, it is inspired by the real organization Women for Women International. Through the fictional format I was able to show characters enmeshed in their environments and describe how those contexts are steeped in social class issues. I used tools including dialogue, interior dialogue and third person narration to forge micro-macro links that readers can tease out through their own individual reading process.

In short, literary tools can enable us to crystalize micro-macro links through showing instead of telling, which I would suggest is pedagogically important. Further, readers can be exposed to what people are thinking versus what they are saying and doing, as well as the context in which the action is occurring.

**Lauren Sardi:** *Low-Fat Love* became Sense Publisher’s top selling book, which is a great boon to ABR. What has the reaction of readers to either of your ABR novels taught you about how and why sociologists should do this kind of work?

**Patricia Leavy:** Just to clarify, I don’t think ABR is appropriate for all projects. For some researchers it will never make sense to do on a personal level, although I do hope they expose their students to it. What I do think all sociologists should do is think about how to make their work accessible to broad audiences; how to engage people beyond the academy. You shouldn't need a PhD in a highly specialized field to have access to sociological knowledge. For me, ABR and specifically fiction was my path to public scholarship and I think it could be for many.
The response I have received from readers has solidified my belief in arts-based research and in the importance of making research findings accessible. People’s responses have been personal, reflective, emotional, and thoughtful; the kinds of responses that show engagement which of course is the point in anything scholars create and then share with others. Whether it is traditional college students reading the books in classes or women and men of all ages who I have connected with through book clubs, book talks and email, the novels have prompted self and social reflection and dialogue in ways that my academic research articles never have or could. This is what research, what knowledge, should do. It should get people thinking and feeling. The arts are uniquely able to stimulate this kind of response and so their power to further public sociology is unlimited. We have barely begun to tap into the potential of art to shape and disseminate social science.

Lauren Sardi: Because you are both very prolific and very public, you have become extremely prominent in the field and to many, you represent the contemporary face of arts-based research. As someone who believes in the importance of public intellectuals what does that mean to you?

Patricia Leavy: I think of my work as contributing to a larger body of work and the ABR movement as a whole. That carries real meaning for me and focuses me on the work at hand, whether it is something I may be writing or a space I am trying to create for others to showcase their work.

I think when I say I am invested in the ABR movement and see my work as contributing to that larger project, it may seem like something that someone just says and thus doesn’t carry the intended weight but I mean this in a serious way. Consider if someone says that are committed to a social movement of some kind, such as civil rights, we don’t question that the focus isn’t on their individual work but rather this far greater and more important project to which they are contributing. To say I am committed to the ABR movement is not just to say I am invested in some academic trend or what have you. I view my commitment to arts-based research movements and aim to imbue it with legitimacy across the research landscape, and indeed something that more students are taught and more researchers practice, I believe there are meaningful consequences at stake. The way we think, learn, share and challenge ideas; none of this is trivial. We are talking about what counts as knowledge, how that knowledge comes to be, who is included in the process, what is funded, and how we teach and learn, which impacts who gets to learn and what they learn. All of this is complicit in how power operates on many levels and whether or not research remains in the hands of a few or if becomes accessible to the many. Let’s not forget that a heterosexist white supremacist research system created many of the methods and funding standards that are viewed as “legitimate” but what might those ways of knowing prevent us from seeing and who is excluded from those knowledge practices? So I very much see my work as a part of this larger project. I am in community with many others who are also doing all they can to contribute to the field. Our community just lost a giant with the passing of Elliot Eisner and I think we all feel that we want to honor his legacy through our continued efforts. Whatever attention comes my way I try to direct to the issues at hand. So I am grateful for any attention my work receives and opportunities I have to advance the field that many have built and remain dedicated to.

Lauren Sardi: What do you want sociologists who are unfamiliar with ABR to know about it?

Patricia Leavy: It is both rigorous and fun. Any notions that it is somehow easier or less serious than other methodologies are totally false. Like anything else, done well, it is very demanding. But it can also be incredibly engaging not just for audiences, but for the practitioner. People are often afraid to say their work is fun, as if it will take credibility away from it, as if we should all aim to do work we don’t enjoy because somehow that makes it better. Being creative and learning to speak to different audiences is incredibly rewarding. And at the end of the day, I would encourage people to think about the impact of their work and the issue of audience. It simply doesn’t make sense to me, particularly in a field like sociology, to spend one’s work life doing research that will be read by 5 or 6 other people. If someone reading this is unfamiliar with ABR I urge you to read about it to see if it has applications for your research, your teaching or your students’ research.
Are some disciplines more sociable than others? (2014-02-05 08:00)

There are a range of social scientific disciplines which have spawned sub disciplinary areas of practice and inquiry explicitly concerned with their public role and purpose. For instance:

1. Public Sociology
2. Public Geography
But others seemingly have not. Why is this? Could it be a matter of explicit naming conventions, such that the disciplines closest to sociology have taken their lead from public sociology but that similar trends exist elsewhere? What do these trends have in common and how do they differ? At some point this year I want to try and assemble a public sociologist, public geographer, public anthropologist, public archaeologist and public criminologist to produce a podcast discussion of these issues. If you might like to be part of this then please get in touch: mark@markcarrigan.net

Also I’d love to hear any Public X examples I’ve missed. Please tweet or comment if you know of any!

Emmet Fox (2014-02-06 11:44:47)
Public sociology to me appears to be a reflection of its subordinated position with the ‘public’ aspect being in part a strategy geared towards improving the discipline’s visibility. (This subordination certainly appears to be the case structuring sociology’s entrance into the discussion on climate change related behaviours where almost every sociologist I come across feels the need (correctly I might add) to criticise the dominant individualizing perspective that leads the issue on climate change receptivity). There is also the moral impetus or fear in seeing the absence, in public discussion, of social structures and relations as a dangerous development which diminishes the capacity to deal with and understand social problems. Such subordination would offer some explanation as to why more dominant disciplines such as psychology don’t feel the need to apply the ‘public’ sub disciplinary strategy. As for the other sub-disciplines perhaps there is also a dimension of strategy or maybe as you state it’s due to their closeness to sociology. These are just musings however, more historical and comparative analysis on the question is needed. I look forward to the podcast. Excellent blog by the way.

Sociological Imagination (2014-02-09 17:23:55)
that’s a really plausible suggestion. my attempt at a pithy title not withstanding, I’d assume there’s some ‘public’ impulse at work pretty much across the social sciences and it’s the divergent form of expression which fascinates me. though it’s hard to analyse this tendency if you can’t identify it...

Emmet Fox (2014-02-10 19:46:31)
Apologies for scan reading you. Well the ‘public’ element will possibly be attachable to the central concerns and interests of the disciplines whereas other disciplines undergo alternative naming processes connected to their (possibly) more individualized concerns (which is I think what your title intends to capture). On top of that Sociology surely has a higher stature amongst the disciplines listed above. As for ‘public economics’, the name already exists as something entirely different. Bound to be interesting whatever you discover.

Hijacked categories: “Employability” an “disability” as tools for government (2014-02-05 14:16)
[1]Ephemera is a pretty good journal. And here is a really cool article about the categories that make up our understanding of labour, employment and work. Categories structure the way we understand the world - they don’t just “reflect” it truthfully. This is an important obvious fact that is, nevertheless, often swept under the carpet of quantitative research. These categories are constructed and can be abused for various purposes. “Employability”
and disability are examples of such categories which the authors call “technologies for government”. In the example in this article, the authors Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson talk about how “non-employable becomes a disability and conversely, to be disabled can make one employable.”

Sorting people in and out: The plasticity of the categories of employability, work capacity and disability as technologies of government, by Christina Garsten and Kerstin Jacobsson, Ephemera 13(4): 825-850

Best thing is, the article is freely accessible.[2]http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/contribution/13-4garstenjacobsson.pdf

1. [http://www.ephemerajournal.org/s](http://www.ephemerajournal.org/s)

Sociology and poetry (2014-02-06 08:00)

Sitting near a lake

See more than our reflections

So this is sociology

K.J., sociology student

There is an uneasy relationship between traditional sociology and the arts, in particular openly irrational registers of writing, such as poetry. I’m not sure the ‘founding fathers’ would be very amused if they could see you trying to use poetry as a medium in a sociology class. But who cares: it’s no longer the XIX century, and back then many universities didn’t even have sociology as a subject. I’d like to think that C.W. Mills would have liked the idea of linking sociology with poetry. So, here is a great blogpost by sociologist Peter Kaufman on one of our favourite blogs ([1]everydaysociologyblog.com) about poetry and sociology - and about using poetry in teaching and learning.
Reading this makes me wish he had been my teacher when I did my degree in sociology.

Click here to read [2]"Poetic sociology" by Peter Kaufman (and some pretty cool sociological poems)

1. http://everydaysociologyblog.com/

Margaret Archer – We are what we love: love and identity (2014-02-07 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//player.vimeo.com/video/70410224

1. file://player.vimeo.com/video/70410224

Tracey Yeadon-Lee (2014-02-07 17:26:48)
It’s so nice to see Margaret Archer here. This talk takes me back to my undergraduate days in Sociology at the University of Warwick on the course 'Conceptual Foundations of Sociology'. Margaret was a great teacher then, as she clearly still is now, and her ideas have remained very influential within my work. Thanks for this!
Oh I didn’t know that - nice to hear about this background. I tend to feel like I’m the only person in UK sexuality studies who has any interest in her work!

Wolfgang Hofkirchner – ICTs and Society Research – What for? (2014-02-07 14:00)

Sad YouTube: fascinating fragile fragments of humanity (2014-02-08 08:00)

YouTube comments are notorious. But Mark Slutsky, writer and filmmaker [and, clearly, also amateur sociologist] has dedicated his blog [1]SadYoutube to salvaging fragile fragments of humanity from YouTube comments. He calls them

"Moments of melancholy, sadness and saudade from the lives of strangers, gleaned from the unfairly maligned ocean of YouTube comments."
In this [2]buzzfeed article he tells more.


Sexuality Summer School 26 – 30 May: Queer Anatomies (2014-02-09 08:00)

Sexuality Summer School 26 – 30 May: Queer Anatomies

Registration for the Sexuality Summer School is open to all PhD and Masters students and will go live on 14 February 2014 at [1]estore.manchester.ac.uk. The number of students is limited to 35 so book early to avoid disappointment. Price: £70 (early bird, until 14 March) / £80 (regular). Includes some food / refreshments and tickets to public events at Contact and the Cornerhouse.

The Sexuality Summer School is a five-day event for postgraduates, organized by the Centre for the Study of Sexuality and Culture (CSSC) at the University of Manchester since 2008. The Sexuality Summer School brings together postgraduates, researchers and international scholars, and also artists and filmmakers, to facilitate dialogue and discussions that speak to contemporary debates in queer and feminist sexuality studies, with a particular emphasis on the interdisciplinary study of culture. In 2014, our focus will be on cultural theories and histories of anatomy.

The Sexuality Summer School includes public events (see below for details) with Jaspir Puar (Rutgers), Jim Hubbard (director, United in Anger), Richard Dyer (Kings), Valerie Traub (Michigan), Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver (Split Britches), Mary Bryson (British Columbia) and Chase Joynt (Chicago). The Summer School will also include workshops with [2]Claudia Castañeda (Emerson), with [3]Erika Alm and [4]Kajsa Widegren (Gender Studies, Gothenburg) and members of CSSC at the University of Manchester, including: [5]Jackie Stacey, [6]Monica Pearl, [7]David Alderson and [8]Laura Doan.

The Sexuality Summer School is sponsored this year by the University of Manchester Faculty of Humanities; Cornerhouse; Contact; Screen; Science, Stroke, Art 2014; and SEXGEN.

For more information about the Sexuality Summer School, including details of previous events, go to [9]sexuality-summerschool.wordpress.com, email us and get on the mailing list at [10]sexualitysummerschool@gmail.com, find [11]Sexuality Summer School on Facebook or tweet us [12]@SSS_Manchester.
SSS 2014 Public Events (open to everyone):

**Monday 26 May – 12-2 -** lunchtime public lecture: Professor [13]Jasbir Puar (Rutgers)


1. [http://estore.manchester.ac.uk/](http://estore.manchester.ac.uk/)
2. [http://www.emerson.edu/academics/departments/liberal-arts-interdisciplinary-studies/faculty](http://www.emerson.edu/academics/departments/liberal-arts-interdisciplinary-studies/faculty)
3. [http://www.kultur.gu.se/english/contact/All_staff/erika-alm](http://www.kultur.gu.se/english/contact/All_staff/erika-alm)
4. [http://www.kultur.gu.se/english/contact/All_staff/Kajsa_Widegren](http://www.kultur.gu.se/english/contact/All_staff/Kajsa_Widegren)
5. [http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Jackie.stacey](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Jackie.stacey)
6. [http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/monica.pearl](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/monica.pearl)
7. [http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/david.alderson](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/david.alderson)
8. [http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Laura.doan](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/Laura.doan)
10. [mailto:sexualitysummerschool@gmail.com](mailto:sexualitysummerschool@gmail.com)
12. [https://twitter.com/SSS_Manchester](https://twitter.com/SSS_Manchester)
13. [http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/faculty/core-faculty/143-jasbir-puar](http://womens-studies.rutgers.edu/faculty/core-faculty/143-jasbir-puar)
17. [http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/monica.pearl/research](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/research/monica.pearl/research)
21. [http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/peggy-shaw](http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/peggy-shaw)
22. [http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/lois-weaver](http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/lois-weaver)
25. [http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/peggy-shaw](http://splitbritches.wordpress.com/about/peggy-shaw)
CfP: Where now for social justice? (2014-02-09 14:00)

REMINDER: CALL FOR PAPERS

'WHERE NOW FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE?'

THE MARGINALISATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK'

Thursday 12th – Friday 13th June 2014

We are inviting abstracts for a Two day Conference at Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent, UK on behalf of the Inclusion Equalities and Social Justice Theme and the Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities.

We are seeking papers which challenge the dominant ideologies and notions of social justice that are driving current changes in social and educational policy. We are particularly interested in papers which explore social justice in relation to marginalised young people, including those from education, health and social care, social policy, sociology and criminology disciplines. We are also interested in papers exploring innovative research methods with young people. Issues for papers include:

- Impact of poverty and inequality on young people
- Marginalisation of young people
- Use of innovative research methods
- Role of education in reproducing inequality
- Pedagogies of inclusion in schools and universities
- Diverse identities of young people, including:
  - Gender
  - Sexuality
  - Ethnicity
  - Children in care.

Proposals of 300 words are invited for consideration for 20 minute papers (followed by 10 minutes for questions and discussion).

Last year, whistleblower website WikiLeaks released three of the biggest ever leaks of classified information in history: the Iraq War Logs, the Afghanistan War Logs and Cablegate.

Since then the world has undoubtedly changed. Ambassadors have resigned amid scandals exposed by leaked cables; the UK government has ordered a review of computer security; and, at the same time, a huge wave of protest has swept the Middle East and North Africa – in part fuelled, some believe, by WikiLeaks revelations.

Discussing the impact of WikiLeaks on the world and what it means for the future, for this very special event WikiLeaks editor-in-chief Julian Assange will be in conversation with renowned Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek.
Focusing on the ethics and philosophy behind WikiLeaks’ work, the talk will provide a rare opportunity to hear two of the world’s most prominent thinkers discuss some of the most pressing issues of our time.

It will also mark the publication of the paperback edition of Living in the End Times, in which Žižek argues that new ways of using and sharing information, in particular WikiLeaks, are one of a number of harbingers of the end of global capitalism as we know it.

The event will be chaired by Amy Goodman, the award-winning investigative journalist and host of Democracy Now!, a daily, independent news hour which airs on the internet and more than 900 public television and radio stations worldwide.

Tony Yustein’s Thoughts | » Julian Assange in conversation with Slavoj Žižek The Sociological Imagination (2014-03-01 03:01:52) [...] ...read more [...] 


by Tracy Jensen

Today the sad news was announced that Stuart Hall has died. My Twitter timeline and email account has been awash with mourning colleagues; scholars, researchers and students remembering and reflecting upon the legacy of his enormous archive of work. Many people have shared stories of how his innovative combinations of critical theory and public activism have inspired them, and linked to recent interviews and articles where [1]he turned his intellectual gaze upon the activities of the Coalition administration – the culmination of a political and cultural turn to neoliberalism, the first rumblings of which he charted in Policing the Crisis (published the year before Thatcher came to power). If you have ever wondered where the word ‘Thatcherism’ came from – that was Stuart Hall. Although we never met, I have always felt my connection with him – we were both uncomfortable Oxbridge outsiders, we were both housed by the Open University (Hall as Professor of Sociology and me as a PhD candidate) and he was a member of the first Board of Governors at UEL where I am now based. One of my proudest moments was being published alongside him in the latest issue of [2]Soundings – a journal where his stirring manifestoes for moving beyond neoliberalism can be found. His wide-ranging eminence across so many fields means that there are many, many others like me who have overlapped with and admired his work and his approach.

More than our institutional crossovers though, Hall has sustained me intellectually through his fierce writing, his sophisticated approach and his devotion to social justice. To my mind, he is the most powerful advocate of interdisciplinarity and collaborative scholarship – two things we need more than ever if we are to keep the university going as a place of critical insight, and not simply a profit-seeking institution. Hall famously said the university is a critical institution, or it is nothing. His work insists that we develop ways of opening up a critical dialogue between the machinery of politics and the culture of the everyday. He exhorts us to connect up the places where state power is exercised and where we take these workings of power into our daily lives, conversations and exchanges. He recognised that the media take a central role in structuring ‘social knowledge’ – in his words possessing a
‘near-monopoly’ as the primary source of information and mediating the passage of this from those ‘in the know’ to the ‘structured ignorance’ of the general public (Policing the Crisis, p66). Yet he also recognised the limits of remaining overly-attached to media power conspiracies – it is a ‘near-monopoly’ certainly, but not a complete one. Ideological closure can always be interrupted – counter-definitions and narratives can always be developed. Hall’s commitment to identifying and nurturing sites of counter-narratives led, under his directorship, to fascinating close-up portraits of cultural resistance from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. This influential body of work triggered a reflective ‘cultural turn’ across many disciplines of study, supplanting the often-fatalistic inertia that characterised theories of cultural power through the notion of ‘cultural politics’ (possibly my most-over-used phrase), and establishing popular culture as an object for serious study. I still find it incredible that the CCCS – the home of British cultural studies – was closed in 2002. While political elites are clearly invested in dismissing and discrediting sociology, media and cultural studies (not least because they teach students how to think critically about power), it is hard to believe that a university would vandalise itself in such a wilful act of atrophy.

I am re-reading much of Hall’s work in 2014. The second edition of Policing The Crisis was published last year and it feels as fresh and mighty as ever. I defy anyone to read the new preface without concluding that this research is still one of the most important publications written about the apparatus of power. In particular his examination of ‘public opinion’ machinery is timely within the context of welfare reform debates and the saturation of primetime television with so-called ‘poverty porn’ such as We All Pay Your Benefits (BBC), On Benefits and Proud (Five) and most recently the ongoing series Benefits Street (Channel 4). Hall and his colleagues were concerned with the emergence of a new cultural figure – ‘the mugger’ – upon whom street crime is racialised and against whom social anxieties around youth, urban space and control become projected. The conjunctural analysis they develop – mapping out public and official disquiet, “trying to catch public opinion, unawares, in the very moment of its formation” (2013: preface, xiii) – is an approach I use in my current work mapping out the emergence of the ‘welfare scrounger’. As Hall and his colleagues compellingly argued, such figures are essential at times of crisis, when new formations of ‘commonsense’ are condensing. Our current crisis – economic and political but also cultural, organised around the concept of austerity and the ‘virtues’ of restraint vis-à-vis the welfare state – is a crisis that is rapidly condensing upon figures of ‘welfare dependence’. The figure of ‘the mugger’, and repetitions of mugger discourse (across news media, courtrooms, public commentary, everyday conversation, gossip and other formal and official sites of disquiet) came to solidify a new ‘commonsense’ consensus around authoritative policing. Welfare has now firmly ascended into the public arena and taken the shape of ‘public issue’ – that much is clear from the burst of poverty porn programming. But what new forms of consensus will become ‘commonsense’ in the repetitions of welfare crisis discourse? What will be legitimised once the shifting public opinions around welfare crystallise and harden? Poverty porn television...
is too important in the manufacture of a welfare crisis for us to ignore, and the public opinion that is orchestrated via such cultural sites is not ‘spontaneous’ or ‘organic’ but powerfully structured and editorialised. As Hall et al argue:

In formally democratic societies, ‘becoming commonsense’ is one key route to securing popular legitimacy and compliance and thus the basis of what Gramsci called ‘hegemonic’ forms of power (2013: xiii)

The process of welfare reform ‘becoming commonsense’ is therefore a process of pulling ordinary, normally invisible, people into a staged public conversation, something that looks like public debate but which is in fact a highly structured exchange. We can see how this orchestration of public opinion was developed in Big Benefits Row: Live, in which Five shamelessly capitalised on the ratings success of Channel 4’s Benefits Street, drawing on familiar talkshow tropes to prolong and extend the ‘debate’ which had scrutinised the residents of James Turner Street. Big Benefits Row: Live promises immediacy (through its liveness), participation (displaying a Twitter hashtag throughout) and controversy (host Matthew Wright promising “strong opinions” from “a nation at boiling point” in his opening speech – and in its very title we are offered a ‘row’). But while it seems to promise an unmediated window onto ‘how the public really feels’, BBR in fact functions as an organised, formal part of how public opinion becomes shaped. Hall and his colleagues plundered the ‘letters to the Editor’ pages of newspapers to catch public opinion in the moment of its formation – we might view the tweets sent in response to the #BigBenefitsRow as a contemporary version of this. Letters, tweets, and the increasingly heated exchanges of those participating in BBR are “the more powerful because
it appears to be in the readers’ [tweeters, viewers] keeping and done with his or her consent and participation” (Policing the Crisis, p121).

Big Benefits Row: Live goes one step further – displaying the results of its opinion poll which asks ‘do you think the benefits system is fit or unfit for purpose’ and finds that two-thirds of respondents think it unfit. This moment potently documents the democratic image that poverty porn television has of itself – as well as its profound lack of reflexivity. Innocently asking ‘why are we talking about benefits so much’ at the very moment that it exploits such talk; populating a discussion panel with professional attention-seekers (‘self-styled public commentator’) and not one sociologist in sight; such compositions demonstrate how ‘public consent’ is prompted, manufactured and constrained. Hall and his colleagues are eloquent on this – replace ‘crime’ with ‘welfare’ and they could be writing in response to poverty porn television;

“‘Public opinion’ about crime does not simply form up at random. It exhibits a shape and a structure. It follows a sequence. It is a social process, not a mystery. Even at the lowest threshold of visibility – in talk, in rumour, in the exchange of quick views and common-sense judgements – crime talk is not socially innocent […] the more an issue passes into the public domain, the more it is structured by the dominant ideologies about crime” (Policing the Crisis, p136)

We must interrupt – and keep interrupting – the crystallisation of ‘commonsense’ ideas about welfare. The populist authoritarianism that is incited by poverty porn, and apparently licensed by such ‘public opinion’ polls, must be resisted. Hall’s project to map the production of consent and the structuring of social knowledge has never been more urgent than now. He heard, in the mugging crisis, "the ugly sound of an old conjuncture unravelling" (2013: xviii) – but what will we hear when the ugly echoes of poverty porn exploitation have died down?

Sociological Research Online has announced a Rapid Response to Channel 4’s Benefits Street – if you would like to contribute to this important issue you can find more details [4]here.

Tracy Jensen’s research explores the classed and gendered intersections of contemporary parenting culture, and how these are reproduced across social, cultural, media and policy sites. Tracy tweets at @Drtraceyjensen

References

2. [http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/issue/55.html](http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/journals/soundings/issue/55.html)


[...] subaltern. In light of Stuart Hall’s passing this week we would do well to remember, as noted here how the welfare claimant has become the public figure through which so many of our modern […]

[... ] light of Stuart Hall’s recent passing we would do well to remember, as noted here, how the welfare claimant has become the public figure through which so many of our modern [...]

Angela Kennedy (@AcademicAnge) (2015-03-16 23:28:33)
I’ve actually been applying ‘policing the crisis’ to Canine Breed Specific Legislation, especially here in the UK, in my own research analysis. It has been very fruitful indeed, quite astoundingly so. It’s good to see how useful it remains for other issues such as the Coalition’s treatment of people needing social security.

The pedagogical value of Twitter: enhancing the collective identity of independent learners (2014-02-11 08:00)

Last year I taught on a newly designed module in my School and was struck by the value of Twitter as a learning resource and teaching tool. ‘Current Issues in Society’ is a first year undergraduate module that has deviated quite considerably from the conventional teaching format. Usually, a module is made up of a one hour lecture and a one hour seminar each week over the course of an academic term. Albeit a tried and tested formula, this roster can, at times, stifle the pedagogical process. Particularly for those just beginning their degree, this teaching timetable can sometimes feel disjoined, with students only starting to grasp the content and rationale of a module in the latter weeks of term. Independent research and reading are a crucial means by which to ‘bridge the gap’ but this often leaves students navigating an unfamiliar academic terrain alone. At the beginning of their degree, students are not only faced with the challenge of familiarising themselves with their lecturers and peers, they must also grapple with a step change in their educational development. Namely, they have to negotiate the transition from passive to active independent learner.

‘Current Issues in Society’ broke the mould in a number of important respects to respond to some of these challenges. The module ran as a mini-conference over one afternoon each week, with an opening plenary, two hour workshop and closing plenary. This format facilitated intensive and collaborative working between staff and students. Many positive outcomes of the course can be ascribed to this format, but I’d like to focus here on an important adjunct to this shakeup - the introduction and use of Twitter. The module in question lent itself particularly well to this innovation with the primary focus of the course being on the uses (and abuses) of evidence, arguments and theory in current affairs. Before, during and after each mini-conference, students were encouraged to tweet their reflections and any content relevant to the topic of that week.
Online dialogue between students and staff extended teaching beyond the classroom

As a result, students availed themselves of the opportunity to engage with the news in a way that many never would have done before. Not only were students accessing and consuming academic knowledge in a novel format but they were also able to generate, map and track their own knowledge in a concise and compelling new way.

Twitter as a heuristic in that process allowed students to engage with the content of the course in their everyday lives – not for just a few hours a week. Students were able to interact with their peers and the content of the module well beyond the classroom. This proved immersive so that students more seamlessly developed new ways of interpreting and using the news in their wider academic work, whilst thinking sociologically in their day to day lives. Crucially it enabled students to integrate this way of looking at the social world and themselves within it through a medium that is often (falsely) considered separate from more formalised pedagogic methods.

Students recognised the value of the module and use of Twitter

Thinking and working alone are key features of independent learning. However, due to the open forum of Twitter, students could see each other engaging with material and continuing the sociological discussion (with themselves and others) beyond the classroom. This sort of symbolic feedback cultivated a collective identity amongst students, such that they were able to situate themselves and their own work within the School. Using Twitter opened up new avenues for students to explore, develop and play with the material of the course. Perhaps most importantly though it offered students the reassurance of being [1]’alone together’ in their transition to active independent learners.

After the course last year, there was a clear realisation amongst the students that engaging with current affairs and thinking sociologically outside of their lectures and seminars can greatly enhance their understanding and experience of the academic programme. Without the use of these more innovative teaching methods, I doubt students would have come to the same realisation so easily.

The module will be running again this semester. Follow [2]@SSP_Cissues to see how we get on!

Daniel Edmiston is a PhD student in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Leeds.

2. [https://twitter.com/SSP_Cissues](https://twitter.com/SSP_Cissues)
There's a great article by Lisa Wade in Salon talking about the 'hidden crisis' of white heterosexual American men. They have the fewest friends of any group within American society and, it seems, they wish they had more. What really caught my attention was the description of the qualitative characteristics of the relations they have and those which they seek:

Of all people in America, adult, white, heterosexual men have the fewest friends. Moreover, the friendships they have, if they're with other men, provide less emotional support and involve lower levels of self-disclosure and trust than other types of friendships. When men get together, they're more likely to do stuff than have a conversation. Friendship scholar Geoffrey Greif calls these "shoulder-to-shoulder" friendships, contrasting them to the "face-to-face" friendships that many women enjoy. If a man does have a confidant, three-quarters of the time it's a woman, and there's a good chance she's his wife or girlfriend.

From a relational realist perspective, it's important to identify the distinctive self/other interactions generative of the kinds of relational bonds identified here. These 'shoulder-to-shoulder' friendships, grounded in shared interests and reproduced through shared activity, involve a reciprocal orientation towards practice. The friendships grounded in self-disclosure, what Archer calls 'thought and talk', involve a reciprocal orientation to each other. The problem is that sustaining these relations necessitates work to sustain the continuity upon which they are founded. Reciprocal self-disclosure which is subjectively satisfying and meaningful to each party, as well as the trust which it depends upon but also generates, necessitates 'catching up' as a regular activity. It involves making the effort to know what is going on in the other's life. It depends upon shared understandings and shared references points because otherwise self-disclosure, externalising internal conversation to a trusted interlocutor, doesn't work. Without the contextual continuity upon which 'face-to-face' friendships are based, self-disclosure doesn't bring about understanding in the other. The friend may be sympathetic. They may be helpful. But they simply won't understand in the same way. This in turn leads to a diminished propensity towards self-disclosure:

For those people who gradually learn that their internal conversations do indeed 'make sense only to themselves', this discovery has far-reaching consequences. Attempts at spoken interchange about one's internal deliberations are rebuffed by incomprehension or misunderstanding. Since renewed efforts to make oneself clear usually involved greater self-revelation, continued failure is doubly hurtful and self-defence consist in withdrawal ... And to stop (or possibly never to begin) throws one back on one's own mental resources. In turn, that makes significant tracts of a person's internal conversation self-contained and knowingly not for traffic in spoken conversation. (Archer 2007: 86)

In late modernity contextual continuity is something that has to be worked at because it's valued. What I found so thought-provoking about Lisa Wade's article is the extent to which it suggests that white heterosexual American men would value relations which had these characteristics:
When asked about what they desire from their friendships, men are just as likely as women to say that they want intimacy. And, just like women, their satisfaction with their friendships is strongly correlated with the level of self-disclosure. Moreover, when asked to describe what they mean by intimacy, men say the same thing as women: emotional support, disclosure and having someone to take care of them.

Men desire the same level and type of intimacy in their friendships as women, but they aren’t getting it.

[http://www.salon.com/2013/12/08/american_mens_hidden_crisis_they_need_more_friends/]

But Wade argues that gender norms intervene. I think this can be usefully understood in terms of the gendering of internal conversation, with normative sanction attached to adolescent boys engaging in ‘thought and talk’:

During these years, young men are learning what it means to be a “real man.” The #1 rule: avoid everything feminine. Notice that a surprising number of insults that we fling at men are actually synonyms for or references to femininity. Calling male athletes “girls,” “women” and “ladies” is a central part of motivation in sports. Consider also slurs like “bitch” and “pussy,” which obviously reference women, but also “fag” (which on the face of it is about sexual orientation, but can also be a derogatory term for men who act feminine) and “cocksucker” (literally a term for people who sexually service men). This, by the way, is where the ubiquitous slur “you suck” comes from; it’s an insult that means you give men blow jobs.

So men are pressed — from the time they’re very young — to disassociate from everything feminine. This imperative is incredibly limiting for them. Paradoxically, it makes men feel good because of a social agreement that masculine things are better than feminine things, but it’s not the same thing as freedom. It’s restrictive and dehumanizing. It’s oppression all dressed up as awesomeness. And it is part of why men have a hard time being friends.

To be close friends, men need to be willing to confess their insecurities, be kind to others, have empathy and sometimes sacrifice their own self-interest. “Real men,” though, are not supposed to do these things. They are supposed to be self-interested, competitive, non-emotional, strong (with no insecurities at all), and able to deal with their emotional problems without help. Being a good friend, then, as well as needing a good friend, is the equivalent of being girly.

[http://www.salon.com/2013/12/08/american_mens_hidden_crisis_they_need_more_friends/]

As this cultural environment throws them back upon their own resources (“I don’t talk to nobody about serious stuff... I don’t talk to nobody. I don’t share my feelings really.”) it becomes increasingly difficult to establish ‘face-to-face’ friendships even if the characteristics of these friendships are sought after. It’s important not to see ‘shoulder-to-shoulder’ friendships as intrinsically diminished though, which I think Wade’s post does to a certain extent, however this is another discussion in its own right. I also think we need to see what I presume is a diminishment of homosociality (that’s empirically true, right?) I just realised I’ve assumed it in the past but don’t know) in this context. Nonetheless this article captures something important about male homosociality in late modern societies:

Of course, not all men buy into these prescriptions for male behavior, but these expectations do influence most men’s friendships at least a little bit. They mean that, to make good friends, men have
to take risks. In a context in which being a man is good and being friendly is being womanly, each time a man tries to form intimate bonds with another man, he potentially loses status. Men who want truly close friends have to fight the instinct to protect their standing above all else. This isn’t easy, as they’ve been told for a lifetime that their status as male, and their place in that hierarchy, is a significant part of why they’re important and valuable human beings.

Men also have to find other men who are willing to take those risks with them. Knowing who to reach out to isn’t always easy, as men often wear a masculine guise, a mask that projects masculinity and hides the things about them that are disallowed. In one study of men’s experiences, one college-age man explained: “I am more of an emotional person. ... I never really felt much like who I [pretended to be] because I [was]... putting my man face on.”

These norms are something which need to be seen in historical perspective. There’s a great discussion in Doris Goodwin’s Lincoln biography of the ‘intimate male attachments’ which were common in his time. While it’s perfectly possible that Lincoln may very well have been having sex with some of these famously close male friends, the propensity of many commentators to assume this as a matter of reflex speaks volumes about the cultural tendency Wade discusses in this article. Interestingly Goodwin offers a sociological account of the intensity which characterised the ‘intimate male attachments’ amongst men of Lincoln’s generation:

The family-focused and community-centred life led by most men in the colonial era was transformed at the dawn of the new century into an individual and career-oriented existence. As the young men of Seward and Lincoln’s generation left the familiarity of their small communities and travelled to seek employment in fast-growing, anonymous cities or in distant territories, they often felt unbearably lonely. In the absence of parents and siblings, they turned to one another for support, sharing thoughts and emotions so completely that their intimate friendships developed the qualities of passionate romances. (pg 33)

Are similar trends on the horizon? Will the desire for more intimate friendships described by Wade actually lead to them?

1. http://www.salon.com/2013/12/08/american_mens_hidden_crisis_they_need_more_friends/
11. http://books.google.com/books/about/Friendship_processes.html?id=AUnuAAAMAAJ

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1st International Conference on Men and Masculinities: "Identities, Cultures, Societies" will be held on 11-13 September 2014 in Izmir Turkey. Initiative for Critical Studies of Masculinities (ICSM) invites proposals for the first international conference on men and masculinities to take place in Turkey, in collaboration with Stony Brook University Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities, Ankara University Women's Studies Centre (KASAUM) and Izmir University Women's Studies Centre. The deadline for submission is 30th March 2014. For details please check the conference website [1]http://icsmsymposium.org

1st International Conference on Men and Masculinities "Identities, Cultures, Societies"

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Call for Papers

Initiative for Critical Studies of Masculinities (ICSM) cordially invites proposals for the first international conference on men and masculinities to take place in Turkey, in collaboration with Stony Brook University Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities, Ankara University Women's Studies Centre (KASAUM) and Izmir University Women's Studies Centre. The conference aims to discuss theories, narratives, experiences, discourses, and activisms related to transformations of and challenges to men and masculinities with a particular focus on the Global Southern and Eastern European contexts.

Various phenomena such as globalisation and reconfigurations of nation states/nationalisms; identity politics; new social movements and political activism; rise in digital technology and the new social media; and the influence of postmodern and queer theory have changed and challenged men's lives and masculinities in distinct ways. Yet there is little consensus on how to characterise transformations caused by such phenomena. We are seeking to explore issues related to such transformations with their political, economic, social and cultural implications for men and masculinities. We are also interested in addressing issues concerning methodologies, scope and conceptual boundaries of the critical studies of men and masculinities that need rethinking in light of these changes and developments. In order to contribute to these debates, researchers from social sciences and humanities are invited to send proposals to discuss topics including, but not limited to:

- Revolutionary movements, political activism, ethnic/religious conflicts
- Nationalism, military and militarisation
- Lived experiences and/or representations of the body, disability
- Sexualities, desire, pornography
- Intimacy, affective turn, emotions

2430
• Subjectivities and experiences
• Queering men and masculinities, sexual identities
• Legacy of masculinity studies, future agenda, feminisms

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Abstracts of up to 300 words for individual papers and 600 words for panel proposals as well as a 100-word biographical note should be sent to [2]icsmsymposium@gmail.com by 30 March 2014. Graduate students who wish to take part in the forum discussions should send a 300-word description of their research and a 100-word biographical note. Notification of acceptance will be made by 02 May 2014. The registration fee for the conference is 70 € and 40 € for graduate students. Five conference fee waivers will be granted for graduate students based on need and merit.

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The responsibility of being nice: An idea, a method and a personal utopia on suicide. A conversation with Dr. Ben Fincham (2014-02-13 08:00)

I. News that stale

Having interrupted the flow of the Sociologists of Crisis series for a timely intervention on the issue of the Golden Dawn trials in my native Greece, it seems timely to return to a matter that was very much on my mind when I started this article series: suicide in times of crisis. The very mention of the phrase may evoke negative sentiments, but it may also reveal the way in which we are herded by the rhetoric of news headlines into accepting such statements almost as axiomatic, especially when they are accompanied by a sprinkle of statistics and a few blurbs from ‘the experts’. To accept numerical representations or the musings of pundits, since ‘numbers don’t lie’ or because ‘an authority knows better’, is bad enough, given that it eschews our civic responsibility to weigh any such statement critically; not just for our own good, but to avoid doing injustice to our fellow human beings whose thoughts, sentiments, decisions, passions and actions are explained away with the use of sensationalist headlines and a fatalistic, yet sympathetic, shrug of the shoulders. But to surrender so easily to such a comfortable position on a matter that we would otherwise find ever so sombre, flirts with irresponsibility and hypocrisy even, both of which are admittedly unwise options both for our individual conscience or our collective welfare.

A few caveats, reservations and doubts must be generously offered when too many people gather around a cliché, hug it close and wish to adopt it as ‘the truth’, starting with the appreciation that any research, for all its merits, also carries the weight of its prejudices and preconceptions; reporting back to us the bias of what questions are being asked and how they being framed in the first place. The results of any such survey are influenced by the collection of data as much as they are by the way the research question is articulated (and interpreted), not to mention the logic behind the way a question is framed the way it is; its ontology to use a more technical term. If we are, for instance, met with a study that is already convinced that with any fluctuation in the economy, suicide rates simply go up and
that is the way in which the issue is approached on the whole, then the findings will simply fit that hypothesis in the same way that our hold luggage fits the prescribed dimensions when we check it in upon arrival at the airport. What I mean to say here is that a study that may record any rise in suicide rates during economic crises leads us to assume, almost automatically, that the cause of such a rise must be attributed to the crisis. But what happens if and when reality is more complicated and the crisis-ridden climate simply amplifies tensions, problems, thoughts, decisions, anxieties that may be already at play and might have been expressed anyway but might have gone unnoticed during more affluent times? Is this the same as considering an act of suicide the direct outcome of a period of recession? If so, you can disregard my objection, but if not should we not be more careful in the way we plan, articulate, and express our research questions, our news and, perhaps most importantly, our reaction to them?

This very question is intended not as a disagreement voiced on the grounds of epistemological soundness (alone), but primarily as a moral dilemma suggesting that any matter that is so perilously close to our fundamental existential anxieties ought to be treated with more sensitivity, sensibility and care on a number of levels; scientifically, philosophically, culturally and socio-politically too. The moment we stop consuming information as all-too-rational automatons by striving to turn knowledge into understanding (Blacking, 1977: 5), we start realising our humanity by recognising the people behind the statistics and the pronouncement of the experts as our very cultural colleagues (Garfinkel, 1967: 11), whose welfare very much depends on the way we treat them, not simply in our daily encounter but in our thoughts and the public or private verbalisations of these thoughts too. May I then suggest that instead of nodding our mute assent to dramatic news snippets, we (re)turn to the consolations of philosophical (humanist) thinking in order to relate to the very dramas that make us human after all? Would such a shift from passively consuming data, news and ready-mixed opinion, to actively concerned contemplation not signal a more empathetic stance towards our inner fears and those of our fellow-commuters in life? This could easily be dismissed as a luxury but I think the reverse is true. Rationalising something so close to the bone means abstracting it, but jumping into it headlong with sharpened minds and alert hearts can only do good, and it is that very last thought which forms the ethical centre of this article.

II. Death and Suicide: a matter of social life

Ethical and moral commitments aside, public discussions on suicide can profit substantially from sociological investigations of and philosophical reflections on the possible meaning, causes, and casualties of suicide with a view of restoring the matter to its complexity instead of granting unconditional support to media generalisations which are so readily available. In doing so, we are confronted with the responsibility to respond to a sensitive social issue attentively rather than half-heartedly or even dismissively by accepting the common-sense ‘truths’ that surround it. Nothing could be more complex, complicated and varied however than the decision to take one’s own life and we can only learn from the mythological, literary and everyday testimonies of suicide in human history; be it Jocasta in Sophocles’ Oedipus the King, Dido in Virgil’s Aeneid or the first-hand experiences of people who have lived with or have survived suicide, recent accounts of which were broadcast recently on the BBC Radio 1’s Stories programme, guested by UK rapper Professor Green. A moment’s thought on this observation makes Albert Camus (2005 [1942]: 1-2) sound eerily relevant in his assertion that ‘[t]here is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest-whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories- comes afterwards’. David Hume (2005 [1783]: 8) seems equally troubled by suicide offering an interpretation of it as a concern that braids together ‘grand fabric’ and ‘individual creature’, ‘personal troubles’ and ‘public issues’, as Mills (1959: 8) would put it, and amounts to an existential burden of, on and for humanity; ‘tired of life, and hunted by pain and misery’, ‘loaded with pain and sickness, with shame and poverty’ (Hume, 2005 [1783]: 3, 5). Philosophical contemplation aside, suicide and its macabre sibling; death have some sociological life to live if one considers their personal, political and social attributes and ramifications. De Beauvoir (1948: 7), quoting Montaigne, in The Ethics of Ambiguity opined that ‘[t]he continuous work of our life is to build death’ , in her attempt to show how necessary it may be to develop an ethics of struggling with ‘life’ and ‘death’ on an intellectual, personal, cultural and social
level, while Mbembe (2003: 14-5) imagines ‘politics [as] death that lives a human life’ thus re-defining it as a domain of life where power and sovereignty influence decisions of who may live and who may die through ‘the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations’. The take-home message, of sociological importance, from Beauvoir’s existentialism and Mbembe’s bio-political dialectics is, to paraphrase surrealist poet and lay psychoanalyst Andreas Embirikos (1980), no other than the invitation to re-make the fear of death into a skill and ‘inspiration for life’; a central existential concern alchemised into a socio-cultural and political resource by ‘learning how to die [as] learning how to let go, and learning to live [as] learning to hang on’ (Bakewell, 2011: 33).

The significance of such preponderant commentary on death is that it unlocks different ways of approaching suicide less as a merely dramatic, desperate and/or irresponsible gesture but as an anguished response to manifold pressures that weigh on our psyche thus making it hard to accept facile interpretations of it.

Sociological evidence sides with the theoretical peregrinations of Montaigne, Hume, De Beauvoir, Camus, Embirikos and Mbembe; immortalised in the writings of Durkheimian sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1978) who, in The Causes of Suicide, attempted to show ‘in instructive detail how difficult it is in concrete research to decide which of the various background factors are genuine rather than spurious in their impact on suicide rates’ (Coser in: Halbwachs, 1992: 15). Besides, as Durkheim (1951 [1897]: 297-298) himself wrote in a quite unforgettable passage, ‘the circumstances are almost infinite in number which are supposed to cause suicide because they rather frequently accompany it. One man kills himself in the midst of affluence, another in the lap of poverty; one was unhappy in his home, and another had just ended by divorce a marriage that was making him unhappy. In one case a soldier ends his life after having been punished for an offense he did not commit; in another, a criminal whose crime remained unpunished kills himself. The most varied and even the most contradictory events of life may equally serve as pretexts for suicide. This suggests that none of them is the specific cause. Could we perhaps at least causality to those qualities known to be common to all? But are there any such? At best, one might say that they usually consist of disappointments, of sorrows without any possibility of deciding how intense the grief must be to have such great significance’.

III. To know the causes of things

With a little help from Durkheim and a verse from Virgil; ‘Fortunate is he, who is able to know the causes of things’ (verse 490 of Book 2 of the Georgics), it shouldn’t take too long for us to realise how difficult the task of ‘knowing the causes of things’ is, and how fortunate indeed we would be if we could afford to say that we can ‘know’ the causes of suicide. Such scepticism and the doubt(s) that accompany it should not scare us however. Rather, they should humanise us and allow us the rare opportunity to open ourselves to the lives of others by listening to their stories. Instead of matching numerical data to human lives, it might be preferable to attune ourselves to human stories and if there is one ‘take-home’ message from the discussion that follows, that would be it.

IV. A conversation with [6]Dr. Ben Fincham about understanding suicide sociologically in times of crisis

One of the main issues that are being discussed at the moment in Greece, in relation to suicide at least, is the extent to which the financial crisis has contributed to and impacted on increasing suicide rates. Is it reasonable, responsible and/or fair to consider that statistical spike a prime cause for suicide?

It makes sense to me to assume that when people fall into positions of crisis, as a result of economic circumstances, the ways in which they might then understand a sensible way of reacting to that will change from periods in which they’re not in crisis. Losing your job and the things that might follow from that might of course make people consider things they normally wouldn’t, and suicide is just one of those things. However, the point about
the relationship of suicide to economic crisis is that it’s just one part of a much more complicated story; all sorts of people are suffering as a result of economic downturn but not everybody thinks about killing themselves, so it’s not as if there’s an immediate, instrumental reaction to economic crisis that then provokes people generally to think that killing yourself is a reasonable thing to do. In fact, I suspect that lots of people who are in families where people have killed themselves as apparently a direct result of joblessness or the economic downturn, would have thought that it was something pretty unreasonable for that family member to have done. Therefore, it’s not as if suicide is a uniform response to crises.

What do you think would be a more helpful way of discussing the issue of suicide in relation to ‘a’ Crisis, with a capital ‘c’? If, for instance, we think that this is not a particularly helpful way of framing the public discussion; that it’s doing nothing to assist us either to understand suicide or the current climate of Crisis, how would you rather see the public discussion be framed? Imagine being faced with the statement: ‘people kill themselves because of the Crisis’, what would you suggest as a more helpful way of approaching the issue?

I think that the problem you have identified has largely to do with the way in which we understand suicide at a societal or ‘macro’ level and that’s actually a methodological issue as much as anything! So what we tend to do is gather statistics, in the way Durkheim did I suppose, and then we infer from those statistics particular causal factors. In the study that I was involved with Scourfield, Langer and Shiner, [7]Understanding Suicide: A Sociological Autopsy, we were fairly sure that there had to be a more subtle way of understanding the individual circumstances of suicide which then required a much more ‘micro’ account. So rather than inferring from aggregated data, we said that we would look at individual cases of suicide and then try to understand what the circumstances that supported a suicidal act were.

One of those features might involve someone losing their job but because we thought that’s not enough to determine whether one would kill themselves or not, we looked at what other things were also involved, what other circumstances were present at the time when somebody wanted to kill themselves. So to answer your question, the most useful thing to do in a debate which appears to be about macro-politics or macro-economics (like macro-economic depression for example), is to really go down to an individual level rather than seek a direct causal relationship. The conundrum here is that because we’re used to a macro-level approach to such issues, we then tend to talk about consequences at a macro level using aggregated data; ‘X amount of people have killed themselves in this crisis and that’s different from previous years’. Clearly that’s a decisive factor but the way in which we’re oriented to particular acts is influenced by a huge amount of other things that need accounting for, and the evidence for that in our study was that so many people don’t kill themselves in apparently similar circumstances.

So do you suspect that in periods of crisis, we see rising suicide rates and rush to make an immediate connection rather than carefully consider other possibilities that might be at play? If that is so, does the facile link between economic crisis and suicides become an accepted ‘fact’ to which we become attuned or used to? Isn’t that way of thinking risky both in terms of our sensitivity towards others, but also in terms of making it normal to consider becoming such a statistic ourselves following from the legitimising assumption that ‘that’s what happens in periods of crisis’?

Well, that’s partly our conclusion following the model that we used. If one thing that would influence your decision to kill yourself would be hearing about other people in similar situations who kill themselves, then it becomes a reasonable option. It becomes a narrative which you can mobilise at any point by saying ‘Well, look people in my position kill themselves, therefore it’s not unreasonable for me to do the same’.

Which may then suggest that there might be a fifth type of suicide, added to Durkheim’s original four (egoistic, anomic, altruistic, and fatalistic)? We might call it ‘mimetic’ suicide or [8]‘copycat suicide’ as it’s known in popular debates...
Well, it's not as simple as being an act of copying! There have to be many other things in place because there are so many people who are in similar positions and don't commit suicide. The financial crisis is interesting however because on the one hand there is a statistical or generalised account of suicide which seems to be one that government responds to; government is not so good at responding to individual stories because they're not generalised! But that isn't to say that aggregated accounts aren't useful or to deny that huge spikes in suicides coincide with periods of economic downturn, it would be remiss not to acknowledge that.

I suppose what you were suggesting is that the whole issue operates on a societal level as well so one might introduce a raft of policies which address the general issue, but actually that's operating at a different level than that of a person who's just been told that they've lost their job. They go home, their partner’s really angry at them, the kids have left home, they worry about all sorts of other things, about the mortgage, this, that and the other, they then have feelings that perhaps they’ve let people down, feel like they failed or they might just get angry because this is not what life was supposed to be. The scenarios that you can play out seem fairly uniform and regimented but you can’t really assume that everybody's life is the same. These things are going to play out differently in different ways in people's lives, so I suppose what we were asking for in our study is a more sensitive account; sensitive to the sorts of clusters of circumstances which involve things like experience, beliefs and values, the ways you reflect on those things as well as what your life is like now. Our relationship to suicide can change over time and might then lead one to a range of actions or responses to a situation which will appear as reasonable or unreasonable but these actions/responses can also change! And they can change even during an economic crisis; you can be suicidal at one point during an economic crisis and non-suicidal at another; it's not a linear relationship and though I suspect people will say 'Well, the statistical data is there; why don't you just admit that it's a strong causal factor?' I'd say, 'No, it's one of many!' But what happens in economic crises is that many other areas of our life which are related to well-being are also put under strain. So it’s not the economic crisis itself, it could be relationships that are put under strain by a particular circumstance which is to do with money, relationships with children, expectations of life, disappointment, existential questions and all of those things may be put under strain by economic crises, but they also can be compensated for elsewhere; in strong relationships, strong friendships, or being surrounded by people who are nice to you.

I like that remark! Especially as it seems applicable to other spheres of public and political life in Greece as well. A lot of things seem to have come under pressure lately and reveal themselves as rather sudden. The reality however is that they’ve always been with us, operating on the background with the current climate of crisis simply shining a light on them...

Yes and the other thing which routinely comes under strain in such sorts of periods is your relationship with others! You can therefore swap suicide with fascism and the rise of Golden Dawn as it’s not that you just become fascist as a result of an economic crisis. We may always say that economic crises breeds fascism but I suspect it simply coincides, it doesn't just like that. You don’t have a 20 % of the population that are waiting for an economic crisis to become fascists....

Does that then not provide us almost with a macro-level invitation to look at the micro-level of things?

Yes, although invitation makes it sound like there's less agency involved! But when your material circumstances are changed through no agency of your own then obviously the things which you do have more control over like individual relationships or feelings of happiness and well-being are then trammelled by the other stuff, the material stuff which you have no control over. And I think powerlessness and a feeling of hopelessness is something that comes out very strongly. In the study that we did, which was undertaken just at the beginning of the financial crisis we found narratives of unemployment and suicide rather than narratives that would point to something else. To a certain extent then, the financial crisis has shone a light, a bit like you’re saying, on the fragility of your sense of well-being at times when your expectations aren't met, particularly when it comes to relationships. We found this to
be very strong.

V. A method for studying suicide (sociologically)

I would like us now to introduce the approach that you used for ‘understanding suicide’; sociological autopsy.

Sociological autopsy seemed like a neat moniker! The idea came from discovering that there’s a technique called psychological autopsy which had been developed by researchers in Oxford who, quite rightly in our view, had decided that a good way of understanding the psychology of suicide, was to go and look at individual stories. Their technique therefore was based in the same thinking as ours, or to be more precise our technique was the same as theirs because we copied it. What the researchers did, was to spend time at the coroners’ office and look at the coroners reports, but they had tick boxes so they could get through loads of those reports noting for example: ‘Is there depression?’, ‘tick’ and so on and so forth.

Now, we thought this was clearly an interesting way of going about studying suicide, particularly since part of our remit was to develop a method where you could interrogate a sociology about people that were dead, without this starting to look like history or something similar.

So what we did was spend a couple of years in the coroner’s office, and we interviewed people who had been recently bereaved through suicide. We went with a fine toothcomb through all of these stories/accounts, but also looked at media reports of the cases we were looking at in order to try and build a picture of what seemed to be going on for the person who killed themselves at the time when they died. This would include the coroners’ reports that were very detailed, but also interviews where we would ask a mother about what her child was like for instance. You would therefore build those partial views, because every view of the circumstances would be partial to the position of the person was in. A mother’s account would be very different from a police officer’s account which in turn is different from a son’s, a daughter’s or a colleague’s. All those accounts were very partial so we had to acknowledge not only that one would never get a full picture about somebody, but that we build a picture of the person based on these accounts. Because of the multiplicity of such accounts, an immensely complicated picture of a person emerges, because that’s what a person is; a very complex human being. In addition to those accounts, there were lots of artefacts that were left by people; suicide notes, text messages, so we looked at the scenes of death, saw photographs of the scene of the suicide and then analysed those to build up a fuller picture. What we did then was to try to write a story, not saying that we would come to any definitive truths, but to look closely at the sorts of things which seem to be present in someone’s life which can possibly steer them towards suicide as one of a range of other reasonable options.

And that’s very human data you were handling! They suggest vulnerability, fragility and weakness thus giving your study an extra interpretive weight; because it’s fine to examine the figures, but when you’re looking at things that expose people so much, even at a post-mortem level, you begin to wake yourself up to the complexity of the issue especially when witnessing artefacts, listening to stories and coming across things that don’t quite fit a neat picture. By the way, let me just say that I use the term ‘post-mortem’ figuratively, thinking that through your method you tried to bring the person back to life in order to understand what was happening in his/her life...

Well, the post-mortem reports, the medical reports were unsurprisingly very dry, but also very useful in making sense of the situation. Occasionally, there were circumstances where you drew your breath, where someone would write in their note: ‘I can’t bear the fact that I lost some children, please don’t tell my family’; then in the account from friends and parents it came out that they clearly had no idea that someone was pregnant! The friends said: ‘she was pregnant’ and the post-mortem would state there was no sign of ever having been a pregnancy. Now, at surface level, or crass tabloid level if you prefer, one might be tempted to say: ‘She’s lying’. A much more subtle account/reaction however would be: 'My goodness, how complicated' thus making one think about why somebody
would be in that position and what is it that is driving this narrative for that person. So, that really dry data was really useful for seeing how easy it is to aggregate suicides, because if you turn anyone into a body, bodies are generally similar, and they’re all dead.

And, before we move to your idea of repertoires of action, isn’t it interesting that even by simply following that method many other things are unmasked as well? How mainstream ways of accounting for suicide are organised for instance by the police or the coroner’s office? In a way you are also shining a light to institutional ways with which we understand such phenomena and that seems to me, at least as a non-specialist in such areas of study, as a bit cruel. When you hear something like the story that you just recounted and you’re faced with a cold coroner’s report, it makes you think that it doesn’t capture anything, in fact it almost does injustice to the person and the situation they found themselves in and perhaps to those researching it too...

I think you’re right! It’s funny actually because justice and injustice are tricky terms to use. There were occasions where some of the characters that have died were doing it exactly to avoid justice in a crudely institutional sense but I agree, I wasn’t comfortable with this kind of anti-human perspective. But then again, we never wanted the research to be seen as set up to oppose other ways of understanding or interpreting suicide; all of those things for us were data but we were never disavowing them or suggesting that they’re not worth something. Those observations needed to be made, so the post-mortem accounts were really important for seeing whether you think somebody else might have been involved which, in turn, is clearly essential if you want to make sure that someone killed themselves or was murdered instead. Also, it would be quite churlish to think that you’re not going to have a very strong biological account in something which is about a body no longer being animate.

It also seems like a very good sensitising tool to start conversations with because it’s almost as if we want a dispassionate view and a couple of statistics about suicide rather than face the complexities and contradictions of being human are immensely helpful on a social level because it exposes things to us; things we can relate to and matter to us.

Well, you’ll also find that in the lectures that I have given on suicide! If I give a lecture on Durkheim and suicide a lot less people will be upset than in a lecture I might give on sociological autopsy...

But it’s good to be upset about such things, it’s a way of revealing our humanity, is it not?

Yes, I think so because it is as you say, it strikes a chord and you think: ‘Crikey, these are real people!’, and there are people that you know and people that you’ve met who have been in so much difficulty that this seemed to be the best way of dealing with it than thinking that suicide is something remote, odd, entirely to do with mental health or that there’s nothing you can do about it. What such thinking achieves, is the proliferation of narratives that pass responsibility to other individuals to make particular choices. If you say this is to do with mental health, with the economic crisis, then if those things aren’t fixed then there’s nothing you can do about suicide. If on the other hand you say this is to do with social relations and think that you might know one of these people, suddenly you have to take responsibility for other people’s well-being and that’s a big responsibility; I can understand why we shy away from it. And again the other thing that happened in the study is that it appears as if we’re damning individuals, and we’re not, we were never saying ‘why wasn’t that bloke giving that woman a cuddle, that’s what she wanted, she didn’t need being shouted at?’

VI. The responsibility of being nice and a personal utopia concerning suicide

You must have discussed such incidents between you, perhaps not on paper but behind the research scenes so to speak...

Oh yes, we did, we had lots of discussions like that and for something like reactions to economic crisis, like I
said it shifts responsibility from people to society. Well, society is an abstract term and people are walking around and getting on with their lives and not attending to each other and I think we don't really want to hear that. But on the other hand we were never saying; ‘Listen I'm not blaming somebody for not doing that’ because it's routinely what we don't do. I gave a paper in a place a while ago and there were lots of questions and then somebody said: ‘All-right, what’s your recommendation?’ We’ve got a set of recommendations at the end of the book specifically about Britain. so not applicable necessarily to Greece to do with suicide prevention strategies, but in the end this guy pushed me and pushed me and I said that the thing that I would do if I had a wish is that I would get specialised workers to go to every newsagent, every take away, every shop, every bus driver, every taxi driver, everybody who's slightly removed but might have a personal day to day interaction with someone who is feeling really distressed and they'll never know it. I’d set up cafés where people would just drop in and you wouldn’t know if people were workless, this, that or the other and inculcate everyday interactions with people with the idea that you should be nice to each other. So the guy looks at me and says: ‘So your recommendation is that we should be nice to each other?’ and in the end I said ‘Well, yes’. If, for example, you’re a newsagent and you’re selling a newspaper and you’re in a bad mood and someone comes in and you’re a bit grouchy to them you've no idea what ramifications that will have. And it is easy to forget that people might respond to things in ways that you could not possibly predict.

Take that nurse who [10] killed herself because of a prank call and the whole narrative about this has been: ‘You could never predict such a thing’. Ok, that may be true! However you could predict that people will respond differently to that very prank call. That’s what you can predict. You couldn’t predict that there is a range of reactions; I might think it was this is terribly funny, or it may make me terribly upset but all you're acknowledging is that there is a range of responses to you behaving quite poorly towards me. So the solution to that isn’t to say to the nurse: ‘You should be a bit more robust’ the response is to say to the radio DJs: ‘Will you stop calling people up and make them look/feel foolish?’ Be nicer, that’s it really. But along the lines of what I was thinking apparently there are cafés that were set up by services in deprived areas in some European country, somebody told me at a conference, and I was thinking a similar thing; to have really lovely cafés where you’d let people know that there’d be spaces where people would just go and be nice to each other and so if you’re feeling down or have health issues or something you have trained workers in there but you wouldn’t know who is a worker and who isn’t , and the whole remit of the café would be to go and just have a chat with someone, and they wouldn't be known to be run by services or whatever. So since there is no way of predicting what somebody’s reaction will be to our actions, why not be nice as a default mechanism of sorts.

In a paper I’m working on with a colleague who looks at how people survived suicides we looked at two stories; one where someone killed themselves and one where someone didn’t kill themselves and in the one where the person didn’t kill themselves that was because somebody went back with a sandwich; he said she looked hungry, so she prepared her flat to kill herself and then there was a knock on the door and rather than just do it she thought I’d better answer the door and it was a guy, a social worker actually who had been there earlier, noticed that she didn’t have any food, got worried and out of hours went out and bought a really nice sandwich and said, listen I noticed you didn’t have any food so I think you should have something to eat. She thanked him, closed the door, took the noose down and didn’t hang herself as a result of that interaction; and he has no idea, that that’s what happened.

And then I had a case where a woman was saying to her partner: ‘Look, you take this food I don’t want it’, because she was preparing to kill herself. He didn’t know this, and the partner said ‘I don’t want the food what are you doing?’ and they got into an argument about it, he left and she killed herself. And what we were saying is that the contingency in those situations is really interesting! What if the guy hadn’t got the sandwich in the first story and the what if the guy in the second story had said: ‘Oh, come here, let’s have a cup of tea, give me a hug’ instead of getting angry and just saying ‘Put your food away, don’t be stupid I don’t want it’ and get into an argument? We obviously don’t know how these things will play out and again it sounds so condemning to the poor bloke. But that’s how/why daily interactions are so important. Imagine a scenario where someone gets on the bus, the driver is in a bad mood, he’s just rude to you, you get off the bus and you think: ‘I don’t want to be here no more, people are horrible, I’ll kill myself’ rather than going on the bus and the guy being lovely and letting you off 10p or something. It makes you
think: ‘Oh that was so nice’ and your repertoire of action is changed by your relationship to the circumstances you find yourself in.

VII. The concept of repertoires of action

Could/would you please introduce the idea/concept of the repertoires of action for us?

The broader idea is that there is a relationship between three key components of our understanding of a current situation and those will be (a) experiences or our understanding of the experiences that we’ve had throughout our life. The next will be the (b) values and beliefs that we hold as a result of those experiences and the last one is what we call (c) the cluster of circumstances which are made up of the position that we’re in; job, no job, flat, no flat etc. The way things are around us, or the cluster of circumstances, are the things that are present at the time when we are considering a particular action and the relationship between these three then lead us to a set, or repertoire, of actions which appear to us as reasonable.

Now obviously the perception of your experiences can change at any moment, your values and beliefs, if they’re largely led by those perceptions, can also change very quickly and your circumstances can change really quickly so the three of those things are completely dynamic. If then you are to say that those dynamic features of your life lead you to sets of actions that you think are reasonable, then clearly the sets of actions that appear to you reasonable are also dynamic and change. In fact, they can change in an instant! Following this reasoning, in the one moment the option of suicide is completely unreasonable because your relationship to all of those things means that you wouldn’t kill yourself. In a moment, that can change and suddenly suicide becomes reasonable, and these sets of actions is what we call the repertoires of action. I borrow the concept from social movements theorists who talk about group behaviours and I remember thinking: ‘Actually I don’t think it explains groups nearly as good as it describes individuals’. What it does, is that it accommodates dynamism that was the whole point, it is not a static model and moves away from the temptation of causality or fixity. At no point therefore do we claim that we understand, you can never understand fully what’s going on for someone, you never can. Even individuals themselves often struggle to hold all that.

And this is precisely the virtue of this approach! It invites us to open up our thinking about suicide to a number of possibilities that we might not have considered otherwise, which is what sociology is about after all. To just say; ‘Well you know that’s fair enough but there’s X, Y, Z to consider’ rather than telling people and browbeating people with information we have. Why not invite them to say: ‘Well that’s what we found out, that’s how we make sense of things, what do you think? Let’s discuss’ …

What I quite liked about it as an idea as well was that it did adhere to all those good sociological principles without ever saying anything definitive or simply saying: ‘You need to ask more questions’. I did like the idea that wherever you are in the exploration of that way of thinking about a particular way of social actions you can say: ‘Do you know what, I reckon that’s what may have happened’. And even though you can never say that with any certainty, I quite like the idea that we were to say: ‘That’s as close that we can get at the moment’ because it felt a bit more like providing some sort of context rather than answers. The whole point of the sociological autopsy method was that we were saying: ‘let’s just see what happens if you take the psychology out’. We weren’t ever saying that the psychology was wrong, but we were saying was that if you look at it psychologically there’s lots of context, lots of scaffolding that you’ll miss and the best way of understanding that social context is sociologically. Because psychology isn’t really designed for such a thing that and that’s great because you can use the two in combination! You don’t simply say: ‘One is wrong and the other one is right’. You just say: ‘You know all about what’s going on in people’s heads so you go ahead and do that we’re supposed to know about how those things are then supported socially so we’ll look at that’ and we found out lots of interesting things particularly in relation to friendships, partner relations and children which aren’t really there in more established accounts. It’d be interesting if someone applied it to Greece or Portugal at the moment because the narrative there is just to do with economics, it must be so strong and that will
kind of stream-roll everything in its path. You can always counter that however by arguing that suicide in times of crisis probably has that aspect but this can’t be the whole story because not everybody is doing it. The reason why we’re so quick to judge is because such thinking simply isn’t in our repertoires of action...

Well, perhaps not yet but we can only hope! Thank you very much...

Thank you!

Dr. Ben Fincham trained as an FE teacher at Cardiff University, where he subsequently completed a PhD and an ESRC postdoctoral fellowship. He then worked as a research associate with Qualiti, a part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods. He lectured at Brighton University before joining University of Sussex in 2009. He has been involved with developing projects on 'mobilities', qualitative approaches to studying work in unstable employment environments and the relationship between work and mental health. He has worked and on gendered aspects of suicide and death as well as gender and research methods. He is currently writing a book for Palgrave Macmillan entitled 'The Sociology of Fun'. He is also developing projects on sex and sexuality in the Centre for Gender Studies.

Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name [11]Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music. Recent publications are featured on the British Sociological Association's Postgraduate Theory Forum and on The Sociological Imagination blog on a variety of issues ranging from the English riots, the idea of sociological imagination and the Eurozone crisis. In the spring of 2013 he achieved Associate Fellow status of the Higher Education Academy.

References


1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/5rgS57eymbc
5. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03q0xdx

[...] published at The Sociological Imagination on February 13, [...]”

Why I am quitting the British Sociological Association (2014-02-13 21:01)

Now that my PhD is almost complete, I’ve received a polite request from UCU that I rejoin as a staff member. I was pleased to find that subscription rates are on a sliding scale, with the highest band paying twice as much as the band I’m in (and unlikely to leave any time soon).

[1]
So UCU, as an organisation I’ve had little involvement in, will continue to have me as a member. In contrast, the BSA, an organisation I’ve committed huge amounts of my time to in various guises have a much less inviting membership policy (left) and conference costs (right):

[2]

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Registration

Registration is OPEN.

BSA Member Full Conference
£310
I would need to renew my membership before the next conference. I'm a research associate in one place (2 days a week) and a research associate in another place (1 day a week). As someone "NOT a full-time student, fully retired or unwaged" this means my annual membership fee is £118. Note that part-time students, often those without funding, don’t qualify for concessionary membership either. This means that ‘UK member’ encompasses everyone from the £60,000 & above through to, I guess, the £5,000-£10,000 categories used by UCU to determine the fees of their members. So as someone post-PhD with 60 % employment is it unrealistic to expect not to be placed in the same cost category as someone on the salary of a full professor? The sliding scale doesn’t have to be particularly radical (UCU's isn't) but its absence is emblematic of the lack of understanding (or concern – I've assumed the former given principle of charity) that I've witnessed so frequently from those at the heart of the BSA.
understand academics on Council were opposed to the recent changes, but that decisions are made by a very small number of Trustees.

In the past five years I’ve occupied many roles and organised lots of events as part of them, all at a time when as an unfunded part-time PhD student working full time with a wide range of other projects I had very little time. I did these things with the BSA because I want to contribute to the sociological community in the UK:

1. Co-convened the Postgraduate Study Group
2. Been part of the steering committee for the Theory Group
3. Co-founded the Digital Sociology Group
4. Co-convened the Realism Group
5. Managed the websites for each of the above
6. Helped out as much as possible when people got referred to me as ‘the social media guy’

At this year’s BSA conference I had organised:

1. A realism plenary session with Margaret Archer
2. A digital sociology plenary session with Deborah Lupton, Emma Uprichard, Mike Savage, Noortje Marres and Evelyn Ruppert
3. A panel discussion on Digital Public Sociology
4. A panel discussion on sociological approaches to self-tracking (w/ Chris Till)

I’m still irritated that I won’t be able to attend any of these. As one of numerous PhD students from my department, I wrote to the BSA explaining the complex situation we faced for getting department’s funding to support our travel. We were offered a short extension of the presenter deadline for registrations in January but not one long enough to clarify the situation. Or one long enough to allow me to desperately scrape together the funds to register.

I now can’t afford to attend the BSA. Including membership it would be £428. Along with train fair and accommodation this would be easily £600 or more. Would you pay £600 to go to a conference, in which you had organised a range of events, but weren’t allowed to speak at? I can’t afford to go to the BSA. But I wouldn’t go under these conditions anyway.

I understand that long term trends mean that the BSA will become increasingly dependent upon their membership. Well I have been the most committed and enthusiastic member imaginable. Yet after five years of mounting frustration I now want to have nothing more to do with the British Sociological Association and I’ll looking for some other way to contribute to sociology in the UK.

So why am I writing this? Partly to explain why I won’t be at the conference despite my having organised 4 relatively high profile events. It seemed like a bit of an academic faux pas and it was stressing me out. Partly to make my feelings clear about the BSA rather than just slink away into non-participation. Partly to vent the frustration.
that I've been politely restraining myself from expressing for years, knowing I'll no longer find myself ceaselessly defending the BSA against all the people who criticise them for precisely the issues that have (silently) troubled me for the entire time I've been involved. Partly out of sheer concern for British sociology that the BSA is responding to short term financial challenges with action that is destructive to its long term strategic needs. The BSA needs members and I don't think those running it day-to-day realise quite how much grumbling goes on about the BSA within British sociology. More to the point: unless there is a radical change to pricing structure I suspect much of my cohort and subsequent ones will just fail to engage. The BSA risks losing PhD/ECR students in the UK. The only reason it hasn't already lost them is because, I'd suggest, the widespread belief persists that you 'need' to have a presentation at the BSA on your CV to get a job.


Dr Ulrike M Vieten (2014-02-14 15:07:55)
I fully agree; the conference fee politics of these bigger Sociological Association events really got out of hands... similar situation with the ISA. Suppose, the 'professional' organisation of these mega-meetings consume a lot of money (I doubt efficiency and effects though). Time to move on I guess...

I'm saddened but not surprised to learn that the BSA is acting this way. You have done so much work on their behalf and it's ridiculous that they don't have an appropriate category for members in positions such as yourself. Given this stupid error they should give you a free place and a written apology.

Leon (2014-02-18 19:18:02)
Yeh I fully sympathise Mark. The conference is even in Leeds this year, where I'm based, but I'll not be registering as on a part-time teaching assistant's wage I've not got any spare cash to fund the cost. Pretty frustrating!

Corey Wrenn (2014-03-11 17:36:33)
It really saddens me how privileged the sociological discipline is despite it's claim to challenging inequality. Something that also aggravates me is that all of the top tier journals have a hefty submission fee of about $50...just for a "shot" at being published in a journal with a very low acceptance rate.

Nikolas Rose on the Public Brain (2014-02-14 08:00)

The [1]Human Brain Project is a rather enormous EU funded project, funded to the tune of €1.3 billion over 10 years, looking at future neuroscience, future medicine and future computing. It aims to overcome fragmentation within neuroscience, synthesise existing data sets and produce a platform to make this openly available to neuroscientists worldwide:
It doesn’t take much reading around the project to realise that it has some pretty big social and ethical implications. So it’s reassuring to find Nikolas Rose, critical sociologist par excellence, on the steering committee of the social and ethical issues part of the project. It’s also interesting to learn that 3-5% of the funding is set aside to fund these activities. Rose spoke recently to [3]USAPP about the project and related issues:

I think it’s difficult to talk about the way in which the Human Brain Project in and of itself has captured the popular imagination. It’s in early stages, it’s not clear how many people are aware of what it is doing and when people are aware of what it’s doing they tend to misunderstand. The Human Brain project is largely a data integration project, it’s largely trying to pull together data from a whole range of different sources, it is doing much more than just creating a computer model of the brain. People have concerns about modelling the human brain in a machine, worries about free will and worries about creating conscious computers and so forth, which are probably not the key of issues that are going to be raised by the HBP. More generally though, it’s undoubtedly the case that at the moment, at least in Europe and America and similar developed societies, the brain has become a fascinating object for public debate. Brain-based explanations of everything are becoming increasingly prominent in the media and also in the commercial field—you should buy brain gyms to train your children, brain foods, you should do Sudoku or brain exercises to ward off dementia etc. I don’t want to say this is just a facile fascination with the brain, which I think would be a trite conclusion: I think we are seeing the beginnings of a different way of thinking of the role of the brain in individual and collective life. When I started my 10 years of research on the social implications of neuroscience – for the book called [4]Neuro that was published a little while ago— I hypothesized that that psychological explanations of human behavior might soon be completely displaced by brain based explanations of human behavior. My research didn’t find this, but it did show a growing belief in so many fields that our mental states are underpinned in some fundamental ways by our brains, by our neuro-biology. The nature of our brains is now considered to have huge implications...
for who we are, individually and collectively, and on our conduct and our capacities. This is becoming rather a pervasive way of thinking, and I think it’s the emergence of that way of thinking, rather than the implications of any one piece of research or any one project like the Human Brain Project, that is important. That is really the phenomenon – the change in the kinds of creatures we think we are, and all the implications of that change – that one has to try to understand.


2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/_UFOSHZ22q4
4. http://amzn.to/1e9VUyy

“Just waiting for you to talk so that I can” – John Grant (2014-02-14 12:45)

Discussion, so it is said, is of key importance to the academic life. The debate, the flow of ideas, comparison and critique, amongst your peers, is the primary signifier of academia’s importance. Why then do so many academics sit through seminars with the single goal of waiting until they can talk themselves? Comments, less than the constructive development of ideas, are packing crates on which to stand and air one’s own agenda, ideas or approaches. This steering of discussion is not always done with malice: Often people are blinded by the narrative of their own publications and institutional years in defence of arguments. The ability to accept new approaches, or even opinions on old subjects, has been whittled down by the pugilistic stance that they themselves continue in seminars. Others are simply too tied up with their own egotistically driven focus to tear their minds away. At times such focus becomes so blinkered it is as if any divergence of thought away from their own interests would lead to feelings of insecurity that they normally equate to those who remain quiet.

All is not lost for the discussant. With careful balance of whit and respectful play to ego, the speaker can gain valuable reassurance that they have either covered the ground for critical responses, or at least have had their work reflected in the eye of someone else’s agenda: these can lead to valuable changes in perspective. The speaker’s expectation regarding the listeners is unlikely one of engagement with their topic, unless it suitably matches the schedule of those present: in which case the seminar is mere campaigning to those who are already signed-up. Rarely do you find the academic who sits and wonders ‘what is the speaker trying to say?’ - Instead they insist on focusing on correction: ‘What should they be saying?’ The performance of presenting amongst your peers requires skill in story telling: make sure that they sit comfortably, buff their ego cushions and speak softly; grasp their attention with something agreeable and lead them down the road of acceptability towards your slightly shocking, but now obvious, conclusion. Engagement is the key, will they ask questions that imply they have listened, will they want to clarify some aspects that appear vague or will their steel hard cage of academic institutional life keep the speakers own approach from truly being heard?

In this industry of knowledge manufacture and understanding there needs to be a greater focus on the power of iteration and failure. Standardised events for the display of framed arguments are illusions, hiding the real process
that leads to the development of ideas. Within such power centred arenas the loudest voice is often the status quo and the new challenging developments can often be silenced with effort. Ideas, theories, approaches and methods all require a driving force to take them from inception to development and application. All great work requires commitment and defence for ‘there is no such thing as an immaculate conception’; but when this industry is driven by the systemic defence of such psychologically embedded projects, how do you remain committed to one idea, without being in some way closed to new ones.

[nbox type="notice"]

Dave Yates is a PhD Candidate at the University of Kent. His research interests are the development of applicable theories in systemic meaning construction. He is interested in applying such work towards understanding place design and construction amongst urban planners and architects.[/nbox]

Babette Babich (2014-03-02 12:44:00)

Heidegger thought that scholars should simply trade questions, but that would include the speaker first and foremost. I have watched conference presentations for more than three decades and never has a speaker offered a “new approach” that was in fact new (except in their own minds). Some approaches became, as you rightly identify, the latest thing because, as you also rightly identify, they were already part of a larger, already extant movement/meme (lots of heads nodding in agreement there). But I have also never heard a young person speak who was not persuaded that his or her ideas were not utterly unprecedented... What strikes me most (apart from the evident desire for non-reciprocity here – it seems that the desire is that discussants not discuss but ask what some youthful presenters imagine to be ‘real’ questions), is the conviction that simply because a conference resembles a classroom situation that the listeners are there to take instruction rather than to participate. Even those respondents who are genuinely confused and want clarification (does one really want a conference room full of such gratefully attentive respondents? would that not be a classroom? is the epitome of the conference encounter an ex cathedra address?) want that clarification only for their own agendas: they too are just planning to talk later or elsewhere or at their own conference... The idea should be to exchange ideas and if speakers seem to comment on their own ideas in response to your ideas, is that not a good thing? Not only might the speaker learn something but it is also the case that there is usually no difference in competencies between the person at the podium (the selection committee arranging the talk is a committee of one’s peers not arbiters of the truth) and, at an academic conference, it is usually the case that the persons in the audience who strike you as waiting to say what they seem hellbent on saying, do indeed have something to say and might have been speaking themselves.

CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-02-14 12:57)

The [1]Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached
Recent public debate in the UK surrounding Channel 4’s ‘Benefits Street’ documentary has highlighted an apparent proliferation of media representations of unemployed and/or working class lives that emphasise themes such as dependency, laziness, anti-social behaviour and criminality. At the same time, welfare reform has become increasingly central to public debate and policy making in many countries across the world. This rapid response call
invites sociological consideration of the relationships between contemporary cultural representations of the poor and political/ideological developments with respect to welfare and social security.

Rapid Response articles should be up to 3000 words in length. Please indicate that the article is in response to this call on your submission.

Authors are encouraged to submit articles as soon as possible after the call and papers are reviewed and published (if accepted) as they come in. The final deadline is 30 April 2014.

Sociological Research Online publishes high quality, fully peer-reviewed articles across the spectrum of current sociology. An innovative, online-only journal affiliated to the BSA, we reach a wide international readership, have fast turnaround times and encourage integration of audio, video and images, as well as welcoming text-only contributions. We also publish special sections and rapid response articles which address current issues in sociology and the public arena.

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What is happening in Bosnia? (2014-02-17 08:00)

Since 5 February 2014, all major cities in Bosnia have had daily mass protests by factory workers. What is happening and why? Read a good [1]article by Michael Karadjis.

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**Are you a doctoral ‘student’?** (2014-02-18 08:00)

That’s the great question Pat Thomson asked in a [1]recent blog post. Are you a doctoral student? Or a doctoral researcher? I’ve tended towards the latter, partly because being called a student began to bug me as soon as I’d published my first paper. More importantly though, it seems to downgrade the status of those doing PhDs, defining them, as Pat puts it, in terms of a “binary between supervisor and supervisee that magically disappears when the thesis is successful in examination”:

One of the things I’ve been trying really hard to get over is the notion of the doctoral ‘student’. This is by far the most common way to refer to people doing a PhD, and it’s pretty hard not to use the ‘s’ word when it’s all around you. I think of myself as a recovering ‘s’ word user. I lapse occasionally, but I’m trying hard not to.

I want to use the term doctoral researcher instead – or dr for short. So, dr – not yet Dr but on the way. Just insert title (case) and the transition is complete.
Now, there are good reasons why the 's' word persists. There is a fee for doctoral study, and yes, doctoral researchers are enrolled at a university. So this makes them students, just like any other students, right?

Well yes. But on the other hand...

One reason I dislike the term doctoral 'student' is that it downplays the level and quality of thought, knowledge and work that is required to achieve the Dr. Apart from mandatory methods training, there is no set doctoral syllabus. While there is lots of learning, and continuous formative assessment, a thesis is not an assignment – it is a substantive piece of independent research judged by senior peers. While there has been guidance and coaching from supervisors, the doctoral researcher has been required to make up their own mind about any number of issues, including, quite often in the arts and social sciences, the choice of topic.

And, by and large, most doctoral research is not judged as 'student' work. Doctoral research is generally publishable. This publication frequently happens during the period of candidature, and sometimes actually IS the PhD, as in the case of PhD by publication. So the output of doctoral research – papers and sometimes books – stands in the field equivalent in status to that of any other research and it is judged by the field using the same criteria as is applied to any other publication.


Dr. Usha A Makwana (2014-02-18 12:14:50)
i am working as a senior lecturer in the research center of the NGO but it's a contractual appointment and it will be over in the starting of next month therefore am searching for new job, do you have idea of any vacant post, please suggest me

Monica (2014-02-22 00:40:40)
The moment I read Patter's article I changed my signature!

Kip Jones (2014-03-08 16:07:06)
I try to use the term 'doctoral candidate' when possible.

New student sociology journal at Warwick! (2014-02-19 08:00)

The [1]Warwick Sociology Journal is a new journal founded and edited by students which will publish excellent undergraduate and postgraduate work. Each issue will have a central contemporary theme, and the journal accepts
submissions from people of any discipline at any level, as long as there is a link to the overall theme.

Check out the [1]first issue, entitled Feminism and the perception of women in contemporary society, here!

The journal is supported by the Warwick Sociology Society and the Sociology Department.

The next issue will be Education and Learning. You can submit your work by Friday 28th February. There is no upper or lower length limit: The only guidance is that submissions must use Harvard referencing where necessary and be related to the central theme (the editors want to give you as much freedom as possible, pieces could be on anything from the relationship between 'race' and educational achievement to the way that media passes on knowledge to apprenticeships).

If you have a piece to submit or any questions, you can contact the Editorial Board at [3]SociologyJournal@warwick.ac.uk

The Editorial board of the new Warwick Sociology Journal.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/undergrad/prospect/warwicksociologyjournal/?utm_content=buffer121f&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign
3. mailto:SociologyJournal@warwick.ac.uk
Some auto-ethnographic thoughts on the phenomenology of writing (2014-02-20 08:00)

How do you find time to write? I’ve become fascinated by this question in recent months. Implicit within it is an understanding of ‘writing’ which I’m coming to see as deeply problematic. It treats the creative activity of writing as a matter of temporal budgeting. But how much time does writing take? It obviously depends on what we mean by ‘writing’. According to the [1]typing test I just took, my typing speed is 120 words per minute, which is pretty fast in population terms but not exceptional for someone who has been touch typing for a long time. At this rate I could type an 80,000 word thesis in around 11 hours. Except I obviously can’t and not just because of the debilitating RSI that would no doubt ensue. In the touch typing test I’m transcribing from on screen text into an on screen text box. In my writing I’m creating something new. So what does that act of creation require? At its best, it relies on inspiration:

The notion of revelation – in the sense that suddenly, with ineffable assuredness and subtlety, something becomes visible, audible, something that shakes you to the core and bowls you over – provides a simple description of the facts of the matter. You hear, you don’t search; you take, you don’t ask who is giving; like a flash of lightening a thought flares up, with necessity, with no hesitation as to its form – I never had any choice.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, Ecce Hommo, Pg 68 (Duncan Large translation)

I feel like this sometimes when blogging. In the past I’ve described it as [2]thinking-through-writing. As I put it [3]last summer: there’s a certain experience of immediacy and urgency in writing which has always been one of my most valued creative experiences: when an inchoate idea is at the forefront of your mind and the process of rendering and externalising it feels like one of the most natural (and important) things in the world. But this only seems to happen if I blog immediately. I grasp at the [4]‘feel of an idea’ and immediately begin to try and elaborate upon it, drawing out the form incipient within it (or less pretentiously: I put it into words straight away). This is when blogging is really fun. It’s also fast. When in the habit of doing this, I often find I can write a 1000+ word post in 30-45 minutes. But it’s the role of the habit here that I don’t entirely understand. Partly I think it’s a matter of routine. There’s something about immediately grasping an idea and giving it form which will tend to engender the experience of inspiration. Hearing and taking, rather than searching and asking. So perhaps it’s getting into the routine of responding to ideas in this way as and when you encounter them.

Last summer my enthusiasm for blogging suddenly and surprisingly deepened. I say ‘surprising’ because I’ve been blogging in one guise or another for over a decade. But I’d always seen it as a useful and interesting diversion, whereas I suddenly found it began to [5]matter to me as a form of creative expression that I found intensely liberating, as I began to acclimatise myself to pursuing a career in the academy after an experiment in full time web editing that made me realise that being anything other than a sociologist would bore the shit out of me in the medium or long term. Blogging was a release from all the structural pressures corroding the creative impulse that had led me to wonder if I actually did want to be an academic. Embracing the lack of constraint attached to this blog (for me) and making it my main vehicle for intellectual exploration, which I guess it had been becoming anyway, helped me make my peace with the jumping through hoops that a modern academic career unavoidably entails. If I can write whatever the hell I want here then I come to feel better about subjugating what I want to write to instrumental considerations elsewhere.

In terms of more formal writing I’m an archetypal binge writer. Until recently, I’ve tended not to write for weeks at a time and then write flat out for one or two days. For a brief period of time I become utterly engrossed by what I’m writing. This absolute immersion in the task at hand tends to eliminate any propensity to self-censorship and I usually find I can write a great deal, often articulating new ideas and drawing out new connections, in a very
short space of time. This worked hand-in-hand with a technique I picked up from a Bertrand Russell book years ago:

My own belief is that a conscious thought can be planted into the unconscious if a sufficient amount of vigour and intensity is put into it. Most of the unconscious consists of what were once highly emotional conscious thoughts, which have now become buried. It is possible to do this process of burying deliberately, and in this way, the unconscious can be led to do a lot of useful work. I have found, for example, that if I have to write upon some rather difficult topic the best plan is to think about it with very great intensity – the greatest intensity of which I am capable – for a few hours or days, and at the end of that time give orders, so to speak, that the work is to proceed underground. After some months I return consciously to the topic and find that the work has been done. Before I had discovered his technique, I used to spend the intervening months worrying because I was making no progress; I arrived at the solution none the sooner for this worry, and the intervening months were wasted, whereas now I can devote them to other pursuits.

Bertrand Russell, The Conquest of Happiness, Pg 49-50

So until recently I’d found writing largely unproblematic. I read, I blogged, I talked and every now and again a few thousand words would pour out of my brain in a way that was often quite enjoyable. Deadlines helped but they weren’t essential to this. The problem began when the process of trying to squeeze too much into the rest of my working life (particularly a full time job, commuting from the midlands to London and setting up a training business) led to the rapid disintegration of this comfortable, albeit occasionally manic, routine of creative production. I made very little progress on my PhD for six months and struggled to get back into a writing groove, not least of all because I had to deal with my masses of data, which in a way I’m still not back into. Binge writing is unreliable: it’s a little scary how much time can elapse before you realise that you’ve not had a serious session of writing for a long time.

It’s because of this PhD delay, as well as my impending deadline, that I’ve been trying to force myself into a daily writing routine. Frankly, I hate it. It makes me self-critical about the intellectual content of my writing in a way I have never been before. Largely because I previously edited my work but didn’t assess it. I’d read it through, note points that needed developing or consider ones that should be removed. But these considerations were post hoc and practical, immediately feeding into the next stage or the next project, rather than leading me to say “this is shit” to myself. Forcing myself to sit down and write for a set amount of time every day completely takes the fun out of it. It leads me to try and write when the ideas aren’t ready to come out. The only occasional experience of inspiration I’ve had in this period has been when I’m working intensively, over and above the daily goal, to meet a deadline I’ve agreed with my supervisor.

So I can see that I’ve bounced from one writing extreme to the other. A complete draft of my PhD is days away (if that). I’ve then got a bit of work to turn a complete draft into a finished draft. After that I want to find some middle ground between my unreliably organic binge writing and this stultifying imperative to sit down and write every single day. But I’m not sure where that middle ground is. It involves inspiration. But does it involve habit? Or is what I’ve been thinking of as ‘habit’ actually a matter of attentiveness, recognising the potential emergence of inspiration and responding to in a way which gives it maximal expression? Perhaps it’s also a matter of cultivating the conditions necessary for this attentiveness? But what are they?

Edit to add: this post was an example of the experience I’m talking about. I’ve had these thoughts spilling around in my head all day. So when I sat down to articulate them, it took well under an hour. Whereas if I sit down for my ‘minimum of two hours daily work on my PhD’ it could easily take me twice as long to write half as much.

1. http://www.typeonline.co.uk/typingspeed.php
Austin Kleon (http://tumblr.austinkleon.com/) has written a lot about the self-discipline of daily creativity. And while it seems a whole lot less romantic than the image of a passionate writer powering through the night by candlelight, it means you get stuff done regularly until waiting until inspiration comes. Gustave Flaubert said: 'Be regular and orderly in your life, so that you may be violent and original in your work.' So far it's working for me :) 

Sociological Imagination (2014-02-20 09:35:35)
I hoped it would for me on exactly the rationale! It really doesn't though.

Introductions, Writing Patterns, and Tidy Desks: Personal Reflections on the Writing Process (2014-02-20 08:42)

A while ago, Mark Carrigan asked me to contribute a blog to a series he was curating on the writing process. I said that I was too busy writing to do so. Now that I’ve just submitted the manuscript I had been working on, and haven’t quite got around to starting the next piece, I thought I could use the time to reflect on writing.

I don’t find writing an easy process. Or rather, I don’t find starting the process of writing easy. I will often spend days trying to write the perfect first paragraph because somehow I’m convinced that I need to get this first paragraph right in order to be able to move on. Usually, I’m trying to condense the whole article in that one paragraph … and getting annoyed that it doesn’t seem to be possible.

During those first few days I might also tidy my study, re-arrange my books, and this last time I actually redecorated (in my defence, the room needed it and it was a big project I was starting!). I usually also get cross a few times, especially if (when) someone looks at my attempts and says ‘yes, that’s fine, just get on with the rest of it and then come back to the first paragraph’ (don’t they know that if the first paragraph isn’t right then the rest of it just won’t flow?).

After a few days, however – and I never know quite how many in advance – something breaks, I stop obsessing about that first paragraph and get on with writing the rest of the piece. At this stage, I really enjoy the process. I’m not one of those people who write their final draft the first time around. I read and then write, and then read and then rewrite, and then rewrite again. I enjoy engaging with other texts, seeing an argument develop, and getting words to turn into sentences and then paragraphs and then finished pieces.

While this may, or may not, be an interesting personal reflection on the process of writing, I’m not sure how helpful it is. So in an attempt to think about what might be helpful through this reflection, I offer the following thoughts.

We all work differently – this may be obvious and not in need of saying, but I thought I would just reiterate it here. In that sense, it’s important to work out how best you work and whether you do indeed have a pattern of
working. I didn’t realize for quite a while that I have a really difficult time with introductions and so for those first few times when I was writing and it just wasn’t going anywhere I would get really down and frustrated and concerned about my very ability to write.

After it happened a few times (and it was helpfully (!) pointed out to me that this is ‘what I always do’ and that it usually works out OK) I began to recognize the frustration as part of the process of ‘clearing’ before the writing could begin. It didn’t necessarily make it any easier to live through, but I was more convinced that these difficulties would pass, rather than be despondent that this was how things would always be.

This was also when I began tidying my desk and re-arranging my bookshelves instead of just sitting in front of the computer screen trying to get the words in the right order. These activities helped pass the time and were useful in both being practical (my desk often needs tidying) and also in providing space for thinking about the article. So every time I would head back to the keyboard, things would be a little clearer and then one time instead of getting frustrated I would be getting somewhere.

Getting to know your own patterns and ways of behavior doesn’t necessarily stop you repeating them, but I’ve found that in recognizing them I have been able to manage the associated emotions, which in turn has eased the very process of writing.

[1]Gurminder K Bhambra is Professor of Sociology and Director of the Social Theory Centre at the University of Warwick. Her recently submitted manuscript, [2]Connected Sociologies, will be published in the autumn by Bloomsbury Academic.[/nbox]

1. https://twitter.com/GKBhambra

Michael (2014-02-25 10:37:49)
To the extent that I actually sit myself down and write, I enjoy writing. I find it almost excitingly free and cathartic once I get into a piece of writing or into the rhythm or habit or keeping a journal. Once in the habit, writing also becomes ‘easy’. But, oh the agony of getting out of the starting blocks. There is, of course, a neat metaphor emerging here. So I don’t think the problem you relate is that unique, as writing is perhaps one of the few activities that closes that gap between mind and matter, or thought and reality. That is indeed the wonder of writing I believe: it might be (along with other artist pursuits, such as singing or art) the truest, most compassionate and also most powerful, reflection of oneself. Essentially, your very core, your inner nature cannot help but being present, in at least some way, in anything you write. There are certain pursuits and activities one can perform with a higher degree of insincerity than others - writing surely falls at the lesser end of this continuum. Getting back to the metaphor, for me writing is akin to running around naked. Starting to write something is like walking around your own house in the nude - often difficult at first for most people. But try it a couple of times and you will start to enjoy it. The next step is to let someone see you naked. The next would be (hypothetically, for me at least) to walk around in public in the nude. That first draft, having someone read over it, can really be as terrifying as approaching them without any clothes on. Publishing it takes your bare ass to the streets, and in our digital age, to the world. The more one gets used to seeing himself naked, the more easily and readily they will take off their clothes. And so, the more one comes to recognize that deep-seated self that is ever-present in their work, the more one may come to accept, even like or love, it and ultimately know it, and then, the less apprehensive one might be to once again reengage in conversation with it - with himself.

Richard Kerley (2014-03-01 14:29:18)
Fascinating and encouraging piece ; hope many others find it... I’ve never decorated, but cupboards sorted ; shelves tidied ;

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rooms cleaned etc figure high on my list of ‘prevaricateese’...

C (2014-09-13 14:42:28)
Thanks for this - I always enjoy personal insights into the writing process. I agree that finding the patterns and habits that arise during different working processes (article writing being different from lecture writing, which itself differs from conference talk writing) is essential to making them work for you. I now know that when I sit down to write a paper, it will be brainstormed, mind-mapped and planned in excruciating detail at least four times on separate pieces of paper, before I am able to physically face my computer screen and start getting the words out. I suspect for me the matter is not so much 'having the plan' and writing out different versions of what’s in head multiple times that builds enough momentum to get me onto the page.

» Carol Smart: “ideas come about through the process of writing” The Sociological Imagination (2014-11-08 08:02:13)
[...] approach to writing that was natural for her. This advice echoes what Gurminder K. Bhambra says here about recognising recurrent frustrations in the writing process as being important parts of that [...]
Moreover, there is a sense that various concepts and theories have become reified and constraining – closing down the possibilities of critical thought. However, the issues that post-structuralist theory placed on the critical social science agenda have become more vital than ever - be that the concern for the complex and dispersed nature of power and agency; the imbrication of power and economics with knowledge and science; rethinking the relation between equality and difference; the political/contested/changing nature of embodiment, biology and ecology; or the efforts of states and others to establish and exercise power over life itself. We maintain that now is the time, not to reject post-structuralist perspectives, but to reinvigorate and transform those traditions through empirical and political work that is creatively engaged with current problems. The Authority & Political Technologies group at Warwick will host a series of annual events that bring together world leading, emerging and postgraduate scholars from across the social sciences whose work promises to renew post-structuralist critical thought through empirical scholarship. This year we invite papers on the theme 'Power in a World of Becoming, Entanglement & Attachment’. Topics may include, but are not limited to, the suggested themes above. **Deadline for abstract submission March 10th 2014.** For further information and updates see the conference website [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/)

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1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/)
2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/)
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4. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rsw/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2014/)

**Giving voice through animation: "my first crush" (2014-02-22 08:00)**

This charming animation is based on interviews the artist conducted with people about their first encounters with love. As she puts it, “their animal counterparts tells their stories of humor and heartache” and, through doing so, give voice to these stories in a way profoundly different to any straight forwardly representational strategy for conveying narratives.
Blind Eye Forward (2014-02-23 08:00)

How does a critical sociologist approach a troubled world? [1]Bill Carroll, professor of sociology at the Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Victoria, Canada), has sent us this awesome music video. The original composition, entitled "Blind Eye Forward", is a collaboration between Bill and his son Wes who is a jazz guitarist. It’s a fantastic example of how music, lyrics and image can be combined into an unusual and effective syncretic medium which can convey sociological insights and provoke discussion, in the classroom and elsewhere. Bill Carroll’s research is very interesting - watch this space, we will write more about his work soon!
Blind Eye Forward
(lyrics by Bill Carroll, 2004)

Shining future, sterling past
Tired clichés once again recast
Age old battles, trying times
Ancient hearts propelling modern minds
Howls of terror pierce the night
The morning after makes a sorry sight
We turn a blind eye forward.

One day bleeds into the next
A spell of sameness puts a world to rest
Killing time as time kills us
Gleaming spires slowly yield to rust.
A simple gesture, a point to make:
15 candles on a birthday cake
And a blind eye forward.

We can’t see
An old world dying and a new unborn
We hesitate, lost, our eyes fixed upon things too familiar.
To reach for something still unknown
To look for what cannot yet be shown
Bells toll faintly in the distance
Unheard prayers don't build resistance
Live each the moment as if the last
Invent the future, piece together the past
And keep a blind eye forward.

Far away, out of sight
Plans go forward under cover of night
If you listen closely you can hear the sound
Of grand illusions crashing to the ground
Keep a rose fastened to your chest
Expect disaster but hope for the best
And keep a blind eye forward.

2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/cV4htNK1aeU

Bill Carroll: Grassroots organizations as alternatives in the global economy The Sociological Imagination (2014-02-24 12:07:53)
[...] Eye Forward was written, my older son Myles was turning 15 (there is a reference to this in the music video Blind Eye Forward which we posted yesterday – MK), and was himself becoming quite politically conscious. So the songs began to take a political [...] 

I don't see a link to the video and I’d like to watch it.

The sociology of climate change (in blues format)! The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-15 08:00:17)
[...] of Victoria (Canada). We previously posted another of his sociological blues compositions, Blind Eye Forward, and a video talk on global [...] 

Bill Carroll: Grassroots organizations as alternatives in the global economy (2014-02-24 08:00)

William Carroll is a Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Victoria, Canada). In this video from the 2012 Global Studies conference, he talks about his research on global politics, and looking at grassroots organizations as alternatives in the global economy. This lecture is part of Bill’s current research program on transnational alternative policy groups and counter-hegemonic struggle:
Milena Kremakova (MK): Tell us more about your research.

Bill Carroll (BC): Shortly after that lecture, I embarked on a year of round-the-world field work, doing site visits at 11 of those alt policy groups, including Focus on the Global South, the Transnational Institute, Centre for Civil Society (in Durban), Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Third World Institute and Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). A number of articles from this research have come out recently, including an article in The Journal of World-Systems.

MK: How did you come to do these music videos?

BC: I have done 4 in ten years – not a rate-busting record! I first started writing political music while in grad school, when I was quite active in the Toronto-based Marxist Institute. We are talking late 1970s/early 80s. I did some performing at political events in the 1980s, then my partner and I had kids. My interest in creating music resurfaced as I started writing annual birthday songs for my sons, which were always pitched at a level they could comprehend. As they grew up, the songs did too, so that by 2004, when Blind Eye Forward was written, my older son Myles was turning 15 (there is a reference to this in the [3] music video Blind Eye Forward which we posted yesterday - MK), and was himself becoming quite politically conscious. So the songs began to take a political turn. After I recorded one of them (Do we pull the monster down? – also written in 2004, but for my younger son Wes, who was turning 12) and put some images to it, a close friend encouraged me to put it out into the world. So I did that, via the Net. A while ago some [4] colleagues in Toronto at Socialist Project put that music vid up on their Leftstreamed site. I supplied some interpretive notes for that, and they set it up so the words could be read alongside the images. Leftstreamed gave the same treatment to [5] another music vid of mine, on the 2010 BP oil spill. My younger son Wes is now a professional jazz guitarist (he is just completing his BMusic) and we have collaborated on the most recent three music vids, including Blind Eye Forward. Blind Eye Forward as not been 'published' at any other venue than my own website, by the way!

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**Eating disorders awareness week (2014-02-24 21:10)**

This week (24 February - 2 March 2014) is dedicated to raising public awareness about eating disorders. Read more at the website of [1]B-EAT - a charity working to beat eating disorders, www.b-eat.co.uk.

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**Lorde, spoof Facebook posts and the future of academic knowledge (2014-02-25 08:00)**

*by Sumi Hollingworth*

I’m finding more and more friends posting ‘news’ articles and the like on Facebook that (depending on the post) attract a flurry of excited or outraged comments and interaction, and then turn out to be ‘hoaxes’ or ‘spoofs’ as some brainy friend posts: ‘it’s not true,’ followed by a link to an article which exposes the hoax, and then everyone who believed it feels a bit silly. Recent examples include the [1]Denmark Dolphin Slaughter scandal, where a Facebook post about the Danish brutally slaughtering Dolphins for sport – complete with graphic photographs - went viral (and see [2]the exposure). More recently, there was a post about [3]Lorde’s suppressed Grammy Award acceptance Speech (and see [4]the exposure). In this, the young New Zealand singer songwriter is claimed to have had her real Grammy speech ‘a scathing indictment of global capitalism’ – suppressed and removed from live broadcast.
These stories, and their response, got me wondering what about the stories that don’t get ‘exposed,’ the stories that go under the radar? How do we know what to believe? I then started thinking, as a sociologist does, that maybe it doesn’t matter if things that are posted on Facebook or Twitter are ‘true/real’, or ‘fake/spoof/hoax’. If people want to believe it, share it, circulate it, and maybe even take action as if it were ‘real/true’, then it becomes real in its consequences. I suppose this isn’t something new (says the sociologist again): government lies to us all the time. The mainstream media regurgitates it, and we want to believe some of these government lies sometimes, and sometimes we don’t. However, these observations lead me to wonder if perhaps we are witnessing a democratisation of propaganda. Anyone can write anything they like and publish it on an obscure indy-media URL and what they say can go viral. If people believe it, or at least invest in it in some form, then that is powerful.
I suppose I could insist that people need to check their sources more clearly (if they investigate the sources of articles they read at all), and ask ‘is this source reliable?’ But realistically, we are all very busy, and that is really quite time consuming, given the amount of media we now digest daily. Furthermore, it is not actually that easy to work out which sources are most reliable, because of this democratisation of knowledge production: our reference points are not the same anymore. In [5]David Beer’s words, we now live in and with fragmented, decentralised ‘mediascapes’.

Or maybe it doesn’t matter how reliable the source is? Maybe we just let the lines blur? Don’t know what’s ‘real’. What’s not. Just believe what I want to believe. As one post, on a Reddit [6]conspiracy discussion forum stated, after the Lorde-Grammy-Speech-suppression debacle:

‘I upvote things that I want to be true. And I only read the title and maybe the first paragraph. That is a huge MAYBE. I’ll let some one else actually do a little independent thinking and reading to find out if it is true at all. Usually at that point I forget about checking back, move on to the next story, and just continue to believe that a satirical article is true. Then I share my brilliant opinion with everyone that will listen’.

While this is tongue in cheek, we are all gradually forming opinions based on this media we digest daily through Facebook and twitter, and we share it, and may act on it.

But one could argue that is just what used to happen with the Church: they tell us what is real, we act on it as if it is real. That was no preferable a situation. But now I feel like what I am being told is just more random. What knowledge gets produced, is believed, and gets acted upon, feels very random and much more incoherent. Knowledge hierarchies are crumbling. Or being shaken, at least. Who is (to be) more trusted? [7]The Government? [8]The Guardian? [9]Spiked Online? [10]Upworthy? [11]NewsBiscuit? Religious figures? Celebrities? Man in the pub? And if anyone can produce and publicise knowledge and be believed, where does this leave the university and ‘the academic’? Apart from a handful of commendable academic bloggers, and the slow move to ‘open access’ journals, the university is busy producing knowledge, that is a mile away from being ‘bite size’, that very few people read, or can afford to have access to. One renowned academic association’s [12]journal has even proposed to bar any of its editors from blogging, pushing academic knowledge into an even more rarefied position of access.

In the context of calls for a more ‘public sociology,’ it is important for us, as sociologists, to engage with this knowledge circulation on social media. As Beer argues: ‘in order to understand contemporary popular culture we now need to acquire practices that afford an engagement with the complex and often unpredictable forms of emergence […] and the grammar of conduct that it offers.’ Going back to Lorde’s suppressed Grammy Speech, what grammar of conduct is going on here? I used the word propaganda earlier in reference to this circulation of stories on social media. The Oxford Dictionary defines propaganda as [13]‘information, of a misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view’. Arguably, this is often what these posts are. Personally and professionally, I thought Lorde’s supposed suppressed speech was brilliant with many well-founded, salient points in it; and I hate the idea of dolphins or whales being slaughtered. However, the way in which both of these messages were communicated was misleading, to promote a particular political view point. Yet, the way in which it is done is very interesting: What we have here with both cases is misattribution, be it for spoof or hoax purposes. The 17 year old Lorde is (mis-)attributed with having given a public speech about the tyranny of global elites (almost definitely written by an academic or someone with considerable training in academic writing); and the Danish government (mistakenly?) attributed with being responsible for the mass inhumane slaughter of an endangered dolphins/whales (accurately attributed to the Faroe Islands, autonomous of Denmark). We could see these stories as a form of cyber-activism, but one in which the misattribution – clearly deliberate in the case of Lorde, or perhaps accidental in the case of the Danish Dolphins - gets the message out to a broader public by using the power of social media to send the message viral. Taking the Lorde case further, not only might we see this as a form of political activism, it also bears hallmarks of hacking. The (somewhat dry, though clearly important) message – our oppression by the domination of a global network of elites-
is wrapped up in another more populist story (Lorde’s Grammy Award). Lorde is a mere puppet - a pawn in the game to get the story out. The technique works like a computer virus. It is a Trojan horse: you hide your weapon inside something else palatable- something people will more readily engage with. It is a clever technique.

But perhaps this is also about a desire for our celebrities to be more radical. The idea that Lorde is delivering this message makes it all the more powerful, subversive. Let’s be honest, who would have read a dry, lengthy, anti-capitalist rant had it been posted as-is, by a Professor so-and-so? In its entanglement with celebrity culture, this message gains even more traction. It is as if this kind of cyber-hacktivism is filling a political vacuum. The very circulation of these kinds of posts – the apparent thirst for these stories to be true – is itself culturally significant. The circulation of Lorde’s speech- seems to represent some desire to see celebrities speak out against injustice, to be a figure of critique and resistance. There is so much symbolic loading by others to produce her as something she may or may not be. Is this indicative of our thirst for public figures to speak out against the injustices of neoliberalism and global-capitlism? Even if we have Russell Brand and his new ‘anti-capitalist’ guise, or Matt Damon’s public speeches on civil disobedience, such outspoken celebrities are few and far between. We just don’t expect our celebrities to be so politically subversive and radical in an industry that is arguably conservative.

So does this label - ‘propaganda’ - capture what is happening here, with its associations with ‘false consciousness’ or even a lack of criticality among those who consume such information? Does this label do justice to the complexity of how and why these stories have such purchase? Why might we post these, in partial knowledge they are probably not true? Perhaps it is part of our social media identity and feeling part of a collective, political ‘community’ of alternative values, a community of subversion and resistance. Even when you discover it is ‘not true,’ a ‘hoax’, a ‘spoof’ you are not angry. It works, if you identify with the message. If you want to believe it.

However, I want to come back to my earlier point about which knowledge gets produced and circulated, feels very random and much more incoherent. What else are people thirsty to believe? The stories digested and circulated by people who aren’t in my Facebook network might look very different. Such as the Youtube video that has gone viral that [15]Justin Bieber is in fact a shape-shifting lizard. In a recent blogpost I wrote on [16]Russell Brand and accidental utopia, I celebrated Brand’s call for the revolution not to be serious but to be ‘fun’, somewhat random and accidental, so in some ways I invited this scenario. However, what concerns me is which messages will go viral, and will be acted upon? At the moment it seems like academics are woefully lagging behind in the way in which knowledge is packaged and delivered. There is something that public sociology can learn from this democratisation of knowledge on social media, the role, function and utility of hoax and spoof, and sociology might make useful alliances with online communities in engaging with this media.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Kim Allen and Rich Franklin for their contributions to these ideas.

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Michael (2014-02-25 14:39:10)
Perhaps what such hoaxes and spoofs represent is not so much a desire for celebrities to be more radical, but simply for them to represent something, anything, of more substance and value than shallow celebrity culture and the attendant (and stale) image and lifestyle propaganda they wittingly and unwittingly promote. Consequently, I think there is a positive underlying message in such scenarios: that a hunger for greater intellectual nourishment is starting to take hold in society, as the initial phase (and craze) of social media wears off. In other words, I am proposing that as social media as an idea reaches its climax (although I do not argue that it has or what this climax looks like), there is an almost implicit social desire for it to be used for more valuable ends. In its infancy, social media’s novelty in itself was enough to propel it forward and keep people interested and so its content was of secondary importance - celebrity news, selfies, posting photos of your breakfast and the like justed added to the fun. But now society wants more, as the emptiness of such usage of time and the irritating 'look how good life is' message that is shoved in your face become both boring and irritating. As much as there is a moral element to the act of posting hoaxes, especially when using another ‘person’ (are celebrities not hoaxes themselves?) as the avatar, I think that celebrity culture and all related to it is so repulsive that it is a question of which is the lesser of the two evils. The answer, in my opinion, is that the hoaxes are not only lesser evils, but not really evil at all. I believe celebrity culture has done more to damage society than any publicly broadcast hoax ever could. On a final note, I may be a bit too optimistic in the idea that there is a intellectuality hunger amongst society broadly and would certainly not object to arguments against such a view. In fact, another argument I would like to discuss in place of that is that such hoaxes and spoofs are more a spiteful dig at celebrity culture and its shallowness, (perhaps at times inspired by the perpetrators sense of inadequacy, which in turn is to a large degree a result of celebrity and popular culture itself) in and of itself, rather than a desire to replace the shallowness with a different set of values (e.g. the Justin Bieber-Lizard reference). Interesting article. Thank you. Look forward to your ideas in response.

Doing it for ourselves: the women’s workshop (2014-02-26 08:00)

by Ros Edwards and Val Gillies

As the academy becomes further marketised and institutionalised, it grows harder to envisage operating academically outside of traditional organisational forms. Yet the resulting pressures, hierarchies and exclusions are
leading many to look for alternatives. Can we have study groups and organise ourselves in informal ways that are autonomous from professional associations and universities and still carry academic value? Well, there’s a group of women academics who’ve been doing this independently now for a quarter of a century: the Women’s Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research. We can’t say that there haven’t been any compromises to be made or tensions faced, but we’re still going from strength to strength.

The Workshop didn’t start off as the Workshop. It began as a nameless informal support group of five women who met at a British Sociological Association summer school for PhD students in 1988. Back then, the ESRC used to fund the BSA to run what was a three-day long residential summer school and postgrads could apply decided to continue meeting because they were all researching family-related issues using qualitative methods, mostly from a feminist perspective. Five years on, the Workshop had up to 14 active members. People came along by word-of-mouth (little widespread use of email and no twitter available then anyway). The Workshop continues largely to operate through face-to-face meetings every few months or so – although requests for information and discussion of ideas now occur between times by email list. We’ve always met in London – at the LSE, at the National Children’s Bureau, at University College, and now at London South Bank, but we’ve long had members who want to hang on in there even though they’re far away or can’t manage to fit in attending meetings.

A growing group meant that things became a bit more formalized about three years into the Workshop’s existence. Someone took on being co-ordinator, a role that over the years has shifted around between members as and when necessary. The group also became a named entity. Quite a bit of discussion and care was put into coming up with the title, Women’s Workshop on Qualitative Family/Household Research, at the time. And part of that was the decision that it would explicitly be women-only. While this has been reviewed over the years it has retained unanimous support. Another part of the naming discussion was that the group’s title indicates and reflects that it’s as much concerned with the methodological process of qualitative research, with being a woman researcher, and with epistemological debates about how we can know about social life, as it is with the substantive topic of families and households.

As well as holding study group meetings and discussions, the Workshop publishes, both because we feel that we have important things to say but also because we do have an eye to our members’ academic careers. These initiatives reflect some of the shifting stances towards feminism in the academic publishing world.

Our first publishing venture was a special issue of the journal Women’s Studies International Forum (18:3, 1995) entitled ‘Women in Families and Households: Qualitative Research’. The roots of the Workshop are recorded in the introduction to that WSIF special issue, and the introduction also illustrates that in the early days we could say: “no ‘big names’ attend so we wield little academic power”. This is no longer the case when, alongside the post docs and early career researchers, several of us are professors (as is the case for us authors of this blogpost). While this might be seen as compromising our independence it is probably key to our survival. In the early days a postgrad could book a room in her institution for us to meet and maybe even extract some resources to hold a Workshop event with no direct REFable outcome. Now that is less possible and it is the members of the group with ‘permanent’, and more senior, positions who can leverage resources to ensure that meetings are free. In addition, the Workshop now provides a valuable networking space across roles, hierarchies and institutions. What remains true however is the remark in the WSIF introduction that: “we are as likely to celebrate the birth of a baby as the birth (publication) of a thesis, article or book”.

Three years after the journal special issue, the Workshop produced an edited volume entitled Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives, published by Sage and still selling well nearly a decade and a half later. Another edited volume came out in 2002, Ethics in Qualitative Research. We had wanted to have the term ‘feminist’ in the title, but while we had the same publisher as for the Feminist Dilemmas book, and its reach hadn’t been held back by having the F word in its title, Sage decided that somehow that wasn’t good for sales. Feminism wasn’t selling in ‘post-capitalist’ times. But the content of the volume is pretty clear, with the introduction
to the collection including the sub-headings 'Being a feminist researcher' and 'A feminist perspective'. (And a second edition was published in 2011.)

Another five years on and Power, Knowledge and the Academy appeared, along with a shift of publisher to Palgrave. Any feminist would recognise the nod of the sub-title of the volume: ‘The Institutional is Political’. One of the perennial issues in connection with Workshop edited collections was discussed in relation to this initiative, and is recorded in the introduction to the volume. We mused upon whether we could have a collective approach and put out the publication and its contents simply as by the Women’s Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research. The topic of the book – our experiences of power issues in the face of rampant marketisation of higher education – shaped the answer to this question. Back in 1979 the Bristol Women’s Studies Group could publish Half the Sky: An Introduction to Women’s Studies, under the name of the collective. In 2007, in a climate of the (then) Research Assessment Exercise, appraisals, competition for jobs and promotion, and so on, it seemed far less possible not to have specific names as authors of chapters, and less possible for people to feel able and want to put work into editing the collection without named acknowledgement.

But the Workshop isn’t just about publishing outputs, and it’s important to acknowledge this. As much, or even more significant, is that the Workshop seeks to be a forum, a space for all and any of its members to try out ideas, to reciprocally hear and comment on others’ work and receive feed back. This means that the Workshop isn’t all feminist collective sweetness and light (as was pointed out in [1]the introduction to the book on power in the academy). Relations can be strained when editors of a collection have to make decisions about whose work is going to be included in a book, and those who want to be included but aren’t can feel rejected. And there are tensions between devoting Workshop meetings to the publishing project and keeping it open for anyone to feel able to put forward work for discussion, to come along to the meeting and to be given time and attention. Indeed, it’s the lively exchanges at the Workshop that produce the ideas for publications, often with members then stepping forward to act as editors, that drives the Workshop, rather than people who want to edit a book identifying issues to write about.

And despite the tensions, the Workshop as an open and welcoming forum remains as its intention, and also we think also its practice. Senior members reflect on how important the Workshop was as a source of support while doing their PhDs and hugely value the continued friendships and intellectual stimulation while post docs and early career researchers, like their doctoral forebears, see the Workshop as a safe forum to present their work and receive encouragement to publish for the first time. Whatever our career stage we experience the Workshop as standing in sharp contrast to some of the more adversarial academic cultures and contexts in which we can find ourselves. The Workshop remains a rare space in academia where women support each other while also providing excellent cross-generational mentoring and critique. We don’t know if our study group is unique in being an academic group, not institutionalized, explicitly women only and feminist, that’s achieved a silver anniversary and is still as active as ever. We think that we are, but we hope not.

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[3] Val Gillies is a Professor of Social Research and a co-director of the Families & Social Capital Research Group at London South Bank University. Twitter: @ValGillies
Too much ink has been spent on examining the socio-economic conditions under which shantytowns emerge as urban enclaves and develop into unique lifeworlds. As 'cities within global cities', such as Delhi, Cape Town, Kingston, Buenos Aires or Rio de Janeiro (Frenzel Koons and Steinbrink 2012), but also as spaces declared by various constituencies in a 'permanent state of exception' (Agamben 1998), slums harbour postmodern ethical contradictions. This is so because of their increasing marketing as alternative holidays for those who can afford the ticket and are bored enough with luxury hotels. These tourists look for new experiences of gazing, listening, performing or living like the 'destitute other' under exotic cultural conditions – but only for a few days. Alongside such ego-enhancing journeys (Dann 1977) that facilitate expressions of – usually Western but also non-Western affluent – individualism (Giddens 1991), there are genuine, if at times misguided, humanitarian gestures. These may include independent charity projects or documentaries and other recorded testimonies on living conditions in the slum, widely disseminated across the world by independent artists. The distant humanitarian gaze produces all the right emotions to the gazer who never visited these places; not using those affective-come-emotional means to help others would contradict the nature of middle-class radicalism (Crossley 2003).

There are nevertheless other considerations at play in such contexts of touring and pouring one's heart when one considers accusations that slum charity fosters a new ideology of 'poorism'. Inversely, local regulation of tourism as an activist tool might be distorted. This slum tourist activism (tourism managed exclusively by slum-dwellers for the slum-dwellers) runs the risk of completing a vicious circle in which advocacy of the native right to self-regulation, a better life or 'difference' might support local anti-cosmopolitan ethics or the neo-colonial rationale of Westernization by native means (Argyrou 2005: 78; Korstanje 2011: 166; Tzanelli 2013: chapter 6). For research into parts of the world in which humanitarian activism was promoted through both religious (Catholic, Orthodox, Hindu) institutions and the particular religious doctrine's anthropocentric ethical tenets, the old Marxist term 'ideology' can be safely replaced by 'cosmology': the structured views we are acculturated to embrace as natural givens, but also the competences we acquire in the socio-cultural environment that generates these worldviews.

But I am mostly concerned with the novel multi-sited, technological, political and economic environments in which such distant tourist mobilities are produced and maintained. This generates new questions concerning the production or dissemination of cosmologies, as well as their profitable simulation. I place my sociological spyglass on Rio de Janeiro's slum tourism, which seems to experience a 'second Renaissance' on the eve of two major, global athletic events: the World Cup 2014 and the much-anticipated Olympic Games of Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Just out of an extended authoritarian regime that helped turn religious humanism into charity activism, and just into its first socialist government that [1]now faces favela protests for its 'unjust' urban planning, Rio 'slumming' appears to have joined the new knowledge economies. These economies of tourism or 'poorism' are regulated from many different business sites, including those of Rio, and are progressively more digitised. It is in fact their online façade that invites one to examine old questions of exploitation, representation and development anew, in their new shiny bottles. Organised journeys to favelas such as [2]Rocinha or [3]Santa Marta might be fronted by locals, as is the case with Mumbai's [4]Reality Tours, a business with a strong virtual (Internet) presence that currently donates 80 % of its profits to local development projects. The tours might be bringing business to local shops, which, in the case of Rio's favelas, [5]act as 'proof' that civilising the disorderly, 'dirty' populations of a glamorous city is underway. Back in 2010, when Rio started getting seriously ready to host the World Cup and the Olympics, the city's hillside shantytowns became the target of a government clean-up that in turn was [6]being used as a springboard to develop tourism in the favelas with special tours.

But what sort of tourism is that – and how much of it is truly regulated by the Brazilian centre, when all relevant tourist business entices digital visitors to become terrestrial tourists with its own online messages? Are favelas' virtual representations as bright, entrepreneurial social milieus actually hiding the realities of making ends meet on the site, or staying at the margins of mainstream society while acting as the object of desire? Just as the
eighteenth-century shantytowns of European cities and the twentieth-century slums’ connection to great traumas of modernity such as the Holocaust and the universal tale of genocide, Rio’s favelas act as repositories of global memory (Bauman 1989). As lieux de mémoire (Nora 1989), they concentrate and capitalise on stories of global or regional migration, resettlement and oppression, which in Rio date back to histories of slavery and more recent authoritarian control alike. Any digital or terrestrial tourism to these sites is a form of thanatotourism or dark tourism that in certain representational formats might sustain racist consumption. Finally, local responses to the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry & Larsen 2011) could sustain activism alongside tourist development, but still push localities to reproduce global stereotypes of the swindler of charitable donors, the irrational rebel or the mystical primitive who sells simulations of their sociality in search of recognition they never get ‘at home’. Labelling e-tourism business ‘evil’ or inconsiderate may also be unhelpful. In contemporary hyper-neoliberal environments sociologists need to consider first what technological means and tools do to society and how. Internet projections of favela lifeworlds and slumscapes are often designed or maintained by professionals who are not familiar with local realities; when they are, they have to reduce them to globally intelligible ‘facts’. What do such new ‘economies of signs and space’ (Lash & Urry 1994) have in store for those who live in the enhanced terrestrial environments that will host the greatest mega-events of humanity?

References


Rodanthi Tzanelli is Associate Professor of Cultural Sociology at the University of Leeds. She works on globalisation with an emphasis on tourism, digital mobilities cultural industries and transformations of collective memory in post-national environments.
The pen is stubborn, sputters – hell! (2014-02-27 08:00)

The pen is stubborn, sputters – hell!
Am I condemned to scrawl?
Boldly I dip it in the well,
My writing flows, and all
I try succeeds. Of course, the spatter
Of this tormented night
Is quite illegible. No matter:
Who reads the stuff I write?

- Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Prelude: 59
There is a really interesting post [1]here by Stuart Elden on his writing space, which links into another post on the topic and a related Twitter hashtag (#whereiwrite). My writing space has varied a bit over the last couple of years. I used to do nearly all of my writing in my university office, with just about everything I'd written either being prepared in my office at York St John or, after I moved, University of York. In the Summer term of 2012 I had a research term, so from the Easter holiday I started writing at home. I'd done bits of writing like that before but this was the time I shifted to doing most of my writing at home. I still write some bits at work, but these tend to be less common now.

As a result of limitations of space and along with it only being a recent shift to writing at home, my writing space has stayed very minimal. Nearly all my books are in my university office and I just bring home what I need for that day or week. But when I first started I didn’t even have a desk. Below is the temporary desk I used in the Easter-summer of 2012. It’s a towel box. I used this with a plastic fold up chair.

[2]
On this temporary desk (pictured above) I wrote the first half of my book on the [3]politics of circulation. I also wrote an article on [4]music and cultural classification, as well as shorter pieces on [5]Sloterdijk and [6]new music cultures. It was a really productive time for me and this temporary desk somehow just became part of the process. I enjoyed writing on it. Managing with this temporary desk seemed to contribute something to the writing.


[9]
2476
I’m not sure if it’s because of the positive experience with the towel box, or the lack of space, but I’ve kept my writing space very minimal. I’m still using the same white plastic MacBook. The desk is used then for reading and note taking or for writing things using the laptop. I occasionally use my laptop to write in other spaces but nearly all of the substantial writing I do now is on my home desk.

David Beer is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York, UK. His book Punk Sociology will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in January 2013. You can read the introduction to the book open access [10]here. He also blogs at [11]thinkingculture.wordpress.com. This post was originally posted on [12]Thinking Culture[/nbox]

Superstar professors and their growing tendency to 'do research' in adverts (2014-02-28 08:00)

Witness Daniel Gilbert, superstar psychologist of TED fame, starring in adverts for Prudential:


And the rather less well known Adam Alter, who’s an assistant professor at NYU Stern,


Weirdly Robin Dunbar, he of Dunbar’s number, starred in a Guinness advert which has now been taken offline:

[3]
2478
Any other examples? This appropriation of the trappings of research within adverts seems to be matched by a trend towards ‘research’ in TV programmes themselves.

5.3 March

CfP – Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters (2014-03-01 08:00)

Second Call for Papers

‘Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters’


Confirmed keynote speakers for the conference are:

Ann Phoenix, University of London

Ken Plummer, University of Essex

This conference builds on the University of Huddersfield’s long held tradition of hosting a bi-annual conference on narrative research. It seeks to provide a fresh context for the development and dissemination of new research, ideas, perspectives and methodologies in the field of narrative research and enquiry and aims to bring together scholars working in a range of disciplinary fields. ‘Narrative’ is well known for its looseness of definition, its multiplicity of approaches and its interdisciplinarity, which over the years has led to a richness and diversity of narrative work. Identities, both private and public and individual and collective, have long been a focus for narrative researchers, where the content, form and effects of identity story-telling have been explored in a range of areas and contexts. The focus of ‘Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters’ is to address the ‘troubles’ that now surround contemporary narratives of identity, and the ways in which previous work may simultaneously inform but also trouble and be ‘troubled’ by new narrative work in the broad area of ‘identities’.

We invite contributions from researchers interested in using narratives across a range of disciplines including sociology, gender studies, psychology, law, politics, criminology, philosophy, history, anthropology, social work, education, and business and management. Topics of interest to this conference include (though are not restricted to) the following areas, including:

gender, sexuality, ethnicities, law, religion, politics, feminisms, digital technologies, work, deviance, consumption, citizenship, consumption, narrative methods, interpersonal violence, generations, emotion, trauma, trans*, lifestyle, education, bodies, age.

Abstracts should be no longer than 250 words. We invite papers in the form of 20 minute oral presentations, and also workshop sessions and poster presentations (the format should be clearly stated in the abstract). All submissions must include the author/speaker(s) name, title of paper, university or organizational affiliation, and...

A strike or a shot in the dark? An antithesis in eleven theses (2014-03-01 17:00)

In the midst of an ongoing campaign against [2]privatisation in Higher Education at the University of Sussex, [3]Prof. Luke Martell and I were kindly invited to join a debate on the subject for the University’s student TV Station ([4]UniTv), as part of its [5]Viewsbit interview series. My longstanding concern with and thoughts on the matter however returned with unexpected urgency instead of withering away after our lively but short twenty-minute discussion. This article aims at combing the shoreline where my own position on the matter claws at the topic discussed, in order to build a more spacious shelter for my argument(s) against striking, which Prof. Martell countered with a committed argument for it, as he has done with erudition and conviction numerous times [6]before.
Before setting the scene for what follows, a cautionary remark on the ambition of this piece seems obligatory, not to avoid friction, but rather to clear up the space for it to occur with imagination, critical spirit and goodwill. The intention of this piece then is neither to offer a space for showy provocation, nor to stage a mindless confrontation, secure in its ideological prejudice, but to offer a tentative (yet hopefully nuanced) rebuke to the immediate and automatic support to the strikes at Sussex (and perhaps elsewhere too), when a whole array of attendant questions of vital importance are ironed out in the process of tidily placing each other between opposing camps and assuming too much about who we are, where we stand and how we speak when we should also perhaps interrogate our everyday professional conduct to see how we fare, individually and collectively, in relation to the principles we claim to defend.

Despite the unashamedly mischievous title of this article, the eleven theses defended here aspire to make any such polarisation irrelevant, if not extinct, by virtue of my belief, trust and hope in political exchange as ‘the art of making hatred less eternal’ (Todorov, 2003 : 169), rather than prolonging some of its most sinister features, as witnessed in the form of popular (if not populist) slogans that fan rather than fight ‘class warfare’ instead of working towards making it less relevant and/or enduring. Such allusion to ‘class war(fare)’ however has sadly found expression in the form of commentary, protest banners and, perhaps more eerily, in the form of a chant that preceded a message delivered by Noam Chomsky (via Skype) in support of the protests at Sussex. To make matters worse, that very slogan (of which, sadly, I have no footage) was sung en masse by a host of students who were there to soak up Chomsky's sentiments of revolutionary fervour, initially mistaking their idol for Chomsky's assistant, who was cheered and venerated as a deity that neither Chomsky nor his assistant should be(come). The point here is that when emotions run high, the clarity of the picture fades, often returning to us as a mockery of ourselves, which is why the evocation of divisive language achieves just that and in the process, human passions and crowd behaviour only turn against our better judgement and our better selves.

The eleven theses that follow aim at doing away with such purely emotive responses to the chosen topic, by offering an antithesis to much of the language of, the thinking behind, and the practices witnessed at and during the strikes, thus sharing the sentiment of Marx and Engels' much maligned eleventh thesis on Feuerbach about how 'philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'. The problem however is that when/if opposition to something is articulated in such divisive and militant, if not militaristic, prose (i.e. class war), we might be suspected of wanting to conserve the world exactly as it is by shifting the blame onto others and eschewing our responsibility for much of what happens, rather than showing some willingness to change ourselves, our work ethic, our ideological habits, our political reflexes or our interpersonal commitments to each other and the ideals we seem to be pledging allegiance to.

Having attempted to provide an avowedly personal, selective and in no way objective or wholly representative snapshot of the atmosphere here at Sussex (when on strike), I intend to identify what I perceive as the fault-lines of this dispute in the hope that my unpopular argument will neither be revered nor smeared, but allowed to live its own life as a worthy participant in an energetic discussion on such a pressing question.

I. Against it because I'm (up) for it

Recognising the very question of choosing one of two sides as an artificial dilemma, since multiple positions can and do always exist, I am tempted to respond to it with a paradox; I am against the strikes because I am for what they represent. Although I fully support the ideas, ideals and principles behind both the anti-privatisation campaign as well as the reasoning behind industrial action, I don't think many of "us" who do support the strikes overtly and vocally are in a position to hold such a view by virtue of what "we" do in our every-day, routine professional practice as University workers. I very much fear that we are far too complicit in and complacent about the trends, the workings and the regulatory regime of Higher Education in our every-day academic practice to be able to afford such a stance without sounding naïve or hypocritical even.

II. Resistance against ourselves?
Given that our work at the University is not based on coercion but on our contractual agreement with specific terms and conditions of employment, is it consistent to sign one’s terms of surrender on the one hand and rebel against that decision on the other?

What is being defended in the strikes, and quite rightly so, are the very values and principles that Universities are no longer run by, if they ever were. A cursory glance at Plato’s Academy for the few, Cardinal Newman’s elitist Catholic University, Minister Humboldt’s university of high culture, or the successive (re)incarnations of such master-images for the modern Western University, reveals little else than a long pedigree of lament and betrayal of high ideals about University education as a rare opportunity for contemplative life, critical thought and the cultivation of character, replaced instead by complaints of exclusion, discrimination, inequality, mounting debts incurred by hefty loans, disillusionment with pursuing tertiary education, declining standards of teaching and research and the emergence of the techno-bureaucratisation of post-war Western Universities.

Romanticising the University against its true image as an institution that has hardly lived up to its imagined standards, also means disguising our contribution to the proliferation of its vices that have long prevailed over its supposed virtues, by consenting to and signing the very terms of our surrender as academics, knowledge-workers and learners in such an institution; we vote with our contracts and with our fees too. To make matters worse, education; that other chimera, doesn’t fare that well either, making it even harder to pretend that we lend our support to ideals we so readily devalue through the contracts we sign and the type of work we submit ourselves to do.

Put simply, sparing you any further historical or other flourishes, it seems rather unrealistic if not entirely misleading to lend our support to what the University has not been and probably never will be, unless we question our every-day practice within such an institution, or our commitments towards education and the flowering of scientific knowledge and humanist concerns.

We cannot afford to inflict upon ourselves the ‘hidden injuries of neoliberal academia’ on a daily basis and strike against such contractually agreed upon demands and pressures as a special occasion.

We cannot consent daily to reducing the production of knowledge to the level of drafting applications for funding, point-scoring for the RAE and the REF, evaluating our work by Key Performance Indicators and audit measures, upsetting our brains, stomachs and nerves over maximising citations, measuring our work in terms of bibliometrics, undermining our pedagogic relationship with our students by treating teaching as a time-consuming chore and by minimising the feedback or the academic and pastoral support we give to them, humiliate ourselves by accepting the casualization of our labour, and claim to want to overthrow all that in one stroke during a strike. We cannot afford to march for education as a public good yet agree to march to the beat of our institution’s trustees, at least not at the peril of being accused of double-standards.

Striking won’t restore University education or academic working conditions to a golden era that never was, nor will it prepare the ground for more hope towards overthrowing the regulatory discourse of the post-modern enterprising university, but our every-day academic conduct will. Engaging in the first but not the latter gives the impression that we are comfortable with being actively just one day yet passively unjust the rest of the time by fooling ourselves and others in the meantime.

III. Give it up to live it up

Following the argument presented above and provided that we feel utterly disgruntled, disappointed, frustrated, angered and disgusted by the way in which we are treated in and the way in which we treat our students within the cloistered walls of the University, why do we not choose to seek employment, personal joy and academic rigour by abandoning such an institution to its sorry state and join or form other institutions that cater for our

Taking up the thread from A. Hirschman’s (1970) Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, why not express our loyalty to principles and values that we cherish by exiting an institution that does not defend or support them and lend our voice instead to other initiatives that abound or just wait to be discovered? It is hardly news that universities have ceased to have the monopoly on the production and dissemination of knowledge in an era of such fervent Internet activity and the proliferation of the so called ‘Mode 2’ knowledges which herald an unprecedented shift towards a non-hierarchical, applied, reflexive, often community-based, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, and publicly relevant/available/accountable knowledge ecology as opposed to the docile transmission of specialised knowledge fit for use in a small circuit with a limited scope and remit, such as that of the University.

Why not set the standards for our work, the tone of our message, and the example for others (students, colleagues, public) by taking ownership of our scholarship rather than leave it to bob away on a sea of agony under the [16]‘creaking piers of peer review’.

IV. ‘Our’ University, ‘our’ services, ‘our’ colleagues?

In the light of the above, and amid urgent reminders that ‘our’ University and ‘our’ services are ‘not for sale’, accompanied by calls for solidarity with and support for ‘our’ colleagues, academic and non-academic alike, is it consistent to claim them as our own? How can ‘our’ University be ‘ours’ when we have no say on how it is run? How can ‘our’ services be ‘ours’ when we haven’t chosen them according to our ethical standards and requirements? How can ‘our’ colleagues be our colleagues when a community of/as scholars is found lacking?

Our university is not ours because we have chosen it not to be run by us but by a board of trustees, thus limiting ourselves to the role of corporate stakeholders when we could be shareholders in a public agora.

Our services are not ours because we have not chosen how our non-academic colleagues are employed, with what pay, welfare provisions and guarantees of overall job satisfaction.

Our academic colleagues are not our colleagues because solidarity isn’t (and shouldn’t be) automatic, but conditional, depending on a great number of things. A colleague is not she who does the same job as me, but the person who shares the same principles and values as me in practice.

For the University, its services and our colleagues to become ours, we would first need to make them ours in the manner described in Thesis III. None of those three commitments stand as they are but they can do if we take pains to institute such changes ourselves.

In very much the same manner, and to allude to another notion that is claimed as ‘ours’, there is or has been nothing ‘public’ about the University since ‘public’ is not merely something that is subsidised by the public purse, but something we (can) have a say on; be it organisational issues or the curriculum itself. And what better way to orient a University to public goals and values than by making it ourselves?

V. ‘Us’ and ‘them’ or ‘us’ in ‘them’?

Let us imagine that someone is walking towards the University and is met with a picket-line. That person will most likely feel intimidated by being shouted and be discouraged from going where she is going on the grounds that she’d better join ‘our’ protest, or she’s one of ‘them’. Who gets to decide however, who ‘us’ and who ‘them’ is?
What if the person crossing the picket-line is the parent, relative, or friend of a student who needs to be picked up to be carried to the hospital due to a health problem. Is that person one of ‘them’? Or is she one of ‘us’? How do we get to decide? With what knowledge of the other person? Might we not feel rather embarrassed for having assumed too much in the first place?

Imagine another person crossing the picket-line to go and teach. She’s clearly not one of ‘us’, she’s one of ‘them’, but what if that person shares the same principles and harbours the same hopes as ‘us’ but disagrees with our methods or tactics and thinks it best to serve the same values differently? Does she remain one of ‘them’ or is she closer to ‘us’. And if she is closer to us, why does she not come close to us? Are we not right to intimidate or undermine her dignity, confidence and self-esteem for not joining ‘us’? Or are we wrong to assume a great deal about who she is, what she thinks and/or how she does things? And if her views are not reducible to a slogan, what happens then? She must be one of ‘them’, because ‘we’ don’t think this way and, to paraphrase the Alexandrine poet C.P. Cavafy, [17] ‘Now, what’s going to happen to us without ‘them’? They were, those people a kind of solution’.

If we are so serious about and committed to values of solidarity, mutuality and convivial associational life does this polarisation, in terms of ‘us-and-them’, not frustrate not just the aesthetics but also the content and the political orientation of our struggle? What happens if you’ve read my article and I cross the picket-line, will I be one of ‘us’, or one of ‘them’? If I believe that the principles I stand for and wish to live in harmony with are better served in my daily, undisrupted relationship with my students even during a strike, does that make me one of ‘us’ or one of ‘them’ and why? If I think it vital to discuss those issues in the classroom during a strike as part of the curriculum am I one of ‘them’ or one of ‘us’? If I am to support teach-ins, rather than teach-outs in my next thesis, will I be one of ‘us’ or one of ‘them’?

VI. Teach-ins, not teach-outs

As someone who currently teaches and has been studying sociology for the past decade or so, I can’t help but remain faithful to an understanding of that discipline as an intellectual adventure that makes the world safe for doubt, rather than from it, preferring open discussion to fanaticism, multiplicity to dogmatism, uncertainty to axiomatic certitude, plurality over homogeneity, respect for rather than denunciation of ‘the other’, with a view of understanding and nurturing sociology as ‘The’ discipline that recognises [18] ‘no nation now, but the imagination’.

Armed with such aspirations for an academic subject I have developed an affective relationship with over time, it would feel like betraying my love of discussing sociology with my students if I were to declare myself absent from a ‘sit-in’ (pun intended!) with my students where we rub and polish our brains through contact with each other; voicing our thoughts, ideas, comments, disagreements and feelings. For such discussions to take root somewhere, they need to start here by learning the art of speaking calmly, clearly and in a collected manner while also honing that other skill; of listening intently and patiently but in no way subserviently, passively or uncritically. These qualities do not flourish in ‘teach-outs’; sloganeering is preferred to argumentation, taking sides is favoured to flipping sides to see what noise they make, ideology replaces a more searching position, ‘us’ dominates ‘them’. In my mind and as far as I can judge from my own experience a ‘teach-in’ is an immensely more effective and durable form of a ‘sit-in’ compared to a ‘teach-out’.

During recent strikes, I defended that exact position in practice by choosing to teach-in rather than to shout-out, thus turning the curriculum on its head in order to discuss, in class, the issues that trouble us in relation to the current state of Higher Education, the state, position, role, and function of the University as well as the merits, but also the contradictions and obstacles, of collective action and associational life at broad. All of these points naturally admit a whole array of divergent views, perspectives and interpretations that do not fit any Manichean grid of good/bad, right/wrong, us/them that is thrown around us like a straitjacket which we have to cling to in order to have a voice, an opinion and a ‘say’ on any matter. The picket-line often takes the form of such a straitjacket and acts as a physical, intellectual and moral barrier to the permeability and circulation of thought trapping the many,
and often unpredictable, possibilities, sites and sides of exchange in an unnecessary dividing line, a gap, a rift and perhaps a void and vacuum too. What we do, who we are, how we think, where we stand, what we say, are renewed relationships and negotiations on thinking and doing, necessity and convention, emotion and reason, introspection and excursus, ritual and resistance, structure and agency, and similar other conceptual pairs that cannot be brushed off without doing violence to the virtues of deliberation, negotiation, association and exchange. To paraphrase Georg Simmel (1910: 390), the whole point and essence of sociability is not to strive for the perfect society but the perfect society, and this can hardly be accommodated in the shape or form of a dividing line.

In the last few instances of such teach-ins during strikes, I took the initiative to bend the curriculum to fit discussions with my students about what and who the University and education are (for), who and what the ‘Other’ is, whether failures in our public culture and polity are systemic faults of capitalism, ideology and the machinations of a ruling class or inherent shortcomings of our ability to make and participate in collective life. In the process of doing so, a much more complicated picture emerged of many of the topics, issues and ideas that are (inevitably) treated as one-dimensional absolutes when people are artificially divided up into ‘us’ and ‘them’.

How could I possibly abandon such energetic intellectual, moral and political activity where critical thought and judgement reigns over taking sides and moral grammars of learning how to live together with people who are and think unlike us are explored, in favour of a false dichotomy that is represented by the picket-line? Would I not betray the function of my seminars as an outlet for and the natural home of cultivating sentiments and ideas that I consider educationally, culturally and socio-politically vital, if I were to flee away from discussing how ‘I am confounded by you, then you are already of me, and I am nowhere without you’ (Butler, 2006: 49) or showing that ‘there is something more important than my life, and that is the life of the other’ (Levinas in: Bernasconi 1988: 172)? How and who could accommodate such thinking about how to ‘do’ and ‘be’ social life across the picket line? How could I ask my students to be absent from such an encounter and how could they ask me to stray away from forging such a collegial, pedagogic relationship? For all I know, most students who attended those sessions instead of joining ‘our’ colleagues and ‘our’ fellow-students outside the classroom felt overwhelmed and genuinely appreciated my invitation to challenge ourselves inside rather than outside the seminar room. In fact, many expressed their gratitude and support for my decision to host, spark and moderate such discussions in-class. Had all this not happened, I would have not been invited by my students to join Prof. Martell in a debate about the strikes in the first place.

If my students and I were to join ‘us’, would we not become invisible, left without a voice and feel lost in the midst of a lonely crowd defined by its sameness rather than by what makes us stand out as different, unfamiliar and unique?

VII. Pay and services without content?

Puzzled as I am about a number of issues voiced in the preceding Theses, I fear that much of the argumentation in support of the strikes seems rather limited applying to ‘our rights’ an instrumental veneer rather than aiming at the intrinsic core values of what we should be asking for. There is much talk about ‘pay squeeze’, ‘pay disputes’, ‘strike action’, a fairer treatment towards ‘services’ aspiring to a more egalitarian occupational environment; all of which are urgent demands and need to be addressed immediately, without a hint of doubt. At the same time however, it does surprise me how there is almost no mention at all about the content of our work, thus limiting the discussion on our rights solely to an instrumental level of things.

Agitating for our occupational rights is of course vital but does that also not include our right to have more power, more involvement, more ‘say’ on the content of our everyday work? That is, deciding who it is that assesses, values and is in a position to determine how funding is allocated and how it is prioritised? Are we happy just to get our share of the University’s profits without doing our bit to change the essence of what we do, or are we happy,
pleased and in agreement with the current regime of, what Nigel Thrift (2005) calls, ‘knowing capitalism’ which creates the standards for our work with very little deliberation or control from our part? It is one thing to ask that our occupational demands are being met, and quite another to agitate for change in the type of academic work that is currently being carried out and materially rewarded at the moment; fearing that the first is well advertised and fought for, leaving the latter in tatters under the assumption that with a single pay rise we shall transform ourselves into virtuous and learned academics who engage in publicly relevant and accountable scholarship. While income inequality is obviously important for reasons that don’t need further analysis, are we not prolonging inequality in terms of our commitment to our academic oath or our responsibility and accountability to our publics (students and civil society at broad)? Can we afford to demand more pay, and indeed we must, without meeting or changing the standards and public orientation of our scholarship? Might we not be rightly accused of instrumentalising our contribution to public life by only demanding changes in instrumental terms? I clearly know that strike action is not just a pay dispute, though it largely is that, but I also can’t help by noticing where our priorities seem to lie.

If we think, as I certainly do, that our work involves more than delivering products to paying clients, thus amounting to an enduring relationship of vital civic importance which we forge with our students, colleagues, and civil society at broad, do we not need to broaden the scope of our demands? Am I alone in thinking that even if we were to have better wages and better services, our commitment to academic, ethical, pedagogic and civic values would still need to be demonstrated somehow? It is because I spot a discrepancy here that I insist on suggesting that we urgently need to work against the strikes in order to better work for them, implying that ‘our work is our strike’ by setting the standards that we wish to see implemented. That ought to be our daily resistance to the corporatisation of the University we so readily and willingly denounce.

My counter-argument reads like an invitation to denounce the entrepreneurial streak we see in the universities we work in, by renouncing demands that are made on us and aren’t ‘ours’; quantifying academic performance rather than striving to uphold academic principles and public values. To do so, we might have to envisage our role as demiuorgoi (demos= public, ergon =making) working simultaneously towards the advancement of our academic disciplines as well as making things public; countering efficiency and excellence with quality and arête (virtue), valuing co-operation, not competition and aiming at redrafting our ‘epistemological constitution’ by preparing ourselves for such change through a daily re-evaluation, re-positioning and re-alignment of academic and public values.

VIII. Exercise of rights or an exercise in self-righteousness?

Continuing the discussion on rights, but this time on a different plane and a slightly different context too, I remain sceptical of having too many of us warming our hands around the fire of our indignation towards the state of things and the status quo in Higher Education for the simple reason that I suspect too much agreement to be an exercise in self-righteousness, which in itself is not a resource in any way but a mere nod to and an argument for doing close to nothing. It feels rather nice indeed to bathe ourselves in self-righteous glow and bask in the adulation of others, but I fear that we may need to be more explicit about what ‘rights’ mean and what we are prepared to do in order to safeguard them. Exercising our rights, at least in my moral vocabulary, ought to be equated with doing the right thing and that means meeting our responsibility towards (a) our discipline, (b) our students and (c) the publics we create or wish to participate in.

Doing the first means, exercising, sharpening and indeed wearing out our independent critical judgement rather than accepting the pay-cheques, standards, demands and desired outcomes of a study’s funders to help increase sales, boost prestige, generate ‘impact’ or what have you. Committing to the second means being willing to treat learners with respect, giving them detailed feedback that they can do something with, rather than a page with sprinkled red ink all over it and indecipherable doodles in the margins that only bruise one’s confidence rather than help in acquiring it. It also means, getting to know students as people with names, personalities, dreams and needs we need to cater for by offering, not just academic but broader pedagogic support which also comes in the form of ‘out of hours’ work and pastoral care too. Aspiring to the third means writing our work for a public and making ourselves
accountable to our fellow-citizens by offering, not simply answers in the form of dry research but context too in the form of theory, thought, and knowledge turned into understanding. All three are affective relationships we need to attend to for higher education to flourish, or nobody else will. This is the morale of Aristophanes' [19]The Birds, and it ought to be the morale of the stories we write too, but without the Faustian bargain that the play narrates, and I'm afraid that's up to us too.

IX. Change without change?

Resistance without willingness to change will only bring about a change in actors, not a change in the script. Advocating ideals but choosing illegitimate means to adopt it, annuls the contents of these ideals in the first place, and reveals how ideological demands can function as mere pretexts for legitimising enmity, hatred and 'war' (remember the 'class war' chant?). As I have tiresomely argued above, change in the culture of Higher Education can't come from ex cathedra denunciations, punching the air, shouting slogans, holding banners, or forming picket-lines but by viewing resistance as a daily pursuit that disrupts the tidy symmetry of ideology and replaces it with the complicated work we need to do as publicly-minded scholars. Turning a blind eye to vandalism, intimidation and verbal abuse won't do, turning away from all three however, might.

I have witnessed incidents of students and people I don't know, and therefore should not judge (are they staff, visitors, service workers, family?), be intimidated and undermined by verbal abuse that 'describes' who and what they are, and indeed some damage to University buildings. Quite ironically, I have also witnessed protesters dressing their kids with the University's insignia, logos and branding while feeding them slogans to shout against that same institution. Worst of all, I have heard the story of a cleaner in the building where I work who, upon leaving the building to throw 'our' rubbish could not get back in to collect her personal belongings because the door was superglued to detain 'us' from entering the building. This is not change, but a mockery of change, not even a parody of it, and it reminds me of that slogan that defends 'our' service workers; is the cleaner I just mentioned not 'our' service worker? We bemoan the bad labour conditions in our campus but have we done anything close to '[20]Berkeley's Betrayal'? That courageous report penned by sociology students at Berkeley who protested against low wages and appalling working conditions at their University by interviewing workers, and writing an impressive, and influential forty-page-report, hailed as an exemplary work of [21]public sociology with a foreword by [22]Barbara Ehrenreich. Have we got anything similar to boast about? When I introduced the idea of doing something similar to students and colleagues I got only polite nods, pleasant cheers but no responses, to an initiative I was willing to help with by editing, supervising, and facilitating the interviewing and writing up process at the expense of my 'other work' (as if there is any 'other work' to do, worthy of its name).

X. A prayer or a plan?

Unlike the characters of Aristophanes' plays, in our social world it makes very little sense to seek advice from oracles, but we can learn something from the way Aristophanes lampoons ideologies, challenges norms (in his unique bawdy way), and ridicules our ill-conceived and misguided deeds in his work. She who desires change in Higher Education may indeed issue clarion calls to 'stop the privatisation of Unis now', but 'ending privatisation' is a prayer, not a plan; for something not to happen 'in our name', we need to stop signing up for it with our name, as the previous nine Theses have attempted to demonstrate. Until then, the noise we make submits itself to faith, not to reason, to passive injustice, not active justice, walking the walk but not grabbing Leviathan's tail on our way, and twisting it hard 'til the beast learns to fear us.

XI. Look who's talking!

An entirely valid and justified reaction to what I've written so far could indeed resemble the title of the last of my eleven theses against the strikes, but given that this is an article and not a self-portrait, I will limit myself to introducing mere fragments of my own quotidian professional practice, as a way of defending, but not over-indulging
myself.

I am a self-funded doctoral student and unofficial, if not illegitimate, lover of sociology who writes a thesis on the changing conceptions and the historical transformation of public sociology, the University, higher education, intellectuals and the public sphere with a view of offering alternatives that will reform these into more public, sociable and less pretentious versions of themselves by:

(a) Suggesting the integration of public sociology as a new curriculum for critical scholarship which will transform the production of knowledge from its current transactional role to a more relational one which would implicate learners, teachers and doers of sociology as participants in the political agora, by means of a pedagogy that is oriented to the cultivation of civic virtue(s).

(b) Calling for a reshaping of the University to fit a more co-operative model where everyone involved can be a beneficiary owner/member of the institution rather than a paying client or a delegating chairperson.

(c) Ushering in the Internet as a new public sphere which we found, by interacting and co-creating rather than simply find, and abide to, with a view of encouraging, developing and aspiring to a governance of the commons.

(d) Working towards replacing public intellectuals with public characters who, in Jane Jacobs’ (1961: 68) coinage of the term, can be ‘anyone who is in frequent contact with a wide circle of people and who is sufficiently interested to make himself a public character. A public character need have no special talents or wisdom to fulfil his function—although he often does. He just needs to be present, and there need to be enough of his counterparts. His main qualification is that he is public, that he talks to lots of different people. In this way, news travels that is of sidewalk interest’; thus, admitting makers and doers, flâneurs and bricoleurs rather than orators, demagogues and saloniers into the public realm as co-authors of a communal script, by heralding a substantive, not a merely decorative, shift which emphasises practical, not intellectual intervention and allows access to and participation for many more figures than are normally admitted to the pearly gates of the intelligentsia.

In the meantime, I periodically write for and maintain a column at The Sociological Imagination, which is an open, free online magazine; aiming hosting sociological interventions on public issues that matter rather than selling stylised, technical monographs for internal consumption and use.

In so doing, and taking into account my approach to teaching as set out in Thesis VI, I feel like I am indeed in a position to say that I hardly betray my ideals as:

(a) I fund my own research rather than relying on external sponsors who might (and in most cases do) have a ‘say’ on the content of my work,

(b) I contest the current audit-culture in academia that presses for publications but undermines authorship.

(c) I teach out of love for the subject and the relationship with my students, not (strictly!) for money, believing not just in the public role of education for citizenship but also in the virtues of pedagogy.

(d) I give detailed, qualitative feedback to my students, offer my time generously to students who wish to discuss something (anything!) with me and often accompany them on social events (i.e. relevant film screenings, public lectures etc.) therefore acting beyond the confines of my working time and well beyond the terms of my contract.

(e) I resist the regulatory discourse and regime of the University and its managers wherever and whenever I see it as part of my daily conduct as a doctoral researcher, a student, a tutor and a young sociologist, rather than
wait for 'that one special day' to do so.

In sitting down to write this, and with a little help from my deluded mind, I suspect that sharing my thoughts with you, rather than striking for two hours to get myself a nice, frothy latte, seems to be more of a resistance, or at least, that's my pact with the Devil, and my story what's yours?

[Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name [Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music. Recent publications are featured on the British Sociological Association’s Postgraduate Theory Forum and on The Sociological Imagination magazine on a variety of issues ranging from the English riots, the idea of sociological imagination and the Eurozone crisis. In the spring of 2013 he achieved Associate Fellow status of the Higher Education Academy. You can watch his debate with Prof. Martell in full here.]

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Strike-breaking is strike-breaking regardless of your intellectual justification for it The Sociological Imagination (2014-03-01 20:25:25)

[... ] is a quick rejoinder to this article by Lambros Fatsis. I wasn’t comfortable with the idea of rejecting the article because of my [...]

Joining the dots in seven points: A response to Mark Carrigan’s rejoinder | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:32:40)

[...] the publication of a recent article of mine which debates rather than simply negates the issue of striking as witnessed at my affiliated [...]

Silver-bear is strike-breaking regardless of your intellectual justification for it (2014-03-01 20:09)

This is a quick rejoinder to [1]this article by Lambros Fatsis. I wasn’t comfortable with the idea of rejecting the article because of my political disagreement with it. But equally I’m not comfortable with publishing an argument that "we urgently need to work against the strikes" without also registering my complete rejection of it.

There are some points in the article which I think are straight forwards problematic (e.g. the notion there’s something ‘inconsistent’ about signing an employment contract and going on strike, the notion that the structural positions of those involved make support for the strike seem ‘naive’ or ‘foolish’, the slightly sneering dismissal of the language of class war) but, reading charitably, I take the basic argument here to be that strikes aren’t radical enough. They render dissent as something exceptional, perhaps carnivalesque, briefly suspending the order of things only for it to later return with a crushing intensity which negates the emancipatory impulse underlying the strike:

We cannot consent daily to reducing the production of knowledge to the level of drafting applications for funding, point-scoring for the RAE and the REF, evaluating our work by Key Performance Indicators and audit measures, upsetting our brains, stomachs and nerves over maximising citations, measuring our work in terms of bibliometrics, undermining our pedagogic relationship with our students by treating teaching as a time-consuming chore and by minimising the feedback or the academic and pastoral support we give to them, humiliate ourselves by accepting the casualization of our labour, and claim to want to overthrow all that in one stroke during a strike. We cannot afford to march for education as a public good yet agree to march to the beat of our institution’s trustees, at least not at the peril of being accused of double-standards.
Striking won’t restore University education or academic working conditions to a golden era that never was, nor will it prepare the ground for more hope towards overthrowing the regulatory discourse of the post-modern enterprising university, but our every-day academic conduct will. Engaging in the first but not the latter gives the impression that we are comfortable with being actively just one day yet passively unjust the rest of the time by fooling ourselves and others in the meantime.

The structure of this argument is one I’m actually somewhat sympathetic to. I think there’s a tendency, not just amongst the left, to overvalue personal judgement in a way which combines objective complicity with subjective repudiation i.e. rejecting a system in principle while nonetheless acting in a way which willfully reproduces it. So what I take Lambros to be saying is that strikes are one step removed from this, constituting expressive action which leaves the day-to-day life of the institution untouched. If this were so then I’d probably accept the argument. However it straightforwardly misunderstands what a strike is, misreading collective action as a day out for a collection of individuals. Collective agency is exercised through the coordinated withdrawal of labour, representing one move within a much longer standing game. Steven Shakespeare has expressed what I believe more competently than I’ve thus far been able to:

There is no reason why academics should be any more logical about these matters than anyone else. But I wonder if the gaping holes in these responses are, at least in part, a result of the shaping of academic subjectivity by the capitalist university. We are engaged in a profession which claims to promote something above instrumentalism – and it is precisely this which is our instrumental role. We have to play the games of preparing students for employment, and raising money for research, but we keep an internal distance from these things. We cynically despise them (and often despise the students who do not measure up to our ideals), whilst committing ourselves to a system which believes in these things on our behalf (cf. the Zizekian analysis of contemporary belief).

However, it is this internal displacement which produces the figure of the contemporary academic. This person is invested in an ethic of scholarship, which actually leaves them without a language or imagination for addressing the material conditions of higher education, beyond that of an ultimately ineffective idealism. The melancholy of the modern scholar over the marketization of education is therefore neither a form of resistance nor mere nostalgia, but a fabricated affect essential to the mediating role we play.

Of course, I generalise hugely, and we can all think of many exceptions. I am not suggesting that our bureaucratised unions or existing left groups offer any panacea. Nevertheless, higher education has been, and will continue to be, marketised and instrumentalised, and the vast majority of academics will (grudgingly, cynically) put up with it. And our ethic of scholarship is of no use. It is the same ethic which is able to abide such logical inconsistencies and lack of solidarity when it comes to strikebreaking.


Repudiating collective action because its goals aren’t lofty enough in practice does little more than strengthen those seeking to destroy public higher education. Criticise the tactics, suggest alterations of the strategy but accept that strike-breaking is strike-breaking regardless of your intellectual justification for it. If you’re going to actively undermine the collective action of others while castigating them for the narrow instrumentalism of their goals then you need to offer an alternative. Unfortunately a radical ethics of everyday life just doesn’t cut it. It offers no theory of change. It’s just the universalisation of a personal ethos. It is the apotheosis of precisely the expressive politics Lambros is rejecting.
If strikes aren’t radical enough then you need to explain how we can collectively work towards these loftier ends without them.

2. [http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/](http://itself.wordpress.com/2013/12/05/the-academic-ethics-of-strikebreaking/)

As far as the 'I’ can hear (2014-03-02 08:00)

Taking up the challenge that [1]Paul Warmington set for The Guardian readers to name ‘a Black British intellectual, now that Stuart Hall is gone’, I found myself simultaneously nodding my assent to his well-reasoned tribute to an inspirational role model of mine, but also fundamentally disagreeing with the very terms and conditions of the challenge.

I very much fear that Dr. Warmington's effort to locate the black public intellectuals of today is tainted by a desire to look for them, almost exclusively, in the physical geography of academia, thus reproducing a common trope, if not an outright bias, in how and what we understand intellectuals to be. Any such search operation, using as its sole criterion the (public) intellectuals’ academic descent, simply reproduces the tired image of a pampered scholarly clan while sidelining, belittling and even ignoring the every-day presence of black Britons as active participants in and custodians of a superbly rich urban, convivial multicultural exchange, to which we bear witness, not just with our minds but with our senses too, in the cities we live in.

Commendable though Dr. Warmington's argument is when applied to the [2]absent presence of black intellectuals in the academy, I would urge us to widen the dimensions of how and what we understand public culture and intellectual life to be by inviting many more cultural allies in our discussion than academic orientation allows, given that they are co-authors of our every-day experience of urban cultural life. To paraphrase an arresting snippet from Rousseau's Émile, ‘we can be public men and women without being scholars', by aspiring to be and to live among public intellectuals, rather than public intellectuals, and one of way of doing so is to turn away from the monopoly of the mind’s 'I' by embracing our ‘other’ and better senses; the ability to hear, smell and feel public life as the sum total of activities that gently weave the tapestry of our daily metropolitan experience as forms of intellectual and public life that happen to our bodies through our senses, in ways that transcend the mere transmission of electro-chemical signals located in the brain.

Public participation, intervention and collective action, all assume multiple forms which do not and should not fit the intellectualist formula, and are represented by a host of public intellectuals who contribute to public cultural life in ways that urge us to re-consider the way we make sense of culture and public life as a hybrid, syncretic activity mediated through a number of genres where intellectual activity may and does indeed flourish. There is an entirely new black music network (Radio 1 Xtra) broadcasting dancehall, hip-hop- drum n’ bass, garage, dubstep, grime and so many other distinctively black British musical styles, we have the cinema of Menelik Shabazz and John Akomfrah who have directed splendid films on lovers’ rock and the 1985 Handsworth riots respectively, we see black British photography at its best at [3]Autograph ABP, we always learn from the biting commentary of Gary Younge and Roifield Brown, we indulge in reading the popular [4]history of black London’s soundscapes borrowing the ears of Lloyd Bradley (who also was the executive producer of BBC’s Reggae Britannia), we dance and cry our hearts and souls out at international festival line-ups where black Britons top the bill, we entice our literary flair with superb craftspeople of the pen such as James Berry, Caryl Phillips, Courttia Newland, Alex Wheattle, Zadie Smith, Hanif Kureishi, Andrea Levy, Salman Rushdie, we learn more about black British literature and history by holding a copy of Penguin's [5]IC3.
book of new black writing in Britain, Onyekachi Wambu’s companion [6] to fifty years of writing about black Britain or Kadija Sesay’s collection; [7] ‘Write Black, Write British’, and indeed delight in savouring spicy Caribbean delicacies and frequent specialist record shops that have long served as public agoras of black Caribbean culture at broad. More importantly however, we enjoy the virtues of [8] soundsystem literature and culture in Britain which has contained all the tensions of the black British experience since the Windrush generation and has revolutionised not just the way we listen to music but the way we perceive sound, its frequencies, its message and role in the shaping and the possibilities of re-making public culture into something that is lived experientially rather than pondered on intellectually.

Besides, for every deluded, ignorant and bigoted version of [9] David Starkey’s comments, of which Warmington is rightly critical, there is the sensibility of Dreda Say Mitchell; restor(y)ing our public, intellectual life to its quotidian cosmopolitan dimensions by replacing noise with sound, theory with experience and academic insularity with broader socio-cultural context, thus opening up the scholarly ‘I’ to our other senses.

Lambros Fatsis is a doctoral researcher and an Associate Tutor in Sociology at the University of Sussex, specialising on the history of public sociology and the sociology of intellectual life. He also performs as a reggae selector with the alias, Boulevard Soundsystem. [/nbox]

3. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Empire-Windrush-Fifty-Writing-Britain/dp/0753808390
4. http://autograph-abp.co.uk/who-we-are
5. http://www.amazon.co.uk/IC3-Penguin-Black-Writing-Britain/dp/0140287337
7. http://www.amazon.co.uk/IC3-Penguin-Black-Writing-Britain/dp/0140287337

As far as the ‘I’ can hear | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:37:11)
[...] published at The Sociological Imagination on March 2, [...]

What are conferences for? (2014-03-02 17:33)

Heidegger thought that scholars should simply trade questions, but that would include the speaker first and foremost.

I have watched conference presentations for more than three decades and never has a speaker offered a “new approach” that was in fact new (except in their own minds). Some approaches became, as you rightly identify, the latest thing because, as you also rightly identify, they were already part of a larger, already extant movement/meme (lots of heads nodding in agreement there). But I have also never heard a young person speak who was not persuaded that his or her ideas were utterly unprecedented...

What strikes me most (apart from the evident desire for non-reciprocity here — it seems that the desire is that discussants not discuss but ask what some youthful presenters imagine to be ‘real’ questions), is the conviction that simply because a conference resembles a classroom situation that the listeners are there to take instruction rather than to participate. Even those respondents who are genuinely confused and want clarification (does one
really want a conference room full of such gratefully attentive respondents? would that not be a classroom? is the epitome of the conference encounter an ex cathedra address?) want that clarification only for their own agendas: they too are just planning to talk later or elsewhere or at their own conference...

The idea should be to exchange ideas and if speakers seem to comment on their own ideas in response to your ideas, is that not a good thing? Not only might the speaker learn something but it is also the case that there is usually no difference in competencies between the person at the podium (the selection committee arranging the talk is a committee of one's peers not arbiters of the truth) and, at an academic conference, it is usually the case that the persons in the audience who strike you as waiting to say what they seem hellbent on saying, do indeed have something to say and might have been speaking themselves.

[nbox type="notice"]Babette Babich is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, for sending this on. You can find Babette’s website [1]here[/nbox]

1. http://faculty.fordham.edu/babich/

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Xavi (2014-03-03 18:41:28)
Conferences are mainly tourism and resume fattening. No one listens to anyone but themselves.

Do you have quotitis? (2014-03-03 08:00)
This is a common disease amongst qualitative researchers. One which, though I occasionally suffer from it myself, nonetheless irritates me when I read other people’s work. But what is it? [1]Nick Hopwood explains:

Quotitis is a common disease among qualitative researchers. It’s a name I have started using to refer to the tendency for people writing about qualitative data to over-rely on raw quotes from interviews, fieldnotes, documents etc.


Read more about [3]diagnosis and cure. It would be interesting to know if anyone disagrees with here. I do to a certain extent, in so far as that I distinguish between block chunk indented text (avoid unless absolutely necessary) and using their words as you are telling their story (which I do a lot). The former is problematic and, while I’m not saying the latter is never problematic, I think it works well if done carefully.

(and I couldn’t agree more with what he said about the role of coding in this)

1. http://nickhop.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/do-you-have-quotitis-how-to-diagnose-treat-and-prevent/
2. http://nickhop.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/do-you-have-quotitis-how-to-diagnose-treat-and-prevent/
Upcoming event: Symposium on Web Surveys of the General Population (5 June 2014) (2014-03-04 08:00)


"As ever greater numbers of face-to-face services move to the web delivery, survey funders increasingly ask whether the same transition can be achieved for surveys. Conducting surveys online should, in principle at least, bring substantial cost efficiencies as well as enabling surveys to be undertaken in new, faster and more innovative ways. To a large extent this move to an online survey environment has already taken place, with a huge volume of commercial polling now carried out via 'opt-in' online panels.

However, there remains a high degree of uncertainty about whether this type of sample design is capable of providing estimates of sufficiently high quality for the purposes of academic research and the production of official statistics. Concerns centre around the non-random nature of sample recruitment, as well as the deleterious effects of incentive payments and repeated interviewing on measurement quality. Attempts to interview random samples of the general population online are hampered by a lack of suitable sampling frames and a substantial minority of citizens still having no access to the internet. This symposium comprises presentations from leading international scholars on the current state-of-art in surveying the general population online.

Speakers: -

Chair, Patrick Sturgis, National Centre for Research Methods, University of Southampton

Using the web to survey the UK general population: conclusions from the GenPopWeb network, Gerry Nicolaas, NatCen Social Research, London

Feasibility of Using the Web to Survey the UK General Population: an Experiment from the European Social Survey, Ann Villar, Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University, London

Taking an existing face-to-face panel survey online: methodological challenges, Peter Lynn, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex

Lessons Learned from Creating Probability Sample Online Panels in the U.S., Jon Krosnick, Stanford University"

To [4]read more and register, visit this page on the NCRM website.
Citizenship Education, as a subject, has been a part of the English National Curriculum since 2002, and this book by Lee Jerome outlines interesting developments in this field over the last ten years. The Crick Report of 1998 was influential in establishing governmental policies that eventually introduced Citizenship Education as a subject: secondary school students are encouraged to become informed and responsible citizens, in a democratic society, with finely tuned critical thinking skills, whilst learning about identities and diversity, democracy and justice, and rights and responsibilities. Citizenship Education in the curriculum has placed emphasis on students enjoying learning through active participation.

In this treatise on the way this relatively new subject has impacted upon schools, Lee Jerome successfully argues that any developments in education cannot be separated from the political context in which policies emerged. Throughout the book he provides evidence and examples to emphasise the importance of always critically examining the prevailing political context.

The book would benefit those wanting a good grounding in the establishment of general citizenship education in the last decade informing us about distinct types of citizenship literature: justificatory, definitional, comparative, historical, and evaluative. If you are new to this field of researching citizenship education, then this is a great compilation of relevant significant literature and case studies illustrating how citizenship education has progressed in England. Moreover you will be introduced to the relevant terminology within this field in a straightforward and simple way.

Jerome provides readers with a ‘toolkit’ to become confident in understanding definitions and analysis of citizenship education policy, particularly in the context of the New Labour government initiatives that helped to bring this area to the forefront. We learn about New Labour’s intentions in promoting citizenship concerns as a contested site, as well as their Third Way approach. Moreover, we receive detailed information about the trope of the new citizen (advocated by New Labour) through three key discourses: rights and responsibilities, active citizenship and participation, and community and diversity.
Two significant texts that have contributed to contemporary ideas on citizenship education policies and practices are the Crick Report of 1998 and the Ajegbo Review in 2007. Jerome discusses these two reports in relation to the aforementioned three key discourse areas of the educational field. Further, Jerome provides us with in-depth case studies of Citizenship Education in action in school settings through teacher interviews and examination of policy documents. We gain knowledge of teachers’ perspectives and experiences of the teaching and learning of the still relatively new subject of Citizenship Education. We also become familiar with students’ perceptions and encounters with Citizenship Education in the curriculum.

I particularly enjoyed reading the section where Jerome highlights how research can be innovative and democratic if we train students to become researchers and champion their voices. Rather than conceptualising the students as ‘subjects’, it is preferable to view them as participants in the study, or even better as co-researchers. Excellent reasons are given as to why the idea of students as ethnographic researchers can be beneficial and useful, for example they can help with the design, with access and with interpreting data. If students are given opportunities to analyse the data, this will contribute to their becoming more critical in their reflections on citizenship issues.

Therefore the book is useful in allowing insight into both student and teacher articulations about the practice of Citizenship Education in action, rather than just giving us an abstract and theoretical point of view. The case studies illustrate how the contested subject of Citizenship Education is actually interpreted by schools, and the staff and students within these schools.

In terms of notions of multicultural citizenship in England, and concepts of community and diversity, there is much to learn about how students talk about important issues such as racism and immigration. Towards the end of the book, Jerome highlights the implications of the new coalition government’s stance towards citizenship.

This book would be a superb key text for those working in sociology and education research fields who wish to learn more about the impact of political context on citizenship education policy in schools, on teachers and on students. One of the main lessons from Jerome’s writings is that any study of citizenship education in schools cannot be divorced from a detailed understanding of the political forces at play attempting to influence how schools frame citizenship issues in their local communities. Jerome ends his book with the concluding optimistic thought that citizenship education can work well when taught well.

[nbox type="notice"]Sadia Habib is a PhD candidate in Educational Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London.[/nbox]


Joining the dots in seven points: A response to Mark Carrigan’s rejoinder (2014-03-04 21:56)

Following the publication of a [1]recent article of mine which debates rather than simply negates the issue of striking as witnessed at my affiliated institution (University of Sussex), I was delighted to read [2]Mark Carrigan’s objections to my original piece to which I can’t avoid responding in the fear that my argument may have been partly or wholly misunderstood. The comments that follow take the form of a defence in seven points to match the format of the
eleven theses I attempted to offer in my original article. Before doing so however, let me qualify my response and my
dialogue with Mark, by defending it against the charge of a point-by-point 'petty-house squabble' which it certainly
is not. I may indeed have chosen a point-by-point format to better capture my arguments in the most concise way
available to my own cerebral resources, but this is by no means an attempt to deliver a riposte against Mark or to
argue over trivialities; rather it is a necessary rejoinder from my part in an effort to rescue the essential components
and the integrity of my argument from possible misreadings, which cloud the picture more than they facilitate
exchange on an important issue.

I. Starting with the very reason that Mark gives for his rejoinder, namely his political disagreement with what
I wrote, I feel the need to stress that my article, although political in essence, is not articulated in any ideological
terms and the difference between the two is one that needs to be highlighted to say the least. I do not ascribe to any
ideological position when writing, although I do indeed offer my independent political reflections on a number of
issues. This stance derives from my disbelief in and distrust of ideology as an intellectual and rhetorical habit which
signifies, but does not directly engage with political ends. Personally, I prefer to discuss politics outside ideological
positions, believing that there is no need to position oneself ideologically in order to stand for something politically.
One can indeed have a stance which may be political by itself rather than by means of ideological strictures, thus
praising political exchange as an intrinsic, not an instrumental good; an end in and of itself, therefore rejecting
ideological exchange as a viable means of or a vehicle for politics. It can be said that my view of politics owes a great
deal to the ancient Greek paradigm of discussing and enacting politics without necessary pleading allegiance to
an ideological position, enclave or party. In fact I adamantly believe that politics is what happens outside ideology
rather than through it. That’s another matter however, which is relevant for our discussion here insofar as it spells
out where I stand politically but not ideologically.

In the light of the above, the argument I make is hardly informed by an assumed preference for a politics that
negates or opposes striking and that’s why I am never (just) saying that “we urgently need to work against the strikes”
as Mark claims, but arguing that we; ‘urgently need to work against the strikes in order to better work for them,
implying that ‘our work is our strike' by setting the standards that we wish to see implemented’. The full quote, you
will agree, spells out something quite different from its sampled version, which gives the erroneous impression that
I wish to see strikes banned in some form of censorship of sorts which I have neither the wish nor the power to
impose. In other words my opposition to strikes is not political but critical of their deliberative currency and power
as a method of opposition and resistance (my counterargument can be found in the last paragraph of Thesis VII).

II. Bearing this distinction between politics and ideology in mind, as it occurs in my own mind, it hurts to see
my argument and position explained away and given the nickname of strike breaking. Taking such liberties amounts
to ideologising my political position for me, implying that it can be placed neatly somewhere on the other side
of the political spectrum, without my asking of course. Could anything be more injurious both to my argument
and to myself as a person and a human being? To make matters worse, the very use of the term ‘strike-breaking’
automatically elevates the choice to strike to the level or a moral absolute rather than treating it as a method, an
idea, and a mode of action that can be contested, opposed, and discussed. By framing any opposition to any strike
merely as ‘strike-breaking’ one is ushering in a Manichean world-view where strikes almost automatically tilt towards
‘the good’ while any opposition towards them is to be found at the dark recesses of evil alone. Strikes, much like
any opposition towards them are not such absolute values however but relative, contestable, discursive, dialogic
resources and practices we have in our disposal in order to do or undo things.

II. In addition to being eagerly enlisted as a strike-breaker, regardless of what I think or whether I recognise
such a label as an appropriate description of who I am and what I do, I am also accused of misunderstanding what
a strike is. In Mark’s reading, strikes equal collective action, and I am accused of reducing them to “a day out for
a collection of individuals", which I am also never saying apart from as an example to highlight the contradiction
between everyday professional practice and the exceptional circumstances of a strike. Even if I am to accept that
I misunderstand what a strike is, I do not make sense of collective agency and action in the same way as Mark. In
my mind, collective action does not assume one form, does not fit one single formula and does not express itself in a one-dimensional way. Rather, I see it as a very complicated, multi-directional process involving a number of different actors rather than a uniform whole; therefore allowing the possibility of many ways of making sense of what collective action is and how it might be best served. No one definition of it will serve all, unless coercion is involved, nor do we all choose to act collectively in the same way; [6]Elinor Ostrom’s recognition of the multiplicity of collective actors and her classificatory typology of (a) rational egoists, (b) conditional co-operators and (c) willing punishers is a testament to such complexity. In case you’re curious I belong, if I must, to the second category.

III. A variation on the theme of collective action comes from Mark’s assertion that I “undermine the collective action of others while castigating them off for the narrow instrumentalism of their goals”, which I never do, urging me instead to ‘offer an alternative’ which I actually do. First of all, I never preach, describe, undermine or ridicule people; there is no trace of such an attitude whatsoever in my tone or in the wording of my argument. I deliberately use ‘we’ throughout the article as an acknowledgment of collective responsibility, thus never reserving for myself a privileged position in the monopoly of truth, morality and virtue, and I am never telling people what to do, undermine their efforts or pass judgment on their actions. What I am doing however is spelling inconsistencies in the way we think and act towards the issues that the strikes purportedly defend.

My interest does not lie in ideologically battling against others by belittling them, but in critically examining our daily conduct towards the claims we make in and during a strike, asking the very simple and obvious questions of (a) are we in a position to shout-out without being found-out?, (b) what do we do daily towards the realising the ideals we claim to defend?, (c) do we actually offer an alternative or some sort of plan? That final point brings us to Mark’s accusation that I offer no alternatives, which I find rather problematic not only because I actually do so (in eleven theses), but also because it assumes that the strikes actually offer an alternative, which they do not; not because they do not intend to but because they are not designed for spelling out plans but merely for expressing dissatisfaction with a state of affairs.

Offering alternatives is not just something that ‘strike-breakers’ need to do, but ‘strikers’ too; when we agitate for change we need to spell out and articulate specifically what it is that we’re prepared to do. Slogans and vague allusions to abstract ideas won’t do, but a clarion call for cultivating those ideals by integrating them to our every-day professional practice will, or so I claim anyway. Even if I am accused of offering no alternatives, what is the alternative offered by the strikes which can match and/or outperform what I suggest?

IV. Mark expresses some puzzlement in relation to the very heart of my argument which he finds “straightforwardly problematic”; especially “the notion there’s something ‘inconsistent’ about signing an employment contract and going on strike”. I have struggled to understand what is so problematic about that claim but have only come up with the, intentionally far-fetched, example of someone who willingly seeks a career in, and is in no way coerced to work for, the porn industry but claims to fight against the objectification of women’s bodies. The example is admittedly exaggerated, in order to sensationalise the contradiction I allude to, but hits my argument at its core. Given that we know that the institutions we sign our contracts with, do not correspond to the romanticised ideal-type we have in our minds, can we still criticise them for not being the institutions that they should be, without feeling at the same time that we have contributed towards such a betrayal by virtue of agreeing to work for/in them?

V. I am also accused of calling people who support the strikes “naïve” or “foolish” which I never do, given that my article is not an attack on or a criticism of other people’s views or decisions, but a critical self-check of whether our claims match our actual performance or at least stand the test of logic. All I am asking is not that we simply practice what we preach, but that we preach only what we actually practice. My use of the word ‘naïve’ by the way is taken out of context from the following phrase: ‘I very much fear that we are far too complicit in and complacent about the trends, the workings and the regulatory regime of Higher Education in our every-day academic practice to be able to afford such a stance without sounding naïve or hypocritical even’. Needless to say, there is no mention
of "foolishness" in any part of my article, nor is any such characterisation attributed to anyone but 'us' given the use of 'we' throughout the article. Cutting and mixing are two beautiful and immensely creative skills both in the process of film editing as well as in music production, but they are used to add to the result not to reduce it to a bare form, and in order to do so they always remain faithful to the context of what is being expressed as well as to how.

VI. Mark, quite rightly, identifies what he calls my "sneering dismissal of the language of class war" and although I do indeed oppose such a rhetoric of class war, I doubt that I adopt a 'sneering' tone. At any rate, what I am arguing is that such allusions to class war add very little except demagoguery and emotive (not emotional!) arousal, so it is now my turn to ask what plan do such statements spell out? What solution do they propose? Where is an argument towards making such warfare irrelevant? Contrary to what I take as Mark's support for such a statement, in the hope that I am wrong, I think that such slogans make class war even more durable using ideology as a pretext for legitimising conflict rather than proposing or even remotely suggesting change; the very wording affirms warfare, it does not negate or offer an alternative to it.

VII. Last but not least, and here is where Mark and I seem to agree is that "strikes aren't radical enough" indeed. Much as I value, the subversive, "carnivalesque" element of striking, it arguably turns vital concerns of ordinary academic politics into extra-ordinary events scheduled as special occasions. When I claim that 'our daily work is our strike' I aim at pointing out that the ideas, ideals and principles we defend in a Rabelaisian fashion during strikes need to be enacted upon in our everyday professional practice. Just as cosmopolitanism and the poetics, ethics and politics of multiculture are not best served by one-off events but by our everyday, ordinary practice of them, the same applies to our fight against the privatisation and techno-bureaucratisation of education and intellectual life at broad. When I appear critical of striking as a method then, it is not the "carnivalesque" that I oppose, but my fear and suspicion that striking privileges preaching and self-righteousness over reflecting on the harm we do or on whether we actually do the right thing during our working hours.

If a "radical ethics of everyday life doesn't cut it" as Mark concludes, then what does? If a change in the way we operate in our routine, daily life is not effected then where will it come from? Besides, I do not see such a change in professional practices as a "personal ethos", as Mark claims, but as a collective responsibility and a collective civic virtue which is realised by collectively aspiring to and actualising the principles of educational and institutional reform we wish to see though what we do at the University. How can change be brought about by striking occasionally, when we are not prepared to change our ways in relation to how we engage daily with our professional practice? A scholarly community which will inspire collective action cannot be convincingly or durably be forged unless we strive to prioritise and set the standards for the type of academic activity we wish to see and live in harmony with.

My personal utopia, to avoid any further misunderstandings, takes the form of pro-active change for where we want to see it happening. Instead of fighting the neoliberal University after accepting to work within its walls, why not refrain from joining it in the first place, seeking and creating better spaces to host our homeless minds? (see [7]Thesis III). Instead of supporting the techno-bureaucratisation of scholarly curiosity and intellectual life by succumbing to the [8]regulatory discourse of the current Higher Education climate, why not, like our [9]German counterparts have done, boycott modes and types of evaluation that betray scholarly sensibilities and standards? Instead of asking students to protest against much of what we commonly oppose, after they've paid their fees, why not plead with them publicly to protest by not enrolling in institutions which [10]undermine the intrinsic value of their learning, asking them instead to organise nationwide protests, before joining a Uni, until [11]tuition fees are abolished?

In the light of the above, and bearing in mind the word-length of my original article (6.000 words), has it not become clear enough that the issue that the strikes polarise admits more than a binary mode of thinking and talking about it? Academics of the world unite, we have nothing but some REF points to lose, but our integrity, courage and goodwill to win! Can we, will we do that?
Lambros Fatsis is a final year DPhil student at the School of Law, Politics and Sociology at the University of Sussex. His doctoral thesis concentrates on discussions of public sociology, the role of the University and intellectuals, while other research interests include black music, urban culture and the history and sociology of the Jamaican soundsystem. He also performs as a reggae selector/radio presenter under the name Boulevard Soundsystem and is a contributor of Billboard magazine on reggae music. Recent publications are featured on the British Sociological Association's Postgraduate Theory Forum and on The Sociological Imagination magazine on a variety of issues ranging from the English riots, the idea of sociological imagination and the Eurozone crisis. In the spring of 2013 he achieved Associate Fellow status of the Higher Education Academy.

4. http://www.amazon.fr/La-douceur-dans-pens%C3%A9%e-grecque/dp/2251326766

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**Call for Papers => #Ethnography: Trends, Traverses and Traditions (2014-03-05 15:58)**

**ESA midterm conference, Research Network on Qualitative Research (RN20)**

#Ethnography, @Amsterdam #August 27-29th 2014 [1]http://aisr.uva.nl/ethnography

Ethnography is often seen as one of the principal approaches in qualitative methodology in general. The ESA midterm conference for the Research Network on Qualitative research (RN20) will be on trends, traverses and traditions in Ethnography. The central question posed at this conference will be: How do current societal and technological trends influence ethnography when we are studying that same society? One could think of more concrete questions such as:

- Is ethnography changing due to social media, such as Twitter and Facebook? In what ways?
- What happens when we use mobile field recording devices, Skype and Youtube in our fieldwork?
- What theoretical innovations have led to new approaches in ethnography?
- How does the current economic crisis influence ethnographic practices for researchers?
• What turn are we at now?
• What other trends do we see in ethnography today?

In times of digital information overload, conferences are useful venues to discuss the trending topics within our field. Some of the questions posed above could be used to approach the vast array of ‘new’ trends in ethnography. Since one of the methodological virtues of ethnography is the possibility for adaptation to local and new situations, the question might rise whether these trends are actually methodologically new. Different specific sessions will be organised by leading specialists. Please see the website ([2]http://aisrr.uva.nl/ethnography) for the list of specific sessions.

We hope to organise an interesting conference in the heart of Amsterdam, combining classic presentations with a social program that consists of a Fieldwork Experiment: Mass – Observation in the Amsterdam Red light district, interactive lunch sessions and interesting keynotes.

Authors are invited to submit their abstract either to a specific session or to the open sessions. Please submit each abstract to a single session only.

Abstracts should not exceed 250 words.


The local organising committee,
Christian Bröer, Erella Grassiani, Gerben Moerman and Milena Veenis

1. http://aisrr.uva.nl/ethnography
2. http://aisrr.uva.nl/ethnography

Bullshit jobs (2014-03-06 08:00)

Today I came across another good article by David Graeber about why there are so many really bad jobs around: [1]On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs.

"In the year 1930, John Maynard Keynes predicted that, by century's end, technology would have advanced sufficiently that countries like Great Britain or the United States would have achieved a 15-hour work week. There's every reason to believe he was right. In technological terms, we are quite capable of this. And yet it didn't happen. Instead, technology has been marshaled, if anything, to figure out ways to make us all work more. In order to achieve this, jobs have had to be created that are, effectively, pointless. Huge swathes of people, in Europe and North America in particular, spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed. The moral and spiritual damage that comes from this situation is profound. It is a scar across our collective soul. Yet virtually no one talks about it."
Why is it that "in our society, there seems a general rule that, the more obviously one’s work benefits other people, the less one is likely to be paid"? According to the author,

"[t]he answer clearly isn't economic: it's moral and political. The ruling class has figured out that a happy and productive population with free time on their hands is a mortal danger (think of what started to happen when this even began to be approximated in the '60s). And, on the other hand, the feeling that work is a moral value in itself, and that anyone not willing to submit themselves to some kind of intense work discipline for most of their waking hours deserves nothing, is extraordinarily convenient for them."

On the face of it, the problem of "bullshit jobs" has nothing to do with the work of scientists. Aren't scientists those select few who are lucky to work in clean and well supplied institutes, practising a science which they feel is their vocation, so engrossed in the practice that they do not even know what the phrase "labour market" means? And yet, all jobs, good, bad or ugly, are part of the same system. And the subjective value we attribute to different jobs is also judged against the backdrops of other existing types of activity. In other words, we cannot understand the work done by scientists without paying attention to what goes on in other parts of the global labour market:

"If someone had designed a work regime perfectly suited to maintaining the power of finance capital, it's hard to see how they could have done a better job. Real, productive workers are relentlessly squeezed and exploited. The remainder are divided between a terrorised stratum of the, universally reviled, unemployed and a larger stratum who are basically paid to do nothing, in positions designed to make them identify with the perspectives and sensibilities of the ruling class (managers, administrators, etc) – and particularly its financial avatars – but, at the same time, foster a simmering resentment against anyone whose work has clear and undeniable social value. Clearly, the system was never consciously designed. It emerged from almost a century of trial and error. But it is the only explanation for why, despite our technological capacities, we are not all working 3-4 hour days."

This article is reposted from Matters Mathematical, http://mattersmathematical.wordpress.com where the Idle Ethnographer writes about sociology of science and what it is that mathematicians really do


Being a link between the academic world and local communities (2014-03-06 14:24)

by Lisa McKenzie

Coming into Higher Education as a 30 year old mum was daunting to say the least. I arrived at the University 2504
of Nottingham in 2000 as an under-graduate on the joint honours course of Sociology and Social Policy. Even though I had lived in Nottinghamshire for all of my life until this point I had never been into the University, or even onto the grounds of the University. I knew little of the University, and was ignorant to the process, and the practices which went on within it. I believe now it was my ignorance to higher education which led me to this particular Russell Group Institution. In all honesty had I known, I would be one of only 4 mature students in a year of about 150 students, and the only student who lived on a council estate, I probably would have gone to Nottingham Trent University, the route that other local people in Nottingham had taken into higher education. However there I was, meeting young privately educated people for the first time. I remember trying to explain the poll tax to them, what it was, and why it was wrong, and realising like Dorothy I was not in Kansas anymore.

From day one my interest in Sociology was inequality, social class, and community studies, although at the time I wouldn’t have been able to articulate it in that way. My dream was to research the neighbourhood where I lived, St Ann’s a council estate in Nottingham. I had been inspired to do this by a book written in the 1960’s by Ken Coates and Bill Silburn ‘Poverty the Forgotten Englishman’. I realised this ambition in 2009 when I submitted my PhD thesis ‘Finding Value on a council estate: Complex lives, Motherhood and Exclusion’. I knew very early on as a mature student that higher education is a special gift and also the importance of Sociology, it had changed my life, and I remember the enlightened moment I had while sitting in a lecture that my failure to go to University as an 18 year old, or my failure to attain decent qualifications at school was not my failure, but the failure of a structure, and of a system that needed neat and clear classifications of who you were, and what you were entitled to based on social class. I also realised that the University of Nottingham was an extremely privileged place with vast resources, most of which went un-used for large parts of the year.

Throughout the PhD research I was often enraged moving between the University and my local community, witnessing and seeing the massive inequalities even in a small City like Nottingham. My local community, in actual fact even my family didn’t really know what I was doing, or what others did at the University, I have often said it is like Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, people go in, you don’t know them and they are not from your community, and you don’t know what happens in there. I felt the unfairness of this sharply, and also encountered the University’s reluctance in engaging in any real way with the local community. There are individuals working in Universities who almost wear themselves out, and teetering on the edge of nervous breakdown trying to do work in the local community, or fighting inequalities in other ways, this is on top of their jobs, very little of what they do is officially recognised, and supported. I have also met others who work in academia who are ‘off the radar’ and are unlikely to be interested in real community engagement unless it is somehow linked to their careers, or the Impact Agenda or the REF.

Because my research was based in the local community, and because of the stark inequalities and unfairness I felt and because of my own social position, but also because Sociology changes something within you, where ignoring social inequities becomes impossible, I was available and motivated to working and becoming a link between the academic world and my local community in Nottingham.

Over the years at the University of Nottingham, I was engaged in many different projects, some worked, on one occasion the Lakeside Arts Centre at the University paid for 50 members of the St Ann’s Community to come and see Ken Coates and Bill Silburn’s film connected to the ‘Poverty the Forgotten Englishman’ study, and see a photographic exhibition of ‘Nottingham Life’ where the stills from Alan Sillitoe’s 1958 film based on his book ‘Saturday Night and Sunday Morning’ were shown. Other things did not go so well, I used my contacts with a local Youth Worker who has actually got an MBE for his voluntary work with gangs in the City, to have a meeting with the University of Nottingham sports department in trying to set up a football match between local young people, and the University of Nottingham’s team, the response from the University was that it was too much of a risk, because the young people might want to come back at night. This was a low point during my research at the University of Nottingham, and I struggled to continue. The people from my community had been told they were not welcome, and after that I was suspicious that neither was I.
I think because of the community and voluntary work I have undertaken over the years, and also because of the nature of my research, I am very honest about my own background when I write, which I believe has made me appear approachable. Therefore I get many requests to speak at community centres, schools and colleges all over the country now. I try very hard to go to as many of them as possible. I was recently at Ruskin College where I spoke to a group of mainly working class mature students. I was very proud of this, as Ruskin College was the only University my parents had heard of. I received an email from a student afterwards who was in the audience who said she had felt very alone in the academic process, and described herself as ‘an ex-care girl from a mining town’ who thought she had nothing to give to sociology her last words were ‘and then there was you’. I cried all night when I read her email. I know that our participation as Sociologists in the fight for social justice, whether that is through working directly or indirectly with those who are at the sharp end of inequality is as important to the discipline of Sociology as is the academic reading, writing and teaching we do in our institutions, and I take this responsibility seriously. I know that not all of us can engage in local communities in the same way as I do, we all have different strengths and skill sets, and passions. However to think about Sociology as a subject we learn, and then teach only to those who have the cultural, social and economic capital to get themselves into institutions of higher education, is not how I understand our discipline of Sociology, and this is not the Sociology which will benefit anyone either inside or outside of the University. It could be argued that my philosophy is in conflict with the institutions that employ me, but I don’t think it is; I’ll quote my mentor and friend Professor John Holmwood,

‘I am committed to my discipline rather than my institution, my commitment to my discipline therefore makes me a good employee and consequently committed to my institution’.

[1]Lisa McKenzie is a research fellow at the London School of Economics. She previously held an Early Career Leverhulme Research Fellowship conducting a re-study of the 1970 St Anns 'Poverty' study, focusing upon the changing shapes of community, family, and belonging in contemporary Britain. She is writing a book on this research to be published by Policy Press in early 2014.[/nbox]

1. [http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/Experts/profile.aspx?KeyValue=l.l.mckenzie@lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/Experts/profile.aspx?KeyValue=l.l.mckenzie@lse.ac.uk)

Agoston Faber (2014-04-13 10:58:45)

Indeed, the more lower-class students understand the role vast social structures play in the formation of their perspectives and in their relatively bad school performance, the less they will blame themselves about it. Keep on!

New book - "Undoing property?" (2014-03-07 08:00)

Exciting-sounding (fairly) new book!

[1] *Undoing property* examines complex relationships inside art, culture, political economy, immaterial production, and the public realm today. In its pages artists and theorists address aspects of computing, curating, economy, ecology, gentrification, music, publishing, piracy, and much more.

Property shapes all social relations. Its invisible lines force separations and create power relations felt through the unequal distribution of what is otherwise collectively produced value. Over the last few
years the precise question of what should be privately owned and publicly shared in society has animated intense political struggles and social movements around the world. In this shadow the publication’s critical texts, interviews and artistic interventions offer models of practice and interrogate diverse sites, from the body, to the courtroom, to the server, to the museum. The book asks why propertization itself has changed so fundamentally over the last few decades and what might be done to challenge it. The “undoing” of Undoing Property? begins with the recognition that something else is possible.


Rajani Naidoo: Why the "ranking fetish" is bad for universities (2014-03-08 08:00)

In this video, Dr. Rajani Naidoo of the University of Bath explains how higher education is becoming increasingly market driven, thus becoming less interested in the common good. Dr. Naidoo has written on the contemporary transformations of higher education.

1. file://player.vimeo.com/video/60905658?title=0 &byline=0 &portrait=0

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Raise university tuition fees to improve education... or not? The German approach (2014-03-10 08:00)

What can England learn from Germany's approach to financing higher education?

"During the past eight years, university tuition fees were introduced into most west German federal states. Yet in a few months, every single state will have abolished them. These facts raise a series of topical questions that cast current English higher education policy in a fresh and revealing light."

Read the [1]full article by Howard Hotson in the Times Higher Education

1. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/feature-germanys-great-tuition-fees-u-turn/2011168.article

Kai Arzheimer (2014-03-19 06:02:01)
Interesting piece, but the portrait of Germany is a bit too idyllic. From up close, Germany's u-turn smells of populism. Moreover, even without fees access to higher education is still more socially stratified in Germany than in the UK because of the selection mechanisms built into the system of secondary education.

Milena Kremakova (2014-03-21 15:34:03)
Good point, thanks! The social stratification remains largely invisible when you look at it from abroad. Do you think that, populist as it may be, the reform will be positive - or not?

10 reasons why you need social science (2014-03-12 08:00)

This interesting list of reasons by Audrey Osler was published by the [1]Campaign for Social Science. Read the descriptions for each reason [2]here.

1. Social scientists help us imagine alternative futures
2. Social science can help us make sense of our finances
3. Social scientists contribute to our health and well-being
4. Social science might save your life

5. Social science can make your neighbourhood safer

6. We need social scientists as public intellectuals

7. Social science can improve our children’s lives and education.

8. Social science can change the world for the better.

9. Social science can broaden your horizons

10. We need social science to guarantee our democracy

Are there any missing? Let us know your suggestions and we’ll extend the list.

1. http://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/

Emmet Fox (2014-03-12 10:56:32)
I know it’s submerged somewhere within the broaden your horizons section but he could be a bit more clear-cut about how social science helps you not to take your world for granted, as in the case of the relational sociology advocated by Emirbayer and Bourdieu. Recognising the influence of powerful societal and historical relations upon the common-sense perception of the world is essential to the broadening of horizons, identifying the forces of oppression, and to recognising the possibilities for social change (alternative futures). Possibly worthy of its own mention or at least greater emphasis within some of the articles listed.

Emmet Fox (2014-03-12 11:06:37)
That should be "she" Sincere apologies

Robyn (2015-02-17 13:11:34)
Social scientists work to eliminate mass inequalities. They care about the poor, the working poor and the working poor middle class.

What’s the Point of Academic Publishing? (2014-03-13 08:00)

[1]
What's the point of academic publishing? It’s such an integral part of the academic role in the contemporary university that it can be jarring to step back and ponder a question like this. It was addressed by Sarah Kendzior in a [2]great article recently,

Publishing and labor are two of academia’s most contentious issues, and they are usually debated separately. But when the rate of contingency hires and publications rise together—with the assumption that the latter is a means to avoid the former—they need to be taken as a broader problem: the self-defeating mechanization of scholarship. Scholars are encouraged to sacrifice integrity and ingenuity to careerism that does not reward them with a career.

Graduate students are told that publishing frequently and in traditional journals is key to landing a job. "In many if not most fields it is now necessary to have at least one refereed journal article while still ABD," [3]writes Karen Kelsky, Vitae columnist and academic advisor for hire, on her blog. But the harsh truth is that many scholars with multiple journal articles—and even multiple books—still do not find full-time employment. Academic publishing is no guarantee of anything, except possibly the[4]paywalled obsolescence of your work.

For tenure-track academics, publishing is a strategic enterprise. It’s less about the production of knowledge than where that knowledge will be held (or withheld) and what effect that has on the
author’s career. But for graduate students and contingent faculty, academic publishing is less a strategy than a rigged bet.

With the odds of finding a tenure-track job against them, graduate students are told to plan for a backup career, while simultaneously being told to publish jargon-filled research in paywalled journals. Scholars who bet on that insular system find themselves stranded when that system fails them, as it does most. Appeasing academics means alienating alternatives.


Is it possible to reconcile writing as a communicative activity with publishing as a strategic enterprise? Is the strategic value of publishing overstated in an age of contingent employment within the academy? There’s something existentially compelling about Kendzior’s call to reclaim the intrinsic value of writing,

Making your work "count" on its own intellectual merit helps rescue you from the sense of personal failure that accompanies loss on the job market. When you orient your scholarship toward a future that never comes, it can start to feel like you have no future. When you orient your scholarship toward its obvious yet overlooked purpose—furthering human knowledge—its value does not need to be determined by others, because the value lies in the work itself. This is what counts.

But is there a risk that this could become a palliative, subjectively comforting while objective circumstances remain unchanged? Is it instead feasible to hack the system and find room for this meaningful authorship as part of a strategic enterprise?

6. http://www.slate.com/articles/life/culturebox/2013/04/there_are_no_academic_jobs_and_getting_a_ph_d_will_make_you_into_a_horrible.html

Social Media for Academics (2014-03-14 08:00)

Are you an academic? Are you interested in social media? Given you're reading a blog post with the title 'Social Media for Academics' then I’ll assume that you are. In which case I hope you’ll be interested in the book that I’ll be spending much of this year writing. I’m due to deliver it to Sage next January to be published later that year. Here’s the current blurb for the project:

This practically minded book will provide an accessible introduction to the opportunities and challenges social media presents for academics. It will situate the fast-changing landscape of social media in terms of

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the existing needs and priorities entailed by a career in the contemporary academy: publicising research, building networks, managing information and engaging with wider publics. It is intended as a 'best practice' guide, applicable to anyone working within higher education who seeks to better understand and utilise the opportunities offered by social media. Adopting a practical approach throughout, it will frame discussion of platforms and tools in terms of the concerns, projects and practices more broadly applicable within higher education. Though comprehensively informed by the growing research literature on social media, it will not in itself form part of that literature, but rather contribute to the practical application of the knowledge generated by this expanding field of inquiry.

In keeping with the ethos of the book, I'll be doing much of the work which goes into it [1]here on my blog (i.e. the 'social media for academics' item on the menu bar). Much more to follow over the next nine months - though at markcarrigan.net, rather than on here, as I wanted to keep advertising on SI down to a minimum now that I've finally junked those horrible Google Ads.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/02/12/social-media-for-academics/

The Geek Anthropologist (2014-03-14 16:41:02)
This will prove interesting and useful!

Emma Uprichard on the challenge of Big Data (2014-03-15 08:00)

Anything that helps us to see the world a bit differently [...] can potentially help to nurture a healthy 'sociological imagination'. But the frame will remain on the relative present – the 'plastic present' to use a phrase I've used before – and that is unlikely to be enough to help us address the big social problems in the world today and make any substantive changes to them tomorrow. As [1]Heffernan (2013) recently put it, 'Big data will never give you big ideas... Big data doesn't facilitate big leaps of the imagination. It will never conjure up a PC revolution or any kind of paradigm shift. And while it might tell you what to aim for, it can't tell you how to get there. [...] If we take C. Wright Mills' quest for a 'sociological imagination' seriously, then ideally we need to also turn to big data to help us think differently, to see differently and re-en/act the world differently. So much social theory has gone into arguing and discussing these very issues and we cannot afford to let big data run away without good social theories about what to do with the masses of data we are producing.' (Pritchard, 'Focus: big data, little questions'? in Discover Society)

Read Emma Uprichard's [2]article on the challenge of big data - and the discussion in the comments.

Social Movements in the Neoliberal Age (2014-03-17 08:00)

This year’s annual lecture at the [1]Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice (CSSGJ) featured Michael Burawoy speaking on *social movements in the neoliberal age*. You can find the audio of the lecture on [2]Adam David Morton's blog.

In keeping with some of his recent books [3]*Global Ethnography* (2000) and [4]*The Extended Case Method* (2009), a major statement on the wave of social movements that have unfolded in light of the Arab Uprising since 2010 was delivered. Territories in resistance, commonly revolving around the issue of dispossession of land and labour and conditions of commodification, would recently include the West Bank, special economic zones (SEZs) in India, the Marikana miners' strike in South Africa, migrants' claims and land rights in China, the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States, and the Indignados movement in Spain. To name just a few!

Michael Burawoy argued that the diversity of these social movements is also marked by certain
common characteristics: 1) strong national specificity; 2) global connectivity; 3) concern over the separation of power and politics; 4) a focus on democracy in terms of direct, horizontal and prefigurative forms; 5) struggle over public and virtual spaces of resistance; and 6) subjection to repression. Indeed, the extended case method that Michael Burawoy has fashioned captures well the particular and the general of the social movements arising since 2010. Also, it offers an alternative, reflexive and critical method of science to highlight the issues of power and knowledge in both sociological theory and the study of social movements.


4D Research: Early experiences of Designing, Debating, Doing and Disseminating Social Research

4D Research: Early experiences of Designing, Debating, Doing and Disseminating Social Research.

7th ENQUIRE Postgraduate Conference, 14th November 2014

Call for Abstracts

This conference aims to bring together post-graduate researchers from a variety of disciplines to facilitate shared critical engagement with the various obstacles and opportunities of the PhD process.

We are pleased to confirm our keynote speaker:

- Alan Bryman, Professor of Organisational and Social Research, University of Leicester

Whilst the PhD process is often referred to as a ‘journey’, we tend to hear more about the destination rather than the pit-stops and bumps that occur along the way. As postgraduate researchers ourselves, we recognise that the PhD process is complex, non-linear and rife with ambiguity. Nonetheless it is a privileged opportunity that allows individuals to devote three years to the detailed exploration of a subject they are passionate about. With this in mind, we are seeking to present a conference which explores individuals’ candid stories of the various ups and downs of the PhD process, across social science disciplines.
Therefore, we are eager to hear about individuals’ experiences throughout their PhD; from initial ideas at the masters level right through to the dissemination of published work. The aim is to facilitate mutual discussion and debate which enables people to learn from the experiences of others. We are therefore inviting researchers to share honest accounts of aspects of the research process which include, but are not limited to, reflexive considerations of:

Ø Designing: Literature review; research questions; methodological design and its limitations; planning for practicalities

Ø Doing: Access; consent; data generation/collection; administration; emotional well-being

Ø Debating: reflexivity; ethics; validating and justifying your work

Ø Disseminating: Social media; public speaking to diverse audiences; impact; publishing; how to deal with misinterpretation of your findings

This conference will be most relevant to:

- MA research methods students (with the intention of PhD study)
- People exploring the option of PhD study
- Current PhD students at all stages

Email abstracts to: [1]LQ-Enquire@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk

Deadline for submissions: 11th April 2014

1. [mailto:LQ-Enquire@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:LQ-Enquire@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk)

What have we done to universities? (2014-03-19 08:00)

Is it inevitable that the university will be reduced to the function of providing, with increasingly authoritarian efficiency, pre-packed intellectual commodities which meet the requirements of management? Or can we by our efforts transform it into a centre of free discussion and action, tolerating and even encouraging ‘subversive’ thought and activity, for a dynamic renewal of the whole society within which it operates? (Thompson, 1970: 166)

[1]This article by Martin Parker gives a bleak account of change management of a European business school, which he describes as "performance based Taylorism, with academics as tradable commodities based on the number of stars they had on their CV". If we at SI could have only read one new article in the last month, this would be it.
1. http://org.sagepub.com/content/21/2/281

How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic) (2014-03-20 08:00)

Dear stressed student,

Here are a bunch of useful resources from yours truly, the Idle Procrastinator Ethnographer for writing essays and papers:

Start small: this is perhaps the most useful of all links posted here: a post about [1]how to write an effective paragraph. Master this and you won’t need any of the others.


An article on [3]how to focus when you’re writing your PhD or anything else (I’ve bookmarked the website, it’s really useful).

Forgodssake, [4]stop checking your email!

I know - easier said than done. Here are [5]some more tips for getting a clearer focus on your work kicking your arse back into shape. Read this now. It will take you two minutes. It will save you countless hours.

I found this post about writing [6]sociology papers without plagiarising on the Everyday Sociology blog three years ago and it doesn’t get old. If you are a student and have to write essays this year, read it.

Don’t (self)plagiarise! Cartoon seen at plagiarismtoday.com, an interesting website about online plagiarism.

Once you’re done (or almost done), here you can find an [7]online word counter (useful if you aren’t using MSWord or Open Office but some more exotic word processing package… for example, I used it to see how many words there were in the final PDF version of my PhD thesis which I typeset in LaTeX). Warning: it can also be a source of procrastination. But then, what can’t.

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The most important thing:

3. http://karakey.com/phdadvice/phd-advice-3-tips-to-more-productive-writing/
5. http://zenhabits.net/tada/
Essay Writing Tips | Myths of Our Time (2014-03-22 12:37:54)

[...] Here are some links to essential tips for piecing together an essay. Some years back I tutored undergraduates in political ecology. I was blown away by the structuring of many of the assignments that I corrected. The standard was truly shocking and from conversations with my colleagues I learned that this was not limited to my tutorials. They too had some horror stories to relate. The worst has to be the use of an url address as a citation in mid paragraph. Scarier still, the address was for search results from ask.com. I get the strong impression that students were not taking the assignments seriously due to the small proportion allotted them from the overall course results. Still the assignments surely reflect some of the bad writing habits of the students. [...] 

» Our most popular posts of 2015 The Sociological Imagination (2015-12-31 08:00:57)
[...] How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic) [...] 

Aaron Miller (2019-08-28 03:04:14)
I enjoyed how to write an effective paragraph

Some thoughts on the sociology of animals (2014-03-21 08:00)

One of many likeable things about the renaissance essayist [1]Michel de Montaigne was his relationship with animals. In an intellectual context soon to be overcome with Cartesianism, with its [2]mechanistic understanding of non-human animals, Montaigne exhibited an admirable degree of sensitivity to the consciousness of animals. As Sarah Bakewell ably summarises,

A dog, for Descartes, has no perspective, no true experience. It does not create a hare in its inner world and chase it across the fields. It can snuffle and twitch its paws all it likes; Descartes will never see anything but contracting muscles and firing nerves, triggered by equally mechanical operations in the brain.

Descartes cannot truly exchange a glance with an animal. Montaigne can, and does. In one famous passage, he mused: “When I play with my cat, who knows if I am not a pastime to her more than she is to me?” And he added in another version of the text: “We entertain each other with reciprocal monkey tricks. If I have my time to begin or to refuse, so has she hers.” He borrows his cat’s point of view in relation to him just as readily as he occupies his own in relation to her.

Montaigne’s little interaction with his cat is one of the most charming moments in the Essays, and an important one too. It captures his belief that all beings share a common world, but that each creature has its own way of perceiving this world.

_How To Live: A Life of Montaigne in one question and twenty attempts at an answer._ Pg 136-137.

It is undoubtedly true that people anthromorphise animal relations. However the significance of this is often overlooked – what is it to impute human characteristics to animals? It’s obviously symbolic action, in so far as that one party (the human) ascribes meaning to the actions of another party (the animal). But is it symbolic interaction? In other words, are animals ascribing meaning to humans as part of the same interactions through which humans are ascribing meaning to them? In the rest of this post I’ll talk about cats because, other than rodents, they’re the animals I’m most familiar with. In terms of the rodents I’ve owned, I think interactions between rats and humans are
very interesting. Whereas I’m sceptical that the Roborovski hamsters I owned saw me as anything other than a feature of the physical environment. But though I’m talking about cats, this post is mainly an attempt to work out what I think about the sociology of animals. I’ll defend a view of social relations in a weak sense between human and non-human animals, based on trajectories of iterated interaction and the practical capacity to impute intentions on both sides. I’m not sure what I think about the possibility of social relations in a strong sense, which for me would entail the possibility of emergent relational goods (e.g. trust) to which both parties orientate themselves evaluatively. I think there are emergent goods, with trust being the most obvious one, but I don’t think that animals are capable of ‘strong evaluation’ in Taylor’s sense i.e. they care about things but they don’t care that they care (or even have any second-order awareness at all for that matter).

One way of gaining traction on this question is to consider what is assumed by the meanings ascribed to cats by humans. Almost 100 % of respondents in one survey of cat owners reported a belief that their cats could feel curiosity, joy and fear (pg 155 of Cat Sense). Around 60 %-80 % believed their cats had a capacity for surprise, anger, anxiety and sadness. Around 40 %-60 % believed they had a capacity for jealousy, pride, empathy and grief. Much smaller numbers believed in a capacity for guilt, shame and embarrassment. I find the last one a surprise, given how axiomatic I’d always taken it to be that cats can experience embarrassment but, stepping back from my own reaction, it’s precisely this sense of obviousness (“of course cats get embarrassed! I can tell you about A and B and C which show this” etc) which I find interesting.

The emotional capacities we impute to cats entail certain assumptions about their psychological capacities. We might not explicate these entailments under normal circumstances but, I’d suggest, these sometimes inchoate ideas we have about cats nonetheless connect up into a more or less coherent picture. So for instance my sense of the self-evident capacity of cats to experience embarrassment goes hand-in-hand with my sense that they experience pride, with the former occurring under certain conditions (e.g. a cat falls off a fence while people are watching) precisely because of the cat’s capacity to experience pride under others (as a statement about my spontaneous opinions rather than the conclusion I’d come to if I really thought about it). I guess what I’m saying is that I’m interested in the theory of mind that cat owners impute to their pets, which I suspect is more multifaceted then many might assume.

So I think the tendency to anthromorphise animals needs to be seen in the context of a history of interaction within which such a theory of mind has emerged. This might be typological, in so far as that trajectories of interaction with many cats (or dogs, or rats, or whatever) jointly contribute to the development of a theory of mind which shapes a person’s future interaction with any such animal. But we can still talk meaningfully of social relations, at least in the weak sense, between human and non-human animals. I’m arguing that we can’t adequately understand the kinds of characteristics which humans impute to non-human animals without taking account of these relations, in the sense of histories of past interaction and expectations of future interaction. For instance my sense of cats as being able to feel embarrassed is tied up with a sense of cats as feeling pride, jointly contributing towards a picture of the psychological capacities of cats in which I’m invested because of my past relations with them (with my own pets, volunteering at a cat shelter, interacting with other people’s cats, funny memories I’m attached to etc).

Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that “contamination by epistemology” prevents some from entering into relations with animals “through which interpretative knowledge of their thoughts and feelings can be gained, relationships expressed in responsive activity” ([5]pg 17). I think he rather overstates the point precisely because he doesn’t take account of the investment of people in a certain view of the capacities of animals which has emerged from a history of interaction with them. But it’s an important point nonetheless that “knowing how to interpret” is a form of practical knowledge, through which we are able to move from reciprocal responses in interaction to a "set of recognitions of the intentions embodied in these responses and then a set of recognitions that each of the intentions includes the intention that it should be recognized by the other as the intention that it is” ([6]pg 15). Or in other words (a) we learn to recognise why the other does something (b) we learn to recognise that some of the things the other does are done with the intention that we recognise why they’re doing it.
Is this as true of our relations with non-human animals as it is of our relations with other humans? I think it basically is. I’m not sure how else it’s possible to account for meaningful interaction with animals. The typical repudiation of such a view is to argue that such “meaningful interaction” is anthropomorphism masquerading as intersubjectivity. But I’ve tried to argue briefly in this post how a tendency towards anthropomorphism can be explained in terms of a genuine intersubjectivity within such relations, representing an investment in a certain way of viewing a particular animal which someone is drawn to precisely because of their history of meaningful interaction.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9hjo401DV8&feature=kp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9hjo401DV8&feature=kp)
4. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cat-Sense-Feline-Enigma-Revealed/dp/1846145945](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cat-Sense-Feline-Enigma-Revealed/dp/1846145945)

If you’re interested in the sociology of animals, check out the American Sociological Association’s section on Animals & Society: [http://www.asanet.org/sectionanimals/animals.cfm](http://www.asanet.org/sectionanimals/animals.cfm)

In Search of the Chinese Parsons (2014-03-21 08:48)

When Pitirim Sorokin was brought to Harvard to found its Sociology Department in 1930, ‘sociology’ was still very much seen in the United States in the Comtean mould as a macro-policy science. Sociology would focus on the ‘big picture’ and the ‘long run’, based on both qualitative and quantitative data, to discern socially meaningful trends with an eye to promoting ‘progress’. Some of these trends may turn out to be enhancing and others debilitating. To a certain extent, the sociologist would be a diagnostician and, where necessary, a provider of remedies, or at least ideas for remedies. This idea of what sociology might be remains an attractive one but it is not the one came to be institutionalised worldwide in the second half of the 20th century. Instead the future of the discipline was determined by one of Sorokin’s junior colleagues, whose tenure he tried to block, Talcott Parsons.

In a time when it is common to hear our quite learned, theory-oriented colleagues claim that it is impossible to mix traditions grounded in, say, quantitative and qualitative social epistemologies, economistic and communitarian modes of reasoning or biological and sociological variables, we should always recall that this is precisely the sort of thing that Parsons did in his discipline-building work, The Structure of Social Action. Given what was on offer in terms of Europe’s sociological legacy by the 1930s, Parsons’ selection of theoretical exemplars was not without reasonable cause but was inevitably idiosyncratic and certainly brought together figures who had very little, if anything, to do with each other in their lifetimes. As an American travelling across Europe as a graduate student, Parsons saw the broad outlines clearly: The discipline of sociology was being established in response to the perceived inadequacies of classical political economy, which by the 1870s had been acknowledged within the field by Alfred Marshall and others. ‘Sociology’ would be the name of the science that integrates the main paths one might take to deal with those inadequacies. Parsons chose a particular way of identifying and representing those paths, which provided him the pretext for dealing in detail with Pareto, Durkheim and Weber. Of course, Pareto could have been replaced by Marx, Durkheim by Tarde, and Weber by Tönnies or Sombart. The integrated result would have been a quite different conception of ‘sociology’. This became clear once Pareto did get replaced by Marx in the late 1960s – and more recently, at least in postmodern circles, Durkheim by Tarde.

2520
The key point is that such invariably arbitrary choices, ensconced in powerful institutional environments, can serve to anchor a discipline globally for many decades. We need to remember that while Harvard was always seen as the strongest American university, what it meant to be 'the strongest American university' started to change only with the end of the First World War and especially the Second World War. As the United States transformed itself from being a rich provincial country to a global player, the significance of its universities as sources of intellectual leadership also changed. I say all this because I can easily imagine a young Chinese scholar right now canvassing the current crop of Western sociological thought in order to deliver a new synthesis – initially to Chinese audiences but ultimately worldwide – for the 21st century. If this scholar has benefitted from Parsons’ example, s/he will see beyond theoretical disputes that are artefacts of particular readings of particular texts that are considered to be ‘canonical’. Instead the Chinese scholar will mix and match Western authorities in a manner suitable for the sort of the world in which we should be spending the rest of this century – if not beyond.

"Looking for a husband with an EU-passport" (2014-03-21 15:37)

We are posting this again because the video was not visible in the original post. Thanks to Sadia Habib and Yolanda van Wyk for alerting us - and sorry that fixing it took so long!

[1]Tanja Ostojić, a Serbian feminist performance artist, talks of her art project "Looking for a husband with an EU-passport":

2521
sadia habib (2014-03-12 14:47:46)
I can’t see the piece - is it just me or can others not see it? All I can see is Tanja Ostojić, a Serbian feminist performance artist, talks of her art project "Looking for a husband with an EU-passport": (and it is all blank after the colon)

Yolanda van Wyk (2014-03-19 09:48:33)
Maybe the 'blank space' is the 'art'? 

Milena Kremakova (2014-03-21 15:41:29)
Thanks! Can you see it now? Sorry it took ages to fix, both SI editors have been overworked lately :)

Upcoming event: Max Weber, Markets and Economic Sociology, Warwick University, 7 May 2014 (2014-03-22 08:00)
An event organized by the Max Weber Study Group of the British Sociological Association and the Social Theory Centre at the University of Warwick

In the wake of the recent financial crisis, there is an urgent need for social scientists to think conceptually and critically about the economy and its relation to society. This event will contribute to this task by re-examining Weber’s writings on capitalism, markets and banking, and considering the value of his work for understanding the ongoing financialisation of the economy and of everyday life. While Weber’s economic sociology dates from the turn of the 20th Century, in many ways it continues to speak to the present. The 1890s saw the collapse of several European banks, suspension of payment on sovereign debt bonds issued by the governments of Argentina, Portugal and Greece, and speculative activity in the stock exchanges, with calls for a moralisation of finance in the name of the ‘thrifty average people’, sometimes coming from very interested parties (the Prussian landowner class). Max Weber became actively engaged in the debate on the regulation of the exchanges and published two pamphlets intended for a general audience, which looked at the stock and commodity exchanges as ‘institutions’. Another Weberian theme is what sort of person is produced by financialization: the banker, the trader, the capitalist adventurer as well as the upsurge of acquisitive culture. Recent controversies over bonuses return us to the principal-agent dilemma. In considering such work, this event will position Weber’s economic sociology in relation to recent debates over the limits of neoclassical and neoliberal economics, and will reflect, more generally, on the ways in which it might be used to gain an understanding of the complexities of capitalism - both of the past and of the present.

Confirmed speakers:
Geoff Ingham (Cambridge)
Scott Lash (Goldsmiths)
Linsey McGoey (Essex)
Keith Tribe
Sam Whimster (Global Policy Institute)
David Woodruff (LSE)

Session topics:
‘Market Order and Social Rationality’
‘Charismatic Authority and the Rise of the 21st-Century Philanthrocrat’
‘Weber and Markets: From Neoclassicism to Neoliberalism’
‘Weber and Money as an Economic Institution’
‘The Economics of Power: Max Weber on Banking’
‘Money, Capitalism, and the West’

To read more and register, click [1]here.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/news/maxwebermarketsandeconomicsociology

Will there be a printed transcript of the presentations and Q &A (if any)? If so, E-mail me. Unable to come. M+
(Re)Producing Pistorius: Patriarchy, Prosecution and the Problematics of Disability (2014-03-22 16:30)

Introduction

Reeva Steenkamp was a South African model. She grew up in Cape Town, South Africa, and began modelling at 14 after she was "spotted" while out shopping. Steenkamp, a law graduate, advocated on "women's issues" such as rape and violence, as well as bullying. Her Twitter feed shows that she loved popcorn, chocolate mousse and smoothies; and, of course, her family and friends. The Thursday after she died Steenkamp had been scheduled to speak to students in Johannesburg about empowerment. She died on Valentine's Day 2013 aged 30 at the hands of her partner, Para/Olympic runner Oscar "Blade Runner" Pistorius.

I anthropomorphize Steenkamp deliberately here, to counter her secondary place in the story of her own death. Despite the fact that she was the one that lost her life, she is not the core of the story; it's not even her story. The narrative unfolding in the media coverage, perhaps not unexpectedly, is hollow: beautiful young people; a once golden "celeb" couple; glitz, glamour and wealth; a (fallen) sporting hero; and a grisly televised 'CSI style' (CNN, 2014) trial with the 'makings of a riveting movie script' (Daily Mirror, 14th March 2014), which is sating its audiences since 'that sensational arrest' (Daily Mail, 14th February 2013; emphasis added). Typically, Steenkamp has been sexualised in her death, with "racy" modelling photos routinely accompanying related news stories: 'Reeva...the last pictures of Bladerunner's girlfriend, days before he shot her' (The Sun, 25th April 2013). Not allowed to rest in peace, Steenkamp's embodiment of youth, womanhood, and beauty is rabidly consumed and regurgitated by misogynist newspapers for (amoral) profit in the form of the tantalising but typical 'never-before-seen pictures'. In this article, I ask some critical questions about the crime (of whichever nature it is deemed to be); the trial; the wider narrative and its main characters. I suggest that two central characters around which this tragic story revolves are cultural productions: the Supercrip and the imagined (black) intruder (Orford 2014). Writing from a critical disability studies and feminist perspective, I trace the complex intersections of disability, race, gender, colonialism, and class as they materialise in this case. Throughout the article, I purposefully keep Steenkamp in view as I question the (extra)ordinariness of her death. Quite simply, I conclude by offering an answer to this question. The "Blade Runner": A Cultural Production

Oscar "Blade Runner" Pistorius was, prior to his arrest for murder in early 2013, readily hailed as both an ableist symbol of overcoming and beacon of exceptional hyper-masculine embodiment. Having been born without fibulas and having both legs amputated below the knee when he was 11 months old, Pistorius made history by becoming the only athlete to ever compete in both the Paralympics and Olympics; a notion of overcoming officially sanctioned, then, by the Court of Arbitration for Sport and International Association of Athletics, and celebrated by global media. Not only do his hegemonic masculine heterosexual materiality and extraordinary sporting achievements contradict common understandings of disabled masculinities as asexual, partial, fractured, and lacking masculine power and privilege (Gerschick, 1995; Shakespeare, 1999), but, as a man of remarkable aesthetic beauty, his image has been eagerly commodified through corporate sponsorship and advertising, alongside that of his non-disabled sporting peers. Thus, Pistorius embodies and affirms our dis/ableist culture's unequivocal propagation of 'compulsory able-bodiedness' (McRuer, 2006: 2): an overarching, all-consuming dis/ableist ideology (intertwined with compulsory heterosexuality) which positions bodily normalcy as the exemplary human embodiment. Compulsory
able-bodiedness ensures that the absence of normative embodiment be unquestionably endeavoured, regardless of human, economic, cultural and societal cost – hence the routine pathologisation, medicalisation and psychologisation of disabled people's selves, bodies, and minds. Moreover, Pistorius' will, self-discipline, and achievement realise the dehumanising dis/ablest ideal of the 'supercrip' – a popular depiction of disability 'where the disabled person is assigned super human, almost magical, abilities' (Barnes, 1992: 10; Crow, 2000). Rooted in neoliberal and capitalist ideologies, the 'supercrip' valorises individual effort, human resolve, self-control, competition, and success, only celebrating disability and impairment which can be normalized through exceptionalism. Crucially, the supercrip is a discursive construction of disability against which all disabled people are implicitly and explicitly measured, classified, marked, and Othered. This is, in essence, its inherent danger for disabled people. However, the ways in which it defines disability only as bodily, simultaneously masking the environmental, economic, structural, cultural, and political causes, consequences and productions of both disability and impairment make it a construction of disability which is, by all accounts, precarious. Further, Pistorius' use of Cheetah Flex-Foot prosthetic limbs also offers our ablest cultural imaginary the possibility that we 'could reconstitute our bodies, both as mechanical and organic' (Meekosha and Shuttleworth, 2009: 60). His prosthetics are imagined to represent sleek military hardware; which may be rooted in the fact that much of prosthetic technology has emerged from military culture and research (for newly-amputee veterans) (Ott 2005). Thus Pistorius is hybridized, a mix of flesh and machine (see Haraway 1991), or posthuman (Braidotti 2013). Such a hybridized body – a real life "bionic man" – fulfils both our cultural thirst for weird, wondrous, and freaky bodies that can be unveiled, exhibited, examined and our fixation with scientific and medical advancement and their possibilities for the human body. Through a dis/ablest gaze Pistorius has been (re)produced as both a spectacle and an embodiment of freakery all at once (Clare 1999). Where for other disabled people this objectifying fetishisation likely induces feelings of shame, in Pistorius’ case he is revered because of the ways in which his (freaky) body is thought to “transcend” disability (Camporesi 2008). As Time stated when it voted him one of 100 most influential and heroic people of 2008: Pistorius is “on the cusp of a paradigm shift in which disability becomes ability, disadvantage becomes advantage”. Thus, Pistorius' freakdom is sanctioned and celebrated in dis/ablest cultures only because it disassociates him from dominant meanings of disability and impairment. The (imagined) Intruder: Another Cultural Production One can’t ignore the racial, colonial, gendered, classed and disability contexts in which Steenkamp's tragic death is situated, nor their intricate intersections. A white Afrikaner’s only rationalisation for shooting his girlfriend through a locked door is that he thought she was an intruder. Such a defence is steeped in a prominent history of racial and colonial violence and is a product of a racist and neo-colonial contemporary South Africa. As South African novelist Margie Orford (2014) has commented, the third person – the (imagined) intruder – has silently been cast by Pistorius’ defence team as a black man. Such assumptions rest firmly on historical tropes of the indigenous black man as savage, violent, and criminal and the white settler as productive (thus wealthy), civilised and heroic (a heroism exacerbated by disability in this case). Tellingly, high-security gated housing developments are common in South Africa as the corporations that produce them deal in a politics of (racist) fear; as much providing separation as security. The swart gevaar (Afrikaans for black threat) continues despite the fact the official apartheid ended long ago. Swartz (2013) argues that the swart gevaar is intensified by unfounded beliefs that the (majority black) African National Congress (ANC) government is fuelling violence against whites. Despite South Africa's readily identified “trigger happy” culture where the majority carry or own guns, and where research shows black people are more likely to be victims of violent crime than white people (see Swartz 2013), it is only the black indigenous figure that is both dangerous and a threat. But, as Pistorius’ defence is arguing, it’s important to situate this fear in the context of disability and bodily impairment: the notion that Pistorius was more fearful because he (allegedly) wasn’t wearing his prosthetics at the time (although this is, in reality, impossible to determine)[2][iii]. The implicit and explicit swart gevaar carefully weaved into Pistorius' defence is made all the more precarious (for him) because, in a court system with no jury, his fate rests upon the judgement of Judge Thokozile Masipa, a black woman. While this has been said to be symbolically positive for black power in South Africa (the black woman determining the destiny of the white man), this power is somewhat mitigated by the trial being conducted in English (despite the fact that English is not the first language of any of the key experts or witnesses), without even the question of which language needing to be asked (e.g. Arikaan of English) (Groots, Daily Maverick, 17th March 2014). An (Extra)Ordinary Death Thus, both the defence and the prosecution are peddling for Steenkamp's death not to be 'just another South African femicide' (Orford 2014). Rather, during the trial her death is being carefully assembled as the exception: a tragic freak
accidental shooting in an otherwise non-violent, loving relationship; or a calculated and callous “crime of passion” (a misogynistic construction of violence against women if ever there was one). But the story that gets lost in all the inane drama is, actually, the mundanity of Steenkamp’s death; the fact that her death isn’t particularly exceptional, but one of thousands. The cultural violence of South Africa combined with a strong patriarchal context ensures that intimate partner violence and its most extreme consequence, femicide, is prevalent. In longitudinal research over 10 years, Abrahams et al. (2012) found that despite significant government intervention and national efforts to prevent gender-based violence, there was only a reduction in female homicide which was consistent with a decline in overall homicides in South Africa. Abrahams et al. (2012) found less decline among intimate femicides (where a woman has been killed by her intimate partner) leaving intimate partner violence as the leading cause of death of women homicide victims, with 56% of female homicides being committed by an intimate partner. While consideration of this violent culture is important, explaining Pistorius’ crime only in the context of South African violence has been argued to be yet another way of removing responsibility, denying his agency, and restoring his reputation (Ndopu 2013). It also ghettosises South African cultures in ways that mask the fact that misogyny and violence are global problems as well as socially, economically, and politically entrenched ones. The disabled violent man, however, is a relatively unfamiliar notion. While disability and evilness, criminality, and monstrousness are synonymous in television, film and literary portrayals of disability – or as Longmore (2003: 133) states ‘deformity of body symbolizes deformity of soul’ – the combination of disability and violence in the minds of most extends only to the abuse and exploitation of, and violence inflicted towards, a disabled victim. This victim usually has physical, sensory, and/or cognitive impairment; the exception being those deemed mentally ill, who are habitually thought to be (potentially) violent and dangerous. Further, the culturally desexualised minds and bodies of disabled people ensure that intimate partner violence is seldom considered as a factor in disabled people’s lives (Thiara 2011; Liddiard 2013) – an assumption that has been particularly dangerous for disabled women (Liddiard 2012). But the disabled male (regardless of impairment, sexuality, age or class) is (re)produced in a peculiar dis/ableist binary: weak, dependent, non-violent, and safe; and yet bitter, caustic, revengeful and angry (anger positioned as emerging from an assumed resentment of disability). In Pistorius’ case, his well-constructed overcoming and becoming (from impairment to sporting hero) and struggle against (assumed) adversity affirms him as of an inherently good character. To counter this powerful narrative of disabled people as saintly, the prosecution are purposefully casting Pistorius as reckless, immature, and treacherously uncurbed; a lover of fast cars, guns and beautiful women. But in court, Pistorius’ behaviour is carefully refuting this role: he whimpers, he places his head in hands, he wretches, and he vomits. These actions, which have been markedly amplified in media reporting of the trial, suggest that he is a devastated man who made a costly mistake – for which we must remember that Steenkamp has paid the ultimate price. Such actions whether real, performed, or both, give Pistorius a humility and gentility. In contrast, in ways typical for women when they are victims of violent crimes, Steenkamp has almost completely been written out in court – reduced to a mere corpse around which myriad events has unfolded. Where she is actively written in is via some particularly deplorable media spaces which have routinely interrogated of her moral (and sexual) character. Did she meet with her ex two days before she was killed? Was she making Pistorius jealous by flirting with his close friend, rugby player Francois Hougaard? Was she really the ‘other woman’ with whom Pistorius cheated on his ex-partner? Was she really pregnant with someone else’s child at the time of her death? (Perezhilton.com 2013). Each of these questions are asked in ways which suggest that their answer makes any difference at all, or somehow serve rationalise Pistorius’ violent actions and therefore justify Steenkamp’s untimely death. The Reappearance of Disability and Impairment: The Court Room Returning to the media’s fixation with Pistorius’ embodied experiences in court, it is important to consider the meaning of such a preoccupation. Swartz (2013) and other commentators have suggested that, ‘a noteworthy feature of the coverage of the shooting in South African media has been the relative lack of attention to issues of disability’. In dis/ableist cultures where disabled people are customarily ascribed a one-dimensional identity (whereby disability subsumes all other identity markers) and the fact that so much of the Pistorius brand has been about (overcoming) disability, this is curious to say the least. But I suggest that disability – or rather, impairment – is visible. The trial has brought the everyday realities of Pistorius’ impairment into view for the first time. For example, much of the case hangs on the details of whether Pistorius felt more fearful of the imagined intruder because he wasn’t wearing his prosthetics, and how this relates to whether or not he was wearing his prosthetics at the time of both shooting Steenkamp through the door and then beating it open with a cricket bat to save her (as he maintains).
Considering that Pistorius’ own lived embodiment incorporates militarily-created technology, one might think of Pistorius as quite literally unarmed without his prosthetics on; hence his need/desire to use a real life weapon. Further, we are witnessing an increasingly sickly, ailing body and broken mind in Pistorius as the trial continues. Pistorius’ post-human masculine self is being presented ultimately, as human, emphasised in the ways in which it is experiencing trauma. While this corporeal expression of trauma isn’t impairment in the strictest sense, its presence certainly disrupts common depictions of Pistorius as both superhuman and infallible. Rather, a new vulnerable, fragile and breakable Pistorius is emerging. Another locale in which disability is reappearing is in the form of the dis/ableism found in much of the media coverage. For example, some media commentators have relied heavily on common disability tropes of the embittered, maladjusted cripple for most of their analysis – the assumption that, as Longmore (2003: 139) states, ‘disability is primarily a problem of emotional coping, or personal acceptance’. Lisa Vetten of the WITS Institute for Social and Economic Research has notoriously commented: “disabled men and women often struggle with their sense of masculinity or femininity because they are to some degree dependent”. As a disabled person, I wonder how Vetten knows this; or whether she realises it, at best, homogenises disabled people, and at worse, seemingly constructs a dangerous disabled psyche whereby disability – a form of social, economic, political and cultural oppression – is reduced to the level of the individual. Also present (though far less common), has been the equally lazy “he hasn't got a leg to stand on it court” or “he's shot himself in the foot there” (BBC News 18/3/2014) type humour from particular corners of the press: the notion that the cultural project of removing or rejecting the (disabled) Poster Child needs (and avows) raging dis/ableist discrimination and prejudice in the form of mocking a person’s impairment[3][iii]. Also routine, are the ways in which his violent actions have been positioned as the sum of his disability status. For Pistorius, whose overcoming and casting away of disability is central to his fame, it’s intriguing to see how quickly disability gets drawn back in; how quickly the Supercrip image crumbles once the disabled person becomes deemed unworthy. This reveals the danger of the supercrip not only for the majority of disabled people, but also the supercrip themselves. Its speedy seizure by dis/ableist cultures exposes less how the supercrip is a true celebration of will and achievement, but more a means through which to make disability socially acceptable and palatable for non-disabled publics. Thus, if the supercrip cannot uphold their super-humanness, they succumb and are returned to connotations of monstrousness and experience social death (Longmore 2003; Hevey 1992).

**Conclusion** I’m left wondering how to conclude this article. Of course, it inevitably brings about no change to any of the events it has made its subject. My hope is that I have not replicated the spectacle, the drama, or the sensationalism of Pistorius, Reeva, and the trial, but exposed the banality and triteness of gender-based violence, and the dis/ablism, racism and colonialism, gender inequality, and class which have both produced and contoured it in this case. Despite its sensationalist narrative, and the relative privilege Reeve Steenkamp had as an educated wealthy white woman in a South African context, her death is painfully and tragically ordinary. In South Africa, every one to two women killed, are killed by her partner (Abrahams et al 2012), making intimate femicide a routine danger in the lives of South African women – the likelihood of which is increased by race and poverty, and I would add, disability (because this is so often omitted when we talk about multiple forms of gender-based violence) (Thiara 2011). However, it’s important not to reify this social problem as inherent only to a South African context any more than as a consequence of a “damaged” disabled masculinity. Violence against women is a global problem, as is intimate femicide (ACUNS 2013). This, for me, is the real story. Let’s hope Steenkamp’s death shines a light to this, too. It appears there only one thing left to say: Rest in Peace, Reeva.

1. This article was written and published prior to Pistorius’ 30 day mental health assessment at the Weskoppies psychiatric hospital in Pretoria, meaning that such an explicit psychologisation of the accused isn’t included in this analysis.

2. Further, the most recent defense arguments which speak of Pistorius’ “slow burn reaction” to disability, as well as the deeply problematic analogy made by Barry Roux, Pistorius' head lawyer, of Pistorius acting like an abused woman who "kills her husband after many years", are not included in this article. For an analysis from a disabled activist, please see here: [4]http://samedifference1.com/2014/08/09/barry-roux-pistorius-had-a-slow-burn-reaction-to-living-his-life-with-a-disability/

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on earlier drafts of this article. [nbox type="notice"]Kirsty Liddiard is Ethel Louise Armstrong Postdoctoral Fellow in the School of Disability Studies at Ryerson University.[/nbox] References


[5][i] I use the term ‘dis/ableism’ through this article to refer to the dual processes of disablism and ableism. Where they are present, both separately and working in conjunction, I use the term dis/ableism. Where I refer specifically
to one of these forms of oppression, I use the respective terms. While there are contestations around the meanings of both disablism and ableism (particularly between British and North American disability studies scholars), for the purposes of clarity, I use Fiona Kumari Campbell’s (2001: 4, 44) definitions throughout this article: Disablism: ‘A set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities’. Ableism: ‘A network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability then is cast as a diminished state of being human.’

[6][ii] It was determined at the time of writing that the prosecution accepted (18th March 2014) that Pistorius was not wearing his prosthetics at the time of shooting Reeva Steenkamp or when he broke down the bathroom door with a cricket bat.

[7][iii] Lance Armstrong and Heather Mills are two other famous people who have become victim to disablism in the form of mocking their impairment/disability.
The Paradox of Civility, or, “why is this place filled with such rude assholes?” (2014-03-24 08:00)

There was a strange and compelling article on Medium this week, reflecting on the author’s experience of being a devotee of Whole Foods, the self-certifying purveyors of ‘natural’ produce who will surely expand in the UK at some point. The author was at great pains to make clear how much he loves Whole Foods:

“I’ve shopped at Whole Foods in every time zone, in at least 10 different cities: LA, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Austin, Chicago, Milwaukee, New York, DC and Richmond, VA. I love Whole Foods. Scratch that, I love the products Whole Foods sells, no matter what other people might have to say about them. Maybe the simplest way to phrase it is, I love whole foods. Whole Foods as an experience, that’s a whole other matter.

But here’s what sucks for Whole Foods: it has nothing to do with their employees. Across the board, across the country, they have been helpful, knowledgeable, and cordial. I’ve received phenomenal service in every department: from the beer fridge to the butcher counter to the bulk aisle. I now know everything there is to know about lentils, for instance, thanks to a guy stocking roma tomatoes in the produce section of the downtown Milwaukee store, who took the time to explain why he used red lentils for his curried lentil dish a couple nights before.

But there was one problem: the other customers. These customers are “across the board, across the country,
useless, ignorant, and miserable”. Do you pity this poor author who is forced to brave "a sneering, disdainful horde of hipster Zombies and entitled 1 %ers" every time he wants to purchase his favourite lentils? I certainly do. Imagine having to cope with a supermarket where people block the aisles:

They stand in the middle of the aisles, blocking passage of any other cart, staring intently at the selection asking themselves that critical question: which one of these olive oils makes me seem coolest and most socially conscious, while also making the raw vegetable salad I’m preparing for the monthly condo board meeting seem most rustic and artisanal?

If you are a normal human being, when you come upon a person like this in the aisle you clear your throat or say excuse me, hoping against hope that they catch your drift. They don’t. In fact, they are disgusted by your very existence. The idea that you would violate their personal shopping space—which seems to be the entire store—or deign to request anything of them is so far beyond the pale that most times all they can muster is an "Ugh!"

Over the years I have tried everything to remain civil to these people, but nothing has worked, so I’ve stopped trying. Instead, I walk over to their cart and physically move it to the side for them. Usually, the shock of such an egregious transgression is so great that the “Ugh!” doesn’t happen until I’m around the corner out of sight. Usually, all I get is an incredulous bug-eyed stare. Sometimes I get both though, and when that happens, I look them square in the eye and say "Move. Your. Cart." I used the same firm tone as Jason Bourne, with the hushed urgency of Jack Bauer and the uncomfortable proximity of Judge Reinhold. From their reaction you’d think I just committed an armed robbery or a sexual assault. When words fail them, as they often do with passive aggressive Whole Foods zombies, the anger turns inward and they start to vibrate with righteous indignation. Eventually, that pent up energy has to go somewhere, and like solar flares it bursts forth into the universe as paroxysms of rage.

Outside the four walls of a Whole Foods, you might recognize these people as Gawker commenters or Twitter shamers. Hmm. The anecdote which occupies the rest of the article is very funny and definitely worth reading. But what interested me was the apparently complete failure of self-awareness exhibited by this otherwise perceptive writer. He is an angry Whole Foods devotee who regards everyone in the store as beneath contempt, accosts people threateningly in the isles and then goes home to let the internet know what rude assholes he has had to negotiate while shopping for his much needed organic food.

What interests me is the incivility with which he acts while nonetheless understanding himself as fighting to preserve civility. Squaring up to someone, aiming for “uncomfortable proximity” in order to “look them square in the eye and say ‘Move. Your. Cart.’” isn’t civil behaviour. It just isn’t. So his response to the problem of incivility within Whole Foods actually contributes to it, seemingly without the author having stopped to ponder whether one of the people he threatens in the aisles might go home and blog about how rude Whole Foods customers are.

What’s really going on here? It’s not that there aren’t any endorsed and enforced norms about bodily comportment within public space. Clearly, there are many potential acts which would be roundly condemned and which would provoke an intervention by security (though it’s worth considering the relationship between interpersonal
norms and the institutional structure in such instances). But this assembly of norms applicable to the social space is much fuzzier when we move away from absolute prohibition. If someone acts to enforce a norm (e.g. asks you to stop talking on your phone in the quiet zone of a train) and you endorse that norm (e.g. you felt you shouldn’t answer your phone but didn’t want to get up and leave the carriage) then their action has a normative force which it otherwise wouldn’t. This is what makes the difference between someone hanging up their phone at this point and blithely continuing to talk or even telling the complaining party to go fuck themselves.

When someone acts to enforce a norm which they endorse but others don’t, it is experienced as an arbitrary intervention or assertion of power. This doesn’t mean it’s necessarily opposed, given an overriding concern to sustain the peacefulness of the interaction, only that the phenomenology of the interaction is different. I’ve been shushed in a restaurant: at which point we did restrain the volume but, at least in my case, only to avoid a conflict rather than because I felt we’d violated a norm about proper comportment within the social space.

What interests me about the Whole Foods example is how the author would be perceived by one of the “sneering, disdainful horde of hipster Zombies and entitled 1 %ers” he shoves past in the isle. It’s apparent to him that he’s acting to enforce a norm but presumably the norm is neither endorsed or even perhaps recognised by the offending party. Therefore, he’ll just seem very rude. What I’m pretentiously calling the paradox of civility is the necessity that norms of civility be both endorsed and enforced within a social space in order for action which enforces civility to avoid contributing to incivility. If the norms being acted upon aren’t widely endorsed then acting upon them will contribute to incivility no matter how justified the enforcing party believes themselves to be. People who complain about incivility and then act in this way are actually contributing to the very problem which so troubles them.

1. file://embed.gettyimages.com/embed/143070307?et=or5p80XZ7kCIVBHRtfmIHw&sig=kMlpEy1cIZTeffyvhgLNV9WzRYgprP64X7741U4Y=
2. https://medium.com/race-class/d778c31aa9be
5. https://medium.com/race-class/d778c31aa9be
6. https://medium.com/race-class/d778c31aa9be

Hi Mark Your story reminded me another one in which I was involved myself some days ago. I live in the center of Barcelona, in a very nice street but full of tourists. I wrote a post about it in this blog, in the visual sociology section (I shoot, therefore I exist). The thing is, every day, when I go home, I find 10 or 15 tourists taking photos to the building in front (Palau de la Musica, quite a touristic attraction) and blocking (literally) the entrance to my street (which is really, really narrow). Some days ago I met this group blocking the entrance, as usual, and I asked them to let me in. There was a man in the group which got very rude at me... for disturbing them. I am normally a quiet person, and don’t use to argue with people in the middle of the street, but this was too much for me and told him that I was fed up of not being able to access normally to my home (I was quite rude here, I have to admit it), to which he answered that I should move somewhere else!!!! Well, in summary, the whole story was quite incivil. I was mad at this man not because he was in the middle of my way but because many people, over 15 years I’ve been living here, is in the middle of my way every day. And he was angry at me because whatever had happened, that had nothing to do with me (he had probably argued with his girlfriend, or had been cheated by the taxidriver, or his boss had been anoying him on the telephone on his leisure time.. whatever) and he took it with me. The result was incivility in both sides (I would say, more incivility in his side, but this might be a subjective view, of course). My conclusion from all this story: though I am usually a very quiet, respectful and educated person, far away from that man in the whole foods shop you speak about, sometimes, any of us can become incivilised at any moment, for a handful of reasons which have nothing or little to do with what is really happening. Don’t you think so?

2533
I do! And I really can relate to that... This line of argument emerged from me analysing my own irritations as much as anything else - I guess I’m saying it’s a tendency at the level of social interaction which arises from much larger scale macro-social processes which are increasing the degree of normative heterogeneity in the social world.

Manuel DeLanda on Deleuze, Morphogenesis, and Population Thinking

Manuel Delanda, contemporary philosopher, discusses Deleuze, materialism, morphogenesis, and the first of three reasoning styles, population thinking. Public open lecture for the students and faculty of the European Graduate School EGS Media and Communication Studies department program Saas-Fee Switzerland. 2011 Manuel DeLanda.

Manuel DeLanda, (born 1952 in Mexico City), is a writer, artist and distinguished philosopher who has lived in New York since 1975. He is a professor and the Gilles Deleuze Chair of Contemporary Philosophy and Science at the European Graduate School in Saas-Fee, Switzerland, a professor at the Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, and professor at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. DeLanda was formerly an Adjunct Associate Professor at Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University (New York).

Simulation: The Emergence of Synthetic Reason (2011). He has published many articles and essays and lectured extensively in Europe and in the United States. His work focuses on the theories of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze on one hand, and modern science, self-organizing matter, artificial life and intelligence, economics, architecture, chaos theory, history of science, nonlinear science, cellular automata on the other. De Landa became a principal figure in the "new materialism" based on his application of Deleuze's realist ontology. His universal research into "morphogenesis" - the production of the semi-stable structures out of material flows that are constitutive of the natural and social world - has been of interest to theorists across many academic and professional disciplines.

1. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/5HSMTUZ64bY](file://www.youtube.com/embed/5HSMTUZ64bY)

Some thoughts on DIY sociology (2014-03-26 08:00)

In a [1]recent post Ros Edwards and Val Gillies described the Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family and Household Research which has been meeting independently for a quarter of a century. It began as a “nameless informal support group of five women who met at a British Sociological Association summer school for PhD students in 1988” and slowly grew over the years through word-of-mouth. This growth of the group required a certain degree of formalisation but in a way which sustained its autonomy from professional associations and universities:

A growing group meant that things became a bit more formalized about three years into the Workshop’s existence. Someone took on being co-ordinator, a role that over the years has shifted around between members as and when necessary. The group also became a named entity. Quite a bit of discussion and care was put into coming up with the title, Women's Workshop on Qualitative Family/Household Research, at the time. And part of that was the decision that it would explicitly be women-only. While this has been reviewed over the years it has retained unanimous support. Another part of the naming discussion was that the group’s title indicates and reflects that it’s as much concerned with the methodological process of qualitative research, with being a woman researcher, and with epistemological debates about how we can know about social life, as it is with the substantive topic of families and households.


As well as meetings and discussions, the group enacts collective publishing projects, motivated in part by an awareness of the necessity of such activity for individual members. As it has become more difficult for postgraduate members to host meetings, it’s increasingly the “members of the group with ‘permanent’, and more senior, positions who can leverage resources to ensure that meetings are free”. Nonetheless, the concern throughout has been to preserve the ethos of a group which was able to say in its early days that “no ‘big names’ attend so we wield little academic power”.

It’s definitely worth reading [3]the article in full. It represents a case study of an alternative organisational form which, though many might be vaguely aware of its possibility, nonetheless seems to rarely figure in the repertoire of modalities through which projects can be enacted. The question I’ve been ruminating about recently
is "what is a conference for?" or "what is a seminar for?". Questions of this form can, as Stefan Collini observes, encourage deliberation about the purposes of ways of doing things which are otherwise taken for granted.

But, sometimes, asking what something is ‘for’ can, if understood as an expository tactic, a starting-point rather than a ruling, be a means of helping us to clear away the discursive debris that accumulates round any widely used category. The very asking of the question in this slightly over-insistent, finger-jabbing form may be enough to encourage reflection to cut through the incidental clutter and begin to wonder what kind of response could count as a useful answer. From then on, it is probably sensible not to try to press the question further in this narrow form, but to let rumination extend itself, brooding on the diversity that may shelter under a single term, pondering a series of characterizations or historical instances rather than seeking a single defining proposition.


What I see as the pressing question confronting professional associations in the contemporary climate is whether their organisational form is eroding the purpose of certain forms of activity or even excluding them outright. The danger of this line of argument is that it lapses into idealism, failing to recognise the practical exigencies attendant upon certain forms of activity or the instrumental motivations which often lead people to willfully engage with them despite widespread grumbling about their particular characteristics. This is why studying actually existing organisational forms, alternative ways of meeting and enacting collective purposes, becomes so important. It's also crucial that we avoid the temptation to dichotomise forms of organisation, counterposing what is ‘good’ and autonomous and what is ‘bad’ and institutionalised.

There are many things which are only likely to be possible at scale and an interest in the autonomous, local and networked shouldn’t give rise to a simplistic disavowal of any forms of organisation which are institutionalised. Instead, we should look to actually existing cases to better understand what value each does and doesn’t have for the people participating in it. Ros Edwards and Val Gillies really helpfully bring out the intersection between what might otherwise be construed as two distinct spheres, recognising how participation in one can be leveraged to enable the other. I don’t think spaces like the ones they describe are a panacea for the ills of the contemporary academy but I do believe that they are becoming ever more important, for reasons too innumerable to address in a short blog post:

And despite the tensions, the Workshop as an open and welcoming forum remains as its intention, and also we think also its practice. Senior members reflect on how important the Workshop was as a source of support while doing their PhDs and hugely value the continued friendships and intellectual stimulation while post docs and early career researchers, like their doctoral forebears, see the Workshop as a safe forum to present their work and receive encouragement to publish for the first time. Whatever our career stage we experience the Workshop as standing in sharp contrast to some of the more adversarial academic cultures and contexts in which we can find ourselves. The Workshop remains a rare space in academia where women support each other while also providing excellent cross-generational mentoring and critique. We don’t know if our study group is unique in being an academic group, not institutionalized, explicitly women only and feminist, that’s achieved a silver anniversary and is still as active as ever. We think that we are, but we hope not.


The organisational forms preponderate within the academy have their history of emergence. They are not fixed or
immutable, though of course they exhibit a persistence which cannot simply be wished away. What I’m calling ‘DIY Sociology’ is first and foremost an insistence that we cultivate a heightened reflexivity about dominant organisational forms and the panoply of purposes they serve or frustrate.

**If you’re involved in something like this then why not [6]write about it for Sociological Imagination?**

4. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/what-are-universities-for-ebook/B005VFV7HE/B006UCVPJM

Lindsea (2014-03-29 19:32:39)

Great post! I love this idea. I explore DIY philosophy... DIY philosophy assumes these basic premises: 1. We are all born with an innate sense of wonder. 2. We all have a philosophy (whether we call it that or not). It’s the set of beliefs we’ve developed based on our experiences in the world, and our association with others. 3. Philosophy does not happen while reading a book—philosophy happens in our interaction with others. Philosophy is active, not passive, and the more we practice it, the more we hone our beliefs and perceptions about the world around us. The method of DIY philosophy is as follows: first, the group sits in a circle. There is a community ball used to designate the speaker. Passed around the circle one time after the facilitator introduces the question, each player introduces themselves (with a real or fake name) and respond to the question. Listening is as important as speaking, and anyone is allowed to pass if they feel like it. Metrics for the discussion on a cognitive, social and emotional level: 1. Feeling of confusion—entering complexity, an objective is to embrace an intellectual curiosity that begins in healthy confusion. 2. Linking of new ideas—in a self corrective, inquiry lead discussion, new lines of questioning lead to insights. 3. A sense of understanding begins to emerge for the individual at the junction of many complex systems.

http://opengovunderground.org/2013/07/09/gov-futures-lab-usa-and-millennial-t rains-project/

**The ontology of books (2014-03-27 08:00)**

I read a book a decade ago and struggle with it. I read it again now and find it astonishingly thought-provoking. How do you explain this? It seems I bring something different to the book on the second reading: concepts, experiences and knowledge which I lacked at the time of the first reading. But what role does the book play? It seems obvious to me that this can only be explained in terms of the interaction of two sets of properties and powers: mine and those of the book itself. I have changed in the aforementioned decade but the book has not. The causal role of the latter is not trivial and understanding it opens up really interesting questions about the ontology of books. Books can change us but, as we change, so too does what we bring to books as we engage with them.
The Art of Listening (2014-03-27 19:08)

This is a preface to the new Japanese edition of Les Back’s The Art of Listening, published by Serica Shobo and translated by Dr Takeshi Arimoto. It is republished here with permission.

Since its publication in 2007, The Art of Listening has been read enthusiastically by students and young scholars but ignored largely by Professors of Sociology and the discipline’s ‘big names’. The response from younger readers has been nothing short of astonishing. One wrote in an email that the book was so exhilarating to read that they felt compelled to take it for a walk out into the streets of London, where they could feel the textures of city life while they turned its pages.

A reviewer for the British Journal of Sociology commented that sociology students were so enthused by the book that they were encouraging their parents to read it. The book somehow captured the imagination of younger readers trying to use sociology and cultural studies to make sense of their lives. Reflecting on it now, I think I was subconsciously aiming the book at a younger audience all along, so in a sense it should be of no surprise that it resonated with them rather than established scholars. It is a book that asks the big questions about the value and
purpose of what we do as thinkers, researchers and writers.

I was mindful too that in publishing a book that is very personal and unguarded, that tried to stretch the parameters of what sociology can be beyond current academic conventions, I took a risk. In the final stages of its completion in 2006 I had a moment when I lost my nerve. Did I really want to speak openly about intimate relationships within my own family and also be quite so reckless and blunt about intellectual and political commitments?

As the first principle of their craft academic readers are trained to be unforgiving critics. Clouded by anxiety I toyed with withdrawing the manuscript just at the moment when it was ready to be submitted for publication. In the end, I decided to let it go. The Art of Listening was the only thing I had to say, the only book I had in me to write. Publishing it was a turning point for me, a kind of intellectual and personal crossroads. I would like to just make a few points of introduction for Japanese readers about what was at stake for me in writing this book and why it might also speak to their concerns too.

By the beginnings of the 21st Century the authority of humanistic sociology had been challenged profoundly. Humanism’s hubris was cut down to size by a wide variety of thinkers like Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak and Bruno Latour for its Eurocentrism, sexism and its conceit for the non-human world. Also, the claim that social researchers had privileged access to social reality was undermined once and for all. It was irrefutably established that researchers made social realities through their endeavours rather than simply reflect them as society's mirror. The question remained: how do we continue with our research craft in the aftermath of the deconstruction of the implication of power and knowledge in social science?

At the time of writing The Art of Listening these arguments seemed intellectually right but actually not a very good way to live as a scholar committed to public conversation and dialogue. What was left in its place seemed to me like a cold-hearted social science which reified impersonal critical distance. So much of the ‘big stuff’ of life – love and loss – simply became inadmissible or dismissed as sentimental. I wanted to try and write a book that would make the experience of life and the public issues contained in personal troubles admissible again, even if it was for no one else except myself.

As you will read this book emerged out of a moment of personal grief and a sense of biographical dislocation. Writing it was an attempt to build a bridge made of words that could span the huge social chasm between working-class London life and the bourgeois academic world of the University. In a way a scholarly vocation provided a way for me to retain a connection to the working-class world that I left behind as a young man for a new life at the University. The book is both facilitated and limited by that experience in ways that still remain a mystery to me but I do not want to hide from that fact.

Looking back on it now the book offers a series of ‘listening lessons’. The first relates to politics. Our political debates do not suffer from too much doubt but from too much certainty. The task of thinking is to live with doubt in the service of understanding, rather than living with certainty in the preservation of ignorance. Name-calling is not thinking. The temptation to dismiss the view of one's opponents as “rubbish” is strong but misguided for two reasons. Discounting racist views, for example, as drivel does nothing to evaluate and understand their resonance or reach. It is for this reason that, though I've spent much of my adult life fighting against racism, I no longer subscribe to the “no platform” argument with regard to racists. We need to know what a racist argument sounds like. This is not the same as saying that organisations like Uyoku dantai, or Japan's newly confident nationalists who want to revise World War II history, should be offered a comfortable seat at the table of public debate. Rather, it means paying close attention to what they say and subjecting the content to critical judgment.

Reducing opposing views to rubbish produces encamped positions that actually stop listening. It forecloses critical thinking – they simply need no further attention other than being consigned to the category of waste to be disposed. We have to pay attention to those voices that seem abhorrent because understanding is not the same as
agreement or justification. What does the racist graffiti being daubed over the walls of Tokyo’s Shin-Okubo district, where Tokyo’s Korean community live, tell us about Japanese racism? Or, what does the vandalism of hundreds of copies of Anne Frank’s Diary in Tokyo’s Metropolitan Library indicate about the targets of the ultra-nationalist imagination?

Politicians like to threaten us with listening. Tony Blair was very fond of this and part of the problem with the very idea of listening in a political context is that there is something very suspicious about it. It was strategist British Philip Gould who made the “focus group” a strategic resource for Blair’s New Labour project. Political focus groups are not really about the kind of attention I am arguing for. Their function is to “sound out” the voters in order to fine-tune party political rhetoric in order to manipulate very select groups of the electorate to do the politician’s bidding, i.e. vote for them. Rather, the political lesson at the heart of this book is that we have to listen to our enemies as well as our friends in order to understand critically the world that each of us forms a part.

Our second lesson is that we must strive to develop a prosaic and everyday ethics of attentiveness. “You do not interest me. No man can say these words to another without committing a cruelty and offending against justice,” writes philosopher Simone Weil. To turn a deaf ear is an offence not only to the ignored person but also to thinking and justice. Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner is cursed because no one will listen to his story. The Italian chemist-turned-writer Primo Levi was preoccupied with this fable because of his fear that on returning from Auschwitz people like him would be either ignored or simply disbelieved. Regardless, listening gets a very mixed press amongst critics and intellectuals. There is a suspicion of wistful optimism or the quasi-religious appeal to ‘hold hands’ and play priest at the confessional.

These qualms miss the centrality of listening in dialogue that is not merely about consensus or agreement but engagement and criticism. This is something that Primo Levi understood. Faussone, the hero of Levi’s novel The Wrench, is a difficult man. An itinerant rigger, he spent his life travelling the cities of the world operating high-rise cranes. Despite the dramatic nature of his adventures Faussone is not a natural storyteller.

The novel’s narrator comments on how tempting it is to interrupt him, put words in his mouth and spoil his stories before they have even been told. He comes to realise: “Just as there is an art of storytelling, strictly codified through a thousand trails and errors, so there is also an art of listening, equally ancient and noble, but as far as I know, it has never been given any norm.”

The quiet patience required to invite the story’s telling makes an important contribution to its content. For, as Levi writes, “a distracted or hostile audience can unnerve any teacher or lecturer; a friendly public sustains.” The listener’s art for Primo Levi is practiced through abstaining from speech and allowing the speaker to be heard. Listening is active, a form of attention to be cultivated.

Inspired by Primo Levi, this entails tuning our ears differently. A good starting point would be to stop talking over each other. Listen to your own voice and develop a mild aversion to it. Hearing yourself recorded on a dictaphone is a good way to achieve this. It may produce a situation where we become more judicious, careful and measured in what we say, and more able to stop talking and listen. Like Levi’s narrator in The Wrench we must resist the temptations of interjection or ventriloquism.

The main lesson offered here is that listening is not merely the instrumental extraction of information or a matter of “ticking the box” of consultation. Or, the wounding compassion that has been directed at the citizens of Japan – often coloured with an Orientalist sense of Japanese stoicism– in the face of recent natural and man-made disasters. This active listening creates another set of social relations and ultimately a new kind of society, if only temporarily. This is not about making people “nice”, although it might make those who like to parade their superior intelligence less insufferable. Rather, it is a way to develop a more searching critical engagement with the kinds of human beings we have become.
The Art of Listening argues for a kind of intellectual craft that is vital and lively. One that is both inventive in terms of its methods and techniques but also restless in its search for new forms that sociology and cultural studies might take. One in which we can develop ways to represent our multicultural realities, for a in a hyper-connected world we all need to learn to live with difference. Here attentiveness becomes a vocation, as we notice and question what is before us.

John Berger once commented that translation is an act of smuggling. The translator sneaks ideas and thoughts across the border of one linguistic territory into another language. I deeply grateful for the effort and time this takes and for Takeshi Arimoto’s careful, patient and rigorous work to smuggle these words and ideas into the Japanese language and make them available to you. I would also like to thank Hiroki Ogasawara for his guidance. I hope the sensibilities of this book are useful in some way as you grapple with the urgent task of understanding what is alive in our damaged and mortified world. Also, that reading this book will compel you – like the young student in London – to test its usefulness by taking its ideas for a walk through the streets of Kobe, Fukuoka or Tokyo.

Les Back has been teaching in the Sociology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London since 1993. His main areas of academic interest are the sociology of racism, multiculture, popular culture, music and sound studies and city life.

1. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Art-Listening-Back/dp/1845201205](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Art-Listening-Back/dp/1845201205)
2. [http://www.serica.co.jp/index.htm](http://www.serica.co.jp/index.htm)

A new preface for Les Back’s The Art of Listening | Thinking culture (2014-04-24 08:02:42)
[...] Japanese edition of his book The Art of Listening. The preface has been published in full on the Sociological Imagination site. In this new preface Les reflects on the reception and writing of the book, he also talks of the [...]
One of my favourite passages by C Wright Mills concerns the tendency of academics to “slip so readily into unintelligibility”. An “elaborate vocabulary” and “involved manner of speaking and writing” become props for a professional self-image which defines itself, in part, through the inaccessibility of the work being produced:

In many academic circles today anyone who tries to write in a widely intelligible way is liable to be condemned as a ‘mere literary man’ or, worse still, ‘a mere journalist.’ Perhaps you have already learned that these phrases, as commonly used, only indicate the spurious inference: superficial because readable. The academic man in America is trying to carry on a serious intellectual life in a context that often seems quite set against it. His prestige must make up for many of the dominant values he has sacrificed by choosing an academic career. His claims for prestige readily become tied to his self-image as a ‘scientist’. To be called a ‘mere journalist’ makes him feel undignified and shallow. It is this situation, I think, that is often at the bottom of the elaborate vocabulary and involved manner of speaking and writing. It is less difficult to learn this manner than not. It has become a convention – those who do not use it are subject to moral disapproval. It may be that it is the result of an academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre, who understandably wish to exclude those who win the attention of intelligent people, academic and otherwise.

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pg 218

This was written at a very particular point in time. Yet this trend has seemingly persisted, perhaps intensified, even though the particular circumstances of mid twentieth century American academia have passed. The confusion between what is simplified and simplistic persists, with new modes of intellectual expression leading many to conflate the two with a renewed vigour. It’s important to avoid overstating this case. Some readable things are superficial. Some simplified things are simplistic. Would anyone deny this? The point is to sensitise ourselves to where these boundaries fall. At what point does the pursuit of the former risk engendering the latter? Unless we’re clear about this, any activity tending in this direction will be left as a site of unbridled professional neurosis. So while I agree with Arlene Stein [2] here, I think it’s only part of the picture:

I know from my work with Contexts that there are lots of sociologists who have very interesting things to say about the world. And in fact, they yearn to share their work with audiences beyond the academy, but they don’t know how to do so. That’s because they don’t know how to translate their work for different publics.

In recent years, more and more sociologists are making a case for the importance of doing “public sociology.” This discussion, while certainly important, has taken place largely at the level of theory, via the work of past American Sociological Association President Michael Burawoy and others. Some of it is taking place among those who are engaging in digital sociology, if posts I’ve been seeing on such blogs as The Sociological Imagination are any indication.

Yet few, it seems, are focusing their sights on making sociological writing more engaging, and fewer still see this as central to the public sociology project.

We need to do all of these things simultaneously: reflect upon the work we do and the uses to which it is put; use new technologies as tools for research and communication; and value good writing—and teach others how to do it.
There's a deficit of skills. There's a corrosive culture, particularly in graduate school, which socialises trainee academics into unintelligibility. But there's also something personal and biographical here which needs to be understood. The sacrifices people make to pursue this course of life. The efforts and energies they put into it and the things they forego as a consequence. These engender an *investment* in a self-presentation of specialisation which has enormous practical implications for their willingness to contort a communicative impulse into the *alienated* form impelled by the structures of the academy.


Claudia Vallvé (2014-04-01 14:12:21)
One of my favourite paragraphs by Wright Mills!!! This idea of things being superficial because readable (or profound because unreadable) is also extended down here, and it's sometimes difficult to find profound and readable things. That's why I've recomended your post in my blog today (in spanish) to remind myself and others to have these concepts in mind when sitting in front the computer to write down the results of our investigations. http://claudiavallve.com/2014/04/01/sociologia-publica-y-escritura-sociologica-i-en-the-sociological-imagination-por-mark-carrigan/,

Out of interest: how widely read is C Wright Mills in Spanish? I've always wondered if he might be a peculiarly anglo-american trend, in spite of his new leftist internationalism.

Stephanie (2014-05-03 06:48:12)
You can refer to Howard Becker too! :) He writes a whole book about Writing for Social Scientist.

Laura (2014-06-28 05:57:45)
Yep I had a colleague recently critique my writing as "too folksy," which I took to be a compliment, although I don’t think it was intended that way. I basked in the same passages of the Sociological Imagination. Just because if everything is so "rarified" as to not be accessible to someone who is interested, uninformed but wants to know, we're just contributing to knowledge as a strategy to oppress. I'm not saying there aren’t occasions and places where complex ideas require complex language, but too often, methinks, it's hubris driving the bus.

Andrew Jakubowicz (2016-08-28 15:35:15)
One strategy is to pair up with a good editor and publish on The Conversation - lots of accessible sociology for smart non-sociologists who are happy to test your claims -
Graham Harman, American philosopher, talking about speculative realism, philosophy, natural sciences, fine art, correlational circle, object, plasma. In the lecture Graham Harman discusses the concepts of phenomenology, pre-socratics, quality, in relationship to Bruno Latour, Slavoj Zizek, Alain Badiou, Heidegger, Whitehead, Deleuze, Meillassoux, focusing on surplus, materialism, idealism. Public open lecture for the students and faculty of the European Graduate School EGS Media and Communication Studies department program Saas-Fee Switzerland Europe 2013 Graham Harman.

Graham Harman (born May 9, 1968) is a professor at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. He is a contemporary philosopher of metaphysics, who attempts to reverse the linguistic turn of Western philosophy. Harman is associated with Speculative Realism in philosophy, which was the name of a workshop that also included the philosophers Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, and Quentin Meillassoux.

Central to Harman's philosophy is the idea that real objects are inexhaustible: "A police officer eating a banana reduces this fruit to a present-at-hand profile of its elusive depth, as do a monkey eating the same banana, a parasite infecting it, or a gust of wind blowing it from a tree. Banana-being is a genuine reality in the world, a reality never exhausted by any relation to it by humans or other entities." (Harman 2005: 74). Because of this inexhaustibility, claims Harman, there is a metaphysical problem regarding how two objects can ever interact. His solution to this problem is to introduce the notion of "vicarious causation", according to which objects can only ever interact on the inside of an "intention" (which is also an object).

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/hK-5XGwraQo

Michel Foucault: Beyond Good and Evil (2014-03-29 10:29)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/xQHm-mbsCwk?feature=player_embedded


1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/xQHm-mbsCwk?feature=player_embedded
Not Your Typical Call for Papers (2014-03-30 08:00)

With the 2014 Volume, the Berkeley Journal of Sociology will focus its efforts on writing a “history of the present.” The journal will no longer publish academic research articles. Instead, we seek compelling essays, insightful commentaries, critical analyses, and topical symposiums on the most pressing political and cultural issues of the day. Our aim is to provide critical perspectives from the social sciences on public debates and current events with an orientation toward social and political engagement. We seek to transform our longstanding graduate-run academic journal into a print and online magazine sourced by a global graduate community with wider relevance. The BJS is re-imagining the purpose of a publication that emerges from within the academy, but which does not take the discipline of professional sociology as its aim. We seek new audiences across new platforms to firmly root sociological knowledge within society, for society.

We believe there is a need for creative translation and wider circulation of the knowledge we are producing as graduate students of the social sciences on politics and culture today. We seek to broaden the interpretive range, imaginative scope, and prospective application of our research to ongoing political struggles, emerging cultural trends, and possibilities of alternative futures. We are not content to be relegated to the sidelines. The point, after all, is to change the world. The task before us is to arm our critiques with power. This is a call to join a proper conspiracy whose aim is not only to critique, but to intervene; not only to intervene, but also to shift the terrain beyond the internal debates of the academic field.

The BJS seeks to open up a space to re-compose social research into a range of written forms, unobstructed by technical jargon and unconstrained by formalistic rigidity. Through its online-first approach the journal seeks to redistribute its material across sources and publications, in the alternative and popular press. Toward that end, BJS is accepting the following kinds of submissions on topical issues or debates:

- research essays: open to interpretation.
- commentary: social scientific assessments of events, journalistic reportage and public discourse; critiques of recent reports by state agencies, think-tanks, NGOs, foundations, polling agencies, etc.
- conversations: interviews with traditional or organic intellectuals on topical subjects and debates.
- field memos: ethnographic dispatches from graduate researchers; elaborations of experiences in the field as they relate to contemporary social struggles, crises, cultural or political debates.
- photo essays: from a site of research; sociological critiques of art or visual culture.
- book reviews (joint or solo): social scientific assessments of recently released trade books; reviews of academic books relating to contemporary events or debates.
- debates: The journal will be running video and transcripts from UC Berkeley’s Public Sociology Initiative. We invite similar debates or symposia on contemporary politics and culture, in the flesh or virtual.
Submissions are due by June 1st and may be sent as email attachments to submissions@berkeleyjournal.org and will be subject to a review among Berkeley graduate students in the social sciences. We also invite proposals for forums comprised of a number of contributions around a single topic. Proposals for forums should include a brief description of the project and information about the authors, including contact info, and should be submitted by April 1st to submissions@berkeleyjournal.org. All journal content will be published under a CC-BY-NC-ND license.

The *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* is a graduate student-run journal that has been in publication since 1955. Archived articles can be found on JSTOR.

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**Inside Llewyn Davis, or what is it like to be a fractured reflexive?** *(2014-03-31 08:00)*

I was expecting to *like* this film but it completely exceeded my expectations. Largely because it was such an interesting and accomplished exploration of a particular mode of being-in-the-world. Llewyn Davis is a struggling folk singer in Greenwich Village of the early 1960s, enmeshed in a tightly knit cultural world of fellow folk singers and shared venues, with the only welcome face of the outside world being an affable though patronising sociology professor, prone to introducing him at dinner parties as “our folk musician friend”. Formerly half of a folk duo, we come to discover that his former partner died in tragic circumstances, with Llewyn avowedly pursuing a solo career,
while in reality existing in a chaotic cycle of gigs, arguments and homelessness.

What the film captured so powerfully was the episodic character of Llewyn's life. There is a cut to black when Llewyn sleeps, experientially demarcating one episode from the next. His life is fragmented and his responses to it are fractured. He cares deeply about things, he feels strongly in relation to the events of his life but there's no sustained coherency to this intentionality. The disjuncture between himself and the Gorfeins, his well-off sociological friends, is not simply a matter of wealth and age but rather mode of existence. Llewyn's life is utterly devoid of routine but it is also devoid of sustained reflexivity. In the absence of these, time is circular for Llewyn. It has rhythm but not structure and it sets him at odds with the only people he is close to, not least of all his deeply conventional sister raising a child in the suburbs. When he returns from a unsuccessful trip to Chicago, he is bewildered to realise how different his sense of time is from his friend's, explaining how "it felt like a really long time but I guess it was only a couple of days" (or words to that effect).

He has little success with his music. He derides a friend for her putative careerism while nonetheless retaining a notional commitment to his own music constituting a career. When he works on a novelty record, later to achieve much success, he foregoes royalties in favour of immediate payment. When he gives up on music, he returns to his father's work and his father's union, rather than looking elsewhere. When he gives up on giving up the film has begun to feel so circular that we can only suspect he has done this many times before. There's no unity to Llewyn's life. There are events, with resonances and rhythms, fleeting but intense meanings which lack coherency over time. He lives on gut feelings, negotiating situations through impulse or necessity, forming powerful connections which he abandons as easily as he forms them. Or maybe I just can't forgive him for leaving the cat in the car. Either way, I think he's the most fully rounded portrayal I've ever seen of a fractured reflexive and the film has left me newly convinced about the potential value of relational realism as an approach to reading films. It also has what is probably now my all time favourite ending: despite his dramatic journey to Chicago, the drama in his personal life and his professional woes all that really happens in Llewyn's life during the film is that he learns how to stop the Gorfeins' cat from getting out when he leaves their apartment. I've written a PhD about temporality and reflexivity but the Coen brothers understand it better than I do. Damn.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/LFphYRyH7wc?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

5.4 April

Representing Interiority in Film and TV (2014-04-01 08:00)

The notion of 'internal conversation' can be contentious in some quarters within the academy. However, outside it, I've found that anyone I've spoken to about my research instantly knows what I mean when I say 'internal conversation' or 'inner monologue'. I'd suggest that the notion of internal conversation, as something we listen in to needs to be recognised as something distinctly different from those ghostly recesses of subjectivity we look into. Or in other words 'internal conversation' does not equate to introspection.

It's this older understanding of introspection which underlies representations of interiority in terms of mindscapes or psychic landscapes. We enter a 'door' into someones mind and action takes place within it. In some cases,
this is action within the mind as the individual concerned proceeds to occupy their usual position within the world:

In other cases, the 'entered' individual is rendered passive in the world, as with the dreamscapes of Inception, existing in the mind of a sleeping individual and radically unbound by the metaphysics of everyday life:

(Thanks Marta Wasik for these examples)

These are examples of ‘interiority’ of the form I find philosophically problematic and sociologically uninteresting. So why do I find ‘internal conversation’ interesting? Because I’m convinced by Margaret Archer’s argument that we need to invoke something like it in order to gain purchase upon why people do the specific things they do:

without it we can have no explanatory purchase upon what exactly agents do. Deprived of such explanations, sociology has to settle for empirical generalisation about ‘what most of the people do most of the time’. Indeed, without a real explanatory handle, sociologists often settle for much less: ‘under circumstances x, a statistically significant number of agents do y’. These, of course, are not real explanations at all (Archer 2007: 133)

On this view interiority becomes important to narratives because it’s these processes of deliberation (often internal
but sometimes ‘spilling out’ into external conversation) which condition the choices made by characters in the story. People are forced to make decisions, choose between competing paths or deliberate about moral dilemmas. These are crucial aspects of stories (and lives) such that their complete absence from film and tv would be jarring, at least without a televisual idiom that compensates for this somehow. But this is an outcome of internal conversation (an answer to the question: "what should I do?") which doesn’t exhaust the process itself.

One of my favourite examples of the process without the outcome can be seen in the beautiful ending to Six Feet Under (which I’ve just discovered that I’m finally able to watch without crying) in which Claire leaves her family, moving away to build a new life and, as I interpret the scene, sifts through her memories as she comes to terms with the significance of her radically changing life: “what did this mean to me? what did these people mean to me? am I making the right decision? can I really live so far from them?”. As the scene progresses, she projects forward into the future, imagining the person she will become and the persons her significant others will become, as well as how their biographical entanglement will unfold over their lifetimes. I love this scene because it captures the essence of those moments when everything is open, when ‘I’ am standing on firm ground looking towards a future ‘you’ yet to be formed, without reducing it to pure subjectivity. These ‘openings’ exist in the social world, because we do, which is precisely why the ‘I’ never has the sustained freedom it might fleetingly feel it possesses. Institutions, structures, relationships and routines are all recalcitrant. But there’s something deeply human about the feeling involved in radical action to change our lives, in spite of the likelihood that even were it all to go to ‘plan’, it will bring with it all manner of unintended consequences.

But that’s an example of internal conversation in a monological mode. As anyone who watches the show will know, Six Feet Under also shows internal conversations conducted in a dialogical mode. We talk, silently and internally, to others. We talk to ghosts. We talk to people we care about who are absent. We imagine what they say. We take imaginative comfort in disclosing things to them. We exist, as Charles Taylor puts it, as part of “webs of interlocution” and sometimes we converse with introjections of our interlocutors rather than the interlocutors.
themselves:


There are other examples of this which could easily be appropriated by the notion of 'exploring the subconscious'. As in Frasier:

But given that the model I'm deploying here is first and foremost sociological, invoking interiority as a crucial moment of social explanation, I'd suggest it's a much more interesting approach to take in analysing how interiority is displayed in TV and Cinema.

If anyone else has examples (preferably youtube videos!) I'd love to know about them. Please tweet me (@mark_carrigan) or write in the comments box below.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/JfCrj7hxLY8?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/GvpR-yprNk0?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/mCwfgCHuScw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
6. http://www.youtube.com/embed/WFgi8eCfWNo?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
7. http://www.youtube.com/embed/7YcbqNU_PeA?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
8. http://www.youtube.com/embed/nOnpuDA0dyY?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
Neil Fox (2014-04-20 14:52:58)
I love this piece, it’s fascinating. I am using it to discuss issues around adaptation, particularly the idea of work being 'unfilmable' due to interiority. Anyway. An example I love, if I am understanding correctly, is in Joel and Ethan Coen’s 'No Country For Old Men' where Tommy Lee Jones’ character visits an older, patriarchal character and they talk about life and death in such a beautiful, not quite direct, poetic and incredibly illuminating way, particularly as as way of understanding the present psychological and emotional state of Jones’ sheriff, even though he barely says anything in the entire exchange. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz8SPnRNvoc Thanks for this piece, Neil.

thanks Neil, glad you liked it! and that example sounds great, i’ll have a watch now


Have you ever been inside your local county health department? Who goes there, who works there, and what do they do there? [1]October Birds explores a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding public health and sociological practice through social fiction. Increasingly popular with students, social fiction is introduced through the pretend societies, people and circumstances presented in lifelike scenarios in fiction, gaming and fantasy worlds. Through the decidedly appealing format, readers are introduced to subjects of social justice, oppression, privilege, and possibilities. Social fiction introduces us to ideas of future society in much the same way as science fiction brings the possibilities of what future science might entail. We imagined the possibility of talking to those in distant places and the telephone was invented. We imagined going to the moon and we did.

Muhammad Yunus, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006, strongly believes in the power of social fiction. Social scientists should follow the path of make believe, in the same way as science fiction. What can be imagined today can be reality tomorrow, states [2]Muhammad Yunus on creating social fiction. Themes of social problems dominate the emerging genre of social fiction, whether it be poverty, unemployment, racial and class conflicts, or health pandemics.

As Yunus imagines, social fiction may introduce the reader to the concepts of a remarkable world without poverty or unemployment. On the other hand, [3]Jessica Smartt Gullion invites the reader to envision a frightening account of how quickly links of society unravel at the onset of a calamitous health crisis.

In real life, Gullion served as the Chief Epidemiologist for one of the largest county health departments in Texas. From this experience the author creates a fictitious account of medical chaos. Gullion, primarily a researcher in areas related to coping with community health threats, was aware of the consequences from historical pandemics. The Plague of Justinian beginning in Constantinople (Istanbul Turkey) is said to have claimed 10,000 people per day beginning in 541 A.D. and possibly killing half of Europe and Asia's population by the 700s. Black Death of Bubonic Plague is believed to have claimed 25 million people in the 1300s. In London, one in five inhabitants succumbed to the pandemic in the 1600s. Modernity did not save us. The 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic infected twenty percent of the world's population, proving most deadly for people ages 20-40. SARS swept the headlines in 2003. "Swine Flu" erupted in 2009, and that was the year Dr. Gullion sat at her desk inside the county health department. Her telephone began to ring.
In a matter of weeks, the social fiction came to life as hundreds of people are dead and thousands more became ill. [4] 'October Birds' recounts how disease could spread within a Texas community or your community...and beyond. The next global pandemic may be only one patient away. Are they sitting in your county health department or local hospital? As the frequency and accessibility to travel continues to increase for ever greater numbers of people, coping with a pandemic could mean lying in a hospital in a country where you do not speak the language. Social and cultural values and norms may dictate who gets treated and what kinds of treatment patients receive.

*October Birds* begins the tale of public health practice, emergency medicine, and the sociological context related to power and dominance in the medical profession. In *October Birds*, Gullion reveals through the background of a rapidly escalating pandemic, the social circumstances of collective behavior, emergency management, ethics in medicine, crisis counseling, critical incident stress management, modern families, Hispanic culture in America, and the value of non-Western medical practices.

Discussion questions for book clubs or classrooms are redolent throughout. Such as, what comparisons can be made between the social fiction characters and their attempts at work-life balance? Working late one night, Dr. Eliza Gordon struggles with how to explain to her husband she is still at work struggling with the chaos emerging from the pandemic. "He would put Sophie on the phone – say hello to Mommy, we won’t see her tonight – really ratcheting up the guilt meter. She decided to email him instead and call later."

Meanwhile, the grizzled Dr. Cromwell admits two failed marriages might have partly been the result of his affair with his mistress – the practice of medicine "vastly more interesting than any woman he’d ever met."

Jack, the incident commander, "finally cried all of his tears" as he leaned on his colleague, Dr. Gordon. He had no other place to turn when his partner, Nabil, succumbs to the pandemic while at home alone.

The curanderas avoided the city’s health department and the hospital. But the pandemic crosses all sections of the society. "She wanted to be welcoming to her patients without actually advertising her clinic. Because many of her patients were not in the US legally...." When medical provisions are in short supply who determines the triage for care? "He was an old man, with a poor prognosis. The woman is a young mother. She is improving." Debates of ethics, power, and politics are available at every turn of the crisis.

*October Birds* is the latest release in the Social Fiction Series by Sense Publishers. Social fiction is an emerging genre that should prove popular with both the public and academia. Each title is prefaced by the author with research and teaching remarks that emphasize the social science or scholarly perspective presented in the novel. With the increasing recognition of arts-based research, *October Birds* is a narrative that will have any student, health care practitioner, or person who reads enthralled with the true possibilities of what might be transpiring inside the walls of their local county health department.

[nbox]Dian Jordan is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Texas Permian Basin [/nbox]

Big Data & Society now open for submissions (2014-04-01 20:59)

We are pleased to announce that the new SAGE journal, Big Data & Society, is now open for submissions at http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas. The journal invites contributions that analyse Big Data practices and/or involve empirical engagements and experiments with innovative methods while also reflecting on the consequences for how societies are represented (epistemologies), realised (ontologies) and governed (politics). For more details please see our blog at http://bigdatasoc.blogspot.co.uk/ or follow us on Twitter at https://twitter.com/BigDataSoc.

Journal information and submission guidelines can be found here: http://www.uk.sagepub.com/journals/Journal202236 #tabview=manuscriptSubmission

Best regards,

Editorial Office
Big Data & Society: Critical Interdisciplinary Inquiries (Launch 2014)
bdseditors@sagepub.com

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Recollections on working with Howard Becker (2014-04-02 08:00)

In this interesting video, Clinton Sanders reflects on his experiences of being taught by [1]Howard Becker. It sheds light on Becker as a teacher and person but also offers insights into US sociology in the 1960s.
There are many things I dislike about 90s self-help Giddens. However one aspect that has stuck with me is his discussion of ‘ontological security’. This is established relationally between child and care-giver through the durability of trust, acting to “‘bracket out’ potential occurrences which, were the individual seriously to contemplate them, would produce a paralysis of the will, or feelings of engulfment”[1](Giddens 1991: 3). As I understand him, Giddens sees this as a response to a radical openness which characterises our relation to the future*: everyday life and everyday interaction presents us with a potentially infinite range of responses which are filtered through a sense of what is appropriate and what is inappropriate. The great majority of possibilities simply don’t occur to us because our experienced participation in a “shared – but unproven and unprovable – framework of reality” which is "simultaneously sturdy and fragile" leaves us treating the world around us as if the qualities it spontaneously manifests to us are durable and enduring features ([2]Giddens 1991: 36). As Giddens puts it, “To live our lives, we normally take for granted issues which, as centuries of philosophical enquiry have found, wither away under the sceptical gaze” [3](Giddens 1991: 37). There are many issues we don’t ponder because of the practical business of everyday life. The former is the condition for the latter, securing our capacity to function purposefully in the social world. But what secures this ‘turn away’ from existential rumination?
Giddens places great stress on the capacity of *routines* which ‘answer’ existential questions on the level of practice. Through our routines, we treat the world *as if* it is stable and enduring. We answer questions with our practice and so avoid ruminating upon them through our reflections. It constitutes a “protective cocoon” which we “carry around” with us leaving us “able to get on with the affairs of day-to-day life”[4](Giddens 1991: 40). But a blind adherence to routine as a source of security can become *compulsive* if not coupled with the trust upon which ontological security depends. This compulsivity emerges from unmastered anxiety, with repetition constituting a performative attempt to dispel this anxiety rather than routine simply reflecting an ability to ‘get on with things’. However even when ontological security is well entrenched within the personality structure of the individual, it is not an impenetrable psychic shield. Ontological security brackets out possibilities, things which *could* happen but almost certainly won’t, preoccupation with which would quickly become debilitating. Like worrying that a helicopter will crash into the venue when we’re out seeing live music. But of course such things do happen:

![youtube](http://www.youtube.com/embed/9YuwxvX0SkQ?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)

We rely on ontological security to avoid obsessiveness. It is a psychological achievement which allows us to ‘let things go’. Rather than attempting to ‘think our way out’ of something which troubles us, it is what allows us to simply *stop thinking* and *start doing*. But it is recurrently challenged throughout our life course, sometimes in ways which are edifying and instructive:

> “the protective cocoon is essentially a sense of ‘unreality’ rather than a firm conviction of security: it is a bracketing, on the level of practice, of possible events which could threaten the bodily or psychological integrity of the agent. The protective barrier it offers may be pierced, temporarily or more permanently, by happenings which demonstrate as real the negative contingencies built into all risk. Which car driver, passing by the scene of a serious traffic accident, has not had the experience of being so sobered as to drive more slowly – for a few miles – afterwards? Such an example is one which demonstrates – not in a counter-factual universe of abstract possibilities, but in a tangible and vivid way – the risk of driving, and thereby serves temporarily to pull apart the protective cocoon. But the feeling of relative invulnerability soon returns and chances are that driver then tends to speed up again” [6](Giddens 1991: 40)

But what matters is our capacity to immerse ourselves in activity once more. To recognise a risk but avoid obsessing about it. To take stock of possibilities inherent in our situation without allowing awareness of those possibilities to preclude the possibility of negotiating the situation itself. To instinctively recognise lines of thought worth pursuing, distinguishing between those which are *symptomatic* and those which lead towards a potential resolution. This is what I mean by *reflexive poise*.

It’s on this level that the accusations of voluntarism against 90s Giddens ring most true. However 80s Giddens lurks beneath the surface of the 90s books if you read them closely, occasionally pulling him back from some of his more absurd

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1. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y)
2. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y)
3. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y)
4. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y)
5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/9YuwxvXOSkQ?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
6. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC&redir_esc=y

Graham Harman on Heidegger and the Arts (2014-04-04 08:00)

CfP: Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters (2014-04-05 08:00)

Final Reminder: Second Call for Papers

'Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters'

The Institute for Research in Citizenship and Applied Human Sciences, University of Huddersfield, Thursday 2558
19th and Friday 20th of June 2014.

Confirmed keynote speakers for the conference are:

Ann Phoenix, University of London

Ken Plummer, University of Essex

This conference builds on the University of Huddersfield’s long held tradition of hosting a bi-annual conference on narrative research. It seeks to provide a fresh context for the development and dissemination of new research, ideas, perspectives and methodologies in the field of narrative research and enquiry and aims to bring together scholars working in a range of disciplinary fields. ‘Narrative’ is well known for its looseness of definition, its multiplicity of approaches and its interdisciplinarity, which over the years has led to a richness and diversity of narrative work. Identities, both private and public and individual and collective, have long been a focus for narrative researchers, where the content, form and effects of identity story-telling have been explored in a range of areas and contexts. The focus of ‘Troubling Narratives: Identity Matters’ is to address the ‘troubles’ that now surround contemporary narratives of identity, and the ways in which previous work may simultaneously inform but also trouble and be ‘troubled’ by new narrative work in the broad area of ‘identities’.

We invite contributions from researchers interested in using narratives across a range of disciplines including sociology, gender studies, psychology, law, politics, criminology, philosophy, history, anthropology, social work, education, and business and management. Topics of interest to this conference include (though are not restricted to) the following areas, including:

- gender, sexuality, ethnicities, law, religion, politics, feminisms, digital technologies, work, deviance, consumption, citizenship, consumption, narrative methods, interpersonal violence, generations, emotion, trauma, trans*, lifestyle, education, bodies, age.

Abstracts should be no longer than 250 words. We invite papers in the form of 20 minute oral presentations, and also workshop sessions and poster presentations (the format should be clearly stated in the abstract). All submissions must include the author(s) name, title of paper, university or organizational affiliation, and contact information. The deadline for submission of abstract is Monday 14th April 2014. Please email your abstract to the conference organisers at: [troublingnarratives@hud.ac.uk](mailto:troublingnarratives@hud.ac.uk) with ‘conference abstract’ in the subject line. You will be notified about whether your paper has been accepted soon after 28th April 2014. Registration deadline: 5th June 2014. Conference costs: Full rate: £150 including conference dinner, or £110 without. Student rate: £50 including conference dinner, or £30 without. See:[http://troublingnarratives.wordpress.com/](http://troublingnarratives.wordpress.com/) and Facebook:[https://www.facebook.com/TroublingNarratives](https://www.facebook.com/TroublingNarratives)

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CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-04-06 08:00)

The [1]Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?
How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.


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Kimberly Springer (2014-04-06 14:54:51)
What’s the deadline for this CFP?

no deadline!

The 3 Stages of Academic Awareness (2014-04-07 08:00)

Stage 1: It’s complex and needs more research (funding)

[1]

See [2] here for the next two stages. I share the frustration at this belated mainstream recognition of things that many have been pointing out for years.

So the weather in Britain has been a bit extreme recently, right? Well actually, argues [1]Christopher Brooker, a quick perusal of the facts shows nothing of the sort:

On the belief that Britain has recently experienced unprecedented rain, for instance, look at the analysis of the Met Office’s England and Wales rainfall data sets on Paul Homewood’s website, Not A Lot Of People Know That. There is no upward trend in our rainfall. Even January’s continual downpours made it only the sixteenth wettest month since records began in 1766. Even if this month’s rain adds a further 200mm (8in) to the December-January figure, the resulting 650mm would still be way short of the 812mm (32in) recorded between November 1929 and January 1930.

The problem is that "all true science ... has here been thrown out of the window". In a political environment dominated by ‘anthropogenic global warming’ (AGW) flat-earthers with their absolute lock on the institutions of science and the media (apart from the ones the critics of AGW write for that is) the responsibility falls on right-thinking empiricists like Christopher Brooker to rescue ‘the facts’ from the scientists responsible for their ideological distortion. As he explains, “for proper evidence-based science these days one has to step outside the hermetically sealed bubble of warmist group-think and look to that array of expert blogs and websites that provide the data necessary to thinking straight”.

So what is “evidence-based science”? It’s empiricist science. It’s positivism of a peculiarly unsophisticated sort. Data speaks for itself. All it requires is a mind free from distortion to identify the constant conjunctions indicated by the data. On this view, theory entails a retreat from ‘evidence’. What intrigues me about this proto-positivism is its capacity to be both naïve (the ‘facts’ speak for themselves) and paranoid (disagreement is reduced to a plot to distort the ‘facts’). If one were to look psychoanalytically at this cultural trend, we might point to ‘the facts’ as a fetish object for critics of AGW. They are imbued with magical powers, able to dissolve complex arguments into self-evident truths which illustrate the path forward for humanity amidst a 21st century almost constitutively dilemmatic. But ‘the facts’ are also made by those very scientists who are conspiring to undermine such clear-thinking: meteorologists and climatologists produce the very data sets upon which this empiricist army of keyboard warriors depend to rescue "proper evidence-based science". They are dependent upon the scientists yet simultaneously repudiate this dependence. They want the power of ‘the facts’ but refuse the dependence which would ensue from exercising this power. And this is how people who, though loathsome, are not idiots end up saying things like this:
Or perhaps he is just an idiot. He’s an “interpreter of interpretations” who repudiates the professional establishment he’s interpreting. You see what I mean? As a cultural formation ‘AGW-criticism’ is really interesting.

2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/0wmuhKzYp4s?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Howard Becker on the Craft of Sociology (2014-04-09 08:00)

This [1]great podcast is from an event at Goldsmiths a few years ago. It’s introduced by Les Back and the talk covers a lot of ground. The video below shows Howard Becker engaged in a different craft.

1. http://magiclantern.gold.ac.uk/movs/sociology/howie-the-craft-sociology.mp3
3. file://www.youtube.com/embed/aMAjVtpz88o
After a long period of monopolising academic discourse, European universities went into decline as classical scholasticism, which was primarily inward and backward looking, gave way to the ideas of Enlightenment. Intellectual development moved outside the walled gardens of academia, because enlightenment thinkers shifted their various discourses into the realm of correspondence, creating a Republic of Letters. Prof. Dunleavy argues that we are currently experiencing a similar shift towards a Republic of Blogs that enlarges communication, debate and evidence beyond the halls of universities. Academic research is changing, academic publishing is moving towards a new paradigm of advancing ideas outside the confines of the traditional academic publishing model. Orthodox journals will soon be understood as tombstones: end of debate certificates. In particular: Micro-blogging is not only replacing traditional news media, but becoming a tool for finding and disseminating ideas and research (active research surveillance)

Well edited blogs are becoming core communication tools and vehicles for HE debate; while the less traditional format encourages a writing style that invites debate from academics and lay persons alike, thus cutting across ranks, locations and academic status

Working papers and online journals are now key, immediately accessible evidence and theory/methods development sources.

A Modest Proposal for All Future Keynotes (2014-04-10 12:29)

For about ten years now, I've been arguing about the benefits of improvisational performance in academia, not simply as an experience for the audience but more importantly as a way of getting 'experts' and 'luminaries' to speak unguardedly on what they think about a topic on which they have established a reputation. Indeed, this is how I believe that academics might earn some entitlement to being called [1]'intellectuals'. But increasingly I also think that this skill might be vital to the future of [2]the university as a clearly branded institution in a world where just about anything is a 'knowledge producer' by default.

More specifically, public academic speaking might serve as a living moment of intellectual experimentation, not simply a reproduction of past thoughts. This means that improvisation should be taught to aspiring academics - and if you think that 'teaching improvisation' is an oxymoron, then you know nothing about performance, regardless of all the Judith Butler you've been force-fed. (Maybe I'm wrong but invocations of 'performativity' in an academic talk's title is usually a dead zone for intellectual engagement - unless you like to hear about non-humans 'performing'!)

(The great mystery to future historians of our times will be why the people who play up 'performativity' tend to be such lousy performers! Have these people never heard of acting - and the distinctive skills associated with it? Maybe this is how the curse of Plato - who demonized acting as a way of being-in-the-world in his dialogue, Ion - continues to play itself out among 'postmodernists' who unwittingly feel they have already released themselves from Plato's spell!)

Anything interesting said publicly has training at its source, but the 'creativity' and 'novelty' comes from the room to manoeuvre (Spielraum), which is to do with what your training has not already pre-disposed you to do, in combination with your ability to gauge your audience's expectations - and then defy them in some important way. (For social theorists who still take 'structure-agency' seriously, you should hear echoes.) In classical Athens, this complex capacity was called 'rhetoric', and I could spend the rest of this blog bemoaning the disrepute that rhetoric has fallen into over the last 2000 years - but I won't.

However, what I will bemoan is the tendency for conference organizers to invite keynoters who fail to meet the above standards, perhaps as a desperate attempt to stress the importance of the gathering. In other words, if you're willing to spend such significant resources on inviting someone who will appear more relevant to how people outside than inside your field think about your field, then you should demand something of them that makes the connection between outside and inside your field explicit. It is not sufficient to invite a speaker who performs an
oratorio version of an already published text, which only the more cosmopolitan members of the audience will have read. (And frankly, that’s the best that often happens...)

Keynote speeches should be about challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions of the field, but in a way that enable the audience to go forward. In other words, however critical one is of the field, there must be a sense that field contains the resources to move forward. If someone cannot fulfil that basic requirement, then they should not be invited.

But from a strictly economic standpoint, no one should be invited to give a keynote speech to a specific academic field who is simply going to repeat a message they would have said to anyone – and most likely have already said in publications. Whenever I hear someone read passages of their own books in keynote conferences, I think that some publisher or bookshop should be sponsoring the event. Self-publicity is fine, but if it is so closely tied to what is already available in the public domain – indeed, the marketplace – it is not clear what other than transient publicity is gained by having that person present, unless (oratorio-style) one likes the sound of the speaker’s voice. Maybe there is an economic model where this works. But it needs to be presented to me.

In the end, what I am calling for is that conference organizers liaise in a bit more detail about what is expected of keynote speakers. As someone who has keynoted a lot of conferences, I am always flattered by invitations, but I take this as incurring responsibilities that go beyond self-publicity. However, I feel that I’m in a minority...


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Tomorrow in Academia? (In Haiku) Plumply posthuman Battery-farmed Butlerites Drone in unison


Dear Steve Fuller, I really enjoyed your piece and I think you hit the nail on the head. Once I was chairing a final plenary discussion with the keynote speakers at a conference at Goldsmiths. The speakers had all pronounced and voiced their keynotes. In the middle of the discussion one of the keynote speakers - a 'world-class urbanist' - turned to me and asked "what is theme of this conference again". They obviously didn’t think they needed even to know, let alone address, the issues that people had gathered around for the occasion. I wondered if your emphasis on improvisation connects in any way to an interest in music? Personally, I think we can learn a lot about improving sociological communication from music and musicians. It’s always struck me that the idea of a ‘keynote’ should be a kind of intellectual sounding, which seeks to establish the key of the event. I also think you are quite right to say that the legacy of thinking rhetoric only as something pejorative is really damaging, the ancient meaning going back to the art of persuasive talk is so important to remember. I’ve got to do a keynote in June - I’ll have your blog in mind. Best, Les Back

Steve Fuller (2014-05-22 08:14:58)

Yes, music is always in the back of my mind. In particular, unlike musicians, I don’t think academics have a very joined-up sense of the relationship between reading, writing and speaking, which may help to explain why research and teaching tend to move farther apart. I talk more about this here: [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/16/five-minutes-with-steve-fuller/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/16/five-minutes-with-steve-fuller/)
I'm not someone who is interested in vampires, either in the highbrow terms you'll sometimes find in English Literature departments or the lowbrow terms that modishly respond to their asinine revival in popular culture (also sometimes found in English Literature departments). But if the man who directed Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai has directed a vampire film, it's probably going to be a little bit different... and it is. Only Lovers Left Alive is, in a manner of speaking, a romantic comedy. It depicts an episode in the lives of two world-weary and highly-cultured vampires, who take their pleasure where they find it as the world around them gently slides into oblivion. In a weird sort of way, it really reminded me of Inside Llewyn Davis in the sense that music is deployed artfully to help get 'inside' a life where nothing much really happens, capturing the texture and the temporality of existence for those who, to an outside observer, simply appear languid and aimless.

The film has two settings: post-crash Detroit and ancient Tangier. The former is placed very much in time, with expository dialogue about its depopulation constituting the one clunky moment in this otherwise accomplished film. The latter is very much out of time, an effect intensified by the presence of an ancient Christopher Marlowe whiling away his final years in the back room of an all night cafe. The aesthetics of industrial ruination have become a little bit of a cliche at this point (though not, perhaps, for everyone) but this only detracted a little from the cinematographic accomplishment of so overpoweringly capturing the extent to which vampiric capital* has left Detroit drained and dying.

Adam, reclusive post-rock genius and former pal of Byron, spends his days rattling around in an old house in a deserted part of town, making music and playing with the instruments he's accumulated over the years, all the while becoming steadily more depressed. Eve, his gregarious and effusive literary wife of the last two centuries, lives in Tangiers while maintaining a social life of sorts (at least compared to Adam). The film revolves around Adam’s growing depression, with him becoming suicidal as bearing witness to what the 'zombies' are doing to the world.

*capital
gradually wears him down, before Eve visits him in Detroit out of concern for his declining mental health. Then Eve’s ‘younger’ sister arrives unexpectedly, sparking off a chain of events which generates upheaval and forces both Adam and Eve to move on and adapt to new circumstances; something which, we’re reminded at the conclusion, they must have done on many occasions in their long lives.

Given how attentive to time the film was, it seemed odd to me that it felt so unnecessarily compressed. The growing tendency towards long films** generally irritates me but this is one of those rare occasions where I felt a two hour film would have benefited from a further hour. Not only because it was such an aesthetic delight, with post-rock melancholia framing the worn beauty of Adam and Eve and the desolate urban landscape in which much of the film was played out. But it could have explored the characters further. Culture was a big part of the film: books, music, musical instruments, technological artefacts, composition, attribution, literary figures. But the meaning of this for Adam and Eve only figured tangentially. There were a few asides about the importance of “getting the work out” or words to that effect but little exploration of this motivation or the meanings underlying it. What is it like to be a depressed vampire? Perhaps I’m approaching the film rather idiosyncratically but it felt like an answer to this question was tacitly promised but never explicitly offered.

Thankfully the expository dialogue stopped short of a conversation about how “we just suck people’s blood but their system sucks away all life” even though the direction was clearly gesturing towards this.

*This may very well be confirmation bias on my part.

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**Using Slideshare and Prezi to disseminate your work (2014-04-12 08:00)**

One of the most obvious forms that digital scholarship can take is making ‘outputs’ public that would otherwise remain private. So for instance making slides available online after a talk or lecture. When I use slides, which is pretty irregular, I tend to make them available as part of the process of preparing. I’ll produce some slides, write a blog post and embed the slides in the post. The whole unit then becomes my frame of reference for the talk itself. I then tend to forget about the slides and not make any effort to promote them. It’s therefore a bit of a surprise when I look at how many times these slides have been viewed:

×


×

“What on earth will I tweet about?” from Mark Carrigan

The first is from a talk about Open Access at the Institute of Art and Design at Birmingham City University. The second is a talk about social media I did for the Text and Academic Authors Association. The former has been viewed over 2000 times and the latter has been viewed over 1500 times. These are the most popular but there are slides on my slideshare account from a range of other talks and most seem to have been viewed 300+ times.

These are not slides designed for online dissemination. These are not slides I’ve made any effort to promote. Yet people do look at them. If you search for the most popular slides of all time on slideshare, it soon becomes obvious how powerful slideshare can be for dissemination. There are countless pages of slides that have been viewed hundreds of thousands (in some cases millions) of times.

I find the political uses of slideshare particularly interesting. These slides seem to be produced by people writing about these issues in order to embed the slides on pages, though I’ve not substantiated this impression in any sort of thorough way:

[IFRAME: http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/31852692]

10 Reasons Why Russia Invaded Ukraine from John Maxfield

Using Prezi as an online only tool for dissemination has come naturally to me. Partly because I struggle to present with Prezi for a variety of reasons. My first Prezi, how to create a successful online presence, has now
been viewed almost 4500+ times. I’ve occasionally tweeted the link but otherwise made no effort to promote it. Some of the others have been viewed thousands of times and I’m surprised to find that seemingly obscure conference presentations I’ve made no effort to promote have been viewed hundreds of times.

My point is not about the stats per se but rather that these metrics are fallible indicators of the visibility facilitated by Slideshare and Prezi. It doesn’t take much of a conceptual leap to get into the habit of archiving presentations by uploading slides after the fact. However the audience on Slideshare and Prezi is potentially much larger than that which you gave the talk or lecture to. Recognising this fact shouldn’t lead us to counterpose ‘offline’ and ‘online’ in a dualistic way but it does suggest that perhaps we should consider the latter as something other than a second-thought. What does this mean in practice? I’m not really sure and that will be a topic for another post.

One of my most enjoyable uses of Prezi was to create this:

[11]How our society got so fucked up about sex: a brief tour through history...

It’s a plan for a short book (Zero or Pivot style) which I’ve intended to write for over a couple of years. It is a ‘plan' in a very different sense to anything I’d written in text alone. It will require a lot of translation to turn it into a book proposal. But the substance of the planned book is much clearer in my mind than it would otherwise be. I’m also reasonably confident that others will find the book interesting. Perhaps the downside to this is that the Prezi has left me so clear about the book’s argument that the ensuing immediacy with which I confront the hard work of actually substantiating it has proved a little demotivating! Though this is far from the only reason I’ve yet to start proper work on this.

1. http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/13648074
2. https://www.slideshare.net/markcarrigan/iad-talk
3. http://www.slideshare.net/markcarrigan
5. https://www.slideshare.net/markcarrigan/what-on-earth-will-i-tweet-about-14999029
7. http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/31852692
Groups matter in political philosophy, most would now agree – but precisely how they matter is contentious. Group-related issues emerge in various contexts of debate: the redressing of past or current injustices suffered by ethnic or cultural minorities; the nature and scope of group rights; the appropriate treatment of a certain specific identity/cultural/ethnic group. Less prominent, though, is a comprehensive analysis of groups as both agents and objects of social policies. This is the aim of our conference.

What challenges are posed to social, moral, or political philosophy when addressing a collection of individuals who act or are treated in a collective way? Answering this involves consideration about how institutions should treat groups, but also of the normative implications of taking groups as possible social agents, when acting either in vertical relations with the state or in horizontal relations with other groups (or individuals). This conference aims to bring together scholars from a large range of disciplinary backgrounds, from social ontology to sociology and anthropology, through ethics and normative philosophy, in order to explore these questions from both theoretical and practical perspectives. We hope to combine questions about the nature of groups, and their social and political impacts, with attention to the particular, pressing normative questions to which the negotiation of group-related issues gives rise.

**Invited speakers:** Lawrence Blum (Boston University), Catherine Colliot-Thélène (Université de Rennes 1), Vincent Descombes (EHESS), Tariq Modood (University of Bristol).

We invite paper proposals along the following lines:

**Methodological and Ontological issues**
• What specific questions, if any, does the existence of groups pose to a theory of justice, or a theory of recognition, or a theory of democracy?

• Why should groups matter in moral, social, or political, philosophy– and if they do, what kinds of group?

• Should we consider groups as significant units of analysis of the social world, or should we operate with more dynamic concepts of group formation?

• How and why are groups constructed entities, but nevertheless normatively relevant ones?

Normative and Political issues

• What kinds of theory, principles or norms might political thinkers propose in order to tackle the particular questions which groups pose?

• How is the specific moral status of groups staked out: for instance, (how) can they be attributed with moral responsibility?

• Should we strongly differentiate between different types of group — on the ground that it entitles them to variable claims for differential treatment, or differentiated group rights?

• Do recent proposals for renewing theoretical frames in political philosophy, such as participative democracy or cosmopolitanism, offer new paths for appreciating the role and function of groups in political theory?

Paper proposals of max. 1000 words should be sent by April 21, 2014, to

[1]groups.conference@gmail.com
Notification of acceptance will be sent by the end of May.

Proposals may be sent in English or in French. However, the working language of the conference will be English.

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**A Modest Proposal for Making Actor-Network Theory More than Academia’s All-Purpose App**  
(2014-04-13 10:36)

As someone who suffers the misfortune of having committed to an academic life when very young, my institutional memory is somewhat older than my chronological age. For me the 1960s and 1970s remain very much part of living memory, which extends equally vividly into the present day – and beyond (as anyone familiar with my work can testify). This means that over my career I have witnessed a lot of amplifications, elisions, forgettings and, indeed, reinventions, if not outright fabrications, of various theories and concepts.

One especially striking development for social scientists has been the so-called ‘ontological turn’, which is strongly associated with actor-network theory (ANT). To my ears, it sounds like Orwellian newspeak for a methodologically justified refusal to take responsibility for the entities that one observes in the ‘world’ defined by one’s research subjects. Ontology is normally taken to be a normative philosophical discipline that prescribes the space in which thought and action can occur. Historically one didn’t talk ontology unless one meant it – i.e. the speaker endorsed the entities and relations being conjured in the discourse. Even imperial anthropologists who described ‘relativistically’ the ontologies of the subjugated natives felt – or were made to feel – a bit guilty about the degree of exposure involved, given the asymmetric power relations. Nowadays, however, appeals to ‘ontology’ merely signal a politically correct way of doing research that would have been condemned in my youth as ‘value-neutral’.

A researcher who takes the ‘ontological turn’ is rendered eminently ‘tool-worthy’ because by revealing something previously hidden for what it ‘really’ is, he or she makes it available for others to inspect and potentially act upon, if they’ve got the power to do so. Put it this way, by promoting the ontological turn, ANT reduces ethnography to an App, whose utility depends on the processing power of the platform to which it is attached. And with the demise of empire and the erosion of the nation-state, such ‘platforms’ are available to just about anyone who can afford them. This helps to explain why ANT is in such big demand to funding agencies (both private and public) yet so useless as a framework for extending the life-expectancy of strictly academic inquiry.
This is not to say that ANT isn’t good in keeping academics amused in the short-term! Followers of the works of Graham Harman and Timothy Morton know that these guys are masters of the ontological pirouette. But they are also quite explicitly apolitical in their intent. They are much more of the school (formerly called ‘Marxism’) that sees theorizing as a self-contained practice than theorizing as spilling over into practice. But does ANT need to remain the victim of this sort of self-domestication, a kind of caged craziness whose ultimate significance at best will be as a brilliant move in a philosophical chess match?

Luckily there is an opportunity for ANT to step up to the plate and earn its political cojones. It turns out that ‘natural historians’ – the field to which Charles Darwin thought he belonged and which continues to enjoy high media ratings – constitute[1] an endangered species in academia. This is easy to understand in terms of scientific specialisation and funding patterns. Nevertheless, ANT could adopt a very interesting intellectual line on this.

The argument would be to shift the field of natural history into the ‘humanities’ but as part of a longer term strategy to re-divide the two major academic cultures. Instead of the humanities v. the sciences a la CP Snow, we might think of the posthumanities v. the transhumanities. The latter polarity would require a 90 degree shift away from the former polarity. I have been already arguing this point with regard to [2]politics more generally – and it figures prominently in [3]my forthcoming book, which supports the transhumanist side of the shift. But regardless where one stands on this issue, it is clear that Harman and Morton are simply making explicit what the great imperial anthropologist Malinowski called the ‘phatic’ side of sociality which ANT has long exploited, while capitalising on the aspersions associated with science as concealing hidden depths, available only to adepts.

The thing that is lacking from ANT – in both its empirical and theoretical expressions – is a place for will. It is to ANT’s diabolical credit that I am forced to remind readers that in ordinary English ‘agency’ implies a potential to do other than what one has. A more wilful approach to agency would involve altering, perhaps substantially, current states of being, along the lines afforded by live or virtual experimentation – that is, probing those hidden depths to which ANT seems so allergic. One of the great misapprehensions about ANT is to think that its classic interest in experimentation (from Latour & Woolgar’s Laboratory Life onward) comes from an acceptance of the epistemic premise of experimentation. No, ANT is simply interested in an experiment as an interesting observable event, with the assumptions of the experimenters (and subjects) just so much backchat until they appear in discourse available to ANT researchers.

I plan to pursue this idea of post- v. trans- humanities as a pivot point for tomorrow’s university in the future. But for now I flag the issue because if ANT people are interested in a life that goes beyond next the grant cycle, then they should jump to defend natural history as a ‘humanistic’ field.


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Will and intent are Western philosophical fixations which themselves need thorough re-theorising prior to any such mooted inclusion into ANT.
Philip (2015-03-22 15:52:36)
There's no 'will' in ANT? Rather depends what you mean by will. The Nietzschean will to power is pretty foundational to it. Didn't Schopenhauer also use will as a metaphysical concept? Not an insignificant lineage, then. The point re 'agency' presupposing that the agent could have done otherwise presumably is meant to imply that rocks, scallops, etc. are bound by natural causality and therefore can only do as they do? (Welcome back bifurcation of nature, we didn't miss you.) No counterfactuals for things. By the by, I'd argue against any really close connection between Morton, Harman and ANT. The latter is militantly empiricist and the former pair have little or no interest in empirical research (this is less true of Morton [though not untrue of him] but Harman is a pure philosopher). Of course they derive concepts and images but to divest ANT of its empiricism is to more or less destroy it. In practice, ANT studies are full of reflexive, wilful human agents. Maybe even excessively so (the legacy of ethnomethodology shouldn't be forgotten). When reduced to its theoretical vocabulary (and this is a complete reduction) then of course it appears to be rather tough on human intentionality but then it was never intended to be a 'standalone' theoretical vocabulary (although I admit that it has been taken as such). The whole point of it is that the concepts must always be wrapped up in the empirical work. Divest it of that principle and you have something completely different. There's nothing inherently 'prescriptive' in ontology (historically maybe but, really, so what?). It's certainly not immune from it, of course, but, likewise, epistemology is no stranger to prescription (what is?). Not sure who these 'value neutral' apologists cloaking themselves in 'ontology' are either. The 'speculative realists'? If so, then see my answer above. They bear only superficial resemblances to ANT as it's generally been practiced. There's a difference between something being 'value free' and it just not being explicitly on board with any particular political programme. Has every single research paper got to be banging some particular political drum? What if a researcher doesn't know the political consequences of their research – yet? That doesn't mean value neutrality, just naive uncertainty – an uncertainty that is acknowledged rather than buried underneath dogmatic adherence to whatever pre-existing sect (membership of which is perhaps to be prescribed – there's that word again – by the 'leading lights' and 'great old men' of the discipline?). I do agree that ANT research, in the final analysis, can be somewhat limited for its tendency to eschew politics. However, there's nothing necessary in that. Doubtless part of its popularity is due to its political open-endedness (the point of it was always to be open-ended) but that shouldn't paper over the achievements of the field or license a regression to a modified, made-over humanism as if that was a new idea.

Steve Fuller (2015-03-23 13:27:02)
Actually there is no place for 'will' in actor-network theory. Who in this crowd embraces Nietzsche, let alone Kant or Augustine? Will implies too much potential for responsibility – a godlike position that ANT's self-styled 'irreductionist' ontology refuses, as it endlessly 'delegates' (a bit like Eichmann dispatching trains). But ANT's refusal to embrace will also helps to explain its popularity among researchers in precarious positions. After all, if you don't know where your next paycheque is coming from, it pays not to presume any explanatory framework that might put your potential paymaster in a disadvantageous light (as in the case of Marxist explanations).

ailsahaxell (2015-03-30 18:54:35)
I think the limitation placed on will and agency from an ANT perspective is more that we do not know what always drives us, and therefore ascribing will and agency in such ways may be flawed rather than non existent. IMHO and as an ANT researcher I would claim that I have will; from the choice of a research question to the way it is studied, written of, and disseminated, there is no neutrality. However, my self-awareness is partial, both because of bias and because I do not know everything (!!!). ANT is after all a humble methodology. Some further reading on the place of cognitions http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/380

Steve Fuller (@ProfSteveFuller) (2015-04-05 15:47:08)
There's nothing wrong with being 'humble' – and ANT certainly didn't invent this attitude (so references to Latour are gratuitous). However, humility is not an excuse for hiding behind the data in the manner of a dithering ventriloquist. Rather humility should imply a willingness to draw a firm conclusion which others may then contest – perhaps even successfully – and which in the process creates a common sense of inquiry. No doubt It is a mark of our times – where researchers find themselves in precarious employment – that the hyperbolic enactment of fallibility becomes the preferred researcher's stance. It amounts to taking minimum responsibility for whatever you say. In the past, if people weren't sure what they thought, they simply kept their mouths shut. When they opened their mouths, they already knew that they might be shot down. See here
Porn Studies is Released (2014-04-14 08:00)

Routledge Journals Publishes Porn Studies

March 2014 – Routledge (Taylor & Francis Group) publish the first double issue of *Porn Studies*, the premier dedicated, international, peer-reviewed journal to critically explore those cultural products and services designated as pornographic and their cultural, economic, historical, institutional, legal and social contexts. *Porn Studies* is edited by Professor Feona Attwood of Middlesex University and Professor Clarissa Smith of the University of Sunderland and supported by an international editorial board including: Constance Penley, Brian McNair, Lynn Comella, Martin Barker, Susanna Paasonen and Alan McKee.

Professor Gerard Goggin, University of Sydney comments on the journal’s inaugural issues:

"Finally we have a journal that brings together the urgently needed research, theories, and debates to make sense of an important aspect of social and cultural life. The breadth, depth, and richness of its packed first issue confirms its promise as a platform, not only for understanding pornography – but as a space for new, adventurous, genuinely cosmopolitan rethinking of many of the things about identity, bodies, power, belonging, media, and contemporary reality that we take-for-granted, but still know too little about."

In their introduction to the first, double issue of the journal Attwood and Smith outlined why this new journal is needed: "Perhaps one of the most important reasons for *Porn Studies* is the very topicality of pornography; we believe it is the right time to launch this journal because the subject is so politically and emotionally charged. Pornography has a public presence as an object of concern and as a metaphor used to designate the boundaries of the public space.

Articles by leading scholars identify some of the leading themes in pornography research today:

Utilising data from more than 5000 responses to an online questionnaire, Martin Barker’s ‘The “Problem” of Sexual Fantasies’ explores understandings of the relations between pornography and sexual imaginaries.

Fears about what children might be learning from pornography have been centre stage for some time, in ‘Porn and Sex Education, Porn as Sex Education’, Kath Albury addresses those concerns and their intersections with other issues around young people’s sexual practices, sexual self-representation and sexual knowledge.

In ‘Studying Porn Cultures’ Lynn Comella suggests a ‘porn studies-in-action’ and exhorts researchers to ‘leave the confines of our offices, and spend time in the places where pornography is made, distributed and consumed, discussed and debated, taught and adjudicated’.

Read these and more free online until 31 May 2014.


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How to be a blogger without having your own blog (2014-04-15 08:00)

It’s a common assumption that ‘bloggers’ and ‘blogs’ are unavoidably intertwined. There’s a sense in which it’s true but it can also be slightly misleading. It’s possible to be a blogger without having your own blog. In fact, there are a lot of advantages to doing this. Patrick Dunleavy and Chris Gilson from the LSE PPG [1] summarised this issue helpfully a couple of years ago and everything they said is just as true now:

According to some good estimates, perhaps 80 per cent or more of the single-author blogs on the web are currently inactive, or are ‘desert blogs’ that very rarely updated. And this is because people start them with high hopes, in determinedly individualistic mode, but find that hard to sustain after a while. Coming up with fresh content, day after day or week after week, is hard work for any academic, especially in the current climate where there are so many other demands on people’s time. But if you don’t post regularly, in a rhythm that is clear to readers so they know when to come back, then it can be hard to keep things going.

We don’t think single-author blogs are a sustainable or genuinely useful model for most academics – although all praise to the still many exceptional academics who can manage to keep up the continuous effort involved. By joining together and forming multi-author blogs, academics can mutually reinforce each other’s contributions.

It’s difficult to build an audience for a personal blog. Many people manage it but, if and when they do, it tends to reflect a sustained commitment to blogging on their part. It can be quite dispiriting to recurrently throw your polished thoughts out into the wilds of the internet only to find they receive little to no attention. While twitter has changed this dynamic slightly, it has only done so in a limited way. While it may have made it easier to provide an audience for your blog, it has also led to an entirely different set of pressures, leaving two rather than one platforms to engagement within in a sustained way.

These dynamics of audience building often mitigate against the upkeep of blogs, as Patrick and Chris point out. In one sense I disagree that this means personal blogs should only be for a committed few – this claim overlooks the overlap between blogging platforms and content management systems. So it might be useful for someone to setup a wordpress blog as an alternative to using something like academia.edu or an ePortfolio i.e. producing a static website of a form that is extremely familiar within higher education. However this isn’t really a ‘blog’ per se so in another, more meaningful sense, I entirely agree with the claim above.

The obvious worry that stems from this is that people who want to write online immediately setup personal blogs, rapidly lose interest and their contribution to the blogosphere is then lost. So if you’re someone who wants to write online but isn’t interested in committing to sustaining a blog on an ongoing basis, these are some alternatives
which might be of interest to you:

1. Does your department have a blog? See for instance the Sociology@Warwick and Politics@Warwick blogs.

2. Does your university offer opportunities to write online? See for instance the Warwick Knowledge Centre.

3. Discover Society is an online magazine publishing commentary by sociologists and social policy academics. Potential articles can be discussed in advance with the editors. Guidance for contributors is provided here. My perception is that it’s seen as a prestigious online outlet but then I’m rather biased.

4. Sociological Imagination covers a diverse range of topics and accepts a broad range of formats. I think it’s great but then I’m even more biased in this case. You can find notes for contributors, which I wrote years ago and should really update, online here.

5. There’s a number of LSE blogs which accept contributions: LSE Impact Blog, LSE British Politics & Policy, LSE EUROPP, LSE USAPP and the LSE Review of Books. All these links go to instructions for contributors, apart from the LSE Review of Books which has a slightly different process.

6. The Conversation is a great initiative which is expanding internationally. Much like the LSE blogs, articles are edited by professional editors. Unlike the LSE blogs, these editors are journalists. I think there are strengths and weaknesses stemming from this which you can see if you compare the two sites. I think the Conversation articles can sometimes be a little sterile, as if the communicative impulse has been edited out of them. On the other hand, the grammar and syntax is impeccable. You can find information about becoming an author here.

7. Open Democracy is a “digital commons not a magazine” (though personally I can’t see the difference between a ‘digital commons’ and a large, sprawling and well established online magazine) that has been around for a long time. You can propose articles here.

8. Medium and other new generation blogging platforms work in a rather different way. I’ve written about this here recently. If none of the ideas listed above take your fancy then it’s worth considering the use of Medium.

Unless you’re blogging on at least a weekly basis, it’ll be difficult to build an audience. There are exceptions to this (e.g. Deborah Lupton’s blog) but, unless you’re already well established, it’s unlikely that an audience will consolidate around your blog. People might read articles, particularly if you make the effort to disseminate them in the networks available to you, but it’s unlikely that they’ll get into the habit of reading it i.e. choosing to check your site or subscribing to an RSS feed because they have an expectation there will be new material for them to read.

This is not to say there’s anything wrong with blogging in the absence of an audience. I did it for years because I fundamentally enjoy blogging. This is rather my point: if you think a personal blog is something you’ll enjoy then I couldn’t be more enthusiastic in my support of it as a practice. But you should do so in awareness of the practicalities involved in using a blog for purposes over and above this. If you’re more interested in using a blog for impact or public engagement then you are in blogging as a form of self-expression, it’s unlikely to be worth your while to pursue a personal blog. In which case, any item from the by no means exhaustive list above would likely be more useful.

One final thought is that these different platforms can be combined. So for instance you could archive all your guest blogs on a personal blog. Or you can republish articles you’ve written for one site on your departmental
blog. The key thing is to **ask**: many sites are covered by a Creative Commons license anyway but editors will still appreciate it if you ask permission before reduplicating a post. My standard practice is to get put a 'Originally posted at X' link but there are different ways of doing this.

Though they’ve made such a mess of one of my favourite wordpress themes.

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1. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/
2. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/24/five-minutes-patrick-dunleavy-chris-gilson/
5. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/knowledge/about/contact/
15. https://theconversation.com/become-an-author
17. http://www.opendemocracy.net/node/add/submission

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Record of the Week (Week of 14 April 2014) « STS Turntable (2014-04-20 01:13:16)
[...] The Sociological Imagination – How to be a blogger without having your own blog [...] 

[...] Here’s an interesting link featuring some comments on the trials and tribulations of single-author blogging for academics. In short the enterprise mostly fails. Blogging needs regular postings, otherwise one has little hope of building and sustaining an audience. I was going well with maintaining a regular schedule; however, it has been over a month and a half since my last post. I have multiple reasons for the hiatus but the one I will give here is that a few PhD deadlines suddenly overran what little free-time I had. Additionally I've been reluctant to return to posting. I knew that once I had returned the exertion of commitment would have to begin anew. It is just like when breaking from a gym regime. The break gets extended as your reluctance grows in the knowledge that returning to the regime means less relaxing evenings undisturbed by the realisation that soon you would be straining and grunting. Although my dedication for the latter has truly collapsed I always intended to return to blogging but after the thesis had undergone the internal review. So why am I back before that? Two reasons: 1) a friend of mine said if you intend to continue in academia you will always find deadlines threatening your other commitments so it's best to just get use to it; 2) my reply to Crossley and Bottero's article has just been published in cultural sociology and I want to brag about it. Actually it is relevant to an earlier post that I made on Bourdieu. So here's the link to that. [...]
Public reaction to the recent spate of celebrity deaths has been interesting to watch. Social media has led to an increase in the amount of "virtual mourners" who are able to flood the web with displays of grief, the sincerity of which has been '['questioned'. As a researcher of media fandom, I am particularly interested in how fans use the internet to grieve when the object of their fandom dies. This interest has led me to start researching fan response to the death of wrestler Chris Benoit, who killed his wife and young son before committing suicide in 2007. One particular concern was how fans deal with the process of remembrance when they find it difficult to separate the actions of the man from his celebrity persona.
It was with this in mind that I started to examine response to the death of wrestler the Ultimate Warrior (James Hellwig, who legally changed his name to Warrior in 1993), where commentators have similarly attempted to separate the man from the performer. However, it was when looking at response to Warrior’s death that I was struck by the comparisons to be made with the response to the death of Peaches Geldof. The two cases have produced an interesting set of memorialisation narratives to compare particularly with regard to questions of gender. The way people have responded to their respective “private” and “performed” lives along gendered lines signals a continuation of the way celebrity culture contributes to the existence of gender norms. Memorialisation of Geldof and Warrior has been heavily influenced by their recent media output. These “last appearances” have been used to shape the narratives of their remembrance: For Geldof it was an Instagram photo of her and deceased mother Paula Yates accompanied by the simple description ‘Me and my mum’. For Warrior, it was an appearance on Monday 7th April’s WWE Raw broadcast which saw him deliver an eerily prescient speech which spoke of one’s legend not being stopped by death.

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xR08M6EUd0g]

Geldof’s photo has helped promote remembrance which combines her “private” and “performed” personas. Where previously her “bratty” celebrity was attributed to her privileged upbringing, now the most dominant media narrative is to think of Geldof as the “doting mum”. Audiences have similarly focused on her domestic
identity; a quick look at the current most popular Tumblr posts shows a number of different photos of Geldof on her wedding day and with her children. Although her regular column for [7]Mother and Baby did help to highlight her image as a celebrity mum, significantly it is this identity which has been stressed, rather than her position as a celebrity journalist who happens to have children.

As a result, Geldof’s posthumous celebrity is inextricably tied to her personal identity as a wife and mother. Speculation that her death is possibly [8]linked to an eating disorder further emphasises the importance of how aspects of her “private” life, in particular gendered ways, inform the mediation of her celebrity. Such concerns of “ordinariness” – previously used to criticise her “fame for being famous” – are now used to ratify Geldof’s behaviour as she reverted to a more culturally acceptable state of motherhood, constructing a tidy memorialisation narrative for us to consume in the process.

In contrast, Warrior’s speech has been used to specifically highlight the difference between James “Warrior” Hellwig and the Ultimate Warrior wrestling character. Warrior himself made the distinction on Monday night, symbolically donning a mask to let ‘[The Ultimate Warrior] do the talking.’ Fans’ sharing of this speech and its message – through tribute [9]art and sharing memories of Ultimate Warrior’s legacy – allowed the markers to be laid for the memorialisation narrative to follow. Tributes have specifically highlighted the prime of Warrior’s [10]career – a bombastic muscled athlete and childhood nostalgia figure – rather than the retired father-of-two.

In fact, little media attention has been paid at all to Warrior’s surviving wife and children – his identity as a father and husband is apparently as “private” a topic as his [11]political views, the tone of which are seemingly inappropriate to include during a period of mourning. Mention of Geldof’s husband and children is essential to current media discourse, yet for Warrior such a topic is off-limits and irrelevant to a celebration of the “ultimate” icon of masculinity.

Although one could cynically think of these “last appearances” as part of a celebrity’s performance, that they’ve been interpreted along gendered lines underlines the selectivity in how memorialisation narratives are constructed. Celebrity deaths do seem to have an [12]emotional pull for audiences, yet even at times of tragedy it is important to
understand how particular stories are being crafted and maintained.

Tom Phillips is a Senior Research Associate at the University of East Anglia and co-chair of the Fan Studies Network. You can follow him on Twitter @TheTomPhillips.


What's the Point of Ontology?
PhD Workshop at the University of Warwick
18th June 2014, 10am - 5:30pm

Ontology can often prove a contested and confusing issue within social research. Everyone has on ontology, explicit or otherwise, but the process of drawing this out and thinking through its implications for research can often be a confusing part of the PhD process. This participatory workshop explores the practical significance of ontological questions for social research, inviting participants to reflect on their own research projects in a collaborative and supportive context. It aims to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse matter of social ontology, linking theory to practice in the context of their own research projects. The main focus throughout the day will be on how ontological questions are encountered in social research, the questions posed by such encounters and how engaging explicitly with social ontology can often help resolve such issues.

All participants will offer a brief (5 minute) presentation of their research project and the ontological questions which have been or are expected to be encountered within it. Those still early in the PhD process are welcome to substitute this for a discussion of their research interests and potential project. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on their own social ontology and how it pertains to their project. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day!

We also invite two more substantial presentations (10 mins) for the first afternoon session, reflecting on your
engagement with ontological questions in your own project in order to help begin a practical engagement which encompasses the entire group. If you would be interested in leading the discussion in this way then please make this known when registering.

To register please contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your research and your interest in social ontology (500 words or less) by May 15th. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available, please ask for more details.

The Centre for Social Ontology
http://go.warwick.ac.uk/socialontology/

The idea that ‘[e]veryone has [a]n ontology, explicit or otherwise’ might be a dangerous one: see Raymond Geuss’ essay 'The Wisdom of Oedipus and the Idea of a Moral Cosmos' in A World without Why (Princeton, 2014).

Sociological Imagination (2014-04-16 09:47:37)
Rephrase: everyone has beliefs, implicit or otherwise, about the social world. If you’re conducting social research then it’s important to be clear about the role your beliefs about the phenomena you’re investigating play in the investigation.

PhD Comics: Les (Really) Miserables – “I Dreamed a Dream” (2014-04-16 08:00)

Does this strike a chord with anyone else...?
Wilhelm Reich’s 6 Rules for Creative Sanity (2014-04-17 08:00)


1. Keep one’s life financially independent.
2. Continue unabated to exercise one’s power of creativity in concrete, strenuous tasks, always seeking perfection as near as possible.
3. Carefully cherish LOVE of a partner with full gratification, of the total emotional being if possible, of the body in a clean way if necessary.
4. Keep out of the trap of confusion by the average man and woman, helping others to keep out of the trap too as best they can.
5. Keep one’s structure clean like brook water through knowing and correcting every mistake, making the corrected mistake the guiding lines to new truth.

6. Never yield to the expediencies of life except where it is basically harmless or where the main line of development is not impeded for the duration of one’s life.

I’ve never read Reich, who had always struck me as someone occupying the same intellectual space as Erich Fromm but doing so in a much less interesting way. However [4]Maria Popova’s article has persuaded me to explore his autobiographical writings. He was an interesting guy but also a frustrated one, with it not taking too much interpretation to see how the 6 Rules might be connected to the difficulties he describes here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4t5h-93bOY
#t=0


Richard Dawkins, Twitter and the dangers of thinking aloud Edit (2014-04-18 08:00)

There’s a great Brendan O’Neill post on Telegraph blogs* in which he reflects on the self-destruction of Richard Dawkins** online and its roots in the nature of Twitter as a medium. He’s probably correct that, with the exception of a cadre of ‘skeptic’ true believers, Dawkins has through his ill considered anti-religious tweets effectively destroyed a reputation he’d spent a lifetime building. What interests me about O’Neill’s argument is the claim that “we are seeing how Dawkins’s mind works prior to his exercise of thought and self-editing, and it isn’t pretty”. Again, he’s probably correct. His conviction that this is a negative trend, illustrated by the particular case of Dawkins, rests on a set of claims about intellectual expression in public life:

Twitter by its very nature invites its users to express unedited thoughts which in earlier eras would have lingered at the back of our minds or been spoken only to small groups of people, perhaps over a pint. In the past, there was a clearer distinction between private man and public man, between what we thought and what we said, between the inner workings of our brains and the public utterances that later fell from our mouths.

Today, that divide has been muddied almost into oblivion, so that now it is perfectly normal to
see people tweet their instant, unformulated feelings about an event, a person, a religion, or whatever. Twitter isn’t single-handedly responsible for the detonation of the dividing line between private thought and public speech, of course, but it is the technological tool that has most explicitly moulded itself around the corrosion of the private/public split, inviting us, cajoling us in fact, to instantly share our half-baked thoughts on just about everything.

The end result is that even someone like Dawkins can now be better known for his late-night blabbing than for his intellectual works. I’m sure that to young people in particular, who don’t remember that time when Dawkins was taken seriously and who get the vast majority of their info via the Twittersphere, Dawkins is now just “that bloke what says weird stuff on Twitter”.

Dawkins’s fate – his self-demotion from serious author to barking tweeter – should be a lesson to everyone: beware Twitter, for it is the technological facilitator of the most backward cultural trend of our age – the Oprahite urge to spill, sputter and speak every thought, idea and feeling that pops into our heads.


He sees this as the apotheosis of a longer term trend in which the valorisation of ‘authenticity’ leads us “to give voice to our every feeling”. The real problem for intellectual life comes because this trend deprives us of “the space in which we once worked out what we really think about other people and world events, and instead encourages us to express our instant feelings about them”. So this isn’t the real Dawkins we see, as opposed to a previously false Dawkins, rather it is an unedited rather than edited encounter with the man.

I never thought I’d find a Brendan O’Neill article so thought provoking but this is a really provocative framing of a question that fascinates me. I’m convinced that iteration is an important aspect of the creative process: clarifying what it is you’re trying to say by recurrently attempting to articulate it. In other words, the space in which we ‘work out what we really think’ can be as dialogical as it is monological. But I think he’s certainly correct that Twitter encourages us to think aloud (this certainly fits with my experience) and that dangers are attached to this. Internal conversation is not a uniform thing, instead varying between people and across times and contexts. I don’t think communications technology can initiate these changes but I think it can (and clearly does) tendentially nudge them in certain directions. What makes this so complex though is that effects are not going to be uniform because mental life is not uniform – the properties and powers of Twitter (or an equivalent) are not the only variable in play here, with existing tendencies towards certain forms of intra-action shaping the inter-active uses people make of social platforms like this.

So I guess what I’m saying is that Twitter probably does inculcate a tendency towards thinking aloud, simply because it so radically minimises the constraints on externalising a thought. But leaving aside compulsive use (which is not a minor issue by any means but a distinct one) it doesn’t create the impulse to share, determine the content of the thought* or condition its likely reception in anything more than the most formal sense (i.e. the kinds of people one is connected to, the channel constraints involved in their responses etc). In other words: the problem here is not twitter and thinking aloud, it’s Dawkins himself and the culture within which these ‘pre-edited’ views become plausible and coherent.

Writing this sentence disturbs me on at least two levels.

*What does it say about you if even Brendan O’Neill thinks you’re obnoxious?
**Though it obviously may provoke it. Twitter can be a banal space but it can also be an intensely thought-provoking one.**


Record of the Week (Week of 14 April 2014) « STS Turntable (2014-04-20 01:37:49)

[...] The Sociological Imagination – Richard Dawkins, Twitter and the dangers of thinking aloud Edit [...]  

Laura (2014-05-12 23:00:53)

Yes I think there is perhaps too much technological determinism in his argument. At the risk of oversimplifying, “think before you speak” applies, regardless of the medum. Oh yeah. And I can’t wait for the opportunity to use the words "emotional incontinence" in a conversation! :-D

"Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind": Jack Kerouac, creativity and academic writing (2014-04-19 08:00)

I just came across this wonderful list by Jack Kerouac, *Belief and Technique for Modern Prose*, in the Beats anthology I’m slowly making my way through:

1. Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy
2. Submissive to everything, open, listening
3. Try never get drunk outside yr own house
4. Be in love with yr life
5. Something that you feel will find its own form
6. Be crazy dumb saint of the mind
7. Blow as deep as you want to blow
8. Write what you want bottomless from bottom of the mind
9. The unspeakable visions of the individual
10. No time for poetry but exactly what is
11. Visionary tics shivering in the chest
12. In tranced fixation dreaming upon object before you
13. Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition
14. Like Proust be an old teahead of time
15. Telling the true story of the world in interior monolog
16. The jewel center of interest is the eye within the eye
17. Write in recollection and amazement for yourself
18. Work from pithy middle eye out, swimming in language sea
19. Accept loss forever
20. Believe in the holy contour of life
21. Struggle to sketch the flow that already exists intact in mind
22. Don’t think of words when you stop but to see picture better
23. Keep track of every day the date emblazoned in yr morning
24. No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge
25. Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it
26. Bookmovie is the movie in words, the visual American form
27. In praise of Character in the Bleak inhuman Loneliness
28. Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better
29. You’re a Genius all the time
30. Writer-Director of Earthly movies Sponsored & Angeled in Heaven

There’s a few points in here which really speak to the argument I’m developing for an upcoming paper about sociological writing, blogging and attentiveness. I’m not sure how, if at all, I could include them in the paper — something which actually neatly illustrates the broader point I’m trying to make in it. I’m having to abstract away from what I’m trying to express, as well as the terms in which I feel moved to express it, for the paper in a way which I’d never have to do on a blog.

But assuming that the form of the paper serves a purpose (it clearly does) and is not going away any time soon (it clearly isn’t) then the personal question becomes how to preserve the creative impulse from corrosion by the endless, sometimes imperceptible, acts of censorship and detachment which ‘academic writing’ unavoidably entails. I’m arguing in the paper that blogging can be an integral part of this, as part of a practice of cultivating attentiveness, though there’s no guarantee it will be so for any one person or for ‘academic blogging’ as a broader trend.

On Improvisation (2014-04-19 17:15)

'So what would an improvisation-friendly academia look like? Certainly standards of public performance would shift. We would become more tolerant of people who speak crudely without notes, if they can improve as they take questions from the audience. But we would equally become less tolerant of people who refuse to take questions simply because they stray from their carefully prepared presentation. Instead of ‘sloppy/rigorous’, we would apply the binary ‘expansive/limited’ to describe the respective intellects of these people.’ Thus proclaims sociology’s Icarus.

How “would” all the things that [1]Steve Fuller says “would” happen actually come to pass? What “would” stop the loosening required for improvisation becoming – or, in some cases, remaining – a low-quality free-for-all?

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We need to pin down the reality of this excellent sounding “more improvisation” ideal, less for fear our wings will melt but more because we might never leave the ground. Even worse, we could end up thinking we’ve taken off while all the time we’re just running around with our arms out shouting “zooooom”.

What kind of education would encourage high-quality improvisation? Perhaps we can draw some comparisons with music. What gets derided as (ahem) ‘instrumentalist planning’ in our context is called ‘composition’ in music. Classical music honours composers more than any other single individual in its production and finds little room for improvisation. It would be a perverse critic who claimed that Wagner’s Ring Cycle is too fully orchestrated. There is still room for creativity from musicians because the same piece of music can be played in different ways. Radio 3’s CD Review - Building a Library is a wonderful testament to this. The way these musicians innovate is by difficult, repetitive practice based on a mastery of the repertoire first and the more progressive reaches second, but even this is honed and (excuse me) fine-tuned. And yet, perhaps this is too conservative a comparison for some tastes, and it doesn’t tell us much about improvisation.

However, when we turn to jazz and folk, two genres that value improvising musicians very highly, we find a similar reliance on familiarity with the standards and the repetitive honing of skills. When they improvise (well), it’s the cream off the top of an astonishing body of received knowledge. They can cope with the lack of regimentation because they are so well practiced and, as Wittgenstein said, ‘know how to go on’. (Despite what [2]Bruno Latour says, Wittgenstein was the most important twentieth century philosopher – certainly whose name began with a ‘W’.) Freedom, to put it differently, is earned, because otherwise it really would just be bullshit. I think it was either Dizzy Gillespie or Charlie Parker who said you get your own style by following others who impress you and only emerging as your own butterfly later – but you’ve got to be good. The lesson from the folk world, of course, might simply be more real ale in seminars, but even that needs to ferment.

There’s a massive difference between my early cow-horn-esque efforts on the saxophone – complete bullshit – and John Ogden’s avant garde piano pieces, which would be "bullshit" to someone whose sensibilities couldn’t stretch beyond Bach. If we want improv in the academy we might in fact need a pretty conservative educational structure for students and a continuing requirement on academics to know and teach our own classical repertoire. And we might do well to remember that it’s not the only form of creativity. Think composition. Making stuff up can’t be the general rule. The difference between me and Ogden or Parker is that they knew what they were doing musically and I didn’t. We in the academy too need to learn our scales.

Hastily flung together by Dan Fairbrother

Dan Fairbrother is a PhD student in Sociology at Warwick University. He is writing a thesis in nineteenth-century intellectual history.


Western art music’s notation-only focus is an anomaly, an aberration, when viewed in the perspective of both the history of Western music and of the rest of the world. Music was aural and improvised in both performance and pedagogy until the Middle Ages when notation came into use. Musicians continued to be comfortable improvising and embellishing compositions for another thousand years until the giant orchestras of the Romantic era plus the rise of the conservatory and the method book killed improvisation (except for church organists and jazz musicians) so that by the 20th century, not only had classical
players lost the ability to do anything but read notes, they were also ignorant that it had ever been any other way. Creative music is the other half of comprehensive musicianship. One half is the Literate Side, where the only value is what is has been notated by a distant expert (= composer). The other half is the Aural side, where the player has a unique voice and is able to "think in music" - understand what others are saying in music, make an instant decision about how to contribute, and join in. Just like a conversation. Improvisation is unpredictable, like conversations. But in the same way, you can get into some very interesting stuff. If you only read aloud something that someone else has written for you, it is entirely predictable and "clean." But if that is the only model, you are giving up the possibility of enjoying the fun and benefits of thinking for yourself and creating something new with others. You can’t improvise in something you don’t know anything about (try auctioneering in Mandarin); but you can improvise at any level, i.e. make choices that are comfortable and easy. You don’t invent words or say words that you can’t pronounce when you converse. If you are improvising, you can do the same. One thing that keeps classical musicians from trying it (aside from receiving no encouragement or training in it, ever) is the usual definition of improv = jazz = bebop. This is one kind of improvise, one with a very steep learning curve that is going to exclude almost everyone. But there are many ways to improvise. Auctioneer style talk is not the only way to talk. You can improvise a dirge, a fanfare, a lullaby, a children’s song, and so on. There are always rules, even if you haven’t discussed them before you started playing. Improvisation teaches us to really listen, to understand what’s going on, rather than just parrot, or recite by rote. Improvisation is scary to some because it is unpredictable, but in fact it is no more so than a conversation. Mistakes - the terror and stressors of classical players - are now opportunities to discover things that you would have never thought of otherwise, a chance to make lemonade from lemons. Improv is like life itself. We don’t have to give up the literate side of music. But music life is vastly richer, more rewarding, and just plain fun if you get in on the aural/creative side as well. Classical training has silenced generations of voices for the past 150 years. It’s time to get back to the long-time traditions of the past and start releasing those voices, hearing what they have to say. Classical music is strangling on perfection and museum pieces. It’s time for everyone to have a voice again.

I can’t quite make out the subtext of your thoughts about music, Jeffrey. I took my little piece to be quite sympathetic with Steve Fuller’s aspiration for more improvisation in the academy. I suspect both Fuller and I would like to encourage high quality academic work in the slightly elitist way you deride in music. Fuller’s thought appears to be that we have to accept a certain amount of bullshit in which the rose we really want (to adopt a well worn image) will grow. But he accepts that it is bullshit and not valuable in the same way as a rose. My response (which I admit remained in the subtext) was that even though the way Fuller makes his suggestions makes it all sound quite radical, the practical ways in which we might encourage good improvisation might in fact be somewhat more conservative. So, despite the mildly satirical way in which I wrote the piece, my point was more that Fuller’s end-goal (which in a more modest way I would claim to share) might imply something slightly different in practice to what he suggests. Indeed (and here I speculate), perhaps Fuller underestimates the extent to which his own ability to do the things he talks about so well is based on his having had the benefit of a thorough and traditional academic education. It’s easy - perhaps deceptively easy - when you know how. Your point though, Jeffrey, seems to be that we’re both wrong, and that we should accept some of what gets called “bullshit” as valuable in itself, like lullabies. But too much in the academy is already apt to send one to sleep.

Hi. Interesting thoughts. I have just been to the BSA conference so what you are discussing was very relevant. Plenaries were all written out but only Steve Fuller could deliver his ideas coherently without sounding as though he was reading from a book. The open forum celebrating Stuart Hall’s contribution to sociological thinking was the neerest any session came to improvisation. Contributors spoke without notes and from the heart. I learned a lot about Sociological practice. Anyone familiar with Hall or his work could have contributed to the discussion. The presentations by PhD students were pretty pointless and I wonder what this effort is all about. Maximising delegates and fees for the BSA? None could handle questions which went beyond their ‘area’ and conveners would jump in if they thought questions were too demanding. Sorry to say it but PhDs seem to be getting very narrow and unambitious. Improvisation comes with NOT reading written notes and having prompts for oral delivery. Needs to start with lecturing and student seminar work.
Personally I couldn’t agree more. I had an interesting debate with Kirsty Liddiard (who writes sometimes for SI) about this though, who pointed out to me that there’s a gendered dimension to this and that it might be equally problematic to cultivate an “expectation” of improvisation. That said, I get frustrated that I sometimes feel as if I’m being rude if I don’t use powerpoint (as if I didn’t care enough to prepare properly?) - it’s a feeling that mystifies me, which I’m sure does at least in part stem from something ‘out there’ in academic culture, as opposed to me just being neurotic.

CfP: What are seminars for? What are conferences for? Towards DIY academic events (2014-04-20 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common?
If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.


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Trying to “evade the academic literature” (2014-04-21 08:00)

There’s a wonderful discussion in the midst of [1]this review essay of Bernard Williams's collected essays, which incidentally sound fantastic, in which the author defends Williams against accusations of lazy scholarship. I’ve written about this issue in the past (particularly [2]here and [3]here) and it’s one which continues to concern me. The author of the essay brings out much more clearly than I have been able to what I see as the crux of this problem: the prohibition on ‘evading the literature’ has a disciplinary function, drawing scholarly endeavour into an over-production of scholarly work that has structural origins and, through doing so, fuelling the over-production which is the underlying problem. This isn't an argument in favour of ‘evading the literature’ but it as an argument against such a prohibition being axiomatic. The “Sisyphean task of attempting to stay up to date” often works to squeeze out time for thinking about the things that most interest us.

Seeing the range of Williams's knowledge is important because it casts into new light a refrain often heard about his academic philosophical writing: that it is characterised by a fundamental laziness regarding scholarship, evidenced by the fact Williams only ever cited his friends and his students.

The accusation is usually meant as one of sloppiness, of Williams’s unwillingness to supplement his dazzling intellect with the hard work of scholarly endeavour, trusting that he could evade the academic literature by simply being quicker than his peers. Perhaps this is true, but these essays suggest a better line of explanation. We can now see that Williams was not lazy: he spent an immense amount of time reading and thinking, and knew much beyond his own academic arguments. What he chose to do was spend time thinking about things that most interested him, rather than engaging in the Sisyphean task of attempting to stay up to date with the vast and ever-expanding sea of contemporary scholarship, which tirelessly throws out publication after publication in every conceivable niche of enquiry. It is undeniable that the vast majority of present scholarly output in philosophy and attendant disciplines is of a poor standard: it is either unoriginal, original at the expense of being preposterous and tiresomely pointless or trivial, or else diligent and robust but utterly devoid of interest to anybody other than those academics who have made a career out of grinding out points and counterpoints within debates that only exist because of the very professionalization of intellectual pursuits of which their activity is a function. Williams chose to bypass all of this and get on with being original and interesting. It is not at all clear that he was making a mistake.

The present government’s Kafkaesque “Research Excellence Framework” demands that academics churn out publications, regardless of whether they have anything to say. More generally, there has been a pronounced cultural shift in professionalized academia away from teaching and towards measurable 'outputs', encouraging academics to translate whatever modest or untenable ideas they have into high 'impact’ publications. Academia is in danger of ending up moribund via a prolonged case of morbid
obesity. Williams’s advice was the exact opposite of all of this: disciplines like philosophy should not encourage, or give incentives for, publishing, unless what one writes is likely to be very good indeed; likely to be both genuinely interesting and original. This was not (as it is often mistakenly taken to be) a matter of snobbery on Williams’s behalf. It was a function of a well thought-out view regarding what philosophy is, one that comes out strongly in the later essays collected in Essays and Reviews. In essence, for Williams, philosophy is not like science. In science, the big breakthroughs come from brilliant thinkers, but the rest of the time everybody else can usefully get on with collecting data and increasing the sum of human knowledge. Philosophy is not like that: in philosophy, you are not only not adding data if you are making bad, or unoriginal, or stupid, or pointlessly banal and repetitive arguments, you are getting in the way of those who are trying to make sense of our world, and who might be able to make more sense of it than those who have tried before. If this is elitism, it is justified by the seriousness with which Williams wanted to make more sense of our world than has hitherto been managed; the brute truth is that most practitioners of contemporary academic philosophy just do not help in that task. (There is a separate question as to whether one needs to be a highly talented and original thinker in order to teach at a university. That in turn raises questions about what the role, purpose, and corresponding organizational structure of the modern university should be—questions to which it does not seem that anybody at present has particularly good answers, least of all the present government.)


Ann Oakley: women, childbirth and the invention of gender (2014-04-22 08:00)

[1]Ann Oakley’s work was the first serious academic study of housework (The sociology of housework, 1974; Housewife, 1974, and Woman’s Work: The Housewife, Past and Present, 1976). Previously we had posted an interview from 2013 in which she spoke of her radical feminist research about women who work at home and shared insights about qualitative research methods - very useful if you are planning to do qualitative interviews for the first time. Sadly, the video no longer exists on YouTube. So instead, here are two other interviews:

On women’s experience of childbirth:
and on the Invention of Gender: Social Facts and Imagined Worlds:
Review of the Critical Pedagogy Reader (2014-04-23 08:00)

Critical Pedagogy as an educational philosophy refers to education that advocates the liberation of oppressed communities through developing a critical consciousness among teachers and students so that they are able to critically interrogate the inter-relationships between culture, economics, ideology and power. Critical Pedagogy concerns transforming theoretical and practical ways of doing education in order to work towards eliminating social inequalities and social injustices. Many of you may have heard of Paulo Freire, one of the famous proponents of critical pedagogy; the book contains essential readings by influential advocates of critical pedagogy like Freire, as well as bell hooks, Gloria Ladson-Billings and Henry Giroux.

The second edition of the Critical Pedagogy Reader provides an updated in-depth and definitive approach to highlighting key issues in promoting educational practice that is critical of hegemonic mainstream policies, and thus is very useful for researchers of social sciences, in particular educational research, as well as beginning and experienced teachers who wish to teach their students to critique dominant assumptions that affect their schooling and everyday life. The essays chosen by the editors highlight the significance of critique, critical interrogation and critical consciousness through discussion of key intersectional issues of identity such as social class, gender and race, and the impact upon the theory and practice of educationalists. There is also a much needed discussion of disability as a social construct, just like race and gender. Moreover we gain knowledge of the significance of dialogue in critical pedagogy, dialogue as critical consciousness and dialogue as collaborative form of communication.

The comprehensive introductory section usefully provides a socio-historical outline of how critical pedagogical thought emerged as well as useful detailed definitions of key terminology in the field of critical pedagogy: we learn about the necessity of understanding how hegemony works to keep some in society comfortable in their positions of power and privilege, as well as the interconnected relationship between hegemony, discourse and ideology. Definitions of concepts that need to be urgently deconstructed are provided for the reader, for example class and culture and its variant forms.

As well as referring to race, gender, sexuality and social class, the book provides us with an understanding of the notion of critical literacy which is one of the pillars of critical pedagogy required for its successful exploration. We learn about how language and literature can be used to engage students to become critical readers and writers.
There is also a section on teacher training that outlines the crucial site of teacher education in empowering teachers to be critical of dominant social structures. Towards the end of the book, we learn about critical pedagogy beyond the classroom motivating teachers and students to interrogate other public institutions, for example the mainstream media. Further the essay on Ecopedagogy gives insight into the challenges and solutions of environmental literacy and ecocitizenship, encouraging us to apply concepts of critical pedagogy to diverse areas that are increasingly crucial to the future of our world.

Throughout the book the theme of empowerment is evident: we are given insight into how to empower our students through the curriculum, classroom practices and beyond the confines of the classroom environment in order for them to become critical citizens. We are able to read about the essays of educationalists who have illustrated personal critical pedagogy visions and actions through theoretical reflections of practical endeavours. The Critical Pedagogy Reader would be an authoritative, accessible and beneficial read for anyone who wishes to learn more about the key concepts, applications and theories of critical pedagogy without being overwhelmed because all the necessary terminology is explained thoroughly and clearly. Researchers of Education and trainee teachers will be able to gain perspectives from a wide range of authentic voices in the area of critical pedagogy.

The strengths of the book are that the essays are scholarly and contemporary, but the history of critical pedagogy is evident in the background. The book is a massive contribution to the field of critical pedagogy, for as well as reminding us of classic writings of Paulo Freire and bell hooks, it succeeds in bringing new debates and definitions to the forefront of our minds. The book contains questions for reflection and dialogue that you can ponder over yourself or use with your students or colleagues. The editors have structured the book neatly and thematically making it easy for the reader to navigate through a well-organised text. Each section is preceded by a summary of the main essays allowing for an overview of the key arguments proposed throughout each of the sections, also each section is concluded with a helpful list of recommended readings for future study providing more research sources for anyone wishing to delve further into critical pedagogy theory and practice.

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1. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Critical_Pedagogy_Reader.html?id=8wR9PgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y
2. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Critical_Pedagogy_Reader.html?id=8wR9PgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

Charles Tilly on Causal Mechanisms (2014-04-24 08:00)

An interesting interview by Daniel Little as part of his [1]Understanding Society project:
The continually shrinking conference presentation (2014-04-24 09:35)

This blog recently featured a [1]call for papers that reflect on ‘forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy’. I thought that this was a timely request, which resonates with different concerns we can identify around how some academic events are run. For many researchers the costs of some well-established conferences are prohibitive. We are working at a time when sociologists are reflecting on mainstream ways of doing sociology and suggesting alternatives, for example, ‘[2]Punk sociology’, or ‘[3]live methods’. It seems appropriate that part of this reflection on the disciplinary project is also a questioning of how we arrange conversations between researchers, how we communicate with each other, and how we seek to engage wider publics. I’ve been wondering if there is a wider sense of dissatisfaction with the standard model of workshops and conferences, the 20 minute presentation, often accompanied by a power point presentation, followed by five or 10 minutes for questions and discussion. I have seen events advertised where this seems to be the case, in one instance participants were asked not to use power point, in another power point and similar ‘tools’ were not permitted.

I recently received a decision on an abstract for a conference paper that has prompted me to think about some of these issues. I submitted an abstract for a paper that would be 20 minutes long, followed by questions. As is common with these kinds of events, the organisers have received far more abstracts than could fit into the

1. http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/
2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/PP900JiYFr8?list=PLE7580FE92113B5E6
programme. I have been asked to give my paper as a PechaKucha presentation where 20 slides auto-run for 20 seconds each, meaning each talk is six minutes, 40 seconds long. So, how can we understand this move away from the standard format, to this shorter, more visual, set-up? From the perspective of the organisers it might be a pragmatic move, a way to allow more presenters to talk about their work. There might be a profit motive at play here, researchers are probably more likely to attend an event if they are presenting, rather than making up the audience, and might be more able to access university research funds for this. Thinking instrumentally, a PechaKucha presentation and a standard one might end up looking very similar on a CV, so perhaps organisers don’t think that shortened papers will be a problem for the speakers.

I think there is also something going on here about the role of technology in academic events. For some conference organisers, it seems that technology is perceived as having damaged good communication between researchers - so, we get the ban on power point, or similar formats. For the event I hoped to present at the increased use of technology seems to be a kind of solution, though beyond the issue of oversupply of papers, it is not clear what the problem is. On the PechaKucha website we learn that the format was devised by two architects and is a response to the problem of architects talking too much when given a microphone. PechaKucha presentations appear to be designed for creative people to showcase their work in informal, sociable, events. On other websites these kinds of presentations are described as upbeat, engaging, and where the audience is on the side of presenter. There might be some problems with translating this format to academic events - not all topics are suitable for an 'upbeat' style, if the audience and presenter are all caught up in ensuring the format succeeds, does this become more important than the ideas being discussed? Do these kind of 'hacks' to the standard model of conference presentation put more emphasis (and pressure?) on the researcher to be a performer? Is this undesirable? And, what can you say in six minutes, 40 seconds - does this help researchers focus on their key argument, or is only a superficial exploration of a topic possible in this time? My guess would be that the latter is usually the result.

I would like to hear from researchers who have used alternative formats at events - has this been a positive move? Is there a widespread sense that the standard model of conference sessions no longer fits into the wider culture of contemporary academic life? I think it is time to have some of these discussions. At conferences we often have a dual role, as both speakers, and as listeners. If we are going to rethink the role and format of academic events, we need to keep both of these in mind. I would like to think of conferences as spaces for thinking and discussing ideas. My concern is that if we start to think of presentations mainly as performances, the idea of the conference for a place for talking and listening might slip from view.

[Emma Head is Lecturer in Sociology at Keele University. She is co-convenor of the BSA Digital Sociology group and edits the Sociology and Criminology at Keele blog.]

6. http://socandcrimatkeele.blogspot.co.uk/
discussed; we can’t assume this is ‘only’ of academic interest, or that no-one in the room will not have direct and perhaps very traumatic experience of FGM. [* in essence, an extension of this - http://hilaryburrag.com/2014/04/11/the-real-economics-of-fgm-its-much-more-than-wages - to examine the idea that FGM in western societies actually creates for some who experience it the very ‘underclass’ status which in traditional societies it is claimed a woman with FGM-status will avoid.] Also, I wanted to judge reactions and responses as we went along so that I could see where any gaps in the attendees’ knowledge might be (there were a few), and because I’d hoped for (and received) several observations which a more slick techno-style of presentation would have prevented. In other words, I wanted to take the opportunity to actually talk with, not just to, sociological colleagues during my precious 20 minutes. Imposing any across-the-board techno format on the presentation would have been exceedingly counter-productive. In fact, I don’t think I would have bothered to submit... but doing it in my own preferred fashion left me very pleased that I’d been able to present. So I guess some flexibility in presentational mode can be critical for some of us who want to share our work - and also for those who come to join the debate. Context is (nearly) all, in these things.

**PhD Workshop: What’s the point of social ontology? (2014-04-24 14:52)**

What’s the Point of Social Ontology?  
PhD Workshop at the University of Warwick  
18th June 2014, 10am – 5:30pm

Ontology can often prove a contested and confusing issue within social research. Everyone has an ontology, explicit or otherwise, but the process of drawing this out and thinking through its implications for research can often be a confusing part of the PhD process. This participatory workshop explores the practical significance of ontological questions for social research, inviting participants to reflect on their own research projects in a collaborative and supportive context. It aims to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse matter of social ontology, linking theory to practice in the context of their own research projects. The main focus throughout the day will be on how ontological questions are encountered in social research, the questions posed by such encounters and how engaging explicitly with social ontology can often help resolve such issues.

All participants will offer a brief (5 minute) presentation of their research project and the ontological questions which have been or are expected to be encountered within it. Those still early in the PhD process are welcome to substitute this for a discussion of their research interests and potential project. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on their own social ontology and how it pertains to their project. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day!

We also invite two more substantial presentations (10 mins) for the first afternoon session, reflecting on your engagement with ontological questions in your own project in order to help begin a practical engagement which encompasses the entire group. If you would be interested in leading the discussion in this way then please make this known when registering.

To register please contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your research and your interest in social ontology (500 words or less) by May 15th. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available, please ask for more details.

[1]www.socialontology.eu

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1. [www.socialontology.eu](http://www.socialontology.eu)
CfP: Not Your Typical Call for Papers (2014-04-25 08:00)

With the 2014 Volume, the Berkeley Journal of Sociology will focus its efforts on writing a “history of the present.” The journal will no longer publish academic research articles. Instead, we seek compelling essays, insightful commentaries, critical analyses, and topical symposiums on the most pressing political and cultural issues of the day. Our aim is to provide critical perspectives from the social sciences on public debates and current events with an orientation toward social and political engagement. We seek to transform our longstanding graduate-run academic journal into a print and online magazine sourced by a global graduate community with wider relevance. The BJS is re-imagining the purpose of a publication that emerges from within the academy, but which does not take the discipline of professional sociology as its aim. We seek new audiences across new platforms to firmly root sociological knowledge within society, for society.

We believe there is a need for creative translation and wider circulation of the knowledge we are producing as graduate students of the social sciences on politics and culture today. We seek to broaden the interpretive range, imaginative scope, and prospective application of our research to ongoing political struggles, emerging cultural trends, and possibilities of alternative futures. We are not content to be relegated to the sidelines. The point, after all, is to change the world. The task before us is to arm our critiques with power. This is a call to join a proper conspiracy whose aim is not only to critique, but to intervene; not only to intervene, but also to shift the terrain beyond the internal debates of the academic field.

The BJS seeks to open up a space to re-compose social research into a range of written forms, unobstructed by technical jargon and unconstrained by formalistic rigidity. Through its online-first approach the journal seeks to redistribute its material across sources and publications, in the alternative and popular press. Toward that end, BJS is accepting the following kinds of submissions on topical issues or debates:

- research essays: open to interpretation.
- commentary: social scientific assessments of events, journalistic reportage and public discourse; critiques of recent reports by state agencies, think-tanks, NGOs, foundations, polling agencies, etc.
- conversations: interviews with traditional or organic intellectuals on topical subjects and debates.
- field memos: ethnographic dispatches from graduate researchers; elaborations of experiences in the field as they relate to contemporary social struggles, crises, cultural or political debates.
- photo essays: from a site of research; sociological critiques of art or visual culture.
- book reviews (joint or solo): social scientific assessments of recently released trade books; reviews of academic books relating to contemporary events or debates.
- debates: The journal will be running video and transcripts from UC Berkeley's Public Sociology Initiative. We invite similar debates or symposia on contemporary politics and culture, in the flesh or virtual.
Submissions are due by June 1st and may be sent as email attachments to submissions@berkeleyjournal.org and will be subject to a review among Berkeley graduate students in the social sciences. We also invite proposals for forums comprised of a number of contributions around a single topic. Proposals for forums should include a brief description of the project and information about the authors, including contact info, and should be submitted by April 1st to submissions@berkeleyjournal.org. All journal content will be published under a CC-BY-NC-ND license.

The Berkeley Journal of Sociology is a graduate student-run journal that has been in publication since 1955. Archived articles can be found on JSTOR.

The Centre for Social Ontology (CSO) was established in 2011 at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne. Now based in the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, its main focus is the Morphogenetic Project.

- The Morphogenetic Project produces an annual volume as part of the Social Morphogenesis series.
- The first two volumes in this series are Social Morphogenesis and Late Modernity: Trajectories Towards Morphogenic Society.
- Our first PhD workshop will take place in June 2014.
- Our monthly seminar series is due to begin in October 2014.
- Further activities are planned for next academic year.

To join our mailing list, please contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk. The CSO website will be regularly updated with information about our activities: www.socialontology.eu
Reflections on My British Sociological Association Keynote (2014-04-26 01:41)

8 September 2014: [1]My keynote address is now on-line

I delivered the first keynote of the British Sociological Association annual meeting this year. I was especially honoured to learn that I was a popular choice, because what I had to say was designed to get people to think about the nature of the collective they form by virtue of being 'sociologists'. I improvised the keynote, so what follows are my reflections based on what I did say but also the response of people both at the event and on twitter. The keynote itself should be posted on-line by the BSA in the near future.

As someone who comes to sociology with 'professional' credentials (aka PhD) from history and philosophy of science, not sociology, I actually made a conscious choice to become a sociologist when I moved from the US to UK twenty years ago. Before that time I was seen as a funky philosopher promoting [2]'social epistemology'. Frankly, I don't believe that much about me has changed (except looking older), but what has changed is the academic environment in which I have been practicing my funkiness. I think that moving to the UK was exactly the right decision at the time, but for reasons that raise some important challenges to an organization that calls itself the 'British Sociological Association'.

My keynote was framed around the conceit of the great science fiction writer HG Wells' candidacy for the first UK chair in sociology, at the London School of Economics in the first decade of the 20th century. Wells clearly saw sociology as primarily a normative discipline, taking his cue from Comte and Spencer as 19th century benchmarks for what 'sociology' might become. To be sure, these two figures differed radically from each other – and from Wells – in terms of their projected utopias. Nevertheless, both saw ‘sociology’ as mobilising our best scientific knowledge to enable humanity to be all it can. Although Wells did not say this when making [3]his pitch for the chair in 1905, his critical eye on Marxism throughout his career shows that [4]he would have included Marx as a fellow traveller. (By the way, when exactly did Marx become a 'sociologist' – the 1960s, perhaps?)

Today's sociologists should ponder what it might mean to take that Wellsian ambition seriously. Sociologists are nowadays inclined – at least rhetorically – to allow the inevitable uncertainty of their findings to slide into a kind of learned helplessness, so that they sometimes casually insult the intelligence of non-sociologists (helpfully not in the room) by ending a talk with: 'It's really all very complex and I'm glad it's not me who has to sort out this mess… (Next contract, please!)' And, courtesy of John Law, [5]'mess' has become a badge of methodological honour in some precincts of this field. Yet non-sociologists manage complexity perfectly well all the time, indeed, often in watered-down sociological terms – perhaps redeeming the media's educative function. So what's the value-added of sociologists stressing the 'complexity' of things, unless they highlight certain factors in the complexity as being salient for some larger prospect that may have escaped the notice of the non-sociologists but that nevertheless may be of interest to them?
In this respect, ‘complexity’ poses a very direct challenge to sociology. If sociology is a proper ‘profession’, then it needs to stand for something beyond a certain sense of ‘technical reliability’, be it based on qualitative or quantitative methods. I have no doubt that artificially intelligent machines will soon be able to perform a very sophisticated form of social research that will represent all the available complexity within prescribed parameters. That’s because the ‘prescribed parameters’ will have been set by someone other than the artificial researcher. When I said that ‘anyone can do social research without being a sociologist’, that’s exactly what I meant. Social research without sociology is precisely what an artificial researcher will eventually be programmed to do.

Now some social researchers will object at this point, saying that they have a special kind of knowledge that no machine could have because they are themselves embedded in the target society, if not belonging to it normally. I see this point clearly. But in that case, what is the virtue of amplifying complexity without resolution? Yes, you’re one of ‘them’, in some sense. But doesn’t that increase your responsibility to say something a bit more definitive, however contestable, than what your non-academic fellows could say? If not, then you would seem to have provided grounds for eliminating publicly funded higher education.

I realize that we all need to publish to earn our keep, but to retain professional standards as sociologists in this political economy, we should require that people who claim the title of ‘sociologist’ to present findings that include a judgement about the matter at hand, where the researcher’s own voice is one of clarity, not the usual dithering, ambivalence, blah, blah. Of course, any judgements pretending to be definitive will be contested and eventually be shown fallible. But the only way that sociology can contribute to social progress is by the public airing of such conflicts, with the onlookers deciding as they will about what to make of it all.

The above helps to explain an assumption I made in my talk that clearly riled some in the audience: The more that ‘social researchers’ offload personal responsibility for what they reveal about their informants to their clients, the more they diminish their own humanity – and in that respect betray the Wellsian imperative. If there is one crime against ‘humanity’ that can be held against actor-network theory is the idea that information overload – aka ‘plurality of actants’ – absolves you of moral responsibility for what you’re talking about. On the contrary, all it does is to ease your replacement by a machine. Excellently done social research that gives clients all they need to know in order to do whatever they want does not require training in sociology – and in the long term may not even require membership in Homo sapiens.

I am not sure that my argument is obvious or strange (or wrong!), but I think it is what an organization that calls itself the ‘British Sociological Association’ needs to hear now. Since all ‘sociologists’ continue to genuflect to Max Weber, let me end by offering an interpretation of his very strong distinction between ‘science’ and ‘politics’ as vocations. Weber would be the first to object to my hypothetical researcher who gamely presents the ‘mess’ of social reality in the spirit of advertising their own virtuosity to future funders. Weber took seriously that science and politics are two autonomous professions, which means that each has its own ends, which are conditioned by their respective modus operandi.

Just as the politician needs to explain to his/her constituency why s/he chose to make a particular decision, the scientist needs to do something similar, but to the politician. However, the additional burden placed on the scientist is that s/he must represent fairly alternative point of views because s/he is not in a position of making the ultimate policy decision. In other words, what we might regard as the ‘scrupulousness’ of academic judgement simply reflects the relative lack of power in the moment of decision. (In this respect, I see Carl Schmitt as picking up on Weber.) The bottom line is that a Weberian sociologist fully realizes that s/he does not take the ultimate policy decision. Nevertheless, as a matter of professional integrity, the Weberian takes an explicit stance based on the available research, but which is presented in a way that enables the politician to disagree.
You should also get Sara Delamont to write a piece - her plenary was excellent, very funny and some astute points about gender inequalities in relation to the H index, and naive, sloppy internal colonialism in sociology journals.

It sounded interesting on twitter! I’ve never had any contact with her though.

Well said, on all your points. I do think professional sociology needs to be shaken out of its insularity and conservatism (small ‘c’). E.g. how many core journals of sociology publish a reasonable number of articles by persons with non-sociology-political science, philosophy, communication, free lance, etc-affiliations? I suspect, but bibliometrics would have to confirm, very few. If indeed confirmed, shame!

CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-04-26 08:00)

The Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.

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Review of Punk Sociology (2014-04-28 08:00)

[1] I actually liked the ‘punk’ bit of this book less than I expected to. I’m a big fan of Nick Crossley’s work – though I disagree with him on a lot of things, engaging with it was really important for 2606
developing the theoretical perspective in my PhD. I’ve read a lot of what he’s done and the punk research is by some margin the weakest element within it. It’s not my area of expertise by any means but some of the historical claims about punk seemed quite jarring to me, with the approving references to Crossley’s work being symptomatic of this. I sort of see what Beer means when he says that “the original punk movement was so short-lived and so self-destructive” but given I’ve regularly been going to punk gigs of one sort or another for well over a decade, it’s a counter-intuitive claim nonetheless. Obviously the crux here is the term ‘original’ but I think the extent of this sustained activity cannot be something marginal when discussing punk. It’s not my area of expertise by any means, but I suspect that sociologists of punk will find some of the cultural history here to be problematic.

However this doesn’t really matter. The book doesn’t purport to be a cultural history of any sort. It rather uses punk as a cultural resource to elaborate upon a sociological ethos in a time of institutional crisis. In this sense, it’s a wilfully provocative and undoubtedly thought-provoking contribution to a much broader tradition within sociological thought. There’s a pragmatic dimension to this which might attract some activist critique:

It is obvious that we are not going to reverse the apparent marketization and neoliberalization of higher education. Instead, we need to think about how we should respond. The best response, that is to say the best form of protection, is to shape a discipline that is attractive, lively, and exciting. A discipline that draws people in. This will ensure that sociology has a ready-made and substantial audience, and that it is able to attract those who will then go on to be the future of the discipline. It will also make it far more likely that value is seen to reside in the sociological project. This does not mean that we are ‘selling out’, it is not to go with the flow and to simply adopt the spirit of market-based competition into our lives. Rather it is to work towards a version of sociology that thrives under these conditions by offering an alternative voice and an engaging tone. Sociology will then thrive, because it will draw people into its debates, into its ideas, and into its findings, all of which are likely to provide alternative visions of the social world.

But I think this would be unfair. I think there’s a risk that such engagement could become normalising but the best way to avoid this is to be clear about the ethos underlying it: this is precisely what the book contributes. When we’re clear about what we’re trying to do, it becomes easier “to play along with the demands placed on us, but that at the same time we try to preserve a creative space”. What would make such a space ‘creative’ and how do we ‘preserve’ it? This is what the analysis of punk as a cultural form contributes:

It is about the drive of the individual to make a contribution and to sometimes look to subvert restrictive or oppressive social categories, norms, or conventions. This in turn leads punk to be open and eclectic. It is outward looking and is keen to respond, react against, or draw upon alternative cultural resources. The products of this background and approach are then often quite raw, stripped back, and fearless. A punk is not afraid of their own limitations and vulnerabilities. Nor do notions of legitimacy or authenticity inhibit them. Punk seeks to break down and transcend boundaries and obstacles and to erode the lines between the performer and the audience. Finally, we can see this form of communication operating in a terrain in which cultural expression is relatively unrestricted. The punk can then be bold and inventive in their work. Conventions do not hold them back, and the idea of playing it safe is discordant with its central motifs. The driving force here is a strong commitment to a pro-activism that is often expressed as the do-it-yourself or DIY ethic. The DIY ethic is an extension of the inventiveness of punk and affords an unbounded engagement with the cultural world. This leads punks to use the opportunities and materials that they encounter to express their creative forces. This is often highly opportunistic and is based upon the use of media and social networks in new and unpredictable ways. The punk finds a way to make things happen and finds a way to be unconventional in carving out pathways of expression and communication. The punk adapts to the terrain in which they are operating and refuses to be restricted by the limitations of access and funding. Punk is based on resourcefulness.
On this account, punk sociology openly engages with the sociological ideas present in other cultural forms. It is unconcerned with hierarchy or convention, construing institutional environments in terms of their capacity to constraint or enable prior projects, resourcefully navigating these environments rather than letting them dictate the sort of work that is deemed worthwhile. It is risk taking and provisional. It rejects technical virtuosity as an end in itself, instead tending towards a ‘stripped-back’ aesthetic that nonetheless remains open to a diversity of forms. It is open towards experimentation and untroubled by the failure of any one experiment. In short, it’s a wonderfully appropriate ethos for social media, which was predictably enough, my favourite part of the book:

One day the punk sociologist is writing a blog post, the next they are working on an audio podcast, the next they are creating posters, the next they are making short films, the next they are curating content. They gather, uncover, and generate insights through their sociologically sensitive trawling of the social world, using the things they find to illustrate and enliven sociological topics (using anything from art, to film, to advertising, to photography, to web visualizations, to flyers they get through their front door, to guidebooks – the options are limitless). Books and journal articles will still matter; they are still likely to be the bedrock of academic communication. But the punk sociologist looks to use these traditional forms of communication in unusual and maybe even subversive ways, and then looks to build on this work through other forms of communication and through other media. The debates on open-access publication, escaping the paywalls that limit communication, create new questions for academic publishing and communication, the punk sociologist is likely to be working around the edges of what is possible and exploring the reach of their means of communication anyway

I think Dave Beer is really onto something here, in so far as that an ‘ethos’ helps people navigate the communicative possibilities opening up to them. Where I think this is strongest is as a discussion of how sociologists could and should approach the communication of sociological ideas, something which has long been marginalised for reasons which would constitute a book in their own right. I think it’s weaker when it comes to the structural pressures inculcating a great need for team-work and collaboration – I can see how punk sociologists would collaborate on organising events or running websites. I find it harder to see what, if anything, the notion brings to the practical questions of working together in a sustained way. But this isn’t a critique as much as an awareness that the book asks more questions than it can answer given its length, something which speaks volumes about how genuinely provocative Beer has succeeded in making this short book. It’s almost pamphlet like in its intensity and brevity. It would clearly have been too short for a monograph but too long for a paper or chapter. The ‘pivot’ format fits well with the ethos advocated in the book itself. in this sense, the nature of the book itself resonates with the arguments about sociological writing contained within it:

The punk sociologist looks to communicate widely, with various audiences, and the work they produce is direct and incisive, whilst still being lively, nuanced, and layered. The stripped-back nature of the punk sociologist’s work means that there are few barriers to communication with audiences inside and outside of academia. Indeed, its instant form is likely to attract audiences. Different types of writings might be used and different forms of communication will enable this to occur. Sometimes these will be short and punchy, the equivalent of the single in music, on other occasions they will be album-length book works that are built out of collections of punchy chapters and phrases, they might even take the form of sociological gigs with lively talks and audio-visual stimulus. The punk sociologist does not need a list of possibilities because they will look to exploit the opportunities for communication that are available and will respond to these opportunities. They will find ways around the restrictions and limitations that are there, using the means and potentials that the remediation of everyday life might bring. The punk sociologist adapts their means of communication to suit the changing mediascape and materials with which they are faced.
This is very literally an attention-seeking vision for sociology. On this level, it will surely attract criticism from some quarters but the professional norms upon which such criticism are predicated have contributed to a growing marginality of sociological ideas within public life. I agree that “sociologists need to be bold, to be outspoken and daring, to take risks, and to, on occasion, be audacious” and don’t see any contradiction between this aim and the preservation of technical standards, though there may certainly sometimes be a tension. What the book reminded me of is how stultifying I find many of the conventions of academic writing and academic publishing. I don’t think ‘punk sociology’ offers a structural critique or structural solution, nor does it pretend to do so. But it does offer an appealing call for a cultural response to a set of cultural pathologies which have structural origins. The book strikes me as the start of a conversation rather than the conclusion of one:

A final note relating to this is that punk sociology should not be read as a need to simply speed up and be more responsive. In some cases this may be necessary, but we also need to protect long-term, careful, and meticulous work (such as editing, translation, longitudinal studies, reflective pieces of synthesis, retrospective books, historical and documentary studies, secondary analysis, contextual readings of conceptual ideas, reviewing, and the like). In fact, this type of work is more likely to be defended if we are to take on a more punk sensibility. This type of work is increasingly likely to be tantamount to an act of resistance or rebellion that goes against the grain of the systems of measurement of academic worth or value. Punk sociologists, by not playing it safe and by not being dominated by such systems, are likely to actually maintain the diversity of approaches in the discipline and to add new avenues and perspectives to supplement them.

Interestingly, I don’t think he defines this term in the book. I have a clear idea of what ‘ethos’ means but I wonder how varied interpretations of this term might be.

1. [http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/punk.jpeg](http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/punk.jpeg)

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What’s the Point of Social Ontology?
PhD Workshop at the University of Warwick
18th June 2014, 10am - 5:30pm

Ontology can often prove a contested and confusing issue within social research. Everyone has an ontology, explicit or otherwise, but the process of drawing this out and thinking through its implications for research can often be a confusing part of the PhD process. This participatory workshop explores the practical significance of ontological questions for social research, inviting participants to reflect on their own research projects in a collaborative and supportive context. It aims to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse matter of social ontology, linking theory to practice in the context of their own research projects. The main focus throughout the day will be on how ontological questions are encountered in social research, the questions posed by such encounters and how engaging explicitly with social ontology can often help resolve such issues.
All participants will offer a brief (5 minute) presentation of their research project and the ontological questions which have been or are expected to be encountered within it. Those still early in the PhD process are welcome to substitute this for a discussion of their research interests and potential project. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on their own social ontology and how it pertains to their project. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day!

We also invite two more substantial presentations (10 mins) for the first afternoon session, reflecting on your engagement with ontological questions in your own project in order to help begin a practical engagement which encompasses the entire group. If you would be interested in leading the discussion in this way then please make this known when registering.

To register please contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your research and your interest in social ontology (500 words or less) by May 15th. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available, please ask for more details.

[1]www.socialontology.eu

Sociological Writing and the Causal Power of Ideas (2014-04-29 08:00)

I’ve always tended to write in a fragmented way. This post is incredibly rare in that I’ve started writing it at what seems, at least for now, to be the beginning. I’ll usually jump in with an idea, elaborate it until I get stuck and then move onto another. If I know what I’m trying to say but am struggling to say it, I’ll usually leave a note in the text e.g. “[explain why this is a bad idea]”. Eventually an order starts to emerge between the fragments. The endless notes to self, always in square brackets and always highlighted in yellow, gradually become more connective. Substantive purposes become structural and stylistic e.g. “[finish off this paragraph and link neatly to the next]”. I’ve often thought this is a strange way to write and occasionally worried that it represented some difficulty with producing novelty. Perhaps I just regurgitate other people’s ideas, stitching them together in new forms, rather than producing any of my own? The recognition of my tendency (being the sort of person who always writes in this way) has been a focal point for anxiety. Anxiety I pretty much immediately dismiss (“that’s impostor syndrome!”) which largely dissipates upon command but recurrent anxiety nonetheless.

I recently reread Howard Becker’s [1]Writing for Social Scientists. I’m sure I read this early in my PhD (I’ve definitely owned it for years) and it didn’t make much of an impact on me. I suspect I was too early in the PhD process. Whereas this time I was struck by what a wonderful book it is. One particular thing stood out for me though: he writes in the same way that I do. He advocates it as an approach to writing which works to dispel anxieties, overcoming the common tendency to get ‘stuck’ on difficult bits by simply moving on to the next one. Whereas for me it was a behavioural tendency which provoked anxiety, given it didn’t feel like the ‘proper’ way to write. Suddenly, his view led to a transformation in my own – what’s going on here? What’s going on when I introspectively label something as ‘impostor syndrome’ and this works to dispel anxiety? What’s going on when someone who doesn’t experience sexual attraction encounters the idea of asexuality for the first time and realizes “oh, I’m not so weird after all, there are other people just like me”? 
These are all examples of the causal power of ideas. Take my mildly self-pathologizing interpretation of my approach to writing. I have a recurrent behaviour, self-recognition of its recurrence and an evaluation in light of this. When encountering Becker’s advocacy of this approach, I recognize my own behaviour in his description and re-evaluate it in light of this. This isn't a volitional process: I don't think "oh that’s interesting, should I reconsider my view on my own writing", deliberate about it and then change my opinion. There's an immediacy to the process which such a voluntaristic and cognitive reading fails to capture. I don’t choose to re-evaluate X in light of this alternative way of looking at X (though clearly this does happen in many other circumstances) but rather am changed by this encounter with the idea itself.

This is what I'd like to understand more than I do. The notion of 'idea' I'm using here is problematically fuzzy but I'm not sure what to replace it with. I guess my claim is fundamentally one about propositional content. I have a reflexive relation to my own behaviour which I can represent syllogistically:

1. I recurrently find myself writing in a fragmented way
2. Recurrently writing in a fragmented way suggests numerous personal characteristics (e.g. over reliance on other sources, inability to apply structure etc)
3. Those personal characteristics are undesirable (e.g. I believe it is important to develop my own ideas etc)
4. Therefore writing in a fragmented way is undesirable

The approach to writing found in Becker’s book can also be represented syllogistically. My point is not to suggest that I reason syllogistically when encountering the advocacy of fragmented writing found in Becker’s book – in fact this is exactly the opposite of the argument I’m making. But I do think cashing out the propositional content of what I've been haphazardly referring to as 'ideas' can help make the underlying process at work here much clearer than it otherwise is. For instance consider the intra-personal speech act of saying "that’s imposter syndrome" to myself if, as has sometimes happened, I start dwelling on this tendency I've identified in my writing. If considered in terms of the syllogism above, this speech act relates to (2) – rather than recognising undesirable personal traits on the basis of how I’m tending to write, I instead recognise my own act of recognition as an instance of a broader socio-cultural tendency (higher education provokes 'imposter syndrome' in people).

1. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Writing_for_Social_Scientists.html?id=VZdAAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y

Beyond Dystopian Education in a Neoliberal Society (2014-04-30 08:00)

This powerful article in Fast Capitalism by [1]Henry A. Giroux considers the overlaps between the 'reform' agenda in secondary education and higher education. It’s a little depressing but it does end on a positive note. Read it in full [2]here.

Public and higher education are increasingly harnessed to the interests of corporations, a growing legion of bankers, billionaires, and hedge fund scoundrels, and the warfare state. One consequence is that many public schools, especially those occupied by poor minority youth, have become the new factories
for dumbing down the curricula and turning teachers into what amounts to machine parts. At the
same time, such schools have become militarized and provide a direct route for many youth into the
prison-industrial complex or what has been called the school-to-prison pipeline. What is excised from
the educational rhetoric of casino capitalism reform is the ideal of offering public school students a civic
education that provides the capacities, knowledge, and skills that enable young people to speak, write,
and act from a position of agency and empowerment. At the college level, students are dazzled by a blitz
of commercialized spaces that now look like shopping malls, and in between classes they are entertained
by a mammoth sports culture that is often as debasing as it is dangerous in its hypermasculinity, racism,
and overt sexism.[3]

Privatization, commodification, militarization, and deregulation are the new guiding categories
through which schools, teachers, classroom pedagogy, and students are defined. The current assaults on
public and higher education are not new, but they are viler and more powerful than in the past. Crucial
to any viable reform movement is the need to understand the historical context in which education has
been transformed into an adjunct of corporate power as well as the current ways right-wing educational
reform is operating within a broader play of power, ideology, and other social forces—which together
are applying antidemocratic pressure to change the purpose of schooling and the practice of teaching
itself. Making power visible is important, but it is only a first step in understanding how power actually
works and how it might be challenged. Recognizing a challenge is not the same thing as overcoming it.
Part of the significant task of reinvigorating civic education in the United States necessitates that edu-
cators anchor their own work in classrooms through projects that engage the promise of an unrealized
democracy against its existing, often repressive, forms. And this is only the beginning of resistance that
must struggle for broad-based social change.


1. http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/10_1/authors10_1.html#giroux
2. http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/10_1/giroux10_1.html
3. http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/10_1/giroux10_1.html#sdendnote16sym
4. http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/10_1/giroux10_1.html

5.5 May

The Phenomenology of Reading and the Rhetoric of Theorists (2014-05-01 08:00)

The notion of ‘clarity’ is a contested one within social theory. This was made clear to me when various posts of mine,
often just embedding videos of other people speaking, attracted a lot of indignation on Twitter. There are some
people who really don’t like Lacan and Žižek being criticised for their lack of clarity. The latter still bothers me, given
how much I enjoy his work and how much of it I read. For instance I’m currently reading his Hegel magnum opus*
- the seeming inability of some people to accept it is possible to enjoy someone’s work while also criticising them
baffles me. Or perhaps I’m still indigent about being called ‘scientistic’.

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Rather than rehearsing this tedious internet dispute, my point is to stress that writing **clearly** and writing **well** can be antithetical. I think Žižek often writes well, in the limited sense that his work is often enjoyable to read, while nonetheless rarely writing in a way that could be called clear. I think John Rawls writes **clearly**, in the sense that one knows where one stands with him, while nonetheless writing tedious prose. I mean this in the sense that it is clear what he is saying and why he is saying it. This is sustained throughout a text. Therefore it becomes possible to relate to him in a way that otherwise would not be possible.

It's this capacity to **relate** to the arguments a theorist makes in a text which has been on my mind since reading the chapter on Goffman in Ian Craib's (wonderful) Experiencing Identity. In this chapter, he identifies the "appeal to obviousness, self-evidence and reasonableness" which runs through Goffman's work, such that “the world calls, everyone can hear it, it is reasonable that someone try to answer” (p 76). He offers a wonderfully incisive critique of this rhetorical deployment of obviousness:

To read Goffman is to be seduced or to refuse seduction. It is not to enter into a critical dialogue, nor is it to understand another’s view of the world. Initially one must lose oneself in his world or keep out of it altogether. The seduction fails or succeeds through a double strategy. In the first place, the reader is led into an ‘identification-in-superiority’ with Goffman. We become privileged observers in a special way: we see through tricks, acts, illusions of all sorts. With Goffman the reader is no fool. the reader becomes an 'insider', his or her status is confirmed by the systematic use of argot and suspicion. The alliance is confirmed when the suspicion is extended by Goffman to himself; it becomes a knowing alliance in which both Goffman and the reader admit to the possibility that Goffman might be fooling the reader. The systematic ‘frame-breaking’ of the introduction sets up a knowing conspiracy which achieves seduction through a revelation that seduction may be what is happening. It is not that we are taken in by Goffman's openness, rather we side with him because of his admitted trickiness. We ourselves become tricky, knowing and suspicious. (pg 79)

He goes on to develop this line of argument, contending that “rarely does [Goffman] take the responsibility for what he is saying”. I'm not sure Žižek takes much responsibility for what he is saying either. This is my fundamental suspicion about opaque writing – it tends to undermine active intellectual engagement** by suppressing the propositional content of the argument. In any argument there are a multiplicity of points which can be affirmed or contested, with varying degrees of significance given their locations within the unfolding structure of the argument. Many of these nodal points will call into question the logic of the argument itself, or at least open up the possibility of it being reframed. By suppressing the propositional content of the argument (which all prose will do to some extent) we close down certain lines of response. Texts which lack clarity tend to obscure these and, through doing so, preclude an experience of **being monologued at** becoming one of **having a dialogue** with. For instance I find Žižek difficult to engage with because reading him is like having a very entertaining, interesting and learned scholar drunkenly monologuing at you in a high speed way. It can be great just to sit and listen. It can get boring and you make your excuses and move to a different table. But what it never facilitates is a **dialogue**.

I find Žižek to be a very particular sort of reading experience, which is perhaps why I enjoy reading his books. What I’d like to understand more broadly is this relationship between the **phenomenology of reading** and the **rhetorical style of theorists**. I think Craib captures something important about Goffman and there’s the possibility of extending an analysis of this form to other theorists:

The alliance with the reader, then, is in the face of a world which is 'just like that'. All one can say immediately is, ‘Yes, it is like that’, or ‘No, it is not’. In fact, neither response is adequate, or both are equally

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adequate: some aspects of the world are 'like that', others are not. To break free of Goffman’s guiding gestures is to begin to distinguish what he is really talking about, and it is a matter of looking at the questions that come out of his descriptions, but which remain unanswered and often unasked (pg 79-80)

My most rewarding experiences of reading theory have come from those who I was initially sceptical of but then was largely persuaded by (Archer) or those who I was initially persuaded by but then developed a scepticism towards (Crossley, Giddens, Elder-Vass). It’s this experience of moving closer or moving further away from a body of work, through textual engagement, which I’d like to understand better than I do. What sorts of relations does a text facilitate with its reader? What implications do these have for the reader’s mode of engagement? How can we understood these as a relationship between two distinct sets of properties and powers: those of the reader and those of the text?

Consciously I’m genuinely interested in it. I’m also hoping it’s broad enough in its scope to help flesh out the limited (and limiting) intellectual map of contemporary continental philosophy I’m working with. Though it’s hard not to wonder if I have some unconscious motive in relation to these disputes about Žižek that irritated me so much at the time (whereas few things on the internet do these days).

*I use the word ‘tends’ very consciously here. I think there are countervailing tendencies, often arising from determined readers keen to cut through the thicket of obscurity, operating here in a way which ensures that philosophy of this sort doesn’t descend into oratory.

Samantha Lyle (2014-05-01 08:45:22)
Mark, i really enjoyed reading The Phenomenology of Reading and the Rhetoric of Theorists. It reminded me of the joy and agony of reading (not being a Social Theory person (?!)) and having moderate Dyslexia) what i would call dense, difficult or dull prose is especially painful. With a research interest in social class i am pained by the heavy toms of Bourdieu, notorious for his writing style with the added issue of translation on top. Reading Goffman was indeed seductive because i found it 'easy' to read but i was always left with a feeling that i was missing something, being tricked, surely, i thought to myself, it couldn't be that straight forward and obvious. Sadly my response to the 'difficult' theorists Lacan, Butler, Irigaray etc 'is to shrink into a "I'm not clever enough to understand this so i shall give up" mind set. Whereas those writers such as Beverley Skeggs whose work and prose i usually find exciting and engaging and therefore 'easier' to read sustain my attention even to the point where i might be able to offer a critique. What one finds convincing depends so heavily (in my experience) on how readable it is that i cannot take too seriously my own or others insistent that one theoretical perspective is better than an other - this is obviously bad for social science and i can only assume that others are better at this important aspect of our work than i am.

Hi Sam, I'm glad you liked it. I’m really curious about why both reading and writing are seen as so marginal in terms of the things sociologists talk about, whereas they’re so central to what sociologists actually do. Ian Craib, who prompted that post, wrote later in the same book about Lacan. I've tried to read primary and secondary literature on Lacan and barely got anything out of it. But Ian Craib described it straight forwardly in a way I could immediately understand. Which then made me wonder why neither Lacan nor Lacanians could do that. I think there's all sorts of weird power relationships that get reproduced through writing, the reactions of readers, as well as the kinds of writing those readers learn to do as a consequence of what they're exposed to. It's something really insidious and I think it hinders real debate in social theory for precisely the reasons you're pointing to.
Steve Fuller (2014-05-01 08:48:00)
I understand your response to Zizek, and it is not unreasonable. But I think it is worth saying that Zizek is a real virtuoso at what he does and he is a master of his source texts (Marx, Freud, Lacan, etc.) but he is not very original and so there isn’t any of the mystery to him that is associated with a thinker whose sources aren’t so obvious, which would lead one to think that they contain ‘hidden depths’. So, while Heidegger may have been a student of Husserl, Heidegger cannot be reduced to Husserl. However, Zizek is pretty decomposable. His ‘value-added’ really comes from the applications (to film, current events, etc.) of a body of work that will be familiar, by now in quite good detail, to a broad swathe of people across the humanities and social sciences (i.e. the Marx-Freud nexus). A guy like him could only have such a mass following in a period where there is already a generation or two of people who have been taught to think that Marx and Freud can constitute a coherent centre to the intellectual universe. This really only began in the 1960s and Zizek is the ultimate beneficiary of this tendency. And as often happens when intellectual or artistic tendencies are in decline, a baroque manner of expression sets in as people desperately tweak the canon to make it say new things. So think of Zizek as a master jazzman whose repertoire draws on a well-defined set of scores to which an appreciable audience can readily respond.

I think you’re underselling him to a certain extent, as well as his readers. If you read enough of it (I’m not sure why I do this given my antipathy to him) there clearly are original ideas, though obviously ones that are heavily indebted to a very particular tradition of post-Freudian thought. Though having said that, I do find it plausible that Zizek could be the last gasp for that tradition. He monopolises the intellectual field to such an absurd extent and doesn’t exactly work in a way that lends itself to post-Zizekian work. I’m curious as to what the journal of Zizek Studies is like for this reason, though not curious enough to actually go and look through it.

Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age (2014-05-02 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/0lfPg _5iaGQ?feature=player _embedded
Fred Phelps, Calvinistic soteriology and its implications (2014-05-03 08:00)

Does adopting a five point Calvinist soteriology logically implicate the type of views advocated by Fred Phelps and Westboro Baptist Church? The opinion of Frank Schaeffer, son of Francis Schaeffer, is that there is a positive continuity between these views and those advocated by Fred Phelps. The Calvinist God is an angry God whose wrath is provoked by the seriousness of sin and that punishment must follow the fall; all fall under the curse of sin and are deserving of damnation. Christ’s death was thus necessary to take on the guilt of those deserving of this damnation. The point is that an angry God is mindful of human wickedness; in the words of Jonathan Edwards (who adopted a Calvinistic soteriology):

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. You have offended him infinitely more than ever a stubborn rebel did his prince; and yet it is nothing but his hand that holds you from falling into the fire every moment. It is to be ascribed to nothing else, that you did not go to hell the last night; that you was suffered to awake again in this world, after you closed your eyes to sleep. And there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God’s hand has held you up. There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship. Yea, there is nothing else that is to be given as a reason why you do not this very moment drop down into hell.

This way Frank Schaeffer states that what are ‘mainstream’ Evangelical views are in fact, in essence, no different to what Fred Phelps preached and the activism the Westboro Church put to practice. There may be a difference in the style or rhetoric adopted but the message is essentially the same. In other words, Fred Phelps preached what they hold to be the Gospel and if Fred Phelps brought discomfort in how he preached and the type of activism that followed, he just had the courage to state the implications of their opinions as they are. The logical implications of this system of thought leads to Fred Phelps and this is more pronounced in the case of the Calvinistic soteriology he adopted and many ‘mainstream’ Evangelicals adopt this too.

I do not wish to discuss if indeed the logical implications of a Calvinistic Soteriology specifically and ‘mainstream’ Evangelicalism, in general, is the message preached by Fred Phelps but to move beyond ideation systems to what Margaret Archer classifies as socio-cultural interaction. It is this level that there is mediation of cultural systems such as the theological systems identified with certain forms of Protestant Christianity. After all, the types of ideas that are now salient among certain Evangelicals was not always the case and likewise the manner a belief in a soteriology can lead to different forms of practice in different contexts. For example, the very resurrection of Dutch neo-Calvinism by the likes of Francis Schaeffer and the adoption of its underpinning mission to redeem a sinful culture by Jerry Falwell, an Arminian in doctrine, demonstrates the way at the level of people interaction there
is adaption and elaboration of cultural systems. If we return to the doctrinal then a neo-Calvinist like [6]Abraham Kuyper’s goal to claim European culture for Christianity is very much rooted in a (strong) sovereign view of God and it this high theocentric position that he juxtaposed against the autonomous liberal subject. In other words, we have a theological system, distinctively Reformed, that addresses culture from that position. Falwell viewed this system as a form of heresy but yet still influenced by Francis Schaeffer, believed it a Christian mandate to redeem American culture and government but the approach and vision taken was something very different to the Dutch neo-Calvinists (Kuyper identified as a Christian Socialist).

The point here is that sharedness is variable and not definitional or that cultural integration is something mediated and that there is no linear movement or logical implications to be drawn from cultural systems to socio-cultural interaction and so a quasi-teleological movement to certain conclusions or forms of political activism. Fred Phelps’s understanding of a Calvinistic soteriology may have affected his activism in specific ways but there is hardly anything in this theological model that, as Frank Schaeffer identifies, necessitates a movement in certain directions. In future posts, I wish to draw out how this reification at the level of cultural system (often from ideological representations of cultural systems) affects policy formulation and initiatives then taken.

[[nbox]Basem Adi is interested in critical realism and its application for sociological questions of personhood and its implications for a critical social policy[/nbox]]

5. [http://est.sagepub.com/content/15/1/93.abstract](http://est.sagepub.com/content/15/1/93.abstract)

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**Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World (2014-05-04 08:00)**

[Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World](http://www.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1540235414550651) by Professor Anoop Nayak provides a useful insight into the growing area of youth studies by highlighting the nature of youth identity and how it connects to local space and the globalised world. The book concentrates on youth, ethnicity and social change in the northeast of England, and the significance of the local and the global in the lives of young people is explored. Race, racism and whiteness are explored in relation to research conducted by Nayak throughout the years, but in particular data is included from the three year ethnographic project that reached out to hear the voices of local young people in the northeast through interviews, interactions and observations in a diverse range of neighbourhoods.
Youth is defined and discussed in relation to the history of subcultures. We gain an introduction to the socio-historical importance to youth studies of The Chicago School of Sociology, University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, and The Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt University, as well as feminist and postmodernist critiques of subcultural theorists. The book is situated in the field of social geography but is interdisciplinary in its content and would be of great interest for sociology, cultural studies and educational research students who are reading about and researching about race, racism and whiteness, as well as the importance of place in the lives of young people. Nayak structures his book into three parts: Passing Times, Changing Times and Coming Times.

The chapters in the Passing Times section provide a broad understanding of the origins and critiques of subcultures, as well as the socio-political context of diasporic settlement in northeast England. We also gain an understanding of the ways in which anti-racism and racism operate in the northeast of England. The conclusion of this section reminds us of the urgent need to research young people’s local place-based belongings and new local identities. In Changing Times, Nayak focuses in detail on whiteness in the de-industrialised northeast, particularly the fascinating identities of the young people who fit into distinct categories of Geordies, Wiggers and Charvers.

Key questions that are answered thoroughly are: What does it mean to be young and white in the northeast? How does economic change reflect upon local young people’s sense of identity? What is the importance of place and race in a changing globalised world? The features of this de-industrialised locale are fully explored in relation to migration, economy and culture by describing how socio-economic changes have impacted upon the lives of the local white working-class communities. The final section, Coming Times, draws together the research previously discussed with a reconsideration of anti-racism policies and youth cultures, all the while pointing towards the need for the study of the complexity of modern multiculturalism and how young people negotiate their identities amidst social upheaval.

The book provides an interesting and necessary understanding of how race and ethnicity configure in the lives of young people in the northeast of England, particularly in respect to their practices of work and leisure, all the time emphasising how in an increasingly globalised world, place and identity are ever significant. Nayak proposes modern multicultural societies can pursue social justice through engaging with local youth identities and cultures, and recognising the significance of race and ethnicity in the lives of young people.

Nayak reminds the readers that young people’s sense of identity should be understood from multiple intersectional positions. Nayak successfully illustrates how local place and space continues to matter even if globalisation has become the dominant theory of choice, and even if the postmodernist argue that modern society is characterised by a sense of placelessness. The connections between race and place are brought to prominence in this engaging and important ethnographical account of young people’s experiences of identity that draws upon historical, cultural and structural perspectives.

[boxed]

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[/boxed]

1. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Race_Place_and_Globalization.html?id=8ohzPMPfxmlC&redir_esc=y
Thugs, Revolutionaries, or Shoppers? Rethinking the 2011 English Riots Through Consumer Practises & Black Friday (2014-05-05 08:00)

Like many riots before it, those who partook in the disturbances of 2011 have been popularly framed either as an immoral underclass or incipient revolutionaries. This article seeks to re-examine an element of the 2011 riots in order to dispel these perceptions by suggesting the emergence of the riots from the broader social practises of ‘consumerism’. Focusing on publically available evidence pertaining to the looting in 2011 and its similarities to consumer practises, in particular Black Friday, Stuart Scrase forwards a case for the careful consideration of Western consumer practises and meanings as part of any attempt to explain why the events of August 2011 occurred.

Revolutionaries or Thugs?

In August 2011 rioting spread across England. What began in as a local issue in Tottenham, North London was to spread to many areas of the city before jumping to Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Bristol and more, causing estimated damages of £200 million to the UK economy (Riots to cost... 2011). Newspapers splashed images of hooded and masked youths framed by burning cars and buildings. The response by the political elite was condemnation of a ‘feral underclass’ (Ken Clark. 2011), their actions: ‘criminality pure and simple’ according to the Prime Minister, David Cameron (2011). Indeed, in the same speech to parliament the Prime Minister stated, that it was ‘preposterous’ to link the rioting and looting to the shooting of a black male in Tottenham by police – it was thievery and hooliganism, nothing more. A closed case then? The rioters were thugs and thieves, and the appropriate response is harsher punishments to deter them from further crime. Yet we might ask, why then were the police such a focus of anger and violence? Why did the riots emerge out of a protest over the police’s actions during and after the shooting of Mark Duggan? And perhaps more fundamentally, why are so many ‘youths’ willing to engage in criminal activity?

On the other hand, I have heard many people on the left argue (using the anger and violence towards police as proof) that the rioters were people fed up with the injustice of the system, such as [1]lack of opportunities, police discrimination, economic inequality and so forth. This line of argument generally treats the rioters as incipient revolutionaries, prevented from being so only by the rioters’ inability to politically frame their complaints and actions. While this view has more substance than that of the politicians, it cannot explain all that happened in the riots. Here the problem almost seems to be the reverse of the politicians’ stance as the looting is ignored in favour of the violence against the police.

Employing either of these two lenses will distort the view we take of the 2011 riots. As a first step to understanding, we should not make the mistake of assuming the riots were a single event, but rather made up of differing acts and motivations. Having said this, three general themes might be said to characterise the majority of rioting in 2011: firstly, violence and anger directed against the police; secondly, the looting; and lastly, the seemingly nihilistic destruction and vandalism (Moxon. 2011). This clearly suggests that the rioting is more complex than either side would have us believe. While any full explanation of the rioting must account for the violence against the police and destruction of property, I want to put aside these two points and instead draw out some implications from the looting to briefly highlight considerations that the left has ignored, and the politicians simplified and condemned.

Shopping in 2011

The looting in 2011 saw two seemingly contradictory themes in its similarity to a consumer holiday, and the clear rejection of social norms and law. Zygmunt Baumann (2011) argued that this was because the riots were a result of consumerism’s ‘have-nots’: social inequality in a consumer ideology. Putting aside the problems of describing the violence against police as ‘consumer’, to assume the looters were ‘have-nots’ is questionable and certainly a simplification. The majority of rioters interviewed by The Guardian (Datablog 2011) did live in economically deprived areas, yet the arrest figures show that students constituted 17 % of arrestees and 39 % were in employment (‘An
Overview of Recorded Crimes...'. THO. 2011. 5). Moreover, these figures are based on arrests made by the police and cannot be seen as truly representative of those involved in the riots. Indeed, evidence from the Home Office reveals that 22 % of commercial premises targeted were specialist retailers in clothing or electronics, very few seem to be related to basic goods. This figure can only be indicative not proof, regardless, it is perhaps safer to describe looters not as simply 'have-nots', but also those with 'not enough'. Aside from these problems Bauman’s argument has its merit; in particular, it seems some of the looters were, in part, engaging in normal social practises, not rebelling.

In its simplest sense 'engage in normal social practises' means to consume and shop. For this to be so the looters must have acted for similar reasons as everyday shoppers. So why do we shop? Miller (2005) argues that shopping is employed as a means of reproducing relationships, that decisions to purchase are made with others in mind, and with the idea of fulfilling or exceeding expectations of us. For instance, Miller talks of a parent who purchases a football shirt due to their anxiety over whether their child will live up to the expectations of his peers (ibid. 26-7). In this relation we can note the idea that the child will be viewed and judged by others; the implication being that the football shirt functioned as a marker of, and improvement to social position. Consuming is a social practise performed in reference to others, and often because of what the object will say about us.

But we must also take into account the relation of consumers to companies involved in the material and symbolic production of the product. To generalise, this is a relation between the consumer and a brand in which the latter aims to endow their product and brand with real meanings (e.g. ‘glamour’ and Chanel perfume). Wernick (1983) argues that this form of advertising seeks to create a product’s social value and use through association to pre-existing meanings and values. If the advertising is performed well, that is it seems authentic to its chosen audience, this product will become meaningful (e.g. the branding of Adidas through their association with the meanings and cultures of urban life, such as through street dance). Through their use, these products become social markers of belonging and status, such as the football shirt, and to be without is to risk being judged as lesser.

For Campbell (2005), what defines modern practises of consumerism is not simply the reality of gaining the benefits of a product, but the anticipation of our selves benefiting from them. Desire is produced by a “favourable reaction to certain patterns of sensation” (ibid. 60) This sensation is found in the moments where we imagine the purchase; for instance, we imagine how we will look to others with a new piece of clothing, what it will say about who we are, the respect we will gain, and the momentary overcoming of our insecurities. Branding then arguably influences how we imagine ourselves altered by the product, through attempting to create egoistic values and desire by emphasising the product’s revolutionary social potential for you. The argument I am making, while in no way can explain all consumption or looting, is that processes we group under the term ‘consumerism’ have the effect of shaping shoppers as ‘never enoughs’; because we can always imagine ourselves as better, and always want to reproduce the pleasurable sensations. Put in terms of the riots, looters who took (the now clichéd) trainers may have done so for their value as a status symbol and as a means to build self-esteem within their social world, in which: "obviously appearance is a lot ... if I was approaching a girl, I would go over to her and I would look at her face and look at her trainers" (Riot. 2012. 51.00).

**Black Friday and Changing the Rules of Shopping**

If the above theory proffers an accurate and plausible explanation, then the looting as an event should display similarities to modern consumer practises. Shopping as a practise is often pleasurable in and of itself, where people forget their everyday realities, enjoy the moment and reward themselves, resulting in terms like 'shopping spree'. This shouldn’t need great elaboration as even the most frugal, such as myself, can enjoy purchasing a desired thing or finding a bargain. Briefly then, what can be said to characterise the shopping spree is not restraint or utilitarian decisions, but spontaneity and pleasure seeking (Bauman. 1994. 83). It is the anticipation of the social benefits of the product prior to and at the moment of decision that creates the pleasurable sensation pursued, and perhaps pushes other concerns or restraints aside (expense, the daily requirements of life etc.); a description that fits both with some witness accounts of the rioting: "... their eyes were just lit up, so in the moment" (Riot. 2012. 7.30), and
statements from those involved: "The riotin' an' lootin' was something that you sit around talk with your friends 'Oh imagine all the shops in the high road was open, you could go in there an' take whatever you want' ..." (Slovo. 2012 p.23). At least some of the looting then seems to be driven by this pleasure seeking behaviour, in which worries are forgotten and pleasure is gained through imagining the self gaining the product and its social payoffs. Rather than simply being thieves or revolutionaries the drive behind this sort of action may then come from accepted societal practise.

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvE_WM1i6hA]

To better demonstrate the need for examining societal causes of looting we can make a useful comparison with Black Friday. This consumer holiday takes place every November across North America, and signals the beginning of the holiday shopping season by supposedly drastic reductions in prices. While the term Black Friday was coined much later, the practise of beginning Christmas shopping and sales the day after Thanksgiving has been around since the late 19th century. Today it has evolved into a practise which draws in vast crowds of shoppers desperately trying to get the deals before their desired products sell out. The result is regular cases of violence and arrests as shoppers fight over the last deal. Indeed, Black Friday has resulted in a number of deaths, for instance in 2008 a store employee was trampled to death as he opened the shop doors to the waiting crowd, while in another case that year two men were shot and killed during an argument in a toy store ('Wal-Mart ...' CNN 2008). Sociological research on Black Friday is thin on the ground, yet the similarities between it and the looting are there: both were acts of consumption performed through meanings and practises of their society, and both seem to be driven by pleasure seeking and financial benefit (for Black Friday see: Swilley & Goldsmith. 2013). But more than this, the moment or experience of pleasure in shopping also displays parallels. Thomas and Peters found when discussing with female shoppers, that shoppers thought of Black Friday in terms of time-constrained competition, resulting in excitement, pleasure and aggressive behaviour by the informants: "It's fun to try to get as many bargains as I possibly can in a limited amount of time. It's like a game show." (2011. 531). Shoppers also described 'surviving' these encounters and later swapping 'war stories'. What we can take from these statements is that the normal rules of shopping (to queue, to only take from the shelf and not other customers) were not in play, but the values and pleasure seeking that drove this behaviour were [youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zkQVAb1DBjA] What Thomas and Peters' research suggests is that there is a revelry in the event nature of Black Friday – a perspective that displays similarities to accounts given by rioters of looting: "Then once you do it and nothing's happened, yeah, you're like: "Oh my gosh!' and you're like: "This is a once in a lifetime thing," you're going to get everything you want for free." (Prasad. 2011 b.). Both events brought to mind the old game show Supermarket Sweep, in which contestants rush round a supermarket throwing products into their trolley – what they grab they keep. On the show there was no property owner, no guilt or restraint, only goods to be taken, and money to be made [youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gggWmpiEEkY] Revolutionary Shoppers? Of course, there is a contradiction because the looting in 2011 clearly represented a rejection of the laws and norms of the UK. Moreover, the majority of people who engage with the same or similar consumption rituals in the UK did not loot, thus there must be something more to this than the links to social and economic systems suggested above. To understand this contradiction it is worth noting that this mass rejection suggests that the laws of the UK to some extent were only held in place by the threat of physical force from the police. Once the riots began and the police looked to have lost of control, committing 'crime' did not matter: "I just felt that out of all these people there's probably a 5 % chance I'd get caught" (Prasad; 2011 a.). The implication is that the law held no or little normative value for the looters, or perhaps the drive to seek pleasure was stronger than the feeling of obligation to the law, either way, with the police seemingly powerless law ceased to be relevant. Some might argue that 2011 looters differed from Black Friday shoppers because they did not break the law. Yet on closer inspection this seems a superficial difference because both events operate under a change of rules or exceptional circumstances – the difference is only in the degree, so to speak. Take Black Friday: the normal rules of consuming (e.g. do not commit violence against other consumers, to accept that when someone else has a product it is legitimately theirs, to queue) are relaxed. For whatever reason, it is deemed acceptable for some to push through crowds, jump barriers, use violence, and to grab what is desired and available - even if already claimed by other consumers. Rather than the law being
removed and goods becoming ‘free’ as in the 2011 riots, on Black Friday it is the social norms of consuming which are removed or loosened. Law and the police remains at least a physical limit on behaviour, but in the heat of the moment, grappling for the last discounted TV, violent conflict is always a possibility. It seems plausible that these transgressions have become normalised, eroding the usual rules by which consumers operate, creating a concept of Black Friday in the minds of consumers which, in part, changes the rules of shopping. In other words it creates an opportunity, much as the perception of the police and their loss of control did for the looters of 2011. Consequently, it may be that looters in 2011 did not reject the order and its values itself, only their position within it and the rules that defined how they engaged with it. Perhaps for some this was more a momentary rejection, driven by the desire for products or caught up in the moment. But even this would support the idea that many looters ‘shopped’ in a fundamentally similar manner to those of Black Friday, as a social act pleasurable in and of itself, taking what they could get before the opportunity had gone. The difference between Black Friday and 2011’s looting is then not in the aim, but in the immediate and superficial context. Rather than looters being simply an ‘immoral’ group then, the above argument has brought into question Western consumer society’s role in producing the values, the feelings, which drove the looting in 2011. Consumer Riots? Of course some might argue that looting predates consumerism and even capitalism. And it does; however, we should not see ‘consumerism’ as something fundamentally different to what came before, but a particular mode of doing what we always have done – consume. Looting is created first by the possibilities of us as consuming beings generally, then given shape by the particular economic, political and cultural context. The task with understanding any particular act of looting, or indeed riots, is to understand why it took that form. The looting of basic goods would suggest the issue related to the ability of the looters to sustain themselves and thus point to basic economic issues. Or if particular targets were selected it would suggest some resentment towards another group. In 2011, as Bauman (2011) argued at least some of the looting seemed to be driven by a socially produced, relative discontent with their ownership or ability to acquire certain status goods. The argument I have briefly made above suggests that practises such as advertising/branding and consuming often encourage the pursuit of an individualistic or egoistic form of pleasure, while at the same time ‘law’ seems to be losing its normative force. Indeed, we might strengthen the argument by locating similar examples of behaviour, such as the outlook of bankers and traders who make enormous profits at the expense, and arguably without consideration or care of those affected. If so, the looting of 2011 was neither a revolution nor mindless thuggery, but a larger problem regarding the manner in which we relate and think of ourselves and the exterior world. However, I am not suggesting that this is the whole explanation for the looting. We must understand other how practises, experiences, and cultural meanings shaped the looting, how these intersected with the social, political and economic relations resulting in people willing to loot, and finally why the law and police hold no normative force. Without asking these difficult question and attempting to understand the riots with our desires aside the 2011 riots will remain popularly understood as either a moral problem of individuals who make up this ‘underclass’, or an unrealised revolution: and neither one is accurate. [nbox type="notice"] Stuart Scrase is an interdisciplinary PhD candidate at the University of Exeter, focusing principally on sociology, anthropology, and political theory. His research looks at the 2011 riots in England with the aim of developing in-depth theoretical understandings of riot participants’ lives to contextualise the different forms that the rioting took as socially meaningful and produced action.[/nbox] References ‘An Overview of Recorded Crimes and Arrests Resulting from Disorder Events in August 2011’. 2011. The Home Office (THO). 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1. http://pennyred.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/civil%20unrest%20
10. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-wyANyRG10

Some reflections on #BritSoc14 by @chrishtill (2014-05-06 08:00)

Last week I attended the [1]British Sociological Association Annual Conference held at the University of Leeds. I found this to be a particularly engaging event which made me quite hopeful for the direction of sociology. Not because there are not significant social, institutional and disciplinary problems on the horizon and already here but because it seems that many people are addressing these in reflexive, challenging and collaborative way. Part of this optimism stemmed from my perception that the issue which was most consistently engaged with across the event was neo-liberalism or contemporary consumer capitalism in various guises. The papers which were on offer at the conference took a variety of perspectives and certainly not all audiences members were in agreement with what was proposed but there was a lively discussion about pressing issues of inequality and the impact of economic forces and
recent policy changes. Two years ago the Guardian journalist [2]Aditya Chakrabortty criticised the BSA conference of that year for not dealing with the economic crisis. This was a misrepresentation based on a quick browse of the conference abstracts but if there was any truth to his claim then it is clear from this year’s event that there no longer is.

The impacts of commercialisation were explored through cultural analyses in one of the first panel sessions. [3]Karl Spracklen discussed how alternative cultures of goths and black metallers have moved from being a localised and politicised "scene" to a broad, commodified, global subculture through the appropriation by markets enabled by the "liquid space" of the internet. Younger generations are also potentially being brought into an industry which has flourished under austerity; online gambling. [4]Heather Wardle explored the hugely increased industry of virtual gambling which has achieved great popularity with children. While many of these are purely virtual with no real money changing hands they are increasingly intertwined with the formal gambling industry through advertising and games which blur the boundaries between virtual and actual.

As part of a discussion of the BSA’s open access [5]Discover Society magazine and its role in digital public sociology the association’s president [6]John Holmwood warned of the dangers of sociologists working in institutions which may be increasing rather than reducing inequality. He suggested that the “[7]public university”, which can be aided through genuinely open access can contribute to a “real utopia”.

[8]Evelyn Ruppert’s plenary presented theoretical, conceptual and practical ways forward for sociology to deal with “Big Data”. She focused on the role which data practices play in enumerating, constituting populations and cultivating peoplehood. Like the social statistics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries big data is producing “kinds” of people. It will be vital to engage with the economies and ecologies in order to conduct inquiries into the types of people and collectivities which are being “made up” as well as how people are diffracting or challenging the ways of being accumulated or analysed.

[9]Monica Prasad presented a provocative analysis of the emergence of neoliberalism in her plenary address. She suggested that the policies of heavy tax cuts often associated with neoliberalism were not driven by business interests but by an electoral strategy to present then presidential candidate Ronald Reagan as electable. Evidence was presented to show that American business was not interested in personal tax cuts so the Republican party struck a bargain with them to support their policies in exchange for business tax cuts as part of the package. Post-Watergate the Republican party was deemed largely unelectable and a candidate who would be days away from his 70th birthday when taking office was deemed too old. The one issue which could trump these two issues for the American voter was tax cuts. This was a fascinating paper packed with historical detail but was a narrow view which did not take account of many other social, cultural and economic factors not to mention the emergence of neoliberalism in other countries. All of this may well be accounted for elsewhere in Prasad’s work.

The experience of obesity under neoliberalism was presented in a fascinating qualitative account by [10]Paul Bissell, [11]Marian Peacock, [12]Jo Blackburn and [13]Christine Smith. Bissell spoke of the discourses on which people draw to account for their obesity. Counter to some other approaches which have emphasised resistant “excuse accounts” they suggested that for many people sadness and guilt over being obese were the prevailing ways of discussing their situation. They suggested that overeating has taken on a similar position to smoking in the 1980s (as described by [14]Hilary Graham) as allowing disadvantaged people to “do something for themselves” through the visceral pleasure experienced through eating. The achievement of this pleasure, however, seeks to further disadvantage many people through the kinds of judgements made about fat bodies in the “enterprise society” associated with neoliberalism. In this situation, Bissell et al suggested, the “fat poor” are shamed shadows of neoliberalism who are often stigmatised because they do not fit with the dominant entrepreneurial values.

The stigmatisation of particular people through neo-liberal governing was also addressed by [15]Janice McLaughlin who discussed how discourses of normality led to children who are considered to be “different” come to be labelled as problematic. She showed how the regulation of normality is increasing in the global North as many disabled
children are increasingly encouraged to blame themselves, or their assistive technologies, rather than their social context for their difficulties. In particular McLaughlin situated this within the discourse of self-realisation which is presented in ideas about the right kinds of transition to adulthood for disabled children. A hierarchy is produced between those who can become seemingly autonomous and independent and those who cannot meet these qualities which are highly valued in neoliberal societies.

[16]Bill Hughes drew parallels between disabled people and migrants in his historical analysis in which he suggested both groups have been presented as strangers; the former existential and the latter geographical. He identified a populist resentment which has produced a bifurcation of the population into the moral majority of "hardworking people" and those who are perceived to constitute a fiscal burden. This distinction is predicated upon what Hughes called a "miser's calculus" through which, largely false, statistics are presented to demonstrate the costs of these groups to the rest of society and justify the representation of disabled people and migrants as "counterfeit citizens".

[17]Katherine Smith presented a study of public health academics and their roles in advocacy and activism. The barriers to activism or pressures against engaging in it are many and serious and include impeding career progression, not being taken seriously by colleagues and being pushed into giving an overly simplistic view of research results in order to push a political message. All the same many academics felt that "doing nothing is doing harm" and that to merely observe is not sufficient.

The conference (or at least my conference) closed with a panel session on digital sociology. All four participants called for a more reflexive and critical approach to digital technologies than has often been the case in the past. In particular [18]Deborah Lupton proposed a greater emphasis should be placed on the emotional relationships we have with computerised technologies. She also highlighted the changed relationship we have had with the digital through the decline in the use of the "cyborg" and "cyber" metaphors in sociology as now technologies are often too integrated to even seem like an appendage.

[19]Mike Savage and [20]Noortje Marres both highlighted the importance of not approaching the digital (and the methods through which we employ it) as neutral. Savage in particular called for social scientists to see methods as an agent of social change through which they should be intervening not just observing. For Marres, we must be more aware of the instability of data which is not just an object but an instrument and mediator which necessitates a move from a sociology "of" the digital to a sociology "with" the digital.

Perhaps the biggest challenge came from [21]Susan Halford who claimed that so far sociologists have not been good at taking technology seriously. Digital sociology cannot just be critical questioning of the technical but must engage with the nature of knowledge flows (perhaps engaging with the potential impact of the semantic web) and must instate sociological concerns into the digital as well as interpreting it. In order to achieve this they must engage more thoroughly with disciplines such as computational science.

The papers presented at this year's conference offered original, potent critiques of social, political and economic forces which create inequalities as well as significant challenges to sociologists themselves.

[nbox type="notice"]Chris Till is Senior Lecturer in Social Science in the [22]Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at Leeds Metropolitan University. This was originally posted on [23]Chris's blog. It is reproduced here with permission.[/nbox]
I was back last week from the annual conference of the British Sociological Association (BSA) in Leeds, and as usual, I try to put down my impressions as long as they’re still fresh in my mind. I wasn’t very quick, though, and the BSA’s members newsletter has already come out with comments and short reports about the plenaries, the prizes awarded, and the conference overall. While the conference is described as having been “very vibrant and sociable”, with “exciting conversations” during the breaks and a “diverse mixture of topics” that “reflected the breadth of interests”. My own feelings, I confess, are a bit more mixed.

In 2012, the BSA conference was followed by a lively debate after an article, by Aditya Chakrabortty on the Guardian, where he complained about the discipline’s lack of engagement with the financial crisis. He pointed to the BSA press releases featuring research on “older bodybuilders”, and to time devoted to the “holistic massage industry” at the conference, as evidence of what he saw as a retreat from public space. The BSA took the criticism very seriously and, apart from responding to the Guardian, put in place a massive effort to encourage public engagement. The 2013 conference was entitled “Engaging Sociology” and many sessions were dedicated to showing that the profession means it. Confrontation and comparison with economics was open and clear. A major project on social class was presented with all honours. The Sociology journal released a call for papers for a special issue to “Sociology and the Global Economic Crisis”.

This year, the “Changing Society” title aimed to stress continuity with last year’s efforts; yet it seems to me that we are back to business as usual. I had the impression that many paper presentations were on topics similar to the
body builders and massage that Chakrabortty talked about. That’s why, as I said, my feelings are mixed.

To be sure, I wouldn’t dismiss topics such as bodybuilders, massage and the like[7] as “quibbles” as a former BSA President himself seemed to suggest (sic!!). I trust the colleagues who work on these topics have spotted issues there that are worth exploring, even if they are not immediately apparent to me. For sure, though, these are very micro topics, descriptions of niches of our society, of local relevance; but it is often difficult, from there, to move up to a higher level of awareness of, and insight into, the broader issues facing society and its transformations more generally. Sometimes, these studies reveal some form of frustrated ambition: using “a Foucauldian lens” (to take again Chakrabortty’s example) or some other high-profile theory to study a micro-phenomenon with, in general, a handful of interviews, can at most shed light on the phenomenon but rarely brings the Foucauldian (or whatever) theory to a significant advancement. There is often a mismatch between, on the one hand, the breadth and depth of the theories that inspire sociologists, and on the other hand, what they actually do with them. Of course it’s always hard to move from empirics up to theory, but it’s even harder with micro studies; that’s why I’d like to see fewer of them, though I wouldn’t go as far as taking them out altogether.

Here, however, is what I consider to be most valuable in the BSA 2014 conference: greater-than-before methodological ambition. The BSA has opened itself to big data and is questioning both its potential and the risks involved. The plenary given by [9] Evelyn Ruppert on how to be a data sociologist was illuminating. Based on her own experience (which somehow resonates with mine…), she clearly and convincingly outlined how data are a social object in itself. To start from a more classical data undertaking, census not only reflects aspects of society that the government wants to know about, but is a social fact in itself; what questions to include, how to voice concern, who has ever voiced concern, and who is included, are all social policy questions. Big data are a corporate and administrative phenomenon first, and as such, they are an object of strategic choice by organisations and of policy by governments. They raise issues of citizenship, value production and social exclusion. Data are no longer a methodological concern, but a substantive object.

I also admired the introduction of a “Methodological Innovations” stream of sessions, all pretty interesting and quite
diverse even though sparsely attended. A new “Frontiers” stream, more diverse in terms of topics, was also introduced to showcase novelty in the discipline. And finally, I missed because of a train to take, a very promising session on the Social Life of Methods.

If I go back to my comments to that famouns 2012 conference, where I noticed that just a few participants were live-tweeting, the progress was manifest this time, with many more active people and lively discussions online paralleling, and accompanying, what was going on in the conference rooms. The Digital Public Sociology initiative is also a most welcome development.

In short, my impression is of a lot of still-standing on the side of choice of topics, substantive issues, and (mostly) methods used; but some methodological innovations and a new direction for scholarship and research focusing on data, and greater opening to social media. Both are avenues for renewal, and it’s good they have been opened; let’s hope they will be taken, and let’s hope to see some of the results next year.

For more information, and to hear different voices, see a storify by Christopher Till; Digital Public Sociology podcasts by Mark Carrigan; a blog post by Christopher Till.

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1. http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/
[1]Culture Wars: Context, Models and Anthropologists’ Accounts provides students of anthropological and ethno-graphical research with a detailed illustrations of British and international accounts of critical social anthropology in the light of methodological issues. The focus of the book is predominantly on culture and how it may be interpreted in various valid ways according to the researcher and the researched by employing a self-aware and critical stance about how knowledge is produced. South Africa, Germany and Greece are just some of the places explored in the book providing the reader with international scope on how best to understand critical social anthropology. The book is helpful in allowing opportunity to reflect upon whose accounts are included in ethnographies, and how culture and context are interpreted by a diverse range of researchers working in international field settings.

The editors remind us that it goes without saying that contemporary scholars recognise the significance of the lenses which anthropologists and ethnographers use to study the lives of those they are interested in researching. Still ethnography is necessary, they explain, for it is a “powerful means of analysing what it is to be human in all its multiplicity”. They then go onto place emphasis on the need to understand that field observations conducted through the lenses employed by social anthropologists are shaped firstly by his/her relations with those being researched, and secondly by the lived history the anthropologist/ethnographer brings with her to the field, and that influences
the emerging relationships and observations.

The book’s premise is that the term culture has become taken for granted, and needs to be interrogated. Further, context too needs to be questioned, as this too is ever shifting and multiple in perspectives: “key ideas and practices are at once expressed and constituted somewhat differently by persons whose somewhat different histories produce different perspectives”. Social processes in research, production of knowledge and relations between the researcher and the researched have inter-connections and mutual implications that contest previously theorised dichotomies and binaries of social anthropology such as culture v biology or collective v individualist.

Gerd Baumann's chapter on the multi-ethnic area of Southall in London considers moral panics about Asian gangs. Baumann shows how the wider discourses of international significance inter-relate to what happens in local contexts, for example by referring to Britain’s colonial legacy. My favourite chapter, because it resonates with my current research on Britishness in Bermondsey, is What about White People’s History?: Class, Race and Culture Wars in Twenty-first-Century Britain by Gillian Evans. Evans argues for the urgent need to examine educational inequalities by giving social class significance when studying minority ethnic communities, and equally not neglecting the diversity amongst white working-class students, and therefore considering white ethnicities. She tells us that black and Asian boys who are struggling at school are often suffering social class inequalities, and at the same time the diversity of white communities is ignored. Therefore the complex challenge is to understand how inequalities of race, social class, ethnicity and cultural background intersect in modern British society. Both Baumann and Evans point towards the need to interrogate media and governmental agendas on interconnections between race, culture and social behaviour.

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Digital Public Sociology at #BritSoc14 (2014-05-08 08:00)

At this year’s British Sociological Associate conference Jessie Daniels, Deborah Lupton and John Holmwood discussed public sociology and social media:
The conference as site for neoliberal behavior (2014-05-08 17:18)

During the conference ‘Thinking about the University’[1], the university was framed variously as location, change agent, institution, producer, concept, tradition, employer, workforce, resigned guardian, soon to be ex-monopolist on information and, currently, nightmare. The rhetorical style, however, was uniform. Here I discuss how performing neoliberal criticism isn’t incompatible with neoliberal behavior.

Using concepts as commodities

The debate about ‘university’ was structured as a competition between concepts. One was ‘Humanism’, the other ‘Neoliberalism’ (I’m using the nomenclature from the conference here, what was meant by it will become clear in the rest of my report. At only one moment in the conference, Neoliberalism was explored on its agency. Was it a myth? A conspiracy? An ideology? An invisible hand? Rationality? Forms of reason? A modality of governance? Can we grab it? I got the impression that it was sold as the antithesis of Humanism, most conference participants were
Humanism was framed as critical, ethical, curiosity driven, aimed at the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, whereas Neoliberalism was framed as utilitarian, immoral, society and/or market driven, aimed at the pursuit of knowledge for the economy. If Humanism were to overcome its internal differences and unite, said our host, professor Belrose, the future would be brilliant. Still, Neoliberalism, is on the verge of winning, with consequent risks for our democracies.

During and after the conference I wondered, does it make sense to structure the debate this way? It seemed to me that ‘Humanism’ and ‘Neoliberalism’ were used as containers, with ‘othering’ as a consequence. ‘Othering’ is the process in which we define what is ‘not us’ in terms of an easily recognizable surface and a ‘not us’ content that doesn’t deserve further examination. While ‘othering’, we define ourselves in terms of ‘not our enemy’ and deny firstly that we too might have characteristics that we despise in the other, secondly that the other can have the same characteristics that we love in ourselves. This reduction can be seen as a commodification of concepts, which makes them easier to sell in the academic theories market.

Advertising concepts

The concepts were, as a consequence of othering, framed as either super attractive or super unattractive. Humanism represented academic freedom, activism, ambiguity, analytical thinking, associated with progressive and leftish, autonomy, captivating stories, citizenship, classical training, creativity, constructive, craftsmanship, creativity, criticism, curiosity, debate, decadence, democracy, denounce/expose universals, discursive, distinguish foolish from wise, doubt, education, emancipatory, empowering, ethical questions/thinking, experience of the excluded, facilitator of the public, fidelity to the truth of the event, free agenda, guardian, guild like, inspiring, intellectual, interpretation, intrinsic value of knowledge, ivory tower, knowledge of the human, liberal arts, life of freedom, love of learning, political work, practice of thought, professional, professor, public intellectual, radicalization, rhetoric and eloquence, self governance, self regulation, selected guardians, showing specifics, soul building, study of the demos, subversive, super specialism, talent, truth to power, uncertainty, understanding codes, understanding socio-historic conditions.

Neoliberalism, in turn, represented accountants, administrators, anti-professionalism, assessment, calculation, cash, CEO, commodification, competition, corporatization, culture of evidence, deliverables, disinvestment, economy, efficiency, external metrification, fees, hedonistic, indicators, investment, managerialism, performance agreements, power, privatization, production, quantified control, rankings, return on investment, sellability, service, stakeholder value, testing industry, transparent work load models, value for money, value maximalization, worth.

But as history shows, Humanism has been more than this package (its a-religious past was forgotten) and less than this. As some admitted during the conference, not all of the labels above have ever referred to a robust social reality and together they nostalgically and melancholically point at a romanticized image of a Humanist university that has never been. In the same vein, the terms used to refer to Humanism’s rival are hardly confined to the realm of Neoliberalism, as the histories of Communisms, Bureaucracies and Fascisms show. And Neoliberalism was born out of the concern that governments spend too little to get the economy going, not out of a blind obsession with budget cuts. When disclaimers are absent, we can speak of advertising.

Market values
Neoliberalism and Humanism were presented as mutually exclusive in their essences. Rightly so? Are there no Humanist traits in Neoliberalism? I guess there are. It’s just as curious about what works why and how, and just as critical about values as Humanism. It’s also ethical in choosing between right and wrong based on arguments. At most, one can say that its performance indicators are different from the ones Humanism would choose. But is Humanism really free from Neoliberal traits in these indicators? I guess not. In academia it’s deemed fully legitimate to create a (niche) market, enter into competition and pursue a monopoly in the field, become a brand and gather honorary jobs such as speaking at conferences. The differences between academic haves and have-nots become visible once a select group is put on stage and the majority isn’t, as the conference at hand exemplified too. The possibility of a genuine exchange was limited as the larger part of the available time was allotted to the speakers and further limited because some speakers left the conference shortly after they addressed the audience, as was the case on the first morning. The disappearing act after lunch of the national contributors, men with administrative tasks, can be interpreted as the subtle but notable message, “I have something to say to you, but nothing to learn from you.” Obviously, the organizing party and international contributors couldn’t leave the conference, but I didn’t notice a lot of engaged interaction with others during the informal parts of the program either. I don’t think this is necessarily a deliberate form of in and exclusion, but I do think the behavior at an academic conference is a matter of playing out a performance, with power differentials, role division and habit – and, again, not very different from how competitors behave in a market.

Indeed, the critique of the Neoliberal university has become its proper market, governed by the same principles that were put forward in the critical analysis of Neoliberalism.

Another similarity with how markets work is the reception of newcomers on the market. Tellingly, in the conference booklet the names of the younger generation were concealed under the header ‘Young academics panel’ and, unlike the other speakers’ bios, their bios were missing. At the conference discussed here, the established generation was critical about the pragmatism of the upcoming generation and at times, I sensed an atmosphere of disapproval. The upcoming generation, in turn, expressed some worries about what they perceived as the idealized and romanticized version of academic freedom. As they said: “We try to play the game and keep our backs straight.” They showed a desire to change things they were dissatisfied with, instead of self-marginalize and self-annihilate. Alternatively, they also expressed worries about being sucked into a system with other values than their own. Their statement was that they were affected by the rules set by the older generation, itself not affected by them. Professor Belrose succinctly verbalized the importance of position in the final sentence before drinks: “We radicalize because they can’t touch us because we have a position.”

At a more abstract level, there’s always a quid pro quo, a trade off in academia, be it as basic as a salary and the opportunity to maintain a certain life style, as hidden as the tit for tat cartel formation that helps create the market and its star providers, or as inherent as the importance of the method (the Greek ‘way to get somewhere’) one utilizes. That’s not essentially Neoliberal nor Humanist, but Human. I missed that last concept in this conference. It could have been the missing link.

To conclude

I don’t want to belittle the problems nor insult the analysts, but all in all I think that how the issues were framed resulted in a rhetoric in which the arguments of Neoliberalism were deconstructed – read: shown as false – and those of Humanism left untouched (only professor Duck took some effort to try to explain Neoliberalism and mitigate its consequences with the proposal of mixed funding and slow science). To me, it didn’t testify of a lot of self criticism (although professor Head sighted that “We have ourselves to blame” by denying the honor in teaching). Othering can have that effect. At moments, I had the impression that the ‘things can only get worse’ script of the academic haves on stage was enforced, because otherwise the whole anti-Neoliberal narrative would lose its validity.
The rituals I observed here I also noted at other conferences. The topic of this particular conference and the way it was discussed offered the frame to interpret them as neoliberal.

[1] The names are fictitious, the (biased) observations and interpretations are mine. This is a reworked version of a longer blog post.

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Sam Burgum (2014-08-02 08:53:35)
Really enjoyed this article (refreshingly critical and reflexive). Although surely the answer is to assert what is politically proper and ethical?

Improvisation in academic life (2014-05-09 08:00)

I really like Steve Fuller’s arguments about ‘improvisation’. He rehearsed them yesterday in a post for Sociological Imagination about the originality of conference keynotes:

For about ten years now, I’ve been arguing about the benefits of improvisational performance in academia, not simply as an experience for the audience but more importantly as a way of getting ‘experts’ and ‘luminaries’ to speak unguardedly on what they think about a topic on which they have established a reputation. Indeed, this is how I believe that academics might earn some entitlement to being called [1]’intellectuals’. But increasingly I also think that this skill might be vital to the future of [2]the university as a clearly branded institution in a world where just about anything is a ‘knowledge producer’ by default.

More specifically, public academic speaking might serve as a living moment of intellectual experimentation, not simply a reproduction of past thoughts. This means that improvisation should be taught to aspiring academics – and if you think that ‘teaching improvisation’ is an oxymoron, then you know nothing about performance, regardless of all the Judith Butler you’ve been force-fed. (Maybe I’m wrong but invocations of ‘performativity’ in an academic talk’s title is usually a dead zone for intellectual engagement – unless you like to hear about non-humans ‘performing’!)

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It reminded me of this experience I had a couple of years ago. I had a talk planned for a conference (albeit only some bullet points in notes on my iPhone I wrote on the train to London) but decided to talk about something else because the talk prior to mine was so thought provoking. I’m not sure about the quality of the presentation but, at least subjectively, it was peculiarly enjoyable to get up and elaborate a line of thought on the fly:

I really dislike using slides. If someone has invited me to talk then I feel obliged to use slides. Much of my antipathy towards slides (beyond the fact that I’m bad at producing them) stems from how difficult I find it to improvise with them. I enjoy presenting most when I have the equivalent of index cards on my iPad – a short series of grouped bullet points. This reminds me what I’m intending to say but usually means I improvise about how and when I say it. On some occasions, it doesn’t work. If someone has gone a bit wrong prior to the event then the lack of planned structure amplifies my situational anxieties and incapacities. But when it does work, I’m a much better speaker if I just stand up and chat.

Blogging represents another form of improvisation. I thought earlier “I want to write something in response to Steve’s post yesterday”. I didn’t know until I started writing exactly what I would find myself writing. Reflecting on it, it’s not a particular surprise in this case. The influence of Fuller’s concept of ‘improvisation’ on me has largely been about public speaking, so it’s not unexpected that a blog post about it has turned into one considering public speaking. But many blog posts are a surprise. I discover a new idea or a new theme when writing. Or I find a new way of looking at a familiar idea. In this sense, I see ‘improvisation’ as intrinsically linked to what I think of as ‘non-linear creativity’.
Another example in a very specific area is given by a client in a follow-up interview as he explains the different quality that has come about in his creative work. It used to be that he tried to be orderly. "You begin at the beginning and you progress regularly through to the end." Now he is aware that the process in himself is different. "When I'm working on an idea, the whole idea develops like the latent image coming out when you develop a photograph. It doesn't start at one edge and fill in over to the other. It comes in all over. At first all you see is the hazy outline, and you wonder what it's going to be; and then gradually something fits here and something fits there, and pretty soon it all becomes clear – all at once."

Carl Rogers – On Becoming a Person Pg 152

So while I think Fuller's argument could sound trivial to someone determined to be critical of it, such that it’s concerned primarily with entertaining audiences, it’s actually much more significant than that. There’s immense creative importance in the capacity to think on your feet or, as Nietzsche might put it, to write on your feet:

Not with my hand alone I write:
My foot wants to participate.
Firm and free and bold, my feet
Run across the field – and sheet.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Prelude in Rhymes: 52

I don’t think ‘improvisation’ and ‘creativity’ are co-extensive. But I do think that an intellectual environment hostile to improvisation will tend to constraint creativity. If we don’t have space to experiment, to improvise on the spot, it’s unlikely that we’ll have much space for creativity. We may be perfectly free to create but the forms we produce will be familiar and routine. If we have room to improvise then we’ll be better able to cope with what Howard Becker describes as the ‘chaos’ involved in writing:

You can’t deal with the welter of thoughts that flash through your head when you sit at your keyboard trying to think where to begin. No one can. The fear of that chaos is one reason for the rituals that the students in my seminar described. First one thing, then another, comes into your head. By the time you have thought the fourth thought, the first one is gone. For all you know, the fifth thought is the same as the first. In a short time, certainly, you have gone through your whole repertoire. How many thoughts can we have on one topic?

Howard Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Pg 55
Improvisation makes this chaos into a virtue. It licenses us to jump headfirst into the flux and see what has happened to us once we emerge from it. In the absence of improvisation, the creative flux becomes a problem. It becomes something to discipline through routine and repress through ritual. It means the most live moments of creative production are approached in a way which, to paraphrase Les Back, seeks to assassinate the life within them.

4. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/xyjgY2CzMFE?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&mod_e=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/xyjgY2CzMFE?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&mod_e=transparent)

Research presentations from hell | The Research Companion (2014-12-05 12:01:26)
[... 05.12.14 This post on Improvisation in academic life contains some useful reflections on being a flexible speaker/presenter (although I suspect the [...]

**PhD Workshop: What’s the point of social ontology?** (2014-05-10 08:00)

What’s the Point of Social Ontology?
PhD Workshop at the University of Warwick
18th June 2014, 10am – 5:30pm

Ontology can often prove a contested and confusing issue within social research. Everyone has an ontology, explicit or otherwise, but the process of drawing this out and thinking through its implications for research can often be a confusing part of the PhD process. This participatory workshop explores the practical significance of ontological questions for social research, inviting participants to reflect on their own research projects in a collaborative and supportive context. It aims to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse matter of social ontology, linking theory to practice in the context of their own research projects. The main focus throughout the day will be on how ontological questions are encountered in social research, the questions posed by such encounters and how engaging explicitly with social ontology can often help resolve such issues.

All participants will offer a brief (5 minute) presentation of their research project and the ontological questions which have been or are expected to be encountered within it. Those still early in the PhD process are welcome to substitute this for a discussion of their research interests and potential project. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on their own social ontology and how it pertains to their project. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day!
We also invite two more substantial presentations (10 mins) for the first afternoon session, reflecting on your engagement with ontological questions in your own project in order to help begin a practical engagement which encompasses the entire group. If you would be interested in leading the discussion in this way then please make this known when registering.

To register please contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your research and your interest in social ontology (500 words or less) by May 15th. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available, please ask for more details.

[1]www.socialontology.eu

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The film 'Transcendence' would make good classroom material (2014-05-10 11:30)

I recently saw the film Transcendence with a close friend. If you can get beyond Johnny Depp's siliconised mugging of Marlon Brando and Rebecca Hall's waddling through corridors of quantum computers, Transcendence provides much to think about. Even though Christopher Nolan of Inception fame was involved in the film's production, the pyrotechnics are relatively subdued – at least by today's standards. While this fact alone seems to have disappointed some viewers, it nevertheless enables you to focus on the dialogue and plot. The film is never boring, even though nothing about is particularly brilliant. However, the film stays with you, and that’s a good sign. [1]Mark Kermode at the Guardian was one of the few reviewers who did the film justice.

The main character, played by Depp, is ‘Will Caster’ (aka Ray Kurzweil, but perhaps also an allusion to Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann’s The Magic Mountain). Caster is an artificial intelligence researcher based at Berkeley who, with his wife Evelyn Caster (played by Hall), are trying to devise an algorithm capable of integrating all of earth’s knowledge to solve all of its problems. (Caster calls this ‘transcendence’ but admits in the film that he means ‘singularity’.) They are part of a network of researchers doing similar things. Although British actors like Hall and the key colleague Paul Bettany (sporting a strange Euro-English accent) are main players in this film, the film itself appears to transpire entirely within the borders of the United States. This is a bit curious, since a running assumption of the film is that if you suspect a malevolent consciousness uploaded to the internet, then you should shut the whole thing down. But in this film at least, ‘the whole thing’ is limited to American cyberspace.

Before turning to two more general issues concerning the film, which I believe may have led both critics and viewers to leave unsatisfied, let me draw attention to a couple of nice touches. First, the leader of the ‘Revolutionary Independence from Technology’ (RIFT), whose actions propel the film's plot, explains that she used to be an advanced AI researcher who defected upon witnessing the endless screams of a Rhesus monkey while its entire brain was being digitally uploaded. Once I suspended my disbelief in the occurrence of such an event, I appreciate it as a clever plot device for showing how one might quickly convert from being radically pro- to anti-AI, perhaps presaging future real-world targets for animal rights activists. Second, I liked the way in which quantum computing was highlighted and represented in the film. Again, what we see is entirely speculative, yet it highlights the promise that one day it
may be possible to read nature as pure information that can be assembled according to need to produce what one wants, thereby rendering our nanotechnology capacities virtually limitless. 3D printing may be seen as a toy version of this dream.

Now on to the two more general issues, which viewers might find as faults, but I think are better treated as what the Greeks called aporias (i.e. open questions):

(1) I think this film is best understood as taking place in an alternative future projected from when, say, Ray Kurzweil first proposed 'the age of spiritual machines' (i.e. 1999). This is not the future as projected in, say, Spielberg's Minority Report, in which the world has become so 'Jobs-ified', that everything is touch screen-based. In fact, the one moment where a screen is very openly touched proves inconclusive (i.e. when, just after the upload, Evelyn impulsively responds to Will being on the other side of the interface). This is still a world very much governed by keyboards (hence the symbolic opening shot where a keyboard is used as a doorstop in the cyber-meltdown world). Even the World Wide Web doesn't seem to have the prominence one might expect in a film where computer screens are featured so heavily. Why is this the case? Perhaps because the script had been kicking around for a while (which is true). This may also explain why in Evelyn's pep talk to funders includes a line about Einstein saying something 'nearly fifty years ago'. (Einstein died in 1955.) Or, for that matter, why the FBI agent (played by Irish actor Cillian Murphy) looks like something out of a 1970s TV detective series, the on-site military commander looks like George C. Scott and the great quantum computing mecca is located in a town that looks frozen in the 1950s. Perhaps we are seeing here the dawn of 'steampunk' for the late 20th century.

(2) The film contains heavy Christian motifs, mainly surrounding Paul Bettany's character, Max Waters, who turns out to be the only survivor of the core research team involved in uploading consciousness. He wears a cross around his neck, which pops up at several points in the film. Moreover, once Max is abducted by RIFT, he learns that his writings querying whether digital uploading enhances or obliterates humanity have been unwittingly inspirational. Max and Will can be contrasted in terms of where they stand in relation to the classic Faustian bargain: Max refuses what Will accepts (quite explicitly, in response to the person who turns out to be his assassin). At stake is whether our biblically privileged status as creatures entitles us to take the next step to outright deification, which in this case means merging with the source of all knowledge on the internet. To underscore the biblical dimension of dilemma, toward the end of the film, Max confronts Evelyn (Eve?) with the realization that she was the one who nudged Will toward this crisis. Yet, the film's overall verdict on his Faustian fall is decidedly mixed. Once uploaded, Will does no permanent damage, despite the viewer's expectations. On the contrary, like Jesus, he manages to cure the ill, and even when battling with the amassed powers of the US government and RIFT, he ends up not killing anyone. However, the viewer is led to think that Will 2.0 may have overstepped the line when he revealed his ability to monitor Evelyn's thoughts. So the real transgression appears to lie in the violation of privacy. (The Snowdenistas would be pleased!) But the film leaves the future quite open, as what the viewer sees in the final opening and closing scenes looks more like the result of an extended blackout (and hints are given that some places have already begun the restore their ICT infrastructure) than anything resembling irreversible damage to life as we know it. One can read this as either a warning shot to greater damage ahead if we go down the 'transcendence' route, or that such a route might be worth pursuing if we get manage to sort out the 'people issues'. Given that Max ends the film by eulogising Will and Evelyn's attempts to benefit humanity, I read the film as cautiously optimistic about the prospects for 'transcendence', where the film's plot is taken as offering a simulated trial run.

My own final judgement is that this film would be very good for classroom use to raise the entire range of issues surrounding what I have called [2] 'Humanity 2.0'.

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Humanity-2-0-Means-Present-Future/dp/0230233430/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=139713242&sr=1-1&keywords=Humanity+2.0+Steve+Fuller
The Centre for Social Ontology (CSO) was established in 2011 at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne. Now based in the [1]Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, its main focus is the Morphogenetic Project.

- Our monthly seminar series is due to begin in October 2014.
- Further activities are planned for next academic year.

To join our mailing list, please contact [6]socialontology@warwick.ac.uk. The CSO website will be regularly updated with information about our activities: [7]www.socialontology.eu

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/rs/sw/researchclusters/theoryandmethodologies/cso/
6. mailto:socialontology@warwick.ac.uk
Many academic articles are never cited, although I could not find any study with a result as high as 90%.
Non-citation rates vary enormously by field. "Only" 12% of medicine articles are not cited, compared to about 82% (!) for the humanities. It's 27% for natural sciences and 32% for social sciences ([1]cite). For everything except humanities, those numbers are far from 90% but they are still high: One third of social science articles go uncited! Ten points for academia’s critics. Before we slash humanities departments, though, remember that much of their most prestigious research is published in books. On the other hand, at least in literature, [2]many books are rarely cited too.

It sources and refutes the original 90% claim while also exploring some of the wider issues involved. An interesting question occurred to me: why has that 90% claim circulated so readily despite it being an over-estimation for the humanities and emphatically wrong for other disciplines? It is an 'urban legend' as the author puts it in the blog post. It appears to confirm a perhaps unspoken fear ("no one cares about what I write") or a self-aggrandising prejudice ("I get cited a lot but other people's work is crap") and this affectively imbued confirmation bias keeps the claim circulating.


It could also be exaggeration for effect. 90% of things academics publish aren't cited really means, as both this and the LSE article point out, that academia is relatively unimportant. (anecdotal evidence warning!) a bit like a friend of mine who announced that 87.5% of all academic work is horse manure, and going to uni was a waste of time.

Loren (2014-05-22 03:12:14)
I suspect the fear that "no one cares what I write" may be well-grounded, especially in the humanities.

Deborah (2016-04-30 08:39:46)
Possibly the figure is high because many articles and books are not groundbreaking enough, because the cycle of publication is too rapid. It takes a few years to produce truly innovative research, longer to write about them effectively and engagingly. And then again there is simply too much to read, and the methods of dissemination not systematic enough.
The politics of austerity (2014-05-13 08:00)

Richard Seymour had a thoughtful and incisive analysis in the Guardian a couple of weeks ago, released around the same time as his new book on austerity (see the video above). It addresses what I take to be the questions which the left has to address: how was it that a crisis of finance capital transmuted, as if by magic, into a crisis of sovereign debt? Furthermore, what strategies can be learnt from the sheer efficiency with which this (cultural) agenda was pursued?

How can it be that more than six years since the credit crunch, with austerity under way for more than three years, the left has barely showed signs of life, let alone scored a single significant victory? Particularly when capitalism has been in its deepest crisis in generations. We have been floored by austerity, and above all passive acceptance.

To understand how we got to this impasse, we need to radically rethink many of our core assumptions. The first is the engrained idea that a capitalist crisis necessarily leads to radicalisation. As political theorist Antonio Gramsci pointed out, it is the “traditional ruling class” rather than its opponents who are best positioned to take command of a crisis. Its control over the dominant institutions, its loyal cadres of supporters in thinktanks and the media, and its economic and political strength, all enable it to adapt and propose its own solutions. Proactively, it seeks to meet the crisis on every level on which it manifests itself by changing strategies, winning over popular layers with “demagogic promises”, and pre-empting and isolating opponents.

http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/28/right-only-econom-solution-austerity
It’s really worth reading [7]the article in full. I happened to stumble across it via his website a few hours after I’d been listening to [8]Thinking Allowed. It had two of my favourite political thinkers: [9]David Harvey and Colin Crouch. I’ve interviewed Colin Crouch on two occasions: [10]here and [11]here. He remarked to Chris Mullin once that his current position as a critic from the left was a consequence of shifting political ground. As a student he had been on the right of the Labour party and he feels he’s stayed in the same place while party politics has shifted. Whatever truth there is to that, I think his critique of the institutional trajectory of representative democracy is an important one. Post-Democracy seems like a very prescient book in retrospect, one heralding changes which are really beginning to become apparent seven years on from the onset of the financial crisis. Here’s a video of him talking briefly about post-democracy:

IFRAME: [12]http://www.youtube.com/embed/FnTOiso08HM?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/TxsBRJqYck?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
8. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04001kg
Academic scribes, their writing and their unsociability (2014-05-14 08:00)

The paradox is that we academic scribes are not always very sociable. We cling to the library like bookish limpets that, like Kierkegaard, find real human beings too heavy to embrace. We speak a lot about society but all too often listen to the world within limited frequencies. I am proposing an approach to listening that goes beyond this, where listening is not assumed to be a self-evident faculty that needs no training. Somehow the grey books written on sociological method do not help much with this kind of fine tuning. The lackluster prose of methodological textbooks often turns the life in the research encounter into a corpse fit only for autopsy.

Les Back, The Art of Listening, Pg 163

I think there's more to this than can be fairly ascribed to the limitations of ‘traditional’ scholarly communication. But I think these nonetheless play a significant role in contributing to the ‘unsociability’ of sociology. In part, it’s a matter of audience, with marginality arising from a turning inwards towards others like ourselves. If we’re communicating with a technical audience, it creates a tendency to drift towards ever more technical language. In doing so, norms surrounding ‘proper’ communication will themselves tend towards the obtuse and, with this, the starting point from which we drift becomes ever more mired in professionalised marginality.

When I say ‘technical language’ I mean specialised vocabulary in the broadest sense, those networks of terms and concepts which emerge in relation to specialised practices, deriving their meaning and purpose from connection to such skilled activity. I don’t think there’s anything fundamentally wrong with technical language in this sense. It shouldn’t be avoided entirely nor could it be. But to use Les Back’s lovely expression, “we have to insist on having both Adorno and Orwell at our elbow as we write”. We should be relentlessly critical of our tendency to slide into jargon while nonetheless recognising the role that jargon can serve. Rather than seeing clarity and complexity as antipathetic, such that we struggle to distinguish between the (accessibly simplified and the simplistically accessible, we should focus on the ways that technical vocabulary (complex) can be used to express precise claims succinctly (clarity) in a way which would otherwise be impossible.

What role does it serve beyond this? I can’t see that it serves any intellectual role and, as prone as I am to slipping into it myself, I’m determined to train myself out of the habits that 7 years of postgraduate education have inculcated in me*. It clearly serves a personal role though, as C Wright Mills makes clear in one of my favourite passages from his work**:

In many academic circles today anyone who tries to write in a widely intelligible way is liable to be condemned as a ‘mere literary man’ or, worse still, ‘a mere journalist.’ Perhaps you have already
learned that these phrases, as commonly used, only indicate the spurious inference: superficial because readable. The academic man in America is trying to carry on a serious intellectual life in a context that often seems quite set against it. His prestige must make up for many of the dominant values he has sacrificed by choosing an academic career. His claims for prestige readily become tied to his self-image as a ‘scientist’. To be called a ‘mere journalist’ makes him feel undignified and shallow. It is this situation, I think, that is often at the bottom of the elaborate vocabulary and involved manner of speaking and writing. It is less difficult to learn this manner than not. It has become a convention – those who do not use it are subject to moral disapproval. It may be that it is the result of an academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre, who understandably wish to exclude those who win the attention of intelligent people, academic and otherwise.

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pg 218

In this sense I think we can see 'academic writing' as a dispositional complex which has been reinforced in three ways: status anxiety at the level of the person, restrictive norms about 'proper' writing at the level of academic culture and a narrow range of available media** at the level of academic institutions. These constraining factors will act in different ways and at different times but their emergent power over time mitigates against the possibility of forms of writing which aim "to document and understand social life without assassinating it". This is on page 164 of the Art of Listening. There’s an even nicer formulation of this in an interview with Les Back [2]here: "ways of writing about the social world that don’t assassinate the life that’s in it". I think this expression is an example of precisely the virtues it advocates. It’s a phrase I’m simply not going to forget and it conveys its main claim with an immediacy which would be difficult to accomplish with a less literary mode of expression.

In my paper about online writing I’m trying to think through the possibilities offered by blogging in terms of this diagnosis. I think there’s a real risk of academic blogging being ‘captured’ by professionalisation in a way which undermines the potentially transformative role it can play in relation to personal practice. But the possibilities for experimentation are hugely significant nonetheless. In an important sense, it’s a uniquely malleable medium, at least compared to monographs, edited books and journal articles etc. I need to figure out more precisely what I mean by 'malleability' here. I’m also including ‘micro-blogging’ within this scope, despite it being a term I’ve always hated. Partly to expand the scope of what I’ve been invited to write but also because considering Twitter could help flesh out my overarching argument. I’m very interested in the aesthetics of [3]Nein Quarterly as an example of the innovative modes of expression that the radical brevity of Twitter can help give rise to.

*Including the habit of writing sentences, such as this one and many in the main body of the text, which I believe are called compound-complex sentences. Quite why I feel so compelled to do this, with the strangely undulating character it entails for my prose, continues to elude me but I’d like to know nonetheless.

**I don’t think this can be straight-forwardly applied to our present situation but the [4]main thrust of the argument is still valid.

***Which are themselves narrow in terms of the expression they permit.

2. https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/Attentiveness%20as%20a%20Vocation%20-%20Back%20and%20Ruiz.pdf

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Those remarks about assassinating the life we write about remind me of Ben Marcus’ *The Age of Wire and String*. In the [1]"argument" of that book he suggest that "culture has been willfully hidden to the routine in-gazing of professional disclosers", who forget that "by looking at an object we destroy it with our desire" and that the task, therefore, is not to represent social life but to train things to see themselves. The book itself, it seems to me, is a good attempt at such training.

The thing I like most about Bourdieu is his conception of public sociology. It seems clear to me that Bourdieu was a public sociologist, though [2]others are less certain about this and I suspect it’s not a term he would have chosen to use himself. The book of talks I’m basing this post on is [3]here and all the references are from this book.

The politics of these talks are rooted in the anti-globalisation movement of the late 90s and early 00s. As such, Bourdieu’s attentiveness to the political rhetoric of ‘globalisation’ is not a surprise. He draws attention to the double meaning of ‘globalisation’: the *descriptive* sense of a unification of the economic field and the *normative* sense of the desirability that these changes are supported through economic policy. The slight of hand arises because the former is often used to disguise the latter i.e. economic ‘reality’ is invoked to justify the pursuit of policies which are themselves responsible for the putative ‘reality’. The global market is a political creation, much as national markets had been, arising from “policy implemented by a set of agents and institutions, and the result of the application of rules deliberately created for specific ends, namely trade liberalisation (that is, the elimination of all national regulations restricting companies and their investments)” (pg 84). Bourdieu argues that ‘globalisation’ is a ‘pseudo-concept’, at once descriptive and prescriptive, which has replaced ‘modernization’ as the intellectualised trappings for the ideology of late capitalism.

However something real and momentous is taking place. Bourdieu is concerned with the capacity of international institutions to “invisibly govern” national governments, which are preoccupied by the management of “secondary matters” and form a “political smoke screen that effectively masks the true sites of decision-making” (pg 91). He describes a “veritable invisible world government” constituted from “the big multinational firms, and their international boards, the great international institutions, the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank, with their many subsidiary bodies, designated by complicated and often unpronounceable acronyms, and all the corresponding commissions and committees of unelected technocrats little known to the wider world (pg 78). This is a state of affairs that
national governments have been wilfully complicit in bringing about, most strikingly those of a putatively social
democratic inclination, the conduct of whom has "by extending or adopting the policy of conservative governments"
made "this policy appear as the only possible one" giving "regulation measures complicit with business demands the
appearance of invaluable achievements of a genuine social policy" (pg 58).

The Internationalisation of Social Movements

It is because of the depoliticisation which accompanies 'globalisation', as the arena of decision-making moves ever
further from the demos, that social movements must develop the capacity to act at a European level. In making
this case, Bourdieu is rejecting what he sees as a manipulative dichotomy drawn between being pro-Europe and
anti-Europe, instead rejecting the deployment of the rhetoric of cosmopolitanism in defence of the neoliberal project
in Europe. His concern is to develop a capacity to pursue agendas at the European level in order to avoid the tendency
to get dragged down by particularistic disputes, given that national governments often act as a 'smoke screen' for
processes of change which have their origins at an international level. He sees great hope in the multiplication
of social movements but great challenges involved in the integration necessary to constitute them as collective
actors on the international stage. He offers a lot of interesting suggestions about the practical organisational
forms coordination of this sort could take, with the necessity being to "establish a coordination of demands and
actions while excluding attempts of any kind to take these movements over" (pg 42). I find his argument here most
compelling when he discusses cultural production by social movements:

There are currently many connections between movements and many shared undertakings, but these
remain extremely dispersed within each country and even more so between countries. For example,
there exist a great many critical newspapers, weeklies, or magazines in each country, not to mention
internet sites, that are full of analyses, suggestions and proposals for the future of Europe and the world,
but all this work is fragmented and no one reads it all. Those who produce these works are often in
competition with one another; they criticise each other when their contributions are complementary
and can be cumulated. (pg 43)

If you consider the number of radical presses currently operating, with their varying degrees of size and political
engagement, it's hard not to see his point here. The advent of multi-author blogging has intensified this existing
process, as the reduction of entry costs to near zero has led to a proliferation of websites which are, individually, a
natural response to the question of 'what to do?' faced by those hoping to promulgate a counter-hegemonic politics
but, collectively, this perhaps serves to fragment the very cultural terrain upon which it is hoped that an alternative
'common sense' will begin to take root.

The Responsibilities of Intellectuals

In an argument [4]redolent of C Wright Mills, Bourdieu maintains that “those who have the good fortune to
be able to devote their lives to the study of the social world cannot stand aside, neutral and indifferent, from the
struggles in which the future of the world is at stake” (pg 11). However this engagement inevitably poses challenges,
as seen in the personal tensions Bourdieu recognises in his own position,

I have often warned against the prophetic temptation and the pretension of social scientists to announce,
so as to denounce them, present and future ills. But I find myself led by the logic of my work to exceed
the limits I had set for myself in the name of a conception of objectivity that has gradually appeared to
me as a form of censorship. (pg 66)
But what does he mean by ‘censorship’? His target is the notion of 'axiological neutrality' which, he argues, represents a "scientifically unimpeachable form of escapism" rather than a necessary condition for social science. Bourdieu calls for a scholarship with commitment, in opposition to a dominant tendency which sees scholarship and commitment as antipathetic. This is a point I found inspiring when I first read it and it has stuck with me since. It’s an important corrective to a tendency Burawoy describes for the original commitments which lead people towards sociology to be marginalised by the pressures of completing a PhD and pursuing a career:

The original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world, that drew so many of us to sociology, is channeled into the pursuit of academic credentials. Progress becomes a battery of disciplinary techniques—standardized courses, validated reading lists, bureaucratic ranking intensive examinations, literature reviews, tailored dissertations, refereed publications, the all-mighty CV, the job search, the tenure file, and then policing one’s colleagues and successors to make sure we all march in step. Still, despite the normalizing pressures of careers, the originating moral impetus is rarely vanquished, the sociological spirit cannot be extinguished so easily.


However with these engagements come responsibilities. Bourdieu argues that the intellectual world "must engage in a permanent critique of all the abuses of power or authority committed in the name of intellectual authority". It must also resist the temptation to "mistake revolutions in the order of words or texts for revolutions in the order of things, verbal sparring at conferences for ‘interventions’ in the affairs of the polis" (pg 19-20).

**Resisting the Rise of Think Tanks**

The role of think tanks is too often overlooked or their study marginalised as a specialism. Whereas the case can be made that think tanks were integral to the consolidation of late capitalism, as well as to the neoliberal counter-revolution that began in the 1970s. This is certainly Bourdieu’s view and he calls for resistance to the "paradoxical doxa" produced through the intellectual activity of think tanks:

In order to break with the tradition of the welfare state, the ‘think tanks’ from which have emerged the political programs of Reagan and Thatcher, and, after them, of Clinton, Blair, Schröder, and Jospin, have had to effect a veritable symbolic counterrevolution and to produce a *paradoxical doxa*. This doxa is conservative but presents itself as progressive; it seeks the restoration of the past order in some of its most archaic aspects (especially as regards economic relations), yet it passes regressions, reversals and surrenders off as forward looking reforms or revolutions leading to a whole new age of abundance and liberty. (pg 22)

As I’ve [6]written elsewhere, the influence of think tanks has expanded rather than contracted in an age of austerity. We should also be aware of the [7]direct and indirect ways in which think tanks are participating in an the project of ‘reforming’ higher education. But how can it be resisted? The first step is to “break out of the academic microcosm and enter resolutely into sustained exchange with the outside world (that is, especially with unions, grassroots organisations, and issue-orientated activist groups) instead of being content with waging the ‘political’ battles, at once intimate and ultimate, and always a bit unreal, of the scholastic university” (pg 24).
This renewed engagement cannot be the work of a "master thinker endowed with the sole resources of his singular thought" but through collective work seeking to "create the social conditions for the collective production of realist utopias" and "joint research on novel forms of political action, on new manners of mobilizing and of making mobilized people work together, on new ways of elaborating projects and bringing them to fruition together" (pg 21). There is also a negative function, involving work “to produce and disseminate instruments of defence against symbolic domination that relies increasingly on the authority of science (real or faked) (pg 20). This would involve critique of neoliberal thought, its rhetoric and mode of reasoning, as well as sociological analysis aimed at uncovering the social determinants shaping its production.

One of the ideas I like most in Bourdieu's public sociology is the call for giving "symbolic force, by way of artistic form, to critical ideas and analyses". By this I think he means social scientists collaborating with artists, drawing on other ways of telling about society (as Becker would put it) in order to disseminate critical analysis of the operations of power. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he’s particular attuned to the role of cultural works in potentially resisting the seemingly irrevocable marketisation of cultural production:

If I recall now that the possibility of stopping this infernal machine in its tracks lies with all those who, having some power over cultural, artistic, and literary matters, can, each in their own place and their own fashion, and to however small an extent, throw their grain of sand into the well-oiled machinery of resigned complicities. (pg 65)

The accumulation of ‘grains of sand’ is not a particularly inspiring theory of change but I suspect it’s an accurate one. We need to disrupt the ‘machinery of resigned complicities’ to open up space for collective action orientated towards loftier purposes. As well as alliances with cultural producers, Bourdieu explores the potential role that social scientists can play in alliance with social movements. He suggests that social scientists could play the role of “organizational advisors to the social movements” as they pursue integration at the international level by "helping the various groups to overcome their disagreements" (pg 43). I think Bourdieu’s vision here has three aspects: scholarship working towards the elaboration of real utopias, constituting a sort of ‘applied research division’ of international social movements and acting as critical voices in public debates in alliance with the agendas of social movements.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/_9PCp9oKPRw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Firing_Back.html?id=VLIiTxInnqF4C&redir_esc=y

Thank you for writing this. I, too, was inspired by like Bourdieu’s vision of the relationship between sociology and social movements, and I was involved in a transnational social movement, ATTAC, that attempted to put these ideas into practice in
the early 00s. (In particular, I was involved in organising the short-lived ATTAC branch in London, in Europe's most neoliberal state.) ATTAC had a "scientific committee" that, I think, helped focus mobilization on certain issues by providing the sort of critical applied social science Bourdieu had in mind. ATTAC had a lot of members in several European countries, and it was certainly a lively movement. More broadly, the alter-globalisation movement that it was a part of organized many public events that involved large numbers of enthusiastic people (a series of European Social Forums that I was involved in, as well as the World Social Forums). However, I think the overall results were disappointing. The implementation of the alter-globalisation movement's proposals required the cooperation of political parties and governments, which were singularly uninterested in those proposals. Paradoxically, the EU's now-likely adoption of one of ATTAC's main proposals, the Tobin tax, has happened only after the decline of the alter-globalisation movement. Did this movement actually have a subtle long-term effect that was difficult to perceive at the time, or was it simply irrelevant to the processes that actually shape state policies? Now I'd like to read some of the sociological research that's been done on that sort of mobilisation, starting with Geoffrey Pleyer's book. Maybe now that ten years have passed, it's easier to assess Bourdieu's vision of mobilization and how that vision was put into practice.

"Did this movement actually have a subtle long-term effect that was difficult to perceive at the time, or was it simply irrelevant to the processes that actually shape state policies?" That's a fascinating question. I got involved in activism around the time the movement was in decline, with the anti-Iraq war campaign being the first I was involved in. Rereading that Bourdieu book left me really intrigued by how the discourse of globalisation dropped from view, at least in my experience, as a framework for mobilisation. I think the specific question you're asking about particular organisations is VERY interesting but I think it's also a way into these important broader issues (globalization -> war on terror??) which as far as I can see have been widely overlooked.

Benjamin Geer (2014-05-16 00:58:55)
In 2002 I said to Bernard Cassen, one of the founders of ATTAC, that I was afraid the war on terror was going to completely derail the alter-globalisation movement by absorbing all the energy of the left, and he said not to worry. By February 2003, I had drifted away from ATTAC and was demonstrating in Hyde Park against the invasion of Iraq, and then I started learning Arabic and thinking about an academic career in order to better understand what was going on...

would you fancy writing a semi auto biographical post about this, ben?

Benjamin Geer (2015-03-07 15:17:27)
Hey, I just realized that I totally missed your last comment. Yes, thank you, I'd like to write something like that if I can find the time for it. I'll give it some thought and get back to you.

Sociological Imagination (2015-03-08 06:25:59)
Great!

Foucauldian analysis and the mystification of elites (2014-05-16 08:00)
In a recent review of *The Reflexive Imperative*, Jonathon Joseph describes subjects "being encouraged to become active citizens and consumers who must make the right life choices based on acquiring the appropriate skills and information, making informed choices about risk activities, taking responsibility for their welfare and well-being and drawing on the appropriate resources (and social capital) from their communities and networks". These "new notions of governance" are ones which "operate from a distance" and "use market logic as a rationality". These "new forms of regulation" are ones which "rely on the responsibilization of various actors through more normative and normalizing techniques and procedures" (pg 101).
What does it mean to say that a 'notion of governance' uses 'market logic as a rationality'? Is a 'notion of governance' the same as a 'form of regulation'? What does it mean to say that a 'form of regulation' relies on the application of 'techniques and procedures' to actors? There's undoubtedly sloppy conceptualisation here. It's rife within social theory and I'm not exempting myself from it. But I think there's a more entrenched problem with this conceptual vocabulary. Theoretical language of this sort has always irritated me slightly and it's only recently, after reading Howard Becker's Writing for Social Scientists, that I've finally realised why this is. It is, as Becker puts it, "a theoretical error, not just bad writing":

In many sociological theories, things just happen without anyone doing them. It's hard to find a subject for a sentence when 'larger social forces' or 'inexorable social processes' are at work. Avoiding saying who did it produces two characteristic faults of sociological writing: the habitual use of passive constructions and abstract nouns.

Becker, Writing for Social Scientists, Pg 8

This is why Joseph can be found saying that a “notion of governance” uses “market rationality”. What could this even mean? How can a notion use anything? The process of governance may use market rationality but the notion of governance is, well… notional. The claim about "new forms of regulation"relying on various strategies is much more coherent but again lacks a subject. I find it jarring to talk about strategies and techniques in the absence of an agency underlying them. Likewise to talk of “forms of regulation”. As Mouzelis has observed, “Foucault’s insistence that practices of subjugation fulfil specific objectives in a subjectless, disembodied manner comes remarkably close to Parson’s middle-period writings on the social system, where systemic analysis completely displaces agency considerations” (Mouzelis 1995: 46).

Insisting on the role of agency in 'governance' doesn't entail the self-transparency of agency. Nor does it suggest that the ‘techniques and strategies’ used straight-forwardly derive from instrumental scheming on the parts of agents (with the image this conjures up of closed door meetings at Davos devoted to ‘notions of governance’ and ‘new forms of regulation’). But this is an assertion that, so to speak, people make the world go round: something has gone seriously wrong with an account of ‘governance’ that isn’t couched in terms of elites, vested interests and the strategies they pursue to protect those interests. In this sense, I’m saying that Foucauldian analysis at its worst constitutes a form of mystification. It actively occludes the operation of power, obscuring the deliberate strategies of groups (and the emergent consequences which arise as a result of the competition between groups in an open system) behind an obscure rhetoric of governance without governors and regulation without regulators. Incidentally, does talk of governors and regulators as singular groupings not sound jarringly simplistic? But surely talk of ‘neoliberal governance’ is no less singular and far less concrete?

As an example of what I mean, consider the Bourdieusian analysis [1]Tom Medvetz offers of how ‘dependency theory’ was promulgated by think tanks and taken up by political actors in a specific context. The same process of social change, in which the relationship between welfare recipients and the welfare state was recast as dependency, could easily be ‘explained’ in terms of the enactment of neoliberal modes of governance. But is this really an explanation? It not only wouldn’t specify the concrete action involved in this transition, it would also undermine our inclination to look for it.
However at its best, Foucauldian analysis offers something really valuable. When I talk about Foucauldian analysis I like, it’s inevitably Nikolas Rose that I think of. But even he falls into these passive constructions, as seen in this example from one of many instances where I’ve quoted him on my blog:

Today, we are required to be flexible, to be in continuous training, life-long learning, to undergo perpetual assessment, continual incitement to buy, constantly to improve oneself, to monitor our health, to manage our risk. And such obligations extend to our genetic susceptibilities: hence the active responsible biological citizen must engage in a constant work of self-evaluation and the modulation of conduct, diet, lifestyle, and drug regime, in response to the changing requirements of the susceptible body.

Nikolas Rose, The Politics of Life Itself, Pg 154, Princeton University Press

Surely the notion of ‘requirement’ is relational? If I am required to do or be a certain way then someone or something is requiring this of me. Are my social and cultural circumstances requiring me to be a certain way? Then what matters are the characteristics of those circumstances and how, in relation to my own characteristics, I am led to be required to be a certain way. Rose’s sheer insightfulness and detail about the former is why I like his work. He neglects the latter but, unlike many others, clearly states that this is a methodological and meta-theoretical move.

It’s the relationship between the circumstances and the self which interests me. While it’s a contentious claim, it nonetheless seems obvious to me that it is present, though suppressed, within Foucauldian analysis. It’s logically entailed by any statement that “we are required” or “we are subject to” or “we are governed by” (etc). It’s only excluded entirely by elaborating logical obscenities like “notions of governance use market rationality” which excludes human agency at the cost of imputing agency to ideas. But if we’ve brought the self back into the picture then why not go further? I accept there is a discourse surrounding reflexivity, one which social theorists may contribute to through their pronouncements upon reflexivity (though it does always strike me that there’s a tendency towards scholastic over-estimation of our influence). But there is also a capacity to be reflexive which is not discursively constructed. However the exercise of this capacity is discursively influenced and this is precisely why I’d like to bridge the gap between relational realism and foucauldian modes of analysis.

*It’s in Journal of Critical Realism (13): 1. I’m struggling to find a web link for some reason.


Adam Barker (2014-05-17 12:38:45)
It’s always tempting to talk in vague notions of governance and tendencies. I think it’s in some respect because it allows us to make claims about things we see going on while remaining somewhat insulated from the partisan or invested push-back that comes with ‘naming names’ (that is, saying that real people do real things that hurt or disadvantage other real people). In my general field (settler colonialism and decolonisation), there’s a great deal of this vague language that comes from postcolonial theory and critical literary theory. I recently reviewed a book that brilliantly observed what happens in the processes of settler colonialism and empire building the United States, but only rarely mentioned the people who actually make it happen. On the
other hand, when some of us (and I do include myself in this category) try to point out that groups of people actually do these things and why, the public and academic backlash is at times severe: ‘How dare you insinuate that I am a colonizer!’, etc... It really does discourage people from speaking plainly about what they perceive when what they would have to say is that racism is rife in society, that greed is a primary motivating factor for violence against specific individuals and communities by other specific individuals and communities, and so on. It’s difficult to put forward a well-reasoned and researched argument of that realist sort without it being treated as an opinionated personal attack by the people who ‘resemble the remark.’ I try to get around it by always including myself explicitly (as a white, male, Settler Canadian) in the group of people whose dominating actions I examine, but it doesn’t always help.

hi adam, that’s a really thought provoking and honest comment. would you think about extending it ever so slightly and it could be a free standing post? i think it’s a fascinating and little discussed issue (the epistemic implications of the social consequences attached to making knowledge claims) which needs to be talked about more.

Mark this has interesting implications for my work that I’m now thinking through. In the meantime, I agree Foucauldian analysis works better when it has a specific research object; when it becomes a theory-method. For example, take term ‘excited delirium’ used in coroners courts in the USA (and increasingly over here) to explain deaths in custody. The term has no scientific validity yet it’s used to close very ambiguous cases of involving police restraint. Clearly, it’s a discursive construct that serves someone’s interests the key research question is whose interests?

Sociological Imagination (2014-05-18 11:36:49)
it’s a discursive construct that coheres (or fails to) with people’s interests but I’m less sure that it can be said to ‘serve’ them and that this explains the circulation of the construct, if you see what i mean.

Yes I can see what you mean. At some point a coroner decides to use a non-scientific term to make a subjective decision seem objective and close out other interpretations. This often leaves relatives unhappy. I agree, it’s difficult to say whose interests this process serves and this question is left hanging too often - but it’s clearly not serving the interests of the relatives.

I wonder how many senior academics would feel comfortable rereading their PhD? Equally, I wonder how many current research students can imagine revisiting their work in twenty or thirty years? This is precisely what I did recently, having come to the somewhat chastening realisation that I was so old that what had once been a cutting-edge sociology project might now have a second life as social and intellectual history.

Technology, Consumption and the Future: The Experience of Home Computing (Brunel University) was submitted in 1992 but was based on fieldwork conducted in the late 1980s. I started to reread it with what might be politely described as mixed feelings, not least as this meant putting myself back into the (very mixed up) head of my twenty-something self. I had made a terrible meal of my PhD: the one viva question I could not answer was ‘why did it take you so long to finish?’ Barely a week goes by that I don’t feel a twinge of guilt for the indignities that I put my late, great supervisor Roger Silverstone through. Moreover, for a variety of reasons (some understandable some not) although I applied the arguments developed in the thesis elsewhere (notably in McLaughlin et al Valuing Technology 1999) I never published on home computing (except [1]here).

Even in the 1980s most people thought my approach idiosyncratic; I saw home computing as a way of studying consumption processes and exploring the form and appeal of nostalgic accounts of a future where technology
ended the flux of modernity. Underlying this was a deep cynicism (sometimes productive and sometimes completely wide of the mark) about the potential of home computing. My approach is also dated by a wilful disinterest in the technical aspects of computers and computing. I must admit that I hardly touched an actual home computer during the research - although I had worked in the computer industry before I started it - so convinced was I of my mission to assert the significance of the ‘social’ over the ‘technological’.

In my defence, much of the reading that I did in the 1980s predated the emergence of Science and Technology Studies which would have provided a ready-made way into the socio-technical. I had to work hard to find a language and literature with which to discuss technology as culture and early chapters of my PhD range widely over topics as diverse as cargo cults and the lost history of the gas refrigerator! It also took me a long time to switch on methodologically; encouraged by my supervisor (who was developing an approach that came to be known as the ‘ethnography’ of domestic media use) I agonised as to how to find ‘ordinary families’ to interview about home computing. Thus many of my early informants were passed over as atypical hobbyists. I missed a trick, for example, in not continuing early fieldwork with a group of New Age enthusiasts for computer communication. Here is a quote from one of them promoting the possibilities of technology, taken from the programme of the 1987 Festival of Mind Body and Spirit:

"... individuals will extend their minds by connecting their computer to other computers serving as distributor of shared information and memory banks of unforeseeable wealth .... We will dial computers like we choose radio stations and TV channels, and we will create electronic communities around each machine: a green network, peace people, health enthusiasts - everyone will have ‘their’ machine and community, and everybody can move from one community to another: it happens all in our minds, from the comfort of our home or office - on the road towards the global village."

I am not quite sure why I was so easily convinced that I should abandon this fieldwork in favour of tramping the suburban streets of Uxbridge and Ruislip in search of ‘real’ home computing but that’s what I did, diligently conducting over fifty semi-structured qualitative interviews.

So regrets I have a few but then again the resulting thesis has some interesting elements. For example, I was determined to locate the emergence of home computing in a wider account of the form and influence of predictions of what was then termed the Information Technology (IT) Revolution. In the 1970s and early 1980s these predictions had a strongly millennial tone: some of the buzz phrases of this period now sound very dated - ‘an end to work’, ‘leisure society’, ‘the computer society’, ‘wired society’, ‘the electronic cottage’, ‘teleworking’, ‘family computer’ ‘educational computer’ and indeed ‘home computing’. As the Janus-faced rhetoric suggests, hopes and fears about the future impact of IT emerged out of the economic, political and cultural crisis of the 1970s. International prophets such as Alvin Toffler, Donald Macreae, and Zbigniew Brzezinski saw IT as offering a route from current malaise to future stability. In late 1970s Britain predictions of the IT Revolution had taken on a particular resonance in a setting where public discourse was dominated by talk of crisis and decline. Prime Minister Jim Callaghan organised a special screening of an apocalyptic Panorama television programme Now the Chips Are Down for his cabinet and senior civil servants. As I write in the thesis, this was part of a pattern that persisted into the Thatcher era and helped shape the early production, consumption and academic study of home computing in Britain: the arrival of information technology was often presented as a crucial watershed in economic development - a one-off test of a nation’s economic, intellectual and perhaps even moral strength. As the 1980s continued discussion of home computing was still linked to hopes of economic renewal and fears of social decline (typically focused on the family and or ‘community’).

What became known as the British home computer boom lasted for the first half on the 1980s. Given the global character of contemporary digital culture it is hard to remember how distinctive different national paths to adoption of IT were at this time. The British boom was dominated initially by 'microcomputers' made in the UK and marketed explicitly as 'home computers' (remember that this predates the PC): older readers will recall the Sinclair
and Acorn micros. The pace and scale of early adoption of these micros was unmatched anywhere else in the world but by 1985 when I began my project, some commentators were talking about the end of the boom, of dashed expectations and some were questioning whether the home computer had a long term future. When I conducted the bulk of my interviews in 1987 and 1988 many of those I spoke to were looking back to the heyday of the home computer boom and forwards to a new era of computing.

One of the contributions of the thesis was to describe the home computer boom as a ‘public event’ and locate micro users’ experiences within other developments such as government initiatives to promote IT awareness and literacy as a challenge to the (non)problem of supposed resistance to new technology. 1982 was, for example, designated ‘IT Year’ and there was considerable investment in computers in schools. The public event of the boom can also be tracked via extensive media coverage (including a growing specialist consumer press) and in the growth of numerous computer clubs held in schools, libraries and shops. As my interviews confirmed, many of the users of the home micro were responding to prophecy, convinced that their purchase was equipping them or their children for a future shaped by IT.

For all its initial commercial success, the home computer was a shifting and contested product. The early British micros were, in Leslie Haddon’s phrase, ‘self-referential’: limited memory and storage meant that their only function was to explore what a computer was. As the market matured most machines still relied on cassettes for data storage and plugged into the household television. Many of those I interviewed wrote (or often more precisely copied) programmes in Basic code rather than purchase ready-made software for gaming or home accounting or other uses. A key theme of my interviews was the way in which people’s narratives of their ‘computer careers’ often focused on the process of ‘finding a use for’ their micro. Their exploration of the capacities and possibilities of the micro often encompassed playful (and frequently painstaking) attempts to bring visions of a computerised home of the future to life. This process sometimes ended in disappointment but, through it, differing conceptions of what was useful emerged. My analysis placed the users in a cycle of cultural production in which shifting and competing conceptions of what a computer was for took shape: the ‘home computer’ was beginning to evolve into ‘the word processor’ and ‘the games machine’.

Given that Digital Sociology is all the rage, and I also learn that there is now something called Media Archaeology that teaches us that digital technologies develop through the dialectic of the new and the old, perhaps it is a good time for other sociologists also to revisit the home computer boom.

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1. http://ssc.sagepub.com/content/9/3/435.abstract

CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-05-17 08:00)

The [1]Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow
conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.


The Media Sociology of that 'Car Crash' Farage/UKIP Interview (2014-05-17 11:30)

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) – and especially its leader Nigel Farage – has been under enormous scrutiny in the run-up to the European elections next week, where UKIP is expected to score very well, embarrassing all the major parties and presaging some seats in Westminster next year. This party organizes all its policies around the idea that the UK’s departure from the European Union would improve the UK’s situation with minimum loss. (The Scottish National Party is pushing a similar line vis-à-vis the UK itself in its September referendum, but that’s another matter.) For better or worse (I think worse), this simple message has turned out to be a stroke of political genius, and UKIP is clearly trying to catch up with its fan base to appear to be a party ‘worthy of government’.

So how is UKIP doing? Probably as well as it can, which may well turn out to be good enough come polling time. Nigel Farage is certainly the best thing that has ever happened to UKIP. He is a master of the political emotions – he knows his brief, can stay on message, remain personable and roll with the punches, displaying just the right proportion of concession and indignation. He is right to think that the media is holding him and his party to a higher standard than the other parties. But this is to be expected. Outright dislike of UKIP’s policies aside, the media is doing this because UKIP leads with its extremism, whereas other parties wait until they’re in power to unleash, say, Michael Gove on the school system. Think of the interrogation that other successful party leaders would have received, had what turned out to be their flagship policies were known at election time.

Much has been made of yesterday’s radio interview with Farage by James O’Brien of LBC (London Broadcasting Company), a venerable commercial channel based on talk/news. No doubt O’Brien was on top form in pressing Farage on all sorts of tricky issues, in response to which Farage made the best fist of it. The most unfortunate part of the interview came when his communications director intervened to stop the proceedings, which ended up being the story covered in the newspapers today. Farage clearly did not want to end the interview, and frankly I’d sack the communications director for effectively implying that the event was a disaster. [1]You can judge for yourself, but up to that point I’d say Farage was holding his own against someone who clearly was gunning for him.

Now let’s think about this from the standpoint of the sociology of media. Farage’s interrogator O’Brien benefitted greatly from four things: (1) He doesn’t have a national profile, and so one can’t very easily attribute prior motives, etc. that might have biased his treatment of Farage. (2) His personal manner is like that of the flat-footed detective who is simply wanting the facts, nothing more. (3) Commercial radio is generally more much rough-and-tumble and desultory than BBC stuff. (4) The interview took place at the end of a campaign, where Farage (and other candidates) said the same things over and over, and so there has been more time to think of incisive questions.

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Now consider someone who does interrogate all the party leaders (and their mouthpieces) very incisively on a regular basis – regardless of where we are in the political cycle – yet doesn't get nearly the same credit. I’m not talking about Newsnight’s Jeremy Paxman, but [2]Andrew Neil of Daily Politics fame. For those old enough to remember, Neil was Rupert Murdoch’s boy at the Times during the Thatcher years and is generally known for a smart-ass, take no prisoners comic style of political commentary that can veer into the salacious. And there lies the problem. In a democratic polity, baggage can weigh one down. If you don’t share the same burdens as your viewers, they’d prefer you share no burdens at all so that they can project their fantasies about you – in the case of O’Brien, he becomes the voice of reason because he is the quintessential ‘man without qualities’.


Professor Tahir Abbas (2014-05-22 06:11:23)
Thank you for posting a very interesting topic. I thoroughly enjoyed the conversation and learned many important points about sociology.

The Centre for Social Ontology (2014-05-18 08:00)

The Centre for Social Ontology (CSO) was established in 2011 at the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne. Now based in the [1]Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick, its main focus is the Morphogenetic Project.

- Our monthly seminar series is due to begin in October 2014.
- Further activities are planned for next academic year.
One of the problems I had when I studied analytic philosophy was my inability to map much of what I was studying onto how I saw the world. There were a few exceptions (Hume, Marxism, Causation, Political Philosophy) but I otherwise struggled to understand what was at stake in the work we were studying. This work was presented to us in terms which stressed its interrelations but in a way which was entirely artificial: framing Locke, Berkeley, Hume against Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz doesn’t help matters if the categories of ‘empiricists’ and ‘rationalists’ have little substantive content. I just found it dull... in retrospect I find this strange given how much I can enjoy philosophy now. For instance I recently read [1]this book which brought Leibniz and Spinoza to life for me. I found it stunning that something which had once so bored me (though at least I tried, as opposed to basically giving up when we got to Kant) could now be so intellectually gripping.

What’s obvious to me in retrospect is how little studying analytic philosophy changed how I saw the world. Weirdly, I can only think of formal logic (which I hated at the time) as having had any lasting perceptual impact on me, as being forced to learn this stuff at 18 leaves you much more attuned to non sequiturs than you might otherwise be. In contrast, sociology has radically changed how I see the world, both in a Millsian sense of ‘making the familiar strange’ but also in the sense of furnishing me with a social ontology that actually maps onto my day-to-day experience, opening out those aspects of the social world which common sense tends to close down. After this experience, going back to philosophy, I find I can get much more out of it. In the past few months I’ve been slowly reading Heidegger’s What Is Called Thinking? and a lot of Nietzsche (Ecce Homo, The Gay Science, Beyond Good and Evil, Daybreak). Suddenly, these books which I’d struggled with as an MA student (believing that my problem with philosophy was with analytic philosophy rather than with philosophy itself) make sense to me in a way that they didn’t previously.

What’s changed? These ideas map onto my own experience. They also map onto other people’s ideas. I think this is what was missing when I studied philosophy. Almost none of it mapped onto my own experience and, in retrospect, I seized upon what even vaguely did (e.g. political philosophy) out of sheer intellectual boredom. It also only mapped onto other work is a somewhat empty and formalistic way, as a function of abstracted taxonomies rather than as a multiplicity of concrete disputes. I think this is crucial to our capacity to engage with theoretical work because, without it, it remains difficult to genuinely elaborate a view upon what we are engaging with. Again, as with many things, I’d see this propositionally while resisting the impulse to reduce it to its propositional content.

My point is that theoretical argument builds upon points of agreement and disagreement. One chapter of my PhD thesis looked very closely at the account of the subject offered by Giddens and its implications for his analysis of social
change. Both he and I use the same term ‘reflexivity’ but we use it to refer to a slightly different thing. Understanding
the significance of this necessitates an appreciation of what ‘reflexivity’ means to Giddens, how it relates to his
broader conception of what the individual is and his conception of the social processes in which such individuals
are embedded. In this sense, there’s a hermeneutic moment entailed in engaging with someone’s work but, if we
leave it here, social theory remains a fragmented enterprise. My chapter rested on a further analysis of the points
of disagreement between this Giddensian account of agency and my own. So while it’s not as simple as cashing out
atomistic disagreements in propositional terms (e.g. reflexivity as monitoring vs reflexivity as deliberation) a proper
engagement necessitates an understanding of the network of disagreements.

I completely get why critical realism turns a lot of people off. In fact I sometimes find myself reticent to use the term
‘critical realism’ and instead slip into saying ‘relational realism’, ‘social realism’ or just ‘realism’. But the sort of critical
realism I like (Archer, Donati, Sayer, Elder-Vass, Porpora, Smith, the early Bhaskar and Derek Layder, though he
wouldn’t identify himself as such) is appealing to me precisely because it helps with translation of this sort. Archer’s
work in particular offers an extremely sophisticated meta-theory which is sometimes obscured by the sheer volume
of her work and her tendency to be intellectually combative. I guess what I’m saying is that these meta-theoretical
resources have proved very helpful in understanding what it is that theorists are arguing about.

This isn’t just a point about realism. I think realists can often write in a way which obscures the logic of their
disagreement with others (at its worst tending towards scholasticism: “that’s the epistemic fallacy?”, “er what’s
an epistemic fallacy?”) but the best realist critique tends to draw out ontological disagreements in very specific
terms e.g. [2]Dave Elder-Vass on ANT. One of my favourite non-realist theorists is Nicos Mouzelis. He’s adept at
precisely the sort of ‘translation’ I’m talking about. One of the things I find so helpful about his work is that much
of his engagement rests on incorporating disparate theorists into the same intellectual topology and evaluating
them in terms of this. It produces some insightful, though contentious arguments, such as his observation of the
“methodological similarities” between Foucault and Parsons (Sociological Theory: What Went Wrong? Pg 47) that
become “quite striking” once you strip away their profoundly divergent vocabularies. Ian Craib makes a similar point
in his discussion of Stuart Hall (Experiencing Identity, Pg 8) observing that if we “substitute ‘role’ and ‘role expec-
tations’ for ‘discourse’ and ‘practice’ we are close to the determinist version of the traditional sociological approach”.

My experience has been that proponents of the views that are incorporated (or relativised?) in this way can often
react with irritation. I think there’s an important line to walk between preserving the textual adequacy of readings
and tolerating what, in practice, constitutes a form of relativisation that is necessary for progress in sociological
theory. My fear is that the career structure of the modern academy mitigates against this ‘translation’ though. It
requires rather a lot of careful reading. It produces commentary rather than the novel contributions upon which
such commentary depends. But unless we can be clear about precisely what we agree and disagree upon, it’s hard
to see how progress in sociological theory could be possible.


What are conferences for? (2014-05-19 12:33)

For many years my most common nightmare scene has been an academic conference. In those dreams I am alone
in a conference hotel that is new and strange to me, and I am either lost or far from where I need to be. I know
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nobody there and nobody knows me or pays attention to me. But the place is always visually complicated and interesting, with hidden doors and elevators that don’t go where one thinks they will and corridors that twist and turn in surprising ways, my room moving to someplace different from where I thought it was, fascinating architectural details, my luggage disappearing, and people moving purposely toward places I don’t know about. Perhaps these dreams disqualify me from writing anything about conferences, because they seem to mean I am lost at conferences and an outsider. But then the dreams also suggest that I have worked hard over the years to find my way in the world of conferences, and maybe that means I have learned something.

Developmental Perspective

I think there is a developmental course for all of us conference attenders. I am sure that the developmental course varies a lot among us, but I think often there is a developmental evolution in what conferences one attends, what one goes to conferences for, what one gets from conferences, and the mistakes one makes concerning conferences. As a beginner I went to conferences to learn what the leaders had to say, to try to understand my fields better, to figure out what went on at conferences, and, most of all, to learn content. After a few years of conference experience I was going to conferences to hunt for jobs, to get conference presentations on my resume, to try to fit in to this or that ingroup that from the outside seemed appropriate for me, and to see what books people in my fields were publishing. Conferences helped to drive me away from some ingroups and subdisciplines. For example, I left one subdiscipline when I found that talking to the research assistants of prominent scholars I could surprisingly often elicit stories of what I considered violations of basic methodological honesty—for example, discarding outlier data only because it was implausible in terms of the researcher’s theory. I left two other subdisciplines that I aspired to because it became clear to me that I lacked the educational credentials and to some extent the legitimacy of having published on certain topics or used certain methods to ever be counted as an ingroup member. I could say that conferences have been very important to me in reality checks—ascertaining whether I fit well enough with what the people who seem to be central to the conference and the discipline or subdiscipline to which it is linked.

As I became more savvy about conferences, I became more purposeful in the sense of going to conferences only that offered a good chance to nurture my intellectual growth in areas in which I was teaching and writing, conferences where I had sufficient professional legitimacy to participate, that offered me peer group memberships that I could feel comfortable with, and that might give me some chance to publish in my areas of expertise.

Politics and Money

University life is a life in politics in the sense of jockeying, negotiating, manipulation and the like concerning resources, rewards, reputation, and influence. Publishing is political. What gets counted as knowledge is political. There is a politics to what is taught and not taught. So why would academic conferences not be political? My reaction to the politics of academic conferences has always been a mixture of fascination, disappointment, interest, realism, self-protection, playful involvement, anger, and indignation. It has been easy enough to see that in the politics of conferences there are ingroups that control things and that people who are ambitious and effectively manipulative get more of the goodies. Very good and able people may be on the outside—perhaps because they are relatively shy, perhaps because they are unwilling or unable to play the games that it takes to do well, perhaps because the topics that interest them and the approaches they use in their scholarly work are not those that powerful ingroups care for, and perhaps because of the accidents of birth and where they attended school they lack the ingroup allies that others have. I have not always been aloof from the political games. For example, I have at times been cynically planful about allying myself with some ingroup, trying to establish a new ingroup, or taking sides in political battles in ways that probably benefitted me. But then at other times I have been alienated from politics and have instead sought out my friends and acquaintances and made new friends and acquaintances and had interesting and pleasant visits but stayed away from sessions, parties, meetings, etc. in which the major political players were operating. However, the friendships I have made at conferences sometimes give me ingroup success benefits—for example, invitations to publish in edited volumes or special issues of journals, editorial board memberships, and invitations to
speak. So at conferences even friendships can be political. But mostly I like the friendships I have made because I like who I like...often people who are as disaffected as I am.

Some people gain economically from the politics of conferences. There are, of course, the job seekers, and also people who will get themselves nice raises by getting job offers or even job feelers from other places. There are people who may increase their chances of receiving grants as a result of connections they make at conferences, and these pay off economically in terms of summer salaries, annual salary raises, and perhaps opportunities for better paying jobs. Some people may earn considerable money from publishing if they connect with the proper publisher representatives at conferences or the proper textbook promoters. There are people who may earn considerable money from invitations to give lectures, to do visiting faculty work, to do webinars, and the like, and they promote themselves at conferences. And in some fields I am associated with, there are people who make impressive amounts of money offering workshops, consulting, in-service training, short courses and the like (and the money will even be greater if these activities include sales of their publications, DVDs, CDs, etc.) And they promote themselves at conferences. And the gains are not only to individuals but also to cliques and ingroups, in which people can promote one another by trading invitations to speak, writing letters of recommendation for one another, and much else.

I sometimes wish conferences were free of politics and were places where people could meet, ideas could be exchanged, various areas of scholarship could be enhanced, and merit was rewarded. And there is always some of that at conferences, but I don't think academic conferences are different from the rest of society. Politics is everywhere in society. So is manipulation for personal gain. And I suppose one could make the case that for those of us in the social sciences, academic conferences are teaching situations, offering us wonderful learning experiences on how things work in all sorts of places in society.

More on My Nightmares

My nightmares about conferences in some ways misrepresent my experience at conferences. At this point in my conference attending life, I can always count on spending conference time with friends or interesting strangers. And I know better than I did as a beginner how to find sessions that I value and how to escape those that I experience as dreary. But my nightmares also tell what I consider to be the truth in that conferences, while rich and fascinating for me, are also places of anxiety, places where I can be lost and where lots goes on that I don't understand. I often feel that others do conferences better than I and know better what they are doing. And maybe because I am not as ambitious as some or as extroverted or needy, I try to stay on the outside while still paying attention to what goes on. And yet I have also understood things well enough to at times help students, mentees, and myself to get ahead in the sense of being offered assorted leadership roles and opportunities to publish or speak.

Paul C. Rosenblatt is Professor Emeritus of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. He claims to be engaged in a fake retirement such that he writes, advises, teaches, and does research, but he no longer attends faculty meetings. As a multidisciplinary academic, he has often attended conferences in sociology, psychology, anthropology, the family field, the bereavement field, social psychology, cross-cultural studies, and qualitative research.
The difference between Foucault and Adorno (2014-05-20 07:02)

I'M NOT SAYING EVERYTHING IS BAD
I'M SAYING EVERYTHING IS DANGEROUS
I AM SAYING
EVERYTHING IS BAD

(HT [1]Damon Young)

1. https://twitter.com/damonayoung
Bourdieu meets Marx, Gramsci, Fanon, Freire, Beauvoir and Mills (in Burawoy's imagination)  
(2014-05-20 08:00)

In this series Michael Burawoy conceives of a whole series of imagined 'meetings' between Bourdieu and leading political thinkers, elaborating his own understanding of Bourdieu's work by considering its relationship with important intellectual trends:

[1]Prefaces


[5]Resurrecting the subaltern: bodies of defiance


[7]Subaltern crowds challenge authority


[9]The state and the people, symbolic violence and physical violence


[11]Discipline, the canon and the 'imperialism of reason''


[13]Gentle violence, brutal violence and the struggle to empower women


[15]The 'Realpolitik of reason' meets the symbolic world of politics


2664
Bourdieu, symbolic order and the 'margin of freedom': four sketches for a theory of change

Epilogue

1. http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Bourdieu/1.PREFACE.pdf

Looks like a Bourdieu church... When all Bourdieu really wanted was to seek more knowledge of our world and fight for knowledge being used to make the world a better place.

Peter Haussler (2015-02-14 10:13:02)
Great idea to converse with a 'world' of thinkers. I like particularly the 'dialogue' with Beauvoir’s view (good to remember in gender-discourse) and with Freire’s approach. We miss a debate on ‘education for the people’. It’s needed not only because of the neo-liberal (capitalist?) domination but because of the new fascinating ‘big wave’ of consumerism in our IT-world (with a formalized, minimized and ‘democratized’ communication). We need the discourse against this stream. As intellectual and popular ‘life-west’ to survive the ‘tsunami’ and, ... get a new chance to swim. For instance, discussing and politicising Habermas’ discourse-ethics in public space could do it, I think. To stop a growing sickness of observed 'self-disempowerment of people and intellectual 'self-mutilation'. What about a fictive communication on 'freedom to learn'? Michael Burawoy could invite Habermas, Benhabib and Freire; and he would be a great moderatior, I am sure. Thanks - good luck.

TV game shows and social change (2014-05-20 08:00)
The jokes are usually about the speedboats. And, granted, it is funny when two people who live somewhere in the midlands or the north of England are shown a speedboat that they have just failed to win. But there is
something revealing about the comedic response we have to old TV game shows like Bullseye. As they are recalled in nostalgic laments of memory or through the repeats made available on digital TV, these old game shows evoke the distance of time and an ironic sense of whim for the way we were 30 years ago. There is something quaint and strange about these shows. This was a time, if we believe what we are seeing, when people could win a metal tankard or handmade key fob without a crushing sense of awkward self-awareness or the need to look into the camera lens to share the joke. These shows act as a portal on the passage of cultural-time, they present to us a society that seems quite distant, alien and maybe even odd. This is despite them actually showing us an earlier version of our own cultural selves. The palette of beige and grey, the neon lights, the captions – “jackpot”, “holiday of a lifetime”, “a family fortune of...”, “TVs biggest...” – the posing models, the multipurpose sets, the applause, the innuendo, the grinning hosts, the catchphrases. I've often thought that you could use TV game shows as documents of social change, they seem to capture something of their time. Over recent months the UK Freeview channel Challenge has provided plenty opportunity to reflect on this thesis. This channel predominantly shows old episodes of TV game shows from the 1980s and early 1990s. This was something of a golden era for this type of TV format. Challenge has shown old episodes of a wide variety of shows, including Bullseye, Family Fortunes, Take Your Pick, Big Break, The Price Is Right, Strike it Lucky, Celebrity Squares, 321 and Wheel of Fortune. If we look carefully, these repeats potentially reveal more than a taste for nostalgia, they actually document some interesting social characteristics of the time – especially when compared to the few equivalent programmes of today.

Game shows today, if we can still call them that, are often centered on large cash prizes, a million pounds is often the landmark but it is nearly always in the tens-of-thousands at least. Although in some cases the prizes are knowingly small, and are delivered with an unmissable sense of irony and a calculated wink (Pointless deploys this type of approach). Back in the 1980s shows like Bullseye were built around prizes, these prizes might be seen to reveal something of the aspirations of the time. There is an overwhelming sameness to the desired lifestyles that are put on display and narrated by these prizes. From pine plant stands and canteens of cutlery to trouser presses and
hand-held video cameras. And then there are the infrequently won star prizes, a trailer tent, a caravan, a fitted
kitchen, a dining room suite, a hatchback, a speed boat. These prizes all reveal something of the aspirations of the
time, they may even say something of lifestyle choices and perhaps even social mobility. On Wheel of Fortune we
see something similar, with a pint size bottle of French perfume contained in a large glass flower, leather trouser
suits and 'his and hers' watches. These are prizes that seem to be woven with powerful social norms – embodied by
those 'his and hers' watches.

If we look across the TV games shows I've listed above, we begin to get a vision of what might have been an ideal or
utopian lifestyle to-be-desired. Waking up to a cup of tea prepared by an automatic teasmade, preparing a fondue
in a fitted kitchen, entertaining around a barbeque whilst sitting on garden furniture and sipping from a magnum of
champagne poured into champagne flutes, or perhaps gathered around a dinning room table serving from a hostess
trolley to a table decked in gold knives and forks whilst discussing our latest holiday of a lifetime – then our guests,
dressed in Italian leather jackets, drive their saloon cars home for a nightcap poured from a cut-glass decanter. These
are the types of dream lifestyles that are woven into the prizes and into the way that these objects are presented
to the contestants and viewers. They have norms bound up within them, norms that now might appear stifling in
their depiction of the lifestyles that they are scripted to be a part of. These shows, many of which were watched
by very large audiences, seem to say something about the types of want that were dominant at the time, and may
even be a precursor to the types of visions of consumerism we see today. Where the prizes in 80s and 90s game
shows were about scripted lifestyles, today's are about the consumer freedoms of money. That is to say that instead
of pre-determined objects with narratives and norms attached to them, instead now the focus is upon the limitless
possibilities of large sums of cash.

Looking back at these shows though, what is perhaps most immediately obvious is how the protagonists have become
much more media savvy. We now appear to innately understand how to behave when on television. Contestants of
the 1980s and 1990s appear unsure and uncomfortable. They are uncertain in their movements and often mumble
their way through anecdotes, furtively looking at their shoes. They appear to be wearing the clothes they would
wear to work or when at home – this is the colour palette of greys and light browns that contrast with the brightly
colored sets. They appear to be ill prepared for the experience. The knowledge of how to be media content is not
yet developed. Somewhere along the line we became more media savvy, with the confidence to speak, dress and
move in the way expected and required of a TV persona. The contestants may no longer be dressing themselves
but, if this is indeed the case, they look comfortable in the retrofit clothes provided by the stylists. People appearing
on TV no longer appear out of place or like they are participating in a disconcerting or traumatic adventure to the
unknown. They appear to know what they are doing. It is like we are now media trained as a routine part of our
socialisation processes. In the 1980s game shows in particular, and a little in the game shows of the 90s, there is
still something of the wonderment in what Graeme Turner has described as the presence of ordinary people in the
media. It is as if both the contestants and the viewers are surprised that they are a part of what is happening. They
respond accordingly. This is no longer the case, the wonderment has passed, contestants today look increasingly like
they belong – and the viewers are not surprised to see them there.

These old TV game shows are not the type of documents or artefacts that might usually be used by those interested
in understanding social change, but there is definitely something of a rich resource here for projecting an audio
and visual account of these times. I remember once visiting an art installation that simply included a TV showing
a short loop of an old game show based around a variety of pub games. There was no narrative or text, the artist
appeared to be inviting the visitor to reflect back on this historical artifact. These old TV game shows tell surprising
stories and reveal something of the time. These are audio and visual documents that depict social change. There is
definitely more to be said, but for the moment they certainly seem to say something about aspiration and how we
have become increasingly media savvy.

I would like to introduce myself as the Book Review Editor for Sociological Imagination. I am currently researching student identity in a south London school, after having taught English at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 for many years in a college in north Manchester, and a school in south London.

We are looking to expand the number of books reviewed on Sociological Imagination. If there are particular sociology related books you are interested in reviewing, or any sociological topic areas you are passionate about, we can consider you as a prospective reviewer for Sociological Imagination. Our book reviews reach a wide audience through digital publishing: the blog, email subscribers and twitter.

Guidelines for potential Reviewers:

Reviews need to

- be between 600 and 1000 words
- relate to the themes of sociology and social theory
- offer a critical, vigorous and fair engagement with the ideas of the book
- be completed within one month of receiving the book
- usually focus solely on one book (but can compare two books in detail)

When writing a review, you should aim to respond to some of the following:

- the book's principal aims/focus/argument
- why the book is important/how it relates to current debates and trends
- the book's strengths
- who would benefit from reading the book

Please send an email with your ideas, preferred book/subject areas, and CV with current contact details to Sadia Habib, Books Reviews Editor at phdsadia@gmail.com.
The academic blogosphere, scholarly craft and the end of ‘pluralistic ignorance’ (2014-05-21 08:00)

One of many useful discussions in Howard Becker’s Writing for Social Scientists concerns ‘pluralistic ignorance’. He argues that this [1]social psychological effect manifests itself in academia in relation to writing. Academic writing is a private and isolated endeavour, in which adversity (rejections by journals, lacerating criticism, endless requests for revision) are dealt with in isolation. The proliferation of journals, writes Becker in 1983, means that every point of view can ultimately find a home. So the public markers of difficult (i.e. going unpublished) diminish at the same time as private difficulties remain or may even increase, as the proliferation of journals goes hand-in-hand with a pluralisation of standards, meaning that navigating the submission process becomes a more complex and less predictable task. This results in a state of affairs where “Everyone thinks that everyone else is getting it done” and “They keep their difficulties to themselves” (pg 21). The privatised character of the process means that “sociological writers do not develop a culture, a body of shared solutions to their shared problems” because no peer group has the same problem (pg 20). In its absence, the tendency is to assume that everyone else copes with writing without problems.

It’s in this context that I find ‘craft’ so interesting. In a descriptive sense, I think of ‘craft’ as encompassing the practical activity involved in creative production. So it’s all the practical embodied things involved in academic writing, as well as the order in which they fit together into a sequence. The concept provides a normative standard, in the substantive perspective it offers from which to critique instrumentalism, but there is also a normative dimension to the practices designated by the concept. To engage with craft involves an encounter with standards inherent to the practice, though of course our acquaintance with those standards is fallible and constrained by our circumstances. I like Richard Sennett’s account of this:

Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman’s discipline and commitment; schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession.

Richard Sennett, The Craftsman, pg. 9

Assuming you accept the coherency of ‘academic craft’, variegated in terms of disciplines and traditions, it becomes increasingly curious that there’s no "body of shared solutions" of the form invoked by Becker. Tricks of the Trade* might be passed on by supervisors or within networks of friends and colleagues. But there’s a striking absence of
a public stock of knowledge, a common culture orientated towards practical affairs that is tied in with professionalisation. I think something of this is captured in the notion of 'professional socialisation' but that this framing is a symptom of the problem rather than a potential solution to it. I think it also inevitably enters into training in methods and methodology, with questions of technique coming closest to the more everyday conception of 'craft'. But it still seems there's something rather major that is conspicuous by its absence.

The prominence of 'craft' in professional consciousness is inversely proportional to pluralistic ignorance of the sort Becker describes. The more people talk about the practicalities of doing writing, the less room there is for the assumption that everyone else finds it easy and one's own difficulties are unusual. But discussions of writing will tend to be marginal in traditional modes of publication. There are only so many books about writing that social scientists are ever going to produce. There are only so many books about writing that social scientists are every going to buy. Likewise I suspect that market forces will tend to push these towards the lowest common denominator, though of course there are many exceptions to this.

However the academic blogosphere and the academic twittersphere, to use two terms I hate, seem obviously amenable to these discussions. They create a space for them that was previously absent. Furthermore, the market constraints which perhaps mitigate against discussions of craft in traditional publishing could be said to encourage it in a way in the space of academic blogs. My experience on this site and sociologicalimagination.org has been that discussions of writing, professional practice and higher education tend to attract much more attention online and they circulate further on social media. The influence of these 'market forces' on academic blogging is a complex issue, representing a problem in many ways, but I think this is one way in which they can be helpful. To anyone trying to build an audience for a blog, it creates an incentive for them to reflect on scholarly practice in a way they might not otherwise. In this sense, I think that the academic blogosphere might involve a tendency to go against the grain of a broader trend within social science that C Wright Mills was fulminating against over half a century ago:

Be a good craftsman: Avoid any rigid set of procedures. Above all, seek to develop and to use the sociological imagination. Avoid the fetishism of method and technique. Urge the rehabilitation of the unpretentious intellectual craftsman, and try to become such a craftsman yourself. Let every man be his own methodologist: let every man be his own theorist; let theory and method again become part of the practice of craft. Stand for the primary of the individual scholar; stand opposite to the ascendancy of research teams of technicians. Be one mind that is on its own confronting the problems of man and society.

C Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pg 224

*To use another catchy term of Becker’s. He has a knack for them.

**This is a completely speculative idea that only occurred to me when writing the post.

Are you confused by critical realism? (2014-05-22 08:00)

If so then this glossary might be a helpful resource:

- [1] Absence
- [2] Actualism
- [3] Change
- [4] Closed and Open Systems
- [5] Completion
- [6] Constellation
- [7] Critique and Transcendental Argument
- [8] Determinism
- [9] Dialectics
- [10] Differentiation and Stratification
- [12] Epistemic and Ontic Fallacies
- [13] Epistemic Relativism and Judgmental Rationality
- [14] Ethical Naturalism and Moral Realism
- [15] Explanation
- [16] Fact-Value
- [17] Facts
- [18] Laws
- [19] Metaphysics
- [20] Ontological Extensionalism
- [21] Ontological Monovalence
- [22] Reasons as Causes
- [23] Retroduction and Retrodiction
- [24] Strong and Weak Actualism
- [25] Transdictive Complex
- [26] Transitive and Intransitive Dimensions
- [27] Truth
Why disappointment? In common usage, and in the dictionary, we talk about disappointment as what happens, what we feel, when something we expect, intend, or hope for or desire does not materialise. One of the difficulties of living in our world is that it is perhaps increasingly less clear exactly what we might expect or hope for or desire. In fact, these words mean different things. The most basic is desire: it carries connotations of needing urgently, yearning, to the point almost of trying to will something into existence. Sometimes we desire something so completely that we revert to our infant selves and scream, metaphorically or in reality, in the hope that our desire may be realised – just as, if we were lucky, the milk used to appear in response to our screams from the cot.

Ian Craib, The Importance of Disappointment, Pg 3

In this [1]thoughtful book Ian Craib argues that ‘disappointment’ is an integral aspect of human life which increasingly finds itself denied by dominant tendencies within anglo-american culture. I think what he’s getting at relates to something which Andrew Sayer describes in terms of the ubiquity of dilemmas in our lives. We constantly face ‘tough choices’** that elude resolution, forcing us to choose the least worst option or avoid the moment of choice at the cost of inertia. But we seek to deny the unavoidability of such choices. We wish to avoid consequences other than those we seek. We wish to avoid waiting. As Craib puts it,

Some part of us wants immediate satisfaction, wants it all and wants it now, and whilst we might try to rationalise this away with our knowledge that it is unreasonable, our gut reactions belie our heads ... I spend my life surrounded by other people, who are more or less independent of me and constantly doing things on their account. As a consequence, I have to adjust to them. If I am to control my own life, then I will first have to control the lives of all those around me.

Ian Craib, The Importance of Disappointment, Pg 5-7

Disappointment has its roots in the social world and this is why dilemmas are ubiquitous in society. Craib’s argument is that “there is much about our modern world that increases disappointment and at the same time encourages us to hide from it: to act as if what is good in life does not entail the bad – for example, that we can love and be loved by another person without having to give up other aspects of our lives” (pg vii). Disappointment is irrevocably bound up with ambivalence because “nothing is ever simply ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and most things are at the same time good and bad” (pg 2). This entails a perpetual remainder, uncomfortable left overs to our decisions which run contrary to what we expected and hoped for. Craib’s point is two-fold. Firstly, disappointment is unavoidable in this sense regardless
of the social context. Secondly, there are peculiar features of our social context which encourage problematic tendencies in how we react to disappointment.

He brings this point to life in his discussion of relationships and intimacy, drawing on the use Giddens makes of self-help books in his work on late modernity to develop a critique of ‘the powerful self and its illusions’. He takes issue with a tendency to see ‘emotional satisfaction’ as the central basis for intimate relationships, arguing that with this “our primitive fantasies of complete satisfaction are brought into play”:

The simple question 'Is everyone OK?' carries a whole impossible world of satisfactions, one loaded with so much feeling that the thought that things might not be OK is enough for the speaker to consider flying from the relationship. The demand for the impossible is at the centre of this type of intimacy; the tragedy is that it prevents us from seeing or learning from its impossibility. If everything is not OK, we do not learn but seek out another relationship in which it might be OK. If we fall in love, then the decline of being in love, whether slow or fast, is felt as a failure rather than a deepening of our understanding of the world and the reality of the other person. The speaker's sense of 'never being satisfied' is an accurate perception of internal and external reality, but it is experienced not as knowledge and understanding but as failure and deficiency.

Ian Craib, The Importance of Disappointment, Pg 123-124

Intimate life is perhaps an extreme case of a broader tendency, with this disposition to flee in the face of dissatisfaction (“if we’re not happy then the relationship must be wrong”) matched by a milder, though no less problematic, intolerance for unhappiness in other spheres of personal life. Our failure to accept disappointment, those aspects of life which are unwelcome and unexpected, leaves us perpetually moving and problem solving. We can’t live with our choices or sit with their consequences. Our actions can never bring about their consequences in the straightforward way that the ‘illusions of the powerful self’ lead us to expect. Our relationships of all kinds inevitably elude our capacities to control them because “when two people come together in this way, what happens between them is less a matter of conscious control and planning (although that enters into it) than emotional attachment and interlocking that makes such control difficult” (pg 127).

What much of this comes down to is “a desire to get out of the mess of life” as Craib memorably puts it (pg 131). In advocating the importance of disappointment Craib is suggesting we must live with mess. Not necessarily live with this mess but with mess as such. So we shouldn’t resign ourselves passively to our circumstances but we should resist the temptation to allow our responses to those circumstances to be dictated by an illusory image of the absence of mess. There’s nothing wrong with trying to order our lives but there is something mistaken about expecting this goal to be achieved. At best it’s something fleeting and the mess will always return.

Our choices not bringing us the satisfaction we hoped for does not mean our choices were wrong. Our life encompassing periods of dissatisfaction does not mean there is a problem that must be solved***. These are the fantasies of an omnipotent self. In pursuing them, informed by a self-image of our potential for self-control, we preclude the satisfactions which are their ultimate object. The problem solving often is the problem and Craib is intensely critical of the tendency of therapy to get drawn into supporting this behaviour and reinforcing the cultural trends underlying it.
Though I can’t for the life of me find where he does this, leaving me to wonder if I’ve imagined it. I’m really starting to regret the hundreds of books I read as a PhD student that I didn’t put into a reference manager.

**I wonder if there is a kernel of truth underlying the spread of this political platitude? If a repudiation of disappointment is as widespread as Craib suggests, what are the implications of this for political culture?

***While I’d trenchantly resist the reduction of political issues to psychoanalytical ones, it did occur to me that Craib’s argument could be leveraged into an intriguing critique of the ‘modernising’ tendency within political parties.

1. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Importance_of_Disappointment.html?id=P5F01t-poxQC&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Importance_of_Disappointment.html?id=P5F01t-poxQC&redir_esc=y)

CfP: BSA Activism in Sociology Forum (2014-05-24 08:00)

BSA Activism in Sociology Forum welcomes new contributions from both established and early career researchers as well as sociologists outside of academia to share their hands-on activist experiences or reflections. Contributors are welcome to produce a new piece built around, but not limited to, the themes below or to respond to any future published pieces on the blog:

- Reflections on public sociology as an approach to the discipline in transcending the academy in order to engage with wider audiences
- Debates over public policy, political activism and the purposes of social movements
- The extra-academic purpose of sociology
- Turning private concerns into public issues (C Wright Mills, 1959)
- What’s the future of public Sociology?
- Applied sociology and “sociological practice” how we can use sociological knowledge in an applied setting
- Practicalities associated with field research: field access; collaboration with local partners
- Relationship between the researcher and the researched: researcher’s positionality; power relations; insider-outsider dichotomy; boundary crossing
- Research ethics an public sociology
If interested in contributing to the blog, please contact convenors ([1]bsaactivism@gmail.com) with your ideas including (1) a detailed abstract (about 200 words), (2) a brief biography (you may also wish to publish anonymously). The total length of each contribution can be around 500-2,000 words.

Best wishes, Jenny


How capitalism survives? A Marxist-Feminist perspective

Call for Papers within the framework of the 11th Historical Materialism Annual Conference 'How Capitalism Survives' – 6-9 November 2014 – Vernon Square, Central London

The Historical Materialism annual conference in London has emerged as a pivotal site for critical, engaged, constructive, and provocative scholarship and activism internationally. This is a fitting place for focusing the (re)emergence of Marxist-Feminist historical materialist analysis. Now in our third year at HM, the 2014 Marxist-Feminist stream of the conference is seeking contributions that continue in the tradition of dynamic and original reflections of previous years, and also those that press the boundaries and take on the bold challenges posed by debates old and new.

The question ‘how capitalism survives?’ resonates strongly with a range of feminist critiques on the Left. In the 21st century this question invites us to revisit the history of capitalism and patriarchy in their myriad entanglements as well as to analyse the daily (re)construction of a globally dominant socio-economic model that thrives on gendered and racial asymmetries.

The Marxist-Feminist stream this year wishes to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that make the reproduction of capitalism possible in the very sites that constitute an ‘everyday life’ where exploitation and struggle are actualised or forestalled. We are also interested in analysing the continuities, discontinuities and mutations of the capitalism & patriarchy nexus from the age of empire all the way to contemporary neo-colonialisms. Such colonial projects may involve anything from territorially-based extraction of surplus value to the production of individual and collective subjectivities.

This year’s conference theme hopes to provide an opportunity to think in truly interdisciplinary fashion about how ‘we’ participate in sustaining capitalism as a reality of intersecting modalities of exploitation. To offer just one obvious example, today the exploitation of women by women has become indispensable to sustaining contemporary capitalism as a planetary biopolitics.
On the basis of the above, we invite papers that may address (but are not limited to) the following themes and/or questions, here presented in random order:

• Critical descriptions of capitalism across Marxism and feminism from feminism’s ‘first wave’ to the present

• Social reproduction and capitalist transformation: micro and macro-analyses

• Instances of success and failure in Marxist-Feminist struggles from the 19th to the 21st centuries

• In what particular ways does the ‘feminisation’ of labour help capitalism survive?

• Are new concepts and methodologies needed to understand women’s roles in capitalism’s ways of overcoming the recent crisis?

• How do the crises of capitalism help generate or overcome otherness (understood in gendered and/or racial terms)?

• Women and queer subjects’ roles in the rise of new capitalist economies and in the assumed decline of Western capitalism

• Homophobia and homonationalism before and after 9/11

• Moving borders, regenerating boundaries: states, bodies, temporality

• Ecosocialism, ecofeminism, ecology: narratives of change or scripts of subjugation?

• Revolution and reform in the theories of Marxist-feminism

• Racism, femonationalism, Islamophobia: the bigger picture

• Intersections of Marxism, feminism, critical race and postcolonial theories

• Sexual assault, rape and resistance

• Women in contemporary liberation struggles

• Marxist feminism and intersectionality theories

• Women’s art, film, music literature: subversion or reproduction of capitalist relations of production?
• Feminism and the reproduction of the capitalist art world

• Women in the communist/socialist tradition: Luxemburg, Zetkin, Kollontai, and others

• Welfare and the political economy of care

• Contemporary sexual politics: resistance to or empowerment of capitalism?

• Violence, fascism, Marxism and Feminism

• Separatism or participation? The case for the 21st century

• Feminism and the institutions of capitalism

• Gender, race and international migration

• Uniting forces: what does an interdisciplinary Marxist feminist theory would look like?

Paper proposals should be max 200 words. When submitting your proposal, please indicate the theme to which your paper could contribute.

Please note that we welcome panel proposals. When you submit a panel proposal, please send an abstract of the general theme of the panel (max 300 words) together with the abstracts of the individual papers in the panel. For individual paper proposals, it is helpful to indicate the theme (above) to which your paper could contribute. This will help us to compose the panels. Panels and individual papers should be submitted by June 1st to: [1]http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/conferences/annual11/submit

Please be aware that the conference is self-funded; therefore we are unable to help with travel and accommodation costs.

The stream is organised by: Abigail Bakan, Angela Dimitrikaki, Sue Ferguson, Sara Farris, Genevieve LeBaron and Nina Power.


What is progress in social theory? (2014-05-26 08:00)

At last year’s International Association for Critical Realism conference, I saw perhaps the most impressive conference presentation I’d witnessed in my five or six years of going to conferences regularly. [1]Jamie Morgan demolished the
notion of 'norm circles' offered by Dave Elder-Vass and he did so in a way which made a whole host of important meta-theoretical points about the purposes of social theory (while also avoiding making the whole exercise feel at all personal, despite the fact he was kicking down something Elder-Vass had spent the last five or six years building up). The overarching purpose of the exercise was to ask what constitutes progress in social theory. As Morgan says in his write-up of this paper, "it is an issue that becomes significant for any social theory that survives long enough to become a general and recognized position with a range of proponents" (115). As a theoretical position becomes entrenched, internally differentiated into multiple strands with varying degrees of complementarity, it becomes increasingly important to ask what constitutes a progressive development in that position.

On this sort of meta-theoretical level, I'm not sure critical realism is in particularly good health (even if there are events taking place at an institutional level which could leave it stronger than ever). The internal differentiation has become quite pronounced. There's the obvious distinction between 'basic' critical realism*, dialectical critical realism and the meta-reality stuff. But we might also distinguish between systems theoretical strands, relational realism, Marxist orientated realism. Or even perhaps in terms of disciplinary divisions which express themselves in divergent interests, sensitivities, proclivities etc (e.g. sociology, human geography, economics, philosophy). Only the first set of distinctions are ones that are established sites for explicit identification (e.g. I have pretty much zero interest in anything other than 'basic' critical realism) but this doesn't mean the other distinctions aren't real. They are differences and fault lines within the theoretical corpus, encountered in unpredictable ways through engagement with critical realist thought. Furthermore, there are explicit identities and social networks which emerge, unfold and change across these fault lines (and in turn contribute to the restructuring of this internal differentiation). Some of these stem from supervisory arrangements or recurrent face-to-face meetings (e.g. there's a definite network connected to Tony Lawson and the Cambridge Social Ontology Group) to the other end of the spectrum, with networks which might be 'virtual' or even in some cases 'imagined', constituted through textual engagements with real effects but nonetheless in the absence of personal relations.

This multi-dimensional complexity is something likely to grow with an intellectual movement (which I think is a more accurate term than 'position') that is sufficiently entrenched, intellectually and institutionally, to avoid gradual dissipation. But very particular risks inhere in security of this sort, as an intellectual movement becomes sufficiently settled to give rise to successive generations of theorists. These are amplified by the necessity for individual scholars to establish a career, with the attendant pressures to publish widely, find some novel framing of an existing issue and generally to capture the attention space within an environment where a publications arms race mitigates against holding anyone's attention for long. These broader circumstances can tend to distort what counts as 'progress', making it ever more important to be explicitly clear about this as a guiding norm on a meta-theoretical level. Jamie Morgan's argument is very helpful in understanding the intellectual implications of this:

This then is considered progress – lacks, inconsistencies, tensions and contradictions are highlighted and some development then follows. This development is typically inferred to be, by virtue of the very process, more 'adequate'. However, the meaning frame of adequate here can gradually become ambiguous. Though realism in particular is sensitive to epistemic fallibility and to the potential for an epistemic fallacy – and ultimately ontology is theory so one is careful to never assert a definite identity between ontology and reality – the originating point of the exercise is to under-labour for more adequate accounts of reality. As such, one can ask in what sense the development has actually enhanced one's understanding of or capacity to undertake further explanatory investigations of reality ... 'Adequacy' can be directed towards internal projects of social theory addressing aspects of social theory for purposes other than demonstrated adequacy for accounts of reality. They can be about finding difference or reformulating what is actually similar, where both may perhaps be in some sense a non-problem. Furthermore, they can involve the pursuit of categorizations or taxonomies that are then
justified as no more than 'consistent with the existing realist ontology'. The development may then focus on placing an existing alternative framework over the same conceptual terrain – the matter of dispute can then become difference among the positions and where one set of potential weaknesses is traded for another in terms of conceptual critique. (116-117)


This is an extremely clear and succinct formulation of what I was struggling to say [5]here. I take Morgan to be saying that a criterion of ‘progress’ is necessary because of the worrying tendency for intellectual movements to tilt towards discursive elaboration, as elaboration comes to hinge on internal points of agreement and disagreement in a way that contributes to the ideational density of the theoretical corpus. It becomes an arcane world, with its own taken for granted axioms, obscure vocabulary and in group / out group distinctions. Sound familiar? This is why the link between theoretical research and empirical research is so important (I say as someone who’s clearly a much better theorist than I am a social researcher but pursues the latter nonetheless). Realist theorists have a tendency to make pronouncements about the ontological regulation of empirical research, which I largely agree with though the point can be overstated. However I think a much more important (and interesting) issue is the empirical regulation of ontological research.

So an important question to ask is: what is ontology for? What is social theory for? What is sociological theory for? These are the questions I’m naturally drawn to, though they’re also ones which tend to be suppressed by structural and cultural tendencies towards growing ideational density in any established theoretical position. As a body of ideas becomes ever denser, more rife with internal distinctions and specialised vocabulary, it’s very easy to lose sight of the underlying question: what is the point of this body of ideas?

*The term 'basic critical realism' rather irritates me.

1. http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/research/2676.htm
2. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/01/22/against-norm-circles/
3. http://essential.metapress.com/content/316934k1155kw362/
4. http://essential.metapress.com/content/316934k1155kw362/


When I attended Jesuit prep school in the mid-1970s, I bought the second edition of Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolution, but it was a version that still reflected its origin as the final volume of the logical positivists’ International Encyclopedia of Unified Science. Despite its relatively few pages, the book’s format was large and pink, with the ‘in your face’ lettering of the day (1970). I say ‘was’ because my heavily annotated copy mysteriously disappeared from my office in Durham when I was professor there in the 1990s and working on Thomas Kuhn: A Philosophical History for Our Times (U Chicago Press, 2000). (Anyone who knows my office now will not find the prospect of theft a surprise.) I think I know who stole it – a smart, self-made guy from Scarborough with a
Thatcher/Blair admiration of the USA. In any case, whoever possesses the original inserts, which functioned as bookmarks, they will see my drawings of the Rolling Stones logo (Mick Jagger’s lips, teeth and tongue), reflecting my own expression of the two-finger salute to the establishment. But of course, that was before blogs gave us the capacity to express outrage in a medium other than the one that elicited it. Nowadays we would call it ‘punk sociology in action’.

Digital sociology and the coming crisis of qualitative research (2014-05-27 08:00)

This is a deliberately provocative title. But an interesting post by patter reminded me of a theme that has been on my mind for a couple of years. Pat’s post concerns the implications of the increased ‘findability’ of qualitative researchers for their practice:

Once you know where someone works, a lot more detail comes within reach. Because of this ‘findability’ it’s almost impossible these days for someone who is a practitioner researcher or auto-ethnographer to completely disguise their location and their participants because they themselves are locatable. Teacher-researchers for instance all work at a school which can be found simply via tracking them. Schools generally have websites which often have the names of all staff as well as pictures of students doing things. They put their newsletters on line. It’s not too hard then for someone who is so-minded to pick up a teacher-practitioner thesis, get to the name of the school, identify some of the people involved in the research and possibly even find pictures and names of the staff and students who feature in the thesis as anonymised persona.

I was recently in a viva where one of the examiners did just this online detective work, as a way of raising with the practitioner-researcher the dilemma of whether it was actually possible to promise anonymity. It had taken less than five minutes for this examiner to track down the exact location of the research site and find out the identities of some of the people involved in the research. Now the examiner wasn’t doing this to be nasty or invasive, but to raise the question of how, in the kind of data-dense world in which we now live, it is actually feasible to guarantee anonymity in the way we once did.

The question of identification of course goes beyond practitioner research. We are wrestling with anonymity in one of my current research projects. Because of the specificity of what particular sites offer it won’t be too difficult to work out who some of them are.

These are issues that have really troubled me in the past six months or so, as I finally handed in my PhD which involved a two year longitudinal study. I’ve deliberately decided not to blog about this and I’m not going to start now. But I sometimes wonder if the full significance of this transformation of the field of research is understood by qualitative researchers. I completely agree with patter’s claim that “these tricky issues are not going away” and that
“they will become more and more tricky the more we amass digital footprints and interlocking and enormous data bases”.

From a more positive standpoint, my experience with conducting asexuality research (as well as being involved as an ally in asexual visibility activism) has left me with a sense of the actually rather positive implications of the same process for public sociology. It’s much easier to sustain relationships with communities you research* and, more so, it’s possible to do so in a way which is helpful to those communities, as well as to yourself as a researcher.

But it does necessitate a very different form of engagement. I’ve written more about this [3]here. The field of research is changing and qualitative researchers need to expand the repertoire of strategies through which they sustain relationships with their participants. If we can do so then there’s a real possibility for a more publicly orientated qualitative research, grounded in ongoing relationships and shared commitments, embodying a more equal relationship between researchers and those they research. But I think real problems will emerge if we can’t do this. In fact, as Patter points out, they’re already emerging.

*Note I’m not saying this didn’t happen prior to the emergence of social media. Clearly it did and on a large scale. I’m saying that the environment will increasingly **demand** it, as opposed to it being solely a function of the personal commitments of researchers.

1. [http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/anonymity-in-research-how-now/](http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/anonymity-in-research-how-now/)
2. [http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/anonymity-in-research-how-now/](http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/05/01/anonymity-in-research-how-now/)


… on qualitative research and anonymity: you might also be interested in this post by Mark Carrigan, and in the post by Pat Thompson he links to …

Kate (2014-06-20 00:05:21)

I wonder how exclusively contemporary this issue is. If, for an example off the top of my head, you look at Taylor and Cohen’s "Psychological survival" based in a specific, high security prison with a specific, small population, anonymity is a fragile, easily questionable thing. I’m not sure how utterly different is the contemporary position. Our sensitivities however, and priorities have shifted markedly. Perhaps this is where the biggest changes are truly perceptible...

Sociological Imagination (2014-06-20 07:30:23)

Hi I definitely agree and thanks for such an interesting example! I’m trying to say it’s becoming more common now but not that it’s exclusively contemporary.

Simon Lidington (2014-09-18 19:49:08)

I thought you might like to know about Big Sofa. Our technology allows you to search video verbatim and take a grounded theory approach to building concepts, constructs, themes etc from open ended data. Being a sociologist myself (1972-75 Exeter University) who still retains copies of The Sociological Imagination to give to budding researchers - and also being an erstwhile social researcher, I started developing this over 5 years ago. It’s now being used by researchers across the world.
intriguing name!

Perhaps these concerns are something anthropology and anthropologists can help you to better understand. They have been discussing these issues since the 1970s

** Trafficked Filipino Teachers in the USA (2014-05-28 08:00)**

I just read [1] an article about something new and shocking to me - qualified teachers of mathematics (and other subjects) from the Philippines who are recruited on one-year contracts to teach in USA public schools, but often end up in appalling working and employment conditions:

"Between 2007 and 2009, [2]350 Filipino teachers arrived in Louisiana, excited for the opportunity to teach math and science in public schools throughout the state. They'd been recruited through a company called [3]Universal Placement International Inc., which professes on its website to "successfully place teachers in different schools thru out [sic] the United States." As a lawsuit [4] later revealed, however, their journey through the American public school system was fraught with abuse.

According to court documents, Lourdes Navarro, chief recruiter and head of Universal Placement, made applicants [5] pay a whopping $12,550 in interview and "processing fees" before they'd even left the Philippines. But the exploitation didn't stop there. Immediately after the teachers landed in LAX, Navarro coerced them into signing a contract paying her 10 percent of their [6] first and second years' salaries; she threatened those who refused with [7] instant deportation. Even after they started at their schools, Navarro kept the teachers dependent on her by only obtaining them one-year visas before exorbitantly charging them for an annual renewal fee. She also confiscated their passports."

The article continues with an interesting analysis of the underlying problems in education and the neoliberal economy:

The idea that new teachers should be imported from halfway around the world for yearlong stints, knowing no background about the communities they are entering and the content relevant to them, is only justified if the teacher is reduced to an instrument of standardized information transmission. And if teachers are just such instruments, why not search the global market for the cheapest, most malleable ones possible? [...] for corporate recruiters and their district clients, finding the right match for a school is not about teacher quality or experience, but rather cost and expendability. The phenomenon of teacher trafficking, then, doesn't rest entirely on recruiters' mercenary tendencies or districts' drive to cheapen their labor. It also rests on the larger neoliberal conception of workers. In this case, teachers become moveable parts, switched out in accordance with the iron laws of supply and demand in order to more efficiently output successful test scores, whose value comes to represent students themselves.

There is, however, something that worries me in the article. It also talks of "Teach For the Philippines" and its mother scheme, Teach for America, as a "global empire". Although I can see how this scheme is part of the same complex of problems - not enough teachers in poorer countries, exacerbated by richer countries "poaching" teachers from poor
countries - the disparaging analysis of "Teach for X" took me aback. I know only very good things about a similar scheme in Bulgaria. I would like to read more - if you read this and want to recommend me something to read about "Teach for X", please do.


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Computational Social Science Conference (2014-05-28 12:29)

COMPUTATIONAL SOCIAL SCIENCE CONFERENCE

Wed 11
-
Fri 13 June 2014
, University of Warwick, UK

The increasing availability of large quantities of human behavioural data has drawn the interest of researchers across the social sciences, the natural sciences and engineering. This conference aims to bring together this interdisciplinary community to share perspectives and identify opportunities to gain new insights into human behaviour and decision making.

Keynotes will be given by

* Steven Koonin, NYU CUSP
* Neil Johnson, University of Miami
* H. Eugene Stanley, Boston University
The full programme and list of invited speakers can be found at [2]http://compsocsci.eu/programme/

Attendance at the Computational Social Science Conference is free, but requires registration. Participants may submit posters for presentation, and may also apply for accommodation in Warwick’s on-campus conference centre. We encourage you to apply as soon as possible, as availability is limited.

If you would like to attend, please register here: [3]http://compsocsci.eu/registration/

We look forward to welcoming you to Warwick!

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

* Suzy Moat, Warwick Business School

* Mark Carrigan, Warwick Business School

* Tobias Preis, Warwick Business School

An Invitation to DIY Sociology (2014-05-29 08:00)

For the last few months I’ve been playing with the idea of DIY Sociology, largely as a result of my [1]dissatisfaction with professional associations. The intuition underlying this is that the institutional forms of academic life are not immutable, arising in a particular context and changing as that context changes, so that a relational reflexivity about them becomes ever more important if that context is undergoing a radical change. Would anyone deny that higher education in the UK is currently undergoing a ‘radical change’? One of the most immediately experienced forms taken by this change is the contraction of the academic labour market, the normalisation of fixed term contracts and the rise of what could (optimistically) be labelled ‘portfolio careers’ but can more realistically be termed precarious working. The implications of these changes for professional associations seem obvious to me and I have no great desire to rehearse my own frustrations to this end.

But what does ‘DIY’ mean more broadly? Dave Beer offers some useful answers to this question in [2]Punk Sociology: “A Do-it-yourself movement, in which forms of communication, creativity, and dissemination are co-opted to work
towards this shared project”. This is what I mean by ‘relational reflexivity’. Not an individualistic ‘dropping out’ of the ‘mainstream’ but a converging orientation towards shared projects and shared values, working collectively towards their pursuit. Here are some other points in Punk Sociology where Beer writes about the 'DIY ethic':

The roughness of the music was a part of the iconoclasm of the movement and the projection of its DIY ethic. This DIY ethic, for some, is central to punk, as Kugelberg (2012: 46) writes, the 'legacy of punk is simple: the immediate implementation of D.I.Y grassroots culture ... No distance. Form a band, start a blog, become an artist, a DJ, a guitar player, an editor'. This DIY ethic played out in a number of ways, in the music and in the business practices, but it was perhaps most clearly honed in the use of self-publication and alternative means of communication that often took the material form of fanzines. As Hebdige described (1979: 111), ‘fanzines (Sniffin Glue, Ripped and Torn, etc.) were journals edited by an individual or a group, consisting of reviews, editorials and interviews with prominent punks, produced on a small scale as cheaply as possible, stapled together and distributed through a small number of sympathetic outlets’. Clearly the communicative possibilities and media have changed radically since the mid to late 1970s, and the possibilities for decentralized communication are now widespread in social media (which I will return to in Chapter 5).

The driving force here is a strong commitment to a pro-activism that is often expressed as the do-it-yourself or DIY ethic. The DIY ethic is an extension of the inventiveness of punk and affords an unbounded engagement with the cultural world. This leads punks to use the opportunities and materials that they encounter to express their creative forces. This is often highly opportunistic and is based upon the use of media and social networks in new and unpredictable ways. The punk finds a way to make things happen and finds a way to be unconventional in carving out pathways of expression and communication. The punk adapts to the terrain in which they are operating and refuses to be restricted by the limitations of access and funding. Punk is based on resourcefulness.

Conventions do not hold them back, and the idea of playing it safe is discordant with its central motifs. The driving force here is a strong commitment to a pro-activism that is often expressed as the do-it-yourself or DIY ethic. The DIY ethic is an extension of the inventiveness of punk and affords an unbounded engagement with the cultural world. This leads punks to use the opportunities and materials that they encounter to express their creative forces. This is often highly opportunistic and is based upon the use of media and social networks in new and unpredictable ways. The punk finds a way to make things happen and finds a way to be unconventional in carving out pathways of expression and communication. The punk adapts to the terrain in which they are operating and refuses to be restricted by the limitations of access and funding. Punk is based on resourcefulness.

The debates about 'public sociology' (Clawson et al., 2007) and sociology's 'public face' (Holmwood & Scott, 2007) were formulated before these media developments took hold. As such they need to be re-imagined to tally with the ongoing remediation of everyday life. The punk sociologist would seek to
understand and work with this remediation. The dissemination practices of the punk movement – based on hand written, cut-and-pasted, and self-printed fanzines distributed through shops and at gigs – might seem small in comparison, but it is the aesthetics of these practices and the creative and unconstrained attempts at novel types of communication that we might borrow from punk. The materials might have changed but we can find inspiration in the sentiment and in the drive to co-opt media and materials in communicating ideas.

The punk sociologist is going to need to be inventive in responding to their conditions, in working around the limitations of the austere neoliberal structures in which they are operating, and in finding opportunities that counteract the limitations of funding and powerful constraining norms and conventions. One way forward is to reflect on the boldness and inventiveness of punk, but more specifically we might look to take on the Do-It-Yourself ethic of the punk movement.

Those interested in what is described as digital sociology are also tending to use DIY means of communication, with social media outlets such as Twitter and blogs being used to publish and disseminate ideas in various stages of development. We perhaps have something here that is suggestive of how this inventiveness and DIY ethic might be deployed.

So we can perhaps isolate two strands here: communication and organisation. What unites them both is a disinterest in established forms of authority and prestigious modes of dissemination. The point is not to oppose these things for their own sake but instead to subordinate these characteristics to the accomplishment of a shared project. The key values which informs both DIY communication and DIY organisation are resourcefulness, inventiveness and boldness. There’s [3]lots of existing activity which exhibits these characteristics, whether or not it sees itself as in way ‘DIY’. I’m interested in trying to conceptualise this tendency in order to better think through its implications for higher education. I’m also curious about the self-understanding of those engaged in it. Is it possible many see this as a pragmatic adaptation to marginal conditions rather than something positive in and of itself?

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Punk-Sociology-David-Beer/dp/113737120X
3. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/02/some-thoughts-on-diy-sociology/

Simon Smith (2014-06-01 03:11:24)
15 years ago, when I was researching my PhD on the social and political meanings of independent culture in communist Czechoslovakia, I recall my frequent self-doubts about whether I risked romanticising those social practices - like samizdat, i.e. illegal self-publishing - that people had adopted or invented out of sheer necessity - "a pragmatic adaption to marginal conditions" to borrow your words. Member checking didn’t help very much to reassure me, because my respondents often confessed to having similar doubts when they found themselves reflecting nostalgically on those times. The source of that occasional nostalgia appeared to be the experience of having time (endless time) for activities like reading, writing and
sharing the products of that DIY cultural industry that emerged behind the scenes of the so-called ‘official culture’. Time they found themselves lacking in their typically hectic lives in a democratic society and market economy. But when I probed them about whether it would be possible to recreate something like samizat in today’s world, and recover that sense of lost time, they mostly dismissed the idea - quickly adding that the benefits of democratisation far outweigh the losses. That was all before the world of blogging and online social networks came along. Today you do find some people prepared to draw an analogy between samizat and blogging, for example. But if academics are adopting similar tactics to resist what Brandist calls the Stalinist management model of the contemporary university (http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/a-very-stalinist-management-model/2013616.article), it seems slightly paradoxical that chosen form is one that goes along with the logic of social acceleration that robs them of time to think! Samizdat magazines could circulate from hand to hand for two years or more, without exceeding their ‘sell-by date’. Do we need to invent a form of online self-publishing with the same capacity of temporal ‘resistance’?

Sociological Imagination (2014-06-02 18:30:53)
thanks Simon, that’s really interesting. i tried to write a bit about temporality and social media here - http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14529 i’m not convinced that social media is as straight forwardly accelerationist as a lot of people are. though i completely understand what they’re saying about the connection. when you say a form of “online self-publishing with the same capacity of temporal resistance” that’s exactly the idea i’ve been trying to express when playing with notions such as ‘craft’ to understand how academics can (or should) use social media. in potentially (only potentially) provided a forum where intrinsic goods predominate over extrinsic ones, social media can (counter-intuitively) constitute a slower medium of creation and communication. not in the sense of the rhythm of production and dissemination but in that both these functions aren’t subordinated to institutional imperatives (though they might well come to be in the name of ‘impact’). plus the speed actually facilitates a paradoxical slowness. you can write and publish so rapidly that it reduces the demands of the activity in the context of an already busy and pressured life. it lets people take time to think and write and talk about stuff they otherwise wouldn’t, partly in virtue of how quickly it is possible to do these things.

» A new campaign for accessible conferences fees The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 07:56:45)
[...] that fundamentally excludes a large (and growing) section of the academic workforce then we need to rethink what exactly we mean by a ‘conference’ and the purposes that it [...]
Valuing Electronic Music


6 June 2014 4.30-10pm Admission free

work explores how the value of electronic music transcends economic value for producers, DJs, and audiences — and how geographical location continues to play a significant role in the recognition of musical value even where musical scenes become increasingly international (thanks in large part to websites such as SoundCloud). Such findings have implications for the careers of music-makers more generally.

On 6 June, we are holding a public event at The Lexington in Angel, Islington, featuring talks, live performances, and an interactive panel discussion with electronic music producers. Come along to find out what we and other researchers have discovered, as well as to hear some great music and to put your own questions to the people who make it. You are welcome to drop in at any time.

4.30 Doors open

5.00 Free food

5.30 Introduction


6.30 Talk: [7]Luis-Manuel Garcia

7.00 Music: [8]Winterlight


8.15 Music: [12]Slackk


9.30 Thanks

The Valuing Electronic Music project combines social network analysis of online data with ethnographic interviewing and observation to understand how music-makers produce value for their own and one another’s work, especially in genres without mainstream recognition. It is currently supported by an AHRC Research Development Grant.

1. http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/vem_poster_online.png
2. http://www.thelexington.co.uk/
5. http://www.open.ac.uk/people/bd2367
8. http://n5md.com/artist/Winterlight

2690
[...] Read more here: Valuing Electronic Music The Sociological Imagination [...]
The full programme and list of invited speakers can be found at [2]http://compsocsci.eu/programme/

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1. http://compsocsci.eu/

5.6 June

Racism and Digital Communication and Stories of Cosmopolitan Belonging: 2 events at @SocioWarwick
11th June (2014-06-01 08:00)

Workshop on Race, Racism and Digital Communications, 10.30-1pm, Gillian Rose Room (R3.25), Ramphal Building, University of Warwick [with the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, Warwick]
Discussion featuring Alana Lentin, Sanjay Sharma, Kirsten Forkert and Nathaniel Tkacz on transformation of race through digital communication networks, ambient racism and racism denial on social media, and social media responses to government immigration campaigns. Lunch provided.

Seminar and book launch for Stories of Cosmopolitan Belonging: Emotion and Location (eds Hannah Jones and Emma Jackson), 1pm-4pm, Gillian Rose Room (R3.25), Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

[with Urban Studies, University of Glasgow]

Discussions on home, migration and belonging including Kieran Connell on music and Black British identity in Birmingham and Melissa Fernandez Arrigoitia on public housing struggles in Puerto Rico, with contributions from Emma Jackson, Hannah Jones and Goldie Osuri.


1. http://digitalracism.eventbrite.co.uk/
2. http://cosmobelonging.eventbrite.co.uk/

CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-06-02 08:00)

The [1]Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.

The slow death of originality? Thoughts on the self-plagiarisation of Slavoj Žižek (2014-06-03 08:00)

There’s an [1]interesting article by Žižek on the Guardian website. It’s a little too pop-sociological for my tastes but it’s nonetheless an engaging read. However the first paragraph of the article is lifted verbatim from his The Year of Dreaming Dangerously:

During a recent visit to California, I attended a party at a professor’s house with a Slovene friend, a heavy smoker. Late in the evening, my friend became desperate and politely asked the host if he could step out on the veranda for a smoke. When the host (no less politely) said no, my friend suggested that he step out on to the street, and even this was rejected by the host, who claimed such a public display of smoking might hurt his status with his neighbours ... But what really surprised me was that, after dinner, the host offered us (not so) soft drugs, and this kind of smoking went on without any problem – as if drugs are not more dangerous than cigarettes.

or

(Žižek 2012: 47)

It seems most of the subsequent article is contained within this chapter of the book. I think self-plagiarisation is rife within academia. I’m not condemning it - well perhaps I am a little bit - as the pressures underlying it are something I’ve encountered relatively early in my career. I’ve been conscious for a while in my work on asexuality that I’m not saying anything new. I’m just finding new ways to express the same thoughts, framed in response to a particular invitation. I’ve had two short books about asexuality planned for at least a couple of years now (one an introduction and overview of the literature, the other a popular[ish] look at the history of sexual culture through an asexual lens) but I’m not sure I’ll ever get started on them because I’m conscious of how egregiously repetitive they’ll be (to me at least). My point is that the invitations to publish can often outstrip the novel ideas & arguments which one is being invited to make public.

So I think the pressures towards self-plagiarisation are experienced widely. But I think Žižek is particularly prone to giving into them, as perhaps are all prolific authors. I’ve read a lot of Žižek books and I read a lot of his popular articles (I subscribe to the LRB and New Statesman and I read the Guardian obsessively). I frequently experience déjà vu when reading Žižek and have long suspected he reproduces large chunks of text between books. But I’ve never cared enough to look it up and this is the first time I’ve ever been able to place a regurgitated paragraph from memory. Žižek has published [3]at least 50 books since 2000. If Žižek’s self-plagisation is a rife as I suspect it is then I see this as a reductio ad absurdum of the capacity to publish 50 books in 15 years. However I’d hate to go too far in the other direction. I think repetition of arguments is inevitable and often desirable. I think the creative process is fundamentally iterative and a continued struggle to say what we’re trying to say is integral to clarifying what we think. I also think the imperative of ‘publish or perish’ makes repetition to some extent unavoidable. But where is the line to be drawn? I’m honestly not sure and this post is not intended to be as condemnatory as some might take it to be. I intuitively feel there’s something slightly rude about regurgitating your own prose verbatim without citation. But I’m equally resistant to drawing abstract boundaries between (acceptable) repetition and (problematic) self-plagiarisation that don’t take any account of the specificity of discipline and intellectual trajectory. Given these conflicting intuitions, I’m not sure whether this tendency, rooted as it is in structural changes within higher education, definitely threatens originality, though I suspect that it might. Perhaps we need the [4]Niall Ferguson index to
metricise our way out of this incipient dilemma:

There is a ratio that really would be good to have as a metric of the seriousness of a public intellectual. It is the ratio of words read to words written. Ideally, I would say, that ratio should be between 100 and 1000 to 1. But in the case of the Invincible Krugtron, I begin to suspect it has now fallen below unity. (When he does read a book, he mentions it in his blog as if it’s a special holiday [5] treat.)


Ben Eppard (2014-06-03 19:18:16)
I’m not sure plagiarisation is the right word, since technically that means using someone else’s ideas as if they were your own. Nonetheless, I agree with your sentiment. It’s disappointing when one of your favorite authors puts out a book that feels repetitive. And the same can be said for public speaking engagements. It’s always a little annoying when you buy a speaker’s book and find that half of it was spoken word for word the night before.

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Dark Ecology, the Higher Misanthropy and Object-Oriented Ontology (2014-06-03 08:24)

For those who don’t already know, actor-network theory isn’t just a useful tool for getting grant money by guilt-tripping funders about all the various things in the social world they’re not attending to. It’s also a platform for philosophical innovation, in particular ‘object-oriented ontology’ (or ‘OOO’, as it is known onomatopoetically by its admirers). The chief scholastic in this field is [1]Graham Harman, who nurtures and polices the boundaries of OOO with the efficiency of a micro-Aquinas. I recently posted a piece that provides a context for the development of this perverse line of thought, which veers towards a world-view that is at once objectivist, apocalyptic and, most importantly, misanthropic (aka [2]'dark ecology'). Though making only a peripheral appearance in my discussion, Harman was emboldened to respond on[3] his website. What follows below is my response to it.

I am posting my response on this site for several reasons: (1) I can’t figure out how to post on Harman’s site. (2) Sociologists interested in both metaphysics and politics should take this line of thought seriously because it is very much of our times and unlikely to go away soon. (3) It raises fundamental questions about the marking of the ‘normative’ in social theory, especially since people like Harman want to treat OOO as fundamentally apolitical.

So here is my response to Harman (addressed as if he allowed me to post on his website):

Sorry for my delay and thanks for linked article, which is very interesting as a guide to speculative realism.
However, I’m interested in speculative realism as a moment in a movement of thought, not as a field of play. So I apologise for collapsing distinctions that you find significant.

Even if we grant for the sake of argument that your line of thinking does not court misanthropy, why are you so keen on conceptually segregating the human from other things in the world? When Latour first did it, it was simply a salutary methodological move to remind researchers that there is more to the social world than human beings – especially if one wants to understand why things happen as they do. Indeed, the proposal was initially offered in the spirit of a more complete empiricism. Of course, I don’t deny that Latour has always had grander ontological ambitions, and some of his more recent stuff provides a glimpse as to its normative payoff. I don’t buy his Gaia-mongering but I can appreciate it as a development of his ontological position.

As I understand your position, you want to reinstate the idea of a God’s eye-view on reality but without the historically monotheistic connection between God and humans, as philosophers and scientists have liked to talk about in terms of ‘getting into the mind of God’. The deity from whose standpoint your philosophy is done has no more special relationship to humans than to any other object in your ontology. Indeed, according to you, imagining that there is such a relationship can lead to philosophical error, as one ends up either shrinking altogether from the challenge (your view of Kant, whose noumenal noises reflected his pietistic upbringing) or recklessly projecting our best theories onto features of reality as such (the sort of anthropomorphism that science performs when it turns ontologically ambitious). I realize that you don’t put things in quite this way, but isn’t this how you generally position yourself? In short, OOO is a radically de-humanized objectivism, right?

If I’m right on this general point, then I guess you’re happy to let Nick Land go his merry way because his view is compatible with yours at the level that matters to you – regardless of its general implications for humanity. And this brings me to the business about being an ‘administrator’.

Let me apologise for confusing you about my remark concerning your (past) role as administrator. You should have focussed on the ‘Cairo’ part of what I said. I actually hold academic administrators in high esteem and have extolled their virtues – especially at the highest levels – on many occasions, especially if they uphold Humboldtian ideals, even in reinvented forms, such as James Bryant Conant, the mid 20c Harvard president whom I hold in much higher esteem than his clueless yet more influential protégé, Thomas Kuhn. To be clear: Academia does itself no favours by derogating those who assume administrative roles because, in the end, they are the keepers of the university’s soul. However, these visionary administrators shared an overriding desire to promote humanity, which from the standpoint of your philosophy should be completely misguided. Thus, it does not surprise me that you have administered a university in Cairo, a place where curricula that actively promoted the self-realization of humanity could get you into serious political trouble. Maybe there’s a politics to what you’re doing, but it’s the politics of Leo Strauss.

2. [http://slowlorisblog.wordpress.com/2014/05/20/dark-ecology-as-the-higher-misanthropy/](http://slowlorisblog.wordpress.com/2014/05/20/dark-ecology-as-the-higher-misanthropy/)
Steve can always be counted on for productive mischief. I think it is clearly possible for promoting humanity to be a misguided administrative ethic, irrespective of questions about metaphysics.

**Fast capitalism and peer review (2014-06-04 08:00)**

The public debate concerning ‘scare stories’ about statins is an interesting case study for the politics of peer review. It’s an important reminder that these seemingly technical issues of scholarly communication can have important public consequences. The case seems to be framed in the media as calling into question the ‘gold standard’ of peer review. Is this fair? I suspect it is but that the media coverage is inevitably somewhat simplistic.

It’s interesting to hear the rhetoric deployed to defend peer review and how obscurely, if at all, the institutional context figures into this. It makes ‘peer review’ into a timeless and placeless activity, with the inherent characteristics of the practice working to ensure the promised outcome. But if the context is only invoked by those attacking peer review, sometimes convincingly but often in a way I find rather worrying, it makes the ensuing debate weirdly one sided. It’s important to be able to defend the values of peer review while recognising that a shifting context should be grounds for recalibrating an existing practice.

The authors of two papers published by the British Medical Journal have publicly retracted statements they made about the frequency of side effects experienced by people taking statins, following a charge by an Oxford professor that the information was wrong and could endanger lives.

Prof Sir Rory Collins told the Guardian in March that a paper and a subsequent article in the BMJ were inaccurate and misleading. They had claimed that 18 %-20 % of people on the cholesterol-reducing drugs suffered adverse events. Collins called on the BMJ to withdraw them and complained that the authors were creating unease and uncertainty in British patients prescribed statins in large numbers to protect them against heart attacks and stroke.

“It is a serious disservice to British and international medicine,” Collins told the Guardian at the time, claiming that the alarm caused was probably killing more people than had been harmed as a result of the paper on the MMR vaccine by Andrew Wakefield. “I would think the papers on statins are far worse in terms of the harm they have done.”

The paper, by John Abramson and colleagues, questioned the decision to extend statins to thousands of people at low risk of heart attacks and strokes, saying that the drugs had not been proven to save lives in that group. They also claimed that an observational study had shown that 18 %—20 % suffer side effects from statins. An article by cardiologist Aseem Malhotra published the same week repeated the figure. Both authors have now withdrawn that statement.

[4]In an editorial published in the BMJ, author Dr Fiona Godlee said the error was due to a misreading of the data from the study and was not picked up by the peer review process. “The BMJ and the authors of both these articles have now been made aware that this figure is incorrect, and corrections have been published withdrawing these statements,” she writes.
How would a publish-then-filter model be treated by the media? Would it undermine the authority of scientific publication? Would this definitely be a problem given that this authority is already being undermined by cases such as the BMJ one above? This seems an obvious transition to make, albeit with great caution, under conditions of fast capitalism. Unless the over-production of academic publication goes away (it won’t) I can’t see how the current peer review system is sustainable. My suspicion is that the time spent on peer review has declined precipitously given the broader shifts in the occupational demands placed upon academics. Publish-then-filter shifts the evaluative burden to a different sector of the working lives of academics.

4. http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.g3306

Benjamin Geer (2014-06-04 08:42:50)
"Publish-then-filter shifts the evaluative burden to a different sector of the working lives of academics." Could you elaborate on that a bit? If publish-then-filter results in more reviewers per article, but most of those reviewers just read each article very quickly and superficially, perhaps the total amount of review time per article will be about the same, and the overall quality of review won’t improve.

Sociological Imagination (2014-06-04 09:29:08)
I’m suggesting that they read it as part of their engagement with a literature, as opposed to constituting a specialised task which is regarded as important but nonetheless probably peripheral to their actual day-to-day allocation of time, with the ‘filtering’ enacted through the subsequent choice to address, highlight and share the paper. I’m not rejecting current peer review outright, I’m saying that its quality only subsists as a reflection of agential commitment to doing things ‘properly’ and thus I think problematic cases will begin to multiply over time.

Academics using kickstarter (2014-06-05 08:00)
I was intrigued to see [1]this great project by [2]Emma Jackson and a collaborator on Kickstarter. It’s fantastic that it seems to have been so successful for them. Is this likely to become more widespread? I find this quite exciting in some respects but also quite worrying, in so far as that it could easily be seized upon as a rationale for intensifying the retrenchment of funding which an academic turn to Kickstarter would (partly) be a response to. Nonetheless, I’ve been wondering for ages whether to try this myself and seeing this project has given me a nudge towards finally doing it.
Lots of Planets have a North is a new project produced by sociologist [3]Emma Jackson and artist [4]Claire Biddles, exploring the North of England as it is lived, remembered and dreamed of. Bored of totalising accounts of a solitary man on a mission to uncover ‘the North’, ours is a communal project, made up of fragments, accounts, stories, poems and pictures collected from an open call for contributions early in 2014.

Our project is a showcase for the stuff that gets missed out of the bricks and smoke, brass band, Hovis advert-style North of popular representation (although we have nothing against red brick, or smoke, or brass bands). The Glam North, Queer North, Missed North, Uneasy North, Dreamed of North, and lots of other Norths that aren’t explored often enough.

Here’s a few selections from the project – you can see more on our [5]project blog, too.
The Performativity of Social Movements (2014-06-06 08:00)

What does it mean to talk about the *performativity* of social movements? The obvious answer is to look to the aspect of performance inherent in the mobilisation of contemporary social movements. In this sense protests and demonstrations can be seen as drawing upon established repertoires of activity, orientated towards an audience, which depend upon certain meanings and also reproduce these meanings through the performances they facilitate. This cultural dimension to social movements enjoys an objectivity over and above its (re)production in collective activity of participants within it. I’m interested in how cultural forms like this song by the King Blues (oh how I miss them) and the accompanying fan video both draw upon this culture but also contribute to it:

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3TV6vOt4Mc]

I think this is an important aspect to the culture of social movements. I’m not sure how effectively the concept of performativity can capture this. I accept the importance of "small-scale participants' performances that occur in networked relations" such as "encounters at meetings, planning sessions, recruitment forays, and socializing" as sites "where movement ideas are discussed, elaborated, and 'performed'" in a way that 'grounds' "rationales and motivations for action" ([1]Johnston 2014: 22-23).

But what concerns me about this is the *exhaustive* focus upon interaction. In my PhD I’ve developed a critique of symbolic interactionism, accepting the importance of interaction for the constitution of relationships and persons but arguing that we need to look at what goes 'into' and 'out' of social situations. If we only focus on the situated interactions and performances (T2-T3) we obscure the important questions of how persons have been shaped by past interactions (T1) (conditioning what they bring to the present interaction) and how this will shape how they approach future interactions (T4). Obviously sophisticated symbolic interactionists will recognise this but the conceptual repertoire they’re using will inevitably *tend towards compression*, shutting down the questions of temporal extension through a presentist vocabulary which struggles to support temporal distinctions.
This isn’t a repudiation of symbolic interactionism but is rather an attempt to engage constructively with it. I think the relational realism of Margaret Archer and Pierpaolo Donati tends, for a variety of reasons, to underplay interaction. Realists can learn about how to better address the T2-T3 from symbolic interactionists. But in doing so, they bring their insights about the T1 and T4 in a way which fleshes out the sociology of the situation.

So when Johnston (2014: 23) talks about the "dense network of performances, macro and micro, through which both the structural sphere and the ideational-interpretative sphere are acted out in real time" I couldn’t be more in agreement about the general direction of thought. I think the micro-social dimensions to social movements do constitute, as he puts it, "the multitudinous building blocks of a movement’s structure and its ideations". But I want to bring the *person* more fully into this picture, understanding their *trajectories through social movement participation* rather than simply focusing on performances. Social movements are *made of people*, both aggregatively and emergently, in a way which renders *individual biography* an important unit of analysis. Performances are an important part of what people do and it’s a crucial concept for understanding the unfolding relationships between them within situated contexts. But it is the people who are primary rather than the performances.


Sam Burgum (2014-06-12 13:32:16)

Interesting post (and I enjoyed the video!) Just wondered whether there really is a contradiction between 'performance' and 'people' (individuals)? Surely the answer is that both are primary? I’d argue that the performance of social movements is ultimately one of identity and belonging. Indeed, an identity and belonging that provides much sought after authenticity, righteousness and 'underdog' legitimacy. If we think of it this way, then it also becomes easier to see the contradictions between the particular(s) and the universal(s) in forming a collective, positive, counter-political identity. What’s more, we can also spot the potential problems of a movement attempting to be inclusive (of all identities or particulars) and exclusive (of...
one universal politics) at the same time. Be interested to hear your thoughts.

Sociological Imagination (2014-06-15 15:04:37)
Hi Sam, I agree really, I just think the language of 'performance' too easily suppresses the temporality of 'identity' and 'belonging'. How did person X come to identify THIS way in relation to THIS group at THIS point in time - I don't think anyone would deny we can trace back a history of the individuals, the groups, the performative repertoires that emerge out of the interplay between them in particular contexts (etc) but I’m arguing that certain modes of theorising make it more difficult to ask these questions in a systematic way. Looking purely in terms of biographies is very problematic but I'd argue it can be a useful expansion of 'performance’ talk.

Sociological Imagination (2014-06-16 08:14:33)
what about some kind of social movements reading group at warwick?

Queer Futures – new research project (2014-06-07 08:00)

Queer Futures is a national study exploring the self-harm and suicidal feelings of young LGBTQ people

Lancaster University is leading a £300,000 study aimed at reducing self-harm and suicide among young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or questioning.

International research has shown that LGBTQ adolescents and young adults can be four to seven times more likely to self-harm or have suicidal feelings compared to their heterosexual peers. They are also more likely to experience homelessness, or drug or alcohol problems. Queer Futures is a two-year project funded by the Department of Health and is being led by Dr Elizabeth McDermott and Dr Victoria Rawlings of Lancaster University with Dr Liz Hughes of the University of York.

Dr McDermott said: "It is only very recently that the UK Suicide Prevention Strategy has recognised that LGBTQ people have a higher risk of suicide and self-harm. We are very pleased that the Department of Health are funding the research which will provide the evidence, which is currently missing, to tackle the problem at a national level. LGBTQ young people can feel marginalised in a variety of settings such as school, work, sporting environments, religious institutions or social groups because of discrimination against their gender identity or sexuality. They may also experience rejection from their families. These experiences may put them at increased risk of self-harm and suicide. The Queer Futures study aims to provide health professionals and services with information about how to help LGBTQ people aged 16-25 who are feeling distressed."

Dr Rawlings said: "Our research aims to understand the factors that cause distress for some young LGBTQ people by listening to their opinions and experiences. This will help to explain why some young LGBTQ people in England take risks with their personal safety, harm themselves or think about suicide. We hope our findings will identify what types of services and support can help young LGBTQ people in distress."
Queer Futures is currently seeking participants. See [1]www.queerfutures.co.uk or alternatively find the project on Twitter (@QueerFutures) or Facebook ([2]www.facebook.com/QFutures).

1. http://www.queerfutures.co.uk/

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Maths and Girls: Sensible Solutions... (2014-06-08 08:00)

Reblogged from the Idle Ethnographer's mathematical blog, [1]mattersmathematical.wordpress.com/2014/05/20/sensible-solutions
Anais Lockwood (2014-06-08 21:04:26)

I like this...but the problem with comics...is that they can sometimes oversimplify things. It's not that mathematics is perceived as "unfeminine". It's a whole institutional system that promotes and perpetuates the idea that females aren't good at mathematics, that the "female brain" (not a thing) is somehow inherently incapable or at least inferior in its ability to process mathematics and mathematical concepts. That isn't "maths is unfeminine", it's "maths is not for females". It's the internalized idea that because someone is female, they are not "good" at maths. That they shouldn't enter the field of mathematics and maths-related subjects (i.e. science), not because it's unfeminine, but because as a female, they cannot "do" maths. (Actually, I wonder about quantitative researchers in the social sciences. Have females in these fields, using statistics, felt like they are not as "good" as maths as their male peers? That their results aren't as sound as their male peers?) It's also the knowledge that entering mathematics as a female is a hard thing, because it's a male-dominated field, and because there is institutional and systemic sexism. How many females, considering how difficult it is to negotiate sexism in a non-male-dominated field, would want to try to negotiate that in an almost completely male-dominated field? As social researchers, we (all genders included) have a fair amount of paranoia over research credit, who gets noticed, who gets the kudos. Can you imagine, given the erasure and silencing of the females who ARE already in mathematics and mathematics-related fields, how hard it would be having to negotiate recognition and credit there? As a female, it might be quite rational to want to avoid the stress. So, I like the comic. But I think it fails to make the whole point, and I think if comics like this are going to help educate (if that's the point of the comic), they need to cover most of (because who can cover all?) the bases.


Thank you for such an articulate comment. I agree with everything you said - and many mathematicians I've interviewed say similar things! So in this case, the comic has been successful in provoking the articulation of a problem and this is great.

The Impact Agenda and the Good (Academic) Life (2014-06-09 08:00)

This was the rather unlikely connection suggested in Jonathan Wolff's recent [1]Guardian article. I have massive respect for Wolff, who taught me as an undergraduate and is the only lecturer who has ever consistently held my attention, which left me taking this article more seriously than I otherwise might have. To be fair, he's not talking about the 'impact agenda' as such but rather a broader tendency of which the 'impact agenda' can be taken to a bureaucratic and unlikable leading edge. His point is that there is a change taking place in the criteria by which 'success' is measured in academic careers. Furthermore, it is a change which is bringing activities motivated by private commitments, often done in private time without recognition, into the sphere of public assessment. In doing so, 'academic success' comes closer to life success. Or perhaps life success is being collapsed into career success. I'll be pondering this for a while:

The final category is a recent innovation, by which I mean that it has crept in over the last 20 years. It goes by various names: knowledge transfer, knowledge exchange, public engagement or impact. Specialists will shudder at my ignorance in lumping all of these together. To transfer knowledge is to take your research and apply it outside an academic context. Knowledge exchange is a less imperialistic version of the same thing, recognising that one might actually learn something oneself in the process. Public engagement can be roughly the same thing yet again, but perhaps with other people's research rather than your own. As for "impact", it seems to be whatever the research councils have decided it is this month.
This final category, however, reflects a quiet revolution in the way in which universities conceive of themselves and their contribution. Not so long ago, if you were a school governor, or edited a community newsletter, you kept quiet about it. Either it was regarded as entirely your own affair or, even worse, a distraction from the real business of research and teaching. Now it is public engagement. We seek it out, promote you for it, and crow about it on the university's website. Cynics might think that it is the invention of web pages, and the need to fill them with something, that has made the difference. Or that it is encouraged only because universities are continually under pressure to demonstrate their "relevance". But whatever the explanation, it is encouraging that a successful university career is now somewhat closer to a successful life than it once was.


REF and the usefulness of academia (2014-06-10 08:00)


Japanese Suicide Culture (2014-06-11 08:00)

by Kanika Sud*

"He was exceptionally quiet after he got pink slipped" says the crest fallen mother of a 27 year old Japanese youth. "He refused to eat a morsel of food, and talk to anyone at all. One fine morning he left the house. Little did I know that he left, only to never return..." It was later found that the young bloke had committed suicide by boarding a tube to (insert some Japanese place) and jumped out of the moving tube.
In another instance, a teenager was found dead in his room. "I opened the door of my child's room after a few attempts at knocking. The sight that followed was abysmal and I wish no parent witnesses what I did" says the teary eyed father of the teenager. He witnessed a rope tied around his son's neck and found a suicide note alongside a table. The note mentioned his inability to cope with his academic failure in college and the constant bullying by his peers.

Sadly enough, the instances mentioned above are few of the several that have occurred in Japan since the past few decades. Japan has the highest cases of suicides, so much so that it is a major social issue. If the Japanese are faced with the choice to endure bully, persecution or high stress encounters, a momentous number would decide to end their lives. Japanese history and literature is abounding with incidents of suicide, since it is used as a coping mechanism during testing times, which are (literally) worth dying for.

Notorious as the 'Shame Society', the people in Japan who are unable to acknowledge being fired, business losses, or other forms of failure, turn their anger inward. Notions like 'Honour' and 'Dignity' are way more worthy than lives to the Japanese Populace. Suicide is perceived as a way of tackling problems and taking responsibility. Japan is also recognized as the 'Sacrifice Society', where people would rather choose to sacrifice themselves, than being burdens on others.

Contrary to how suicide is viewed with stigma in many societies, the Japanese society views notion of suicide as an act of honour and bravery. Therefore, the concept of suicide is a socially legitimized concept, and not an individualized one. The individual acceptability of suicide is determined by how the society perceives the notion of suicide to be.

Suicide is akin to the dark ghost of the past that refuses to let go of Japan since a very long time. The present cases of suicide that occur are intricately linked to the historical traditions of this phenomenon. Therefore, understanding the history of suicide in Japan is important in proffering us essential insights about the Japanese perspective on Suicide. The justification of Suicide as a virtue and not sin is explained in the religious and historical texts of Japan. Understanding the historical perspective is therefore necessary therefore to relinquish Suicide pandemic.

**Historical context**

**Military**

Many historians have examined Seppuku, literally known as ‘stomach cutting’ to be one of the prime expressions of suicide in Japanese culture, which was a ‘ritualized form of suicide by disembowelment.’ This earliest type of Suicide materialized at around 700 AD in religious texts and literature, where in a young Goddess incised her stomach after a fight with her God. Subsequent to such legitimization of disembowelment by the mythological texts, acts of Seppuku dispersed to Samurai military. Such gruesome act of Seppuku started expanding to the Samurai military nobility in the 12th and 13th Century, in order to safeguard their honour from the humiliation of imprisonment by the enemy. Military conflicts paved way for numerous instances where Samurai military officials would use Seppuku
in order to demonstrate their valour. In the 17th century, Seppuku emerged as an alternative to death penalty in the 17th century. For the next 200 years, Sepuku remained fundamental to the Japanese society in its myriad forms, till the 1800s and 1900s. A ban was imposed on this practice, in an endeavour to assume a Western perspective on Suicide. Despite the ban in the political and legal framework, it was still undertaken as a voluntary practice in the 1900's. One such instance which exemplifies this claim is the suicide of the many military officers subsequent to the announcement of surrender during the World War II. Although instances like these might befall infrequently, the vestiges of this are still very deep rooted in the Japanese psyche. The western world has a vivid memory of the very famous and the most recent manifestation of suicide in the Japanese history where in the Kamikaze pilots were used in the World War II. While the Americans were horror stricken by mass suicide committed by the Kamikaze pilots, they were perceived in a very different way by the Japanese. These pilots were viewed as ‘guiding spirits’ of a country, which was an honourable post to occupy. Due to the association of the notion of honour, it was easier to recruit the Japanese youth. Consequently there was a mass production of human bombs human torpedoes. Thus the usage of suicide weapons was seen as calculated move to combat the enemy and the dead soldiers are highly cherished and etched to memory. Religion and culture In the Contemporary Japanese society, the Japanese do not take their lives by Hara Kiri or Seppuku anymore, but by inseki-jisatsu. It is a form of suicide which every so often is considered as a way of accepting responsibility. Inseki means responsibility and Jisatsu means Japan. Toyomasa Fuso a sociologist has been carrying out suicide researches from a cross cultural perspective, and recommended that suicide frequently takes place when political or social scandals occur in Japan. As can be noted, the historical and militaristic traditions of suicide in Japan played a pivotal role in setting a context for the suicide culture in Japan. However, there exist various cultural factors which are causal to the perpetuation of the current psyche regarding suicide, religion being one of them. Japan is a mix of few religions and majority of the population follow Shinto, which condones departure from life for a variety of reasons. Thus religion too plays an important role in the perpetuation of suicide culture in Japan. The historical traditions of religious and militaristic perspectives towards suicides are excruciatingly important to explore the analysis of suicide in Japan, as they give us an insight about the Japanese perspective. Suicide is perceived as the morally responsible act in Japan, in response to an untoward event in their lives, to spare themselves from ‘dishonour’ and ‘shame’. Media and economy Various Studies have reported that media coverage of suicides results in higher percentage of Suicides, popularly known as the imitation effect. The topic of suicide is pervasive and is used for entertainment purposes in movies, music, books and even video games. However, the underlying issues about the phenomenon are not spoken about. Although some studies mention that imitation effect was not greater in Japan than it is greater America, greater receptivity to suicide was found in the Japanese society. While some research studies claim a correlation between abysmal economic conditions and higher suicide rates, i.e. more Japanese people have committed suicide when faced with unemployment or failure in businesses. However, this is only a fraction of the elucidation, not the sole root cause. While all factors must be taken into consideration while looking at this phenomenon, it is very difficult to quantify their relative importance separately. It is noted that compared to other countries, Japan scores the highest. This can be attributed to the cultural legitimization of the notion that suicide is the most honorable act when faced with situations that give rise to disgrace and shame. They view suicide more tolerantly than other people belonging to the Christian culture.

Various ways of committing suicide. Contemporary ways of ending one’s lives include jumping off the train, hurl off high places, overdose of medication, etc. Some have used household chemicals to terminate their lives. One man consumed pesticides and was later hospitalized. However, a newer method is gaining popularity these days, due to the publicity from the internet websites. Internet suicide packs. With the advent of the ICT (Information communication technology) era, and an already ubiquitous cultural legitimization of suicide in the Japanese society, a murky new trend has surfaced which involved – group suicides of persons who have congregated over the internet. The experts too are appalled by the group suicide agreements. In a particular case in May 2003, the victims were a man and two women, who met online and started planning their suicide. They committed suicide by emission of carbon monoxide from a coal burning stove, after fastening themselves in a room with plastic sheeting and duct tape. There have been others too, who have attempted suicide using the same techniques as publicized by the websites as swift and effortless. However, there have been suicide pacts that have been forestalled, or ended up injury of some sort, as in the case of two Japanese girls, who jumped off a five storey building. While there are online websites which advocate suicide pacts, there are web spaces, Wiredsafety, which has numerous volunteers around
The world. They report these suicide websites to the local law enforcement to have them taken down, but they pop up somewhere else. Some sites encourage the most favourable ways in which one can commit suicide, while others provide those who want to commit suicide a platform to congregate. They render themselves as humanitarians and philanthropists. Mental health experts do not however, hold the internet responsible for the current huddle of suicides and attribute this grave social issue to mounting mental health predicament. Yukio Saito, a Methodist minister who established the country's first suicide prevention hotline says "Generally they have a serious emotional problem, which is that they have difficulty dealing with other face-to-face, kind of phobia, or a fear of talking about their feelings in front of others. Maybe this is quite a Japanese type of emotion. They have difficulty having personal relationships, so they tend to use internet to communicate how they feel." He hypothesizes that people in search of suicide partners are looking for companionship even during the time of their demise. "One single suicide seems quite wrong and awful. But a double suicide has in a sense peace, affection, and solace." Retreating from the world The Japanese culture is collectivist in nature, and the pressures to perform in the job arena and school are immense. Children are pressurized by the parents to keep up with the appearances, lest they bring shame and dishonor to the family. Failure to thrive on the mammoth pressure to perform, many withdraw themselves from the society for months and in a lot of cases, years at a time. Saito notes this syndrome as "hikikomori". Often "hikikomori" sufferers detain themselves to a bedroom in their parent's rooms. Even if they are home bound, internet is the only way to be in touch. Government and individual interventions Notwithstanding the economic revival in the year 2007, suicide rates have persistently been soaring. This has left the government insipid with apprehension. During the same year, the government introduced a nine year plan, a "counter suicide white paper" with the intention of diminishing suicide rates by the year 2017. The root causes of suicide would encouraged to be scrutinized in order to thwart them, transform cultural stance towards suicide and improvement of the treatment of failed suicide cases would be focused upon. Naoto Kan, the earlier prime minister, asserted his willingness to curtail 'unhappiness' in the country and reduce Japan's high suicide rate. 15.8 Billion yen was spent in the year 2009, towards suicide deterrence approaches. In 2009, amidst by and large increase in suicides, the governments proclaims there have been heartening signs since September. Monthly suicides had reportedly reduced between September 2009 and 2010. In fact, in gruesome precursor of times, a task force re-evaluated ways to blueprint and design of buildings to avert them from jumping off the building. Train stations initiated the installation of "Suicide mirrors" in order to prohibit people from diving onto the tracks. The Japanese government started providing finances for the suicide awareness programs, and issued pamphlets to companies, requesting them to watch out the danger signs among employees and instructed to offer them counseling. While it is noteworthy that the government is taking initiatives to put an end to this grim social issue enveloping Japan, there have been a few individuals as well who have taken a stand against it. As Rene Duignan has made a documentary film to raise awareness about the ever growing issue of suicide, a Buddhist priest Itettsu Nemoto has introduced a website and a number of workshops, to provide counseling and help to those inflicted with the desire to commit suicides. Conclusion The notion of Suicide is a complex phenomenon, which comprises of multiple factors and processes. It is to be construed from a multidimensional perspective. Suicide ought not to be viewed as an individual phenomenon only, using solely a psychological perspective. Rather it should be looked at from a historical, cultural, sociological, human rights framework. Ideas of 'honour' 'disgrace' and 'shame' which are placed on a pedestal over the well being of a human being, must be looked at critically. Since these notions are extremely deep rooted in Japan, it would understandably buy immense amount of time, patience and determination to ameliorate the status quo in Japan, and do away with such exorbitant suicide rates. - - - Kanika Sud is an MPhil Sociology student in Mumbai University, India, and the author of an interesting Facebook page, [1]The Feminist Goddess. She is interested in Sociology, Gender Studies, Social Psychology, Diaspora Studies, Qualitative Research methodology, Feminism, Feminist Science Studies and Media and Culture. We republish this article with her permission from her blog, [2]kanikasud21.wordpress.com.

Battling Against the Atrocities (2014-06-12 08:00)

by Kanika Sud*

She dreamt of pursuing her higher education and enjoying civil liberties just like her brother. While the brother could choose the course of his career, possessed unrestricted freedom and had access to the public sphere, she could only drift in a reverie of doing so. She faced restrictions and burdens of performing back breaking household tasks, was unable to wear clothes of her choice, was expected to preserve and practice the cultural traditions, was not allowed to go out after a certain time, and if she did, countless questions were hurled at her. While at home she was constantly made to realize her identity as a 'girl', you'd like to believe outside was better, but it certainly wasn’t.

When she stepped outside her abode, the constant glares, cat calls, ogling, groping, etc. made her constantly apprehend every day, that she - a girl, in this patriarchal society, was destined to live a life of misery. She had to accept it as an inextricable aspect of her everyday existence. If any untoward incident occurred towards her, i.e. she was teased and raped; she was constantly blamed under the pretext that 'she was asking for it'. A volley of questions and accusations would be tossed at her; 'What were you wearing?'; 'Why did you venture out at such an odd time?'; 'You should have known better to go there!'

Why question the girl for something she is not responsible for in the first place? Why do we fail to question the behaviour of the perpetrator in question? Most of all, why are we so aversive to change? Look at our honourable Police commissioner Satyapal Singh's comments! One would have laughed if these comments weren’t for real. Unfortunately they are, consequently making us recoil with fury. At such a time where crimes against women are on an immense high, sex education is the need of the hour. We need to get the young educated not only about anatomy but about attitudes too. But he proclaims otherwise.

In another instance, a renowned RJ puts the onus of women’s safety on the Bar dancers. Yes, because opening up of dance bars would prevent the men from attacking the ‘good girls’ – (read your wives, sisters, and daughters) Right! As if to say, men do not have an agency and are compelled to think from a space other than the one between their ears. Such statements reflect the fact that, men are socialized in a way which gives them a sense of entitlement to a woman’s body. They are internalized to believe that the responsibility to sexually gratify them lies with the women, so thank goodness for dance bars; otherwise women ought to beware, lest they be assaulted by a group of hungry ogres.

Our newspapers, news channels, social media outlets, etc. are replete with heaps of information on various atrocities committed against women every day. One positive aspect we can come across is that the newspapers and other media outlets, do not refer to the women at the receiving end of abuse as ‘victims’, but as ‘survivors’. Women, by virtue of their gender (along with other interlocking identities such as class, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc) face enormous amount of atrocities in this patriarchy induced society. Women everywhere feel at risk of being violated, and if God forbid, they are violated, then in most scenarios they are held responsible, when in reality, the onus of the crime should have been the perpetrators.

In cases of domestic violence, many would shirk their responsibility as a fellow citizen to come forward and help the victim. They would conveniently identify it as ‘Ghar Ka Maamla’ and not intervene- reflecting an attitude that demonstrates the existence of a thick wall between the public and the private realm. Heck, marital rape is STILL not recognized as a crime in our country. As if it’s the duty of a woman to accept harsh treatment at her home, where she is supposed to feel safe!

All women in our country are at the risk of being sufferers of virulent atrocities like Rape, [1]FGM, enforced child marriage, female foeticide and infanticide, acid attacks, forced servitude, abduction and imposed prostitution, sexual harassment, blatant victim blaming, dowry inflicted torture, etc in our excessively male dominated society. They are being constantly beaten, attacked, and ‘punished’ because many refuse to conform to the socially con-
structured notions of how a woman is 'ought to behave'. Women in most places in India, get burnt, assaulted or mutilated because they either declined a proposal, transgressed 'boundaries' by getting into a relationship without their family's knowledge and will, dressed 'immodestly', were a victim of sexual assault, or were talking to a male friend.

We need to question ourselves, why are so many women at the receiving end of such human rights violations? Why are these gruesome atrocities so normalized that we don’t even allow ourselves to wonder the legitimacy of these acts? It is taken for granted that – a woman's body is supposed to be hidden, otherwise "she is at a risk of inviting attention and attack", as if she were a piece of gold, and not a human being. Why have we not questioned such outmoded attitudes which do not serve us an iota of purpose?

Access to free mobility, speech, and safety from the petrifying apprehensions of gender based atrocities are every woman's basic right. Yet, so many are denied their rights on some absurd ground such as culture, etc. Irene Khan, Secretary General of Amnesty International asserted that "Disparaging a woman's sexuality and destroying her physical integrity have become a means by which to terrorize, demean, 'defeat' entire communities, as well as to punish, intimidate and humiliate women."

Atrocities against women are a way to exercise male dominance, control, and power over them. Women are violated as they are perceived as unequal, meek, and submissive. (The fact that sexual assault is barely reported, committed by those who believe they can get away with the act of expressive power to another ‘subordinate’ human being, is a grave injustice). The historicity and pervasiveness of these and many more unspeakable atrocities against women and the patriarchal context, within which they function, serve to normalize and justify the grotesque forms of violations against women. It was not until the Women and Feminist movements came into the picture, that various forms of atrocities against women became a part of the public awareness campaigns worthy of deserving concern, in the USA and subsequently elsewhere.

Although we may have come a long way in understanding the importance of women's rights, fostering equality and a gender just society, we still have a long way to go. Women are unsafe not only in the public sphere, but also in the private realm. Majority of the crimes against women happen by people they personally know and those who are supposed to ‘protect’ them, such as their own fathers, brothers, uncles, teachers, etc. This reflects the need to relinquish the notion that women need to take liability for their safety by being by ‘at the right place and right time’. The responsibility lies with each one of us, who are socially conditioned, to believe that ‘men naturally possess a ravenous appetite for power, and hence it’s obvious they perform such heinous acts’. Archaic notions such as these should be done away with, and there is a lot of unlearning and relearning to do on our part, to promote a gender just society. As Gloria Steinem quotes – ‘The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn.’

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I wrote a few months ago about the representation of interiority in film and television. I’ve lost count of the number of conversations I’ve had about the internal conversation after six years researching it. While some sociologists are deeply sceptical of the concept, it nonetheless always seems striking to me how intuitively people grasp what it refers to. I don’t think the constructionist critique of the ‘internal conversation’ is intrinsically problematic, though some of the knee-jerk forms it can take are, but inevitably I’m not remotely convinced by them.

One of the more sophisticated forms a critique could take is to look at the normative force which representations of internal conversation could have on how people represent and narrativise their own inner experience. That’s partly why I’m becoming so interested in how interiority is represented in film and television. I’ve been thinking about this recently because I’ve started watching Scrubs for the first time in years (damn Netflix) and I’m newly aware of how central JD’s internal conversation is to the narrative form of the show:

Another comedy that relies on internal conversation in this way is Peep Show. The comedic role of the internal conversation is simpler in Peep Show, largely relying on the everyday disjuncture between internal conversation and external conversation. In a way I think the internal conversation in Scrubs is a lot more complicated, being both a source of humour (“Why do I never listen to myself?” asks JD after having done something stupid) but also a device to structure the narrative. The reason I find Scrubs so weirdly charming is the way in which JD narratives his experiences to himself.

I think the show could easily be read as somewhat postmodern but doing so obscures some interesting aspects of it. JD’s responses are clearly subjective responses to objective circumstances, with some of the humour deriving from the incongruity between them e.g. his attempts to cast Dr Cox as his heroic mentor long before Dr Cox is even
remotely willing to play that role. The bricolage upon which the show relies is a feature of JD’s internal life rather than of the show itself. It’s a representation of the role pop culture plays in his own processes of making sense of life events, as enacted through the internal conversation.

Some of the internal conversation in Scrub isn’t naturalistic. But I just saw the episode where JD is revealed to be keeping a journal. So the very reflective narrativising moments, as opposed to the situational self-talk, should presumably be understood as self-reflection in his journal. This seems to extend my reading of the show as being about JD’s internal processes of making sense of his trajectory into the medical system.

2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/3WVwcscVWbk?version=3\&rel=1\&fs=1\&showsearch=0\&showinfo=1\&iv_load_policy=1\&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/3WVwcscVWbk?version=3\&rel=1\&fs=1\&showsearch=0\&showinfo=1\&iv_load_policy=1\&wmode=transparent)
3. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/QrIM9IQoRS0?version=3\&rel=1\&fs=1\&showsearch=0\&showinfo=1\&iv_load_policy=1\&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/QrIM9IQoRS0?version=3\&rel=1\&fs=1\&showsearch=0\&showinfo=1\&iv_load_policy=1\&wmode=transparent)

Lacuna - a new online magazine which commits sociology (2014-06-14 08:00)

We would like to introduce you to a new favourite online magazine of ours - [1]Lacuna.
"Lacuna is an online magazine that challenges indifference to suffering and promotes human rights. Its aim is to fill the gap between the short-term immediacy of daily journalism and long-term academic analysis. It will publish credible, accessible and compelling content that enables concerned readers to gain a better understanding of a particular issue. It will stimulate ideas for action and provide resources for those who wish to look deeper than may be possible through mainstream media. And it will give space and assistance to new writers and those who want to speak for themselves.

Lacuna will provide commentary, reportage and expert analysis that uncovers issues of injustice and human rights abuses. We will review the best books, articles, films, music, art, theatre connected to these issues; bring to life the wider and deeper aspects of a specific theme of justice; offer stimulus, advice and ideas for writing and campaigning for human rights; and encourage and support unheard voices. All forms of writing and visual art will be considered: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, film, animation, photography."

The magazine is funded by the [2]Institute of Advanced Training and Learning and the Research Development Fund at [3]the University of Warwick.

1. http://lacuna.org.uk/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/
3. http://www.warwick.ac.uk/

Killed for King Football? Brazil, Police Violence and the World Cup (2014-06-15 08:00)
Let's hope America is not returning to ‘normal’: We may need another ‘American Century’
(2014-06-15 14:32)

Nowadays I run across two groups of intelligent people who feel they understand why the United States seems to have lost its mojo. One group of people (typically on the right but invariably libertarian) believe that the US political class has cared more for making grand gestures on the world stage than securing the prosperity of its inhabitants. Thus, the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented squandering of human and material resources on a seemingly endless trail of wars and proxy wars. The other group of people (typically but not always on the left) believe that the problem lies with special interest groups (‘lobbyists’) capturing the mechanisms of politics, either by buying them outright or perverting their normal function.

At issue here is the America to which people across the world – not least Americans themselves – grew accustomed over the past hundred years: what the journalist Walter Lippmann dubbed the ‘American Century’. This self-understanding arose from a high-minded, cross-party coalition of self-styled ‘Progressive’ politicians who played a very strong foreign policy hand in order to consolidate public opinion and strengthen state power in ways that served to professionalise the political process and eliminate most of the key sources of corruption in the conduct of public affairs. The names of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson loom large in this context, with the supporting roles played by the nation’s emerging intelligentsia, including William James and John Dewey. These were the people who started America down the road of what by 1970 sociologist Alvin Gouldner had branded the ‘welfare-warfare state’. The greatest triumphs and disasters committed by both Democrats and Republicans over the past hundred years are traceable to some version of this vision, which is popularly captured by the idea that the US has a moral obligation – more than any other nation – to right the world’s wrongs.

What we’re seeing now is a rollback of this grand sensibility and a reversion to the much more fragmented self-understanding that Americans had as late as the start of the First World War. A seasoned American politician who wanted to win elections even in the first decade of the 20th century would cut deals with the people who mattered and promise not to endanger everyone else, say, through foreign entanglements. Corrupt isolationism was the norm back then and is becoming the norm once again. And certainly the two diagnoses of America’s malaise at the start of this piece suggest evidence of just such a reversion to type.

Nevertheless, however one wishes to judge the American Century, it massively transformed the fortunes of a nation that for the first 125 years of its history had been of no greater international significance than Australia is today – that is, a country whose pursuit of peace and prosperity (the latter somewhat more successfully) had been largely confined to its own coterminous land mass. Things changed only when Americans started effectively (and perhaps even half-consciously) to take Hegel seriously that the world-historic spirit’s movement westward meant that it was time for the United States to take charge of safeguarding ‘the future of civilization’.
To be sure, unlike Hegel, this ‘civilization’ was not humanity’s cumulative ascent from its origins in China but something of distinctly ‘Western’ provenance. Moreover, it happened gradually. At first, Americans were led to believe (by Lippmann and the founder of public relations, Edward Bernays) that they owed it to Europe to save the continent from itself, given the steady stream of displaced Europeans who managed to flourish on American soil. Here America was portrayed as the peacemaker and powerbroker in an inherently conflict-ridden Europe, where old enmities never seem to be forgotten. This line persuaded Americans to enter the First World War and then broker the peace but not to enter the League of Nations.

Despite that final setback, the academic establishment – of which Wilson was himself a distinguished member (both as a scholar of political administration and as President of Princeton University) – followed through on the idea of Europe ‘passing the torch’ to America by establishing ‘general education’ programmes at the university level, such as Columbia’s in [1]’Contemporary Civilization’, from which I benefited sixty years later, in the 1970s. Nowadays it is easy to mock such programmes as having encouraged dilettantism and ‘middle-brow culture’, because they were organized a bit like today’s course packs, in which students never really read a complete work but only strategically selected excerpts. But the people who most strongly believed in these general education programmes also believed that the world may be engulfed in a war of such devastating proportions that the bases for all the hard-fought yet normally taken-for-granted liberal values must be understood properly, in the unfortunate event that civilization needs to be built from scratch after one such war.

Columbia’s ‘Contemporary Civilization’ programme began in 1919 under the rubric of ‘War and Peace Issues’. Once Winston Churchill forged with FDR what is still known as ‘the special relationship’ between the UK and the US in 1940 (it’s easy to forget that the US generally regarded the UK as a potential meddler in its affairs until that time), the US became not only a diplomatic but also a military broker of the world’s great conflicts. With the end of the Second World War, the US also became the world’s financial broker, as dollar reserves replaced the gold standard. And the advent of television in the 1950s completed the Americanisation of the world as the emerging suburban lifestyle was successfully sold as a global quality of life indicator, the downstream effect of which is the climate change crisis that we experience today as the rest of the world still tries to meet the mid-20th century American standard.

American detractors of the ‘American Century’ regard it, in National Review editor Jonah Goldberg’s damning yet best-selling phrase,[2] ‘liberal fascism’. At one level, they’ve got a point: On this basis, Americans came to be subjected to regular federal income tax, unprecedented regulation of the private sector, military conscription and loss of life in foreign wars, not to mention various adventurist medical regimes (ranging from mass vaccination to mass sterilisation). Such was the dark side of the so-called ‘welfare-warfare state’. At the same time, however, the United States kept its borders open to people from all over the world, providing all its inhabitants with unprecedented educational and economic opportunities to substantially improve their fortunes, albeit fitfully and even as the difference between rich and poor increased. To be sure, the American Century’s balance sheet is far from ideal, but to my eyes it appears unequivocally positive. Indeed, if it constitutes ‘liberal fascism’, so be it. We probably need more of it today, once again with science and technology becoming more closely wedded to the projects of government – but this time allowing the maximum feasible freedom for those willing to participate in those projects.

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Liberal-Fascism-History-Mussolini-Politics/dp/0141039507/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1402838966&sr=8-1&keywords=liberal+fascism
Reading about educational theories and educational research I have come across these useful books. The first book *Educational Theories, Cultures and Learning* edited by Harry Daniels, Hugh Lauder and Jill Porter gives educational researchers a chance to reflect upon urgent issues of pedagogy. The second book, the second edition of *Educational Research* by John O’Toole and David Beckett is an introductory textbook, which provides new researchers with a step by step approach to starting research.

[1]
Educational Theories, Cultures and Learning – edited by Harry Daniels, Hugh Lauder and Jill Porter

Educational Theories, Cultures and Learning provides a critical approach to contemplating questions in education on culture, globalisation, language, childhood, learning and teaching, and identity. The book highlights the importance of visiting and revisiting significant areas of education that provide teachers, policy makers and educational researchers with a professional and practical compass to help guide them through the challenges and complexities faced by those in the education profession. Educationalists are given an opportunity to consider the debates around what should be taught, and how it should be taught. The role of theory is expounded, allowing the reader to ask important questions about how theories can apply to our understanding of culture and pedagogy. Further, empirical research is explored, for example the chapter on Cyberworlds by Sarah L Holloway and Gill Valentine includes a detailed exploration of how certain notions of childhood and technology informed the way that they researched children and cyberspace.

The book is divided into three parts: the first section focuses on international perspectives of education, thus countering ethnocentric notions of education; the second section expands on theories of pedagogy; and the third section includes discussions on the identities of teachers and learners. The editors are conscious of positioning, bias and validity, and therefore all the contributors in the book have made clear their assumptions and positions that underpin their thinking in order for there to be clarity for the reader. The comparative analysis of education within the book also helps to interrogate assumptions and biases that may hold us back from a breadth of thought.

The book also provides readers with questions to reflect upon, and further reading guides for certain chapters the reader may want to investigate further. The book should be ideally read in conjunction with the companion book Knowledge, Values and Educational Policy which is also edited by Daniels et al, and which delves into the purpose and nature of schooling and knowledge, alongside the role of educational policy and educational research.

If you want a solid and broad understanding of how “the learner, pedagogy and schools interact to produce students’
identities and outcomes" then these books will provide you with that grounding. The overall message is that pedagogy is not solely concerned with teaching techniques, as some policy-makers wrongly think, but we must remind ourselves that pedagogy is an intellectual and a technical practice. And the book is useful in validating the need for a sociocultural approach to explaining how teachers and learners come to be the way they are in educational contexts, for sociocultural theories emphasise the idea that teachers and learners are products of their history and culture.

**Educational Research: Creative Thinking and Doing (2nd Edition) by John O’Toole and David Beckett**

Particularly for educational researchers interested in the Arts, the second edition of *Educational Research* by John O’Toole and David Beckett is an introductory textbook that gives plenty of food for thought about the massive area of research. Though the writers are writing from positions as drama and philosophy specialists from Australia, the book is useful for worldwide qualitative researchers in humanities, arts and sociology. O’Toole and Beckett provide the reader with a fresh and interesting insight by using anecdotes and examples to illustrate the nature of research processes and practices. This makes the textbook enjoyable to read and digest. We are encouraged to consider the reasons and contexts for conducting research, as well as the philosophical elements, and responsibilities we must have as researchers. Further the book provides a detailed section on methodologies and methods that may employed when doing research.

Newcomers to research should read Part A and Part B chronologically, for Part A outlines key ethical, philosophical and methodological issues to think about before conducting research. Newcomers to research will also find many succinct and clear definitions of key concepts in research. All researchers should find important guidelines and practical advice in Part B of the textbook where we are provided with a range of areas that need consideration on the part of the researcher: the literature review, data analysis, and the final report. Very useful for teachers who want to conduct educational research is the section on Research and the Practitioner.

The textbook is especially helpful in giving you tasks to help you along the research journey. For example, after reading about how to seek our relevant literature and critically review the literature, the authors encourage readers to respond to the reflective questions by considering how their research question relates to the sources they have reviewed. Minor details such as helpful side headings of key words make the textbook all the more accessible and quick to read to locate relevant information.

Like *Educational Theories, Cultures and Learning* by Daniels et al, these authors also subscribe to the idea that presenting your positionality is crucial, reminding us that just as teaching is a political, cultural and ideological act within a specific context, so is the act of researching. Daniels et al pointed out that their books emphasise that there is no quick-fix recipe book to solve educational problems. Similarly O’Toole and Beckett highlight that their book is not a tablet or a stone. These reminders about positionality and truths are useful for all researchers. Like Daniels et al, this book again ends each section with questions to consider, as well as references for wider reading.

Constructing a Sociological career: An eternally complex autobiographical practice (2014-06-16 08:00)

It wasn’t billed as an early careers master-class and pep talk, but from my personal perspective, this was precisely what the recent ‘Conversations with David Morgan and Friends’ event delivered, as well as interesting insights into current research at the Morgan Centre in Manchester, and a chance to network with Sociological colleagues from all stages of the career. I’d arrived at the event feeling quite self-conscious, a little bit anxious and somewhat of a charlatan. Having graduated in 2001, with a degree in Sociology and History, the last 13 years have been spent bobbing and weaving between arguably relevant short term employments and studies, with the lofty goal in mind of somehow, one day, becoming a ‘Sociologist’ and, hopefully, an established academic.

Through a combination of planning, cunning and luck, I have successfully managed to remain in the higher education milieu, gained a social science PhD, worked on some interesting research projects and I even have a couple of publications coming out this summer. In fact, not two summers ago, I narrowly missed out on landing a prestigious early career fellow grant, which would have meant three luxurious years of focussing entirely on my own research project, which I had designed myself without the aid of a mentor. However, despite making the short-list I didn’t get the grant, and there were no prizes for runners up. Additionally, my current contract was due to expire within the next six weeks, after which I would be doing – what exactly?

Given that the summer is an especially bad time to be looking for jobs in academia, and given that my teaching experience is limited, the most likely looking opportunities, though interesting and appealing to me, were outside of the academy. Whilst I had settled it with myself that some of these roles might enhance my sociological imagination and expand my horizons, I was nevertheless plagued with doubts about how they would fit on my otherwise reasonably consistent HE focussed CV.

I began to doubt the wisdom of my having attended. Was I sociological and/ or academic enough to be here? I pondered, whilst loitering around the registration table, cringing and feeling socially awkward. What were the criteria for ‘belonging’ at an event like this anyway? Qualifications? Publications in certain journals? Being successfully employed as a lecturer? This kind of ridiculous navel-gazing went on for far longer than I care to admit and was in danger of mushrooming into an existential crisis – who did I think I was anyway, booking myself onto this event, taking up the place of a more worthy delegate?

Thankfully I soon got chatting with some other ‘early career’ delegates, and as I dutifully recited the narrative ‘in a nutshell’ version of my CV, it didn’t sound anyway near as random or ‘unsociological’. In fact it wasn’t long before viva stories were being compared and we were exchanging hushed whispers regarding our career-related anxieties and bumps in the road in our persistent campaigns to get a foothold. After all, establishing an academic career, or indeed any career, was tricky these days wasn’t it? In today’s climate etc etc.

Feeling far more relaxed I entered to room for the final part if the conference, ready to celebrate the glittering careers and brilliance of the two established academics ‘in conversation’ – Professors Carol Smart and Jeffrey Weeks. However they surprised me by instead revealing the slightly more haphazard trajectories of their own careers - being ousted for being ‘too much trouble’ and working outside the academy in order to ‘survive’ (rather than strategically deciding to engage with political and community activities). I sat up in my seat, delighted, letting these precious revelations wash over me like a wave of reassurance. So it was okay to meander and drift - outside the academy if necessary, one’s career need not necessarily follow a nice, linear, progressive path. And it had always been so, it seemed, even for those destined to be highly influential, bone fide Sociologists!

Interestingly, a ‘further reading’ note emerged from the conference slot which saw Professors David Morgan and Sue Scott in conversation - an article about the construction of a CV. Following the conference I sought it out - and I am most glad that I did. In this splendid article, Professor Morgan and a colleague, Professor Nod Miller, explored the production of a CV as a form of autobiographical practice and ‘presentation of a self’ in a particular
Miller and Morgan drew on guidelines for CV writing, anatomising the process and drawing on their own CVs as a source of data. They described their approach as 'heterodox', nodding to the inevitable relevance of a Foucauldian framework, but also using Goffman's work to examine 'the more processual details'. Drawing on Goffman's eight elements of 'performance' analysis, they use the concept of 'front', for example, to examine the guidance regarding drawing particular attention to certain activities and achievements, such as academic invitations received to national or international occasions, over other more 'trivial' details, such as book reviews. However there is, the authors point out, a matter of balance here, because early career academics might include book reviews since they may be used to indicate the beginnings of the establishment of a reputation.

I was particularly interested in this discussion regarding the value of book reviews, which has often been a source of personal dilemma. Recently I was informed that my book review essay on 'Deafhood' has been sent for print and will appear in 'Sociology' (journal of the British sociological Association) in August of this year. Whilst in the wider context of a fledgling academic career a book review essay will be viewed as 'trivia', this particular contribution is, in my opinion, as insightful as many academic articles and certainly required as much time, effort, thought and perhaps even skill. In presenting my nutshell, narrative CV to colleagues at the Morgan Centre event, I had chosen to mention it since it will be my first publication in this prestigious journal of our discipline and I am very proud of it. However, even as I did so I found myself apologising "I know it's only a book review essay but...", however I was pleasantly surprised by the positive reaction I received. One fellow early career colleague commented that I had always been good at 'getting myself out there', which reflected my reasoning for undertaking the review, since it would connect my name with the field of Deaf studies – a new research direction for me.

Another interesting aspect of the CV article related to Goffman's heading of 'misrepresentation', under which the authors discuss the fine line between outright dishonesty and economies with the truth. For example one author included on their CV not only the number of post-graduates supervised but also listed those who had successfully completed; the other author, meanwhile, felt that this was overdoing the honesty. In this section there are some amusing comments regarding the authors inviting each other to 'spot the whopper' in each other's CVs and having been given the informal advice 'what you need is some whopper training'.

Whilst the overall themes of this article on CVs are comparable with the present day, the article was written in 1993 and thus many additional elements must now be considered. The advance of the internet has revolutionised the ways in which we discover, read and publish Sociology. Social media such as researchgate.net provide new ways in which we can present our biographies. Meanwhile the importance of the Research Excellent Framework (REF) and establishment of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) make it vital that we develop a plethora of skills and publish prolifically, whilst promoting these appropriately through having ORCID and Scopus accounts. It is worth considering, therefore, this variety of activities and outlets when constructing our biographies, careers, and our CVs to present ourselves. ‘The Sociological Imagination’ is one such forum and I have finally set up a twitter account for the purposes of joining the online Sociological sphere.

Reflecting on the moral of this tale, Aesop-style, I would say that I am now feeling far less anxious and rigid about constructing my Sociological career during the next few years. In fact, with my recent discovery of autoethnography as a genre, and adopting a reflexive approach to addressing the domains of the RDF, I am excited about exploring a diversity of experiences, and about tackling this eternally complex autobiographical practice.

[Sara Louise Wheeler is a Research Assistant at the University of Liverpool and a Visiting Research Fellow at Glyndŵr University. Her research interests include autoethnography, health, disability, plural identities and belonging. She is currently seeking funding for an ethnographic study on Deaf Welsh identity and belonging. She tweets at @SerenSiwenna]
Jackie Goode (2014-08-14 12:02:30)
Great piece. You might like my 2006 'Research Identities' article in Sociological Research Online and 'Women's Studies' in Qualitative Inquiry, same year. While I'm coming to the end of my research career, I'd like to think they'd give you just a little bit more power to your elbow. You go girl!

Jackie Goode (2014-08-14 12:02:43)
Great piece. You might like my 2006 'Research Identities' article in Sociological Research Online and 'Women's Studies' in Qualitative Inquiry, same year. While I'm coming to the end of my research career, I'd like to think they'd give you just a little bit more power to your elbow. You go girl!

Sara Louise Wheeler (2014-08-26 18:10:23)
Hi Jackie, Thank you for your kind words, I've been truly surprised and delighted by the positive response I have received to this little piece; it has been re-tweeted and many have commented on how relatable it is. Your Qualitative Inquiry article is very moving and powerful, I very much enjoyed reading it; I actually have my own little piece in Qualitative Inquiry this month, it's called: Tinnitus: a Deafhearing phenomenon and it is a performance autoethnography with my cousin (which I have since discovered is either a collaborative autoethnography or a duoethnography, depending on your point of view?) Your 'Research Identities' article looks interesting and will undoubtedly be a good starting point for my future articles about the early career trajectory. Thanks again Sara

New Journal Issue - ethnographic studies of Georgia (2014-06-17 08:00)

New theme-issue of Slavic Review, Interdisciplinary Quarterly of Russian, Eurasian, and East European Studies: Ethnographies of absence in the Republic of Georgia


Tales of single parenthood in austerity Britain (2014-06-18 08:00)

Great article in the [1]Lacuna magazine discussing the hardships of single parenting in contemporary Britain and what the benefits system and employment policies are doing wrong. (Also, a great example of sociological writing
with interviews).


“Every time they bring in an academic and come up with a new solution – the solutions never seem to work. It is partly because they don't consult with us.”

1. http://www.lacuna.org.uk/

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Depression by Any Other Name (2014-06-19 08:00)

I came across a nice little [1]article by the Irish author and journalist [2]Mary Kenny from 2010, in which she writes about the multitude of other feelings and emotions with which depression is increasingly conflated. She writes:

It is an accepted truth, in our time, that depression is an illness with a global reach. [...] This new openness is a good thing. Yet in the process, are we losing something?

Perhaps Kenny isn't entirely right about our "openness" about depression. Mental illness remains a stigma, although less so than it once was. But her brief excursus through the history of how we (and other cultures) deal with sadness and grief is well worth a read.


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The capability approach (CA), developed by Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and other social theorists is a broad, human-centred normative framework for the evaluation of individual and group well-being, quality of life and social justice. Sen and Nussbaum’s ideas have influenced global, national and local policy, such as the annual Human Development Reports of the United Nations Development Programme since 1990, over 500 regional or country-level Human Development Reports and many local policy initiatives in different countries. The CA has also been influential in a number of academic disciplines, inspiring a vast and expanding literature in diverse fields of academic and policy research, evaluation and practice. The approach has been taken up most notably in development, international justice and human rights and, more recently, also in welfare, social policy, the labour market, education, gender, health and disability. However, so far have the CA remains largely unnoticed in sociology. In this interview, Martha Nussbaum explains briefly the rationale behind her version of the capability approach. In this article, I try to explain why this is, and why the capability approach could be very interesting and useful for sociologists and can contribute to a publicly engaged sociology. Below are some resources on the Capability approach and examples of its application.

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SCHMID, Jürgen. 2013. 'Public Services in Erfurt and Frankfurt am Main Compared (c. 1890-1914): Capabilities in Prussia?' Urban History. First view (10), 1–18.
1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/cbcGbflpFzI?rel=0
2. http://scholar.harvard.edu/sen/home

A BSA Bourdieu Study Group Event: Are Elite Universities Meritocratic? (2014-06-21 08:00)

Are Elite Universities Meritocratic?

A BSA Bourdieu Study Group Event

Tuesday 8th
July 2014 10am-5pm
Keynote Speakers
Professor Diane Reay and Dr. Vikki Boliver

Bourdieu talks about university being a process of 'elimination' for those who lack the type of 'capital' valued by those institutions. In the UK meritocracy is promoted, the idea that one's position in society is determined by ability plus effort rather than background. However, despite the gap closing slightly in recent years, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are still much less likely to be admitted to higher education and specifically to elite universities. UCAS data (2013) shows that young people from the most advantaged areas are still 7.5 times more likely than those from the most disadvantaged to enter a higher tariff institution. Moreover Black and Asian young people are much less likely to receive an offer from a Russell group university than their White counterparts. In a context where universities are charging up to £9,000 it is important to scrutinise their admissions processes. This conference will do just that, asking the following questions: Are elite universities meritocratic? What role does class and race play in their admissions processes? The conference will also consider the question of what happens to the minority of disadvantaged students that do make it through the system. Overall asking a crucial question: Are elite universities –themselves- reproducing inequality?

To cover expenses, the event costs: £35 – BSA member students; £40 -BSA member non-students and £50 – Non-BSA members. Lunch, refreshments and a wine reception will be provided.

To register please go to:

Programme

10:00- 10:30: Registration/Tea and coffee

10:30 -10:45: Welcome by convenors

10:45 – 12:00: Dr Vikki Boliver 'Meritocracy and fairness in elite university admissions'

12:00- 13:00: Lunch
13:00 – 14:15: Professor Diane Reay 'Elite universities and their centrality in the reproduction of educational inequalities'

14:15 – 14:30: Tea and coffee break

14:30 – 16:00: Panel Discussion- Dr Vikki Boliver (Durham University); Professor Harriet Bradley (UWE Bristol) Professor David James (Cardiff University) Professor Diane Reay (University of Cambridge); Mr Richard Smith (HEFCE)

16:00 – 17:00: Wine reception

17:00: Close and depart for dinner/drinks

For further info contact: events@britsoc.org.uk or (0191) 383 0839
For academic queries contact: Jessie Abrahams: abrahamsjj@cardiff.ac.uk
For more info about the BSA Bourdieu Study Group:


2. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/bourdieu.aspx

CfP: Crisis and Social Change: Towards Alternative Horizons (2014-06-22 08:00)

Crisis and Social Change: Towards Alternative Horizons.
Call for Papers. Deadline Monday July 21st.
Organized by the Department of Sociology, Cambridge University
Date: Sep 26-27, 2014

Venue: Faculty of Human, Social, and Political Sciences, Free School Lane, Cambridge, CB2 3RQ

This conference moves beyond crisis as a category of diagnosis and critique to explore alternative horizons, raising fundamental questions about the nature and extent of ruptures and continuity in the contemporary social world.

Among the multiple horizons in view, we are motivated by the generational need to draw upon the legacies of critique, while shifting toward the production of alternative futures.
From diagnosis to treatment. From deconstruction to reconstruction. From negation to vision. From crisis to progress. Such is the responsibility of our Age, from which positive social change might rise.

We welcome contributions from researchers, activists, artists, and professionals from across the world on the following topics, though this list is by no means exhaustive, and we are keen to receive contributions on other topics aligned with the conference theme:

- Critical and Empancipatory Thought and Action
- Social Transformation and Cities
- Alternative Economic Practices
- Work and Life
- Media
- Education
- Revolutions and Social Protest
- (Post) Democracy
- Environment

We have also introduced a soapbox session within the Conference programme and encourage speakers to participate. For the natural orators out there, the soapbox session provides you with the opportunity to stand up for 2 minutes and air your fiery, risky, extravagant and controversial views on the following question: WHAT IS RADICALISM?

The conference is organized by PhD students from the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge. To give attendees time to explore the city’s history and socialise, the conference will be held over two days.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

We are pleased to announce our three distinguished keynote speakers:
- Professor Greg Philo (School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow),
- Professor Emeritus Goran Therborn (Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences, University of Cambridge)
- Professor Ted Benton (Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Essex)

PLENARY PANELS:

The conference will also host two plenary panels on the following themes:

- Plenary panel 1: The Great Recession and Varieties of Social and Political Responses
  Chair: Professor Andrew Gamble
  Dr. Rowan Williams (tbc)(Master of Magdalene College, Cambridge), Professor Larry King (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge), Professor John Kelly (Dept. of Management, Birkbeck), and Dr. Jeff Miley (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge)

- Plenary panel 2: Mobilisation, Social Change and Revolution
  Chair: Barrister Dexter Dias QC
Professor P.G Klandermans (Dept. of Applied Psychology, University of Amsterdam), Emeritus Reader in Sociology Dr. David Lane (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge), Professor Jane Wills (Dept. of Geography, Queen Mary University of London) and Dr. Manali Desai (Dept. of Sociology, Cambridge)

HOW TO SUBMIT:
Paper presentation: abstract (300 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)
Poster presentation: abstract (300 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)
Soap box presentation: abstract (100 word max.) and biography (100 word max.)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE:

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is Monday, July 21st 2014. There is no registration fee.

All abstracts must be submitted by visiting the Ex Ordo abstract submission system (you will be required to setup an account first): [1]http://csc2014.exordo.com/

Successful applicants will be informed by July 31st, 2014.

The selected applicants are expected to submit an outline of their presentation (or the power point slides) by September 1st, 2014

PUBLICATION AND AWARDS:
Awards will be given for Best Paper, Best Poster and Best Soap Box Presentations at the end of the Conference in recognition of originality and excellence. The Organising Committee also plans to publish selected papers of the highest quality in a special issue of a UK journal or as an edited volume.

FURTHER INFORMATION:
For further details on our distinguished keynote speakers and plenary panelists please visit [2]http://www.towardsalternativehorizons.wordpress.com, email the organising committee at towardsalternativehorizons@gmail.com or visit our Facebook page [3]http://www.facebook.com/events/850509748311055


The Destruction of Public Space (2014-06-23 08:00)

In the past few days, this bench has made an outrage among my Internet community. I had to look it up and discovered that it is a public installation by the German designer and conceptual artist 2730
Fabian Brunsing intended to pervert the idea of public space as a satire of the commercialisation of modern life.

But the idea behind this piece of art is not entirely new. In 2001, a Seattle gallery exhibited the piece [1] "SeatSale: Licence to Sit": an "Internet Chair with magnetic stripe card reader and spikes that retract when a seating license is downloaded from a license server in response to input from the card reader incorporated into the chair".

After some time (e.g. after the movie has finished) a bright flashing animated version of the following is displayed:
Now if we go back to real life...We are all familiar with the relatively recent emergence of anti-seater seating in UK public spaces:
In 2007, as a poor East-European MA student in the UK, I went to Brussels and got stuck there overnight because I stupidly missed my flight. I discovered that both the Central Train Station, and Brussels Airport, are designed to make sleeping very hard. There were no spikes, but the walls of the station were curved in such a way to make it impossible to sit or lie next to the wall; if you lied down, you would be almost in the middle of the hall, and exposed to a horrible cold draft. In the airport, all benches had arm rests and there were no flat surfaces. Having filled my camera with photos and my time with an improvised photoshoot, exasperated, [3] I finally fell asleep at 5am on a bar table. I caught a bad cold and spent three weeks ill on antibiotics. And I am very, very far from homeless.

[4]

Spikes for the prevention of rough sleeping are used under bridges in China:
A couple of days ago, the Guardian reported that a new housing development on Southwark Bridge Road in London has installed metal spikes to deter beggars and homeless people sleeping there.
Historians reading this would be better qualified to comment - but I am sure that this has been happening throughout history. The first example which comes to mind is the Window Tax - a property tax based on the number and size of windows in a house which existed in England, Scotland and France in the 18-19 Centuries. The point is not whether defensive urban architecture, or other restrictions of public access to nature or necessities, is a new phenomenon, but that the public outrage it causes is usually too short-lived to resist it. Dystopian art can warn us about the dangers of the future, but sadly, we rarely listen.

2. [http://](http://)

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dmf (2014-06-23 18:37:10)
has a significant public (enough people/clout to be effective) really ever been brought to progressive public action by avant-garde art, and why would we attend to speculative art more than we do to actually alleviating present day outrages? we really need to start to come to terms with peoples' cognitive-biases if we want to make a difference that makes a difference...

I don’t know whether avant-garde art has ever been successful in bringing about public action. It’s a good question. I’m not sure I know where the boundary lies between avant-garde art and popular art, I think some avant-garde art influences the wider public indirectly, by influencing other artists who then create stuff that reaches wider publics. Any idea of where to find research on that? Which exactly cognitive biases on that list did you mean? Who are "we" and do you mean that we need to learn about our own ones, or about the biases of the public we try to influence? Say more!

The historic Lincoln Prison has seats that have a very similar shape to the curved ones shown here. They are almost impossible to sit on. For those with an interest in the panopticon there is further description and pictures here: http://loonyliterature.com/2012/08/31/writing-embracing-characterisation-in-a-haunted-victorian-prison/

The Muppets explain Phenomenology (2014-06-24 08:00)

Its philosophical accuracy is questionable but it is very catchy:
I recently heard [1]Gene Stanley, an affable and [2]rather polymathic physicist, reflect on his experience of collaborating with economists. He was concerned to make clear the different skill sets that physicists and economists bring to collaborative work, with each able to do things which the other can’t. But what really caught my imagination was his description of their divergent sensibilities. As I live tweeted at the time:


This is a topic that has intrigued me for a long time. One aspect of my PhD research which got slightly lost amidst the many other aspects was the aspect of self-selection involved in choosing a university degree. Obviously many
other factors are in play here but I was curious about what, if anything, draws people towards certain subjects? Are certain kinds of people attracted to certain kinds of disciplines? Much of one thesis chapter was devoted to unpacking this claim. Leaving aside the limited scope of the data itself, it's important to avoid imputing a uniformity to decision-making on these matters that manifestly isn't the case. Many people have no feeling of being 'drawn' towards a discipline. Even amongst those who do, it is balanced by many other concerns (e.g. employability, location of university, grade requirements for the course, confidence in the subject matter) which are weighed up in a way that is clearly purposive but often far from being 'rational' in any abstract sense. Furthermore, many students simply acquiesce entirely to the advice of their trusted interlocutors or inflect their own preferences through the assumptions loaded into the advice of authority figures.

Another complicating factor is the opacity of the cultural system, particularly when we were are young. Our intellectual journeys are path-dependent, leading us to push against the limitations of what we encounter and search for intellectual variety, often without knowing exactly what it is we're looking for. Peter Preston nicely captures how what can be a fundamentally messy process of intellectual engagement begins to consolidate through graduate school and into academic careers:

If one stands back from the day-to-day demands of professional routine, it becomes clear that an intellectual trajectory is not organised in advance, we do not begin by surveying the intellectual ground before deciding upon a line of enquiry; rather, as Hans-Georg Gadamer might put it, we fall into conversation; our starting points are accidental, our early moves untutored, they are not informed by a systematic professional knowledge of the available territory, rather they flow from curiosity; we read what strikes us as interesting, we discard what seems dull. All this means that our early moves are quite idiosyncratic, shaped by our experiences of particular texts, teachers and debates with friends/colleagues. Thereafter matters might become more systematic, we might decide to follow a discipline, discover an absorbing area of work or find ourselves slowly unpacking hereto deep-seated concerns. It also means that we can bestow coherence only retrospectively. This idiosyncratic personal aspect of scholarly enquiry is part and parcel of the trade, not something to be regretted, denied or avoided; nonetheless systematic reflections offers a way of tacking stock, of presenting critical reflexive statements in regard to the formal commitments made in substantive work.

- Peter Preston, Arguments and Actions in Social Theory, Pg 1

The process of pursuing graduate education and even an academic career necessitates continued self-selection, often through making choices which have increasingly pronounced disciplinary characteristics (though this is far from universally true). However it can also reflect social inertia, as people continue making choices which increase the opportunity costs of future exit while privately doubting whether academia is for them. My meandering point is simply to stress the complexity of this process – it’s inherently biographical, unfolding from iterated choices within an environment which entails a variable constellation of constraints and enablements each time, in a way which can’t be divorced from the context itself. The ideographic complexity of this process finds itself reflected in the kinds of intellectual biographies someone like Ray Monk writes (e.g. Oppenheimer, Russell, Wittgenstein) who deftly traces the multiplicity of ways in which the character of these thinkers and the character of their work co-condition each other within the context of an unfolding human life. Analysis with this level of detail obviously doesn’t scale but it’s important that we remember the complexity of the lived lives we’re abstracting from.

Which brings me to the topic I started with. Can we talk about the pleasures of disciplinarity? Can we talk about the things that thrill physicist and economists? I would certainly like to. As an accidental sociologist (and far from the
only one) I'm very conscious of the what appeals to me about sociology. I've been also been aware recently of the ease with which I could have 'discovered' social psychology as a frustrated philosophy masters student in much the same way I 'discovered' sociology. This is Peter Preston's point in the extract above. Where the pleasures enter into it is how these possible routes would have felt to me – would social psychology have fascinated and frustrated me in the way that sociology has? I suspect not. There's a complex interplay of factors driving the pleasures we derive from disciplines and they are made all the more complex by the fact that we too are changing as we are socialised (and socialise ourselves) into disciplines. In other words, I think the different 'thrills' that physicists and economists derive from their work is in part simply a reflection of their having been trained to do that kind of work, though of course sustaining this training necessitated their co-operation (at the minimum) and more likely their growing commitment. So if there are not 'physics people', 'economics people' and 'sociology people' could there be potential physicists-to-be, economists-to-be, sociologists-to-be co-existing within the same person prior to the training which gives life to these peculiarly intellectualising ways of being-in-the-world? I suspect so, though probably not all at the same time. I'm aware of not having really answered my own question here. But I'm also aware of being entirely comfortable with that fact yet nevertheless wondering what it says about the peculiarity of my own intellectual socialisation (or perhaps simply my own peculiarity).

1. http://polymer.bu.edu/hes/
4. https://twitter.com/thedataascilab/statuses/477363570465075201
7. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Bertrand_Russell.html?id=urCAAACAAJ
8. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Ludwig_Wittgenstein.html?id=NCFy6E4s6DsC
Recently I have been reading up on contemporary social and cultural geography's take on race and racism, and I have come across a very interesting and useful edited collection by Claire Dwyer and Caroline Bressey (from the Department of Geography at University College London). New Geographies of Race and Racism is principally based upon conference proceedings in 2005 where leading academics and researchers discussed issues of race and racism in the UK and Ireland. The book focuses on contemporary academic discourses of difference, inclusion, exclusion and religious discrimination in a post 9/11 and post 7/7 world, and explores how these discourses are related to issues of race and racism, particularly in contemporary Britain where geographical imaginaries are central to political discourses of race and ethnicity.

The book contains detailed case studies from the UK and Ireland which illustrate the richly complex and interconnecting areas of race, nation and place. The chapters in this edited volume revolve around three key themes of racial and ethnic identity: the complexity of contemporary categories of race and ethnicity, micro-geographies of every day ethnicities, and the theoretical aspects of race and ethnicity. According to the editors the shifting demographic, political and policy framing of ethnicity and race is apparent in urban geography writings, and thus they have included chapters which respond to current debates. The edited collection also places great emphasis on historical significances, reminding us of how the past informs the present: Alastair Bonnett’s chapter on "Whiteness and the West" focuses on the historical and geographical elements of transition that impact upon the changing trajectories of whiteness.

As well as providing illuminating case studies, the book engages with philosophical and epistemological aspects to the question of race, and thus helps us to understand methodological implications of studying race and ethnicity, particularly as some say we are living in a post-race world, whilst others argue that racism is ever present in contemporary societies. Moreover, the book moves away from solely concentrating on England by including case studies from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. We learn about identity politics through reading about constructions of whiteness in the context of Europe, Arab activists in Britain, Bengalis in the East End of London, and Scottish Muslims amongst others.

The chapter “One Scotland, Many Cultures" by Jan Penrose and David Howard draws on the interconnections between race and place in Scotland by looking at how attitudes towards race and racism have changed over time, and examining the anti-racism campaign conducted by the Scottish Executive. Penrose and Howard explore the language of multiculturalism and anti-racism as presented through discourse on Scottishness. John Clayton's chapter "Everyday Geographies of Marginality and Encounter in the Multicultural City" concern race relations in the city of Leicester, often seen as harmonious multicultural success story, from the perspective of the white working-class.
youth and their everyday experiences. Una Crowley, Mary Gilmartin and Ron Kitchin reflect on the experience of the Republic of Ireland where emigration was once the norm, but now increasing immigration is having an impact upon ideas of race, place and identity, and thus there is a political discourse that attempts to define and place the new immigrants.

Like Anoop Nayak's [2] Race, Place and Globalization: Youth Cultures in a Changing World, Dwyer and Bressey's edited collection is excellent in making contemporary arguments about race and ethnicity accessible for students and researchers from all backgrounds. In fact, New Geographies of Race and Racism contains a chapter by Nayak on racism and anti-racism in northeast England, illustrating how white youth articulate issues of race and racism in a mainly white post-industrial place. Even though these texts are grounded in the field of social geography, they can be utilised by sociologists and educational researchers, as well students of politics, interested in learning more about race and ethnicity in modern times. The book reinforces the importance of examining how race and place are inextricable in modern times (and past times), and thus challenges theories that promote the idea that globalisation has led to a sense of placelessness, whilst providing readers will fascinating case studies about the lived realities of race and racism in the UK and Ireland.


A New Way of Thinking. The Sociological Imagination of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) (2014-06-26 08:00)

by Nina R. Jakoby and Michaela Thönnes

The classical social science tradition would remain incomplete without mentioning the first female sociologist Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) – a pioneer of sociological theory and social research (Rossi 1973). When C. Wright Mills (1959) elaborated his idea of Sociological Imagination and referred to the sociological classics Marx, Weber and Durkheim, among others, he did not consider the outline of a sociological discipline written by a British woman in the middle of the 19th century. Her theoretical and methodological concept of a "science of society" (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 15), even before the name sociology was established and institutionalised as a science, has mostly been forgotten in mainstream sociology. Yet the plea for substantial, relevant, theoretical as well as empirical social inquiry – in the sense that Mills (1959) had in mind – is found in her pathbreaking work How to Observe Morals and Manners (1838) and her study Society of America (1837). Both have to be recognised as sociological classics. Further, Martineau must be acknowledged because of her "condensed and free translation" (Martineau 1958a: 8) of The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte (1858). How to Observe Morals and Manners (1838) was the first book on methodology in sociology, published nearly fifty years prior to Durkheim’s Les Règles de la Methode Sociologique (Hill 2002). How can we capture the sociological imagination of Harriet Martineau? Well, it is best to let her speak for herself.

The Observer of Man and Manners stands as much in need of intellectual preparation as any other student. [...] the science [of Morals] which of all the sciences which have yet opened upon men, is, perhaps, the least cultivated, the least definite, the least ascertained in itself, and the most difficult in its application (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 13–15).

Her work reveals an early outline of sociology as a distinct social science that includes micro and macro analysis,
social structure and institutions, quantitative and qualitative analysis as well as the use of types and classifications (e.g., religion, suicide). "Things" serve as indicators of morals and manners in a given society, as the following quote demonstrates impressively:

The grand secret of wise inquiry into Morals and Manners is to begin with the study of THINGS, using the DISCOURSE OF PERSONS as a commentary upon them. Though the facts sought by travellers relate to Persons, they may be most readily learned from Things. The eloquence of Institutions and Records, in which the action of a nation is embodied and perpetuated, is more comprehensive and more faithful than that of any variety of individual voices. The voice of a whole people goes up in the silent workings of an institution; the condition of the masses is reflected from the surface of a record. The Institutions of a nation, - political, religious or social, - put evidence into the observer's hands as to its capabilities and wants which the study of individuals could not yield in the course of a lifetime. The Records of any society, be they what they may, whether architectural remains, epitaphs, civic registers, national music, or any other of the thousand manifestations of the common mind which may be found among every people, afford more information on Morals in a day than converse with individuals in a year (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 73-74, original emphasis).

The investigation of the "physiognomy of a nation" (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 71) implies the following fields of research that are necessary to understand the morals and manners of a society by investigating the "general tendencies of any society" (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 225):

- **Religion** (churches, clergy, superstitions, suicide),
- **General moral notions** (epitaphs, love of kindred and birthplace, talk of aged and children, character of prevalent pride, character of Popular idols, epochs of society, treatment of the guilty, testimony of criminals, popular songs, literature and philosophy),
- **Domestic state** (soil and aspect of the Country, markets, agricultural Class, manufacturing Class, commercial class, health, marriage and women, children),
- **The idea of liberty** (police, legislation, classes in society, servants, imitation of the metropolis, newspaper, schools, objects and form of persecution),
- **Progress** (conditions of progress, charity, arts and inventions, multiplicity of objects).

Martineau's social analysis is guided by an overarching purpose underlying her research: to promote human happiness, including the values of liberty, equality and the participation of both men and women (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 25–26).

To test the morals and manners of a nation by a reference to the essentials of human happiness, is to strike at once to the centre, and to see things as they are (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 26).

Therefore she addresses "substantive problems", as Mills (1959: 128) emphasises that sociology should do, especially social inequality constituting a public issue as well as a personal trouble interwoven with social values, historical and social structures (Mills 1959: 130). Martineau's conception of sociology as a distinct discipline incorporates the ideas
of Mills’ Sociological Imagination, integrating biography, history as well as social structure as key elements of social analysis.

In a later article, Martineau (1958b: 1119) addresses relevant issues of the development of a new social science by defining the subject methodically, laying down the definition of terms and its features, and ascertaining the essential principles around which this science revolves. With How to Observe Morals and Manners (1838) she successfully lived up to her own expectations by specifying the content, methods and principles of the new science that is now called sociology. She indicates the importance of the quality of social research because “if the instrument be in bad order it will furnish a bad product, be the material what it may” (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 23). Her recommendations and guidelines include sensibility towards “hasty generalizations”, ethnocentrism, and a “bias” due to the error-proneness of human perception and the “narrowness of the mental vision” (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 24–25, 229, 223). To complement the study of “things”, representative data must be collected based on a variety of interviews “with all classes of the society […], – not only the rich and poor, but those who may be classed by profession, pursuit, habits of mind, and turn of manners” (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 223).

The Martineauian sociological imagination offers a sociology that connects theory and life, theory and empiricism, and a mode of living devoted to scholarship and public enlightenment. The science of society is always comparative and historical, because “if he explore[s] only one country, carries in his mind the image of all; for, only in its relation to the whole of the race can any one people be judged” (Martineau 2002 [1838]: 29). With regard to these values and the sociological possibilities Martineau personified and demonstrated in her work, she must be included in the historical narrative of sociology (Hill 2003). Her sociological imagination avoids one-sidedness and trivialisation by considering man, woman and society, micro and macro, theory and empiricism, “verstehen” and ”erklären” as the main objectives of sociology, written in an absolutely intelligible language. She reminds us that sociology has always been a critical social science with a public mandate to distribute knowledge and shed light on major societal problems, social inequalities, values or taken-for-granted truths. Remembering Martineau as a sociological classic means learning from a conception for gaining scientific insights that is still modern to this day – a conception that holds itself to the standard that its results be relevant to the reality of the object of research and thus demonstrates what has always been the strength of sociology in analysing social issues and problems. Sociology cannot afford to forget her.

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References


Steve Fuller (2014-06-26 11:05:28)

Thanks for this. A couple of years ago I actually called for someone to do a Ph.D. on Martineau’s work – indeed on this very blog: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/10796. One problem that Martineau suffers from – and this may apply to other marginalised figures from the early history of sociology – is that she self-identified with a movement that has fallen out of fashion, in her case ‘positivism’, which you deftly manage to avoid mentioning. Moreover, it was easy for her to avoid the theoretical/methodological dichotomies that have plagued modern sociology because she lived before they were institutionalised. She is basically from the generation before Dilthey and the Neo-Kantians started carving up the disciplinary space between ‘naturalistic’ and ‘humanistic’ modes of inquiry. Now some interesting consequences follow: (1) The original positivists may not be as ‘positivistic’ as we imagine them to have been. (2) That we might want to reconceptualise sociology from the standpoint of what the field would have looked like, had the naturalistic/humanistic distinction never been drawn, as Martineau clearly did in her own practice. (She was not alone, of course. John Stuart Mill is another obvious case in point.)

Five Recommendations for Social Scientists in responding to big data (2014-06-27 08:00)

This is our 2000th post!

I recently came across this post by [1]Helen Margetts on the LSE Impact Blog from a few months ago. It’s worth reading the post in full but what really caught my imagination were the five recommendations she makes at the end. I don’t think the methods training I received was bad but in retrospect I think it was hugely limited (and consequentially limiting). This needs to be addressed institutionally because otherwise conversations surrounding ‘big data’ are likely to become absurdly lopsided over time, as successive cohorts of data scientists are trained in a way that is relatively insulated from the traditional concerns of the social sciences. I think Helen’s third point is important as a matter of technical proficiency but perhaps even more crucial as a precondition for sustained interdisciplinary
communication. So while my current strategy of gradually working through Code Academy might be useful for me, it’s not exactly a scaleable solution for the social sciences more broadly (though it does fit worryingly well with the privatisation of upskilling in order to ensure one’s own occupational viability in a changing labour market). These are Helen’s five recommendations:

1. Accept that multi-disciplinary research teams are going to become the norm for social science research, extending beyond social science disciplines into the life sciences, mathematics, physics, and engineering. At [2]Policy and Internet’s 2012 Big Data conference, the keynote speaker Duncan Watts (physicist turned sociologist) called for a ‘dating agency’ for engineers and social scientists – with the former providing the technological expertise, and the latter identifying the important research questions. We need to make sure that forums exist where social scientists and technologists meet and discuss big data research at the earliest stages, so that research projects and programmes incorporate the core competencies of both.

2. We need to provide the normative and ethical basis for policy decisions in the big data era. That means bringing in normative political theorists and philosophers of information into our research teams. The government has committed £65 million to big data research funding, but it seems likely that any successful research proposals will have a strong ethics component embedded in the research programme, rather than an ethics add on or afterthought.

3. Training in data science. Many leading US universities are now admitting undergraduates to data science courses, but lack social science input. Of the 20 [5]US masters courses in big data analytics compiled by Information Week, nearly all came from computer science or informatics departments. Social science research training needs to incorporate coding and analysis skills of the kind these courses provide, but with a social science focus. If we as social scientists leave the training to computer scientists, we will find that the new cadre of data scientists tend to leave out social science concerns or questions.

4. Bringing policy makers and academic researchers together to tackle the challenges that big data present. Last month the OII and Policy and Internet convened a workshop in Harvard on [6]Responsible Research Agendas for Public Policy in the Big Data Era, which included various leading academic researchers in the government and big data field, and government officials from the Census Bureau, the Federal Reserve Board, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The discussions revealed that there is continual procession of major events on big data in Washington DC (usually with a corporate or scientific research focus) to which US federal officials are invited, but also how few were really dedicated to tackling the distinctive issues that face government agencies such as those represented around the table.

5. Taking forward theoretical development in social science, incorporating big data insights. I recently spoke at the Oxford Analytica Global Horizons conference, at a session on Big Data. One of the few policy-makers (in proportion to corporate representatives) in the audience asked the panel “where is the theory”? As social scientists, we need to respond to that question, and fast.

CfP: What are conferences for? The Political economy of academic events (2014-06-28 08:00)

The [1]Sociological Imagination invites short articles (500-1500 words) critically reflecting upon the prevailing forms of intellectual meeting within the contemporary academy. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How could they be done differently? What are the sociological implications of these standardised forms of intellectual meeting? Whose voices do they amplify and whose do they suppress? What behaviour do they reward and what behaviour do they discourage? What are their intellectual implications? How far does intellectual form follow conference function, limiting time and expression in the interests of the event’s logistics? Why do people attend seminars? Why do people attend events? What are the wider significance of these common reasons? Are there other motivations for attending academic events which tend to be squeezed out in the neoliberal academy. How might we do things differently? What alternative forms can we imagine? What would the implications for the academy be of DIY academic events becoming common? We’re particularly interested in receiving articles on the political economy of conferences, seminars and workshops?

If you would like to submit an article please send mark@markcarrigan.net a 500-1500 word article, attached within the body of the e-mail, as well as biographical details to be displayed with the post.


debлина (2014-06-29 08:26:42)
Hi want to know till when can we submit? is there any deadline?

Sociological Imagination (2014-07-01 19:08:14)
Nope, no deadline

"Worker analytics" - Taylorization 2.0? (2014-06-29 08:00)

This article on [1]Pop Matters is an interesting critique of the growing trend towards 'Worker analytics' and how it meshes with productivity culture to expand the scope of workplace control: 2746
Both Taylorism and People Analytics are largely based on the idea that the human worker can be effectively represented through a composite of statistical metrics, and that an understanding and wielding of the information produced by those collective metrics will allow the managerial class control over the worker. However, there still exists a gap between a human being's capacity to be fully measured and data-technology's capacity to fully measure. Whole industries still misinterpret data all the time in pursuit of their respective goals (for a good example of this, check out [2]this discussion on “click-baiting” and digital publication analytics, on Time.com ). That gap is precious, and it represents the battleground over which the worker and the manager/corporation will struggle; the former for freedom, the latter for control.


This is better than a festschrift!

Rediscovered: C. Wright Mills’ 1951 book “White Collar – The American Middle Classes” (2014-07-01 08:00)

by Hannes Antonschmidt*

If he could look into the faces of work commuters on public trains of Western cities today, C. Wright Mills would be quickly convinced of the continuing relevance of his 1951 book, “White Collar – The American Middle Classes”.

The core thesis of his work is that the ongoing mechanization and automation of the factory halls has caused the same unpleasant symptoms that had become normality at the assembly lines. Estrangement from the product and oneself, demotivation and a sharp spatial and emotional split of work and leisure, according to Mills, no longer
only hit the proletariat but increasingly also the "white collar" employees.

In postwar America his book caused mixed reactions. Criticism, however, was mainly directed to the rigidity of his conclusions with its harsh and sometimes dark views and prospects. Mills' general analysis was largely appreciated. The New Republic said the book "offers an absorbing though somewhat bitter picture of the new white-collar middle-class personality", while the New York Times even lifted it to the level of a seminal publication "that persons of every level of the white collar pyramid should read and ponder."

Let me first summarise Mills' argument, before relating it to today's situation.

Mills regards the US farm crisis of the 1920s as the starting point of the rise of the new, mass middle classes. Mills writes that it was the farm crisis that lead to a market consolidation and concentration which, in turn, made the former independent farmers and their sons and daughters, no longer able to find employment on their farms, available for the labour market. Instead of operating as autonomous market actors in the free interplay of supply and demand, they were absorbed by the expanding administrative apparatus of the new main influencers of America's economic fortune: the increasingly powerful big industries and central government. (Chapter 2 "The Transformation of Property"/Chapter 4 "The New Middle Class, I")

Mills' argument was that, additionally fuelled through this new supply of labour, the trend towards bureaucratization, mechanization and professionalization then began to reach the whole middle class. The old traditional middle class professions, such as doctors and lawyers, were commercialized, the independent entrepreneur became an anachronism, the free intellectual dies out. Instead, a management stratum arose within the corporations, which, completely removed from the production process, manipulatively steers the army of small employees while having to obey the nervous orders of their capital investors. (Chapter 5 "The Managerial Demiurge"/Chapter 6 "Old professions and New Skills")

Accordingly, the common daily routine of this new middle class, according to Mills, consisted of two parts: The working part, dominated by superficial, calculating friendliness, a striving for power and money and an increasing loss of the meaning of technical abilities, on the one hand; and the leisure part that allowed for a temporary escape in an unreachable glamour world, on the other. This short-term fulfilment of the personal craving for recognition which Mills called a "status cycle"(1969, p.257), for example on holidays, gained further importance, as the previous status bases (higher education and training, income, or origin) noticeably lost their exclusivity, as the new middle class became a mass stratum. (Chapter 10 "Work"/Chapter 11 "The Status Panic")

Those who, driven by "status panic" (Mills 1969, p.240) wanted to keep their sinecures were compelled to take the path of agility and sell themselves on the personality market. The self-reliable entrepreneurial personality was thereby replaced by the well-trained hierarchy climber, who, on his way to the corporate Olympus, has to assert himself or herself against an army of likeminded careerists. (Chapter 8 "The Great Salesroom")

Opportunism also shaped the process of politicization of the new middle class. Mills saw unions and parties as becoming polluted to become instruments for gaining the biggest share within the distributive struggle of the political economy. Systematic change was hindered because the members of the new stratum would always attach themselves to any political stream that just possessed the most power within the prevalent political order. (Chapter 15 "The Politics of the Rearguard").

It is astonishing that Mills 60 years ago recognized trends and phenomena that do not only shape the lives of members of the middle class today, but also significantly influence political decisions in industrial democracies in the 'west'.

This political dimension can be demonstrated by reference to a very adequate example of recent public sector reform in Europe: The Bologna Process, a university reform agreed upon by then 30 European countries in 1999 that
established the so called European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Benelux Bologna Secretariat 2009). Its aims, to harmonize European degrees, while at the same time increasing graduates’ mobility and labour market readiness, implied a change of the role of universities which are now expected “to equip students with the knowledge, skills and competences that they need in the workplace and that employers require” (Working Group on Employability 2009, p. 5). Higher education institutions are seen as “partners [of politics and economy] in a joint venture that will create a good future” (Fejes 2008, p.525). Key player in this process is the (newly constructed) European academic citizen characterized in political planning as autonomous, flexible and mobile (ibid.).

The commercialization and its influence on graduate’s personalities were also two major findings of Mills’ analysis of the American university sector of the 1950s. His dark discovery that “high schools, as well as colleges and universities, have been reshaped for the personnel needs of business and government” (Mills 1969, p.266) is by the same time a complaint against a nation that has become a ”great salesroom” (Mills 1969, p. 161). Mills finds the finished product of the educational machine to be ”the successful man” (ibid.), a good employee within the “society of specialists” (ibid.), yet no ”good citizen” (ibid.).

“Little Man, What Now?” – Hans Fallada’s famous appeal is only rudimentarily addressed by Mills. The upheaval, the revolution must come – but what should it look like, who can start it, what comes after it – the Texan professor abandons the reader alone with these important questions. Considering that many trends Mills describes have neither slowed down, nor attenuated, in the past 60 years, we must pose additional questions: Was this course of history simply inevitable fortune? Was it the result of an (implicit) agreement? Or did people just fail to realize and discern the underlying processes? The latter seems rather unrealistic if one recognizes the apparentness with which the European Union can pursue goals that caused Mills’ outcry in his days. A third explanation might be that postmodernism has (with few exceptions) made even academics apathetic enough simply not to mind what is going on with themselves.

Especially in this respect, Mills’ book remains enormously relevant, since his relentless look behind the scenes sheds light on the constituting processes of everyday life and provokes a consciousness for reality that has become a scarce social good in modern mass society.

References


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He was enlightened when he rather accidentally found an old edition of Ralf Dahrendorf’s "Homo Sociologicus" that first led to a passion for sociology in general and later for C. Wright Mills in particular. Sociological thinking as a great way to reflect on economic phenomena also inspires his work as a consultant at the German Economic Institute for Tourism in Berlin.

2. mailto:h.antonschmidt@dwif.de

The DIY PhD and the transformation of intellectual life (2014-07-02 08:00)

As so often happens, [1] a post by Pat Thomson recently caught my imagination and left me thinking more deeply about an aspect of my own academic experience. There are lots of reasons I find the mechanics of postgraduate education interesting, foremost amongst which is probably the fact I’ve been one for rather a long time (and don’t feel like I will have stopped being one until my viva in September). But this personal dimension to my interest goes hand-in-hand with an intellectual fascination in the process by which postgraduate education is responsible for the reproduction of disciplines (or failure thereof). It has a similar importance for the university as an institution (today’s graduate students are tomorrow’s academics) and to actually existing HEI’s as organisations (today’s graduate students are today’s underpaid teaching assistants and tomorrow’s precariously employed lecturers – not to mention financial assets). When we look at this nexus (intellectual disciplines, higher education and specific universities) and the manifold tensions within it, it’s important not to forget the individual lives unfolding through it, as reflexive individuals try and negotiate a way through circumstances which may not be what they expected prior to choosing, drifting or being placed in postgraduate education but nonetheless constitute the reality they find once they are there (so basically S-A-C to anyone familiar with the latest realist lingo). Some of them may already know each other, they meet many others, develop enduring friendships (or resentments) and coalesce into networks which incorporate into and extend beyond the existing structure of social relations they initially encountered within these organisations and disciplines. They develop commitments to shared projects and values, unite around share identifications and even sometimes organise collectively (though usually not). They experiment with (and within) existing institutional forms, organising events, supporting certain norms (often implicitly propagating others) and both aggregatively and collectively begin to contribute to the reproduction or transformation of this complex system within which they were once so starkly peripheral, in spite of their continual centrality to the life of the organisation.

My point is that the way in which higher education changes is very complex but that the converging movements of graduate students into the system is crucial to understanding the dynamics we find within it. The issue patter’s post raised for me, which I’ve obsessed about from time to time but struggled to articulate clearly is: are graduate students becoming more reflexive and, if so, what are the implications of this for higher education? For younger graduate students, I’d argue this reflexive imperative reflects a broader set of social processes, though would certainly accept the reality of [2] social inertia being facilitated by privilege. I’d argue that pursuing education at a later age is inherently reflexive (see the late John Alford’s [3] PhD thesis which I’d love to help get published at some point). But does higher education itself lead to an intensification of this reflexivity and, if so, what are its implications for the system itself? This is where I found patter’s post so thought provoking and helpful. The post is definitely worth [4] reading in full.

2751
The plethora of advice books (Kamler & Thomson, 2008) were probably the first major indication of the trend to de-institutionalise doctoral education through DIY pedagogy. The advent of social media has exponentially accelerated it. Doctoral researchers can now access a range of websites such as [5]LitReviewHQ, [6]PhD2Published and [7]The Three Month Thesis youtube channel. They can read blogs written by researchers and academic developers e.g. [8]Thesis Whisperer, [9]Doctoral Writing SIG, [10]Explorations of Style, and of course this one. They can synchronously chat on social media about research via general hashtags #phdchat #phdforum and #acwri, or discipline specific hashtags such as #twitterstorians or #socphd. They can buy webinars, coaching and courses in almost all aspects of doctoral research. Doctoral researchers are also themselves increasingly blogging about their own experiences and some are also offering advice to others. Much of this socially mediated DIY activity is international, cross-disciplinary and all day/all night.

We know too little about how doctoral researchers weigh up the advice they get from social media compared to that of their institutional grad school and their supervisors. We also don’t know much about how supervisors engage with this DIY sphere, particularly about how much they talk with their supervisees about what they are doing online. We don’t know what support doctoral researchers get to work out what is good and bad online advice. We don’t know how supervisors and academic developers build on what doctoral researchers are learning elsewhere.

As someone who is engaged in this DIY field with books, blogs and twitter, it seems pretty apparent to me that something is happening here and we (collectively) don’t know what it is. It’s largely outside the normative audit oriented training processes that Green and Lee were so concerned about. It’s a field which is fragmented, partially marketised, unregulated and a bit feral. But it’s big, it’s powerful, more and more doctoral researchers are into it, and it is profoundly pedagogical. I’m concerned that British universities are generally (and of course there are exceptions, but mostly this is the case) not helping supervisors to think about this DIY supervision trend and what it means for how doctoral education is changing – and crucially, what the implications for their supervision practices might be.


I find the implications of this fascinating. If DIY educational practices are becoming a dominant feature of postgraduate education then what are the implications of this for how disciplines reproduce themselves and how higher education reproduces itself? I think there’s important work to be done both in mapping this trend empirically – clearly the social media sphere is integral to this (it has been to my own DIY PhD) but it extends much more broadly. Are there more reading groups, informal seminars, DIY conferences than have previously been the case? Do universities support these activities or are people creatively using the affordances provided by social media to organise outside of their institutions? Is the nascent industry of online coaching and training likely to grow and what are the implications of this? How do ‘para-academics’ and ‘alt-academics’ figure into this trend? To what extent do precarious working practices explain this tendency and to what extent are they reinforced by it? If it’s becoming more common (note the if, I’m conscious of the risk of assuming a linearity to a change) to work as a research assistant outside the context of your doctoral education then how does this change your orientation towards your PhD itself? Does the reflexivity made imperative by a precarious labour market devoid of full time work (let alone ongoing contracts) for postgraduate students inculcate a greater degree of reflexivity about their
studies? Is this intensifying the significance of peer socialisation in doctoral education and, if so, could we securely say that this is a good thing? What are the implications of these trends for intellectual quality and endorsement of the (conflicted) norms in virtue of which we seek to assess that ‘quality’?

There are lots of fascinating questions here. Not for the first time I find myself frustrated to realise that there’s another topic I’d like to do serious work on but, only having so much time and energy, I can’t given my existing commitments. Reflecting on my own experience (and resisting the urge to dignify it with the epithet auto-ethnographic) I think that a DIY PhD has proved inimical to specialisation. The range of experiences it has encompassed have expanded my awareness of intellectual variety (things to do, stuff to read, places to go, people to talk to) in a way which makes the necessity of patiently focusing upon one topic a deeply frustrating one. I wonder what other people’s experiences of a DIY PhD have been?

(and don’t even get me started on the politics of the DIY PhD....)

1. http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/
3. http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/36193/
4. http://patthomson.wordpress.com/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/
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March 2015 useful stuff roundup | The Research Companion (2015-03-31 22:17:12)

[...] blogging and tweeting about research papers? The importance of stupidity in scientific research Mark Carrigan on the DIY PhD. From Crisis to Sustainable Health – lessons learned from the Ebola Outbreak worth viewing in [...]


Review by James MacFarlane
The Proactionary Imperative aims to provide a comprehensive intellectual basis for the emerging progressive movement of transhumanism. This is approached though four main chapters, then culminating in a manifesto.

The first chapter sets the scene by reflecting upon the disarray of contemporary politics, which seemingly serves only to alienate the younger generation despite the world undergoing momentous socio-economic and technological changes. Such disaffection apparently correlates with ongoing techno-scientific informed transformations in humanity’s self-understanding, which the authors anticipate may lead to a reorientation of the former right-left ideological axis by 90 degrees, according to differing approaches toward risk. 21st century political discourses could well be increasingly marked by a schism between those aspiring toward a ‘sustainable’ a.k.a risk-averse humanity, versus those who would sooner embrace-risk, seeking grand technological fixes to solve the world’s problems. Correspondingly, traditionalists and communitarians would become situated ‘down-wing’ forming precautionary pole of the new ideological spectrum, whilst libertarians and technocrats would shift ‘up-wing’ according to their proactionary disposition.

The second chapter offers a theological framework for understanding transhumanism, emphasising the necessity for a literal belief in our capacity for apotheosis. Accordingly, the authors strongly identify with the conception of nature as the product of an anthropocentric yet transcendent deity as favoured by the Abrahamic religions: reality might then not only appear fundamentally intelligible to us, but can equally be imagined as perfectible under the right (techno-science enabled) conditions. Such then leads them to appropriate the neologism theomemesis (‘God-Playing’ in Greek) for attempts to acquire God’s point-of-view, capturing the apparent maturation of earlier scientific aspirations at ‘Getting into the mind of God’ (exemplified in Physics), now increasingly towards a position of ‘Playing God’ (exemplified in Biology). As Science regularly destabilises our existence, a calculated and decidedly proactionary embrace of risk is suggested to be necessary for the fullest realisation our divine potential.

The third chapter revisits the history of Eugenics, with the book predominantly concerned with human biology as the most immediate material platform for transhumanism. It is suggested to be incumbent that proactionaries
re-engage constructively with this history, as transhumanism owes itself (at least in name) to Eugenics, the spirit of which it continues to promote under the more politically correct rubric of ‘human enhancement’. The authors suggest Eugenics was originally conceived as the ‘final frontier’ for nineteenth century political economy, or effectively the conversion of humanity to capital. Aspiring toward a future bio-capital utopia would involve ensuring maximum productivity, or making the most of one’s inheritance. However, ‘irrational’ (aka traditional) socio-economic barriers are likely to prevent some individuals from achieving this ideal. While wealth redistribution and egalitarian legislation might assist in the short term, a more comprehensive long-term solution would involve improving the capital stock of humanity itself: understanding the entire evolutionary process could unlock ‘unrealised potential’ or ‘unexploited capital’. Despite the Nazi use of genetic differences to declare a race war that ultimately turned into genocide, the authors maintain that Julian Huxley (the Evolutionary Biologist who coined ‘transhumanism’) wasn’t deterred from the project altogether. Essentially then, they point out that the recognition of genetic variations does not in itself prescribe a particular societal response: the ‘is’ merely prompts but does not determine the ‘ought’ (92). Equally, prospective future strategies for a 'Eugenics 2.0' wouldn't necessarily look as they had in the 20th century. New genomic knowledge acquired in the interim means that future interventions into the gene pool could well move beyond the gross regulation of individuals breeding patterns toward more targeted approaches such as drug-based gene therapies and direct nano-level genetic re-engineering.

The penultimate chapter then provides a legal and political framework for the proactionary principle. Here the authors recognise the most obvious means of advancing a collectivised proactionary policy agenda would be for a state to require that its citizens be duty-bound to participate in scientific research. Equally though, they realise that under the current increasing privatisation of science the most likely beneficiary wouldn't be the general public, but rather those biotechnology firms poised to exploit the findings for profitable products. In which case a solution may be the right (as opposed to duty) to participate in scientific research, which would translate into science appearing as an opportunity (as opposed to obligation) for the ordinary citizen. The authors then offer the new legal concept of hedgenetics, to capture ‘collective right to gene ownership compatible with the duty of genetic stewardship’ (122). In this sense, through self-organising collectives individuals would be encouraged to seek out others with whomever they might establish a common cause through common bio-capital interests, resulting in multiple ‘hedgenetic funds’ with overlapping membership. While corporate bodies wouldn’t be directly eligible for hedgenetic status (on account of their already existing legal personality and pure commercial interest), they could become involved by way of induction payments for individuals to participate in the company’s own genetic research in exchange for ‘access units’ - a non-exclusive right for individuals to use the results of research in the event that it makes a profit or novel finding. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this review to fully expound, essentially Hedgenetics aspires toward a participatory, democratically accountable and legally binding version of eugenics written into the heart of intellectual property law and the regulation of transactions.

The books foremost strength is its willingness to address the challenging social justice issues which those on the libertarian side of the transhumanist movement might otherwise overlook. Also greatly commendable is the varied array of material the authors summon to make their case. Accordingly, anyone who identifies with the need for future collectivist and democratic (as opposed to the typical market-driven) strategies for human enhancement, will undoubtedly find this text a well-informed 21st century starting point. [nbox type="notice"]James is a postgraduate student currently studying for the MSc in Science, Media and Public Policy within the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick. His interests centre around self-identification and expression in hyper-technological societies.[/nbox] 1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/fuller.jpg
Transhumanism’s Big Political Blind Spot | The Sociological Imagination (2015-07-28 18:54:10)

[...] Veronika Lipinska and I have argued in The Proactionary Imperative that a truly free transhumanist society would stretch society's powers of accommodation and [...]
(2002), the authors recognise that the academic imperatives of neutrality, anonymity and objectivity often leave the intellectual producing knowledge which is ‘parasitic’ on the movement itself (cited in Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 6). It is argued that the academic gaze of social science objectifies the movement and does little for the movement’s cause. In either misperceiving the general contours of the critical agency involved, or, worse, restoring or preserving the hegemony of academic discourse, the gaze of the social movement researcher is dispassionate, often sacrificing an activist’s own acts of collective remembrance for intellectual self-promotion (Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 3).

Cresswell and Spandler’s point-of-departure is founded upon Gramsci’s (1971) archetypal theory of the intellectual. Here, Gramsci constructed two types of intellectual: the ‘traditional’ and the ‘organic’. The former being characterised as the ivory tower academic who secures the status quo and the latter as the activist whose function it was to construct a transformative historical bloc (Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 4): an alternative basis of consent for social order. To sacrifice an activist’s own acts of collective remembrance, then, is considered crucial: for a theory which is animated by the production of knowledge from activist experience is considered necessary in order to respond to challenges effectively (Cox and Nilsen, 2005). Indeed, such a theory is an essential condition in order to understand what is meant by transformation in the first place: a move from ‘an unwanted to a wanted source of determination… [which] can only be effected in practice’ (Bhaskar, 1989: 90).

Seeking to develop political practice (‘movement activism’), then, is considered a privileged source of knowledge as it is cultivated through an experiential engagement with mechanisms of constraint and oppression. To treat the social movement as an object of research – ‘to be observed, described and explained’ – is to be disengaged in such a way that the ‘active processes that people […] experience’ are either ignored or side-lined (Barker and Cox, 2002 cited in Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 4). Largely devoid of any sense of ‘reflexive auto-critique’ (Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 4) this academic’s theoretical work is said to be ‘confined’ to a set of abstract ‘generic propositions’ (Barker and Cox, 2002), which only marginalises the position of the movement actor and, therefore, negates his or her experiential knowledge, which is considered crucial in creating a transformative historical bloc.

Adjacent to the Gramscian perspective, there is another project, marked by an academic’s will to influence the wider public. This ‘public sociology’ (Burawoy, 2004) is animated by a realist ontology (Bhaskar, 1989). It believes in not creating knowledge directly for the movement, but rather, about questioning those with power (Mills, 1963) and about having ‘an uneasy relationship with the status quo’ (Furedi, 2004: 33).

It recognises that experience cannot solely explain what is happening in the world or ‘what is to be done’ (Lenin, 1973) in order to confront the challenges that movements represent. Experiential artefacts are only part of a wider, more complex picture. There are structures and mechanisms at work which give rise to these human experiences (Bhaskar, 1989). So the role of realist theory is to go deeper; to explain those ‘inner connections’ (Lebowitz, 2003), which were important to Marx’s own ‘politico-ethical stance’ (Cresswell and Spandler, 2012: 5). This move should not render activist experience epiphenomenal. On the contrary, it is marked by urgent social and political effects – effects which guide an academic’s theory towards oppressive social structures at ‘depth’. This is important to the sociologist who wishes to augment public debate about moral and political issues (Burawoy, 2004).

Rather than being left with a confrontation between academic and activist theorising, paradigmatically expressed by the question, ‘Which side are you on?’ (Barker and Cox, 2002), this project seeks to enrich public debate about those (structural) relations between phenomena which remain unseen, felt or experienced by actors (Thompson, 1995: 26). If we foreground our theories in experiential artefacts, if we delve into the pre-packaged chaos of activism, we are better positioned to critically question the conventions that sensitise society to particular ideals and values; norms which do not always push forward human progress (Furedi, 2004: 37). In good conscience, this perspective does not discuss the minutia which constitutes motivation for political change. As Cresswell and Spandler (2012) show, it cannot. Rather, its function must be to probe beneath the surface of experiential reality, and actively seek out those
‘inner connections’ in order to theorise the (structural) conditions for a progressive public discourse.

Tom Brock is a lecturer in the department of Sociology and Criminology at Manchester Metropolitan University. He holds a doctorate in Sociology and an ESRC-recognised Masters degree in research methods from the University of Durham, where he also worked as a research associate and a part-time teacher in the School of Applied Social Sciences.


Jerald (2019-08-07 09:45:22)
Excellent web site you have got here.. It’s hard to find good quality writing like yours nowadays. I truly appreciate people like you! Take care!!

Evelyn Ruppert & Roger Burrows on The Social Life of Methods (2014-07-04 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/cnwkjQv1cig

There's an overview of the project on the CRESC website [2]here.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/cnwkjQv1cig
William Davies on Markets, Neoliberalism and European State Aid rules (2014-07-05 08:00)

You can read the article here. His new book on this topic looks great.

Our Currency is Information (2014-07-06 08:00)

The digital age has profoundly transformed the way people find and share information. The Internet is enabling collaboration between activists, hackers and journalists on an unprecedented scale. This has led to previously unimaginable possibilities in investigative reporting. People are newly empowered to uncover hidden information, expose corruption and bring the truth to light.

Through a series of short films, Exposing the Invisible tells the personal stories of those working at the new frontiers of investigation.
We explore their tools and methods and learn how they manage the risks of information activism. The project also offers a range of resources to help activists protect themselves and their work.

We hope that *Exposing the Invisible* will inspire a new generation of people committed to transparency and accountability.

Our currency is information is the first episode of the documentary film series Exposing the Invisible by Tactical Tech. In this episode you will learn about methods for investigating corruption and organised crime. You will meet Paul Radu from the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project one of the most inspiring investigative reporters from Romania.


For more information see: [2]exposingtheinvisible.org/

2. [https://exposingtheinvisible.org/](https://exposingtheinvisible.org/)
The title of this post comes from Ian Craib’s wonderful book *The Importance of Disappointment*, which I wrote about a couple of months ago. His concern is with a contemporary inability, pervasive to the point that we may regard it as epochal, to live with disappointment. We struggle to tolerate the failure of our plans or the frustration of our expectations, instead resolving to change our selves or our circumstances in order to evade these limitations on our next attempt. We are hyperactively concerned to fix things because, argues Craib, doing so allows us to avoid confrontations with our own limitations and the recalcitrance of our world. His point is not that deliberation or planning are intrinsically delusive but rather that we invest ourselves in them in a way which is. Unintended consequences, thwarted ambitions and unrealised hopes are an unavoidable aspect of the human condition and yet we repudiate this reality, in our manner of being even if not our reflective judgements, because doing so helps us avoid the ambivalence which unavoidably follows from it. We strive to do better next time, moving on to something new in the belief that we can arrange the pieces of our life in a way that provides the grounding which we are peripherally aware of lacking. The problem is not that we try to better ourselves but rather in what we avoid through ‘self-improvement’: displacing our confrontation with disappointment by orientating ourselves towards next time in such a manner that we foreclose the capacity to experience this time.

The themes from Craib’s book came back to me when I recently read Oliver Burkeman’s *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can’t Stand Positive Thinking*. I’ve attached a video below from a lecture in which he summarises the book’s argument. It’s a great read and I couldn’t help but think of it as basically being *The Importance of Disappointment* if you substitute experimental psychology and cultural commentary for psychoanalysis and social theory (though this is probably unfair to both authors by conflating the distinctive qualities of each book).
much more nuanced than this, it’s hard not to wonder if the ‘h’ word in the title was insisted upon by the publisher). His target is not just the banality of these books but rather their tragically counter-productive character, with their inevitable tendency to provoke an attitude towards life which intensifies dissatisfaction and leads to the purchase of further books:

This is why, among themselves, some self-help publishers refer to the ‘eighteen-month rule’, which states that the person most likely to purchase any given self-help book is someone who, within the previous eighteen months, purchased a self-help book – one that evidently didn’t solve all their problems. When you look at the self-help shelves with a coldly impartial eye, this isn’t especially surprising. That we yearn for neat, book-sized solutions to the problem of being human is understandable, but strip away the packaging, and you’ll find that the messages of such works are frequently banal. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People essentially tells you to decide what matters most to you in life, and then do it; How to Win Friends and Influence People advises its readers to be pleasant rather than obnoxious, and to use people’s first names a lot. One of the most successful management manuals of the last few years, Fish!, which is intended to help foster happiness and productivity in the workplace, suggests handing out small toy fish to your hardest-working employees.

This is why I found myself so unwaveringly categorising The Antidote as a companion volume for The Importance of Disappointment. The self-help industry depends upon and contributes towards the widespread evasion of disappointment whereas, as Burkeman, rather succinctly puts it: “the effort to try to feel happy is often precisely the thing that makes us miserable”. Our desire to avoid mess, refuting disappointment by energetically seeking solutions to our perceived problems, intensifies our inability to cope with our circumstances. What worries me though is how to stop this critique, persuasive as I find it, from leading to passivity – either at the level of personal life or social change. Both authors are sensitive to this issue but didn’t seem to resolve it in any substantive fashion. Perhaps I’m expecting too much? After all, we do not need to live with this mess but mess in general. So the recognition that there are problems which need to be solved can co-exist with a rejection of problem solving as a general condition of life. But this is by definition something that’s hard to write about in the abstract and it’s our own tendency to think about it in abstract terms (generalising our dissatisfactions and projecting into the future rather than engaging with their particularity in the present) which is such a large part of the problem both authors diagnose in their different ways.

Looking back through my kindle highlights I realise I’m perhaps being unfair by saying that Burkeman’s approach to this issue was unsatisfying. The stoics were the aspect of the book I was least familiar with but also perhaps the most interesting, at least in this particular respect:

It is essential to grasp a distinction here between acceptance and resignation: using your powers of reason to stop being disturbed by a situation doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try to change it. To take one very obvious example, a Stoic who finds herself in an abusive relationship would not be expected to put up with it, and would almost certainly be best advised to take action to leave it. Her Stoicism would oblige her only to confront the truth of her situation – to see it for what it was – and then to take whatever actions were within her power, instead of railing against her circumstances as if they ought not exist. ‘The cucumber is bitter? Put it down,’ Marcus advises. ‘There are brambles in the path? Step to one side. That is enough, without also asking: “How did these things come into the world at all?”
The economies and ecologies of Big Data (2014-07-08 08:00)

In this fascinating talk from the NSMNSS conference last year, [1]Evelyn Ruppert discusses the economies and ecologies of Big Data. Her research flowed from the [2]Social Life of Methods project and led to the establishment of the exciting journal [3]Big Data & Society which recently launched.

IFRAME: [4]//www.youtube.com/embed/hIFD1l8zJCo

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/04/15/the-importance-of-disappointment/
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/osJ-J2x7qFw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. http://www.gold.ac.uk/sociology/staff/academicstaff/ruppertevelyn/
6. file://www.youtube.com/embed/hIFD1l8zJCo

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Would you like to write for Discover Society? (2014-07-08 21:01)

Discover Society is a free online magazine featuring articles on social research, policy analysis and commentary. It is supported by Policy Press and endorsed by the British Sociological Association and the Social Policy Association.

We publish short (1500 word) research-based articles on a variety of topics. We also publish: ‘Viewpoints’ (on current social issues); ‘Policy Briefings’; ‘On the Frontline’, and a longer, ‘Focus’ article in each issue.

Deadlines: mid-month for publication first Wednesday each month.


Potential contributions can be discussed in advance with the editors via a short ‘pitch’ sent to: [3]discoversociety@outlook.com

3. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
This essay by Kate Crawford (from Microsoft Research) at the New Inquiry explores the relationship between big data, the anxieties it provokes and normcore ("Having mastered difference, the truly cool attempt to master sameness"). If one accepts her contention that normcore reflects "the dispersed anxiety of a populace that wishes nothing more than to shed its own subjectivity" then the argument comes to seem very important. In the absence of sustained macro-political responses to the Snowden revelations, at least thus far, it's imperative that we look to the cultural consequences of this sudden awareness of institutionalised digital surveillance.

What does the lived reality of big data feel like?

2014 is the year we learned about Squeaky Dolphin. That’s the Pynchon-worthy code name for a secret program created by British intelligence agency GCHQ to monitor millions of YouTube views and Facebook likes in real time. Of course, this was just one of many en masse data-collection programs exposed in Edward Snowden’s smuggled haul. But the Squeaky Dolphin PowerPoint deck reveals something more specific. It outlines an expansionist program to bring big data together with the more traditional approaches of the social and humanistic sciences: the worlds of small data. GCHQ calls it the Human Science Operations Cell, and it is all about supplementing data analysis with broader sociocultural tools from anthropology, sociology, political science, biology, history, psychology, and economics.
An Alternative History of Sociological Thought (2014-07-10 08:00)

This idea occurred to me earlier today when I read this great article on Harriet Martineau for a second time. I’d first heard of Martineau through a conversation on twitter, ultimately leading to this proposal by Steve Fuller. The longer I study sociology, the more I learn about these figures, whom for whatever reason did not make it into the sociological cannon and yet made hugely original and important contributions to sociological thought. I’m thinking of people like Harriet Martineau, Patrick Geddes, William Du Bois and even Gabriel Tarde (though his championing by Nigel Thrift and Bruno Latour has contributed to a renewal of interest in his work). I’m assuming there are many others I’ve not encountered. Who else should figure in an alternative history of sociological thought?

While resisting the urge to commit myself to another project for the moment, it also occurs to me that such an alternative history would by its nature be something which benefited from a diverse range of contributions. Given what I assume to be a multiplicity of processes that can lead important and valuable figures to be historically marginalised and excluded from the cannon, it stands to reason that attempting to sole author a history of these exclusions would be an unavoidably difficult task - the very fact of the exclusions means that first contact with particular thinkers would likely be accidental, with a continued engagement reflecting the value that the reader found in their work despite the relative lack of status accorded to the thinker in question. So the wider the range of perspectives that figured into this alternative history, the more likely it would be to serve the purpose I’m proposing for it.

Why does this matter? There are lots of ways to answer this question, some of which are more politically inclined than others. But the one that seems most immediate and obvious to me is the intellectual implications of how narrowly conceived the contemporary cannon of sociological thought is. I recognise the likelihood of national differences, with this being an important issue that an alternative history could explore, but with regards to British sociology I agree with the assessment made by William Outhwaite:

The last 35 years or so in British sociology (by which I mean sociology written and taught in the UK) have been marked, I think, by two processes of ‘canonization’. The first is that of the holy trinity of Marx, Weber and Durkheim (sometimes including Simmel) as the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology as we know it. The second, more contentious, is the emergence of what seems at present like a fairly stable ‘canon’ of theorists ascribed a comparably prominent super-star role in contemporary sociology; my tentative list here (in alphabetical order) is Bauman, Beck, Bourdieau and Giddens.
In the five years since Outhwaite wrote this paper, we have approached a point where Latour could be added to this list (and we could conceive a point where Giddens might, rather unfairly, drop out of it). But it's remarkably limited in many ways. It's an empirical question whether these theorists do have the status which Outhwaite suggests they enjoy but, assuming he's correct, I find it easy to see all sorts of deleterious consequences which are likely to flow from the narrowness with which this cannon is constituted. These are probably the subject for another post. But I think there's an obvious need for a broadening out of the sociological cannon, not necessarily for an attack on canonisation as such but for a debate about what it means to have made an important contribution to the development of sociology.

An interesting way to stimulate such a debate would be to allow people to argue for those figures who they believe to have been unfairly excluded from the sociological canon. The point would be to give an overview of their work, explain your own enthusiasm for it and make a case for the distinctive contribution that the sociologist in question has made to the development of the discipline. Each contribution would include an annotated bibliography in order to sign post a way for the interested reader to explore their work in greater depth. The point would not simply be to say 'so and so is brilliant and should be more widely recognised' but rather to elaborate upon what it is precisely about their work which is particularly valuable in virtue of wider trends (positive or negative) within the discipline.

Such a project would benefit from being as accessible and open-ended as possible. This is why I think a platform like PressBooks would be so useful for producing something like this. This is a Wordpress like platform which can be used to collectively produce an electronic book - I could imagine this being an ongoing effort, resulting in successive volumes as more people make contributions to the project, with the intention being that the resulting book would be freely available in a variety of electronic formats.

The contributions would be:

1000-3000 words in length
Include an additional annotated bibliography, providing full bibliographical details about notable texts and a brief description of their content
Referenced in Harvard
Making a case for the importance of the sociologist in question in terms of broader disciplinary themes
Does this appeal to you? If so then please get in touch (mark@markcarrigan.net) - it's going to be a few weeks before I have time to sit down and get the logistical side of this off the ground. But I think this is feasible and I'm serious about going ahead with it if there's enough contributions. To be clear: the book would be self-published. But it would be freely available in Kindle, iBook, PDF and on the web - it will likely have a much broader reach than if it were issued by a publisher. I also imagine that this is something which could grow over time in a way that would potentially be hugely valuable, perhaps providing scope to systematically explore some of the broader issues which would be partially addressed by individual contributions.

SIR James Ubuo (2014-08-08 07:04:20)
The history of sociological thought is the history that is incomplete. Social sentiments were applied during the period of putting the sociological thought together. We all should know that Sociology became academic discipline in the late nineteenth century but some sociological writers put that it was in early 20th century. However, Marx, Max and Emile even Auguste claimed to be the founding fathers. This then seems to be sentimental. As Sociology is said to study social behaviors, that is, individual differences in group, it is necessary for a core Sociologist to go down deep to avoid social sentiment.
The World Cup in Brazil and the Political Economy of Mega Events (2014-07-11 08:00)

This fascinating discussion offers a penetrating critique of the politics of the world cup, reflecting on the 'echoes of dictatorship' that can be seen in the implementation of such a mega event within a country that has only been a democracy for a few decades. If you wonder what the next stage of post-democracy will look like, the political economy of events like the world cup and the Olympics would be quite a good place to start. The analogy could certainly be overstated but the opacity of decision making, the naked capture of resource allocation by powerful interests and the increased 'efficiency' of judicial processes ('World Cup courts' is a terrifying phrase) in order to avoid disruption are all disturbing trends. What would they look like if they're generalised? I interviewed Andrew Feinstein about similar issues in the South African world cup a few years ago.

Accessible Books on Social Theory (2014-07-11 23:01)

The following two books are extremely useful for those embarking on a social theory journey and getting to know social theorists. The books would suit undergraduate students in fields such as Sociology and Politics, as well as
postgraduate students who require an accessible and absorbing introduction to the key themes and concepts that have influenced social theory in the past, and continue to affect contemporary thinkers and writers. Both books use language that makes social theory easy to comprehend and enjoyable to study, whilst allowing us to consider the nature of modern society and its institutions, identities and the significance of structure v agency through appropriate sociological terminology.

An Invitation to Social Theory by David Inglis with Christopher Thorpe

“Learning about theory is like learning a new language”. For those who are keen to gain a solid and engaging introduction to the sometimes heavy and complex writings on social theory, you would do well to pick up a copy of An Invitation to Social Theory by David Inglis, to learn about the terminology of social theory. The book invites to you to gain a good foundation in key social theorists and social theories – "what they are saying and how they are saying it" by explaining the principal ideas and concepts that are relevant to contemporary social theory. At the beginning of the book, you can read a historical perspective about the classical paradigms of theory from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that have influenced contemporary theorists, as well as been influenced themselves by German philosophers like Immanuel Kant and George Hegel.

The three recurring themes that are prevalent in social theory are outlined for the reader: knowledge (ontology and epistemology), structure and action (agency) and modernity. The book reminds us that the area of social theory for beginners can sometimes be exciting to venture into, yet at other times it can be confusing. The advice given is to persist in getting to know the social theories and theorists, and do not be put off by obscure jargon or elite pretensions, as in the long run you will develop your knowledge and understanding, and discover the social theories and theorists you can connect with the most. The book also reminds us that social theory sometimes reflects what we already know, thus confirming the beliefs we hold, but other times it succeeds in changing us slightly or dramatically by providing us with new perspectives about the social world.

Newcomers to social theory will feel confidently informed about the main paradigms in social theory, from Functionalism to Marxism, Symbolic Interactionism to Feminism and more. You might just peruse certain relevant chapters of the book or you might read the entire book chronologically as it is an easy read. However we are advised to ensure we read Chapter One first because the classical paradigms referred to are what sow the seeds for later social theory and contemporary social theory. Readers of the book will be able to understand enough of the basic
significant concepts of social theory to go onto further reading. Readers will also, over time, become more confident in applying the concepts acquired through reading such an introductory text to social theory, and understand the significance and relevance of social theory to the contemporary world.

Social Theory: Continuity and Confrontation – A Reader edited by Roberta Garner

2nd edition

Continuity and confrontation are the key themes of this reader on social theory, as the editor explains: “...ideas develop both through controversies and continuities...”, and thus her aim is to "emphasize the restless, rebellious side of social thought". Continuities concern revisiting and rethinking of social theories, whilst confrontation refers to the development of social theory through debate, discussion and controversy. Over time, as social changes take place, theories must be revised or rendered obsolete, the editor reminds us. Like An Invitation to Social Theory, this book also relates the excitement of studying social theory, and reminds us that we can overcome any frustrations about the sometimes dry and abstract nature of social theory. The book provides vivid and important writings for us to get a taste of well-known theorists as well as those we may not know so well. It is a must-read for anyone who is new to social theory and wishes to gain a brilliant breadth, for the book presents a wide scope of key readings to help you develop an extensive understanding of the scope of social theory.

One of the benefits of this reader on social theory is that Roberta Garner has aimed to connect classical theory with accessible empirical studies, allowing the reader to make the vital links that will illuminate key social theory ideas and concepts, as well as the relationship between theory and empirical reality. Further, the book highlights how it is essential to question the social world, and not solely explain it. Being critical and open to change is crucial to the works of many social theorists. Thus, Garner incorporates works in this book that are diverse in content and style, and from both mainstream and "marginal" sociology. Garner rightly points out that writers and readers of social theory change over the course of their lives, and therefore theorists, texts and readers do not remain static and fixed in interpretation.

The book is divided into three parts covering distinct historical epochs. Beginning with the impact of Machiavelli’s The Prince on society's awareness of the powerful and the political, and then moving onto introduce the reader to Edmund Burke and August Comte, the book is always engaging and surprising in the content and selections from original texts imparted to us. The second section of Part One focuses on classical theory: Karl Marx, Friedrich
Engels, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel and Max Weber. Part Two moves onto examining the importance of ethnicity and race by introducing the reader to W.E.B. DuBois, as well as The Chicago School, Charles Cooley and George Herbert Mead. We then get to know about the social theorists like Antonio Gramsci writing around the time of the war, and then post-war perspectives from Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills. Symbolic Interactionism is explored by examining Howard S. Becker, and Ideology is considered from the perspective of Louis Althusser. Part Three delves into the more contemporary theorists like Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, as well as raising issues of gender and sexuality through theorists like Dorothy E. Smith and others. Media, culture and globalisation are expanded upon towards the end of Part Three.

[nbox type="notice"] Sadia Habib is a PhD candidate in Educational Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London. [/nbox]


VALUES BEYOND VALUE? BEV SKEGGS ASKS "IS ANYTHING BEYOND THE LOGIC OF CAPITAL?" (2014-07-12 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/7vLeYNVUAEk
Writing and your imagined audience (2014-07-13 08:00)

Do you imagine an audience when you write? I've become aware recently of how rarely I do this. The main reason for this has been the jarring experience of finding myself overly conscious about the particular audience I happen to be writing for in recent projects. I wrote a chapter on asexuality for a handbook on sexuality and was suddenly aware of the fact it would presumably be trainee councillors, sex therapists and psychology students reading the chapter. The uniform chapter headings that were built into the design of the book produced all sorts of angst about how I was writing i.e. if I'm writing under the heading 'implications for applied practitioners' (or a phrase to that effect) then I can't help but wonder who are these practitioners and what will they think of how I'm writing? More recently, with Social Media for Academics, I've found myself very conscious of what will presumably be a diverse audience and worrying about the ways in which disciplinary specific norms and styles might be creeping into my writing in a way deleterious to the readability of the book.

I've found these experiences strange because I'm rarely aware of an audience the rest of the time when writing. Obviously I realise reflectively that people read things that I've made public. But this awareness rarely enters into the process of writing itself. It makes me second guess, immediately read back over what I've written and agonise over word choice and sentence structure. It seems to preclude the sort of 'flow' that my orientation towards writing generally leaves me seeking out. It reintroduces my internal conversation into the writing process and I write much more slowly and enjoy it much less. This left me thinking about how you make sense of this imagined audience, as internal conversation – it makes me think of pragmatism, with this 'other' entering into my inner experience while I write, offering a judgemental gaze in virtue of which I find myself assessing what I have written rather than losing myself in the process of writing. But my sense of this other is partial at best and entirely imagined at worst. I don't really know these audiences and that's why they're entering into my writing process in such a censorious way. But then again do I know my 'usual' audience, the familiar group to which I'm implicitly contrasting these unfamiliar others? I really don't and I find it oddly unnerving to pursue this line of thought. Perhaps if I pursue it too far, I'll find a real generalised other, in Mead's sense of the term, entering into my experience of writing and forevermore be prone to self-censoring in the face of its stern yet ephemeral gaze.

Six principles for organising academic conferences in the 21st century (2014-07-13 21:03)

by Steve Fuller

After my recent keynote at the 2014 meeting of the British Sociological Association, I was interviewed about my views on the conference. Perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, I said that a large professional conference such as this one is a great place to catch up with old friends and hawk some book ideas to publishers, but rarely memorable for its intellectual substance. Generally speaking, only junior, relatively unpublished academics really need to go to such conferences to acquire visibility among prospective employers and colleagues. And, of course, it is also an esteem indicator to be invited to speak in plenary fashion at such occasions. Otherwise, there is little else to recommend.
attendance at an academic conference in its current form. However, the six principles below are designed to turn the conference into a unique sort of academic event well worth attending.

1. A conference is a distinct channel – perhaps even genre – of academic communication. It is not a watered-down or zombie version of the academic print culture. It requires its own ‘peer review’ standards that do not simply trade on the conventions of academic writing. Thus, instead of abstracts, prospective presenters should send video clips of 1-3 minutes that convey what will be said and how it will be said.

2. Presenters should be strongly discouraged from reading their presentations. More generally, presenters should be forced to make a special case for presenting material that is already available in print. The norm for conference presentations should be new material – unless a presenter hails from a field with which conference members are unlikely to be familiar.

3. Presentations heavily reliant on Powerpoint should be gathered thematically into what are essentially high-tech poster sessions rather than be given stand-alone speaker slots. This may mean that a larger percentage of the space in the conference facility is given over to such sessions. Indeed, organizers may wish to consider that the explicitness of many Powerpoint presentations render the human presenter redundant. Thus, interested conference goers may simply be directed to a computer terminal where all the Powerpoint-based presentations are loaded, perhaps with recorded voice-overs from the absent presenters.

4. In short, my ideal conference would have fewer presenters but who give stronger, fresher performances. Most of the texts associated with a conference would not be found in the thick book of abstracts normally distributed when the conference begins but in the social media streams that are generated during and after the presentations.

5. It also follows that funding for conference attendance should not be tied to a formal presentation but to a requirement to make one’s participation visible, through the various forms of live interaction that the conference allows and social media enables to be documented. Among other things, this would have the effect of keeping most people engaged with the conference beyond simply the session in which they deliver their presentation, as often happens now.

6. A large hall in the conference facility – perhaps where the book exhibit or reception is – should be open throughout the conference for the organization of what Silicon Valley calls ‘unconferences’, namely, spontaneously generated academic interest groups that are made up of anyone drawn to the topic. A noticeboard could be available where such groups could book rooms or tables in the conference facility for particular times. If the groups are especially well-organized, they might even record their meeting for archival purposes on the conference website.

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1. http://www.twitter.com/ProfSteveFuller
In the last few years my interest in asexuality has shifted from a concern with the experience of asexual people to a preoccupation with why those who aren’t asexual find it as confusing as they do. This can seem to be a confusingly niche interest, or at least I occasionally worry that it might come across that way. It emerged from one recurrent theme in the many personal stories I encountered in my research: the incomprehension with which most asexual people have at times found their asexuality greeted. What makes the notion so hard to grasp? I’ve written about this at length in the past and I don’t think I have anything new to add to the discussion at this point. What’s more important is how this incomprehension can lead people to act. This inability to grasp asexuality as a concept can bring otherwise well meaning people to act in deeply hurtful and marginalising ways. It can leave those who are far from well meaning acting in even more unpleasant ways than they might otherwise. What these actions usually have in common is a failure to believe asexuality exists as a possibility and a concomitant tendency to explain it away. Offering asexuality as an account of themselves, asexual people are instead told that it can’t exist... it must be their hormones, psychological damage, repressed child abuse. Don’t they know that sex is natural? Don’t they realise that sexuality is an integral aspect of the human condition? Perhaps they’re just a late bloomer? Or maybe they haven’t met the right person yet? In terms of the broader cultural frameworks within which we think and talk about sexuality, some of these reactions are entirely comprehensible to me (and this is why I find the reaction of non-asexuals to asexuality so interesting from a sociological standpoint). But they’re often deeply hurtful and what frustrates me is how unnecessary the hurt caused is. What we need is some sort of accessible introduction to asexuality, providing a readable overview of the many ways in which these reactions (and their underlying assumptions) are mistaken. Thankfully we now have one, with the publication of Julie Sondra Decker’s The Invisible Orientation: An Introduction to Asexuality.

Written by a well known and respected figure within the asexual community, Decker’s book benefits from a personal familiarity with the issues concerned that lends an air of implicit authority that the author manages skilfully throughout. The tone is just right for a book of this sort: friendly and conversational yet also authoritative and precise. It begins with a personal story which illustrates the first-hand experiences Decker brings to the book, which is intended as a "starting point for people interested in asexuality". It begins with an ‘Asexuality 101’ that introduces the basics in a way satisfying to the reader yet also firmly repudiating some of the most common miscomprehensions that one might bring to a book such as this. It then moves on to the varying experience of those who identify as asexual, introducing the potentially confusing panoply of terms which have proliferated within the asexual community but skilfully showing how these are grounded in specific kinds of experience. The next section, unsurprisingly my favourite given the nature of my own interest in the subject, addresses the (many) myths surrounding asexuality. The final sections offer practical advice to those who are asexual (or questioning whether they may be) and to those who
know someone who is asexual (or suspect that they might be). The book then concludes with a helpful compendium of resources that the reader can use to explore further.

This is a long overdue book, offering the general purpose introduction to the subject which has heretofore been lacking. It is an essential addition to any academic reading list that encompasses asexuality and should be required reading for any therapists with an interest in sexuality. It provides a sense of what it is like to be asexual that can sometimes be missing from academic work and engages with the literature while nonetheless refusing to be constrained by it. It is also immensely readable, providing an authoritative overview that sign posts the reader who is keen to explore further. I can’t recommend The Invisible Orientation highly enough and hope it has a wide readership. Given how effectively it critiques the myths surrounding asexuality, helping those who are not asexual themselves better understand something that can at first be deeply confusing, it is a book with the potential to make a positive difference to many people’s lives and help combat what the author describes as the “insidious form of exclusion” that asexual people continue to experience.

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A Conversation with Sudhir Venkatesh (2014-07-15 08:00)

In this videocast Sudhir Venkatesh, well known for his authorship of [1]Gang Leader for a Day, discusses his experience of being invited to work with the FBI as a roving advisor on issues related to gang related crime. He describes how "as a researcher and a geek" it was fascinating to see the FBI from the inside out:

Sudhir Venkatesh, William B. Ransford Professor of Sociology at Columbia University, talks with Vera director Michael Jacobson about his 18 months advising the FBI on working with local law enforcement agencies to deal with gang-related crime and his current research on informal justice systems in urban communities. This podcast is part of the 2011-2012 Neil A. Weiner Research Speaker Series.

Discover Society is a free online magazine featuring articles on social research, policy analysis and commentary. It is supported by Policy Press and endorsed by the British Sociological Association and the Social Policy Association.

We publish short (1500 word) research-based articles on a variety of topics. We also publish: ‘Viewpoints’ (on current social issues); ‘Policy Briefings’; ‘On the Frontline’, and a longer, ‘Focus’ article in each issue.

Deadlines: mid-month for publication first Wednesday each month.
Bev Skeggs discusses the contemporary sociological imagination with Les Back (2014-07-16 08:00)

In this lovely dialogue hosted on the Goldsmiths website, thanks to Dave Beer for flagging it up, Bev Skeggs discusses the contemporary sociological imagination with Les Back. To begin they discuss discomfort and dislocation as an integral aspect of the sociological imagination, engendering an inability to take the familiarity of things for granted, instead prompting a search for the patterns underlying it:

Les: It can be about discomfort. I think sometimes often people come to sociology with an incredible sense of discomfort or dislocation. I have something within myself, you know, a discomfort, a disquiet sense of not quite fitting in place or being out of place, or even being confined or suffocated by the place in the world that one occupies, you know.

Bev: So it’s about a complete lack of ontological security?

Les: It can be–, sometimes students are absolutely suffocated by that lack of ontology. Of a sense of, you know, ‘I just don’t fit in this world’...

Bev: Or know how to? On a tangent, this is very interesting in terms of Bourdieu's habitus, because he had the model of subjectivity, which is about fitting dispositions to positions, and I've always thought it was highly problematic because I think most people just do not fit the fields into which they are positioned. It's a theory of adaption that does not work for me.

Les: And in a sense he was betrayed in his own biography. It is a sense of being displaced; being displaced not only from the world he enters in the Ecole Normale and all that whole world that he described in Homo Academicus, but he also doesn’t fit in the world in which he identifies so strongly.

I found the critique of Bourdieu here particularly interesting. As Bev Skeggs puts it, “he is trying to understand that lack of fit, but then he comes to a theory of fit.” This prompts a lovely exchange about ‘crampedness’ and its relationship to the sociological imagination.
Bev: And you’re saying that you think the politics—, and let’s be clear, it’s the politics of the sociological imagination, is understanding the lack of fit?

Les: A lack of fit or I think a sense of kind of suffocation often people feel in their place in the world.

Bev: Crampedness?

Les: Crampedness, being hemmed in, there’s something very powerful in Mills’ formulation when he says—, although I’m not sure it holds true now, but he says, people experience themselves as if they’re spectators in their own lives.

You know, and I think there’s something about that that is very powerful as a formulation, as an invitation. And I suppose what the politics of the sociological imagination and I’ll just put to one side the question of what you do with sociological imagination as a practice, but part of the politics I think is to have an enlarged sense of an understanding of one’s place in the world.

The whole thing can and should be read in full [1]here. There’s one additional section I can’t resist quoting (and not only because it offers such an eloquent formulation of why the Wire is sociologically fascinating):

Bev: So you’re saying what’s happened is that the technologies of sociology, say, the methods of empirical understanding, be it measurement or ethnography, are detached from a very particular form of sociological attention, a detachment from critical political understandings of power relations, and it’s that detachment that has enabled the spread of the sociological imagination but only in its limited technical forms

Les: I think sometimes it’s reduced to those bare technical forms and other times it’s really fantastically alive, at its most imaginative. And that’s part of the—, of the difficulty in summing up exactly that thing about where sociological imagination has moved to, because partly, you know, I think in some ways the sociological imagination is much more alive in The Wire than it is in most seminars about urban ethnography.

Bev: And that I would want to argue, is because The Wire pays attention to big explanations whilst locating those big explanations, which are institutional, they’re economic, in characters. So it comes back to what you were saying about how the characters’ crampedness carries the precarious conditions of the global in which they creatively struggle to survive. So it’s not about positioning them as passive or victims, it’s about looking at how people are struggling within those incredibly cramped conditions, paying attention to that intensity of struggle and the reasons for it.

1. [https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/les%20back%20soc%20imag%20june%202010.pdf](https://www.gold.ac.uk/media/les%20back%20soc%20imag%20june%202010.pdf)
The next phase of post-democracy? Political disagreement becoming personal prejudice (2014-07-17 08:00)

I listened to a [1]fascinatingly crap podcast while in the gym earlier – Robin Aitken, introduced solely as a ‘Tory supporter’ but last seen complaining about [2]institutional discrimination against conservatives during his career at the BBC, has produced an episode of Analysis on Radio 4 exploring whether anti-conservative sentiment is the last acceptable prejudice. It’s a rather confused argument, simultaneously explaining away blanket criticism of a political party as prejudice while also arguing that the Tories have changed and so the ‘nasty party’ tag is inaccurate (thus implying that it might have been an accurate assessment in the past). It’s also rather oddly produced, with the most prominent commentators including Norman Tebblitt, who talks about the need to ‘hurt the population’ in a documentary arguing that Tories aren’t nasty, as well as Roger Scrutton, who has been dismissed from journalistic roles for writing about ‘tobacco issues’ while [3]failing to declare the generous salary he was being paid by tobacco companies, in a documentary arguing that Tories aren’t greedy and self-serving. It was all a bit inadequate really, leaving me surprised that it had been made, even allowing for the over-eager interpretation of ‘balance’ likely to be in play when someone like Aitken produces something for the BBC in the present political climate.

However I’m intrigued by the attempt to subsume political disagreement under the logic of identity politics. Not only because it is so axiomatically relativistic a move being made by those who so habitually attack relativism. It also suggests something interesting about broader developments in political culture. As one cringe-worthy Tory analyst said during the podcast: “modern politics is as much an exercise in self-expression as it is in self-interest”. Leaving aside the philosophically and empirically dubious status of such a claim, it nonetheless points to questions about why this form of argument has begun to emerge in the last decade or so. What interests me is how this notion could creep into common circulation, as opposed to its rhetorical deployment by journalists producing bad radio documentaries. I mean things like this, which I found at random through google:

[4]

The notion of ‘anti tory prejudice’ becomes an organising concept through which other political claims are made. Take for instance [5]this thread I found on the Student Room, in which a poster asks for a ‘survival guide for ultra conservative students’:

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Are there any other social/cultural conservatives here who feel that they are being or have been marginalised in an increasingly liberal modern society?

Why do you think this has happened? and how do you cope with it?

Are there any careers which you feel are more suitable for ultra conservatives? Most modern workplaces seem to be dominated by extreme trendy liberals so which careers are still suitable for a social conservative (outside of the Church)?

I think we can see this psychoanalytically, in terms of the kinds of arguments made by [6] Iain Craib and others, in which many of us are becoming progressively less able to live with discomfort, disagreement and disappointment – in this sense, finding one’s views at odds with those of the people around us comes to feel as if we are attacked by our environment or that we may at any point become so. We shore ourselves up by affirming that they have a problem with us - we confront their prejudice, revealing them to be bad and ourselves to be an innocent victim. Or maybe we just self-select? I guess I’m proposing a particular psychosocial mechanism driving homophily (a statement I write as someone who to the best of my knowledge has never had a right-wing friend).

I think it would be a mistake to treat this entirely at the level of the psychosocial though – if this is a trend, which is far from clear, it’s a complex issue that points to a range of potential factors driving it. I think Colin Crouch’s work on post-democracy could be useful here, offering a framework through which we can begin to ask questions about the political psychology of post-democracy. This is how Crouch describes the underlying idea:

The term was indeed a direct analogy with ‘post-industrial’. A post-industrial society is not a non-industrial one. It continues to make and to use the products of industry, but the energy and innovative drive of the system have gone elsewhere. The same applies in a more complex way to post-modern, which is not the same as anti-modern or of course pre-modern. It implies a culture that uses the achievements of modernism but departs from them in its search for new possibilities. A post-democratic society therefore is one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite. I did not say that we were now living in a post-democratic society, but that we were moving towards such a condition.


I’m interested in how the social psychology of political (dis)engagement changes when “the energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena” – what does the political come to feel like under conditions of post-democracy? Chantal Mouffe has argued that those who might otherwise be seen as adversaries (to be opposed) instead come to be seen as enemies (to be destroyed). Her argument concerns the construction of ‘political antagonism’ – could the reduction of disagreement to prejudice be a form that antagonism takes at the level of everyday life?

1. http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b047ws86
I don’t like ‘viral videos’. I like many videos that have gone viral. But the notion of producing ‘viral videos’, with a deliberate strategy to engender virality, irritates me – it entrenches commodification of internet culture, often involves trying so hard that it doesn’t work and contributes to the blurring of the boundary between commercial and non-commercial contributions to the internet. When deployed for marketing, they attempt to highlight the specificity of an object but paradoxically obliterate this specificity by drawing on the most generic cultural forms in circulation - by their nature viral forms lend themselves to infinite substitutability and thus trivialise their object rather than valuing it.

They particularly vex me in higher education because they’re one of the most distinctive expressions of marketization. They reflect a change in higher education marketing which can be traced directly to the government’s higher education ‘reforms’, with the sudden imperative to differentiate prompting an expansion of investment in marketing and communications – I’ve tried to argue, in a conference paper at WES 2013, that this creates a vested interest in intensifying what are fundamentally deleterious trends. I don’t think marcomms creates the trend but I think its expansion, as well as a growing centrality within institutions as a whole, creates incentives to discursively exaggerate the necessity of this activity, lobby for further investment and contribute to a marketing arms race which risks consuming ever greater proportions of university budgets:

There are obvious inefficiencies in this competition as increasing resources have to be devoted to marketing and recruitment ... The cost of financing higher education through the botched loan scheme means that the Treasury has insisted on an overall cap on student numbers. This creates a zero sum game where the sector is unable to expand overall and individual institutions are fighting for market share.


I’m not personally hostile to people working in communications (far from it) but I believe something is happening in UK universities that I find both sociologically interesting and politically worrying. I’m not advocating that we should resist viral videos or anything like that. I think they’re pretty inconsequential. But I do believe they reflect the aforementioned trends and that it would therefore be valuable to consider alternative ways in which universities and departments can promote their activity. So here are a few ideas, in a list I contemplated formatting in the style
of BuzzFeed but couldn’t be bothered:

1. Find innovative and engaging ways to highlight the work your PhD students are doing. Such as these [2] ‘your PhD in 60 seconds’ videos that my university produced a couple of years ago.

2. Help promote the research culture and facilitate the vibrant life of the institution. See informal events as a resource to be supported rather than an irrelevance or potential threat to the brand – put resources into improving internal communications, helping initiatives that come from staff & students then use what you’ve done as a selling point for the institution.

3. Highlight the opinions of your students about the university rather than seeing them as a threat. RT positive comments but engage even with the comments that aren’t positive.

4. Support a departmental presence on social media across the university. Encourage them to be engaged, answer queries and provide resources for this if necessary. See this as a practical contribution to enhancing ‘student experience’.

5. Encourage your staff to use social media freely and help them build an audience through RTs, twitter lists and well advised departmental accounts.

6. Provide training and drop in sessions for staff and students. Demonstrate the technical capacity of tools but also encourage debate around best practice.

7. Support initiatives which profile your staff, particularly those who have been part of the institutions for a long time. Don’t trivialise these by reducing them to sanitised talking heads – take the lead from the staff themselves and let each project unfold by its own logic to the greatest extent possible. [3] This is one of the best examples I’ve seen of this sort of activity.

8. Encourage best practice by recognising and profiling staff who are active on social media and are using it to contribute to the life of the institution.

9. Be open to aspects of your institutional identity which emerge naturally through social media. Some of these might not be positive and it would be a mistake to promote them. But don’t see this solely in terms of potential threats and instead engage with the online culture already in existence (and that grows through your encouragement) – otherwise you’ll miss important opportunities for the elaboration of institutional identity.

10. Curate the content which is being produced within your institution and support the creation of further content! Encourage and support multi-author blogging. Track new social media initiatives and offer practical support. See this as content marketing from below.

1. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/the-great-university-gamble-ebook/B0071YE66M/B00CEXCAB8
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcsG9weM2pc
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=blFzkCW_oUQ

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In recent months I've been slowly working through some of Jeffrey Alexander’s work. I'm interested in what cultural sociology has to offer as I begin to try and extend my PhD research on internal conversation & biography into my planned post-doctoral work on the sociology of thinking. However I've found Alexander’s work slightly hit and miss, occasionally leaving me wondering whether I've misunderstood his project or perhaps overestimated its potential relevance to my own. This post on Daniel Little’s book has clarified my sense that cultural sociology is highly relevant to me but also something I need to be critical when engaging with:

It seems clear that human beings bring specific frameworks of thought, ideas, emotions, and valuations to their social lives, and these frameworks affect both how they interpret the social realities they confront and the ways that they respond to what they experience. Human beings have “frames” of cognition and valuation that guide their experiences and actions. The idea of a practical-mental frame is therefore a compelling one, and it should be a possible subject for empirical sociological investigation.

[...]

The term “cultural sociology” is sometimes used to try to capture those research efforts that try to probe the meanings and mental frameworks that people bring to their social interactions. We can postulate that human beings are processors of meanings and interpretations, and that their frameworks take shape as a result of the range of experiences and interactions they have had to date. This means that their frameworks are deeply social, created and constructed by the social settings and experiences the individuals have had. And we can further postulate that social action is deeply inflected by the specifics of the mental and emotional frameworks through which actors structure and interpret the worlds they confront.


I think these internal constraints and enablements are underemphasised in Archer’s work on reflexivity. They are integral to her account of meta-reflexivity, in the sense that such individuals come to orientate themselves to a cause they have encountered or jury-rigged together from elements in their environment, but she lacks a comprehensive theory of what these resources are. The elements necessary for such a theory, an extremely sophisticated one in fact, can be found in her wider body of work - the distinction between the cultural system and socio-cultural relations, as well as the various situational logics that obtain at this interface, simply needs an account of how cultural relations are mediated at the level of everyday life to flesh out this aspect of human experience.

I’ve conceptualised this in terms of recurrent relations between ‘me’ and ‘I’ - at any given moment, my repertoire of routine responses is conditioned by the cultural elements I reflexively orientated myself to at a previous moment in time, in turn shaping how I respond to present cultural variety and coming to constitute the ‘me’ to my ‘I’ at some future point in time. In other words, I’m always constrained by my past but presently able to act freely* within them. I like this framework and it seems to work quite effectively, with my intention being to flesh it out at much greater length when I extend my PhD thesis into a monograph.

I’m hoping cultural sociology will be very useful for this purpose but thus far it hasn’t been. Little helpfully sums up what is of value in cultural sociology but also why I don’t like what I’ve read thus far:
But this kind of research becomes especially interesting if we find that the mental frameworks and systems of meanings that actors bring with them actually make substantial differences to their social actions and the choices that they make. In this case we can actually begin to create explanations and interpretations of social outcomes that interest us a great deal. (Why are some extremist militants so ready to put on suicide vests in actions that are almost certain to bring about their own deaths?)


My problem here is with the failure to conceptualise the interface between the personal and the cultural – it’s a parallel to what I earlier referred to as the lack in Archer’s work of an account of how cultural relations are mediated at the level of reflexive individuals (it’s there in parts, it just hasn’t been worked out thoroughly). Little refers to this as a need for cultural sociology to pay “more attention to the interface between frame and actor”. I don’t think this is simply an oversight but something which would constitutively reorientate the entire approach – I think it would involve an engagement with the ontology of media (e.g. books), biographical questions about how culture reorientates lives and an analysis of the cognitive processes by which ideas are appropriated. At the very least ‘cultural frames’ are inflected through the path-dependent orientation of particular individuals but I think I’d argue for the stronger claim that they are transformed through this appropriation or rejection by individuals – with this individual action contributing to the reproduction or transformation of the frames themselves which are more broadly in circulation within the social world.

*I’m talking purely about internal constraints and enablements here for sake of brevity. Obviously external constraints/enablements, as well as the relations between those operating internally and externally, would be considered in practice.


Sociologies of Everyday Life – Still Time to Submit Your Paper (2014-07-19 08:00)

Sociology

A journal of the British Sociological Association

Sociologies of Everyday Life

Special Issue Call for Papers

Deadline for submissions: 31 August 2014
Everyday life sociology is a well-established tradition in the discipline and interest in ways of understanding day-to-day worlds continues to be significant. These engagements are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, across the social sciences as well as outside them. It is in this context that the 2015 Special Issue aims to provide a timely opportunity to take stock.

We aim to be able to collect together a series of papers that variously reflect the breadth and diversity of sociology's enchantments and engagements with everyday worlds as well as the imaginative and innovative ways in which the discipline has sought to analyze and respond to it.

We invite papers that explore, through the lens of everyday life, one or more of the following indicative themes and/or areas:

- Theories of everyday life and conceptual approaches
- Materialities, cultures and senses
- Social practices, activities and interactions
- Social divisions and exclusions
- Animals, entities and the more-than-human
- Senses of community and belonging
- Selfhood and identifications
- Public, semi public spaces and the built environment
- Domestic spaces and routines
- Institutions and organisations
- Affect and intimacies
- Landscapes, localities, places and place making
- Convivialities and socialities and social interdependencies
- Everyday racism, cultural difference and everyday multiculture
Environmental practices and consumption

In/security and violence

Methods – researching the everyday

The Editors welcome contributions on relevant topics in any field of social science engaging with sociological research, from early career and established academics, and from those outside academia.

Queries: To discuss initial ideas or seek editorial advice, please contact the Sociology Editors by email on [1] karim.murji@open.ac.uk or[2] sarah.neal@surrey.ac.uk

Full Call for Papers can be viewed at


Two upcoming quantified self special issues (2014-07-20 08:00)

[1] Sensor Informatics and Quantified Self

Deadline: 18 December 2014

Preventing disease through promotion of healthy lifestyle choice is a potentially cost-effective approach to modern healthcare challenges. Choices such as diet, physical activity, sleep, smoking and alcohol, have all been associated with many medical conditions. The purpose of this special issue is to address key topics in sensor informatics and quantified self, with focuses on novel sensor design, stratify patient management, long term continuous monitoring of therapeutic response, social and psychological aspects related to self-tracking practices, policy, security, piracy of personal wellbeing data, etc.
What sociologists actually do and what social theorists think they should do (2014-07-21 08:00)

There’s a great post on Daniel Little’s blog which uses a critique of analytical sociology and critical realism to explore a premise which he argues they both share: ontology dictates methodology. As he [1]frames the issue:

Both groups have strong (and conflicting) ideas about social ontology, and both think that these ideas are important to the conduct of social-science research. Analytical sociologists tend towards an enlightened version of methodological individualism: social entities derive from the actions and nature of the individuals who constitute them. Critical realists tend toward some version or another of emergentism: social entities possess properties that are emergent with respect to the individual activities that constitute them.

Both groups tend to design social science methodologies to correspond to the ontological theories that they advance. So they tacitly agree about what I regard as a questionable premise — that ontology dictates methodology.

I want to argue for a greater degree of independence between ontology and methodology than either group would probably be willing to countenance. With the analytical sociologists I believe that social facts depend on the availability of microfoundations at the level of ensembles of individuals. This is an ontological fact. But with the critical realists I believe that it is entirely appropriate for social scientists to examine the causal and structural properties of social entities without being forced to attempt to provide the microfoundations of these properties. This is an observation about the locus and nature of explanation. There are stable structural and causal properties at the social level, and it is entirely legitimate to investigate these properties in full empirical detail. Sociologists, organizational theorists, and institutional researchers should be encouraged to investigate in detail the workings, arrangements, and causal properties of the regimes that they study. And this is precisely the kind of investigation
that holds together researchers as diverse as Michael Mann, Kathleen Thelen, Charles Perrow, Howard Kimmeldorf, and Frank Dobbin. (Use the search box to find discussions of their work in earlier posts.)


This is an issue I'm very interested in but have struggled to come to any firm conclusion about. My most serious attempt to think through these issues is [3]this working paper. On the one hand, I find Margaret Archer's argument that social ontology regulates the kinds of entities which can be admitted into explanation intuitively plausible. On the other hand, I find myself intuitively hostile – even actively irritated by – the style of social theory that someone like Dave Elder-Vass sometimes lapses into, in which he appears to argue that sociological investigation is unable to proceed adequately until social theorists have provided the domain specific ontology sociologists need to undergird their activity.

I guess a lot depends on what we take the claim about 'regulation' to mean. Does ontology regulate methodology? Should ontology regulate methodology? Could ontology regulate methodology? I think a similar ambiguity can be found in Little's own framing of the relationship between ontology and methodology in the aforementioned post:

Ontology is not irrelevant to methodology; but it provides only weak constraints on the nature of the methodologies social scientists may choose in their pursuit of better understanding of the social world.

Is this an empirical statement about sociological practice? If so then we're in the domain of the sociology of social theory - a notion that I've played around with in the past and at some point in my life, when I've read an awful lot more than I have at present, intend to come back to. If it's not an empirical claim of this sort then what is it? This is the question that interests me and it's one I don't feel I have a sufficiently firm grip on to try and answer - descriptive claims about sociological practice unavoidably include normative claims within their scope (i.e. describing what sociologists actually do includes descriptions of what their theories tell them they should do) and yet as such a purportedly neutral sociology of social theory comes to constitute a move within the same game.

I'm very interested in the possibility of an ethnographic study of how sociologists actually use theoretical concepts as part of the research process. But at the same time I find the possibility of the neutrality this would entail to be rather implausible... I guess this is why I'm so confused (and yet fascinated) by questions like the relationship between ontology and methodology. The tendency seems to be for explicitly normative claims about what the methodological implications of social ontology should be. My problem is not with the normativity here but rather with the slipperiness of the grounding, if any, in facts of the matter about sociological practice. I'm interested in the sociology of social theory as a normative project - how do sociologists actually use theoretical resources and what conclusions can we draw about how they should use them in light of such a state of affairs? This is a project which unavoidably confronts a messy reality, in which an underlying impulse towards theoretical tidiness (which I think animates the work of many social theorists even if they reflectively deny it - I've had a post about the psychodynamics of social theory which I've intended to write for ages) runs headfirst into the tangled reality of empirical research.

I guess what I'm saying comes down to this: can we incorporate what sociologists actually do and what social theorists think they should do within a unified frame of reference?
Justine (2015-04-22 16:11:35)

Trust a sociologist to go fractally-meta on meta. I had actually hoped this was going to be one of those "What my mum thinks I do / What social theorists think I should do / what I actually do" type memes. To answer: Yes, I think we can unify methodological theory with research practice. Apart from using words like, "underpinning" in methods sections, I think this is what solid methods classics such as eg. Charmaz on GT already do. The ontological comes into normative argumentation about the basis of how we view social relations: our unifying frame of reference is just that. We need to be pragmatic, and think about approach in terms of explanations for the social. You paraphrase Elder-Vass as, "...until social theorists have provided the domain specific ontology". But this should not be a concern, because it is like saying that unless we can label grammar, we cannot use language. Reflexivity is probably a basic requirement to doing sociology, but as sociologists we engage in reflexive praxis. Our epistemological ground will usually stem back to one or other of the great philosophical paradigms, or be defined in opposition to one. As intelligent people, we do not need case specific, domain specific theoretical guidance as we are able to transfer previous understandings to new research situations (indeed, probably can’t avoid it). We synthesise knowledge from the mundane, ordinary daily life with abstractions, theory - and we make it sociological. This is why sociology is so sublime. Given the right conditions, I’m a relativist. My standpoint is putty in the hands of a persuasive writer. Whether their premise for sociological explanation goes from the myriad of individuals that make up the ant-heap, or the more familiar 'I put it to you that' methodological collectivist approach. Methodological individualism is actor oriented and (yet) you could say it lends itself to quantitative, positivist approaches because if the social is simply the sum of all these little parts, then why wouldn’t we just add them up? But then, Weber was probably a mild methodological individualist - methodological Individualism lets us think about roles, meanings, action, networks. What a weird collection of micro-ish and big data-ish sociology that approach lends itself to. Its ontological basis is well established (unfortunately, thanks Margaret "there is no such thing as society" Thatcher). Just goes to show that ontological position and choice of method CAN be two quite different things. I strongly agree that, "social ontology regulates the kinds of entities which can be admitted into explanation intuitively plausible." That would have to be a basic premise. I don’t quite see how it contrasts with Elder-Vass on slipperiness. Where sociology is not watertight (and yes, I do think this is a problem) is in qualitative research with lack of reflexivity. Firstly, researchers must fess up to who they are. Note that the word "are" is the word "to be": who we ARE is our ontological grounding. Like, I think, therefore, etc! The only slipperiness from a research point of view is if readers don’t have a fair shot at a more than one-dimensional interpretation of that ‘being’. Secondly, did the researcher spend a convincing amount of time with these people who they presume to describe and report on, and base a version of reality on them? Am I convinced that the researcher KNOWS them, their lives? Because if these two conditions are met, BEING and KNOWING, then we are ontologically safe. So in other words, sociology has to be rooted in data. Not exactly in a Glaser and Strauss way, but in the sense that we are doing sociology, not philosophy. We can argue about at what stage data must come into the project, but the decisive is that it does at some point. And if it does, then we’re a LOT better off with sociology than standing on our own wobbly opinions. ie. sociology is better than an opinion at the pub, whether we’re talking about a regression line, or an understanding that gives us socially transformative potential. Further, sociology assumes normative argumentation about social relations - this is what lets us interpret what we’re looking at through our little lenses. Is this a normative claim? Well yes, but essentially its a description of the parameters of what sets sociology as a practice apart from at one end everyday musing, and at the other, philosophy
Maya Angelou’s Letter to Her Younger Self (2014-07-22 08:00)

This wonderful letter by Maya Angelou was [1]featured on Brainpickings recently. It was a contribution to a 2006 anthology, [2]What I Know Now: Letters to My Younger Self, in which forty-one famous women wrote letters back in time to their former selves. The anthology itself looks very interesting & Maya Angelou’s letter is wonderful:

Dear Marguerite,

You’re itching to be on your own. You don’t want anybody telling you what time you have to be in at night or how to raise your baby. You’re going to leave your mother’s big comfortable house and she won’t stop you, because she knows you too well.

But listen to what she says:

When you walk out of my door, don’t let anybody raise you — you’ve been raised.

You know right from wrong.

In every relationship you make, you’ll have to show readiness to adjust and make adaptations.

Remember, you can always come home.

You will go home again when the world knocks you down — or when you fall down in full view of the world. But only for two or three weeks at a time. Your mother will pamper you and feed you your favorite meal of red beans and rice. You’ll make a practice of going home so she can liberate you again — one of the greatest gifts, along with nurturing your courage, that she will give you.

Be courageous, but not foolhardy.

Walk proud as you are,

Maya

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0767917901/braipick0d-21

The politics of facebook (2014-07-23 08:00)

This post by [1]Zeynep Tufekci on her Medium site is the best thing I’ve read yet about the recent [2]facebook controversy.
I’m struck by how this kind of power can be seen as no big deal. Large corporations exist to sell us things, and to impose their interests, and I don’t understand why we as the research/academic community should just think that’s totally fine, or resign to it as "the world we live in". That is the key strength of independent academia: we can speak up in spite of corporate or government interests.

To me, this resignation to online corporate power is a troubling attitude because these large corporations (and governments and political campaigns) now have new tools and stealth methods to quietly model our personality, our vulnerabilities, identify our networks, and effectively nudge and shape our ideas, desires and dreams. These tools are new, this power is new and evolving. It’s exactly the time to speak up!

That is one of the biggest shifts in power between people and big institutions, perhaps the biggest one yet of 21st century. This shift, in my view, is just as important as the fact that we, the people, can now speak to one another directly and horizontally.


This strikes me as an important fault line, in so far as a superficial difference (i.e. whether or not this bothers you) tracks much broader divergences in political orientation which are likely to become more pronounced as these trends develop over time. However the risk is that this one contentious study becomes a distraction because, as Tufekci points out, this is something Facebook does on a daily basis. What could be lost here is a sense of the political apparatus coming into being and its broader implications.

1. [https://medium.com/message/engineering-the-public-289c91390225
2. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/facebook/10944613/Facebook-conducted-widespread-experiments-on-user-data-to-alter-peoples-behaviour.html
3. [https://medium.com/message/engineering-the-public-289c91390225

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Warwick University Limited: Lessons from 1970 and the higher education sector today (2014-07-24 08:00)

This recent conference at the University of Warwick took its name from [1]Warwick University LTD, a scathing critique of the institution by the renowned historian E .P. Thompson. The videos and other material from the event are now available on the Warwick UCU website:

[2]Programme

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3. https://lecturecapture.warwick.ac.uk/ess/echo/presentation/cd43bc11-3718-4c8a-aca1-62236bd8d941
4. https://lecturecapture.warwick.ac.uk/ess/echo/presentation/751e1f3e-b9ce-40ee-8c52-6f8c24183899
8. https://www.warwickucu.org.uk/sites/default/files/Parker.pptx

James Baldwin vs William Buckley (2014-07-25 08:00)

[1]
Thanks to The New Inquiry for the link to this video in which James Baldwin and William Buckley debate whether "The American Dream is at the Expense of the American Negro":

Brought together by the Cambridge Union Society at Cambridge University in 1965, this video shows a bunch of twee British white boys introducing one of the 20th century's greatest artists and one of the 20th century's biggest pricks. In a packed room in which he is perhaps the only person of color, Baldwin makes a devastating speech and wipes those centuries-old floors with Buckley's smug, idiotic grin.


Did you enjoy watching that as much as I did? Then check out this video of Chomsky debating Buckley on Vietnam and Buckley losing his temper at Gore Vidal. I'm sure there are more of these out there, searching for this stuff reminds me what a goldmine YouTube is, but I should probably go back to doing some real work.

IFRAME: [5]//www.youtube.com/embed/gbTxLmbCoo4
Multicultural Britain: Conviviality (2014-07-26 01:42)

Multicultural Britain: Conviviality
#ShareRamadan with Neighbours, Colleagues and Friends

The political pessimism about multiculturalism is evident in announcements of its death that keep on coming nearly a decade after Gilroy (2005:1) put forth who was to blame: “the murderous culprits responsible for its demise are institutional indifference and political resentment”. The call to solely promote 'British' values also smacks of promoting patriotism above diversity in the rhetoric of some politicians, whilst others would argue that British values actually incorporate diversity.

Advocates of assimilation are frequently defied by what is happening on a daily basis in modern Britain, where multiculturalism is alive, well and healthy. Mainstream media coverage of positive stories about successful integration
amongst British multicultural society is so sparse that it is painful to purchase the ‘papers, or peruse online new sites. When it comes to reporting on issues concerning ethnic minority communities, there is doom and gloom.

Yet in spite of the politicians and the mainstream media falling short in highlighting examples of how British people experience multiculturalism amongst their friends, colleagues and family, there are glimpses of good that prove that difference and diversity are respected. There is much going on that contradicts this spiel that multiculturalism has failed. Here comes in social media democracy that allows the spread of stories illustrating the significance of small-scale social interaction between diverse Britons of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. One such example of Gilroy’s concept of conviviality in action is #ShareRamadan, which shows British people engaging in social practices that are beyond the confines of giving lip-service to tolerance and civility.

Ramadan 2014 is part-way through, and an interesting project aiming to #ShareRamadan with non-Muslims has been trending on social media. Those taking part in #ShareRamadan have been providing video logs of the experience of the fasts that British Muslims are experiencing this lunar year. Non-Muslims are getting to know first-hand how it feels to not eat or drink in daylight hours, and have been waking up at Suhoor time to eat a pre-dawn meal, and then breaking their fast with Muslim friends at sunset (around 9.40pm for most some parts of Britain). Throughout the world the lengths of the fasts vary according to the time of the Fajr and Maghrib prayers, with the fasts in Brazil and Australia being relatively short compared with Iceland and Britain. The Guardian online has provided a space for user-generated content where contributors from all around the world are sharing their photos and tales about Ramadan.

This exciting project reveals positive relationships in contemporary multicultural Britain, making a refreshing change from the usual onslaught of bad press against Muslims in Britain or against the modern multiculturalism. It cannot be doubted that representation of Islam and Muslims in the tabloids is frequently in relation to terrorism and extremism (Baker et al., 2013). The #ShareRamadan project started in Oldham, a place often maligned as ghettoised and segregated, or referred to in relation to “race riots”. The Oldham pioneers of this project aim to raise awareness about the experiences of the one who is fasting in Ramadan, as well as combat negative stereotypes and pre-judgements about Muslims and Ramadan. They are hoping the project will spread internationally allowing people everywhere to learn more about Ramadan. Those non-Muslims who have fasted for a day or more of have been uploading video diaries and photos to the #ShareRamadan Facebook page or Twitter page to relate their new experiences of this obligatory Islamic practice their friends and colleagues passionately partake in year after year. They have been invited to break their fast at their Muslim friends’ homes. Some of those who have attempted these fasts have further enriched their experience by attending the supererogatory prayers (tarawih) at the local mosques. For some, this has been the first time they may have visited a mosque. The much needed democracy of social media is a vehicle to promote the small-scale significances of social interaction between diverse individuals and communities.

There has been some coverage of #ShareRamadan in local media: the Manchester Evening News shared their story, and the local British Muslim Heritage Centre’s Radio Ramadan interviewed some of those involved with the initiative. Yet aside from some local coverage and social media updates about such stories of positive multicultural interactions, there has been no mainstream coverage of this. This is just one example of multicultural in action, and yet such stories are not shared enough with the general public. Agenda-setting by the major news channels means we only mainly hear about the doom and gloom of unwanted migrants and Muslims (and Muslim migrants!), with the rhetoric spewed out that they do not integrate, and they should assimilate. Almost a decade ago, we were being warned about the need to be wary and cautious about “ways in which debates led by politicians and the media quickly become the norm and end up fuelling racism” against Muslims who are racialised and blamed for not integrating in British society (Bhavnani et al., 2005:49). Yet this racialisation of Muslims as clashing with values of white Christian Britain are salient in the political and media discourses of 2014, as evident in Michael Gove’s vindictive mission to demonise normative Muslims for practising their faith. Simpson and Finney (2009) cite one of Ruth Levitas’ approaches to understanding social inclusion:

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...a "moral underclass discourse, which emphasises moral and cultural causes of poverty and is centrally concerned with the moral hazard of 'dependency'... [It] tends to replay recurrent themes about 'dangerous classes' to focus on consequences of social exclusion for social order, and on particular groups, such as unemployed and potentially criminal young men, and lone parents, especially young never-married mothers' (Levitas, 1999, p12) in (Simpson and Finney, 2009:34). Simpson and Finney go on to argue that if Levitas had been writing a few years later, she may have included the Muslim community in the aforementioned list of people who are experience social stigma and labelling, especially by politicians, as belonging to a "moral underclass" (2009). Nandi and Platt (2014) also discuss how the failure of multicultural policies in creating social cohesion is often cited in relation to Muslim communities, yet the perceptions and experiences of other minority groups and the White majority are rarely investigated. In their research, they found that ethnic minority communities have strong affiliations to British identity, "stronger in fact than the White majority" (Nandi and Platt, 2014:41).

Mr Turner, one of the teachers trying out fasting for a week, has found that his Muslim students have appreciated these sincere attempts to getting to know their religious practices, and are seeing him in a new light. It is well-documented that British schools are not tackling the issue of diversity effectively (Maylor, 2010). Thus, though at an institutional level, diversity is not explored in depth, there surely are more examples in modern Britain of teachers like Mr Turner who are finding novel ways to understand student identity. On Radio Ramadan, Mr Turner explained that the giving up food was not the difficult part, but he felt very thirsty throughout the day. Moreover he acquired awareness about the essence of fasting which he felt improved his self-control of behaviour and thoughts. Before experiencing the fast he had assumed it was just about abstaining from food and drink, and after he saw there was much more to the religious practice.

Some have talked about how they have reflected on their lives and what they take for granted.


Others too have discussed how they have shown solidarity with their Muslim friends and learned more about self-control and contemplation through fasting.
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=575140062597098

Aside from the #ShareRamadan initiative, others have also decided to fast to share the experiences of their Muslim friends and colleagues. After fasting a whole day, my husband’s colleague had realised how difficult it was, and stated he would no longer tease his fasting Muslim colleagues by making a cheeky gesture of drinking and eating in front of them. In another workplace, a group of colleagues have used the opportunity to #ShareRamadan to raise money for charity.

Such processes of contact, cohabitation and interaction reflect how multiculture is an ordinary feature of Britain’s urban postcolonial cities (Gilroy, 2005). Further, such interactions point towards social beings engaging in social practices with genuine desires to learn about diverse ways of living, rather than merely being tolerant or civil towards diverse neighbours and colleagues.

Watch the video diaries on the #ShareRamadan Facebook page, and judge for yourself whether multicultural Britain is ghettoised, or whether the everyday lives of diverse peoples show how people want to get along and get to know one another, and share their social worlds.

References

[...] mosque before, and thus decided to accompany their Muslim friends for the Tarawih prayer at night. The concept of #ShareRamadan vividly demonstrated multicultural conviviality as alive and well in Br... The detailed accounts on social media and the video diaries of the experiences of those who are [...]
anthropology, geography, science and technology studies) and experience working with qualitative methods and data analysis. Knowledge of science and technology studies, digital studies and scholarly work in the field of Big Data and of basic statistical concepts and quantitative methods also required. Knowledge of and experience working with official statistics desired.

For further information please visit our website:


Ref: SOC000058

Closing date: 15 August 2014

1. http://www.gold.ac.uk/jobs/

The meaninglessness of the Myers-Briggs test (2014-07-27 08:00)

There's a great article on Vox discussing the massive limitations of the Myers-Briggs personality test. You can read it in full [1]here. What fascinates me is why it enjoys the popularity it does in spite of these limitations. Part of the answer to this question is a matter for organisational sociology but another aspect, no less important in my view, relates to the [2]meaning which people are able to find in their categorisation and the broader cultural context within which these (vacuous) categories are capable of becoming meaningful in this way:


The only problem? The test is completely meaningless.

"There's just no evidence behind it," says Adam Grant, an organizational psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania who's [6] written about the shortcomings of the Myers-Briggs previously. "The characteristics measured by the test have almost no predictive power on how happy you'll be in a situation, how you'll perform at your job, or how happy you'll be in your marriage."

"ANALYSIS SHOWS THE TEST IS TOTALLY INEFFECTIVE AT PREDICTING PEOPLE'S SUCCESS AT VARIOUS JOBS"
The test claims that, based on 93 questions, it can group all the people of the world into 16 different discrete “types” — and in doing so, [7] serve as “a powerful framework for building better relationships, driving positive change, harnessing innovation, and achieving excellence." Most of the faithful think of it primarily as a tool for telling you your proper career choice.

But the test was developed in the 1940s based off the untested theories of an outdated analytical psychologist named Carl Jung, and is now thoroughly disregarded by the psychology community. Even Jung warned that his personality "types" were just rough tendencies he’d observed, rather than strict classifications. [8] Several [9] analyses have shown the test is totally ineffective at predicting people’s success in various jobs, and that about half of the people who take it twice get different results each time.

2. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/24/am-i-living-my-life-right-as-an-infp/
5. http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/on-leadership/myers-briggs-does-it-pay-to-know-your-type/2012/12/14/eaed51ae-3fcc-11e2-bca3-aadc9b7e29c5_story.html
8. http://jom.sagepub.com/content/22/1/45.short


Beyond the BBC: Social Media Sharing News Stories on Palestine

News items shared by those we follow on social media sites will perhaps be [1]our first point of contact with breaking news items. Many of us no longer sit down to watch the news at nine on the BBC, as we are able to access news items at the touch of our fingertips online, and we can learn what is going on in the world indirectly via social media sites like Facebook and Twitter by clicking on our news feeds or seeing what is trending, and read articles that have been shared by our friends and those we follow. Dissatisfaction with the biased nature of some traditional mainstream channels, in particular the BBC, has deterred people from gaining their news solely through this usual method. In the past, the BBC have been frequently criticised about their lack of balance and impartiality, but they have taken this too far this time as observed by their current coverage of Israel's attack on Gaza. Thus, the #BoycottBBC campaign began and [2]many protested outside the BBC offices against the biased coverage of the BBC. [3]Owen Jones severely condemned the BBC’s propaganda-like headline of Israel under renewed Hamas attack: “It is as perverse as Mike Tyson punching a toddler, followed by a headline claiming that the child spat at him. As Elizabeth Tsurkov, a Tel Aviv-based Israeli human rights activist, [4]tweeted: “We are targeted by mostly shitty rockets. Gazans
are being shelled with heavy bombs. We have shelters, sirens, Iron Dome. They have 0."

The BBC would have me believe that Israel is the helpless victim, and the Palestinians are heavily armed aggressors with their rockets and rocks. The news coverage is shockingly biased against the Palestinians who, from the reports and pictures on social media, are unarguably the ones who are suffering the most. The rise in criticism against the BBC’s news coverage of Gaza is supplemented by an increase of reliable alternative ways to gain knowledge about current affairs. The many alternative online news magazines and newspapers are telling us what the BBC is refusing to acknowledge. Many of the shares of news stories on social media sites are stories that the BBC would never dare to cover in fear of recriminations from the pro-Israel lobby.

Contrast the BBC with Channel 4. Channel 4 News has been praised on social media sites for their efforts to present the situation in Gaza. The Channel 4 News team have reported live from on the ground in Gaza. Jon Snow has been tweeting, blogging and video logging regularly about his experiences in Gaza, and providing us with a reality about Gaza that the BBC has thus far not acknowledged.

http://youtu.be/ACgwr2Nj_GQ

Channel 4 News seems to have recognised the gravity of social media reportage. Their journalist Paul Mason has highlighted [5]why Israel is losing the social media war over Gaza: "there is a massive change in the balance of power between social media and the old, hierarchical media channels we used to rely on to understand wars". He elaborates on the power of social media in showing a version of reality that is independent of what the BBC, for example, show their viewers. Further, journalists like himself, Jon Snow and others are able to bypass traditional editorial processes and report what they think matters. And I believe that nowhere is this more evident than in Twitter, where in 140 characters or less Israel’s actions are being revealed to the world by these journalists who normally were subject to stringent controls by editors. Twitter is giving these journalists the chance to say what they most want to say, and even when they have been made to delete a tweet by censorious employers, those views do not disappear from cyberspace due to retweets and screenshots by many who have recognised the validity of these reports.
Paul Mason reminds us that American mainstream media is overwhelmingly pro-Israeli, but now for the first time something monumental is occurring for the Americans are receiving their news from sources other than pro-Israeli news channels, and seeing pictures of dead Palestinian children which contrast starkly with what the mainstream news channels are reporting about Israel being under attack. [7]CNN News claims that the majority of Americans support Israel, but then of course they would if they watch mainstream American news channels. Further, those speaking for Israel are [8]spinning their tales using strategies in “fighting the media war for Israel”. The [9]US is the only country in the world who voted against the United Nations investigating human rights violations by Israel on the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, in America, another news source, Jon Stewart’s Daily Show has been criticised by the pro-Israeli lobby, but others are thankful to him for making it [10]okay to care about Palestinian suffering.

Paul Mason states that social media has put the power in the hands of the people and taken it away from the governments. And taken away the power from the previously dominant news channels too, I would add. The numbers of people who are getting their news from social media sites is on the increase: a report by Pew Research Centre found that [11]a third of Americans get their news via Facebook. The rise of obtaining news via Twitter results in us receiving reports [12]not as censored and ideologised as those that go through editorial processes. Some of the British newspapers are also allowing their contributors, even those going through their editors, to manifest the raw reality. Richard Seymour, writing in The Guardian, reveals [13]how indiscriminately the Israeli military are bombarding hospitals, beaches, residential neighbourhoods, cafes, schools and medical facilities. The BBC is unlikely to report increasing accusations that [14]Israel are attacking Gaza to gain access to the gas reserves, but The Guardian allowed this to be raised.
Twitter is being personified as a powerful political entity that challenges those who do not seem to have a handle on the reality of the situation in Gaza, as seen in this reference to those responding to Piers Morgan tweeting about Palestine: "Unfortunately, Twitter did not want to discuss the matter with the chat show host and instead just chose to mercilessly maul him". Perhaps this reaction to Piers Morgan by the personified Twitter is because Twitter has been sufficiently traumatised by the tweets from journalists that tell us Palestinian parents are having to put the remains of their children in shopping bags, children and women are dying, and those who go to hospital for help are killed. Many news reporters, celebrities and politicians are tweeting about Palestine/Israel, and thereby firmly presenting their views to their thousands of followers. Many prominent people (including film directors, musicians and writers) have signed an open letter to David Cameron demanding a halt to arms trade between the UK and Israel. After all, the BBC may not highlight this, but Press TV have rightly pointed out Britain’s relations with Israel when it comes to weapons. The BBC News are unlikely to investigate why the British government hides the extent to which it is arming Israel. Footballer Joey Barton has tweeted about the attacks on Gaza, and re-tweeted about apartheid in Israel. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz removed an article that showed the world more about Israel’s apartheid state where Africans are told to go home, because Israel is a Jewish state. The mainstream media’s reluctance to cover such stories that portray the reality of what goes on in Israel is concerning: “When Israeli government ministers incite angry mobs, calling Africans “cancer,” they are simply expressing another face of the racism that Palestinians have always experienced...Yet rarely does this knowledge make it into mainstream media."

The young people of Gaza are too letting the world know what is on their mind in moving and powerful tweets:

[25]
Twitter is also being used to call out the media establishment for its biased and unbalanced coverage:

[26]

The Huffington Post has also given voice to those generally unheard otherwise, as well as allowing more well-known figures to comment. Even Jon Snow of Channel 4 News submitted [27]his experiences of Gaza to The Huffington Post. The Huffington Post also provided important pictures showing [28]the masses coming out to demonstrate against Israel, images that need to be seen on mainstream channels like the BBC for those who do not use social media are being barred from access to newsworthy events because of the bias of BBC, Fox News and others. Al Jazeera has also given a voice to academics to provide the world with information about western governments who do nothing to prevent [29]Europeans and Americans join the Israeli military.

The impact of small-scale journalism is also such that we gain much needed perspectives that the BBC is not presenting. The Middle East Monitor is reporting and publishing what the BBC is not likely to show: [30]America's Israeli jihadists, [31]Israeli weapons add to brutality of Gaza attack, how Israel are pursuing the [32]natural resources in Gaza, and a [33]Norwegian doctor's letter about the carnage in Gaza. [34]Denmark, Norway and Finland are supporting the Palestinian people with medical aid, but the BBC is not interested in focusing on this significant point.
Hot Press is reporting that singer Sinead O'Connor has cancelled her gig in Israel. Democracy Now presents a debate on Gaza between those at the helm of smaller-scale news mediums. A group of journalists, bloggers and photographers who are the voices of the online magazine +972 have been providing us with up to date news too, for example of the largest West Bank protest in decades. The Electronic Intifada is reporting on the many academics joining the boycott of Israel, as well as giving us news about the writers in Palestine who despite the attacks, are attempting to keep on with their writing. It is the Electronic Intifada showing us that British people are challenging the BBC’s pro-Israeli bias., and publishing information on who has actually violated the ceasefire agreements. Mondoweiss has also pointed towards the growing space to voice criticism and show dissent in America against the Israeli support we have come to expect in the media: “from John Kerry's hot-mic moment expressing anger at the Israeli brutality– a moment Kerry has survived– to The New Yorker accusing Israel of a “war crime,” to TV reporters Richard Engel and Karl Penhaul describing the inhumane conditions in Gaza, to Anne Barnard of the New York Times explaining to Americans that Gaza is an open-air prison, to Lawrence Weschler’s outburst, that Israel has “rabies” and Gaza is “a concentration camp.” We can thank social media and small-scale online journalism for bringing to us injustices committed by the controlling powers of mainstream media, for instance news that An MSNBC contributor had her future bookings cancelled for speaking up on-air about the biased pro-Israel news coverage.

Within Israel itself, censorship is at work to prevent the Israeli people knowing how many children have been killed. Yet small-scale journalism is presenting the evidence we need to know more about Israeli propaganda, for example Digital Resistance showed a video of a former Israeli soldier who described his experiences of the Israeli army. Israel's promotion of the the rape of Palestinian women is observed through the sharing of tweets, images and speeches that have been originating from Israel. Last year, we heard about Israel's propaganda machine as they recruited and paid students to spread pro-Israeli information on social media. This year, we are hearing about Israeli universities encouraging and supporting those who are attacking Gaza. The mainstream newspapers are also giving us much needed perspectives, for instance a voice to the Israeli reservists who are refusing to serve in the Israeli army for varying reasons. Or the Independent newspaper which has been featuring impactful article titles by Mira Bar Hillel, an Israeli-born London writer: Why I’m on the brink of burning my Israeli passport, and Israel has discovered that it's no longer so easy to get away with murder in the age of social media. The Telegraph published the names of the Palestinian children who have been killed by Israel. Our politicians are being called out for their cowardly relationships with Israel.

A few years ago, at a workshop at Cardiff University, a teacher (studying for her doctorate) mentioned to me that she did not understand the need for Al Jazeera English, as the English news channels were sufficient for her to receive her news about the world! When I attempted to explain to her that plurality of voices in news broadcasting was crucial to learning about world events, she could not fathom this. It seems that for some people the need to gain a non-Eurocentric perspective and balanced news coverage is unimportant. For others though, clearly it is an issue of significance. As I write this blog piece, notifications on my Twitter and Facebook alert me to more updates, news and pictures on Gaza. In the last couple of days alone, more and more urgent important information has been coming out on social media that I have not seen reported on the BBC News. Firstly, there are massive demonstrations taking place with huge turnouts in major cities throughout the world in support of Palestine. Some in Israel are also demonstrating, but of course this we will only know through images shared on social media.
Secondly, we learned that "[57]It Turns Out Hamas Didn't Kidnap and Kill the 3 Israeli Teens After All".

Thirdly pictures from reporters are being collated to show the destruction of the homes in Shaja'ia:
What is the BBC not telling you? Where are you getting your news from?

4. https://twitter.com/Elizrael/status/486763377650171905
8. http://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8&q=israel+social+media&tbm=nws
uftering.html
Adam Graff (2014-07-27 17:45:44)
I agree with this article completely. There is definitely biased reporting in many news channels including BBC and Fox, which is in favor of Israel and defaming and dehumanizing Palestinians. Where is the integrity and honesty of media when they hide facts about Gaza, tell us misinformation about the current situation in Gaza and report lies. These media channels who are reporting biased information and hiding the facts are far away from truth—basic lesson taught for core element of journalism. How people can sleep at night—while lying and not sharing about murders of children, innocent people living at home, women, hospitals and schools being bombed in Gaza. The false and twisted reporting about events happening in Gaza is unimaginable. I wish people are able to report, see and comprehend truth and stop violence and murders committed in Gaza to Palestinian people.

Qualitative self-tracking and the Qualified Self (2014-07-28 08:00)

The idea of “qualitative self-tracking” is one that I’ve mentioned on my blog before. It’s a term in which I think but it’s also one that I’m aware of being unclear about exactly what I mean by it. Searching google shows a complete absence of material relating to it – returning only three hits for the exact phrase, all for the same document, which makes reference to “qualitative and quantitative self-tracking data” as opposed to the specific sense in which I’m suggesting qualitative self-tracking can be thought of as a distinct type of practice.

There’s a lot more on the notion of the Qualified Self. This is a term that had occurred to me a [1]couple of years ago and I really like it. My point at the time was that the ethos of self-knowledge through numbers does very little for me personally. But I’m intellectually drawn to the Quantified Self because it’s a fascinating example of the intensification of reflexivity in contemporary society.

In talking about the Qualified Self I’m not disputing the complexity of the inferences that people can and do draw about their selves and their lives on the basis of quantitative data. I’m just suggesting a different starting point which might often have similar implications at the level of practice. I also think there’s an inherent tendency towards behaviourism in a lot of the discourse surrounding the Quantified Self. To be clear: I don’t have any objection to quantitative research into human behaviour (in fact I’d find such an objection absurd) but I do see it as a form of abstraction that is methodologically unavoidable in addressing certain kinds of question and/or to work at a certain level of scope. But what ultimately concerns me are the qualities of things – this is something that’s often associated
with description and narrative but I’d argue causality, in the sense of what lies beyond observable regularities, necessitates invocation of qualities. Why does X do Y under condition Z? I see how it’s possible to reject the assumptions underlying the question but I don’t see how it’s possible to address such a question without a concern for the qualities of X, Y and Z.

So rather crudely here’s an attempt at a definition of qualitative self-tracking: using mobile technology to recurrently record qualities of experience or environment, as well as reflections upon them, with the intention of archiving aspects of personal life that would otherwise be lost, in a way susceptible to future review and revision of concerns, commitments and practices in light of such a review. So obviously things like personal journals would fall into this category. Quantitative self-tracking pre-existed the Quantified Self, as well as the novel practices that began to diffuse and prompted the elaboration of the QS. But I think qualitative self-tracking goes back much further. It’s the continuities that interest me here and how examination of what is similar can help us better understand what is different about our present circumstances.

While I use the term ‘mobile’ above in a rather generic sense, it’s nonetheless the case that smart phones facilitate greater opportunities for qualified self-tracking. For instance iDoneThis, though designed as an enterprise tool, has been something I’ve increasingly enjoyed using in the last week. Every day it sends you an e-mail at a defined time asking, perhaps unsurprisingly, “what did you do today?” – to which the response is to e-mail back and say “I done this …. ”. It’s an incredibly quick process, automatically formatting each line of the e-mail into a separate entry. These are then indexed to the day in question and marked on a calendar which can be (re)viewed later:

[2]
In a little under a week of using this, though not on every day, I’ve already been struck by the variability with which I respond to it. Some days I’ve immediately been able to say “I did a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h” etc. On other days, it’s necessitated that I deliberate about what exactly I did do that day. I find this very interesting as an example of a socio-technical system inculcating a deeper degree of personal reflexivity about how you’ve spent your day. Some days, I felt I did a lot but then realised upon reflection that I hadn’t done a great deal. Other days, I thought I hadn’t done much but then realised I had actually accomplished rather a lot.

Goalstreaks is a ‘habit tracker’ which may seem an odd choice to include in a post about the qualified self. It’s designed to keep track of the number of days in which you have taken action towards a goal. The idea is that this produces a goalstreak which, as it becomes longer, feels progressively more jarring to break. I’d argue it’s qualitative, at least in the particular sense in which I’m using the term, as a result of the distinction it draws between goals and action. The idea is to define a medium term outcome (e.g. write a book) and then specify a particular daily task which contributes substantively towards achieving that goal. In this sense, it links what the social theorist Harmut Rosa describes as everyday and biographical time horizons – drawing out connections between day-to-day routine and the unfolding of your life in the longer term, with the intention of progressively reshaping the former so that it contributes towards the shaping of the latter. This is why I think meaning is integral to the process – it tracks but it does so in a way that tracks the quality of the action vis-a-vis personal concerns. The normativity is built into how you use the app rather than being something that only factors in when you interpret the data (in fact the scope for treating goalstreaks as data is quite limited I think, over and above modulating your plans because certain goals you’ve aimed for progressively come to seem as if they might be unsustainable).

[3]
Hopefully this has given some sense of what I mean by 'qualitative self-tracking'. As I said at the start of the post, it's a term I use in thinking about my own life, as opposed to one I'm necessarily serious about as a proposed concept for sociological inquiry. But this is my starting point for investigating personal reflexivity and digital technology. So it seemed a good idea to try and clarify, at least for myself, what I actually mean when I use the phrase.


Tweeting Gluten Free: Quantified Self, Qualified Self, or Both? | Digital Coeliac (2014-08-06 17:47:37)
[...] this is done. Recent reading of the notion of the Qualified Self, and posts by Mark Carrigan on Qualitative self-tracking and the Qualified Self, and Deborah Lupton on "...The Reflexive Monitoring Self". Lupton argues that [...]

Against word counts as part of a daily writing routine | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-18 13:35:48)
[...] so serves a useful purpose. Perhaps this is a useful starting point for thinking about how the Qualified Self does inevitably sometimes interface with [...]

Cfp: Mini Conference on Digital Sociology (2014-07-29 08:00)

MINI-CONFERENCE ON DIGITAL SOCIOLOGY
CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

[1]Eastern Sociological Society

New York City

February 26-March 1, 2015


2812
In keeping with the Eastern Sociological Society's theme of "Crossing Borders", the Digital Sociology Mini-Conference seeks papers that address the many borders crossed – national, disciplinary, theoretical, methodological, epistemological – in digital ways of knowing. As Daniels and Feagin (2011) have observed digital technologies have offered both challenges and exciting possibilities for the ways in which sociologists do their work. Yet, as Lupton (2014) notes, the field of sociology has only just begun to take account of the broader implications that the digital has raised about the "practice of sociology and social research itself." Similarly, Clough and colleagues (2014) suggest that the "datalogical turn" underway in the social sciences poses not only serious challenges to sociological methodologies, but requires more robust theorizing of the social itself.

Digital Sociology as a field is gaining more traction in Australia, Canada and the UK than the US, but the burgeoning field of digital sociology is still "before the beginning" in theorizing and articulating the digital turn for the social sciences (Wynn, 2009). Despite the fact that many of the social implications of the Internet were articulated more than a decade ago by leading sociologists such as Castells, DiMaggio and colleagues, Sassen, and Wellman, (Castells, 1997; DiMaggio, et al., 2001; Sassen, 2002; Wellman, 2001), North American sociology overall has been less concerned with defining its relationship to the digital and has instead been content to cede this terrain to those working in communication, cultural and media studies, library and information science, and journalism.

We maintain that the field of sociology has insights to offer the questions that emerge from the proliferation of digital technologies and that a sociology without a thorough understanding of the digital will be a discipline that is irrelevant to the most pressing issues of the 21st century. The digital spaces where we increasingly interact, learn, and work lack fundamental sociological frameworks that might help us better understand such spaces (McMillan Cottom, 2014). Sociologists who wish to make sense of the social and the digital are faced with developing research methods that can account for lived realities, as well as articulate structural shifts in the nature of labor, economy, politics, and governance (Gregory, 2014). Therefore, we are convening this Mini-Conference on Digital Sociology as a way of sharing new forms of knowledge creation, connecting sociologists engaged in this work, and strategizing the future of "digital sociology" within the discipline in ways that "cross borders" of North American sociology.

We will consider abstracts on a wide range of topics, including – but not limited to – the following themes:

- **Digital Sociological Methods:** How do traditional, analog sociological methods become digital? Are there new, "born digital" sociological methods? Will big data replace survey methodology? What are ethics of doing digital sociology?

- **Critical Theories of the Digital Itself:** How have we theorized the digital? What challenges does the digital pose to epistemologies underlying sociological methods?

- **Digital Structures, Digital Institutions:** The datafication of everyday life is posing unique challenges to the composition of social institutions and giving rise to new instantiations of education, finance, labor, and governance. How do we theorize, study, and conceptualize the recomposition of these institutions?
• **Identity, Community, and Networks**: How do sociological concepts of micro and macro, personal and public, “front stage” and “back stage,” evolve as digital and mobile technologies increasingly blur these boundaries? How do case studies of networks further the field of digital sociology?

• **Race, Racism and Digitally Mediated Spaces**: How do existing sociological concepts of race and racism expand our understanding of digital diasporas, racist video games, regulating hate speech in a global era, hashtag activism, racial justice social movements and racist countermovements, the ways that racialization “happens” in digitally mediated spaces?

• **Queering Digital Technology**: How do we deploy – and queer – sociological theories to make sense of the twined realities that historically marginalized groups (like LGBTQ people) use digital technologies to connect across geographic distances, share resources and to work for social change while simultaneously experiencing the expanded practices of digital surveillance, loss of privacy, and identity-based harassment, even leading to violence?

We encourage submissions from scholars at all levels, and are particularly enthusiastic to support the work of graduate students and early career researchers. We welcome submissions for individual papers and for entirely constituted sessions. The organizers share a commitment to creating a field that honors diverse voices, and as such are excited to see scholars from groups that are typically underrepresented in sociology. When proposing entirely constituted sessions, please keep this commitment to diverse voices in mind.

Because we aim to foster dialogue beyond the parameters of the meeting, papers presented will be considered for inclusion in an open-access, peer-reviewed volume on Digital Sociology. If you have any questions about proposals, topics, or session ideas please contact one of the organizers: Karen Gregory ([3]kgregory@ccny.cuny.edu), Tressie McMillan Cottom ([4]tcottom@emory.edu) or Jessie Daniels ([5]jdaniels@gc.cuny.edu).

For papers, please submit an abstract of no more than **250 words**, as well as the title of the paper, name of presenter, institutional affiliation and contact details. For wholly constituted sessions, please include a short description of the concept behind your session, and then include all of the abstracts (along with names and affiliations of presenters) in one document. Please email your submissions to: [6]ESSDigitalSociology@gmail.com. Proposals not accepted for the Mini-Conference will be submitted to the ESS general call for submissions.

Karen Gregory (2014-08-25 20:47:08)
Thanks for sharing the CFP! I just wanted to add that the deadline for submissions to the DS mini-conference is October 1, 2014. Please consider submitting. Best, Karen

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-26 06:55:43)
Hopefully I will!

Rhea Page (2014-10-17 16:39:06)
This is intriguing! But what does CFP stand for?

Sociological Imagination (2014-10-17 16:58:47)
call for papers

OkCupid, social media and the ethics of data science (2014-07-30 08:00)

Not long after a scandal erupted over Facebook’s report on the experiment they conducted on users of the service, leading to[1] an apology about how the study was communicated, the dating website OkCupid has [2]waded into the debate with an admission that they regularly experiment on users and that they are not alone in doing so. Given the form taken by this pronouncement, it’s hard not to see it as a deliberate intervention with the intention of steering an area of widespread anxiety only likely to grow with time. However at the level of data science and web development, it’s hard not to recognise the logic of their argument, even if there are ethical issues which are obscured by it. Experimenting on users is “how websites work” as the author of the blogpost puts it. He gave a convincing performance on UK radio yesterday, arguing that the OkCupid matching algorithm is something that’s been constructed through the activity of data scientists at the company and that continued engagement with available data is an integral part of refining how the matching, as well as the broader website of which it is such a key part, works day-to-day. The Guardian offers a helpful summary of the news and the reaction that it has provoked:

Dating service OkCupid has cheerfully admitted to manipulating what it shows users, a month after Facebook faced a storm of protest when it revealed that it had conducted psychological experiments.

Christian Rudder, OkCupid’s co-founder and data scientist, posted three examples of experiments the firm had performed on to the site’s OkTrends blog, in an upbeat article entitled "We Experiment On Human Beings!".

The blog, which used to chronicle the discoveries OkCupid made by observing its users’ behaviour, has been mothballed for three years, since OkCupid was purchased by dating behemoth Match.com in February 2011.

"OkCupid doesn’t really know what it’s doing," [3]writes Rudder in the most recent blogpost. "Neither does any other website. It’s not like people have been building these things for very long, or you can go
look up a blueprint or something. Most ideas are bad. Even good ideas could be better. Experiments are how you sort all this out.”

Rudder refers specifically to Facebook’s troubles over its experimentation, when the firm tweaked the content of users’ news feeds in an effort to discover what their reaction was to a higher proportion of positive or negative posts. “Guess what, everybody,” he says, “if you use the internet, you’re the subject of hundreds of experiments at any given time, on every site. That’s how websites work.


The outcry seems to relate to the particular form the experiments take. Read the [5]original post for details about two of the experiments they’ve conducted. However it’s the final experiment which has proved most contentious:

The ultimate question at OkCupid is, does this thing even work? By all our internal measures, the “match percentage” we calculate for users is very good at predicting relationships. It correlates with message success, conversation length, whether people actually exchange contact information, and so on. But in the back of our minds, there’s always been the possibility: maybe it works just because we tell people it does. Maybe people just like each other because they think they’re supposed to? Like how Jay-Z still sells albums?

† Once the experiment was concluded, the users were notified of the correct match percentage.

To test this, we took pairs of bad matches (actual 30% match) and told them they were exceptionally good for each other (displaying a 90% match.)† Not surprisingly, the users sent more first messages when we said they were compatible. After all, that’s what the site teaches you to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For users whose actual match percentage is 30%...</th>
<th>30% match</th>
<th>60% match</th>
<th>90% match</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>when we DISPLAYED</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds of sending one message:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But we took the analysis one step deeper. We asked: does the displayed match percentage cause more than just that first message—does the mere suggestion cause people to actually like each other? As far as we can measure, yes, it does.

When we tell people they are a good match, they act as if they are. Even when they should be wrong for each other.
The four-message threshold is our internal measure for a real conversation. And though the data is noisier, this same “higher display means more success” pattern seems to hold when you look at contact information exchanges, too.

This got us worried—maybe our matching algorithm was just garbage and it’s only the power of suggestion that brings people together. So we tested things the other way, too: we told people who were actually good for each other, that they were bad, and watched what happened.

Here’s the whole scope of results (I’m using the odds of exchanging four messages number here):

As you can see, the ideal situation is the lower right: to both be told you’re a good match, and at the same time actually be one. OkCupid definitely works, but that’s not the whole story. And if you have to choose only one or the other, the mere myth of compatibility works just as well as the truth. Thus the career of someone like Doctor Oz, in a nutshell. And, of course, to some degree, mine.


Should this be the case? I find many aspects of this concerning but my fear is that these media hyped instances of particular cases which seem intuitively problematic to many risk obscuring the broader picture in which increasingly large parts of our lives are mediated through socio-technical systems with workings that are opaque to us at best.
Is there a risk that a debate about the research ethics of these experiments conducted by corporate data scientists distracts us from the political implications of the social relations upon which their capacity to do this depends? Is there a risk that a debate of the utmost importance ends up being driven by intuition rather than reasoned debate? One thought these debates have left me with however is the need for a serious engagement with research ethics by data scientists. These issues are just too important to overlook.


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Against the 'sharing economy'? (2014-07-31 08:00)

The notion of the "sharing economy" is entering popular circulation in a way that would have seemed extremely unlikely only a year or two ago. Yet what is it? Is this really 'sharing'? Is this capitalism creating the basis for its own transcendence? Or is it a particularly noxious form of neo-capitalism that affects quasi-socialism while aggressively deconstructing secure and regulated industries? [1]This podcast won't answer these questions but it might help us understand their significance with a greater degree of clarity - [2]LISTEN HERE

More and more, consumers are turning to Uber to hail rides with their smartphones, or renting spare rooms from strangers online through Airbnb. These companies typify the sharing economy where everyone can be a micro-entrepreneur and provide valued services without a professional middleman. But as these peer-to-peer businesses explode in popularity, cities are dealing with major questions over how to regulate them. Following a wave of recent protests by taxi drivers across the U.S. and Europe, the debate over these services is heating up. Diane and her guests have a conversation about regulating the sharing economy, and what it means for businesses and consumers.

Guests
Dean Baker

coc-director, Center for Economic and Policy Research and blogger, Beat the Press; author of "The End of Loser Liberalism: Making Markets Progressive."

Emily Badger

staff writer at The Washington Post covering urban policy.
This is a very interesting question you pose and one which I am currently fascinated by, for it speaks to the paradoxical nature of the times in which we live. Their ‘double-swordedness’. Something that starts out as an experimental, even neutral idea, (although encouragingly many new ideas and start-ups are motivated by a social good to at least some extent), threatens to be usurped by dominant agendas. The question, I think, that needs to be analyzed is: who is doing the sharing (and why)
and who is doing the taking (and why)? The answer seems to often be that those who are sharing are those who want to initiate change in the status quo and disrupt otherwise harmful hegemonies (although not always and completely - one must make a living after all), while those doing the taking are both those who benefit from its original intentions and those who it threatens (by copying or subverting). Of course, then the even bigger question is who (or what) is controlling the sharing economy itself - that is, the communication channels and infrastructure, policies, etc? As so much of what the internet and the sharing economy offers us is easily corrupted, the final questions that then need to be answered are what has the internet and increased accessibility to services really done on a societal level in terms of equality and social benefits and where to from here? What other means of social exchange are on the horizon, since the very ubiquity of the internet increasingly seems to be a threat to itself and its potential for fundamental change. The deep web, of what little I know about it, is interesting in this regard, for it seems that we cannot, and I don’t think should necessarily look to, escape the medium of technology in its entirety.

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-01 09:37:34)
I agree! It’s that ‘double-swordedness’ which makes it so interesting - I flip between extreme cynicism and benign interest without being able to reconcile the two views of the ‘sharing economy’

5.8 August

Our most popular posts in July (2014-08-01 08:00)

[1] Six principles for organising academic conferences in the 21st century
[2] Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today
[3] How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)
[4] Not the Nine O’Clock News: Where do you get your News from?
[5] 38 reasons why you should blog about your research
[6] Accessible Books on Social Theory
[7] Four extremely interesting digital sociology postdoc opportunities at Goldsmiths
[8] Multicultural Britain: Conviviality
[9] The DIY PhD and the transformation of intellectual life

Call for contributions: An Alternative History of Sociology (2014-08-01 10:02)

This open and web based project aims to contribute to a rethinking of the sociological canon and debates about the past and future of the discipline. Would you like to contribute to An Alternative History of Sociology? There’s more information here about the project and its aims. Though it’s still in an early stage, we’d be interested in receiving:

1. Biographical accounts of historical figures
2. Narrative summaries of historical figures and their work
3. Narrative summaries of contemporary figures and their work
4. Personal accounts of the constraints of the sociological canon and the broadening of intellectual horizons
5. Analysis of the broader methodological and historical questions entailed by the project

There is no deadline for submissions. The idea is to create a living resource which grows over time, highlighting sociologists who haven’t received the recognition you believe they deserve and encouraging debate about the history of the discipline and what it means to have made a contribution to it.

All submissions should be 1000-3000 words and include a suggested image that is licensed for reuse. References should be included at the end of each post in a briefly annotated form, with the intention of sign posting an interested reader keen to navigate a body of work they had previously been unfamiliar with. Please include a 100 word first-person personal biography with submissions.

E-mail mark@markcarrigan.net to contribute an article or discuss a potential contribution.

All articles will be licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. This permits attributed reproduction for non-commercial purposes but precludes modification.

1. http://alternativehistoryofsociology.org/?page_id=4
3. http://alternativehistoryofsociology.org/CC%20BY-NC-ND%204.0
What does Wikipedia sound like? It probably never occurred to you to ask that question. But this website provides an answer. There's a description below the image of the meanings of the sounds used. I really like this project. What can initially seem like an interesting curiosity is actually something much more interesting, using sounds to visually communicate the quantity and quality of a dynamic system:

Listen to the sound of Wikipedia's recent changes feed. Bells indicate additions and string plucks indicate subtractions. Pitch changes according to the size of the edit; the larger the edit, the deeper the note. Green circles show edits from unregistered contributors, and purple circles mark edits performed by automated bots. You may see announcements for new users as they join the site, punctuated by a string swell. You can welcome him or her by clicking the blue banner and adding a note on their talk page.
The emotional wellbeing of non-tenure track faculty (2014-08-03 08:00)

The [1]Academe blog has an interesting post reporting on a new research paper which explores the emotional impact of the academic "caste system" that afflicts American higher education (and is present elsewhere in a less explicitly codified form). It seems like a quantitative and US-focused supplement to Ros Gill’s qualitative and UK-focused [2]Breaking the Silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia.

A recently released research article in the July issue of Frontiers in Psychology, authored by Gretchen M. Reevy and Grace Deason, finds that the very stigma of non-tenure track employment—now a reality for some 70 % of higher education faculty members in the U.S.—brings with it an increase in stress, depression, and anxiety.

 Appropriately titled “[3]Predictors of depression, stress, and anxiety among non-tenure track faculty,” the article derides the widespread faculty "caste system" that separates contingent faculty from their tenure-track colleagues for leading to an increase in the emotional and psychological stressors experienced by non-tenure track faculty.

 "Results indicate that NTT faculty perceive unique stressors at work that are related to their contingent positions," the article stated. “Specific demographic characteristics and coping strategies, inability to find a permanent faculty position, and commitment to one’s organization predispose NTT faculty to perceive greater harm and more sources of stress in their workplaces. Demographic characteristics, lower income, inability to find a permanent faculty position, disengagement coping mechanisms (e.g., giving up, denial), and organizational commitment were associated with the potential for negative outcomes, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress.”

The big data brain drain (2014-08-04 08:00)

This [1]provocative post by Jake VanderPlas argues that "the skills required to be a successful scientific researcher are increasingly indistinguishable from the skills required to be successful in industry" and that important implications follow from this for the future of higher education. There is a "new breed of scientist" that the academic world increasingly struggles to retain:

The increasing data-centeredness of science, however, is already leading to new approaches to problems: in the era of the LHC and LSST, the most exciting research is being driven by those who have the expertise to apply high-performance data-parallel statistical algorithms to ask interesting questions of huge, community-generated datasets. It is driven by the application of new statistical approaches, of new machine learning algorithms, and of new and faster codes to repeat classic analyses at a previously unattainable scale. In short, the new breed of scientist must be a broadly-trained expert in statistics, in computing, in algorithm-building, in software design, and (perhaps as an afterthought) in domain knowledge as well. From particle physics to genomics to biochemistry to neuroscience to oceanography to atmospheric physics and everywhere in-between, research is increasingly data-driven, and the pace of data collection shows no sign of abating.


The development of specialised software is becoming ever more integral to the cumulative progress of scientific inquiry. So too is the openness of that software, with privatised development processes intensifying a broader crisis of reproducibility that afflicts contemporary science. The problem is that not only does higher education not incentivise researchers to spend time and energy on these increasingly important pursuits, it actively disincentivizes them from doing so:

This brings us to Academia’s core problem: despite the centrality of well-documented, well-written software to the current paradigm of scientific research, academia has been singularly successful at discouraging these very practices that would contribute to its success. In the "publish-or-perish" model which dominates most research universities, any time spent building and documenting software tools is time spent not writing research papers, which are the primary currency of the academic reward structure. As a result, except in certain exceptional circumstances, those who focus on reproducible and open software are less likely to build the resume required for promotion within the academic system. And those poor souls whose gifts lie in scientific software development rather than the writing of research papers will mostly find themselves on the margins of the academic community.

To an extent, disconnects like this have always existed. The academic system has always rewarded some skills at the expense of others: teaching is a classic example of an essential skill which is perennially marginalized. But there are two main differences that make the current discussion more worrying:

1. As I’ve mentioned, the skills now slipping through the cracks of the academic reward structure are the very skills required for the success of modern research.
2. With virtually the entire world utilizing the tools of data-intensive discovery, the same skills academia now ignores and devalues are precisely the skills which are most valued and rewarded within industry.
The result of this perfect storm is that skilled researchers feel an insidious gradient out of research and into industry jobs. While software-focused jobs do exist within academia, they tend to be lower-paid positions without the prestige and opportunity for advancement found in the tenure track. Industry is highly attractive: it is addressing interesting and pressing problems; it offers good pay and benefits; it offers a path out of the migratory rat-wheel of temporary postdoctoral positions, and often even encourages research and publication in fundamental topics. Most importantly, perhaps, industry offers positions with a real possibility for prestige and career advancement. It's really a wonder that any of us stay in the academy at all.

What do you think of this argument? We'd love to hear responses, particularly from the perspective of the more qualitatively orientated social sciences. Get in touch if you'd be interested in writing something.

3. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

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Michael (2014-08-05 02:51:38)
The question which seems to be absent, or implicitly answered in the positive, is what are the real benefits of big-data, or more important still, who does big-data serve? This seems to be glossed over in part due to the author’s field in which he is experiencing big data (astrophysics), which naturally has a different agenda in comparison with corporations in terms of why they are interested in big data. For example, big-data is an increasingly utilized tool in supermarkets, having both the effect of ensuring the consumers demands are satisfied (e.g. keeping track of floor stock and ensuring it is efficiently replaced) but also the more pernicious effect of CREATING, arguably unhealthy, demand in consumers (e.g. strategic positioning/supply of items in relation to weather conditions). One must then ask where does the consumers’ conscious decision-making end and the unconscious process begin. Or, in other words, when is big data serving to make its customers happy by meeting their premeditated demands and when is it manipulating its customers? Of course, marketing is all about manipulation, so this may be considered a moot point. The point I wish to raise is really: is big-data a status-quo perpetuating wolf, posing as the innovative, making-life-easier-for-all sheep? More data in certain fields may allow more effective decision-making, yet it also has the effect of making us complacent and overly reliant of numbers to give us the illusion of certainty. We may thus be making signal out of noise, whilst overlooking other, more important factors. It is here that the more qualitative oriented modes of research and inquiry seem to be at risk of being marginalised, as big-data serves to put quantitative research on an even higher pedestal, making qualitative research the progressively uglier step child. On a less related note, I think another interesting sociological dimension of the big-data argument (or reflex, for it seems the concept has its own momentum) is how it essentially can be read as the shifting from humans creating inert, passive forms of technology to serve our needs and make life easier and more productive (beginning in the stone age) to a time when technology becomes used, if not to create our needs, at least to predict our needs and in turn allow us to be more productive in other non-related areas (or so the argument goes). But is it not closer to the truth that certain applications of big-data makes us unnecessarily more consumptive and less in control of our lives? One the one hand, it could be said that the control is handed over to large corporations and marketers. However, more interestingly, if for no other reason than its conspiratorial connotations, is what the potential power of big data says about our relationship to technology - the power ascribed to big data hints at the idea of singularity - the time when technology attains greater than human intelligence. With so much data on ourselves and our behaviour, which is used to in
turn predict, modify and inform subsequent behaviour, we do in a very real sense become slaves to technology, albeit in a
more benign way. When everything runs so smoothly that we have little more to do than enjoy the ride and little need to think,
what does that make us and what does that make the ‘machines’?

**The possible convergence of social movement theory and organisational theory (2014-08-05 08:00)**

There’s a very interesting post on Org Theory which discusses the converging trajectories of Organisational Theory
and Social Movement Theory. As Brayden King argues, the similarities in these fields of study were obscured by the
different theoretical starting points within both subfields:

Both literatures are, after all, primarily concerned with group behavior, problems of collective action
and coordination, and dynamics of stability and change. Why did it take so long for the two theoretical
areas to engage one another? (I should note that social movement theory has for some time borrowed
ideas from org. theory, but this doesn’t really amount to full engagement in my mind.)

We argue that in the early years of American sociology, social movements and formal organizations
were viewed as very distinct phenomena – social movements are irrational and disruptive and formal
organizations are rational and stability-inducing – and that this characterization prevented scholars from
seeing potential empirical overlap.


Book Review by Pallavi Mittra
Concepts of the Self (3rd edition) by Professor Anthony Elliott, is as the title suggests a comprehensive presentation of the varied perspectives on the formation of selfhood. The author has structured the book in accordance with the disciplines. In the introduction the author classifies this book as an attempt to “make various social, cultural, political and psychological aspects of the self in our changing world intelligible to a wide readership” (pp.4). The book does that and significantly more by integrating these theoretical positions on subjectivity with a common sense understanding of the self.

The first chapter presents a sociologically informed discussion of the self by drawing on Mead’s symbolic interactionism, Gidden’s reflexivity and Goffman’s varied presentation of the self. This is followed by a psychoanalytical perspective of the repressed self, drawing largely on Freud, Lacan and Winnicott. The other chapters focus on Foucault’s concept of power and bureaucracy and on the deconstruction of the self with the emergence of feminism and homosexuality.

Towards a perspective of selfhood: The discussions of these varied theories are far from descriptive and are critically appraised in relation to other schools of thought. This is instrumental in outlining the similarities between these traditions. For instance, in the course of discussing Butler’s concept of performativity in relation to gender, the author aptly refers back to Foucault, Lacan and even Goffman. Though it could be difficult for a layman reader to go back and forth, an understanding of where these traditions come together and at what points they diverge is pivotal. It is for this reason that a preliminary understanding of these theories will help the reader make the most of the discussion and critique.

The book ties the discussion into a reinvention of the concept of self in the new-age lifestyles. It is in this penultimate section that the book shifts from a theoretical discussion to a somewhat simplified application of the popularly identifiable concepts with the commonly found prototypes of identity in the present generation. Furthermore, the chapters are intercepted with brief sketches of characters that one can identify with in today’s world, in the act of getting on with life. This is primarily done with the objective of positioning this theoretically driven discussion in the context of our everyday lives surrounded by a fast paced and dynamic world of social media, which is a catalyst to the formation of self. This also serves to emphasise the split of the self into the private and
the social. Such illustrations of common place instances are characteristic of Elliott’s style and are applied more extensively in Contemporary Social Theory (2009). The impact of this style for a wide readership is that it would be almost impossible to get on with work, write emails, follow up on world affairs or even listen to music without being reminded of and reflecting on how this shapes one’s identity. It is due to these factors that the book goes beyond introducing the concepts of self and identity to developing a perspective towards selfhood.

Discipline over paradigm: In structuring the book according to disciplines, the book relegates the importance of structuralist and post-structuralist traditions in the formation of self. As a result the significance of semiotics and language in subjectivity is barely included in the text. Moreover, missing here is the argument that identity is too stable a concept to represent the self and hence present an alternative view of identification (cf. Bracher et al., 1994; Lacan, 2006). A few other concepts that are treated as footnotes in the discussion are deconstructionism and object relations theory. Since both of these theoretical traditions relate closely to the postmodern conceptions of self in the debates on feminism (cf. Kristeva, 1986), it can be argued that these needed to be set up before delving into a discussion of gender, homosexuality and feminism. These exclusions are an outcome of the tough choice of discipline over philosophical paradigm in structuring the book and are understandable to an extent.

On the whole, the depth and extent of discussion in the book deserves the description of a critical introduction to the concept of self, with an inclination towards identity theories. It is a good book to start with if the reader is looking to get a critically presented overview of the theoretical traditions and could further deepen the reading by exploring the extensive citations made by the author.

[Pallavi Mittra is a first year PhD student at Strathclyde Business School and her research is focused on the psychoanalytical studies of employees in a strategic change context.]

Self-tracking and data sensibilities (2014-08-06 08:00)

I recently blogged about the idea of the ‘qualified self’ and why I’m drawn to this phrase. As sometimes happens, I wasn’t being enormously serious when I started writing the post but had argued myself into a new position by the end of it. I like the ‘qualified self’ because it draws attention to the aspects of self-tracking, broadly construed, which can tend to be obscured if we focus in an overly narrow way on the Quantified Self. I use capitals here in allusion to a distinction offered by Whitney Erin Boesel between the Quantified Self and quantified self: as an organised movement of sorts, the QS encompasses a very particular relationship between personal and social reflexivity: “QSers” don’t just self-track; they also interrogate the experiences, methods, and meanings of their self-tracking practices, and of self-tracking practices generally” as Boesel puts it.

However I think the ‘big tent’ strategy she discusses as characterising the movement, if indeed we can call it that, can obscure how specific these reflexive practices are because it’s easy to mistake inclusivity for commonality. To be clear I really don’t mean this as a criticism of the Quantified Self. I think this is a very valuable thing for them to have done on a number of levels. I say this as someone who has thought about ‘big tent policies’ a lot in terms of another social movement of sorts that can be found in asexuality activism. But as with the asexual community, ‘big tents’ can obscure the differences of those within the tent. The notion of the Qualified Self appeals to me as a way of articulating certain motivations for self-tracking, techniques and attendant technologies which I worry are being subsumed under the rhetoric of the QS. Perhaps I’m even talking about an entirely different sensibility with which
people engage in self-tracking? This interesting post by Deborah Lupton observes the trends in google search terms relating to these practices:

As part of my research for the book I made a Google Trends graph comparing the major terms that are used to denote the practices of voluntarily monitoring aspects of the self: self-tracking, the quantified self, life logging and personal analytics. As the resultant graph demonstrates, it was not until mid-2007 that any of these terms began to show up in Google searches. Self-tracking led the way, followed by life logging, then personal analytics. The quantified self is the newest term. It began to appear in searches in January 2010 and rose quickly in popularity, beginning to overtake self-tracking by April 2012 (although just recently self-tracking has caught up again). The quantified self, therefore, has become a well-used term, at least among people using Google Search. In another study of news coverage of the quantified self I found that the term has become increasingly used in these accounts as well.

But is it time to rethink or even relinquish the term ‘the quantified self’? For my book I prefer to use ‘self-tracking’ over the alternatives, as this term is broader and more inclusive of a range of practices (and I refer to ‘self-tracking cultures’ to denote the various social, cultural and political contexts in which self-tracking practices are carried out).

This doesn't confirm my sense of ‘quantified self’ swallowing up the broader discursive field out of which it emerged by any means. But it is suggestive of a trend. While I agree with Deborah that “Self-tracking is not simply about quantified (or quantifiable) information”, I'm not sure it follows from this that we can detach self-tracking practices from the kinds of data that inform them in the way I perhaps wrongly read her as saying. I think epistemologies are encoded into practices and the appeal of those practices in turn must be understood in terms of personal biography. Certain types of people are led to practices under certain conditions and then contribute to the reproduction or transformation of those practices (and the broader conditions) in virtue of what they bring to them.

What intrigues me about the QS is how closely entwined the ethos and the epistemology seem to be. On a personal level, it just doesn't make sense to me to think of my own life in terms of what I take to be the prevailing concepts within the Quantified Self. But I can easily see why it would for others and it's these questions of biographical differentiation that interest me e.g. how does one come to be someone who participates in quantified self practices? How does one come to be someone who participates in QS events? How does one come to be someone who engages in the kinds of practices I was describing in terms of ‘qualitative self-tracking’?

This is why I think the distinction draw by Margaret Archer between different modes of reflexivity is so important to understanding this. My hunch is that the QS community is filled with autonomous reflexives. In a later post, I'll map out my reasons for thinking this and explain the concepts I'm using properly. But my broader claim is that there's often a contingent complementarity between particular styles of internal life and particular practices of self-tracking. I'd like to understand this at an empirical level much more than I do and I think doing so would help illuminate at a theoretical level a lot of issues about the relationship between personal reflexivity and technology which interest me.

Perhaps this is all a long winded way of saying that I think the kinds of information that a person comes to think of as salient to their selves is a very interesting issue. So I think numbers are important to people whose self-tracking
practices revolve around quantifiable data and my inclination as a biographically orientated sociologist is to ask how did this come to be so? Addressing this question properly entails consideration of structure, agency, culture and the relationships between them. This is far too big a question to address in a blog post but I can see the outline of a potential paper beginning to take shape.

2. http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2013/05/22/what-is-the-quantified-self-now/%20whitneyerinboesel

Tweeting Gluten Free: Quantified Self, Qualified Self, or Both? | Digital Coeliac (2014-08-06 17:47:50)


Book Review by Bradley Williams

How do the experiences of leaders and members of a medical humanitarian aid organization structure the organization’s principles and practices and enlighten us to the meaning and purpose of their work? Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), (Doctors Without Borders in English), is “an international medical humanitarian organization created by a small group of French doctors and journalists in 1971 (p. 1). Throughout the book, Doctors Without Borders: Humanitarian Quests, Impossible Dreams of Médecins Sans Frontières, sociologist Renée C. Fox succinctly makes perceptible MSF’s complex existence, including maintaining transnational autonomy while operating within the borders of various democratic and authoritarian polities. Drawing from her extensive field research, the author reviews the history of MSF, the goals that they have set as an “international movement”, their organization and mobilization efforts and how they affect the prioritization and execution of these goals (p. 2).
The first three parts of the book, a little under half in length, offer analyses of MSF’s origin, history, and some of the earlier crises that tested MSF’s core principles. The first chapter in particular presents weblogs of members’ personal accounts of their service “in the field” (13-40). Web entries reflect such thoughts as members’ appreciation and pride for serving distressed populations, “culture shock” or “existential transformation” from their experiences, and disappointment with organizational, political, and resource limitations (p. 39). The fourth and fifth parts detail thoroughly the author’s studies using her ethnographic data drawn from the experiences of MSF workers in South Africa combating HIV/AIDS and in Post socialist Russia fighting Tuberculosis in Siberian prisons. The book contains a handful of photographs featuring significant events during the MSF missions in South Africa and Siberia, which were the subject of Fox’s analysis. There are also several sociopolitical cartoons from creator Samuel “Brax” Hanryon that offer a critique of the various core concerns of MSF, including organizational growth, gendered violence, and “the limits of humanitarian action” (p. 98). These illustrations added a playful form of conscience which acted as a barometer of the most impactful concerns of the movement’s present. Added to all of this, the book contains the insight-filled notes, placed before the index and after the text, one might expect from a leading sociologist.

A central theme examined throughout the book is the relationship between MSF’s principle of témoignage, or “bearing witness” in English, to threats to human rights and its political neutrality. This is primarily illustrated through cases of events in which humanitarian needs, political influence, social environmental factors, and internal dynamics shaped transformations in MSF’s organizational structure. For example, the project aiding the resistance to HIV/AIDS in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa ultimately culminated in the creation of a South African section of MSF (p. 193). The author’s greatest accomplishment is bringing the history of MSF’s organizational evolution to life. Doctors Without Borders feels semi-biographical, even a little autobiographical upon reading. This will most likely set it apart from other contributions to literature on MSF and international medical NGOs. The author acknowledges that she feels personally invested in the mission of MSF, noting that her experiences conducting sociological research in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was the inspiration for her work on MSF. She underscores early in the book that her ethnography required that she navigate the “culture of debate” that pervades the organization (p. 5). Reading this book makes apparent the personal care she took to understand this culture and translate her experiences. Books about MSF have tended to focus primarily on pragmatic analyses of the movement’s contributions to the populations it aids; one notable exception being Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders by Peter Redfield, an example of recent ethnographic research.

The author provides a well written ethnographic account of the often conflictual internal dynamics of inclusion and exclusion among various factions within MSF. This book is original in its scope, taking seriously the opinions and personal history of past and current MSF members, from the more prominent and infamous leaders to veterans of humanitarian aid and newcomers alike. The photographs are highly welcome and the caricaturist illustrations are particularly elucidative; the “Brax” illustrations include short descriptions of their depictions as they relate to specific events and concerns relevant to MSF. The author makes an excellent contribution to sociological ethnography while demystifying the important role played by NGOs in international relations. I would recommend this book particularly to researchers interested in the meanings that members of NGOs place on their work. Readers will have no problem jumping into this book without prior knowledge of NGOs. I think this book would make a good additional reader for a course in medical sociology or a similar course concerning the work of medical NGOs.

[notice] Bradley W. Williams is a graduate student in sociology beginning his PhD studies at George Mason University in 2015. His research is located within the intersection of sociology and international relations, specializing in the study of religion, social movements, and Islamic peace processes. [/notice]

Last year saw the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling introduce a new prison regime that included a [1]vindictive ban on prisoners being sent books. The ban has been widely condemned and [2]legally challenged. In this post Les Back from Goldsmiths College shares the letter he has written to Grayling criticising the ban. He included a copy of [3]Escape Attempts with the letter, as part of the Howard League’s project to send books to the conservative politician with the request that they be passed on to [4]prison libraries.

Dear Chris Grayling,

I am very pleased to send you a copy of Stan Cohen and Laurie Taylor’s Escape Attempts and request that you sent it on to a prison so that prisoners will be able to read it.
The book is not actually as impudent a choice as the title suggests. It is not literally a 'how to' guide for scaling the prison walls. Rather, what Cohen and Taylor document in this classic study in sociology is the deadening nature of prison routines and the importance of the life of the mind in imagining an alternative future into existence. I have worked in prisoner education initiatives for over ten years through a scheme at Goldsmiths, University of London called Open Book. It is an aptly titled initiative in my view. I am merely an academic volunteer and visit potential students inside prison, many of whom gain access to higher education through their involvement. In the last year I have also visited one of our students who was recalled to Wormwood Scrubs, so I have some direct experience of what reading means for prisoners behind bars.

For more than a decade it has become progressively difficult to get books into prison. I have documented this here in an on-line book called Academic Diary if you are interested (see [5]http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=18). As a result of government policy several books I have posted to students have been impounded. This has been documented in a series of podcasts which you can listen to for free on Goldsmiths website [6]http://magiclantern.gold.ac.uk/podcasts/sociology/sonicpostcards/postcard4done.mp3.

As you know the ban on sending books was introduced a year ago as part of the incentives and earned privileges changes. I have witnessed the transformative power of reading and education for prisoners and former prisoners. We know from our experience at Open Book – but also from existing research – that learning reduces reoffending and helps animate dead time into something that can be productive, not just for prisoners, but also for society as a whole.

You have said that books are a security concern because they can be used to smuggle drugs into a prison. You must know that this is utter nonsense. As the Howard League has pointed out there is no evidence that drugs have ever been smuggled into a prison through the pages of a book. The Prison Governors Association and the Prison Officers Association have both dismissed the idea that books constitute a security issue.

It is my experience that reading offers students an imaginative escape but it also provides an opportunity to envision a different future. Isn't this precisely what you – as the Minister of Justice – should be seeking i.e. that people who have a history of offending embrace a different kind of future when they leave prison. There are very low incidents of re-offending amongst students on the Open Book Project. Higher Education quite simply works for them because it creates a structure not only for learning but also within which a better life can be made.

Your book ban is making it harder for prisoners to access education's transformative power. I have witnessed this at close quarters and urge you to review this policy and once again allow the magic of books back into prisons.

Professor Les Back

5. [http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=18](http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/page.php?entryID=18)
6. [http://magiclantern.gold.ac.uk/podcasts/sociology/sonicpostcards/postcard4done.mp3](http://magiclantern.gold.ac.uk/podcasts/sociology/sonicpostcards/postcard4done.mp3)
Anon (2014-08-11 20:30:10)
Your otherwise excellent letter is weakened by the statement about books never having been used to smuggle drugs into a prison. I don't know how the Howard League did their research but, as someone who works in a prison the statement is utterly false. The POA and PGA are correct in saying that books are not a security risk - but that is because they were searched thoroughly not because they weren't used as smuggling devices.

Les Back (2014-08-14 18:04:07)
I take your point and stand corrected as you've witnessed this first hand. However, during the period when I was sending books to students through the post and they were getting through it seemed the security vetting procedure was actually very tough. Is this a matter of resources in a time of financial cuts in the prison service? The band on books just seems vindictive to me. You might be interested to listen to a interview with one of our students that has just been posted on the Goldsmiths website. http://magiclantern.gold.ac.uk/podcasts/sociology/sonicpostcards/lifeofthemind.mp3 Thanks for taking the time to comment. Les Back

Time is always running out (2014-08-07 08:00)

I got briefly obsessed last year by [1]the observation that at a rate of one book a week between the ages of 5 and 80, it will only be possible to read 3,900 books in a lifetime. This is a little over one tenth of one percent of all the books currently in print – obviously an overall figure that continues to grow at an astonishing rate. Around the same time, I came across this odd little insight into the understanding AC Grayling has of the finitude of his own life:

As a shake-up, the philosopher AC Grayling is fond of reminding people that the average span of human life is less than 1,000 months. “If a third of them you are asleep and a third you’re in Tesco’s,” he says, “the other third, about 25 years, is left to you to live well.”


Much as I despise the man, it’s an orientation towards life which resonates with me. The reason that quantifying the number of books it will likely be possible to read in a lifetime struck such a chord with me (apart from the fact that I don't naturally tend to think quantitatively and it just hadn't occurred to me to place a number on it) was because I’d long noticed that my ‘to read’ list was becoming ever more problematic. At first it was a list. Then it was a stack. Now it’s a heap. This is a photo I took around last Christmas:

[3]
Six months on and the heap is twice the size. Or perhaps it's two heaps – I'm foregoing the impulse to make a geeky philosophers joke about the sorites paradox... my point is that it keeps growing and that this invites explanation. It may just be that I have a 'book problem'. In some ways I clearly do, both in terms of my continuing to acquire them at a rate faster than I can read them and the problem of determining the 'right' thing to be reading when there's so much from which to choose e.g. I recently found myself obsessively reading a 600 page biography unrelated to any research work at a point where I was in the final stages of writing a paper and should have been focusing my reading upon that task. Prioritisation is hard and so too is committing to reading a particular book when there's always a further pile waiting for me that I've already selected from a much broader pool of cultural variety.

However I think this example from my own life reflects a broader process. As soon as I try and write about my 'book problem' seriously I inevitably start using words like 'prioritisation', 'commitment', 'selection' and 'variety' – invoking social theoretical concepts that have been integral to my PhD research. Part of the problem is that my capacity to identify potential reading material and my inclination to select it both tend to increase with my reading and associated practices. I become more attuned to following references. As I read more, I read more literary publications (like the LRB and the culture bit of the New Statesman which I tended to skip in my early 20s) and identify more books to read, in turn inclining me to attend further to these sources of information about new books to read. The frame of reference I bring to books expands and so too does the range of what I extract from the books I read, broadening the range of things I might read in future and what I might take from them.

This is all taking place against the background of a necessarily finite lifespan. Time is literally running out. However our awareness of this finitude is always conceptually and culturally mediated. This might be a statement of the obvious but I think it's very interesting to consider the implications of this for the variable ways in which we
understand that finitude at different points in our life. One interesting way of looking at this is to consider ways in which it can be represented. This illustration from [5]Wait But Why represents this in a way I find very powerful:

My point is that there is an *existential challenge* objectively encountered in the finitude of the human lifespan but that philosophical approaches to understanding this can often be insufficiently sensitive to the social and cultural factors shaping the ways in which people within a given social setting actually attempt to elude or build upon these inherent constraints. I think the mundane challenges of ‘time running out’ offer a very interesting way in which we can connect the *everyday dimension* to temporal finitude to the *biographical dimension* inherent in the limitation of the lifespan. I’ve talked about my ‘books problem’ simply because it’s familiar to me rather than it necessarily being
a particularly typical or interesting example of what I'm suggesting is a broader trend.

However the lifespan itself is not fixed. Beyond the social and cultural factors shaping how it is understood, we have the similarly social and cultural factors shaping its temporal extension. Social institutions, relations, practices and ideas all contribute to conditioning the extent of the lifespan in complex and interconnected ways. So too does technology, though I’d suggest never in a way that can be abstracted from the relational framework within which technological interventions are enacted (the closest I can think of in relation to this is a nuclear destruction launched by one person accidentally pressing a button).

The social theorist Harmut Rosa distinguishes between the time structures of everyday life, life time and that of the epoch in which they live. He argues that all persons continually struggle towards a degree of synchrony between these three dimensions to temporal experience. I think this is a really helpful perspective through which to address these issues. It’s from this perspective that I find the analysis of things like my ‘book problem’ so interesting – in identifying the mechanisms which lead to the intensification of the problem rather than its abatement, we get a fine-grained perspective on the temporal dynamics of the broader social system.

It also helps us understand what goes on in people’s lives when the struggle for synchrony backfires. A sudden awareness of mortality at the biographical level inculcates hedonism (live faster, live more) that proves destabilising at the level of everyday life. Or a concern to do work that matters leads to a day-to-day routines deprived of pleasures and so proves unsustainable. The strategies people adopt in the face of this central question (“my life is short, how do I make the most of it?”) necessarily play out in the three dimensions that Rosa delineates even if the person themselves does not recognise them. In fact many of the interesting unintended consequences emerge from the frequent disjuncture between the objectivity of these temporal dimensions and their subjective (mis)recognition. Things like productivity culture and self-help books can also be analysed in relation to a struggle for synchrony, as can their many failings. So too can religious practices which regiment time and social institutions which provide temporal structures that negate the existential pangs provoked by the absence of synchrony. Our attempts to get out of the mess of life are more temporally complex than we tend to realise.

1. [http://markcarrigan.net/2013/12/09/1000-months-in-which-you-can-read-4000-books/](http://markcarrigan.net/2013/12/09/1000-months-in-which-you-can-read-4000-books/)
2. [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9035892/A-C-Grayling-the-master-of-positive-thinking.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/9035892/A-C-Grayling-the-master-of-positive-thinking.html)
3. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/heap.jpg](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/heap.jpg)
5. [http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/05/life-weeks.html](http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/05/life-weeks.html)
6. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/weeks-1.png](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/weeks-1.png)

Realist evaluation, mechanisms and theoretical minimalism (2014-08-08 08:00)

At IACR earlier today I heard two interesting talks about [1]Realist Evaluation. I had previously had a vague idea about what this involved, largely through encountering citations from Pawson in other texts, without ever having really grasped what it was in a concrete sense. Now I have, I’m very interested. All the more so because of the number of people who have told me today about the excitement that realist evaluation has generated in environments that one would have expected to be utterly hostile to critical realism more broadly. So there’s an interesting question about how realist evaluation has proved so amenable to circulation outside of its initial domain. Certainly, some of this must be a matter of networks, in terms of the original generation of those advocating this approach and the patterns
of work stemming from their own engagements. I imagine it’s also a matter of analytical value – I was particularly interested to hear how realist evaluation appears to those from an applied background working within a positivistic intellectual culture. It sounds like the conceptual distinctions it draws are crucial – realist evaluation critiques what positivist empiricism does but also explains how its own function corrects these mistakes by going deeper into the case.

However the aspect that interested me most were the questions about intellectual self-presentation. Firstly, in terms of the limitations upon the acceptability of realist evaluation that some people encounter e.g. the approach is becoming fashionable but the results may still be somewhat alien on an intellectual level to funders. Secondly, in terms of what strikes me as the terminological minimalism which characterises the approach and its proponents. Take this extract about mechanism in a [2] paper I just found by Pawson and Tilley:

The concept is best grasped through an illustration. The ‘primary school breakfast club’ is a very popular measure used to boost early education performance, often included within community regeneration initiatives. The key point here is that ‘the measure’ is not the basic unit of analysis for understanding causation. A measure may work in different ways or, in realist parlance, they may trigger different mechanisms (M1, … , Mn). A breakfast club may aid classroom attentiveness by offering the kids a ‘nutritious kick-start’ (M1) to the day, which they might not otherwise get. And/or it may act as a ‘summoning point’ (M2) to prevent kids loafing or absconding or misbehaving in the chaotic period before school. And/or it may act as an ‘energy diffuser’ (M3) to soak up gossip and boisterousness before formalities commence.

And/or it may enable to school to present a more ‘informal face’ (M4) to those uninspired by classroom and book learning. And/or it may act as a ‘pre-assembly’ (M5) enabling teachers to troubleshoot potential problems and seed the day’s schedules. And/or it might give parents and school staff an ‘informal conduit’ (M6) to mix and offer mutual support. Mechanisms also explain a programme’s failure, of course, so to this list we might add some adverse processes. It may act as an opportunity for ‘messing about’ (M7) if only ancillary staff are on duty; it might provide an unintended ‘den of iniquity’ (M8) for planning the day’s misdeeds: or it might prove a ‘cultural barrier’ (M9) because inappropriate food is served, and so on.

I’ve long thought that mechanism is a powerful concept. In fact encountering the notion of a generative mechanism, in virtue of the operation of which events unfold in the way that they do, played a crucial role in winning me over to critical realism in spite of my initial scepticism. Even the more instrumental conception of mechanism found in analytical sociology appeals to me because once you start to think in terms of mechanisms, it’s hard to understand how anyone could be satisfied by a form of social inquiry entirely absent of them, even if you may disagree with the way in which other people conceptualise them.

But it can also be a hard concept to explain to those who don’t think in these terms. They are also often not written about clearly and, in spite of what I’m suggesting is their analytical pay off, I can understand why this is the case. In my own work I’ve tended to use ‘mechanism’ as a vague concept I employ in my provisional analysis but then articulate in other terms at the point of writing. The reason for this is partly because I don’t have the confidence that I can write clearly in terms of mechanisms while also being accurate. Or sometimes, if I’m honest, it’s because what
I'm bestowing the 'mechanism' title to actually just reflects a causal hunch. Or my own thinking is much vaguer than I would like it to be.

It's in terms of this experience that I find the clarity of Pawson and Tilley's writing about mechanisms so striking. What I see as problematic, using it to designate the fact that I think I've identified operative causal power of some form, seems utterly fine when I encounter it in their writing. I find it problematic in my own because of the vast meta-theoretical edifice in virtue of which the concept is meaningful to me. But perhaps this is a feature of my own intellectual biography rather than anything that should exercise normative power in relation to my own writing? Could this be a more general mistake i.e. assuming that the theoretical considerations that led you to come to have accepted a concept should figure into your applications of that concept?

I look forward to reading more of Pawson and Tilley's writing and I'm interested to develop my understanding of the style they write in. The small amount I've looked through in the last hour or so certainly fits with the effusive complements I heard about their style during the conference today. I'm also intuitively of the opinion that this style is, in a very particular way, part of the reason for the success their work has enjoyed. I'm not making the rather trite claim that 'theory would be more popular if theorists wrote more clearly'. I'm suggesting there's something very specific about their particular kind of clarity which lends to their work a wider popularity than would otherwise be the case.

My suggestion is that it uses the minimum of terminology necessary to convey the conceptual distinctions which have practical implications. It's stylistic parsimony. Or at least it tends towards this. Are there many other theorists this is true of? I'm not convinced that there are. I'd like to be one of them though.


Stephen (2014-08-12 08:57:50)

Do mechanisms have simplicity or relative autonomy? Within critical realism, mechanisms belong to the real intransitive domain. But one can postulate that mechanisms belong to all three levels of stratified reality: the intransitive, the actual and the observer (empirical). One is then free to create mechanisms to observe the real as others are free to both create and evaluate their mechanisms. Mechanisms that become widely adopted and institutionalized then become part of the intransitive domain. Simplicity is then not an attribute of mechanisms, as they can become complex and embedded, but (more importantly) simplicity is an attribute of elementary human action that can be explained is clear and simple terms but this can get lost in an overemphasis on the intransitive domain. The key feature of mechanisms is their relative and initial autonomy from the intransitive domain.

The origins of methodological genocide: "all science is becoming data science" (2014-08-09 06:36)

All science is becoming data science. Therefore data scientists have a lot of power in this regime [stifles a laugh] It's a great time to be a data geek.

This is an interesting aside made by Bill Howe of Washington University in an early lecture on Coursera’s Introduction 2840
to Data Science MOOC. I take this to be the point that Emma Uprichard was making when she wrote about 'methodological genocide' last year in [1]Discover Society:

At the risk of sounding a bit melodramatic, the big data hype is generating, for want of a better term, a methodological genocide. To my mind, it even has a flavour of being a disciplinary genocide. It is fierce and it is violent, and social scientists – and especially sociologists – need to fight back. Certainly, if we are going to meaningfully interrogate the social systems and structures that make up the social world, we will need to improve our quantitative skills. I know, I'm sorry to say it, I know this doesn't always go down well among many social scientists, especially among those in the UK. But whilst I do think that one of the ways we will need to fight back is to increase our quantitative skills – we need to be clear about the kind of social science we move forward to [....]

Many new statistical techniques used to crunch through big data involve 'shrinking' the data. This not only 'dilutes' the importance of extreme cases – the outliers – within large datasets, but also focuses the analysis on the masses in the middle. One of the key strengths of social research and sociological research in particular is a sensibility to social divisions, minority groups, oppressed and silenced voices. In order to remain strong in these areas, we must absolutely remain attentive to the methodological techniques that go some way to erase extreme cases, pockets of extreme difference. Another big way of organising data is through data mining, machine learning and pattern recognition. At the core of those approaches, there are issues such as classification – who or what goes into which group and how are units of analysis measured as 'similar' or 'different'? How should we count in a way that allows for meaningful counts over time? How we shape the social through our counting and classifying are highly political and ethical issues.


The only difference is that Howe thinks this is great. ‘Soft sciences’ are becoming ‘hard sciences’. Intellectual life is transforming and he finds himself at the centre of it. There are different ways in which the emerging field can be understood in intellectual terms. I find the emergence of data science in this context, within the university and outside of it, extremely interesting. It partly represents an interdisciplinary point of convergence driven by socio-technical innovation, the opportunities for inquiry facilitated by it and the technical challenges posed by them:

[3]
I honestly think it’s hard to overstate the significance of this for the Social Sciences as a whole. Much of their future development will hinge on the dynamics underlying the second venn diagram. I find it easy to imagine a future where computational social science becomes established as the vanguard of the social sciences, with disciplinary boundaries between them a thing of the past, buttressed by entrenched pockets of more discipline bound enquiry which nonetheless are implicitly and explicitly supportive of the computational social science project on an epistemic and methodological level. Meanwhile qualitative sociologists, anthropologists and other hold outs become less part of the diagram and more a circle on to themselves, hopefully doing sustained research in an interesting way but with the risk that they become preoccupied by hurling critique at the shiny and well-funded convergent project over the road from them. Hopefully I’m wrong because this seems like it would be a suboptimal state of affairs on many levels.

Another interesting thing about data science is the emergence of the ‘data scientist’ as an aspirational category. Not to worry though because [4]You can be a Data Scientist too!
Again there is socio-technical innovation, the opportunities they provide (for business) and the technical challenges posed by their exploitation. It builds upon the existing occupational role of the business analyst, adds additional skills and valorises 'curiosity'. It is the sexiest job of the 21st century:

Goldman is a good example of a new key player in organizations: the "data scientist." It's a high-ranking professional with the training and curiosity to make discoveries in the world of big data. The title has been around for only a few years. (It was coined in 2008 by one of us, D.J. Patil, and Jeff Hammerbacher, then the respective leads of data and analytics efforts at LinkedIn and Facebook.) But thousands of data scientists are already working at both start-ups and well-established companies. Their sudden appearance on the business scene reflects the fact that companies are now wrestling with information that comes in varieties and volumes never encountered before. If your organization stores multiple petabytes of data, if the information most critical to your business resides in forms other than rows and columns of numbers, or if answering your biggest question would involve a "mashup" of several analytical efforts, you've got a big data opportunity.

The corporate demand for data science has led some to bemoan a 'big data brain drain' in higher education. In so far as there's lots of money to be made in corporate data science and relatively little within the universities, with even the massive funding provision for data science research encouraging academic entrepreneurism but having little impact upon the academic career structure, it can't be separated from the broader trajectory of the labour market in an age of austerity. Nor too can we adequately understand the emergence of data science if we don't consider it in the light of the cultural ascendancy of quants and the entrenchment of the quants within the finance
industry and beyond.

I’m also intrigued about what drives these interdisciplinary trends at the level of intellectual biography. For instance physics is well represented within data science, as well as often being invoked in the discourse surrounding it as an illustration of the scientific rigour characterising data science. There has been a sharp increase in Physics PhDs since 2000 in the US ([9]source) - to what extent is this being driven by newly graduated post-doctoral physicists who, either out of curiosity or necessity, go marauding into other areas of inquiry because advancement in their own field is either unlikely or undesirable?

Source: American Institute of Physics http://www.aip.org/sites/default/files/statistics/graduate/trendsphaps-p-12.2.pdf

[...] 2014, Mark Carrington discussed the insurgence of data science and the methodological genocide in [...] 

Stretching the Sociological Imagination: A Conference in Honour of John Eldridge (2014-08-09 08:00)

Glasgow University will be hosting a conference in honour of John Eldridge on 16th-17th September. Entitled ‘Stretching the Sociological Imagination’ it will include papers inspired by John’s work in the fields of social theory, work and industry and the media. The event is free to attend.

Confirmed speakers include John MacInnes (Edinburgh), Kevin Williams (Swansea), Tim Strangleman (Kent), Tony Elger (Warwick), David Miller (Bath), Greg Philo (Glasgow), Bridget Fowler (Glasgow), Howard Davis (Bangor) and Robert Moore (Liverpool).

For details on how to register and the conference programme, see our conference website: [1] https://eldridgeconference2014.wordpress.com/.

We hope to see you there. Please feel free to pass on details of the conference to anyone who may be interested.

Given the increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact of social research, it is inevitable that researchers are looking towards the opportunities offered by social media. This one day course offers an accessible introduction to the use of blogging and twitter, encompassing the possibilities they offer for social researchers and walking you through best practice.

You will learn through a combination of presentations, informal discussions and practical sessions, including pre-course reading.

Course content covers:

- An introduction to blogging
- An introduction to twitter
- Making an impact with blogging and twitter
- Integrating blogging and twitter into your working life

Who is it aimed at?

This is an entry level course, which assumes no familiarity with blogging or twitter.

You will find this course useful if you:

- conduct social research
- have responsibility for impact and public engagement
- communicate findings to policymakers and practitioners
Learning outcomes:

By the end of the programme you will be able to:

- understand the characteristics of blogging and micro-blogging
- get started in a practical and engaged way with Twitter and Wordpress formulate your own strategic plan to use these services effectively
- connect effectively with others online in a way which serves these ends measure the impact of your online engagement
- participate enjoyably in the emerging academic blogosphere and twittersphere

[1]Book here


Call for Contributions – Special Issue on Sexism (2014-08-10 08:00)

This special issue of New Formations will explore sexism: a problem with a name.

Sexism is a term that feminists have used to explain how social inequalities between men and women are reinforced or upheld through norms, values and attitudes. To use the term 'sexism' is, however, always to be involved in a political struggle or contestation. Marilyn Frye begins her important essay 'Sexism' with the following observation: ‘like most women coming to a feminist perception of themselves and the world, I was seeing sexism everywhere and trying to make it perceptible to others’ (1984: 17). Frye suggests that making sexism ‘perceptible to others’ becomes a project because many ‘would not see that what I declared to be sexist was sexist.’ In this special issue we hope to explore why making sexism ‘perceptible to others’ remains an important and difficult feminist project. How does sexism get reproduced? How are sexist attitudes or values institutionalised? To what extent are we witnessing new forms of sexism, for example, 'retro-sexism' (Judith Williamson), 'hipster or ironic sexism' (Alissa Quart), 'enlightened sexism' (Susan J. Douglas), or ‘critical sexism’ (Sara Ahmed)? What role does the media...
have in reinforcing or challenging sexism? In asking these questions, we hope for contributions that explore how sexism intersects with racism, homophobia, transphobia, ageism, ableism as well as class inequalities. We anticipate consideration of how feminists can intervene in the reproduction of sexism with bell hooks’ affirmation of feminism as ‘the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression’ (2000: viii, emphasis added), kept firmly in mind.

Why sexism, why now? On the one hand, we have witnessed an increasing attention to the problem of sexism from feminist activists and journalists as we can witness, for example, in the Everyday Sexism project. On the other hand, although critiques of sexism as structural to disciplines were central to early feminist work in the academy, the concern with sexism, or the use of the vocabulary of sexism seems to have, if anything, receded within feminist theories. In this special issue we invite and enact a redirection of feminist theory towards the question of sexism. We also welcome contributions that question as well as show the utility of sexism as a name or framework; that ask how sexism might relate to other terms that feminists have used to explain gender inequalities (such as patriarchy, masculinism or phallocentrism); and that explore how sexism manifests in relation to heterosexism as well as cissexism.

The special issue is premised on the claim that thinking about sexism is a way of generating new feminist knowledge and understanding.

Contributions could cover the following issues:

- Institutional Sexism
- Sexism and Language
- Academic Sexism
- Sexism and Science
- Sexism and Intersectionality
- Phenomenologies of Sexism
- Everyday Sexism
- Sexism and the Media (including Social Media)
- Sexism as/and Technology
- Reproducing Sexism

Deadline for papers (maximum 8000 words) March 16 2015.

Please email your paper as a word document to Sara Ahmed (s.ahmed@gold.ac.uk) who is the editor of this special issue and on the editorial board for New Formations. You are welcome to get in touch with Sara before the deadline to discuss your contribution.

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**Self-tracking, governmentality and social control (2014-08-11 08:00)**

This post on [1]Org Theory, which makes reference to a superb [2]New Yorker article about the Fitbit, nicely captures an ambivalence about self-tracking which I share:

In fact, there is a whole [3]Quantified Self movement, complete with conferences and meet-up groups.
One obvious take on this is that we’re all becoming perfect neoliberal subjects, rational, entrepreneurial and self-disciplined.

For me, though, what is fun and appealing as a choice — and I do think it’s a choice — becomes repellent and dehumanizing when someone pushes it on me. So while I’ll happily track my work hours and tally my steps just because I like to — and yes, I realize that’s kind of weird – I hate the idea of judging tenure cases based on points for various kinds of publications, and am uneasy with UPS’s use of data [4] to ding drivers who back up too frequently.

It’s possible that I’m being inconsistent here. But really, I think it’s authority I have the problem with, not quantification.


I’m theoretically resistant to attempts to reduce self-tracking to neoliberal governmentality. Partly this is because I’m increasingly [6] unsure what this actually means beyond saying that the technology socialises people into forms of self-management conducive to the demands of the socio-economic system – sounds weirdly functionalist when you rephrase it like this, no? I’m also aware of the role self-monitoring plays in my own life, using apps like [7] Goalstreaks, [8] iDoneThis, Day One Journal and my Nike Fuel Band. Though with the exception of the latter there’s a predominately qualitative aspect to this practice, even if Goalstreaks is superficially a matter of counting.

This obviously constitutes a form of self-work. What I object to is the fundamentally crypto-functionalist interpretation of this self-work that I increasingly see the notion of governmentality as entailing. However the widespread diffusion of digital self-tracking practices – I use the qualifier ‘digital’ because self-tracking practices are obviously not new – throughout the populace clearly has political, social and cultural implications which it would be hard to make sense of adequately without considering the power relationships contributing to them and ensuing from them.

This is why I’m ambivalent about self-tracking. Like the author of the Org Theory post quoted above, it’s authority I have the problem with, not quantification (or tracking). But when you consider the trajectory of self-tracking (and gamification for that matter) it looks likely to become increasingly difficult to separate one from the other. I’m particularly interested in how self-tracking might be introduced in workplaces, in the form of socio-technical systems of (pseudo-) participatory tracking and ranking, with the intention of mobilising [9] ‘discretionary effort’:

Discretionary effort is the level of effort people could give if they wanted to, but above and beyond the minimum required. Many organizations manage performance in such a way that motivates employees to do only enough to get by and avoid getting in trouble (negative reinforcement). Typically, these organizations manage by exception, providing consequences for worker’s performance only when it falls below the standard or minimum required. This approach gets immediate results, but just enough behavior to stop the threats and the potential for other negative consequences in the near future. It suppresses discretionary effort because there’s nothing in it for people to do more than the minimum required.

In this sense, it’s easy to see the appeal of self-tracking as technologies of motivation that can be deployed in the workplace. I’m (slowly) working my way through some of the literature on digital labour and it’s proving useful to begin to think through the implications of this.

8. https://idonethis.com/home/

Thoughtful post Mark! I would be very interested in discovering more about apps that people use and map these onto the classification provided by Deb.

Bloggers blogging about blogging (2014-08-11 18:24)

An interesting post on patter’s site reflects upon the tendency of bloggers to blog about blogging. This is something I do a lot and I’m not alone in this. Why is it so common? A useful answer to that question can be pursued by considering the recurrent themes which patter identifies in blogs about blogging:

I’ve also noticed that a lot of blogging about blogging has common themes:

(1) advocacy blogging about blogging – readers are encouraged to think about blogging and given reasons why it is a Good Thing
(2) instructional blogging about blogging – readers are provided with a set of handy hints about how to start and manage a blog
(3) reflective blogging about blogging – writers consider their own blogging habits, be they fast/slow, regular/irregular, diary-like, linked to impact, absolutely unlike other forms of academic writing, career building, testing out of ideas, a way of improving other forms of academic writing and so on …


It’s a thoughtful post, as is everything else on the site. Pat’s argument is that blogging has “somehow legitimated,
promoted and extended an interest in academic writing”. This reflects the qualities of the medium itself, with its tendency to inculcate a greater sense of agency about writing, as well as the lack of gatekeepers to control who blogs about blogging. It’s an interesting piece and it’s made me think more deeply about something I’d noticed myself gravitating towards without always been entirely clear why.


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I try to only blog about blogging when someone else asks me to blog about blogging on their blog. Example: http://artsontelevision.wordpress.com/ There are some people, strangely enough, out there who have no idea what blogging is or why we do it. For them, I try to answer some of the questions.

**Weirdly ethnomethodological magic tricks with dogs (2014-08-11 18:43)**

These are very amusing and very cute but does anyone else find the bewilderment of the animals utterly fascinating? I find it hard not to read these as almost akin to a [1]breaching experiment - the dog reveals its understanding of how the world functions by the chain of reactions which ensue from its expectations having been disrupted: "where's the treat? is it down here? is it back here? omg, what's going on!? it just vanished!"

IFRAME: [2]//www.youtube.com/embed/VEQXeLjY9ak
Perhaps unsurprisingly cats seem less willing to participate in these experiments:

2. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/VEQXeLj9ak](file://www.youtube.com/embed/VEQXeLj9ak)
3. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/okuwB9zrncg](file://www.youtube.com/embed/okuwB9zrncg)
4. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/s3Gl6T0CC2I](file://www.youtube.com/embed/s3Gl6T0CC2I)
5. [file://www.youtube.com/embed/FkTsVT2OJBk](file://www.youtube.com/embed/FkTsVT2OJBk)

The Bullshit Machine (2014-08-12 08:00)

The digital management guru [1]Umair Haque seems to be having something of a nihilistic turn. At least until you get to the end of [2]this essay, posted on his medium blog, which somewhat undermines the effect of a piece of writing I actually rather liked:
I’m bored, in short, of what I’d call a cycle of perpetual bullshit. A bullshit machine. The bullshit machine turns life into waste.

The bullshit machine looks something like this. Narcissism about who you are leads to cynicism about who you could be leads to mediocrity in what you do...leads to narcissism about who you are. Narcissism leads to cynicism leads to mediocrity...leads to narcissism.

Let me simplify that tiny model of the stalemate the human heart can reach with life.

The bullshit machine is the work we do only to live lives we don’t want, need, love, or deserve.

Everything’s work now. Relationships; hobbies; exercise. Even love. Gruelling; tedious; unrelenting; formulaic; passionless; calculated; repetitive; predictable; analysed; mined; timed; performed.

Work is bullshit. You know it, I know it; mankind has always known it. Sure; you have to work at what you want to accomplish. But that’s not the point. It is the flash of genius; the glimmer of intuition; the afterglow of achievement; the savoring of experience; the incandescence of meaning; all these make life worthwhile, pregnant, impossible, aching with purpose. These are the ends. Work is merely the means.

Our lives are confused like that. They are means without ends; model homes; acts which we perform, but do not fully experience.

Remember when I mentioned puritanical Calvinism? The idea that being bored is itself a sign of a lack of virtue—and that is, itself, the most boring idea in the world?

That’s the battery that powers the bullshit machine. We’re not allowed to admit it: that we’re bored. We’ve always got to be doing something. Always always always. Tapping, clicking, meeting, partying, exercising, networking, “friending”. Work hard, play hard, live hard. Improve. Gain. Benefit. Realize.

Hold on. Let me turn on crotchety Grandpa mode. Click.

Remember when cafes used to be full of people...thinking? Now I defy you to find one not full of people Tinder—Twitter—Facebook—App-of-the-nanosecond-ing; furiously. Like true believers hunched over the glow of a spiritualized Eden they can never truly enter; which is precisely why they’re mesmerized by it. The chance at a perfect life; full of pleasure; the perfect partner, relationship, audience, job, secret, home, career; it’s a tap away. It’s something like a slot-machine of the human soul, this culture we’re building. The jackpot’s just another coin away...forever. Who wouldn’t be seduced by that?

Winners of a million followers, fans, friends, lovers, dollars...after all, a billion people tweeting, updating, flicking, swiping, tapping into the void a thousand times a minute can’t be wrong. Can they?

And therein is the paradox of the bullshit machine. We do more than humans have ever done before. But we are not accomplishing much; and we are, it seems to me, becoming even less than that.

I recently had dinner with a close friend at the Strada restaurant in Cheltenham Spa. The dinner was fine, as was the waitress. At the end of the meal, the waitress presented me with the bill and then directed my attention to a survey that with my participation would put her in a competition for an hour’s extra wages. She didn’t say whether that ‘extra hour’s wages’ would simply be for one hour or for an extra hour applied to each day of a week, a month – for the rest of her employment? Suppose we’re talking about the simplest option – which would mean at most an extra
20 pounds? In that case, wouldn't it be more honest to have the following printed on the bill:

1. If you don't fill out the indicated survey, the waitress stays at her lowly wages

2. If you fill out this survey, the waitress gets put in a competition to raise her wages.

3. If you don't want to fill out this survey, and you don't want waitress to stay at her lowly wages, add X to your tip.

If I were provided with these options, I would probably go for (3) and justify it in my own mind as a form of charity, regarding the waitress as engaged in Strada-vetted begging, which means that my regard for the waitress reflects my regard for the restaurant's quality control. Others may judge the matter differently, and neo-liberalism invites us to explore these differences, which end up being direct judgements of the waitress and not the restaurant.

As for the restaurant, when speaking to my close friend I have referred to the survey as a 'quiz' because the restaurant 'always already' knows the right answers - at least from the standpoint of marketing. In any case, I doubt the results will be made publicly available for others to draw their own conclusions. Nevertheless, waiters and waitresses who fail to appear by name in this survey will become eligible for the chopping zone. I thus acted accordingly to keep one waitress employed – however lamely.

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Using Archives to Teach Gender (2014-08-13 08:00)

The University of Warwick's Maria do Mar and colleagues from the University of Leeds have put together this great resource on [1] using archives to teach gender. It includes an extensive collection of [2] artefacts and documents relating to gender, as well as [3] practical suggestions about how to incorporate these materials into teaching gender:

**Using archives is a fantastic way of enhancing undergraduate and postgraduate teaching on gender.** Integrating archival materials in lectures, seminars and coursework, or conducting study trips to archives, not only helps bring theories, concepts and facts to life for our students, but is also a way of supporting the extraordinary work done in feminist archives throughout the world.

And yet, in the busy-ness of everyday life in contemporary universities, it is often very hard for lecturers (and students) to find the time to explore archives and to design new learning activities using archival materials.

That is why we have created the website Using Archives to Teach Gender, which is now available at [4]http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/

This website offers a resource database with **images and descriptions of over 150 artefacts and documents** that relate to gender and feminism, and belong to the collections of the [5]Feminist Archive North and the [6]Marks & Spencer Company Archive.
This website was designed to serve as a **useful resource for lecturers and teachers who teach sessions or modules on gender and feminism**, at all levels of study, and also for **students** working on these topics. Here you can find a range of materials that will both enhance your teaching and learning, and save you time.

This includes:

- a fully searchable [7][database of images](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/images/) that you can download to use in lectures, seminars, research and coursework
- [8][practical suggestions](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/suggestions/) on how to draw on these materials and on archival collections more broadly to create **innovative classroom exercises, engaging assessment activities, and ideas for undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation projects**
- links to [9][other websites](http://www.feministarchivenorth.org.uk/north.htm) where you can find additional audiovisual and textual archive material relating to gender and feminism
- [10][recordings and material](http://alpha.marksintime.marksandspencer.com/) from our events, including presentations and discussions on the potential and challenges of using archives to teach gender

This website is one of the outcomes of a University of Leeds Student Education Fellowship-funded project **Using Archives to Teach Gender**, coordinated by Maria do Mar Pereira. Working with her on the project was a team of extraordinary student research assistants: **Eleanor Broadbent, Anna Colgan** and **Freya Potter**.

To find out more about the project, click [11][here](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/about/). To contact the research team, email Maria do Mar Pereira on [12][m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk).

*If you have suggestions of links to add to our [13][Other Useful Resources](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/otherresources/) page, or teaching activities to include in the [14][Suggestions for Teaching](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/suggestions/) page, we would be delighted to receive them and add them to the website.* Please send them to **Maria do Mar Pereira** on [15][m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk).

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10. [http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/about/](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/about/)
11. [http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/about/](http://gender-archives.leeds.ac.uk/about/)
12. [mailto:m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:m.d.m.pereira@warwick.ac.uk)
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A Conversation with Benjamin Zephaniah on Britishness (2014-08-13 08:11)

In January 2014, I interviewed the writer and Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing Benjamin Zephaniah about his thoughts on British identity and belonging to Britain. I began by informing him of my research on students’ perceptions of Britishness. My research commenced in response to calls for the teaching of Britishness by the previous Labour government in 2007/8. These calls are being echoed once again by the current coalition government requiring all schools to actively promote “British values” from September 2014.

I was keen to learn about Benjamin Zephaniah’s ideas on Britishness and British values, as I was a big fan of his poetry and writings on multicultural Britain. I had read his novel Refugee Boy with my Year Eight Class and collated their responses to learning about a young boy from Ethiopia/Eritrea, Alem Kelo. The students had been deeply moved by Alem’s story as they reflected upon the life of a refugee child in Britain.

Sadia Habib: What inspired you to write your poem The British?

Benjamin Zephaniah: People would talk about Britishness, and you had real extreme racists saying that we have got to protect this country from people who are not British, and I just thought who really is British. Everybody in these islands came from somewhere, even the early tribes, so I just thought let me have a bit of fun.

At the time it was when cookery shows were becoming really popular, and I thought I am going to use that format of a recipe. I knew that I am not going to be able to put everyone in it, yet sometimes people come up to me and say: "You missed out Trinidad or somewhere!" I had somebody say to me the other day, attacked me in the newspaper and said: "He did all that, and he never mentioned the Jews". I wrote back that in that poem I never mentioned any religion, there’s no religions mentioned at all. There’s Jews in England, there’s Jews in Jamaica, so Jews are mentioned but not their religion! It’s just one of those people who think anyone who doesn’t mention Jews is being anti-Semitic.
It was a simple need to put in a very simple way, direct way, and very fun way. You get kids at school, and teachers tell me, they get them to do their own recipe of the British, and they come up with a completely different group of nationalities.

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq13dvtZjP4 &w=560 &h=315]

Sadía Habib: Can you tell me about what Britishness actually means to you personally?

Benjamin Zephaniah: For me Britishness is being a part of these islands. I say that very carefully because I also respect Scottish people if they want to go separate. I'd be happy just to have England, and not have Britain actually. While we have this concept of Britishness, it’s being a part of these islands, and if you really want to be a part of these islands, I think by definition you have to accept multiculturalism. Not just diversity. Diversity can mean all kinds of things. Multiculturalism is what it says on the tin: Multi. Many cultures. Living together. As I alluded to before, the Celts, the Jutes, and all these people were different cultures. I come from Birmingham which was started by a tribe called the Beorma tribe, and they were seen as a very odd tribe, and they came and they settled they used to keep cows and bulls, and they had this place where they kept bulls, and that became The Bull Ring, and today it is a shopping centre.

That’s multiculturalism.

I don’t know if it’s still true now, but certainly a few years ago they were saying that the most popular food in Britain was an Indian curry. And some people thought it was a very British thing to have a curry. There are lots of other things which people think of as really British that came from somewhere. I mean what could be more British than living out in the countryside in a beautiful bungalow with a thatched roof? But where did the word ‘bungalow’ come from? Bengal, yeah. The English language also borrows from other cultures. So it’s being a part of that, that I think is Britishness. I actually think that in a very odd way, actually I don’t think it’s that odd at all, but when you hear racists saying "Britain is a white country", I think that is anti-British. Because Britain has never been fixed. Britain is like its weather – you know it’s the weather but you don’t know where it is going from one time to another. We know we are British.

I just made a film in Sheffield a few weeks ago about people complaining about Romany Gypsies, I don’t know if you saw it. People are saying "They are coming in our country, they are taking our jobs". And they are all Asian and black people. It’s actually quite British in a sense. They have settled down. I think it is negative. I’m looking at them and I am saying "People were saying that about you just ten years ago or so, and now you’ve settled and you are seeing the new immigrants coming in and you want to blame them." In a few years’ time, Romanys and Poles will be complaining about the Azerbaijanis coming in or something. It’s always happened, and we have always got over it actually. That’s why any final solution kind of sounds like Hitler stuff, anybody that thinks they can step in and do something about it is wrong, and that’s when it becomes kind of totalitarian. People start killing each other in a really big way. People come here, they settle and start complaining about the new people coming, who make friends with the old people and then they start complaining about the new people coming in. There are issues of course about services and schools, and overcrowding and other things, but there have always been those issues.

Sadía Habib: What do you think about the government’s proposals that schools should teach Britishness?

Benjamin Zephaniah: I don’t like the idea. You can teach things about Britain, and that should be just a gen-
eral part of education, but to teach British-ness... Now some people say a great symbol of Britishness is the Queen. I
don't. I think a great symbol of Britishness is all the people who have fought against monarchy... the Levellers... the
people who fought for freedom... the suffragettes. That's the tradition that fascinates me. I don't say to the other
people that your one is less important, if that is what you want to do, then let me do my one as well. So what version
of Britishness are you teaching? If you are going to teach it, you have to pick a version of Britishness.

If you are the government, and you are telling people how to teach it in schools, you are going to teach one
that suits the status quo. As part of your Britishness, are you going to teach about the British people that went to
Amritsar and massacred innocent people? I guess most likely not. Are you going to romanticise that? Are your going
to teach the real details of slavery? I know you may mention it, but as part of Britishness, as part of where we got
where we got today?

Liverpool is part of Britain. Why are certain roads in Liverpool named after slave-drivers or slave-masters?
Why have we got banks in this country that were started off during the slave trade and are a part of the great British
establishment? Are you going to teach that? I think not. In their version of Britishness, they are probably going to
teach that great comedy comes out of Liverpool, and there are banks, maybe on now and then they get it wrong, but
on the whole they are alright as they will give you a mortgage eventually! They are going to teach a very sanitised
version of the British institutions. So I don't think you can teach Britishness. And all this stuff where foreigners are
expected to swear allegiance to the Queen and all, I think it is bullshit! (Sorry for using such words!)

Some people are against state multiculturalism. I am as well, oddly enough, because the kind of multicultural-
isim I am talking about happens organically. I look at my band of musicians: I've got an Indian girl on percussion, I've
got a Chinese guy in guitar, Jamaican, an African, and two English people. I just went out and looked for the best
talent. That's what I got. I remember the first time I met the Chinese guy, and I said to him play a lead piece for me,
and he played the guitar, and it sounded kind of Chinese-y. And it was a lead. I said: "God! That's really good!" One
of the other people said: "Oh no, you are getting the tones wrong." And I said "No, he's getting them right. That's
working." That's what makes our music interesting. That's what makes our culture interesting. That's what makes
our food interesting. So the kind of multiculturalism I am interested in is the one that happens organically, happens
naturally.

Look how many black people are in America. Look how many white people are in America. And did you
know that we have more inter-racial marriages than them? Because they're separated over there. They live in their
here, I mean you can go to Bradford and see parts that are basically very Pakistani, and go to other parts and see parts
that a little more Jamaican. But on the whole, we inter-marry and we mix a lot more than most other people. Now
that's not state-sanctioned. The government doesn't say that we want so many black men to marry so many Indian
girls this year. It happens naturally. We just fall in love with each other. That's the kind of multiculturalism I'm talking
about. You know you come around to my house and you show me how to cook something, and I say let me just
dash a bit of this curry into it or whatever, and we make something new! That's different from state multiculturalism.

And so our ideas of what it is to be British should also happen organically. We should just teach the history
of these islands, real and honest history of these islands, what the British have done and achieved etc, and some-
times failed to achieve. And then let the students decide what is their idea of Britishness. I don't mind that question
being asked, but I just don't like when it is answered by the government and dictated to children. If the government
decide what it is, and this is the version we have got to teach, we just get a sanitised government-approved version.
Britishness may mean different things to different people.

Sadia Habib: If students did explore Britishness, rather than be taught a government-sanctioned sanitised ver-
Benjamin Zephaniah: Yes, that's exactly what I would promote. Let's look at some facts of what's happened in Britain. Look at the people that have come here. Let's look at the struggles of people. I mean, this is a really important question. I have raised it before but this is not really taught in schools. Because it is sometimes not in the interest of the powers-that-be to talk about it. I mean people will now talk about the suffragettes, and you'll get a bit of that somewhere in the curriculum, won't you? Because it just seems so right that women should have the vote. The interesting thing is that, and you probably know, that although the suffragette movement started in Britain, the first people to actually get the vote were in New Zealand. Do you know Shelley the poet? He wrote a poem called Mask of Anarchy...I remember when I was in school and the teacher put this poem in front of me and said to me: “Can you read it and tell me what it means?” And I remember reading a couple of lines of it and... And she gave me this verse and said: “Read a little bit of it and tell me what it means”. The bit I had to read was... I will read it very quickly:

As I lay asleep in Italy
There came a voice from over the Sea,
And with great power it forth led me
To walk in the visions of Poesy.

I met Murder on the way—
He had a mask like Castlereagh—
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven blood-hounds followed him:

All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew

Now it goes on... I remember reading it because I wanted to understand what this means. Shelley was talking about I met Murder on the Way/He had a mask like Castlereagh... Castlereagh was a British Minister at the time. Very smooth he looked, yet grim/Seven blood-hounds followed him. He had just signed a deal with seven other European countries to continue slavery. All were fat; and well they might/ Be in admirable plight. They were all looking to Britain because there was the leader, slavery country. For one by one, and two by two/ He tossed them human hearts to chew. He's talking about black people and the suffering of black people. When I learnt it years later, I thought: "My God, why didn't my teacher tell me that? Why didn't he put it in context?" Now to me this is a great British poet, at a time when if you were teaching mainstream Britishness you would say, “Britain was involved with slavery. Full stop”.

I have just been making a programme with women in Birmingham whose husbands were making the shackles for slaves, they used to make a lot of metal things in Birmingham. And they refused to sleep with their husbands until they stopped making shackles for slaves. These are women who had started to discover tea from India, and sugar from the Caribbean, you know taking tea from India and sugar from the Caribbean and making a nice British drink! But they refused to use sugar because they said it was from slavery... are they going to teach that version? That's the kind of things I want them to explore, as well as Henry the Eight and his wives and all that kind of stuff, that tells me there is a tradition in Britain of connecting with people around the world that has very little to do with government. Here is Shelley saying: "Never mind the government, the government looks like murder. The government is dealing with slavery. We are all human beings, and we want to connect with other human beings".

So my history of Britain would talk about the poets and what they really stood for. You see when those people talk about the history, they talk about the Kings and Queens, and who had sex with who, and what baby they had.
And this King and this Queen went to war with another King in Europe and they called it a World War, just because the Europeans were having wars, they called it the World War! There were parts of the world that didn't have any war. But they are so important, that when they have wars they call it a World War. But if it’s a war with Iraq, they just call it the Iraq War. Or a war with Afghanistan, they call it the Afghan war. A war with Korea, they call it the Korean war. But if it’s the Europeans at war, it’s the world! That’s just self-importance. That’s like thinking Europe is the centre of the world, and that they are so important here, and everybody else are just second class citizens of the world.

Sadia Habib: How do you think Britishness is generally portrayed currently through popular culture and media?

Benjamin Zephaniah: I think the mainstream are trying to portray Britain as civilised, as opposed to those Muslims and those other people who have really negative views on women and so on. I don’t say women are living the best of situations in some parts of the world, I know there are issues, but the idea that the western woman is completely liberated, especially the British woman, and so we need to go out there and civilise these people. Not in the war way… I know most wouldn’t say it’s colonisation again, but it is colonisation in a cultural way, although there are sometimes aspects of militarism. But most of all I would say, if you are watching mainstream media and you are not thinking too deeply about wars, you would think that British culture is obsessed with celebrity. You would think the Royal family represent us, and Kate and those others… what are their names? I can never remember their names… And you would also think England is London, or Britain is London really, if you were an outsider. It saddens me sometimes when tourists come, and they just go to London, and say: “I’ve been to England!” So the sanitised one is where the government is so democratic, and everyone is so free, and the women are so liberated, and the Royal family is so good! They wouldn’t want to mention that all over this country now we have soup kitchens, it’s one of the growing industries, and on most high streets now shops are closing down. And one shop that is not closing down, but are growing more and more are charity shops.

Sadia Habib: Charity shops and pound shops.

Benjamin Zephaniah: Yes, and pound shops. And also many money-lending shops and Wonga and so on. But they would like to tell you the City is doing well and the bankers need really big bonuses. It sounds terrible when you put them both together, doesn’t it? We know the reality of it, but the media can completely control it so that people don’t really understand how bad it is for some people. I mean it really is. I mean you live up North, I know Manchester has got its nice parts. But sometimes when you go to the smaller towns and you see the poverty there. Even in London actually. I went to Tipton the other day, just outside Birmingham, I looked at the place and I thought I would love to drag up some of the people from London and show them this place, because they would swear there is nothing like this in England. It looked like it had gone back in time…

Sadia Habib: In what way?

Benjamin Zephaniah: When I was growing up there were areas that had been bombed during the war that had never been built up, and they were still there, areas where there are no houses, just like wasteland, and closed down factories… it really makes me angry, and I do know that some people in London just don’t see it. I remember I was doing a film shoot in Stratford once, I was doing a poem about urban life or something….this was many years ago....and we found this wall that had this graffiti, anti-government graffiti and about unemployment, and we decided we would film against this backdrop. And we went away, and we came back the next day to film me and somebody had painted over the wall. Somebody made some enquiries as to why this wall was painted over, why now, when it has not been painted over for so long... Oh! The Queen was going to be driving past there! For years that wall has been there, and if the Queen drove past there, if she would have glimpsed that wall, she would have glimpsed it for
a split-second, but for that reason it was cleaned up. Not because the people needed it cleaned up. But because the Queen was driving past. And I think that’s very symbolic of the idea of Britain that some people want to feed you... a very white-washed version of Britain. But I love Britain.

Sadia Habib: You love Britain! In spite of all that? So tell me why you love Britain?

Benjamin Zephaniah: Because, as bad as it is, when I go to bed, I don’t think when I wake up there’s going to be a coup in the morning! Because, on the whole, if I fell in love with somebody and if somebody fell in love with me (that doesn’t really happen!), but if it was to happen, it wouldn’t really matter what race she was, I may there may be some family issues, but that’s got nothing to do with the culture of the country. I came from a family that was poor, very working-class, uneducated, but I am a Professor of Poetry and Creative Writing now. It’s actually unfair of people like me to go on and say this country is horrible and rotten, and there are no opportunities here... there is opportunity, and we just want better and more. And we don’t want the government to take it away from us. That’s the main point. I think a lot of our hard won freedoms and things that we fought for, that other people have fought for before us, some people want to take it away from us now.

I’ll tell you a story... can I tell you something really personal? There’s this man right... he raised me like a son. I call him “Dad”, sometimes it confuses people, they ask me how many dads have you got? Well, I’ve got two. This one was really important, because when I was a teenager going through all the teenage things he was there for me. And he looked after me all the time. He worked in Britain all his life, all his other kids... all born in Britain. He worked here... worked most of his life. I can’t think of him ever going on the dole... I can’t think of him going in hospital.... And he went over to America to retire, and while in America, he was getting old now and he got ill, and they have somebody that comes over to look after him, kind of home help, and she was robbing him of his money. She was taking his money. And in America you can get a grant and it goes directly to the home help, and she was taking the money and partying and leaving him there. As soon as we found out we went and got him, we couldn’t believe how ill he was, we brought him back here. When he arrived at Heathrow... he had to go straight to hospital. He got better, he came out, he got ill, he went in and a few days ago he died. Do you know they said he is not a British citizen? So you are going to have to pay for his hospital care. We said that he paid all his taxes here! He went to America and retired. And somebody said to him while he was there that if you need help you would need to drop your British citizenship. So he dropped his British citizenship when he was eighty or something. And they were literally holding the body and saying that we are not going to give you the dead body back until you pay! The only thing that managed to help us was because me being a well-known person went in there and said: “Shame upon you, the Health Service!” My mother worked in the Health Service since she was young! They knew that I could go public with it and they said that they were going to try and sort something out, and promised we would get the body back now, and we are going to be able to bury the body next week. You know that’s the government doing that... my dad didn’t say I am going to England because I want to die in a hospital in England. He paid into this Health Service, and all his kids were here. I genuinely can’t remember a time he went into hospital. I mean ninety-four... you have got to be strong to live to ninety-four. Over two weeks ago they turned off the machinery... they called us in and said that we have to turn off the machinery, and he will die within hours. He lived for another two weeks. The doctors were confused that he had no liver and kidneys left and he wasn’t dead. We said to the doctor that he has never been to a hospital, and he just lives, he just goes on and goes on. But because of the politicians... actually the nurses and the doctors were a little embarrassed. They knew who I was and at the moment I am being employed to try and help Black and Asian people in the West Midlands area who have HIV but who are not getting checked because of stigma in their communities... they are using me, they don’t know how, they are just talking to me at the moment, they are using me to try and reach these people. And I am looking at them and thinking you are using me, but look at what you are doing to us...(laughs).

I don’t know why I went onto that. Oh I know why, because these are the things the government wants to take away from us. This is the kind of government the country wants us to have. You see, Britishness, to me, is the
National Health Service. That’s really British. What can I say? That’s really British. When I walk down the street, if I see you, and I don’t know you, I can look at you and say to I am going to give a little of my money to your healthcare. I don’t know who you are, but I’ll put a little bit in the kitty so if anything happens to you we can take care of you. We all put a bit in... I think that is really British. That’s one institution that I think kind of represents us. But the government... well a long time ago Thatcher was saying more or less that she wanted to privatise it, I mean she never actually said she wanted to disband it but we know that’s what she wanted to do originally. When she saw the outcry from the people, she started talking about privatising parts of it... No, I think that belongs to us. We all put our money in that and it belongs to us. And they can’t come on the street and say that my dad because he retired in America, he can’t die here. Holding his body? It sounds primitive: I am going to hold your dad’s body until you give us some money! And we all pay into that. My dad paid into that. And we all benefit from it. Sorry I personalised it too much.

Sadia Habib: How do you think Britishness is perceived from a global perspective?

Benjamin Zephaniah: Well, you know I work for the British Council a lot? When I used to go around working for them, there used to be a real sense of pride. We used to go into countries that were quite totalitarian and they would hear my poetry and say: “Wow, you can say that in England!” You know, you have come in with the British Council and you have just said “Up the British government!” Yeah, we can say that, you know! Now, if you are working for the British Council, in a lot of countries you have to have protection. Yeah, we are seen like war-mongers... there has to be a level of risk assessment... even have to have a bodyguard over there. We used to...I remember working in Libya, when the politicians weren’t talking, the poets were talking...talking culturally... a long time before. A lot of the time you saw relationships were falling in this country between the British government and the Libyan government or whoever, you knew that the poets were in there working first, you know we were making the ground ready... we were building up some understanding through arts and art exchange... bringing an artist over from Libya to Britain, and sending a painter back over there, doing a poetry festival where we all got together. I call it cultural intercourse. But now you go to these countries and it’s like: “What are you guys doing? Why are you attacking these people? Why are you saying you are so good? Why are you saying you are better than us? Why is your civilisation better than us? Our civilisation goes back hundreds and hundreds of years but you just want to bomb it. And I can understand why they say that.

It’s a real shame. We used to be so proud sometimes to go to some places and represent Britain. And it’s really weird that it’s Tony Blair that went down this track of following America. I remember once in Russia this guy, as I was walking past him, this guy shouted something in Russian, and he was very aggressive, and I asked the people who were with me about what he had said. They said that he had said: “Piss off home, Americans!” (laughs) So I said: "Hold on, let me go back...". And we went back and I said to the translator: “Tell him I’m not American, I am British.” (laughs) And they told him I was British, and he called: “Oh yeah, Maaanchester Uniteddddd! Yeah! Yeah!” And he tried to put his hand around me you know. I mean this is some time back. “Shakespeare! Yeah yeah! Manchester United! Shake-es-peare! Reggae!” Completely different! And those were the main themes: America were the big aggressors, and now we are just seen as America’s poodle.

Sadia Habib: How do you see the relationship between whiteness and Britishness that certain factions like the EDL try to promote?

Benjamin Zephaniah: I like to say to them: “What is your idea of whiteness?” Go and get your DNA checked. I did propose it once as a television programme, but somebody told me that there is something similar where they checked a racist’s DNA and they found out he has Algerian blood in him or something. Like I said, their idea of Britishness is anti-British because it is anti-change, it is anti-progressive, and it is anti-compassion. It is inward-looking.
It's not creative. And it's racist. Now when the Celts came here, they came with a culture, when the Jutes came here, they came with a culture, when the Beorma tribe came here, they came with a culture. They tolerate them because they think they were all white, but they weren't all white. Romans had black people with them. I know Romans were conquerors as opposed to settlers, but they had black people with them. And there were black people here a long time before the Windrush. In a way I feel sorry for them because they are denying themselves the true history of this country and they are limiting their possibilities. There was a crazy wonderful story the other day on the internet, you might have seen it, this guy was a BNP member and he had BNP tattooed on his forehead, then he fell in love with a black girl. You saw him go and get the tattoo removed, and it was really quite moving, and he talked about when you love somebody, you just love somebody and what he has done in the past is just rubbish. And he said he realised how shallow he had been. You could see him really opening up.

I was on radio once a long time ago talking about when I was fighting skinheads in the streets of East London, then a couple of days later I got a handwritten letter, four sheets of A4 on both sides, from a Buddhist monk who said that he was one of the racist skinheads that used to fight me. Now he was a Buddhist monk, and he said his eyes had opened. I could almost feel the tears on the page. Because he was very open with me, and explained to me why he got involved with that crowd, and what was going on at the time.

So the sad thing is what are they doing to themselves, and what are they doing to their children, with this idea of whiteness, this idea of pure, this idea of what it is to be British is so ... I mean there's lots of nasty words you could call it... but ... it's just so limiting, it's not setting themselves free. That's the crazy thing. It's setting themselves up in a prison of their own making.

[nbox type="notice"] Sadia Habib is a doctoral candidate currently researching British identity at Goldsmiths, University of London. Prior to this she taught English at Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 in Manchester and London.[/nbox]


Shaista Khan (2014-08-13 11:04:09)
An excellent interview the government can try to control and dictate what should be taught and how it should be taught but to what lengths.

Affy (2014-08-14 22:19:07)
I found this interview really fascinating, it makes you think so deeply about what it means to be "British". Thank you!

Angela Kennedy (2014-11-29 12:57:40)
This was a most interesting interview, full of nuanced insights by Benjamin: to the point I personally would use this as a teaching aid for students at undergraduate level (though I'd argue that it would be an effective resource as part of any 'learning about Britishness' in school). I do feel, however, that there were possible problems in how he categorizes gender inequalities and stratification generally, but perhaps especially in Britain. There sadly remains the myth that gender inequality and, crucially, 'jeopardies' from gender stratification, are at most minor in the UK, that women here are 'liberated'. But feminisation of poverty; violence against women; sexual 'colonisation'; unequal pay and career opportunities; and devaluing
of the caring labour women in which women are most often engaged are just some of the major ways in which women's lives, health, well-being and opportunities are endangered, every day, in the UK, whatever their age, class, race or ethnicity, health/impairment status, sexuality, body size, whether cis/trans/queer, or other form of stratification to which they are subject. It wasn't clear to me that Benjamin understood this, but this may have been an effect of a informal conversation where he had a lot of interesting and useful comments to make and that particular point got lost. On the other hand, I am often dismayed at how many men fail to check their male privilege, and I would hope this wasn't the case with Benjamin.

Hi Angela, Thank you for taking the time to read and comment. I would not use all the interview with school students, perhaps only some sections. I love the idea of using at undergraduate level. Regarding Benjamin’s comments on gender inequalities/stratification, I too hope (and think) he was not neglecting the importance of it, I think like you said in the conversation, his mind was probably consumed by so many different angles/aspects of Britishness, that sometimes some points were not fully elaborated upon. I would like to think he does check his male privilege. Would you be able to let me know which particular statement(s) struck you as problematic, and maybe if I am able to, I can ask him to clarify. Thank you again.

Angela Kennedy (2014-11-30 16:56:37)
Hi Sadia, thank you very much indeed for discussing this with me. The comments I was concerned about are these: "I think the mainstream are trying to portray Britain as civilised, as opposed to those Muslims and those other people who have really negative views on women and so on. I don’t say women are living the best of situations in some parts of the world, I know there are issues, but the idea that the western woman is completely liberated, especially the British woman, and so we need to go out there and civilise these people." Obviously this was part of an oral conversation - where syntax and sentence construction is a lot different from written, so it may very well be that what I’ve tentatively interpreted is not what Benjamin meant. It looked to me that he was (possibly) accepting the notion that ‘the western woman is completely liberated, especially the British woman’ and that his problem was with a notion that British women’s liberation needed to be ‘spread’ towards the ‘uncivilised’. But I do accept (and hope) that it is completely possible he was problematizing the whole notion that British women are somehow ‘completely liberated’ and living in ‘the best of situations’. It would be good to get that clarified.

» Our most popular posts of 2015 The Sociological Imagination (2015-12-31 08:01:30)
[...] A Conversation with Benjamin Zephaniah on Britishness [...]
There is no deadline for submissions. The idea is to create a living resource which grows over time, highlighting sociologists who haven’t received the recognition you believe they deserve and encouraging debate about the history of the discipline and what it means to have made a contribution to it.

All submissions should be 1000-3000 words and include a suggested image that is licensed for reuse. References should be included at the end of each post in a briefly annotated form, with the intention of sign posting an interested reader keen to navigate a body of work they had previously been unfamiliar with. Please include a 100 word first-person personal biography with submissions.

E-mail mark@markcarrigan.net to contribute an article or discuss a potential contribution.

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1. http://alternativehistoryofsociology.org/?page_id=4
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Buzzfeed on The Stuff White People Say (2014-08-14 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/A1zLzWtULig
2868
Big Data and the Future of the Social Sciences (2014-08-15 08:00)

In this podcast, [1]Professor Patrick Dunleavy talks about how big data will affect the future of the social sciences. Say goodbye to academic siloes as we enter into a new age of cross/multi/and inter-disciplinary research. In this changing landscape, the old boundaries between physical, social and data science disintegrate. Here Professor Dunleavy talks about the Social Science of Human-Dominated and Human-Influenced Systems given as part of the Annual Lecture series at the Academy of Social Sciences.
An introduction to blogging and twitter for social researchers (2014-08-16 08:00)
Given the increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact of social research, it is inevitable that researchers are looking towards the opportunities offered by social media. This one day course offers an accessible introduction to the use of blogging and twitter, encompassing the possibilities they offer for social researchers and walking you through best practice.

You will learn through a combination of presentations, informal discussions and practical sessions, including pre-course reading.

Course content covers:

- An introduction to blogging
- An introduction to twitter
- Making an impact with blogging and twitter
- Integrating blogging and twitter into your working life

Who is it aimed at?

This is an entry level course, which assumes no familiarity with blogging or twitter.

You will find this course useful if you:

- conduct social research
- have responsibility for impact and public engagement
- communicate findings to policymakers and practitioners

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the programme you will be able to:

- understand the characteristics of blogging and micro-blogging
• get started in a practical and engaged way with Twitter and WordPress formulate your own strategic plan to use these services effectively

• connect effectively with others online in a way which serves these ends measure the impact of your online engagement

• participate enjoyably in the emerging academic blogosphere and twittersphere

[1]Book here


Call for contributions: An Alternative History of Sociology (2014-08-17 08:00)

This [1]open and web based project aims to contribute to a rethinking of the sociological canon and debates about the past and future of the discipline. Would you like to contribute to An Alternative History of Sociology? There’s more information [2]here about the project and its aims. Though it’s still in an early stage, we’d be interested in receiving:

1. Biographical accounts of historical figures
2. Narrative summaries of historical figures and their work
3. Narrative summaries of contemporary figures and their work
4. Personal accounts of the constraints of the sociological canon and the broadening of intellectual horizons
5. Analysis of the broader methodological and historical questions entailed by the project

There is no deadline for submissions. The idea is to create a living resource which grows over time, highlighting sociologists who haven’t received the recognition you believe they deserve and encouraging debate about the history of the discipline and what it means to have made a contribution to it.
All submissions should be 1000-3000 words and include a suggested image that is licensed for reuse. References should be included at the end of each post in a briefly annotated form, with the intention of sign posting an interested reader keen to navigate a body of work they had previously been unfamiliar with. Please include a 100 word first-person personal biography with submissions.

E-mail mark@markcarrigan.net to contribute an article or discuss a potential contribution.

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1. http://alternativehistoryofsociology.org/?page_id=4
3. http://alternativehistoryofsociology.org/CC%20BY-NC-ND%204.0

The Philosophy of Data Science (2014-08-18 08:00)

This is a series of interviews I’m conducting for the LSE Impact blog:

[1]

[2]Rob Kitchin: “Big data should complement small data, not replace them.”
In this first interview, Rob Kitchin elaborates on the specific characteristics of big data, the hype and hubris surrounding its advent, and the distinction between data-driven science and empiricism.

[3]

[4]Evelyn Ruppert: “Social consequences of Big Data are not being attended to”
For the second interview, Evelyn Ruppert discusses creating an interdisciplinary forum to analyse the major changes
in our relations to data, as subjects, citizens and researchers.

[5] Deborah Lupton: Liquid metaphors for Big Data seek to familiarise technology
Deborah Lupton talks about how sociologists are involved in making sense of and positioning big data. Also of interest to social researchers are the nature metaphors used to discuss data, such as ‘flows’ and ‘flood’

[6]

[7] Susan Halford: “Semantic web innovations are likely to have implications for us all”
Co-director of the Web Science Institute, Susan Halford underlines the necessity of broad interdisciplinarity as well as further technical training to engage in depth with the web as it evolves in different ways.

More to follow soon!


Self-tracking and social control: what would techno-fascism look like? (2014-08-19 08:00)

Earlier this week I finally bought the Jawbone Up24 after weeks of deliberation. I’d got bored with the Nike Fuel Band, losing interest in the opaque ‘fuel points’ measurement and increasingly finding it to be an unwelcome presence on my wrist. I’d also been ever more aware of how weird my sleep patterns have become in the past couple of years,
cycling between rising early and staying up late, with little discernible rhyme or reason. The idea of tracking my sleep in a reasonably accurate fashion, using degree of bodily movement as a cipher for the depth of sleep, appealed to me on a reflexive level. Somewhat more practically, the Jawbone’s silent alarm sounded great: it gently wakes you by vibrating on your wrist at the period within a defined interval at which it detects you are in the lightest state of sleep. It’s only been a few days but it really seems to work. I’ve woken up refreshed in a way that feels oddly natural given the rather novel consumer technology that’s bringing it about.

So thus far I’m rather pleased with this purchase. It also looks so much better than the Fuel band. It wasn’t a major factor in my decision by any means but it’s still nice. However there is something that bothers me about it. The Jawbone Up24 has an “idle alert”. This is how the company describes the feature:

What is an Idle Alert and how does it work?The UP Idle Alert is a great way to remind you to get up and move. You can set an Idle Alert within the app, so the band will gently vibrate if you’ve been inactive for a period of time.

This sounds innocuous, right? I spend far too many hours sitting down each week. I’m either working on a computer and sitting in a chair or I’m sitting reading sociology books and papers on my sofa. It has really started to bother me and the idle alert initially struck me as a great way to help ameliorate this problematic trend in my lifestyle. I spent yesterday afternoon working my way through various bits of social theory at home, with the Jawbone gently vibrating
every 15 minutes to remind me that I’d been sedentary for that length of time. I stood up, walking around the room while continuing to read and sat down again. It’s only one occasion so it would be a mistake to overgeneralise but I was struck by how much less lethargic I felt than I often would have after spending an afternoon reading at home on my own. Oddly I also forgot to drink coffee, though it’s entirely possible that was a coincidence.

However I spent this morning struggling to copy edit and format an upcoming book when I really wasn’t in the mood for it. I was trying to decipher the superficially helpful instructions provided by the publisher which were, in practice, anything other than helpful. A task that had seemed simple, albeit dull, suddenly acquired an unexpected complexity. I spent the morning getting increasingly stressed out and the Jawbone would not stop fucking vibrating…. oddly it didn’t occur to me to just turn the feature off until after lunch. The constant buzzing on my wrist, as the little device grappled for my attention in a manner that felt creepily agentive, only served to intensify my general state of irritation at the world and frustration with my lack of progress at the task at hand.

I set the ‘idle alert’. I did so because I found it an appealing idea. It was an expression of my own agency. But it left me with a sense of quite how intrusive and aggressive this technology could be if it were ever mandated. How hard is it to imagine a situation where Amazon factory workers are expected to wear similar bands, programmed to issue a vibrating warning after 15 minutes of idleness and to alert the supervisor if the worker is still idle a few minutes later? Is it at all challenging to imagine a comparable band with an RFID chip being used to track and sanction a call centre operator who spends too long in a toilet? The social arrangements invoked here are not a matter of dystopian science fiction. They already exist. My suggestion is that this technology very likely will be rolled out in such settings, at least in the absence of legislative intervention which seems unlikely. How far could it go? What will a debate about its implications look like? What role will voluntary self-trackers and the quantified self play in these debates?

As Emmanuel Lazega has argued, ironically in one of the chapters I was editing this morning, the *conditionality of welfare* is likely to be an important vector of diffusion for these techniques of control. Earlier this morning, enjoying a relaxed start to the day at the crack of dawn thanks to the silent alarm on my magical band, I listened to a radio discussion of ‘sobriety tags’:

People who repeatedly commit alcohol-related crime will be forced to wear ankle tags that monitor whether they are still drinking, under a year-long pilot scheme.

The “sobriety tags”, to be worn around the clock, will enforce abstinence by measuring a person’s perspiration every 30 minutes and testing whether it contains alcohol.

If any trace is found, an alert will be sent to the offender’s probation officer and they can then be recalled to court, where they may be resentenced or face sanctions such as a fine. The tags register alcohol consumption but do not monitor movement or where people are.

The scheme is being trialled for 12 months in four London boroughs – Croydon, Lambeth, Southwark and Sutton. It is anticipated that up to 150 offenders will be fitted with the tags. They will be banned from drinking alcohol for up to 120 days.

Offenders will be screened before being tagged, and the scheme will not be used on people who are alcohol-dependent and require specialist support.

The scheme, being introduced by the mayor of London, Boris Johnson, builds on a similar scheme in the US and aims to reduce alcohol-related reoffending and ease pressure on the police and courts.
Consumer self-tracking devices and schemes like this serve to normalise tracking of this sort. What comes next? How hard is it to imagine a situation where a Conservative government, eager to separate 'strivers' from 'skivers' demands that welfare recipients submit to monitoring of their alcohol and nicotine intake? How hard is it to imagine a situation where recipients of weight related interventions on the NHS are made to wear activity tracking bands with the threat of withdrawn rights to healthcare in the case of unhealthy eating or sedentary lifestyles? What comes next? Part of me wants to research this stuff, looking at the subjective meanings attached to self-tracking as the devices become mainstream and analysing the assumptions loading into the emerging discourse surrounding the application of this technology for social policy. Part of me wants to write a dystopian science fiction novel about the coming techno-fascism. Part of me just wants to despair about a likely future in which the iron cage becomes an iron straight jacket.

1. http://www.youtube.com/embed/UI4Cfdy_9KU?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
2. https://jawbone.com/up/faq
5. http://www.theguardian.com/uk/london

Deborah Lupton (2014-08-19 09:47:38)
You’re right, Mark, these coercive uses of self-tracking devices are already in place. Heart-rate monitors are being introduced into school physical education to ensure that students don’t slack off when they should be reaching a certain exertion level. Corporate wellness programs in the US encourage workers to be physically active or face higher health insurance premiums, while car insurers are installing devices in customers’ cars to measure their driving practices and customise their insurance premiums accordingly. Virgin Pulse offers a package to employers of tracking devices that monitor not only employees' progress towards achieving a certain fitness level or losing weight but also their sleep patterns, because well-rested and fit workers are productive workers (according to their website). The list goes on ...

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-21 11:52:20)
Look forward to talking to you about this in person in January - I’d love to commit to looking at as many case studies as I can find at the moment, unfortunately I’ve committed myself to a load of stuff I need to get out of the way first. It seems there’s a lot of important work to be done simply in mapping the proliferation of these cases, let alone working out their theoretical and political implications.

Danal Estes (2014-09-09 17:06:57)
State enforced, or employer enforced, use of tracking technologies deserves much debate. However, Mark, you may have picked a very poor example by involving Alcohol, and particularly when the device is applied to people who have been convicted of alcohol related crime, multiple times. It is quite simple: Alcohol abusers are a hazard to society. Alcohol abusers kill random
human beings on a regular basis. Once again, I support your basic premise, tracking/monitoring/surveillance deserves a great deal of discussion. Therefore, please consider restricting yourself to examples that are more clearly invasive toward the broad spectrum of 'baseline' society. Attempting to garner sympathy for multiply convicted criminals, who are clearly a hazard to society at large, weakens your case. Thanks for the consideration, Danal

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-10 13:50:57)
"Attempting to garner sympathy for multiply convicted criminals, who are clearly a hazard to society at large, weakens your case" Not what I was doing! It was just the most recent example I'd heard. Feel free to ignore...

Danal Estes (2014-09-09 17:08:07)
"oddly it didn't occur to me to just turn the feature off until after lunch." Even more odd that you didn’t just take the annoying thing off! :-)

In Defence of Obama’s Handling of Ferguson (2014-08-19 09:32)

I have been struck by the on-line antagonism to US President Obama’s relatively muted response to the civil unrest in Ferguson, a suburb of St Louis, Missouri, which followed the shooting of a black youth by a white police officer. [1]Some people on the Left who rightly believe that the Civil Rights Act (celebrating its 50th anniversary this year) hasn’t completely succeeded in healing racial tensions, also seem to believe that Obama should leverage his Blackness into the situation – as if this were the sort of thing promised by the election (twice) of Obama as the first Black president of the United States.

As it stands, Obama has been quite understated – indeed, more understated than his response to the ongoing crisis in northern Iraq, which as of this writing has been scaled up from humanitarian to military aid. Obama’s most direction action in the Ferguson case has been to dispatch the US Attorney General (also Black) to sort out the legalities of the situation, especially after the state governor questioned the judgement of the local police force in releasing CCTV footage of the shot youth robbing a convenience store earlier.

The negative response by some on the Left to Obama’s approach strikes me as borderline racist, however well-meaning. Whatever one wishes to say about the United States, its Constitution is very explicitly constructed to be a government of ‘laws not men’. Moreover, the Constitution’s design delegates considerable authority to locally elected and appointed officials. That’s what ‘federalism’ means. Indeed, the Constitution enables the President to intervene more easily in foreign affairs (in defence of the nation’s interests) than in local affairs (where the President has no presumptive authority unless the Constitution is explicitly violated). While it’s understandable that non-Americans might not get what Obama is up to here, it’s not clear why well-educated people on the Left don’t get it.

But I think it would be doing Obama a further injustice to think that he doesn’t care about what’s going on in Ferguson. Rather, my guess is that he doesn’t want to dignify historically entrenched symbolism of standoffs between white police and Black residents. Obama may be Black but he is not a Black leader, unlike Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, who have quite justifiably come to Ferguson to stand up for the community. Obama’s role is quite different and he knows it very well: He stands for a standard of justice upheld by the US Constitution. The laws are already on the books protecting the rights of Black people. The problem is whether they have been enforced properly in this situation. The presence of a President who happens to be Black in the situation would effectively cast aspersions on the validity of the laws themselves, rather than particular people who may have broken them, who of course should be brought to justice.

Alistair Duff (2014-08-19 14:25:16)
Interesting remarks. But I beg to differ. It is a national situation and demands a presidential lead. Cf. Kennedy in the ’60s. My own view is that Obama is generally weak. He did not have the guts to deal with the torturers of the previous administration; and he has not responded firmly enough to Putin’s Hitler-style conduct in Ukraine, the biggest political challenge of this generation, bigger than Iraq, and the one by which, I fancy, history books will judge him, Cameron, the Dutch prime minister, Merkel, etc, etc.

What will neo-neoliberal ideology look like? (2014-08-20 08:00)

Do you remember compassionate conservatism? It seemed vacuous when promulgated by George Bush pre-9/11 and even more so when David Cameron was going through his ‘hug a husky’ phase pre-crisis. It still seems vacuous now, at the point of its purported resurgence, though much more interestingly so given the broader ideological context within which an increasing number of influential figures within the Republican party are advocating its embrace as a solution to their growing electoral woes. In essence, it still seems to amount to a matter of ‘how do we get people to like us?’ but I think this question takes on an epochal significance in our current situation. Rather than solely being a matter of professional politics, with conservative modernisers seeking to catch up to their third-way predecessors on the centre-left, it comes to encompass an ideological project to rebuild a constituency for neoliberalism as the old one is coming to shatter (particularly demographically in the US), the spectre of populism looms and the prevailing ethical motif of the Thatcher-Reagan settlement (“a rising tide lifts all boats”) comes to seem like a hollow joke.

In this interesting podcast Bill Moyers debates compassionate conservatism with [1]Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute. Leaving aside the noxious absurdity of hearing the president of a hugely influential think tank backed by the richest people and most powerful corporations in America complain about corporate power in Washington, it’s actually quite interesting to hear what he has to say and to use this as a basis to consider the future contours of ideological debate in the US. The think tank system in effect takes responsibility for road testing ideological constructs and providing the intellectual infrastructure for class politics in the country. So I think it’s important to take seriously what this man has to say, without slipping into a lazy conspiratorial mindset which assumes that just because he says it, it’ll be taken up as an organising motif by the Republican party for the next election. But he’s putting forward an ideational construct and seeking material sponsorship for it.
It’s partly a critique of the left, accusing it of monopolising the debate surrounding poverty while offering non-solutions that only serve to harm the people they purport to help. It’s partly a critique of the right, repudiating the quasi-technocratic discourse of the free market right that his own organisation did more than most to promote in American politics. It’s partly a reiteration of tired and familiar themes that serve to illustrate the intellectual vacuity of contemporary conservatism. However I was struck by how coherently it combined the tropes of compassionate conservatism (we need to take hard working families out of the tax system, enthusiastically supporting the safety net for the ‘truly poor’, invocation of a renewed philanthropy and public spiritedness) with the influential notion of Austrian origin that the problem is that contemporary capitalism is not capitalist enough. It’s not convincing because the coherency is only superficial, necessitating the suppression of the obvious structural link between how capitalist contemporary capitalism actually is and the communitarian values that are being sought, as Moyers astutely observes in the case of the Walton family. But I find it hard to see another strategy that can sustain a constituency for the Republican party in the medium to long term and voter suppression can only go so far in the face of a changing country in which angry white men are an increasingly particular demographic group. The worrying thing is that the Democratic political machine is sufficiently spineless that, in the absence of someone like Elizabeth Warren running, it’s easy to see how the disciplined advocacy of this neo-neoliberalism could actually rob the opposition of any critical standpoint from which to make a case for even minute social change.

There’s a lot of nice responses to this which have been posted on the Bill Moyers website but this is my favourite. You can read the rest of them [3]here. It probably goes without saying that I disagree with everything Arthur Brooks says, not least of all his appropriation of the Dalai Lama as a free market capitalist. But I’m sufficiently interested to read further. I guess my fear is that the glaring holes in his argument are ones which can only be pointed out on the basis of causal inference e.g. clientism and rent seeking are consequences of the principles he embraces rather than exceptions to them, unemployment is generated in part by the accumulated power he gets paid $700k per year to defend etc. The contemporary media environment makes it hard to make arguments of this sort in a sustained way.
“Pure Chutzpah”

People, like Arthur Brooks, who proclaim that money can’t buy happiness usually have both. In 2012, Brooks earned $716,908 in total compensation from his American Enterprise Institute position alone. It’s nice that Brooks says that US poverty and inequality are too high, but, in this interview, he again indicates that he opposes every policy that actually reduces them. His claim that minimum wage increases kill jobs has been factually disproven repeatedly. It would be bad enough if he admitted that he opposes wage hikes because they harm his corporate funders, but it’s pure chutzpah to claim that they harm the people who get higher wages.

I also wonder about the potential alliance between a mainstream compassionate conservatism of this form and a populist radical right. Could the ‘moral reformation’ that Brooks calls for be invoked rhetorically against the radical right at opportune moments while nonetheless serving to solidify a ‘small government’ alliance? Would the Tea Party accept this way of talking? I suspect so if the distinction between welfare dependents and the ‘truly poor’ is drawn carefully enough and the proposed solutions to the plight of the latter are presented as a matter of working towards the remission of state intervention rather than entrenching it. The problem is how you sustain this given the inevitable need for some intervention. Compassionate conservatism would come to look a little implausible if support is withdrawn entirely, with all the social consequences that would ensue from this.
The artistic opportunities afforded by self-tracking technology (2014-08-21 08:00)

A lot of work went into these – [1]running drawing. (HT Kirsty Lohman)

Another long run completed. Photograph: Running Drawing/Claire Wyckoff


by Patrick Ainley
When Eric Hobsbawm asked in 1978 whether the forward march of labour had halted, he was calling attention to a possible political reversal, not bidding Farewell to the Working Class as Andre Gorz did two years later. More recently, drawing heavily on Gorz, Guy Standing in 2011 proposed the birth of The Precariat, a 'dangerous new class' growing alongside the dwindling proletariat, while in the same year Owen Jones suggested that the entire English working class had been turned into Chavs (2011). Both books reviewed [2]here on SI.

The subtitle of Selina Todd’s history poses the same existential question which she pursues as a personal quest: 'It began as my attempt to find out about the history of one family – my own’ (p.2) and she revisits the classmates of ‘her large, socially-mixed comprehensive school’ in Newcastle-upon-Tyne ‘as they prepared to turn forty’ (p.356) to include their experiences among the many oral histories and other testimonies and sources expertly crafted into her collective narrative. All these witnesses are bound together by episodes in the life of ‘rags to riches and back again’ pools winner, Viv Nicholson, as ‘a fable for her generation’ (p.316): ‘Back in the 1960s, it had seemed like working-class life was on an upward trajectory... But by 1977 that certainty had been replaced with insecurity, fear and bewilderment about the future...’ (p.317)

Where Selina Todd takes this argument makes her very full history a real page turner. Her thesis is ‘The years between 1910 and 2010 were the working-class century [when]... most Britons came to understand themselves to be working class... specifically during and after the Second World War the working class became “the people”’ (p.1). Consequently, ‘as factory work eclipsed domestic service as the country’s largest employer... working people came to see themselves as a collective force – a class’ (p.121) and were recognised by politicians and the press as being ‘the backbone of the nation, on whose labour Britain depended.’ (p.121) In addition, ‘A growing number of people called themselves working class, or saw their interests as being synonymous with those of working-class people. They included many first-generation white-collar workers, and many public sector employees like teachers, who benefitted from the post-war welfare state.’ (p.361) The 1939-45 People’s War ‘marked one of two major turning points in the twentieth century, heralding a period of full employment and comprehensive welfare provision that was only brought to an end by the second turning point: the election of Margaret Thatcher to government in 1979.’ (p.120)

The chapter titles ‘New Jerusalems’ and ‘Communities’ emphasise the varieties rather than the equality of this experience for ‘Most politicians had little interest in making Britain a more equal society.’ (p.120) Instead, Attlee’s government pursued meritocracy through ‘equal opportunities’, a slogan that Thatcher was to translate into ‘opportunities to be unequal’. Politicians of all parties ‘accepted that profit-making and the people’s welfare were ultimately irreconcilable... Faced with the choice, they chose loyalty to industrialists, businessmen and financiers...
united in viewing working-class power as a threat to democracy rather than being a prerequisite of it.' (p.314) So the working class were ‘the beneficiaries but not the architects, of social welfare.’ (p.120-1)

Labour’s ‘social contract’ offered welfare for labour (p.158). When this contract began to deteriorate, ‘Rising unemployment and economic insecurity had exacerbated people’s desire to exert more control over their lives, but the collective approach to achieving this – through trade unionism, women’s groups and tenants’ campaigns – had apparently failed.’ (p.314) Thatcher ‘promised to give voters the control over their own lives that Labour had failed to deliver… predicated on the myth that everyone could exercise equal choice in a free market.’ (ibid) Economic and political rights became attached to individuals rather than to groups but ‘This did not address the economic and political subordination that working-class people shared as a result of their relationship to production: their need to labour for a living.’ (p.295) ‘Like Labour in 1945, Margaret Thatcher presented a vision of a society where class background did not matter. Unlike Attlee’s Labour Party, she proposed that this would be created by the free market and competition, rather than through cooperation.’ (p.319)

It is now clear where Selina Todd’s quest is leading; the working class has never gone away. ‘Superficially my classmates epitomized Britain’s transformation into a middle-class, if not classless, society.’ (p.346) But ‘their non-manual occupations could not disguise a shared sense of powerlessness’ (p.349). This because, again, ‘Class is not determined by a person’s level of income’ or whether or not they work with their hands or their brain, ‘but by their power – primarily their economic power.’ (p.358)

The middle class also lack economic power but ‘The top-down nature of Labour’s reforms... emphasized a distinct role for the educated middle class,... reinforcing the notion that the middle class was a distinct social group entitled to special treatment’ (p.168) and fraying the alliance of ‘workers by hand and by brain’. There is a nod here to Bourdieu’s Distinction, especially when Todd adds ‘class implicates and confines everyone, and the middle class was, then as now, largely preoccupied with the hard work, effort and self-interest that maintaining and reproducing... privilege in a class society requires.’ (p.364) But for Bourdieu the middle class rely on cultural capital because they lack economic capital. This makes education crucial, especially for the limited upward social mobility from the manually working class to the expanding non-manual middle class during ‘The Golden Age of the Grammar Schools’ as Todd ironically heads her chapter ten.

Now that limited upward social mobility has been reversed into general downward social mobility, widening participation – to higher education this time – again ‘symbolizes a better life tantalizingly out of reach.’ (p.361) Only now there is no floor for the class of professionals and administrators to stand on as new technology is applied further up the employment hierarchy proletarianising the professions while promising to professionalise the proletariat. This leaves those in the middle desperately running up a down-escalator of inflating qualifications to avoid falling into the structural insecurity beneath because, especially since 2008, numbers in low-paid, insecure and often part-time jobs have ratcheted up to include perhaps half of new entrants to employment.

No wonder that ‘by 2010, people were less likely to see class and inequality as a means of making sense of their circumstances.’ (p.355) So much so that ‘race and immigration have become the only acceptable frames within which white working-class people can talk about inequality.’ (p.354) ‘Some people blame “scroungers” or immigrants for their difficult circumstances, some blame their middle-class neighbours – but more blame themselves.’ (p.356) ‘Others viewed “working class” as a socially stigmatized term that was increasingly interchangeable with “underclass”’. (p.358)

Nevertheless, in epilogue Selina Todd recognizes: ‘being working class has come to matter once more because of the return of massive insecurity, for professionals as well as waged workers, and for home owners as well as tenants.’ (p.365) ‘The existence of class always testified to pervasive inequality. But it also suggests that some things have been lost: primarily, a vision of life based on co-operation and camaraderie, rather than on fighting your way to the top. In learning from their history, we can begin to imagine a different future.’ (p.366)
Patrick Ainley’s latest publication with Martin Allen is *Another Great Training Robbery or a Real Alternative for Young People? Apprenticeships at the start of the 21st century* available as a free download from the [3]radicaledbks website!

1. [https://www.hodder.co.uk/books/detail.page?isbn=9781848548817](https://www.hodder.co.uk/books/detail.page?isbn=9781848548817)

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**Rob Kitchin on critical data studies (2014-08-22 08:00)**


IFRAME: [4]//www.slideshare.net/embed_code/33595285


[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgSFJJw0To]
The need for a sociology of thinking (2014-08-23 08:00)

How much time do you spend talking to yourself? If you put the question this way, it often makes people uncomfortable. An alternative phrasing: how much time do you spend engaged in “directed conscious thought”? This is what Tim Wilson et al investigated in a [1]new paper published in Science. It’s exactly the sort of work I’m looking forward to engaging with when I start my sociology of thinking project later in the year:

The ability to engage in directed conscious thought is an integral part—perhaps even a defining part—of what makes us human. Unique among the species, we have the ability to sit and mentally detach ourselves from our surroundings and travel inward, recalling the past, envisioning the future, and imagining worlds that have never existed. Neural activity during such inward-directed thought, called default-mode processing, has been the focus of a great deal of attention in recent years, and researchers have speculated about its possible functions ([2]1–[3]5). Two related questions, however, have been overlooked: Do people choose to put themselves in default mode by disengaging from the external world? And when they are in this mode, is it a pleasing experience?

Recent survey results suggest that the answer to the first question is “not very often.” Ninety-five percent of American adults reported that they did at least one leisure activity in the past 24 hours, such as watching television, socializing, or reading for pleasure, but 83% reported they spent no time whatsoever “relaxing or thinking” ([4]6). Is this because people do not enjoy having nothing to do but think? [5]http://www.sciencemag.org/content/345/6192/75.full

Much psychological research has tended to investigate the role of external distractions in interrupting introspective activity. However Wilson et al contest that "it is surprisingly difficult to think in enjoyable ways even in the absence of competing external demands". My problem with time use surveys as a method for investigating this is that it conflates internal conversation with making the time for internal conversation. The former is so ubiquitous that it often escapes our notice and failing to make time for it doesn’t mean that we don’t do it. In fact I’d suggest making time for internal conversation reflects a certain mode of orientation towards one’s inner life that is much more strongly evidenced in some people than others. Furthermore, considering the social conditions propitious towards time for reflection immediately places us within the sphere of sociological questions of autonomy, power and labour that represents one of the main contributions that Sociology can make to the study of thinking. Unless we sustain
a strong distinction between internal conversation as a ubiquitous activity and the recognition & valuation of one’s
own internal conversation (so as to attempt to make time for it etc) these important ‘internal’ and ‘external’ issues
start to look a lot murkier and less susceptible to investigation. This is by no means a dismissal of their empirical
value, rather a simple note of caution about how they are interpreted.

That said I like the way the two questions are articulated:

Do people choose to put themselves in default mode by disengaging from the external world?

And when they are in this mode, is it a pleasing experience?

I just think there’s a sociological complexity to them which the authors, entirely understandably, don’t acknowledge
in this paper. My favourite representation of the pleasure of ‘disengagement’ comes from the Simpsons. Here it
is presented as a soothing retreat from the world, tuning out external demands as Homer becomes mesmerised
by the monkey ‘in’ his head. Eventually his reflexivity kicks in and the monkey tells him to attend to his circumstances:

However what happens if the monkey isn’t willing to offer direction? I do think that there are many forms of retreat
which constitute escapism, with soothing rituals or incantations (or narcotics) serving to dull the incessant demands
of our circumstances and offer us temporary relief from the necessity of responding to them. However it’s the
necessity of responding, the fact that daily life throws up continual challenges about what to do and how to do it,
which is what makes internal conversation so charged and so challenging. It’s draining to make decisions all the time (and this is another area that’s spawned a vast psychological literature I want to engage with properly) and the intensity of this imperative to make decisions is historically variable and sociologically complex. This is the second major contribution that Sociology makes to the study of thinking – the (re)introduction of historical change and the macroscopic context and, with this, an awareness of the divergent forms of agency which have emerged within that context, been shaped by it and contributed to shaping it. That said, I found the experimental results really interesting:

To address these questions, we conducted studies in which college-student participants spent time by themselves in an unadorned room (for 6 to 15 min, depending on the study) after storing all of their belongings, including cell phones and writing implements. They were typically asked to spend the time entertaining themselves with their thoughts, with the only rules being that they should remain in their seats and stay awake. After this “thinking period,” participants answered questions about how enjoyable the experience was, how hard it was to concentrate, etc.

[7] Table 1 summarizes the results of six studies that followed this procedure. Most participants reported that it was difficult to concentrate (57.5% responded at or above the midpoint of the point scale) and that their mind wandered (89.0% responded at or above the midpoint of the scale), even though there was nothing competing for their attention. And on average, participants did not enjoy the experience very much: 49.3% reported enjoyment that was at or below the midpoint of the scale.

[8] http://www.sciencemag.org/content/345/6192/75.full

I was initially very sceptical about Margaret Archer’s argument that portable music, so as to effectively provide a soundtrack to your life, reduces the time available for internal conversation. Until I persistently interrogated my own experience & realising that I could see her point – music often intensifies my inner experience but erodes its directedness, I think and feel more but I don’t tend to have sustained internal conversations in the way I often do when I’m not listening to music on headphones. She makes a similar argument about social networking. Again, I’ve been initially sceptical but I’m gradually proving more open to the idea, largely because I can see using these sites can be compulsive (”I’ll just quickly check Twitter”) and that compulsions can often serve the same purpose as the monkey in Homer’s head, helping us tune out the demands the world is placing upon us and the intensity of our relation to them. However the findings of this study don’t support this and they also challenge the broader theoretical claim about the social diversity of human reflexivity:

To see whether the difficulty with "just thinking" is distinctive to college students, in study 9 we recruited community participants at a farmer’s market and a local church. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 77 (median age = 48.0 years). As in study 7, they completed the study online in their own homes, after receiving instructions to do so when they were alone and free of any external distractions. The results were similar to those found with college students. There was no evidence that enjoyment of the thinking period was related to participants’ age, education, income, or the frequency with which they used smart phones or social media (table S2).

[9] http://www.sciencemag.org/content/345/6192/75.full
Teresa Culverwell (2014-10-18 11:15:07)
Question is - what about over thinkers (like me)? Or those who have information overload? It's like hoarding on a grand scale. Why does this happen, and why does it happen to some while not to others who seem to sift out a lot and leave just the bare bones - I need it all!!! Does OCD influence this overloading, even if that OCD relates to other things (but mostly information and paperwork in my case) And why can it finally reduce some to nervous wrecks unable to work out how and where to file "F"?

Could you see over thinking as an inability to bring internal conversations to a close? There's lots of things in your life which prompt you to start thinking but you've not developed triggers which get you to stop?

CfP: The Sociological Craft Project (2014-08-24 08:00)
In this new feature the Sociological Imagination invites short (2500 word max) contributions reflecting on any aspect of sociological craft. We use the term 'craft' in the broad sense conveyed by Richard Sennett:

Craftsmanship names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake. Craftsmanship cuts a far wider swath than skilled manual labour; it serves the computer programmer, the doctor, and the artist; parenting improves when it is practiced as a skilled craft, as does citizenship. In all these domains, craftsmanship focuses on objective standards, on the thing in itself. Social and economic conditions, however, often stand in the way of the craftsman's discipline and commitment; schools may fail to provide the tools to do good work, and workplaces may not truly value the aspiration for quality. And though craftsmanship can reward an individual with a sense of pride in work, this reward is not simple. The craftsman often faces conflicting objective standards of excellence; the desire to do something well for its own sake can be impaired by competitive pressures, by frustration, or by obsession.

We envision a number of forms such contributions might take:
• Reflections on particular academic roles (e.g. [1] review editor).
• Reflection on the process of writing for particular forms of publication (e.g. journals, monographs, logs)
• Reflections on the craft of research (the tools utilised, your relationship with them, the messiness of the process)
• Reflections on where you work, the devices you use, how the ambiance shapes your writing
• Reflections on undertaking research, managing time, negotiating conflicting demands.
• Reflections on routines and writing practices which are integral to your craft
• If you were brave enough to send us a picture of your workspace we’d love to include it!

However these are only examples. We’re keen not to get posts of the style “10 Tips for Writing Good Journal Articles”. We have nothing against these posts – we often feature them! But this project aims to generate a discussion of the craft of sociological work, the practices which sustain it and the emotional life and personal concern which are irrevocably bound up with it. We are particularly interested in contributions that explore the constraints that contemporary academic structures place upon the creative exercise of sociological craft and how we can, hopefully, work towards ameliorating these circumstances.

If you want to submit a contribution for the project then please e-mail it to mark@markcarrigan.net attached as word document (with any multimedia files attached separately) along with a short 2 line bio to accompany your post.


Rikke Toft Noergaard (2014-08-25 16:44:55)
Dear Sociological Imagination This looks really great and just down my alley - I would love to write a piece :-) However, I cannot see the deadline for contributions? Nor can I see wether contributions are peer-reviewed / published and other such practical matters Kind regards, Rikke Toft Noergaard Assistant professor, PhD, Aarhus University, Denmark

Sociological Imagination (2014-08-25 18:46:34)
Hi Rikke, there's no deadline for contributions and they're not sent out for peer review. I'm not sure what you mean by 'published'? To be clear: the call for papers is for the blog, not for a journal issue. I should probably stop writing 'cfp' to avoid confusion in future.

Creative Methods in Gender, Sex and Relating (2014-08-24 14:56)
This upcoming event at Coventry University looks great. It's the latest instalment in a series so I think there will be more to come even if you can't make this one.

Following on from the amazing Creative Methods in Gender, Sex, and Relating, held at the Open University and Manchester University, we are pleased to announce the next instalment at Coventry
Do you want to explore beyond well-used methods that reproduce established stories about sex, gender, sexuality and relating? Fancy yourself doing performance, bad sex writing or as a deep thinker, visual artist or ‘craftivist’?

Creative research methods can yield narratives different from and phenomenologically richer than interviews, focus groups and surveys. When doing public engagement and dissemination, creative methods can help people think differently about sex, gender, sexuality and relations/relating to challenge popular/media representations.

This free half-day event will encourage sharing of knowledge and experiences. It will explore among a host of other issues:

- creative writing around intimacy, desire, and sex;
- arts-based and performance practices;
- craft, activism and creative play to present narratives;
- tools for collaborative production.

Also starring the ‘bad sex media’ bingo card as a way of challenging problematic media depictions.

Booking for this event can be done here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.com/e/creative-methods-workshops-tickets-12634651583

1. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/creative-methods-workshops-tickets-12634651583
The USA’s main Arab ally Saudi Arabia has created a monster in Isis (2014-08-25 08:00)

For anyone confused by the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant and keen to learn more about the origins of the group, this short essay on Organised Rage is a good place to start:

The jihadists of IS and its antecedent groups initially rose to prominence in the vacuum left by the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. When the US toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, they did not only purge the state apparatus of his Baathist allies, but they purged it of the entire Sunni minority of which Saddam himself had been a part. Most dramatically, large parts of the majority-Sunni army were disbanded, leaving tens of thousands of combat-savvy and frustrated young men without pay and without any meaningful influence on the new Shia dominated and US-backed political establishment in the country.

As was already obvious to many observers back then, the US invasion thus set the stage for a disastrous backlash. Many of Saddam’s former Sunni soldiers ended up joining the jihadist insurgency against the US occupation, giving Al Qaeda a new foothold in Iraq — a country where it had previously had no real influence to speak of. The bloody sectarian strife that subsequently broke out, killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and preparing the ground for further radicalization, was not the cause but the outcome of the destabilization of the Iraqi state at the hands of the occupying forces.

Meanwhile, as it brandished its anti-Shia credentials, ISIS received lavish financial support from one of the United States’ main allies in the region: Saudi Arabia. The other Gulf states, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, are also implicated in directly or indirectly financing various extremist groups in Syria, including Jabhat al-Nusra, the official Al Qaeda affiliate in the country and second biggest faction after ISIS. But as one senior Qatari official affirms, “ISIS has been a Saudi project.” Patrick Cockburn, a long-term Middle East correspondent, notes that “Saudi Arabia has created a Frankenstein’s monster over which it is rapidly losing control.”

Given the United States’ historical support for extremist groups, most notably its sponsoring of the mujahideen in their struggle against communism in Afghanistan, which directly paved the way for the rise of the Taliban and Al Qaeda, it should not come as a surprise that, this time around, the US has also been directly involved in enabling the rise of ISIS. In fact, it turns out that leading US lawmakers, including Republican Senator John McCain, have been actively pressing their allies to support the Syrian opposition and oust Assad. “Thank God for the Saudis and Prince Bandar, and for our Qatari friends,” McCain exclaimed as as recently as February 2014. (Prince Bandar is alleged to be the Saudi point man behind the funding of ISIS.)

At the same time, another important US ally in the region, Turkey, a NATO member, has been a crucial hub for ISIS by deliberately opening its 500-mile border to allow Syrian rebels to fall back onto Turkish territory and to permit Western jihadists, alienated young Muslim men from Europe, Australia and the US, to join their comrades in Syria. Consistent rumors have been doing the rounds that the head of Turkey’s intelligence services, Hakan Fidan, a key confidante of Prime Minister Erdogan, was personally responsible for the country’s covert support for ISIS.

What’s particularly galling about this is how those now dominating the debate so shamelessly ignore the recent geopolitical context and their own role within it. Consider this video of John McCain, until recently so vocal in calling for support for the Syrian resistance out of which Isis emerged, lacerating Obama for a failure to understand
the 'nature of the enemy'. Having been told a decade ago that Iraq must be invaded because of the clear and present danger posed by Iraq, many of the same figures are now calling for a third invasion of Iraq in three decades to counter this [13]"apocalyptic" threat.

8. http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_world_/2014/06/16/the_saudis_helped_create_a_monster_they_can_t_control_in_iraq.html

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by Jim Kemeny

I still remember the large number of personnel needed to input and analyse data in the 1950s:

"Computers were giant mechanical assemblages, big enough to take up an entire warehouse, programmed in advance with punch cards. In 1961 the most powerful computer in the world was the mighty 36-bit IBM 7090, one of the new 'transistorised' mainframe computers that set back the owners to the tune of 2.9 million dollars and cost a thousand dollars an hour to run." Astronomy Now (Vol. 27 No. 5 p. 23 May 2013).

I worked with these at the time. These gigantic computers were housed in air-conditioned security. To use punch cards demanded two types of labour-power in what was a much more gender-segregated specialisation: a small group of (male) systems managers using pen and paper to write the programmes and a much larger (female) force for punching and inputing the Hollerith cards.

This type of data processing was, I felt, far too distanced from the research act, the collecting and sorting the data into simple yes-no answers using a knitting needle to shake out the number of cards with different combinations of responses. The more advanced this became the more alienating I felt it to be from "gathering" data. This, more than anything else, made me feel that the research process was potentially corruptible, just as Mills warned. He wrote about this in The Sociological Imagination, the appendix On Intellectual Craftsmanship (1970 Edition, Pelican pp. 217-218):
"One of the very worst things that happens to social scientists is that they feel the need to write of their 'plans' on only one occasion: when they are going to ask for money for a specific piece of research or 'a project'. It is as a request for funds that most 'planning' is done, or at least carefully written about. However standard the practice, I think this very bad: it is bound in some degree to be salesmanship, and given prevailing explanations, very likely to result in painstaking pretensions; the project is likely to be 'presented', rounded out in some arbitrary manner long before it ought to be; it is often a contrived thing, aimed at getting money for ulterior purposes, however valuable, as well as for the research presented."


From my own experiences in research this advice was very telling. It has become even worse as competition for funding becomes a factor in "grant capture".

Indeed, for me the most important part of The Sociological Imagination is the appendix: "On Intellectual Craftsmanship". In this, Mills conveys the sense of discovery and excitement that accompany the research process. He argues that sociological research is not an exact science but rather a craft in which a number of skills need to be deployed. He argues that the researcher’s personal life is an important mirror to enhancing research.

He goes on to make a number of very practical suggestions on how research can be made self-reflexive, using the sociological imagination in a two-step process. The first is using files of notes on books you have read (to both record the contents and reflect on them). Mills illustrates how this can be done with concrete examples from his own notes on Mosca. He then shows how such voluminous files can be drawn on to first explore then develop concepts and ideas to be taken further, cross-referencing between books, personal experiences, theories, concepts, ideas etc.

Mills illustrates this in an extended study of Mosca with his own research on elites, showing how he explored a range of ideas, experimenting with a number of conceptual frameworks and approaches, drawing on his files of notes and developing them.

The sociological imagination can be stimulated by rearranging the files in order to relate concepts and approaches in novel and unusual ways. This can lead to new classifications, polar types, reviews of previous books in a new light, and other innovative mental experimentations. In the pre-computer age that Mills was part of this involved using filing cards, but the technique is of course even more powerful using data technology.

The sense of adventure, enthusiasm and inventiveness Mills was able to convey for the maximum exercise of the sociological imagination together with his moral and political commitment, his comparative and historical perspective and his concern with contemporary issues and their relationship to individual life-worlds profoundly influenced the generation of sociologists who were students of his work.

This was a model for my own development as sociologist. Wright Mills died in 1962 while I was a first year sociology student. I began to keep records of ideas and references to what I felt was stimulating research as soon as I realised I might become a researcher. Mills begins with some very practical advice on keeping a folder containing detailed notes on important books. So I began to do just that, though I quickly realised that I would need several folders so I went over to index cards. computerisation came later, and so my collection of references and notes changed form as the years passed.

It also changed as a result of the simple fact of the passing of time. Mills’ advice on intellectual craftsmanship was written as guide to the young new generation of researchers, not as an attempt to set in concrete the methods of continual intellectual stimulation.

So my sets of index cards covering different subjects that interested me transmogrified into a number of com-
puter files using a word processor. The earliest data file was on “Accounts”. This is a list of publications in alphabetic order by author. The oldest entry in this file was the article published by C. Wright Mills "Situated Actions and Vocabularies of Motive" in the American Sociological Review 1941. The earliest symbolic interactionist entry was the article published by Marvin Scott and Stamford Lyman "Accounts" in the American Sociological Review 1968.

The most recent entry is an article by Cheryl Cook in Sociological Perspectives in 2009, which is the only one with an abstract, though ideally the abstract as a form of summary would today be almost universal.

So my experience has been that over the last 50 years since Mills died technology has changed and this is reflected in my research notes that also changed, resulting in an incomplete mixture of technologies that reflected computerisation. I still have some hand written index cards but also abstracts of articles copied from the internet. Since retiring ten years ago this mixture of index cards and copy-and-paste abstracts has slowed down in development, so I can see the result in growing gaps in my collections.

But I still read the appendix On Intellectual Craftsmanship for inspiration and for the sheer enjoyment of reading what for me remains the wisdom of the appendix of The Sociological Imagination.

[1]Jim Kemeny is Emeritus Professor of Housing and Urban Sociology in the Institute for Housing and Urban Research at Uppsala University.

1. [http://www2.ibf.uu.se/PERSON/jim/jim.html](http://www2.ibf.uu.se/PERSON/jim/jim.html)

Book Review: The Sacred Project of American Sociology (2014-08-26 07:51)

I approached this book with a certain degree of ambivalence, curious as to the hostility one of my favourite sociologists has seemingly provoked in many of its readers. As someone fascinated by the sociology of sociology, it was exciting to hear that Christian Smith had written a book of this sort, even if it sounded incongruously polemical and had led to some strongly critical reviews. For those not familiar with him, Smith has been a prolific sociologist in recent years, working on the sociology of religion and social theory: his recent work includes Moral Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture, What is a Person? and Lost In Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood. He’s also become a leading advocate of critical realism in US sociology, alongside Phil Gorski, a position which came to the fore in a very public dispute on Org Theory last year.

His recent work represents an important and forceful contribution to the sociological dimension of critical realism, offering a philosophically sophisticated defence of the category of the person as integral to sociological inquiry.
I found What is a Person? to be an inspiring work, both in terms of its arguments but also the scope and ambition of the book. One of the best aspects of the book was the way in which it situated his argument in terms of the dominant strands within US sociology, fairly but forcefully critiquing them in a way which showed Smith to be deeply conversant with intellectual tendencies within the discipline. So a book entirely about those tendencies was an appealing prospect for me. However it’s a very different sort of book and I feel much more ambivalent about it than his other work.

His argument in the book is that American sociology is dominated by a ‘sacred project’, in the Durkheimian sense of sacred, orientated towards the amelioration of social problems and the ultimate transformation of society. Many diverse strands have contributed to this project, in a cumulative and uneven way, eventually leading to what he claims dominates US sociology at present: a “liberal-Enlightenment-sexually liberated-civil rights-feminist-GLBTQ-social constructionist-poststructuralist/postmodernist” complex. This cumbersome phrase is intended to indicate that this ‘sacred project’ “does not embody one single ideology or program” but rather constitutes “an unstable amalgam of variously accumulated historical and contemporary ideas and movements” (p. 8) with conflicts and compatibilities obtaining between them. Broadly speaking his point concerns the ‘moral unconscious’ of American sociology, to use Phil Gorski’s phrase from an endorsement blurb. There’s a rich and diverse history of American sociology which has complex and, in Smith’s view ambivalent, consequences for the contemporary state of the discipline that are rarely acknowledged. These sources don’t figure into the self-definition of sociology or of sociologists. These identities usually relate to what sociology does or how sociologists do this rather than why this activity is pursued. It is the animating force of the sacred that Smith believes accounts for the ‘why’ and he’s interested in recovering this and framing it in terms of the intellectual politics of contemporary sociology. But what is the sacred project? This is the most direct statement Smith makes about it:

American sociology as a collective enterprise is at heart committed to the visionary project of realising the emancipation, equality, and moral affirmation of all human beings as autonomous, self-directing, individual agents (who should be) out to live their lives as they personally so desire, by constructing their own favoured identities, entering and exiting relationships as they choose, and equally enjoying the gratification of experiential, material, and bodily pleasures. (p. 8)

Already the specificity of Smith’s claims about the sacred project seem to sit uneasily with his repeated caveats about the heterogeneity of both its origins and present condition. I found his argument most plausible when it takes a counter-factual form, asking what American sociology would be like in the absence of a sacred project: “Without this Durkheimian sacred project powerfully animating the soul of American sociology, the discipline would be a far smaller, drabber, less significant endeavour - perhaps it would not even have survived as an academic venture to this day.” (p. 8).

However I don’t think this establishes the character of the sacred project suggested by Smith. I think it highlights the existence of a moral unconscious, in the sense of animating purposes and commitments underlying the elaboration of a discipline, without which it would not and could not exhibit its developed characteristics. This is an important thing for us to discuss: why does sociology matter to people and how does this concern shape the discipline? But would anyone deny this category out of hand? It may be overlooked and there may be systematic social and intellectual factors accounting for this occlusion but I suspect most sociologists would accept the category of ‘personal motivation’ in principle, even if their methodological commitments lead them to circumscribe it in practice. Obviously Smith means much more than this in his invocation of the ‘sacred’ but I think you could minimally restate his core thesis without losing much of consequence: it’s about the structuring of personal concerns in the (re)production of disciplines, with the notion of a ‘moral unconscious’ (I think Gorski hit the nail on the head with this) being a potentially powerful way to make sense of both the motivation and the way it is structured.
Much criticism related to the alleged lack of rigour in the book, with one comment on [2]this hostile review calling it "a 200 page blog post". I think this is actually quite an apt description and, as I’m sure anyone who knows me can guess, I don’t think this is necessarily a bad thing. I think there’s a time and a place for broad brush strokes and that under certain circumstances impressionistic judgements shouldn’t be excluded a priori from discussions about ‘big’ issues of the sort that necessarily elude empirical resolution. But it’s more problematic when this gives rise to a tendency to overlook obvious objections, proceeding with such confidence and verve that the gaps in an argument are not so much swept under the rug as left abandoned and forgotten in the author’s wake. Furthermore, the book isn’t brief, at least not to the extent of the ‘mini-book’ format that is becoming increasingly popular amongst academic presses and that I’m enthusiastic about precisely because it provides a forum for the kinds of discussions that are too deep for a research paper but too diffuse for a research monograph. I couldn’t help but contrast The Sacred Project of American Sociology to Stephen Turner’s [3]American Sociology: From Pre-Disciplinary to Post-Normal that was recently released as a Palgrave Pivot, with the former being I think somewhat longer than the latter. My intellectual congruence with the theoretical thought of Smith contrasts to my continued inability to confidently ‘get’ where Turner is coming from (which I guess amounts to me saying I can’t pigeonhole him, surely a virtue now I think about it) but I nonetheless felt that the former’s book lacks the degree of rigour and detail we see in the latter’s, in spite of their arguably similar scope.

In an important way I think Smith is too defensive about his argument and this compounds the more contentious aspects of how he makes it. Consider this passage from Michael Burawoy’s [4] 2004 Presidential Address for the American Sociological Association

in which he talks of the normalising pressures encountered in the pursuit of an academic career and their implications for the ‘sociological spirit’:

The original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better world, that drew so many of us to sociology, is channeled into the pursuit of academic credentials. Progress becomes a battery of disciplinary techniques—standardized courses, validated reading lists, bureaucratic ranking intensive examinations, literature reviews, tailored dissertations, refereed publications, the all-mighty CV, the job search, the tenure file, and then policing one’s colleagues and successors to make sure we all march in step. Still, despite the normalizing pressures of careers, the originating moral impetus is rarely vanquished, the sociological spirit cannot be extinguished so easily.

I may be wrong but I read ‘spirit’ here in largely the sense that Smith intends it. His defensiveness results perhaps from an awareness that a sociologist of religion who (correctly in my view) makes no effort to privatise his own Catholicism and exclude it from the scope of his professional activities might provoke misunderstanding by talking about ‘spirit’. So he over defines his terminology in a way that sets up the notion of ‘spirit’ as a point of contention in a way that it just isn’t in the sense in which Burawoy uses it. For all the points in the book where Smith falls short of his customary rigour, I don’t find his notion of the ‘sacred project’ conceptually problematic given the qualifications he attaches to it. He is not claiming the existence of a mono-thought clique but rather suggesting a dominant tendency within the discipline, constituted by a number of more or less conflictual intellectual strands, with the ‘sacred project’ being the underlying structure of feeling (Burawoy’s ‘sociological spirit’) which animates activity that contributes towards the enactment of the project. He recognises the "variance" with which "American sociologists" pursue it: unfortunately in doing so the "liberal-Enlightenment-sexually liberated-civil rights-feminist-GLBTQ-social constructionist-poststructuralist/postmodernist" complex comes to seem so comically diffuse that it’s hard not to wonder if we might be better off just saying the ‘sociological spirit’ and leaving it at that. Smith’s point though is that this quietism would contribute to a widespread inarticulacy in sociology about its own meaning and motivation - it’s a form of argument that will be familiar to anyone acquainted with the work of Charles Taylor. In effect Smith is saying that sociology needs to retrieve its moral sources and, through doing so, we can strengthen the discipline.
think the most convincing argument is a thought-experiment:

Imagine this (if possible): What if sociology really and truly was nothing but a purely scientific, objectively neutral, spiritually disinterested, just-the-facts-and-theory study of society? Would most current-day sociologists really want to be a part of it? How would it be different than it is now? For one thing, sociology departments would have far fewer undergraduate majors and graduate students than they currently have. Sociology of that kind just wouldn’t be that attractive to as many students. For another thing, the undergraduate and graduate students that sociology would attract would be a very different bunch of people than they are now, ideologically, culturally, and politically. The composition of its practitioners would be more blandly mainstream, facts-orientated and technocratic. Furthermore, the subject matter of the journal articles and the content and tone of the books that such a spiritually blank sociology would produce would also be very different than they are now ... Sociologists would generally be less impassioned about their work, and they would enter their classrooms with less of an agenda to convince and transform their students. (Pg 22)

I find this a compelling argument and I think one that can be detached from pretty much the rest of the book. If we accept the argument and sociology isn’t just a “purely scientific, objectively neutral, spiritually disinterested, just-the-facts-and-theory study of society” then what is the additional element? This is what Smith is suggesting we are inarticulate about and this is what The Sacred Project of American Sociology attempts to retrieve. The problem is that this immensely important question gets somewhat lost in the detail of his argument, as well as the rushed and polemical way it is made. This is compounded by the fact that Smith seemingly does have an axe to grind, further provoking the critics. The overriding impression this leaves me with is akin to watching two people you were having an interesting conversation with breaking into a tedious argument, seeing them talk past each other and wishing you could go back to the fascinating point you’d seen them hit upon just before the shouting started.

However I don’t think the book’s problems are purely rhetorical. Leaving aside the invocation of a ‘stroll’ through the ASA book displays (might it not have been better to just introduce this informally and not subsume it under the category of ‘evidence’?) and the similarly impressionistic perusal of book reviews and journal abstracts, what I found really problematic was his lack of attention to the way in which his own situation might shape his perspective on the ‘sacred project’. He begins his section laying out the evidence, in so far as it exists, with an appeal to first person experience. He has “learned and taught sociology in a small liberal arts college, at a major private Ivy League university, in a major public research university, and at another elite, private university” yet has also “always felt some distance from and marginality in relation to American sociology” (pg 28). I can only speculate based on familiarity with his more theoretical works as to what explains this feeling of distance and marginality (to be fair he qualifies it as ‘some’) and, in keeping with the broader tenants that draw me to his work, I’m reluctant to dissolve these feelings into third person sociological concepts. Even so, how marginal can he really think he is? As the hostile comment on the review I mentioned earlier points out, “The fact that Christian has a named chair at a research university and can publish a 200 page blog post on Oxford University Press belies his thesis that sociology is controlled by decadent communists.” I don’t think this is what Smith argues and I’m far from hostile to either the book or its author but this point still stands. What marginality Smith might experience is of a very particular sort, such that from the outside he can’t help but look like an enormously prolific, widely recognised, award winning tenured professor who has won over $15 million dollars worth of funding in his career. None of these factors constitute a reason to either dismiss his argument or affirm but it seems axiomatic to me that this positioning should be held in mind when meditating upon his arguments about the ‘dominant trends’ within American sociology.

This issue occurred to me again later in the book when Smith decries the ‘secret club’ at the heart of American Sociology, the invitation only Sociological Research Association which meets at the same time as the American Sociological Association. He invokes this to make a point about the tendency towards perpetuating inequity of those
committed to the sacred project. But the existence of the SRA surely indicates something else: the centre of power in American sociology is hostile to the sacred project, if indeed such a project exists. Consider [8]this extract from the after dinner speech made by Andrew Abbott at the SRA which Smith himself cites:

Many people in the SRA dissent from this strong politicization and indeed there has been talk about activating the SRA as a possible alternative organization to the ASA, an organization focused on sociology as an intellectual enterprise rather than a political one. I am of two minds about this project. I am also, as it happens, of two minds about after dinner speeches. It is one thing to give them, it is quite another to attempt to listen to them. Much, then, as I hate to disappoint those of you who have come to hear me say something blunt and outrageous about the follies of the ASA, and much, indeed, as I would like to say something blunt and outrageous about the follies of the ASA, I have chosen instead a milder course, and that is to argue that we have taken the ASA's political shenanigans far too seriously.

We have therefore missed the fact that the spectacle of a bunch of reasonably well-heeled, sinecured academics parading around a pair of fancy hotels and talking about Oppression, domination, and liberation is fundamentally and delightfully silly. Here we are trading students and manuscripts like so many yard-sale fanatics while we bustle importantly from the oppression of women here to the oppression of Puerto Ricans there and the oppression of short people somewhere else. Can anyone in the world take this seriously as political action? Is it not the very epitome of absurdity? If we ask what would be the response of the oppressed masses to a typical sociological paper about oppression, a moment’s reflection gives the answer: The oppressed masses would tell us at once, that like them, the sociologists are just trying to get by and feel good. Getting by in a fancy hotel is great, if you can manage. Beats working...

Now if one recognizes that the ASA is, prima facie, an absurd organization, one can hardly then exonerate this august body before which I now appear. When I tell people I’m a member of the SRA, they say "whazzat?" – I should know I’m in trouble, right there..... Well, I tell them, it’s kind of a secret handshake society of the movers and shakers in sociology. They ask, "what does it do?" And I say, Well, it has a dinner once a year at which people drink and eat and sleep through a talk. When I look at people’s reaction to this explanation I begin realize that listing the SRA in the honors and awards section of my vita may not be too bright an idea. Maybe I should list it in the obscure achievements section, or even the why exactly do I do this section or even the administrative service section. Like the ASA, the SRA is, in fact, a largely silly organization.


I’ve included the third paragraph because it would seem disingenuous not to, as it manifestly qualifies the strident tone of the first two. However I was struck by recognition of the seemingly casual contempt of Abbott’s initial paragraphs ("look at those left-wing idiots! morons! who could take them seriously?") and how closely it resembled Smith’s own at various points in the book. The latter, it goes without saying, makes little effort to qualify his hostility, though he does at one point reveal that he has heretofore in the book been showing ‘restraint’ in his comments upon others in the discipline. Leaving aside how little evidence of this I could see, it surely reveals something about the mindset with which Smith has written the book.

I’m focusing so much on the tone of the book because I think much of what’s wrong with it stems from this.
think the book is flawed, particularly the 'evidence' section. So too though are many of the critiques it has attracted and an awareness of this likely line of attack perhaps goes some way to explaining the odd tone that permeates the book, above and beyond it feeling rushed, which I found sharply in contrast to the confidently pleasant erudition I associate with his other writing. It was also jarring to realise that many bibliographical details seem to be missing from the book, with references like Smith (2015) - and nothing else - to be expected in a blog post but not in a book published by OUP. It feels like it wasn’t subject to any editorial feedback and I’d be interested to know the timescale of its publication. The near constant scare quotes, coupled with an attack on others for doing the same thing about "reality", lend the text the feel of a rant at times. The fact that Smith repeatedly addresses the difficulty of "proving" his case with empirical data makes him seem defensive in a way that just wouldn't be the case if he just used the word proving without the scare quotes.

There seem to be sections of the book that serve no purpose other than to antagonise those who will already be sceptical about the book's argument, adding literally nothing to the substantive case Smith is trying to make. The four page chapter on 'spiritual practices', an ill advised 'comedy' diversion, only adds to the sense of this being a 200 page blog post. This is a real shame because the subsequent chapter is probably the strongest in the book, a concise and panoramic thesis about the mechanisms driving change in the intellectual makeup of sociology. He makes a simple though compelling argument about the confluence of circumstances that led to an initial radicalisation of sociology (expansion of higher education in response to the demographic demands of the baby boomers, social and political upheaval in wider American society and the disintegration of the Parsonian consensus) later entrenched by self-selection mechanisms that lead those amenable to radicalism to be more likely to enter university and then more likely to choose sociology as an undergraduate major. The problem is that making this argument compels him to suggest that sociology undergraduates are often intellectually inferior to their peers (it might very well be true but the repeated assertions, irrelevant to his argument as far as I can see, have a nasty tone to them) and he again lapses into the argument that sociologists are effectively indoctrinating their students (with the graduate students representing indoctrinators-to-be). Unless I have completely misunderstood Smith's theoretical work on personhood, which alongside Margaret Archer and Andrew Sayer has been a big influence on my own work, I don't understand how he can support these at times quasi-conspiratorial claims reducing the emergence of a series of value commitments into a hierarchical power relationship within an institutional setting. Again, the way the book is written undermines what the book is arguing.

The following chapter is also much stronger than the early sections of the book, with Smith explaining how he sees the effective 'peace treaty' that emerged out of the 'paradigm wars' as engendering a sclerotic tendency, in some ways as destructive as the internecine intellectual warfare which proceeded it. Everyone is left to do as they wish, provided they respect the sacred project, with the consequence that:

In sum, most of American sociology has becoming [sic] disciplinarily isolated and parochial, sectarian, internally fragmented, boringly homogenous, reticently conflict-averse, philosophically ignorant, and intellectually torpid. Sociology lacks the kinds of sustained, fruitful, and intellectually meaningful clashes, struggles and clarifications needed for a discipline such as itself to regenerate important scholarship and education. (p. 144)

This might be correct. To address this in terms of the moral unconscious of the discipline is a line of inquiry I find intellectually exciting. It’s precisely what I’m interested in exploring in my upcoming project on the Social Life of Theory and I’ve taken illuminating ideas from Smith’s book which I intend to apply in this project. I’d recommend this book to anyone interested in the history of sociology, its contemporary circumstance or critical realist theory. But it’s a book to be read charitably and, even as someone with immense respect for Smith as a person and scholar, I had to read charitably to cut through the incivility which pervades the book. I’ve largely ignored the book’s ‘evidence’ section in this review and the personal anecdotes that seem to be as much about score settling as illustrating his
underlying argument. I’ve ignored them because I simply couldn’t find any value in them, in spite of my inclination to read the book as charitably as possible. However it’s provocative and thought-provoking in spite of its flaws. While I wish it had been produced as a 10,000 word paper rather than a diminutive 200 page book, it nonetheless has enough of intellectual value within it to be worth reading. Smith’s prolific writing shows no signs of slowing down and this represents an intriguing, if slightly confusing, precursor to his next big work of theory that will be released next year.


etseq97 (2014-09-04 11:27:21)
How could you fail to mention Smith’s involvement with Mark Regnerus and the palpable religiously inspired homophobia that animates many of his rants? It takes quite a bit of privilege as a reviewer to avoid the politics of the book, especially his conspiratorial tone when it comes to gay rights, and praise his insights into social theory. For all his post-modern pretensions, his rejection of methodological naturalism is part of a larger political project to smuggle in supernatural theism back into social science, similar to the efforts of the Discovery Institute’s attack on evolution under the guise of “intelligent design” Smith is part of a network of right wing christian “scholars” that have colonized sociology of religion funded by conservative foundations and think tanks. Brad Wilcox and Mark Regnerus almost got away with scientific fraud in hopes of smearing gay parents as some sort of danger to their own children solely for the purpose of slowing down or stopping political and judicial efforts to secure same sex marriage. Smith was a vocal defender of Regnerus and lied about his association with him (he chaired his dissertation committee but denied even knowing Regnerus). As much as you would like to defend Smith and claim some sort of middle ground between him and his critics, you seem to mistaken Smith for a sophisticated thinker rather than a run of the mill reactionary catholic that yearns for the authoritarianism of pre-modernity.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-05 10:15:15)
"How could you fail to mention Smith’s involvement with Mark Regnerus and the palpable religiously inspired homophobia that animates many of his rants?" Quite obviously because my desire to get dragged into this tedious dispute is absolutely non-existent.

etseq (2014-09-18 21:45:47)
Tedious dispute? That’s a very revealing statement...By bracketing out such "tedious disputes" from your analysis, you miss the forest for the trees. Smith’s interest in social theory is a transparently cynical move to resuscitate the Science Wars of the 90s, an internecine dispute amongst the academic Left, and retool many of the losing arguments for the ultimate conservative goal - thwarting or reversing modernity. PS - Homophobia, especially when wrapped in the guise of academic respectability, may be tedious to you but it has deadly consequences in the real world. Warwick once was known for fostering a radical, socially engaged faculty, especially in Sociology. I fear that debates over arcane social theory is what passes for radical these...
Sociological Imagination (2014-09-19 08:16:14)
You’re on my website berating me because I’ve been insufficiently hostile to a social theorist in an academic book review. That’s what is tedious. More than happy to keep approving your blog comments in the interest of openness but I have no interest in getting drawn into this.

» Sociology as the Science of Human Uplift: The Sacred Project of UK Sociology? The Sociological Imagination (2014-09-08 15:01:14)
[…] towards social change, by the parallels to what Chris Smith has recently written about as the Sacred Project of American Sociology. Is Steve Fuller talking about the sacred project of UK sociology? I think his historical claims […]

» Sociology as the Science of Human Uplift: The Sacred Project of UK Sociology? The Sociological Imagination (2014-09-08 15:01:18)
[…] towards social change, by the parallels to what Chris Smith has recently written about as the Sacred Project of American Sociology. Is Steve Fuller talking about the sacred project of UK sociology? I think his historical claims […]

etseq (2014-09-18 21:52:05)
I just noticed Steve Fuller (leftist Intelligent Design anti-evolutionist) association with this website. Does the author of this review similarly share his affection for reactionary religion as some sort of radical engine for “reforming” the sciences? Such cynicism reminds me of the worst of marxist theories of false consciousness and vanguard Leninism...

Social Theory as Optometry (2014-08-27 08:00)
The notion of philosophical under-labouring has been integral to the development of critical realism. It is, as Roy Bhaskar puts it, what critical realist philosophy most characteristically does. The metaphor comes from John Locke but it is deployed in a way that criticises Locke’s philosophical legacy, reframing it in terms of a much more substantive understanding of what under labouring entails as an activity. This concerns the relationship between theory and practice, something which philosophy has tended to violently misconstrue. Instead critical realist philosophy seeks to provide us with a deeper understanding of practices that are adequate and to contribute towards the transformation of practices which are inadequate. Doing this involves the development of a philosophical ontology but it is one which, at least in principle, should be orientated towards the practical activity of scientific investigation, with the caveat that being useful in this way necessitates a degree of congruence with the nature of things that means that truth cannot be collapsed into utility.

Given that ontological claims are continually secreted by statements about the social world, it seems obvious to me that there’s a value to be found in philosophical ontology. At the very least, this is a matter of rejecting quietism with regards to ontological matters – only by opening up the space of ontological questions can we serve to identify our assumptions and locate them within the range of logical possibilities in a way that facilitates critical distance. The problem is that ontological reasoning, with its complex relation to practice and reality, can sometimes spiral in a way that can ultimately lead to a scholastic abstraction that can prove deeply off putting to those with a less theoretical inclination. I think Jamie Morgan gives a really useful account of some of the dynamics that can take hold here:

Though realism in particular is sensitive to epistemic fallibility and to the potential for an epistemic fallacy – and ultimately ontology is theory so one is careful to never assert a definite identity between ontology and reality – the originating point of the exercise is to under-labour for more adequate accounts of reality. As such, one can ask in what sense the development has actually enhanced one’s understanding.
of or capacity to undertake further explanatory investigations of reality ... 'Adequacy' can be directed towards internal projects of social theory addressing aspects of social theory for purposes other than demonstrated adequacy for accounts of reality. They can be about finding difference or reformulating what is actually similar, where both may perhaps be in some sense a non-problem. Furthermore, they can involve the pursuit of categorizations or taxonomies that are then justified as no more than 'consistent with the existing realist ontology'. The development may then focus on placing an existing alternative framework over the same conceptual terrain – the matter of dispute can then become difference among the positions and where one set of potential weaknesses is traded for another in terms of conceptual critique. (116-117)


It occurs to me that part of the problem may be with the metaphor itself. Perhaps rather than *underlabouring* we should think of optometry. This is how Wikipedia describes optometry:

**Optometry** is a [1] healthcare profession concerned with the [2] eyes and related structures, as well as [3] vision, [4] visual systems, and [5] vision information processing in humans. Optometrists[6][1] (also known as *ophthalmic opticians*[7][2] outside the United States and Canada or optometric physicians in some states [8][3][9][4][10][5][11][6][12][7]) are trained to prescribe and fit lenses to improve vision, and in some countries are trained to diagnose and treat various eye diseases.

The term "optometry" comes from the Greek words [13]*ὀπτής* (opsis; "view") and[14]*μέτρον* (metron; "something used to measure", "measure", "rule"). The root word opto is a shortened form derived from the Greek word *ophthalmos* meaning, "eye." Like most healthcare professions, the education and certification of optometrists is regulated in most countries. Optometrists and optometry-related organizations interact with governmental agencies, other healthcare professionals, and the community to deliver eye- and vision-care.

The history of optometry can be traced back to the early studies on optics and image formation by the eye. The origins of optometric science (optics, as taught in a basic physics class) date back a few thousand years BC as evidence of the existence of lenses for [15] decoration has been found. It is unknown when the first[16] spectacles were made. The [17] British[18] scientist and [19] historian [20] Sir Joseph Needham stated in his "Science and Civilization in China" vol 4.1, that although it sometimes has been claimed that spectacles were invented in China, that belief may have been based on uses of a source that had addition to them from the Ming dynasty (14th – 17th century) and that the original document had no references to eye glasses, and that the references that were there stated the eyeglasses were imported.

The optometrist assesses a person's needs, drawing on elaborated diagnostic techniques to prescribe lenses which enhance vision. What counts as an enhancement is relative to a particular kind of need (e.g. close reading) and the success of the enhancement is dependent upon finding the right apparatus for that person, given the present state of their vision and the character of the aforementioned need. Needs are dynamic and the interventions facilitated
by optometry need to be similarly dynamic if they are going to help rather than hinder the person in question. After all the intervention is intended to enhance or ameliorate, as opposed to creating a capacity where there was not one previously.

I’m being slightly factitious in suggesting that we see social theory as optometry. Though I do think there’s a usefully epistemological aspect to it (measuring perception) as well as an ontological one (an understanding of the nature of the perceptual system, the world being perceived and the process of perception). But I like the idea as a way of drawing out a few beliefs which I hold strongly.

1. Social research is not dependent upon social theory and can proceed without it.
2. Social research can be enhanced by social theory because at least tacit theoretical assumptions are unavoidable in the practice of social research.
3. Social research often isn’t enhanced by social theory because the practical relationship between the two is generally quite poorly attended to.
4. Social research could be enhanced by social theory if more attention were paid to the specific ways in which different aspects of social theory play a practical role in the practice of social research.

13. [http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E1%BD%84%CF%82%CE%B9%CF%82#Ancient_Greek](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%E1%BD%84%CF%82%CE%B9%CF%82#Ancient_Greek)
14. [http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BC%CE%AD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD#Ancient_Greek](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%BC%CE%AD%CF%84%CF%81%CE%BF%CE%BD#Ancient_Greek)

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Steve Fuller (@ProfSteveFuller) (2014-09-07 10:28:14)
Bhaskar and his followers missed the point of Locke's original appeal to 'underlabouring', at least as far as critical realism's own demonstrated practice is concerned. Locke was actually declaring to be an underlabourer for Newton's world-view. A less polite way of putting it: 'ideological mouthpiece'. In more polite terms: Locke's philosophy should be seen as providing the philosophical implications of Newtonian mechanics. The point is that you underlabour for particular substantive theories. Underlabouring doesn't make sense as a second-order activity, which is pretty much where critical realism exists. This is not to say that critical realists haven't done empirical work, but usually that ends up challenging the established paradigms. (Although merely the godfather of critical realism, Rom Harre is probably truest exemplar of this approach.) Whatever else this might be, it is not 'underlabouring' in Locke's sense. This misunderstanding of the term may go some way to explaining why many see critical realism as toadying to the natural sciences, when of course in fact it's not.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-10 13:59:05)
Well that's an argument I wasn't expecting and you've made me realise that my sense of what Locke said amounts to little more than regurgitating Bhaskar and some vaguely remembered undergraduate philosophy lectures. However going off quotes selected from the former, I don't see how what you're saying holds but I recognise my flimsy textual basis for this - the difference between "providing the philosophical implications of X" and "being the ideological mouthpiece for X" is massive IF you're operating under the assumption that there's more to advocacy of X than a power-relationship. I think critical realists do far too little empirical work but I can't think of instances of these 'challenging the established paradigms'. I think the problem is that the established paradigms are over-elaborated, kind of scholastic in a way that irritates me and dominated by philosophers - the under-labouring should stop somewhere and there's little conversation about where and how that point should be reached. I mean at the end of day in practice under-labouring amounts to developing philosophical ontologies and domain specific ontologies. I can see why this could be seen as of limited or zero use but I'm puzzled by the idea that it doesn't make sense. perhaps I've misread what you mean by 'second-order activity' though.

Mike Agar (2014-12-21 16:26:57)
I don't know the critical realism lit, but I like the optometry metaphor. Few years back I participated on an ESRC sponsored panel at their "methods fair" on "methodological innovation in the social sciences," argued that innovation in soc sci wasn't method so much as conceptual, a different way to "see" the world, used Zadeh, Goffman, Bartlett, and Glaser/Strauss as examples. A German colleague said it was "objective hermeneutics" of Oevremann, that most people didn't understand that he meant "objective" as in lens, like this third definition in my computer dictionary, " (also objective lens)the lens in a telescope or microscope nearest to the object observed." I never followed up on that. The article is displayed on a page I never heard of, https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/19533426/a-method-to-my-madness-michael-agar-ethknoworks-llc. If anyone wants a copy glad to send the PDF of the published version. Probably all came out of independent work for the last couple of decades--people in orgs contact me because I "see" things differently.

Sociological Imagination (2014-12-29 09:36:22)
oh that's interesting, thanks - that way of looking at it makes a lot of sense to me

Mike Agar (2014-12-21 16:29:49)
That last line should be people in "orgs" as in "organization." I didn't catch the automatic correction. None of my work has been interplanetary.

Escher Girls: bodies don't work that way.... (2014-08-28 08:00)
This [1]great Tumblr blog collates and critiques the frequently absurd representations of women in comics. This is an issue which seems to have come to new-found prominence partly through social media, with the much shared Avengers graphic below only the tip of the iceberg as far as online critique and parody is concerned. However Escher Girls (subtitle: "float like a buttefly, sting like a WTF?") addresses the more extreme aspects of this beyond 2906
the sexualisation that is disturbing in its ubiquity. It's quite shocking to see these representations of anatomically impossible women, with figures that would require a complete lack of internal organs, presented adjacent to one another. They seem much more mundane, less pronounced in their sinister absurdity, when embedded in the comic itself - or so I write as a 29 year old male who's been reading comics like this for two decades... read the blog [2]here and see what you think - also marvel at the nastiness of the legal threats directed towards the author by one of the artists whose work she is critiquing.


Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-11 16:50:58)
Good point - but, writing as an 11 stone knock-kneed book-reader who regularly risks both lycra (cycling) and neoprene (kayaking), doesn't it cut both ways (so to speak)? The male characters seem equally impossible and ridiculous (and, taken as ideals, unattainable) on both sides. I know little of this academically, but don't the stereotypes come in pairs?

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-12 09:51:17)
I think it's hard to recognise that point without slipping into politically tone deaf "but men are oppressed too" rhetoric, which I suspect is why some people (including myself) get uncomfortable with it being pointed out...

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-12 14:38:06)
Yes, I can see that - in one way. Representations of women as in the above are much more likely to be related to inappropriate sexualisation and sexual violence against women than the representations of men are to be related to sexual harm of men. So
one major harm will weight down mainly on women. But isn't it more complicated than that? Firstly, men - at least some men - really are "oppressed", have life destroying body issues, etc., and suffer all the stress associated with this. Right through from primates to us, competition among males is horribly destructive for most males. Secondly, and perhaps even more importantly, the idea that gender stereotypes come in pairs can still be an important point effecting women directly: aren't big, muscly, aggressive or controlling men the logical "counterpart" of passive women who are seen to be "asking for it"? You've got to have both, at least implicitly, to make one or the other dangerous.

Mark (2014-09-13 08:55:00)
I see what you're saying about the pairing but I think it risks overstating the case - I think there are some modes of representation which are paired in this way and they're certainly obvious in comics but that contemporary body norms are shifting and multiplying in a way which resists easy 'pairing' e.g. if you accept that 'metrosexuality' (horrible word but useful short hand for a complex trend) has become normative, at least in some social spheres, then what does this pair with? Also you put the point I was trying to make really effectively - men obviously are oppressed in some ways but, at the risk of sounding obnoxiously blunt, I think this oppression is much less important (and circumscribed) than that of women for precisely this reason: "Representations of women as in the above are much more likely to be related to inappropriate sexualisation and sexual violence against women than the representations of men are to be related to sexual harm of men"

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-15 17:52:41)
I don't think that's too blunt, I take the point. The "metrosexuality" thing (which as a poor village boy I thought "this must have something to do with trains", the first time I heard it...) definitely complicates it. But I think I still disagree with the relevance of the moral point in two ways. Firstly, sexual harm is not the only kind of harm, so on what grounds are we comparing sexual harm with, say, the harm involved in male suicides based on body image or sexuality, or the harm involved in male genetic predispositions to lower life expectancies? The other concern is that even if we accept that sexual harm of women has moral priority, this doesn't mean that it has explanatory priority, even in an explanation of itself. It could be (and I suspect this is the case) that sexual violence against women is a consequence of other more complicated sorts of social relationship. And these two points may be connected: if it turns out that sexual violence against women is the consequence of a social dynamic which also includes other, terrible harms against men and women, then I'm not sure I see what the point is in treating the different harms as competing moral claims - the social dynamic is bad all-round. One might even see the potential for a certain kind of solidarity in this.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-17 17:50:09)
Weirdly, given our recent debates, my problem with what you're saying is with the politics not the theory - I don't think they're competing moral claims and it seems obviously possible to me to advocate on these issues without framing it like this. But I think responding to a discussion of female body representation by replying that "men have these issues too!" gives succour to a men's rights movement that is, on the most charitable interpretation, deeply reactionary. I guess this claim is ultimately an empirical one. I like the idea of solidarity in this but I just don't see it as possible given the actually existing state of gender politics.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-15 17:57:52)
(I have no doubt I just reinvented multiple wheels, by the way!)

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-18 10:45:19)
I'm sure what you say about the rhetorical state of the gender issue in certain quarters is entirely accurate. But I don't think I can be held to account for what the reactionary male-ists would say if they were to misread my point. (Which isn't to say that they aren't interesting as an object for social science.) As for solidarity, don't plenty of politically active feminists, and politically active women, actually strive for it? In the Green movement, in the socialist movement, etc.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-18 15:04:10)
Well if I'm being really pedantic to make a point, I'd suggest you obviously can be held to account in this way but I'd agree with your suggestion that you shouldn't be - I guess I'm making a suggestion about how, in this instance, analysis of political
context enters into discussion about the moral equivalence of two similar social trends.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-18 17:12:52)
I'm not sure I follow the argument now.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-18 17:14:59)
You're treating it like a moral issue, I'm treating it as a political one.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-22 14:52:07)
I'm not sure how I'm treating it as a moral issue. I'm happy to ignore "morality" (a la Bernard Williams) and talk only about politics. (There is of course an old problem with moralistic as opposed to realistic politics...) But both "moral" and political positions which are trying to be critical should be based on good sociological explanations - otherwise they are just insubstantial "intentions".

I'm not sure what we're arguing about! I don't disagree with your initial claim that ludicrous representations of male bodies cause problems for men. You don't seem to disagree with mine that this oppression is in a way less important and more circumscribed.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-23 14:15:53)
I'm not clear about what your criteria are for *comparing* oppression of men and women - which is necessary if you're going to say something about their relative "importance" or "circumscription". If your criteria are moral or political (including legal) criteria, I think this is irrelevant to sociology. If they are sociological criteria, then I doubt that oppression of women is more causally important than oppression of men, because I don't think it's possible to abstract them from each other, or from the set of underlying social processes and mechanisms of which they are (in abstraction) effects and which (taken together) they are partly constitutive. This is *not* "holism", but you don't have to be a holist to think we need to pay attention to causal complexity in social science. (Michael Mann is good on this...) If we give up on rigorous, causally complex explanations, there is no point doing sociology. There ought to be more to it than the moral outrage of memes, otherwise we're just the other side of the Daily Mail coin. I also think it's pointless to have moral or political views that do not pay this same attention, but this is a separate point - which perhaps I didn't separate enough above.

Sociological Imagination (2014-09-23 14:24:48)
You're the one who introduced the comparison! In fact this entire conversation is a response to you making that comparison. My original response to your comment: "I think it's hard to recognise that point without slipping into politically tone deaf "but men are oppressed too" rhetoric, which I suspect is why some people (including myself) get uncomfortable with it being pointed out...." I haven't disagreed with the content of your claim, I've only said that (a) it's not an issue I see as a political priority (b) advocating for the claim risks inadvertently lending support to groups, opposition to whom I do see as a political priority. Beyond disagreeing with how I draw conclusions about which political issues I see as a priority I'm not really sure what your point is. Being a sociologist doesn't exhaust either my social or personal identity. It doesn't even exhaust my identity as a blogger, though I could see how the fact we're having this conversation on a blog called 'the sociological imagination' might suggest otherwise.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-24 11:57:01)
My original comparison was between the representations of men and women on offer, which I then tried to suggest might be best analysed together sociologically. This isn't the same as me comparing - and favouring, as you do - one or the other morally or politically. This is a very important distinction. Of course you are free to prioritize by whatever criteria suit you, but 'advocating' in whatever direction is a shot in the dark, with likely minimal effects, without its being informed by the kind of sociological analysis I've suggested. Why do you think ignoring part of the sociological picture is more likely to have good effects than including it? Don't reactionary male-ists like a good, fully adversarial scrap - and wouldn't confuse them if we were
to be painfully fair-minded about it all? Finally, politically speaking, not all feminists have felt the need to prioritize as harshly as you seem to want to: perhaps we’re repeating the middle class feminist (you) versus socialist/Marxian/Marxist feminist (me) debate - ? (Maybe some of this is for the coffee we've never got round to having?...)

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-24 11:57:15)
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Sociological Imagination (2014-09-24 12:17:37)
Sure, will give me time to think about what do I actually believe here qua sociologist - what sociological content there has been to my claim (which I’ve basically just been restating) concerns the empirical growth of the men’s rights movement, as a social movement, as well as theoretical claim about how discursive agenda setting can escape the intentions of agents party to it (e.g. liberal critics of Islam inadvertently contributing to Islamophobia or 'liberal' interventionists strengthening the conservative agenda after 9/11). If you’re talking very specifically about the origins and operation of gender based harm via cultural representations, I honestly have no idea, I’ve never really thought about it in any serious way or read any relevant literature, beyond an MA feminist theory module I took years ago. If you read back to the opening post, it was a plug for an interesting blog and a brief statement of what I took to be the 'sinister absurdity' of these representations when presented side-by-side, not a considered contribution to the sociology of gender.

Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-25 12:11:57)
Ok. Apologies for hitting "post" twice.

The Life of the Mind Behind Bars (2014-08-29 08:00)
A few weeks ago we hosted an [1]open letter by Les Back to the UK Justice Secretary Chris Grayling. In this podcast he talks to Simon Williams, a Goldsmiths student Les corresponded with during the student’s time in prison:

Les Back talks to Simon Williams about his experience of prison life, his involvement in Goldsmiths' Open Book programme and the value of education. This discussion is structured around the letters exchanged between Simon and Les during 2013-14 when Simon was an inmate in Wormwood Scrubs. Amongst other things they talk about the current ban on sending books to prisoners, the impact of pubic sector cuts on prison life and what Simon hopes for as he contemplates start the 3rd year of his degree in Sociology.

You can listen to the podcast [2]here. It’s part of a broader series, Postcards from a sabbatical, produced by Les during his sabbatical (surprisingly enough).

2. http://www.gold.ac.uk/podcasts/app/front/podcastsBySeries/24
The Doorways Project (2014-08-30 08:00)

A couple of months the Idle Ethnographer wrote about the war on public space unfolding across Europe. However, recognising this trend leaves us with the obvious question of who is being excluded from this space and how do they see it? This is what The Doorways Project seeks to illuminate:

Rough sleeping is an "absolute form of exclusion" (Mills, 2005) and is a social issue that is widely misunderstood. Public attitude surveys suggest that one of the biggest misconceptions is that people living on the streets are there by choice, assuming that complex issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, debt or relationship breakdown are the fault of the person concerned, rather than understanding the complexity of these situations.

However, homelessness is rarely a choice and prior to becoming homeless people do everything they can to prevent ending up on the streets. Yet, it has been recognized by those working with homeless people that those sleeping rough for a period of time "acclimatise" to the streets and become part of what Academic Megan Ravenhill calls Homeless culture.

"any serious attempt at resettling long-term rough sleepers needs to consider what it is that the homeless culture offers and whether or how this can be replicated within housed society" (Ravenhill, 2008)

The Doorways Project aims to raise awareness of the complexity of the issue and explore the notion of a homeless culture in a non-judgmental, yet unsentimental way. Offering homeless people a voice within mainstream culture will offer a range of audiences the opportunity to engage with the issues which, on the whole, remain – or are kept – invisible. The project is an ambitious attempt to explore the subject of homelessness, in a non-judgemental and honest exploration telling the stories of homeless people, which differs from the 'deficit model' where homeless people are portrayed as victims. The project reverses this model by giving homeless people a voice and focusing on the realities of street life through personal experience. The intention behind collecting everyday stories about life on the streets is to humanize a situation that many people often find threatening and uncomfortable, and to challenge the notions of blame and victimisation. The direct voice, apart from asserting its human presence, enables listeners to connect on a personal level and enter the speaker’s world of experience.


This past project by the artist explores their own experience of sleeping rough in London for a few years. I found it extremely powerful and wish I could see the full body of work:
I spent several years homeless in Central London. I remember wandering aimlessly around the streets in the rain, feeling so cold and alone, looking down because I never had the confidence to look up. I was always fascinated by the reflections of London in the puddles, the beauty in the darkness of the water and the shapes and patterns jumping back at me. So I decided to re-trace those aimless walks and photograph the puddles – it made sense to me to photograph the streets and the beauty there that is so easy to walk by.

[6]

2. [http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=246](http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=246)
3. [http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=246](http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=246)
4. [http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=13](http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/wp/?page_id=13)
5. [http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/?page_id=13](http://bekkiperriman.co.uk/?page_id=13)
On 'Secular Humanism' (2014-08-31 15:21)

This post is written largely as a reflection on our times. Yesterday I had the honour of addressing the European Society for the Philosophy of Religion in a plenary session. I was glad to learn that one can believe in God without believing in religion – which is basically my own position. I gained a renewed respect for theologians who are very alive to theirs being quite literally a 'science of God' and not simply a science of religious experience, whatever the source.

I am a self-declared 'secular humanist'. I am also a 'theist' in the sense that I believe that God is an entity worthy of sustained inquiry, whose existence would effectively rationalize how humans have conducted themselves over the past couple of millennia, if not more. Here I am alluding to the Abrahamic belief that humans are created in the image and likeness of God, which has led to ideas that we might get into the mind of God (a la physics) or even play God (a la biology). But this general line of thought has nothing to do with 'religion' in the conventional institutionalised sense. In this respect, my belief in God should be treated as a theoretical commitment, or 'hypothesis', subject to scientific investigation. For this reason, I believe that theology should be counted as a 'science' in the proper sense, Wissenschaft.

My empirically considered view – of course, subject to revision – is that we act as if we are on the road to merging with, if not outright becoming, just such a deity. Although it is still fashionable to follow Voltaire's derisory portrayal of theodicy (i.e. the justification of divine agency in human terms) in Candide, as a matter of fact our species has followed the advice of Dr Pangloss and treated even the worst of human atrocities – say, the Nazi genocide of Jews – as learning experiences from which we come out stronger. After all, research into genetics could have been stopped altogether, if our overriding concern were to prevent any version of racism from arising in the future. But in fact such a precautionary policy was not adopted. Instead particular individuals were punished for documented atrocities – but the science was left unscathed.

The history of genetics research in the second half of the 20th century and beyond has vindicated such a restrained approach toward dealing with mass human error on the scale perpetrated by the Nazis. But wherein does this wisdom lie? The answer is complicated. After all, the constraints imposed by what academics routinely experience as 'institutional review boards' were products of the 'never again' mentality generated in the wake of the discovery of the atrocities that the Nazis committed in the name of medical research. To be sure, they have hobbled the progress of science in ways that astute commentators have already noticed. Nevertheless, these constraints have functioned more as an irritation than a discouragement. We are still on the road to divinity – and movements like 'transhumanism' represent very adventurous, and perhaps even adolescent, steps in that direction.

Given all of the above, there is no natural place for either atheism or religion in my sense of 'secular humanism'. Atheism doesn't make sense because the chequered history of humanity reveals us to be a being who is primarily focussed not in the here and now but in some much greater expanse of space and time, on behalf of which we have been willing to undergo considerable risks and sacrifices along the way. More importantly, the strategy seems to have worked. But at the same time, the strategy leaves no obvious place for 'religion', understood as a specific set of dogmas and rituals. The sense of 'faith' that is relevant to secular humanism is that, whatever we do, we remain in contact with the source of all being. But the bottom line is that what goes on in a lab is more likely to provide a secure route to this ontological connectedness than what goes on in a church.
Dan Fairbrother (2014-09-11 14:21:22)

"Atheism doesn’t make sense because the chequered history of humanity reveals us to be a being who is primarily focussed not
in the here and now but in some much greater expanse of space and time, on behalf of which we have been willing to undergo
considerable risks and sacrifices along the way." I’m not sure I follow this at all, but why doesn’t the claim I’ve quoted amount
to saying this: "atheism doesn’t make sense because people have illusions"? Why anyone would accept this as valid is hard to
fathom. ('Illusions' would be another way of putting the bit about people having a purview beyond the here and now for which
they are willing to take risks and costs. I know this isn’t what Fuller intends - but that’s my point.) There is, of course, a problem
with people who think that once they’ve joined the Dawkins club, presumably by expressing confused outrage 3 or 5 times a
day, they get full rationality honours by default and can claim not to have any illusions themselves. In this way, having a fixation
on atheism does *not* make sense as a positive world view. But woe betide those who forget the Greek privative in 'atheism';
who says we need a positive world view? I might find many, unconnected ways of orienting a life, but find the God-people (Wis-
senshaftlich or otherwise) so consistently annoying and obstructive that it makes a great deal of sense, in a context I can’t escape
from, to maintain a constant guard. Finally, I might in fact regret this apparent necessity, because it might seem like a waste
of effort compared to what I might otherwise do with my time. Just like sitting in traffic on the A46, waylaid by the common herd.

Steve Fuller (2014-09-11 17:02:54)

I think you’ve addressed your own point, and I agree with your conclusion. The real battle is not between Dawkins and the
theists. It is between, on the one hand, Dawkins and the theists and, on the other, the Greek sceptics (including you and, I
believe, Darwin himself). The former are obsessed with what you call 'illusions' but tell different stories about how to justify
them, whereas guys like you just recognise them as illusions and carry on in what George Santayana called 'animal faith'. But
then the burden is on you to explain why we think humans are special and, in particular, why the most abstract science is the
most special thing that humans do.... that is, unless all of that is an illusion too....


To the extent to which people do think humans are special, isn’t it because we’ve managed to build-up 6-8 million years’ worth
of self-serving self-importance? And don’t most of us very often forget the specialness of humans, and replace it with the
specialness of myself, or my family, etc., whenever a sufficiently scarce resource is present? Wouldn’t all of this be more of an
explanatory challenge - and provide more support for your theism - if *another* load of fairly highly cognitively capable animals,
perhaps from another planet, were to commonly think that humans were special? As for abstract science, presumably the
people who think it is the most special thing humans do feel it shows-off our exceptional (but not evenly distributed) cognitive
abilities - and then get a bit excited about it. These abilities have been a real advantage in material life, so the excitement
isn’t exactly inexplicable. Naturalists always travel with an appropriate beast to carry the burden of proof: adventavit asinus,
pulcher et fortissimus...i.e. self-interest. Not the Greeks, Pragmatists, or Darwin, I’m actually with Marx (a la The German
Ideology) on all of this: any shopkeeper can tell you the difference between what people say they are and what they actually
are. Taking people’s various God-sounding aspirations as any kind of evidence at all for the existence of such a thing sounds
like repeating the error of failing to be as discriminating as a shopkeeper - which he nailed in the historians of mid-nineteenth
century Germany. (Feuerbach in particular.) Marx’s own aspirations, of course, turned out to be equally pretend; once more,
thought and action went their separate ways...the one to Paris and the other to Russia?

Steve Fuller (2014-09-12 08:32:04)

I think you’re arguing with yourself. We’re in agreement. You are indeed a sceptic. Marx, by your own account, was on the side
of illusory self-importance. Marx, after all, actually believed that humans were special, and this led him to retain the medieval
idea (also in Locke) of ‘labour’ as a source of value. In Marx, horses do work but do not engage in labour. Economists more
comfortable with the replacement of human labour by technology have differed with him on this point, since they are more
concerned with the ‘done’ than the ‘doer’. So Marx is an irrelevance to your argument.
I’m not sure what we agree on! Just because Marx got his predictions and thinly veiled prescriptions wrong, as I suggested, doesn’t imply his criticisms of the German historians in The German Ideology were wrong too - the only part of Marx I was relying on. He nowhere in the Ideology (or the Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations part of the Grundrisse) takes the specialness of humans as a focus - presumably getting him to say this involves digging for presuppositions with an interest different to Marx’s in mind. But your theistic argument, as I understand it, is that people believing in God and acting in ways that register this belief can be ‘rationalized’ by taking God actually to exist (presumably “actually transcendentally”). Not only is this as horribly circular as the original ontological argument on one hand and anthropologically doubtful on the other, there are also better, more sociologically mundane explanations, like those I summarized above. As with Marx, I think there are good materialist explanations for why particular beliefs proliferate and why people are inclined to think in certain ways; unlike Marx, I don’t think things are as simple as base and ideological superstructure. If I’m a Greek anything it’s a materialist rather than a skeptic - I’m only sceptical about things that don’t exist!

5.9  September

Big/Bad Pharma Recruiting Trail Participants in Homeless Shelters (2014-09-01 08:00)

This is a disturbing but unsurprising trend. Read the full article [1]here - it’s wonderfully written:

We arrived at the shelter, where a security guard was patting down residents for weapons. It didn’t take long for the shelter employees to confirm that some of the people living there were taking part in research studies. They said that the studies are advertised in local newspapers, and that recruiters visit the shelter. “They’ll give you a sheet this big filled with pills,” a resident in the shelter’s day room told me the next day, holding up a large notebook. He had volunteered for two studies. He pointed out a stack of business cards on a desk next to us; they had been left by a local study recruiter. As we spoke, I noticed that an ad for a study of a new ADHD drug was running on a television across the room.

If you’re looking for poor people who have been paid to test experimental drugs, Philadelphia is a good place to start. The city is home to five medical schools, and pharmaceutical and drug-testing companies line a corridor that stretches northeast into New Jersey. It also has one of the most visible homeless populations in the country. In Philly, homeless people seem to be everywhere: sleeping in Love Park, slumped on benches in Suburban Station, or gathered along the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, waiting for the free meals that a local church gives out on Saturdays.
1. https://medium.com/matter/did-big-pharma-test-your-meds-on-homeless-people-a6d8d3fc7dfe
Do not despise your inner world. That is the first and most general piece of advice I would offer... Our society is very outward-looking, very taken up with the latest new object, the latest piece of gossip, the latest opportunity for self-assertion and status. But we all begin our lives as helpless babies, dependent on others for comfort, food, and survival itself. And even though we develop a degree of mastery and independence, we always remain alarmingly weak and incomplete, dependent on others and on an uncertain world for whatever we are able to achieve. As we grow, we all develop a wide range of emotions responding to this predicament: fear that bad things will happen and that we will be powerless to ward them off; love for those who help and support us; grief when a loved one is lost; hope for good things in the future; anger when someone else damages something we care about. Our emotional life maps our incompleteness: A creature without any needs would never have reasons for fear, or grief, or hope, or anger. But for that very reason we are often ashamed of our emotions, and of the relations of need and dependency bound up with them. Perhaps males, in our society, are especially likely to be ashamed of being incomplete and dependent, because a dominant image of masculinity tells them that they should be self-sufficient and dominant. So people flee from their inner world of feeling, and from articulate mastery of their own emotional experiences. The current psychological literature on the life of boys in America indicates that a large proportion of boys are quite unable to talk about how they feel and how others feel — because they have learned to be ashamed of feelings and needs, and to push them underground. But that means that they don’t know how to deal with their own emotions, or to communicate them to others. When they are frightened, they don’t know how to say it, or even to become fully aware of it. Often they turn their own fear into aggression. Often, too, this lack of a rich inner life catapults them into depression in later life. We are all going to encounter illness, loss, and aging, and we’re not well prepared for these inevitable events by a culture that directs us to think of externals only, and to measure ourselves in terms of our possessions of externals.

What is the remedy of these ills? A kind of self-love that does not shrink from the needy and incomplete parts of the self, but accepts those with interest and curiosity, and tries to develop a language with which to talk about needs and feelings. Storytelling plays a big role in the process of development. As we tell stories about the lives of others, we learn how to imagine what another creature might feel in response to various events. At the same time, we identify with the other creature and learn something about ourselves. As we grow older, we encounter more and more complex stories — in literature, film, visual art, music — that give us a richer and more subtle grasp of human emotions and of our own inner world. So my second piece of advice, closely related to the first, is: Read a lot of stories, listen to a lot of music, and think about what the stories you encounter mean for your own life and lives of those you love. In that way, you will not be alone with an empty self; you will have a newly rich life with yourself, and enhanced possibilities of real communication with others.

Asexuality in Japan (2014-09-02 15:46)

The Asexual Agenda has an interesting interview with a Japanese asexual activist:

*I recently had the opportunity to chat with harris-hijiri. harris-hijiri is a native of Japan, and has been involved in asexual activism for about 14 years. She has been a member of AVEN since 2007, and you can also find her [1]on tumblr. Although she was involved in managing several Japanese-language asexual communities from 2005 to 2008, she stepped down from an administrative role for a variety of reasons (some of which we discuss below). She has also participated in a number of Japanese LGBT communities, and is currently active in Toyohashi City.*

You can read the full interview [2]here. There's some very interesting stuff in it:

**Q:** Does the Japanese community borrow asexuality-related words and concepts from English? Or does it mostly use words and concepts created within the community?

Well, I suppose English doesn't have the division between asexuality and nonsexuality, but aside from that are there any big differences?

**H:** I don't think there are any big differences.

Of course, there are people who tried to create the concept “unsexual” (性無),[3][5] but that is definitely not common.

**Q:** But the definition is slightly different, right? Asexuality and nonsexuality is defined as “not having sexual desire,” but in English it's defined as, “An asexual person is a person who does not experience sexual attraction.”

**H:** [The Japanese definition] is mixing “sex-revulsion” (性嫌), “I don't want to do sexual things,” and “not having sexual impulses.”

**Q:** In English it's slightly different, isn't it? In English we're always saying, “attraction is not behavior,” but the definition you just gave is half about behavior, isn't it?

**H:** Ah, I'm sorry. “Sexual desire” is a good approximate [translation] for “seiyoku” (性欲; sexual desire). I was confusing it with [the feelings of] people in the nonsexual community. Sorry.

**Q:** In other words, is sexual desire the feeling of wanting to have sex?

**H:** It probably is. (We don’t really talk about sexual desire much, so.)

**Q:** Is the definition of nonsexuality different from the definition of asexuality other than romantic love (愛愛)?

**H:** Probably, falling in love and wanting a partner [would fall under] nonsexuality.


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Andrew Collier, 1944–2014 (2014-09-02 15:49)

There’s a lovely obituary for Andrew Collier, the critical realist philosopher, in Radical Philosophy:

Andrew Collier’s contribution to realist philosophy and social theory can perhaps best be summed up in the title of one of his chapters in the collection *Critical Realism: Essential Readings*, edited by Andrew himself along with Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Tony Lawson and Alan Norrie and published in 1998. The title is ‘Explanation and Emancipation’, and it can be argued that Andrew gave a unique focus to both, and of course to their conjunction. First, there was his stress on the natural world and environmental issues, shared with Ted Benton. It was brought to bear by both of them in their conversations with Roy Bhaskar in the late 1980s, as described by Bhaskar in his chapter in the Festschrift for Andrew, *Defending Objectivity*, edited by Margaret Archer and myself (2004) – hastily assembled after he was given only six months to live in 2003. Bhaskar had emphasized ontological depth and the stratification of reality in his earlier work, but Andrew and Ted opened up what, at least for me, and possibly also for Roy, were new dimensions of the analysis of the interrelations of (to put it simplistically) the natural and the social.

A realist conception of explanation, in other words, had not only to be philosophically persuasive and to include a broadly Marxist, or, more loosely, pragmatist conception of the place of philosophy in human practice, but also to take full account of the world as it is in itself and not only ‘for humans’. For Andrew, though we were not aware of it at the time, there was also a religious dimension, present in our conversations in his impressively wide knowledge of medieval Christian philosophy.


His introductory Critical Realism book is sadly out of print but it’s the best introduction to the subject that exists. His work as a whole seems somewhat under appreciated which is a shame.


The teaching and learning of Britishness is once again on the educational agenda. Governmental proposals for schools to teach Britishness arrive on the doorsteps of educational establishments cyclically: In [1]2007, it was the Labour government calling for the teaching of Britishness in schools, and now [2]in 2014, the current coalition government have re-invigorated these calls by insisting that this is not optional, but that schools must actively promote British values.

My research with two GCSE Art classes and their respective teachers, Ms Anderson and Mr Martin, pointed
towards the urgent need to explore student identity by critically interrogating identity issues affecting young people. For their GCSE coursework, the students created self-portraits about their personal sense of British identity. When interviewed, the two teachers highlighted the emotional engagement of the students, for instance the cathartic and meaningful process of exploring identity for some of the students who openly revealed how they experienced local place, social class, race and ethnicity in their exploration of belonging to Britain. The teachers pointed out that the students were very excited to explore Britishness in relation to their personal perceptions, and to discuss notions of British identity with their peers, teachers, and even with their families at home. My research on the teaching and learning of Britishness with two art classes in a south London school highlighted the importance of teachers employing a critical pedagogical approach when exploring Britishness. Students, the teachers recognised, rarely have the opportunity to express aspects of their identity creatively and in a safe space. The two teachers who explored Britishness with their students found that this experience of identity exploration provided students with the perfect platform to express what they had learned about themselves and others, and embrace the chance to have their voices heard. The research showed how the teaching and learning of Britishness in the classroom setting can be approached through a critical pedagogical approach, as this style of educational philosophy and activity is the most appropriate in allowing students to project their ideas and voices. [3]

The Critical Pedagogy Reader edited by Antonia Darder et al highlights the importance of understanding how hegemonic social structures and institutions perpetuate positions of power and powerlessness, thereby advocating students and teachers to engage in theories and practices of education that will help rid society of inequalities and injustices.

Schools can be improved if student’ stories and concerns are heard and their ideas implemented in the school policies and practices (Carlile, 2012). A key finding in my research was that the students were enthused about discussing their sense of local place and how their belonging to London impacted upon their sense of British identity. In this case, the school would do well to heed this matter of importance to students and their lives by providing more opportunities in the classroom and the curriculum to engage with issues of place, as well as the intricate connections with social class and ethnicity. The students’ stories imparted concerns about white working class identity being caricatured by wider society through representation of Bermondsey as a “chav” place, as well as about issues of race/racism that they encountered in their daily lives. Students were open and honest about how they experienced identity issues from their positioning as young Londoners. Their teachers had given them a wide berth, with guidelines about respectfulness towards peers, so that the students were able to have a safe space to express their stories and ideas on Britishness and hear their culturally different peers’ voices at the same time.

The students were able to freely express themselves to the extent that some were brutally honest about their identities and influences. The Head of Art, Ms Anderson, in the interview, pointed out how one of her students in his artwork revealed a pointed gun at his head, which she felt was a recurring symbol for some of the students reflecting a sense of feeling threatened:

Ms Anderson: And then in the background he had the territories of South East London marked out by colour and roads, and he knows exactly which territories belong to which geographical area... which was an eye-opener for me...but yeah...that seemed to be quite controversial in a way... because he was really saying something about himself...and where he stood within it all.

The teacher was able to learn something quite profound about her students’ lives and the reality of their lived experiences as young Londoners in modern Britain. It was staggering what the students felt able to reveal once they understood this was genuinely about their experiences of Britain. Ms Anderson also highlighted how knife and gun crime was a popular topic with some of the students, perhaps because it was topical, but she was surprised that “an equal number almost of girls attempted a piece that had that sort of message within it...I suppose I was expecting that sort of issue to actually come up with young men...but it actually seems to resonate with girls too”. Ms Anderson’ observation is important in highlighting how students, of both genders, are keen to discuss the impact of living in a
Mr Martin, who taught the other Art class, explained how most of the artwork created by the students revolved around urban London. Mr Martin explained how such revelation about identity is very “powerful” in terms of the "sophisticated" message being communicated by the students independently, as they had not been instructed on what to put in their artwork, but instead they had chosen to communicate their experiences of identity with gentle encouragement. Teachers are not infallible and may make assumptions about their students, but a project on identity challenges teachers’ pre-judgements by giving students the platform to express themselves how they wish to be perceived. Ms Anderson pointed out how she found it interesting that one of the Turkish students, Almas, had not included much reference to Turkey in her self-portrait. Any exploration of identity grants the teacher greater insight into what matters to their students, instead of simply judging students with our assumptions because of how we perceive them to be because we read them as coming from a certain culture. Mr Martin explained that he would like to advise teachers to “really to get to know your students”, as he has found the project “illuminating” from the perspective of their teacher. Further, he emphasised the student-teacher relations that developed through the process of identity work:

Mr Martin: …you really look at them and you think... you know we have a different relationship to when we first started off because I was the scary Art teacher that basically... you know was determined to get them their marks... and they sort of felt “I know him... I've had him before... I might be able to get away with this and get away with that…… but we sort of know each other now slightly differently..

The personal nature of the project on identity impacted upon teacher-student relations, as the students responded to the teacher’s keen interest in getting to know their dreams and ambitions. Mr Martin explained that the project provided the perfect opening for the teacher to really get to know his students as the students shared “their ideas, their aspirations, their loves, their hates...”. Mr Martin gained in-depth knowledge of “their abilities and what they are scared of...”. All of the aforementioned factors resulted in the project being poignant and powerful for the teacher and the students, as well as laying down the foundations for the year ahead. Another major success of the project was that teacher assumptions about students’ cultural backgrounds became invalid:

Mr Martin: I think the point is that it actually helped me not to know about my kids make-up.... it helped me just to ignore everything I know... such as their religious and cultural background... it’s quite important as a teacher that you sort of stand objectively and you say “Well, you tell me about it. You tell me what it is... if your day involves praying... if your day involves picking up your brother, okay, you tell me about it... because I haven't got enough information about you..." And that sort of thing... sharing... is a big thing...

Students need guidance, support and regular reassurance that their voices matter. Some students have internalised the idea that the teacher is right and the teacher holds all answers. Mr Martin found that sometimes the freedom granted to the students resulted in their worrying about what the teacher would think and what the teacher wanted:

Mr Martin:... but I think they always found it a bit difficult because they thought “He's going to mark it... but isn't he going to mark it from his perspective?... Isn't he going to say that's wrong?”... because they were waiting for me to say “You can't do that! It has to have a flag in it... or it has to have some bit of culture in it...” They were waiting for me to say that... but what I did was... I moved in my approach and I sort of said “You do it. There's a reason why you are doing it”...
The exploration of Britishness took careful thought and flexibility, as when students wanted to be dictated to, the teachers had to keep changing the lesson in order to challenge and remind the students, sometimes to their frustration, that this was not a project about what the teacher wanted. At times, for example, Mr Martin felt that the students wanted him to tell them what was the right thing to do, for instance to "draw a portrait of themselves with a union jack in the background... a nice cup of tea... and a nice red phone box...". He found himself having to regularly remind them "No, it's not what I want you to do". Mr Martin explained that the project was "an uncovering" both for the students and for himself as he had to continually mull over what to show them and how to challenge them to think beyond simple stereotypes, particularly when some of the students may have wanted very simplistic notions of Britishness to be approved by their teacher:

Mr Martin: ... they wanted me to tell them that you know... you've got to be White, you've got to speak English...

Critical Pedagogy provides the students and the teachers with an educational philosophy that embraces and values student voice, whilst at the same time allows teachers and students to critically interrogate dominant assumptions about social ways of being, in this case about the notion of Britishness. According to the teachers, the students felt empowered to reveal more and more about themselves, about how they felt about belonging to Bermondsey, to London, and to Britain. Students responded enthusiastically to the project on identity because essentially they were being given a chance to communicate identity issues that aren't elicited often enough in our education system. Both teachers, in my research, had taken a chance on exploring identity in an open and direct manner to challenge the restraints of the curriculum where students do not normally have many opportunities to express themselves, and Ms Anderson stated this behind her rationale of developing the scheme of work on Britishness:

Ms Anderson: I think what interests me about it is how maybe the children don’t get enough chance to... in the educational system to actually express their own opinions, maybe through the fear of the school or the curriculum lighting the blue touch paper and not raising issues that become difficult to manage in the classroom...

She concluded that it was possible to successfully manage a potentially controversial topic in the classroom, as they had done, and were willing to do with the future GCSE classes:

Ms Anderson: ...we have experienced is that it isn’t that difficult to manage and that actually allowing them to do a piece of work about it almost gives it a voice and softens it all, and hopefully builds an understanding between the students as well.

Careful and sensitive handling of the potentially controversial and sensitive elements to identity exploration was successful in this case. The teachers enjoyed exploring Britishness with their classes, and found that students gained new perspectives on Britishness by sharing perceptions with their peers. The uncovering of identity issues enabled students to recognise that their voices and views were respected and required. Further the students gained in confidence and independence, as they learned that this exploration of Britishness concentrated on their journey, and it was not an exercise in spoon-feeding them with what to include in their GCSE coursework.

Critical and engaged pedagogy is the way forward to encourage schools, and teachers, to explore notions of
belonging and identity with their students. Exploring notions of belonging and identity with students must entail this idea of critical consciousness advocated by hooks (1991, 1994), who was heavily influenced by the writings of Freire (2000). Critical consciousness refers to the awareness we have about how we are products of a society that is prejudiced against many groups (hooks, 1994). Any exploration of Britishness must stay true to the spirit of engaged pedagogy, for “engaged pedagogy necessarily values student expression” (hooks, 1994:20). Students who explore their identity may encounter such critical consciousness as they become aware of how societal values and norms affect their sense of belonging. Education that is liberating is a core concern of Freire and hooks, and my research on identity highlights how exploring identity is significantly liberating for the students and teachers alike, once the initial cautions, about potentially sensitive and controversial topics being raised, have been overcome. An exploration of Britishness need not be a hegemonic act where teachers uncritically impose a dominant discourse of Britishness on their students; instead teachers can work on ways to give students a safe space to express their identity.

The government’s promotion of British identity is often received warily by those working in education, as we suspect that whichever government is in power at the time has its own agenda at play. Some would challenge the government’s focus on discourses of Britishness as blindsiding social inequalities that they should be tackling to make Britain better. It is easy for governments to place blame on scapegoated communities who are seen as not integrating or seen as disaffected, when in reality there are countless inequalities that urgently need addressing and resolving. It is important, therefore, to provide these scapegoated communities and other oppressed groups in society with a voice to express what matters to them as members of society. Critical pedagogy advocates the liberation of these oppressed communities through giving students and teachers a space to develop a critical consciousness and to critically interrogate the relationships between culture, economics, ideology and power (Darder et al., 2009). The impact of employing critical pedagogy in the classroom is powerful as it gives students a platform to present to the world what life is like for young people in London. Generally, when over-worked teachers are focused on getting students through the exams, they may not get to hear about what matters to their students, yet opportunities to explore identity issues gives students that important avenue to express their voice on issues they deem serious and significant. This research project made me ponder over whether we teachers know enough about our students, and whether we have scratched beyond superficial assumptions we may hold about our students due to their gender, ethnicity or religion. If students are given more opportunities to express their identity issues within the curriculum, this will have two worthwhile outcomes: firstly, it will give students an urgently needed voice, and secondly it will allow the student-teacher relationship to flourish.


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1. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6294643.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/6294643.stm)

### Stephen Harper on (not) committing sociology (2014-09-03 08:00)

Last year the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced in the wake of a foiled terrorist attack in Canada that "this is not a time to [1]commit sociology". I’m sure we’re not the only sociologists who immediately fell in love with the phrase. It seems he’s been in at it again, this time arguing that there’s no need for an inquiry into missing indigenous women because this is not a "sociological phenomenon". Clearly, it is - as this [2]fact sheet observes "Aboriginal women and girls represented approximately 10 % of all female homicides in Canada" while "Aboriginal women make up only 3 % of the female population". Once you look through the data, it’s obvious that not only is this a "sociological phenomenon", it’s manifestly an example of something that you can’t adequately understand non-sociologically, as this author makes clear:

Of course, not only is [3]all crime a sociological phenomenon, but also without a broader sociological analysis we can’t begin to understand why the rates of missing and murdered indigenous women are tragically high compared to non-indigenous women. Furthermore, it’s clear that if rates of violence against non-indigenous women climbed as high as those of indigenous women, this government (even with its woeful record on women’s issues) would be more likely to announce not only a public inquiry but a full-scale national strategy. (This double-standard in how we value human lives is what sociologists call "racism.")

However rather than simply repudiating Harper’s comments as stupid and harmful, which they certainly are given the longstanding inaction on this issue in Canada, it’s interesting to consider what they reveal about the politics of social explanation:

Harper’s two disparaging comments about sociology, however, also need to be understood alongside his gutting of the long-form census in 2010. It is widely accepted that this action fundamentally undermined Canada’s ability to understand its own demographics, long-term social trends, and inequalities — in short, its sociology.
So what does Harper have against sociology? First, Harper is clearly trumpeting a standard component of neo-liberal ideology: that there are no social phenomena, only individual incidents. (This ideology traces back to Margaret Thatcher’s famous claim that “there is no such thing as society.”) Neo-liberalism paints all social problems as individual problems. The benefit of this for those who share Harper’s agenda, of course, is that if there are no social problems or solutions, then there is little need for government. Individuals are solely responsible for the problems they face.

This ideology is so seductive not only because it radically simplifies our world, but also because it mirrors the two social institutions neo-liberals actually believe in — the “free” market and law and order. Everything is reduced to either a simplistic market transaction or a criminal case. In the former, you either have the money to buy stuff, or you don’t and it’s up to you to get more. In the latter, a lone individual is personally responsible for a crime and is punished for it. Easy peasy. No sociology needed.


A modest proposal for postmodernists who decide to write plain English (2014-09-03 13:54)

Many of you will have seen the [1]Postmodernism Generator, which for nearly twenty years has been spitting out algorithmically designed sentences, paragraphs and even entire essays in the style of postmodernist academic
discourse. Much of its charm and authenticity comes from the wide range of references and sophisticated jargon that it can mobilize at a moment’s notice.

But in a way that’s too easy. Much harder would be to capture the much more prevalent mode of discourse that occurs when postmodernists descend to the levels of plain English. Once I show you an example, you’ll know exactly what I mean. I call it the **Higher Dithering**. Lots of words are taken up hovering around vaguely defined alternatives, resulting in the author saying exactly nothing. It’s the intellectual equivalent of that nightmare plane that endlessly circles Heathrow with no touchdown in sight.

This is not Carnap’s complaint against Heidegger: There’s nothing obscure here that pretends to be meaningful but really isn’t. Rather, it is a quite brazen attempt to drag out the failure of thought in prose out of some perceived obligation to reach an intellectually satisfying conclusion. It is the sort of thing that in pre-postmodern days would have been struck out by an editor as ‘filler’. In any case, it is certainly the replacement of thought.

Here is my example, kept anonymous to protect the guilty:

I have refrained from offering a settled version of how STS should do anthropology or how anthropology should influence STS. Instead, my aim has been to illustrate some of the productive discussions and tensions among scholars. I have done so because I believe that they can inspire a continued conceptual-empirical innovation across STS and anthropology.... More than anything, they illustrate that questions regarding the relationship between researcher and interlocutors, and also the empirical and the conceptual, are far from resolved. ....keeping these tensions alive may be the most important resources we have for posing questions anew about how (scientific) worlds are made, how to analyze this making, and how we allow analysis to be a proxy for questioning our own conceptual repertoires.

Now, why can’t we simply let a computer programme generate this mechanical prose and spare the author the burden of having to generate it for herself? It might even leave her more time and space for thought itself!


__Nigel Grant (2014-09-08 17:07:55)__

Excellent! This is why the well-known basic plain English criteria of everyday words, few acronyms/initialisms, active voice verbs, short sentences, personal pronouns, and minimal nominalisation only scratch the surface of good communication. Having something useful to say is the main point.

__Ron Wohl (2014-09-18 15:27:10)__

I am, I say shudderingly, an anthropologist. I wish I understood the paragraph produced, whether post, pre, or plain old modernist. I would like to understand it, I would like to delve into it further to see its plainativity or even its plainousness. However, I have no idea of whether it is mechanically produced or human. I know it clearly makes no sense to me. Does it have a deeper meaning? One which uncovers the pre-meanings of modern literature or is it merely tension producing or perhaps it
is meant as pre-tension or, having been writ, past-tension, or maybe just pretentious.

Steve Fuller (@ProfSteveFuller) (2015-04-05 15:32:15)
Here’s the source - it comes from own field of social epistemology: http://openarchive.cbs.dk/bitstream/handle/10398/8691/ratner.pdf?sequence=1

Ernest Hemingway on Solitude and Writing (2014-09-03 14:29)

Privacy in a Digital Age (2014-09-04 08:00)

In this interesting debate from the [1]iai.tv the “outspoken philosopher of science” Steve Fuller (also SI blogger and Warwick sociologist) debates Cory Doctorow and Kate Russell on the meaning of privacy in contemporary society. I’m pretty hostile to Fuller’s argument here but there’s some wonderful points in it (e.g. “transparency is just a euphemism for surveillance opportunities”, a general tendency towards privacy as a domain of litigation needing to be understood against the background of a weakened state) that I found extremely thought-provoking. The highlight
though was Doctorow’s dismissal of big data evangelicalism: “The idea that bigger haystacks have more needles on them is dumb on its face”. Though I’ve read some of his blog posts, I’d never heard him speak before and hadn’t realised quite how interesting a thinker he is. His fiction seems to be informed by his information activism and online work - [2] this sounds very interesting for instance.

3. file://www.youtube.com/embed/EdU1q-dWmK0

Alistair Duff (2014-09-04 10:52:01)

I enjoyed this lively debate. The fight against technocracy is one of the biggest challenges of this century, so it’s good to see more and more people talking about privacy. Sorry to come out with a mere platitude.
The Scandinavian noir film adaptation of Danish author Jussi Adler-Olsen's gripping book The Keeper of Lost Causes hit our British art-house cinema screens this week. The original book, which was first published in Danish as Kvinden i buret in 2008, was translated into English by Lisa Hartford in 2011 with a new title Mercy. 

The Hollywood film industry could do very well to take note of something remarkable about the film adaptation of The Keeper of Lost Causes which should not be remarkable at all, but unfortunately in the socio-political climate we live in, I was surprised and pleased by the representation of the Muslim character. There is a subtle reference in the film itself to the way that the media presents Muslims, when Assad's partner tells him to stay quiet as the old lady has only seen his type on the television, but generally the character’s Muslim-ness is not overly focused upon. Assad (played by [1]Fares Fares) is a regular guy, as the film portrays, but he isn't a terrorist as we have come to expect of Hollywood blockbusters, where typically in an Orientalist tradition the Muslims are caricatures and stereotypes of villains and "others" (as was the case even before 9/11).

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNSm4MW3sic &w=560 &h=315]
Jack Shaheen’s famous 2001 [2] book and [3] film (Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People) documented how 900 American movies (from the year 1896 until 2001) vilified Arabs males and females through ugly characterisation: the Arabs were portrayed as savage, uncivilised, aggressive and evil. Reel Bad Arabs also explains how Israel has in the past succeeded in garnering support in America because the American audiences, journalists and soldiers have always been bombarded with images and ideas about the “bad Arab” and the “good Israeli”. Shaheen has made an analogy between the anti-Semitic films made by the Nazis (that are now banned from German cinemas) and the image of the Arab in Hollywood. Schools need to explore the findings of Shaheen’s study of the Hollywood film industry, in Sociology, English, History and Media Studies, to begin to understand how prejudice against a people is amplified through negative representation, seeping into the consciousness of people, and eventually leading to widespread discrimination and racism in other areas of society. It is telling that Shaheen came to see that the distorted representations of Arabs were [4] not due to sheer ignorance, but was a purposeful ploy to demonise the “other”.

Watching The Keeper of Lost Causes made me appreciate the intentions of the writer to include the character of a Syrian Refugee whose humanity is at the forefront. Assad is Muslim, this is clear, but he is seen by the audience as more than that. Other aspects of his identity and his personality shine through to the audience who come to like him for who he is. There are scenes throughout the film that could be missed with a blink of the eye that hint at Assad’s faith: he has experienced hard times throughout his life too, he says, but it is implied that his faith in God has got him through testing times, particularly in a final scene. It will take years and years to combat the terrible harm that the Hollywood film industry has caused to Muslims in the US and worldwide, but films like The Keeper of Lost Causes are a positive step in the right direction. It makes a welcome change to not be disappointed by representation of Muslims in media texts. The Keeper of Lost Causes is the first in a trilogy of books/films about Department Q. I hope the sequels that follow continue to impress with positive representation of Assad.

2. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Reel_Bad_Arabs.html?id=nWXp59GVNgIC
Something very odd happened at the end of 2011. Time Magazine nominated ‘The Protestor’ as their Person of the Year. How did such a once reviled and satirised figure come to receive this mainstream acclamation? The magazine themselves invoked the End of History thesis, suggesting that the protesters who had shaped liberal democracies in the '60s and '70s had become passé with the fall of the Berlin wall and the ascendency of capitalism to untrammelled status across the globe. But with this era drawing to a close and finance capitalism seemingly struggling for survival, the “protestor once again became a maker of history”.

The Arab Spring protests that inspired this choice have since led somewhere altogether darker than was hoped by commentators in the upswell of breathless optimism that accompanied them. The Occupy movement, towards which liberal opinion was decidedly more ambivalent, no longer enjoys the prominence it briefly did. It would be silly to suggest that Time’s endorsement had any role in the subsequent perceived decline of these movements, if indeed this is the correct term for them, but I nonetheless found it hard not to ponder the correlation. It seemed to indicate something interesting about the significance of contemporary social movements but also the contradictory nature of their relationship with the media, in part seeking the publicity the media afforded but also at risk of being pacified by it.

Against this backdrop Social Movement Studies comes to seem one of the most significant areas of interdisciplinary research within the social sciences. Developing alongside the social movements which have been its object, contemporary social movement studies has become a vast and multifaceted tradition of inquiry. Speaking as someone who has been making a concerted effort to familiarise myself with the area over the last six months, the sheer size of this detailed and interconnected literature can be a barrier to new readers, whether they are aspiring social movements researchers or those with a more casual interest in the field. It is for this reason that [1]Hank Johnston’s book *What is a Social Movement?* is so valuable, offering a broad and accessible overview of this field by someone who has been at the centre of it through both his own research and position as founding editor of the journal Mobilization.
The weakest chapter comes at the end of the book. This is a shame because it is in this chapter that Johnston tries to
draw out the contemporary relevance of Social Movement Studies. The chapter feels somewhat rushed, lacking the
measured pace which plays such an important role in ensuring the clarity of his exposition elsewhere in the book. He
addresses topics like digital mobilisation and tactical occupations but does so rather briefly, in a way which makes it
hard not to wonder if he secretly wanted to write a longer book than this. The final chapter simply doesn’t cohere as
well as those that preceded it. It’s difficult to choose particular chapters to focus upon from this book, reflecting both
its consistent excellence and its affable brevity. I found the second chapter particularly useful, offering a perspicuous
overview of this expansive literature. It identifies a series of influential approaches and explains them clearly while
nonetheless avoiding the sort of irritating simplification that routinely afflicts textbooks about theory. Beginning
from Gustave Le Bon’s now largely rejected social psychological account of crowd behaviour, Johnston adroitly
demonstrates how the social movements literature has been recurrently structured around a conflict between
those researchers who, like Le Bon, conceive collective action as exceptional and irrational and those who see it
as a rational extension of ‘normal’ politics. The clarity with which Johnston draws out these tendencies across the
literature reflects the depth of his own engagements over his career. I found this immensely useful, almost equivalent
to having a jovial senior academic volunteer to sit down and talk you through a literature you’re unfamiliar with.

What makes this book so useful is how thoroughly it maps the topography of social movement research. It not only
summarizes particular approaches and tendencies within the literature, but also draws out the points of contention
between them and illuminates the fault lines upon which social movements research has grown and changed over
the previous century. The relative brevity of the book makes this achievement all the more impressive. It is a short
book, well under 200 pages, which nonetheless offers an admirably panoramic perspective upon a complex and
detailed field of research. What is a Social Movement? is an invaluable book, signposting a vast literature in an
accessible way likely to appeal to students and academics alike. While some of the contents may be challenging to
those without a social scientific background, Johnston’s prose is nonetheless clear enough that the book could be of
interest to a more general reader seeking to better understand the ways in which social movements have shaped the
world in which we live and are currently reshaping our collective futures.

This review was originally published on the [2]LSE Review of Books

4. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/uk/

Should graduate school be producing technicians or public intellectuals? (2014-09-07 08:00)

In his [1]rather contentious book about the current state of American sociology, Christian Smith makes an important
argument about graduate training in sociology and the kinds of scholars US graduate schools will tend to produce. It
echoes an argument I’ve read Steve Fuller [2]making in the past:
Increasingly, sociology graduate programs are turning out not intellectuals, but specialized technicians. After a perfunctory sprint through some of the classics, most graduate students are drilled on methods and statistics, pushed through some seminar classes that review major debates in certain fields, run up and down the MA-thesis staircase, given doctoral qualifying exams that summarise and criticise relevant literature in a few fields, and finally are pushed to write "doable" (read: narrow, unambitious, publishable) dissertations in order to prevent extended strays in their programs. Lately, dissertations often consist merely of three somewhat-related empirical papers intended to become journal articles, with an introduction and conclusion serving as bookends. Specific techniques are taught to graduate students in workshops about how to write an article that "land" well (again, the Holy Grail being in ASR or AJS), which only a few are capable of doing. Time for sociology graduate students to read, think, and converse deeply is minimal, sometimes nonexistence. Professionalization and career development trump grad students' intellectual formation in what would be truly interesting and important questions. So, such a system does not produce many broadly read, thoughtful, intellectually interesting scholars and teachers. It produces technicians, as I said, who have learned more or less well how to play the faculty-career publishing game.

The Sacred Project of American Sociology, p. 143

Leaving aside the obvious criticism that there are many factors other than programme design likely to be responsible for a squeeze on the time of graduate students, it's interesting to see these aspects of graduate education in the US which I'd always seen as positive instead described in such negative terms. I've often thought my own graduate education, with the exception of my excellent supervision, would have gained massively from being much more structured (though, to be fair, I think I resisted what attempts were made by the institution to try and ensure it was structured). Perhaps the relevant absence of professional socialisation in the UK, though this is changing rapidly, should be seen as a virtue? Particularly when it's coupled with [3]DIY doctoral pedagogy of a sort that has become increasingly common. Fabio Rojas touches on these questions in an interesting way in a post about 'Foucault kids', a group I'd understand as overlapping with but not being reducible to public intellectuals in Smith's sense i.e. all 'Foucault kids' are public intellectuals but not all public intellectuals are 'Foucault kids':

First, let's start with a discussion of the Foucault kids. In the way that I used it, I roughly mean ambitious graduate students who are doing work that crosses or combines various areas of study. Foucault, of course, was a Foucault kid. His training was in philosophy, but worked with George Canguilhem, who did work on the philosophy of science. In his career, Foucault did this mutant form of work that combined philosophy, history of ideas, and other stuff. Similarly, the Foucault kid is the young scholar who sees himself as some awesome sui generis scholar that breaks boundaries.

Who is a Foucault kid? Not you, probably. In fact, during my graduate career in Chicago, I only met two genuine Foucault kids, [4] this guy (who combined anthropology, ethnography, and hermeneutics) and, I think, one of his students. Later, I've seen them here and there, mainly at other elite programs in sociology. You also see them in idiosyncratic programs, like the [5] Committee on Social Thought . But still, overall, they're rare. I've met lots of brilliant people, but they exist mainly within the confines of sociology or some other discipline.

So, what sort of training does such a person need? It is unclear to me since we have little data. Many Foucault kids end up flailing, they can't complete their dissertations, and you never hear from them. The license to "be great" is often interpreted as a demand for perfectionism, or endless procrastination, or
being so weird that no one will take them seriously.

I can offer two hypotheses about what might work for a Foucault kid: (a) no training, just let them wander and demand a dissertation at the end, or (b) demand high quality training but allow weird or unusual combinations of fields.


Though Smith and Rojas are making different arguments, both seem to concern the extent to which the disciplinary mainstream is reproduced in graduate education. I suspect sociology in the UK would benefit from moving more in the US direction but Smith offers an important caution against this trajectory going too far.

5. https://socialthought.uchicago.edu/

Teaching philosophy through games: 8-Bit Philosophy (2014-09-08 08:00)

Our new favourite thing on Youtube: "Combining your favorite retro video games with legit philosophy knowledge, 8-Bit Philosophy will have you philosophizin’ like a BOSS". There are more [1]here but these are some of our favourites:
Sociology as the Science of Human Uplift: The Sacred Project of UK Sociology? (2014-09-08 14:35)

In this keynote talk from the 2014 British Sociological Association conference, Steve Fuller talks about "Sociology as the Science of Human Uplift". I was struck when listening to his discussion of the early history of the discipline in the UK, particularly the notion of sociology as a synthetic discipline orientated towards social change, by the parallels to what Chris Smith has recently written about as the [1]Sacred Project of American Sociology. Is Steve Fuller talking about the sacred project of UK sociology? I think his historical claims could be usefully articulated in terms of Smith’s notion and the exercise would be more historiographically plausible when applied to pre-disciplinary and early disciplinary currents in UK Sociology than it was with American sociology. In this case, it seems that the project was lost and that Fuller is arguing for its (cautious) retrieval.

Unfortunately it seems the BSA have disabled embedding so you’ll have to watch the video of Steve’s talk [2]here.

etseq (2014-12-20 18:55:50)
I had never thought to associate Steve Fuller and Christian Smith before but upon reflection, the comparison does illustrate an odd convergence of the extreme social constructionist Left and the theocratic revanchist Right in opposition to modernity, particularly the exclusion of the supernatural from the Academy. Fuller is one of the few on the Left that is still fighting the Science Wars of 90s - he reminds me of the Japanese Holdouts who refused to accept the surrender of the Emperor long after the end of the battles in the pacific theatre - who makes common cause with anti-secular religious fundamentalists and carlist roman catholics in opposition to well settled evolutionary theory. Christian Smith embraces a similar epistemological attack on science, methodological naturalism is the villain in his narrative, and laments the loss of Christian social and political hegemony, which he sees as the only bulwark against the "evils" of feminism, gay rights, atheism, etc. So far both Fuller and Smith have been unsuccessful in their attempted interventions in the academy and politics. Fuller’s testimony in the Kitzmiller trial on behalf of the intelligent design creationists seemed to validate the worst fears of his opponents in the Science Wars, Norman Levitt would be smiling from above if there was a heaven, while Smith comes off a bitter cultural conservative whose hypocrisy was exposed in his embarrassing homophobic "defense" of Mark Regnerus. If this is the state of critical social theory, the project needs serious reevaluation if it ever wants to exert influence beyond a small niche of ivory tower academics.
Without wishing to endorse the comparison, I can see why you lump me together with Christian Smith, in that we both maintain strong normative visions for sociology. I can even see why you compare me to a Japanese holdouts after the Second World War because, indeed, I do believe that the social constructivists (starting with Latour) blinked during the Science Wars and suddenly took an ‘ontological’ turn that implicitly ceded the epistemological ground to guys like Levitt. I call it surrender. However, where I disagree with you is in your conclusion – namely, that critical social theory needs to ‘re-evaluate’ itself in order to exert extra-mural influence. No, that’s the last thing that critical social theory needs to do, mainly because it’s the only thing that critical social theory ever does: i.e. reflect on itself (aka navel gazing). What critical social theory needs to do is to make more public interventions of the sort that Smith and I have done. Of course, there is no guarantee of success, but you might learn something from these failed experiments (if they are indeed failures) to do better in the future. But there is no formula hidden in the writings of Bourdieu or anyone else that will guarantee that a theorist can make a positive difference to the world. You just need to try harder.

As it turns out, this Christmas message of mine to the Social Epistemology collective may be of interest in the context of this discussion: http://social-epistemology.com/2014/12/25/christmas-greetings-2014-steve-fuller/

I am amazed that Fuller is still taken seriously in the UK - his reputation was destroyed in the US because of his creationism. If you want sociology taken seriously, I’d suggest not having him speak at your annual BSA meeting!

Smith’s public interventions include promoting right wing think tank funded “science” that smears gay parents as child molesters. I’m sure you can justify this as some sort of reverse affirmative action for straight, white christian homophobes but at that point you should just drop your pretense at being a leftists, liberal, etc.

Pro-wrestling, unionisation and American capitalism

This fascinating article on Jacobin offers an historical perspective on professional wrestling, a sport that "with its screaming neon lunatics, potbellied big daddies, and tasseled 'ring rats', has been considered too absurd to be taken seriously". Yet the dominant World Wrestling Entertainment trades on the New York Stock Exchange with a capitalisation of over $856 million and professional wrestling has a long history which intertwines in complex ways with that of the United States itself:

Nothing is more real — and more obscured by the smoke and mirrors of the mat — than a simple fact: the billion dollar spectacle of pro wrestling relies entirely on the ruthless economic, mental, and physical exploitation of its performers. In that world, of lingering physical ailments, screwjob employment contracts, and chugalug drug abuse, Hulk Hogan is a millionaire named Terry Bollea, a favorite of WWF management, poached from a Minneapolis wrestling promotion and transformed into the star of "Hulkamania." In that world, in 1986, Bollea ratted out his fellow wrestlers to crush a nascent unionization drive ahead of Wrestlemania II. In that world, wrestlers are exploited and injured and thrown away — their final contribution to the world, a mortality rate on par with day one of Antietam.

For a fake sport, pro wrestling sure has a lot of real casualties. Its only business model is fear.
Yet it wasn’t until recent decades that wrestling would grow unbelievably profitable, just as control of the entire industry came to rest with one corporation. On New Year’s Day, 2014, WWE CEO and Chairman Vince McMahon could claim to be a billionaire in almost full control of the industry.

But these machinations are the stuff of rich men. Most wrestlers are not rich men.


It’s a wonderful piece, even by the high standards of Jacobin Magazine. Read the full essay [5]here.


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Book Review: A Critical Pedagogy of Resistance: 34 Pedagogues We Need to Know (2014-09-09 12:09)
Those passionate about social justice issues will enjoy reading an edited collection that illuminates the lives and works of the brilliant people who have dedicated their lives to fighting social injustices, and aims to inspire the reader to think about and act upon ways to engage in social transformation. The book, edited by James D Kirylo, highlights how social inequalities in the last decade (class, race/ethnic) have been steadily increasing globally. Poverty amongst children is ever increasing; in the USA, there are more black males in the criminal justice system than students in college; among the youth of Spain the percentage unemployed is more than 54%. According to Kirylo, neoliberalism has given rise to a validation of individualism, privatisation, competition and profit, resulting in decline of the public. Education is seen in terms of economics, students are commodities and teachers are mere machines. Henry Giroux et al in their new book, Neoliberalism, Education and Terrorism, have also discussed the threat of neoliberalism on contemporary progressive education: “Neoliberal approaches to educational practice shun innovation because these teaching practices attempt to foster autonomous, critically engaged citizens, rather than non-autonomous, fundamentally structured state subjects”. Therefore, it is clear that we urgently need critical pedagogues and their philosophies of education: the argument for the relatively new concept of critical pedagogy, influenced by Paulo Freire, is that it is “ethically responsible to scrutinize, challenge, and oppose people, structures, and systems that oppress and dehumanize”, and to resist/challenge mechanisms of oppression in order to demand equal opportunities to participate in the world.

The introduction of the book neatly defines the core characteristics of transformative social justice. We learn that critical pedagogy is an ongoing project simultaneously located in pain/struggle and hope/joy. Critical pedagogy is evolving and empowering as the social world changes, new problems and new conflicts arise, that need interrogating and resolving. Critical pedagogy, allows us to be honourably angry about injustice, and is never about staying in a neutral position, but always about being decisive and active. Critical pedagogues are humanizing agents. We are shown that critical pedagogues are concerned with resistance, courage and action. There are commonalities that bind together these specific pedagogues the editor has chosen to focus upon: he explains that they all are driven by conviction to transform society, they all possess love and care for humanity, and most have them have a link with Paulo Freire and his ideas. Critical pedagogy is therefore about promoting social justice, democratic spaces, and love and hope for humanity.

Some of the more well-known critical pedagogues included in the book are Michael Apple, Judith Butler, Noam Chomsky, Antonio Darder, John Dewey, bell hooks, Henry Giroux Antonio Gramsci, Joe Kincheloe, Donaldo Macedo, Ira Shor, Edward Said, Cornel West, W E B DuBois, as well as a number of other inspiring educationalists (not educationalists in a conventional sense) from diverse backgrounds. The book places emphasis on the autobiographical experiences of each of these pedagogues, and how their powerful, diverse and complex socio-political histories impacted upon their critical consciousness and their desires to transform the world into a just place. Some of these pedagogues have personally experienced oppression and danger, whilst the other pedagogues are have been in dangers of losing their jobs because of their challenging oppressive institutions and practices. Kirylo explains that these pedagogues he has included in his edited collection have shown vast commitment to social justice through visits to oppressed and marginalised communities, through research, teaching and writing about oppression, and through becoming beacons of hope serving humanity.

The audience for this book is students interested in critical pedagogy and social justice issues (education, race, ethnicity, gender, theology, language, power, justice and so on), as well as teachers and other educationalists who are keen on widening their knowledge base on key thinkers and writers in the field of critical pedagogy. The book is extremely useful for those wanting to get to know a range of critical pedagogues, and then use this as a springboard to further research those particular pedagogues who appeal. The book aims to accompany the reader on a journey out of his/her comfort zone, so that s/he reflects upon the social world. A Critical Pedagogy of Resistance: 34 Pedagogues We Need to Know is one of a great number of important books in a contemporary series entitled Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education, aiming to explore how the intersection of cultural studies and education brings forth fresh new emancipatory and transformative ideas and practices.
Sadia Habib is a doctoral candidate currently researching British identity at Goldsmiths, University of London. Prior to this she taught English at Key Stages 3,4 and 5 in Manchester and London.


Foucault—The Lost Interview (2014-09-10 08:00)

This is a very interesting companion to the well known debate between [1]Chomsky and Foucault. It also has an unintentionally hilarious opening scene with retro music and an action close up on Foucault's scalp.

IFRAME: [2]//www.youtube.com/embed/qzoOhhh4aJg

Unusually for a youtube video there's an extensive and informative note accompanying the video. Read the full thing [3]here:
This until now rarely seen 15-minute footage is of an interview that was conducted by the Dutch philosopher Fons Elders in preparation for the debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, which was broadcasted on Dutch television on Sunday, Nov. 28, 1971. The whole interview was essentially lost for decades and was published in the winter of 2012 for the first time. It is now available as a book under the title of "Freedom and Knowledge." An excerpt is available for free online on Elder’s own website where people can also purchase the actual book (only available there):


The interview in its book form as "Freedom and Knowledge" includes a few more topics and has both an excellent introduction by author of "Mad for Foucault," Lynne Huffer, as well as an answer to her, a preface, and a retrospective appendix, each by Fons Elders.

2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/qzoOhhh4aJg
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzoOhhh4aJg

Ecological privilege and the ugly underside of airborne conference-going (2014-09-10 13:42)

by Joseph Nevins

Hardly a week seems to pass when an announcement or a “call for papers” for a conference, seminar, or workshop enters my inbox, or I hear a colleague mention a recently undertaken or soon-to-happen trip to some far-flung locale for an academic gathering. Among other things, they are a manifestation of the growth in what Karl Høyer and Petter Næss call “[1]conference tourism”—a phenomenon that typically involves air travel for the vast majority of participants.

Airborne academic conference-going is often undertaken with a certain glee given the opportunity to meet up with old friends and make new ones, to travel to interesting destinations, and to exchange ideas with engaged colleagues. Although the individual benefits are clear, rarely, if ever, are the considerable socio-ecological costs raised, costs typically incurred by the already vulnerable, the global majority who live on the world’s socio-economic margins.

The failure to do so is especially striking in a time of climate change, one that now demands immediate, [2]radical reductions in the ecological footprints of (especially) the [3]twenty percent of the world’s population responsible for more than 80 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. In the face of such demands, the effective response of academics has been to jump on the next flight to yet another conference city, growing what are typically already grossly oversized, individual and collective carbon footprints in the process.

It is a behavior that flows from and serves to exacerbate the unjust "isms" associated with race, class, nation, and empire, ones constructed in part by the extraordinary spatial mobility enjoyed by Western academics as a whole: (Flying is an activity of the planet’s privileged classes: according to the World Watch Institute, [4]less than 10 percent
of humanity has ever flown.) The costs also emanate from and reproduce [5] ecological privilege—which allows for the appropriation of a disproportionate amount of the planet’s resources, the privatization of the benefits and the socialization of the detrimental impacts—and its flipside, ecological disadvantage.

To get a sense of how big the footprint is of professional academic gatherings, I [6] measured the impact of attendee flights to and from Seattle, the host city of the major conference of the Association of American Geographers in 2011. An estimated 7,300 people attended with the vast majority coming from throughout the United States and Canada and 20 percent from outside of North America.

Total conference-related air travel resulted in roughly 5,351 metric tons of carbon emissions. (By way of visualization, one ton of carbon emissions at standard atmospheric pressure would fill [7] a cube, each of whose sides would be more than eight meters by eight meters.) The actual impact on the climate system was far greater, however. The height at which planes fly, the mixture of emitted gases and particles, and the contrails and other forms of cloudiness that aviation produces mean that air travel contributes to the warming of the climate approximately 3 times more than that of its carbon emissions. Given this, the meeting’s effective aviation-related footprint was approximately 2.2 metric tons of CO2 emissions per attendee—regardless of mode of travel (an estimated 7.66 percent of attendees were already in the Seattle area or traveled there via ground transport). In other words, the impact of conference flights per attendee was, by itself, [8] greater than what would be allowable were carbon emissions allocated equitably and sustainably among the planet’s denizens. As for the conference as a whole, its total aviation-related warming effect on the climate system is that of about 16,053 metric tons of CO2—equal to the annual emissions of 76,443 Haitians (based on 2006 figures from the U.S. Department of Energy).

One might contend that in a world of more than seven billion people, a population that produced [9] 36 billion tons of carbon emissions in 2013, the impact of any individual conference, even one involving thousands of people, is too small to be of concern, and that scrutinizing it is a diversion from the need to focus on the big picture, or structural matters. But just as “everyday” sexism flows from and helps to reproduce patriarchy, so, too, does individual consumption relate to systemic ecological injustice—that is, there is a dynamic interrelationship between agency and structure. Moreover, as Kevin Anderson, deputy director of the [10] Tyndall Center for Climate Change Research, states, such a contention can serve as an excuse for personal inaction and a way of avoiding putting one’s proverbial house in order. “Divide the world into a sufficient number of small parts,” he [11] writes—say, California, Beijing, or London—and everything fits into the “classification of ‘miniscule’, i.e. so small as to be irrelevant.”

The “miniscule” matters not only for the biosphere, but also for human well-being and issues of social justice as climate change disproportionately impacts [12] people of color and [13] low-income populations and countries—due to their already existing vulnerability and the accidents of geography (as climate change-related detriments spread unevenly across global space and concentrate in particular regions). In terms of individual bodies, increasing carbon emissions, and air pollution more broadly, contribute to respiratory illness and asthma, and large numbers deaths annually. (The World Health Organization [14] approximates that outdoor air pollution caused 3.7 million premature deaths in 2012. Climate change, according to [15] one estimate, contributes to the deaths of another 400,000 annually) Hence, conference-going of the jet-setting variety helps to kill—and typically the most vulnerable among us.

Admittedly, one could make the same argument about any consumptive practice based on industrially-produced goods in a world of gross inequalities embedded in unjust systems. But what makes flying stand out is the size of its impact, one that dwarfs all other acts of individual consumption and hence its injurious effects. Furthermore, by allowing for fast travel, flying “saves” time that [16] allows for additional acts of consumption (such as more trips).

There are alternatives, of course to conference jet-setting. These include: choosing the sites of meetings on the basis of limiting the total amount of miles travelled; reducing the frequency of meetings (changing them from annual to quadrennial, for instance); holding smaller conferences that draw on spatially limited areas; requiring that attendees take ground transport; and instituting ways of disseminating research and networking that do not require
in-person meetings.

Beyond such innovations, more far-reaching changes are needed, ones entailing slowing down, doing and consuming considerably less, and sharing the Earth’s resources in a far more equitable fashion than is the case currently. These changes have implications not only for the individual choices of academics, but also for our collective professional practices that involve, among other matters broadly related to consumption, long-distance travel—ranging from job interviews, to guest lectures and academic conferences (and the pressures on graduate students and non-tenured faculty to participate in them). While the neoliberalization of the university and the growing emphasis on quantifiable forms of professional academic output help to shape these practices and to limit alternatives, this does not at all mean that academics don’t have agency—or responsibility.

What allows us, the ecologically privileged, to ignore responsibility is our social position. Even if we are aware of how our practices relate to injustice, we do harm-inducing things (among other reasons) because we are structurally allowed to do so, because we don’t want to inconvenience or to deny ourselves, because we can pass off the costs to unseen and seemingly distant others, and because we are rarely, if ever, compelled to account for our profligate ways.

A more just world necessitates such an accounting—in addition to new sociological imaginaries and practices, and new ecological ones to which they are inextricably tied. Putting an end to the high-flying ways of academic conference tourism is one of many good places to start.

Joseph Nevins is an associate professor of geography at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. His research interests include socioterritorial boundaries and mobility, violence and inequality, and political ecology. Among his books are A Not-so-Distant Horror: Mass Violence in East Timor (Cornell University Press); Dying to Live: A Story of U.S. Immigration in an Age of Global Apartheid (City Lights) and Operation Gatekeeper and Beyond: The War on “Illegals” and the Remaking of the U.S.-Mexico Boundary (Routledge).
Joseph Nevins is an inspiration on this topic. No exaggeration – a conversation with him a couple years ago persuaded me to undertake a year without flying for either pleasure or work, despite being an active academic. I made it only 11 months (sigh), from May 2013 to April 2014, but I’m trying again now. Why should we be hypocrites? If we tackle this issue with courage, we will have greater integrity in our research and somewhat rarer conferencing on environmental issues, “and” quite probably we will have some extra time left over to spend with loved ones.

» On the Future of Face-to-Face Academic Interaction, or Why We Need to Talk about Gemeinschaft The Sociological Imagination (2014-12-30 11:46:55)

[...] usual academic narcissism, this question is periodically posed in terms of conference attendance, with the Pharisees amongst us in full flow about how much harm is caused by flying. To be sure, I am the first to admit that the performance of most academic conference speakers does [...]
You know you’re a sociology student when... (2014-09-12 08:00)

...you [1]think like this!

Research ‘Ignite’ CFP – Being Human in a Digital Age (2014-09-13 08:00)

The event is aimed at early career researchers in the humanities (who may be also working across disciplinary divides such as in the arts and sciences) whose research connects to the theme of ‘being human in a digital age’. Ignite events challenge researchers to make their case in a short, succinct way by giving them five minutes only to make their case. For this event, which will be held in the University of London’s Senate House on the 15th November 2014, we are also challenging applicants to make their research accessible to a non-academic audience.

The event forms part of [1]Too Much Information – a day of public events hosted by the School of Advanced Study, University of London exploring what it means to be human in a digital age. Contributors to the day include the Mass Observation Archive, the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis (UCL), the British Library and the Oxford Internet Institute. Confirmed keynote speakers include Professor Sir Nigel Shadbolt and technology writer Ben Hammersley.

We are particularly (but not exclusively) interested in hearing from people whose research may touch upon some of the following areas working on some of the following topics:

- the history and future of ‘big-data' in the humanities – from paper archives to digital repositories
- surveillance, online privacy, the ‘right to be forgotten’ and the politics of the internet
- new technologies and their impact on human consciousness, memories, emotions
- historical, literary or artistic explorations of ‘information overload’
For the full call, and details of how to apply, visit the [2]Being Human festival website. The deadline for applications in 1 October, 2014.

Please feel free to circulate this amongst colleagues/PhD candidates who may be interested.


Wellcome Trust Symposium and The Curious Museum of Personal Medical Devices (2014-09-14 08:00)

Wellcome Trust Symposium on New Conceptual Approaches to Personal Medical Devices

18th-19th September 2014
Post-doctoral Suite, 16 Mill Lane, University of Cambridge, Cambridge

Fuelled by the accelerating pace of technological development and a general shift to personalised, patient-led medicine alongside the growing Quantified Self and Big Data movements, the emerging field of personal medical devices is one which is advancing rapidly across multiple domains and disciplines – so rapidly that conceptual and empirical understandings of personal medical devices, and their clinical, social and philosophical implications, often lag behind new developments and interventions. Personal medical devices – devices that are attached to, worn by, interacted with, or carried by individuals for the purposes of generating biomedical data and/or carrying out medical interventions with/on the person concerned – have become increasingly significant in clinical and extra-clinical contexts owing to a range of factors including the growth of multimorbidity and chronic disease in ageing populations and the increasing sophistication and miniaturisation of personal devices themselves.

The aim of this symposium is to consider recent theoretical developments in the humanities and social sciences in relation to personal medical devices, and to address important gaps in understanding such as the differences between wearable and non-wearable devices, the ontological implications of personal devices for concepts of the body, the self, and technology, and the extent to which such questions may arise with particular force owing to ‘new’ technologies.

The symposium takes place at the University of Cambridge over two days, with the first day consisting of papers and keynote presentations, and with the second day consisting of further discussion and a concluding panel of invited discussants from a range of backgrounds including computing science, clinical medicine, technology, and philosophy. The symposium combines invited and submitted papers from established and emerging scholars to consider how recent theoretical literature can shed light on current debates surrounding personal medical devices these and other important issues.

Some of the questions that papers may address include:
• How ‘personal’ are personal medical devices?
• How new are ‘new’ medical technologies?
• What are the implications of personal medical devices for enduring philosophical dualities such as mind/body and
CONTRIBUTIONS INVITED FOR THE CURIOUS MUSEUM OF PERSONAL MEDICAL DEVICES

As part of the Symposium, we are hosting a multidisciplinary panel discussion inspired by Radio 4’s Museum of Curiosity – i.e. we are asking panellists to suggest technologies that they believe merit inclusion in a virtual museum, in this case of personal medical devices. The idea is to encourage interdisciplinary discussion in an interesting and fun manner.

We wanted to open an invitation to members of the Quantified Self network who might be interested in putting forward their own suggestions of personal medical devices that have somehow defined a particular medical (or related) field or which they see as of particular significance. As long as they are attached to, carried by, worn on, or otherwise interact with individuals, the devices can be of any kind whatsoever – past or present (or future!), small or large (within reason), automated or ‘dumb’, simple or complex. They don’t even have to be ostensibly ‘medical’ devices as long as a rationale can be made for their serving medical ends – i.e. Jawbones, Fitbits, Garmin all welcome!

We would be very grateful if you would consider contributing. If possible, we would like suggestions to be passed on by 8th September, accompanied by a short piece of text (e.g. up to 300 words) making a case for the device’s inclusion. Suggestions would be displayed at the symposium, online, and in future events. In order to illustrate the kind of thing we are looking for, I have included below the suggestion received from Professor Simon Griffin of the Primary Care Unit, University of Cambridge.

We hope you will consider being involved in this way in what promises to be a very interesting and stimulating event.

Best wishes,
Conor Farrington and Rebecca Lynch

What would happen if an evil scientist wiped the memories of everyone within a workplace? (2014-09-15 08:00)

In a recent paper [1]Tero Piirainen suggests that “if we all just suddenly lost our memories and other relevant neural dispositions—if no one was able to remember his or her own name, let alone relatives, friends, possessions,
occupation, place of residence, and so on—there would be nothing left of social relations and structures”. This is a science fiction scenario I actually find extremely interesting. Consider that one day, as a result of a natural disaster or fiendish scheme by an evil scientist, “memory and neural dispositions” were suddenly erased at one moment in time. What would the world look like afterwards? I think it would briefly look very similar to the world before the event. For instance the spatial positioning of people within a workplace would be structurally conditioned, likewise how they were co-located (or not), how they were dressed, the length of time they had been present at the workplace that day and what they had been doing up until the memory wipe. It’s certainly unlikely that these structural features of the workplace would be reproduced after the memory wipe but this simply reflects the activity-dependence of social structure i.e. they rely on agential doings for their reproduction or transformation. The enduring causal power of past structures is precisely the point that social realists are making against the central conflation that Piiroinen espouses. I’d maintain that you couldn’t explain the unfolding of events in this scenario without reference to the causal power of past structures i.e. the responses would be patterned rather than atomistically chaotic.

But a lot also depends upon precisely how many “relevant neural dispositions” have been lost in the mind wipe. In a workplace that has card based access systems, the physical possession of the card and its power to enable access to certain locations within the workplace would be unaffected by the mind wipe. People would still have credit cards, mobile phones and personal computers which with sufficient remaining ‘neural dispositions’ could be leveraged to make sense of the undoubtedly confusing situation in which they now found themselves. In fact if the memory wipe were not worldwide but rather something localised to a particular region, or even a workplace, it’s not difficult to imagine how aggregated individual actions of those subject to the mind wipe would provoke collective intervention by authorities that could in turn lead to the reproduction of those structures Piiroinen suggests would be ‘lost’. In short I think there would be something left of social relations and structures. We wouldn’t be able to see it directly but we would be able to see its effects.

1. [http://stx.sagepub.com/search?author1=Tero+Piiroinen&sortspec=date&submit=Submit](http://stx.sagepub.com/search?author1=Tero+Piiroinen&sortspec=date&submit=Submit)

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**An introduction to curation tools** (2014-09-16 08:00)

For all that digital technology offers the academy, it also presents new problems. The instant availability of information from all over the world poses the inevitable challenge of how to collect, sort, evaluate and share this information. These are tasks which those working in universities, across the full range of roles, have always performed. However the sheer abundance which characterizes our modern knowledge environment too often results in information overload for those whose professional and personal interests give them no choice but to engage with this torrent. It is for this reason that curation tools, often ‘seen as the next big thing’ of social media, offer the potential for such enormously gainful use by university staff.

Curation is the broader concept behind Pinterest, by far the most well known of these tools. The service operates as a virtual ‘pinboard’, allowing the user to explore the internet, collecting images they find through the use of a convenient browser button (in a similar way to creating new browser bookmarks) and make these titled pinboards available online. However Pinterest is just one tool amongst many and, with its central focus being on images, in many ways it is less versatile than some of the others. Here are three of my favorites:

**Storify** allows users to search multiple social networks and knit together items they find into sequential stories. I’ve personally found this useful for preserving Twitter debates that I’ve found particularly intellectually stimulating. However this only represents part of what the tool is capable of if you combine a sufficiently diverse range of elements,
whereas my uses have been merely been reconstructing conversations on one medium that I was actively involved in. The most impressive uses I have seen have tended to revolve around covering events, either live or retrospectively.

**Bundlr** is my personal favorite and I can’t recommend it enough. As with the others, you use a browser button to 'bundle' content. When you’re on a web page which you want to curate, press the button and either choose an existing bundle or make a new one. What’s most impressive about Bundlr is how it combines the ability to handle many types of content (e.g. youtube videos, images, tweets, presentations, web pages) with effortlessly making the finished product look aesthetically appealing. It’s also incredibly easy to pick up and use. Within a few hours of signing up to Bundlr I had multiple bundles which had collectively received hundreds of hits.

**Scoop.It** allows you to publish 'magazines' based on content you 'scoop' through a browser bookmark. Whereas some of the other tools focus more on collating items, Scoop.it offers more room for curation in the strict sense of the term: it gives you more opportunity than the other tools to control what aspects of your 'scooped' items are highlighted and what commentary you offer about them. It also has an interesting, though in my experience not quite perfected, tool which automatically offers you ideas about things to 'scoop'.

If the concept of curation interests you then I would advise experimenting with a few tools to see which one is right for you. While there are undoubtedly objective differences between them, there is also a large aspect of subjective fit: each of them rests on some underlying embodied metaphor (e.g. pinning on your pinboard, putting items in a bundle, scooping up items for your scrapbook newspaper) and what works for one person might not necessarily work for another. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to use these tools. Here are some of the things I have used them for: making resource packs for social media training, inventoring journal articles I use in my research, producing a portfolio of projects I have been involved in, pulling materials together to help prepare for projects I have yet to start and collecting materials about my favourite authors. But there are many other ways in which they can be used. Curation tools will enhance any task that involves collecting, sorting, evaluating and sharing digital material.

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**Social Acceleration and Musical Innovation** (2014-09-17 08:00)

I just came across a lovely point in Harmut Rosa's book about the relationship between social change and musical innovation. Certain forms of music come to be seen as emblematic of the age but, as that age changes so too does the sensibility which is brought to bear upon that music:

> today certain forms of jazz music that, at the time of their emergence in the first half of the twentieth century, were experienced as breathless, hectic, exceedingly fast, machine-like, and stupefyingly chaotic - and thus as fitting reflections of their era - are touted as "music for tranquil hours" or "jazz for peaceful afternoon."

Harmut Rosa, Social Acceleration, p. 82

If I'm in the right mood, I love music that is "stupefyingly chaotic". I wonder if digital hardcore, gabba and breakcore
will come to seem quaintly relaxing in future years? Or are there inherent limits upon musical innovation which entail an upper limit on elaboration of this very particular sort?

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH4xhhFj6qQ]
[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLDuh0phBCg]
[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UZqnydWxEA]

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**How To Keep Your Sociological Imagination Alive (2014-09-17 17:40)**

In this podcast recorded for Sociological Imagination, Les Back discusses the craft of sociology with Howard Becker. As anyone familiar with his [1]Art of Listening will realise, Les has long been concerned with the role of attentiveness in the practice of sociology, striving to "document and understand social life without assassinating it" and helping younger scholars learn to do the same. This is an approach to sociology both inspired by and building upon the lifelong craft which Howie, as he's known to his friends, has expressed in far more than a plethora of books and papers (including the [2]most inspiring book about academic writing that anyone is ever likely to write) - as Les put it to me in an e-mail, Howie has tried throughout his career to show how it's possible to do sociology differently. So too has Les and in this fascinating discussion he invites Howard to reflect on how to keep your sociological imagination alive in a context that too often mitigates against it. In the process they present a vision of sociology in which creativity co-exists with rigour and a sociological sensibility is something one cultivates by looking beyond the academy. I found the resulting interview hugely inspiring and I hope you will too:
Useful resources for early career Sociologists – TSR theme donovan (2018-10-23 22:34:20)

[...] podcast discussion between Les Back and Howard Becker provides an illuminating perspective on how to keep your sociological imagination alive in circumstances that aren’t always conducive to [...]


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3. https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/167976489&auto_play=false&hide_related=false&show_comments=true&show_user=true&show_reposts=false&visual=true
Trailblazing Sociologist Receives Special Achievement Award: An Interview with Dr. Patricia Leavy
(2014-09-17 23:13)
Patricia Leavy, Ph.D. is an independent scholar and novelist (formerly Associate Professor of Sociology, Founding Director of Gender Studies and Chairperson of Sociology & Criminology at Stonehill College). She has published sixteen books including Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice (Guilford Press, 2009, 2015) and research-informed novels American Circumstance (Sense Publishers, 2013) and Low-Fat Love (Sense Publishers, 2011). She is the editor for five book series with Oxford University Press and Sense Publishers. She has appeared on national television, radio, is regularly quoted by the news media, publishes op-eds and is a blogger for The Huffington Post and The Creativity Post. The New England Sociological Association named her the 2010 New England Sociologist of the Year. She just received the prestigious 2014 Special Achievement Award given by the American Creativity Association for her work advancing arts-based research and for the ground-breaking Social Fictions book series.

Congrats on your ACA Award which recognizes your “special and extraordinary advancement of arts-based research and the ground-breaking Social Fictions book series.”

Thank you!

The ACA recognizes creativity in any field and they have honored some of the world’s most famous astronauts, scientists, inventors, surgeons, and humanitarians. You’re the first sociologist to receive this honor.

Well, that’s what I’ve heard. I think it goes back to the hard science versus soft science artificial divide that privileges some ways of knowing over others. The social sciences, and sociology in particular, have historically been undervalued. We continue to see this built into funding structures and the like. It’s absolutely the case. However, I am increasingly hopeful that the tide is turning. As the global work economy continues to stress the importance of innovation, creativity and critical thinking, the perspectives and tools of sociology will have their chance to shine. We can’t put it all on the structure of funding agencies and the like though. I think we need to take some responsibility too. There is a marketing issue. Sociologists need to find creative and effective ways to market what it is that we do, so that others know the tools we have in our arsenal.
The award honors your work advancing arts-based research. Can you explain that and how it is connected to public sociology and the sociological imagination?

Arts-based research merges the creative arts and scholarly research across the disciplines. For example, one might write up their focus group research as a play. Arts-based research practices offer us new ways to ask and answer research questions, they may allow us to tap into issues that are otherwise out of reach, they can help us forge micro-macro connections and they allow us to engage broader public audiences with social research.

Expanding on those two last points, first arts-based research provides one set of tools for public sociology. I think most sociologists accept that traditional academic journal articles are totally inaccessible to the public because both they are jargon-laden and they circulate in out of reach journals. Arts-based research facilitates public sociology by making the products of our research accessible in every sense of the word. What’s more, the work has a chance at being engaging and memorable so that audiences are more likely to be affected and moved to reflection, re-evaluation of previously held ideas, or even social action.

With respect to micro-macro connections, the heart of the sociological imagination, arts-based research is enormously useful for crystalizing these connections through the process of showing instead of telling. For example, by taking interview research and writing it up as a short story or novel we can use tools such as interior dialogue to show how characters are internally impacted by their environment, such as a conversation or interaction or when they are consuming the services of an institution or consuming cultural objects like pop culture. The possibilities are unlimited for illustrating micro-macro connections in ways that include the reader in the process.

You’re specifically being recognized for the Social Fictions book series which is being called “ground-breaking,” “a watershed moment in the academy” and “a landmark achievement.” Please describe the series.

We publish books that are written entirely in literary forms including novels, plays, short story and poetry collections, but the books are authored by scholars and informed by their teaching and research. In other words, the series publishes the products of arts-based research. The series represents a new way to communicate information. I began the series after wrote my first novel, Low-Fat Love. Low-Fat Love explores low self-esteem, the psychology negative relationships, attraction to those who withhold their support and female identity construction. That book was loosely based on nearly a decade of interview research with young women about their relationships, identity and self-esteem issues.

The real idea behind the series is to change the way we share research outside of the academy and to change the way we teach within the academy. The books are read by both lay people and are adopted by college professors as springboards for class reflection and discussion on the themes in the books. In an age dominated by standardized testing and the like I think it is vital we create more ways to foster engagement, critical thinking and active learning. That is the intent behind our series. For my own novels in the series part of my hope is to share a sociology of daily life and help readers to forge micro-macro connections, through their own analytical process. For instance, in Low-Fat Love characters are engaged in consuming pop culture and readers have access to descriptions of that pop culture as well as how the character is affected by it. Readers have that access through internal dialogue and third person narration.

As someone who has repeatedly taught introduction to sociology with your novel American Circumstance, I can see exactly what you are talking about. Students love reading the book because it’s not dry the way typical course texts are but they are also given the chance to interpret the text in multiple ways, and their assumptions are challenged along the way which then becomes grounds for discussion.

That’s fantastic because it has been the hope. That book explores how social class impacts identity and relationships
which is something that is often difficult to talk about. I was particularly committed to exploring the back-stage of the 1% given the events and social climate of the past few years. So much of sociology considers patterns of interaction, cultural norms and values, and I wanted a way to show some of that in action. American Circumstance is actually my favorite of my own books. One of my heroes, sociologist Laurel Richardson, said that the book offered a “sociology of everyday life” and challenged her cultural assumptions. I hope it does the same for students and others.

In the field of sociology we often recognize people for their theoretical contributions. I believe you consider yourself a methodologist. How important is it that we recognize methodological contributions?

Methodology is all about building effective research practices, designing plans for carrying out research and even considering new structures for building research and research reports. So there's no question methods and methodologies are integral to our field and all fields. The privileging of theory over methods is sort of nonsensical because in fact in methodology theory and methods merge. In other words, they are inextricably bound to each other. It's the chicken or the egg question of sociology, but honestly, instead of asking that question isn't it best to support and honor both?

Finally, people credit you with being a leader in your field, particularly through the book series you have created. But knowing you personally, I’m not quite sure if you see it that way. Any comment?

In some ways I think of myself as very much following others who are doing amazing, ground-breaking work. I learned that sometimes if you want to hang out with the cool kids you need to invite them to a party.

Learn more about Dr. Patricia Leavy [1]www.patricialeavy.com

In honor of the ACA recognition Sense Publishers is offering 25 % off all titles in the Social Fictions series as well as free shipping at [2]www.sensepublishers.com (use promo code 192837 at check-out).

Lauren M. Sardi, Ph.D is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Quinnipiac University in Hamden, CT.[/nbox]

How to become a superstar economist (2014-09-18 08:00)

http://gty.im/120947010

This was an interesting little section in a thought-provoking article about Alan Greenspan's ambivalent relationship to the economics profession:

Step 1 is to attend an elite college, like Harvard (Bernanke), M.I.T. (Summers) or Brown (Yellen), followed by a top Ph.D. program at a place like M.I.T. (Bernanke), Harvard (Summers) or Yale (Yellen). Next, establish yourself as one of the smartest kids on campus, though not necessarily one of the most popular.

While in graduate school, find a prominent mentor. For Bernanke, it was Stanley Fischer (later governor of the Bank of Israel). For Summers, it was Martin Feldstein (later Ronald Reagan's chief economist). For Yellen, it was James Tobin (a former adviser to John F. Kennedy).

If your dissertation is good enough, you get to become an assistant professor at yet another elite institution, like Stanford (Bernanke), M.I.T. (Summers) or Harvard (Yellen). There you spend your time teaching and, more important for your future career, writing scholarly papers. These papers may be unintelligible to mere Muggles, but that's O.K. Your goal is to impress your fellow economists.

If your articles are sufficiently numerous, well published and widely cited, you are eventually awarded a tenured sinecure in a top economics department or business school, like Princeton's (Bernanke), Harvard's (Summers) or Berkeley's (Yellen). Having achieved this rung of success, you are on your way to becoming an economist's economist.

At this point, paths diverge. Most economics professors are content spending their careers at universities. Some temporarily depart from academia to make a small contribution to the policy world. (Full disclosure: From 2003 to 2005, when I left Harvard to serve as chairman of George W. Bush's Council of Economic Advisers, I regularly interacted with Greenspan, who was then chairman of the Federal Reserve.) But most of these professors-on-leave soon return to the comforts of the ivory tower.

Yet a few tenured economists become restless with the obscurity, slow pace and petty politics of academia. They yearn for the fame, fast pace and petty politics of Washington. With the help of political benefactors, they find themselves in positions of real authority. Bernanke, Summers and Yellen are examples.


Would it even be possible to write a similar article about becoming a superstar sociologist? Perhaps this is a very good thing.
The weight of economic output (2014-09-19 08:00)

Loathe though I am to say something positive about Alan Greenspan, I'm rather taken with [1]this way of thinking about economic output:

Mr. Greenspan, one of the nation's most astute economic observers, has a rare talent for framing economic trends. He writes, for example, that as the value of the nation's economic output has increased since the 1970s, the weight has not. He means this literally: If everything "Made in the U.S.A." in 2013 was placed on a giant scale, it would weigh about as much as everything "Made in the U.S.A." in 1977. It's hard to imagine a more vivid illustration of what it means to say that the United States has shifted toward a "knowledge economy."


Crisis and Social Change: Towards Alternative Horizons (2014-09-19 17:56)

Cambridge Sociology Conference
Crisis and Social Change: Towards Alternative Horizons Friday Sep 26 – Saturday Sep 27 2014 Department of Sociology, Free School Lane

Hi everyone,

You are all hereby invited to attend the Crisis and Social Change conference next week at the Department of Sociology. With 36 presenters from the UK and abroad, two plenary panels and four keynote speakers it is set to be a stimulating and memorable event.

Our keynote speakers are:
The politics of mindfulness (2014-09-20 08:00)

Sceptical about the current fashionableness of mindfulness meditation? So are we. The problem is not mindfulness practice itself but rather the vulgarised form in which it is presented as a panacea to social problems. It strips it of its philosophical and existential underpinnings in a way that seems questionable in most cases (with notable exception such as [1]this) but the politics of its ascendancy are also rather worrying. Suzanne Moore makes this point well:

For mindfulness is [2]Buddhism without the awkward Buddhist bits. A complex philosophy is rendered as self-help. What does freedom from attachment and desire mean in this self-centred world? What is radical acceptance? Why practise non-judgment? Those who have practised meditation all their lives may not say it’s to get a promotion or be less stressed. There is a whole history of thought here.

But no, once Arianna Huffington is on the case, you know there is money to be made in commodifying blankness. Indeed, the whole of Silicon Valley has hugged mindfulness close, as have the US marines, who use it as part of "mind fitness" to help soldiers relax and learn "emotional intelligence".

These are basic meditation techniques being sold as a way to function better in an over-connected world. Thus, in the finance sector, companies where bankers are super-stressed – unlike poor people – arrange
for their staff to have 10-minute daily meditations. It’s all scienced-up with names such as Mind Lab to shake off the hippyish/religious/psychic-adventurer connotations. Keep fit for the brain.

[...]

Much of the cult of mindfulness is a reaction to technology. It speaks the language of detox, of decluttering. There is too much information. We need to clear our minds. Be and not do. The new ascetic is someone who goes for a walk without their phone or takes a week off Twitter to cleanse themselves. This version of meditation requires no more than the faith that we can all be self-improving part-time gurus. It requires no commitment to a community, and it’s cheap.

The corporate world sees that it can make its workers more self-reliant, balanced and focused. What could be better? Take your medicine, because the mindfulness movement is symptomatic of what late capitalism requires of us. A contemplative space opens up where religion used to be. We learn techniques to make us more efficient. This neutered, apolitical approach is to help us personally – it has nothing to say on the structural difficulties that we live with. It lets go of the idea that we can change the world; it merely helps us function better in it.


The term McMindfulness, which is rapidly spreading, seems to have been coined in this Huffington Post article by a Professor of Management and a Zen teacher. You can read the full thing [5]here, it’s very good:

The booming popularity of the mindfulness movement has also turned it into a lucrative cottage industry. Business savvy consultants pushing mindfulness training promise that it will improve work efficiency, reduce absenteeism, and enhance the "soft skills" that are crucial to career success. Some even assert that mindfulness training can act as a "disruptive technology," reforming even the most dysfunctional companies into kinder, more compassionate and sustainable organizations. So far, however, no empirical studies have been published that support these claims.


Žižek as a player of paradoxes (2014-09-21 08:00)

Thanks to [1]
Colin Wight
for pointing out [2] this great analysis of the formulaic tendencies in Žižek's writing style:

Žižek arranges his book like a piece of music with different movements, with chapter subheadings such as "allegro moderato". This is fitting, because Žižek is something of a virtuoso, but as a player of paradoxes. His great riffs take one of a finite number of forms. There is the simple psychoanalytic trope of claiming that however something seems, its true nature is the precise opposite. Then you have the repeated claim that a certain position entails its opposite, but that both sides of the paradox are equally real. Then again, there is the reversal of common sense, in which, whatever the received wisdom is, Žižek postulates the opposite.

And that really is it: Žižek simply repeats these intellectual manoeuvres again and again, albeit brilliantly, supplementing them with Lacanian embellishments such as the objet petit, the Other and the Real.

If you think I’m exaggerating, try doing what I’m about to do now: open any page at random and you’ll almost certainly find the play of paradoxes in some form. The book falls open at page 40 and I read: "One thing that never ceases to surprise the native ethical consciousness is how the very same people who commit terrible acts of violence towards their enemies can display warm humanity and gentle care for the members of their own group." On page 166, we only have to read until line two to find mention of Lacan’s interest in the "paradoxical reversal". Try page 87: "In the much celebrated free-circulation opened up by global capitalism, it is 'things' (commodities) which freely circulate, while the circulation of 'persons' is more and more controlled." Four lines into page 122, we find "the paradox of universal singularity".

This game of seeming contradictions is not at all pointless: very often it leads Žižek to turn up real gems. His analysis of the suspect motivations of what he calls "liberal communists" - the educated, liberal middle classes - is a wonderful piece of satire: "Liberal communists also love the student protests which shattered France in May 1968: what an explosion of youthful energy and creativity!" He’s also good on tolerance: "My duty to be tolerant towards the Other effectively means that I should not get too close him, intrude on his space. In other words, I should respect his intolerance of my over-proximity."


My own views on Žižek have hardened recently after I stupidly purchased his 800 page Hegel book with the intention of clarifying once and for all how seriously I’m inclined to take him as a philosopher. After 50 pages, it returned to my shelf, to be surreptitiously deposited in the Warwick Philosophy common room at some point, or some other venue where I suspect it will be likely to find a new owner able to identify charm amidst what I could see only as
tediousness. I also realised quite how much he publishes (see [4]this list, which I know to be missing at least one recent entry) and quite how frequently he self-plagiarises. I discussed the one example I was able to place from memory [5]here but I'd long suspected it was a continual feature of his books that becomes obvious if you read both his essays and his books. It seems his proclivity for this is [6]much more pronounced than I'd realised myself:

In Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle, the Guardian, the London Review of Books, the Australian Broadcast Corporation's Religion & Ethics site, and The Year of Dreaming Dangerously, Žižek's words run around in circles, endlessly quoting himself without attribution, adaptation, or citation. And these instances stand in stark contrast to the ones in which Žižek's re-appropriations were noted correctly, as in [7]his April 24, 2012 article for the Guardian, which noted at the end: "This article is based on remarks Slavoj Žižek will be making at an event at the New York Public Library on 25 April, ahead of publication of The Year of Dreaming Dangerously (2012)."

Self-plagiarism is something of an ambiguous crime, but it is a far different matter when committed across separate publishers who, presumably, assumed they were receiving original pieces of writing. I could have cited even more examples of Žižek's self-plagiarism from various works (for example, that was not the only London Review of Books essay he would later re-appropriate), but I think the general picture is already quite clear. And given Žižek's extensive bibliography, it is quite possible that the extent of the recycling is far greater than I have so far discovered.


I have nothing against Žižek personally and the little I know about his motivations suggests that he [9]hates teaching, likes travelling and has discovered that churning out four books or more a year allows him to avoid teaching and travel lots, presumably while making rather a lot of money and enjoying a jet-setting lifestyle that sits uneasily with his avowed communism. On this level, I think he's merely inconsistent at worst - almost all of us are and those who aren't tend to be incredibly irritating. But I also increasingly see him as emblematic of everything that is wrong with modern academia: the superstar professor able to float free of any limiting norms of collegiality or professionalism, the cult of personality which dominates an intellectual space and erodes it vitality and the tendency towards an obscurely theoretical radicalism accessible only to those versed in contemporary continental philosophy. The final paragraph in the post quoted above expresses my own view very effectively:

Slavoj Žižek's sin is not in reformulating long-held ideas into new books, something many authors do. It is in copying (nearly without modification) large sections of other works of his without attribution, and while simultaneously presenting each work as an original piece of writing. The extraordinary pressure on today's writers, ranging from promising young journalists such as Jonah Lehrer to world-renowned...
philosophers such as Slavoj Žižek, to maintain prolificacy in the age of shortened attention spans is surely to blame for the graying hairs of many an aspiring writer. But it is no excuse for repackaging something old as something brand-new.


1. https://twitter.com/colwight
2. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/400599.article
3. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/400599.article
7. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2012/apr/24/occupy-wall-street-what-is-to-be-done-next

I agree with Mark Carrigan in several aspects and hope to discuss this topic further with another text. There are a couple of questions to be asked on Zizek and after that he can be located much more properly to his place in intellectual history.

Why does the iPhone matter to us? (2014-09-21 11:50)

My initial impressions of Bernard Stiegler were far from positive, largely ensuing from the [1]sheer incomprehensibility of his writing. However [2]this essay by Mark Featherstone (HT Emma Head) has reminded me why I bought Stiegler’s books in the first place after a few people explained the themes he addresses in his work. Featherstone is concerned with Stiegler’s work as a resource to help illuminate a way out of our being “lost in a hyper-functional technological world” in which “the masturbatory logic that supports, for example, the Apple universe” leads me to “become my own other”. His point here concerns the deliberate eroticisation of these products, coupled with the designed inevitability of their obsolesce. The iPhone, so sleek and seductive, encourages us to invest ourselves in it while the commercial system upon which we depend to attain it strenuously works to preclude the sustainability of that investment:

The effect of this reliance is that we escape our lack through the object. Of course, the additional problem of the technological object today is that, unlike the transitional object — such as the ageing teddy or the old blanket, which grow with us — the evolution of the modern technological object is organised around planned obsolescence. Where we are meant to outgrow the transitional object, the technological gadget outgrows us. It moves on — the iPhone 3 becomes the 3G, the 4, 4S, 5, 5S, 5C. As
Steve Jobs famously said before the unveiling of Apple's latest gadget, “one more thing.” Following the logic of Marxist commodity fetishism, there is always “one more thing . . .” that indicates to us that we always lack.

His argument makes me think back to an exhibition I saw at the Tate Modern earlier in the summer. It involved a dark room, into which people entered and were assailed by fleeting apparitions projected onto the walls. But the contents of the exhibition itself were largely irrelevant. What struck me was how utterly the efficacy of it depended upon the jarring impact of entering a pitch black space and how manifestly this failed because the majority of those entering the room immediately reached for a smart phone to pierce the darkness, in many cases subsequently clutching it protectively even after they had ceased to depend upon the reassurance of its light to acclimatise themselves to the installation. My initial reaction to this was irritation, followed by curiosity and then paroxysms of reflexive doubt when I realised that the immediate expression of my internal realisation (“isn’t it weird and interesting that people do this with their iPhones?”) was to reach for my own iPhone and open Twitter.

To a cynic this might sound like an awfully long winded way of saying that our consumer objects bring us comfort. I think there’s more to it though. Featherstone’s point in contrasting ‘my smartphone’ to a transitional object is that we come to outgrow the latter. It serves to facilitate a transition from the unmediated dependency of early natality through to our individuation within a network of relations in which we gradually come to negotiate this need without ever entirely overcoming it: it’s the consistency of this dependency throughout the life course, depending on others throughout even if dependency on a particular other is fleeting, which is repudiated within the culture of late capitalism. Others recognise us in a way that disowns our dependency, with ‘co-dependency’ widely seen as pathological, in turn encouraging us to disown it in others. Where dependency is acknowledged it is sequestered in specialised institutions, constituting a way in which modernity itself mitigates against our learning to live with dependency. If it is acknowledged, it is framed as something which is overcome through childhood and which cannot be overcome in old age. This confusion becomes particularly pronounced if we consider that one way of reading the findings of the emerging adulthood literature is that the extent of dependency in late adolescence is expanding rather than shrinking, at least in the industrial west.

Against this background the iPhone becomes a strangely overloaded object. As the people in the Tate Modern installation showed, it is literally a torch we can use to pierce the darkness. It allows us to absent ourselves from social situations, escaping from others and their recalcitrant disinclination to cater to the dispositions we are often only dimly aware we possess. It leaves the knowledge system at our fingers, in the process allowing us to evade the limitations of our capacity to remember and our willingness to even try. It is our entire network, all those we know and all those we might wish to know, compressed into the palm of our hands. The latent capacity of the object is bewildering and overwhelming: in allowing us to say whatever we want to whomever we want to, it obscures the question of why we would want to do these things. Stripped of the horizons imposed by scarcity, we struggle to orientate ourselves to the endless possibilities it affords. The iPhone comes to represent everything we could do and could be but are not. It helps us repudiate our dependency (“I don’t need them, there’s no end to the things I could do”) without making us independent – in fact it undermines this because the simultaneous expansion of possibility and contraction of grounds upon which to choose can easily engender compulsivity (i.e. never exhausting the novelty in my hand and having no grounds upon which to choose between novelties leads to mindless repetition and inertia).

In this sense, we can see the iPhone as an object both reassuring and destabilising. It induces a sense of autonomy but at a cost of undercutting our capacity to sustain meaningful commitments in a life structured around its omnipresence. It helps us symbolically overcome our dependence but detracts from our capacity to meaningfully enter into new relations with all the capacity for dependency they herald: why commit to these people when I can
so easily meet those people? What I’m trying to get at is the relationship between a technological artefact like the iPhone and our capacity to live with what Ian Craib calls ‘disappointment’:

Why disappointment? In common usage, and in the dictionary, we talk about disappointment as what happens, what we feel, when something we expect, intend, or hope for or desire does not materialise. One of the difficulties of living in our world is that it is perhaps increasingly less clear exactly what we might expect or hope for or desire. In fact, these words mean different things. The most basic is desire: it carries connotations of needing urgently, yearning, to the point almost of trying to will something into existence. Sometimes we desire something so completely that we revert to our infant selves and scream, metaphorically or in reality, in the hope that our desire may be realised – just as, if we were lucky, the milk used to appear in response to our screams from the cot.

Ian Craib, The Importance of Disappointment, Pg 3

In fact I’d go as far as to venture that the iPhone is the most potent artefact ever constructed for escaping disappointment. Our desire to [4]get out of the mess of life finds expression in this shiny implement for which we pay so much and from which we expect so much. It serves this practical function (distraction, connection, escape) but it also comes to represent our capacity to float free of others, wriggling free of the bonds of dependency in which we are all irrevocably entwined. However it is a fleeting object, soon to be obsolete, offering a chimerical sense of autonomy generative more of compulsion than purposiveness.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/07/14/the-most-ridiculous-sentence-ive-ever-read/

Improving the relationship between academics and journalists (2014-09-22 08:00)

Having spent a lot of time working with journalists, I’m very aware of the difficult questions contrasting world views can pose and the lack of support for negotiating them in many areas of higher education. At various points in the last few years, I’ve found myself agonising about decisions (usually erring on the side of caution and often kicking myself for it later) without knowing where to go for advice. Hopefully this will change but, until it does, the internet is a useful source of advice and insight. So too is experience - my disastrous attempt to once explain the philosophical concept of ontological emergence in response to the question ‘is asexuality nature or nurture?’ taught me the importance of being simplified without being simplistic. It’s a hard balance to strike and it does often feel like you’re being pushed to oversimplify in order to fit into someone else’s narrative structure or, if you don’t oversimplify, you’ll be oversimplified by the journalist anyway. These experiences seem to be quite common as this [1]great article in the Times Higher Education suggests:
Academics and journalists share a common mission: to create and disseminate knowledge. But their wildly contrasting approaches have given rise to a relationship that, when not characterised by mutual neglect, can be awkward and strained.

The growing pressure on academics to throw themselves into public debates and demonstrate the societal impact of their work, however, is demanding closer and more frequent interactions with journalists. So it is vital that we properly understand the underlying causes of the mutual frustrations.

A survey I recently conducted into the nature of interactions between scholars and journalists within my own field of China studies revealed that, for academics, the biggest source of irritation is receiving requests for interviews at very short notice; one respondent likened such requests to "late-night booty calls". These leave the academics feeling like simply "space-fillers" for hard-pressed news researchers desperate to secure an academic, any academic, before deadline.

Academics' other main complaint was being asked questions outside their area of expertise. If journalists do value scholarly contributions, they wondered, why do they apparently expend little effort to identify appropriate experts?

Further bugbears included being misquoted and pushed to oversimplify and give strong opinions. The journalists, on the other hand, emphasised the value they place on academics’ responsiveness. "Understanding the immediacy of media", one said, "is fundamental for good cooperation between journalists and academics." If messages are not promptly answered, journalists move on.

Journalists’ other significant gripe concerned clarity. One correspondent stressed the need to avoid "jargon or academese", while another said stilted writing styles have a tendency to "bleed over into conversation". Column inches are limited, so academics need to be able to sum up their point succinctly.

The discussion about motivations later in the article is interesting as well. I see my media work on asexuality as a form of visibility activism. However I tend not to talk about the media work I do ‘offline’ - I’m not sure if I’m correct but I often feel there’s something suspect about actively pursuing engagement with the media as a sociologist. I thought I was being paranoid about this until I overheard someone at a conference being described, with what sounded like genuine hostility, as a "media whore". Is this a widespread opinion? If so then it’s surely deleterious to sociology as a discipline. Does it reflect an underlying lack of professional self-confidence, a defensive reaction to an environment within which sociology is marginalised? Perhaps it’s rude to do pop-psychoanalysis on people who happen to disagree with me but I do wonder sometimes. It’s a shame more sociologists aren’t engaging in this way because of the exciting opportunities for collaborative work that this growing tendency towards engagement with the media is opening up. For instance interview I did with Tim Newburn, Professor of Social Policy at LSE, discusses his experiences working with the Guardian on the Reading the Riots project:

Rose Bowl 263, City Campus, Leeds Beckett University (formally Leeds Metropolitan University) 29 October, 2014, 12:00-16:30

The British Sociological Association Medical Sociology group for Yorkshire was launched in February 2014 with an event that brought together researchers from across the region to discuss stimulating work conducted by well-established and more junior colleagues. To build on this successful first meeting the second event will take place in Leeds where attendees will hear about exciting work from a plenary speaker from outside the region (Professor Maggie Mort) and early career researchers based in Yorkshire. There will also be lots of time for networking with other researchers and to discuss the broad future direction of the group and more specific potential projects. This will be a great opportunity to meet with others with an interest in sociology of health and illness/medical sociology,
to share ideas and help to build the local research community.

**Who should attend?**

The meeting is open to postgraduate students, academics and researchers. But we would also welcome anyone who has an interest in the sociology of health and illness.

**Cost of attendance**

Lunch and refreshments will be provided on arrival. In order to cover our costs and to help with future meetings the following charges will apply:

£15 for BSA Members, £20 for Non-members, £10 for BSA Concessionary members and £15 for Non-member students.

Please follow this link to register:


1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events.aspx)

**The Psychology of Writing (2014-09-23 08:00)**

This typically fascinating post on BrainPickings reflects on the psychology of writing and its implications for the notion that a fixed writing routine is most conducive to creativity and productivity. The argument certainly seems plausible yet I remain ambivalent about too much fixity in relation to writing, without really being able to articulate why. Read the full post [1]here.

Reflecting on the ritualization of creativity, Bukowski famously scoffed that [2]“air and light and time and space have nothing to do with.” Samuel Johnson similarly contended that [3]“a man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it.” And yet some of history’s most successful and prolific writers were women and men of [4]religious daily routines and [5]odd creative rituals. (Even Buk himself ended up sticking to a [6]peculiar daily routine.)


[..]
Location and physical environment also play a role in maintaining a sustained and productive workflow. Bob Dylan, for instance, extolled the virtues of being able to "put yourself in an environment where you can completely accept all the unconscious stuff that comes to you from your inner workings of your mind." Reviewing the research, Kellogg echoes Faulkner's memorable assertion that "the only environment the artist needs is whatever peace, whatever solitude, and whatever pleasure he can get at not too high a cost" and notes that writers' dedicated workspaces tend to involve solitude and quiet, although "during the apprenticeship phase of a writer's career, almost any environment is workable" — most likely a hybrid function of youth's high tolerance for distraction and the necessity of sharing space earlier in life when the luxury of privacy is unaffordable.

But the key psychological function of such dedicated environments isn't so much superstitious ritualization — an effort to summon the muse through the elaborate juju of putting everything in its right place — as cognitive cueing. Kellogg considers the usefulness of a special space used solely for writing, which cultivates an "environment that cues the desired behavior"
attempts to answer these questions by tracking a handful of millennial recruits to Wall Street as they navigate a post-crash environment that has changed in some ways yet stubbornly remains the same in others. This immensely readable book is something akin to longitudinal quantitative research, albeit in an obviously journalistic mode, recurrently interviewing these recent graduates as they attempt to cope with the 18 hour working days considered the norm for new analysts. It’s a fascinating read in many respects, not least of all because of its counter-intuitive insights into how graduates are drawn to Wall Street and how they come to remain there:

As strange as it sounds, a big paycheck may not in fact be central to Wall Street’s allure for a certain cohort of young people. This possibility was explained to me several weeks before my Penn trip by a second-year Goldman Sachs analyst, who stopped me short when I posited that college students flock to Wall Street in order to cash in. “Money is part of it,” he said. “But mostly, they do it because it’s easy.” He proceeded to explain that by coming onto campus to recruit, by blitzing students with information and making the application process as simple as dropping a résumé into a box, by following up relentlessly and promising to inform applicants about job offers in the fall of their senior year—months before firms in most other industries—Wall Street banks had made themselves the obvious destinations for students at top-tier colleges who are confused about their careers, don’t want to lock themselves in to a narrow preprofessional track by going to law or medical school, and are looking to put off the big decisions for two years while they figure things out. Banks, in other words, have become extremely skilled at appealing to the anxieties of overachieving young people and inserting themselves as the solution to those worries. And the irony is that although we think of Wall Street as a risk-loving business, the recruiting process often appeals most to the terrified and insecure.

I think this argument coheres with many of the insights that can be found within the emerging adulthoods literature. Immediate material rewards in a climate of endemic insecurity and the promise of postponing difficult decisions by a number of years would inevitably seem tempting to many who might have been profoundly unlikely to be drawn into the orbit of finance in the 1980s or 1990s (not least of all because of the radically different climate greeting new graduates in those decades). However this isn’t true of all, with the author recognising the likelihood that those young financiers willing to risk their jobs by sharing their anxieties with him are likely to be atypical. What I found particularly compelling though was his insight into what it is like day-to-day to live with the demands placed upon the young analysts:

Today, as before the financial crisis, it’s not uncommon for a first-year IBD analyst to work one hundred hours a week—the equivalent of sixteen hours a day during the week, then a mere ten hours on each weekend day. Which is not to say that these twenty-two-year-olds are actively doing one hundred hours’ worth of work every week. In fact, many sit around idly for hours a day, listening to music or reading their favorite blogs while they wait for a more senior banker to assign them work. (These drop-offs are never pleasant, but they’re worst when they happen at 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. as the senior banker is leaving for the day, giving the analyst a graveyard shift’s worth of work before he or she can go home and sleep.)

In an important sense they forego personal responsibility to choose how to spend their time, with the challenges this poses for synchronising everyday routine with longer term plans and aspirations. They are cut off from the non-financial world, with social media blocked within the offices where they spend 18 hours each day and on site services designed to minimise the need for errands and their attendant human contact outside the firm. They are encouraged to socialise together, within specific venues that graduate in cost and prestige as the analysts work their way through the clearly delineated hierarchy. Rigid sartorial norms are enforced aggressively: don’t over-dress but don’t under-dress. Certainly don’t out-dress the boss. The whole thing generates something the author describes as
cognitive triage, with everyday demands blotting out reflexivity about the medium and the long term:

The compartmentalization phenomenon turned out to be bigger than Jeremy and Samson, and bigger even than Goldman Sachs. As I interviewed dozens of young analysts at firms across the financial sector, I heard the same kinds of answers to my questions about morality and ethics: “I don’t know, I never really think about it.” “I’m just trying not to fuck up.” “Dude, I’m so far away from anything like that...” Entry-level analysts, it seemed, were so routinely exhausted, and so minutely focused on their day-to-day tasks—on pleasing their bosses, nailing every page of their pitch books, and avoiding getting in trouble—that they often avoided thinking about the big picture. It was a sort of cognitive triage, and daily concerns always took priority over long-term, large-scale worries. Still, there was no doubt that these worries existe

I love this phrase. I think ‘cognitive triage’ is something by no means restricted to those working in finance. However what the author skilfully demonstrates is how cognitive triage can work to render these frantic actors uniquely susceptible to professional socialisation, accumulating habits of manner and outlook because the intensity of daily precludes the time for withdrawal and consideration, making it impossible to reflect in a consistent way upon whether this is really what they want to do and who they want to be. This is great book - highly recommended.

1. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Young-Money-Streets-Post-Crash-Recruits/dp/0446583251

The role of metaphors in framing Data Science (2014-09-25 08:00)

This is [1]very interesting. The author argues that “Data carpentry” is “not a single process but a thousand little skills and techniques”. He takes issue with the manner in which other ways of framing this dimension of what data scientists do obscure the craft inherent in it. I think this argument has important implications for the rapid expansion of data science courses and the risk that speed and modularisation lead ‘data carpentry’ to be rendered peripheral:

The New York Times has an article titled [2]For Big-Data Scientists, ‘Janitor Work’ Is Key Hurdle to Insights. Mostly I really like it. The fact that raw data is rarely usable for analysis without significant work is a point I try hard to make with my students. I told them “do not underestimate the difficulty of data preparation”. When they turned in their projects, many of them reported that they had underestimated the difficulty of data preparation. Recognizing this as a hard problem is great.

What I’m less thrilled about is calling this “janitor work”. For one thing, it’s not particularly respectful of custodians, whose work I really appreciate. But it also mis-characterizes what this type of work is about. I’d like to propose a different analogy that I think fits a lot better: data carpentry. (Note: [3]data carpentry seems to already be a thing).

Why is woodworking a better analogy? The article uses a few other terms, like data wrangling (data as unruly beasts to be tamed?) and munging (what is that, anyway?), neither of which mean

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much to me. I also like data curation but that's also a bit vague. Data carpentry probably has something
to do with wishing I could make things like [4]Carrie Roy, but I should start by saying what I don't like
about the "data cleaning" or "janitor work" terms. To me these imply that there is some kind of pure
or clean data buried in a thin layer of non-clean data, and that one need only hose the dataset off to
reveal the hard porcelain underneath the muck. In reality, the process is more like deciding how to cut
into a piece of material, or how much to plane down a surface. It's not that there's any real distinction
between good and bad, it's more that some parts are softer or knottier than others. Judgement is critical.


I'm interested in the rapidity with which the role of 'data scientist' is emerging, the interests expressed within it
and their conjunction in the institutionalisation of 'data science': what implications does the hype surrounding data
science have for how data science courses are designed and marketed?
Why are modern pianists so boring? (2014-09-26 08:00)

Why are pianists today so boring? The stilted way they often dress, the seriousness of performance, and even the way the whole pianist community or subculture works, is out of date. Why are pianists no longer the stars of the art scene - why does it even sound odd to suggest that they once were? What has changed? Here is an old, but [1]great article by Martin Kettle in the Guardian, recently unearthed by my classical pianist sister who now spends more and more time on experimental music, exasperated by her own "tribe":

"The days in which every middle-class home, and many working-class ones too, contained an upright piano - and at least one person people who could play it a little - have not been completely erased from memory. But they are fading fast. The gramophone, the radio and above all the television long ago replaced the piano as the focus and main source of home entertainment. It will never reclaim that place.

The piano's fall from eminence has been accompanied by a falling-off in the replenishment of the piano repertoire. As in all other music, composers have gone in other directions. Who, since, let's say, Shostakovich (and even this is stretching a point), has written piano music that genuinely holds its place in the recital repertoire? Certainly, few composers any longer write music that amateurs are able to play (not that many amateurs could ever play much Chopin); or (more importantly) that amateurs want to play, even in simplified editions.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the piano recital itself should have begun to wither too. The recital has undoubtedly become a less mainstream part of musical life. There are fewer of them. They are not such big events in either box-office or artistic terms. Of course, there are exceptions. There always are. But we are kidding ourselves if we pretend that nothing has changed."


1. http://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/sep/05/classicalmusicandopera.artsfeatures

Benjamin Geer (2014-09-26 08:42:42)
"Who, since, let's say, Shostakovich (and even this is stretching a point), has written piano music that genuinely holds its place in the recital repertoire?" There's György Ligeti, whose Études for piano are frequently played at piano competitions and have been recorded several times.

Benjamin Geer (2014-09-26 08:53:27)
Also, how relevant are recitals at a time when most people listen only to recorded music? And aren't, say, Keith Jarrett and Michael Wollny pianists? Perhaps the issue here isn't piano per se, but the whole social structure known as classical music.

Being a sociologist means never having to be bored (2014-09-27 08:00)

The social theorist Randall Collins offers a lovely account of Sociology's distinctive worth in this short article from Contemporary Sociology. There's a PDF of the article available online [1]here:
Sociology, like everything else, is a product of particular historical conditions. But I also believe we have hit upon a distinctive intellectual activity. Its appeal is strong enough to keep it alive, whatever its name will be in the future and whatever happens to the surrounding institutional forms. The lure of this activity is what drew many of us into sociology. One becomes hooked on being a sociologist. The activity is this: It is looking at the world around us, the immediate world you and I live in, through the sociological eye.

There is a sociology of everything. You can turn on your sociological eye no matter where you are or what you are doing. Stuck in a boring committee meeting (for that matter, a sociology department meeting), you can check the pattern of who is sitting next to whom, who gets the floor, who makes eye contact, and what is the rhythm of laughter (forced or spontaneous) or of pompous speechmaking. Walking down the street, or out for a run, you can scan the class and ethnic pattern of the neighborhood, look for lines of age segregation, or for little pockets of solidarity. Waiting for a medical appointment, you can read the professions and the bureaucracy instead of old copies of National Geographic. Caught in a traffic jam, you can study the correlation of car models with bumper stickers or with the types of music blaring from radios. There is literally nothing you can't see in a fresh way if you turn your sociological eye to it. Being a sociologist means never having to be bored.

Contemporary Sociology, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan., 1998), pp. 2-7

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Readings – classical sociological theory (2016-06-02 00:37:47)
[...] Being a sociologist means never having to be bored [...] 

Rosemary Crompton’s Journey to Sociology (2014-09-28 08:00)

[1] Rosemary Crompton (1942-2011) was a famous British sociologist of work who researched white-collar work, women’s employment, organisational careers and class, cross-national variations in gender relations and related policies and their impacts on employment and family life. Yet, she was - as I found out today - also, like many of us, an accidental sociologist. Here is how she described her own journey to sociology (Source: BSA, [3]www.britsoc.co.uk):

“It would be nice to be able to tell a heroic tale about my 'journey to sociology' but unfortunately this isn’t possible. At my Hampshire grammar school, we had to choose between continuing with physics and chemistry, or starting Latin, at the age of thirteen. I chose physics and chemistry, not realising that I would need Latin 'O' level in order to study English (my best subject) at university. So I went up to London University in 1960 to do a degree in biology. I swiftly realised that I had made a terrible mistake, but wasn’t qualified to switch to English. In desperation I persuaded the sociology department to take me on,
as they didn’t require Latin. After an undistinguished undergraduate career, I moved to Cambridge, getting a short-term job as a junior researcher on the Affluent Worker project. In the pre-computer era, my main task was to prepare tables, using punched cards and a Hollerith machine (located in the basement of the Marshall library). I became an expert in getting the tattiest cards through the machine, and doing six-way cross-tabulations that were then percentaged (by me) using a fearsome (and noisy) adding machine.

You could say that my journey to sociology began in the basement of the Marshall library. I was fascinated by the data, and the relationships between the variables that emerged from my cross-tabs. Goldthorpe and Lockwood, who directed the Affluent Worker project, were highly critical of both Parsonian functionalism, and ideas about ‘industrial convergence’ that were the dominant orthodoxies of the sixties – although my undergraduate years hadn’t included Parsons as my theory lecturer at university had a thing about Herbert Spencer. A further research job at Cambridge drew me into the ‘sociology of work’, and indeed, I have been talking to people about their work ever since. After a move to East Anglia and another research job I got a junior lectureship. At the end of the sixties, sociology became immensely popular and for a number of years I did nothing but teach. I did read, though, and the books that influenced me most were C Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and R K Merton on Social Theory and Social Structure. From there it seemed but a short step to Marx. In the radical atmosphere of the politics of the time (and books such as Baran and Sweezy’s Monopoly Capital), Capital volume 1 seemed to me to reveal the underlying processes that were shaping employment in the 1960s, leading to my first book on class (Economy and Class Structure, with Jon Gubbay). This impression was more than confirmed by Braverman’s Labor and Monopoly Capital.

When the teaching receded a bit, I turned again to empirical research and (with Gareth Jones) carried out an ESRC funded study of clerical workers (White-Collar Proletariat). Doing the research in the 1970s uncovered a lot of furious women who realised they were never going to make it up the organisational hierarchy. This led to research on women’s employment in the 1980s (Gendered Jobs and Social Change, with Kay Sanderson). I had tried to keep up with debates on social class, and in the 1990s it seemed there was a lot of confusion about, so I wrote Class and Stratification. I also began doing comparative cross-national research (Restructuring Gender Relations and Employment), which has become something of a passion, as it facilitates the causal unravelling of topics that have long been of interest to me. Why do women in some societies do so much better in employment than in others, for example? My current research has a focus on how employment and family life are being reconfigured in contemporary societies, and how class processes are inter-twined with this reconfiguration.

In conclusion, although my beginnings in sociology were accidental, I don’t consider that my journey is over yet. I have always felt that sociology is like detective work, a combination of different kinds of reasonings, and different methods, in order to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of a particular phenomenon – at least for the time being. Luckily (or perhaps unluckily) there will always be things that need explaining, and that is what sociologists do.”

3. www.britsoc.co.uk
The Physics of Productivity: Newton’s Laws of Getting Stuff Done (2014-09-29 08:00)

The Newtonian analogy may vex any physicists reading this but there's some great productivity advice in this article:

Newton’s First Law of Productivity

First Law of Motion: An object either remains at rest or continues to move at a constant velocity, unless acted upon by an external force. (i.e. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest.)

In many ways procrastination is a fundamental law of the universe. It’s Newton’s first law applied to productivity. Objects at rest tend to stay at rest.

The good news? It works the other way too. Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. When it comes to being productive, this means one thing: the most important thing is to find a way to get started. Once you get started, it is much easier to stay in motion.

So, what’s the best way to get started when you are stuck procrastinating?

In my experience, the best rule of thumb for getting started is the 2-Minute Rule.

Here’s the 2-Minute Rule adjusted for productivity: To overcome procrastination, find a way to start your task in less than two minutes.

Read the full article [5] here for the other two 'laws' of productivity. I thought the final one was probably the best. It's certainly true in my own experience, though unfortunately rather difficult to implement in practice.

2. [http://jamesclear.com/start-succeed](http://jamesclear.com/start-succeed)

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Book Review by Bradley Williams

To begin, I chose to review this book with no prior knowledge of the author or his academic work, nor about the book's thesis. I have a general interest in the history of American sociology and welcome any book that claims to be a sociologist's take on the field of sociology. This book is not a history of American sociology, nor the kind of examination of the profession that I have read in other books such as Turner and Turner's Impossible Science. Though the author does not wish to explicitly proclaim it, this book is an argument against the tradition of activism within the sociology profession.

Christian Smith's book The Sacred Project of American Sociology explores an undercurrent moral imperative that has structured American sociology since its inception. By "sacred project", Smith means a moral mission within American sociology that is implicit and largely visible only through the habitus of sociologists and sociology students. Smith applies the term "sacred" to those collectively held beliefs that the majority of sociologists adhere to unwaveringly and innately learn to defend throughout the professional socialization process. Basically, the sacred project is the animating drive in American sociology to decrease all forms of social, economic, and political inequality and generally transform the whole of society toward maximizing the freedom of individuals. Smith claims that the profession has fostered this implicit desire to transform the whole of society through its various schools of thought while still explicitly claiming to be an objective and systematic study of society. Smith further concludes that along with relegating the serious study of religion to other fields, American sociologists have trained themselves to uphold secular, scientific inquiry as categorically as a religious belief. The tradition of scientific enlightenment has given the profession of sociology the dual identity of claiming to be objective, while obsessing about social revolution.
While there is a multitude of various sub-disciplines within sociology, Smith contends that most (almost all, excluding methodology and rational choice perspectives) are "vanguards" of the sacred project. Referring to the dominance of these "sacred" sub-disciplines within sociology, he satirically notes that the current state of the sacred project is within a "liberal-Enlightenment-sexually liberated-civil rights-feminist-GLBTQ-social constructionist-postructuralist/postmodernist 'tradition'" (p. 11). This immediately narrows the focus of the book which might have been helpful if it hadn't set a condescending tone that continues throughout most of the book. Smith repeatedly states that he does not personally dislike the "sacred project" that he has identified, even explaining that its overall affect is one that makes American sociology as vital and interesting as it is. His tone and use of short and pointed jabs make his distaste of most sociologists evident, as they are framed as opponents (defenders of the sacred project) rather than colleagues with a different perspective.

In the second chapter titled 'evidence', Smith provides a non-comprehensive, but thesis-validating content analysis of books and articles that he found "randomly" while taking a "stroll" at an ASA meeting. He also surveyed the various ASA sections and some random review articles he received in the mail, noting examples of the sacred project. First, none of the data selection is treated seriously, because we are told that sociology's sacred project is so ubiquitous that a "systematic" analysis is not possible. Whether this is true or not, he notes that his personal experience as an academic sociologist, renowned in his field and included in the highest ranks of sociology's professional strata is enough to trust his thoroughness and objective standards. Smith's arguments are fairly straightforward, offering examples one by one, showing indeed that a majority of articles and books from top publishers are focused on some form of inequality. I never found this surprising, nor do I think most sociologists will either. We are repeatedly prepared for the outcry that will follow the publication of this book. If the points made in this book are going to actually produce some rupture within the field that incites meaningful dialogue, it will most likely come from another writer. Unfortunately, Smith continuously wavers between making a serious call for reform and an overly defensive and sardonic criticism of elite tendencies within the field.

To contrast, in one surprisingly illustrative point, Smith asked what sociology might be like without this animating drive for utopian ideals, in which he admitted a disinterest in seeing this become a reality. This portion, more than the other "evidence" in the chapter seemed to belie an interest in cultivating an honesty within the profession that would be healthier and more constructive. Unfortunately, this tone does not hold and remains the only part of the book that seems true to the stated intent of an honest dialogue within sociology, where most of the book makes more pointed criticisms at individuals and research areas.

One of the more convincing arguments made in the book is that by reinforcing the implicit mission of sociology to assuage inequality, sociologists might effectively limit the kinds of research they commit themselves. Another consequence of this is that field pushes away great sociologists by showing an unwillingness to accept any findings that do not support the general thesis of inequality ad societal transformation. He states that sociologists might support claims that inequality is rampant throughout societies and a fundamental restructuring of society is the solution because this will keep sociologists in business. In a sense this argument is the same one held against the proliferation of the modern terrorism analysis industry after September 11, 2001. Sociologists elaborate perceived threats to society in order to maintain job security, though this relationship would contradict and undermine the overall sacred project by perpetuating inequality if it were true. Smith makes one of his strongest points when offering a short critique of textbooks, particularly Macionis's Society: The Basics, which is in my opinion a poor barometer of the field. He makes the case that the text produces an ahistorical account of the three supposedly equally dominant paradigms in sociology: conflict, structuralism, and interactionism. Smith also takes time in a later chapter to emphasize real negative consequences of the sacred project, though he chooses to omit what he sees as obvious positive impacts on the profession. By brushing aside any explanation of the positive consequences of the sacred project, he merely reinforces his already evident distaste of activism and further narrows his own argument similar to the way he imagines the sacred project to narrow the creativity and perspective of other sociologists.
Smith makes a direct case that sociology is hostile to Christianity, including restricting the hiring of Christian sociologists in prominent positions within the professional hierarchy. Part of his chapter on ‘evidence’ includes a comparative case of two sociologists that have produced significantly inaccurate research, one of which produced research compatible with sociology’s sacred project and the other did not. The one that did not, the infamous case of Mark Regnerus, was treated with footnotes so inappropriately thick that they took up almost the entire page in some cases. Smith makes this now very infamous case his prime example of sociologists banning together against an author whose findings (that couples where one parent has had a previous homosexual relationship raised children with lower socioeconomic outcomes than otherwise heterosexual couples) do not conform to the ideals of the sacred project. His championing of Mark Regnerus as a victim of institutionalized bias based on his Christian beliefs from within the sociology community is interesting given his main thesis about the activist mission of the field. While a secular bias may very well exist within the field at large (a trait found in any social science), the study of religion in sociology is actually quite fruitful, if not still uncomfortable asking many questions.

In what little history that is offered, Smith details the linear progression of the sacred project from the first sociology textbooks by Lester Ward and Albion Small and others to the current proliferation of sub-disciplines championing various, yet apparently ideologically similar, causes. He dismisses structuralism as a mere break from the progressive and cumulative hegemony of the sacred project. This, unlike his critique of the sociology textbook discussed above, is treated as ahistorically as possible, despite his argument against the shortsightedness of sociologists and their works.

Smith named a few sociologists that, like him, are marginalized by the secular and activist-utopian sacred project. I found his list of marginalized sociologists interesting because it included Peter Berger and James Hunter, both of who have temporarily joined the same sociology department at Baylor University in recent years. I am sort of curious to know if Baylor’s prominent focus on statistical analyses of religious experience or openly Christian mission are the kinds of things Smith thinks of when imagining a healthy sociology research program.

The arguments in this book are lessened by the tone the author uses to speak to his prospective audiences. He conceives of this debate, or lack of debate, as a conflict against opponents instead of a possible dialogue. He dismisses the power of challengers to oppose this apparently very old and uniform hegemony by presenting sociology students as mere constructs of the sacred project. Students that do not wish to conform or admit to being Christian will be immediately marginalized by their instructors and peers. The author’s contempt or distaste for the majority of professional sociologists makes this a poor opening for dialogue.

Toward the end of the book, Smith makes the claim that sociology blogs (left unspecified in the book) are a symptom of what he sees as a breakdown of the peer review system. He uses an extremely crude blog entry by a sociologist known for his vitriolic language, which criticizes openly Christian sociologists. I really don’t think this was a representative example of any kind of academic blog. His view that the peer review process should be held to high standards is laudable, but he could have made a more substantial argument for or against sociology blogs. Neither the writing nor the "evidence" presented here needed a nicely bound book from Oxford University Press to state. The types of arguments and the way they are written in this book will be easily familiar to readers of niche and opinionated, as well as academic blogs.

[nbox type="notice"]Bradley W. Williams is a graduate student in sociology beginning his PhD studies at George Mason University in 2015. His research is located within the intersection of sociology and international relations, specializing in the study of religion, social movements, and Islamic peace processes.[/nbox]
Rebooting Robbins in The Second Machine Age (2014-09-30 00:16)

Review by Patrick Ainley


Brynjolfsson and McAfee is one of those admirably readable US business books, academically well supported by a range of reference across the various disciplines that modern Business Studies brings together if not integrates, whether at MIT - where the authors work - or in the wider arena of global Business Study. It is predominantly upbeat and optimistic in the way those supportive of global business have to be but still draws attention to drawbacks that need to be overcome if - as the authors recognize - that business model is to survive.

Their prospectus therefore is a simple one we have heard before: The Second Machine Age follows the first industrial revolution, automating mental rather than manual labour. It is still in its early stages of bringing together and standardising various aspects of the new digitising technology in dynamic synergies. The book relates how fast this is occurring, particularly as sensors are attached to various machines causing a veritable Cambrian explosion of diverse developments. The authors are particularly taken with the Googlecar that carries them driverlessly through the traffic of a Californian freeway. This seems the paradigm case for them of an activity that can be digitally automated.

Brynjolfsson and McAfee are however hip to the potential downsides of such developments. They recognise the dangers of being 'Alone Together' in a mediated world that cuts humanity off from its real experiences but imply that these are no different in kind to the distancing of consciousness that comes with the use of tools and symbolic speech. Besides, they have a solution to bring together the routinized mental performances of machines with the human imagination machines lack. Predictably it is to be found in education.

Like nearly everyone – except perhaps the teacher unions, who seem to think a teacher in front of a class of 30 kids for five or six hours a day makes all right with the world – Brynjolfsson and McAfee acknowledge that we cannot continue with the mass schooling that was created as a consequence of the first machine age. So they dedicate schools to catching up with Singapore and South Korea in the PISA rankings of test performances that they take as indicative of scholastic success with 'longer hours, additional school days and a no-excuses philosophy that tests students and, implicitly, their teachers' (p.212).

This familiar prescription is to be achieved through a Goveist-Murdochite NewsCorp-Pearson diet of MOOCs and teaching machines, whilst not forgetting to boost 'hard-to-measure skills [that ubiquitous word] like creativity [not a skill, by the way] and unstructured problem solving [that] are increasingly important as machines handle more routine work' (213). This will produce the entrepreneurs of the future, assembling the latest applications of new technologies, shared freely across the world wide web in a blaze of Schumpeterian creative destruction. This is clearly what Naomi Klein calls 'magical thinking'.

Is anything to be made of it in relation to higher education? Labour’s HE Shadow, Liam Byrne, clearly thinks so. Written in riposte to Robbins Revisited, David Willetts’ contribution to the fiftieth anniversary of the Robbins'
Report on higher education, Robbins Rebooted sees universities as ‘the power stations of the knowledge economy’ (p.9). ‘The knowledge economy’ replays ‘the white heat of the technological revolution’ that Harold Wilson promised in 1964 would ‘harness science to Socialism and Socialism to science’.

Education at all levels was crucial to this promise and Robbins’ endorsement of the expansion of higher education initiated a period of progressive reform as local education authorities were invited to junk 11+ IQ-testing and go comprehensive. This freed primary schools for child-centred education and prepared the way for expansion of F &HE, including the polytechnic experiment. As Byrne sees it ‘The result was the creation of millions of opportunities for a new middle class.’ (p.20)

This is topsy-turvy: it was the expansion of professional and technical employment sustained by a growing economy that allowed for the limited upward social mobility which ended in the 1970s. That ‘a grammar school education for all’, as Gove echoed Wilson, could restart this limited upward mobility in face of the general downward social mobility that has succeeded it, is more magical thinking. As if ‘skills’ (actually qualifications) can conjure up jobs!

The same goes for the ‘apprenticeships’ both Labour and Tories have lately promised to revive. Recreating a pale version of them will not transform the English into a German economy, no matter how lavishly they are advertised. But Byrne misidentifies a UK mittelstand of small- to medium-size interconnected companies waiting to be serviced with research by our ‘brilliant universities’ (p.11), while also offering ‘real choice’ to the bottom 50 % of school leavers. But, unless related to economic reform to end austerity and the continued slide into low-wage, low-skill employment, this risks repeating the failures to rebuild a vocational route to replace the industrial apprenticeships lost in the 1970s but this time at a tertiary level of learning.

However, Shadow Education Minister, Tristram Hunt backs Byrne with plans for a Technical Baccalaureate for the half of 14+ school students who don’t do A-levels. Rebranding FE colleges as ‘Institutes of Technical Education’, they could go on to new part-time, two-year ‘Technical Degrees’, reinventing Foundation degrees to bring back secondary technical schools and polytechnics, while making everyone 18-21 either a student or apprentice – both paying fees!?!

Byrne at least offers HE a possibility of recovering itself in connection with FE by replacing market-driven expansion with regional partnerships to end the ‘ferocious competition’ (p.69) between universities, colleges and private providers. He connects this to the need for devolution of the centralised market state revealed to all Parties by the Scottish referendum. Apart from Scotland and Wales though, which are national regions, there are no natural regions in England like those in mainland Europe and they will not be constituted by Cameron rushing through ‘US-style directly-elected mayors with cabinets’ that are the optimal internal management arrangement for privatised local government services.

Instead, Byrne affirms that ‘an integrated system is possible’ (p.74) and gives examples based on the Universities of Herts, Staffs, Oxford Brookes and Birmingham City – all former-polytechnics with the exception of Sheffield’s arms-length Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. For other universities perhaps, he advocates ‘expanding post-graduate research and teaching... to ensure that post-graduate learning does not become the new barrier to access’ (p.82), while boosting MOOCs through the Open University’s Future Learn partnership.

The ‘unplanned explosion in provision at private colleges, including allegations of fraud’ (p.71) that resulted from Willetts' ‘free-market experiment gone wild’ (p.46) is ‘indefensible’ but it is not clear what Byrne would do about it – or fees! If the Conservatives return to government and lift the current £9,000 cap on fees, Oxford, Cambridge and a handful of other English universities will seek to charge more, leaving less strong institutions in an impossible position and fragmenting what remains of a coherent system of F &HE provision.

Already, unlike the other 24 self-styled ‘Russell Group’ universities, Oxbridge restrict their entrants to heighten demand for their places. Meanwhile they maintain their staff’s research and scholarship to further enhance their
quality, simultaneously investing in bursaries and other widening participation efforts to ‘skim the cream’ of state school applicants. Caroline Benn’s solution of turning them into research institutes alongside adult residential colleges looks tempting! Not that Byrne entertains anything like this or even mentions the private schools; any more than Hunt does, despite 23 % of British school spending going to just 7 % of pupils with their close Oxbridge links epitomised by Cameron and his pals.

The problem remains however that, while schools, colleges and universities claim to make their graduates ‘employable’, education cannot guarantee employment. So, the perception of ‘the problem’ needs to change: from being one where young people are seen as having to be prepared for ‘employability’ by earlier and earlier specialization for vocations that may not exist in The Second Machine Age. Instead, the starting point should be a common general but not academic schooling to 18 giving entitlement to progression for citizens ‘fit for a variety of labours’, as Marx says in Capital.

This implies confronting the possibilities of flexibility but avoiding the current situation in which there are more people in the workforce but many are paid little for unregulated employment. This would require an alternative economic framework but not necessarily ‘the right to work’ with which the orthodox left continues to operate in a post-war collectivised model of the labour market. Instead, a general schools education to graduation linked to the assumption of citizenship at 18 means learning about work and not just learning to work. Paradoxically, for universities this means rediscovering the vocational nature of the higher education preserved by the most prestigious subjects at the most elite institutions, as in the ‘original vocations’ of law and medicine. Importantly, this includes an academic vocation dedicated to learning critically from the past with research and scholarship enabling change in the future. Undergraduates can contribute to that continuing cultural conversation, giving them a sense that many have lost of what higher education is supposed to be about.

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Rethinking empirical social science (2014-09-30 08:00)

In this paper in Dialogues in Human Geography, [1]Evelyn Ruppert from Goldsmiths College makes a case for the need to rethink empirical social science in the face of the epistemological and methodological challenge of ‘big data’:
While Big Data – the vast amounts of digital information generated, accumulated and stored in myriad databases and repositories, both online and offline – does present specific challenges to the geography discipline, I would suggest that it also calls for interdisciplinary approaches perhaps more than ever. There are of course many different rationales for interdisciplinarity but in the case of Big Data I will attend to two. First, the distributed relations and entanglements of ownership and expertise that make up Big Data call not only for interdisciplinary approaches but also cross-sectoral engagements between the social sciences, industry, government and business. And second, the ontological and epistemological consequences of methods that take up Big Data cut across disciplines and provide an opportunity for collaboration on the underlying theoretical propositions as well as the vexed political questions of data privacy, rights, ethics and ownership.

[...]

All of these arguments for interdisciplinarity and collaboration are not a call for turning social scientists into statisticians or computer scientists, but for ‘socialising’ what could otherwise become a positivist science of individuals and societies or lead to re-inscribing a division between quantitative and qualitative methods. Retreating and engaging in internal debates within social science disciplines cannot achieve this, as Savage and Burrows (2007) also warn. Instead, it means to explore methods of doing immersive interdisciplinary data work by innovatively, critically and reflexively engaging with new forms of data. This calls for experimenting with various data sources and techniques, innovating methods, and working with researchers in computing and other sciences.

Dialogues in Human Geography. November 2013
vol. 3
no. 3
268-273

There's a pre-print available [2]here. I don't agree with how Evelyn theorises the underlying questions but I'm convinced she's correct about how the social sciences can and should respond to these technological innovations.
5.10 October

Call for Proposals: Sociological Review monograph series (2014-10-01 08:00)

The Sociological Review, the UK’s oldest sociology journal, publishes a series of monographs encompassing a diverse range of topics. They’re now seeking proposals for the next round of monographs:

The key international journal *The Sociological Review* is home to a prestigious Monograph Series that publishes collections of outstanding and original scholarly articles on issues of general sociological interest.*

Dedicated to showcasing the very best and most innovative sociologically informed work, and to promoting emerging as well as established academics, the series has for over fifty years produced intellectually stimulating, coherent volumes of the highest quality. The books are available to buy separately, but are also included as part of [1]*The Sociological Review* journal subscription price.

If you would like more information about the history, or aims and scope of *The Sociological Review Monograph Series*, or perhaps you are thinking about submitting a book proposal and would like some advice, then please click on the link below where Dara Blumenthal interviews Series Editor, Chris Shilling.

[2]Interview with Series Editor, Chris Shilling

We are always interested in proposals for new books in the series and you may email your proposal for consideration to the Book Series Editor, Professor Chris Shilling, at [3]C.Shilling@kent.ac.uk.

**CALL FOR PROPOSALS: 2017 MONOGRAPHS!** We are currently seeking proposals for two monographs to be published in January/February 2017 (deadline for completed ms = beginning of March 2016).

**THE DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS** is Monday 1st December 2014. Completed proposals should be emailed to the series editor, Professor Chris Shilling at [4]C.Shilling@kent.ac.uk. All decisions should be made by
An introduction to analytical sociology (2014-10-02 08:00)

One of the most intellectually vibrant movements in contemporary social theory is *analytical sociology*. This is how the International Network of Analytical Sociologists describe it on their[1] (shiny) website:

Analytical sociology is a strategy for understanding the social world. It is concerned with explaining important macro-level facts such as the diffusion of various social practices, patterns of segregation, network structures, typical beliefs, and common ways of acting. It explains such facts not merely by relating them to other macro-level facts, but by detailing in clear and precise ways the mechanisms through which they were brought about. This is accomplished by a detailed focus on individuals’ actions and interactions, and the use of state-of-the-art simulation techniques to derive the macro-level outcomes that such actions and interactions are likely to bring about. Analytical sociology can be seen as contemporary incarnation of Robert K. Merton's well-known notion of middle-range theory.

The analytical approach is founded on the premise that proper explanations detail the "cogs and wheels" through which social outcomes are brought about, and it is driven by a commitment to realism. Empirically false assumptions about human motivation, cognitive processes, access to information, or social relations cannot bear the explanatory burden in a mechanistic explanation no matter how well they predict the outcome to be explained.

With its focus on the macro-level outcomes that individuals in interaction with one another bring about, analytical sociology is part of the "complexity turn" within sociology. Until very recently sociologists did not have the tools needed for analyzing the dynamics of complex systems, but powerful computers and simulation software have changed the picture considerably. So-called agent-based computer simulations are transforming important parts of sociology (as well as many other parts of the social and natural sciences) because they allow for rigorous theoretical analyses of large complex systems. The basic idea behind such analyses is to perform virtual experiments reflecting the analyst's theoretical ideas and empirically-based knowledge about the social mechanisms influencing the action and interaction of the individuals. The key is to identify the core mechanisms at work, assemble them into a simulation model, and establish the macro-level outcomes the individuals bring about when acting and interacting in accordance with these mechanisms.

There’s an excellent critical introduction to Analytical Sociology in [3]this paper by Daniel Little. His perspective on it is quite similar to my own: rejection of its 'methodological monism' (i.e. the notion that there's only one correct way to do social research), scepticism about its reductive focus on ‘aggregation dynamics’ but supportive of the sophisticated manner in which it seeks to bring the individual back into sociological thought in a serious way. In fact some have suggested we might think of Analytical Sociology as little more than methodological individualism 2.0 - I've not read enough to be sure how fair this is. I guess it depends in part on whether the accusation is that it's a cynical rebranding (seemingly unfair) or that it's a development of methodological individualism (seemingly accurate). I'm also interested in how readily analytical sociologists embrace computational techniques - there's an obvious affinity between Analytical Sociology and agent based modelling in particular, as well as computational approaches more broadly, which will surely have an impact upon the intellectual viability of the position as Sociology is increasingly reshaped by 'big data' over coming years. In fact Analytical Sociology could prove influential as a post-positivist philosophy for Computational Social Science.

Though I love the term and since I started reading this stuff, I've found phrases like 'analytic decomposition' creeping into my thinking, even though my other theoretical commitments mean the term takes on a different meaning when I use it.


Mike Agar (2014-12-25 17:44:29)
This is interesting. I've done a few ABMs over the last several years but didn't know there was a home for ABM socsci in the U.S. I've oriented towards the European network around Nigel Gilbert at Surrey, who runs CRESS, Centre for Research in Social Simulation http://cress.soc.surrey.ac.uk/web/home, and founded and until just recently edited JASSS, Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/JASSS.html. It’s not meth individualism, though, has its roots in anti-reductionist nonlinear dynamic systems i.e. complexity theory. Thanks for the comment and the linked article. I'll take a look. Maybe it'd be worth trying on their meeting, in Cambridge U.S. next year.

Sociological Imagination (2014-12-29 09:41:16)
I wasn’t suggesting there’s anything intrinsically methodologically individualist about the method but the philosophical work I've encountered certainly seems to lean in that direction - I've still not read anywhere near as much as I'd like to but I'm really interested in how collective agency is modelled within ABMs, with emergent characteristics and the capacity for downwards causation.

Mapping the Philosophy of Social Science (2014-10-03 08:00)
How would you map the current state of the philosophy of social science? I really like how Daniel Little does this [1]here - it’s a very informative post which deserves to be read in full:

There is a traditional lineup of topics that has guided courses and books in the philosophy of social science. But a shorter list of topics have generated a great deal of debate and discussion in the field
today. Here is a sketch:

- Reduction and emergence; microfoundations and meso causation
- Actor centered sociology
- Microfoundations
- Social ontology; heterogeneity and plasticity; assemblage; actor-network theory
- Analytical sociology
- Causal mechanisms
- Critical realism
- The status of social structures

In each of these areas there are well defined debates underway, and in some cases there are interesting cross-references across these areas of theorizing. If we were drawing a graph of these debates, we might consider several major poles – analytical sociology, critical realism, and ANT – and arrange the other topics according to their interconnectedness with the claims of one or the other of these poles.

[2]


I think these maps are important because of what Omar Lizardo identifies as the changing place of theory in the intellectual field of contemporary Sociology. I don’t think the trends he identifies are as true in the UK as in the US but the former is definitely heading in the direction of the latter. Lizardo’s argument is that theory is being de-institutionalised (i.e. gradually marginalised in graduate education) and de-valued (theory papers are worth less and less) with an ensuing fragmentation of the field undermining any consensus about its means and end - how theory
should be 'done', how theory should be evaluated, what issues are important etc. His arguments leads to an important recommendation:

The main point is that theory and theorizing is just not a single thing. Yet, the problem is that this is not just a definitional or “lexicographic” issue, or even an issue of the fundamental polysemy of all meanings; it is a reality, an objective fact that there are multiple modes of doing theory and that these modes entail a different set of initial dispositions, a different history of acquisition, and ultimately the mastery of distinct (and possibly conflicting) sets of skills. I think that the proper metaphor is that there exist different “genres” of theory, and that we can all become proficient (realistically) in one, two, or at most three of these genres. As theory becomes devalued, and the field becomes increasingly heteronomous, the basic danger is to rush into thinking that our salvation entails the privileging of any one of these genres (e.g. the one preferred by so-called “Analytical Sociologists”) to the denigration of all others (e.g. theory in the classical mode, or theory in the meta-methodological mode). This (essentially retrogressive) temptation must be fought at all costs.

I think mapping in Little’s sense can be an important antidote to this tendency. It can help us get a sense of
the theoretical landscape as a whole, encouraging debate about the key issues and how different approaches
relate to them. I don’t think it can ‘fix’ theoretical fragmentation but I think it can ameliorate some of the negative
tendencies which flow from it.

1. [http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/new-philosophy-of-social-science.html](http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/new-philosophy-of-social-science.html)
2. [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-T2gL_ApALbk/UsdB-mZ_OWI/AAAAAAAAIhQ/eObTBusOBMA/s1600/topics.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-T2gL_ApALbk/UsdB-mZ_OWI/AAAAAAAAIhQ/eObTBusOBMA/s1600/topics.jpg)
3. [http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/new-philosophy-of-social-science.html](http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/new-philosophy-of-social-science.html)

Manchester : Sites of Sociology, Politics, History and Art (2014-10-03 15:41)

On Wednesday I went to visit the [1]People’s History Museum in Manchester and attended the Museums and
Academics Research Network’s first meeting in their light and bright reading room. The purpose was to learn
about how the Museum’s collections can be accessed by academics interested in the study of British Social History,
particularly the history of the working people. Walking up to the Museum, I took a couple of pictures of this excellent
space. I have walked past the building many times and given it a cursory glance hoping to visit one day. Today though
was my first visit. And I will definitely be back!

How can researchers use the archives? A meeting for those interested [2]@PHMMcr
[3]pic.twitter.com/GKCrh61IPU

— Education Researcher (@educ_research) [4]October 1, 2014

[5]
It was an eye-opening and useful meeting attended by many lecturers and students from the University of Manch-ester and Manchester Metropolitan University, giving me insight into the vast collection that can be accessed at the Museum that I hadn't previously given much thought to: political posters, banners, badges; central executive and sub-committee papers and minutes from the Labour Party and the British Communist Party. Within these papers there are all matter of references to British Social History of the past 200 years: anything that was talked about in political circle will be in these documents.

I also learned more about other great places for academics to use in Manchester.

Sadly on the same day, after getting to know the brilliant resource that is the People's History Museum, I later read [6]an article in The Guardian referring to funding cuts that will affect the Museum greatly:

“There is also something quite spiteful about this government too: a vengeful, nasty streak seems to underpin almost everything they do. Take its decision to slash funding to the only museum in England dedicated to celebrating the history of working people. The People's History Museum in Manchester is facing a £200,000 shortfall in funding after the government slashed its grant.

According to the museum’s deputy director, Cath Birchall, part of the reason is because their present exhibition graphically tells the story of working people and their role in the first world war, including some who were conscientious objectors. Birchall has said: “They don't see the importance of a national museum that shows the effects of the war on ordinary people.” This was a war that saw an estimated three-quarters of a million people die in combat and over a million injured. It produced domestic casualties too. Research suggests that while the battles raged on the western front, as many as 100,000 people died of malnutrition and disease at home.

The proposed funding cut for the museum is a blatant attempt by the Tory party to rewrite history in its own image, to stop future generations from learning what their great-grandfathers sacrificed in the name of their country. In Tory history, brigadiers and colonels are worth more than barrow boys and coalminers.
It is one museum out of approximately 2,500 in the country. If your thing is the history of lawn-mowers then you're well catered for, with several dedicated to the machinery. If you're a bit of a mustard aficionado then there are multiple museums devoted to telling you the difference between Dijon, English and wholegrain. Yet, when it comes to the history of working people, England boasts just one – and the government wants to shut it down.

History is not just about those who write it, but about those who live it. Working people and the labour movement have been at the forefront of all social and political changes this country has undergone over the past three centuries. We must defend the People’s Museum from the Tory-led government’s malicious and politically motivated attack, and safeguard the one museum dedicated to telling the story of us all.”

People's History Museum

Left Bank, Spinningfields, Manchester, Lancashire M3 3ER
0161 838 9190

The Museum is the only one in the UK that focuses on British democracy over the last 200 years. The collections span from the late eighteenth century up until today as the Museum continues to collect contemporary material. The complete holdings of the Labour Party and Communist Party of Great Britain, as well as Conservative Party and early Liberal Party material is strongly represented as are other organisations including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Trades Union Congress and The Co-operative Group.

The Museum’s collection of trade union and political banners is the largest and most important of its type in the world. There are over 2,000 posters covering elections and issue campaigns. Satire forms a strong part of our holdings, with over 300 18th, 19th and 20th century political cartoons, including Steve Bell’s cartoons of the Falklands War. There are 7,000 badges and tokens from the late 19th century to the present day, and over 95,000 photographic images and 17,000 pamphlets covering social and political history. People’s struggles to gain the vote and workers’ rights to unionise are some of the topics covered in the collections. The Museum is actively working to amass collections concerning anti-fracking protests, Scottish Independence and LGBTQ history. The papers from the 2015 Election campaign should be coming to the Museum too.

As well as the object collection and archival collection, there is an off-site store on Princess Street that can also be visited. The political posters contained in the Museum probably amount to the largest collection in the UK, and interest not only historians and sociologists, but also art and design students and others. Much of the collection is catalogued, but if it isn’t searchable online or at the Museum itself, the very friendly team including Chris Burgess (Curator), Darren Treadwell (Learning Assistant) and Heather Roberts (Archivist) will no doubt be able to point anyone needing specialist help in the right direction. Educationalists who are keen to bring in their students – ranging from Early Years, primary and high school, sixth form or adult community groups – can arrange projects with Kirsty Mairs (Learning Manager) who has been at the Museum for over ten years. School students of History, Art and Design, English, Drama, Sociology and Citizenship are able to take part in some of the projects organised to inspire young people: Living History where trained actors perform for the students who are in turn inspired to create a response, pARTicipate covers the Art of Protest, printing power, build a banner and protest pottery amongst other activities, City Centre trails to inspire students to respond creatively, and an introduction to archives amongst other projects that the Museum can work on in conjunction with schools and community groups.
Representatives from other organisations and institutes also attended the meeting, and gave insight into how their resources can benefit academics. Here are the details of other great sites of sociology for you to visit:

**Working Class Movement Library**

**51 Crescent, Salford M5 4WX**  
**0161 736 3601**

A representative from the Working Class Movement Library also highlighted how they have a useful collection for academics and researchers to use which follow similar themes to the People’s History Museum. Although they are closed access, we can call and arrange a time to visit and they can bring out the relevant material.

"The Working Class Movement Library started life in the 1950s as the personal collection of Edmund and Ruth Frow. It became a Charitable Trust in 1971 and moved to its present home in 1987.

Edmund and Ruth Frow were proud that their love of books had created a unique and valuable resource for people wanting to know more about working people’s lives and political beliefs."

"Working people have always struggled to get their voices heard. The Working Class Movement Library records over 200 years of organising and campaigning by ordinary men and women. Our collection provides a rich insight into working people’s daily lives as well as their thoughts, hopes, fears and the roles they played in the significant events of their time."

"Our collection contains:
- books
- pamphlets
- archives
- photographs
- plays
- poetry
- songs
- banners
- posters
- badges
- cartoons
- journals
- biographies
- reports

We have information on:
- The trades and lives of people who worked in the past - brushmakers, silk workers, tailors, boilermakers and others
- Trade unions, where people have banded together to improve their working conditions
- Politics and campaigns, from Chartism to the General Strike and more recent protests
- Creativity and culture - drama, literature, music, art and leisure
- Important people who have led activist lives
- International events such as the Spanish Civil War, and aspects of Irish history

Much of this information is held in books, pamphlets or leaflets. Many more stories are told by our photos, banners and tape recordings.

Our collection captures many points of view to tell the story of Britain’s working classes from the beginning of industrialisation to the present day."
Our oldest items date from the 1760s. From the 1820s we have some of the earliest trade union documents to have survived.

We have material on politics of all shades and come right up to date with the archive of Jim Allen, the Manchester-born screenwriter who worked on Coronation Street and collaborated with film director Ken Loach."

Ahmed Ullah Iqbal Race Relations Resource Centre

Central Library, St Peter’s Square
Manchester, M2 5PD

0161 275 2920

Hannah Niblett from the Ahmed Ullah Iqbal Race Relations Resource Centre which is an open access library specialising in the study of race, ethnicity and migration came to tell us a little about how we can use the resources they hold in our work. The Centre is based in the beautiful newly-refurbished Central Library, and I have found this to also be a great bright space to sit and study. The specialist Centre has approximately 15,000 books on the shelves and another 6000 or so in their archive storage.

- Works with community groups to collect life histories, photographs and documents so that the community histories are not lost to the future.
- Supports teachers and student teachers to develop an anti-racist curriculum.
- Lends books and teaching materials that reflect the diversity in schools.
- Creates and publishes Black history resources for use in school and community settings.
- Publishes multicultural stories and biographies of Black British heroes that are written and illustrated by school-children.
- Organises events, exhibitions and activities to share knowledge of the contributions of BME communities to British history.

Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) Special Collections

Sir Kenneth Green Library
All Saints, Manchester, M15 6BH

0161 247 6107
Louise Clennell, Education and Outreach Officer, informed us of the vast collections they hold at MMU which are available to all. There is a Reading Room, an Education Room for teaching groups, and a Gallery. It is an accredited museum so it is open to the public.

"The collections are central to the artistic culture and teaching of the faculty and have been since its foundation as the Manchester School of Art in 1853.

The collections include:

Artists' Books: a great range of creative experimentations with the book form

20th century international poster collections

The Manchester School of Art Collection including fine and decorative art and the work of past and present students and staff

The Schmoller Collection of Decorated Papers

Children's Book Collection: featuring 19th and 20th century children's book illustration

Book collections exploring aspects of the book as an artifact

Archive collections including artists' working drawings and correspondence

Manchester Society of Architects Library

Victorian ephemera featuring 19th century albums and scrapbooks

Mary Butcher collection of Baxter prints"

2. https://twitter.com/PHMMcr
3. http://t.co/GKCrh61IPU
4. https://twitter.com/educ_research/status/517299349798531072
Michael Burawoy on Neo-Liberalism and Social Movements (2014-10-04 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/N4acGTVKm04

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/N4acGTVKm04
In the first Centre for Social Ontology seminar of 2014/15, Daniel Chernilo (Reader in Social and Political Thought at [1] Loughborough University) discusses his work on philosophical sociology. This was the basis for a [2] recent paper in the British Journal of Sociology.

[3] In this presentation, I introduce the idea of philosophical sociology as an enquiry into the relationships between implicit notions of human nature and explicit conceptualizations of social life within sociology. Philosophical sociology is also an invitation to reflect on the role of the normative in social life by looking at it sociologically and philosophically at the same: normative self-reflection is a fundamental aspect of sociology’s scientific tasks because key sociological questions are, in the last instance, also philosophical ones. The idea of philosophical sociology is then sustained on three main pillars and I use them to structure this article: (1) a revalorization of the relationships between sociology and philosophy; (2) a universalistic principle of humanity that works as a major regulative idea of sociological research, and; (3) an argument on the social and pre-social sources of social life. As invitations to embrace posthuman cyborgs, non-human actants and material cultures proliferate, philosophical sociology offers the reminder that we still have to understand more fully who are the human beings that populate the social world.

October 14th, 5pm to 6:30pm, S0.08 (Social Sciences Building) at the University of Warwick


1. http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/academicandresearch/chernilo-daniel.html
3. https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/chernilo2-small.jpg
4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/
5. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
Big Data and the “Book of Society” (2014-10-05 08:00)

An important point from the paper [1]Big Data, social physics, and spatial analysis: The early years by Trevor J Barnes and Matthew W Wilson:

The most immediate invocation of monism by Big Data is its assumption that the social world can be mathematized in the same way as the natural world. Just as Galileo thought that the Book of Nature is written in the language of mathematics, there is a parallel belief within Big Data about the “Book of Society.” Without the supposition that the social world can be fully made over as numbers, Big Data would have no purchase. We also suggest that monism is invoked by Big Data in a second form, at least implicitly. When Big Data deploys models of spatial analysis monism is presumed, because those models partly rest on a social physics that makes monism foundational.

[2]http://bds.sagepub.com/content/1/1/2053951714535365.abstract

What’s the difference between ‘public intellectualism’ and being unusually willing to talk about stuff in public? (2014-10-06 08:00)

In the last year I’ve had a selection of requests from the media to talk on an eclectic range of issues: contemporary sexual culture, the quantified self, dystopic social change, the limits of liberal tolerance and hipster hatred. I’m fairly confident in dealing with the media and I enjoy the challenge of condensing ideas in the way necessary to communicate them effectively. However apart from a couple of occasions where people asked me to talk about open access and scholarly publishing, all these interactions have been concerned with asexuality. This is a subject I obviously do know a lot about and have felt confident discussing because I don’t doubt that I have genuine authority to speak: I’ve conducted one of the largest empirical studies, I’ve written widely about it and I’d like to think I’ve become reasonably effective at contributing to asexual visibility. I don’t say this to boast but only to illustrate that on this topic, any reservations I have about engaging with the media are entirely extrinsic to the subject. In terms of stuff I’ve been asked about recently, I’d actually really like to have said ‘yes’ in almost every case but I lack confidence in bringing any genuine expertise to the issue in questions.

However I also wonder if my notion of ‘genuine expertise’ is rather restrictive, suggesting as it does that the category of ‘public intellectual’ amounts to little more than someone unusually willing to speak in public on a range of topics far beyond those they have academic warrant to do so on. I have no qualms whatsoever about expressing my ideas on any subject when it’s on my blog but this feels different – it’s obviously not private but it’s also not public in the same way as speaking to a journalist writing an article for a national paper is. Perhaps if academics aren’t willing to speak beyond the range of their research topics then ‘public intellectuals’ come to be replaced by ‘social commentators’ who have no such qualms and, in many cases, lack the genuine expertise the former group has in a certain set of topics. Maybe it’s a case of primary and secondary knowledge? So I should feel uncomfortable with speaking on issues where I have no real academic grounding but should be willing
to speak on those where I have a familiarity with the academic literature even if I haven't undertaken research myself.

Or maybe I do want to be one of the 'social commentators' I just invoked so derisively and that my problem here is not with 'public intellectualism' but is rather with my commitment to 'being an academic'.

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Patrick Ainley (2014-10-13 11:22:00)
Looking at recent 'conversations', it seems to me a lot of our self-styled academic 'public intellectuals' just publish on blogs as well as in journals to raise their profile and not because they have anything to say consistent with the issue to hand or indeed anything worthwhile to say at all!

On Jacques Lacan (2014-10-07 08:00)

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/7HpuDmTqWal

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Why politics needs arts & crafts (2014-10-08 08:00)

By [1]Dr Anna Feigenbaum, lecturer in Media & Politics and contributor to the 'Disobedient Objects' exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Inflatable cobblestones, book blocs, musical pot lids. This week these objects joined the Victoria & Albert Museum's collection, taking their place in design history alongside Grecian pottery and fashion couture. Curated by Gavin Grindon and Catherine Flood, the V &A's Disobedient Objects show serves as much as an intervention than as an exhibition. Its 99 objects from social movements around the world ask us to rethink what counts both as art and as politics.

From brightly coloured, hand-woven tapestries to a rice sacks with head and armhole cut-outs, the show's disobedient objects range from refashioned rubbish to intricate craftwork. While everyday items like tea cups or water bottles may not be inherently ‘disobedient’, repurposed here as objects of solidarity and makeshift tear gas masks, they take up status as ‘disobedient.’

Other objects showcased in the exhibition were intentionally designed for disobedience. The shields adorned with images of climate refugees used to transport pop-up tents at Climate Camp in 2007 are an excellent example of how spectacular art created spectacular media images, and swayed public opinion. Similarly, the ‘dragon’ concrete lock-ons made infamous in the anti-roads actions of the 1990s show how protest sites often become innovative centres of disobedient design.

There is as much variety in these objects as there is in the people who made them. Artistic credits for the show include professional architects, sculptors trained in world-leading art schools, gardeners, electricians, prisoners, students and anonymous collective assemblies of all kinds of people. These objects are neither art of the institution, nor art simply made outside of the institution. Rather, they are blends of both, the products of imagination as it travels between cultures and countries.
Just as our conception of art is disrupted by this exhibition of disobedient design, so too are our ideas of politics. Normally, when we think about what makes up politics, talking comes to mind. Politics is debates and speeches. It is dealing with campaign donations and soliciting support at gala dinners. It is the fighting, the demanding, and, all too often, the lying of our political leaders.

But these disobedient objects open up a different kind of politics. They give way to a politics of the senses. They showcase campaigners' sensibility of political norms that enables them to anticipate and out-design their opponents. This politics can manifest as sound; the sing-song banging in unison of cacerolazo pan lids. Other times it is found in acts of collective sleeping – a politics shared through open-source designs for winterising protest camp tents. Often this different kind of politics is expressed in signs, flavoured with humour and pop culture savvy, as in the hanging hand-painted cardboard: 'I wish my boyfriend was as dirty as your policies' that now adorns the V &A (and its gift shop rack of postcards).

These are just some of the crafted politics of everyday people that arise when voices go unheard. Marred by low voter turnout and growing distrust, traditional politics is desperate for creativity. It is begging for new ideas to get beyond its self-perpetuating bureaucracies and stale public school styles. But to carry on, politics needs innovation from below. It needs to learn to better craft possibilities and policies from the perspective of the people. AsDisobedient Objects shows, real change can only come when the imagination challenges the institution—and wins.

[nbox type="notice"]This post was originally published on [5]Protest Camps. It has been reposted here with permission.[/nbox]

1. http://staffprofiles.bournemouth.ac.uk/display/afeigenbaum

Atmospheres Conference, 1-2 July 2015, CALL FOR ABSTRACTS (2014-10-09 08:00)

Atmospheres, 1-2 July 2015, Call for Abstracts

Atmospheres play a significant role in, and add an important quality to, our intimate, domestic and public lives, yet
are often overlooked in social research, not least because of the methodological challenges involved in 'capturing’ them.

In this major conference celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Morgan Centre, we will be using the theme of 'atmospheres' as our starting point for interdisciplinary dialogue. Abstracts will be invited in the following kinds of areas. These are intended to stimulate ideas and are not prescriptive.

- Atmospheres in intimate, domestic and emotional life
- Belonging, place and atmosphere
- Smell, sight, sound, touch and taste
- Political and socio-cultural atmospheres
- Atmosphere, public events and crowds
- Online/virtual atmospheres
- How atmospheres can be 'captured' methodologically
- What makes an atmosphere

**Submitting an abstract** For more information on how to submit an abstract and to download the submission form, please visit our website[1]http://www.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/call/

1. http://www.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/call/

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**David Tyfield and John Urry on Energy and Society (2014-10-10 08:00)**

This fascinating (and impressively produced) video introduces a [1]special issue of Theory, Culture and Society on the neglected role of energy within sociological accounts of modernity:
1. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/31/5.toc
2. file://www.youtube.com/embed/T7kvxigHRGA
7 ways to use a blog as a research journal (2014-10-12 08:00)

1. **Recording particularly powerful extracts of texts to which I might wish to refer later.** This can serve a practical purpose, constituting a form of reference management which both indexes a source amongst a heterogeneous range of other materials and foregrounds a particular extract of the text. This transforms the status of the archived source and, in my experience, increases the ease with which one is able to later connect it with other ideas and artifacts. It also serves a communicative process which can, if the extracts are posted 'in real time', constitute a form of live-blogging. This form of post can help others navigate the academic knowledge system, with quoted extracts constituting an alternative to abstracts. The context provided by the author of a blog having chosen to share an extract from a source can, presuming knowledge of their interests and work, help elucidate connections between disparate literatures and disciplines which might otherwise go unrecognized e.g. a sociologist of personal life introducing other sociologists to work within human geography that has a similar focus through posting extracts on a blog.

2. **Capturing ideas and insights which occur, usually when engaging with the ideas of others.** What I would have once written down in a notebook or scrawled in the margins of a book I instead record on my blog. The knowledge that others will read the ideas inculcates a desire to fully explicate it so as to leave it at least potentially
comprehensible to others. My note taking otherwise tends to take the contracted and personalized form of inner speech. This limits the utility of these notes when it comes to academic writing, leaving a gap between the analogue record of the thought and the mode of articulation required in academic writing. In contrast the digital record on my blog avoids this gap by already being articulated in something approaching the manner which would be required to include the thought in an article or chapter. Furthermore, such indexed, tagged and searchable posts usually include an extract from the text which sparked the idea in question. Most of the posts that fall into this category result from an engagement with literature but by no means all. Blogging can also provide an outlet for ideas sparked by face-to-face conversation and can, in many cases, extend those conversations across contingent barriers of time and space.

3. **Brainstorming sessions in response to particular ideas or around particular themes.** The articulation of a whole sequence of connected ideas, usually in bullet point form, which have begun to emerge in my mind as a potential cluster. This has often been a result of particularly stimulating conferences or public engagement events and the blog, as an immediately available public forum to record ideas, provides a unique and valuable outlet for the sort of creative 'buzz' which can ensue. To use a personal example: I gave a TEDx talk a number of years ago at the University of Warwick. This is a format structured around "ideas worth spreading", necessitating the distillation of a research agenda into the core elements that excite and concern, with the caveat that the audience members are unlikely to be familiar with either your discipline or the topic in question. This process of 'translation' from my own sociological language of talking and thinking about my research area of asexuality and sexual culture already proved extremely thought-provoking, allowing me to step back and detach myself from an area in which I have been deeply immersed. The talk itself and subsequent questions and post-event discussion were enormously enriching, with the effect of detaching a number of lines of inquiry from the disciplinary structures within and through which I had been habitually approach the underlying questions. The result was to leave the 'familiar seeming strange' in a way which inculcated a newfound and enriching energy into my interest in the topic area. However it was the capacity the blog afforded to subsequently go home and spend an hour capturing each and every one of the thoughts now bubbling through my mind in a document ("11 random thoughts about asexuality studies") which allowed this creative energy to find an expression which it would not have otherwise had.

My contention is not that such moments of creative 'flow' are rare in academic life or that blogging is the only productive outlet for them. Instead I am arguing that the particular characteristics of a blog (e.g. freedom from institutional structures, stylistic informality and its accessibility via tablets and smart phones) render it a particular congenial medium for the expression of such creative energies, given they tend to occur in an intensely situational and contingent manner. Furthermore, the indexing function of the blog then allows these ideas to function as an open archive. Permitting easy and instant reacquaintance has obvious practical benefit for the research process but these ideas also have a life of their own. They provoke reactions in others, stimulate dialogues and occasionally impinge upon the author’s own life via the reactions they provoke in other people. This action takes place while such notes are either 'in storage' waiting for further use by the author or, as often may be the case, entirely forgotten by the author. This autonomy has always been a characteristic possessed by books and journal articles, which both circulate and retain the capacity to be understood independently from their author. However blogging as 'continuous publishing' generalises this status from the finished 'products' of the research process to the continual outputs ensuing from iterative processes of knowledge production.

4. **Longer form reflections on particular topics.** These often take the form of reflections on practice (e.g. "reflections on editing books and journals") but can sometimes be explorations of particular substantive issues. In such cases the post then sits nearer to the formal presentation of these thoughts. In this sense it could be thought of as sitting 'between' brainstorming or capturing ideas on the blog and formal academic writing. This might pose complications because of a potential tension between writing of a style that might be deemed suitable for more traditional forms of scholarly publishing and the question of how, if at all, it is directly reproduced in journal articles or book chapters. Does this constitute a form of 'wasting' the writing on a 'mere' blog? In a discussion of book reviews David Beer offers the interesting suggestion that the lack of any "describable or measurable
“payoff” means that the time spent on such forms of production almost constitutes a form of resistance “against the constraints and expectations of contemporary higher education”. If this point can be sustained with reference to book reviews then it is difficult to see how it could not also be extended to other forms of writing: those approached with equivalent care and exhibiting equivalent quality to that which the author might otherwise submit to a journal, which are nonetheless intended solely for a blog and will not be directly reproduced. It constitutes a form of performatively grappling with the internalised values of the audit culture which could, perhaps, be seen as a form of proto-therapy (i.e. learning to take pleasure in ‘wasting’ work on a blog) for those who feel pathologically affected by the instrumentalizing malaise of the contemporary academy.

5. **Sharing ‘homeless’ bits of academic work that have been cut from papers.** My own tendency to desire that I ‘save’ bits of writing that have been cut from papers and chapters by posting them on my blog sits uneasily with my comments in the previous section as to the subversive value of ‘wasting’ academic work through publishing outside the remit of processes of credentialisation and auditing. However I suspect a dual meaning characterises the term ‘waste’ here. On the one hand, one could ‘waste’ through self-publishing on a blog a piece of writing that could form a sizable portion of a journal article which one could leverage for instrumental gain. On the other hand, one could ‘waste’ a piece of writing that was formerly intended for public consumption by extracting it from a manuscript and saving it in a private file or, indeed, deleting it altogether. This later sense of waste seems less problematic, in so far as that it expresses an attentiveness to the autonomy of our cultural creations and a desire to let them ‘out in the world’ to take what action they may.

6. **Developing conference presentations.** Increasingly my habitual form of preparation for conference presentations or longer talks is to produce a brainstorming blog post of the sort described above and then use this as a basis upon which to develop a set of slides. I then upload the slides via the Slideshare service and embed them into the original blog post. Having done this, I often choose not to use the slides on an OHP but instead draw on them as notes. My experience has been that the iterative method (blog post → slides → presentation) helps collate ideas in my mind in a way which is inherently structured rather than, as was my previous experience, using the format of powerpoint slides as a framework into which I attempted to ‘squeeze’ a relatively disparate and unstructured cluster of ideas.

7. **Planning forthcoming writing projects.** This is the aspect of my blogging which I suspect many would find most questionable and I have grappled with it myself. As part of a commitment to ‘openness’ I plan my future projects out in the open. I oscillate between a worry that I am being deeply naive by doing this and a belief that processes of metrification have inculcated a deep sense of incipient paranoia within contemporary academic life. The truth likely lies somewhere between the two polarised views. I recognise the affordances which my own position entails for such a practice, in that I work in two relatively obscure areas which likely curtails the ability or willingness of anyone to ‘steal’ ideas from my blog. Nonetheless, I remain sceptical about the origin of such fears, at least assuming we exclude work that is commercially sensitive in some way. This may be a function of some underlying naivete on my own part but, equally, it seems important to consider the possibility of latent conflicts between academic habitus and the culture of openness.

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Nam Tran (2014-10-14 20:00:51)

Great article! Who would’ve thought to turn notes or highlights from books into blog posts.
Žižek is an actor of the spectacle (2014-10-12 14:53)

There is a lot to say and discuss about Slavoj Žižek, however here I’d like to limit the discussion to what I’ve witnessed in my experience of the last year, observations through media and the points raised by Mark Carrigan’s critique of Žižek.

First of all, we should all recognize that Žižek is not an academic or scholar in a conventional sense. Of course, to be an academic in this sense is not an obligation for intellectual, sociological, philosophical or theoretical production more broadly; for instance, the late Jean Baudrillard also refrained from working in this way. However nobody seriously disputed his being an academic or scholar. Baudrillard’s philosophical line has taken its place in the main roads of Western Philosophy.

It seems that, for Slavoj Žižek, the corpus of his work emerges in TV shows, interviews, news and that what exists in between (books, articles, serious conferences, Etc.) are just like a net, connections making these essential components (short and flashy) reach each other. As Mark Carrigan explained: Slavoj Žižek became “the superstar professor able to float free of any limiting norms of collegiality or professionalism.” The main orientation of his intellectual praxis has less in common with Hegel, Marx, Freud, Lacan than with Lady Gaga and other celebrities of global popular culture, stars of Hollywood and MTV. This reminds me Pierre Bourdieu’s “fast-thinker” concept and we can even go a little bit further and call him as a “fast sayer”. Because with any breaking events Žižek’s short, “striking” comments and talks are emerge almost automatically.

If somebody (he, his followers or criticizers) define him as "Marxist", then there would be a real misunderstanding of Marx’s ideas. Žižek is a popular and compatible part of the puzzle that global authorities (and also their opponents) can put wherever there is a need. Žižek is an actor of the spectacle. Guy Debord (a Marxist for sure) [1]said: “The spectacle, considered as the reigning society’s method for paralyzing history and memory and for suppressing any history based on historical time, represents a false consciousness of time.” Žižek’s analyses of social, political, historical issues hinder the possibility for a comprehensive and profound history of humanity. I am really curious what a scholar of philosophy, psychology, political sciences or history who spends their life in libraries for decades, thinks when they see Slavoj Žižek talks about the field of their specialization with a few sentences in a TV show or newspaper. Many of them would keep calm, some of them maybe just smile, however I’m pretty sure that some would get really angry.

Slavoj Žižek’s works have become an attainable and accessible reverse Objet Petit A, which you can reach through a Google search if you have limited time and with more detailed readings if you have more time and a professional purpose. It is a widely consumable form of Lacanian thought. You read his “magical words” and get enlightened quickly! Everything is clear to you now: Lacan, Marx, Middle Eastern politics, Hitchcock or Lynch films. A theory cover everything without being a system; playing a part in the global spectacle yet remaining ‘critical’. The more Žižek embraces a place in the global media of late capitalism the less he becomes a part of those theoretical lines moving through Marx, Freud, Lacan etc. Žižek is moving beyond the legitimate borders of academia.

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Kubilay Akman is a sociologist and academic teacher at the University of Bingol, Turkey. He graduated in sociology and completed his PhD at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, Istanbul. His research interests are Sociology of Arts, Sociological Theory, Sociology of Literature and Mysticism. He has focused on Sociotherapy recently. [nbox type="notice"]
Mick Stupp (2016-09-14 10:19:09)

"I am really curious what a scholar of philosophy, psychology, political sciences or history who spends their life in libraries for decades, thinks when they see Slavoj Žižek talks about the field of their specialization with a few sentences in a TV show or newspaper" I am really curious what a scholar of philosophy, psychology, political sciences or history who spends their life in libraries for decades, thinks when they see that reality has diverged from the dream theatres that seemed so perfect in the library. I am no advocate of Žižek but he does seem to try and confront the spectacle on its own terms, perhaps a foolish strategy but one that circulates the ideas of Marx, Freud, Lacan, etc far more effectively than a ‘conventional scholar’ shut away in a nice, safe library.

How not to use twitter as an academic (2014-10-13 08:00)

I usually tend towards the view that there’s no right or wrong way to use social media. These evaluations only make sense relative to some prior purpose and so I’m sceptical when blog posts pronounce on the right way to use Twitter or parallel claims with other platforms. However I realise there are a few things which I do see as intrinsically negative things to do on twitter, at least if you want to build positive connections with others working in your field:

1. Don’t tweet everything you blog at people. It’s hard to build an audience as a blogger and a sense that no one is reading what you write can erode the enjoyment of blogging. But repeatedly tweeting links to new posts at people (i.e. “@soc_imagination my new blog post http://www.myblog.com”) is the digital equivalent of looking up phone numbers of people in your field and cold calling them to announce that you’ve done some writing. If there’s some particularly pressing reason why this one post needs to gain an audience then that’s fair enough but before you send it directly to scores of people, it’s worth thinking about whether you’d do this ‘offline’.

2. Don’t tweet requests for people to follow you back once you follow them. Much as with the first point, I’m surprised at how frequently I see people do this and more so they’ve done it with scores of people in quick succession. I understand the impulse to do it in some cases but again consider the ‘offline’ equivalent to this. I can’t quite work out what it would be but I’m sure it would be slightly creepy.

3. There’s no need to thank people for retweeting you. If you remark something in conversation and someone says “that’s interesting” would you say “thank you for finding my remark interesting”? Retweeting is usually some variant upon affirming that a tweet was interesting or valuable in some way. Thanking people for retweeting (or following for that matter) makes a momentary interaction feel creepily transactional to me.

What would you add to the list? If a certain number of people share an antipathy towards a way of acting on twitter then at what point should we start talking about these as norms?
Harmut Rosa on the inescapable logic of growth (2014-10-14 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/XCLPpU0hSUw

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/XCLPpU0hSUw

Harmut Rosa on Public Spaces The Sociological Imagination (2016-05-29 08:00:50)

[...] A really interesting interview by Harmut Rosa, whose groundbreaking work on acceleration has been developed in recent years into a theory of 'resonance': [...]

The internal conversation of James Bond (2014-10-15 08:00)

Earlier this week I read [1]Solo by William Boyd. The idea of a new James Bond novel wouldn’t have appealed to me if it had been written by anyone other than Boyd and it lived up to my expectations. One curious aspect of it which I wasn’t expecting was the prominence of James Bond’s internal conversation in the narrative:

Bond lay in bed thinking about the plans for the following night – the crossing of the lagoon and trusting this man, Kojo, to deliver him safely. And what then? He supposed he would make his way to Port Dunbar and introduce himself as a friendly journalist, provide himself with new accreditation, and say he was keen to report the war from the Dahumian side – show the world the rebels’ perspective on events. Again, it all seemed very improvised and ad hoc. (pg 84)
Bond forced himself to think about his options for a while, kicking at bits of the shattered road surface. (pg 99)

To be honest, Bond had to admit that he hadn’t thought much about what he was doing once the urgency of the situation was apparent and the beautiful clarity of his plan had seized him. All that had concerned him was how best to execute it. (pg 146)

Bond paced slowly to and fro, affecting unconcern, but his mind was hyperactive. Something must have gone very wrong – but what? No clever strategy suggested itself. (pg 173)

He stopped. It had come to him like a revelation. All you had to do was give your brain enough time to work. A solution always presented itself. (pg 200)

There was nothing so invigorating as clear and absolute purpose. There was only one objective now. James Bond would kill Kobus Breed. (pg 272)

Bond’s mind was working fast – sensing opportunities, weighing up options, minimising risk. (pg 282)

Bond turned the Interceptor on to the London road and put his foot on the accelerator, concentrating on the pleasures of driving a powerful car like this, trying not to think of Bryce and whatever dangers had been lurking out there in the darkness of her garden. (pg 321)

I use the phrase ‘internal conversation’ because I think Boyd is doing something more here than simply describing the contents of Bond’s mind. These ‘contents’ enter into the narrative because they represent the basis for action rather than solely being a subjective response to the protagonist’s circumstances.

A Radical’s Guide to Long-Term Reputation Management (2014-10-15 08:50)

1. Begin by having a reputation for something conventionally positive, which enables you to speak your mind in risky ways beyond your remit.
2. It follows that you will eventually offend a significant swathe of the population, but be sure that you explicitly signal those in whose name you claim to speak. In other words, strategically polarize the audience to your advantage.
3. But be sure that over time you adapt your message to attitude change, so that you continue to polarize in just the right way. This invariably involves massaging the original meanings of crucial terms in your message to create just the right level of dissatisfaction with the status quo, as the occasion demands.
4. It helps to write a lot so as to present this shift as seamlessly as possible. A diary is especially good at portraying self-consistency and a sense of purpose across the vicissitudes of events, over which one has no substantial control.

Paradigm case? UK Labour politician, [1]Tony Benn. Over a political career that spanned more than a half-century, he was always just ‘radical’ enough to keep self-affirmed radicals of the time engaged but never too radical that he dropped off the political radar entirely. The presence of a continuous self-narrative throughout created the appearance of a ‘man of principle’.

Others may wish to reach other judgements about this life strategy, but in Benn’s case it resulted in a soft landing at death, so that the obituaries waxed nostalgic about what might have been rather than focusing on what in retrospect look like a bull-headed refusal to see the political possibilities that were opened up by admitting error.

And that’s the point of my calling this post a ‘radical’s guide to long-term reputation management’. Benn was dead wrong on so many things, yet his reputation survives.

(I am writing this partly because the [2]Blue Labour’ people who track UKIP’s ‘Little England’ policies with inordinate interest may be tempted to revive the spectre of Tony Benn.)


Geek is Chic, but still the same Capitalism? (2014-10-15 10:19)

By Christopher Vito

One of my fondest memories as a child was when my father would take me to the comic book store on his days off from work. I remember picking out X-Men and Spider-Man comic books, and being enthralled with the storylines and artwork. After school I would go to the park with my friends and we would all pretend to be superheroes ready to take on the world with our make-believe super powers. During my youth, my father would also save up money to take me to Comic-Con International: San Diego. In the mid-1990’s I remember this event being predominantly occupied by a subculture of local comic book shops, upcoming artists and writers, and smaller comic book companies. But what would become of this event as I grew older?

Many long time Comic-Con attendees have mentioned a paradigm shift in the culture of Comic-Con itself. With the rise in popularity of “geek culture,” Comic Con International: San Diego has become a massive event unlike my experiences in the mid 1990s. According to its website, it has topped 130,000 attendees in recent years, and has
expanded outward to include satellite locations, local hotels, and outdoor parks. It has been harder to obtain tickets, has become more crowded, and consists of longer waits in line for panels and autograph signings. There is also a noticeable shift from smaller comic book stores and companies to major corporations taking up most of the event. Signs from Fox, Warner Bros., NBC, and Sony suffocate you with their bright lights and overbearing advertisements.

[1]

The paradigm shift is concordant with my experiences as an employee at Comic-Con. For the past five years I have switched roles from attendee to employee. As a worker for a marketing company that promotes major corporations at Comic-Con, I have seen that the days of small comic book stores controlling their own stands are now over. Instead major corporations have erected extravagant monuments usually over thirty feet tall and spanning hundreds of feet wide. In addition, my experiences during my youth consisted of leisurely discussions of comic book characters with local artists and store owners. Many comic enthusiasts had time to rummage through boxes of comic books, while toy collectors had a chance to admire their favorite pieces. Now underneath those thirty foot monuments are hustling employees trying to push you along the crowded walkways if you are not attracting attention to or purchasing their product.

In particular, two instances exemplify the experiences I have had as an employee at Comic-Con. My first year job consisted of heat pressing logos of major films onto t-shirts. The process was quite tedious, as we had to print them quickly but correctly. The first task was to determine which size shirt the customer wanted. Next, the customer determined which logo they wanted on the shirt and where they wanted it placed. Finally, the logo was heat pressed on the shirt and quickly dried by fanning it. The t-shirt making process occurred so quickly that I found myself pressing a new shirt almost every minute. Thus, the whole transaction between the customer and employee was brief, if not impersonal. The primary motivation for doing my job properly came from the solidarity I built with my co-workers, as my interaction with Comic-Con customers in this instance was minimal.

[2]
My third year job consisted of opening and closing the lines for free giveaways. The primary concern was to regulate the length of the line so the booth would not get shut down by the Fire Marshall. This meant that I had the ability to let people in the line and deny them when there was not enough space. The job was quite stressful as many Comic-Con attendees would become highly agitated by this and would consistently try to ignore my instructions. At one point, it became such a problem that I almost engaged in an altercation with a male attendee. By the third day I developed a system to avoid attendees altogether. I created a cardboard sign that read "the line is now closed" that I would put in front of my face whenever someone would try to get in line. In contrast to my first year job, the only motivation for doing my job properly came from the attendees who understood my position and respected the job I had to do. Oftentimes I found that these attendees were ones that came to Comic-Con in the 1990s, as we would reminisce about when Comic-Con used to be a close-knit event.

As a sociologist, I cannot help but think that capitalism needs to expand into new markets. I ask myself: has an event such as Comic-Con, which previously catered to a sub-culture of comic book enthusiasts, become a mainstreamed and corporatized event predicated on the commodification of "geek culture"? Even more importantly, is this shift only going to be further exacerbated both by the corporations' desire for profit and the growing consumption of "geek culture" by the masses? Time will tell, but it surely is a place of sociological analysis.

Photo Credit: Crystal Toctocan

Christopher Vito is a PhD student in Sociology at UC Riverside.

Speaking ... Truce to Power Reflections of a “guilty” bystander to the Israel-Palestine conflict (Part One)  
(2014-10-15 10:37)

by Dr Lambros Fatsis

Having borne witness to seven weeks of fighting in Gaza which resulted to a multilateral ceasefire and a relative media silence ever since, anyone armed with a basic, cosmopolitan civic conscience, cannot help but feel helpless and hapless even, despite or rather because of the geographical distance which shields a lot of “us” from the immediate effects of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

We can indeed feel helpless for not being able to fully understand or contribute in any direct way to fruitful discussions, and authoritative decision-making processes that could influence peaceful outcomes in the West Bank, but we cannot fully justify to ourselves remaining hapless bystanders to such a deep and longstanding political and humanitarian crisis.

In a similar way, acknowledging both a sense of vulnerability and indirect responsibility for the recent events in the Gaza Strip, involves spelling out what exactly one can do as a geographically distant spectator to respond to images and realities that have surrounded our daily lives so pervasively in the last month or so. Following a recent correspondence with a former lecturer of mine, who voiced similar concerns with characteristic sharpness and brevity, I felt that it should be vital to give even the slightest indication of what academic discourse could possibly have to say, show or come up with in response to such events, especially given its deafening silence so far.

Momentarily restoring my belief in the power of “uttering” as a necessary pre-condition, if not a synonym, of “altering”, but without harbouring any illusions of “speaking truth to power” as the intellectualist cliché has it (Benda 1928, Jacoby 1987, Said, 1994), much of what follows serves as a confession of a “guilty” bystander who has only his scholarship to offer as an antidote to war, motivated by a desire to speak ... truce to power.

Leaving heartfelt declarations of civic virtue aside, it seems rather urgent to immediately introduce the contents of this article, starting with some obligatory caveats and provisos that eventually pave the way to some predicaments of and responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict, as can be identified not only in the relevant academic scholarship on the subject, but in our collective understanding of it too.

For convenience’s sake, the article is divided into three main sections, the first of which describes two caveats which serve as warnings about what this article is not, as well as about what it actually is, followed by a necessary proviso which spells out what the article attempts to show, say and “do”. The second section of the article recognises two striking predicaments of the Israel-Palestine conflict that hint at its complexity and difficulty, while the third and last section focuses on two potential responses to such a crisis, drawing on scholarly work in sociology and sociolinguistics.

Section I: Caveats and Provisos

1.1 What this article is not

Contrary to the almost built-in ambition of political commentaries, this article does not proffer the pretence of being the product of some authority in the Israel-Palestine conflict, nor does it reflect the musings of a seasoned expert with valuable experience in international relations, international diplomacy and foreign policy. In that sense, it is not a recipe for policy, or an authoritative alternative, a convincing proposal, or a firm (re)solution, much less a rousing call to arms. To make matters worse, much of the above, at least to my mind, might be suspected of committing analytical, moral, and political hubris, oscillating between “omniscient” puffed-up self-importance and ideological posturing, and saturated with irresponsible rhetorical grandstanding that shows little regard for the
actual, and very real, sensitivities affected.

1.2 What this article actually is

Having spelled out what the present article is not, it is fundamentally important to establish what it actually is, or may be. Conceived as a modest attempt to fill gaps in the discussion, as observed in the recent coverage of and commentary on the Israel-Palestine dispute, this article aims at:

- Highlighting hitherto unnoticed, routinely by-passed, or deliberately marginalised issues that demand our immediate attention as cosmopolitan citizens witnessing an ongoing crisis of tragic proportions
- Offering a different vocabulary, ideas and interpretations with which to make sense of an unavoidably divisive political issue
- Attempting to break the silence of academic discourse by showing its potential relevance through a discussion of some themes, issues, perspectives and debates that help us understand some rarely remarked upon dimensions of the conflict, and
- Refusing to treat the issue as a bureaucratic turf struggle, or a merely technical, legal, diplomatic matter, thus opposing any discourse which may prioritise (state) interests to (human) rights, or disregard moral and political imperatives in favour of dispassionate diplomatic solutions drafted by professional policy-makers abroad

What is attempted instead is an invitation to:

- Acknowledge the complexity and sensitivity of the matter by describing, albeit passingly, the emotional, psychological, cultural, political and moral dimensions that make this conflict so difficult to (re)solve without taking into account these factors
- Stress the need for a dispute settlement that involves and makes demands on both sides by creating a negotiating space where both sides can meet equally, with the presence of disinterested, balanced, unbiased international negotiating mediators who will host, convene, and "police" discussions, without ambitions to hatch abstract proposals or offer indecent capitulations, like the existing ones.
- Appoint such a neutral international agent with the aim of (a) conducting discussions towards reaching a non-belligerent agreement, (b) to achieve mutually desirable aims, while (c) guaranteeing fair terms, freedom, equality and full protection for both sides.

To do so however, another set of pre-conditions need to be met, which involve:

- Understanding the Israel-Palestine dispute as an international human rights issue, rather than a localised tussle over land
- A publicly announced, official international recognition of the existence and traumatic history of Palestine, which even today appears "not to exist", 'except as a memory or, more importantly, as an idea, a political and human experience, and an act of sustained popular will' (Said, 1992: 5)
- Bringing together perpetrators (the state of Israel), victims (Palestinians), and international by-standers to the same negotiating table, asking the perpetrators to publicly acknowledge and regret the harm that is done, the victims to forgive, both sides to reconcile, while pressing the international community to assume responsibility for its role as a major player in the lopsided and imbalanced pseudo-agreements that have so far been signed, from the callous Balfour Declaration of 1917 to the largely defective Oslo accord of 1995, so memorably criticised by Edward W. Said (1995) in Peace and its Discontents.
- Demanding, funding and supporting a mutual history project and similar educative incentives with the aim of healing existing historical traumas, and turning sentiments of enmity into seeds of and for reconciliation. Fanciful though such a proposition may initially sound, it is only by radically "undoing" the deeply ingrained hatred that both sides feel about each other, that a transition from 'apartheid' (Said, 1995: 62) to democracy can be achieved, provided of course that a sustainable peace agreement has been achieved first, in the manner suggested above. Promoting stereotypical falsehoods that intend to demean one side while glorifying the other (see Jiryis, 1976) can hardly be thought as an acceptable state of affairs. Therefore, the teaching of traumatic (hi)stories with a view of co-operatively overcoming them by acknowledging such events and trying to understand them, enriches both national histories, while creating a novel, mutual history that can pave the way towards a more harmonious
relationship, providing people on both sides with a new script of learning and "doing" history and politics in a manner that does not fence the 'Other' in, or out.

1.3 What it tries to say, show or do

Recognising that the two caveats, or warnings issued above might be suspected of stipulating terms and conditions for a bilateral agreement between Israel and Palestine, it seems incumbent upon the scope of the article to re-emphasize their intended role a mere side-notes towards stimulating a jump in our political consciousness, when discussing one of global history's most provocative disputes. In doing so, I plead for the reader's patience, while I qualify what has been said by spelling out my intentions and my intellectual rationale for thinking about and discussing the matter in question, the way I currently do.

To offer any attempt at a discussion of the Israel-Palestine conflict, at least in my mind, automatically means recognising that:

• It is an intricate, emotive, contentious and immensely complicated matter whose discussion, analysis, interpretation and understanding is held hostage to decades of misapprehension and misrepresentation, psychological barriers and cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ellis and Maoz, 2002, Griefat and Katriel, 1989, Cohen, 1990), as well as political status issues (minority, majority, dominance, oppression), therefore making it both a real, material problem of acute political urgency, as well as an issue of inter-cultural miscommunication that underscores much of the "deadlocking" of so many negotiations.

• It cannot be solved by realpolitik alone, although 'real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue' (Said, 1995: 36)

• Peace does not come by one-state, two-state or bilateral, federal state solutions alone, but requires a vocabulary of truce and reconciliation to undo the rhetorical habit of power, defined by Corsini (1984: 63) as a 'capacity to influence other while resisting the influence of others'. Instead, 'real dialogue' and 'real justice' is achieved 'between equals not between subordinate and dominant partners' (Said, 1995: 36-37).

In the light of such necessary pre-conditions, or provisos for discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict in any responsible way, the argument here proposed is that there exists a body of sensitive, humane, and sensible scholarship on various aspects of the dispute that can contribute to a positive and reconstructive change of outlook that remains committed to replacing intolerance with debate, killing with dialogue, paranoia with real politics, in a manner reminiscent of the wise words of a Palestinian laundry worker who confiding in social anthropologist Rosemary Sayigh (2007: 200), painfully acknowledged that: 'We know that Israel exists, we don't want to throw the Jews into the sea. We don't want to die, we want to live. We want to live, and we want others [i.e. Israelis] to live. But we don't want others to live, and us to die'.

Section II: Predicaments

2.1 Exiles Making a Home By Means of Exile

Paraphrasing the subtitle of Richard Sennett's (2011: 3-44) essay on exile, this section starts with an ambitious attempt to understand the ferocity and unshakable conviction with which the modern Jewish State was planted on the ruins of Palestinian land. Whilst it is common, and quite undeniable, to describe the foundation of Israel as a flagrant case of irredentism, it is also extremely vital to understand the reasons why such sentiments have had such a firm grip on the Jewish consciousness, political imagination and policy.

A fundamental aspect of the Zionist movement's sheer force, tenacity and appeal relates to the historical experience of Jews as exiles. From the Roman siege of Masada and the ghettoization of Jews in Renaissance Venice, to the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and the Holocaust (Shoah), experiences of segregation, persecution, displacement, and extermination have played a fundamental role in the self-definition, self-understanding and
self-identification of Jews throughout history. It is therefore within that historical, cultural and psychoanalytical context that, what Israel Shahak (1998) called, 'Jewish fundamentalism' needs to be understood if any clear picture of Israel's militancy is to emerge.

Such experiences of centuries-old anti-Semitic persecution do not of course justify the uprooting of Palestinians in the War of 1948, but they hold the key to unlocking the paradox of how one people, as Said (1992: xxi) observed, ‘in their new nation [have] become the victimisers of another people, who have become, therefore, the victims of the victims’, thereby extending the tragedy of the Shoah to the Palestinian suffering of alienation, dispossession, marginalisation and exile, (ghourba in Arabic).

Founded on the trauma of dislocation, aided and abetted by the Zionist movement’s colonialisland zeal (see Herzl, 2007), Israel came to impose itself as a state on ‘[a] land without a people, for a people without a land’, as Zionist leader Max Nordau’s cynical dictum had it (Sayigh, 2007: 198). This disturbing combination of a ruptured past with the fundamentalism of a dogma of imperialist intent and colonialisland tactics, constituted Israel’s "origin myth" forgetting and often openly denying Palestine's existence, reaching its apogee in post-1948 Occupation where, in Hannah Arendt’s (1973: 290) words, 'the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people'. It is in that context of purging a traumatic past, that the subsequent purge of Palestinians was orchestrated with Golda Meir’s ‘flat assertion in 1969 that the Palestinians did not exist’ (Said, 1992: 5), epitomising the whitewashing of history by denying the continuous Palestinian presence on the land of Filastin or Falasteen since the end of the 7th century, despite successive waves of Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, British and Israeli occupation (see, Said 1992: 8-11, and Sayigh, 2007: 1-61 for a historical overview).

What is imperative then is not merely to condemn the long-lasting oppressive and authoritarian settler colonialisland of Israel, but to also come to realise that what feeds such fanaticism is the desire to consolidate a spatially fixed national identity in order to heal the injuries of dispersal by engineering, and imposing, a return to a perceived ancestral home, even at the cost of expelling others (Palestinians) from their place of origin. In other words, it is not enough for the international community to merely point the finger at Israel's aggressive tactics without recognising the deep insecurities that nourish such absolutism, as it is not enough to do just the absolute minimum in intervening to help Palestinians regain their self-respect by simply granting them observer status in the UN. Recognising and allowing Palestine to exist as an autonomous and independent nation is what is at stake, and it is international parties within the UN that need to do that by mounting an opposition to the hypocritical reservations of the US, as evidenced in the [1]General UN Assembly vote of 2012. While it is indeed true that [2]‘negotiation is the only way to achieve peace’, as Israel’s former ambassador to the UN, Ron Prosor recognised, it cannot happen in a vacuum without openly discussing the source of Israel and Palestine’s embittered relations. One the one hand we have the indiscriminate, wholesale endorsement of a totalitarian dogma (Zionism), which provides a historically transplanted population with the comfort and security of a territorial identity, while on the other hand we have the continuous marginalisation, uprooting and oppression of another people (the Palestinians) in a vicious circle which transforms both sides into warring groups that neither were or needed to be, before the experience of Holocaust which fuelled Zionism, and before the Uprooting which in turn invited armed struggle as a vehicle for revolutionary change. Fighting the root cause of this seemingly interminable conflict does not simply mean doing so rhetorically by drafting UN resolutions as a technical solution to a real, political problem of international significance, but by making decisions that will make such hatred irrelevant in time to come. This can only emerge if the international community commits itself to securing ongoing peaceful negotiations and creating initiatives for educational, cultural and political change that will urge more dialogue and more sociability between Israel and Palestine therefore heralding a long-term period of reconciliation as a pathway to transition from violence to democracy (see Section III of this article).

2.2 Proximity and Distance

Another predicament that is often papered over in discussions of the Israel-Palestine conflict is the paradox of
the two parties’ geographical proximity and cultural distance and its negative impact on negotiation(s). Despite ‘overwhelming evidence for the salience of intercultural incompatibility in the deadlocking of talks, formal and informal’ (Cohen, 1990: 152, 136-7), this ‘intercultural dimension’ of the conflict is passed over ‘in silence’ when it should be taken into account seriously, given that cross-cultural antinomies can and indeed do lead to communicational dissonances which soon turn into political discord, thereby hindering the prospect of resolution because of contrasting assumptions about negotiation and bargaining. Sociolinguists such as Cohen (1990), Casmir (1990), Ellis and Maoz (2002), Katriel (1986), and Griefat and Katriel (1989) have produced impressive scholarship on the subject showing the differential emphasis, meaning and understanding that Israeli-Jews and Palestinians place on bargaining. While Palestinian-Arabs act in accordance with the elaborately dialogic, contractual ethos of musayra (or musayara), Israeli-Jews adhere to the dugri code of speech which emphasizes “straight talk”. Whilst this may sound like a version of cultural relativism, if not cultural determinism, what the work of such scholars tries to show is not the impermeability and unchangeability of these communicational codes and cultural traditions, but that such socio-linguistic and cultural differences need to be acknowledged, recognised and wrestled with for any attempt towards establishing peace by dialogue, given the emphasis placed on specificity, preclusive detail, semantic accuracy, precision, and explicitness in the Israeli dugri ethos of speech, contrasted by preference for constructive ambiguity, social contract, deliberate obscurity, and implicitness in the Arabic folk-linguistic habit of musayra.

Although such cross-cultural differences may at first glance appear purely aesthetic, if not entirely decorative, they shed light on a gravely problematic relationship between two spatially adjacent, yet culturally remote parties. If we are to consider peaceful negotiation as a viable solution to longstanding political conflicts such as this, cultural misunderstandings of this kind need to be thought as having serious political implications, rather than be easily dismissed as irrelevant trivialities.

Understanding the contrasting assumptions of Palestinians and Israeli Jews regarding negotiation and bargaining is important for realising why dialogue between the two groups often comes at a standstill. In the ‘other-oriented’, ‘humoring’, ‘conciliatory’, and often exhaustingly long-winded, interational ethos of musayra (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 121), bargaining is praised as a value in its own right, and seen positively as ‘a forum for human relationships' and ‘social integration’ (Cohen, 1990: 138). From an Israeli standpoint however, bargaining has negative connotations and is associated with the ‘rejected and despised’ practices of the Jews’ mercantile past when they first arrived in Palestine as traders; an experience that is seen as ‘part of a struggle for survival in a hostile environment’, if not an ‘aberration’ (Cohen, 1990: 139). Set against this background of conflicting ideas about the virtues and vices of negotiation, any meaningful dialogue cannot but take into account this socio-linguistic and cultural dimension of political exchange, recognising that ‘to be a person […] is to be a person-in-a-culture’ (Griefat and Katriel, 1989: 136). And while it is certainly the divergent political aims, objectives and demands of such debates that make disagreements between Palestinians and Israelis so flammable, the cultural gulf between them can hardly be by-passed when the influence of such factors largely determines the binding powers of contracts. ‘Peace comes from understanding, not agreement’, claims an Arabic proverb (Cohen, 1990: 148), and if it is at all true, political agreement without cultural understanding between Palestinians and Israelis is bound to continue to be difficult to arrive at.

Section 3 and Bibliography are available in [3]Part Two of this article.

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Section III: Responses

3.1 Negotiation, not a dialogue of the deaf

Having already attempted to show some neglected or even hidden layers that lurk behind a sensitive and volatile political debate, this section endeavours to introduce the idea, notion and practice of negotiation as a fundamental political act, thereby elevating it as a necessary practice for political change rather than reducing it to a mere linguistic or cultural device. This is an important acknowledgement to make, not just to ward off accusations of committing “policy by Freud”, but to stress and highlight the significance of negotiation in the resolution of political conflict as a crucial rather than a naïve plan of action, that is as difficult to implement as it is vital.

Despite the immense complexities and difficulties of negotiation, described by Henry Kissinger as an ‘ordeal by exegesis’ (Cohen, 1990: 146), it is here contended that treating negotiation as a key process in reaching a consensual agreement as well as helping in winding down the fighting is important on a number of counts.

Firstly, negotiation helps in breaking the mould, if not the patterns and habit of the existing dialogue of mutual exclusion, by turning interminable disputes into potentially sustainable negotiations that stress communication in pursuit of peace, rather than as a proxy for a performance of dramatic confrontation.

Secondly, negotiation recognises the dependence on others to achieve one’s own independence; a process which requires building trust given the ‘intrinsic contradiction between conflict and the need for joint action’ (Casmir, 1990: 43). Besides, as Casmir (1990: 43) notes, ‘[i]t is the resolution of that conflict which is the primary purpose’ of the negotiation process, and given that what we ‘need to remember’ is that when two parties are in dispute ‘they want different things and they want them from each other’, it is apprehension and mistrust, not co-operation and negotiation that act at the expense of each side’s own interests.

Thirdly, negotiation offers a much more well-rounded approach to conflict-resolution, than continued violence or indifference does because, as Casmir (1990: 40) states:

‘Negotiations, especially on the international level, are a complex process that requires consideration not only of the factors contributing to them at the moment, but also cultural and other interrelationships that precede and follow the readily apparent procedures. All negotiations are concerned with power; that is they are the result of power relationships between negotiation partners. Furthermore, they must take into account factors that have caused trust or mistrust to develop in the past because of perceptions related to the use of power by one or more of the negotiation partners’.

3.1 Reconciliation, not alienation: A sustainable alternative?
Having so far discussed the historical, linguistic and cultural dimensions of the Israel-Palestine conflict, without in any way wishing to reduce it to those factors alone, this section of the article hopes to reveal its author’s orientation to the issue by sharing a few reflections as notes towards re-thinking the whole debate as well as offering some alternative responses to it, with the intention of proposing reconciliation via peaceful negotiation as a viable linguistic, cultural and political mode for speaking truce to power.

Reconciliation is therefore seen here as a serious and important process of political deliberation seeking to ‘repair damages of the past through a new mode of justice, often called ‘restorative’ justice, which can be understood as an attempt to establish and legitimate an emotional ‘regime’ that is markedly different from the regime that typically underpins the retributive justice of ordinary democracies’ (Ure, 2008: 284-5). The aim of such a proposition for a shift from "retributive" to "restorative" justice, is to try and imagine a sustainable alternative to violence and enmity which ‘acknowledges the legitimacy of ‘past grievances’, but also attempts to ‘find ways to overcome victims’ anger and resentment for the sake of creating a viable social future’ by means of '[r]espect[ing] the victims and survivors of atrocity-yet broker their participation’ (Ure, 2008: 285).

Ambitious and ambivalent though such a proposition might be, it will dominate the argument of this article which is organised in four themes; (a) Avenging Revenge, (b) Taking Emotions Seriously, (c) Healing, not Killing, and (d) Arresting Violence

Avenging Revenge
Revisiting an argument that was initially defended at a [2]previous article for the [3]Sociologists of Crisis series, albeit set at a different context altogether, my call to avenge revenge by entirely abandoning the idea and the practice serves as an invitation to fashion a different image, and inspire a different interpretation of justice that moves away from automatically, spontaneously and lazily equating it with retribution and revenge.

Despite literary, legal and cultural evidence that defines revenge as synonymous to justice, from Homer’s (18: 127) depiction of it, via Achilles, as ‘sweeter than dripping streams of honey’, and Hesiod’s scathing description of Thebans’ whose ‘justice is violence’ (Lane, 2014: 29), to Judith Shklar’s (1990: 94) emphatic observation that ‘for most people, retributive justice is justice’, it is here argued that considering the ‘exhilaration of revenge’ (Shklar, 1990: 97) as justice is immensely problematic, if not erroneous, intellectually, morally, culturally and politically alike.

Re-defining justice instead in a way that opens up a space, a middle ground, a mean between anger (thymos) and compassion (eleos) seems more sensible and durable, bearing in mind Plato’s resounding claim that ‘the just city is based on an education that carefully calibrates its citizens’ anger (thymos) and extinguishes their sense of tragic grief or compassion (eleos)’ (Ure, 2008: 283). Such an alternative definition of justice moves away from revenge as a rightful or even righteous response to harm, and directs our energies instead towards what, South African psychologist and esteemed participant in the third [4]Russell Tribunal on Palestine, Gobodo-Madzikela (2008: 331) calls ‘empathetic repair’. Substituting violence and aggression, with empathetic repair however requires a leap in political consciousness, and the guiding assumption behind such a logic is that ‘building or re-establishing a sense of shared humanity’, as Ure (2008: 285) puts it, needs the emergence, if not creation, of a ‘political community based on equality of respect and civic trust’, with the aim of encouraging ‘victims, perpetrators and beneficiaries to undergo an emotional catharsis’; a consideration that is entirely over-looked by conventional criminal and civil laws and practices. ‘Compared with retributive justice’, Ure (2008: 285) adds, ‘the restorative mode of justice pioneered by traditional societies demands the application of a greater range of emotional responses to injuries and violations and, in some cases, a challenge to the norms of reasonableness in emotions that applies in established democracies’.

Changing the mode of justice as a result of political will however largely depends on making past enemies regard one another as fellow human beings, an imperative identified by Trudy Govier (2002: 144), in Forgiveness and
Revenge, as follows:

‘People cannot come together in a lasting way and cooperate as they will need to in a jointly run society if they remain angry, vengeful, suspicious, and insecure. The need for forgiveness lies in its relevance to two very practical aspects of reconciliation: cooperation and sustainability.

Removing ‘resentment and anger’, Govier (2002: 144) suggests, is important because they undermine the trust that sustains social cooperation, and need to be replaced instead with a different emotional education, or rather, re-education that equips citizens with the confidence of nurturing and defending more lasting political emotions, by taking them as seriously as they would act of retribution and violence.

Taking Emotions Seriously

Avenging revenge with compassion, apart from a magnanimous display of political will, also involves a reconciliation with emotions as a rich lexicon in and of political life, urging us to mine our psyche for solutions beyond anger in order to effect a transition from authoritarianism to democracy by confronting a bully without becoming thugs ourselves. Vague and hopelessly naive though such a suggestion for resolving political issues may sound, it is not without its proponents, and the figures I have in mind as I type do not come from the insular, ivy-clad world of academia, but from the realm of direct, traumatic experience. Nelson Mandela was one such figure and, as Muldoon (2008: 307) observes, he was one to see a ‘strong connection’ between the ‘(external) transition from authoritarianism to democracy and the (internal) transition from anger to forgiveness’. Desmond Tutu, another South African candidate, had a similar philosophy in mind when encouraging the Truth and Reconciliation Committees with the aim of seeing forgiveness as a lasting remedy rather than a quick fix for those choking upon their anger and resentment.

Last but not least, comes Phan Thị Kim Phúc, now a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador campaigning for peace, and a nine-year old child in the Vietnam War when she witnessed and suffered severe injuries and underwent numerous operations as a result of the napalm bomb shower that devastated her village in South Vietnam. The ‘Napalm Girl’, as she came to be known after photographer Nick Ut’s iconic photo ‘The Terror of War’, made the following appeal during a ceremony in Washington, DC: ‘If I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him that we cannot change history, but at least we can try to work together in the future to promote peace’.

Upon delivering her speech, Gobodo-Madzikela (2008: 345) recalls, ‘John Plummer, the man responsible for dropping the napalm bomb was present in the audience. He wrote a note with the words: ‘I am that man’. The note was passed on to Kim and at the end of her talk they approached each other’, where Kim Phúc opened her arms to Plummer, and upon accepting his sobbing apology said: ‘It’s alright’, ‘I forgive. I forgive’.

What this incident portrays, is not, as Gobodo-Madzikela (2008: 345) puts it, a ‘misguided sentimentality’ at the expense of “real politics” but an encounter which is ‘illuminative of the development of emphatic identification between a perpetrator of an atrocity and a survivor who bears emotional and physical scars from the atrocity’. In political terms, such examples address the need to introduce forgiveness, empathy and compassion as a trinity of emotions that form and inform a new kind of political ethic, ‘an ethic for enemies’, as Donald Shriver (1995) called it. For forgiveness to matter however, escaping its stigmatisation as a rose-tinted abstraction with little relevance to pragmatic reality, its ‘proper function’ needs to be understood in terms of its capacity to ‘forgive the inexcusable and incomprehensible’. ‘Without the gravity of an atrocity’, Jankélevich (2005: 106) argues, forgiveness would be ‘superfluous’, a mere formality and an ‘empty protocol’ devoid of meaning or purpose. Elaborating on his argument Jankélevich (2005: 106) adds that:

‘When a crime can neither be justified, not explained, nor even understood, when, with everything that could be explain having been explained, the atrocity of this crime and the overwhelming evidence of this responsibility are obvious before everyone’s eyes, when the atrocity has neither mitigating circumstances, nor excuses of any sort, and when hope of regeneration has to be abandoned, then there is no longer anything else to do but to forgive’. Such a process of forgiveness however, involves, as Horwitz (2005: 485) notes, ‘significant intrapsychic work,
conscious and unconscious working through one’s anger, and putting the offence into the context of an integrated view of the whole person of the offender, thus neither forgetting one’s trauma, nor denying the humanity of the perpetrator by means of exterminating her, but urging “villains” and victims to start conversing in the common idiom of humanity, rather than the enraged babble of violence.

Healing, Not Killing
Building on the previous argument, before we reach the conclusion to this article in the next and final section, forgiveness is here praised as a psychically and politically transformative process which turns killing into healing or at least aspires to do so. In that context, forgiveness is not equated to forgetfulness, selective memory or total amnesia, but rather to a process of learning to live with a trauma with a wish to heal rather than avenge the violence that has been inflicted. Woundedness is therefore seen as what Gobodo-Madzikela (2008: 344) describes as ‘an ethical responsibility towards the other’, urging us to converse responsibly with the realm of what Arendt (1998) called ‘radical evil’, which is neither punishable or forgivable.

Radical evil, according to Arendt, is “unpunishable” because no amount of punishment can restore a proper sense of justice, and unforgivable because such evil deeds are impossible to forgive. Yet it is in this battle between two impossibilities that Arendt (1998: 237) paradoxically offers forgiveness as a possible solution, arguing that forgiving ‘serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose “sins” hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation’. In doing so, Arendt, who knows a thing or two about violence, totalitarianism and evil, is being neither vague, nor utopian, but bravely puts her argument against the rhetoric of revenge, punishment and persecution, defending instead an ‘enduring vision of democracy and action in political life; bringing victims, perpetrators and beneficiaries of oppressive regimes together for sustained dialogue about the past’, believing that it is ‘the only action that holds promise for the repair of brokenness in post-conflict societies’ (Gobodo-Madzikela, 2008: 335). Thus, replacing vengefulness with forgiveness and killing with healing also means resisting the teleology of violence, urging instead the possibility of peace, which will be neither punitive (towards the perpetrators), nor humiliating (for the victims), but negotiated in pursuit of rationally defined interests, and policies, thereby substituting the degrading effect of violence and aggression with the restorative effect of forgiveness as the basis of and for politics in post-traumatic societies with a view to prompt self-examination and revision of cherished values, ideals and beliefs.

Arresting Violence and Speaking Truce to Power
In concluding this article it seems important to offer a generalised view of the argument here espoused as one that aims to “arrest violence” in favour of “speaking truce to power”, thus arguing for a shift from a rhetoric of conflict towards establishing a culture of healing and reconciliation aimed at peace through negotiation.

Unlike most politicised responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict, what is argued here is a fundamentally political alternative response, which does not treat the resolution of the issue as a state-building exercise alone, but as a task of overcoming betrayal and trauma in an enduring and sustainable manner which takes into account the emotional, cultural and political dimensions of conflict that are often neglected, if not despised, in the fear of de-politicising the issue in favour of psychoanalytic interpretations. In defence of the argument here proposed however, a distinction should be made between the “politicised” and the “political”, given that the former is served by acclamation and assertiveness while the latter is characterised by extermination of hatred and attentiveness. It is therefore argued that any self-respecting “political” response to the Israel-Palestine conflict cannot afford to ignore the complexity, the parallels, the paradoxes and the painful contradictions that the issue engenders in favour of taking just one stance, defending just one position, at the expense of considering what makes it such a complicated and divisive matter in the first place.

The use of scholarly work on cross-cultural conflicts, borrowed from linguistics and on reconciliation and trauma, borrowed from social theory, tries to negotiate that gap by furnishing imaginative solutions to the deadlocking of talks and the continuation of violence, in the hope that they might at least enrich our thinking and our public
pronouncements about such deeply divisive political debates; thereby hinting at the possibility of replacing excitable babble with careful, empathetic consideration of the various aspects of a conflict that is so often charged by polarisation, division, and a disturbing amount of fanaticism that culminates into hatred, as witnessed in a worrying re-surfacing of anti-Semitic rhetoric during the recent events in Gaza.

To be pro-Palestinian does not mean being anti-Semitic, as the slogan goes, yet adopting a one-sided stance to a multi-layered problem only makes sense in cloistered ideological terms, not in the open court of politics. The subtle, yet hopefully powerful, alternative here proposed then has a twofold aim; to invite us to think of the Israel-Palestine conflict differently, as well as to infuse hard-line realpolitik with a sense of soft power, by considering, as the UN-sponsored Durban Declaration of 2001 did, truth commissions, special legislation mandating reparations, formal acts of apology, judicial tribunals, state trials, and other international action on behalf of political reconciliation as important initiatives in a politics of social repair to replace peddling simplistic and divisive one-state, or two-state solutions to a problem that is bigger than a mere territorial dispute, and requires more than an exchange of land for its resolution in any sustainable way. To undo the harm of long-standing traumas one cannot simply issue calls to arms, propose divisive policies, or erect walls and borders that separate, but rather offer the space, the time, the security, the guarantees and the chance for rival sides to non-defensively engage the world by negotiating a desirable outcome together, leaving the politics of reversion behind.

Paraphrasing Édouard Glissant (1989: 16) who, as a Martinican, knew only too well what colonialism and oppression meant, ‘to revert is to consecrate permanence and negate cont(r)act’, and in the Israel-Palestine conflict choosing to revert would simply re-stir past and existing animosities rather than alter the current state of affairs by giving political love, not enmity a try.

References:


Dr. Lambros Fatsis teaches Sociology at the University of Sussex. He also performs as a reggae selector under the alias Boulevard Soundsystem.


Speaking … Truce to Power Reflections of a “guilty” bystander to the Israel-Palestine conflict | Sociologist of Crisis (2015-05-07 16:43:06)
[...] published at The Sociological Imagination, as a two-part article on October, 15, [...] 

[...] Η δεύτερη, «αυτομαστιγωτική», προσέγγιση εξηγεί τις πρόσφατες επιθέσεις ως ακραίες, πλην όμως δικαιολογημένες, πράξη εκδίκησης έναντι των στρατιωτικών επεμβάσεων της Δύσης χρεώνοντας την ευθύνη στις ανίερες δυτικές συμμαχίες και τον μετεπαλατιστικό τους χαρακτήρα. Κι αυτή η στάση είναι ελλιπής, αν και αιτιολογικά ορθή, αφού σχεδόν δικαιολογεί υπόκωφα την βία και τη λογική της εκδίκησης εκφράζοντας μια τιμωρητική ερμηνεία της δικαιοσύνης κατά το πρότυπο της παροιμιώδους φράσης: «όπως έστρωσες, θα κοιμηθείς» (περισσότερα εδώ). [...] 

[...] Η δεύτερη, «αυτομαστιγωτική» προσέγγιση, εξηγεί τις πρόσφατες επιθέσεις ως ακραίες, πλην όμως δικαιολογημένες, πράξη εκδίκησης έναντι των στρατιωτικών επεμβάσεων της Δύσης χρεώνοντας την ευθύνη στις ανίερες δυτικές συμμαχίες και τον μετεπαλατιστικό τους χαρακτήρα. Κι αυτή η στάση είναι ελλιπής, αν και αιτιολογικά ορθή, αφού σχεδόν δικαιολογεί υπόκωφα την βία και τη λογική της εκδίκησης εκφράζοντας μια τιμωρητική ερμηνεία της δικαιοσύνης κατά το πρότυπο της παροιμιώδους φράσης: «όπως έστρωσες, θα κοιμηθείς» (περισσότερα εδώ). [...] 

Τραυματίζοντας το παρόν με το παρελθόν | PolisPress (2016-01-28 17:09:47)
[...] διαλόγου, δεν είναι κάτι ξένο ούτε στη σχετική βιβλιογραφία, ούτε και στην «ρεαλπολιτικ». Χαρακτηριστικό [...]
Wounding the Present with the Past (Article for Huffington Post Greece, January 2016) – Sociologist of Crisis (2016-01-28 17:33:29)

[..] διαλόγου, δεν είναι κάτι ξένο ούτε στη σχετική βιβλιογραφία, ούτε και στην «ρεαλπολιτίκ». Χαρακτηριστικό [..]

Λάμπρος Φάτσης: Τραυματίζοντας το παρόν με το παρελθόν – AW NEWS (2016-01-29 05:52:00)

[..] διαλόγου, δεν είναι κάτι ξένο ούτε στη σχετική βιβλιογραφία, ούτε και στην «ρεαλπολιτίκ». Χαρακτηριστικό [..]

Nausea, vertigo, and "our own" integration (Article for Huffington Post Greece May 2016) – Sociologist of Crisis (2016-06-14 16:53:43)

[..] Αυτή η οπτική υποφέρει από τον ίδιο δογματισμό που στηλιτεύει, αφού στην προσπάθεια της να εντοπίσει/υπογραμμίσει διαφορές, συγχέει την Ανατολή με το Ισλάμ, το Ισλάμ με την τρομοκρατία, και την τρομοκρατία με τους μουσουλμάνους παύοντας έτσι να στέκεται κριτικά απέναντι στον φανατισμό, διοικεί αναζητώντας δυστυχώς στην προσβολή και τον στιγματισμό των μουσουλμάνων συνανθρώπων/συμπολιτών μας. Η κριτική στην ακρότητα δεν δικαιολογείται να είναι η ίδια ακραία, πόσο μάλλον όταν φιλοδοξεί να θεωρηθεί ως διαφωτιστική προσέγγιση σε ένα πολυδιάστατο φαινόμενο. Πέρα από την μονόπλευρη στάση που τέτοιες τοποθετήσεις υιοθετούν για να αντιπαραβάλλουν «εμάς τους ομο(ι)ογενείς» με τους «διαφορετικούς άλλους» αρνητικά, ενώ η σύγκρουση ακόμα αφού τις αντιμετωπίζουν ως στατικές, αναλογικές, αυτοφεύλησης, ενώ η πραγματικότητα αποδεικνύει πως δεν συνιστούν κάτι άλλο από πολύπλοκες διαδικασίες που δεν οριοθετούνται/τακτοποιούνται βολικά. Οι πολιτισμοί, όπως και οι ιδέες και οι γλώσσες, προκύπτουν τόσο από την επικοινωνία, όσο και από συγκρουόμενες. Η διαφορά μπορεί να οριοθετείται ως διαφωτιστικότητα αλλά μπορεί και να αποτελέσει αφορμή για περισσότερη, όχι λιγότερη προσπάθεια συνεννόησης. [..]


Michel Foucault (15 October 1926 – 25 June 1984) was a French philosopher, historian of ideas, social theorist, philologist and literary critic. He also wore a turtle neck jumper and loved his cat.
Is American higher education as horrible as 'advice' posts make it sound? (2014-10-16 08:00)

I read a lot of higher education blogs. One genre that you encounter from time to time is the 'tough but fair advice to grad students' post. This often offers advice on conferences or career planning. It tends to be slightly facetious and adopts a tone of demythologisation. These posts irritate me because they often appear to be perpetuating things I suspect are myths while purporting to be doing the opposite.

They also make American higher education sound horrible. They leave me with a mental image of American conferences as filled with hoards of angst-ridden grad students, desperately surrounding established academics, projecting fixed smiles and simultaneously doing their 'elevator pitches' while trying to shake hands en masse. My point is not that I think conferences in the US are actually like this. But these advice columns implicitly suggest that conferences should be like this.

I'm also wondering to what extent these notions are projected by people with a vested interest in graduate students being anxious: the growing class of freelance PhD advisors. I'm thinking about things like [1]this. Some of the advice might be accurate and there might be people who will benefit from it. But something about the tone of it really bothers me when it’s conjoined with taking money from the most anxious amongst the group described.
Emma Uprichard on Complex Temporal Ontologies and Method - October 28th @SocioWarwick
(2014-10-16 12:25)

In the second [1]Centre for Social Ontology seminar of 2014/15, [2]Emma Uprichard (Associate Professor at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies) discusses **Complex Temporal Ontologies and Method**:

This paper reflects on the methodological challenge of applying complexity theory to study social systems. More specifically, the focus is on the problem of capturing complex patterns of time and temporality empirically. The onus of the talk will be: a) to problematize existing longitudinal qualitative and quantitative social research approaches, which fail to capture complex temporal ontologies, and b) to suggest some tentative methodological alternatives which focus on capturing temporal patterns of change and continuity from a complex systems perspective. A particular concern throughout the discussion is how to study complex change and continuity empirically, whilst also ensuring that notions of agency and the reflexive ageing actor remain central.

All welcome! The seminar will take place on **October 28th, from 5pm to 6:30pm in R1.15 (Ramphal Building)** on the University of Warwick campus. See [3]here for help getting to the campus. Feel free to contact [4]Mark Carrigan with any questions.

2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/people/academic/emma-uprichard/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/people/academic/emma-uprichard/)
3. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Shaking up the social sciences (2014-10-17 08:00)

Ahead of the visit by Nicholas Christakis to the UK next month, the Times Higher Education has run an interesting article by Amanda Goodall and Andrew Oswald. I wrote a [1]response to the original article by Christakis that sparked this debate (in fairness he didn’t choose the title) arguing that the problem with this argument is political rather than intellectual. I actually have a lot of sympathy for the intellectual case he’s making but I worry that his argument inadvertently lends support to a concerted attack on the social sciences (particularly in the case of political science in the US) and a broader attempt to restructure the university system in the UK. Goodall and Oswald succinctly convey what for me is the root of the problem:
The first thing to have in mind, as background, is the astonishing size of the social science literature. Few people appreciate this. The Thomson Reuters Web of Science database (which is by no means exhaustive of the entire global academic output) lists more than 3,000 social science journals. The journals classified as economics alone contained approximately 20,000 articles last year. This implies that one new journal article on economics is published every 25 minutes – even on Christmas Day. This iceberg-like immensity of the modern social sciences means that it is going to be difficult to say anything coherent and truly general across them. Nobody walking the planet has read more than 1 per cent of their published output. Most of us have not read 0.1 per cent. Such facts should give all of us – whether or not we agree with Christakis – pause for modesty in our assertions.

This situation seems obviously untenable to me. Add to it the low citation rates across the social sciences and we’re left with an utterly depressing picture of an ever growing quantity of [unread and unloved] publications that should surely leave us asking what on earth is this work for? What are the social sciences supposed to do? What purposes do they serve? What purposes should they serve? I’m intuitively inclined towards a pluralistic view of social inquiry in spite of having firm theoretical commitments. This leaves me frustrated when encountering responses to these questions that affirm the validity of one approach and denigrate all others. But I’m equally firm in my conviction that these questions need to have an answer, even if the purpose might be some oblique matter of edification rather than anything even approximating instrumental standards of utility. In other words, I think it has to be for something and when considering the output of the social sciences as a whole, in contrast to any particular example of research I might choose to examine, it’s far from clear to me that this is the case. Furthermore, I think the proliferating piles of unread (and in some cases unreadable) literature mitigates against it serving some purpose. The problem is getting worse, not better.


I agree. The problem will get worse until there is some convergence that manages not to mask or minimise the specificities and mechanisms of singular actual societies.

The question about purposes can interpreted as a question about interests. We’re all aware of how research can serve the interests of the researchers who need to improve their CVs. Can it serve anyone else’s interests? Social theories can and do have huge social effects far beyond academia: just look at the effects of neoliberal economics and of Marxist economics before it. As those examples suggest, such effects can be aimed at serving the interests of the haves or of the have-nots. People who argue for strengthening the autonomy of the field (myself included) argue that sociology should not aim to serve non-scientific interests, and that it should be protected from the harmful influence of those interests, because even good politics often makes for bad science. Instead, they suggest that only an autonomous social science, which is able to ask questions and think thoughts that cannot be asked or thought in everyday discourse, can produce understanding of society that would be accurate enough to be of any real use to social movements aimed at serving the interests of the have-nots. Aside from the pressure of publish-or-perish, I think there is also pressure to do research that is seen as ‘relevant’, either to state policy-making or to
the contestation of state policies. Perhaps this helps explain why so much research seems obsessed with social minutiae and utterly lacking in intellectual ambition. If sociologists were expected to tackle deeper questions, perhaps they would publish less.

I find that very plausible. You give grounds for thinking that the call to relevance might inadvertently entrench the problems lead people to call for relevance.

Resonance and subjectivity on twitter (2014-10-18 08:00)

In four years of using Twitter regularly, I've often found others tweeting things that resonate with me and vice versa. In fact one could plausibly suggest that these experiences play an important role in making continued use of the service appealing. What do I mean by ‘resonate’? I mean knowing where someone is coming from, understanding the reaction they're expressing and sharing it to some extent. I would argue that resonance is an important factor to consider in understanding subjectivity within a changing social world – to understand where someone is coming from necessitates some degree of converging experience and circumstances. If everyone's experience and circumstances are entirely particularistic then resonance becomes impossible. If everyone’s experience and circumstances tend towards homogeneity then resonance in interaction fades into the background and ceases to become a distinguishable phenomenon.

In this sense, I'd see resonance as an important micro-social mechanism engendering social integration: it helps translate objective commonalities into subjective commonalities. Experiences of resonance leave us with a sense that others understand where we are coming from and vice versa. The new forms of interaction facilitated by social media enable new ways in which objective commonalities can be translated into subjective commonalities. Things that previously couldn’t be a basis for subjective commonalities – because they rarely, if ever, entered into interaction – now can be and this has important social consequences. It would be easy to overlook the way in which something like Twitter can contribute to social integration because it is so empirically different to what we're used to but I'd argue the same underlying mechanism is at work. It tends to increase the degree to which people feel a sense of commonality with a range of others with whom they interact and it does so because there are real underlying commonalities which facilitate this.

An introduction to blogging and twitter for social researchers (2014-10-18 13:22)

My course at Nat Cen has been moved to December. You can book online [1]here.

Given the increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact of social research, it is inevitable that researchers are looking towards the opportunities offered by social media. This one day course offers an accessible introduction to the use of blogging and twitter, encompassing the possibilities they offer for social researchers and walking you through best practice.

You will learn through a combination of presentations, informal discussions and practical sessions, including pre-course reading.

3028
Course content covers:

- An introduction to blogging
- An introduction to twitter
- Making an impact with blogging and twitter
- Integrating blogging and twitter into your working life

Who is it aimed at?

This is an entry level course, which assumes no familiarity with blogging or twitter.

You will find this course useful if you:

- conduct social research
- have responsibility for impact and public engagement
- communicate findings to policymakers and practitioners

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the programme you will be able to:

- understand the characteristics of blogging and micro-blogging
- get started in a practical and engaged way with Twitter and WordPress formulate your own strategic plan to use these services effectively
- connect effectively with others online in a way which serves these ends measure the impact of your online engagement
- participate enjoyably in the emerging academic blogosphere and twittersphere

The exciting future of governance (2014-10-19 08:00)

Background to the video [1]here. I have to admit that I’d assumed this sort of thing was at least a decade away. What’s so creepy about this (beyond “because of this your feeling of safety increased”) is how ‘joined up’ the proposed monitoring is. Rather than piecemeal monitoring that gradually gets joined up in response to instrumental concerns, this company is proposing total monitoring from the outset because of the kinds of interventions it can facilitate.

1. [http://boingboing.net/2014/10/04/dutch-it-contractor-lays-out-t.html#more-335985](http://boingboing.net/2014/10/04/dutch-it-contractor-lays-out-t.html#more-335985)
2. [http://www.youtube.com/embed/LqhbuTA5WY4?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](http://www.youtube.com/embed/LqhbuTA5WY4?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
How did the Goldsmiths MA/MSc in digital sociology come about?

[audio http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ds1.mp3]

Is it difficult to unify the disciplines that are represented on the course?

[audio http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ds2.mp3]

How would you describe the aims of the course?

[audio http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ds3.mp3]

What sort of students are attracted to the course?

[audio http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ds4.mp3]

Do you think digital sociology courses like this will become more common over time?

[audio http://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/ds5.mp3]

You can find out more about the MA/MSc in Digital Sociology [2]here. You can find out more about Noortje’s work [3]here.


“I have no idea what to tweet about!” (2014-10-20 08:00)

Are you a social researcher who feels this way? Here are some ideas which might help:
• Have you read any interesting papers recently? Link to them and briefly explain why you liked them.

• Are you going to any conferences soon? Tweet that you’re going and ask if anyone else is.

• Are there any new stories which connect to issues you address in your research? Link to them and explain why

• Working on a presentation or a paper? Take one idea, try and express it succinctly then throw it on to twitter to see what reaction you get.

• Have you read anything good recently that isn’t related to your research? Tweet about it and explain why.

• Try to find other people working on similar issues to you. Tweet and ask! (e.g. “Does anyone know other people working on x, y, z?”)

• Are there any blogs or other websites you follow that are connected to your research? Tweet and tell other people why you like them.

• Are there policy or political conclusions which follow from your research findings? Explain what they are.

• For that matter, what are your research findings? Tell people.

• The most obvious one: link to your publications. Tell people what they’re about and why the work mattered to you.

Call for contributions: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life (2014-10-20 17:30)

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This workshop will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:
• empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
• the origins of metrification of higher education
• metrification as a form of social control
• the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
• common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place in December 2015 in Prague. At present, we’re seeking to clarify the level of interest before determining the length of the event, fixing a date and inviting keynote speakers. Please send expressions of interest – a biographical note and brief description of interest in the topic – to mark@markcarrigan.net and filip.vostal@gmail.com - deadline January 31st 2015.

Venue

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic (http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

Travel

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

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Gurminder K Bhambra on Connected Sociologies (2014-10-20 17:44)

The discussion of Connected Sociologies as theoretical methodology around the 13 minute mark is particularly interesting:
Limits of democratization. Two roots of the current political misery (2014-10-20 20:53)

by Ralf Wetzel

Rwanda. Somalia. Iraq. Afghanistan. Libya. Egypt. And Syria. And Iraq again. The number of failed modern political interventions is legion. Successful examples are the rare exceptions. There are few worth mentioning, except certainly post-war Germany or post-Apartheid South Africa. How come? People trying to understand malfunctioning or even [1]‘failing’ states tend to make two fundamental mistakes, mostly by ignoring the conditions of societal intervention in the modern world.

The three forms of societal evolution
It would be moot to state that societal conditions and the level of development around the globe differ considerably. The fundamental difference, beyond differences in commercial wealth, political participation, or educational inclusion, is the state of societal evolution. This term is understood here in the way the German sociologist [2]Niklas Luhmann developed it in the second half of the 20th century. According to his extensive work on societal evolution and [3]differentiation, we know three distinct forms of societal differentiation: a.) a peripheral society which distinguishes between a centre and its periphery, b.) between above and below, forming a stratified order, and c.) between different functional domains, like the economy, politics, or education in modern society. Such
centre|periphery-based societies arose in the very early days of social evolution, when different tribes began operating in limited spatial conditions, fully reliant on physical co-presence and interaction. Ancient Greece or medieval Europe can figure as examples of above|below-centered societies, in which different social strata (slaves|craftsmen|nobility), the parallel hierarchy of religion, and the overall dominance of a religion (the temporal expression of a presumed divine will) determined the social world. Latest with the 18th century in Europe and North America especially, a new form of societal differentiation occurred, which is the so-called functionally differentiated society. Here, the ranking of different social strata has been replaced by the appearance of different societal domains, such as the economy, politics, education, or science. Religion stepped down from its eminent place as a primary and distinguished observer of society and became one amongst many functional milieus. Since then, Western modern society has lost its foundations of a hierarchical nature.

**Functionalism as the precondition of modern democracy**
The current political ambition that modern democracy could hold sway as the governing principle of today’s world results from a terrible overestimation of its applicability. Originally born under highly specific and improbable conditions in one specific stratum of ancient Greek society, its first manifestation disappeared alongside the political and societal context that gave birth to it. It reoccurred as the political outcome of the Renaissance ending the medieval order in Europe, when Europe’s societies shifted their constituent principle from stratification to functionalization. Both economic and political communication separated from and challenged the religious primary, visible in the tectonic shifts in the political landscape between the 15th and 17th century. Religion lost substantial societal impact and parties and enterprises appeared independent from any religious roots. Democracy became a core program for the system of politics in the first impactful modern nations in Europe, like England or France, later on the ascendant in North American state building ventures. The success of democracy was grounded in its ability to adapt to the call for broad participation of individuals in these societies. If there had not been society-wide political communication, resting on the call for participation and inclusion, there would have been no democracy. Democracy became the modus vivendi of modern societal politics.

**The modern relevance of organizations**
With the functionalization of society, another social system launched its extraordinarily successful career: the formal organization. Already used to great effect in local projects such as dam construction, in armies, and in religious orders, the sheer number of organizations exploded while the stratified society of yore disappeared. Since the general stability of stratified societies was replaced by modern ambiguity and individual uncertainty resulting from the heterogenization of modern society, organizations stepped in to fill its place. The temporal hierarchy of organizations could serve the need of stability and provide clarity, temporal goals, and individual inclusion. Formal administration became the backbone of nation building, and formal procedures guaranteed the application of democratic principles. Furthermore, organizations have become the core and almost single means of modern society to intervene in itself. Political and economic intervention is basically less about the injection of materiel, overwhelming numbers of soldiers, or developmental aids. It is about an organization (government, enterprise, army, NGO, United Nations, whatever) intervening in another organization (government, army, company, school) or another social system (economy, education politics, or quasi-systems like nations or networks). There is nothing left to use but organizations. We have ‘unlearned’ other means. Accordingly, the form of democracy we know today is fate-bound to the principal conditions of modern Western societies, which are functionalization and organizationalization.

**The pre-modernity of intervened nations**
A quick look at the constitution of the ‘nations’ that form the targets of modern intervention reveals that these pre-conditions of modern democracy do not hold true there. Without any exception, we find stratified or even peripheral societies in which the implementation of a Western kind of democracy lacks all prerequisites and, in very generic terms, is not meaningful. The cognitive horizon of these societies is bound to their form of societal differentiation as much as modern Western society is bound to its own. Literally, implementing democracy does not make sense for pre-modern societies, since the general notion of and emphasis on heteronomy, equality, and individuality is simply not given and has no anchor in the societies’ constitution (as the implementation of pre-modern regulatory
means would not hold under modern conditions). Democracy, in short, is unusable, and the attempt to implement such a political and highly organized program [4] astonishingly naïve. Furthermore, the organization-based style of intervention is inappropriate as well. Different societal constitutions are based on different forms of intervention, and intervening by means of organizations in a society unused to organizations cannot hope to lead to the intended effects.

And now? About functional equivalences
Clearly, the West has been too self-assured in assuming that a modern technology to produce collectively binding decisions could be applied under circumstances which lack the essential preconditions. And it has been astonishingly ignorant to the point that political interventions by means of organizations will not take hold, since there are almost no organizations to intervene in. The agenda now has to be to look for functional equivalences of democracy, which could stabilize the societies in question and which could provide a link to modern conditions of decision-making and participation. An equivalent stand for a program which could create collectively binding decisions (like democracy does to modern nations), however, must acknowledge the different societal constitution. This search will be painful, since Western values and myths like equality and individualism will not be mirrored by whatever it reveals. To bring these values by modern, Western means to pre-modern societies is a vain illusion. There is no other way than to acknowledge the fundamental difference of pre-modern societies first, to accept a fundamental distinction in terms of the values and aspirations on the other side, and to check what is possible in the development of both (arrogant) modern and (ignorant) pre-modern societies in their co-evolution. Local wars will certainly be a constant and almost unavoidable part of this pain. Let’s face it, this pain won’t go away easily.

Ralf Wetzel began his career as an electrician. He joined Vlerick Business School as a Professor of Organization and Management after extensive work experience in management and organization research and after being a head of a joint research and consulting group. His career path led him from Germany to the UK, via Switzerland to Belgium. He applies art-based research like improvisation principles and theatre play in his work, especially for inquiring into topics like organization theory & behaviour, change management, consulting, leadership, organization & society. Aside of his academic writing, he loves to turn research results into art-based forms like fiction, accessible for non-academic readers. Twitter: @RalfWetzel

1. http://whynationsfail.com/

Why don’t more early career researchers produce podcasts? (2014-10-21 08:00)

I've never understood why more PhD students and Early Career Researchers don’t produce podcasts. I’ve wondered this for a long time and the question came back to me when reading [1] this post on LSE Impact. I think she overstates
the case slightly (both in terms of the degree to which social media reproduces existing hierarchies and the extent to which podcasts level them) but it’s an important argument nonetheless:

I’m extremely optimistic about the use of podcasts because academia is a slow ‘industry’ and often only a few people hear about your work. With a podcast the focus is on your research topic and you can quickly share your results. Findings are also made more accessible and engaging for people outside of the academic bubble, and who are often directly applicable to the results. In addition, social science research can become sanitised when researchers are left to summarise their findings in a few lines. By literally giving researchers a voice, findings become more exciting as people are allowed to animate their findings and bring character to their research, which I think does more justice to the research that they carry out.


"Invisible Lives": Romanian Night Workers in London (2014-10-22 08:00)
Global cities like London have an incessant rhythm of consumption that needs to be maintained around-the-clock. This short film shines a light on the invisible lives of people working at night whilst the majority sleep or enjoy the nocturnal life. *Invisible Lives* is a short documentary that explores the experiences of Romanians working at night in London.

This film, made by Tim Marrinan and Iulius-Cezar Macarie, features night workers in the construction and hotelier industries, a sex worker on the street and a market trader. They share their stories that encapsulate the highs and lows of night work, from moments of danger to moments of tranquillity when night meets day.

These people’s lives are hardened by threats from pimps and punters or from tiring 12-hour night shifts. The night workers’ experiences are revealed in snapshots through audio stories combined with a visual portrait of nocturnal London—a city that never sleeps.

Through a mix of visually artistic frames and in somewhat poetic manner, the film documents through images and words, the pulse of the nocturnal London, and how and in what ways the precariousness affects the lives of Romanian migrant night workers in this global city. Uncertainties and risks taken by workers on short-term contracts or working illegally (sex worker and market trader), flexibility demands, and no welfare benefits available to protect them reveal the presumed precarious livelihoods. What sets *Invisible Lives* aside from other films is that it allows the protagonists to portray their lives as they are, without much interference through commentaries or analysis.

As SI’s visual sociology editor, I was very excited to find such a great recent example of visual ethnography/sociology (which is why we included it both in the Visual Sociology and the Sociological Craft categories). The carefully dovetailed image-and-narrative work together to explore a number of important sociological issues—migration, gender, labour, sleep, precarity. *Invisible Lives* makes great use of thick description—both in the traditional, narrative sense, and a more modern visual ethnographic sense. While it does guide the viewer towards a certain standpoint of analysis (critical of the precarious life-paths of the invisible night workers, reproachful of society’s lack of engagement with the night workers’ plight), it does so in a gentle, non-prescriptive, and all the more convincing way, allowing for multiple interpretations, and letting through the authentic voices of the research participants.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the film is the brainchild of a sociologist—[2]Iulius-Cezar Macarie, junior research fellow at the Centre for Political Studies at the Central European University, and a documentary filmmaker with some great projects in his portfolio—[3]Tim Marrinan.

[4]Tim Marrinan is a freelance documentary filmmaker based in London working primarily on films addressing issues related to art, culture and society. He is currently working on his first feature length documentary and his previous short film, [5]Beam Drop was screened internationally at film festivals and was aired on television in the UK (Sky Arts), the US (Plum TV).

Macarie’s PhD research investigates who is up at night, why and for what purpose. It seeks to explore if an anthropologically informed qualitative inquiry could reveal differences and similarities amongst Romanian and Turkish night workers’ access to a decent human life in global cities like London with an acute need for migrant labour to maintain its 24-hour economy. The central theme of solidarity against competition amongst migrant night workers provides the conceptual framework for his in-depth comparative research to investigate these two communities living and working the nightshift in London. Macarie grew up in Romania and collaborates with [6]Nightlaboratory. Since September 2013, he is an ‘INTEGRIM’ Marie Curie Junior Research Fellow affiliated to the Center for Policy Studies, and in parallel a PhD student in Sociology and Social Anthropology, at the Central European University.

3038
Budapest.

The film co-directors, sociologist Iulius-Cezar Macarie (left) and documentary filmmaker Tim Marrinan.

The film is part of Roundtable Projects 2013 – an open platform for cultural projects developed in partnership with the members of the Romanian community in the UK. If you liked it, here you can check out the film’s [7]Facebook page.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/Sir0Xad80wA

Emma Uprichard on Complex Temporal Ontologies and Method - October 28th @SocioWarwick (2014-10-23 12:26)

In the second [1]Centre for Social Ontology seminar of 2014/15, [2]Emma Uprichard (Associate Professor at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies) discusses Complex Temporal Ontologies and Method:

This paper reflects on the methodological challenge of applying complexity theory to study social systems. More specifically, the focus is on the problem of capturing complex patterns of time and temporality em-
pirically. The onus of the talk will be: a) to problematize existing longitudinal qualitative and quantitative social research approaches, which fail to capture complex temporal ontologies, and b) to suggest some tentative methodological alternatives which focus on capturing temporal patterns of change and continuity from a complex systems perspective. A particular concern throughout the discussion is how to study complex change and continuity empirically, whilst also ensuring that notions of agency and the reflexive ageing actor remain central.

All welcome! The seminar will take place on October 28th, from 5pm to 6:30pm in R1.1S (Ramphal Building) on the University of Warwick campus. See [3]here for help getting to the campus. Feel free to contact [4]Mark Carrigan with any questions.

2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/people/academic/emma-uprichard/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/people/academic/emma-uprichard/)
3. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)

Four concepts of social structure (2014-10-24 08:00)

The concept of ‘social structure’ is central to sociological inquiry yet there is little agreement about what it means. This matters because social explanation hinges on what we take ‘structure’ to be and a lack of ubiquity about the term helps fuel the disagreements and confusions which are already rife within sociological theory. In a [1]paper from 1989 Doug Porpora identifies the four most prominent uses of the concept:

1. Patterns of aggregate behavior that are stable over time
2. Lawlike regularities that govern the behavior of social facts
3. Systems of human relationships among social positions
4. Collective rules and resources that structure behavior


The first use tends to be associated with individualists concerned to explain how social patterns arise aggregatively from individual behaviour. The second use tends to be associated with holists concerned with social facts and the properties of collectivities. The third use is most frequently associated with Marxism and network theorists (for different reasons) with their respective concerns for the causal power of social relations. The fourth use has often been associated with symbolic interactionists, as well as the structurationist theory of Anthony Giddens.

Another way of considering the different uses of ‘social structure’ is [3]offered by Dave Elder-Vass. He argues that a notion of structure as an emergent feature of social wholes can contribute to existing understandings of structure within sociological theory:
This paper engages with the long running debate on social structure, using Lopez and Scott’s typology of social structure as a starting point (Lopez and Scott 2000). In their useful summary of this debate, they have portrayed the history of this concept as a dialogue between two different concepts or facets of structure, both with roots in Durkheim. On the one hand, institutional structure is comprised by the cultural or normative expectations that guide agents’ relations with each other. On the other, relational structure is composed of the social relations themselves – causal interconnections and interdependences between agents. More recently, a third facet has come to the fore: embodied structure, and Lopez and Scott suggest that embodied structure can play a key role in reconciling and integrating the earlier institutional and relational views.


Institutional structure include macro phenomena (e.g. property, employment, marriage) and micro phenomena (e.g. queuing, turn taking, gift giving). In both cases, institutions serve to regulate interaction by conditioning the reciprocal expectations of actors. Relational structure encompass the relations between roles (e.g. teacher/students, employer/employee) and between concrete individuals. With regards to the latter, we can find a weak sense of relation found in someone like Crossley (a relation is a past history and expectation of future interaction between A and B) and a strong sense found in Donati and Archer (a relation is an emergent property of interaction, producing relational goods/evils, which can only be experienced through participation in that relation). I think Crossley’s sense is congruent with network theory but I’m not certain. Embodied structure is a notion found in theorists like Giddens, Bourdieu and Foucault (in different ways) and concerns the way in which structure ‘gets inside’ actors. It sees social conditions as inculcating behavioural dispositions with consequences for those conditions. In someone like Bourdieu there’s an extremely sophisticated sense of those conditions, which leaves embodied structure as a mechanism through which relational structure gets transformed or reproduced.
In his paper Dave Elder-Vass in concerned to integrate these notions of structure into an account of social wholes. The idea here is that wholes have powers in virtue of the arrangement of their parts:

Let me illustrate the point with one simple example from the natural world. Dogs usually have the emergent power to bark (the property of being able to bark). The dog’s vocal cords, windpipe, lungs, mouth, and brain are all required to make this happen, but none of these parts, or even all of them linked together, would have the power to bark if they were not organized (along with its other parts) into the anatomical relations required to form them into a living dog. We could explain how these parts, combined in this way, generate the power to bark, but this does not take away the fact that this power can only be possessed by a whole living dog, and not by the parts as such.


However understanding how this can be so necessitates that we address the underlying ambiguity in the word structure, as a feature of lay discourse, which compounds the higher level confusions surrounding it as a concept in sociological theory:
These arise from the 'persistent ambiguity' in the meaning of structure identified by Raymond Williams (Crothers 2002: 7; Williams 1976: 253). As Williams explains, the word originally referred to the process of building, but:

The word was notably developed in C17, in two main directions: (i) towards the whole product of building, as still in 'a wooden structure'; (ii) towards the manner of construction, not only in buildings but in extended and figurative applications. (Williams 1976: 253)

It is clear from the history of structure and structural that the words can be used with either emphasis: to include the actual construction with special reference to its mode of construction; or to isolate the mode of construction in such a way as to exclude both ends of the process – the producers . . . and the product, in its substantive sense. (Williams 1976: 257)

In other words, the label structure can be used to refer to different structural elements. It can, for example, refer to a whole entity that is structured by the relations between its parts ((i) in Williams), which I shall call structure-as-whole, or it can refer to the way that a group of things (generally the parts of a whole) is related to each other ((ii) in Williams), which I shall call structure-as-relations.


It's in this sense of structure-as-whole that we can conceive of wholes as having powers in virtue of the arrangement of their parts.
Call for Papers: Feminism, Activism, Education (2014-10-25 08:00)

Call for Papers

If not now, when? Feminism in contemporary activist, social and educational contexts

Political and socio-economic developments in recent years have created new opportunities and new battle-grounds for feminism, with women taking to the streets and demonstrating against the status quo, corruption, sexism, austerity and capitalism. On February 13th, 2011, demonstrations took place in various Italian cities, with over a million participants in total. They were coordinated by the feminist coalition Se Non Ora Quando? (If not now, when?). The demonstrations voiced the urgent need to reassert women's dignity and renewed faith in the effectiveness of a popular feminist movement. There seems to be a pervasive optimism that feminism is now entering a new era, as evidence from different countries seems to suggest. At the same time, it is said that the advance of neoliberalism and the indisputable gains of feminism in the last thirty years have resulted in de-politicisation and a decline of interest in feminism. The mainstreaming of feminism has also raised concerns about its independent and autonomous existence. ‘If not now, when?’ invites potential contributors to consider the present moment of feminism and the presence of feminism on the streets and in mainstream society. It is seeking both theoretically informed and more empirical contributions on feminist endeavours, the strategies they employ and the values they uphold, the lessons learnt, and the new or emerging debates and challenges. In the context of a broadly defined feminist education, ‘If not now, when?’ also wishes to explore the pedagogical aspect of contemporary feminism, as well as testimonies of politicisation and mobilisation relevant to the formation of a feminist consciousness, especially in higher education. Further, and focusing on the present, it invites contributions on the theoretical ideas that are most relevant for feminism today. We are particularly interested in the notion of timeliness or kairos, the right time...
for something to happen as opposed to *chronos* or linear time. This temporal aspect of the contemporary feminism needs to be analysed and fully understood in the light of debates over the future of democracy, the welfare state, neoliberalism and globalisation. As evidence from the ‘periphery’ of Europe and the Mediterranean show that feminists decide to take to the streets again, we particularly welcome contributions that speak about the present and recent past of feminism in that part of the world, especially in the light of the significant political, social and economic changes in the region. Contributions might address the following topics:

- Feminist alternatives to patriarchy and neoliberalism: contemporary strategies, theoretical ideas and practices;
- Feminism in the academia and beyond: reflections on the past, emerging issues in the present, pedagogical prospects;
- Contemporary feminist activism in the South of Europe and beyond: what do know, what do we learn?
- Feminism, ethical values and the role of the individual;
- Feminism and the idea time and timeliness (*Kairos*);
- Is feminism still transformative or has it become too mainstream and confluent with dominant politics?
- How could the insight, issues and strategies of popular movements be transformed into permanent advantages for feminism?
- How does academic feminism respond to ideological, political and cultural demands outside the academia?

350-500 word abstracts are due by 1st December 2014. Proposals should be for original works not previously published (including in conference proceedings) and that are not currently under consideration for another journal or edited collection. If your proposal is accepted for the special issue, a full draft (5000-7000 words) will be required by June 2015. Editors are happy to discuss ideas prior to the deadline. Proposals should be sent to: Olivia Guaraldo, University of Verona, Italy [1]olivia.guaraldo@univr.it and Angela Voela, University of East London, UK [2]a.voela@uel.ac.uk

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**The Mobile Apps in Research Summit 2014 (2014-10-26 08:00)**

On December 4th 2014 The University of Birmingham will be hosting the second Mobile Apps in Research Summit. We are excited to announce that delegate registration is now open.

This year’s Summit includes some discussion-based workshop sessions, by popular demand, as well as presentations, panels and networking.

**Programme**

**Welcome**

**Panel: Supporting apps in research – what UK universities need to do**
Workshop Sessions: delegates may attend either A or B

- **Session A:** When is an app the right thing for your research?
- **Session B:** Designing data gathering apps

Workshop Sessions: delegates may attend either C or D

- **Session C:** Can research apps be commercialised?
- **Session D:** Make an impact – evaluating your app in the real world

Panel: The Future of Mobile Apps: Ubiquitous apps, appcessories, and the Internet of Things

Closing session: shaping the Mobile Apps in Research Summit 2015

There will also be a networking lunch with the chance to meet developers who have experience in creating mobile apps based in academic research. There’s an increased focus on outputs this year, including responses and solutions from the workshops, partnerships for collaboration, and consultation on the future of the Summit for 2015.

For the full programme and to register visit our website [1]www.appsinresearchsummit.com. Tickets cost £15 including lunch. Follow us on Twitter for updates @appsinresearch.


The unavoidability of sociological theory (2014-10-27 08:00)

There's an important way in which sociological theory is unavoidable. I mean this in the sense in which Alexander describes the problems of action and order as non-optional: “every theory takes some position on both” ([1]Alexander 1987: 12). This is an empirical statement about sociological practice as much as anything else. Against those who dismiss 'general theory' as unnecessary, I'd argue that the sorts of questions encompassed by it inevitably emerge in any kind of sociological reasoning – to talk of a general problem of order is simply to affirm the (potential) value of our treating those questions we can’t avoid in a reflective and systematic way.

If we assume there are patterns to social life susceptible to explanation then we are necessarily committed, however inchoately, to a view of these patterns as having some ontological status. The possibility of a pattern presumes a distinction between identifiable regularities and some broader sum of activity in relation to which the regularity is (potentially) identifiable. This distinction in turn invites questions of the relationship between the former and the latter: how does (identifiable) order emerge out of (observable) activity? Once we ask this question, we're effectively talking about structure and agency. This doesn't commit us to any one understanding of 'structure', 'agency' or the relationship between them. But it does leave us within the space of questions which the discourse of structure and agency attempts to treat systematically. The notion of a 'space of questions' I'm invoking doesn't imply deterministic constraints. It creates openings to escape the space of questions by seeking to transcend the dichotomies encountered e.g. both Bourdieu and Giddens seek to do this in different ways. We
can find alternative ways to characterize the space of questions. What I think of as structure and agency seems to be seen by Jeffrey Alexander in the 1980s as two related questions: the problem of order and the problem of action.

On my understanding, sociological theory should be concerned with the systematic elaboration of this space of questions with a view to the amelioration of problems that impede empirical research and the construction of conceptual tools which contribute to it. This entails ‘translation’ work in order to bring divergent perspectives into dialogue with each other. It invites empirical work looking at how theoretical ideas are applied in practice and their contributions (or lack thereof) to empirical research. It invites conceptual work to establish meta-evaluative criteria upon which to establish what constitutes a contribution to sociological theory and what does not.

In essence I’m arguing for the unavoidability of sociological theory on praxeological grounds. I’m suggesting that certain presuppositional categories are intrinsic to sociological practice as a purposive activity orientated towards particular classes of objects. As Alexander puts it, “the real world puts terribly strict limits on our theorizing” (Alexander 1987: 5). We encounter these ‘limits’ through purposive activity of a very particular sort and I’m interested in how the activities which I’m subsuming under the category of ‘sociological practice’ mediate our encounter with these limits on theorizing. I share Alexander’s view that theoretical reasoning has “relative autonomy” in relation to the real world but I want to understand in a much more substantive way how relative it is. My underlying claim is that the theoretical constructs I’m invoking (‘structure and agency’, ‘the problem of order’, ‘the problem of action’ etc) are systematic articulations of issues raised by a practical engagement with the social world motivated by specific purposes. We are drawn to take positions and/or make assumptions on these issues as a necessary condition of sociological practice. So why not try to do this systematically?


CfP: On the Politics of Ugliness (2014-10-28 08:00)

Anthology — Call for Submissions – On the Politics of Ugliness – deadline 15 January 2015

Ugliness is a pejorative marker for bodies, things, and feelings that fall beyond or outside the limits of acceptability. Ugliness has long been indirectly deployed in order to mark, collect, and exclude that which is determined to be aesthetically intolerable (Garland-Thomson; Grealy; Schweik), disgusting (Meagher), dirty (Douglas), abject (Kristeva), monstrous (Braidotti; Haraway; Rai & Puar; Schildrick; Sharpe), revolting (Lebescos), grotesque (Russo), or even simply plain and unaltered (Bartky; Bordo; Morgan; Wolf). While aesthetically ugliness has been positioned both against beauty and as a distinct category for art and art-making (Adorno; Ranciere), there has been little sustained engagement with the ways that ugliness operates alongside identities, bodies, intimacies, practices, and spaces (exceptions include Danticat; Kincaid; Athanassoglou-Kallmyer). Part of the reason for this absence might be that ugliness is at once too broad and too diffuse, serving, as art historian Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has pointed out, as “an all-purpose repository for everything that [does] not quite fit,” a marker of “mundane reality, the irrational, evil, disorder, dissonance, irregularity, excess, deformity, the marginal” (281).

A repository for many socio-cultural feelings and attitudes, ugliness operates in ways that have dangerous and deadly consequences for bodies and those who inhabit them. When a body is labeled or understood as “ugly,” it is subsequently positioned as up for expunging, destruction, and affectively motivated terror (Fanon). For example, the “ugly laws” of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America demonstrate the visceral discomfort that
“ugly” bodies evoke, justifying their exclusion from public spaces on account of their “polluting” effects (Schweik). This demarcation of ugliness is inextricably bound with taken-for-granted ethical, epistemological, and ontological assumptions about the value of bodies. Further, ugliness is infused with dominant discourses of ability, race, heterosexuality, gender, body size, health, and age. At the level of ideas, relations and institutions, deployments of ugliness can have lethal effects on a body’s horizons and the possibilities for visibility, intimacy, and thick life.

On the Politics of Ugliness seeks to provide the first anthology that centralizes ugliness as a political category. It explores the various ways in which ugliness is deployed against those whose bodies, habits, gestures, feelings, expressions, or ways of being deviate from social norms. It argues that ugliness is political in at least two ways: (1) it denotes inequalities and hierarchies, often serving as a repository for all that is “other;” and (2) it is contingent and relational, taking shape through the comparison and evaluation of bodies. This collection asserts that it is only in facing ugliness as a political category that we can agitate routinely harmful ways of seeing, understanding and relating.

We are seeking an array of contributions that will center the politics of ugliness as it relates to bodies, feelings, gestures, habits, things, spaces, sounds, intimacies and their operations alongside ability, race, gender, class, sexuality, body size, age, health, or animality. Specifically, we invite submissions of academic papers; however, we will also consider art-based work, memoirs, cultural commentaries, and creative pieces (short stories, poetry, photo essays) from scholars, writers, and artists. We welcome approaches informed by (but not limited to) critical disability studies, critical race and postcolonial studies, feminist theory, literary theory, art history, cultural studies, queer and sexuality studies, science and technology studies, critical psychology, environmental studies, musicology, and performance studies.

Submissions should engage with the politics of ugliness. Topics of inquiry may include:

- interrogations of ugliness as violence against bodies
- the ethics of engaging with ugliness
- feminist explorations of ugliness, “ugly” engagements with feminism
- ugly methodologies, reading practices, and modes of inquiry
- representations of ugliness, “ugly” bodies, body parts, and “ugly” behaviors
- phenomenological encounters with ugliness: feeling ugly, being “ugly,” embodying ugliness
- ugly intimacies, feelings, and dispositions (e.g., Ngai; Sharpe)
- genealogies, archives, temporalities, and histories of ugliness
- the fashionizing of ugliness, ugly fashion
- ugly development practices, environmental ugliness
- visual, sensorial, and tactile pollution in relation to spaces and geographies
- theoretical considerations of ugliness as a political category
- reclamations and tactical repositionings of ugliness (e.g., Eileraas)
The deadline for chapter proposals (maximum of 500 words) is 15 January 2015. Please forward proposals or questions to Ela Przybylo ([1]przybylo@yorku.ca) and Sara Rodrigues ([2]sararod@yorku.ca) with the subject heading "On the Politics of Ugliness."

1. mailto:przybylo@yorku.ca
2. mailto:sararod@yorku.ca


The issues surrounding boys ‘underachievement’ and raising standards have been at the centre of public debate in education over the last two decades. As part of the Routledge Research in Educational Equality and Diversity series, Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration: Educating White Working-class Boys (2015) by Dr Garth Stahl explores the phenomenon of boys' disengagement and challenges the pathologization of working-class boys, both in the education system and in wider society. The research raises important questions around why this low-performing ethnic group continually underperforms? How do current educational practices contribute to their underperformance? What shapes their aspiration?

Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration: Educating White Working-class Boys will be of international relevance as the moral panic regarding the education of boys is a globalised one. While the boys’ crisis in education has been a priority in the last decade there have been few examples of careful investigative and research. The research is distinguished by close scrutiny of original empirical evidence and the focus on a highly vulnerable population. Qualitative research was conducted with 23 white working-class boys in their final years of compulsory schooling and explores their identities within school environments where quality education is rationed. In understanding aspirations, the work explores how the boys constitute themselves as valuable in schooling practices which consistently devalue them.

Key questions explored in the book:

What shapes the aspirations of these young men?

How do these young men comprehend their own disadvantage?

How do these boys make sense of expectations surrounding social mobility?

What factors contribute to them ‘buying into’ education or ‘buying out’ of education?

How does the system set them up to fail?

How is white working-class disaffection symptomatic of much larger issues in British education?

About the Author:

Dr Garth Stahl is a Lecturer in Literacy Education at University of South Australia and a researcher with the Hawke Research Institute. Previously, Garth lived and worked in London as a Teacher of English, Head of Sociology
Department and consultant for nine years. Garth’s main research interests are: masculinities, Bourdieu, ethnography, urban education, educational inequalities (race, class, gender, etc), and applied sociology.


https://twitter.com/educ_research/status/526729131971837952

In October 2006, I interviewed a White British female Year 11 student who had researched Islam for eight months and then decided to convert to Islam. Alice’s parents were devout Christians, and she explained that they were not too pleased with her conversion to Islam, hoping it was merely a phase that teenagers go through. She had become interested in Islam as she had Muslim friends whose way of life she found intriguing, and thus, she began to read up about their religion. As she learned more about Islam, she felt a connection and found that many previously unanswered questions were being resolved. Therefore, she decided to convert to Islam. She decided to wear the hijab, which was a significant marker of her new identity. One of the reasons, she explained, was that because she was not born into the religion, she felt she had to prove her commitment to everyone around her. She found that her white non-Muslim school friends were supportive of her decision. Interestingly, none of her school teachers had directly asked her about her decision to convert to Islam. Since becoming a Muslim, she loved her Monday morning Religious Education (RE) lessons, as there were many devout Christian students in the class and she could argue her position with them in a “friendly debate”. Moreover, she enjoyed researching and learning about Islam in preparation for RE lessons.

Alice highlighted how her conversion to Islam gave her a sense of belonging, but at the same time she had become very aware of the ethnic and cultural heritage that other Muslims (born into Islam) can rely on. This act of converting to Islam had provided her with a symbolic space to belong, but it also made Alice aware of how sometimes she did not belong: “It puts a smile on my face when I see another white Muslim. I haven’t seen many of us”. She discussed changes since adopting this new identity:

“I’m thinking about every little thing I do…every little step I take. Is that haram or halaal? Before when I do good things, I’ll do someone a favour or I’ll go out of my way to do something and I’ll be like “Yeah, that was alright”. But now I’ll be blessed for doing it as well. It’s more encouraging. I’ve been concentrating on doing a lot of better things. I used to get a joy out of threatening people…I used to feel my power…I wasn’t a bully, but I would talk harshly to people who were smaller than me. Whereas now I don’t. I feel like that’s not the way to do it”.

It is fascinating to learn about the complexities and nuances of such reflective identity work, and how it impacts upon Alice’s everyday life. She explains how she has essentially adopted a new internal framework of reference that values strong family bonds, modest dress and education.

[1]Grayson Perry’s new exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery also presents a White British female convert
to Islam. [2] *Who are you?* depicts 14 modern day Britons and their complex identities. Kayleigh Khosravi, the subject of a silk screenprint with the title *The Ashford Hijab*, spent time with Grayson Perry in order for him to better understand her identity as a White Muslim convert.

https://twitter.com/educ_research/status/526730895798337536

Political and media rhetoric almost always focuses on how Islam is incompatible with Britishness, and how Muslims must work harder to *integrate* (often code for *assimilate*). What about White British Muslims? With the emergence of new identities of White British Muslims, more research is needed into the stories of converts to understand how they are able to position themselves as both British and Muslim, in order for us to develop discussions on what this means for modern multicultural Britain and the discourse of integration/assimilation.


fantastic piece

**Between interaction and intra-action (2014-10-29 08:00)**

The notion of ‘interaction’ is well understood. Interactions are part of our everyday life. Sometimes these interactions leave us thinking about them afterwards (“what did he mean when he said that?”, “why is she always like that?” etc) and sometimes this leaves us thinking about interaction in a *second-order* way (“why do I always feel so uncomfortable in situations like that?”). In this sense, I’d argue that interaction and intra-action are intrinsically linked. Each impacts upon the other in manifold ways. We intra-act in response to our interactions and this shapes what we bring to subsequent interactions. However sociological conceptions of intra-action have tended to be rather deficient. Unfortunately these failings tend to be most pronounced amongst those who most acutely analyse *interaction*. For instance as Nicos Mouzelis writes in his critique of Hans Joas,

If actors do not operate on the basis of rigidly set means-end schematic, if interactive situations constitute and constantly reformulate both means and ends, what sort of conceptual tools can make this obvious, and how are such tools linked to each other and to broader macro-sociological conceptualisations joas does not give us any answers here. Neither does he show how interaction is linked to intra-action – i.e. to the reflexive process, the internal conversations that constantly take place within the actor’s mind. In order to understand how interactions shape means and ends, it is necessary to see how an actor deals not only with other actors in interactive contexts but also with himself/herself.
The risk in critiquing a deficient account of intra-action is that we lose the insights into situated interaction that theorists like Joas offer. I’m interested in the interface between interaction and intra-action: how situated encounters both shape and are shaped by the exercise of our reflexivity. In my PhD I’ve argued that if we compress interaction and intra-action too closely together, such that we fail to recognise the relative independence of actors from the situations in which they are (inter)acting, we will struggle to gain traction upon how interaction is related to inter-action and vice versa. I’m suggesting that theorists of the interaction situation focus on the T2-T3 shown in the diagram below – in doing so, they fail to account for how situated interaction has variable consequences for those party to it and how these ensuing changes effect what actors bring to subsequent situated interactions. Rather than being concerned solely with situations, we should be interested in pathways into and out of situations and how interacting actors change in the process.
Using your blog as a research journal (2014-10-30 08:00)

1. http://prezi.com/embed/5souwydttbd/?bgcolor=ffffff&lock_to_path=1&autoplay=0&autohideCtrls=0

claudia vallve (2014-11-18 11:26:39)

Hi Mark, Thanks for sharing your ideas!! They are inspiring and encouraging, as usual. I’ve written a post in my blog to research online journals linking to your blog (though it’s in spanish) –> http://claudiavallve.com/2014/11/18/utilizar-el-blog-como-diario-de-investigacion-el-archivo-sociologico-de-wright-mills-en-version-digital/ I would like to ask you if you know any examples of blogs used as research online journals for a particular investigation. I’m starting a new project to investigate different models of individual financing of training (from pre-compulsory to long life learning) and, apart of assessing the different existing models and analysing strengths and weaknesses of each one, I’ve been asked to create a community and generate debate with relevant stakeholders in this area (families, public agents, students, NGOs,...). I had the idea of creating either a blog or a wiki, and seeing your post has confirmed that I’m in the good direction. I’m now preparing the architecture of the whole project, and it would be really inspiring to see examples of similar experiences around!!! Thanks again for your posts. I love reading them (not all of them, since it’s impossible to keep up with your pace!!!) and I always find interesting thoughts.
Graham Scambler on an interdisciplinary approach to the ‘structuring of agency’ – November 11th @SocioWarwick (2014-10-30 13:40)

In the third [1]Centre for Social Ontology seminar of 2014/15, [2]Graham Scambler (Emeritus Professor of Medical Sociology at UCL) discusses reflexivity and an interdisciplinary approach to the ‘structuring of agency’:

Margaret Archer’s recent contributions to our understanding of reflexivity in late capitalist society provide useful resources for theorizing across the substantive domains of sociology. Using illustrations from my own work on the sociology health inequalities in general, and my ideal type of the ‘vulnerable fractured reflexive’ in particular, I examine some of the pros and cons of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the structuring of agency. I conclude with a skeletal research programme involving interdisciplinary collaboration.

All welcome! The seminar will take place on November 11th, from 5pm to 6:30pm in S0.13 (Social Science Building) on the University of Warwick campus. See [3]here for help getting to the campus. Feel free to contact [4]Mark Carrigan with any questions.

3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/about/contact/gettinghere/
4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Human/animal cognition and the attribution of causal powers (2014-10-31 08:00)

Walking home in the rain earlier today, I encountered a very fluffy and very wet cat sitting unhappily outside someone's front door. Upon getting my attention, the cat insistently tried to lead me towards the front door in the hope that I would open it. It’s not the first time I’ve noticed cats doing this and I think it shows something interesting about cognition. Cats have come to recognise the capacity of human beings to remove the obstacles that impede fulfilment of their wishes. However they fail to recognise that particular people have the capacity to open particular doors. That cat was convinced I had the capacity to open its front door. They presumably have the understanding they do on an inductive basis, inferring a capacity from the recurrent interventions of human beings in relation to once closed doors that are subsequently opened. To differentiate within the ensuing category, recognising the connections between particular people and particular contexts within which they can (and should) intervene, presupposes a complex web of further categories which could not in themselves be derived inductively.

It wanted you to ring the doorbell.
The Dark Side of Chocolate (2014-10-31 17:09)

Chocolate comes from cocoa beans, and about 70% of coco beans come from Ghana and the Ivory Coast in Africa. Coco bean plantations where it is grown and harvested have historically relied on child, slave labor to harvest those coco beans so that you and I can eat a product many of them have never tasted. As told by Food Is Power, the reality of human trafficking and modern slavery to produce chocolate is a true evil of our time:

“Every research study ever conducted in [Western Africa] shows that there is human trafficking going on, particularly in the Ivory Coast.” While the term “slavery” has a variety of historical contexts, slavery in the cocoa industry involves the same core human rights violations as other forms of slavery throughout the world. Cases often involve acts of physical violence, such as being whipped for working slowly or trying to escape. Reporters have also documented cases where children and adults were locked in at night to prevent them from escaping. Former cocoa slave Aly Diabate told reporters, “The beatings were a part of my life. I had seen others who tried to escape. When they tried, they were severely beaten.” Drissa, a recently freed slave who had never even tasted chocolate, experienced similar circumstances. When asked what he would tell people who eat chocolate made from slave labor, he replied that they enjoyed something that he suffered to make, adding, “When people eat chocolate, they are eating my flesh.”

(From [1]The Evil Part of Halloween You Probably Didn’t Think Of, by B.J.Corey)

Happy Halloween.
5.11 November

An introduction to blogging and twitter for social researchers (2014-11-01 08:00)

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Given the increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact of social research, it is inevitable that researchers are looking towards the opportunities offered by social media. This one day course offers an accessible introduction to the use of blogging and twitter, encompassing the possibilities they offer for social researchers and walking you through best practice.

You will learn through a combination of presentations, informal discussions and practical sessions, including pre-course reading.
Course content covers:

- An introduction to blogging
- An introduction to twitter
- Making an impact with blogging and twitter
- Integrating blogging and twitter into your working life

Who is it aimed at?

This is an entry level course, which assumes no familiarity with blogging or twitter.

You will find this course useful if you:

- conduct social research
- have responsibility for impact and public engagement
- communicate findings to policymakers and practitioners

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the programme you will be able to:

- understand the characteristics of blogging and micro-blogging
- get started in a practical and engaged way with Twitter and WordPress formulate your own strategic plan to use these services effectively
- connect effectively with others online in a way which serves these ends measure the impact of your online engagement
- participate enjoyably in the emerging academic blogosphere and twittersphere

The Overton Window (2014-11-02 08:00)

From Owen Jones’s The Establishment, Location 774. According to [1]this biography of George Osborne, which I’m amazed at myself for having read, the window of political acceptability is a key factor in Osborne’s strategic thinking:

What the corporate-backed outriders have achieved is this. They have helped shift the goalposts of debate in Britain, making ideas that were once ludicrous, absurd and wacky become the new common sense. In the terminology of right-wing political thinkers, they have shifted the 'Overton Window'. The Overton Window is a cherished concept of the US right, coined in homage to Joseph P. Overton, the late vice-president of the right-wing think tank the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. It describes what is seen as politically possible or reasonable at any given time while remaining within the political mainstream. But the very nature of outriders is that they can float ideas or policies that a politician would not dare mention. In doing so, they shift the Window.


Why we need a sociology of the dark side (2014-11-03 08:00)

This intriguing talk makes a case for a sociology of evil given the ubiquity of othering processes:
The price of a citation, or How did King Abdulaziz University get in the world's top 10? (2014-11-03 12:00)

[reblogged from [1]Matters Mathematical]

According to a great [2]recent blogpost by Berkeley academic Lior Pachter, there is something very fishy about university rankings. In last week's global university [3]ranking published by the US News and World Report (USNWR), the top 10 universities listed in mathematics are:

1. Berkeley
2. Stanford
3. Princeton
4. UCLA
5. University of Oxford
6. Harvard
7. King Abdulaziz University
8. Pierre and Marie Curie – Paris 6
9. University of Hong Kong
10. University of Cambridge

The USNWR rankings are based on 8 attributes:

- global research reputation
- regional research reputation
- publications
- normalized citation impact
- total citations
- number of highly cited papers
- percentage of highly cited papers
- international collaboration

Now, how did KAU end up in the top 10? Its chair received his PhD in 2005 and has zero publications. Its own PhD programme is only two-years old. It has separate campuses for men and women. The author, and probably many other mathematicians, have never heard about KAU. Apparently, the secret of the ranking success lies in the fact that,

"[a]lthough KAU's full time faculty are not very highly cited, it has amassed a large adjunct faculty that helped them greatly in these categories. In fact, in “normalized citation impact” KAU's math department is the top ranked in the world. This amazing statistic is due to the fact that KAU employs (as adjunct faculty) more than a quarter of the [4]highly cited mathematicians at Thomson Reuters."
The article goes on with a very interesting and evidence-supported discussion of the ranking system, and of the particular approach taken by KAU in order to put itself on the world's mathematical map. There are also comments by various academics, a few of whom work for KAU. Well worth a read if you have time to be scared about the future of global academia.

Pachter’s blogpost raises some very interesting questions about the future of global academia. First of all, it is not at all surprising that universities from the periphery (the "global south", as we sociologists like to call it) are trying to gain prestige and put themselves out there. It is also not surprising that some, which are very affluent, will attempt to buy their way in the global academic system. In fact, by doing so, they are merely using loopholes and bugs - which to them are "features" - in the ranking and prestige system created by old-world academia. Our indignation at this, while justified, is also somewhat hypocritical: after all, they are simply taking the "money makes research go round" principle that bit further. Academics and administrators in US and European universities should take this as a warning - a mirror held up to our own academic institutional practices which may be less blatant and aggressive, but are nevertheless often the same in their nature. UK universities in particular - more so than in the rest of Europe, but still less so than in the US - are also doing their best to hire highly-cited academics. I'm not at all worried about universities from other places taking the lead in research, and no doubt many of the names on the list are doing just that. What is really worrying is the increasing overreliance on numeric indicators of academic quality as a substitute for much more detailed, more qualitative indicators. I think that we... or someone? but who? well, we - vice-chancellors, academics and administrators - should take the hint from KAU's success on paper and change the system of science quality assessment not just by tightening existing loopholes, but by not relying on simplified indicators at all.

1. mattersmathematical.wordpress.com
2. http://liorpachter.wordpress.com/2014/10/31/to-some-a-citation-is-worth-3-per-year/

What are research methods for? (2014-11-04 08:00)

From [1]Paradigm wars: Some thoughts on a personal and public trajectory by Ann Oakley:
It is because doctors, teachers, social workers and others are so prone to launch interventions without knowing their effects that social science is obliged to use the best tools at its disposal to scrutinize such activities. Method here is (as Wright Mills advised) properly harnessed to the service of the social problem itself, rather than the other way around.

[...]

What are research methods for? In an era dominated by postmodernism, postfeminism and a general acceptance of multiple meanings, it is obviously unfashionable to suggest that the aim of research methods is to provide some sort of approximation to what is ‘really’ going on. Yet this is, I think, what drives and should drive most social scientists, just as most of us live our everyday lives as though reality exists and can be known about. Put the other way round, this concern becomes one about the extent to which different research methods offer protection against bias, against the possibility that we will end up with misleading answers. Much 'qualitative' research is simply too unsystematic, too masonic in nature, too cavalier about appeals to ‘triangulation’ and/or analysis using computerized software packages, to establish serious credentials for being trustworthy. (p. 251-252)
I find it hard to disagree with her argument here. Part of me nonetheless wants to assert some fuzzy sense of the intrinsic value of qualitative research but another (much less fuzzy) part of me thinks this is just the residual influence of the politicised commitment to qualitative research described by Oakley that I once shared yet no longer do.


The ‘Bro’ and the ‘Lad’: The Identity and Subculture of Default Man’s sons? (2014-11-05 08:00)

In a recent [1]New Statesman article, Grayson Perry reflected on what he termed ‘Default Man’ ("white, middle-class, heterosexual men, usually middle-aged") and the power he wields within our putatively meritocratic social order. Perry makes the important point about how ‘identity’ tends to be seen as something marginal, in contrast to the individualism of Default Man:

When we talk of identity, we often think of groups such as black Muslim lesbians in wheelchairs. This is because identity only seems to become an issue when it is challenged or under threat. Our classic Default Man is rarely under existential threat; consequently, his identity remains unexamined. It ambles along blithely, never having to stand up for its rights or to defend its homeland.

When talking about identity groups, the word “community” often crops up. The working class, gay people, black people or Muslims are always represented by a “community leader”. We rarely, if ever, hear of the white middle-class community. “Communities” are defined in the eye of Default Man. Community seems to be a euphemism for the vulnerable lower orders. Community is “other”. Communities usually seem to be embattled, separate from society. “Society” is what Default Man belongs to.
I think it would be interesting to address 'Bro' and 'Lad’ culture in these terms. Could we be talking about the subculture and identity of Default Man? Or rather the sons of Default Man?


Digital Sociologist: Garry Crawford (@CultSociologist) (2014-11-06 08:00)

[1]

In this series of interviews, I ask Digital Sociologists about their work and the background to it. You can find [2]Garry on Twitter here. See [3]here for the previous interviews in the series.

How did digital technology first begin to enter into your research? It seems to have flowed naturally from the broader topic at hand.

[4]Audio: [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/zoom0001.mp3](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/zoom0001.mp3)

How have your engagements with it changed over time?
What direction is your research heading in? How has digital technology featured in this?

Lots of podcasts on methods and methodology (2014-11-07 08:00)

The National Centre for Research Methods has a fantastic selection of podcasts on their website. Here are some of the ones we thought looked most interesting:

- [1] Using Social Media in Research
- [2] The potential of crowdsourcing for research and funding in academia
- [3] The 'Thing-ness' problem of mixed methods research
- [4] Narrative imagination and everyday life
- [5] Big Data challenges for social scientists

However there’s a lot more. See [6] here for the full list.

2. [http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/podcasts/view.php/potential-crowdsourcing-research-funding-academia](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/podcasts/view.php/potential-crowdsourcing-research-funding-academia)
6. [http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/podcasts/](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/podcasts/)
Carol Smart: "ideas come about through the process of writing" (2014-11-08 08:00)

In this [1]videocast released by the Morgan Centre, Carol Smart discusses the emotional challenge of writing. It's a wonderful discussion, encompassing everything from the pains of writing to the origins of creativity in engaging with those difficulties. Smart suggests writing is not discussed because it's generally assumed that we can all do it. Yet so much is at stake for academics in their writing. Another key point made is the need to find your own rhythm: Smart recounts how she used to criticise her own habits surrounding writing before learning to accept them as the approach to writing that was natural for her. This advice echoes what Gurminder K. Bhambra says [2]here about recognising recurrent frustrations in the writing process as being important parts of that very process.


Or rather that’s one way ideas come about. More important tho is whether they are good ideas or not!

Guides to innovative and creative research methods (2014-11-09 08:00)

[1]Toolkit 18: Using diaries in research with people with dementia
Ruth Bartlett (University of Southampton) December 2011

Naomi Richards (University of Sheffield) November 2011

Nicola Allett, Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Loughborough University) October 2011

[4]Toolkit 15: Using an external agency or individual to transcribe your qualitative data
Hazel Burke (Morgan Centre, The University of Manchester) January 2011

Annie Irvine (University of York) October 2010

Andrew Clark (University of Salford) and Nick Emmel (University of Leeds), August 2010

Vanessa May, Morgan Centre, The University of Manchester, July 2010

[8]Toolkit 11: Practical considerations of leading and working on a mixed methods project
Vanessa May and Hazel Burke, Morgan Centre, The University of Manchester, July 2010

Helene Snee, The University of Manchester, July 2010
These toolkits were produced as part of Real Life Methods, an ESRC National Centre for Research Methods phase one node at the universities of Manchester and Leeds.

1. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-18/
2. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-17/
5. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-14/
7. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-12/
11. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-08/
17. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-02/
18. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgan-centre/research/resources/toolkits/toolkit-01/
"Footnotes in History: Being Anglo Indian" (2014-11-10 08:00)


[3]

From Karan Kapoor’s Anglo-Indians, first exhibited 1990. (Photograph from www.tasveerjournal.com/ai)

http://www.tasveerjournal.com/ai/

Smyth’s and Santoro’s exciting new edited collection is aimed at educationalists researching diverse cultural contexts from a critical perspective. The selected papers, with underlying themes of social justice and educational equity, together point towards an increasingly globalised world where educationalists (trainee teachers, established teachers working on professional development and researchers of education) can enhance their critical awareness about working with diasporic communities and settings.

One major concern in social research is that researchers mainly tend to come from the “hegemonic cultural mainstream” (pxii), which requires that as researchers we refine our reflexive approach to methodologies and ethics of research. The book, therefore, usefully includes accounts from researchers about how they work to ensure that research methodologies they employ are ethically and methodologically sound and appropriate to culturally diverse communities.

Distinctive methodologies are advocated to achieve the important goals of social justice and social equality: Dewilde, for instance, discusses how she used ‘Discursive Shadowing’ which involves “the study of individuals over a period of time by means of participant observation and audio recordings” (p1) in order to learn about an under-researched group with low status – bilingual teachers - in the Norwegian educational system. She came to realise that ‘discursive shadowing’ worked effectively if she was “moving around the school with them, instead of trying to pin down collaboration through the formal meetings and joint lessons” when collecting data (p10).

Critical participatory action is shown to be a democratic methodology in Schmidt’s account of researching immigrant teachers in Canada’s education system. Teachers in Manitoba, Canada were involved in "co-operative
inquiry” (p15) - research, thus, involved “actively engaging them in designing, co-constructing, and carrying out the research” (p17). Post-structural ethnography, in this case in rural Australia, is shown to be an excellent tool to empower research participants and to provide rich detailed description about issues of difference and exclusion in schooling: Edgeworth outlines ways in which post-structural ethnographies can “construct counter-narratives of belonging” (p38). Research in Pakistan by Shah demonstrates the complexities of insider and outsider research: "Who does the research has effects on data collection and analysis” (p44).

Smyth’s chapter outlines research in Scotland to empower diverse research participants through collaborative pedagogies which "give voice to the researched while also offering strategies to develop their skills or social networks” (p58). Santoro investigated indigenous teachers in Australia using a longitudinal case study and the methodology of Situational Analysis: “...useful for researchers working in culturally diverse contexts because it makes visible” (p88) what researchers may have missed.

Students, taking an active role in the research process, as action researchers investigating immigration and integration, within a critical pedagogy framework, are discussed by Gagne and Gordon who outline the advantages of this methodology: student-researchers improved their language and communication skills, and developed confidence and friendships. Fassetta also considers how school students can be actively involved in collecting data through the popular mode of photography: child-led photography focuses on issues of whose eyes we are seeing things through, as well as matters of power and agency.

The collection of chapters in this book beautifully illustrates the importance of considering how we can become more open, more democratic, and more just in how we seek to present the voices of culturally diverse and often silenced students and teachers. To work hard to become ethically sound and methodologically adventurous may be the goals of many qualitative researchers, like me, as we become involved in new projects within culturally diverse contexts.

This important book helps early career researchers, like myself, in working through issues of how to ensure students and teachers are not mere research participants, but directly active in the research process, thereby fulfilling the conditions of ethically sound research.


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By John Smyth, Barry Down, Peter McInerney, and Robert Hattam
This book discusses in great detail the internationally recognised collaborative and critical nature of the educational research conducted by Australian Professor of Education, John Smyth. At a time when we may be disheartened because “rampant individualism, competition and commodification” (pxiii) are impacting upon global educational systems and thereby resulting in unpredictable policies and practices for students and teachers, this book comes as a timely and crucial reminder of how we can be inspired and inspire others to create a more “humane, democratic and socially just” (pxiii) system of schooling.

The authors state from the outset that this is not another ‘how-to-do-educational-research’ book, instead they have presented us with key pedagogical and political issues affecting contemporary educational research for us to better understand the richness and complexity of critical research in making sense of the social world. Furthermore, (like our sociological writings on The Sociological Imagination) Smyth has also been stimulated by the legendary C W Mills and his key anchor points regarding the intellectual craft of doing Sociology. As a result, we learn about the key ‘critical’ anchor points that Smyth deems important when doing critical pedagogy: active listening, advocacy, challenging power, representing with respect, committed praxis, and activism (p8).

The chapters contain in-depth analysis of what critical educational research looks like in contemporary society, for example how the politicization and de-humanization of teachers’ work due to “broader contextual, historical and structural forces” (p37) creates certain challenges we need to work towards resolving through employing critical consciousness and critical reflexivity. We also learn about the lives of students in neoliberal times, and how this affects how we do critical research: “the political imperative for researchers and educators is to create the conditions for dialogue and practice” (p74) to interact with students and represent their voices and experiences.

Community engagement and public sociology are advocated as very necessary to critical educational research – “taking an activist stance with/for excluded groups whose viewpoints are diminished, silenced or ridden-over by so called ‘experts’ whose technocratic knowledge is deemed to be superior” (p81). Thus, contemporary critical educational research involves collaborative journeys, examination of power/powerlessness, working towards social change, and engagement with communities. Educational policy and leadership are explored to highlight the need to move away from neoliberal policies and practices, and instead to promote a “socially critical approach” to enable educational reform (p107). The authors argue that educational policy and leadership need to be reinvigorated by working critically to “reassert the moral purpose of education and to restore ‘educational’ values and norms to the
The book perfectly and vividly captures the importance of doing critical pedagogy and critical educational research in neoliberal times by presenting the challenges faced by teachers, students and school management, and also by providing the readers with a real sense of hope and possibility (in the spirit of Freire), so that we can consider the various solutions and practices that will open up sites of schooling to be democratic and fair places for students, teachers, managers and researchers. The strengths of the book are that the detailed vision of John Smyth's critical pedagogy is impressed upon the reader examples from his life and works, but also that these examples are explained in a concrete and engaged way so that we can take these on board in our work in education and research.

[nbox type="notice"] Sadia Habib is a doctoral candidate currently researching British identity in the Educational Studies Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. Prior to this she taught English at Key Stages 3,4 and 5 in Manchester and London.[/nbox]


An introduction to blogging and twitter for social researchers (2014-11-11 08:00)

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**Towards a sociology of endings (2014-11-12 08:00)**

There’s a particular kind of sociological theorising which I’ve always been drawn to that concerns itself with the identification of epochal shifts in social life. When I was an intellectually frustrated philosophy student, the work of Giddens on Late Modernity and Bauman on Liquid Modernity seemed to hold the promise of intellectual work that addressed something far greater than the technical problems of philosophy: *what is it like to be a person now?* I tried to argue in my PhD thesis that this aspect of their work, simultaneously profound yet also slightly asinine, surely accounts for part of the appeal which a sprawling body of work has held for many in spite of its many defects. I wondered recently if it could be seen as a kind of (historicised) *sociological anthropology*, inquiring into the phenomenology of the person in a way that refuses the possibility of abstracting the core questions from the particular time and place in which they are being asked. However I do think this work is deeply flawed and one of the most incisive ways to analyse these flaws is to consider the claims about transitions from ‘old’ to ‘new’ which are made within it. This is how Paul Heelas describes the transitions that are implicitly and explicitly asserted within the literature on detraditionalization:
Once you set things up in this way, it’s hard not to see radical change everywhere. The underlying dichotomies operate as an interpretive framework which highlights discontinuities and obscures continuities. This is why, as Graham Crow [2] puts it, a “more nuanced account of the processes involved in beginnings and endings needs to be developed”. He identifies a large number of phenomena of which it has been declared that we are witnessing the end:

- family relationships
- community relationships
- politics
- poverty
- capitalism
- slavery
- masculinity
- privacy
- work
- unemployment
- the nation-state
- organised capitalism
- socialism
The identification of ‘endings’ is more methodologically complex than someone like Giddens seems willing to admit:

Endings, and the opportunities for new beginnings for which they open the way, thus merit some attention because they are so frequently a point of reference. Claims to have identified the emergence of a new social phenomenon and the end of an existing one are rhetorically powerful, but assessing them is by no means straightforward. To begin with, there are varying interests at stake in the promotion of certain social phenomena as ‘new’ and others as ‘dead’ or ‘dying’. Most social transformations have ‘losers’ as well as ‘winners’ ([3]Crow and Rees 1999), even though the voices of the former tend to be drowned out by the latter. Secondly, the momentousness of social changes is not always apparent to the people living through them and, as a result, interpretation of their perceptions of continuity needs to be undertaken with caution. Conversely, developments that can seem momentous as they unfold can come to be regarded as less so with the passage of time


In fact it’s very easy to relativise the account offered by Giddens in terms of both his own life and the unfolding of history. He was (anecdotally) going through major changes in his personal life and, it seems with hindsight, moving away from social theory and towards politics. His main three books on this subject were published after the fall of the Berlin Wall, as either history itself or at least one era seemed to be falling away, with market capitalism triumphant and the key question facing the centre-left seemingly being one of how to tame capitalism from within. Given his subsequent trajectory and reinvention as a political guru for New Labour, it’s hard not to see a potentially self-interested dimension to this as well: in identifying the end of the old he positioned himself as an interpreter of the new. This sense of new times, to which we must adapt through ‘modernising’ or risk becoming antiquated, should be understood as crucial to the cultural politics of New Labour as well: in recognising the 'new', we claim a temporal identity for ourselves, one superior to that we impose on the 'old'. Furthermore, as Crow notes, it’s difficult to find empirical grounds for these considerations in everyday life. People often don’t recognise momentous change (for reasons I describe here as the [5]epistemology of collapse) or they experience as momentous things that later come to seem much less so.

The risk is that, as Crow puts it, we lose sight of “underlying continuities by focusing only on those elements in a situation that have changed". If we develop concepts of social change (e.g. detraditionalization, individualization, globalization) that foreground those elements in a situation that have changed and fail to contextualise them in terms of those elements that have not, we’re led to pronounce epochal shifts (with all their rhetorical and political temptations). In [6]his paper he offers ten propositions concerning the sociology of endings. His point is that if we come to understanding endings better then we’ll be less inclined towards “the premature identification of endings and new beginnings”:

Processes of decline are responded to in various ways.
Long-term decline is not necessarily perceived as such by those living through it, because of imperfect information, self-persuasion, denial, nostalgia, or addiction.

People may be persuaded to remain loyal to existing arrangements even when they are undeniably in decline because they are convinced by one or more strands of *The Rhetoric of Reaction*, the argument that efforts to change a situation are bound to fail or to bring even more undesirable consequences.

The sociology of emotions and rational choice theory both provide plausible starting points for the analysis of the decision to cut one’s losses by ending involvement in existing relations that are in decline, if and when it is taken.

The social context of decision-making concerning endings is crucial.

The process of moving towards and beyond endings is rarely a smooth, linear progression through a succession of stages.

Accounts of change after the event are vulnerable to *post-hoc* rationalizations in which the confusion and indeterminacy of events as they unfolded is played down and inevitability emphasised.

The popular metaphors through which ideas about endings are expressed have a bearing on how people respond to them.

Sociological analysis is weakened when framed in terms of over-arching processes of social change that are presented as irresistible at the level of individuals, communities, or wider societies and socio-economic systems.

The analytical problems presented by the processes whereby social arrangements come to an end have very wide relevance.


Many of these points concern *agency*. People respond differently to endings. People often fail to recognise endings or refuse to recognise them. People may continue to invest themselves in something that is ending because they’re scared of what might come next. People are influenced by each other and by their wider context in how they respond to endings. These factors mean that we should avoid conceiving of endings in a way that treats them as the irresistible force of social change. If we fail to do this, we tend to see a linear transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’, in the process missing the complexity of social change and how its unfolding was shaped by the variable responses of the people on the ground.

It’s a very interesting paper. I find it hard to see how anyone could disagree with Crow’s recommendation that “the temptation to tell an attention-grabbing story should be resisted in favour of a more balanced assessment of change and continuity”. This is his closing statement:

Finally, we might note that sociologists have a mixed record in relation to realising this potential in the analysis of change, not least in terms of the premature identification of endings and new beginnings. Much is lost when complex analyses are reduced to the stark opposition of change or continuity, as is demonstrated in those more subtle analyses that highlight the ways in which change in one facet of a
social phenomenon can contribute to the reproduction of other aspects. But caution about oversimplification regarding social change reinforces the case for a sociological approach to the study of endings. This is not least because there is so much more to be said than economists’ focus on the moment when profit turns to loss, and psychologists’ focus on motivation and individual adjustment. People’s perceptions about whether they stand to gain or lose from the substitution of a new social arrangement for an old one are more complex than the former and more volatile than the latter, and this has major implications for the prediction of their individual and collective behaviour and of longer-term social change.


5. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/20/the-epistemology-of-civilizational-collapse/

Social Acceleration (2014-11-13 08:00)

It is a common sentiment that life is getting faster. However is it accurate and, if so, what does it mean? To talk of life, or social life, speeding up necessitates some working definition of ‘social life’ and what it would be for it to accelerate. Unfortunately these notions are more elusive than they may otherwise appear. Do we mean that things feel faster or that they are actually becoming faster? Whether we intend the former subjective sense or the latter objective sense, we face the problem of how to measure this putative acceleration – this is an empirical challenge of measurement but also a conceptual one concerning the units of measurement. In his Social Acceleration (source of all quotes in this post) Harmut Rosa addresses such questions in a sweeping and impressive way, offering answers to these methodological challenges and using them as a basis upon which to build a comprehensive theory of social acceleration. His account has two aspects: the circle of acceleration and the external ‘motors’ which drive it. These internal mechanisms of social acceleration are mutually reinforcing but this ‘circle’ is set into motion by external mechanisms which initiate the process and contribute to its progressive, though uneven, escalation through their respective impact on each of the three processes of acceleration within the circle. In his notion of the ‘circle’ of acceleration Rosa distinguishes between three distinct processes: technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change and the acceleration of the pace of life. Social acceleration becomes self-propelling because each of these processes contributes to the escalation of the others.

Technical acceleration changes the way in which human beings are in the world, their relations to each other and to their environment, with ensuing implications for how their respective spatio-temporal situations are subjectively understood. There are three types of technical acceleration considered by Rosa: the acceleration of transport, the acceleration of communication and the acceleration of production. This encompasses the “faster movement
of humans, goods, messages, and ... military projectiles across the earth, but also the more rapid production of
goods, the speedier conversation of matter and energy, and, though in lesser measure, the acceleration of services." (pg. 73). He also considers this to include "processes of organisation, decision, administration, and control – for example, in modern bureaucracies and ministries" because these are examples of the "intentional acceleration of goal-directed processes through innovative techniques" (pg. 74).

Our perception of time is a function of our perception of space because, as Rosa puts it, "a feeling for time develops because spatial qualities in our vicinity change; it becomes light as day and dark as night, warm as summer and cold as winter." (pg. 98) It follows from this that well into the nineteenth century, the time of day differed from place to place because day time was defined by the relative position of the sun. The expansion of the rail network necessitated standardisation (there’s a fascinating discussion of this in a US context [1]here) which was enacted temporally – the possibility of traversing previously vast distances as a regular part of day-to-day life newly demanded that these disparate regions be incorporated within a shared temporal frame of reference in order to make movement between them consistently comprehensible i.e. how do you systematically move around goods and people without a reliable sense of departure and arrival times? This serves to detach time from space, abstracting the former from the contextual specificity of the latter, in a way which also compresses space – our movement through space comes to be seen in terms of standardised time rather than time as bound within the specificity of place. This process of compression is compounded by the car and the airplane over the course of the twentieth century, with the result that space has shrunk to a sixtieth of its former size since the eighteenth century, with an average speed of transportation by ship and sailing vessel of 10 miles per hour before 1830 coming to be replaced by an average speed of transportation by jet plane of 600 miles per hour by 1965 (pg. 100). The latter innovation definitively frees people from the "topographical space of life and the surface of the earth". Alongside this revolution in human mobility, the entrenchment of digital communications within social systems leads to an epochal change in how human beings orientate themselves within their environment where “human beings and goods are moving through space not only virtually but also really in historically unprecedented numbers and with great speeds” (pg. 102).

The trend described above concerns our relationship to space but Rosa argues that similar transformations can be discerned in our relationship to human beings and in our relationship to things. In each case, technical acceleration can be seen as the mechanism bringing about a substantive transformation: the acceleration of transportation transforms our relationship to space, the acceleration of communication transforms our relation to human beings and the acceleration of (re)production transforms our relationship to things. With regards to the acceleration of communication, "patterns of association and relationship are no longer or to a lesser extent bound to one common geographical space" and there is an "increase and rapid turnover of communication partners": both are facilitated by a transformation in communications media (pg. 104). With regards to the acceleration of production, we see an increase in the speed of commoditization ("conversation of matter into useful commodities") mandated by the imperative to accelerate "the turnover speed of capital": the result is that "everyday objects that surround us and the material structures of our lifeworld as a whole become contingent and transitory" (pg. 105). I think Rosa’s point here is basically that the normalisation of planned obsolesce becomes more significant than it might otherwise seem when we consider it phenomenologically: the things in which we are moved to take comfort (to paraphrase Danny Miller) are more disposable than ever and we are more inclined to replace them than ever. What then of the comfort we hope they may bring? As Rosa puts it, "identity-constituting processes of adapting to and growing accustomed to things become increasingly improbable" (pg. 105).

1. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Pig_and_the_Skyscraper.html?id=7o_tsZf-_x4C
The obsolescence of things (2014-11-14 08:00)

I love this old Ikea advert. It illustrates the point that Harmut Rosa is making about the acceleration of production and the implications of intensified disposability for our sense of security and continuity. It also shows what I dislike about Rosa's account: *specific groups with vested interests* deliberately sought to inculcate dispositions towards disposability in the population. It wasn't the inexorable unfolding of an historical process. People made it happen. I don't doubt that Rosa accepts this but he sets up his theoretical framework in a way which marginalises the specific questions *(who did what, when and why)* that I'd see as integral to sociological inquiry. [youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZdIJOE9jNcM]

Queerly Theorising Higher Education & Academia: Symposium Registratio (2014-11-15 08:00)

Queerly Theorising Higher Education & Academia: Interdisciplinary Conversations

Half-day International Symposium

Monday 8th December 2014, 12 noon – 7:30pm, followed by a drinks reception

Room 802, Institute of Education (IOE), 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

This half-day international symposium brings together queer theorisations of higher education and academia that are currently developing within discipline-specific contexts. At this symposium, we will explore the ways that academia and higher education are being queerly theorised, and discuss how these theorisations are situated within and yet pushing against disciplinary settings. With an emphasis on conversation and discussion, the event will provide a platform for the collaborative development of ideas over the course of the day. Contributors to the round table and discussion-presentations range from established scholars to doctoral students, and are from a variety of disciplinary locations and institutional settings.

**Round table participants:**

Oliver Davis – University of Warwick

Michael O'Rourke – ISSH, Macedonia & Global Center for Advanced Studies

Nick Rumens – Middlesex University

Yvette Taylor – Weeks Centre, London South Bank University

Kathryn Medien – University of Warwick (Chair)

**Presenters:**

James Burford – University of Auckland, New Zealand/Aotearoa
Jennifer Fraser – Birkbeck

Vicky Gunn – University of Glasgow

Emily F. Henderson – Institute of Education

Genine Hook – Monash University, Australia

Z Nicolazzo – Miami University, Ohio, US

Sean Curran – Institute of Education (Chair)

Emma Jones – Institute of Education (Chair)

Discussants:

Elliot Evans – King’s College London

TBC

The event will be hosted by CHES (Centre for Higher Education Studies) and is funded by the Bloomsbury ESRC Doctoral Training Centre.

Registration is free, but places are limited so booking is essential.

To book, or for further information, contact Emily Henderson:[1]ehenderson01@ioe.ac.uk

1. mailto:ehenderson01@ioe.ac.uk

Call for contributions: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life (2014-11-16 08:00)

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.
This workshop will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place in December 2015 in Prague. At present, we’re seeking to clarify the level of interest before determining the length of the event, fixing a date and inviting keynote speakers. Please send expressions of interest – a biographical note and brief description of interest in the topic – to mark@markcarrigan.net and filip.vostal@gmail.com – deadline January 31st 2015.

Venue

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

Travel

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

An existential analytics of speed (2014-11-17 08:00)

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH4xhhFJ6qQ]

Integral to Harmut Rosa’s [1]Social Acceleration (all references are to this book) is an understanding of cultural responses to acceleration and the role they play in intensifying the acceleration of the pace of life. This is not simply a matter of the valorisation of speed; in fact being satisfied with the identification of such a sentiment would be to restrict our analysis to the most superficial level. Instead what makes social acceleration so culturally loaded is the implications it has for the temporal horizons of human existence. Rosa is concerned with the “motives of action and cultural development”, specifically that of fear and promise, which Weber identified with the Protestant ethic: while he sees these motives as universal, in that they instantiate basic motivational categories of pain and pleasure, he
nonetheless holds that "the characteristic feature of modern culture is the connection of those motives with the principles of time efficiency and the related expectations of acceleration" (pg. 178). He identifies what he takes to be a *basic fear* in modernity:

> The generalised unease ... namely, that of standing in all realms of existence, as it were, on slipping slopes, i.e., of being irrevocably suspended in a world of growing contingencies, of missing decisive opportunities, or of falling hopelessly behind, operates as the *basic fear* in the dynamized, mobile society of modernity. Time thus remains existentially scarce even after specifically religious foundations of meaning "die off". (pg. 178)

The "strict, fastidious time discipline" identified by Weber as the "innerworldly asceticism" of the Protestant ethic was preoccupied by "the imperative of time efficiency, of the intensive usage and valorisation of every minute" (pg 176). To waste time risked one's possible salvation, a fear that responded to the "torturous question of whether one was chosen and in a state of grace" - given the impossibility of knowing if one was predestined for salvation, particularly given the absence of reassurance from religious authority, arduous time discipline embodied in lifestyle came to function as a proxy for the identification of the elect. Time discipline came to function as a way of dissipating the fear of damnation. But it also held the *promise* of salvation, with the imperative to trust in one's own virtue (coupled with the growing belief in lifestyle as a proxy for virtue) functioning to bridge the gap between a putative predestination and a sense of moral agency in one's own life.

Under present circumstances, notes Rosa, "there is no longer a promise of peace of mind in the turn to a powerful, reassuring God who is ready to intervene with respect to the contingencies of life" (pg. 178). However he argues that wealth serves as a *functional equivalent*. Much as the turn to God was motivated by fear of contingencies, the unavoidably uncertain horizons that emerge with the intensification of social change, so too does money come to be seen as a means through which to equip oneself for a future which we by definition cannot know: "In the form of capital, money has taken on the task of transforming indeterminable into determinable complexity" (pg. 179). Money holds out the promise of helping us *master contingency*. As Rosa puts it, we see the rise of a belief that "having the largest possible amount of money, and hence options, will allow one to appropriately react to future contingencies" (pg. 178).

What has changed is that this newer sense of salvation is imminent rather than transcendent. It promises a mastery of contingency *within* earthly time rather than a salvation that lies beyond it. This emphasises the continuity of the earth beyond the point of our own death: social life continues after we are gone. This can be responded to in a variety of ways. We might seek to cultivate a stoical equanimity such that we live our lives without attachment and thus lose nothing when we meet our end. We can identify with some greater continuity, seeing ourselves as connected to our broader movement through history as a consequence of our participation in something greater than ourselves: "individual life takes meaning and consolation from conceiving of itself as a link in a long chain that, even if does not amount to a new form of sacral time, at least bridges the gap between a lifetime and the time of the world" (pg. 181). We might also seek to immortalise ourselves through the production of works that survive us: "to leave behind a trace that extends the span of effects one's own life has far beyond its own duration" (pg. 181). However the response that Rosa sees as coming to predominate with the transition to late modern times is that of
salvation through acceleration:

the idea that an accelerated enjoyment of worldly options, a "faster life," will once again allow the chasm between the time of life and the time of the world to be reduced. In order to understand this thought one has to keep in mind that the question concerning the meaning of death is indissolubly tied to the question of the right or "good life." Thus the idea of the good life corresponding to this answer, which historically became the culturally dominant idea, is to conceive of life as the last opportunity, i.e., to use the earthy time span allotted to humans as intensively and comprehensively as possible before death puts a definitive end to it (pg. 181)

On this view the good life is the full life. To live well is to live maximally in relation to social and cultural variety: doing as many things, with as many people, in as many places as we can. This can take a more humanistic form in which "the good life consists first and foremost in the most comprehensive possible development of the talents and potentials of a subject" (pg. 182). However I think there's a further dimension to this which Rosa oddly seems to ignore in this section despite recognising it in other parts of his analysis: the embrace of speed as a response to a collapse of horizons, the fulfilment that can come from movement without any belief in where we are going, not concerned with self-cultivation or with maximisation but simply with embracing the present and grasping the moment. I think Atari Teenage Riot express this incredibly forcefully in the track I included at the start of this post:

Tomorrow, tomorrow, always tomorrow
There is no future in the weastern dreamin'!
We feel it, we must beat'em!
It's too late to create a new world!
Alternative living it must be given a chance!
Water the problem's solution! No solution if you can't use it!
And then I heard the siren of the police!
My blood went up to 90 degrees!
You can't see white cats in the snow
Oh human being, how low can you go?
Risin', risin' to the top
the pills are ready to be dropped
1, 2, 3 and 4
Got the joker shoot the score!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it! Speed!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it!
Speed! Just wouldn't believe it!
Another example of this ethos can be found in the film Spring Breakers. As I wrote about it at the time, "the private catharsis of drinks, drugs and sex is made public during ‘spring break’ and the film portrays the nihilistic collapse into a perpetual present which ensues when these are pursued as ends in themselves". Atari Teenage Riot present an escape from a world they disdain through drugs and movement. Spring Breakers presents an embrace of that world through drugs and movement. What both have in common is an exploration of the perpetual present which ensues when people respond to social acceleration with neither an orientation to self-cultivation (in order to maximise possibilities) or to seek to maximise possibilities in order evade the damage to the self that would be seen to ensue from missing out.

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oaevPDsVkyA]

Rosa’s important point about the limitations to self-cultivation and self-maximisation is that the options we forego will tend to increase faster than the ones we choose. As he puts it, "the very same inventions, techniques and methods that permit the accelerated realisation of worldly possibility and hence the increase of the total sum of options realised in a life also multiply the number and variety of realisable options" (pg. 185). In other words, the opportunity costs multiply with the opportunities: in selecting from our available choices, we miss out on the things we do not choose. However where I think Rosa goes wrong is in the assumption that an ethos of maximisation demands mastery - it doesn’t follow that a concern to live maximally necessitates an inability to tolerate the fact that the possibilities we seek to master always grow faster than our actualisation of them. This is where the notion of self-cultivation could be key: could we not conceive of a way of living maximally which seeks to cultivate equanimity in the face of the logic of escalation that Rosa identifies? We might strive to live more richly rather than fully, concerned with the poise which allows us to weave together a maximally diverse life from the endless threads available to (some of) us, not orientated towards a final resolution but instead seeking to let the process unfold more artfully and more dextrously with time.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/10/20/social-acceleration/

Joseph Sylvester Pampliega (2014-12-17 15:39:06)
I’d like to say that this article covers much of my anxiety nowadays. Time and the context of where I am now (Toronto, Canada), in contrast to where I used to be (Iloilo City, Philippines). What I do also contributes to this since a great part of “social life” here has to do with work. “Good life is the full life” is also my principle in life and self-cultivation and self-maximisation is also my driving force or my objective all the time. Other than that, I also share much of these, principle and driving force, to others given the chance. I used to be a teacher in the Philippines and this gave me the opportunity to help others. Here, because of the pace of life, no matter how relatively affluent you are, a lot of things are that are even essential and necessary to human life are set aside, are wasted. It is not even something that are up to personal choice. The structure of society forces it upon people to the point that they don’t see what they have set aside and wasted early on. And with the pace of society, with the changes that happened with those things that were not chosen, that they have set aside or wasted, stress, regrets are so common people easily lose their minds. No wonder depression is so common. I can see a lot of factors that contribute to these. These are but my troubles at the moment but I know, given the chance to sit down, take a pause from work, when I can see the patterns and make sense of it, that these troubles of mine are definitely issues worth studying. Thanks for this article. It awakens me to do just what I have to do. Sometimes anxiety or to Soren Kierkegaard, angst are but the only power than can
I question the universality of the base motives. Luhmann covers the development of this being the Protestant Ethic via the construction of reality by the mass media. The pace is how modernity threatens itself anew to compel individuals forward which is essential for capitalism with its growth fetish to survive.

**Internal Conversation in Gone Girl (2014-11-18 08:00)**

I was surprised how much I liked Gone Girl. I liked the film so much I went out and bought the book. I’ve been ever more surprised by how interesting I’ve found the contrast between the two. One interesting difference between the film and the book were the different ways in which Nick’s perceived obnoxiousness were narrated. The latter lacked the first person narration which was so prominent in the former and we missed something crucial as a consequence: Nick was concerned about his perpetual failure to translate *internal conversation* into *external communication*. In the book he describes how “I carry on an inner monologue, but the words often don’t reach my lips … *She looks nice today*, I’d think, but somehow it wouldn’t occur to me to say it out loud”. We see this tendency through the eyes of others in both the book and the film:

> 'I still remember that very first night: Amy’s missing, you come in here, we park you in this very room for forty-five minutes, and you look bored. We watched you on surveillance, you practically fell asleep.' ...

> 'I was trying to stay calm.'

> 'You looked very, very calm,' Boney said. ‘All along, you've acted ... inappropriately. Unemotional, flippant.'

But in the film Nick’s awareness of this tendency can only be expressed in *external speech*. We don’t see that it’s something that concerns him, something he recognises as an issue and provokes anxiety in him. He only voices an awareness of his behaviour when challenged by others and the circumstances under which he raises it make his replies seem evasive and unreliable. This entails constraints and enablements for the narrative structure – both film and book play with ambiguity but the former does so on the basis of the unreadability of Nick while the latter does so on the basis of the unreliability of his narration. Unreadability induces doubt about what will happen (if we don’t understand his motives then how do we know what he’ll do next?) whereas unreliability induces doubt about what has happened (if the narrator is unreliable then how can we trust their account of the events thus far?) – each is grounded in a certain strategy of representing *internal conversation*. These can be seen even more emphatically in the case of Amy, as this interesting article from Think Progress makes clear:

> Out of structural necessity, we begin our story on Nick’s side. We only know what he knows, and often even less. To reveal more of Amy’s inner life early on would render the big twist untwisted. But even in the scenes that are lifted from “her” chapters in the book feel like they’re being narrated by somebody else. When it is revealed, in the film, that Amy is alive, it doesn’t really feel like anything in Amy has changed. We never get that great, punchy shift in tone. We don’t get those stellar lines of Amy talking about the character of the diary in the third person: “I hope you liked Diary Amy. She was meant to be likeable. Meant for someone like you to like her. She’s easy to like. I’ve never understood why that’s considered a compliment—that just anyone could like you.” Real Amy has total disdain for Diary Amy and
everyone who adores her. Everyone is the cops. Everyone is the reader. In the movie, everyone would be the viewer. But in the movie, you just don’t feel it. The voiceover of Diary Amy and the voiceover of Real, Sociopathic Amy sound exactly the same. The real Amy, the character who is the engine of this story, is as elusive to us as she is to Nick.

One of the more disturbing (and one of the saddest) elements of Amy’s story is gone, too: that her parents had been trying and failing to have a child over and over before they had her. Amy only arrived after a series of miscarriages and stillbirths; all these angels were named Hope, and she was haunted by those ghosts who possessed the perfection only afforded to those who die before they can live. Amy was so named because it was a popular girls’ name at the time, as if this would save her from notice by God. Amy's original plan—depicted in the movie by her “Kill Self” post-its on the calendar—is to hide out just long enough to enjoy watching Nick’s life crumble. To observe the trial, to see him sentenced to life in prison, or maybe, as is legal in Missouri, the death penalty. And then she wants to kill herself. "To join the Hopes." She is a woman with no will to live.


We see external traces of her inner life but Amy herself remains unknowable in the film. This leaves us with a sharp juxtaposition between Diary Amy and 'real Amy' which is absent from the book: it’s presented as a transition from fiction to reality, whereas the book itself is much more ambiguous.

2. http://thinkprogress.org/culture/2014/10/05/3576170/gone-girl-review/
3. http://thinkprogress.org/culture/2014/10/05/3576170/gone-girl-review/


We’re really interested in who actually reads our blog. More specifically, we’re interested in whether our readers currently do or have formerly had a connection to sociology in an institutional sense.

[poll id="2"]

Do we need to shake up the social sciences? (2014-11-19 08:00)

In July 2013 Nicholas Christakis, sociologist and physician, published a [1]provocative opinion piece in the New York Times arguing for the need to shake up the social sciences. We’ve [2]blogged about it in the past and Christakis
certainly provoked a lot of discussion with the case he made. The LSE recently ran a panel discussion exploring these themes when he visited the UK ([3]link) and we’ve attached the podcast and information about the event below:

**EMBED**

**Speaker(s):** Professor Nicholas Christakis, Professor Patrick Dunleavy, Dr Amanda Goodall, Professor Andrew Oswald  
**Chair:** Siobhan Benita


'Yes', according to Nicholas Christakis. He wrote, in the New York Times, 'Taking a page from Darwin, the natural sciences are evolving with the times. In contrast, the social sciences have stagnated. They offer essentially the same set of academic departments ... This is not only boring but also counter-productive ...' Is Christakis right? In this event, physician and sociologist Nicholas Christakis, political scientist Patrick Dunleavy, management scientist Amanda Goodall and economist Andrew Oswald will debate this question, and then join a discussion on the issue with policy and strategy officer Siobhan Benita.

Nicholas Christakis (@NAChristakis) is the Sol Goldman Family Professor of Social and Natural Science at Yale University.

Patrick Dunleavy (@PJDunleavy) is Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at LSE.

Amanda Goodall (@AmandaGoodall1) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Management at the Cass Business School.

Andrew Oswald is Professor of Economics at the University of Warwick.

Siobhan Benita (@SiobhanBenita) is Chief Policy and Strategy Officer in the Department of Economics at the University of Warwick and Co-director of Warwick Policy Lab (WPL).

The Forum for European Philosophy (@LSEPhilosophy) is an educational charity which organises and runs a full and varied programme of philosophy and interdisciplinary events in the UK.

3. [http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=2647](http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=2647)

"Every white girl's father's worse nightmare or nah?" (2014-11-19 11:16)

School students at Book T Washington High School in Norfolk, Virginia (USA) walked out of school in protest after nothing was done when they reported a racist retweet by a staff member at the school.
Read more at:

http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2014/11/black-students-walk-out-over-school-official-tweet-every-white-girls-fathers-worse-nightmare/


_____________________

**Powerful song by UK Hip Hop artist Swiss** *(2014-11-19 11:42)*

**UK Hip Hop artist Swiss interrogating the widespread use of "Nigger".**

Powerful messages:
I don’t change colour, but they call me a coloured man!

The language of Black: blackmail, black-hearted, black sheep, blacklist, black magic!
Skin-bleach because wanting to be white.

Let me do you a favour, I am going to teach you mysteries...
House nigger, Field nigger.

Now everybody use the word like we weren't "niggers",
Like they never kidnap and hurt niggers...
stripped naked, burnt and castrate niggers,
Had them swinging from a tree..

Racism don't exist, oh really?

[youtube http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2EwNp4ODaTQ &w=560 &h=315]

Why are some interactions energising while others are not? (2014-11-20 08:00)

We subsume such a wide array of phenomena under the category of 'interaction' that we sometimes risk obscuring the diversity within this category. One important way in which interactions differ is in how energising, or otherwise, they are to the participating actors. Some interactions can be draining and tedious. Others can have a negligible impact upon us. Others still leave us energised and focused. We can leave some interaction situations and feel marginal and diminished while others leave us feeling fuller and more congruent. These experiences are probably peripheral in the scheme of our lives as a whole but they’re nonetheless sociologically important. For the kind of actor-centred sociology I advocate, in which individual lives are taken as a basic unit of analysis and analytically distinguished from the relationships in which they are always embedded, it’s also a challenging one – it’s necessary to account for these seemingly intersubjective aspects of experience in terms of individual trajectories into, through and out of interaction situations in which “reside the energy of movement and change, the glue of solidarity, and the conservatism of stasis” as Randall Collins [1] puts it. For the position I’m advocating to be tenable, it needs to account for the experience of these situations in a way that resists the (effective) dissolution of the individual that is advocated by Collins:

This is not to say that the individual does not exist. But an individual is not simply a body, even though a body is an ingredient that individuals get constructed out of. My analytical strategy (and that of the founder of interaction ritual analysis, Erving Goffman), is to start with the dynamics of situations; from this we can derive almost everything that we want to know about individuals, as a moving precipitate across situations.

Here we might pause for a counterargument. Do we not know that the individual is unique, precisely because we can follow him or her across situations, and precisely because he or she acts in a familiar, distinctively recognizable pattern even as circumstances change? Let us disentangle what is valid from what is misleading in this statement. The argument assumes a hypothetical fact, that individuals are constant even as situations change; to what extent this is true remains to be shown. We are prone to accept it, without further examination, as “something everybody knows,” because it is drummed into us as a moral principle: everyone is unique, be yourself, don’t give in to social pressure, to your own self be true—these are slogans trumpeted by every mouthpiece from preachers’ homilies to
advertising campaigns, echoing everywhere from popular culture to the avant-garde marching-orders of modernist and hypermodernist artists and intellectuals. As sociologists, our task is not to go with the flow of taken-for-granted belief—(although doing just this is what makes a successful popular writer)—but to view it in a sociological light, to see what social circumstances created this moral belief and this hegemony of social categories at this particular historical juncture. The problem, in Goffman's terms, is to discover the social sources of the cult of the individual.


It’s strange to only really discover Collins after I’ve finished my PhD. In a very real way, his project is the mirror image of my own: to develop situational micro-foundations for macro-sociology i.e. how can the analysis of everyday life be made most amenable to drawing out the connections between micro and macro? However Collins argues that the situation rather than the individual should be the starting point while I argue that we should understand situations as composed emergently of individuals in movement - the crucial factor conditioning a situation, as well as the situated and structured milieu* in which it unfolds, being what the individuals bring to that situation - the propensities and liabilities, the expectations and concerns, originating through the personal changes they have undergone as a consequence of past situations and analytically distinct from the present situation. While Collins says that “A situation is not merely the result of the individual who comes into it, nor even of a combination of individuals” because “Situations have laws or processes of their own” I’d agree but I see the causality differently: I see any number of people P(n) with distinct characteristics at a ‘moment of entry’ to a situated milieu with distinct characteristics M - one of the characteristics of P(n) are the existing relations obtaining between them R(n). So we have (Pn) + R(n) entering M. The situation S unfolds because of how P(n) interact with each other, conditioned by the characteristics of R(n) and M(n), while they contribute to the reproduction or transformation of P(n), R(n) and M as a result of their situated interaction - everything (potentially) changes in the interaction situation, include those party to it. There are a finite number of true statements that can be made about P(n) at the start of any interaction situation and the truth of those statements can be analysed in terms of the consequences of past interaction situations. It’s only through analytically distinguishing between these changes that we can gain traction on the links between situations i.e. how what P(n) bring to future situations was shaped by their experience of past situations.

One thing I find particular problematic about the account given by Collins is how he conceives of structure and agency:

Am I proclaiming, on the micro-level, the primacy of structure over agency? Is the structure of the interaction all-determining, bringing to naught the possibility of active agency? Not at all. The agency / structure rhetoric is a conceptual morass, entangling several distinctions and modes of rhetorical force. Agency / structure confuses the distinction of micro / macro, which is the local here-and-now vis-à-vis the interconnections among local situations into a larger swath of time and space, with the distinction between what is active and what is not. The latter distinction leads us to questions about energy and action; but energy and action are always local, always processes of real human beings doing something in a situation. It is also true that the action of one locality can spill over into another, that one situation can be carried over into other situations elsewhere. The extent of that spillover is part of what we mean by macro-patterns. It is acceptable, as a way of speaking, to refer to the action of a mass of investors in creating a run on the stock market, or of the breakdown of an army’s logistics in setting off a revolutionary crisis, but this is a shorthand for the observable realities (i.e., what would be witnessed by a micro-sociologist on the spot). This way of speaking makes it seem as if there is agency on the macro-level, but that is inaccurate, because we are taken in by a figure of speech. Agency, if we are going to use that term, is always micro; structure concatenates it into macro.
My account offers a micro-sociology of collective action. In fact Tom Brock and I have a paper coming out soon in the Journal for Theory of Social Behaviour in which we analyse political demonstrations in these terms. If agency is predominantly micro-sociological then how do we explain the capacity to organise together for common purposes? Tom and I argue that demonstrations are important situations in which collective participation in a situated milieu helps solidify relational bonds that are experienced as solidarity – I see so many others who have converged on this situation for the same purpose as myself and I recognise converging motivations, facilitating a translation from the relational characteristics of my existing bonds to the crowd at large – solidified in turn by the performative aspect of protest (“you say cut back, we say fight back!” etc). The language I’m prone to using (motivations, concerns, solidarity, collectives) would be anathema to Collins who sees agency as “the energy appearing in human bodies and emotions and as the intensity and focus of human consciousness”. My reasons for rejecting this language could easily constitute a a second PhD thesis. But I’m engaging with his work because I recognise that, with the partial substantive exception of what Tom and I have written about demonstrations, I can’t account for something which his theoretical framework can: energy. I need to develop an alternative explanation, probably predicated on the social psychology of what Pierpaolo Donati calls relational goods, if I want to seriously advocate that the social world can be fruitfully understood through the micro-situational realism I’ve been trying to develop over the last six years. I like how Collins describes this, I just don’t like how he explains it:

Perhaps the best we might say is that the local structure of interaction is what generates and shapes the energy of the situation. That energy can leave traces, carrying over to further situations because individuals bodily resonate with emotions, which trail off in time but may linger long enough to charge up a subsequent encounter, bringing yet further chains of consequences. Another drawback of the term “agency” is that it carries the rhetorical burden of connoting moral responsibility; it brings us back to the glorification (and condemnation) of the individual, just the moralizing gestalt that we need to break out from if we are to advance an explanatory microsociology. We need to see this from a different angle. Instead of agency, I will devote theoretical attention to emotions and emotional energy, as changing intensities heated up or cooled down by the pressure-cooker of interaction rituals.

The central mechanism of interaction ritual theory is that occasions that combine a high degree of mutual focus of attention, that is, a high degree of intersubjectivity, together with a high degree of emotional entrainment–through bodily synchronization, mutual stimulation / arousal of participants’ nervous systems–result in feelings of membership that are attached to cognitive symbols; and result also in the emotional energy of individual participants, giving them feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action in what they consider a morally proper path. These moments of high degree of ritual intensity are high points of experience. They are high points of collective experience, the key moments of history, the times when significant things happen. These are moments that tear up old social structures or leave them behind, and shape new social structures. As Durkheim notes, these are moments like the French Revolution in the summer of 1789. We could add, they are moments like the key events of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s; like the collapse of communist regimes in 1989 and 1991; and to a degree of significance that can be ascertained only in the future, as in the national mobilization in the United States following September 11, 2001. These examples are drawn from large-scale ritual mobilizations, and examples of a smaller scale could be drawn as we narrow our attention to smaller arenas of social action.
IR theory provides a theory of individual motivation from one situation to the next. Emotional energy is what individuals seek; situations are attractive or unattractive to them to the extent that the interaction ritual is successful in providing emotional energy. This gives us a dynamic microsociology, in which we trace situations and their pull or push for individuals who come into them. Note the emphasis: the analytical starting point is the situation, and how it shapes individuals; situations generate and regenerate the emotions and the symbolism that charge up individuals and send them from one situation to another.

Because there is structural conditioning that transcends the situation even if this, in turn, can be understood in micro-sociological terms. For instance when students interact in a Student Union bar, the accumulated consequences of a panoply of past situations operate causally in relation to the character of the SU bar, the roles they play within it and the consequent expectations they bring to bear upon the interaction. All these factors have their own history of emergence which can be analysed micro-sociologically but they operate concurrently i.e. statements about their situational origins are ontologically past tense rather than present tense.


Creating an 'idea index' (2014-11-21 08:00)

In a recent interview Maria Popova, curator of the wonderful Brain Pickings blog, explained how she reads books. Cal Newport summarises on [1]his blog:

Around thirty-one minutes into the interview, Popova explains how she takes notes on books:

1. As she reads, she creates an index at the front of the book that lists its most interesting ideas.
2. Every time she encounters a passage relevant to one of these ideas she adds the page to the relevant line in the index. If its a new idea, she creates a new line for it.
3. As she reads more, the index grows.

Here’s what’s great about this idea index method: When you pick up a book read long ago, you can quickly recall what it has to offer by glancing at the index. Then, if you want to grab some quotes about one of these ideas, the index tells you exactly where to look (no more reading every annotation!).

I also find this a really appealing idea. I tend to underline & scribble notes & fold corners for particularly important pages (in my books) or use mini post (in library books) to mark parts of the text to come back to. However the only structure between the notes tends to be how they are sequences so it leaves me running back through a text in a very linear way. Popova’s method seems a lot better in that respect. Particularly when I use a Kindle, my approach to reading sometimes feel like mining for ideas in a way I’m unhappy with. If I’m enjoying the book then it’s not a problem. But if I’m a little bored or the author writes badly, I sometimes slip into something that’s far closer to skim reading to ‘extract’ useful bits then I’m happy with.


How to ensure the democratic dividend of academic capitalism (2014-11-21 12:53)

I recently tweeted that the Anglo-Indian welfare economist Amartya Sen has received 90+ honorary degrees. Speaking as someone who sees Sen as a net positive influence on contemporary political economy, I have nothing against the idea that some academics may acquire a disproportionate level of attention vis-à-vis their colleagues. However, if this fact is supposed to empirically ground normative judgements about specifically institutional recognition, then universities should only give honorary degrees or comparable honours to people who are willing to acknowledge the significance of the honour in material terms. This means that the recipient should absorb some of the cost of receiving the honour, which involves endorsing the institution bestowing the honour. There needs to be something more than just a ‘thank you’, even if that alone seems to generate a transient ‘feel good’ factor in the granting institution. On the contrary, any prospective recipient of such an honour should absorb the cost of transport to the relevant university, which in return would agree cover the ground costs. Only under such conditions would capitalism coincide with democracy because there would be a formal acknowledgement of the academic’s need to receive external honours in a way that is commensurate with the price that the institution is willing to pay.

Thomas Piketty: New thoughts on capital in the twenty-first century (2014-11-22 08:00)

TED have come to the rescue of those who, like me, only got 50 pages into Piketty’s Capital before getting distracted:

French economist Thomas Piketty caused a sensation in early 2014 with his book on a simple, brutal formula explaining economic inequality: $r > g$ (meaning that return on capital is generally higher than economic growth). Here, he talks through the massive data set that led him to conclude: Economic inequality is not new, but it is getting worse, with radical possible impacts.
The psychology of your future self (2014-11-22 18:52)

This talk by Daniel Gilbert is excellent. He argues that human beings exhibit a pervasive tendency to see their present selves as the culmination of a process of becoming who they are. In doing so they tend to vastly underestimate the amount of change they will undergo over the coming ten years. This has important consequences because the decisions we make now have implications for our future selves - we overestimate the stability of our current preferences and assume a fixity to the basis upon which we make our decisions instead of factoring in the likelihood of our continued change. As Gilbert poignantly phrases it: "Human beings are works in progress that mistakenly think they are finished".

One of my favourite academic blogs is [1]Understanding Society. Written by the philosopher Daniel Little, it covers a diverse range of topics across the social sciences while continually coming back to a number of core theoretical questions that fascinate me. Reflecting on its seventh anniversary, Little offers some interesting thoughts on the role that academic blogging plays in his own intellectual life:

This week marks the seventh anniversary of Understanding Society. That’s 954 posts, almost a million words, and about a hundred posts in the past twelve months. The blog continues to serve as an enormously important part of my own intellectual life, permitting me to spend a few hours several times a week on topics of continuing interest to me, without needing to find the time within my administrative life to try to move a more orderly book manuscript forward. And truthfully, I don’t feel that it is *faut de mieux* or second-best. I like the notion that it’s a kind of “open source philosophy” — ideas in motion. In my view, this is an entirely legitimate primary way of contributing to philosophy and sociology.

He also makes some interesting suggestions about the future of academic blogging that are informed by his own experience. In the last couple of years I’ve been settling into a view of my blog as my main outlet for developing my ideas, feeding into formal publications as occupational necessity and/or personal passion dictate – in fact the blog has helped me come to terms with the fact that the former and the latter may not always coincide. It’s interesting to see how Daniel Little experiences his blogging because it contrasts in some ways with my own – I share the experience of it being often ‘more creative and less laboured’ but I’m certain it’s much less rigorous, at least in the narrow sense of being carefully constructed. What I do on my blog often amounts to a form of free writing – I’m interested to see if this will change over time. I think Little offers a compelling account of the intellectual legitimacy of blogging and it’s actually left me wondering if I should try and be more careful and selective about my own writing online:

What I would really like to see in the future is a more porous membrane between academic blogging and academic publishing. There is no reason why the arguments and debates that are presented within an academic blog should not enter directly into engagement with formal publication — specialists writing about mechanisms, explanation, or historiography might well want to engage in their published work with the ideas and arguments that are developing in the online world of academic blogging. For example, I think the series of exchanges among Kaidesoja, Elder-Vass, Hartwig, Cruickshank, and Ruth Groff in Understanding Society in December and January make a substantive addition to debates within the field of critical realism. It would make sense for other specialists to take these sources into account in their published work.

I suppose many scholars would look at blog entries as “working notes” and published articles as “archival” and final, more authoritative and therefore more suitable for citation and further discussion. But I’m not sure that’s the right way of thinking about the situation. When I compare the intellectual work process I undertook in writing [3]Varieties of Social Explanation or[4]Understanding Peasant China: Case Studies in the Philosophy of Social Science with the care and concentration I give a blog post, I would say that the latter is just as rigorous and often more creative; less labored, more willing to lay out a new idea quickly. So speaking as a focus group of one, I would say I’m more satisfied with the quality of thinking and presentation I’ve conveyed in the blog than in the books I’ve published.

Lou Bloom is a petty thief, prowling Los Angeles by night while seeking some purpose in his life. He exists on the fringes of society, stealing to survive while also offering himself as an employee prepared to work under any conditions. We see the rejection he must have faced on many occasions, in spite of his ostentatious subservience ("my motto is if you want to win the lottery, you have to make the money to buy the ticket") and genuine acceptance of the dogma that demands this of him as a precondition for employment. However a chance encounter on the roadside introduces Lou to the world of LA’s stringers, the freelance video journalists chasing ambulances and assaults, striving for the most lurid footage ("if it bleeds, it leads!") to buy their way into a local news media concerned for crime reporting above all else. Lou is captivated by what they do, the urgency and action which defines
it, leading him to take his first fumbling steps into this occupational world. He rapidly advances, soon revealing himself to lack scruples – putting it mildly – with the film closing at what we can only assume is the beginning of his ascendency to power within the seedy world of TV journalism in LA. In the interests of avoiding spoilers, I won't say precisely what he does but it's not pleasant.

Jake Gyllenhaal is superb throughout (incidentally, wouldn't he make the perfect Patrick Bateman if American Psycho was ever remade?) and much of the film depends upon the consistency with which his performance sustains the balance between calm self-mastery and the rage we know exists beneath the surface. Too much of either would have detracted from the sheer creepiness of Lou Bloom, a man equally unblinking when blackmailing his employer into sex as when filming a corpse. The only time Lou's mask slips is when his ambitions are thwarted, with this experience of denial prompting an outburst of rage as disturbing as it is understated. Other than this, the only emotion we see from him is delight, with involuntary smiles only becoming sinister because of context.

It's this quality that renders the homilies which he delivers throughout the film quite so unsettling – he regurgitates nuggets of wisdom from the online business courses he consumes autodidactically, advising those around him on their negotiating positions and reflecting on the status of his transactions. However in an important way Nightcrawler isn't about Lou Bloom's sociopathy, it's about his calling: he genuinely loves his newfound profession, exhibiting a natural flair and impulse towards self-improvement that combine to facilitate a rapid ascent into TV journalism and an escape from the precarity that had defined his existence heretofore. We only see hints at his previous life, most pointedly in the certainty with which he recognises that his newfound assistant was leaving sex work behind to work for him, but it seems to have been one that left him driven towards 'bettering himself' and with a very particular idea of what 'better' entails. He is an American success story, as Henry Barnes [2] puts it in the Guardian, with the satire of this being constructed through the careful arrangements of parts rather than simply holding up Lou's vacuity as an indictment of the America that produced him. Many aspects contribute to the force with which this critique is conveyed, not least of all the incisive assessment of TV journalism and the endemic insecurity which drives a race to the bottom, however without Lou's fundamental earnestness I don't think it would work. He seeks self-improvement, to embrace his newly discovered calling and earnestly strives to make a success of himself through it. The moral bankruptcy is contextual, expressed through Lou but not originating in him – satirising the American dream in terms of the immorality it licenses is far from a novel project but I found Nightcrawler a peculiarly gripping and elegantly constructed example of it.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/u1uP_8VJkDQ

Junior Theorist Symposium August 2015, Chicago, IL CFP (2014-11-25 08:00)

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 13, 2015

We invite submissions for extended abstracts for the 9th Junior Theorists Symposium (JTS), to be held in Chicago, IL on August 21st, 2015, the day before the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA). The JTS is a one-day conference featuring the work of up-and-coming theorists, sponsored in part by the Theory Section of the ASA. Since 2005, the conference has brought together early career-stage sociologists who engage in theoretical work.

We are pleased to announce that Patricia Hill Collins (University of Maryland), Gary Alan Fine (Northwestern University), and George Steinmetz (University of Michigan) will serve as discussants for this year’s symposium.
In addition, we are pleased to announce an after-panel on "abstraction" featuring Kieran Healy (Duke), Virag Molnar (The New School), Andrew Perrin (UNC-Chapel Hill), and Kristen Schilt (University of Chicago). The panel will examine theory-making as a process of abstraction, focusing on the particular challenge of reconciling abstract "theory" with the concrete complexities of human embodiment and the specificity of historical events.

We invite all ABD graduate students, postdocs, and assistant professors who received their PhDs from 2011 onwards to submit a three-page précis (800-1000 words). The précis should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and a general outline of the argument. Be sure also to include (i) a paper title, (ii) author’s name, title and contact information, and (iii) three or more descriptive keywords. As in previous years, in order to encourage a wide range of submissions we do not have a pre-specified theme for the conference. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes and discussants’ areas of interest and expertise.

Please send submissions to the organizers, Hillary Angelo (New York University) and Ellis Monk (University of Chicago), at juniortheorists@gmail.com with the phrase "JTS submission" in the subject line. The deadline is February 13, 2014. We will extend up to 12 invitations to present by March 13. Please plan to share a full paper by July 27, 2015.

1. mailto:juniorthorists@gmail.com


by Gwen Redmond

An interest in the methodological debate between qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as an inclination to read methodological approaches with a feminist perspective, drew me to reading Ann Oakley’s Experiments in Knowing. Published in 2000, it still has relevance to anyone with an interest in the history of research methods in social sciences.
in the social sciences, and will resonate with anyone looking to challenge their own thinking on methodologies. It is a tome of heavily referenced reflections on the origins of research in the field of science, in particular health science which, in its early history influenced by philosophy, was eager to distance itself from abstract theory and so began providing quantifiable evidence. I expected to read a resounding affirmation for the qualitative method, instead I found an explanation for how qualitative research found itself in the feminist realm and why quantitative research was, and still is, seen as the patriarchal, distanced and clinical method.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One looks at the origins of what Oakley calls 'The Paradigm Wars' claiming that the hierarchal debate between the two methods did not exist prior to the 1960s, when the feminist movement 'infiltrated academia' and began to question methodology. This in turn influenced the first feminist social science texts published in the 1970s querying the absence of women's voices in research. Good feminism, she purports, became synonymous with qualitative methods. Feminist researchers rallied against the 'three p's', positivism, power and p values. At this point she traces the change in language around research, subjects became participants, research was for participants not about and democratic values espoused. She goes further in arguing against experimental methods claiming they were seen as masculine and patriarchal in that they pillaged, plundered and then abandoned participants. Feminist research was arguing for inclusive equal participation with full disclosure on part of the researcher.

Part Two delves further back into the history of methodologies, sociology and gender. Making references to some of the great 'fathers', (founding or otherwise) Descartes, Bacon and Galileo, Oakley unearths the 16th and 17th century views that nature was herself feminine and in need of 'dissection' by the sciences in order to control her. This pervading discourse, she feels, led to women being seen as naturally inferior to men. She goes on to trace how social science became equated with numbers and refers to the work of Hobbs in the 1600s and Condorcet in the 1700s. She reveals the origins of the terms 'normative distribution' and 'the average man' (who was in fact your average army conscript!) as coined by Quetelet in the 1800s, as well as the father of statistics John Graunt. Making reference to women using statistics also, Florence Nightingale's empirical work offers a surprising juxtaposition with her historical image. In chapter six, Oakley again revisits the background methodology of social sciences through the 'penetration' of nature by male scientists in order to understand evolutionary biology. She again refers to the influence of more 'founding fathers' such as Herbert Spencer and Charles Booth and their influence on another surprising researcher, Beatrix Potter. Oakley traces new sociological thinking when she talks about Durkheim (1895) reflecting Mills' (1843) view that experimentation was not the ideal sociological tool of discovery, but that only the observation of society and its social phenomena (or absence thereof) can provide a truth unmitigated by the researcher. The latter part of the 1800s, she says, was the birthing of the new social science, different and separate from its roots in natural science and philosophy. The era recognised the emerging tensions between 'hard' empirical data and 'soft' experiential data (often in the form of art and literature, especially the novels of the era) and Oakley sees this clash as a seed for the future paradigm wars between the quantitative and qualitative methods.

The RCT is introduced in the final chapter of Part Two, however Part Three of the book in the main concerns itself with the continuation of the history of the development of the field of social science, and shifts now from Europe to North America to recount the 'full-blown' use of RCTs in social and health experimentation. Early models of experimentation (by McCall in education for example) used the idea of chance, or random selection, as a control, however it was not until the 1946 streptomycin trial was the design officially applied. Oakley makes her way through a dense history of RCT experimentation in order to remind the continued post-positivist defence of the qualitative method, that the 'frontiersmen' in sociology used experimentation and statistics as a means to take the field into the domain of public policy. The golden age of experimentation in the US led to policy reform in areas of social concern; unemployment, drug misuse, crime and poverty. Oakley argues that although there were disagreements in how to interpret these findings they did however lead to reform, undermining the continued argument against positivist methodology as an impossibility within the field of sociology. In Chapter eleven, Oakley explains some of the resistance towards experimentation lies with its history of unethical methods, for example on animals or without full disclosure and therefore uninformed consent. She queries, with the recent shift to qualitative methods,
whether the public will be better informed without RCTs. This question reflects a recurring practice of Oakley's (in this book) where she queries but often leaves us without answers, or even a direction in which to find those answers.

Part Four aims to conclude the strands Oakley has weaved throughout the book, with her aim being to free social science of the divide between patriarchal quantitative and feminist qualitative ways of knowing and reclaim both as ‘people’s ways of knowing’ free of their gendered past. Oakley advocates a ‘reconstruction’ of the field of social science built on ‘new fundamentals’. She argues that reality exists and experimental methods have a role to play in the social sciences, and that freeing the method of its ‘baggage’ and association with patriarchy will enable its rejuvenation.

Returning to my initial reasons for being drawn to the book, I have to admit some disappointment. I struggled with Oakley’s constant referrals to ‘founding fathers’, ‘frontiersmen’ and ‘master’s tools’ when referring to male historical figures and methods but not ‘founding mothers’ or even ‘sisters’ in reference to female researchers. I felt deference is given to the empirical positivist researchers, and rightly so historically, but that the ‘paradigm wars’ are not wholly served by the retrospective elevation of these methods currently. I agree with Oakley that the quantitative remains a valuable method but only to shine a light on sociological issues rather than possibly being ‘the right tools for the job’ (in some instances) as she claims. However, this is an excellent book on the history of the field and I imagine anyone with an interest in broadening their knowledge would do well to find a more complete reference book.

Gwen Redmond is studying for a Master of Education degree in The Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland. Working in the field of Adult Literacy education for ten years, her studies and practice are informed by Critical Theorists.


How to get started on a sociological essay (2014-11-26 08:00)

1. Are you clear about what the question is asking? If you're uncertain about what the terms mean or how they fit together then it'll be difficult to know how to start writing. Try and clarify issues like these before you start planning the essay.

2. Try getting everything you think about the topic down on paper before you start working on the essay. Don’t self-censor, just write down everything that comes to mind in relation to the question. Try doing this with pen and paper or with a whiteboard if you have access to one. Afterwards think about how these points fit together & hopefully the structure of the essay will become a little clearer.

3. If you're struggling with expressing yourself in writing, find someone else from the module to discuss the question with. If you're able to discuss the topic then you're able to write about it, even if talking about it comes more easily than writing. You could even try recording the conversation to play back when you're planning the essay.
4. Is there a particular point you want to make? Even if it’s just one small thing, finding an argument you’re committed to making can help give you a route into writing the essay.

5. Don’t feel you need to write in a linear way from start to finish. If there are particular points you want to make then try writing these as individual fragments. It’s probably easier to start with the aspects of the essay that are clearest to you. If you are able to write a few hundred words each for two or three points that you want to make then you’ll have made a good start on the essay. Try combining the fragments at this stage and then start thinking about the essay as a whole piece of writing.

6. Writing introductions can be hard! If you’re struggling with this then just move straight on to the main body of the essay and go back to write the introduction once you’ve got a big chunk of the essay written. This makes it easier to know what you’re introducing exactly.

What tips would you add to the list?

_____________________

Emmanuelle Tulle (2015-08-09 11:42:20)
Write the conclusion after the intro, so that you know where you’re going. But be prepared to adjust it.

Exploring Gender: Man Meets Woman by Yang Liu (2014-11-26 17:29)

[1]
A beautifully presented book with bold and binary pictograms illustrating gender issues of contemporary times is the perfect stimulus to use for discussion with undergraduates interested in issues of sociology, sociolinguistics, and particularly gender roles and relationships. Some of the depictions would also be useful for teachers of A level Sociology, Psychology, Media Studies or English Language to use with their students when studying gender stereotypes and sexism in modern societies.

[2]
Yang Liu:

"We are living in an age of constant social change, in which the subject of the sexes ... is rapidly evolving in people’s consciousness. Each generation re-assesses and questions the role models currently in place...

It is interesting to see how Man/Woman clichés have indeed changed in our daily lives and to what extent the attributes that were assigned to the sexes in the past, often centuries ago, are still relevant in today's society. And to consider which desirable role models are already rooted in our thinking but are still in the process of transformation".

Modern Man v Housewife

[3]

Finding the Way

[4]
Magazines

[5]
3102
[6] The artist: Yang Liu was born in 1976 in Beijing. After studying at the University of Arts Berlin (UdK), she worked as a designer in Singapore, London, Berlin and New York. In 2004 she founded her own design studio, which she continues to run today. In 2010 she was appointed a professor at the BTK University of Applied Sciences in Berlin. Her works have won numerous prizes in international competitions and can be found in museums and collections all over the world. East meets West, a series of infographics drawing on her personal bicultural experience has been exhibited worldwide, the corresponding book has become an instant bestseller. Yang Liu lives and works in Berlin.


Critical Realism, Gender and Feminism (2014-11-27 08:00)

Special Issue of the Journal of Critical Realism (15:5, 2016)
An increasing number of gender scholars have become familiar with critical realism, finding it a robust alternative to the poststructuralist perspectives that currently dominate gender studies and feminism. This trend has coincided with an increased interest among feminist theorists in the issues of ontology, materiality and nature, which have always been at the heart of critical realist interventions. However, despite these thematic alignments, and despite the fact that both critical realism and feminist theory are inherently critical-emancipatory, the critical realist approach continues to occupy a marginal role within both feminist and gender studies debates. Concurrently, the field of critical realism is decidedly ‘masculine’ in nature, both in the sense that men dominate the field, and in terms of the issues with which critical realists have most commonly concerned themselves. Recent critical realist feminist work, the International Association of Critical Realism’s adoption of a proactive policy to enhance the representation of women in its organs and activities, and the growing critical realist preoccupation (particularly in Bhaskar’s philosophy of metaReality) with historically ‘feminine’ topics such as love, mark a potential shift away from these unfortunate trends.

In order to encourage the development of this emerging field of critical realist feminism and gender studies, as well as critical exchanges between the respective branches of critical realism (including dialectical critical realism and metaRealism) and feminist theory/gender studies, we are happy to invite submissions for a special issue of *Journal of Critical Realism* on Critical Realism, Gender and Feminism. We welcome not only contributions that draw on critical realism in studying gender relations and/or engaging with feminist concerns but also critiques of critical realism from feminist or gender-based points of view.

Topics of interest include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

- Critical realism and poststructuralist feminism/gender studies
- Critical realism and socialist/eco/radical/black/postcolonial feminism
- Critical realism and the ontological/materialist/naturalistic turn in feminist theory
- Critical realism and intersectionality
- Critical realism, metaRealism, love and gender
- Critiques/auto-critiques of existing critical realist work from a feminist/gender studies perspective
- Feminist epistemology, standpoint theory and critical realism
- Critical realism and feminist critiques of (social) science
- Examinations/critiques of feminist taboos on realism, nature and causality
- Critical realism and post-feminist culture
- Critical realism, dialectics and feminist deconstruction
- Revitalizing the explanatory feminist tradition: what is patriarchy?
- Critical realism and sexuality
- Critical realism and queer studies
• Critical realism and men/masculinity studies
• Critical realism, sex and gender identity
• Critical realism and gendered/sexual violence
• Critical realism, feminism, gender studies and war/conflict
• Critical realism and feminist ethics
• Critical realism and pornography
• Critical realism and feminist methods/methodology
• Agency, gender and critical realism
• Critical realism and feminist activism/politics
• Feminism, gender studies, critical realism and other realisms (Barad’s agential realism, post-positivist realism etc.)
• Critical realism as underlabourer for applied work in feminism/gender studies
• Critical realism, interdisciplinarity, gender and feminism
• Feminist spirituality and metaRealism
• Critical realism and feminist economics

Instructions for authors

Papers should be no more than 8,000 words (not inclusive of references). In all other respects, our instructions for authors apply. Please consult these at www.maneyonline.com/ifa/rea or use one of our recently published articles as a guide in setting out your work. Articles (as distinct from pieces for our Perspective and Debate sections) will be subject to external peer review.

Submissions need not be exclusively concerned with critical realism or its critique, but should relate their arguments in some significant way to critical realism. For instance, the main focus of an article could be Karen Barad’s feminist appropriation of Bohr’s agential realism, but it should include consideration of critical realism.

Important dates

October 1, 2015: deadline for first drafts
February 26, 2016: reviewers’ reports and editors’ decision provided
May 23, 2016: deadline for final drafts
June 30, 2016: final copy due with the publisher
October 2016: publication of the special issue online and print

Enquiries and submissions
Please send any enquiries to lena.gunnarsson@oru.se Please upload articles for peer review to our online system, http://www.editorialmanager.com/rea/default.asp. When uploading you will be asked if your paper is for a themed issue. Please answer ‘Yes, the special issue on Critical Realism, Gender and Feminism’. If your paper is accepted but not included in the special issue, it will appear in a subsequent issue. Please send any other material for the special issue to lena.gunnarsson@oru.se.

About the Journal

*Journal of Critical Realism* is the journal of the International Association for Critical Realism (IACR), established in 1997 to foster the discussion, propagation and development of critical realist approaches to understanding and changing the world. It provides a forum for scholars wishing to promote realist emancipatory philosophy, social theory and science on an interdisciplinary and international basis, and for those who wish to engage with such an approach.

Critical Realism, Gender and Feminism

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Book Review: *Liminality and the Modern, Living Through the In-Between* by Bjørn Thomassen

(2014-11-27 12:55)

Book Review by Bradley Williams

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With Liminality and the Modern, Bjørn Thomassen has provided an invaluable resource for researchers of all types of ritualistic processes in different social settings. As Thomassen notes, the concept of liminality is under-utilized in anthropology and completely ignored by sociologists. Liminality within anthropology has been most closely associated Victor Turner’s writings on tribal rituals practiced within a Ndembu village in Zambia, where he lived and collected field data. Indeed much of the book is devoted to understanding some of the standard and lesser known works of Turner. Thomassen also discusses the history of the lesser known social theorist, Arnold van Gennep, who unarguably pioneered the concept of liminality, and provided a thickly rich though concise analysis in his book Les Rites de Passage (The Rites of Passage).

The greatest contribution that van Gennep proposed was a universal three part structure characteristic of all ritual processes. All initiates or participants undergoing rituals undergo an initial separation from the bounded norms, social repertoires, and general order represented by their pre-ritual ontology. Secondly, they enter into a liminal state characterized by a supreme normlessness that can produce either positive or negative affects (though this last distinction was only established after the concept of liminality had reached its maturity, which came after Victor Turner’s singularly positive appraisal of liminality had been thoroughly considered). Liminality characterizes all in-between social spaces, where individuals, groups, and even whole societies enter into a disestablishment of social order and individual and collective identity. Finally, the participant undergoes a process of re-integration in which a new social order, orientation or identity is accepted. Much of the first half of the book gives a history of van Gennep’s unfortunate, failed attempts at launching an academic career. The thrust of the history involves van Gennep’s fundamental disagreement with the over-socialized structural functionalism of Emile Durkheim. According to van Gennep, and others who found fault in Durkheim’s theories, Durkheim’s theory could not account for reality because it could not account for individual agency within periods of social transformation or transition.
The account of van Gennep's attempts at integrating himself into the French academic community is very interesting. Thomassen writes that van Gennep remains the most cited social scientist in the history of French academia to have never been appointed a professor. It's an intellectual biography that really sheds light on a whole range of famous social theorists, not just van Gennep. The second half of the book attempts to bring the concept of liminality into a twenty-first century context. Taking a lead from Victor Turner, Thomassen infers from the broad conception of liminality in tribal rituals accounted for by Turner, that the concept could and should be applied to all kinds of other social phenomena that adhere to the universal tripartite structure of ritualistic social transformation. As the name of the book implies, much of the second half of the book concerns the application of liminality to our current dominant form of modernity in the West.

Part Two of the book opens with a lengthy discussion of the primacy of the self within the thought of Descartes and the primacy of the state within Hobbes. Thomassen intricately plays the ideas of Descartes and Hobbes off of one another to show how both theorists reacted to an overall sense of unease within Europe. Together these theorists provided the individual and collective conceptions that largely structured the broader modern social context, the underpinnings of our modern celebration of contemporaneity. Thomassen then dedicates a chapter each to the role of the ritual process and liminality in three social phenomena: games and gambling, bungee jumping, and political revolutions. The essay on Gambling draws a comparison between the emergence of casinos in Italy and the "trickster" role played by the infamous Casanova and the modern question of living within a broader risk society. The next chapter proceeds from a discussion of ceremonial precursors to modern bungee jumping to illustrate a particular form of liminality that the author refers to as limivoid. While phenomena such as bungee jumping incorporate the 'going to the limit', dangerous aspect of the liminal phase of ritual processes, the final transformative phase found in actual rituals is missing. This makes the "ritual" of bungee jumping merely a form of simulacra or an incomplete ritual. The penultimate chapter on political revolutions was perhaps my favorite discussion in the book. Thomassen incorporates Victor Turner's meaning-filled descriptions of the liminal atmosphere that permeates large-scale crises to discuss the liminal and transformative aspects of political revolutions. Revolutions, as forms of collective behavior, seem to embody the process-structure of rituals. He identifies some of the emotional aspects of revolutions which account for phenomena such as mass adherence to the whims of charismatic leaders.

The concluding chapter concerns the themes of home and being-at-home as they relate to the transition "out of liminality" for modernity (p 215). In the end, Thomassen posits an understanding of the agency/structure argument that is neither characterized by rational-positivism or social constructivism. Ultimately, van Gennep's work highlights the detachment that both theories have toward 'nature'. Rather than trying to 'tame' and compartmentalize the irrational sensibilities within the world, social science should seek to understand the natural "rhythms" of the social.

This book is a remarkable contribution to sociology and anthropology. Thomassen offers insights valuable to anyone interested in a sociology that can account for transitional periods within human existence. This book is worth reading and re-reading for its illuminating perspective.

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Seven reasons why blogging is academically valuable (2014-11-28 08:00)

This is a good list by [1]John Danaher. Read it in full [2]here:

1. It helps to build the habit of writing:

2. It helps to generate writing flow states:

3. It helps you to really understand your area of research:

4. It allows you to systematically develop the elements of a research article

5. It enables you to acquire serendipitous research interests

6. It helps with networking and developing contacts

7. And yes, it also helps with teaching

1. http://philosophicaldisquisitions.blogspot.ca/
I am increasingly being asked to reflect on my self-development. This is neither as boring nor self-aggrandizing as it might first sound. You may actually learn something about yourself in the process. I was someone who read philosophy from quite an early age – certainly by high school I was able to distinguish the major philosophers and some of them I had actually read in excerpt form. For my high school newspaper, I compiled a list of the 100 greatest people (I think it was ‘people’ – not ‘thinkers’) of all time. All I remember clearly was that Jesus headed the list, with Moses, Muhammad, Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Newton and Kant close to the top. Karl Jaspers’ account of the great thinkers made a strong impression at the time – though I always recoiled at the word ‘wisdom’ he used to characterise them as a group. For me ‘wisdom’ suggests old age, and while we should always learn from the past, we should never venerate it. I believed this at age 15 and at age 55.

I always strongly identified with the Enlightenment as a movement. People who know my work mainly through my critics – especially in the scientific establishment – may find this surprising. However, I’ve been very consistent on this point. But what I value in the Enlightenment is its spirit, not any dogmas that may trace their legitimacy to what some 18th century thinkers said. The Enlightenment was, in the first instance, an anti-authoritarian movement that basically set out to finish the job started by the Protestant Reformation, the denominations of which had begun to coalesce into mini-Vaticans of their own. (If you want to understand the soul of an intellectual movement, don’t take its actual content too literally; rather, take that content as indicative of a certain change in attitude toward what has come before – a kind of re-branding or re-spinning. This is Hegel’s take-home lesson for today.)

In the 1970s, when I first become engaged with these things, the Enlightenment and Romanticism were seen as two complementary movements that pivoted around the Industrial and French Revolutions. (If the reader does not find this framing intuitively clear, then the world really has changed.) Because I remember a time before academics had any clear sense of what ‘postmodern’ might mean, a young person from today transported back to my youth would probably recognize the distinction between Enlightenment and Romanticism in terms of ‘modern’ versus ‘postmodern’ – and then wonder why couldn’t these primitives state the obvious! However, the key difference was that back in the 1970s, much of the discussion focussed on the psychology of the individual that was privileged by Enlightenment vis-à-vis Romanticism. These discussions, very rich in detail, were often reduced to ‘reason’ versus ‘emotion’ in popular forums. (Richard Sennett’s *The Fall of Public Man* is a sociological artefact from that era.) From that standpoint, the more recent wranglings over ‘modern’ versus ‘postmodern’ look very abstract and detached from these original concerns with personal self-understanding.

Of course, what intervened was the French ‘death of the subject’ movement associated with Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, the English translations of which only started to be integrated into humanities and social science curricula when I started university in 1976. Initially Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* made the biggest impression on me but Foucault’s *The Order of Things* has stuck the longest.

I say all this because my sense of the Enlightenment was always coloured by the psychology of the Enlightenment figures – perhaps even more than by the content of their views. In particular, having read Will Durant’s popular biographies of Voltaire and Rousseau, I was drawn to these very brilliant, dynamic and volatile figures, who operated in many media and always presented the assertion of reason as an endless struggle against stupidity, superstition, depravity and incapacity – in both oneself and others. It requires eternal vigilance – comparable to what only God himself provides in keeping the cosmos in operation! If you recall Goya’s famous painting about ‘the sleep of reason’, you get the message. I don’t deny that this image of the Enlightenment was very compatible with the Cold War’s ‘permanent state of emergency’ (Daniel Bell’s phrase) mentality, but at the same time it reached out to the Romantic sensibility by suggesting that even ‘reason’ needs to be somehow ‘inhabited’. (I see Bourdieu’s *habitus* as largely a sociologically relativized and objectivized take on this point.) In any case, I always found that more recent self-avowed defenders of the Enlightenment, whose scholasticism would even make Kant blush (e.g. Juergen Habermas), have lost sight of what made that period so inspiring for many generations of thinkers throughout the world – and still animates my own way of thinking.
We are experiencing a “pre-” that we can’t name yet (2014-11-29 08:00)

This is the claim made by Matthew Barzun, US ambassador to the UK, in an intriguing piece for the New Statesman. He attacks the view that the world is sliding into anarchy, offering a counter-narrative that is every bit as sweeping and accentuates the positive:

- **It is a time of levelling.** The world has reduced extreme poverty by half since 1990. Global primary education for boys and girls is now equal.

- **It is a time of enduring.** The number of deaths among children under five has been cut in half since 1990, meaning about 17,000 fewer children die each day. And mothers are surviving at a nearly equal rate.

- **It is a time of flourishing.** Deaths from malaria dropped by 42 per cent between 2000 and 2012. HIV infections are declining in most regions.

- **It is a time of strengthening.** Africa is above the poverty line for the first time. Tens of millions have been lifted out of poverty in China. The debt burden on developing countries has dropped 75 per cent since 2000.

- **It is a time of healing.** The ozone layer is showing signs of recovery thanks to global action. And all the while, the technological and communications revolution is making more people better informed than at any time in history.

I’m not sure I’m convinced by this. But I agree that “We are experiencing a “pre-” that we can’t name yet” and his article suggests that this widespread sense plays an increasingly important part in the political psychology of our age.


Time and Reflexivity (2014-11-30 08:00)

In Margaret Archer’s work on Reflexivity, this faculty is seen as mediating between structure and agency. Our capacity to ‘bend back’ upon ourselves, considering our circumstances in light of our commitments and vice versa,
constitutes the point at which structural powers operate upon individual lives. On this view, structures don’t operate automatically, they only exercise causal power vis-a-vis the attempting doings of agents, even if the implications of the former for the latter are utterly opaque for the people concerned. In contrast Harmut Rosa sees time structures as the mediating factor, providing "action with normatively binding force, largely stable expectations, and an orientating frame this is experienced as if it were a natural fact" (pg. 225). His argument is basically a functionalist one, with the structuring of time horizons constituting the process through which “systemic requirements” are ‘translated” into “individual action orientations”:

our sense of who we are (hence of our identity) is virtually a function of our relationship to space, time, fellow human beings, and the objects of our environment (or to our action and experience). (pg. 224)

The phrase ‘virtually a function’ is rather ambiguous to say the least*. Clearly, he wishes to recognise some independent variability to identity in relation to what may otherwise be convergent circumstances. However he also dismisses this variability, describing it as ‘virtually a function’, such that this variability comes to be seen as peripheral to the subject matter of our investigation. In essence Rosa treats this as if it were not variable, continually describing uniform responses to social change. He occasionally acknowledges that these claims are empirically questionable but this is seen as something secondary to the theoretical inquiry, as opposed to an important matter that should be incorporated into its terms of reference. Unfortunately this variability matters because if we believe action has (any) efficacy vis-a-vis structure then variable individual responses feed back into the social changes that are reshaping time horizons. If we don’t recognise this variable component of feedback then acceleration comes to seem entirely systemic, revolutionising social life but unfolding by its own logic independent of the actions of individuals or groups.

It’s for this reason that I feel the need to very cautious when engaging with Rosa. The critical theory he espouses is close enough to my own theoretical position (probably because of the legacy of Marxism feeding into both critical realism and critical theory) that much of what he says immediately resonates with me. But there are also these massive points of disagreement that can seem rather small until I stop and think about them. However he does have rather a lot to say about time which fascinates me. What’s particularly relevant for my own work is his account of structural changes to biography:

the predominance of individualization in the transformation of relationships to self and world in classical modernity leads to a temporalization of life, i.e., to a perspective on one’s own life as a project to be given shape in time, while the same process of dynamization in the late modern phase of its development effects a "detemporalized," situational definition of identity. (pg. 226)

His point concerns the temporal dimension to “socially dominant forms of self-relation” (pg. 224). Though she’s retreated slightly on this point, Archer’s early work on reflexivity was concerned with the spatial dimension of dominant forms of self-relation. In Making Our Way Through The World in particular, there was a focus on the way in which patterns of mobility in early life have implications for the forms of self-relation upon which individuals can come to rely as they go through adolescence. Rosa’s quasi-functionalism notwithstanding, I don’t see any reason why we can’t sustain an interest in both: the spatial and temporal dimensions to socially dominant forms of self-relation, as well as the relational dimension to personally dominant forms of self-relation (with the macro operation of the former being mediated through the micro operation of the latter).

Rosa sees a mode of biography as “the directed movement of life along alternative development paths” operating in modernity, dependent upon “the liquefaction of forms of life and community, which reached epoch-making
levels during the industrial revolution” being “steered onto relatively fixed, institutional rails in the increasingly ‘organized modernity’ of the welfare state” (pg. 228) He cites Martin Kohli’s work here, who argues that

a life course divided into temporal sequences has a double function: on the one hand, it undergirds the institutional order of the welfare state (the educational system, the social insurance system, the pension system, etc.) and conversely becomes a socially obligatory standard through this system of institutions; but, on the other hand, it establishes an identity-guiding, orientating schema in the concept of the ‘normal biography,” which allows of respective three-stage ‘schedules’ in professional life (education, gainful employment, retirement) and the familial structuring of life (childhood in the ancestral family, own family with kids, older phase after the kids move out) (pg. 228)

The transition from tradition to modernity is seen as one from a static and situational identity to one that is dynamic and trans-situational. In late modernity this in turn becomes dynamic and situational. This renewed status of being situationally bound is not a function of spatio-temporal immobility as in traditional society but rather a consequence of the breakdown of stable temporal horizons. Identity implies evaluative and action orientations towards our circumstances. Rosa’s claim is that social acceleration creates a tendency to compress those orientations ever further into the boundaries of situations because the context in relation to which we evaluative and act increasingly changes with such speed that our orientations towards it have no trans-situational durability.

He contrast this to the tempo of modernity in which “the horizons of expectations remains stable enough to allow long-run, time-resistant life perspectives to develop, the gratification of needs to be systematically postponed, and the completion of the biographical pattern to be patiently awaited.” (pg 230). On his view, the identity-constituting task facing adults in modernity was to “find your own place in the world”: “choose a career, start a family, decide on a religious community, and find a political orientation.” (pg 229). While people did revise these choices, these revisions were relatively marginal and incorporated into a life narrative in terms of progress towards authenticity i.e. my previous choice was wrong, I realised and thus I revised it. In the absence of these stable time horizons, Rosa argues that this orientation towards biography becomes untenable and thus far we are left with a situational identity. This means that chronological phases of life are losing their internal coherence and external interrelatedness: the ‘building blocks’ out of which biographies are built become less clearly distinguishable and the sequential relationships between them become less linear

Key to Rosa’s analysis is the notion that we’ve moved from an intergenerational to an intra-generational rate of social change. This entails an “escalation of contingency and instability” which serves to render identities relative to situations: “it is not one is a baker, rather one works as one (for two years now); not that one is the husband of X, rather one lives with X; not that one is a New Yorker and conservative, rather one lives in New York (for the next few years) and votes for Conservatives (pg. 147). His argument rests on the sense in which “self-relations have an insolubly temporal structure in which the past, present, and future of a subject are connected”: "Who one is always also defined by how one became it, what one was and could have been, and what one will be and wants to be" (pg. 146). It is through this situatedness vis-a-vis temporality that social change exercises causal power in relation to individual lives. While Rosa systematically underemphasises the role of reflexivity in mediating this process, making universal claims about the consequences for individuals while ignoring the variability of responses by individuals, he is surely correct that intra-generational social change “will have far-ranging consequences for the possibilities and forms of social integration and cultural reproduction” (pg. 114).

Another important aspect of Rosa’s analysis is his account of how “the temporal regulation and deinstitutionalization of numerous fields of activity in late modernity society has massively heightened the cost of planning and thus the time required to coordinate and synchronise everyday sequences of action” (pg 126). As the rapidity of social change leads to the progressive dissolution of collective time structures, as well as a recognition of how fleeting
those that remain must be, cultural synchronisation devices that could once be taken for granted instead “have to be repeatedly planned, negotiated, and agreed upon with cooperation partners all over again” (pg. 126). We can’t take for granted when others will do things or the order in which they will do them and hence there’s an additional cognitive burden involved in day-to-day social life. This also leads to a situation in which we come to be expected to justify our temporal decision making, as socially accepted standards of temporal rationality break down and the consequence for each individual of other’s temporal decisions become more pronounced: the range of ways in which my, say, failing to send an e-mail in time may impact upon a colleague increase because the significance of that e-mail vis-a-vis their own sequence of work commitments has become less standardised. Standards and expectations diverge when collaborative work is no longer embedded within shared horizons and converging circumstances.

This is partly a consequence of the diversification of system environments, “Since, from the internal perspective of a given system or interaction context, all other activities represent only disruptive delays and eliminable empty times” (pg. 191). This leaves conflicts over time occurring between people when operating across system boundaries (e.g. when I am preparing for teaching, the demands of a research commitment made by a collaborator seem secondary and vice versa) but also within the context of an individual’s life as they’re forced to negotiate the competing demands of divergent contexts. Rosa identifies a trend towards time management as “microtemporal oscillation between the demands of distinct functional spheres that are all running as ‘non-stop’ enterprise” (pg. 192) (which incidentally is a fantastic description of how and why Omnifocus works so effectively once you get the hang of it) – the disjunction between spheres becomes too rigid for time managements, sometimes leaving too little time for ‘home’ commitments when at ‘work’ (and vice versa) but also sometimes leaving too much time, confining one to working commitments in absence of impending deadlines or anything approaching real urgency.

These circumstances pose a profound challenge to our capacity to direct our "energy towards a fixed, constant, subjectively worthwhile goal and to express it in action" (pg. 249). In other words, commitment becomes difficult when the things to which we might commit ourselves change so rapidly. This is the part of Rosa’s argument that really fascinates me and I think he gets more directly to the heart of this issue then any of the other authors who address it. I’m interested in empirical detail about the life strategy through which people negotiate the moral logic of this situation. Where Rosa’s account fails dramatically, surprisingly so given his deep conversance with the thought of Charles Taylor, stems from his lack of appreciation for how ultimate concerns can function as meta-commitments: fleeting things in our lives take on mean relative to higher commitments which can transcend situational change. Certainly, this is not true of all commitments and I agree that sustaining commitments becomes much harder when social change reaches an intra-generational tempo. But I nonetheless think Rosa’s point is a dramatic overstatement and that the reasons for this hyperbole stem directly from his inadequate concept of reflexivity.

It’s possible this may be an issue with the otherwise excellent translation, as Rosa is a wordy but precise author.

5.12 December

Benjamin Franklin’s "club of mutual improvement" (2014-12-01 08:00)

What a lovely idea found as an aside in a post on [1]Brainpickings - are there other examples of such "clubs"? It would be interesting to compare the rhetoric found to surround them with that found in contemporary ‘productivity’ culture:
At age twenty-one, he formed a “club of mutual improvement” called the Junto. It was a grand scheme to gobble up knowledge. He invited working-class polymaths like him to have the chance to pool together their books and trade thoughts and knowledge of the world on a regular basis. They wrote and recited essays, held debates, and devised ways to acquire currency. Franklin used the Junto as a private consulting firm, a think tank, and he bounced ideas off the other members so he could write and print better pamphlets. Franklin eventually founded the first subscription library in America, writing that it would make “the common tradesman and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries,” not to mention give him access to whatever books he wanted to buy.


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**Actor centred sociology (2014-12-02 08:00)**

In the last couple of years, I’ve occasionally wondered whether I’m a methodological individualist. The term carries intensely negative connotations within the areas of sociology in which I spend my time. I’m certainly not an individualist in an ontological sense: I think the social world is made up of many kinds of entities and that we can only understand their composition by recognising their plurality and the stratified relations that obtain between them. I also don’t think we can adequately understand individuals as individuals, in the sense that, to use R.D. Laing’s description, “our relatedness to others is an essential part of our being”. However, as he goes on to say, “any particular person is not a necessary part of our being”: while “I” always exist in relation to a “We”, this does not entail that the identity of the former can be subsumed into the latter. Unless we recognise the independent variability of the “I”, it’s impossible to make sense of the pattern of the development of the “We”: the trajectory “I” take can only be understood in terms of the shifting constellation of constraints and enablements entailed by a “We” that is reconstituted through my actions but nonetheless retains a relative autonomy from me.

In this sense, my approach to studying individuals without being an individualist understands people as temporarily extended and always in motion. In other words, I’m concerned with biography. In his account of “actor centred sociology”, Daniel Little talks about the “actor-in-formation”: this is the meta-theoretical function of my notion of personal morphogenesis. I’m suggesting we can best understand the role of the individual within social processes by analysing other social entities in relation to how people change and how people stay the same: personal change and personal stasis then contribute to the reproduction or transformation of other social entities (and in turn engender tendencies towards personal morphogenesis or personal morphostasis etc). This is an argument about biographical microfoundations. This is how Daniel Little describes the notion of microfoundations:

This means that sociological theory need to recognize and incorporate the idea that all social facts and structures supervene on the activities and interactions of socially constructed individual actors. It is meta-theoretically improper to bring forward hypotheses about social structures that cannot be appropriately related to the actions and interactions of individuals. Or in other words, it means that claims about social structures require microfoundations.
I think I differ with Little on what it means to say that we have “appropriately related” structure and agency. I also think there are problems with the notion of supervenience – as far as I can see, it locks us into an ‘aggregation dynamics’ view and precludes top-down causation. However I otherwise like this way of thinking. I’m suggesting that a biographical approach orientated to personal change is a useful way in which we can bridge the gap between micro-sociology and macro-sociology. In essence, I’m suggesting that we think in terms of biographical microfoundations and see the social world as constituted through the unfolding of biographies and their entanglement within situated milieux.

At present I’m leaning towards publishing my PhD as individuals papers rather than as a monograph. However these would be a contribution to a long term project, Becoming Who We Are, which will eventually be a monograph. My PhD has left me with an understanding of my project but I don’t feel intellectually capable of writing it yet. I would use the theory of personal morphogenesis developed in my thesis as a basis for (a) a theory of biographical microfoundations (b) a methodology for studying the lifecourse (c) a theory of the actor (d) a framework for actor centred sociology.

The last phrase is one I’ve encountered through Little and I find it a very helpful way of framing what it is I want to do. Though I don’t think she’d accept the terminology, I’d now understand Margaret Archer’s work on reflexivity (including Being Human, as well as the trilogy of books on reflexivity) as developing a theory of the actor and a framework for studying actors. I think it’s very strong in many respects but that there are elements of it which need to developed further. These are the questions that Little suggests a theory of the actor needs to address:

1. How does the actor represent the world of action — the physical and social environment? Here we need a vocabulary of mental frameworks, representational schemes, stereotypes, and paradigms.
2. How do these schemes become actualized within the actor’s mental system? This is the developmental and socialization question.
3. What motivates the actor? What sorts of things does the actor seek to accomplish through action?
4. Here too there is a developmental question: how are these motives instilled in the actor through a social process of learning?
5. What mental forces lead to action? Here we are considering things like deliberative processes, heuristic reasoning, emotional attachments, habits, and internally realized practices.
6. How do the results of action get incorporated into the actor’s mental system? Here we are thinking about memory, representation of the meanings of outcomes, regret, satisfaction, or happiness.
7. How do the results of past experiences inform the mental processes leading to subsequent actions? Here we are considering the ways that memory and emotional representations of the past may motivate different patterns of action in the future.
Philosophical Perspectives on Why Haters Hate (2014-12-03 08:00)


[6]

Kierkegaard writes:

There is a form of envy of which I frequently have seen examples, in which an individual tries to obtain something by bullying. If, for instance, I enter a place where many are
gathered, it often happens that one or another right away takes up arms against me by beginning to laugh; presumably he feels that he is being a tool of public opinion. But lo and behold, if I then make a casual remark to him, that same person becomes infinitely pliable and obliging. Essentially it shows that he regards me as something great, maybe even greater than I am: but if he can't be admitted as a participant in my greatness, at least he will laugh at me. But as soon as he becomes a participant, as it were, he brags about my greatness. That is what comes of living in a petty community.

Now if this were to become a series of posts, the obvious place to look next would be Nietzsche.

3. [http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/04/22/to-this-day-shane-koyczan/](http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/04/22/to-this-day-shane-koyczan/)
4. [http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/02/26/vi-hart-on-comments/](http://www.brainpickings.org/2013/02/26/vi-hart-on-comments/)
6. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0806502517/braipick0d-21](http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0806502517/braipick0d-21)

The Social Life of Methods (2014-12-04 08:00)

[1]The Social Life of Methods is an interesting programme of research undertaken by Evelyn Ruppert, Mike Savage and John Law. This is orientated towards what the authors term the ‘methodological complex’: a dominant way of understanding method, tangled up in a particular division of labour, which precludes the investigation of methods as objects in their own right. In contrast to the ensuing view of methods as neutral tools for producing knowledge about the social world, they want to study the ‘social life’ of these methods and consider how this has shaped their emergence. In [2]this paper they talk about the dual sense in which methods can be said to have a social life:

Methods are shaped by the social world

Methods don’t come into being without a purpose and methods don’t come to prominence without advocates. In this sense, we can link techniques of map-making and surveying to the needs of nascent nation states to map their territory. The census came about as a result of the need to constitute a governable national population, measurable and therefore susceptible to intervention. For instance, Servius Tullius, the sixth king of Rome prior to the republic, instituted a census and divided the common people (plebs) into social classes: these were defined hierarchically, with rights and responsibilities ensuing from what they could contribute to the city. All the sixth class were seen to be able to contribute was their children ([3]source). The UK census began in 1801 and, with the exception of 1939 and 1966, has been undertaken every ten years since. The present government has discussed [4]replacing the census: “There are, I believe, ways of doing this which will provide better, quicker information, more frequently and cheaper” opined Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude in 2010. The technology used to
conduct the census has changed radically, with a move towards handheld computers and online completion perhaps giving rise to an entirely online census supplemented by existing data or even its complete abandonment. The classifications used in the census change, existing classifications change, for instance ‘pensionable age’ increases, and new classifications are introduced, such as ‘ethnic group’. In fact this [5] didn’t appear in the census until 1991, with Margaret Thatcher having dismissed its proposed introduction in the 1981 census, seeing it as a left-wing dogma incompatible with her planned direction for the UK (weirdly placing her in alignment with some on the radical left who were suspicious of the government collecting such data at a time of racial tensions and with a rising far-right). The purposes underlying the census change, both in terms of the intentions of the government but also the uses to which groups like academics and charities make of the census data, leaving different groups with vested interests who help shape its future direction. The vast majority of the population of England and Wales completed the census form and, while there are legal sanctions for a refusal to complete it, this degree of compliance necessitates an extensive public engagement operation and makes [6] winning public support crucial. In this sense, the logistics of the census itself are of interest, given how all this activity is compressed into the space of a few weeks.

What Ruppert, Savage and Law are arguing is that we miss all the complexity if we simply treat the census as a neutral tool to study an object. It also helps constitute that object, ‘chopping up’ a population in various ways according to political needs and social contingencies, though the ensuing data cannot be dismissed as simply a product of the exercise. The census helps constitute a ‘population’ susceptible to intervention. We confront similar questions when considering the UK government social surveys, which began in 1941 during the second world war.

while the census made people inhabiting a territory into a national population, subsequently that population reality could be further calibrated through the technique of sample statistics in the mid-twentieth century. So there’s a history of method to be told here. In the US, for instance, sample surveys grew up with the Gallup polls of the late 1930s, and then with agencies such as the Department of Agriculture during the Second World War. Mike Savage traces their analogous though later rise in the UK. He shows, for instance, how during the Second World War, the Government Social Survey became a key instrument in generating knowledge of the circumstances and concerns of the British population. It proved popular in part because its methods of anonymous sampling avoided relying on known informants, in a way that had attracted popular opprobrium. The government proved a key player in promoting survey research into the 1960s, seeing it as part of a modernising form of government that no longer needed to rely on the views of the ‘good and the great’. It proved important in shaping educational reform in the 1960s, with surveys being used to explain the social selectivity of grammar schools. As Hilton and Savage have shown, these methods were thus embraced by a technocratic middle class, seeking to distinguish themselves from older gentlemanly intellectuals.


To talk of the social life of methods entails inquiry into the purposes underlying methods and advocates for particular methods, as well as how these change over time. These purposes might not be lofty or consequential ones. The focus group was largely absent from the academy until the 1980s but had been developed and refined as a tool for market research. Likewise corporations have led the way in the analysis of consumer transactional data obtained through mechanisms such as store cards. Considering the social life of such method entails looking at the origins of these methods, their purposes and advocates, as well as how they have changed as they moved out of the commercial sphere and into the academic one. What assumptions are loaded into their use? How are their operations understood by those who use them? What status is ascribed to the data that is produced using them?

Method contribute to shaping the social world
The notion that methods are shaped by their context is relatively straightforward. It might be under-theorised and understudied but it’s unlikely to be a contentious claim. However the authors argue that methods also contribute to shaping that world. This notion of the performativity of method can be slightly harder to grasp. They offer the sample survey as an example:

Take an example: the sample survey. This is not any example, because the sample survey is one of the most legitimated methods in use today. In the UK University teaching is assessed by the scores academic departments achieve in the National Student Survey. Our measures of crime are dependent on the British Crime Survey, which ‘corrects’ for the under-reporting of much crime to the police. The inflation rate is determined by responses to the Family Expenditure Survey, and so on.

The survey works by first sampling people. And then it works by asking them questions about matters of fact (like age, gender, income bracket, religious affiliation, lifestyle choices) and matters of opinion (such as the performance of the government, attitudes to abortion, or meat-eating). We might think of a survey as a bit like a methodological package deal. Like all package deals it has great virtues. It tells those who advocate it something about how people are planning to vote, or, say about their attitudes to global climate change. It’s also exceedingly useful because the basic methodological thinking doesn’t have to be done again. Surveying, after all, is a bog-standard method that has been industrialised and routinised. Its standards of quality control have been set, are widely agreed, and ethical guidelines are in place to police them.

At the same time, like all package deals, it is indeed standardised. You get to see parts of social reality in particular ways, while you don’t see things that escape the package. Or more strongly (and now we’re getting to the point we want to make about constituting), it may be that you get to perform certain kinds of social realities whilst not performing others. You’re actually bringing realities into being while you’re shutting down others

I think the framing here is confusing. But the underlying point is an interesting one. On the most basic level, people (sometimes) act on the basis of research and so what the methods open up and what they close down shapes the ensuing action. In so far as research methods helps shape how people see the social world then methods have consequences, including the oversights and blind spots latent to any particular method. As Einstein (allegedly) put it, "Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted". Things that matter may not show up and, conversely, things that don't matter may show up. However the authors are making a much deeper point than this. Research methods construct individuals as having capacities and properties. To ask someone about their choices presupposes their capacity to choose. To ask someone about their attitudes presupposes that their reported attitudes at one moment can tell us something about their real attitudes at another i.e. it assumes their relative stability. Methods also construct collectives as having certain properties:

Individuals are abstracted from a place and then taken as representatives of that spatially delimited place. A particularly important example is the modern nation. There is no independent nation which does not appropriate to itself the ability to conduct censuses and surveys on its national population delimited by its sovereign boundaries. It is not incidental that new and developing states see the capacity to conduct national censuses and surveys as central parts of their 'statehood'.
This process of abstraction constructs a ‘population’ composed of individuals. In measuring this (newly constituted) population, they become susceptible to intervention. Who needs what? Who can contribute what? The answers to these questions may have become far more complex but the questions themselves are still rather similar to the ones addressed by Servius in pre-Republic Rome. These abstractions enter into the lives of individuals in terms of the expectations placed upon them, the facilities offered to them and the interventions they are subject to. Consider for instance, the vast auditing apparatus involved in the tax system. Methods address subjects as beings with particular sorts of competencies and encourage them to respond as such: for example a life history interview makes a whole range of assumptions about the coherency of an individual’s trajectory and their capacity to recall it. These ontological assumptions may be explicit but they’re often implicit. The latter case makes it even more imperative that we analyse methods and extract these latent claims.

The point the authors are making is that research methods have to “pick and choose between different individual and collective realities”. Methods assume the stability of their object but they also contribute to the reproduction or transformation of that object by foreground certain aspects and backgrounding others. They offer this as an argument about all methods, as opposed to quantitative or qualitative ones. We discover things about the world through methods but we also act in and on that world in way that contributes to changes in the objects we study.

First we’re saying that they make discoveries about the world, and that those discoveries may surprise us. That’s why we conduct interviews and surveys and all the rest. But also, and counterintuitively, we’re saying that they also make more or less self-fulfilling assumptions about the character of the social world. And that in so doing they tend to constitute it, so to speak, below the radar in ways that we scarcely notice. In short, that they tend to produce what John Law calls collateral realities: that is, realities that we don’t think about very much but that we’re all busy reproducing as we go about the daily methodological work of gathering and analysing data ‘about’ the social

This suggests that studying methods as objects in their own right encompasses theory: what theoretical assumptions are loaded into methods, how do they condition the enactment of the method and the status ascribed to the results? It encompasses history, in so far as that studying the emergence of the methods, its advocates and purposes, helps us understand how that method came to be constituted in the way we find it. It involves technique, in the sense that we must attend to the operation of the method but without bracketing it off in the manner implicit in the 'methodological complex'.

The suggestion that research methods have a double social life seems uncontentious to me. The claims being made are that (1) methods are shaped by the social contexts in which they emerge and (2) methods in turn help shape those contexts. So research methods should not be understood as neutral tools developed in isolation from the social world they are orientated towards. Instead, we need to recognise the manner in which methods are shaped by that world and in turn contribute to its shaping. This involves rejecting what [11] Law, Savage and Ruppert describe as the 'methodological complex':

It assumes that methods are tools for learning about the social world. That this is what they are. End of story. We see this in methods courses. Juxtaposed and differentiated both from theory, and from substantive courses, these tell us about techniques for knowing the world. Which to choose. How to use them. How to analyse data. And how to present it.

There’s nothing wrong with this in certain senses: in social research indeed we need methods, and it’s not a bad idea to use those methods properly. But to think of methods in this way – simply as appropriate tools – involves consequences, some of them unanticipated, which create a baggage which can be heavy, even burdensome. We can distil this as ‘the methodological complex.’


This 'methodological complex' entails a particular division of labour for empirical research and a particular conception of how research can be undertaken. Theory, methods and substance are construed as distinct spheres of activity. Research questions are derived from theory, inviting the use of methods to address them in relation to distinct areas of substance. They also argue that this involves the ontological presupposition of a stable world, with definitive features that can be reported and turned into data:

We’re distinguishing between the world on the one hand, and representations of that world on the other. In this way of thinking it’s methods that bridge the gap. If we get those methods right then our representations will match the realities of the world. Tools have a better or worse capacity to do the job at hand. They will, as the philosophers of science say correspond to it; or at least (this is what the pragmatists say) they will describe it sufficiently well to be treated as accurate. This means that they are tools for handling the world. If we get them wrong then our accounts of reality, our data, will be flawed.
I'm hostile to any attempt to refute naturalism on this basis, arising from the obviousness with which these points can be reconciled to a critical naturalism (see Roy Bhaskar's Possibility of Naturalism). But I think it's important to explore them because the analysis seems entirely plausible to me, even if I'm sceptical about the prescriptions many would draw on the basis of them. I also agree that, as the authors put it, "oscillates between an objectivist concern with 'bias' and a humanist response which seeks refuge in an 'ineffable' human moment which somehow lies outside this purview of representational methods". Roy Bhaskar makes a similar point when he argues that positivism and hermeneutics share a view of natural science, framing reality in terms of a schism between matter and meanings with the former being the domain of the natural sciences and the latter the domain of the (hermeneutical) social sciences. In fact I find their analysis congruent with Bhaskar's, complementing it productively as a result of a slightly different focus:

By reducing issues to questions of technique, it allows different parties to come together around some kind of shared project, whatever their goals, values, orientations and identities. If we need to create random samples, then this is because it is important to avoid undistorted samples. If it is dangerous to avoid recruiting so-called professional participants to our focus groups, then this is because we're looking for people who are naïve and untutored in appropriate ways. If the ethnographer needs to avoid the outsiders who flock to talk with her when she first arrives in the field, then this is because she's on the lookout for gatekeepers or people at the core of the community rather than people with grudges on the periphery. We learn all these things in a million different versions in the hope of reducing bias; in the hope of knowing and describing the world accurately. This search to avoid bias and to use our 'tools' more effectively is pervasive, indeed ubiquitous. We share it. But it then also leads to an automatic response, from even the most positivistic researcher, about 'what is left out' by any specific method.

Their point is not that a concern to use tools effectively is wrong but rather that an exhaustive treatment of methods in these terms serves to preclude consideration of others aspects of methods that are salient to the practice of social research. Their project seeks to recognise that "methods are fully of the social world that they research; that they are fully imbued with theoretical renderings of the social world" and to think through the implications of this for how we understand them. These are the questions that we lose sight of if we focus on using tools effectively. As I understand their point, they accept that tools are used in the production of knowledge but argue that to understand these 'tools' we need to stop and consider them as objects in their own right. Their point is not a trivial constructionist one, such as to assert that 'methods are socially constructed' (well of course they are, would anyone argue that methods are natural kinds?) because to do so would enact precisely the oscillation between objectivism (there is a world out there with fixed properties which we use neutral methods to investigate with a greater or lesser degree of efficacy) and subjectivism (there are first-person human realities which are intrinsically beyond the purview of objective representation using neutral methods) – in critical realist jargon, I think they're proposing a systematic framework for investigating the transitive dimension of social science.
3. http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=95bu003LLIsC&pg=PA25&dq=census+rome&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KtVZVMXCcaP7AfqIHADg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=census%20rome&f=false
Tales From the Millennials’ Sexual Revolution (2014-12-05 08:00)

This intriguing but somewhat overstated [1]article in Rolling Stone Magazine contests that there’s a distinctively generational dimension to changing relationship practices, with millennials constituting “a generation that has been raised with the concept of sexual freedom and without solid guidelines for how to make monogamy work” leading some amongst them to embrace what’s been called ”The New Monogamy”:

Certainly, open heterosexual relationships are nothing new. Even the term “open relationship” seems like a throwback, uncomfortably reminiscent of free-love hippies, greasy swingers and a general loucheness so overt as to seem almost kitsch. But Leah and Ryan, 32 and 38, respectively, don’t fit these preconceived ideas. They’re both young professional types. She wears pretty skirts; he wears jeans and trendy glasses. They have a large, downtown apartment with a sweeping view and are possessed of the type of hip hyperawareness that lets them head off any assumptions as to what their arrangement might entail. Moreover, they see themselves as part of a growing trend of folks who do not view monogamy as any type of ideal. “There’s this huge group of younger people that are involved in these things,” says Ryan – an observation that seemed borne out of a monthly event called “Poly Cocktails,” held at an upstairs bar on the Lower East Side a few weeks later, in which one would have been hard-pressed to realize that this wasn’t your run-of-the-mill mixer (a guy who’d wandered in accidentally must have eventually figured it out; he was later seen by the bar grinning widely as he chatted up two women).

In fact, Leah and Ryan are noticing a trend that’s been on the radar of therapists and psychologists for several years now. Termed “The New Monogamy” in the journal Psychotherapy Networker, it’s a type of polyamory in which the goal is to have one long-standing relationship and a willingness to openly acknowledge that the long-standing relationship might not meet each partner’s emotional and sexual needs for all time. Or, more specifically, that going outside the partnership for sex does not necessitate a forfeiture of it. “I was at a practice where we would meet every week, six to eight therapists in a room for teaching purposes and to bring up new things coming into therapy that weren't there before,” says Lair Torrent, a New York-based marriage and family therapist. One of the things all the therapists had noticed over the past few years was “that couples – and these are younger people, twentysomethings, maybe early thirties – are negotiating what their brand of monogamy can be. They are opening up to having an open relationship, either in totality or for periods of time. I have couples that have closed relationships or open relationships depending on how they feel about the relative health of their relationship. It’s not so dogmatic.”


Cats are our captive domesticated aliens (2014-12-06 08:00)

This [1]wonderful article in Wired seeks to explain how, to their cats, any human being is "a huge, unpredictable ape". They are "our captives, domesticated aliens with no way of explaining their customs, or of interpreting ours"
and we don’t know how to listen to them:

You hear the unmistakable sound of claws on couch. You snap, shout, squirt water, and maybe even throw a pillow. It’s all futile, because eventually he’s at it again. Your cat isn’t ignoring you, Buffington says. He just doesn’t know how to connect your negative reinforcement with his behavior. This is because cats evolved as solitary hunters with little need for reading social cues, especially those for behavior modification.

“How the hell is your cat supposed to know that you’re yelling at him because you want him to stop scratching the couch?” Buffington says. Without the cognitive ability to connect your outburst to their scratching, cats see only chaotic aggression. “To the cat, you’re this crazy primate who is attacking him for no reason,” he says.

Instead of discouraging the act, you become an object of fear. What’s more, your cat becomes frustrated, and eventually stressed, because you constantly interrupt natural feline activities like raking his claws or jumping on something high. “Cats get sick when they want to express their natural behaviors and they can’t,” he said, and will continue to do the thing when you aren’t around.

Roy Bhaskar explains critical realism, dialectical critical realism, and metareality in less than 6 minutes (2014-12-07 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/TO4FaaVv0Is

Via the [2]ICCR blog

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/TO4FaaVv0Is

Sociology and, of and in Web 2.0 (2014-12-08 08:00)

In [1]this 2007 paper [2]David Beer and Roger Burrows suggest that "by the time you get to read this paper in its published form, even in the hypertextual pages of Sociological Research Online, what it describes may well have become part of the cultural mainstream". Seven years later, the paper certainly seems prescient, even if the eponymous term 'Web 2.0' has fallen out of use and the now ubiquitous phrase 'social media' fails to feature anywhere in the paper. There are many suggestions they made which can now be seen in much of the work increasingly conducted under the category of 'digital sociology':

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There are two issues here. First, we need to be inside of the networks, online communities, and collaborative movements to be able to see what is going on and describe it. If we take Facebook for instance, it is not possible to enter into and observe the network without becoming a member, providing an institutional email, entering some personal details and generating a profile. Therefore, in order to get some idea of users and their practices it is necessary to become a ‘wikizen’. The social researcher will need to be immersed, they will need to be participatory, and they will need to ‘get inside’ and make some ‘friends’. We will have to become part of the collaborative cultures of Web 2.0, we will need to build our own profiles, make some flickering friendships, expose our own choices, preferences and views, and make ethical decisions about what we reveal and the information we filter out of these communities and into our findings. Our ability to carry out virtual ethnographies will – by necessity – involve moving from the role of observer to that of participant observer.

4.4 A second issue is that once inside these networks we may explore the possibilities of using Web 2.0 applications, and particularly the interactive potentials of SNS, as research tools or research technologies (this is not necessarily limited to research into Web 2.0, SNS could be used to conduct research on any topic). Interviews and even focus groups could comfortably be conducted through SNS, either privately or in the open. Of course, there are a range of alternatives here. We can imagine the construction of virtual ethnographies accounting for these communities of users and their practices. Perhaps, more significantly, what we have, particularly with SNS, are vast archives on the everyday lives of individuals - a sort of ongoing codification of habitus - their preferences, choices, views, gender, physical attributes, geographical location, background, employment and educational history, photographs of them in different places, with different people and different things. These are open and accessible archives of (what was once thought of as sensitive) information that may be used to develop understandings of these people and to track out communities or networks of friends. These archives could be used to track preferences, connections, personal histories, views, friendships that may be data-mined, mapped, network analysed, discourse analysed and so on. There are possibilities then for tailoring innovative research strategies that take advantage of the interactive potentials of these new media and of the data that they hold.


However I wonder how widely social media has influenced the practice of those teaching sociology? There are certainly examples of using services like [4]twitter and [5]youtube for pedagogical experimentation and innovation. But how widespread are these? Beer and Burrows offer a few suggestions towards the end of their paper:

As a final note, once we have entered into these Web 2.0 applications it may also be worth giving some thought as to how they may be used to teach sociology. We can imagine here students building their own sociologically motivated mashups, collaborating to put together wiki’s on sociological topics, running seminars online through SNS, continuing to use SNS groups and profiles to informally discuss sociology or using folksonomies to tag and collate sociology content online (allowing students to create their own reading lists, or perhaps even using SNS as archived data sources on which to draw for short term research projects and dissertations). Of course, this may already be happening.

Does sociological teaching lag behind sociological research in its embrace of the possibilities which social media affords? Or are those utilising social media in their teaching practice not receiving the recognition they deserve? Are innovations failing to diffuse because they’re lodged within existing departments and networks rather than feeding into a more pervasive shift in our understanding of what it is to learn sociology and how sociology can be taught? Is this a matter of teaching repertoires which needed to be expended to take account of these new possibilities? We’d love to know what you think and are particularly keen to feature any experimental uses of social media in teaching that you’d like to tell our readers about.

2. [http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/5/17/beer.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/5/17/beer.html)

There’s a whole emerging world of [1](also networked learning) that incorporates a good deal of social media use. It’s not specific to sociology but sociologists have certainly been involved, myself included as part of our [2]efforts.

2. [http://altlab.vcu.edu/](http://altlab.vcu.edu/)

The myth of ‘us’ in a digital age (2014-12-09 08:00)

In his [1]A necessary disenchantment: myth, agency and injustice in a digital world, Nick Couldry argues that transitions in media infrastructure are facilitating the emergence of a new myth of collectivity:

A new myth about the collectivities we form when we use platforms such as Facebook. An emerging myth of natural collectivity that is particularly seductive, because here traditional media institutions seem to drop out altogether from the picture: the story is focused entirely on what ‘we’ do naturally, when we have the chance to keep in touch with each other, as of course we want to do.


This is coming to replace an older sense of media as the point of access to the centre of society. The reliance on media organisations to access flows of content helped constitute an understanding of centre and periphery, with the media facilitating access to the (mythical) centre of value, knowledge and meaning for the majority who experienced themselves as peripheral to it. The rapid diffusion of the internet, mobile computing and social networking engenders a new form of mediation, by ‘us’ rather than content producing media organisations, which helps shatter this previous myth of the ‘mediated centre’ and substitute it with a vision of human networks, animated by natural
sociability, dispersed across national boundaries. As I understand Couldry’s argument, the power of this new myth derives in part from its displacement of the old: once our reliance on the old media organisations is seen to be shattered, our sociability is unbound, revealing a naturally co-operative inclination towards discussion, creation and sharing (see for example Clay Shirky’s theory of ‘cognitive surplus’). Obviously, the perception is erroneous and it serves vested interests: media organisations haven’t ceased to be party to communication, either in the sphere of content-production or facilitating communication, it’s only that their role has shifted with a change in the logic of their competition. This obfuscation serves the interests of platform providers in particular, as they drift towards being seen solely in terms of the provision of infrastructure rather than as corporate actors with increasingly vast lobbying operations.

Couldry’s concern is that “we must be wary when our most important moments of ‘coming together’ seem to be captured in what people happen to do on platforms whose economic value is based on generating just such an idea of natural collectivity”. Social media platforms present themselves as providing new enablements for and eliminating old constraints upon ‘natural collectivity’: their business model simultaneously relies upon monetizing the crowd which they have encouraged to gather, profiling behaviour in a manner susceptible to inference and allowing the growing data mining industry to do further work to this end. Their concern becomes less a matter of reaching as many people with adverts as possible (on occasions of mass attention driven by shared spectacle) but reaching the right people all the time. This is why ‘big’ data analytics are so tied up in the broader transformation of the media: the process itself demands innovation in order to extract the value it promises to generate. However this genuine computational challenge, as well as the economic interests which partly drive it, stand obscured behind the ‘myth of big data’ which Couldry takes aim at:

Myth works, as I’ve often argued following Maurice Bloch (1989) and Roland Barthes (1972), through ambiguity: through sometimes claiming to offer ‘truth’ and at other times to be merely playful, providing what, in the George W. Bush era, was called ‘plausible deniability’, but here at the level of claims about knowledge claims! So Mayer-Schonberger and Cukier, on the one hand, say big data bring ‘an essential enrichment in human comprehension’ (2013: 96). They go further, proposing a large project of ‘datafication’ that involves quantifying every aspect of everyday phenomena to enable big data analysts to find its hidden order: the result will be ‘a great infrastructure project’ like Diderot’s 18th-century encyclopaedia: ‘this enormous treasure chest of datafied information . . . once analysed, will shed light on social dynamics at all levels, from the individual to society at large’ (2013: 93–94, emphasis added). The world too will look different: ‘we will no longer regard our world as a string of happenings that we explain as a natural or social phenomenon, but as a universe comprised essentially of information’ (2013: 96, emphasis added). On the other hand, when the moral consequences of acting on the basis of ‘big data’ arises – for example, arresting people for offences they are predicted to commit but haven’t yet – they back off and say that big data only provide probabilities, not actualities, and worry about ‘fetishizing the output of our [data] analysis’ (2013: 151)

It’s the final points which will be so crucial to understanding the trajectory of ‘big data’ in a social world rapidly acclimatising itself to these forms of intervention. The mythical sociability of ‘us’ stands in sharp contrast to the quantity and quality of the interventions we are potentially susceptible to in virtue of our participation in (digitised) social life: we stand exposed, fragmented and scrutinised before a diffuse and inscrutable power. Under these circumstances might we come to cling to the myth more tightly than ever for the security it provides? As Couldry points out in relation to big data, “we too are involved in its reproduction, supplying information (to government and countless other collectors, including social media platforms) about what we do, as we do it, allowing that information to supplant other possible types of information about ourselves, what we say, and how we reflect”. He
goes on to call for an ethical engagement with these questions and the implications that they have for the social order:

The CEO of a big-data-based sentiment analysis company, sounds reasonable when he says that ‘if we’re right 75 % to 80 % of the time, we don’t care about any single story’ (quoted Andrejevic, 2013: 56). But if the big data model works by equating our only forms of social knowledge with such probabilities, then we have already started organizing things so that the single story – your story, my story – really doesn’t matter. That raises fundamental questions about individual voice, and the way voice is valued in our societies.

He doesn’t develop the point but it strikes me there’s a contradiction between the myth of ‘us’ and the myth of big data which could provide a focal point for resistance. In reality, the networked ‘us’ makes ‘big data’ possible. However symbolically, the reality of big data serves to negate the imagined promise of the ‘us’: can we reclaim an impulse towards networked sociality and co-operation in a way that resists corporate capture? Could the very force of the myth of ‘us’ be something that can be drawn upon to mobilise resistance to a world in which, as Couldry puts it, “corporate interests and the state seek to know us through big data”?


Linky Friday 189: Tattooed Introversion | Ordinary Times (2016-10-21 14:59:59)
[...] When is the concept of us a fiction created by Big [...]
Any new media is first experienced as an additional and problematic mediation to our lives. We can’t help but contrast it with some imagined conversation between two people standing in a field as representing the original, unmediated and natural form of communication. A technology, by contrast, is always regarded as something artificial that imposes itself between the conversationalists and mediates that conversation. (pg. 5)

This licenses the nostalgia and despair for what’s lost that can be seen in the work of someone like Sherry Turkle, in which the (unmediated) world of face-to-face relationships has been replaced by the (mediated) world of digital connections. From an anthropological standpoint however “there are no unmediated, pure relationships” (pg. 3) to be dissolved by digital communications. There has always been material culture and, it follows from this, human relationships have never been exhausted by other human beings. Nonetheless, they seek to acknowledge that people do change in relation to technology but not in a way that can be described as becoming ‘more or less human’ (with the weirdly zero-sum relation between humanity and technology which that implies). Their concern is “to find a means of understanding the impact of new technologies that allows us to consider these as radical changes in consciousness and other basic modes of life, but without this being seen as either an increase or decrease in our essential humanity” (pg. 11).

Their theory of attainment seeks to do this by accounting for ”how technology becomes an ordinary aspect of being routinely human” (pg. 13). They begin from the observation that “people who have access to a new media are at first usually concerned to use this technology to facilitate things they already had been trying to do, but had up to then been thwarted by the lack of means” (pg. 11); their focus is on ‘latency’, the situational frustrations, which can be found within any group. Technological innovation should be understood in terms of the “situation of incompleteness with respect to what we want to be or do” which invariably characterises the human condition (pg. 11). New technologies initially facilitate things people wanted to do but couldn’t – or perhaps couldn’t easily due to constraints entailed by prior analogues – with these inclinations predating the utilisation of the technology for things people didn’t know they wanted to do. Their interest is in when these technologies cease to be seen as innovations, facilitating frustrated desires before offering unimagined possibilities, instead becoming part of our background understanding of what it is to be human:

It is the next phase, when this facility becomes the merely taken-for-granted condition of what people simply assume as an integral aspect of who they are, which is the realisation of what we are calling attainment. The ability to write is a mark of attainment because we now tend to view those without that ability as though they lacked some fundamental property of being an ordinary human. Originally writing was an achievement, but by now it is considered a necessary condition. For many people, being able to type on a computer, or to drive a car, or speak on a telephone has become a similar mark of attainment. Webcam will serve as an example of this process because of the sheer speed with which it passes from an ideal we had aspired to, to a mundane technology we taken for granted. (pg. 12)

This account conceives of technology as facilitating latent capacities of human beings. As I understand it, they offer the notion of ‘an attainment’ as a way to conceptualise those capacities which rely upon a technological apparatus that we now take for granted: our technological innovations realise latent capacities and, in doing so, change what it is to be human but in a way that recognises this capacity for change as something intrinsic to humanity. This implies “a kind of latency in the human condition, but not merely a litany of pre-given imagined abilities planted in evolutionary time and then coming into being with new technology” (pg. 14):

There was no gene for writing that was frozen until the invention of the pen. Technology in and of itself transforms capacity and changes what human beings can do or can be envisaged as doing. The last of the
four stages defined by Miller and Slater in examining technological change, which was called the expansive potential, concerns those aspirations that can only now be imagined thanks to these developments. Technology creates as well as realises latency. (pg. 15)

This theory of attainment offers a framework for analysing the trajectories through which technological innovations are adopted and how the adopters change in the process. It can be usefully applied to the study of individual cases or to much wider social units. This is a view of humanity “that incorporates its own potential for change” (pg. 12) and I think this is crucial: it avoids a view of infinite plasticity, where we are reshaped by technical tools, but also one of inert quiddity, where we remain stubbornly resistant to technologically induced change. It recognises the properties of technology, without leading us into the trap of either seeing the uses to which a technology is put as intrinsic to the technology or as irrelevant to the technology.


Devouring your data (2014-12-11 08:00)

As someone who only a year ago was drowning in the mountains of interview transcripts that I was (stupidly) somewhat surprised to find that longitudinal qualitative interviewing had produced, this post by patter offering advice on ‘devouring your data’ really struck a chord. Read the full post in full [1]here:

You’ve read hundreds of books. You’ve waded through archival material. You’ve got mountains of surveys, folders full of transcripts, notebooks stuffed with barely legible field notes, and rather more photographs than you initially intended. Now what? How is it going to be possible to convert all of this material into something sensible? Where do you start? What is it you don’t know about data analysis?

It’s not at all uncommon to feel deeply worried about getting started on analysing all your material. Thinking about what it might take to make something out of the pantechnicon of paper and digital documents produces deep chasms of doubt, a fug of anxiety and/or a crisis in self-belief.

Getting through this stage can be really, really tough. They don’t often say that in the methods books. It all looks rather simple and straightforward on the written page. Well, I’m here to tell you that too many of the books gloss over the messy reality that is beginning to make something out of your research stuff. It’s daunting.


The Sociology of Living and Dying Optimally: Towards a Transhuman Necropolitics (2014-12-11 08:16)

[This post is inspired by a twitter exchange with Mark Carrigan over[1] this post, which reveals Foucault’s latent neo-liberal sympathies. Emilie Whitaker and I then had an exchange over this exchange, in which she coined ‘transhuman necropolitics’, capturing what I’m talking about here.]

Ever since I became interested in ‘Humanity 2.0’, it was clear that in the future the life/death distinction would be up for grabs. As a participant-observer in many events involving self-described ‘post-’ and ‘trans-’ humanist thinkers, what the US anthropologist Ernest Becker 40+ years ago dubbed ‘the denial of death’ is very much a bone of contention. Both biologists and sociologists have remarked that humans are striking in the fanfare attached to the birth and death of individual members of its species. The Abrahamic religions raised this species tendency to a fevered pitch, the secular legacy of which is canonized in the meaning of the word ‘humane’ (which Jeremy Bentham extended to animals).

At the same time, there remains the pagan legacy of the Greco-Roman world that treats life and death in a more generally resigned fashion. Their punchline is that we shouldn’t invest too much emotional energy in matters that, in the final analysis, are simply ‘natural’, in the sense of indifferent to whatever we might think or wish. Thus, the ‘good life’ and the ‘good death’ are about avoiding extremes in behaviour that can lead to needless suffering in oneself and others. Here personal experience is accorded an overriding role in ethical judgement: If you or others feel pain as a result of what you do, then it’s probably wrong.

But, for better or worse, we still live in a more Abrahamic world, notwithstanding the best efforts of atheists. In this world, life is treated as a project of self-realization – to be sure, just as much in matter as in spirit. Life and death are, at least in principle, voluntary and rational. Life is not something into which we are thrown – ‘abjection’, as those touched by Heidegger and Lacan like to put it. Now, why should anyone take literally the idea that life and death are in our own hands? Our having been created ‘in the image and likeness of God’ remains the most straightforward justification. Everything else either tries to replace the deity or deny the validity of the question.

Accordingly, our lives can be seen as sites for doing in small form what God does in ultimate form – namely, create the best possible world. The ethic of efficiency and productivity to which Max Weber drew attention in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is the most influential outgrowth of this sensibility. In this context, life is seen as an ‘inheritance’ in both economic and biological terms, out of which the heir is supposed to make something greater. If you fail, then it is your fault and the law – both positive and natural – will deal with you accordingly.

In light of the actual history of capitalism, we are prone to understand Weber’s thesis as justifying an ethic of productivity, where ‘productivity’ is equated with ‘endless production’. But ‘productivity’ is ultimately about doing the most with the least – i.e. our attempt to simulate God’s creatio ex nihilo. In that case, productivity may be achieved by knowing when to stop producing, which is to say, when we’re likely to get diminishing returns on each additional investment of effort. Of course, this can apply to living itself. Once we take this prospect seriously, then we can start talking about an optimal life and death. To strengthen such ‘optimality’ intuitions, we might consider how what one does later in life has the potential to detract value from what one did earlier.

To be sure, we already do something like this when we pass post-mortem judgements on the lives of ‘creative’ people. The paradigm case is the English Romantic poets, some of whom died at 30 and others at 80. The reputations of the longer-lived poets (Coleridge, Wordsworth) suffered, whereas those of the shorter-lived poets (Keats, Shelley) benefitted. The former are stigmatized for having become more reactionary, whereas the latter are presumed to have possessed unfulfilled promise – even though with age they too might have become reactionary. Closer to home, Max Weber was spared the reputational fate of his rival [2] Werner Sombart, who lived twenty years longer than Weber, just in time to endorse the Nazi regime. In our own time, the radical glow that continues to surround Michel Foucault is abetted by his death in 1984, just before the neo-liberalism toward which he was already inching came...
to acquire a hegemonic grip on the world-order. Had he lived another twenty years, Foucault might have come to be known as the French Nikolas Rose, an unabashed theorist of the neo-liberal self.


What is social policy? (2014-12-12 08:00)

That’s the question answered in this excellent video from the [1]Social Policy Association.

IFrame: [2]//player.vimeo.com/video/85823294

There’s another two that have been produced as part of this series:
Why is my curriculum white? (2014-12-13 08:00)

This powerful video was produced by the UCL student union. They explain the background to the project [2]here:

In the NUS Black Students Campaign National Students Survey, it was found that, '42 per cent did not believe their curriculum reflected issues of diversity, equality and discrimination.'

In addition, it found that, '34 per cent stated they felt unable to bring their perspective as a Black [BME] student to lectures and tutor meetings. A running theme through both the survey and focus group data was a frustration that courses were designed and taught by non-Black teachers, and often did not take into account diverse backgrounds and views'.

As a result, the NUS proposed a set of recommendations, including the notion that, 'institutions must strive to minimise Euro-centric bias in curriculum design, content and delivery and to establish mechanisms to ensure this happens. Universities Scotland has published an excellent example of why and how this can be done in their race equality toolkit, Embedding Race Equality into the Curriculum'.
Social Theory Re-Wired (2014-12-14 08:00)

We just discovered this interesting resource produced by Routledge: [1]Social Theory Re-Wired.

A rich collection of web-based materials—including interactive versions of key texts, open spaces to write and reflect on readings, biographical sketches of authors, and dozens of supplementary sources—that transports social theory from its classic period to the vibrant and complex world of now.

It’s worth signing up to have a proper look around. Upon closer inspection, it doesn't quite live up to its initial promise - for instance the 'interactive readings' aren’t all that interactive. But they deserve credit for exploring the potential forms that a project like this could take and there’s certainly things of value on the site.

London in data maps (2014-12-15 08:00)

This great feature on the BBC News website collects 12 data maps which represent different characteristics of London. See the full feature [1]here to explore the maps (the one embedded below shows commuter routes into London)

A new collection of data maps of London reveals a city heaving with information. A quick quiz question for you. How many football pitches could fit inside the Greater London boundary? Well, 220,000 of them would fill the space between Cockfosters and Croydon, Heathrow and Hornchurch.

That statistic is just one of thousands of facts and figures contained in a new book about London, which according to its creators is the most data-heavy capital of the world.


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**Sociological Science and the future of the qualitative sociology (2014-12-16 08:00)**

This interesting reflection on Org Theory asks what the success of the innovative open access journal [1]Sociological Science, which leans heavily towards quantitative sociology, means for the future of qualitative research within the intellectual landscape of the discipline. Read it in full [2]here:

So I should start this post by first saying that I’m thrilled that Sociological Science exists. It is terrific that a group of folks did the hard work — and I imagine it’s been a lot — of putting together a high quality, open access journal that sidesteps the protracted review process we all love to hate, that evaluates quality rather than importance, and that values replication as a scientific contribution. I’ve been impressed by the caliber of the articles and love that they’re getting covered in places like [3]Salon and [4]Daily Kos.

In fact, it’s only because Soc Science has clearly been successful, and I think will become even more so in the future, that this is even worth bringing up: What does it mean for qualitative sociology?
Although the editorial board of Soc Science leans heavily quantitative, the journal explicitly states that it "does not privilege any particular theoretical or methodological approach." And it has indeed published a qualitative article, the interview-based "[5]So You Think You Can Dance? Lessons from the U.S. Private Equity Bubble," by Catherine Turco and Ezra Zuckerman. But that's one of 27 articles published to date. (Apologies if I’m missing any.)


For those not familiar with the journal, it takes a proactive approach to addressing some of the many difficulties which plague academic publishing. In this sense, it’s an incredibly exciting project and should be celebrated. But for those who work at an intellectual distance from Sociological Science, it’s hard not to share the concerns that Elizabeth Popp Berman outlines in the Org Theory article.

_Sociological Science_ is an open-access, online, peer-reviewed, international journal for social scientists committed to advancing a general understanding of social processes. _Sociological Science_ welcomes original research and commentary from all subfields of sociology, and does not privilege any particular theoretical or methodological approach. It is:

- Open access: Accepted works are freely available, and authors retain copyright
- Timely: _Sociological Science_ will make editorial decisions within 30 days; accepted works appear online immediately upon receipt of final version
- Evaluative, not developmental: Rather than focus on identifying potential areas for improvement in a submission, editors focus on judging whether the submission as written makes a rigorous and thoughtful contribution to sociological knowledge
- Concise: _Sociological Science_ encourages a high ratio of novel ideas and insights to written words
- A community: The journal’s online presence is intended as a forum for commentary and debate aimed at advancing sociological knowledge and bringing into the open conversations that usually occur behind the scenes between authors and reviewers

_Sociological Science_ is published by the Society for Sociological Science, a non-profit organization.


3. http://www.salon.com/2014/11/04/study_women_are_less_likely_to_tell_pro_life_friends_about_their_abortions/
Last week [1]The Telegraph newspaper reported that a college in Brighton were planning a field trip to observe “working class culture” in action at a football match:

“To anyone else, a trip to a football match would merely be a chance to see some sport played.

But for sociology students at one sixth form college, it has been billed as an educational opportunity to see racism, homophobia, hyper masculinity and working class culture in action.

Varndean College in Brighton is offering AS-level sociology students the chance to watch Brighton and Hove Albion take on the “notorious” Millwall Football Club at their home team’s American Express Community Stadium.

A poster for the trip on Friday says those involved will be able to see “gender performance” in action, including types such as “the new lad” on show.

There will also be a chance to observe “issues around sexuality, race and ethnicity,” “women challenging gender norms” and to “even talk to football fans,” it promises.
Former students familiar with the local area having attended school and sixth form near to Millwall FC criticised this proposed trip:

Edwin Magombe:

...This is ridiculous, I really hope a group of Millwall fans turn up to the Sociology class in Brighton unannounced to observe the natural habitat of the misguided hipster and snobbish lecturer who could never quite make it beyond lower middle class... seriously what’s wrong with people?

Frank Frost:

"Seems like the Varndean College still hold onto their past grammar school mentality. I'm a Millwall season ticket holder, Black, in the middle class, no criminal record, never experienced racism in or around the stadium, and I go with my sister. The course director should apologise. This approach is just breeding the next wave snobbery to wash over Brick Lane and Camden.

Dr Garth Stahl, currently lecturer at University of South Australia's School of Education, but who previously taught at a 11 to 18 school in southeast London where many of the students were Millwall fans:

"Brighton's Varndean College offering students the chance to observe the crowds of the "notorious" Millwall Football Club where they may possibly observe "racism" and "homophobia" certainly presents an interesting venture into experiential learning. Unfortunately such a venture - depending on how the pedagogy is delivered - runs the risk of pathologizing white working-class culture further for these AS-level sociology students. Students are already exposed to a ubiquitous pathologization of the white working-class which is ever-present in UK culture. This is partially fueled by a morose pop culture fascination with social class and "poor" behaviour as seen in the popularity of recent television shows such as Channel 4's Educating Essex. Varndean College's efforts are reminiscent of the 2007 controversies concerning Glenalmond College in Perthshire where students from privileged backgrounds made mock videos of Etolians 'chav hunting' young men in sporting apparel. While Varndean College students may gain a more nuanced study of "lad culture" and gender performativity upon their trip to Millwall, I would also hope their teachers push them to examine such behaviours with a certain criticality. Considering working-class culture as both highly contextual and historically constituted is essential when considering why certain behaviours are validated through social collectiveness and why they continue to be of fascination to certain outsiders".
Oliver (2014-12-16 17:04:40)
The poster was very clumsy but the idea of taking young sociologists to a football match (or an opera house, or anywhere they might not usually go) is pretty good one - the problem is that it seems they've been prepped on what to expect to see when they get there.

Zuleyka Zevallos (2014-12-17 13:29:55)
This is an interesting critique. The sociology of "doing gender" certainly requires direct observation. This collection of responses raise an interesting point about access to participants in field research and participant observation. Working class events are more public and accessible (free or relatively inexpensive for a field trip or to carry out field research). Sociology mostly studies working and middle classes mostly because of our discipline's concern with socio-economic disadvantage, and yet there's something to be said about access and power. As researchers we often have a higher level of education than the people we study, or we otherwise have a relatively greater socio-economic status than our interviewees. Studying the upper classes through ethnography is harder. We don't have easy access. It would be harder to organise a group to study a private school soccer match or it would be more expensive to go to the opera or some other cultural event associated with elites. Professor Michael Gilding made this point in his book "Secrets of the Super Rich." He felt the power imbalance shifted in trying to organise interviews with people on the Business Review Weekly "Rich List." It was tough to get them to agree to be interviewed for sociological research, mostly because they're not used to it and as he found, because they are distrustful of academia. The interviews were hard to manage as a result (though data were interesting).

Why your mind is not a computer (2014-12-17 08:00)

This is an engaging exploration of an idea that has endured for decades: the notion that we can understand the mind as a particular sort of computer. It’s an intriguing mix of panelists and one of many great discussions that are being produced by ia.tv - Dreyfus’s contribution is particularly illuminating, arguing that Artificial Intelligence is a research programme founded on a philosophical mistake that goes back to Kant’s philosophy. Philosophers have long since given up on the notion that the mind could be understood as a computer.
40 years on from the film 2001 many of its predictions have come to pass - videophones, flat screens, permanent space stations. Yet we have no equivalent to HAL, the intelligent machine, or anything close. Is it possible that the human mind is a radically different thing from a computer?

**The Panel**

Behavioural scientist Paul Dolan, artificial intelligence expert Margaret Boden and, live from Paris, philosopher Hubert Dreyfus join forces to confront the mind’s greatest metaphor.
Translating the Social Sciences (2014-12-18 08:00)

This episode of the Office Hour’s podcast interviews Emily Bazelon about the challenges of translating the social sciences:

In this episode we speak to Emily Bazelon. Emily is former senior editor at Slate, a New York Times Magazine staff writer, and the Truman Capote Fellow for Creative Writing and Law at Yale Law School. We asked Emily to join us today as she is one of the most visible translators and disseminators of social science research.


Listen to the [2]podcast here. It’s interesting that Bazelon accepts jargon (“it’s a form of short hand”) in academic writing, seeing it as an inevitable feature of the genre. The task of ‘translation’ would likely be approached rather differently if she saw jargon as unnecessary affectation that could be dispensed with if only academics would deign to write properly. She offers lots of other interesting insights about how this translation works: the difficulty of evaluating methodology, the value of finding ‘good explainers’ to act as gatekeepers and the way in which conflicts can help clarify the terms of a complex debate.

See [3]this post is an exploration of translation from a different perspective. What role will the expanding academic blogosphere have in mediating this process of translation? It argues that academics can contribute to success of this translation by participating in the blogosphere and producing writing which mediates between the academic world and the media.

3. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/01/10/academic-blogging-both-and-rather-than-either-or/

Cognitive triage in higher education (2014-12-19 08:00)

A few months ago I wrote about the notion of ‘cognitive triage’ put forward in [1]Kevin Roose’s book about young recruits on Wall Street. He suggests that the intensity of the situational demands placed upon them necessitates attending only to the most immediate and concrete concerns, pushing out all other considerations which might lead them to reflect upon their current circumstances:

Today, as before the financial crisis, it’s not uncommon for a first-year IBD analyst to work one hundred hours a week—the equivalent of sixteen hours a day during the week, then a mere ten hours on each weekend day. Which is not to say that these twenty-two-year-olds are actively doing one hundred hours’ worth of work every week. In fact, many sit around idly for hours a day, listening to music or reading their favorite blogs while they wait for a more senior banker to assign them work. (These drop-offs are never pleasant, but they’re worst when they happen at 6:30 or 7:00 p.m. as the senior banker is leaving for the day, giving the analyst a graveyard shift’s worth of work before he or she can go home and sleep.)
The compartmentalization phenomenon turned out to be bigger than Jeremy and Samson, and bigger even than Goldman Sachs. As I interviewed dozens of young analysts at firms across the financial sector, I heard the same kinds of answers to my questions about morality and ethics: “I don’t know, I never really think about it.” “I’m just trying not to fuck up.” “Dude, I’m so far away from anything like that...” Entry-level analysts, it seemed, were so routinely exhausted, and so minutely focused on their day-to-day tasks—on pleasing their bosses, nailing every page of their pitch books, and avoiding getting in trouble—that they often avoided thinking about the big picture. It was a sort of cognitive triage, and daily concerns always took priority over long-term, large-scale worries. Still, there was no doubt that these worries existed.

What I’m curious about is whether we can see cognitive triage of this sort within higher education. As people rush through an academic term, struggling to keep on top of their commitments, how do their time horizons change? If your focus goes no further than tomorrow’s deadline (or the one after that) then what are the implications of this for your capacity for serious scholarship and considered reflection? What about the quality of your life?

1. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Young-Money-Streets-Post-Crash-Recruits/dp/0446583251

The ‘boardroom liberalism’ of Barack Obama (2014-12-20 08:00)

It can seem as if American politics is significantly far to the right of party politics in the UK. But is this an accurate description? It seems to convey a linear political spectrum in which party politics in the USA is simply shunted to the right of that in the UK. This [1]New Republic article discussing the senior Whitehouse advisor Valeria Jarrett offers an interesting insight into the complexity underlying this apparently simple difference:

They emanate from the worldview that Jarrett and Obama share — call it “boardroom liberalism.” It’s a worldview that’s steeped in social progressivism, in the values of tolerance and diversity. It takes as a given that government has a role to play in building infrastructure, regulating business, training workers, smoothing out the boom-bust cycles of the economy, providing for the poor and disadvantaged. But it is a view from on high — one that presumes a dominant role for large institutions like corporations and a wisdom on the part of elites. It believes that the world works best when these elites use their power magnanimously, not when they’re forced to share it. The picture of the boardroom liberal is a corporate CEO handing a refrigerator-sized check to the head of a charity at a
celebrity golf tournament. All the better if they’re surrounded by minority children and struggling moms.

Notwithstanding his early career as a community organizer, Obama, like Jarrett, is fundamentally a man of the inside. It’s why he put a former Citigroup executive and Robert Rubin chief of staff named Michael Froman in charge of assembling his economic team in 2008, why he avoided a deep restructuring of Wall Street, why he abruptly junked the public option during the health care debate, why he so ruthlessly pursues leakers and the journalists who cultivate them. It explains why so many of his policy ideas — from jobs for the long-term unemployed to mentoring minority youth — rely on the largesse of corporations.

It’s the boardroom liberal in Obama who gets bent out of shape over criticism from outsiders, despite having once urged progressives to press him the way civil rights activists like A. Philip Randolph pressured Franklin Roosevelt. He is a president profoundly uncomfortable with populist rhetoric. He prefers to negotiate behind closed doors, as he did on the stimulus, health care, and deficit reduction, rather than wage a state-by-state political campaign to force concessions. Except for a handful of moments over the last six years — like when the administration tried to pass a second stimulus bill known as the American Jobs Act — Obama has rarely tried to mobilize public opinion in any sustained fashion. He has been consistently slow and half-hearted about taking unilateral action.


The agency moment (2014-12-21 08:00)

This [1]thoughtful New York Times column by David Brooks reflects on what he terms “the agency moment”:

I’ve been thinking about moments of agency of this sort because often you see people who lack full agency. Sometimes you see lack of agency among the disadvantaged. Their lives can be so blown about by economic disruption, arbitrary bosses and general disorder that they lose faith in the idea that input leads to predictable output. You can offer job training programs, but they may not take full advantage because they don’t have confidence they can control their own destinies.
Among the privileged, especially the privileged young, you see people who have been raised to be approval-seeking machines. They act active, busy and sleepless, but inside they often feel passive and not in control. Their lives are directed by other people’s expectations, external criteria and definitions of success that don't actually fit them.

So many people are struggling for agency. They are searching for the solid criteria that will help them make their own judgments. They are hoping to light an inner fire that will fuel relentless action in the same direction.

[...]

Agency is not automatic. It has to be given birth to, with pushing and effort. It’s not just the confidence and drive to act. It’s having engraved inner criteria to guide action. The agency moment can happen at any age, or never. I guess that’s when adulthood starts.


It’s easy to see why sociologists are cautious about this sort of language - it can easily entail a simplistic individualism in which structural constraints are obscured and ‘agency’ is moralised. However there’s no reason why this needs to be the case and there’s nothing intrinsic about this issue which means it should be treated as the sole domain of psychologists. In fact there’s a strong case to be made that we misrepresent “the agency moment” if we abstract if from its social context.

Steve Fuller (2014-12-21 08:13:52)
It’s good to see that David Brooks has reinvented Kant’s essay on Enlightenment for the 21st century! Enlightenment = the state of intellectual adulthood, thinking for yourself, in the sense that you are happy to own what you think, regardless of the consequences.

Cyber athletics (2014-12-22 08:00)

The US government now grants “athlete visas” to gamers and competitive gaming is shown on the ESPN channel. This fascinating New Yorker article explores the rise of the ‘cyber athlete’ - read it in full [1]here:

“It's not a sport,” John Skipper, the president of ESPN and, by extension, the emperor of contemporary sports, has declared, referring to gaming in general. “It's a competition.” He added, “Mostly, I'm interested in doing real sports.” That "mostly" was an acknowledgment that the network has nonetheless begun hedging its bet against a cyber-athlete insurgency. In July, ESPN2 aired a half-hour program previewing an annual tournament for a game called Defense of the Ancients 2, or Dota 2, thereby enraging football and basketball fans who would have preferred round-the-clock speculation about off-season roster moves, and who vented on Twitter: "None of these people are anywhere near athletic,” “Wtf man. This is our society now,” "WHAT THE HELL IS HAPPENING ON ESPN? . " and so on. Meanwhile, the winners of the Dota 2 tournament took home a total of five million dollars.
A month earlier, in June, I had my own first exposure to gaming-as-sport, at an ESPN event: the X Games, in Austin. It was an inadvertent discovery. I had gone to see the skateboarders and BMXers, so-called action-sports stars, and found that many of them were incredulous at being asked to keep company with joystick jockeys. For the first time, X Games medals were being awarded for Xbox proficiency. There was a pleasing irony in the circularity of the kvetching. Here were traditional outsiders, some of them outspoken victims of childhood bullying, who, twenty years ago, were dismissed by the jock establishment for bringing their alternative fashion sense and disaffected miens to an Olympic-style competition. And now, secure with their corporate sponsors and honorary square jaws, they, in turn, were sneering at a new breed of outsider arrivistes: nerds!


The cultural politics of brunch (2014-12-23 08:00)

This is rather interesting if you can get past the grumpiness with which it’s written. It’s worth reading the article in full [1] here:

But now that I have a young daughter, brunch is completely impractical. By noon I’ve been up for hours and am ready for an actual lunch — although that meal is an increasingly endangered species on the weekend. For most restaurant owners, serving brunch is mandatory. It’s a revenue stream that also exposes restaurants to diners who might become regular customers. Even our local Thai restaurant insists on topping every dish with a poached egg on weekends and offering an ambiguously Asian mimosa.

There’s something more malevolent at work than simply the proliferation of Hollandaise sauce that I suspect comes from a packet. Brunch has become the most visible symptom of a demographic shift that has taken place in our neighborhood and others like it. As rents have gone up, our area has become unaffordable to much of the middle class, and to young families who want more than two bedrooms — or can’t even afford one.

This leaves an increasing number of well-off young professionals who are unencumbered by children — exactly the kind of people who can fritter away Saturday, Sunday or both over a boozy brunch. Our once diverse neighborhood now brims with the homogeneity of an elite university. (Julian Casablancas, I imagine, will be disappointed to discover the same crowd of white people brunching in Phoenicia, Hudson or Beacon upstate.)

“Brunch,” said Mr. Micallef, the author, over the phone, “is a visible sign of the changes that sometimes feel out of our control.”

For me, having a child — and perhaps the introspection that comes with turning 40 — made me realize what most vexes me about brunch: Once the domain of Easter Sunday, it has become a twice-weekly symbol of our culture’s increasing desire to reject adulthood. It’s about throwing out not only the established schedule but also the social conventions of our parents’ generation. It’s about reveling in the naughtiness of waking up late, having cocktails at breakfast and eggs all day. It’s the mealtime equivalent of a Jeff Koons sculpture.


The wisdom of sociology (2014-12-24 08:00)

Can Sociology be life changing? That’s what Sam Richards argues in this thought provoking TED talk which explores how the discipline can lead us to reimagine our circumstances and see those connections which we otherwise miss - it reveals hidden commonalities and the vast network of relations within which we are all embedded:

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/gWD6g9CV_sc

How can an academic discipline like Sociology be life changing? This talk suggests one way by exploring how sociologists teach us to re-imagine our personal problems and ourselves. In the end, we learn that even in our most private and seemingly isolated moments, we may be more connected to others than we realize.

1. file://www.youtube.com/embed/gWD6g9CV_sc
The sociology of christmas cards (2014-12-25 08:00)

In this article from Trans-action (now published as Society) Sheila K. Johnson reflects on the practice of sending and receiving christmas cards, arguing that it is an archetypical case of a phenomenon susceptible to sociological explanation:

Anyone who has ever composed a Christmas card list has pondered the inclusion and exclusion of names on the basis of a variety of fairly explicit considerations. Shall I send so-and-so a card this year, since he didn't send me one last year? Or, I must send so-and-so a card this year, even though he probably won't send me one, because I want to be remembered by him. Like the decisions we make about whom to vote for, we like to think of these choices as purely individual, rational matters. Nevertheless, sociologists have demonstrated that, regardless of how and why we choose a candidate, voting behavior can be analyzed as a function of one's socioeconomic status, mobility aspirations, ethnicity and religious affiliation. Similarly, it seems likely that the patterns in which people send and receive Christmas cards can also be explained in terms of certain social characteristics, especially their social status and mobility aspirations.

Reflecting upon her own christmas cards, Johnson observes a clear pattern where those cards that are reliably reciprocated tend to be sent to those with whom she and her husband were on equal social footing with (family members, professional friends) whereas those that weren't reciprocated had an aspirational dimension to them, as was the case with cards the couple received but did not themselves reciprocate:
People with regard to whom we were, in sociological terms, "upwardly mobile," such as professional acquaintances who might someday prove useful or important or social acquaintances whom we wished we knew better. By the same token, the cards we received and to which we did not reply came from individuals who wanted to cultivate us—some of my husband’s graduate students and office employees, the liquor store, the hairdresser and foreign scholars who obviously expected to visit the United States at some time in the future.

Her suggestion is that the percentage of cards sent and received by an individual function as an index of their present status and future "mobility aspirations": to what extent are people ‘below’ you trying to cultivate you as a future social relation and to what extent are you trying to do the same thing with people 'above' you? However Johnson goes on to observe that sending cards is a practice which in itself tends to mark someone as middle class, with "high managerial and professional people" in particular being "the Christmas card senders par excellence". She makes a plausible case as to the structural reasons for this, as a combination of the geographical dispersion of friendship networks that are inflected through each party’s respective trajectory up their various occupational ladders.

Intriguingly, she recounts the negative reactions from her friends while undertaking the small piece of work with which she explored this practice. Rejecting claims from others that there "is no upward sending or downward receiving in our family: it’s strictly reciprocal", she points to the feeling of obligation as in itself socially structured: in so far as there are people to whom they felt they must send christmas cards (regardless of whether they are reciprocated) then hierarchal relations likely obtain. Conversely, receiving cards that were not reciprocated reveals one’s own status in relation to (likely) subordinates - a fact that is often occluded by the panicked response it provokes in some people:

As for people who receive cards they were not expecting—that is, cards being sent upwards to them—and who then shamefacedly rush out on Christmas Eve to mail the forgotten sender one of theirs, they are simply insecure in their status position. Imagine the president of Chase Manhattan Bank receiving a Christmas card from the janitor and saying remorsefully, "Oh, my God, and I didn’t send him one." Yet thousands of people do roughly the same thing when they receive a card from someone who looks up to them.

It’s a fascinating (and short) article and you should read it. Though maybe not today, I say writing this on the 23rd November... we’re very organised here. Happy Christmas!
Three ways to speed write (2014-12-26 08:00)

This [1]typically helpful post by patter suggests three ways to speed write - it suggests that the relationship between speed and slowness in academia isn't necessarily zero sum. Slow planning can facilitate fast writing:

The usual way to write fast is to 'speed write'. This often requires the use of timed sessions where the goal is to write as much as possible in the allotted minutes. Another approach to producing a fast first draft is to just literally empty your thoughts onto the page – sometimes referred to as vomiting words, a term I don’t much like for obvious reasons. Barbara and I are using a third approach – fast writing on the basis of a slow-cooked plan and a lot of pre-preparation. […]

The plan we have for our chapters might seem to someone else to just be a relatively short, numbered bullet point list. Two mere pages of bullet points. However, the bullets must be understood as a
set of reminders of the very lengthy conversations we've already had about what is to be covered and what should go where. Our two pages are the framework that now guides what we do. While we might change the order of a few points, or add, remove or shift the odd one here or there, this numbered list is basically a road map to our book.


Transhumanism as the Heir of Ethical Modernism – or Against Virtue (2014-12-26 13:47)

Anyone who takes transhumanism seriously is almost by default an 'ethical modernist'. The position is easiest to state in terms of the history of philosophy. It is someone who believes that Kant and Bentham in the late 18th century set the framework for constructing a theory of ethics. To be sure, they are associated with quite different, typically opposed positions: 'deontology' and 'utilitarianism'. However, they share a few salient features:

1. Morality is not something that one acquires from others and then reproduces; rather it is something that one legislates for oneself and others, and ethics is its rationalization.
2. 'Rationalization' is understood as akin to the process that science performs on our empirical understanding of the world.
3. Armed with the right ethics, the moral agent acquires powers that had been previously reserved to God.
4. The fact that ethics contradicts ordinary morality is at most a public relations problem and quite possibly a mark of its validity and hence an inspiration to self-discipline.

When I first studied ethics in the 1970s, the Cold War was very much in the air. Perhaps unsurprisingly, ethical modernism was the only game in town – and Existentialism was its irreverent popular front. (Anyone who sees Existentialism as opposed to Kant and Bentham fail to appreciate their massive common ground.) Back then, it was all about taking sides, taking responsibility and hoping for the best but expecting the worst. But this was before 1989, when the USSR demonstrated that it was incapable of holding up its side of the world-historic tension.

Since this historical backdrop remains strangely muted in the academic literature, I need to resort to more familiar academic benchmarks. From this perspective, Alasdair MacIntyre's conversion to Roman Catholicism was the tipping point that unleashed the revanchiste movement against ethical modernism known as 'virtue ethics' (and its sidekick, 'virtue epistemology'), with branch offices in the left-of-centre world, courtesy of Martha Nussbaum and Michael Sandel. This movement, which is arguably the dominant trend in moral philosophy today, involves a systematic denial of the above four theses in the name of what it advertises as a more 'humane' and even 'humanistic' approach to our moral life, typically rooted in some conception of a species-wide 'human nature', which has been given a slightly less essentialist spin in recent years under the rubrics of 'capacities' and 'capabilities'.

Virtue theory takes human life as it already is – understood in light of our 'natural history' – to have arrived at largely satisfactory norms of conduct. From that standpoint, both Kant and Bentham appear to have operated with hyperbolic standards that underestimate the strength of our sentiments, our cognitive limitations, and perhaps most importantly, the enduring nature of our traditions and institutions, which have not required the services of a Kant or
To be sure, ethical modernism always faced opponents who saw morals in more broadly ‘ontological’ terms, i.e. as intimately connection to some relatively fixed conception of human nature that can be accessed through intuition and/or biology. Indeed, Aristotle is rightly seen as the patron saint of contemporary virtue theory. For their part, ethical modernists see ‘human nature’ as no more than a platform for building an ethical life, which goes beyond the default patterns of social relations. Thus, ethics doesn’t aim merely to reflect humanity’s state of being but to improve it.

Logically speaking, virtue theory collapses a distinction that ethical modernists uphold, namely, between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’. However, I don’t mean to accuse virtue theorists of fallacious reasoning. On the contrary, their view harks back to the pre-modern period, when people believed that a moral life was led by discovering one’s place in the natural order (a la ‘natural law’), what the great historian of modern ethics Jerome Schneewind gamely called the ‘divine corporation’. It followed that people tailored their aspirations to their capacities, secure in the knowledge that their capacities – however meagre on their face – did indeed serve a larger purpose. In this respect, life was about figuring out your job description before you’re retired and sent to Heaven.

Ethical modernism is not about dissolving the divine corporation but about replacing God with humanity as its CEO. In that case, the corporation may be due for a structural overhaul, both in terms of its overall ends and the means by which they are achieved. Thus, biologically given capacities may be enhanced or diminished, depending on the corporate strategy – and, in principle at least, any human should be able to make such a judgement and all should be able to agree to it. Indeed, this principle is present – in somewhat different guises – in both Kant’s and Bentham’s accounts of rationality. And while both acknowledge that our epistemic and practical powers fall short of the divine, nevertheless the ethical character of our actions is located specifically in our willingness to own those actions, i.e. take responsibility for them, regardless of the consequences.

The step from Kant and Bentham to transhumanism can be seen in their common attitudes, which can be in turn contrasted to that of the virtue theorist, in at least two respects:

1. The meaning of ‘ought implies can’: This Kantian slogan is usually read to mean that people can’t be obliged to do things that they are incapable of doing. To a virtue theorist, it refutes the superhuman feats of will and calculation that ethical modernists would require of us. In other words, we need to downsize our moral aspirations. However, the correct way to read this slogan, which pushes Kant toward transhumanism, is that we need to become the sort of people who can live up to the correct ethical principles. Kant was not only the philosopher of human dignity but also of species-level moral progress, a theme further developed by Hegel and Marx. For their part, Bentham and his followers have been happy to offload the utility calculations to mechanical procedures if they prove too taxing to ordinary human minds. These are the precursors of today’s transhumanist talk about ‘moral enhancement’ via the right neurochemical cocktail or gene therapy.

2. The role of science in ethics: Virtue theory is often presented as part of the general ‘naturalistic’ turn that has been slowly taking place in philosophy over the past 50 years. However, the exact relationship between ‘naturalism’ and science is rarely made explicit. In the case of virtue theory, the emphasis seems to be placed on the actual content of, say, social or biological science, especially as a check on the more outlandish aspirations of the ethical modernists. In terms of evolutionary theory, virtue theorists are more partial to Darwin’s natural historical approach than the lab-based molecular genetics approach that has dominated in the post-war period and fuels transhumanist imaginaries of a ‘Humanity 2.0’. This latter position locates the ethical modernists, who are ultimately more aligned with the rational and experimental character of science than the actual findings of science. Thus, they stress the reversibility of facts under changing conditions and the need to harvest untapped potential: To simply let the past dictate the future is to abdicate moral responsibility and thereby behave unethically. In that case, perhaps the
Kantian slogan should read instead: ‘can implies ought’?

A good genealogy – or perhaps better an autopsy! – of virtue theory will no doubt cover many cases – like that of MacIntyre himself – in which someone starting from the hard left becomes disillusioned with Stalinism’s efforts to shoehorn people into ideology and then gradually loses faith in human beings, either individually or collectively, to determine their own destiny. In the end, they end up as neo-conservative Neo-Thomists, often in spite of themselves. I have called these people [1]’down-wingers’, and I’m afraid they’re not going away soon. In fact, my guess is that self-avowed people of the left who rest content with criticizing the current neo-liberal order without proposing a positive alternative are likely to be lured by the siren call of virtue theory.


The Sociology of Civilizational Collapse (2014-12-27 08:00)

How do we envisage our future? To ask this question usually invites reflections upon personal biography. More rarely does it address ‘our’ in a civilizational sense - I use the term loosely here to refer to the totality of organised human social life which, in contemporary circumstances I would take to be unitary (in the sense of global capitalism rather than an underlying species bond) but would not assume this has always been true. In this sense, speaking of ‘civilizational collapse’ does not entail the extinction of the human species (though neither does it rule this out) but rather the unravelling of the existing social order: not a change in its state but the collapse of its capacity to change states. I’m using a processual term because in the absence of a discrete event bringing about the extinction of the species this collapse would inevitably be a process and potentially an extremely slow one. I’m very interested in the constraints upon our capacity to envisage such a collapse and suggested a few points in a [1]blog post earlier this year:

• We tend towards a generic assumption of the durability of social structures.
• We tend even more strongly towards a generic assumption of the durability of social formations (i.e. assemblages of social structures)
• We tend to miss the origins of social formations in the intended and unintended consequences of deliberate action, as well as the interactions between them.
• We tend to reason inductively and, in doing so, miss the possibility that the future will be radically distinct from the past.
• Even if we deny it intellectually, we tend towards exceptionalism in how we see social formations which are deeply familiar to us.

Reading Tony Benn’s diaries I was intrigued to find that he was plagued by thoughts of impending collapse towards the end of his life. As he records on the 2nd November 2011:

I happened to see a television programme, when I was having my meal in the evening, about the Maya culture in Mexico. I had absolutely no idea that the temples they built were bigger than the pyramids; 1,500 years ago there was the most tremendously civilised society in Latin America, which simply disappeared, went under the jungle, and it does make you wonder whether ours might not do the same. There’s no absolute law to say that our civilisation will survive for ever.

That final line is a very succinct statement of what I was trying to get at with the notion of ‘the epistemology of civilizational collapse’: there’s nothing certain about the sustained survival of a civilisation and yet we assume that there is. A few years from his death (20th November 2008) Tony Benn described the nightmares that plagued him:

I have nightmares every morning. I am overwhelmed by the feeling that the world - Britain and the world - is going to collapse through shortage of oil. I visualise circumstances where people at the top of tower blocks would find that the lift couldn’t be run because there was no energy; doctors couldn’t climb twenty-four flights to stairs to look after them if they were ill; and the whole of society comes to an end.

There’s something interesting about a state of affairs where these ideas are largely confined to nightmares or to fiction. I’m sure there are people studying this (I’d be fascinated to find that there aren’t) but its relative absence from public discourse is surely susceptible to both sociological and psychoanalytical explanation. To clarify, I don’t think that much of the discourse surrounding climate change reaches the level of ‘collapse discourse’ of the sort I’m proposing: it’s technocratic on the one hand and individualised on the other.

I’m interested in exploring cultural representations of collapse as a means to understand the epistemology and sociology of collapse. I think that cultural representations of collapse are often post-hoc, elaborating a vision of the rebuilding of human society after a collapse has taken place. Whereas I’m fascinated by what the process itself would be like and how it would be understood by those within the collapsing social order. In spite of its many flaws, this was what I loved about the film Interstellar:

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0vxOhd4qInA]

In fact I would have much preferred this film if it hadn’t had any of the science fiction and had just explored the transformed social order in which a "caretaker generation" seek to sustain the viability of an ever more inhospitable earth: I was gripped by the representations of a social order in which ascriptive identity had returned, agriculture dominated the American economy and the intellectual horizons of the society were narrowing into survival. I’m currently gripped by [3]The Massive - a sociologically rich exploration of life post-collapse:

[4]
Perhaps when I talk about 'collapse' what I really mean are the conditions leading to dystopias? In a post earlier this year, Dan Hirschman put forward the idea for a course on real dystopias as a grim parallel to Erik Olin Wright’s work on real utopias. He suggested that “Each week or sub-unit would cover a different real dystopia, ideally with a guest lecturer who could speak to the underlying science or politics of the particular kind of dystopia.” These are the topics he suggested:

1. Antibiotic resistant infections
2. Widespread droughts and massive disruptions of the food supply connected to climate change
3. The dominance of the patrimonial super-rich
4. The Player Piano dystopia (“a relatively small clique of engineers built and maintained the machines, while a large class of unemployed workers lived lives of aimless poverty”)
5. The Surveillance state dystopia
However I think it’s important to distinguish between states of collapse and dystopias. Representations of dystopias often presuppose the ecological viability of the underlying context, projecting it forward so as to conceive the future as a product of solely social processes. Representations of ecologically induced collapse often have a converse absence of substantive social content:

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w _1VnGp8Lls]

Whereas I’m interested in the relationship between the two. Ecological decline doesn’t necessitate collapse in the sense in which I’m using the concept but it does make it ever more likely. I’m wondering if some general philosophical propositions (the epistemology of civilizational collapse) could be explored through an analysis of fictional representations (the representation of civilizational collapse) to shed more light on the character of social processes (the sociology of civilizational collapse)?

1. file://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/20/the-epistemology-of-civilizational-collapse/
2. file://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/20/the-epistemology-of-civilizational-collapse/

A very interesting article on a topic close to my heart! Isn’t it odd how we seem pathologically incapable of imagining a collapse in our own civilisation? In spite of seeing the collapse of the Soviet Union in our own lifetime, it just never seems feasible that it could happen to us. In fact, even something as seemingly-all pervasive as global capitalism is precarious. I speculate here that we have less than 100 years left in our current system: http://kerrysmallman.wordpress.com/2014/-12/19/the-end-of-history-revisited/ I happened upon this article from 2001 about globalisation and it could have been written yesterday: https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/162/27684.html . We take it for granted that we live in a hyper-Globalised world, when in reality, it is mostly just financial institutions which are globalised. The lived reality of everyday existence is, for most people on the planet, very local. For example, only 10 % of people in the UK are foreign-born. It could be the fact that the gatekeepers of knowledge live in large metropolitan centres - and the fact that global capitalism is our economic system - that makes us believe we live in a globalised society. That's just one example, I guess, of our tendency to skew towards cosmopolitan, urban visions of reality. Many of the most likely distopian/future scenarios for us in the UK would actually involve movement away from cities (and rivers) towards the uplands. A starting point for imagining the new society would be somewhere as humdrum as Huddersfield or Barnsley, I would conjecture. The rule of law is deeply ingrained in the British psyche and the silent majority are white, lower middle-class suburbanites. Also, it's worth looking at Ethnographies of gypsies, travellers, ravers, or perhaps middle-class caravaners to see how ad-hoc societies are created and perpetuated. And perhaps remembering that those most unfashionable of institutions - the family and the village - might well make a come-back.

Sociological Imagination (2015-01-09 15:44:47)
really interesting, thanks!

That's very interesting - I think you're underestimating mobility in the UK (and elsewhere) but I agree there's a corresponding tendency to over-estimate it and assume that the situation of some groups can be generalised to the population at large. I think there's a dystopian novel waiting to be written about residual human life post-collapse in Huddersfield... many more thoughts, look forward to hopefully talking on Tuesday.
I just came across a passage by James Meek in which he describes being drawn to,

the obscure realm of events that are too fresh for history, but too old for journalism; the murky gap of popular perception that covers the period from two years ago to about twenty-five years back, in which events are well remembered but patterns not easily perceived.

I’m struck by the realisation that so much of the sociology I’ve been drawn to (Giddens on late modernity, Bauman on liquid modernity, Castells on the information age, Rosa on social acceleration etc) similarly concerns itself with this ‘murky gap’ between current affairs and historical inquiry. It’s also the domain of ‘contemporary history’ but I’m drawn to social theoretical engagements because of their concern to discern those patterns “not easily perceived” in spite of the manifold inadequacies which characterise these bodies of work. Perhaps those inadequacies stem at least in part from the ‘murkiness’ inherent in this gap?

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From What about Me?: the struggle for identity in a market-based society by Paul Verhaeghe:

Enron, an American multinational, introduced this practice at the end of the previous century, dubbing it the ‘Rank and Yank appraisal system’. The individual performances of its staff members were continually monitored and contrasted. On the basis of the results, one-fifth of its employees were sacked each year, but not before they had first been publicly humiliated by having their name, photo, and failure posted on the company website. It wasn’t long before total paranoia reigned and almost everyone was falsifying their figures. The widespread fraud led to a court case and the bankruptcy of the corporation. Despite that failure and the criminal practices associated with it, the Enron model is still in wide use. HR managers at multinationals are expected to apply the 20/70/10 rule. Twenty out of every hundred employees are the high flyers, seventy provide the critical mass, and ten should be given the boot, even if sufficient profit and growth has been achieved. Five minutes of Googling the search terms ‘Rank and Yank’ and ‘20/70/10 rule’ throws up hundreds of hits of company documents praising this approach, invariably referring to Spencer’s ‘survival of the fittest’ and Dawkins’ ‘selfish gene’.

Within the span of a single generation, however, this situation changed dramatically, with the result that, nowadays, university staff, especially if they are young, feel that they have very little influence
over their careers. Instead, they are compelled to dance to the music of an invisible administration. They work flat out, but don’t find their jobs satisfying. They no longer identify at all with the organisation, and solidarity among colleagues has largely disappeared. This is the academic version of the Rank and Yank system, and the consequences are the same: production continues to increase on paper; an atmosphere of personal frustration, envy, fear, and paranoia is created; and creativity is effectively stifled. Anything that doesn’t fit within rigid parameters doesn’t count anymore. Thinking out of the box — that precondition for innovation and discovery — has become impossible.

Paradoxically enough, this quality-monitoring system fosters fraud, just as in the case of Enron, ranging from the Stapel affair in the Netherlands to the fraud with PhDs at German universities. (Not so long ago, a Dutch professor of social psychology, Diedrik Stapel, was an authority in his field, renowned for his extensive empirical research and numerous publications in top journals. But his career came to an abrupt end when it turned out that he had fabricated and manipulated data on a massive scale. Nearly every newspaper found an explanation for such practices in the enormous pressure to publish, and the hyper-intense competition for jobs and promotion. In Germany in August 2009, mass fraud with doctoral titles came to light, in which various universities and hundreds of professors were involved.)

My first thought when reading this was that this system hasn’t yet come to higher education and that it might still be avoided. However this evening I found myself thinking back to this case, in which David Browne, Senior Associate on the Employment Team for SGH Martineau, suggested that even “academically brilliant” staff who damage the brand through “outspoken opinion” should be disciplined in order to set an example for the rest. For ‘Rank and Yank’ in Higher Education, perhaps even the “high flyers”, those who are valuable to the institution, aren’t safe unless they conform to a narrow range of behaviour consistent with the ‘brand’.

1. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/what-about-me-struggle-market-based-ebook/B00L3NT842/B00IO8KZHS

An Agenda for Digital Sociology (2014-12-30 08:00)

I see Digital Sociology as an open-ended integrative project, concerned to assemble the disparate strands of sociological engagement with digital technology within a more or less shared intellectual space: not in the sense of striving for unanimity but rather to ensure that disagreements at least tend to play out in terms which make the basis of intellectual disagreement clear and at least in principle leave all parties aware of the methodological and theoretical consequences which hinge upon them. In this sense, I advocate the need for what Nicos Mouzelis calls a theoretical lingua franca: “a flexible vocabulary with no foundationalist pretensions, which can help sociologists establish bridges between their own and other disciplines, as well as between competing social science paradigms” (1[pg. 9]).

My belief is that the initial work towards this end can be achieved through the assembly of divergent traditions with convergent interests within spaces conducive to ‘building bridges’: face-to-face, print and digital fora in which sociologists undertaking work that seeks to describe and/or explain the ‘digital’ in the broadest sense of the term enter into dialogue with one another. In such spaces, we have dialogical rather than dialectical interaction, such that as Richard Sennett describes it “through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another” rather than seeing disagreement as an obstacle to the
achievement of common ground that must be overcome ([2]pg. 19). Digital Sociology is both what emerges from these spaces and the assembly work required to ensure their success.

The ‘theoretical lingua franca’ of Digital Sociology is something that has to be built up from within them as a hermeneutical project that seeks to elaborate upon the basis of agreement and disagreement. The point is not to overcome distinctions but rather to ensure that they “do not become dichotomtic essences” as Mouzelis puts it in his discussion of sociological theory more broadly ([3]pg. 9). Through such conceptual work, we ensure the possibility of reclaiming those points of agreement which tend to get lost because scholarly debate frequently proceeds through the articulation of disagreements. In the most mundane sense possible: what are we trying to do? What is (digital) sociology for? There are likely to be disagreements here as well – for instance between those who argue for a “renewed interest in sociological description” ([4]4.8) and those concerned to explain ‘why this is so rather than otherwise’ – but there’s an enormous amount to be gained by entering into productive dialogue about the reasons for these disagreements e.g. perhaps an explanatory project for digital sociology is reliant upon the “renewed emphasis on good – critical, distinctive and thick – sociological descriptions of emergent digital phenomena” that Beer and Burrows advocate ([5]1.1).

The understanding of Digital Sociology I’m advocating is one which rejects intellectual provincialism. I like the account Pablo Boczkowski and Ignacio Siles offer of this as “a sort of intellectual insularity (or provincialism) that privileges a certain inwards-looking commitment to a particular paradigm, set of ideas, or mode of inquiry without considering work done in other fields that might significantly enrich or transform it”. Instead they argue for an intellectual cosmopolitanism that “promotes the crossing of territorial scholarly quadrants in the study of media technologies to rethink assumptions and normalized processes” ([6]pg. 58). For Digital Sociology to be cosmopolitan in the sense would be for it to be proactively and openly engaged with the wide range of intellectual trends which could be referred to as a ‘digital turn’ (but probably shouldn’t be): digital humanities, digital anthropology, digital geography, social informatics, data studies, web science, data science, software studies, platform studies and game studies.

However what distinguishes it from the “emerging, fundamentally transdisciplinary, computational literacy” of which Lev Manovich and others claim the existence is a conviction in the continued value of the intellectual resources carried within sociology as a discipline. It should be engaged with computationally but it shouldn’t be exhausted by it. To have a theoretical lingua franca, a multifaceted conceptual vocabulary through which ‘internal’ disagreements can be translated into the same intellectual topology, helps guard against this assimilation or exhaustion – by elaborating upon a language which is often tacit, it becomes easier to translate into the language of other disciplines and sub-disciplines in a way that’s both effective and minimises semantic loss. It allows distinct, though not necessarily compatible, elements of the sociological tradition to be articulated in relation to digital phenomena (e.g. the sociological imagination, structure and agency, critical reflexivity, self and society) and for novel insights and approaches found in other disciplines to be contextualised in terms of these intellectual resources. This avoids the tendency for substitution, in which an existing element is replaced with a novel one, instead facilitating combination in which existing elements and novel ones are combined in order to produce something new and distinctive (which can then in turn be contextualised in terms of more established intellectual resources).

To advocate combination rather than substitution doesn’t entail intellectual stasis because existing intellectual resources are modified through this engagement with novelty – the point is to get beyond both substitutive and additive approaches to intellectual development. This applies as much within the discipline as beyond it. The methodological opportunities presented by digital data should be brought into dialogue with the existing theoretical resources of the discipline rather than taken as an occasion for their replacement. In doing so, we help avoid a preoccupation with (digital) technique by using an awareness of these new techniques for producing data about the social world as a basis upon which to enrich our understanding of the possibilities for description, explanation and intervention that our overall toolbox potentially affords. I see this as a case of expanding and refining the methodological repertoires of sociology rather than as anything which could be seen as a ‘new’ way of doing sociological
research (even though some very new and innovative techniques may be incorporated into the aforementioned repertoires).

One of many things I like about Deborah Lupton’s work on Digital Sociology is her appreciation of the many strands of activity woven into Sociology which have sought to engage with digital technology and its embedding in social life: ‘cyber sociology’, ‘the sociology of the internet’, ’e-sociology’, ‘the sociology of online communities’, ‘the sociology of social media’ and ‘the sociology of cyberculture’ etc ([7]loc 309). Drawing these strands together within the integrative spaces of Digital Sociology helps illuminate what are distinctively sociological approaches to these phenomena that other disciplines also attend to: digital devices and their associated infrastructures, how they are shaped by their context & contribute to shaping it, the activities transformed & facilitated by them etc. The point is not to assert the superiority of sociological understanding but to bring it into dialogue with the insights and findings of other disciplines in a mutually enriching way. Another is Lupton’s focus on the digital transformation of professional practice (as just one form of activity transformed by digital technology). The context within which sociologists work is being transformed and this entails both challenges and opportunities – I see attempts to rethink sociological practice as an integral part of Digital Sociology: for instance Live Sociology and Punk Sociology.

We need to avoid pursuing innovation for its own sake but nonetheless creatively explore the opportunities that digital devices offer for creating and communicating sociological knowledge differently (in the process overcoming the evaluation of the former as more important to the discipline than the latter). Partly this is a matter of Digital Scholarship by Sociologists but we should also be critical of the context in which these changes are being pursued, their constraints and enablements, the agendas subsumed into transformations later presented as inexorable (the ‘tsunamis’ and ‘avalanches’ of digital transformation). In this sense, I hope that Digital Scholarship by Sociologists leads to Digital Public Sociology but I think this requires work. My enthusiasm for digital engagement comes about because I think it offers opportunities to circumvent constraints of work within the academy, facilitating an open and engaged scholarship that avoids the axiomatic opposition of commitment and scholarship that was critiqued by Bourdieu, leading to greater participation within public life and collaboration with groups pursuing agendas of social amelioration outside the academy. It offers an opportunity to, as David Beer puts it, create a sociology which “will draw people into its debates, into its ideas, and into its findings, all of which are likely to provide alternative visions of the social world” and to deploy sociological knowledge in collective projects of achieving those alternative worlds.

At the risk that this post grows ever longer, here’s a summary of what I’m suggesting should be included within Digital Sociology as an intellectual project:

1. **Building an online space for digital sociology** within which debates can take place, announcements can be circulated and ideas can be shared. I suspect a group blog could serve this function, with a defined series of regular contributors and a process for applying to this contributing group to join the list, as well as an editorial process for accepting guest posts.

2. **Building a print space for digital sociology**. By which I mean an open-access journal & so ‘print’ in a figurative sense really. Ideally it would be attached to the aforementioned online space in order to overcome some of the limitations inherent in academic journals. I think a book series would also be beneficial so that future monographs on digital sociology can be drawn into dialogue with one another.

3. **Building face-to-face spaces for digital sociology**. A regular conference that brings digital sociologists together – ideally rotating internationally and digitally enhanced to the greatest possible extent given available funding. Also a regular conference that brings digital sociology into dialogue with cognate disciplines – I’m currently organising something on the ontology of digital technology (keep July 18th 2015 free!) that could provide a model for how this could work, albeit with an expanded remit. Also a regular seminar series that would incorporate both the inwards facing and outwards facing aspects suggested here – again digitally enhanced to overcome the geographical restrictions inherent in something like a seminar series.
4. **Identifying and disseminating innovations in sociological practice** including but not limited to the generation and analysis of digital data. Using digital devices in any aspect of the research process – the possibilities, challenges and questions encountered through such applications. This goal could be incorporated within any of the three points suggested above in various ways (perhaps a more informal 'show and tell' format as well as more traditional training) as well as pursued separately through the production of digital training resources and the organisation of more traditional training workshops. I’d also include coding within this category - in the sense of formal training but also informal networks of people who are training themselves in their spare time.

5. **Conceptual work elucidating the multi-faceted language of digital sociology**: the objects of digital sociology, the ontology of digital devices and infrastructures, the meta-theoretical ambitions of digital sociology. For instance the event mentioned above about the ontology of digital technology will (hopefully) serve this purpose, as is the work I’m starting on social media and social normativity that seeks to contextualise the claims made about social media in terms of existing frameworks within which sociologists have made claims about social change. These are just examples that reflect my own interests though & I think there are *many* forms this could take.

6. **Elaborating the methodological repertoires of digital sociology** through high quality research into particular substantive topics that uses new techniques and forms of digital data to address important questions relating to digital devices and their associated infrastructures, how they are shaped by their context & contribute to shaping it, the activities transformed & facilitated by them etc.

7. **Creating an infrastructure for digital public sociology**: running training, creating resources and developing networks that help us get good at doing public sociology (including though not limited to the utilisation of digital tools). Creating spaces which gather an audience (e.g. Sociological Imagination, Discover Society, The Society Pages) and facilitate interventions that are irregular yet still effective. These spaces also make it easier to get new projects off the ground.

1. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Sociological_Theory_What_went_Wrong.html?id=vSY46yhNEfUC\&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Sociological_Theory_What_went_Wrong.html?id=vSY46yhNEfUC\&redir_esc=y)
2. [http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=aKc9W7fn2AMC\&printsec=frontcover\&q=richard+sennett+together\&hl=en\&sa=X\&ei=Hd96VLK3HuO07ga2-JE4\&redir_esc=y\#v=onepage\&q=richa](http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=aKc9W7fn2AMC\&printsec=frontcover\&q=richard+sennett+together\&hl=en\&sa=X\&ei=Hd96VLK3HuO07ga2-JE4\&redir_esc=y\#v=onepage\&q=richa)
3. [http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Sociological_Theory_What_went_Wrong.html?id=vSY46yhNEfUC\&redir_esc=y](http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Sociological_Theory_What_went_Wrong.html?id=vSY46yhNEfUC\&redir_esc=y)
5. [http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/5/17.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/12/5/17.html)

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**On the Future of Face-to-Face Academic Interaction, or Why We Need to Talk about Gemeinschaft** (2014-12-30 11:45)

Oh, how I hate *Gemeinschaft*! But as with so many things one hates, there are some deep things worth cherishing, preferably in some other form. For the benefit of non-sociologists, this German term belongs to a foundational moment in the discipline, namely Ferdinand Toennies' 1887 *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, which is normally translated as 'Community and Society'. But this is a weak translation in terms of what's at stake in the distinction.

3166
Toennies was trying to contrast the scope of social life as based on hereditary bonds and on voluntary association – i.e. can you leave your village without losing your rights? Nowadays we are likely to respond to this in terms of 'vertical' versus 'horizontal' forms of social organization. But at the time, 'determined' versus 'free' was more operative. In any case, the distinction is most obviously grounded in the law, Toennies' original discipline. Weber and other sociologists (often with much the same legal training) followed suit, resulting in the stereotypes we have today of what distinguishes 'pre-modern' and 'modern' forms of life.

I say 'stereotypes' because Toennies packed perhaps a bit too much into this distinction. In particular, I want to focus on the alleged connection between Gemeinschaft and face-to-face interaction. Toennies' original point was that sheer regular acquaintance with someone can foster many different sorts of social relations, which together stabilize society as a whole. Of course, he was talking about physical co-presence, as when people spend most of their lives in the same place. However, nowadays remote face-to-face interaction is possible via Skype and its undoubtedly improved successors in the future. From that standpoint, we seem to be heading to the sort of future that Marshall McLuhan projected fifty years ago, whereby we all live in one 'global village'. In that case, what is the added value of your being physically co-present with someone, especially if you come from far away and will have to use up scarce energy resources to get there?

Thanks to the usual academic narcissism, this question is periodically posed in terms of conference attendance,[1] with the Pharisees amongst us in full flow about how much harm is caused by flying. To be sure, I am the first to admit that the performance of most academic conference speakers does little to enhance whatever value they already provide in their writings, audios and videos. But I am more concerned about wasting people's time and money than precious environmental resources. In that spirit, we might reserve face-to-face interaction in the full sense of physical co-presence to moments where we want/allow people to act with maximum discretion in a fixed setting, with all the powers and liabilities that that entails. This is the sense of face-to-face that operates in the diplomatic and business spheres – except that those encounters are normally conducted privately and with small numbers present.

The idea here, however, would be for academics to operate in this manner in public, as staged events. In other words, the robust face-to-face character of social life that many sociologists still hanker for in the idea of Gemeinschaft would be restricted to a kind of spontaneously performed theatre, whose degree of indeterminacy would be comparable to that of a sporting event. Those unwilling or unable to operate in that mode can resort to some more formalized mode of self-presentation that reduces the uncertainty of the situation but equally reduces the need for them to be physically present. In that case, Skype and YouTube beckon.

In practice, I have in mind a talk presented as a pitch to an audience whose attendance would be based on some familiarity with the speaker's likely moves. The pitch itself would be shorter than a full talk, say, only 20 minutes, but the argument would be expected to be both developed and validated in the course of interacting with the audience over a period, say, of the same or double the length. A goal may be advertised in advance, specifying what might count as a success for the speaker – i.e. where agreement might be expected to be reached with the audience on that occasion. As with sporting matches, these events may also be recorded and scrutinized for what went right and wrong. If budding academics were encouraged to aspire to this sort of treatment, they might start spontaneously thinking of themselves as 'public intellectuals'.

Call for papers: Causal Inference and Mechanism-Based Explanation: Friends or Foes? (2014-12-31 08:00)

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ANALYTICAL SOCIOLOGISTS

We are happy to announce the call for papers for the 8th Analytical Sociology Conference – June 12 and 13, 2015 in Cambridge, MA.

Theme: "Causal Inference and Mechanism-Based Explanation: Friends or Foes?"

Organizers:
Mary Brinton, Filiz Garip and Robert Sampson
Department of Sociology, Harvard University

CALL FOR PAPERS
Deadline: February 1st, 2015

Analytical sociology is a general approach to explaining the social world. It is concerned with phenomena such as social network structures, patterns of segregation, collectively shared and diffused cultural ideas, and common ways of (inter-)acting in a society. The mode of explanation is to specify in clear and precise ways the mechanisms through which social phenomena are brought about. Parts of analytical sociology focus on action and interaction as the cogs and wheels of social processes, while others consider the dynamic social processes that these actions and interactions bring about.

We are delighted to announce that Peter Bearman of Columbia University will give the keynote address at the 2015 conference.

We welcome presentations using any qualitative or quantitative methods that allow for the study of social mechanisms and the complex social dynamics they give rise to. In addition, we welcome purely theoretical papers dealing with central aspects of the explanatory approach of analytical sociology. Depending on the submissions we will organize one of more sessions around the conference theme, in addition to a concluding session that will feature a panel discussion on the topic.

Abstracts (and only abstracts) of 500-1000 words should be sent to inas2015@fas.harvard.edu no later than the 1st of February 2015 and should contain the following elements:

1) title of the paper,
2) author(s) and their affiliation and e-mail address, and
3) brief summary of the paper.

Acceptance notes will be sent out on the 1st of March 2015. Participants are encouraged to submit the final versions of the paper no later than the 15th of May 2015.

For more information on practical details such as location, hotel, etc. please visit http://hwpi.harvard.edu/inas2015 (please note: more information will be uploaded to the site soon). If you have any questions please do not hesitate to send an email to inas2015@fas.harvard.edu.

2. inas2015@fas.harvard.edu
3. inas2015@fas.harvard.edu
5. mailto:inas2015@fas.harvard.edu
6. mailto:inas2015@fas.harvard.edu
6. 2015

6.1 January

There was no 'I' to do it, because the 'I' was the result (2015-01-01 08:00)

From [1]How We Are (How to Live Trilogy 1)
by Vincent Deary (loc 247) – a beautiful and strange book:

Our first memories are of things out there, worldly happenings taking place in a world of circumstance, to this 'I' here, to this little self. Our real beginnings are veiled in darkness. Below the coherent order of the rational world, before the light of reason and reasonableness which illumines the world wherever we care to glance, beneath this familiar world, lies what? The scientists and analysts can only hint, guess or romanticize, but they seem to agree on this: that beneath the present coherence lies a time of chaos. Our sense of continuity, this coherence we rarely have cause to question, let alone notice, had to be formed, order had to be imposed, coherence grown, sense made. There was no 'I' to do it, because the 'I' was the result. At some point the 'I' that is you and me began to form the living breathing world that we now inhabit, at some point this world began to form an 'I'. This strange reciprocity gave rise to us

1. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/how-we-are-live-trilogy-ebook/B00KBTSHAA/B00M9TGP9Q

CFP - BSA Early Career Theorists' Symposium (29th May, 2015, Goldsmiths) (2015-01-02 08:00)

Submission DEADLINE: 27th January, 2015

We invite early-career sociologists across all research areas to submit abstracts for the 3rd Early Career Theorists’ Symposium (ECT). Submissions from advanced PhD students are also welcome.

ECT is a special one-day symposium for up-and-coming theorists, organized by the Theory Study Group of the British Sociological Association. This symposium brings together sociologists at a relatively early stage in their careers, who work on theory or are engaged in original theoretical work as part of their ongoing research.

The papers will be discussed by:

Les Back (Goldsmiths), Manali Desai (Cambridge), and Steph Lawler (York)

The abstract submission must contain:
(1) name, title, and contact information of the author; (2) a paper title; (3) a 500-word abstract of the paper; the abstract should include the key theoretical contribution of the paper and an outline of the argument. (4) three or
To encourage a wide range of submissions, there is no designated theme for the symposium. Instead, papers will be grouped into sessions based on emergent themes and discussants’ areas of interest and expertise.

A closing panel of not-so-early career theorists will comment on the day and discuss the present trends of sociological theory. This panel will be composed of:

Hannah Jones (Warwick),
Dariusz Gafijczuk (Newcastle), and
Raphael Schlembach (Sussex)

Please, send submissions to the organizers, Francisco Calafate-Faria, Goldsmiths College (f.calafate@gold.ac.uk) and Silvia Pasquetti, University of Cambridge (sp638@cam.ac.uk) with the phrase "ECT submission" in the subject line.

Invitations to present will be sent by February 10th. You should plan to share a 6,000-word paper by April 10th.

Life in the accelerated academy: how it’s possible for Žižek to publish 55 books in 14 years (2015-01-03 08:00)

I’ve long been a little bit fascinated by Žižek. I find him utterly hypnotic to watch and have consumed countless YouTube lectures by him. I genuinely enjoy his journalistic output and have read a lot of it via the Guardian, London Review of Books and the New Statesman. I find his short books immensely readable and his longer books rather tedious. I’ve never been able to work out how seriously I take him as a philosopher. I find myself simultaneously drawn to him and repelled by him. I find his politics brave yet vacuous. I find his ideas occasionally illuminating yet more frequently elusive. He’s a strange thinker who disrupts my evaluative habits, preventing me from fitting him into the categories I use with other writers and revealing the limitations of those (overly neat) categories in the process.

However the thing that intrigues me most about Žižek is his voluminous output. He is a publishing phenomenon – something attested to by the regurgitation of blurbs about him on each new book. He transcends his work, becoming a brand in a manner so knowing that his status resists easy condemnation. In an important way he is a product of the neoliberal academy: the superstar professor who uses his global brand to float free of the scholarly and collegial ties that otherwise bind. Partly this is a contradiction that can be observed in other left wing intellectual superstars – Chomsky is the most obvious example and this is why their ‘spat’ was so fascinating to many. But Žižek seems at least quantitatively different in the sheer scale of his output.

According to the Žižek bibliography on wikipedia, he has published 55 books since 2000. 55 books in less than 15 years. I was curious about whether this amounts to the sheer weight of writing that it would superficially appear to be. In assessing this I’ve excluded papers, letters, interviews, collections of his writing, things that are co-written, his joke book (!), edited collections and what is apparently a reprint of his doctoral thesis. I’ve also
excluded anything that I’m unable to categorise reliably which excludes the books published in Slovenian that haven’t been translated yet (as far as I’m aware). In other words, this is an extremely conservative figure for Žižek’s output since 2000. Not least of all because it excludes his vast journalistic writing (though obviously we know that, in an important sense, [4] it includes this).

For purposes of an exercise in procrastination, I was content to simply add up the total pages of each book (as listed on Amazon) in order to gain an overall figure of the quantity of his writing. Obviously I realise that neither publishing nor writing really works this way – there’s also the open question of how much regurgitation there is between each of these books. Here’s the full list:

- Absolute Recoil: 440 pages
- Trouble in Paradise: 240 pages
- Event: 224 pages
- Year of Dreaming Dangerously: 144 pages
- Less Than Nothing: 1046 pages
- Living In The End Times: 520 pages
- First As Tragedy, Then As Farce: 168 pages
- Violence: 224 pages
- In Defence of Lost Causes: 504 pages
- How To Read Lacan: 128 pages
- The Parallax View: 448 pages
- Iraq: 224 pages
- The Puppet and the Dwarf: 190 pages
- Organs Without Bodies: 232 pages
- Welcome to the Desert of the Real: 160 pages
- On Belief: 176 pages
- The Fright of Real Tears: 144 pages
- Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism: 288 pages
- The Fragile Absolute: 208 pages
- The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: 46 pages

There are those I’ve read and enjoyed (First As Tragedy, Year of Dreaming Dangerously), those I’ve started and given up on (Less Than Nothing, Living In The End Times) and those I’ve read but cannot remember a single thing about (How To Read Lacan, In Defence of Lost Causes). There are also many I’ve never heard of. They come to a grand total of **5754** pages. That’s actually rather less than I expected. In a very rough way this quantity of output could be seen to amount to **411 pages per year** since 2000. To reiterate: I do realise that neither writing nor publishing actually work this way. However it could be argued that any overestimate inherent in how crudely I’ve measured this is likely offset by the vast array of material that I’ve excluded from the count.

I don’t find anything remotely inconceivable about the idea of writing 411 pages in a year. Where it becomes surprising is when considering how consistently it would be necessary to sustain this sort of rate – I assume there’s an editorial infrastructure around Žižek which takes much of the work out of the many additional publications (edited collections, interviews etc) and also that pitches books to him at least some of the time. In this sense his commercial success likely translates into institutional scaffolding that reduce the cognitive load of writing i.e. reduces the number of things he has to think about in order to move from one project to the next. It’s also hard not to wonder if some of the contents of these books are just transcriptions of the many public talks he does (not that I think there’s anything intrinsically wrong with this) and that these invitations in turn enhance the writing process by offering a constant stream of ideational prompts and regular opportunities to refine ideas.

Even so, he still writes a hell of a lot with a remarkable consistency. In spite of his self-presentation as dishev-
elled and chaotic, it seems rather unlikely that he’s a binge writer and that he instead has a very regular writing routine. The more I’ve thought about this, I’ve become really intrigued by the conditions of his working life and how they facilitate his prolific output. As part of the project me and Filip Vostal are discussing at the moment, looking at the acceleration of higher education and its implications for scholarship, I’m increasingly aware that I’d like to do a case study of Žižek as representing a mode of public intellectualism facilitated by the accelerated academy. I don’t begrudge him his success but I’d like to understand it more than I do – particularly the intersection between his commercial viability and his scholarly virtues or lack thereof. I think many trends that are reshaping academic life find their expression in the figure of Žižek and writing this post has left me with a greater degree of clarity about why I find him so intriguing.

2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavoj_Z%C5%BDi%C5%BEek_bibliography
3. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Most-Sublime-Hysteric-Hegel-Lacan/dp/0745663753/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1417965247&sr=1-1&keywords=the+most+sublime+hysteric

Peter Davis (2016-03-12 19:45:09)
How much of the material in these many books is repetitive? How much is comprehensible to any but the cognoscenti? If there is little repetition, and the material is understandable, this person is indeed a phenomenal public intellectual!

amen peter davis (2016-05-28 17:06:33)
1. zizek has copied his previous work a lot and refers to some old books as "a bluff" 2. any criticism of zizek is buried in a flood of assertions that the critic has "misunderstood" zizek

Two digital sociology events @sociowarwick on January 13th (2015-01-03 17:06)

What is Digital Sociology? An evening lecture by Deborah Lupton with Mark Carrigan and Emma Urrichard responding. It will take place in S0.21 from 5pm to 7pm. This is in the Social Sciences Building on the University of Warwick campus. It would be helpful if you could register using [1]Eventbrite.

Sociological Perspectives on Digital Health: An afternoon seminar with Deborah Lupton, Conor Farrington, Sam Martin and Maz Hardy. It will take place in A0.23. This is Milburn House, the centre of the IAS which is next to University House. You can find it on the campus map [2]here by typing in A0.23. The seminar will take place from 2pm to 4pm. It would be helpful if you could register using the eventbrite page [3]here.

Feel free to contact [4]mark@markcarrigan.net with any questions. There are travel directions to the university [5]here.

2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/interactive/
4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
5. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/
Sexual Cultures 2: Academia Meets Activism

Sexuality activists/academics – do consider submitting to this and please pass it on.

Due to the huge interest in the Sexual Cultures 2: Academia Meets Activism conference, we have extended the Call for Papers to 15 January 2015. Please circulate widely and forward to individuals/networks who might be interested.

[1]Sexual Cultures 2: Academia Meets Activism

April 8-10 2015 University of Sunderland London Campus, South Quay, London, UK

This conference, co-hosted by the [2]Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sunderland, and the Onscenity Research Network will take place on April 8-10 2015 at the University of Sunderland London Campus, London, UK [3]

The conference will host several keynote panels, bringing together key academics and activists on the topics of:

- Sex and disability
- Trans* and non-binary activism
- Sex worker and stripper activism
- Youth, race and sexuality

Panellists will include: Andrea Cornwall, Kat Gupta, Kate Hardy, Laura Harvey, Alex Iantaffi, Jade Fernandez, Tuppy Owens, Emma Renold, Jessica Ringrose, Nabil Shaban, Jay Stewart.

The overriding theme of the conference is the bringing together of academia with activism. Submissions are particularly welcomed from: academics who are also activists, activists who are also academics, academic/activists on the inside and outside of conventional academia, and academics and activists who are working together on projects relating to sexual cultures.

The key themes of the conference are:

Intersecting sex

Many of the most important and current debates around sexual identities, practices and cultures in recent years have cohered around intersectionality. Sex is an area in which we particularly see intersections playing out between various forms and systems of oppression discrimination. For example, key debates concern the possibilities for consensual sex and agency within multiple intersecting structures of oppression; the ways in which ‘sexualization’
operates – and is discussed – in gendered, classed, and raced ways; which bodies and identities are considered to have the potential to be sexual or not, and which are regarded as intrinsically hypersexual or pathologically sexual. Papers in this strand will explore intersectional elements of sexual identity, practice, experience and culture, the ways in which academics and/or activists are engaging and intervening in these areas (online and offline), and the key points of tension and conflict that are emerging around these issues.

**Advising/educating sex**

Sex advice and education is a key area of concern in relation to sexual cultures. Sex advice and sex education are arenas in which cultural conceptualisations of sex are reproduced and perpetuated, as well as being potential sites for the resisting of dominant cultural understandings and offering alternative possibilities. Sex advice and education occur across various media and diverse professional contexts, including – for example – self-help books, problem pages, websites, online forums, news reporting, TV documentaries, and pornography, as well as school sex ed, youth work, sexual health clinics, sex therapy, sex coaching and sex work. Papers in this strand will explore the kinds ways in which intimacies are being mediated through various forms of sex advice and education, as well as considering the ways in which activists and/or academics are engaging and intervening in these areas (online and offline, in policy and in practice) and the forms of sex advice and education that are emerging from these engagements and interventions.

**Sex and technology**

Technologies of all kinds have been central to the ways in which sex is understood and experienced in contemporary societies. We are interested in papers that explore evolving technologies in the presentation of sex through print, photography, film and video to today’s online and mobile media; the ways that technologies are increasingly integrated into everyday sex lives; the expansion of sex technologies in toy, doll, machine and robot manufacture, the marketing of drugs such as Viagra and cosmetic technologies such as body modification and genital surgery for enhancing sex; the expansion of sex work and recreation online; sex 2.0 practices, regimes and environments such as porn tubes, sex chat rooms and worlds like Second Life; and the shifting relations between bodies and machines in the present and in predictions of future sex.

**Working sex**

In recent years sex work has become a potent site for the discussion of labour, commerce and sexual ethics, attracting increased academic attention and public concern. Papers in this strand of the conference will seek to develop our understanding of commercial sex, focus on conceptualizing emerging types of sexual labour, and explore the place of sex work of all kinds in contemporary society. They will ask how an investigation of contemporary forms of sex work and sex as work may shed new light on the study of cultural production, industry, commerce, and notions of commodification and labour. We are also seeking papers which are interested in exploring the connections between work and leisure, work and pleasure, sex work as forms of body and affective labour, and the ethics and politics of sexual labour.

**We invite proposals for the following:**

Panels, roundtable discussions, and workshops of up to four presenters/facilitators (1 hour)

Papers/interactive events (20 minutes)

Short Ignite papers (5 minutes/20 slides)

Posters
We particularly welcome proposals for non-standard types of presentation which question the academic/activist distinction, such as fish bowl discussions, pecha kucha, creative methods workshops, and interactive workshops.

All presenters are requested to make their material accessible to an audience which will include academics, activists, practitioners and community members.

**Deadline for the submission of proposals is January 15 2015.**

For all individual papers please submit a 150 word abstract and 150 word biographical note. Please indicate which key theme of the conference your paper belongs to.

For panels, workshops and roundtable sessions please submit a 600-800 overview and set of abstracts with 150 word biographical notes. Please indicate which key theme of the conference you want your panel to be considered for.

**All submissions should be addressed to sexualcultures2[at]sunderland[dot]ac[dot]uk**

2. [http://www.crmcs.sunderland.ac.uk/](http://www.crmcs.sunderland.ac.uk/)

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**The value of blogging for part-time PhD students (2015-01-05 08:00)**

One of the more elusive benefits of blogging has been the implications for my professional identity. As a part-time PhD student, without funding but committed to an academic career trajectory (albeit at times waveringly), I found myself engaged in a diverse array of short term roles within the academy. Some of these had clear relevance to my nascent identity as a researcher but most did not, requiring competencies I already possessed by virtue of my research training or helping me develop ones which might in future be beneficial to me as a researcher; though never quite reflecting the core concerns that motivated my work while nonetheless being close enough to them that I could rarely put these questions out my mind in the way that would be expected in paid work engaged in for consistently and straight-forwardly instrumental reasons. The professional socialisation that ensues from such circumstances is inherently refractory, shaping one's professional identity in all manner of ways but without the easy unfolding of a narrative that makes sense of the occupational trajectory that is unfolding. This is far from a unique experience within the neoliberal university, as the systematic casualization of academic labour combines with the idealised notion of scholarship as a noble calling to produce an intersection of commitment and precarity with all manner of harmful consequences.

It is in this context that these new communication tools become so significant, with the possibilities afforded by them being misrepresented when conceived as something external to the everyday lives of those working within the academy. Obviously these are instruments which can function to expand the scope of dissemination activities but construing them solely in such terms misses an important set of questions concerning the implications of social media for academic identity. In my own experience personal blogging helped integrate what would have otherwise been a fragmented professional identity, perpetually divided as it has been between different roles and different institutions. Sustaining a personal blog inevitably invites reflection on one’s own experiences, though of course
such a use is not dictated by the technology itself. In doing so, it helps imbue those experiences with a coherency which they might otherwise lack, addressing the perennial question of how present commitments relate to potential futures.

The process of using the blog in this way has also led to an increasing awareness of the types of use I make of it, reflected in an initially inchoate working taxonomy which has emerged in my own psyche as to the various tasks which are involved in the development of ideas and the production of academic work. The process of sustaining the blog as an 'open notebook' has inculcated a sensitivity to workflow and craft which I had previously lacked. The claim here is a straightforward one: a change of tools can provoke a greater awareness of the uses to which such tools can be put. However this could easily be misconstrued as postulating an untenable juxtaposition of habitual analogue practice to reflexive digital practice. Instead I wish to offer a much less contentious proposition: digital tools offer a diverse range of opportunities for rethinking the practice of research and, in doing so, unavoidably raise questions in virtue of their novelty which can lead to a newfound reflexivity about the means and ends of practice. To make sense of such a claim, it is crucial that we distinguish between the tool used and the purposes to which it is put because the former may be new but the latter manifestly is not. For instance one of the most prominent explorations of the practice of journaling can be found in the explanation by C. Wright Mills of how keeping a file or a journal,

“encourages you to capture ‘fringe-thoughts’: various ideas which may be by-products of everyday life, snatches of conversation overheard on the street, or, for that matter, dreams. Once noted, these may lead to more systematic thinking, as well as lend intellectual relevance to more directed experience [...] by keeping an adequate file and thus developing self-reflective habits, you learn how to keep your inner world awake. Whenever you feel strongly about events or ideas you must try not to let them pass from your mind, but instead to formulate them for your files and in so doing draw out their implications, show yourself either how foolish these feelings or ideas are, or how they might be articulated into productive shape.”

What concerns Mills here is the cultivation of attentiveness as an aspect of intellectual craft. Through the considered adoption of specific habits of self-reflection, enacted via the medium of the ‘file’, it becomes possible to more fully and creatively engage with one’s environment and to develop the fruits of this engagement in a productive manner. On such a view, the development of ideas is seen as something which cannot be segregated into particular tracts of space and time without proving injurious to the creative faculties on which such work depends. Instead, Mills offers a view of intellectual work as dependent upon a lived engagement with the world and one which, if creativity is allowed to emerge, often overflows the conventional boundaries that society places on ‘work’. On such a view the ‘file’ cannot be adequately understood as an external record simply used to record ideas for future retrieval (though of course it does serve this purpose). Instead, it is seen as constitutive of the process through which such ideas emerge prior to being ‘recorded. For Mills the ‘file’ is the medium through which academic work becomes intellectual craft and, with this, a life encompassing academic labour becomes a life of intellectual craft which may (or may not) contingently be supported by employment within the academy.

Given that talk of 'craft' may divide sociological opinion, we might simply reframe this in terms of writing in the most encompassing sense of the term. Not just writing for publication but all the prior working through and recording of developing thoughts which runs prior to more formal writing. As Howard Becker succinctly observes, “by the time we come to write something, we have done a lot of thinking”. In highlighting the degree to which “[w]e have an investment in everything we have already worked out that commits us to a point of view and a way of handling the problem” Becker aims to help his readers overcome the anxieties which failing to recognise this so often provokes. Once we see writing as something intertwined with a broader process of intellectual engagement than the disabling perfectionism which can thrive in circumstances of ‘pluralistic ignorance’ (where the difficulties of similarly placed others are rendered invisible by their privatised working practices) begins to abate: it helps remove
the pressure otherwise attached to the writing process by repudiating the myth of ex nihilo creation.

If we accept Becker’s diagnosis of the psychology of the writing process then we can begin to see personal blogging as an important spur to reflexivity. It very literally serves to clarify where we stand in relation to our own work. Through regular blogging we come to register what Becker, in his discussion of free-writing, describes as “what you would like to say, what all your earlier work on the topic or project has already led you to believe”. Through the iteration which characterises engaged blogging, themes begin to emerge through repetition; some explicitly, as deliberate ways of formulating or categorising ideas, others less so, as repetition gradually reveals the convergence or overlap between superficially distinct interests or enthusiasms. Blogging of this form, as an engaged practice sustained over time, can be conducive to what we might think of as ‘non-linear creativity’: an open-ended creative process generative of emergent structure in often surprise and unpredictable ways. The humanistic psychologist Carl Roger conveys something of this in his account of the transformation experienced by a client in his creative work,

"It used to be that he tried to be orderly. “You begin at the beginning and you progress regularly through to the end.” Now he is aware that the process in himself is different. “When I’m working on an idea, the whole idea develops like the latent image coming out when you develop a photograph. It doesn’t start at one edge and fill in over to the other. It comes in all over. At first all you see is the hazy outline, and you wonder what it’s going to be; and then gradually something fits here and something fits there, and pretty soon it all becomes clear – all at once.”

Julie Bounford (2015-01-05 17:59:36)  
Thank you Mark Carrigan, for this eloquent post about your experience which mirrors my own in many ways.

Sociological Imagination (2015-01-09 15:44:11)  
you’re very welcome!

The sociology of sociological writing (2015-01-06 08:00)

The denial of what [1]Ben Agger calls 'authoriality' in sociological texts helps explain why concerns about the character of sociological writing have figured so prominently in recurrent anxieties about the status and future of the discipline. Its suppression involves a certain kind of self-presentation for sociology, as individual sociologists frame their work in a way which systematically occludes their involvement in it. When authoriality is suppressed we are left with little sense of how sociologists figure in sociological writing: the path which has led them to write this piece, the purposes it serves and why it matters to them. This reinforces the ‘axiological neutrality’ so integral to a certain understanding of scholarship in which [2]scholarship and commitment are understood as antipathetic. In this mode of scholarly production the objectivity and rigour of what is produced is seen to be threatened by the values which motivate that production. In this sense we can see that sociological writing is irrevocably tied up in the process of professional socialisation: learning to write in the ‘proper’ way is integral to becoming a sociologist. The corollary of this is that concerns about the purposes and ends of sociological inquiry, as well as what it means to be a sociologist, recurrently lead those who see a crisis (coming or otherwise) in sociology to contest the dominant understanding of how sociologists should write.
Sociological writing sits at the intersection between "the normalizing pressures of careers" and the "originating moral impetus" which in many cases leads people towards sociology in the first place. It is through negotiation between the two that "the original passion for social justice, economic equality, human rights, sustainable environment, political freedom or simply a better worlds" begins to be "channelled into the pursuit of academic credentials" as Michael Burawoy once put it. This is why attempts to reclaim the former so often lead to the impulse to rethink the latter: sociological careers largely advance through writing. Perhaps the most famous critique to this end comes from C. Wright Mills whose repudiation of the sociological establishment of his time went hand-in-hand with a critique of how sociologists were socialised in a way that reproduced that establishment and its relation to the broader social and political context:

In many academic circles today anyone who tries to write in a widely intelligible way is liable to be condemned as a 'mere literary man' or, worse still, 'a mere journalist.' Perhaps you have already learned that these phrases, as commonly used, only indicate the spurious inference: superficial because readable. The academic man in America is trying to carry on a serious intellectual life in a context that often seems quite set against it. His prestige must make up for many of the dominant values he has sacrificed by choosing an academic career. His claims for prestige readily become tied to his self-image as a 'scientist'. To be called a 'mere journalist' makes him feel undignified and shallow. It is this situation, I think, that is often at the bottom of the elaborate vocabulary and involved manner of speaking and writing. It is less difficult to learn this manner than not. It has become a convention – those who do not use it are subject to moral disapproval. It may be that it is the result of an academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre, who understandably wish to exclude those who win the attention of intelligent people, academic and otherwise.

C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, Pg 218

This conflation of readability and superficiality persists in present circumstances. Part of the difficulty which blogging poses for sociologists (and for academics more broadly) lies in this pervasive failure to distinguish between material that is accessibly simple and that which is simplistically accessible. Blogging readily lends itself to both and can often blur the boundary between them such that 'academic blogging' can seem to corrupt the 'academic' through proximity to 'blogging'. The analysis of Mills was rooted in a particular time and place, reflecting upon tendencies specific to that environment, such that it would be a mistake to simply project them on to the present contexts within which sociologists write. Its value is in reminding us of the ways that sociological writing and its (in)accessibility are woven together in the formation of professional identities: it is not simply a matter of who sociological writing is for but also of who it isn’t for.

The commitment involved in pursuing graduate education is an important biographical dimension to how these identities form and how sociologists come to write. These efforts and energies, as well as the things foregone as a result, can work to engender an investment in a self-presentation of specialisation which, often unwittingly, contributes towards the marginality of sociological contributions in the 'marketplace of ideas'. Once answer to this problem can be seen in David Beer’s notion of ‘punk sociology’. Treating punk music as a cultural resource to be drawn upon in rethinking and reinvigorating the communicative styles and strategies of sociologists, Beer points towards a broader understanding of writing which incorporates many of the possibilities which social media affords for communicating within and beyond the discipline. Beer talks of punk sociologists who “communicate widely, with various audiences, and the work they produce is direct and incisive, whilst still being lively, nuanced, and layered”. These will vary, eclectically and enthusiastically, because sociologists working in this manner will “will look to exploit the opportunities for communication that are available and will respond to these opportunities".
His point is not simply to sustain optimism in the face of Sociology’s misfortune but to respond to this broader context of retrenchment and constraint in a genuinely creative way. He paints a vivid picture of the diversity which characterises the working patterns of the punk sociologist:

“One day the punk sociologist is writing a blog post, the next they are working on an audio podcast, the next they are creating posters, the next they are making short films, the next they are curating content. They gather, uncover, and generate insights through their sociologically sensitive trawling of the social world, using the things they find to illustrate and enliven sociological topics (using anything from art, to film, to advertising, to photography, to web visualizations, to flyers they get through their front door, to guidebooks – the options are limitless). Books and journal articles will still matter; they are still likely to be the bedrock of academic communication. But the punk sociologist looks to use these traditional forms of communication in unusual and maybe even subversive ways, and then looks to build on this work through other forms of communication and through other media. The debates on open-access publication, escaping the paywalls that limit communication, create new questions for academic publishing and communication, the punk sociologist is likely to be working around the edges of what is possible and exploring the reach of their means of communication anyway.”

We don’t have to accept Beer’s notion of ‘punk sociology’ to be able to take something from the vision he’s outlining here. His case is a proposition about how sociology could thrive under present circumstances: “sociologists need to be bold, to be outspoken and daring, to take risks, and to, on occasion, be audacious”. My point is not that we should all become ‘punk sociologists’ (though I personally find the notion appealing) but rather that a turn towards digital engagement, perhaps as part of a broader move towards a Digital Sociology analogous to the Digital Humanities, must be accompanied by some explicit dialogue about the ends served by such engagements. In doing so, we effectively recast the risks social media undoubtedly poses into opportunities for us to rethink sociological craft in a way that ensures the viability and vibrancy of the discipline within a social and intellectual context likely to become ever more challenging.

1. http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Public_Sociology.html?id=Weu4AAAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y
3. http://asr.sagepub.com/content/70/1/4.abstract

Well said. Isn’t it sad and ironic how sociological concepts and little turns of phrase become commodified in academia. They are not only irritatingly thrown in in places where they wouldn’t otherwise have been, but they also become cliched. It makes the genre so predictable.

The most popular posts on The Sociological Imagination this week | The Sociological Imagination (2015-06-02 22:15:34) […] The sociology of sociological writing […]
Two digital sociology events @sociowarwick on January 13th (2015-01-06 17:22)

**What is Digital Sociology?** An evening lecture by Deborah Lupton with Mark Carrigan and Emma Uprichard responding. It will take place in S0.21 from 5pm to 7pm. This is in the Social Sciences Building on the University of Warwick campus. It would be helpful if you could register using [1]Eventbrite.

**Sociological Perspectives on Digital Health:** An afternoon seminar with Deborah Lupton, Conor Farrington, Sam Martin and Maz Hardy. It will take place in A0.23. This is Milburn House, the centre of the IAS which is next to University House. You can find it on the campus map [2]here by typing in A0.23. The seminar will take place from 2pm to 4pm. It would be helpful if you could register using the eventbrite page [3]here.

Feel free to contact [4]mark@markcarrigan.net with any questions. There are travel directions to the university [5]here

1. [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-is-digital-sociology-tickets-14901389457](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-is-digital-sociology-tickets-14901389457)
2. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/interactive/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/interactive/)
4. [mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net](mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net)
5. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/)


By Gwen Redmond

Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science by Ann Oakley (Policy Press, 2014)

I am not sure how an academic like Oakley would respond to my referring to her book as 'unputdownable', but there you have it. Impossible to categorise, Father and Daughter is part autobiography, part biography of her father, part reflections on family life, class and gendered societal structures and also a dense social history on the evolution of professional social work training and social policy in Britain. It’s also about politics and power and about men and women separated and defined by gender roles. Any research on her father, Richard Titmuss, will reveal his passion for social justice and welfare through policy formation and his position at LSE (London School of Economics) as founding chair of Social Administration. That is just one story. Oakley aims to tell another, a story about her father,
the man rather than the 'saint' and the people (often women) and the structures (always patriarchal) surrounding
him.

All stories are told through a lens, and of course Oakley's is gender. Her archival research, alongside her mem-
ories of the men and women who worked with her father, reveals the work and research of the women prior to
and during the establishment of the Department. In particular, she recounts the groundbreaking work of Eileen
Younghusband who, with other women, had been working in 'settlements' (a way of doing social research and work
by immersing oneself in the community) in a largely voluntary capacity. Younghusband aspired to founding a social
work education course, attached to universities and professionally recognised. Due to her reputation, she secured
funding from the Carnegie UK Trust for a survey which led to the establishment of the 'Carnegie Experiment', a
generic course on social work training, established at the LSE in 1954. Oakley's assertion that this course was the
'material realisation' of all Younghusband's work, and the acceptance that the Department in essence 'belonged' to
her prior to Titmuss taking over, is a generous acknowledgment of the power of patriarchy to not only steal the prize
from women but also, write them and their achievements out of the annals of history. She recounts how during
the early years at the Department, her father brought home stories of 'difficult women' such as Younghusband,
Lewis, McDougall and Towle. Retrospectively, of course that's just gendered language at play. Had they been men,
they may have been described as assertive or powerful. The real difficulty was Titmuss's problem seeing women as
equals. After a successful internationally recognised career and twenty-five years work at LSE, Younghusband applied
for promotion as a Reader. Titmuss vetoed the application writing on it 'not now'. Younghusband's personal and
professional story is just one of the many told in this book.

An important sociological account is given of these women on another level. Oakley postulates networks, specifically
class networks, are a means to success. Her father is hailed retrospectively as an anomaly, in that his lack of formal
third level education and establishment links did nothing to deter his success in a world usually defined by these
connections. (Oakley's research goes someway to unravelling the myth of his background however). The interesting
networking story though belongs to the 'settlement' women. These women were networking, even transatlantically,
decades prior to the establishment of the Department. They networked not for 'self-aggrandisement' but for,
as Oakley understands her work to be also, the public good. Often these women were unmarried, financially
independent, well travelled and had lasting, loving and intimate relationships with one another. Their private and
public lives are obviously a result of first wave feminism and Oakley's own immersion in the second wave was no
doubt influenced by these women. These women were part of her private life also, they were the 'difficult' women
her father spoke of around the dinner table. Her reflections on these women's lives are in marked contrast to the
recollections of her mother's seemingly sterile existence.

There is something incredibly generous in revealing the private world, especially by the British middle class.
Oakley believes the personal and public are inseparable, that our private problems are more often a reflection or
an effect of social problems. Indeed, an obsession with class in Britain defined her parents' relationship with her.
She recounts a distanced and cold childhood, certainly a mother more interested in her father's career than herself
or her child. She occasionally discloses what could be considered family secrets; her mother's revelation that her
father dressed in women's clothes, sexual tensions between the 'titmice' (the close male colleagues of her father)
and memories revealed to her under hypnosis. I pondered the relevance of these exposures, as Oakley states but
doesn't go so far as to examine them. But then they are part of her memories, her story, and not all stories reach
conclusions. She could have easily left them untold, but maybe they go some way for her in dismantling the 'God'
Richard Titmuss and revealing the fallible man.

The structures Titmuss operated within were classist and gendered. What surprised me reading this book was
how little has changed. Oakley writes of her own journey through the academic quagmire. Her part in the women's
liberation movement, her fight to give weight to her theories on gender, her battle for promotions over the years,
watching less qualified men being promoted before her, her relegations to the attics of universities and relentless
struggles for funding. She recounts sitting at board meetings with a majority of men using gendered metaphors and
her not understanding them, stories of women who can’t get their opinions heard unless it is repeated by a man and then given credence. Depressingly, not much has changed. It certainly is a long revolution.

To assign this book neatly to a particular genre is futile, as too in trying to define its audience. The book will appeal to anyone interested in social policy, sociology, the emergence of the profession of social work, university life, gender studies, the family and the fifties. Most of all it will appeal to those readers who love a good story, well told.

Gwen Redmond is studying for a Master of Education degree in The Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland. Working in the field of Adult Literacy education for ten years, her studies and practice are informed by Critical Theorists.


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A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism (2015-01-06 23:53)

A Decade Lost: Rethinking Radicalisation and Extremism by Professor Arun Kundnani

[1]A report released today by Professor Kundnani and Claystone (a social cohesion think tank) critiques the government’s Prevent strategy and calls on the government to end this controversial programme. Prevent has already been previously been [2]discredited by CAGE.

Professor Arun Kundnani is the author of The Muslims are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror (Verso Books, 2014). He teaches terrorism studies at John Jay College, New York, and is an adjunct professor in the Media, Culture, and Communication department at New York University. He has been a Visiting Fellow at Leiden University, Netherlands, an Open Society Fellow, and the Editor of the journal Race and Class. His previous book is The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain (Pluto Books, 2007).

"An official narrative holds that terrorism is caused by the presence of extremist ideology. Extremism is defined as opposition to British values. To prevent terrorism, according to this narrative, the government should intervene to stem the expression of extremist opinions and demand allegiance to British values."
"Advocacy of the official narrative on the causes of terrorism has had a significant polarising effect on public discourse in Britain, contributing to a climate of systematic hostility to Muslims. This has happened in two main ways:
• The term "extremism" is used selectively and inconsistently to construct Muslims as a suspect community and to discourage the expression of radical opinions;
• The debate on multiculturalism is securitised so that a series of distinct issues involving Muslims in public life are interpreted through the lens of clashes over identity that can only be remedied by demands for assimilation."

"The Prevent agenda, with its near total focus on Muslims, in practice undermined the best elements of the new cohesion policies and returned local authorities to engaging with select community leaders who were seen as the best way of embedding government policy within communities. Efforts to bridge communities and overcome ethnic fragmentation tended to be neglected with Prevent’s focus solely on Muslims. As Prevent evolved under the Blair, Brown and Cameron governments, it increasingly emphasised the demand that Muslims declare their allegiance to British values. The criticism of multiculturalism embedded in the official narrative on extremism is thus quite different from that of the earlier cohesion agenda and appears more like a return to demands for cultural assimilation. Moreover, the failure to assimilate to British values is now presented as a national security threat, adding an unprecedented intensity to questions of identity".

Call for papers: Internet of You: Data Big and Small (2015-01-07 08:00)


Internet of You: Data Big and Small

Final submissions due: 1 March 2015
Publication issue: November/December 2015

Please email the guest editors a brief description of the article you plan to submit by 1 February 2015. Guest editors: Deborah Estrin and Craig Thompson ([2]ic6-2015@computer.org).

We are at a great divide. Where our ancestors left behind few records, we are creating and preserving increasingly complete digital traces and models of almost every aspect of our lives. This special issue of IEEE Internet Computing aims to explore technologies and issues from small user-centric models of individuals to real-time analytics on huge aggregations of user data. At present, some are aspiring to create immortal avatars by letting you record everything about yourself and convert it into a model that’s queriable, conversant, and possibly even active in gaining new experiences for itself. Meanwhile, others are equally concerned with stemming the tide of third-party data aggregation of individual models to mitigate risks that can evolve from this kind of near total information awareness.

This special issue seeks original articles that explore both small data (individual-scale data sources, processing, and modeling) and big data (community level aggregation and analytics). Topics include

- diverse data sources and digital traces, including email, Facebook, financial, health, location, images, sound, consumer transactions, and interests;
- methods to combine trace data into complete models; data liberation; kinds of user models, such as the physical self, memories, aspect-limited versus comprehensive models; and data quality, including managing history, change, comprehensiveness, and accuracy;
- methods to aggregate and process heterogeneous data sets, stages of life ontologies, the scope and purpose of these data collections, available public data sources;
- usage models for experience sampling — proximity, context, activity sensing, quantified self, situation-aware modeling, activities of daily living, my immortal avatar, workflows, and pattern learning;
- representation technologies such as agents, smartphones, wearable computing, personal sensing networks, pattern representation and adaptation, and natural language;
• new kinds of applications that draw insights from data analytics—including, recommendation systems, personalized health, real-time marketing, and predicting elections from twitter feeds;

• open architectures for personalization, the role of cloud computing, relevant emerging standards;

• concerns regarding privacy and surveillance, the extent of privacy erosion, taxonomy of privacy threats, and incentives and disincentives for sharing, the right to forget, and status of legal safeguards;

• privacy and security technology safeguards, including identity management, disclosure control, privacy-preserving data mining, de-identification, new security models, mechanisms that audit and control personal information flows and usage; and

• social and philosophical implications for humans’ conception of self. Is there a natural boundary between user models and world models?

Submission Guidelines

All submissions must be original manuscripts of fewer than 5,000 words, focused on Internet technologies and implementations. All manuscripts are subject to peer review on both technical merit and relevance to IC’s international readership—primarily practicing engineers and academics who are looking for material that introduces new technology and broadens familiarity with current topics. We do not accept white papers, and we discourage strictly theoretical or mathematical papers. To submit a manuscript, please log on to ScholarOne (https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com:443/ic-cs) to create or access an account, which you can use to log on to IC’s Author Center (http://www.computer.org/portal/web/peerreviewmagazines/acinternet) and upload your submission.

2. mailto:ic6-2015@computer.org

Does Sociology as a Discipline Have a Future in the UK after the REF? (2015-01-07 09:42)

The British Sociological Association (BSA), the main professional body for sociology as a discipline in this country, has recently called for some calm soul-searching about the results of the latest Research Excellence Framework (REF), in which the lowest ever number of submissions were returned—29, down from 67 in 1992. Moreover, some historically important departments to the discipline (including my own) were ranked low. These two facts alone suggest that sociology as a discipline may be in decline. I tend to share this assessment—for two reasons.

One reason is that REF doesn’t respect discipline-based prerogatives, which were established prior to our neo-liberal regime. Rather what seems to have happened (and I wasn’t here when it happened 30 years ago) is that academics decided that if they had to show value for public money, then these matters should be decided through
self-constituting peer review processes that tracked established disciplines. (The imagined nightmare alternative was probably some bureaucrat in Whitehall making the judgement without consulting academics.) But there were at least couple of other options available: (1) Continue resisting the impending neo-liberal regime, at least until a more favourable deal was on offer; (2) go for metrics of some sort, which the academics themselves might design, presumably to highlight their value to society.

David Willetts, the ex-Minister for Higher Education in our Tory-led government, has often observed that no government has a vested interest in funding such a labour-intensive process as the current REF. It operates on the pretence that many academics will read many pieces of work over a relatively short period, disrupting the normal course of academic life. Politicians would much prefer that we found a more efficient way of dealing with the funding issue. Indeed, it is a testimony to their respect for academics that politicians allow us to hang ourselves by such a richly brocaded noose. And why shouldn’t we be entitled at least to this?

This brings me to the second reason. The pieces that are submitted to REF for evaluation have been already peer reviewed and hence judged fit for wider consumption in the knowledge system. So what’s the point of peer reviewing them again? The most obvious answer is that, in some sense, academics don’t think that the peer review process itself provides an adequate means of judging the ultimate value of a piece of work. And I would certainly count myself among those academics.

However, only a [1]‘cargo cult’ mentality would conclude that what we need is more peer review to solve the problem. Rather, we need some orthogonal means of assessing value – and here metrics opens up opportunities, since you don’t need to assume prior disciplinary formations to see the relevance and interrelations. As a result, you can get a different and certainly more dynamic view of the overall knowledge system.

There is a general and more specific lesson here. The general lesson is that the more academics stick to peer review in administering processes like REF (i.e. evaluations at the system-level of knowledge production), the more they reveal their unwillingness or inability to think about the value of their work beyond those with whom they most comfortably share knowledge. This is something that should concern politicians and policymakers.

The specific lesson with regard to sociology is that the lack of consensus on the acceptance of the overall REF results – highlighted by the BSA’s general statement to members – may indeed be a sign of sociology’s loss of clear disciplinary identity in this country. What critics of the REF results claim to be the ‘harshness’ of the REF panel’s judgements may reflect the highly variable understanding of what counts as ‘sociology’. Yes, it may really matter who’s on the panel because there is no common understanding of the field. If so, then on what grounds can the idea of sociology as a ‘discipline’ be maintained? No doubt ‘sociology’ is a great market attractor to get students into specific degree courses – and long may it flourish! But you don’t need dedicated sociology departments or, more to the point, research units to do this. Thus, the value of having sociology continue as a ‘discipline’ should focus sociologists’ minds, given that the neo-liberal order is not designed to respect, let alone protect, the value of disciplines as such.


Carl May (2015-01-17 18:04:04) I’ve been through the process of shaping an RAE or REF return twice now, although in a different unit of assessment (Sociologists are widely distributed). I take a slightly different view. It’s worth disentangling the REF from the future of the discipline. First, the REF is a rather more holistic enterprise than is described here. In it, representatives of Units of Assessment are asked to select the best published work work (outputs) from participating academics, report on grant income and numbers
of postgraduate research students, describe the important features of the research environment, and demonstrate wider impact on society. These are then rated by senior academics in the field in a process that is designed to make it difficult for an individual (or a clique) to skew the outcome. Because the REF asks each sociology group or department to present its best work, and then to contextualise this against a number of other aspects of performance, there is a clear competitive and comparative element to this. But to give the game a twist, the rules are changed slightly each time. It’s not just about reviewing papers, and in REF 2014, the introduction of impact case studies and an impact narrative has been the innovation in competition. It’s clear that these have been a problem for departments and subject groups that are not closely engaged with shaping or supporting policy and practice beyond the academy. Those academics that are busy critiquing other people’s critiques are unlikely to do well in this process. This is not confined to sociology, it’s the case for all social and health science submissions: those units or departments that could show clear ‘impact’ effects in a narrative and describe these in accounts of specific cases. When these are published later in the month, we will have a much better understanding, I suspect, of the distribution scores. There are many things wrong with REF, not least the burden of work that falls on academic units, but the future of the discipline of Sociology might not be one of them. There are many reasons why historically important departments could have been ranked lower in the current REF. I don’t know Steve Fuller’s department and I don’t want to comment about that particular case. But historical importance and contemporary significance are not the same thing. The declining number of submissions for the discipline of sociology may well be related to poor performance in the REF, and that’s true in other disciplines too. If this is so then the long cool look that the BSA recommends might need to be about what stands for quality, and how this is defined, in the most pragmatic way.

Steve Fuller (2015-01-19 13:01:15)
Everything that Carl May says is true and in most cases obvious (and sometimes even mentioned in my post). The question is what if anything would count for him as signs of a discipline in decline. However, one can’t but admire his HEFCE-friendly brave face...

The gaps in which being human happens (2015-01-08 08:00)

I’m currently reading Vincent Deary’s [1]How We Are. It’s the first book in a planned trilogy exploring how people change. For the last few months I’ve had a vague idea that at some point I’d like to develop themes from my PhD into a book for a wider audience. My project sought to develop a framework for studying the processes through which people change in a sociological way. But I’ve realised recently that there’s a sense in which that focus was as much a reflection of the process which led me towards these questions as it was an expression of my underlying interests (not to mention the fact that I had to write something sociological in order to be awarded a PhD).

What I’m really drawn towards are these questions of stasis and change - what does it mean to say someone stays the same and what does it mean to say they’ve changed? How do our circumstances facilitate or frustrate these processes? Where do these processes originate and how do they fit together over time? How can the lives we live be our lives when they are composed of moments we so often miss? It’s this last question in relation to which Deary’s book is most illuminating. It’s a poetic reflection on the relationship between stasis and change, exploring how a life composed of fragments can nonetheless avoid fragmentation. It’s this relationship between the whole and the parts of a life which I was trying to understand in my PhD and I’m left with the impression that Deary understands it much more profoundly than I do. He’s certainly written a book which occupies the same space as the one I aspired to write, even if it occupies that space in a slightly different way than would likely have been the case with the one I imagined.

One of many things I like about his book is how carefully he treats the relationship between cognition and agency. The philosophical tradition left us with a conceptual minefield here that Deary adroitly sidesteps, avoiding the parallel temptations of affirming a deliberative faculty from which reasons-as-causes inexorably originate and dissolving that deliberation into casually determined automaticity. Our deliberation often supplies us with reasons that many times lead to action but in a way that is far from inexorable and is dependent upon a vast assemblage
of learned routines ("thousands of little rules so rigid they are no longer up for negotiation") that are folded into our capacity for both deliberation and the action to which it sometimes leads. As he puts it, deliberation is "a late arrival at the evolutionary party, a tiny mote atop the massive mountain of automatic life, of knack and gist" (loc 693). But that doesn't mean it can be dismissed as phenomenological froth, as a tendency towards higher level rationalisation of still basically automatic responses to environmental stimuli. The question then becomes one of how the two faculties operate in tandem, an issue made even more complicated by the demonstrably different temporal sequencing which characterises the operation of each. In addressing this question Deary uses the notion of the 'gap':

Between the impulse and the act, there is a gap. A gap in which imagination can picture outcomes, in which alternative impulses can compete, in which, for instance, morality (such as yours is) has time to encounter impulse (such as yours are) before it commits to act. There is time to think. (loc 704)

During that pause, our ability to remember and imagine comes into its own. Without the recourse to the gist of all our past, of who we are, without the ability to use that same faculty to imagine and construct future possibilities, there would be no space or time to think – no deliberation. (loc 713)

This is the gap in which reflexivity operates. It relies upon automaticity in the sense that as he puts it, automaticity reflects "everything you've ever thought, every place you have ever been, every action you have ever practised or mastered, every dream and wish and hope, every encounter, every place, every face and feeling, everything you know". We encounter our situation already constructed (with the viability of interventions like CBT resting on the inherent possibility that we could reconstruct it in a different way) in a way that isn't arbitrary but eludes our immediate control. The framing reflects who we are as a particular human being with these particular concerns and with this particular past that's led us to this present situation and the future possibilities we (fallibly) perceive within it. Who we are is further expressed in how these possibilities come to matter to us - are we drawn towards some and repelled by others? Therein lies our inclination to be a person who does this and avoid being a person who does that. In acting within this gap, acting on the basis of inclinations or struggling against them, we contribute to the reproduction or transformation of these deeper continuities in which our personhood inheres.

The way Deary imagines this process is as dialogical but interior. The decision-making process is a meeting in which different aspects of us come into dialogue - we talk to ourselves about ourselves (and our circumstances) and through these internal conversations we reach decisions:

The nearest I can picture it is like being a host, in most of its senses, from genteel (host of a party) to spooky (host to a possessing spirit). In these moments when we are hosts to the decision-making process, we are holding open a space for notions, routines and agents to meet, encounter and network, to deliberate - a get-together of a group who somehow manage to accomplish a common task. As host, or even more accurately, as the venue, you merely provide, you are, the material conditions where this teamwork happens.

On this view automaticity isn't a challenge to reflexivity but rather is a condition for it. Our deliberative faculty emerges out of this inner space in which inclinations, concerns, routines and ideas meet. Often it doesn't - there's much more to our inner worlds then the deliberation which sometimes emerges out of them.

The clearly calculated mass murder that occurred yesterday at the headquarters of the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*, is an affront to basic standards of human decency. However, the ensuing outrage has been spun in terms of various diagnoses: Did the magazine go too far? Do Muslims accept Western values? Is Western intervention in the Islamic world the ultimate cause? Beyond these questions, however, an uncomfortable meta-question lurks: *If you say you're willing to die for the right of free expression, then what's wrong when someone takes you seriously and kills you?*

Of course, there's a lot wrong in such a situation – but how much of it is to do with free expression? Murder is simply illegal, whether or not you freely express your views. But clearly that's not the whole story. As several social media commentators have observed, many more than 12 are killed every day in various places in the Islamic world by extremists. However, the fact that those killed in Paris were champions of free expression elicits an especially strong form of outrage.

Journalists like those in Charlie Hebdo talk about their possessing an *unconditional* right to offend, an idea that appeals to the liberal in all of us. However, 'unconditional' may mean at least two things, both of which are in evidence in the history of free expression: (1) I can offend anyone in any way (short of physically harming them); (2) I am willing to suffer any consequence from my offence. Taken together, (1) and (2) look asymmetrical: Shouldn't there be a similar parenthesis after (2) as in (1), which ensures that I'm not physically harmed in return?

However, the modern idea and rhetoric of free expression predates the founding of the welfare state. People who believed that, as Thomas Jefferson said, 'the pen is mightier than the sword', were willing to suffer harm and even die for their right to offend. And often they did, becoming inspirations as 'martyrs'. Moreover, it is not clear that they felt themselves entitled to any greater protection than that afforded to ordinary citizens, who are left to indulge in various forms of reckless behaviour, unless they physically harm someone other than themselves. However, attitudes have clearly changed, certainly over the past hundred years. The state now appears to be committed to the unconditional *protection* of free expression.

So, not surprisingly, in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo murders, questions were asked about the adequacy of police security, with promises made to make improvements. Needless to say, the task of protecting free expression – which, again, is something above and beyond simply allowing it – is expensive. Ask the British taxpayer, who for about ten years spent millions of pounds per annum protecting Salman Rushdie from the fatwa declared on his life, following the publication of his irreverent novel, *Satanic Verses*. While providing great symbolism in the 1990s for Britain as a defender of liberal values, with the passing of time more people wonder whether the Rushdie Affair had been handled with excessive caution.

There is something quite admirable about the welfare state's protection of free expression. It almost looks principled. But it isn't quite. I say this because it is predicated on relatively few people fully exercising their right. And even in those cases, security is at least partly provided by private means, including insurance policies. If everyone who waved a 'Je Suis Charlie' banner last night in an endless sea of selfies actually lived up to the slogan, the state would go bankrupt trying to protect them – either that, or there would be a bonanza for the insurance industry!
It says a lot about our commitment to free expression that we indulge people who push the boundaries to such an extent that they regularly put their own lives at risk by the offence they cause. The welfare state would normally hospitalize people with such suicidal tendencies. But my guess is that business as usual will continue in this matter, just as long as not too many people are offending too many different groups. Protection at current levels remains affordable under the welfare state’s neo-liberal arrangements.

As a closing thought, consider why the first two amendments of the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, are the right to free expression and the right to bear arms. Nowadays we extol the one, while loathing the other. But in fact, they were meant to be two sides of the same coin: the right to offend and the right to self-defence. As the Founding Fathers saw matters, shared by Americans today, if you wish to freely express yourself, you also need to protect yourself from the consequences – or be willing to suffer them gladly.

Charlie Hebdo: #JesuisCharlie ou Non? (2015-01-08 16:02)

[1]

Following the horrific murders of police and journalists in Paris yesterday, Muslim communities in Europe are facing the inevitable consequences. Today [2]mosques in France have been attacked. Muslims in Europe are
feeling further reverberations, evident in criticisms of their supposed contention with freedom of speech, whilst
governments continue to justify tightening measures that will ironically restrict freedom of speech amongst Muslims
who condemn foreign policy. The dominant voices in the mainstream media are focusing on perpetuating myths
about a clash of civilisations: the Western ideals of freedom of speech vs the barbaric repression of the (Muslim)
Other.

Social media is abound with calls to [4] #killallmuslims, whilst all Muslims are expected to apologise (again)
for the individual evil actions of murderers, and declare loudly #notinmyname, else their silence will be subject
to scrutiny and suspicion and branded as complicity. At such times it is the Muslims who are always expected to
apologise, a point frequently argued by Muslims and non-Muslims:

[5]“So let’s avoid religious profiling. The average Christian had nothing to apologize for when Christian
fanatics in the former Yugoslavia engaged in genocide against Muslims. Critics of Islam are not to blame
because an anti-Muslim fanatic murdered 77 people in Norway in 2011.... Let’s also acknowledge that
the most courageous, peace-loving people in the Middle East who are standing up to Muslim fanatics are
themselves often devout Muslims”.

[6]
The prevailing narrative on social media is of #JesuisCharlie understandably demonstrating how humanity feels compassionately for the victims at Charlie Hebdo. And yet there is an alternative narrative (not well publicised) of those Muslims speaking up against the atrocity without having to apologise for a crime they have not committed. Others, Muslim and non-Muslim, are voicing their
concerns with how the hegemonic narrative on Charlie Hebdo is unfolding to promote the status quo. Whilst some are highlighting how a Muslim policeman was a victim too:

"My name is Ahmed. A name I share with one of the two police officers killed in Paris today in the #CharlieHebdo attack. Ahmed Merabet who was only 42-years-old, was killed outside the building after he encountered the gunman while patrolling the 11th arrondissement. Ahmed is also one of the Prophet Mohammed’s names, derived from the Arabic root word “hamd” meaning “praise”. It can be translated as “the Highly Praised One”. There is a sick, deep, and dark irony in the fact that the men who launched the attack in Paris, claiming that they had avenged the Prophet Mohammed by murdering 12 people, killed a man who himself was named after the Prophet. Those who view the world in an us versus them paradigm are dangerous because they are obliviously ignorant to the fact that we are all the children of God - whatever or whoever you believe God to be. #JeSuisCharlie #JeSuisAhmedMerabet".

One blogger states JE NE SUIS PAS CHARLIE drawing parallels between this situation and her experiences as a black female:

"I will not stand for this magazine, I will not celebrate the privilege of “free speech” to be a disguise for hate. I am a black woman who understands how frustrated one can be as whites continue to use laws as an excuse to be abusive to who we are whether it be religion, skin color, or sexual orientation. I know France is scared, I know people are hurting. But I cannot be this newspaper’s ally. I am an ally for the people of France, I am an ally to the victims and their families but I will not stand in solidarity for this hateful newspaper."

Whilst another blogger highlights her disconnection also:
“But the simple fact is, I am not Charlie. I couldn’t be. Rather, I’m the sort of person who’d only ever get to be an ugly, rude caricature in their pages — a trans woman, a Latina, Puerto Rican but in the same community of Latinos scapegoated for various and sundry evils in the US, much as Muslims are in France. I’d never be the one wielding the pen, merely the lewd, pornographic subject and nothing more. I’d be fit for only the consumption of a privileged community, their joke, an unwilling jester. No, je ne suis pas Charlie.”

Anti-censorship bloggers are even highlighting the complexities calling #JesuisCharlie when the magazine was inciting hatred against Muslims:

“...I understand why a culture that is being systematically and individually mistreated and ignored by the privileged in power may eventually spawn some folks who resort to violence doesn’t mean I condone that violence! It means I can see why decades of hurt, fear, and institutionalized abuse may lead to a violent reaction. Understanding is not supporting, it simply means I can connect the dots. Can you not?!? What I find incredibly disappointing is that on my social media, I see a bunch of white people “standing up” for the “bravery” of a racist magazine to incite hatred against people of colour. I have seen next to nothing about the bombing of the NAACP by a white man on our own soil. I see anti-Muslim protests being started in Europe, and people calling for the genocide of Muslims on Twitter, but very little attention to the number of Muslims who condemned the violence.”

An Indian publication highlights the nuances involved in calls for rights to freedom, as Sandip Roy argues:

“And yes, we forget that even France, which has become the embattled bastion of freedom of expression today, wears its own limits on its sleeve. Its staunch defence of freedom of expression did not prevent it from passing a ban on the niqab even though it was deliberately veiled as a ban on “clothing intended to conceal the face”. “Bans like these undermine the rights of women who choose to wear the veil and do little to protect anyone compelled to do so, just as laws in other countries forcing women to dress in a particular way undermine their rights,” says Izza Leghtas at Human Rights Watch. Between April 2011 and February 2014, French law enforcement fined 594 women for wearing the niqab. A Reuters report points out that many of the cartoonists in Charlie Hebdo got their start in another satirical magazine called Hara Kiri which proclaimed its aim to be “inane and nasty”. That magazine was banned in 1970 after printing a mock death notice for General Charles de Gaulle. Its reincarnation after the ban was as Charlie Hebdo.”

Free speech is not a straightforward and uncomplicated matter.
Satire can be highly problematic as Jacob Canfield explains:

"...the editorial staff of Hebdo consistently aimed to provoke Muslims. They ascribe to the same edgy-white-guy mentality that many American cartoonists do: nothing is sacred, sacred targets are funnier, lighten up, criticism is censorship. And just like American cartoonists, they and their supporters are wrong. White men punching down is not a recipe for good satire, and needs to be called out. People getting upset does not prove that the satire was good. And, this is the hardest part, the murder of the satirists in question does not prove that their satire was good. Their satire was bad, and remains bad. Their satire was racist, and remains racist....
To simplify the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices as “Good, Valiant Westerners vs. Evil, Savage Muslims” is not only racist, it’s dangerously overstated. Cartoonists (especially political cartoonists) generally reinforce the status quo, and they tend to be white men. Calling fellow cartoonists TO ARMS is calling other white men to arms against already marginalized people. The inevitable backlash against Muslims has begun in earnest."
Thus ideas about free speech and satire are impacted upon by who has the power to profess when free speech is acceptable and when it becomes offensive, and there will always be those who are powerless to fight back against what they deem to be offensive.

Some are highlighting how it is troubling to elevate Charlie Hebdo as a magazine representing European freedom of speech when the themes involve Islamophobic and xenophobic ideas of Muslims in cartoons. Where are the boundaries between grossly mocking the tragedies impacting upon people’s lives and freedom of speech? One example is the disturbing depiction of the girls kidnapped and raped by Boko Haram as happy recipients of welfare benefit. How would the families of the girls who are kidnapped respond to this “humour”? 

Ben White

"Freedom of speech is the core of western values. If we don’t defend this, it is the end of our civilisation," French attendee of Charlie Hebdo vigil in Rio de Janeiro.

"I am shaking with rage at the attack on Charlie Hebdo. It’s an attack on the free world. The entire free world should respond, ruthlessly," Roger Cohen, New York Times columnist.

"the war on terror offered a different glue to hold society together. liberal values - held up as the cultural basis for Western identity and the universal standard of civilisation - were taken to imply an identitarian politics of national security rather than an egalitarian politics of social security. Fighting an extremist enemy constructed as Huntingdon’s ‘ideal enemy’ - both ‘ideologically hostile’ and ‘racially and culturally different’ - required that liberalism become an identity politics, a call to recharge the batteries of belonging, to take a stand defending a way of life - militarily, intellectually, and culturally - while still claiming the mantle of a universal civilisation." from Arun Kundnani’s ‘The Muslims Are Coming’
Another example discussed on social media questioning what is sacrosanct is the cartoon about the protestors murdered in Rabaa Square in Egypt. Again, how would those impacted by the massacre in Rabaa Square feel about this “humour”? 

[16]
Would it be humorous to create satirical representations, and have a sense of humour, about the evil massacre that took place yesterday at the Charlie Hebdo offices? Would Muslim writers be allowed to satirise the tragedy of journalists and cartoonists murdered as they went about their daily lives?

Richard Seymour expresses what some Muslims have argued, that there is a distinction between showing compassion for the victims and the families of the victims and supporting a racist publication:

"...I think there’s a critical difference between solidarity with the journalists who were attacked, refusing to concede anything to the idea that journalists are somehow “legitimate targets,” and solidarity with what is frankly a racist publication.... I will not waste time arguing over this point here: I simply take it as read that — irrespective of whatever else it does, and whatever valid comment it makes — the way in which that publication represents Islam is racist. If you need to be convinced of this, then I suggest you do your research, beginning with reading Edward Said’s Orientalism, as well as some basic introductory texts on Islamophobia, and then come back to the conversation.”

No, the offices of Charlie Hebdo should not be raided by gun-wielding murderers. No, journalists are not legitimate targets for killing. But no, we also shouldn’t line up with the inevitable statist backlash against Muslims, or the ideological charge to defend a fetishized, racialized “secularism,” or concede to the blackmail which forces us into solidarity with a racist institution."

Seymour rightly emphasises the need for those who are elevating the cartoons of Charlie Hebdo research Orientalism. Twitter has also revealed many calling for the world’s newspapers to stand in solidarity with Charlie Hebdo by publishing the offensive cartoons, and yet is this a well-thought out plan to show support?

Others are arguing that the attack on Charlie Hebdo was not an attack on freedom of speech, but about foreign policy and war:
"White people don’t like to admit it, but those cartoons upheld their prejudice, their racism, their political supremacy, and cut it how you will — images like that upheld a political order built on discrimination”.

The role of foreign policy and war is as ever underplayed by political and media rhetoric. It is only the minority of voices who challenge the mainstream media’s rhetoric.

The mainstream media’s reach to the masses shows some glimmers of hope in presenting necessary alternative voices in analysis by Owen Jones and Peter Oborne. There are many opinions countering the dominant narrative of #jesuischarlie coming from Muslims and non-Muslims alike as they manifest the problematic nature of claiming oneness with a controversial publication, and show it is still possible to feel pain for those grieving after the shattering events in Paris yesterday, and condemn Islamophobic backlash:
4. https://twitter.com/search?q=%23killallmuslims&src=typd
11. http://kittystyker.com/2015/01/unpopular-opinion-satire-should-punch-up-charlie-hebdo-did-not/
18. http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/charlie-hebdo-the-media-doesnt-have-to-publish-their-most-controversial-cartoons-to-show-its-support-9963567.html
19. https://medium.com/@asgharbukhari/charlie-hebdo-this-attack-was-nothing-to-do-with-free-speech-it-was-about-war-26aff1c3e998
Xavi (2015-01-08 18:08:48)
Good point. Brave. It is easier to present this in a very Occident-comfy way.

Sadia Habib (2015-01-09 17:35:39)
Thank you for commenting, you hit the nail on the head with "Occident-comfy" - that's all I keep seeing most places I look.

Angela Kennedy (@AcademicAnge) (2015-01-09 12:12:19)
Thank you very much indeed Sadia for such a well-researched and beautifully put together article, which neatly summarises key, vital points raised by many in the past few days but largely drowned out by the dominant, and often asinine, narratives: let alone the hatred/bigotry into which these are feeding. I am very happy to be able to refer to this summary now in future debates.

Sadia Habib (2015-01-09 17:34:49)
Thank you for your comment Angela. I feel heartened that you get that I was aiming to put the voices of those who are ordinarily silenced in the mainstream press out there. Thank you for reading, commenting and sharing.

Tim Mason (2015-01-09 16:14:14)
Pace Richard Seymour, I have done my research, and this includes reading both Said and occasional copies of Charlie Hebdo. It would be interesting to see a defence of the magazine by someone who knows a little bit more about it than the people cited in your text seem to do. I think that a good argument can be made that it it is/was neither racist nor islamophobic (nor indeed anti-arab, which is what the term really means). Neither was it sexist. All members of the editorial committee rejected those accusations, and several of them have a record of taking part in anti-racist, anti-arab, and anti-woman actions. Given these facts - and they are facts - you might want to look at the cartoons and ask yourselves what it was that they thought they were doing. You may in the end still disagree with the way that they attempted to do it, but that demands thought and analysis, rather than Seymour’s easy dismissal of the task. All of the cartoons incriminated are direct reactions to the political news in France, and if you don’t place them in the context of their apparition, you will be mistaken as to what they convey. The "Welfare Queen" is an American rallying cry : it has little traction in France, and even less among the CH team, all of whom were of the left, and Charb close to the Communist Party. I would like to add something other to this mix. Two of the men murdered had been household names in France for decades. Cabu’s and Wolinski’s works have accompanied the adolescence of three generations of Frenchmen and women - including those of North African origin. During those years, both men made many mistakes -Cabu’s use of children with Downes syndrome in his early years was particularly appalling - but that was not all he did. Wolinski worked his way through from sexism to feminism - a pathway that many men will have traveled over the 60s and 70s - with intelligence and humour, in a way that certainly helped many others make the same journey. As feminists, you may want to listen to what his wife had to say yesterday - the video is at the bottom of the linked page - [1]To begin with, I was myself iffy about the "IamCharlie" slogan. However, with the news that is breaking at the moment, I have to admit that it looks as if our jihadists see us all as legitimate targets for their hostage taking and their murders. So, yes - whatever you or I may conclude about the inner souls of Cabu, Wolinski, and the other men slaughtered in the CH offices - I am Charlie.

Hi Tim, Thanks for taking the time to provide your perspective. The people cited in my text, I doubt know any less than the people whose voices are aired in the mainstream media, and offer a valuable counternarrative. Islamophobia is not defined as anti Arab. There are plenty of non-Arabs who are unfortunately experiencing the rise of Islamophobia - attacks on women for wearing a headscarf, attacks on mosques etc. It is incorrect (and orientalist) of you to describe Islamophobia as "really" meaning anti-Arab.... when there are Muslims who come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Islamophobia is thus a fear of Islam and Muslims (who come from all walks of life, including white Muslims). Those who work for Charlie Hebdo may not have been evil Islamophobes, but nevertheless in the French context it is acceptable to satirise Muslims, but not others. Those who are arguing that CH mocked everyone are choosing to ignore facts such as CH firing one of their own staff after claims the created an anti-semitic caricature. Ask yourself, why then is Islamophobic discourse permissible? Your applauding CH's anti-racist and "anti-anti-woman" stance is akin to saying "I'm not a racist, my best friend is black". You may view CH as a remarkable leftist publication, but unfortunately the satire therein has real lived consequences in the lives of Muslims in Europe, the more the media satirise and demonise Muslims, the more attacks on mosques and hijab-wearing women. And then come tweets like #killallmuslims. Worrying. Freedom of speech comes with responsibility. Satire should make a statement about the powerful elite, not marginalise and demonise minorities. The hypocrisy and double standards are not lost on those thinking critically about the mainstream media's self-interested focus on "freedom of speech". Where was freedom of expression in 2005 in France when some argued an advert based on Leonardo Di Vinci's The Last Supper was not offensive, and yet the French court banned the advert? Where was freedom of expression in 2006 in France when rapper Makela was arrested for insulting France and Napoleon? CH may not have intended to cause attacks on mosques and the attacks on Muslim elderly folk, but you can’t get away from the fact they are white men with powerful positions who are reinforcing hegemonic social structures that already discriminate against minorities. I understand your point that Wolinski and his colleagues may have tackled sexism with humour and intelligence, it’s a shame they did not do the same with Islamophobia.

Correction - I meant anti-anti-woman actions, of course.

Sadia Habib (2015-01-09 17:20:25)

Glenn Greenwald, lawyer and journalist, states exactly what was problematic with CH: "[T]here are all sorts of ways ideas and viewpoints are suppressed in the west. When those demanding publication of these anti-Islam cartoons start demanding the affirmative publication of those ideas as well, I'll believe the sincerity of their very selective application of free speech principles. One can defend free speech without having to publish, let alone embrace, the offensive ideas being targeted. But if that's not the case, let's have equal application of this new principle....I've previously covered cases where Muslims were imprisoned for many years in the U.S. for things like translating and posting "extremist" videos to the internet, writing scholarly articles in defense of Palestinian groups and expressing harsh criticism of Israel, and even including a Hezbollah channel in a cable package. That's all well beyond the numerous cases of jobs being lost or careers destroyed for expressing criticism of Israel or (much more dangerously and rarely) Judaism. I'm hoping this week's celebration of free speech values will generate widespread opposition to all of these long-standing and growing infringements of core political rights in the west, not just some." Tim Wise, anti-racist author, who gets anti-racism unlike CH: "....historically, satire has always been about barbs aimed at those who are MORE powerful than oneself (the elite, royalty, the dominant social, economic, political or religious group), rather than being aimed down the power structure at those with less power. To satirize people who are the targets of institutionalized violence (whether for religious or racial or cultural or linguistic or sexual or gendered reasons) is not brave. It's sort of shitty, in fact. Should it be protected legally? Sure. Should those who do it be killed or punished in any way? Of course not. But should we hold them up as exemplars of who we want to be, all the while ignoring how the exercise of their freedom, without any sense of responsibility to the common good, actually feeds acrimony and violence on all sides? I think not." My last point: Tim, your viewpoint is the one dominating the media airwaves, and thus it is important that there are voices (like the ones in my text) who are given a platform to allow people to understand the complexities of the problem.
Damien (2015-01-12 01:09:24)
It is very important for dissenting voices to be heard and CH should not be exempt from criticism. It did publish many problematic cartoons during its history, and structural racism is huge problem in France, including in left-wing circles. But what bothers me is that it’s not clear that those who are denouncing CH as a hotbed of racism, sexism, homophobia, etc. had even heard of CH, let alone read an entire issue of it, before last week. The most basic requirement would be knowledge of French and of the context in which the cartoons were drawn, which I think many CH critics lack. This is the standard that we traditionally apply: we don’t take seriously those who publish Islamophobic screeds that compile poorly translated, out-of-context excerpts from the Quran, to conclude that Islam is violent. So maybe we should be equally skeptical of those who read CH cartoons with little understanding of the context in which they were drawn, and little knowledge of the larger body of work of these cartoonists? As Tim Mason rightly pointed out, this leads to people identifying in those cartoons US stereotypes that are not as salient in France, and not seeing how they often relate to domestic political events. For instance, the Boko Haram cartoon was not meant to portray these women as “happy recipients of welfare benefit” (or, worse, “welfare queens”, as some US commentators have said). It aimed to paint an absurd picture of Boko Haram abductees protesting cuts in child benefits to satirize and mock not those women but the high-income French people who were complaining about small cuts in their child benefits. Which means that, unlike what some had assumed, it did not tap into racist clichés about allegedly welfare-scrounging immigrants. It is because it makes no sense at all to think that women abducted by Boko Haram would be concerned about changes to French child benefits that the cartoon works. Of course, yours is also a legitimate criticism: this cartoon would hurt those whose lives have been destroyed by Boko Haram. Which is why I’ve never been a CH supporter, but is a different question than whether such cartoons are also racist. You noted that “those who are arguing that CH mocked everyone are choosing to ignore facts such as CH firing one of their own staff after claims the created an anti-semitic caricature. Ask yourself, why then is Islamophobic discourse permissible?”. It’s more complicated: the cartoonist Siné had published a text (not a caricature) that mocked Sarkozy’s son conversion to Judaism, which was seen as opportunistic. He was fired by the then-editor of CH, but several other cartoonists, including Tignous who was killed last week, publicly protested. This was in fact widely seen as a betrayal of the CH spirit and Philippe Val eventually resigned to be appointed director of a public radio by... Sarkozy. Apart from this single event in 2009, CH did not typically shy away from criticizing other religions. Again, I’m not saying that CH was great. I did not like how it made fun of marginalized people either.

Sadia Habib (2015-01-12 12:32:32)
Thank you Damien for your comments, appreciate what you are saying and agree with you. Just that even if the CH “satire” was more complex and nuanced than average folk realise, the problem is that Joe Public will start to become immune to caricatures of Muslims, and succumb to demonisation of Muslims. That’s how it begins. Nazi Germany began by portraying caricatures of Jewish folk in their publications and films etc which seeped into the consciousness of the German people as they dehumanised the Jewish communities. We see now in the UK that on radio shows ordinary British folk call in and demand rounding up Muslims and sending them to detention camps, as well as giving out rewards/prizes to Muslims who become spies and inform on their family and friends. Nazi state? Stasi state? How is it acceptable to have such views and air them on BBC radio? Shocking. Fox News in the US has an ever ready fan base who believe the rubbish spewed by the presenters - and now they claim Birmingham (UK) is a Muslim city only, and non-Muslims are forbidden from entering, and Muslim "officers" beat anyone who does enter the city. You could not make this up! Are Fox News viewers really critical enough to know this is utter rubbish? Are people ever looking at these caricatures in CH and thinking "Ah, yes, this is a nuanced comment against the government policies and for the Muslims!" I seriously don’t think so. Honestly, I agree with most of your commentary, but nevertheless when I see White men on social media defending CH as satire, this quote from Tim Wise’s Facebook page comes to mind: “It’s not racism, it’s satire.” – ancient white person proverb, origin unknown

Dan Fairbrother (2015-01-12 15:08:15)
Is “Je suis Charlie” supposed to connote Spartacus...or the Borg?
A nice article which makes some great points. I agree with you that JeSuisCharlie is not about free speech; it is about the notion of ‘freedom’ as conceived by the west in opposition to a real or imagined other civilisation.


Sadie Habib (2015-01-16 22:56:52)
Here we go, for those claiming CH was not a racist publication: http://www.counterfire.org/articles/opinion/17616-former-charlie-hebdo-employ ee-lambasts-its-racist-trajectory?utm _content=bufferb0cda &utm _medium=social &utm _source=twitter.com &utm _campaign=buffer

As a Muslim woman, I am faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, I dread the day Muslim law would govern my life, my thought. It would be as bad as the Stasi if not worse. A violent reaction to everything perceived offensive is not acceptable. I talk to everyday Muslims regularly and their justification of violent action by way of “persecution cannot be tolerated, the Quran says” disturbs me. What is "persecution"? Tomorrow your neighbour might cheat you, is that persecution, would you kill him? Yes, they say, "if it gets beyond tolerance". Disturbing. On the other hand, yes the backlash against the entire Muslim world is equally disturbing. The arrogance of the "intellectually superior" western world should prompt rising above the basic instinct of labelling entire communities as good or bad. Doing so discredits the minority of liberal Muslims trying desperately to 'belong'. But violence has that effect. It is unjustified without exception and has the power to bias the most compassionate, liberal mind against those engaging in violent actions, including those who do not condemn it. By condemning such acts, I do not become an apologetic Muslim. Does the liberal white world that condemns Islamophobic attitudes seen as apologetic? It is necessary to condemn violence.

Unpopular Opinion: Satire Should Punch Up. Charlie Hebdo Did Not. - Slixa Late Night (2018-11-26 02:20:00)
[...] » Charlie Hebdo: #JesuisCharlie ou Non? The Sociological Imagination [...]
Joe Sacco - On Satire (2015-01-09 18:07)

W.G. Runciman @SocioWarwick on January 22nd (2015-01-09 19:59)

The Social Theory Centre at Warwick is pleased to announce two events happening on Thursday 22nd January 2015 with W.G. Runciman (Trinity College, Cambridge; ex-President of the British Academy):

**Why So Little, Why So Much?: Change in English Society Since the Time of Defoe**

A workshop with W.G. Runciman based on his recently published book *Very Different, But Much the Same: The*
**Evolution of English Society Since 1714.** Assuming no prior reading, Runciman will elucidate his vision of English social history over the last 300 years according to his neo-Darwinian model for sociological explanation. This will prove to be a fascinating opportunity to engage with one of Britain foremost sociologists.

Location: Postgraduate Hub

Time: 3:30 pm

**Evolutionary Sociology: New Paradigm or Old Hat?**

A debate between W.G. Runciman and Steve Fuller. On one hand we have Runciman and his attempt to remodel the social sciences along evolutionary lines. On the other, Prof. Steve Fuller, who has defended "Intelligent Design" and predicted the eventual decline of Darwinism. The debate will be chaired by Dr. Charles Turner (Editor of the *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*).

Location: MS.02

Time: 5:30 pm

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ALL WELCOME - please contact Dan Fairbrother ([1]D.J.Fairbrother@warwick.ac.uk) for further details.

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Dan Fairbrother (2015-01-12 11:35:05)

Even if you’re completely opposed to the whole idea of evolutionary theory in the social sciences, or value-freedom, or even the idea of evolution per se (!), come and put your case in the debate!

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Some thoughts on sociological blogging (2015-01-10 08:00)

The potential value and dangers of sociological blogging arise because of an environment in which the demands of audit culture incentivise the production of 'unread' and 'unloved' publications which are too often written to be counted rather than to be read. The risk is that sociological blogging gets drawn into the pernicious logic of these metrics perhaps with 'impact' being measured through the daily visitors a blog receives or the number of times an online article is shared on social media. The temptation arises in part because of the manner in which such analytics are designed into blogging platforms themselves, with all providing numerous ways to view statistics about a blog’s popularity and many third party utilities available which can extend these modes of measurement. Given a broader trend first towards 'content factories' and then 'viral publishers', as well as the domination of 'click-bait', we need to think seriously about the potential for the the logic of the 'social web' to act back upon digital scholarship in a way
that leads to a slide towards banality. My own experience has been that these considerations can creep in almost surreptitiously, as a seamless extension of rather innocuous practical considerations. If one is investing time in a project that aims to provide a platform for sociological writing then a reliance upon the built in metrics for measuring the circulation of that writing is inevitable. The problems begin when a incipient awareness of the varying popularity of different kinds of writing begins to effect how they are valued.

For example, articles bemoaning the contemporary state of higher education are inevitably very popular (presumably because they both have a broader disciplinary remit then things which are explicitly sociological and appeal to something in the day-to-day professional lives of those reading them) but should this popularity mean that writing of this form becomes particularly valued for the blog itself? It probably should not but it is easy for this slide to happen, with a concern for the blog's popularity and reach too easily giving rise to a concern for ‘content’ that contributes to these ends. We can see a similar issue with the titles which are chosen on blogs. With even the most casual assessment of the relative ‘performance’ (my unthinking use of this term and overwhelming need to place it in scare quotes reflects the underlying ambivalence I am attempting to convey) of blog posts, it soon becomes clear that the title chosen contributes to how widely ready they are, largely through the mediating factor of how pervasively they are shared on social media. To a certain extent this can be a positive thing, encouraging the choice of informative and evocative titles, as opposed to narrowly descriptive ones. However a recognition of the sheer difference that a title can make, particularly if this is grounded in an engagement with the available data about how widely posts are shared on social media, can surely have a distorting effect. To use a recent example, I found that a post initially entitled "Gender, Reflexivity and Friendship" attracted little attention on social media but was shared extensively when given a new title "The Sociology of Friendship". Soon after, I found myself rejecting the potential title "Performance, Awkwardness and Sociability" for a similar post (a couple of thousands of words of social theory, too unstructured for an academic article but nonetheless trying to make a serious, albeit meandering, sociological point) in favour of "The Sociology of Awkwardness". Predictably enough this proved extremely popular and acted as encouragement to pursue similar naming conventions in future. The risk here is that a tendency within online publishing more broadly, in which often quite obnoxious headlines are generated quasi-algorithmically because of their demonstrable impact on the ‘virality’ of a post, creep into online scholarship as a proclivity for data analysis and an investment in the success of a project outweigh the high minded dismissal of these trends.

Perhaps this points towards the emerging need for online editorship to be taken seriously as a form of academic service. It is only in the last two years, partly as a result of editing the LSE's British Politics and Policy blog as a full time job, that I've begun to feel comfortable describing myself as such. Previously, I felt there was a degree of affectation about it, as if describing oneself as an ‘editor’ in relation to a blog was a pretence at seriousness about an inherently unserious activity, something which was occasionally reflected in judgements I received from other people (though inevitably my own insecurity led me to give more weight to their judgement that they probably intended). But given the likely continued expansion of sociological activity online then the role of the blog editor is likely to grow in importance over time, as a gatekeeper to opportunities for professional visibility but also as a mediating factor shaping the emergence of online norms.

While some normative standards are beginning to emerge concerning matters such as attribution, style and format, these are inevitably fragmented and partial. The more seriously we take the role of blog editor then the more reflexively such questions are likely to be approached by those performing this function. This is important given that such individuals are amongst the few actually able to enforce standards online, albeit in a truncated domain, with the solidification of such norms otherwise being largely a matter of mimesis, as individuals observe others in their networks (or beyond them) in order to inform their own emerging practice. If we take editorship in this sense seriously as a form of academic service then we help mitigate against the tendency for such questions to be responded to pragmatically, instead creating the possibility of a ‘third space’ between academic research and journalism occupied by those who are concerned to translate academic knowledge. Either in the sense of being writers themselves who work to popularise academic knowledge by writing about it in a form amenable to a wider readership or by working with academics, whether directly on particular pieces of writing or indirectly through
creating structures that incentivise certain forms of communication. My contention is that such a function is not straightforwardly academic but nor is it journalistic. Given the much remarked upon overproduction of PhD graduates, with too few academic jobs available for those awarded doctorates to pursue academic careers, it is intriguing to speculate about the likely implications of a potential funded expansion of group blogging for academic career trajectories.

I am personally within the first cohort for whom this is a viable occupational opportunity, albeit still in a very limited way, with blogging having contributed in an important way to sustaining myself financially through six years of a part-PhD (through working full time as an editor for some time but also through more ad hoc work such as running workshops and managing social media accounts). There is obviously a sense in which I have a vested interest in the expansion of this sphere, given I enjoy this work and, if possible, want to pursue a career path which mixes my own research and social media to the greatest extent possible. It is precisely the existence of such vested interests, as well as the significance of broader institutional trends for academic blogging and vice versa, which makes it imperative that we expand discussions of online writing, as well as other forms of social media engagement, beyond the scope of the merely technical. The communicative opportunities afforded by blogging invite us to consider the purposes of such communication. My suggestion has been that they pose tacit questions of great importance which it is valuable for the discipline as a whole to recover: what is sociology for? How do sociologists communicate? How could they communicate? How should they communicate? Many of the risks which have been discussed reflect a failure to address such questions adequately, with immediacy and novelty potentially squeezing out disciplinary craft rather than acting as an invitation to rethink that craft in light of these changing opportunities.

Two digital sociology events @sociowarwick on January 13th (2015-01-10 17:33)

What is Digital Sociology? An evening lecture by Deborah Lupton with Mark Carrigan and Emma Uprichard responding. It will take place in S0.21 from 5pm to 7pm. This is in the Social Sciences Building on the University of Warwick campus. It would be helpful if you could register using [1]Eventbrite.

Sociological Perspectives on Digital Health: An afternoon seminar with Deborah Lupton, Conor Farrington, Sam Martin and Maz Hardy. It will take place in A0.23. This is Milburn House, the centre of the IAS which is next to University House. You can find it on the campus map [2]here by typing in A0.23. The seminar will take place from 2pm to 4pm. It would be helpful if you could register using the eventbrite page [3]here.

Feel free to contact [4]mark@markcarrigan.net with any questions. There are travel directions to the university [5]here.

1. [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-is-digital-sociology-tickets-14901389457](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-is-digital-sociology-tickets-14901389457)
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/interactive/
4. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net
5. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/)
The Board of Trustees at the University of Pennsylvania appointed Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois Honorary Emeritus Professor of Sociology and Africana Studies on February 17th 2012. The day included three intellectual panels, art installation, musical tribute, and a poetic tribute. This short video captures the day's activities. Tukufu Zuberi, professor of sociology and the Lasry Family Professor of Race Relations in the School of Arts and Sciences, led the effort to recognize W.E.B. Du Bois with the professorship and facilitated this daylong conference at Penn to mark the occasion. The conference included three intellectual panels, an art installation, and musical and poetic tributes. TZ Production Company, which Zuberi helms, documented the conference in a half-hour video "Honoring W.E.B. Du Bois 2012"

Call for Papers – International Social Theory Consortium 2015

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL THEORY CONSORTIUM 2015


14th Annual Conference of the International Social Theory Consortium
Cambridge, UK, June 18-19, 2015

RECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL THEORY, HISTORY AND PRACTICE

CALL FOR PAPERS

With regard to developments in social theory, the past 30 years can be characterized as an Age of Deconstruction. Inspired by post-structuralism, post-modernism, critical theory, and science studies, as well as combinations of related approaches, theorists have endeavoured to shatter historical meta-narratives and struggled to include previously excluded standpoints in social thought. This important trend no doubt has informed our understanding of the role of discourse, difference and expertise in determining relations of power and inequality.

The central theme of the 2015 annual meeting of the International Social Theory Consortium (ISTC) will be "Reconstruction", dedicated to taking account of and interrogating the possibility of picking up the pieces. Are there limits to the deconstruction project, and have these limits been reached? What are the possibilities for the 'reconstruction' of narratives of long-term historical change? Is it possible to include and integrate the insights and contribution of various critiques of knowledge, while at the same time developing new forms of knowledge? Can we submit the project of deconstruction itself to deconstruction?

Essential to such a project of "deconstructing deconstruction" would be a return to history—acknowledging its continuing importance as a social-theoretical category and frame, considering its persistent utility after decades of sobering realizations, and accepting the fact that, by most accounts, history has not reached its end. How would social science disciplines – e.g. economics – benefit from new perspectives on understanding long-term change? What might, could and should a new philosophy of history – subsequent to so many ‘turns’ – look like? What are the possibilities for practice in addressing social justice and democracy, with the benefit or in the absence of long-term historical consciousness?

While conference continues the ISTC’s tradition of encouraging...
Submission of abstract proposals on the entire range of topics under the general heading of social theory...

...and we especially look forward to receiving submissions that...

Frame contributions in terms of Reconstruction
Relate existing research agendas and projects to Reconstruction
Directly address the theme of Reconstruction

...including:

> Philosophy of History in an Age of Deconstruction
> Reconstructing Theories of the State and Politics
> The Limits, Horizons and Possibilities of Critique
> Knowledge, Authority and Expertise
> Historicizing Social Theory
> Reconstructing the (His)Story of Modern Societies
> Social Theory as the Link between the Past and the Future
> Social Theory after/beyond the Human

Please email abstracts to istc2015@socialtheory.org no later than 15 March 2015.
Organizers:
Eric R. Lybeck, Department of Sociology, Cambridge University
Harry F. Dahms, Department of Sociology, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Please feel free to address any questions or concerns to Eric Lybeck (erl37@cam.ac.uk) or Harry Dahms (hdahms@utk.edu)


Universal Credit: a quiet revolution in the Welfare State (2015-01-13 08:00)

Universal Credit: a quiet revolution in the Welfare State

23 January 2015

Reichel Hall, Bangor University

The introduction of Universal Credit is the most significant and wide-ranging change to the benefits system since its establishment in 1948.

The Credit will co-ordinate aspects of State support with the aim of ensuring that no claimant will be financially worse off by accepting work than they would be by claiming benefits. It will replace the following benefits:

- Income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit and some aspects of the Social Fund

The Conference will bring academics and professional workers in the field to discuss and try and foresee the impact this change will have on some of the most disadvantaged people in Society.

The Conference will be particularly informative and important to those whose decisions affect families on low incomes, children and the housing sector and will be of interest to workers in the third sector, policy directors and officers as well as local and national elected representatives and students of social policy.

The Conference will be held in Welsh but with translation available.
Key Note Speech: Hywel Williams MP

Conference Details

Time: 10.30am – 3.30pm

Admission: Free but delegates are asked to register before hand

Registration and Further Information:

Siôn Jobbins: [1]s.jobbins@colegcymraeg.ac.uk | 01970 622893

Conference Hashtag: #CredydCynhwysol

Social media and ambient intimacy (2015-01-14 08:00)

http://gty.im/135199854

There’s a pervasive tendency to see social media as something detrimental to the quality of human relationships. The precise formulation tends to vary but in practice it amounts to a claim that ‘real’ and ‘meaningful’ (i.e. relationships sustained through face-to-face communication) are being replaced with ‘virtual’ and ‘superficial’ ones (i.e. relationships sustained through digitally mediated communication). It doesn’t take much thought to recognize [1]this is simplistic but I think something important is changing here.

One important aspect of this is how intimacy emerges within geographically dispersed but highly networked social orders. Intimacy is an important part of human relationships and for much of human history it was grounded in (to some extent) shared experiences within a (to some extent) common context – what Margaret Archer calls contextual continuity. The continuity that such circumstances made possible provided a reliable stock of common reference points, taken for granted understandings and modes of self-expression: a shared mental furniture. This facilitates forms of self-disclosure that are otherwise unreliable. When we share this common mental furniture, it becomes easier to externally communicate our internal conversations: the other is much more likely to understand what we mean when we disclose our inner life to them. They understand where we’re coming from.

This general experience finds it apotheosis in the development of intimacy: a general understanding of where we’re coming from develops into a refined sense of who we are. With such people, we don’t need to explain why we experienced something as a slight or a joy. They get us. In romantic relationships and close friendships this is something elective: we work at sustaining continuities because we value the relationship. My suggestion is that the degree to which this intimacy is elective goes hand-in-hand with a decline in our ability to take for granted a general continuity with the other people in our lives. We value intimacy more because a commonality rooted in a converging context can no longer be taken for granted. It still exists but it’s becoming the exception rather than the rule for most and it’s a contingent accomplishment rather than an ongoing feature that fades into the background. However new
forms of intimacy are facilitated by digital communications. I like the idea of ambient intimacy suggested by Leisa Reichelt,

> Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible. Flickr lets me see what friends are eating for lunch, how they’ve redecorated their bedroom, their latest haircut. Twitter tells me when they’re hungry, what technology is currently frustrating them, who they’re having drinks with tonight.

Who cares? Who wants this level of detail? Isn’t this all just annoying noise? There are certainly many people who think this, but they tend to be not so noisy themselves. It seems to me that there are lots of people for who being social is very much a ‘real life’ activity and technology is about getting stuff done.

There are a lot of us, though, who find great value in this ongoing noise. It helps us get to know people who would otherwise be just acquaintances. It makes us feel closer to people we care for but in whose lives we’re not able to participate as closely as we’d like.

Knowing these details creates intimacy. (It also saves a lot of time when you finally do get to catchup with these people in real life!) It’s not so much about meaning, it’s just about being in touch.


This isn’t intimacy in the sense in which we usually use the term. I’d prefer to think of it as a form of mediated continuity to be compared to contextual continuity. Could we say that continuity itself – either mediated or contextual – stands as a necessary but insufficient condition for intimacy? It does not in itself lead inexorably to intimacy, to the discovery of commonality in spite of difference and the emergence of relationships, but without this continuity the possibility of intimacy doesn’t arise.


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**Subtraction stories and social change (2015-01-15 08:00)**

The closest thing I have to an historiographical principle is to always be suspicious of what Charles Taylor calls ‘subtraction stories’. While he uses the concept to refer to congratulatory stories of rational emancipation in which human beings have gradually dispensed with myths and illusions that served to limit them, it can equally be applied to refer to narratives of gradual decline in which we have progressively lost touch with the authentically human. To
call something a subtraction story does not entail that we think the story is false so much as that it is simplistic. In the more sophisticated forms of subtraction stories, elements that are empirically accurate serve to reinforce the plausibility of an account that is appealing on a narrative level but analytically deficient.

The temptation here is to flip to the opposite extreme, responding to the obvious simplicity of a subtraction story by denying its claims in their entirety. For instance, to respond to those who say we have lost everything by claiming that we have lost nothing. While the inverse position might be more sensible than that which it is a response to, it’s no less questionable to me because it reproduces the narrative structure which is the underlying problem. There’s a certain temptation to these positions, with the bold pronouncements of epochal change (or lack thereof) which they license. I think sociologists are far too prone to them. In practice, I lean much more towards the proclamation of change rather than its denial because I think things are changing in a significant way. But I think this narrative temptation inheres in any attempt to offer accounts of social change that go beyond the merely descriptive.

Demographics of social networks in the US (2015-01-16 08:00)

These findings from the [1]Pew Internet Project are interesting. I had no idea how widely used Pinterest and Instagram were:

- **Facebook**: 23% of adult internet users/19% of entire adult population
- **Twitter**: 71% of adult internet users/58% of entire adult population
- **Instagram**: 26% of adult internet users/21% of entire adult population
- **Pinterest**: 28% of adult internet users/22% of entire adult population
- **LinkedIn**: 28% of adult internet users/23% of entire adult population

LinkedIn has the lowest daily use (13%) and the highest percentage of users (61%) who use it less than once a week. It would be interesting to know how many of these 61% use the service at least monthly. My hunch is that LinkedIn has spread because of an effective automatic invitation system and a widespread sense that opportunities are available through the system (without anyone being particularly clear about what those opportunities actually are) - it’s technically very easy to get drawn into it and there’s a diffuse sense that allowing oneself to do so might be valuable at some unspecified point in the future. In essence, I’m suggesting that LinkedIn is a triumph of marketing over functionality.

Another interesting finding is that Instagram has the highest portion of daily users (49%) after Facebook and roughly half of internet using 18-29 year olds use the service. The recent $35 billion valuation it received seems (slightly) less absurd when you take these demographic factors into account and assume social media as a whole will grow in a sustained way over coming years.

Colin Mills from [1]Oxford Sociology has posted an interesting response to [2]Steve Fuller’s piece here last week about the fortunes of Sociology in the UK’s research assessment exercise. Many of the complaints that have followed the REF concern the peer review process itself and the nature of the standards applied in enacting it. Mills offers a very plausible case that the intellectual promiscuity of sociology (my phrase) leaves assessments of quality as little more than contingent expressions of personal preference because there aren’t generally agreed upon standards of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ sociology:

"Successful" disciplines - in the social sciences the paradigm case is probably economics - define relatively tightly what kind of thing is inside and outside of the tent. Standards about what is and is not an acceptable question or solution to a question are shared and there is a consensus about the suite of acceptable research strategies - though not necessarily agreement about the applicability of a particular tool in each case. All this is not to say that people agree all the time about all the questions and the ways to answer them, but people do agree about the sort of thing they are doing to the extent that they can meaningfully talk to each other. The Economic Journal does not publish [3]poems.

Paradoxically a "discipline" in which "anything goes", is, of course, not literally a discipline in which everything goes. It is simply a discipline in which quite arbitrary decisions about academic value get made that depend on whoever has grabbed or promoted themselves to positions of power and influence. Sometimes these decisions coincide with what is reasonable, sometimes they are absurd. How they look will very much depend on what flavour of "sociology" the observer happens to prefer.


When I’ve read about graduate education in the US and compared it to my own experience in the UK, I’ve been struck by the disparity. I feel like I’ve thrived intellectually in the conceptually anomic environment of British Sociology but this is a statement about personal experience rather than anything else. I find it hard to see how anyone could contend that more professionalisation in graduate education wouldn’t contribute to raising intellectual standards - unless one perhaps were to argue that any attempt to this end would inevitably be done rather badly under current conditions.

Mills goes on to argue that personal interests have led many to acquiesce to a fragmentation of the discipline that they privately bemoan:

The real criminals, in my view, are the people that have led and been influential in running the major British sociological institutions. The BSA Presidents, the editors of the journals, the Professors in the major departments, in short the people who could have led but instead sat back and let a hundred flowers bloom while saying things in private like: "I know that what x says is correct but I can’t be seen to endorse that because it will upset y and lead to z and then w won’t like me and therefore I won’t be invited to v."


I have no idea if this is an accurate picture. Though I’m again struck by the disjuncture between my subjective
satisfaction (I quite like an environment in which a “thousand flowers bloom”) and my reflective agreement with the spirit of what he’s saying, even if I dislike the way he says it. I enjoy this slightly anarchic atmosphere but if we think the discipline of Sociology is an intellectual project with value then it seems obvious to me that the former is in tension with the latter. I find invocations of ’hobbyist sociology’ obnoxious and yet I do see what they’re getting at: perhaps my discomfort with reaching these conclusions goes some way to explaining why I find the terminology so irritating.

I’m reminded of what Christian Smith says in the Sacred Project of American Sociology about the ’peace treaty’ within the discipline: “everyone should mostly think and do whatever he or she wishes in terms of methods, theory, and intent and not suggest that what anyone else is doing might be a problem” (pg. 142). The result isn’t really pluralism in any meaningful sense, in so far as that people aren’t within the same argumentative space (as Doug Porpora would put it) but are rather simply doing their own thing within more or less shared institutions. Though I’ve been told that what I do isn’t sociology enough times at this nascent stage of my career that perhaps a revocation of the ’peace treaty’ would mean I get kicked out and I’d have to go a philosophy department and perhaps change the name of this blog. Hmm.

1. http://oxfordsociology.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/steve-fuller-on-sociology-and-ref.html
5. http://oxfordsociology.blogspot.co.uk/2015/01/steve-fuller-on-sociology-and-ref.html
Tony Lawson: 90%+ of economics taught in Western world is based on mathematical modelling that is useless (2015-01-18 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/b_vMLHis5cE

rennie warburton (2015-01-19 03:48:18)

Lawson’s presentation is understandable, clear and well-supported by the examples he provides. Are there economists who have taken up Lawson’s ontology and demonstrated its relevance to their discipline?

What will post-democracy look like? (2015-01-19 08:00)

As anyone who reads my blog regularly might have noticed, I’m a fan of Colin Crouch’s notion of post-democracy. I’ve interviewed him about it a couple of times: once in [1]2010 and again in [2]2013. Whereas he’d initially offered the notion to illuminate a potential trajectory, in the sense that we risk becoming post-democratic, we more latterly see a social order that might be said to have become post-democratic. He intends the term to function analogously to post-industrial: it is not that democracy is gone but that it has been hollowed out:

The term was indeed a direct analogy with ‘post-industrial’. A post-industrial society is not a non-industrial one. It continues to make and to use the products of industry, but the energy and innovative
drive of the system have gone elsewhere. The same applies in a more complex way to post-modern, which is not the same as anti-modern or of course pre-modern. It implies a culture that uses the achievements of modernism but departs from them in its search for new possibilities. A post-democratic society therefore is one that continues to have and to use all the institutions of democracy, but in which they increasingly become a formal shell. The energy and innovative drive pass away from the democratic arena and into small circles of a politico-economic elite. I did not say that we were now living in a post-democratic society, but that we were moving towards such a condition.


Crouch is far from the only theorist to have made such a claim. But I think there’s a precision to his argument which distinguishes it from the manner in which someone like, say, Bauman talks about *depoliticisation*. My current, slightly morbid, interest in representations of [4]civilisational collapse has left me wondering what *entrenched post-democracy* would look like. Asking this question does not refer to an absence of democracy, for which endless examples are possible, but rather for a more detailed sketch of what a social order which was once democratic but is now post-democratic would look like. While everyday life might look something like that which can be seen in Singapore, ‘the city of rules’ as [5]this Guardian article puts it, I think there’s more to be said than this. However we can see in Singapore a vivid account of how micro-regulation can be deployed to facilitate a city in which ‘nothing goes wrong, but nothing really happens’ as one ex-pat memorably phrases it in that article. Is it so hard to imagine *efficiency* and *orderliness* being used to secure consent, at least amongst some, for a similar level of social control in western Europe or America?

Perhaps we’d also see the *exceptional justice* that intruded into UK life after the 2011 riots, with courts being kept open 24/7 in order to better facilitate the restoration of social order. There’s something akin to this in [6]mega sporting events: opaque centralised planning overwhelms democratic consultation, ‘world cup courts’ dish out ad hoc justice, the social structure contorts itself for the pleasure of an international oligopoly upon whom proceedings depend, specialised security arrangements are intensively deployed in the interests of the event’s success and we often see a form of social cleansing (destruction of whole neighbourhoods) presented as a technocratic exercise in event management. We also see pre-arrests and predictive policing deployed to these ends and only a fool would not expect to see more of this as the technological apparatus and the political pressures encouraging them grow over time.

These security arrangements point to another aspect of a post-democratic social order: the economic vibrancy of the security sector. There is a technological dimension to this, with a long term growth fuelled by the ‘war on terror’ coupled with an increasing move towards ’disruptive policing’ that offers technical solutions at a time of fiscal retrenchment, but we shouldn’t forget the more mundane side of the security industry and its interests in privatisation of policing. This is how Securitas, one of the world’s largest security companies, describe the prospects of the security industry. Note the title of the page: *taking advantage of changes*.

The global security services market employs several million people and is projected to reach USD 110 billion by 2016. Security services are in demand all over the world, in all industries and in both the public and private sectors. Demand for our services is closely linked to global economic development and social and demographic trends. As the global economy grows and develops, so do we.

Historically, the security market has grown 1–2 percent faster than GDP in mature markets. In recent years, due to current market dynamics and the gradual incorporation of technology into security solutions, security markets in Europe and North America have grown at the same pace as GDP. This trend is likely to continue over the next three to five years.
Market growth is crucial to Securitas’ future profitability and growth, but capitalizing on trends and changes in demand is also important. Developing new security solutions with a higher technology content and improved cost efficiency will allow the private security industry to expand the market by assuming responsibility for work presently performed by the police or other authorities. This development will also be a challenge for operations with insourced security services and increase interest in better outsourced solutions.

Consider this against a background of terrorism, as the spectacular narrative of the ‘war on terror’ comes to be replaced by a prospect of state of alert without end. We've not seen the end of the ‘war on terror’, we've seen a spectacular narrative become a taken for granted part of everyday life. It doesn't need to be narratived any more because it's here to stay. Against this backdrop, we're likely see an authoritarian slide in political culture, supplementing the institutional arrangements already in place, in which 'responsibility' becomes the key virtue in the exercise of freedoms – as I heard someone say on the radio yesterday, "it's irresponsible to say democracy is the only thing that matters when we face a threat like this" (or words to that effect).

Crucially, I don't think this process is inexorable and it's certainly not the unfolding of an historical logic. It’s enacted by people at every level – including those who reinforce the slide at the micro level of everyday social interaction. The intractability of the problem comes because the process itself involves a hollowing out of processes of contestation at the highest level, such that the corporate agents pursuing this changing social order are also benefiting from it by potential sources of resistance being increasingly absent or at least passive on the macro level. This is how Wolfgang Streeck describes this institutional project, as inflected through management of the financial crisis:

The utopian ideal of present day crisis management is to complete, with political means, the already far-advanced depoliticization of the economy; anchored in recognised nation-stated under the control of internal governmental and financial diplomacy insulated from democratic participation, with a population that would have learned, over years of hegemonic re-education, to regard the distributional outcomes of free markets as fair, or at least as without alternative.

*Buying Time, pg 46*

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/atoz/thinkingaloud/podcasts/crouch/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/atoz/thinkingaloud/podcasts/crouch/)
Syndicalist Sociology: The Forgotten Work of Guillaume De Greef (2015-01-20 08:00)

by Jeff Shantz, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Vancouver

Radical perspectives, particularly those that have connections with or roots in actual movements for social change and resistance, often find their contributions unacknowledged or marginalized within formal academic disciplines such as the social sciences. Even where such radical perspectives make useful, insightful contributions to the development of, and developmental debates and arguments within an academic discipline, they are often written out of the history of those disciplines after the fact. Such has been the case especially for those theories that challenge instituted structures of authority, such as anarchism or syndicalism.

Despite the fact that anarchism has always informed sociological thought and debates (from the inception of sociology as a formal discipline up through the present) anarchism has largely been excluded from discussions of sociological thought. This is true in the case of both texts on the history of sociology as well as in works focused on traditions of sociological theory (see Shantz and Williams 2014). Recently, though, some work is being done to re-evaluate the contributions of anarchism to the social sciences more broadly (See Howell 2014; Shantz 2014; Shantz and Williams 2014; Williams 2014).

If anarchism has been marginalized within disciplines like sociology, the situation is even more dire for treatments of syndicalist theory within sociological history (and thought). With a few exceptions syndicalism has been rendered, unjustifiably, invisible. Syndicalism emerges as part of the radical working class movements in the nineteenth century, not only in Europe but on virtually every continent (see van der Walt 2010). It presents searching perspectives on exploitation, labor, and workplace relations that eschew hierarchy, including labor hierarchies, and emphasizes informal work networks, rank-and-file self-determination, and working class solidarity and autonomy from capital. At the same time syndicalism highlights social developments that hint at alternative social relations in formation, suggestive of “a new world within the shell of the old.” This is an anti-authoritarian vision of labor that focuses on working class self-organization and decision-making. It views such organizing as incubators for new, innovative, non-exploitative, forms of human social arrangement.

Syndicalism has made important contributions to thinking about work, production, divisions of labor, hierarchy, authority, class relations, democracy, etc. Yet an examination of sociological history or theory texts shows that syndicalism is almost entirely absent from the literature. The few exceptions include brief discussions of Georges Sorel, theorist of revolutionary syndicalism, the general strike, and social myth, who wrote numerous notable texts such as The Decomposition of Marxism (1908), The Illusions of Progress (1908), Material for a Theory of the Proletariat (1919) and most famously Reflection on Violence (1908).

Yet there are other, intriguing yet hidden, syndicalist contributions to sociology, from practicing sociologists, from within formal sociology. Among the most interesting and insightful if unjustly long forgotten syndicalist contributions to sociology is the work of Belgian sociologist, and contemporary of Sorel, Guillaume De Greef (1842–1924). Indeed, De Greef has been recognized as Belgium's most prominent and noteworthy sociologist (of any tendency or tradition). The radical character of De Greef’s work perhaps contributed to the limitation on its broader influence on
De Greef was born in Brussels in 1842 and was raised in a family of free thinkers and artists. In his youth he read progressive philosophers, like Voltaire, who influenced the thought of Revolutionary France and the generations following the Revolution (Douglas 1948, 539). As a university student he gravitated toward the works of utopian socialists, including Saint-Simon and the proto-anarchist Charles Fourier, before coming to his greatest influence Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first to explicitly identify his philosophy as anarchist. De Greef adopted Proudhon’s theory of mutualism that emphasizes social order and interchange on the basis of mutually beneficial, equal, exchange or interaction. De Greef would go on to edit the Proudhonian journal La Liberté along with his colleague and classmate Hector Denis.

From his days as a university student onward the petit bourgeois De Greef would dedicate himself to the cause of the working class and social reform (Douglas 1948, 539). It is believed that De Greef prepared the program if the Belgian delegates to the International Workingmen’s Association (IWMA, or First International) in the 1860s. A clearly Proudhonian program, emphasizing free credit and opposing any state, this perspective was defeated at the International by the approach promoted by Karl Marx, which asserted the necessary role of a proletarian state in the transition to communism. The growing dominance of Marxism in international socialist movements contributed to the marginalization of De Greef’s syndicalist perspective, as indeed it did for other libertarian and anti-statist versions of socialism and communism.

With his influence within the labor and socialist movements waning, De Greef devoted his efforts increasingly to his academic research and writing. De Greef’s first published monograph in theoretical sociology appeared circa 1886 with his relatively influential Introduction à la sociologie. The critical response to De Greef’s initial work was so positive that he was appointed the first Chair in Sociology at the University of Brussels. While in this position De Greef became embroiled in some controversy related to the university’s decision to dismiss respected geographer, but active anarchist, Élisée Reclus, due to that eminent scholar’s political agitational work. In response De Greef mobilized an exodus of numerous other professors and students from the school (Douglas 1948, 540). The departed scholars soon founded a new progressive institution, L’Université Nouvelle, which was committed to work in the social sciences while also asserting freedom of thought and cooperation with the educational movement of workers (Douglas 1948, 540). This project, and the earlier support of Reclus and academic freedom, shows De Greef as a committed public intellectual and principled scholar. The project also represents a much earlier model of institutions such as the New School for Social Research set up as centers of critical research, scholarship, and pedagogy in the face of politically motivated attacks on critical and progressive scholarship and faculty.

De Greef’s sociological work builds upon Proudhon’s conception of free credit associations and proposes the notion of occupational representation through trade associations. In this perspective free credit associations would be organized on a trade by trade basis in each locale. In this they would carry out their more traditional economic activities but also, at the same time, assume the functions currently carried out by the political state. In this the trade associations provide the basis for a syndicalist form of social order. Notably this vision of social order is developed by De Greef more than a generation before the ideas presented in the works of better known syndicalists such as James Guillaume and Emile Pouget or in the guild socialism of G.D.H. Cole (which is perhaps closest to De Greef’s perspective).

Among De Greef’s major theoretical works are Structure général des sociétés and Lois sociologiques. His applied works, which stand as some of his most engaging, include Ouvrière dentellière (The Women Lace-Makers), Rachat des charbonnages (The Repurchase of the Coal Mines), and Régime représentatif (How Government May Be Made Representative). These give a robust presentation of the Proudhonian syndicalist social order in the actual contemporary conditions of life which they discuss (rather than in a future utopian scheme). In his social researches De Greef finds evidence for such directions among social conditions and practices. His is not some speculative or utopian approach.
De Greef’s analysis centers on the role of workers’ associations, something similar to but more than trade unions as typically understood. Collective bargaining in industry provides the model for an occupational parliament on a national scale for De Greef. This occupational parliament is accompanied by transformation in systems in credit (in a manner inspired by Proudhon’s discussions). In terms of political transformations, De Greef suggests that formal democratic practice may be reformed immediately by having all people register at polls by trade instead of by simple geographic divisions or ridings. In these trade polls, workers and management are represented separately and equally (Douglas 1948, 541). While his will initially result in an inequality of representation, as fewer owners will have the same representation as far more workers, De Greef is not overly concerned by this. From his perspective this approach makes its contradiction open for all to see unlike current representative democracy which masks this fundamental reality of social structure and inequality. In his view:

Equality is not personal, but functional....Suppose there were formed a nationwide trust of all coal mines....in the hands of a dozen....large capitalists. These twelve....could have a representation equal to that of the 144,000 workmen!....well, I do not recoil before this abominable situation. Why? Because....I prefer a truthful representation to one which is fictitiously and deceptively democratic. What matters it if the mirror that reflects our social system gives back an ugly image? Is it the fault of the mirror that society is not beautiful, and should we in anger throw down and break the mirror. (quoted in Douglas 1948, 542)

As labor comes to play a more predominant economic role (in cooperative ownership, for example) its representation will grow accordingly. As capital becomes usurped or expropriated its representation will diminish such that workers solely will be represented.

At the same time governance can occur on a day to day basis in local joint industrial councils. These industrial councils, including employers and workers, will oversee grievances, working conditions, and trade issues.

For De Greef, these innovations, which are possible within current conditions, would bring the social questions, and key economic functions, to the center of politics (rather than giving them the phony cover they enjoy in conventional parliamentary politics). At the same time they would shift the reconstruction of these systems in the direction of control by labor (Douglas 1948, 542). This would occur because of the day to day practical and pedagogical effects of a national system of mass, rather than trade-based or union based, collective bargaining in which all were directly and actively involved.

It was De Greef’s expectation that the syndicates would eventually take on the functions of employment, through cooperatives for example, and thus assume all political power (Douglas 1948, 542). In terms of the system of credit, De Greef suggests the issuing of what amounts to fiat currency, alongside redeemable money (Douglas 1948, 541). Fiat notes would reflect the commercial and industrial transactions underway at a given time. They would not carry any interest above a nominal charge for overhead and risk and would be apportioned to member institutions, typically workers’ associations, which would supervise applications for credit by members and apportion the notes accordingly to them. Such readily accessible credit made available to productive enterprises would allow for syndicates to quickly take over collective contracts for work (Douglas 1948, 541). In De Greef’s view, this would mean that idle capital would be absorbed by the syndicates with the capitalist employer eventually dispossessed (as a matter of economic efficiency rather than political ideology or revolution).

De Greef analyses processes that simultaneously bring social contradictions to the surface of politics and transform social relations in the present. His evolutionary approach is a break with most syndicalism which asserts revolutionary perspectives on social change. Indeed, De Greef’s work is particularly at odds with the perspective of Sorel who...
abhors notions of worker and management councils or collective bargaining which he views as buffers on class struggle. For Sorel, the emphasis is on scission or the rupture, along class lines, of workers and capital. In this, class violence famously plays a part in Sorel's view.

De Greef, perhaps ahead of much early sociology, provides an ecological analysis that recognizes and emphasizes the connectedness of humans and the natural world and centers this in his analysis. He emphasizes not only humans and their social relations, but situates these within the physical environment in connection with which he says human relations must be studied. De Greef constructed Herbert Spencer’s notion of social evolution in terms of increasing differentiation and coordination (Douglas 1948, 542). This is similar to the ecological notion of unity in diversity.

Overall, De Greef understood his sociology as a merging of Comte (classification), Spencer (social evolution), Quételet (statistics and quantitative analysis), with socialism in his view sociology is scientific socialism. Yet this is a socialism of Proudhon rather than of Marx. De Greef’s syndicalist perspective suggests that economic activities outweigh the political. In addition, organic economic divisions according to function represent the rational seats of power in the future (Douglas 1948, 551). At the center of his analysis is his conception of débat, or processes of mutual interest adjustment between groups and group pressures. In a subsequent article I examine this and other key components of De Greef’s sociology.

**Further Reading**


**Author Biography**
I currently teach critical theory, elite deviance, and community advocacy at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Metro Vancouver. My recent publications include "Cyber Disobedience: Re://Presentations of Online Anarchy" (Zero Books, 2014, with Jordon Tomblin) and "Anarchy and Society: Reflections on Anarchist Sociology" (Haymarket Books, 2014, with Dana M. Williams). My works have been published in numerous journals including "Contemporary Sociology" and "Critical Sociology" and I am the founding editor of the journal Radical Criminology (journal.radicalcriminology.org). I can be followed on twitter @critcrim.

Prosumption, appropriation and the ontology of economic form – January 27th @SocioWarwick
(2015-01-20 08:30)

Dave Elder-Vass (Loughborough)
Tuesday, January 27, 2015
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.15
Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

Prosumption – the unpaid performance of productive work by ‘consumers’ who thus help commercial businesses to generate a profit – is perhaps the most studied of the many hybrid forms of economic practice that have proliferated in the digital economy. A number of critical accounts have analysed prosumption in terms of Marx’s labour theory of value, suggesting for example that as prosumers do useful work for free they are infinitely exploited by the firms that profit as a result. But such accounts analyse the digital economy in terms that were derived from the nineteenth century factory – and terms that were highly questionable even in that context.

The spectacular mismatch between this model of capitalism and the case of prosumption exposes the inadequacy of the standard monolithic conception of capitalism as a homogeneous and universal contemporary economic form – a conception that at a certain level is also shared by the marketised discourse of mainstream economics. We need a new ontology of economic form that goes beyond the totalising concepts of mode of production and market economy and instead provides us with tools for understanding the sheer diversity of forms of economic practice in the contemporary economy. This paper offers the concept of appropriative practices as a contribution to such an ontology and applies it to the case of prosumption.

Dave Elder-Vass is a senior lecturer in sociology at Loughborough University, where he teaches a variety of core sociology modules. He also offers an MA module on Digital Economies and an innovative undergraduate option that consists entirely of debates between students on popular recent books. He is available to supervise PhD students, particularly those with an interest in social theory, critical realism, digital social developments or economic sociology.

Previously, he spent three years as a British Academy post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex, after completing his PhD at Birkbeck, University of London. Before returning to the academic world he was a senior IT executive in a major UK retail business.
The Relational ‘We’ in Personal Morphogenesis – February 3rd @SocioWarwick (2015-01-20 08:31)

Beth Weaver (Strathclyde)
Tuesday, February 3rd
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.15
Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

This paper discusses my empirical application of a relational realist analytic framework to illuminate the role of social groups or collectives, as social relations, in shaping and affecting outcomes for individuals and for groups. Using the morphogenetic sequence developed by Archer, to illustrate the conceptual schema progressed by Donati (2011), this framework affords equal recognition to individual actions, social relations and social systems. To empirically capture the relational ‘we’ in social morphogenesis, however, requires taking the social relation as a central unit of analysis. This means empirically conceptualising the social relation as both context and as interaction, and it means analysing the shifting dynamics and influences on the form and shape of a given social relation. Such an analysis can reveal what triggers reflexivity, what different forms of reflexivity entail, and how social relations can shape and influence outcomes for individuals and groups as well as how such processes shape and alter the relations themselves. Using examples from my own research examining the dynamics of desistance from crime, I will show how both individual and relational contributions are interconnected, and how the manner of relating and the reciprocal orientation of individuals-in-relation towards the maintenance of a given social relation are significant in understanding the relational ‘we’ in social morphogenesis.

Beth Weaver is a Lecturer at the Glasgow School of Social Work, University of Strathclyde. Prior to entering academia, she worked in the areas of youth and criminal justice social work in Scotland and latterly as a MAPPA Coordinator.

2015 - The year of the new necropolitics? (2015-01-21 08:00)

by Emilie Whitaker

Unusually for a festive period associated with new beginnings and births, the past fortnight has been suffused with debate around death and dying. The death of [1]Debbie Purdy, long-term campaigner for assisted dying, reopened the ‘right to die’ debate in frank fashion. In obituaries, commentators called for the House of Commons to support Lord Falconer’s Assisted Dying Bill which would allow doctors to prescribe a lethal dose to terminally ill patients judged to have less than six months to live. As a barometer of the public mood, a steady 60 - 70 % are in favour assisted dying. Those of us who are fortunate enough to work with the practitioners of tomorrow are likely to report similar patterns of support amongst students in our classrooms. In my own experience many despair at the ‘warehousing’ of older people and argue for ‘self-determination in death.’

Debate over what constitutes a ‘good death’ has moved from the hands of bioethicists into mainstream and

There has been the rise of the 'death café' which seeks to engage the public at large on debates about death and dying. Indeed the mundane interaction of strangers gathering over cake to discuss death in order to [4] "increase awareness of death with a view to helping people make the most of their (finite) lives" underlines how death discussion is losing the protective clothing and going mainstream. There can be little doubt that the stories of those living with dying have through their adoption of social media, brought the debate into kitchens, chat rooms and pubs. The intently personal reflections by Gould and Dr Kate Granger and the sociability of the death cafés make it increasingly difficult, perhaps passé, to keep death sealed in the box we all hold at the back of our minds.

The shift from the social denial and medicalisation of death to the conversational and public has been placed into sharp relief by a [5] controversial blog post written by Dr Richard Smith. Smith, a former editor of the British Medical Journal wrote that cancer provided the "best way to die". His argument rested on temporality and vitality. He outlined the long decline of dementia “slowly erasing” the person, the "up and down" of organ failure as 'tempting' doctors to 'treat too long' before dismissing the widely preferred quick, sudden death as self-centred, "That may be OK for you...but it may be very tough on those around you." On his case for cancer he writes,

You can say goodbye, reflect on your life, leave last messages, perhaps visit special places for a last time, listen to favourite pieces of music, read loved poems, and prepare, according to your beliefs, to meet your maker or enjoy eternal oblivion.

Dr Smith revives in many ways, the most ancient of arguments - that only through confronting death can we truly know how to live.

From a sociological viewpoint these events mark a reorientation in the politics of death and dying, one which alerts us to the generative as well as punitive aspects of what Mbembe (2003) coined ‘necropolitics.’ In Mbembe’s Foucauldian-inspired theorising, our current geopolitical condition is indicative of unprecedented forms of biopolitical governmentality in which the technologies of control strategically subject life to the power of death. Drone strikes, ISIS orgies of violence and the geopolitics of the Ebola outbreak underline such a thesis, but perhaps there is more to necropolitics as a site of inquiry and human experience.

The current academic writing on necropolitics tends to deny the generative aspects of Foucault’s schemata – the subversions, the resistances the alternate narratives, the cultural. The work of those like Gould, Dr Granger and participants in death cafés suggest that necropolitics can be a site for cultural action and broadening public understanding. The turn outwards to debate what a ‘good death’ means is sociologically instructive of a burgeoning public reclaiming of death. Such an expansion troubles the current conceptualisation of necropolitics, challenging it to encompass the generative cultural responses and subversions of citizens to biopolitical governmentality exercised not only on the battlefield but in hospitals and residential homes across the county.

Reflecting these burgeoning cultural shifts in the practices, narratives and cultures of death and dying I, with Professor Steve Fuller, have a call for papers on "Beyond the Negativity of Death: Towards a New Necropolitics" in a special issue of the journal Social Sciences. Open until 30 June 2015. [6] http://www.mdpi.com/journal/socsci/special_issues/beyond_the_negativity_of_death

3230
Emilie Whitaker is a lecturer in sociology and social work at Cardiff University. She is a sociologist of the life course with a particular interest in the practices, cultures and experiences of care. Her burgeoning work on necropolitics, ageing and dying has been buoyed through her teaching on the social work programme at Cardiff University. She gives particular thanks to the students on the course for their insights and engagement with these complex ethical issues. She tweets @Whitaker_Emilie

2. https://twitter.com/grangerkate

How to be an academic and deal with stupid & hostile interviewers (2015-01-22 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/Jt1cOnNrY5s
What is Digital Sociology? (2015-01-23 08:00)

What is Digital Sociology? I really like that Deborah Lupton suggested this title for her recent lecture at Warwick because it’s a question which fascinates me. Obviously this is in part a matter of terminological novelty, with ‘digital sociology’ obviously supplementing parallel projects of ‘digital humanities’, ‘digital geography’ and ‘digital anthropology’ in ways that are nonetheless difficult to pin down. However I think there’s more to it than this and that asking the question ‘what is Digital Sociology?’ helps keep our focus on digital sociology as a project that is open-ended and integrative, aiming to combine the various disparate strands of sociological engagement with digital matters into a more or less unified field of inquiry. One of the many things I like about Deborah Lupton’s work on Digital Sociology is the way it attempts to answer this question in a way that is intellectually diverse but nonetheless remains coherent. I’m increasingly drawn to the idea that Digital Sociology could be conceived of as:

1. an intellectual and institutional project which aims to build spaces within which these strands of activity can be brought into productive dialogue with one another

2. the totality of work which emerges from within such spaces having been shaped by them
It sounds absurdly abstract when I phrase it like this. In practice I’m talking about quite mundane things like expanding study group activity, organising conferences, developing websites, establishing journals. I’m also speculating about what will emerge out of such spaces because I don’t know but I’m convinced it would be valuable. I’m also convinced it’s going to prove crucial to the future of the discipline in an increasingly inhospitable climate, though whether I’m able to justify that intuition evidentially is another question. I think there’s something very exciting beginning to happen though and it feels like Digital Sociology is beginning to take some kind of concrete shape rather than simply being something which is invoked in a quasi-speculative manner.

One of the things that appeals to me most about digital sociology is the possible transformation in sociological practice which it both reflects and reinforces. If digital communications increasingly become part of the research process itself then there’s a tendency towards a form of continuous micro-publication, almost constituting a kind of open-source sociology, which could contribute in an important way to the profile of the discipline. I’m cautiously optimistic that the tendency within sociology to see the communication of sociological knowledge as something of secondary importance could become a thing of the past & sociologists could become somewhat more sociable than they have tended to be. I’m also excited by the feral forms of public engagement which are proliferating on social media and hope they resist assimilation into the assessment structures of the academy. I’m deeply opposed to social media metrics being incorporated into academic assessment precisely because I think it’s likely they’ll squeeze the life out of the nascent sphere of activity. In this sense I think the potential implications of digital sociology extend far beyond new research topics, new methods and new methodologies – underlying questions of what constitutes sociological craft and how, if at all, it should be revised to take account of new circumstances have heretofore entered rather naturally into digital sociology. I hope these won’t be sidelined as it continues to develop.


CFP for the Asexuality Studies Interest Group at the NWSA Annual Meeting 2015 (2015-01-24 08:00)

2015 Call for Papers about Asexuality

Asexuality Studies Interest Group

National Women’s Studies Association (NWSA)

November 12-15, 2015, Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The NWSA Asexuality Studies Interest Group welcomes papers for the 2015 NWSA annual conference. These asexuality-related themes are orientated towards the full NWSA 2015 CFP which can be found here: http://www.nwsa.org/Files/2015/NWSA %202015 %20CFP_Final.pdf

If you are interested in being a part of the 2015 Asexuality Studies Interest Group panels at NWSA, please send the following information to the designated panel organizer (listed under each theme) by Friday, February 6, 2015:

Name, Institutional Affiliation, Mailing Address, Email, Phone
We will try to accommodate as many qualified papers as possible, but panels are limited to 3-4 presenters. NWSA will make the final decision about which panels are accepted. Presenters accepted into the conference program must become members of NWSA in addition to registering for the conference.

1) Sponsored Session: Disciplining Bodies, Regulating Identities: Affect/Eros and the Intersection of Asexual and Fat Identities

This is a sponsored session of the Asexuality Studies Interest Group in collaboration with the Fat Studies Interest Group.

The fields of Asexuality Studies and Fat Studies are two exciting areas of inquiry in the contemporary academy. Rigorous scholarly analyses and theoretical production combine with cutting-edge social activism to create new epistemologies, creative political strategies and visionary, new social paradigms. Understandings of affect and eros have informed these two academic fields and social movements by fostering knowledge about the role of affective and erotic economies, intensities and potentialities. As the NWSA CFP states: “There is ample evidence of communal and collective practices that invoke alternative imaginaries, worlds, memories, mythologies, desires, cosmologies, embodiments, and yearnings and that disrupt the disciplining of non-normative emotions, desires, bodies, peoples, practices, histories, spaces, and ideas. Affect and eros can thus be considered pivotal both to understanding how precarity is structured and also contested.” This session will utilize perspectives gleaned from asexuality studies and fat studies to explore the fields’ relationship to affect/eros and the productive potential of these intersectional analyses to interrogate, deconstruct and reimagine oppressive corporeal regimes based on compulsory sexuality and the tyranny of slenderness. Topics for this session could include, but are not limited to:

- the experiences of individuals who identify simultaneously as fat and as asexual and the vulnerability engendered by converging ideological systems based in acephobia and fatphobia; affective knowledge of uniquely fat and asexual grammars of the body

- the ways in which affective and/or erotic work is deployed in service of fat and asexual acceptance, rights, visibility, community-building and education; the fostering of fat and asexual affective solidarity

- the corporeal disciplining of fat and asexual bodies and the regulatory control of these identities through affective and erotic inducements in a culture of precarity

- The construction of fat bodies as inherently asexual and the theoretical, discursive and political implications of this conflation

- The stereotyping, bias and discrimination faced by fat and asexual communities; affective and erotic policing and regulatory surveillance of fat and asexual bodies and identities within a neoliberal cultural economy

- The ways in which asexual and fat eros/affect intersect with multiple categories of difference including race, ethnicity, class, age, immigrant status, dis/ability and religion

Please submit materials for the sponsored session to organizer, Joelle Ruby Ryan (Joelle.Ryan@unh.edu).
2) Co-Sponsored Session with Trans/Gender-Variant Caucus:

Institutions, Containments and the Intersection between Asexuality & Trans/Gender-Variance

This is a co-sponsored Round Table Discussion* with the Trans/Gender-Variant Caucus and the Asexuality Studies Interest Group.

Institutions, even with the best of intentions, can create containments or confinements for those they work to serve, and exclude those outside predetermined groups. Asexuality and trans/gender-variance often fit outside institutional categories, which can cause uncertainty, insecurity, or precarity for one’s well being. This discussion will focus on the intersection of trans/gender-variance and asexuality, how their resistance to control, repression, and confinement overlap, and power imbalances between them.

Proposals for this theme may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

●How can the intersections of trans/gender-variant and asexuality studies serve as a way to critique institutional control and containment, through disability, debility, race, citizenship, sexuality, class, and gender?

●How are asexual and trans/gender-variant bodies positioned within hierarchies of power and what (different) avenues are available for contestation and resistance to those hierarchies?

●Collaborations and intersections between trans/gender-variant and asexual studies can be key to contesting the violence of institutions/containments and to addressing pervasive injustice, but how are power asymmetries addressed within such work?

●How do institutions promote and help asexual, trans/gender-variant, and queer communities and how do they induce precarity, marginalization, and containment?

●Where do trans/gender-variance and asexuality intersect and how can they work against precarity?

●How can asexuality and trans/gender-variant identity be a form of empowerment and not stigma?

As a round table discussion there may be 4-6 presenters. In addition, paper titles are not required for individuals and 50-100 words introducing your contribution to the discussion will suffice as an abstract.

Please submit materials for the co-sponsored session to organizer Bauer McClave (Caroline) at bauer1331@gmail.com

3) Theme 1: Debility/Vulnerability:

The Relevance of Asexualities, Debility and Vulnerability

This panel examines the adaptability of asexualities, debility and vulnerability, as related to both current and past issues of precarity and paradox: indifferent and varying working contexts and creative agency and voice; uncertain futures and possibilities of the present; established hierarchies and open, horizontal structures - largely organized online; old nationalism and new cosmopolitanism; individual inadequacy regarding climate change and project based alliances.

Questions to consider for applicants:
- In what ways are asexualities connected to, and different from, debility and vulnerability?

- How do asexualities, debility and vulnerability represent a radical challenge to power structures rooted in heteronormativity?

- What are working lives of lived asexualities, vulnerability and debility like, within framework of heteronormative dominant culture?

- What are the risks, possibilities and ensuing tension implied within asexualties, debility and vulnerability?

Please submit materials for this session to organizer Anna Lise Jensen, aaaonyc@gmail.com

4) Theme 2: Affect/Eros

Between Affect and Eros: Precarity and the Asexual Community

Following the NWSA theme of Precarity and Affect/Eros this panel will explore the "embodied, political, affective, economic, ideological, temporal, and structural conditions" which construct and regulate asexuality. Precarity "draws attention to the lived conditions, structures nature, and relational aspect of systemic inequality" as an emerging and often contested sexual orientation asexuality is a precarious identity, and asexual individuals often find themselves in precarious positions. As an emerging political identity and orientation asexuality challenges established understandings of both eros and affect. What role can eros play in the politics of asexuality? How do eros and affect emerge in the daily lived experiences of asexual individuals? What expectations around affective labor does asexuality reinforce or challenge? Can eros and affect be deployed to challenge the precarious and marginalized position of asexuality? Or do eros and affect contribute to the precarious position of asexual identities?

Proposals for this theme may include--but are not limited to--the following topics:

● What can be gained by attending to eros and affect together, as sites where Asexual Identity is both precarious and resisted?

● How have affect and eros served as sites of social control? How does Asexuality challenge these conceptions across context and over time?

● How has the surveillance and regulation eros and affect been differently marked in the asexual identity and across intersecting identities such as race, class, disability, citizenship status, gender, ethnicity, religion and/or spirituality and body size?

● How does asexuality eros and affect transform inequality and challenge hegemonic values and practices?

● What productive investigations can be produced by placing asexuality into conversation with affect theory?

● How can feminist theoretical understanding of asexuality produce challenges and knowledge about the norms of romantic love?

● How can asexual identities and experiences challenge, reinforce or dismantle expectations of eros and affective labor sexual relationships of all kinds

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5) Theme 3: Institutions/Containments

This theme will seek to explore how various institutions and regimes of social control have sought to contain or regulate asexual identity, as well as how asexuals might form coalitions to resist oppression and precarity. Papers might address any of the following questions, or other relevant questions:

- What is the state of asexual institution building? Do these institutions help asexuals resist precarity or do they further reproduce it?

- How have various institutions and regimes of social control (medical, legal, educational, cultural, carceral, etc.) sought to contain, regulate, or define asexuality across different historical and geopolitical contexts?

- How might asexuals’ coalition building with other gender and sexual minorities contest the violence of institutions/containments and combat pervasive injustice? How are power asymmetries addressed within such work?

- What are the possibilities and potential problems inherent in institutionalizing asexuality under the umbrella of queer identity? Is such an alliance a site of resistance or containment?

- How does asexuality intersect with other institutionalized forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, colonization, and poverty, to produce precarity?

Please submit materials for this session to organizer Kara French at kmfrench@salisbury.edu

6) Theme 4: Distortion/Dispossession

This year’s conference theme of precarity is particularly relevant to Asexuality studies and to work which intersects many fields of study including health sciences, sociology, anthropology, geography, and others. Precarity, as the NWSA 2015 CFP indicates, is intended to "draw attention to the lived conditions, structured nature, and relational aspects of systemic inequality. Focusing on diverse forms of violence, inequality, and harm pervading contemporary life, precarity names a 'politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become deferentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.'"

To address precarity and differential suffering, distortion (via representational economies and controlling images) and dispossession (structural dispersal and material deprivation) are key areas of interest. This panel will look specifically at social and material realities of Asexuality, including the effects of distortion and dispossession at both individual and collective levels and possibilities for resistance. From relationships with Queer/LGBT communities, to media representations of Asexuals using only White representatives, to the lack of legal protection for Asexual/LGBTQ people in many states, this panel is intended to build from lived experiences of Asexuality in relation to the systemic and structured nature of inequality and violence.

Proposals for this theme may include–but are not limited to–the following topics:

- Asexual activism as resistance to dispossession/distortion

- Intersections of distortion and dispossession in Asexual experience/Asexual community

- Differential suffering of/for/by Asexual people
-Ways that structures, institutions, and systems perpetuate dispossession/distortion around Asexuality and Asexual people and the associated effects

-How do Asexual people deferentially “experience the material, representational, environmental, political, and discursive effects of dispossession, distortion, and degradation?”

-Solidarity with Asexual people/communities and confronting dispossession/distortion/degradation

Please submit materials for this session to organizer Sarah Jasmine Stork, stork.sarahj@gmail.com

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**The Super Rich and Us (2015-01-25 08:00)**

I thought this was pretty good, given it’s a popular show produced for prime time TV:

IFRAME: [1]//www.youtube.com/embed/t2BiuW93bos

Centre for Social Ontology Seminars: Spring Term 2015

January 27th: Dave Elder-Vass (Loughborough University) R1.15
*Prosumption, appropriation and the ontology of economic form*

February 3rd: Beth Weaver (University of Strathclyde) R1.15
*The Relational ‘We’ in Social Morphogenesis*

February 17th: Balihar Sanghera (University of Kent) R1.04
*Lay ethics, distortions and charitable giving*

March 10th: Alistair Mutch (Nottingham Trent University), R1.04
*Routines and Reflexivity: Consequences of Developments in Organizations for Morphogenesis*
All Seminars Take Place 5pm - 6:30pm in the Ramphal Building on the University of Warwick Campus

All welcome! Contact socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions.

www.socialontology.org

The Sociologist in the Strip Club (2015-01-26 08:00)

There’s a wonderful essay in the New Yorker reflecting on Howard Becker’s life and work. Among many other features, it contains a trenchant critique of Bourdieu:

“Bourdieu’s big idea was the champs, field, and mine was monde, world—what’s the difference?” Becker asks rhetorically. “Bourdieu's idea of field is kind of mystical. It's a metaphor from physics. I always imagined it as a zero-sum game being played in a box. The box is full of little things that zing around. And he doesn't speak about people. He just speaks about forces. There aren't any people doing anything.” People in Bourdieu's field are merely atom-like entities. (It was Bourdieu's vision that helped inspire Michel Houellebecq's nihilistic novel of the meaningless collisions of modern life, "The Elementary Particles.")


1. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/12/outside-game
2. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/12/outside-game

Call for papers: Beyond the Negativity of Death: Towards a New Necropolitics (2015-01-27 08:00)

Dear Colleagues, At least since Ernest Becker’s 1970s anthropological classic, The Denial of Death, but with precedents from Epicurus to Freud, death has been presented as the ultimate fact about the human condition, which while certainly not positive in its own right, only becomes more negative through its denial. This Special Issue is dedicated to denying the two assumptions in this line of thought: (1) that death is the negation of life; (2) that the terms of death are non-negotiable. In this respect, the Special Issue will develop positive, empowering attitudes toward death, perhaps even an 'economy of death', removing the sense of absoluteness that still surrounds the topic.

- Death as the ultimate challenge for science to overcome to prove humanity's supremacy: longevity medicine, cryonics.
• Death as a moment in a process of rejuvenation or resurrection—a re-booting of life.
• Benefits to reputation from either dying early or long ago: i.e., how absence makes the heart grow fonder.
• Death as an opportunity for a new life, say, in a ‘digital afterlife’.
• Death as a hypothetical perspective for regarding the world: i.e., the standpoint of quasi-human spiritual entities who no longer have a material investment in what they observe.
• Death as an incentive for productivity in life: i.e., optimizing personal resources in a finite space and time to leave the greatest legacy.
• Death as an occasion for the individual to validate the collective, say, through self-sacrifice.
• Death as a normal and arguably even progressive feature of experimentation and innovation: e.g., the role of mutation and selection in evolution, the use of extreme experience to define the limits of life.
• Models from the non-human world for adopting a positive attitude toward death: e.g., planned obsolescence, recycling.

Theoretical, empirical, and practice-based studies are welcomed, from any disciplinary or methodological perspective. Prof. Steve Fuller Dr. Emilie WhitakerGuest Editor Submission Manuscripts should be submitted online at [1]www.mdpi.com by [2]registering and [3]logging in to this website. Once you are registered, [4]click here to go to the submission form. Manuscripts can be submitted until the deadline. Papers will be published continuously (as soon as accepted) and will be listed together on the special issue website. Research articles, review articles as well as communications are invited. For planned papers, a title and short abstract (about 100 words) can be sent to the Editorial Office for announcement on this website. Submitted manuscripts should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere (except conference proceedings papers). All manuscripts are refereed through a peer-review process. A guide for authors and other relevant information for submission of manuscripts is available on the [5]Instructions for Authors page. [6]Social Sciences is an international peer-reviewed Open Access quarterly journal published by [7]MDPI. Please visit the [8]Instructions for Authors page before submitting a manuscript. For the first couple of issues the [9]Article Processing Charge (APC) will be waived for well-prepared manuscripts. English correction and/or formatting fees of 250 CHF (Swiss Francs) will be charged in certain cases for those articles accepted for publication that require extensive additional formatting and/or English corrections.

Disposed to Learn: Schooling, Ethnicity and the Scholarly Habitus by Megan Watkins and Greg Noble is a thought-provoking, cohesive, and deeply engrossing monograph of research which will be of interest to scholars studying ethnicity and education using a Bourdieusian lens. Throughout their scholarship, Watkins and Noble have challenged the tendency toward the essentializing of ethnicity within multiculturalism, while presenting a more sensitive analysis of the relationship between ‘culture’ and academic outcomes. Keeping relations between ethnicity and dispositions towards learning as a central focus, this book examines the dynamics of learner differences. The work is designed to both enable the reader to gain an overview of the key debates regarding the role ethnicity plays in education before focusing on a specific research project with families of Chinese, Pasifika and Anglo backgrounds in Australia. The research presented draws from work across ten schools using survey and observational methodology. This review intends to provide an overview of Watkins and Noble’s contribution with a focus on the way their epistemological underpinnings and theoretical framework inform their analysis and discuss some of their main findings before concluding with some thoughts on the significance of the text from the perspective of an educational researcher who is interested in Bourdieusian ‘tools’ in practice.

One of the most striking things, when one first begins reading Disposed to Learn, is how assiduous Watkins and Noble are as they navigate the tricky terrain of ethnicity and learner identities. The ethnicization of educational achievement is widely discussed in popular and educational discourse, but it is a difficult area to theorize. As scholars, Watkins and Noble caution against the reductive use of ethnicity in explaining educational performance and argue that broad correlations can only be a starting point for analysis. Cultures and ethnic groups are no longer totalities and, arguably, never were. Watkins and Noble contend:

“‘Ethnicity’, ‘culture’ and ‘race’ are all complex and problematic terms evoked in discussions about educational (and economic and social) disadvantage.” (4)

Of credit to the quality of analysis to come, the authors spend a considerable amount of time (Chapters 1 and 2) putting forth the complex nature of these terms while defining key debates. These early chapters are very accessible and the analysis presented will be of substantive interest to social theorists. Critiquing the various pathologies surrounding ethnicity, Watkins and Noble discuss how ethnic-centered notions of academic attainment are taken up in the media, specifically the controversy over Amy Chau’s ‘Tiger Mother’ and the significance of privately operated academic coaching/tutoring colleges. As this book is intended to be an account of how students are ‘disposed’ to learn, Watkins and Noble continue with a key focus on how dispositions come into being and the various factors which work in practice to form these dispositions. The authors write that rather than view dispositions as innate qualities of one’s ethnic background, dispositions must be studied as specific capacities and forms of educational capital that emerge from specific practices.

As the work seeks to unearth a more nuanced understanding of tropes commonly associated with ‘ethnicity’ and ‘culture,’ Watkins and Noble’s argument concerning scholarly habitus becomes an essential theoretical lens. Scholarly habitus – or what Bourdieu called the competence of ‘educational capital’ – covers the wide array of skills and knowledges that serve these functions within the schooling system. Conceptualizing within a Bourdieusian framework of practice allows Watkins and Noble to synthesize what they consider to be the factors which influence academic engagement and capacity for scholarly labor, mainly: parental engagement, aspirations, stereotypes, homework habits, spatial and corporeal congruence, schemas of perception, and student attitudes to teaching and learning. Watkins and Noble do some excellent theoretical work on capturing how the scholarly habitus forms. They write:

“The concept of a scholarly habitus is useful then in exploring the links between home and school practices,
embodied dispositions and sociocultural background because it allows us to address issues of self-regulation and the possession of educational capital without falling into simplistic arguments about ‘ethnic drive.’” (8)

Through this attention to practice in the construction of a scholarly habitus, they also extend Lareau’s work on ‘accomplishment of natural growth’/’concerted cultivation.’ This becomes a particularly excellent part of the book where Watkins and Noble are able to build upon existing social theory, while continuously drawing back to their concept of scholarly habitus, as they interrogate commonly held assumptions regarding ethnicity and academic attainment. To explore how these factors manifest, Watkins and Noble present small illustrative case studies. The case studies in Chapter 5, concerning teacher perceptions of normative behavior concerning ethicized learning styles and how school cultures influence the ongoing formation of dispositions toward academic success, remain particularly striking. In Chapter 6, the authors extend this knowledge to show how pedagogy and school cultures of discipline and control contribute to the formation of academic engagement.

What will be of significant interest to scholars in the social sciences is how staunchly Watkins and Noble argue that scholarly activities are “dependent upon bodily control” where “a certain kind of stillness affords a readiness to engage in higher order activities” (53) or what they also referred to as “productive stillness” (83). These dispositions, the authors contend, are embodied through specific practices, specifically the cultural background and resources available; Watkins and Noble argue that bodily control has tremendous productive capacities. Furthermore, they contend that to fully understand the bodily control/embodied capacities argument, bodies must be thought about in specific fields and not in terms of “abstracted notions of class or ethnicities inscribed in the habitus” (54), which may raise eyebrows for strict Bourdieusian scholars who will read this as a misinterpretation of how habitus can be utilized in educational research.

As fruitful as Bourdieu’s tools are, especially in considering the linking of home and school, Watkins and Noble explore – through a more cautious approach – how educational knowledge and skills becomes “a social mechanism of distinction and legitimation and reproduction of social power” (37). After all, they point out that not all “educational knowledge is the class-based knowledge of the powerful,” and analysis must open the door for “the socially useful skills that are largely monopolized by the powerful” (37). This point reminded me of how class is not necessarily about resources but the strategies employed around resources.

Before concluding this review, I want to critique Disposed to Learn from the perspective of a Bourdieusian scholar. While fastidious Bourdieusian scholars may expect to a larger attention paid to social class/social mobility/cultural capital, what I found particularly interesting about the work was how Watkins and Noble account for the influence of the school on the habitus. While there has been some work done in this area (cf. Atkinson 2011), it is certainly an unexplored area in Bourdieusian scholarship. Of course, it is interesting that Watkins and Noble have chosen to use Bourdieu as a theoretical lens, given his gaping silences concerning gender and race/ethnicity. Given their area of expertise and knowledge of Bourdieusian theory, I wanted to know more about how Watkins and Noble conceive of race/ethnicity working (with)in the habitus.

In order to capture the formation of educational capital, Watkins and Noble’s work is required to be expansive, in depth, and consistently theoretically robust. While it obviously is an important book for those interested in educational social theory and ethnicity, it must be noted how Watkins and Noble construct the work so it is accessible to those who do not necessarily have knowledge of these areas. The active engagement with this contentious area (which runs through the introduction, discussion, and conclusion of each chapter) enhances the scholarship. In their exploration of the formation of a scholarly habitus, Watkins and Noble meticulously balance the theory and the empirical creating a compelling narrative. In conclusion, Watkins and Noble’s investigation of the complex relationship between ethnicity, habitus and dispositions to learn shows an exciting capacity to build on existing socio-cultural work.
Ignorance in the ‘Golden Age of Television’ (2015-01-28 08:00)

by Tracy Jensen

Last month the House of Commons hosted an evening debate “Manufacturing Stereotypes of Benefit Claimants: the role of the media and political leaders”. It was remarkable for all the wrong reasons and I’ve been getting stuck trying to write this post about it ever since. Finally this week I realized that I was trying to say about that evening – and as is usually the case, that realization came in an unexpected moment, during a meeting with a student who made a wise comment about how politicians, knowing nothing about poverty, carelessly reducing incomes by a few pounds here, a few pounds here, have no idea of the devastation they create. So this post is about ignorance and its production across politics and media.

The House of Commons debate itself took place at the end of the corridor of Committee Rooms, the high-ceilinged, wood-paneled debating chambers, access to which takes you on a humbling tour of the upper echelons of political power. In Westminster Hall, a parade of stalls sold a range of tastefully-branded festive gifts (House of Lords champagnes truffles, anyone?) and the Committee corridor took me past many portraits and marble statues of dead white men who peered down at me with the same expression of disapproval. What chance do ordinary people have of being represented in this setting? The evening was a stark reminder of our current crisis of representation, which both media and political agents contribute to, sometimes greasing the wheels and sometimes driving the machine of welfare commonsense. This machine insists that unemployment, poverty and precarity are the result of individual poor decisions, lack of willpower or motivation. The commonsense narrative of the welfare state is that welfare itself has created something called ‘welfare dependency’; a state of infantilised reliance, indulgence, entitlement, the ‘[1]something for nothing’ culture [2]so often spoke of by [3]political elites. Accompanying such ‘welfare dependency’ talk is the fantasy solution of ‘getting tough’, hardening our ‘soft touch’ welfare, making assessment more rigorous, reducing eligibility criteria, increasing conditions and so ensuring that people become more ‘responsible’, ‘reliant’, that they make better ‘lifestyle choices’.

The debate panel, while set out as an opportunity for the speakers to think reflexively about the role they play, intentionally or otherwise, in benefit stigma, was largely, disappointingly, unreflexive. The most interesting and useful comments of the night came from Professor Ruth Lister, who highlighted the “insidiously corrosive” effect of the concept of ‘welfare dependency’, and particularly of the conventional wisdom that there are families where...
‘several generations have never worked’. Such myths have been consistently exposed by decades of sociological re-
search (most recently [4]here) and yet they keep returning in the rhetoric of political elites, whose poverty-producing
policies rely on such bogeymen.

The two politicians in attendance on the panel, John Redwood MP and Steven Baker MP, repeated echoes of
these myths in their debate comments. Discussing the workfare programme, Redwood suggested that it “helps
people gain the habit of work” which they have lost; reproducing the myth that unemployment is caused by
an individual lack of willpower. It is frustrating to see such myths circulate endlessly, particularly in light of the
consent they generate for increasingly punitive and conditional welfare reforms. See for yourself how [5]Redwood
and [6]Baker have voted in recent welfare reform motions. The stubbornness of this mythology in the House of
Commons also – perhaps – reflects the narrowing of avenues that can lead there: last year the Social Mobility
and Child Poverty Commission published [7]a report which powerfully documented the dominance of a tiny elite
in the political chambers who should represent (‘reflect’) us all. What can we expect from a House of Commons
increasingly filled by this ‘[8]class apart’, cushioned from poverty and precarity, for whom working class people
are some ‘quaint ethnicity’. We should not be surprised that in this crisis of representation, these representatives
increasingly rely on a commonsense shorthand, obligingly circulated by [9] neoliberal thinktanks and special advisors.

The crisis of representation extends too to media; and at this debate we heard from several figures in the
television industry. Richard McKerrow, founder of Love Productions, must win a prize for most regrettable comment
of the evening when he stated that we are in a “golden age of television”, including presumably his own Benefits
Street. When Channel 4 broadcast Benefits Street at the beginning of 2014, the eruption of disgust and hate that it
seemed to authorize was alarming. During broadcast there were threats across social media sites to firebomb James
Turner Street, and in the days and weeks after a shocking and sustained campaign of media intrusion into the lives
of the programme’s participants. (The sociological response to the programme, and to the genre of ‘poverty porn’
can be accessed [10]here.) I started thinking seriously about this genre in September 2013 and since that time I have
struggled to keep up with the great swathes of symbolically violent television that (re)presents poverty in voyeuristic
and damaging ways. The latest example of this ‘golden age’ genre forensically charted the welfare ‘burden’ of several
trails for Love Production’s second season of Benefits Street and the producers must be eagerly anticipating the
guaranteed attention currency that will be generated by its broadcast. The directors proudly describe the second
season as if it will be a public service, telling the [12] local Teesside newspaper that “we’re looking to give a voice to
a community that don’t really have a voice […] we think it’s incredibly important to represent those people”; yet to
me the real, invisible story is one of cold, hard economics. The value of Love Productions [13] increased by twenty
five per cent in 2014. Not one penny went to any of the people living on James Turner Street, whose unpaid labour
provided the thirty pieces of silver swiftly pocketed by Love Productions once they were done ‘representing’.

What struck me most about McKerrow’s comments at the House of Commons – and the comments of other
speakers – was how media and political elites strategically profess ignorance. In the audience discussion, I asked
why social scientists – experts on poverty, inequality and precarity – are not routinely invited to the table of political
and media debate about welfare reform. It was a genuine question aimed at both McKerrow (Love Productions,
as far as I know, did not take any advice from social scientists or sociologists while producing Benefits Street) and
at Baker (a member of think-tank Centre for Social Justice, who have managed to produce not one but [14] two
reports on poverty without consulting a single social scientist, see Slater, 2012). The response to this question was
disappointing; the chair asked how anyone is to keep up with the great volume of social research produced every
year? (to which I would answer: keeping up with any of it would be a start).

Of course, the conditions under which we come to know – and to not know – are deeply political, and the
study of knowledge (as well as a counterstudy of ignorance) reveals the multiple dimensions of power. When McK-
errow (and other poverty pornographers) state that programming “[15]shines a light on poverty” he is participating
in a re-invention of ignorance that both serves him with a rationale to make his programme, and also denies that
anything useful is already known. “We must shine a light on poverty because we know so little about it!” Poverty pornographers have shown that they are not interested in exploring the hundreds of detailed, thoughtful, sociological books about poverty and inequality. They have not attempted to enlist the advice or counsel of researchers who have spent years researching communities on the breadline: communities they may live in, often the very same communities that directors wish to ‘represent’ (this award-winning sociological study was based in Teesside, where Benefits Street 2 is set, yet its authors have not been consulted nor are they serving as advisors to the production). The study of ignorance, mapped out by Proctor and Scheibinger in their 2008 edited collection Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance, can point us to how and why certain knowledge and forms of knowing become ‘disappeared’, delayed or neglected.

Image: Local knowledge: Benefits Street camera crew had ‘local connections’ which (eventually) granted access. Photograph: Gazette Live, 2014

(Of course, even this liberal use of ignorance requires the occasional strategic flash of knowledge. When location scouting in Teesside for Benefits Street 2, producers were initially chased out by residents who did not want to be insects under their microscope. They were given a clear message by Middlesborough football fans who unfurled a banner reading “Being Poor Is Not Entertainment: Fuck Benefits Street!” The eventual selection of Stockton as a location came about partly as a result of the ‘local knowledge’ of some of the film crew who hailed from the area, which eventually granted access and ‘consent’. This flags up a useful site for starting to unpick the interweaving of knowledge and ignorance; the shaky politics of ‘representation’ in contemporary reality television; the hierarchies of ‘technician’ and ‘creative’ in the cultural work of media production. Most importantly it reminds us that welfare commonsense machinery is staffed by a whole range of exploited workers – some paid behind the camera, some completely unpaid in front of it – whose compliance is essential but precarious).

My question then is not “how can documentary television shine a light on the unknown world of poverty”, since that world is far from ‘unknown’. My question is equally not “how can we stop such television being made”. Television is an incredibly powerful medium, which can drive and shape social debate and change political consensus. Rather, my questions are; is our representation ‘machinery’ broken? Has television craft become television franchise? What are the conditions that enable ignorance about poverty to be claimed, constantly; by television producers who claim to bravely explore it while reproducing the same tired visual scripts; by politicians who cling
to myths about the feckless welfare-dependent poor? What would television look like if production companies consulted advisors with actual, sociological expertise about the very processes they wish to ‘represent’? What would welfare policy look like if politicians read sociological research about poverty rather than a narrow range of think-tank publications? How bold would it be if, rather than inviting them to appear as ‘reality stars’ in their vision, directors gave cameras to people marginalised by poverty, showed them how to use them, and asked them to represent themselves and their lives in self-authored programming? Then we would truly be in a golden age of television.

Notes

Thanks to Tom Slater who introduced me to the term ‘agnotology’ which in turn led me to Proctor and Scheibinger’s bracing [19]collection. You can read Tom’s blistering article on agnotology and welfare reform [20]here

[nbox type='notice']Tracy Jensen’s research explores the classed and gendered intersections of contemporary parenting culture, and how these are reproduced across social, cultural, media and policy sites. Tracy tweets at @Drtraceyjensen[/nbox]

2. http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/395548/Britain-s-something-for-nothing-culture-is-over-says-Iain-Duncan-Smith
15. http://go.dspy.me/p5cG
17. http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847429100
18. https://mediapovertywelfare.wordpress.com/2014/10/30/being-poor-is-not-entertainment

Steve Fuller (@ProfSteveFuller) (2015-01-28 08:15:32)
While I appreciate your outrage and I certainly endorse the study of agnotology, your piece reads more like an advertisement for the need for more research into the public misrepresentation of poverty than a strategy for addressing the response of the committee chair who professed not knowing where to begin sifting through the relevant social research literature. This suggests to me that sociologists should try to work as researchers for MPs and their committees to bring the relevant literature to their attention. Otherwise, you may just end up unwittingly reproducing the problem that you’re trying to solve – i.e. by expanding the literature base and pushing it in a more inward-looking (i.e. academically oriented) direction.
I take the point Steve, and thank you for it. At the same time, I don’t agree that ‘academically oriented‘ necessarily means ‘inward-looking‘ - I know so many public-facing sociologists who are trying to bring their research, and the research of others, onto the tables where it can influence and shape policy (we all want our research to have ‘impact’, right?) - too often they are blocked, silenced and ignored. If anyone is inward-looking it is think-tanks (and the politicians who set them up) who fail/refuse to consult these experts and instead conduct their own rigged research (what Tom Slater memorably calls ‘policy-based evidence-making’), rely on ‘research by dipstick’ and ‘anecdote’ to drown out the literature base that already exists.

Class, integrity and carpetbagging: Labour’s MP selection in York (2015-02-06 14:50:48)

[...] So when we consider who is the ‘best’ candidate, we must think who can ‘best’ connect, understand and appreciate the challenges of York’s residents. Class in politics does matter, and Tracy Jensen explains why far better than I ever could here. [...]
‘For sociology to be to be effective, especially beyond the academy, it must have literary ambitions. Mills’ assessment of the quality of the sociological writings of his time is damning. He argues that there is a “serious crisis in literacy” in which sociologists are “very much involved” (1959:239). Mills’ position here is an extension of his earlier attack on Parsons and Lazarsfeld, and is just as fierce in tone. He observes that “a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences” (Mills, 1959:239), and adds that this style of writing has nothing to do with the complexity of the subject matter. Mills explains the prevalence of this style, instead, in terms of a quest for status. He declares: “Desire for status is one reason why academic men slip so readily into unintelligibility. And that, in turn, is one reason why they do not have the status they desire” (Mills, 1959:240). This thirst for status is said to be driven by an underlying desire for the sociologist to achieve recognition as a “scientist”; something, he argues, that led to sociology written in clear and accessible prose (including, presumably, his own work) to be dismissed by many as mere journalism.’

Mills saw the promise of sociology as being undermined by this quest for status and the sclerotic forms of expression he saw associated with it, with sociologists prone to ‘stereotyped ways of writing which do away with the full experience by keeping them detached throughout their operations’ almost as if ‘they are deadly afraid to take chance of modifying themselves in the process of their work’ (Mills, 2001: 111). He saw this failure of vision and expression in what could almost be construed as epochal terms, representing a failure of sociological imagination at precisely the moment when this distinctive sensibility was most needed. Mills was, in many ways, estranged from the academic establishment and this was, in part, both cause and a consequence of his critique. This estrangement gave him a degree of intellectual freedom from the cultural norms prevalent within the professional sociology of his day and this was in turn entrenched by the manner in which he employed that freedom to pull apart many of the orthodoxies which he saw as so inimical to his understanding of sociology’s promise. This post by Mark Carrigan and Milena Kremakova is an extract from a [1]longer co-authored essay.


An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving in the UK - Feb 17th @SocioWarwick (2015-01-29 20:00)

Balihar Sanghera (Kent)
Tuesday, February 17th
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.04
Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

This paper examines how charitable giving is an outcome of different interacting elements of lay morality. Charitable giving reflects people’s capacity for fellow-feeling (or sympathy), moral sentiments, personal reflexivity, ethical dispositions, moral norms and moral discourses. An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving is warranted because of the complex nature of the object. Though ordinary people engage in ethical reasoning, they often think and act in piecemeal fashion, so that confusion and inconsistencies can occur. This is particularly evident when gender, class and ‘race’ shape people’s feelings and evaluations of others, their attention and care for others, and their understanding of responsibility and blame for social issues. Morality is further complicated because it takes place in the mundane world of everyday life that can result in inconsistent and confusing judgements and actions on giving.
All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions

Our most popular posts this month (2015-01-30 08:00)


[2]Does Sociology as a Discipline Have a Future in the UK after the REF?

[3]How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)

[4]Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[5]How not to use twitter as an academic

[6]The price of a citation, or How did King Abdulaziz University get in the world’s top 10?

[7]Life in the accelerated academy: how it’s possible for Žižek to publish 55 books in 14 years

[8]Making the familiar strange

[9]How to get started on a sociological essay

[10]The Sociology of Civilizational Collapse


[12]How To Keep Your Sociological Imagination Alive


What is Philosophical Sociology? (2015-01-31 08:00)

In this podcast recorded at a [1]Centre for Social Ontology seminar, Daniel Chernilo (Reader in Social and Political Thought at [2]Loughborough University) discusses his work on philosophical sociology. This was the basis for a [3]recent paper in the British Journal of Sociology.


2. [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/academicandresearch/chernilo-daniel.html](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/academicandresearch/chernilo-daniel.html)
4. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/philosophicalsociology.mp3](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/philosophicalsociology.mp3)


[... a recent example in touch with the meta-debate of method and philosophy, Daniel Chernilo (2014), in a recent paper (also presented at the Centre for Social Ontology), introduces what he calls philosophical sociology, described in the abstract as “an

When considering the future of the research seminar, it’s best to begin by recalling that ‘seminar’ relates to words like ‘seminal’ and ‘seminary’. No, I don’t mean the politically correct point that it is focussed on the male semen. Rather, I mean that it is focussed on the early stages of research, where one is sharing initial findings with others who might or would like to offer input into its further development. It follows that a research seminar should be exploratory and relatively non-threatening in character. Invitees should be discouraged from reading already published works in this context, and no one should be required to attend if they do not feel they have anything useful to say. Both of these conditions add up to a relatively open intellectual environment. It is also in the spirit of teaching seminars, where students are normally expected to set the terms of the discussion in light of a lecture. The difference here boils down to voluntary attendance in research seminars and compulsory attendance in teaching seminars. At least that’s the theory...

However, the research seminar is too often turned into a church service where a department’s identity is reinforced in the presence of an outside speaker, who may or may not be a willing celebrant. This is the source of stories about certain departments being supportive, hostile or indifferent to outside speakers. If research seminars did what they should be doing, these stories would not be in circulation. Those who share the speaker’s concerns would not be reduced to ‘witnessing’ in the face of half-informed sceptics in the audience: A more productive exchange would result. To be sure, attendance might be lower. But outsiders would not be invited to where they are not wanted, and locals would be able to decide whether to attend an advertised event without fear of violating some imagined sense of collective identity.

The last point raises the crux of the matter: namely, that as long as departments are seen as units of research assessment, there will be a tendency to ‘churchify’ its activities into opportunities for collective expressions of a common faith, albeit often expressed in a more pedagogical way: ‘You should learn what your colleagues are doing’. This is a big mistake, albeit one that the current UK assessment regime encourages. In contrast, I believe that a sharp line should be drawn between a research seminar and a public lecture – basically the private/public split, but inscribed within academia itself. Public lectures, the stuff of academic conferences, should operate on the principle of widest participation, encouraging no holds barred performances from both lecturer and audience. This is where people should see a field at the top of its game. However, research seminars should be much more like incubation spaces. At the moment, academics blur the two contexts to the disadvantage of both sides – and to the misery to all who get caught in the mixed messages.

6.2 February

Are disciplines too big to grasp? (2015-02-01 08:00)

I saw an interesting talk recently given by W.G. Runciman on Evolutionary Sociology. The whole notion was very thought provoking but there was one particular aspect that was curious. He described the central conflict facing the discipline being one of Evolutionary Sociology in confrontation with Rational Choice Theory. But I’d never heard of
Evolutionary Sociology prior to this talk and I rarely encounter Rational Choice Theorists. If you'd asked me what about the central conflict that would define the future of the discipline I'd have told you it was one of how we interpret and use transactional data. This left me wondering how perspectival our accounts of these issues will inevitably be. Are disciplines as a whole too big to grasp?

jimsresearchnotes (2015-02-01 09:20:53)
I can relate to that because I spent much of my working life trying to incorporate my interest in symbolic interactionism into my housing and urban sociology, and largely failing because housing and urban studies were incorrigibly positivistic. It is somewhat better now but the bias is still there.

SheriO (2015-02-01 15:31:37)
Disciplines feel arbitrary. Sociology so often verges with psychology. Why is there a distinction between mathematics and statistics? From the perspective of doctoral education, the doctoral researcher most often develops niche knowledge that may be applicable to one scholarly journal in the world. To describe this person as a steward of a vast and ever-expanding discipline hardly fits. Without disciplinary silos, how would universities ever teach undergrads?

An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving in the UK – Feb 17th @SocioWarwic (2015-02-01 15:58)

Balihar Sanghera (Kent)
Tuesday, February 17th
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.04
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This paper examines how charitable giving is an outcome of different interacting elements of lay morality. Charitable giving reflects people’s capacity for fellow-feeling (or sympathy), moral sentiments, personal reflexivity, ethical dispositions, moral norms and moral discourses. An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving is warranted because of the complex nature of the object. Though ordinary people engage in ethical reasoning, they often think and act in piecemeal fashion, so that confusion and inconsistencies can occur. This is particularly evident when gender, class and ‘race’ shape people’s feelings and evaluations of others, their attention and care for others, and their understanding of responsibility and blame for social issues. Morality is further complicated because it takes place in the mundane world of everyday life that can result in inconsistent and confusing judgements and actions on giving.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions

Nearly 100 podcasts by @ProfSteveFuller (2015-02-02 08:00)
Available online [1]here. It would be great if more academics did this.
The Promise of Digital Sociology (2015-02-03 08:00)

My response to a lecture by Deborah Lupton on Digital Sociology at the University of Warwick on January 13th.

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/188466070" params="auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false &visual=true" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" /]

Productivity culture, cognitive triage and the pseudo-commensurability of the to-do list (2015-02-04 08:00)

For a couple of years I’ve been striving to empty my e-mail inbox on a daily basis. It doesn’t particularly bother me if I don’t succeed and I often don’t. I go through phases of doing this daily and then, for whatever reason, fall out of the routine. I’ve rarely had to spend more than a hour a day on e-mail this way because there’s only so much that accumulates in the space of twenty-four hours. It’s left me with a firm conviction that e-mail is only really a problem if the quantity exceed a certain point (e.g. if dealing with a day’s e-mail always took a few hours or more) or if you don’t attend to it regularly. Obviously, it can be difficult to attend to it regularly for all sorts of reasons. That in fact is why I write this as someone who does ‘inbox zero’ for a couple of weeks at a time rather than as a continuous feature of my life. But from my point of view what I formerly experienced as a real problem now just seem as if I was doing it wrong. It used to stress me out a lot and, at least when I’m in a phase of emptying my inbox daily, it just doesn’t stress me out at all. I drink coffee, listen to Today on Radio 4 and have cleared my inbox by the time I start my day.

What struck me this morning however is that this process can have unforeseen consequences. It’s not a case of ‘stress’ caused by e-mail giving way to an absence of stress but something more subtle than that. I tweeted earlier today:

Spend day crossing items off to do list.
Spend next morning adding ‘to do’ items from new e-mails
Spend day crossing items off to do list.


I was suddenly struck by the horrible repetitiveness of this process. Had the character limit not precluded it, I would have likely added a fourth line: “continue daily until death”. Well actually I probably wouldn’t because of how unspeakably depressing a sentiment that would be in the absence of the navel-gazing contextualisation a blog post like this would provide. Nonetheless I’ve been thinking about that feeling all morning. It quickly passed but it was an arresting sense of the intrinsic pointlessness of practices conducted in this mode.
I say intrinsic because it has all sorts of extrinsic benefits: by dealing with e-mail in this way I neutralise it as a source of stress, I ignore my inbox for the rest of the day*, I have more time and energy for the things I care about etc. But in and of itself, the practice of ‘inbox zero’ is devoid of value: it’s a kind of cognitive triage, systematically attending to what is urgent in order to free up resources for what is important. That at least is what it’s supposed to do. But I think the instrumentalism of triage practices, desiring to do something as quickly as possible because you’re fundamentally irritated by the fact it’s necessary and want to get it out of the way, risks seeping into how other activities are engaged with.

What provoked that slightly despairing feeling in me this morning was the exercise of going from e-mail to omnifocus: clearing my inbox, clarifying the necessary actions ensuing from those e-mails and filing them in my organiser. Suddenly the various lists contained within that organiser grew dramatically – in one case going from 10 items to 20 items. My problem is that while some of those tasks were incredibly dull, others were not and yet the way I framed them led me to see them all as problems to be solved. They were irritants, barriers to a conceptually incoherent state I was implicitly seeking to attain in which everything I’d ever have to do was now done.

This is the mentality that cognitive triage generates: things are conceived as obstacles to be eliminated rather than activities to be enjoyed. As the list gets bigger, it becomes harder to see the individual ‘to do’ items as activities in their own right. They are reduced to uniform list items and nothing more. Things you enjoy and things you despise are given equal weight. The logic of the to-do list is one of commensurability and this is the problem with it. The process of triaging combined with the logic of the to-do list can lead to an evisceration of value: the potential goods internal to activities, those experiences of value that can only be found through doing, get obliterated by the need to cross items off a list. There’s a relational richness to practical activity which can easily be obliterated at the level of phenomenology by the tendency of ‘productivity’ to give rise to ‘mindless busyness’. This is how Heidegger describes it in *What Is Called Thinking?*

A cabinetmaker’s apprentice, someone who is learning to build cabinets and the like, will serve as an example. His learning is not merely practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather information about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood – to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintain the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. Every handicraft, all human dealings are constantly in that danger. The writing of poetry is no more exempt from it than is thinking. (pg 14-15)

In other words: your desire to ‘get things done’ obscures the fact that you actually like many of the things you’re doing and, as a statement about moral psychology, if you forget this fact then you’re much less likely to enjoy doing them. Being in a rush to get something done runs contrary to attending to the task itself. Unfortunately, it is only through attentiveness that we derive value from practical activity. Focusing on the next thing you have to do squeezes out awareness of what you are presently doing. Wondering how quickly you can get something done makes it hard to focus on the logic of the task itself. Seeing something as an obstacle to be overcome precludes experiencing it as a source of fulfilment. Productivity culture or rather the various forms of triaging it encourages can easily undercut many of the things which motivate it in the first place e.g. seeking to perform mundane tasks more efficiently in order to have more time to write.

Well actually I don’t but at least I recognise that it’s blind compulsivity that undermines this rather than any practical necessity.
What is social ontology? An introduction in 13 minutes by Margaret Archer (2015-02-05 08:00)

This podcast is an introduction to social ontology given by Margaret Archer at a Centre for Social Ontology event in June 2014.

This podcast is an introduction to social ontology given by Margaret Archer at a Centre for Social Ontology event in June 2014.


psdmccartney (2015-12-15 03:12:41)
this is great but the volume is lousy...can you normalise it or boost the dB level? even with headphones on I could barely hear it

Mark Carrigan (2015-12-15 13:38:03)
volume is fine on my computer - don’t get the problem so unsure how to solve it...

How to use @Artefact_Cards for academic writing (2015-02-05 08:00)

I finally received my Artefact Cards last week and I love them. They were a pain to get hold of due to a spectacularly inept delivery company but Artefact soon rectified this when I e-mailed them to complain. They’re probably only likely to appeal to those with a real stationary problem but if you too find yourself fixated on Moleskine notebooks and their ilk then I suspect you will like them every bit as much as I do.

The idea behind the cards is to materialise ideas. This is a concept that appeals to me immensely. One of the weirdest experiences of my life was the first time I printed out my PhD thesis. Suddenly the ethereality which had recurrently seeped into every part of my life over the past six years was transmuted into a thing... it was just some stuff that I had written. This was a more intense form of a feeling that I often get when writing. Getting the words out into the world, giving them a form, somehow makes my mind feel lighter, even if that form is digital. The idea becomes something 'out there' rather than 'in here', with a definite form rather than a potential range.

The card themselves are designed to “help you craft better ideas, create new idea combinations by moving, shuffling, stacking, dealing and matching them”. In essence they’re just blank playing cards, with a look and feel which has obviously been the subject of much thought, which can be filled using the supplied Sharpie. They’re perhaps slightly overpriced but it’s hard to begrudge an individual creator this for a product that so much love has clearly gone into.
I’m already finding them immensely useful. In the cards below are the talk I’m giving at the Digital Sociology conference in New York in a couple of weeks. I recorded everything I wanted to say on its own individual card. I’m now going to arrange them in order to draw out clusters, perhaps discard a few and then write the talk using these cards as prompts. In this sense, it allows me to organise my ideas in a more systematic way without sacrificing the writing-to-see-what-happens approach which I prefer. I’m sure some of the prompts will be discarded, others will be rethought and all of them will exceed the limits of what I placed on the card itself.

In the past I’ve blogged about this in terms of non-linear creativity. I’ve always struggled to write and think in a linear way. I find it difficult to develop ideas sequentially and planning pieces of writing just doesn’t work for me. I often don’t completely know what it is I’m trying to write when I start the process. Assuming I’ve previously [3]baked ideas in the unconscious mind the kind of writing I enjoy most is quasi-automatic. I prefer to write in fragments and piece them together, with the overall structure being something that emerges through this process:

Another example in a very specific area is given by a client in a follow-up interview as he explains the different quality that has come about in his creative work. It used to be that he tried to be orderly. “You begin at the beginning and you progress regularly through to the end.” Now he is aware that the process in himself is different. “When I’m working on an idea, the whole idea develops like the latent image coming out when you develop a photograph. It doesn’t start at one edge and fill in over to the other. It comes in all over. At first all you see is the hazy outline, and you wonder what it’s going to be; and then
gradually something fits here and something fits there, and pretty soon it all becomes clear – all at once.”

*Carl Rogers – On Becoming a Person Pg 152*

I find this immensely enjoyable and blogging is the apotheosis of it for me. However in the last couple of years, I’ve taken this too far and I’m trying to reintroduce structure into the process. Overly-enthused by the discovery that I can write pretty endlessly about subjects that I’ve thought a lot about, I submitted a series of journal articles that were basically 7000 word blog posts. The responses weren’t actually that bad but they were uniformly requests for major revisions and the experience made me realise that I need to introduce much more discipline into my academic writing and this is what the Artefact Cards seem to be helping with already. I need to develop ideas in a more sustained way, producing more tightly argued and well integrated scholarship, without sacrificing the creative side of the process that I enjoy so much. In other words, I have lots of ideas but I need to learn to develop them much more systematically in order to produce journal articles of the standard which I’d like to.

I’m convinced that the Artefact Cards will prove very helpful in this respect. They introduce another step in the planning process before any kind of writing has taken place: rather than having the ideas churning in the back of my mind, it’s possible to get them out into a physical form where they can be sifted, shuffled and sorted. Here are some other ways I’m using them:

1. I’m setting myself 500 word writing assignments for *Social Media for Academics*. I’m going through the book as it currently stands and recording every idea I have about something that should be added in. I’m going to take some of the ensuing cards in my wallet whenever I travel so that I can do brief bits of focused writing on my iPad on the train.

2. I have close to 100 cards now which record every idea I have about the *acceleration of higher education* for the project I’m doing with Filip Vostal. I did hit exhaustion point with the cards and that was interesting. I had a very definite sense that “this is everything I think about this subject” and I’ve had no further ideas since (whereas with others, ideas keep occurring to me). It’s presented me with the limitations of what I have to say about the subject but also left me with a more clearer sense of what I do want to say, even if it’s not quite as expansive as I thought it was. I’m going to use these cards to do some prompted blogging on [accelerated.academy](http://accelerated.academy/), consult them when planning the conference and use them as a source of ideas in the writing we’re doing.

3. I have a stack of cards for the large post-doc project that is starting to take shape in my mind. This is much more provisional and I only have 20 or so cards thus far. This has left me aware of how much more work I need to do because the ideas on the cards are very general. I’m going to try and develop these in clusters: going from an idea like ‘cognitive triage’ to develop many other related notions. I plan to add to these over time and hopefully by the time I start putting together a grant application at the end of the year, I’ll have a much more concrete sense of the planned project than I do at present.

These are just a few ideas I’ve had in less than a week of owning the cards. I’m sure I’ll have many more. Though I’ve almost finished a £36 box of cards since then, it’s been a really useful experience and left me with a much greater degree of purchase upon the projects I’m in the process of developing. I doubt this intensity of usage will be the norm but I’m certain that Artefact Cards will be a regular part of my working life from this point onwards.

An important event for anyone interested in self-tracking:

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

The Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) invites submissions for its 2015 conference in Denver, Colorado, November 11-14.

There are numerous open panels to which submissions are invited, but I wanted to notify you about the panel on self-tracking and quantified self:

Exploring self-tracking: between submission and resistance

Ever-increasing number of apps and sophisticated technologies allow us on a minute-basis to know our bodies in unusually detailed ways: the number of calories consumed, the steps taken, our average heart-beat, hours of REM sleep etc. The use of these new technologies are often referred to as ‘self-tracking’.

Technologies of self-tracking can be perceived as a way of governing that greatly highlights the individual responsibility for personal well-being and can be seen as encouraging ‘the entrepreneurial, self-regulating subject that is represented as the ideal responsible citizen in neoliberal societies’ (Lupton 2012:235). Seen from this point of view self-tracking implies submitting oneself under the neoliberal self-governance to maintain the health and wellbeing as they are defined by the discourses of biomedicine.

However, alternative takes on self-tracking exist. The Quantified Self community offers a platform for people involved in self-tracking to share their ideas and experiences. Very often people in this community build new technologies or tinker and individualise the old ones to gather the self-knowledge they want. This emphasises the n=1 approach to self-tracking, where the most important data is individual, rather than statistically defined. Based on this Nafus and Sherman (2014) argue that Quantified Self can be seen as ‘soft resistance’ to the authoritative meanings of wellbeing.

This panel aims to develop a better understanding of self-tracking as both technologies closely related to and diverging from biomedicine and biopolitics. It invites participants to explore, for example, what kinds of knowledge self-tracking technologies employ and what kinds of subjectivities they shape. Can its users be classified as simply controlled or resisting? Is self-tracking a product of ever-increasing medicalisation or new ways of exploring your body outside the realm of clinic and biomedical knowledge? What needs and ideas shape self-tracking technologies and what kind of users they are tailored to?

You are kindly invited to submit your papers here (includes more info about submission requirements): [1]https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/ssss/4s15/

IMPORTANT DATES
Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2015: Submission opens
Sunday, March 29, 2015: Deadline for submissions of individual papers, session proposals and movies/videos.
May 25 – August 9, 2015: Early registration.
September 1, 2015: All presenters must register to be included in the program. For papers with more than one author, one presenter must register to be included in the final program.
September 13: Program posted


1. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/ssss/4s15/
2. http://www.4sonline.org/meeting

What is Digital Sociology? (2015-02-06 08:00)

This podcast is a lecture given by Deborah Lupton at the University of Warwick on January 13th:

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/188467572" params="color=ff5500 &auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false" width="100 %" height="166" iframe="true" /]

A Proposal for a Public Understanding of Sociology Chair (2015-02-06 12:01)

This morning Mark Carrigan opined on twitter that it would be great to have at least one chair in Public Understanding of Sociology, given how such chairs have benefited not only the natural sciences, where they began around 1990, but also philosophy, where it is now used to great effect by its first holder, Angie Hobbs.

In case it’s not obvious to the reader why there might be a need for such a chair, Mark outlines the reasons [1]here. In addition, one might add a particular 'crisis' of sociology that is exhibited in the last quarter-century of research assessment in the UK – namely, that ever fewer 'units of assessment' self-identify as 'sociology'. While research assessment is obviously a game of strategy, it’s striking just how easily the baggage of 'sociology' is dropped to gain strategic advantage. So if there’s something at stake in having a distinctively 'sociological' perspective, then this is the time to make it publicly visible.
So here is my proposal for how the Chair in Public Understanding of Sociology should be selected and financed.

1. You have an open competition in which universities wishing to house the chair would bid with a candidate in mind, for whom they would be already committed to providing the basic salary.

2. However, this person may be either someone already hired or someone the university would be willing to hire, were that person to get the chair – but perhaps not otherwise. This condition is important to incentivize departments to think in terms of the value they might provide to the discipline as a whole rather than simply their own place in a league table.

3. This candidate would be worthy of a chair in Public Understanding of Sociology but not necessarily worthy of a chair simply based on research achievements. This means that in principle someone who is young but is very knowledgeable and articulate in public settings in sociology could get the chair. There might even be a preference for appointing such a person.

4. The application process would be initially about certifying a sufficiently high level of sociological competence by more conventional means (e.g. degrees, publications, letters). But at the shortlist stage, it boils down to who can write and speak in many media. Once candidates are shortlisted, they may be required in advance of the interview to send e.g a 750-word newspaper column on one of four possible assigned topics that represent the broad remit of the discipline. The 'interview' phase may require speaking to camera for 2-3 minutes on, again, one of four topics, from which they are allowed a free choice.

5. Those involved in vetting and deciding who gets the chair would provide a top-up to the successful candidate's salary that would relieve them of most if not all of their teaching and administrative burdens. Since the British Sociological Association and the Academy of Social Sciences claim to speak on behalf of sociology, I would prima facie expect them to be strongly involved in both the vetting of candidates and financing the top-up. Yes, as far as the professional societies are concerned, there is a 'put your money where your mouth is' aspect to this proposal.

6. But the chair in public understanding of sociology would be a fixed-term deal (say, three years), at the end of which all parties concerned may refuse to renew the association. In the meanwhile the BSA and the Academy of Social Sciences would endeavour to raise capital to keep the chair alive as an ongoing concern.

7. However, the first chosen chair will not be required to be involved in this fund-raising process – other than by setting an example in their practice as a public intellectual who inspires others to think that such a chair might be worth funding indefinitely. (Of course, in the meanwhile, if some university or even private donor, wishes to provide an indefinite endowment, then that would be need to be taken seriously.)

Now if it turns out that a chair cannot be appointed under something like the above conditions, then it speaks against sociology's long-term prognosis as a discipline.

Postscript (8 February 2015): A couple of days later, in response to e-mail traffic, I posted my response here to most frequently asked questions about this proposal.

1. http://t.co/dXe1Q8Hoys
2. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/
I understand the need to generate 'public understanding' in the context of perhaps, enhancing the standing of the discipline amongst a range of audiences including the 'public'. Is that what your are aiming to achieve here? The title, however, has connotations of the old deficit model of public engagement, aimed at securing a license to practise, and little else. Perhaps this is what you want but is that not rather limiting? The term, 'public understanding', also implies a one-way communication with our audiences including the public, ignoring a need to genuinely understand, on our part, what the role of the discipline is in society today. It would be better if the role of this chair, and the title, clearly demonstrated that we, as a discipline, are seeking to build a constructive, two-way relationship with our audiences. That we are willing and able to listen to our audiences, to consider other perspectives and to have a dialogue about any aspect of the discipline.

Steve Fuller (2015-02-06 19:41:13)
You're just describing what many sociologists already do. But the idea here is that there really needs one or more people dedicated to putting across a distinctly 'sociological' perspective on matters in public forums. At the moment, the discipline's identity is rather invisible, either because sociologists are removed from the public altogether or they just dissolve into it, which your comment comes close to endorsing.

JEBounford (2015-02-06 20:35:04)
I understand what you are saying about the need for visibility but would argue that there is a distinction between dissolution and dialogue.

Why is social science communication so underdeveloped compared to natural science communication? | The Sociological Imagination (2015-06-01 15:03:13)
[...] months ago about the need for a public understanding of sociology chair and how this might work: here, here and here. More self-interestedly, it also relates to my awareness that despite effectively [...]
As the alarming consequences of the dominance of anthropocentric forms of thinking and politics on environmental, social and mental ecologies (Guattari, 1986) become ever more apparent, there has been a surge of interest in inventing new ways of collaborating with, listening to, and granting authority to new kinds of voices, including more-than-human life and forms of material agency. In this symposium, we invite participants to explore practices, politics, histories and futures of attunements to voices, temporalities, and material processes that exceed the human subject. In doing so, we ask participants to consider the ways in which matter and more-than-human life can make demands for human ethical and political response (Jackson, 2012).

Practices of attunement are associated with various traditions of thought including: phenomenological ideas of dwelling and worlding (Heidegger, 1923); post-phenomenological and neo-vitalist theories of encounters, affect, and hybridity (Bennett, 2009; Haraway, 2008; Anderson, 2014; Ash & Simpson, 2014); sensory methodologies (Evans & Miele, 2012; Spinney, 2015); spiritual practices (Oosterbaan, 2008); feminist materialisms (Braidotti, 2002); speculative modes of theory and politics (Whitehead, 1967; Stengers, 2011); and indigenous traditions of responsibility to the natural world, which have arguably been marginalized in recent debates (Tallbear, 2015).

Attunements strive to attain greater familiarity or intimacy with more-than-human worlds. In doing so, they experiment with creating more sustainable and egalitarian social forms. However, when attunement starts to invoke normative ideals of being 'in harmony', those who appear 'out of tune' (strangers, outsiders) can be registered as dangerous and threatening (Ahmed, 2013). Nevertheless, attunements can also affirm difference and be receptive to non-human 'qualities, rhythms, forces, relations and movements' (Stewart, 2011). Post-human attunements generate monstrous aesthetic forms (Dixon, Hawkins & Straughan, 2012) and require inventive practices of listening (Hetherington, 2013). When objects, forces and spirits that exceed the spaces and times of human experience press themselves upon us with increasing force, attunements can be strange, uncanny and uncertain. They bring us into contact with lost futures and haunted presents (Fisher, 2014). In fact, attuning to non-human or post-human worlds may require actively distancing our enquiries from the intimacy of the organic body and its lived experiences and affects (Colebrook, 2014).

This symposium invites participants to explore ‘attunement to the world in all its particularity, strangeness, enchantment and horror’ (Anderson et al., 2012). In doing so, we aim to contribute to recent efforts to recalibrate notions of authority, voice, and objectivity in ways that work towards more egalitarian, sustainable worlds.

Topics that will animate the discussion may include:

- Practices of attunement that aim to facilitate deeper collaborations between humans, more-than-human life, and material agency;
- Materialisms (old and new);
- Intersections or tensions between new materialisms and indigenous standpoints;
- Attunements, spirituality and ritual.
- The role of attunements in (re)distributing power and authority;
- Attunements and aesthetics;
- How attunements affect the quality of experience and encounters;
- Narrative and non-narrative forms for expressing experiences and practices of attunement;
- Material/semiotic figures of attunement (stranger, diplomat, monster, guide, alchemist...);
• Biopolitics, the anthropocene, and the inorganic.

Apply to attend / present a paper.
Researchers from across the arts, humanities and social sciences are warmly welcome. If you wish to attend, or to give a 20-minute paper, please complete the form at: [2]http://www.authorityresearch.net/spaces-of-attunement-abstract-submission.html before 1800, February 10th, 2015. We will respond to all applicants by the end of that week.

Proposals for alternative presentation formats, artworks, performances, films, sound art etc. are encouraged. We will do everything we can to help with this in terms of technology, time, and potentially some extra financial resources. Please get in touch.

1. https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Cardiff+CF10+3WT/@51.4861978,-3.1813485,17z/data=!2m1!4b1!4m2!3m1!1s0x486e1cbb302d1bd7:0x8bda1fbd9952194f?hl=en

Making Sense of the Crisis: Is the financial crisis cascading into a democratic crisis in Europe? (2015-02-08 08:00)

The lecture will take place in the Sir Charles Wilson lecture theatre, from 17.00 to 18:30 on Tuesday March 24th.

The lectures are free to attend and open to all so please feel free to forward word of this to anyone who might be interested. Details of how to reach the campus are here: [1]http://www.gla.ac.uk/about/maps/howtogethere/ Lecture Title: 'Making Sense of the Crisis: Is the financial crisis cascading into a democratic crisis in Europe?' Abstract: The European nightmare is that economic crisis leads to the re-emergence of ethno-nationalism and fascism, with violence engulfing democratic institutions. Potentially, the crisis, starting in finance in the US and UK in 2007, cascading into the real economy of output and employment, cascading into fiscal crisis and 'austerity', and cascading into political crisis, will become a crisis of democracy in the European Union. Sociology did not see the crisis coming and has struggled to produce adequate analyses of its various phases and of its political dynamics. What are its gender dynamics and why do these appear invisible to Sociology? The developments challenge traditional systems theory as well as the recent 'cultural turn'. Using the insights of complexity theory, I re-work core Sociological concepts and theories: re-thinking rather than rejecting the concept of system; re-thinking the concept of society in a globalizing world; developing the concepts of 'tipping point' and path dependency; rethinking the intersection of gender, class and ethnic inequalities and of political projects. These enable a more adequate account not only of the changes in capital, but also of the gendered nature of the neoliberal project that is challenging social democracy.

1. http://www.gla.ac.uk/about/maps/howtogethere/
In the last couple of days, I have received many queries about the public understanding of sociology chair that I proposed [1]here. What follows is a set of answers to those questions.

1. Why even have such a thing?
   a. There have been chairs in the public understanding of science, sponsored in various ways, for the last quarter-century. The occupants of these chairs have been generally very media-friendly but differ quite substantially in the interpretation of their remit. Yet, the overall effect has been to raise the profile of the natural scientist in the general public and perhaps even to provide nuance to the perception of scientists. An important feature of this development is that professional scientific bodies have never attempted to 'recall' such a chair-holder, even when, say, Richard Dawkins overstepped what many saw as appropriate for a scientist to say.

2. But isn’t this even more reason NOT to have such a chair in sociology?
   a. On the contrary, if sociologists cannot find people to trust as competent spokespersons, even when they say things that many practising sociologists would disagree with, then the point of having such a chair would be defeated. The strength of having such a chair comes at least as much from an ability to display publicly what it means to think 'sociologically' as from an ability to represent 'what most sociologists think' about various topics.

3. But doesn’t the very idea of this chair go against the spirit of most sociological research, which is about revealing the complexities of social life that emerge from engaging empirically with real people?
   a. Most sociological research does indeed do this, but the need for the chair arises from a general unclarity – both inside and outside the discipline – about what is especially 'sociological' about this research. Thus the ideal chair-holder would be someone who is familiar with the diversity of the field yet able to present any bit of it as distinctly 'sociological'. This means that any prospective chair-holder would have to want to see the field better integrated than it currently is.

4. But your conception of the chair seems to presuppose a univocal conception of 'sociology' that really doesn’t exist – if it ever has...
   a. You may be right. However, turning this point into the last word on the matter runs the risk of calling into question the viability of 'sociology' as the name of a discipline – as opposed to a market signal for a variable range of courses that students might find attractive in different universities.

5. But what could possibly be such a univocal conception of 'sociology'?
   a. Well, it’s back to Durkheim, really: Society is sui generis. To think sociologically is to think in terms of how what people think and do contribute to some collective fate shared by all of them, regardless of their individual differences. The nation-state has been historically in the business of promoting this idea as the default mind-set of citizenship. But with the rise of globalization and neo-liberalism, the public availability of this idea is much less secure – and hence there is a greater need for a 'public understanding of sociology' that reinvents Durkheim’s original concerns in a new key for a new time.

6. But isn’t this what Michael Burawoy’s call for a ‘public sociology’ is all about?
   a. No. On the contrary, I see ‘public sociology’ as a policy that would let the discipline's research priorities be driven mainly by the agendas of those in society whose voices have not been traditionally given their due. Of course, there is nothing wrong with redressing long-standing social injustices. However, the task of sociology as a discipline is to conceptualize – and promote – an idea of 'society' in terms of which it makes sense to say that certain groups have been systematically disadvantaged by virtue of the activities of others. Ideas of justice and (dis)advantage only make sense in relation to some normatively bounded sense of 'society'. And it is at this second-order level that sociologists need to be publicly understood.
7. So how should someone think about whether this chair is something worth pursuing – since you say it could go to people at virtually any stage in their career?
a. Here’s a litmus test. If you think that Margaret Thatcher has turned out to be way too effective when she declared in 1987 that ‘there is no such thing as society’, then you appreciate the job ahead of you. Demonstrating that ‘society’ exists above and beyond the voluntary associations and familial ties of individuals is not an easy sell in 2015 Britain. But that’s what the chair would need to do.


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» A Proposal for a Public Understanding of Sociology Chair The Sociological Imagination (2015-02-08 11:17:13)
[...] (8 February 2015): A couple of days later, in response to e-mail traffic, I posted my response here to most frequently asked questions about this [...] 

Prosumption, appropriation and the ontology of economic form (2015-02-09 08:00)

This podcast by [1]Dave Elder-Vass (Loughborough University) is from a Centre for Social Ontology event in January 2015. Unfortunately it cuts off a few minutes from the end - sorry!

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Prosumption – the unpaid performance of productive work by ‘consumers’ who thus help commercial businesses to generate a profit – is perhaps the most studied of the many hybrid forms of economic practice that have proliferated in the digital economy. A number of critical accounts have analysed prosumption in terms of Marx’s labour theory of value, suggesting for example that as prosumers do useful work for free they are infinitely exploited by the firms that profit as a result. But such accounts analyse the digital economy in terms that were derived from the nineteenth century factory – and terms that were highly questionable even in that context.

The spectacular mismatch between this model of capitalism and the case of prosumption exposes the inadequacy of the standard monolithic conception of capitalism as a homogeneous and universal contemporary economic form – a conception that at a certain level is also shared by the marketised discourse of mainstream economics. We need a new ontology of economic form that goes beyond the totalising concepts of mode of production and market economy and instead provides us with tools for understanding the sheer diversity of forms of economic practice in the contemporary economy. This paper offers the concept of appropriative practices as a contribution to such an ontology and applies it to the case of prosumption.
The Alaskan town straight out of a Ballard novel (2015-02-10 08:00)

This video shows Whittier, Alaska, a town where most people live and work in one building, and is only accessible by a miles-long tunnel with limited hours:

5. https://soundcloud.com/tags/economy
An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving in the UK – Feb 17th @SocioWarwick (2015-02-10 15:57)

Balihar Sanghera (Kent)
Tuesday, February 17th
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.04
Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

This paper examines how charitable giving is an outcome of different interacting elements of lay morality. Charitable giving reflects people’s capacity for fellow-feeling (or sympathy), moral sentiments, personal reflexivity, ethical dispositions, moral norms and moral discourses. An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving is warranted because of the complex nature of the object. Though ordinary people engage in ethical reasoning, they often think and act in piecemeal fashion, so that confusion and inconsistencies can occur. This is particularly evident when gender, class and ‘race’ shape people’s feelings and evaluations of others, their attention and care for others, and their understanding of responsibility and blame for social issues. Morality is further complicated because it takes place in the mundane world of everyday life that can result in inconsistent and confusing judgements and actions on giving.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions
“All this happened a long time ago—so many years ago that if you counted them on your fingers among all the old men in the village you would have to borrow some from the children. But the children are running around. So try and find out when this was!” (Nagishkin 1980).
I will filch a trick from Gottschall’s book, when I ask did you imagine the village? Did you imagine the people?
The short quote above is to illustrate that a story can be irresistible to our brains. Before introducing Johnathan
Gottschall’s book, The Storytelling Animal, I want to ask why should sociology as a field care about storytelling?

To answer this question requires a redefinition of storytelling from its oral, and perhaps overly nostalgic, tradi-
tions. For the purposes of this article storytelling could be redefined as narratives in different forms: literature, TV,
films, video-games, music, media, education, the internet and interaction with other people, like friends and family,
all contain stories. This is not an extensive list, yet illustrates how commonplace stories are in our everyday lives.
Story needs to be researched because we do not yet understand story’s relevance to society.

I am currently writing a research paper which questions the use of storytelling as a catchall term. A general
search on storytelling on Web of Science resulted in 404 papers. Of these papers 20 were tagged with oral story-
telling. When studies involving digital storytelling, oral history and reading, studies were removed this left two papers
on oral storytelling (none of which involved folk or fairy tales). Where is the storytelling in ‘storytelling’ research? A
redefinition of terms would enable researchers to share relevant research.

The Sociology of Story

According to Ken Plummer:

...a sociology of stories would be concerned not with analysing the formal structures of stories/narratives,
but with studying the social roles stories play: the ways they are produced, read, change, and so on. This means trying to answer the following research question: What social role does a particular instance
of story-telling play in society? What political process does a particular instance of story-telling play in

Plummer explored, through accounts of sexual identity and ‘narratives of the intimate’, the place for narratives in
sociological research (1995a: 6). He proposed that there should be a sociology of story. But that this sociology of
story need not be limited to personal narratives. Sociology already uses story: it ‘is bound up with gathering other
people’s stories (via interviews and so on) and telling stories (about modernity, class, the degradation of work, and
so on)’ (Plummer 1995a: 18).

The literary-evolutionary perspective: people as storytelling animals

I enjoyed reading Gottschall’s The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make us Human for the simple way it tack-
led a difficult subject. Gottschall addresses the relevance of story to society through a literary and evolutionary
perspective. His book bridges biology, literature, psychology and neuroscience to ask ‘How did we become the
storytelling animal?’ Gottschall uses the metaphor of a fish out of water to illustrate that we cannot function
without story because make-believe has played a major role in the evolution of human society (2013: xiv). His argument echoes that of literary critic Jack Zipes, who believes that fairy tales have had an historical influence on the behaviour of young people, an influence which continues today through different forms of narrative such as Disney films (2006: 20). Therefore story might play a role as a stabilising, or possibly as a subversive, influence in society.

What is the role of story in society that Gottschall proposes? Gottschall's focus is on the evolution of story. He asks, ‘How did we become the storytelling animal?’ Each chapter lays out why as humans we cannot function without story: why it is irresistible to our brains, the nature of dreams, and how we can learn morals from stories. Gottschall concludes that we are storytelling animals, and that make-believe has played a major role in the evolution of human society. He illustrates through psychology, neuroscience and evolutionary thought how characters and situations ‘shape our behaviours and our customs, and in so doing, they transform societies and histories’ (2013: 145).

My main criticism is that Gottschall talks about storytelling when he really means narratives. If this were an academic book, Gottschall would have chosen a different title, because he is talking about storytelling when referring to the different narrative forms of story, and these two things are different. However The Narrative Animal, as a title, doesn’t have quite the same ring to it. Using ‘storytelling’ reinforces his point that the brain finds a good story pattern hard to resist. And as the main audience for this book is the general public the title works well in that context. I liked the way each chapter began with a story which relates to Gottschall’s argument. I think that anyone who has an interest in story would benefit from reading the book.

References

Emma is a doctorate researcher in Sociology at the University of Warwick. Emma is researching the role that stories might play in our understanding of the construction of young people’s behaviour, emotions and social education. For more information see: http://about.me/emma.parfitt/


mashup32 (2015-02-16 16:56:31)
Thanks for your review, Emma! I also think important and interesting can be found in Gottschall’s book to understand the social role of storytelling. However, as sociologists, shouldn’t we be more skeptical about his evolutionary approach? For instance, a risk is to assume that the social functions of stories are a-historical...

Jaames Waddington (2017-08-21 11:37:44)
Interesting review. I haven’t read the book, but I’m certainly interested in the evolution of the story as a major part of the evolution of the human extended phenotype, or culture as it is more popularly known. So I’m puzzled by the specific use of the term evolution by mashup32 above. The Darwinian hypothesis is profoundly historical - that was one of the main elements of the Enlightenment, that e.g. the bible was not an a-historical given but a super-narrative that changed over time, and also
‘Questioning Technology’: The Importance of Empirical Work and Ontological Philosophy (2015-02-10 18:26)

by Declan Mcdowell-Naylor

There’s little question that, for at least two decades, technology has been a centre piece of enquiries across the humanities and social sciences. Nearly every field has made valuable empirical contributions, addressing plenty of normative questions ‘about technology’. Yet, there’s lacking a question ‘of technology’, though in many areas this is changing. Nonetheless, I feel it persists enough to make a point on it and to advocate the continued use of philosophy alongside empirical studies.

It is often the case that the initial assumptions, or analytic consensuses, about technology go unquestioned. This can be damaging to otherwise useful empirical investigations of normative concerns. Because they are, typically, reductive or undetermined in some way, they severely limit the horizons of their argument and findings. Additionally, they risk creating false scenarios based on a limited set of circumstances, usually in the form of a dichotomy. Lastly, they sometimes make statements that are entirely incorrect.

There are few common examples of these initial assumptions, or analytic consensus. The first, and perhaps most common, is the idea that technology, and usually that just means social media, is a just a tool (and that data is just data). There are examples of technology, being referred to as a political tool for use in elections, or as a means to achieve political goals in movements. This is openly contestable, yet I’ve frequently seen it explicitly referred to as ‘merely a tool’. This is certainly accurate intuitively, but that’s a very limited basis.

Another assumption is that questions about technology must take place within the two sided-political debate based on competing political factions, typically institutions or movements. It leans on the notion of technology as tool, arguing its use as such should be for democratic and emancipatory ends, as opposed to totalitarian ends. So the argument usually ends with the dictum that we should strive for genuine democracy or some hopeful conclusion that we find ourselves on the cusp of a better society. Good ideas, sure, but are they enough?

I’m not saying they’re necessarily incorrect assumptions, or the only ones. This is the point. Technologies are tools in a sense, and we do encounter situations where technology plays a role in what is generally a struggle between two forces. But these statements in no way exhaust what technology is or does, and to frame it that way not the best foundation for empirical work, as I’ve stated above. They are at least useful contributions. There are situations where there are basic errors and bad uses of data, usually in journalistic discourse adapting academic discourse, used to inflame technophobia.

So, why endorse a philosophical approach to empirical studies about technology? For me, when it comes to writing ‘about’ technology, retaining the popular and normative concepts attached to the issue can only take an empirical study so far. Not only this, we also have to be aware of how our research feeds into public discourse. Encouragingly, the advocates of philosophy come from many different areas.

For example, a few days ago I found [1] a blog post which argued why the concept of ‘cyberspace’ must die. Cyberspace, with all its historical connotations and metaphorical guise, is totally unsuited to a world in which we have the Internet of Things. And it was right. Likewise, a few years ago now, the philosopher of technology, Andrew Feenberg wrote Ten Paradoxes of Technology, in which he argued, quite bluntly, that most of what we know about technology’s ontology is false. Accordingly, he argues these common sense conceptions have- far from abstract
worrying political consequences in the real (that is, empirical) world. Likewise, ANT theorists have for years now being advocating a mixture of philosophy and sociological empirical work, from their early work in science labs, to my favourite study: Annmarie Mol’s The Body Multiple (2002). Recently, from the PIR department which I work in, Andrew Chadwick’s The Hybrid Media System (2013) adopts an ontological approach to the concept of ‘hybridity’ to inform an empirical analysis of political communication and the attendant technologies. From sociology, Judy Wajcman (2008), in establishing her sociology of technology and time, carefully considers the “need for increased dialogue to connect social theory with detailed empirical studies”. There’s more examples, of course, these are simply indicative.

What is clear is that the philosophical approach has gained particular traction around the question of humanity, a question with perhaps the closest tie to the questions about technology. We see this in work of the ‘post-humanists’. As a recent example in touch with the meta-debate of method and philosophy, Daniel Chernilo (2014), in a recent paper (also presented at the Centre for Social Ontology), introduces what he calls philosophical sociology, described in the abstract as “an enquiry into the relationships between implicit notions of human nature and explicit conceptualizations of social life within sociology”.

So we are certainly seeing a constellation of advocates from many disciplines. Venn and Blackman put forward that ‘common ontologies’ are emerging across the humanities, social sciences of natural and physical science. Unifying them in this sense, the basic argumentative premise is actually nothing unusual, but it is important. It basically says that if we apply different initial assumptions derived philosophically, this will lead to a different range of enquiry, and thus the approach to a normative issue under consideration. Still, we have to appreciate the perspectives of different disciplines without blithely assuming there is an automatic ease transitioning concepts. Writing about human nature is comparative to writing about technology’s nature, and we already know about the philosophical and political debate on the former. But, equally, this doesn’t mean we should just stick to what we (think) we know every time.

To conclude, it is particularly important to broaden our assumptions about and of technology, since technology is already broadening and challenging our assumptions in the way in which it newly enables certain new forms of sociality and practice. We need to keep up with it, empirically and philosophically. How this reaches out into the methodologies of natural and physical science is significant for the future of technology design and implementation, as Feenberg suggests. I’ve seen a recent theoretical computer science paper which was attuned to the need for formal philosophical enquiry. In this regard, we need to continue to pay attention to the ontological arguments which relate to ethical issues and the normative moralities across society- for that challenge, empirical observations will certainly not alone suffice.

References


Declan Mcdowell-Naylor is a doctoral researcher in the Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London.


Reflexivity and an interdisciplinary approach to the ‘structuring of agency’ (2015-02-11 08:00)

This podcast by [1]Graham Scambler was recorded at a Centre for Social Ontology event in November 2014.

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/188525951" params="auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false &visual=true" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" /]

Margaret Archer’s recent contributions to our understanding of reflexivity in late capitalist society provide useful resources for theorizing across the substantive domains of sociology. Using illustrations from my own work on the sociology health inequalities in general, and my ideal type of the ‘vulnerable fractured reflexive’ in particular, I examine some of the pros and cons of adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the structuring of agency. I conclude with a skeletal research programme involving interdisciplinary collaboration.


The Philosophy of Data Science (2015-02-12 08:00)

I conducted this series of interviews for the LSE Impact Blog:

• [1]Sabina Leonelli: “What constitutes trustworthy data changes across time and space”
• [2]Rob Kitchin: “Big data should complement small data, not replace them.”

Sociological Perspectives on Digital Health (2015-02-13 08:00)

This seminar organised by the Quantified Self Research Network brought together a range of thinkers to discuss sociological perspectives on digital health.

Dr. Conor Farrington (Cambridge) - The Sensemaking Spectrum: Understanding User Interactions with the Artificial Pancreas

The artificial pancreas (AP) is a system for the treatment of diabetes, incorporating a body-mounted glucose sensor and body-mounted insulin pump in conjunction with an algorithm controlling insulin dosage. In common with many new medical technologies, the AP presents users with both opportunities and challenges – opportunities in terms of improved outcomes, and challenges in terms of incorporating new artefacts, systems, and treatments into everyday life. Research on ‘sensemaking’ in the information technology and organisational fields shows that different users, and groups of users, ‘frame’ and ‘make sense’ of (i.e. interpret) technology in different ways, with significant impacts on patterns of use and eventual outcomes. While technology is often assumed to be ‘univocal’ (i.e. meaning the same to all users), sensemaking research reveals the ‘equivocality’ of technology, and the ways in which technology can be interpreted and used in different ways by different users. Likewise, different patients (and groups of patients) often experience the opportunities and challenges presented by new medical technologies in different ways, owing in part to varied understandings of technology, illness, and healthcare, and (more widely) distinctive identities, formed against varied socio-economic, ethnic, educational, and geographical backdrops. These varied sense-making experiences have the potential to generate differences in the way that patients interpret the AP technology and incorporate it into their self-management routines, and thus potential variations in the effectiveness.
and acceptability of the technology in everyday settings and long-term use and adherence. Likewise, the use of AP technology, in common with the use of new technology in general, may in turn influence and potentially transform users’ wider perceptions of technology, illness, and healthcare, with potential implications for future attitudes towards, and usage of, new medical technologies.

Prof. Deborah Lupton (Canberra) - Critical Digital Health Studies: A Research Agenda

In this presentation I discuss the various elements that comprise the digital health phenomenon and consider the implications for social and cultural analyses of medicine and public health. Most popular and professional representations portray digital health technologies in utopian terms, focusing on the benefits they may offer to healthcare delivery and public health surveillance and illness prevention. Yet, as I have argued in recent work, a critical approach to digital health technologies is important to go beyond instrumental concerns and identify their social, cultural, ethical and political dimensions. I will identify some important questions for a sociological critique of digital health technologies and talk about some of my current research, including analyses of self-tracking technologies, apps as sociocultural artefacts and 3D printing in medicine and health.

Sam Martin (Warwick) - Twitter: Re-Writing The City Landscape With Health Knowledge

There is a huge body of research relating to e-health and the interaction between people’s online engagement and their health practices. Main approaches look at how e-health can be used for medical intervention to promote healthy behaviour and self-management of chronic conditions, and the quality of e-health information on websites and smartphone apps.

However, there is little on how patients self-managing chronic conditions use real-time social media, such as Twitter, as decision-making and risk-aversion tools to navigate the physical environment of the city. In this presentation I discuss how individuals’ online interactions on Twitter inform their health navigation of the city, and how this process performs a re-writing of the city landscape with health knowledge. With the case study of Coeliac Disease, my research explores different ways of analysing and visualising the ways that patients share information about the diagnosis, symptoms and daily self management of chronic illness. I will also discuss how this interaction informs Coeliacs’ evolving identity with food, and different ways that data mining, social network analysis and data visualization techniques can be used to map both textual and visual interaction across cities in a comparative study of activity in London and New York.

International Association for Critical Realism (IACR) 2015 Annual Meeting (2015-02-14 08:00)

"Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science"

July 28-30, 2015
Notre Dame, IN (USA)

“What difference does critical realism make for how we do our empirical work?” That is the question that
many social scientists who hear about critical realism initially ask, especially in the United States. This is an honest question that needs good answers.

How does the alternative meta-theory of critical realism change the kinds of scholarly research we conduct and the ways we conduct it? What real differences does critical realism make analytically and methodologically? How would social science that was primarily informed by critical realism, instead of some other background philosophy, look and act differently?

Critical realism makes a big difference, in fact. Some of these differences are subtle, others more profound. Yet more work must be done to think through and spell out specifics on how critical realism already does and might continue to re-orient scholarly research in practical ways.

“Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science” is the theme of the 2015 Annual Meeting of the International Association of Critical Realists (IACR), to be held at the University of Notre Dame, July 28-30, 2015. Papers on all topics relevant for critical realism are invited for submission for presentation in a session at IACR 2015, but papers that focus on the practical analytical and methodological implications of critical realism are especially welcome.

To submit a paper for consideration, please prepare an abstract of no more than 500 words and send it by email along with your paper title, name, contact info, and organizational affiliation to Nicolette Manglos-Weber at [nmanglos@nd.edu]. Submissions must be received by April 1 for full consideration for inclusion on the program.

Registration costs are only $400 USD, which includes full room and board from the evening of July 27 to the evening of July 30. All participants must register for the conference by May 30. After that date, an additional fee of $40 USD will be applied.

Conference costs are supported with generous grants from the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at Notre Dame University and the Templeton Religion Trust.

1. [http://nmanglos@nd.edu/](http://nmanglos@nd.edu/)

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Being a link between the academic world and local communities (2015-02-15 08:00)


[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/188495428" params="color=ff5500 &auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false" width="100 %" height="166" iframe="true" /]

1. [https://twitter.com/redrumlisa](https://twitter.com/redrumlisa)
3. [http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781447309956&sf1=contributor&sti=Lisa%20w%20Mckenzie&m=1&dc=1](http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781447309956&sf1=contributor&sti=Lisa%20w%20Mckenzie&m=1&dc=1)
An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving in the UK – TOMORROW @SocioWarwick
(2015-02-16 08:00)

Balihar Sanghera (Kent)
Tuesday, February 17th
5:00 PM to 6:30 PM, R1.04
Ramphal Building, University of Warwick

This paper examines how charitable giving is an outcome of different interacting elements of lay morality. Charitable giving reflects people's capacity for fellow-feeling (or sympathy), moral sentiments, personal reflexivity, ethical dispositions, moral norms and moral discourses. An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving is warranted because of the complex nature of the object. Though ordinary people engage in ethical reasoning, they often think and act in piecemeal fashion, so that confusion and inconsistencies can occur. This is particularly evident when gender, class and 'race' shape people's feelings and evaluations of others, their attention and care for others, and their understanding of responsibility and blame for social issues. Morality is further complicated because it takes place in the mundane world of everyday life that can result in inconsistent and confusing judgements and actions on giving.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions

The Fetishisation of Intelligence Under Neoliberalism (2015-02-17 08:00)

An interesting exchange on Twitter last year about how intelligence is represented in film and TV has stayed with me since it occurred. Watching Hannibal with a friend who was a big fan of it, I found myself obsessed by the quasi-supernatural form which Will Graham's intelligence takes in the show, allowing him to see through the superficial veneer of a crime scene and reconstruct the truth of what occurred. Though Hannibal's talent is slightly different to Will's, relying on personal observation rather than contextual reconstruction, it's also nonetheless akin to a superpower. Will has "pure empathy" and can entirely assume another's point of view, whereas Hannibal can anatomise the psyche of an individual, pulling it apart as reliably as if he were taking a scalpel to their brain:

[youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgy4vQfVYhc]

Much to my friend's irritation, I found myself embroiled in a fascinating conversation on Twitter about the cultural politics of how intelligence is represented. One of the people I was talking to, whose name I have forgotten and would love to know if they happen to read this so that I can attribute the thought to them, pointed out that this is a broader tendency in contemporary television: intelligence is fetishised because 'merit' is such an ambivalent topic within our 'meritocracy'. Once you start looking for it, there are examples everywhere. One of the most prominent is the "Sherlock Scan" portrayed so characteristically by Benedict Cumberbach:
A few years ago I found myself strangely obsessed with a pretty awful show called Suits. It’s a weird throwback to the 1980s, with obnoxious corporate lawyers being presented as noble warriors in suits. Utterly devoid of irony, it rests upon the exploits of Harvey Spectre, the supernaturally self-possessed attorney, mentoring his young protégé Mike Ross. What got me hooked on the show is how it presents the latter’s talent. He wanders into a recruitment event for the high powered law firm, which only hires from Harvard Law School, in order to escape a drug deal gone wrong. With his photographic memory, he proves sufficiently impressive that they hire him, before increasing numbers of staff at the firm come to look the other way in virtue of his sheer talent.

Talent trumps prestige. If someone sufficiently talented takes their chance, no matter how bizarre the circumstances are that lead to it, their advancement is justified. But what is this talent? In effect, he’s an informational sponge. His talent is not only akin to a superpower, it’s one emptied of positive content. It’s not an ability to do things in the world as such but rather that Mike lacks the tendency of others to lose information. Yet the show frames attempts to expose him by enemies at the firm as irrational projects motivated by petty loathings and personal jealousies, rather than their seeking to hold to account a drug dealer who wandered into a law firm and now regularly goes up in front of judges pretending to be a lawyer.

Another example is The West Wing’s Jed Bartlett, though in a slightly different way. He’s a liberal fantasy figure, allowing mainstream Democrats in the US to imagine a world in which Bill Clinton was also a morally flawless figure with a nobel prize in Economics. The most obvious example of this is the debate in an early season between Bartlett (Al Gore) and Richie (Bush) but this stuff pervades the whole show:

I particularly love the "oh my god" from CJ Craig at the end of this clip: "he’s so smart, so witty, so articulate! how lucky we are to have such an intelligent president". However what interests me about this is how Bartlett’s intelligence is represented. He’s obsessed with trivia and constantly quizzing his staff on obscure topics. We see intelligence reduced to an ability to recall ephemera and to litter utterances with it at a rate which is at best unlikely and at worst utterly ridiculous. This is reflected more broadly in Aaron Sorkin’s characteristic fast talking dialogue, representing intelligent people being intelligent as little more than talking very fast and very articulately, usually while walking.

These representations interest me because ‘talent’ has become so integral to the defence of social inequality. We can see this when Boris Johnson [1]mocks the 16 % of our species’ with an IQ below 85 and praises the 2 % with an IQ over 130. It’s why the popularisation of developmental neuroscience is so sinister: it heralds a social imaginary in which ‘talent’ can be understood as hardwired, while still acknowledging that circumstances plays a role in how these characteristics are inscribed in the human i.e. it justifies present arrangements while licensing punitive interventions against parents who fail to raise their children in a way conducive to the genesis of talent. Looking to the more ridiculous forms this fetishisation of talent takes can help us critique the more insidious and sophisticated variants that are increasingly dominant. This case can be made in particular about the most popular forms of self-help in recent years:

And this is the most remarkable feat of The Secret: its ability to defend inequality. While the 99 per cent has become a worldwide slogan questioning the concentration of wealth, the author of The Secret offers...
an alternative view of the situation. 'Why do you think that 1 percent of the population earns around 97 percent of all the money that’s being earned?', Bob Proctors is asked rhetorically in the book, answering, 'People who have drawn wealth into their lived used The Secret, whether consciously or unconsciously. They think thoughts of abundance and wealth, and they do not allow any contradictory thoughts to take root in their mind.

*The Wellness Syndrome, Carl Cederstrom & Andre Spicer, pg 80*

What makes The Secret so interesting is how nakedly metaphysical it is. The affluent do it 'unconsciously' and that is why they are affluent. Those who are not nonetheless have the choice to do it. If they do it correctly then they too will become affluent. If they do not then they deserve their fate. This bizarre concept of "The Secret" fascinates me because it’s easy to see how it holds the whole picture together: this latent faculty, to which we all have access, allows us to succeed. Some people are disposed to access it already (inherited privilege) but this places no restriction on others. We can all access this latent ability to be a success if only we choose to do so and then use it in the proper way. Replace "The Secret" with "Intelligence" or "Talent" and you have the governing ideology of neoliberalism.

Weirdly, it seems to me that The Secret is actually more coherent. Its metaphysical character reconciles the tension within neoliberalism, much as the eidetic memory of Mike Ross obscures the fact that lawyers probably do need some specialised training. As soon we start specifying what ‘intelligence’ or ‘talent’ is in a positive way, we find ourselves embroiled in complex questions of social causation which undercut the simplistic moral logic in which each gets what they deserve. Representing talent as magical or metaphysical escapes this problem and, through continuous repetition in popular culture, reinforces the intuitive plausibility of successful people being so in virtue of their innate talent.

1. [http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/28/is-boris-johnson-right-about-iqs](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/nov/28/is-boris-johnson-right-about-iqs)

kerrysmallman (2015-02-27 09:01:11)
Thanks for drawing my attention to this! In a paper I’m half working on, I came to a very similar conclusion. While capitalism is quite comfortable with worker/owner inequality, it seems to feel the need to defend inequality within the bourgeoisie. The protestant work ethic, eugenics and IQ were all invented as ways to explain inequality of outcome in capitalism.

Good post. In his book "Twilight of the Elites", Christopher Hayes wrestles with a similar topic; worth a read.

Deborah (2016-09-19 07:09:01)
I don’t think an interest in intelligence can be so neatly layered to that pop term neoliberalism. People really hate sharp auto-didacts from working-class backgrounds, for example, and there’s a secret envy directed against them. Look at how they often fare in higher education. Or highly intelligent women, or super clever foreigners. Class, gender and race trumps everything in the UK (impoverished people that we are), though it’s true the US is more ideologically meritocratic (and always has been, predating 'neoliberalism'). Incidentally, the point about Jed Bartlett was his grasp of detail, something often lacking in US politics. The show was about the triumph of rationality and intelligence over ideology. Guess that would piss some people off....
I'm currently reading [1]Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures by Mark Fisher. It's an interesting book which explores a condition in which "life continues, but time has somehow stopped". His claim is that this "stasis has been buried, interred behind a superficial frenzy of 'newness', of perpetual movement" and he explores it in terms of popular musical culture:

Nowhere is this clearer than in popular music culture. It was through the mutations of popular music that many of those of us who grew up in the 1960s, 70s and 80s learned to measure the passage of cultural time. But faced with 21st-century music, it is the very sense of future shock which has disappeared. This is quickly established by performing a simple thought experiment. Imagine any record released in the past couple of years being beamed back in time to, say, 1995 and played on the radio. It's hard to think that it will produce any jolt in the listeners. On the contrary, what would be likely to shock our 1995 audience would be the very recognisability of the sounds: would music really have changed so little in the next 17 years? Contrast this with the rapid turnover of styles between the 1960s and the 90s: play a jungle record from 1993 to someone in 1989 and it would have sounded like something so new that it would have challenged them to rethink what music was, or could be. While 20th-century experimental culture was seized by a recombinatorial delirium, which made it feel as if newness was infinitely available, the 21st century is oppressed by a crushing sense of finitude and exhaustion. It doesn’t feel like the future. (loc 183)

Can we see a similar process in higher education? The way Fisher describe the hyperactively inert quality of contemporary music immediately resonated with me: “the rates of innovation in both these areas had enormously slackened”. This is precisely the terminology Filip Vostal and I have been using to discuss the acceleration of higher education: we’re interested in how the rate of innovation relates to the rate of publication. Our hunch is that the former declines as the latter increases. We’d like to substantiate this. But perhaps more importantly, we’d like to explain it.

What would this hyperactive inertia look like in higher education? We’d see the same underlying ideas being expressed in new ways. We’d see the same underlying debates – conflicts between ideas – being pursued in new forms with no reference to previous skirmishes which largely or entirely addressed the same issue. We’d see reiteration that understood itself as novelty – making no reference to what has come before because the temporal horizons are sufficiently circumscribed that this novelty appears to unfold within a perpetual present. We’d see a perpetual forgetting coupled with perpetual innovation: nothing moves forward because the foundations upon which innovation might be built would be constantly discarded.

I’d argue we can see this. It’s a process that seems pretty obvious to anyone who’s kept up with academic literature over a sufficient number of decades (or maybe it’s just the people in this category whom I happen to talk to a lot). Part of the project we’re planning would intend to actually map this empirically. But the indicators are pretty clear: conceptual commonalities between referentially disconnected literatures, shrinking time horizons of citations, constant invocation of 'turns' in the name of innovation. Constant movement without anything ever progressing.

What makes this odd is how unnecessary it is. Since I started working at the Sociological Review, I’ve been slightly obsessed by the fact that the archive extends to 1908 and is fully digitised. It’s as easy to access a paper from 1915 as it is to access a paper from 2015. I’ve gone around telling anyone who might care about this in a way that extends far beyond any remit arising from the fact I’m employed by the journal. This fetishisation of the past is exactly what I take Mark Fisher to be concerned with – I’ve been hugely enthusiastic about these archives without ever seriously engaging with them. Crudely: I think it’s really cool that they are accessible but I’m not really...
sure why I think this. As Fisher observes, “it seemed that practically everything was available for re-watching. In conditions of digital recall, loss is itself lost” (loc 105). There’s no technical reason for this loss of the sociological past but this seems to make little practical different, suggesting that the reasons for this loss have very little to do with technological capacity. This recent post by Graham Scambler identified one of the core reasons for this forgetting:

There is now a premium on roller-coaster productivity pertinent to crass metrics like the REF. To (appear to) stand still is to attract opprobrium, too often from line-managers as crass(ly ambitious) as the metrics they bend the knee to. We are fast accelerating away from the concept of education as intrinsically worthwhile. Education in its entirely needs defending against the bureaucratic instrumentalism characteristic of this vicious neo-liberal interlude.


The broader perspective of social acceleration helps situation this institutionally specific trend in terms of broader macro-social processes. But it’s important not to lose sight of the institutional specificity of higher education. I like how Graham describes the dilemma for scholarship posed by what I’m suggesting is the acceleration of higher education:

we already possess a considerable and under-utilized body of work, both theoretical and empirical (and yes, empiricist too). While the need for innovative theorizing and for up-to-date or novel data and analyses remains, there are published warehouses of the stuff that we neglect. It would pay us to tap and reflect on these. It really is okay to relearn lessons from dead social theorists, sociologists and researchers!

Much of my own recent output – mainly publications, but a few blogs too – comes within the orbit of meta-reflection. This is especially true of my work on health inequalities, but it applies also to my discourses on stigma. I have attempted to draw on and occasionally to develop extant theory as well as quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods investigations to explore optimal ways of determining the extent and nature of, and ultimately explanations for, enduring health inequalities and stigmatization. I have staked claims for theory that is in my view consonant with available evidence bases. I am of course deeply indebted to innumerable predecessors and contemporaries!


It’s for this reason that I think questions of scholarly communication are integral to the future of the social sciences. But my reasons for believing this to the case are somewhat idiosyncratic. This is another theme which we’re hoping to explore in our project (and at the conference we’re organising in [4]Prague in December). There’s a big picture here that is getting lost because of the very academic specialisation it has some important consequences for.

1. https://kindle.amazon.com/work/ghosts-my-life-depression-hauntology-ebook/B00JQQBDFK/B00JQPK1V8
The price of modernity: Disentangling the source of modern terror (2015-02-18 16:29)

By Ralf Wetzel

The bloody advent of Al-Qaeda and, more recently, the so-called Islamic State has incited much and heated debate about the sources that evoke and feed modern terror. The main suspect so far has been religion, especially a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The propagation and enforcement of its tenets seem to be an obvious cause. However, this is too short-sighted an explanation. Religion is certainly involved, but neither more nor less than modern politics, law, or mass media. Modern terror tells us much more about the structure of the modern society and the side-effects of the over-simplifications we use on a daily basis than it does about any radical tendencies in religious beliefs. It is time to move beyond everyday simplifications and understand what there might be hiding behind.

The end of an ordered world

For the last fifteen years now ever more so than ever before, the West is being forced to decide about political and military interventions, while experiencing the constant risk of disaster. America is hesitant to get drawn in too close again into the quagmire of Iraq or Syria, while the actions that it does take have only limited impact. Europe is forced to decide whether to give weapons to the Kurds without knowing on which side of the front they will end up being used. The Kremlin supports local dictators, knowing full well that this might undermine its regional influence in the long run. Somehow, modern terror forces us to put aside the old distinctions that told us the lines along which the world is divided. For a long time, it was quite easy to tell Americans from Russians, democracy from stratified polities, the poor from the rich, deliberate intervention from sheer chaos, the 'here' of the West from the 'there' of the conflict zones, neo-liberals from left-wingers. All of that has collapsed to Western eyes as we witness the new battle for Iraq, the battle against the Islamic State. The classic order of this world has been broken time and again and, what is much more important, so has the moral code that attributes and distinguishes the good from the bad. It is as sub-complex as it is dangerous to still stick to the image of a liberal, enlightened West, threatened by some tribal, fundamentalist pre-nation states as well as astonishingly post-modern, agile militant networks. It does not do the problem justice. Let's take the description of the problem to another level: We need to move beyond a worldview which understands the world as a biological body, in which everything has its place, and terror is just a happenchance disturbance, a kind of 'infection' indicating sickness in the body politic that just has to (and can) be healed. This metaphor does not help much.

The 'event' of terror and the structure of modern society

Terror attacks modern society, and it attacks it as a whole, not only its specific parts. Following Peter Fuchs, one of the strongest and most innovative developers of Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, it is a kind of protest against modernity, containing not merely the rejection, but the communicated end of communication. Terror rejects communication with the societal conditions that surround it. Probably the most frightening feature is its 'blindness', its undirected, furious rage which hits usually innocent people, meaning individuals who personally do not have any links to what happens some 2000 miles away, who individually did nothing specifically 'wrong' whichever vantage point one might apply. This rupture, this communicated termination is directed at a society that, according to German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, can be characterized as a functionally differentiated society. Such a society is a network of communication, structured into heteronomous domains like economy, politics, law, science, arts, or mass media. Each of these functional domains consists of communication alone, not of people, and each provides a specific function (e.g. distributing scarce goods = economy, establishing collectively binding decisions = politics) for society. Each domain operates autonomously. By contrast to medieval or ancient times, modernity has lost its inner hierarchy, the primacy of a single observer, a role once fulfilled by religion in medieval Europe. Modernity has no centre. Triggering first the French and later the Industrial Revolution, functional domains like economy, politics, education, science, or law have replaced the hierarchy of different strata (aristocrats, guilds, slaves) that were dominant in earlier times. With this shift, another feature of the stratified order has been
lost: modern society has no single representation anymore, no unifying institution which stands for society as a whole. Unlike medieval times, there is no god (or his earthly representative in the form of the pope) to whom communication could turn as a single representation of society. Someone to get in touch with, someone one could write a letter to. In other words, modern society cannot be directly accessed, the functional systems of politics or economy have no homogenic and unifying body anymore. There is nobody to contact or to vent one's anger and frustration to. One can only reach and access organizations or individuals, who alone are still addressable. However, the organization of the European Commission, the State Department, or the headquarters of McDonalds are not fully unifying institutions of society. One could attack them, but one would only find the European Commission, the State Department or the McDonalds headquarters, not society as a whole. Terror communicates to modern society that it does not want to communicate with society. However, the communication of this rejection never reaches its intended audience. The fury of modern terror therefore rails mainly against the lacking addressability of modern society. It is built on the insight that attacking modernity directly in fact comes to nothing. Since terror does not find an addressee, it attacks substitutes found in the environment of functional systems: innocent people, respectively their bodies. The core speculation of terror is that modern society is extremely sensitive in observing individuals and their bodies, and that all functional systems can become alarmed by the experience of innocent dead people. The fact that every (sic!) body (sic!) can become a target is what alarms almost all functional systems of modernity. This alarm takes place indirectly, and it takes advantage of one specific functional system: mass media.

**The role of mass media**

That terror, although confronted with the inaccessibility of its target, can nonetheless have impact happens for a reason. Modern society is an observed society, in which functional systems observe each other. One of the core functional systems providing self-observation in society is the system of mass media. This system is constantly engaged with the production of information, especially information that is new, emotional, and able to affect people in the environment of functional systems. The result of terror, the bleeding bodies, the buildings destroyed, the general outcry, together with the fury of the attack and the observable innocence of the victims, feed mass media like no other system. Terrorist attacks and their aftermath cannot be ignored by mass media. In this respect, modern terror rides the code of mass media. Terror itself is in this respect ‘modern’. It can be sure that this system will transform its substitutive work on bodies into the social language of society: Politics cannot ignore information spilled across society by mass media. Neither can law; neither can economics. Terror, as a modern system on its own, and mass media are structurally coupled; they feed and re-enforce the demands of each other. Both enable each other. Mass media is the interface through which terror irritates modern society. Even the attempts to respond to terror are, as such, bound to the logic of mass media. In this sense, they again feed the goal of terror.

**And ... religion?**

All of this can operate without having to fall back to the one system that is regularly scapegoated as the source of terror: religion. However, religion might be as closely coupled with terror as mass media is, given its stratified internal order and the existence of formal representatives. Religion is a copy of the lost order of stratified society, the society that religiously flavoured terror in essence refers back to. The similarity of the internal structure of religion with a stratified society provides the semantics, the language that terror can start from. Clearly, this is not a feature of Islam alone. It is inscribed in nearly all religions. And in this respect, almost no religion is safe from becoming a resource or semantic for modern terror, however it eventually occurs.

**So what?**

All of this gives not much reason to hope for a quick solution. It seems as though terror has become a genuine feature of modern society. It might only become subject to change, once the structure, the differentiation of modern society changes. However, there are not many indications that this will happen any time soon. We might have to live with terror, whatever intervention strategy we can dream up. However, two things are needed to be set
clear: The first is that the modern appearance of terror is not about religion in the first place. Terror is a reaction to a core feature of modern society, and religion is just one functional milieu giving source to its appearance. The second is that terror might become one functional milieu of its own to modernity. In this respect, it is a side effect of modern differentiation and it fuels it by its own means.

Ralf Wetzel began his career as an electrician. He joined Vlerick Business School as a Professor of Organization and Management after extensive work experience in management and organization research and after being a head of a joint research and consulting group. His career path led him from Germany to the UK, via Switzerland to Belgium. He applies art-based research like improvisation principles and theatre play in his work, especially for inquiring into topics like organization theory & behaviour, change management, consulting, leadership, organization & society. Aside of his academic writing, he loves to turn research results into art-based forms like fiction, accessible for non-academic readers. Twitter: @RalfWetzel


Lean in and die trying. A lesson in how to obscure instead of solve a problem (2015-02-18 21:17)

By Ralf Wetzel

[1]
Today’s chauvinists live in difficult times. Waving the flag of equality, women successfully conquered most domains of modern life decades ago, with no regard for the consequences for their poor male counterparts. That’s nothing new. They found ways to adapt, in the worst case by resorting to cynicism. However, encountering an average chauvinist these days means witnessing a state of sheer devastation. Famished, pale, hopeless, almost with tears in his eyes. What happened? Women have obviously overrun one of their last strongholds, one of their last resorts. So far, they always could retreat to one safe zone in their arguments, to one last point of polemic: ‘Dear ladies, overall, you’re just not smart enough.’ Well, that’s history. Even that polemic is now found on the lips of women, they have conquered the last bastion as well. From now on, chauvinists are truly somehow, ... well: homeless.

The hypothesis of ‘Lean In’

‘Lean in’ has been one of the management bestsellers of the previous years. Sheryl Sandberg wants to offer a refreshing look into gender inequalities, especially in the world of business and management. And she aims to provide a clear and empowering guidance for women planning to step into higher management positions and crack the ‘glass ceiling’. The ambition to "help" women to liberate themselves from low self-perception and considerable self-restrictions is more than laudable, and she herself seems to give the proof that it works. As COO of Facebook, she has climbed to the top of the greasy pole with mind-blowing speed and success. She seems to be the role model for the quickest way to the top, given that no one else will fight for women’s rights and equality than themselves. Cut to the bones, the core message of the book claims: ‘It’s you, stupid!’ If women only were more active and went bravely against stereotypes, if only they started investing more in knowledge-building and networking, if only they adapted to assertive decision-making and generally had more presence to fight their claims, they would be more successful. It’s the women’s own problem is the message, heralded by one of their own. But how much substance is there to this argument?

The hidden role of cultural capital

However, steeped in American individualism and pragmatism, the arguments of Sandberg miss some important side conditions of modern gender inequality which we need to understand as its very core. It was Pierre Bourdieu, the French philosopher and sociologist, who made it clear that there is a structural societal background that gender inequalities especially stem from. Bourdieu introduced aside the notion of economic capital the idea of non-monetary, non-financial capital that individuals have access to, can acquire, barter and store, even build a living upon. Economic capital becomes relevant, since it can be exchanged and transformed into other, none-economic capital, when university degrees become subject of admission fees for example. For the non-economic sorts of capital he distinguishes between social, cultural, and symbolic capital, of which social capital stands for access to and relevance in networks, cultural capital for the acquired knowledge and behavioural richness, and symbolic capital for the value of all capital, for the prestige of a person. The more a person can acquire these different sorts of capital, the more vertically and horizontally mobile he or she becomes between the different layers of society. For example, a university degree implies a proficiency in a language that someone without a degree hardly can keep up with. A childhood in a family of academics implies a versatile and eloquent turn in the given tongue that someone being raised in a blue-collar family can almost never reach. The societal ‘pedigree’ and the amount of formal education are important pre-conditions for the eventual societal position of any person. If you have been socialized in the English upper class, this upper class will much more easily welcome and embrace you than if you haven’t. Clearly, the ways in which these capitals can be accumulated reinforce the given distribution. Societal inequality supports societal inequality. Women face the problem of graduating less and, when they do so, preferring degrees in sectors and industries which tend to have a lower societal rank and remuneration than their male counterparts. Strikingly, professions which become feminized experience a reduction of status over time. It is the non-financial capital that women lack and that substantially impedes their societal mobility, on a structural basis, based on a lack of economic capital that furthermore would allow to better acquire non-economic capital. The vast majority of women who Sandberg reaches out to lack symbolic and economic capital compared to their male peers. Sandberg
obscures the fact that the accumulation of non-financial capital is mainly a long process of socialization, only partly influenced by individual action. To change this inequality, a toolbox of intervention with a quite different armour is needed, since it is about changing complex, and mainly sublimely operating discriminating gender regimes, and less about individualistic action. And whether this part of modern feminisms, which fancies work as a mere means to emancipation, is better than other predecessors, which aimed to distribute work and non-work-loads differently, is at least worth a second look.

**The obscuring impact of modern organizations**

Since Sandberg is most concerned with the problem of the glass ceiling, one of the core domains where inequality persists, as is visible in the enduring underrepresentation of women in the management boards of companies, another blind spot needs to be spotted here. The organization, that is, the social order that companies incorporate, is by definition, by its sheer constitution – unequal, asymmetric, in short: hierarchical. More problematically, it represents the core mechanism of modern society for solving one of its core paradoxes. Modern society claims to be an equality-based society, where everybody should have access to all societal sectors and services like the economy, law, politics, or education. Factually, however, this equality is not given. It seems as if the more equality is in demand, the more inequality is the result. According to Niklas Luhmann, a German sociologist, organizations ‘help’ solve this problem. Organizations include only a very limited number of people as members, though the sheer number of organizations enables society to include almost everybody in one or more of them. Which role and position the included members acquire is then again open to acquired individual symbolic capital, but this is almost invisible to the outside society. All members of society are included, albeit not equally so. Furthermore, organizations act as a collective person; they establish an address by which they can be reached. Around this address, a fully fleshed-out ‘front’, a façade is established which is shown to the outside world to cover and shelter all the micropolitics, inefficiencies, and all premature innovation from external observation. These facades help to make organizations acceptable on the outside. To establish legitimacy, organizations react to external expectations (such as equality) while disconnecting these from internal realities (such as unbending hierarchy). It took a while for feminist activists and even gender theorists to realize that organizations play a core role in maintaining gender inequality as well. When organizations establish gender mainstreaming programs and announce gender or diversity positions, then this should not be misunderstood as a contribution to societal equality. It is an attempt to meet external societal and moral needs instead, presenting formal and objective measures which, once installed, are driven by internal political games and informality like everything which happens in the sub-cosmos of organisations. Organizations serve their own operational interests and are clever enough to transform external moral demands into internal means, feeding the on-going informal and formal battles.

**Another type of organizations?**

‘Lean In’ is, in this respect, certainly a necessary and important hygienic factor to keep the movement going. However, given the absence of context sensitivity, it creates a strong risk for women to fail and fall prey to frustration of the second order. Obviously structural shifts of society are required to fundamentally change the equality conditions which let individual action somewhat restricted. Two things might help nonetheless. The first is simple patience, since women have indeed been shown to accumulate symbolic capital over longer periods of time. The rising number of women attending first-tier business schools is a sign of this, although the prospects of female alumni are far from unrestricted. A second glimmer of hope might rest in the advent of new organizational forms, avoiding or minimizing (formal) hierarchy, incorporating equality standards in their core values that conflict with the appearance and constitution of their traditional predecessors. Whether these new forms can escape their paradox-solving role for contemporary society is currently being researched intensively and must remain open here. At least the principle of hope - again - will remain. That the old-schooled business masculinity will get back in its office remains improbable in any case. However, with new organizational and societal forms of order, there might emerge a new form of testeronized daily practises too. To announce and celebrate its societal death would certainly be somewhat premature, to which the currently rising claim for ‘mainstreaming men’ might be only one indicator.
Ralf Wetzel began his career as an electrician. He joined Vlerick Business School as a Professor of Organization and Management after extensive work experience in management and organization research and after being a head of a joint research and consulting group. His career path led him from Germany to the UK, via Switzerland to Belgium. He applies art-based research like improvisation principles and theatre play in his work, especially for inquiring into topics like organization theory & behaviour, change management, consulting, leadership, organization & society. Aside of his academic writing, he loves to turn research results into art-based forms like fiction, accessible for non-academic readers. Twitter: @RalfWetzel

4. http://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=1234
5. http://www.amazon.com/Organizations-Stefan-K%C3%BChl-ebook/dp/B00I5020JW/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1421058316&sr=8-3&keywords=stefan+k%C3%BChl

Applying for postdocs - what are your tips? (2015-02-19 08:00)

This Guardian Higher Education articles offers 18 tips for applying for postdoc jobs. There's some really useful advice supplied for each one, which you can read in full [1]here:

- Get advice from your PhD supervisor
- Start building your networks early
- Finding funding
- Be cautious about firing off out-of-the-blue emails
- Look for opportunities outside your specialism
- Look worldwide
- Consider opportunities for a portfolio career
- Try working as a researcher for a company
- If you don’t meet the essential requirements, don’t apply
- If there is a formal application process, read the guidance
- Avoid excessive jargon
- The cover letter should entice the recruiter to the CV
• Always tailor your application
• Put yourself in the principal investigator’s shoes
• Show that you’re a team player
• First impressions count
• Talk about something other than your PhD
• Make sure you are able to work well with your prospective boss
• Think carefully about whether you want to stay in academia

What would you add? Are there any you disagree with? Are there some disciplinary specific aspects to this question which a general article overlooks? How do these issues differ internationally?


The Promise of Sociology in 2015 (2015-02-20 08:00)

Earlier this month, I spoke to Nicholas Gane (Warwick) and Les Back (Goldsmiths) about an article they published in Theory, Culture & Society. It was called [1]C. Wright Mills 50 Years On: The Promise and Craft of Sociology Revisited and, as you can see from the title, it was concerned both with C Wright Mills himself and the way of doing sociology he has come to personify. It’s the relationship between the two that has always fascinated me and it became something of an obsession after I read his [2]letters and autobiographical writings. But what’s more important here is how his life and his work can illuminate present dilemmas facing the discipline. This is what I spoke to Nick and Les about and the conversation soon extended beyond C. Wright Mills and turned to the many continuities between his circumstances and our own, as well as how his responses to them might guide ours


1. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/29/7-8/399.abstract%20C.%20Wright%20Mills%2050%20Years%20On%3A%20The%20Promise%20and%20Craft%20of%20Sociology%20Revisited

Tom (2015-02-20 10:24:25)
Really enjoyed that, thanks. Haven’t seen Nick since York years ago.
Coping with Acceleration (2015-02-21 08:00)

I wrote recently about [1]cognitive triage in higher education and its ramifications for personal reflexivity. My claim is that an inflation of situational demands leads subjects to prioritise the urgent, moving immediately from one necessity to another, in a way which crowds out the important. While the urgent/important dichotomy is a feature of the ‘productivity culture’ I’m trying to analyse, I nonetheless think it’s actually a useful contrast. It loosely reflects the distinction between first-order desires and second-order desires offered by Charles Taylor and Harry Frankfurt: between our immediate desires and our desires about our desires e.g. I don’t want to go outside into the snow to walk to work but I want to want to do this and will if my second-order desire wins out over my first-order desire.

I’d like to develop the urgent/important contrast as a way of conceptually unpacking how reflexivity operates in working life. Dealing with both entails reflexivity but of very different sorts. The reflexivity of urgency is much more limited in its scope, often instrumental and usually restricted to situational considerations. The reflexivity of importance is much more expansive, often value-rational and tends to transcend situational limitations. It’s the latter that is the foundation of agency, as what is important leads to action orientated towards changing our circumstances or exiting them ([2]another aspect of what I’d like to do with this project). This is an overview of what I’m trying to argue:

1. Social acceleration leads what is urgent to crowd out what is important via an escalation of situational demands
2. In doing so, personal reflexivity tends towards the urgent rather than the important
3. This has important ramifications for how subjects behave within the workplace
4. Coping strategies by subjects reinforce this tendency towards urgent reflexivity
5. These coping strategies also tend to reinforce acceleration within the workplace, as they facilitate the continual escalation of situational demands

Along with Filip Vostal, I want to develop this argument using higher education as a case study but I believe the process is far from restricted to the academy. In short, we’re trying to explore how a ‘circle of acceleration’ is intensified by personal coping strategies. These questions seem politically pressing to me because social acceleration is not an inexorable phenomenon. While some important aspects of it are technological, there’s nonetheless a large element which emerges from new technologies of control within the workplace (and is in turn being entrenched through an expansion of the technological facilities for audit & intervention). This amounts to, as Will Davies put it, “[3]heating up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest” (I’ve had this line stuck in my head since I encountered it) – what we’re interested in is how people seek to get better at hopping and how this reinforces the overall trend.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2015/02/02/higher-education-and-the-temporal-conditions-for-critique/

Steve Fuller (2015-02-21 08:26:44)
I find this a rather topsy-turvy way, though perhaps interesting, way of talking about the problem of ‘discounting’ in what is known as ‘picoeconomics’ (i.e. the economics of allocating psychic resources). People generally discount the future too
heavily when deciding what to do. Thus, short-term desires swamp long-term desires, even when people know that long-term desires are more important. This is how addiction is explained by people (e.g. George Ainslie) who apply rational choice theory to psychiatry, namely, as people lurching from satisfying one short-term desire to the next, fully realizing that their long-term desires are less likely to be satisfied in the process. However, your example about not wanting to go to work in the snow is unclear. Is your lack of desire to go out to be read as a sign of discounting or not? Because you want to give this a social acceleration spin, one might interpret you to mean that actually the first-order lack of desire is the right one, since the second-order desire is simply imposed by our urgency culture. However, in the normal picoeconomic rendering of the example, that second-order desire would be seen as the one to follow because it has your long-term interest in view.

Sociological Imagination (2015-02-21 18:08:10)
Thanks Steve, I'd never heard of 'picoeconomics' and it's fascinating - this seems to be the thread that unites all the things I'm trying to do at the moment. A kind of sociological picoeconomics I guess. But I'm not sure I accept the framing of 'discounting': it seems to imply a cognitive bias in an otherwise uniform faculty of cognition, whereas I'm trying to suggest that cognition is *not* uniform in the first place. Social conditions engender different temporal horizons and these in turn tendentially lead to outcomes. It's a minor distinction between this and what you mean by 'discounting', assuming I've understood you correctly, but I think it's an important one in terms of the methodological consequences that follow from it.

Sociological Imagination (2015-02-21 18:21:26)
In other words, I think 'discounting' suggests the variation in cognition is entirely individual in its origins, whereas I'm suggesting it's mostly social.

rbotoole (2015-04-29 09:46:12)
There's also a more extreme kind of behaviour sometimes called "hurdling" - where the hurdler actively seeks out a constant stream of small but challenging problems to "hurdle" at just the right speed. They get really good at managing the stream of incoming problems so as to get the pace and intensity right. There's a psychological dynamic, a focus and adrenalin curve, involved in it. I'm a computer programmer, so I know what it is like - and I know programming teams who work in this way (Jira is their favoured platform). My theory is that such people are in increasingly powerful positions in the technocratic world. So they actively construct a reality adapted to their hurdling-addiction. They might have, for example, propagated the myth that "change only happens when there is a burning platform". Thus adding to the sense of acceleration.

I really like the idea! I also immediately started wondering about whether I've been implicitly striving towards hurdling...

CfP: Thinking Beyond Capitalism, Belgrade, June 24-26, 2015 (2015-02-22 08:00)

International Conference

Thinking Beyond Capitalism, Belgrade, June 24-26, 2015
Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory

How is it at all possible to make sound statements about contemporary capitalism? How does one adequately diagnose the current state of the economy? Clearly there is no consensus whether the financial crisis which culminated in 2007-2008 should be seen as a symptom of the structural crisis of neoliberal capitalism only, or of capitalism in general. Moreover, one should keep in mind that the term 'crisis' is itself laden with different ideologems. The talk of 'crisis' implies the existence of a superior prior state of capitalism, free of any crisis, and that we are now witnessing an extraordinary phase which is alien to the 'normal functioning' of the system. Should we understand the crisis merely as the means for restructuring the existing system, or as the beginning of an irreversible demise of the current mode of production? Is it possible that the crisis has actually enabled the exacom preservation of the status quo, and has prevented any change? Or was the crisis, on the contrary, the crucial catalyst for the politicization of the otherwise depoliticized actors within late capitalism? We are thus simultaneously exposed to various institutional-reformist suggestions, more or less grounded apologias, and identifications of fundamental contradictions within the capitalist reproduction process.

In The Communist Manifesto Marx argues that capitalism is a social order which arises and subsists in the form of a critique of all alternative orders and subjective dispositions. Capitalism has proven more radical than its competitors: it has destroyed the ancien régime, has rendered all societal bonds flexible and has constantly revolutionized the means of production. It is a system in which 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned'. To what extent, then, is it even possible to formulate a critique of such societal system, a system that has managed to incorporate critique itself? Can one stage a revolution against the 'revolution' itself? If capitalism thus emerges as the actual constitutive framework of our thought, how do we begin to think beyond capitalism?

Starting from the assumption that crises are in fact situations which open up space for thought rather than obstruct it, we intend to thematize the following spectrum of problems:

- Difficulties regarding the self-valorization of capital
- Inequalities within the global division of labour and the challenges of (re)distribution
- Reproduction of social classes and forms of domination
- Structural unemployment and the growth of the precariat
- Tensions between market imperatives
- Ideologems of management, esprit d’entreprise...
- The transformed property relations characterizing 'non-material goods'
- Geographical aspects of capitalism (territories, borders, etc.)
- Tensions between the centres, semiperipheries and peripheries of capitalism
- Dangers of climate change
- Competing dimensions of normativity (universal, global, particular, local, singular...)
- Democracies versus authoritarian social orders
- The cultural dimensions of neoliberalism
- Critique of ideology, critical discourse analysis of neoliberalism
- Neoliberal patriarchy and the new feminisms
- The rise and evolution of anti-neoliberal / anti-capitalist movements
- Left, right, and Romanticist anti-capitalism

Organization of the conference

The conference is organized by the Group for the Study of Social Engagement, part of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory in Belgrade, with the support of the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Centre for Advanced Studies in Rijeka, Croatia, the Centre for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy in
Belgrade, and the French Institute in Serbia. The official language of the conference is English. Presentations should not exceed 20 minutes. The Program Committee of the conference will select the presenters based on the submitted abstracts. The book of abstracts will be published by the time of the conference. Conference applications should be sent only via e-mail to the following address: [1]ifdt.capitalism@gmail.com We kindly ask you to put in your email subject the following title: 'Application: title of the paper'. The complete application in the .doc, .docx or .pdf format must contain: the title of the presentation, an abstract of up to 200 words and a short biography, in English. There will be no registration fees. Conference organisers will provide lunch and light refreshments during the conference program. Participants are kindly requested to make their own accommodation and travel arrangements.

Important dates

Application deadline: 10 April 2015

Notification of acceptance: 25 April 2015

Conference dates: 24–26 June 2015

Program Committee

Petar Bojanić, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade
Laurence Fontaine, CNRS, Centre Maurice Halbwachs/ENS, Paris
Mladen Lazić, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade
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Catherine Samary, Université Dauphine, Paris
G. M. Tamás, Visiting Professor, CEU, Budapest
Mislav Žitko, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

Much of the debate occasioned by the development of ideas about reflexivity and morphogenesis has turned on the status of habit. Whilst recognising the importance of this debate, this seminar takes an alternative tack. Returning to Bhaskar’s formulation of ‘position-practices’, it reviews recent work on organizational routines. Developing a position which sees routines as a key emergent property of organizations, recent developments in information technology are seen to cement autonomous reflexivity. Accompanied by an increasing discourse of ‘strategizing’, this might limit the development of meta reflexivity.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions
David Cameron as neoliberal prophet (2015-02-23 08:00)

I recently heard these prophetic words from UK Prime Minister David Cameron on the radio:

"if you're not good or outstanding, you have to change. If you can't do it yourself, you have to let experts come in and help you"

He was talking about [1]schools. But have you ever encountered a purer statement of neoliberal ideology? In practice this demand for excellence amounts to, as Will Davies puts it, “[2]heating up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest”.

1. http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/national/11764431._Coasting__heads_could_face_sack/

The dogs of the Moscow metro (2015-02-24 08:00)

Can you think of a space more emblematic of urbanism than a metro? I can’t and perhaps that’s why I’m so preoccupied by [1]Moscow’s metro dogs: it’s a reminder that cities are sites of ecological novelty, rather than human constructions that have constituted nature as ‘outside’. I love reading about the distinctive behaviours that have emerged amongst Moscow’s metro dogs:

Rather than chasing the dogs away, metro workers fed them. Riders, too, were kind: if a tired dog fell asleep in the middle of a marble station, people walked around the animal to avoid waking him. The dogs have learned to recognize stations from the announcers’ voices—though Neuronov added that he doubts the oft-repeated assertion that, like humans, the commuting dogs occasionally fall asleep and miss their stops. “There are three models of metro dogs,” he explained: dogs who live in the subway but do not travel, dogs who use the subway to travel short distances instead of walking, and entrepreneurial dogs who spend the day riding back and forth, busking. This last type of dog takes long trips, working the crowd for treats and emotional contact. (On trains, dogs “seeking tenderness” are particularly inclined to approach women over forty who are carrying large shopping bags.) And, according to the results of a study Neuronov conducted of the Red Line, some dogs hop on the train for purely recreational reasons. “Like in human society,” he said, “there are dogs who are inclined to see new places.”

I'm aware that I probably come across like I hate Slavoj Zizek but there are many aspects of his work which I really like. My favourite is his account of neoliberal ideology which I understand to be an argument about how subjective disavowal goes hand-in-hand with objective complicity: we maintain a critical distance from a system while nonetheless behaving in a way conducive to its reproduction. Rather than labouring under illusions which, if absented, would lead to action, we see things as they are but in a way that engenders passivity. We expressively repudiate our conditions while nonetheless continuing to acquiesce to them. In fact the former reinforces the latter. We invest ourselves in having seen through the mystification of the system but the pleasure we take in this cynical distance leaves us able to pragmatically continue as if the mystification was still operative.

It seems obvious to me that this cynicism is rife within higher education. Consider the REF: widely scorned yet near universally acquiesced to. My point is not to minimise the practical obstacles to resisting it but simply to suggest that the contrast between the vehemence with which it is discussed and the pragmatism with which it is adapted to is, to put it mildly, rather curious. However I think Zizek’s account helps illuminate the tension here but doesn’t entirely explain it. I’m curious about whether there’s a temporal dimension to critique that needs to be invoked in order to explain this tendency. For a while now, I’ve been trying to develop the notion of cognitive triage: coping strategies on the part of overburdened subjects in which they prioritise the most immediate and urgent demands upon them.

The urgent things which we must attend to tend to be situational. The more time we spend triaging, the more situational factors occupy our decision making. Given our finite attentional resources, we can therefore talk about situational factors crowding out trans-situational considerations. Our decision making doesn’t cease but its temporal scope diminishes. Urgent requirements for next week, tomorrow or later today crowd out considerations of next month, next year or next decade. People adapt to this in all sorts of ways and I would argue that things like digital detoxes can be understood as a coping strategy under conditions where triaging is proving frequently necessary. These coping strategies in turn act back upon the subject when they are pursued habitually. If we are what we habitually do then when, say, one draws on life hacking techniques to cope with their burdens one eventually becomes a life hacker. I’m not sure this is a good thing but reasons I’ll do my best to explain.

My suggestion is that many second-order coping strategies actually intensify the tendency towards triaging. One finds oneself in this state of cognitive triage (first-order) and begins to consult resources to develop techniques to avoid this overburdened fire fighting (second-order). But these techniques will usually involve cultivating a more refined process of self-management: deliberate triaging rather than desperate coping. These techniques involve greater scrutiny of first-order responses in order to better facilitate policing of reactions e.g. measuring and controlling a proclivity towards distraction. In doing so, the slide into situationalism is actually reinforced. The strategies we draw upon to help us cope with the intensity of situational demands leave us more embroiled in situationalism. We do it more gracefully and more efficiently but the tendency towards a narrowing of our temporal horizons is entrenched.

The problem is that critique is necessarily trans-situational. Lay normativity rests on personal concerns which
by their nature transcend particular situations. If we’re embroiled in coping with day-to-day demands then it’s very difficult to step back and reflect critically upon the conditions within which those demands occur. It’s more difficult still to consider potential courses of action through which we could individually, let alone collectively, work to change conditions that generate these ceaseless demands that leave us pushed and pulled by forces beyond our immediate control. Under such circumstances, it seems to me that expressive disavowal occupies an important psychological role as a safety valve. It lets us vent and moan. It lets us experience an ephemeral feeling of moral agency over circumstances that frustrate and impede our sense of what a good life could and should be. When we do it collectively, it has the feel of collective repudiation of that which we reject in common. But unfortunately it rarely, if ever, will lead to action. There’s a character in the John Lanchester novel Capital who continually fantasises about leaving his job:

That didn’t mean he didn’t think about giving it up and doing something else. He did, almost every day. The thought was a safety valve; the idea that he could quit whenever he liked was one of the things which kept him in the job. The exit was always in his line of sight. The idea of it helped him to stay put and to cope with the rough parts of his job and his day.

I’m suggesting inertia of this sort is a common phenomenon under conditions of social acceleration. As things get faster, as the demands upon us increase, we are left scrabbling to cope with immediate demands. We don’t lose the capacity to think about the longer term but we do it less and it becomes harder to sustain. The better we become at coping with these situational demands, the more we become locked in the immediate and urgent. The longer this continues, the more we recognise these conditions as ‘life’ and fail to imagine anything else. We don’t cease to be agents but the scope of that agency begins to change in a radical way. Critique and the action to which it leads increasingly gives way to cynicism and inertia. The fact this is occurring in institutional environments where those in charge are “[1]heating up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest” only makes it worse.


Name-Dropping vs Name-Checking as Academic Vices (2015-02-25 08:58)

When I was a student, teachers used to warn against ‘name-dropping’ as a scholarly faux pas. This is when you suddenly provide a string of names in place of a substantive argument. The implication is that if you read the guys behind the names, you would understand what the author is trying to say. However, this was seen as an unfair imposition on the reader, who should be able to judge an argument through direct presentation. In fact, name-dropping would be cited as a paradigm case of ‘argument from authority’, a fallacy of informal logic. It was seen as a very elitist – if not outright bullying – tactic. But I now believe that this attitude is an artefact of the context in which scholarly communication was conducted in the 20th century, an exponential growth in publications while ordinary human cognitive capacities remained largely the same – i.e. technologically unenhanced.

I seem to see fewer complaints about name-dropping these days. A big reason no doubt is the widespread adoption of the so-called Harvard style of scholarly reference (i.e. author/date format embedded in the text), which basically allows you to drop names with impunity but in a superficially accountable way. Another reason, of course, is that search engines allow the reader easy access the identities behind the names, so that one can quickly discern the
pattern of thought that the names trace. In fact, the burden of proof is beginning to shift, so that if someone complains that they didn’t know half the names mentioned in an article, they’re told, ‘Why didn’t you Google the names?’

However, name-dropping is not the same as name-checking. Name-checking is when you do more than simply say you’re relying on the authority of someone else’s work. Rather, a stronger bond is suggested, namely, that you’re somehow part of the same team, party or movement as the other person. Thus, a much stronger sense of identification is being asserted – in fact, so strong that the name-checking serves to pre-empt any criticism that the name-checked party might have of you. This is recognizable as part of the Mafia’s gift-giving modus operandi: I go out of my way to do something nice for you in order to put you in my debt, which you may repay simply by keeping quiet if I do something (to someone else) that you don’t happen to like.

(I must confess that this influences my view of gift-giving more generally: in other words, I tend to regard it as a mildly aggressive act unless the gift-giver is clearly exposing themselves to risk.)

I first associated name-checking and the Mafia mentality when I heard a distinguished feminist theorist periodically name-check people in the audience by referring to them as ‘my dear friend’, which I found (and still do) vaguely annoying. She spoke in the sort of raspy voice that I associated with[1] Borscht Belt comedians, who also use the same mode of address. The Borscht Belt bred America’s edgiest comedy talent, but the resort hotels in which they operated were under the protective gaze of the Mafia. My view is that these comedians incorporated Mafia discourse protocols into their acts, so as to co-opt the audience into accepting things that they might not otherwise, were the audience not overtly made complicit in them by the comedian.

The interesting thing, of course, is that comedians often refer to literal strangers in the audience as ‘my dear friend’, which is much braver than academics who cite as ‘friends’ people they already know – and perhaps whose behaviour they can then more easily control.


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davemack (2015-02-25 13:09:33)

’on being accused of name-dropping, [Norman] St John-Stevas is said to have sighed: “The queen said the exactly same to me yesterday”’ (http://www.economist.com/node/21549927)

**Understanding academia through food (2015-02-26 08:00)**

Is it a meme? Is it a research project? Does it matter?

We aim to understand academia through food. Do you have a picture of an academic event or function where food is provided? Who was there and what was happening?


(HT [2]Kirsty Liddiard)
We have for some time been looking into the effects of neoliberalism on culture, identity, and institutions - effects that have included 'audit culture' (Marilyn Strathern), self-branding, and the subsuming of any collective 'voice' into individualistic 'consumer power' (Nick Couldry). At the same time, we have struggled with the fading importance of structural inequalities in the minds of policymakers.

There are developing answers, though, in many theoretical idioms. Stephen Ball has commented that "both structural and poststructural theories and analyses are necessary for 'bearing witness' and for an adequate critical understanding of educational realities". We could add to this that other kinds of practice, developed in fields like art or drama, also contribute to the working out of critique and the embodying of alternatives.

At DPR, these varied perspectives all find a home. Over the years, the conference has asked, how can we develop such creative theoretical approaches? And how would they look in practice? DPR 15 continues this line of work. Beyond critique, it asks how we can resist, subvert, and create spaces for multiple and collective voices, for change, and for social justice.

The conference brings together a range of practitioners, researchers, policy-makers, learners and teachers, who are actively engaged in these kinds of challenge. Presentations at the conference will take the form of papers, workshops, performances, exhibitions, and posters. We hope that presenters will come with ideas to share about research and practice, through single or joint presentations or as a contribution to any of the symposia that will be taking shape. [2]Please keep an eye on the DPR15 web page for further details.

If you have suggestions, or ideas for a contribution you would like to discuss, please contact the conference organizer:

Anna Carlile
[3]DPRConference@gold.ac.uk
CfP: Web Science 2015 (2015-02-27 08:00)

Call for Papers & Posters ([1]text version)
The Web Science conference welcomes participation from all disciplines including, but not limited to, art, computer and information sciences, communication, economics, humanities, informatics, law, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology, in pursuit of an understanding of the Web. This conference is unique in bringing these disciplines together in creative and critical dialogue. We particularly welcome contributions that seek to cross traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Following the success of WebSci’09 in Athens, WebSci’10 in Raleigh, WebSci’11 in Koblenz, WebSci’12 in Evanston, WebSci’13 in Paris, and WebSci’14 in Bloomington, for the 2015 conference we are seeking papers and posters that describe original research, analysis, and practice in the field of Web Science, as well as work that discusses novel and thought-provoking ideas and works-in-progress. There is a [2]separate call for colocated workshops.

Possible topics for submissions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Theoretical, methodological and ethical approaches for Web Science
- Web practices – individual and/or collective and/or institutional
- Humanities on the Web
- The architecture and philosophy of the Web
- Web Science approaches to Data Science and the Web of Data
- Web Science and the Internet of Things
- Social machines, collective intelligence and collaborative production
- Social Media analytics for Web Science
- Web economics, social entrepreneurship and innovation
- Web Science and Cybersecurity
- Governance, democracy, intellectual property, and the commons
- Personal data, trust, and privacy
- Web access, literacy, and development
- Knowledge, education, and scholarship on and through the Web
- Health and well-being online
- Arts and culture on the Web
- Data curation and stewardship in Web Science
- Web archiving techniques and scholarly uses of Web archives
Submission
Web Science 2015 is a very selective single track conference with a rigorous review process. To accommodate the distinct traditions of its many disciplines, we provide three different paper submission formats: full papers, short papers, and posters. For all types of submissions, inclusion in the Association for Computing Machinery Digital Library proceedings will be by default, but not mandatory. All accepted research papers (full and short papers) will be presented during the single track conference. There will be a reception for all accepted posters, which will all be displayed in a dedicated space during the conference.

Full research papers (8-10 pages, ACM double column) Full research papers should present substantial theoretical, empirical, methodological, or policy-oriented contributions to research and/or practice. This should be original work that has not been previously published.

Short research papers (up to 5 pages, ACM double column) Short research papers may present preliminary theoretical, empirical, methodological, or policy-oriented contributions to research and/or practice. This should be original work that has not been previously published.

Posters (up to 2 pages, ACM double column, poster reception and presentation) Extended abstracts for posters may be up to 2 pages.

Other types of creative submissions (flexible format) are also encouraged, and the exact format and style of presentation are open. Examples might include artistic performances or installations, interactive exhibits, demonstrations, or other creative formats. For these submissions, the proposers should make clear the format and content and any special requirements they would need to successfully deliver this work (in terms of space, time, technology, etc.)

Submission instructions

Review Process
The Web Science Programme Committee covers all areas of Web Science. Each submission will be refereed by three Programme Committee members and one short meta review written by a Co-Programme Committee chair, to cover both the research background of each submission as well as the necessary interdisciplinary aspects.

Digital Library
All accepted papers and posters will by default appear in the Web Science 2015 Conference Proceedings and can also be made available through the ACM Digital Library, in the same length and format of the submission unless indicated otherwise (those wishing not to be indexed and archived can "opt out" of the proceedings).

Important Dates
20 Mar 2015
Deadline for paper and poster submissions

30 Apr 2015
Paper/poster notification

15 May 2015
Paper/poster camera-ready

Programme Chairs

- Christine L. Borgman, Professor and Presidential Chair in Information Studies, UCLA
- Pete Burnap, School of Computer Science & Informatics, Cardiff University, UK
- Susan Halford, Professor of Sociology, Web Science Institute, University of Southampton, UK

Call for Workshops
For WebSci15 the workshops will be integrated into the main conference programme, running in the afternoons of June 30 and July 1. The workshops offer organisers the opportunity to curate panels, or collaborative research and scholarship activities around a key Web Science theme and to explore this in depth. Workshops may be proposed on any theme that facilitates interdisciplinary discussion of the Web and approaches to Web Science research. We particularly welcome applications that are ambitious in scope and aim to address the pressing challenges of Web Science. This might include, but is not restricted to:

- Theorising the Web
- Data ownership, access and ethics
- Digital cultures
- Digital inequality, citizenship and governance
Workshops can have a mixture of panel presentations and invited speakers, but presentations should reflect the diversity of approaches that characterise the multidisciplinary nature of Web Science.

**Workshop submission**

Workshop proposals should contain the following information:

1. Title summarising the tutorial goals or workshop theme.
2. Details of the organising committee, including names and institutional affiliations.
3. Max two-page description about the relevance, motivation and goals of the tutorial or workshop.
4. Schedule of sessions, panels, and talks (half day 14:00-17:00).
5. Names of instructors and potential invited speakers.
6. For workshops, selection criteria for papers to be presented.
7. Workshop website URL (desirable).

It is the prerogative of organisers to decide whether to have an open call for participants and papers, or arrange panels by invitation only. Proposals should include as many details as possible about sessions, speakers, and talks: they will be evaluated by their coherence and ability to address the stated goals.

It is the responsibility of organisers to advertise their event, and constitute a program committee to review and select papers, manage the review process, and possibly arrange for selected papers to be published in a special issue of a to-be-identified journal.

If successful, we advise proposals to have a website describing the event (within two weeks of acceptance) and, if applicable, information about similar events held in the past. Workshops will be linked from the main conference site. Proposals should be submitted in pdf format through EasyChair to: [easychair.org](https://www.easychair.org/conferences/?conf=websci2015ws).

**Workshop proposal review**

The Web Science programme chairs will review each submission and select those with the higher scores on originality, timeliness and relevance of the proposed topic, its interdisciplinarity, rigour of the review process, coherence with the conference aims, and potential to attract a large audience.

**Workshop proposal deadlines**

February 27, 2015

Workshop proposal submissions
March 6, 2015
Notification of workshop acceptance

March 13, 2015
Workshop website due

5. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=websci2015
6. https://www.easychair.org/conferences/?conf=websci2015ws

JG Ballard’s High-Rise recreated in lego (2015-02-28 08:00)

JG Ballard’s High-Rise is one of my favourite novels. It’s easy to see why sociologists would like it and it seems I’m [1]not the only one this is true of. So I’m not sure what to make of High-Rise recreated in lego... it’s a homage but it feels like it also trivialises it somewhat. These haunting scenes that have stayed with me long after I read the book actually look twee when materialised in lego. This is how the author describes the project:


I was in Covent Garden at the time, on one of my many trips to pillage London, and as I had been to the tavern the night before and imbibed enough alcohol to bring down a small Bilgesnipe, it is entirely possible that I only accepted the challenge because I was still slightly tipsy. I still believe it was an excellent choice, nevertheless.

To adequately tell the story of High-Rise I decided to do one image per page of the book, which would be 166 photos according to my battered paperback copy of the novel.

Due to budget constraints I could only afford to buy enough LEGO bricks to build one set at a time, so to save time and avoid having to rebuild the same set multiple times I began work on a shooting script.

3304
Unless you’ve read the novel this must all be pretty meaningless (and you probably skimmed the first few sentences at most). But for those who did, [7]see what you think:

Later, as he sat on his balcony eating the dog, Dr Robert Laing reflected on the unusual events that had taken place within this huge apartment building in the previous three months.
You can read the lego story in full here. But if you haven't already, please read the book. It's fabulous.

1. https://thinkingculture.wordpress.com/2013/12/04/a-75-storey-residential-tower-block/
3. https://twitter.com/HighRise_movie/
5. https://twitter.com/HighRise_movie/status/505100512296185856

6.3 March

Vocabularies of Active Female Desire: A FemGenSex Symposium 30 March at Middlesex University
(2015-03-01 08:00)

Vocabularies of Active Female Desire: A FemGenSex Symposium
Monday, 30 March 2015 from 13:00 to 17:30
To book a free ticket please register on Eventbrite: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/vocabularies-of-active-female-desire-a-femgensex-symposium-tickets-15356200810

Despite years of heated debate, reaching back at least as far as the feminist sex wars of the 1970s and 1980s, issues surrounding the depiction of active female desire remain high on the cultural agenda. Whether it be new UK regulations taking aim at the depiction of certain kinds of female sexual enjoyment in video-on-demand pornography, or the upcoming release of the film adaptation of Fifty Shades of Grey, it is clear that desire, sexual difference, and representation continue to form a complex and provocative conceptual nexus. Such a nexus demands careful consideration from a variety of perspectives if we wish to cultivate a more nuanced and holistic understanding of a topic too often generative of uncritical kneejerk reactions or rehearsed moral panics. This one day symposium, to be held at Middlesex University in London, invites theorists and practitioners from a range of disciplinary backgrounds to discuss the challenges posed by attempts to represent active female desires (inclusively defined), as well as to explore some of the innovative contemporary strategies for addressing these challenges within various media and discursive traditions. In what ways is female desire active, and what activates it? What might such a desire look like? How does it sound, and what language does it use? Where can we detect the presence of active female desire in contemporary legal, medical, and other discourses, and how have artists, writers, and filmmakers sought to represent it? These are some of the topics that 'Contemporary Vocabularies of Active Female Desire' will seek to address. Confirmed speakers: Katherine Angel [2]http://katherineangel.com/, Dr. Alison J Carr [3]http://alisonjcarr.net, Alex Dymock, Royal Holloway[4]http://royalholloway.academia.edu/AlexDymock, Professor Feona Attwood [5]http://www.feonaattwood.com, Dr Helen Hester, Lecturer in 3306
Routines and Reflexivity – March 10th @SocioWarwick (2015-03-01 12:17)

[1]
Much of the debate occasioned by the development of ideas about reflexivity and morphogenesis has turned on the status of habit. Whilst recognising the importance of this debate, this seminar takes an alternative tack. Returning to Bhaskar’s formulation of ‘position-practices’, it reviews recent work on organizational routines. Developing a position which sees routines as a key emergent property of organizations, recent developments in information technology are seen to cement autonomous reflexivity. Accompanied by an increasing discourse of ‘strategizing’, this might limit the development of meta reflexivity.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions

1. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/alistair-mutch-nbs.jpg](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/alistair-mutch-nbs.jpg)

11 reasons why we need a Chair for the Public Understanding of Sociology (2015-03-02 08:00)

- It would provide a default point of contact for the media when looking for a sociological perspective.
- It would allow someone the time & support necessary to build up working relationships with a wide range of figures in the media.
- These relationships would be of use to the discipline more broadly by allowing the chair to refer journalists and broadcasters to specialists in particular areas
- It would increase sociology’s media profile through the prominence of a particular figure who intervened across a range of areas
- It would demonstrate that communicating sociological knowledge is valued by the discipline
- The chair would be able to provide informal support and mentoring to other younger sociologists who try to be media active
- The chair could help establish a body of know how which could help other sociologists when engaging with the media
- I can think of a range of sociology professors in the UK who would be good at this. The specialised chair would free them up from teaching and administration in order to allow them to concentrate full time on public engagement.
- The philosophers have one
- So do pretty much all the natural sciences
- We can’t leave it all to Owen Jones (as Lisa Mckenzie wisely observed in a talk last year)
agree— the universities do have their own protocols for referring media inquiries on specific topics, but a figurehead like this could do a lot towards increasing awareness (and dispelling doubts) of the field as a whole.

These are very good and indeed convincing observations, Mark. I’m fully behind the proposal for a public chair in sociology. I just wonder though about the VERY different views that sociologist have about….well pretty much everything that takes place in society and how the holder of this chair may end up promoting a particular understanding of sociology and its role in society - one that other sociologists may want to distance themselves from...! I'd think that for natural scientist this isn’t a major problem but maybe philosophers have found a way of dealing this problem?! All best Daniel

Marilyn Sanders (2015-03-30 15:28:05)
This role should be central to the purpose of the discipline to help increase the knowledge & understanding of the population beyond that of mere ‘common sense', our views tend to be drawn from narrow personal experience married together with the equally prejudiced views of journalists in the media, a much less sound source of critical thought than a discipline whose main function is to question assumptions and to knit together knowledge of interconnected fields e.g psychology, human geography, history, genetics. For a sound democracy we need an informed society but at present this information often remains lodged in the silos of educational establishments. Such a waste.

What constitutes a civilisational collapse? (2015-03-03 08:00)

What constitutes collapse? This is the important question which Phil BC asks in response to my post on the sociology of civilisational collapse. If I mean the notion as anything other than a fleeting speculative thought* then conceptual clarification is essential. I said in the original post that I understand collapse to be the loss of an ability to change state, as opposed to any particular catastrophic change in the social order. By this I mean that the social order, as an emergent totality, ceases to possess the capacity to change its state. It’s these objective possibilities for change, known fallibly by situated actors through all manner of cultural constructions, through which collective agents seek social transformation. It’s the activation of these latent capacities for change which is what people are fighting over.

But what change ensues comes about through the unintended consequences arising from their conflictual plans rather than as the result of any grand design. But latent in any project of social transformation is a set of claims, implicit or explicit, concerning the capacity of the social order to change state. These claims may be idiotic, deluded or incoherent but they nonetheless have an objective referent. Accepting the objective capacities for change within any social order (though not necessarily our ability to know them with any reliability) allow us think about collapse in a sociological way. All manner of epistemological obstacles impede our knowledge of collapse but I don’t see this as creating any difficulties for attempting to posit it as a possibility.

If the social order is an emergent totality, collapse can be best understood as its de-emergence (if anyone could suggest a less clumsy antonym than this, I’ll be forever in your debt). The social order loses its malleability as a totality. This doesn’t mean it dissolves but it does mean it begins to crumble. It loses its susceptibility to steering. Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold (etc). Most of the examples Phil cites are about dramatic social
transformations and in this sense they’re not instances of collapse: it’s this very susceptibility to transformation, even if the actual changes elude the intentions of those groups fighting over them, which I’m suggesting is lost under conditions of civilisational collapse. This is not a matter of the ‘parts’ of the society (people, social relations, organisations, institutions) but rather a feature of the ‘whole’: an emergentist ontology lends itself to quite a specific understanding of civilisational collapse but this is obviously neither an argument for that ontology nor the notion of collapse itself.

The de-emergence of the social order in this sense does not mean that we see the collapse of social order as such. As Phil points out, the durability of social relations mitigates against this:

Therefore theorising about collapse has to take into consideration is the durability of social relations. At certain levels of abstraction, sociology assumes the durability of social relationships because they have proven to be just that. There is social change, but the – on paper – precariously balanced division of labour with its innumerable interdependencies has not just survived, but has thrived economic shocks and world wars, and has spread itself across the globe. The social substance is elastic and tough, I’d wager, because on the one hand capitalist societies are constituted in their production and reproduction by irreducibly antagonistic relationships, and on the other human beings cannot be anything but social, meaning-making beings in the Goffman mode who, in turn, constitute/reproduce social structures as per Giddens and Bourdieu. It’s also worth noting that crisis tendencies are organic to capitalism, that each of its myriad points of tension are pregnant with destruction and creation, of enculturation and barbarism. In other words, while there are precedents from history of civilisations coming and going, none have attained the level of social complexity and productive prowess as our own. Fundamentally speaking, the Romans, the Mayans, the Hittites, and the Babylonians were static societies. The advanced capitalist, industrial societies of today are dynamic and fluidic. They have momentum that might carry them through a huge disaster, or allow them to adapt to real and imagined threats posed by climate change, pandemics, artificial intelligence, and so on.


While I’m far from clear in my own mind about these questions, it’s the characteristics of social orders as emergent totalities (for which I’m using ‘civilisation’ as a lazy shorthand) which interests me. I’m undecided whether I’m serious about the notion of the collapse or if I just see it as a thought experiment with which to consider the characteristics of social totalities with the widest possible lens. It offers an interesting way to consider what it means to talk of a social totality as ‘having momentum’ or attaining a certain level of ‘social complexity’ and ‘productive prowess’.

I’m still far from certain that I do.

3. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/20/the-epistemology-of-civilizational-collapse/
Hi Mark, per your description of "de-emergence" I'd usually say "loss of adaptive capacity" or "rigidity trap": http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol13/iss2/art40/ Something like what you have in mind?

Sociological Imagination (2015-03-05 08:14:01)
I like it!

The sociological imagination of Ava DuVernay (2015-03-04 08:00)

The latest issue of the BFI’s Sight & Sound has an illuminating interview with Ava DuVernay, director of Selma, in which she describes her sensibility and approach to directing. The film itself resists a tendency towards hagiography, instead focusing upon Martin Luther King as a ‘leader of leaders’, continually seeking to explore the social and cultural context within which these networks worked together as part of a movement. When asked about a focus upon bureaucracy in the film, DuVernay replies:

I don’t see it as bureaucracy, I see it as my interest in process ... the process by which minds are changed and hearts are changed. And part of that is bureaucracy and heavy lifting, and passion. That’s where my interests lie as a filmmaker. "How does this work?" is usually what I’m asking for

While sociology cannot be reduced to this, it nonetheless captures much of interest. When presented with social change, asking “How does this work?” and looking to the processes through which people and circumstances are transformed surely represents the sociological imagination in action: connecting biography and history in a way that helps us better understand both. Selma offers a wonderful example of what this looks in practice and it’s something that would be worth engaging with in the way David Beer describes in Punk Sociology:

Using cultural resources to think through problems, issues, and questions is not uncommon in academic work. It is far from a mainstream approach, but there is a growing body of work that attempts to use literature (Lewis et al., 2008; Carlin, 2010; Taylor, 2008, Daniels et al., 2011), poetry (Abbott, 2007; Brown, 1977; Martin, 2010), film (Diken, 2005; Alsayyad, 2006), TV (Gregg & Wilson, 2010; Penfold-Mounce et al., 2011), music (Beer, 2014), social media (Crampton, 2009), and other types of cultural resources to explore social and cultural phenomena. These works often use such resources to engage the sociological imagination and to think through the analytical issues that are being considered. In these instances fictional and other cultural resources are used to explore actual social and cultural phenomena. This type of work can be seen to be controversial in some respects, but it appears to be the way that cultural forms enable the illumination and reappraisal of established research topics that generates a good deal of enthusiasm amongst researchers.
Maggie Feeley’s book *Learning care lessons - Literacy, love, care and solidarity* is the result of a period of longitudinal ethnographic research with survivors of the industrial school system in Ireland. Feeley spent some years as a voluntary literacy tutor at an education centre for ex-residents of Irish industrial schools. Over the years she gained the trust of those attending and, in her capacity as a researcher, some agreed to share their stories. What results is a book about her methodology, her understanding of the changing nature of literacy education under neo-liberal policy making and, the imperative to validate ‘care’ in the learning process. The book examines, what can only be described as, the inhumane treatment of children under the supposed care of the state. Feeley posits, through the voices of her participants, that state neglect, but also the lack of care on the part of individuals involved in the running of the homes as well as a care-less complicit society, need to be challenged to ensure affective inequalities are recognised in future policy making in education.

Using New Literacy Studies (NLS) as her theoretical framework, alongside radical, liberatory theories of literacy education such as Freire’s, Feeley initially travels back through the past landscape of literacy and observes the power always enmeshed within it. Those who have literacy and the ‘authority of the written word’ have always had more power, not only within educational frameworks but socially and economically also. Feeley is particularly interested in equality and structures of power. Neo-liberal policy-making links adult literacy learning with social inclusion and economic improvement, however it places the responsibility to learn on the shoulders of the individual. Feeley drives home the importance of the affective domain for learning and how structural variances lead to putting some sections of society at a disadvantage from birth. Literacy is not just a set of reading and writing skills, it is an interpersonal event, a communicative event. In reducing it to a set of measurable skills, to be acquired by the adult learner, nothing is done to reveal the reasons why those skills were not gained as a child. Naming the many learning care domains in which a child needs to feel safe in order to learn, the home, school and community, Feeley argues the existing structural inequalities means that some children will always be at a disadvantage and that interventions such as family literacy programs can only go some way to addressing the problem. Furthermore, that learning care, especially in the case of adults with unmet literacy needs, needs to be part of the lifelong learning process.
Through the generosity of the adult learners revealing their childhood stories, the reader gains an understanding of the compacting inequalities which led to their not only missing out on literacy learning but the injustices of a society which saw some individuals as worth less and so powerless, and the state took advantage of this power inequity. Their stories make for heart-breaking reading. These are extreme cases of abuse, and it is easy to see that learning under such conditions was next to impossible. Those who did manage to learn stated that either they may have had some skills prior to entering the homes or learned as a means to escape the horrors around them. The lack of care was astounding, but it is the intentional institutionalised abuse of these children, already at a disadvantage in their primary care homes, which makes for much soul searching when reading the book. Who has responsibility to fight for those more disadvantaged? One of the participants put so eloquently when she said "It might sound simplistic but it is every adult’s responsibility to ensure every child is educated", the truth is often that simplistic.

This book will be of interest to anyone in the field of literacy, social work, sociology and psychology. With Ireland’s past history of abuse of its most vulnerable, and current UK revelations of abuse of those in care homes and hospitals, by not only the carers but celebrities in positions of power, Feeley's book will demonstrate the lifelong effects of those who most are vulnerable to structural inequalities and powerlessness. Her plea for the state to recognise its neglect in not recognising the value of 'care' to mitigate inequalities is a powerful one.

Gwen Redmond is studying for a Master of Education degree in The Department of Adult and Community Education at Maynooth University, Kildare, Ireland. Working in the field of Adult Literacy education for ten years, her studies and practice are informed by Critical Theorists.

“Apparently, he comes with a rider these days" (2015-03-04 12:33)

By Kip Jones
Narrative Practitioner Conference, Keele University, 2009. I asked audience members to bring objects with them. In the photo, they are exchanging them with someone they do not know.

I remember quite well a major national disciplinary group's annual conference in Birmingham that I attended some time ago now. We were kind of 'outsiders' at the time, but excited to present our government-funded project to this particular interest group. We thought that they might, indeed, be 'interested' in our project.

The presentation went well, but we were attending only for the first day, mostly because of the expense of the conference. At the day's end I was waiting for my colleague in a seating area of the hotel's lobby. I noticed a table with materials on it set up nearby and decided to investigate. As soon as I approached the area, a bloke came up to me and said, 'You can’t be here. It’s for members only'. He pointed to a line on the carpet as some sort of barrier. The space was about to be turned into a cocktail do for the great and the good. I was astounded quite frankly. What a stupid, little club.

Years later, even after having accomplished a major project in their subject area, I still choose not to attend their annual conferences because of that experience.

I also remember early days as a PhD student and wanting to attend conferences to hear from and (hopefully) engage with as many of the big guns at the theoretical end of my field as possible. I had a modest amount of ESRC money annually for such activity, which meant budgeting and planning travel and accommodation carefully.

On one occasion, I took a ferry to Amsterdam, and then caught two trains packed mostly with local commuters, changing trains and platforms twice, to eventually arrive at the conference in Nijmegen. The opening night of the conference was astounding. They had a drinks and nosh welcome party with a Mariachi band. Now first, who came up with the idea of a Mariachi band (brilliant) and secondly, how did they ever find one in Holland? Two key players in my PhD’s method were presenting at the conference—one is a personal hero of mine. I got to hear and meet both of them. On this occasion as well, I had to leave a day early because I couldn’t afford accommodation for the full conference.

I took a ferry another time, first to Hamburg, then caught the train to Berlin in order to present at a conference where my hero was again keynoting. He mentioned my presentation in his keynote. To me, it was like receiving an Academy Award as well as great encouragement to forge my own path and, at times, go it alone.

As my career progressed after completing my PhD, I found myself involved in planning and organising annual conferences myself. One of the first things I noticed was that most of the income from conference attendees’ fees went towards flying in heavy hitters as keynotes and put them up in the style to which they had become accustomed. Although I realised the importance of these ‘stars’ of the field in attracting attendees, I also felt that more attention (and budget) might be paid to the conference ‘experience’ itself and what participants were getting for their money. (A Mariachi band?) For instance, were paying delegates given opportunities to interact with these academic heavy-hitters? Could we provide even more organised opportunities for conference participants to engage with each other? Audience involvement and ways to develop its potential became part of my theoretical development of a Performative Social Science from that point forward.

Lately, I mostly attend conferences as a keynote myself. I have become quite fussy about travel and accommodation arrangements and even joke that I come with a ‘rider’. I fondly recall presenting at LSE recently. When asked why I liked that particular experience so much, I replied, ‘Well, the marble floors and the handsome young men who offered me lunch, direct me to the hall and handled my technical needs’.

What is (still) most important to me even now, however, is how my presentations contribute to the conference experience for delegates. I try not to be a ‘parachute’ keynote, i.e., one that shows up, talks (usually reading
from a PowerPoint) and leaves immediately following the presentation. (And how many Deans, VCs, etc. show up to open a conference in this way, then never bother to stick around to find out what the conference is really about?)

My favourite part of presenting is the Q & A that more often than not follows my contribution; I try to allow at least half of the allotted time for this. Nonetheless, a chance for a conversation over lunch or even a coffee is still the best bet. This is where communication really takes place, and what conferences should be all about, serendipitous encounters.

[2]

Kip Jones (BA, MSc, PhD) is Reader in Performative Social Science at Bournemouth University.

His post straddles both The Faculty of Media & Communication and the Faculty of Health & Social Sciences and involves the use of tools from the arts in culture, community and communication. #ValueCulture

Email: [3]kipworld@gmail.com

3. mailto:kipworld@gmail.com


Dear Colleagues

Discourse, Power, Resistance 15 - Creative Spaces for Collective Voices
Come to a conference at Goldsmiths on 15th-17th April 2015. Abstracts have been submitted from all over the world including:

- Reigniting the Flame of Activism: Challenging Homophobia as the final socially-acceptable form of discrimination in Australian schools
- The End of Democracy and the Modes of Resistance
- Presentation & workshop: Clowns, buffoons and the power of the killing laugh: an investigation of CIRCA (The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army) and its unique approach to the subversion of power and place through non-violent direct action
- Thinking past the Black/White binary: mixed heritage children in London schools
- The rock or the hard place: Discursive invisibility and misrecognized visibility of school-going Muslim girls across the policy-practice continuum
- Exploring Britishness in a GCSE Art class: Emancipatory pedagogy in creative space
- Living politics and the City: Youth protests, art and the view from elsewhere

There is still time to contribute a paper or a poster, or to take part in a symposium, or simply to come and join in. But time is passing so I’d strongly recommend you to act without delay if you want to take part. See https://dprconf.wordpress.com/ for more details.

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**How to use @Artefact_Cards for academic writing (2015-03-05 08:00)**

I finally received my @Artefact Cards last week and I love them. They were a pain to get hold of due to a spectacularly inept delivery company but Artefact soon rectified this when I e-mailed them to complain. They’re probably only likely to appeal to those with a real stationary problem but if you too find yourself fixated on Moleskine notebooks and their ilk then I suspect you will like them every bit as much as I do.

The idea behind the cards is to *materialise ideas*. This is a concept that appeals to me immensely. One of the weirdest experiences of my life was the first time I printed out my PhD thesis. Suddenly the ethereality which had recurrently seeped into every part of my life over the past six years was transmuted into a *thing*... it was just some stuff that I had written. This was a more intense form of a feeling that I often get when writing. Getting the words out into the world, giving them a form, somehow makes my mind feel *lighter*, even if that form is digital. The idea becomes something 'out there' rather than 'in here', with a definite form rather than a potential range.

The card themselves are designed to "help you craft better ideas, create new idea combinations by moving, shuffling, stacking, dealing and matching them". In essence they’re just blank playing cards, with a look and feel which has obviously been the subject of much thought, which can be filled using the supplied Sharpie. They’re perhaps slightly overpriced but it’s hard to begrudge an individual creator this for a product that so much love has clearly gone into.

I’m already finding them immensely useful. In the cards below are the talk I’m giving at the Digital Sociology conference in New York in a couple of weeks. I recorded everything I wanted to say on its own individual card. I’m
now going to arrange them in order to draw out clusters, perhaps discard a few and then write the talk using these cards as prompts. In this sense, it allows me to organise my ideas in a more systematic way without sacrificing the writing-to-see-what-happens approach which I prefer. I’m sure some of the prompts will be discarded, others will be rethought and all of them will exceed the limits of what I placed on the card itself.

[2]

In the past I’ve blogged about this in terms of non-linear creativity. I’ve always struggled to write and think in a linear way. I find it difficult to develop ideas sequentially and planning pieces of writing just doesn’t work for me. I often don’t completely know what it is I’m trying to write when I start the process. Assuming I’ve previously [3]baked ideas in the unconscious mind the kind of writing I enjoy most is quasi-automatic. I prefer to write in fragments and piece them together, with the overall structure being something that emerges through this process:

Another example in a very specific area is given by a client in a follow-up interview as he explains the different quality that has come about in his creative work. It used to be that he tried to be orderly. “You begin at the beginning and you progress regularly through to the end.” Now he is aware that the process in himself is different. “When I’m working on an idea, the whole idea develops like the latent image coming out when you develop a photograph. It doesn’t start at one edge and fill in over to the other. It comes in all over. At first all you see is the hazy outline, and you wonder what it’s going to be; and then gradually something fits here and something fits there, and pretty soon it all becomes clear – all at once.”

_Carl Rogers – On Becoming a Person Pg 152_
I find this immensely enjoyable and blogging is the apotheosis of it for me. However in the last couple of years, I've taken this too far and I'm trying to reintroduce structure into the process. Overly-enthused by the discovery that I can write pretty endlessly about subjects that I've thought a lot about, I submitted a series of journal articles that were basically 7000 word blog posts. The responses weren't actually that bad but they were uniformly requests for major revisions and the experience made me realize that I need to introduce much more discipline into my academic writing and this is what the Artefact Cards seem to be helping with already. I need to develop ideas in a more sustained way, producing more tightly argued and well integrated scholarship, without sacrificing the creative side of the process that I enjoy so much. In other words, I have lots of ideas but I need to learn to develop them much more systematically in order to produce journal articles of the standard which I'd like to.

I'm convinced that the Artefact Cards will prove very helpful in this respect. They introduce another step in the planning process before any kind of writing has taken place: rather than having the ideas churning in the back of my mind, it's possible to get them out into a physical form where they can be sifted, shuffled and sorted. Here are some other ways I'm using them:

1. I'm setting myself 500 word writing assignments for Social Media for Academics. I'm going through the book as it currently stands and recording every idea I have about something that should be added in. I'm going to take some of the ensuing cards in my wallet whenever I travel so that I can do brief bits of focused writing on my iPad on the train.

2. I have close to 100 cards now which record every idea I have about the acceleration of higher education for the project I'm doing with Filip Vostal. I did hit exhaustion point with the cards and that was interesting. I had a very definite sense that "this is everything I think about this subject" and I've had no further ideas since (whereas with others, ideas keep occurring to me). It's presented me with the limitations of what I have to say about the subject but also left me with a more clearer sense of what I do want to say, even if it's not quite as expansive as I thought it was. I'm going to use these cards to do some prompted blogging on [4]accelerated.academy, consult them when planning the conference and use them as a source of ideas in the writing we're doing.

3. I have a stack of cards for the large post-doc project that is starting to take shape in my mind. This is much more provisional and I only have 20 or so cards thus far. This has left me aware of how much more work I need to do because the ideas on the cards are very general. I'm going to try and develop these in clusters: going from an idea like 'cognitive triage' to develop many other related notions. I plan to add to these over time and hopefully by the time I start putting together a grant application at the end of the year, I'll have a much more concrete sense of the planned project than I do at present.

These are just a few ideas I've had in less than a week of owning the cards. I'm sure I'll have many more. Though I've almost finished a £36 box of cards since then, it's been a really useful experience and left me with a much greater degree of purchase upon the projects I'm in the process of developing. I doubt this intensity of usage will be the norm but I'm certain that Artefact Cards will be a regular part of my working life from this point onwards.

1. [http://shop.smithery.co/](http://shop.smithery.co/)
2. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/img_0099.jpg](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/img_0099.jpg)
In light of today’s Google doodle in honour of Geradus Mercator, it’d be worth drawing your attention to the 11th century, in which four centuries prior to Gerardus Mercator allegedly “created a flat map”, [2]scientist Al-Idrisi from modern day Morocco is said to have “used in a creative way the system of cylindrical projection of the Earth’s surface, which was to be claimed some centuries later, in 1569, by the Flemish Gerard Mercator.

[3]Mahmud of Kashgar, also from the 11th century, Xianjiang, modern day China drew maps which pertained to the world being round.

Not to mention, [4]Piri Reis from the Ottoman Empire who in the 16th century is said to have drawn maps highlighting projection centres.

There are other cartographers such as Al-Muqaddasi from Jerusalem, Palestine and the author behind the “Book of Curiosities” in the 11th Century.

For more information, see the [5]Muslim Heritage website.
Sairah Yassir works for The Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation (FSTC) is a British not-for-profit, non-political, and non-religious organisation founded in 1999 by a group of philanthropic historians, scientists, engineers and social scientists.


by Hafsah Aneela Bashir
"So I watched the film Kingsman - The Secret Service, based on the acclaimed comic book, directed by Matthew Vaughn (Kick Ass, X-Men First Class) which tells the story of a super-secret spy organisation in London. Described by one review as 'perhaps the riskiest mainstream movie in years, Vaughn's love letter to spy movies may be uneven in places, but it's ultra-violent, envelope-pushing, and fun enough to overcome the flaws. Bond with the stabilisers taken off'.

I don’t know if I was the only one to see beyond the fun but I found it to be an accumulation of disturbing stereotypes coupled with the stuff of nightmares depicting a not so distant future.

The trailers promoting the young to join up as cannon fodder for the army were bad enough but the film itself glorified the sacrificing of new generations for the state as an honour - at least for those who can truly become a ‘gentleman’ which by my understanding meant, shedding your underbelly/working class identity, and joining the secret service where, donned in pinstripes and posh English accents, one can save the world. As long as your white that is which smacks of the white saviour complex that we all too often see in movies.

Spoof of previous spy movies or no spoof, comedy or satire, what was noticeable was that all the people in positions of power were white males, the black man was the criminal super mind, the Arabs were the enemy and women the sexualised prop at the sides of men- if not helping save or destroy the world with their male counterparts then certainly offering their ass to men for gratification. Maybe this is explained away by the reviewer who said 'the core story unfolds predictably, but, like the Kingsmen themselves, with style. Vaughn keeps his tongue firmly in cheek as his ever-dynamic camera conveys the action. Yet, admirably impudent and slyly funny as the film can be, it’s mostly just an exploration of typical comic-book tropes.'
I don't think so. How far from the film's reality are we really (is what I found myself asking during the super slick CGI far fetched illusory of the film)?

It glorifies warfare, killing, gun culture, deception, sacrificing the young for state and country in a world where nothings is as it seems. The young must become killing machines and demonstrate endurance. Placed among some humorous shots, the most disturbing scene of the film I found was the mass killing of racist bigots in an American church, where the congregation turn on each other like animals and kill in brutal sick fashion. Apparently shown to be done by triggering neurological waves via phone sims rendering all human inhibitors to switch off thus causing brutal aggression, it made me think of MK Ultra and mind control conspiracies that we are so quick to shoot down. But then the film also plays on other concepts that have been relegated as conspiracy theories such as New World Order, the mass culling of humans, saving a chosen elite, security chips to control human activity, global warming among other things! How much of this is truth hidden in plain sight?

The film also reminds us that not only does murder become devoid of guilt when one is not pulling the trigger themselves, but also how people's ignorance and inability to challenge or question what is going on around them makes them easy targets for manipulation.

Corruption and greed festers at the top of society's triangle while mass waste features at the bottom with 'sheeple' only interested in consumerism and themselves. It's dog eat dog world at its worst. I don't have to look far to see what power structure that's based on!

It left me feeling alarmed at what messages our kids are being subjected to when watching morally ambiguous films, even if they are peddled as comedy. That they still promote negative stereotypes and dominating ideologies is problematic to me. You only need to look at highly sexualised music videos that are nothing short of soft porn to realise how influential these messages can be. Call me a prude if you want to. I call it a concerned conscious!

Hafsah Aneela Bashir is currently studying for an MA in Postcolonial Literature and Culture at the University of Leeds. She writes and performs poetry and is part of a Humanitarian organization delivering medical aid and emergency supplies to conflict zones as well as working with projects within her community. These interests infuse social and political experiences with creativity to provide commentaries on ethnicity, religion, identity, racism and resistance.


Fuller’s Law of Intellectual Influence (2015-03-05 16:02)

The law is simply stated: If you exert intellectual influence, it is not for the distinctive thing you say but for the conceptual framework that you had to assume in order to say it.
What this means is that you end up receiving credit for both more and less than your actual contribution. The current scientific citation culture – represented by the so-called Harvard style of referencing – outright encourages this behaviour, but of course did not originate it. In any case, whenever a work is cited without page or chapter, it probably says more about how the citer came to acquire the framework assumed by the cited party than the cited party’s own distinctive position in that framework.

In historical terms, the paradigm case of Fuller’s Law is Darwin, who is popularly credited with the theory of evolution, full stop. Of course, he did not invent evolution. Lamarck probably did. Moreover, Darwin’s particular version of evolution – based on natural selection – was for many decades the most controversial, on both empirical and more metaphysical grounds. However, there is no doubt that Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was understood to be a game-changing book shortly after publication. Why? Because in order to put forward his particular theory of evolution, Darwin had to assume that evolution was broadly speaking true, which meant that certain non-evolutionary theories (e.g. special creationism) just become irrelevant to a discussion that involves much fine-grained natural history. Darwin never polemicizes against creationism: He simply ignores it.

Here it is worth recalling that before Darwin, there was no generally recognized categorical difference between evolutionary and creationist accounts of natural history. Many, if not most, commentators occupied what we would now regard as hybrid positions. However, after Darwin the distinction in accounts becomes clearly marked, which is then backdated to some allegedly perennial ‘war’ between science and religion, usually starting with the trial of Giordano Bruno or Galileo, 300 years before Darwin. And so it continues to this day. To be sure, this manufacturing of the science-religion controversy did not necessarily make it easier for people to accept Darwin’s own theory of natural selection. On the contrary, it has arguably delayed acceptance. Nevertheless, wherever you stood on this manufactured controversy, Darwin was framing the key issues, which in the long term served to make his name synonymous with ‘evolution’ itself, even after the details of evolutionary theory had strayed far beyond what Darwin could have imagined.

People familiar with media theory will recognize what I’m talking about as [1] ‘agenda setting’. Darwin is modern biology’s agenda setter. More generally, intellectual influence is more about agenda setting than about getting people to take a particular side in the agenda, though that may well be a long-term effect of adopting the agenda. Kuhn got close to this point with his idea of paradigm, the scientific theory that exerts a hegemonic control over the research agendas of scientists in a particular field. However, Kuhn presumed that you first had to buy the theory before you can buy the world-view that makes the theory possible. Thus, you had to accept Newton’s account of planetary and projectile motion before accepting the idea that reality is one big machine. Indeed, this is the sense in which ‘scientific revolutions’ are science-driven for Kuhn.

I am proposing something rather different in spirit. Newton’s empirically grounded theories constituted an elaborate marketing device – perhaps even baiting – to get you to buy into the Newtonian world-view. The theories didn’t need to be true in the sense of being the foundation stones on which an epistemic edifice is built. Rather, they just needed to be true enough for you to think that any problems that are later thrown up will be solved by more of the same. Apple’s radical consumer incorporation strategy extends this model into everyday life. Thus, one becomes a member of a ‘community’ through a ‘gateway product’, such a particular make of iPhone. This locks you into a certain way of thinking about how your needs are to be serviced. To be sure, some other company may come along to service those needs better, but they too would be part of the same framework. The difference between science and Apple, of course, is the former’s frameworks are collective and the latter’s corporate, which boils down to a difference in the concentration of social power.

Tomorrow is going to be the 350th anniversary of the scholarly journal on March 6, 1665. The publication permitted easier exchanges between members of the Royal Society of London, and is still in print. The royal society adopted a motto of 'nullius in verba' meaning don’t trust claims, but check them out. Scholarship hovers around this motto. To what degree is the influence of a scholarly mind frame, 'nullius in verba,' the warrant that allows for intellectual upheaval and influence?

'We believe' - but who are we? Margaret Archer on the Relational Subject (2015-03-06 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]//player.vimeo.com/video/116692230


The Lure of Minimalism (2015-03-07 08:00)

What is ‘lifestyle minimalism’? To a certain extent it depends upon whom you ask. It’s often talked about as a ‘tool’ to live a simpler and more meaningful life. It’s often framed in terms of reducing ‘stuff’ through sometimes extremely rigid regimes of limiting ownership to a certain number of objects. It’s correspondingly hostile to ‘clutter’ and imbues it with almost magical capacities to shape one’s psychic life. It sometimes celebrates nomadism – of a very privileged sort – including a permanent home within the category of ‘stuff’ that constrains our lives. It’s most influentially
propounded by people who are making a career out of propounding it.

I see it as one strategy amongst others that is emerging to cope with acceleration. Lifestyle Minimalism is a response to a particular sort of consumerist ennui, responding to a failure of possessions to bring happiness through a corresponding declaration of possessions as being the enemies of happiness. It’s hard not to see a neurotic element in the recurrent counting of possessions: it’s like an ascetic bodily regime but enacted at the level of the lifestyle, purging one’s life of ‘stuff’ in order to[1]apophatically enact purpose. While I find Lifestyle Minimalism immensely off-putting, I nonetheless find minimalism itself appealing. It becomes so in relation to what Harmut Rosa describes as the growing sense of the good life as the full life:

the idea that an accelerated enjoyment of worldly options, a “faster life,” will once again allow the chasm between the time of life and the time of the world to be reduced. In order to understand this thought one has to keep in mind that the question concerning the meaning of death is indissolubly tied to the question of the right or “good life.” Thus the idea of the good life corresponding to this answer, which historically became the culturally dominant idea, is to conceive of life as the last opportunity, i.e., to use the earthy time span allotted to humans as intensively and comprehensively as possible before death puts a definitive end to it. Pg 181, Social Acceleration.

Left unchecked this inclines one towards doing everything all at once. There’s a latent agony in every moment of choice because of the possibilities it forecloses. Given that our knowledge of possibilities expand faster than our capacities to act on them (there’s always more books to read, more people to meet, more places to go, more things to do – with each one we do, we learn of many more) there’s a performative contradiction loaded into this existential ethic. The desire to live most fully, with a maximum intensity, continually thwarts itself through a perpetual expansion of horizons that inevitably elude us. We’re always looking beyond what we are now doing.

Lifestyle Minimalism is a particular regime (or cluster thereof) which aims to regulate this tendency through behavioural prescriptions of various sorts. Minimalism as an ethos distinguishable from this reflects a concern for the quality rather than the quantity of experience. The frantic movement of a full life in which no experience is ever really attended to can only be considered ‘full’ in a very truncated sense. It opens up the possibility that we might live maximally but in a self-consistent way, following the paths outwards from our present possibilities but doing so at our own speed in a way that enables us to attend to the reality of our present activity.

1. http://est.sagepub.com/content/13/2/271.full.pdf

Cherie Knighton (2018-10-22 09:41:00)
I enjoyed reading this a few times. Do you write any scholarly acedmic articles? Would love to find out soon as I’m doing my research on this same topic. ☺ On another note, I see both points of views when it come to minimalist behavior. I didn’t agree with a few things, of how you viewed minimalist lifestyle, but some of it is true.

'Are we going to be allowed to stay here?': Migration, Discrimination and Resistance (2015-03-07 17:26)

'Are we going to be allowed to stay here?': Migration, Discrimination and Resistance
19th March 2015

The Drum, 144 Potters Road, Aston, Birmingham B6 4UU

7-9PM

(Free entry and no need to prebook)

Immigrants are being blamed for pressures on housing, jobs and infrastructure, in a context of austerity which is hitting the poorest hardest. Vulnerable people are being encouraged to blame their problems on other vulnerable people, while the government introduces ever harsher measures that directly discriminate against immigrants and people from immigrant backgrounds. Politicians state that ‘it’s not racist to talk about immigration’ at the same time as using the language of Enoch Powell and telling people to ‘Go Home’, while ordinary people such as landlords, teachers and doctors are being required to ask people they suspect may be migrants to prove their right to housing, education and health. All the main political parties are promising harsher treatment of immigrants in their election manifestos.

This meeting will address the questions:

What are the consequences of this for immigrants themselves and for British citizens?

Are new forms of racism, xenophobia and discrimination emerging?

How can we resist this?

A panel of invited speakers will address the questions above with reference to their own experience and expertise, and invite lively debate and contributions from the meeting.

Panel:

Kirsten Forkert, BCU on findings from the Mapping Immigration Controversy research project which examines the effects of government anti-immigration campaigns on migrants and non-migrants, including activist resistance, in Birmingham and nationally.

Saqlain Shah and Boniface Mambwe from Birmingham Asylum and Refugee Action on their project to expose the housing conditions faced by asylum seekers in housing managed by G4S in Birmingham, and on particular self-organising and campaigning by migrants themselves.
Speaker from Movement Against Xenophobia on their organisation and campaigns, in particular the 'right to rent' pilot requiring landlords to check the immigration status of tenants being piloted in the West Midlands and their survey about its effects

Shreya Paudel, National Union of Students, on how immigration policy changes are affecting international students in Birmingham, and how students, migrants and others can work together

Speaker from UCU (University and College Union) on trade union organising and equalities, and in particular attendance monitoring of international students and how it can be resisted

Chair: Hannah Jones, University of Warwick

The evening is designed to bring together community activists, trade unionists and those with an interest in social justice. If you just want to find out more and/or share your views on these burning issues please join us.

Facebook Event Page: [1]https://www.facebook.com/events/1553343528255862

1. [https://www.facebook.com/events/1553343528255862](https://www.facebook.com/events/1553343528255862)

The Pleasures of Acceleration (2015-03-08 08:00)

Acceleration is often framed as a problem. Things are speeding up. We never have enough time. We’re always falling behind. These will be familiar experiences to most. While the problem is more complex than may initially appear to be the case, with little quantitative time squeeze actually registering, it nonetheless leaves us with a sense of late modernity as a ‘runaway world’ in which things are accelerating beyond our capacity to cope with them. This diagnosis tends to identify the causality at the systemic level and occludes the role of agency: it’s ‘modern life’ which is running away from us while we’re left merely struggling to catch up.

The difficulty here is that the role of agency is crucial if we are to understand the time-pressure paradox. If we have roughly the same amount of time, what is it about how we orientate ourselves towards temporality that accounts for the pervasive sense that we are perpetually running out of time? It’s important that we resist the urge to do what Andrew Sayer calls a ‘pomo flip’ and respond to the systemic bias of the acceleration thesis with a corresponding bias towards agency. The motor of acceleration cannot be seen as straightforwardly arising from the social system, in the sense that it produces changing circumstances to which agents can do nothing but adapt or fail. But nor should it be seen as something that arises from people ‘using time badly’ (whatever that would mean) or any other account of (implicitly pathological) responses by agents leaving them feeling more harried while the objective availability of time remains constant.

Instead we need to understand acceleration in terms of the interface between the social system & agency. Crucially, this doesn't mean 'agency' in a schematic sense: we need to understand how embodied people, with capacities & liabilities, live through the temporal horizons obtaining within the system and, through doing so, contribute to the transformation or reproduction of those (temporal) structures. One useful concept I’m thinking
about at the moment which helps in this respect is that of the pleasures of acceleration. For all that people complain about time pressure – particularly, it should be noted, when responding to researchers studying the time-pressure paradox – there are also pleasures to be found within it:

1. Time-pressure can be a symbol of status and flaunting it can represent one of the few socially acceptable forms of conspicuous self-aggrandisement available.

2. Time-pressure can reduce the time available for reflexivity, ‘blotting out’ difficult questions in a way analogous to drink and drugs.

3. Time-pressure can facilitate a unique kind of focus in the face of a multiplicity of distractions. If we accept that priorities are invested with normative significance (i.e. they matter to us in direct and indirect ways) then prioritisation can be pleasurable. This can take the form of people who rely on deadlines to ensure things get done. More prosaically, it can undercut procrastination by leaving one with finite temporal resources to utilise for non-negotiable obligations.

4. Time-pressure can leave us feeling that we are living life most fully. If the good life is now seen as the full life then living fast feels like living fully.

We need to understand the pleasures as well as the pains of acceleration. Through doing so, it becomes possible to flesh out the rather anaemic conception of agency usually found within the acceleration literature and instead look at speed as something which matters to people, in ways that are complex and often contradictory. We don’t just have first-order responses to our circumstances (whims and desires) but also second-order responses (concerns and commitments) which are themselves shaped by our cumulative experience of circumstances past. Understanding how people cope with acceleration requires that we attend to the former and the latter. We can’t treat agency as a cypher in the analysis of acceleration.

Nonetheless my point isn’t that people are embracing acceleration because they (secretly) like it. I’m only suggesting that there are pleasures to be found in it, alongside the many pains, which need to be recognised before we can even begin to grasp the agential dimension of social acceleration.

1. [http://markcarrigan.net/2014/10/21/the-existential-analytics-of-speed/](http://markcarrigan.net/2014/10/21/the-existential-analytics-of-speed/)
Much of the debate occasioned by the development of ideas about reflexivity and morphogenesis has turned on the status of habit. Whilst recognising the importance of this debate, this seminar takes an alternative tack. Returning to Bhaskar’s formulation of ‘position-practices’, it reviews recent work on organizational routines. Developing a position which sees routines as a key emergent property of organizations, recent developments in information technology are seen to cement autonomous reflexivity. Accompanied by an increasing discourse of ‘strategizing’, this might limit the development of meta reflexivity.

All welcome! E-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with any questions

1. https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/alistair-mutch-nbs.jpg
A viral video was released depicting NFL player Raymell M. Rice dragging his then fiancée Janay Palmer out of a Revel Casino elevator on February 15th, 2014. He was then charged with aggravated assault by the police in March of 2014, which is also the same month that Rice and Palmer married. The outcome of the incident initially sparked a two game suspension for the 2014 NFL season. Upon a second video release depicting Rice actually striking Palmer in the elevator, Rice was suspended indefinitely and subsequently released by the Baltimore Ravens. Legally, Rice was granted a twelve month pretrial intervention as part of a deal with Atlantic County, New Jersey prosecutors. This would allow Rice, a first time offender, to have his record cleared if he follows protocol. The NFL’s policy on domestic violence has been subject to strict scrutiny and criticism in lieu of the Ray Rice incident. Many organizations, such as the National Organization for Women, have called for NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell to step down following the labeled “debacle.” As a response the NFL has revised its domestic violence policy stating that first time offenders will receive a six game ban without pay, and second time offenders will receive a lifetime ban from the NFL. Concordantly, Goodell sent a letter to each NFL owner notifying them of six actions to reinforce and enhance their new policies. The NFL also implemented a “NO MORE” Public Service Announcement aimed at bringing attention to domestic violence and sexual assault. The salience of domestic violence in the NFL was highlighted by a New York Times article depicting the types of crimes reported by the news media from 2000 to 2014. Using a record maintained by USA Today, the NY Times finds that there were 713 arrests of NFL players over the 14 year period, of which 85 were domestic violence related. Based on their report, they find that on average 1 in 40 NFL players will be arrested in a given year, with about 12 % of them being domestic violence violations. The take home message for readers of this article is that domestic violence has been a recurrent problem long before the Ray Rice incident. Following the aftermath of Rice’s incident, the NFL had numerous questions to answer regarding current NFL players. For example, Carolina Panther Defensive End Greg Hardy was accused of domestic violence on May 13, 2014 after reports that he beat and verbally assaulted his then girlfriend Nicole Holder. After being convicted he was deactivated for week 2 but still was paid a full salary for the rest of the season before the case was eventually dismissed. San Francisco 49er Defensive Tackle Ray McDonald was arrested on August 31, 2014 and was accused of domestic violence charges although no formal charges were filed. He was subsequently released from the 49ers after another being suspected of another incident of domestic violence. Moreover, news outlets have shown that this is not an isolated incident but rather a recurring theme amongst professional male athletes. In the MLB, former Minnesota Twin, New York Yankee, and Kansas City Royal Chuck Knoblauch was arrested the same month (July 2014) that evidence was released concerning Ray Rice’s case; despite garnering little to no mainstream media attention. Additionally, UFC star War Machine (real name Jonathan Koppenhaver) was arrested following an August 8, 2014 attack on adult film actress Christy Mack. He was formally charged with felony battery, assault and coercion charges and is currently serving time in prison. The NFL’s NO MORE campaign and major media outlets address important issues such as domestic violence, institutional rule changes, and women’s rights. However, the NFL is still a for-profit corporation with billions of dollars on the line concerned by stakeholders, investors, and its employees—which are male-dominated. All institutional policies are thus garnered with a male-perspective in mind, and are enforced by males themselves. For example, a four game suspension was given to Seattle Seahawks cornerback AJ Jefferson for domestic violence. This suspension went relatively unnoticed by mass media and the public, and was not highly scrutinized like the Rice case. It was only when a superstar, Rice, was convicted with video evidence that there was public outcry for the lack of action against domestic violence perpetrators. Here, it becomes obvious that only until the problem reaches a precipice wherein the NFL is facing heightened scrutiny will it take action to appease the public. Otherwise, it is business as usual—making money and maintaining a profitable name brand—that are important to those in power. Now that some time has passed and free agency is set to begin, we wonder if players such as Ray Rice will get a second opportunity in the NFL despite their troubles with domestic violence. We suspect that the NFL will continue to act in concordance with the norms of mainstream society in its reaction to domestic violence—specifically by ignoring it. Notes


6. ibid

7. ibid


Amanda Admire and Christopher Vito are PhD candidates at the University of California, Riverside. Amanda’s research interests include gender studies, criminology and socio-legal studies, intimate partner violence, and immigration. Chris’ research interests include hip-hop culture, political economy and global social change, and gender studies.

1. http://www.tmz.com/videos/0_c5nk3w3n/
I am a feminist sociologist turned novelist. My primary interests are in gender and methodology. For me, methodological issues are about how we can best build and share knowledge. The desire to make social research engaging, provocative, impactful, and accessible, brought me to arts-based research.

Arts-based research practices (ABR) are methodological tools that adapt the tenets of the creative arts in order to address social research questions in engaged ways. They can be used for data collection or data generation, analysis and/or representation (Leavy, 2015). ABR requires researchers to think conceptually, symbolically, metaphorically (Saldaña, 2011) and thematically and requires us to use intuition, creativity and flexibility. ABR also pushes us to think seriously about the audiences for social research as well as the craft of writing. Genres of
ABR include any art form or combination of art forms, but for this piece I am focusing on fictional formats which might include novels, novellas, short stories, experimental writing, graphic novels, and so on. I turned to fiction as a research practice as a way of sharing cumulative insights from my research, teaching and personal experiences, engaging readers on deeper levels with the hopes of causing self and social reflection, and to contribute to public sociology. There is also reason to believe that readers can learn more, and more deeply, from fiction than from other forms of writing. There’s a field called “literary neuroscience” that examines how literature impacts our brains. There have been several recent studies that show reading fiction can impact us deeply, engage more parts of our brains, and leave more lasting impressions as compared to nonfiction. This research accounts for experiences such as getting so immersed in a novel you lose track of time, or not being able to get a story you are reading out of your mind.

I have written two novels based on my research (and recently released an expanded anniversary edition of my debut novel). Over the course of a decade, I conducted hundreds of interviews with women, as well as some men, about their relationships, body image, sexual and gender identities and related topics. I learned about women’s struggles for self-esteem, the impact of toxic media on body image and sexual identity, and the challenges young women face in their romantic and other relationships. During the same time period I was a professor teaching sociology courses about gender, popular culture and intimate relationships. Both inside and outside of my classes students often shared their personal experiences and stories about their peers and peer culture. I learned endlessly about their experiences, including their struggles with self-worth and identity. For instance, many young women had experienced dysfunctional or confusing relationships, abusive relationships or sexually dissatisfying relationships. Some women recounted roller coaster romances where they never quite knew where they stood; others described "game playing" and other power issues that I interpreted as disempowering, and many others simply resigned that they were “unlucky” in the romance department. Beyond this, most of the women I interviewed over the years struggled to build an identity for themselves that was not dependent on their relationship status. I also heard story after story of poor body image and even body hatred, low self-esteem, unhealthy eating habits, extreme exercising, and so on. What was frustrating in all of these situations was that as an interviewer/professor I was limited in my ability to respond freely. Interviewers are not therapists and they are not there to judge or deliver advice about how one should live her life. Professors are discouraged from getting overly involved with their students personally.

Although I did publish some of my research as journal articles and deliver conference papers, those formats are very constrained and I was not able to properly share the stories I’d heard or express all of my interpretations. Moreover, scholarly journals are not keen on publishing "cumulative knowledge" but rather focus on specific studies. Many of my insights were cumulative and based not only on my research but also my encounters in and outside of class with students, as well as my own experiences and those of my friends. In short, I felt like I had learned a lot that I wanted to share in the hopes of helping others. I also owed a debt to the women who gave me their time and trust, whose stories hadn’t been properly told. And let’s face it, academic journal articles are inaccessible in every sense of the word. They are jargon-laden, dry, and circulate in hard-to-get journals. They simply don’t reach the public. So I decided to write a novel titled [2]Low-Fat Love.

Thematically, Low-Fat Love explores the psychology of dissatisfying relationships, identity-building, the social construction of femininity within popular culture and the importance of self-acceptance. The novel is underscored with a critical commentary about how, too often, women become trapped in limited visions of themselves. Women’s media is used as a signpost throughout the book in order to make visible the context in which women come to think of themselves as well as the men and women in their lives. In this respect Low-Fat Love offers a commentary about popular culture and the social construction of femininity. Ultimately, the book explores women's identity struggles in relation to the men in their lives in light of their attraction to men who withhold their support. Women often develop myopic images of themselves as a part of "face-saving" strategies employed to cover up shame and a learned devaluation of self. Low-Fat Love suggests women seek new ways to see that are not dependent on male approval so that they will value themselves and reject degrading relationships. Moreover, as the main characters in the book learn, the most toxic relationship a woman may participate in is often with herself. So, too, the male characters learn that one must find one’s voice or suffer the consequences. I hope an empowering message emerges
through the characters’ struggles.

The novel format invites readers into the characters’ stories with the hope of achieving resonance, disrupting the familiar and prompting them to engage in self-reflection. If readers get immersed in a novel they may engage in self-reflection and in essence, connect the dots for themselves and in a way that works for them, individually. Based on the incredible response to the novel which is widely used in both college courses across the disciplines and has a popular audience, I wrote my second arts-based novel, *American Circumstance*, which explores appearance versus reality in people’s lives; how our lives and relationships look versus how they feel. For me, the turn to fiction as a part of my sociological practice has been enormously rewarding. I have been able to share my insights freely, reach public audiences, and connect with readers who have sought me out to tell me how their lives relate to the novels.

Writing sociology as fiction isn’t for everyone or for every project, but if you’re interested in exploring this approach, here is my list of top 10 tips for turning research into fiction (which originally appeared in *The Huffington Post* on July 2, 2013):

1. **Goals**: it’s important to start by clarifying your goals. While you always want to write a great story, what is the topical or thematic content you want to explore? What do you want readers to learn or reflect on?

1. **Target Audience**: determining your target audience(s) will help you select an appropriate genre, style and tone.

1. **Meticulous Research**: once you’ve selected your topic it’s important to do your homework and seek multiple perspectives on the subject. Your research may consist of a literature review to see what experts have written about your topic and/or first-hand data through interviews and the like.

1. **Distill Themes**: after you compiled your research you need to sort through it and reduce it to key themes.

1. **Let Go**: despite all of the work you’ve done conducting extensive research, you need to let it go so it doesn’t bog you down and detract from writing a great story. While you’ll never be able to fit all, or even most, of your research directly into the fictional rendering, the more you have learned about your topic the stronger the result will be.

1. **Good Story**: don’t lose sight of writing a good story. At the end of the day if your work isn’t engaging, authentic and resonant, readers are unlikely to take anything away from it. So pay attention to aesthetics, literary craft and the construction of narrative.
1. Literary Tools: use the power of literary writing, such as the ability to represent interiority (the inner life of characters) through interior dialogue. Fiction is uniquely able to engage, transport and build connections with readers.

1. Specificity: incorporate specific details from your research into your fictional work in order to build authenticity, believability and trustworthiness. The fictional world should ring true.

1. Foreword/Preface/Afterword: consider including a brief foreword, preface or afterword in which you note the research you conducted.

1. See It Through: all writing takes guts. When we’re blurring genres and innovating we open ourselves up to even more potential critique. See your vision through by believing in your goals and staying true to your vision.

References


[nbox type="notice"]Related Books by Patricia Leavy (with discount offers)


rglw (2015-03-11 02:22:35)
I have long thought that what we study in sociology should be expressed in narrative form and appreciate your post for its honesty and advice. Looking forward to reading your novels for inspiration!

Patricia Leavy (2015-03-11 14:45:39)
Thank you so much! I hope you enjoy them. There are loads of other examples out there, by other authors, so you could be reading for a while if you so choose. :)

Janice Wilson Stridick (2015-03-12 13:30:18)
Fascinating approach, thanks for laying it out so clearly. I’ve struggled with the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction or years. In fact, I turned to poetry as a result. Research pulls me in so deep I have a hard time staying true to task. I think the last tip is the most difficult.

Patricia Leavy (2015-03-16 14:22:28)
Thanks so much for your comments. I think so many struggle with those boundaries. I have several colleagues who write poetry as a part of their research (there’s a terrific book by Sandra Faulkner with Left Coast Press if you’re interested in that topic). So true, seeing it through is always the hardest (I think for many reasons). Good luck in your work!

Book Review: The Nature of Intractable Conflict by Christopher Mitchell (2015-03-10 12:08)

by Bradley W Williams
In the third edition of *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Mi-
all (2011) note that the "new field of conflict resolution in the 1950s defined itself in relation to the challenge of
understanding and transforming destructive human conflicts". The literature on conflict resolution has grown consid-
erably in the past several decades and a review of that dense literature will always be welcome in the sub-field. *The
Nature of Intractable Conflict* by Christopher Mitchell not only provides a comprehensive review of the literature, but
as the title of the book suggests, he also frames his arguments around the problem of seemingly intractable conflicts.

In 1981, Mitchell released his influential text *The Structure of International Conflict*. Mitchell explains that he
was first approached by Macmillan to create an updated version of this text. Instead he offers something far more
substantial, a text that takes the whole of conflict resolution literature into account while changing the direction of
the conversation to a focus on intractability. A theme running throughout the book is that many conflicts that seem
intractable can in fact be reconciled through innovation and a focus on the causes of intractability. As he states in
the book's Afterword, "I began with the argument that to end a conflict 'for good and all' it was necessary to find
a solution to the goal incompatibility that was the genesis, the starting point, for difficult, protracted, deep-rooted,
intractable conflicts"(292).

The book is divided into chapters that each act as a step in the linear process from the formation of interests
around seemingly intractable conflicts and their perpetuation, through processes of prevention and mitigation, to
processes of innovation, termination, and reconciliation. The linear process structure makes this book an accessible
research tool, while covering a daunting amount of information. Regardless of the overall structure, students and
researchers will make good use of the index, as researchers will approach questions of intractability from distinct
disciplines, particular levels of analysis, and centered on cases that are at unique points within the processes of
formation, perpetuation, and reconciliation.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 survey research concerning the prevention, mitigation, and regulation of intractable, or
protracted conflicts that may be familiar to many. These sections break down key environmental, social-relational,
and political factors that affectively stifle conflicts at the level of goal incompatibility. The chapters on mitigation
and regulation are particularly useful for cultural theorists in the sub-field. I found myself gladly rereading sections
concerning sacred, or defended, spaces and persons, and particularly the author's analysis of rituals as symbolic
referents for peace processes. Mitchell surveys the breadth of information in a accessible way, producing a book that
at once provides a definitive and unique view of conflict analysis and resolution without overly daunting the reader.
The last three chapters particularly deal with ending protracted conflicts through innovative approaches to addressing goal incompatibility. As Mitchell explains, sources of conflict tend to go understudied, while theorists overwhelmingly concern themselves with analyzing factors that either perpetuate already existent conflict or provide classifications for specific types of conflicts. Mitchell shows that it may be possible to mitigate or end seemingly intractable conflicts where the adversaries’ behaviors and attitudinal changes are key drivers of contention. Besides a focus on behaviors and attitudes, the book closes by showing how “a search for solutions in conflicts over scarcities, ostensibly indivisible goods, incommensurable, belief systems and even ‘existences’ were not quite as hopeless, at least in theory, as they might often appear” (292).

This book is an indispensable resource for research ideas or solutions to problems. The number of sources and case studies presented in the text is immense. Due to the dearth of information, readers will make a lot of use of the index. For example, researchers interested in information about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will find specific aspects of the analysis in various parts of the book, though this should be expected from a text with as much on offer as this. Researchers looking for particular cases may find themselves somewhat more reliant on the well-crafted index than those that are interested in specific processes and situational dynamics, but either way navigating this book is easy. The book will be valuable to researchers studying conflicts and peace processes at all levels of intensity and complexity, applicable to any discipline within the social sciences. Far from being exhausted, Mitchell provides a considerable amount of evidence to suggest that research in conflict resolution is only gaining momentum.

Bradley W Williams is a doctoral researcher at George Mason University. His research is located within the intersection of sociology, anthropology, and international relations. He studies transnational governance, religion, social movements, and peace processes.


Considering becoming an indy scholar? 5 tips to get you started... (2015-03-10 12:30)

By Floor Basten

You’re approaching the end of your PhD. While considering your alternatives for work, why not flirt with entrepreneurship? In 2003, almost a year after I left the university, as a postdoc, I decided to start my own business. Twelve years since, I have learned some things I’ll share here with you, so that entrepreneurship can enter your window of opportunities.
First and foremost, tell everyone you know you’re thinking about starting your own business. As long as people think you’re employed by a university, they assume you’re taken care of, at least financially. The minute you start talking about setting up your own business, they’ll think along with you and come up with ideas and potential clients. Don’t seclude yourself in the attic writing a Five-Year Plan (Soviet Union style!) by way of business plan. Include your personal network and have them introduce you to their networks, and from thereof you can start growing a professional network. Use LinkedIn to showcase your work.

Secondly, build a portfolio that illustrates how you helped what kind of clients. This is different from your academic resume. For most non-academics, your specific expertise/PhD project is abracadabra. Furthermore, academic origins suggest to them a lofty inclination to theory and a clumsiness with practice. Yet, most clients don’t struggle with theoretical issues. Their challenges are in practice. Research can be one of the solutions so your expertise can help them out. Your particular research experience can be in completely different fields, but you know your methods, so be creative. If your PhD thesis is about Papua New Guinea, remember that organizations, urban areas and all other sorts of communities can be analyzed as societies. Think about how to translate your expertise into a potential offer for a client.

Thirdly, don’t give away your expertise like candy on Halloween! You’ve worked hard and invested a lot to become the expert you are now. Temper your desire to build an impressive portfolio asap and resist the temptation to work for free. Here are some pitfalls to avoid:

- Clients will attempt to seduce you to work in exchange for ‘network’ and ‘name’. In some cases this works out well, but in others you end up being the only unpaid individual in the room as the others cash their salaries at the end of the month. Inexperience in entrepreneurship is no reason to lower your price. Prospective clients will thank you for the work you put into designing research which they can now do themselves. No need to see all prospectives as potential profiteers, but some vigilance is necessary.

- You can be asked to be on board a project that never starts. The hours spent aren’t necessarily wasted as you can benefit from contacts and ideas in future projects, but be careful not to invest weeks into nothing—and you might want to reconsider future invitations by people who turned out unable to successfully land a project. Having said this, you can never invoice every minute of work, so don’t be too stiff with the quid pro quo.

Fourthly, entrepreneurship calls for investment, for instance in your own research program. This helps you bring coherence into your projects and it increases visibility, expert status and credibility. Use social media. Blog about your observations, participate in discussions on your subject via Twitter. When I started, I focused on the narrative method I developed for my PhD. This wasn’t an easy route, as ‘narrative’ wasn’t very en vogue then. Although it can be applied to any subject—and in fact I did, from educational innovation to soil sanitation—the breadth of subjects was confusing for clients. I decided to make a clear choice and given some recent large-scale projects, I now present myself as an expert in urban development based on the initiatives of residents and local entrepreneurs (not that I decline research on other subjects). Make sure to clearly profile your qualities too. If you’re a researcher with little experience in advice, don’t call yourself a consultant, even if this resonates more with clients. I introduce myself as a researcher and once I teamed up with experienced consultants, we can offer the full package—and it’s nice to work with others.

Last but not least, help your client.[3] Elsewhere I explained the difference between how academics help each other and how clients want to be helped. In a nutshell, where academics use criticism in a peer-review setting, clients consider this to be yelling. They look for solutions that don’t hurt them. That doesn’t preclude criticism, but means that criticism isn’t the primary focus of your research. While you may have learnt to speak truth to power, remember two things. One, your clients aren’t stupid. Often they understand the truth perfectly but work within the
constraints of power balances that are carefully and subtly negotiated. The outcome may not be ideal, but it may be the worst except for all others. You calling out the elephant in the room can be insulting and destructive—you wouldn’t consider that a perfect strategy in a university context either. Two, again, your clients aren’t stupid. Their truth matters as much as yours. Don’t ignore, or worse, deny their perspective on the matter. They’ve probably been thinking about their problems long before they asked you to help them. Use their experiences and insights, acknowledge their expertise.

So there you have 'em, five pointers that should set you right on your way to becoming an indy scholar. There’s more to say about this, so [4]I started a weekly blog. Follow me via @BlanchefleurX for weekly updates.


Suzanne (2015-05-08 18:28:50)
thank you for sharing your insights, very helpful in the start of my journey. It is a bit intimidating, so helpful to know it can be done ;)

The Tyranny of the Forced Smile (2015-03-11 08:00)

An [1]interesting article in the New York Times discusses the mandated enthusiasm which increasingly characterises labour. This can be seen most emphatically in service jobs (e.g. the training required by [2]Pret A Manger and its subsequent monitoring) but it’s also a feature of higher education:

A decade ago I was interviewed by three academics for a teaching job at a university. The final question went something like this: Would you describe yourself as a passionate teacher? A silence fell over the room; it lasted much too long. I’d surely lost the job by the time I cleared my throat and began to qualify an answer I’d yet to give. The truth was I didn’t consider myself a teacher at all — I hadn’t been in a classroom in years. I stumbled my way through a circuitous reply and concluded by saying that, yes, actually, I suppose I could describe myself as passionate, in a sense.

In a sense. I couldn’t resist the qualification. It was like a nervous tic. Moments later, the interview was over and I was leaving the room. As I shut the door behind me, the committee erupted into laughter.

Thankfully, I did manage to land a job, one I greatly enjoy, and now find myself on the other side of the hiring process. This winter I am serving on a committee charged with interviewing applicants for a new professorship here at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Wary of lawsuits, the school has seen fit to train me and my colleagues on what the law permits us to ask applicants. All questions, H.R. has advised,
should relate to three core concerns: Can the applicant do the work? Will the applicant fit in? Will the applicant love the job?

I was surprised to learn that love is now considered essential to the employment relationship. Some of us are lucky enough to have lovable jobs, but this strikes me as an extreme standard to apply with respect to most positions.


This mutation of capitalism has left us with a situation where, as the author puts it, "we are all expected to whistle like Disney dwarfs". Is this trend one of emotional labour becoming a general feature of employment? At least in the abstract, I quite like the idea of a vocation - see for instance this [4]micro-podcast by Les Back on Sociology as a Vocation. But is this lending intellectual weight to a deeply corrosive trend in which there's no such things as a 'just a job': increasingly it seems to be expected that every job should be treated as a vocation and that there's something disreputable about those who fail to do this.


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Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (2015-03-12 08:00)

Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological
developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim 'patent and prosper' (Schachman) supplements the traditional 'publish or perish'). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars' complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from **December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague**.

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

**Keynote Speakers:**

Roger Burrows – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The Perils, Pitfalls, and Power of Peer Review in Public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and Space in the Contemporary University

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

**Fee**

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

**Venue**

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Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

**Travel**

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.


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**An invitation to Digital Public Sociology (2015-03-14 08:00)**

This is a slightly abridged version of the talk I gave at the Digital Sociology mini-conference at the Eastern Sociological Society conference in February 2015. At some point this will be the basis for a paper:

[1]Listen to ‘What is digital public sociology?’ on audioBoom


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[...] Not necessarily so. [http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS/Open %20Letter %20to %20Mills.pdf](http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/PS/Open%20Letter%20to%Mills.pdf) I’ve written about this as the ‘fallacy of amelioration’: the notion that all it takes to solve social problems is [...] 

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**Call for Papers: Journal of Intercultural Studies Inaugural Conference 2015 (2015-03-15 08:00)**

**Call for Papers: Journal of Intercultural Studies Inaugural Conference 2015**

CUNY Graduate Center, New York November 19-20, 2015

*Submission Deadline: 1 June*
The Journal of Intercultural Studies is pleased to announce a call for papers to be presented at its Inaugural Conference at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York City, NY on November 19-20, 2015.

Confirmed Keynote Speakers

Professor Eduardo Bonilla Silva, Duke University, USA

Professor Gurminder K Bhambra, University of Warwick, UK

We hope to bring together research on a number of themes that together represent the breadth of journal’s aims and scope, as well as its interdisciplinary and global content. The event encourages the participation of emerging and established scholars from a variety of disciplines and locations with an interest in critical scholarship on the challenges and potentialities of contemporary cultural formations and transformations.

We welcome theoretically-informed abstracts on these themes but not limited to

Citizenship, Nationhood and Racialisation

Transnationalism and Diaspora

Hybridity and Border-Crossing

Mixed-Race Postcolonialism and Indigeneity

Multicultural Alternatives

Everyday Multiculturalism

Performing Culture Migration Theory

Please submit your abstracts to [1]unesco.cdsj@deakin.edu.au

Hosted by the Journal of Intercultural Studies, supported by CUNY Graduate Center, the UNESCO Chair in Comparative Research on Cultural Diversity and Social Justice, and Taylor and Francis

Regulating Intimacy: A Research Symposium (2015-03-16 08:00)

Regulating Intimacy: A Research Symposium

"Intimate Labors and the Labors of Intimacy"

Indiana University, Bloomington
Regulating Intimacy is an interdisciplinary research symposium held annually at Indiana University. We seek to bring together scholars and professionals at all levels from a wide variety of (inter)disciplines, including women's and gender studies, law, education, public health and biology, to discuss the institutional forces—legislation, policy, religion, and scientific authority, and many more—and the gendered, raced, classed, and dis/abled sociocultural norms that define and regulate human relationships.

The theme of the 2015 Regulating Intimacy Research Symposium is "Intimate Labors and the Labors of Intimacy." Both labor and intimacy are broadly understood to include traditional notions of workplace, markets, and the labor force as well as emotional labor, caregiving, relationship building, and networks. How is work intimate? Which jobs/occupation/labors are or can be considered "intimate"? Should intimacy and labor be intertwined? What labor goes into creating and sustaining intimacy? How do work spaces generate or inhibit intimacy? Regulating Intimacy will explore the cultural, technological, and historical legacies, significances, and implications of laboring alone or together, on small and grand scales, and across time and space.

We are accepting proposals for both full panels and individual papers. Full panel proposals should include panel rationales of 300 words, and up to four paper abstracts of 250 words each. Individual proposal should include abstracts of 250 words.

Submissions may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Sex Work (prostitution, stripping, sexual surrogates)
- Pregnancy & Surrogacy
- Caregiving (nursing, child care, elder care, companions, care for disability)
- Professional Relationships (doctor-patient, attorney-client, co-workers, bosses)
- Workplace Intimacy (dating, harassment, power dynamics)
- Parenting, Homemaking, & Intergenerational Care
- Intimate Spaces (physical, virtual, transient)
- Networks of Intimacy (markets, community, government, production)
- Spheres of Intimacy (work/play, public/private)
- Building and Maintaining Relationships (courtship, friendship, networking, marriage)
- Laboring Bodies (committees, councils, body politics; vulnerable bodies, physical labor)

Individual and panel submissions are due on Friday, May 8, 2015. For more information and answers to frequently asked questions, please see the Regulating Intimacy website at [2]regulatingintimacy.wordpress.com.
Selling psychopathy in late modernity (2015-03-17 08:00)

A few weeks ago, I was browsing the bookshop in Kings Cross while waiting for the Eurostar and came across this disturbing book:

![Book Image](image1)

Given I was on my way to a much needed holiday, I didn’t buy the book at the time, intrigued though I was by it. I just went on Amazon to finally purchase it and was genuinely surprised to discover that this isn’t the only one:

![Book Images](image2) [image3]
The author is a psychologist at Oxford who seems to be carving out a media career as Dr. Psychopath. However there are also many other texts with ‘psychopath’ in the title which intrigue me. Many seem to be self-published texts offering advice on avoiding manipulation by ‘psychopaths’. Others are confessional texts of various sorts. Whereas others seem to be popular science books which, I imagine, likely come close to the territory of Kevin Dutton’s books at points.

2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/Wisdom-Psychopaths-Kevin-Dutton/dp/0099551063/ref=sr_1_6?ie=UTF8&qid=1424767790&sr=8-6&keywords=psychopath

samanthawhyte (2015-03-17 09:10:35)
There’s also a trend for "listicles" citing highly ambiguous alleged "red flags" for psychopathy (usually the kind of traits one might attribute to a former parter following an acrimonious split). I blame Jon bloody Ronson.

Sociological Imagination (2015-03-17 12:35:49)
Lots of people seem to be self-publishing books on a similar basis!

Dr Max Tookey (2016-01-10 21:30:10)
I read this post and thought it was very interesting. For the last few years psychopathy has been a key part of a course I currently teach at the University of Greenwich in Organisational Behaviour - which has proved to be very popular with my students. My own interest in this topic came about when I was the victim of a psychopath in 2003/4 and again in 2011, and I can honestly say that it was one of the most genuinely upsetting and terrifying experiences of my life. If I knew then, what I know about psychopathy now, I would have avoided this terrible experience. But I have since read a range of excellent material about what psychopathy represents, how to avoid it, and what to do when we encounter a psychopath. And this has effectively informed the material I currently teach on this topic. I don’t agree what was mentioned in one of the comments to this post, and I think that Jon Ronson’s excellent book in this area (The Psychopath Test) is one of the most accessible and engaging commentaries on how psychopathy manifests itself in contemporary society. I also don’t agree with the perspective of psychopathy offered by Kevin Dutton and Andy McNab in their book on this topic. I feel that this represents a disturbing precedent in how this truly

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abhorrent human condition is becoming conceptualised, and I don’t think that there is anything "good" about psychopathic behaviour. While I wouldn’t argue that many "successful" individuals would indeed score high on Hare’s Psychopathic Checklist (PCL), I would also suggest that the damage incurred by psychopathic behaviour should be given a lot more attention. I believe that the study of psychopathy has now "hit the zeitgeist" in terms of what is fashionable in the sociological and human sciences, and I would suggest that the author of this post avoids Dutton/McNab’s work, as above all, it "sensationalises" this condition, without looking enough at its real impact. I have personally learnt a lot about this pathological aspect of the human condition since I first seriously studied it five years ago - including the many forms it takes, the effects it has, and the strategies I will adopt to ensure that the psychopath I encountered will be accountable for their behaviour. As a postscript to this reply, I would welcome a debate on the "sociological role of psychopathy" for this blog, and be willing to make further contributions towards this. From Dr Max Tookey - Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour (University of Greenwich)

@GeneticPsycho (Tina) (2016-09-29 12:30:04)
Dear Dr. Tookey, You are right on point. Kevin Dutton is a quack. I slowly came to understand that the dysfunctional behaviors in my family, and my resulting episodes of major depression, were due to my family being mostly psychopaths. The gene runs strong in my family, and there are equal numbers of female-to-male psychopaths in my family. Why is it nobody teaches children about personality disorders and protecting yourself from con artists? There seems to be some conspiracy among psychopaths in power (they are definitely in the Psychiatric Associations) to keep the disorder hidden from society. Psychopathic politicians make policies that keep people ignorant. I happen to think that if someone had told me at the age of twelve that my father had a brain disorder, I would have adjusted much better in life. By studying my family, and other psychopaths along my life path, and I was able to create a list of their pervasive habits so that anyone can spot a psychopath, even when they are well behaved: https://www.facebook.com/notes/psychopathy-genetics/how-to-spot-a-pro-social-psychopath/781795738538803 I also have campaigns ongoing to raise psychopathy awareness: http://NoPsycho.org and http://nopsychos.wordpress.com I am so glad that you are in a great position to use your experience with psychopaths to educate others "officially" in a university setting. The best of luck to you!

John bird (2016-07-09 18:49:10)
Maybe we need a distinction between psychopath and sociopath. Does the lack of empathy that many sociopaths exhibit have an affinity with a post-modern, narcissistic and celebrity-obsessed society?

Three Modes of Academic Success, none of them quite autonomous (2015-03-17 11:07)

Early career academics periodically ask me what it takes to be successful – as if I would know! Nevertheless, I do have some general observations on the topic based on what seems to work. Unfortunately, the three strategies listed below have nothing to do with the individual autonomy of academic inquirer as popularized by Max Weber in his advice to graduate students, ‘Science as a Vocation’. But in the end, I’ll return to Weber.

Discipline-based success: You become someone who is seen to have made a distinctive contribution to the collective knowledge process of a discipline. It is what Kuhn called ‘normal science’. However, because your contribution is exhaustively explained in terms of the larger disciplinary narrative, you end up being no more than a vehicle to move the plot along and so your name is forgotten shortly after your work has been superseded. Weber believed that this was the fate of most academics, regardless of the formal autonomy of their work conditions.

Constituency-based success: You become the academic voice of a recognizable sector in society. Michael Burawoy's idea of 'public sociology' seems to aspire to this status, especially for sectors of society that might not otherwise be given effective voice. This sense of success is likely to be held hostage – or at least accountable – to the changing fortunes and dispositions of the constituency in question. So, if your own thinking does not move in the same direction as that of your constituency, you may find yourself out of a job, just like an MP!
**Funding-based success:** You become a ‘rain-maker’ who can parlay the same toolkit of concepts and methods in many different funding environments to success. (Science & Technology Studies comes to mind here.) Indeed, your flexibility might be easily mistaken for autonomy, especially if you normally get the money that you apply for. However, such a person’s curriculum vitae tells otherwise, since there is no clear narrative thread running through the series of successful funding bids (other than perhaps size of bid) that might amount to ‘intellectual progress’.

To be sure, these are ideal types that may be mixed in practice. I’m particularly struck by the hybridisation of the first two types – namely, the elective affinity between an established body of academic knowledge and an established extra-academic constituency. These are the sorts of figures who had they not already existed could be easily invented. Slavoj Zizek and Judith Butler come to mind as people who have leveraged into public discourse a certain set of texts that humanistic academics had already been reading in consort for around a generation. (Roughly speaking, for Zizek it’s the French Marx-Freud complex, for Butler the French post-structuralist complex.) This helps to explain the rather polarized attitude – ‘you either get it or you don’t’ – that has surrounded their public reception. The people who think such people are geniuses are basking in the reflected glow of their own college days, whereas those who don’t see the genius in Zizek and Butler didn’t go to the same colleges.

But finally let’s go back to Weber. What makes him appear so ‘autonomous’ to us is something that would not have been so obvious to his contemporaries. After all, this was a guy trained in law and political economy who found himself somewhat awkwardly placed in those disciplines because of the nature of his interests and his approach to them. However, once ‘sociology’ came to be recognized as a separate academic subject (which was shortly before Weber died), he was seen as a ‘founding father’, a godlike figure who set the terms that others then developed. In short, he was deemed ‘autonomous’.

Autonomy requires a collective Gestalt switch on the part of the academic community to turn someone’s awkwardness into originality. Weber may have reflexively understood this process, which is simply a secular way of talking about the complementarity of what he had identified in the great world-religions as ‘charisma’ and ‘routine’. Thus, Jesus remains an awkward Jew in the history of Judaism but the founder of a new faith in Christianity.

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Thomas Basbøll (@ThomasBasboell) (2015-03-17 11:25:33)
Or the way Socrates was a somewhat awkward sophist, and yet a (the?) founder of philosophy.

**Lately everybody seems to be talking about Digital Sociology (2015-03-18 08:00)**

Or at least it’s easy to get that impression if you spend your time talking to digital sociologists. Last month saw the world’s first digital sociology (mini) conference, part of the Eastern Sociological Society’s event in New York. It was an exciting event with a range of international speakers over an intensive two days. If you’d like to find out more, here’s a Storify of the conference:
Here are some post conference notes by myself and Jessie Daniels on what we felt was expressed at the event:
The return of serious research into psychedelic drugs (2015-03-19 08:00)

While psychedelic drugs are now seen as illicit and criminalised around the world, with even those few remaining substances not criminalised occasionally cropping up as a potential bête noire for politicians, they were once at the forefront of psychiatric research. Here's an astonishing video which gives a sense of this long suppressed research activity:
This fabulous New Yorker article introduces the background to this research and details its contemporary resurgence, as well as the many challenges it faces before any hoped for normalisation could come to pass:

Between 1953 and 1973, the federal government spent four million dollars to fund a hundred and sixteen studies of LSD, involving more than seventeen hundred subjects. (These figures don’t include classified research.) Through the mid-nineteen-sixties, psilocybin and LSD were legal and remarkably easy to obtain. Sandoz, the Swiss chemical company where, in 1938, Albert Hofmann first synthesized LSD, gave away large quantities of Delysid—LSD—to any researcher who requested it, in the hope that someone would discover a marketable application. Psychedelics were tested on alcoholics, people struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depressives, autistic children, schizophrenics, terminal cancer patients, and convicts, as well as on perfectly healthy artists and scientists (to study creativity) and divinity students (to study spirituality). The results reported were frequently positive. But many of the studies were, by modern standards, poorly designed and seldom well controlled, if at all. When there were controls, it was difficult to blind the researchers—that is, hide from them which volunteers had taken the actual drug. (This remains a problem.)

By the mid-nineteen-sixties, LSD had escaped from the laboratory and swept through the counterculture. In 1970, Richard Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act and put most psychedelics on Schedule 1, prohibiting their use for any purpose. Research soon came to a halt, and what had been learned was all but erased from the field of psychiatry. “By the time I got to medical school, no one even talked about it,” Ross said.

Two points stand out: (1) we have vast evidence of experiences induced by psychedelic drugs which cohere with 3352
religious experiences recorded in the scholarly literature concerned with them (2) we have strong evidence of the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs and the biggest obstacle to overcoming the risks concerning them (the most sensible objection to this research) are constraints on serious clinical research itself.

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/V5d4wWGK41g

Big data philanthropy (2015-03-20 08:00)

This recent article in the New Yorker introduces a new counselling service, based in New York, which uses text messages a point of contact for young people experiencing crisis. It's an intriguing discussion of changing generational norms regarding communication, offering a rich account of why SMS is so amenable a channel for young people seeking help:

A person can contact Crisis Text Line without even looking at her phone. The number—741741—traces a simple, muscle-memory-friendly path down the left column of the keypad. Anyone who texts in receives an automatic response welcoming her to the service. Another provides a link to the organization's privacy policy and explains that she can text "STOP" to end a conversation at any time. Meanwhile, the incoming message appears on the screen of Crisis Text Line's proprietary computer system. The interface looks remarkably like a Facebook feed—pale background, blue banner at the top, pop-up messages in the lower right corner—a design that is intended to feel familiar and frictionless. The system, which receives an average of fifteen thousand texts a day, highlights messages containing words that might indicate imminent danger, such as "suicide," "kill," and "hopeless."


However what really stood out to me was the role of data science in this charity’s activities. The CEO of the charity describes how "We think of ourselves a lot more like Airbnb or Uber or Lyft" and this is reflected in the centrality accorded to the analysis of digital data across all their activities:

Like a tech company, C.T.L. analyzes feedback from users, performs A/B testing, and is quick to make changes on the basis of what it finds. Although other data-driven philanthropic missions exist—Kiva, the microfinance site, and the public-school donation service Donors Choose are among the more well known—nonprofits have generally been reluctant to embrace methods of quantification that big corporations increasingly take for granted. But at C.T.L. the chief data scientist, Bob Filbin, was Lublin's second hire. He co-wrote the data algorithms for C.T.L.'s system after travelling to crisis centers across the country and interviewing hundreds of volunteers about how their work could be made more effective. The communication techniques employed by C.T.L. counsellors are largely modelled on standard crisis-counselling practices, but C.T.L. has made modifications based on its data. It turns out that, for instance, statements couched in the first person ("I'm worried about how upset you seem") are associated with positive responses.
The organization’s quantified approach, based on five million texts, has already produced a unique collection of mental-health data. C.T.L. has found that depression peaks at 8 P.M., anxiety at 11 P.M., self-harm at 4 A.M., and substance abuse at 5 A.M. The organization is working on predictive analysis, which would allow counsellors to determine with a high degree of accuracy whether a texter from a particular area, writing in at a particular time, using particular words, was, say, high on methamphetamine or the victim of sex trafficking. A texter who uses the word “Mormon” tends to be reaching out about L.G.B.T.Q. issues.

Out of consideration for texters’ anonymity, Crisis Text Line displays its findings only by state. (Arkansas ranks highest for eating disorders, Vermont for depression; suicidal thoughts are most common in Montana and least common in New Hampshire.) But eventually there will be enough data to allow the organization to confidently reveal Zip codes and area codes without the risk of making any single texter identifiable. Such a wealth of data is new in the field of mental health. Isaac Kohane, a pediatrician who also has a Ph.D. in computer science and is the co-director of the Center for Biomedical Informatics at Harvard Medical School, told me, “You cannot have accountable care—financially or morally accountable care—if you cannot count, and until recently we literally could not count with any degree of acceptable accuracy.” He added, “It’s been mind-boggling, to those of us who knew what was available, that Amazon and Netflix were creating a far more customized, data-driven, evidence-based experience for their consumers than medicine has.”

While they have thus far resisted pressure to monetise the data by selling access to it, it’s hard not to wonder if this is a stance likely to persist in the event of a shortfall in funding. My point is not to criticise a charitable initiative that is doing important work in an innovative way but only to point out potential longer-term ramifications of this model. It surely represents a seismic shift in philanthropy which needs to be better understood.

1. [http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/r-u](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/r-u)
2. [http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/r-u](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/r-u)


by Tom Brock
Social Morphogenesis is the first volume in a series of books, edited by Margaret Archer, that seeks to develop an explanatory framework that can account for how the rate of social change has ‘speeded up’ in the last three decades. The first volume is dedicated to an analysis of what the ‘generative mechanism’ is that produces such rapid change and discusses how this differs from Late Modernity. The first volume can be seen as an elaboration of Archer’s Morphogenetic Project, which over the last thirty years has focused on theorising social stability and change in a way that is applicable to three levels of social analysis - micro, meso and macro– and across all three elements of social transformation – structure, culture and agency. The challenge of the Morphogenetic Project has been to specify their interplay with Archer’s offering a sociological interpretation of Morphostasis and Morphogenesis to help make sense of the processes that tend to either preserve or change a social system’s given form or structure. The term ‘social morphogenesis’, then, elaborates on these previous developments and refers to the generative mechanism that Archer and 10 other contributors are interested in holding to account for the increasing rapidity of social change.

Each chapter engages with the question of social change and reproduction within social systems and each chapter talks broadly and critically to the idea of a Morphogenetic Society. The breadth and depth of the philosophical discussion that takes place in each chapter makes the volume a difficult but valuable read. It also makes it difficult to review in as far as each chapter speaks to issues that range from broad theoretical questions (see Popora, p.25) to more specific areas of inquiry (see Wight, p.85 or Lazega, p.167). Thus, I’ll only speak to the broad themes of the book here.

The volume is held together by a clear sense of direction towards one important question, which Archer summarises in the opening passage,

This book is about theorising a possible transition from the social order of late modernity... In itself, rapid social change does not necessarily signal, much less constitute, a new type of social formation. What intrigues us is whether or not this increasingly important process could be responsible for generating a different kind of social formation - Morphogenetic Society (p.1)

Archer adds, 'All of us are vary about the array of social forms that have hastily been advanced as superseding modernity. Thus, we do not precipitously announce a new “Beyond”’. The modesty is reassuring, particularly at
a time when it feels as if the search for answers to big questions, like 'what direction is society going in' or 'how can people effect social change' can be achieved through appeals to big data analytics and empiricism. Indeed, as Archer assures us, 'the books deals with "social morphogenesis" as a process rather than an end product' (p. 1; my emphasis), and this means that 'speculations' must be 'vented' (p.2) towards if one is to theorise social change or, more specifically, possible changes in the 'balance' between morphostatic and morphogenetic sequences. Indeed, a proportion of Archer's introductory chapter is dedicated to demarcating one of the important principles of realist social theory – ontological realism – and whilst Archer suggests that not all of the contributors are critical realists, it appears that all agree on the shortcomings of empiricism and, in particular, how it has been used to announce various new societies.

One way in which such empiricism announces itself in the literature on 'globalization' is in the over-hasty proclamation of new 'Ages': the Global Age itself (Albrow 1997), the Information, Knowledge, Network, Risk, Liquid, etc., societies. Significantly, each of these adjectives highlights a characteristic that is held to be distinctive of a 'new' social ordering and justifies differentiating it from the preceding social formation. But what is the nature of these characteristics singled out? Are they descriptive or explanatory? Mostly, these seem to begin as the former but then pretend to be the latter, as is generically the case with empiricism (p.5-6)

Archer's introductory chapter, then, sets the beginnings for a project that sees a number of contributors engage critically with the idea that society has 'speeded up' but all whom seek to provide an explanatory account of why this has happened, rather than a descriptive account of the changes that have occurred. For those unfamiliar with Archer's work, this focus comes from a long-standing interest that she has had in providing causal explanations of social change, particularly with reference to the interaction between structure and agency over time. This position, which is fully elucidated in her work Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach but, in short, is an explanatory framework that draws out a sense of how Morphogenesis and Morphostasis operate at different 'levels' of reality with, potentially, transformative effects.

The basic shortcoming of empiricist and actualist accounts is that observable transitional features are simply extrapolated and presumed to constitute transformation. Instead, and at most, social morphogenesis has been discussed as a process that could prove transformational. Contributors are in agreement about the meta-theoretical need to adduce a generative mechanism accounting for the possible transition towards transformation, but not yet clear – and therefore cannot be consensual – about either its definition or operation (p.19)

It is through a discussion of three different 'levels' of reality that we get a clearer sense of what this generative mechanism might constitute:

At the macroscopic level (third-order), the generative mechanism is held to derive from 'Contingent Compatibilities' coming to predominate for the first time... At the institutional (second-order) level, however, we confront the paradox of various institutions seeking to take advantage of such synergy whilst also retaining the situational logic of competition... At the (first-order) level, agents (individual or collective) and actors confront rapidly changing structural and cultural contexts in daily life and across generations (p.20)

Throughout the volume a number of contributors begin to adduce what this mechanism might look at these various

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levels. Archer talks of ‘reflexivity’ (p.9) and the ‘conflicting pressures of primary and corporate agency’ particularly as these relate to the situational logics of ‘opportunity’ and ‘competition’ in a Morphogenetic Society (p.14). In other words, one might begin to account for the mechanism of social morphogenesis (‘variety producing more variety’) through a look at how people respond to the expansion of choice in their lives. Thus, Archer’s account of modes of reflexivity (see The Reflexive Imperative, 2012) seems integral to her account of social morphogenesis.

Similarly, Pierpaolo Donati’s discussion of relational sociology talks to this search for a generative mechanism, which he sees in terms of ‘relational feedback’ (p.219). Donati opens his chapter by providing an overview of what he views relational sociology to be and he demarcates it from the work of other sociologists, such as Nick Crossley through a discussion of Archer’s morphogenetic approach. In doing so, Donati distances himself from an understanding of social relations as ‘dyadic’ and looks to ‘the triadic nature of social relations’ (p.215) to make sense of the emergent effects of reciprocal action between social subjects. One such effect is what he calls ‘relational feedback’, which is defined as:

...those feedbacks which: (i) are non-automatic; (ii) are generative in the sense of giving birth to a new, relatively stable, relational configuration; (iii) they are special positive feedbacks, which operate according to a many-valued and transjunctive logic, not according to a mechanical binary (positive/negative) logic; (iv) imply a social networks of agents (partners); (v) so that the feedback loop is regulated mainly by redefining the goals and/or rules of the network step-by-step (p.219)

In terms of social morphogenesis, then, how variety is produced, how the selection of variety is accepted and rejected and how the stabilisation of these emergent forms arises, is regulated through feedback. As Donati suggests, ‘The direction of MG [morphogenesis] depends of the type of feedback that prevails’ and, thus, it is to the relational character of feedback that one can begin to consider the path that social change will make. In Donati’s own words,

In many respects, the emerging society has to look for remedies to the negative outcomes of modernity, to the extent that the latter has been governed by the principle of ‘institutionalized individualism’, by reversing this principles into a principle of relationality. The incoming morphogenetic society is society that has a ‘relational matrix’ run by a many-valued and transjunctive logic (p.206)

It appears, then, that generative mechanisms, like the ones offered above can lead to social outcomes that are often unpredictable and rarely patternable but nevertheless work, increasingly, to create conditions whereby ‘variety produces more variety’. This is certainly a thought-provoking idea and one that appears to be based upon the suggestion that one should engage, critically, with discussions about social ontology, and how it is to be operationalized to inform better empirical research. There is little sense of wanting to foreclose on the possibility of undertaking social research (see Donati, p.225) but, rather, to better equip sociologists with a practical social theory that “tallies” with a realist social ontology and an interest in causal explanation. To achieve this, the volume challenges its readers to think through the consequences of asking big questions and, in the process, provides them with the outline of a theory that might one day yield answers.

I found the philosophical theorising and language to be abstract and, at times, I found myself often re-reading sections to help clarify my understanding of certain topics. Nevertheless, I found each discussion incredibly valuable. The contributions made here have sharpened my understanding of morphogenesis as a meta-theory, which is providing the grounds for a sensible discussion on the future direction of society. That the beginnings of such an ambitious project would need to flesh out the theoretical terrain, particularly given the number of collaborators involved, should not be surprising. However, I would expect that future volumes begin to engage more readily with

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practical issues of social research, not least because it will help present the case of why this modelling is so important.

Tom Brock is a Lecturer in Sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University. He has research and teaching interests in the areas of digital sociology, politics and social theory. Tom is currently writing a paper that re-conceptualises video game consumer culture through a discussion of habitus and reflexivity.


Weber/ Simmel antagonisms: Staged dialogues (2015-03-21 08:00)

Weber/ Simmel antagonisms

Staged dialogues

University of Edinburgh

10/11 December 2015

A conference organized by the Max Weber Group of the British Sociological Association & Sociology Edinburgh

Call for outlines

Much has been said about the strong oppositions between Simmel and Weber as founding fathers of sociology – as well as about their shared concerns. Capitalism and culture, ‘worlds’ and their tensions, rationalization and objectivation, the city, music, the methodology of the social sciences and ideal types, equally exercised their thought and yielded very different creatures.

But rather than merely intellectual or methodological quarrels, the antagonisms between Simmel and Weber engaged their whole way of being and acting in the world – the constantly renewed aspiration yet impossibility of
reconciliation with oneself and the world, for Simmel; agonic tension, struggle with oneself and the world, for Weber. This is perhaps the reason why Weber/Simmel antagonisms have had continuity in social theory and shaped some of its major currents of thought. More importantly perhaps they spur us to be and act in the world in very different ways: hence this conference, which does not only explore these differences, but stages them.

The **format** of the conference is inspired after the staging of the Tarde/Durkheim debate by Latour/Karsenti, but rather than recreating a real debate with prominent actors, we invite outlines for short ‘imagined dialogues’ between Weber and Simmel on topics which were addressed by both. The topics chosen should not be of merely scholarly interest but rather capture problematics mattering today.

**Keynote dialogues**

Money Nigel Dodd (LSE).................................................. ‘Simmel’

Geoff Ingham (Cambridge)......................... ‘Weber’

Capitalism (TBC)

Scott Lash (Goldsmiths)...............................‘Simmel’

Uta Gerhardt (Heidelberg)............................‘Weber’

Verstehen and writing

Rosalie Dion (Montréal).........................‘Simmel’

Barbara Theriault (Montréal)...................‘Weber’

Conflict

Thomas Kemple (UBC)..........................‘Simmel’

Austin Harrington (Leeds)......................‘Weber’

Philosophical & political stance Olli Pyyhtinen (Tampere)..............................‘Simmel’

Carlos Frade (Salford)..............................‘Weber’
Outlines can be submitted by pairs or by individual academics and students. PhD students are particularly encouraged to take part. Selected pairs will be asked to play their dialogues at the conference. If you are an individual with a dialogue but without a partner, we can supply one from our Edinburgh team!

Outlines should include:
- the theme chosen for their dialogue
- the key texts serving as a basis for the dialogue;
- a starting imagined dialogue between Weber and Simmel, of about 500 words.

**Deadline for submission: 29 May 2015**

**Send to:** [1]webersimmel@ed.ac.uk

The selected applicants will then be invited to submit their fully written dialogues in advance of the conference. This will allow the Conference committee to make suggestions and above all to plan the staging of the dialogues. The dialogues will be read/acted at the Conference, and will be recorded and put on line.

We are aiming to put together a special issue of *Classical Sociology* featuring some of the best dialogues.

**Fee:**
Academics £75
Students £50

We are currently seeking to arrange travel/accommodation grants for about 10 participants from the UK and Europe (or a contribution towards costs for travel from further afield). These are meant to encourage participation from students and early careers researchers without a permanent University contract. If you are in such case and would like to be considered for a grant please let us know when you submit your outline.

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**Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (2015-03-22 08:00)**

**Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague**

**Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life**

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological...
developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague.

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

Keynote Speakers:

Roger Burrows – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The Perils, Pitfalls, and Power of Peer Review in Public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and Space in the Contemporary University

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Fee

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

Venue
Using fiction to write about your research (2015-03-22 16:40)

I was fortunate to meet Tim Maughan at the Digital Sociology conference in New York last month. Along with Sava Saheli Singh, he's been exploring how design fiction can be used to communicate sociological ideas. This is how Sava and Tim describe design fiction:

Design fiction is a term first coined by Julian Bleecker and popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as “the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.” and that it "attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different."

Design fiction isn't science fiction, it's not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

I find this idea really exciting and I invited Tim to give a talk when he visits London. If you’d like to come then you can register here. It’s a free event that will take place at Goldsmiths on the afternoon of May 13th. I’ll be talking, as will Les Back, Keith Kahn-Harris and Sarah Burton.
In the meantime, here’s a great example of the work produced by Tim:

For a workshop on future London, five individuals—Arup, Social Life, Re.Work, Commonplace, Tim Maughan and Nesta—created 10 Future Londoners for the year 2023. This is a short fictional piece describing the working day of 19 year old Nicki, a zero hours retail contractor.

[9]https://medium.com/@timmaughan/zero-hours-f68f17e8c12a

Here’s an example of what Sava and Tim have worked on together:

People talk about the future of technology in education as though it’s right around the corner, but most of us get to that corner and see it disappearing around the next. This innovation-obsessed cycle continues as we are endlessly dissatisfied with how little difference these promises make to the people implicated in these futures. These products and practices, cloaked in the latest buzzwords and jargon, often trickle down to non-western geographic regions after they’ve been tried and rejected, yet still adopted as the new and advanced “western” methodology that will solve the “problem” of education.

In an attempt to cut through the relentless TED Talk-like optimism of ed tech marketing, this year at the HASTAC conference in Peru we presented a series of fictional case studies. These four design fiction based personas aimed to illustrate the possible impact on society and education, in both positive and negative ways, of not just emerging technologies but also global social and economic trends. They give brief snapshots of the lives of individuals in imagined futures from different geographic, ethnic, economic, and cultural backgrounds, illustrating how each of them might interface and interact with the different technologies.


1. [https://twitter.com/timmaughan](https://twitter.com/timmaughan)
2. [https://twitter.com/savasavasava](https://twitter.com/savasavasava)
Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology. This could include but is by no means limited to:

- The relationship between tacit assumptions concerning social ontology and reflective theoretical positions
- Social ontology and the formulation of research questions
- Social ontology as a topic standing at the interface between the social sciences and philosophy
- The methodological implications of social ontology
- The ontological assumptions implied by research methods
- The social ontology of particular areas of inquiry e.g. social movements or digital technology
- Disciplinary differences in approaches to social ontology
- Social ontology and philosophical under-labouring
- The limits of social ontology and where under-labouring has to stop
- New directions in sociological research through questions of social ontology
The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.

Please send abstracts of 200 words or less and a short biographical note to [1]socialontology@warwick.ac.uk by May 1st

Registration will be free and a limited number of small travel bursaries will be available to support attendance at the conference.

1. mailto:socialontology@warwick.ac.uk
Collective Cleanliness: A Meta-Discursive Study of Academic Tearoom Culture

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ARTICLE INFO

This paper presents a meta-analysis of literature contributing to academic tearoom culture. We present a renewed argument for a grass-roots approach to the mechanics of tearoom cleanliness, specifically in the microclimate of academic tearoom contexts where time is of the essence in an increasingly deregulated and over-scheduled higher-education system. We re-contextualize the concept of early studies to evacuate the focus away from washing up mechanics toward the concern with the maintenance and encouragement of positive social bonds in tears. In surveying recent experimental studies, this paper presents an optimistic view of the capacity for long-lasting cultural change in academic tearoom environments.

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Cleanliness, Byssenthal Effect, Workplace harmony, Tangential disbelief, Passive-Aggressive non

1. Introduction

In this study, we follow Tallies (2011) who has called for a renewed investigation into the cultural mechanics of tearoom culture. She questions the apparent paradigm of social researchers’ awareness of the importance of cleanliness to social cohesion, but our inability or perhaps reluctance to apply these in regards to the dishes at hand.

Early functionalist accounts of tearoom culture focused on the breakdown in the processes associated with keeping dishes clean (Elabor & Scott, 1954; Cisneros & Bock, 1960) and removing tlc from tearoom fudge in a timely manner (Finke & Bouch-Durnault, 1990). Traditional methods (Sudd & Bubba, 1834; Scrub & Tense, 1930) have all proven to be more effective at the physical work of cleanliness than those proposed by other studies (Stocket & Romaney, 2014; Leavitt-Dury, 2015).

Later studies focused on the gendered dimensions of the work of maintaining cleanliness in the tearoom environment (Steph & Impress, 1979) which ordinary, everyday昀analytic questioned whether poicy or paid faculty were more likely to make messes (Workez-UNisy 1978).

1. Experimental Participatory Action Research in Etcology

In our previous work on passive-aggressive note (Dishoe & Brou, 2010), one notable exception of this cycle in various forms of group gatherings which tend to produce an excess of consumables which are then placed under refrigeration (Cooling, 1993). These well intentioned actions result in the creation of communal consumables (Sharlot, 2002) which rather than being consumed, leaving many tearoom refrigerators resembling something that belongs to a chemistry lab (Molody-Geize, 1988).


2. https://twitter.com/jamandcrumpets

3366
What is theory? (2015-03-24 08:00)

Another interesting video from [1]iai.tv:


Theories, Mysteries and Mistakes

We assume our theories about the world are gradually uncovering the way it really is. Yet from quantum mechanics to post-structuralism, the reality the theories describe is contradictory. Should we conclude that the world is essentially unintelligible? Or is it simply the theories that are mistaken?

The Panel

Founder of Loop Quantum Gravity Carlo Rovelli, post-postmodernist Hilary Lawson, and philosopher of mind Jennifer Hornsby confront the limits of our understanding.

2. https://iai.tv/VideoController/EmbeddedVideo/628?width=576&height=324&startTime=00%3A00
Call for an Internet Social Forum (2015-03-25 08:00)

The Internet belongs to all people – Let’s occupy it

More and more, the Internet is the place where we meet up with our friends, get information, organise work, store our pictures and texts, do our banking, see videos, buy tickets and get public services. As we use the Internet extensively, we begin to be “known” through the Internet equally intimately. Soon, it will also hold extensive transactional information from the many “things” in our daily lives—the entire range of domestic devices as well as public and private infrastructure and services. All this knowledge is power, which can be put to good use or bad. Not only does the Internet increasingly hold too much information about us, with the advancing networked automation and remote access, it provides the power to reach anywhere to control physical spaces and activities.

It being so central to our daily lives and social systems, what do we want the Internet to look like in the future? Should it be a decentralised network for unmediated social connections, and for creating, exchanging and sharing information, publicly or privately as we choose? Will we have applications oriented to better living conditions, education and cultural development for all; services that guarantee the privacy of our data; technology our communities can trust, collectively own and control? Or will it be a surveillance-centric network controlled by a handful of governments and corporate monopolies that have a continuous micro-view of our interaction spaces; commoditise our information; extract exorbitant revenue by selling our private data; and police all of our online (and increasingly offline) activities? What Internet do we want?

As in the beginnings of the Internet, both trends are present; but the Internet is fast evolving towards the second scenario, as major transnational corporations concentrate their control over the net and security services such as the US National Security Agency and its close allies engage in pervasive monitoring. Such centralised control of international communications and data, alongside a vacuum of legal checks and balances with global application, are leading to an accumulation of global power in a few hands. This, in turn, not only threatens to further exacerbate imbalances of wealth and power, but could undermine the very bases of democratic society.

So then, what can be done to reverse this trend, before it becomes irrevocably ingrained in the Internet’s DNA, and ‘normalised’? In particular, how can organisations working for social justice, democracy, communication rights, free/libre and open-source software, net neutrality, or the broad range of human rights, as well as for citizen empowerment above that of governments or corporations, contribute to building a People’s Internet?

This call for an Internet Social Forum aims to create a global space precisely to take up these issues, where we will discuss the Internet we want, share information on our endeavours and struggles for democracy, human rights and social justice in relation to the Internet, and develop collective action agendas.

Why a Social Forum? The Internet Social Forum (ISF) takes its inspiration from the World Social Forum (WSF) process and its visionary call that “Another world is possible”—we are suggesting that “Another (People’s) Internet is possible”. Recalling the WSF Charter, which calls for a different kind of globalisation than that “commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations’ interests”, we are calling for an Internet from below which is controlled by the people— including those not yet connected.

The WSF Charter presents the vision that “globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in history”, 3368
marked by respect for universal human rights and the environment, and resting on democratic international systems
and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples. We see the ISF as a direct
parallel to these efforts but within the sphere of the Internet and its governance.

From its first edition in Porto Alegre, in 2001, the WSF has been conceived as a people's opposition to the
elites of the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) which we have now come to call the “1 %”–those who represent
and benefit from banker imposed austerity measures, from the globalisation of capital, and the ideological and
institutional dominance of neo-liberalism; and also now in its Internet embodiment– the "Net Mundial Initiative"
(NMI), recently launched by the World Economic Forum. The WEF’s NMI is directed as the elite’s attempt to provide
self-serving ‘solutions’ with regard to global Internet-related public policy issues, and it simply takes one significant
step forward in the WEF’s continuing efforts to enable an economic and political hegemony by global corporations
and the global 1 %. The WSF process appears as the obvious and appropriate space to launch a movement for a
People’s Internet rather than an Internet in the interests of global economic and political elites.

Beyond the technical issues of standards and management of domain names, Internet governance is increas-
ingly about finding appropriate ways to respond to the larger framework of social and economic justice and human
rights issues that are emerging as the Internet impacts society at large. The governance of the Internet should be
undertaken based on the same democratic principles and mechanisms as we expect in other aspects of our lives.

The Internet Social Forum will be open to participation by all those who believe in the philosophy and values
of the WSF, and that the global Internet must evolve in the public interest. It will be underpinned by values of
democracy, human rights and social justice. It will stand for participatory policy-making and promote people’s control
of social technologies, as for instance is represented in the community media movement. It will seek an Internet
that is truly decentralised in its architecture and based on people’s full rights to and control over data, information,
knowledge and other ‘commons’ that the Internet has enabled the world community to generate and share.

The Forum also proposes to launch a bottom-up process for developing a People’s Internet Manifesto, involving all
concerned social groups, communities and movements, in different regions; from techies and ICT-for-development
actors to media reform groups, democracy movements, women’s rights organisations and social justice activists.

Next steps: A preliminary planning workshop will be held at the 2015 WSF, in Tunis, in March, titled 'Organis-
ing an Internet Social Forum – A call to occupy the Internet’. The Internet Social Forum is being planned for late 2015,
or early 2016. Provision will be made for remote participation.

How to participate in the ISF initiative: As a people's initiative, anyone motivated to support the public inter-
est is welcome to join. However, as a matter of maintaining a congruence of some basic values, we follow the
criteria of participation followed by the World Social Forum which can be found at [1]https://fsm2015.org/en/criteria-
participation. Anyone self-declaring as fulfilling these criteria may join by sending an email to the following addresses.

ISF secretariat : [2]secretariat@InternetSocialForum.net

Regional contacts:

Europe Norbert Bollow Email: [3]NorbertB@InternetSocialForum.net

Asia/ Oceania Rishab Bailey Email: [4]RishabB@InternetSocialForum.net

Africa Alex Gakaru Email: AlexG@InternetSocialForum.net

North America Michael Gurstein Email: [5]MichaelG@InternetSocialForum.net
Latin America/Caribbean Sally Burch Email: [6]SallyB@InternetSocialForum.net

Initial list of participating organisations:

Advocates of Science and Technology for the People, Philippines
Agencia Latinoamericana de Información, Regional
All India Peoples Science Network, India
Alternative Informatics Association, Turkey
Arab NGO Network for Development, Regional
Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), Bangladesh
Association for Proper Internet Governance, Switzerland
Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training, Canada
Chaos Computer Club Schweiz, Switzerland
CODE-IP Trust, Kenya
Computer Professionals Union, Philippines
Digital Empowerment Foundation, India
Foro de Comunicación para la Integración de Nuestr’América, Regional (América Latina)
Free Press, USA
Free Software Movement of India, India
Fundación-Redes-y-Desarrollo, República Dominicana
Global _Geneva, Switzerland
[7]GodlyGlobal.org, Switzerland
Institute for Local Self-Rliance – Community Broadband Networks, USA
Instituto del Tercer Mundo, Uruguay
International Alliance on Information for All (IAIA), Global
IT for Change, India
Just Net Coalition, Global
Knowledge Commons, India
Open-Root/EUROLINC, France
Other News, Italy
P2P Foundation, Global
Project Allende, Ireland and Argentina
SLFC.in, India
Solidarius (Solidarity Economy Network), Italy
Southern Africa Telecentre Network (SATNET), Zambia
The Network Institute for Global Democratization, Finland
The New Power by Synthecracy Movement, Global
Transnational Institute, Global
[8]uncomputing.org, global
Verein [9]grundrechte.ch, Switzerland
Young Internet Professionals, Africa
Suryusur, Regional (América Latina)
Argentina Hub for Internet Governance, Argentina
Fundación para la Integración Latinoamericana (FILA), Regional (América Latina)
Action Aid, India
Media Rights Agenda, Nigeria
Fundación Casa del Bosque, Colombia
Forum for a new world governance, Argentina
Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Thailand

This innovative conference brings together leading figures from a variety of fields which address issues of digital technology and digital data. We’ve invited speakers with a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds who engage with questions relating to digital data and digital technology in their work. Our suggestion is that social ontology, however this might be construed, represents a potential common ground that could cut across this still rather siloed domain of inquiry into the social dimensions of digital technology.

The conference aims to explore this possibility by assembling a diverse range of perspectives and drawing them into a dialogue about a common question, without assuming a shared understanding of the topic at hand. Our aim is to extend this digitally via twitter, podcast and blog beyond the event itself, in order to facilitate an extended conversation that will draw more people into its remit as it circulates after the conference itself.

To this end, we invite each speaker to address this theme (the social ontology of digital data & digital technology) in whatever way they choose. Each speaker will have 30 mins to talk and 15 mins for questions. We’ll have an accomplished audio editor on hand to record each talk as a podcast. These will be released on [1]www.socialontology.org and will be circulated on social media in order to try and stimulate a continuing debate around the issues raised at
the conference. The hashtag for the day will be #socialontology.

Confirmed Speakers:

- Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) - Does Digital Sociology have a Problem?
- Jochen Runde (Cambridge) - Non-materiality and the Ontology of Digital Objects
- Alistair Mutch (NTU) - title TBC
- Susan Halford (Southampton) - title TBC
- Nick Couldry (LSE) - title TBC
- Another speaker TBC


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**Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (2015-03-26 08:00)**

**Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life**

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.
This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from **December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague.**

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

**Keynote Speakers:**

Roger Burrows – Ancient cultures of conceit reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The perils, pitfalls, and power of peer review in public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Oili-Helena Ylijoki – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

**Fee**

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

**Venue**

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

**Travel**

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.
Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.


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**Saying goodbye to Apple, Microsoft and Google** (2015-03-27 08:00)

[1] Provocative reading for those, such as myself, who have become utterly reliant upon the products produced by these corporations:

I’ve moved to these alternative platforms because I’ve changed my mind about the politics of technology. I now believe it’s essential to embed my instincts and values, to a greater and greater extent, in the technology I use. Those values start with a basic notion: We are losing control over the tools that once promised equal opportunity in speech and innovation—and this has to stop.

Control is moving back to the center, where powerful companies and governments are creating choke points. They are using those choke points to destroy our privacy, limit our freedom of expression, and lock down culture and commerce. Too often, we give them our permission—trading liberty for convenience—but a lot of this is being done without our knowledge, much less permission.


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1. [https://medium.com/backchannel/why-i-m-saying-goodbye-to-apple-google-and-microsoft-78af12071bd](https://medium.com/backchannel/why-i-m-saying-goodbye-to-apple-google-and-microsoft-78af12071bd)
2. [https://medium.com/backchannel/why-i-m-saying-goodbye-to-apple-google-and-microsoft-78af12071bd](https://medium.com/backchannel/why-i-m-saying-goodbye-to-apple-google-and-microsoft-78af12071bd)
This review was originally posted on the LSE Review of Books

Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society is an impressively cohesive collection that seeks to map the intersections between Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Communication and Media Studies (CMS). The quality of the project has its origins in the approach the authors took to producing it: each essay went through many iterations, including a face-to-face meeting at a special workshop, with the demonstrable result of a diverse mix of contributions which nonetheless fit together into an overarching project. This endeavour was animated by a sense that both fields have come to share a concern with theorising media technologies but have in recent years been constrained by intellectual legacies that close down more than they open up in relation to this area of research (particularly the polarisation between technological determinism and social constructionism). In this sense, the project of the volume is a positive one, seeking to deploy the intellectual resources of both traditions in a way that better facilitates the investigation of these convergent objects of inquiry. However, what this means in practice varies greatly across an engagingly eclectic range of contributions made by scholars from both STS and CMS.

The third essay in the collection, written by Pablo J. Boczkowski and Ignacio Siles, draws on the notion of cosmopolitanism to outline an intellectual agenda for transcending the disciplinary boundaries which they, as with so many other contributors, see as constraining our understanding of media and communications. The division of labour encoded in the disciplinary silos which characterise the contemporary field have profound analytical implications for their objects of study e.g. scholars studying production rarely consider reception (and vice versa), while those studying the materiality of technology rarely consider their associated content dynamics (and vice versa). They make a plausible case that this structuring of social scientific knowledge has the effect of artificially prising apart shared objects in which these various aspects exhibit a deep interrelationship. In their view, the contemporary field of inquiry into media and technology encompasses four distinct spaces of scholarship: production/content, consumption/content, production/materiality and consumption/materiality. The relatively discrete form taken by these areas of inquiry has the effect of imposing a strong separation between elements of the technologies which commonly intermingle along their life cycle. The authors advocate a cosmopolitan sensibility as the solution to this problem, arguing that by seeking to overcome ‘provincial’ intellectual tendencies, we help make a more holistic approach to media technologies possible.

There are two important ways in which their argument is more sophisticated than a simple call to transgress artificial boundaries. Firstly, they recognise that these silos have their origins in the development of both STS and communications studies. Both fields originated in a project that cut across existing disciplinary boundaries in exciting and productive ways, however in recent years they have turned inwards as a product of institutionalisation, with deleterious consequences for their intellectual vibrancy. They suggest that the cosmopolitan sensibility which is the focus of their chapter did once animate both fields and that it can be recovered by stepping backwards in order to move forwards. Secondly, their claim about the interpenetration of different aspects of media technologies is not simply a theoretical one: even if we affirm the artificiality of these analytical boundaries on a theoretical level, we’re still faced with the methodological challenge of overcoming the limitations they impose when conducting empirical research. The cosmopolitanism they propose would work towards the reintegration of these ‘spaces of inquiry’ across the full range of practices we tend to subsume under the label of ‘scholarship’. Through doing so, they make a convincing case that STS and CMS can recapture the outwards facing orientation which animated their initial projects. Doing so can provide the foundation for a broader engagement with the social sciences that takes on a newfound importance at a time when media technologies are ever more closely woven into the fabric of social life.

The tenth essay in the collection, written by Christopher M. Kelty, addresses a very different concern but one no less radical in its inclination to traverse disciplinary boundaries. Observing the close relationship between the language of technology and the language of freedom, Kelty’s contribution begins with the obvious question of precisely what this connection should be understood to be. Is it rhetorical or is it something more than this? The
author leans towards the latter view, drawing on a curious mix of the social history of technology and political philosophy in order to make his case. He suggests that the treatment of the political in STS and CMS tends to be circumscribed, restricted to the affirmation of the existence of a political dimension of technology rather than any attempt to unpack its political origins and consequences. He traces the emergence of the personal computer, arguing that it has long been framed in terms of a specific concept of freedom because of the circumstances under which it was developed and the genuine liberation of sorts it entailed for those who had formerly worked with mainframes. A brief overview cannot do justice to the subtlety of an argument that weaves such distinct strands of inquiry together into a compelling whole. In this sense, the essay resembles the book as a whole: an impressive achievement, creatively traversing disciplinary boundaries in a manner valuable both in itself and for the further inquiry its diverse contents will no doubt provoke.

*Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society* is a fascinating volume, likely to be of interest to anyone working within STS and CMS or for those, such as myself, with an interest in issues pertaining to media and materiality emerging from other disciplinary modes of inquiry.


Making Sociology Public (2015-03-29 08:00)

This was originally published on [1]Making Science Public

Ever since I began to study Sociology, I’ve been fascinated by the question of how the discipline orientates itself towards public life. When I first encountered Sociology I was an intellectually frustrated philosophy student with a desire to study something that informed my activism. The political philosophy which had been the main object of my interest was clearly related to my activism but it was only when auditing a module on sociology that this weird tension in my experience, in which I tried to bridge a gap between activism and theory, began to dissipate in the face of a discipline that in an important way refused this separation. Like many other activists entering Sociology, I gravitated towards Public Sociology and the work of C. Wright Mills, soon coming to a deep conviction that the discipline should be engaged in and with public life, even if I wasn’t entirely clear what form this should take. It was through my fumbling engagements with this question that I began to see that my longstanding hobby of blogging was hugely relevant to my academic goals. This was a pretty organic process: as I began to study sociology, my predominately political blog posts began to take on a distinctly sociological tenor, with my activist blogging ultimately giving way to a much broader sociological identity.

However while it’s obviously the case that social media is relevant for public sociology, I’ve found it harder to be clear about precisely what this relationship entails. The communicative affordances of social media obviously play an important part in this: these tools are ‘fast, cheap and out of control’ as the educational technologist[2] Martin Weller has put it. But there are good sociological reasons to reject a view of the communication of sociological knowledge as intrinsically valuable, as well as important conceptual questions about what exactly we mean by ‘sociological knowledge’. The discipline’s identity is far from secure and ritualistic invocations of the sociological imagination (etc) need to be treated with caution at a time of institutional instability. That said, I’m still convinced that Sociology has an important role to play in public life and I’m much more interested in [3]getting good at public sociology than I am in adding to an already voluminous [4]literature.
To a certain extent this ambition fits with the theme of 'making science public'. I'm interested in how we can use these new tools to help make sociology public. What are we doing? What could we be doing? What should we be doing? There's a theoretical dimension to such questions but it's one with a fundamentally practical orientation.

To my slight surprise, I've recently been finding the later work of [5]Pierre Bourdieu immensely useful towards this end. One aspect of this that has particularly influenced me is Bourdieu's suggestion that collaborations with artists allow us to give symbolic force to social scientific ideas. This was the understanding that motivated a project I undertook with my friend Holly Falconer, a photographer, which was recently published by Vice. This project was an attempt to convey photographically something which I'd struggled somewhat to articulate in the context of journal articles. Having undertaken research on asexuality, I'd reached the conclusion that much of what makes asexuality problematic is the widespread assumption that it must be problematic. Many of the problems encountered by asexual people have their origins in a widely shared assumption about sexual attraction (specifically: it's universal and it's uniform) that lead people who aren't asexual to act in inadvertently pathologizing ways towards those who are. On an academic level, I was reasonably pleased with how I'd developed this notion of 'the sexual assumption' but there was something dissatisfying about the way in which it was necessary to publish what was an abstract critique of an (often) unacknowledged assumption. The appeal of the project with Holly was the immediacy with which we could convey this notion through photography, communicating that asexual people live just fine, without falling back into the obtuse formulations that are so hard to avoid with academic writing.

Photography is only one example here, albeit one with which Bourdieu was intensely engaged as both theorist and practitioner. Another which I've been preoccupied by recently is Social Fiction or Design Fiction, which using fiction to explore social scientific ideas in the mode of 'showing' rather than 'telling'. To get a sense of what this might look like, it's worth reading [7]Zero Hours by Tim Maughan which was written as part of a NESTA project on [8]Future Londoners. Tim explores the near future implications of gamification, zero hour contracts and micro-tasking to convey the texture of daily life for a young Londoner caught in an exhausting cycle of 'digitally enhanced' precarious labour only eight years from now. The capacity of such fiction to bridge description and explanation, illuminating social forces by describing their imagined ramifications, represents something I think many critical social scientists could find hugely promising. We can see similar ideas at work in the [9]Social Fictions series edited by Patricia Leavy or the [10]Performative Social Science enacted by people like Kip Jones.

While I don’t think these can be reduced to the category of public scholarship of the form I’m advocating, in fact it would be unfair on those in question to do this, it nonetheless shows us that there are a range of possible forms through which we can seek to communicate critical ideas in more immediate ways. This notion of 'giving symbolic force, by way of artistic form, to critical ideas and analyses' was offered by Bourdieu before social media. But the only thing which has been changed by the emergence of these services is the ease with which we can pursue such activity, not least of all in seeking collaborators and circulating what has been made collectively. The opportunities for an artistically orientated Public Sociology are more pronounced than ever and Bourdieu's account allows us to see this activity as intrinsically political, seeking as it does to communicate critical abstractions with an immediacy and power that academic writing inevitably lacks.

1. [http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2015/03/06/making-sociology-public/](http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2015/03/06/making-sociology-public/)
7. [https://medium.com/@timmaughan/zero-hours-f68f17e8c12a](https://medium.com/@timmaughan/zero-hours-f68f17e8c12a)
1st Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies Conference (2015-03-30 08:00)

1st Non-Monogamies and Contemporary Intimacies Conference (Sept. 25th–27th, '15) Call for Contributions – Deadline 18th May 2015 (To see a longer version of this Call for Contributions, please go [1]here) || PLEASE SHARE Research in sociology, psychology, anthropology and contemporary history has shown that traditional concepts and practices regarding marriage, family, sexuality, and intimacy have been changing rapidly in recent decades. There have been radical revisions of thinking and practice not only related to sexuality but also involving gender roles, single-parenthood, family structures, contraception, abortion, and divorce. Many of these areas have been linked to transformations in broader social, economic and political constructs, such as same-sex marriage. These changes are faced with mainstream negative representations of non-monogamy which describe it as “infidelity”, “serial monogamy”, or “failures” of the “normal” pattern of intimacy. Such perspectives assign a privileged role to the idealized couple, portrayed as intrinsically better. The dominant academic paradigm legitimates and strengthens monogamy’s normativity. At the same time, academia frequently fails to acknowledge the existence of open, consensual non-couple-based forms of relationships, and of a-romantic and/or asexual intimacies. Moreover, even the limited existing research on consensual non-monogamies focuses mostly on English-speaking and socio-economically privileged white groups and communities. The rise in critical discourses regarding normative sexualities and intimacies (and the ways in which these two elements interact) calls into question the traditional paradigm of lifestyles that have been at the core of the sex-gender system, as well as hetero-mono-normative institutions and practices in general. Topics: With this conference, we intend to bring together research, activism and other forms of social expression, focusing on, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Research around the lived experiences of non-monogamies, especially those considered consensual;
- Ideological and representational changes in how intimacies are thought of;
- Intersections with race, sex-gender, sexual orientation, kinship, kink, sex work, class, culture, religion, dis/ability, asexuality, a-romanticism;
- Activism and community-building around non-monogamies;
- Reproduction of normativities and resistances: polynormativity and relationship anarchy, neo-liberalism and political contestation;
- Evolution of scientific discourses on non-monogamies;
- Challenges to counseling, psychotherapy, (public) health and legal frameworks around non-monogamies;
- The roles of mass media and new technologies around transformations of intimacy.

Our goal is community-building within and beyond academia in all its fields and disciplines, challenging traditional models of the hegemonic Global North system of knowledge production. Therefore, we encourage the submission not only of academic papers and thematic panels, but also round-table discussions, film screenings and debates,
installations, activist-driven reflections and other modalities. **Language & accessibility:** For logistic reasons, the conference’s common language will be English, and abstracts must be submitted in English. If you wish so, you can also send us your abstract in another language, provided that you also submit it in English. It is highly recommended (but not mandatory) that presentations during the conference are in English. The venue is wheelchair-accessible. If you require a Sign Language interpreter, please contact us via email; unfortunately we cannot guarantee that this will be provided. **To submit:** Abstracts of up to 250 words for individual submissions and up to 500 words for panel submissions, by May 18th, using [this platform](https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/submit/). **Before submitting, please read the instructions** [HERE](https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/presenterinfo/). Any doubts or technical difficulties should be addressed to the following email: nmciconference@gmail.com **Venue:** Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (UNL) in Lisbon, Portugal **Read the Call for Contributions in other languages**

2. [https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/submit/](https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/submit/)
3. [https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/presenterinfo/](https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/submissions/presenterinfo/)
4. [mailto:nmciconference@gmail.com](mailto:nmciconference@gmail.com)
5. [https://www.google.com/maps/place/Av.+Berna+26,+1050+Lisboa,+Portugal](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Av.+Berna+26,+1050+Lisboa,+Portugal)

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**Preview of Book: Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-Segregation (2015-03-30 20:06)**

![Preview of Book](https://nmciconference.wordpress.com/category/call-for-contributions/2015-lisbon-pt/)

Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-Segregation by Shamim Miah
'Integration' or the supposed lack of it by British Muslims has been a ubiquitous feature in political, media and policy discourses over the past decades, often with little or no evidence base. This book is particularly timely as it draws on empirical research amongst both Muslim school students and parents to examine the question of 'self-segregation' in the light of key policy developments around 'race', faith and citizenship. It aims to contribute towards a national debate on segregation, schooling and Muslims in Britain through deconstructing the received wisdom of 'Muslim separateness'.

Reviews:

"This book makes an incisive intellectual contribution to understanding contemporary educational politics, policy and practice, with a specific focus on the schooling of Muslim students. It brilliantly investigates several highly contested concepts – segregation, integration, radicalisation, Britishness – offering innovative insights into how we re-imagine educational equality and justice." - Mairtin Mac an Ghail, Professor of Education at Newman University, Birmingham

"Theoretically informed and empirically substantiated, Shamim Miah has produced a vitally important intervention on the 'integration' debates. Originally formulated and clearly presented throughout, Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-Segregation is a must read for both researchers and policy makers alike." - Dr Nasar Meer, Reader in Comparative Social Policy and Citizenship, Strathclyde University.

"Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-Segregation is a compelling and penetrating analysis of civic integration and community cohesion in Britain. Demonstrating how complex choices surrounding housing and schooling have been misconstrued as 'self-segregation', Shamim Miah clearly indicates that British Muslims consistently strive to contribute, to engage and to integrate." - Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Professor of Political Science and Visiting Professor, Department of Political Science, Huron University College, Canada and School of Health and Human Sciences, University of Huddersfield, UK

Dr Shamim Miah is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Huddersfield, UK.
The End of Theorists?  (2015-03-31 08:00)

We’ve indirectly linked to this before but stumbling across it momentarily reminded me of how good it is:


6.4 April

Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life, 2nd-4th December 2015, Prague  (2015-04-01 08:00)

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:
• empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
• the origins of metrification of higher education
• metrification as a form of social control
• the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
• common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from **December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague**.

Deadline for abstracts will be **May 1st 2015**. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

**Keynote Speakers:**

Roger Burrows – Ancient cultures of conceit reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The perils, pitfalls, and power of peer review in public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Oili-Helena Ylijoki – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

**Fee**

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

**Venue**

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

**Travel**

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.
CfP: The Politics of Data (Science) (2015-04-02 06:42)

The Politics of Data (Science)

This special issue of Discover Society will explore the political implications of ‘big data’ and the systems of expertise emerging around it, including though not limited to Data Science. In doing so it will aim to bridge the gap between the methodological discourse surrounding data science and the political discourse beginning to emerge around ‘big data’. Here are some of the questions the issue will address:

- How is ‘big data’ understood and acted upon? How should we understand its cultural power?
- How is ‘big data’ reconfiguring the social sciences? Do we risk all science becoming data science?
- How and why has the ‘data scientist’ come to be seen as the ‘sexiest job of the 21st century’?
- Is the ‘data scientist’ just a ‘Statistician who lives in Shoreditch?’ Or is this a genuinely new intellectual role?
- Can ‘big data’ address ‘big questions’? If not, is this a problem?
- What are the precursors of ‘data science’ within the academy and/or within corporations?
- What implications does corporate data science have for the relationship between corporations & consumers?
- What implications does national security data science have for the relationship between the state & citizens?
- Can the use of digital data lead to efficiency savings in public services? How does this relate to the politics of austerity?
- How could predictive privacy harms emerging from data analytics be addressed politically?
- Can the opacity of algorithmic processes be challenged? Or are we heading inexorably for a ‘black-box society’?
- How are new forms of digital data reconfiguring activity in particular social environments?

However these are just suggestions and ideas beyond the scope of this list are very welcome.

The deadline for contributions is June 15th. Contact mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss a potential contribution.

The article will constitute the July issue of Discover Society. Most articles will be **1500 words** however there are a number of special sections in the online magazine.

Front line – 1500 words  
View point – 1500 words  
Policy briefing – 1500-2000 words

If you would be interested in writing one of these thematic sections, please get in touch asap.

The issue will follow the usual formatting guidelines of Discover Society. Please consult the [1]notes for contributors.
The difficulty of organising events in a digital age, or, 'y u register but no turn up?' (2015-04-02 08:00)

I’ve often seen events advertised, thought ‘that looks interesting’ and booked a place, giving little thought to how I’ll actually get there on a specific day. It’s an expressive action, with booking a place being more a matter of wanting to attend the event than it is of actually deciding to attend it. It’s the kind of action which is more likely in a state of perpetual distraction.

Post. Post. Post. Click. Click. Click (as Jodi Dean conveys it)

I try my best to ensure I tell the organizers when/if I realise I won’t actually attend. I sometimes fail to do this. More often I do it too late for it to be of any use in terms of reallocating tickets. I try to remind myself of this when I’m the organiser. It’s started to really irritate me when people do this at events I’ve organised. At a recent event three people, who didn’t show up despite three requests that anyone not willing to attend let me know, denied a potential place to three of the people on the waiting list. It wasted money but the fact other people might have turned up was what bothered me.

However I recognise that this is easy to do. Quite obviously because I do it myself. When there are so many opportunities, so much of interest that we confront when we browse social media, it’s easy to be overly enthusiastic when it comes to registering for events. Particularly given the mentality which emerges with such reliability when we’re immersed in social media.

Post. Post. Post. Click. Click. Click
Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration - Educating white working-class boys

by Garth Stahl

Adopting a culturalist approach and a Bourdieusian lens, the book focuses on research conducted in London to learn about white working-class students’ experiences, identities and aspirations in the multiple sites of school, home and community, with the underlying theoretical approach that “identity is always residual, refracted, emergent and contested” (p1). Identity is constructed and contested in spaces such as schools and communities, and thus the
book successfully explores the nuances involved in white working-class boys' social and learner identities as they strike a balance between sometimes fluid and sometimes fixed identities. Neoliberalism encourages "competitive, economic and status-based" aspirations and subjectivities (p2), and these boys' lives are inevitably shaped by neoliberal systems of schooling, where the boys want to do well, but not too well. In the contemporary globalised world, where identities are fluid, flexible and hybrid, Stahl also points towards how some white working-class youth experience identities and subjectivities that are "fixed in place by both circumstances – material, economic, familial, cultural" and by "neoliberal discourses" (p159). The boys become neoliberal subjects "enmeshed in processes of individualisation and individualised failure", yet they work towards presenting themselves as "valuable individuals where egalitarianism becomes a process of amelioration, contestation or resistance" (p133).

Following contemporary theories and empirical studies on classificatory struggles, Stahl too discusses social class as cultural and ideological, rather than solely concerned with wealth and occupations, thus the research highlights in great detail how white working-class boys are socially positioned in schools. Aspiration and subjectivities are thoroughly explored in order for us to gain a deeper insight into the shaping and re-shaping of learner and social identities. Stahl shows how white working-class boys' subjectivities and aspirations are intricately meshed with social, structural and economic factors, and he problematizes what he refers to as common and crude conceptions of white working-class culture – for example, poor aspirations, poor parental attitudes, poor work ethic and poor attendance. The boys' aspirations are shown to be deeply intertwined with neoliberal educational practices, all the while schools' policies and practices regarding ability and achievement, through certain fixed assumptions, can result in racist and classist ideological structures. The research explores the contradictions and ambivalences in identity issues as the boys fear academic failure but simultaneously they fear academic success. Stahl offers recommendations of ways in which schools and teachers could better engage white working-class boys in order for them to enjoy and benefit from the curriculum and general schooling in order for them to enhance their learner and social identities. Having taught for in white working-class communities for many years

Part One of the book reviews contemporary education debates and literature on the educational policies which impact upon white working-class communities, in particular, drawing upon Bourdieu, Stahl raises key concerns about aspirations and identities of white-working class boys. In keeping with contemporary revival of Bourdieu's theoretical frameworks, Stahl advocates multiple and nuanced readings of gendered/classed identities and aspirations through a detailed examination of interrelated and interdependent capitals, habitus, field and associated disjunctures. Part Two of the book then goes onto examining the site of the school and the identity work therein – how identity construction and contestation impacts upon the boys' definitions and discourses of everyday experience of social class, and as a result the consequences for their learning and aspirations. We learn about how these boys have become adept in evading "labels, judgements and distinctions" (p7), and how they adopt strategies to reaffirm their own respectability through a process of ‘othering’ boys they deem different.

The book is timely, accessible, engaging and thoroughly grounded in extensive empirical work conducted in contemporary south London sites of schooling with boys whose voices come alive as we learn about their conflicting experiences, aspirations and identities, and their everyday experiences of the negative discourses imposed upon them. The boys know shame, self-doubt and poverty, as they reveal their ambivalent relationship with their locality, and make meaning through identifying boundaries. Thus Stahl's ethnographic study is an urgent and necessary read for teachers, educationalists, researchers, policy makers and sociologists interested in the interplay between intersections of whiteness, social class, gender and identity issues in the lives of young boys.

Garth Stahl completed his PhD at Cambridge in July 2013 while working as a teacher in a traditionally white working-class section of South London. He currently works as a Lecturer at University of South Australia.

Cruel optimism in #highered (2015-04-03 08:00)

This powerful essay by Maria Warner in the LRB echoes what I was trying to say recently about the perils of passion:

A university is a place where ideas are meant to be freely explored, where independence of thought and the Western ideals of democratic liberty are enshrined. Yet at the same time as we congratulate ourselves on our freedom of expression, we have a situation in which a lecturer cannot speak her mind, universities bring in the police to deal with campus protests, and graduate students cannot write publicly about what is happening (one of my students was told by management to take down the questions she raised on Facebook). Gagging orders may not even be necessary. Silence issues from different causes: from fear, insecurity, precarious social conditions and shame. It is the shame of the battered wife that allows her husband to count on her silence. I recognise, for example, the compunction in the words of Rosalind Gill in her fine article 'Breaking the Silence: The Hidden Injuries of the Neo-Liberal University'. She nearly didn’t write the piece, she says, because she felt that ‘pointing to some of the “injuries” of British academic life had a somewhat obscene quality to it given our enormous privileges relative to most people in most of the world’. She felt ashamed to be complaining about conditions at work because she was in it ‘for the satisfaction, not the money’. The managers count on that feeling – in others, not themselves. Gill recognises that the very sense of specialness that still attaches to the idea of being a teacher or a professor – especially for women, after our late acceptance into the profession and our erratic and precarious progress within it – has stood in our way; or rather, it predisposes us to be agreeable. ‘We therefore need,’ she writes, ‘urgently to think about how some of the pleasures of academic work (or at least a deep love for the “myth” of what we thought being an intellectual would be like ...) bind us more tightly into a neoliberal regime.’

Gill is describing an instance of what the American scholar Lauren Berlant calls ‘cruel optimism’. People open themselves to exploitation when the sense of self-worth that derives from doing something they believe in comes up against a hierarchical authority that is secretive, arbitrary and ruthless. Cruel optimism afflicts the colleague who agrees to yet another change of policy in the hope that it will be the last one. The cruel optimism that motivates the colleagues who undertake examining for the REF has grown out of a long, deeply held belief in the value of knowledge and the wish to pass it on – from one person to another, from one generation to the next. Yet university life has depended on this willingness of colleagues to undertake all manner of tasks above and beyond the ordinary job, reading one another’s work, writing recommendations, making nominations, translating, assessing and examining and sitting on councils and external bodies, developing analyses and plans, arranging for this and that conference or lecture or seminar series, without every moment and every act being quantified and calculated. Not everything that is valuable can be measured. But I am talking as if the chief sufferers from cruel optimism are teachers. This is of course not the case; students are above all the victims. The new managers want to pack ‘em in and pile ‘em high – and then neglect their interests by maltreating their teachers.

CfP: The Politics of Data (Science) (2015-04-03 11:45)

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3388
Are academics very well-educated journalists who write badly but will work for free? (2015-04-04 08:00)

A few years ago I wrote a short article about the relationship between academic blogging and journalism which received a pretty positive reaction online. My suggestion was that academic blogging increasingly constitutes a ‘third space’ between the academy and journalism which facilitates translation between the two institutional spheres. It becomes easier for journalists to find relevant academics when their research is expressed in a few blog posts as well as articles in scholarly journals. However might we increasingly see academics become journalists? Not necessarily in the sense of individual career transitions (though this does happen) but rather in a blurring of the two activities that has important consequences for those working at the intersection.

Part of me likes this: I want critical social scientists* to ‘occupy debate’ in a way that gets social scientific ideas out of the academy. However in a way it’s also rather sinister if we look at the broader transformations underway within both spheres. Is there a risk that junior academics, keen to differentiate themselves and demonstrate a capacity for impact as they strive to move beyond precarious contracts, come to be seen as a reserve army of well-educated quasi-journalists who may write badly but will work for free? Maybe even ones who aren’t critical, at least if they write reasonably well.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2013/01/10/academic-blogging-both-and-rather-than-either-or/

Definitely a concern. I wonder how much young academics are aware of places that pay for their words, esp. as many of the CFPs that circulate are for unpaid labor. Are there places on the web where we can encourage each other to write for appropriate compensation? I’m definitely up for joining / supporting a community like that!

From passion to profit: exploitation under neoliberalism, or, how seriously should we take latte art? (2015-04-05 08:00)

Since I first encountered the notion of a calling, I’ve found it a difficult category to expunge from my thought. It appeals to me greatly on a personal level: it points to the higher dimension to human experience which I believe tends to be ‘flattened out’ in the culture of liberal democracies. It helps us attend to the possibility of work that is meaningful and non-alienated so as to give shape to a life and provide the qualitative distinctions of worth in relation to which we can orientate ourselves existentially.

However I find myself increasingly troubled by the appeal this has held for me, as well as how notions of this sort might buttress exploitation under contemporary conditions. For instance consider the ‘perils of passion’ in the video game industry, as detailed in this excellent Jacobin article:
Again and again, when you read interviews or watch industry trade shows like E3, "passion" is used as a word to describe the ideal employee. Translated, "passion" means someone willing to buy into the dream of becoming a video game developer so much that sane hours and adequate compensation are willingly turned away. Constant harping on video game workers' passion becomes the means by which management implicitly justifies extreme worker abuse.

And it works because that sense of passion is very real. The first time that you walk through the door at an industry job, you're taken with it. You enter knowing that every single person in the building shares a common interest with you and an appreciation for the art of crafting a game. Friendships can be built immediately – to this day, many of my best friends arose from that immediate commonality we all had on the job.

This is an incredibly enticing proposition; no one who goes in is completely immune to it, no matter how far down the totem pole of life's interests gaming is. And there are few other jobs quite like it. Geek culture takes such strongly held commonalities of interest and consumption far more seriously than most other subcultures. I recently wrote a [1]piece for this publication which was, in part, about the replacement of traditional class, gender, and racial solidarity with a culture of consumption. Here, in the video game creation business, is the way capital harnesses geek culture to actively harm workers. The exchange is simple: you will work 60-hour weeks for a quarter less than other software fields; in exchange, you have a seat at the table of your primary identifying culture's ruling class.


This isn't a new phenomenon. Another example can be found in the comics industry, as far back as the early days of the contemporary corporations. With the original creators leaving, having scarcely been rewarded for much of the creative labour underlying the emergence of Marvel Comics, [3]the corporation turned to “a new generation of creators, wide-eyed twenty-somethings who flashed their old Merry Marvel Marching Society badges as though they were licenses for breaking rules”. The grievances of those original creators faded from view as their creations inspired a new generation willing to work under precisely the conditions which had forced their predecessors to leave.

What about higher education? Does a sense of social science as a calling leave people continuing to chase a career which is in reality only available to a fraction of those pursuing it? Does it lead to an acceptance of precarity as a way of life, with the harsh realities of labour relations within the academy being softened by the rewarding ideal of a calling? Part of my political and theoretical problem here is that I don't want to fall into the trap of denying the reality of passion by reducing it to an instrument of exploitation. Doing so makes it difficult to explain precisely why people persist in these fields in the way that they do. But we must conversely refuse a naive reading of 'calling', which I see in terms of a cluster of concepts of which 'passion' is just one, in moral terms so as to neglect this pernicious systemic trend.

Another way to frame this question: how seriously should we take latte art? I've more than once had a conversation with a barista about this practice who clearly takes great satisfaction from it. However it's hard not to wonder if this is a cynical attempt to introduce craft and creativity into a job which some would consider the archetype of zero hours employment. I'd love to visit latte art competitions in an ethnographic capacity to explore how seriously the participants take these endeavours and how pervasively such events are permeated by corporate imperatives. Till that day, I'm left to speculate that this is a case of craft being encouraged by owners for reasons that are largely self-serving, even if they understand their motivations in terms of a benign concern for the well-being of their employees.


3390
19 interesting ways to communicate knowledge (2015-04-06 08:00)

- Through Design Fiction (e.g. [1]Zero Hours)
- Through Social Fiction (e.g. [2]Low Fat Love)
- Through Visual Journalism (e.g. [3]Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt)
- Through Visual Biography (e.g. [4]Robert Moses: The Master Builder of New York City)
- Through Graphic Novels (I lack examples of this – I'm also aware the distinction between 'graphic novels' and 'visual biography' and 'visual journalism' may be so fine grained as to be pretty meaningless)
- Through Photography (e.g. [5]Art Sexual)
- Through Creative Non-Fiction (e.g. [8]Zeitoun, [9]Venkatesh's work)
- Through Film or Animation (e.g. [10]Rufus Stone, [11]Waking Life)
- Through Theater (e.g. [12]the Fabulous Ruins of Detroit)
- Through Video Games (e.g. [13]Celiac Sam)
- Through Buzzfeed Style Lists (e.g. [14]this)
- Through Walking Tours (e.g. the superb tour of Manhattan given by an urban sociologist at the 2015 Eastern Sociological Society conference)
- Through Podcasted Dialogues (e.g. [15]the Promise of Sociology in 2015)
- Through Filmed Dialogues (e.g. [16]British Sociology since 1945 or this dialogue between [17]Carol Smart and Jeffrey Weeks)
- Through Stand Alone Prezis & Slideshare (e.g. I've never given [18]this as a talk in person or intended to)
- Through Short Story (e.g. [19]The Last Seminar)
- Through Musical Theater (e.g. [20]The Theory of Justice Musical)
- Through Cut & Paste Assembly (e.g. [21]Kant in Hand!)
Miranda (2015-04-07 02:23:27)
A graphic novel example: "Citizens of No Place" by Jimenez Lai http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-07/12/citizens-of-no-place

Sociological Imagination (2015-04-07 14:36:51)
thanks! I'll order it now

An introduction to Design Fiction for Sociologists, May 13th at Goldsmiths (2015-04-07 08:00)

Design fiction is a term [1]first coined by Julian Bleecker and [2]popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change." and that it "attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different."

Design fiction isn’t science fiction, it’s not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

In this event Tim Maughan introduces design fiction for sociologists. He discusses the work he is undertaking with Sava Saheli Singh (New York University) and its possible implications for how we write about research.

Keith Kahn-Harris will discuss his new project which looks at how kinds of mainstream texts other than science fiction also generate ‘social science fictions’, often ‘accidentally’ as a result of the pragmatic requirements of generating workable plots and scenarios. Such texts can help force attention to a neglected sociological question: what are the limits of possibility in human society?
Sarah Burton will also speak on a topic to be finalised.

Les Back and Mark Carrigan will each offer a short response before the event is opened up for a general discussion.

2. http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2013/10/play/patently-untrue

» When Sociologists fail to talk about the future The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-17 08:29:08)

[...] in the week I organised a Design Fiction for Sociologists workshop at Goldsmiths with the help of Les Back. It was a really interesting event on a number of [...]  

Call for papers: Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference (2015-04-08 08:00)

Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference
June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology. This could include but is by no means limited to:

- The relationship between tacit assumptions concerning social ontology and reflective theoretical positions
- Social ontology and the formulation of research questions
- Social ontology as a topic standing at the interface between the social sciences and philosophy
- The methodological implications of social ontology
- The ontological assumptions implied by research methods
- The social ontology of particular areas of inquiry e.g. social movements or digital technology
- Disciplinary differences in approaches to social ontology
- Social ontology and philosophical under-labouring
The limits of social ontology and where under-labouring has to stop

New directions in sociological research through questions of social ontology

The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.

Please send abstracts of 200 words or less and a short biographical note to socialontology@warwick.ac.uk by May 1st

Registration will be free and a limited number of small travel bursaries will be available to support attendance at the conference.

1. socialontology@warwick.ac.uk

You must change your life! (2015-04-09 08:00)

I was introduced to this Rilke poem via a book by Peter Sloterdijk:
We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned to low,
gleams in all its power. Otherwise
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.

Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast’s fur:

would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life

He takes the closing line as the title for his book. I’ve struggled somewhat with it. I don’t find Sloterdijk to be a clear or careful writer. It’s also a translated work which I’ve been reading in fragments. But his interpretation of Rilke’s words has stuck with me:

‘You must change your life!’ – this is the imperative that exceeds the options of hypothetical and categorical. It is the absolute imperative – the quintessential metanoetic command. It provides the keyword for revolution in the second person singular. It defines life as a slope from its higher to its lower forms. I am already living, but something is telling me with unchallengeable authority: you are not living properly.

This authority touches on a subtle insufficiency within me that is older and freer than sin; it is my innermost not-yet. In my most conscious moment, I am affected by the absolute objection to my status quo: my change is the one thing that is necessary. If you do indeed subsequently change your life, what you are doing is no different from what you desire with your whole will as soon as you feel how a vertical tension that is valid for you unhinges your life.

I think this is another example of what Ian Craib describes as the [2]importance of disappointment: “what happens, what we feel, when something we expect, intend, or hope for or desire does not materialise”. If Craib is right that we often retreat from disappointment in the late modern world, reflecting “a desire to get out of the mess of life”, we also miss out on these moments in which we confront ‘vertical tensions’. The discomfort generated by a vertical tension, in which we recognize a gnawing sense of ‘subtle insufficiency’, might come to
be seen as pathological: what should be a spur to self-transcendence instead becomes seen as a threat to self-esteem.

1. https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/archaic.jpg

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life (2015-04-10 08:00)

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars' complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague.

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.
Keynote Speakers:

Roger Burrows – Ancient cultures of conceit reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The perils, pitfalls, and power of peer review in public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Oili-Helena Ylijoki – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Fee

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

Venue

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

Travel

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Towards a Sociology of the Good Life (2015-04-11 08:00)

What is the good life? It's a question which preoccupied me in my past life as a trainee political philosopher and it's one which still concerns me as a sociologist. It's rarely addressed within the discipline for reasons that cut through a number of trends within the field: a hostility towards normativity, an admission of normative question in a restrictively critical mode and a scepticism concerns questions pertaining to the particular character of individual lives. This is a shame because I believe sociology has a lot to contribute towards questions of the good life, not least of all because it can ensure otherwise abstract ruminations are grounded in an appreciation of the variable circumstances within which actual lives are lived. It can also help link these philosophical questions to empirical ones concerning dominant trends in how 'the good life' is conceived within a particular social order.

In this sense we could see existential questions as close to invariant but the dominant cultural answers as being immensely variable through history and across the planet. This is not a matter of individual variation, such that each person individually confronts universal existential dilemmas and through their responses contributes towards patterns that register aggregatively at the macro level as empirical patterns in understandings of 'the good life'. It's also necessary to distinguish between discursive formulations and actual practice without prioritising one over the other. Cultural formulations of 'the good life' are intimately connected to lived practices in a way that necessitates we appreciate their entanglement if we are to properly understand either culture or life. Only through doing so does it become possible to understand how change occurs at either level, as people individually or collectively advocate for heterodox understanding of the good life or elaborate upon prevailing ideas through their personal or shared practice which may come to be formulated at a discursive level and so escape their original context and begin to potentially exert an influence in others.

The work of Harmut Rosa offers clues about what a sociology of the good life might look like, though his suggestions are only a peripheral part of a much larger and very different project. In his Social Acceleration, he writes about the notions of a good life that emerge under conditions of acceleration and describes how these have been shaped by older conceptions of the life well lived:

> the idea that an *accelerated enjoyment of worldly options*, a “faster life,” will once again allow the chasm between the time of life and the time of the world to be reduced. In order to understand this thought one has to keep in mind that the question concerning the meaning of death is indissolubly tied to the question of the right or “good life.” Thus the idea of the good life corresponding to this answer, which historically became the culturally dominant idea, is to conceive of life as the *last opportunity*, i.e., to use the earthy time span allotted to humans as intensively and comprehensively as possible before death puts a definitive end to it (pg. 181)

These are theoretical observations that are informed, albeit unsystematically, by historical sociology. I think they could also be informed by cultural sociology and cultural studies, drawing upon popular texts which deal with these themes. For instance I've been reading [1]Late Fragments by Kate Gross, a former high flying civil servant, who died of colon cancer at the age of 34 and left a moving collection of ruminations on life catalyzed by its early end and the pain of leaving behind two young sons and a much loved husband.

Acceleration is a theme that runs through the book, albeit without using that term, for instance in her description of friendships that "survive on scraps of time and emails, squeezed between the rest of life, and very often conducted thousands of miles apart" (pg 51) and her wonderment at the life she has lived (analysis of her privilege would be an important part of a Sociology of the Good Life, though in Kate's case, it's hard to think this through without feeling immensely uncharitable):
There is wonder in my past, and in my present. As I write this book, I lay out my memory quilt to see all the dancing I have done: places I have been, people I have met. I have fitted so much colour into my short life that I wonder if I lived on hyper-speed, as if, somehow, I knew my time was limited. (pg 30-31)

My suggestion is that Kate Gross embodied Rosa’s accelerationist ethic, feeling compelled at she did to fit so much into her life and confrontation with an early death leads her to reflect on the virtues and limitations of it. Her account of the cancer in part frames it in terms of *deceleration*, in which “time was carved out for friendship again” (pg 52) and she was led, by existential need rather than reflective inclination, to cultivate those aspects of herself which had been lost in the rush:

> It is too easy, as an adult, to let life rush past with its business of succeeding, working, consuming, rearing. All of that can be joyful and fulfilling, I grant you. But it is so, so easy in the rush of life to neglect your inner world. I know mine was dead for many years, squeezed between work and achieving *stuff* and my darling little ones – it’s a choice I made, and gladly. But one of the unexpected blessings of illness is that it has given me time to tend my mind again. (pg 75).

I found the phrase ‘achieving *stuff*’ immensely powerful. It conveys her continued investment in what she has accomplished while expressing how the details (what? when? why? with whom?) have begun to fade away in the face of finality. Perhaps this suggests it was the *achievement* rather than the particular achievements which were deemed worthwhile: securing the worth of life through what is achieved in its short span. This points us towards questions of qualitative worth: what distinguishes an ‘achievement’ from the simple fact of something we have done? Does it entail leaving a lasting mark? Once we start to ask these questions, we’re already way outside the realms of the hedonistic calculus currently being reinvented by behavioral scientists like Paul Dolan. The graphic artist Jim Steranko conveys this vividly in his account of the meaning he derives from his work:

> I believe that happiness is nothing ... I don't think people were put here to be happy. I think if you decide to be an artist or a writer, you automatically accept the responsibility of being alone. However, after your 50 or 60 years are up you'll be able to look back and see this output that you've done that will endure long after you're gone, and will continue to fill the minds of millions of people.

*Marvel: The Untold Story, Pg. 83*

Would this still provide meaning for him if his work endured but it was largely forgotten? There are lots of different levels on which statements *of* purpose and statements *about* purpose (with the latter probably more interesting) can be analyzed. I think a Sociology of the Good Life would be well equipped to do just this. The study of texts could supplement the theoretical work undertaken by someone like Rosa in a way that enhances both. However I think there would be much more to it than this, for instance looking at the material constraints upon the good life and how these ideas help reproduce existing inequalities, not least of all by binding people in to life strategies that perpetuate structural injustice.

1. [https://kateelizabethgross.wordpress.com/late-fragments/](https://kateelizabethgross.wordpress.com/late-fragments/)
Over the past few weeks I have been having a series of interesting exchanges with a young Canadian philosopher (who works outside of academia), Adam Riggio, who has been responding chapter-by-chapter to my latest book, *Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History*. [1]In the most recent exchange, Riggio brought up the state of the university, which figures in the book – and my writings more generally. He is understandably concerned about the role of neo-liberalism in the transformation of the university. You can judge for yourself what to make of the exchange.

The general point I wish to make here is that no type of political regime holds a monopoly on the capacity for justice. An autocrat can do justice just as well as a democratically elected assembly. But clearly they meet the demands of justice differently – and should be judged accordingly. Thus, we can have just and unjust neo-liberal regimes, in the same sense that we can have just and unjust socialist regimes. Here ‘justice’ depends on the consistency with which a politically inspired standard is applied. Of course, one may not like the outcomes, and this would be grounds for changing the regime.

In theology, the field of ‘theodicy’ was canonized by Leibniz in the early 18th century to capture arguments about God’s sense of justice. In today’s terms, we might see this as the algorithm that God uses to redistribute costs and benefits to get the results he wants. Given that we typically don’t know what God is on about until after the fact, it follows that the significance of things is not quite as they seem, and one needs to watch history play out longer to get a clearer sense. (Hegel name-checks Leibniz early in his lectures on the philosophy of history.)

Now we can imagine a human-sized deity who doles out justice in a neo-liberal academic regime. What would that look like? At the very least it would mean subjecting everyone to the same performance review standards – including the most senior professors. It would also involve being on the lookout for market bottlenecks that end up concentrating resources inefficiently – understood from the standpoint of spawning innovation and wealth creation, however broadly ‘innovation’ and ‘wealth’ are understood (i.e. not necessarily commercial). This too is likely to put professors under more severe scrutiny by preventing them from simply drawing on the reputation of their previous work to extend their current value indefinitely. At the same, investment might be shifted to junior people simply based on a compelling forward-looking proposal, regardless of prior track record – but requiring delivery by a fixed date.

In this respect, the UK Research Excellence Framework institutes a brutal version of the neo-liberal ideal, since both junior and senior academics are in principle placed on a level playing field, having to justify themselves in terms of work actually produced over a fixed period in the immediate past. To be sure, the system is far from perfect. But the imperfections are to do more with a refusal on the part of academics to fully implement it, resulting in an unsatisfactory hybrid system that often ends up doing the worst thing that a market-based regime of justice can do: namely, obscure the signals generated by the market, such that those in it aren’t quite sure how to turn them to their advantage.

The take-home point here is that justice and neo-liberalism are not mutually exclusive categories. To think otherwise is to engage in a category mistake. However, neo-liberalism (like any other political regime) may be implemented unjustly, which is to say, by compromising its own principles.

The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism provides a thoroughly detailed and very contemporary analysis of the problematic and nuanced nature of the important concept and public practice of multiculturalism. It is an accessible edited collection of modern takes on multiculturalism for those new to the great variety of arguments regarding multiculturalism who are keen to gain an understanding of the meaning of modern multiculturalism, yet at the same time it is in-depth and appealing to those who are already familiar with the ambiguities of thought on multiculturalism who are consolidating their knowledge of this "awkward term" (p1) and this "demanding and risky ideal" in practice (p11), and learning about the different types of multiculturalism in a range of contexts. The book raises key questions about "what or who is the proper subject of multiculturalism – individuals, groups, peoples, cultures?" (p5), as well as exploring different forms of multicultural belonging.

Some chapters closely examine multicultural society in light of indigenous people belonging to that place, whilst other chapters focus on newcomers, new migrants and refugees. A concurrent theme running through the edited collection is the need to remind ourselves that context matters and impacts upon how multiculturalism is practised. We gain insight into how multiculturalism has impacted upon and transformed how people “think about the world, but also how they interact with others, and especially the shape and look of their public institutions” but equally importantly it affects nation, national identity and “economic and political power” (p11). We learn about how political theory – and in particular, multicultural thinking – is sometimes neglectful of gender issues, despite being concerned with the promotion of “human freedom and equality” (p138). Thus, from a feminist perspective, women struggle when there is a backlash against multicultural policies and practices: for instance by becoming even more restricted to the private sphere, and pushed out of the public sphere due to attitudes towards the hijab or niqab. Eisenberg’s Chapter problematizes feminist responses towards Multiculturalism, Gender and Justice: referring to France she discusses how “many people involved in this debate seem to been blind to the irony of the state forcing girls not to wear headscarves in order to protect them from being forced by their communities to wear them” (p123).

Multiculturalism is defined as referring to “theories, attitudes, beliefs, norms, practices and policies that seek to provide public recognition of and support for accommodation of non-dominant ethnocultural groups” (p2).
Any writing on multiculturalism will inevitably engage with ideas of culture, as well as “freedom, equality, democracy and justice” (p2). Ivison, the editor, in his introduction, emphasises three ways of understanding multiculturalism: protective/communitarian multiculturalism, liberal multiculturalism and imperial multiculturalism. Protective/communitarian multiculturalism is concerned with preservation/protection of the culture of the minority group. Liberal multiculturalism, which is universalist and the most popular multiculturalism in contemporary political thinking, refers to promoting liberal values like “equality, autonomy, toleration, or equal respect” (p3). Thus we can ask questions like “are we seeking to promote a greater diversity of cultures, languages, and ethnic groups in order to provide a richer set of choices and experiences for individuals?” (p5). Finally, there is imperial multiculturalism which is “a new version of the hierarchical and/or racialized modes of political order that it was supposed to have displaced” (p4). Thus this approach to multiculturalism interrogates how minority and majority communities are defined in public discourses.

The book is beneficial to scholars from diverse backgrounds as a multidisciplinary approach to analysing multiculturalism is presented through the inclusion of distinctive perspectives from fields such as philosophy, political science, sociology and anthropology. The book brings forth an important discussion about how multiculturalism is increasingly becoming a steady feature in global discourses. The structure of the book neatly yields significant ideas on multiculturalism through three sections: Foundations, Challenges and Alternatives. The first part – Foundations – contains detailed definitions, advantages, limits and critiques of liberal multiculturalism, as well as socio-political developments that have impacted particularly on perceptions of Muslims and belonging; there is discussion on how some argue that multiculturalism is dead, whilst others believe it is alive and ever relevant and needed; the nature of culture, identity and power in modern multicultural society is also examined.

Part Two of the book brings to light key Challenges involved in referring to associated concepts of multiculturalism. For example, toleration – “what toleration is, why we ought to tolerate, and what we ought to tolerate” (p75). Part Three offers Alternative Perspectives: Ghassan Hage considers the limits of “multicultural governmentality” in the Australian context with its heavy reliance on colonial politics and its difficulties in dealing with the “ungovernable”. Thus, Hage recommends “intercultural relations” that move beyond the stale polarity of multiculturalism-assimilation (p253). Rita Khaur Dhamoon discusses how multicultural discourses of securitization are concerned with powerful meaning-making about nation and belonging: the focus is “territory, identity, whiteness and economic development” in Canada’s hegemonic nation-building endeavours (p257). She recommends that “alternative counterpractices and discourses are necessary” (p274), as are disruptions and deconstructions of power relations. Jeffrey Riegel’s fascinating chapter entitled Master Kong versus Master Mo: Two Views of Cosmopolitanism and Multiculturalism in the Early Chinese Philosophical Tradition most definitely provides us with alternatives in explaining ways in which we can understand cultural difference through a reading of early Chinese philosophies, particularly the teachings of Confucius.

Who is this describing? (2015-04-12 08:00)

From this [1]article (don't read it yet though!):

1. "barely capable of distinguishing themselves from the consuming desire to work at all times"
2. "neurotic people who deploy a series of practices that coincide quite neatly with the requirements of the neoliberal, predatory, continually mutating capitalism of the every moment"
3. "people who behave, communicate, and innovate in the same manner as those who spend their days trying to capitalize every moment and exchange of daily life"
4. "they offer no alternative to this"


Five important works of realist social theory being published in 2015 (2015-04-13 08:00)

[1]To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil

Generative Mechanisms Transforming the Social Order (Social Morphogenesis)

The Relational Subject
Reconstructing Sociology: The Critical Realist Approach

A realist philosophy of social science
Workshop: Investigating the Internal Conversation (2015-04-13 11:26)

I’m organising this workshop at Warwick in June for anyone using Margaret Archer’s work on reflexivity in empirical research. She’ll be there all day & will discuss the development of this work as well as answering questions about it. There will also be a few speakers (including myself, talking about my PhD, which I so rarely do) who have used these ideas in empirical studies. If you know anyone studying reflexivity in this way then please do let them know about the workshop:

Investigating the Internal Conversation
June 2nd at the University of Warwick

The Centre for Social Ontology invites applications for this practical workshop aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The ‘internal conversation’ was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society’s objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

This workshop intends to support those who are currently undertaking or in the process of planning empirical research investigating the internal conversation. The day will begin with an introductory lecture by Margaret Archer in which she will discuss the development of her work on reflexivity, ranging from the initial formulation in Being Human through to her recent work with Pierpaolo Donati on relational reflexivity. Then [1]Mark Carrigan (Warwick), [2]Monder Ram (Birmingham) and [3]Balihar Sanghera (Kent) will each give a shorter talk about their experience of investigating reflexivity through empirical research. The rest of the day will address the methodological and theoretical questions often encountered when studying reflexivity e.g. how to identify the modes of reflexivity of research subjects.
The workshop is free but registration is essential. If you would like to participate then please e-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your project. We’re keen to adapt the content as much as possible to meet the needs of participants. If there are particular issues you would like us to address then please suggest these in your initial e-mail.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/


As part of its effort to expand beyond traditional types of academic publication, Big Data & Society has introduced an Early Career Researcher Forum targeted to scholars finishing or having recently completed advanced graduate degrees. More specifically the ECR forum seeks work by researchers reflecting about some of the challenges of their work (related to Big Data topics) in about 1000 to 2000 words with a range of illustrations, figures, etc. as well as a brief bio (100 words). The goal is to encourage reflexive submissions that explore what it means to be a researcher studying issues concerning big data and society. As guidance we ask authors to consider a series of questions (addressing any or all of these):

- What kinds of challenges empirically and/or methodologically have you encountered in your work?
- Do you have an example of these challenges, particularly one that can be shared in an online forum such as the journal offers, i.e., with visualizations, graphs, etc.?
- Does Big Data allow you to ask new questions or explore old issues?
- Are there questions that your data can not answer? Why? What else is necessary?
- Why is your research important and interesting?
- How do you relate back to your home discipline, and do your colleagues understand you?

In addition to targeted submissions, the Early Career Researcher forum accepts unsolicited contributions and encourages those who are interested to correspond with the co-editors (Irina Shklovski and Matthew Zook) for guidance.
In my talk at the Digital Sociology conference in New York in February 2015 (available online [1]here) I explained my enthusiasm for the new possibilities afforded by social media for doing research in real time with communities. These are the two examples I’m familiar with but I’d like to know about any others that exist.

1. Every minute of every day was an experiment in 'real time ethnography' undertaken by Les Back and others at Goldsmiths. You can read about it [2]here. Unfortunately the project’s website is no longer online because it was hosted on Posterous website. This is sad and highlights some of the risks involved in relying upon commercial problems.

2. The Barrio Ed Project is a "digital, participatory research project on Comunidades Latinos & EdReform". You can read more about it [3]here.

One potential constraint upon these projects is the absence of a pre-existing audience. In some cases this won’t be a problem but in others I expect it will be and interesting work will be done that would benefit from a much wider audience. The life cycle of any project makes it difficult to gather an audience purely for that project. Obviously an audience doesn’t constitute a public but in many cases the project might benefit from a public and an audience.

Given that the original idea for SociologicalImagination.org was a platform for public sociology, I’d love to open it up for use by research projects if it would be helpful. The twitter feed has almost 17,400 followers and the blog gets 1000-3000 page views per day so there’s a significant audience already in place. I’m not sure exactly how this would work in practice but if you’d like to discuss it further then please do get in touch. My e-mail address is mark AT markcarrigan.net.


Using social media to improve the student experience: creating a departmental back channel for undergraduates (2015-04-15 08:00)

A few years ago when I was running the Twitter feed for the Sociology department at Warwick, I noticed how readily first year undergraduates tweeted practical questions to the account during their first few weeks of the first term. Students tweeted questions intermittently throughout the year but it was particularly marked at the start of their time within the department. As someone who spent 6 years studying the undergraduate experience, it’s not hard for me to understand why this would be so: the organisation the student has joined tends to seem rather large and they often feel they have only a superficial grasp on how it works.

What I find harder to answer is why universities haven't seized upon social media as tool for improving the...
‘student experience’. As well as the aforementioned questions, I noticed a few instances of forthcoming students tagging the department on Twitter prior to starting their degree. As a part-time PhD student with little practical involvement in the department beyond my role maintaining the twitter feed, I often found myself unable to answer the questions undergraduates had and struggling to welcome forthcoming students to the department in any meaningful way.

I find it easy to imagine how this could be done with social media in an effective way: inviting forthcoming students to engage with the department prior to joining it, encouraging them to address any questions they have to the twitter feed and checking in with the students on a semi-regular basis throughout their first year. It would require an investment though not a particular significant one – perhaps it could be factored into the workload allocation of an existing administrator? The work involved would be regular but fairly unsubstantial, necessitating that someone knowledgeable about the day-to-day life of the department were to prioritize twitter as a communications channel alongside e-mail.

My experience of the 'back channel' that Twitter provides at conferences is that it makes large and impersonal events feel friendly and accessible. Could the same effect be achieved with the student engagement project I’m outlining?

CfP: The Politics of Data (Science) (2015-04-15 11:45)

The Politics of Data (Science)

This special issue of Discover Society will explore the political implications of 'big data' and the systems of expertise emerging around it, including though not limited to Data Science. In doing so it will aim to bridge the gap between the methodological discourse surrounding data science and the political discourse beginning to emerge around 'big data'. Here are some of the questions the issue will address:

- How is ‘big data’ understood and acted upon? How should we understand its cultural power?
- How is 'big data' reconfiguring the social sciences? Do we risk all science becoming data science?
- How and why has the ‘data scientist’ come to be seen as the ‘sexiest job of the 21st century’?
- Is the ‘data scientist’ just a 'Statistician who lives in Shoreditch?’ Or is this a genuinely new intellectual role?
- Can ‘big data’ address ‘big questions’? If not, is this a problem?
- What are the precursors of ‘data science’ within the academy and/or within corporations?
- What implications does corporate data science have for the relationship between corporations & consumers?
- What implications does national security data science have for the relationship between the state & citizens?
- Can the use of digital data lead to efficiency savings in public services? How does this relate to the politics of austerity?
- How could predictive privacy harms emerging from data analytics be addressed politically?
- Can the opacity of algorithmic processes be challenged? Or are we heading inexorably for a ‘black-box society’?
- How are new forms of digital data reconfiguring activity in particular social environments?

However these are just suggestions and ideas beyond the scope of this list are very welcome.

The deadline for contributions is June 15th. Contact mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss a potential contribution.
The article will constitute the July issue of Discover Society. Most articles will be **1500 words** however there are a number of special sections in the online magazine.

Front line – 1500 words  
View point – 1500 words  
Policy briefing – 1500-2000 words

If you would be interested in writing one of these thematic sections, please get in touch asap.

The issue will follow the usual formatting guidelines of Discover Society. Please consult the [1]notes for contributors.


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**Call for papers: Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference (2015-04-16 08:00)**

**Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference**  
**June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm**

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology. This could include but is by no means limited to:

- The relationship between tacit assumptions concerning social ontology and reflective theoretical positions  
- Social ontology and the formulation of research questions  
- Social ontology as a topic standing at the interface between the social sciences and philosophy  
- The methodological implications of social ontology  
- The ontological assumptions implied by research methods  
- The social ontology of particular areas of inquiry e.g. social movements or digital technology  
- Disciplinary differences in approaches to social ontology  
- Social ontology and philosophical under-labouring  
- The limits of social ontology and where under-labouring has to stop
The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.

Please send abstracts of 200 words or less and a short biographical note to [1]socialontology@warwick.ac.uk by May 1st

Registration will be free and a limited number of small travel bursaries will be available to support attendance at the conference.

That time we went on a pub crawl with Karl Marx (2015-04-16 12:00)

I can't recall encountering any other fragment of writing which brings a historical figure to life for me as vividly as [1]this does:

One evening, Edgar Bauer, acquainted with Marx from their Berlin time and then not yet his personal enemy […], had come to town from his hermitage in Highgate for the purpose of “making a beer trip.” The problem was to “take something” in every saloon between Oxford Street and Hampstead Road – making the something a very difficult task, even by confining yourself to a minimum, considering the enormous number of saloons in that part of the city. But we went to work undaunted and managed to reach the end of Tottenham Court Road without accident.

There loud singing issued from a public house; we entered and learned that a club of Odd Fellows were celebrating a festival. We met some of the men belonging to the “party,” and they at once invited us “foreigners” with truly English hospitality to go with them into one of the rooms. We followed them in the best of spirits, and the conversation naturally turned to politics – we had been easily recognised as Germany fugitives; and the Englishmen, good old-fashioned people, who wanted to amuse us a little, considered it their duty to revile thoroughly the German princes and the Russian nobles. By “Russian” they meant Prussian nobles. Russia and Prussia are frequently confounded in England, and not alone of account of their similarity of name. For a while, everything went smoothly. We had to drink many healths and to bring out and listen to many a toast.

Then the unexpected suddenly happened...

Edgar Bauer, hurt by some chance remark, turned the tables and ridiculed the English snobs. Marx launched an enthusiastic eulogy on German science and music – no other country, he said, would have been capable of producing such masters of music as Beethoven, Mozart, Haendel and Haydn, and the Englishmen who had no music were in reality far below the Germans who had been prevented...
hitherto only by the miserable political and economic conditions from accomplishing any great prac-
tical work, but who would yet outclass all other nations. So fluently I have never heard him speak English.

For my part, I demonstrated in drastic words that the political conditions in England were not a bit better than in Germany [... ] the only difference being that we Germans knew our public affairs were miserable, while the Englishmen did not know it, whence it were apparent that we surpassed the Englishmen in political intelligence.

The brows of our hosts began to cloud [...]; and when Edgar Bauer brought up still heavier guns and began to allude to the English cant, then a low "damned foreigners!" issued from the company, soon followed by louder repetitions. Threatening words were spoken, the brains began to be heated, fists were brandished in the air and – we were sensible enough to choose the better part of valor and managed to effect, not wholly without difficulty, a passably dignified retreat.


An introduction to Design Fiction for Sociologists, May 13th at Goldsmiths (2015-04-17 08:00)

Design fiction is a term [1]first coined by Julian Bleecker and [2]popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change." and that it "attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different."

Design fiction isn’t science fiction, it’s not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

In this event Tim Maughan introduces design fiction for sociologists. He discusses the work he is undertaking with Sava Saheli Singh (New York University) and its possible implications for how we write about research.

Keith Kahn-Harris will discuss his new project which looks at how kinds of mainstream texts other than science fiction also generate ‘social science fictions’, often ‘accidentally’ as a result of the pragmatic requirements of generating workable plots and scenarios. Such texts can help force attention to a neglected sociological question: what are the limits of possibility in human society?

Sarah Burton will also speak on a topic to be finalised.
Les Back and Mark Carrigan will each offer a short response before the event is opened up for a general discussion.

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life (deadline May 1st! All 5 keynotes now confirmed) (2015-04-18 08:00)

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim 'patent and prosper' (Schachman) supplements the traditional 'publish or perish'). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars' complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis
The workshop will take place from **December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague**.

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

**Keynote Speakers:**

Roger Burrows – Ancient cultures of conceit reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The perils, pitfalls, and power of peer review in public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Oili-Helena Ylijoki – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

**Fee**

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

**Venue**

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

**Travel**

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

What would British fascism look like? (2015-04-18 14:22)

I recently stumbled across [1]this old* Huffington Post article by James Bloodworth, editor of Left Foot Forward, speculating about what a British fascism would look like. I don’t think it’s actually very good but it’s a fascinating question to ponder.

And yet, were a far-Right government ever to win power in Britain – and never get too complacent, for a [2]Searchlight poll last February found a staggeringly high number of voters who said they would be prepared to vote for party of the far-Right if it renounced violence – what might it do in its first year of power?

This is pure speculation of course, but interesting all the same, I think.


One of my favourite works of fiction in recent years was [4]Dominion by C.J. Sansom which depicts a Britain that surrendered in World War 2 and has become a satellite state of Nazi Germany. I found it much more plausible than Bloodworth’s speculations but perhaps that’s in part due to gradually showing this world over 500 pages rather than boldly stating it in a 1500 word blog post.

Thanks to Danny Birchall for sharing this film – "It Happened Here":

IFRAME: [5]http://www.youtube.com/embed/HhGxM4hXBjk?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent
There’s also a 2004 documentary drama which addressed this question: [6]https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NnsRCt8-TGM (embedding disabled)

I wonder if counter-factual drama of this sort can be included within the remit of design fiction for digital public sociology?

Well 2012. I’m not sure when that became ‘old’.

5. http://www.youtube.com/embed/HhGxM4hXBjk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
6. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NnsRCt8-TGM

Heating up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest (2015-04-19 08:00)

This expression by Will Davies has stuck with me since I read it a [1]few months ago. Teaching is a disturbing example of the process Will is alluding to: ratcheting up demands on staff to the point where many are unwilling to continue. In fact increasing numbers seem unable to continue:

The BBC has also seen a survey of 3,500 members of the Nasuwt teaching union which shows more than two-thirds of respondents considered quitting the profession in the past year.

Workload was the top concern, with 89 % citing this as a problem, followed by pay (45 %), inspection (44 %), curriculum reform (42 %) and pupil behaviour (40 %). In addition:

- 83 % had reported workplace stress
- 67 % said their job has adversely impacted their mental or physical health
- Almost half of the three thousand respondents reported they had seen a doctor because of work-related mental or physical health problems
- 5 % had been hospitalised, and
- 2 % said they had self-harmed.


Much of the issue here stems from the demand for ‘excellence’: as David Cameron recently put it, “if you’re not good or outstanding, you have to change. If you can’t do it yourself, you have to let experts come in and help you”. For head teachers a bad Ofsted report can mean the end of their career and this tyranny of excellence mutates into
something ever more brutal as it works its way down the hierarchy.

Replace ‘heads’ with ‘HoDs’ and ‘Ofsted’ with ‘REF’ and we can see the same trend at work in higher education. Meanwhile the VCs fly around the world, creating strategic partnerships to actualise latent synergies. Here on the ground, [3] one in six universities refuse to answer freedom of information requests about their expenses.

Across both spheres, we can see people breaking the professions, one personal tragedy at a time, while rewarding themselves extravagantly for doing so.


24 podcasts and videocasts with Richard Sennett (2015-04-20 08:00)

Found on his website [1] here:

"The Edge: Borders and Boundaries", Cambridge University
[2] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Lessingtage 2015
[3] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube (beginning at minute 25).

On the Open City at Stockholmia’s conference.
[4] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Richard Sennett on Open City Planning
[5] Click here to view the interview on YouTube.

In Conversation with Richard Sennett, filmed by Gob Squad for “Be Part of Something Bigger: Celebrating the Art of Collectives and 20 Years of Gob Squad”
[6] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

New Cities Summit 2014: Opening Panel: Re-Imagining Cities
[7] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

The Open City, Harvard Graduate School of Design
[8] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Writers & Company with Eleanor Wachtel Interview
[9] Click here to listen to the interview.

Foreign Perspective: Europe Seen From The United States, EUROPA Conference
[10] Click here to view the talk.
The Architecture of Cooperation, Harvard Graduate School of Design
[11] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Urban Age Electric City: Richard Sennett - The Stupefying Smart City
[12] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Thomas Struth and Richard Sennett discuss 'Unconscious Place', Venice Biennale
[13] Click here to view the talk on YouTube.

Richard Sennett and Rowan Williams on Narrative and Ritual
[14] Click here to view the talk on YouTube.

Richard Sennett: The Sociology Of Public Life
[15] Click here to view part 1 on YouTube.
[16] Click here to view part 2 on YouTube.

The Decline of the Skills Society, UK Berkeley
[17] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Richard Sennett on Art and Craft, Getty Museum
[18] Click here to view the lecture on YouTube.

Antony Gormley and Richard Sennett in Conversation
[19] Click here to view the talk on YouTube.

Private Passions with Michael Berkeley
[20] Click here to download an audio clip of the introduction
[21] Click here to download the full audio

Thinking Allowed with Laurie Taylor (BBC Radio 4):
Cities and Memory [22] Click here to download this audio clip

Craftwork and Skill
[23] Click here to download this audio clip

Imagination and The City
[24] Click here to download this audio clip

UrbanOmnibus: A Walk with Richard Sennett
[25] Click here to watch this video clip

Start of the Week with Andrew Marr: Meaningful work in the recession (BBC Radio 4)
[26] Click here to listen

Capitalism in Crisis: The Corrosion of Character
[27] Click here to watch this video clip
Workshop: Investigating the Internal Conversation (2015-04-20 14:33)

I’m organising this workshop at Warwick in June for anyone using Margaret Archer’s work on reflexivity in empirical research. She’ll be there all day & will discuss the development of this work as well as answering questions about it. There will also be a few speakers (including myself, talking about my PhD, which I so rarely do) who have used these ideas in empirical studies. If you know anyone studying reflexivity in this way then please do let them know about the workshop:

Investigating the Internal Conversation
June 2nd at the University of Warwick

The Centre for Social Ontology invites applications for this practical workshop aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The ‘internal conversation’ was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society’s objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society
through their actions. Since initially discussed in *Being Human*, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

This workshop intends to support those who are currently undertaking or in the process of planning empirical research investigating the internal conversation. The day will begin with an introductory lecture by Margaret Archer in which she will discuss the development of her work on reflexivity, ranging from the initial formulation in *Being Human* through to her recent work with Pierpaolo Donati on relational reflexivity. Then [1]Mark Carrigan (Warwick), [2]Monder Ram (Birmingham) and [3]Balihar Sanghera (Kent) will each give a shorter talk about their experience of investigating reflexivity through empirical research. The rest of the day will address the methodological and theoretical questions often encountered when studying reflexivity e.g. how to identify the modes of reflexivity of research subjects.

The workshop is free but registration is essential. If you would like to participate then please e-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your project. We’re keen to adapt the content as much as possible to meet the needs of participants. If there are particular issues you would like us to address then please suggest these in your initial e-mail.

1. [http://markcarrigan.net/](http://markcarrigan.net/)
2. [http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/business/monder-ram.aspx](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/business/monder-ram.aspx)
3. [http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr/staff/academic/s/sanghera-balihar.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/sspssr/staff/academic/s/sanghera-balihar.html)
Bruno Latour: The Whole is Always Smaller than the Parts (2015-04-21 08:00)


The digital availability of profiles deeply modifies the definition of what it an individual agent and, reciprocally, what is a structure because of the new ways in which researchers navigate database. This is true not only for human actors but for any agent on which individualizing items are accessible (ants, baboons, as well as bacteria or scientific papers). Building on actor-network theory, physics of complex systems and the visualizing work of Sciences Po médialab, the paper resuscitates the notion of monads that Gabriel Tarde had brought forward and that had disappeared through lack of efficient data tracing tools.


The fact that you have a Ph.D. – let alone that you teach at a good university – doesn’t make you an intellectual. Being an intellectual means, at the very least, that you can convey ideas in multiple media, thereby testifying to the very existence of ‘ideas’ as entities that transcend a particular medium of expression. In its backhanded way, the phrase
‘public intellectual’ concedes the point, as it desperately tries to reserve the term ‘intellectual’ for well-credentialed academics who talk about big issues but to audiences no larger than their classrooms.

Nevertheless, academics, as their degrees signal, are in the first instance experts in particular fields of knowledge, which means that they can say things that other like-credentialed people find sound and interesting, even when they don’t agree. This matters to the larger society only because the particular field of knowledge matters to the larger society. The media – which is the natural home for intellectual life – grasps this point perfectly. This is why when they’re putting together a story of any depth, they’ll ask, say, ‘Where can we find a sociologist?’ It doesn’t matter who the sociologist is, as long as they are reputable in the field. This is just the right way to think about the default position of academics vis-à-vis intellectual life.

Now, of course, some academics function in a more expansive and personal capacity in intellectual life. But can you name one who has not been censured for having done so, especially when their academic expertise gets dragged into public debates? An Einstein or Chomsky figure is quite rare, namely, someone whose prominence in their own fields is such that they are allowed to talk about things quite unrelated to their expertise. Usually academics who become intellectuals are, in some sense, leveraging their expertise without having received collegial approval. Richard Dawkins is an obvious case in point. What this shows is that academic disciplines are mainly in the business preserving the integrity of their knowledge base, and public enlightenment is something to be tried only in a low risk environment. Thus, the day that ‘peer review’ becomes totally demystified – be it by metrics-based replacement or some larger democratization process – the value of holding a degree in a particular academic field will disappear altogether. However, the value of holding an academic degree as such – say, in something quite generic like ‘liberal arts’ – will not disappear.

In light of the above, academics who are reluctant to become ‘public intellectuals’ (to use their preferred phrase) are prone to two complementary modes of fallacious reasoning, which together constitute misplaced modesty:

- I’m afraid of the impact that my words, even if correctly understood, might have on policy: Despite its surface modesty, this concern presupposes, rather arrogantly, that academic experts are given so much credit in a democratic society that the lives of millions hang on their every word. Of course, their words will be taken seriously, but only alongside other words uttered by experts and non-experts. So no excuse not to argue your case, given the opportunity!

- I’m afraid that my words will be misunderstood and spun in the wrong way: This is the flipside of the first fear. But really, if you want to exert such proprietary control over how your words are used, then you need to see your intervention as an opening move in a public conversation, in which you continue to participate by clarifying your position. Otherwise, you should be psychologically prepared to let others do what they will with what you say – in the spirit of a vendor who doesn’t fret over how the client uses his wares.

If I were a psychoanalyst, I would say that the fallacy of misplaced modesty reflects the passive-aggressive attitude that contemporary academics have towards democracy: They claim to love it but they are repulsed by the prospect of entering into it. Moreover, I think this neurosis is endemic to the postmodern condition, since as Allan Bloom notoriously alleged in The Closing of the American Mind, academics from the 1960s to his own day (the mid-1980s) were more than happy to promote quite specific anti-establishment agendas both inside and outside the classroom. Ah, the good old days!
I see the situation differently. As you quite rightly point out, academics are "in the first instance, experts in particular fields of knowledge". But by the same token they are generally no wiser than others on issues outside their particular area of expertise. And because life is complicated, the narrow prisms of academia are by definition inadequate as a basis for opinions on wider matters. This is not misplaced modesty but commonsense. This is nothing new. See Hazlitt’s 1822 essay "On the Ignorance of the Learned".

perfect answer...

Jason (2015-04-22 06:11:29)
>the day that 'peer review' becomes totally demystified – be it by metrics-based replacement or some larger democratization process – the value of holding a degree in a particular academic field will disappear altogether. The merit of peer-reviewed work is not determined by the author's degree. An excellent paper or insight can come from anywhere; but, most scientific fields require significant background in math, physics, chemistry, biology, and/or the subject matter at hand. A degree is simply a reflection of a student’s mastery of these subjects. Few, if any, PhD students are in it “for the degree." I can’t imagine what you would hope to accomplish by opening up the peer review process to the public. It’s safe to assume that the average person is not well versed in any particular academic subject. What is the merit of allowing such people to determine the merit of a scientific paper? I can’t speak for the "metrics" system you vaguely mention, but can only point out that such a system would have to be designed by someone – presumably an expert. You would be trading a dynamic peer-review system for an arbitrary set of someone's biases. There's no way out. Someone has to decide the merit of these things, and if you don't think a panel of experts are the right people to do it...are you really of the opinion that you know better? Because your suggested alternatives suggest that you don’t value scientific rigor in the least.

Chris (2016-01-16 19:57:00)
Two thoughts - one in response to the original post, and one in response to Jason, above. 1. I agree with the overall depiction of "misplaced modesty," and the two sides of that coin. However, PARTICULARLY in the case of the latter ("I'm afraid that my words will be misunderstood and spun in the wrong way"), but true for both sides - when considering our post-modern condition, we must consider how complex ideas end up circulating as memes, 140-character tweets, and other bytes of compressed information. It is all too easy for either the correct interpretation of a hastily-conceived idea...or the incorrect interpretation of any idea or sound byte - to take on a life of its own. While misplaced modesty is a problem, we can’t fail to be cognizant of this aspect of the post modern condition, whether the academic pursues and alter ego as an intellectual or otherwise. Even leaving it in the classroom, conference presentation, abstract, or paper, our words, thoughts, slides, deeds etc. can be shared instantly, whether we want them to be or not. 2. Regarding Jason's concern about peer-review and its potential democratization - perhaps the original post meant exactly what Jason appears to be concerned about, i.e. that people without any relevant expertise might be reviewing technical or specialized manuscripts (if I have understood Jason correctly). However, "democratization" of peer review might not be so extreme. I think moving the peer review system beyond the opinion of a single editor and 2-4 anonymous reviewers that she or he selected could happen lots of ways. Unblinded review, post-publication review, or "open comment" periods extended to members of the profession or those with relevant knowledge, etc. may all be more democratic, without going all the way to what I believe causes Jason concern. Indeed, the traditional peer review system has, at best, been tried-and-often-true, but also error prone and subjective; at its worst, it allows predatory journals to hide behind the traditional anonymity to implement (and I use that term loosely) non-expert or completely falsified review processes. The fact that a predatory journal can use a facsimile of the traditional peer review system to produce exactly the opposite effect of that traditional system, is also a product of the post modern condition that we must acknowledge. My two cents...

John Harris (2016-01-16 23:13:56)
According to the dictionary the term intellectual means someone with a highly developed intellect. There’s no reference in that definition to the requirement or demand to share the fruits of that development abroad, especially amongst the flashing
lights and blaring noise of today’s ‘news as entertainment’ marketplace. Besides, what exactly is an ‘intellectual’ in today’s argot? If I talk on NPR, do I become one? What if I tweet, or maintain a blog? And what am I called if I speak at a rally? Maybe a ‘public intellectual’ is just an ‘independent scholar’ with tenure? Just as a PhD does not mean one is automatically a competent teacher, neither does it denote one as readily publicly vociferous in advancing a theory or view. Perhaps the fault lies then with our own expectation - that the one be the other, or both.

**Geek Revenue: The Cultural Industries in the Age of Digital Piracy (2015-04-22 08:00)**

This video essay uses classical cultural theory as well as current internet research to address the relationship between the cultural industries and the increasingly active and tech savvy audiences of the 21st century. Is there always a clear-cut division between capitalist media institutions on the one side, and a pirating audience on the other? What space is there for remix culture and other potentially copyright infringing activities in the discourse of digital content monetization?

1. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/20202256](https://player.vimeo.com/video/20202256)
2. [https://vimeo.com/20202256](https://vimeo.com/20202256)

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1. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/20202256](https://player.vimeo.com/video/20202256)
2. [https://vimeo.com/20202256](https://vimeo.com/20202256)
The Journal of Academic Videos (2015-04-23 08:00)

What a brilliant idea! See more [1]here:

Audiovisual Thinking is a leading journal of academic videos about audiovisuality, communication and media. The journal is a pioneering forum where academics and educators can articulate, conceptualize and disseminate their research about audiovisuality and audiovisual culture through the medium of video.

International in scope and multidisciplinary in approach, the purpose of Audiovisual Thinking is to develop and promote academic thinking in and about all aspects of audiovisuality and audiovisual culture.

Advised by a board of leading academics and thinkers in the fields of audiovisuality, communication and the media, the journal seeks to set the standard for academic audiovisual essays now and in the future.

Video submissions are welcome from all fields of study and, as one would expect, the main criteria for submissions are that the discussion and thinking are conveyed through audiovisual means. [2]Submit your video here.

1. http://www.audiovisualthinking.org/about/

Call for papers: Queer Methods (2015-04-23 08:00)

WSQ, Call for Papers: Special Issue

QUEER METHODS

Guest Editors:

Amin Ghaziani, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of British Columbia
Queer Studies is experiencing a methodological renaissance. In both the humanities and the social sciences, scholars have begun to identify research protocols and practices that have been largely overshadowed by advances in queer theory. The fall 2013 "Queer Method" conference organized by Heather Love at the University of Pennsylvania indexed this shift toward methods by reframing the question "what is queer theory?" to "how is the work of queer theory done?"

Evocative in this regard are David Halperin's works How to Do the History of Homosexuality and How to Be Gay, along with the 2010 collection Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research, edited by Kath Browne and Catherine Nash. These efforts have pioneered a new conversation, one that links an account of a situation (or "theory") with a set of guidelines about how to gather evidence to explore or test those particular propositions (or "methods"). Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin's large-scale empirical study, The Lives of Transgender People, exemplifies how queer methodologies can allow scholars to envision a world that is otherwise obscured by traditional approaches. Despite these early advances, however, vast opportunities for exploiting the innovations of queer methods remain. This issue of WSQ will take up some of the most pressing of those yet-unaddressed queries as it explores the queer take on research methods in the humanities and social sciences.

The question of method inevitably incites a discussion of disciplinarity, since theories generally precede and largely determine particular research strategies. Yet queer studies, much like women's and gender studies, stakes its claims by working at once within, against, across, and beyond disciplinary boundaries, which provocatively blurs distinctions between "the field" and "its methods." If inter-disciplinarity, multi-disciplinarity, and even anti-disciplinarity are all hallmarks of queer and feminist theories, then what promises and pitfalls inhere in the development of queer methods? What inferential and interpretive possibilities are afforded to scholars when we think about queer methods as a distinct analytical approach? How can we queer established protocols while generating new queer methodological possibilities? Finally, borrowing from Valerie Traub, how might traditional disciplinary-specific approaches to methodological scrupulousness and exactitude allow us to be precise about the imprecisions of queer?

While this special issue understands theory and method to be in close conversation, it focuses on the methodological parallels to queer theory. To do this, it will create a forum among qualitative and quantitative scholars from the humanities and the social sciences to discuss either methodological challenges that arise when applying traditional methods to LGBTQ populations or innovations in methodology that can inform further theorizing on the epistemological distinctiveness of gender and sexuality. Conducting research with sexual and gender minorities raises a host of issues pertaining to recruitment (how can we reach hidden populations?), ethics (what are the potential negative impacts of unpopular findings on the communities of study?), measurement (how can scholars operationalize the many modes through which people think about the origins, mutability, and stability of sexual orientation categories?), and meanings (what is the significance of engaging in particular sexual practices?), along with implications for challenging normative conceptions of what constitutes positivist, post-positivist, essentialist, constructionist, interpretivist, and queer social research.

We solicit paper proposals that are theoretical, conceptual and/or empirical on a wide range of topics relating to queer methods, including but not limited to the following:

What are similarities and differences between queer and feminist methodologies?

How can queer methods, like feminist methods, overcome biases that inhere in traditional social scientific and humanist approaches? How can they bring about social change?

When is a queer method/intervention called for?
What interdisciplinary methodologies are employed by queer studies? In what ways is this methodological whole greater than the sum of its disciplinary parts?

How can humanities and social science scholars use scientific studies in their work?

How can humanities and social science scholars use humanist approaches in their work?

What do we gain and lose by queering established protocols versus generating new queer methods?

Is queer theory itself a method of inquiry, and if so, what kind?

How can we count the non-heterosexual and non-cisgender population? And are there ways to approximate random sampling?

What practices and protocols can we establish for constructing queer archives? And how can we index or historicize the ways queer methods change over time and across locations?

What methods and techniques can advance queer library sciences? Performance studies? Dis/ability studies? Trans* studies?

How can "big data" produce queer subjectivities, bodies, and populations?

What procedures should we employ for queer oral histories? Queer reading strategies?

How can we queer the case study approach?

What are the links between queer research methods and critical pedagogies?

How might the institutionalization of queer studies affect how we conduct queer inquiry?

How might we queer "best practices" for research?

How can we assess queer pedagogies?

What methodologies can we devise for conducting LGBTQ campus climate surveys?

Scholarly articles and inquiries should be sent to guest issue editors Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim at WSQqueermethodsissue [at] gmail.com. We will give priority consideration to submissions received by September 15, 2015. Please send complete articles, not abstracts. Submissions should not exceed 6,360 words (including un-embedded notes and works cited) and should comply with the formatting guidelines at http://www.feministpress.org/wsq/submission-guidelines.

Poetry submissions should be sent to WSQ's poetry editor at WSQpoetry [at] gmail.com by September 15, 2015. Please review previous issues of WSQ to see what type of submissions we prefer before submitting poems. Please note that poetry submissions may be held for six months or longer. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable if the poetry editor is notified immediately of acceptance elsewhere. We do not accept work that has been previously published. Please paste poetry submissions into the body of the e-mail along with all contact information.

Fiction, essay, and memoir submissions should be sent to WSQ's fiction/nonfiction editor, Asali Solomon, at WSQCreativeProse [at] gmail.com by September 15, 2015. Please review previous issues of WSQ to see what type of submissions we prefer before submitting prose. Please note that prose submissions may be held for six months or longer. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable if the prose editor is notified immediately of acceptance elsewhere. We do not accept work that has been previously published. Please provide all contact information in the body of the e-mail.
A scientist discovers ethnography (2015-04-23 09:53)

This is a [1]fascinatingly open reflection upon discovering ethnography for the first time and how it challenges one's training in the 'scientific method':

In summary, this experience has been a fascinating one – a new world for me. I have been trained as a scientist. As a scientist, I have ideas about what scientific method is, and what evidence is. I now understand the value of the qualitative approach – hard for a scientist to say. Qualitative research opens a window to descriptive data and analysis. As our markets change, understanding who constitutes our market, and how users behave is more important than ever.

The Long Game of Creativity (2015-04-23 09:59)

IFRAME: [https://player.vimeo.com/video/87448006](https://player.vimeo.com/video/87448006)

(via [Open Culture](http://www.openculture.com/2015/04/the-long-game-of-creativity.html))

1. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/87448006](https://player.vimeo.com/video/87448006)

A world without foundations: Politics, society and history in post-foundationalist thought (2015-04-23 19:06)

International Conference

A world without foundations:

Politics, society and history
in post-foundationalist thought

September 23 & 24, 2015

Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago de Chile

Keynote speakers:

Oliver Marchart (Academy of Arts Düsseldorf, Germany)

Martín Plot (CalArts, EE.UU.)

In political as well as scientific debate, not having “foundations” for the things one says or does is often considered as indicating a failure to comply with certain moral or epistemic standards, as it suggests the absence of grounds upon which one’s words and actions may be interpreted, evaluated and justified. In view of this fact, it may seem surprising that “post-” or “antifoundationalism” has become established as a label and general description for a particular strand of contemporary philosophical, political and social thought. The term designates a kind of thinking that conceives the human being, society, history, or the cosmos at large as lacking any fixed ground or telos (revealed divine precepts, universal moral and political principles dictated by reason, immutable laws of nature, etc.), a thinking that insists on the contingency, fragility, and plurality of our modes of living. Thinkers as diverse as Arendt and Foucault, Laclau and Deleuze, Agamben and Badiou—to name but a few of the most prominent—have been associated with this description.

This conference is intended to explore the very idea of anti- or post-foundational thought from an interdisciplinary perspective (including philosophy, sociology, politics, history, among others). More specifically, it seeks to discuss the various challenges that this way of thinking confronts. How can one think without solid foundations? Can such an approach be consistently carried out, i.e., can it avoid the risk of self-contradiction? Does it lead to the sterile conclusion that “anything is possible” or “anything goes”? Are the thinkers who commonly receive the label adequately understood in this way?

The conference invites proposals for presentations in English or Spanish. We welcome submissions of extended abstracts of around 500 words, or else of complete papers. They should be prepared for blind review and sent to [1]coloquio_sin_fundamentos@mail.udp.cl. The **deadline** for submissions is **June 14**. Notices of acceptance will be sent by July 6.
The conference is hosted by the Instituto de Humanidades and the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales e Historia of the Universidad Diego Portales. For additional information, please contact the organizers, Rodrigo Cordero and Wolfhart Totschnig, at the email address above.

1. mailto:coloquio_sin_fundamentos@mail.udp.cl

CfP: The Politics of Data (Science) (2015-04-24 08:00)

The Politics of Data (Science)

This special issue of Discover Society will explore the political implications of 'big data' and the systems of expertise emerging around it, including though not limited to Data Science. In doing so it will aim to bridge the gap between the methodological discourse surrounding data science and the political discourse beginning to emerge around 'big data'. Here are some of the questions the issue will address:

- How is 'big data' understood and acted upon? How should we understand its cultural power?
- How is 'big data' reconfiguring the social sciences? Do we risk all science becoming data science?
- How and why has the 'data scientist' come to be seen as the 'sexiest job of the 21st century'?
- Is the 'data scientist' just a 'Statistician who lives in Shoreditch'? Or is this a genuinely new intellectual role?
- Can 'big data' address 'big questions'? If not, is this a problem?
- What are the precursors of 'data science' within the academy and/or within corporations?
- What implications does corporate data science have for the relationship between corporations & consumers?
- What implications does national security data science have for the relationship between the state & citizens?
- Can the use of digital data lead to efficiency savings in public services? How does this relate to the politics of austerity?
- How could predictive privacy harms emerging from data analytics be addressed politically?
- Can the opacity of algorithmic processes be challenged? Or are we heading inexorably for a 'black-box society'?
- How are new forms of digital data reconfiguring activity in particular social environments?

However these are just suggestions and ideas beyond the scope of this list are very welcome.

The deadline for contributions is June 15th. Contact mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss a potential contribution.

The article will constitute the July issue of Discover Society. Most articles will be 1500 words however there are a number of special sections in the online magazine.

Front line – 1500 words
View point – 1500 words
Policy briefing – 1500-2000 words

If you would be interested in writing one of these thematic sections, please get in touch asap.
Overcoming your modernist training for constant improvement, advancement, development and accumulation (2015-04-25 08:00)

Overcoming your modernist training for constant improvement, advancement, development and accumulation. That’s what the social psychologist Kenneth Gergen advocates in the new introduction to his famous work The Saturated Self, as quoted by Harmut Rosa in Social Acceleration:

I am also struggling against my modernist training for constant improvement, development, and accumulation. Slowly I am learning the pleasures of relinquishing the desire to gain control of all that surrounds me. It is the difference between swimming with deliberation to a point in the ocean – mastering the waves to reach a goal – and floating harmoniously with the unpredictable movements of the waves.

This rather Taoist sentiment does not necessarily entail passivity, as much as an embrace of situational constraint. It’s probably easier to embrace as a life philosophy when you’re an internationally renowned tenured professor at a private liberal arts college. I think we need to recognise this privilege but it would be a mistake to dismiss what he is saying on this basis. We should take his life philosophy seriously, as well as the goods that it can lead us to:

The rewards can be substantial – the devotion of one’s intimates, happy children, professional success, the achievement of community goals, personal popularity, and so on. All are possible if one avoids looking back to locate a true and enduring self, and simply acts to fulfil potential in the moment at hand.

What Gergen articulates is one particular solution to a problem we all face: how to give shape to our lives? This has a practical dimension to it. Any plan for the future provides a framework within which present choices can be understood as moving us further towards or farther away from where we hope to get to. I think there’s a more affective dimension to this as well, albeit one which varies a lot between people for reasons that likely incorporate the social, cultural, psychological and neurophysiological. Our future plans create a structure for our present experience by constituting a sense of how the present connects to the future. It is in virtue of this that we feel our lives are ‘going somewhere’ or that we are ‘drifting’.

What Gergen’s responding to is the stress produced by the drive towards “constant improvement, development, and accumulation” when it operates under uncertain conditions. With the acceleration of social change, our experience comes to be characterised by instability, both ontologically (circumstances are unlikely to last) and epistemically (circumstances cannot be assumed to last). My plan to ‘play the game’ and climb to the top of my profession begins to seem implausible if the ‘game’ itself is seen as being in a state of flux. My plan to ‘lay down roots’ in a particular geographical area comes to seem implausible if the characteristics of that area are changing rapidly (or my ability to preserve these roots is likely to be interrupted by the demands of my a changing professional ‘game’).
He’s suggesting that it is our “modernist training for constant improvement, advancement, development and accumulation” which is the problem here. As Bauman puts it, “the site on which we build is always cluttered: the past lingers in the same ‘present’ in which the future tries to take root”. Extending the metaphor, I take Gergen to be saying that our ‘modernist training’ leads us to grasp hastily at potential futures taking root in the present, trying to steer the unfolding of events but killing these roots in the process: an activity that fails to work and makes us miserable in the process.

Either we kill potential futures by grasping too hastily or we ignore potential futures because of our fixation on our prior blueprint. Trying to control the direction of our future leaves us failing to attend to our present. Instead, Gergen advocates we should embrace the reality of our present situation, act in ways that are valuable within it and cultivate an equanimity towards the future unfolding of events.

However the social world is not so ‘liquid’ as thinkers like Bauman are prone to suggest. While radical changes does occur, it is far from the norm: our circumstances are not transformed in each successive moment. Margaret Archer suggests that instrumental rationality becomes increasingly untenable with the intensification of social change. This doesn’t mean that people abandon it, only that strategic planning in terms of means and ends becomes error-prone to the degree that each is prone to change. The point can sound trivial in the abstract but when you consider the number of contingencies built into any ‘life plan’ that has been elaborated with any degree of detail, it starts to seem much more significant. The point is not that planning is becoming impossible but rather that it is becoming unreliable.

We might respond to this by building contingencies into our life plans and returning to them with much greater frequency. These changing circumstances therefore encourage an intensification of reflexivity, an expansion of life tactics to ensure the endurance of our life strategy. This will work most effectively when our ends remain stable (e.g. becoming established & recognised within a given profession that remains securely existent) and only the means are

IFRAME: [1]http://www.youtube.com/embed/b54EEpdv9q8?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent
subject to change (e.g. changing expectations attached to this professional role, changing practical activity necessary to establish oneself within the field).

An alternative strategy is to temporise, reducing the window of time within which we seek to enact a plan in order to preserve the efficacy of our planning, as can be seen in the example of Spotify's 31 year old CEO:

Ek describes himself as “missionary,” by which he means he likes to formulate five-year missions for himself. “That’s how I think about life,” he said. “Five years is long enough for me to achieve something meaningful but short enough so I can change my mind every few years. I’m on my second five-year commitment on Spotify. In two years, I will have to make my next one. I will need to ask myself if I still enjoy what I’m doing. I’m kind of unusual that way, but it gives me clarity and purpose.”


Without a window of five years, it becomes possible to "achieve something meaningful". Ek might well have accomplished something similar if muddling through situationally in the way advocated by Gergen. But this would be a collection of actions rather than a project: it would be something we look back and realise we've done rather than a growing awareness of succeeding in something we'd sought to accomplish. However if advocates of the acceleration thesis are to be believed, it is likely the window within which instrumental rationality could be operative in a subjectively satisfying way will continue to decrease: the practicality of ‘five years’ as a unit of time for Ek cannot be assumed to be sustainable.

It's against this background that we can see how planning can come to take on a fetishistic character. We look to our plans to secure us against contingency, providing us with a sense of security and direction in a world that makes the achievement of either into a precarious accomplishment. We look to 'escape the mess of life', as Ian Craib puts it, fantasising about a life in which plans unfold smoothly and taking the inevitable failures we experience in reality as invitations to plan further and plan better. It's in view of this that Gergen's suggestion comes to seem distinctly therapeutic, representing a regime of equanimity through which we seek to stop worrying about the future and start living in the present.

However when does equanimity become drift? When does acceptance become passivity? The instrumentally rational life plan operates at the level of biography as a whole and increasingly fails for this reason. The 'five-years missions' of Ek enact this strategy over a shorter span of time, ensuring the same motivational pay-off while building in uncertainty in a way that makes the missions into plausible undertakings. Gergen's presentism embraces living well under current circumstances and accepting our inability to dictate the direction of their change. The problem with this is that much of what matters to us extends beyond our present situation. There's a dimension to human experience, in which we recognise ourselves as having become the person we are now at this moment through a process that goes back far into the past and extends forward through the entirety of our life. Gergen's account confuses the capacity to control our biography with the reality of that biography itself. His person risks idling away their life in a diverting and enjoyable way only to wonder in old age about all the things they could have done with their life if only they had looked beyond the confines of their circumstances.

So how can we shape our lives while avoiding the sisyphean business of life plans? By finding meaningful projects and cultivating the mindfulness necessary to attend to them maximally. Any project pursued in such a way is liable to change because neither self and circumstances are static. But our projects and the concerns in virtue of which they are meaningful to us constitute a thread through which purpose is enacted at the biographical level, linking the many situations within which we find ourselves over time through our projects and the meaning they hold for us.
The drip-by-drip erosion of our liberties in an age of austerity (2015-04-26 08:00)

Towards the end of her memoir/manifesto, the Green Party MP Caroline Lucas offers an articulate warning about the "drip-by-drip erosion of our liberties":

There is little risk of anyone seizing power, declaring martial law or suspending the constitution in Britain; instead through a hundred lesser acts, the state takes more and more power to itself, and our protections becomes steadily weakened. We are comforted by being told that these are a response to an extraordinary situation; but we have seen time and time again that powers given supposedly to fight terrorism are used by the police for far less significant threats, such as checking up on whether people have claimed the right benefits or tax rebates, or even spying on protesters or campaigners.


I've always found the tendency of some on the left to invoke the spectre of a 'police state' to be worrying and irritating in equal measure. Even in its most sober versions, it tends towards a ridiculous degree of overstatement that is offensive to those who have actually lived under such conditions. It also contributes to an atmosphere within which conspiracy theories can thrive on the left, not least of all the appearance of 9/11 trutherism in the UK.

However the risk is that this position can too easily give rise to the dismissal of the underlying concerns. The reality is much more mundane. In a [1]New Statesman essay last year, David Runciman made a convincing case that we are witnessing a trajectory towards long-term decline in British politics of the sort in which "nothing gets sufficiently broken for anything to get finally fixed". He compares our present circumstances to the intensity of the political crisis in the 1970s:

The first is that there existed a surprisingly widespread belief during the mid-1970s that, were the muddle to continue, it might need to be ended by force, with a military takeover. A coup was not outside the realms of political possibility (and we now know that rogue forces within the secret services made cack-handed attempts to organise one, with either the Duke of Edinburgh or Lord Mountbatten as the preferred strongman to replace Wilson).

The particular focus of these fears was rising inflation. It was a common assumption at the time that no democracy could survive a sustained bout of inflation above 30 per cent - and in Britain the rate hit 25 per cent in 1975. It was commonplace to invoke the baleful example of Latin America, where the global economic crisis of the mid-1970s led to the collapse of a number of democratic regimes. The economist Milton Friedman suggested in 1974 that the failure to control inflation had been responsible both for Heath’s replacement by Wilson in Britain and for Allende's replacement by Pinochet in Chile. It
cost one man his job; the other his life. The barely veiled sense of threat was apparent.

Today the talk of democracy-destroying inflation has more or less disappeared. Yes, we face a mix of rising prices and stagnant or falling wages – the “cost-of-living crisis”, as the Labour Party likes to call it – that has some echoes of 1970s stagflation. But the scale is very different. Ours is a slow-burning, incremental squeeze on living standards, not the threat of an inflationary rip tide sweeping away savings and security. In large part because of the fears generated in the 1970s, we now have economic technicians in charge of an independent central bank whose job is to ensure that inflation remains more or less under control. Likewise, the idea that the current crisis might result in a military coup seems laughably remote. We worry – or at least some of us do – that the military-security complex is squeezing what is left of our privacy by spying on our communications. We don’t, however, worry that the security services are secretly plotting to install a member of the royal family as an unelected head of the government.

What we’re seeing is not the emergence of a ‘police state’ but rather the drip-by-drip erosion of liberties in conjunction with a growing inability of any political agency to reverse the trend. The issue doesn’t capture the attention of a distracted public, the political socialisation of MPs mitigates against concerning themselves with such matters and the time horizons of party-politics incentivise headline grabbing announcements concerned with the performance of virtue rather than the practicality of policy.

Such a gradual trend that results from so many disparate causes resists easy theorisation. But if the politics of austerity are here to stay, we should all be concerned by the shrinking sphere of civil liberties. The notion of ‘extremist’, one who has been subject to ‘radicalisation’ and now promulgates ‘extremism’, increasingly dominates government rhetoric and it’s a terrifyingly elastic notion. These are two aspects of the recent bill which particularly concern me:

- Creating an obligation to monitor and report extremism – Colleges, schools, prisons, GPs and councils will now have a legal duty to prevent people being drawn into terrorism. Schools, nurseries even GPs will be required to monitor those they provide services to and report anyone they believe is at risk of, or has in fact been drawn in to terrorism. Universities will have to draw up policies on extremist campus speakers, and prisons will be required to have policies for dealing with radicals. The Home Office will be able to get court orders obliging bodies to comply with their obligations.
- ”De-Radicalisation” Panels – The Bill creates a legal duty that will require local authorities to establish a panel to refer people identified as being at risk of ‘being drawn into terrorism’. The composition of that panel is set out in the Bill, and its purpose is to draw up a “de-radicalisation” plan for the person identified as being at risk. The Bill makes no provision for the person identified to have legal or other representation, or in the case of a child, to have a parent present.


But what I find so disturbing is that this legislation seems as much to do with Theresa May positioning herself as Iron Lady 2.0 in order to compete for the leadership of the Conservative Party as it does with any reflective desire to solve a social problem, as much as I might disagree with either the interpretation of the problem or the proposed solutions.

If ‘extremism’ entails ‘opposition to British values’ and those values include ‘free markets’, it’s not unlikely we’ll see some of these new powers brought to bear upon anti-cuts protesters. These will be situational application of new powers rather than a considered attempt to suppress dissent. But the effect will be that possible agencies of change outside parliament will come to be muted in much the same way as those within it. Thus reinforcing our long post-democratic drift into a state of perpetual crisis in which “nothing gets sufficiently broken for anything to get finally fixed”.

The Social Ontology of Digital Data & Digital Technology, July 8th in London (2015-04-27 08:00)

This innovative conference brings together leading figures from a variety of fields which address issues of digital technology and digital data. We’ve invited speakers with a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds who engage with questions relating to digital data and digital technology in their work. Our suggestion is that social ontology, however this might be construed, represents a potential common ground that could cut across this still rather siloed domain of inquiry into the social dimensions of digital technology.

The conference aims to explore this possibility by assembling a diverse range of perspectives and drawing them into a dialogue about a common question, without assuming a shared understanding of the topic at hand. Our aim is to extend this digitally via twitter, podcast and blog beyond the event itself, in order to facilitate an extended conversation that will draw more people into its remit as it circulates after the conference itself.

To this end, we invite each speaker to address this theme (the social ontology of digital data & digital technology) in whatever way they choose. Each speaker will have 30 mins to talk and 15 mins for questions. We’ll have an accomplished audio editor on hand to record each talk as a podcast. These will be released on [1]www.socialontology.org and will be circulated on social media in order to try and stimulate a continuing debate around the issues raised at the conference. The hashtag for the day will be #socialontology.

Confirmed Speakers:

- Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) – Does Digital Sociology have a Problem?
- Jochen Runde (Cambridge) – Non-materiality and the Ontology of Digital Objects
- Alistair Mutch (NTU) – title TBC
- Susan Halford (Southampton) – title TBC
- Nick Couldry (LSE) – title TBC
- Another speaker TBC
Workshop: Investigating the Internal Conversation (2015-04-27 14:37)

I'm organising this workshop at Warwick in June for anyone using Margaret Archer's work on reflexivity in empirical research. She'll be there all day & will discuss the development of this work as well as answering questions about it. There will also be a few speakers (including myself, talking about my PhD, which I so rarely do) who have used these ideas in empirical studies. If you know anyone studying reflexivity in this way then please do let them know about the workshop:

Investigating the Internal Conversation
June 2nd at the University of Warwick

The Centre for Social Ontology invites applications for this practical workshop aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The 'internal conversation' was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society's objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

This workshop intends to support those who are currently undertaking or in the process of planning empirical research investigating the internal conversation. The day will begin with an introductory lecture by Margaret Archer in which she will discuss the development of her work on reflexivity, ranging from the initial formulation in Being Human through to her recent work with Pierpaolo Donati on relational reflexivity. Then [1]Mark Carrigan (Warwick), [2]Monder Ram (Birmingham) and [3]Balihar Sanghera (Kent) will each give a shorter talk about their experience of investigating reflexivity through empirical research. The rest of the day will address the methodological and theoretical questions often encountered when studying reflexivity e.g. how to identify the modes of reflexivity of research subjects.

The workshop is free but registration is essential. If you would like to participate then please e-mail socialontology@warwick.ac.uk with a brief description of your project. We're keen to adapt the content as much as possible to meet the needs of participants. If there are particular issues you would like us to address then please suggest these in your initial e-mail.
Call for papers: Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference (2015-04-28 08:00)

Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference
June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology. This could include but is by no means limited to:

- The relationship between tacit assumptions concerning social ontology and reflective theoretical positions
- Social ontology and the formulation of research questions
- Social ontology as a topic standing at the interface between the social sciences and philosophy
- The methodological implications of social ontology
- The ontological assumptions implied by research methods
- The social ontology of particular areas of inquiry e.g. social movements or digital technology
- Disciplinary differences in approaches to social ontology
- Social ontology and philosophical under-labouring
- The limits of social ontology and where under-labouring has to stop
- New directions in sociological research through questions of social ontology

The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.

Please send abstracts of 200 words or less and a short biographical note to [1]socialontology@warwick.ac.uk by May 1st

Registration will be free and a limited number of small travel bursaries will be available to support attendance at the conference.
(Re)situating Queer Theory on the Critical Left (2015-04-28 14:30)

(Re)situating Queer Theory on the Critical Left
A Morning Seminar at Warwick University, 10.30am – 1pm, Friday 22 May 2015
Ramphal Building, Room R0.3-4

This seminar aims to explore and debate two influential recent attempts to (re)situate queer theory within the broader field of critical social and cultural theory on the Left, with a particular but not exclusive focus on the relevance of this discussion within French Studies:

This exploratory seminar is intended principally for early-career academics and post-graduate researchers in French Studies, Sociology, Gender Studies, Queer Studies, Women’s Studies and related areas but all are welcome. Participants are invited to offer a 5-10 minute paper, which could explore an aspect of either or both texts, in isolation or in relation to the speaker’s own work.

Participants are asked to signal their desire to take part to Oliver Davis (O.Davis@warwick.ac.uk) by 1 May 2015 and also to indicate whether or not they would like to deliver a short paper. Selected participants will be invited to develop their paper into a submission for the edited volume arising out of the AHRC-funded research project to which this workshop is attached, Queer Theory in France. Participants who have already confirmed their attendance at this seminar include Oliver Davis (French Studies, Warwick), Alex Dymock (Law, Criminology and Sociology, Royal Holloway), Elliot Evans (French, KCL), Hector Kollias (French, KCL), Kayte Stokoe (French Studies, Warwick), Matthew Waites (Sociology, Glasgow) and Emma Campbell (French Studies, Warwick).

The seminar will take place in Room R0.3-4, Ramphal Building (Main Campus). Room R0.03-4 is an accessible room on the Ground Floor of the Ramphal Building on the main campus of Warwick University. Travel directions to the campus may be found here: [1] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting For a map of the campus (the Ramphal Building is number 53, square D4) please see here: [2] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/

Please contact Oliver Davis with any questions (O.Davis@warwick.ac.uk)

Queer/Coercion
An Afternoon Critical Sexology in the Midlands Public Research Seminar, 2 – 5pm, Friday 22 May 2015
Warwick University, Ramphal Building, Room R0.03-4

Queer thought and activism may be defined by their vigilance to the varieties of violence with which norms coercively constitute gendered sexual subjects. At a moment when, in numerous national contexts, the work of sexual and gender policing is increasingly abetted by manifestations of organized state violence against dissidents – so extreme in some cases, as in Uganda, as to suggest the idea of genocide – this afternoon seminar will explore the topic of coercion in a global perspective and across the related fields of queer, feminist, and masculinity.
studies. Concretely, the event will focus on legal responses to the phenomenon of 'revenge pornography', on the representation in pop music videos of violence against men and on the scope and value of the concept of genocide for global queer politics resisting coercion in the particular context of Uganda. Questions to be explored include the following:

How does contemporary queer thought envisage and resist coercion?
How can we conceptualise feminist responses to 'revenge pornography'?
How to account for the remobilisation of recognisably queer representational codes and strategies (e.g. camp) in mainstream music videos depicting violence against men?
To what extent is genocide a useful concept for global queer politics today?
How and why do queer, feminist, and masculinity studies differ in their apprehension of the coercive force of the law?

Speakers and paper titles:
Alex Dymock (Law, Criminology and Sociology, Royal Holloway), ‘Eroticising retribution?: criminalising “revenge pornography”
Marc Lafrance (Sociology, Concordia), ‘The Dark Side of Camp: Violence Against Men in Popular Music Videos Made by Women’
Matthew Waites (Sociology, Glasgow), ‘Queering Genocide'

Respondents: Oliver Davis (French Studies, Warwick) and Kayte Stokoe (French Studies, Warwick).

For further information about Queer/Coercion, including full paper abstracts and speaker biographies, please visit:

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/maps/campusmap/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/research/french/current projects/queertheory/workshops/resituatingqueertheory/queercoercion/

An introduction to Design Fiction for Sociologists, May 13th at Goldsmiths (2015-04-29 08:00)

Design fiction is a term [1]first coined by Julian Bleecker and [2]popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change." and that it "attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different."

Design fiction isn’t science fiction, it’s not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

In this event Tim Maughan introduces design fiction for sociologists. He discusses the work he is undertaking with Sava Saheli Singh (New York University) and its possible implications for how we write about research.
Keith Kahn-Harris will discuss his new project which looks at how kinds of mainstream texts other than science fiction also generate ‘social science fictions’, often ‘accidently’ as a result of the pragmatic requirements of generating workable plots and scenarios. Such texts can help force attention to a neglected sociological question: what are the limits of possibility in human society?

Sarah Burton will also speak on a topic to be finalised.

Les Back and Mark Carrigan will each offer a short response before the event is opened up for a general discussion.

2. http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2013/10/play/patently-untrue

The dead zones of the imagination in higher education (2015-04-29 10:00)

In his recent book on bureaucracy, David Graeber often turns to higher education to furnish examples of the broader tendency he describes. I thought this was a particularly vivid passage worth reproducing:

The explosion of paperwork, in turn, is a direct result of the introduction of corporate management techniques, which are always justified as ways of increasing efficiency, by introducing competition at every level. What these management techniques invariably end up meaning in practice is that everyone winds up spending most of their time trying to sell each other things: grant proposals; book proposals; assessments of our students’ job and grant applications; assessments of our colleagues; prospectuses for new interdisciplinary majors, institutes, conference workshops, and universities themselves, which have now become brands to be marketed to prospective students or contributors. Marketing and PR thus come to engulf every aspect of university life.

The result is a sea of documents about the fostering of “imagination” and “creativity,” set in an environment that might as well have been designed to strangle any actual manifestations of imagination and creativity in the cradle. I am not a scientist. I work in social theory. But I have seen the results in my own field of endeavour. No major new works of social theory have emerged in the United States in the last thirty years. We have, instead, been largely reduced to the equivalent of Medieval scholastics, scribbling endless annotations on French theory from the 1970s, despite the guilty awareness that if contemporary incarnations of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, or even Pierre Bourdieu were to appear in the U.S. academy, they would be unlikely to even make it through grad school, and if they somehow did make it, they would almost certainly be denied tenure.

The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy pg 134
His claim is an empirical one: ever greater tracts of time are consumed by activities other than scholarship. This in turn has obvious implications for scholarship. Dead zones of the imagination can increasingly be found in our universities.

kerrysmallman (2015-04-30 14:06:32)

My husband resigned from a readership at Edinburgh university in the year 2000, when the paperwork became so immense that teaching and research became impossible. I can’t help but think that this is a key factor in the lack of imagination in new research. The REF or RAE is probably the single biggest cause of the decline in originality, however. The big name journals simply do not allow for research which is truly paradigm-breaking. The constant need for funding also means that the research which gets done is the type which serves a purpose for corporations or governments. Research into esoteric or controversial subjects get sidelined in favour of working within the capitalist/bureaucratic orthodoxy.

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life (deadline May 1st! All 5 keynotes now confirmed) (2015-04-30 08:00)

Call for papers: Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement and quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life (i.e., in many disciplines the new maxim ‘patent and prosper’ (Schachman) supplements the traditional ‘publish or perish’). Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays (i.e., the shifting parameters and patterns of academic subjectivity). Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This conference will inquire into the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

The workshop will take place from December 2nd to 4th 2015 in Prague.

Deadline for abstracts will be May 1st 2015. Please send 250 words and short biographical note to Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and Filip Vostal (filip.vostal@gmail.com) by the deadline.

**Keynote Speakers:**

Roger Burrows – Ancient cultures of conceit reloaded

Philip Moriarty – The perils, pitfalls, and power of peer review in public

Susan Robertson – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

James Wilsdon – In numbers we trust? Reflections on the UK’s independent review of the role of metrics in research assessment

Oili-Helena Ylijoki – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

**Fee**

50 Euros (standard) / 25 Euros (PhD/ECR)

Registration to open in summer 2015

**Venue**

Hosted by Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences the event will take place in Vila Lanna, V Sadech 1, 160 00, Prague 6, Czech Republic ([1]http://www.vila-lanna.cz/index.html)

**Travel**

Air: From Vaclav Havel Airport Prague take the bus no 119 to Dejvicka (which is the terminal stop). Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

Train: From Main Railway Station (Praha hlavni nadrazi, often abbreviated Praha hl. n.), take metro line C (red), change at Muzeum for line A (green) and get off at the terminal stop Dejvicka. Vila Lanna is 5-6min walk from there.

The Politics of Data (Science)

This special issue of Discover Society will explore the political implications of 'big data' and the systems of expertise emerging around it, including though not limited to Data Science. In doing so it will aim to bridge the gap between the methodological discourse surrounding data science and the political discourse beginning to emerge around 'big data'. Here are some of the questions the issue will address:

- How is 'big data' understood and acted upon? How should we understand its cultural power?
- How is 'big data' reconfiguring the social sciences? Do we risk all science becoming data science?
- How and why has the 'data scientist' come to be seen as the 'sexiest job of the 21st century'?
- Is the 'data scientist' just a 'Statistician who lives in Shoreditch'? Or is this a genuinely new intellectual role?
- Can 'big data' address 'big questions'? If not, is this a problem?
- What are the precursors of 'data science' within the academy and/or within corporations?
- What implications does corporate data science have for the relationship between corporations & consumers?
- What implications does national security data science have for the relationship between the state & citizens?
- Can the use of digital data lead to efficiency savings in public services? How does this relate to the politics of austerity?
- How could predictive privacy harms emerging from data analytics be addressed politically?
- Can the opacity of algorithmic processes be challenged? Or are we heading inexorably for a 'black-box society'?
- How are new forms of digital data reconfiguring activity in particular social environments?

However these are just suggestions and ideas beyond the scope of this list are very welcome.

The deadline for contributions is June 15th. Contact mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss a potential contribution.

The article will constitute the July issue of Discover Society. Most articles will be 1500 words however there are a number of special sections in the online magazine.

Front line – 1500 words
View point – 1500 words
Policy briefing – 1500-2000 words

If you would be interested in writing one of these thematic sections, please get in touch asap.

The issue will follow the usual formatting guidelines of Discover Society. Please consult the [1]notes for contributors.


3rd British Sociological Association Early Career Theorists Symposium
Friday May 292015
3446
Professor Stuart Hall Building room 326, Goldsmiths College

Organised by Francisco Calafate-Fario (Goldsmiths) and Silvia Pasquetti (Cambridge)
Supported by Goldsmiths’ Department of Sociology

Attendance is free but places are limited. Please email Francisco: f.calafate@gold.ac.uk or Silvia sp638@cam.ac.uk to book a place

12.00 Arrival and registration (coffee and light snacks provided)

12.30 Differences and Indifferences: Emergent Conceptualisations of Inequality. Discussant: Steph Lawler (York)
12.40 – 12.50 Jon Dean (Sheffield Hallam): The Illegitimacy of Informal Volunteering
12.50 – 13.00 Barbara Neukirchinger (Bangor) Critical Theory: Poststructuralism and the Intersection of Gender and Disability
13.00 – 13.20 Steph Lawler’s response
13.20 – 13.45 Discussion

13.45-14.00 coffee break

14.00 Spatio-temporalities of Political Subjectivity and Belonging. Discussant: Manali Desai (Cambridge)
14.00 – 14.10 Miranda Iossifidis (Goldsmiths): The Spatio-temporality of Polytechnico Remembrance: Indirect Embodied Resistance, Storytelling, and Tradition
14.10 – 14.20 Sam Burgum (Warwick): Occupying London: Post-Politics or Politics Proper?
14.30 – 14.50 Manali Desai’s response
14.50 – 15.15 Discussion

15.15 – 15.45 coffee break

15.45 Senses and Affect in Public Encounters. Discussant: Les Back (Goldsmiths)
15.55 – 16.05 Lambros Fatsis (Sussex): Becoming Public Characters, not Public Intellectuals: Notes Towards an Alternative Model for a Sociology of Intellectuals
16.05 – 16.15 Simone Varriale (Warwick): Beyond Distinction: Theorising Cultural Evaluation as a Social Encounter
16.15 – 16.35 Les Back’s response
16.35 – 17.00 Discussion

17.00 - 18.00 After panel with Hannah Jones (Warwick), Dariusz Gafijczuk (Newcastle), and Raphael Schlembach (Sussex)

18.15 Drinks and dinner at Natura Café, Goldsmiths
#FreshersToFinals: Understanding LGBT people's perspectives on higher education (2015-04-30 14:41)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans* (LGBT) young people are increasingly visible in policy and practice, often in relation to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. However, this can result in misunderstandings and/or over-simplification about all LGBT students' needs and experiences. The #FreshersToFinals project is being undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and seeks to develop a fuller understanding of LGBT experiences of higher education.

The project will culminate in two free events - booking is now open! Further details at the links below:

Manchester July 17th http://lgbtqatuniversity.eventbrite.com
Sheffield July 24th http://lgbtq-universities.eventbrite.com

The events are designed to feedback on the #FreshersToFinals project, and explore the implications for practice.

For more details about the project see http://research.shu.ac.uk/ceir/fresherstofinals.html

The next five years of sociologicalimagination.org? (2015-04-30 14:55)

The fact we've just moved to a new server, it's almost five years since we started the site and an impending deadline have left me contemplating future plans for SI. I recently closed my personal blog in order to focus on SI and I'd like to expand what we're doing over the coming years. Here are some ideas:

- [1]Opening up @soc_`imagination as a platform for public engagement
- Incorporating the [2]Alternative History of Sociology into SI
- Finding a new theme for the site & generally improving how it looks
- Experimenting with eBook publishing, particularly tied to interesting events
- More generally hosting interesting examples of sociological communication.
- Finding some additional regular bloggers whose interests match those of the site.
- Launching more calls for guest posts focused on our core themes.
• Possibly a shop... I've had a couple of ideas for SI themed t-shirts which I think are quite good. Less certain about this than the other suggestions though.

• Finding another editor to join myself, Milena and Sadia.

Any other ideas are very welcome! Now I've got that down on paper, I should return to the chapter that has to be submitted in 9 hours.


6.5 May

What will micro-publishing look like in higher education? (2015-05-01 08:00)

A few weeks ago I was browsing a photography bookshop in London and came across the term ‘micro-publisher’ for the first time. The friend I was with seemed slightly bemused that I hadn’t encountered the term and explained that it just meant small publishers with tiny print runs. Here's how Wikipedia defines micro-publishing:

• The book publishing industry sometimes uses this term in discussing publishing companies below a certain revenue level.

• It is also used to describe the use of efficient [1]publishing and [2]distribution techniques to publish a work intended for a specific [3]micromarket. Typically, these works are not considered by larger publishers because of their low [4]economy of scale and [5]mass appeal and the difficulties that would arise in their [6]marketing.


The two meanings seem obviously connected to me, in so far as that the former will be the likely state of companies who only engage in the latter. In fact, as the Wikipedia articles goes on to make clear, it's only with the growth of Print on Demand that the niche markets to which micro-publishers cater became financially feasible because of a radical reduction in the upfront investment that was necessary. This trend intensified with the emergence of online publishing in general and eReaders in particular. As the Wikipedia articles continues:
Before the emergence of the internet, micropublishing was considered a "microtrend" that would not play much of a role in the publishing world, because costs per copy were too high. The internet has changed this by providing authors and micropublishers with an affordable medium through which to publish and distribute their works.\footnote{citation needed}

The Internet is also evolving how the works from traditional publishing, self-publishing and micro-publishing are distributed. The long imagined dream of digital distribution for published works is quickly becoming a reality. For micro-publications, digital distribution may enable greater numbers of authors and potential authors to enter the publishing industry to access readers who prefer to receive and/or consume content in digital form.

Digital micropublishing sites like Scribd and Docstoc enable micro-publishers to easily distribute their digital works using intellectual property licenses. Licensing micro-publications simplifies protecting and tracking those works which are distributed digitally, an approached used for many years by software producers, and in the last decade by MP3 music distributors.

Micro-publishers and authors who use intellectual property licensing sites are not limited to a specific medium (like eReaders) to distribute their works. This flexibility may allow micropublishing to significantly expand readership while protecting copyrights.

\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Micropublishing}

The Subcompact Publishing manifesto thinks through the potential implications of this for the nature of the magazine. To produce a digital edition of a print publication leaves a publisher under a very particular set of constraints:

A generalized print magazine may be composed of the following qualities:

- Each issue contains a dozen or more articles.
- Issues operate on a monthly cycle.
- All articles are bundled and shipped at the same time.

Almost all of these qualities are the result of responses to distribution and production constraints. Printing and binding takes a certain amount of time. Shipping the issues takes another chunk of time. In order to find a balance between timeliness of content and shelf-life, a month makes a pretty sensible — if brisk — publishing schedule.

Old into new

So why do so many of our digital magazines publish on the same schedule, with the same number of articles as their print counterparts? Using the same covers? Of course, they do because it’s easier to
maintain identical schedules across mediums. To not design twice. To not test twice (or, at all).

Unfortunately — from a medium-specific user experience point of view — it’s almost impossible to produce a digitally indigenous magazine beholden to those legacy constraints. Why? Not least because we use tablets and smartphones very differently than we use printed publications.

One of the great benefits of being part of the emergent publishing world is that you don’t have multiple mediums to publish across. You can and probably should focus squarely on digital. Perhaps later — contingent on market demand and content quality — you can consider publishing a print anthology to give your publication a stronger literal edge.


The author then outlines how ‘Subcompact Publishing’ can take advantage of freedom from these legacy constraints:

Subcompact Publishing tools are first and foremost straightforward.

They require few to no instructions.

They are easily understood on first blush.

The editorial and design decisions around them react to digital as a distribution and consumption space.

They are the result of dumping our publishing related technology on a table and asking ourselves — what are the core tools we can build with all this stuff?

They are, as it were, little N360 s.

I propose Subcompact Publishing tools and editorial ethos begin (but not end) with the following qualities:

• Small issue sizes (3-7 articles / issue)
• Small file sizes
• Digital-aware subscription prices
• Fluid publishing schedule
• Scroll (don’t paginate)
• Clear navigation
• HTML (ish) based
• Touching the open web


To my surprise, the author suggests that Apple’s Newstand is actually a grossly under-appreciated tool to this end.
The argument seems convincing:


Newsstand is perhaps the most underutilized, under-imagined distribution tool in the short history of tablet publishing. If you squint your eyes and tilt your head at just the right angle, you’ll notice something magical about Newsstand: given the proper container, it’s a background downloading, offline-friendly, cached RSS machine people can subscribe to. For money.


What I find interesting is how much of the innovation in this field has been driven by the facilitation of micro-publishing by others:

The Magazine is no longer alone as an enterprising app-magazine. It has been joined on the Newsstand by a host of publications put out by [24]29th Street Publishing, which acts as a publisher and marketer for indie editors and writers, and now a clutch of other startups have entered the fray, each toting cheap or free tools that help regular schmoes produce and sell beautiful cross-platform publications. The options available to independent publishers have never been better, but it’s also likely that this space is going to get saturated quickly. Below is a rundown of the new companies that offer digital publishing products.


Here are some of the tools listed in this article:

1. [26]Readymag
2. [27]Periodical
3. [28]Blookist
4. [29]Glossi
5. [30]TypeEngine
6. [31]Packagr

What does all this mean for scholarly publishing? Three initial thoughts occur to me. Firstly, it’s clearer to me than ever why I’m ambivalent about the growth of new journals facilitated by [32]Open Journal Systems. If the journal is freed from the complexity of sales & licensing then why so enthusiastically reproduce the form of long established non-OA journals? Secondly, these tools could offer new opportunities for dissemination by large research projects, publishing accessible material on an ongoing basis rather than restricting dissemination to the end of the project. Thirdly, it potentially becomes feasible to run public engagement projects on an ongoing basis without being completely reliant on grant funding and/or endless unpaid labour.
The surprisingly vitriolic misogyny of James Bond (2015-05-02 08:00)

I recently started reading the Ian Fleming novels for the first time. While I expected some unpleasant sentiments in them, I've been surprised by quite how vitriolic Bond’s misogyny is:

And then there was this pest of a girl. He sighed. Women were for recreation. On a job, they got in the way and fogged things up with sex and hurt feelings and all the emotional baggage they carried around. One had to look out for them and take care of them.
'Bitch,' said Bond, and then remembering the Muntes, he said 'bitch' again more loudly and walked out of the room.

Casino Royale, Pg 32

This was just what he had been afraid of. These blithering women who thought they could do a man's work. Why the hell couldn't they stay at home and mind their pots and pans and stick to their frocks and gossip and leave men's work to the men. And now for this to happen to him, just when the job had come off so beautifully. For vesper to fall for an old trick like that and get herself snatched and probably held to ranson like some bloody heroine in a strip cartoon. The silly bitch. [...] 

The idea was a straight swap. The girl against his cheque for forty million. Well, he wouldn't play; wouldn't think of playing. She was in the Service and knew what she was up against. He wouldn't even ask M. This job was more important than her. It was just too bad. She was a fine girl, but he wasn't going to fall for this childish trick. No dice. He would try and catch the Citroen and shoot it out with them and if she got shot in the process, that was too bad. He would have done his stuff - tried to rescue her before they got her off to some hideout – but if he didn't catch up with them he would get back to his hotel and go to sleep and say no more about it. The next morning he would ask Mathis what had happened to her and show him the note. If Le Chiffre put the touch on Bond for the money in exchange for the girl, Bond would do nothing and tell no one. The girl would just have to take it. If the commissionaire came along with the story of what he had seen, Bond would bluff it out by saying he had had a drunken row with the girl.

Casino Royale Pg. 116-117

Through the red mist of pain, Bond thought of Vesper. He could imagine how she was being used by the two gunmen. They would be making the most of her before she was sent for by Le Chiffre. He thought of the fat wet lips of the Corsican and the slow cruelty of the thin man. Poor wretch to have been dragged into this. Poor little beast.

Casino Royale, Pg 137

laimgr (2016-01-19 12:34:53)

It’s interesting - I always thought the films put a gloss on the novels in this respect. they were sexist but not anywhere near as misogynistic as the books. However, the misogyny has definitely surfaced in the Daniel Craig films. Skyfall was appalling in this respect.

Call for papers: The Great Outdoors? (2015-05-02 08:32)

Call for Papers
THE GREAT OUTDOORS? CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IN NATURAL AND RURAL SPACES

9th and 10th September 2015
Centre for Children & Youth, and Institute of Health & Wellbeing
University of Northampton

Organising committee:

John Horton, Faith Tucker, Michelle Pyer

Keynote speaker:

Professor Owain Jones (Bath Spa University)

Themes:

This conference marks 15 years since the publication of Matthews et al.'s (2000) 'Growing up in the countryside: children and the rural idyll'. This anniversary represents a timely moment for reflection on the state of research into children, young people and families in, and in relation to, 'rural' and 'natural' spaces. We suggest that this anniversary should prompt consideration of the complex ways in which rural and natural spaces have changed over last two decades, recognising the multiple, shifting ruralities and natures which constitute the everyday lives of children, young people and families in diverse international contexts. We also call for continued critical reflection upon the categories of 'natural' and 'rural' which are perhaps too-often conflated, sentimentalised and idealised in relation to childhood, youth and families.

In a context of growing policy/practitioner concern about the value of outdoor, natural and rural spaces (e.g. for education, play, health and well-being) and on-going conceptual/critical reflections upon ideas/norms about nature and countryside (e.g. via wonderfully rich theorisations of landscape, materiality, vitalities, human-nonhuman interactions, emotions/affects), we invite papers which focus on children, young people and families in relation to the following topics:

Managing natural and/or rural environments for children, young people and families;
Play and learning in natural and/or outdoor spaces;
Rural change and livelihoods in the Global South;
Health and wellbeing in natural and/or outdoor spaces;
Friendships, relationships and belonging in rural and/or natural environments;
Innovative concepts and research methods for exploring rural and/or natural spaces;
Community social norms and surveillance in rural and/or natural areas;
Participation, activism and citizenship in natural and/or outdoor spaces;
Concepts of rural idyll, nature deficit disorder and the great outdoors;
Changing contexts of policy and service provision for rural spaces;
Rural mobilities, economies and housing

Abstracts (c.200 words) should be emailed to: faith.tucker@northampton.ac.uk by 15th June 2015.

Further information:

Location: The conference will be held at Sunley Conference Centre, University of Northampton.
Conference registration: standard fee £160, postgraduate students £90. Fee includes lunch on both days and conference dinner on 9th September. Accommodation can be booked at Sunley Conference Centre (http://www.sunley-northampton.co.uk/index.php). Please note that there is an additional charge for accommodation.

Twitter: @CCYNorthampton #ccyevent
Email: faith.tucker@northampton.ac.uk


For those unfamiliar with it, Microtasking could be the future of work. As well as digitised tasks that can literally be minutes long (see [1]Amazon Mechanical Turk) companies like [2]TaskRabbit unbundle what might have previously been temporary jobs and allow those who would not or could not hire a full time assistant to occasionally hire people to perform assistant like tasks. This is how TaskRabbit works:

Doesn’t it look nice? Well, no, not really. The chronopolitics of it are extremely interesting (i.e. using wealth to free up your time by hiring those who need to sell theirs) and the potential long term trajectory is extremely worrying: see [4]Zero Hours for an example of where this might lead. If you’re interested in finding out more, the Matter online magazine are running a series of reflections called the on-demand diaries. Here are links to the first two and there are apparently more to come:

[6] I Was A TaskRabbit Butler

3. https://www.youtube.com/embed/WzcCxGvvShI
4. https://medium.com/@timmaughan/zero-hours-f68f17e8c12a
6. https://medium.com/matter/the-on-demand-diaries-i-was-a-taskrabbit-butler-2f8f9c5d319a
A new campaign for accessible conferences fees (2015-05-03 07:51)

Do you think conference fees are too high? Lots of people do (including the [1]editor of this site). Sign a [2]petition here to show your support. You can find out more about the campaign and the issues it’s addressing [3]here:

And yet, our universities and our academic events (including conferences) keep ignoring this reality. It’s time for conference organizers and, more generally, our departments and universities to acknowledge the existing variability in job conditions, and stop ignoring it. Adjuncts and lecturers, and (perhaps to a lesser extend) also postdocs, are generally outside the domain of most, if not all funding opportunities, in spite of constituting an important part of our universities and carrying an important burden of each department’s teaching load. They are neither students, nor real faculty members. They are at the margins. Creating a third category for conference registration is just one step, but an important one, towards recognizing the conditions of scholars who are struggling to be part of the research community, in spite of their uncool job titles and their job instability.


This is an important attempt to create the expectation that the pricing of events be done in a way that makes them accessible. Obviously it’s difficult to organise events but, if it’s really not possible to organise a conference in a way that fundamentally excludes a large (and growing) section of the academic workforce then we need to [5]rethink what exactly we mean by a ‘conference’ and the purposes that it serves.

3. https://academiserias.wordpress.com/

Benjamin Geer (2015-05-03 08:31:50)

Have any anthropologists figured out the purpose of conferences? I’ve been to quite a few, because everyone said it was the thing to do, and I’m still puzzled. Why spend all that money on planes and hotels just to listen to people read papers out loud, as if we were all children who need to have our bedtime stories read to us because we can’t read them ourselves? Sure, it’s nice to catch up with friends, but couldn’t we just skip the conference and go on holiday together, probably to someplace much nicer?

Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 08:52:11)

Well said


This Day event will take place in the James France Building, room CC021, from 10.30-4.30pm - 2 June 2015, and
will focus on the Future of Social Critique.

The event was organised to celebrate the careers of two renowned colleagues in our department, Prof Michael Pickering and Prof. Graham Murdock, but also as an opportunity to broaden the discussion on the subject.

Synopsis
The continuing financial crisis of capitalism in Europe has been accompanied by a right-wing response that has sought to reduce the size of the state and the power of labour, changes that will inevitably increase income inequality and consequently other inequalities in the future placing the burden of the crisis on the shoulders of those least able to bear it. This neo-liberal response has not gone unchallenged at least in some European countries. We have witnessed the growth of extra-parliamentary and more recently parliamentary opposition on both the right and the left. In the UK, however, whilst we have experienced a ‘revolt from the right’ with the growth of UKIP, the response from the left has been more muted. While there has been some left opposition to austerity, it has remained largely on the margins. In contrast, the early years of the Thatcherite project in the UK saw a flowering of radical opposition that crossed over from politics to culture to the academy. The questions animating this seminar are: if then, then why not now? What has changed both inside and outside universities? How do we assess questions of value and make this a key aspect of critique? What resources are generally available for the renewal of critique? Whatever happened to the 'public intellectual'?

[1]To download the poster of this event click here

and

[2]To download detailed information and schedule click here

1. [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/wwwlboroacuk/content/socialsciences/downloads/POSTER%20CCC%20event.pdf](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/wwwlboroacuk/content/socialsciences/downloads/POSTER%20CCC%20event.pdf)
2. [http://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/wwwlboroacuk/content/socialsciences/downloads/Detailed%20Info%20CCC%20event%20and%20schedule.pdf](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/wwwlboroacuk/content/socialsciences/downloads/Detailed%20Info%20CCC%20event%20and%20schedule.pdf)

Some brief thoughts about digital social ontology (2015-05-03 08:00)

A few years ago I sat in a publishing workshop in London listening to a presentation about ontology. My confusion grew as the presenter continued to make all manner of claims about ontology that I didn’t understand. As someone who had two degrees in philosophy before turning into a theoretically inclined sociologist, I thought I had a pretty confident grasp of what ontology was and how it was discussed. Yet I had no idea what on earth she was talking about. It eventually clicked that ontology meant something very different to publishing & information science people. I’ve been thinking about that experience recently, as I’ve been making plans for the [1]digital ontology symposium that the Centre for Social Ontology is holding in London this July.

The idea for the event is to bring together people from web science, media sociology, science & technology studies, social informatics and complexity with a shared focus on digital data and digital technology. My hope is that digital social ontology might bridge the gap between these different forms of ontology: understanding taxonomies as (re)produced and transformed, mediated by the material constraints & enablements of technological artefacts, through human activity within a social context and in turn exercising causal power in relation to happenings within
that context, as mediated through digital artefacts & infrastructure.

This would be a crude overview of a realist approach to digital social ontology but my broader point is about the need to incorporate these three areas of ontological discourse (social context & activity, technical artefacts & infrastructure, relational & conceptual taxonomies) into one overarching frame of reference. This isn’t new: I’m aware that software studies & STS have, in different ways, done this already. Plus I’d appreciate anyone pointing out other instances I might not have encountered! But I’m suggesting that a meta-theoretical conversation across disciplinary and paradigmatic boundaries could help structure a broader domain of ‘digital social ontology’ with practical transdisciplinary relevance.


The burden of continual assessment in a digital age (2015-05-03 11:58)

Due to my current reliance upon a laptop that’s unsuitable for my work, I presently find myself running a disk cleaning utility on a near daily basis. It’s a very useful bit of software that very quickly wipes caches and clears unneeded files. I like it a lot and it was pretty cheap to purchase. But every time I use it, I’m presented with the following request:

Selecting the happy face produces a request for a ‘review or rating’. Selecting the neutral or sad faces leads to an invitation to get in touch to raise concerns or address technical problems. The software casts the user in a role of perpetual evaluation from which it’s relatively easy to escape (with one or two clicks) but impossible to reject all together. This strikes me as an interesting metaphor for operation of digital systems which aim to produce ‘excellence’ through real-time user feedback - in this sense, I see this as big data even if the data in question are not very, well, big - as well as a taste of what seems likely to become a potentially overwhelming routine feature of daily life in the near future. Each individual act of evaluation is trivial but the aggregate cognitive burden likely isn’t.
The most popular posts over the last 5 years of Sociological Imagination (2015-05-03 18:56)

[1] Home page / Archives

[2] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[3] How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)


[5] Is someone you care about involved with post structuralism?

[6] Making the familiar strange

[7] 38 reasons why you should blog about your research

[8] The Sociological Imagination Revisited

[18] Why study Sociology? What will I learn?

[19] Radical Education Projects


[21] A Summer of Television Poverty Porn

[22] Contribute

[23] The best infographic ever? A briefing on intersectionality

[24] The difference between Foucault and Adorno

[26] Review of ‘The Aftermath of Feminism’ by Angela McRobbie

[27] The Ethnographer, by Jorge Luis Borges

[28] How to write 1000 words a day and not go bat shit crazy (at least not within the first two weeks)

[29] Social Class and Life Chances as seen through Survivor Rates on the Titanic

[30] Tips for writing good survey questions

[31] Privilege & Oppression, Conflict & Compassion

[32] The Dangers of Academic Blogging

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How To Keep Your Sociological Imagination Alive

Six principles for organising academic conferences in the 21st century

An invitation to punk sociology

Social Fiction: Writing Social Science Research as Fiction

Why have young people in Japan stopped having sex?

The Public Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu

The (un)intelligibility of academics and being ‘a mere journalist’

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Review of ‘Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place and the Traveller’

A Conversation with Benjamin Zephaniah on Britishness

Japanese Suicide Culture

The Muppets explain Phenomenology

Policing the ‘Benefits Crisis’: what would Stuart Hall do?

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs & the Social Media that Fulfill Them

Please keep up, Sociology

The craft of giving (bad) presentations
Your 'daily dose of Sociological Imagination': reflections on social media and public sociology

The Paradox of Sociology

The joys of grad student shaming

What Africa might have looked like today, had it never been colonised

A New Way of Thinking. The Sociological Imagination of Harriet Martineau (1802-1876)

Rediscovered: C. Wright Mills’ 1951 book “White Collar – The American Middle Classes”

Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing

(Re)Producing Pistorius: Patriarchy, Prosecution and the Problematics of Disability
The Sociology of Awkwardness

The Sociology of Gossip

C. Wright Mills' Pragmatism

TED talk: Sam Richards on empathy

The Accidental Sociologist: disciplinarity and academic identity

Digital sociology and the coming crisis of qualitative research

"A 1940's record of a symphony written in late 19th century": Interview with German filmmaker Moritz Liewerscheidt

Anarchism and The Sociological Imagination: An Interview with Dana Williams
Žižek vs Chomsky: Is a pointless spat becoming a meaningful debate?

Indigenizing Approaches to Research

Is a Post-Neoliberal politics possible?

Sociology of procrastination

Economists are horrible people

Noam Chomsky's Advice to Students

The Fallacy of Misplaced Modesty: Why Academics Don't Become Intellectuals

Judith Butler: “A Politics of the Street”
Grayson Perry and The Ashford Hijab: White, Female & Muslim

Does Sociology as a Discipline Have a Future in the UK after the REF?

Nikolas Rose: What is Mental Illness Today? Five Hard Questions

Being a sociologist means never having to be bored

No nation now, but the imagination

Being a link between the academic world and local communities

Are you a doctoral 'student'?

Intellectual Craftsmanship As Refusal

An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy about Arts-Based Research, Fiction and Public Scholarship
[84] Popular culture and the unconstrained sociological imagination

[85] Harvey Specter: a study in late modern sociopathy


[87] The Art of Sociological Argument – review by @AcademicDiary

[88] Kant in Hand! (Visual Sociology #005)

[89] Charles Wright Mills documentary

[90] The Visual Criminology Project: Beyond Data Visualization and the Power of Spectacle (Visual Sociology #004)

[91] The Quantified Self and Taylorization 2.0

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What is the Capability Approach about?

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
17. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14628
34. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/16120
The Social Ontology of Digital Data & Digital Technology, July 8th in London (2015-05-04 08:00)

This innovative conference brings together leading figures from a variety of fields which address issues of digital technology and digital data. We’ve invited speakers with a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds who engage with questions relating to digital data and digital technology in their work. Our suggestion is that social ontology, however this might be construed, represents a potential common ground that could cut across this still rather siloed domain of inquiry into the social dimensions of digital technology.

The conference aims to explore this possibility by assembling a diverse range of perspectives and drawing them into a dialogue about a common question, without assuming a shared understanding of the topic at hand. Our aim is to extend this digitally via twitter, podcast and blog beyond the event itself, in order to facilitate an extended conversation that will draw more people into its remit as it circulates after the conference itself.

To this end, we invite each speaker to address this theme (the social ontology of digital data & digital technology) in whatever way they choose. Each speaker will have 30 mins to talk and 15 mins for questions. We’ll have an accomplished audio editor on hand to record each talk as a podcast. These will be released on [1]www.socialontology.org and will be circulated on social media in order to try and stimulate a continuing debate around the issues raised at the conference. The hashtag for the day will be #socialontology.

Confirmed Speakers:

- Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) – Does Digital Sociology have a Problem?
- Jochen Runde (Cambridge) – Non-materiality and the Ontology of Digital Objects
- Alistair Mutch (NTU) – title TBC
- Susan Halford (Southampton) – title TBC
- Nick Couldry (LSE) – title TBC
- Emma Uprichard (Warwick) - title TBC
The ten habits of failed grant proposal writers (2015-05-04 08:06)

An incredibly useful post by Pat Thomson, particularly for those early career researchers (such as myself) beginning to cautiously dip their toes into the water of applying for grants:

[1]the ten habits of highly unsuccessful research bid writers

Early retirement blogging (2015-05-04 08:22)

Would you like to retire? While many might have this thought as a fleeting whim on a bad day at work, the internet is giving rise to a subculture in which strategies to achieve retirement earlier are shared and refined. Here's [1]an example:

Unlike many other ERE (early retirement extreme) blogs I've included some fairly specific details about my income below. Having read quite a few of these blogs it really isn’t helpful that most of them don’t talk about their incomes because this makes it very difficult to assess how likely it would be for someone else to pursue a similar financial plan. I've decided to include my own actual income in order to make it very clear that my early retirement strategy excludes at least the bottom 80 % of income earners. So in short, unless you’re a high income earner in the UK already, or are on the path to becoming one, there is no point you reading this! This is what all ERE blogs should say, but don’t.

My grand plan pads out into three stages – 40-48/ 48-60/ 60+. The boundaries are flexible. NB I only stumbled upon and committed to the idea of early-retirement when I was 41 this August 2014 (so slightly oddly I've backdated this plan!)


The author in question explicitly links their ambition to [3]the transformation of teaching and their lack of satisfaction under new conditions. In this sense, it’s an obvious question to ask whether the rise of early retirement strategizing
has its roots in an occupational crisis within the professions. But there’s clearly a crucial role being played by social media, facilitating the elaboration of a discourse that allows what might otherwise have been vague aims to become precisely formulated plans articulated in a shared vocabulary.

Sometimes it takes a more extreme form than this. Early-retirement extreme can be seen as akin to lifestyle minimalism, an ascetic practice of renouncing consumption motivated by the desire for clarity and focus, except for the sake of retirement at the end of it rather than being an end in itself. It also seems to be a field in which, like lifestyle minimalism, people stake out a claim as gurus and make the secondary income stream (which these blogs say is necessary for early-retirement) by preaching the virtues of early-retirement itself. Presumably though, as in any other field like this, there will be many making no money from such cultural entrepreneurialism for every person who is doing so successfully.

4. [http://markcarrigan.net/2015/04/16/the-surprisingly-rapid-destruction-of-the-professions/](http://markcarrigan.net/2015/04/16/the-surprisingly-rapid-destruction-of-the-professions/)
5. [http://earlyretirementextreme.com/about-the-blog](http://earlyretirementextreme.com/about-the-blog)
6. [http://markcarrigan.net/2015/02/15/the-lure-of-minimalism/](http://markcarrigan.net/2015/02/15/the-lure-of-minimalism/)


Sociology Department Theories & Methodologies Cluster and the Authority Research Network Present a two day symposium at the University of Warwick

**Occupational Hazards: Theories & Methodologies (Palestine/Kashmir) - a workshop:** [Thursday May 7th]

**Authority & Political Technologies 2015: Dialogues and Works in Progress:** [Friday May 8th]

Full programme and registration on our website [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/2015](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/2015)

All welcome - but please do register!

**Theories & Methodologies Cluster, Authority & Political Technologies IAS Network Symposium 2015: University of Warwick May 7th-8th**

**Occupational Hazards: Theories & Methodologies (Palestine/Kashmir)**

[Thursday 7th May; [10.00-18.00; Ramphal R 1.04]

Goldie Osuri: Welcome; Claire Blencowe intro to APT and Social Theory Centre

Miriyaam Aouragh: Methodological hazards: the challenge of a techno-social dialectics

Mohamad Junaid: Research in ‘conflict zones’, methodological pluralism, and rethinking philosophical concepts in ethnographic research: some preliminary observations


Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian: Palestinian Indigeniety, Israel's Settler Colonialism, and Bedouin Children's Politics of Liberation
Farrukh Faheem: Research in Contested Sites: Burdens and Challenges

Michael Kearney: (TBA)

Ather Zia: You cannot be neutral on a "runaway" train: Doing Militant Anthropology in Kashmir

'Legal By All Means' (Film/Work in Progress. Dir. Iffat Fatima). Introduced by Farrukh Faheem

Panel Discussion: Palestine/Kashmir: Transnational Histories & Possible Sovereignties

(Chair: Dibyesh Anand)

**Authority & Political Technologies 2015: Dialogues and Works in Progress**


Claire Blencowe - Welcome

Cath Lambert – Affective Methodologies

Illan Wall – Crowds & Atmosphere

Sam Burgum – The Powers That Be: Conspiracy & Cynicism whilst Occupying London

John Narayan – Black Cosmopolitanism: From the Black Panthers to Black Lives Matter

Miguel Beistegui – Genealogies of Desire

Goldie Osuri – Bodies as Border Technologies

Marijn Nieuwenhuis – Dome Thinking: Reflections on what it means to live under the dome

Concluding Discussion

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'Media, Gender & Culture' Summer School, King’s College London (2015-05-05 07:14)

King's College London Summer School 2014

'Media, Gender & Culture'


How does gender organize contemporary life? What role does media play in shaping individual identities, cultural attitudes and social practices? How can we understand gender inequality on a global scale? What is the relation between media and capitalism? Can media be used as a resource for cultural politics and activism? By who, and in what ways?

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Exploring these and other questions, this course offers students the opportunity to study media, gender and culture in transnational perspective. Students on the course will gain a critical foundation in gender and cultural theory, examining issues such as the representation of women in news media, constructions of gender and sexuality in advertising, as well as the role of gender in shaping media production practices. Examining current trends in popular film and television, we will consider debates over 'postfeminism' and the 'sexualisation of culture'; through discussion of both transnational protest movements and local activist campaigns, we will think through some of the ways social media might be used as a tool of social change. In dedicated workshops students will learn how to critically analyse a range of media forms, including print, screen and digital media. Taking advantage of our central London location, the class will visit a number of the capital’s foremost cultural institutes – including BBC Broadcasting House and the Victoria and Albert Museum – where students will have the opportunity to meet with practitioners from the media and cultural industries. At all points the course will promote intersectional thinking, as we consider how gender interacts with other axes of power such as sexuality, race, and class. Engaging research and theory from a diverse range of social and cultural contexts, students will develop the knowledge and critical skills necessary to analyse gender, media and culture in a global arena.

Registration for the 'Media, Gender & Culture' Summer School course is now open.


Administrative contact: [3]summerschool@kcl.ac.uk

Academic contact: [4]rachel.r.o’neill@kcl.ac.uk

1. x-apple-data-detectors://1/
3. mailto:summerschool@kcl.ac.uk
4. mailto:rachel.r.oneill@kcl.ac.uk
Academic entrepreneurship and white privilege (2015-05-06 08:00)

An interesting story circulated recently which was widely seen as a particularly egregious instance of white privilege within the academy:

On the evening of March 25, the hashtag #CadaanStudies ("cadaan" meaning "white" in Somali) emerged amongst Twitter timelines as a small collective of Somali academics and writers spoke out, 140 characters (or less) at a time. Initiated by Safia Aidid, a Canadian Harvard PhD candidate, the hashtag gradually became a commentary on the whiteness and privileges prominent within academia. More specifically, the online conversation served as a direct response to the launch of the Somaliland Journal of African Studies (SJAS), a peer-reviewed scholarly journal that claims a particular focus on East Africa—the absence of a single Somali editor, advisory board member, or contributor left many pointing out that the only thing Somali about this journal is its title.

Founded by Rodrigo Vaz, a white male MSc candidate for The School of Oriental and African Studies at University of London, the journal was made in collaboration with University of Hargeysa's Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies. Yet somehow, it lacks any Somali involvement. This fundamental error is one often repeated in academia or any platforms that narrate the black or African experience.

While agreeing with how this case has been framed, as well as the condemnation it has been subject to, it strikes me that there's another aspect of the story which has been less widely remarked upon:

But its description stating that SJAS is dedicated to "covering an academic research area in clear expansion" led many to wonder if this journal was simply created by an aspiring young, white academic hoping to attain credit in an area with growing scholarship that's still garnering little attention.

Consider what has happened here: a masters student founds a journal and appoints himself Editor-in-Chief. How long has this been something that masters students do? It's a broader instance of something that fascinates me. We can see it in the endless ‘turns’ in which someone seeks to capture the intellectual attention space in a way that ensures their own prominence within it. We can see it in the endless proliferation of X Studies in which the intellectual attention space fragments into discrete areas of inquiry with their own conferences, journals and networks within which early entrants automatically find themselves placed in a position of prominence.
There’s much more to academic entrepreneurship than this (as can be seen in the academic-as-fundraiser model we’re sliding towards) but these intellectual strategies can usefully be seen in these terms. The impulse to pro-actively shape a field in this way is a situationally rational response to an accelerated academy in which secure jobs are scarce and attention spans are short. My point is not that privilege is incidental to the case but rather that what makes this story so off putting is the way in which academic entrepreneurship intersects with white privilege.

1. [https://www.facebook.com/sjasjournal](https://www.facebook.com/sjasjournal)

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**Girlhood in Post-Socialist Times (2015-05-06 08:18)**

SPECIAL ISSUE: Girlhood Studies in Post-Socialist Times (Volume 8, Issue 1)
Edited by Olga Zdravomyslova and Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova

Editorial: International Collaboration and the Spread of Girlhood Studies
Claudia Mitchell
[1][http://bit.ly/1z74lGc](http://bit.ly/1z74lGc)

Introduction: Girlhood Studies in Post-Socialist Times
Olga Zdravomyslova and Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova

**ARTICLES**

Bodies in Transition: Girlhoods in Post-Communist Balkan Cinema
Ana Bento-Ribeiro

The Construction of Girls’ Femininity through the Ukrainian TV Show The Queen of the Ball
Tetiana Bulakh

Olga Boytsova and Elena Mishanova

Fictional Girls in Transition during Perestroika
Judith Inggs

3480
Organizing Girls' Groups for a Better Future: Local and Global Challenges and Solutions
Yulia Gradskova

Mapping Motherhood: Girls as Mothers in Contemporary Russia
Nadya Nartova

Between Us Girls: On Girls' Interpretations of Sexuality
Elena Omelchenko

"Fighting Is Not Pretty": Interpreting the Experience of Self-Defense in Girls' Fights
Elvira Arif


Our most popular posts this month | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-26 14:09:03)
[...] Girlhood in Post-Socialist Times [...] 


The Sussex Humanities Lab at the University of Sussex is pleased to invite applications to study for a PhD. We are offering 4 Home/EU fully funded scholarships and 1 International fully funded scholarship OR 5 Home/EU fully funded scholarships depending on the applicants.

The Humanities demand re-invention. Digital transformation means the objects of humanist study have changed. This project and programme of activities is designed to develop critiques, methodologies, and tools ensuring this field is fit for the future. As our culture is re-born digital, old divisions that marked out image from text, music from paint and object from performance, have become increasingly archaic - legacies of the technologies of print and the medieval university. When all the forms of cultural production flow through the digital, the boundaries between them are reconfigured. This reality calls for us to build fields of study informed by new digital objects of study, rather than by inherited disciplinary silos.
We welcome applicants with humanities, social science and computational specialisms and anticipate cross-school supervision teams.

Successful international applicants to either School of Media, Film and Music, the School of History, Art History and Philosophy or the School of Education and Social Work will be eligible to compete for a Sussex Humanities Lab scholarship.

**Timetable**

[1] 27th May 2015 - Deadline for completed applications

[2] 3rd June 2015 - List of applicants holding offers to be sent to Panel for consideration

[3] 15th June 2015 - Deadline for applicants to be informed of the outcome

[4] [http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/money/scholarships/pgr2015/view/504](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/study/money/scholarships/pgr2015/view/504)

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**The omnipresent threat of violence under neoliberalism (2015-05-07 08:00)**

An important argument by David Graeber in his new book. I've been thinking about this (particularly on university campuses) since [1] events at Warwick last term and I find his analysis deeply persuasive:

And indeed, in this most recent phase of total bureaucratization, we've seen security cameras, police scooters, issuers of temporary ID cards, and men and women in a variety of uniforms acting in either public or private capacities, trained in tactics of menacing, intimidating and ultimately deploying physical violence, just about everywhere – even in places such as playgrounds, primary schools, college campuses, hospitals, libraries, parks, or beach resorts, where fifty years ago their presence would have been considered scandalous, or simply weird.

All this takes place as social theorists continue to insist that the direct appeal to force plays less and less of a factor in maintaining structures of social control. The more reports one reads, in fact, of university students being tasered for unauthorised library use, or English professors being jailed and charged with felonies after being caught jaywalking on campus, the louder the defiant insistent that the kinds of subtle symbolic power analysed by English professor are what's really important. It begins to sound more and more like a desperate refusal to accept that the workings of power could really be so crude and simplistic as what daily evidence proves them to be.

It is curious how rarely citizens in industrial democracies actually think about this fact, or how instinctively we try to discount its importance. This is what makes it possible, for example, for graduate students to be able to spend days in the stacks of university libraries poring over Foucault-inspired theoretical tracts and the declining importance of coercion as a factor in modern life without ever reflecting on that fact that, had they insisted on their right to enter the stacks without showing a properly stamped and validating ID, armed men would have been summoned to physically remove them, using whatever force might be required. It’s almost as if the more we allow aspects of our everyday existence to fall under the purview of bureaucratic regulations, the more everyone concerned colludes to downplay the fact (perfectly obvious to those actually running the system) that all of it ultimately depends on the threat of physical force.

*The Utopia of rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy, pg 58*

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**Straight with a twist*: reflections on heterosexuality beyond the heteronormal (2015-05-08 08:00)**

heterosexuality beyond the heteronormal

Call for Papers on the 3rd European Geographies of Sexualities Conference, Rome, 16-18 September 2015

Session organizers:
Valerie De Craene and Maarten Loopmans, University of Leuven, Belgium

In recent years, geographers have paid increasing attention to heterosexuality, underlining the multiplicity of heterosexual identities and performances. Normative heterosexuality has been described as "a highly unstable, default characterization for people who have not marked themselves or been marked by others as homosexual. (...) The resulting class of heterosexuals is a default class, home to those who have not fallen out of it" (Halley, 1993, p 83, 85).

This session aims to critically reflect on and explore possibilities for a queer analysis of heterosexuality. We follow the line of argument that queer should not be reduced to sexual preference (cfr. "Queer is more than short hand for LGBT" (Browne, 2006, p. 886); Thomas, 2000), nor should it (only) imply an expression of "an affiliation with antihomophobic politics" (Butler, 1993, p. 230). If we understand queer as resistance to regimes of the normal (Warner, 1993), we can critically engage with heterosexuality within and beyond the heteronormal through a queer lens. It offers possibilities for a queer analysis of processes of inclusion and exclusion, of deconstruction and (re)production of heterosexual desire, behavior, identities, practices.

Such straight queer aspiration has a clear political ambition. As Thomas (2000) puts it, straight disloyalty to straight identity is "to assist in working the weaknesses in the heterosexual norm, to inhibit the practice of heterosexuality’s rearticulation and inhibit its hegemonic dominance" (p. 31). Indeed, the repeated subverting, parodying and challenging of heteronormativities, might actually help to change dominant 'scripts' (Butler, 2000). Taking a position of a queer aspiring straight should always be handled with care, bearing in mind the privileged position one speaks from, and therefore always requires a complicated negotiation of a straight critic’s subject position (Schlichter, 2004).
As such, recent geographic research on non-heteronormative heterosexualities has emphasized the biopolitical regulatory urge which has set aside non-heteronormative heterosexualities as a discursive and spatial antipode for the construction of heteronormality. In such discourse, a moral geography is constructed segregating certain performances of heterosexuality as "incompatible with family occupation" (Hubbard and Prior 2013, p. 145). The policing and control of heterosexualities outside the norm, such as adult entertainment, is exposed as functional to the biopolitical regulation of the wider population (Howell, 2004; Brown & Knopp, 2010; Evered & Evered, 2013).

Simultaneously, micro-spatial studies have emphasized everyday spatial performativities (Gregson and Rose, 2000) to demonstrate how heteronormativity is at the same time challenged and reproduced through the repeated construction and performance of also straight queer subjectivities (Faier, 2014; Silvey, 2010). Moreover, geographers have emphasized how performances and places are mutually constitutive and intrinsically related; performances take and make place simultaneously and both are constitutive to sexual identities. Performances in one place and time cannot be understood in isolation from experiences and performances in other places and times.

The overall aim of this session is to develop a better theoretical understanding of heterosexuality beyond the heteronormal and to explore its various guises empirically and theoretically. We encourage a wide variety of contributions, on topics such as (but not limited to):
- How do new media and digital social networks favour the expression of different forms of heterosexuality?
- Queer spatial performances of heterosexualities
- Exploring heterotopia from where to challenge heteronormativities
- Queering heterosexuality from the rural to the urban
- Spaces of queer heterosexualities from transactional sex to Durex Play

Proposals (max. 250 words) can be submitted by email until April 28, 2015 to: Valerie.Decraene@ees.kuleuven.be and Maarten.Loopmans@ees.kuleuven.be.

Outline of a relational realist theory of anarchism (2015-05-09 08:00)

In the last few days I read David Graeber’s new book which begins to develop a novel left-wing critique of bureaucracy. I’d seen Graeber lecture but hadn’t read anything by him previously. His anarchism comes through much more clearly in his book than it did in the lecture I saw him give on the the history of debt at the International Association for Critical Realism conference last year.

It’s left me thinking about my own anarchism: something which was central to my outlook on the world and my activism for a long time but which I gradually drifted away from in the process of my transition into a sociology department. In part this was because I began to realise that my anarchism had been sociologically naive (something I realise now was a statement about my anarchism rather than anything intrinsic to it as a political outlook) and I was troubled by the individualism I increasingly saw as latent in it in spite of my frequent invocations of the nebulous concept of ‘community’. I also had an increasing awareness of the usefulness of bureaucratic organisations that sat uneasily with my professed anarchism. I’ve always endorsed what Noam Chomsky sees anarchism to be but I’ve never been convinced he’s describing anything more than anti-authoritarianism when he makes statements like [1]this:
Well, anarchism is, in my view, basically a kind of tendency in human thought which shows up in different forms in different circumstances, and has some leading characteristics. Primarily it is a tendency that is suspicious and skeptical of domination, authority, and hierarchy. It seeks structures of hierarchy and domination in human life over the whole range, extending from, say, patriarchal families to, say, imperial systems, and it asks whether those systems are justified. It assumes that the burden of proof for anyone in a position of power and authority lies on them. Their authority is not self-justifying. They have to give a reason for it, a justification. And if they can't justify that authority and power and control, which is the usual case, then the authority ought to be dismantled and replaced by something more free and just. And, as I understand it, anarchy is just that tendency. It takes different forms at different times.

I’m increasingly wondering if relational realism provides a useful starting point for conceptualising the theory and practice of anarchism. From this perspective, much of sociological thought has either assumed relations and treated them as epiphenomenal or dealt with them in a basically minimalistic way: as internal relations between social roles (e.g. landlord/tenant, teacher/student), the occupancy of social position within distributional structures or as trajectories of iterated interaction. The former view treats role incumbents as basically interchangeable while the latter view presents social life as ceaseless transactions. What all miss is the quality of the social relationship which has crucial causal implications for how the parties so related act in relation to each other.

These qualities exist for those related in virtue of the relationship. For instance, you can’t point to the ‘trust’ in a trusting relationship but this quality is integral to those who are related in such a way. It’s something produced through interaction but irreducible to that interaction: it can be lost even if both parties value that trust. This is the foundation of collective concern because the character of our relations matters to us. This is what Archer and Donati talk about as collective reflexivity: ‘collective orientation to our collective outputs’. The notion of a safe space is an interesting example of this: one in which a group is concerned to develop social relations in which all members feel able to voice their concerns without censure. But collective reflexivity can be found wherever there are social relations.

This offers us a way of theorising collectivity between people that has no need to impute identical beliefs, identities or commitments to members of the collective. It’s a theory of shared commitment and I think it has important implications for political theory which I’m in the process of trying to elucidate. One of these is for anarchism itself: it seems to me that it offers a way of thinking about communality that fiercely critiques bureaucracy without lapsing into individualism. I’m playing with the idea that hierarchies in themselves tend to be corrosive towards relational goods and that there are other features of bureaucratic modes of organisation which contribute to this corrosiveness in different ways e.g. impersonality. We could see bureaucracy as a social technology which seeks to turn thick relationality (of the kind that generates relational goods) into thin relationality (links between roles within an organisation) and in doing so has an inherent tendency towards the impoverishment of human life. I think relational realism has a lot to offer Graeber’s project of trying to develop a language in which we can be much more precise about what it is we object to in bureaucracy.


kerrysmallman (2015-05-09 14:50:47)
Thanks for this thought-provoking article which has given me a great deal to add to my reading list! I find myself increasingly moving towards an anarchistic political outlook. The anti-austerity, pro-Government, pro-employment, pro-Bureaucracy
narrative which the left seems to be unable to see past is a hiding to nothing, in my opinion.

Sociological Imagination (2015-05-09 18:48:01)
David Graeber’s book is totally worth reading then :-)

The Problem of the Opaque Subject (2015-05-09 11:50)

In his recent book [1]The Happiness Industry, Will Davies offers an interesting analysis of [2]whiplash and its uneven growth across the world in recent years even as car safety standards have increased. He observes that the "bizarre philosophical status of whiplash as a form of entirely invisible pain makes it unusually amenable to fraudulent insurance claims" but that for the same reason "it is impossible to ever know how much fraud is really going on".

In this sense I think whiplash is emblematic of a more primitive philosophical problem of the opaque subject. Across the full range of human activity, we find that first-person experience takes on an enduring significance. In many cases, this significance is ignored or denied, but we can’t ever quite get away from it. Even when we look for proxies, objective features of a person to measure which stand in for subjective characteristics, we affirm the importance of first-person experience even as we try and reduce it to the measurable.

This epistemological challenge can be seen as integral to human agency: we’re disposed to be concerned about a subjective reality which forever eludes our capacity to gain what is seen as reliable knowledge about it. The intellectually history of this problem is obviously extremely complex at the level of theory, methods and methodology. But I’ve been thinking recently about how the problem of the opaque subject is engaged with culturally. Consider the lie detector:

![IFRAME: [3]https://www.youtube.com/embed/tHCDnKhppw8](https://www.youtube.com/embed/tHCDnKhppw8)

This technology is seen to help us overcome the problem of the opaque subject. It cuts through the ambivalence and uncertainty of interaction between subjects who are reciprocally opaque and helps us find the hidden truths behind the masks we wear. In reality it does little more than measure the relation between physiological arousal (blood pressure, pulse rate, breathing etc) and the questions being asked under bizarre and artificial circumstances. But we could see the 'lie detector', such a familiar trope of TV and film, as a fetish object which helps maintain an illusory belief in a world in which other people can in principle be rendered transparent. It props up a certain utopian sense of technological capacity and helps us avoid confrontation with the existential and ethical dilemmas which the problem of the opaque subject unavoidably poses for us.

3. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/tHCDnKhppw8](https://www.youtube.com/embed/tHCDnKhppw8)
Five ways to deal with 5 years of a Conservative government (2015-05-09 11:56)

An excellent post by [1]Rebecca Winson on the CLASS blog. Important advice for left-wing sociologists in the UK who are currently in a state of mild despair:

1. If you're in work - or maybe even if you're not - join a trade union.

2. Get involved in community activism too. Housing groups, food banks, local strikes, local progressive parties. Work for the vulnerable.

3. Soz, but we're going to have to be tireless.

4. Don't be tied by party lines.

5. Find a way to preach to the unconverted. We need them on our side.

These are just a summary. Read the full post [2]here.


The Dilemmas of the Consumer (2015-05-09 12:07)

It’s hard being a consumer these days. Do I buy it? Do I not buy it? How many minutes will I have left by the time I’ve blogged about it?
The gloomy digital sociology of Zygmunt Bauman (2015-05-09 13:45)

From Bauman's talk at re:publica a couple of days ago. They've released these videos with remarkable speed:

[IFRAMEx 1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/860aspvsS1E

Working in the on-demand economy (2015-05-09 13:49)

An interesting though remarkably uncritical discussion of working in the on-demand economy:
The place of sociology in the Second Machine Age (2015-05-10 08:00)

We've recently seen an emerging discourse of the 'second machine age' considering the potential implications of advances in robots and computational technologies for employment. In a recent [1]London Review of Books essay, John Lanchester offers an insightful overview of this issue:

What if that’s where we are, and – to use the shorthand phrase relished by economists and futurists – 'robots are going to eat all the jobs'? A thorough, considered and disconcerting study of that possibility was undertaken by two Oxford economists, Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, in a paper from 2013 called 'The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?'[2] They came up with some new mathematical and statistical techniques to calculate the likely impact of technological change on a sweeping range of 702 occupations, from podiatrists to tour guides, animal trainers to personal finance advisers and floor sanders. It ranks them, from 1 (you’ll be fine) to 702 (best start shining up the CV). In case you’re wondering, here are the top five occupations:

1. Recreational Therapists
2. First-Line Supervisors of Mechanics, Installers and Repairers
3. Emergency Management Directors
4. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers
5. Audiologists

And here are the bottom five:

- 698. Insurance Underwriters
- 699. Mathematical Technicians
- 700. Sewers, Hand
- 701. Title Examiners, Abstractors and Searchers
- 702. Telemarketers

The theme is clear: human-to-human interaction and judgment is in demand, routine tasks are not. Some of the judgments seem odd: is it really the case that choreographers come in at 13, ahead of physicians and surgeons at 15, and a long way ahead of, say, anthropologists and archaeologists at 39, not to mention writers at 123 and editors at 140? Nonetheless, the paper’s methodology is sober and it makes clear just how far-ranging the impact of technological change is in white as well as blue-collar work.


Leaving aside any specific problems we can identify with the methodology here, it nonetheless raises important questions about the future of capitalism. What makes Lanchester’s article so commendable is his insistence that this tendency is not inexorable and he calls for what might be described as a repoliticisation of an issue that has been (self-interestedly?) rendered as narrowly technical. The hyper-capitalist dystopia of vast unemployment predicated upon robotics is something which has haunted popular culture, coming to be represented in everything from 2000AD to the more recent films of Neill Blomkamp:
What Lanchester suggests is that we need to move beyond dystopian imagery in order to flesh out our heretofore entirely speculative understanding of what might happen if 47% of jobs are lost in two decades. We also need to recover the latent promise that robotics and computation might prove emancipatory, creating new possibilities for human flourishing in a world liberated from mental and physical drudgery:

A great deal of modern economic discourse takes it as axiomatic that economic forces are the only ones that matter. This idea has bled into politics too, at least in the Western world: economic forces have been awarded the status of inexorable truths. The idea that a wave of economic change is so disruptive to the social order that a society might rebel against it – that has, it seems, disappeared from the realms of the possible. But the disappearance of 47% of jobs in two decades (as per Frey and Osborne) must be right on the edge of what a society can bear, not so much because of that 47% per cent, as because of the timeframe. Jobs do go away; it’s happened many times. For jobs to go away with that speed, however, is a new thing, and the search for historical precedents, for examples from which we can learn, won’t take us far. How would this speed of job disappearance, combined with extensive deflation, play out? The truth is nobody knows. In the absence of any template or precedent, the idea that the economic process will just roll ahead like a juggernaut, unopposed by any social or political counter-forces, is a stretch. The robots will only eat all the jobs if we decide to let them.

It’s also worth noting what isn’t being said about this robotified future. The scenario we’re given – the one being made to feel inevitable – is of a hyper-capitalist dystopia. There’s capital, doing better than ever; the robots, doing all the work; and the great mass of humanity, doing not much, but having fun playing with its gadgets. (Though if there’s no work, there are going to be questions about who can afford to buy the gadgets.) There is a possible alternative, however, in which ownership and control of robots is disconnected from capital in its current form. The robots liberate most of humanity from work, and everybody benefits from the proceeds: we don’t have to work in factories or go down mines.
or clean toilets or drive long-distance lorries, but we can choreograph and weave and garden and tell stories and invent things and set about creating a new universe of wants. This would be the world of unlimited wants described by economics, but with a distinction between the wants satisfied by humans and the work done by our machines. It seems to me that the only way that world would work is with alternative forms of ownership. The reason, the only reason, for thinking this better world is possible is that the dystopian future of capitalism-plus-robots may prove just too grim to be politically viable. This alternative future would be the kind of world dreamed of by William Morris, full of humans engaged in meaningful and sanely remunerated labour. Except with added robots. It says a lot about the current moment that as we stand facing a future which might resemble either a hyper-capitalist dystopia or a socialist paradise, the second option doesn’t get a mention.


This all raises the question of the place of sociology in a second machine age. It seems to me that we are strongly positioned to make a unique contribution to our understanding of possible futures (e.g. what might happen if 47% of jobs are lost in two decades) as well as, alongside other social sciences, fleshing out our knowledge about the conjunction of factors which might lead to each such possible future. This will involve going beyond the traditional repertories of scholarship and communication. It might benefit from the embrace of design fiction:

Design fiction is a term [6]first coined by Julian Bleecker and [7]popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as “the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change.” and that it “attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different.”

Design fiction isn't science fiction, it's not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

[8]https://www.eventbrite.com/e/design-fiction-for-sociologists-tickets-16160973908

There’s an example of the form such a future-orientated sociology might take in a recent event with Deborah Lupton and John Urry at the Hawke Research Institute in Australia. In Catastrophic Futures they addressed the question of what kind of future we can expect by 2050, as well as some of the methodological and political questions posed for sociology by such an investigation. There’s a podcast available [9]here and it’s really worth a listen. It also suggests a need for sociological thinkers to help ‘join the dots’: linking together what we know across a range of fields into broader synthetic accounts that accurately convey conceptually opaque aspects of our present situation and highlight potential trajectories. John Urry’s recent book Offshoring is a good example of what this might look like:
It seems obvious to me that sociology could make an important contribution to the repoliticisation that John Lanchester calls for but it’s not obvious to me that it will. Not least of all because the audit driven logic of the university mitigates against forms of sociological inquiry which by their nature would both transcend specialisation and include a speculative component that resists codification in ‘internationally excellent’ journal articles.

But if the worst does happen, if we see a catastrophic slide into hyper-capitalist dystopia driven by these technological advances, what place would there be for sociology then? It occurs to me that much of sociology could probably thrive quite well in a world where, as Lanchester puts it, "human-to-human interaction and judgment is in demand": the obvious risk is that it would be an instrumentalised sociology, robbed of any critical impulse, with sociologists reduced to technicians of human capital attendant upon the social relation of those still in employment and directed towards the problems caused by those condemned to perpetual unemployment. There might be a place for corporate ethnography but not for critique, for bounded theorising but not for expansive theory. Contrary to John Urry and Deborah Lupton in the aforementioned podcast, I think we should begin to talk about dystopias while we still can.
The Promise of Sociological Fiction (2015-05-10 11:52)

It’s been far from obvious to me what I should say for my talk at the [1]Design Fiction event at Goldsmiths on Wednesday. The motivation behind this event has been little more than "isn’t this interesting? let’s talk about it" but I realise that I’ve become *slightly* clearer through the process of organising the event about why I find it so interesting. I’ll leave it to [2]Tim to introduce design fiction. It’s a concept which is still relatively new to me but it’s one that I immediately found exciting. But it isn’t the only kind of sociological fiction.

I first encountered the *social fiction* of Patricia Leavy a few years ago. She found an outlet in fiction for expression of the cumulative knowledge which journals are ill suited for, as well as an opportunity to reach a much wider public. She edits a Social Fiction series which now has 16 titles. Fiction can, as she puts it, "enable us to crystallize micro-macro links through showing instead of telling": it can allow the sociological imagination to be exercised in a way which is vivid and direct but nonetheless grounded in research.

There are also surprising numbers of distinguished academics who have written novels without, as far as I’m aware, seeing these as social scientific projects per se. For instance Ann Oakley has written 7 novels and Richard Sennett has written 3. Rob Kitchin, who’s a leading figure in digital geography has written 4 novels and 2 collections of short-stories. It would be fascinating to know more about how such thinkers see their fiction and its relationship to their research. Then there’s someone like Sudhir Venkatesh whose work sits uneasily between fiction and non-fiction, in a way open to legitimate criticism, but who shows how sociological writing can exceed conventional categories in a way which engages a mass audience.

I’m interested in how sociological fiction can, as Bourdieu put it, give "symbolic force, by way of artistic form, to critical ideas and analyses". There’s a potentially powerful political function here: both in communicating ideas in an engaging way but also by unsettling that which is taken for granted by vividly representing futures that are either likely or which are being suppressed.

There’s another lovely phrase Bourdieu uses, he talks about the need to "throw their grain of sand into the well-oiled machinery of resigned complicities". I think sociological fiction can help do this by helping illustrate that there are *alternatives* and by exploring their character in a systematic but engaging way. I’m not for a second suggesting this is something *only* sociologists can do, such a claim would be absurd, but rather hoping that sociologists begin to experiment with fiction more widely in order to bring our particular insights and skills to an endeavour in which non-sociologists have long excelled: showing the interplay between biography and history.

[I’d love it if Sociological Imagination could become a platform for sociological fiction: if you’ve written anything that you’d like to see published then please do send it to me (mark AT markcarrigan.net). I’d love to read it.]

1. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/design-fiction-for-sociologists-tickets-16160973908
The history of Netflix (2015-05-10 12:19)

This talk by the CEO of Netflix is interesting for many reasons. But one more oblique one which struck me was how he describes his career in gladiatorial terms. His initial pronouncement that luck is the main part of commercial success is belied by his subsequent stories of the courageous battles he fought in which he destroyed his more powerful foes, a victory made possible through his courage and perseverance. Do corporate warriors see themselves in these terms? Or is it just something they put on when giving public talks in front of overly-eager audiences?
Who came second in the UK election? (2015-05-10 17:23)

Two very interesting maps by [1]Kieran Healy showing the disjunct between first and second place candidates in each constituency in the UK under our absurd voting system. It’s an important analysis [2]worth reading in full.
Queer Kinship & Relationship Conference 2015 - Registration till 17th of May (only few places left) (2015-05-11 07:11)

We are pleased to announce the registration for non-presenting participants for the Queer Kinship And Relationship Conference (8-11 June 2015, Zalesie, Poland). During the conference we will concentrate on different understandings of queer kinships/relationships, and present more insights into the dynamics of non-normative kinship configurations in various geo-temporal contexts.

The following speakers have accepted our invitation to participate in the conference:

Prof. Judith Butler (University of California, USA),
Dr Ulrika Dahl (Södertörn University, Sweden),
Dr Jacqui Gabb (Open University, United Kingdom),
Dr Ruth Preser (ICI-Berlin Institute for Cultural Inquiry, Germany),
Dr Ana Cristina Santos (Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal).
If you wish to know more about the conference theme and the PRELIMINARY PROGRAM of the conference please visit our website: [1]http://queerkinship.systemcoffee.pl/.

Registration fee for non-presenting participants is 240 EURO (which covers accommodation, meals for the whole conference as well as conference materials). We organize transportation (by coach, optional) from Warsaw to Zalesie and back, transportation fee is additional 25 EURO. Please note, that you can register with an accompanying person (so if you are coming with a friend and you will share a room only one of you needs to proceed with the registration process - fees for accompanying person will be added automatically by the system).

THE ONLINE REGISTRATION FOR THE CONFERENCE IS OPEN FROM 1ST OF MAY, AND WILL BE UNTIL 17TH OF MAY. In order to participate in the conference please make sure, that you register and pay your registration fees which we MUST receive no later than until 17th of May. THE ONLY WAY OF PAYING YOUR REGISTRATION FEES IS BY THE BANK TRANSFER. YOU WILL FIND BANK DETAILS IN THE SYSTEM AFTER YOUR REGISTRATION IS FINISHED. THE NUMBER OF PLACES AVAILABLE FOR THE CONFERENCE IS VERY LIMITED, so in order to participate in the conference please register as soon as possible. After filling in all the available places the registration will be closed. The conference is organized by the research team of the project 'Families of Choice in Poland' (2013-2015), Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any further enquiries or problems at: [2]familiesofchoice@psych.pan.pl

2. mailto:familiesofchoice@psych.pan.pl


4th Annual Conference of the
International Social Theory Consortium
Cambridge, UK, June 17-19, 2015


RECONSTRUCTING SOCIAL THEORY, HISTORY AND PRACTICE

We are pleased to announce the 2015 meeting of the International Social Theory Consortium to be held at the Arts School Building, University of Cambridge, June 17-19, 2015.

The central theme of this year’s meeting is 'Reconstruction', dedicated to interrogating the contributions and limits of 'deconstruction' and the possibilities of a return of history.

Are there limits to the deconstruction project, and have these limits been reached? What are the possibilities for the 'reconstruction' of narratives of long-term historical change? Is it possible to include and integrate the insights and contributions of critiques of knowledge, while at the same time developing new forms of knowledge? Can we submit the project of deconstruction itself to deconstruction?

3500
In addition, we continue the ISTC’s tradition of encouraging discussion across the entire range of topics under the general heading of social theory across disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

Confirmed Speakers include:

Peter Baehr, Lingnan University  
Gurminder Bhambra, University of Warwick  
Harry F. Dahms, University of Tennessee-Knoxville  
Sarah Franklin, University of Cambridge  
Tim Luke, Virginia Tech  
Lois McNay, Oxford University  
Stephen Turner, University of South Florida

Free Registration required through Eventbrite before end of May. Register at: [2]bit.ly/1I4Nw0g


Conference hosts:

International Social Theory Consortium and  
University of Cambridge, Faculty of Human, Social and Political Science  
[4]www.hspscam.ac.uk

Supporters:

The British Sociological Association (BSA)  
Theory Study Group and Historical and Comparative (Hist-Comp) Study Group

Cambridge Society for Economic Pluralism  

King’s Review  
[6]www.kingsreview.co.uk

An important contribution to Qualitative Longitudinal Research (2015-05-11 08:00)

Qualitative Longitudinal Research has often been overlooked in the past but it’s been undergoing something of a resurgence in recent years in the UK. There’s an important special issue of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology which collects a number of papers from those at the forefront of these developments. The editorial is free to access at the time of writing:

[2]New frontiers in qualitative longitudinal research: an agenda for research

This paper outlines the state of the art in qualitative longitudinal methodology, reflecting on more than 10 years of development since a previous special issue on qualitative longitudinal research was published by the International Journal of Social Research Methodology in 2003. The papers presented in this special issue emerge from a methodological innovation network that brought together an international community of researchers in order to map new frontiers for the method. This paper summarises the development of the method from a design to a sensibility, identifying three new frontiers as part of a future research agenda including: the need for a processual imaginary; experimentation with temporal perspectives and orientations and explicating the temporal affordances of our methods.

The post-holder will contribute to the continuing success of the MA Digital Culture and Society, and will join the team teaching on and further developing the BA Digital Cultures.

They will be an internationally excellent academic in the area of digital cultures and will have strong record of publications with the potential for impact and research income generation.

They will have a clear plan for building research in digital cultures for the future and the next REF. They will be expected to foster existing and develop new connections with practitioners in the digital industries (in the UK and ideally overseas) and will be open to developing links with colleagues in other departments, and at other universities internationally.

They will be expected to enhance the capacity of the Department to develop successful bids for research grant applications, and obtain funding from third sector source.

1. [https://www.hirewire.co.uk/HE/1061247/MS_JobDetails.aspx?JobID=60631](https://www.hirewire.co.uk/HE/1061247/MS_JobDetails.aspx?JobID=60631)

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**Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science (2015-05-11 14:15)**

"Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science"

at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame/South Bend, Indiana, USA

27-30 July 2015

"What difference does critical realism make for how we do our empirical work?" More work must be done on how Critical realism may re-orient practical Research. Papers applying a critical realist approach are invited on all topics, but in particular papers that focus on the practical, analytical and methodological implications of critical realism.

The Conference program will include a memorial for Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014)

Details about conference registration, paper submissions, housing and more: [http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/](http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/)
Submission of papers: send abstract of no more than 500 words to Nicolette Manglos-Weber \textsuperscript{[2]}\texttt{nmanglos@nd.edu} by April 15th 2015

Conference registration deadline: May 30 2015

Registration costs: $400 USD

Conference organiser is professor Christian Smith, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame.

After the Conference a one-day interdisciplinary workshop will be held on \textit{What Conversations about Science, Religion and Theology does Critical Realism make Possible (that other Philosophies of Science Do Not)?}

The annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) will be held August 22-25 in Chicago. Notre Dame is two hours away from Chicago, and IACR participants may want to prolong their stay to attend the ASA Conference.

1. \url{http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/}
2. \texttt{mailto:nmanglos@nd.edu}

Podcasts from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (2015-05-12 08:00)

Understanding Society is the world’s largest household survey, jointly funded by the ESRC and government departments. Here’s how the project describes itself:
Largest household study of its kind

We interview the same people in the same households each year to build a longitudinal picture of how their lives are changing over time.

Represents the diversity of the UK

Our participants live in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England and all of Britain's ethnic groups are represented in our Ethnicity Sample.

Issues that affect all our lives

Our questionnaires cover a wide variety of themes such as family, education, finance, employment, health and wellbeing. Read about the carefully-chosen questions we ask.

[4]https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about

They've also produced a vast selection of podcasts with the project team and those using the survey data. There's a full list here but we've linked below to some of the ones we thought looked particularly interesting:

- [6] Biomarkers and genetic data podcast
- [7] White flight and the rise of UKIP
- [8] Can video gaming be good for young people?
- [9] Getting online - are older people included?
• Does how we live influence how we sleep?
• Sexual orientation and poverty
• Why sample size matters
• Getting a good night’s sleep
• How British is the UK?

1. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about/longitudinal-studies-guide
2. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about/ethnicity
3. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about/questionnaire-content
4. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about
5. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts
6. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2014/17
7. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2014/14
8. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2014/13
9. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2014/09
10. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2014/08
11. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2013/22
12. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2013/10
13. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2013/07
14. https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/podcasts/2012/01

Well-Being, Society and Crisis Symposium (2015-05-12 11:20)

BSA Regional Postgraduate Symposium, Leicester 4th June 2015

Inequalities by Ethnicity in the UK *  Eilis Lawlor GDP Growth and Well-Being: Ireland Before and After the Crisis

15:20-15:30 Coffee and tea  
15:30 – 16:15 Panel discussion: What other terms should we use to evaluate our societies if well-being is not enough?  
The contribution of sociology and other academic disciplines  
16:15 – 17:00 Keynote by Professor Andrew Oswald (University of Warwick) 'Happiness around the World: The Current Scientific Evidence'

17:00 – 17:15 Closing remarks and reflections  
17:15 – 19:00 Wine Reception  
Registration: Conference registration: £10 BSA Members, £25 Non-BSA Members (includes lunch, refreshments and wine reception)  
Twitter: #swbLE2015  
Facebook: Well-Being Symposium Leicester June 2015  
For more information contact the organiser [4]kk237@le.ac.uk

1. https://email.le.ac.uk/owa/attachment.ashx?id=RgAAAABQ4AuSVdL5Qp%2fgooGWcz7rWBwCl9q2t0QUQbvj21KIs5GAAQ9YTZAyAADapJ1vhKtvTqNXaCDm8cMdAAAri%2b%2bUAAAJ&attcnt=1&at
4. mailto:kk237@le.ac.uk
5. mailto:kk237@le.ac.uk

Doing Justice to Figures and Figuration (2015-05-12 11:21)

Registration is now open for Doing Justice to Figures and Figuration, an ESRC and Gender Institute supported one-day graduate symposium at LSE on 19 June. Please [1]visit our registration page to sign up.

Doing Justice to Figures and Figuration seeks to bring together interdisciplinary scholars in the social sciences working on figuration and/or with figures. Figuration – the process of consolidating understandings of individuals and populations into a particular form or idea – is increasingly understood as significant to mobilizing and understanding social and political life. In the stigmatization or celebration of figures, affective and historical discourses of gender, ability, race, religion, sexuality, age, class, and nation are called upon to structure social and political life. Thinking across political and academic uses of figuration, Doing Justice to Figures and Figuration seeks to create a space in which to discuss the potentials and risks of using and interrogating figures within academic research.

The symposium includes a vegetarian and vegan catered lunch, and the following papers:
A public keynote lecture:

Dr. Imogen Tyler (Co-Director, Centre for Gender & Women's Studies: Lancaster)
"Figurative Methods: Craftivist Theory"

Maria Alexopoulos (Humboldt)
"The burden of lesbian existence: Reification and refusal in feminist literature"

Elaine Forde (Goldsmiths)
"Figuring and reconfiguring: The eco-warrior as trickster"

Aura Lehtonen (LSE)
"'The Benefit Scrounger': Racialisation and Sexualisation of the Welfare Recipient in Austerity Britain"

Nicole Shephard (LSE)
"Figuring Big Data"

Lauren Tooker (Warwick)

"Not a Loan, Not Alone? Indebted figuration in the Strike Debt movement"

3508
Design fiction is a term first coined by Julian Bleecker and popularized by SF author Bruce Sterling, who describes it as "the deliberate use of diegetic prototypes to suspend disbelief about change." and that it "attacks the status quo and suggests clear ways in which life might become different."

Design fiction isn't science fiction, it's not just a telling of stories in the future or trying to make predictions of the future, instead it is a way of trying to envision and interrogate possible futures based on research data, current trends, and/or technologies. Originally, primarily used by product designers as a cheap alternative to prototyping new products, it has found traction as a critical tool allowing us to see through the fog of hype and digital evangelism.

In this event Tim Maughan introduces design fiction for sociologists. He discusses the work he is undertaking with Sava Saheli Singh (New York University) and its possible implications for how we write about research.

Keith Kahn-Harris will discuss his new project which looks at how kinds of mainstream texts other than science fiction also generate 'social science fictions', often 'accidentally' as a result of the pragmatic requirements of generating workable plots and scenarios. Such texts can help force attention to a neglected sociological question: what are the limits of possibility in human society?
Sarah Burton will discuss the use of literary techniques within critical theory, thus interrogating (apparent) disciplinary demarcations set in place. Focusing on literary techniques of the fantastic, Sarah will demonstrate how these can be usefully employed in sociology writing to question dominant ideologies and praxis.

Les Back and Mark Carrigan will each offer a short response before the event is opened up for a general discussion.

1. https://www.eventbrite.com/e/design-fiction-for-sociologists-tickets-16160973908
3. http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2013/10/play/patently-untrue

Social Theory Centre Annual Lecture @SocioWarwick: Imogen Tyler: Classificatory Struggle (2015-05-12 11:27)

Social Theory Centre Annual Lecture 2015

Classificatory Struggle: Class Culture and Inequality in Neo-liberal Times

A Public Lecture with Imogen Tyler
Warwick University, MS.02

May 13th 17.00-18.30 followed by drinks reception – this event is free to attend - all welcome!

Classificatory Struggles: Class, Culture and Inequality in Neoliberal Times

The fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them (Bourdieu, 1984).

This paper begins by arguing that the fundamental problem that the concept of ‘class’ describes is inequality. The transition from industrial to financial capitalism (neoliberalism) in Europe has effected ‘deepening inequalities of income, health and life chances within and between countries, on a scale not seen since before the Second World War’ (Hall, et al., 2014). In this context, class is an essential point of orientation for social theory if it is to grasp the problem of inequality today. Traversing a route through Pierre Bourdieu’s relational understanding of class, Jacques Rancière’s formulation of declassificatory struggles, Beverley Skeggs’ understanding of class as struggles over value, and Wendy Brown’s argument that neoliberalism is characterised by the culturalization of political

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struggles, this paper develops a social theory of classification, with which we might better apprehend the escalating inequalities which characterise the societies in which we live today. The central argument is that social theories of class should be grounded not in the assumption and valorisation of class identities but in an understanding of class as struggles against classification. That is, the most effective forms of class-analysis are concerned not with undertaking classification per se, but rather with exposing and critiquing the consequences of classificatory systems and the forms of value, judgements and norms they establish in human societies. Only through a movement of declassification can social theories of class contribute to the development of alternative social and political imaginaries to the biopolitics of disposability which characterises neoliberal governmentality.

Imogen Tyler is Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Centre for Gender & Women’s Studies at Lancaster University. Imogen's research is concerned with social inequalities, power, injustice and resistance. It examines why inequalities exist, why inequalities are currently growing (patterns of neoliberalism, marketization, privatisation and the erosion of democracy in the transition to ‘postwelfare’ systems) and the intersections of different histories and forms of inequality. This is interdisciplinary research which employs mixed methods and draws together long-standing research interests in migration, internal and external borders, sexual politics, social class, race & ethnicity, disability and poverty, and an abiding interest in culture, processes of mediation and political aesthetics. Her book, Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain (2013) developed the concept of ‘social abjection’ to examine the operations of neoliberal state-crafting and was shortlisted for the 2014 Bread & Roses prize for political writing. Imogen has also recently edited a special issue of Citizenship Studies on ‘Immigrant Protest’ (2013) and a book Immigrant Protest: Politics, Aesthetics, and Everyday Dissent (SUNY 2014). Imogen is in the early stages of a new project on the sociology of stigma in neoliberal times, 'The Stigma Doctrine'.

Imogen blogs at [1]http://socialabjection.wordpress.com Tweet @DrImogenTyler email. [2]i.tyler@lancs.ac.uk

2. mailto:i.tyler@lancs.ac.uk

Michel Foucault - The Culture of the Self (2015-05-12 12:00)

Lectures given by Foucault at UC Berkeley soon before his death:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PL4226B755FD34C95A

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PL4226B755FD34C95A

A rare interview in English with the enigmatic French philosopher Michel Serres (2015-05-12 12:03)

I was only introduced to Michel Serres yesterday and he [1]seems like a fascinating figure who is relatively unknown in Anglophone philosophy. Here's what seems to be a rare interview him in English:
Despite being one of our closest living relatives, bonobos are still one of the least well understood of the great apes, largely remaining in the shadow of their better known cousins, the chimpanzees. In contrast to chimpanzees, bonobo societies are characterized by strong female social relationships, female dominance and generally peaceful social interactions. Here I explore the roots of female power in bonobos, focusing on both their reproductive and feeding ecologies, patterns in their communicative behaviour, as well as the extent to which close social bonds contribute to their raised status in bonobo society.
The Shifting Sociologies of the Street (2015-05-12 15:36)

Tuesday 15 September 2015, 10.00 - 18.00, University of Kent

A symposium sponsored by The Sociological Review

The street has long been a key laboratory for studies of social life, from the roots of urban sociology in the pioneering ethnographies of the Chicago School through to the diverse studies considering the performative, affective and non-representational nature of social practice through in situ examination of street etiquette and encounter. For all this, the street remains only loosely defined, and sometimes disappears from view in studies in which social action is privileged over material context.

This symposium - and a subsequent special issue of The Sociological Review - will act as a spur to take the street more seriously in contemporary sociology, and will demonstrate the value of a more careful scrutiny of the importance of the street as a site, scale and field for sociological research.

For more information or to register, see the [1]symposium’s website at the University of Kent


Brick Walls: On Racism and Other Hard Histories - Sara Ahmed @SocioWarwick on May 20th (2015-05-12 16:48)

Warwick Borders, Race, Ethnicity and Migration Network Public Lecture 2015

Brick Walls: On Racism and Other Hard Histories

Professor Sara Ahmed, Goldsmiths, University of London

Wednesday 20th May 5pm-6.30pm
Room S0.11, Social Sciences Building, University of Warwick

In her book, On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life, Sara Ahmed considered how diversity work is often described as "a banging your head against a brick wall job." In this lecture, she reflects further on brick walls as the hardening of histories, or as how histories becomes concrete. But walls that are hard for some (because of who they are, or what they do) do not appear for others. This lecture will invite reflection on how some borders that are tangible and material (that can stop or block bodies from entering) can be understood and lived by others as immaterial (as phantom walls). Thinking through and with walls, the material stuff of power, allows us to explore how diversity work (both the work we do when we try to transform an institution and the work we do when
we do not quite inhabit the norms of an institution) can be an experience of shattering and of assembling worlds from being shattered.

The event will be followed by a drinks reception

This is a public lecture and all are welcome.

If you have any queries about this event please contact Dr Hannah Jones, Sociology [1]h.jones.1@warwick.ac.uk

1. [mailto:h.jones.1@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:h.jones.1@warwick.ac.uk)

The Brave New World of Work: Over 25% of Jobs on Unitemps are for Interns (2015-05-12 21:13)

Out of curiosity I just searched for 'internship' on [1]Unitemps. There are 57 results with intern in the title. There are currently 201 jobs listed on Unitemps. So over 25 % of jobs on Unitemps are currently looking for interns. Many of these have an identical description as "3 Months 'Paid' Internship". The invert commas are presumably intended to indicate a description of the status rather than to cast doubt on the meaningfulness of the pay. But the effect is jarring nonetheless.

What's even more jarring is how many of these internships are clearly just jobs. But calling it an internship is seen to justify much lower wages and/or a flat fee on the strength of a barely sustained pretence that it's a training programme rather than a strategy for recruiting staff at (and potentially below) minimum wage. Remember it's a university at the heart of this. Unitemps is "the University owned temporary staffing service providing job opportunities on campus and with local commercial businesses" for those who haven't encountered it.

The other jobs service my university runs is doing the same thing. These are the first few of the 25 results when you search for "internship" on jobs.ac.uk. Surely the first 'internship' is obviously below minimum wage?
Summary

The SSRC seeks a Program Officer/Director for its new Digital Culture program. The program engages the opportunities and challenges presented to the social sciences, and scholarship more broadly, by the digital revolution. In the program’s first phase, the Program Officer/Director will oversee the engagement of these issues through working groups, a new digital forum, the development of a research agenda, and the exploration of new techniques in digital social science.
Description

The Social Science Research Council (SSRC) is an independent, international, nonprofit organization devoted to the advancement of interdisciplinary research in the social sciences through a wide variety of workshops and conferences, fellowships and grants, summer training institutes, scholarly exchanges, research, and publications.

The SSRC invites applications for the position of Program Officer/Director for the new Digital Culture program. The program engages the opportunities and challenges presented to the social sciences, and scholarship more broadly, by the digital revolution. Opportunities for the production and dissemination of social knowledge are, in many ways, unprecedented. The digital tools and sources of information now available include digitized archives, journals and books; massive data sources of new kinds; enhanced capacity to search; the explosion of software for the organization, investigation, and display of knowledge; radically innovative techniques for data visualization; and a growing commitment by an array of scholarly institutions to extend these means to advance research, teaching, and publishing. The challenges these changes pose to the generation, quality, and availability of knowledge are equally pressing and include the hollowing out of crucial institutions, the privatization and commercialization of data, the frequent absence of gatekeeping and guardianship of standards, and stark inequalities of access.

The Digital Culture program’s first phase will engage these issues through the mobilization of working groups on the curation of scholarly knowledge, the digital social sciences (including, but not limited to, questions surrounding big data), and the reliability of social science. A new digital forum will publish ideas and generate public discussion on these and related topics. The program will also use its first phase to develop a research agenda that brings a range of social science thinking to key questions regarding digital knowledge. Lastly, it will explore and experiment with new techniques in digital social science. The Program Officer/Director will design these activities in collaboration with a program advisory committee and oversee their implementation with the support of the Digital Culture Program Assistant. This is a two-year position with the possibility of renewal.

Qualifications

The best-qualified candidates will have a PhD in one of the social sciences, the humanities, information science, or interdisciplinary fields such as communications and media studies. Strong candidates will also have demonstrated achievements as researchers, as well as experience in the design and managing of digital scholarship. Competitive
candidates should demonstrate experience in collaborative work, the organization of events, and/or connection and outreach to a range of constituencies in academia, publishing, and media. The ability to communicate effectively is crucial, and experience engaging both researchers and nonacademic constituencies, including funders and policymakers, is likewise critical. Familiarity with grants administration and budgeting is desirable. Candidates must demonstrate their ability to work collaboratively and to manage multiple priorities and projects effectively.

Responsibilities

- Manage the continued development and implementation of the Digital Culture program in collaboration with the program’s advisory committee and in consultation with the SSRC’s President and Executive Program Director. This includes the development of funding proposals to support program activities.
- Engage with key members of the program’s network, especially its advisory committee and working groups, to facilitate strategic planning and oversight of program activities.
- Oversee planning for upcoming events, including conferences, workshops, and other meetings, and manage program budgets.
- Oversee the development of the program’s digital forum, and help curate its content in consultation with an editorial board and editorial advisors.
- Oversee the process and quality of publications emerging from the program as well as its online presence.
- Facilitate connections between the program’s scholars and relevant policy and media communities.
- Develop models of “digital social science” that the SSRC could implement and/or promote.
- Liaise and coordinate with other SSRC departments and with partner organizations.
- Handle additional responsibilities and projects as directed, depending on interest and capacity.

Terms, Salary and Benefits

Annual salary will be commensurate with experience. Comprehensive benefits include health, dental, vision, disability, life, and gym reimbursement; outstanding pension plan and tax savings programs; generous vacation and sick leave; and more. Provisions are made for professional staff to continue their development as social scientists while at the Council.

Application Information
For further information or to apply, please send a cover letter that includes your thoughts on how the Digital Culture program might proceed, a curriculum vitae, one writing sample, and the names of at least three professional colleagues who can serve as references to [2]applications@ssrc.org. Please put "Digital Culture PO/PD" in the subject line. Applications will be accepted until the position has been filled but should be received by May 31, 2015, for priority consideration. Please contact Ella Wagner at [3]wagner@ssrc.org with any addition questions.

1. [http://www.ssrc.org/about/employment/listings/digital-culture-program-officer-director](http://www.ssrc.org/about/employment/listings/digital-culture-program-officer-director)
2. [mailto:applications@ssrc.org](mailto:applications@ssrc.org)
3. [mailto:wagner@ssrc.org](mailto:wagner@ssrc.org)

Call for Papers: Mediated Intimacies: Relationships, Bodies and Technology (2015-05-13 06:24)

Mediated Intimacies: Relationships, Bodies and Technology

Call for Papers: Special Issue of Journal of Gender Studies to be published March 2017 edited by Alison Winch, Feona Attwood, Jamie Hakim.

We are looking for 7000 word completed essays by 31st December 2015

In what ways does media convergence culture represent, intervene in, exploit and enable intimate relations? How is intimacy being reconfigured under neoliberalism?

On the one hand we are living in atomized and individualistic times where relationships are increasingly strategic and competitive. On the other the media has become, as Beverly Skeggs argues, intensely intimate. This special issue on mediated intimacies aims to explore how understandings of intimacy are (re)constructed and experienced, particularly in digital cultures. In addition, we are interested in the ways in which the apparently alienated entrepreneurial self is constructed through and by forging intimate connections and simultaneously how these networks are mined and monetized by corporate culture.

This special issue of Journal of Gender Studies is developed from a symposium held in July 2014 on Mediated Intimacies where the speakers explored, among other topics, girls’ online friendships, ‘expert’ sex advice in printed media, male seduction communities, and how pornography reconceptualises the very idea of intimacy itself.

Potential papers could explore the affective dimensions of intimate practices reflecting the pleasures and pains of life lived under neoliberalism, including how precarity and class impact on the ways in which intimacy is forged. Because digital culture is primarily corporate driven (Taylor 2014) we are interested in how user-generated media employs self-branding strategies. For example, in the refashioning of the body or gendered and sexual identities, or the ways in which intimacy can be a form of self-promotion.

Feminist and queer perspectives seek to expand the reach of what is constituted as belonging, love, connection and intimacy. Whereas recession culture has reestablished normative gender categories (Negra and Tasker 2014)
contemporary digital cultures have the potential to challenge and rework gender and sexual identities (McGlotten 2013). This issue hopes to explore these productive tensions.

Potential papers could also explore how sexuality, sex, sexual knowledges and sexual pleasure function by looking, for example, at Do-It-Yourself porn, sexual subcultures and alternative sex practices. A final consideration underpinning this issue is how different intimacies intersect along axes of class, race, disability, age and geographical location.

Possible topics could include:
● adapting and resisting gendered and sexed identities
● forging new normative gendered identities
● mediatised kinship (families, parenthood and fertility)
● geolocation technology
● dating and hook up apps, sex dating and relationship cultures
● selfies
● role of experts (e.g. sex advisors and agony aunts), including their changing meaning in peer-driven contexts
● mediated romance
● fitness apps and body culture
● use of social networking sites, including Instagram, Facebook, Twitter
● self-branding
● the mediation of friendship
● rebranding feminism
● pornography
● monetization of intimacy, including big data, content generation and PR/advertising

Please send 7000 word completed essays by 31st December 2015 through Scholar One Manuscripts: [1]http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cjgs20/current. Please direct enquiries to Alison Winch ([2]a.winch@mdx.ac.uk<mailto:a.winch@mdx.ac.uk>, Feona Attwood ([3]f.attwood@mdx.ac.uk<mailto:f.attwood@mdx.ac.uk>) and Jamie Hakim ([4]j.hakim@uea.ac.uk<mailto:j.hakim@uea.ac.uk>)) Publication schedule: 31 December 2015: Papers to peer reviewers March 2016: Comments to authors June 2016: Authors final revisions September 2016: Final acceptance
Call for Papers: The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World

Call for Papers at the ISA World Forum, Vienna, 10-14 July, 2016

Theme: The Futures We Want: Global Sociology and the Struggles for a Better World

Dear colleagues,

We would like to call your attention to the call for papers at the ISA World Forum, RC34, Sociology of Youth panel entitled ‘Understanding Youth Activism in Local, National and Transnational Contexts: Innovative Methodological Approaches’ (full description of the session can be found below).

The session will include 4 papers presented in person, with the possibility of additional papers being made available for distribution or as posters. Papers will be selected by Session Organisers from those submitted to ISA by the deadline of September 30, 2015. Abstracts should be submitted at: [1]https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/forum-2016/cfp.cgi

Notification of acceptance will be made by 30 November 2015.

Carles Feixa, Hilary Pilkington and Mariona Ferrer

Session title:

‘Understanding Youth Activism in Local, National and Transnational Contexts: Innovative Methodological Approaches’

Session Organisers:

Carles FEIXA, UDL, Spain
Hilary PILKINGTON, University of Manchester, United Kingdom
Mariona FERRER, Pompeu Fabra University, Spain

Session description:

Amidst the call for academics to think big and to routinely cross disciplinary and geographical boundaries, this panel invites critical discussion of what value is added to knowledge from conducting large scale, transnational research into youth activism. The session invites challenges to methodological assumptions that survey research shows the big picture but at the cost of local nuance while qualitative research cannot speak beyond the individual case. It welcomes discussion and examples of the potential for conducting context-sensitive survey research and meta-ethnographic analyses that allow interview and ethnographic data to speak across the local and national contexts in which they are embedded without making false claims to representativeness. It also welcomes contributions that demonstrate the added explanatory value that can be generated from triangulating data of qualitatively different kinds in order to understand contemporary youth experience.

“Go Home”: Mapping Immigration Controversy

End of Project Conference

[1]REGISTER HERE

June 10th, 9.30am - 6.30pm, University of Warwick, Social Sciences Building

This one day conference is aimed at academics and activists interested in discussing the findings of the Mapping Immigration Controversy project. We want to bring together learning and research within and outside universities, to discuss how government rhetoric and practice on immigration is affecting our everyday lives, and the new forms of resistance that are emerging.

Keynote speakers:


Panel discussions on:

Activist Research Methodology

State Communications on Immigration

Resistance

The conference will also include performance and interactive sessions
Free attendance, including lunch, but you need to register

The Mapping Immigration Controversy project is an 18 month research project that had been exploring the impacts on local communities and national debate of current publicity campaigns about migration by the UK Home Office. Discussions at the conference will build on our interim findings and will include other researchers and activists.

GETTING TO THE EVENT
The nearest mainline station to the University of Warwick is Coventry station. Buses and taxis to campus are available at the station. There is pay and display car parking on campus but spaces are often very limited. You can find out more about transport options here: [9] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/

TRAVEL BURSARIES

We have travel bursaries for travel within the UK, to enable participation from people who would not otherwise be able to come, and to encourage attendance from community organisations, activists, migrants, people directly affected by Home Office immigration campaigns, young people, students and early career researchers.

If you are applying for a travel bursary, please be prepared to write a sentence about why, and give an estimate of how much your transport costs are likely to be on the registration page. Please note that we will ordinarily expect you to pay for your travel in advance, and will reimburse you by BACS transfer to your bank account after the conference (you will need to complete a form and provide receipts). If you foresee a problem with this - for example if you are not able to pay the cost of your travel up-front, or if you do not have a UK bank account which can receive BACS transfers - please get in touch and we will try to make arrangements to book your travel for you.

3. [https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/people/staff/bridget-anderson/](https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/people/staff/bridget-anderson/)
4. [http://www.ramfel.org.uk/wordpress/staff-trustees/](http://www.ramfel.org.uk/wordpress/staff-trustees/)
5. [http://www.tmg-uk.org/about/staff-and-trustees/](http://www.tmg-uk.org/about/staff-and-trustees/)
6. [http://www.uel.ac.uk/lss/staff/wemyssgeorgie/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/lss/staff/wemyssgeorgie/)
9. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/)

Algorithms and Accountability (2015-05-13 08:00)

Algorithms and Accountability took place in the Department of Law at New York University in February. Here’s the description of the symposium:

Scholars, stakeholders, and policymakers question the adequacy of existing mechanisms governing algorithmic decision-making and grapple with new challenges presented by the rise of algorithmic power in terms of transparency, fairness, and equal treatment. Algorithms increasingly shape our news, economic options, and educational trajectories. The centrality and concerns about algorithmic decision making have only increased since we hosted the [1]Governing Algorithms conference in May 2013. This event built upon that conversation to address legal, policy and ethical challenges related to algorithmic power in three specific contexts: media production and consumption, commerce, and education.
The event was recorded in full and the videocasts are attached below:


CMRB (The Centre for Research on Migration, Refugees and Belonging) at the University of East London is pleased to announce as part of its Borders and Bordering Seminar Series:

'Sexuality, Borders, and Categorical Edges', Prof. Allaine Cerwonka (University of East London)

This seminar will take place 5-7pm, Monday 8th June 2015 in EB.G.08, Docklands Campus, University of East London, E16 2RD, nearest tube: Cyprus DLR

([1]http://www.uel.ac.uk/campuses/docklands/) The event is free but spaces are limited so please reserve a place by following this link: [2]cerwonka.eventbrite.co.uk
How obsessive auditing produces “a profession which is incompatible with a normal life” (2015-05-14 08:00)

80% of new teachers in 2005 were still teaching after their first year. In 2015 that has shrunk to just 62%, coupled with record numbers leaving mid career. In the intervening period, we’ve seen successive governments seek to transform schooling in a way that has left the [1] “profession monitored to within an inch of its life”: increasingly teaching can’t retain its new recruits and given 76% of new teachers report having considered leaving the profession, it’s possible the retention rate will continue to collapse over time.

Can you blame them? David Cameron recently pronounced that “if you’re not good or outstanding, you have to change” and that “If you can’t do it yourself, you have to let experts come in and help you” – with ‘good or outstanding’ constituted through the unreliable judgements of an audit regime utterly disconnected from the realities of teaching. The result is a ratcheting up of situational demands amidst a climate of fear, leaving teachers drowning in assessment, terrified of negative assessments and increasingly prone to illness, as a [2] recent survey found:

- 83% had reported workplace stress.
- 67% said their job has adversely impacted their mental or physical health
- Almost half of the three thousand respondents reported they had seen a doctor because of work-related mental or physical health problems
- 5% had been hospitalised, and
- 2% said they had self-harmed.

This has produced a situation which the general secretary of the ATL describes as teaching having become “incompatible with normal life”. This is what audit regimes do when they’re pursued as an instrument of workplace control. How far behind is higher education? Will the greater sunk costs of newly qualified PhDs preclude a mass exodus from the profession? The analogy is far from perfect, not least of all because of the much lower ratio of available jobs to newly qualified academics, but there seems to be a similar direction of travel in both professions.

Decolonizing Gender: Raewyn Connell at LSE (2015-05-14 08:16)

Decolonizing Gender

An LSE Gender Institute and Feminist Theory public lecture

Speaker: Professor Raewyn Connell

Date: Monday 18 May 2015
Time: 6.30-8pm
Venue: Old Theatre, Old Building
Chair: Dr Ania Plomien

Members of the public, LSE alumni, LSE students and LSE staff can request one ticket via the online ticket request form:
[1]Ticket Request - Decolonising Gender, Professor Raewyn Connell, 18 May

The creation of contemporary knowledge about gender is a revolution in thought that has been closely connected with political struggles for gender justice. In the last generation a major problem about this field of knowledge has been recognized, its constitution within a worldwide economy of knowledge shaped by the power and wealth of the global North. This lecture will explore recent attempts to overcome this problem, in feminist re-thinking of imperialism, coloniality and Southern perspectives. The lecture will consider connections of knowledge with feminist politics in the neoliberal era, when new forms of patriarchy have emerged; and will ask if we can have a fully decolonized global feminism that is both politically effective and socially radical.

For more information: [2]http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/events/2015/05/20150518t1830vOT.aspx

2. http://www.lse.ac.uk/publicEvents/events/2015/05/20150518t1830vOT.aspx

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Campaign Against The Arms Trade: Universities Network Co-Ordinator (2015-05-14 08:18)

Universities Network Co-ordinator (internship)

This is a great opportunity for someone wanting to take their first career steps in campaigning with an award winning NGO.

The Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) works to end the international arms trade and promote peace, justice and democratic values. The arms industry is a deadly, corrupt business that has a devastating impact on human rights
and security, and damages economic development.

CAAT is offering a

**9 month paid internship**

post to someone wanting to build on their campaigning and outreach skills. CAAT’s Universities Network is an informal collective of students and groups at universities across the UK who are campaigning to break ties between their institution and arms companies. We are looking for someone to

inspire

and

support

students

to

take action and

campaign

effectively.

The internship will be full-time based at our London office, although travelling to universities around the country is also a large part of the role. The intern will be offered a comprehensive training programme when they start and support from our Local Outreach Co-ordinator throughout the nine month period.

For more information on the post including how to apply please visit:


The deadline for receiving application forms is

**midday Wednesday 3rd June**


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**Luc Boltanski at University of Westminster (2015-05-14 08:21)**

The [1]Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster is delighted to announce that this year’s CSD Encounter will be with the internationally renowned French sociologist [2]Luc Boltanski. Convened by [3]Chantal Mouffe. Details below and attached. Additional speaker information can be found via the booking link: [4]boltanski-csd.eventbrite.co.uk. Apologies for any cross posting.

LUC BOLTANSKI
Saturday 6 June 2015
THE BOARDROOM
309 REGENT STREET, LONDON W1B 2UW
The culture of dependency (2015-05-14 08:35)

(via [1]Rob MacDonald)

Childhood and Youth Postgraduate Summer School (2015-05-14 13:04)

5th International CSCY Summer School for Postgraduate Students
Wednesday 15 – Thursday 16 July 2015

ICOSS, 219 Portobello, Sheffield, UK

This exciting two day international summer school is for post-graduate students working in the area of childhood and youth.

The workshops and networking sessions will be of interest for students about to embark on research and for those who are preparing their dissertations.

Plenaries

Professor Allison James, Sociology: ‘Personalising children’s lives: reflections on childhood research’

Professor Kate Pahl, Education: ‘Co-production in practice: the processes and practices of research without a map’

Also featuring ....

- Practical research workshops to include visual methods, ethnography, ‘impact’ and making a difference and using social media in your research.

- Careers panel session.

- Ethical question time: submit your ethical dilemmas to a panel of experts and join in the debate!

- Students are encouraged to submit posters.

Further details, including the programme, how to book and the booking fee are available on the CSCY website: [1] http://cscy.group.shef.ac.uk/events/. If you have any queries contact Dawn Lessels, [2] d.j.lessels@sheffield.ac.uk
In January 2015, scientists recorded atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide above 400 parts per million on a regular basis – the first time such a level had been reached so early in the calendar year. It is well established that levels of CO₂ above 350 (already well above the preindustrial norm of 275 ppm) spur global warming – we are now experiencing the effects in extreme weather, droughts, rising sea levels, thawing permafrost, etc. Levels above 450 will most likely put the planet on an inescapable course toward catastrophic climate change. 400ppm is an eco-political music-video which encapsulates climate crisis and climate justice in three minutes flat. It is an intervention in popular political ecology/economy, aimed at those who are uneasy with the increasingly obvious deterioration of the living systems of which we are an inextricable part. The arc of the song begins from basic observations – symptoms of the crisis – and then shifts to the ideological problem of denial, softened in recent years by massive Corporate Social Responsibility advertising and complemented by the emergence of ‘silver-bullet’ geo-engineering schemes. At the song’s midpoint, its bridge identifies the structural drivers of the crisis: carboniferous capitalism, and the contradiction between compounding capital accumulation and the principle of homeostasis which governs the biosphere. The next verse underlines that point and invokes, with the wheel of fortune, a financialized casino-capitalism inured to its material ‘externalities’. Wes Carroll’s spirited guitar solo is accompanied by images from Canada’s notorious Tar Sands of bitumen extraction and what it leaves behind. But at this point the video begins to arc toward hope, with footage from the Tar Sands Healing Walk (featuring Cree activist and writer Clayton Thomas-Muller) – an annual event since 2010 bringing together Indigenous activists, environmentalists and others. The last verse gestures toward a just transition – a power shift – to a post-capitalist future that combines global justice and solidarity with ecological stewardship, and that abandons the consumer-capitalist logic of always having more in favour of buen vivir: ‘living well’. To get there, we had better start healing what Karl Marx called the metabolic rift between capitalist extractivism / accumulation and the conditions for a vital ecosystem. Mass popular struggle, building on but going beyond the September 2014 People’s Climate March (the final image), is a necessary condition for such a radical remaking of our world.
Bill Carroll is Professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Canada). We previously posted another of his sociological blues compositions, "Blind Eye Forward," and a video talk on global politics.

1. [https://youtu.be/V4_AfzUXLSU](https://youtu.be/V4_AfzUXLSU)

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**Visual Matrix Workshop: Imagery, Affect and Visualisation in a Psychosocial Research Method**

(2015-05-15 08:47)

**Association for Psychosocial Studies**

in collaboration with

**Birkbeck Institute for Social Research**

[1]  [2]


[4] **Friday 5 June 2015** | 10.00am – 5.00pm | Room B03, 43 Gordon Square

*This is the first workshop in our new series, “New Developments in Psychosocial Methods”, organised by Association for Psychosocial Studies in collaboration with the BISR.*

The Visual Matrix is a new research method, led by imagery, affect and visualization, that has been developed in order to inquire into phenomena that research participants may find difficult to put into words. It works with a group, who are invited to respond associatively to a stimulus related to the research problem or question. Typically, the stimulus is presented in visual or other sensory form, and the group's associations build up over the course of an hour into a 'collage' of images, affects and ideas. This collage provides the material for a discussion that is organised through 'image mapping'. Both the matrix and the post-matrix discussion are then subjected to an interpretive process that is normally carried out by a research analytic panel.

The Visual Matrix, was developed and tested through a study (Froggett et al 2014) that aimed to understand the impact of public art on a town, through people's experience of the artworks. This included unarticulated dimensions, still in the process of emergence a year after the artworks had arrived. It has since been used in clinical environments and social interventions where people are subjected to experiences they find hard to articulate; for example the 'unspeakable' experience of breast amputation following breast cancer surgery, or in the context of an arts/health collaboration on erectile dysfunction.

The workshop will engage participants in a short 'taster' matrix and in the beginnings of the interpretive process that follows. The hybrid theoretical underpinnings of the visual matrix, will be highlighted and the further interpretative protocols, that would normally follow a matrix, explained. This will help to clarify the research outcomes that can be expected, and how they might differ from other group-based methods such as a focus group. Hence the workshop offers participation in a 'live' matrix, an understanding of how it is situated in a research process, and an opportunity to discuss its theoretical origins and research applications. A link to a short video clip of a visual matrix, recorded for demonstration purposes, can be found at [11]http://vimeo.com/97731002


Registration and payment are essential –[13]book your place here
£15 Standard | £10 APS Members / Birkbeck Staff & Students | £5 APS Students /Unwaged APS Members

1. https://www.facebook.com/BirkbeckISR
3. http://www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr/events/events/bbk-local?uid=5c8f0be5e6c6ca4e685e2630991f9196
4. x-apple-data-detectors://1/
5. x-apple-data-detectors://2/
7. http://www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr/
13. https://www2.bbk.ac.uk/bisr/visualmatrix.html
Wednesday, May 20th, 10:30am to 3:30pm

We have launched a brand new workshop aimed at academics wanting to, or already working with community based organisations and groups. The workshop will provide you with an insight into the dynamics of Community University Partnerships (CUPS), and explore ways in which universities can work equitably with community partners.

**Objective:** To promote good practice CUPs from a community perspective

**Learning outcomes:** By the end of the workshop you will have:

- Built on your understanding of the dynamics of CUPs, paying particular attention to the role and perspective of community partners
- Identified skills and approaches that can help to create effective and mutually beneficial CUPs
- Considered ways to manage CUP working in an equitable way by drawing on messages from the UK Community Partner Network and Research for Community Heritage projects

To find out more about the workshop and how to book, visit the NCCPE website.

1. x-apple-data-detectors://0/
2. [http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/events/engaging-with-communities](http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/events/engaging-with-communities)


Last week I attended re: publica in Berlin for the first time. For those not familiar with it, it’s a vast conference about internet and society incorporating activists, journalists, hackers, academics, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists in a melange of sessions over 3 days that was at times frustrating but which I nonetheless found enormously stimulating and enjoyable. It takes place in a stunning post-industrial venue in Kreuzberg, a vast series of linked warehouses and out buildings centred around a large court yard, the scale of which can be seen in the Flickr stream for the event.

By the second day of the event, I was consumed by the thought: *what would a sociological re: publica look like?* I’ve been preoccupied by this ever since and I’m starting to plan how to make something like this happen. Obviously re: publica is a massive event that has grown over many years and I’m not planning to attempt anything on this scale. But the idea I have is for an initial 3 day event, taking place in summer 2017, taking the form of a literary festival focused around sociology, anthropology and related disciplines.

The theme of the festival would be *making the familiar strange.* This might seem too diffuse but I think it captures something crucial about the capacity of these disciplines to contradict common sense, unsettle taken for granted ways of viewing the world and to work creatively in elaborating upon dormant alternatives. In this sense all the content would be ‘critical’ but in a way that avoids obscure theoretical argument and addresses everyday life in an accessible way.

I’m obsessed with the idea that this would take place in a post-industrial venue similar, though smaller, to that of re: publica. Birmingham and Manchester immediately seem like potential locations which could facilitate this. I’m keen that the atomisation of TED talks be avoided (as well as the simplification that they sometimes fall into) so I would imagine a lot of the intellectual content of the events being centred around a key topic which speakers would explore in different ways. For instance here are some of the potential session topics that occurred to me. These only reflect my own interests and I’m hopeful that the actual range of topics would be much broader than this:
1. Life after capitalism
2. Acceleration society
3. The future of cities
4. Riots and disorder
5. Real utopias and dystopias
6. Stigma and shame
7. Robots and the end of work
8. Freedom in an age of big data

However I'd like there to be lots of stuff that isn't talks. As well as the generic category of 'workshops' (about what I'm not sure) I'd like there to be art installations scattered around the venue and the 3 days could be a host for all manner of public engagement projects that fit with the theme of the event.

This plan is far from complete but I think it's starting to take shape. I've had a first attempt at an initial financial plan and I'm cautiously optimistic that if I could raise £15k+ in funding, this could otherwise be self-financing through ticket sales at a price that wouldn't be extortionate. However this is so far beyond the scale of anything that I've ever tried to organise before that it's possible I'm being wildly unrealistic.

If this seems like something you might want to help with then please get in touch: mark@markcarrigan.net

1. https://re-publica.de/en/
2. https://www.flickr.com/photos/re-publica

» Making The Familiar Strange: A Festival of Critical Social Thought The Sociological Imagination (2016-01-26 13:00:52) [...] planning Making The Familiar Strange: A Festival of Critical Social Thought for summer 2017. See here for some background to the event. If you'd like to get involved, we're having a [...]

3536
The new Apple Watch and the problem of our creeping connectivity (2015-05-16 07:14)

by David Beer

One of the most memorable images from my childhood is a suave and leather jacketed David Haselhoff, playing the reluctant but slick hero Michael Knight in the TV show Knight Rider, speaking into his watch. He'd usually utter something like "Come and get me Kitt" or "I need you buddy". Kitt, the automaton car, would be there in seconds. The fantasy of being able to communicate through a watch was spectacular stuff for a child in the 1980s. With the launch of Apple Watch we may only be a mildly sarcastic robotic car away from that dream, but for some reason the realities of the networked watch seem a little less shiny than the fantasy version. Instead, the corporeal hyper-connectivity of this new wearable device highlights to us the strains and pressures that come with always being switched-on.

The problem is that this type of smart watch inevitably seeks to increase our already deeply connected lives. Just over a decade ago Scott Lash wrote of the lack of space for critical reflection that results from the dense information flows that have come to dominate our lives. Our constant exposure to information simply leaves us with little room to think. We live, he has suggested in a more recent book, in an 'intensive culture'. The pace and volume of these information flows are seen to be escalating and are becoming increasingly difficult to swim against.
With the arrival of smartphones in 2007 and now with the smart watch, these information flows are increasingly finding their way to the inside of our bodily routines and are embedding themselves deeply into our everyday lives. As these wearable devices connect us into our environments, it will almost certainly become harder for us to disconnect – even for fleeting moments. The Apple Watch is another step towards the networking of our bodies into the communicative networks in which we live. The consequence is that we will be opening our bodies up to the pressures of constant networking and the unstinting demands of mediated social connectivity.

Indeed, if we put this into a broader context, there has already been plenty of work to suggest that the very divide between work and leisure is breaking down. This is a result of the changing nature of work and, more specifically, the rise of mobile and home based working. It has been argued that we occupy and exist within a kind of social factory. Work and leisure blur as the time and space of labour and “free-time” dissolve into one. Our lives become spaces of production and value creation. The consequence, for writers like Ros Gill and Andy Pratt, is that work can become inescapable – as can the type of bodily and emotional sensations that it provokes within us (they report on how the precarious nature of labour and the heightened competition it fuels leads to feelings of insecurity, fatigue, anxiety and exhaustion). Alongside this, it has also been argued that the divide between production and consumption is breaking down as we engage in the significant labour required to maintain our social media profiles, feeding them with personal data for others to consume. These arguments have been unfolding for some time, but with the Apple Watch we have a device that is designed to further blur the boundaries between work and leisure and to optimize our performance as productive and active consumers. This is a device that makes clear to us the very inescapability of our role as value or content generators, and reinforces the obligation to be always switched-on.

William J. Mitchell once spoke of the way that our nervous systems are extended and augmented by mobile devices. With the Apple Watch we have the most literal and obvious embodiment of this meshing of our nervous systems with our informational environments. The biological body can now be connected ever more directly and smoothly into these information flows.

When you look at the marketing that has accompanied the launch of the Apple Watch, you actually find that this kind of bodily and nervous connectivity is a central part of how the watch is being sold. We are told that it will provide a more “haptic” experience. This is a tactile and sensory set of connections, with the watch sharing sensory information with the body. It extracts information such as heart rate, using its sensors placed on the skin, whilst buzzing with notifications and bodily interventions. For example, as the TV advert shows, the watch might buzz to tell us that we have been sitting for too long and that it is time to stand up, this is just one possible way that we can use it to enhance our lifestyles.

Reflecting on how these devices are constructed in Apple’s series of marketing videos is revealing. We find the fetishization of materials, of personalization and of capability. The “heritage” of watch making is forged in the metals and connects the past with the technological present. This is a device of precision. It is a device that heightens our sensory connections – we can now feel information as well as see and hear it. There are then various new possibilities for the body to be tracked, measured and compared. The device is presented as being part of a lifestyle in which our connectivity becomes the means of self-improvement and heightened experiences. This is a device, we are told, that helps you to be more healthy and active. As the video dedicated to health and fitness suggests, this watch “gets to know you the way a good personal trainer would”. That is to say that it takes on an active role in guiding your lifestyle, suggesting goals and activities. The promise is that you will become less sedentary and the watch’s presence on your body will stimulate and provoke action.

The launch of the Apple Watch gives us the opportunity to reflect more broadly on how connected we might want to be. Do we really want a “haptic” connection to our informational environment? Given the recent accounts of contemporary work and productive consumption, we might wonder what the consequences of not being able to step away from the intensity of contemporary culture will be. Based on the discussions of precarious forms of labour and the active role of the consumer in the production of culture, it is certainly a device that is fitting with the social
Despite their glossy appeal, I won’t be buying a smart watch. A buzzing wristwatch will only heighten my stress levels by reminding me of the work that needs doing and the things that require my attention. The type of physical feedback that these watches give, the corporeal buzz of a responsive and personalised notification, is the perfect technological embodiment of the social factory. Our bodies will get caught up in the demands of being switched-on and will become the surfaces on which the tensions between work and leisure become a reality.

So the type of connectivity that the Apple Watch offers is not so much the realization of a fantasy as the spreading of the pressures of the contemporary world. We should note William Mitchell’s observations and wonder what might be the outcomes of appending our nervous systems with such devices. Being physically connected with information and communication systems might seem like progress towards some technological dream, but it is likely to extend the reach of the demands placed upon us by the social factory. Such devices are likely to disrupt our immediate social connections and interrupt our time/space of rest, recuperation and thoughtfulness. These, via such devices, are likely to be unsettled and disturbed by the pressures of constant and inescapable connectivity. The dreams of the communicative watch that populated my childhood seem less appealing in the unforgiving and stark daylight of the present day – especially as they represent the furthering of the presence of new forms of mobile work, bio-tracking and the demands of new media-based consumption. In short, the Apple Watch is emblematic of the creeping extension of our connectivity. Its launch presents us with an opportunity to reflect on just how connected we want to be.

David Beer is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York. His publications include Punk Sociology, Popular Culture And New Media: The Politics of Circulation and New Media: The Key Concepts (with Nicholas Gane). He is currently working on a book called Metric Power and he is an editor at theoryculturesociety.org.

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mo8Q1s0HnW0
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4_4-CbpCRE
5. http://www.uk.sagepub.com/books/Book205809
8. https://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/angela-mcrobbie/is-passionate-work-neoliberal-delusion
9. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/25/7-8/1.abstract
10. http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/25/7-8/1.abstract
12. http://joc.sagepub.com/content/10/1/13
13. http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/me
Our most popular posts this month | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-26 14:08:48)
[...] The new Apple Watch and the problem of our creeping connectivity [...] 

The comfort of a smartphone | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-28 08:06:37)
[...] This reliance is not just based on the fact that these phones allow us to keep in touch, to stay networked and to participate in the incessant din of social media. The response I had was not just about the [...] 

The most popular posts on The Sociological Imagination this week | The Sociological Imagination (2015-06-02 22:15:19) 
[...] The new Apple Watch and the problem of our creeping connectivity [...] 


IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/0jZrCVjwcIo

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/0jZrCVjwcIo

Our most popular posts this month | The Sociological Imagination (2015-05-26 14:09:18) 
[...] Bruno Latour: The Relativist [...] 

Dear academic hive mind, please help me identify radical education projects in the UK (2015-05-16 08:00)

A few years ago I produced a list of all the radical education projects that sprang up in the wake of the government’s agenda for higher education ‘reform’. I didn’t really have a clear definition of ‘radical education projects’ beyond
people “trying to explore different, freer and more autonomous ways of learning”. Looking back at the list now, I’m struck that I’ve forgotten what half of these projects actually were or how I came across them:

1. [1]Left Overs ([2]podcast)
2. [3]The Social Science Centre
5. [6]The University for Strategic Optimism
7. [8]The University of Utopia
10. [12]Birmingham Social Centre and Free School
12. [14]Student as producer
13. [15]The University of Incidental Knowledge
14. [16]The University Project

It seems I saw a family resemblance between a lot of different projects I encountered in a very specific period of change within higher education. However a conversation with [17]Nick Mahoney yesterday has left me wondering if my focus on responses to government policy was overly restrictive: it left me ignoring things that were more recent (the post-occupy education projects) and things that were much more long standing (the Workers Education Association). So I’d like to compile a new list of projects that represent different, freer and more autonomous ways of learning. Any suggestions? Here’s my attempt:

1. [18]The Social Science Centre
2. [19]The Ragged University
3. [20]The Workers Education Association
4. [21]WikiQuals
5. [22]New Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies

It’s interesting to look through the previous list and see how many of the projects lapsed within a few months and how many continued for a few years. I’d love to interview people involved in both, as well as those that are still ongoing, in order to understand how these developed over time and how they changed the people involved.
Routines and Reflexivity in Organisational Life (2015-05-17 08:00)

In this podcast recorded at a Centre for Social Ontology seminar in March 2014, Alistair Mutch (Nottingham Trent University) discusses routines and reflexivity in organisations.
Much of the debate occasioned by the development of ideas about reflexivity and morphogenesis has turned on the status of habit. Whilst recognising the importance of this debate, this seminar takes an alternative tack. Returning to Bhaskar’s formulation of ‘position-practices’, it reviews recent work on organizational routines. Developing a position which sees routines as a key emergent property of organizations, recent developments in information technology are seen to cement autonomous reflexivity. Accompanied by an increasing discourse of ‘strategizing’, this might limit the development of meta reflexivity.

2. https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/200619044&color=ff5500&auto_play=false&hide_related=false&show_comments=true&show_user=true&show_reposts=false
When Sociologists fail to talk about the future (2015-05-17 08:29)

Earlier in the week I organised a Design Fiction for Sociologists workshop at Goldsmiths with the help of Les Back. It was a really interesting event on a number of levels but the aspect of the discussion which has most preoccupied me since is the failure of sociologists to talk about the future. I learnt that projective analysis is a relatively common feature of scholarship in the material sciences and yet it is largely absent from sociology, at least as a routine and taken for granted part of research.

We need to be cautious about this. If we accept that the social world is an open system (as opposed to the closed systems produced in laboratory work) then prediction in the traditional sense would be an obviously mistaken goal. There’s simply too many contingencies, with their potential impact multiplying over time in a path-dependent way, for it to be feasible to offer definitive claims of what will happen.
But can we forecast? My hunch is that we can and that a mechanisms based sociology is actually well equipped to do this, providing it is extremely sensitive to contextual changes over time i.e. recognising how the operation of a mechanism will unfold differently across changing contexts as other, perhaps newer, mechanisms will act conjointly to amplify or impede its operation. The results are obviously fallible but so is everything else we do. I'm increasingly convinced we can sketch potential futures, as well as the conditions likely to give rise to them, in a manner that has the status of something significantly beyond speculation.


Is human culture collapsing under the weight of its own verbiage? (2015-05-17 11:33)

I just quoted [1]this article from Charlie Brooker in the section of Social Media for Academics about 'how to ensure you're not wasting your time when you should be doing real work'. I've begun to feel like this about social media sometimes (particularly Twitter) and I thought my own feelings about this could be a helpful way to structure the wider discussion in the book:

I've recently been overwhelmed by the sheer amount of jabber in the world: a vast cloud of blah I felt I was contributing to every seven days.

If a weatherman misreads the national mood and cheerfully sieg-heils on BBC Breakfast at 8.45am, there'll be 86 outraged columns, 95 despairing blogs, half a million wry tweets and a rib-tickling pass-the-parcel Photoshop meme about it circulating by lunchtime. It happens every day. Every day, a billion instantly conjured words on any contemporaneous subject you can think of. Events and noise, events and noise; everything was starting to resemble nothing but events and noise. Firing more words into the middle of all that began to strike me as futile and unnecessary. I started to view myself as yet another factory mindlessly pumping carbon dioxide into a toxic sky.

[..]

But then right now I don't "get" most forms of communication. There's just so much of it. Everybody talking at once and all over each other; everyone on the planet typing words into their computers, for ever, like I'm doing now. I fail to see the point of roughly 98 % of human communication at the moment, which indicates I need to stroll around somewhere quiet for a bit.

I'm taking a break from my own personal Twitter account for this reason. Ultimately I can't really take a break from social media (given it's my job, at least 0.6 of the time, as well as my commitment to SI and the fact I've become disturbingly dependent on blogging to develop my thoughts) but hopefully whatever step back I can take will help restore some of my currently waning enthusiasm.

You said you were disturbingly dependent on your blog to develop your thoughts. In light of your observations about the "noise" in social media, why is blogging needed for developing the thinking behind something you want to write. Granted it is very helpful for us to write down our thoughts and review them. Maybe step away and come back with fresh eyes. I may be misunderstanding. If by blogging you meant generate drafts, I totally get it. The process of writing often clarifies our thoughts. If you meant blogging as in publishing the blog, then just don’t do that step. Review it later. Or share it with a trusted colleague or friend for insight. I share this because I have started using the classic draft and develop approach to writing and just not posting until my thought processes and the end piece has gelled. Otherwise I find the responses and my subsequent reactions just take me further off target. It is the posting of the drafts "aka blogs in media-speak" that is the distraction. And it is so seductively training us to constantly respond rather than take the time to think and reason it all out. Ultimately, we all have to slow down. I appreciate your perspective and wish us both well.
The petition is online [1]here. Please forward to any Warwick staff you know who are opposed to casualisation in higher education. Events have been moving so rapidly that there’s no up to date report on events but this [2]Times Higher Education article gives useful background.

1. https://warwickstudentsolidaritywithstaff.wordpress.com/
2. http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/comment/opinion/teachhigher-wages-lower-beware-the-outsourcers-razor/2019760.article
National Demonstration Against Casualisation and TeachHigher (2015-05-17 19:03)

19th June at the University of Warwick. There’s a [1]Facebook event here. Details copied & pasted below:

“No to the ‘insourcing’ and further casualisation of academic staff!”

TeachHigher threatens job security and quality education at ALL UK universities.

Make your voice heard at Warwick University Open Day!
Warwick University staff and students call on their colleagues across UK Higher Education to support them in resisting TeachHigher. TeachHigher is a scheme whereby hourly paid academic staff will no longer be recruited and employed by academic departments but contracted via this new ‘internal academic recruitment and administration service’. TeachHigher is being piloted at Warwick but intends to franchise out at universities across the UK.

We oppose TeachHigher because it will institutionalise and entrench a two-tier system of academic staffing at Warwick – further separating off hourly-paid academics from those on more secure contracts. It will give Human Resources control over hiring and firing – not only threatening the autonomy of academic departments but also making it easier for central management to recruit ever larger numbers of hourly-paid and casualised staff while continuing to reduce the number of secure and permanent positions. TeachHigher staff will be employed on even worse terms and conditions than those currently endured by hourly paid academics at Warwick.

TeachHigher represents a threat not just at Warwick, but to anyone working and studying at a UK university. Warwick Employment Group plan to sell TeachHigher as a commercial franchise to other universities. In fact, Warwick is already complicit in promoting casualisation and precarity at numerous other UK Higher Education institutions, via Warwick-owned agency UniTemps which contracts mainly catering and cleaning staff but also some admin and academic staff. TeachHigher looks suspiciously like another version of Unitemps – a national outsourcing agency for academic staff – unless we stop it now!

Active opposition to TeachHigher among Warwick staff and students has already met with two small but significant victories – collective resistance can work! Massive public meetings, extensive press coverage and so-far three academic departments voting to boycott TeachHigher has resulted in the cancellation of the pilot scheme due to begin in April, and its postponement until October 2015. Management have also begun to backtrack on the outsourcing question – whereas the initial website for TeachHigher described it as a ‘subsidiary’ company, it is now claimed that it will be an academic services department. But there is still much to be done...

We need to act now, and act together, to put an end to TeachHigher once and for all!

This demonstration is supported by Warwick UCU.

HOW TO GET HERE:

The nearest railway stations to Warwick University campus are Coventry and Leamington Spa. Do not go to Warwick train station (it is far away, and has no public transport links.) From Coventry station catch the number 11 or 12 bus, from Leamington Spa catch the U1. 19th June is a Warwick University open day, so transport may be congested – leave lots of time to get here. There may be free shuttle buses running from Coventry railway station to campus.

1. https://www.facebook.com/events/877394662349003
For too long, we have been a passively tolerant society, saying to our citizens: as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone.

David Cameron, prime minister of the United Kingdom

For too long, we have been a passively tolerant society, saying to our citizens: as long as you obey the law, we will leave you alone.

David Cameron, prime minister of the United Kingdom

(HT [1]Artist Taxi Driver)

1. http://@chunkymark/
An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving in the UK (2015-05-18 08:00)

This podcast was recorded at a [1]Centre for Social Ontology seminar in February 2015. The speaker is Balsihar Sanghera from the University of Kent.

This paper examines how charitable giving is an outcome of different interacting elements of lay morality. Charitable giving reflects people’s capacity for fellow-feeling (or sympathy), moral sentiments, personal reflexivity, ethical dispositions, moral norms and moral discourses. An eclectic account of lay morality and charitable giving is warranted because of the complex nature of the object. Though ordinary people engage in ethical reasoning, they often think and act in piecemeal fashion, so that confusion and inconsistencies can occur. This is particularly evident when gender, class and ‘race’ shape people’s feelings and evaluations of others, their attention and care for others, and their understanding of responsibility and blame for social issues. Morality is further complicated because it takes place in the mundane world of everyday life that can result in inconsistent and confusing judgements and actions on giving.

Programme:

Given that the information society and the study of information face a world of crisis today and are at a crossroads, also the future of the Internet and social media are in question. The 5th ICTs and Society Conference therefore wants to focus on the questions: What are the main challenges that the Internet and social media are facing in capitalism today? What potentials for an alternative, commonist Internet are there? What are existing hindrances for such an Internet? What is the relationship of power structures, protest movements, societal developments, struggles, radical reforms, etc. to the Internet? How can critical political economy and critical theory best study the Internet and social media today?


Collaborative Seminar, at Loughborough University on 2 June 2015

This Day event will take place in the James France Building, room CC021, from 10.30-4.30pm - 2 June 2015, and will focus on the Future of Social Critique.

The event was organised to celebrate the careers of two renowned colleagues in our department, Prof Michael Pickering and Prof. Graham Murdock, but also as an opportunity to broaden the discussion on the subject.

Synopsis

The continuing financial crisis of capitalism in Europe has been accompanied by a right-wing response that has sought to reduce the size of the state and the power of labour, changes that will inevitably increase income inequality and consequently other inequalities in the future placing the burden of the crisis on the shoulders of those least able to bear it. This neo-liberal response has not gone unchallenged at least in some European countries. We have witnessed the growth of extra-parliamentary and more recently parliamentary opposition on both the right and the left. In the UK, however, whilst we have experienced a 'revolt from the right' with the growth of UKIP, the response from the left has been more muted. While there has been some left opposition to austerity, it has remained largely
on the margins. In contrast, the early years of the Thatcherite project in the UK saw a flowering of radical opposition that crossed over from politics to culture to the academy. The questions animating this seminar are: if then, then why not now? What has changed both inside and outside universities? How do we assess questions of value and make this a key aspect of critique? What resources are generally available for the renewal of critique? Whatever happened to the ‘public intellectual’?

[1] To download the poster of this event click here

and

[2] To download detailed information and schedule click here

1. http://www.lboro.ac.uk/media/wwwlboroacuk/content/socialsciences/downloads/POSTER%20CCC%20event.pdf
In this podcast I interview Andrew Sayer, Professor of Social Theory and Political Economy at the University of Lancaster, about his book Why Things Matter To People.

Here's a link to the book:

There's a review I wrote of the book here: [2]sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14330
Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself (2015-05-18 09:30)
As some people reading this might know, I’m an obsessive cultivator of habits. I’m preoccupied by them intellectually and spent 6 years writing a PhD about how who we are is shaped by the situated interplay between reflexivity and habit over time. But this is also a big part of how I orientate myself to my work: what’s the most satisfying and effective way to approach what it is I have to do? I’ve blogged in the past about [1]the apps I use for this purpose.

It’s for this reason that I’ve tried various writing routines over the last few years and I’ve recently come to the conclusion that word count goals just don’t work. In fact setting myself a goal for how many words to write a day now strikes me as representative of everything that’s wrong with the academy i.e. counting your writing rather than valuing it. Looking towards a quantity of words inevitably encourages you to see how quickly you can write them and move on to something else. If not necessarily alienating, it now strikes me as quite alienated, no matter how useful the capacity to do quasi-automatic speed writing I’ve developed over the last few years is increasingly proving to be.

Since giving up on a word count goal I’m enjoying academic writing more than I have in a long time. I’m actually finding my book interesting again, after months of seeing it as an obstacle to be negotiated through daily bouts of meeting my word target (in turn ratcheting up my stress about the book when I failed to meet them). My new resolution: to only count things if I’m certain doing so serves a useful purpose. Perhaps this is a useful starting point for thinking about how the [2]Qualified Self does inevitably sometimes interface with self-quantification.

2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/15674](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/15674)

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As part of its effort to expand beyond traditional types of academic publication, Big Data & Society has introduced an Early Career Researcher Forum targeted to scholars finishing or having recently completed advanced graduate
degrees. More specifically the ECR forum seeks work by researchers reflecting about some of the challenges of their work (related to Big Data topics) in about 1000 to 2000 words with a range of illustrations, figures, etc. as well as a brief bio (100 words). The goal is to encourage reflexive submissions that explore what it means to be a researcher studying issues concerning big data and society. As guidance we ask authors to consider a series of questions (addressing any or all of these):

- What kinds of challenges empirically and/or methodologically have you encountered in your work?
- Do you have an example of these challenges, particularly one that can be shared in an online forum such as the journal offers, i.e., with visualizations, graphs, etc.?
- Does Big Data allow you to ask new questions or explore old issues?
- Are there questions that your data can not answer? Why? What else is necessary?
- Why is your research important and interesting?
- How do you relate back to your home discipline, and do your colleagues understand you?

In addition to targeted submissions, the Early Career Researcher forum accepts unsolicited contributions and encourages those who are interested to correspond with the co-editors (Irina Shklovski and Matthew Zook) for guidance.


CfA: Ethnographies & Health early-career workshop

LSHTM, 1st - 2nd October 2015
We are pleased to announce a call for abstracts for an exciting new workshop for early career researchers, entitled 'Ethnographies and Health', to be held at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in London, UK, on 1st and 2nd October, 2015.

**Keynote speaker: Dr Tiago Moreira, Durham University**

We invite abstracts of up to 400 words for papers that explore topic-based, methodological and theoretical questions of using ethnographic approaches in health, and health-related research, from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Supported by a workshop grant from the Foundation for the Sociology of Health & Illness, the workshop will be free to attend and will be structured to allow for supportive and engaged debate around each paper presented.

Please see the attached poster for more information, and please feel free to circulate this call widely.

Deadline for abstracts is 31st June, 2015. Please send abstracts (and any enquiries) to Joanna.reynolds@lshtm.ac.uk

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**Intersections of Ageing, Gender, Sexualities (i-ages)**

**UNIVERSITY OF SURREY, GUILDFORD, UK**
6 July 2015 - 7 July 2015

This international, multidisciplinary two day conference offers a unique opportunity to explore the intersections between ageing, gender and sexualities. It explores how they work together to produce structural inequalities, privileges and disadvantages, challenges and opportunities, and diverse lived experiences. Papers will be presented by researchers from, Australia, Hong Kong, Iran, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, South Africa, Taiwan, UK and USA.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Professor Toni Calasanti, Virginia Tech, USA

GUEST SPEAKERS

Professor Mark Hughes, Southern Cross University, Australia

Associate Professor Travis Kong, University of Hong Kong

Professor Yvette Taylor, London Southbank University, UK

Registration for two-day event (includes lunch and refreshments both days) £80 (£40 students)

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PROVIONAL PROGRAMME & REGISTRATION GO TO [1]EVENT WEBSITE

In the late 20\textsuperscript{th}/early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, many scholars (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Fine, Weis, Addelston, & Marusza, 1997; Weis, 2004; Nayak, 2003; 2006) have cited the massive societal shifts in economic and gender-relations which have resulted in fragmented rites of passage (employment, marriage) and which have placed the males in a position of confusion commonly called the ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Faludi, 1999). Evolving from the moral panic concerning boys‘ underachievement’ (Griffin, 2000) and, more specifically, underachieving working-class males (Epstein, 1998), debates over ‘failing boys’ has focused on the complexities associated with the so-called ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Faludi, 1999) and boys ‘underachievement’ in schooling. A highly charged context of backlash politics has shaped a particular gender agenda, and in this miscellany we see arguments concerning boys (as a homogenized group) portrayed as victims of discrimination both in schooling and in wider society (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

As the so-called ‘crisis of masculinity’ (Faludi, 1999) occurs beyond the classroom, there has also been major pedagogic shifts inside the classroom; school processes have become increasingly neo-liberal (league tables, high stakes testing, a rise in accountability), which creates more difference and influences the how learner identities are formed (Francis, 2006; Wilkins 2011). In his analysis of the ‘boy turn’ in education, Weaver-Hightower (2003) argues that there have been four main strands to the ongoing debate on boys’ education: popular-rhetorical, theoretically oriented, practice oriented, and the feminist and pro-feminist. Weaver-Hightower contends a significant prompt for the ‘boy turn’ has been ‘increasing neoliberal education reforms and the rise of the New Right-the conservative restoration since the 1980s’ which is particularly true in England, where neoliberal reforms ‘produced an educational choice structure in which schools compete with one another for students’ (p. 476). Epstein, Elwood, Hey, and Maw, (1999) identified separate discourses used in the popular and academic press to explain boys’ educational underperformance: ‘poor boys’, ‘boys will be boys’, ‘at risk boys’, and ‘problem boys’. While these discourses have framed key debates in gender theory concerning boys, the neoliberal policy drivers ensure that working-class boys are individualised and held accountable for their failure (Francis, 2006, p. 191). Furthermore, such neo-liberal discourses, while denying the existence of any real class distinctions, limit the discursive space in which various forms of working-class masculinity are acceptable.

\textit{‘Urgency’ and ‘solutions’?}

Griffin (2000) argues that the ‘language of crisis, alarm and urgency’ (p. 170) is typically followed by a list of school-based remedies which have been posed by policy-makers to counteract male ‘underachievement’ (for critiques see Skelton, 2003; Weaver-Hightower, 2008). There have been a plethora of policy responses to this perceived ‘crisis’ but very few take into account the ‘very significant ways in which the social construction of gender impacts significantly on curriculum, pedagogical practices and relations with and between students in schools’ (Lingard, Martino, & Mills, 2009, pp. 9-10). In the policy discourses surrounding boys and schooling, there are ‘constant slippages’ that reaffirm what are ‘natural predispositions or learning behaviours and orientations for both boys and girls’ [emphasis in original] (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2007, p. 3561).
15). Drawing on biological essentialist notions and Gardner’s multiple intelligences, certain common tropes such as kinesthetic learning, devaluing inter/intrapersonal skills, preferring explicit/relevant teaching, and requiring male role models to learn often tend to dominate. Such strategies fail to acknowledge the culture of masculinity as well as environments and discourses from which boys draw their identity from. These initiatives risk homogenizing working-class boys into one cohesive group when we must recognize heterogeneity and their diversity in values, attitudes, and behaviour and how these are influenced heavily by their school and social contexts.

The working-class male

The ’crisis of masculinity’ is arguably felt more harshly by the working-class male. The so-called ‘macho lad’, whose ‘reproduction of working-class masculinity has been ruptured’ (Kenway & Kraack, 2004, p. 107), and who, perhaps, finds it more difficult to adapt. Today, working-class youth have to contend with a rise in credentialisation alongside a hazy economic future where stable employment is less common (Brown, 2013). As traditional social structures have disappeared, young men, particularly those from lower and working-class backgrounds, have to negotiate their identity work around rapidly changing discourses of aspiration and power. In place of traditional, respectable, working-class employment we have seen the steady rise of service-level positions which require working-class men to ‘learn to serve’ (McDowell, 2003) or ‘learn to loaf’ (Marks, 2003, p. 87). If working-class boys are drawing upon employment as part of their identity construction, they are now more likely to draw upon the ‘McJob’ (Bottero, 2009, p. 9). The impact of post-industrialism on white working-class masculine identity, specifically how masculinity is constructed in relation to education and the labour market, is framed by efforts to preserve tradition, uncertainty, survivalist mentalities, unrealistic expectations, and new searches for ‘respectability’ and ‘authenticity’ (Dolby & Dimitriadis, 2004; McDowell, 2003; Nayak, 2003).

As a result of post-industrialization, I argue working-class males draw on certain historically validated dispositions, such as social cohesion and social solidarity (through a legacy of union action and community involvement) to confirm their gendered, classed, and ethnic subjectivities inside and outside of schooling (Stenning, 2005; Mac an Ghaill, 1994: Pye, Haywood, & Mac an Ghaill, 1996). Social solidarity is often rendered through farouche ‘laddish’ or ‘loutish’ behaviours (cf. Francis, 1999) which can be socially empowering but also transgress boundaries of what is considered acceptable in a school context. Laddish behaviour is always a form of social validation and tied to self worth (Jackson, 2002; 2003).

About the author: Garth Stahl (@GarthStahl) is a Lecturer in Literacy and Sociology at University of South Australia. He is a theorist of sociology of education. His research interests lie on the nexus of neoliberalism and socio-cultural studies of education, identity, equity/inequality and social change. Currently, his research projects and publications encompass theoretical and empirical studies of learner identities, gender and youth, sociology of schooling in a neoliberal age, gendered subjectivities, equity and difference, and educational reform. Of particular interest to him is exploring counternarratives to neoliberalism around ‘value’ and ‘respectability’ for working-class youth. His book, entitled Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration: Educating White Working-class Boys is now available from Routledge.
This useful post on the [1]Pickle Jar blog offers some pointers about effective live tweeting. I agree it's important to remember that most (?) people reading your live tweets won't be in the room with you and thus will be confused by any features of the context you take for granted in your tweets. In that sense, I think this is excellent advice:

Context is key. If you're sending a tweet out into the world, assume your audience knows very little. If you hear something interesting, try to share it as if you're sharing words of wisdom with someone who wasn't there. Feel free to paraphrase, and take pictures of the slides if there's just too much amazing stuff on there for 140 characters. Those who aren't there will get something out of it, and those that are will have a reminder that they can re-tweet or favourite.


But surely live tweeting also serves a purpose for people within the room? The experience of live tweeting has often lived up to the rhetoric of the 'back channel': offering an outlet for both exchange with and awareness of other people at the event, many of whom I've never previously met. There are obviously risks posed by this (a topic for another post) but it's also something that can introduce a novel sociality into what might otherwise be a large and impersonal event.
This is why I think it's important to distinguish between the **official live-tweeter** (scene setter, context communicator and summariser in chief) and the voluntary live-tweeting of others at the event. Part of the role of the former is to encourage the latter through regular retweets and rapid responses to any questions. But another crucial part is to provide a sufficient sense of the context to 'outsiders' for the flurry of activity taking place amongst 'insiders' to be comprehensible and engaging. The insider activity isn't a threat to the quality of the live tweeting, it's rather what can make a hashtag fascinating to read if there is someone mediating between the two in order to ensure that 'insiders' don't exclude 'outsiders' by taking their shared context for granted.

There are numerous ways to establish context: regular reminders of what the hashtag is (e.g. “We're live tweeting from @BritSoci conference day 2, #BritSoc15”), taking pictures of the venue itself to convey a sense of place, regular statements of the schedule (e.g. “Our next speaker is @mark_carrigan from @SocioWarwick talking about social ontology of social movements”) and signalling openness to queries (e.g. “If you have any questions about #BritSoc15, whether you're here or not, please get in touch!”). This kind of activity can help if you're subsequently using the hashtag as a basis to compile a report of the event by providing way marks to make sense of what can be a vast stream of activity. But more importantly I think it also contributes to the accessibility of the event, structuring what might otherwise be an intimidating mass of communication and doing so in a way which encourages it to grow.

There's a really important suggestion later in the [3]Pickle Jar post which I've only recently started doing myself:

One way to really add some useful background is to start digging up links. Is the person on stage mentioning a project they worked on? Dig up a link to that project (or better still, a video about it), and share that on the conference hashtag. Do they have a personal site, with background detail? Go find it, and share it. It may seem like a bit of a slog, but Google is your friend here.


I prefer to live tweet on a phone but I'm planning in future to always use my laptop for this reason. If someone mentions a paper they've written, look it up and tweet the link! Tweet the institutional profile of the speaker and always ensure you link to their personal twitter feed and tag the department as well if they have a twitter presence. In this sense, the official live tweeter does a large part of the 'networking' in order that other people don't have to.

There's suggestions [5]later in the post which I've experimented with in the past but found people quite reluctant to participate in. Perhaps it's how I'm phrasing it? But the promise of Audioboom for micro-podcasts with speakers really fascinates me and I've love to find a way to suggest this possibility to speakers that doesn't immediately make them recoil in horror:

While you're there, how about tracking a few speakers down for an audio interview? [6]We've already chatted about the possibilities of platforms such as Audioboom, and you can use these with little more than a smartphone and a quiet sideroom or corridor.

If video's more your thing, why not provide some great content for curators and your followers by capturing a quick chat or a tech demo using [7]Youtube Capture, [8]Vine, or [9]Instagram Video? Or if you've got an audience that isn't in a wildly-different timezone, why not livestream an interview or a quick event summary using [10]Periscope or [11]Meerkat?
7. https://www.youtube.com/capture
8. https://vine.co/
11. http://meerkatapp.co/

Very nice, helpful. ALSO: in my experience Twitter can often be useful in those meetings where the panel or speakers share a reactionary position and the structure of the event - or lack of confidence among critics in the room - prevent a serious critical debate from taking place. Tweeting among audience can build another narrative and - who knows - embolden critics to push in to the debate.

Oh very good point - will cite in the book!

Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science (2015-05-20 06:48)
"Critical Realism: Reimagining Social Science"

at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame/South Bend, Indiana, USA

27-30 July 2015

"What difference does critical realism make for how we do our empirical work?" More work must be done on how Critical realism may re-orient practical Research.
Papers applying a critical realist approach are invited on all topics, but in particular papers that focus on the practical, analytical and methodological implications of critical realism.
The Conference program will include a memorial for Roy Bhaskar (1944-2014)

Details about conference registration, paper submissions, housing and more: [1]http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/

**Submission of papers:** send abstract of no more than 500 words to Nicolette Manglos-Weber [2]nmanglos@nd.edu by April 15th 2015

**Conference registration deadline:** May 30 2015

Registration costs: $ 400 USD

Conference organiser is professor Christian Smith, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame.

After the Conference a one-day interdisciplinary workshop will be held on *What Conversations about Science, Religion and Theology does Critical Realism make Possible (that other Philosophies of Science Do Not)?*

The annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) will be held August 22-25 in Chicago. Notre Dame is two hours away from Chicago, and IACR participants may want to prolong their stay to attend the ASA Conference.

1. [http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/](http://csrs.nd.edu/events/iacr2015/)
2. [mailto:nmanglos@nd.edu](mailto:nmanglos@nd.edu)
Despite years of investment into widening participation agendas, marginalised persons, whether in terms of class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality or disability, remain ‘devalued’ (Skeggs and Loveday 2012) owing to systems and structures of Higher Education. Reappropriating Value(s) will be a day of discussion and will bring together various academics and practitioners whose work speaks towards, or takes direct action against these practices. See here for confirmed speakers’ abstracts.

Schedule for the Day

9:30-10:15: Registration (tea/coffee)

10:15-10:30: Welcome and introduction to the day

Morning Session: Re-appropriating Values (theoretically and empirically)

10:30-11:15: Keynote 1

Dr Stephanie Lawler: ‘We’ve been framed!’ Value, social magic and symbolic power

11:15-12:15: Panel 1

Jessie Abrahams: Honourable Mobility or Shameless Entitlement? Social class and graduate employment

Rashida Bibi: "I understand how the world works much better": British South Asian Muslim women and experiences of Higher Education

Hilary Stewart: Disability, Symbolic Capitals and the Psychosocial
12:15-12:45: Discussion with keynote and panel

12:45-1:45: **Lunch** (provided)

Afternoon Session: Re-appropriating Values (politically, practically, pragmatically)

1:45-2:30: **Keynote 2**

Prof. Tracy Shildrick and Prof. Rob McDonald: 'Fat Cat Sociology' Revisited: the pressures and possibilities of 'public sociology' and 'real world' research impact

2:30-3:10 **Panel 2**

Victoria Armstrong: Introducing Mad Studies...

Dr Lisa McKenzie: 'Beyond Capital': The value of academic work

3:10-3:40 Discussion with keynote and panel

3:40-4:30 **Closing Comments & Ways Forward**

4:30-6:00 **Wine Reception and further discussion**

6:00 **Meal and more drinks for those interested**


For more info, contact [5]kirsty.morrin@manchester.ac.uk or [6]susan.oman@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk.

Location information here: https://reappropriatingvalues.wordpress.com/venue/
"The Relational Subject by Pierpaolo Donati and Margaret S. Archer

Many social theorists now call themselves ‘relational sociologists’, but mean entirely different things by it. The majority endorse a ‘flat ontology’, dealing exclusively with dyadic relations. Consequently, they cannot explain the context in which relationships occur or their consequences, except as resultants of endless ‘transactions’.

This book adopts a different approach which regards ‘the relation’ itself as an emergent property, with internal causal effects upon its participants and external ones on others. The authors argue that most ‘relationists’ seem unaware that analytical philosophers, such as Searle, Gilbert and Tuomela, have spent years trying to conceptualize the ‘We’ as dependent upon shared intentionality.

Donati and Archer change the focus away from ‘We thinking’ and argue that ‘We-ness’ derives from subjects’ reflexive orientations towards the emergent relational ‘goods’ and ‘evils’ they themselves generate. Their approach could be called ‘relational realism’, though they suggest that realists, too, have failed to explore the ‘relational subject’. 
2015 Social Media, Activism, and Organisations Symposium (#SMAO15) (2015-05-20 06:57)

2015 Social Media, Activism, and Organisations Symposium (#SMAO15)

Call for Submissions

Social media (from mainstream platforms such as Twitter to organization-specific tools) have become increasingly pervasive. This is exemplified by the diversity of uses ranging from Twitter and Facebook use during the Arab spring to the use of Snapchat by highly surveilled activist groups. Many social movements have increasingly seen social media as a means to collaboratively crowdsource, to network and communicate with diverse stakeholders. In large organizations, social media is often supported because the technology can help foster the sense of a "digital village", where individuals are able to “see” the lives of others within their organization and feel closer to them. However, the literature on social movements and social media has not fully grasped just how much social media has fundamentally changed the landscape of organizational communication, ranging from stakeholders being able to directly mobilize resources to making grassroots transnational social movements more organizationally feasible.

Social Media, Activism, and Organisations ( #SMAO15) seeks to better our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.

The Social Media, Activism, and Organisations symposium will be held in London, England on November 6, 2015 at Goldsmiths, University of London. The symposium is sponsored by The Sociological Review, The Centre for Creative & Social Technologies at Goldsmiths, and the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths.

We invite you to submit short papers which explore the social media-influenced intersections of social movements and organisations. Full papers are not required for this conference, only short papers (2500 words, excluding references) related to the broad theme of “Social Media, Activism, and Organisations”.

Papers should be submitted by September 7, 2015 via Easy Chair at [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15 and there is no preset template for submission. If selected, the author(s) will be invited to give a 15-minute oral presentation followed by a 5 min Q &A period at the symposium.

Author(s) of accepted paper abstracts may also be invited to submit full papers to a special issue of The Sociological Review, published by Wiley.

#SMAO15 TOPICS OF INTEREST

- Organisational communication and social media
- Democratizing organisational structures via social media
• Gender, social media, activism, and organisations
• Activist knowledge aggregation techniques
• Enterprise applications and social activism
• Collaboration, social media, and activism
• Virtual teams, social media and activism
• Activist networks and organizational communication
• Social media and organizational leadership
• Communicating organizational messages via social media
• Social media and advocacy organizations
• Inter-movement organizational communication and social media
• Visual social media and organisations
• Implications of anonymous social media

We welcome both theoretical and empirical papers and the symposium seeks to showcase a variety of case studies to advance our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.

1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15

The Study of the Learner Identity in Neoliberal Times (2015-05-20 11:24)

by Garth Stahl

Class, gender, and ethnicity, while contested areas, all play a role in the constitution of identity as the self is not fixed. Identities are not distinct from discourses but instead produced by and through them. As collections of meaning imbedded with symbolic connotations, discourses define objects set parameters on what we can think, feel, and be (MacLure 2003), where we may ‘make ourselves but not in conditions of our own choosing’ (Archer et al., 2010). Neoliberalism, as an extension of human capital theory which suggests that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people (Sweetland, 1996, p. 341), was a step toward eliminating ‘class as a central economic concept’ (Bowles & Gintis, 1975, p. 74). Current iterations of neoliberalism function as a political, economic, and ideological system that gives considerable credence to the market as the best, most efficient platform for distributing public resources. This macro-level structural framework attributes greater consideration of individual duty than government responsibility (Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Zipin, Sellar, Brennan, &
Archer and Francis (2007) write that in the neoliberal reading ‘there are no foundational aspects of selfhood such as “race” or gender that preclude an individual from taking up the opportunities available to them – failure to do so simply reflects an individual lack of enterprise’ (p. 19). Within a neoliberal discourse it is argued that the self is malleable, constantly made and re-made as people must become ‘entrepreneurs of the self.’ Neoliberal ideology privileges the reflexive modernisation thesis where historic conventions of femininity and masculinity can arguably be reinscribed in new ways (cf. Adkins 2000; Kenway and Kelly, 2000) and where historic and gender-based inequalities exist simultaneously with evidence of changed expectations (Adkins, 2000). In our neoliberal times, Davies and Bansel (2007) have claim:

The so-called ‘passive’ citizen of the welfare state becomes the autonomous ‘active’ citizen with rights, duties, obligations, and expectations—the citizen as active entrepreneur of the self; the citizen as morally superior. This is not simply a reactivation of liberal values of self-reliance, autonomy and independence as the necessary conditions for self-respect, self-esteem, self-worth, and self-advancement but rather an emphasis on enterprise and the capitalization of existence itself through calculated acts and investments combined with the shrugging off of collective responsibility for the vulnerable and marginalized. (p. 252)

The neo-liberal rhetoric, where context is ignored for the sake of the entrepreneurial self, has the ability to create conditions of heightened fixity especially if one lacks certain capitals. Within neoliberalism, risk is always pervasive where today young people often seek to manage the riskiness of transitions from school to work through a range of strategies including cultivating certain identities. Saturated in labels of success/failure and active/stagnant, education today is infused with the neoliberal prerogative which increasingly fixes identities within rhetoric is risk.

The neoliberal education experience

The neoliberal policy which permeates classroom discourses becomes a powerful mediating force in the identity construction of all students (Phoenix, 2004). Neoliberalism, with its promotion of ‘efficiency’, ‘productivity’, ‘targets’, and ‘choice’, enables competition and market-driven results without strategic consideration to the gross economic inequalities it creates, particularly for marginalised communities (Ball, 2009; 2012;). Working-class students both present learner identities and have learner identities imposed upon them within a highly pressurized and stratified educational environment.

As pedagogic processes become influenced by neoliberal logic, there are overt and subtle consequences for gender identities. The presence of a competitive ‘performance-oriented culture generates anxiety, especially among boys whose gender identity needs to be based on achieving power, status, and superiority’ (Arnot, 2004, p. 35). In terms of gender, we must consider the sublimation of certain elements of the self as particularly potent for working-class boys who construct their masculinity around traditional models of ‘breadwinners’ in economies where their employment ‘choices’ are increasingly limited. In contrast, femininity seems to be less impacted by neoliberal logics as young women have been documented as ideal, flexible, neoliberal subjects (McRobbie, 2008; Walkerdine 2003).
In considering the identity work of students, the concept of ‘positioning’ raises the question of possible selves which are contradictory both to other selves and to internal selves (Davies, 1989, p. 229). The production of the self, our subjectivity, involves learning inclusive and exclusive practices and positioning oneself in relation to these practices to establish a sense of belonging (Davies & Harre, 1990). Further, it is argued that human beings ‘are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity’, where selfhood is the product of discursive practices and these processes lead to a multiplicity of selves (Davies & Harre, 1990, p. 46). As a result, individuals are active agents who position themselves (‘reflexive positioning’) and are positioned by others through social interaction (‘interactive positioning’) as gendered, classed, and ethnic individuals (Davies & Harre, 1990). Therefore, identity work involves grappling with both subjective constraints and the constraints of accepted discursive practices (Renold, 2004), often within powerful neoliberal discourses (Francis, 2000).

When considering an analysis of learner identities with engagement/disaffection, the emotional power of education is in the creation of the self. In schooling, the self is increasingly sublimated through neo-liberal agendas, where ‘it is the duty of the individual to be sufficiently flexible to maximize the opportunities available to her/him, and any failure resides in the individual rather than in the socio-economic structures’ (Francis, 2006, p. 191). When considering identity as negotiated through school contexts, it is essential to consider the ‘web’ of numerous and complex factors that contribute to disaffection toward school (Stevenson & Ellsworth, 1991). Therefore school failure/success is bound up with the process of students doing ‘identity work’, where young people’s engagement with schooling ‘depends in part on the sense they make of themselves, their community, and their future and in part on “the adaptive strategies” they use to accept, modify, or resist the institutional identities made available’ (Smyth, 2006, p. 290). Within or beyond the classroom, identity is positioned through conceptions of the collective and the individual and in a constant form of negotiation as it is constructively articulated, debated, and problematised.

**Works Cited:**


About the author: Garth Stahl (@GarthStahl) is a Lecturer in Literacy and Sociology at University of South Australia. He is a theorist of sociology of education. His research interests lie on the nexus of neoliberalism and socio-cultural studies of education, identity, equity/inequality and social change. Currently, his research projects and publications encompass theoretical and empirical studies of learner identities, gender and youth, sociology of schooling in a neoliberal age, gendered subjectivities, equity and difference, and educational reform. Of particular interest to him is exploring counternarratives to neoliberalism around 'value' and 'respectability' for working-class youth. His book, entitled Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration: Educating White Working-class Boys is now available from Routledge.

Queering ESOL: towards a cultural politics of LGBT politics in the ESOL classroom (2015-05-20 12:54)

‘Queering ESOL: towards a cultural politics of LGBT politics in the ESOL classroom’
UCL Institute of Education
19 - 20 June 2015

For info about previous seminars go to:https://queeringesol.wordpress.com/

Plenary speakers
Luiz Paulo da Moita Lopes (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)
Queering language teaching in Brazilian schools

Holly Cashman (University of New Hampshire)
Making queer latinidad visible in the U.S. Southwest: xenophobia, identity politics, and resistance

Tommaso Milano (University of Witwatersrand)
Queer entanglements: representations, practices and the complex politics of sexuality in South Africa

Susan Stryker (University of Arizona)

3574
Crossing Genders, Crossing Borders: Transgender in Transnational Contexts

Confirmed invited speakers
Helen Saunston (York St John University)
Queering TESOL in international learning contexts

Mark McCormack (Durham University)
Moving beyond homophobic language: the intent-context-effect matrix

Nick Mai (London Metropolitan University and Aix-Marseille)
Assembling 'Samira' and 'Travel': understanding sexual humanitarianism through experimental ethnofictional filmmaking

Rusi Jaspal (De Montfort University)
ESOL An Opportunity for Challenging Homophobia

Jason Ho (City University of Hong Kong)
"Blue pill or red pill" (or both?): Critical and dramatic inquiry approaches in a CLIL curriculum on sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia

There will also be contributions from Francesca Stella (University of Glasgow), Laila El-Metoui (LGBTiq inclusion in Further Education), Joanna Pawelczyk and Łukasz Pakuła (Adam Mickiewicz University), Thorsten Merse (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität), Mike Baynham (University of Leeds), Yiu Tung Suen (City University Hong Kong), Melanie Cook (King’s College London) and John Gray (UCL Institute of Education).

The conference will also include the screening of the film Samira, which will be introduced by the director Nick Mai.

To reserve a place contact Tracy Modha (t.modha@ioe.ac.uk).

Note that this event is free and that funding for travel of up to £75 per attendee is available for research students and ESOL practitioners.
How you can become a Twitter ninja in 7 days or less (2015-05-21 07:50)

Apologies for the title. It’s intended as an example of what this post discusses: what titles work well on Twitter? The Buffer team [1] share examples of titles that have proved particularly effective on their blog. Their average tweets receive 100-150 clicks whereas all of these reliably receive over 200:

1. Twitter Tips for Beginners: Everything I Wish I Knew When I Started
2. How I Got 4x Faster Writing Blogposts
3. The Origin of the 8-Hour Work Day and Why We Should Rethink It
4. 59 Free Twitter Tools and Apps That Do Pretty Much Everything
5. Shave 20 Hours Off Your Work Week With This Email Template
6. How to Get Your First 1,000 Followers on Twitter — A step-by-step guide!
7. 30 Little-Known Features of the #SocialMedia Sites You Use Every Day
8. How to Easily Save 60 Minutes Every Day on the Internet
9. 7 Ways I Accidentally Got More Twitter Followers (and How You Can on Purpose!)
10. 53+ Free Image Sources For Your Blog and Social Media Posts

They describe how these titles use a [2] range of reliable strategies which anyone can use when blogging:
My own experience suggests their claims are accurate. But I’m still hesitant when it comes to academic blogging. Ideally I’d like to find a middle ground between these social media friendly titles and the ‘narrative titles’ that the LSE blogs use. My fear is that following the metrics too closely inevitably leads us into [3]Upworthy territory: "You'll never believe what this start-up company is telling us about what academics have to do in order to succeed at social media". That would be bad, right?

1. [https://blog.bufferapp.com/clickable-headlines](https://blog.bufferapp.com/clickable-headlines)
2. [https://blog.bufferapp.com/clickable-headlines](https://blog.bufferapp.com/clickable-headlines)

The Journal of Applied Social Theory is an exciting new journal launched by the team behind Social Theory Applied:

The Journal of Applied Social Theory aims to provide an intellectual space where critical applications of social theory (in all its varied forms) can flourish.

The objective in setting up this new open-access journal is to fill a gap in current academic debates regarding the treatment of well-established and sometimes revered theories, theories that can all too often inhibit discussion while shying away from more applied forms of theoretical work.

By providing this platform for debate around social theory and its applications, we aim to make a strong contribution to critical understandings of how theory can be applied to various forms of practice – professional research, policy, practitioner, etc. All too often we find discussions of theory divorced from method and/or separated from practice. We hope that in the long run the Journal of Applied Social Theory can offer an online space where such troublesome boundaries and dichotomies can be traversed.

We also envisage the journal providing a space for future innovation across a range of areas, not just in contributions to intellectual knowledge, but also issues of style, delivery, engagement and impact. Combined with our sister website Social Theory Applied we see this new journal as having a role in delivering on the promise of the digital public sphere. We have a clear and unambiguous commitment to democratising knowledge while staying true to the ‘traditional’ emphasis on academic standards and peer review. In this important regard, the journal is itself a boundary spanner looking to making the best of both worlds while seeking ways via which we can shape future alternatives around questions of access, academic knowledge and impact.

Given the scope of the journal, we have a number of audiences in our sights. These include the ever growing number of academics working across a wide range of disciplines who are engaged in the application of social theory in their research. Moreover, we would like to engage with communities outside the academy. These include people working in different forms of professional practice (e.g. teachers, public administrators, health sector workers, industry, etc.), policy makers at various levels of governance (regional, national and international), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and interested members of the wider public. Over time, what we would really like to achieve is a digital space where the interests, values, and ideas of these audiences can come together and create alternative forms of knowledge. After all, no one sector has a monopoly on useful knowledge.

To achieve this, the journal consists of two main sections:

1. Social Theory and Research
2. Social Theory and Society

These sections inevitably overlap to some extent but they have the purpose of serving different forms of practice – the first serving researchers who wish to report and discuss the challenges of combining theory and method, whilst the second section provides a home for academics and/or practitioners and/or policy makers who want to reflect more generally on social issues via a socio-theoretical lens. The second category is wider but deliberately so; we aim to be as inclusive as possible and engage with as wide a readership as we can.
Workshop on gender and climate change - 29th May (2015-05-21 07:55)

Gender and Climate Change workshop

Friday May 29th from 2.00 til 4.30

Wolfson Research Exchange at the University of Warwick

Sherilyn MacGregor (Keele)

Vulnerable victims or resilient subjects? Dismantling the gendered discursive traps of climate change politics

Abstract

Feminist activists and policy professionals have provided ample evidence that the impacts of climate change have gender dimensions, thereby putting gender on the international climate agenda. Feminist academics have been much slower to take up the issue, resulting in a shortage of theoretical scholarship on gender and climate change. What can feminist political theorizing contribute to the project of developing gender-sensitive responses to this serious global challenge? I argue that one task should be to complement field-based research on women’s experiences of climate change with feminist constructivist analyses of how discursive framings of ‘the problem’ and policy solutions often serve to reinforce neoliberal, patriarchal power relations. Understanding the complex workings of ideology, language, and power can help us to beware the discursive traps that inevitably threaten all those who work for counter-hegemonic social change. To illustrate this approach, I use feminist critical discourse analysis to interrogate the emergence of a vulnerability-resilience dualism that now dominates climate policy at all levels. I show that within the adaptation literature, the construction of the ‘resilient subject’ in opposition to the ‘vulnerable victim’ fits squarely within the dominant post-political agenda: it is founded on scientistic and masculinist values; it naturalizes neoliberal rationalities of governance; and it deflates the political capacities and identities of people as citizens. The vulnerable climate victim is weak, usually feminized, and in need of ‘knowledge transfer’ in order to become robust and self-reliant enough to survive and thrive in harsh new conditions beyond control. Not only does this simplistic binary ignore complexities on the ground, including the dubious construction of masculine resilience, but it also removes expectations of citizen resistance to the root causes of ecological crisis, thereby casting it as non-political fait accompli. I argue that feminist theoretical analyses should expose and devise strategies for avoiding this and other discursive traps that exist within the sphere of climate change politics and policy.

Biographical note

Dr Sherilyn MacGregor (PhD York University-Toronto) is senior lecturer in Environmental Politics and director of the Environmental Studies programme at Keele University in the UK. Her research expertise lies in the fields of...
gender politics and environmental politics, with a special focus on the theoretical and policy connections between sustainability, citizenship and social reproduction. She is joint editor of Environmental Politics journal and director of PublicSpace, a not-for-profit company specializing in research communication in the public interest.

Lopa Saxena (Coventry)

Gender, Climate Change and Food Sovereignty in South Asia: an exploration from a feminist political ecology perspective

Abstract

In South Asia as in many other agrarian economies in the developing South, the gendered impacts of Climate Change have led to women being disproportionately affected posing a substantial threat to food security. On the other hand, Food Sovereignty is attracting much attention as a form of resistance to dominant neo-liberal influences on food, agriculture and rural development. I am exploring the relation between the two from a Feminist Political Ecology perspective looking at some of the issues in relation to production, gender and climate change adaptation.

Biographical note

Dr Lopa Saxena has recently become a Research Associate in the Centre for Agro-ecology, Water and Resilience in Coventry University. Previously she was working as an independent researcher on consultancies and has worked on University-led team projects. Her research interests include Food Security, Climate Change and Gender, Vulnerability and Resilience, Gender and Disasters, Sustainable Land and Water use Practices, and Women Entrepreneurship. She holds a PhD in Environmental Economics and Environmental Management from the University of York (UK).

Rebekah Martin is an MA student on the Gender and International Development programme in the Department of Sociology at Warwick. She will introduce the film 'Missing: the forgotten women in India's climate plans'.
Demonstration Against Casualisation and TeachHigher

Friday 19 June, 12 noon, Library Road
“No to casualisation of academic staff!”

Make your voice heard at Warwick University Open Day!

TeachHigher threatens job security and quality education at ALL UK universities

We need to act now, and act together, to put an end to TeachHigher once and for all!

For updates keep an eye on our blog: [1]https://no2casualisationwarwick.wordpress.com/

1. https://no2casualisationwarwick.wordpress.com/
When corporations try too hard on social media (2015-05-21 20:21)

OMG Mega Lolz, FML, I can haz KitKat? I've just been writing about this KitKat post in my social media book. It's a great example of a corporate brand trying too hard when engaging on social media. But as Kate Loose points out in this [1]wonderful New Inquiry article, it's much creepier when they get it right. The KitKat post is just slightly awkward but I find the broader trend completely unnerving:

But slowly, and by 2014, very quickly, the insouciant, lower-case voice became the mainstream, corporate voice. Now, a Denny's tweet can sound more casual and on meme than any individual's Twitter account. And it isn't just Denny's: Brands from Chipotle to Hamburger Helper have gained massive followings this way. If in the past five years we all had to grow up somewhat — Carles doesn't even tweet any more — how is it that corporations grew down, becoming the new meme-aware "teens" of social media?

It is a fact of marketing that brands can't ask for business too directly. People tend to recoil from requests that feel too direct, and this is why social-media accounts explicitly selling anything seem like spam, triggering disinterest. Brands have to make us want them by giving us something: in branding
terms, providing value. This is how humor, or the gift of laughs, becomes the universal gift that any Twitter account can provide to its followers, as #weirdtwitter proved in its universe of thousands of anonymous accounts tweeting nonsensical humor at each other.


British Sociological Association

MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY GROUP ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015

THIRTY TWO FREE PLACES AT THE 2015 BSA MEDICAL SOCIOLOGY CONFERENCE

Thanks to successful conferences in recent years, the BSA Medical Sociology Group committee has been able to increase its support for a number of groups who may find it difficult to obtain funding for attendance at its annual conference. For the [1]2015 Annual Conference, which will take place on 9-11 September at the University of York, a number of free places will be available (including registration, meals, accommodation and conference dinner):

- 20 free places for postgraduate students
- 12 free places for individuals who are unwaged, low-waged or working outside academia (e.g. sociologists in non-academic posts, in civil society organisations or service user groups, etc.)

These places will be distributed to eligible individuals who apply to the BSA before 19 June 2015. If there are more applicants than available places, then places will be allotted to eligible applicants through a process of random allocation.

To apply for a place, please visit [2]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/medsoc-annual-conference/registration.aspx for detailed eligibility and to download the application form.

Please note those who have previously received a funded place will not be eligible to apply.

Completed forms should be sent to [3]events@britsoc.org.uk before the deadline above.

You will be notified regarding your application shortly after the deadline. If you are unsuccessful, you will be placed on a reserve list. If you are successful and later find that you are unable to attend the conference, please notify the BSA office as soon as possible, so that the place might be offered to someone on the reserve list.
Please note that free places cover registration, accommodation and subsistence for the conference. Unfortunately it is not possible to subsidise travel to and from the conference.

1. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/medsoc/
3. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk

Social Networks and Belonging, June 10th at Keele (2015-05-22 06:14)

Social Networks and Belonging

Sociology Workshop

Wednesday, 10th June 2015

2.00pm – 5.30pm

Chancellor’s Building: CBA1.078/9

‘Refugee Week is a UK-wide programme of arts, cultural and education events and activities that celebrates the contribution of refugees to the UK and promotes better understanding of why people seek sanctuary’ (Refugee Week nd). It involves thousands of people, institutions, organizations, and individuals throughout the country. Last year Keele joined Refugee Week for the first time by [1]hosting a weeklong photographic exhibition, an opening event with a musical performance and a poetry open mic night. Placing our university on the map alongside numerous institutions and cultural hubs across the country and building on previous success, this year Keele Refugee Week will be hosting an even richer programme of events.

As part of the [2]national and [3]Keele Refugee Week celebrations, this year Sociology will be hosting a half-day workshop to highlight research on the theme of social networks and belonging among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK. Presentations will examine the politics and performances of asylum within different domestic contexts, and attempt to unpack some of the complex relationships that form between ‘host’ and ‘guest’ and within migrant networks.

This free event aims to bring together academics, students, refugees and asylum seekers and those working with refugees and asylum seekers, and to encourage lively debate about the challenges and opportunities facing refugees in the UK.

Programme

2.00: Welcome and introduction

Dr Siobhan Holohan, Keele University

2.15: Presentations
Dr Jonathan Darling, Manchester University

Dispersal and Disruption:
The Challenges of Isolation within the Asylum Accommodation Model

Natalie Soleiman, PhD Candidate, Keele University

Seeking Refuge in the UK:

An Iranian Story of Asylum and Living in the ‘In-betweens’

3.30: Break for refreshments

3.45: Presentations

Dr Simon Goodman, Coventry University

The Role of Social Networks for Asylum Seekers in the Midlands

Dr Ala Sirriyeh, Keele University

‘This is in a way my birthplace’:

Young Refugee Women, Social Relationships and Networks

5.00: Exhibition

Discussion and art exhibition by women from the ‘Women Together’ project based in Huddersfield

(Refreshments will be available)

**Admission is free:** however, please confirm your attendance with Siobhan Holohan ([mailto:s.holohan@keele.ac.uk](mailto:s.holohan@keele.ac.uk)) or Ala Sirriyeh ([mailto:a.sirriyeh@keele.ac.uk](mailto:a.sirriyeh@keele.ac.uk)) by Monday, 1st June for catering purposes. Find us on the first floor of Chancellor’s Building ‘A’ block: [download campus map](http://www.keele.ac.uk/findus/maps/Keele_campus_guide_colour.pdf). For more information about National Refugee Week go to: [http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/](http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/) For information about Keele Refugee Week activities go to: [http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/)

3. [http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/)
4. [mailto:s.holohan@keele.ac.uk](mailto:s.holohan@keele.ac.uk)
5. [mailto:a.sirriyeh@keele.ac.uk](mailto:a.sirriyeh@keele.ac.uk)
8. [http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/](http://www.keele.ac.uk/refugeeweek/)
The latest volume in the [1]Social Morphogenesis series examines how generative mechanisms emerge in the social order and their consequences. It does so in the light of finding answers to the general question posed in this book series: Will Late Modernity be replaced by a social formation that could be called Morphogenic Society?

This volume clarifies what a 'generative mechanism' is, to achieve a better understanding of their social origins, and to delineate in what way such mechanisms exert effects within a current social formation, either stabilizing it or leading to changes potentially replacing it. The book explores questions about conjuncture, convergence and countervailing effects of morphogenetic mechanisms in order to assess their impact. Simultaneously, it looks at how products of positive feedback intertwine with the results of (morphostatic) negative feedback. This process also requires clarification, especially about the conditions under which morphostasis prevails over morphogenesis and vice versa. It raises the issue as to whether their co-existence can be other than short-lived.

The volume addresses whether or not there also is a process of ‘morpho-necrosis’, i.e. the ultimate demise of certain morphostatic mechanisms, such that they cannot ‘recover’. The book concludes that not only are generative mechanisms required to explain associations between variables involved in the replacement of Late Modernity by Morphogenic Society, but they are also robust enough to account for cases and times when such variables show no significant correlations.

See [2]here to order a copy or review a table of contents.me

Critical realism is a philosophy of science that positions itself against the major alternative philosophies underlying contemporary sociology. This book offers a general critique of sociology, particularly sociology in the United States, from a critical realist perspective. It also acts as an introduction to critical realism for students and scholars of sociology.

Written in a lively, accessible style, Douglas V. Porpora argues that sociology currently operates with deficient accounts of truth, culture, structure, agency, and causality that are all better served by a critical realist perspective. This approach argues against the alternative sociological perspectives, in particular the dominant positivism which privileges statistical techniques and experimental design over ethnographic and historical approaches.

However, the book also compares critical realism favourably with a range of other approaches, including post-structuralism, pragmatism, interpretivism, practice theory, and relational sociology. Numerous sociological examples are included, and each chapter addresses well-known and current work in sociology.

Reconstructing Sociology will be published by Cambridge University Press in September 2015. See [1] here for more details or to pre-order.


New perspectives on class, inequalities and families (2015-05-23 10:52)

BSA Teaching Group Regional Conference
New perspectives on class, inequalities and families
3588
Programme

9.30 Registration, tea & coffee

10.00 Prof Corinne Squire, UEL: Introduction and welcome

10.15 Prof Mike Savage, London School of Economics: The Great British Class Survey and new forms of class in the UK. Chair: Dr Penny Bernstock, UEL

11.00 Examination board presentation - AQA

11.30 Patrick Robinson, Cadbury Sixth Form College: Teaching the new 2015 specs: Globalisation and social networks. Chair: Prof Corinne Squire, UEL

12.15 Lunch with networking time – delegates will be invited to bring at least one resource with them which they find useful in the classroom.

13.15 Prof Gargi Bhattacharya, UEL: Living in a time of diminishing expectations: Inequality after austerity. Chair: Patrick Robinson, Cadbury Sixth Form College

14.00 Examination board presentation - OCR

14:30 Postgraduate Micro-lectures

Jenny Thatcher, UEL: ‘You got to have faith, Polish migrants in the UK and their secondary school choices

Rumana Hashem, UEL: Thinking intersectionally and taking the sociology lecture outside the classroom

Jose Ignacio Diaz-Vazquez, UEL: Becoming a woman by practising autofiction

15:15 Break, tea & coffee

15.30 Examination board presentation – WJEC Eduqas

15:45 Dr Janet Boddy, University of Sussex: Researching families across contexts.

Chair: Dr Belinda John-Baptiste, UEL

16.30 Close

Delegate rates (include lunch & refreshments):

Science, Security and the Future of Freedom

Wednesday 3rd June 2015 – All day event

Venue: MS.01. Maths Building, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL

http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/clusters/irs/wif/event/

The twenty-first century will be shaped by cyber security. In 2012, the world sent over eight trillion text messages. In five years time, everything we buy in a shop that costs more than $10 will have an IP address and will collect information on the world around it. Many farm animals now contain SIM cards that transmit their health status and in ten years time, equivalent body-monitoring for humans will be ubiquitous. In twenty years time we will think - then blink - and send an email. In cities like London, New York and Toronto the majority of human interactions will be recorded. Who will secure these digital shadows of ourselves? And will they constrain us - or make us more capable and free?

Programme

10.30 - 11.00 Registration / Coffee

11.00 - 12.30 Session 1 - Open Futures

"How I learned to Stop Worrying and enjoy Surveillance"
Richard Aldrich, (Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick)

"The End of Secrecy"
Chris Moran and Melina Dobson, (Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick)

"Intelligence and the Future of Accountability"
Mark Phythian, (Politics and IS, University of Leicester)
12.30 - 13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 15.00 Session 2 – Possible Futures

"The Digital Future"
Carsten Maple, (Warwick Manufacturing Group, University of Warwick)

"The Future of Technology and Privacy"
Tom Chothia, (Computer Science, University of Birmingham)

"The Future of Resilience",
Mark Freeman, (Business School, University of Loughborough)

15.00 – 15.30 Coffee break

15.30 – 17.00 Session 3 – Dangerous Ideas

"The Future of Digital Activism"
Athina Karatzogianni, (Media Studies, University of Leicester)

"Surveillance and Science Fiction"
Simon Willmetts, (American Studies, University of Hull)

"Science, Security and the Idea of Freedom"
Andrew Hammond, (Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick)

17.00 Drinks

Web Science 2015: Call for Late Breaking Research (2015-05-23 10:56)
At WebSci15 we will hold an exciting and interactive session for Late Breaking Research: analysis, demos and concepts that are not yet ready for publication, but would stimulate debate and further investigation into current topics within Web Science. Abstracts are invited (approx 500 words) that propose interesting and novel research that will presented in a Pecha Kucha-style session on Sunday afternoon (28 June).

Late Breaking Research may be proposed on any theme that facilitates interdisciplinary discussion of the Web and approaches to Web Science research. We particularly welcome applications that are ambitious in scope and aim to address the pressing challenges of Web Science. This might include, but is not restricted to:

Theorising the Web
Data ownership, access and ethics
Digital cultures
Digital inequality, citizenship and governance
The future of the Web

Submissions will be reviewed by the General and Programme Chairs as they are received and will not be otherwise peer-reviewed. They should be approximately 500 words and are not required to follow ACM formatting requirements. Figures and references can be included but please respect a two page limit to facilitate review.

Submit papers using EasyChair at https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=websci2015

Please note the interim deadline of 27 May in order to receive notification before the early bird registration deadline of 29 May. Submissions will be accepted up until 14 June.

Find out more about the conference at: http://www.websci15.org

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**Brutalist urban architecture in Hong Kong (2015-05-24 08:00)**

Think a city cannot surprise you? I thought so, until I found Michael Wolf’s work. Here are some of his pretty ugly - or pretty in their ugliness, depending on your viewpoint - [1]photos of HK urban highrise blocks of flats. This is how I imagined sociology to be, when I first read my first sociology book back in 2002: Peter Berger’s "Invitation to sociology" (I found a [2]pdf of first chapter here - beware, it might hook you up on sociology). Check out more about Wolf’s photographic project on [3]life in cities.

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) provides competitive funding for independent-minded researchers. It supports original work which takes new approaches and suggests new solutions to real-world social problems, and which is unlikely to be otherwise funded.

At the ISRF Annual Workshop the ISRF’s Fellows report on their work, to each other and to a wider audience drawn here from its host, the Research Centre for Social Sciences (ReCSS) at the University of York. The Workshop focuses on the ISRF’s requirement that the research should be interdisciplinary, innovative and critical. The topic for this year’s Workshop is ‘Critique and Critiques’ and the two-day event will interrogate this theme, in a space where introductory, provocative, exploratory or research-based statements make way for audience participation and discussion by audience members.

What counts as critique varies across the disciplines; critical history, critical anthropology, critical theory and theories, critical philosophy and so on differ in theory and method. All are themselves subject to critique and, of course, the critique of the notion of critique presents a further complication. The Workshop is an opportunity to consider what the truly critical and intellectually research sought by the ISRF, and aimed at by its Fellows, might look like. On Day One there will be short presentations by the ISRF Fellows of projects from across the social sciences, and a Roundtable discussion: ‘What is critique and (how) are we doing it?’

Day Two, bringing together researchers from York and beyond, focuses on contemporary forms of critical theory and its application in empirical research. As a body of thinking, analysis and research critical theory problematizes superficial and complacent analyses of our contemporary human, social and economic condition. The day discovers the range of engagement in critical understandings of social change, progress, the impact of technology, our imbrication with economic rationalities and discourses, as well as deepening problems of ecocide, inequality and violence, in the work of the University’s social science scholars.
The ISRF funds work across and beyond the social science disciplines, to include literature, anthropology, law, history, politics, sociology, philosophy, finance, economics & psychology. This two-day event brings the ISRF and its Fellows together with York's own scholars and research establishment. ‘The politics of names and naming in India’

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) provides competitive funding for independent-minded researchers. It supports original work which takes new approaches and suggests new solutions to real-world social problems, and which is unlikely to be otherwise funded.

At the ISRF Annual Workshop the ISRF’s Fellows report on their work, to each other and to a wider audience drawn here from its host, the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. The Workshop focuses on the ISRF’s requirement that the research should be interdisciplinary, innovative and critical. The topic for this year’s Workshop is ‘Social Science as Communication’ and the two-day event will interrogate this theme, in a space where introductory, provocative, exploratory or research-based statements make way for audience participation and discussion by audience members.

The title ‘Social Science as Communication’ is intended to provoke uncertainty. Is one communicating when doing social science? Is one doing social science when communicating? Re-thinking social science as (being) communication? Re-thinking communication? What is being communicated? What counts as communication (anyway)? There will be a Panel of the ISRF’s Fellows to consider these and other options, and the Fellows will be asked to bear the Workshop theme in mind when presenting their own work.

On Day Two, the University of Edinburgh’s School of Social and Political Science will host panels on ‘The Media, The Academy and The Referendum’ and ‘Digital Social Science’, and will present a lunchtime communication carnival: ‘a promenade presentation of creative and committed experiments in social science communication’.

The ISRF funds work across and beyond the social science disciplines, to include literature, anthropology, law, history, politics, sociology, philosophy, finance, economics & psychology. This two-day event brings the ISRF and its Fellows together with Edinburgh’s own scholars and research establishment.

**Workshop Title:** Social Science as Communication

**Dates:** 1st & 2nd June 2015

**Location:** Summerhall, Summerhall Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1QH

[2]Click Here to Download the latest Workshop Flyer, Including Provisional Timetable

[3]Click Here to Register
The Association of (Gay) Suburban People (2015-05-24 11:17)

It’s easy to associate gay culture with urban life, as if the two are inextricably linked and always would be. But this fascinating work of social history offers an illuminating perspective on organised gay suburban life in the 1970s and 1980s:

The name was carefully chosen: it emphasized the group’s goal of challenging the sexual conformity of suburban society and also invoked the First Amendment right to peaceably assemble — yet avoided any reference to either homosexuality or Detroit. As Rogalski notes, “It was politically expedient to pick a name ... that wasn’t threatening.” Before long the group was promoting itself on the local radio show, Gayly Speaking. “Gay people in Oakland and western Wayne County no longer have to feel isolated in the desert of suburbia,” said Herbert “Bo” Taylor, the group’s first chairman, in an interview with host
David Krumroy, another ASP founder. "We saw a need to organize not only for social reasons but for political reasons, for reasons of self-protection." ASP was, he said, sparking "a new consciousness" and raising "a new awareness of the numbers of gay people in the suburbs."


Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference

Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference
June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology.

The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.
Schedule

9:30 to 10:00 — Welcome and coffee

10:00 to 11:30 — 3 papers

• Jonathan Beacham: Mixed Method Ontologies and Dialectical Futures
• Adam Wood: Why Architecture Needs a Social Ontology
• Giulia Lasagni: Mutual Recognition and Social Commitment

11:30 to 11:45 - Coffee

11:45 to 12:45 - 2 papers

• Janet Lord: What does it mean to be a teacher? A critical realist approach.
• Kalok Yip: IHL and IHRL – Convergence of Laws, Conflation of Ontologies

12:45 to 13:30 - LUNCH

13:30 to 15:00 — 3 papers
The multi-millionaires running higher education (2015-05-24 15:08)

To say things are "getting out of hand, especially given the tax-exempt nature of universities" shows an impressive capacity for understatement:

For E. Gordon Gee's final year as the president of Ohio State University, which he left in 2013, he got a package of more than $6 million, as was widely reported. It was a one-time bonanza, including deferred payments and severance, but he'd earned roughly $2 million annually over the previous years.

The Chronicle of Higher Education analyzed salary information for private colleges from 2012, the most recent year available, and found that Shirley Ann Jackson, the president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, received a package worth over $7 million.


Fenves's salary as the president of the University of Texas puts him well behind that of his counterpart at Texas A & M University, who has an annual base of $1 million plus $400,000 in additional compensation, according to The American-Statesman.

Each profligate compensation package breeds more like it, as schools' trustees convince themselves that they must keep pace in order to recruit, retain and receive the precious fairy dust of the heaviest hitters.

They reason that "this is a winner-take-all society and that people with extremely high levels of talent are richly rewarded," said Richard Vedder, the director of the Center for College Affordability and
“But I think that things are getting out of hand, especially given the tax-exempt nature of universities,” he told me. “They’re in privileged positions, and they were given these privileged positions not to enrich themselves but to serve society. These presidents are expected to live quite nicely but not exorbitantly and not extravagantly.”


[7]


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Television and feeling the passage of life (2015-05-25 08:57)
There’s an intriguing passage in Difficult Men, an account of television’s ‘third golden age’, concerning the temporality of Mad Men and how it differs from The Sopranos, which is widely acknowledged as the originator of our current glut of quality television:

And Mad Men used the ongoing, open-ended format to approach a kind of radical realism that went way beyond whether, say, the refrigerator in the Draper home was the perfect shade of 1962 olive green. The show, in a wildly un-TV-like way, insisted on portraying how the passage of life feels.

"The first season of The Sopranos, you literally felt like you were being dropped out of an air plane every episode," Weiner said. "You constantly had the sensation that you missed an episode: 'Everybody in this story seems to know that guy. Do I know that guy? Was he on last week?' No, they act like they know that guy because they have a life without you.

Brett Martin, Difficult Men, pg. 261

I take the author’s point to be that Mad Men seeks to create an experience of immersion in the passage of life within its narrative world rather than, as with say The Sopranos and The Wire, a tour of an immensely detailed social world with the route driven entirely by the exigencies of story telling. I haven’t actually watched Mad Men beyond the first series because I found it too slow. But I’ve been thinking about temporality in film and television since watching Boyhood last year, a film representing the titular boy growing up over 7 years, in the process capturing the goal of my PhD thesis (key question: what is it for a person to change?) far more perfectly than did the thesis I spent six years working on:
We’re having some problems with the new @soc_imagination site. Are any technically skilled readers able and willing to help? (2015-05-25 09:05)

As you’ve probably noticed, we redesigned the site using a new Wordpress theme which will fit the site more effectively as we become more image heavy and expand the number of our daily posts. However there’s two problems which we’re struggling to fix:

- The logo and the background on the sidebar don’t match. I’ve used an online tool to determine the precise colour of the logo. I’ve set the background to this. On my office PC, it matches. On my personal MacBook Air, it doesn’t. I’ve repeated the process the other way round, picking the colour on my laptop, only to find the mismatch now holds the other way round. What on earth is going on?

- The new theme removes Wordpress bylines and I’m trying to restore them. We’ve had lots of different people post on the site and we need to ensure that it’s clear to the reader who has written what. I’ve worked out how to reinsert author bylines with CSS by modifying single.php but my incredibly meagre CSS skills don’t stretch as far as working out how to incorporate them into the design of the theme itself. At present, I can get the byline included as a line of text at the very top of the screen but ideally I want them as ‘by [author]’ below the post title and above the main body of the post.

Any help would be much appreciated! I’ve now spent at least a day over the past week on changing the site, something which I initially thought would take a couple of hours maximum. I’m on the verge of giving up and just reverting back to the old theme.

Brilliant thanks so much Alasdair! Both things now fixed.
It was only with the success of shows like The Sopranos and The Wire that the reverence accorded directors in cinema began to be extended to creators of television. David Milch was the show runner for NYPD Blue and Deadwood. He also seems to have been a remarkably unusual creative, with the extremity of his behaviour perhaps illuminating a dimension of the creative process which too frequently passes unnoticed:

He also developed several obsessive-compulsive conditions. These included addictions to alcohol and heroin, though they were not as immediately crippling to his ambitions to become a novelist as were such habits as rewriting the same thirteen pages of prose over and over again, word for word, in longhand, for a year. Television proved a salvation [...] TV's "coercions of circumstances," as Milch called them - speed, deadlines, the constraints of genre, the necessity of collaboration - would prove to be precisely what he needed to emulate his mentor and become an author.

Brett Martin, Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution, pg 172

For those who aren’t working with multiple addictions and suffering under the weight of debilitating obsessive compulsive symptoms, it’s easier to lose sight of the ‘coercions of circumstance’ under which we work. We could argue that these are anyway more extreme when it comes to television. But creative work always takes place within a context and I like this notion of ‘coercions of circumstances’ as a way of making sense of how these contextual factors impinge upon the rhythms and meanings of creative work. Part of the motivation for the [1]Accelerated Academy project is a desire to understand how coercions of circumstances are being transformed in the contemporary academy in a way that leaves them inimical to scholarship.

The Cheat’s Guide to Academic Success (2015-05-26 00:16)

HT [1]Petra Boynton. It’s funny but it’s fucking tragic that this is so:

The cheat’s guide to academic success.

1. Continuously check your academic evaluation grid. Select your research topics based on government policy, on your institution’s key performance indicators, or on current societal hypes. Avoid unnecessary efforts, personal passion or commitment at all cost.
2. Choose the slipstream of a colleague who is going to retire, lick his/her boots and eventually take over his/her academic chair.
3. You will never be asked to show that you are a specialist in something, but if you happen to conduct some actual research yourself: make sure to slice your work into least publishable units. Salami publications are considered to be part of the game.
4. Always add the names of four colleagues as co-authors: if they do the same, you will have four articles for the price of one.
5. Put pressure on your PhD students: it is their task to write your articles and project proposals out of sheer gratitude. Five PhD students should be sufficient to allow you to become a world expert in something.
6. Embarrass less diligent scholars with a well-placed sally from time to time, or better: ask them to add your name as seventh co-author on whatever publication. They will feel honored.
7. Avoid conference presentations at all cost. They are time-consuming and expensive, ruin your health, might shake your beliefs and do not yield any academic points. Just mention on your CV that you are a frequently invited speaker. Nobody will ever check.
8. When you really need to say something at some occasion, first spend a couple of hours finding some procedures, guidelines, rules and visitation reports to refer to. People will be impressed by your knowledge.
9. Use the real decision channels, the grapevines, not the councils, procedures and other artefacts administrators put into place to make less diligent scholars believe that they are actually involved in the decision making process.
10. Beware of the first signs of personal passion for knowledge building or commitment for societal service: these have appeared to be contagious and even fatal to more than one career. You might end up as a real scholar.

1. https://twitter.com/drpetra
The Ghost Estates of Ireland (2015-05-26 00:39)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/Rtz85asdsSo

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/pvdtUA5cZdo
CfP: The Neoliberal University: Gender, Class, & Sexuality (2015-05-26 00:55)

This panel intends to investigate processes of bureaucratization and business-afication of the university and the role that these have in re-shaping the interrelations of class, gender, and sexuality; and the specific ways that the change from educational pedagogy to business model has impacted classed, gendered, and sexual practices and relationships.

The rise of neoliberalism coincided with the increase of enrollments in universities and this panel proposes to investigate these two in relation to each other. The scale of the university has increased in terms of rising numbers of students enrolled. Also, as university has become more accessible to larger numbers of citizens, the importance of higher education as a marker of class has become, relatively, more available.

In the light of these shifts, the question is how the (increasing) importance of the university as a site of emancipation takes on questions of gender norms and practices, as well as forms of sexuality.

On the one hand, universities can be seen as sites of normative structures regarding gender, sexuality, race / ethnicity, class, age and more, shaping normativity from aesthetics to (gendered) harassment on college campuses.

On the other hand, universities have also been the sites for social justice and emancipation, regarding gender
and sexuality, by the way of Women’s & Gender studies, LGBT studies and Queer Theory.

This panel seeks to bring together a collection of papers on the role of the neoliberal university in shaping, marking, and creating new expressions and relations of gender, class, and sexuality. In this way, it opens up the discussion to allow for the varied ways that universities implement and allow possibly opposing development of providing spaces for emancipation as well as reproducing normative spaces in terms of gendered, sexualized and classed possibilities.

Papers should seek to elaborate on both theoretical elements and empirical cases (from the Global North and South) and aspects of the role of the university in the 21st Century and its impact on gender, class, and sexuality.

The Politics of Happiness and the Purpose of the Social Sciences: an interview with @davies_will (2015-05-26 08:20)


IFRAME: [3]https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https %3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/207114442 &color=ff5500 &auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _re-posts=false

[...] This is an extract from The Happiness Industry by William Davies. If you find it interesting then you’ll like this podcast. [...]
We spend ever more hours of our day discussing, analysing and assessing what we do, and ever fewer hours actually doing it (2015-05-26 21:27)

An [1]excellent account of the stultifying experience of the [2]acceleration of higher education:

There’s a simple explanation for the drive to quantify everything: the replacement of the horizontal self-government of university departments with the vertical hierarchy of departmental heads and senior management. Academics used to document their output on their CVs; now, managers have to find ways to justify their existence. “Everyone knows the results are absurd,” Graeber tells me via email. “We all spend more and more hours of our day discussing, analysing and assessing what we do, and fewer and fewer hours actually doing it, and all of it, just to give these high-level administrators who aren’t really needed something to do for their gold-plated salaries.”

But this is more than just a power shift, Graeber notes. “It represents a transformation in our basic assumption about what a university is...Thirty years ago, if you said ‘the university’, people assumed you were referring to the faculty. Now if you say it, people assume you’re referring to the administration.” The corporate bureaucrats who now run universities are “often more interested in real estate speculation, fund-raising, sports, and ‘the student experience’ than anything that has to do with learning, teaching, or scholarship at all”.


[...] para os finais de semana, como se apenas essa porção fosse efetivamente prazerosa. Leiam este post no Sociological Imagination e tenham uma ideia do que significa a ‘aceleração da [...]”

How Much Data Is Created Every Minute? (2015-05-26 22:05)

I’m usually somewhat sceptical of content marketing infographics but I rather like this:
The naked reality of capitalism is today on display. And it’s horrible. 

PhD Studentship: Gender, Bodies and Technology, Engendered bodily practices and self-monitoring in the digital age 

There has been a significant uptake in the use of 'body tracking', m-health and e-health devices in recent years. There are many body tracking apps available on the Apple, Android and Windows app stores and many more in development. An increasing range of facets of human existence are being monitored and quantified by
devices which enable digital manipulation and analysis. Like many other forms of digital data, self-tracking data have a vitality and social life of their own, circulating across and between a multitude of sites. These devices are, however, not used by individuals in isolation, rather, they enable the online sharing and comparison of data which present new dimensions of embodied and gendered practices to examine for sociologists. Furthermore, corporations who manufacture such devices draw on aggregated, accumulated data for commercial purposes. These data, and their analysis, are reconstituting how people relate to their bodies and selves and those of others. So far these developments have not been considered in relation to how they constitute, and are constituted by, 'gendered logics'.

Thus it is timely to pursue questions of how and why people choose to engage with their health through quantification and tracking and what meanings they attach to them in relation to their gender. Body tracking' devices and their users are of increasing interest to academic and sociological researchers although so far little empirical research has been conducted. Yet the shifting forms of selfhood configured via these digital data assemblages are of huge interest to contemporary social life. The theoretical implications of the use of such methods of digital self-analysis has only just started to be explored in relation to issues of surveillance and self-surveillance (Bossewitch and Sinnreich, 2012; Lupton, 2012) and notions of ‘gamification’ (Whitson, 2013) and this scholarship provides an opportunity to contribute and work in an exciting new field.

The study will involve a mixed methods approach which will enable the researcher to generate data which give a broad but detailed picture of how data and technologies intersect with the social and embodied experience of gender through two approaches.

First, analysis of the offline aspects of this topic is to be conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus groups with users of self-monitoring techniques (both digital and analogue) and particularly those which are closest to the experience of gender and bodies (eg. exercise, fitness, menstrual cycle, food). Visual and haptic methods will be central to this aspect of the research with participants asked/encouraged to discuss their methods of monitoring, and those of others, in relation to how they look and feel. This will be achieved through direct interaction with devices and representations and some respondents creating visual and written logs of their experience.

Second, digital methods will be used in order to analyse the topic on the data level. For instance the researcher will perform a hyperlink network analysis which can help to determine who are the powerful actors in networks and the role they play in the formation of cultural capital (Beer, 2011: 4.14). They will also conduct a sentiment analysis of different kinds of online posts which can be mapped in order to determine positive, neutral or negative sentiment. Such analysis can help to ascertain broad sentiment towards, and connection between, particular topics.

However, it is imagined that the student will contribute to the final and more detailed research methodology for the project and take a decisive part in further developing the proposal.

Please contact Dr Natalia Gerodetti for further details: [mailto:n.gerodetti@leedsbeckett.ac.uk] 1.

1. [http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/research-studentships-and-fees-only-bursaries/](http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/research-studentships-and-fees-only-bursaries/)
2. [mailto:n.gerodetti@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:n.gerodetti@leedsbeckett.ac.uk)
Shocking news was revealed about Hello Kitty on her 40th birthday in summer 2014: ‘Hello kitty is not a cat – she’s a British girl’ named Kitty White and lives with her sister and parents in suburban London. But this has hardly affected the global popularity of this character created by the Japanese company Sanrio in the 1970s. Her fandom has a large following around the world. She can be seen in Tokyo, New York, or Rio de Janeiro. 25,000 fans flocked to her convention in Los Angeles last year. The world’s first Hello Kitty theme park opened in China.

Illuminating on the intersection of popular culture and international relations (IR), the Hello Kitty and International Relations workshop aims to explore deeper, more nuanced understandings of IR through an interdisciplinary dialogue on the Hello Kitty phenomenon. International relations is not defined here as a narrow subfield in politics, but an interconnecting constellation with cultural, social, economic, and linguistic implications. It is the production of ‘relations international’ (Christine Sylvester) that incorporates questions of gender, relations among ethnic/racial groups and bridges between local and regional communities.

In the spirit of the aesthetic turn in IR (Roland Bleiker), this workshop recognises Hello Kitty's potential to invite us to challenge granted dogmas in everyday life, interrogate in new ways global issues that affect our life-worlds, and reinvigorate silenced or marginalised debates. Above all, despite her commodification, she is an artistic expression that reifies and epitomises hope in and for the everyday. As the Japanese-American conductor Kent Nagano claims, the main purpose of art is to plant the seed of hope, through impassioning our innermost feelings.

This ubiquity of Hello Kitty is a result of her ‘emptiness’, or what Roland Barthes calls ‘the empty sign’ that embodies ‘an empty point-of-affluence of all its occupations and its pleasure’. Christine Yano’s recent monograph on Hello Kitty concurs: Hello Kitty ‘inhabits the “thingness” of the “thing” in the physical properties of cuteness she brings to meaning making’. Hello Kitty is then a ‘liminal space’ to posit academic conjectures on the everyday and the international.

This workshop welcomes contributions from a variety of approaches that discover Hello Kitty’s relevance in the contemporary world, especially in consideration to the three following sub-themes:

- Resurgence of the global (political) subjects
- Performing IR in everyday life
- Speaking in silence: reconstructing marginalised voices in IR

**Registration:** Please contact Misato Matsuoka (m.matsuoka@warwick.ac.uk) by **5th June**; limited spaces are available.

[5] Event programme

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/current/earlycareer/events/hellokitty/poster_hk.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/current/earlycareer/events/hellokitty/poster_hk.pdf)
2. [http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/staff/profile/kyle.grayson](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/staff/profile/kyle.grayson)
3. [https://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff36875.php](https://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff36875.php)
4. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/strausz/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/people/strausz/)
5. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/current/earlycareer/events/hellokitty/hello_kitty_and_international_relations.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/current/earlycareer/events/hellokitty/hello_kitty_and_international_relations.pdf)

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**Online Misogyny and Sexual Harassment Event (2015-05-27 08:56)**

**Online Misogyny and Sexual Harassment**

**Gender & Sexualities Research Forum (GSRF) at City University London**

Wednesday 17 June 5-7pm

Rooms A107 and A108, [1] College Building

St John Street
London
EC1V 4PB

Online spaces such as blogs, forums and Twitter are invaluable resources for feminist communities. However, due to its nature, the Internet also expands the space available for misogynistic discourses to spread and be heard and - as the cases of Caroline Criado-Perez and Mary Beard demonstrate - provides an outlet for ‘trolls’ to enact vitriolic attacks on women who publicly voice their opinions. Whilst encouraging progress has been made in increasing public and corporate awareness, we still have much to learn about this problem and about how we can start to tackle it. This seminar will discuss new research into the online harassment of women and explore how academic work can start to answer some of these questions. Topics up for discussion include: what methods can we use to track harassment on large social media platforms? What is the role of the law in addressing cyber-hate against women? What would a more ethical Internet look like and how might this be achieved?

**Speakers:**
Marianne Franklin (Goldsmiths, University of London): Title TBC

Marianne Franklin is Professor of Global Media and Politics at Goldsmiths, University of London, where she is a member of the Centre for Feminist Research. Active in research and advocacy on human rights issues and the internet, she has served as co-Chair of the Internet Rights and Principles Coalition at the UN Internet Governance Forum and is currently chair of the Global Internet Governance Academic Network ([2]GigaNet). Her latest book is Digital Dilemmas; Power, Resistance and the Internet (Oxford University Press, 2013).

Olga Jurasz (Open University): “Online Misogyny and Social Media: A Challenge for (Legal) Regulation”

Olga Jurasz is a lecturer in law at the Open University Law School. Her main research interests are public international law, human rights and legal regulation of gender-based violence. She has been recently working on a collaborative project addressing gender, cyberviolence and law.

Carl Miller (Centre for the Analysis of Social Media, Demos): “Researching Misogyny on Twitter”

Carl Miller is the Research Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Media at Demos. It is the first British think tank unit dedicated to researching and understanding the digital world. He develops new ways of understanding social media as a new part of social and political life. He wrote a weekly column on digital politics for The Sunday Times and is a social media commentator for Sky. He is a Visiting Research Fellow at King’s College, London.

Chair: Laura Thompson

** Talks and discussion followed by refreshments at 7pm **

For more information or to join the GSRF mailing list, contact Laura García-Favaro on: [3]genderforum.city@gmail.com

1. http://www.city.ac.uk/visit/campuses/northampton-square/college-building
3. mailto:genderforum.city@gmail.com


Youth, Multiculturalism and Community Cohesion by Paul Thomas (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) (Palgrave Politics of Identity & Citizenship Series)
Thomas’ book is an engaging and well-written account of the dilemmas of contemporary society in dealing with youth identity and multiculturalism, particularly since 2001 when new ways of approaching multicultural youth work came to the forefront because of government concerns about the failure of multiculturalism. Riots in 2001 in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford, and the events of 9/11 and 7/7 led to the introduction of new models of dealing with the youth of ethnically diverse towns and cities based upon ideas about community cohesion. The principal strategy discussed in this book is employment of community cohesion policies and practices: Thomas highlights what these policies on community cohesion, that have been increasingly been recommended by government, mean on the ground for those working with young people in diverse ethnic communities like Oldham and Rochdale, and he attempts to take a positive approach to the current debates on the implications of community cohesion policies.

“All public bodies in Britain now have a duty to promote community cohesion...” (p1).

What is community cohesion? Community cohesion refers to an emphasis on commonalities rather than differences. Thomas’ perspective on community cohesion is that it is a “re-balancing of multiculturalism towards a more overt and proactive commitment to liberal citizenship for all citizens, of whatever ethnic background” (p189). Rather than simply dismissing community cohesion as an assimilationist project or as the death of multiculturalism, Thomas uses empirical evidence to argue that these aforementioned ways of understanding community cohesion are inadequate for in his view “community cohesion represents a helpful and necessary reorientation of multiculturalism’s priorities and approaches in order to positively engage with modern complexity, and that it is certainly not a retreat to assimilationism” (p4).
The empirical data is drawn from “the most marginalised” (p6) young people and their youth workers in Greater Manchester - Oldham and Rochdale - where the communities experience high levels of economic and social deprivation. Thomas highlights how “issues of ethnicity and youth are highly relevant to wider discussions of poverty, inequality and life chances in areas like Oldham and Rochdale” (p6), and there is a chapter discussing gender dynamics as well as the territorialisation elements to belonging to the locale, but in general the book does not sufficiently cover the significance of structural inequalities in the lives of young people inhabiting multicultural urban spaces in Britain. I would have liked to have learned more about material disadvantages faced by these ethnically diverse youth that might contribute to tensions and troubles in their everyday lives in multicultural communities.

The main arguments employed by Thomas are that community cohesion policies (though critiqued by some academics) are utilised successfully by youth workers in their work with young people – where safe spaces are created to encourage direct contact between otherwise segregated youth:

“...cohesion in practice is working with and respecting existing ethnic and other identities, augmenting them, rather than replacing in an assimilationist sense, with an overarching focus on common identities and experiences” (p10).

The strengths of this book are that Thomas rightly emphasises the significance of exploring the lives of young people in marginalised and deprived areas of the UK, for as he points out these youth are central to the future of multi-ethnic Britain. Moreover, he argues that there is a lack of empirical evidence in academic writings on community cohesion, and thus he has significantly addressed this current failing by including the ideas and identities of young people and their lived experiences of the impact of community cohesion policies on their local areas. Thomas has aimed to relay to the reader the practice of community cohesion policies – how local and national government officials have implemented notions regarding cohesion in diverse communities like Oldham and Rochdale.

The empirical research in the book gives the reader a sense of optimism about how governmental policies can be engaged with in meaningful ways on the ground (even if, like me, you might be sceptical about the government’s focus on cohesion rather than inequality and austerity). One of the most impactful chapters focuses importantly on Muslim youth and their relationship to national identity and belonging to Britain, challenging the negative scaremongering that is prevalent in mainstream media. We learn that, contrary to media and political rhetoric, young Muslims are able to express a strong faith identity alongside their British identity. In a different chapter, we are also guided through a critique of the much maligned Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) policies and programmes, and shown how examples of local organisations using PVE resources resiliently to do good work with young people. Another well-written and significant chapter discusses white working-class youth identity and the importance of bringing social class to the debates on belonging, identity and multiculturalism, whilst remaining sensitive to the anti-racist project.

At the time of publication, perhaps there was not more known about the failure of Prevent, as though it has been mentioned, I would have liked to have seen more critique about how Prevent was implemented in local communities by key local players. One very off-putting point that arises again and again in the book is reference to Trevor Phillips who is quoted regarding his skewed views on multiculturalism. Yet Trevor Phillips is not well respected by many academics writing about multicultural belonging to Britain, and thus citing his views takes away something from this otherwise admirable book. This book’s focus is northwest England, particularly Oldham and Rochdale, but it would be interesting to learn more about community cohesion polices in practice in other parts of Britain.

The Offending Article on www.bustle.com:

Kendall Jenner is known for showing off her toned model bod and long legs, but she kept the paparazzi on their toes with her latest bold style trend. According to Refinery29, Kendall Jenner wore a dress over pants (OK, fine, it was technically a tunic, but still) while wandering the streets of LA, adding yet another trend to her resumé of style pioneering. The all-white wonder was a nice change from her normal crop top and mini-skirt ensembles, but she still managed to look as effortlessly chic as always.

The outraged POC Responses on Facebook:

[3]

[4]

[5]
Further Reading:


What it’s like for your pet on fireworks night (2015-05-27 20:11)

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Are you a dandelion or a mammal? (2015-05-27 21:13)

This is a question [1]Cory Doctorow introduces in his book Information Doesn’t Want To Be Free:

When my daughter was born, I became keenly aware of how much stock we mammals put into the copies we make of ourselves (yes, a child isn’t a "copy" exactly, but go with it for a moment). Mammalian reproduction is a major event, especially for us primates, and we want to be sure that every "copy" we make grows up healthy, strong and successful.

But here are other life forms for whom copying is a lot more casual. Dandelions produce two thousand seeds every spring, and when a good, stiff breeze comes around, those seeds are blown into the air, going every which way. The dandelion’s strategy is to maximise the number of blind chances
it has for continuing its genetic line - not to carefully plot every germination. It works: every summer, every crack in every side walk has a dandelion growing out of it.

Next question: are you a [2]hedgehog or a fox?


Social Media and Ambient Intimacy (2015-05-27 21:41)

There’s an extremely important idea expressed in this video if you can get past the irritating presenter:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/IgsHuaS8G84

I’ve written more about this idea [2]here. It needs to be treated carefully but this formulation shouldn’t be dismissed.

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/IgsHuaS8G84
Last month I made the mistake of putting my mobile phone in the washing machine. Despite being quickly retrieved, the phone died. I left it to dry out for a few days, but nothing. There was an encouraging flashing light, but this was a false dawn. Breaking your phone is probably a fairly common experience and shouldn’t be too much of a problem, but what I was surprised about was the feeling that it created. There was something disconcerting about not having my phone with me. This moment of stupidity was a moment of rupture for my normal routines. It provided me with some insight into just how much we rely on our mobile devices. This reliance is not just based on the fact that these phones allow us to keep in touch, to stay networked and to participate in the incessant din of social media. The response I had was not just about the missing functions of the phone and my sudden inability to stay networked. Rather this was about the comforting presence that these objects have in our lives.

We might go as far as to say that we develop something of an emotional attachment with our smart phones, particularly as they become embedded in our bodily routines. They provide a comforting weight in our hands, pockets and bags. We slide them out, check them, hold them, place them back. When we think about the impact of phones, we usually just think about what it is that they can do. But they also have a material presence in our lives. Our relationship with them is tactile and physical. They are not just devices or portals onto an informational world, they are also objects.

Sherry Turkle has used the phrase ‘evocative objects’ to think about the types of connections that we have with the things that we surround ourselves with. Turkle’s point is that what seem like quite mundane objects can have profound personal meanings for us – triggering memories and emotional responses. For Turkle, we should think of these types of evocative objects ‘as companions to our emotional lives or as provocations of thought’. We connect to these objects and use them to negotiate and stimulate emotional responses or to trigger thoughts and
feelings. We share experiences, moments and sentiments with these objects – which, in Turkle’s edited volume, can range from a camera, to a suitcase, to a rolling pin, to a yellow raincoat. This is what the anthropologist Daniel Miller has called the ‘[4]comfort of things’. His study of a street of 30 households revealed a deep connection that the residents had to the stuff that filled their homes, these objects were seen to have a comforting presence in their lives. We probably all have objects around with which we have a strong emotional attachment, and which are both evocative and comforting. I’m sitting writing this next to a miner’s lamp which I keep on my desk, it means nothing to anyone except me. Yet, for me, it brings both strong memories and a sense of familiarity and reassurance.

In the 1930s, [5]Walter Benjamin wrote some brief reflections on what it was like to be reunited with his book collection – it had been in transit when he had been forced to move across Europe. Benjamin uses that experience of prizing open the packing cases to reflect on the attachment that he had with his books. His essay explores the importance of the materiality of the book collection. Benjamin’s book collector sees through the objects into their past. Part of our attachment with these objects, Benjamin’s piece suggests, comes from the shared biographies of the book and its owner – the yellowed paper, the coffee stains, the dog eared pages, the dusty cover. He suggests that what is written in the book is not necessarily the only thing that is of importance to the collector, rather it is the presence of that book in the glass case or on the shelf that matters – the cloth, cardboard, paper and binding that can be held in the hand or put on display. Benjamin’s attachment to his books is material. It is not about the function of the media, but their presence in the collector’s life.

As [6]we live with them, we develop a kind of personal attachment with our phones. This is so familiar to us now that we might only notice it in moments of rupture – when a phone is lost. We might even go as far as to say that they are ‘evocative objects’ with which we have a visceral bodily connection. Although we move onto the next phone when the time comes for an upgrade, transferring this temporary attachment to the next phone – perhaps experiencing a brief moment of uncertainty and discomfort in these moments of change and before our new object becomes familiar. We are attached to what it is that these devices can do, facilitating our [7]creeping connectivity, but they are also objects that are [8]comforting and reassuring.

I’ve argued [9]elsewhere that smart devices have a kind of comforting effect that can be linked to the broader neoliberal political agenda, making us work smarter and not harder. Again though, that piece was concerned with what these devices are seen to be capable of. The notion of smartness there was a concept that performed a particular role, both comforting us and provoking action. My experience with my broken phone suggests that they are not only reassuring us in this way, but that they are also comforting in their material presence as objects in our lives and in our hands. It is perhaps hard to separate these mobile media devices themselves from their functionality, but it does help us to notice how attached we have become to their presence. Smartphones, it seems, are comforting both in the functional role that they perform and as potentially evocative objects that are, as Turkle put it, companions to our emotional lives.

David Beer is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of York. His most recent book is Punk Sociology.
Connected and disconnected writing | The Sociological Imagination (2015-07-21 08:00:22)

[...] device. I've lost the shared history I had with my old laptop, it had become the kind of 'evocative object' to which Sherry Turkle has referred, it had seen me through some tough writing days. We do [...]  


Challenging ‘Lad Culture’ in Higher Education and Through Education

Thursday, 4th June, 12.30-4.30, in the Social Sciences Building, level 12, room 12.25

We warmly invite you to this half-day event hosted by Sharon Elley, FLaG and Sally Hines, CIGS in the School of Sociology and Social Policy. The event brings together leading academics, researchers and practitioners working to challenge laddism, violence, gender and class inequalities in higher education and via education. Attendance is free and refreshments will be provided. Places are limited so please register your attendance ASAP by email to: [1]s.t.elley@leeds.ac.uk.

The Issues:

12.30-12.50: Register
12.50-1.00: Welcome: Dr Sharon Elley
1.00-1.30: ‘Lad cultures’ and sexual violence in UK higher education - where do we go from here? Dr Alison Phipps, University of Sussex
1.30-2.00: ‘Is 'lad culture' a problem in HE? Exploring the perspectives of staff working in UK HEIs', Dr Vanita Sundaram, University of York
2.00-2.30: Q & A
2.30-3.00: Refreshments

Tackling issues:

3.00-3.30: ‘Escaping the ‘Man-box’ – Coaching Healthy and Respectful Masculinity in Schools: An Approach to Prevention’ Michael Conroy, A Call to Men, UK
3.30-4.00: ‘White, Male and Privileged’: Experiences of Lad Culture in the US Context, Jon Mermelstein, Exchange Student, University of Leeds
4.00-4.25: Q & A
4.25-4.30: Closing: Dr Sharon Elley

1. mailto:s.t.elley@leeds.ac.uk
The Research Companion (2015-05-28 08:12)

by Petra Boynton

10 years ago I published a book called 'The Research Companion'. It was based on talks and teaching I'd been doing with social scientists and healthcare staff that were supposed to be about the 'how to's' of research (questionnaires, focus groups, ethics approval, publishing etc), but inevitably turned into the practical bits of research you don't necessarily get taught in standard methods courses. Things like how to stay safe when doing research, managing bullying at work, publishing and presenting for the shy, how to read a paper, addressing inequalities in academia, or getting people to actually take part in your research.

Within the book was a link to a forum, which was excitingly cutting edge at the time. Like most people, the times when I'd struggled with research, writing, analysis and so on wasn't necessarily when I was at work, but was in the early hours of the morning or over the weekend when I had nobody about to ask for help. A forum provided a round the clock place for people anywhere in the world to ask for help about their research, or share their experience, or link to tools and resources they were finding helpful.

As with so many things social media moved on, the book grew out of date and the forum closed. But the need for research help didn’t go away and increasingly as I began working with people in development, activism and those outside academia I wanted to create somewhere that people could use to talk about research as and when they wanted to that could, perhaps, avoid some of the hierarchies built in to standard university teaching or continued professional development.

Facebook seemed an obvious place to try, with the opportunity of having a closed group where researchers from any country, at any level, working anywhere across the social/health sciences or development could link up. I post resources, job adverts, calls for conferences and fun stuff on a daily basis while other group members ask for advice or share their learning as necessary.

The group is diverse and I hope will stay that way. It’s got people within it from all over the world and I’m especially keen to welcome those who ordinarily aren’t having dedicated academic support where they are based. Group members include students, professors, journalists, retired research enthusiasts, activists, and community workers. Not everyone has, or is working towards, a higher degree. Not everyone is employed or working in/for a university. Many
members are carers, parents or have other jobs alongside their research work. We connect via phone or computer with some in the field (including field hospitals) and some, like me, at the kitchen table fitting in posts around the housework and sorting the kids’ packed lunches.

As I’m revising the Research Companion book for a second edition I sometimes ask within the group for people’s thoughts about something I’m working on. Alongside the Facebook group is a blog where I share wider, open resources on research methods and things that will be referred to in the updated text but won’t be explored in depth there. I also archive what’s been shared in the Facebook group on a monthly basis and put that on the blog so anyone who’s not on Facebook (including in countries where access is limited) can still find and use resources that might help in their work.

All of this is still a work in progress and is very much being led by the communities of diverse people who either call themselves researchers or call what they are doing research. I’m interested to see what works best, with the overall aim of making research methods interesting, accessible, effective and ethical. Noting that research can be exciting and enjoyable, a total nightmare, or just a job to get on with.

There’s more information about the Facebook group and what people can get from it here


1. http://theresearchcompanion.com/about/the-research-companion-facebook-group/

A conversation with Lisa Mckenzie about sociology, activism and sociological activism (2015-05-29 12:24)

I recorded this interview with [1]Lisa Mckenzie last month, a few weeks before the general election in which she was standing as a challenger to Iain Duncan Smith in Chingford. We cover a lot of ground in the discussion but underlying it all is a clear commitment to the public role of sociology. Rather than sociology and activism being in tension, Lisa makes a convincing case that one can inevitably lead to the other.

1. https://twitter.com/redrumlisa/
2. https://w.soundcloud.com/player/?url=https%3A//api.soundcloud.com/tracks/204699776&auto_play=false&hide_related=false&show_comments=true&show_user=true&show_reposts=false&visual=true


[...] ele bate papo com outros cientistas sociais sobre temas próprios à sociologia pública, como o papel do ativismo. Alô Fernando Perlatto, vamos trazer esse cara pro [...] 


Remembering Operation Spanner: Culture, Law, History and Crime

10th & 11th September 2015

Two interdisciplinary workshops at the University of Essex & Royal Holloway, University of London
Keynote Speakers:

Professor Ken Plummer (University of Essex)

Professor Carl Stychin (City University)

February 2017 will mark the 20th anniversary of the 1997 European Court of Human Rights’ judgment in the case of Colin Laskey, Roland Jaggard and Tony Brown v United Kingdom, ending the legal appeals for the defendants in R v Brown [1994]. A group of men were convicted of assault occasioning actual bodily harm for engaging in ‘extreme’ sadomasochistic sex acts. None of the ‘victims’ of the ‘assaults’ were themselves the complainants, and in fact gave evidence of their consent to the acts. Moreover, the activities were undertaken in private without causing any lasting injury. An undercover Manchester Metropolitan police investigation of 1987 called Operation Spanner uncovered video evidence of the incident and the CPS made the decision to prosecute the assailants. While legal scholars have interrogated the judgment by focussing on the deployment of consent, recklessness and the legality of sexual pleasure, a major interdisciplinary project that examines the wider and longstanding impacts of Spanner and the judgments has not yet been undertaken. The ruling was affected by and had wide-ranging impacts on culture more broadly, and its shockwaves continue to be felt today. Two single-day seminars at Essex and Royal Holloway will be held on the 10th and 11th September 2015 respectively. The convenors intend that these intensive one-day workshops will facilitate discussion to determine the direction of a series of fundable research projects and outputs, and bring together an interdisciplinary cohort working on these topics in order to lead to published and other material outcomes. We solicit papers and proposals for 20 minute papers which examine Spanner and its legacies from the time of the arrests to the present day in broader social, cultural and historical contexts, including but not limited to: · criminological and criminal justice contexts · performance art · body modification, both professional and private · Socio-legal and cultural regulation of bodies · the “Video Nasties” panic of the mid-80s, cultural rhetoric of danger and contagion · sexual subcultures, sexual rights and activism in the late 1980s and early 1990s · pornography, particularly that classed “extreme” by recent laws · political discourses on homosexuality, and sexual behaviour more generally · Biomedical issues including HIV transmission, public health We welcome proposals from the humanities and social sciences, including but not limited to sociology, law, history, criminology, art history, cultural studies, media studies, film studies, anthropology and geography. Please send abstracts of 300 words (max) to [1]mlodder@essex.ac.uk and [2]alex.dymock@rhul.ac.uk by Friday 17th July 2015. Funding for travel and speaker accommodation is available. Speakers are very welcome to attend both workshops.

For those who think Islamophobia is not an issue... (2015-05-29 20:03)

Please read [1]this report by the anti-racism educational organisation Show Racism the Red Card.
“To what extent do young people share potentially damaging attitudes with far right groups and where do these ideas come from? What are the opportunities and risks that this presents?”

[2]Dr Paul Jackson from the University of Northampton, who worked on the research project with SRTRC, said: “There is clearly a gap between the reality and perception on issues like the number of immigrants or the size of the UK’s Muslim community among some young people. The subsequent levels of hostility towards these groups is very worrying and is something that we, as a society, need to take seriously.”

How else to know people? (2015-05-30 07:59)

This is an extract from [1]The Happiness Industry by [2]William Davies. If you find it interesting then you’ll like [3]this podcast.

Psychology and social science are perfectly possible, under the sorts of conditions described by Wittgenstein, indeed they are much more straightforward. Systematic efforts to understand other people, through their behaviour and speech, are entirely worthwhile. But they are not so different from the forms of understanding that we all make of one another in everyday life. As the social psychologist Rom Harre argues, we all face the occasional problem of not being sure what other people mean or intend, but have ways of overcoming this. "The only possible solution", he argues, "is to use our understanding of ourselves as the basis for the understanding of others, and our understanding of others of our species to further our understanding of ourselves".[i]

One implication of this, when it comes to acquiring psychological knowledge, is that we have to take what people say far more seriously. Not only that, but we have to assume that for the most part, they meant what they said, unless we can identify some reason why they didn’t. Where behaviorism always attempts to get around people’s ‘reports’ of what they’re feeling, an interpretative social psychology insists that feeling and speaking cannot be ultimately disentangled from each other. Part of what it means to understand the feelings of another is to hear and understand what they mean, when they use the word ‘feeling’.

Techniques such as surveys may have a valuable role to play, in fostering mutual understanding across large and diverse societies. But again, there is too much misunderstanding as to what is going on when a survey takes place. Surveys can never be instruments which represent some set of quasi-natural, objective facts; rather they are useful and interesting ways of engaging with people, probing them for answers. As the critical psychologist John Cromby has argued with respect to happiness surveys:
Happiness does not exert a determinate force that always makes all human participants tick the boxes on a... scale in a particular way. There is not the law-like relation between happiness and questionnaire response that exists between, say, the volume of a quantity of mercury and its temperature.[ii]

This doesn't mean that a happiness survey doesn't communicate anything. But what it conveys cannot be disentangled from the social interaction between the surveyor and the surveyed. The ideal of discovering something more objective than this, through stripping out the self-awareness of the respondent (for instance, analysing twitter sentiment instead) is a chimera. It also involves forms of trickery and manipulation, which open up a breach between the researcher and everybody else.

Another way of understanding this argument is that psychology, clearly understood, is a door through which we pass on the way to political dialogue. This is in contrast to the Benthamite and behaviorist traditions explored in this book, which view psychology as a step towards physiology and/or economics, precisely so as to shut the door on politics. Unless something goes wrong, the core questions of psychology are relatively simple. 'What is that person doing?'. 'What is that person feeling right now?'. For the most part, the answers to these questions are relatively unproblematic, and the first and most important 'methodology' for answering them is one that we all use every day: just ask them.

That this methodology is not taken more seriously by managerial elites is scarcely surprising. It requires processes of deliberation. It credits people with their own legitimate interpretations and critiques of their own circumstances. It also requires skills to listen, which become submerged in societies that have privileged the power to observe and visualise. Management and government are more secure with the notion of brains 'lighting up' or thinking being 'no less observable than baseball', than they are with the prospect of people intentionally expressing their emotions and judgements. For various reasons, making our minds visible seems safer than making them audible. Entire organisational structures would need to change, if the behaviorist vision of an automated, silent mind were abandoned, in favour of an intelligent, speaking one.

In a society organised around objective psychological measurement, the power to listen is a potentially iconoclastic one. There is something radical about privileging the sensory power of the ear, in a political system designed around that of the eye. The clinical psychologist, Richard Bentall, argues that even quite severe forms of 'mental illness', which are routinely treated with drugs in the West today, can be alleviated through a patient, careful form of engagement with the sufferer and their life history. He suggests that:

If psychiatric services are to become more genuinely therapeutic, and if they are to help people rather than merely 'manage' their difficulties, it will be necessary to rediscover the art of relating to patients with warmth, kindness and empathy.[iii]

Listening and talking will not 'cure' them, because they are not 'treatments' in the first place. But behind the symptoms of psychosis and schizophrenia there are stories and emotional injuries, which only a good listener will discover.

The rediscovery of listening is a priority that permeates other fields of social science. The sociologist, Les Back, argues that "listening to the world is not an automatic faculty but a skill that needs to be trained", noting that it is this which gets lost in a society of 'abstracted and intrusive empiricism' of endless data, exposes, facts and figures.[iv] To know others is to engage with their stories and how they tell them. In the past, critiques of 'ideology' have proposed that most people labour under a 'false consciousness', not knowing what their real interests are. There is a certain irony, in the age of 'nudges' and clandestine facebook experiments, that it may now be more radical to highlight precisely the ways in which ordinary people do know what they're doing, can make sense of their lives,
are clear about their interests. For this, researchers need to learn some humility.

Amongst all of this, one of the most important human capacities which is rediscovered by the sociological psychologist is that to offer a critical judgement. To describe a critique or a complaint as a form of ‘unhappiness’ or ‘displeasure’ is to bluntly misunderstand what those terms mean, or what it means to experience and exercise them. ‘Critique’ will not show up in the brain, which is not to say that nothing happens at a neurological level when we exercise critical judgement. The attempt to drag all forms of negativity under a single neural or mental definition of unhappiness (often classed as ‘depression’) is perhaps the most pernicious of the political consequences of Benthamism generally.

If we understand concepts such as ‘critique’ and ‘complaint’ properly, we will recognise that they involve a particular form of negative orientation towards the world, that both the critic herself and her audience are aware of. As Harre puts it, "to complain verbally is a part of being discontented, because part of what is ascribed to a person who is described as 'discontented' is a tendency to complain".[v] Notions such as ‘critique’ and ‘complaint’ mean nothing, without also appreciating that people have the unique power to interpret and narrate their own lives. Where the 'sentiment analyst', mining reams of twitter data, is looking for evidence of psychological emotion which people have emitted by accident, to listen to someone explain the rights and wrongs of their own lives is to grant them the human dignity of both understanding and articulation.

Recognising that people get angry, critical, resistant and frustrated is to understand that they have reasons to feel or act in these ways. People express themselves in different ways, and with different levels of confidence, but there are good reasons to accept the narratives that people offer about their own lives. If someone is invited to express their feeling (rather than instructed to correctly name or quantify it), they make it into a social phenomenon. Once people are critical or angry, they can also be critical or angry about something, which is external to themselves. Whether or not they are considered an articulate or expert person is scarcely relevant. This is already a less lonely, less depressive, less narcissistic state of affairs, than one in which people wonder how their mind or brain is behaving, and what they should do to improve it.

[v] Harré & Secord (1972) p. 107

2. http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/davies/

Thanks for this. I found it useful, but a bit patronising towards the end.
Atmospheres play a significant role in, and add an important quality to, our intimate, domestic and public lives, yet are often overlooked in social research, not least because of the methodological challenges involved in ‘capturing’ them.

In this major conference celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Morgan Centre, we will be using the theme of ‘atmospheres’ as our starting point for interdisciplinary dialogue.

Keynote Speakers
• Simon Armitage
• Jennifer Mason
• Sheila Rowbotham

For details of the full programme, please visit [1]http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/programme/ Early Bird Registration closes 31 May 2015 £160 - Full conference attendance (2 days) £80 - Full conference attendance (2 days), concession* £120 - One day attendance £60 - One day attendance, concession* * The concessionary rate is available to full-time students and unwaged (retired, unemployed)
For more details, and to register please visit [2]http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/registration/

1. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/programme/
2. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/events/atmospheres/registration/
E-mail apnoea (2015-05-30 20:03)

Even though the postural mechanism invoked here makes sense, it’s hard not to wonder about the psychosocial costs of our communications systems when [1]reading about things like this:

While we have a greater tendency toward email apnea or screen apnea, while doing email and texting on laptops and smartphones, we are at risk for breath holding or shallow breathing in front of any screen, any time. Not only does this increase stress levels, it impacts our attitude, our sense of emotional well-being, and our ability to work effectively.

In 2007, I noticed this in myself, and then placed heart rate variability ear clips (HRV is often used to measure stress) on visiting friends while I observed them doing email and texting. I observed and interviewed people in cafes, offices, and on the street. At the same time, I contacted and interviewed physicians, psychologists, cardiologists, neuroscientists, and others, to learn about the implications of breath holding and shallow breathing, especially when it’s chronic and cumulative – day after day, hour after hour.

Recently, researchers, Gloria Mark, Stephen Voida, and Anthony Cardello, have made headway into [2]formally validating the impact of email, using HRV.

Why are we doing this? Our posture is often compromised, especially when we use laptops and smartphones. Arms forward, shoulders forward, we sit in a position where it’s impossible to get a healthy and full inhale and exhale. Further, anticipation is generally accompanied by an inhale – and email, texting, and viewing television shows generally includes a significant dose of anticipation. Meanwhile, the full exhale rarely follows. The stress-related physiology of email apnea or screen apnea is described in some detail in my 2008 post, linked to above.


This [1]superb post by Tressie McMillan Cottom considers the algorithmic shaping of life chances under digital capitalism:

Whether or not I know these ads are scams is entirely up to my individual cultural capital. Basically, do I know better? And if I do know better, how do I come to know it?

I happen to know better because I have an advanced education, peers with advanced educations and I read broadly. All of those are also a function of wealth and status. I won’t draw out the causal diagram I’ve got brewing in my mind but basically it would say something like, “you need wealth and status to get advantageous services offered you on the social media that overlays our social world and you need proximity wealth and status to know when those services are advantageous or not”.

It is in interesting twist on how credit scoring shapes life chances. And it runs right through social media and how a “personalized” platform can never be democratizing when the platform operates in a society defined by inequalities.

Introducing Feminist Dissent: a new journal from Warwick University (2015-05-31 07:44)

Feminist Dissent is a new academic journal. It brings together activists, academics and writers to interrogate the multiple connections between religious fundamentalism and gender. It will open up new ways of thinking about secularism, religious freedom, civil liberties and human rights, nationalism and identity politics, anti-racism and multiculturalism, neo-liberalism, feminist theory and feminist resistance.

At this event, members of the editorial collective will present the thinking behind the new journal.

- Why feminist dissent? (Rashmi Varma)

- Why universal human rights? (Alison Assiter)

- Why fundamentalism? (Gita Sahgal)

Presentations will be followed by questions, comments and discussion.

DETAILS:
Date: Monday 15th June 2015

Time: 12.30pm - 3pm (lunch and refreshments will be provided)

Venue: IALS seminar room (F204), Milburn House, University of Warwick

Rashmi Varma teaches in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick.

Alison Assiter is Professor of Feminist Theory at UWE, Bristol, the author of a number of books and articles and also feminist and anti fundamentalist activist.

Gita Sahgal is a founder of the Centre for Secular Space, which opposes fundamentalism, amplifies secular voices and promotes universality in human rights.

Places for the event are limited, so please do use the eventbrite page to register.


The unfolding events of TeachHigher (2015-05-31 07:50)

For the last few months I’ve been regularly coming into my department to work on Sundays. It’s quite a conducive environment for working on my soon to be completed book, as well as for catching up on ad hoc tasks. My desktop at home has been broken for a while and I sometimes find it helpful to switch from my laptop to my office PC. This is all in contrast to my continued inability to ever get any serious work done on the campus during the week. It’s usually devoid of people on a Sunday and yet it’s nonetheless often very noisy. I’m writing this post as the noise of the endless building work reverberates around my office in a way that leaves me relying on the radio in the background to block it out. On those rare occasions when the creative destruction of the [1]accelerated academy has temporarily ceased, I’m always surprised by quite how much traffic there is in the background on this leafy campus on the outskirts of a medium sized city. During the week there’s noise everywhere. It’s a state of affairs I’ve got used to and I only notice it on a Sunday because its relative absence carries within it the unrealised promise of potential tranquillity.

I’m struck by the thought that this noise could be understood as an important marker of institutional acceleration. The ‘slow academy’ which we inevitably imagine when we consider the ‘accelerated academy’ is inevitably richly symbolic, mediated through nostalgic narratives of what we have lost and a pained awareness of what we cannot or will not adapt to about present circumstances. With that caveat out of the way, I think it’s interesting to consider how I imagine the ‘slow academy’ as very quiet. I’m sure I’m not alone in this but I may be wrong. Here’s the image of slow academia which I’ve recently been preoccupied by:

When questioned by a friend in 1980 as to whether he was happy at Princeton, the philosopher Richard Rorty replied that he was “delighted that I lucked into a university which pays me to make up stories and tell them”. He went on to suggest that “Universities permit one to read books and report what one thinks about them, and get paid for it” and that this is why he saw himself first and foremost as a writer, in spite of his already entrenched antipathy towards the philosophical profession which would grow with time. It’s a lovely idea, isn’t it?

The image Rorty presents us with of scholarship is idealistic. It reflects his own privilege. It’s an artefact of a higher education system that in the 1980s Ivy League was substantially different to what we see in 2015 in the UK. Most strikingly of all: the image is of a slow life. It suggests Rorty dreamily ambling through his days, going for long morning walks through the Gothic splendour of Princeton’s campus and spending long afternoons reading books in front of a fireplace, occasionally putting pen to paper to record what thoughts they have provoked within him.

Now I realise that there are universities which are quiet. The time I spent in Trinity Cambridge (staying with my ex-partner rather than in any academic capacity) left me captivated by how quiet it could (sometimes) be, as much as I felt profoundly uncomfortable there on an interpersonal level. On my one experience of visiting Princeton it seemed remarkably quiet and the IAS there seemed designed to amplify this character of the campus: though the fact it was a freezing Sunday afternoon and evening probably contributed as well.

In contrast my present university has a blaring big screen in the piazza. Don’t get me wrong, I see nothing intrinsically problematic about this. But I remember a weird evening, soon before handing in my thesis, when I walked through the piazza at 3am in the morning on my way home after an evening spent drowning my pre-completion sorrows with friends. An old Arnold Schwarzenegger was playing on ITV with full volume as I stood there, alone, in the court yard in the middle of the night. At the time this seemed simultaneously absurd, disturbing and hilarious to me and I find it hard not to think back to it when considering how loud the accelerated academy is.

Considering this in a less impressionistic way, I think a plausible case can be made about noise as a marker of...
institutional acceleration: for instance the endless extensions of campus and new buildings, the increasing circulation of people as a function of desynchronised schedules and the crude but I think not inaccurate generalisation that people in a rush tend to make more noise while going about their day. Don’t even get me started on open plan office which is something I’d be utterly unable to cope with. I struggle to work on the occasions my various shared office have in fact been shared, instead talking endlessly to whoever else is physically present as a way of displacing my inability to concentrate without solitude.

Were universities ever quiet? I suspect the reality is more uneven than a simplified juxtaposition between the ‘slow academy’ and the ‘accelerated academy’ would allow for. But I think a sensory perspective on these questions is a really interesting facet to my ongoing work which until a couple of hours ago had never occurred to me. I’ve had a project in mind for a while about recording ‘soundscapes’ to capture the texture of different university campuses and I’m now extremely keen to actually do this.


The challenge of open plan offices and the importance of quiet | Progressive Geographies (2015-05-31 13:38:48) [...] of open-plan offices at her personal blog Refracted Input; and then Mark Carrigan asking ‘were universities ever quiet?’ at The Sociological [...]  


Don't like unions? Fine. Tomorrow go to work for 16 hours. Do it for 6 days, 52 wks/year. Congrats, you're now living like workers did before unions came along.

(HT [1]anniecxxx)

1. [https://mobile.twitter.com/anniecxxx](https://mobile.twitter.com/anniecxxx)
The busy academic’s guide to writing concisely (2015-05-31 12:52)

Thanks to [1]Shit Academics Say for an image which is both funny and useful:

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1. https://mobile.twitter.com/AcademicsSay
Towards a Digital Social Ontology: Free Day Symposium in London on July 8th (2015-05-31 14:02)

The Social Ontology of Digital Data & Digital Technology
Wednesday, July 8, 2015 from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

This innovative symposium brings together leading figures from a variety of fields which address issues of digital technology and digital data. We’ve invited speakers with a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds who engage with questions relating to digital data and digital technology in their work. Our suggestion is that social ontology, however this might be construed, represents a potential common ground that could cut across this still rather siloed domain of inquiry into the social dimensions of digital technology.

The symposium aims to explore this possibility by assembling a diverse range of perspectives and drawing them into a dialogue about a common question, without assuming a shared understanding of the topic at hand. Our aim is to extend this digitally via twitter, podcast and blog beyond the event itself, in order to facilitate an extended conversation that will draw more people into its remit as it circulates after the symposium itself.

To this end, we invite each speaker to address this theme (the social ontology of digital data & digital technology) in whatever way they choose. Each speaker will have 30 mins to talk and 15 mins for questions. We’ll have an accomplished audio editor on hand to record each talk as a podcast. These will be released on [1]www.socialontology.org and will be circulated on social media in order to try and stimulate a continuing debate around the issues raised at the symposium. The hashtag for the day will be #socialontology.
This event is funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation

Confirmed Speakers:

Chair: Celia Lury (Warwick)

Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) - Does Digital Sociology have a Problem?
Jochen Runde (Cambridge) - Non-materiality and the Ontology of Digital Objects
Alistair Mutch (NTU) - Organizational Implications of Digital Data
Susan Halford (Southampton) - title TBC
Nick Couldry (LSE) - title TBC
Emma Uprichard (Warwick) - title TBC

2. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=16315265398&ref=etckt
Are you a PhD student or early career researcher interested in social ontology? (2015-05-31 14:09)

Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference
June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology.

The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.

Schedule

9:30 to 10:00 — Welcome and coffee

10:00 to 11:30 — 3 papers

• Jonathan Beacham: Mixed Method Ontologies and Dialectical Futures
• Adam Wood: Why Architecture Needs a Social Ontology
• Giulia Lasagni: Mutual Recognition and Social Commitment

11:30 to 11:45 - Coffee

11:45 to 12:45 - 2 papers

• Janet Lord: What does it mean to be a teacher? A critical realist approach.
• Kalok Yip: IHL and IHRL – Convergence of Laws, Conflation of Ontologies

12:45 to 13:30 - LUNCH

13:30 to 15:00 — 3 papers

• Gry Cecilie Høiland: Using a critical realist approach for studying the implementation of a work inclusion policy measure at the front lines of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Agency - methodological implications
• Michael Bauwens: What is social ontology (not)?
• Michael Edward Walsh: title TBC
15:00 to 15:30 - Coffee

15:30 to 16:30 - 2 papers

- Maryam Al Mohammad: Towards building a researcher methodological habitus
- Sara Melo: Exploring the ontology of patient safety

This event is funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation

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6.6 June

The Logic of Freedom in Digital Capitalism (2015-06-01 08:39)

I’m sitting in Edinburgh airport having a coffee and catching up on some e-mail before I start my day. This required internet access and I was pleased to find free WiFi here. What irritated and amused me in equal measure though was the discovery that you can’t register for free WiFi without confirming that "I would like to receive news and exclusive offers from Edinburgh Airport":

I would like to receive news and exclusive offers from Edinburgh Airport.

To use the free service, Skyscanner would like to send you great travel deals, tips and inspiration direct to your inbox.

* Compulsory fields

By using this service you agree to Arqiva WiFi Ltd Terms & Conditions and Privacy Policy.

Register & get online

There are obviously many digital services we use for which making our selves and our data available function in lieu of monetary payment. But I don’t recall ever seeing this logic stated in such a charmingly artless way before. I’m newly hopeful that the many pages of terms & conditions for each iTunes update will be replaced by a compulsory checkbox saying "I would like Apple to elaborate opaque terms governing use of their services and impose them on
Muslim youth live in very diverse contexts from Muslim majority societies of the Middle East like Iran and Egypt through religiously and ethnically divergent societies like Malaysia and India to Western societies like France and the UK. Constituting nearly one fourth of the world youth population, Muslim youth are experiencing a crucial era with multiple political, socio-cultural as well as economic challenges in contemporary world at all levels. Muslim communities usually have a very high proportion of youth population and the phenomenon of youth bulge is of considerable implications. Young people are at the forefront of dramatic political developments such as the so-called Arab Spring while being the vanguard of cultural and social change in their respective societies. Muslim youth in Western societies have also come to the attention of politicians, policy makers and most notably the international media given the security threats that have occurred in the past decade. Therefore, this session is aimed to address the main current challenges that are experienced by Muslim youth and future prospects for them and thus welcomes papers dealing inter alia with the followings:

1. Diversity in everyday life challenges of Muslim youth
2. Culture and subcultures of Muslim youth and their identity
3. Muslim youth as actors of social and political change
4. Portray and representation of Muslim youth in western media
5. Muslim Youth and their integration in non-Muslim societies
6. Youth policies in Muslim societies or policies affecting Muslim youth in other societies

Why is social science communication so underdeveloped compared to natural science communication?

The evidence included below is rather crude but it lends support to my impression that social science communication lags far behind natural science communication. The former isn't taken seriously as a specialist role (frustrating for someone like me who increasingly thinks of myself as a communicator of sociology as much as a sociologist) whereas the latter is a well established occupational role with its own conferences, support structure and occupational culture.
This relates to the ideas Steve Fuller and I offered a few months ago about the need for a public understanding of sociology chair and how this might work: [1]here, [2]here and [3]here. More self-interestedly, it also relates to my awareness that despite effectively working as a consultant social science communicator, my sense is that I would just confuse people if I described myself that way when looking for work.

Dave Ashelman (2016-07-21 13:12:00)

This may be a legitimation problem. Is it the public's fault for not understanding, is it the social scientist's fault for not communicating, or is it something deeper within social science discipline? I'm going with #3. Before I got into Sociology, I was in natural sciences (physics/chemistry). I was surprised at how few Sociologists (and social scientists in general) think like scientists. In the natural sciences, we are not afraid of the unknown. The words "I don't know" is almost sacrilege to utter in the social sciences. In the natural sciences, if a theory doesn't support the observable facts, then the theory is tossed out. In the social sciences, it's the opposite; if observable facts don't fit the theory then it's not the theory that's bad, it's that the data wasn't manipulated enough, we observed the wrong thing, or (worst case) observations just don't matter. If Social Science wants to be a "science," then perhaps it's time that Social Scientists start to think like "Scientists." Once that happens, then transmitting knowledge to the public will not only become easier, but will become legitimate in the public view.

The Social Life of Money (2015-06-02 19:23)

A world of languages - and how many speak them (2015-06-02 19:28)

This wonderful infographic was produced by [1]South China Morning Post (HT [2]Zach Noble)
The most popular posts on The Sociological Imagination this week (2015-06-02 22:15)

[1] The new Apple Watch and the problem of our creeping connectivity

[2] How to live tweet effectively at academic conferences

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The ten habits of failed grant proposal writers

Girlhood in Post-Socialist Times

The gloomy digital sociology of Zygmunt Bauman

The busy academic's guide to writing concisely

The sociology of sociological writing

Public Sociology

Bruno Latour: The Relativist

The Fallacy of Misplaced Modesty: Why Academics Don't Become Intellectuals

How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)

The omnipresent threat of violence under neoliberalism


“When I see a policeman with a club beating a man on the ground, I don’t have to ask whose side I’m on”
(2015-06-02 22:18)

The E-mail Charter (2015-06-03 09:03)

I came across [1]this great initiative via Blair Matthews - it started with a blog post by Chris Anderson and Jane Wulf from TED that has since been added to by a wide range of contributors:
10 Rules to Reverse the Email Spiral

1. Respect Recipients' Time
This is the fundamental rule. As the message sender, the onus is on YOU to minimize the time your email will take to process. Even if it means taking more time at your end before sending.

2. Short or Slow is not Rude
Let’s mutually agree to cut each other some slack. Given the email load we’re all facing, it’s OK if replies take a while coming and if they don’t give detailed responses to all your questions. No one wants to come over as brusque, so please don’t take it personally. We just want our lives back!

3. Celebrate Clarity
Start with a subject line that clearly labels the topic, and maybe includes a status category [Info], [Action], [Time Sens] [Low Priority]. Use crisp, muddle-free sentences. If the email has to be longer than five sentences, make sure the first provides the basic reason for writing. Avoid strange fonts and colors.

4. Quash Open-Ended Questions
It is asking a lot to send someone an email with four long paragraphs of turgid text followed by "Thoughts?". Even well-intended-but-open questions like "How can I help?" may not be that helpful. Email generosity requires simplifying, easy-to-answer questions. "Can I help best by a) calling b) visiting or c) staying right out of it?"

5. Slash Surplus cc's
cc's are like mating bunnies. For every recipient you add, you are dramatically multiplying total response time. Not to be done lightly! When there are multiple recipients, please don’t default to 'Reply All'. Maybe you only need to cc a couple of people on the original thread. Or none.

6. Tighten the Thread
Some emails depend for their meaning on context. Which means it’s usually right to include the thread being responded to. But it’s rare that a thread should extend to more than 3 emails. Before sending, cut what’s not relevant. Or consider making a phone call instead.

7. Attack Attachments
Don’t use graphics files as logos or signatures that appear as attachments. Time is wasted trying to see if there’s something to open. Even worse is sending text as an attachment when it could have been included in the body of the email.
8. Give these Gifts: EOM NNTR
If your email message can be expressed in half a dozen words, just put it in the subject line, followed by EOM (= End of Message). This saves the recipient having to actually open the message. Ending a note with "No need to respond" or NNTR, is a wonderful act of generosity. Many acronyms confuse as much as help, but these two are golden and deserve wide adoption.

9. Cut Contentless Responses
You don't need to reply to every email, especially not those that are themselves clear responses. An email saying "Thanks for your note. I’m in." does not need you to reply "Great." That just cost someone another 30 seconds.

10. Disconnect!
If we all agreed to spend less time doing email, we’d all get less email! Consider calendaring half-days at work where you can’t go online. Or a commitment to email-free weekends. Or an 'auto-response' that references this charter. And don't forget to smell the roses.

Podcasts from the @IJSRM (2015-06-03 09:08)
The International Journal for Social Research Methodology has a new podcast page:


The hollowing out of local government in the UK (2015-06-03 09:13)
This agenda has gone [1]very far in an extremely short space of time:
Councils of all stripes have been outsourcing for decades, which is why your local traffic warden is usually tramping the streets on behalf of a private firm. But that isn't enough for Tory-run Barnet – it is on a mission to make itself disappear. It has begun a programme to farm out so many of its services that the local trade union calculates staff will [2] shrink from 3,200 in September 2012 to just 332.

Everything from registering births to mowing the local cemeteries has either already been outsourced or is about to about be. And most of the key tasks have been given to the FTSE giant [3] Capita. Not just for a few months or a couple of years, mind you: Capita will run these services for at least 10 years.

So an arm of Britain’s local government has in effect agreed to a friendly takeover by a £7bn multinational. Whoever Barnet residents vote for in local elections, they will always get Capita. Whenever they phone or email or visit, they will speak to a [4] Capita employee. The FTSE giant will face no competition for the next decade; nor will it endure the same scrutiny as democratic government, as previously public information is veiled under “commercial sensitivity”.

This scale of outsourcing is new to Barnet, but has already given rise to some monstrous cock-ups. I’ve mentioned one here before: the loss of legal expertise meant that Barnet councillors were given the wrong reports to vote on last summer, prompting an independent inquiry that concluded: “[5] There is no one who understands local government law in depth at Barnet.” And while the council claims the point of outsourcing is to save money, evidence of that is thin. One local blogger, who writes under the pen name [6] Mr Reasonable, makes it his habit to go through the accounts and can’t identify any of the much-touted savings. He has offered to donate £250 to charity if the council can prove its claims, but so far there’s been no reply. I asked the local authority the same question this afternoon, but staff couldn’t come back to me in time. Meanwhile, the cost of interim and agency staff is ballooning from £12.5m two years ago to £15.5m.


5. http://www.times-series.co.uk/news/11519194__Inexperienced__staff_who_have__no_understanding__of_local_government_law_at_Barnet_Council/?ref=mr

Fitcoin, exercise and the logic of capital (2015-06-03 09:23)

Would you exercise for money?
A new online currency system has been developed to reward people for their exercise activity. [1] Fitcoin is a "cryptocurrency" like [2] Bitcoin (currently it actually uses Bitcoin but there are plans to develop their own) which has been produced by the company [4] Chaotic Moon. It runs through an iOS app when connected to an activity tracker like [5] Fitbit, the phone is used to "mine" new Bitcoins and effectively converts the user’s exercise activity into virtual currency. The [6] company website describes the system like this:

"FitCoin is a connected app ecosystem leveraging the power of your fitness tracker to generate cryptocurrency. After your workout, your wearable sends the data to the Fitcoin app that is analyzed to find out how hard you were pushing yourself. It also detects your exact activity so weight lifters won't get snubbed.

FitCoin uses a calibrated algorithm so your effort matches your payout. Your average heart rate, distance, and pace are counted and turned into a FitCoin value. Your FitCoin value totals the amount of bitcoin you’ve earned—from your workout to your (BitCoin) wallet."

The system is currently in a testing phase and is technically still a proof of concept although it has generated significant interest not least from Adidas and Nike (who might consider it a more advanced replacement for their [8] NikeFuel system). If one of these big corporations do get hold of Fitcoin it is likely that it will be presented in a friendlier way but the commercial, neo-liberal, entrepreneurial spirit is currently clear in the slogans found on Chaotic Moon’s website (even if it is semi-satirical):

"Sweat for coin. Get rich. Die Young. Submit to the gods of image and wealth."

[9] A demonstration at SXSW festival showed a designer run on a treadmill for 40 seconds and generate five cents. While this is unlikely to be a route to riches the company are suggesting reductions in health insurance premiums or free merchandise as potential applications.

It is possible that such a system will be effective as a motivational tool (if ethically questionable) but what is more interesting to me is the cultural impact it might have on the meaning of exercise. Will exercise come to be seen more like work ([10] an idea I have already developed elsewhere)? Especially when language such as “mining” is used.

Fitcoin seems to perform all of the necessary functions to transform an activity into labour which generates value. Heterogeneous exercise activities are transformed into a standardised form (a digital trace) which can be combined and compared with others and can take on an exchange-value from which profit can be extracted.

When considered in this way Fitcoin seems to be turning exercise into a form of "[11] digital labour" so perhaps it is positive for people to be paid for the value they are generating for corporations. There have been (partly satirical) [12] calls for Facebook to pay users for the value they produce through "liking" on their site for some time. However, there might be more problematic impacts on how we conceptualise exercise.
A divide may already be emerging between those exercise activities which are tracked and those which are not with the more enthusiastic trackers seeing little point in untracked activity. Perhaps this will also happen with monetised and non-monetised exercise. Anyone who has ever trained for any kind of long running race has probably been asked "who" or "what" they are running for. The implication being that it is something of a waste to dedicate time to running without generating money for charity. This logic could easily be transferred to a more individualistic narrative. What is the point in exercise unless you are earning?

11. https://christopherharpertill.wordpress.com/2014/01/30/what-is-digital-labour-or-how-did-facebook-make-its-billions/

Bitwalking, exercise and the workification of everything | This Is Not a Sociology Blog (2015-11-28 10:04:19)

[...] generating these data. It didn’t occur to me that this might actually happen this quickly. In another post I have also explored this phenomenon in relation a similar exercise driven cryptocurrency mining […]

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“What kind of a cultural space is the nation with its transgressive boundaries and its ‘interruptive’ interiority?” (p5)

Bhabha’s edited book contains chapters by prominent thinkers on the “ideological ambivalence” of nation, and the performative nature of language employed when narrating nation (p4). The book’s aim is to provide a space for writers to articulate the in-between spaces and international aspects of nation where the “origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion and cultural contestation” (p5). The book reminds us of the complexities of modern national belonging:

“America leads to Africa; the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis. The island story is told from the eye of the aeroplane which becomes that ‘ornament’ that holds the public and the private in suspense. The bastion of Englishness crumbles at the sight of immigrants and factory workers.” (p6)

Bhabha acknowledges the fact there are people in this world yet to find a sense of belonging to nation, who are seeking nationhood – he refers to the Palestinians, for example as one such people. Today, we might also think about the Rohingya people. Bhabha rightly laments that “it is our loss in making this book we were unable to add their voices to ours” (p7). Thus, any contemporary research on nation must account for ways to represent the voices
of such marginalised peoples on identity and belonging. Also Bhabha highlights that through the cases of these nationless peoples we must make efforts to understand our positioning and our relationships with others.

**Renan on “What is a Nation?”**

Nation is a relatively new concept which "antiquity was unfamiliar with" (p9). Renan explains that although some political theorists attempt to define a nation as dynastic, a nation is not a dynasty. There have been claims that a nation is based upon the exclusivity of race or of language, yet these are proven to be misguided assertions as there is no purity of a nation due to race or language, instead the opposite is the case and nations are racially and linguistically heterogeneous.

Importantly Renan has emphasised the problematic nature of claiming an exclusive nation by proclaiming racial or linguistic superiority:

"Such exaggerations enclose one within a specific culture, considered as national; one limits oneself, one hems oneself in. One leaves the heady air that one breathes in the vast field of humanity in order to enclose oneself in a conventicle with one's compatriots. Nothing could be worse for the mind; nothing could be more disturbing for civilization." (p17)

Moreover, Renan reminds us that we should not neglect an exploration of “the secret of the genuine education of the human spirit”, after all universal human values matter:

"Let us not abandon the fundamental principle that man is a reasonable and moral being, before he is cooped up in such and such a language, before he is a member of such and such a race, before he belongs to such and such a culture. Before French, German or Italian culture there is human culture".(p17)

In any teaching and learning of issues of nation and national identity there would be a need for teachers to bear these aforementioned points in mind. The book delves deeper into the meanings of nation by referring to literary genres including Australian, English and American. For Brennan, there may be multiple mythical elements to nation and narration – where nation can be seen as a distortion, or a mythical tradition, or as literary representation. Whilst for Sommer, Latin American literature reveals romantic notions of nation and identity. The chapter by Gunew refers to Australian literature and its relationship with multicultural belongings and ways of being, as she recommends ways of re-reading texts bearing in mind cultural nationalisms and multicultural concerns. Bennington highlights the distinct approaches towards studying nation – do we examine the centre? Or do we start from the edges and margins? He provides a new way of considering post-structuralist thinking in relation to narrating the nation.

This is an open event: we welcome anyone interested in critically reshaping the future of wearables and their impact on society. Here’s the [1]registration form for the event. There's more information below.

Why?

There is an urgent need to open up critical thinking and doing around wearable technologies. The headlong rush to market and the huge potential for applications like personal health monitoring occlude both the potential dark side and the possibility for wearables to be part of alternative social formations.

In the post-Snowden era we cannot ignore the consequences for privacy, ethics and governance of wearing networked devices. Nor can we ignore the way a narrow focus on individual applications overlooks the potential role of wearables in collective and community-driven activities. By questioning the dominant narratives around wearables and facing up to the dark sides of surveillance and unsustainability, the research lab will help to clear the way for fresh and more unexpected questions about their transformative potentials.

This research lab will be an intensive one-day event that brings together researchers and practitioners to raise questions and generate new ideas, collaborations and methodologies. It will link directly to a second event which will take the form of a hackathon, prototyping practical devices that draw on questions raised by the research lab.

How?

The lab itself will be based on ‘material thinking’ - making speculative devices that combine real wearables with junk material which is used to materialise research questions. This hands-on method can make visible the overlooked aspects of existing assemblages and can encourage new questions about what kind of futures are likely or possible.

During the day this will be combined with demonstrations of real devices, firestarter presentations, group work and discussions. In the morning we will address head-on the the dystopian aspects of wearables, and in the afternoon we will raise interesting research questions about alternative possible futures. The overall format will be in the unconference or barcamp style.
Participants will include researchers from a wide range of fields & disciplines, from fashion to machine learning and from computing to cultural studies. It will appeal to practitioners who are seeking the space to reflect on the meanings being materialised by their current work, and who are looking for new ways to frame future activities.


Impact in Sexualities and Queer Research: One day event in Leeds (2015-06-04 08:23)

IMPACT IN SEXUALITIES AND QUEER RESEARCH
Sponsored by the Space, Sexualities and Queer Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society with the Citizenship & Belonging Research Cluster, University of Leeds

Date and time: 8 September 2015, 10 AM – 3:30 PM
Location: University of Leeds, UK
Organising Committee: Robert Vanderbeck (University of Leeds), Martin Zebracki (University of Leeds), and Alexandra Fanghanel (University of Bedfordshire)

Confirmed keynote panellists:
Dr David Bell, University of Leeds
Dr Gavin Brown, University of Leicester
Prof Ruth Holliday, University of Leeds
Dr Jacqui Gabb, Open University
Prof Paul Johnson, University of York
Prof Nina Laurie, University of Newcastle
Dr Joanna Sadgrove, Research and Learning Advisor, the United Society

Overview
The notion of 'impact' has become increasingly central to the practice of research in the U.K. Research councils now expect research to have clearly defined 'pathways to impact', while the Research Excellence Framework (REF) has made the evaluation of impact central to its assessment of the research activity of universities. Questions about the ability of researchers to generate demonstrable research impact have now become a commonplace feature of the appointment process for academic positions, with implications both for aspiring academics and those already in academic posts. In some academic departments, it is a mark of prestige to have one's work be the focus of an 'impact case study' for the REF, with internal competition between colleagues taking place over whose research will be seen as the most 'impactful' for the REF.

While many critical geographers and other social scientists have long stressed the importance of conducting research that has relevance outside the academy, the current drive for impact has triggered a range of critical discussions regarding the definition of impact, the implications of the 'impact agenda' for curiosity-driven research, the effect of the 'impact agenda' on how researchers work with external partners and organisations, and a range of related issues (see, for example, Pain et al. 2011; Phillips 2010; Rogers et al. 2014; Slater 2012).
This one-day event provides a forum for discussion of the theme of research impact as it relates to sexualities and queer research (broadly defined) in human geography and the social sciences. Issues for discussion include:

- the prospects for, and challenges of, working with non-academic partners and research users to generate impact
- ethical issues and dilemmas related to generating research impact
- interacting with the press and other news media
- using blogs and other media as tools for research dissemination and public engagement
- the career implications of the impact agenda for sexualities and/or queer scholars
- the influence of the ‘impact agenda’ on the future trajectories of sexualities and queer research in the U.K. and beyond
- strategies for challenging the instrumentalisation of impact within the academy

The event will combine two keynote panels with smaller, interactive discussions where participants will reflect upon issues related to impact as they relate to their own research endeavours. Early career researchers and postgraduates are especially welcome to attend. Some funds for travel bursaries are available for postgraduate students and unwaged individuals to contribute towards travel expenses (see below).

**Registration**

The cost of registration is £15 (£5 for students and unwaged). This includes a light lunch and refreshments. Students and unwaged individuals can apply for bursaries (below). The registration cost can be waived for research user organisations with limited resources (please contact Robert Vanderbeck: [r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk)). Please visit the following site to register: [http://store.leeds.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&deptid=9&catid=47&prodid=551](http://store.leeds.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&deptid=9&catid=47&prodid=551) Bursaries Bursary applications are available on the SSQRG website. Students and unwaged individuals are welcome to apply for bursaries.

1. [mailto:r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk)
2. [mailto:r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:r.vanderbeck@leeds.ac.uk)

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**Young Voices: The Active Engagement of Young People, Methods Workshop** (2015-06-04 08:24)

**Young Voices: The Active Engagement of Young People, Methods Workshop**

The Manchester Centre for Youth Studies invites you to a FREE methods-based workshop, 10am-3.30pm Thursday 25th June. This event is open to academics, practitioners, and local youth organisations. You’re also welcome to invite any of the young people you work with to join us. For more info, follow the link below.

There will be five interactive sessions, each led by a different presenter, including:

- Andrew Clark (University of Salford, Visual Methodologies)
- Natalie Walton (Freelance Arts Consultant, Art and Creative Methods)
- Joanne Tippett (Ketso, Hands-on kits for Creative Engagement)
The day will conclude with a short Q &A session, based on the day’s activities. We hope you’ll join us to share experiences and ideas.

Please register everyone in your party for catering purposes: [1]https://mcysyoungvoices.eventbrite.co.uk

1. [https://mcysyoungvoices.eventbrite.co.uk/](https://mcysyoungvoices.eventbrite.co.uk/)

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**CfP: Ethical Practice and the Study of Girlhood** *(2015-06-04 08:26)*

Special Issue of
Girlhood Studies
An Interdisciplinary Journal

**CALL FOR PAPERS:**
Ethical Practice
and the Study of Girlhood

For this themed issue of Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal, "Ethical Practice and the Study of Girlhood," we invite submissions from transnational and transdisciplinary perspectives that investigate how the constructs of girlhood and ethics might inform each other. We are interested in work that explores, disrupts, or otherwise complicates the notion of girlhood studies as an ethical space. As of yet, the relationship between girlhood studies and the field of ethics remains under-articulated and under-researched. While there is a range of research that takes up questions of feminist ethics, childhood ethics, and to a lesser extent feminist girl-centred interventions, ethics in girlhood studies is a new nexus of inquiry. Persistent forms of marginalization and ongoing concerns about the physical and mental wellbeing of girls around the world necessitate the development of girl-responsive ethical frameworks. Ethical considerations may also allow probing into the taken-for-granted aspects of what it means to be a girl. The aim of this themed issue is to produce new imaginings and understandings of ethical being, rights, otherness, power, agency, and responsibility in relation to the study of girlhoods.

We ask: What does an ethics of girlhood studies look like? Are there unique features of a girlhood studies ethics? Feminist, postcolonial, and childhood studies have troubled adult-centric views on girls' and young peoples' visibility, citizenship, and capabilities. How might ethics in girlhood studies be connected to such examinations of girlhood? How may new understandings of the relationship between ethics and girlhood complicate these existing fields of scholarship? Research with girls, for girls, and by girls aims to draw attention to the absence of girls’ voices in initiatives that affect their lives. Given that this is the starting point of Girlhood Studies, what would that mean for an ethics of research in such studies? Research with girls necessarily invokes a range of legal and moral obligations. How might the changing socio-political forms of girls’ lived experiences and the representation of these inform the meaning of constructs such as "in the best interest of the (girl)-child" and “doing the most good and least harm”? This questioning extends to research into practice, policy, and theory.

Articles may approach ethics and girlhood studies from a number of perspectives that reflect shifting understandings. We position ethics as a multifaceted entity that encompasses systems of socialization, morality, norms,
prescriptive rules of conduct, and personal transformative practices and discourses. We seek submissions that draw on the perspectives of girls themselves and subjective, embodied experiences of girlhood. A range of research approaches is encouraged including memory work, ethnographic, artistic, poetic, narrative and other forms of qualitative or quantitative inquiry.

Contributions to this themed issue may address the following topics:

- The ethics of research into health as it relates to girls, and issues of participation in medical research, treatment, and care
- The ethics of research into girls' work and labour
- The ethics of research into girls' experiences with and use of social media, online communications, and digital networking platforms
- The ethics of doing visual work with girls
- Girls' agency in the context of research into family dynamics and parental rights, as in cases of abuse, incest, or exploitation
- Building global ethical practices and transnational solidarity in international research with girls
- Discourses of institutional ethics and the construction of girls in relation to concepts such as vulnerability, informed consent, assent, and beneficence
- Ethical responses to gender-based violence and institutional violence against girls
- The ethics of work on LGBTTQQIA girlhoods and normative belonging, identity, categorizations of difference, and the meaning and boundaries of the body
- The ethics of research into indigenous girlhoods, self-governance, and responses to colonial gendered-based violence including the connections between colonial gender constructs and violence against indigenous girls and the land
- The ethics of girlhood studies in the context of histories, colonialism, and the neoliberal moment
- The ethics of research into girl-led movements, activism, and creative practices of resistance (for example, instances of girls as producers of their own culture and girl-implemented social change)

Suggested Bibliography
Mupotsa, Danai. 2010. “If I Could Write This in Fire/African Feminist Ethics for Research in Africa.” Agenda Africa 6, no. 1: n.p..

GUEST EDITOR
April R. Mandrona is currently a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Integrated Studies of Education at McGill University. Her doctoral research involved the creation of art groups with young people in rural South Africa and focused on the development of ethical practices as a researcher, teacher, and artist. Dr Mandrona’s current research explores the building of intergenerational digital networks to help youth art communities grow and develop.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION
Manuscripts may be no longer than 6,500 words including abstract (150 words), keywords (6 to 8), article, bio (100 words), references, and notes, captions, tables, and acknowledgments (if any). Girlhood Studies, following Berghahn’s preferred house style, uses a modified Chicago Style. Please refer to the Style Guide on the website. If images are used, authors are expected to secure the copyright themselves.
Inquiries and submissions may be sent to: April R. Mandrona ([1]aprilmandrona@gmail.com)
Should we include audio extracts in publications? (2015-06-05 12:45)

I’m listening to a really interesting talk by Paul Hopkins at the University of Hull about the use of multimedia as part of the PhD thesis. Surprisingly it seems this isn’t disallowed at many institutions even though it’s far from encouraged. Have you used multimedia as part of your thesis?

The broader question this talk has left me with is whether extracts of audio files could be included in publications more generally? As Paul points out, listening to an extract from an audio file is not equivalent to reading a transcription of that extract. There are many reasons why this might not be a good idea but I’m fascinated by the potential implications of this in an intellectual context where writing about qualitative research is dominated by what Nick Hopwood calls quotitis:

> Look at your findings / discussion section. How much is indented as quotes from raw data? How much is “quoting the delicious phrases of your participants” within a sentence? It would be daft of me to give a fixed proportion to limit this, so I’m not going to. Do you give multiple exemplars to illustrate the same theme? Look at the text around the quotes. Have you given yourself (word) space to introduce quotes appropriately, and to comment on them in detail?

[1]https://nickhop.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/do-you-have-quotitis-how-to-diagnose-treat-and-prevent/

What do you think? I can’t work out if I actually think this is a good idea but it’s certainly a provocative one. In spite of the potential problems, the idea of drawing on research data to produce multi-modal publications in the spirit of a curatorial sociology rather appeals to me. I returned to my audio files in the later stages of writing up my thesis, long after I’d initially transcribed them, finding myself surprised by how effective this proved in changing how I was orientated towards my research data. What effects would it have on journal readers if we replaced the block indented quotations that characterise quotitis with snippets of the original interview?

[1]https://nickhop.wordpress.com/2014/02/02/do-you-have-quotitis-how-to-diagnose-treat-and-prevent/
Another useful point from this great presentation by Paul Hopkins at the University of Hull. I’d like to try using Textwall myself in the near future:

**what is a textwall?**

A textwall is a web page that learners or delegates can send text messages to. The messages can then be shown on a large screen or interactive whiteboard as part of a lesson or event for everyone to see.

You are not charged for messages you receive. It costs the learner their standard sms charge to send text messages to the textwall. Depending on their phone contracts, this could be free.

**sending SMS messages**

A textwall can be used to compose and send bulk text messages to learners or delegates for informative, administrative or pastoral purposes.

**choose your own textcode**

You will be asked to choose a textcode when opening your textwall account which must be between 3 and 5 characters in length.
"No one would be interested in what I have to say" (2015-06-05 17:00)

How widespread is this sentiment? It's been discussed a few times during the social media day I'm attending and it's made me realise that I don't really address this fear properly in my upcoming social media book. In part this is because my faith in narrowcasting had led me to assume that there would be an audience for any topic, no matter how niche. This is how Marshall Poe describes *narrowcasting*:

> The Internet, however, can make these connections because it permits economical, finely calibrated "narrowcasting," that is, the transmission of specific information to specific interest groups. Of course print and – to a much lesser extent – radio and television also allowed some narrowcasting. Academic journals and industry newsletters are perhaps the best examples. But the scale of narrowcasting on the Internet is orders of magnitude greater than anything known before. Take the blogosphere for example. Here tens of thousands of interest-specific public intellectuals talk to tens of thousands of interest-specific publics concerning every imaginable interest. If you want to know about it — beer brewing, Italian shoes, organic chemistry — you can probably find someone with considerable expertise blogging about it. That’s truly remarkable.


But is there much to this story? What do people think? Is it possible that there is no one out there who will care about your research? I’d like to think that this isn’t the case but the conversations earlier have left me aware that this is an assumption I’m making.


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Tony Soprano and reflexive socialisation in late modernity (2015-06-06 15:01)

Watching the Sopranos, I was struck by what a good example this was of what Margaret Archer argues are the consequences of the intensification of social change for intergenerational socialisation: the decreasing likelihood that children will encounter occupational roles familiar to their parents will tend to increase the degree of reflexivity with which the parents orientate themselves to the lives of their children. If they don’t feel they understand the occupation world their children are entering than what might have otherwise be a transmission of normative guidance is more likely to become a generalised expression of support as they make their own choices.
Richard Wilsnack, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences (2015-06-06 19:26:17)

Mark, what you describe is from another perspective a chronic problem of aging amid social and technological change, at least in the USA. People approaching and passing retirement age are not adequately prepared for the extent to which the generations after them (such as their children) will experience what their elders know (and tell them) as obsolete, irrelevant, and intrusive. We geezers often suffer from a painful awakening to how useless we are to people younger than us.

Sociological Imagination (2015-06-07 10:07:07)

I’d not thought of it in those terms. That’s very interesting. My point is that this experience of being ‘useless’ will likely have important consequences for how parents relate to their children. If you feel your understanding has no use to them then your parenting style will likely become much more non-directive (“I’ll support them in whatever they decide”) which has important developmental consequences for the children’s transition into adulthood.

What can economists learn from science fiction? (2015-06-07 10:11)

This intriguing talk by Ha-Joon Chang, author of 23 Things They Don’t Tell You About Capitalism, was given at the launch event for the Political Economy Research Centre at Goldsmiths. Listen to the podcast here: [1]http://www.perc.org.uk/project _posts/podcast-of-ha-joon-chang-lecture-what-can-economics-learn-from-science-fiction/
What Can Economics Learn From Science Fiction?

Economics and science fiction have many relationships that are rarely noticed. A lot of economics is science fiction, in that economists believe in the fiction that they are practicing a 'science', and that progress in this 'science' can potentially solve all economic problems. Equally, science fiction can be a helpful way of imagining alternative realities, making us re-think assumptions about economy and society that we otherwise take for granted. In this public lecture and launch event for PERC, Professor Ha-Joon Chang argues that science fiction teaches us important lessons about the economy, in particular that it can be changed, that it has been changed, and, most importantly, that it has been changed in the way it has only because some people dared to imagine a different world and fought for it.


Sociologist Considers Own Behavior Indicative Of Larger Trends (2015-06-07 10:19)

Funny but potentially painful reading at the Onion. Read it in full [here]:

According to the findings of a paper published Monday in The American Journal Of Sociology, the behaviors and experiences of Boston sociologist Dr. Stephen Piers are indicative of a host of wider societal trends.

"My observations indicate that the typical married American man has had increasing difficulty relating to his spouse over the last two and a half years, ever since she started taking those yoga classes," wrote Piers, 56, in his Interpersonal Connections Within The Marriage Paradigm: A Study In Causality.

In the paper, Piers asserted that the most pressing issue for American men is maintaining healthy sexual relations with their wives.
"Back in 1999, American men's frustration derived mostly from the infrequency of sex," the paper read. "Recently, however, that trend has shifted as husbands report a decreasing interest in intimacy, particularly if there is a Celtics game or a new NYPD Blue on TV. While many men cite increased job responsibilities and stress as possible catalysts, many more blame the affair their wives had a year ago with some textile salesman during a training conference in Seattle."


What is Extreme Early Retirement? (2015-06-07 10:23)

By Karl Thompson

What is Extreme Early Retirement?

Extreme Early Retirement (EER) is a strategic approach to the life-course through which the individual aims to
achieve financial independence within five to twenty years by saving half or more of their income. Rather than focussing on generating extreme levels of wealth in order to retire to a life of leisure and luxury, the philosophy of EER is to reject the ordinary debt-driven, high-consumption, convenience based lifestyle of the typical consumer and instead practice ‘optimism rather than convenience’ and to develop a range of ‘resilience skills’ in order to live well on a relatively low income. EER also involves taking an interest in and learning something about the economics surrounding investing and personal finance.

Extreme Early Retirement finds most of its followers in America, where the two most popular foundation blogs are based - [1]Mr Money Moustache, and Jacob Lund Fisker’s [2]Early Retirement Extreme, both of which are written by individuals who achieved early retirement in their 30s.

Mr Money Moustache is closer to a more conventional early-retirement model: he and his wife were high-income earners ( $130 000 per annum between them) and simply saved two thirds of their income to accumulate a total net worth (TNW) of £600 000 and now live on an annual income of around $25 000. Fisker is a little more opaque about the precise details of this own capital situation but given that he lives on $7000/ year, my own estimate is that he retired with a TNW of around $150 000.

Both blogs are keen to emphasise that EER is achievable by even average income earners because the basic principle is that whatever your income, the higher your savings to expenditure ratio, then the earlier you can retire. Mr Money Moustache illustrates this by pointing out that if you can save half of your income then it will take you seventeen years until retirement, but at 75 % it will take you only seven years.

While no precise figures exist on the number of people pursing extreme early retirement, overall numbers are small. The [3]Mr Money Moustach Forum has 20 000 members, but it is likely that only a tiny percentage of these are people who are seriously practicing the early retirement philosophy: a brief analysis of the blog-role reveals a mere 60 people actively documenting their missions towards early retirement. Fisker’s more radical [4]Early Retirement Extreme Forum is even less popular with only 3500 members.

In the United Kingdom, there are a mere handful of individuals actively pursuing and publishing their efforts to achieve financial independence and early retirement. The site which is the most dedicated in terms of regular posts and explicit details pertaining to finance is [5]The Firestarter (Financial Independence, Retire Early) which is run by a 32 year old ‘normalish bloke’ who is aiming to retire within five years, having started with a TNW of practically zero.

Extreme Early Retirement as a form of Social or High Reflexivity

Those practicing extreme early retirement certainly seem to be engaged in what Giddens (1991) would refer to as 'social' or 'high' reflexivity as EERs clearly maintain a high degree of separation between their daily lives and their virtual reflections on early-retirement. EER blogs are not focussed on 'what I like doing' they are focussed on 'here are the reasons I am doing this given the goal I am trying to achieve'. The EER community is also highly calculative - It is common to post considerable details of monthly finances; there is constant assessment of the transformative potential of lifestyle choices to bring forward or retard the date of early retirement; and a high degree of willingness to engage with a variety of new information in order to develop resilience skills to reduce dependence on money.

Our ideas about retirement are normally embedded within a broad set of existing cultural norms surrounding work, consumption and the life-course more generally, and these ideas are largely taken for granted and not reflected on, but the reflexivity of EERs clearly transgresses such normative boundaries forcing the individual the rethink their entire life-course.

Fisker’s Early Retirement Extreme especially offers a critical intellectual framework for rethinking about work-
consumption-retirement, criticising what he casts as the 'wage-credit-spend-consume-retire on a million-cycle'. It also offers us an overview of an alternative way of thinking about this nexus which ultimately means working and consuming less, retiring a lot earlier than normal, and rethinking what retirement actually means (which is not merely conceived as a life of never ending leisure in EER circles).

**Extreme Early Retirement as a Critique of The Society of Consumers**

One of the predominant themes in the work of Zygmunt Bauman is that in post/late modern consumer society the rapid consumption of goods and services has become the primary mechanism of social integration, and the primary means whereby individuals seek to find biographical solutions to systemic problems: buying things plays a fundamental role in maintaining personal relationships; and shopping has become an end in itself through which we escape the harsh realities and instabilities of working-life.

Bauman also argues that seeking to construct an identity through consumption means that we suffer from 'subjectivity fetishism' – constructing an identity may involve freely choosing between objects, but we forget that we are, in fact, dependent on those objects, and thus not truly free. Moreover, we are not truly free of the economic system which requires us to rapidly become dissatisfied with today's products so that we will buy new ones tomorrow, a system that depends on consumers buying and throwing away goods at an ever faster rate, which in turn requires credit.

Ultimately, if we buy into a life course mediated by consumption, we buy into a life of having to make progressively more choices pertaining to consumption as we age. The end result is that our subjectivity narrows and we end up suffering from the tyranny of choice and a curiously hurried life as we unconsciously react to markets in overdrive.

The Extreme Early Retirement community presents a sustained critique of what Bauman calls the 'consumerist syndrome', and, very much in the spirit of C. Wright Mills' sociological Imagination - they make familiar consumption habits seem unusual, even pathological.

'Convenience consumption' is subjected to the highest degree of criticism – the poster child of which is the $4 daily Latte, and extending to a whole range of labour-saving goods and services.

There is also considerable criticism of wasteful consumption, which mainly focuses on buying products which we hardly ever use which includes everything from the obvious kitchen and gardening gadgets which are stored in the cupboard for most of the year to the less obvious - buying a house with a spare bedroom is widely regarded as superfluous expenditure for example.

Finally, EER blogs rail against what Mr Money Moustache calls 'Tiny details exaggeration syndrome' or the practice of paying hundreds of dollars more for a car with a bespoke paint job or thousands of dollars of more for a house with a better view. Where the later is concerned, wanting to live in a 'good neighbourhood' may well be the thing which prevents you from living close to work and locks you into needing a car rather than being able to walk to work, then you pay for a gym membership to keep fit.

However, it is not just high levels of the wrong type of consumption which EER critiques, it also emphasises deferred over immediate gratification, and the fact that its adherents have extremely long term plans regarding their finances EER can also be seen as an alternative to living a hurried, fragmented, Pointillist existence.

**The Limitations of the Critical Potential of Extreme Early Retirement**

Despite its critique of consumer culture it would be inaccurate to describe the Early Retirement Extreme community as a movement because it operates firmly within the Capitalist system, given that each individual's ultimate aim is to generate sufficient capital to provide a return sufficient to meet their needs.
The EER community also appears to be little more than a lose network of isolated individuals seeking privatised, individualised strategies towards early retirement, individuals whose most committed relationship is ultimately between their individual selves and international financial markets. There appears to be no affective commitment or collective-investment that binds the community together in any significant way, with connections limited to that of knowledge exchange. It cannot be said to offer anything like a viable systemic solution to problems such as job insecurity and work based alienation, rather it offers a means of escape for the relatively well off.

Having said this, there is some overlap with the more radical elements of the EER community and movements for social change - Fisker’s approach involves a much higher level of frugality, and stems from a unique criticism of the inefficiencies of the present economic system and at times chimes with the ideals of self-reliance found within anarchism, although Fisker himself is definitely not anti-capitalist.

A further problem of Extreme Early Retirement is that it is clearly not open to everyone. Its two leading proponents both had solid professional careers – in Engineering and Astrophysics and earnt significantly above the average salary, which meant they were able to save considerable sums in a short time-frame and retire very early.

Where the UK is concerned I have [6]elsewhere calculated that the median income earner in the could retire at the age of 52 if they started on an early retirement strategy at the age of 35, this assumes, however, an extremely frugal existence and no significant life events that would detract from savings, and on the median salary the kind of sums being put away every month would hardly be motivational to keep one going for such a long period.

Obviously Extreme Early Retirement is not an option to anyone living in at least the bottom quintile of income earners, given that such a low income would require 100 % of expenditure for meeting basic needs within nothing left to save.

**Conclusion - The Social Significance of Extreme Early Retirement**

Given its reflexive and highly individualised nature, the EER community is very much a product of late modernity, and its social utility lies in the fact that it encourages us to think critically about the sub-optimal nature of the consumerist mode of existence, and for those with the means it offers the potential to gain a high degree of financial freedom very early in life. However, precisely because of its highly individualised nature and strategic dependence on personal wealth generation, extreme early retirement in its present form can only ever be achieved by a tiny minority of people, thus while it remains of sociological interest, it is of limited use in helping us to translate personal troubles into broader public issues.

**Sociological and Other Works drawn on**


Giddens, A (1991) The Consequences of Modernity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age


**About The Author**

I’m Head of Sociology in the best marketed sixth form college in the country. I’m now in my 14th year of teaching, having originally intended to do the job for a year and then get back to my PhD research into radical eco-communities in 3670
the UK. I guess I stayed because all things considered it’s quite a nice job - you get to make interesting ideas accessible to people, it’s stable and permanent, well paid and now I’m established I get a genuine 13 weeks of holiday every year. Sad to say but had I carried on with the PhD I doubt if I’d be able to tick any of those boxes by now.

I blog at 'RealSociology’ – mainly focusing on various aspects of Sociology to do with the A level syllabus (most of it’s pretty interesting), Buddhism, and Extreme Early Retirement.

When I retire (in six years aged 47) I intend to establish an edible forest garden, graze and meditate for a few years and then figure out what do with the rest of my life. [/nbox]

5. http://thefirestarter.co.uk/meet-the-firestarter/

Charles Knight (@Charlesknight) (2015-06-07 20:04:29)
Interesting blog post - I take it EER overlap with people who aim for a similar date but don’t plan to retire? On my current projections, I’ll be about to pack in at 52 - but I wouldn’t because - what would I do all day? It’s an interesting worldview because it dictates all sorts of life choices that are not apparent to others - I work at a post-92 university and have turned down offers to work at RG universities - my academic friends are astonished - "but it’s big london university X!" However although I like academia - it’s a way of earning a living not a lifestyle for me. Yes I would get a short-term ego-boost from moving to an more impressive university but I’d take a massive cost of living hit. Moreover once you live that way - all sorts of other 'behaviours’ that academics take for granted and the academy tries to ‘breed’ into you no longer make sense - pay your own money to attend a conference? 0 _0

thefirestartercouk (2015-06-11 10:14:54)
Great summary of ERE Karl... and a thoughtful post to read on a sunny Thursday morning :) You bring up some of the drawbacks and criticism which is interesting as it’s not written about so much in "our" sphere, or if it is I often don’t find that the answers given are really that satisfying. MMO in particular makes a lot of sweeping statements and is far too over optimistic about what if everyone lived this way. I mean it would be good for getting more/all people to live the good life that is described, but IMHO individually we’d all end up working more again as returns on investment would be much lower. Saying that I would happily trade that for a better functioning, more efficient, more equal and happy world. To Charles - The "what would I do all day” is a common reply to retiring early and you are lucky that you have found a job you enjoy and has purpose (sorry I am assuming there but that is what it sounds like you meant by your comment). ERE people are either usually in a job they don’t particularly find fulfilling or just have far too many other interests to have to concentrate on one area 40 hours per week. I am a little of column A and a lot of column B. Most of us will never(!?) be short of something to do in early retirement, I have so many things I want to see, do and learn it will easily last me out a 50 year retirement span (if I last that long, fingers crossed!) Thanks!
The really hard problem facing behavioural science (2015-06-07 10:51)

In recent years behavioural science has made great advances in the reliability of facial recognition techniques. Current evidence suggests algorithmic facial identification systems are now more reliable than human attempts to recognise faces. This leads some to have confidence in the capacity of computational systems to read human emotions in a way that will be more reliable than interpersonal interpretation. To those optimists, I present the really hard problem facing data driven behavioural science (HT [1]Shit Academics Say):

![Star Wars Emotions](image)

For a more serious attempt to make the same point, see [2]this post from a few weeks ago.

1. [https://twitter.com/academicssay](https://twitter.com/academicssay)
2. [http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/17395](http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/17395)
Marx and Philosophy Society Conference: Marx and Utopia (2015-06-08 08:24)

Marx and Philosophy Society
Annual Conference 2015
'Marx and Utopia'

Saturday 13th June 2015, 9.45am - 6.00pm
Room 828, UCL Institute of Education 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL

9.45 Registration

10.00 Lea Ypi (LSE) Revolutionary Partisanship

11.15 Break

1.45 Parallel graduate panels:

(1) Paul Raekstad (Cambridge) Marx's realism, utopianism, and the role of vision Owen Holland (Cambridge) Utopia and the suspension of the political Sina Talachian (Amsterdam) Between universalism and particularism: the later Marx's conception of reformism

(2) Emily Cousens (Oxford Brookes) Marx's contribution to feminist thought Dimitri Kladiskakis (Sussex) Marx and Heidegger: social ontology and the object Chris Ferguson (Sussex) Alienation as social-institutional heteronomy

1.30 Lunch

2.30 David Leopold (Oxford) Marx's Critique of Utopia

4.00 Break

4.30 Gregory Claeys (Royal Holloway) Marx, Marxism and Utopia

Admission free
Please reserve a place in advance by emailing Meade McCloughan at [1]meade.mccloughan@gmail.com Further details: [3]http://www.marxandphilosophy.org.uk We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Mind Association

1. mailto:meade.mccloughan@gmail.com
2. mailto:meade.mccloughan@gmail.com
Thanks to [1]Jacqueline Bartram who drew these great cartoons as I was talking at a Hull event last week about academic blogging. Why should academics blog about their research?

It provides a home for things you reluctantly cut from your publications:

It allows you to get early feedback on ideas and try them out for the first time in public:
It allows you to exchange early thoughts with others working on the issues that concern you:
It allows you to share your struggles with others who are going through the same thing:
1. http://www.twitter.com/jaxbartram/

Why should academics blog about their research? An answer in pictures | Progressive Geographies (2015-06-13 10:09:30) [...] should academics blog about their research? An answer in pictures at The Sociological Imagination. Four reasons in the full [...]

Like many other graduate students, I need scraps of teaching to survive. Today's session is one of several teaching commitments. My thesis is nearing completion but my funding has evaporated, so I am fortunate to have found some work in a nearby university. However, as the bus meanders along and I overhear students disparaging their assignments and lecturers with increasingly colourful language, I cannot help wondering whether my efforts will be worth it.

At the university, there is no office space for temporary staff, so I head to the campus cafe. Like much of the UK, it is privatised. I cannot justify buying an expensive coffee just to sit comfortably, so I turn away from the soft seats, which are reserved for customers, and find a wooden bench in the corner. Slowly, the space fills with students as lecture time nears. Looking around, I become aware of other older faces: people perched on the peripheral benches buried in piles of marking, or reading the only open books in the room. These are academic staff, people priced to the edges of their own workplace as the gentrification of higher education continues apace.

I purloin a cup of water and review my lecture resources. In this department, most course “content” is slathered on to PowerPoint. The students expect it; presumably it reminds them of school. I quickly discover their aversion to lectures that revolve around listening and discussion, their resistance to independent thinking, and their lack of interest in sustained engagement with textual sources. Later I am told, perhaps apocryphally, that one can finish an undergraduate degree here without ever reading
a whole book.

[2]https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/content/few-crumbs-of-comfort-in-a-temporary-lecturers-day

The reality of digital capitalism (2015-06-09 08:38)
CfP: Journal of Peer Production: Work and peer production (2015-06-09 08:44)

CFP Journal of Peer Production: Work and peer production
Editors: Phoebe Moore (Middlesex University London), Mathieu O’Neil (University of Canberra), Stefano Zacchiroli (University Paris Diderot)

The rise in the usage and delivery capacity of the Internet in the 1990s has led to the development of massively distributed online projects where self-governing volunteers collaboratively produce public goods. Notable examples include Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) projects such as Debian and GNOME, as well as the Wikipedia encyclopedia. These distributed practices have been characterised as peer production, crowdsourcing, mass customization, social production, co-configurative work, playbour, user-generated content, wikinomics, open innovation, participatory culture, produsage, and the wisdom of the crowd, amongst other terms. In peer production, labour is communal and outputs are orientated towards the further expansion of the commons, an ecology of production that aims to defy and resist the hierarchies and rules of ownership that drive productive models within capitalism (Moore, 2011); while the commons, recursively, are the chief resource in this mode of production (Söderberg & O’Neil, 2014).

Peer projects are "ethical" as participation is primarily motivated by self-fulfillment and validated by a community of peers, rather than by earning wages. Their governance is "modular," understood in a design sense (decomposable blocks sharing a common interface), but also in political-economy terms: participants oppose restricted ownership and control by individually socializing their works into commons. Conflicting interpretations of their societal impact have been articulated (O’Neil, 2015). Skeptics view the abjuration of exclusive property rights over the goods they produce as irrelevant, and ethical-modular projects as increasing worker exploitation: participants’ passionate labour occurs at the expense of less fortunate others, who do not have the disposable income, cultural capital, or family support to engage in unpaid labour (Moore & Taylor, 2009; Huws, 2013). In contrast, reformists, often hailing from a management perspective, suggest that the co-optation of communal labour by firms will improve business practices and society (Arvidsson, 2008; Demil et al., 2015). Finally activists celebrate the abjuration of exclusive property rights, and present ethical-modular projects as key actors in a historical process leading to the supersession of capitalism and hierarchy (Kostakis & Bauwens, 2014).

This last perspective raises a central challenge, which is the avoidance of purely utopian thinking. In other words, how can commons-based peer production reach deeply into daily life? How can already existing non-capitalist economic processes be strengthened, new non-capitalist enterprises be built, and communal subjects be established (Gibson-Graham, 2003: 157)? An increasingly large free public goods and services sector could well cohabit in a plural economy with employment in cooperatives, paid independent work, and the wage-earning of the commercial sector. However analysis of peer production typically eschews mundane considerations such as living wages, benefits, job security, working conditions, work-induced medical conditions, and debates on labour organization. How can peer production operate as a sustainable practice enabling people to live, if labour and work issues are not formally addressed?

To advance this agenda, the tenth issue of the Journal of Peer Production, titled Peer Production and Work, calls for papers in two linked areas:

Peer production in a paid work society*

Nowadays firms attempt to monetize crowdsourced labour. The paradigmatic example is Amazon’s Mechanical Turk labourers (popularly known as "Turker=s", "cloud workers" or "click workers") who accomplish micro-tasks such as tagging and labeling images, transcribing audio or video recordings, and categorizing products. This extreme modularization of work results in their status being that of independent contractors rather than employees with rights, necessitating novel means of protection and redress (Irani & = Silberman, 2013). The so-called ‘sharing economy’ also uses peer production methods, such as the self-selection of modular and granular tasks, to extract ever-more value from the labour of volunteer =prosumers=" (Frayss=E9 & 3680
Capitalist firms are also increasingly engaging with ethical-modular organizations, in some cases paying wages to participants. Such labour is thus both alienated, or sold, and communal, as workers freely cooperate to produce commons. Do traditional categories such as exploitation and alienation still apply?

Topics may include, but are not limited to:
- Peer production and the global political economy
- Peer production and the rise of precarious work
- Peer workers and possibilities for worker organisation
- Does the autonomy of peer workers cause conflict in firms, and how is it resolved?
- What strategies do firms adopt to co-opt peer production (e.g., hackathons)?
- Do tensions around property rights emerge?
- Subjectivity in peer production
- Peer production and intellectual property, coded work

Paid work in peer production projects

How does paid labour affect ethical P2P projects? Mansell and Berdou (2010) argue that firms supporting the work of programmers who contribute to volunteer projects, to the commons, will not affect the cooperative spirit of projects; nor can this support prevent the results of labour from being socialized into commons. Is this always the case?

Topics may include, but are not limited to:
- How do peer projects deal with the presence of paid or waged labour?
- Is this topic discussed within peer production projects? In what way?
- What benefits do paid or waged workers enjoy in peer projects?
- How does paid labour affect peer production projects?

Timeline

300-500 word-abstract due: 30 July 2015
Notification to authors: 30 August 2015
Submission of full paper: 31 December 2015
Reviews to authors: 15 February 2016
Revised papers: 30 April 2016
Signals due: 30 May 2016
Issue release: June/July 2016

Submission guidelines

Submission abstracts of 300-500 words are due by July 30, 2015 and should be sent to work@peerproduction.net. All peer reviewed papers will be reviewed according to Journal of Peer Production guidelines. See http://peerproduction.net/peer-review/process/ for review. Peer reviewed papers should be around 8,000 words; personal testimonies or tales of toil in the Processed World tradition should be up to 4,000 words.

References
- Moore, P. (2011). Subjectivity in the ecologies

1. mailto:work@peerproduction.net

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Immigrant Protest: Politics, Aesthetics and Everyday Dissent (2015-06-09 08:51)

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/srI2V_9yfno

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Towards a Digital Social Ontology: Free Day Symposium in London on July 8th (2015-06-09 15:32)

The Social Ontology of Digital Data & Digital Technology
Wednesday, July 8, 2015 from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM

3682
This innovative symposium brings together leading figures from a variety of fields which address issues of digital technology and digital data. We’ve invited speakers with a range of intellectual perspectives and disciplinary backgrounds who engage with questions relating to digital data and digital technology in their work. Our suggestion is that social ontology, however this might be construed, represents a potential common ground that could cut across this still rather siloed domain of inquiry into the social dimensions of digital technology.

The symposium aims to explore this possibility by assembling a diverse range of perspectives and drawing them into a dialogue about a common question, without assuming a shared understanding of the topic at hand. Our aim is to extend this digitally via twitter, podcast and blog beyond the event itself, in order to facilitate an extended conversation that will draw more people into its remit as it circulates after the symposium itself.

To this end, we invite each speaker to address this theme (the social ontology of digital data & digital technology) in whatever way they choose. Each speaker will have 30 mins to talk and 15 mins for questions. We’ll have an accomplished audio editor on hand to record each talk as a podcast. These will be released on [1]www.socialontology.org and will be circulated on social media in order to try and stimulate a continuing debate around the issues raised at the symposium. The hashtag for the day will be #socialontology.

[2]//eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=16315265398 &ref=etckt

[3]Powered by Eventbrite

This event is funded by the [4]Independent Social Research Foundation
Confirmed Speakers:

Chair: Celia Lury (Warwick)

Noortje Marres (Goldsmiths) - Does Digital Sociology have a Problem?
Jochen Runde (Cambridge) - Non-materiality and the Ontology of Digital Objects
Alistair Mutch (NTU) - Organizational Implications of Digital Data
Susan Halford (Southampton) - title TBC
Nick Couldry (LSE) - title TBC
Emma Uprichard (Warwick) - title TBC

Are you a PhD student or early career researcher interested in social ontology? (2015-06-09 15:32)

Centre for Social Ontology PhD/ECR Conference
June 23rd, University of Warwick, 10am – 4pm

Social ontology is integral to the study of society. It is impossible to inquire into the social world without some understanding, at least tacitly, concerning the entities which make up that world and their properties and powers. However social ontology remains an often confused and contentious matter within the social sciences.

The first Centre for Social Ontology PhD and ECR conference seeks to address this matter through papers exploring the role of social ontology within sociology.

The conference is open to all PhD students and Early Career Researchers with an interest in social ontology.
Schedule

9:30 to 10:00 — Welcome and coffee

10:00 to 11:30 — 3 papers

- Jonathan Beacham: Mixed Method Ontologies and Dialectical Futures
- Adam Wood: Why Architecture Needs a Social Ontology
- Giulia Lasagni: Mutual Recognition and Social Commitment

11:30 to 11:45 - Coffee

11:45 to 12:45 - 2 papers

- Janet Lord: What does it mean to be a teacher? A critical realist approach.
- Kalok Yip: IHL and IHRL – Convergence of Laws, Conflation of Ontologies

12:45 to 13:30 - LUNCH

13:30 to 15:00 — 3 papers

- Gry Cecilie Høiland: Using a critical realist approach for studying the implementation of a work inclusion policy measure at the front lines of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Agency - methodological implications
- Michael Bauwens: What is social ontology (not)?
- Michael Edward Walsh: title TBC

15:00 to 15:30 - Coffee

15:30 to 16:30 - 2 papers

- Maryam Al Mohammad: Towards building a researcher methodological habitus
- Sara Melo: Exploring the ontology of patient safety

This event is funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation

1. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=17016640229&ref=etckt

Questionable university advertising #1 (2015-06-09 15:41)

In this new feature we’re collecting examples of questionable university advertising. Get in touch (mark@markcarrigan.net) if you’d like to share some advertising you’ve seen.
I saw this at Sheffield train station in June 2015. I found the premise of the advert fascinatingly weird:
"We Can More Or Less Know What You’re Thinking About" (2015-06-09 15:49)

Gayatri Spivak on Still Pushing for the Humanities (2015-06-11 08:03)

LSE Gender Institute: Professor Gayatri Spivak speaking on June 29th.

Still Pushing for the Humanities
In this lecture, Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak will explore the importance of teaching the humanities at both ends of the spectrum: post-tertiary at Columbia and elementary on the Birbhum-Jharkhand border. She examines how being taught the humanities can provide a critical route to social justice for today’s youth within globalization.

Date: Monday 29 June 2015
Time: 6.30-8pm
Lectureships in The Theory and Methods of Social Futures (2015-06-11 08:07)

Lectureship (x2) in The Theory and Methods of Social Futures
50th Anniversary Lectureships
Starting Salary between £33,242 - £39,685 *
Closing Date: Tuesday 30 June 2015
Interview Date: To be confirmed


Lancaster University is seeking exceptional people to help set up and develop a major new Institute for Social 3688
Futures, co-directed by Professors John Urry and Linda Woodhead. This interdisciplinary Institute is concerned with examining the nature of multiple, complex and interdependent social futures.

In the first 2 years you will concentrate upon research while in subsequent years you will develop UG and PG teaching and administration in a relevant Lancaster University department(s). A strong interest in social futures is expected, as well as a PhD and excellent research outputs and grant promise. Grounding in social science is expected, but we are mainly looking for innovative researchers working across disciplines, and with interests in interdisciplinary research.

Appointments will normally be made with starting salaries in the range £33,242 - £39,685 but appointments may be made at a more senior level including Senior Lecturer/Reader


Great to see all the sessions from [1]this immensely oversubscribed event at LSE now available as videocasts:

Ayn Rand on Love and Happiness (2015-06-11 14:34)

As much as I dislike the ideas of Ayn Rand, I think this animation is marvellous. I'd love to see something along these lines exploring the ideas of C. Wright Mills:

[IFRAME: 1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/mQVrMzWtqgU
Recently I have been catching up on publications about diversity, ethnicity and multiculturalism. The following books, written or edited by academics from a range of backgrounds including the Social Sciences, Geography, Population Studies have provided a broad and engaging insight into contemporary academic debates and discussions in the UK and abroad. The books are accessible to all interested in modern multicultural in society, and in particular useful for those interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of the evidence about race and migration, in order to learn about how to effectively challenge the pernicious myths that perpetuate racial inequalities and racism in local, national and international landscapes.

'Sleepwalking to segregation'? Challenge myths about race and migration
- Nissa Finney and Ludi Simpson (Policy Press, 2009)

Finney and Simpson, of University of Manchester, discuss contemporary UK media and political debates about migration and race showing us that many of the prevailing ideas that are perpetuated particularly by right-wing factions of polity and media are actually dangerous myths and generalisations. Statistics about immigration, race relations and integration are being utilised to scare-monger, rather than being used fairly and openly, as the authors advocate. Evidence is frequently ignored by those pursuing a pessimistic agenda. Evidence is "selectively presented, at times ignored and at times creatively invented", resulting in myths and distortions when it comes to issues of race and migration. Myths about segregation, ghettos, immigrants and Muslim terrorists are seeping into the public imagination. Worrying still is that academic research slips into a discourse – which is subject to "exaggeration and untested assumptions" about 'problem' immigrant areas. The authors are concerned by how spokespeople from the media and institutions such as polity, as well as MigrationWatchUK, are prone to "repeating claims without concern for their truth".

The authors focus on presenting the evidence we should know about multicultural Britain. Finney and Simpson argue that the current pessimism about Britain as a failing, ailing segregated and ghettoised society is "unnecessary and unwarranted". They want us to think about alternative ways of discussing race and migration in modern Britain. They support equality of treatment as the basis for respect, as well as action against racism, and
ensuring promoting of the rights of refugees. The authors discuss how ethnicity/race is defined/measured in this inaccurate storytelling about the state of modern multicultural Britain. Selective reporting represents communities and schools that are segregated, yet Finney and Simpson show that these communities and schools could equally be described as mixed, if certain evidence was used fairly and openly, instead of through selective ignorance and abuse of statistics. "Overstatement and oversimplification" are two ways that lead to abuse of statistical evidence on race and migration. If the growth of segregation is a myth, as shown by the authors, then they argue that multiculturalism is a "legitimate option in social policy".

The book is very useful for those reading up on and researching multicultural Britain, as it provides you with the myth-breaking that is urgent and necessary in challenging the current climate where moral panics and hysteria are provoked by some media and political players. The authors also provide the readers with a summary of much needed arguments and evidence at the end of the book to be used as a reliable reference source. Although the book principally concentrates on Britain, there is information provided about France and North America in relation to how data on race and ethnicity are utilised, thus giving the reader some comparative perspectives.

Lived Diversities: Space, Place and Identities in the Multi-Ethnic Society – Charles Husband, Yunis Alam, Jorg Huttermann, Joanna Fomina (Policy Press, 2014)

"What do we expect of people who share life in specific neighbourhoods?" (p5)
The book successfully explores the concept of co-existence within a contemporary multi-ethnic urban specific space, bearing in mind that the global and the local are not mutually exclusive but often interdependent concepts in the study of modern societies. Co-existence and ethnically diverse cities are not new phenomena (for example, convivencia was commonplace in Muslim Spain), and the authors aim to contribute to current literature on belonging to a multi-ethnic locality through their detailed focus on Manningham, which is an area (in the city of Bradford) often viewed negatively in public discourses by those external to the area, but desirable to those inhabiting this place. The key strength of this collaborative text is that the multiple authors contest deficit discourses (on the part of the government and the media) regarding diversity in Britain by showing us how the locals make meaning from multi-ethnic belongings; moreover, the diverse demographics of Manningham can be used to critique the "essentialising language of government" (p10). Manningham "has its own distinctive history, which includes a long history of different flows of migration" (p34), and thus the authors are able to show us that census data alone cannot provide an accurate picture of the daily diversities of the people in this locale.

Ethnicity has come to be understood as more than a "mere convenient marker of interesting difference between citizens", for it is a "powerful means of coding a complex web of conceptions of superiority/inferiority, entitlement/disenfranchisement and closeness/distance" (p3). Unfortunately for contemporary British society, political and policy rhetoric have "racialised the experience, and conception, of coexistence in multi-ethnic urban settings"(p3). Bradford – and Manningham – have been racialised too as "Pakistani" places, yet the authors present a place that has a great Polish presence too. The authors also report interview findings that show the nuances of how both majority and minority ethnic Manningham residents perceive their everyday lives and identities: as a safe and familiar space of settlement for some Muslim South Asians, as a cosmopolitan place according to some local White people, or some White people who feel they are a "self-conscious minority" (p81).

Language employed nowadays in relation to ethnic diversity – pejorative words like "conflict" and "challenge" create an image of "disaffected and inadequately assimilated minority groups destabilising urban life...inherent pathologies in their way of life that have rendered them a dysfunctional and threatening presence in our urban landscape" (p4). The authors bring to the forefront the lived realities of the residents of Manningham by providing a detailed description of the streetscape, as well as the historical and physical factors that impact upon the everyday interactions of the local people, in order to challenge negative stereotypes about the area.

A highly engaging chapter of the book introduces the interplay between masculinity, urban life, ethnicity and the automobile – what is the symbolic significance of the car in the lives of the Manningham residents, and how does this relate to issues of identity? This "vibrant and, at times, overpowering car presence" (p198) is explored to make sense of as the authors highlight how "part of the story rests in the rich texture of meanings that car ownership has for some of Bradford's Pakistanis" (p149):

"It is a physical presence that has the capacity to trigger acute moments of inter-ethnic sensibility that may be characterised by envy, suspicion, resentment and anger, each with the associated attribution of legitimating beliefs about the character and intentions of the car driver/owner" (p149).
Book Review: Muslims, Schooling & The Question of Self-Segregation

The Sociological Imagination (2016-01-16 20:18:18)

[...] and political rhetoric about segregated ghettos and cultural clashes lack empirical evidence; when statistics and claims, even those presented by academics and well-intentioned government organs... Similarly Muslims, Schooling & The Question of Self-Segregation by Shamim Miah deconstructs [...] 


Land of Strangers – Ash Amin (Polity Books, 2012)

Ash Amin’s book focuses on how we live as strangers in modern society: the stranger who resides in hybrid modern Western societies “with their heterogeneous populations and cultures, they exist as gatherings of strangers – home grown and migrant”. He is fascinated by the gaps between the singularity and plurality, how social beings are subject to processes and practices of inclusion or exclusion, how society can be regarded as hybrid or otherwise,
and how “the stranger is not afforded air to breathe”. Amin argues that we need to develop a discussion around the existence of the society of strangers to understand the nature of modern multicultural society, as well as its potential.

Amin aims to expand a discussion on this very fascinating type of belonging to a society of strangers, as well as the fate of the stranger in modern Western cosmopolitan society, for he believes that studying the land of strangers would help us to understand modern multicultural globalised society, instead of narrowly focusing on the discourses about social integration and social cohesion. Amin concentrates upon the different ways that the stranger is defined and labelled as an outsider, as not belonging, and as the racialised Other by referring to “an intricate and often interwoven set of biopolitical, behavioural and affective forces that are simultaneously ingrained and unstable”.

Negative commentary on multicultural society places strangers and minorities in precarious positions, and calls for assimilation and promotes exclusion. The book highlights how calls for reviving nationalism is “regressive for its veiled xenophobia and exclusionary nostalgia, and unrealistic for its denial of the plural constituency of modern being and belonging”. In Europe, we observe the rise of “aggressive political demagoguery, targeting minorities, immigrants and democracy itself” which is worryingly no longer the sole domain of far right extremists but it is witnessed in “mainstream political forces trying to appease national majorities that have been destabilized by growing economic and welfare insecurity, cultural and ethnic mixity, and future uncertainty”.

The book also explores the meeting of strangers in workplaces, the concepts of social ties and situated practice in the work place, where learning and creativity can be priorities. Trust, loyalty and mutuality in workplace settings point towards virtues of social encounters and community. Furthermore, we learn about “urban technologies, infrastructures and aesthetics” relate to how strangers belong to modern society”. A “flourishing and dissenting public sphere” is argued to be a legitimate place to encourage shared encounters, participation and engagement.

The imaginary notion that British society exists as a homeland “with its own people, known and loyal to itself (and distinct from strangers from another land) remains vice-like”. And thus Amin questions this vice-like grip of imaginary territorial belonging by exploring whether modern multicultural societies are actually cohesive because of “plural publics and as the result of active work by collective institutions, integrating technologies, and constructed narratives and feelings of togetherness, rather than around givens of historic community?” We cannot simply rely on these notions of historical territorial belonging when we consider how there are a vast range of belongings: local, national, virtual, postcolonial and transnational.


Stop the Arms Fair: Conference at the Gates A Workshop on Militarism, Resistance and Academic Praxis
(2015-06-12 08:52)

Call for Papers

Stop the Arms Fair: Conference at the Gates
A Workshop on Militarism, Resistance and Academic Praxis

Where: ExCeL Centre, East London, E16 1XL
When: Thursday 10th September 2015
This September arms dealers from around the world will congregate in London's ExCeL Centre for the DSEi arms fair. As one of the world's largest arms fairs, DSEi brings together over 1,500 arms companies and military delegations from over 100 countries. On display will be everything from crowd control equipment to machine guns, tanks, drones and even battleships. It is a crucial event in the business of the international arms trade, and the deals done here play a major role in reinforcing Western militarism, fuelling conflict, repressing dissent and strengthening authoritarian regimes across the world.

The Stop the Arms Fair coalition have called a week of action at the venue to disrupt the setup of the arms fair. On Thursday 10th September, the protests will focus on the relationship between militarism and education. As part of this day, there will be an open air academic workshop at the gates of the ExCeL Centre. The aim is to build networks of solidarity in opposition to the arms trade, to explore forms of academic practice that don't stop at the university walls, and to directly disrupt the setup of the arms fair. Blurring lines between theory and practice, academics from a range of disciplines will gather at this event to explore issues and ideas relating to contemporary militarism and global politics.

Papers, presentations and performances are welcome on any theme. However, we particularly encourage contributions that focus on aspects of conflict, security, militarism and warfare, and those which engage the politics of protest and resistance. Possible topics include:

- The political economy of the arms trade
- The militarisation of police and security forces
- Contemporary imperialism and colonialism
- The gendered politics of conflict and militarism
- The neoliberalisation of war
- Militarism in everyday life
- Prospects for resistance during the second Tory government
- The Egyptian Revolution: five years on
- Resisting new strategies of repression
- Peace movements and anti-militarism

Presentations should be between 10 and 15 minutes. Please send a title and a short bio to chris_ross-dale@hotmail.com by the 10th July 2015. Alternatively, let us know if you would like to attend/be kept informed of further developments, but don't wish to give a presentation.

Further details will be announced nearer to the time.

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**Food, poverty and policy: evidence base and knowledge gaps (2015-06-12 08:53)**

**BSA Food Study Group ￿ SPERI event**

Tuesday 30th June 2015, 09:00-17:00

Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences, University of Sheffield, S1 4DP

3696
Plenary session with: Geoff Tansey, Chair of the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty; Niall Cooper, Director of Church Action on Poverty; and Elizabeth Dowler, Professor of Food and Social Policy, University of Warwick

Book Now - booking deadline 20th June 2015

In the current era of austerity, with high costs of living, stagnating incomes, and rising levels of inequality the question of how well all people are able to eat is increasingly urgent. In this context a growing body of UK research addresses the extent and experience of household food insecurity. Yet despite this evolving evidence base there has as yet been little discussion between academic researchers themselves, or between academics, policy makers and practitioners, about what this wealth of research adds to knowledge and how it may be able to play a stronger role in influencing effective policy interventions.

This day-long workshop will bring together leading sociological and other researchers, policy makers and practitioners to showcase cutting-edge findings, take stock of the research available and reflect on the implications of what we know. The day will also highlight key gaps in our evidence base that need filling and explore the cross-overs between different disciplinary and sub-disciplinary approaches and between non-academic researchers, practitioners and the academy.

In the closing session Liz Dowler, Geoff Tansey and Niall Cooper will reflect and elaborate, in discussion with the audience, on the history of food insecurity in UK public policy, the relationship between evidence and policy in this field and the increasingly important role of civil society organisations in influencing the agenda.

Booking closes on Friday 20th June. Click here for practical information.

More questionable university advertising (2015-06-12 18:38)

This one from Cem Selvi. There are no English subtitles but, as he points out, "You do not really need to understand though :-()". I agree.

More questionable university advertising please! Send your examples to mark AT markcarrigan.net or on twitter @mark_carrigan

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/HSvYWJpFDiQ
Margaret Archer, Douglas Porpora and Pierpaolo Donati talking about the sociology of human trafficking at this event organised by the [1]EndSlavery campaign and [2]the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences:

IFRAME: [3]https://www.youtube.com/embed/EtWiqeAvP4s

Call for chapters
Masculinity, Labour and Neoliberalism: Working-Class Men in Global Perspective
Editor: Charlie Walker, University of Southampton, UK

The social position of working-class men across the Western world has been transformed in recent decades. In material terms, the replacement of industrial sector jobs by unemployment and hyphenated forms of service work has all but removed old pathways into a respectable working-class masculinity for young men, while even those retaining a position in skilled manual labour find themselves worse off than their fathers had been relative to the rest of the workforce. Furthermore, both young and older working-class men are not only the losers of neo-liberal transformation, but are commonly depicted as its enemies, apparently unable and unwilling to heed the prevailing rhetoric of responsibility, flexibility, and self-improvement that has come to dominate life domains from employment and education to health, consumption and leisure. Having once been valorized for their authenticity and resistance, working-class men are often pathologized as part of the newly abject, left behind in the last modernity and without a legitimate place in the present.

While such notions have been a mainstay of popular and policy discourses, the academic literature exploring the making of masculinity amongst working-class men has presented a range of portraits illustrating not their inflexibility, but the structural and institutional barriers to the forms of self-invention now expected of them. This book intends to build on this literature, exploring the active ways working-class men construct and perform masculinities in the context of wider shifts towards individualization and self-making associated with processes of neoliberalization. Crucially, since such processes are not confined to the core countries of Western modernity, the book adopts a global perspective, inviting contributions addressing the lives of working-class men in countries across the world. Following attempts to understand how re-constructions of hegemonic masculinity have both reflected and been central to the cultural and economic projects of neoliberal globalization (Connell and Wood 2005), the book seeks to explore the ways in which working-class masculinities across a range of countries have been re-positioned by these same global processes, and the ways men have negotiated this through forms of adaptation, resistance and rejection. While the impact of transformations in employment is a central concern of the book, it seeks contributions that understand constructions and performances of masculinity as multi-sited, being enacted not only within and through formal spheres such as employment, training and education, but also in informal work, family life and leisure.

Abstracts of around 500 words should be sent to Charlie.Walker@soton.ac.uk by Friday 3 July 2015.

Book website: https://masculinitylabourneoliberalism.wordpress.com/
Talking ourselves through the working day (2015-06-13 11:58)

After seven years of studying the internal conversation, it still surprises me how sceptical many sociologists are of its existence and/or significance. This scene from the Sopranos is a great illustration of how quotidian the internal conversation often is: [1]Vito’s work. Unfortunately embedding is disabled by request on the YouTube video.

1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUgHDX0dUos](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUgHDX0dUos)

Perhaps Sociologists can learn from the wisdom of Tom Waits (2015-06-13 11:59)

"They say that I have no hits and I’m difficult to work with. They say that like it’s a bad thing" - Tom Waits

A world without foundations: Politics, society and history in post-foundationalist thought (2015-06-14 09:13)

A world without foundations:
Politics, society and history in post-foundationalist thought
September 23 & 24, 2015 / Universidad Diego Portales, Santiago de Chile
Keynote speakers:
Oliver Marchart (Academy of Arts Düsseldorf, Germany)
Martín Plot (CONICET/IDAES-UNSAM, Argentina)

* The abstract submission deadline has been extended until June 21, 2015 **

In political as well as scientific debate, not having "foundations" for the things one says or does is often considered as indicating a failure to comply with certain moral or epistemic standards, as it suggests the absence of grounds upon which one’s words and actions may be interpreted, evaluated and justified. In view of this fact, it may seem surprising that "post-" or "antifoundationalism" has become established as a label and general description for a particular strand of contemporary philosophical, political and social thought. The term designates a kind of thinking that conceives the human being, society, history, or the cosmos at large as lacking any fixed ground or telos (revealed divine precepts, universal moral and political principles dictated by reason, immutable laws of nature, etc.), a thinking that insists on the contingency, fragility, and plurality of our modes of living. Thinkers as diverse as Arendt and Foucault, Laclau and Deleuze, Agamben and Badiou—to name but a few of the most prominent—have been associated with this description.

This conference is intended to explore the very idea of anti- or post-foundational thought from an interdisciplinary perspective (including philosophy, sociology, politics, history, among others). More specifically, it seeks to discuss the various challenges that this way of thinking confronts. How can one think without solid foundations? Can such an approach be consistently carried out, i.e., can it avoid the risk of self-contradiction? Does it lead to the sterile conclusion that "anything is possible" or "anything goes"? Are the thinkers who commonly receive the label adequately understood in this way?

The conference invites proposals for presentations in English or Spanish. We welcome submissions of extended abstracts of around 500 words, or else of complete papers. They should be prepared for blind review and sent to coloquio_sin_fundamentos@mail.udp.cl. The deadline for submissions is June 21. Notices of acceptance will be sent by July 6.

The conference is hosted by the Instituto de Humanidades and the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales e Historia of the Universidad Diego Portales. For additional information, please contact the organizers, Rodrigo Cordero and Wolfhart Totschnig, at the email address above.
How many twitter followers does it take to run for President? This interesting feature on [1]the National Journal shows how the once marginal role of social media in election campaigns has become hugely prominent:

Democrats

[2]Hillary Clinton: 883,292 Facebook likes, 3.6 million Twitter followers, 119,000 Instagram followers, and 25,273 YouTube subscribers

[3]Bernie Sanders: 545,897 Facebook likes, 60,700 Twitter followers, 9,634 Instagram followers, and 1,669 YouTube subscribers

[4]Martin O’Malley: 70,822 Facebook likes, 74,500 Twitter followers, 1,517 Instagram followers, 539 Youtube subscribers, and Snapchat

Lincoln Chafee: 7,216 Facebook likes, 16,600 Twitter followers, 93 Instagram followers, and 63 YouTube subscribers

Republicans

[5]Rand Paul: 2 million Facebook likes, 628,000 Twitter followers, 27,200 Instagram followers, 6,352 YouTube subscribers, 1,664 Vine followers, 133,559 Google+ views (account does not give followers), and Snapchat
Ted Cruz: 1.2 million Facebook likes, 415,000 Twitter followers, 7,133 Instagram followers, 5,364 Vine followers, and 22,489 YouTube subscribers

Marco Rubio: 877,283 Facebook likes, 745,000 Twitter followers, 13,000 Instagram followers, 3,726 YouTube subscribers, 212 Pinterest followers, Snapchat, and a Tumblr.

Ben Carson: 1.5 million Facebook likes, 354,703 Twitter followers, 15,700 Instagram followers, 1,371 Vine followers, and 10,693 YouTube subscribers

Carly Fiorina: 3,946 Facebook likes, 670 Twitter followers on her campaign account and 370,000 followers on her personal account, 176 Instagram followers, and 319 YouTube subscribers

Mike Huckabee: 1.7 million Facebook likes, 369,000 Twitter followers, 4,106 Instagram followers, 298 YouTube subscribers, and 76 Google+ followers

Rick Santorum: 261,297 Facebook likes, 232,000 Twitter followers, 2,217 Instagram followers, and 2,992 YouTube subscribers

Lindsey Graham: 113,826 Facebook likes, 18,200 Twitter followers, 638 Instagram followers, 84 Google+ followers

Rick Perry: 1.1 million Facebook likes, 292,000 Twitter followers, 2,458 Instagram followers, 1,029 YouTube subscribers, and Snapchat

George Pataki: 15,585 Facebook likes, 41,900 Twitter followers, 44 Instagram followers, and 103 YouTube subscribers

In a fascinating paper from 2008, Michael Burawoy wrote an Open Letter to C. Wright Mills. You can read it online [1]here but I wanted to share this insightful passage which stood out to me:

But recognizing the link between social milieu and social structure does not mean crossing the line, turning personal troubles into public issues. Knowing that my unease or malaise is due to anomie in society, or knowing that I’m without a job because I live in a world of unregulated capitalism does not necessarily lead me to turn my personal trouble into a public issue. In fact, knowing the power of social structures is just as likely to paralyze as to mobilize. Indeed, sociological insight may even be universal but that would not guarantee bringing personal troubles into the public sphere. This is your first scholastic fallacy—that knowledge is liberating. Today, following Michel Foucault, we are more likely to follow the bleak hypothesis that sociological knowledge is disabling, incapacitating, a form of control. I know you saw that sociology could be used to serve power, as in your article "A Marx for managers", but you thought that if sociologists were independent then their sociological imagination was liberating. Not necessarily so.
I've written about this as the 'fallacy of amelioration': the notion that all it takes to solve social problems is the improved circulation of expert knowledge concerning their resolution. It's a surprisingly common assumption and I'm surprised to find myself agreeing with Burawoy that Mills ascribed to a version of it. This surprises me because this concept is one I came to from reading the latter's work about professional socialisation. I see the fallacy of amelioration as one that goes hand-in-hand with the tendency to slip so readily into unintelligibility so pithily identified by Mills. It's a professional conceit, emerging through years of training that don't quite ensure a secure social status, allowing the sociologist to ignore the messy and ambivalent business of politics by arming them with the confidence that these problems would be solved *if only people would listen to us.*


I shall read this article with great interest! Thanks.

Sociological Imagination (2015-06-16 08:18:07)
it's good!

Dr. Muhammed Asadi (2016-04-12 05:39:34)
The author of the letter misunderstands the entire concept behind personal troubles and public issues as for the powerlessness due to structural forces, Mills wrote, "The powers of ordinary people are circumscribed by the everyday worlds in which they live, yet even in these rounds of job, family, and neighborhood they often seem driven by forces they can neither understand nor govern." and "The more we understand what is happening in the world, the more frustrated we often become, for our knowledge leads to feelings of powerlessness. We feel that we are living in a world in which the citizen has become a mere spectator or a forced actor, and that our personal experience is politically useless and our political will a minor illusion." To translate personal troubles into "public" issues means being aware of social structure and the structural underpinnings of your troubles instead of self blame, to translate public issues into personal troubles means being aware of your biography as societally enacted. There is no fallacy on the part of c.w.mills, just ignorance on the part of his detractor.
I must say, I agree. At the early stage in the book where Mills makes these claims, he also claims that sociology realizing its concept or 'fulfilling its promise' requires that it first sweep the decks of poor theory. But it is not true that Mills is claiming this would be sufficient - just that it would be necessary for social change. Arguably this claim is correct - certainly it appeared to be Marx's and, among many others, my belief.

Marcin Grodzki (2016-07-20 17:42:22)
Just read Burawoy's letter. Must say that it is typical for leftist sociologists in their study of Mills' work to skip Character and Social Structure, which no doubt stands as the theoretical primer for much of his post 1956 work, and without which the theoretical basis for those other works remains hidden (one would think that especially in a class on theory one would begin with the most theoretical work of his corpus but no!). Ideological analyses of the ideological project of "public sociology" aside, which Mills understood as the practice of "political philosophy" (old discipline which in vain tries to combine the role of sociologist as theoretician of certain cultural systems with the role of moral philosopher and the role of ideologue), it seems to me that any criticism of Mills' work must meet on the ground of the critique of the theoretical scaffolding contained in the Character and Social Structure and worked out in other books, otherwise it's just a newer generation of scientific ideologues talking to their past heroes of how to do political philosophy without the benefit of them answering back, but there is little theoretical and methodological advancement beyond their heroes...

Dr. Muhammad Asadi (2016-07-25 20:43:31)
Not true. Biography and Structure relationship which is what the Sociological Imagination is all about and is well known and discussed, is what Character and Social Structure is about. Because political philosophers like Nietzsche lacked an understanding of Social Structure, Mills found their work defective, something he also stated for Dewey. Character and Social Structure is primarily more about Mead, Marx and Weber and not Mills' theoretical underpinnings which were vaster, as in the pieces he reproduced in "Images of Man."

Marcin Grodzki (2019-01-23 22:06:00)
Character and Social Structure is a synthetic theoretical work in what Gerth and Mills called "the psychology of social institutions." What Mills called biography and history corresponds to the study of biographies as "character structures" and the study of history as structured by the institutional social structures discussed in part 3 of the Ch & S.S.; the last part of the work deals with "dynamics" and "trends." Mills' other sociological works are monographic studies of particular strata of the U.S. institutional social structure. They can be read as application of the theory to particular segments of the U.S. society. Agents who are part of these strata are studied based on the role theory presented in Ch & S.S...

Traditional public sociology vs organic public sociology (2015-06-15 08:03)
Another interesting passage from the [1]Open Letter to C. Wright Mills by Michael Burawoy:

But how should we talk to publics? Your modus operandi, I have to tell you this, is to talk down to publics. You place yourself above publics. In fact you don't believe there really are any publics except the New York intellectuals that surround you. For the rest you have mass society, atomized, deceived, and manipulated individuals. It's as if making direct contact with people would contaminate you or your thoughts. There is a deep elitism in your detachment. You represent what I would call traditional public sociology — books written for but not with publics.
There is another type of public sociology, what I call organic public sociology, in which the sociologist steps out of the protected environment of the academy and reaches into the pockets of civil society. The organic public sociologist enters into an unmediated dialogue with neighborhood associations, with communities of faith, with labor movements, with prisoners. If, for traditional public sociology, publics, say the readership of The New York Times, are national, thin (people hardly aware of one another), passive, and mainstream, the organic publics are likely to be local, thick, active and often counter-public.


Benjamin Geer (2015-06-16 09:02:39)
As much as I approve of Burawoy’s call for unmediated dialogue with counter-publics, I’m a bit uneasy with the idea of criticising academics for ‘talking down’ to laypeople. When medical researchers tell people to quit smoking, is that ‘talking down’?

Sociological Imagination (2015-06-20 15:09:58)
Point well made

**Government Interference in Academia (2015-06-15 16:36)**

Last week there was a conference that took place at the University of Bath: *Understanding Conflict: Research, ideas and responses to security threats*.

[1]The programme included:

- The Historiography of Terrorism by Marc Sageman, former CIA Operations Officer
- Killer Drones as a Weapon of Empire Terrorism by Scott Poynting, University of Auckland
- Problems and Pitfalls of ‘Preventing Extremism’in Britain’s Education System by Katy Sian, University of Manchester
- Extraordinary Extradition: Exploring Race and Citizenship in the Context of the War on Terror by Nisha Kapoor, University of York
- Pushed Out: A Practitioners Assessment of the Role the State Plays in the Process of Disenfranchisement by Asim Qureshi, CAGE

[2]and many other presentations on counter-terror, conflict and Islamophobia.
Professor David Miller and Narzanin Massoumi have written about the problems of government agencies interference in university research, published in today's Guardian:

“We have experienced pressures about who should speak at the event and who should be allowed to attend, for example the police asked for the list of all delegates (which we did not supply). We had a number of speakers from civil society and Muslim groups, often attacked by the conservative press, government ministers and the Twittersphere. These included Moazzam Begg from Cage, the civil rights organisation which works with terrorism suspects, and a representative of Tell Mama, which monitors anti-Muslim hate crime. But we also had the prominent former CIA official Marc Sageman and counter-terrorism officials from the government’s Prevent strategy (pdf). Also in attendance were two officials from the MoD and even two from the Israeli embassy in London, who reportedly recorded sessions and photographed presentation slides.”

For more on the conference proceedings, check out #iprunderstandingconflict on Twitter.


The Present Situation for LGBTI People in Uganda (2015-06-16 08:24)

The Present Situation for LGBTI People in Uganda - Dr. Frank Mugisha (Executive Director, Sexual Minorities Uganda) Tuesday 16 June, 5.00pm - 7.00pm Yudowitz seminar room, Wolfson Medical Building, University of Glasgow.

On 17 June Dr Frank Mugisha, Executive Director of Sexual Minorities Uganda and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award Laureate (2011), will be awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (DUniv) at the University of Glasgow, on Commemoration Day. This award follows Dr. Mugisha’s address as Keynote Speaker at the LGBTI Human Rights in the Commonwealth conference held at the University on Nelson Mandela Day 18 July 2014, as a partnership between Glasgow Human Rights Network, Equality Network, Kaleidoscope Trust and Pride Glasgow.

On 16 June the Glasgow Human Rights Network, in partnership with the Gender and Sexualities Forum, is hosting a special event for Dr. Mugisha to speak on ‘The Present Situation for LGBTI People in Uganda’, regarding, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people’s experiences. The event will be chaired by Dr. Matthew
'Unnatural offences' concerning 'carnal intercourse against the order of nature' have been prohibited by legal statutes in Uganda since their creation by the British Empire in 1902. In 2009 the 'Anti-Homosexuality Bill' was introduced into the Uganda parliament, initially proposing the death penalty for 'aggravated homosexuality' and known as the 'Kill the Gays' bill. A later revised version removed the death penalty. On 24 February 2014, after the bill's passage through parliament, President Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Act into law. However on 1 August 2014 the Constitutional Court in Uganda ruled the Act invalid due to parliament not being quorate when passed. A further bill called The Prohibition of Promotion of Unnatural Sexual Practices Bill was drafted in 2014.

The event will take place in three parts. First, Dr. Mugisha will make a presentation on the present situation in Uganda and international responses. Second, Dr. Mugisha will engage in conversation with Dr. Waites on several questions, particularly on how the LGBTI movement struggles in Uganda relate to UK and transnational politics and LGBTI activism. Thirdly there will be substantial time for questions and open discussion involving everyone attending; it is intended that this final section will be informal and an open forum, including for activists/NGOs to discuss current developments and collaborative strategies and support.

The event will conclude with a wine reception. If you would like to attend, please register on the Eventbrite site, and bring your ticket.

Event website - to register: http://www.gla.ac.uk/research/az/glasgowhumanrightsnetwork/events/headline_400528_en.html

Facebook site:
https://www.facebook.com/events/406031949580168/

Please share information about this event widely to all relevant networks for human rights, LGBTI and social justice issues.

The venue is accessible. Anyone attending with particular access or other requirements or questions, please contact Matthew.Waites AT glasgow.ac.uk


(HT Pat Lockley)

Call for papers: Open issue

Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology | adanewmedia.org
Issue 9, April 2016

Editors: Radhika Gajjala (Bowling Green State University) and Nina Huntemann (Suffolk University)

We invite contributions to a peer-reviewed open call issue featuring research on gender, new media and technology. We are particularly interested in contributions that exemplify Ada’s commitments to politically engaged,
intersectional approaches to scholarship on gender, new media and technology

Contributions in formats other than the traditional essay are encouraged; please contact the editors to discuss specifications and/or multimodal contributions.

All submissions should be sent by **AUGUST 10, 2015** to editor@adanemedia.org. Your contribution should be attached as a word document. Please use "Ada Open Call Contribution" for your subject line and include the following in the body of your message:

- A 50 word abstract
- Your name
- A mailing address
- Preferred email address.

**Important dates:**

- Deadline for full essays: August 10, 2015
- Open peer review begins: January 15, 2016
- Expected publication date: May 1, 2016

**About Ada:**

Ada is an online, open access, open source, peer-reviewed journal run by feminist media scholars. The journal’s first issue was published online in November 2012. Since that launch, Ada has received more than 200,000 page views. Ada operates a review process that combines feminist mentoring with the rigor of peer review.

*We do not — and will never — charge fees for publishing your materials, and we will share those materials using a Creative Commons License.*

**Information about the editors:**

**Radhika Gajjala** is professor of media studies and American culture studies at Bowling Green State University, Ohio, where she teaches courses in global media, international communication, media and cultural studies and feminist research methods. She is the author of *Cyberselves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women* and of *Cyberculture and the Subaltern: Weavings of the Virtual and Real*. She has also co-edited *South Asian Technospaces* and *Cyberfeminism 2.0*. She is co-editor of *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*.

**Nina Huntemann** is associate professor of media studies at Suffolk University and and co-director of Women in Games Boston. Her research focuses on the intersections of gender, culture and technology, applying feminist theory and cultural production perspectives to the industrial and social practices of digital gaming. She is co-editor of *Gaming Globally: Production, Play and Place* and *Joystick Soldiers: The Politics of Play in Military Video Games*. She is also the associate producer of the film *Joystick Warriors: Video Game Violence and the Culture of Militarism* and produced and directed *Game Over: Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games*, both distributed by the Media
Education Foundation. She is co-editor of *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology*.

Elites and Urban dynamics: New Perspectives (2015-06-16 08:29)

Wednesday 22nd July

LSE International Inequalities Institute One-day Seminar
*Elites and Urban Dynamics: new perspectives*

10.00-12.00 Session 1: The resurgence of elite sociology

13.00-14.30 Session 2: Urbanism and wealth

15.00-16.30 Session 3: New agendas and Future Research

Location: Room 1.04, 32 Lincoln’s Inn Fields

Booking is essential. To request a place please email Clara Lyons: [c.lyons AT lse.ac.uk](mailto:c.lyons AT lse.ac.uk)

More information: [http://www.lse.ac.uk/socialPolicy/departmentDiary/home.aspx](http://www.lse.ac.uk/socialPolicy/departmentDiary/home.aspx)

The Sociological Review’s Early Career Researchers Event: Working Outside of Academia
Organised by The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher team

For those with a background in social science, career paths do not always followed a straight forward traditional academic trajectory. With the current shortage of entry-level academic jobs and the opportunities in academia being short term or exploitative for recent graduates, many may seek employment outside of the academy.

Social scientists have a lot to offer other employment sectors. Whether you are activity pursuing employment outside of academia or thinking of taking a new direction in your career, this event will provide an insight into the world of social scientists engaged in practice outside the university.

Please join The Sociological Review’s Early Careers Researchers’ event for what is going to be informative and stimulating event.

[1] REGISTER HERE
Speakers include:

Carole McNaughton Nichols (Director at Truth)
Simon Roberts (Stripe Partners)
Kandy Woodfield (Higher Education Academy)
George Julian (Indie researcher)

When: Friday, October 30, 2015 from 1:30 PM to 5:00 PM (GMT)
Where: Friend’s Meeting House, Euston Road, London

Illustrated metaphors for the Postgraduate Research Experience (2015-06-17 10:32)

A lovely feature on the #HullEdD blog: [1]read it in full here.

[2]

"I'm not racist, but..." (2015-06-18 07:20)

A few days ago, [1]Sadia Habib posted this excellent cartoon on our Twitter feed:


This [6]sadly defunct website explores the same theme. Many extremely offensive though often strangely interesting examples of "I'm not racist, but..." to [7]read through here:
Joel Tieg (2016-06-13 05:53:36)

Why do people get mixed up between race and ethnicity? Arabs and Persians are both white.


Author Meets Readers: Wendy Brown's Undoing the Demos

Date: Tuesday 30 June 2015
Time: 4-6pm
Venue: Vera Anstey Room, LSE Old Building, Houghton Street.
Author: Wendy Brown (Political Science, UC Berkeley)
Readers: Anne Barron (LSE Law), Nick Couldry (LSE Media and Communications), David Graeber (LSE Anthropology), Anne Phillips (LSE Government).
Chair: Ayça Çubukçu (LSE Sociology)

The argument of Wendy Brown's powerful new book is that neoliberalism is in the process of draining liberal democratic ideals – liberty, equality, legality, popular self-rule – of their distinctively political meanings. Worse, it is filling these terms with new meanings that represent the political as subsumable, like everything else, within a totally 'economised' world, a world ordered entirely by the imperative to maximise capital in all its forms – including
that which is supposedly embedded in human capacities and potentials.

Drawing on, but also departing from, Foucault’s writings on neoliberal governmentality, Professor Brown characterises neoliberalism as a form of calculative reason that is colonising every domain of life in Euro-American societies today: from states and workplaces to educational institutions and households. Warning that both liberal democratic practices and radical democratic aspirations are threatened with extinction by these changes, Undoing the Demos (Zone Books, 2015) focuses particularly on three manifestations of what its author calls 'neoliberalism's stealth revolution': the continued rise of governance as a characteristic modality of rule in the post-democratic state, an ongoing judicial trend towards extending 'human' rights to corporate persons, and tendencies in the organisation and culture of universities that are reducing higher education to little more than a site of human capital formation, justifiable only insofar as it delivers a competitive rate of return on students’ investments in themselves.

On Tuesday, June 30, Wendy Brown meets a panel of readers – Anne Barron, Nick Couldry, David Graeber and Anne Phillips – who will have approached her book from disparate perspectives informed respectively by legal theory, media theory, anthropology and political theory. This event is free and open to all with no ticket or pre-registration required. Entry is on a first come, first served basis. For any queries, email a.barron@lse.ac.uk.

Wendy Brown is Class of 1936 First Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley, USA, and a Shimizu Visiting Professor in the Law Department at LSE, 2015.
Anne Barron is an Associate Professor in the Law Department at LSE
Nick Couldry is Professor of Media, Communications and Social Theory in the Department of Media and Communications at LSE
David Graeber is Professor of Anthropology in the Anthropology Department at LSE
Anne Phillips is the Graham Wallis Professor of Political Science in the Department of Government at LSE
Ayça Çubukçu is an Assistant Professor in the Sociology Department and in the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at LSE

People Against Neoliberalism: Why We Are Not Okay With This System (2017-08-17 11:28:38)
[...] liberty, equality, legality, popular self-rule – of their distinctively political meanings,” says The Sociological Imagination. “Worse, it is filling these terms with new meanings that represent the political as subsumable, [...]"

Jon Stewart on Charleston: This is Black and White (2015-06-19 09:09)

Jon Stewart on Charleston terror shootings, and his extreme sadness at the "racial wound that will not heal but we pretend does not exist".

Stewart acknowledges "we still won't do jack".

He also talks about the "disparity of response" if we had thought this was "Islamic" terrorism, invading countries and torturing people would have been immediate reaction, but Charleston terrorist attack gets dismissed as a "tragedy" and as "crazy is as crazy does".
Media & Politics 101 (2015-06-19 09:20)

[1]

via @FoulExpress & @MUSLIMSHOW


White Terrorist Bingo (2015-06-19 09:35)

[1]
Dare to Do it Differently: Creative Methods In Gender and Sexuality Research & Public Engagement

Transforming Sexuality and Gender Research cluster event on: Friday 3rd July from 12.00-4.30 p.m, Falmer Campus, University of Brighton

Want to explore beyond well-used methods that reproduce well-established stories about sex, gender, sexuality and relating?

Fancy yourself doing modelling, bad sex writing or as a deep thinker, visual artist or ‘craftivist’? Read on!

Creative research methods can yield narratives different from and phenomenologically richer than interviews, focus groups and surveys. When doing public engagement and dissemination, creative methods can help people think differently about sex, gender, sexuality and relations/relating to challenge popular/media representations.

Having been successfully hosted by the Open University, University of Manchester and Coventry University this half-day FREE event is hosted by the University of Brighton. It will encourage sharing of knowledge and experiences and will explore among a host of other issues:
• creative writing around intimacy, desire, and sex;
• arts-based and performance practices;
• craft, activism and creative play to present narratives;
• tools for collaborative production.

This event would appeal specifically to; PhD Students; Researchers in the Field; Community Partners

(Please circulate as appropriate)

The event is free, but to book a place please visit the UoB online store by clicking on the link below


For further information please feel free to contact us at [2]SexGenCluster AT brighton.ac.uk

2. mailto:SexGenCluster@brighton.ac.uk

fkitpts (2015-07-06 12:18:33)
We need also a workshop in Austria :)


Porn Studies
Special Issue: Inside Gonzo Porn

This special issue of Porn Studies focuses on contemporary gonzo pornography. Emerging in the United States in the late 1980s and pioneered by directors such as John Stagliano, Seymore Butts, Ben Dover, and Rodney Moore, gonzo constituted both a low budget response and an “aesthetic” alternative to the glossy, plot-oriented feature films produced by companies such as VCA or Adam & Eve. Gonzo established a new “mode” of pornographic expression, taking fiction out of hard-core videos and heading straight for the sex, employing a documentary style – hand-held camera, camera-looks, live recording etc. – in order to enhance the authenticity and the realness of sexual representation (Hardy 2008; 2009; Biasin, Zecca 2009; Fuchs 2011; Tibbals 2014). In doing so, gonzo exacerbated the constant dialectic between the immediate, indexical depiction of the “mechanical truth of the bodily pleasure” (Williams 1989), and its symbolical reconstruction and “falsification” through specific representative and stylistic conventions (Dyer 1985; 1994). At the same time, gonzo pushed hard-core videos increasingly to the “extreme,” bringing sex performances and body practices to become more and more “hyperbolic” (Stüttgen 2009; Biasin, Zecca 2009; Paasonen 2011; Maddison 2012) – and almost completely detached from any sexological “idealism”.

3719
Discursive tensions circulate gonzo – where different and often contrasting perspectives (theoretical and political) on porn representation and sexual agency meet and collide with each other. Some identify gonzo as a violent vehicle for the humiliation of women (Dines 2006; Purcell 2012) and “grotesque degradation” (Langman 2004), a chauvinist and hyper-masculinized “fantasy” of retaliation to women’s social assertiveness. Yet other academics and activists promote a queer, (trans)feminist and subcultural re-appropriation of gonzo as a way to explore new “contra-sexual” body practices (Preciado 2000; Stüttgen 2009), and to displace the heteronormative order (Borghi 2014); for them, gonzo constitutes a film form that can be productively re-employed to express new post-pornographic fantasies and desires, and to open alternative markets of porn consumption (Maina 2014). However, despite its centrality in debates about pornography, gonzo has hardly been examined in depth. This special issue of Porn Studies welcomes essays, interviews, and personal accounts from academics, artists, activists, and adult industry practitioners. Proposals are invited to address (but are not limited to) the following questions:

**Genders/Bodies:** What gender configurations does gonzo perform and (re)produce? What constitution types does it dictate and (re)shape? How are bodies depicted and “treated” in gonzo?

**Actors/Stars:** What performative abilities and what acting techniques does gonzo require? What actor’s personae does gonzo construct? How is a gonzo celebrity built? And what is its social “aura”?

**Styles/Texts:** What are the representative conventions of gonzo? What is its iconography? What are the stylistic features of gonzo “aesthetics”? Is there a gonzo textual “canon”?

**Contexts/Positions:** What are the ways in which gonzo is consumed? And in which contexts? What consumption positions does gonzo activate? And what cultural repertoires does it entail?

**Markets/Business:** How is gonzo positioned within the porn market? How is gonzo produced? What are its business models, its working routines, and its commercial strategies?

**Communities/Fans:** What reception and interpretive communities does gonzo produce? And what are their dynamics? Is it possible to speak about a gonzo participatory fan culture? Is there a gonzo “cult”?

**Tastes/Affects:** Does gonzo produce a distinctive sex taste culture? What fantasies and pleasures does it entail? What affects does gonzo generate? What is its carnal appeal? How could gonzo be embodied by the viewers?

**Global/Local:** How has US gonzo been re-adapted in different national contexts? What are the globalisation/glocalization processes that underlie the international dissemination of gonzo style?

**Submission Details**

Articles for peer-review should be between 5000-6000 words. Shorter thought pieces of approximately 1500-2000 words may also be submitted, and the editors will make a selection for the Forum section.

**Journal Deadline**

The deadline for submission of proposals is September 1, 2015. Please send abstracts of 400 words and a short biographical note to federico.zecca AT uniud.it and e.biasinAT libero.it. Authors will be notified by September 7, 2015 if their proposals have been accepted.

The deadline for submission of full articles is January 18, 2016.

The special issue will be published in December 2016.

**How to Submit**

All the manuscripts must be submitted online. Please consult the Authors and Submissions tab in the journal website for more information, and the Submit Online link is there as well: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rprn20#VOomnFPF-#.VOomnFPF-.

**Editorial information**

Guest editor: Dr Enrico Biasin (e.biasin AT libero.it)

Guest editor: Dr Federico Zecca (federico.zecca AT uniud.it)

If it wasn’t for the fact we’ve been going for over 5 years, I’d be tempted to move SI over to [1]Medium. It’s immensely appealing in a range of ways and it becomes more exciting with each passing month. As this talk by the editor-in-chief of one of the most prominent magazines on Medium makes clear, it’s redefining what digital publishing means in an era of social media:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/AyxIQnPEeoc

1. https://medium.com/
2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/AyxIQnPEeoc
An interesting post on Deborah Lupton’s blog considering [1]digital data as something we consume. I’m not persuaded by the bulk of the argument, even though it’s thought provoking:

Mol points out that once a foodstuff has been swallowed, the human subject loses control over what happens to the content of the food in her body as the processes of digestion take place. As she notes, the body is busily responding to the food, but the individual herself has no control over this: ‘Her actorship is distributed and her boundaries are neither firm nor fixed’ (Mol, 2008: 40). The eating subject is able to choose what food she decides to eat, but after this point, her body decides how to deal with the components of the food, selecting certain elements and discarding others.

This raises questions about human agency and subjectivity. In the statement ‘I eat an apple’ is the agency in the ‘I’ or in the apple? Humans may grow, harvest and eat apples, but without foodstuffs such as apples, humans would not exist. Furthermore, once the apple is chewed and swallowed, it then becomes part of and absorbed into the eater’s body. It is impossible to determine what is human and what is apple (Mol, 2008: 30) The eating subject, therefore, is semi-permeable, neither completely closed off nor completely open to the world.

Mol then goes on to query at what stage the apple becomes part of her, and whether the category of the human subject might recognise the apple as ‘yet another me, a subject in its own right’ (Mol, 2008: 40). Apples themselves have been shaped by years of cultivation by humans into the forms in which they now exist. In fact they may be viewed as a form of Haraway’s companion species. How then do we draw boundaries around the body/self and the apple? How is the human subject to be defined?
It strikes me that this only works if you hold a ‘subject’ to be something with fixed boundaries and absolute mastery over its inner space. Does anyone actually hold this view? I don’t think even rational choice theorists, surely the strongest advocates of contemporary individualism, would accept such a view. The risk here is of what Andrew Sayer calls a PoMo flip: responding to a problematic position (that may or may not be held by anyone) by flipping to the other extreme while retaining the problematic conceptual structure. This isn’t an obscure matter of ontology because how we conceive of the subject has important consequences for how we make sense of Deborah’s final question:

How are the flavours and tastes of digital data experienced, and what differentiates these flavours and tastes?

This is a fascinating question which I’ve tended to think of as ‘data sensibilities’: how do we develop tastes for different kinds of data? The recent work of Will Davies could be read as, in part, an account of how these tastes changed. We’ve developed a taste for quantitative data about our behaviour that increasingly replaces a taste for qualitative data about our action. Making sense of such changes, let alone the political economy underlying them, necessitates that we identify the variable capacities of the subject to ‘consume’ data, to put it to work in some way, as well as how these tendencies can be influenced by broader social and cultural structures.

Mol’s account is a form of what Margaret Archer calls central conflation: responding to the challenge of analytically unpacking the interface between objectivity and subjectivity by blurring the boundaries between them. Whereas I think Deborah’s question, which seems enormously important to me, necessitates an account of the sequencing of objectivity and subjectivity over time: how we ‘consume’ certain kinds of data, the work to which these are put in our lives and how we change in the process, with effects upon our future data tastes. Here are the questions which such a view would lead to:

- What types of individual data tastes can we identify?
- How did these types of individual data tastes come about?
- What work do these types of individual data tastes do in personal life?
- How do these types of individual data tastes shape the biographical trajectories of individuals?
- What are the aggregate effects of these outcomes for social life as a whole?
- What are the collective effects of these types of individual data tastes i.e. how do they condition social participation and collective action?

Any thoughts much appreciated!

I'm currently reading an excellent book, [1]The Culture of Connectivity, by the media scholar José van Dijck. It has many virtues but her project as a whole really resonates with my interests. Though she doesn't use the term 'ontology', the intentions underlying the book are very much in keeping with those of the symposium on the [2]Social Ontology of Digital Data and Digital Technology (or Digital Social Ontology) which I’m running in London in July:

I propose to look at distinct platforms as if they were microsystems. All platforms combined constitute what I call the ecosystem of connective media—a system that nourishes and, in turn, is nourished by social and cultural norms that simultaneously evolve in our everyday world. Each microsystem is sensitive to changes in other parts of the ecosystem: if Facebook changes its interface settings, Google reacts by tweaking its artillery of platforms; if participation in Wikipedia should wane, Google's algorithmic remedies could work wonders. It is important to map convolutions in this first formative stage of connective media's growth because it may teach us about current and future distribution of powers. (loc 483)

Doing so necessitates that we address the underlying ontological questions in a systematic way: what are platforms? What are their characteristics? What are their causal powers? How are they shaped? How do they change? How do they interact? What are the properties and powers of the emergent wholes? These questions shouldn’t be detached from empirical studies but should rather be addressed in dialogue with them. Such issues are unavoidably addressed in social scientific work on social media but doing so in a systematic way, understanding this as Digital Social Ontology, would help draw partial answers into constructive dialogue and open up a conceptual space within which the "connective approach" advocated by José van Dijck would become easier to sustain, particularly across disciplinary boundaries within what is still a fragmented field of inquiry.

The Interdisciplinary Challenge of Social Media and the Need for Digital Social Ontology | The Sociological Imagination (2015-06-20 15:05:15)

[...] extract from the excellent The Culture of Connectivity which eloquently expresses why I think Digital Social Ontology is necessary, even if the author doesn't use such a term [...]

When Hollywood actors become motivational speakers (2015-06-20 12:43)

Difficult to know what to make of this:

×

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/nuHfVn_cfHU

Apparently one section of this larger project: [2]https://vimeo.com/125095515

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/nuHfVn_cfHU

The Interdisciplinary Challenge of Social Media and the Need for Digital Social Ontology (2015-06-20 15:05)
Another extract from the excellent [1]The Culture of Connectivity which eloquently expresses why I think [2]Digital Social Ontology is necessary, even if the author doesn’t use such a term herself:

One obvious problem with studying the phenomenon of social media is that it involves a multitude of probing angles that each bring along a different academic expertise. If we take the above questions seriously, we need insights from at least six disciplinary perspectives—information technology, social science, humanities, economics, law, and political communication—to open up a panoramic view onto social media. This could well lead to each perspective highlighting one single aspect of the phenomenon. Information scientists are intent on exploring large data sets provided by, for instance, YouTube or Flickr, in order to analyze and design algorithms; social scientists study data to detect patterns of user behavior; academics from the humanities commonly set their minds to examining content and cultural form; economists and MBAs zoom in on business models; legal scholars focus on issues of privacy and intellectual property; and political scientists or sociologists are concerned with social media’s implications for the larger information order. Indeed, many of these disciplinary perspectives yield important research results and fascinating insights.20 The problem, however, is that each discipline moves around in its own orbit of mutually incompatible vocabularies and methodologies. (loc 906)


The Sadistic Irrational Bastards fallacy (SID) (2015-06-20 17:34)

On a couple of occasions I’ve heard Graham Scambler discuss what he calls the 'greedy bastards hypothesis' (GBH):

This asserted that health inequalities in Britain were first and foremost an unintended consequence of the 'strategic' behaviours at the core of the country’s capitalistic-executive and power elite. It is a hypothesis even more plausible in 2012 than it was in the late 1990s.

The term 'capitalist-executive', borrowed from Clement and Myles, contained what I subsequently called a core ‘cabal’ of financiers, CEOs and Directors of large and largely transnational companies, and rentiers. These individuals were perfectly capable of ‘conspiring’ but despite being involved in fierce competition rarely had a need to do so in the post-1970s neo-liberal era of financial capitalism. This cabal, I intimated, has come to exercise a dominating influence over the state’s political elite (that is, the upper echelons of government together with its multifold 'new middle class' tacticians). US historian David Landes’ once asserted that ‘men (sic) of wealth buy men of power’; and my contention was that they got more for their money post-1970s than in the postwar welfare-statist era. So the GBH charged leading capitalists and politicians with what the likes of Engels and Virschow in the nineteenth century called homicide. As Michael Marmot has more recently averred, policies can kill, and when these are reflexively enacted their architects shouldn’t be surprised to find themselves liable to prosecution in the
event of a regime change.


While I think he’s largely correct, I’d like to counterbalance GBH with my notion of the Sadistic Irrational Bastards (SID) fallacy. Put bluntly: we often tend to impute egregious dispositions to those people doing things which we find profoundly disagreeable on a moral level. We exaggerate their deficiencies of character (how else could they do these things if they weren’t evil sadistic bastards?) and correspondingly pay too little attention to how structural circumstances enable actions which have no explanation other than sadism when considered in individualistic terms. SID is morally reassuring. In its most extreme manifestations, it supports conspiratorial thinking where the complex problems of the world are reduced to the Machiavellian machinations of evil men plotting in a room in some secret location. But I think it’s more widespread than this. It underwrites a sense of one’s own righteousness and supports the kind of indignation which can drive valuable protest.

However my problem with it is that it leaves us ill-equipped to make sense of people doing sadistic things who do not in fact seem to be sadists. What’s more, they’re capable of giving reasons to justify their actions. We may dismiss their reasons instinctively or even through careful consideration of their moral and intellectual merits. But adherence to SID leaves a mismatch between our moral experience and our rational appraisal which can be strategically disorientating. It can leave us torn between indignant condemnation and rational acquiesce: allowing us to be content with expressing our contempt without this leading to sustained action. It tends to individualise problems which are not themselves individualistic and supports late capitalist cynicism of the sort described by Zizek: overestimation of subjective disavowal going hand-in-hand with objective complicity.


Benjamin Geer (2015-10-03 08:49:48)
The idea that social problems are caused by ‘bad people’ is a very common kind of folk sociology, and perhaps it’s the basis of all conspiracy theories. It’s dangerous, because it often leads to the demonisation of vulnerable groups, e.g. on the basis of religion, skin colour, nationality, etc. Shouldn’t one of the main tasks of sociology be to combat this folk sociology?
My new favourite way to write (2015-06-20 18:02)

Buy an Alphasmart Neo and do it like this all the time. NO distractions and batteries that last a year. It is so liberating.

Datafication, dataism and dataveillance (2015-06-21 06:43)

The Ace Scholarship #Asexuality (2015-06-21 07:21)

This is an interesting initiative I hadn’t encountered previously:


AceAdmiral (2016-05-05 03:06:20)
This comment is way late, but thank you so much for linking the scholarship solicitation. I really appreciate it!

you’re very welcome!
The conference stream on Radical Transfeminism, London Conference in Critical Thought takes place on Friday 26th/Saturday 27th June at the University College London anthropology department, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW.

Against a backdrop of social gains made by mainstream LGBT movements, the reality of trans* lives (particularly for transpersons of colour) continues to be one of material and social struggle, against poverty, deprivation and violence.

While inclusion in existing structures, whether they be social initiatives or current feminisms, is often the focus of the discussion, this stream looks to radicalise the transperspective. This redistribution of emphasis from inclusion in existing centres to the possibility of elaboration from the limits outward, will give the will create the terrain for alliances, strategies, and politics. We propose to look at points of divergence instead of inclusion, both as means to build practices of solidarity, as well as highlight differences of perspective. By emphasising trans* as an open-ended category without a core, a potential radicalisation of perspective and action, as opposed to erasure, is actualised.
The stream aims to address the social, material and political necessity of transfeminism as a radical and potentially revolutionary sphere of thought and praxis. It will address the importance of a transfeminist critique of the limitations of liberal transgender politics that are being rapidly and unquestioningly taken up across the world. It specifically looks to extend transfeminisms beyond rights discourses, and formulate critiques as evolving practices and theories.

Friday 26 June 9:30-11:00 (room 2/TBC)
1. The End Times of a Failed Political Myth - openingspanel by Mijke van der Drift, Chryssy Hunter, Nat Raha.

Friday 26 June 13:45-15:15 (room 2/TBC)
2. Panel: Radical Transfeminist Activism
Mylo Lewis-Norman - Trans* generational sharing as a form of resistance to normalisation
Andy Misandry - I Have No Photo For You - liberal feminism, Germany's Next Topmodel and why it doesn't get better
Raju Rage - Reclaiming Radical Transfeminism: Time- Travelling Trans* Politics In Neoliberal Times
Respondent: Sasha Padziarei
Chair: Mijke van der Drift

Saturday 27 June 13:30 - 16:30 (Panels will happen with a small break in between) room 6/TBC
3. Roundtable: Radical Transfeminism in Communities
Ellis Suzanna Slack - Sexworker transfeminisms
Pum Kommattam - At the margins of margins - the necessity of actual intersectionality and solidarity in transfeminist queer communities
Audrey de Virion & Frankie Hall - The growth and formalisation of radical trans and queer support networks in Brighton, UK
Chair: Chryssy Hunter

4. Panel: Theories of Radical Transfeminism
Charlotte Gage - Reproducing ‘states of injury’ on trans* bodies: How does Wendy Brown's concept help to think through the idea of a ‘wounded attachment’ to the female body in feminism?
Barbara Neukirchinger - Critical Theory, Poststructuralism and the Intersection of Gender and Disability
Andi Sitwell - The politics of gender variance: a queer materialist critique of identity
Chair: Nat Raha

Paper abstracts and further details at http://londoncritical.org/conference

Other Europes: Migrations, Translations, Transformations
MLA International Symposia: Translating the Humanities
Düsseldorf, Germany, 23?25 June 2016

The Modern Language Association of America, the world? s largest professional organization for scholars of literature and language, announces its first conference outside the United States and Canada,
organized in collaboration with the Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf.

Europe remains a conspicuous part of the global public imagination and a haunting presence in literary and cultural studies across the globe, even as claims for its centrality continue to be challenged from a variety of political and theoretical perspectives. This conference brings together an international group of scholars and engages the paradigms in and through which they work. It seeks to develop ways of thinking that emerge from and address Europe’s evolving political, economic, historical, and philosophical role in a world of ever-shifting migrations, translations, and transformations.

We invite proposals across a broad range of historical periods and disciplines that engage with literary and cultural texts and practices as they interact with or resist political, economic, scientific, or philosophical models of thought.

Papers might be grouped under the following rubrics:

- Marking time: dynasties, empires, revolutions, republics, regimes; pasts, presents, futures, aftermaths; trauma and memory, ghosts and hauntings; generations; senses? of history; literary times and periods
- European maps: East, West, North, South; city, country, banlieue; center, margin, periphery; borders, boundaries, contact zones; the ?other? within and the ?other? without
- European economies and the economies of European cultures
- European subjects and identities: religions, genders, sexualities, ages, affects, bodies
- Community, nation, migration, mobility, roots
- Precarious lives: citizens, migrants, refugees
- Postcoloniality, decoloniality, subalternity, hegemony, sovereignty
- Languages of Europe; multilingualism; Latin, French, English as lingua francas
- European cultural politics and institutions: the economies of European cultures, book fairs, film festivals, prizes, universities, publication, national cultural organizations such as the Goethe-Institut, the Alliance Française, and the Instituto Cervantes
- Translation, resistance, transmission
- Theory transfers
- Media and genres, old and new
- Transatlantic Europe

The conference will feature several keynote talks and roundtables, as well as traditional sessions with three or four fifteen-minute papers, workshops with precirculated papers, and roundtable conversations based on five-minute presentations. We invite proposals for any of the above formats.
The conference languages will be English, German, French, and Spanish, but papers can be delivered in any language if speakers arrange for written or oral translation within the time frame of the session.

Paper proposals should include the paper title, a 300-word abstract, the speaker’s institutional affiliation (if any), and a 1-page biography or CV.

Proposals for panels, workshops, and roundtables should contain the above items for each speaker, a brief description of the format (including an estimate of how many speakers will participate), and a rationale for the session’s topic(s) and format.

Please send submissions to othereuropes2016@hhu.de. All submissions must be received by 15 August 2015, and participants will be notified of the outcome of the selection process by 15 October 2015.

25 Years of the Cambridge Realist Workshop (2015-06-23 08:26)

A reunion conference, generously sponsored by the Cambridge Journal of Economics, is to be held in Newnham College, Cambridge, 7-9 September 2015, marking 25 Years of the Cambridge Realist Workshop.

Conference Themes

The Conference Theme is 'Social Ontology and Modern Economics'.

There will be no parallel streams, just a series of single sessions. To allow maximum participation of everyone present the sessions will be mostly round tables on specific sub themes, with two or three individuals giving short introductions.

Those already agreeing to introduce various themes or otherwise participate include: Richard Arena, Bruce Caldwell, Steve Fleetwood, Tony Lawson, John Latsis, Paul Lewis, Nuno Martins, Dimitris Milonakis, Leon Montes, Jamie Morgan and Stephen Pratten.

Likely sub themes include (but are not exhausted by):

- Philosophical Ontology (emergence; causal reduction and downward causation; process and evolution; entities and stability; order and co-ordination; practice including language; comparing competing conceptions);
- Ontology and Heterodox Economics;
- Ontology in the History of Economic Thinking;
- Topics in Scientific Ontology (money, technology, gender, the corporation, social relations, institutions, communities, power, trust, rules, collective practices; method for scientific ontology);
- Ontology and Methodology (dialectics/contrast explanation; abstraction; methods of isolation; internal critique; transcendental reasoning);
- Ontology, Ethics, and Moral Conduct.

Conference structure

The conference will start late afternoon on Monday September 7 and most likely end around lunchtime on Wednesday September 9th. There will be conference dinners on both the Monday and the Tuesday evening, with a reception on the Monday. **Registration and other administrative stuff.** A conference fee of £24 (£20 +VAT) will be charged. However this is merely nominal. Participants will thereafter be invited to participate in both the conference dinners plus lunches, etc., without additional charge. Numbers though are limited to about 70 participants, and we do need you to register. In order to register please go to: [1]http://www.cpes.org.uk/events/25-crw/

**Accommodation** Basic (non en-suite) accommodation is available at Newnham College at very reasonable rates (about £48 per night inclusive of VAT). To book a Newnham College room please contact Marilyn Dowling, the Conference and Events Co-ordinator at Newnham College (Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DF) by email: [2]marilyn@newn.cam.ac.uk (telephone : +44 (0) 1223 335803). Other Cambridge accommodation can be located here (though please check you are not further than you would like to be from Newnham College [CB3 9DF]): [3]http://www.visitcambridge.org/accommodation

Where you stay in College or elsewhere in Cambridge, do please register above first, and make sure you have a confirmation of registration. We are restricted to accepting only the first 70 so to register. **Hardship Fund** We do have a small amount of funding to help those whose situations make it difficult to raise the total costs themselves. Applicants for this should get in touch as soon as possible. Apply, sending details, to [4]CSOG@econ.cam.ac.uk with subject heading 'CSOG funding'.

2. [mailto:marilyn@newn.cam.ac.uk](mailto:marilyn@newn.cam.ac.uk)
3. [http://www.visitcambridge.org/accommodation](http://www.visitcambridge.org/accommodation)
4. [mailto:CSOG@econ.cam.ac.uk](mailto:CSOG@econ.cam.ac.uk)

**Where is the university? #CSOPhD (2015-06-23 11:00)**

A very interesting extract from Gilbert Ryle shared by Adam Wood (MMU) at the Centre for Social Ontology PhD Conference:

A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments, and administrative offices. He then adds "but where is the university? I have seen where the members of the colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your university." It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the colleges, laboratories, and offices which he has
seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized. When they are seen
and when their coordination is understood, the University has been seen. His mistake lay in his innocent
assumption that it was correct to speak of the Christ Church, the Bodleian Library, the Ashmolean
Museum, and the University, to speak, that is, as if "the University" stood for an extra member of the
class of which these other units are members. He was mistakenly allocating the University to the same
category as that to which the other institutions belong.


methods@manchester Summer School (2015-06-24 00:06)

Interesting in gathering and analysing twitter data?

The Manchester Methods summer school is fast approaching and runs from 6th-10th July 2015 at The University of Manchester.
Booking is essential to secure a place on the summer school courses.
The school will run for one week, and participants will select a single course for the duration of the school. Each course will deliver four days of content to a five-day timetable (Monday afternoon to Friday lunch-time), building on successful methods@manchester and CMIST short-courses given throughout the year. The courses include software training, qualitative and quantitative analysis, area studies, and research design.

We now have seven individual streams available on the methods@manchester Summer School, including courses on social network analysis, mplus, mixed methods research, content analysis, the Rasch Model and our newest addition ‘Researching public and voluntary sector organisations’.

Available Courses:
• Advanced methods for social network analysis (SNA)
• Structural Equation Modelling using Mplus
• Integrated Mixed-Methods Research
• Introduction to social network analysis (SNA) using UCINET and Netdraw
• Content Analysis for Online Data
• Constructing and Validating Measures using the Rasch Model
• Researching public and voluntary sector organisations

Full details of the Summer School, courses and booking requirements may be found at http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/events/summerschool
Call For Papers

Social media (from mainstream platforms such as Twitter to organization-specific tools) have become increasingly pervasive. This is exemplified by the diversity of uses ranging from Twitter and Facebook use during the Arab spring to the use of Snapchat by highly surveilled activist groups. Many social movements have increasingly seen social media as a means to collaboratively crowdsource, to network and communicate with diverse stakeholders. In large organizations, social media is often supported because the technology can help foster the sense of a “digital village”, where individuals are able to “see” the lives of others within their organization and feel closer to them.
However, the literature on social movements and social media has not fully grasped just how much social media has fundamentally changed the landscape of organizational communication, ranging from stakeholders being able to directly mobilize resources to making grassroots transnational social movements more organizationally feasible. Social Media, Activism, and Organisations (#SMAO15) seeks to better our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.


We invite you to submit short papers which explore the social media-influenced intersections of social movements and organisations. Full papers are not required for this conference, only short papers (2500 words, excluding references) related to the broad theme of “Social Media, Activism, and Organisations”.

Papers should be submitted by September 7, 2015 via [4]Easy Chair at [5]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15 and there is no preset template for submission. If selected, the author(s) will be invited to give a 15-minute oral presentation followed by a 5 min Q &A period at the symposium.

Author(s) of accepted paper abstracts may also be invited to submit full papers to a special issue of The Sociological Review, published by Wiley.

#SMAO15 TOPICS OF INTEREST

- Organisational communication and social media
- Democratizing organisational structures via social media
- Gender, social media, activism, and organisations
- Activist knowledge aggregation techniques
- Enterprise applications and social activism
- Collaboration, social media, and activism
- Virtual teams, social media and activism
- Activist networks and organizational communication
- Social media and organizational leadership
- Communicating organizational messages via social media
• Social media and advocacy organizations

• Inter-movement organizational communication and social media

• Visual social media and organisations

• Implications of anonymous social media

We welcome both theoretical and empirical papers and the symposium seeks to showcase a variety of case studies to advance our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.

2. [http://www.gold.ac.uk/cast/](http://www.gold.ac.uk/cast/)
4. [https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15](https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15)
5. [https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15](https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15)

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New website: Global Social Theory (2015-06-24 00:13)

From Gurminder K Bhambra:

This is just a quick email to let you know about a new website that has been set up on Global Social Theory. I have set this up together with Lucy Mayblin and Lisa Tilley and with expert web design by Pat Lockley.


The intention of the website - organised in terms of concepts, thinkers, and topics - is to provide resources for the teaching of theory from, and in, global perspective. The site is designed to be collaborative and resourced through contributions by students and colleagues. There are a few contributions already live, many promised, and more are needed to make this a fully functioning resource for the teaching (and learning) of global social theory.

If you would be interested in contributing an entry or two to the site, please get in touch with us at

contact@globalsocialtheory.org

If you would like to be more actively involved, then feel free to email me directly about this.
In the aftermath of the terrible events in Charleston, there were [1] politicians attempting to deny the racist nature of the terror that struck the Black people of Charleston, while [2] educators were working hard to challenge the spurious notions of a post-racial USA by directing us towards resources and readings crucial to understanding the persistently pernicious nature of racist inequalities.

[3] #CharlestonSyllabus is a necessary Twitter hashtag directing us to the much needed conversation on the subject of #BlackLivesMatter. Check out the # on Twitter for more useful links and ideas on how to teach slavery, civil rights, South Carolina history and many other related topics from a critical perspective.

[4]
3740
The Groomers and the Question of Race (2015-06-24 15:08)

by Shamim Miah
The last decade has witnessed a number of prominent police-led operations relating to child sexual exploitation (CSE) in England. Whilst much of the public discourse related to Operation Yewtree, Operation Fernbridge, and others has focused on the criminal nature of CSE, race has been absent from that discourse; conversely, the public debates relating to grooming cases by men of Pakistani heritage have been marked by the presence of race. By critically evaluating the above cases this article aims to put forward three related arguments. First, it aims to highlight and explain contrasting ways in which CSE is debated vis-à-vis the category of racialised politics. Second, it demonstrates how racialised discourse of CSE, initially considered to be a feature of far-right rhetoric, has taken centre ground. Finally, drawing upon analysis of various reports it aims to question the links between race and CSE to show how racialised discourse of CSE helps undermine its victims.

For more on this paper: [http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/24223/1/115.pdf](http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/24223/1/115.pdf)

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Call for Abstracts: Unlocking the Black Box (2015-06-25 08:34)

Call for Abstracts: Unlocking the Black Box

Date:

Saturday, August 15, 2015 - 12:00pm

Location:

3742
The Yale Law School Information Society Project is seeking abstracts of papers for a conference on big data and algorithmic accountability to be held on April 1-2, 2016. The best papers will be considered for inclusion in a special issue of the Yale Journal of Law and Technology ([2]YJoLT) (link sends e-mail)
The increasing power of big data and algorithmic decision-making—in commercial, government, and even non-profit contexts—has raised concerns among academics, activists, journalists and legal experts. Three characteristics of algorithmic ordering have made the problem particularly difficult to address. The data used may be inaccurate or inappropriate. Algorithmic modeling may be biased or limited. And the uses of algorithms are still opaque in many critical sectors.

No single academic field can address all the new problems created by algorithmic decision-making. Collaboration among experts in different fields is starting to yield important responses. For example, digital ethicists have offered new frameworks for assessing algorithmic manipulation of content and persons, grounding their interventions in empirical social science—and, in turn, influencing regulation of firms and governments deploying algorithms. Empiricists may be frustrated by the “black box” nature of algorithmic decision making; they can work with legal scholars and activists to open up certain aspects of it (via FOIA and fair data practices laws). Journalists, too, have been teaming up with computer programmers and social scientists to expose new privacy-violating technologies of data collection, analysis, and use—and to push regulators to crack down on the worst offenders.

Researchers are going beyond the analysis of extant data, and joining coalitions of watchdogs, archivists, open data activists, and public interest attorneys, to assure a more balanced set of “raw materials” for analysis, synthesis, and critique. As an ongoing, intergenerational project, social science must commit to assuring the representativeness and relevance of what is documented—lest the most powerful “pull the strings” in comfortable obscurity, while scholars’ agendas are dictated by the information that, by happenstance or design, is readily available. What would similar directions for legal scholars and journalists look like? This conference will aim to answer that question, setting forth algorithmic accountability as a paradigm of what Kenneth Gergen has called “future-forming” research.

Algorithmic accountability calls for the development of a legal-academic community, developed inter-disciplinarily among theorists and empiricists, practitioners and scholars, journalists and activists. This conference will explore early achievements among those working for algorithmic accountability, and will help chart the future development of an academic community devoted to accountability as a principle of research, investigation, and action.

The conference seeks abstracts on topics including:

- The law and ethics of artificial intelligence
- Algorithmic accountability in medicine, finance, journalism, law, and education
- Algorithms and transparency
- How can law enable “innovative” journalism and research?
- The effect of socio-technological environment on professional practices and norms
- What are the black boxes lawyers and policymakers most want exposed?

500-700 word abstracts may be submitted by August 15 to Heather Branch at heather.branch@yale.edu. Notifications of selection will be made by September 10. Full first draft papers are expected on December 15, 2015. The best papers will be considered for inclusion in a special issue of the Yale Journal of Law and Technology (YJoLT) to be published in Spring 2016.
Conference Organizers

Frank Pasquale (Professor of Law, University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law), Caitlin Petre (Resident Fellow, Yale Information Society Project), and Valerie Belair-Gagnon (Executive Director and Research Scholar, Yale Information Society Project)

- See more at: http://isp.yale.edu/event/call-abstracts-unlocking-black-box?#sthash.vCGNnb4g.dpuf

2. mailto:http://yjolt.org/
3. mailto:heather.branch@yale.edu

Decolonizing Knowledge: Invitation to participate in workshop (2015-06-25 08:35)

Decolonizing Knowledge
Invitation to participate in workshop
November 2-3, 2015

For at least two centuries, the only knowledge which has been accorded the status "respectable", whether the site of its production is in the "West" (understood as a region, or as the origin of modernity) or elsewhere, is the knowledge created within the modern human and natural sciences; sciences associated with the European Enlightenment and its attendant site of production and dissemination - the modern university. The cultural and historical specificity, as well as the assumed truth and universality, of this knowledge are rarely questioned. Skills, crafts, popular knowledges, tacit, non-systematic, embodied, and gendered knowledges, whether indigenous or not, hold little claim in the face of the 'expert' knowledges produced in the university as well as other privileged sites such as think tanks, governmental agencies, media outlets, and corporations - expertises that are subsequently exported through systems of commerce, trade, development and aid to the rest of the world. More than this, even if other forms of knowledge are recognized, invariably they are domesticated as 'content' to be studied and 'explained'.

The Centre for Postcolonial Studies, Goldsmiths, together with the Linnaeus Centre for Concurrences, Linnaeus University, is proposing a workshop and a special issue of the journal Postcolonial Studies which seek to enquire into the epistemological superiority accorded to modern, Western knowledge, asking whether this is warranted, and what effects it has. To this end, we welcome participants who are engaging in their own work with this theme, either by addressing this knowledge in general, or any of the particular disciplinary manifestations of it, eg, sociology, anthropology, international relations, history and so on. The workshop will be a mix of presentations and of
discussion, so rather than ask for abstracts, we ask those interested in participating to send, by September 1, an outline of their research, of 1000-1500 words, and how it speaks to the theme of the workshop. These outlines will be pre-circulated but because space is limited and also because we wish to keep this workshop intimate, so that sustained conversation is possible, only a small number of those who respond to this call will be asked to present a paper, or provide specific commentary. Participation will be confirmed by September 30.

Topics include, but are not limited to:
- connections between the global distribution of modern western knowledge and a global, economic, geographic, and medialized dominance of the "West"
- whether and how different knowledge traditions can relate to one another and with what consequences
- the entanglement between different and rival knowledge traditions
- indigenous knowledge traditions

The workshop is hosted by Linnaeus University Centre: Concurrences and held at Teleborg Castle in Växjö, Sweden, on November 2-3, 2015. Participants are expected to pay their own travel costs, while the Centre covers accommodation and other workshop costs.

How American Youth (Mis)Understand Science and Religion (2015-06-25 08:37)

[IFRAME: https://www.youtube.com/embed/OaS1SV7xwWQ]
Social theory is something you can’t get away from

From an interview with Margaret Archer in [1]disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory:

Well, social theory is something you can't get away from. It’s indispensible. People in the street are social theorists. They don’t know it, they wouldn’t appropriate the label, but what they’re doing is social theorizing. They do that every time they say things like, “Well, there wouldn’t be any benefits from doing that, would there?” Or, “That's just how you would expect the bankers to behave, isn't it?” It’s social theorizing. It may be crude. Quite often you can find that sociologists, really well established names, are saying very much the same thing. It’s just that their language is more technical or sometimes it’s just more pretentious than lay or folk social theorizing. We should respect lay social theory, not just because we are respecting the people who voice it, which we should do, but because this is what prompts their action. So, whether they’re right or wrong in what they say, that’s why, that’s their motive for acting. It’s usually
a lot more interesting than the alternative. Namely, because we can’t get away from talking about human motives, we, the investigators, impose our own interpretations on them; our beliefs about why they’re doing what they’re doing, and these can be wildly wrong


Margaret Archer on her relationship with Pierre Bourdieu and his work (2015-06-26 08:44)

From this interview in in [1]disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory:

DC: How might you characterize the connection, if any, between your theoretical work and that of Pierre Bourdieu?
MA: Sadly, because he was a good friend. He was very good to me, indeed. This was a not a common experience, for important French professors to be kind to little foreign visiting post-docs. It really wasn’t. So, he was an exception in that sense, and I kind of like put it on record. Therefore, it hurt me, as it hurt many of his research team - people like Luc Boltanski and later Laurent Thévenot, when we came to the parting of the ways. You see, Bourdieu thought, he maintained until he died—and we were good friends, he used to come and stay at my place in London in the 70s and early 80s—he thought that he was putting forward a general theory; general in the sense that it worked everywhere. I wrote an article, which you can check out if you like, in the European Journal of Sociology in 1982, called “Process without System.”

Fundamentally, he was very acute in analyzing the processes of French education, but then he wrongly universalized this by saying that that process was the same anywhere, regardless of the structure of that system. I said, no, I can’t agree. I think the kind of standardization he was talking about was something that a centralized structure monumentally reinforced, whereas in a decentralized structure you could have all sorts of people who didn’t like it, for one reason or another but they could do something about it. Plenty didn’t like it in France either, but could do nothing. Particularly the French industrialists who were coming on the educational scene in the latter part of the 19th century and were finding a very intellectualized syllabus that didn’t help them produce engineers.

Conversely, in England, if you wanted to found what was the beginning of our polytechnics and if you had the money, you just founded one. It could be a school for auto manufacturing or refrigeration. The area where I was brought up, it was manufacturing cement. Well, let’s have a part of the curriculum that is about the chemistry of cement making, then how to make reinforced concrete, so on and so forth. That was why the parting of the ways came. It came over the sociology of education, but more generally it was over the effect of structure on agency.


Featured Image By Alicia Gaudi [CC BY 2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons
Vacancy for a Post-doctoral researcher in Sociology / longitudinal ethnographic research (2015-06-27 08:24)

Part of the reason I’m reposting this is because I value longitudinal qualitative research. But I’m also intrigued that part of the job description is to "raise additional funds" - how much of academic life is coming to be dominated by fund-raising?

Vacancy for a Post-doctoral researcher in Sociology / longitudinal ethnographic research
The closing date is July 5.

The Postdoctoral researcher will prepare and conduct research and raise additional funds for a longitudinal ethnographic cohort study with varied families in Amsterdam with the aim of understanding emerging patterns of physical activity and eating in the first 4 years of life, possibly extending to later years. The ethnographic study is embedded within a large multi-disciplinary cohort study on bodily-weight set-up by the newly found Sarphati Institute. The research group actively seeks to give a public role to fundamental research.

The Postdoctoral researcher will closely collaborate with sociologists, anthropologists, epidemiologists, health care professionals and policy makers in Amsterdam. The present appointment is for 2 years, but there is a strong commitment to prolong the position. The research is preferably combined with teaching in the sociology program.

www.academictransfer.com/28504


Toilet Talks: A Speaker Event on Bodies, Identities & Design
Monday 29th June, 1:00 - 5:30pm
Lecture Theatre 1, Brooks Building, Birley Campus, Manchester Metropolitan University

Speakers include:

Barbara Penner (Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL)
'Redesigning for the User: Alexander Kira and the Ergonomic Bathroom'

Leo Care (School of Architecture and Co-Direct of Live Works, Sheffield University)
'Around the Toilet: From Social Mess to Architectural Touchstone'

Jo-Anne Bichard (Royal College of Art Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design)
'Extending Architectural Affordance or How to Spend a Penny'
Morag Rose (Sheffield University and Co-Founder of the Loiterers Resistance Movement)  
'Are you Engaged? The Secret World of Manchester’s Toilets'

Clara Greed (Emerita Professor of Urban Planning, University of the West of England)  
Discussant and closing remarks

Tickets are FREE and available via our Eventbrite page:  
https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/toilet-talks-a-speaker-event-on-bodies-identities-design-tickets-17072334813

For more information on the event or the project, please take a look at the website:  
https://aroundthetoilet.wordpress.com/

14 – 16 December 2015, Torino/Turin (Italy)

Workshop : Worker’s Writing in Europe (19th-20th centuries)

A contribution to the cultural history of the worlds of work
Within the framework of constructing a cultural history of the worlds of work "seen from below", this workshop suggests studying workers' writings on the European level.

By "workers' writings", we mean the body of texts produced by working men and women: those writings produced in the heat of political and/or trade union action such as leaflets, weapons for action which reflect (often, though not always) the appropriation of political or union cultures, but which are also cries of revolt against "the factory order" and/or the political regime, as well as texts written in retrospect, such as autobiographies, memoirs, personal diaries and factory journals, literary and poetic texts. These are so many "memories of work" made up of gestures, places and practices of solidarity, but also the desire for liberation or at least an empowerment which is not only collective but also individual.

Through diverse case studies, we propose three axes of reflection for discussion:

• Studying workers' writings as responses to a range of discourses employed by the powerful about workers, most often of a derogatory nature or aiming to stigmatise their alleged behaviour. Worker writers who have read or heard these judgments reject these discourses in various ways, even in an implicit fashion. In this way, these writings may also constitute "political acts" in themselves and means of empowerment.

• Understanding the reasons and conditions for working men and women to engage in writing. In other words, it will be important to consider how these individuals, carriers (or not) of a workers' culture transmitted by their social and familial world, armed (or not) with an ideological and "romantic" baggage typical of political and trade union requirements, and with ideas "poached" from more personal reading, moved from a political/trade-union workers' culture to a "literary" workers' culture. How did they move from writing pamphlets and speeches to other forms of writing? What books and authors who can be considered as "models" or points of reference? Can we identify any "cultural smugglers"?

• Taking account also of writings by working men and women who did not engage with or support political parties or trade unions. What do these texts suggest about the limits of the reach and appeal of the organised labour movement? What experiences and values were shared between militant, "engaged" workers and their non-militant, "apolitical" fellows, and what differentiated them? What role did writing play in the lives of the latter group?

• Starting from thematic and formal analyses of workers' writings, to proceed to comparisons on a European level. We can pose the question whether the European labour movement has built a common universe of militant workers' writings. We can also examine the autonomy of the writings of skilled workers of the generation of 1968 in relation to the labor movement: is the emergence of the emancipatory 'I' limited to these years, and is it a widespread process in all workers' communities in Europe?

These approaches also allow discussion of the effects of these experiences of writing on individuals and therefore on the evolution of worker and/or militant identities at the European level (in the 19th and 20th centuries)

Workshop languages: English and French

We invite you to send an abstract of your contribution (200 words maximum) to the organisers:

Timothy Ashplant, Centre for Life-Writing Research, King's College London, t.g.ashplant@kcl.ac.uk

Nathalie Ponsard, Université Blaise Pascal de Clermont-Ferrand, nat.ponsard@wanadoo.fr

Deadline: 30 June 2015
If so then it seems the British Sociological Association win. This [1]interesting and provocative post about the British International Studies Association (BISA) conference bemoans its exclusionary price:

If you were to ask a handful of early career scholars for their impressions of the recent British International Studies Association (BISA) conference in London they would probably say: “I wasn’t there”. The reason for the dearth in young attendees is that the conference (like all conferences) was prohibitively priced. Its four days costs a whopping £120 for early birds and £150 otherwise. For undergrads and postgrads the fee is £100 (early bird) and £130 (late). Membership to BISA is compulsory, which costs another £30 a year. It’s a hell of an entry fee into the Ivory Tower.


This seems remarkably cheap to me. The Royal Geographical Society is [3]somewhat more expensive at £155.
(members) and £175 (non-members) for those who are low income or without funding. The Social Policy Association is more expensive still at £350 (members) and £450 (non-members). This is comparable to the British Sociological Association’s charge a couple of years ago of £310 (members) and £450 (non-members).

It doesn’t follow from this that BISA are good, only that the SPA and BSA are very bad. I promised myself that I’d stop blogging about these issues after what felt like a very public meltdown a couple of years ago. But it still pisses me off immensely. Perhaps even more so as I gain ever more experience of organising events and increasingly feel confident in my view that these costs are completely unnecessary. If you do not believe they are unnecessary then publish a full breakdown of costs for the conference and engage in a dialogue with your membership about them.

If many of your members cannot afford to attend your conference then the nature of that conference must change to make it affordable. This seems so axiomatic to me that I can barely believe it needs saying. Professional associations are contributing to the disenfranchisement of the constituencies they are supposed to serve. I left my professional association for this reason and I haven’t regretted it for a single moment. I encourage other early career researchers to do the same thing. We can find our own ways of contributing to our disciplines. Ultimately, I do accept they are necessary but I don’t see how they will change while we continue to give them money and free labour en masse and without protest.

Edit to add: I’ll expand on this post and do a systematic comparison of conference fees & costs once my current deadlines are out of the way. Perhaps this could be a regular exercise that other people help me in? It would be interesting to compare national associations.

I don’t think we should ‘steal this conference’. We just shouldn’t go.

1. http://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/06/19/steal-this-conference/
2. http://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/06/19/steal-this-conference/
3. http://www.rgs.org/WhatsOn/ConferencesAndSeminars/Annual+International+Conference/Registration/Register+to+attend.htm
5. http://thedisorderofthings.com/2015/06/19/steal-this-conference/

annikacoughlin (2015-06-28 12:20:49)
I have tended to think that prices set are the prices that are necessary, so I would definitely be interested in hearing in your view how they could be different and the comparison of costs. Would be quite tricky to compare costs wouldn’t it though because diff associations have different things to take into account e.g. not everyone gets income though journals, some get reduced rate venues, others don’t, some have big sponsors others don’t, some pay permanent admin staff, others don’t etc. Some include accommodation, others don’t. Big spreadsheet time?! Interesting post though!

Idle Ethnographer (2015-06-30 20:16:54)

3754
The Future of Social Critique (2015-06-28 08:36)

Videos of the talks from [1]this seminar at Loughborough:


Bio-power(ful) Cloud-Bodies

Host: Foucault Madness Collective

Date: Saturday, September 26th, 2015.

Location: The Historic Thibodo House (1150 Lupine Hills Drive, Vista, CA)

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Jack Halberstam

The Foucault Madness Conference is back for a second year! This year’s theme brings into critical light how current norms of cyber-based speech-acts create new technologies of selfhood. Many early, and utopian, post-structural theorists of cyberspace, such as Donna Haraway ("A Cyborg Manifesto"), surmised that digital disembodiment might mean greater liberation from the categorizing limits of race, class, and gender.

However, recent events indicate that pure dis-embodiment has not been realized. In fact, the embodied world has been in a dialectical relationship with cyberspace. This relationship is being manifested through varying and widespread occurrences: Gamergate, doxxing threats, the new men’s rights movements, thinspiration. As such, we understand that new forms of gendered aggression and violence are an interplay between both realms of the physical and cyber. In a Foucaultian sense, what are the effects of routing our increasingly post-biological identities into entirely observed data-spaces?

This conference seeks to understand which embodied notions of selfhood have been further re-inscribed through the uncritical participation in cloud-based, “big data” technologies; and, conversely, what are the possibilities for resistance in using these technologies to challenge hegemonic forms of embodiment? Thus, the conference theme recognizes the way that cyberspace is not about pure disembodiment at this point; cyberspace produces new regimes of truth, a third site, that directly affects “real life” corporeality.

The conference solicits a wide range of papers that address the current ways internet technologies (such as social media, mmorgs, cyber communities, communication boards, etc.) directly inform: feminism, gendered norms, activism, trans and queer politics, heteronormativity, post biological colonialism, body politics, community justice, personal relationships, fields of affect, etc.

We are seeking papers from Professors or experts in the field, graduate students, and advanced undergrads. Academic disciplines and methodologies across the humanities and social sciences may be used. Research questions may include, but are not limited to:

- What is the role of rape speech and/or doxxing as a method of constructing the internet as an exclusively male controlled space (Anita Sarkeesian, for example)?
- What are the real possibilities for the subaltern to speak in this new public space, given the “digital divide” and the normative, neoliberal design of the internet?
- What are the legal implications of the collapse between the private and public into a merged space?
- What are the modern norms of surveillance that may be going unnoticed online, and who benefits?
- Does turning the surveillance on the perpetrator engender positive change or reinforce surveillance as hegemony and/or Truth?
• What are the potentials of hactivism and cyber-anarchy (for example, Anonymous)?

• How has the internet affected activism, particularly in regards to race, class, and gender?

• How has web-based social networking affected the goals and practices of feminism and trans politics?

• How is the human body as political site altered by social networking, including "safe spaces" of reprieve (pro-ana, thinspiration, self-branding)?

• What are the effects of the New Men’s Rights Movement, including pick-up artist, and misogynist communities?

• How does cyberspace reconfigure the problem of alienation and anomie?

• How are new cloud body norms, such as neoteny, kawaii, and cuteness reinforced or subverted through cyber representations, photographic angles, the use of "cutsie" avatars and design, etc.?

• How do male gamer communities reinforce paranoid/neurotic masculinities based around the fear of women (Zoe Quinn, for example)?

• What role do internet White Knights play in the re-creation of traditional norms of masculinity, where women require protection?

• How is the policing and norming of marginalized bodies represented in MMORGs and internet spaces?

• How does the cloud affect our relationship to death, heroism, and significance (cosplay, LARPing)?

Submissions: Please submit a 250 word abstract to foucault.madness@gmail.com by July 31st, 2015.

Please NOTE: The emphasis of this conference, apart from the conference theme and quality scholarship, is the role of mentorship and networking. As such, the panels will consist of a similar theme addressed by three speakers: (1) Professor, (2) Grad Student, and (3) Undergrad.

In the email body, please include your name, institutional affiliation, category for submission (professor, grad student, or undergrad) and email address.
These are some notes in preparation for my participation in [1]this panel next week.

I like the title of the event because it neatly raises something which I've been preoccupied by recently and is a key theme in the final chapter of my long overdue book about academic social media. My sense is that there's been a dramatic change in how social media is received within UK higher education in the space of little more than a few years. I'm less sure about other national contexts but I don't see any reason why this would be restricted to the UK.

My impression is that what was once seen as a waste of time at best, seriously questionable at worse, now finds itself increasingly regarded as a necessary activity for researchers. Whereas once people felt the need to justify their use of social media as a scholarly activity, it's now more likely that they'll feel the need to justify not using social media. In higher education, it's perhaps becoming the case that 'social media is the new black'. At the very least, it
feels like the [2]'coming social media revolution in the academy' which Jessie Daniels and Joe R. Feagin wrote about in 2011 has now arrived.

However I wear multiple hats. When I take off my 'social media geek' hat and put on my 'sociologist' one, it strikes me that that I'm being rather hyperbolic. Of course it 'feels' like the social media revolution is here to me: my working life increasingly revolves around social media in a variety of direct and indirect ways. It doesn't take a network scientist to observe the inevitability that this brings me into contact with many others who are similarly orientated towards social media, intensifying the impression that social media is transforming the very nature of academic life. Could it be possible that we're just ratcheting up expectations amongst ourselves about this 'social media revolution' while the rest of the academy goes on with business as usual?

It’s worth seeing this question in terms of the broader influence of digital technology within academic life. How many people still read paper journals? How many people's first recourse for searching a literature is to physically visit the university library? Could the modern university function without e-mail? These examples are so ubiquitous as to seem trivial but this ubiquity illustrates the extent to which academics are already digital academics, before we even begin to think about social media and how its being used. Given this, it seems unlikely to me that academics en masse were ever likely to be hostile in social media in a sustained way, at least if they perceive clear benefits to themselves from using these tools.

Here are some of the benefits that get cited most frequently:

- Increasing the ease with which you can build meaningful connections with others within your field and discipline
- Increasing your public profile and helping find opportunities for collaborations with people outside of the academy
- Increasing the likelihood that your paper will be read and cited
- Increase your skill at communication with those outside of your specialist area

What bothers me about how these benefits are presented is how what are 'outcomes' increasingly get presented as 'aims'. These are things which can result from engaging with social media as an academic but I think these engagements change in important ways if these are the reasons motivating the engagement. Part of my suspicion also stems from the fact that these potential benefits will meet with the approval of managers within most universities.

In a climate where universities are felt to need to justify their position within a changing society, it's becoming increasingly important for academics to demonstrate the capacity for their research to make an 'impact', even if the precise way this is understood might vary between national contexts and remain contested in most of them. In a competitive academic job market (a term I hate), a greater capacity to 'network' (a term I hate even more) and more people reading and citing your papers will be equally welcomed outcomes, helping increase the profile of research done within a university in an over-crowded intellectual market place.

But it's this over-crowding which is part of the problem. The more people dive into social media with these aims in mind, the louder the whole sphere gets and ever more work is necessary to be heard above the din. The more communication takes place, the more communication is necessary to keep up with it. The more people are promoting their papers through social media, the more work is necessary to try and ensure your papers attain any sort of prominence. If some people are scheduling 20 tweets a day, it creates a natural incentive for someone to schedule 30 in order to try and capture more of the sparse and increasingly fragmented attention span of the target audience. But this in turn creates an incentive for someone else to supersede that. Not necessarily by assessing
what others are doing and deliberately surpassing it but simply by experimenting with what works and acting upon it. There’s a process of escalation at work here, on all channels, which is potentially open-ended.

Much like any other field in which viral marketing becomes the name of the game, it’s easy to find examples of people who’ve succeeded and to seize upon these as exemplars of a radical levelling which is in actuality anything but. People have differing capacities to meet these growing demands and the success of those who can do it contributes to the demands placed upon everyone. This is particularly problematic when we consider that this success might make it easier to accumulate the resources necessary to trade prestige for less administrative duties and thus more time to engage in this activity. Or even to hire someone to do it for you.

The fact managers encourage this stuff simply adds to the problem. If you’re doing it because you feel you have to, it’s unlikely that you’ll enjoy it or really derive all that much from it. I’m really interested in the extent to which people do increasingly feel it’s expected of them to use social media in higher education: any thoughts or experiences you’d like to share about this would be really welcome. My impression is that it’s a pervasive expectation but this is ultimately just an impression. However it’s easy to see why this would become so given:

- how central social media is becoming to debates about impact and public engagement
- the growing frequency with which training is offered in universities, though possible to overestimate this
- the message this implies about the desirability of engagement
- people seeking contributions for things like collective blogs: I love these but it hadn’t occurred to me until recently that the sudden visibility of calls for blog posts might expand the scope of things people feel they should be producing
- universities, departments and research centres seeking contributions for such projects obviously has an additional dimension to it
- stories about career success founded on an online presence: a sense that this stuff is crucial for career opportunities, without anyone being able to specify quite why this is the case, perhaps propped up by a few mythical cases
- the anxiety about not missing out on opportunities which inevitably abounds within an unhealthy job market.

Or to put it another way: if you find yourself at a conference where everybody seems to be ‘live tweeting’ and you have no idea what this is, it’s probably going to create some anxiety in you and perhaps lead you to try it. It might also lead you to reject it entirely and this is a position I increasingly respect and would perhaps like to study.

This is a shame because I think it’s possible to enjoy this stuff a lot. Much of the appeal for me has been about blogging as a form of research notebook: constituting a sort of open-source scholarship in which you develop ideas in the open, accumulating visibility and esteem as a by-product of sharing ideas rather than deliberately seeking to win through additional activities over and above your core duties.

This makes the time commitment a lot easier because in some cases it can make your working more efficient: a trivial example would be the ease with which I can look up fragments of thoughts on my blog compared to the difficulty I had deciphering (or even finding) old notes when I wrote by hand. A less trivial example would be the way in which it helps you see connections based on how you’ve tagged and categorised material, identifying themes in your own work and patterns in your interest through what you recurrently feel moved to blog about and how it is then laid out of the screen.

To me this is an organic way in which social media can be integrated into the ‘research life cycle’. It’s possible to be both effective (in instrumental terms) but also personally enjoyable and intellectually valuable. My fear is that if ‘social media is the new black’, something which everyone is expected to do, it becomes harder to sustain this because instrumental concerns will come to squeeze out the more nebulous joys and satisfactions which can be found at present.

I also think that social media can help short-circuit some of the temporal pressures will lead to incivility or at
least a lack of collegiality within academic life: it’s easy to be helpful on Twitter because what constitutes ‘help’ is often little more than a few hundred characters. It doesn’t quite have the same feel as yet another e-mail to answer or, worse yet, a request that will take up valuable face-to-face time as we go through our days checking items off a to-do list that grows faster than we’re able to clear it. There’s a real promise to social media which I’m increasingly concerned could be lost if it becomes something obligatory rather than optional.


the morning after we all became social media gurus | the theoryblog (2015-09-25 16:06:22)

[…] to give, because…academic service. When what was gauche and time-wasting yesterday is The New Black today, it’s handy to have a vanguard of self-taught experts to teach everybody else how to […]

catherinecronin (2015-09-25 19:17:35)

Delighted to find your post, Mark, as well as your tweets from the #SRHE event today. Many thanks. As you say, we who are active in social media tend to see its ubiquity, but this is a partial view, of course. I’m conducting a research study at the moment, exploring open educational practices in higher education. During Phase 1 of the study, in the past few months I’ve interviewed academic staff at one university – across disciplines, seniority levels, employment status (permanent/temporary, full-time/part-time). Overall, there is a relative lack of participation in social media. Many participants expressed a vaguely uneasy feeling of social media as “Another Thing” to do – and of the pressure they felt to “be doing more” re: social media, to update their various profiles, to maintain their digital identities. All of this is layered onto other concerns around data ownership, corporate agendas, and privacy in general. Very complex. I’ll be sharing some of these early findings and analysis at #dlRN next month (and blogging before that) – will you be there, by any chance? In any case, delighted to see your post and to learn more about your work. Thanks.

Sociological Imagination (2015-09-26 17:53:51)

Hi Catherine, I’d be really interested to find out more. Is this the event? http://linkresearchlab.org/dlrn/ Wish I could attend, it looked great. I have no institutional support for anything not connected to my day job unfortunately though. Will do my best to participate remotely!

catherinecronin (2015-09-26 18:57:17)

That’s it, Mark. The hashtag will be very active and you can also tune in via @virtuallyconnecting - see http://linkresearchlab.org/dlrn2015/virtually-connecting/
The Reality of LinkedIn (2015-06-28 16:38)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/C82sJXfAJeE

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/C82sJXfAJeE](https://www.youtube.com/embed/C82sJXfAJeE)

Podcasts and videocasts from the Social Theory Centre @SocioWarwick (2015-06-28 17:17)

Great to see this being done:

- [2]STC Annual Lecture with Imogen Tyler: Classificatory Struggles: Class, Culture and Inequality in Neoliberal Times (13th May)
- [4]Frantz Fanon: Concerning the Psychoanalysis and Cosmopolitanism of Violence (18th March)
• [8] Evolutionary Sociology: New Paradigm or Old Hat? (22nd January)
• [9] Why So Little, Why So Much?: Change in English Society Since the Time of Defoe (22nd January)
• [10] Are We All 'Post-Racial' Yet? (26th November 2014)

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/archive/stigma/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/2015/
4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/fanonevent/
5. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/clusters/tam/narcissismandmelancholia
6. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/archive/everydaymarketlives/
8. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/archive/wgruncliman/
10. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/centres/socialtheorycentre/archive/areweallpostracialyet/

__________________________

Congrats, you did not cite any feminist work! (2015-06-29 07:44)

HT[1] Sara Ahmed for this interesting Tumblr blog. It only has one entry at present but it seems likely to grow:

[2]

[3] Congrats, you did not cite any feminist work

Many social theorists now call themselves 'relational sociologists', but mean entirely different things by it. The majority endorse a 'flat ontology', dealing exclusively with dyadic relations. Consequently, they cannot explain the context in which relationships occur or their consequences, except as resultants of endless 'transactions'.

This book adopts a different approach which regards 'the relation' itself as an emergent property, with internal causal effects upon its participants and external ones on others. The authors argue that most 'relationists' seem unaware that analytical philosophers, such as Searle, Gilbert and Tuomela, have spent years trying to conceptualize the 'We' as dependent upon shared intentionality.

Donati and Archer change the focus away from 'We thinking' and argue that 'We-ness' derives from subjects' reflexive orientations towards the emergent relational 'goods' and 'evils' they themselves generate. Their approach could be called 'relational realism', though they suggest that realists, too, have failed to explore the 'relational subject'.


2. http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Relational-Subject-Pierpaolo-Donati/dp/1107513952
The aims of the workshop are to engage researchers from both Healthcare and Quantified Self communities to discuss key issues, opportunities and obstacles for personal health data research. These include challenges of capturing, summarizing, presenting and retrieving relevant information from heterogeneous sources to support a new vision of pervasive personal healthcare.

# TOPICS OF INTEREST #

We invite submission of papers reporting relevant research in the area of self-tracking for healthcare. We welcome submissions across a broad scope, addressing any of the following guideline topics but not excluding others, relevant to the workshop goals.

- Personal Health Informatics
- Quantified Self for Healthcare
- Activity Monitors and Devices
- Self-Tracking
- Gamification
- Healthcare Knowledge Representation & Reasoning
- Health Data acquisition, analysis and mining
- Healthcare Information Systems
- Biomedical Signal/Image Analysis
- Validity, reliability, usability, and effectiveness of Self-Tracking devices
- Design of Experiments
- Social and Psychological investigation into Self-Tracking practices
- Health Monitoring in clinical and lifestyle environments
- Sensors and actuators for Wellness, Fitness and Rehabilitation
- Innovative Algorithms for assessment of long-term physiological and behavioural data
- Models for interpreting medical sensor data
- Lifelogging, lifecaching, lifestreaming
- Biometric data
- Medical Self-diagnostics

# PAPER SUBMISSION #

All manuscripts must be written in English and formatted following the IEEE 2-column format. We accept full papers (up to 8 pages) and short papers (up to 4 pages). Papers should be submitted using the online submission system available at: https://wi-lab.com/cyberchair/2015/bibm15/scripts/ws_submit.php
# IMPORTANT DATES #

Full/Short Papers Due: September 10th, 2015  
Notification to Authors: September 30th, 2015  
Camera-Ready: October 17th, 2015  
Workshop: November, 2015 (exact date tbd)

# ORGANIZERS #

Frank Hopfgartner, University of Glasgow, UK  
Na Li, Dublin City University, IE  
Till Plumbaum, TU Berlin, DE  
Heather J. Ruskin, Dublin City University, IE  
Huiru (Jane) Zheng, Ulster University, UK

A single train station makes £439,651.30 a year from their toilets (2015-06-30 07:53)

Thanks to @lucyhbmort for flagging up this fascinating finding. I’d often wondered about this and use the train station in question very frequently. Here’s [1]the source - this might seem like an interesting bit of ephemera but I think it could be argued that this trend quite closely tracks broader socio-economic trends in all sorts of direct and indirect ways.
Dear Mr Hoyle,

Thank you for your request on 13th October 2014. You requested what revenue is generated from the toilets on the main concourse at Manchester Piccadilly station. Although Network Rail won't be covered by the Freedom of Information Act until April 2015, in line with our on-going commitment to transparency, we have dealt with your request as if we were.

I can confirm we hold the information you have requested. In the last year the revenue from these toilets was £439,651.30. It is worth noting that any money generated from toilet turnstiles helps fund the upkeep of these facilities and the running of our stations. Any profits that remain from this are invested into stations and the rail network.

If you have any questions about the handling of your request, please contact us at TEDteam[@]networkrail.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Rooney
Transparency Advisor

1. https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/revenue_from_toilets_on_manchest

6.7 July


The Sociology of the Arts Study Group Presents:

‘UNPACKING ART’

ANALYSING THE SOCIAL CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION OF ART

On Friday 11 September 2015, from 1.30pm-4.30pm
The London College of Fashion, UAL, 272 High Holborn Room 302
In recent years there has been growing sociological interest in the consumption and production of art. This afternoon event launches the BSA Sociology of the Arts Study Group, and in bringing together academics from across the social sciences explores the factors which motivate our consumption of visual arts and asks 'What can the sociology of art and culture learn from other disciplines?'

Registration: £5 BSA Members, £10 Non-BSA Members.
To register please visit: http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10438

Registration will start at 1.30pm. Refreshments will be provided.

The programme:
The afternoon will be divided in to two parts. The first, led by Professor Tak Wing Chan, University of Warwick, focuses on the consumption of the arts and specifically the concept of cultural omnivorousness. Tak Wing Chan questions explanations which center on social mobility and instead stresses the importance of education in increasing individuals' consumption of visual arts.

The second part focuses more closely on the production of art, and involves a panel discussion which brings together academics working outside the discipline of sociology, in the areas of art history, psychology, geography and visual culture. The panel highlights the interdisciplinary nature of research exploring cultural production and consumption and asks, 'What can the sociology of art and culture learn from other disciplines?'

Keynote Speaker: Professor Tak Wing Chan
Professor Tak Wing Chan is Chair of Sociology and Quantitative Methods at Warwick University, and has extensively researched social stratification and consumption of the arts. His paper 'Where do cultural omnivores come from?' uses data from a large-scale and nationally representative UK survey to investigate and critique the association between social mobility and cultural omnivorousness.

Panel Speakers:
Dr. Allan Watson is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography in the Department of Geography at Staffordshire University. His research centres on the economic geographies of the creative and media industries, and the cultural economy of cities, with a particular focus on the music and film industries.
Dr. Richard Clay is Senior Lecture in History of Art at the University of Birmingham. Richard’s research considers aspects of late eighteenth-and-early nineteenth-century French and, to a lesser extent, British visual cultures.
Dr. Rachel Souhami is a museum consultant and exhibition maker. Rachel has over fifteen years of experience working with museums and design companies and has previously taught Museum Studies at Imperial College, London. Rachel advises on vision, strategy and planning for exhibition projects, and encourages creative and innovative approaches to content and design development.
Dr. Victoria Tischler is a Chartered Psychologist whose key interests are art/science collaboration and public engagement activities. Her research focuses on the use of creativity and creative outputs to improve health and well-being in people with mental health problems.
Congrats, you have an all male panel! (2015-07-01 07:27)

[1]Congrats, you have an all male panel!

Documenting all male panels, seminars, events, and various other things featuring all male experts.

Please submit! Preferably photos and screenshots. Or links. Make sure it is an all male thing, if not, please explain how it still may count as one. All male references in academic work are also welcome, please submit full bibliographic details on those.

Add a Hoffsome stamp to your photo before submission at: http://www.hautomohattu.fi/hoffsomerator/

http://allmalepanels.tumblr.com/


Some new developments in #asexualitystudies (2015-07-01 12:02)

I've had a [1]chapter on Asexuality published in this psychology handbook

An interview I did with David Jay has been published in [2]this book.

I've just been sent a review copy of [3]this novel with asexual themes.

Some interesting new sociological papers on asexuality:

[4]You Have to be Normal to be Abnormal: An Empirically Grounded Exploration of the Intersection of Asexuality and Disability

[5]Rethinking asexuality: A Symbolic Interactionist account

[6]Ace of (BDSM) clubs: Building asexual relationships through BDSM practice
The History of New Public Management in UK Universities (2015-07-01 14:56)

This report makes for fascinating (though dry) reading:

he origins of performance management in UK HEIs has been associated in general with the advent of New Public Management (NPM) and, in particular, to the changes proposed by the Jarratt Committee in the management of universities

The NPM movement, which emerged in the 1980s and remains influential today, aims to improve the performance of public

services in terms of their efficiency and their effectiveness. NPM is based on economic rationalism and promotes practices that are typically used in for-profit sector organisations, such as external audits, results-based management, quantitative performance measures, performance targets and individual performance appraisals. NPM defines itself as fundamentally different from old public management characterised by professionalism, self-management, implicit standards and mostly qualitative performance indicators. NPM promotes the view that management and managers are essential and desirable for the appropriate administration of public sector institutions NPM emphasises the idea of accountability and the need for increased transparency and availability of information. The NPM movement has led to an increased focus on performance and performance management at all levels in public services.

In line with the NPM movement, in the mid 1980s a committee of vice-chancellors and principals known as the Jarratt Committee was established to review the efficiency and effectiveness of UK HEIs. The recommendations of this committee introduced significant changes in the management of HEIs. Among other actions, the committee proposed that institutions use performance management practices such as
quantitative performance indicators and staff performance appraisals. It also suggested that HEIs be less
dependent on public funding and more cost conscious when managing their resource.


(HT [2] Academic Irregularities)

2. https://academicirregularities.wordpress.com/about/

A feminist leaves the neoliberal university (2015-07-02 07:38)

A moving and important post by Liz Moorish. I think it’s a response to a colleague’s letter of resignation but I’m not certain:

I was very sorry to read your letter of resignation. I was, though, delighted that you decided to circulate it among colleagues at NeoLiberal U, along with an article, rapidly becoming a classic, if my Twitter feed is any predictor, by Mountz et al in the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective, offering a manifesto for a slower pace of academic life. This is what you have not found at NLU, and you weren’t prepared to go on sacrificing the possibility of intellectual creativity, family life and personal space forever. Sometimes principles have to be lived by, because that’s the right thing to do. NLU doesn’t seem to have any other principle than to ‘maximize the staffing resource and leverage the maximum from the academic contract’ (I paraphrase).

It has been a long time since we sat down and discussed all this. That is just your point, though. In the speeded up university, with its distorted constructions of academic ‘productivity’, schedules are crafted to eliminate the necessary practices of caretaking. In my field of work, this is known as ‘relational practice’, and in its most benign form, it is attributed to women. I haven’t been doing much relational practice recently, and have been contemplating this neglect during a period of sabbatical. There is a tendency at work to hole up in offices, and scurry past colleagues you know to be in need of support. It is emails like yours that make me aware of how many of us inhabit the same private hell of alienation, shame, stress and guilt.
Read it in full [2]here. There are obviously similarities between the ideas discussed here and those addressed in the [3]Accelerated Academy. There are also differences though. One is that we're very interested in exploring the *pleasures of acceleration*: why do people embrace this way of working? What satisfactions can we derive from this? Reading the post by Liz Moorish makes me realise that it’s important we discuss this in gendered terms.

1. [https://academicirregularities.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/a-feminist-leaves-neoliberal-u/](https://academicirregularities.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/a-feminist-leaves-neoliberal-u/)
2. [https://academicirregularities.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/a-feminist-leaves-neoliberal-u/](https://academicirregularities.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/a-feminist-leaves-neoliberal-u/)

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**Independent Scholar Research Fellowship (2015-07-03 06:55)**

A really welcome initiative that funds independent researchers. See [1]here for full details:

> The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) wishes to support independent-minded researchers to do interdisciplinary work which is unlikely to be funded by existing funding bodies. It is interested in original research ideas which take new approaches, and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems.

> The Foundation intends to award on a competitive basis, to candidates of sufficient merit, up to two Independent Scholar Fellowship grants to support original interdisciplinary research, across the range of the social sciences, to be held from a start date no later than the end of December 2016.

1. [http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/grant-competitions/isf3/](http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/grant-competitions/isf3/)
2. [http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/grant-competitions/isf3/](http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/grant-competitions/isf3/)

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CfP: ‘Who are the ruling class and how do they rule?’ (2015-07-03 06:56)

Critique Special Issue, ‘Who are the ruling class and how do they rule?’

Call for Papers

This special issue calls for papers from authors able to address key questions about the global capitalist class.

The material and ideological basis for a global capitalist class to sustain its’ rule are somewhat at odds. On the one hand, capital has never been centralized in so fewer hands. The volume and intensity of capital never more concentrated within a relatively few global political, financial and economic organizations, head-quartered in global cityscapes, such as London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, whose power dwarfs that of the national economies they reside in. On the other hand, the global population has never been so aware they are the ‘99 %’ looking back with a mixture of anger, fear and resentment at the audacious scales of social economic and political inequalities this centralization and concentration of wealth and power brings forth. Indeed, against the backdrop of a concentrated and centralized material basis for rule, the myth of the free market has long been exposed, along with the ideological veneer of ‘globalization’, leaving the capitalist class with a fragile political basis for rule driven by a coherent ideology.

So who are the ruling class and how do they manage to sustain and organize their rule globally? Is the ruling class best understood as finance capital or transnational capital and what relationship does the ruling class, so defined, have with productive capital? Is the global ruling class aware that they are engaged in a global class struggle and if so how does this awareness manifest? How consciously does the ruling class act in administrating the flow of global accumulation and indeed the contours of recession?

Moreover, how has the ruling class maintained control over the inter-national state in order to develop their global interests? What specific mechanisms, institutions and networks have become instruments of the global ruling class to maintaining its rule, politically, materially and ideologically? To what extent are they able to resist sub-global interests and divisions and maintain global unity of purpose? Does the ruling class have a long-term view of its prospects or have collective horizons become myopic, motivated more by small pragmatic advances than grand visions of future longer run accumulation trajectories?

The deadline for submissions is February 30th 2016. The submission of papers and any queries pertaining to this special issue should be addressed to:
Muslims “Quietly condone Terrorism” — a Desperate Lie (2015-07-03 15:33)

by Ghulam Esposito Haydar

While Muslims around the world have been fasting during the holy month of Ramaḍān, both terrorists and politicians alike have continued in their respective destructive crusades which currently show no sign of abating.

Last Friday saw the deadly destruction of a mosque in Kuwait, the decapitation of a man at a gas plant near Grenoble in France and the mass killings at a tourist beach hotel in Sousse, Tunisia. These are the latest atrocities
which have shocked people of faith and no faith to the core. According to statements on Twitter, ISIS has claimed responsibility for the attacks in Tunisia and Kuwait. (It was interesting to note the language used to describe these attacks differed somewhat to the Charleston and Chapel Hill massacres respectively.[1][2]. Both of these crimes Stateside were proven to be driven by a far-right ideology where the perpetrators hate for Black and Muslim citizens led to a devastating terror attack, yet, the term "terrorism" was seldom used nor was there such a public outcry).

How do we stop such atrocities from taking place? Our Prime Minister David Cameron believes it solely boils down to taking on a poisonous ideology. According to the radicalisation hypothesis, it is an extremist interpretation of Islām known as Islamism which is exclusively responsible for terrorism around the world.

Just last week, Cameron addressed an audience in Bratislava where he said:

“The cause is ideological. It is an Islamist extremist ideology: one that says the West is bad and democracy is wrong, that women are inferior and homosexuality is evil. It says religious doctrine trumps the rule of law and Caliphate trumps nation state, and it justifies violence in asserting itself and achieving its aims. The question is: how do people arrive at this world view? I am clear that one of the reasons is that there are people who hold some of these views who don’t go as far as advocating violence, but do buy into some of these prejudices – giving the extreme Islamist narrative weight and telling fellow Muslims ‘you are part of this’. This paves the way for young people to turn simmering prejudice into murderous intent. To go from listening to firebrand preachers online to boarding a plane to Istanbul and travelling onward to join the jihadis. We’ve always had angry young men and women buying into supposedly revolutionary causes. This one is evil, is it contradictory, it is futile but it is particularly potent today. I think part of the reason it’s so potent is that it has been given this credence. So if you’re a troubled boy who is angry at the world or a girl looking for an identity, for something to believe in, and there’s something that is quietly condoned online or perhaps even in parts of your local community then it’s less of a leap to go from a British teenager to an Isil fighter or an Isil wife than it would be for someone who hasn’t been exposed to these things.”[3]

This is not the first time Cameron has taken to foreign lands to address concerns regarding Muslims. Many have found it deeply concerning that Cameron felt the need to address the subject of national security from foreign shores. If he wanted to attack British Muslims by accusing them of “quietly condoning” terrorism, he should have had the decency to do it on British soil rather than in front of a foreign audience of arms dealers at a security conference in Slovakia.

Charles Farr, director general of the Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism (OSCT), commenting on Cameron’s address said there was a “risk” of oversimplification given around 2.7 million Muslims live in Britain but just a few hundred had joined ISIS in the Middle East. The comments contrast with Cameron’s keynote speech on radicalisation where he toughened his rhetoric on the responsibilities Muslim leaders had to stamp out extremism. Speaking at a Jewish News conference on Israel, Farr warned of the dangers of playing up the numbers of Britons who have headed to the Middle East to join ISIS: “It’s not to say the challenges they pose are not significant, they are. But, the more we overstate them the more, frankly, we risk labelling Muslim communities as somehow intrinsically extremist, which actually despite an unprecedented wealth of social media propaganda, they have proved not to be. So I think we need to be cautious with our metaphors and with our numbers.” [4]

Just as David Cameron did with his Munich address in 2011 which paved the way for the “revised” Prevent strategy, [5] his address in Bratislava was simply a precursor to the implementation of the new Counter Terrorism and Security Bill and the intention to draw up a new “Counter Extremism” bill where he and his neoconservative allies are preparing the ground for the government’s next onslaught. The target will not be terrorism, but “non-violent extremism”. The new Counter-Terrorism measures will legally require nursery schools, teachers, health care service professionals and universities to monitor students and patients for any sign of “extremism” or “radicalisation”. The new powers represent a level of embedded state security surveillance in public life unprecedented in modern times. We already know from the government’s Prevent programme the chilling impact of such mass spying on schools,
where Muslim pupils have been reported for speaking out in favour of Palestinian rights or against the role of British troops in Afghanistan. The “counter-extremism” bill announced in the Queen’s Speech [6] is about to take the anti-Muslim clampdown a whole stage further. The plans include banning orders for non-violent individuals and organisations whose politics are considered unacceptable; physical restriction orders for non-violent individuals and groups deemed “harmful”; powers to close mosques; and vetting controls on broadcasters accused of airing extremist material.

In an address on BBC Radio 4, David Cameron called for a “full spectrum” response to the Tunisia attack, crushing the “appalling death-cult of IS in Iraq and Syria but also fighting extremist’s "poisonous narrative" elsewhere in the world: “Frankly, we cannot hide from this thinking if you step back you become less of a target. They are attacking our way of life and what we stand for, and so we have to stand united with those that share our values. We need to recognise that we’re not just fighting terrorism here, we’re also fighting extremism. There are many extremists who fall short of actually condoning terrorism, but they buy into a lot of the narrative of the terrorists [e.g.] they support [belief in a] Caliphate. We have to say in our country, those views while they fall short of condoning terrorism, they’re not acceptable either. We need to do more to help integrate people into our country. There are some organisations and some people. To those people we have got to say, that is not an acceptable view, and we’re not going to engage with people who believe that their ought to be a Caliphate.” [7]

According to the Prevent strategy [8], non-violent extremism consists of a belief system which opposes ‘British Values’ which has been defined as; democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs [8]. This ideology is the precursor to violent extremism and subsequently terrorism. The theory that was engineered in the right ring neoconservative offices of the Henry Jackson Society (formerly known as the Centre for Social Cohesion) and Policy Exchange (who’s founding Chairman was none other than Michael Gove, the former Education Minister at the heart of last year’s false Trojan Horse allegations and now the current Secretary of State for Justice) is known as the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory [10] [11]. The theory has already been challenged by many leading academics and practitioners alike who not only cite the total lack of empirical evidence for this theory, but also provide us with a more comprehensive and holistic alternative which references a plethora of driving factors which often leads to an individual turning to violent extremism and terrorism. Earlier this year, Professor Arun Kundnani published an account on how the rhetoric of radicalisation has created “a decade lost”. [12] In it, Kundnani summarises the flimsy empirical basis on which the connection between radical theology and terrorism has been built and the extent to which the burgeoning radicalisation industry, especially in academia, is linked by a revolving door to conservative political lobbyists keen to blame conservative Islam for terrorism.[13]

For any meaningful discussion on “Islamic Extremism”, the government needed to attain a genuinely nuanced understanding of Islam and the make-up of the many different Muslim communities that reside Britain, but in 2013, the government-proposed measures to tackle “Islamic Extremism” failed to engage in any meaningful way with the plethora of voices within the Muslim community [14]. It failed miserably in defining “Islamic extremism”, conflating it with religious conservatism. The report made Muslims feel like a suspect community, further alienated them and caused a great deal of mistrust in the process. This method of disengagement is likely to backfire and cause many Muslims to become even more disenfranchised, disempowered and resent the government. To the majority, it does seem that the government officials in Whitehall are only keen to listen to the opinions which agree with their ideas about Islam and Muslims. Some of the selected (and funded) think tanks researching the causes and threat of terror were specifically set up as “Counter Terrorism” or “Counter Extremism” to receive government funding in the first place. This alone should raise suspicion since these organisations solely rely on government funding for their continual existence and thus are likely to doctor up or exaggerate their findings in order to a create climate of fear.

It does not come at any surprise that proponents of the ‘Conveyor Belt’ theory, the Quilliam Foundation are happy to support characters who re-enforce their narrative [15]. Earlier last week, the fiery foreign cleric Tahir ul-Qadri who is a self-proclaimed supporter of the blasphemy law in Pakistan launched what he referred to as the first Islamic curriculum on Peace and Counter-Terrorism in the world. During an interview with BBC Radio 4 [16],
he explained the purpose of this curriculum and the target demographic. When asked why many people are being radicalised he responded: “I have heard the Prime Minister’s speech and I agree that some Muslim communities are silently condoning extremism and it opens the door to justify acts of terrorism. This problem of radicalisation has not been tackled properly. The government have been dividing extremism into two different categories; violent extremism and non-violent extremism. By defining extremism into two different categories they have allowed extremism to grow into terrorism. Extremism is extremism, so non-violent extremism will become violent ultimately because it will convert into terrorism. Lessons against extremism should be taught at state schools as part of the curriculum. De-radicalisation and counter-terrorism studies should be taught as subjects. It should be made compulsory for Muslim children and optional for non-Muslim children”.

It is interesting to note that even Charles Farr disagrees with such a simplistic narrative bereft of a wider context. Farr revealed the kinds of people who are drawn to the likes of ISIS often have “personal problems” and can be seeking excitement. He said, “The background of broken families, lack of integration into what we might call mainstream society, some level of criminality, sometimes family conflict, are all more than normally apparent. People join terrorist organisations in this country and in others because they get something out of them beyond merely satisfaction of an ideological commitment. Sometimes it’s about resolution of personal problems, sometimes it’s about certainty in an environment which has deprived them of it, sometimes it’s about excitement and esteem, and we should not omit the last two factors. This is the reality in Syria and Iraq but also many other contexts we’ve worked on over the past five or 10 years.” [4]

Barring the exclusion to mention the role of foreign policy, Farr’s own conclusion is not much different to what the academic researchers, practitioners and activists on the ground have been saying for years. Those behind nearly every violent attack or terror plot have cited western intervention in the Muslim world as their motivation. In reality, it should not be difficult to understand why a small section of young alienated Muslims are attracted to fight in Syria and Iraq with ISIS and to blame it solely on ideology without focussing on the factors which lead to it is being wilfully negligent. After all, the pseudo-jihadi “ideology” has been around for a long time, but there were no terror attacks in Britain before US and British forces invaded Afghanistan and Iraq and nor was there such a pull to travel abroad and fight with some of these groups. The government’s admission that violence is driven by injustices and grievance of its own policies in occupying and destabilising of Muslim states, engaging in and supporting torture and state kidnapping on a global scale, and support for dictatorships across the Arab and Muslim world which contradict the apparent 'British Values' it stands for would be an admission of their role in creating terrorism here at home and abroad.

As the journalist Owen Jones mentioned, a History student would be graded a D- if they simply reduced the rise of Nazism to “evil”. In no way would understanding these factors behind Nazism be regarded as somehow legitimising or apologising for it [17]. A fringe ideology does exist but as responsible human beings, we must not fall into the danger of exaggerating the numbers attracted to it nor should we shy away from the reasons why a small but significant number are becoming increasingly attracted towards it. A whole range of factors are involved in radicalisation. It may be different from one individual to another. As Giles Fraser recently put it, it would be facile to reduce it to one thing or the other but to solely focus on an extremist ideology is about as convincing as arguing that the murderous bits of the Bible were solely responsible for the brutality of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The language of terrorism may borrow its vocabulary from Islamic theology, it’s a useful marker of shared identity, but root motivation is as it always is: politics. [13] In the overwhelming majority of the cases, those who have been persuaded to go and take the law into their own hands by committing acts of terror here in the UK or abroad have not had any real meaningful engagement in the coherent study of Islam. Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practise their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious households, and there is a higher proportion of religious novices who’s lack of Islamic upbringings has made them susceptible to political manipulation coaxed in religious language. MI5 says there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalisation [18]. If terrorism in the name of Islam is really all about politics, then we must acknowledge that the long history of disastrous western interventions in the Middle East is a part of the
cause of the horror that continues to unfold both here in the UK and abroad. We have to face up to our responsibility.

Social and personal factors play a significant role in the pathway to radicalisation. Ideology does need challenging but this only gains traction through grievances. We need services which provide safe places to allow the discussion of grievances without the fear of reporting to Prevent. Under legislation that came into force this week schools are obliged to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". A teacher's position depends on trust as well as respect. Both could be undermined if teachers are transformed into de facto adjuncts of the police. [19]. We must not shut down means for people to implement change using legitimate political avenues and subsequently accuse them of 'entryism' but rather educate and empower young Muslims to use legitimate avenues of British polity to do something meaningful about their current situation. We must explore and find solutions to factors such as social deprivation, inequalities and personal vulnerabilities which increase the likelihood of a person becoming disenfranchised or disillusioned with life in the UK. We must also explore the role of relentless media hostility, rampant Islamophobia, undue state surveillance and harassment of Muslim communities and the evidence of an increasing level of anti-Muslim attacks. Islamophobia now outstrips hostility to any religion or ethnic group in the UK and this cannot be good when it comes to preventing radicalisation. [20]

Notes:

[7] www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02vw70k
[9] www.politics.co.uk/blogs/2015/05/13/theresa-may-s-plans-are-a-threat-to-british-values
[16] www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02vb95h
[18] www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/aug/20/uksecurity.terrorism1

This article is an updated version of one originally published earlier this week on Islam21C.com.

Ghulam Esposito Haydar is a Muslim community activist in Manchester. He is one of the Founding Members of the Myriad Foundation, a voluntary organisation that sets up and runs inter-faith initiatives in a range of areas - blood donation, feeding the homeless, hospice buddy support, and mosque collections distributed to Manchester food banks and shelters. He also volunteers with Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND).
Is the @TimesHigherEd "exam howlers" competition driven by metrics? (2015-07-03 19:18)

In the section of my book on 'effective communication online', I've been writing about the informal space of interaction between academics and students that social media opens up. This is an issue which is only going to become more complex with time and I don't try to offer any rules for negotiating the challenges it poses, apart from perhaps being aware that students might stumble across, or even deliberately seek out, things you post online. It's in these terms that I've found myself writing about the Times Higher Education 'exam howlers' competition:

Due to the annual event's popularity, we have extended the deadline for this year's entries until 12 July at 5pm.

For your chance to be crowned the winner of this competition - which comes with a magnum of champagne - please send examples of hilarious typos, unfortunate spoonerisms and daft misunderstandings to [1]john.elmes@tsleducation.com.

I love the Times Higher Education. I really do. But this is just fucking unpleasant. It obviously raises the question of why they continue to do it every year, in spite of the outcry it provokes. The only answer I can come up with is metrics. I bet this is the most shared content they have on the website each year. What do other people think?
The pseudo-normalisation of flying (2015-07-04 08:12)

Most people I know travel frequently. I realised on an intellectual level that there are various factors which mean my friends, family and acquaintances probably travel more than average. But I didn’t realise quite how much more. This [1]Guardian article cites a government report that makes clear what a small proportion of the UK’s population fly regularly:

[2]Over half the UK population doesn’t fly even once a year. A very small minority flies three or more times per year, just 15% of UK residents, and that group accounts for seven out of 10 of all flights taken.


It’s somewhat jarring to realise that the overwhelming majority of people I know are members of that 15%. It would be interesting to see national comparisons for these figures. Is this stratification a common pattern? Is it even more pronounced elsewhere? It’s frequently argued in the UK that low cost airlines have democratised travel, implying that opposition to low-cost flying represents an elitist attempt to return international travel to the restricted few.
But it looks prima facie like the reduction of costs in flying have led a minority to travel much more frequently, rather than making international travel a regular part of life for the majority.

I was struck recently by the discovery that to travel from the West Midlands to Edinburgh cost less than half the price of a train ticket (£90 to £240 if I recall correctly) and took a quarter of the time. The costs are structured in a way that almost seems as if it was designed to incentivise domestic flying. I’ll reluctantly admit that I’ve flown to Edinburgh twice since then. I dislike the idea of domestic flying but I dislike paying twice the cost of a flight for a ten hour round trip on the train even more. As Andrew Simms points out in [4] that article, aviation is "hugely subsidised and compared to other economic sectors enjoys [5] multibillion-pound tax breaks, from its fuel to its VAT-free tickets and duty-free emporia".

This regulatory environment doesn’t emerge naturally. It’s something that’s sought and brought about through lobbying and campaigning. To what extent has its success been founded on creating an impression that flying has been normalised as a fact of life for the majority of the British population?

5. [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media.afreeride.org/documents/FFL+Modelling+paper.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/media.afreeride.org/documents/FFL+Modelling+paper.pdf)
What does it mean to write with energy? That’s a question [1]Patter addresses on her blog this morning, reflecting on the notion of ‘writing without a parachute’. As she summarises this approach to writing:

1. write what comes up for you – this suggests that you don’t have a plan or prompts and just write what comes into your mind
2. don’t change anything – this suggests you don’t read back what you are writing until you’re actually done. This doesn’t mean you have to write continually, you can stop to consider what is the most interesting, accurate or persuasive way to write something, but you don’t switch gears and go back to ‘fix’ something. You keep going.
3. go where the energy is. This suggests that you write about something that grabs you, that you want to write about.


This is often how I approach blogging. It’s usually astonishingly cathartic to sit and write like this, often finding myself surprised by what I find myself to have written at the end. It’s also energising. It puts me in touch with what I’m interested in. But “what I’m interested in” is not a category that’s immediately accessible to us cognitively. Our cognitive understanding of our interests and our concerns is fallible. It’s often retrospective. We don’t always recognise our enthusiasms and we sometimes misconstrue them when we do. To make time for this ‘writing without a parachute’ could almost be seen as an exercise for grounding our writing in our energy and enthusiasms.
1. http://patthomson.net/2015/07/05/writing-where-the-energy-is/
2. http://patthomson.net/2015/07/05/writing-where-the-energy-is/

This is great, it is something I have tried to write about in my blog in relationship to shame, vulnerability and impression management. My blog is just a way of trying to get sh*t out there without thinking to much.. I talk a bit about flow, play etc in some of the posts https://whatisnottobedone.wordpress.com/2015/02/14/writing-vulnerability-and-shame/

whatisnottobedone (2015-07-05 11:18:37)

Call for papers: Media Representations of ‘antisocial personality disorder’ (2015-07-05 09:07)

Call for papers:

Media Representations of ‘antisocial personality disorder’

Wednesday, 16th September 2015

Bournemouth University (UK)

ESRC Seminar Series: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on ‘antisocial personality disorder’

This day-event is being organised as part of the ESRC sponsored seminar series ‘Cross Disciplinary Perspectives on antisocial personality disorder’ (aspd-incontext.org) and is being run in association with the Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University and the ‘Media and the Inner World’ research network.

We are using ‘Antisocial personality disorder’ as a shorthand for a range of labels used to describe individuals who seem to act in very antisocial ways but who otherwise appear to have a clear understanding of the world. A central thesis of this series is that the kinds of difficulties that are likely to involve the use of labels like ASPD need to be understood within broader historical, cultural and socio-political contexts than many psychological and psychiatric constructs allow.

This event is designed to explore the ways in which the meanings of ASPD have been shaped by the representations of ‘antisocial’ or ‘deviant’ identities in wider culture - in art, literature, film, television and news media. One can find such representations in classic literary depictions of antiheroes like Heathcliff in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights or Camus’s L’étranger. Lionel Shriver’s 2003 novel and later film adaptation, We Need to Talk about Kevin provides a more contemporary example of a portrayal of an antisocial individual that provoked discussion about the gendered dynamics of the family and maternal ambivalence. Cinematic representations of psychological disturbance can be found in the ‘outsider’ despair and destructiveness of Travis Bickle in Taxi Driver (Scorsese, 1976), or in representations of jealous women in films such as Fatal Attraction (Lyne, 1987) or Gone Girl (Fincher, 2014). On TV, the proliferation of forensic detective dramas such as CSI (CBS, 2000) or legal dramas such as Silk (BBC1, 2001), often trouble the boundaries of ASPD and its meanings as a psychological condition. In news media, representations of mental health are also widespread in efforts to understand the subcultural shaping of individuals such as Dylann Roof, Timothy McVeigh, Mohammad Sidique Khan and others committing acts of ‘terror’.

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Whilst such images contribute to the cultural shaping of ASPD, they in turn can have influence on legal and psychiatric debates about the nature of dangerous individuals. As the role of Taxi Driver in the trial of John Hinckley (who attempted to assassinate Ronald Reagan) illustrated, the interaction of media, psychiatry and law can be very direct and can have powerful implications. It is important therefore to explore the ways in which images of ASPD in popular culture also influence the fields of forensic psychotherapy, psychiatry and the law.

We are therefore inviting submissions from people who have an interest in media representations of 'antisocial personality disorder' and their significance to psychiatry and socio-legal contexts.

As this is sponsored by the ESRC we be able to pay modest travel and accommodation costs for speakers.

If you are interested in contributing, please send a 300 word abstract to:

* Dr David W Jones, Reader in Psychosocial Studies, University of East London (d.jones AT uel.ac.uk)

Closing Date: 7th August (we will let people know soon after)
On the assumption that at least some of our readers find Yanis Varoufakis as interesting as I do, here’s some links to autobiographical blog posts explaining the unfolding of his own life:

[1] Early academic path: From England to Australia to Greece  
[3] From personal calamity to restored hope

There's also two autobiographical talks here:
[5]Being Greek and an Economist while Greece burns


4. https://www.youtube.com/embed/A3uNIgDmqwI

st. domestihus (@demesti1) (2015-12-05 00:19:41)
Thank you so much. Yanis, our Yanis

**Job: Race in the Academy (2015-07-06 08:40)**

This seems like an important project:

Please do circulate these details for a Research Officer at the LSE to examine 'Race in the Academy'. This is an exciting qualitative research project that will examine the factors behind the lack of black (African
and Caribbean heritage) staff at the London School of Economics and other universities, and include both staff and PhD students. The project will be based in the Department of Social Psychology and make draw on expertise on the institutionalised racism, identity and agency, as well as other research insights from across the school.

Please see attached documents. Any queries can be directed to Caroline Howarth (c.s.howarth AT lse.ac.uk).

1. mailto:c.s.howarth@lse.ac.uk


by Dr Shamim Miah

Don’t BELIEVE THE HYPE

[1]Don’t, don’t, don’t
Don’t, don’t, don’t
[2]Back, caught you looking for the same thing
It’s a new thing, check out this I bring
[3]Uhh, oh, the roll below the level, cause I’m living low
Next to the bass, [4]turn up the radio
[5]They claiming I’m a criminal
[6]But now I wonder how, some people never know
The enemy could be their friend, guardian
[7]I’m not a hooligan, [8] I rock the party and
[9]Clear all the madness, I’m not a racist.

Public Enemy, [10]Don’t Believe the Hype

The London bombings, 10 years ago this month, radically transformed the education policy framing of Muslim communities in Britain. The events signified a radical shift away from the politics of racial inequality/multiculturalism to racialised politics of securitisation. A clear example of how minority communities are racialised and also criminalised can be seen through the politics associated with the Counter-Terrorism and Securities Act 2015 and its impact on education policy.

Section 26 of the [11]Act places statutory duties for schools (including nursery schools) to exercise ‘due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’. The government’s revised [12]Prevent policy published in 2011, as part of the [13]CONTEST 2 strategy, defines extremism as ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values’, these non-negotiable British values, include ‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs’. In fact, the new [14]guidance issued to schools this week urges schools to play an active role in promoting British values through the school curriculum. It

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also advises school teachers to ‘identify pupils who may be at risk to radicalisation’ and also demands schools to build pupil resilience to radicalisation by promoting ‘fundamental British values’.

In case schools are reluctant to comply with the duty then the Prevent Oversight Board has the ‘power of direction’ through the Secretary of State (see section 30 of the Act) to ensure schools do comply with this section of the legislation. More crucially, Ofsted conscious schools may well draw the conclusion that ‘resistance is futile’ particularly given that promoting fundamental British values and ‘approach to keeping pupils safe from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism’ are key features of the Ofsted inspection criteria (see [15]Ofsted Inspection Handbook). Possible signs of extremism within schools will inevitably fall under the one of the following tropes; this is clear from a close reading of the documentations published in light of the ‘Trojan Horse’ saga and also the subsequent interviews given by leading political actors including David Cameron, Theresa May and more recently the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan:

• Racialised sexual politics: A recurring theme within policy discourse revolves around the notion that Muslims are essentially homophobic and sexist. For example, in a recent interview to the BBC’s Today programme Ms Morgan described how intolerance towards homosexuality could be seen as an example of extremism (readers note that Ms Morgan, a [16]Christian voted against gay marriage). Moreover, anyone reading The [17]School Report by Stonewall will quickly realise that Muslims do not have sole monopoly over homophobic bullying in schools.

• Self-segregation: Claims of Muslims' self-segregation can either take the form of spatial or cultural segregation. This is one of the key features arising from the Trojan Horse discourse; Ofsted Inspectors and the investigations into the Trojan Horse letter by [18]Ian Kershaw and [19]Peter Clarke had a tendency to conflate segregation or self-segregation with extremism.

• Muslim Ummah and the question of loyalty: Global political events around Palestine, Syria and Iraq have had a profound impact on Muslim youths. Questioning of British foreign policy could be translated into giving loyalty towards the Muslim Ummah over the nation state.

What are the implications for the sociology of schooling for minority groups in general and Muslim communities in particular? What implications will this have on the racialised politics of schools for Muslim pupils? More crucially, does this fundamentally change the nature of schooling to what Michael J. [20]Dumas as described as schooling as ‘spaces of Black suffering’.

Firstly, Muslim pupils are no longer individuals with their own autonomy; they are problems that need addressing. Thus conventional debates around educational underachievement, discourses around racial inequality or anti-Muslim racism are all disregarded for broader security concerns. In short, the racialised politics of securitisation incorporates the idea of post-race; that is to say that race is no longer the salient excluding marker that it once was and the continuing racial practices of the state which impact upon racial experiences of minority groups.

Second, it is clear that the Muslim problematic embodied by the image of Dangerous Brown Men (see [21]Gargi Bhattacharyya) is constructed within policy discourse. Thus policy formation is no longer based upon evidence or rational thought but rather as David [22]Gillborn has shown from the following statement by Paul Flynn, member of the Public Administration Select Committee, that ‘much of our policy making is evidence free, prejudice driven and hysteria driven (particularly hysteria generated by the press). A crucial point to note is that ‘extremism’, as defined in the above policy discourses, is often projected onto Muslim bodies and rarely projected from Muslim bodies.

Third, the logic which permeates the current hysteria around Muslims as the existential security threat follows a particular thought pattern, that is, there is a ubiquitous security threat and something exceptional has to be done
about this threat. In the spirit of the moral panic, parameters for these debates around security are so narrowly defined to limit any critical discourse - so that criticism of fundamental British values leads to one being defined as an extremist.

Finally, the debates around Prevent in schools 'marks' Muslims in class as the racialised 'other' a group that is de-humanised and stigmatised; ironically who's de-humanisation and stigmatisation is silenced. The implications of such policy can best understood against a back-drop of the following observation by Judith [23]Butler:

> When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all.

Dr Shamim Miah is a Senior Lecturer at University of Huddersfield. He is the author of *Muslims, Schooling and the Question of Self-Segregation* (Palgrave).

10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vQAoEI0Ej0
21. http://zedbooks.co.uk/node/21471
This group is designed as an academic research community for students, scholars and practitioners with an interest in questions of nostalgia and the media. We hope to offer a space fostering discussion and collaboration across fields, disciplines and research contexts. We welcome open debate, inputs, suggestions, or any kind of helpful advice on our members' projects, as well as links to research-related publications, call for papers, conferences, workshops and events.

[1]https://www.facebook.com/groups/researchnostalgia/126246717710078/?notif_t=group_activity

1. https://www.facebook.com/groups/researchnostalgia/126246717710078/?notif_t=group_activity
Call for Papers

The first Sociology Graduate Conference at the University of Leicester will gather masters and PhD students to explore the implications of emerging information and communications technology. The conference is a platform to encourage discussion about the changes that digitalization has brought to the social worlds and new social phenomena. We seek both theoretical and empirical contributions on the status, limitations and problems that social methods – both qualitative and quantitative - currently encounter, as well as the new lines of inquiry that have been opened up because of digital methodological innovations.

Participants will explore the role of social science at a time where citizens, companies and governments are continuously generating, sharing and processing data. Researchers now face challenges to data access, analysis, and dissemination that raise ethical issues related to copyright, data protection, privacy and surveillance. For instance, knowledge dissemination is vital to the advancement of social methods, even creating new links between social researchers and actors, yet it also requires far-reaching revisions to our ethical procedures. We encourage graduate students to present case studies on these topics, and also to show how they deal with these questions in their own research, and to discuss the solutions they reached.

The interest that ICTs have generated in social sciences might render other social processes invisible, which are equally worthy of study, for example social inequality or the role of vulnerable subjects in transnational capitalism. And although offline activity has a long research history in the social sciences, with the use of valid and reliable methods, the appearance of an 'online' sphere has created new implications for carrying out studies into both spheres. In this regard, we welcome contributions illuminating these social processes that either are difficult to study with digital methodologies or require the collaboration between "old" and "new" methods. The conference will deal with the challenges, risks and new possibilities that the digital turn brings for methodologies in social sciences, but also will revise the mere notion of "traditional methods".

The conference will bring together postgraduate researchers from social sciences and humanities engaged in the interdisciplinary studies related to ICTs. The event will give them the opportunity to exchange views about their area of research. Suggestions for presentations topics include, but are not limited to:
digital social research and its implications
understanding Big Data
researching social media and the issues it raises
online identity and risk
social media and social change
people’s relationships with digital media
online activist communities and civic media activism
surveillance, privacy and conflict in the digital public sphere
media, culture and gender
web user experience
open knowledge and data sharing

Please send your abstract proposal (300 words) and a brief biographical note in a Word document to conferencepgsoc AT leicester.ac.uk

**********The deadline for applications is 5 pm on Monday 31st July**********

Conference registration:

Delegate rate £10 (conference fee includes refreshments, lunch and printed materials)

Registration will open on the 1st of August

Website: https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/sociology/research/conferences-and-workshops/s/sociology-postgraduate-conference

The Happy Forecast and the quantification of emotion (2015-07-08 09:46)

A new project has just been launched which aims at quantifying and comparing the happiness of different areas of London. The Happy Forecast purports to offer an answer to the question "Which areas of London are best for social wellbeing?" On the website an interactive 3D map of London can be explored down to the level of the postcode.

[1]
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At the postcode level a “Happiness Outlook” is given based on:

“over a year of observational social wellbeing research” as well as giving a sense of the “current mood” based on analysis of tweets in the area

The main ranking is based on a "Jen ratio" which is:

"...calculated by the total number of positive micro-interactions over the total number of negative that strangers share during a given period of time, in a given place. Body language, verbal interaction and acts of kindness or aggression were key categories assessed during observation"
The concept of jen is derived from Confucian thought but is definitely twenty-first century in its formulation and the principle behind it can be summarised in the words of its key proponent, [7]Dacher Keltner, as[8] "a simple fraction [which] can tell us whether or not we're truly happy".

Jen is derived from observations of emotions that "transpire between people" such as "compassion, gratitude, awe, embarrassment, and amusement". In order to analyse this it examines "new human languages" like "movements of muscles in the face that signal devotion, patterns of touch that signal appreciation [and] playful tones of the voice that transform conflicts" as well as drawing on aspects of neuroscience which purportedly signal trust, forgiveness, etc (Keltner, 2009). A jen ratio is calculated like this:

"The jen ratio is a lens onto the balance of good and bad in your life. In the denominator of the jen ratio place recent actions in which someone has brought the bad in others to completion—the aggressive driver who flips you off as he roars past, the disdainful diner in a pricey restaurant who sneers at less well-heeled passersby. Above this, in the numerator of the ratio, tally up the actions that bring the good in others to completion—a kind hand on your back in a crowded subway car, the young child who compliments the elderly woman on her bathing suit as she nervously dips her toe in a swimming pool, the woman who laughs as a stranger accidentally steps on her foot. As the value of your jen ratio rises, so too does the humanity of your world."

(Keltner, 2009)

I am not quite sure what to make of this on broad terms yet (and would really like to hear from anyone who has any better formed ideas) but it is an interesting mix of ideas which seems to represent a kind of micro utilitarianism aimed at maximizing the quotient of happiness in a particular situation.

Having just heard many deconstructions of the faith we are encouraged to place in data at a recent conference the use of quantified measures and ratios to "tell us whether or not we're truly happy" strikes me as being part of this fetishisation of big data.

Keltner discusses how the "science" of jen seeks to understand the things which help to "bring the good in others to completion" through performing acts of kindness, it also positions trust as central to this. But he and his fellow researchers at the "[9]Greater Good Science Centre" at the University of California, Berkeley seek to understand these social actions through a Darwinian microbiological approach. They look at the individual neurological transmissions and individual actions such as "a kind hand on your back".

The assumption of this approach seems to be that we can be happy (or unhappy) and not know it and that our happiness lies in aspects of our behaviour and environment rather than our feelings. This reflects a mistrust in people as speaking subjects. For me one of the great strengths of sociology is that it is dialogical, it engages with the voices of people. The jen ratio has similarities with "big data" approaches which seek to simply let the data "speak for itself". With fundamentally human and social phenomena such as happiness might it be better to encourage people to speak for themselves?

A few years ago Zygmunt Bauman (2011) warned that sociology has been compliant in producing their subjects (human beings) as objects by rendering people mute in order to understand them sociologically. He asserted the importance of placing the supposedly ‘inferior ‘conscious motives’ of actors on a level with the superior
renderings of their intentions by their scientific analysts' (Bauman, 2011: 165). In his analysis of the measurement of happiness [10]Will Davies has pointed out that people are coming to be seen as 'unreliable narrators of their own lives' and that 'We need to accept that people often have reasons to feel happy or unhappy, and that those reasons are as important as the feelings themselves' Bauman warned that sociology must must be engaged as a dialogic, or polylogic, discipline this might well mean resisting the kinds of investigation seen in the Happy Forecast despite their enticing immediacy and broad sweep.


3. https://medium.com/@weareclubhouse/the-happy-forecast-3199e9a5b05a
6. https://medium.com/@weareclubhouse/the-happy-forecast-3199e9a5b05a
7. http://psychology.berkeley.edu/people/dacher-keltner

kerrysmallman (2015-07-08 10:39:09)
I work at a new research centre at Oxford, The Dalai Lama Centre For Compassion. http://compassionoxford.com. We share a lot of common ground with the guys in Berkeley. Centres/research units which research things like positive psychology and emotions face an uphill struggle because scientific materialism and reductionism is the orthodoxy not only in Universities, but also in the media and popular imagination. If we are to get column inches in newspapers or have an impact, say in policy formulation, we must create a 'metric' for compassion/happiness/empathy etc. Of course, we all know that any metric we devised would be 90% bullshit. The trouble is that the Social Sciences and Humanities have singularly failed to take on board ideas such as subjectivity, consciousness, quantum indeterminacy, Holistic thinking and all those other ways of understanding which break the 19th Century materialist paradigm. They have failed to take them on board because they would lose all credibility in Universities and journals as they currently are. The happiness index you mentioned is an example of what happens when Sociology insists on trying to be a "science". I am firmly of the opinion that the current scientific paradigm is in desperate need of reform in order to take on board the lessons of the 20th century physicists and that once this paradigm shift finally happens, we will have far better ways of describing and explaining psychology and emotion. The men in white coats who are the current gatekeepers of what is deemed appropriate for journals, university courses, television shows, healthcare, warfare and everything else will have to relinquish their power first. Until then, we are stuck with lame behaviourist attempts at explaining human reality from the outside in instead of the other way around.

kerrysmallman (2015-07-08 10:48:24)
For a taster of what lies beyond the current scientific paradigm, this video is a good start: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjYQUmNtwt0

Chris Till (2015-07-08 12:26:30)
Many thanks for your comment, Kerry. Really interesting points. I might be confused but you suggest that the jen ratio I
discussed in the post is the result of sociology trying to be a science. As far as I am aware it was not developed by sociologists or directly incorporated any sociological ideas. It was developed by Keltner and colleagues at the "Greater Good Science Center" at Berkeley who (as far as I can tell) do try to incorporate some of the ideas you have discussed. Again, I may not have completely grasped your point but I don’t agree that the social sciences and humanities have not drawn on concepts such as subjectivity and consciousness (I will concede your points on quantum indeterminacy and holistic thinking as I do not know what these are). Subjectivity is a central aspect of sociological inquiry although of course this is tackled in a different way to how it is in philosophy. There are journals dedicated to it, it is pivotal in the founding texts of the discipline (eg. Weber) and most undergraduate students would encounter Merlau-Ponty amongst others. The video you linked to was great but I think supported the point I made in the post. As Stephen Priest stated in the lecture subjective experience has been devalued in favour of the God’s eye view of science. I argued above that we should listen to the subjective experiences of people rather than imposing an abstractly defined quantitative measure onto them.

PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent (2015-07-10 20:09)

[2]The Independent carries a letter from academics collectively critiquing (the already many times discredited) Prevent strategy which has now become a statutory duty directly affecting places of education.

"In an unprecedented intervention, 280 academics, lawyers and public figures claim the controversial law will make Britain less safe as it will force radical political discussion underground.

[3]Among the leading academics who want the Government to rethink the strategy are Karen Armstrong, one of the country’s most prominent writers on religion, as well as Baroness Ruth Lister, emeritus professor of social policy at Loughborough University and Dr Brian Klug, senior research fellow in philosophy at St Benet’s Hall, Oxford."

We, the undersigned, take issue with the government’s Prevent strategy and its statutory implementation through the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 for the following reasons:
1. The latest addition to the United Kingdom’s counter-terrorism framework comes in the form of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTS Act). The CTS Act has placed PREVENT on a statutory footing for public bodies to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism by tackling what is claimed to be ‘extremist ideology’. In practice, this will mean that individuals working within statutory organisations must report individuals suspected of being ‘potential terrorists’ to external bodies for ‘de-radicalisation’.

2. The way that PREVENT conceptualises ‘radicalisation’ and ‘extremism’ is based on the unsubstantiated view that religious ideology is the primary driving factor for terrorism. Academic research suggests that social, economic and political factors, as well as social exclusion, play a more central role in driving political violence than ideology. Indeed, ideology only becomes appealing when social, economic and political grievances give it legitimacy. Therefore, addressing these issues would lessen the appeal of ideology.

3. However, PREVENT remains fixated on ideology as the primary driver of terrorism. Inevitably, this has meant a focus on religious interaction and Islamic symbolism to assess radicalisation. For example, growing a beard, wearing a hijab or mixing with those who believe Islam has a comprehensive political philosophy are key markers used to identify ‘potential’ terrorism. This serves to reinforce a prejudicial worldview that perceives Islam to be a retrograde and oppressive religion that threatens the West. PREVENT reinforces an ‘us’ and ‘them’ view of the world, divides communities, and sows mistrust of Muslims.

4. While much of the PREVENT policy is aimed at those suspected of ‘Islamist extremism’ and far-right activity, there is genuine concern that other groups will also be affected by such policies, such as anti-austerity and environmental campaigners – largely those engaged in political dissent.

5. Without due reconsideration of PREVENT’s poor reputation, the police and government have attempted to give the programme a veneer of legitimacy by expressing it in the language of ‘safeguarding’. Not only does this depoliticise the issue of radicalisation, it shifts attention away from grievances that drive individuals towards an ideology that legitimises political violence.

6. PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent. It will create an environment in which political change can no longer be discussed openly, and will withdraw to unsupervised spaces. Therefore, PREVENT will make us less safe.

7. We believe that PREVENT has failed not only as a strategy but also the very communities it seeks to protect. Instead of blindly attempting to strengthen this project, we call on the government to end its ineffective PREVENT policy and rather adopt an approach that is based on dialogue and openness.

Signatures
Signing with institution name is for identification purposes and not for institutional endorsement.

Prof. Baroness Ruth Lister Loughborough University and House of Lords
Karen Armstrong OBE Author and Historian of Religion
Prof. Paddy Hillyard Queen’s University, Belfast
Prof. Tariq Ramadan University of Oxford
Prof. Humayun Ansari Royal Holloway University
Prof. David Miller University of Bath
Prof. John L Esposito Georgetown University
Prof. Laleh Khalili School of Oriental and African Studies
Prof. Arun Kundnani New York University
Prof. Augustine John University College London Institute of Education
Prof. Gargi Bhattacharyya University of East London
Prof. Tariq Modood University of Bristol
Prof. Robert Gleave University of Exeter
Prof. Bill Bowring Birkbeck College
Prof. John Holmwood University of Nottingham
Prof. Richard Jackson University of Otago
Prof. Gurminder Bhambra University of Warwick
Prof. Marie Breen-Smyth University of Surrey
Prof. Richard Tapper School of Oriental and African Studies
Prof. Urfan Khaliq Cardiff University
Prof. Julian Petley Brunel University
Prof. David Boucher Cardiff University
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Prof. Bob Brecher University of Brighton
Prof. Ian Stronach Liverpool Hope University
Prof. Debbie Epstein University of Roehampton
Prof. Jeremy Keenan School of Oriental and African Studies
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Prof. Adam Gearey Birkbeck College

Prof. Hilary Povey Sheffield Hallam University

Prof. Peter Hallward Kingston University

Prof. Basia Spalek University of Derby

Prof. John O Voll Georgetown University

Dr Tarak Barkawi London School of Economics and Political Science

Abdoolkarim Vakil King's College London

Asim Qureshi CAGE

Dr Lucy Delap University of Cambridge

Dr Jim Wolreys King's College London

Dr Rizwaan Sabir Edge Hill University

Dr Katy Sian University of Manchester

Dr Salman Sayyid University of Leeds

Dr Anna Bull King's College London

Yahya Birt University of Leeds

Dr Sadek Hamid Liverpool Hope University

Dr Kalpana Wilson London School of Economics and Political Science

Dr Fauzia Ahmad University of Bristol

Bill Bolloten Teacher and education consultant

Dr Nisha Kapoor University of York

Dr Sarmin Hossain Brunel University

Dr Charlotte Heath-Kelly University of Warwick

Dr Narzanin Massoumi University of Bath

Dr Tom Mills University of Sussex

Dr Vian Bakir Bangor University
Dr Fahid Qurashi Canterbury Christ Church University
Dr Chris Allen University of Birmingham
Dr Katherine E Brown King’s College London
Dr Qasim Rafiq Aston University
Dr Waqas Tufail Leeds Beckett University
Dr. Féilim Ó hAdhmaill University College Cork
Dr Piers Robinson University of Manchester
Dr Erica Wald Goldsmith’s College, University of London
Dr Paul-Francois Tremlett The Open University
Dr Kasia Narkowicz University of York
Dr Samia Bano School of Oriental and African Studies
Dr Rania Hafez University of Greenwich
Dr Naveed Syed University of Birmingham
Dr Justin Cruickshank University of Birmingham
Dr Emma Briant University of Sheffield
Dr John Smyth University of Huddersfield
Dr Heather Mendick Brunel University
Dr Karima Laachir School of Oriental and African Studies
Dr Nasima Hassan University of East London
Dr Mark Carrigan Centre for Social Ontology
Dr Peter Kennedy Glasgow School of Business for Society
Dr Carl Morris University of Central Lancashire
Dr Haitham al-Haddad The Fatwa Council of Europe
Dr Ian Patel Independent researcher
Dr Uthman Lateef Stoke Poges Masjid and Islamic Centre
3800
Dr Virinder S Kalra University of Manchester
Dr Christopher Baker-Beall Nottingham Trent University
Dr Nadya Ali University of Reading
Dr Malcolm MacLean University of Gloucestershire
Dr Teodora Todorova University of Nottingham
Dr Julian Wells Kingston University
Dr Sinéad Ring University of Kent
Dr Robin Dunford University of Brighton
Dr Patricia McManus University of Brighton
Dr Reza Pankhurst Author and academic
Dr Sarah Keenan Birkbeck College
Dr Nadine El-Enany Birkbeck College
Dr Samuel Solomon University of Sussex
Dr Emily Wykes University of Nottingham
Dr Sarah Ilott Teesside University
Dr Anna Ball Nottingham Trent University
Dr Ziba Mir-Hosseini School of Oriental and African Studies
Dr Louise Purbrick University of Brighton
Dr Muhammad G Khan Ruskin College, Oxford
Dr Iona Heath Former President of the Royal College of General Practitioners
Dr Hameed Al-Ameen Cardiff University
Dr Jane Essex Brunel University
Dr Adi Kuntsman Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr Jan Dobbernack University of Lincoln
Dr Julia Welland University of Warwick
3802
Dr Chris Zebrowski Loughborough University
Dr Laura Zahra McDonald Connect Justice
Dr Mohammed S Seddon British Muslim Heritage Centre
Dr Muzammil Quraishi University of Salford
Dr William Jackson Liverpool John Moores University
Dr John Smith Kingston University
Dr Robert Jeffrey Sheffield Hallam University
Dr Daniel Nilsson DeHanas King’s College London
Dr Nina Power University of Roehampton
Dr Elena Loizidou Birkbeck College
Dr Christopher Horrocks Kingston University
Dr Atsuko Ichijo Kingston University
Dr Amna Afreen Harvard University
Dr Sarah Marusek Independent researcher
Dr Aren Aizura University of Minnesota
Dr Ramon Grosfoguel University of California, Berkeley
Dr Lubica Ucnik Murdoch University
Dr Sue Ashford Murdoch University
Dr Thomas Gregory University of Aukland
Anisa Mustafa University of Nottingham
Milly Williamson Brunel University
Fatima Rajina School of Oriental and African Studies
Ali R Chaudhary University of Oxford
Liam McCann University of Lincoln
Layli Uddin Royal Holloway
Christopher Olley King’s College London
Randy Banks University of Essex
Jimi Cullen University of Oxford
Liz Morrish Nottingham Trent University
Raza Kazim Middlesex University
Atif Jaleel Middlesex University
David Orr University of Central Lancashire
Colin Creighton University of Hull
Amanda Latimer Kingston University
Lisa Tilley University of Warwick
Fleeta J Chew Siegel Kingston University
Jonathan Chu Kingston University
Samuel Barry University of Manchester
Alejandro Forero Cuéllar University of Barcelona
Julie Ward Member of European Parliament for North West England
Simon Barrow Ekklesia Think Tank
Shaykh Abdalhaqq Bewley The Muslim Faculty of Advanced Studies
Hajj Uthman Morrison The Muslim Faculty of Advanced Studies
Salma Yaqoob Stop the War – Birmingham
Shaykh Zahir Mahmood Al-Suffa
Shaykh Abdassamad Clarke The Muslim Faculty of Advanced Studies
Shaykh Shams ad Duha Ebrahim Community College
Arzu Merali Islamic Human Rights Commission
Vajahat Sharif Tuckers Solicitors
Saghir Hussain HMA Solicitors
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Sufyan Ismail Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)
Azad Ali Muslim Safety Forum
Ismail Patel Friends of Al Aqsa
Imam Shakeel Begg Lewisham Islamic Centre
Mohammed Kozbar Finsbury Park Mosque
Sheraz Ahmed Waltham Forest Council of Mosques
Usman Qureshi Norbury Muslim Centre
Anjum Anwar Women’s Voice
Tafazal Mohammad Muslim Youth Skills
Ananya Rao-Middleton Independent researcher
Gillian Klein Race Equality Teaching
Martin Spafford Retired History teacher
Catherine Duxbury Colchester Institute
Baljeet Singh Gill Ruskin College, Oxford
Tait Coles Dixons City Academy, Bradford
Ali Mahmood Marple Hall School
Fraz Farhat Newham Collegiate Sixth Form Centre
Matthew Vince Religious education teacher, Torbay
Kate Begley Retired-former teacher
Robin Richardson Insted Consultancy
Sadia Habib Goldsmith’s College, University of London
Hafsah Aneela Bashir University of Leeds
Hilary Aked University of Bath
Christina Pantazis University of Bristol
Ellie Cameron-Smith University of Sussex
Colm McQueen University of Sussex
Abida Malik University of Nottingham
Lewis Hendon-John Brighton and Sussex Medical School
Ibtihal Ramadan Moray House School of Education
Rana Jawad University of Bath
Thomas Martin University of Sussex
Caomhe Mader McGuinness Queen Mary University
Sitara Akram University of Leeds
Pallavi Mittra University of Strathclyde
Miranda Iossifidis Goldsmiths University
Azeezat Johnson University of Sheffield
Katherine Jenkins University of Sheffield
Nat Raha University of Sussex
Tasnim Alahdal University of Leeds
Gwyneth Lonergan University of Manchester
Ajmal Hussain Aston University
Dinah Rahman Imperial College London
Rob Ferguson National Union of Teachers, Newham
Mike Searby University and College Union, Kingston
Bahar Mustafa Goldsmith’s Students’ Union
Areeb Ullah National Union of Students NEC
Samayya Afzal National Union of Students NEC
Fran Cowling National Union of Students NEC
Simon Englert National Union of Students NEC
Shabina Raja National Union of Students NEC
3806
Beth Redmond National Union of Students NEC
Haaris Ahmed National Union of Students NEC
Barnaby Raine National Union of Students NEC
Sahaya James National Union of Students NEC
Sabrin Adam National Union of Students NEC
Hannah Webb National Union of Students NEC
Shelly Asquith National Union of Students Welfare
Sorana Vieru National Union of Students Higher Education
Noorulann Shahid National Union of Students LGBT Committee
Susuana Amoah National Union of Students Women’s Officer
Malia Bouattia National Black Students’ Campaign
Shabina Raja National Black Students’ Campaign NEC
Annie Teriba National Black Students’ Campaign NEC
Yusuf Hassan Federation of Student Islamic Societies
Mariya Hussain King’s College London Student Union
Nadine Almanasfi King’s College London Student Union
Rachel Williams King’s College London Student Union
Shruti Iyer King’s College London Feminist Society
Joe Simpson King’s College London Student Union
Ali Milani Brunel Students’ Union
Ayesha Fekaiki LSE Students’ Union
Mahamid Ahmed LSE Students’ Union
Nona Buckley Irvine LSE Students’ Union
Hassun El-Zaffar Sheffield Hallam Students’ Union
Sayed Alkadiiri Middlesex Students’ Union
Robiu Salisu Swansea Students' Union
Hannah McCarthy University of Manchester Students' Union Campaigns
Harriet Pugh University of Manchester Students' Union Community
Naa Acquah University of Manchester Students’ Union
Hannah Sketchley National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts NC
Aaron Kieley Student Assembly Against Austerity NC
Natasha Brooks University of Manchester Students’ Union
Ayo Akinrele Liverpool Hope University Students’ Union Welfare
Jim Hirsch University of Westminster Students’ Union
Salsabil Sila University of Westminster Students’ Union
Lucy Hallam University of Manchester Students’ Union Wellbeing
John Grayson South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group
Amirah Mohamud University of East London Students’ Union
Tom Phipps Bristol Students’ Union
Mohamed Zain Dadas School of Oriental and African Studies Events
Tasmia Salim University of Central Lancashire Students’ Union
Kavita Bhanot Writer
Hodan Yusuf Journalist
Sheena Sumaria Documentary filmmaker
Clare Sambrook Journalist
Batur Talu Independent researcher on social science
Hamja Ahsan Activist
Rachel Harger Defend the Right to Protest
Hannah Dee Defend the Right to Protest

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

I Confess:
An Anthology of Original Essays on Constructing the Sexual Self in Contemporary Moving Image Art, Media and Culture (title-in-progress)

edited by Thomas Waugh and Brandon Arroyo, Concordia University

A twenty-chapter collection of essays on confessionality (self-referencing, first-person and/or autobiographical stories, testimonies or performances) around sexual identity, desire and practices in moving image media over the last quarter-century, principally in the Global North.

The Sexual Revolution of the postwar era was built on a foundation of confessionality. The recorded stories and practices of sexual subjects, a societal spectrum of voices including hitherto silenced sexual, gender and racial minorities, radically transformed the nature of cinema, television and the emerging moving image art scene. They also helped turn scattered individuals on the fringes of society into communities and a new cultural force. However, with the loss of many of those voices to the AIDS crisis, and the ideological destruction of collective empowerment in favour of individual accomplishment during the Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney regimes of the 1980s, one might have thought that the revolution had slowed down. But in fact the ever-expanding porn industry, in dialogical relation with the inextinguishable and continuous sex/porn wars, maintained the revolution’s critical mass. And the digital revolution underway in earnest in the 1990s kickstarted new energies and aftershocks in the sexual revolution, leading to galactic techno-cultural economies of sexual representation that pioneers from Kinsey and Hefner to Fred Halsted and Barbara Hammer had never dreamed of. These 21st-century sexual-cultural economies clearly corroborate and extend Foucault’s prophetic probings into the interwoven operations of confession, desire, identity, truth and power, but how, why and to what effect?

At the centre of the second (third?) sexual cultural revolution has been an extraordinary, paradigm-shifting proliferation of first-person voices and imagery within moving-image formats in both high and low culture, inflected by subaltern and identity political movements as well as hegemonic backlashes, incorporating both traditional and new media and platforms. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of millennial confessionality is the way it exists within the in-between spaces and across inherited boundaries of the culture. For example, porn world confessionality offers new ethnographies of porn performers and sex workers. And porn confessionality’s soft core nature has allowed it bleed into G-rated social platforms like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Political contradictions are rife: while
confession can be a cornerstone of sexual revolution, the first-person discourses of sexual diversity can also help enforce sexual conformity, and get mired in sexual political correctness, advocate assimilation (in the marriage- and military-consumed gay community), instil fear (as in the false rape "confession" at the University of Virginia), and confirm racial stereotypes (Osama Bin Laden's porn collection which is "too perverted" to release to the public, and The Maury Show's showcase of African-American confessions of sexual irresponsibility). Such contradictions and panics within popular culture stretch across the entire landscape of moving image culture that is the focus of I Confess.

Our book will survey the cornucopia of shifts in sexual voices, stories and iconographies within moving-image culture since the 1990s. Few studies in moving-image visual culture have moved beyond the traditional cloisters and boundaries of cultural analysis. Few have captured within the same analytic scrutiny both licit and illicit, documentary and fiction, queer and straight, subversive and hegemonic, text and flow, trauma and jouissance, north and south, surveillance and empowerment, narcissism and community. I Confess will fill this gap.

Historical and cultural scope: The collection will scan approximately the last quarter-century. While we are focusing on Euro-American culture and the Global North, inflected as in Foucault by the heritage of Judaeo-Christian confessionality and scientia sexualis, we hope the volume will encompass at least as control studies other cultural contexts, notably East Asian and South Asian. Our period is of course the age of the internet, and even those essays addressing localized or non-digital moving image culture in traditional platforms and venues, from the film festival to the art gallery, will situate their object in relation to the ineradicable presence of the net.

Methodologies: While the collection will profit from an eclecticism and interdisciplinarity suitable to our topic, our favoured methodologies include textual analysis—as applied of course to the always evolving platforms of the sexual mediascape—rigorously anchored both theoretically and materially/historically (and confessionally where appropriate!). The book will build on cultural studies and performance studies as well as traditions of cinema and media studies, will benefit from recent advances in queer, gender, sexuality and affect studies, and is open to cross-pollinisations from the social sciences. We will encourage an accessible, jargon-free style and a crossover audience.

Timeline:

Preliminary prospectus. Please submit a 300-word prospectus for your proposed chapter, along with five key words, applicable preliminary bibliography and mediagraphy, and brief c.v. to [1]i.confess@concordia.ca, by October 1 2015. Participants will be notified of inclusion within one month. We envisage testing the water in 2016 through conference panels and/or curated screening programs, perhaps even special issues of periodicals, enlisting selected participants. Publication: both book and electronic format are envisaged. Publishers will be canvassed for interest throughout the end of 2015 and early 2016. In addition to initial funding through a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Insights Grant, the co-editors anticipate a range of internal Concordia University support and further normal grants in support of Canadian arts-related publication. Deadline: final text. October 1 2016. Essays should be between 5000 and 6500 words, using Chicago date-author format. Anticipated publication: Fall 2017 or Winter 2018. Co-editors. Thomas Waugh is Concordia University Research Chair in Sexual Representation and Documentary in the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema in Montreal, Quebec. He is the editor of Show Us Life: Towards a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary(1984), co-editor of Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada (2010) and The Perils of Pedagogy: The Works of John Greyson (2013), as well as author of Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from their Origins to Stonewall (1996), The Fruit Machine: Twenty Years of Writing on Queer Cinema (2000) Out/Lines: Underground Gay Graphics from Before Stonewall (2002), Lust Unearthed: Vintage Gay Graphics from the Dubek Collection (2004), The Romance of Transgression in Canada: Sexualities, Moving Images, Nations (2006), Montreal Main (2010), The Right to Play Oneself: Looking back on Documentary Film (2011) and The Conscience of Cinema: The Films of Joris Ivens 1912-1989 (2016). Brandon Arroyo, is a doctoral candidate in the PhD in Film and Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. His dissertation is an affective
reading of contemporary gay male pornography in the popular internet age focusing on the text’s impact on space, identity formation and discourse. He won a Society for Cinema and Media Studies Student Writing Award in 2014 for an essay titled "Pornographic Space and Sexual Affect in the Networked Gay Village," and is the author of the forthcoming essay titled "An Amplification of Being: Chris Crocker and the Making of a Transindividual Porn Star." Both essays will be published in the Porn Studies Journal. Thomas Waugh Concordia University Research Chair in Sexual Representation and in Documentary Prof. Film Studies; Coordinator Program in Interdisciplinary Studies in Sexuality Director Concordia HIV/AIDS Project Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema FB315-5 Concordia University Tel. 514-848-2424 #4654; res. 514-845-2512 Mail address: 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd W Montreal QC H3G 1M8 Courier address: FB319, 1250 Guy St., Montreal QC H3H 2T4 (tel. #4666)

1. mailto:i.confess@concordia.ca
2. mailto:thomas.waugh@concordia.ca

What does it mean to be asexual? (2015-07-11 10:20)

This [1]feature in Vice I produced with my friend Holly Falconer was discussed in this [2]interesting Slate podcast:


(edit to add: turns out we weren't discussed at all, only included as supplementary reading. oh well!)

3811
Call for Papers: Issues of Power in Social Research (2015-07-12 08:00)

8TH ENQUIRE CONFERENCE: ISSUES OF POWER IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

To colleagues who have submitted abstracts for the 8th Enquire Conference - many thanks. Speaking with a number of colleagues, however, we are aware that there are some who were eager to submit but missed the deadline. So, we have decided to extend the deadline to 7th August 2015. As a reminder, the Enquire Conference is an annual, one day conference organised by PGRs from the School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Nottingham, this year taking place on 7th November 2015. The theme this year is ‘Issues of Power in Social Research’ and we are excited to announce that we have Lisa McKenzie (LSE), Les Back (Goldsmiths) and John Holmwood (University of Nottingham) as keynote speakers. Please see details below regarding call for papers. This is also attached as a PDF file, as is the poster for the event. Call for Papers Issues of power are central to both theoretical and empirical research in most social sciences (sociology, politics, economics and psychology, for example). As such we invite doctoral and early career researchers to submit abstracts concerned with issues of power in social research. Power here should be understood in a broad sense, and we have deliberately left it undefined. We are interested, for instance, in both substantive research on power and broader reflections on power in the practice of social research. We therefore welcome abstracts for papers concerned with empirical and/or theoretical research based around issues such as, but not limited to:

- **Issues of power at the micro-interactional level of research practice**, for instance between participants, between researcher and the researched, between researcher and gatekeepers, between funding bodies and researcher, or even between supervisor and supervisee during the PhD process.

- **Ethical issues in relation to power**, such as coercion, payment and informed consent.

- **The role of the expert** and associated issues such as the relationship between power and knowledge, dissemination, and implications of research for policy.

- **Macro-level power structures** including those of an institutional kind such as governments and other political organisations, and interactional structures such as ‘race’, gender, sexuality, class, status and age, how they intersect and how they perpetuate inequalities.

- **The lived experience of power**, resistance to it, and attempts to overcome power imbalances through social movements.

- **Grand theoretical debates on power questioning**, for instance: what power is, how it should best be understood, and how and by whom theories of power are written.
This is a one day event taking place on **7th November 2015 costing £15** (£10 early bird rate available: ends 7th September 2015). We welcome **abstracts of 250-350 words for presentations of 15 minutes**, to be submitted to [1]LQ-Enquire@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk. **Extended deadline for submission: 7th August 2015.** We look forward to hearing from you! Kind Regards, **The Enquire Conference Team** Twitter: @enquirenottm #enquirepower Website: [2]http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/research/enquire/conference/index.aspx

1. mailto:LQ-Enquire@exmail.nottingham.ac.uk

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JK Rowling displays empathy with a Muslim fan and replies to his tweet about reading in Ramdan. (2015-07-12 16:45)

[1]JK Rowling displays empathy with a Muslim fan and replies to his tweet about reading in Ramdan.
[2]


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3813
It is that time of year again: Muslims around the world are fasting during Ramadan in the lead up to Eid ul Fitr. The #ShareRamadan concept has long existed as older generations of Muslims have shared their food with their neighbours during and outside of Ramadan, or local community leaders and businesses organise interfaith iftars (breaking of the fast). Last year though three Muslims from Oldham decided they would encourage more young people to engage in interfaith social practices by inviting their work colleagues, friends and neighbours of all faiths and none to partake in the fasting experience.

#ShareRamadan went viral last year as people around the world fasted for one or more days to experience what it was like for their Muslim friends, before attending iftar at their Muslim friends’ homes where they broke the fast together. Some new to fasting had perhaps never visited a mosque before, and thus decided to accompany their Muslim friends for the Tarawih prayer at night. The concept of #ShareRamadan vividly demonstrated
multicultural conviviality as alive and well in Britain. The detailed accounts on social media and the video diaries of the experiences of those who are participating in this religious practice are fascinating for those interested in everyday multiculturalism. [3]Last year, I compiled some of the accounts in a blog post highlighting these practices of multicultural conviviality.

This year I have been keen to follow new accounts of the experience. I have been thinking about “Red Boots” multiculturalism which has been used to describe the idea of food, festivals and fun being the focus of multicultural governmental policies. This once popular type of multiculturalism has rightly been heavily criticised for neglecting the real issues of inequalities. We must never neglect to highlight issues of inequalities, particularly important now more than ever in times of austerity, as observed in the rise of food banks and voluntary organisations assisting the homeless, as well as those struggling to pay for food after rent/bills are paid.

There are Muslims in Britain who have set up voluntary groups to help those who are suffering poverty, again illustrating models of interfaith work that is common throughout Britain. [4]The Myriad Foundation consisting of a small group of volunteers have set up a Feed a Friend Project that provides local foodbanks and shelters with donations from mosque congregations; [5]they also provide run a mobile food kitchen every Wednesday in Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester. Every year another group of [6]Muslims during Ramadan encourage local Mancunians to come and feed the homeless. There are countless positive examples of everyday multiculturalism taking place up and down Britain which the mainstream media outlets would do well to present to their audiences.

With #ShareRamadan we have an interesting case of community cohesion where fasting, food and (religious) festivals can result in multicultural mingling and more as evident in the responses of those engaging in #ShareRamadan, and research into this area would be useful in understanding everyday multiculturalism. One of the Christian participants this year who fasted for four days reflected upon how he would like to do more than just fast as has been prescribed to Muslims, and thus he went out and assisted the Myriad Foundation on their weekly pop up kitchen in Piccadilly Gardens.

Last week, MEND (Muslim Engagement & Development) organised a community iftar for people of all faiths and none to gather together share a Ramadan meal at The Sheridan Suite. They collaborated with the Myriad Foundation and the #ShareRamadan team to put on a splendid informative and entertaining evening. Over 400 people from a variety of backgrounds, people of different faiths and none came together to learn about Islam and Ramadan, the contribution of Islamic civilisation to the modern world, the communal need to challenge Islamophobia and all other forms of hate as well as Muslim contribution to modern day Britain. The three groups (MEND, Myriad & Share Ramadan) invited their friends/colleagues/neighbours to the iftar, in attendance were teachers, academics, public sector workers, union representatives, representatives of synagogues and churches, and many more. Guests also included volunteers from [7]Coffee 4 Craig and [8]Community Awareness Network who regularly work with Myriad in helping the homeless in Manchester. Some of those who learnt more about Ramadan decided they would fast some of the remaining days of Ramadan.
Share Iftar Manchester
Thursday 9th July
7.30pm - 10.30pm

Location
Sheridan Suite, 371 Oldham Road, Manchester M40 8RR
Register at the link below to reserve your place for this free event
www.mend.org.uk/iftar

Email: manchester@mend.org.uk | Tel: 020 7871 8430
Special guest speakers, quiz, iftar (evening meal), stalls, literature, tea and desserts

www.mend.org.uk
#shareramadan
Enjoyed an amazing #ShareRamadan Iftar meal with MEND and Myriad Foundation.... During an interview about Coffee4Craig we kinda egged each other on to fast out the last week of #Ramadan.... So true to our word...

Revy Wevy Risha Lancaster and myself will be fasting and breaking fast at sundown for Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and right through until we celebrate Eid with our buddies at Myriad over Friday or Saturday next week.

Monday night at 9.39 ish we will break fast with guys from Myriad and the homeless.

Venue and more details TBC but we would like to raise awareness especially in light of the terror attacks in Tunisia and show the world that terrorists are not Muslim, Islam is about unity, peace and we are all one race....

We're joining with our brothers and sisters to be as one and unite our cultures!! Come join us, fast during sunlight and then eat together...

#ShareRamadan
Qaisra Shahraz @QaisraShahraz
Great @mendcommunity event @JonnyWineberg enjoying Kosher 'iftar #ShareRamadan meal @MJF_Manchester @JewishMCR @FN4M
Broke fast tonight with #shareramadan & Community Awareness Network, Myriad Foundation, Mend, Coffee 4 Craig
Fantastic evening. Great turnout by all communities #shareiftar #ShareRamadan #Manchester @Myriad_F @mendcommunity

Ben Godfrey @BNGDFRY
Thanks for having us and congratulations on a great event, excited to learn more about your work @mendcommunity @Myriad_F @ShareRamadan
Dan Silver follows
Ben Godfrey @BNGDFRY 4h
It's all gone a bit Derek and Clive (with less swearing). Love it. #shareiftar

Stuart Browning follows
Mancunian Rant @sapphiremounty 4h
ShareRamadan : Myriad_F Ali Mahmoud giving a great talk
#ShareRamadan #shareiftar (via Twitter twitter.com/ShareRamadan/s...)

Share Ramadan @ShareRamadan
@Myriad_F Ali Mahmoud giving a great talk #ShareRamadan #shareiftar

Education Researcher @educ_rese... 4h
#shareramadan #shareiftar
@Myriad_F @mendcommunity #interfaith #Muslims #manchester
#foodbanks, #homeless, #blood
Ch Insp Umer Khan @ChInsUmerKh... 1d
Friends from @FN4M at #shareiftar event - different communities coming together to promote unity
#WeStandTogether

Qaisra Shahraz and 4 others

Dr Erinma Bell MBE @ErinmaBell 1d
We should not Fear as fear breeds Hate and hatred leads to violence. Ask questions, Seek understanding and gain Knowledge. #shareiftar
Coffee4Craig @Coffee4Craig

Proud and honoured to be invited to #ShareIftar tonight at The Sheridan Suite. #WeStandTogether
About to break fast at #ShareIftar meal #Manchester thoughts for those forced into hunger everyday.
#FoodPoverty
Faiza @faiza_choudhary
Bringing the community together at the #shareiftar event #mend #myriad #shareramadan

NW Friends of Peace @NorthWestF...
Fantastic evening. Great turnout by all communities #shareiftar

KaJo @kajo123
Having a great evening at #ShareIfTar and #ShareRamadan evening with our friends @Myriad_F @mendcommunity
4. https://www.facebook.com/MyriadFoundation/photos/pb.368359933266474.-2207520000.1435318269./506719439430522/?type=3&theater
5. https://www.facebook.com/MyriadFoundation/photos/pb.368359933266474.-2207520000.1435318123./576566182445847/?type=3&theater

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Trailer for the Syriza documentary by @paulmasonnews (2015-07-13 08:00)


3828
Academic spammer or weird meta-troll? (2015-07-14 08:00)

Has anyone else received e-mails from JPMontfort? I was intrigued by the sheer weirdness of things like this:

FROM YEAR 2210

TO UCHICAGO PRESIDENT ROBERT J. ZIMMER


RECIPIENTS 159.134 FACULTY & STAFF IN BRITAIN

We have a reason to believe that our special envoy to present time Earth, Time Traveler JP.Montfort has been subject to arbitrary, subjective and perhaps discriminatory treatment by the personnel in your institution. Following our specific instructions to become a Generalist, our special envoy has previously graduated from The University of California-Berkeley, The London School of Economics and Columbia University.


We understand that decision makers in your institution have retaliated against JP.Montfort’s exercise of freedom of expression, subjectively and arbitrarily applying the "Authority To Direct" Policy described in your [6]Student’s Manual. We also have a reason to believe that retaliation was incorporated when evaluating JP.Montfort’s application to doctoral and master’s programs at The Harris School in the fall of 2014.

For all of the above we strongly encourage you to take action in order to avoid an escalation of the ongoing issue. We estimate a loss in goodwill for your institution in present time dollars of between $100 Million and $1 Billion between today and 1-January-2051 if you do not act promptly. This message has been typed from Year 2210. Over and out

You may contact the protagonists Dean of Students Teresa Hord Owens at [7]+1 773.702.8217 and Associate Dean Jeremy Edwards at +1 [8]773.834.8177.

There’s an interesting bit of background to this weirdness [9]here: "it is difficult to discern whether Monfort is deluded, a scam artist, or some sort of weird meta-troll".

2. http://harris.uchicago.edu/directory/staff/jeremy_edwards
Jim (2019-01-26 09:24:02)
To everybody who receives all those bloody emails from Mooron #jpmonfort ... Resend ALL and MORE emails you receive, back to his jpmonfort.join@gmail.com And tell that Twat he’s a Fucking Mooron.


review by Bradley Williams

The 2011 Bahraini Uprising seemed to confirm that Bahrain does not conform to the orthodox theory of rentier oil states, referred often to Rentier State Theory. As Gengler (p. 147) asks “What is it about Bahrain qua rentier society that renders its rulers particularly incapable of buying popular political quiet?” The theory of the rentier state, or allocative oil state, predicts that Gulf States garner allegiance from citizens by redistributing the wealth that they accrue from oil revenues. Redistribution of wealth is supposed to alleviate all forms of opposition and protest. This perspective has remained dominant in international relations for roughly the last thirty years. Rentier State Theory was first explained in 1970, in a chapter by Hossein Mahdavy (1970) titled The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran. Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (1987) produced another influential analysis of Rentier State Theory in The Rentier State (Nation, State, and Integration in the Arab World, Vol 2).
The Royal al-Khalifa Monarchy in Bahrain controls virtually all areas of state and military governance. While Shia Muslims constitute the majority of civil society in Bahrain, they are barred from employment in the police and military and other areas of state governance that are deemed security sensitive. The protests referred to as the Bahrain Uprising have clearly shown that the ideal model of the rentier state and the assumptions that it makes about individual level behavior do not adequately explain the persistence of political opposition to rulers in Bahrain. Via a critique of Rentier State Theory, Justin Gengler shows that the relationship between civil society and the state does not conform to the rentier model at all. Gengler bases his findings on data from his mass survey, collected in early 2009. The survey is representative of the whole country and includes questions concerning political orientation, religion, and other information about ordinary Bahraini citizens. The survey data indicate that the government of Bahrain intentionally exacerbates tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This strategy undermines opposition without compensating either Sunni or Shia Muslims with money in accordance with the rentier state model.

As I briefly noted above, Gengler developed and administered a first-of-its-kind survey instrument. As the author states, the survey is based off of the "Arab Barometer questionnaire” with admittedly minor adjustments to fit the Bahrain context. Chapter Four examines the process of developing and administering the survey and the efforts he and his team underwent to gather data. The whole affair was completed in a short amount of time given that they still gathered 437 completed surveys of their goal of 500. The survey includes at least one respondent from every Bahraini village. I found this chapter to be one of the more interesting parts of the book. The researchers even utilized one challenge in a constructive way. They were able to account for the interaction affects between interviewers and interviewees from different devotional communities.

The findings of the survey seem to completely undermine our general understanding of rentier, allocative Gulf States. The study finds that first, private and public goods are not allocated in a politically neutral, or agnostic, fashion across all populations. Second, the study finds that there are many individual level factors that actually account for political opposition beyond merely economic incentives, or government incentives of any kind. The government and Royal Family in Bahrain have fostered a populace divided by distrust and fear between Sunnis and Shia Muslims. Sunnis surveyed indicated their belief that the state is the sole defense against the perceived threat of an Iranian-inspired Shia insurgency. Because of this fear, rulers in Bahrain are able to keep monetary allocation to Sunnis low while still maintaining strong support from most Sunnis. Shia Muslims, on the other hand, oppose a wide range of government policies based on a wide range of grievances concerning systemic inequalities and not caused by the amount of rent allocation. Because the Shia opposition cannot be dissuaded by a higher rent allocation, the state subdues political opposition with police and military force.

Justin Gengler has written an excellent and succinct examination of Bahrain that explains the recent political opposition and the government’s failure to sustain social order. The only real criticism is that the book is not a bit longer in parts. There are only 159 pages of text. The main text is followed by a seven page index consisting of the tables of data and a twenty-two page Notes section, which seems large in proportion to the main text. Although the book is short, the author adequately presents enough information to make an interesting and convincing argument. Many events, including the Bahraini Uprising and subsequent government repression, have been previously reported in the media. However, this book does compile these events in one place along with a superb, empirically verifiable analysis. Every part of the argument seems necessary.

Thinking of future research, Gengler states that research will need to focus on the consequences of divisive engineering by Gulf state rulers incite inter-sect conflict. Furthermore, one consequence of royal meddling is the rise of Salafist and Sunni militant groups, such as ISIS (Daesh). Gengler insists that research should seek to understand this link between the actions of rulers like the al-Khalifa in Bahrain and the persistence and rise of specifically Salafist and Sunni militant movements.

In conclusion, this book is a singularly important book that advances the fields of political economy and inter-
national relations. This book offers a unique and one of a kind insight into the country of Bahrain. Additionally, the author shows that his explanation of inter-religious conflict and government opposition within the country of Bahrain can be generalized to a broader range of Gulf oil countries. As Gengler puts it, the conditions within Bahrain are "merely the realization of a latent possibility that exists in other Arab Gulf regimes according to their peculiar vulnerability to such conditions" (p.7). This book is intended for an academic audience. It is particularly appropriate book for Gulf state specialists within political economy and international relations. However, anyone with an interest in the future of Bahrain would find this book accessible. This book is definitely unique and invaluable to anyone wanting a fuller understanding of the economic, political, and religious tensions within Bahrain that media outlets and published reports have scarcely revealed.

Bradley W. Williams is a doctoral researcher at George Mason University. He studies transnational governance, social movements, peace and organizational processes.

Twitter: @B_W_Williams


Call for Digital Anthropology book proposals (2015-07-15 08:00)

This looks like it will be an extremely valuable book series:
Do you have an active URL for this? I haven't found anything else about it.

only what's in the flyer sorry
CfP: Beyond the Master’s Tools: Post- and Decolonial Approaches to Research Methodology and Methods in the Social Sciences (2015-07-16 08:00)

Call for Papers

Beyond the Master’s Tools: Post- and Decolonial Approaches to Research Methodology and Methods in the Social Sciences

University of Kassel, 14-15 January 2016

The contention that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde) translates into a major critique of Social Science research. Accusations regarding the continuation of “epistemicide” (Santos) highlight the dangers of an occidentalist or Eurocentric research agenda. Post- and decolonial perspectives point to colonial continuities embedded not just in the epistemic foundations and thematic concerns, but also in the actual practices, i.e. the craft of research as canonised in re-search methods and methodologies. A decolonising approach to Social Science research is necessarily twofold: the deconstruction of existing methodologies and methods that (re)produce the coloniality of knowledge; and a reconstruction and/or reinvention of research practice. The conference aims to bring together scholars to discuss methodological and methodical critiques as well as potentially post-/decolonial ways of doing empirical research.

Academic knowledge production has become a highly diversified field. Various turns (argumentative, ethnographic, spatial, practice, intersectional etc.) claim to offer epistemological lenses that allow for a more pluralist, contextualized and enriched understanding of the social world. While these developments may point to a desirable ‘mainstreaming’ of heterodox and critical approaches, we can still observe that the “right to research” (Appadurai) as a universalized hegemony over knowledge production remains the reserve of a minority marked by privileges linked to the history and present of colonialism. “Researching back” (Smith) appears to be a necessary but difficult process. The conference aims to discuss and learn from different approaches that strive to decolonize the field of academic research, i.e. the epistemological conceptualization and selection of research objects and research designs (Mato).

The methodological reflection of ongoing entanglements regarding hegemonic power/knowledge complexes leads to the reflection of decolonial methods and research practice. Feminist, anti-racist and decolonial scholars have focused on developing methods for power sensitive research in order to deconstruct what still appears to be a hegemonic and positivist research paradigm by putting forward concepts such as positional reflexivity, standpoint feminism, situated knowledge or critical whiteness. Analyzing everyday life practices or stories in ethno-methodological methods, reflecting on ‘writing culture’ (Clifford/Marcus) in cultural anthropology, focusing on counter-narratives in biographical research, conceptualizing gaps and silences in discourse analysis or addressing complexity in situational analysis are all approaches that provide useful tools for decolonial research. Furthermore, participatory research methods such as popular education (Freire) or participatory action research (Fals-Borda) open up perspectives for horizontal and collaborative research processes.

While university regulations might require researchers to follow formal guidelines for ethical research – for example, participant information sheets, informed consent, and right to withdraw at any moment –, post-/decolonial critique requires a more profound recognition of ethical issues. It urges us to account for the positionality of the researcher in relation to the field, the people investigated, and the "geopolitics of knowledge" (Mignolo) more broadly. Rather than perpetuating the obscuring stories of how we stumbled across field sites „by chance", it is necessary to bring to the forefront the ways in which researchers are "historically and socially [...] linked with the areas we study" (Gupta/Ferguson). First and foremost, a de-/postcolonial research ethics demands that we choose sides and step away from any pretense of neutrality, objectivity, and impartiality - while we still try to to reach an intersubjective understanding of the world. We thus have to ask (and answer) the highly political question of who benefits from our research. Postcolonial research ethics might even go further and say that it is not up to academics...
to decide on relevance, but that it should be up to the people fighting the decol-nial struggles on the ground. It is not an easy feat, but – in spite of itself being predominantly Western, white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual, and able – academic research needs to be "existentially and poli-tically committed to decolonisation" (Decoloniality Europe).

We invite contributions which engage with the following set of questions:

How do the prevalent geopolitics of knowledge production shape social science research? How do they become productive – and which privileges/visibilities/ capacities or marginalisations/invisibili-ties/ways of silencing does this entail? * How do post- and decolonial perspectives challenge the Eurocentric grounding of research methods, methodologies, and ethics? What (new) empirical approaches, lenses and tools for research do these approaches offer or imply? * What are the implications of decentering or decolonizing methodology? What does this imply in terms of research agendas, research cooperation, case studies, academic discourse and dissemination? How does this relate to traditions of academic writing? How can new forms of expression be mobilised (e.g. story-telling, oral history, auto-ethnography, action-research)? * How can research designs and field access be realized without reproducing power complexes, but enable a process of „studying with“ (Mato) marginalised actors and social groups? * How do requirements of decolonal research ethics clash with academic regulations and guidelines? Are such clashes necessary and to be welcomed; or are there innovative ways to pretend to play by the rules? * If the researcher abandons her*his privileges to select the problem to be analysed and leaves the decision to the decolonal social movements: who decides which social movements are decolonial and according to which criteria? *Is it possible for privileged researchers to unlearn their privileges and conduct research with margi-nalised groups in a political and ethical manner? If so, how? What are the implications for processes of research and knowledge dissemination? Our conference welcomes a variety of forms of academic presentation. Research will be discussed in panels and roundtables as well as in a poster session. The latter format is particularly suitable for dis-cussions on research design and 'work in progress' by both junior and senior researchers. Please send abstracts of no more than 250 words to [1]beyondthemasterstools@uni-kassel.de by 15 August 2015. Further information can be found on [2]https://www.uni-kassel.de/go/beyond-the-masters-tools Keynotes (confirmed): * Gurminder K. Bhambra, University of Warwick (UK) * Aida Hernández Castillo, CIESAS (Mexico) * Siba Grovogui, Cornell University (USA)

1. mailto:beyondthemasterstools@uni-kassel.de
2. https://www.uni-kassel.de/go/beyond-the-masters-tools
For the last few months, I’ve been curating a series of essays for The Sociological Review’s website, reflecting on the future of the discipline and related issues. Here are the initial essays:

- [1] Sociology’s Dual Horizons by David Beer
- [2] Are We Seeing the Closing of Sociology’s Mind? by Les Back
- [4] Towards a Philosophical Sociology by Daniel Chernilo
- [5] Swimming Upstream: Sociology Beyond Description by Nicholas Gane
- [6] Committing Sociology: Defending the Public University by Gurminder K Bhambra

There will be more coming soon!

Support Sociological Imagination with a T-Shirt! (2015-07-18 08:00)

In recent years, the once negligible hosting costs of this site have begun to increase. Hopefully this has had some positive impact, as the site had been increasingly unreliable on our old host. Our new host is great. But a lot more expensive. This site has always been a hobby, into which myself, the co-editors and contributors have willingly sunk lots of time. In the case of myself and the Idle Ethnographer we’ve also put money into it. It’s fine really, we do this out of love. But with the new host the money leaving my account each month to pay for the host is more conspicuous than used to be the case. As a way of allowing readers to support the site, without anything so crass as a donations tin, [1]I’ve made some t-shirts. Hope you like them!
In recent months, I’ve become fascinated by [1]Design Fiction as a potential tool for Sociologists. Related to this is the question of counter-factuality: can we use fiction to explore hypotheses about what would have happened if ... in a way that helps explain what actually did take place? This example by [2]A Very Public Sociologist might not be entirely clear to those unfamiliar with the party politics of the United Kingdom, but it’s a very interesting example of how sociologists might go about doing this. Read it in full [3]here:

The polls were with Labour. The feedback on the doorstep was very encouraging. It looked like all the naysayers and the problems of the previous five years had been put to bed. Until that exit poll flashed up on the nation’s TV screens. It gave the Tories a clear lead, and one several seats away from a majority. Then the worst happened. As the night wore on it became increasingly clear Labour were not winning the seats it needed to capture to form the largest party, and by the morning the impossible had happened: David Cameron had pulled the irons of an overall majority from the election fire.
Despite the naysaying and doom laden predictions coming from the left of the labour movement, David Miliband’s leadership of the Labour Party started off well. From the moment he emerged ashened face from behind the curtain at party conference, he set out a stall that confounded expectations. Labelled as the continuity Blair candidate, David’s victory speech - secured across all three sections of the electoral college, albeit very narrowly in a higher-than-expected turnout from USDAW members in the trade union component, emphasised the need to capture economic credibility. He announced an establishment of a commission under Alastair Darling to revisit the rules and responsibility attached to government spending, but he also played to the left by indulging tough rhetoric around the regulation of the entire economy. The behaviour and spending of public bodies wouldn’t be the only ones to be covered by tough new rules: businesses big and small were also expected to behave responsibly and play their part. Concerned to yank back economic credibility from the Tories, he reaffirmed the Darling plan to halve the deficit over the course of the parliament, and made points around the need to develop a proper industrial strategy. Lastly, David Miliband announced an ambitious plan to re-energise and refound Labour as a mass organisation, offering CLPs incentives to recruit people and draw more trade unionists into the party. Jon Cruddas was also announced as the face of the Movement for Change.


1. http://markcarrigan.net/2015/03/22/an-introduction-to-design-fiction-for-sociologists-may-13th-at-goldsmit
2. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/if-david-miliband-had-won.html
3. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/if-david-miliband-had-won.html
4. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2015/05/if-david-miliband-had-won.html

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Returning to blogging (2015-07-20 08:00)

Around two months ago I reluctantly came to the conclusion that I no longer had time to maintain two blogs. I won’t go into the reasons here, but the case seemed pretty unanswerable. So I closed down this blog and decided I would focus on Sociological Imagination. Since then I’ve felt the quality of my writing gradually deteriorate. The reasons for this seem obvious to me: objectively I write much less without a personal blog. The recurrent practice the blog helps ensure writing is a taken for granted part of my everyday life, it’s something which I feel no more anxiety about than other mundane daily activities.

I’ve found my creeping sense of dissatisfaction in the last two months extremely worrying. It’s a new experience for me to look at my writing, conclude “this is crap” and to feel uncertain of how to fix it. It’s not that I was always happy with my writing up to this point. I really wasn’t and I have multiple ‘working papers’ which demonstrate this. But when blogging was a part of my daily routine, my response to difficulty was to keep writing. The challenge added to my enjoyment of the process, rather than contributing to my descent into a seething mass of writerly neurosis.

Having a personal blog enables a cheerful optimism about writing. One which I never want to be without again. In the words of one of my favourite punk bands, it facilitates ‘word acrobatics, performed with both harness and net’. I feel like I learnt to write seriously in the last couple of years of my PhD, when blogging became a daily activity for me. That’s when I began to take profound pleasure in writing for the first time. I’m not entirely sure I can be a writer, as opposed to someone who is contingently obligated to write stuff, without having my own blog. It seems I’m not the only person to have this experience, as [1]A Very Public Sociologist recounts:
Since December 2006 this blog has weighed on my brain like a digital nightmare. Apart from a six month break and a further 18 month leave of absence, I've been writing or thinking about writing content all that time. Even when I took a hiatus, words, phrases, screeds of 500 words or more tangoed across my eyeballs when the shutters came down at night. As our minds have allowed social media technologies to colonise and structure our perceptions - how many times have you thought of a real-life happening in terms of an instagram snap or a sharply-observed tweet - so mine finds half-digested ideas immediately suited to bloggable form


Does anyone else have an experience, of trying and failing to give up blogging, which they'd be willing to share?

1. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/p/about.html
2. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/p/about.html

Carmen Tong (2015-07-21 04:47:26)
What a coincident! I started blogging again recently, for a week so far. It took a much longer time for me to start writing again... the last time was 2008.

Abs (2015-08-04 21:48:41)
I lasted six months then had to return, spent a very dedicated week catching it up on everything it has missed out on then vowed not to ever go without it that long again!

The @_ISRF @DigitalSocSci and @BigDataSoc Essay Competition (2015-07-20 14:33)


The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power'. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

I recall watching a documentary about the popular crime novelist Ian Rankin. It’s a documentary that is well worth watching for any writer. The programme followed him through a year in his life. It began in January, as he started preparations for new book, and followed him through to the completion of the publishing cycle. It was a fascinating account of the craft of a professional writer. It began with him sifting through notes and newspaper cuttings to find ideas for the plot, then we saw him working up the plot and writing a draft. The draft was then honed and we saw his response to editorial comments and suggested revisions. Then, somewhere around the middle of the year, the book went to press. Quite a bit of the latter part of the year was then spent on promotional work of various types. I watched the documentary closely for tips. Ian Rankin is a great author and I hoped that I might pick up something from his practices, something that might help. I’ve already spent a lot of time reading Rankin’s work, and I often try to see if I can find a way to capture some of his style and tone in my own work – I can’t manage it, but it gives me something to aim at. I find that reading Rankin’s work whilst I’m working on a writing project really gives me something to aim at, an ideal of clarity, complexity and direct no-nonsense flare.

One of the things that struck me in the documentary was that Rankin worked on an old laptop that had no internet connection. There was another computer in his study with internet connection, but he wrote on this internet free laptop instead. I seem to remember him seeing this as a way of removing distractions or the temptation of procrastination. Disconnected writing is undisturbed writing. When I was looking for tips I thought about this, and I made sure my email was never switched on when I was writing, so as not to receive something that might disturb the flow. Recently though I was forced to follow Rankin’s approach more closely. My old white plastic MacBook stopped connecting to Wi-Fi. I suddenly became a disconnected writer. Remembering the images of Ian Rankin writing away on his disconnected device, I thought that this malfunction might not be a problem. I soon realised though that being connected is central to my own writing practices. It is not until I lost the ability to connect whilst writing that I realised how central it was. This was probably why I managed to mirror some of Rankin’s other writing practices with the exception of the disconnected laptop. The problem became clear when I started trying to add and check references. I found I kept opening the failing internet connection to check a passage I thought might be wrong or to find some missing information or check a year or titles, I kept forgetting. Completing references seemed impossible. I also tend to write quite a few short pieces for web publications now, and those require inserted hyperlinks in the text, which proved to be impossible on a non-connected device. Plus, my reading practices have changed. I now read lots of blog posts and use other online resources in my writing. As a result I’m finding that I now frequently cite such sources. This is impossible without being able to connect to that source to pull out the URL for the reference section, or simply to search through the reading to find relevant bits. Its possible to
write in disconnection, but it is much more difficult. I found being a disconnected writer to be impossible. It was nice to be certain of no distractions, and to avoid the temptation of searching for music or books to buy. But a connection is central to the way I write. This recalls something I read recently in Les Back’s contribution to the recently published book [2]The Craft of Knowledge. In that piece Les reflects on writing and reading in the context of hyper-connectivity. He highlights some of the costs as well as massive benefits of the information to which we can have instant access as researchers, writers and readers. I’ve also found, like Les, that over time my writing practices have increasingly been reworked to rely upon having a connected device upon which to write.

The routine of writers is something that we ponder about quite a bit, if you search around there are quite a lot of reflections on writing practices. My broken laptop forced me to break my own routine and to buy a new laptop. I see my laptop as being a central part of my writing routine and a defining presence in my writing space, I’ve had it for years and I’ve written most of my work on it, so getting a new one was a strange. My writing desk suddenly looks different and sitting down to write today feels a bit alien. This is the first piece that I’ve written with my changed writing space. I’m using this piece to get warmed up and to test out my new writing device. I’ve lost the shared history I had with my old laptop, it had become the kind of [3]evocative object to which Sherry Turkle has referred, it had seen me through some tough writing days. We do develop attachments with such objects, particularly where there is a prolonged history. I wonder if this new device and the disruptions it will bring will change how I write. Maybe it will freshen things up or alter my perspective, perhaps though it will just quickly mould itself into familiarity. Certainly it is good to be a connected writer again and to take advantage of the speed at which I can link, check, add, search and revise. I can understand why Rankin likes to be a disconnected writer, with the undisturbed time and space that it brings. Much as I admire his writing, this is one aspect of his practice that I’ve found I can’t manage to adopt (whether through choice or a broken laptop). Connected writing just seems to be more productive for the type of writing tasks I have – the tricky bit is enabling this connectivity to enrich my writing rather than it allowing it to get in the way.

David Beer is Reader in Sociology at the University of York. His most recent book is Punk Sociology (the first chapter of which is open access [4]here). He is on Twitter @davidgbeer[/nbox]
without trial. Extradited, stripped and placed in solitary confinement for trumped up “terrorist” charges with his only escape from this awful ordeal being a plea bargain. [1]Judge Janet Hall who accepted his plea noted: "There was never any aid given by these defendants to effectuate a plot. By plot, I mean a terrorist plot ... Neither of these two defendants were interested in what is commonly known as terrorism ... It appears to me that he [Babar] is a generous, thoughtful person who is funny and honest. He is well liked and humane and empathetic...This is a good person who does not and will not seek in the future to harm other people." Yet, he did not return to a Britain of compassion, humanity and justice. Rather a Britain which continues its never ending "War on terror" narrative with misleading, irresponsible and sensationalist articles such as "[2]Terrorist slips back into UK after release from US jail". This is a narrative which has seen not only the death of many innocent civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq but also military expenditure spent on bombing civilians in Syria and Libya. What is more, on Wednesday 8th July, the evening prior to the [3]one year commemoration of the latest massacre unleashed by Netenyahu in Gaza, the BBC with its ever “objective" journalism once again released a documentary entitled "[4]Children of the Gaza War" withstanding fair historical, political or social context with regards to the Palestinian plight - especially the [5]effect this has had specifically on Palestinian children. During a recent film showing as part of Manchester Srebrenica Memorial Week 2015, "A Cry to the Grave" was aired, ironically also released by the BBC, one section of the film in particular stood out: blood, limbs and the haunting sound of Bosnian Muslims wailing depicted some of the aftermath Bosnian Muslims suffered at the hands of the Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb) militia. This was followed immediately by a scene featuring Bosnian Serbs mourning their dead. A local Bosnian Muslim who very narrowly escaped the onslaught carried out by the Republika Srpska (Bosnian Serb) militia took issue with this "objectivity" with the repetition of “They are not Muslim. But they are not Muslim?!” Although there were Bosnian Serb deaths, to depict their suffering as relatively equal to Bosnian Muslims echoes of similar partial BBC journalism we observe today of how Israelis are alleged to suffer just as gravely as Palestinians. The victim is in the same boat as the oppressor apparently. A shameful continuation of a shameful legacy for the BBC. However, the BBC cannot solely be blamed as they are funded by the government. On Monday 6th July during a Civic event in Westminster Abbey, David Cameron recently stressed words of “Never again can we allow this kind of thing to happen” whilst [6]Pro-Palestinian campaigners demonstrating outside the infamous Elbit weapons factory in Shenstone were at the receiving end of severe police brutality and arrested for taking a stand against arms being manufactured and sold to massacring maniacs such as Netenyahu. David Cameron who pledged to “continue funding initiatives which remember Srebrenica“ has recently passed the CTS bill which effectively legally mandates public figures such as doctors and teachers to spy on Muslims in the hope of curbing them from becoming "terrorists". This suspicion and othering is exactly what led Serb nationalists to commit grave human rights abuses including genocide, physical, mental and sexual abuse towards Bosnian Muslims. Bosnian Muslims were “dangerous” Bosnian Serb nationalists alluded; “we will take our revenge from the Turks” Ratko Mladić, former Bosnian Serb military leader and perpetrator of war crimes, is famously quoted to have said. The continuous suppression of historical, political and social facts, overtly and covertly, incites disunity amongst the average person in what is supposed to be a multicultural society, and in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina led to heinous violence. When certain history is ellipsed, an indirect or direct form of subordination occurs as that group of people are not deemed as important to mention. Bosnian Serb nationalists until this day taunt survivors of the genocide with Ottoman or "Turk" related slurs. This disregards the centuries [7]under Ottoman rule where the Serbian Orthodox community began settling and establishing multiple places of worship in cities like Sarajevo in the first instance. What is more, Muslims in Bosnia are reported to have settled there since the 10th and 11th centuries. Although there were some people who were Slav in origin who converted to Islam during Ottoman rule, there were significant waves of ethnic Muslims to Bosnia and Herzegovina including Muslim Albanians, the Pomaks and the Torbesh, also referred to as the Gorans. Likewise, Muslims have lived peacefully in Britain for more than a century but are now depicted as the greatest threat. This once again disregards Muslim history in Britain through figures such as [8]John Nelson, [9]Pasqua Rosee who is alleged to have brought coffee to Britain, [10]Muhammad Asad, [11]Abdullah Quilliam and many more. The value of the words “never again” have long seemed to be nothing more than fanciful hyperbole. If Britain and its allies truly did honour these words, [12]chemical weapons in the form of Sarin would not have been sold to Bashar al-Assad from six years prior to the Ghouta massacre. [13]The British government and its allies would not pander to the Israeli lobby. Their foreign exploits with the United States of America would cease. For many, particularly in the Global South, “never again” appears to signify nothing more
than “never again” for the same people. Or “never again” in the same geographical location. What national and international leaders fund in one country seems to be what they destroy in another, how else would these actors be relieved of accountability? Mladić stroked the heads of innocent Bosnian Muslim children and the world sighed a temporary breath of relief. When the cameras stopped rolling, he began slaughtering them again, not only does propaganda sell, it "wins" wars. The UN of course is reported to be just as culpable with [14] leaked evidence obtained by renowned journalist, Florence Hartmann. This is in addition to last week’s delay in classifying the Srebrenica genocide as a genocide in the UN Security Council, thus once again failing Bosnian Muslims and bringing to question what use the UN actually serves the average person who has been at the brunt of these atrocities. It is worth also noting that [15] the Hague has forbidden acclaimed interpreter and survivor Hasan Nuhanovic from appearing in the tribunal, thus raising alarms for justice campaigners of where cries for “free speech” and “Western values” happen to be in this case. This is all while the Rohingya continue to be massacred, as do the people of CAR, the people of Iraq, the people of Palestine, the people of Syria, the people of Yemen and sadly the list continues. This “othering” of Muslims within and without Bosnia has led many justice seekers to conclude that they do not expect the UN and its members to recognise the liberation of various independence movements, yet through the commemoration of the dead and in the remembrance of the living, national and international leaders will continue to be exposed for their complicity and their hypocrisy. In their remembrance, justice campaigners aim to continue opposing national and international selectivity and subjectivity. In their remembrance, they will never let national and international leaders forget.

Sairah Yassir is a graduate of French and International Politics. She currently researches contributions of diverse peoples to science, technology and civilisation. She is active in local, national and global campaigns for justice, and frequently blogs about social and political affairs.

3. https://electronicintifada.net/content/window-hell-gaza/14679
4. http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/search?q=Children%20of%20the%20Gaza%20War
5. http://www.alzaytouna.net/english/books/AmINotaHuman-3-Child.pdf

Call for Papers: Righting Feminism (2015-07-22 08:00)

CALL FOR PAPERS
Righting Feminism
In recent years, we have witnessed the multifarious ways in which feminism as an emancipatory project dedicated to women's liberation (whether conceived in liberal, radical, or Marxist terms) has increasingly "converged" with non-emancipatory/racist, conservative, and neo-liberal economic and political agendas. This issue aims to move beyond the well-worn economic-culture dichotomy that tends to inform many of the current discussions about feminism's "co-optation" and to provide a multi-dimensional theorization of how and why feminism has, in certain contexts, increasingly ceased to be an oppositional discourse. The questions this issue aims to address include:

What are the concrete forms of such convergences and why are they taking place with greater frequency? Why might neo-conservative forces and parties with a racist and/or neo-liberal agenda desire to co-opt the emancipatory promise of feminism? What purposes does the mobilization of feminism for non-emancipatory projects serve? Is this co-option merely a strategic ruse or a "natural" (even teleological) folding of certain elements of liberal feminism into these neoconservative movements? How are such convergences affecting the ways in which we can understand the intersection of gender, class, sexuality and race? Is it sufficient to speak about different feminisms today in order to make sense of feminism's rightward movement or do we need a new lexicon for speaking about gender oppression? Alternatively, if feminism has no essential "core" then how might we reclaim feminism for the twenty first century? What alternative politics can and should we propose to counter the evacuation of feminism's emancipatory impetus?

We welcome abstracts of up to 500 words. Please send to rightingfeminism@gmail.com by September 1, 2015.

Decisions will be made within six weeks. Contributors whose abstracts have been accepted will be asked to submit their papers within approximately six months (March 31, 2016).
Sometimes the noise other people make bothers me. I mean really pisses me off. The kind of irritation which makes it impossible to ignore the noise, leaving your attention locked in and your perceptual field narrowed until there is only you and that noise. On those occasions where I talk myself out of it, I often realise there’s nothing particularly egregious about the noise in question. It’s just that a particular confluence of circumstances has conspired to make the noise enormously disruptive to me. The problem of the noise is both relational and emergent. It’s not a problem in and of itself. This is reflected by the fact that on other occasions, similar noise barely registers, maybe eventually prompting me to wonder “has that been audible for a while?”

This is a useful thing to register when learning to live with noise. But there are limits to personal adaptation. It doesn’t follow that disruptive noise is subjective, simply because our experience of it as subjects has an obvious range that is in turn modulated through our responses as subjects. I used to live in between two pubs, literally in between them, one of which attracted what, to me at least, was the most obnoxious clientele imaginable. It’s in Earlsdon in Coventry, for those who know the area and are wondering. There were particular characteristics of the venue, as well as the area itself, which contributed to the production of disruptive noise on the weekends. I might be able to modulate my response to that noise but the circumstances were generative of it, not my own perceptual capacities. Likewise the cockerel who lived in my neighbour’s back garden at the same flat. I didn’t get much sleep that year.

I find ‘disruptive noise’ ontologically interesting because it’s hard to have a substantive discussion about how to regulate it which doesn’t fall into an objective/subjective dichotomy. Subjective prescriptions are inadequate (“why do you let it bother you so much? just try and put it out of your head”) when there’s drunken fights outside your door at midnight and a cockerel crowing outside your window at 5am. I’m very glad I don’t live there any more. Objective prescriptions also seem inadequate to me because of the potentially open-ended character that’s lent to the problem by the subjective dimension, for lack of a better word. If noise becomes disruptive whenever any
particular person at any particular time finds it disruptive then interventions become rather disturbingly authoritarian, allowing fleeting whims of irritated (and sometimes irritating) people to lead to the suppression of activities which most people would find reasonable.

If you google for stories of noise complaints, it soon becomes obvious quite what a range of circumstances councils are called upon to deal with. In some cases, people’s lives are literally destroyed by the noise of others. A couple of minutes down my ex-partner’s street was a house which, for 6 months, had (bad) techno playing constantly at high volume whenever I passed. Living so close to each other, yet not together, I passed that house at all hours of the day and night. The music was always playing. It must have destroyed the lives of the people living next door. On the other end of the spectrum, I’ve found people online complaining that they can hear their neighbours talking after 10pm. From the report, it seems their neighbours are talking at normal volume in their house in the evening. But for whatever reason, the complainers are unable to tune this out and become fixated on this utterly everyday life noise at the expense of their own lives.

This raises the question for me of whether this inability to live with the noise of others, something which I’ve occasionally recognised in myself but learnt to dismiss as unreasonable through my internal conversation, might be on the rise? If we conceive of ourselves as bounded and autonomous, experiencing life through the constraining prism of our own imagined independence and isolation, involuntary exposure to noise takes on an ambivalent status. It both undercuts our imagined atomism, revealing the interdependencies through which sociality is constituted, as well as appears as an attack upon it. It feels like an intrusion of other isolated individuals upon our own isolation, while leaving us inclined to fight it off in order to restore the hermetic seal which perceptually props up our imagined a-relational nature.

When I talk about a-relational here, I mean it in the Thatcherite sense of ‘individuals and their families’. I’ve often wondered about the Tory fixation on council refuse policies and suspect there’s a similar mechanism at work. If an English Man’s home is his castle then what does that make the bins outside, the people who come to collect it each week and the organisational structure this routine presupposes? The politics of bins are a messy and quotidian instance of the politics of individuality.

I’m suggesting that changing policies for bin collection is threatening to this imagined individuality in the same way and for the same reasons that intrusive noise is experienced as an assault upon it. We imaginatively deny our inviolable being-with-others, the fact we are always already placed within a network of relations, such that recurrent reminders of it becomes fetish objects: they take on power and significance far beyond their literal meaning and consequences, challenging us to either fight off this threat to how we conceive of our place within the world or learn to live with it as something other than a threat. Crucially, I don’t think the challenge of being-with-others entails subjective adjustment. It might involve telling yourself that on this particular occasion you should let something lie but it might equally involve taking action, trying to establish a new common ground through which interdependency can be something conducive to flourishing rather than a threat to well-being.
Cameron on Extremism – the good, the bad and the ugly! (2015-07-23 13:05)

by Sufyan Ismail

With extremism in our midst, David Cameron unveils a 5-year plan, with four planks, to tackle one major extremism threat.

David Cameron's speech on his 5-year plan to tackle extremism covered a huge amount of ground to say the least. From parents cancelling children's passports to Cameron financing his brand of 'good Muslims', it was all on show today.

So what's my take?, well the good, bad and pretty ugly are all in here. Let's start with the good:

THE GOOD

British Muslims travelling to Syria to fight for ISIL is undoubtedly a detestable problem; lets be clear, nobody likes ISIL, their philosophy or methods, and on countless occasions Muslims like myself have condemned them. So a genuine desire by the PM (and I believe it is genuine) to tackle the problem head-on is heartwarming. Equally encouraging is the PM’s description of Islamophobia as "sickening" alongside the numerous references to the sickening far-right. Some might, (rather justifiably), say talk is cheap, what has he done to tackle Islamophobia? The Tories pre-election promise to ensure Islamophobia is recorded as a separate category of crime by police forces in England and Wales (similar to racism and anti-semitism currently), has yet to materialize. Equally powerful is the accusation pertaining to the far-right with justified accusations that the Tory government and PREVENT policy has done precious little to tackle the threat of far right extremism and the radicalisation of young people safeguarding them from white supremacist ideologies; verbal condemnation is never enough. For now though, let’s give him the benefit of the doubt and assume ‘intention is the first step to action’.

THE BAD

So now the bad and as the old saying goes, ‘if you start off in the wrong place you will almost certainly end up in the wrong place’. Cameron has a fixation with "ideology" being the primary (arguably even sole) driver of radicalization. This is deeply troubling when empirical analysis tells such a different story.

The Guardian yesterday published an article by Professor Andrew Silke, an academic and advisor to the OSCT on counter-extremism. Silke argued that factors driving individuals to extremism was not ideology but "identity issues".

Silke said the government’s [1]Prevent strategy for tackling terrorism was too focused on extremism with no research to back up such an approach.

Silke wrote: “This theme of fighting on behalf of others and in reaction to the suffering of others ... recurs frequently in accounts of the personal motivation of individual terrorists.”

This is, of course, not just the view of Professor Silke but that of renowned academics, such as Professor Marc Sageman, and the many other academics who signed an open letter last week in a major national newspaper calling on the Government to recognise its Prevent policy failure and set about a strategy based on dialogue with Muslim communities.

Equally important is the anecdotal evidence derived from the mass of British Muslims who also feel ideology is just one (less significant) factor amongst many others causing radicalization. And if the PM wants to “empower”
moderate voices among British Muslims, he should acknowledge that the majority of Muslims are moderates, not the few as is mistakenly trumpeted by interest groups who have made a cash cow of "counter extremism".

One of Cameron’s planks is “identity” and while he posits the appeal of ISIL to young minds who lack a "sense of belonging" to Britain, he does not unpack why young Muslims may be acutely affected by alienation and a lack of attachment to the UK. The lived experience of Muslims looks something like this: –

- **Rising Islamophobia in Britain** – Data published by the Metropolitan Police coupled with FOIs submitted by MEND (Muslim engagement and Development) detailing the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes year on year show that [2] Islamophobia is rising. Something must be done to curb this trend and police recording Islamophobic hate crimes is one advance but not near enough.

- **Deeply negative press coverage on British Muslims** – An academic study by Lancaster University shows that for every one mention of “moderate” Muslims in the British Press, there are 21 mentions of “extremist” Muslims. This tendency for disproportionate negative coverage of Islam and Muslims has a corrosive effect on British Muslims and their treatment by wider society.

- **Employment discrimination** – The ‘double ethnic penalty’ faced by Muslim communities has been policy knowledge for over a decade and despite newer research cementing evidence of the level of employment discrimination faced by British Muslims, [3] the highest of all minority groups, we have seen next to no policy interventions to address the issue. The Tory manifesto paid reference to making the labour market "more inclusive" but said nothing about the worst affected group: Muslims.

- **Inconsistency in the incitement to Race and Religious Hatred law** – The burden of proof required to prosecute incitement to racial hatred crimes, covering communities such as Sikhs, Blacks and Jews, is far lower than the threshold required for incitement to religious hatred which is virtually unworkable due to the ‘burden of proof’ required (proof of intent). Suffice to say that since the law has been in existence, not a single offence has been successfully prosecuted under the religious incitement provisions.

- **Foreign policy** – what Cameron called “grievance justifications” are more than grievances and certainly warrant serious attention given the evidence base of its being an important causal factor. No less than the former head of the security services, [4] Dame Eliza Manningham Buller has spoken about the impact of the Iraq war on radicalising young Muslims.
• **A lack of proactive engagement by Muslims with non-Muslims** – Yes, I firmly believe this to be true. Successive studies show that non-Muslims who have come into contact with Muslims tend to have a better opinion of Islam and Muslims. Muslims definitely need to do more to cultivate ties of friendship.

So with the best will in the world, which I don’t deny Cameron has, you can’t solve a problem without diagnosing it correctly in the first place. Factors such as Islamophobic attacks, discrimination in employment, relentless stereotyping and sensationalizing of Muslims in sections of the British press, and of course foreign policy, all play a role here.

**THE UGLY**

Before I offer concluding remarks, I want to touch on the ugly in Cameron’s speech and there certainly was some of it.

**Trojan Horse (Hoax)** – Cameron reiterated the fictitious Trojan Horse plot (or as I may put it Trojan ‘Hoax’ plot). When the Parliamentary Education Committee concluded that with “the exception of one isolated incident in one school, there was no plot”, what on earth is the PM doing reiterating this nonsense? It’s shocking to find a false premise reiterated to justify interventions of the sort proposed in yesterday’s speech. Policy based on no evidence base is not just bad policy, it is bad reasoning.

**Attacks on NUS and Muslim organisations** – This was really underhanded I felt and not befitting a Prime Minister. In fact I’m trying to remember the last time any PM stooped this low and publicly had a pop at an organization like the NUS. It just doesn’t feel right. He attacked the NUS for ‘allying itself with CAGE’ and then criticised CAGE for the ‘Jihadi John’ saga. I’ll let CAGE defend themselves on the Jihadi John front but if the PM was going to attack the NUS for allying with CAGE then surely he should have balanced his analysis by praising the NUS for its sterling work in exposing the Henry Jackson Society’s erroneously named ‘Student Rights’ organization which the NUS concluded was a ‘anti-Islam’ organization, stating “Student Rights are not a legitimate organisation, with a total lack of transparency and have been the source of many sensationalist stories demonising Muslims”.

The PM derided the NUS for not living up to its history of championing good causes – well, exposing Student Rights was the NUS acting at its best so credit where credit is due.

**Good Muslims, Bad Muslim** – If the PM and his advisory team had started off in the right place, then playing the ‘good muslim, bad muslim’ game is not a bad idea. But if your calibration is deeply deviated from the start and diametrically divergent to empirical evidence, academic analysis and Muslim community experience, then not only are you unlikely to achieve your overall objective of reducing extremism but in truth you could wind up being totally counter-productive and defeating your own cause. As Cameron is obsessed with ideology, irrespective of any proof to back this approach (and worse still so much academic research pointing to the contrary), he is playing in to the hands of the ‘self-appointed’ experts on counter terrorism like the Quilliam Foundation, a deeply neocon supported initiative with precious little experience in counter terrorism and virtually no credibility amongst British Muslims. One can also add the likes of Inspire (a Muslim womens’ empowerment initiative) in this sphere too. The frequent pairing of these two organisations is not accidental, it is calculated, to project the idea of “moderate Muslim”. We already know, from the previous Prevent strategy and the heavy endorsement of Quilliam and the Sufi Muslim Council which flowed from it, what “moderate Muslim” means in policy circles. What’s worse is that Cameron is threatening to potentially bankroll his type of Muslim. Talk about out of the frying pan and into the fire!

**A FINAL DELIRIOUS JUMP FOR JOY!**

There was, however, one part of Cameron’s speech which sent me delirious with excitement and I almost jumping for joy. Mid-way through the intense sweaty encounter Cameron expressed his disgust at those who believe ‘Muslims are secretly taking over the Government, and we should not work with them’.
The idea is often articulated as ‘entryism’ and is regularly levied against Muslims simply wanting to engage in the system as should be perfectly compatible with the PM’s mantra about democracy and British values. This ‘entryist’ allegation is a favourite tactic used by neo-con organisations and detractors to demonise mainstream British Muslims and keep them out of mainstream politics (a tactic which ultimately is in nobody’s interest). Most recently the Islamophobe Andrew Gilligan littered one of his articles with ‘entryist’ references against mainstream Muslims organisations. Thank you Mr Cameron for standing up to such people!

Sufyan Ismail is the CEO of Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND). On the advocacy front, MEND is involved in media engagement, lobbying, and policy research. On the community empowerment front, MEND regularly works with grass roots Muslims to help them tackle Islamophobia locally and to increase their media and political literacy.


The Power of Perception: Common Sense or Nonsense (2015-07-24 08:00)

(HT [1]Robert MacDonald)
I left a successful career as a software developer in London to study Arabic and do a PhD in Middle East Studies. I then had a traditional one-year visiting assistant professor job (in Egypt) and a traditional one-year post-doc (in Singapore), while applying for about 50 academic jobs per year. By then I’d had enough of the academic job hunt, which demanded a great deal of time and effort but offered terrible odds and highly arbitrary results, and my wife and I were tired of moving to a different country every year, especially with a child. I was thinking about going back to software development, but knew I’d have to update my skills, since I hadn’t had a programming job in seven years. My wife then got a job in Germany that gave us a little breathing space, and I taught as an adjunct for a semester while trying to figure out what to do next.

I’d heard of a field called digital humanities, which sounded like it might enable me to use my programming skills while staying in or near an academic environment. It turned out that the Digital Humanities Lab at the University of Basel had an opening for someone with a background both in the humanities and in software development. After a brief exchange of emails, they invited me for an interview and made me an offer immediately, which was certainly a contrast to the typical long, formal academic job application process. I asked for and got a flexible working arrangement: I work in Basel three days a week, and work from home in Germany two days a week. Best of all,
one day a week is set aside for my own research. The lab’s current funding situation doesn’t enable them to offer long-term contracts, so I’m on my second short-term contract (my official title is post-doc), but there’s at least a possibility that this will turn into a permanent job.

Having gone through a period of mourning my former ambition to have a traditional academic career, I think my current situation actually seems better. I don’t take my work home with me, and I have more time for research and writing than I did when I was a visiting assistant professor working 12-hour days and weekends to prepare courses. Since I’m under no pressure to publish anything, I can do the research I’m most interested in, rather than the research I think I can publish quickly. So it seems that I actually have more academic autonomy than I would have in a conventional academic career.

Benjamin Geer blogs at [1]socioresources.net and tweets at [2]@benjamingeer

How to Become an Obscure Public Sociologist | SocioResources (2015-07-29 09:57:26)

[...] has the result of all this been in my case? Not much, probably. I have an alt-ac job that doesn’t leave me much time for research or writing. I expect it will take me several [...] 

**CfP: World Society in the Making? Varieties of Transnational Institutions** (2015-07-26 08:00)

Call for Papers for the Workshop
World Society in the Making? Varieties of Transnational Institutions
(7-8 December 2015, Duisburg, Germany)

The emergence of a world society is often considered to be a homogenizing process dominated by the extension of Western rationality with its specific forms and functions of social institutions to other parts of the world. Similarly, norm diffusion is mostly portrayed as a top-down process of transferring globally accepted norms to 'local' settings, e.g. through localisation or emulation.

Another general assumption is that growing economic interdependence in the wake of 'globalization' along with the global availability of modern communication technologies drives this process, and the growing need of global cooperation to tackle the world’s problems should create further incentives along these lines. Yet, is this what we truly observe when we look at the various forms of (institutionalized) transnational cooperation? Can we not expect, in contrast to the aforementioned arguments, that the at least partial demise of the West and the rise of new powers, regions and new types of actors has led to a growing cultural and thus also institutional differentiation in the world? And do these different instances of cooperation follow the same assumed rationalities – or do they offer alternative forms and functions of cooperation?

The workshop will take stock of various instances of inter- and transnational cooperation and forms of emerging World Societal institutions. What forms and functions do social institutions assume that facilitate transnational, regional and trans-regional cooperation (e.g. knowledge transfer, identity-building, ethnic and religious community-building, solidarity, civil society representation or social movements etc.)? Can we identify patterns – and do those
challenge established theories?

The aim of the workshop is to identify potential patterns of transnational cooperation and to take a fresh look at processes of institutional diffusion. We are looking for papers that provide (1) conceptual/theoretical contributions that address the question of cooperation in world society (seminal trends of homogenization or of differentiation; functional necessities of global cooperation or the lack thereof etc.) and/or (2) empirical analyses of instances and forms of cooperation (inter- and transnational, regional, trans-regional), searching for patterns of institutionalization.

Please submit paper proposals (max. 500 words) to baumann@gcr21.uni-due and freistein@gcr21.uni-due by August 15th, 2015. Full conference papers should be distributed by the end of November 2015. The workshop will take place at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research in Duisburg on December 7-8, 2015. Expenses for traveling and accommodation will be covered by the Centre for Global Cooperation Research (http://www.gcr21.org/)

The Critical Realism Network (2015-07-27 08:00)

An [1]important new initiative for anyone interested in Critical Realism. This is how Phil Gorski introduces it:

Dear Colleagues,

I am excited to announce the launch of [2]the Critical Realism Network (CRN) which aims to engage a community of academics from sociology and neighboring disciplines about the importance and applicability of Critical Realism (CR) for social science today.

In collaboration with the project team members, I am excited to introduce our new CRN website with an array of different online resources, ranging from a reading plan to a free webinar series. We will also be hosting multiple events throughout the year with the aim of equipping you with the necessary skills to apply CR to your respective field of study and research.

Welcome to the Critical Realism Network and I hope to see you on August 22, 2015, at our ASA reception.

Regards,

Professor Philip Gorski

1. http://www.criticalrealismnetwork.org/
I recently saw the news that ‘Infidelity site’ Ashley Madison had been hacked, with the attackers [1] claiming 37 million records had been stolen. The site is an online forum for infidelity, a dating site explicitly designed to facilitate affairs, something which potentially provoked the ire of the hackers. Or it could be the fact that users are charged a fee of £15 to permanently delete their records from the site, the efficacy of which the hackers dispute. This seems to be indicative of a broader trend in which dating sites as a whole were [2] found by the Electronic Freedom Foundation to have failed to implement basic security procedures and to be near uniformly vague or silent about whether user data was deleted after the closure of an account.

This is a specific instance of a much broader category of problem which I’ve been thinking a lot about recently: escaping the filter bubble. I use this concept in a much broader sense than [3] Eli Pariser’s original use in his (excellent) book. I see filter bubbles as being a matter of algorithmic enclosure but also of information security. In fact I would argue that the former inevitably poses questions for the latter, because filter bubbles rest upon the collection of personal information and intervention upon this basis. Filter bubbles always pose questions of information security because environments designed around them are always information-hungry and mechanisms of personalisation inevitably introduce opacity into interactions between users and a system in an asymmetric way. But I’d like to expand the concept of filter bubble to encompass the entire informational environment in which we find increasingly find ourselves deliberately enclosed through our use of digital technology. Not all of this is applied algorithmically but I would argue, somewhat crudely, we can talk about greater or lesser tracts of everyday life being lived via digital mediation in a filter bubble characterised by varying degrees of enclosure.

What interests me are experience where we don’t realise we’re in a filter bubble. The questions of information security don’t occur. We live with ontological security, sufficiently comfortable with this technology (something which personalisation can contribute to) in order to act ‘as-if’ the filter bubble doesn’t create risks for us. Will Davies [4] offers an analogy which captures this effectively:

I have a memory from childhood, a happy memory — one of complete trust and comfort. It's dark, and I'm kneeling in the tiny floor area of the back seat of a car, resting my head on the seat. I'm perhaps six years old. I look upward to the window, through which I can see streetlights and buildings rushing by in a foreign town whose name and location I'm completely unaware of. In the front seats sit my parents, and in front of them, the warm yellow and red glow of the dashboard, with my dad at the steering wheel.

Contrary to the sentiment of so many ads and products, this memory reminds me that dependence can be a source of deep, almost visceral pleasure: to know nothing of where one is going, to have no responsibility for how one gets there or the risks involved. I must have knelt on the floor of the car backward to further increase that feeling of powerlessness as I stared up at the passing lights.

But when this ontological security is punctured, we can see risks everywhere. What are people doing with our data? What could they be doing with our data? How are our online environments manipulating us? I’m interested in using ontological security as a conceptual frame through which to understand the urge to escape the filter bubble on a psychoanalytical level. As I develop this line of argument, I need to work on making the exact sense of the underlying concept clearer, but leaving that aside for now, I think it offers a really interesting frame for exploration. Here are the propositions I’m going to come back to in order to develop further:

1. We are enmeshed within a filter bubble through our everyday use of digital technology
2. The filter bubble is deliberately designed, indeed redesigned on a sometimes hour-to-hour basis, driven by complex and opaque interests.

3. Our orientation towards the filter bubble is extremely variable, even over time in one life, let alone between people.

But for now what I’m interested in is how we escape the filter bubble. When we see the endemic risks, when the reassuring cocoon of ontological security recedes, what do we do? The problem is that not everyone is equally well positioned to escape the filter bubble. It necessitates technical knowledge, time and energy. Some people don’t care but know what to do. Some people do care but don’t know what to do. Most people fall between these two poles at different points in relation to specific issues. What I’m interested in is how any definite attempt to escape the filter bubble leads to an intensification of cognitive burdens at a time of endemic acceleration. If everyone feels rushed, how does the urge to escape the filter bubble contribute to that experience, constituting just one more thing to worry about? How does this in turn contribute to the problem of what I’ve elsewhere described as [6]cognitive triage? I can imagine an emerging profession, consultant digital escapologist, paid to help the cash-rich but time-poor manage their information security.

2. https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/02/comparing-privacy-and-security-online-dating-sites

Allan McDougall (2015-07-28 13:17:19)
I wonder what your thoughts would be on taking the idea of filter bubble(s) and ontological security and applying them to evidence-based medicine. Individuals and groups (end-users) interacts with the health care system—a patient, patients with the same condition, and families. In many ways, information is filtered through various technologies and filtered in how it is delivered to both health professionals and then end-users. I would argue health status has a lot to do with how individuals and groups situate themselves ontologically. The concept of the filter bubble is one I’ll keep in my back pocket as I move forward in my research. Thank you for this excellent post, Allan

I think that’s a really interesting suggestion, thanks! Will have to ponder some more.

Colin Carré (2015-07-29 10:29:15)
The thing is also that escaping the filter bubble still gives informations to the bubble: what we want to escape from can be as informative (if not more) as what we want to give to the bubble.

Transhumanism's Big Political Blind Spot (2015-07-28 18:54)
For those who still don’t know what it is, transhumanism is basically the application of science and technology to amplify the human condition, potentially well beyond our biological default settings. As someone who has increasingly identified with transhumanism since publishing [1]Humanity 2.0 in 2011, I welcome the ideology’s move
into the mainstream of politics and culture, at least in the English-speaking world. But the form it has taken is rather curious.

Zoltan Istvan, a California-based science fiction writer with columns in *The Huffington Post* and *Vice*, is running for the US presidency in 2016 on the Transhumanist Party ticket – so far without a running mate, it seems. He plans to drive an ‘Immortality Bus’ across America to dramatize his main policy priority: enabling everyone to live forever. A measure of Istvan’s respectability is that he keynoted this year’s [3]Camp Alphaville in London, a meeting point for Silicon Valley and *Financial Times* readers. Meanwhile, [4]Maria Konovalenko, also California-based, is a Russian-born biophysicist who promotes transhumanist lifestyle issues, from cooking to sex, all aimed at immortality as well. She does a lot of fund-raising activities for transhumanist causes, and like Istvan presents a certain vision of transhumanism – infinite youthful vitality, basically – as an inherently attractive ideal for all of humanity.

But what if you don’t share this ideal? I’ve semi-facetiously speculated that such transhumanists must regard [5]most non-transhumanists as zombies who spend their lives waiting to die. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that the mainstreaming of transhumanism has occurred this way, as if reflects issues already on people’s minds, such as health and ageing. Indeed, Istvan and Konovalenko periodically suggest that transhumanism is really just an extension of ‘common sense’, one that happens to promise to cure ‘disabilities’, end degenerative diseases and reprogramme potential criminals. All of these goals, while undoubtedly attractive to many individuals, point to enormous social and ethical problems down the road once scaled up into the realm of public policy. My own version of transhumanism has put these problems in the foreground, typically in an optimistic spirit that sees an opportunity for radical social innovation. However, these scale-related issues are conspicuous by their absence from mainstream transhumanism.

This absence points to transhumanism’s political blind spot, which is related to its default libertarian philosophy. Transhumanists (and here I would also include even some of the more sensible Silicon Valley entrepreneurs) generally believe that all of humanity’s differences – be they in terms of wealth or health – are the result of large organizations, perhaps most of all the state, blocking the flow of information which has the potential to provide a cornucopia of benefits, typically through new technologies, once the information is allowed to develop freely. Of course, the resulting innovations may make a few people rich at first but markets will spur competition, drive down prices, distribute the innovations, etc. What gives this narrative its surface plausibility is that, at bottom, all people are seen as wanting the same things, to be the same way, and so they have a common interest in pushing together towards the envisaged utopia. Whatever value differences seem to exist amongst people can be resolved simply by ‘upgrading’ their existence. Thus, the fact that all societies are anchored in quite specific interpretations of the life cycle is treated as a mere wrinkle that will be ironed out over time as a downstream effect of the cornucopian onslaught.

To be sure, there may well remain irreconcilable value differences. And here the idea of a cornucopian cosmos kicks in. Many transhumanists are open to the idea of humanity’s sub-speciation, a line of thought that implies self-segregating eco-niches, perhaps even corresponding to separate forms of life flourishing on different planets. However, a prospect that one rarely sees transhumanists pursue is that of integrating a much wider range of beings travelling under the banner of ‘humanity’ than ever before under a common system of governance. Yet, people’s intuitions about ‘disability’ are becoming increasingly fluid, connected in part to the popularity of cyborgs, as well as transhumanism’s own idea of ‘morphological freedom’ (i.e. the capacity to move between radically different states of being, especially carbon and silicon).

Indeed, Veronika Lipinska and I have argued in [6]The Proactionary Imperative that a truly free transhumanist society would stretch society’s powers of accommodation and assimilation to levels that no classical liberal theorist could ever have imagined. John Locke and his liberal descendants presumed a ‘natural’ (i.e. biological) equality amongst all people, which in their own way libertarian transhumanists continue to uphold. However, the deep political challenge facing transhumanism is how to integrate a range of ‘humans’ whose resource requirements may differ substantially because, say, their carbon/silicon ratios vary radically – but equally, and more simply, because
people refuse to hop on Istvan’s Immortality Bus. These beings would not be ‘natural equals’ yet they would qualify for some more expansive sense of *Equality 2.0*.

*Thanks to Emilie Whitaker for some well-targeted tweets.*

4. [https://mariakonovalenko.wordpress.com/](https://mariakonovalenko.wordpress.com/)

The @_ISRF @DigitalSocSci and @BigDataSoc Essay Competition (2015-07-29 08:00)

An exciting new project I’ve helped launch: a collaboration between the [ISRF](http://www.isrf.org/)’s [Digital Social Science Forum](http://twitter.com/digitalsocsci) and the journal [Big Data & Society](http://bds.sagepub.com/). See [here](http://www.isrf.org/2015/07/29/freedom-from-self-imposed-metrified-tyranny-some-thoughts-on-the-moral-psychology-of-self-tracking/) for full details:

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic ‘Influence and Power’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

[www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/essay-competitions/](http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/essay-competitions/)

1. [http://www.isrf.org/](http://www.isrf.org/)
2. [http://www.twitter.com/digitalsocsci](http://www.twitter.com/digitalsocsci)
3. [http://bds.sagepub.com/](http://bds.sagepub.com/)
5. [http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/essay-competitions/](http://www.isrf.org/funding-opportunities/essay-competitions/)

Freedom from self-imposed metrified tyranny: some thoughts on the moral psychology of self-tracking (2015-07-30 08:00)

A couple of years ago I purchased a Nike Fuel Band, partly out of a curiosity driven by my nascent interest in self-tracking and partly out of a desire to rationalise not going to the gym. If I was planning to conduct research
on self-tracking practices then it seemed important to me to actually try them myself. However over the following years, my interest in self-tracking became downgraded to that of something like urbanism, as a topic that fascinates me but that I realise I have nothing useful to say on, while my engagement (entrapment?) in self-tracking practices remained, first through the fuel band then two successive jawbone bands.

I’ve been given cause to reflect on this recently by the fact that my jawbone has broken twice in the space of a week (ouch) giving me a respite from the metricised tyranny to which I had merrily subjected myself over the previous years. In defence of the jawbone: the soft wakeup function can be an extremely pleasant way to wake up. It starts buzzing up to half an hour before a set time when it detects, albeit by way of questionable proxies, you are sleeping most lightly, with the intention of reducing drowsiness. I think there’s something to this but there’s also an obvious invitation to confirmation bias: if you set a device to wake you up without feeling drowsy then you’re much more likely to ask yourself ‘am I feeling drowsy?’ when you wake up and attribute its absence to the magical powers of the band. The sleep tracker was also the first and only experience I’ve had of ‘self-knowledge through numbers’. It turns out I had a persistent habit of going to bed very early when I was sleep deprived then it taking hours for me to get to sleep i.e. it would usually take me 10 minutes to get to sleep if I went to bed 10pm-12pm but hours if I went to bed earlier. Thus undermining the point of going to bed early. I also saw for the first time how much alcohol would undermine the quality of my sleep, prompting a year long experiment with cutting back on and then completely giving up alcohol, which I’m now in turn giving up on (I missed red wine & craft beer) but that was nonetheless enormously healthy for me as a person.

Now those defensive remarks are out of the way: the jawbone is fucking creepy. I’ve written about the idleness alarm and [1]how readily the concept would lend itself to invasive applications. But I’m wondering now about how systematically the measurements have tended to crowd out the value of what is being measured within my own psyche. My standard defence of self-tracking had been that voluntary self-tracking is an augmentation of reflexivity: if you reflexively decide that exercise is good and you want to incorporate more exercise into your life, these technological practices can be useful tools to overcome some of the all-too-human propensities which undermine the projects of self-cultivation we seek to pursue. Furthermore, critics of self-tracking often mistake the narrative of self-tracking (self-knowledge through numbers) for its moral psychology, something which I think is empirically variable but I suspect has far more in common with neo-ascetic regimes like ‘lifestyle minimalism’ and ‘life hacking’ than these critics tend to recognise. The practices, the devices, the contexts and the sensibilities upon which the diffusion of ‘self-tracking’ depends may all be new. But this self-self relation simply isn’t and anyone who fails to recognise this has a poor grasp of ‘the self’, its history or both.

Nonetheless, what I’m now recognising is how what can be reflexively taken up as an extension of one’s agency – in order to increase our capacity to act on 2nd order desires (“I want to want to exercise”) in the face of 1st order whims (“I don’t want to go to the gym today”) – nonetheless acts back iteratively upon the agent in a way that moulds their dispositions towards reflexivity. What do I mean? Firstly, self-tracking practices are outcome orientated. What matters is a completed activity. This doesn’t magically remove your capacity to enjoy an activity but it does mitigate against it: if you’re going for a walk because your jawbone tells you to, it’s not impossible that you’ll nonetheless enjoy the walk, the scenery, being outside etc but the mentality of self-tracking never encourages and sometimes actively undermines the attentiveness necessary for this enjoyment to emerge during the walk. Secondly, this mattering is unstable unless the completed activity is measured in a reliable way: the whole edifice starts to crack if you begin to think about how the instruments may be deliberately or accidentally gamed, as well as the spheres of errancy (e.g. sleep vs. lying perfectly still unable to sleep) that become obvious once you’ve used a band for a bit. That this activity matters to you necessitates continued faith, perhaps ontological security in the sense of a willingness to act ‘as if’ the measurement is as objective as it says it is, in the instruments and your use of them. Thirdly, this mattering is contingent upon continued submission to the system. If your band breaks or you cease using it, perhaps switching to a competitor, the meaningfulness of what you’ve been doing is imperilled in proportion to the scale of the technological transition.
This is all a long winded way of saying that I’ve changed my views on self-tracking. I do find it creepy after all. But I still think many of the critics misunderstand exactly what’s going on here. I think cessation of self-tracking is an enormously important empirical topic, without which discussion of self-tracking will inevitably remain prone to over-generalisation. We also need longitudinal qualitative studies of self-tracking, serious and extended versions of the auto-ethnographic reflections I’ve tried to outline here, in order to better understand how these activities unfold temporally in a way able to change both the person and the activity.


John McCreery (2015-07-31 01:10:06)
Mark, I am serendipitously where you are. My second jawbone bracelet stopped working properly two months ago and has not been replaced. Why? The first two bands were very good for me (age 70) and my wife (age 68). We got the bands because a brush with mortality persuaded our daughter to persuade us that we needed more regular exercise. And they worked! Striving to walk 10,000 steps a day dramatically changed habits once focused on getting as quickly from point A to point B as possible. Now, whenever possible, we extend walks, using longer back-street routes. It was also fascinating to have our sleep patterns monitored and see how different they are. My wife sleeps like a rock, with long stretches of deep REM sleep. I am a rapid cycle type, up and down several times a night (which, one observes, has something to do with being an aging male). So with all these good results, why haven’t the bands been replaced? The new habits have become habits and very enjoyable, too. Long walks and a bit more sleep are, indeed, just what the doctor ordered. Don’t need the constant nagging anymore and it’s nice not having the UP application draining the iPhone battery. There is also wanting something more sophisticated now. We live in a hilly city. Yokohama is much like San Francisco. Would like a device that kept track of ups and downs as well as number of steps walked. And even without an Apple watch the new iPhone Health dashboard seems to do a pretty good job. Time for a walk. Take care.

I identify with that a lot - thanks! I like your emphasis on how the habits can outlast the device you temporarily drew upon to help inculcate them.

Alt-academic careers #2: Adam Riggio (2015-07-31 08:00)

By Adam Riggio

When I decided to leave a career in academia behind, I felt betrayed. Since my early twenties, I had received nothing but encouragement from professors in my own program and at conferences where I’d present.

I met some stodgy profs, whose advice sounded more paternalistic and condescending than inspirational. But most of the professors I met and worked with said that my philosophical writing, research, and thought was valuable and would achieve great things for the discipline.

McMaster University, where I did my doctoral studies, supported my trips around the world to present my work at conferences. I knew the job market was tough, but I had every reason to believe that my work was unique and strong enough to withstand those challenges. I would make my mentors proud, and honour the legacies of my mentors who were no longer alive to see it.

Then I received my doctorate, and everything fell apart.
I never heard back from tenure-track positions I applied for, even though my mentors assured me that my publication and conference presentation rate during my doctorate (finished on time in four years) surpassed that of some long-tenured professors.

Adjunct positions in my region of Canada, which has 12 university campuses in commuting range, were all closed to me because they prioritized seniority in hiring. The head of one adjuncts’ union told a relative of mine that his job was to protect his members’ jobs by keeping applications like mine from being read.

Over three years, I received only one job interview, which turned me down because I said, like an honest professional, that when the contract ended, I would consider other opportunities as well as that of renewing the same contract.

Yes, I feel betrayed. But turning away from the university system for my employment isn't the same as turning away from reading and writing philosophy.

Philosophy is more than an academic discipline, despite these institutions and norms for writing and argument having become so dominant that a philosopher outside the academy is inconceivable. Or else, such a philosopher is pathetic, a pitiable “independent scholar” who attends professional conferences in universities only to be mocked and spat upon. “[1]If you were worth talking to, you’d have a university post.”

When I started working out what my new career after academia could be, I went to [2]Versatile PhD, and was horrified by the first forum I read. It was a chain of joyfully bitter people celebrating having sold all their books, set fire to print-outs of journal articles and their old drafts. Even their printed and bound dissertations themselves. I broke down crying. Was all that work, the dedication of the bulk of my twenties, nothing more than a waste of time fit for a bonfire?

I was sure that philosophy wasn't worthless, that it was more than a few increasingly insular pros desperately trying to keep their departments alive in the face of growing disdain for humanities education among university administrations, government, and the wider business world. Philosophy is more than what philosophy professors in universities do.

Philosophy is a tradition of creativity, developing concepts which we use to understand the world where we live, who and what we are, and what our purpose in life should be.

Such an approach to philosophy – the underlying goal it has always had – would make philosophy an artistic tradition. The philosophical works that have a heritage beyond the fragmenting schools of humanities academia read more like artworks than disciplinary research.


But I have always been driven to produce creative works, and what drew me to philosophy was the creative spirit that drives its landmark works. My work in universities existed in my life alongside my artistic projects, and now I carry out my philosophical research and writing as an artistic project as well.

Last year, I published a science-fiction novel, [5]Under the Trees, Eaten. It’s a feminist take on Lovecraftian style, with a small Canadian company. I’ve published short stories through writing contests, and am preparing a collection of social realist fiction stories about growing up in contemporary Newfoundland that I plan to shop to
publishers over the next year.


My philosophical writing includes regular updates and discussions [8]on my blog, where I track the development of all my artistic work idea by idea. This is where I develop the ideas for my next major work of philosophy, an exploration of utopian political thought from just after the First World War to the present. I adapt ideas from this project to other literary works, which right now includes a screenplay for a [9]science-fiction feature, in collaboration with the young Canadian director, [10]Lee Skinner.

It's a more difficult and diverse career path than the comfortable university office of a philosophy professor. But I think my work will have a wider social impact than it ever would from behind those walls.

Adam Riggio is on facebook at [11]https://www.facebook.com/adamriggiowrites and tweets at @adamriggio

2. https://versatilephd.com/
4. https://lifelinesyria.ca/
8. http://adawriteseverything.blogspot.ca/

Allan McDougall (2015-07-31 14:06:35)
Hi Adam, I'm a PhD(c) with an awesome full-time job in the NGO sector that I've started while writing my dissertation. A lot of your points resonate with me. A colleague of mine told me his mentor worked 15 years in government before having the chance to transition into a tenure track position. During those 15 years she made it her goal to publish 2 papers per year. She told him that this would never have happened had she not published 2 papers per year. So maybe your employer will allow you to protect some time for independent research and scholarship—or, more likely, you’ll find ways to publish ideas that generate from your interesting work. Whatever the case, just remember that you never know what will open up for you in the future.
Cheers, Allan
6.8 August

Beyond the Neoliberal University, 18th September at Coventry University (2015-08-01 08:00)

BEYOND THE NEO-LIBERAL UNIVERSITY

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND ACTIVISM

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY - FRIDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2015

Warwick UCU committee encourages you to attend this UCU-sponsored event.

Around the world there have been a whole series of occupations and protests led by students, as well as actions involving lecturers and teachers, which reflect widespread disillusion with the way universities have come to act primarily as money making institutions. This event will begin with speakers who will set out the social and economic context for the marketisation of Higher Education, followed by participatory workshops on issues of activism, pedagogy and research.

The event begins at 9.30 and concludes at 4.00. Light refreshments will be provided.

This event is free to attend but you must register.

[1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/beyond-the-neoliberal-university-critical-pedagogy-and-activism-tickets-17390600755 If you are in full time employment and feel you are able to make a contribution, then a donation of £20 can be used to fund travel expenses of those who need financial support in order to attend. If you are unable to attend, please print out the attached files and encourage colleagues to come along instead.

Advice for junior faculty on dealing with the nasty side of social media (2015-08-02 08:00)

This a little old but there's some great advice here. It's written by Kathleen Fitzpatrick, Director of Scholarly Communication at the Modern Language Association. Read it [1]in full here:

1. Do not let dust-ups such as these stop you from blogging/tweeting/whatever.

2. Listen carefully to these debates, though, as they will tell you something important about your field and the folks in it.

3. Use your blog/twitter/whatever professionally.

4. Make your tweets and blog posts your own.

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5. If somebody says they’d prefer not to be tweeted or blogged, respect that.

1. [http://www.plannedobsolescence.net/advice-on-academic-blogging-tweeting-whatever/](http://www.plannedobsolescence.net/advice-on-academic-blogging-tweeting-whatever/)

Bloggging your fieldwork (2015-08-03 08:00)

Pat Thompson has written a fascinating post reflecting on her use of blogging to record field notes during an ethnographic project at the Tate summer school. She stresses the ethical challenges of such an activity – particularly the need to negotiate consent with participants, including around photos, as well as the need for a framework for naming and recognition of potential harms – but argues that blogging in this context can provide a really useful 'audit trail': a record of what was done and in what order.

She makes a compelling case that the resulting posts offer many advantages compared to more traditional ways of recording field notes: it's easier to discipline yourself to do the blog post, it's easier to link out in ways susceptible to following up later and the need to make the posts accessible and interesting (e.g. not too long) necessitates editing/filtering which itself requires valuable evaluation of the events of the day. What I found most interesting though were the advantages this can have in terms of building connections, within and beyond the fieldwork site:

(5) participants and research partners like to read the posts each day too. It not only works for you but also works for them as a record of what’s gone on and what resources, people, organisations and “stuff” they used – so they can follow these up too.

(6) participants know more about what you’re doing. We all read our institutional ethics forms about checking with participants and keeping them informed, but this is often not taken very seriously IMHO. A daily post goes a little way to telling people what you’re doing, and...

(7) a post can lead to good conversations with participants. if something is online, people can read it and then – tell you’ve got something wrong, or disagree with you, or discuss something further or tell you what they think. If your notes are locked away in your notebook, then this kind of responsive conversation is less easy to begin.

(8) the telling of the events as they’ve just happened has “live-ness” which is often missing from accounts which are heavily processed long after the event has happened (see [2]"Live methods" by Les Back and Nirmal Puwar)

(9) blog readers may get some ideas of their own from reading about your work (I’ve just been contacted by one of my colleagues who is going to play with GIFs and zines on the back of yesterday’s post.)


This is a wonderful example of what I’ve tried to write about in the past as ‘continuous publishing’: the advantages
that can accrue from doing work in the open that once would have been done in private. Getting the ideas out there in this way, making them public, means they begin to act instantaneously – in this case, in a way that feeds back upon the process that is being documented through blogging.


Sociology Special Issue 2017 - Still Time to Submit! (2015-08-04 08:00)

Global Futures and Epistemologies of the South: New Challenges for Sociology

Call for Papers - Sociology Special Issue

Guest Editors:

Gurminder K Bhambra, Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick and Visiting Fellow in Sociology (2014-15), Princeton University

Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor of Sociology, University of Coimbra, and Distinguished Legal Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Deadline for submission of full papers: 16 October 2015

This special issue takes stock of the progress that has been made within sociology over recent decades to become a more globally oriented discipline and discusses the new challenges for the future that emerge as a consequence. It rests on two interlinked premises. First, that understandings of the world are much broader than the Western understanding of the world and so for sociology to adequately address its global futures it needs to take into account ways of knowing that exceed Western thinking, including critical Western thinking. Second, that the current configurations of the world are a consequence of global historical processes that have not always been adequately addressed within western-based sociology. For sociology to better conceptualise its global futures, it also needs to address its global pasts. We invite contributions that address the issues raised, both theoretically and through empirical research, across (but not limited to) the following themes:

- Epistemologies of the South and Global Challenges to /for Sociology
- Imagining Global Sociologies: Past, Present, and Future
- The Global South in the North
- Recovering Silenced / Forgotten Sociologies
- Transnational Solidarities, Anti-colonial Struggles and the ‘Rise’ of the South(s)
- Emancipatory Social Movements and Alternative Narratives

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Imagining post-capitalism and techno-fascism (2015-08-05 08:00)

Last week Paul Mason posted a provocative Guardian essay suggesting that [1]the end of capitalism has begun. It’s a precursor to his upcoming book [2]PostCapitalism: A Guide To Our Future which is released in a few days time. I’m looking forward to the book, not least of all because it’s an optimistic counterpoint to the gloomy thought experiment I’ve been intermittently working on for months now: what would techno-fascism look like? I finished my first piece of work on this recently, a contribution to the [3]Centre for Social Ontology’s Social Morphogenesis project, making the case that digital capitalism is giving rise to ‘distracted people’ and ‘fragile movements’ while also facilitating surveillance and repression of a degree of efficiency exponentially greater than any security apparatus that has previously existed in human history.

My rather depressing conclusion concerns spiralling obstacles to durablesocial movements exercising a sustained influence over political and social life, though not necessarily to protest, politicisation or critique. As the project progresses, I want to explore two tendencies towards digitally facilitated suppression: the ‘hard’ strand, the openly authoritarian mechanisms through which digital technology is used repressively and how they might diffuse, as well as the ‘soft’ strand, the increasingly designed informational environment and the cognitive costs involved in escaping it, as well as their implications for collective action.

I situate these in terms of post-democracy and the political economy of the second machine age: crudely, I’m suggesting that the interests of elites in defensive repression, in the face of growing structural underemployment and unemployment driven by automation, creates a risk that ‘soft’ repression (already a problem) comes to be conjoined with ‘hard’ repression, with a post-democratic political climate likely to render popular restraints upon
this drift ineffective. This is compounded by a political context in which the war on terrorism is giving way to the war on extremism, normalising repressive measures against those whose ‘ideology’ (let alone their actions) put them outside the political mainstream. Underlying this analysis are some much more specific arguments about ‘distracted people’ and ‘fragile movements’ which I won’t summarise here, as well as an argument I want to develop of where a trend to vertical integration is likely to lead the tech sector and how this might further incline the culture within it in a way susceptible to acquiescing to some rather extreme measures.

It’s a depressing argument. But I’m looking forward to developing it. The project has been on hold since I finished my CSO paper because I need to finish Social Media for Academics. But I’m presenting an initial version of the overall argument at a Futures Workshop in August and then I’ll begin work on a book proposal in September. I’d like to include two chapters of design fiction in the finished book: one envisioning post-capitalism and another envisioning techno-fascism. I don’t believe either outcome is inexorable but I do find my own arguments worryingly convincing (I’m often very critical of my own work but I’m really pleased with the CSO chapter, it went through a slightly brutal multistage review process and it really shows) at least in terms of currently inoperative social mechanisms that one could easily envision kicking in under future politico-economic circumstances not much worse than our present ones. But if Mason’s book is as provocative as I suspect it will be, I’d like to use it as an optimistic foil, not least of all to preserve the social optimism which I’m concerned that I’m in the process of losing.

This extract from a recent Guardian debate with Mason (HT [4]Phil BC) gives a taste of what the book will be like: [5]https://embed.theguardian.com/... (unfortunately it won’t embed on wordpress.com)

5. https://embed.theguardian.com/...
is rooted in an ‘existentialist’ conception of the person. It then uses Goffman’s Asylums and Foucault’s Folie et déraison - both published in 1961 - to illustrate how these methodologies reinforce each other.


The researchers’ survival guide (2015-08-07 08:00)

An [1]important resource produced by UCU:

The guide:

- outlines the rights of research staff and what they can expect from their institutions
- offers practical advice on issues including developing your career, workloads and maternity leave
- suggests ways in which you can seek improvements.

It also outlines how UCU campaigns for researchers and offers a range of support options.

The guide provides a great opportunity to recruit new members so that researchers have a stronger voice in their union and strengthen UCU’s ability to improve research careers.


Sociology Associate Board - Call for Applications (2015-08-08 08:00)

Sociology Associate Board Recruitment
Deadline: Tuesday 18 August 2015

We are seeking 8 new members to join the Sociology Associate Board, from mid-October 2015 until July 31 2018.

Sociology relies on its peer reviewers to maintain high quality scholarship. Alongside the work of members of the Editorial Board, members of the Associate Board help to ensure that the journal makes a timely and constructive response to article submissions.

The Associate Board is a flexible way for individuals to become involved in the ongoing success of the journal and also to engage in regular peer reviewing. It is made up of a wide variety of scholars based around the world with a broad range of areas of interest. Early career researchers are welcome to apply.

Members of the Associate Board must possess either a PhD in sociology (or a cognate social science discipline), or at least two years’ research and/or teaching experience of sociology (or a cognate subject). All candidates must have authored peer reviewed publications.

Full details, as well as the application form, are available on the BSA website: [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/pubsvacancies.aspx

If you would like to nominate yourself for membership of the Associate Board, please email a completed form to Sophie Jaques ([2]sociology.journal@britsoc.org.uk) by Tuesday 18 August 2015, 17:00 GMT.

2. mailto:sociology.journal@britsoc.org.uk

Social media and solidarity in higher education (2015-08-09 08:00)

There’s a [1]great article on the THE, in which Caroline Magennis reflects on the success of the conversation she started recently about being an academic from a less privileged background:

What are the challenges of being an academic from a less privileged background? Questions of ‘fitting in’ but also practical issues?

It’s worth [3]reading in full, as is the [4]associated Storify. I’m going to write about it in the final chapter of Social Media for Academics as an example of how social media can allow the emergence of new forms of solidarity, in which public discussion of what had previously been private issues leaves people with a new or renewed sense of shared and systemic problems.
I’ve struggled to see how Snapchat could be used within higher education. I could imagine why academics might end up using it in an entirely personal capacity, but I found it difficult to imagine how it could be used by them professionally. So it was really interesting to read this interview with Newcastle University’s Social Media manager on the Picklejar site. As he points out, “the people we wanted to speak to were there” and they’ve been using Snapchat to find a “new way to engage with current and prospective students that allowed us to showcase different aspects of campus life in a less formal style”. They feel confident that it’s helped them reach their target audience, also citing “anecdotal evidence that it’s working as a way of keeping applicants warm and engaging with our current students”. Interestingly, they’ve found much higher engagement rates than with Twitter, reporting that most stories now receive over 1,000 views (which given they have 1,000 followers presumably means content circulates easily on Snapchat beyond followers).

I’m still a little bemused by Snapchat however. From a sociology of youth perspective, I can understand why it’s popular amongst a certain demographic. But from an institutional standpoint, it seems to me that any success with the platform occurs in spite of rather than because of the distinctive temporality built into the architecture of the platform. Perhaps I’ve simply failed to grasp it. But I wonder if the time invested in Snapchat could be more effectively spent creating content for Instagram which could also be reused on Twitter and Facebook with little to no repurposing. I also still can’t see more substantively academic uses of Snapchat, though would love to hear about any that those reading this might know of.

Emerson Malca (2015-08-11 23:25:05)
We’ve seen librarians offering research help to students and student success centers offering advice and other help to students through StudyRoom. When they initially approached us they expressed the same problem of not being able to reach the students and thus why the need to be where they are. I do think any social media channel is great for communicating with students but as far as academic purposes goes (beyond classroom communication) I think Snapchat is not a great candidate.

Hibben Prejudice: Can Prejudice be Defended? (2015-08-10 09:59)

by Oliver Bonnington

In 1911, John Grier Hibben, who was for twenty years President of Princeton University, wrote A Defense of Prejudice and other Essays; a ‘forgotten’ philosophical text, rarely cited, though recently reprinted. The republishing of a book can give old ideas fresh impetus by apprehending of new adherents. It can also provide an opportunity for us to reflect on its position within an established academic field. Here I just want to offer some reflections on the title essay.

In this work, Hibben set out an individualistic and cognitivist view of the dynamics of prejudice, bypassing, for instance, the roles of affect and social structures, which have themselves gained currency in the study of prejudice and stigma in the last few decades. He argued that prejudice served a ‘legitimate function’ within the mind, reasoning that ‘A prejudice is not always an unreasonable judgement, it may merely be a judgement that is unreasoned’. The main defense he offered boiled down to the idea that non-deliberation is economical in everyday life and such non-deliberative impressions can be a form of prejudice. But, even if both the idea and utility of unreasoned judgement have some validity, and I don’t fully endorse this myself, does it make for an adequate defense of prejudice?

There seem to me to be good grounds for us to reject Hibben’s defense both in the evidence of us as sentient beings who revise our thoughts on matters over time, and as people in search of practical theories that are able to account for change as well as stasis in society. Indeed, ethical imperatives, among others, whether derived through collective or individual reflection, give us cause to avoid cognitive and socio-cultural sclerosis when it comes to issues of prejudice.

It’s doubtful that we’re all constantly nudging ourselves to be critical of our practices or the ideas we and others hold in respect of different social phenomena and what counts as prejudice. Indeed, we forget why we believe certain things or why we’re doing what we’re doing all the time. Moreover, new situations requiring swift action can restrict our ability to deliberate, meaning we partly rely on tacit knowledge. But whilst our relatively non-deliberative acts and habits may enable us to carry out some practices in everyday life with a degree of effortlessness and efficiency, it doesn’t mean that they should go unchallenged, especially if the effects of such practices are deleterious on the wellbeing of others. It also doesn’t mean that they are somehow a natural, innate product of a black-boxed subconscious, as Hibben thought. Instead, prejudice always takes place in socio-cultural contexts, which are never at rest.

It’s worth noting that Hibben didn’t think the cognitive processes of arriving at conclusions were as important as the conclusions themselves: so long as we remember the conclusions, he advised, the processes become unnecessary to retain and we can therefore reliably discard them. Such essentialist thinking about what humans do does violence to the forces of reflexivity in social change and, furthermore, places a thick veil over the power of certain groups and individuals to a) be able to frame, study and draw those conclusions in the first place, and b) to lodge them as ideas with powerful constitutive abilities in the cultural system.
If prejudice is ‘legitimate’ simply because it facilitates the economical workings of the mind, then we should question why an economically working mind is so valued in certain contexts and pay attention to the nature of its social implications. Many people find security, comfort and reassurance in stable ‘facts’ or a tendency to weave neat, linear narratives and assimilate seemingly assorted and contradictory ephemera into them. Yet, to me, it seems obvious that these things are instead quite often troubling. This may lead to a certain degree of reflexive fracturing on my part (by which I mean that my thinking about the world in relation to myself and vice versa often means I fail to act purposively), but I’m much more comfortable being uncomfortable with received wisdom, whether I take it from my or others’ previous conclusions, than with just ploughing on or unreflexively stating my opinions on something because it’s economical to do so.

So, Hibben thought prejudice should be defended. I disagree; prejudice needs to be challenged and this should be a ceaseless endeavour.

Perhaps picking a fight with a dead person of whom relatively few people today have heard is not the most daring or worthwhile thing I could have done. But when Hibben’s ideas were initially published in 1911 they became part of Popper’s ‘World Three’ and we should question why and how they’ve traveled to – or rather been dug up in – the present. Maybe if we look to our current neoliberal context, with its emphases on individualism, self-responsibility and a pre-occupation with the pillorying, marginalization and abjection of certain groups, or to the ascendance (and subordination) of particular disciplinary and philosophical viewpoints, we may find some interesting answers.

Dr. Oliver Bonnington works in the Faculty of Public Health & Policy at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

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Our most popular posts this month (2015-08-11 08:00)

[1]A feminist leaves the neoliberal university

[2]Congrats, you did not cite any feminist work!

[3]CfP: Beyond the Master’s Tools

[4]Connected and disconnected writing

[5]The place of sociology in the Second Machine Age

[7] PREVENT will have a chilling effect on open debate, free speech and political dissent

[8] Considering becoming an indy scholar? 5 tips to get you started...

[9] How to be an academic and deal with stupid & hostile interviewers

[10] Becoming Yanis Varoufakis


Celebrity, Publicity and Self-Branding in Web 2.0 (2015-08-12 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/K5BP_OEBCCY
Oppression and self-promotion on social media (2015-08-13 08:00)

This is a really important post by Eric Grollman that has helped me rethink a part of Social Media for Academics that I was struggling with. The systematic generation of imposter syndrome within the academy is a crucial mechanism through which the costs involved in digital engagement come to be distributed unevenly:

I will grant that self-doubt is [1]not unique to scholars from oppressed communities. But, that is where the commonalities with our privileged colleagues end. For working-class scholars, scholars of color, women scholars, LGBTQ scholars, scholars with disabilities, immigrant and international scholars, and fat scholars, our personal bouts with [2]impostor syndrome — feeling as though we do not belong and/or are not as good as our privileged colleagues — are a symptom of systems of oppression that operate through academia, just as they do through every other important social institution. We cannot help but feel as though we do not belong because academia was not built by us or for us. We had to fight to be let in the front door (and still do), and continue to fight to be included fully; when we do get in, subtle and explicit efforts are made to undermine us at every corner.


This is compounded by the disproportionate risks entailed by digital engagement for the groups Grollman cites. Though this is a subject for another post. Both factors make a requirement for digital engagement, tacit or otherwise, additionally problematic. But Grollman offers a really inspiring account of political agency in relation to these systemic constraints, something which I’ll cite in relation to digital engagement for Social Media for Academics but obviously applies much more broadly:

I push myself because the impostor syndrome that I experience is the same symptom of oppression that my fellow marginalized scholars experience. I push myself because every time I decline an invitation, there is a good chance another person like me may not be invited in my place or also will not accept the invitation; when this occurs repeatedly, we are complicit in the systematic exclusion of the voices of marginalized scholars. I push myself because I cannot afford to turn down the few opportunities that come my way in light of the infinite opportunities that are denied to me because of my identities and politics. I push myself because this job will never be easy; academia is a difficult profession by design, and can be deadly for marginalized scholars.

When marginalized scholars self-promote and speak out, we make space for other marginalized scholars, or at least inspire bravery in others. I simply cannot imagine where I would be if W. E. B. Du Bois, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and the editors of [4]Presumed Incompetent had not dared to...
speak out and promote their own work and perspectives! I doubt sexualities would be the theme of the upcoming annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) if sexuality scholars (including ASA President Paula England) were too afraid to promote their work as a legitimate and important area of study. Each time I promote my work and voice, I hope that I, too, am having the same positive influence on others.

Allowing ourselves to be heard and visible in academic spaces benefits our privileged colleagues, as well. By daring to promote our work and to speak up, we contribute to disrupting our own systemic exclusion. We challenge the perspective and scholarship of white heterosexual middle-class “normal weight” cis men without disabilities as the default or standard. We force our colleagues to take us seriously and see the importance of our work and our perspectives. Hopefully, we also influence our privileged colleagues to prioritize our voices when citing scholarship, choosing panels and committees, and assigning readings in their courses. To put it bluntly, the exclusion and invisibility of unique perspectives is bad for science and bad for higher education; in this way, we all benefit from diversity and full inclusion.


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1. http://thesocietypages.org/sociologysource/2014/02/03/i-may-be-an-impostor-but/

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Marginalisation of Muslims and organisations like CAGE (2015-08-13 17:31)

Alas Max Farrar, the difficulty of your approach is that you consistently fail to accept that collective identities are not predetermined and that the process of mobilization is constitutive of a people. The idea that class based formations are the only legitimate sources of identification and empowerment is continually belied by the experience of ethnic minorities who find solace in what are typically termed religious identities.

There is a clear lack of appreciation, and to some extent a denial, for the possibility of so-called religious identities becoming political. The mobilisation of Muslims in your reading will always be presented as a form of 'fundamentalism' and by definition a reactionary rather than a progressive politics, in which the usual disclaimers apply, e.g. 'women are seen to be 'subordinated' and 'oppressed;' issues around homophobia; restrictions on free speech; victimhood and playing the 'race' card; and of course fairness or equality are 'dismissed' within these communities.

The only answer that your analysis can offer is one based upon an essentialism which determines the characteristics of any politics from the classification from its agents. Therefore, politics (and the political) remain a secondary phenomena throughout ethnicised communities where primordial loyalties and solidarities are immune to the process of political articulation and intervention. Unfortunately in your limited attack of CAGE you can only offer generic notions of 'fundamentalism' at best, which display the Eurocentrism inherent in many sections of the left. As you claim to be a long term fan of Al-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, I wonder what you would think he would make of your position in aligning yourself with such a neocon led campaign against a human rights advocacy organization?

Katy Sian wrote the above response on social media in support of [4]Tom Mills, [5]David Miller and [6]Narzanin Massoumi who have written about [7]the brilliant work of CAGE, as well as about the attempts to derail this work in the name of War on Terror.

See:

1 [8]Why on earth would leftists go out of their way to support Cage? by TOM MILLS, NARZANIN MASSOUMI,
DAVID MILLER, and MAX FARRAR (13 August 2015)


1. http://www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk/subjects/sociology/our-people/staff-spotlight/katy-sian/
2. http://maxfarrar.org.uk/max-blog/about/
5. http://www.bath.ac.uk/sps/staff/david-miller/

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VJ (2015-08-17 23:27:38)
Could you explain why you say CAGE is a human rights organisation? Even they don’t say they are.

I’d question Katy’s assertions that ethnic minorities mobilise around religious identities; it’s true that many or even most do, but others don’t. It’s important to consider the safety of those that don’t. There’s a massive big row going on about this very issue in Bangladesh – maybe you’ve read about it? Are all those murdered secular bloggers ‘eurocentric’? In terms of religious mobilisations, it’s possible to distinguish between progressive and reactionary mobilisations. I can’t speak for Max Farrar but I expect he’s capable of it too. Some religious groups that seem progressive to me: CDD in Latin America, Jews for Justice in Palestine/Jewish voices for Peace in UK/US, Sisters in Islam in Malaysia, Inclusive Mosque initiative here, etc. CAGE does important legal work, yes, but is it progressive? Does Katy think al Qaeda is progressive? Because CAGE promotes the milieu of al Qaeda. You can see this in their invitation to Abu Qatada at an Iftar last Ramadan. Begg has for years argued for dialogue with Abu Qatada and the al Qaeda milieu e.g. al Nusra front who recently slaughtered a village of Druze. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-33092902 This is consistent with Begg’s support for the Taliban at the time when they were engaging in ethnic cleansing of minorities in Afghanistan. Does Katy even read the papers? What a crazy world we’re in when people who don’t think al Qaeda supporters are progressive get labeled ‘eurocentric’. ps - no one, including CAGE, thinks they are a human rights advocacy organisation. LOL.

Redbridge (2015-08-19 16:05:19)
Why do you have a comments section if no one can leave a comment? Mine wasn’t inappropriate, it was a reasonable response to a smear of someone I respect. You can’t just go around calling people racist all the time and expect no comeback.

Redbridge (2015-08-19 16:07:26)
oh I see first comment is still in moderation, sorry, couldn’t see that at first.
Now, above all of it, there's a product referred to as Fitbit that became famous with their model Flex wrist-worn fitness tracker.

Homophobia and Islamophobia: ITV's inappropriate and offensive tweet (2015-08-13 17:40)

[1]

By Jeff Vass in response to [1]this post

Firstly, in view of the way you have problematised the individualistic vs relational self in connection with the noise issue I’d like to make a distinction between ‘descriptive and prescriptive ‘selves’ in the same way that linguistics makes the distinction between describing the actual practices of people and their own ideal, prescriptive rules for governing those practices. In linguistics one has to make a distinction between the grammar that teachers prescribe for ‘Good English’, say, and the actual English(es) that are spoken/written in the myriad contexts in which they occur. The latter are variable, pragmatic, subject to change and variation and, from a prescriptive view, look like an erosion of principles etc. To enforce prescriptive principles seems anti-progressive and most of us tend to live with the linguistic ‘mission drift’ as English evolves. We might argue that the ‘rules’ of grammar should simply follow fashion. Similarly, I see this latter argument in the view that the relational self, by virtue of the fact of its relationality, should simply drift along with any change of conditions in custom and practice in the civic space which embeds it: if the majority uses mobile phones in the quiet carriage on the train I should go with this. By extension, to try to assert my ‘individual rights’ to quietness seems like I am not respecting the relational interdependence that selves have with others if I go against the grain.

However, a relational ontology of the self, if I may, does not mean that we must necessarily impose on ourselves a ‘contingent interdependence’ at all points in civic space. That is to say, if a particularly noisy gizmo comes to market and there is a sudden trend to use it ubiquitously that I find irritating or harmful to my well-being or quality of life, I don’t have to abandon my relational self position in asserting an ‘individualist’ right to be gizmo-free. In other words, from a descriptive sense of the self as relational we are not, by that fact, prohibited from prescriptively taking the self in other ways that we can reasonably sustain as a community. The problem with the Tory view (sic) of individualism is, I think, based on arguing from the apparent empirical outcome, that because we just see individuals everywhere then the ontological basis of social life must be simply collections of individuals. Mrs. 3880
Thatcher’s viewpoint seemed to be, derived from her empirical finding, that she could only see individuals on every horizon she cared to look. From this she reasoned that (I paraphrase) the basic ontology of selves was as primordial individualities. Hence, she did conclude that what seemed to her to be the case ought to be the case. Marx argued that practice was fundamentally ‘co-operative’ in form and that individual productivity is a kind of illusion. I assume he is right. My labour is interdependent. It is dangerous only when we allow the illusion to obliterate the cooperative basis of everything we do. Like Mrs Thatcher he argued that cooperation should form the basis of polity. However, cooperation and relationality do not, in themselves, proscribe ways of organising selves that allow individuals to exercise rights provided that we do not misrecognise the basic interdependencies on which they are based.

I think noise ‘creep’ is harmful and does impact on people’s well-being and does make us forgetful and misrecognise the needs of others. I think it is unlike the problem, say, of the ‘dark sky’ movement (which I also support!). I think we have had light creep from urbanisation and street lighting on a massive scale in the west such that there are parts of the night sky we can now no longer see as a consequence of light pollution. This is sad, but I realise that I have to balance this against the safety of people walking home late at night etc.. Noise I think does adversely impact on well-being, health and the quality of life of people who cannot sleep, cannot concentrate on the things they want to do etc.. Noise also creates new dependencies. In London I lived above a man who had the TV on all waking hours; it was fairly tolerable except that for every news programme he would turn it up to maximum volume. 6AM news, midday news, 6 pm, 9pm and 10pm - the news would go to maximum. I queried this with him. Though he had the telly on all the time he wasn’t always watching it, “but you've got to have something on haven't you?” he said. So, I asked why he had to have every iteration of the news on every channel when basically you get the same stories all day, "well, in case something happens" he said. Since then I’ve lived next to people who likewise need constant noise. One woman found construction noise from pile drivers "comforting". She had the radio on constantly at home and in the car, why was this?: "my brain goes haywire otherwise". Another couple I lived next to did DIY every night and weekend for years. I asked: "why don't you just sit and watch the TV?" the answer was "We can't. After 20 minutes we notice something on the wall and out come the tools". After 8 years they sold up. Why? "There's nothing more to do on the house".

So I realise I may be in a shrinking minority who think that it’s good to be able to sit in the garden and read a book. Many of my neighbours seem to think of their gardens as 'power tool playgrounds'. But they do let me sleep at night, I am grateful for that!

I think we can sustain a descriptive account of the relational self, but also sustain a prescriptive set of ‘rights, duties and obligations’ that we wish to attach to ‘individuals’ in a civic sense without compromising an account of them from the standpoint of relationality. I would promote a concept of ‘sonic footprint’ alongside ‘carbon footprint’. Unlike ‘rights to dark skies’ that are infringed by light pollution I think sonic footprints do impact on others' rights. On the whole I need to be made aware that my carbon footprint shows up a kind of gross negligence that is harmful to others in ways I didn’t intend. Likewise I believe that, in pursuit of our own enjoyments, we corrode public and private spaces and the quality of life of others, often unintentionally, when we generate noise. We do it without extending a due ‘care’ to others. I think that if one wants the civic individual to be informed by their fundamental relationality as social beings then the care principle might be invoked - at least just as easily as the somewhat generous proclivity to learn to live with one’s neighbours’ growing sonic footprints!! I believe that in Germany it is prohibited to use power tools on a Sunday, lawn mowers etc. in residential areas. There has often been a Sunday when I've wished that to be the case here!

On not writing from the PhD (2015-08-15 08:00)

This was originally published on [1]patter:

On March 26th 2014 I finally submitted my thesis for the PhD I had begun almost six years earlier. The event itself was somewhat anticlimactic after a false start the day before when ebullience at having finished gave way to irritation upon realising I’d misread the formatting guidelines and had to get my thesis reprinted. Thus I shuffled into University House the following day, somewhat hungover, with my now correctly printed thesis only to be told that I was in the wrong place and had to make my way across campus if I wanted the university to take receipt of this document which had dominated my life for the past six years. In retrospect this subdued comedy of errors seems rather appropriate because it helped detract from what might otherwise have been unreasonable expectations about how I would feel once it was over. I never really liked being a PhD student yet I never wanted to let go of my thesis. I felt about it rather like this panda feels about his green ball:

![Panda](image)

I’d got used to sitting with it. It’s simply what I was doing: sitting with my green ball. It wasn’t particularly enjoyable and at times it became downright tedious. But it was comfortable and familiar to an extent that made the impending reality of it being snatched away from me feel bizarrely traumatic. But in reality, it wasn’t snatched away, as much as the belittling objectivity of a final deadline from the university made it seem as if it would be. From the mildly chaotic handing in process through to a six month long wait for a viva and the weirdly familiar process of getting a library copy printed and going to hand this in, it simply rolled away from me in a manner I was only dimly aware of at the time. This thing that had provided such structure to my life since the age of 23 faded slowly into the distance until I one day discovered that I was Dr. Carrigan giving a lecture to a room full of masters students. That first lecture on the masters module I convened was the closest thing I’ve experienced to a culmination of the process and it wasn’t all that close. The graduation ceremony was another occasion on which to wear a suit that doesn’t fit me properly, coupled with an ever sillier hat perched upon my head than last time.

The point of this naval-gazing is to address a question Patter asked me after a conversation on Twitter: why I am so averse to going back to publish from my PhD? It’s been over a year since I handed it in and yet a begrudging cover-to-cover reading the day before my viva is the only point at which I’ve looked at in this time. This was the double sided misprint which my false start at handing in left me with, a document I scrawled upon before relegating to the corner of my book shelf. The slightly diminished status of the volume feels oddly appropriate and yet mildly upsetting. Oddly enough for someone who once agonised over whether instrumentalism would win out in deciding what to do with my PhD thesis ([3]http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/12530) I now find myself struggling to
motivate myself to do anything with it.

When I say ‘my PhD’ what do I actually mean? It occurs to me that it was both process and outcome. It’s something I did for six years, entirely subjugating every other aspect of my life to it, but it’s also the outcome of that process. This lends the document itself a tremendously ambiguous status which I think goes some way to explaining my reluctance to part with at the time of submission. I’ve never known quite how to feel about it, least of all when the university was telling me I had to finally hand it over or they’d kick me out.

My PhD has its material existence as sheets of paper, sequentially bound together according to a strict rubric, upon which its intellectual content is inscribed. But it also has a more spectral existence, something which post-modernists might describe as hauntological: its existence as a physical document brings to a close all which came before it and yet these angst-ridden years linger on through the physicality of those pages. As a marker of intellectual progress, it captures all the mistakes I made and grants an acridulous permanence to the missteps which I realise on a reflective level are an unavoidable part of the process. But it was also the horizon of that progress, as well as my life as a whole during that time in which so much happened to make me the person I am now, some fantastic, a little that was truly terrible and much that was simply tedious. In view of this, the materiality of the thesis seems almost pathetically mundane to me.

I can’t imagine ever feeling comfortable with my PhD. It’s not that I think it’s a bad PhD... it’s an unusual piece of work but I’ve had enough people I respect understand what I was trying to do for me to feel confident that it has intellectual value. But the document itself feels so unendingly strange to me, even now over a year later when I find myself reflecting on it for the first time in weeks, I’d like nothing more than to leave it in the past as an awkward and confusing encounter I doubt I’ll ever be sure what to make of. In spite of this, I know my PhD will in reality follow me wherever I go, intensifying my avoidance in the knowledge that I can’t ever entirely avoid it. I might very well end up producing the handful of journal articles which could very easily be adapted from my thesis. I don’t really want to though and the evidence thus far suggests I probably won’t. Hopefully in writing this I’ve helped explain why this is the case and I’m curious to know if others share my antipathy towards something which the culture of the academy suggests we should be proud of.

1. http://onnotwritingfromthePhD/
2. https://patthomson.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/panda.gif

Enjoyed reading this, Mark, as someone who was told ‘get it done or you lose your job’ and has very similar feelings. Seven years on (actually, I just had to try to work that out - I think it was that long ago) I’ve managed to publish 3 papers. I don’t think it does follow you though, I think it just becomes an even sadder single line in your CV that no-one, least of all you, particularly cares about!

Kathryn (2016-08-11 21:42:17)
As someone on step 1 of the journey (ie: my application has been accepted) I read this with conflicting feelings of excitement and dread! It seems such a long road to travel with plenty of self doubt speed bumps along the way. I hope I enjoy at least 60 % of it!

Steve (2017-06-30 13:50:59)
This resonates with my own experience. I loved and hated being a doctoral student, and the latter mostly revolved around producing the thesis. By the end, I had no faith in what I had written (and still don’t have much) and was amazed to pass the
viva without major revisions. I loved the teaching side of being a doctoral student, and the amount of time/freedom I had to explore whatever particular academic alleyways I felt like exploring, and the associated discussion of ideas, misteps, worries, grand plans, etc. with others going through the same experience. But in the end, submission was disappointing and I didn't even look at the thesis for a couple of years afterwards. I published one article, four years after submission, but I had moved on to a different area of interest in which I have published reasonably regularly. What I learned during that period provides me with a pretty solid grounding as an academic, which I like to think I have built on. When I now read what I wrote, it is much better than I remember, but as whole the thesis (I feel) remains fundamentally flawed. It was an apprentice piece, and remains just that.

Call for papers: Medicine, Health and Self-Tracking (2015-08-16 08:00)

This special issue focuses on the topic of self-tracking as it is used for health and medical purposes. Self-tracking has recently been incorporated into a range of health and medical domains. These include voluntary health promotion and fitness monitoring, fertility, sexuality and reproductive health tracking, patient self-care regimens, corporate wellness and productivity programs, health and life insurance schemes and school-based physical education programs. A new range of digitised devices have come onto the market that can be employed to engage in self-tracking, such as smartphone apps and wearable tech, but some practitioners may prefer time-honoured methods such as using weight scales, diaries or journals to monitor their health and wellbeing.

Articles are invited for this issue that address the social, cultural, political and ethical dimensions of self-tracking practices in health and medicine contexts. The deadline for submission of articles is Friday 27th November 2015.

Submission Process

Submissions must align with the journal aims as well as the themed issue, be prepared in line with the instructions to authors, and be submitted through the ScholarOne system, selecting the option for consideration for this themed issue. For all journal and submission information, visit the [1]journal's homepage.

The final decision about publication will be made by the Editors-in-Chief, but if you are not sure whether your article is appropriate for this special issue, please feel free to send an abstract in the first instance to [2]Deborah.Lupton@canberra.edu.au.
Petition to form an analytical sociology section within ASA (2015-08-17 08:00)

Over the last couple of years, there have been discussions about the possibility of forming an analytical sociology section within the ASA. Growing representation not only in leading sociology journals but also in journals like the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science and Science have convinced us that now is the time to launch this section. The recent successes of the International Network of Analytical Sociologists annual conferences, along with a newly initiated book series in analytical sociology by Princeton University Press, lead us to believe that analytical sociology will quickly establish itself as a vibrant and attractive section of the ASA.

We expect that this section will be of interest to many of the existing ASA members. There is an important niche to be filled for a section that caters to scholars in different substantive fields who do serious theory and research focusing on social networks, social mechanisms, collective dynamics, micro-macro links, and related approaches. This includes many junior scholars pursuing research in mathematical sociology, methods, and computational social science for whom analytic sociology would be an attractive home.

The first stage in the process of forming a new section within the ASA is to get a minimum of 200 ASA members to support the initiative. We very much hope that you will be one of them. Please visit [1]https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8YR2ZZC in order to register your support. To have the section in place for the 2016 ASA meeting in Seattle, and to be able to put together a highly stimulating set of sessions that reflect the breath and quality of analytical sociology, we kindly ask for your support by Monday, August 17th. With the best wishes, Delia Baldassari Peter Bearman Elizabeth Bruch Damon Centola Karen Cook Filiz Garip Mark Granovetter Peter Hedström Michael Macy Robert Mare Christopher Winship

1. https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8YR2ZZC

Allan McDougall (2015-08-17 13:01:24)
Non-sociologist here. Alongside what other schools of thought in sociology would you compare/contrast analytic sociology? Further, which ASA sections have analytic sociologists hitherto presented their work?
This superb post by Cory Doctorow, novelist and editor of Boing Boing, offers a philosophy of blogging extremely similar to what I've described in the past as continuous publishing. I really identify with what he's saying here and it goes some way to explaining why I struggled so much with writing when I tried to give up blogging for a few months recently.

As a committed infovore, I need to eat roughly six times my weight in information every day or my brain starts to starve and atrophy. I gather information from many sources: print, radio, television, conversation, the Web, RSS feeds, email, chance, and serendipity. I used to bookmark this stuff, but I just ended up with a million bookmarks that I never revisited and could never find anything in.

Theoretically, you can annotate your bookmarks, entering free-form reminders to yourself so that you can remember why you bookmarked this page or that one. I don't know about you, but I never actually got around to doing this — it's one of those get-to-it-later eat-your-vegetables best-practice housekeeping tasks like defragging your hard drive or squeegeeing your windshield that you know you should do but never get around to.

Until I started blogging. Blogging gave my knowledge-grazing direction and reward. Writing a blog entry about a useful and/or interesting subject forces me to extract the salient features of the link into a two- or three-sentence elevator pitch to my readers, whose decision to follow a link is predicated on my ability to convey its interestingness to them. This exercise fixes the subjects in my head the same way that taking notes at a lecture does, putting them in reliable and easily-accessible mental registers.

Blogging also provides an incentive to keep blogging. As Boing Boing's hit-counter rises steadily, growing 10-30 percent every month, I get a continuous, low-grade stream of brain-rewards; rewards that are reinforced by admiring email, cross-links from other blogs that show up in my referrer logs, stories that I broke climbing the ranks on Daypop and Blogdex (and getting picked up by major news outlets). The more I blog, the more reward I generate: strangers approach me at conferences and tell me how much they liked some particular entry; people whose sites I've pointed to send me grateful email thanking me for bringing their pet projects to the attention of so many people.


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3886
Who’s more popular on twitter? the UK’s top research universities or academic blogs and viral feeds?
(2015-08-19 08:00)

Comparing the follower counts for Twitter feeds based on the [1]2014 REF results (i.e. I mean ‘top’ in a very narrow sense) and an unsystematically chosen selection of the Twitter feeds I’ve been scrutinising this morning as I finish off the book.

Oxford University: 231,000
Cambridge University: 200,000
Shit Academics Say: 129,000
Nein Quarterly: 114,000
Lego Academics: 51,000
Cardiff University: 44,800
Warwick University: 44,300
LSE Politics & Policy: 40,800*
LSE Events: 40,600
Imperial College: 37,900
Kings College London: 37,900
Grad School Elitist: 37,300**
University College London: 34,500
LSE: 23,200
Sociological Imagination: 19,200
Academia Obscura: 17,300
The Sociological Review: 15,500
Manchester University: 11,500
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: 8,590***

I’m pleased to see so much continued growth. I was quite proud of having more than doubled the follower count when I ran it for six months & hoped it would eventually become the most prominent twitter feed at LSE.

*Not for long! The account has now gone private in the face of widespread condemnation.

**This is actually the Press account. The university doesn’t seem to have a dedicated Twitter feed.


Martin (2015-08-19 10:17:55)
Very interesting and informative. But is it also a case of mistaken attribution?

The politics of data science (2015-08-20 08:00)

A special issue of [1]Discover Society I recently edited:

FOCUS: The Emerging Contours of Data Science
William Housley, (Cardiff University)
VIEWPOINT: The Politics of Data Visualisation
Joanna Boehnert

ON THE FRONTLINE: What is the Data in Big Data?
Jeffrey Alan Johnson (Utah Valley University)

POLICY BRIEFING:A smart city’s perspective
Emma Uprichard (University of Warwick)

The Domesticated Aboutness of Big Data Types
Ana Gross (University of Warwick)

Big Data Seductions and Ambivalences
Deborah Lupton (University of Canberra) and Mike Michael (University of Sydney)

The Growing Power of the Data Analytics Industry
David Beer (University of York)

The Uberfication of the University
Gary Hall (Coventry University)

Bottom of the Data Pyramid: Big Data and the Global South
Payal Arora (Erasmus University)

What does Big Data mean for Official Statistics?
Rob Kitchin (National University of Ireland Maynooth)

A Politics of Counting - Putting People Back into Big Data
Hamish Robertson and Joanne Travaglia (University of New South Wales)

Big Data and the Politics of Discipline
Susan Halford (University of Southampton)

Who owns Big Data?
Evelyn S. Ruppert (Goldsmiths, University of London)
The CFP: The Role of Quantified Self for Personal Healthcare (2015-08-21 08:00)

# # # # # # QSPH’15, Washington D.C., USA, November, 2015 # # # # # #

Second International Workshop on The Role of Quantified Self for Personal Healthcare (QSPH’15)

Workshop held in conjunction with IEEE BIBM 2015 in Washington D.C., USA


The aims of the workshop are to engage researchers from both Healthcare and Quantified Self communities to discuss key issues, opportunities and obstacles for personal health data research. These include challenges of capturing, summarizing, presenting and retrieving relevant information from heterogeneous sources to support a new vision of pervasive personal healthcare.
# TOPICS OF INTEREST #

We invite submission of papers reporting relevant research in the area of self-tracking for healthcare. We welcome submissions across a broad scope, addressing any of the following guideline topics but not excluding others, relevant to the workshop goals.

- Personal Health Informatics
- Quantified Self for Healthcare
- Activity Monitors and Devices
- Self-Tracking
- Gamification
- Healthcare Knowledge Representation & Reasoning
- Health Data acquisition, analysis and mining
- Healthcare Information Systems
- Biomedical Signal/Image Analysis
- Validity, reliability, usability, and effectiveness of Self-Tracking devices
- Design of Experiments
- Social and Psychological investigation into Self-Tracking practices
- Health Monitoring in clinical and lifestyle environments
- Sensors and actuators for Wellness, Fitness and Rehabilitation
- Innovative Algorithms for assessment of long-term physiological and behavioural data
- Models for interpreting medical sensor data
- Lifelogging, lifecaching, lifestreaming
- Biometric data
- Medical Self-diagnostics

# PAPER SUBMISSION #

All manuscripts must be written in English and formatted following the IEEE 2-column format. We accept full papers (up to 8 pages) and short papers (up to 4 pages). Papers should be submitted using the online submission system available at: [2]https://wi-lab.com/cyberchair/2015/bibm15/scripts/ws__submit.php

3890
# IMPORTANT DATES #

Full/Short Papers Due: **September 10th, 2015**

Notification to Authors: September 30th, 2015

Camera-Ready: October 17th, 2015

Workshop: November, 2015 (exact date tbd)

# ORGANIZERS #

Frank Hopfgartner, University of Glasgow, UK

Na Li, Dublin City University, IE

Till Plumbaum, TU Berlin, DE

Heather J. Ruskin, Dublin City University, IE

Huiru (Jane) Zheng, Ulster University, UK


The moral discourse of the ‘reasonable technocrat’ (2015-08-22 08:00)

An [1]excellent piece on Democrat Audit looking at the role of the ‘reasonable technocrat’ in the unfolding of the crisis in Europe. It’s important to analyse the moral underpinnings of technocratic discourse, looking at what makes it plausible and important to those who see the world in this way: a self-congratulatory pragmatism, regarding oneself as a ‘very serious person’ able to take tough and necessary decisions, based on an accumulated expertise that the impressionable public lack:

Can the EU afford to follow the will of turbulent, wavering people? For some, the answer is: no. They propose to hand over decision-making to ‘[2]reasonable technocrats’ instead. This not only promises to save people from their own short-sightedness but would also be preferable over the (impossible) promises of ‘populist’ or the take over of political extremists.

Effectively the ‘reasonable technocrat’ is a second coming of Margaret Thatcher’s (and, more recently: Angela Merkel’s) TINA politics. If ‘there is no alternative’, ‘necessary action’ must be taken. It is arguably the core feature of the above mentioned advocacy coalition to refuse to call their core beliefs on economics into question. All to avoid frightening the markets.
But has democracy proved itself being incapable of coping with the crisis? Maybe one should ask what a 'reasonable technocrat' actually looks like. A reasonable politician may always be urged to follow the wishes of their voters and thus might make wrong decision. In contrast, the reasonable technocrat is bound to a specific theoretical paradigm and therefore runs into the danger to make logical but callous decisions. However, it may be hard to tell the reasonable from the unreasonable technocrat, the one who follows personal interests, affiliates with elites or entertains an ideological world view rather then the impartial assessment of the rational expert.

Putting too much trust in experts (reasonable or not) is always dangerous. For it may herald the hollowing out of European democracy and the marginalisation of the original constituency: the people. Back in 2012, the European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi was determined to ‘save the Euro at all costs’. If these costs include the viability of European democracy, one might ask: what was the Euro saved for?


The case for a philosophical sociology (2015-08-22 11:11)
by Daniel Chernilo
(featured in the newsletter of the European Sociological Association, Summer 2015 Issue 38)

In this short intervention, I offer a plea for sociology’s reengagement with philosophy. To be sure, the extent to which their ties have severed over the past few decades will vary in different national or regional contexts. As far as I know, the case is more pronounced in English-speaking sociologies than in Spanish-, German- or French-speaking ones. Also, the field that is commonly demarcated as ‘the epistemology of social sciences’ remains one way in which both traditions still interact – although one suspects that social scientists pay far more attention to it than philosophers do.

I call this invitation ‘philosophical sociology’ and define it as the attempt to unpack the (mostly implicit) conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin our conceptions of social life. The main intellectual source for the idea of philosophical sociology comes of course from philosophical anthropology. Originally associated with the names of Max Scheler (2009) and Ernst Cassirer (1977) in the 1920s and 1930s, the tradition of philosophical anthropology was explicitly devoted to the development of a general understanding of ‘what is a human being’. For my purposes, the most important intervention in this field comes from a short book by Karl Löwith (1993). First published in 1932, Löwith’s Max Weber and Karl Marx starts by stating what for us is now the obvious: Weber and Marx shared an interest in the rise and contemporary workings of modern capitalism and offered radically different interpretations of it. Their scientific originality, their ‘sociologies’, is apparent in how their historical and conceptual sophistication wholly transformed our understanding of capitalism. But Löwith argues that these explicit sociologies of capitalism are in fact underpinned by a common philosophical concern that is the
ultimate motif of their work: what it means to be human under the alienating conditions of modern capitalism. Löwith contends that Weber and Marx were ‘essentially sociologists, namely, philosophical sociologists’ because ‘both provide – Marx directly and Weber indirectly – a critical analysis of modern man within bourgeois society in terms of bourgeois-capitalist economy, based on the recognition that the ‘economy’ has become human ‘destiny’ (Löwith 1993: 48, my italics). As philosophical anthropology continued to develop after World War II, the notion that emerged was that a dual scientific and philosophical approach to understanding the human results from, and must be preserved, because of the duality of the human condition itself: humans are partly natural bodies that are controlled by their urges, emotions and organic adaptation to the world and they are also partly conscious beings that are defined by their intellectual, aesthetic and indeed moral insights (Gehlen 1980, Plessner 1970). A key motif of this philosophical anthropology is the claim that no substantive idea of human nature was ever going to capture the essential features of what makes us humans; human beings are fundamentally indeterminate with regards to organic adaptation and this is what makes social institutions and cultural practices essential to human live.

A second insight for the idea of philosophical sociology comes from Max Weber’s lecture on Science as a Vocation (1970). Weber contends there that sociology can make a contribution to public debates by unpacking the various practical and indeed normative implications of different policy options. I translate this insight into the suggestion that normative debates in society – from abortion to euthanasia via migration and welfare reforms – are actually underpinned by ideas of the human that are never fully articulated out. All societies have normative ideas and most sociologists will accept that a good account of social life will have to be able to say something meaningful about how these ideas are actualised; why and how some are preferred over others. Unpacking these ideas of the human is important because normative debates are never fully disconnected from what human beings themselves consider right or wrong, fair or unfair. In the societies we live in, humans have turned themselves into the ultimate arbiters of normativity itself. By means of its expert empirical knowledge, sociology can cast a critical eye on what is exactly being advocated, both in normatively and in practice, in particular instances.

To reclaim the importance of understanding the relationships between our preconceptions of the human and our explicit theories of society does not entail a return to an anthropocentric ‘epistemological obstacle’: thou shall not explain society through the action of individuals (Luhmann 2012). It is instead an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions (Archer 2000, Arendt 1978, Parsons 1978).

But in mainstream contemporary sociology we are missing these insights all too easily. Its social constructionist variant mistakenly treats the social and the human as a zero-sum game, so that bloated notions of the social leave no space for a philosophical enquiry about preconceptions of the human. Conversely, in the ‘combative’ variant as advocated by Bourdieu (1994), conceptions of justice, legitimacy, fairness or democracy need not be included as part of the social world because conflict, power and struggles are deemed to give a full ontology of the social (Honneth 1986). The fundamental reason for these shortcomings lies in the deficient philosophical underpinnings of both: whilst radical constructionism pays no attention to any form of anthropological reflection, Bourdieu’s sociology uses a highly reductionist conception of human nature that cares only for power and strategic bargaining. Indeed, this form of irrationalism has been available within sociology for several decades (Bendix 1970); other candidates being more or less essentialist ideas of ‘identity’ and ‘authenticity’ that figure so highly in postcolonial and intersectional approaches (Connell 2007, Mignolo 2005). This is sociology’s very own self-fulfilling dystopia: although most sociologists do care about normative questions (not least in relation to their own justifications as to why they are doing sociology at all), they feel no particular need to take normative ideas into account as part of they have to explain sociologically (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).
The history of sociology is of course full of attempts at determining the problem of normative justifications. Even if religion does remain available in contemporary society, cosmological convictions now co-exist with a wide pool of competing justifications and that their (ir)rationality is hotly contested. We have also witnessed the appeal to teleological ideas of secular progress and their belief in the normative power of history; justifications for the rights and wrongs of past and present were to be assessed against the promises of a better future. And society itself has been posited as a source of normative integration. But being subject to permanent historical and cultural changes, society was equally weak for the task of providing stable normative justifications. The ambivalent normative appeal of the nation in modern times, and the need to defend minorities against the nation's unsavoury wishes, illustrates well this point (Chernilo 2007).

As religion, history and society are all in trouble when trying to uphold normative justifications, we can still ask whether the defining anthropological features of our species can do this job – and this is a path philosophical sociology seeks to explore. To be sure, ideas of humanity are socially construed and have themselves changed over time (Fuller 2011). But it seems to me that a key strength of philosophical sociology lies in its taking seriously the humans capacity to reflect on what makes them the kind of being that they actually are. Anthropological arguments remain the best option here because they allow us to consider, simultaneously, that normative arguments are only actualised in society, are to carry the free assent of individual themselves and yet their binding force remains attached to some stable features that all humans possess qua human beings. Indeed, this is precisely why we claim human rights ought to be respected under all circumstances and even especially against society's own will (Habermas 2010, Joas 2013).

For all their claims to originality and intimations that they seek to make sense of a new world that is still in the making, the new strand of post-humanist thinking belongs in the mode that I am describing (Braidotti 2013, Haraway 1991). This genre is constituted by its own combination of partly speculative and partly scientific arguments and echoes previous critiques of humanism. Indeed, its fundamental question remains exactly the same: how open to social manipulation human nature actually is, whether developments in contemporary technology have put an end to the human being as we know it and whether the very idea of humanity has ever been anything but an pernicious illusion. Inside mainstream social science, Bruno Latour (2013) has advanced similar claims about the definitive need for a whole new ontology that can do without the distinction between humans and nonhumans (although the philosophical result of his investigations is an even more reductionist ontology that allows only for the networks). I suggest that we turn their claim to novelty on their head – and not only because there is nothing less original than their claims to originality. The fundamental point that they miss is precisely that their very quest is paradigmatic of the all too human frustration with the irritating inevitability of the question what is to be human. When the post-humanist literature rejects the 'foundationalism' that underpins traditional 'humanist' ideas, they use this term now for exactly the same that, in the 1960s, was deemed mere 'bourgeois' or 'ideological' humanism and, in the 1920s, it was treated as unwarranted 'metaphysics'. What is really going on, however, is that their ontologies of the social are underpinned by too shallow a view of the human.

This anti-humanism is as conventional as it is flawed: it conflates 'Humanism' as the colonial ideology of the West with the legitimate enquiry about anthropological foundations of social life and, as it deconstructs the inconsistencies of the former, it has no difficulty in ubiquitously appealing to traditional humanist values (solidarity, emancipation, subjectivity) for its own justifications. Their explorations into the limits and exceptions to 'Western anthropocentrism' is potentially illuminating, but there is something deeply elitist when this is proclaimed 'on behalf' of the disposed of the world who, quite literally, are dying for the most simple humanist values and institutions are being so arrogantly dismissed here: the right to work, basic human decency, equality before the law. In the old debate on humanism between Sartre (2007) and Heidegger (1993), all the important lessons have been learnt the wrong way round: they misunderstood the deeply humanistic sensibilities of the former (however imperfect) and have instead become intoxicated by the smug self-congratulation of the latter (regardless of how misguided).

The fundamental point remains, therefore: the 'Copernican revolution' of humans stop putting themselves at
the centre of the universe is itself a major human accomplishment (Bachelard 2002). If the current decentering of anthropocentrism is to become sociologically fruitful, we have to accept the fact that this decentering has a limit and is not wholly reversible: the science, law and philosophy that now reflect on the environment, animals and cyborgs remains the wholly human accomplishment of those members of our species that now show an increased sensibility towards them.

If what I have argued so far makes sense, it may already be clear that this is not a task that sociology can fulfil on its own. Given the historical, moral, scientific and indeed theological density of our conceptions of the human, for sociology to pursue this task it needs to reconnect to philosophy. A dual approach, both scientific and philosophical, is needed because this reflects best our human condition – and sociology’s highly sophisticated ability to empirically account for the ways and trends of contemporary society shall prove essential here. We must reconnect our sociological understandings of social life with philosophically informed ideas of the human, humanity and even human nature. After a long history in which sociology tried to differentiate itself from philosophy in order to secure its scientific status, it is now again in need of philosophy. But the idea of philosophical sociology for which I advocate is neither a substitute for empirical sociological research nor a philosophical dissolution of sociology (Chernilo 2014). It rather suggests that the common anthropological traits that define us as members of the same species create the conditions for social life to unfold without this common humanity itself being able to act directly on society (Chernilo 2013). They are also the basis from which ideas of justice, self, dignity and the good life emerge. These are irreducible to material factors because their normative worth ultimately refers back and thus depends on our conceptions of what is to be human. Without disciplinary arrogance or parochialism, a re-engagement between sociology and philosophy can take the form of a mutual learning process between the different knowledge claims that underpin them both: the empirical vocation of sociology as it grapples with the complexities of contemporary society and the kind of unanswerable questions that we still associate with the best of the philosophical tradition. At stake here is the fact that as long as sociology continues to raise the big questions about life in society – the powers of agency, the relationships between nature and culture or the dialectics between domination and emancipation – these are all questions that also transcend it: good sociological questions are always, in the last instance, also philosophical ones.

References


Joshua Stein (2017-04-03 19:14:16)

I think this is an interesting line of inquiry; I've made similar proposals in private conversations with sociologists and anthropologists (as well as other philosophers) and am glad to see other folks engaging with the conversation. As I think about it, there are two dimensions to this sort of program. (1) There is an ethical dimension that involves considering the normative (including ethical, political, religious, social, economic, etc.) implications of the relationship between sociology and philosophy, the concept of human, or person, or of having a certain sort of moral status; (2) there is a methodological dimension that involves considering the ways in which we evaluate problems, the conceptual backdrop against which we make such evaluations, etc. (I do not mean to suggest that the two are discrete; a great deal of good feminist and post-colonial theory is really bringing together these dimensions in a useful way.) With that in mind, I think the gap is often understated. You do a good job of evaluating (1), here, but consider that there are going to be cases where methods of analysis in the various social scientific and philosophical traditions diverge so substantially that the norms start to come apart. One such example has to do with the very terminology present here; to "unpack... conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin our conceptions of social life" is problematic in an era where many prominent views in philosophy reject the notion that "human" is the appropriate family of related concepts to start an analysis in (1). I have in mind here, among others, philosophers like Peter Singer, David DeGrazia, Jeff McMahan, and Tom Regan. There are other related worries about more technically intrenched concepts and approaches that weigh heavily on many of the claims you make here. (e.g.) "... the common anthropological traits that define us as members of the same species create the conditions for social life to unfold without this common humanity itself being able to act directly on society." There are some philosophers who are inclined to agree (Matthew Liao, for example, in his recent writing on human rights) while there are others who won’t, including the various advocates of certain sorts of animal rights and a wider scope for personhood claims, as well as those who are skeptical of certain sorts of moral responsibility claims. My general point is this: The various social sciences are heavy with assumptions that are not made in philosophy, some of which are well supported and justified, and some not. There is a lot of work that has to be done in literacy between the two sets of disciplines before it is plausible to have a really robust sort of interdisciplinary discourse.

2015 Quantified Self Europe Conference - Sept 18-19, Amsterdam (2015-08-23 08:00)

A reminder from QS Labs:

I wanted to send along a quick email to invite you all to the [1]2015 Quantified Self Europe Conference. On September 18th and 19th we’re continuing our tradition of community-supported, peer-to-peer learning conferences with our fourth Quantified Self Europe Conference
at the beautiful canal-side, Casa 400 hotel, a few minutes bike ride from central Amsterdam. We invite you to join us in this relaxed and vibrant atmosphere to learn, share, and engage with self-trackers and toolmakers from around the world.

As always, this will be a "carefully curated unconference" which means we hand craft the program based on who is coming. If you have something to share we want to hear from you! We would love to have research projects, discussions, and self-tracking projects from the Quantified Self Research Network represented in the program.

[2]Register today to take advantage of our €149 Early Bird rate, before the price increases to €249.


Why we should be shoppers – not disciples – in intellectual matters (2015-08-23 11:18)

However much it offends their narcissistic natures, most academics are disciples of one or maybe 2-3 masters. This applies across all the disciplines, though the nature of the discipleship differs among them. In the human sciences, which tend to collapse the distance between what one does and who one is, the sense of discipleship is a secular version of the classic religion model. Thus, a sense of imitation that begins as the sincerest form of flattery can end up as a priestly parody. In contrast, the natural sciences are more medieval, even today, as one still refers to lab 'apprenticeship', where the journeyman acquires a style of research which he or she then carries forward as an independent inquirer. However, nowadays one may need to apprentice in 2-3 or more labs, often turning the scientist into a 'jack of all trades' personality, with little commitment to any of them.

In either case, you can probably predict two-thirds of what academics think just by knowing who they studied – either in text or in person. The other third you can predict, once you know the conditions under which they're deploying this legacy – or accumulated capital – to produce what is honorifically called 'original work'. On this view, the difference between the greater and the lesser lights of a discipline is simply the number of masters that they dextrously handle: i.e. 2-3 versus just 1.

The luminary status of people like, say, Slavoj Zizek and Judith Butler can be explained largely in this fashion, namely, their insights are reducible to the key people they read (very well, to be sure), with a small residue that reflects their own idiosyncratic reading habits. In turn, they attract a mass following because many people in their day will also have read – or at least would want to appear as having read – the same people, say, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Foucault, etc. Academics of this sort are easy to explain in terms of both their influences and the influence they exert over others. In 1998 Randall Collins published The Sociology of Philosophies, which very impressively applied this master-disciple thesis to understand 'global intellectual change', as he put it. It will be a very long time before the institutional history of intellectual life is bettered in all its details.

However, that's not the only intellectual history that can be done, even from a sociological standpoint. In a book I published ten years ago, The Intellectual, I spoke of 'one-stop shopping for the mind' to characterize authors like Zizek and Butler. In contrast, the true intellectual is one of who is always shopping around for new ideas – but
we need to take the idea of shopping literally. Shopping can’t be reduced to ‘following fashion’ because shopping implies thinking in terms of the personal suitability of a good on sale. Indeed, there is a tendency to underestimate the amount of kickback that shoppers give to fashion. You try on the garment or test-drive the car. If you purchase the good, you shape it at least as much as it shapes you.

In this respect, I’m more a shopper than a disciple in intellectual matters. Here it is important to distinguish the customer from the consumer of ideas. The distinction turns on two senses of ‘buying’. The customer ‘buys’ an idea simply in the sense of ‘purchase’, i.e. investing one’s own resources to acquire the idea. Thus, I buy a book, read it, but I may then ignore or inveigh against it – or, best of all, incorporate it in some creative way that makes the book’s ideas my own. Thus, the intellectual customer may well operate against the grain of an idea’s producer by appropriating it in ways that the producer had not intended – or even would approve.

In contrast, the consumer falls more easily into the discipleship mode. That consumers are no more than disciples with a credit line has spurred businesses to increase and extend their brand recognition, such that once a branded product is purchased, its producers will try to ensure that the consumer will also buy many if not all of its affiliated lines, or ‘apps’. Apple and Microsoft are perhaps the most obvious cases in our own day. Moreover, because intellectual movements – no less than commercial enterprises or political parties – are ultimately fields of competing forces in search of coherent productivity, they necessarily have an idiosyncratic character. Thus, discipleship is easily spotted in, say, actor-network theory, given that as soon as Bruno Latour’s reading patterns shift to Alfred North Whitehead, John Dewey and Walter Lippmann – perhaps in a pique of nostalgia for early 20C American thought – all of his disciples follow suit. This is not true shopping: It’s the sort of ‘one-stop shopping’ that comes from buying on subscription.

In British English, ‘shopping’ has an interesting meaning that accentuates the sense of ‘shopping’ I am advocating. If you ‘shop someone’, you are informing them to the authorities, presumably because you managed to gain their confidence, which led them to confess something criminal. This is akin to the profound Italian adage, traduttore tradittore, which I first learned in my student days when Jacques Derrida was fashionable: ‘To translate is to betray’. While it’s often presented as a counsel of despair against the prospect of adequate translation, the adage is best understood as a formula for turning a double negative into positive: You give the impression that your time spent on someone else’s thought is to follow it, but in practice your intention is to supersede it by creatively misunderstanding the thought.

The fiction future of faculty: an afternoon of sociological design fiction (2015-08-24 08:00)

I’m organising a design fiction event in Manchester on September 16th, with James Duggan and Joseph Lindley. It’ll be great. You can register here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-fiction-future-of-faculty-an-afternoon-of-sociological-design-fiction-tickets-18169546603

The ability of storytelling to help us envision and discuss a gamut of plausible futures, from dystopian visions to everyday utopias, is increasingly being harnessed using the nascent practice of ‘design fiction’. Design fiction, a term coined by author Bruce Sterling, “tells worlds not stories”. Although inspired by sci-fi, design fiction is less about the “hocus pocus” of far-flung techno-futures, and instead is more practical, hands-on, and mundane. Design fictions extrapolate from current data, trends,
research and technologies, not in an attempt to predict the future, but to interrogate the plurality of plausible futures by forging a discursive space form which insights may emerge. This session will explore how design fiction can help us illuminate preferable, or indeed undesirable, futures of academia.

The university is a site of managerial and neoliberal transformation, with increased applications of competitive logics and performative technologies to re-define academia and academic practice. There are however examples of resistance and hope, with everyday utopian experiments such as the Social Science Centre, Lincoln. In this exploratory session, we use design fiction as an approach for exploring the potential for change latent within current circumstances, through contrasting utopian and dystopian visions for the future of higher education.

If you are interested in the future of the University and academic practice, or if you have a position or provocation to share, then please come and join us. During the session we will present two contrasting visions of the academy in 2020, one dystopic and one utopian. These positions will provide the foundations for a broader conversation about the future and design fiction. We will unpack questions such as can design fiction inform a better future for Universities? Are dystopian or utopian visions of the future more likely to help us get to a better future? What is ‘better’ anyway?

Judith Butler explained with video games (2015-08-25 08:00)

[IFRAME: https://www.youtube.com/embed/gkilQ87UUj8]


1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/gkilQ87UUj8


by Bradley Williams
In Organizations, Strategy, and Society, Rodolphe Durand draws attention to the ways in which organizations affect and provide meaning to peoples’ public and private lives. Organizations are not merely temporary groups of individuals or groups of aggregate interests. Organizations are mediators between people and large scale social, political, and economic processes that create a sense of disorganization and loss of meaning in late modernity. Organizations provide solutions to their problems, while people grant organizations with greater legitimacy. The pattern described by Durand is cyclical, though by providing solutions, organizations help individuals move beyond current crises and forward toward new challenges. Durand’s conception of organizations is similar to both field theory and the linked ecologies perspective, because all three describe largely self-reproducing social orders. This approach is perhaps most similar to Fligstein and McAdams A Theory of Fields which came out in 2012. Durand is, however, singular in his description of the animating drives embedded within modern organizations. In this sense both field theory and the ecological perspective lack by comparison.

Durand introduces readers to a new discipline, termed orgology, which attempts to invigorate the study of organizations. Drawing from current sociological, economic, and management theories, orgology “not only studies the world of organizations, their logics of action, their respective advantages and their internal consistency but also the organization of our known-worlds” (p. 4). Known-worlds are the reality apparent to persons. This perspective is meant to counter both the “glorification of the individual” and the over-socialized concept of the individual characterizing dominant perspectives in both sociology and economics.

The book is fairly short, with 164 pages of text. It is divided into five main parts, with a main section titled Entry and an afterward titled Exit. While the reader could read the Exit sections and get the general approach of the book, the main sections are filled with examples to demonstrate the main argument and a much fuller description of the correlative processes. Adding an element of artistic inspiration, each chapter features an illustration by artist Stéphane Barry.

Durand describes the current state of disorganization which characterizes both macro and global processes and the lived realities of individuals, which he calls ‘known-worlds.’ He uses the example of the 2008 financial crash and subsequent recession to illustrate the perspective which orgology is said to be a corrective. By examining the rhetoric of financial leaders of the time, particularly Alan Greenspan, it becomes clear there is little to no mention of the positive and negative consequences of organizations. Individuals seem to control, or most often not control, the macro-economic processes in which they are embedded. Durand refers to this dominant perspective in economic explanations which renders organizations unspoken and invisible the ‘quant’ thesis. As he shows, even calls for financial caution from within the economic community concern only the individual’s relation to macroeconomic
processes. Durand contends that the absence of attention paid to organizations is why systemic crises like the Great Recession are so devastating and why solutions to the problem are largely ineffective at providing usable solutions to people’s sense of lived disorder.

Part One continues with a well-written discussion presenting organizations as the units of investigation. Durand centers his analysis on organizations, which operate as mediators between individual and macro-level phenomena. Similar to Fligstein and McAdams’s strategic action fields, Durand credits organizations with having a great deal of agency. His theory is based on the singular role of organizations, unlike both individualistic and macro-theoretical sources of social solidarity and meaning creation. Starting from the premise that solutions to the personal sense of disorganization within our lives created by organizations, Durand critiques two branches of sociological thought, which he terms the ‘sociology of the social’ and the ‘sociology of association.’ For Bourdieu, the sources of meaning are determined by an individual’s habitus by class, which governs their behavior within a hierarchy of social fields. In this view, fields are much more stable and fixed, with individuals entering and leaving them based on their own competence. In an alternative thesis, Latour is credited with a more fluid theory involving the individual’s embedding within various networks which constitute the individual by association. Orgology offers an alternative perspective to both of these. As mentioned above, orgology pays attention to the work of organizations to mediate between the individual and macro-process levels of analysis. In this view, individuals are credited with having less agency than Latour’s method, though a bit more than in Bourdieu conception.

In Part Two, Durand explicates the two sources of disorganization, loss of legitimacy and competition. Both are a result of the way in which organizations provide solutions. By solutions, Durand means “very broadly, the products, services and deals that are offered for our attention, consumption and use and that drive our everyday actions” (p.39). He terms the meaning intrinsic in the solutions organizations provide ‘res-sources,’ or “reservoirs of meaning” (p.40). When organizations are not able to provide meaningful solutions to individuals’ problems, the result is a loss of legitimacy for the providing organization. This also results in the strengthening competition and meaning depreciation of the providing organization. Part Three examines the ‘logics of action’ employed by organizations in the public sphere, or public spaces. Here Durand draws from theories of institutional logics to understand how meaning depreciation occurs and is sustained. To demonstrate his argument, Durand analyzes the ubiquitous logic of ‘the market.’ He critiques all notions of markets as autonomous entities which seem to act directly on individuals with no alternative mediation. He finds the market is not autonomous, nor is the sovereign rule of law enforced by states. This is important since the state is seen as the dominant check on market autonomy. The logic of the market is the aforementioned ‘quant’ perspective indoctrinated into economic explanations of social activity. Organizations offer competing logics which provide meaning to individuals, in a mutually-reinforcing relationship, than what the author refers to as ‘performance tests.’ Performance tests cannot provide meaningful solutions. They only reinforce the standards of market calculability, and ultimately increasing the apparent disorganization which destabilizes the peoples’ lives.

Part Four deals with the history of ‘temporary advantages’ and the over-theorized individual. Throughout the book, Durand discusses the competition existing between organizations in relations to the solution they are able to propose. While many organizations manage to create temporary advantages for themselves within the particular production arena they are competing, organizations must make more lasting decisions to overcome both competition and the loss of legitimacy that follows. Concurrently, sociologists and even many organization theorists have focused almost exclusively on the individual as the source of their own welfare and mobility. Durand contends it is the individuals association to organizations which gives their actions direction and meaning. This section deals with many of the assumptions which underlie contemporary failures to account for individual success in relation to large social and economic processes.

In Part Five, Durand shows how a new understanding of the valuable roles people play when they work through organizations and not around them. The ‘organizations individual,’ as he calls it, must constantly re-evaluate their position within the myriad of organizational association they maintain, and seriously utilize those association to make sense of their own known-world. Durand refers to this corrective process as the reprise, or re-ensensing, of known-worlds. Successful organizations provide solutions to these issues and thus contribute this re-contextualization. They learn to manage their resources in order to both meet the needs of employees, partners, shareholders, and other associates, while keeping in pace with the changing competitive market for their products and services. Durand
notes the critical role of management within organizations, particularly the management of the various competing logics of action. Organizations respond to the very real needs of associates, while concurrently providing solutions directing them toward new challenges and away from prolonged crises like those experienced during this last great economic recession.

This book is appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate students. While many of insights might not be as revolutionary to scholars, this book should be read by organization theorists wishing to conduct research that takes organizations seriously. Durand has written a great work which promotes an honest look at the principle role organizations play in our lives. This book does not replace most sociological and management literatures on organizations, but supplements much of the confusion within these studies stemming from a lack of organizational understanding, particularly in regards to personalized elements of organizations.

Bradley W. Williams is a doctoral researcher at George Mason University. He studies transnational governance, social movements, peace and organizational processes. Twitter: @B_W_Williams


40 reasons why you should blog about you research (2015-08-26 08:00)

We recently had some new submissions to [1]this post. I had thought it was finished but seemingly there are more reasons yet to be shared... can we get it up to 50 reasons to blog about your research?

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/13910/comment-page-1
The self and the selfless (2015-08-27 08:00)

Call for Papers: Regulating the ‘Sharing Economy’ (2015-08-28 08:00)

Call for Papers for Special Issue of Internet Policy Review on *Regulating the 'Sharing Economy'*


**Special Issue editors:** Kris Erickson, Research Fellow, CREATe, University of Glasgow & Inge Sørensen, Research Fellow, CCPR, University of Glasgow.

You are ‘the new infrastructure’, an entrepreneur breathlessly explains to the Wall Street Journal in a recent piece on sharing economy start-ups (9 March 2015). Conceived in the early 2000s to describe alternative practices
of creativity and distribution, the sharing economy has become the rallying call for an array of new businesses which rely on networked connectivity of users willing to exchange, sell and purchase services from one another. The co-optation of online 'gifting' by capitalist interests is a story which traces the progression of many digital social phenomena, from community discussion fora to digital video youth culture. The sharing economy raises important issues for regulators: When does 'sharing' cease to be a private activity and become a public concern? When do affective relationships become exploitative? When is something a gift, and when is it labour? How do we ensure that risks and costs are accurately reflected in the provision of goods? And how should costs be divided between collaborative consumers, businesses, and the public?

This special issue will consider both informal norms of governance as well as formal legal structures governing sharing communities and services. As a result, contributions are likely to touch on a range of disciplines and approaches, including sociological, economic, technological and legal. It is the hope of the editors that this collection of individual contributions will lead to identification of issues of theoretical importance across different configurations of sharing economy practices, and help crystallise future areas of inquiry for empirical study.

Contributions should focus on the impact of technological and social innovation in this area, with specific reference to European societies and digital regulatory frameworks. In particular, we seek papers which address the following topics of interest for regulators:

- Crowdfunding and venture crowdfunding networks
- Economic impacts of sharing economy on traditional sectors
- Informal governance, ratings, reviews and crowd intelligence
- Future of transportation, utilities, and 'smart' urban provision
- Peer-to-peer production and distribution of media
- Alternative digital currencies, legal and financial systems
- Citizenship and civic engagement
- Open data, privacy and accountability

In addition to the above topics, we welcome proposals for original, forward-looking contributions with a focus on the European digital regulatory environment (or that of a national or local jurisdiction in Europe). By critically examining this emerging topic, this special issue will generate EU-specific understanding of policy issues, and expand our scholarly understanding of economic and social trends with potential for long-term impact.

This Call for Papers is open to researchers from the fields of policy studies, sociology, law, philosophy, data, information and technology studies, economics and management. Emerging scholars are particularly encouraged to submit a proposal.

**Important dates**

7th September 2015: Deadline for expression of interest and abstract submission (500 word abstracts) to the co-editors [2]Kristofer.Erickson@glasgow.ac.uk and [3]Inge.Sorensen@g.lasgow.ac.uk

29th September 2015: Feedback on abstract submissions
Viral media and unionisation (2015-08-29 08:00)

I’ve been interested in Upworthy for a long time. It was founded by Eli Pariser, author of the Filter Bubble and key figure in MoveOn.org, in order to leverage the dynamics of viral media to promote ‘meaningful’ and progressive content. But a few years on, with a change in Facebook’s algorithms having brought about a 48% drop in traffic within two months, the company is struggling badly. Hence their stance that, though they support the right of their staff to unionise, [1]they shouldn’t because it would be bad for the company. This was a sentiment echoed by BuzzFeed founder Jonah Peretti:

“I think unions have had a positive impact on a lot of places, like if you’re working on an assembly line, and if you’re negotiating with management it can make a huge difference, particularly when labor is more replaceable. And I think I don’t think a union is right for BuzzFeed for two reasons.

One, I think the way we pattern BuzzFeed is after companies like Google and Facebook, and the tech startups are very, very competitive for talent. They’re all trying to get the very best talent. That’s how I see BuzzFeed as well. We need to provide amazing benefits, we need to provide as much incentive for people to pick BuzzFeed over any other company.

A lot of the best new-economy companies are environments where there’s an alliance between managers and employees. People have shared goals. Benefits and perks and compensation are very competitive, and I feel like that’s the kind of market we’re in. A lot of times when you look at companies that have unionized, the relationship is very different. The relationship is much more adversarial, and you have lawyers negotiating for comp and looking at comparable companies and trying to keep compensation matched with other companies.

I think that actually wouldn’t be very good for employees at BuzzFeed — particularly people who are writers and reporters — because the comps for writers and reporters are much less favorable than
comps for startup companies and tech companies. In general, I don’t think it’s the right idea for us. The only thing about BuzzFeed is that we’re global, most unions are national. We have people who move between different roles and in general unions do a lot of defining clearly what individual roles, and what the job function is. So for a flexible, dynamic company, it isn’t something I think would be great for the company.”


I’m very interested in how a self-congratulatory corporate culture (“we’re disrupting the world, solving wicked problems, making it a better and more exciting place!”) interacts with the accumulation of vast wealth. Or in this case, how the avowedly moral stance of someone like Pariser falls by the wayside when his company falls on difficult times.


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CAMRI Research Seminars Autumn 2015 (2015-08-30 08:00)

CAMRI Research Seminars Autumn 2015
University of Westminster,
309 Regent Street, London W1B 2HW
Mobile work-life arrangements: exploring conceptual challenges (2015-08-31 08:00)

OPEN CALL

MOBILE WORK-LIFE ARRANGEMENTS: EXPLORING CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES. An Interdisciplinary Late-Summer School

9-18 October, 2015

University of Freiburg, Germany

Convened by: COME (Research Group Cultures of Mobility in Europe) and ANTHROMOB (EASA Anthropology and Mobility Network)

Anna Lipphardt (Freiburg); Jamie Coates (Waseda/Sheffield) and Roger Norum (Leeds/UCL)

Funded by Volkswagen Foundation

OVERVIEW

The interdisciplinary field of mobility studies has produced a broad spectrum of theoretical works and structural analyses, driven by research focusing on recent innovation in transport and communication. Within that field, economic and work-related aspects of mobility, are often treated as distinct from other life practices. This late-summer school aims to contribute to the field of mobility studies with respect to two key issues: First, it will turn attention to the interplay between work and non-work (e.g. leisure, family life, well-being) spheres of life linked to mobility. Second, it focuses on the complexities of mobile work-life arrangements as they play out in the everyday lives of an ever-growing number of people worldwide, across the economic spectrum and across diverse professional and socio-cultural fields.
The late-summer school explicitly aims to bring together people studying a range of empirical cases including (but not limited to) research across the following subjects

- peripatetic and pastoralist groups
- transport-sector professionals
- artists, creatives and travelling entertainers
- seasonal and project-based labourers
- academics
- lifestyle migrants.

OBJECTIVES AND KEY QUESTIONS

The late-summer school has two core objectives:

1. Providing a forum for discussing qualitative methodological approaches to mobility, including multi-sited, mobile or trajectory ethnography; life-course and life-world analyses; and newly-emerging ICT-based methods;

1. Exploring the differing forms of knowledge production concomitant with mobile work-life arrangements, it will encourage a critical reflection of the theoretical frameworks, empirical operationalisations and political discourses that implicitly or explicitly inform much research on mobile groups. Our intention is to bring together different epistemic communities, thus fostering a comparative perspective.

Key questions which the late-summer school will address are:

- How do we develop a critical analytical position in light of the complex entanglements between the political and economic discourses on certain mobile groups, the conceptual approaches of our respective research disciplines, and the emic perspectives of the people we study?

- What are the advantages, challenges, and limitations of differing analytical models such as multi-sited ethnography, qualitative case study, life-course analysis, or phenomenology in exploring mobile work-life arrangements?

- How can we compare or generalise insights gained from qualitative studies on specific mobile fields? And how can we employ empirical research to advance theoretical stances on mobility, both within a given research area and across disciplinary divides?

PROGRAMME AND WORKING FORMATS

The programme includes keynote lectures and advanced seminars by Noel Salazar (University of Leuven), Michaela Benson (Goldsmiths University) and Huub van Baar (University of Amsterdam/Giessen University). It also comprises presentations by doctoral students, workshops on mobile methods and representational strategies, informal
discussions on practical issues of mobile/multi-sited fieldwork, career and professional development sessions, a film screening, and recreational activities. The working language is English.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

The programme is aimed at doctoral students working on projects situated in qualitative social research focusing on issues related to mobile work-life arrangements. The common ground for all participants will be their interest in the labour/economic aspects of the mobile empirical fields they study, their footing in qualitative social research, and a shared interest in the epistemology of Mobility Studies. We welcome applications from doctoral students based in disciplines such as cultural and social anthropology, sociology, political science, social work, education, geography, and relevant interdisciplinary research fields including mobility, communication, environmental, transport and labour studies. Doctoral students at any stage of their research - including beginners - are invited to present work in progress and to discuss central research issues with which they are currently concerned. To ensure an open and collaborative learning environment, the number of participants will be limited to a maximum of 25.

APPLICATION

Interested applicants are asked to submit the following materials to the convenors by email up until August 10, 2015:

1. Curriculum Vitae (1 page);

1. Short description of your dissertation project (1-2 pages);

1. Personal statement (1-2 pages) that answers the following:

- Why do you wish to attend the Mobile Work-Life Arrangements Late-Summer School?
- What specific aspects of your dissertation and fieldwork are you most interested in discussing?

Successful applicants will be notified by email by the 3rd week of August.

ACCOMODATION AND TRAVEL GRANTS

It is expected that participants take part in the full duration of the late-summer school. All meals and accommodation will be covered, as will reimbursement for the following travel expenses: up to 150 Euro for participants from Germany; up to 300 Euro for those from other European countries; and up to 800 Euro for students who come from overseas. Participants from developing countries and from countries affected by current economic crises are eligible to apply for full travel funding.

For more information, please see [1]www.mobworklife.net. Please feel free to contact us for specific questions about the programme or application.
We are all equal before Google (2015-08-31 08:00)

This snippet from an interview with the [1]new Google CEO, Sundar Pichai, intrigued me:

Pichai has said that he's attracted to computing because of its ability to do cheaply things that are useful to everyone, irrespective of class or background. “The thing which attracted me to Google and to the internet in general is that it’s a great equalizer,” he said in [2]a video interview last year. “I’ve always been struck by the fact that Google search worked the same, as long as you had access to a computer with connectivity, if you’re a rural kid anywhere or a professor at Stanford or Harvard.”


I'm very interested in the moral self-understandings which are common within the tech industry: do other senior corporate figures think in these terms? To what extent does it motivate the work they do? Or is it simply a retrospective story which they tell to congratulate themselves on their disruption?

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TguamcqrQjI

Colin Carré (2015-08-31 10:07:40)
It works the same, yet the results aren't the same depending on who does the search...

Thinksocialtheory (2015-09-01 22:17:22)
There's an element of truth in this I guess. I've recently done a blog post about one of Paul Virilio's books and I was surprised to see that if I search for an overview of this book on google my webpage is one of the first that can be accessed via the search engine. on the contrary though there are now business's that pay for technical expertise of people who specialise in SEO and this practise would potentially give evidence for the fact that it is not a level field and that those who can afford to pay for technical expertise will have the edge.

TajdarOC (2016-10-17 13:04:40)
I'm more concerned about which parts of our learnings are limited by virtue of the personalized filter bubble that one's activity creates. Search results are tailored to Google's assumed understanding of who we are through our actions and cannot equate for cognizant dissonance when one wants to reset... therefore only giving us what the AI thinks we need rather than what we are really after at times. Repetition and conditioning makes for a very troubling reality.

3912
6.9 September

The fiction future of faculty: an afternoon of sociological design fiction (2015-09-02 10:18)

I’m organising a design fiction event in Manchester on September 16th, with James Duggan and Joseph Lindley. It’ll be great. You can register here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-fiction-future-of-faculty-an-afternoon-of-sociological-design-fiction-tickets-18169546603

The ability of storytelling to help us envision and discuss a gamut of plausible futures, from dystopian visions to everyday utopias, is increasingly being harnessed using the nascent practice of ‘design fiction’. Design fiction, a term coined by author Bruce Sterling, “tells worlds not stories”. Although inspired by sci-fi, design fiction is less about the “hocus pocus” of far-flung techno-futures, and instead is more practical, hands-on, and mundane. Design fictions extrapolate from current data, trends, research and technologies, not in an attempt to predict the future, but to interrogate the plurality of plausible futures by forging a discursive space form which insights may emerge. This session will explore how design fiction can help us illuminate preferable, or indeed undesirable, futures of academia.

The university is a site of managerial and neoliberal transformation, with increased applications of competitive logics and performative technologies to re-define academia and academic practice. There are however examples of resistance and hope, with everyday utopian experiments such as the Social Science Centre, Lincoln. In this exploratory session, we use design fiction as an approach for exploring the potential for change latent within current circumstances, through contrasting utopian and dystopian visions for the future of higher education.

If you are interested in the future of the University and academic practice, or if you have a position or provocation to share, then please come and join us. During the session we will present two contrasting visions of the academy in 2020, one dystopic and one utopian. These positions will provide the foundations for a broader conversation about the future and design fiction. We will unpack questions such as can design fiction inform a better future for Universities? Are dystopian or utopian visions of the future more likely to help us get to a better future? What is ‘better’ anyway?


Social media and the promise of never again being alone (2015-09-03 08:00)

From Liquid Surveillance: a conversation by Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon, pg 22-23. I heard Bauman make these arguments at re:publica earlier this year and was rather impressed. As ever with him, it’s immensely impressionistic but I think he identifies something important that has been substantiated by other work, most obviously Alice
Marwick’s ethnography of the tech scene in Silicon Valley: the fear of exclusion, anxiety in the face of the prospect that we fail to make the cut in occupational structures that increasingly reward only the superstars and doom the rest to a lifetime of precarity, engenders a neurotic embrace of possibility in the hope that we become somebody, rather than being consigned to life as a forgotten nobody.

On the one hand, the old panoptical stratagem (‘you should never know when you are being watched in the flesh and so never be unwatched in your mind’) is being gradually yet consistently and apparently unstoppably brought to well-nigh universal implementation. On the other, with the old panoptical nightmare (‘I am never on my own’) now recast into the hope of ‘never again being alone’ (abandoned, ignored and neglected, blackballed and excluded), the fear of disclosure has been stifled by the joy of being noticed.

Having one’s own complete being, warts and all, registered in publicly accessible records seems to be the best prophylactic antidote against the toxicity of exclusion – as well as a potent way to keep the threat of eviction away; indeed, it is a temptation few practitioners of admittedly precarious social existence will feel strong enough to resist. I guess that the story of the recent phenomenal success of ‘social websites’ is a good illustration of the trend.

And on page 27 Bauman further expands upon the moral psychology of publicity in ‘liquid modernity’: again, it’s rampantly impressionistic and the way he writes obscures a profound empirical variability he seemingly has no interest in recognising, but he offers an important insight into a socio-cultural trend:

These days, it is not so much the possibility of a betrayal or violation of privacy that frightens us, but the opposite: shutting down the exits. The area of privacy turns into a site of incarceration, the owner of private space being condemned and doomed to stew in his or her own juice; forced into a condition marked by an absence of avid listeners eager to wring out and tear away the secrets from behind the ramparts of privacy, to put them on public display and make them everybody’s shared property and a property everybody wishes to share. We seem to experience no joy in having secrets, unless they are the kinds of secrets likely to enhance our egos by attracting the attention of researchers and editors of TV talk shows, tabloid front pages and the covers of glossy magazines.

But there are, inevitably, things which bug me immensely about this text. For instance he draws upon a lengthy quotation from a book edited by Nicole Aubert, L’Individu hypermoderne, describing remarks published in 2004 as ‘recent’ observations, implying they tell us things of interest about social media that basically didn’t exist at the time of their writing and intimating they are grounded in substantial empirical consensus which he makes no effort to convey.

It’s just lazy scholarship and I’m increasingly bothered by the manner in which Bauman gets applauded for it, all the while crowding out other voices through his endless capacity to riff upon a metaphor of liquidity which even on the most charitable interpretation has nothing more than heuristic value. To any critics bristling at this: I’ve probably read more Bauman than you (I’ve read upwards of 15 of these cover to cover) so, if you think I’m being unfair, offer some textual justification of this before you have a go at me. I don’t want to repeat the tedious exchanges about Zizek I got locked into a couple of years ago.
I take Bauman’s fundamental point to be a familiar one about the necessity of self-marketing under contemporary circumstances. As he writes on page 31 and 32:

They are simultaneously promoters of commodities and the commodities they promote. They are, at the same time, the merchandise and their marketing agents, the goods and their travelling salespersons (and let me add that any academics who ever applied for a teaching job or research funds will easily recognize their own predicament in that experience). In whatever bracket they may be filed by the composers of statistical tables, they all inhabit the same social space known under the name of the market. Under whatever rubric their preoccupations might be classified by governmental archivists or investigative journalists, the activity in which all of them are engaged (whether by choice or necessity, or most commonly both) is marketing. The test they need to pass in order to be admitted to the social prizes they covet demands them to recast themselves as commodities: that is, as products capable of drawing attention, and attracting demand and customers.

As with the earlier material, I find the broad brush strokes used by Bauman rather dissatisfying. But I think he offers suggestions about something important: the moral psychological mechanisms underpinning branding and self-promotion. Fear of redundancy drives us to embrace usefulness, embodied in the relentless articulation of our instrumental value in the broader scheme of things.

Christian (2016-01-11 03:52:12)
Hi Mark, On the last point about the moral psychological mechanisms and underpinning branding and self-promotion, I’m thinking of an entry into that, but it gets spread out very quickly for me and I lose an approach (ie. evolutionary mechanisms, cultural or individual values). What do you think is the best lens for at looking at this?

» The Cultural Politics of Automation The Sociological Imagination (2016-03-14 08:02:11)
[...] facing occupational futures? Though the basis for his claims is somewhat unclear, I find Zygmunt Bauman’s analysis of this intuitively plausible. He suggests that the spectre of exclusion, the possibility that we won’t [...]

The Socilality of Sharing Conference, September 23rd (2015-09-04 08:00)

CIM – The Socilality of Sharing Conference

Warwick 23rd September 2015

The ‘sharing economy’ has become a popular term to describe the transformations in sociality under way in the information economy. But what are the practices of sharing that are invoked here? We suggest that they emerge at the intersection of two sets of processes: on the hand, the socialization of the economy, and on the other, the subsuming of social relations by an economic logic. Seen in relation to both these tendencies, the sharing economy refers to such diverse phenomena as new forms of ‘collaborative’ production and consumption, the solidarity of co-workers, the publicity oriented ‘sharing’ that marks reputation-seeking social media users, and the emerging pirate economy of fast and cheap improvisations in the global technological commons that supplies the popular classes in the global South with access to cell phones, computers and other informational products.
In this workshop we would like to investigate these and other examples of the sociality of sharing to ask: what sort of social relations are created in a sharing economy where the boundaries between the economy and everyday life are disappearing? How does the sharing economy relate to wider transformations of sociality in contemporary culture and in particular to the obligations and opportunities to participate offered by digital culture? And can we connect today’s theories of sharing and the collaborative economy with the traditions of mainstream social theory?

For the provisional programme and to register please see our web page: [1]http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/events/sociality_sharing/

1. [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/events/sociality_sharing/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/events/sociality_sharing/)

The private eye’s guide to being a plain speaking politician (2015-09-05 08:00)

This might be a bit mystifying to non-UK readers but Jeremy Corbyn, a left-wing politician likely to be the new leader of the British Labour Party, has provoked what we might call an enthusiastic reaction in the British media. In this feature the satirical magazine Private Eye (HT countless people on my twitter feed) compare what he has said to how it was reported. While Corbyn has generated much enthusiasm for his earnest plain speaking, surely this shows that its the headline writers themselves that cannot be matched in this respect?
» The most popular posts on sociological imagination The Sociological Imagination (2017-10-29 15:09:37) […] The private eye’s guide to being a plain speaking politician […]

Post-democratic political culture: how good leaders go bad (2015-09-05 08:00)

Absolutely fascinating [1]comments offered by Varoufakis in response to unfolding events in Greece:
In the wake of Tsipras’s unexpected move on Thursday to call early elections, Varoufakis said: “Tsipras made a decision on that night of the referendum not only to surrender to the troika but also to implement the terms of surrender on the basis that it is better that a progressive government implement terms of surrender that it despises than leave it to the local stooges of the troika, who would implement the same terms of surrender with enthusiasm.”

As a result, Syriza once the hope of Europe’s anti-austerity movement, had not only betrayed the cause but mutated into the very thing it had set out not to be. “This mutation I have already witnessed. Those in our party/government who underwent it, then turned against those who refused to mutate, the result being a split in the party that our people, the courageous voters who voted No, did not deserve,” he wrote.

Tsipras’s rash decision to resign and call elections – the third poll to be held in Greece this year – the MP argued, amounted to a concerted effort by the leader to purge the party of dissent. “For it is clear,” he continued, “that once you start implementing policies it becomes untenable to say constantly: ‘I am passing law X through parliament even though I think it is toxic.’ At some point either you resign or you remove the cognitive dissonance by beginning to believe that law X ain’t that bad; perhaps it is what the doctor ordered.”

I wonder what went on during the negotiations? As Nikos Mouzelis has pointed out on many occasions, face-to-face meetings between international leaders are an example of macro events that look micro. But the interactional dynamics that micro-sociologists study still obtain: how was the situational logic, which Varoufakis alleges his former colleague has now internalised, enforced and enacted through a perverse sort of peer pressure in the meeting itself?

The Five Pillars of Islamophobia (2015-09-06 19:03)

[1]David Miller, Professor of Sociology at Bath University and key contributor to [2]Spinwatch, will be joining Sufyan Ismail, CEO and founder of [3]Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND), to discuss the impact of the Islamophobia industry at free events in Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and London next week.
Monday 14th Sept -
Manchester

Tuesday 15th Sept -
Leeds

Wednesday 16th Sept -
Leicester
Thursday 17th Sept -
London

[5]Spinwatch is run by journalists and academics with extensive experience in key social, political, environmental and health issues in the UK and Europe.

[6]MEND is a leading UK Muslim organization dedicated to tackling Islamophobia via advocacy in Westminster and grass roots community empowerment. MEND gave evidence to the Leveson Inquiry on press ethics; MEND sits on the CPS’s national hate crime panel and works nationally with Police Crime commissioners to tackle Islamophobia. MEND also has an extensive grass roots Muslim empowerment programme across the UK.

In recent years, anti-Muslim hate crime has been on the rise with official figures disclosing an alarming rate of increase in racial and religious hate crime; 45% increase in religious hate crime between 2012/13 and 2013/14 according to figures released by the Home Office. Moreover, analyses of the British Social Attitudes survey denote a disturbing trend in the growth of racial prejudice, especially anti-Muslim prejudice, among Britons.

While Muslim organisations, like MEND, are challenging anti-Muslim public discourse, tackling biased reporting in the media, and working with police and local authorities to improve reporting of anti-Muslim hate crime, the wider context and factors which facilitate the creation of an environment congenial to anti-Muslim hatred and prejudice are less well known.

This event will explore the five facets to Islamophobia and its impact on British Muslim citizens; their lives, their civil and political rights and their well-being.

It is a view widely held that frustrations with self-confidence and a confused identity are consequential to the susceptibility of people to extremism and radicalisation. How we cultivate a strong sense of British identity and foster a sense of belonging is crucial to the success of British Muslim integration.

We hope you will join us as we examine the factors that contribute to Islamophobia in the UK and nurture social activism in support of diversity and social cohesion.


3920
Please contact Professor David Miller, Sufyan Ismail or Sadia Habib if you have any queries or questions.

BSA Sociology of the Arts Study Group: "Unpacking Art", September 11th (2015-09-07 08:00)

Full details here. The BSA have started promoting everything via PDFs, which aren't blog friendly.

Deadline extended for the Social Media, Activism, and Organisations Symposium (2015-09-08 08:00)

Call for Participation

2015 Social Media, Activism, and Organisations Symposium (#SMAO15) - November 6, 2015 @ Goldsmiths, University of London

FREE Registration at: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/social-media-activism-and-organisations-smo15-tickets-17290579589
Social media (from mainstream platforms such as Twitter to organization-specific tools) have become increasingly pervasive. This is exemplified by the diversity of uses ranging from Twitter and Facebook use during the Arab spring to the use of Snapchat by highly surveilled activist groups. Many social movements have increasingly seen social media as a means to collaboratively crowdsourcing, to network and communicate with diverse stakeholders. In large organizations, social media is often supported because the technology can help foster the sense of a "digital village", where individuals are able to "see" the lives of others within their organization and feel closer to them. However, the literature on social movements and social media has not fully grasped just how much social media has fundamentally changed the landscape of organizational communication, ranging from stakeholders being able to directly mobilize resources to making grassroots transnational social movements more organizationally feasible. Social Media, Activism, and Organisations ( #SMAO15) seeks to better our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.

The Social Media, Activism, and Organisations symposium will be held in London, England on November 6, 2015 at Goldsmiths, University of London. The symposium is sponsored by The Sociological Review, The Centre for Creative & Social Technologies at Goldsmiths, and the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths.

We invite you to submit abstracts and short papers which explore the social media-influenced intersections of social movements and organisations. Full papers are not required for this conference, only short papers (2500 words, excluding references) and abstracts (up to 750 words) related to the broad theme of "Social Media, Activism, and Organisations".

Abstracts and short papers should be submitted by September 14, 2015 via Easy Chair at https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smao15 and there is no preset template for submission. If selected, the author(s) will be invited to give a 15-minute oral presentation followed by a 5 min Q &A period at the symposium.

Author(s) of accepted paper abstracts may also be invited to submit full papers to a special issue of The Sociological Review, published by Wiley.

#SMAO15 TOPICS OF INTEREST

- Organisational communication and social media
- Democratizing organisational structures via social media
- Gender, social media, activism, and organisations
- Activist knowledge aggregation techniques
- Enterprise applications and social activism
- Collaboration, social media, and activism
- Virtual teams, social media and activism
- Activist networks and organizational communication
- Social media and organizational leadership
• Communicating organizational messages via social media

• Social media and advocacy organizations

• Inter-movement organizational communication and social media

• Visual social media and organisations

• Implications of anonymous social media

We welcome both theoretical and empirical abstracts and papers and the symposium seeks to showcase a variety of case studies to advance our understandings of how social media has shaped social movement organizations and the organization of social movements.

The fiction future of faculty: an afternoon of sociological design fiction (2015-09-09 08:00)

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The ability of storytelling to help us envision and discuss a gamut of plausible futures, from dystopian visions to everyday utopias, is increasingly being harnessed using the nascent practice of ‘design fiction’. Design fiction, a term coined by author Bruce Sterling, “tells worlds not stories”. Although inspired by sci-fi, design fiction is less about the “hocus pocus” of far-flung techno-futures, and instead is more practical, hands-on, and mundane. Design fictions extrapolate from current data, trends, research and technologies, not in an attempt to predict the future, but to interrogate the plurality of plausible futures by forging a discursive space form which insights may emerge. This session will explore how design fiction can help us illuminate preferable, or indeed undesirable, futures of academia.

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If you are interested in the future of the University and academic practice, or if you have a position or provocation to share, then please come and join us. During the session we will present two contrasting visions of the academy in 2020, one dystopic and one utopian. These positions will provide the foundations for a broader conversation about the future and design fiction. We will unpack questions such as can design fiction inform a better future for Universities? Are dystopian or utopian visions of the future more likely to help us get to a better future? What is ‘better’ anyway?
Williams, Marcuse, and Smythe in the Age of Social Media (2015-09-10 08:00)

The astonishingly prolific Christian Fuchs gives an overview of his development of critical theory for digital capitalism.

The necessity of digital sociology (2015-09-11 08:00)

It’s far from the most sophisticated argument I’ve heard made to this end, but I appreciate the spiritedness with which David Lyon defends the necessity of digital sociology in his *Liquid Surveillance* book with Zygmunt Bauman pg 3924
Sociology is now obliged to come to terms with the digital, or miss investigating and theorizing whole swaths of significant cultural activity. To begin with, the simple fact of technological dependence has to be factored into any social explanation worth its salt. So many relationships are conducted in part – or completely – online that a sociology without Facebook and its ilk is simply inadequate. Whatever an older generation makes of it, Facebook has quickly become a basic means of communicating – of ‘connecting’, as Facebook itself rightly calls it – and is now a dimension of daily life for millions.

In my new project I’m thinking about this in terms of Digital Capitalism and what a Sociology adequate for its study would look like. I’m finding this a really useful frame of reference through which to draw together a variety of topics that have dominated my interests for some time.

CfP: My Day Job: Politics and Pedagogy in Academia (2015-09-12 08:00)

2016 Annual Meeting
EASTERN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY
CALL FOR PAPERS
My Day Job: Politics and Pedagogy in Academia
The Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers, March 17-20, 2016

The online abstract submission system for the ESS annual meeting is now open at http://www.meetingsavvy.org/ess or through the website at http://essnet.org.

Academics are a bit like aspiring rock stars: we have our passion, and we have our day jobs. We do our valued gigs when we can get them, and we do our day job. For rock stars, that day job might be waitressing. For academics, it might be teaching Intro, or working on department and university committees. We do that work, our day jobs, so that we can pursue our passion – our research, our work with our colleagues and sometimes our students.

Much of what we present at meetings like the ESS is our art, our life, our valued work. And what we do to pay the mortgage, put shoes on the kids, get the money to go to meetings like this, is teach. We sit in sessions and talk about our work; and we go to the bar and talk about our day jobs, what is happening to our colleges and universities, how they are becoming corporatized, how we have less and less control over our work in our day jobs. This is going to be a different meeting – we will sit at the thematic sessions together and talk about what is happening to our universities. We will of course have plenty of other sessions to talk about our research.

While the ESS welcomes submissions, as it always has, which address any and all of the topics of interest to sociology, drawing on every methodology, the 2016 meeting will have a special focus on the current state of colleges and universities. We will have many substantive sessions on research interests, and many wonderful themed mini-conferences. But when we gather at thematics, we will be looking at our under-researched, under-theorized day job.
Some of us — more and more of us — are doing our teaching as piece work, course by course, and as in pre-union days, without any 'benefits.' As courses move online, for some that work —like old style garment industry piecework — is done in our homes, one corner of our living space used for production, providing our own supplies, laptops now rather than sewing machines. For others, luckier, teaching is done as a full time job with full benefits, from a solid college or university base, whether on-line, in person or both, doing our 10 community college courses a year, or our 6 or so undergraduate courses, or even just a lovely one or two doctoral courses, or whatever mix we’ve worked out for ourselves. But that teaching, our day job, most often slips under the radar when we meet as professional sociologists.

At this meeting, we can and will talk about our interesting publications and our grant-funded research and all of that — but let us also talk about our day jobs. While papers will be welcomed in all areas of sociology, and mini-conferences will address a range of issues and concerns, the theme of the conference will be our day jobs. What is happening to universities and colleges as America becomes ever-increasingly corporatized and privatized, as more and more of all work is outsourced, as students and their families become ‘customers’ and faculty are responsible for ‘product’? How are we managing, coping, and rising above all that? How do we remain dedicated to our craft of teaching, our vocation of transmitting our sociological imagination?

Although the ESS particularly encourages submissions related to this year’s theme, we welcome submissions on all sociological topics, drawing on all methods and formats, including:

- Individual papers (please include abstracts of 250 words or less; longer drafts are also welcome via email to the program committee)
- Wholly constituted sessions (with names and affiliations of all presenters)
- Thematic conversations (panels of two or more scholars engaged in debate or exchange)
- Workshops on specific topics and techniques
- Special sessions organized around prominent scholars and their work
- Roundtable and poster session presentations

We particularly encourage the development of ‘mini conferences,’ three or more sessions around a specific theme. Anyone interested in developing a mini-conference should please get in touch with the program committee as quickly as possible with a deadline of September 15.

Paper submissions and session proposals are due by October 31, 2015. Undergraduate abstracts for poster submissions are due December 15, 2015. See Annual Meeting Undergraduate information on the website for more information.

Questions, suggestions, program ideas should be sent to: easterns2016@gmail.com
Program Committee Chair: Vilna Bashi Treitler, Baruch College and CUNY Graduate Center
A Summary of the Speech

Jeremy Corbyn’s winning speech after a stunning win of an undisputed majority today came after 99 rallies around the country. Today was poignantly the 100th gathering. And what a remarkable inspiring speech. A true leader: just, dignified and motivating.

He was critical of all the reasons people are turned off politics, providing hope and possibility for a better national and global society. Things can and will change, he told us.

He showed great appreciation for the work of his Labour party colleagues, praising the rivals in the race: Liz Kendall for standing up for what she believes in, Yvette Cooper for vocalising public support for aiding refugees, and Andy Burnham for his passionate work for the NHS. He thanked the MPs who nominated him in the spirit of inclusion and democracy. He thanked the unions for their overwhelming support, and showed opposition to the Tory government’s trade union bill.

He strongly condemned the malicious media intrusion into his family’s lives. Yes politicians can be critiqued, but the underhand dirty tactics of involving innocent people in a smear campaign need to be halted. He expressed the need for humanity when dealing with the refugee crisis. He will be at the rally later in aid of supporting refugees.

Change must come: governments cannot fund wars, whilst their citizens suffer poverty and inequality. Poverty isn’t inevitable. Things can and will change.

He highlighted the importance of engaging youth participation and voice, and welcomed new party members, and welcomed back old party members who had become disillusioned with Labour policies and practices. And he reached out to Scottish Labour supporters.

Exciting times! Hopefully there will be even more people joining the Labour party next week! Bring on the next election!

[1]
Don’t we need to take into account a researcher’s philosophical presuppositions amid calls for greater research replicability? (2015-09-13 08:00)

by John-Paul Smiley

Calls for greater replicability in social research are seemingly increasing by the day. The issue has garnered renewed attention in light of the LaCour incident and has prompted a flurry of debate across both traditional and new media platforms. What is rarely mentioned in these discussions, however, is the commensurability of replicability with differing ontological and epistemological positions. The calls for replicability arguably rest on positivistic presuppositions concerning the nature of reality; ones not necessarily shared by alternative schools of thought.
Hoping to spark debate, this brief piece considers the implications of adopting one such alternative ontological position for research replicability – an ontology of becoming.

Though the idea of an ontology of becoming can be traced back to the ancient Greeks with Heraclitus, in the modern era, it is Alfred Whitehead (1929) who has done most to popularise the concept, with Chia (1995) bringing attention to it most recently in management and organisational research circles. Leclerc (1958), summarises Whitehead’s position by stating that, ‘...an actual entity’s “being” is constituted by its "becoming". In other words, its existing is constituted by its ‘process” (Leclerc: 1958: p. 69). Consider, for example, the Moon. You may look upon it night after night and ascribe to it a state of permanence. But this is true only relative to your perception of time. In actuality, the Moon, like any other physical entity, is in a state of becoming, of flux. It has emerged at a particular point of time; it is, from moment to moment, changing (through, for example, surface erosion), and it will eventually, in time, cease to exist. The object that we perceive to be objectively there, is there, but only as a temporary formation of matter in a particular configuration.

The same is true for humans – we are born, we grow up, and we die. Along the way, we are socialised into whatever particular communities and institutions we are born into and later, once a certain level of awareness and development is achieved, we dabble with alternatives as we see fit. The point is that human researchers are themselves always changing – the eighteen-year-old researcher is not the same as the twenty-five year old, or the forty-five years old, or the sixty-five year old. Change is not unusual, it is the only constant. Humans are thus constantly interpreting and meaning-making against a backdrop of physical reality which is itself in a continual process of change – and this includes the physical bodies of humans. That entities appear relatively static is solely due to the limitations of humans to perceive minutiae of change. Bodies, whether we are referring to human or planetary, are constantly in a state of flux and change. What we recognise as an ‘entity’ is thus an abstraction based on a perceived momentary state of being. The problem is that humans, due to our limited lifespans, have difficulty perceiving that what is meant by ‘moments’ is relative to your perception of time and can include timespans far exceeding the average human lifespan (consider, for example, the notion of ‘historical moments’, paradigms, and zeitgeists, which often last decades or centuries).

In terms of social ontology, the implication of this is that social and political institutions are constantly in a state of movement and all that can ever be captured at any one moment is an interpretation of a perceived static entity that is in actuality in flux. Social entities may, then, exist in a variety of configurations and relationships, all of which are marked by flux and transience. What is actually perceived is only ever a researcher’s interpretation of a particular level, moment, or stage of being of the action or institution under consideration and never the totality. And this realisation, in turn, has implications for research method, as, following Chia (1995), it is believed in such an approach, that, ‘...reality is deemed to be constantly in flux and transformation and hence unrepresentable in any static sense’ (Chia: 1995: p. 579 – emphasis added). Indeed, the researcher’s and participant’s own understandings at any moment are always themselves characterised by becoming – of constant movement as new interactions, research, and work bring new appreciations, interpretations and understandings. This point, now seemingly forgotten, was made by Lasswell (1936) almost eighty years ago when he stated that, ‘From analysis, then, we can expect no static certainty. It is a constant process of re-examination which brings new aspects of the world into the focus of critical attention’ (Lasswell: 1936: p. 19).

Strict replicability, then, does not, and cannot, apply to research if one adopts on an ontology of becoming. Each moment, the researcher and the subject and/or object of study are in flux – they are different, changed – if only to a degree. The implication of this is that one would not expect research to be accurately replicable over time, indeed it is considered impossible. The more time that passes, the more that both the subject(s) and object(s) change, with the resulting interpretations being different than those previously held – even if unbeknownst to the holder. The forty-year old researcher repeating an analysis of interview data they carried out twenty years earlier, for example, will never replicate his/her work exactly. Moreover, this holds regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative methods are utilised.

3930
Critical readers may suggest that a deliberately extreme example has been used here, and it has. But the point of this piece has not been to suggest that researchers should adopt an ontology of becoming for their studies. Rather, the point has been to recognise that differing ontological and epistemological perspectives have varying implications for conceptualisations of 'appropriate' criteriology – including the perceived potential desirability and feasibility of replicability. More nuanced consideration needs to be given to this issue and researchers can assist in these discussions by more clearly stating their adopted positions and then explicating the logical consequences of such. There is a danger, particularly as we enter the 'Big Data' era, that social research is increasingly likely to converge on an unreflective homogeneity of method – one that pays scant consideration or respect to alternative philosophical presuppositions. This is exactly the fear articulated by interpretive scholars, that, 'The idol of methodological rigour typically acts to obscure prior philosophical issues or even to prejudge such issues to support positivism' (Bevir and Rhodes: 2006: p. 81). But unless we are to suggest that we have resolved all metaphysical debates, that we are certain as to the nature of reality, then a little less hubris, a touch more humility, and greater sensitivity to competing ontological claims would arguably serve us better going forward.

[notice]John-Paul Smiley is a PhD Candidate at Loughborough University[/notice]

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References


The Mike Wallace Interview: Erich Fromm (1958-05-25) (2015-09-14 08:00)

In a sign of how far the quality of television has slipped in past decades, Erich Fromm was invited to take part in this series discussing “the problems of a free society and what it must do to survive” in 1958. Who are the equivalent figures addressing such big issues on the contemporary intellectual scene? Do they stand a chance of being invited on to prime time television?
Some of this material is astonishingly prescient. He talks about how "the symbol pushers" are increasingly forced to "sell their own personality". What would Fromm have made of social media?

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/OTu0qJG0NfU](https://www.youtube.com/embed/OTu0qJG0NfU)

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**Call for book proposals: New Visions of the Cosmopolitan** *(2015-09-15 08:00)*

New Visions of the Cosmopolitan

Series Editors:
Dr Patrick O’Mahony
Dr Tracey Skillington

New Visions of the Cosmopolitan explores how the forces of contemporary social change release a cosmopolitan energy that dilutes the relevance of the nation-state. The ‘transnational turn’ creates tendencies toward greater world openness. A more pluralist, multi-perspectivist late modernity requires a cosmopolitan research framework capable of illustrating how world histories and futures are in these new conditions intricately connected. This series offers a body of work exploring how cosmopolitan ideas, emerging from encounters between local and global currents, generate impulses towards social, cultural, legal, political and economic transformation.

The series invites contributions that focalize this contemporary situation using theories, perspectives and methodologies drawn from multiple disciplines. Of particular, although not exclusive, interest are proposals exploring:
transnational visions of justice and solidarity; cosmopolitan publics; researching cosmopolitan worlds; cosmopolitan memory; the cosmopolitics of contemporary global capitalism; borders of the cosmopolitan; cosmopolitanism in the non-western world; security, war and peace in a cosmopolitan age; multiple modernities; divergence and convergence; political culture and multi-level governance.

For books published in the series so far, see http://www.peterlang.com?NVC. For information on how to submit a book proposal, please contact Christabel Scaife, Senior Commissioning Editor, Peter Lang Ltd, c.scaife@peterlang.com.

Hamid Dabashi on David Cameron's 'concern' for refugees (2015-09-15 10:48)

Selling the UK by the offshore pound (2015-09-16 08:00)

The Private Eye has launched a new data journalism initiative, analysing the growing ownership of the United Kingdom by offshore companies based in tax trusts. Explore the map [1]here.

OVER the last year Private Eye has revealed the extent of ownership of British land by offshore companies, generally for tax avoidance and often to conceal dubious wealth. Now the Eye has created an easily searchable online map of these properties, revealing for the first time the British property interests of companies based in tax havens from Panama to Luxembourg, and from Liechtenstein to the South Pacific island of Niue. Using Land Registry data released under Freedom of Information laws, and then linking more than 100,000 land title register entries to specific addresses, the Eye has tracked all leasehold and freehold interests acquired by offshore companies between 2005 and 2014.

1. http://www.private-eye.co.uk/registry

Noam Chomsky: "Young Marx, Alienation of Man, and Erich Fromm (2015-09-17 08:00)

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IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/h2QPbmnpLU

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/h2QPbmnpLU

Most millennial resists the millennial label (2015-09-18 08:00)

The increasing prominence of the category ‘millennial’ irritates me. I thought this was a sociological objection. As this [1]superb n+1 essay observes, the category builds systemic conditions into the dispositions of the generational cohort and so disguises the former through highlighting the latter:

Of course the kids stay home because they can’t get jobs that pay rent. But the function of millennial-speak is to disguise structural causes (the lack of jobs) as human desires (the kids want to stay home), and to justify further measures (make hiring and firing easier) in terms of those desires. This is why millennials are constantly figured as happily zigzagging from job to job, fleeing long-term employment, luxuriating in the intense anxiety of a precariousness said to be uniquely theirs. If they (we?) don’t like a job, what use is there in organizing or demanding more from it? Just quit and move on, we’re told,
and so we tell ourselves the same. (Another paradoxical statistic: a majority of millennials look fondly on unions, but are also less likely than previous generations to join or form one.) Having been told for decades that they are creative snowflakes, “knowledge workers” laboring in a new kind of capitalism, younger cohorts have been encouraged to recognize themselves as operating in a wholly different, less fair economy than that of their parents — which is one way of ensuring that such an economy actually comes into being. In this way articles that worry over the socialization of millennials function as a way of socializing them into an unequal society.


But it seems that my objection is perhaps an expression of my millennial nature. As this [3]new Pew study finds, "Just 40% of adults ages 18 to 34 consider themselves part of the ‘Millennial generation’". Even if we largely reject the meaningfulness of analysis in generational cohorts, I think it’s an important sociological challenge to explain the variability with which each cohort embraces a generational label.

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**Millennials Less Likely Than Boomers, Gen X to Embrace Generational Label**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Consider Themselves Part of That Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millennial (ages 18-34)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X (35-50)</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomer (51-69)</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent (70-87)</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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**A collection of Digital Sociology CfPs (2015-09-19 08:00)**


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CfP: Power and the Body (2015-09-20 08:00)

Power and the Body

Paper Session for the 2016 ESS Annual Meeting


Power is a topic that is commonly explored through its traditional channels of action, such as political parties, bureaucratic structures, and formal organizations. This panel, however, aims to explore the composition of power through the lenses of the body. It aims to explore the nature of domination, privilege and lack-of-privilege from a corporeal standpoint. This session wants to create a dialogue among scholars using the body as an analytical lens to examine a wide range of sites and activities, such as racial dynamics in formal/informal organizations, gender interactions in the leisure/public sphere, and class relations in un/academic settings, to mentioned a few. Please submit an abstract (200 words) directly to [2]hrc209@lehigh.edu. We will alert you asap about whether or not the presentation will be included in the panel so that you can pop the abstract into the general system in plenty of time to be slotted in another session.


Abstracts of paper proposals should not exceed 200 words.

Session organizers: Hugo Ceron-Anaya, Lehigh University, USA.

Contact Email: [5]hrc209@lehigh.edu

1. http://airmail.calendar/2016-03-17%2012:00:00%20GMT
2. mailto:hrc209@lehigh.edu
3. http://airmail.calendar/2015-10-05%2012:00:00%20BST
4. http://airmail.calendar/2015-10-13%2012:00:00%20BST
5. mailto:hrc209@lehigh.edu
Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life
2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (Vila Lanna)

Organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and supported by the Strategy AV21.

For more details see our webpage at [1]accelerated.academy
There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- *empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education*
- *the origins of metrification of higher education*
• metrification as a form of social control
• the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
• common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.

Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contribution was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived/in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to
assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight - if any - should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.

2. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=18688651259&ref=etckt


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**Philip Abrams Prize 2016 - Nominations Open (2015-09-21 08:00)**

Nominations are now being sought for the BSA Philip Abrams Memorial (PAM) Prize 2016.
The PAM prize is awarded to the best first and sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology published between [1]1st December 2014 and [2]30th November 2015. The winner of the PAM Prize is awarded a monetary prize of £1,000 plus one year’s free subscription to The Sociological Review published by Wiley-Blackwell. The winner also receives an invitation to the BSA 2016 Annual Conference (to be held at Aston University, Birmingham in April), with free conference registration, accommodation and travel (within the UK).


We look forward to receiving your nominations.

The general criteria for eligibility are as follows:

- Nominated authors must be current, fully paid-up, members of the BSA
- Nominated authors must be resident within the UK
- Nominated authors should be within the first seven years (or full-time equivalent) since starting their first academic post within the discipline of sociology
- The nominated book must be the author’s first monograph. If the author has previously co-authored a monograph, they are not eligible for the prize. If the author has previously edited or co-edited a book, they are still eligible.
- The nominated book must be a sole-authored book
- The nominated book should be concerned with the discipline of Sociology
- There is an expectation that the author has observed the contents of the BSA’s Authorship Guidelines for Academic Papers (adopted April 2001)
- Nominations should comprise the official nomination form (duly completed), a brief curriculum vitae of the author, and five copies of the nominated book

1. http://airmail.calendar/2015-12-01%2012:00:00%20GMT
2. http://airmail.calendar/2015-11-30%2012:00:00%20GMT
3. http://airmail.calendar/2015-12-04%2012:00:00%20GMT
4. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/PAM.htm
5. mailto:margaret.luke@britsoc.org.uk
6. tel://01913830839/
Precarious labour in higher education (2015-09-22 08:00)

HT to [1]NotRightRuth for sharing this amazing [2]Doonesbury cartoon:

CFP: Sexualities Special Issue ‘Trans Genealogies: Gender, Sexuality and the Emergence of Trans’ (2015-09-23 08:00)

Guest editors: L Moon, R Pearce and DL Steinberg

Forthcoming 2016

Deadline for submission of papers: November 30 2015

We would like to invite submissions for a forthcoming Special Issue of [1]Sexualities on the topic of ‘Trans-Genealogies: Gender, Sexuality and the Emergence of Trans’. Below please find email contact information for the Guest Editors, a synopsis of the Special Issue and advice for authors. The Guest Editors will be very happy to discuss your ideas for papers in advance of submission.

Contact:
D.L.Steinberg@ warwick.ac.uk
L.Moon@ warwick.ac.uk
R.Pearce@ warwick.ac.uk

Please submit your papers by November 30 2015 for consideration for the Special Issue

Special Issue Synopsis

This special issue of Sexualities focuses on the emergence of Trans as a growing vernacular of identity, intersubjectivity and feeling on the intersecting terrains of gender and sexuality. The issue draws its impetus from the recent ESRC seminar series: ‘The Emergence of Trans: Retheorising Gender and Sexuality’ (2012-14).

Authors are encouraged to address at least one of the following three questions:

- How does the emergence of Trans challenge, develop or extend understandings of gender and sexuality, reconfigure everyday lives or herald new normativities?
- How do Trans lives and discourses articulate with issues of rights, citizenship and (complex and intersectional modes of) discrimination, health and welfare, education and popular commonsense?
- What challenges do Trans identities present for clinical and therapeutic practice, for gender and sexuality theory and for everyday articulations of identity and intersubjective and communal connection?

Thematic Focus / Advice for Authors

The Special Issue will pursue and be organised around four key thematic axes:

1. Trans Genealogies: shifting paradigms and practice in clinical and therapeutic contexts
Emergent themes include: narratives of ‘authenticity’ that guide clinical protocols, psychotherapeutic approaches
and patient self-identifications; ‘pathways of care’ surrounding interventions and management of Trans bodies; professional discourses (educational, diagnostic) and clinical and practice protocols vis a vis patient or client experience; and ‘alternative’ therapeutic discourses and the Trans self-help context.

2. Trans in everyday culture: social networks, social movements, everyday lives and everyday repertoires
The focus here concerns the emergence of Trans social networks, social movements and citizenship struggles, including the impact of digital technology and web based resources on gender and sexuality activism and new identifications. Key themes include: communal, popular and ‘everyday’ repertoires of body, identity, feeling and experience; the impact of digital technology and social networking, and Transformations in everyday vernaculars of gender and sexuality, everyday lives and ‘on the ground’ experiences.

3. Trans in Popular representation
A third thematic focus concerns the spectacular, social semiotic, aesthetic and visual repertoires of Trans. Trans has emerged as a cross-media phenomenon involving traditional and new media from film and television to web-based media to photography to performance art, giving rise to emergent popular and commonsense dimensions of Trans.

4. Trans Epistemologies: retheorising gender and sexuality
The fourth thematic focus concerns the epistemic, intersubjective and affective implications of Trans culture, discourse and practice. Key questions in this context include a) to what degree and in what terms does the emergence of Trans challenge conceptual norms across different cultural sites from professional to popular to everyday practice; and b) what challenges do the epistemic underpinnings of Trans herald for sexuality and gender studies? Does Trans, for example, represent a ‘postcloset’ epistemology? Does it represent an emergent meta-narrative and, in its wake, a Transformed ‘post Kinsey’ understanding of gender, sexuality, bodies and experience?

1. http://sex.sagepub.com/

First Faculty meeting of the year bingo (2015-09-24 08:00)

A [1]superb bingo card by Lisa Nikolidakis on [2]McSweeney’s to help you while away the first faculty meeting of the year:
If you like this then you may enjoy the Conference Bingo card, by [3]Kat Gupta and [4]Heather Froehlich, which [5]we posted a couple of years ago. Are there any other academic bingo cards floating around online?

1. [http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/first-faculty-meeting-of-the-year-bingo](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/first-faculty-meeting-of-the-year-bingo)
2. [http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/first-faculty-meeting-of-the-year-bingo](http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/first-faculty-meeting-of-the-year-bingo)
Call for proposals: BSA Early Career Forum Regional Events 2016 (2015-09-25 08:00)

Call for BSA Early Career Forum Regional Event Proposals 2016

BSA ECF members are eligible to apply for this fund to arrange an event relevant and/or appropriate for early career BSA members. £1,000 is available to fund the event which can be used to hire space, pay for speakers/attendees travel, refreshments and so on.

Co-funding sought from another source is looked on favourably.

Bids for the fund would need to provide a short justification and description of their proposed event, a budget, and an explanation as to how relevant for ECF members the proposed event is. As this a regional event fund, we encourage events outside of London.

Applications should be no more than 1,000 words. Please include your name, current position and years since awarded PhD or working.

Please email all expressions of interest to [events@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk) and address all correspondence: BSA ECF REGIONAL EVENT 2016.

**Deadline:** [04 December 2015](http://airmail.calendar/2015-12-04%2012:00:00%20GMT)

*Please note the following criteria will be used to judge applications*

All applications will be considered by the membership services directors, the treasurer and the ECF convenors. A final decision is then made by the Trustees taking into consideration the feedback from the ECF convenors and based on the following selection criteria:

- Breadth of appeal beyond the organising group
- Centrality to sociological concerns
- Quality of information provided
- Geographical spread
- Distinctiveness from previous events and institutions

For further information, please visit [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/postgraduate-day-events.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/postgraduate-day-events.aspx)

1. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk?subject=BSA%20Regional%20Postgraduate%20Events
2. http://airmail.calendar/2015-12-04%2012:00:00%20GMT
3. http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/postgraduate-day-events.aspx
I’ve recently been writing about the fragility of many contemporary movements: the organisational weakness that can emerge from digitally mediated assembly because the logistical labour formerly necessary to bring people together provided an important foundation for collective reflexivity. Collective projects become harder to sustain without regular face-to-face meetings, shared practical challenges and other forms of mundane encounter which facilitate the emergence of collective bonds. Movements that are fragile in this sense struggle to adapt to changing circumstances, revising tactics and strategy in light of new factors which are relevant. They fracture and break, though potentially in a way which leaves those active within them more motivated than ever to participate in new movements.

I think political culture can intensify this problem. Specifically what Nick Couldry calls ‘[1]the myth of us’: the assumption that digital technology has liberated a natural sociality, allowing a rehumanisation of the world that can lead to the spontaneous amelioration of social problems through the power of the crowd. This could be seen as a particular recent spin, in part propagated by social media platforms for obviously self-interested reasons, upon an older faith in the power of self-organising systems.

Now I want to incorporate Anonymous into this analysis. This line of thinking has left me cynical about the whole notion of digitally native politics. Therefore I’ve come to find Anonymous increasingly fascinating, in terms of their (basically) apolitical origins but also their growth ‘offline’. However I’m discovering that the political culture of Anonymous is much more complex than I realised. From Gabriella Coleman’s [2]Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy

In the midst of all this, a pastebin.com message titled “Anonymous is NOT unanimous” was picked up and read by many participants: Anonymous has a perception problem. Most people think we’re a group of shadowy hackers. This is a fundamental flaw. Anonymous is *groups* of shadowy hackers, and herein lies the problem. Anonymous has done a lot of good in just the past 9 months. It has helped with other groups in providing aid to people on the ground in countries where “democracy” is a bad word. The mainstream media needs to understand that Anonymous isn’t unanimous. I’ve yet to see wide scale reporting make this distinction. A destructive minority is getting a majority of the press, while those of us who toil in the shadow doing good work for people at home and abroad go unthanked. 22 This statement captures Anonymous’s commitment to difference, plurality, and dissension—similar in form to the type of adversarial politics advocated by radical theorist Chantal Mouffe. 23 Anons often disagree and engage in a strong war of words. But very little energy is spent on systematically trying to eliminate difference, or carving out some “middle ground” resolution. Instead, differences are loudly voiced, listened to, responded to, and reluctantly accepted; Anons widely acknowledge that nothing drastic or meaningful can be done to eliminate differences, and they carry on with their interventions or, if the disagreements are unbearable, break away to form a new node.

The idea this leaves me with is of collective reflexivity taking a fractal form. Collective projects and commitments are precarious achievements, something which I’m arguing has become much more true under digital capitalism. But the breaking off of new collectives, pursuing new projects, after the open confrontations of accepted differences complicates my understanding of collective reflexivity. I also wonder if the communicative affordances which characterise a polymedia environment help facilitate this because my hunch would be that fractal collective reflexivity presupposes an intensivity of exchange which would harder to achieve with older modes of mediated communication.

1. [http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/documents/MPP/Nick-Couldrys-LSE-INAUGURAL-SCRIPT.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/documents/MPP/Nick-Couldrys-LSE-INAUGURAL-SCRIPT.pdf)
This one-day workshop is an opportunity for scholars of political economy to discuss and debate how they teach the many facets of this interdisciplinary field of study. A teaching focus workshop seeks to bring the same peer-led engagement of research focused workshops & conferences to the teaching element of academic work. All participants are encouraged to share their teaching methods by bringing along course outlines, teaching resources (newspaper articles, films, blogs etc.), assignments, social media tools, games and simulations to share with the group.

The morning session will focus on ‘Decolonising Political Economy’ which takes seriously calls to no longer simply reproduce dominant orthodoxies by reflecting on the European Enlightenment bias in the political economy cannon. The afternoon session focuses on 'Learning Political Economy through Games and Simulations' which seeks to foster collaborative engagement on how games can transforming how political economy is taught and learned.

You are warmly invited to participate in this event and the ESRC covers travel expenses, please register here: [2]http://www.eventbrite.com/e/innovations-in-teaching-political-economy-tickets-17187040902

Timetable

10:30 am Welcome

11 am Gurminder Bhambra – Global Social Theory project ([3]globalsocialtheory.org)

11:45 am Break-away session – Decolonizing the Political Economy Syllabus

Report Back on Morning Session

1pm Lunch

2pm Chris Clarke – Political Economy Games
The Innovations in Teaching Political Economy workshop series builds on from a successful series of events the University of Warwick and Goldsmiths over the past five years. We seek to bring teachers of political economy together to debate and discuss the pedagogy of political economy. We are not seeking to devise a definitive way of teaching political economy but to promote innovative practices through peer-based learning.

Sponsored by the ESRC Seminar Series (ES/M003051/1) [4]From Recovery to Discovery: opening the debate on alternatives to financialisation and Politics and International Studies Department (PAIS) at the University of Warwick

(HT Su Oman)

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/staff/teaching/teachinggrid/

Military Sociology in the Early 21st Century (2015-09-28 08:00)

My Day Job: Military Sociology in the Early 21st Century


We invite submissions of abstracts for a mini-conference on military sociology. This mini-conference will be held as part of the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, which meets in Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers, [2]March 17-20, 2016 (specific mini-conference dates within these dates to be announced in January). Information about ESS is here: [3]http://www.essnet.org/.

We invite submissions from faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students related to the military broadly defined, and we particularly welcome submissions connected to the conference theme of "My Day Job: Politics and Pedagogy in Academia" (see [4]http://www.essnet.org/annual-meeting/overview/). Some examples of future and past sessions include the following:

Pedagogy in Military Sociology, War, Peace or Social Conflict

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Teaching Veterans

Free Passion, Politics and Teaching in Military Settings

Service and Research Work in Military Academies

War, Peace, and Social Conflict

Life Course Perspectives and Military Service

Civil-Military Relations

Recruitment and Retention

Military Missions Other than War

Military Spouses and Partners

Technology and Culture in the Military

Post-DADT

Peace, Morality, Respect and Justice in Peace and Conflict

Post-Combat Exclusion/Inclusion

Gender Inclusion and the Military

Sexual Assault and Mental Health in the Military

Military Children

The Military and Other Social Institutions

Transgenderism and the Military

Humans and Technology in War

Veterans in Higher Education

Soldier Scholars

Abstracts must be submitted NO LATER than by October 7, 2015. To be considered, please email a title, affiliation, contact information, and abstract of no less than 250 words to Ryan Kelty (rkelty2@washcoll.edu) and/or Morten Ender (morten.ender@usma.edu). All abstracts not accepted for the mini-conference will be forwarded for consideration for the regular paper sessions.

Please also feel free to email the organizers with inquiries.
Call for papers: Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies (2015-09-28 19:31)

Call for papers: Themed Issue

Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies

Qualitative Research [html: http://qrj.sagepub.com]

Edited by William Housley (Cardiff University), Bella Dicks (Cardiff University) and Karen Henwood (Cardiff University).

The explosion of digital social data in recent years has required a response from both the social science and computational science communities. This has been framed as an attempt to move beyond the coming crisis of empirical sociology (Savage and Burrows, 2007, 2009; Edwards et al., 2013; Housley et al., 2014). The opportunities and challenges for social science from this 'data deluge' are wide ranging and a spectrum of thinking is emerging across the community that includes enthusiasts, skeptics and those with deep reservations. Yet, the rise of digital data and the claims being made for it also rest on human practices and social life in multiple ways (Dicks, 2012; Smith, 2014). Consequently, Qualitative Research is central to understanding how digital data is accomplished, lived and analysed.

This themed issue invites contributions that address the role of Qualitative Methods in responding, challenging and contributing to the reflexive interrogation and scoping of data in digital societies at situated, networked and system levels. The advent of Web 2.0, the open data movement and the rhetoric of 'Big Social Data' have opened up opportunities to analyse big qualitative data streams, such as those associated with social media, in ways that are not yet fully understood; new digital data developments include those associated with the emerging contours of the 'Quantified Self' movement and the navigation of health metrics through the use of body proxemic technology giving rise to forms of life characterised by data responsibilisation and self-analytics.

The themed issue will invite papers that report on these and associated developments. Topics of interest include:
• Ethnographic studies of interdisciplinary collaboration in the area of digital data analysis, digital tool development, platform development and the associated context(s) of occupational identities and expertise.

• The Qualitative dimensions and issues surrounding coding and annotation practices through new methods such as crowdsourcing techniques and citizen social science. Qualitative studies of the social life of methods in the digital era and the observation of ‘naturally occurring’ data generation practices that make use of new networked technologies in the pursuit of self-management and performance. This might also include studies that demonstrate how digital actors reflexively navigate data streams in ways that are nuanced and complex and not akin to being a ‘cultural dope 2.0’.

• The interaction order in the digital age; the ‘Self’, identity and digital data.

• Methodographic studies of the design and use of algorithms in digital tool development and data harvesting, the examination of code and machine learning as an accomplishment and artefact, the social organisation of statistics and modelling, the examination of demographic proxies in social media analytics and issues surrounding inference and evidence within the Big Social Data imaginary.

• The relationship between ‘small’ and ‘big’ social data. Innovations in the Qualitative analysis of Big Text data and social media streams.

• The ethical dimensions and politics of data in the digital age. Data inequalities: gender, race, class and the accomplishment of data.

References


Please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to: [1]JonesA7[at]cardiff.ac.uk by 31 December 2015. Abstracts will be reviewed for fit. You will be informed if the article is invited for review. Full manuscripts are due by
There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- *empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education*
• the origins of metrification of higher education
• metrification as a form of social control
• the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
• common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.

Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contribution was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived/in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of...
real-time 'big data' on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.

2. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=18688651259&ref=etckt

The rise of "connexionism" through online-offline integration (2015-09-29 09:54)

When checking in for a flight recently I was offered the opportunity to "Discover who's on board". By connecting my Facebook, Linkedin or Google+ account I could see who else had done the same. So, this makes it possible (in KLM’s words) to "...see who sits where [and] choose or change your seat".

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This opens up the possibility for strange surveillance or stalking potential. The presence of more business-oriented networks (LinkedIn and Google+ along with the dominant social network, Facebook) rather than leisure and youth focused ones such as Snapchat and Instagram seems to be indicative of a more corporate mentality. But is also indicative of the rise of what [2] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiappello call "connexionism" outside of the strictly corporate arena.

Boltanski and Chiappello identify the connexionist ideal in 1990s management culture with these characteristics:

"Connection

<Natural relations between beings>

Connecting,

Communicating,

Co-ordinating,

Adjusting to others,

Trusting
In a connexonist world, a natural preoccupation of human beings is the desire to connect with others, to make contact, to make connections, so as not to remain isolated. To succeed they must trust and be trusted, know how to communicate, discuss openly, and also be capable of adjusting to other people and situations depending on what the latter demand of them, without being held back by timidity, rigidity or mistrust. This is the price of co-ordinating themselves in mechanisms and projects.

Engaged, Engaging,

Mobile

<Condition of great man>

Enthusiastic, Involved,

Flexible, Adaptable,

Versatile, Having potential,

Employable, Autonomous,

Not prescriptive, Knows how to engage others,

In touch, Tolerant,

Employability

(providing)"

(Boltanski and Chiappelo, 2005: 111-112)

Many of the traits and qualities they identified seem to be central to social networking sites particularly those related to the avoidance of "isolation" and the desire to "connect". But many of the fears which the management literature was trying to encourage people to overcome are the same as those which the owners of social networking sites had to train out of people.

People had to be encouraged to trust other people enough to "friend" them and to overcome timidity in airing their views to strangers. "Enthusiasm" and a desire to be "involved" to be constantly "in touch" with others and "engaging" are central parts of the successful social media operator.

Social networking sites in general could be seen as manifestations of this connexionist mentality but their integration with real world scenarios such as catching a flight help to reconfigure another space in a connexionist fashion. An aeroplane seating plan becomes a reserve of potential connections who might enable further career (or other) progression.
What on earth is that? An answer to all your research methods questions (2015-09-30 08:00)

A fantastic resource by the National Centre for Social Research Methods: [1]films of their "what is?" sessions from the 2012 festival of research methods:

- [2]What is analytic induction? by Professor Martyn Hammersley
- [3]What are cohort studies? by Professor Jane Elliott
- [4]What are community studies? by Professor Graham Crow
- [5]What is discourse analysis? by Dr Stephanie Taylor
- [7]What is event history analysis? by Professor Fiona Steele
- [8]NCRM What is geosimulation? by Professor Mark Birkin
- [9]What is multilevel modelling? by Professor Kelvyn Jones

- [10]What is multimodality? by Professor Carey Jewitt and Dr Jeff Bezemer
- [12]What is online research? by Dr Tristram Hooley
- [13]What is propensity score matching? by Dr Barbara Sianesi
- [14]What are qualitative research ethics? by Dr Rose Wiles
• [15] What is the regression discontinuity approach? by Professor Mike Brewer

• [16] What is social network analysis? by Professor John Scott

• [17] What is Web 3.0/crowdsourcing? by Dr Andy Hudson-Smith

17. http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/video/RMF2012/whatis.php?id=2a77e26

All you ever wanted to know about method but were too embarrassed to ask « Hull EdD (2015-10-13 18:13:06)

[…] Shamelessly re blogged from: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/18111 […]

3960
Academia Obscura is an irreverent look inside the Ivory Tower, proving that university life isn't all stuffiness, elbow patches and greying old men.

Please go to unbound.co.uk and help me to fund this book!

Academia Obscura is proof that the university life isn't all stuffiness, elbow patches and greying old men. Researcher (and procrastinating PhD student) Glen Wright takes an irreverent look inside the ivory tower, uncovering the amusing and often bizarre world within. Cats and dogs writing scientific papers, real life nutty professors, and some super-specific scientific research that might just change your life. Academia Obscura takes the reader on a unique journey through the groves of academe. Starting with the earliest in-jokes of medieval scribes, the book exposes Easter eggs buried in peer-reviewed papers, guides the reader through the art and science of academic publishing and conferences, and finds that occasionally the mad scientist stereotype is pretty spot on. Academics will never take themselves too seriously again. Neither will anyone else."

[1]https://unbound.co.uk/books/academia-obscura

What is Neurophilosophy? (2015-10-02 08:00)

HT [1]Paul Raymont for this engaging introduction to the fascinating topic of [2]neurophilosophy:
Workshop and Symposium: The Question of the Human in Social Theory and Social Research  
(2015-10-02 20:27)

25th November 2015, 11:00 to 17:00  
WT0.05, University of Warwick

This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work.
The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by **October 31st, 2015**. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details.

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**ESS Annual Meeting Call For Papers: Developing Bodies** *(2015-10-03 08:00)*

**Call for Abstracts for session titled “Developing Bodies”**

Any work that lies at the intersection of critical development studies and embodiment, broadly considered, is welcome for review. For example, possible topics may include:

- Critiques of global or regional health campaigns (HIV/AIDS, TB, hand washing, etc);
- Explorations of the rise of social entrepreneurial efforts to address poverty and health;
- Analyses of corporate social responsibility engagements with the new Sustainable Development Goals;
- Empirical studies of raced, classed and/or gendered representations of **those in need** in development materials (brochures, social media, etc)

Please send a brief abstract (no more than 200 words) to [1]chris.bobel@umb.edu by 10.12.15. Presenters will be contacted by the organizer about whether or not their presentation will be included in the session, so that they can submit their abstracts through the general submission portal for consideration for another session before the submission deadline.

The ESS Annual Meeting is scheduled for March 17-21, 2016, and is being held at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel and Towers in Boston, Massachusetts. The theme for the 2016 meeting is "My Day Job: Politics and Pedagogy in Academia." For general information about the ESS 2016 Annual Meeting, please visit [2]http://www.essnet.org/
There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

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- *empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education*
• the origins of metrification of higher education
• metrification as a form of social control
• the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
• common strategic responses to these challenges
• the relationship between metrification and acceleration
• how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogoshere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.

Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contribution was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived/in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of
real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.

2. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=18688651259&ref=etckt

Digital Social Science Essay Competition (2015-10-05 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of 3966
CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic ‘Influence and Power’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [1]here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal's key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition's theme and falls within the remit of BD &S's goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel's decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal's peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

**Essay length:** 5,000 to 7,000 words

**Essay format:** Follow the BD &S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.
What on earth is Social Theory? Call for contributions! (2015-10-05 08:00)

So, I signed up for a working group on Social Theory. I have so far spent my short academic life trying to avoid anything theoretical, but as I am about to enter the second year of PhD study I realised I cannot and should not escape it for any longer. So I figured the best way to better understand social theory is to join a group that are designing an online platform to teach social theory – genius!

I haven’t denounced social theory altogether, I am pretty hot on feminist theoretical debates, and have dabbled in Bourdieu, Foucault and Marx. So what is it about the idea of social theory that has got me in such a bother? I am pretty good at this academic stuff otherwise, so why shy away from something so innocuous as conversations about studying the social world? Conversations about grand theories, meta-theories, induction and reduction, epistemology or ontology, positivism and interpretivism….. sorry, it’s too much, I need to sit down.

Social theory is a language that helps us understand and explain the social world, suggested my colleague. And that’s when I realised why I find social theory so daunting and so, well...hard. It is like learning a foreign language. Social theory, like many other languages, is taught in a classroom of students where most know a one or two words or none at all, but need to learn more words as well as how and when to use them. Then there are others in the class who know a few words, but like to use these words over and over again, not always in the right context but just saying them at any opportunity just to prove they know some words. Those people always make me feel stupid and put me off learning languages.
Like learning any language, the usual pedagogic techniques don’t suit everyone trying to learn social theory. So for that reason this Social Theory Research Group, led by Michael Hammond and Milena Kremkova at Warwick, are developing an interactive, online platform to help budding researchers get to grips with social theory. The aim is to make social theory more approachable by taking it down of its scholarly pedestal, and provide accessible tools for learning and sharing information about a wide range of theoretical ideas.

We are considering glossaries, dictionaries, literature maps, metaphors and discussion forums, as well as utilising the power of social media from Facebook to Twitter to Blogs. **To do this we need your help, and would like to find out about your own relationship with social theory: What has been easy? What has been hard? What are your positive and negative experiences when exploring social theory? We would like to hear your stories, the good, the bad, and the theoretically ugly.**

Please send your comments
to
[1]heather.griffiths@warwick.ac.uk
or on message me on Twitter (@FlexiblePhD).

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Heather Griffiths is a PhD student at the Department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. She studies the gendered experiences of work-life balance policies in the UK. Heather tweets as @FlexiblePhD.

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Is Social Theory the hardest language to learn? | PhD Life (2015-10-28 09:00:11)

**Videocasts from the 2014 Research Methods Festival (2015-10-06 08:00)**

• [2] Challenges of coverage, Sampling and participation in mixed mode surveys by Professor Peter Lynn
• [3] Democratisation in theory and (one example of) practice by Dr Jaimie Ellis and Professor Graham Crow
• [4] Democratisation of Research Methods - Discussant by Professor Melanie Nind
• [6] Engagement, co-production and exchange, Creating Vignettes of Early Onset Dementia by Dr Nicholas Jenkins
• [7] Engagement, co-production and exchange: working with community groups and genealogists by Dr Tanja Bueltmann
• [8] NCRM annual lecture: Reverse engineering Chinese censorship by Professor Gary King
• [9] Geographically combining small area environmental and longitudinal data by Dr Benedict Wheeler
• [10] Giving voice to people with disabilities in research by Dr Ed Hall
• [11] Knowledge mobilisation strategies and techniques by Professor Angie Hart and Ms Emily Gagnon
• [12] Lessons for social research from participatory decision making by Professor Graham Smith
• [13] Linking historical administrative data by Professor Chris Dibben
• [14] Methods for dealing with linkage error by Professor Harvey Goldstein
• [15] Methods for testing trends in mental health - is it really possible to compare like-with-like by Dr Stephan Collishaw
• [16] Mobilising social sciences, knowledge and value by Professor Richard Thorpe and Ms Charlotte Coleman
• [17] Scaffolding to using quantitative data in sociology and politics classroom: building bridges by Dr Wendy Olsen
• [18] Keynote: The 'Thing-ness' Problem of Mixed Methods Research by Professor Sharlene Hesse-Biber
• [19] The democratisation of evaluation by Professor David Gough
• [20] The impossibility of separating age, period and cohort effects by Mr Andrew Bell
• [21] The questionnaire design pitfalls of multiple modes by Dr Pamela Campanelli
• [22] Understanding the causes of measurement differences by mode by Ms Gerry Nicolaas
• [23] Using linked data by Dr Melanie Wright
• [24] What data are available? Spotlight on data for linkage in the four UK countries by Professor Peter Smith
• [25] What’s in a letter? What quaL might learn from quaNT, and vice versa by Professor John MacInnes
Lots of open access papers by Andrew Abbott (2015-10-07 08:00)

I’ve always found [1]Andrew Abbott an intriguing figure. He’s someone I’ve come across in a diverse range of contexts: methodology, computational science, sociological writing, meta-theory, research methods, the sociology of higher education and information systems. Looking through his website, I realise that he’s even more wide ranging than I had thought. He also seems to have self-archived meticulously, making many of his papers (particularly hard to access ones) available for free online. You can check them out [2]here.

Academic conference panels normally consist of three speakers, who are optimally arranged as follows: The first speaker is normal and predictable. He or she gives the textbook expectation of the topic under discussion. The second speaker is dopey and forgettable. He or she hasn't quite mastered the topic or is simply a bad presenter. The third speaker is crazy and brilliant. He or she puts an unexpected spin on the panel's topic, which suddenly takes it to a new and hopefully higher level.

Perhaps the most fundamental justification for this arrangement comes from cognitive psychology, where 'primacy' and 'recency' effects in memory studies have been long known. People tend to remember the first and the last items in a sequence and blank out the middle. So a good academic panel organizer knows how to play to that bias, given the set of speakers on offer. (I'm assuming for the sake of argument the perhaps controversial assumption that an academic panel is mainly designed to maximize interesting academic discussion.)

But there are more specifically sociological reasons for arranging academic panels this way. And these points will help future anthropologists figure out something about how academics operate in real life. Much of the audience for an academic panel arrives after the panel has begun. In that case, it’s good to have the most normal speaker go first because then the audience will have effectively missed less 'content' (from an information-theoretic standpoint), given just how much stuff that this person says will be what the audience already knows. (Perhaps this level of semantic redundancy serves to reinforce a sense of common identity – I leave that to the anthropologist.)

One can even go ‘gonzo’ on this – as I have done on several occasions – by arriving in the last few minutes of the first speaker’s talk and then asking a question of this sort: ‘I realize that I’ve only heard the last three words of your talk, but given the topic of this panel, have you considered…?’ If you’re already on top of the topic – and even better the speaker’s published views on it – you’re almost assured a blindsiding performance. However, as I have tried to suggest, such a display of interrogative genius is, like magic, heavily front-loaded. Nevertheless, it makes one wonder whether the ultimate socio-epistemic function of the first speaker is anything more than to provide a minimal ‘portal’ to the topic, say, in the manner of a doorstop.

The second person on the panel really shouldn’t be on it. But there are mitigating circumstances. This person has friends in high places, or (typically a junior academic) has been told to join the panel by people in high places, or is simply not sufficiently incompetent to be ineligible for the panel. (Evolutionary biologists stress the importance of ‘neutral drift’ in just sense, which is something that neo-liberalism seems designed to weed out.) Since by this point, the audience is stuck into the panel, there will be considerable good faith listening to at least half of what is said. The Q &A, assuming there is one, will alight upon any distinctive persons and concepts raised by the speaker without serious engagement with what was said. Questions will be asked more in the spirit of throwing a life preserver to someone drowning, hoping that they can redeem the situation.

The final speaker is on the panel to remind the audience that the panel – either because of the speakers or the topic – is really not what it's cracked up to be, and so something else is needed. Thus, the speaker will begin by saying s/he is offering a reflection on what the previous speakers have said, but really they simply provide this speaker with a platform to launch into ‘something completely different’ that might actually raise the wattage of the
Workshop and Symposium: The Question of the Human in Social Theory and Social Research
(2015-10-08 08:00)

25th November 2015, 11:00 to 17:00
WT0.05, University of Warwick

This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work. The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by October 31st, 2015. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details.
Global Futures and Epistemologies of the South: last chance to submit (2015-10-09 08:00)

Sociology Special Issue: Last Chance to Submit!

Dear Colleagues,

The deadline for Sociology’s special issue on Global Futures and Epistemologies of the South is fast approaching. Any authors who wish to send through an article for consideration need to submit it by **Friday 16 October** please.

Articles should be submitted via the ScholarOne Manuscripts site: [1]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc. Help guides, information on how to prepare your manuscript and a cover sheet can be downloaded from the same site, by clicking on ‘Instructions & Forms’.

If you have any queries about submitting to the special issue, please contact [2]sociology.journal@britsoc.org.uk as soon as possible. Editorial questions can be sent directly to the guest editors at: [3]bsantos@ces.uc.pt and [4]g.k.bhambra@warwick.ac.uk

The full Call for Papers is available on the BSA website: [5]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/publications-vacancies.aspx

**Guest Editors:** Gurminder K Bhambra, Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick and Visiting Fellow in Sociology (2014-15), Princeton University; Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Professor of Sociology, University of Coimbra, and Distinguished Legal Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

This special issue takes stock of the progress that has been made within sociology over recent decades to become a more globally oriented discipline and discusses the new challenges for the future that emerge as a consequence. It rests on two interlinked premises. First, that understandings of the world are much broader than the Western understanding of the world and so for sociology to adequately address its global futures it needs to take into account ways of knowing that exceed Western thinking, including critical Western thinking. Second, that the current configurations of the world are a consequence of global historical processes that have not always been adequately addressed within western-based sociology. For sociology to better conceptualise its global futures, it also needs to address its global pasts. We invite contributions that address the issues raised, both theoretically and through empirical research, across (but not limited to) the following themes:

- Epistemologies of the South and Global Challenges to /for Sociology
- Imagining Global Sociologies: Past, Present, and Future
- The Global South in the North
- Recovering Silenced / Forgotten Sociologies
- Transnational Solidarities, Anti-colonial Struggles and the ‘Rise’ of the South(s)
- Emancipatory Social Movements and Alternative Narratives
- Sociological Futures: Rethinking Social Justice in a Global World
What Can Data Visualisation Do? (2015-10-09 09:00)

Details below for an event on data visualisation which sounds great and is taking place as part of [1]Sheffield universities' ESRC Festival of Social Science.

Presentations and discussion with experts and practitioners considering what data visualisations – that is, the visual representation of data in charts and graphs – can contribute to society.

Speakers include Alan Smith (Former head of the Office for National Statistics' Data Visualisation Unit & now head of data visualisation at The Financial Times), Thomas Clever (from award-winning Dutch visualisation agency Clever Franke), Valentina D'Efilippo (award-winning data visualisation and information designer), William Allen (The Migration Observatory, University of Oxford) and Giulio Frigieri (The Observer).

Public and third sector organisations, designers, campaigners, analysts, visualisers, and people with a curiosity about open data and the visual representation of data, are all welcome.
Book Review: Between Samaritans and States: The Political Ethics of Humanitarian INGOs
(2015-10-09 20:14)

Reviewed by Bradley Williams

Between Samaritans and States: The Political Ethics of Humanitarian INGOs by Jennifer C. Rubenstein

1. http://festivalofsocialscience.group.shef.ac.uk/
How should scholars, activists, and states understand not only the activities of humanitarian INGOs, but also ethically? Humanitarian INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) tend to be characterized by ‘donor’ countries, those usually western countries that provide assistance, as either purely altruistic Samaritans, as unqualified and intrusive agents, or as cold and calculating corporate organizations.

Rubenstein shows that none of these conceptions is adequate and instead proposes intelligent alternatives far more complex than these all or nothing identities. This book illustrates a ‘political ethics’ approach that elides all simplification. Rubenstein identifies four main questions that she thoroughly examines:

- what kind of actors are humanitarian INGOs?
- what types of ethical predicaments do humanitarian INGOs regularly face?
- are there better and worse ways for them to respond to the ethical predicaments they face?
- how does close study of humanitarian INGO political ethics broaden our understanding of democratic, humanitarian, egalitarian, and justice-based norms?

**EIGHT CURRENT APPROACHES**

Rubenstein outlines eight approaches to understanding the work of humanitarian INGOs that are dominant in scholarly literature, public and governmental discourse. Due to the depth of analysis provided in the book, I will generally highlight some of the many insights that can be found.

First, INGOs are seen as apolitical ‘rescuers’ that only respond to crises. This suggests that INGOs do not go
through significant planning or only rescue in short-term, one-off operations. Actually, INGOs “deliberate, in advance, about how to allocate about how to allocate their limited resources among countries, regions, issues, and types of activities, including tradeoffs between emergency aid and other activities” (p.31). This insight corresponds to a critique, which Rubenstein makes, of how humanitarian norms are operationalized in the work of INGOs.

Second, humanitarian INGOs can be characterized as ‘partner.’ Partnership implies that INGOs have an equal status as domestic NGOs, community-based and civil society organizations, and government agencies. INGOs have different, often greater access, to resources that are not bound by the sovereign jurisdiction of the state of the country in question. Also INGOs have priorities that often conflict with any responsibility to empower domestic actors with which they communicate.

Third, Rubenstein notes that INGOs have responsibility to meet the preferences or interests of their donors. Yet, INGOs are normatively guided by principles that do not fit easily with the political priorities of any one or group of donors. While donors might have distinct moral interests, it seems misleading to primarily characterize INGOs as even being capable of navigating effectively between competing normative priorities. As Rubenstein also points out, not only do donors influence INGOs, but INGOs also project a significant amount of influence of their donors, by shaping their perceptions about issues of severe poverty and famine, for instance (p.39).

Fourth, humanitarian INGOs are sometimes thought of as ‘agents for their intended beneficiaries.’ This means that INGOs are merely required to fulfill the interests of the populations to the extent that there is no need for a discussion of political ethics. Like their relationship with donor, INGOs often have somewhat competing priorities with their beneficiaries. Beneficiaries are also not bound by the resource limitation of INGOs.

Fifth, INGOs have a responsibility to be first and foremost ‘accountable.’ Accountability ensures that INGOs can justify their actions to the various parties affected by their work and meaningful sanctions if they fail to meet these standards. INGOs are rarely accountable to any one group, or sanctioned in a way that would somehow provide a meaningful compensation for failing to meet stated responsibilities.

The sixth account of humanitarian INGOs states that they are primarily identifiable by their adherence to traditional humanitarian principles. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, these principles include “humanity,” “impartiality,” and “independence.” Of course, these principles only apply when performing humanitarian activities, and as Rubenstein clearly states, there is much more to the work of INGOs than humanitarianism could encompass.

The seventh characterization is that of ‘neo-colonialist.’ This is the most negative of the list and implies that “any account of INGO political ethics is beside the point, and indeed serves only to further legitimate organizations that should not exist” (p.45).

Finally, the eighth account sees INGOs as merely another form of multinational corporation (MNC). This is the account addressed in works such as Alexander Colley and James Ron’s The NGO Scramble. This account sees an analogy between INGOs and MNCs, donors and shareholders, aid recipients and customers. Rubenstein clearly defines a much more accurate portrayal, by describing, if anything, donors as analogous to customers, because donors can use market forces to check INGOs that do not perform to their liking.

Furthermore, MNCs are guided by principles that characterized as ‘business ethics’ (p.49). The ethical principles would be in such disharmony with democratic, egalitarian, justice-based, and humanitarian norms as to make the work of INGOs make little sense or be totally ineffective. This does not seem to be the case for any organization, let alone an INGO, which lasts for any length of time.

Rubenstein continues to describe four ethical predicaments that seem to be unaccounted or not fully accounted for in the eight accounts of humanitarian INGOs. INGOs are sometimes somewhat governmental, in that they often
enact governance activities, such as conventional governance similar to states and they also enact global governance activities by seeking to change the structure and operation of international governance structures.

Also, INGOs are often “second-best actors,” in that they may either displace actors such as domestic NGOs, civil society or local government organizations that could better meet the needs of beneficiaries. As Rubenstein points out, it is sometimes the best plan of action for INGOs to know when to back away from directly promoting a population and empowering populations or domestic organizations to act on their own behalf. INGOs are highly political. They exercise discursive power through the framing of issues. Secondly, INGO activities often have unintended consequences, such as when violent groups repurpose aid resources. INGOs are given ‘moral permissions,’ specific entitlements granted to them based on the level of responsibilities they have. This complicates the activities of INGOs, because again INGOs are often 'second-best actors,' that should not be held to the same standards as governments.

After describing the limitations of orthodox conceptions of INGOs’ ethics, Rubenstein offers four political ethical areas that can better characterize some of the politically sensitive predicaments they encounter. She uses an interesting cartographic analogy that helps the reader navigate the otherwise dense material. Her analogy of maps is an innovative interpretive frame that I think other scholars could benefit from. For instance, in situations where INGOs should decide whether or not to leave when their actions may actually perpetuate the injustices that they seek to alleviate. She states that INGOs should justify their decision to stay or go and that they are morally responsible for their decisions.

INGOs should be aware of their capabilities and always be ready to relinquish their position to other actors that can better serve beneficiaries, particularly ones that have more experience “on the ground” (125). Rubenstein also provides a nuanced approach to conceptualizing the ethical conundrum of INGOs faced with questions about minimizing harm and refusing to act when harmful situations seem unavoidable or unmanageable. Finally, Rubenstein describes a situation she calls the “moral motivation tradeoff” (p.185). This describes situations where the images used in campaigns, which are seen as beneficial for gaining donors, yet run the risk of degrading the people they portray. This is an interesting issue, and one that previous literature has not adequately dealt with.

Though I have not previously read Rubenstein’s work, I think her work is very interesting. Regarding the focus of the book, I think this is one of the most insightful works available on the subject. Much of the book addresses the question of whether or not a discussion of political ethics is necessary, which I think she successfully answers: yes, it definitely is. The book addresses most of the competing approaches with depth and clarity, leaving nothing of importance wanting from the discussion. Rubenstein does not wholly discount any of the other ethical approaches. This book is useful for anyone that finds the sheer number of approaches hard to navigate. The book definitely progresses the discussion, and I think scholars will be remiss not to cite it when conducting research into the ethical implication of humanitarian INGOs. It is a great tool for students of non-state governance in various fields, practitioners, and educators.

**Bradley W. Williams is a doctoral researcher at George Mason University. He studies transnational governance, social movements, peace and organizational processes. Twitter: @B_W_Williams**

CfP: The Dark Matter of the Urban: Forces, densities, velocities, affects, and more (2015-10-10 08:00)

Call for Papers: Association of American Geographers (AAG) Annual Meeting, March 29-April 2, 2016 San Francisco

The Dark Matter of the Urban: Forces, densities, velocities, affects, and more.

Session organizers:
Michele Lancione (University of Cambridge, UK) Francisco Calafate-Faria (Goldsmiths, University of London, UK)

Deadline for submission of 250 words abstract: 20th of October.
Deadline for registration on AAG website 26th of October.
The sessions will be followed by a panel including some of the scholars cited in this CFP discussing on 'Urban Dark Matter'

Being-in-the-city means being caught up in a maelstrom of bodies, technologies, atmospheres, velocities, and both fixed and fluid elements that are not easy to pin down and understand. Although sociology, anthropology, and human geography have built up a substantial body of scholarship on the urban form – one providing insights into analytically manageable aspects of being-human-in-the-city (such as the economic, the cultural, and the socio-relational spheres) – much has been left out of the picture. In recent years, a new scholarship proposing a focus on urban change and process, and a post-human perspective on the city has contributed greatly to a more nuanced understanding of how cities are and how they become. Outlines of a new urban theorization are emerging from scholars interested in urban assemblages (McFarlane, 2011b; Farías and Bender, 2010; Jacobs, 2012), socio-technical infrastructure (Amin, 2014; Simone, 2004; De Boeck, 2012; Silver, 2014), and vitalist ontologies (Amin, 2007; Braidotti, 2011; Bennett, 2010; Lancione, 2016).

Yet, it seems to us that there is something about cities that escapes the grammar currently employed to describe them. The increasing number of conceptualizations brought forward to grasp urban articulations is a disquieting signal of the tantalizing slipperiness of the urban form. These include Simone’s ‘people as infrastructure’ (2004) and his more recent ‘generic blackness’ (forthcoming); Amin’s ‘animated space’ (Amin, 2015); Chattopadhyay’s ‘infra-structure’ (2012); Pierete’s effort to grasp the ‘unknowable’ of the African city (2013); Thrift’s ‘oustitincts’ (2014); McFarlane’s makeshift notions of learning and dwelling (2011a); Gandy’s ‘cyborg urbanization’ (2005), and De Boeck ‘knotting’ (2015) – to cite just a few.

Instead of seeing these attempts as theorization detached from urban praxis, we understand them as concrete attempts to come to terms with what we cannot see, yet perceive; with what we cannot properly theorize, yet foresee; with a new politics of the urban that is largely undefined, yet urgently needed. This is what we are provisionally calling the ‘dark matter’ of the urban: a substance made of times, spaces, forces, densities, velocities, movements, encounters, processes, and affects that is still largely unknown if palpable, perceived, and imaginable.

We derive the term from Nigel Thrift and his discussion of Bruno Latour’s ‘hidden masses’ of the social (Latour, 2005). As Thrift puts it, ‘the human world contains a vast hinterland of ‘dark matter’ or ‘plasma’ that we do not understand and of which we often only feel as echoes and intimations which we cannot scry’ (2014, p.4). To research the city is often an attempt to understand such forces, of which we can only, at first, grasp the effects. When we think about and discuss urban assemblages, circuits, networks or meshworks, composed of data (ibid), knowledge (Macfarlane, 2011), human labor (Simone, 2004), finance capital (Simone, 2010), circulating materials (Knowles, 3980
heterotopic waste technologies (Campos, 2013), or migrants and elusive cosmopolitan elites in Michael Keith's description of the "new dark London", we are attempting new dialogues that may help us grapple with real problems lived by real people in various cities and in the city as form and process. In this sense, ‘dark matter’ is not here, as in physics, a product of theoretical speculation and rational calculation waiting to be disproved or confirmed by empirical facts. Reversely, the ‘dark matter of the urban’ signals the possibility that there is something unknown and potentially powerful that escapes our current understanding of being-in-the-city, that can be assessed in close dialogue with the empirical. How can we grasp this matter and its potential? How can we think about and theorize it? What do we do to research and account for it? Can it be possible to use it to imagine a radical, alternative form of urban theory and politics?

With this call, we are seeking cutting-edge, provoking papers – of both an empirical and theoretical nature – exploring ‘urban dark matter’, even if not necessarily using this formulation. We particularly welcome contributions from radical feminist, LGBT, and southern perspectives, which are currently underrepresented in the new urban theory we rely upon. As Santos (2014) and others we believe in the epistemological potential of underrepresented viewpoints. Papers should cover one or more of the aspects listed below:

- The city as a repository of energies and forces
- Empirical case studies on forces, densities, velocities, and affects
- Empirical or methodological reflections on accessing hidden processes of urban becoming
- Feminist, LGBT, southern, and non-mainstream perspectives on ‘urban dark matter’ and new urban theory
- Methodological challenges of investigating ‘urban dark matter’
- Oppositional and radical understanding of ‘urban dark matter’ and its potential
- The politics of ‘urban dark matter’ (new political imaginings brought forward by investigating the urban through its hidden forces)
- Critiques of existing scholarship on urban theory
- New theorizations of ‘urban dark-matter’

We plan to organize a few sessions revolving around the above points, followed by a panel including some of the scholars cited (whom we will ask to provide insights into what they conceive as the ‘dark matter’ of the urban, using selected videos and photos as a springboard for discussion). We also welcome presentations in non-traditional and participatory formats. Abstract selection will be based on relevance to the CFP, boldness, and quality of the proposal. Short papers or presentations of max. 3,000 words must be circulated two weeks in advance of the conference.
Please send abstracts of no more than 250 words to Michele Lancione ([ml710@cam.ac.uk] and Francisco Calafate-Faria ([f.calafate@gold.ac.uk]) by the 20th of October. We will confirm acceptance by the 23rd and we expect you to register and submit your abstract on the AAG website by the 26th ([http://www.aag.org/cs/annualmeeting/how_to_submit_an_abstract](http://www.aag.org/cs/annualmeeting/how_to_submit_an_abstract)).

References


1. mailto:ml710@cam.ac.uk
2. mailto:f.calafate@gold.ac.uk
5. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/
Why do you #lovesociology? (2015-10-11 08:00)

The ASA have launched a new project, [1]Speak for Sociology, asking people on social media: why do you #lovesociology?

ASA wants to know why you love sociology. We want to hear from sociologists in all fields, at all levels, at a variety of institutions—early-career academics; teachers at community colleges; sociologists in government, research, or non-profit organizations; or undergraduate/graduate students.

Through social media accounts (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, blogs), use the hashtag #lovesociology and let us know your name, your institution or school (optional), and

- What got you into sociology?
- What keeps you in sociology?
- How do you use sociology in your daily life?
- What important contributions does sociology make in various fields?

We will curate the most memorable posts and include them in [2]ASA's Storify account. Note that Facebook posts must be made public or you need to tag the [3]American Sociological Association.


One problem that we have as teachers of sociology and social theory is that we are so quick to assert our authority that we end up inhibiting the honest and probing questions from our supposedly ignorant students. Nevertheless, these questions sometimes do get asked. One that I have encountered over the years is epitomized in the title of this piece.
Normally this question arises after some detailed discussion of Marx and Marxism. To someone not steeped in the history of the last two centuries, it would be easy to think that Marxism was a theory about how to make capitalism work to maximum efficiency – namely, by not inhibiting the full range of productive forces in society. On this view, Marxism is about getting capitalism to live up to its own principles, which are ones that celebrate the indefinite productivity of people. In the end, machines that we invent will do all the heavy lifting for us, while we write poetry all day – since poetry is the sort of thing that humans can clearly do better than machines.

I exaggerate – but only slightly. To be sure, ‘real’ capitalists oppose immigration restrictions, protected inheritances, preferential trade arrangements, and all of the other historic inhibitors to the full use of the factors of production – including perhaps intellectual property itself. Here Liberals and Socialists sing from the same hymn sheet – especially when both are thinking globally and not locally. The differences between the two positions arise over the power invested in the state as an agent in this process.

Liberals have tended to be much more relaxed about any overarching sense of goal or utopia in which capitalism might eventuate, whereas Socialists believe that without explicit state intervention only dystopia will result. This difference in world-historic intuition leads Socialists to be more alert to issues like 'underdevelopment' and 'inequality' as indicative of a system that cannot run well if left to its own devices. Put bluntly: Income will not be redistributed and talent will not be cultivated at sufficient levels if the future of society is made hostage to the good will of rich people. In response, Liberals invoke the fullness of time either to resolve these problems or to reveal them to be figments of the impetuous Socialist imagination, which wants utopia on demand.

From a sociological standpoint, perhaps the most interesting difference between Capitalism and Socialism is that Capitalism offers the original modern flat ontology of society, a la actor-network theory. For the capitalist, the state is simply one among many agents in the market, to be sure one with its own distinctive knowledge – but it's a knowledge that is subject to the same strengths and weaknesses of other forms of knowledge. It is not superior knowledge in the sense of enjoying a pre-emptive right to speak on behalf of others without explicit delegation. Now, this sounds nice until one records the downstream consequences. A tremendous amount of patience, good humour if not outright insensitivity is required.

Socialism, in contrast, is motivated by a sense that technocrats (or academics or some other vanguard) always already know what everyone would want if they had the opportunity to think through things for themselves. (And of course, a key Socialist ambition is to enable ordinary people to think Socialist things for themselves!) This is why ‘false consciousness’ is such a pivotal and controversial concept in Socialist thinking. Socialism is quite explicit about the temporary need for a paternalistic state to facilitate the relevant redistributions and investments that the potential beneficiaries are not in a position to decide for themselves. But ‘temporary’ means how long? In practice, Socialists are much better at speaking and doing on behalf of others than at allowing them to do so for themselves.
This event is designed to explore the ways in which citizenship has become intertwined with formal and informal education. It aimed to generate discussion about the concept of citizenship in educational systems in the UK and internationally. The day is organised around a series of keynote talks and oral paper presentations that will allow for the exchange of ideas and experiences. You can view all abstracts on the blog ([1]https://bsacitizenship.wordpress.com/2015/09/03/citizenship-and-education-event-programme/).

Keynote speakers include: Prof. David James (Cardiff University) 'Bringing the local knowledge back in? Contrasting citizenships in urban schooling' Dr Bridget Byrne (University of Manchester) 'What is the Britishness in 'British values' and the citizenship process?'

Prof. Jonathan Parker (Bournemouth University) Students and Prevent: Implications for citizenship Programme:
9.00-9.30 Registration and Refreshments 9.30-9.45 Welcome: Professor Jonathan Parker (Bournemouth University)
Introduction and welcome to the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences Welcome to the Study Group; Dr Mastoureh Fathi (Bournemouth University) and Dr Kristoffer Halvorsrud (Knowledge Centre for Education) 9.45-10.45 Keynote:
Dr Bridget Byrne (University of Manchester) 'What is the Britishness in 'British values' and the citizenship process?'
10.45-11.00 Refreshment break 11.00-13.00 Paper Session (5 papers 15 minutes each with 10 minutes question)
Policy and Politics Panel: Citizenship and Neo-Liberalism Professor. Jonathan Parker (Bournemouth University)
Students and Prevent: Implications for citizenship Dr Lee Jerome (Middlesex University): England's Citizenship
Education Experiment: The First Ten Years Rachel Lewis (University of Warwick): Testing Life in the UK, producing
the desirable, neo-liberal subject Dr Anisa Mustafa (University of Nottingham): Active citizenship and modes of
resistance in the cultural politics of young adult British Muslims Dr Nick Stevenson (University of Nottingham):
Education, Democracy and its Alternatives: The Commons and the New Left 13.00-14-00 Lunch 14-00-15.15 Parallel
Paper Session (3 papers 15 minutes each with 10 minutes question) Comparative Contexts Prof Trond Solhaug
(Norwegian University of Science and Technology): Citizenship, diversity and antecedents of intercultural empathy
among Norwegian pupils Dr Shinichi Aizawa (Chukyo University): Citizenship, Social Problems, and Schooling in Japan
Caïtriona Fitzgerald (Maynooth: 'Citizen Child; Hothouse Flower or Hardy Perennial? An exploration of contemporary
debates about 21st century children's 'lived' citizenship framed within the context of Irish and Swedish educational
policy' ‘Britishness” and Faith Céline Benoit (Aston University): The role of secular state schools in the promotion
of a White Christian sense of Britishness Ittikhar Ahmad (London School of Islams Trust): Muslims faiths schools
and the curriculum Iro Konstantinou (University of Warwick): 'Promoting British values in an English, white, middle
class context' 15.15-15.30 Refreshment Break 15.30-16.45 Parallel Paper Session (3 papers 15 minutes each with
10 minutes question) Faith and "Cohesion" Donna Crossland (University of Kent): A rhetoric of social cohesion,
tolerance and civility: A good lessen to learn? Rachael Shillito (Institute of Education, University of Worcester):
‘Doing Good’: Understanding values and morality in collective worship Shiva Zarabadi: 'Crossing borders, changing
faiths and the new organization of self and society'. The experiences of migrant Iranian converts to Christianity in
the UK Policy Processes and Relations Dr Martin Myers (The Open University): Mobility, Citizens and Education: Are
Gypsies supposed to be citizens? Dr Kristoffer Halvorsrud (Knowledge Centre for Education, The Research Council
of Norway): Student 'Dropout' in Upper Secondary Education: A Challenge to the Norwegian 'Welfare State'? Dr
Tamsin Hinton-Smith (University of Sussex): Roma women in European Higher Education: Exploring Tensions of
Individual and Shared Responsibility in Policy and Experience 16.45-17.00 Refreshment Break 17.00-18.00 Keynote:
Professor David James (Cardiff University) 'Bringing the local knowledge back in? Contrasting citizenships in urban
schooling' 18.00-18.05 Closing remarks and goodbye 2ndNovember 2015: Conference dinner at Bournemouth
Hotel Miramar at 8 pm. All welcome but registration is required (three course meal at £30 per person, payable on
the night). Please RSVP to Mastoureh Fathi by 28th October:[2]Mfathi@bournemouth.ac.uk If you wish to attend
the conference on the 3rd and have not registered yet please visit British Sociological Association events page:
[3]http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/events.aspx There are a limited number of free places. Please get in
touch with Mastoureh Fathi if you would like to be considered for a free place.

2. mailto:Mfathi@bournemouth.ac.uk
Workshop and symposium: the question of the human in social theory and social research  
(2015-10-12 09:11)

25th November 2015, 11:00 to 17:00  
WT0.05, University of Warwick

This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work. The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by October 31st, 2015. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details.

Learning to say ‘no’ in academic life (2015-10-13 08:00)

A really interesting reflection by Stuart Elden, editor of Progressive Geographies, about the [1]challenge of saying ‘no’ to requests and invitations. There’s a lot here that people at a much earlier stage in their career can learn from. My own experience has been that beginning to get invitations to do stuff is so flattering that it’s easy to say ‘yes’
to things that you don’t actually want to do, or are not in a position to be able to do. Read Stuart’s post in full [2]here:

When I was recently away, I came back to a lot of requests and I needed to say ‘no’ to most of them. Now I’m on sabbatical and trying to focus on writing, I’m being as focused as I can be (see my self-imposed rules, [3]here). It is a never-ending task to consider all such requests, to work out which I can do and which I can’t, and then to say ‘no’ to some in as nice a way as possible. For me at least, a non-reply is not an option.


1. http://progressivegeographies.com/2015/10/05/the-challenge-of-saying-no-to-academic-requests/
2. http://progressivegeographies.com/2015/10/05/the-challenge-of-saying-no-to-academic-requests/
Available for pre-order now! See [1]here for the cheapest place to buy it online, as well as table of contents & summary.


Academic identity in the digital university: current trends and future challenges (2015-10-14 08:00)

Some talks from a really interesting [1]Society for Research Into Higher Education event are now available as podcasts:
Dr. Antonella Esposito: [2] PhD researchers using social media: Exploring the emergent trajectories of academic identities

Dr. Mark Carrigan: [3] Surviving life in the accelerated academy: prospects and problems for digital scholarship


1. http://www.srhe.ac.uk/events/pastevents/details/?eid=194

The Challenge of Sociological Writing (2015-10-14 16:20)

In this event organised by [1] The Sociological Review’s Early Career Forum, a panel of accomplished writers with a long history of supporting younger scholars reflect on the challenges of sociological writing. Each participant will give a short talk, discussing a particular aspect of the challenge of writing, before the panel opens up for a general discussion with the audience. Building on the previous work by the journal in support of ECRs, there will be a particular focus upon the difficulties encountered in writing by early career scholars in the neoliberal academy, but
also upon the pleasures and opportunities which writing offers.

[2]Book online here

Les Back - Start Writing and Keep Writing: Notes, Drafts, Proofs, Papers

Les Back is a Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. His main fields of interest are the sociology of racism, popular culture and city life. His work attempts to create a sensuous or live sociology committed to searching for new modes of sociological writing and representation. This approach is outlined in his most recent book “The Art of Listening” (Berg 2007). He also writes journalism and has made documentary films. In 2011 he published a free on-line book called Academic Diary (http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/) that argues for the values of scholarship and teaching in the face of austerity and the attacks on the university. His research interests include sociology of youth, ethnography, political sociology, racism and right wing extremism, music, auditory and popular culture, race and social theory, photography and urban culture and the sociology of sport.

Inger Mewburn - Title TBC

I am a researcher, specialising in research education since 2006. Prior to this I lectured in architecture and worked in architecture offices for around a decade.

I am currently the Director of Research Training at The Australian National University where I am responsible for co-ordinating, communicating and measuring all the centrally run research training activities and doing research on student experience to inform practice.

Aside from editing and contributing to the Thesis Whisperer, I write scholarly papers, books and book chapters about research student experiences. I am a regular guest speaker at other universities and do occasional media interviews. Some details of these other activities are below. For further information, view my Linkedin Profile, contact me by email on inger@mewburn.net or visit my Google Scholar page.

Pat Thomson - Organising your writing

Pat Thomson is Professor of Education in the School of Education, The University of Nottingham. Her research is centred primarily on how schools might change to be more engaging and meaningful for more children and young people. She mostly researches the arts, creativity and other kinds of experiential approaches in school and community settings, including galleries and museums. Much of this research has been conducted with her colleague Professor Christine Hall. She also has a long-term partnership with Tate Learning. She also works in researcher education and, together with Professor Barbara Kamler, researches and writes about the writing that scholars want to, and must, do.
Digital Sociology Mini-Conference (2015-10-15 08:00)

In keeping with the Eastern Sociological Society's theme of "My Day Job: Politics and Pedagogy in Academia," the Digital Sociology Mini-Conference seeks papers that address the many digital ways of knowing, particularly as those impinge on the work we do as scholars, both within and outside the academy. We seek abstracts, and wholly constituted panels, on a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to, the following themes:

· **Public Scholarship, Digital Media and the Neoliberal University:** How is the participation of scholars on public, digital media platforms regarded within the neoliberal university?

· **Digital Sociologists, Legacy Institutions:** What does it mean to do digital sociology within institutions that are steeped in legacy modes of rewarding scholarship? How are scholars navigating the landscape of getting hired, tenured and promoted with a strong digital presence, or without one?

· **Digital Sociological Methods:** How do traditional, analog sociological methods become digital? Are there new, “born digital” sociological methods? Is knowledge production different now? Will big data replace survey methodology?

· **Critical Theories of the Digital Itself:** How have we theorized the digital? What challenges does the digital pose to epistemologies underlying sociological methods?

· **Digital Structures, Digital Institutions:** The datafication of everyday life is posing unique challenges to the composition of social institutions and giving rise to new instantiations of education, finance, labor, and governance. How do we theorize, study, and conceptualize the recomposition of these institutions?

· **Identity, Community, and Networks:** How do sociological concepts of micro and macro, personal and public, "front stage" and "back stage," evolve as digital and mobile technologies increasingly blur these boundaries? How do digital environments shape identities of race, gender, sexuality and queerness? And how do the identities of those who create the platforms we use shape the platforms? How do race, gender, sexuality and queerness shape the
communities and networks in which we participate?

- **Digital Pedagogies, Digital Sociology:** How are digital technologies changing the sociological classroom? Beyond simply a recitation of ‘what I did in my class,’ we’re interested in theoretical and empirical explorations of how to think about digitally-informed pedagogies in the sociology classroom.

We encourage submissions from scholars at all levels, and are particularly enthusiastic to support the work of graduate students and early career researchers. We welcome submissions for individual papers and for entirely constituted sessions. The organizers share a commitment to creating a field that honors diverse voices, and as such are excited to see scholars from groups that are typically underrepresented in sociology. When proposing entirely constituted panels, please keep this commitment to diverse voices in mind.

If you have any questions about proposals, topics, or session ideas please contact one of the organizers: Leslie Jones ([1]lesjones@sas.upenn.edu), Tressie McMillan Cottom or Jessie Daniels ([2]jdaniels@hunter.cuny.edu).

For individual presentations, please submit an abstract of no more than 250 words, as well as the title of the paper, name of presenter, institutional affiliation and contact details. For wholly constituted sessions, please include a short description of the concept behind your session, and then include all of the abstracts (along with names and affiliations of presenters) in one document. Deadline: **October 19, 2015.** Please email your submissions to: [3]ESSDigitalSociology@gmail.com. Those whose proposals are not accepted for the Mini-Conference will be alerted in time to submit to the ESS general call for submissions.
How do young people come of age in the 21st Century? (2015-10-16 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/lk1fsdK3PWI

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/lk1fsdK3PWI](https://www.youtube.com/embed/lk1fsdK3PWI)

Over-Reach By Unelected Technocrats (2015-10-17 08:00)

This is the debate which the [1]Financial Times says has been prompted by Mark Carney’s [2]intervention on climate change earlier in the week. His point seemed rather incisive to me, observing that “Since the 1980s the number of registered weather-related loss events has tripled” and that furthermore “Inflation-adjusted insurance losses from these events have increased from an annual average of around $10bn in the 1980s to around $50bn over the past decade”. Given the climatological evidence suggests that “challenges currently posed by climate change pale in significance compared with what might come”, it’s a systemic issue for insurance which needs to be addressed. His concern stems from what he terms the tragedy of the horizon:

We don’t need an army of actuaries to tell us that the catastrophic impacts of climate change will be felt beyond the traditional horizons of most actors – imposing a cost on future generations that the current generation has no direct incentive to fix.
That means beyond:

- the business cycle; [3]9
- the political cycle; and
- the horizon of technocratic authorities, like central banks, who are bound by their mandates.

The horizon for monetary policy extends out to 2-3 years. For financial stability it is a bit longer, but typically only to the outer boundaries of the credit cycle – about a decade. [4]10

In other words, once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late.


As someone who is instinctively and reflectively hostile to technocrats, this strikes me as one of the strongest arguments it is possible to point to for the value of such figures. Their appointment frees them from narrowly political concerns, facilitating interventions which would be constrained by, among other things, the temporal horizons of other actors. This ‘freeing’ is both narrow and shallow. It is also a profoundly political act in its own right, representing a crucial strategy for placing increasing portions of economic questions beyond political scrutiny. But an adequate sociology of technocrats should recognize that insulating policy from politics will tend, all other things being equal, to grant a degree of freedom to the policy maker which is lacking for the politician (though indeed many other constraints may follow from the institutional arrangements in which the technocrat is embedded).

I find the reaction to Carney’s speech curious because I find his intervention itself so plausible. But some have argued that this ‘over-reach’ risks politicizing his role in a way that would lead appointees to be made on the basis of political criteria in future. The interesting question becomes whether such criteria might be applied to other technocrats whose role within contemporary Europe I find much less persuasive. Can we see a nascent elite cultural reaction against the encroachment of technocracy in Europe over recent years? Or is ‘over-reach’ simply what technocrats do when one disagrees with the views they are espousing?
In every democratic institution there is a push and pull between elected members and the officers - it’s one of the eternal dynamics and tensions and is essential. Officers generally have the depth of experience (and should be offering advice like this, either internally or publicly), members have the democratic mandate (and should inform how things are done, as they only rarely have the depth of knowledge). Technocrat is a derogatory term which implies that they are going further than they should - but that can only be the case if members have insufficient influence. In Europe, that is arguably because national politicians have never been willing to give directly elected MEPs the power they should have over the executive. A bigger problem is where politicians adopt a technocratic ethos, as if there is simply one objective and obvious solution, and anyone else is simply being ‘political’.

Call For Papers: Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies (2015-10-18 08:00)

Call for papers: Themed Issue

Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies

Qualitative Research [html: [1]http://qrj.sagepub.com %5D

*Edited by William Housley (Cardiff University), Bella Dicks (Cardiff University) and Karen Henwood (Cardiff University).*

The explosion of digital social data in recent years has required a response from both the social science and computational science communities. This has been framed as an attempt to move beyond the coming crisis of empirical sociology (Savage and Burrows, 2007, 2009; Edwards et al., 2013; Housley et al., 2014). The opportunities and challenges for social science from this ‘data deluge’ are wide ranging and a spectrum of thinking is emerging across the community that includes enthusiasts, skeptics and those with deep reservations. Yet, the rise of digital data and the claims being made for it also rest on human practices and social life in multiple ways (Dicks, 2012; Smith, 2014). Consequently, Qualitative Research is central to understanding how digital data is accomplished, lived and analysed.

This themed issue invites contributions that address the role of Qualitative Methods in responding, challenging and contributing to the reflexive interrogation and scoping of data in digital societies at situated, networked and system levels. The advent of Web 2.0, the open data movement and the rhetoric of ‘Big Social Data’ have opened up opportunities to analyse big qualitative data streams, such as those associated with social media, in ways that are not yet fully understood; new digital data developments include those associated with the emerging contours of the ‘Quantified Self’ movement and the navigation of health metrics through the use of body proxemic technology giving rise to forms of life characterised by data responsibilisation and self-analytics.

The themed issue will invite papers that report on these and associated developments. Topics of interest include:
• Ethnographic studies of interdisciplinary collaboration in the area of digital data analysis, digital tool development, platform development and the associated context(s) of occupational identities and expertise.

• The Qualitative dimensions and issues surrounding coding and annotation practices through new methods such as crowdsourcing techniques and citizen social science. Qualitative studies of the social life of methods in the digital era and the observation of 'naturally occurring' data generation practices that make use of new networked technologies in the pursuit of self-management and performance. This might also include studies that demonstrate how digital actors reflexively navigate data streams in ways that are nuanced and complex and not akin to being a 'cultural dope 2.0'.

• The interaction order in the digital age; the ‘Self’, identity and digital data.

• Methodographic studies of the design and use of algorithms in digital tool development and data harvesting, the examination of code and machine learning as an accomplishment and artefact, the social organisation of statistics and modelling, the examination of demographic proxies in social media analytics and issues surrounding inference and evidence within the Big Social Data imaginary.

• The relationship between 'small' and 'big' social data. Innovations in the Qualitative analysis of Big Text data and social media streams.

• The ethical dimensions and politics of data in the digital age. Data inequalities: gender, race, class and the accomplishment of data.

References


Please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to: [2]JonesA7[at]cardiff.ac.uk by 31 December 2015. Abstracts will be reviewed for fit. You will be informed if the article is invited for review. Full manuscripts are due by 1 June 2016.
The Pre-History of the Internet of Things (2015-10-19 08:00)

I had no idea how long this notion had been around for. Blair Newman was a notoriously drug addled technologist (who once tried to claim cocaine as a business expense) into whose failed venture Microsoft ploughed $50,000 in the late 70s. At the same time, he was also kicking around the idea of an architecture for the Internet of things, predicated upon overly optimistic assumptions that have only recently been proved correct. Quoted from Gates, by Stephen Manes and Paul Andrews, loc 3423-3442

The idea, as expressed in an early document, was that "by the end of the 1980s, experts predict microprocessors will be a part of almost every electrical consumer product selling for more than $20." The logical extension of this prediction—which actually turned out to be more or less true—was that for virtually no additional cost, these microprocessors could be designed to communicate with each other, forming "a modular intelligent network . . . the central nervous system of the microcomputerized home of the future." Shades of the 1962 Seattle World’s Fair! "Energy Conservation . . . Personal Safety . . . Convenience." With Home Bus, you could remotely control everything from your blender to your hot tub. Newman’s Home Bus Standards Association, in conjunction with the research firm SRI International, would develop a single home bus standard that everyone could agree on, and chipmakers and home computer makers would jump gleefully on board. Bill Gates was one of the Association’s original three directors. An outfit called 3Com, masterminded by Robert Metcalfe, who had invented the seminal Ethernet computer network in his Xerox days, was doing Home Bus consulting for General Electric. The idea was that GE would produce its own computer—code name Homer—that could via some sort of network—Home Bus!—control all the GE toasters and blenders and dishwashers in the house.
Available for pre-order now! See [1]here for the cheapest place to buy it online, as well as table of contents & summary.


Workshop and Symposium: The Question of the Human in Social Theory and Social Research
(2015-10-20 08:00)

25th November 2015, 11:00 to 17:00
WT0.05, University of Warwick

This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that 4000
human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else's point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work. The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by October 31st, 2015. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details

Janet Salmons (2015-10-20 19:11:47)
Will this symposium be entirely face-to-face or will there be an online component? Online presenters?

Digital Social Science Essay Competition (2015-10-21 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic ‘Influence and Power’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful
essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [1]here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel’s decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal’s peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

**Essay length:** 5,000 to 7,000 words

**Essay format:** Follow the BD &S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.

**Language:** English

**Submission deadline:** 31 January 2016

**Queries:**
[2]essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas and authors should indicate...
Since first encountering the notion of discretionary effort, I've been fascinated by it. This is a definition I found on page one of Google:

Discretionary effort is the level of effort people could give if they wanted to, but above and beyond the minimum required. Many organizations manage performance in such a way that motivates employees to do only enough to get by and avoid getting in trouble (negative reinforcement).


What renders discretionary effort so problematic is how difficult it is to verify the amount of effort people could give if they wanted to. Particularly if employees are conceived as rationally seeking to minimise their effort, it can license all sorts of performance related interventions in order to mine discretionary effort: heating up the floor to see who can keep hopping the longest, in the pithy phrase used by Will Davies which I've been obsessed by since coming across it.

But things looks rather different is arenas where passion dominates occupational self-understanding. This is something I've blogged about a lot before but it's been on my mind recently since I interviewed the team behind The Sociological Review's excellent Gender and Creative Labour monograph (podcast coming soon on [2]@thesocreview). The invocation of passion offers an entirely new way to mine discretionary effort, one that is perhaps more congruent with the day-to-day necessities of knowledge work orientated towards creative production. This is how a programmer described the experience of being a new hire in the early days of Microsoft, a place renowned for the expectations of long working hours that were perceived to dominate the employment culture of the firm. Quoted from Gates, by Stephen Manes and Paul Andrews, loc 2993:

Fresh from academe, he loved the challenge. “It wasn’t like there was pressure to work twelve-hour days. It’s like you were an astronaut or something. You just kind of loved working so much.”
Loc 2993
David J (2015-10-23 03:38:59)
On the organizational/managerial problem of detecting effort/shirking and the unintended consequences of trying to resolve the problem see Bowles and Gintis, and David Gordon (Fat and Mean).

The Sociology of Everyday Life (2015-10-23 08:00)
A really exciting new special issue of Sociology. It’s free to access for another few days! Find it online [1]here.

Why Everyday Life Matters

Les Back Goldsmiths, University of London, UK

The Scriptural Economy, the Forbes Figuration and the Racial Order: Everyday life in South Africa: 1850-1930

Liz Stanley University of Edinburgh, UK

Migrant Urbanisms: Ordinary Cities and Everyday Resistance

Suzanne M Hall London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Object Relations in Accounts of Everyday Life

Jenny Rinkinen and Mikko Jalas both Aalto University School of Business, Finland and Elizabeth Shove, Lancaster University, UK

A Day at the Beach: Rising Sea Levels, Horseshoe Crabs, and Traffic Jams

Lisa Jean Moore Purchase College, State University of New York, USA

Femininity, Fashion Victims and Shoes: Re-Configuring Structure/Agency Polarities within Feminist Theory through the Mundane and Extraordinary Footwear Practices of Everyday Life

Victoria Robinson University of Sheffield, UK

Everyday Experiences of Sexism in Male-Dominated Professions: a Bourdieusian perspective

Abigail Powell University of New South Wales, Australia and Katherine Sang, Heriot-Watt University, UK

In/Exclusion in the Clinic: Down’s Syndrome, Dysmorphology, and the Ethics of Everyday Medical Work

4004
Gareth Thomas and Joanna Latimer both Cardiff University, UK

‘Snowed in!’: Offbeat Rhythms and Belonging as Everyday Practice

Julia Bennett Manchester Metropolitan University, UK

Telling Moments and Everyday Experience: Multiple Methods Research on Couple Relationships and Personal Lives

Jacqui Gabb The Open University, UK and Janet Fink, University of Huddersfield, UK

Researching the Everyday: An Interview with Amanda Wise

1. http://soc.sagepub.com/content/current

#icanhazpdf (2015-10-23 14:35)

This new way of finding articles is cool. Three people sent me this link in the last few days (two mathematicians and one social scientist). It’s not new, but it is the first sign of organisation spreading beyond social scientists’ personal friendship lines.


But it is a piecemeal approach, a laborious micro-rebellion. Seriously, when will we in the social studies and humanities realise that what we really need is a much larger, concerted movement against the outrageous system of academic journals? What we need is our own version of the [2]ArXiV which is currently used by everyone in the mathematical and computer sciences, physics, statistics, quantitative biology and quantitative finance. We aren’t children. We must make the rules, not break them.


1. http://qz.com/528526/academics-have-found-a-way-to-access-insanely-expensive-research-papers-for-free/
There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis
Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.

Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contributions was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived/in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities...
and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the 'projectification' of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.

2. file://eventbrite.com/tickets-external?eid=18688651259&ref=etckt

Dying alone in New York (2015-10-25 08:00)

A fantastic, chilling ethnography of death in the modern metropolis - and of a life forgotten and pieced together from postmortem scraps. This text gives insights not only into the journey of a death person through a number of complex social institutions, but also into the world of different professionals employed in dealing with death.

[1]The Lonely Death of George Bell, by N. R. Kleinfield, photography by Josh Haner

"In discovering a death, you find a life story and perhaps meaning. Could anything in the map of George Bell’s existence have explained his lonely end? Possibly not. But it was true that George Bell died carrying some secrets. Secrets about how he lived and secrets about who mattered most to him. Those secrets would bring sorrow. At the same time, they would deliver rewards. Death does that. It closes doors but also opens them."
The International Journal of Social Research Methodology Seminar Competition (2015-10-25 08:00)

The Board of the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology (IJSRM)* is pleased to announce the launch of our new Seminar Competition. Our aim is to support the development of critical and innovative approaches to on-going and emerging methodological debates across a range of approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, and including mixed and comparative methods, as these relate to philosophical, theoretical, ethical, political and practice issues. Seminars may consist of single or multiple day events. Topics can include any area of social research methodology.

**Available funding £1500**

**Guidelines for Applicants**

We are seeking proposals that are concerned with debate and critical development of original cutting edge work of methodological significance. Seminars may bring together established and new researchers. They should be collaborative in approach across different institutions and disciplines and may include colleagues from relevant, non-HE, organisations. Proposals should have clear goals and outcomes with evident concern to the methodological contribution of the Seminar. In addition, a core purpose of the Seminar series is to engage with, and contribute to the development of an international community of social researchers. Accordingly, proposers may consider how their events can be recorded for non-participants and posted on the IJSRM multimedia site. Proposers should also consider including the production of new papers for potential publication in *IJSRM*. Such papers will be subject to the normal review procedures of *IJSRM* with no guarantee of publication.

**Format**

We are open to suggestions for format either in the form of a single day seminar or in the form of multiple days across the year 2016. It is expected that the funding will be used towards meeting the cost of room and equipment hire, hospitality, consumables and travel for speakers. It is expected that there are no costs for delegate attendance.

**How to Apply**

Further details and an application form can be obtained from Alice Edwards, Journal Administrator, tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk.

**Closing date for applications: 30 November 2015**

**Assessment Criteria**

All submissions will be reviewed by a Committee drawn from the Board of *IJSRM* and will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Contribution to the development of methodological innovation and debate;
- Relevance to the aims and scope of *IJSRM*;

- Projected outputs and impact;

- Value for Money

**Notes**

- All successful seminars will have a named Principal Organiser and named Co-Organiser. The Principal Organiser will be responsible for all promotion and management of the programme of work, including arrangements for the venue, rooms, facilities, dealing with expense forms, submitting claim forms for event costs to *IJSRM*.

- Travel, at standard return rail fare rates and reasonable subsistence for speakers is permissible. Fees will not be paid to speakers.

- Delegates will not be paid expenses for attendance.

- The events will be promoted by the Principal Organiser and co-organisers through their research networks, institutions and departments. All communications with participants and publicity of events will acknowledge sponsorship by the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.

- Further promotion will be undertaken by Taylor & Francis as appropriate.
This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work. The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty
here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by October 31st, 2015. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details.

Media and the Environment: 2016-2017 Media@McGill Postdoctoral Fellowship (2015-10-26 06:51)

Call for Application: 2016-2017 Media@McGill Postdoctoral Fellowship

Description: Media@McGill is a hub of interdisciplinary research, scholarship and public outreach on issues in media, technology and culture, located in the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. To see the list of postdoctoral fellowships, click here.

Media@McGill offers every year one Postdoctoral Fellowship to a promising scholar engaged in media-related research, as defined in Media@McGill's mission statement.

Fellows are provided with a workspace, and are expected to take an active role in the research activities and academic life of Media@McGill (participation in conferences, seminars, etc.). They may also have the possibility of teaching a course within the Department of Art History and Communication Studies at McGill.

Eligibility: The Media@McGill Postdoctoral Fellowship is open to both national and international scholars who have completed their doctoral degree in a university other than McGill no earlier than June 1, 2012. Candidates must have defended their dissertation and received their PhD by May 1, 2016. Fluency in English is essential; working knowledge of French is an asset.

Value and Duration: The stipend for the Media@McGill Postdoctoral Fellowship is $45,000 CAD for 12 months (this includes a travel research stipend) beginning in September 2016.

Application Process Deadlines: Media@McGill will be offering one Postdoctoral Fellowship for 2016-2017.

- In a cover letter, applicants must stipulate how their research is related to Media@McGill's mission statement and Media@McGill's 2016-17 theme: Media and the Environment. Applicants should also identify a potential faculty supervisor from the McGill Department of Art History and Communication Studies, who is a member of Media@McGill and whose research is closely tied to that of the applicant. Please do not contact the potential supervisor at this stage.

The following should be included in all statements of interest and be sent in a single pdf (the application will not be 4012
accepted otherwise). The documents’ order follows the list below:

- a cover letter;
- a research proposal (750 words);
- a Curriculum Vitae (maximum 5 pages).

**Deadline:** Completed statements of interest should be sent to sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca by **Friday, January 29, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. E.D.T.**

- Statements of interest will be reviewed by the Media@McGill potential supervisor, and candidates will be notified of results shortly after. If successful, the short-listed applicants will be asked to provide the following additional documents:
  - official copies of transcripts during graduate studies;
  - three letters of recommendation (one of which is by the potential Media@McGill faculty supervisor);
  - a writing sample (maximum 20 pages).

**Deadline:** Completed applications should be sent to sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca by **Thursday, March 24, 2016 at 5:00 p.m. E.D.T.** Applications will be reviewed by Media@McGill's Steering Committee, and candidates will be notified of results in early May 2016.

For additional information, please contact sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca


6. mailto:sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca
7. mailto:sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca
8. mailto:sophie.toupin@mcgill.ca
Work, Employment and Society Editorial Board: Call for Applications (2015-10-26 08:00)

Work, Employment and Society Editorial Board

Call for Applications

Deadline: Thursday 5 November 2015, 17:00 (GMT)

Work, employment and society is seeking 10 new members of its Editorial Board to serve for three years from January 2016 to end of December 2018.

The Board welcomes applications involving any areas of methodological, theoretical and empirical expertise, though all applicants should be able to demonstrate an interest in and understanding of sociology.

Candidates with expertise in the following areas are particularly needed:

- Quantitative Methods
- Political Economy
- Comparative Employment Relations
- Theory (especially Social Theory)
- Sociology of Health
- Body Work/Sex Work
- Sociology of the Professions
- Self-employment

WES seeks academics based in the UK for the editorial board, but welcomes members from diverse backgrounds – both cultural and academic – to contribute to the diversity of research published by the journal.

The full call and application form are available on the BSA website:


For further information, please contact Sophie Jaques at [2]wes.journal@britsoc.org.uk

2. mailto:wes.journal@britsoc.org.uk
Rethinking UK Research Funding - Manchester, November 4th (2015-10-27 08:00)

Rethinking UK research funding

- Do you have strong opinions about the way academic research is funded in the UK?
- Maybe you're a researcher employed on one short term project after another and have ideas about how things could be better organised?
- Maybe you are concerned about the effect the competitive culture in research has on the quality of results and their reproducibility and believe changes in the way funds are allocated could improve the situation?
- Or perhaps you believe that the current system for research funding is basically excellent, but have a strong view about one particular issue that needs to be addressed?

If any of the above apply to you, you should consider attending a **FREE** one day event being held as part of Manchester [1]Policy Week 2015, [2]Rethinking UK Research Funding on 4th November. You can register your interest [3]here.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Adisa Azapagic, Professor, Chemical Engineering, The University of Manchester
- Elizabeth Bohm, Senior Policy Advisor, The Royal Society
- Iain Cameron, Head of Research Careers and Diversity, Research Councils UK
- Colette Fagan (Session Chair), Professor of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities Deputy Dean & Associate Dean – Research, The University of Manchester
- Ruth Gilligan, Manager, Athena Swan, Equality Challenge Unit
- Laurence Hopkins, Universities and Colleges Employers Association, Head of Research
- Michael MacNeil, National Head of Bargaining & Negotiations, University and College Union
- Andrew Miller, former MP for Ellesmere Port and Chair of the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee (to 2015)
- Peter Simpson, Director of the N8 Partnership and former Director of Discovery Sciences at AstraZeneca
- Nalin Thakker (Session Chair), Professor of Molecular Pathology and Genetics, Associate Vice-President for Compliance, Risk and Research Integrity, The University of Manchester

There will be two speaker/panel discussion sessions in the morning: "Research Reproducibility, Ethics and Outcomes" and "Creating Sustainable Researcher Careers/ Researcher Quality of Life" and in the afternoon delegates will take part in a number of workshops aimed at developing ideas for innovative approaches to research organisation, or changes to current models, which should positively influence:

- Research reproducibility, ethics and outcomes
• How research funds are allocated and spent
• Researcher quality of life
• Creating sustainable researcher careers

A summary programme for the day can be downloaded [4]here.

1. [http://www.policy.manchester.ac.uk/week/](http://www.policy.manchester.ac.uk/week/)
2. [https://rethinkingukresearch.wordpress.com/](https://rethinkingukresearch.wordpress.com/)
3. [https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rethinkingresearch](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/rethinkingresearch)
4. [https://rethinkingukresearch.wordpress.com/programme/](https://rethinkingukresearch.wordpress.com/programme/)

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### How to shift sociological product: lessons from the career of Tony Giddens (2015-10-28 08:00)

Taking the lead from Peter Walsh’s laudible work [1] on academic celebrity, here’s some lessons from the career of Tony Giddens which I inferred from [2] this excellent review article Peter pointed me towards, coupled with my own reading of Giddens, who was the major protagonist for my PhD:

• Choose your targets well. Take early aim at the established masters. Draw upon the established canon but re-articulate it in a idiosyncratic way.

• Demonstrate a mastery of the classics that is cashed out in terms of their translation into contemporary concerns.

• Tie your interests, however general they may be, into the most pressing topics of the day.

• Cultivate both your critics and yours fans: engage often and generously.

• Publish lots, ideally in a way that combines repetition with reliable progress into new intellectual domains.

• Write texts books. Seriously.

• Own the company that publishes your books. Or, if you can’t, at least exercise substantial influence over the channels through which you disseminate your work.

• (Re)define the canon in a way easily taken up by others.

• Edit the major journal(s) outside of your professional stronghold

• Seek prestigious institutional positions and deploy them to maximal effect in disconnected arenas.

Interestingly, [3] Clegg writes in 1992 that “few have sought to challenge with a competitive strategy based on equivalent market penetration”. But since then many have. Stiegler, Bauman and Zizek, to name but three, have all achieved a rate of publication far beyond that which led Clegg to be so fascinated with Giddens. However, at least the latter two have self-plagiarised extensively, perhaps pointing to Giddens as having pushed the productivity bar...
to the maximum extent possible before one is forced to start copying & pasting from one book to the next in order to keep the profitable publications flowing.

1. [http://www.thesociologicalreview.com/information/blog/on-academic-celebrity.html](http://www.thesociologicalreview.com/information/blog/on-academic-celebrity.html)

Humanity on a Budget, or the 'Value-Added' of Being Human (2015-10-28 10:14)

This piece is dedicated to [1]Stefan Stern, who picked up on – and ran with – a remark I made at this year’s [2]Brain Bar Budapest, concerning the need for a 'value-added' account of being 'human' in a world in which there are many drivers towards replacing human labour with ever smarter technologies.

In what follows, I assume that 'human' can no longer be taken for granted as something that adds value to being-in-the-world. The value needs to be earned, it can't be just inherited. For example, according to animal rights activists, 'value-added' claims to brand 'humanity' amount to an unjustified privileging of the human life-form, whereas artificial intelligence enthusiasts argue that computers will soon exceed humans at the ('rational') tasks that we have historically invoked to create distance from animals. I shall be more concerned with the latter threat, as it comes from a more recognizable form of 'economistic' logic.

Economics makes an interesting but subtle distinction between 'price' and 'cost'. Price is what you pay up-front through mutual agreement to the person selling you something. In contrast, cost consists in the resources that you forfeit by virtue of possessing the thing. Of course, the cost of something includes its price, but typically much more – and much of it experienced only once you've come into possession. Thus, we say 'hidden cost' but not 'hidden price'. The difference between price and cost is perhaps most vivid when considering large life-defining purchases, such as a house or a car. In these cases, any hidden costs are presumably offset by 'benefits', the things that you originally wanted – or at least approve after the fact – that follow from possession.

Now, think about the difference between saying, ‘Humanity comes at a price’ and ‘Humanity comes at a cost’. The first phrase suggests what you need to pay your master to acquire freedom, while the second suggests what you need to suffer as you exercise your freedom. The first position has you standing outside the category of 'human' but wishing to get in – say, as a prospective resident of a gated community. The second position already identifies you as 'human' but perhaps without having fully realized what you had bargained for. The philosophical movement of Existentialism was launched in the mid-20th century by playing with the irony implied in the idea of 'human emancipation' – the ease with which the Hell we wish to leave (and hence pay the price) morphs into the Hell we agree to enter (and hence suffer the cost). Thus, our humanity reduces to the leap out of the frying pan of slavery and into the fire of freedom.

In the 21st century, the difference between the price and cost of humanity is being reinvented in a new key, mainly in response to developments – real and anticipated – in artificial intelligence. Today 'humanity' is increasingly a boutique item, a 'value-added' to products and services which would be otherwise rendered, if not by actual machines then by humans trying to match machine-based performance standards. Here optimists see 'efficiency gains' and pessimists 'alienated labour'. In either case, 'humanity comes at a price' refers to the relative scarcity
of what in the past would have been called ‘craftsmanship’. As for ‘humanity comes at a cost’, this alludes to the difficulty of continuing to maintain the relevant markers of the ‘human’, given both changes to humans themselves and improvements in the mechanical reproduction of those changes.

Two prospects are in the offing for the value-added of being human: either (1) to be human is to be the original with which no copy can ever be confused, or (2) to be human is to be the fugitive who is always already planning its escape as other beings catch up. In a religious vein, we might speak of these two prospects as constituting an ‘apophatic anthropology’, that is, a sense of the ‘human’ the biggest threat to which is that it might be nailed down. This image was originally invoked in medieval Abrahamic theology to characterize the unbounded nature of divine being: God as the namer who cannot be named.

But in a more secular vein, we can envisage on the horizon two legal regimes, which would allow for the routine demonstration of the ‘value added’ of being human. In the case of (1), the definition of ‘human’ might come to be reduced to intellectual property-style priority disputes, whereby value accrues simply by virtue of showing that one is the originator of something of already proven value. In the case of (2), the ‘human’ might come to define a competitive field in which people routinely try to do something that exceeds the performance standards of non-human entities – and added value attaches to that achievement.

Either – or some combination – of these legal regimes might work to the satisfaction of those fated to live under them. However, what is long gone is any idea that there is an intrinsic ‘value-added’ to being human. Whatever added value there is, it will need to be fought for tooth and nail.

1. [http://www.theguardian.com/profile/stefan-stern](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/stefan-stern)
2. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJeLIFrQ8lw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJeLIFrQ8lw)

Israel Contreras (2017-04-23 01:54:59)
Dr. Fuller, Interesting thoughts. I have a few questions. How can humans add value in a world where technology (AI, robots) can bypass them in almost every way? After all, the world only needs so many people working on “creative” endeavors. What happens to the people that can only do the repetitive tasks? Your phraseology “out of the frying pan of slavery into the fire of freedom” invokes a negative connotation of freedom? How can that be? Exactly what do you mean by the following “the term human can no longer be taken for granted as something that adds value to being in the world.” That seems to trivialize what it means to be human. What do you see as the ethical consequences of taking such a view? How does your comment stand against the possible ethical consequences of taking such a view of humanity? What does this do to human rights? Who gets to determine what is valuable? What happens to humans that dont prove their worth? Respectfully

Steve Fuller (2017-04-24 06:07:21)
I'll respond to your questions in successive paragraphs, corresponding to your own: It’s not clear that we need humans to do repetitive tasks or that we need so many humans in the first place. After all, what Marx and others called ‘dehumanization’ was all about people being reduced to repetitive tasks. So, if that’s all people were doing, that wouldn’t necessarily be a life worth living. I’m simply trying to show that the move from slavery to freedom doesn’t mark a straightforward improvement in the human condition. It has costs as well as benefits, though we generally take the benefits to be worth the costs. For example, one ‘cost’ of freedom is that you’re legally obliged to take personal responsibility for your actions. This is not necessarily the case under a slave regime, in which the master may be held accountable for a slave’s behaviour, just as the owner of a dangerous dog might be today. Actually I do not take what I’m saying here as especially controversial. After all, the concept of ‘human rights’ in its legally binding sense – as opposed to a philosophical or theological fantasy – came into being only with the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights because prior conceptions of ‘civil rights’ were not adequate, for a variety of reasons, to safeguard
our humanity. After all, civil rights can be both granted to and taken from individuals and groups by the state. Consider the case of Jews in Nazi Germany. In this respect, civil rights are not sufficient to safeguard humanity because to be 'human' is more than simply being a citizen in good standing with the state. Implied here is a 'value added' notion of what it means to be human.

Israel Contreras (2017-04-28 16:39:30)

Dr. Fuller, I will follow your taxonomy with the paragraphs and answering questions... So what happens to those who only can do repetitive task type jobs? Or for that matter, those who technology simply passes up? What does that do to a job market based on repetitive tasks? What happens to people that have not previously done something or created something previously recognized as valuable? Why would it be necessary to explore the negatives of moving from slavery to freedom when civil freedom is the highest value we hold? I'm just a little confused why that is even part of the discussion. Are you entertaining the idea that people who don't prove their worth be slaves? Regarding human value....Respectfully, I don’t see how your comment answers any of my questions. When you say that you don’t take anything here as especially controversial, that seems to say that there is some long standing tradition that has already recognized that humanity is something that has to bought and maintained through value. This seems to be a remarkable departure from western civilization where all humans are created equal and endowed with certain inalienable rights. I've seen this line of thought in many alt right circles but under the guise of culturalism. What you are saying appears to be some form of that but only in a technological sense...or at least a sense in which no one can be human that hasn't done something that someone somewhere with power and authority deems as valuable. I'm having trouble understanding why you think since civil rights are not perfect and can’t be protected from every type of assault that they shouldn’t exist as a basis for being human. Further questions or questions I didn’t see how your response in the third paragraph answered... Doesn’t making humanity based on value become something even worse than the nazis? What happens to humans who have not added value? Did you have a certain animal rights argument in mind as the basis What do you see as the ethical consequences of taking such a view? How would it play out to have a society where only people who have added value get human dignity? How does your comment stand against the possible ethical consequences of taking such a view of humanity? What does this do to human rights? Who gets to determine what is valuable? What happens to humans that dont prove their worth? Respectfully submitted

Steve Fuller (2017-04-30 15:17:47)

I think I've already covered much of this. You perhaps don’t accept my answers. I’ll try to be more pointed. 1. We have had this problem since the dawn of capitalism, as technology inherently targets repetitive tasks and hence periodically renders much of the labour force redundant. People adapt to the change, perhaps not everyone and many adapt only fitfully. This is what education – including mid-career retraining and lifelong learning – is supposed to be about. I guess I don’t believe that some people are just fit for repetitive tasks. In any case, people who do share you worry tend to support the idea of a Universal Basic Income, so you don’t need to prove your worth through work. 2. If you really believe in freedom, then you also have the freedom to become a slave. Note that slavery need not be someone’s permanent condition. People have been able to buy their way out of it or have their slavery commuted in some other way. Not all slave societies are hereditary and irreversible. One advantage of being a slave is that someone else takes responsibility for your actions. Admittedly that might not be enough of a selling point to prefer a slave’s life, and of course both capitalist and socialist societies have placed taboos on slavery. My only point is that freedom doesn’t come for free – it imposes its own burdens, which are summed up in the word ‘responsibility’. 3. Actually I did answer your question, and it has nothing to do with what alt-right people say these days. Civil rights are rights you have by virtue of being a citizen of a country. To be a citizen is to be ‘more’ than simply being a human being. It both empowers and obliges you in ways that non-citizens are not. If you leave your country or renounce your citizenship, your legal standing becomes uncertain. Of course, countries with good diplomatic relations normally host each other’s citizens – though you often need a visa. Now, what happens when you’re a refugee or for some other reason ‘stateless’? How does your humanity help you under those circumstances? The answer is unfortunately radically unclear, as we see in the never-ending refugee crises and ‘failed states’ around the world. My point is that even before we start talking about futuristic worlds where AI takes all our jobs, we have yet to accord the sheer fact of ‘being human’ all the much normative standing. We’re already looking for the ‘value added’ of a human life. It’s a disgraceful state of affairs, considering the endless talk about ‘human rights’. But we seem to live with it on a daily basis.
Dr. Fuller, Thanks again for your response. It’s not that I don’t accept your answers. It’s just that I don’t see your answers recognizing certain issues that are bound to arise. Nor do I see your answers adequately refuting certain preconceptions.

1. How can even middle class wages pay for college throughout their life? I attend college due to a law passed in Texas for veterans. This allows me not to pay tuition. However, if it wasn’t for this, which I daresay is not the case for most individuals, it would be impossible for me to attend college and support my family. I can see your criticism of repetitive tasks and I can see automation freeing humans up from this labor as a good thing. However I think most would rather choose freedom and a job of repetitive tasks than slavery.

2. Which brings me to my next point....I actually don’t believe that people have the freedom to become slaves. Liberty is an inalienable right which means that no one, not even yourself, can take that away from you. I don’t often agree with the Alabama State Constitution. But it has a section entitled declaration of rights....the very last declaration is a section that the previous rights are inviolate which means they can’t be taken away. So, since I don’t think people have a right to sign away their freedom, and am no fan of Nozick’s ideas that contracts form the basis of ethics and society, I can’t accept your conclusion since I don’t agree with you premises. Freedom very well doesn’t come free. But that doesn’t mean freedom is worse than slavery....

3. You seem to be undercutting the idea that human beings have basic dignity. But your examples seem to be in the context of real life situations. I have in mind the theory. Perhaps that is where we are speaking a big incommensurably. Sure there are many examples where humans have been discarded....to our failure as a race no doubt. But that doesn’t mean we should just double down in theory on what exists due to politics of certain regions. Also, I think your perception of states as failed is another point of departure. I don’t see countries that exist today as failures. They just have issues they need to solve. In some cases, they have severe issues they need to solve. But that doesn’t mean it’s time to throw out Locke and build another slave culture. I appreciate you taking the time to make your point more clearly. For me it’s all about learning more and understanding more. In saying that I have in mind the point you made where you view the work we still have yet to do on making being human a much more dignified situation. We definitely have some work to do there. But is rejecting the theory of human dignity because human practice has work to do really the answer? Maybe that’s not what you are explicitly saying. But it seems that’s the tree around which you are beating around. Once again...I very much appreciate you taking the time to answer my questions. Respectfully, Israel
human too closely to a particular bodily form that can only be treated in a certain range of ways. I know this sounds scary. But now think about all those who object to, say, vaccines, medical treatments, nutritional regimes, etc. even in life-threatening situations. They typically appeal to a natural/unnatural distinction based on world-views that actually identify the human very closely to the body. Yet, the law tends to regard such complainants as outliers if not outlaws. In other words, the law itself is already open to forcing people to have things done to them that violate their bodies in the name of redeeming some sense of ‘humanity’ that transcends how they might otherwise exist. This suggests to me that the law ultimately regards the default human body as a platform for the promotion of some normatively desirable sense of humanity. The question then is how to reinstate some meaningful sense of ‘dignity’ in a world where unwanted physical interference is already given legal standing.

The 2015/16 @sociowarwick seminar series (2015-10-29 08:00)

This year’s seminar series in the Sociology department at Warwick looks like an interesting mix:

[1]
deadline tomorrow! the question of the human in social theory & social research (2015-10-29 12:05)

25th November 2015, 11:00 to 17:00
WT0.05, University of Warwick

This workshop and symposium will explore the, mostly implicit, conceptions of the human, humanity and human nature that underpin various contemporary conceptions of social life. In the context of much-publicised
post-human futures, this is an invitation to reconsider the idea that social life itself is predicated on the fact that human beings are capable of such collective existence. Humans are beings who have a continuity of consciousness so that they see themselves as themselves throughout their life; human are beings who negotiate a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory identities and recognise each other as members of the same species, and they are also beings who can create and interpret cultural artefacts. Crucially, humans are beings who can deploy a sense of self-transcendence so that they are able to look at the world from somebody else’s point of view and thus conceive new social institutions.

The main focus throughout the day will be on how questions about the human are encountered in social theory and social research and what are the various implications and challenges of taking these seriously in our work. The day of activities will be divided into two parts. During the morning, we will have a participatory workshop for PhD students and early-career researchers. The goal of the workshop is to help participants negotiate the sometimes abstruse scientific, philosophical, moral, and even theological underpinnings of asking questions about ‘the human’ in the context of their own research projects. Dr Daniel Chernilo (Loughborough University) will offer a general overview of this field of enquiry as well as reflect on its various implications. We will also invite participants to reflect on their own research projects by making a brief (10-minute) presentation of their research projects and how questions about the human have been or are expected to be encountered within them. We’d like to ask all participants to reflect in advance on conceptions of the human and how they pertain to their projects. Uncertainty here is not a problem, in fact it will be a useful contribution to discussions on the day! In the afternoon, we will have a symposium in which Dr Mark Carrigan, Professor Margaret Archer and Daniel Chernilo will engage with questions of the human as they unfold in their own work on digital sociology (Carrigan), the morphogenetic society (Archer), and philosophical sociology (Chernilo).

To register your interest, please contact D.Chernilo@lboro.ac.uk and Mark@Markcarrigan.net with a brief description (500 words or less) of your research and how questions of the human are relevant to it by October 31st, 2015. The event is free but places are limited. Travel bursaries are available for those in need of it, please ask for more details.
A few places have opened up for tomorrow's event:

**The Sociological Review’s Early Career Researchers Event: Working Outside of Academia**  
*Organised by The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher team*

For those with a background in social science, career paths do not always followed a straight forward traditional academic trajectory. With the current shortage of entry-level academic jobs and the opportunities in academia being short term or exploitative for recent graduates, many may seek employment outside of the academy.

Social scientists have a lot to offer other employment sectors. Whether you are activity pursuing employment outside of academia or thinking of taking a new direction in your career, this event will provide an insight into the world of social scientists engaged in practice outside the university.

Please join The Sociological Review’s Early Careers Researchers’ event for what is going to be informative and stimulating event.

**Speakers include:**

Carole McNaughton Nichols (Director at Truth),  
Simon Roberts (Stripe Partners),  
Kandy Woodfield (Higher Education Academy)  
George Julian (Indie researcher)
The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic ‘Influence and Power’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful
essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [1]here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel’s decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal’s peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

**Essay length:** 5,000 to 7,000 words

**Essay format:** Follow the BD &S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.

**Language:** English

**Submission deadline:** 31 January 2016

**Queries:**
[2]essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas and authors should submit...
cate that their submission is for the special theme, ‘ISRF Essay Prize.’

1. http://www.isrf.org/about/
2. mailto:essayprize2016@isrf.org

The Politics of Data (2015-10-30 08:00)


Our latest series delves into the politics of data. Data has become an increasingly complex force, influencing more and more aspects of social life. This series will explore the role of data and algorithms in research and society, critically interrogating data-driven processes and epistemologies.


According to Hegel's bird's eye-view of the world, the Owl of Minerva takes flight at dusk. If this bird is supposed to be the personification of philosophical insight, then we start thinking deeply about the nature of something only once its existence is in jeopardy. And so it is with the nature of 'being human', which seems to bring out the best in thinkers under the shadow of war or some generalized sense of gloom and doom – of the sort that, say, capitalism routinely invites. Thus, we want to know the difference made by being human because we feel that we might be in the process of losing it.

The standard way to begin such investigations is to ponder the essence of humanity. But 'essence' can mean one of two things, depending on whether one comes from the Greco-Roman or Judaeo-Christian side of the issue. My use of these phrases is somewhat polemical, but I'm interested in normatively amplifying a distinction which already exists – typically in a bloodlessly understated fashion – within analytic philosophy of language.

The Greco-Roman style of essence is about essential properties, understood as functional or morphological
characteristics that are normally on display. Aristotle put this conception on the table, and even after the formal abandonment of the Aristotelian world-view it acquired a scientific second life in Linnaeus’ ‘binomial nomenclature’ of species, the basis on which natural phenomena are classified (e.g. Homo sapiens for humans).

The Judaeo-Christian style of essence is more about the construction of essences - that is, the means by which something is said to have a distinct identity, which entails that it is not anything else: the ‘difference that makes the difference’. Thus, God – and Adam before the Fall – calls the world into being by giving things unique names. Even among the irreligious, this view has enjoyed a second life in science as the search for the ultimate set of fundamental entities (concepts, numbers, elements, etc.) by which the entire world could be generated by some combination of these logical forms.

A quick-and-dirty way of understanding the two sorts of essence is that the Greco-Romans see essence as a product, while the Judaeo-Christians see it as a process. For their part, analytic philosophers recognize the distinction in terms of, on the one hand, the theory of definite descriptions and, on the other, the causal theory of reference - the former associated with Bertrand Russell and the latter with Saul Kripke. For Russell, the essence of something is its normally distinguishing features, whereas for Kripke the essence is whatever happens to make the thing distinct from other things, even under liminal conditions (i.e. 'in every possible world'), which typically requires further investigation. Thus, Russell's 'water' is the life-sustaining fluid, whereas Kripke's 'water' is H2O. The former focuses on what water normally does, the latter on water's overall potential (much of which may be normally unrealized).

Now, let's think about the 'essence of humanity' in light of this distinction. Most social theories today either simply deny the essentialist premise (e.g. postmodernists) or presume one or the other essentialist position without explicit argument (e.g. naturalists). The only contemporary movement that really takes the distinction seriously, albeit implicitly, is transhumanism, which is literally about projecting what is distinctive (and presumably good) about the human to the 'next', perhaps ultimate level. If the 'human' has an essence that is knowable, then it should be possible to project future cases of humanity based on past ones.

But what exactly are we supposed to be projecting? One thing is clear: The projection is more than simply an empirical prediction about certain future beings - though transhumanists often try to make life too easy for themselves by talking the language of prediction. It is also about how those beings would or should be regarded: Are they still 'human'? Transhumanism projects two quite distinct futures for the 'human'. They are not incompatible in principle, but they certainly pull the essence of humanity in quite different directions.

On the one hand, we might live in the bodies of our birth in a state of indefinite health. On the other, we might upload our minds into a more durable silicon platform that would enable us to thrive in perpetuity. Both views clearly dispense with the classical idea of mortality as essential to the human condition. This is where many humanists (and others!) argue that the 'human' has – in the spirit of Elvis – already left the building (i.e. no longer in a state of Heideggerian 'indwelling').

However, assuming the transhumanist premise, the former case is more Russellian in its fixation on our de-fault Homo sapiens embodiment, whereas the latter case is more Kripkean in suggesting that such embodiment is only contingently related to our essence, which may be more clearly expressed in some other medium, especially one that also clarifies the distinctness of our place in the greater scheme of things.

If one wished to write a proper history of humanity, one would need to deal with the genealogies of these two strands of transhumanist thought. The Russelian history would be about locating and accommodating (or not, as has often happened) a sense of the 'normal human', whereas the Kripkean history would be about pushing the limits of the 'human' in ways that treat the 'normal' with suspicion. The former would invite a more 'population' based sense of social ontology fixated on the distribution of physical individuals, and the latter a more 'corporate' sense expressly looking to social formations that achieve more than what any presumptively normal individual might.
This may be because, in the end, the Russellian view takes the ‘human’ to be a kind of self-sufficient animal, whereas on the Kripkean view the exact nature of the ‘human’ is much less clear, and may ultimately be an instantiation of some other, more cosmically inscribed essence altogether.

The esoteric appeal of Tony Giddens (2015-10-31 08:00)

From [1]How to become an internationally famous British social theorist by Stewart Clegg, 585-586:

"Giddens's later concerns with structure and agency allow him to tap into many prestigious intellectual products as resources, such as linguistics, analytical philosophy and the Heideggerian tradition. These connections allow for far great consumption in more differentiated markets. The vague term 'social theory' gives freer scope, allowing Giddens to range freely and widely. The theoretical strategy has been to announce, from New Rules on, the deficiency of the orthodox consensus in some critical respect such as consideration of 'war', 'space', 'time', and then to borrow from cognate disciplines, such as international relations, history and geography, to remedy the defect. This gives Giddens a master key, wrapped up in the grammar of structuration, for addressing some important things that other theories omit. One can claim both transcendence of everything that has gone before and modesty in dialogue with friends and admirers who bring to attention other things not yet integrated into the system. Learn the Giddens system and you unlock the doors of greater perception by becoming acquainted with disciplines, ideas and figures whom one would not normally meet. If you are not familiar with a field, no worries – once you've read Giddens on 'space-time' distanciation you will appear as knowledgeable as the next human geographer – all the time you are doing social theory. The programme is infinitely stretchable (although in practice it rarely addresses contemporary economics). Moreover, when specialists, offer corrections, that simply offers the opportunity for further debate, perhaps subsequent adjustment. It all keeps the product in the discerning public eye.


This review essay is fascinating for many reasons. But perhaps the most important is that it opens up the connections between what Nicos Mouzelis convincingly analyses as intellectual de-differentiation with the political economy of scholarly publishing. Crudeley, blurring intellectual boundaries expands the market for social theorists.

Predatory Publishers Lapping up Content (2015-11-01 08:00)

Recently, Gmail failed to filter out a spam email sent by a company called LAP Lambert Academic Publishing. I don’t usually receive these, as they land straight into my Junk box, so I googled the name of the company. It turns out, they are successful spammers, and have fooled many. Joseph Stromberg takes upon himself to investigate the shady world of pseudoacademic publishing by selling them his undergraduate dissertation in this exciting article: [1]http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/03/lap_lambert_academic_publishing_my_trip_to_a_print_content_farm.3.html

1. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2014/03/lap_lambert_academic_publishing_my_trip_to_a_print_content_farm.3.html

Liberating yourself from leisure activities (2015-11-02 08:00)

I came across this advert in Dublin advert. On the surface, it’s interesting on a straight forwardly chronopolitical level: with sufficient resources, it’s increasingly possible to outsource tasks for others in order to save yourself time. But what stood out to me about this was the increasingly formal category of ‘relaxation’: it’s becoming that which awaits us when all other obligations are met, which of course they never are due to the escalation dynamics which kick in as we reflexively orientate ourselves towards demands upon our time.

[1] 4030
Having spent the day hanging around airports due to circumstances beyond my control, I've been struck by how orientated the space is towards the stimulation of shopping, eating, boozing and gambling. Manchester Airport literally has betting terminals scattered at regular intervals around the airport, even near some of the gates. Surely the justification for the centrality of these activities is that they constitute leisure. So what exactly is the personal shopping service saving time in order to help people do?

1. https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/leisure.jpg
Register for the accelerated academy (2015-11-03 08:00)

Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life
2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (Vila Lanna)

Organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and supported by the Strategy AV21.


[2]Powered by Eventbrite

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered
transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars' complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- **empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education**
- **the origins of metrification of higher education**
- **metrification as a form of social control**
- **the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration**
- **common strategic responses to these challenges**
- **the relationship between metrification and acceleration**
- **how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis**

**Keynote Speakers**

**Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded**

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

**Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public**

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.
**Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university**

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contributions was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived-in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

**James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management**

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

**Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production**

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.
call for contributions: digital sociology and the future of the discipline (2015-11-03 08:55)

In recent years Digital Sociology has emerged as an increasingly prominent trend within the discipline at an international level. But it remains unclear precisely what this tendency represents, provoking enthusiasm and skepticism in equal measure. In this special section for The Sociological Review’s website, we invite short blog posts (1500 words or less) addressing digital sociology and the questions it raises for the future of the discipline. This could include but is by no means limited to:

• What does the 'digital' in digital sociology really mean? Is there a risk that digital sociology fetishises the 'digital'?

• Should digital technology lead us to reconceptualise the social?

• What, if anything, distinguishes digital sociology from fields of inquiry such as cyber cultures, web studies and the sociology of the internet?

• How does digital sociology relate to parallel trends in cognate disciplines e.g. digital anthropology, digital geography and the digital humanities?

• How should we conceptualize the 'offline', the 'online' and the relationship between them? Should we reject this dichotomy entirely?

• What role can digital sociology play in an intellectual landscape increasingly dominated by data science and computational social science?

• Does digital sociology change the relationship between sociology and other disciplines?

Please contact Mark Carrigan with submissions or any questions relating to the special section: mark@markcarrigan.net. The deadline for contributions is December 1st 2015.
What kind of machines do self-tracking devices make us into? (2015-11-03 10:00)

Sociologists have been telling us for a long time that the use of new technologies does more than merely give us new potential functions but actually impacts on our subjectivity; it changes who we think we are what we think is possible. For instance, the introduction of the telephone brings with it the expectation, not just the possibility, of communication over vast geographical distances. The telephone network becomes part of our social identity.

Along these lines I have been wondering what the impact of self-tracking devices might be. One of the more interesting suggestions has been from [1]Deborah Lupton who has proposed that the use of such devices might encourages us to think in terms of a machinic metaphor with the individuals engaging with themselves as self-experimenters with the body defined in terms of inputs and outputs.

I think there is certainly some truth in this although I think the experimentation aspect is perhaps most relevant for the early adopter Quantified Self types. The way in which the everyday self-tracker who uses "out of the box" apps and platforms is likely to be different. If this machinic metaphor does have some traction the interesting question (at least for me) is: what kind of machine?

Rather, than conducting experiments on themselves in order to gain "[2]self knowledge through numbers" and developing their own apps or analytical methods like Quantified Selfers, most people (I think) use devices mostly in the way in which they are intended. For example, most people probably use Fitbits to encourage themselves to walk or run further every day or week.

Most tracking devices seem to focus less on "understanding" or "experimentation" and more on some form of "productivity"; they function to encourage people into more physical exercise or to be more productive. [3]The Fitbit Surge smartwatch is advertised through commanding the customer to be more productive:

Work hard.
But, also, work better.

Designed with advanced smartwatch features, Surge lets you run your day, your way. Text and call notifications keep you on your game throughout the day, while music control helps you find the motivation you need to prepare for a big meeting or beat your best in a big race.

These devices often seem to work on the basis of applying the [4]"nudge" principle to ourselves. The nudge philosophy suggests that if in order to get people to behave in a certain way then the best way to achieve this is to manipulate their environment (or their "choice architecture") to make the preferred choice easier. Alternatively, a [5]gamification approach is used in which the goal (such as walking a number of steps) is made more desirable through the awarding of prizes or medals.

It is assumed that such an approach leads to good "habit formation". So people will automatically engage in the positive behaviour without it directly bothering their consciousness. The monitoring of data and the response to stimuli becomes an integrated part of a person's everyday life and they automatically respond in the desired way.

The development of a new device seems to take this automatic response and integration of technology/data with bodies and subjectivity further. The soon to be released [6]Doppel is a bracelet which gives off a pulse which can manipulate the level of relaxation of alertness of a user. The co-creator [7]told The Guardian that:
“Everyone tries to change their state – they listen to music, they drink coffee, they meditate – and we see this as another tool and a very effective tool because it is so discreet and it is controllable,”

He continues:

‘Everyone tries to change their state – they listen to music, they drink coffee, they meditate – and we see this as another tool and a very effective tool because it is so discreet and it is controllable,” They found that a beat connected to the body could mirror the tempo of music and how it stimulated and calmed. ‘We found that we could change someone’s state in this way. We had something which could only ever be a [8]wearable in that it had to be touching [the skin]”

The self is seen as something which is not entirely under our rational control. Rather, we have to almost trick ourselves into behaving in a certain way. [9]Evan Selinger has warned of the possibility that a nudge approach emphasises “automatic processing at the expensive of deliberative alternatives”.

The Doppel reminded me of a point made by François Guéry and Didier Deleule a long time before the emergence of self-tracking devices in their book [10]The Productive Body (originally published in French in 1972). They suggested that for capitalism:

‘[The] ideal machine would be a blind one [whose] every problem can be resolved through touch, in which robotic hands become part of the wonderful mechanical repetition of the productive gesture’ (Guéry and Deleule, 2014: 120).

The ultimate capitalist machine, for these philosophers, would be one which is entirely integrated with the human body and works on the corporeal not the mental level. Such a machine would maximize the productivity of human beings through encouraging useful and repetitive behaviours and discouraging rational reflection on the process.

Is the machine of self-tracking an unthinking machine?

6. http://www.doppel.co.uk/
Call for Proposals: Sociological Futures Series (2015-11-04 08:00)

A new initiative undertaken by Routledge in collaboration with the BSA. Some of the initial books look excellent. Find out more [1]here:

Call for Proposals: Sociological Futures Series - in collaboration with the BSA

[2]Sociological Futures aims to be a flagship series for new and innovative theories, methods and approaches to sociological issues and debates and 'the social' in the 21st century. The series editors are accepting proposals on a wide variety of themes. To submit a book idea please contact the editors:[3]profeegreen@hotmail.com[4], [5]jdhorne@uclan.ac.uk, [6]caroline.oliver@compas.ox.ac.uk,[7]l.ryan@mdx.ac.uk. [8]Click here for more information.


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2. https://www.routledge.com/sociology/series/SOCFUT?utm_source=sociology&utm_medium=cms&utm_campaign=SBU3_tre_ot_8cm_5soc_oth15_x_X_sociologicalfutures
3. mailto:profeegreen@hotmail.com
4. mailto:e.e.green@tees.ac.uk,
5. mailto:jdhorne@uclan.ac.uk,
6. mailto:caroline.oliver@compas.ox.ac.uk,
7. mailto:l.ryan@mdx.ac.uk
Michel Foucault's 1981 Louvain lecture series 'Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling' is a wonderfully insightful book. It provides a detailed examination of the role of truth-telling throughout antiquity and its development into a key stone of contemporary European juridical proceedings. Specifically, Foucault investigates, within the discourse of criminal law and criminal justice, the use of 'avowal' as a particular form of truth-telling; the process through which an individual identifies themselves as the criminal subject, rather than merely as the author of a crime. Foucault guides the reader through the history of truth-telling within society, how it is constructed and how it affects power, knowledge, and the subject. Using vivid historical, philosophical and literary examples, Foucault constructs a coherent genealogy of the subject (Brion and Bernard, 1981: 271), and how truth-telling aids individuals' development of a sense of self. The lectures are delivered with great zeal and open a window onto Foucault's own politicization, particularly his involvement with the French Maoist political party, Gauche Prolétarienne, during the early 1970s. In culmination the reader is provided with an impassioned analysis of "the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion or domination" (1981: 300).

The inaugural lecture (April 2, 1981) introduces the theme of avowal in the context of a doctor-patient relationship during the mid-nineteenth century. The French psychiatrist, Doctor Leuret, subjected his patient to a series of ice-cold showers in the interest of producing an avowal of madness. Foucault introduces two core issues with this case; firstly the antiquity of the truth-telling/purity duality, and secondly the notion that an avowal can only exist within a power relationship. The post-enlightenment rhetoric employed here is reminiscent of 'Discipline and Punish' (1975) and the panopticism of discipline, however by introducing the notion of the 'avowal' and the avowing sub-
ject, Foucault shows how power is created within discourses. The avowal acts as a tool for the admission of the untold and a submission to one’s superior (2014: 17). The inaugural lecture emphasises the role of the subject in their own domination, and how truth-telling in judicial and medical discourses leads to the construction of a distinct ‘self’ for the avowing subject. Avowal not only changes the reality of a given situation, it changes the understanding of oneself.

The first lecture (April 22, 1981) strengthens the argument for avowal as an altering force in professional power relationships. It uses the chariot race between Antilochus and Menelaus in Homer’s Iliad, to illustrate truth-telling as a social practice which modifies relations of power and institutional structures. Foucault interprets the race as a demonstration of truth; the competitors vary greatly in their ability and thus, in essence, it is not a fair race. Herein, it serves only as a dramatization of an order of truth that is predetermined by the gods. Alas, when Antilochus fails to slow down and allow Menelaus, the anticipated victor, to win, the truth is not revealed. To redress the unexpected altercation Antilochus must issue a truth statement; from a struggle (the *agon*), a judicial procedure is born. Nevertheless, Antilochus refuses to take the oath, as it would mean the *agon* would remain a dispute, and “transfer the agonistic structure from man to the gods” (2014: 41); from Menelaus to Zeus. In doing so, Antilochus enacts a quasi-avowal; he renounces the struggle rather than admits a fault to a judicial body. This subtle variation gives Foucault the opportunity to demonstrate how an avowal, and truth-telling more generally, do not need to be verbalised (as an admission of fault), but can be an action which allows the truth manifest itself. Applying the avowal to the competition detaches the concept from institutional discourses in such a way that clarifies the exact role and purpose of truth telling in society; a bridge between the subject and power (2014: 283).

The second lecture (April 28, 1981) brings in a new component. It reflects on Sophocles’s ‘Oedipus Rex’, to present evidence for the mechanism of recognition (*anagnorisis*) in truth-telling, that is, individual recognition; the emergence of truth in the subject, and chorus recognition; the emergence of the truth in citizens. Despite its historicity, one can draw strong correlations between Oedipus’s (subject) recognition, and the chorus’s (societal) recognition, to techniques employed by the mass media to invoke public opinion on issues including crime, culture, and politics. Indeed the value of lecture two is how it brings the theory into the contemporary; the ease with which parallels can be drawn validates a theory which could otherwise be accused of being obsolete.

The third (April 29), fourth (May 6), and fifth (May 13) lectures all concern the religiosity-avowal binary, and will therefore be discussed collectively. This section raises some fascinating questions about avowal as an expressive and symbolic manifestation of the self and how religion became juridified. These issues are situated firstly in early Christianity; Foucault identifies avowal as a means of penance after sinning to cleanse the soul. Similarly in the monastic cultures of the fourth and fifth centuries, individuals sought guidance and knowledge from a master, a sentiment clarified in the proverb “he who has no director- he who is not directed, falls like a dead leaf” (2014: 134). Thus, in both cases truth-telling about oneself became an indispensable condition for subjection to a relationship of power with another. Through the verbalization of the truth, one destroys oneself as a self, and projects oneself onto, and at, the mercy of another.

The sixth lecture (May 20, 1981) converges upon the increasing role of the avowal in judicial institutions after the twelfth century. Avowal became intricately linked to legal proof, and held the largest relative weight of any element of evidence in a case. Foucault alludes to the cementation of avowal within legal discourses during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It became an explicit tool in the regime of truth, and was employed as a means of getting the subject to recognise the principles and authority of penal law and sovereignty. To acknowledge the rule of the state is a prerequisite for acknowledging oneself as the subject of a criminal. Foucault uses rhetoric of avowal and truth-telling to cleanly identify the point at which criminal culpability and subjectivity became an integral part of criminal proceedings; the subject and their life were made accountable, and in turn, crime was made rational. Truth-telling facilitated the amalgamation of the archetypal, interpersonal *accusatory procedure* in law, and the sovereign, hermeneutic, *inquisitorial procedure*, from which the judge began to ask “Don’t just tell me what you did, without telling me, at the same time…who you are” (2014: 214).
To conclude, 'Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling' is truly a satisfying, and illuminating read and deserves all the praise it receives. As an orator Foucault is captivating; he draws upon unique historical examples to construct a theory that is rich in knowledge and has a breadth of study that does not fail to impress. A great sense of passion and enthusiasm emanates from the book, and at the heart of this, is the centrality with which Foucault places the subject. In doing so there is a considerable personal element to the lectures; one is invited into Foucault’s politicized, historical world view, whilst simultaneously one empathises with the plight of the avowing subject. One of its greatest strengths comes from its accessibility; the direct translation of Foucault’s vernacular speech opens up his theories in a way that transports the reader into the audience to which Foucault was speaking.

In his interview with André Berton, Foucault describes how “within human practices, there is a moment when, in one sense, what is obvious becomes muddied, the lights go out, evening comes, and...as a result, a new light is necessary” (2014: 244). This imagery encompasses the effect of ‘Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling’ on the historical role of truth-telling and its influence on the self. The lectures are a new light within the fields of critical philosophy, criminal law, and criminal justice.

Rosie Smith is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of York. Her research looks at ‘spectacular justice’ and challenges the Foucauldian panoptic privatisation theory of justice. She is interested primarily in crime, justice, media, and Foucauldian theory.


[...] Smith, Resensi Buku: “Jahat, mengatakan kebenaran ‘angin puyuh Imajinasi Sosiologis [...]”

international journal of social research methodology: ask the editors @ijsrm! december 1st at 11am (2015-11-04 12:00)

In my capacity as social media associate editor of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology, I’m arranging an ask the editors session on Twitter. It will take place on Tuesday 1st December, 11.00—12.00.

We’ll definitely have Ros Edwards and Christina Hughes. We’ll possibly have Malcolm Williams participating as well. We’ll use the hashtag #IJSRM for the discussion.

If you can’t be online at the date and time, e-mail me (mark AT markcarrigan.net) and I can ask the question on your behalf. Otherwise see you on December 1st!
Call for papers: The Archers in fact and fiction (2015-11-05 08:00)

Call for Papers

The Archers in fact and fiction: Academic analyses of life in rural Borsetshire

Cara Courage, University of Brighton, Nicola Headlam, University of Liverpool and Peter Matthews University of Stirling invite the submission of abstracts to a seminar to take place on 17th February 2016 at University of Liverpool in London, Finsbury Square.

The seminar intends to take an academic perspective on life in Ambridge and Borsetshire, with papers from across academic disciplines. Papers might include:

- A historical analysis of rural Britain as heard through Archers' storylines
- A cultural analysis of Archers’ fandom
- A sociological analysis of class dynamics in rural Britain through the lives of Archers’ characters
- A hydrology of the Am valley following the recent flooding events
- Elderly care provision in the rural setting
- Participatory and strategic planning in rural areas
- Rural and village economics, from the village store to agribusiness
- The statistical probability of no Ambridge residents listening to radio 4 at 2:00pm or 7:00pm

This list is not meant to be exclusive or exhaustive, but is meant to inspire you to think how your academic research can illuminate and explain life for the Archers and Ambridge. The day is intended to give academic fans of The Archers a platform to exercise their love of the programme and their subject area.

If you are a fellow Archers fan and academic please submit your abstract of 200 words to cara@caracourage.net, headlams@gmail.com and peter.matthews@stir.ac.uk by 16th November 2015.

Do sociologists work outside universities? (2015-11-06 08:00)

Nice post about possible career paths for sociologists by April Schuets, on [1]SociologyInFocus:

[2]Do sociologists work outside universities?

2. [http://sociologyinfocus.com/2015/10/do-sociologists-work-outside-of-universities/?hootPostID=935c7b8d7083431b79dbbc3b9b9941c8](http://sociologyinfocus.com/2015/10/do-sociologists-work-outside-of-universities/?hootPostID=935c7b8d7083431b79dbbc3b9b9941c8)
Professors in Poverty (2015-11-07 08:00)


IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/kbWFcqbefMs

2. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/kbWFcqbefMs](https://www.youtube.com/embed/kbWFcqbefMs)

CfP: Queer Partnering 2016 (2015-11-08 08:00)

QUEERING PARTNERING 2016 - CALL FOR PAPERS

Queering Partnering is the 1st International Conference stemming from the large ERC funded study INTIMATE: Citizenship, Care and Choice – The micro-politics of intimacy in Southern Europe ([1]www.ces.uc.pt/intimate). This year the Conference will focus on LGBT/queer partnering.

The ways in which people choose to be, or are constrained into being, coupled have been at the centre of public debates on intimate citizenship. From legal demands voiced by activists to the de/construction of love and relationality proposed by academics and the constant advancement and setbacks echoed by the media, never as strongly as today could we speak of diversity when it comes to partnering.
Faced with challenges advanced by non-heteronormative partners, the time has come to think critically about queer intimate relationships.

- How central is the idea of couple, and to what extent, and in what ways, is that idea being queered?
- What does the recognition of a relational orientation or relational diversity entail?
- Where do we see the resurgence of new normativities?
- What is absent, what is achieved?
- How are the processes of European/global precarization affecting LGBT partnerships?
- What is the role of LGBT and queer studies, often caught at the cross fire between mainstream academia and outraged collective actors?

Within the broader theme of LGBT and queer partnering, we encourage abstracts from academics and/or activists addressing one or more of the following issues:

- Media representations of LGBT/queer partnering
- Qualitative methods in researching LGBT/queer partnering
- Queering gender, bodies and sexual practices through LGBT/queer partnering
- Queering citizenship: legal frameworks and social policies in relation to LGBT/queer partnering
- Queering public sociology: activism and academia
- Relational diversity, non-monogamies and LGBT/queer partnering

We are committed to promoting interdisciplinary, intersectional, reciprocal knowledge production and sharing in academia and beyond. Therefore we are open to the submission of academic abstracts but also proposals stemming from artistic accounts and activists' reflexive contributions.

Due to logistic constraints, the work language during this conference will be English. The venue is accessible to wheelchair users.

Abstracts should not exceed 300 words and should be submitted through Submission Form.

Deadline: 30 November 2015

Notification of acceptance: 15 December 2015

Group of 56 scholars launches petition calling upon universities and academic professional associations to greatly reduce flying-related footprint as part of effort to cut greenhouse gas emissions

A group of 56 scholars from more than a dozen countries launched a petition today calling upon universities and academic professional organizations to greatly reduce their flying-related footprints as part of the effort to limit the destabilization of the climate system. The signatories represent a diverse set of academic disciplines—from psychology and medicine to sociology and philosophy—in addition to fields (e.g. environmental studies, geography, and earth science) normally associated with climate and other ecological concerns. One is also a former flight instructor and licensed commercial pilot, turned scholar of climate policy and ethics, who no longer flies for conferences and vacations.

Launched less than two months before the international climate negotiations open in Paris, the petition’s release comes on the heels of increased attention to climate change during the U.S. visit of Pope Francis in September. It also comes one week after a study published on October 12 in *Nature Geoscience* that foresees a doubling of surface melting of Antarctic ice shelves by 2050, and a significant risk, if high amounts of greenhouse gas emissions continue, of their collapse by century’s end, a development with potential implications for rising sea levels.

Such signs, and the fact that emissions are cumulative, are why signatories and climate scholars Kevin Anderson and Alice Bows-Larkin at the University of Manchester (U.K.) say that “radical and immediate emission reductions” are needed to avoid extremely dangerous levels of climate change. Professor John Wiseman, another signatory and Deputy Director of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute at the University of Melbourne (Australia) highlights the important leadership role which institutions of higher education can take in reducing emissions from aviation. "Universities and academic professional associations often embrace sustainability," he notes, "but they also tend to have very large carbon footprints—to a significant degree due to frequent flying by members of their academic communities."

Laurie Zoloth, a bioethicist and Professor of Religious Studies at Northwestern University (U.S.A.) as well as the former president of the American Academy of Religion (2014), contends that the changes demanded by the petition are matters of environmental justice. “They may seem trivial,” she says, but “they are cumulative, part of a world so clean and easy for people with wealth, so hard and dirty for the poor. It is a world in which the wealthiest have garnered the vast majority of wealth, burning the vast majority of carbon at the expense of the lives and the health of the poor.”

With moderate sacrifice, university-based faculty, administrators, and students can make large reductions in their total greenhouse gas emissions and, in the process, help bring about a more just and sustainable world. The petition makes some concrete suggestions on how to reduce flying as part of an effort to bring about a broad-ranging discussion within academic communities.

**Background:** Flying contributes significantly to global climate change. It is responsible for 2-3 % of annual global CO$_2$ emissions—about the same percentage that Germany and the city of Beijing, for example, contribute each year. Flying’s share of global emissions is growing steadily as the growth in total flying miles outstrips improvements in fuel and engine efficiency. Because flying releases various pollutants at high altitude, its detrimental impact is far greater than that caused by CO$_2$ emissions alone. One round-trip flight from New York City to London or San Francisco incurs a warming effect equivalent of more than two metric tons of carbon emissions per economy passenger—about 20 percent of the total annual emissions of a typical person in Finland, and more than 100 percent of those generated by an average person in India. For more information, please visit [www.flyingless.org](http://www.flyingless.org), or write
The challenge of sociological writing (2015-11-10 08:00)

In this event organised by [1]The Sociological Review’s Early Career Forum, a panel of accomplished writers with a long history of supporting younger scholars reflect on the challenges of sociological writing. Each participant will give a short talk, discussing a particular aspect of the challenge of writing, before the panel opens up for a general discussion with the audience. Building on the previous work by the journal in support of ECRs, there will be a particular focus upon the difficulties encountered in writing by early career scholars in the neoliberal academy, but also upon the pleasures and opportunities which writing offers.


Les Back – Start Writing and Keep Writing: Notes, Drafts, Proofs, Papers

Les Back is a Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. His main fields of interest are the sociology of racism, popular culture and city life. His work attempts to create a sensuous or live sociology committed to searching for new modes of sociological writing and representation. This approach is outlined in his most recent book “The Art of Listening” (Berg 2007). He also writes journalism and has made documentary films. In 2011 he published a free on-line book called Academic Diary ([3]http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/) that argues for the values of scholarship and teaching in the face of austerity and the attacks on the university. His research interests include sociology of youth, ethnography, political sociology, racism and right wing extremism, music, auditory and popular culture, race and social theory, photography and urban culture and the sociology of sport.

Inger Mewburn – Title TBC

I am a researcher, specialising in research education since 2006. Prior to this I lectured in architecture and worked in architecture offices for around a decade.
I am currently the Director of Research Training at The [4]Australian National University where I am responsible for **co-ordinating, communicating and measuring** all the centrally run research training activities and doing research on student experience to inform practice.

Aside from editing and contributing to the Thesis Whisperer, I write scholarly papers, books and book chapters about research student experiences. I am a regular guest speaker at other universities and do occasional media interviews. Some details of these other activities are below. For further information, view my [5]Linkedin Profile, contact me by email on inger@mewburn.net or visit my [6]Google Scholar page.

**Pat Thomson – Organising your writing**

Pat Thomson is Professor of Education in the School of Education, The University of Nottingham. Her research is centred primarily on how schools might change to be more engaging and meaningful for more children and young people. She mostly researches the arts, creativity and other kinds of experiential approaches in school and community settings, including galleries and museums. Much of this research has been conducted with her colleague Professor Christine Hall. She also has a long-term partnership with Tate Learning. She also works in researcher education and, together with Professor Barbara Kamler, researches and writes about the writing that scholars want to, and must, do.

WHEN Monday, December 7, 2015 from 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM (GMT) – [7]Add to Calendar

3. [http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/](http://www.academic-diary.co.uk/)
5. [http://www.linkedin.com/in/ingermewburn](http://www.linkedin.com/in/ingermewburn)

**Algorithmic Interventions Against Asylum Seekers (2015-11-11 08:00)**

Thanks to [1]Peter Holley for sharing this with me. The Finnish Foreign Ministry has[2]launched a “don’t come” Facebook campaign in Iraq and Turkey:
The thrust of the Ministry’s Facebook campaign is to persuade young men coming from conflict-ridden areas that it’s not work the risk and expense to come to Finland, said Finns Party MP Sampo Terho.

“This realistic message about the possibility of receiving asylum status in Finland is in the best interests of Finland as well as those who are planning the journey. If it’s practically a sure bet that you will be repatriated, why then would you waste up to 10,000 euros on the trip?” Terho queried.

According to the Finns Party parliamentary group the campaign has been rolled out in Arabic and is directed at young men planning to travel to Finland to seek refuge. The Foreign Ministry said Friday morning that the Facebook update had received close to 80,000 views.

Terho, who is the head of the Finns Party parliamentary group, said that the aim of the campaign is to try to curb the so-far “uncontrolled” influx of people.


It makes the British Home Office’s ‘Go Home’ van seem remarkably low tech in comparison:

×


Given what seems likely to be a hardening climate of opinion across Europe, it strikes me that some disturbing examples of digital authoritarianism might be enacted, in a register of exceptionalism, normalising their potential wider application in the future. As Peter observed to me, it’s the use of the capacity for modelling built into the Facebook platform that’s really interesting here: the efficacy of the intervention rests upon a claimed capacity to identify and engage with “young men planning to travel to Finland to seek refuge”. How might this same ambition manifest itself domestically?

1. https://twitter.com/thePeterHolley
The coding skills bubble (2015-11-12 08:00)

As we enter the second machine age, it’s easy to assume that coding skills will be in ever increasing demand. But this TechCrunch feature suggests both that the skills shortage will likely prove fleeting, due to the impending automation of much coding, as well as that bullshit abounds in schemes which aim to address the contemporary shortfall:

It’s an ingenious business model. There’s a dearth of skilled coders in the marketplace to fill the five million computing jobs available in this country. For somewhere between free and $36,000, you learn to program computers in less than a year. If you’re one of the lucky few, you will hit your aha moment with programming and develop a personal passion for it, as well land a real job.

In 15 years, those hard-won skills will be obsolete — if they ever stuck in the first place. Despite their promises, coding academies don’t manufacture coders. They cast wide nets to discover new talent that has not yet been exposed to code. Most people don’t find coding enthralling or interesting enough to continue to pursue it as a career. Given the changing nature of software, they probably shouldn’t.

I see coding shrinking as a widespread profession. Not because software is going away, but because the way we build software will fundamentally change. Technology for software creation without code is already edging toward mainstream use. Visual content creation tools such as Scratch, DWNLD and Telerik will continue to improve until all functionality required to build apps is available to consumers — without having to write a line of code.

Who needs to code when you can use visual building blocks or even plain English to describe intent? Advances in natural-language processing and conceptual modeling will remove the need for traditional coding from app development. Software development tools will soon understand what you mean versus what you say. Even small advances in disambiguating intent will pay huge dividends. The seeds are already planted, from the OpenCog project to NLTK natural-language processing to MIT’s proof that you can order around a computer in your human language instead of code.

Granted, the author has a vested interest as the developer of one of these automation tools. But he makes an interesting point about the growth of what might be conceived as a coding skills bubble, with 175 percent growth in US academies between 2013-14 and an estimated $2.2 million revenue per school. There’s a lot of money to be made here, with a growing stream of people gravitating towards one of the few occupations popularly understood to be entering a boom time. But those willing and able to make money from providing such an education are disproportionally able to shape public perceptions of coding as an occupation, as well as having an obvious financial incentive to do so. Why entertain challenging questions about the future of coding as an occupation when there’s so much money to be made now?

The way myths about coding spread seems strikingly similar to other spheres of the digital economy. The TechCrunch author has a wonderfully succinct phrase: publicize successful outliers to propagate the illusion. The visibility of those who have ‘made it’, who are living the dream and doing what they love, licenses commitment and investment by a much greater cohort who have no prospect of doing so. Sound familiar? I’d love to explore this more rigorously at a later date, because the prospect of a homologous opportunity structure between coding and much of
the creative industries is a fascinating hypothesis. Now what about data science? Is there an equivalent data science bubble developing?

4. https://scratch.mit.edu/
5. https://dwnld.me/
7. https://github.com/opencog

mark johnson (2015-11-17 18:49:27)
A lot of confusion about this. The mentality to skilfully exploit automated coding systems is very similar to that of writing any kind of code. It's still Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance or Winograd and Flores's wonderful Understanding Computers and Cognition. It's dealing with breakdown, modelling behaviour, exploring possibilities, playing... entanglements. If there's now a loss of faith it's because the "dead hand of education" manages not to address the things that matter about coding. And teachers who are forced to teach it will do so monotonously or rigidly and be terrible models for students. There is a pedagogical deficit.

Call For Papers: Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies (2015-11-13 08:00)

Call for papers: Themed Issue

Qualitative Methods and Data in Digital Societies

Qualitative Research [html: [1]http://qrj.sagepub.com %5D

Edited by William Housley (Cardiff University), Bella Dicks (Cardiff University) and Karen Henwood (Cardiff University).

The explosion of digital social data in recent years has required a response from both the social science and computational science communities. This has been framed as an attempt to move beyond the coming crisis of empirical sociology (Savage and Burrows, 2007, 2009; Edwards et al., 2013; Housley et al., 2014). The opportunities and challenges for social science from this 'data deluge' are wide ranging and a spectrum of thinking is emerging across the community that includes enthusiasts, skeptics and those with deep reservations. Yet, the rise of digital data and the claims being made for it also rest on human practices and social life in multiple ways (Dicks, 2012; Smith, 2014). Consequently, Qualitative Research is central to understanding how digital data is accomplished, lived and analysed.

This themed issue invites contributions that address the role of Qualitative Methods in responding, challenging and contributing to the reflexive interrogation and scoping of data in digital societies at situated, networked and system levels. The advent of Web 2.0, the open data movement and the rhetoric of 'Big Social Data' have opened up
opportunities to analyse big qualitative data streams, such as those associated with social media, in ways that are not yet fully understood; new digital data developments include those associated with the emerging contours of the ‘Quantified Self’ movement and the navigation of health metrics through the use of body proxemic technology giving rise to forms of life characterised by data responsibilisation and self-analytics.

The themed issue will invite papers that report on these and associated developments. Topics of interest include:

- Ethnographic studies of interdisciplinary collaboration in the area of digital data analysis, digital tool development, platform development and the associated context(s) of occupational identities and expertise.

- The Qualitative dimensions and issues surrounding coding and annotation practices through new methods such as crowdsourcing techniques and citizen social science. Qualitative studies of the social life of methods in the digital era and the observation of ‘naturally occurring’ data generation practices that make use of new networked technologies in the pursuit of self-management and performance. This might also include studies that demonstrate how digital actors reflexively navigate data streams in ways that are nuanced and complex and not akin to being a ‘cultural dope 2.0’.

- The interaction order in the digital age; the ‘Self’, identity and digital data.

- Methodographic studies of the design and use of algorithms in digital tool development and data harvesting, the examination of code and machine learning as an accomplishment and artefact, the social organisation of statistics and modelling, the examination of demographic proxies in social media analytics and issues surrounding inference and evidence within the Big Social Data imaginary.

- The relationship between 'small' and 'big' social data. Innovations in the Qualitative analysis of Big Text data and social media streams.

- The ethical dimensions and politics of data in the digital age. Data inequalities: gender, race, class and the accomplishment of data.

References


Call for Papers: Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference (2015-11-14 08:00)

BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group

Annual Conference 2016 – Call for Papers

The theme for the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference 2016 is ‘Construction and disruption: The power of religion in the public sphere’.

The purpose of the conference is to examine these and other characteristics of contemporary religion in order to achieve a greater understanding of its constructive and disruptive impact in the public sphere. What are the key categories, discourses, contexts and institutions through which this question can be explored? How do practitioners navigate these characteristics?

The conference welcomes a wide range of topics relating to religion in society and hopes to encourage a space where different faith perspectives can come together.

For more information about the conference and how to submit your paper please click [1]HERE

Methods for Studying Creativity: Ahead of the Curve (2015-11-15 08:00)

Researhing creativity, collaboration and co-ordination requires methods that span disciplinary, quantitative and qualitative, and textual, visual and aural boundaries. Michael Schober (New School, New York), Carey Jewitt (UCL Institute of Education) and Matthew Purver (Queen Mary University of London) discuss and demonstrate developing methods for studying creativity creatively.

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2. [mailto:JonesA7@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:JonesA7@cardiff.ac.uk)
MICHAEL SCHOBER: Creativity in joint musical improvisation
Musical improvisation is a prototypically creative act, not only in obvious cases of "spontaneous composition" in free jazz but even in classical chamber musicians' improvisatory adjustments to each other's gestures in performances of notated music. This presentation focuses on two sets of studies as examples of methods for studying what happens in joint musical improvisation, where performers' improvisations constrain and are constrained by the actions of the other performers. One experiment analyzes millisecond-level synchronization and blind-juror ratings of the playing of 30 pairs of jazz pianists and saxophonists as they played a specially-composed piece (with notated and improvised sections) face-to-face, via remote video, and via remote audio. Another set of case studies uses a retrospective think-aloud method to examine how performing pairs in free jazz, be-bop, and classical chamber music individually characterize—immediately after performing—what just happened, e.g., their partner's intentions, what worked and what didn't. These studies then quantitatively examine the extent to which performers' characterizations overlap, and the extent to which performers endorse (on Likert-type scales) their partner's interpretations any more than interpretations by an outside listener.

Michael Schober is Professor of Psychology and Associate Provost for Research at The New School in New York City

CAREY JEWITT: Methodological innovation: the digital body and the sensory
I will use case studies from the MIDAS project, which explored methodological innovation across the social science and the arts with a focus on the body in digital environments. Drawing on the MIDAS case studies, I will discuss the potential synergies for social science generated by engaging with arts-based methods from fashion, performance and design. One aspect of this is how researchers might be able to identify and exploit the different ways in which the social sciences and the arts case studies zone and fragment the digital body, bring the sensory into view, and create different trajectories and boundaries between the physical and the digital-physical when they research the body. Carey Jewitt is Professor of Technology and Learning at the UCL Institute of Education.

MATTHEW PURVER: Studying Creativity via Computational Modelling
One way to investigate creativity is to build artificial agents which might be capable of creative output – perhaps basing them on theories of human cognition and creativity – and see how well they work. This talk will describe recent and ongoing work on a range of projects in the Computational Creativity Lab at Queen Mary University of London, explain how they relate to general models of human cognition, and discuss what insights they can give us. We will examine general statistical models of sequential and hierarchical learning, discuss how they can be connected to higher-level conceptual structures, and show how they can be applied to model language and music while generating interesting, novel outputs. Matthew Purver is Reader in Computational Linguistics at Queen Mary University of London

Agenda:
1.30 Registration and tea/coffee
2.00 Event starts - Chair and introduction by Patrick Sturgis
2.15 Michael Schober - paper 25 minutes, 10 minutes questions
2.50 Carey Jewitt - paper 25 minutes, 10 minutes questions
3.25 Tea/coffee
4.00 Matt Purver - paper 25 minutes, 10 minutes questions
4.35 Discussion between speakers and participants
5.00 Close

Everyday Life in Salford (2015-11-16 08:00)


I am pleased to present the book of Everyday Life in Salford. Through this project, we have supported six people to be able to represent their own lives through photography, storytelling and info-graphics. The participants in the project and authors of the book - the two Janes, Christine, Glyn, Beth and Letitia - all have powerful individual stories to tell, which also document current issues in our society. It has been a humbling, inspiring and emotional project to be part of.

Each participant took photographs that reflected their sources of everyday support and also issues that caused them struggles or anxieties, and then shared the story behind their photographs in a supportive environment. As one participant said: “By just taking pictures that mean something to you, a meaningful story emerges”. Through these stories, we also considered shared themes and how these related to wider social issues that affected the whole community. In addition to this, the public policies that affected people's everyday lives were identified and the group came up with ideas on how to represent these through infographics co-produced with our graphic designer [4]Dan Farley. It has been a positive experience for everyone involved; Jane Fearns, who tragically lost her son last year, has said how the project has provided “a reason to get dressed and go out” while Glyn noted that “sometimes you only look at the negatives and don't see the positives, but by going out and taking these pictures it reminds you of what’s good about your life”.

Public policy, the media and social science research can often reduce the complexity and individuality of people in order to make sense of our society – but this can lead to negative stereotypes that are rooted in misrepresentation and untruths. It can also neglect the context in which people are living in, individualising blame for the effect of structural inequalities and ignoring the particular life-histories of people. The worst results of this can be the stigmatisation of working class communities and unjust social policies that seem to largely gain public consent.


4. http://www.danfarleydesign.co.uk/
Four days left to register for the accelerated academy! deadline nov 20th (2015-11-16 16:14)

Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life
2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (Vila Lanna)

Organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and supported by the Strategy AV21.

[1]Register here

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are
conspicuous in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars’ complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – *Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded*

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published *Ancient Cultures of Conceit* – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – *The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public*

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.

Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – *Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university*
One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contributions was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived/in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015. In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshapes and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.

1. http://accelerated.academy/?page_id=70
Social media for academics: available for pre-order! (2015-11-17 08:00)

Available for pre-order now! See [1]here for the cheapest place to buy it online, as well as table of contents & summary.

Streams of Consciousness: Data, Cognition and Intelligent Devices (2015-11-19 07:39)

Streams of Consciousness: Data, Cognition and Intelligent Devices


21st and 22nd of April 2016 Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies University of Warwick "What's on your mind?" This is the question to which every Facebook status update now responds. Millions of users sharing their thoughts in one giant performance of what Clay Shirky once called “cognitive surplus”. Contemporary media platforms aren’t simply a stage for this cognitive performance. They are more like directors, staging scenes, tweaking scripts, working to get the best or fully "optimized" performance. As Katherine Hayles has pointed out, media theory...
has long taken for granted that we think "through, with and alongside media". Pen and paper, the abacus, and modern calculators are obvious cases in point, but the list quickly expands and with it longstanding conceptions of the Cartesian mind dissolve away. Within the cognitive sciences, cognition is now routinely described as embodied, extended, and distributed. They too recognize that cognition takes place beyond the brain, in between people, between people and things, and combinations thereof. The varieties of specifically human thought, from decision-making to reasoning and interpretation, are now considered one part of a broader cognitive spectrum shared with other animals, systems, and intelligent devices. Today, the technology we mostly think through, with and alongside are computers. We routinely rely on intelligent devices for any number of operations, but this is no straightforward "augmentation". Our cognitive capacities are equally instrumentalized, plugged into larger cognitive operations from which we have little autonomy. Our cognitive weaknesses are exploited and manipulated by techniques drawn from behavioural economics and psychology. If Vannevar Bush once pondered how we would think in the future, he received a partial response in Steve Krug’s best selling book on web usability: Don’t Make Me Think! Streams of Consciousness aims to explore cognition, broadly conceived, in an age of intelligent devices. We aim to critically interrogate our contemporary infatuation with specific cognitive qualities – such as "smartness" and "intelligence" – while seeking to genuinely understand the specific forms of cognition that are privileged in our current technological milieu. We are especially interested in devices that mediate access to otherwise imperceptible forms of data (too big, too fast), so it can be acted upon in routine or novel ways. Topics of the conference include but are not limited to: - data and cognition - decision-making technologies - algorithms, AI and machine learning - visualization, perception - sense and sensation - business intelligence and data exploration - signal intelligence and drones - smart and dumb things - choice and decision architecture - behavioural economics and design - technologies of nudging - interfaces - bodies, data, and (wearable) devices - optimization - web and data analytics (including A/B and multivariate testing)

Confirmed Speakers: LOUISE AMOORE, JAMES ASH, DAVID BERRY, WILLIAM DAVIES, MICHAEL DIETER, STEVE FULLER, JENNIFER GABRY, ANTOINETTE ROUVROY, NATASHA SCHÜLL, NICK SRNICEK, NIGEL THRIFT, MICHAEL WHEELER.

Please submit individual abstracts of no longer than 300 words. Panel proposals are also welcome and should also be 300 words. Panel proposals should also include individual abstracts. The deadline for submissions is Friday the 18th of December and submissions should be made to cimconf@warwick.ac.uk. Accepted submissions will be notified by 20th of January 2016.

1. [http://warwick.ac.uk/streamsofconsciousness](http://warwick.ac.uk/streamsofconsciousness)
2. [mailto:cimconf@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:cimconf@warwick.ac.uk)

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Flawed cosmopolitanisms of being human: mediation and worldmaking in media discourses of terrorism (2015-11-19 07:43)

by Rodanthi Tzanelli

There is little to say about the Paris attacks that does not touch upon the phantom of the so-called War on Terror. What has been produced in journalistic and intellectual cycles certainly concurs on one thing: invisible violence of this sort challenges the tired cosmopolitan declaration of human togetherness, as it is based on de facto nihilistic actions of self-obliteration in the name of community values. There is much truth in Vijay Prashad’s recent discussion of the ways especially Western leadership has espoused a macho language about "pitiless war" to reinforce its national and global role. Far from peace-making, this role obeys to a global gender order that fits nationalist militarist discourse into a globalised civilising process, presenting social (gender) as cultural (East vs. West, North vs. South, developed vs. underdeveloped) hierarchies.

But it all functions at the level of metaphor to do the job of politics: men rule and those conforming to other
gender or sexual conventions follow. How much does this reveal about the pillars of the present ideological work in leadership headquarters – and how are we to think about the agential basis of this civilising language? What are the consequences of such discourse for the maintenance of our already frail cosmopolitan togetherness? I think it all boils down to an economy of violence. By this I do not refer to classical economics but to the reduction of supposed universal givens, such as the right to be recognised as a human being (as well as the responsibility to recognise others as humans and the intermittently stressed these days norms that regulate our rights and responsibilities in this type of recognition and self-recognition). The economy of violence after the France events is fixated upon measuring one’s humanity against a stabilised (by Western civilisation) factor: the ability to circulate and enable circulations of habitus across markets, phantasmagoric industries and pleasure business.

I do recall here Steve Fuller’s observation on the economic rationale of being human. He starts by distinguishing between the expressions ‘Humanity comes at a price’ and ‘Humanity comes at a cost’. He notes: [2] ‘The first phrase suggests what you need to pay your master to acquire freedom, while the second suggests what you need to suffer as you exercise your freedom’. Though using this to reflect on the role of artificial intelligence in contemporary articulations of the human, his notes have far broader implications and implementations in the context of the Paris attacks. If anything, they suggest that masters do not go invisible in global events whereas the unfree have to suffer publically to be acknowledged and noticed by others. It is only then – and only when the slave achieves representation as sufferer, a dispossessed, an ‘acted upon’ object – that they enter the visible fields of the media as human. Bombers and shooters remain invisible in this respect in an ever more mediatised world in the sense that their motivations and actions do not obey to the economy of violence but inverse roles for a while, by humiliating masters on the global stage.

But first things first: if not carefully unpacked, the rationale of ‘costing’ and ‘pricing’ is in danger of mistaking a cultural recurrence in world societies as an economic activity divested of its utopian origins (reciprocal giving). At the same time, Fuller’s elaboration on costing reproduces Prasad’s argument that nihilist violence of the Paris type tends to mutate and spread like a virus to victimised societies at the level of leadership. If the ISIS terrorist perceives of himself – notably, rarely herself – as a victimised slave regaining self-respect through the ultimate heroic act (self-sacrifice), Western leadership feels that it has to reassert their master place on the world stage by discursive means. Such self-presentational games are characterised by an intersubjective perversion not that dissimilar to those explored by Hegelians such as Alexander Kojève and, more recently, Axel Honneth. They also seem to obey to other processes involving the transvaluation of values within societal formations in which terrorist enclaves originate. But again, they speak of a dramaturgical platform on which roles, duties and resentments are discharged without questioning how their cosmological foundations are laid and how audiences come to accept and finance the ‘play’.

It is here that the notion of the human meets the cultural principles of markets proper, turning the economy of violence into the maiden of capitalism. Note that, as an extension of Fuller’s essay, my understanding of ‘markets’ encompasses ideas of genealogical debts to civilisation and civility – two concepts irrevocably connected to Western and European histories of being human. Such debts refer to our responsibility to maintain and reproduce the pillars of our Western civilisation, which were laid on violence exercised upon racialize others to support ideals of compassion, belonging, equality and fraternity (paradoxically and perversely in the case of an ex-colonial power and current European and world player, France). If this sounds too irrelevant to the Paris events at first, I invite readers to reconsider the power of markets - especially media markets - in producing particular world pictures and hence notions of humanity. While we all mourn the dead of Bataclan – [3] note how a pair of abandoned shoes outside the theatre signifies in Instagram the absence of humans in the violent site - a dear Japanese friend posted on Facebook a shocking statistical chart from the Global Terrorism Index indicating that in 2013 about 80[4] % of terrorist deaths took place in 2013 in 5 countries, none of which located in the Western hemisphere.

These statistics are more elusive in mainstream global media platforms, allowing (by omission) a message to dominate our fully network homes: the West has the only victims worthy of mourning in minute-long silences and annual commemorations; outside its imagined solidarity terrain there are animals and beings that refuse to join the
civilised world of humans. I do not wish to endorse violence of this or any other sort as a response to Western violence, only to highlight how the good old reciprocal cycle (of human recognition) now turns into an accelerating cycle of human self-destruction. Not only does the message reproduce the brutal bipolar logic of the World on Terror, it also promotes it to a worldmaking monologue: an axiomatic picture about foreign realms of being (the lands and heritage domains from which terrorist come, as if there is no home-grown Western terror) managed by global media conglomerates that make de-make or re-make whole populations, destinations and heritages that share little with the perpetrators of terrorist acts (save possibly nationality). Western worldmaking is not always evil in its intentions, but it tends to follow the economy of violence by default: we tend to forget that terrorism does not affect only Western European domains, where civilised mobilities of business, tourism and media flows happen, as there is little to talk about outside them. Who would 'buy into' such unpopular calls anyway? And our world picture remains unchanged and unchallenged until the next bombing tailors a bit more the notion of human existence to our Western, European and civilised measures.

Rodanthi Tzanelli is Associate Professor of Cultural Sociology at the University of Leeds. She works on globalisation with an emphasis on tourism, digital mobilities cultural industries and transformations of collective memory in post-national environments.

1. https://www.opendemocracy.net/vijay-prashad/we-are-in-pitiless-times
3. https://instagram.com/p/-D0JczsoLK/

Register for the accelerated academy (2015-11-19 08:00)

Power, Acceleration and Metrics in Academic Life
2nd-4th December 2015, Prague (Vila Lanna)

Organised by the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences and supported by the Strategy AV21.


[2]Powered by Eventbrite

There is little doubt that science and knowledge production are presently undergoing dramatic and multi-layered
transformations accompanied by new imperatives reflecting broader socio-economic and technological developments. The unprecedented proliferation of audit cultures preoccupied with digitally mediated measurement, quantification of scholarship and the consolidation of business-driven managerialism and governance modes are commonplace in the contemporary academy. Concurrently, the ever-increasing rate of institutional change, (the need for) intensification of scientific and scholarly production/communication and diverse academic processes seem to characterize the overall acceleration of academic life. Quantification and metrics have emerged not only as navigating instruments paradoxically exacerbating the general dynamization of academic life but also as barely questioned proxies for scientific quality, career progression and job prospects, and as parameters redrawing what it means to be/work as a scholar nowadays. Metrification now seems to be an important interface between labour and surveillance within academic life, with manifold affective implications.

This three-day conference investigates the techniques of auditing and their attendant practices and effects and will also probe into scholars' complicity in reproduction of such practices. It will consider processes of social acceleration within the academy and their implications for the management of everyday activity by those working within it. This will include:

- empirical and theoretical engagements with the acceleration of higher education
- the origins of metrification of higher education
- metrification as a form of social control
- the challenges of self-management posed by metrification and/or acceleration
- common strategic responses to these challenges
- the relationship between metrification and acceleration
- how metrification and acceleration relate to a broader social crisis

Keynote Speakers

Roger Burrows (Goldsmiths, University of London) – Ancient Cultures of Conceit Reloaded

In 1990 the sociologist Ian Carter published Ancient Cultures of Conceit – a brilliant analysis of campus fiction. It provides a wonderful rendering of a world we have lost – a world where academic life was slower paced and where spreadsheets, metrics, business plans and impact agendas were largely unknown. This paper attempts to carry forward Carter’s analysis over the last 25 years examining more recent examples of the campus fiction genre but also including fictional representations of campus life to be found on social media.

Philip Moriarty (University of Nottingham) – The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public

There are major deficiencies in traditional peer review. Not only can clearly flawed papers easily pass ‘scrutiny’ with flying colours, but the idea that a study is accepted into the scientific literature on the basis of a handful – or, not infrequently, one – set of anonymous reviewer comments seems quaint and archaic in a Twitter-, blogosphere-, and BuzzFeed-enabled world. Post-publication peer review, enabled by sites such as PubPeer, is an exceptionally important tool for online critique, analysis, and scrutiny of published papers. For the next generation of researchers, PPPR will almost certainly be de rigueur. Before we get to that point, however, there are quite a number of teething problems that need to be addressed. These include, in particular, the key issue of the role of anonymity and moderation in online commentary.
Susan Robertson (University of Bristol) – Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university

One of Henri Lefebvre’s great intellectual contributions was not only how we think about the spatiality and temporality of social life but that lived-in spaces and their social relations are the outcome of ongoing cultural, political and economic projects and their dynamics. In this lecture I explore the changing nature of the contemporary university, and the ways in which recalibrations of time and space are also simultaneously the medium, object, and outcome of these projects and dynamics. I invoke the idea of ‘vertigo’ – the sensation of the world moving, and profound anxieties about the potential for a loss of height – as a way of exploring the complex ways in which governing the university through temporal and spatial strategies mediates the ongoing experiences of living, learning, and working, in the university.

James Wilsdon (University of Sussex) – The Metric Tide: Reflections on the UK’s Independent Review of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management

There are powerful currents whipping up the metric tide. These include growing pressures for audit and evaluation of public spending on higher education and research; demands by policymakers for more strategic intelligence on research quality and impact; the need for institutions to manage and develop their strategies for research; competition within and between institutions for prestige, students, staff and resources; and increases in the availability of real-time ‘big data’ on research uptake, and the capacity of tools for analysing it. Citations, journal impact factors, H-indices, even tweets and Facebook likes – there are no end of quantitative measures that can now be used to assess the quality and wider impacts of research. But how robust and reliable are such indicators, and what weight – if any – should we give them in the management of the UK’s research system? Over the past year, the UK’s Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management has looked in detail at these questions. The review has explored the use of metrics across the full range of academic disciplines, and assessed their potential contribution to processes of research assessment like the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It has looked at how universities themselves use metrics, at the rise of league tables and rankings, at the relationship between metrics and issues of equality and diversity, and at the potential for ‘gaming’ that can arise from the use of particular indicators in the funding system. The review’s final report, The Metric Tide, was published on 9 July 2015.

In his talk, James Wilsdon will reflect on the review process, outline its main findings, and consider the opportunities and obstacles to more responsible uses of metrics in the research system.

Oili-Helena Ylijoki (University of Tampere) – ‘Projectification’ and conflicting time orders in academic knowledge production

Under the current conditions of academic capitalism and market-driven managerialism, university research is increasingly conducted in large projects on external, competitive funding from various national and international sources. The project format offers a fixed-term, fast and flexible organizational mode which fits together with constantly changing needs of the turbulent university environment. This paper argues that the ‘projectification’ of science creates a special project time which stands in conflict with process time. Project time, embedded in standardized and abstract clock time, is decontextualized, linear, cumulative and predictable, entailing a strictly defined timeframe with a fixed beginning and end. This is in a sharp contrast with nonlinear, context-dependent and unpredictable process time involving unforeseen periods of standstill, deceleration and acceleration. Furthermore, project time includes 1) commodification of time by translating research process into money, 2) control of time by dividing research into beforehand determined phases in which accountability of the use of time is required, 3) compression of time by speeding up research productivity, and 4) colonization of time by subordinating alternative temporalities in research. The paper discusses how the intensification of project time reshares and remoulds research practices and academic subjectivity, and what possibilities for alternative temporalities can be created and sustained at the accelerated academy. This is done by distinguishing temporal dilemmas and ways to live with them: long-term commitment vs. short-term funding; fast pace vs. slow thinking; time efficiency vs. wasting time; linear career time vs. circular project rat race; and work time vs. existential time.
Digital capitalism and the form of social science it encourages (2015-11-20 08:00)

I’ve published a [1]great piece on The Sociological Review blog, by Sage’s Ziyad Marar, which really resonates with some of the concerns shaping my new project:

Yet our digital culture may exacerbate this problem by tilting us even further toward speed, simplicity and utility. In what is often called the ‘attention economy’ (where information overload makes attention the scarce resource) there is a clear need to filter our consumption efficiently, therefore inviting the twin enticements of automation and aggregation. The hope is that we can navigate the suffusion of information by using big data, algorithms and metrics of many types and thereby cope with the tidal wave of knowledge without drowning.

But this trend favours certain types of information, the more standardised the better, and relies on a metaphor of knowledge as a process of discovery, yielding up simple enough nuggets that will be grist to the mill of aggregation. This is all very well for simpler, tamer problems that are commonly dealt with by physical and natural science. When it comes to messier and more ‘wicked’ problems, which are to a larger extent the focus of social science and the humanities, interpretation is often a more apt mode of enquiry. And the results are usually more ambivalent and need careful digestion and patience and need to be assessed with a multi-dimensional framing


Later on this year, I’m planning a short piece, building on the question of digital capitalism and the form of social science it encourages, discussing digital capitalism and the form of social science it needs. We’re seeing the emergence of a potentially dominant approach to digital social science which contributes to the systematic mystification of the political economy of digital capitalism.


A short film about the presentation of self in everyday life (2015-11-21 08:00)

Thanks to Les Back for linking to this short film about the presentation of self in everyday life:
The first gold rush of digital capitalism (2015-11-22 08:00)

From *Elon Musk*, by Ashlee Vance, pg 10-11. I think this understates the degree to which 'playing hard' was driven by a potent mix of fear and aspiration. But it’s a nice overview of circumstances which intruige me:

And, in 2000, San Francisco had been over- taken by the boom of all booms and consumed by avarice. It was a wonderful time to be alive with just about the entire populace giving in to a fantasy— a get- rich- quick, Internet madness. The pulses of energy from this shared delusion were palpable, producing a constant buzz that vibrated across the city. And here I was in the center of the most depraved part of San Francisco, watching just how high and low people get when consumed by excess. Stories tracking the insanity of business in these times are well- known. You no longer had to make something that other people wanted to buy in order to start a booming company. You just had to have an idea for some sort of Internet thing and announce it to the world in order for eager investors to fund your thought experiment. The whole goal was to make as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time because everyone knew on at least a subconscious level that reality had to set in eventually.

Valley denizens took very literally the cliché of working as hard as you play. People in their twenties, thirties, forties, and fifties were expected to pull all- nighters. Cubicles were turned into temporary
homes, and personal hygiene was abandoned. Oddly enough, making Nothing appear to be Something took a lot of work. But when the time to decompress arrived, there were plenty of options for total debauchery. The hot companies and media powers of the time seemed locked in a struggle to outdo each other with ever-fancier parties. Old-line companies trying to look “with it” would regularly buy space at a concert venue and then order up some dancers, acrobats, open bars, and the Barenaked Ladies. Young technologists would show up to pound their free Jack and Cokes and snort their cocaine in porta-potties. Greed and self-interest were the only things that made any sense back then.

The idea I’m playing with is that a certain culture developed in this febrile atmosphere, before eventually becoming relatively autonomous from it through the mediation of tech books, magazines and blogs, as well as the diffusion of people into other aspiring tech hubs. The culture has become more extreme since then, while also becoming detached from the state of exceptionalism which initially licensed these extremes.

One week left! The @ijsrm seminar competition (2015-11-23 08:00)

The Board of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology (IJSRM) is pleased to announce the launch of our new Seminar Competition. Our aim is to support the development of critical and innovative approaches to on-going and emerging methodological debates across a range of approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, and including mixed and comparative methods, as these relate to philosophical, theoretical, ethical, political and practice issues. Seminars may consist of single or multiple day events. Topics can include any area of social research methodology.

Available funding £1500

Guidelines for Applicants

We are seeking proposals that are concerned with debate and critical development of original cutting edge work of methodological significance. Seminars may bring together established and new researchers. They should be collaborative in approach across different institutions and disciplines and may include colleagues from relevant, non-HE, organisations. Proposals should have clear goals and outcomes with evident concern to the methodological contribution of the Seminar. In addition, a core purpose of the Seminar series is to engage with, and contribute to the development of an international community of social researchers. Accordingly, proposers may consider how their events can be recorded for non-participants and posted on the IJSRM multimedia site. Proposers should also consider including the production of new papers for potential publication in IJSRM. Such papers will be subject to the normal review procedures of IJSRM with no guarantee of publication.

Format

We are open to suggestions for format either in the form of a single day seminar or in the form of multiple days across the year 2016. It is expected that the funding will be used towards meeting the cost of room and equipment hire, hospitality, consumables and travel for speakers. It is expected that there are no costs for delegate attendance.
How to Apply

Further details and an application form can be obtained from Alice Edwards, Journal Administrator, tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk.

Closing date for applications: 30 November 2015

Assessment Criteria

All submissions will be reviewed by a Committee drawn from the Board of IJSRM and will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Contribution to the development of methodological innovation and debate;
- Relevance to the aims and scope of IJSRM;
- Projected outputs and impact;
- Value for Money

Notes

- All successful seminars will have a named Principal Organiser and named Co-Organiser. The Principal Organiser will be responsible for all promotion and management of the programme of work, including arrangements for the venue, rooms, facilities, dealing with expense forms, submitting claim forms for event costs to IJSRM.
- Travel, at standard return rail fare rates and reasonable subsistence for speakers is permissible. Fees will not be paid to speakers.
- Delegates will not be paid expenses for attendance.
- The events will be promoted by the Principal Organiser and co-organisers through their research networks, institutions and departments. All communications with participants and publicity of events will acknowledge sponsorship by the International Journal of Social Research Methodology.
- Further promotion will be undertaken by Taylor & Francis as appropriate.
How come – at least in the UK – you don’t come across people working in industry, business, the civil service, or pretty much anywhere outside academia or independent research organisations, who have ‘sociologist’ in their job title? Sociologists seem to all reside in universities, unlike psychologists and economists, who have colonised all kinds of settings. There just don’t seem to be any practical sociology jobs out there.

And yet most sociologists believe our subject is essential for understanding the world around us. Or to resolve contemporary problems, from gender violence to climate change. We have the concepts (like ‘cultural capital’ or ‘moral panic’) and the theories (social mobility, socialisation). But where are the practical sociology jobs? Why do so few of those ideas in the sociology journals get applied on a daily basis?

Of course, sociology graduates work in all kinds of jobs, using their knowledge to greater or lesser extent. And some do make a living as independent ‘consulting sociologists’. In the US, people have jobs as ‘clinical sociologists’, addressing problems for all sorts of organisations and corporations.

But what would it take to establish a ‘practical sociology’ in the UK and elsewhere, with sociologists employed to use sociology concepts and models to address problems in industry, business, government, education or health?

In 2016, we’re planning an event that aims to establish an agenda for practical sociology. These are some pressing questions to answer if sociology is to break out from the academy into the outside world.

What has prevented the emergence of practical sociology in the UK?

What are the core knowledge and models that are needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and
the public sector face?

What kinds of skills would be needed to work as a practical sociologist?

How would a practical sociology career pan out?

We'll keep you posted. If you'd like us to contact you directly with updates, please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net and n.j.fox@sheffield.ac.uk with the e-mail subject "subscribe to practical sociology".

Nick J Fox, BSA Sociologists outside Academia

Mark Carrigan

Gabriel (2016-03-01 01:01:16)
At the risk of stating the obvious, it seems to me an important reason for the lack of development of a practical sociology is that industrial, business and civil service organisations involve power structures. An important objective of sociology has always been to expose/reveal these structures. Given that it is usually the powerful within organisations that pay the salaries and fees there would seem to me to be an inherent resistance in these organisations to hiring anyone who specialises in understanding power structures and consequently to the development of a practical sociology. Psychologists and economists on the other hand tend not to be concerned with power structures.

Mark Carrigan (2016-03-03 22:46:10)
As enthused as I am about the idea of practical sociology, I think the idea that sociology's lack of purchase is because the powerful are scared of us verges on self-deception.

Dave Ashelman (2016-07-21 14:28:46)
Before I started working on my PhD, I spent 20 years in Human Resources with a Sociology undergraduate degree. I could think of no better application of Sociology that HR. Then it became about economics, and the psychology of labour economics. Today, Human Resources have very little to do with actual "humans," and especially in social conditions. All humans are independent representative agents of an aggregate labour force. My having a front row seat in the rise of Neoliberalism, I think it's worth critiquing Sociology as a discipline on this front. While Economics and Psychology were doing push-ups in Neoliberal boot camp, developing what would become "behavioral economics," Sociology was distracted by the shiny objects of post modernism. When Sociology finally got around to critiquing things like workplaces and neoliberal takeovers of social institutions, the only thing they could offer was Marx - the very thing that Neoliberal movements were fighting against. Sociology provided no alternative, and failed to add anything useful to the transformations taking place in the 1970s & 80s. Instead, Sociologists in the late 1970s told us that "latch key kids" was the new social problem as more women entered the workforce to supplement falling incomes from union disintegration and stagflation - suggesting that women NOT enter the workforce. Sociologists warned us of Malthusian overpopulation in the 1980s, instead of seeing that resources weren't all that scarce anymore - they just had an unequal distribution. When everyone's workplace retirement funds disappeared in the G7 countries in the 2000s, there was almost nothing from Sociology on it. Even today, more papers on inequality have been published by economists than Sociologists. John Myles' paper "Where have all the sociologists gone" noticed this in 2003. Mitchell Dean's 2014 paper "Rethinking Neoliberalism" notes that Sociology has largely sat on the sidelines, calling the plays of the game, but left the heavy lifting to economists. So the answer to the question of why there are no Sociology professions has to start with looking in the mirror. How do we get back our seat at the policy table, the labour table, and gain legitimization overall? I don't know. I think it starts with a return to science & scientific thinking on Sociology's part. As long we keep screaming things in public that have nothing to do with people's everyday life, or the practice application of
solid theory (as opposed to creating theories that have no practice application in the public’s everyday life), we’re shooting ourselves on that front. As Sociologists, we have to legitimize sociology - and we’ve just been derelict in that for the past 40 years.

Toby Bennett (2016-07-30 16:12:17)
My feeling - and I am not a sociologist by training but an interested observer with a little bit of experience researching this area - is that ‘the business world’ (to rather absurdly assume a unified field for a moment) is sympathetic with sociology as a discipline but unsympathetic with the academy as an institution. It is more about being ‘out of touch’ with ‘the real world’ than being threatening, as such. The university is a assumed to be a place for Mode-1, or ‘theoretical’ knowledge, model-building, where we need more Mode-2, contextual, applied knowledge. This is clearly insensitive to the long history of interaction between these modes but it is the assumption, I think Business has its indigenous sociologists: market researchers, HR, management consultants, “thought leaders”. Academic sociological, even critical, concepts and methods circulate widely in these disciplines - but typically isolated from the broader framework in which they reside (or sociological imagination, perhaps). Indigenous sociologists are legitimate because (and only as far as) their knowledge is pitched primarily at - or, at the very least, is compliant with - the pursuit of competitive advantage and, secondarily, other industrial or civic norms that are important to the particular context of application. An insightful article from Martin Parker on sociology and business schools: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-954X.12166/full So I think the question ’where are the sociology jobs?’ is an existential one that needs a two-pronged response. The first is about convincing the wider world of it’s worth; getting a seat at the table(s). This isn't really a disciplinary argument, it’s an institutional one. So perhaps the question should be rephrased in terms of what role sociology might play in the academy’s broader transformations: the expansion of higher education, not just in student demographics but also impact agendas and the possibility of ‘alternative providers’ on the horizon; and, outside the university, the role of vocational education, professional training and accreditation, internships and so on. The second's more about the methods and institutions of pedagogy in light of those changes, as they play out on the ground. It's almost a Gramscian question. How do you retain not just the “useful” concepts but the need for theory and a sociological imagination? This will be a more fruitful line of inquiry for sociologists, I think. But the two are obviously mutually interdependent.

Mark Carrigan (2016-08-02 12:52:05)
Fancy extending that a little bit? Would make a lovely blog post

Ian (2016-09-05 19:27:24)
I became a documentary filmmaker as an alternative way of doing sociology. I guess what I do is therefore a form of Practical Sociology.

Call for proposals: @thesocreview seminar competition (2015-11-23 19:41)
The Board of The Sociological Review are pleased to announce that the journal is sponsoring a single-themed Research Seminar Series (which may consist of three or more research seminars) as well as three One Day Symposia events. The Board hopes to make this funding available on an annual basis.

Guidelines for Applicants
The proposed Research Seminar Series and each of the three Symposia should have clear goals, bring together established and new researchers in any area of sociology and focus upon producing imaginative cutting-edge work of sociological and social significance. We seek proposals that involve collaborations across institutions and disciplines and welcome those that connect sociology to wider communities and the arts.

An important aim of the series and symposia, is to produce papers that will result in innovative publications of interest to the readership of SR (the journal and/or the Monograph series) as well as an on-line Special Issue, the journal would have first refusal on all papers. Papers would need to go through the usual reviewing procedures and
there is no guarantee of publication.

As part of The SR's mission to serve and enhance the future sociological community, seminars and symposia should be open to members of sociological teaching groups in colleges and schools. For example, a number of places could either be made available to local colleges/6th forms. or sessions could be video recorded and offered to these audiences.

Format:

Either:

a) a single-themed Research Seminar Series (eg three seminars each with four - six speakers presenting papers).

One grant of up to £6000 is available.

Or:

b) a single Symposia event lasting one day.

Three separate grants of up to £2000 each are available.

It is expected that funding will provide for room and equipment hire, consumables, hospitality, travel and accommodation expenses for speakers. It is expected that delegates will not be charged a fee for attending.

NB The funding from The Sociological Review could be match funded with other sources. For instance funding from elsewhere might facilitate and enable connections and scholarly exchange with artists and sociologists working with and for communities and/or to support the presentation and development of new/ongoing research projects.

How to apply

Further details and an application form are available from The Sociological Review. Contact Mark Carrigan at mark@markcarrigan.net

Deadline for applications:

2015-6 Open 1st November, 2015 – Close 20th December, 2015

NOTES

(i) Organizers would consist of the nominated grant-holder (Principal Organizer) plus two additional named participants (co-applicants). The principal organizer will liaise with a named colleague from The Sociological Review. The Principal Organizer will organize, promote and manage all aspects of the programme (organizing seminars, dealing with expense forms, submitting claims to the office of The Sociological Review, etc).

(ii) Topics may include any area within the field of sociology, or topics that engage with key social/sociological issues either through other disciplines or through inter-disciplinary work.

(iii) Reasonable travel and subsistence expenses for speakers are permitted but not for delegates. Secretarial costs, consumables, hire of room and presentation facilities may also be included.
Fees will not be paid to speakers.

Delegates will not be paid expenses, but there will be no charge for attendance.

NB – Value for money will be one of the criteria used to evaluate proposals.

(iv) The events will be promoted by the grant-holder/core members through their research networks and through their own departments and institutions. All communications with participants and publicity of events will acknowledge sponsorship by *The Sociological Review* (eg The University of X in association with *The Sociological Review*) and the seminars will be promoted as The Sociological Review Seminar Series with the Programme and Abstracts circulated in advance. The help of Wiley-Blackwell will be sought in matters of ‘branding’. Events should be advertised on the websites of participating institutions. The Programme would also be advertised by *The Sociological Review* and Wiley Blackwell.

(v) Applications will be assessed by a Committee drawn from the Board of *The Sociological Review*. The criteria for assessment will include:

1. Sociological innovation.
2. Relevance to *The Sociological Review* journal
3. Relevance as appropriate topics for Monographs
4. General contribution to sociological analysis.

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**international journal of social research methodology: ask the editors @ijsrm! december 1st at 11am**

(2015-11-24 07:15)

In my capacity as social media associate editor of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology, I’m arranging an *ask the editors* session on Twitter. It will take place on Tuesday 1st December, 11.00—12.00.

We’ll definitely have Ros Edwards and Christina Hughes. We’ll possibly have Malcolm Williams participating as well. We’ll use the hashtag #IJSRM for the discussion.

If you can’t be online at the date and time, e-mail me (mark AT markcarrigan.net) and I can ask the question on your behalf. Otherwise see you on December 1st!
Transparence and opacity in digital capitalism (2015-11-24 08:00)

It seems that Mark Zuckerberg has a secret back room in his private Facebook office, allowing him to retreat into opacity while sustaining the glass fronted and open plan layout of the corporate offices. From from The Boy Kings, by Katherine Losse, pg 196:

Mark's office sat adjacent to our pod, with its secret back room (for especially important meetings, because the front room of his office had a glass window onto the hallway that made meetings transparent) hidden behind a wallpapered door and a single table illuminated by a Mad Men –style modern lamp, receiving a constant stream of celebrities and tech luminaries and wealthy Russians in silk suits.

This is the same Zuckerberg who [1]bought four homes adjacent to his in order to ensure his own privacy. His own power dramatically illustrates the politics of transparency and opacity in digital capitalism. We can see this even more dramatically in [2]the private retreats of the digital elites: if transparency gets tiring, why not just head off to your super yacht or Hawaii estate for a while? As Zuckerberg describes it, quoted on pg 198: "We are pushing the world in the direction of making it a more open and transparent place, this is where the world is going and at Facebook we need to lead in that direction." The key terms here are pushing and lead. The pushers and the leaders are able to take a break when they'd like, without worrying about someone else perpetually trying to push and lead them.

I think this could be analysed in a similar way to how Bauman explored mobility in his work on globalisation: those at the bottom of the hierarchy are transparent because they lack the resources to escape the filter bubble, while those at the top of the hierarchy are usually transparent as a function of their own commercial success. But one condition is forced, leaving the people in question susceptible to manipulation, while the latter is chosen and can be voluntarily withdrawn from in private life.


got an idea for a monograph? submit to @thesocreview monograph call (2015-11-24 08:58)

The international refereed journal The Sociological Review is home to the Sociological Review Monograph Series. This series publishes edited collections of outstanding and original scholarly articles on issues of wide sociological interest and is dedicated to promoting emerging as well as established academics. For more information, see [1]www.sociologicalreviewmonographs.com

CALL FOR PROPOSALS: We are currently seeking proposals for two monographs to be published in January/February 2018 (deadline for completed ms = beginning of March 2017).

THE DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS is Friday 11th December 2015. Completed proposals should be emailed to the series editor, Professor Steve Brown (s.d.brown@le.ac.uk). All decisions will be made by the end of January 2016.
Proposals should be no more than seven pages long (double spaced, Times 12 font) and should include names and
details of editors and contributors, rationale for and aims of the collection, provisional titles and abstracts of papers,
an account of the appeal of the collection to readers of The Sociological Review, and marketing justification for the
collection (e.g. distinctiveness of collection in relation to existing publications).

All articles published within the monographs are fully refereed and are included within the ISI Journal Citation
Reports and the Social Science Citation Index. The usual length of final completed collections (after refereeing
decisions have been made) is approximately 80,000 – 100,000 words. However, it is permissible for the proposed
word length of the entire collection to be up to 120,000 words.


Milton Friedman vs. Frances Fox Piven on Free Enterprise (2015-11-25 08:00)

A fascinating exchange between one of the US's most accomplished Sociologists and the intellectual hero of the
American right:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/JQkdSj6arn0

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/JQkdSj6arn0
The centre for social ontology book series (2015-11-26 08:00)

We’re now up to book number 4. This is the first one I’ve contributed to personally & it’s due to be published in early 2016. These are the first three volumes in the series:

Here’s the coverage of the books that I know of. Please do let me know if you come across something else! I’ll keep this list updated over the coming months:

- [5]Review of Volume 1 by Tom Brock
- [8]Daniel Little’s Reflections on Social Morphogenesis and Meta-Theory
- [9]Graham Scambler describes the project in terms of Archer’s intellectual trajectory

CfP: the dehumanisation of contemporary societies (2015-11-26 18:27)

International Association for Critical Realism (IACR)
19th Annual Conference

Wednesday 20 - Friday 22 July 2016

Pre-conference workshop: Monday 18 - Tuesday 19 July 2016

Postgraduate Teaching Centre, Cardiff Business School
Colum Drive, Cardiff CF10 3EU

De/humanisation

The dehumanisation of contemporary societies

In many ways, our current epoch witnesses dehumanised social relations. While alienation (Marx) and disenchantment (Weber) or the deficit in social solidarity (Durkheim) are by no means recent phenomena, processes of dehumanisation continue to prevail in most spheres of society. In the public sphere, discussions privilege compliance with bureaucratic regulations and quantifiable indicators (such as GDP and its growth) over human needs and flourishing, have the effect of excluding large portions of the electorate from public debate while accelerating the demise of the Welfare State.

In the economic sphere, the financialisation of the economy and the spread of market ownership tend to privilege economic profitability over human well-being. Corporate Social Responsibility is thus deployed as a rhetorical device whose injunctions are followed mostly when they are profitable to corporate shareholders. Yet, contemporary observers of capitalism witness suffering, destitution and ethical corrosion, both in richer and in poorer countries. Equally worryingly, the private sphere also seems to have undergone dehumanisation: for instance, impersonal relations are the lot of ever-growing urban centres, whilst familial duties of care are gradually replaced either by indifference or by reliance on salaried transactions with professional carers.

The dehumanisation of the social sciences

The dehumanisation of society is mirrored, and perhaps intensified, by the exclusion of the notion of ‘human’ and ‘humanity’ from the social sciences and humanities in the second half of the 20th Century. While philosophers such as Foucault, or more recently Butler, have warned against taken for granted conceptions of the human, their warnings seem to have produced effacement, rather than problematisation, of the category of ‘human’.

The realist tradition provides, however, salutary exceptions to this trend. In his dialectical critical realism, Bhaskar
(1993, 1994) advances a theory of human flourishing alongside a diagnosis of the ills of modernity. Neo-Aristotelian authors such as Sen and Nussbaum have developed political philosophies that place human capabilities at the centre of the stage. In feminist studies, Lawson (2009) advocated 'minimal humanism' and in sociology Archer (2000), Sayer (2011) and Smith (2010) have taken stock of the absence of human subjects from social scientific accounts and sketched the contours of a humanist social science.

Rehumanising society and the social sciences?

The purpose of this conference is to explore how critical realism (CR) can contribute to rehumanising both society, and the social sciences. We welcome contributions from all areas of the humanities and social sciences. Equally welcome are contributions inspired by the various voices of CR, both within Bhaskar’s philosophy (critical naturalism, dialectical critical realism, metaReality) and by the various authors who contributed to CR’s flourishing.

Full details are available on: [1]https://www.eventsforce.net/cbs/156/home

The organising team is Ismael Al-Amoudi, Tim Edwards & Joe O’Mahoney.

Please circulate this call to your Networks.

1. https://www.eventsforce.net/cbs/156/home

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international journal of social research methodology: ask the editors @ijsrm! december 1st at 11am (2015-11-27 07:16)

In my capacity as social media associate editor of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology, I’m arranging an ask the editors session on Twitter. It will take place on Tuesday 1st December, 11.00—12.00.

We’ll definitely have Ros Edwards and Christina Hughes. We’ll possibly have Malcolm Williams participating as well. We’ll use the hashtag #IJSRM for the discussion.

If you can’t be online at the date and time, e-mail me (mark AT markcarrigan.net) and I can ask the question on your behalf. Otherwise see you on December 1st!

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Nicolás (2015-11-29 09:22:01)
Please, when writing a date and time, tell us which time zone you are referring to! :)

Mark Carrigan (2015-11-30 08:51:35)
sorry, reproduced from elsewhere! This is GMT.
The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic ‘Influence and Power’. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel’s decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal’s peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.
This is an interesting development: there’s clearly an interest served by the announcement but the potential success of this positioning could prove influential if legal challenges to contract labour gain some traction:

Shift, an on-demand startup that helps people buy and sell cars, is looking to make employees out of its contract-based labor force. Almost 100 California-based “car enthusiasts” — what Shift calls the people who do price checks, coordinate inspections, facilitate test drives, and otherwise help with the transaction — are being given the opportunity to join the company as employees, starting December 1.

Use of contract labor by tech companies is a hot topic. Companies including Postmates, Washio, Handy, Lyft and Uber are currently being sued by workers who say they should be receiving the benefits and compensation befitting employees.

Not all on-demand companies use independent contractors — Munchery, WashUp, Alfred and Managed by Q, to name a few, use employees. Still others, such as Shyp, Instacart and Sprig, have announced intentions to transition their workforce from contract-based to employee status.

Another BuzzFeed article gives an excellent overview of a legal challenge currently being mounted by four amazon staff over their status as contract labour:
Amazon contractors — drivers who worked for Prime Now, Amazon’s two-hour local delivery service, and were hired through a third-party contracting company — have proposed a lawsuit against the company, accusing Amazon of misclassifying them as contractors.

The drivers, their lawyer Beth Ross argues, should be classified as employees for a number of reasons, including that they work shifts rather than on a gig basis, have to wear shirts and hats with company branding, and are told by the company where to be and when. In addition, the workers are concerned that the cost of gas, tolls, and other incidental expenditures makes their total income below the legal minimum wage in California. (Amazon advertises that the drivers will make around $20 an hour; the minimum wage in California, where these workers live, is $9.)


Mark Zuckerberg’s philosophy of techno-fascism (2015-11-29 08:00)

From The Boy Kings, by Katherine Losse, pg 201. Losse was asked to write blog posts about Mark Zuckerberg’s philosophy, something which he outlined to her in general terms:

"It means that the best thing to do now, if you want to change the world, is to start a company. It’s the best model for getting things done and bringing your vision to the world." He said this with what sounded like an interesting dismissal of the other models of changing the world. I could imagine, like he may have, that countries were archaic, small, confined to one area or charter. On the other hand, companies— in the age of globalization— can be everywhere, total, unregulated by any particular government constitution or an electorate. Companies can go where no single country has gone before. "I think we are moving to a world in which we all become cells in a single organism, where we can communicate automatically and can all work together seamlessly," he said, by way of explaining the end goal of Facebook’s "big theory."

My sense is this view of 'companies over countries' is a relatively common one amongst the digital elite. It's also key to understanding philanthrocapitalism: the political complexity of the world melts away in the face of a single minded concern to discover the most efficient way of bringing your vision to the world.

But what are the political implications of this? As Losse goes on to write, "It sounded like he was arguing for a kind of nouveau totalitarianism, in which the world would become a technical, privately owned network run by young "technical" people who believe wholeheartedly in technology's and their own inherent goodness, and in which every technical advancement is heralded as a step forward for humanity." This is roughly speaking what I'm trying to explore with the techno-fascism idea: how will what is currently a vague musing on the part of digital elites
develop as part of a broader set of social transformations currently underway? How will their own vested interests, against a background of growing social upheaval and threats to their accumulated wealth, shape the development of what is at present little more than a mystical faith in solutionism and the singularity?

The extent to which this idea is discursive can be overstated, as Losse explains, she told Zuckerberg that she struggled to articulate his philosophy for him in a coherent way:

The question was what did any of these values actually mean, and why should we want them? This was something only Mark could explain. I told him that I was having trouble coming up with satisfactory essays on the topics he’d assigned, and asked him to schedule time to explain his ideas in more detail, but he was too busy or wasn’t inclined to explain further— it was hard to tell. I came to the conclusion that perhaps he thought I could invent these arguments of whole cloth, or that we already were cells in a single organism and I should be attuned enough to intuit what he meant, but I couldn’t, and so the essays were never written or posted.

international journal of social research methodology: ask the editors @ijsrm! TOMORROW at 11am (2015-11-30 07:16)

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If you can’t be online at the date and time, e-mail me (mark AT markcarrigan.net) and I can ask the question on your behalf. Otherwise see you on December 1st!
Available for pre-order now! See [1]here for the cheapest place to buy it online, as well as table of contents & summary.

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by Debra Bassett

"I mean, they say you die twice. One time when you stop breathing and a second time, a bit later on, when somebody says your name for the last time" Banksy.

The ubiquitous nature of hardware technology such as smart phones ensures social networking sites have become part of our everyday norms and routines. However, whilst some use social networks to inform people of
the important – and not so important – events in their lives, others are using communication technologies to deal with issues surrounding death, dying, and grieving. The opportunity to “live on” and the ability to create digital memories, which can be left behind for future generations, may be compelling to some: but what about those left behind? How will people use these technologies, and crucially will they help or hinder the bereavement process?

Those who have made the difficult decision to delete the telephone number of a deceased friend or relative from their mobile telephone know only too well the conscious thought process involved in doing this. So what about the decision making process involved with switching off a person’s digital life support machine? Or, importantly, making the decision not to “interact” with the social media platforms of the dead? My research with the University of Warwick seeks to explore these issues.

In my 2015 paper “[1]Who Wants to Live Forever? – Living, Dying and Grieving in Our Digital Society” I introduce the term “digital zombies” to describe the resurrected dead who remain “alive” and “active” in our digital society. Four years after he died, Bob Monkhouse appeared in an [2]advertisement to raise awareness for prostate cancer. Through the wonders of technology, he was digitally resurrected; allowing him to appear at his own graveside and discuss his own death. This type of resurrection is nothing new to the rich and famous, for example celebrities such as Fred Astaire, Steve McQueen and Tupac have all been digitally resurrected. However, the ability to “become immortal” is now on offer to non-celebrities and companies such as [3]Eternime and [4]LifeNaut are using artificial intelligence algorithms to create avatars which, they claim be will be a virtual interactive "you". This technology is available today and the exponential growth of big data ensures this human-computer interaction will increase as more services providers join the market. [5]Dead Social the UK based organisation offers an ‘end user’ planning tool, it works alongside hospices, charities and healthcare workers in an attempt to empower those facing end of life decisions, by enabling the creation and future delivery of messages to lose left behind. The website also offers practical advice regarding digital legacy issues.

Here, I think it is important to differentiate between the creation of ‘digital data’: passwords, account information, digital assets and digital property and the creation of ‘digital selves’: personal videos, messages, photographs and even the creation of avatars. In my paper I suggest “digital legacy” should be used for digital data and “digital memories” for the digital selves. These two categories are very distinct and therefore should be treated and understood in different ways. Because these two concepts are often blended together by service providers it can appear confusing to the users, I suggest clarity is needed.

My interest lies with the creation of digital memory boxes and how we can assist in designing these boxes in a positive and ethical way. Here, I am talking about a physical box, rather like a music box, which could be customised to individually represent the person, this idea is a progression of the idea of a [6]Story Shell’ which is created by the living, following the death of a loved one. However, I think the creation of digital memory boxes could be an important and empowering ‘work in progress’ for the creator and I envisage the contents of these boxes would be curated and added to throughout people’s lives. They may prove a useful tool to those with the early onset of Alzheimer’s, who may wish to fill their digital memory boxes with memories of the past and hopes for the future before their memories are locked away and lost forever.

For me the crucial point to these boxes is that these memories are kept in a special place outside of the daily digital lives of the bereaved – not on a platform on their laptops, phones or tablets - thereby ensuring they do not ‘pop up’ unexpectedly. Those who inherit the box would then be able make a conscious decision when, and how frequently, to open the box and the memories within, rather than having these digital memories on the devices they use in their daily lives. The need to be remembered is a powerful desire for some, because ultimately you only have one chance to make a good last impression!

Debra Bassett is a PhD Candidate at the University of Warwick. Her research interests lie in whether thanatechnology will affect the process of bereavement. During the research she will expand on her ideas of digital zombies.
and the creation of physical memory boxes.

2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quoxni1j1iw
3. http://www.eterni.me/

6.12 December

structure, culture and agency: selected papers of margaret archer (2015-12-01 08:00)

The Amazon page has gone live for [1]this book I’m editing with Tom Brock and Graham Scambler. As well as the titular selected papers, it will include an interview with Archer, an annotated bibliography, a foreword by Doug Porpora and an extended introduction to her work.

This edited collection of papers seeks to celebrate the scope and accomplishment of Margaret Archer’s work, distilling her theoretical and empirical contributions into four sections, capturing the essence and trajectory of her work over almost four decades. Long fascinated with the problem of structure and agency, Archer’s work has constituted a decades long engagement with this perennial issue of social thought. Through an initial empirical study and two expansive trilogies, Archer has developed an explanatory framework that comes to grips with the complexity of social processes at different levels of analysis over time. The Morphogenetic Approach and, later, her work on the Internal Conversation, together, provide a detailed account of the interrelated processes by which structure, agency and culture come to take the forms they do. However in spite of the deep interconnections which unify her body of work, it is rarely treated as a coherent whole. Though its range and depth has been widely acknowledged, it nonetheless has an unclear place within the cannon of sociological theory. The proposed collection seeks to address this relative neglect through collating a selection of papers, spanning Archer’s career, which collectively elucidate both the development of her thought and the value which can be found in it as a systematic whole. It seeks to illustrate the empirical origins of her later ideas in her early work on the sociology of education, as well as foregrounding the diverse range of influences which have conditioned her intellectual trajectory: the systems theory of Walter Buckley, the functionalist Marxism of David Lockwood, the critical realist philosophy of Roy Bhaskar and, more recently, her engagement with American pragmatism and the Italian school of relational sociology.

How to Kill Foreigners Democratically (2015-12-02 09:50)

by Daniel Fairbrother

The debate on airstrikes and token special forces action seems to have a certain gravity about it. Of course it is serious, but what I mean instead is that once a single, apparently proactive proposal has been considered, this seems to present individuals, especially MPs, with a dilemma: act or not. This pulls us between the single plan our PR minded PM has managed to scramble together - or nothing. As a national defence strategy, this seems a bit hit and miss.

Rhetorically, it is very hard to be "against action". Consequently, how, in public and parliamentary debate, can we consider more than one course really as action taken to make us safer? Is there a major structural problem built into the way motions are tabled "for and against" in parliament which distorts the rationality of our decision making and enhances the chances of our acting from a desire for revenge rather than a rational discussion about our best interest? What if parliament were now deciding between 4 or 5 different ways to make us safer? Surely this would be a greater tribute to those who died in Paris, that most illuminated of Enlightenment cities.

Various possible courses of response to the Paris attacks seem to have been side-lined, both those more Hawkish and those more Doveish. It is precisely the regime of half-measures which seems so dangerous for the UK, America, and Europe. If we’re going to fight, let’s win. If we are civilized enough to want control rather than (or maybe as) revenge we need to take a deep, Hawkish breath, invade places and instigate our desired systems of political authority.

Or, if we decide that is a bridge too far, we need to decide what we are capable of controlling. The money and effort to be spent on bombs might be better directed, Doveishly, towards domestic defences and intelligence. Yet more Doveishly, maybe the answer is more social than military. What if (perchance) we made our society more worth being a part of, so that all can contribute more wholeheartedly and no one needs to bother looking for weirdo international ideologies?
Both Hawks and Doves can be strong, but we have to choose. At the moment, we have neither. Cameron looks less like a Chicken Hawk - as they say in the US - than a flapping parrot.

If we stick with this terrible "yes or no" way for parliament, and the public, to engage with decisions about national defence policy, we’ll always be offered the worst of both worlds. Parliament needs to act, and to be enabled to act, much more like Gary Kasparov (don’t tell Putin), and much less like a toddler offered a mushy dinner for the final time.

Daniel Fairbrother is a PhD student in Sociology at Warwick University. He is working on theoretical issues in historical sociology.

Does your monograph not deserve a trailer? (2015-12-03 08:00)

The idea of a trailer for an academic monograph might seem rather strange at first sight. But it’s a potentially extremely effective way of promoting a book which, as social media for academics continues to institutionalise, will only become more potent. Here’s the most recent example I’ve seen, produced by a video editor [1]specialising in academic trailers:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/s4CcVAG1N0

But the best example I’ve seen is still this trailer for Offshoring by John Urry:
1. [http://www.academictrailers.com/#!collection/c1p9k](http://www.academictrailers.com/#!collection/c1p9k)
2. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/s4CcVAGJ1N0](https://www.youtube.com/embed/s4CcVAGJ1N0)
3. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/CChAOh1X5CA](https://www.youtube.com/embed/CChAOh1X5CA)

Digital Health/Digital Capitalism One Day Conference CfP 4th July 2016 (2015-12-03 14:16)
Digital technologies have had a profound impact on the ways in which people live their lives, relate to one another and think about themselves and their capacities. This event will bring together scholars who are interested in the impacts of the digital on ideas and practices of health and the workings of capitalist economies and how the two come together.

The generation and management of vast amounts of health data has been enabled through digital means. In particular this has enabled fine grained analysis of particular types and groups of people in relation to a diversity of factors. Private and profit making enterprises have become increasingly involved with personal health data through partnerships with health services and the generation of new kinds of data through commercial devices apps and websites.

Digital capitalism has produced new approaches to work and profit generation. Human bodies are now intensively digitised due to the (self) tracking and monitoring conducted by commercial enterprises. New digital ways of working have freed some workers from the office while increasing the amount of time and attention they are expected to dedicate to work tasks and the length of time spent sedentary. The productivity and activity levels of some workers are closely monitored leading to increasing physical and psychological stress.

Questions addressed at this event will include but not be limited to:

- How has the digital changed the ways in which bodies and health are understood, managed and experienced?
- How does the management of health data by commercial enterprises (public-private partnerships and sharing and collaborative websites such as PatientsLikeMe) impact on health outcomes and peoples’ engagement with themselves, others and their health and bodies?
- In what ways are digital technologies affecting work practices which themselves impact on wellbeing, physical and mental health?
- How has the blurring of work and non-work life through an “always on” digital culture created new health problems and new potential strategies for managing health?
- What can existing theories tell us about the changes brought about by digital health and digital capitalism? What theoretical innovations are needed?
- Does the commercial monitoring of health and wellbeing (through areas as diverse as corporate wellness initiatives and telehealth) enable greater freedom and stimulation for healthier lives or intensify surveillance?
- What potential is there in digital management of health and work for increasing or decreasing existing health inequalities or producing new ones? Will the digital divide transfer to these arenas or be minimised?

If you would like to talk at this one day event please send a title and abstract of no more than 250 words to Chris Till [c.till@leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:c.till@leedsbeckett.ac.uk) by Monday 15th February 2016. Registration will open 1st March.

The event will take place on Monday 4th July, 2016 at Leeds Beckett University.

This BSA Digital Sociology Group and BSA MedSoc Yorkshire event is supported by a grant from Leeds Beckett University.
The intensification of work and the competitive busyness of ceos (2015-12-04 08:00)

The culture of competitive sleep deprivation has reached weird heights in recent years. This Guardian feature, detailing the times at which CEOs wake up, gives some sense of the extreme forms this can take. Concern for sleep pervades productivity culture, most obviously on sites like Life Hacker, with sleep routines given parity to software choices in their interviews with prominent creatives.

This emerging cultural politics of sleep is a really interesting aspect of what I’m trying to analyse in my new book as cognitive triage (or rather triaging strategies, driven by and in turn driving, the intensification of work). This ’sleep deprivation arms race’ tracks the ossification of opportunity structures across many careers, as well as an acceleration of personal resources being deployed for professional gain. As Lucy Rock [3]observes,

Margaret Thatcher accelerated the sleep deprivation arms race when it emerged she ran the country on four hours’ sleep a night. From Donald Trump’s three to four hours a night to Bill Clinton’s five to six hours when he was president and Condoleezza Rice’s habit of getting up at 4.30am to go to the gym when she was US Secretary of State, minimal sleep has become a sign of your commitment to the job.

Angela Ahrendts, head of retail at Apple who was the first woman to top Britain’s executive pay league when she was CEO at Burberry gets up at 4.35am. She gets a headache if she sleeps for more than six hours. It is, she said, “my inspirational time, my time to find peace, to watch the sun rise”. Marissa Mayer, Yahoo’s chief executive takes between four to six hours a night; Indra Nooyi, chairman and CEO of PepsiCo, a mere four hours.

Now we can be plugged into the world of work day and night, it feels more than ever that to work more and sleep less is the way to the top. Knocking off at 6pm? Hmmm… the boss will be answering emails until 9 and her boss until 11 and as for her boss, well, she only needs three hours’ sleep a night.
But where did it come from? One part of addressing this question involves analysis of the pleasures of acceleration. But another concerns role modelling. There’s a great paper by Ismael Al-Amoudi which I need to go back to in order to develop my analysis of this in terms of modes of reflexivity. But meanwhile, I just wanted to record this little extract from the end of the great Bill Gates biography I’ve been reading recently. From Gates, by Stephen Manes and Paul Andrews, loc 10268-10287:

"He is the world’s busiest man, bar none," said Charles Simonyi, citing one trip that included "Eleven meetings in five days in Europe—you know, like there were days there would be two countries. And he doesn’t fly a private plane, either." Gates still managed a schedule as packed as anyone’s, but as he headed toward his forties, he seemed to be modestly tempering his legendary workaholism—and seemed vaguely defensive about it: Most people have an overblown view of how many hours they work. It’s hard: Working eighty hours is very hard. You can’t do much else if you’re gonna do that. So there’s lots of weeks I work eighty hours, but I think my average is lower than that. . . .On average I take every other weekend off. . . .I’m probably more like seventy average now. There are some weeks I work more than eighty. Like those weeks I travel to Europe: That’s all I’m doing, is working, sleeping, working, sleeping. So you can get weeks where I’ll put in over ninety. . . .I assume you don’t count reading business magazines, the Journal or the Economist. Upon recomputing, he decided that an average of seventy-two hours was the proper figure. Though in recent years Gates had vacationed in the Dominican Republic, Thailand, and Australia with his girlfriend, he could barely contemplate the idea of a longer period of relaxation: “It’s possible I’d take a month off in the next three years. I don’t know what that would be like. I’ve never taken more than a week off with weekends on both ends.”

How much influence did the first billionaire boy-king of technology have in generating this ensuing arms race of competitive sleep deprivation? What does he think of the results? What did he personally gain from this? Was it good and/or necessary for the business? Was it good and/or necessary for his self? I’ve argued in the past that embracing acceleration, pursuing busyness as something desirable, can function in the same way as drink or drugs to help ‘blot out’ unwelcome internal conversation. This comment by an ex girlfriend certainly hints at this explanation in the case of Gates, from loc 10287 of the same biography:

“I don’t know what he would do if he had some time to spend alone with himself,” said one short-term girlfriend who tired of his strange blend of selfishness and selflessness. “He has a significant data storage device. But I don’t think he has a lot of wisdom.” And she didn’t think he was all that happy either. “So many times he complained about how he’s got to be here and got to be there. You say ‘Why don’t you say you’re not going to show up?’ but he won’t do that. He’ll stand up for everybody, but he won’t stand up for his happiness.”

But of course, the cognitive costs of living like this will continue to mount up. This is why I’ve argued for the importance of zones of strategic deceleration. Gates pursues this in a more individualistic way. From loc 9826-9846 in Gates:

Shortly before the Akers flap became public, Bill Gates had gone to the Gateaway complex for one of his “think weeks,” a tradition that had begun on the return from Albuquerque, when Bill would take a week
off to spend time with Gam at her place on Hood Canal. Alone with his thoughts, he would strategize, read, play with competitors' software, and "write a lot of memos."

However this is a form of temporising, compensating for but doing nothing to change the underlying process. I'm not sure how, if at all, the holidays he took can be included within this analysis. But they're notable nonetheless. From loc 8242 in Gates, as recounted by an ex girlfriend:

"Winblad even convinced Bill to take a vacation now and then by coming up with "reading themes . . . We had a physics vacation once, a biotech vacation once, and we had an F. Scott Fitzgerald vacation." Winblad was responsible for picking and packing all the reading material."

1. [http://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/apr/01/what-time-ceos-start-day](http://www.theguardian.com/money/2013/apr/01/what-time-ceos-start-day)
2. [http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation](http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation)
3. [http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation](http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation)
4. [http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation](http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/she-said/2014/may/16/its-time-to-stop-this-competitive-sleep-deprivation)
5. [http://www.researchgate.net/publication/271702337_Authority_s_Hidden_Network_Obligations.Roles_and_the_Morphogenesis_of_Authority](http://www.researchgate.net/publication/271702337_Authority_s_Hidden_Network_Obligations.Roles_and_the_Morphogenesis_of_Authority)

please tell early career scholars: the isrf social media essay competition (2015-12-05 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power'. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF's criteria and goals may be viewed [1]here.
Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel’s decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal’s peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

**Essay length:** 5,000 to 7,000 words

**Essay format:** Follow the BD &S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.

**Language:** English

**Submission deadline:** 31 January 2016

**Queries:**
[2]essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas and authors should indicate that their submission is for the special theme, ‘ISRF Essay Prize.’
Exploring Epistemic Violence (2015-12-05 17:12)
call for papers/contributions

EXPLORING EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

one-day workshop, 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Monday February 22nd 2016, London

at the School of Politics and International Relations Queen Mary University of London

Mile End Campus, Room TBA

in cooperation with the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education, Alps-Adriatic University of Klagenfurt (Austria) and the Colonial/Postcolonial/ Decolonial Working Group at BISA

WHAT IT IS ABOUT While the notion of epistemic violence is well-known in post- and decolonial studies, it is still relatively absent in IR, in Peace and Conflict Studies, in Political Philosophy and in other fields of knowledge that deal with issues of political violence. This workshop will discuss the supposedly simply question of what epistemic violence actually is. How can we frame it as a concept, and how can we approach phenomena that we would describe with that notion? How can we discern a post- and decolonial concept of epistemic violence from or link it with other wide understandings of violence, such as structural, symbolic, discursive, visual violence etc. that stem from a Eurocentrist tradition of thought? From a post- and decolonial point of view, should we give up common and narrow concepts of violence altogether or can we find plausible ways to link them with a thicker concept of epistemic violence? In which ways would it change our analyses of direct and physical political violence, if we developed a theory of epistemic violence?

Papers may include empirical examples of epistemic violence, but the focus should be on theoretical aspects, by bringing together perspectives from a range of disciplinary backgrounds of scholars who are interested in better understanding the entanglements between direct and physical political violence on the one hand and epistemic violence on the other. HOW WE WILL WORK The workshop will cultivate an explorative, egalitarian and creative atmosphere. Participants will read 4-8 papers in preparation of the workshop, prepare a presentation and openly interact with each other during the day. Papers are not presented by the authors themselves, but by another participant and vice versa. After presentation, the whole group will discuss the paper. The author steps in for comments and clarifications in the last part of the session. This ‘counter reading principle’ has proven to be very productive and helps to create a fair and mutually respectful atmosphere of debate. A final plenary discussion will sum up central issues, eventually sketch further prospects of cooperation and exchange, and allow to evaluate the process.

For those who can stay in the evening, we will arrange a screening of a film that creatively illustrates the entanglements between political violence and epistemic violence while investigating World War I from a postcolonial perspective.

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**COSTS/FUNDING** There is a small budget in order to co-finance travel expenses, if needed. We want to primarily support colleagues without institutional financing or PhD students. Please indicate in your application whether you would like to apply for a full or partial reimbursement. Drinks and snacks will be provided.

**APPLICATION** If you would like to participate in this one-day workshop, please send an abstract of your potential contribution (max. 1 page), your contact details and a few lines about who and where you are (max. 1 page) to Claudia Brunner[1]claudia.brunner@aau.at and Robbie Shilliam [2]r.shilliam@qmul.ac.uk by December 15th 2015. We will get back to you in the beginning of January 2016 to confirm the participation of a maximum of 8-10 presenters/discussants. If you wish to attend the workshop without a paper and presentation, please do also mention the context of your work, affiliation and motivation. Depending on the number of applications, we can possibly also include non-presenting participants. **ACCEPTANCE OF ABSTRACTS/PREPARATION FOR THE WORKSHOP** After confirmation, participants will have about four weeks to write their papers (of about 10 pages/3,000 words) and send them in again in the beginning of February. The organizers will match teams of ideally two persons, who will present their colleague's work (and vice versa). All participants should read all papers in order to guarantee a productive discussion.

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**BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference 2016 – Call for Papers - 1 Week Left to Deadline**

BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group

Annual Conference 2016 – Call for Papers - 1 Week Left to Deadline

Dear Colleagues,

The theme for the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference 2016 is ‘Construction and disruption: The power of religion in the public sphere’.

The purpose of the conference is to examine these and other characteristics of contemporary religion in order to achieve a greater understanding of its constructive and disruptive impact in the public sphere. What are the key categories, discourses, contexts and institutions through which this question can be explored? How do practitioners navigate these characteristics?

The conference welcomes a wide range of topics relating to religion in society and hopes to encourage a space where different faith perspectives can come together.

For more information about the conference and how to submit your paper please click [1]HERE. Submission abstract deadline is 11 December 2015.

Best wishes

BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group

BSA Events Team
The expanding ambitions of digital elites (2015-12-06 08:00)

From Elon Musk, by Ashlee Vance, pg 16. I think a sociological analysis of contemporary digital elites needs to treat these ambitions seriously, while nonetheless recognising how these cultural formulations intersect with material interests.

While the “putting man on Mars” talk can strike some people as loopy, it gave Musk a unique rallying cry for his companies. It’s the sweeping goal that forms a unifying principle over everything he does. Employees at all three companies are well aware of this and well aware that they’re trying to achieve the impossible day in and day out. When Musk sets unrealistic goals, verbally abuses employees, and works them to the bone, it’s understood to be — on some level — part of the Mars agenda. Some employees love him for this. Others loathe him but remain oddly loyal out of respect for his drive and mission. What Musk has developed that so many of the entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley lack is a meaningful worldview. He’s the possessed genius on the grandest quest anyone has ever concocted. He’s less a CEO chasing riches than a general marshaling troops to secure victory. Where Mark Zuckerberg wants to help you share baby photos, Musk wants to ... well ... save the human race from self-imposed or accidental annihilation.

Given the mimetic proclivities of status conscious digital elites, I find it hard not to wonder how the scale of these ambitions may cycle upwards over time. Musk’s vision is enticing to anyone who grew up on science fiction but it’s easy to conceive of comparable visions that are much less welcome. The rich vein of dystopian fiction about digital capitalism that is beginning to emerge (e.g. The circle, whisky tango foxtrot, super sad true love story) could be read as in large part about the future ambitions of digital elites and the dangers that follow from their possession of a “meaningful worldview”.

digital capitalism and the acceleration of bullshit (2015-12-07 08:00)

This is a slightly crude attempt to thematise something which I’ve been struggling to express for a while: has there been an acceleration of the rate at which bullshit emerges in the digital economy? Here’s an example of what I have in mind. I’ve been looking through Amazon for business books about the newer social media and sharing economy companies for part of my new project. This is what I find when searching for Instagram in the books section of Amazon:

[1]
If you can’t read the screenshot closely enough, trust me when I say they look crap. What appear to be a uniformly substitutable array of questionably written books united by the underlying motif of *how to get rich from Instagram*. I’ve found something similar for almost every search I’ve undertaken in the last half hour.

The presence of many crap books on Amazon might not be a revelation. But what interests me is the motivations of those writing them. The buzz around a new platform presents an opportunity to establish oneself as a guide to that platform. But the nature of this buzz means awareness of that opportunity is almost as pervasive as awareness of the platform itself. The barriers to entry are minimal and the rewards appear to be great, particularly given the tendency of those who have ‘made it’ to [2] “publicize successful outliers to propagate the illusion”. Furthermore, there’s a broader acceleration of the rate at which people seize on opportunities against a structural background of destructured careers and a cultural background of entrepreneurial individualism.

The result: we find ourselves drowning in an ever expanding pool of bullshit. The cognitive costs entailed by sorting the wheat from the chaff become ever more onerous, our reliance upon human and algorithmic intermediaries tends to increase as a result, making a small but meaningful contribution to the upwards spiral of individual distraction and collective fragmentation that I’m increasingly convinced is perhaps the defining characteristic of digital capitalism.

1. [https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/1.png](https://markcarrigan.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/1.png)
2. [http://markcarrigan.net/2015/10/24/the-coding-skills-bubble/](http://markcarrigan.net/2015/10/24/the-coding-skills-bubble/)
Deborah Talbot (2015-12-07 08:31:58)
The funny thing is that if you dig further you’ll find that many of these contributions are ghost written by freelancers paid very little for the pleasure. The same is true of blogs.

JNoel (2015-12-29 20:39:54)
Actually, it’s been theorised before that given more and more access to technology, certain products of technology become watered down and of less quality. Music, for instance. Instruments used to be nearly impossible to attain. And digital music production has changed the face of music forever. Now that everyone can start a garage band or be a DJ, the overall quality of music as a whole is thought to have become less sophisticated over the past 60 decades.

Beyond the ‘self-tracking’ craze: Towards a true technological enhancement of human intelligence
(2015-12-07 18:00)

This mini-essay forms the basis of my contribution to the [1]‘self-tracking and the emergence of hybrid beings’ panel at the University of Liverpool’s Being Human Festival on 10 December 2015. The reader will see that I’m not especially enamored by the framing of the topic.

Of the various ‘hybrid beings’ that are emerging between humans and increasingly intelligent machines, the ‘quantified self’ has taken centre stage – but mainly because it captures a pervasive phenomenon on which critical theory is well suited to offer commentary. The idea, already implicit in Foucault, involves the alienation of one’s sense of freedom to a range of possible metric values over which one acquires mastery. Many forests will undoubt-edly be felled talking about the character and necessity of the ‘structured agency’ permitted by the quantified self, including the issues of privacy and security, all of which turn on the increasingly fluid boundaries dividing selves from one another. Perhaps the most interesting angle on self-tracking is from the standpoint of political economy, especially if mass technological unemployment – even among professionals – is a long-term consequence of our inhabiting a world of artificial intelligences. In that case, self-tracking may be key to how we earn a livelihood – namely, by selling our consumption patterns, perhaps administered in the form of automatic micropayments.

While some have written positively about the ‘enhanced’ character of human life that may result from self-tracking technologies, the ‘enhancement’ is mainly at the level of amplifying tendencies already registered to some degree by the subject. In contrast, a much more interesting sense of smart technologies capable of enhancing the human condition is captured by the idea of ‘data surfing’, which has been proposed as a counterbalance to ‘data mining’, a long-standing technique in knowledge management systems.

In ‘data mining’, algorithms are used to survey big data streams to find specific patterns, etc. the end-user has already identified of relevance. The traditional advantage of data mining systems is that they ‘cut through the noise’ to get at what the end-user wants. This means, however, that the end-user never really sees the full range of data available. After all, the data may contain patterns of potential interest but because they were not specified by the end-user (no doubt due to ignorance), they were not programmed into the data-mining algorithm. Manifesting these latent data patterns requires ‘data surfing’ techniques, which consists of algorithms designed to structure large amounts of data in ways that enable the end-user to search for patterns inductively – that is, with a relatively loose sense of what might be of interest. Whereas data-mining reinforces your cognitive biases, data-surfacing genuinely extends your cognitive range – to see things you hadn’t seen before.

A characteristic feature of data-surfacing techniques is that they require significant human input through the life of the algorithm in order for the output to be represented in a way that enables the end-users to gain maximum
advantage. Thus, the great champion of data-surfacing, the Silicon Valley cybersecurity firm Palantir, prides itself in selling not only data-surfacing platforms but also installing its own engineering staff to enable end-users to discover things about the data at their disposal that they perhaps would not never have thought of looking for before. While these services are compelling in the concrete context of anticipating the next cyber-attack, they underscore just as concretely how human intelligence may be literally expanded – and not merely replaced or disciplined – by machine intelligence.


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towards a meta-critique of data science (2015-12-08 08:00)

In their new book *Retrieving Realism*, Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor describe what they term a *meta-critique*. From loc 592:

The idea of a metacritique here is, as the name suggests, to inquire into the basis of first- order critical theory. This latter claims to reflect on the conditions of our everyday or scientific knowledge claims, and to upset the ordinary precritical view we have of them. The metacritique reflects in turn on the conditions of our making this kind of critique.

In this sense, data science often constitutes critical theory, even though it clearly doesn't understand itself as such. This can be seen most clearly in a book like Dataclysm, subtitled ‘who we are when we think no one’s looking’, but I’d argue that it manifests itself in more subtle ways in much of the self-presentation of data science (and data scientists). The impulse here is to reveal the reality of human behaviour at scale: the conditions of both our everyday and scientific knowledge claims are implicitly understood to offer only a limited perspective on what it is humans actually do: what they really do, as opposed to what they tell social surveys and interviewers they do.

To offer a meta-critique of data science would entail, as Taylor and Dreyfus put it in Loc 611 in relation to a different target, necessitates unsettling the ensuing picture of human behaviour that is offered by

bringing out the background we need for the operations described in the picture to make sense, whereby it becomes clear that this background can’t fit within the limits that the disengaged view prescribes. Once understood against its background, the account shows itself to be untenable.

In other words, what does the ensuing picture assume about human behaviour that it cannot account for in its own terms? To answer this question properly would entail tracking the place of human reflexivity in data science: the assumption of it in the construal of its objects, the operation of it in the motivation of its practitioners, the imputing of it to those locked into world views which are the target of its critical theory and the absence of it in the substantive data scientific view of the world.
CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR PAPERS

Social Media & Social Science Research Ethics

Location: 33 Finsbury Square, London. EC2A 1AG

Date: Monday 21st of March, 2016

The Research Ethics Group of the Academy of Social Sciences and the NSMNSS network invite abstracts and poster/video submissions for a one-day conference that aims to further develop and explore the ethics of social science research using social media. Our purpose is to move the debate forward and provide examples of good practice. Two Keynote speakers will be confirmed shortly.

As Social Media plays an increasing role in Social Science research, the practicalities, benefits and challenges of making legitimate use of it constitute an important arena for ethical reflection and dialogue. This event builds on earlier conferences, workshops and discussions, organised by the Research Ethics Group of the Academy of Social Sciences and, in particular, the common principles of social science research ethics.

We invite abstracts for full papers or posters/videos* from those whose research makes use of social media. The following 4 themes may offer some guidance:

Ethics & Practicalities: Consent in social media research.
Privacy, ownership and legal dimensions: The use of social media data for research.
Blurred lines: Relationships between researchers and participants in social media research.
Critical ethical reflections: Improving ethical practice.

A copy of our CfA can be found here [.pdf]. 250 word abstracts should be submitted on this form [.docx] and sent to [1]acss.ethics@gmail.com by Friday the 8th of January 2016. There will be a £100 prize for the best poster/video as well as a number of discounted places and travel bursaries for postgraduate students. Following the conference we aim to produce an e-book of the presented papers. Any inquiries should be directed to: [2]nsmnss@natcen.ac.uk

Decisions will be made by the end of January 2016.

We envisage that videos will be the equivalent of posters and should, therefore, not be longer than 2 mins (approx).

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[1] acss.ethics@gmail.com
[2] nsmnss@natcen.ac.uk
Letter to Stella Creasy MP re: Syria (2015-12-09 22:57)

by Heena Khaled

Dear Stella Creasy

Around 2009 I met you for the first time at an event, and then you came and spoke at a women's event I organised. I followed you ever since and you have been an inspirational woman who I looked up to, admired and wanted to be like. Your activism blew me away and the way you had time for anyone and everyone in your constituency made me proud.

I spent the years showing off about how you were my MP and how lucky I was. You stood in mosques, churches, synagogues and against the EDL, with YOUR residents in solidarity, genuinely. I doubt politicians a lot but you were one of the few politicians I felt was real and truly cared about our voices.

You once told me I should become a labour councillor and till this day I have contemplated it and wanted to free some time to work with you and aspired to that dream you showed me, because you taught me that politics can be about people and not just the power hunger we usually consider it to be.

Tonight I saw your status- saying you voted FOR air strikes in Syria. Even though most of your constituents were against it, you voted in support for strikes. You were the one trying to empower poor residents by fighting loan sharks, yet you have supported an expense we shouldn’t contribute to both morally and monetarily.

My faith in democracy has left tonight, my faith in genuine politicians has withdrawn from the little gleam of hope I had in my heart. I no longer aspire to be a politician as of tonight and I am extremely saddened by the truth of my skepticism and your actions.

With great sadness- I don’t have the strength and on a morality level I can no longer support you as my MP because that would mean wiping my hands with blood of innocent civilians who will be killed and become what you regard as ‘collateral damage’. I worked hard in preventing extremism, and now your vote will make us more unsafe.

However I will continue to be a human rights activist and I will continue to speak through moralistic means and I will remind you and everyone of what democracy should look like and why we should reject this hidden dictatorship we have evolved into.

From one of your long time supporters, maybe not so much now.

Heena Khaled

Heena Khaled works for Open Society Justice Initiative and is also a human rights activist tackling issues around Muslim women, discrimination and counter-radicalisation. She holds an LLM in Human Rights and BSc in Sociology and Criminology.
The Pleasures, Pain and Promise of Sociological Work Outside the Academy (2015-12-10 08:00)

by Keith Kahn-Harris

The following is adapted from a talk given at the British Sociological Association SA Sociologists Outside Academia Group's 10th Anniversary Event

Being a sociologist working completely or (as in my case) partially outside academia is not an easy thing. For that reason, it is vital that mechanisms to support people like myself - such as the BSA's Sociologists Outside Academia Group - exist and that they grow in the future. But it's not just a question of providing support and increasingly the visibility of Sociologists Outside Academia (SOAs); as I will argue, a consideration of the position of sociology outside of academia raises important questions about the nature of the discipline itself.

A brief overview of my own career might help to illustrate some of the challenges that SOAs face. In particular, the idiosyncrasies of my career clearly illustrates how, if you do not take a conventional academic career path as a sociologist, there is simply no one generalizable model of how to be a SOA. I doubt anyone in the world would ever see me as a role model for anything, but if anyone was foolish enough to want to follow in my footsteps they simply couldn’t. And that is a major problem for an organization like the BSA’s SOAG group – how to support a disparate collection of people whose experiences are so very different from each other?

So who am I, professionally-speaking? Well, it was pretty simple until I was 29 years old. That was the year (2001) in which I received my PhD in sociology from Goldsmiths College (on the sociology of the global extreme metal scene), following on from my MA, also from Goldsmiths in sociology, and my BA in Social and Political Sciences from Cambridge. Other than a couple of years spent working and travelling, it was all pretty standard stuff.

Post-PhD was where the fun began. Although I love scholarship, academia and teaching, I had, by the time I finished my doctorate, resolved to attempt something difficult – to pursue a career both within and without the academy, drawing on the strengths of both. The reasons were threefold: First of all, I was apprehensive about taking on the mental and physical demands of a academic lectureship. Since my second year as an undergraduate I had suffered from moderate but persistent Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and it was still with me by the end of my PhD. The second reason for my ambivalence towards full time academia was a revulsion at the ravages of managerialism and what was then the Research Assessment Exercise. I didn’t want to become a point-scoring journal article producing machine; I didn’t want to be discouraged from publishing things people would actually read in favour of things that ‘scored’ well. The third reason was that, having worked part time as a researcher in the UK Jewish community as a postgraduate, I wanted to contribute more to Jewish communal life in my work.

My vision, insofar as I had one, was to work towards a position where I would be employed half by some kind of Jewish organization and half by an academic institution – ideally combined into one post. So I started my ‘campaign’ post-PhD with a fellowship for Jewish educators, in which I would begin to re-train from a specialist in metal, to a specialist in Jews.

14 years later, where am I?
Some things haven’t changed: I still have moderate but persistent chronic fatigue syndrome. I’m still revolted by academic managerialism and the REF. I still try and contribute to Jewish communal life.

Some things have not been possible to achieve: I have no stable position that fulfills my 2001 vision.

Some things have surprised me: I thought I would gradually drift away from scholarship on metal, instead I have continued writing on the subject. I’ve also been surprised how my interests have broadened and my passion for work actually increased following the birth of my children in 2003 and 2006 – I had assumed that I would become more content with ploughing a single furrow by the time I hit middle age, instead I am more eclectic and enthused by the possibilities of sociology than I have ever been.

So what, exactly, is it that I do? A chronological list of things I’ve done would be tedious to recount. Instead, I’ll briefly summarise the categories of work I’ve done and continue to do:

I’ve worked as a part time lecturer at the Open University, Birkbeck College and Leo Baeck College.

I’ve held visiting and honorary positions and fellowships at universities in Australia, Israel, Sweden, Germany and Finland.

I privately tutor graduate and postgraduate students.

I’ve held research grants from the ESRC and from private foundations (and bid unsuccessfully for others).

I’ve worked as a research consultant for a number of Jewish organisations and organisations promoting inter-faith dialogue.

I’ve published 4 books and edited several more.

I’ve written dozens of op ed pieces and features for newspapers and magazines.

I’ve done things that don’t fit into any easy category – like speaking at a TEDx event and acting as a trustee for various organisations.

In short, I’ve had a rich and rewarding career. I have a modest reputation in a few specialized areas. I have a great deal of freedom to follow my own interests. I have a family whom I love.

But I also have virtually no job security. I earn way less than someone with my experience should earn. My pension is ridiculously small. Almost everything I’ve achieved I have had to hustle for. I can never have a sabbatical and I may never be able to fully retire. My wife is under intense pressure in her job as she has to provide the lion’s share of our income. I sometimes need to resort to parental help to get through sticky months.

At the age of 43 I’m getting a bit tired of this. The freedom I have is becoming less and less compensation for the other stuff that goes along with it.

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But enough about the pleasures and pains of being me. I have tried hard throughout my work to look beyond my own life and to use my vantage point on the various worlds I move through as a way of developing a sociological understanding of what a sociological career can consist of.
So here’s what I think I have learned:

There is a slowly emerging movement made up of people like us

While an organization for sociologists outside academia is still a rare thing, there is more and more attention being paid to the work and the problems of scholars who work outside academia. This stems in part from the increasing instability of academic careers and university’s reliance on part-time faculty: simply put, there are more and more people with PhDs who cannot find permanent and stable jobs within the academy. There is also a more positive reason for the attention being paid to scholarship outside academia: spurred on by increasing tuition fees, the intrusion of managerialist prerogatives into the universities and the expanding possibilities of new technology, people are beginning to explore alternative ways of learning outside the traditional university.

So some kind of movement is emerging, but it is very much at an early stage. To give a couple of examples: the Social Science Centre in Lincoln has been going for a few years now and is providing free social science university-type classes on a co-operative basis. The Para-Academic Handbook, published in 2014, attempted to sketch out a mode of scholarship that both leverages and critiques the situation of the precariously employed academic.

Whilst I do find it comforting and inspiring that people who share my interests and concerns are beginning to come together, there is – at this stage anyway – a major limitation. No one, to my knowledge, has yet been able to collate ideas and suggest a new and sustainable model for earning a living outside the academy. To go back to my two examples, they are as disappointing as they are inspiring: the Social Science Centre still relies on unpaid labour; the contributors to the para-academic handbook hand interesting things to say about developing a non-academic scholarly identity, but there were few suggestions as to how to support oneself.

It may be that the best way to do scholarship outside the academy is either to work for a think tank or consultancy – which, as I will argue shortly, has certain limitations – or to get a full time ‘day job’ and be a scholar in one’s spare time. For those like me who cannot or don’t want to embrace either option, it’s possible that the way that I’ve managed to sort of make my career work for me is ‘at good as it gets.’ If so, that’s quite a depressing thought!

‘Sociologist’ remains a largely academic identity

Unlike psychology, for example, the sociological identity seems to be largely confined to the academy. Of course, sociological work has always been done outside of the academy. Social researchers and market researchers are sociologists, although their policy-orientation means they usually contribute little to sociological theory as such. Yet it is telling that social and market researchers have their own associations in the UK – the Social Research Association and the Market Research Society – rather than forming sections within the BSA. Their professional identities are largely ‘semi-detached’ from sociology.

So it is that, despite the efforts of the BSA SOA group, I see little evidence that the identity of sociologist is becoming disentangled from that of academic. This remains a source of sadness to me. I still call myself a sociologist and embrace this identity but I cannot help sometimes feel like a bit of a fraud in doing so.

3) Some scholarly activities remain very hard to do outside of academia

There is a range of scholarly activities that form an expected – and hence, implicitly, remunerated - part of the academic’s life, but are almost impossible to fund outside academia. Such activities include writing, refereeing and editing articles for scholarly journals, contributing to scholarly conferences and writing sociological theory. Most non-academic jobs that involve sociological work are more narrowly focused and more tied to specific funded pieces
of work. While research from think tanks does make it into scholarly journals, the think tank or contract researcher may find it difficult to find the time and to convince managers of the need to referee articles or write 'blue skies' sociological theory. For most sociologists outside academia, a significant chunk of scholarly activity can only be done unfunded, perhaps subsidized by a well-page job or project.

The problem is that without doing such activities, one inevitably becomes distanced from the mainstream of scholarly activity and important forms of networking. In my own case I have tried extremely hard to do these things, to referee articles, speak at conferences, write for journals and so on, but as my need for remunerated work has increased, my ability to keep going with such unpaid labour is gradually diminishing. There is, of course, some small comfort that regular academics also find their numerous duties difficult to balance! Once again, SOAs might be seen as the canary in the coalmine – advanced signs that the expectations of the scholarly life are becoming unmanageable.

Part-time and temporary academic work rarely 'works' in terms of status and remuneration

One of the most difficult things about not having a full time and permanent academic berth, has been witnessing one’s peers climbing the career ladder while I myself remain at the same level. I am not someone who is obsessed with titles and status, but the fact remains that the way one is seen by the world does depend in part on such things. Some of those who were contemporaries of mine while we were studying for PhDs are now readers and even professors. In contrast, I cannot encapsulate in a title what exactly it is that I do. It’s almost inevitable that some people who don’t know my work may think that I am a dilettante or someone who just isn’t good enough for a ‘proper’ position. The opposite problem can also occur: I have at times been assumed to be a professor and my part-time teaching gig at Birkbeck has been inflated into something more than it actually is – correcting such misapprehensions is embarrassing.

Aside from the status issue, part time and temporary academic posts often work out financially to be less than the sum of their parts. Part-time teaching invariably involves more hours than one is actually paid for. Temporary research contracts can be decently paid but they always end eventually, leaving researchers with an impossible choice – spend the last few months of the contract preparing a new application rather than actually doing research, or face a barren period between grants.

For those who are unable or unwilling to either accept the insecurity and low status of temporary and/or part time work, or to enter full time conventional academic employment, there are precious few options. Part-time, permanent academic posts that are on the track that can lead to a professorship are simply – as far as I can see – non-existent. Academia is still a ‘one size fits all’ profession.

Some of the time at least, being a SOA can have real advantages

To add to the mountain of other commitments that academics today have, they are supposed to demonstrate the ‘impact’ of their work. In this respect, the REF is completely contradictory and absurd: REF submissions are judged, in the main, on ‘products’ of research that, by being published largely in the academic sphere, are by definition limited in their impact. So the REF has had to demand additional impact case studies that are based on activities that cannot be counted positively in the rest of the exercise.

Blessedly, SOAs do not have to perform such impossible contortions. Research can be communicated in any form that is appropriate. SOAs can, if they wish, do theoretical blue skies research that has no impact beyond specialists. They can also write books that communicate with the wider public – as I have done – without being pressured to salami-slice them into journal articles from which the public is excluded by paywall. They can do policy-oriented research that can be communicated to the public without having to jump through the hoops of the REF.
Potentially then, the freedom of being a SOA isn’t just personally liberating, it also allows us to do sociology we choose to do without at least some of the constrictions of contemporary neo-liberal academia. To an extent at least, the spirit of the academy can be retained outside the academy whilst our universities are ravaged by managerialism.

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It’s become increasingly clear to me that the issues that being a SOA raises go beyond simply the exigencies of how to pursue a viable and sustainable career – vital those these issues are – and touch on more fundamental matters: what does it actually mean to be a sociologist? While, as I’ve said, I have stubbornly embraced this identity even though it seems for the most part a largely academic one, defining what a sociologist actually is remains difficult.

By ‘difficult’ I don’t mean that definitions of sociology are not widely available. Any sociological textbook will do this. The BSA’s ‘Discover Society’ pamphlet – that seeks to introduce sociology as an option for prospective students – offers the following:

Sociology seeks to understand all aspects of human social behaviour, including the social dynamics of small groups of people, large organisations, communities, institutions and even entire societies. Sociologists are typically motivated by their desire to better understand the fundamental principles of social life, believing that an understanding of these principles will help improve people’s lives through more enlightened and effective policies.

Although one might quibble with some of the wording (‘enlightened’ for example), this seems to be as good a brief definition as might be achieved. It certainly describes much of what I’ve tried to do in my own career as a sociologist.

The difficulty for me lies in how to define being a sociologist when one’s relationship to academia is ambiguous or distant. The problem is that, given the overwhelming dominance of academic sociology, the core activity of most sociologists is contributing to the ever-expanding sociological canon. When academic sociologists publish, they are inserting their own work into a dense, multi-dimensional and self-referencing network of publications. When academic sociologists teach, they are inducting students into this network.

What happens, then, when a sociologist outside academia is unable or unwilling to embed themselves into this vast network of words? As I mentioned earlier, it can be extremely difficult to remain in touch with the ever-growing deluge of academic sociological writing. Can someone be outside of this network and still be able to call themselves as sociologist? Is there a sociological sensibility whose presence can make someone a sociologist without reference to what other sociologists write? Is there a bedrock on which sociology rests whose existence both underpins and transcends specific manifestations of sociological writing?

One might return to the BSA’s concise definition or other works such as C Wright Mills’ *Sociological Imagination*, and say ‘yes, of course there is such a bedrock.’ Yet, for most practical purposes, the identity of sociologist is still confined largely to those who embed themselves in the network I have mentioned. With rare exceptions, it is not enough to simply be enthused with a sociological sensibility to be recognized by others as a sociologist, one has to demonstrate one’s familiarity with and ability to add to the work of other sociologists.

Now I want to make two things clear at this point: First, I am not suggesting that those who wish to identify as sociologist should not read the work of sociologists and reference them accordingly. Second, I am not suggesting that I myself do not do this!

What I am suggesting though, is that if sociology is to be more than an internal conversation, it does need to recognize and nurture the possibilities for doing sociology that are not reliant on a constantly-updated familiarity.
with the enormous academic sociological literature. This is where SOAs are potentially in the front line of sociology.

Of course, SOAs are doing this already. When sociologically-informed social researchers publish policy reports they are expanding sociology beyond academia. When sociologically-informed journalists and bloggers communicate to the public they are expanding sociology beyond academia. When those with a sociological training bring what they have learned to a whole range of professions they are expanding sociology beyond academia. What is missing – and what SOAs are not generally doing – is loudly and unapologetically claiming the identity of sociologist outside the academy.

It may be that many of the difficulties that I and many others have had developing a career outside academia are insoluble. We are, after all, living in an age of radical insecurity in employment and it would be odd if sociologists did not share in this insecurity too. However the identity issue is something we can do something about. And in doing so we can contribute not just to the dignity and status of those of us who work in whole or in part outside of academia, but to the expansion and deepening of sociology as a practice and a sensibility.

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/sociologists-outside-academia-(soa).aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/study-groups/sociologists-outside-academia-(soa).aspx)
5. [https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCAQFjAAahUKEwi4qp6q4JAhWEbhQKHWJrC6w&url=https%253A%252F%252Fwww.mrs.or](https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCAQFjAAahUKEwi4qp6q4JAhWEbhQKHWJrC6w&url=https%253A%252F%252Fwww.mrs.or)

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[...] a post on the Sociological Imagination blog, in the context of discussing my experiences as a [...]  

In one’s hand: an extension of self and society (2015-12-11 08:00)

by Mike Duggan

The materiality of things, both physically and symbolically, alongside our fetishisation of things is clear to see in our relationships with personal technologies. Simple observations of people waiting; on train platforms, for the bus or at the bar with a device of one kind or another in hand, are examples of which we are all well accustomed. In contemporary society the objectification and, crucially, the personalisation of digital technologies - smartphones in particular - is perhaps the latest, and most obvious, iteration of our fascination with technical objects. Observations in public space(s) are now seldom described without a narrative portraying the varying degrees with which people engage with the screens of their personal devices. People are touching, tapping, typing, swiping, clicking and stroking their screens all around us. Such instances are described to us by others and observed for ourselves each and every time we walk out into the street.

We have become both familiar and used to this, as well as fond and disparaging of these motions. There are for instance, countless narratives that reiterate the absent presence of smartphone users, most of which explicitly characterise the non-humanness of these interactions. In addition there exists an overflowing vat of positivity and marketing
jargon around the benefits of using our smart mobiles, most of which we are weary of. And yet we persist, both in our telling of these tales and indeed in our use of these technical things. Why? One way of looking at it is that they can be fascinating, interesting, pleasing, practical, comforting, convenient and reflective of whom we think we are or would like to be, as well as plainly annoying, disruptive, trivial, faceless, isolating, exclusionary and symbolic of ubiquitous conformity.

The screens of these devices, and the capabilities of the devices themselves are undoubtedly alluring. They often hold our gazes for longer than we would like, and sometimes for not long enough. Such devices are much liked by their users; loved even. The result being that we increasingly have quite personal relationships with these devices, or at least with what they can do or how they can be used. Engaging with them can mean interacting socially, culturally, economically and politically with a society at large, or simply with close friends and family. Indeed, engagements can also produce long periods of detrimental or even desirable periods of isolation. Moreover playing with them in our hands can indulge a nervous moment or satisfy that slight and yet still seductive sensory stimulus created by the tactility of smooth surfaces. Smartphones tend to play on our social as well as our tactile and embodied desires and discomforts.

Whilst the objectification and fetishisation of technical matter is nothing particularly new - we have long sought personal relationships with both analogue and digital technical objects in an effort to make the seemingly banal and lifeless a part of us; a curated reflection of us - the spectacle of the smartphone in use appears a significant shift in the way these relationships have previously been manifested in public. The relationships we have with other technologies are apparently hidden far from view, perhaps only really taking effect in the privacy of our minds. We do not, it appears, offer similar demonstrations of affection to the other personal technologies intertwined with our lives, and yet we do remain affectionate towards other things.

Many may attribute this cultural, and it must be said visual, shift to the rise of Apple and particularly the personal devices created under the supervision of the late Steve Jobs. Such devices, beginning with the iMac (1998) and then later the iPod (2001) and most recently and most successfully the iPhone (2007) have transformed the ways in which people have engaged with digital technologies on a personal as well as cultural scale. Following the success of Sony’s Walkman, Apple and perhaps most notably Jobs, pushed forward the idea that people could have and would want a personal relationship with digital technologies in similar ways to that which they had with analogue technologies. The evocable “i” that precedes Apple’s product ranges is most telling. As is the sheer diversity of the accessory’s market that has spawned from it.

In the same way that people objectify and fetishise fashionable clothing, home ware, mechanical apparatus, and children’s toys, people now objectify and fetishise the smartphones in their pockets. The difference being that now such dedications to things are glaringly obvious. Nevertheless, much like other technical objects, smartphones are now extensions of the self and therefore reflections of the self, both to oneself and to others.

However, is it really the case that our use of these complex boxes of digital components and accompanying software’s has revealed new ways of interacting with technical artifacts, or even new ways of being? Perhaps it is simply that
these interactions appear to us, initially so alien, as epochal changes in how we have pored over technical things for centuries? There is much rhetoric over a smartphone revolution and yet the social and embodied processes produced by our personal interactions with technical things is hardly exclusive to the smartphone. It is perhaps the sudden shifts in what we see on the street that has prompted this reaction, for take-up in technology is rarely so swift.

Let’s take the analogue watch as an example. The watch is bound up in the minute social processes of identity as well as in the broader ideals of the social, economic and political systems that help produce the world for its wearer. Furthermore, wearing and working the watch is something of a sensory and embodied experience. The turning of the wrist, its captivating face, the reassuring sound of time, the occasional sharp niggle felt as a link catches on a hair all come together to produce the intimate relationship one may have with their device. A watch and its bearer - a technical object and its user - are committed to the dynamic relationship produced by the workings of society and an object’s sensory affects.

Whilst the smartphone is undoubtedly kitted out with more functionality, encased in an aesthetic that appeals to many more people than a single watch design does - no doubt down to the excessive promotional push of their makers - the basic concept remains remarkably similar. The smartphone is similarly involved in the minute processes of social and personal identity curation as well as the broader socio-political and economic systems that govern our time. It is a device that reflects the identity of its user whilst also being a complex computer whose use and affects are molded by the society in which it is connected. In use it is bound up in the very being of one’s lifeworld. It has become an extension of oneself. It is both physically and metaphorically a tool to hand. Indeed, using a smartphone has become constitutive of the phenomenological experience for many.

According to British anthropologist Tim Ingold, objects in what he calls life’s ‘meshwork’ are things - meaningful, symbolic and valuable coming-togethers of matter(s) and practice that emerge along lines which are susceptible to the entanglements of life’s complexities. Ingold’s work suggests that objects are always things in our life-world, no matter how technically complex, for all of life is a series of emerging entanglements woven with the lines of things. Whether things are breathing bodies, organic structures or technical apparatus is irrelevant. Each works with, through or against the other in an emerging meshwork otherwise known as a life, or more objectively as an always-emerging process. Smartphones are hardly exempt from this understanding of technics and being. The phone itself lays down a line and becomes part of life’s meshwork, entangled with the lines of our own lives as well as those of other beings and matter.

Nonetheless, and in response to our current smartphone saturated situation, perhaps it’s best to ask what is new about our apparent fascination with these screening things? Do such engagements reveal novel insights into how we want to be in the world, or do they highlight just how alluring technical objects with highly dynamic functionality can be in establishing our place in the world? Alternatively is our fascination revealing of a society increasingly tailored towards a mode of production committed to ‘always-on’, isolating and attention seeking production and consumption practices? Most likely is that the allure of our pocket-sized screens is revealing novel insights into all of the above and more. It is the latest iteration of a popular technology - perhaps the most popular of our time - that pushes our understanding of what it means to be human.
A smartphone is sold, and brought, on the promise of its functionality as well as its desirable and socially affective aesthetic. Design teams - spearheaded by the likes of Apple, Samsung and HTC - have undoubtedly created personal devices that deliver in spades on all fronts. And yet there is no true telling in how these, or indeed any technologies are folded into the social, political, economic and embodied dynamism of one's life-world, especially from the position of the observer. Certainly such complexity, design and marketing have done more to entice current consumers than the analogue watches on offer, but that is not to say that with the first editions of the wrist watch - alongside a relative understanding of the market and marketing forces at the time - similar desires were not evoked amongst those that knew about and had access to said devices.

If the prescribed mundanities of everyday life continue to be passed off onto these devices, alongside the desire for the latest technical thing, the allure of the smartphone and the resulting fascination isn't likely to evaporate anytime soon, despite the encroaching 'wearables' revolution. More likely such allure and use will seep into the background of everyday life, similarly to the personal technologies of ages gone by. The watch, trainers, notebooks and pens have all successfully filtered into the background of everyday life. These technologies remain relevant as they continue to co-constitute our identities, produce and reflect our society. There is no reason to think that smartphones will not follow suit. At such a point perhaps the touching, tapping, typing, swiping, clicking and stroking of smartphones will go unnoticed, or at least unquestioned.

Smartphones are fast becoming the central hub to which many of our everyday practices are directed through. Many of the mundane workings of everyday life are increasingly dealt with, processed and spat out again by these devices. If we are continually chasing to keep up, or to put it another way, periodically seduced by the social and sensuous lifestyles sold to us by personalised technologies, we are likely to continue to rely on these devices. Moreover as smartphones continue to play a major role in social and economic complexities of daily life we become inclined to blindly opt-in or agree with the terms and conditions all too often accepted without question. The alternative can be exclusionary. The result observationally obvious.

The question is whether one must be wary of their decision to be included, for the smartphone lugs with it the kinds of baggage that other technologies do not. The baggage of 'big data' for instance, with all its pockets omitting privacy concerns, rights to be forgotten and digital wastage are important considerations to examine in one's use. As are one's decision to ignore or accept the entanglements and inequalities of a smartphone's manufacture and distribution. The line laid by a smartphone is entangled in a dynamic mesh of lines of which we do not always know the origins or trajectories of. Whereas our engagements with analogue watches remain largely known, our interactions with smartphones appear endlessly open and accessible in the cloud, to those we do not know and perhaps should not trust so forthrightly.

Mike Duggan is a Cultural Geographer interested in how digital technologies have become entangled everyday experiences of place. He is a PhD candidate within the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group at Royal Holloway University of London. His PhD is in collaboration with Ordnance Survey and the EPSRC.
The proliferation of digital technologies, virtual spaces, and new forms of engagement raise key questions about the changing nature of gender relations and identities within democratic societies. Over two days the colloquium will bring together scholars, graduate students and policy makers/advocates to explore how our everyday leisure lives are being transformed by technology in ways that inform and challenge gender injustice for women, men, and transgender citizens. Identifying leisure related practices that are virtual and visceral the discussion will be broadly oriented around three digital dilemmas:

1. How do virtual voices influence issues at the intersection of gender and (in)justice?

2. How do innovative methodologies enable new insights into the social transformation of gender relations, digital cultures, and social justice?

3. How is digital technology shaping relationships between diverse citizens, communities and policy makers in the context of gender equity?

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach the colloquium will draw upon different theories, methodologies, and applied (policy and practice related) perspectives to examine the interrelationships of gendered leisure, advocacy, and civic engagement. In doing so, we seek to advance new approaches to understanding, critiquing, and mobilizing action within the complex gendered relations between leisure spaces and digital practices. The two keynote speakers for the event include:

Dr. Brittany Cooper, Rutgers University co-founder Crunk Feminist Collective.

Dr. Aimée Morrison, University of Waterloo, co-founder Hook and Eye: Fast feminism, slow academe.

**Academic submissions**

We welcome abstracts from academics that address these questions from diverse social science and humanities disciplines. We will select six academic papers for 30 minutes presentations and provide subsidized funding for travel costs. The event will provide an opportunity for additional academic contributions to round table discussions during the colloquium and networking. We will be proposing a special issue of an interdisciplinary journal to support the publication of colloquium papers.
Graduate students submissions

We welcome abstracts from graduate students that address these questions from diverse social science and humanities disciplines. We will select four graduate students to contribute their research to a panel discussion and we will provide subsidized funding for travel costs. The event will provide networking and mentoring opportunities for graduate students.

Please submit your 300 word abstract including name, title, academic/graduate student status, institution and contact details to: [mailto:digitald@uwaterloo.ca]

Organising Committee: Dr. Diana Parry and Dr. Corey Johnson, University of Waterloo and Dr. Simone Fullagar, University of Bath.

Supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada, the University of Waterloo and the University of Bath, UK.

Tony Giddens does Digital Sociology: Into the Digital Age (2015-12-13 08:00)

IFRAME: [https://www.youtube.com/embed/RnlIZgO9pL8]
CfP Everyday analytics: The politics and practices of self-monitoring track at 4S 2016 (2015-12-14 09:18)

We welcome submissions to our open track on ‘everyday analytics’ at [1]4S/EASST, Barcelona, 2016

Track convenors: Kate Weiner, Catherine Will, Minna Ruckenstein, Christopher Till and Flis Henwood.

Everyday analytics: The politics and practices of self-monitoring

Self-monitoring is a pervasive part of contemporary life, entwined in many spheres of the everyday, for example work, health, fitness, energy consumption, finance. The analysis of these activities, once the preserve of scientific, professional and technology experts, is expanding, as the scanning, recording, memorising and tracking of daily life using digital technologies becomes increasingly possible. Yet self-monitoring involves a variety of technologies and techniques, some digital some considerably more mundane.

Tracking may be voluntaristic, but may be encouraged, promoted or required through corporate and governmental initiatives - and is of interest to numerous commercial sectors. While the term ‘self-monitoring’ invokes the image of an individual tracker, it may involve a variety of collectives, for sharing data and experiences and creating collective knowledge. Collectives may operate at more local levels too, as people and things mediate in the everyday work of tracking.

We invite papers that explore everyday analytics, self-tracking practices and its different meaning: Who and what is involved? What emotions, projects and relationships are important in these practices? How is data interpreted? How and when does data flow where and how does it get stuck? When and how does self-tracking become embedded and normalised in everyday life? What is the scope for resistance, rejection or exclusion? We expect that the papers will contribute to either theoretical or methodological developments relating to self-tracking in practice, investigating how it promotes new forms of individuality, sociality, politics and markets - or moments when it fails to engage people.


Abstract submissions will open soon and the deadline will be 21 February 2016

If you have any questions about the track, please feel free to contact us:

Kate Weiner - [3]k.weiner@sheffield.ac.uk
Catherine Will - [4]c.will@sussex.ac.uk
Minna Ruckenstein - [5]minna.ruckenstein@helsinki.fi,
Funded Places Available at the @BritSoci Conference (2015-12-15 08:00)

Important announcement via the [1]BSA Sociologists Outside of Academia list:

This year there are 40 places available for **40 BSA Concessionary members**. 20 places are being funded by the BSA Support Fund and 20 places by SAGE Publications. Applicants must be paid up members in the UK Concessionary category, must be living in the UK, and must be a member for 12 months prior to applying for this free registration. Members are limited to one Support Fund claim – if you have previously received an award, you are not eligible.


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Are we all Deleuzians now? Or, Why Susan Greenfield may be right, after all (2015-12-15 13:01)

Oxford neuropharmacologist [1]Susan Greenfield has become notorious for arguing that the internet is warping our minds. Many people – myself included – regard her as a [2]scaremonger. Nevertheless, in a recent history of
neuroscience that I've been reading for other purposes, I've run across Eugen Bleuler's original 1911 account of the key symptoms of schizophrenia, a mental illness of his coinage. They consist of the "4A's":

(1) a blunted affect resulting in diminished emotional responding; (2) a loosening of associations causing disorganised thought; (3) ambivalence or an inability to make decisions; and (4) autism referring to a preoccupation with one's own self or thoughts (Taken from Andrew Witkins, A History of the Brain from Stone Age to Neuroscience, Psychology Press 2015, p. 261).

Not only prolonged exposure to the video screen but also postmodern thought more generally may lead to schizophrenia – n'est-ce pas? Perhaps this is why Giles Deleuze, co-author of Capitalism and Schizophrenia, killed himself in 1995. After all, 1995 marked only the dawn of the World Wide Web, which massified this particular vision of reality, against which Greenfield (and others) continues to struggle. From this standpoint, Deleuze may seem so luminous today because he personally lived a world that is now more widely available – and, crucially, more tolerable – than ever before.

In case the lesson of this story is not clear: What passes for 'critical' thinking nowadays is often a rationalization of a lived situation, i.e. an 'enjoyment of the symptom' as Lacan/Zizek might say. In the old days, we called it 'making a virtue out of necessity'.


Dave Harris (2015-12-15 20:48:37)
Since when has Deleuze been 'luminous'? . Did he not argue for greater attention to 'affect', at least in the classic sense? OK, I'll let you have disorganized thought, ambivalence and autism, although nowhere near to the same extent as autoethnography. Exponents of that really do enjoy the symptom...

CfP: The Lives and Deaths of Data (2015-12-16 08:00)

Open Track: The Lives and Deaths of Data

Convenors: Sabina Leonelli and Brian Rappert, Department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology & Exeter Centre for the Study of the Life Sciences (Egenis), University of Exeter, UK (see also the Exeter Data Studies group: [1]http://www.datastudies.eu)

Abstract: This track investigates the relational constitution of data: how stages in the life of data articulate to one another and the challenges involved in storing, moving, classifying, manipulating and interpreting them. The session is intended to explore the collectivities emerging through data collection, dissemination, assemblage and analysis. Analysing the ways in which information becomes taken as given things, the manner in which data and their varying contexts of use are co-constituted, and the means by which utility is invested and divested in them provides a platform to explore and challenge the powers attributed to "Big" and "Open" data by governments, lobby groups and institutions around the world. With its long standing attention to the conditions of knowledge production, STS scholarship is well positioned to reflect on the value(s) attributed to data under a variety of different circumstances, how such attribution changes in time, and what this indicates about the properties of the objects being identified
and used as ‘data’ and of the communities involved in such identification and use. Questions to be addressed include: What would it mean to speak of the birth of data? How do they develop, especially when they are used for a variety of purposes by different stakeholders? Do they ever cease to be data, and how can we conceptualize situations in which data are dismissed, forgotten, erased, lost or regarded as obsolete? This session will be organised as a set of individual presentations encompassing several different aspects and areas of data use.

Process: The deadline for submitting an abstract is 21 February 2016. If you want to participate in this open track then you will need to select it when you submit your abstract to the 4S/EASST Conference. Instructions for submission of your abstract are available at [http://www.sts2016bcn.org/](http://www.sts2016bcn.org/)

If you would like to discuss the relevance of your paper to the open track, then please contact either or both of us: s.leonelli@exeter.ac.uk and b.rappert@exeter.ac.uk


What are your favourite Sociology books of 2015? (2015-12-17 08:00)

Taking the lead from Brain Picking’s list of the [1]best science books of 2015, we’d like to hear from you about your favourite Sociology books of the year. Let us know in the comments box or tweet them to me @mark_carrigan and I’ll compile the list and add them into this post.


Ben Lamb-Books (2015-12-20 21:52:47)

Steve Hall (@SteveHall5582) (2016-01-03 22:59:32)

4116
CfP: A Celebration of Star Trek (2015-12-18 08:00)

Call for Papers and Topic Proposals:
A Celebration of "Star Trek"

(Apologies for cross-posting)

Now accepting submissions and ideas for the fourth annual Pop Culture Colloquium at DePaul University in Chicago!

The Media and Cinema Studies program, along with the College of Computing and Digital Media, the English Department, and the Department of American Studies at DePaul University is hosting a one-day celebratory colloquium in honor the fiftieth anniversary of "Star Trek" on Saturday, May 07, from 9am-6pm. This event will feature roundtable discussions from scholars and fans of "Supernatural", speaking about the cultural impact of the show, as well as analyzing aspects of the episodes. The even will also feature keynote speaker Brannon Braga (executive producer, writer, and director of multiple episodes and films), screenings, screenwriting workshops, a costume contest, and more.

The audience for this event is both graduate and undergraduate students, both fans and scholars, and the focus should be on informed and enlightening discussion rather than formal academic papers. "A Celebration of "Star Trek" " will take place on DePaul's Loop campus.

If you're interested in speaking on a round table, please send a 200 word abstract of your topic and a CV or resume to Paul Booth ([1]pbooth@depaul.edu) by Mar 01. Please aim your abstracts for a more general audience and for a discussion rather than a paper presentation. For more information, please check out the website [2]www.mcsdepaul.com/a-celebration-of-star-trek.html and sign up for updates on Facebook (search "A Celebration of Star Trek"). We hope that you will be able to join in the discussion and celebration! A Celebration of Star Trek (DePaul University, 07 May)

1. mailto:pbooth@depaul.edu

CfP: Political Theory on Refugees (2015-12-19 08:00)

Call for Papers

University of Augsburg, 17-18 November 2016

CONFERENCE: POLITICAL THEORY ON REFUGEES

Working Groups: Democracy and Flight: Political Theories on Refugees and the transcultural and comparative
Convenors: Sybille De La Rosa (Heidelberg University), Melanie Frank (University of Augsburg) and Viktoria Hügel (University of Brighton)

Keynote speaker: Matthew Gibney, Oxford University

Political exclusion and the resulting struggles for inclusion have been in the focus of political theory in general and of democracy theory in particular for a long time. Hence, the aim of this conference is to identify theoretical concepts which focus on the problem of inclusion and exclusion and could, thereby, be an important contribution to refugee studies. Even when these concepts do not genuinely refer to refugees, they could certainly help to address the problems linked to flight and exclusion accurately. Thus, the possibilities of a beneficial argumentative exchange on the topic of refugees can be enhanced.

Participants are invited to "use" political theories in order to transcend the empirical question about 'what is' and rather ask 'what should be'. Doing so, it will be possible to criticize our perception of the problem and, thus, also brings in new consequences for the problem solving. For instance, if one understands refugees as a characteristic feature of a more and more globalized world and, hence, as an inevitable challenge for modern societies and their ability to integrate, one quickly exceeds the perception of refugees as a short-term administrative problem. In consequence, questions are raised about proper integration and representation modi as well as about our responsibility towards strangers and ways of transcultural communication. Hence, it gives us new perceptions and narrations for a new, global and maybe even cosmopolitan self-understanding.

Contributions may consult concepts of representation theory, democracy theory as well as hegemony theory, postcolonial theory, work on transcultural conceptions and communitarianism etc.in order to successfully apply them to refugee studies or address questions like: Does the democratic idea call for the representation of refugees and why? Which kind of representation theoretical and empirical could be best to include refugees' demands? Which democratic practices and institutions could be extended or opened for refugees? Which level of representation would be best, local, regional, European, or global? Which are the transcultural challenges that can emerge when refugees are integrated in modern democracies?

Please send abstracts (250 – 300 words) for twenty-minute papers (in English) along with the name of your institution to sybille.delarosa@ipw.uni-heidelberg.de no later than January 15, 2016.

Depending on the composition of participants, the conference will be either held in German or English. We expect every participant to be ready to present his or her paper in English.

Judith Butler on the Performativity of Assembly (2015-12-20 08:00)


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWfgpQ4-2J8

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iuAMRxSH-s

[...] The Sociological Imagination has gathered up online lectures relating to Judith Butler’s new book Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly. [...]

"Liking" it on Facebook (2015-12-21 08:00)

by Javier de Rivera

The "Like" is one of the most common and successful features on social networking sites. It was the hallmark of Facebook from the beginning, it is the main form of social interaction on Instagram, and Twitter has recently changed the “Fav” by hearts that represent "likes".
Twitter’s evolution with this feature is particularly interesting. At the beginning of its great expansion in 2009, Favs were being used more as a way to archive relevant tweets, mostly containing links, than to praise a fellow user. At that time, the Fav felt like Internet Explorer’s Favorites, a sort of bookmarking feature for archival purposes. Appreciation and acceptance was shown with words like “thanks!”,”cool!” or “u r great!”, or by old-style emoticons. Along with these, the Retweet was a high form of showing appreciation, which also had the important functionality of disseminating relevant content.

On Facebook, both functionalities - social appreciation and dissemination of valuable content - were always mixed in the “Like”. Although users have always had the option to “Share” content without liking it, it seemed unfair to do it that way... and people usually prefer to share content by showing appreciation at the same time. This overlapping of functionalities may look irrational, but when the main purpose is social interaction, usability is more important than direct ‘rationality’.

In this case, the multiple functionalities of the “Like” increase its relevance as a system feature, which probably has something to do with the success of Facebook. The evolution of Twitter seems to be going in the same direction, by experimenting with the Favs and changing them to Likes, establishing the trend that started several years ago - for using this feature to show appreciation rather than for archival purposes. Here, overlapping is not possible, by choosing Hearts as a mean of social interaction we are deploying its value as an archival resource: our list of bookmarks would be flooded with the less memorable tweets we chose to mark as an expression of appreciation.

Considering the issue from another perspective, social positive reinforcement is one the most important motivations for humans to act, together with other (social and biological) gratifications such as having sex or eating. All we all really want is to feel valuable, to feel that people like us, that we are relevant, that we worth it; in the end, that is what motivates every human being. There are individual differences in the way we look for it, but, in general, just hearing good comments cheer us up.

For this reason, when these social applications make it so easy to show off or “be ourselves” and still receive attention and “Likes” from other people, they become like sugar candy for our self-esteem and sense of social acceptance. In face to face interaction it is not so easy to show your appreciation for another person, it can feel awkward or inadequate. Nonetheless, the scarcity of social appreciation can be the cause of great suffering.

On the other hand, the sensibility we have towards different forms of positive reinforcement or social appreciation is what defines us as individuals. Some people desperately look for the approval of parental figures, some are crazy about being admired from below, others can rather get the silent admiration of their partner or the sense of belonging to a cohesive group of peers. There are also many people driven by more pragmatical reinforcement experiences, like a pay rise or a good sexual encounter.

Our sensibility towards gratifications and positive reinforcements determines what drives our desire and will; and in the end it is what defines who we really are. If we are most interested in a pay rise or the parental recognition, we might not be as good coworkers as if we were driven by peer acceptance and companionship. What attracts us the most is both our weakness and our strength, and it constitutes the core of our identity.

In social networking sites positive reinforcement is abundant. After all giving a “Like” is easy, does not cost anything and we know the other is going to like it. The only condition for engaging in this positive and inoffensive social interaction is accepting its mechanical nature, and the process of standardizing and quantifying social gratification. By doing so, all the nuances involved in direct gratification - be it face to face, on the phone or by writing - are filtered out and reduced to a simple click.

This is the reason why the standardization of positive reinforcement can be problematic, especially for young users.
and for those who do not have a strong priority towards the kind of appreciation that they are looking for. It might be that instead of developing a personalized sensibility in the focus of our desire for acceptance - good or bad, but personalized and adapted to our social conditions - users get used to trade themselves in an abundant market of the equally quantifiable “Likes”. This also transforms positive reinforcement and reputation into a digital/social currency.

The abundance of mechanical positive reinforcements is deployed by commercial social networking sites as a decoy for users, thirst for social acceptance and interaction. After all, we are more likely to return somewhere where we feel accepted and praised, than somewhere where people criticize, despise or ignore us.

The "Likes" have yet another marketing strategic functionality. In order to make users’ information valuable for the market it is important to know what they like, what attracts their attention, and this could eventually help frame them as marketing targets. What they do not like, or the strength of their opinions towards things that happen in the world, lacks an equivalent economic interest. That is why there are no features to develop the negative and dialectic style that is the mark of social criticism.

Everything has to be framed and quantified in a positive way. Protestors can freely gather around a protest page where their “Likes” can be added up. Their “anti” feelings and attitudes get turned upside, “positivized”, and can happily exist side by side with the "pro” feelings of their social rivals. In fact, everything can co-exist – not cohabit - producing different market niches to fulfill the long-tail economy.

Unfortunately, public space means sharing the same ground, experiencing the same reality, all together, instead of parallel virtual realities. We all share the same material world, in which our actions affect each other. There are many issues that are of public interest and should be discussed publicly by the communities that more affected by them.

Allowing people to express their social and political opinions online is great, but that does not serve any purpose if they are unable to discuss and work as a community. The way in which social networking sites work systematically discourage the production of shared realities, collective discourses or social spaces. The positive logic of these commercial sites generates spaces without friction, social interactions without society and networks without community.

[1] Javier de Rivera is a sociologist at University Complutense of Madrid, Spain, with a specialism in the study of new technologies and social media. He is a member of the research group Cibersomosguas.net, Digital culture and Social movement, editor at [2] Teknokultura Journal and professor at the Master CCCD (URJC, Spain). Author of [3] SocialMediaSociology.com

1. http://sociologiayredessociales.com/el-autor-javier-de-rivera/

Against ‘hybrid beings’ as a way of understanding our entanglement with digital tech (2015-12-22 08:00)

My objection to the notion that we should understand the ubiquity of digital technology within person life in terms of ‘hybrid beings’ is a fundamentally methodological one. At the level of social theory, I find it relatively unobjectionable as an attempt to conceptualise the entanglement of human beings with technology. But in a sense I find it trivial because we have always already been hybrid beings. We make and use tools and our lives are changed by the tools...
we have made and used. They open up new possibilities and close down others. Our horizons expand in some ways and contract in others. What we can do and what we conceive of ourselves as being able to do develops [crucially I think there's always a gap between the (epistemic) self-conception and the (ontological) causal capacity] develops from the interplay with the tools we made, which in turn have their own biographies of innovation and diffusion that act back upon their makers, contrary to any sense they may have of absolute autonomy over the instruments and artefacts they have produced.

The only way the novelty of hybrid beings can be maintained is to imply a tipping point, beyond which we become ‘hybrid beings’ whereas before we were merely homo faber. But how could such a tipping point be conceptualised? How could it be operationalised? Why even try and draw a line? The differences between our ‘entanglement’ with contemporary technologies and past ones is at most a difference of degree rather than of kind. Even then I’d caution that a prevailing tendency within sociological thought to focus upon the novel and the cutting edge, at the expense of the quotidian and well-established, risks blinding us to the much older forms of ‘hybridity’ all around us. I don’t see much of interest in claiming that my glasses make me a ‘hybrid being’ but I depend on them much more than my iPhone. If hybridity is ubiquitous than I don’t find it interesting or helpful to pronounce the emergence of new hybrid beings. It might unsettle ‘taken for granted dualisms’ but my disinterest in this form of cultural politics is another issue, with its tendency to dissolve political activism into arcane and esoteric philosophical disputes, while congratulating itself on its resolutely political stance. It’s an example of what Bourdieu once described as the tendency to “mistake revolutions in the order of words or texts for revolutions in the order of things, verbal sparring at conferences for ‘interventions’ in the affairs of the polis”.

My more substantive problem is that ‘hybrid beings’ ontologizes a variable process, imputing a category of being where in reality there are dynamic and diverse relations unfolding across a range of contexts. It risks substituting philosophy for empirical social science. This isn’t an inexorable result but I’d suggest that where analysts of new hybrid beings shed empirical light on these trends, they do so in spite of rather than because of the concepts they’re using. I think the underlying dangers here at that we either see human being as being moulded by these new technologies or human beings as simply using neutral technologies for their own ends.

To talk of hybrid beings gets beyond this, recognising co-development, but at the expense of inclining us towards general statements about the ceaseless dance of co-constitution rather than opening up specific cases in a way that allows us to explain them. Because it’s these specific cases which make these explanations urgent. We should not be talking about the new kinds of humans who are coming into being but rather about the many ways in which digital technologies are leading to the reconfiguration of relations within subjects, and between subjects: in personal life, working life and political life. From my standpoint the role of theory should be to support empirical investigation into these issues, as well as incorporating their results, rather than to pre-empt it philosophically.

Towards a sociology of human flourishing (2015-12-23 08:00)

From this [1]interesting interview with Phil Gorski on The Imminent Frame:

That would certainly be a hope of mine, and it’s something that I’ve been thinking about a great deal lately, whether there’s a limited kind of moral realism that we could defend, and that we might actually be able to contribute to through social science or at least through academic reflection of some kind or
another? My suspicion is that there is; I just don’t know what the scope of it is. It would have to be premised on some understanding of human flourishing—that human beings are put together biologically, neurologically, in a certain way—that they have certain kinds of capacities or propensities—that their flourishing and well-being in general involves the development and cultivation of these propensities and capacities.

Of course I’m simply channeling a lot of research that’s being done in neighboring fields. There’s recent work in positive psychology, for example, which is starting to get a great deal of attention by people like Jonathan Haidt and Marty Seligman. There’s a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics tradition that people like Martha Nussbaum and Richard Kraut have revived and defended in recent years. Even some folks like Amartya Sen have tried to make a basis for a different way of thinking about economics and development policy.

So the question is, “How do you develop a theory of the human good which doesn’t become a kind of hardened dogma, a sort of a one-size-fits-all understanding of what a life well-lived is going to mean?” We don’t live in Athens anymore. We live in a much more diverse, much more egalitarian, much freer society. Clearly there has to be a great deal of room for people to act freely. Part of flourishing is also making mistakes and learning and developing, so it’s not the idea that you simply prescribe some kind of a lifestyle. I think this notion that Nussbaum has developed, a kind of capacities approach to justice—that you need to create a basic set of preconditions for people to explore their own particular talents, capacities, inclinations—that that probably strikes the right balance between liberalism and a more robust form of moral realism.

I think where sociology might contribute to this is in thinking harder about how you create the preconditions for the sorts of social connections and communities that are clearly part of human flourishing. We know that this is one of the clear results of recent work in positive psychology: that relationships to other people are critical. There’s a lot of confirmation for this in evolutionary biology and psychology, the mounting evidence of pro-social characteristics of human beings. But most of these disciplines are really focused on the human organism, or they’re focused on the human psyche. They don’t really think deeply about the social, per se, so this is where sociology might actually step in and make some kind of a contribution to this, I think.

But I expect there’ll be a lot of resistance. One of the first things that you learn in graduate school in the social sciences is about the fact/value distinction, that there is no way of knowing or discovering what’s good. I don’t think people really believe that. I think that’s why most people go to graduate school, because they think this will help them answer these kinds of questions. But you get professionalized and socialized out of this during your first few years in graduate school. It’s salutary to the degree that we learn to establish a certain kind of reflexive distance to our tacit assumptions about what’s good, but I think the next step is to return to those basic practical questions that really animate people and get them interested in academic life and scholarship in the first place.

If Sociology has to find a new role for itself, against the background of an empirical crisis, perhaps this could be it?
Susan Shallcross (2016-01-08 12:36:30)
I agree with you about human flourishing. I have just started studying sociology at une and I am interested on what living a good life looks like for different people.

New forms of cultural capital (2015-12-24 08:00)

A video and podcast from an interesting event at LSE, in which some of the team from the Great British Class Survey reflect on new forms of cultural capital:

A panel of leading international experts discuss whether traditional forms of 'highbrow' cultural capital associated with the dominance of the classical and historical canon are being eclipsed by newer and more fluid kinds of cultural tastes, associated with contemporary music and art, sport, and engaging with the social media and computer games.

Philippe Coulangeon is Director of Research at SNRS, Sciences Po and Visiting Professor in the Department of Sociology at LSE.

Sam Friedman is (@SamFriedmanSoc) Assistant Professor in Sociology at LSE.

Laurie Hanquinet (@LHanquinet) is Lecturer in Sociology at University of York.

Mike Savage (@MikeSav47032563) is Martin White Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the International Inequalities Institute at LSE.
The Sociology of Christmas Lights (2015-12-25 08:00)

A great video by Les Back about the sociology of Christmas lights:


Happy christmas!

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/rIicwSY-cp8](https://www.youtube.com/embed/rIicwSY-cp8)
Calling PhDs & ECRs: @thesocreview conference funding competition is now open! (2015-12-26 08:00)

The Sociological Review has launched the next round of its support scheme for unfunded PhDs and ECRs. Find out more and apply [1]here:

We are pleased to announce our latest round of funding, supported by The Sociological Review Foundation.

Funds of **up to £1000 per applicant** are be available for unfunded PhD students and postdocs (within 3 years of completion) to facilitate their attendance and participation of conferences.

To apply, please first check that you meet the criteria for applying (below) and then access and fill in the form below by our **deadline of 31st January 2016**.

You will be informed by 28th February of the outcome of your application.


CfP: Surveillance and Security in the Age of Algorithmic Communication (2015-12-27 08:00)

Surveillance and Security in the Age of Algorithmic Communication
An IAMCR 2016 pre-conference

University of Leicester

26 July 2016

Deadline for abstracts: (500 words): January 15, 2016


The call as pdf:


The Snowden leaks have put mass surveillance on the public and academic agendas. Data collection, interception and analysis by both state and commercial actors are increasingly discussed and investigated, and instances of mass data leaks underline the challenges of big data gathering and storage. So what does the reality of surveillance and the precarity of data security mean as our world is increasingly structured by algorithmic decision-making, artificial intelligence, the internet of things, and robotic cultures? What are the challenges and solutions, and what
new concepts and practices need to be considered? What next?

Academic debates on posthumanism, futuristic philosophical endeavours, and scholarly fields such as science and technology studies have approached these questions, but they have not been very prominent at IAMCR. This preconference will therefore address these current debates on the future of media and communications.

We welcome researchers who are eager to discuss the consequences of algorithmic communication and artificial intelligence to the field of media and communication. We particularly invite studies on the long-term challenges to privacy and surveillance in digital networks as they are emerging in the area of ethics and politics of algorithmic communication, and on the employment of AI in areas such as policing, healthcare, social services, education, the digital economy and the cultural industries.

For this pre-conference workshop we are interested in the following themes:

- The politics and ethics of algorithmic communication and security
- Challenges of the employment of AI in policing, social services, etc.
- Privacy and security in the context of the internet of things
- Roles and implications of corporate, governmental and civil society production of algorithmic communication
- Accountability and agency in the ‘black box society’?
- The role of human/civic rights in the context of AI and algorithmic security
- Necessary policies, regulatory frameworks, and relevant standards
- Robot protests: sociopolitical cyberconflicts and resistance to algorithmic security
- The pre-conference is associated with the projects The Common Good: Ethics and Rights in Cyber – Security and Digital Citizenship and Surveillance Society.

2. [http://iamcr.org/sites/default/files/AlgoSurveillancePreconferenceCfP_0.pdf](http://iamcr.org/sites/default/files/AlgoSurveillancePreconferenceCfP_0.pdf)

 Imagining the Millennial Fascist (2015-12-28 08:00)

A [1]really interesting post by David Banks, reflecting on the possible forms that fascism might take amongst millennials, with the particular experiences of social and political life they share as a generation:

Barring some extreme changes in the political climate the following will be true of the American electorate in 40 years: There will be no living memory of a time when real income rose for anyone but...
the super wealthy. No one, save the oldest citizens will have had a post-9/11 adulthood with all of the normalization of war that entails. Schools will be understood as prime targets for extreme acts of violence even as rates of property and violent crime fall in the aggregate. The total lack of confidence in all established institutions with the exception of police, military, and small business will continue as major cities are washed away as governments look on and refuse to invest in any kind of infrastructure. This will also be happening as America reaches a major demographic milestone: whites (as we presently define them) will no longer be a statistical majority.


Academic life in the measured university: pleasures, paradoxes and politics (2015-12-29 08:00)

The University of Sydney

June 29th to July 1st 2016


Submissions

To submit [1]CLICK HERE

Submissions are due by Friday 15 January 2016.

Themes

The conference welcomes submissions from staff and students (especially collaborations among students, and between staff and students), across the full spectrum of disciplinary lenses on the themes described below. We are especially keen on receiving submissions that address or re-work the themes below drawing on arguments about Indigenous knowledges and southern theory. Please note that the questions at each theme are intended as prompts only:
• Teaching, learning and curriculum: How are changes to teaching, learning and curriculum shifting the identities of staff and students? What kinds of ‘welcome’ and ‘questionable’ identities, roles, and practices have emerged in the measured university for staff and students, and with what consequences? What sorts of theories, approaches, and evidence are now needed to confront and re-work teaching, learning and curriculum in the measured university?

• Research & research education: What are the pleasures, paradoxes, and politics inherent in measuring research? How does the curriculum of research training / doctoral education prepare research students for engaging with (or speaking back to) the demands of the measured university? How do we form and sustain communities that nourish our identities and practices as researchers and scholars?

• Service: How does service manifest in the measured university? What has driven the transformation of ‘service’ into administration/bureaucracy? What are some innovative examples of the recognition and reward of service in the measured university?

• Community engagement: How do staff and students take up the desire by universities for increased community engagement? How are staff and students renewed by their participation in community engagement activities? In what ways does the increased focus on community engagement relate to the demands of the measured university?

• Academic careers and promotion: In what ways has the measured university helped, hindered and shaped the nature of academic careers? What does the emergence of new third space/para-academic roles tell us about the changing nature of the academic workforce in the measured university?

• Leadership: What is the intellectual role of the professoriate in the measured university? What forms of disciplinary and departmental leadership are needed for academic work in the measured university? How do we understand the relation between the restructuring of academic labour and university leadership?

• Governance: In what ways is the measured university transforming academic governance structures? Are we in a time when data has replaced discussion? Does data develop dissent or compliance? How is an understanding of what counts as data informing shifts in academic governance? What is the future role of collegial governance in the measured university?

• Ideas about the university under the conditions of measurement: In the measured university, what languages of description have we become lumbered with, and enabled by? How do practices of care, kindness, critique, and pleasure play out in the measured university? How do we continue to be committed to the idea of the university despite its reputation for being a ‘greedy institution’? What can be done to act both with, and against, the drift, scale, and reach of the measured university? Is it possible to redirect the measured university to different ends? If so, what might those ends be and how shall we go about it?

Submission types

We welcome four types of conference submission. No matter which type you choose, aim to prepare no more than a 500-word submission (which should include no more than five scholarly references). The references should be included in your word count.
Paper/Symposium (30/60/90 mins)

Single-paper presentations explore one or more dimensions of the conference themes. The goal of these sessions is to share work-in-progress and engage in dialogue with conference participants, so timing should be balanced between presentation and discussion (20m+10m is optimal). You should also aim to demonstrate how your paper/symposium contributes (or is likely to contribute) to the existing body of scholarly research. Where presenters have two or three thematically linked papers, you may propose a symposium with a maximum time of 90 minutes. In that case, you need to give an overarching abstract for the symposium as a whole, as well as titles and reduced abstracts for each paper within the symposium. Please nominate a contact person for the symposium.

Roundtable (60 mins)

Roundtable discussions provide the opportunity for a lively discussion around a particular topic or area of research. They are an ideal opportunity for networking and for building collaborations. If you wish to propose a roundtable discussion, the submission should include an overview of the topic, and pose some critical questions that the roundtable discussion will explore. These sessions will be chaired by the person who proposes the roundtable.

Performance (30/60 mins)

Performance-based presentations provide an opportunity for presenters to draw on forms, expressions and traditions of arts-based inquiry as a vehicle for exploring the conference themes. We welcome performance in all its variety. Some possibilities include: readers' theatre, performance ethnography, and poetic representations of research. If you wish to propose a performance, your submission will need to be strong in both the idea (related to the conference themes), and in the description of the type of performance. If the performance involves audience participation, you will need to indicate that as well in your submission.

Pecha Kucha Forum (30 mins)

Presenters show 20 slides for 20 seconds each, giving a total of 6 minutes and 40 seconds for each presentation. The aim is to exchange ideas in a concise and stimulating way. Presentations are image based, which keeps
them engaging. Each forum will have three pecha kucha presentations followed by time for group reflection and discussion. Individual and group proposals are welcomed.


**CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power' (2015-12-29 13:10)**

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power'. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

*Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.*

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [here](#).

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel’s decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career...
The details and criteria are:

**Essay topic:** Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

**Essay length:** 5,000 to 7,000 words

**Essay format:** Follow the BD & S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.

**Language:** English

**Submission deadline:** 31 January 2016

**Queries:**
[2] essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas and authors should indicate that their submission is for the special theme, ‘ISRF Essay Prize.’

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across

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1. http://www.isrf.org/about/
2. mailto:essayprize2016@isrf.org
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The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal’s peer review and decision-making process.

_________________________________________________________

The details and criteria are:

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**Eligibility:** Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

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**Submission deadline:** 31 January 2016

**Queries:**
[2]essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/ bdas and authors should indicate that their submission is for the special theme, 'ISRF Essay Prize.'
Inside the Lives of the 1% – How Power and Inequality Operate in Britain (2015-12-30 08:00)

INAUGURAL LECTURE BY [1]PROF AERON DAVIS, CO-DIRECTOR OF PERC

5.30-7.30PM, 26TH JANUARY

Over two decades Aeron Davis has interviewed some 350 elite subjects from the worlds of business, finance, politics and media: from Nigel Lawson to Jeremy Corbyn, Peter Oborne to Polly Toynbee, Martin Sorrell to Charlie Mayfield. He has simply asked them about their daily working lives, about how and why they do what they do. In this talk, he presents a mix of personal anecdotes and more generalised findings to explain how our leaders have become increasingly detached from their publics. He discusses these tendencies through four themes: the insularity of elite cultures; professionalism and precariousness in public life; risk-reward structures at the top, and; the mundane numbers game of leadership. In each of these discussions he explains how Britain’s leaders in their working lives, sustain power and contribute to inequality, social and political sclerosis.

In the Ian Gulland Lecture Theatre in [2]Goldsmiths, University of London

Refreshments will be served in the Foyer of the Whitehead Building.

Free event – all welcome – but please register your attendance on the Eventbrite link below so that we may know numbers for catering purposes.


1. http://www.isrf.org/about/
2. mailto:essayprize2016@isrf.org

Our most popular posts of 2015 (2015-12-31 08:00)

[1]How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)

[2]The private eye’s guide to being a plain speaking politician

4134
[3] Charles Wright Mills’ Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today


[5] 40 reasons why you should blog about your research

[6] Social Fiction: Writing Social Science Research as Fiction

[7] The pseudo-normalisation of flying

[8] Public Sociology

[9] Making the familiar strange


[12] Why should academics blog about their research? An answer in pictures

[13] Sociology’s Promise and the Sociological Imagination

[14] A Conversation with Benjamin Zephaniah on Britishness

[15] Does Sociology as a Discipline Have a Future in the UK after the REF?

[16] The Promise of Sociology in 2015

7.  

7.1 January

Digital Health/Digital Capitalism One Day Conference CfP 4th July 2016

Digital Health/Digital Capitalism One Day Conference CfP 4th July 2016

Digital technologies have had a profound impact on the ways in which people live their lives, relate to one another and think about themselves and their capacities. This event will bring together scholars who are interested in the impacts of the digital on ideas and practices of health and the workings of capitalist economies and how the two come together.

Questions addressed at this event will include but not be limited to:

- How has the digital changed the ways in which bodies and health are understood, managed and experienced?
- How does the management of health data by commercial enterprises (public-private partnerships and sharing and collaborative websites such as PatientsLikeMe) impact on health outcomes and peoples’ engagement with themselves, others and their health and bodies?
- In what ways are digital technologies affecting work practices which themselves impact on wellbeing, physical and mental health?
- How has the blurring of work and non-work life through an “always on” digital culture created new health problems and new potential strategies for managing health?
- What can existing theories tell us about the changes brought about by digital health and digital capitalism? What theoretical innovations are needed?
- Does the commercial monitoring of health and wellbeing (through areas as diverse as corporate wellness initiatives and telehealth) enable greater freedom and stimulation for healthier lives or intensify surveillance?
- What potential is there in digital management of health and work for increasing or decreasing existing health inequalities or producing new ones? Will the digital divide transfer to these arenas or be minimised?

If you would like to talk at this one day event please send a title and abstract of no more than 250 words to Chris Till [1]c.till@leedsbeckett.ac.uk by Monday 15th February 2016. Registration will open 1st March.

The event will take place on Monday 4th July, 2016 at Leeds Beckett University.

Follow [2]this link for more information.

This BSA Digital Sociology Group and BSA MedSoc Yorkshire event is supported by a grant from Leeds Beckett University.
Survey Non-Response: An @IJSRM Virtual Issue (2016-01-02 08:00)


Survey non-response represents a major challenge to data analyses. It results in smaller samples, lower statistical power, incomplete histories in a longitudinal context, and more worryingly bias in sample composition. In this virtual issue, eight articles focusing on issues of survey response are republished.

Five articles explored the impact of survey practices on response, while the remaining three focused of the determinants of response and the consequences on sample representativeness. The eight articles cover longitudinal and cross-sectional surveys in addition to different survey modes such as postal, web, and face to face surveys.


The growing climate of political repression in the UK (2016-01-03 08:00)

As anyone who follows party politics in the UK will have noticed, the home secretary's rhetoric on 'extremism' has been getting increasingly bellicose in recent months. While it remains an open question as to what extent she believes this, as opposed to simply positioning herself to the right of Osborne and Johnson for the coming leadership election, it builds upon many statements by David Cameron of the need to attack 'non-violent extremism' because it provides an environment conducive to violent extremism:
In her speech last year, May talked about Prevent having previously been focused only on the ‘hard end’ of the ‘extremism spectrum’ and promised new policies that move beyond this. This is framed in terms of bringing other bodies (not least of all the charity commission) into an anti-extremism framework, either through ‘toughening up their powers’ or creating new statutory responsibilities to combat extremism. The ‘extremism spectrum’ encompasses a wide range of extremist groups:

This strategy will be devised and overseen by the Home Office, but its implementation will be the responsibility of the whole of government, the rest of the public sector, and wider civil society. It will aim to undermine and eliminate extremism in all its forms – neo-Nazism and other forms of extremism as well as Islamist extremism – and it will aim to build up society to identify extremism, confront it, challenge it and defeat it.


How does one define ‘extremism’? It is opposition to ‘our values’. These values resist codification in anything but the most vacuous and general of terms, lending a dangerous elasticity to the concept of ‘extremism’. Extremism risks sliding into being whatever bodies charged with combating it say that it is. In this sense, we might come to see extremism everywhere, which would explain why such a wide range of initiatives are seen to be necessary:

Also among the measures within the counter-extremism strategy are:

- A full review of public institutions such as schools, further and higher education colleges, local authorities, the NHS and the civil service to ensure they are protected from “entryism” – or infiltration – by extremists
- An official investigation into the application of Sharia law in the UK
• Extremism disruption orders to stop individuals engaging in extremist behaviour
• Closure orders for law enforcement and local authorities to close down premises used to support extremism
• Tougher powers for broadcasting regulator Ofcom so action can be taken against radio and television channels showing extremist content
• Demands that internet service providers do more to remove extremist material and identify those responsible for it
• Anyone with a conviction or civil order for extremist activity will also be automatically barred from working with children and vulnerable people


It’s worth remembering that this comes from a government which defines the leader of the Labour party as an ‘extremist’. David Cameron and other senior figures use [5]precisely the language of extremism to denounce Jeremy Corbyn. I’m not for a second suggesting that an attempt to ban the Labour party is even remotely imminent (or anything remotely along those lines). But I do think it’s likely we’ll see a hardening of opinion, as well as an institutional environment in which groups on the periphery of the Labour party see themselves frustrated and undermined, either directly through the government or indirectly through over-eagre intermediaries keen to avoid becoming a target themselves. I suspect this is what is currently taking place with the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign:

An activist organisation which has Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn as patron has had its accounts closed down over fears that it may be inadvertently funding terrorism.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), whose patrons also include the Oscar winning actress Julie Christie and the playwright Caryl Churchill, was told by the Co-operative Bank that "risk-appetite" was the reason for closing its account.

In a statement, the bank said that due to the "high risk" locations in which PSC operates and send funds to, it had to carry out "advanced due diligence checks" on their accounts to ensure that funds do not "inadvertently fund illegal or other proscribed activities".

The statement concluded that it was “not possible to complete these checks to our satisfaction and the decision to close a number of accounts, including the PSC and some of its affiliates, is an inevitable result of this process".
Note there’s no actual accusation here. Yet Google News is full of headlines which link PCS and terrorism. Their operations are becoming increasingly difficult in the wider environment created by the Government’s ‘war on extremism’ and I think what we’re seeing here is the start of something that could get out of control far more quickly than people seem to realise.


David Harvey on the power of ideas (2016-01-04 08:00)

A fascinating panel discuss structured around David Harvey. He reflects on the power of ideas, how Marx changed over his career, the limitations of economics and the possibility of radical political change:
Sociology jobs at Utrecht University  (2016-01-04 11:07)

The department of Sociology at Utrecht University searches for 2 Assistant Professors in Sociology (1.0 FTE)

Job description

The two assistant professors will be working in the Department of Sociology. The department has strong re-
search traditions in a wide range of topics in sociology including cooperation problems, social networks, stratification
and inequality, families and work, and ethnic relations.

The department is part of the Dutch research school Interuniversity Center for Social Science Theory and
Methodology (ICS). We teach a bachelor programme in sociology and two master programs: the one-year master:
"Sociology: Contemporary Social Problems” and a two-year research master Sociology and Social Research.

Both positions span 60 % teaching and 40 % research time. Teaching will take place mostly in the bachelor
and in the one-year master.

Qualifications
A Ph.D in Sociology or a closely related field, e.g., social psychology, economics with affinity to sociological problems and sociological approach mentioned below;

- Affinity with problem driven quantitative sociology;

- Excellent track record in research;

- Demonstrable teaching skills. Being able to teach in Dutch as well as English will be an asset. Candidates who do not speak Dutch will be requested to learn to speak Dutch as soon as possible such that also teaching in Dutch is possible after some time;

- Have obtained the Basic Teaching Qualification (at Utrecht University or equal) or willing to achieve this qualification in the near future;

- Both positions are open to any field of specialization, although expertise in the fields of work, families, or care will be an asset for one of the positions.

- Experience with writing research proposals to obtain research grants is an asset;

- Team player.

Offer

We offer for both positions a temporary full-time position for one year. After a positive evaluation the appointment will be extended until at most four years. Your salary will range from a minimum of €3,399 to a maximum of €5,288 per month based on a fulltime appointment (i.e. salary scale 11/12 according to the Collective Labour Agreement for Dutch Universities). In addition, we offer attractive and flexible secondary terms of employment such as an annual holiday pay of 8 %, an end-of-year bonus of 8.3 % per year and partially paid parental leave. We also provide an attractive working environment and a vibrant research climate. For more information visit Working at Utrecht University.

About the organization

A better future for everyone. This ambition motivates our scientists in executing their leading research and inspiring teaching. At Utrecht University, the various disciplines collaborate intensively towards major societal themes. Our focus is on Dynamics of Youth, Institutions for Open Societies, Life Sciences and Sustainability.

The Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences is one of the leading faculties in Europe providing research and academic teaching in cultural anthropology, educational sciences, interdisciplinary social science, pedagogical sciences, psychology, and sociology. Research and teaching activities are concentrated in five areas: Behaviour in Social Contexts; Child and Adolescent Studies; Cognitive and Clinical Psychology;

Education and Learning; and Methodology and Statistics. More than 5,600 students are enrolled in a broad range of undergraduate and graduate programmes. The Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences has some 850 faculty and staff members, all providing their individual contribution to the training and education of young talent and to the research into and finding solutions for scientific and societal issues.

Additional information

Additional information about the vacancy can be obtained from: prof. dr. ir. Vincent Buskens, telephone
number: +31 30 253 1848, v.buskens@uu.nl or drs. Ellen Janssen, e.janssen@uu.nl.

Apply

Please send your application accompanied by a letter of motivation, a curriculum vitae and the names and contact info of at least two persons who are able to provide professional reference. You can apply this link:


We expect job talks to take place between January 21 and January 28.

The application deadline is 11/01/2016

Taking the Cake: Reflecting on A/Sexuality (2016-01-05 08:00)

A documentary project I was interviewed for earlier in the year:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/YGggJwDoAnM
Interview with Steve Fuller on 'Open Access' Academic Publishing with Rabble.ca. (2016-01-05 14:56)

I was recently asked to respond to a variety of issues concerning academic 'open access' publishing, especially in light of the boycott of the publisher Elsevier and other related initiatives happening in Canada. These are detailed in [1]this article in Rabble.Ca. However, my comments which were indeed designed to be a general reflection, were heavily excerpted, so their sense may not be entirely clear. Below is the full response I gave to the reporter, Cory Collins:

I'm somewhat more sceptical than many of the open access movement. I see it as addressing a rather limited set of problems surrounding academic knowledge production and specifically underestimating the role that publishers play in the process. To be honest, I'm surprised that publishers aren't putting up more of a principled defence of their activities.

I think the best way to see the open access movement is as akin to a consumer's revolt. A consumer's revolt doesn't address fundamental problems with capitalism, but it does tackle issues surrounding high prices and value-for-money. Similarly, open access doesn't deal with, say, the power structures inherent in academia's peer review process or the technical language in which academic work is couched. Rather, it simply removes what is seen as an unproductive 'middle man', namely, the publisher, whose efforts at producing and distributing journals don't seem to justify the high price to universities.

I say this because 'open access' is often associated with 'democratizing' knowledge, but at most it is democratizing it for professional academics who are already the beneficiaries of the publishing system. It doesn't 'open' up academia in any other meaningful sense. Even if the open access journals are freely available on-line, you still need to be able to make sense of them (i.e. know the lingo) and submit your papers to its peer review processes. Those are arguably bigger obstacles for non-academics than even the price of journals.

Now, as for the publishers themselves. They do more than simply profit from gullible universities. They actually organize the peer review process and ensure a regular flow of academic product to fill the volumes of the journals. In other words, they industrialize the process. This is not a trivial function: Such a rationalization of the work process cuts against the relatively unreliable character of academic practices. (It's very very hard for peer review to work in a timely fashion unless someone is cracking the whip.) If open access works as a large scale phenomenon in academia, it will be by being parasitic on production systems established by commercial publishers.

Moreover, publishers have incentives, which established academics typically don't have, to look for new fields that can be the basis for new journals, and hence new income streams. In other words, in their endless pursuit of profit, publishers end up promoting innovation on a regular basis, which might not otherwise happen if academics are left to their own devices. Cultural studies, gender studies, etc. may be seen in retrospect to have been publisher-driven movements, based on how these topics were beginning to be picked up in traditional history, sociology, literature, etc. courses in the 1980s.

As for whether to pay for peer review, I've made an argument here: [2]http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/06/16/a-modes-t-proposal-to-solve-the-problem-of-peer-review/. My basic proposal is that 'peer
review’ should be taken out of the professional academics’ hands entirely and be put in the hands of academically trained people who work for the publishers of the journals.


Noam Chomsky: The Singularity is Science Fiction! (2016-01-06 08:00)

This interview is broader than the title suggests, covering a lot of interesting ground. But it’s particularly interesting to hear Chomsky’s views on the technological singularity:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/0kICLG4Zg8s
ISRF Mid-Career Fellowship Competition

Launch: 4th January 2016  
Deadline: 19th February 2016

The Independent Social Research Foundation wishes to support independent-minded researchers to do interdisciplinary work which is unlikely to be funded by existing funding bodies. It is interested in original research ideas which take new approaches, and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems.

The Foundation intends to make a small number of awards to support original interdisciplinary research, across the range of the social sciences, **to be held from a start date no later than the end of December 2017**. Scholars from within Europe are eligible to apply.

The award is intended to enable a scholar at the mid-career stage to pursue his/her research full-time, **for a period of up to 12 months**. The amount will be offered to buy out the costs of replacing all teaching and associated administration in the applicant’s home institution, and will be considered to a **maximum of £60,000** per successful applicant. Within that sum, reasonable support for research expenses may be considered on a matched-funding basis with the host institution.

The applicant should normally hold a salaried position at an institution of higher education and research, and be **10 years or more from the year of their PhD award**. However, a shorter time from PhD award may exceptionally be considered, if the candidate has other qualifications to be considered as mid-career.
Applicants should consult the Criteria as set out in the Further Particulars and show that they meet them. Applicants should follow the Application procedure and should present their Proposal in the format specified there.

CfP: (Dis)empowering technologies (2016-01-08 08:00)

“TransMissions: Journal of Film and Media Studies”, new online academic journal affiliated at the Jagiellonian University, Poland announced its first CfP: (Dis)empowering technologies.

The main areas of our interests are:
- social movement activism
- ethnic, national and religion minorities and their technologies
- women and their technologies
- queer and their technologies
- disabled and their technologies
- migrants and their technologies
- methodological aspects of researching (dis)empowering technologies
- prosthesis as (dis)empowering artifact
- social media
- mobile media
- community radio

We are awaiting abstracts till 31 January 2016.

For more information about journal please visit our web site:

The full CfP may be found here: [2]http://transmissions.edu.pl/call-for-papers/


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**Bruno Latour on the relationship between Philosophy and Social Sciences (2016-01-09 08:00)**

A thought provoking extract from the dialogue between Bruno Latour and Graham Harman transcribed in [1]The Prince and the Wolf: Latour and Harman at the LSE, pg 46:

So if you are a pragmatist, it doesn’t mean there are a few small details that the social sciences would solve while the basic principles and foundations are provided by philosophers. I resent that because I think it’s wrong, and that’s not the way to collaborate between philosophy and the social sciences. Philosophy is too important to be the foundation of the social sciences. Philosophy is the calisthenics necessary to be as subtle as the case at hand.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Prince_and_the_Wolf.html?id=M9WmAEEACAAJ&hl=en

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Yesterday I was speaking with a doctoral student, Morteza Hashemi Madani, about the point of social theory, especially given the recent revelation that Zygmunt Bauman plagiarises not only himself but also Wikipedia – shock, horror! As someone who has always had mixed views about ‘this thing called social theory’, I addressed ‘the point of social theory’ in terms of the spirit in which one might read such works. Below I offer a fourfold typology for your consideration that theorizes my own practice of reading social theory.

• Most works of ‘social theory’ are simply exercises in scholasticism, including the ones written by some of the top names in the field, such as Habermas. What I mean by ‘scholasticism’ is the original academic practice of summarizing what others have said on a common topic, weighing the opinions and drawing a conclusion that does some justice to all of them. This was a notable medieval practice of knowledge transmission, especially given the paucity of books and translations. Scholastics pre-read everything for you, which is why textbooks continue to have this character. The practice also stamped one’s own authority on a topic, as the scholastic basically tells students who is and is not relevant to the topic and how seriously their respective opinions should be taken. In the High Middle Ages, the scholastics themselves – as personalities – were quite powerful people since their judgements varied significantly (consider: Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham were all scholastics). However, in the modern period, scholasticism has maintained its power through sheer redundancy of content across scholastics, which in turn gives the impression of a continuous ‘tradition’ of thought. In that case, the logical next question is ‘Who from the current generation will be included in the next generation’s canon?’ But if you look at the so-called canon, you’ll realize that virtually all the names could be replaced by others, and that only the repeated scholastic presentation holds the ‘tradition’ together – just as was the case in the Middle Ages when the scholastics presumed that Aristotle and the Bible were natural bedfellows.

• Some works of social theory are better read for their references than their main text – a bit like Wikipedia articles. Anthony Giddens falls in this category for me. This is clearly a guy who can spot a good text when he sees one, which he then incorporates into his own text, which turns out to be a pastiche of the contents of several such well-spotted texts, overladen by a vague but dispensable conceptualisation that is Giddens’ own original theoretical contribution. The trick here is to read what Giddens has read but then re-theorize it for yourself, ignoring Giddens’ own weak formulations. I single out Giddens but he’s by no means the only social theorist in this vein. Anglophone postmodern theorists (not the original French guys, more about whom below) apply here too. The way to think about such people is as art connoisseurs who make the mistake of creating artworks themselves, failing to realize that their hand is not as good as their eye. However, my guess is that such people would be quite good at running academic institutions, in terms of knowing the right people to hire, the fields in which to invest, etc.

• Then we turn to people like Bauman – and possibly Beck – who are the jingle writers of theory. Jingles are those catchy tunes used in marketing campaigns to keep a product in the listener’s mind, which work not only because of their own play on words but because they also trigger some deeper sonically coded memories, perhaps from the history of music itself or the sounds of everyday life. Starting in the 1950s, New York jingle writers were instrumental in the conversion of popular music to the 3-minute sonic ‘hit’ that we take for granted today. Bauman and Beck can be seen as theory tunesmiths in this sense. Thus, we might think of Bauman’s career as modulating between ‘Adorno Lite’ (in his more normative moods) and ‘Simmel Lite’ (in his more descriptive
moods). So what might make a music purist recoil from saying that Burt Bachrach is a great composer equally applies to those who might claim that Bauman is a great theorist. In this respect, Beck is a bit different because more concerted efforts have been made to translate his theory-jingles – especially the ‘risk society’ – into proper empirical research programmes on the basis of which policy has been made. They make Beck more ‘serious’ than he himself was capable of being. Behind this move is what Stephen Turner a quarter-century ago identified as ‘conceptual capture’, the technique Robert Merton used to streamline and repackage difficult (often because untranslated) continental social theoretic conceptions for the empirically oriented American sociological market. Thus, one might think of the resulting ‘middle-range theory’ as akin to ‘middle-brow music’, at least vis-à-vis its original sources.

- Finally, there is the most interesting category of ‘social theory’, which is where it really earns the right to be seen as something different from ‘sociological theory’. Here the author is literally thinking his/her way through a body of data. This is neither an application nor a testing of theory. Rather, it is something closer to realizing an idea in an artistic medium, where the theory is the idea and the data are the medium. In terms of recognized ‘modern masters’ of social theory, Bourdieu excels at this. Seen in conventional academic terms, Bourdieu is provincial in his scholarship and sloppy in his method. After all, we always warn students to distinguish theory and data and then show how they interact. Bourdieu profoundly failed at that task – but to good effect. What he gives us instead is a sense of the process by which one tries to come up with a coherent understanding of disparate bits of evidence that he feels need to be understood together. Moreover, he does this in a way that is sufficiently constrained and even driven by the evidence that we don’t think he’s just making it up – yet that very fact then makes it difficult to figure out exactly what the theory is. Hegel attempted this sort of understanding on a world-historic scale, but I also think this is the best way to read people like Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida – all of whom are usefully understood as re-thinking different slices of the history of the sciences, often getting into remarkable detail (albeit distorted, so say critics) about past events. This is a more ‘participatory’ style of theorizing in the Platonic sense of literally merging with what one is talking about. I know that sounds mystical, though there are precedents in philosophers of history such as Collingwood, in turn influenced by Dilthey. One concrete effect of this mode of theorizing is that it becomes easy for the theorist to be him/herself a moment in history. I don’t simply mean that you become a celebrity (though that is one manifestation) but more importantly, you are seen as a kind of prophet in your own time.

_________________________
I agree on Habermas and Bourdieu. But I would love to know where would Steven clasify the only guy who worked out not just social theory but a theory of society in society (or is he folloween the conventional anglosaxon desdain towards him?): Luhmann.

christo22 (2016-01-11 00:06:45)
Which category does Steve Fuller fall into?

Steve Fuller (2016-01-11 07:46:42)
These responses are short because they open up into too many issues. To Cristian M: I think Luhmann falls into category 4 (unlike his mentor Parsons, who despite using the same systems-language, is more in category 1). However, I think Luhmann’s enterprise is closer to the early Hegel (of Phenomenology of the Spirit) than the later, more explicitly historicist Hegel (which is
the model for most of the people in category 4). To Christo22: I think of myself as instinctively in Category 4, though there are elements of the other categories. I actually think that each of the 4 categories has a role to play in intellectual life. For example, I don’t think you can really give a good academic talk unless you have something of category 3 in you: You need to be able to self-vulgarize.


[...] De-institutionalisation: Even sociology has seen the de-institutionalisation of theory at the graduate level so that the teaching of theory is reduced “to a single ‘omnibus’ course that attempts the impossible task of going from Montesquieu to Judith Butler in one semester”. Moreover, theory is generally no longer taught by theorists but by those whose work is only ‘relatively theoretical’. Devaluation: within the academy theory has been devalued in favour of empirically ‘applied’ work which produces ‘useful’ research. Destructuration: there is no longer any sort of ‘hierarchy of modes of doing theory’. We are left with a confusing and ‘rudderless heterodoxy’, and ‘very little agreement as to the “rules” of the theoretical game’(Lizardo). (But see Fuller’s deftly witty four-fold categorisation/hierarchy of theorising in which he rightly locates Luhmann in the fourth category: available here) [...] 

Una guía para leer teoría social, por Steve Fuller (2016-06-05 21:00:47)

[...] Fuente: http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/18343 [...] 

Steve Fuller’s Guide for Teaching Social Theory | The Sociological Imagination The Sociological Imagination (2017-01-29 19:05:05)

[...] this time last year, when a conversation with a graduate student at Warwick inspired me to propose a guide to reading social theory. A couple of days ago I returned from Edinburgh, where in just under a day I had several [...] 

Plumbers Bristol Area (2017-12-31 17:22:36)

Hello, after reading this amazing post i am too glad to share my knowledge here with colleagues.


I don't know if it’s just me or if perhaps everybody else experiencing problems with your site. It appears as though some of the written text on your posts are running off the screen. Can someone else please provide feedback and let me know if this is happening to them as well? This might be a issue with my internet browser because I've had this happen previously. Thanks 

d/s lifestyle jewelry (2018-10-22 04:59:53)

We have found random strangers at bars, strip clubs as soon as a crew member on a cruise ship. If you’re like thousands or millions of other people worldwide, you actually want to lead and live a normal lifestyle - and who doesn’t. Then you can add one extra exercise session for at least thirty minutes once a week, until that becomes only a given part of your week. 

internet cable (2018-10-24 04:23:30)

And live in the arms of this fictitious Adonis you have conjured as your fantasy mate. Think “news” and ensure your posts seem like news articles with pictures and all. You must realise that when you open a brand new Forex position that you are, in reality, trading currency pairs like a single unit. 

ignition casino coupons (2018-10-27 12:40:38)

What a information of un-ambiguity and preserveness of valuable familiarity concerning unpredicted feelings. 

education blog bd (2018-11-02 05:48:36)

Stick with your work, or find another and better marketing strategy to exchange the classified ad strategy. Anyone can compose and come up with any topic, from hobbies to political vies. The inforkal style of your blog gives Internet consumers a chance too familiarize yourself with individuals who’re behind the company better, which makes it easier so they can trust you andd also buyy your site.
Most people understand God by some form.

On extended drives, you'll get what you can get.

May I simply say what a comfort to discover somebody that genuinely understands what they are discussing online. You certainly know how to bring a problem to light and make it important. More and more people need to look at this and understand this side of your story. I was surprised that you are not more popular given that you most certainly possess the gift.

Hi there, this weekend is good in favor of me, since this point in time i am reading this impressive informative post here at my residence.

It's truly very complicated in this active life to listen news on Television, thus I simply use world wide web for that purpose, and take the hottest information.

Hi mates, good paragraph and pleasant urging commented here, I am in fact enjoying by these.

This post is really a nice one it assists new internet users, who are wishing for blogging.

In case you fill this in, you may be marked as a spammer.

Good day very cool web site!! Guy .. Excellent .. Wonderful .. I will bookmark your web site and take the feeds also? I'm happy to search out numerous useful information right here within the put up, we need develop more techniques on this regard, thanks for sharing. . . . . .

I feel this is one of the so much significant info for me. And i am satisfied studying your article. However wanna commentary on some basic issues, The web site style is great, the articles is in point of fact excellent :D. Excellent process, cheers.

That is a good tip especially to those fresh to the blogosphere. Brief but very accurate info... Thanks for sharing this one. A must read article!

I think other website owners should take this website as an example, very clean and fantastic user pleasant style.
It has grown out of a number of different combat sports, many dating back too hundreds, if not 1000s of years. Now before you go on and rave regarding how amazing and fantastic this idea happens to be, in fact hybrid fighting techniques have been about for hundreds of yeazrs already. Thai boxing had some alterations in the initial half in the 20th century though the experience itself has not yet changed dramatically.

excellent put up, very informative. I'm wondering why the other experts of this sector do not understand this. You must continue your writing. I am sure, you have a huge readers’ base already!

I believe everything published made a great deal of sense. But, what about this? Suppose you were to write a awesome headline? I ain’t saying your information is not solid, however what if you added a post title that grabbed folk’s attention? I mean » Steve Fuller’s Guide to Reading Social Theory The Sociological Imagination is kinda vanilla. You could look at Yahoo’s home page and note how they write post titles to get people interested. You might add a related video or a related pic or two to get readers interested about what you’ve written. Just my opinion, it would bring your posts a little bit more interesting.

Arthur C Clarke predicts the existence of the internet in 1974

HT to [1]Org Theory for linking to this great video:

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/bXxyCyDEaEg
Unfolding the origami of collective existence using digital data (2016-01-11 08:00)

A provocative paper co-authored by Bruno Latour, calling for a new spirit of collaboration between social scientists and natural scientists:

This does not mean, of course, that the modeling tradition of natural sciences ceases to be relevant for the study of collective life. Quite the contrary! Such experience is crucial to develop the new methods necessary to handle larger and more diverse datasets. At the beginning of the 19th century natural and social scientists developed together a new discipline, "statistics", that helped them to interpret the new data available at that time ([2]Hacking 1990; [3]Desrosières 2002). Today, the advent of digital data poses a similar challenge and calls for a similar alliance. Micro-macro models have run their course. The time is now to develop the formal techniques necessary to unfold the origami of collective existence and this should be the aim of the renewed alliance between the social and natural sciences. For the next few years, at least, efforts should be shifted from simulating to mapping, from simple explanations to complex observations.


Activism in 2016: Art, Land and Technology (2016-01-11 12:53)

ACTIVISM IN 2016: ART, LAND AND TECHNOLOGY

WEDNESDAY 23RD MARCH 2016, MILLBURN HOUSE, UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Invited speaker: Dr Jenny Hughes, University of Manchester

This one-day conference sponsored by the Humanities Research Centre will explore contemporary forms of political activism and their relationship to the arts. We will explore the world of social media, not only as a means to inform and organise real-life demonstrations, but also as a discrete arena of discussion and activism. We will analyse the practice of demonstration and occupation from a multidisciplinary approach, including sociological, geographical and political analysis. We will also investigate the aesthetic and political value of performance, drawing connections between arts practice and political protest. Activism is a very wide topic and offers many opportunities to think about the role of groups in our society and in the space surrounding us, the way we stand for our political beliefs and how we create, disseminate and express values. This conference will maintain an interdisciplinary perspective, hoping to attract staff and students from various academic fields, including Geography, Theatre Studies, Sociology, Politics and International Relations to name but a few, as well as creative professionals.

Research questions include, but are not limited to:

- What challenges and opportunities does technology present to extra-parliamentary political activity?
- What is the role of traditional forms of activism in the contemporary political landscape?
- What is the connection between territory and activism?
- How do contemporary artists engage with politics?
- What are the connections between protest and artistic performance?

We welcome proposals for 15 minutes presentations. Please send a 250-word abstract and a 150-word biography to a.borchi@warwick.ac.uk by January 17th 2016.

We also welcome contributions from artists and creative professionals of all disciplines, including:

- Provocations on the topics listed above (max. 15 minutes).
- Visual artworks to be exhibited in the foyer of Millburn House, University of Warwick, on the day of the conference.
- Performances (max. 15 minutes).

Please send a 250-word proposal (including technical details and photographs in the case of artworks and performances) and a 150-word biography to a.borchi@warwick.ac.uk by January 17th 2016.

2. mailto:a.borchi@warwick.ac.uk
3. mailto:a.borchi@warwick.ac.uk
The Second Convention for Higher Education

The HE Green Paper:
The Threat to the Public University
...and what we can do about it

Saturday 27 February, 10am-5pm

Christopher Ingold Chemistry Building, University College London

Speakers from: UCU, Campaign for the Public University, Council for the Defence of British Universities & more

Organisation

The Convention will be structured around the stated premises of the Green Paper in order to coordinate a collective collegiate response to it. Sessions are intended to be both informative and participatory.

The Convention is open to everyone who cares about the future of the Public University and the threat the
Green Paper represents to academic freedom.

Sessions on:

- **Teaching quality, social mobility and the TEF** – the rise of metrics and the uncapping of fees
- **Opening the market to private providers** – easy come, easy go?
- **Measure anything, fail everyone?** – the rise of ‘performance management’
- **Deregulation, the attack on governance and statutes** – academic freedom under threat
- **The future of research funding**
- **Strategies to win**: How can we defend the Public University?

Timeline

The closing date for the official government consultation on [2]the Green Paper is **15 January**. The Convention will take place five weeks after, ahead of the publication of the White Paper.

In order to facilitate debate we will post responses to the Green Paper from colleagues across the sector on our website.

Publicity resources

- [3]HE Convention A4 poster
- [4]HE Convention A5 leaflet (2-up)
- [5]Motion to pass formally through your union branch or other organisation

[6]Register via eventbrite

4158
Eventbrite will ask you to make a contribution of £5 to help cover speakers’ expenses.

5. https://heconvention2.wordpress.com/motion/
6. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/convention-for-higher-education-tickets-19768923382

Mini-conference on *Moral Economies of the Digital* (2016-01-13 08:00)

Call for papers for mini-conference at the Society for Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) 28th Annual Conference ‘Moral Economies, Economic Moralties.’ June 24-26, 2016, University of California, Berkeley.

Organizers: Dean Curran, Dave Elder-Vass, Elisa Oreglia, Nikos Sotirakopoulos, and Janaki Srinivasan

DEADLINE FOR ABSTRACTS: January 18, 2016

Digital technologies have opened up new opportunities for novel forms of economic practice and for the economic empowerment of individuals and communities. But what happens when they encounter the mesh of pre-existing social, cultural, and economic relations within which they are deployed in practice? We invite papers that explore the moral economies underpinning the use of digital technologies, and examine how they encourage or constrain the use of technologies to renegotiate existing power structures and economic practices. We are particularly interested in the following themes:

1. How do existing moral economies shape digital economies?
   - The moral economy of digital economic forms. To what extent do new digital economic forms draw on consciously ethical practice and does this open up awareness of different approaches to the economy? Do they offer promising alternatives to mainstream market capitalism or are we already witnessing a gradual subordination of digital gift practices to the accumulation of capital?

   - Explaining new digital economic forms. Between nakedly capitalistic market-oriented models at one extreme, and the almost purely gift economy model of Wikipedia at the other, there lies a continuum of innovative and often hybridised forms of economic practices. Can sociology, oriented to practices, explain how these economic forms operate, how they develop, and how they hybridise, where economics, oriented to markets, cannot?

   - Gender and the moral economy of digital technologies. How do the moral economies of the family, of the community, and of the workplace influence notions of the ‘appropriate’ engagement of men and women with digital technologies, and how does this vary between the Global North and Global South?

2. How are moral economies reworked in the digital world?
- Encounters between the ‘new’ sharing economy and the moral economy of the communities they work in. Are companies such as Uber and AirBnB a new type of moral economy? Do they re-create space for community enterprise or merely seek to evade forms of regulation that have long protected consumers?

- Subaltern communities and the moral economy of digital technologies in the Global South. What processes and circumstances allow digital technologies to be incorporated successfully (or not) into the moral economies of subaltern communities?

- The digital public sphere. In what way are the power relations and social practices associated with digital economies affecting contemporary public and private spheres?

- How do value propositions associated with the introduction of digital technologies, such as disintermediation, or the death of distance, play out in practice?


The films deal with short passages of original philosophical text and interpret them visually. The text concern themes like how we perceive the look of the other (Sartre), what becoming might be (Deleuze/Guttari), and how the spirit refers to itself (Hegel). The aim of the films is to twofold: Firstly, they explore how these text employ language to develop and convey their ideas. They investigate in the phenomenology of the texts: their modes of construction of meaning, their main metaphors, etc. Secondly, these texts by white famous males that are normally seen as rigid and rational. The films try to make their emotional and sensual aspects visible.
Veronika Reichl works as a filmmaker, writer, and lecturer in Berlin. She received her PhD from the University of Portsmouth. Her doctoral thesis investigates in the relationship between linguistic and pictorial information and the nature of visual metaphors. Her book and DVD Sprachkino [Language Cinema] is about the interface between abstract language and images. It was published in 2008. Veronika Reichl did a Diploma in Graphic Design and a Master of Arts in European Media at Merz Akademie, Stuttgart. She was born in Baltimore, USA.

1. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/38114353](https://player.vimeo.com/video/38114353)
2. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/40772316](https://player.vimeo.com/video/40772316)
3. [https://player.vimeo.com/video/38108248](https://player.vimeo.com/video/38108248)

[...] “The films deal with short passages of original philosophical text and interpret them visually.” (article) [...]

#ThisIsACoup by @paulmasonnews and @TheopiSkarlatos (2016-01-14 08:00)

A four part documentary series by Paul Mason and Theopi Skarlatos about what happened when "Greece clashed with the international financial system and lost":

4164
Re-Embedding the Social: New Modes of Production, Critical Consumption and Alternative Lifestyles (2016-01-14 11:52)

Mini-Conference at the Annual Conference for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) Location: Berkeley, University of California Date: June 24-26, 2016 Mini-conference organisers: Francesca Forno, Paolo R. Graziano, Lara Monticelli, and Torsten Geelan Extended abstract: approx. 1000 words to be submitted through the SASE website, clearly stating that you wish to be considered for this mini-conference Abstract deadline: February 1st, 2016 Expected output: edited collection or special issue Extra-conference activity: visiting/dining at a local cooperative/eco-village (tbc) Any questions: email miniconf13.sase@gmail.com Call for Papers (extended version attached): The recent and yet unresolved Great Recession has revealed all the limitations and flaws of the 'economic moralities' embedded in neoliberalism which have been guiding the functioning of economic and political institutions in numerous countries. In tandem with the rise of new social movements and the success of radical political parties, everyday economic practices of production and consumption are also being questioned and challenged by a growing number of 'critical' citizens. These attempts often take the form of local, horizontal and collaborative initiatives such as consumer-producer networks, cooperatives, ethical banking, co-working spaces, and the like. All these practices share a steadfast belief in the idea of 'social sustainability', and a desire to move towards a society which promotes not just environmentalism but also values of equality, diversity, and social cohesion. Such economic practices and ideas have the potential to gradually disrupt the economic moralities underlying many capitalist modes of production and the ways in which we consume goods and services. This Mini Conference welcomes theoretical and empirical contributions from around the world and across the social sciences (sociology, political science, development studies, economics, anthropology, business, and philosophy) that touch on the following three themes: 1) New Modes of Production The social economy refers to economic activity that is directly organized and controlled through the exercise of some form of social power - rooted in the voluntary association of people in civil society, and based on the capacity to organize people for collective action of various sorts. Nestled between the private sector (business) and the public sector (Government), this includes worker-owned cooperatives, social enterprises, charities, and non-profit organisations. The range of economic activities that can be organized through the social economy is very broad and includes recycling, childcare, housing, healthcare, disaster relief and web applications. The vibrancy and effectiveness of which can be enhanced through institutional design, such as state subsidies, social economy investment funds (e.g. crowdfunding), governance through associational democracy, and participatory democratic forms of organisation. This stream welcomes contributions that: o Critique existing modes of production in the social economy; o Provide empirical examples and theoretical accounts of how the social economy could be further enhanced through institutional design; o Identify and explore cases of organizing economic activity through the social economy in hitherto unexamined countries, economic sectors, and geographical levels (local, regional, national, and supranational). 2) Critical Consumption Over the past years, new social movements (Sustainable Community Movement Organizations) have emerged, going beyond more traditional forms of mobilization and of contentious politics. SCMOs are focused on exploiting alternative forms of consumption as a political tool: organizations and
movements such as solidarity-based exchanges and networks, new consumer-producer cooperatives, barter groups, urban gardening, time banks, local savings groups and fair trade, are all examples of SCMOs, which have gained increasing relevance globally. The crisis has provided further space for such organizations, which have helped – and are still helping – to build new social relationships and resistance in a context of radical revision of the function of the market. The growth in the number of ‘political consumers’ has generated considerable scholarly interest. Many of the studies on the topic, however, have analyzed this phenomenon mainly from the individual consumer perspective while less attention has been paid to the role of social movements promoting collective political actions. This strand welcomes contributions discussing theoretical challenges posed by SCMOs and/or empirical illustrations in both the Global North and the Global South. We are particularly interested in papers that investigate: o Why, how and whether Sustainable Community Movement Organizations emerge and succeed in triggering sustained political engagement; o To what extent and how are SCMOs linked to specific movements such as the global justice movement and the indignados movement etc.; o Where, and in what form, are grassroots economic initiative emerging and engaging the public; o How can developments in political consumerism, and critiques thereof, inform the development of social movement research and vice versa; o What is the effectiveness of such organizations in local, national and international political contexts. 3) Alternative Lifestyles In our final stream we will discuss theoretical and empirical (academic and/or activist based) research on all those, increasingly diffused, everyday practices that are based not (or not only) on monetary transactions but on trust, interchange and reciprocity. Examples range from daily ‘sharing economy’ practices - such as car sharing, couch-surfing, house swapping, co-working - to more radical and explicitly anti-capitalistic ones like eco-villages or intentional communities. We welcome papers that address: o The extent to which these practices constitute (or not) ‘coping mechanisms’ for socio-economic exclusion; o The way through which these practices manage to provide not just material goods but services outside a ‘market’ logic; o The extent to which these practices succeed (or fail) in introducing societal values and norms (reciprocity, exchange, mutual help) that are an alternative to neoliberal ideology, and help foster a ‘new imaginary’ for progressive social change.

2. https://sase.org/
3. mailto:miniconf13.sase@gmail.com

Workshop: Conceptual Challenges in Interdisciplinary Social Media Research (2016-01-15 08:00)

I’m very excited that the [1]Digital Social Science Forum’s workshop has been accepted at Social Media & Society in London this year. Susan Halford, Les Carr, Emma Uprichard and Evelyn Ruppert will be speaking at the workshop & I will be facilitating. It will take place on Monday July 11th and you’ll have to [2]register for the (excellent) conference to take part.

Many, if not all, affirm the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in social media research, as different disciplinary backgrounds contribute different skills to the analysis of complex socio-technical objects. However such collaborations also entail conceptual challenges, encountered at the level of substantive theoretical commitments but also in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform everyday practice.

The workshop as a whole will aim both to familiarise participants with common conceptual challenges confronted in interdisciplinary social media research, as well as drawing upon their own experience and understanding to unpack these challenges and explore potential routes beyond them. In doing so, we hope to develop new perspectives on these issues, including the disciplinary origins of these conceptual challenges, which can constitute the basis for further work and the production of practical toolkits to inform interdisciplinary working.
Only a few days left! Digital Methodologies – Beyond Big & Small Data (2016-01-16 08:00)

Digital Methodologies: Beyond Big & Small Data
9th International Conference on Social Science Methodology (RC33)
September 11th – 16th, 2016, University of Leicester ([1]http://www.le.ac.uk/)

Session Organizer
Christian Bokhove, University of Southampton, United Kingdom, [2]C.Bokhove@soton.ac.uk
Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick, United Kingdom, [3]mark@markcarrigan.net
Sarah Lewthwaite, University of Southampton, United Kingdom, [4]s.e.lewthwaite@southampton.ac.uk[5] Richard Wiggins, Institute of Education, United Kingdom [6]r.wiggins@ioe.ac.uk Session Abstract In recent years the challenge of Big Data has become a dominant theme within discussions of social science methodology. But these debates have too often been played out within a limited methodological frame of reference, in which the virtues and vices of Big Data are counterpoised or the call is made to supplement Big Data with Small Data. This stream will critically analyse this methodological framing of Big Data, its strengths and limitations, with a view to developing digital methodologies which move beyond Big Data and Small Data. In doing so, we hope the stream will also addressed a broad range of related issues, such as:

- The methodological challenge of big data and digital social research
- The practical challenges of mixed methods approaches to digital social research
- The role of theoretical ideas in digital methodologies
- The relationship between Virtual Methods, Digital Methods, Technology Enhanced Methods etc.
- The methodological utility of data mining and the dangers of data fishing
- The continued utility of sampling in digital social research, for example with regard to collection methods involving Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and Twitter streams.
- What are the ethical and social implications of linking and accessing administrative data?
- What are the implications for epistemologies, data collection and analysis of the pace of change in which social life is increasingly played out online?

The stream seeks to incorporate technical issues pertaining to digital methods into a broader discussion of the impact of digital methodologies. We are particularly keen to receive papers that reflect upon and bridge existing methods and draw out a vision for the future of social science research and practice. The session is organised jointly between the Independent Social Research Foundation’s Digital Social Science Forum and the International Journal of Social Research Methodology. DEADLINE: 21st January, 2016 Submission Instructions:

1. To submit a paper abstract for the RC33 9th International Conference on Social Science Methodology, you should visit: [7]http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/sociology/research/rc33-conference After landing on the homepage, navigate to 'Abstract Submission', which appears in the top left hand column of the webpage, see image below:
2. Complete the form in full. You may wish to cut and paste your abstract into the Abstract field from another document.

3. Choose the relevant session for your stream. To do so you will need to select the relevant lead session organiser from the drop-down menu highlighted in the image below. To check you are submitting to the correct session, you can view a table of sessions and session convenors by clicking the link entitled ‘View the list of sessions and session convenors’. Once complete, click submit.
Muslims and education are frequently ‘hot topics’ in media and political discourses. Academics have highlighted how pessimistic media and political rhetoric about segregated ghettos and cultural clashes lack empirical evidence; when statistics and claims, even those presented by academics and well-intentioned government organisations, are properly scrutinised it is found that selective evidence is being utilised to set a sensationalist agenda (Finney and Simpson, 2009). Similarly [3]Muslims, Schooling & The Question of Self-Segregation by Shamim Miah deconstructs
simplistic narratives regarding the ‘self-segregation’ of Muslims by illustrating the complexities of contemporary multicultural belongings from the perspectives of engaged and active Muslim parents and students. It is particularly helpful and fair that the author has sought to (re)present the voices of parents and students who are often marginalised and neglected in media, political and policy discourses. I would argue that Muslim parents and students are usually ‘constructed’, and simultaneously judged, by public discourses as holding certain beliefs and as indulging in certain practices; this book addresses the imbalance and lack of representation/voices of marginalised British citizens by giving us empirical evidences about Muslim communities and their views and practices regarding integration and schooling.

Part One of the book examines key historical events, such as the 7/7 bombings, that influenced policy discourses. These are clearly and succinctly outlined for us to understand how these led to 1) current socio-political themes promoting assimilation through the Fundamental British Values agenda, 2) proposed policies of Counter Terrorism and Security. The highly accessible and engaging book offers a valuable critique of contemporary political and policy discourses of British identity, particularly the impact upon British Muslims who are constructed as the terrifying Other. The author also examines how debates on housing and spatial segregation influenced ‘community cohesion’ narratives, and resulted in coercing schools to merge with other local schools to unsuccessfully enforce ‘integration’. Thus Part One of the book introduces key policies and practices relevant to contemporary thinking on multicultural British society.

Part Two of the book draws focus on empirical research conducted in cities containing large Muslim communities. We learn about Muslim students’ perspectives on integration, segregation and belonging to Britain, as well as about the parental choices on residence and neighbourhood. Muslim students from faith schools, as well as their parents, are presented as integrating and integrated through their faith. The connections between social class, integration and belonging show how Muslim parents experience poverty and inequalities, and the consequences of their lived experiences on school choices for their children. The author places emphasis on the importance of taking into account how intersectionalities work when it comes to understanding Muslim students and schooling experiences and options.

The book significantly shows that ‘Britishness’, ‘integration’ and ‘segregation’ are complex and contested notions frequently misunderstood or distorted in public discourses. The timely book supports ideas prevalent in the literature on multicultural Britishness. Firstly, that Britishness is interconnected with broad concepts of citizenship, national identity and multiculturalism, just as the notions of borders and diaspora cannot be discussed without reference to one another (Brah, 1996). The book supports arguments that terms like multiculturalism, Britishness and citizenship are contested and contingent on context for meaning, requiring regular critical analysis that deconstructs taken for granted descriptions and assumptions (Ward, 2004, Faulks, 2006, McGhee, 2008, Haste, 2010). Following Edward Said’s Orientalism (Said, 2003), the author interrogates master narratives that construct the frequently demonised and pathologised Muslim Other and provides the reader with much needed counter-narratives. Muslims, Schooling & The Question of Self-Segregation is very useful research that deconstructs taken for granted societal assumptions, labels and notions by providing up-to-date critical analysis of policies and practices regarding community cohesion and modern multicultural society. This is an important core text for academics and policymakers working on topics of multiculturalism, integration, British Muslim identity and social justice/equality. The author’s academic arguments and grassroots insights provide robust and detailed explanations of British Muslim perspectives on education and British identity.


Only a couple of weeks left: the @BigDataSoc and @DigitalSocSci essay competition (2016-01-17 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power'. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed [1]here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.
The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition's theme and falls within the remit of BD &S's goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

The submitted essays will be judged and the winning essay will be chosen by an academic panel (the ISRF Essay Prize Committee). The panel's decision will be final, and no assessments or comments will be made available. The result will be notified to applicants by email during April 2016 and will then be announced by posting on the websites of the ISRF and of BD &S. The ISRF and BD &S reserve the right not to award the prize, and no award will be made if the submitted essays are of insufficient merit.

The winning essay will be accepted for publication in the Journal; the author may be asked to make some revisions before publication. Other applicants may have their submissions accepted for publication in the Early Career Researcher forum of BD &S subject to the Journal's peer review and decision-making process.

The details and criteria are:

Essay topic: Influence and Power (This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field.)

Eligibility: Participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.

Essay length: 5,000 to 7,000 words

Essay format: Follow the BD &S Author Guidelines, available on the BD &S website.

Language: English

Submission deadline: 31 January 2016

Queries:
[2]essayprize2016@isrf.org

Submissions should be made online at [3]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdasand authors should indicate that their submission is for the special theme, 'ISRF Essay Prize.'

1. [http://www.isrf.org/about/](http://www.isrf.org/about/)
2. [mailto:essayprize2016@isrf.org](mailto:essayprize2016@isrf.org)
3. [https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas](https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/bdas)

In this [1]intensive seminar for doctoral candidates (5 ECTs), we examine how the concepts of human rights and intersectionality might together inform educational theory and praxis to enable social justice. It is open to international participants researching educational inequalities in diverse contexts, from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The starting point is that learning communities are not neutral places and educators have a choice about whether to work to interrupt or ignore systemic injustice. Human rights present a utopian vision, recognising multiple identities and offering a moral and legal framework for justice. Intersectionality offers researchers a tool to examine how multiple and interwoven inequalities (related to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, migration status and so on) impact on achievement, citizenship and participation. Through formal presentations, discussions, workshops, guided reading, and preparation for a written paper, participants will have opportunities to discuss research and share experiences in a supportive environment.

[2]Tutor - Professor Audrey Osler


KC Williams (2016-01-31 15:11:02)
How I’d LOOOVVVVEEEE to take this course!!!! But, alas... no PhD...

The Challenge of Life Planning in a Digital Age (2016-01-18 08:00)

I just got back from the CSO workshop in Paris where I gave a paper on the challenge of flourishing amidst variety. My interest is in how social digitalisation 'opens up' the archive, albeit in a deeply uneven way, as well the implications this has for the process of shaping a life.

However the paper needed a bit of work in order to elucidate the mechanism connecting these two factors. I've argued that the digitalisation of the archive tends to create more awareness of alternative ways of looking at the possibility available to a subject at a given point in time. The missing concept here could be what Daniel Little terms 'space of choices' in [1]this insightful post on life planning:

A life plan isn't like this, however. Consider the space of choices that confronts the 20-year old college student Miguel: what kind of work will satisfy me over the long term? How much importance will I attribute to higher income in twenty years? Do I want to have a spouse and children? How much time do I want to devote to family? Do I want to live in a city or the countryside? How important to me is integrity and consistency with my own values over time? These kinds of questions are difficult to answer in part because they don't yet have answers. Miguel will become a person with a set of important values and commitments; but right now he is somewhat plastic. It is possible for him to change his preferences, tastes, values, and concerns over time. So perhaps his plan needs to take these kinds of interventions...
The space of choices can become overwhelming for contemporary adolescents, as well as complicating the relationship between perceived choice and materially feasible possibilities. Coupled with an increase pace-of-change which means that stable circumstances cannot be relied upon in any domain of social life, other strategies for shaping a life may be necessary, as Little suggests:

It is worth asking whether life plans actually exist for anyone. Perhaps most people’s lives take shape in a more contingent and event-driven way. Perhaps guided opportunism is the best we are likely to do: look at available opportunities at a given moment, pursue the opportunity that seems best or most pleasing at that point, and enjoy the journey. Or perhaps there are some higher-level directional rules of thumb — “choose current options that will contribute in the long run to a higher level of X”. In this scenario there is no overriding plan, just a series of local choices. This alternative is pretty convincing as a way of thinking about the full duration of a person’s life, as any biographer is likely to attest.

There are simply too many contingencies to plan for. I explored two possible responses to this some time ago, looking at the strategies of Ken Gergen and the CEO of Spotify. The former advocates embracing the situation, while the latter aims to enact five year long missions:

Ek describes himself as “missionary,” by which he means he likes to formulate five-year missions for himself. “That's how I think about life,” he said. “Five years is long enough for me to achieve something meaningful but short enough so I can change my mind every few years. I'm on my second five-year commitment on Spotify. In two years, I will have to make my next one. I will need to ask myself if I still enjoy what I'm doing. I'm kind of unusual that way, but it gives me clarity and purpose.”

1. http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/a-fresh-approach-to-life-plans.html
2. http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/a-fresh-approach-to-life-plans.html
3. http://understandingsociety.blogspot.co.uk/2016/01/a-fresh-approach-to-life-plans.html
A Visual Poem of Contentment (2016-01-19 08:00)

In this Visual Poem of Contentment, a young book lover tries desperately to get the book everyone else has:

![Image of a young person reading a book]

Produced by the extremely talented @Blendiculous

2. https://twitter.com/Blendiculous

The Sound of 18th-Century Paris (2016-01-20 08:00)


Paris as you have never heard it before! This novel experience is offered by Mylène Pardoen, a musicologist at the Passages XX-XXI laboratory, through the Bretez Project. The name is not without significance: the first historical audio reconstitution created by this team of historians, sociologists and specialists in 3D representations is set against the backdrop of 18th-century Paris as it appears in the famous Turgot-Bretez Map of 1739. Turgot was the provost of the merchants of Paris who commissioned...
the map, while Bretez was the engineer in charge of surveying the city's streets and buildings.

70 sonic tableaux

More specifically, the 8'30" video takes the viewer to the heart of the Grand Châtelet district, between the Pont au Change and Pont Notre Dame bridges. "I chose that neighborhood because it concentrates 80% of the background sound environments of Paris in that era, whether through familiar trades—shopkeepers, craftsmen, boatmen, washerwomen on the banks of the Seine, etc.—or the diversity of acoustic possibilities, like the echo heard under a bridge or in a covered passageway," Pardoen explains. While historical videos with soundtracks are nothing new, this is the first 3D reconstitution based solely on a sonic background: the quality of the sounds (muffled, amplified...) takes into account the heights of the buildings and their construction materials (stone, cob etc.).

2. https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/sound-18th-century-paris
3. https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/sound-18th-century-paris#footnote1_i69b4f1
4. https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/sound-18th-century-paris#footnote2_mza89jp
5. https://www.youtube.com/embed/YP__1eHeyo4
David Cameron & Muslim Women: Old Orientalism, New Racism (2016-01-20 22:33)

By announcing that £20m will be spent to “teach thousands of Muslim women to speak English”, David Cameron’s portrayal of them as linguistically deficient, culturally suppressed and visibly alien is reminiscent of a long line of colonial repression.

The prime minister is playing the “white male saviour”, seeking to rescue this meek and downtrodden Muslim woman from barbaric and backward Muslim males, by giving her the freedom of the English language, the power of speech and by unveiling her to the world.

It is powerful men like Cameron who are the real cultural oppressors, who can dictate political and media agendas to humiliate and disempower British Muslim women, turning wider society against them.

As a consequence, British Muslim women will continue to face already sky-high levels of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim abuse and attacks.

The prime minister’s plans for language lessons have been greeted with sighs and scepticism, particularly in light of extensive cuts in adult education and English language classes.

Although the money is welcomed by adult education professionals, why has there been a specific focus on Muslim women? This money would be better distributed for the good of all those adults who are seeking to develop their literacy, numeracy and employability skills.

It is laughable that Cameron claims the purpose of the new funding is to tackle segregation and extremism, while at the same time admitting there are no links between a person’s level of English and extremism. Muslims responding to these outrageous declarations by their prime minister are quite rightly angry at the continuous demonisation of Islam, and scapegoating of Muslims.

Marginalising Muslims through political, policy and media practices and rhetoric is responsible for making British Muslims – who call Britain their home – feel like they don’t belong to Britain. Disturbingly, even when ethnic minorities self-identify with Britishness or British values, they may find themselves excluded.

Read more at:


Google Anything, So Long as It’s Not Google (2016-01-21 08:00)

I just came across this fascinating article, now 10 years old, detailing how former Google CEO Eric Schmidt cut off relations with CNET after a reporter there had the temerity to detail the information she was able to find out about him via Google:

Last month, Elinor Mills, a writer for CNET News, a technology news Web site, set out to explore the power of search engines to penetrate the personal realm: she gave herself 30 minutes to see how much she could unearth about Mr. Schmidt by using his company’s own service. The resulting article, published online at CNET's News.com under the sedate headline "Google Balances Privacy, Reach," was anything but sensationalist. It mentioned the types of information about Mr. Schmidt that she found, providing some examples and links, and then moved on to a discussion of the larger issues. She even credited Google with sensitivity to privacy concerns.

When Ms. Mills’s article appeared, however, the company reacted in a way better suited to a 16th-century monarchy than a 21st-century democracy with an independent press. David Krane, Google’s director of public relations, called CNET.com’s editor in chief to complain about the disclosure of Mr. Schmidt’s private information, and then Mr. Krane called back to announce that the company would not speak to any reporter from CNET for a year.

At some point, I’ll collate all the cases like this I can find: it’s grimly fascinating to watch digital elites react with anger to the transparency they seek to impose on everyone else. In this case Schmidt seems to be rather averse to the assumptions about transparency that Google have long sought to inculcate in their users. From pg 177-178 of *In The Plex*:

Omitting a delete button was supposed to teach you to view email—and information itself—the way Google did. The implicit message was that the only thing that should be deleted was the concept of limited storage. Not everybody at Google subscribed to this philosophy—Eric Schmidt had long before instituted a personal practice of making his emails "go away as quickly as possible" unless specifically asked to retain them.

From pg 178 of the same book, concerning how Google see privacy organisations. Note how the epistemic asymmetry, in terms of access to and understanding of internal technical processes, allows criticism to be dismissed:
To most people at Google, though, automatic archiving was a cause for celebration, and gripes from privacy do-gooders were viewed as misguided or even cynically—exploiting a phony issue for their own status and fund-raising. “Even to this day, I’ll read people saying that Google keeps your [deleted] email forever. Like, totally false stuff!” says Buchheit. Buchheit called his critics “fake privacy organizations” because in his mind “they were primarily interested in getting attention for themselves and were going around telling lies about things.”


Call for book proposals: Theory as method in education research (2016-01-22 08:00)

From Mark Murphy at [1]Social Theory Applied:

I am currently in negotiations with a book publisher regarding a potential book series on the topic: *Theory as method in education research*. I am keen to talk to those of you who are interested in this topic and have ideas/plans for publishing in this area – that includes those of you who are nearing completion of doctoral theses as well as more established academics. The series has enormous potential for breaking new theory/method ground and I am open to suggestions from all areas of social theory, methodology and research topic. Please have a read of the short summary below and if you are interested in discussing this further, please get in touch with me, Mark Murphy via [2]mark.murphy.2@glasgow.ac.uk (don’t forget the .2!)

All the best, Mark

**Summary:**

This series is designed to provide a set of books exploring various applications of social theory in educational research design. Each book will provide a detailed account of how theory and method influence each other in specific educational research settings, such as schools, early years, community education, further education colleges and universities. The series will represent the richness of topics explored in theory-driven education research, including leadership and governance, equity, teacher education, assessment curriculum and pedagogy and policy studies. It will also provide a timely platform for highlighting the wealth of work done in the field of social theory and education research a field that has grown considerably in recent years and has made the likes of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault familiar names in educational discourse.

It is envisaged that the series will include a variety of texts, including single/co-authored monographs, edited volumes and potentially readers/anthologies.
Key features and benefits:

- Explicit connections between theory and research practice
- Accessible and illuminating accounts of applied social theory
- Provides innovative ways of thinking about methodology in educational research design

Pedagogical features

Embedded in the design of the series is a strong pedagogical component – with a focus on the ‘how’ of applying theory in methods and an emphasis on operationalising theory in research. This pedagogical remit will be addressed explicitly in all texts – the responsibility of addressing this will fall to the authors and editors, but can take the form of case studies, learning activities, ‘focus’ sections and glossaries detailing the key theoretical concepts utilised in the research.

2. [mailto:mark.murphy.2@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:mark.murphy.2@glasgow.ac.uk)

“now listen you queer!”: the origins of contemporary political punditry (2016-01-23 08:00)

I just watched [1]Best of Enemies, a great film about the rivalry between William Buckley and Gore Vidal that was most famously captured in this scene:
A subsequent exchange of words in high brow magazines then led to an exchange of lawsuits. I've been fascinated by this video since I first came across it. However until watching Best of Enemies, I hadn't realised how central the debates that led to this scene was to the emergence of contemporary political punditry.

ABC television had instituted this format as they attempted to assert themselves against better established rivals, lacking both the standards and budgets of other networks. These debates, as well as their repetition for the later Democratic convention, were a huge success in ratings terms and laid the ground for a slide into the superficial and polemical which characterises so much of contemporary coverage of politics.

One Week Left! The @bigdatasoc & @digitalsocsci essay competition (2016-01-24 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation (ISRF) and Big Data & Society (BD &S) intend to award a prize of CHF 1,000 for the best essay on the topic 'Influence and Power'. This is a topic, not a title. Accordingly, authors are free to choose an essay title within this field. The winner will also be invited to present the work during a special event at Social Media & Society 2016 and will have the conference fee waived and travel costs covered.

Please read these details carefully before submitting your essay for consideration or contacting the Independent Social Research Foundation or Big Data & Society with a query.

The essay will be judged on its originality and independence of thought, its scholarly quality, its potential to challenge received ideas, and the success with which it matches the criteria of the ISRF and BD &S. The successful essay will be intellectually radical, orthogonal to existing debates, and may articulate a strong internal critique across the field of social science in relation to the digital. Its challenge to received ideas will have the potential to provoke a rethinking of the topic. The ISRF is interested in original research ideas that take new approaches and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems. The full statement of the ISRF’s criteria and goals may be viewed here.

Big Data & Society publishes interdisciplinary work principally in the social sciences, humanities and computing and their intersections with the arts and natural sciences about the implications of Big Data for societies. The Journal’s key purpose is to provide a space for connecting debates about the emerging field of Big Data practices and how they are reconfiguring academic, social, industry, business and government relations, expertise, methods, concepts and knowledge.

The ISRF and BD &S invite submissions from scholars across the social science disciplines, philosophy, and the humanities, whose work has implications for the competition’s theme and falls within the remit of BD &S’s goals. For the purposes of the competition, participants should either be current doctoral students or within three years of being awarded their doctorate.
The Higher Groupthink: A Look at the Academic Spin Cycle in a Workshop (2016-01-24 09:32)

I recently attended a workshop in which some very intelligent and informed people from several countries were brought together to discuss a range of topics that had been presented in advance as a set of interconnected, open questions. Although everyone had contributed some relevant texts for the occasion, there were no formal
presentations. Instead each session was structured around one of the questions and the discussion was allowed to go its own way.

The discussions involved considerable back referencing to others’ comments to legitimate one’s own contributions. You know what I mean: ‘I just want to follow up what X said and bring in what Y said earlier in response to Z...’ One participant managed to name-check eight of the fourteen people in the room in a contribution that lasted just over three minutes. Much of the discourse had the feel of washing other people’s laundry. At the end of the workshop, there was a general sense of satisfaction at this ‘refreshing’ format, which had created an atmosphere of consensus, even though no one dared try to capture the nature of this agreement – and how, if at all, it related to the issues that brought about the workshop. But we plan to meet again, nonetheless.

Ernest Gellner used to say that Popper’s main insight for sociology was that there is an inverse relation between forms of social interaction that aim for truth and aim for solidarity. Stated so bluntly, the insight involves a confusion of logical levels. There needs to be some measure of solidarity even among the truth-seekers, if truth is not to become purely idiosyncratic. However, the sense of solidarity is at the second-order level, i.e. the level that enables us to agree to disagree. However, there is nothing epistemically luminous about agreement at the first-order level. It is simply groupthink, unless it provides a space from which significant disagreements may emerge, which may include marginalizing what some of the contributors say – which in turn would either motivate them to conform or to argue more forcefully. Maybe that will happen next time we meet...

Dear PhDs/ECRs: need funding to go to a conference? @thesocreview can help (but ask now!) (2016-01-25 08:00)

The Sociological Review is running another round of its support scheme for unfunded PhDs and ECRs. Find out more and apply [1]here within the next few days :

We are pleased to announce our latest round of funding, supported by The Sociological Review Foundation.

Funds of up to £1000 per applicant are be available for unfunded PhD students and postdocs (within 3 years of completion) to facilitate their attendance and participation of conferences.

To apply, please first check that you meet the criteria for applying (below) and then access and fill in the form below by our deadline of 31st January 2016.

You will be informed by 28th February of the outcome of your application.


“in an ideal world, American sociology would look like British sociology before it became Americanised” (2016-01-26 08:00)

A really nice interview with Doug Porpora by Tim Rutzou. But it ends on a jarring suggestion: “in an ideal world, American sociology would look like British sociology before it became Americanised”. What do you think?

Making The Familiar Strange: A Festival of Critical Social Thought (2016-01-26 13:00)

A small collective is currently in the early stages of planning *Making The Familiar Strange: A Festival of Critical Social Thought* for summer 2017. See [1]here for some background to the event. If you’d like to get involved, we’re having a planning meeting:

Tuesday 23rd February 12:00-16:00.
Room G05 (ground floor) of Cloth Hall Court
Leeds Beckett University
Directions: http://qu2.leedsmet.ac.uk/cloth-hall-court-leeds.htm

All welcome! Please pass on this message to anyone you know who might be interested.


Terraced House, not Terrorist House (2016-01-26 16:21)
by Amar Alam

Racist bullying: Far-right agenda on immigration ‘being taken into classrooms’ THE INDEPENDENT.

The case of a 10 year old Muslim boy who mistakenly [2]wrote "terrorist house" instead of "terraced house" when his teacher asked him to write down the type of house he lived in was documented recently by BBC News.

While Muslim and non-Muslim commentators have focused their attention on the child’s mistake and the disproportionate reaction to the news by his teachers and the police services, there is a greater issue at hand that needs
What impact is the government’s Prevent strategy and the ensuing counter-extremism legislation brought forward by the Conservatives having on ordinary Muslims, especially children?

We constantly hear ambiguous rhetoric from the government that their new anti-extremism laws are not targeting Muslims, rather they are targeting all types of extremist activity within British society, including that of the far-right and "Islamists”. However, contrary to the government’s claims, a number of news and media outlets over the last twelve months have mentioned that the policies put in place by the government suggests the intended target of such legislation are indeed the Muslim community.

What impact are these laws having on Muslim children? The question that must be asked is why would an innocent child mistakenly use the word "terrorist” in a sentence in relation to a topic that has nothing to do with any form of extremism? It seems the government’s Prevent strategy and the negative media portrayal of Muslims is having such a detrimental impact on Muslim children that they are now subconsciously internalising the belief that they are regarded as "terrorists”.

This is deeply worrying. At a time when the government have spent millions trying to prevent young people from being radicalised, their own policies and bias media reporting about Muslims are creating an environment that could potentially push them on to the path of radicalisation.

Only last month, a [3]teacher in Rotherham called a young Muslim pupil a "terrorist" in class. There has also been a dramatic rise in bullying as a result of racist and Islamophobic sentiments in schools. A recent [4]report by the NSPCC documented a 69 % increase in such racist and Islamophobic abuse in schools across Britain. The common theme was for young people to be called a “terrorist” or "bomber”. Research recently published by academics from the universities of Newcastle, St Andrew's and Edinburgh found that a [5]majority of Muslim pupils in Scottish schools have experienced Islamophobia with children routinely being called “terrorists” and "Pakis”. A newspaper in France also found that shortly after the terrorist attack in Paris last November, the events had a particularly damaging impact on Muslim children in France. One child had mentioned that he did not want to be a Muslim anymore because he would be called a terrorist.

This is the impact that the government’s counter-extremism policies and biased media reports against the Muslim community are having on Muslim children across Britain. Therefore, is it surprising that children are mistakenly writing words such as "terrorist" on their school papers? If all you hear about your ethnic and religious community are words such as “extremism” and "terrorists”, it should come as no surprise that children have internalised such words and their response out of anxiety and fear is to mistakenly use them during the most inappropriate occasions.

Amar Alam has studied MSc Psychology at University College London. He has had academic articles published in medical journals and writes articles for a number of news outlets. Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely Amar’s own and do not express the views or opinions of his employer.

An atheist observes online Islamophobia after showing solidarity #JeSuisHijabi (2016-01-26 17:08)

by Sadie Hamilton

Last week, York University in Toronto, where I study, set up tables in the halls. University approved organizations may use this space for fundraising, recruiting members for their club, or raising awareness.

As I was passing by a table for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Students’ Association (AMSA), I saw a friend talking to them and checking out their booth. I decided to join her to see what they were promoting. These amazing women were promoting love, tolerance, and freedom, for women in Islam.

We got talking and they asked if I would like to try on a Hijab. I was quite excited, but worried about whether or not that is considered disrespectful, as I am not a Muslim. She reassured me and helped me put it on, letting me keep the beautiful scarf. They asked me to tweet with the hashtag ‘#JeSuisHijabi’, and I decided to wear it for a couple of hours. It made me feel beautiful, empowered, feminine and happy.

I posted a photo of myself on Twitter in solidarity with Muslim women, knowing how important the campaign...
is to debunk Islamophobic myths.

When I woke up the next morning I found strangers responding hatefully online to my tweet. Death threats, insulting my appearance, intelligence, and attacking Islam in general. I responded to 2-3 of the hateful messages but it just became too overwhelming.

I cannot imagine the harassment, fear, and hate that Muslims must deal with because of this ignorance. For only around a year, I have become more and more aware of the struggles Muslims face in Canada, and other parts of the world. I was not shocked, only saddened by the comments that were made.
Sadie is an atheist, and an intersectional feminist. She is in her first year of studying Psychology at York University in Toronto.

Women should be able to wear whatever makes them comfortable and happy. #SolidarityWithIslam #JeSuisHijabi
This week David Cameron (your prime minister) suggested that English language classes for Muslim women could help stop radicalisation. Yes, you read that correctly. He went on to explain that Muslims arriving in the UK on a five-year spousal visa will have to take a test after two and a half years to show they are trying to improve their English, and a failure to do so would lead to deportation.

This is by no means a unique Islamophobic attack on British Muslims by Cameron and his Government. But, it is one worth further analysis.

Firstly, Cameron's strategy is highly ironic as £45 million was cut from English for speakers of other languages (Esol) classes less than a year ago. Secondly, it is based on an ill-informed and unproven connection between Muslim mothers having difficulties speaking English and that of Islamist extremism. As Dr. Nafeez Ahmed [2] wrote, “What you have done, Prime Minister, is abused your position of authority to broadcast a false, and absurd, image of an incoming swarm of dangerous migrant Muslim women giving birth to potential jihadists, that can only be stopped with extensive English language lessons.” Lastly, the figures used by Cameron are inaccurate and misleading, but essential for the ‘us and them’ rhetoric peddled out and used by the neoconservative establishment to frame Muslims as ‘the other’.

Othering – a term created by Cultural theorist [3] Edward W. Said – is a commonly used agenda that seeks to ‘other’ a minority group on the basis that their culture and beliefs are fundamentally different (and deemed as a threat) to the rest of society. By deliberately creating the idea of an alien ‘other’ it reinforces difference and promotes [4] social and political dominance over the group deemed as being ‘the other’.

Said, in his 1978 book, *Orientalism* explains that, "Orientalism is a study based on the re-thinking of what had for centuries been believed to be an unbridgeable chasm separating East from West" he suggests that we should, "challenge the notion that difference implies hostility, a frozen reified set of opposed essences, and a whole adversarial knowledge built out of those things."

Using the theory of ‘otherness’, we can deconstruct Cameron's unsubtle attack on Muslim females, in which he deliberately portrays, "them as linguistically deficient, culturally suppressed and visibly alien is reminiscent of a long line of colonial repression." Sadia Habib goes on to write that, "The prime minister is playing the 'white male saviour', seeking to rescue this meek and downtrodden Muslim woman from barbaric and backward Muslim males, by giving her the freedom of the English language, the power of speech and by unveiling her to the world."

Cameron's antagonistic approach enables the morally tranquilised Non-Muslim media consumer to not only agree with the ‘othering’ of UK Muslims but to also feel in a place of security and comfort in belonging to a (supposedly) superior group defined by shared beliefs, values and culture.

"The distinction between difference and otherness is that difference is descriptive, whereas otherness is strategic. Otherness describes the distribution of power; the differences between known and unknown are not mediated equally or neutrally. Othering always refers to the other party being repressed in a relation. When the other is being judged, the emphasis is on what differentiates instead of what connects. The encounter with the other is dominated by our preconceptions, which depend on public representations. The less one knows about distinct people, the easier one interprets these people through presupposed characteristics; the “knowledge” and perceptions one gains are stabilised as simplifications and stereotypes that become part of the common stock of knowledge through inter-subjective activity" [7]The Othering of Islam in a European Context

It is clear that the ‘Othering’ theme permeates mainstream media used to promote and support racist government strategies, but is it evident in schools and education? Do we do enough in our schools to promote and celebrate the various different cultures of all the students present in our schools?

And, we need to do so much more than the well-intentioned yet insensitive attempt of looking at different cultures through a ‘[8]saris, samosas, and steelband’ approach.

Are we really doing enough to challenge the unbridgeable chasm, as Edward Said describes?

"Individuals who know the world only from their own cultural perspectives are denied important parts of the human experience and are culturally and ethnically encapsulated. These individuals are also unable to know their own cultures fully because of their cultural blinders. We can get a full view of our own backgrounds and behaviours only by viewing them from the perspectives of other cultures." (An Introduction to Multicultural Education, James A. Banks. 2013)

The Eurocentric curriculum that many schools promote, "negatively affects many students of colour because they often find the school culture alien, hostile and self-defeating. Because of the negative ways in which students of colour and their cultures are often viewed by educators and the negative experiences of these students in their communities and in the schools, many of them do not attain the skills needed to function successfully in a highly technological, knowledge-orientated society" (Conchas & Vigil, 2012: Darling-Hammond, 2010)

We must design and embed a curriculum and a "culturally relevant pedagogy" (Ladson-Billings, 1994) that identifies the cultures and communities of all our students as assets rather than things to be replaced. As I have written [9]before, we see examples where schools have intentionally decided to, “de-culturalise their pupils and convince them into believing that it is necessary to cast off their own backgrounds, values and culture in order for
them to become ‘successful’ and ‘achieve’.”

Carol Lee (2004) supports this idea by saying that, “teachers must be better equipped to investigate what is going on in the lives of their students generally so that their curriculum and pedagogy can be reflective of those lives.”

In their 2008 book, The Art of Critical Pedagogy: Possibilities for Moving from Theory to Practice in Urban Schools; Jeffrey M. Duncan-Andrade and Ernest Morrell suggest that, "Nothing promotes tolerance more, than a pedagogy that enables students to arrive at an implicit understanding of what they have in common with those they are taught (through media and education) to perceive as different.”

In a morally bankrupt society where ‘otherness’ is used by the governments, assisted by the media, to insight hate and promote inequality of ‘the other’, perhaps education is the only solution? As Michael D. Yates writes in Henry A. Giroux’s new [10]book, “Without transformational education, society is doomed to ignorance and autocracy. No democracy can function without the people having a strong sense of public values, seeing themselves in others, and willing to suppress self-interest for the common good. It is critical education that embodies and disseminates this sense.”

[11]This article was originally posted on Tait’s blog.

Tait Coles is a Vice Principal in a school in Bradford. He is the author of [12]Never Mind the Inspectors: Here’s Punk Learning.

In November 2015 - I decided to learn Arabic. As we go along, I shall speak of the reasons why. For now, I would like to say that this idea, which has turned into a great adventure, full of challenges and joy, as all great adventures should consist of. The challenges have been made easier, by the online links of the Sudanese teacher Shaykh Munaf Mohamed – and by another, known as Colette, who comes from Dubai. Other assistance – unknowingly - has been given by international celebrities, such as David Attenborough and Jamie Oliver!

For the last couple of weeks, I’ve been pondering the idea of keeping a diary of this learning. Recently, while sitting on the balcony, enjoying the early morning quiet, enhanced by a blue sky and mild weather - I decided to begin this daily recording.

It’s turning out to be, not only a celebration of the Arabic language and sub-Saharan Islamic scholarship, and the great teachers; but a celebration also, of inter-generational learning and the community activism of East Oxford. All in all, its a homage to learning and culture.

Natty Mark Samuels is a poet and the founder of African School, a Cultural Education project based in Oxford. This initiative provides teaching in African Studies with a focus on pre-colonial sub-Saharan and Islamic cultures and early Black journalism. Formerly a Visiting Tutor at Ruskin College and other academies, Natty Mark also tutors on the Oxford Study Abroad Programme.

The Diary of Natty Samuels - 20 December 2015

by Natty Mark Samuels

Dec.20th

Amongst other words in my head as I awoke this morning, was the name Eric Clapton! Every morning when I awake, I give myself a review, of the previous day’s learning. Yesterday, one of the words I learnt, was the one for night: Layla.

Just found out that Dr Imran Alawiye – not quite sure in which country his roots lie, but of African descent – got his first degree in Arabic Language and Literature, from the Islamic University of Madinah. He received his doctorate in the same subject matter, from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. I shall be using his Arabic From The Beginning series, when I commence the learning of the writing of the script. Watching a short clip, I was immediately drawn to his teaching style.

One reason why I want to learn Arabic, is that after years of reading West African Arabic texts in translation, it is time I learnt to read them in the original! Can’t wait till the day, when I can read the poetry of the Nigerian Nana Asma’u – and of the Senegalese, Amadu Bamba, as they were first written. Looking forward to being entranced by the verse, of the great teachers of Somalia – especially those who shone, during the 19th century. Seeing as this is
Christmas – *eid al-milad* – there are lots of food programmes. Normally, I don’t watch such broadcasts, but as an aid to language learning, they’re perfect! Missed Nigella, but caught the second half of Jamie’s Cracking Christmas. The famous chef was demonstrating ideas of what to do with leftover turkey. I was able to name four - incl. turkey - of the six main ingredients, for his Boxing Day turkey curry. So alongside the turkey – *deek roomi* - there was roasted squash (one of my favourites), peanuts, assorted spices, potatoes – *batates*; onion – *basal*: olive oil – *zayt zaytoun*. Wish he’d done a curry of vegetables – *khadrawat!* Anyway, four out of six wasn’t bad! Wherever I am, I name what I can – even it’s only in the singular! Sitting on the balcony, I say the generic word for bird – *ta'er* – as two make their way across the 4.30 sky. Always, as I sit in my favourite spot on this elevated place, I see the tops of the trees. I repeat the word for tree several times; not just for practice, but for the beauty of sound – *shajara* - with the r that rolls. Shajara, shajara. Fitting that something so essential, should be named so sweetly – beauty expressing beauty. As time turns into a 5pm sky, the first stars – *anujoom* – faintly appear; and the aeroplane – *zayara* – flashes white light, as like the bird, it makes its way to destination. I think again, of being able to read *Lamentation for Aisha*, by the aforementioned Nana Asma’u, the outstanding female scholar, of 19th century Nigeria. To me, it ranks as one of the great elegies. This thinking enthralls me, spurring me on. The language challenges me, in such words as *asmelh* (salt) – those words ending in h. Then again it entrances me, with words like *shalil*, meaning waterfall.  

Natty Mark Samuels is a poet and the founder of African School, a Cultural Education project based in Oxford. This initiative provides teaching in African Studies with a focus on pre-colonial sub-Saharan and Islamic cultures and early Black journalism. Formerly a Visiting Tutor at Ruskin College and other academies, Natty Mark also tutors on the Oxford Study Abroad Programme.

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**SmartPhones and Workplace Repression (2016-01-27 08:00)**

A really interesting [1]BuzzFeed article about the use of smart phones on building sites to increase efficiency (the 30 % of on-site time that is regarded idle, for reasons attributed to ‘miscommunication and disorganisation’) and their implications for workplace surveillance. What’s particularly striking is that inefficiencies are often the result of the complex subcontracting arrangements now ubiquitous within the construction industry:

According to Frinault, 30 % of time workers spend on-site at commercial construction projects is idle — not because workers are lazy, but largely because of miscommunication and disorganization. There’s also the problem of “rework” — doing a task, and then having to do it over again. For example, a subcontractor might be told to cover a hole with drywall; the next day, an electrician who wasn’t finished wiring an outlet comes in and tears that drywall out again, and the drywall hanger has to come back and redo it. With Fieldwire, Frinault hopes to improve the communication channels between subcontractors.

His app, which raised $6.6 million in October, doesn’t locate workers on a map; it locates tasks on a blueprint — tasks that foremen can then check off in real time as they are completed. The purpose of Fieldwire is to record and share information as synchronously as possible. "It may seem invasive," said Frinault’s co-founder Javed Singha, “but the reality is these guys are recording all this information manually anyway.”


This app is apparently being used on over 35,000 construction sites internationally. An even more invasive app has
Rhumbix, an app meant to be in the hands of the workers themselves, is making an even bolder ask in terms of transparency. Not only do workers clock every hour of their day on Rhumbix, but the app also tracks their location, and even some of their movements. Rhumbix is the invention of two former Navy engineers, Drew DeWalt and Zach Scheel, who took a class together at Stanford and decided to build a startup. "I said, every phone has GPS in it," Scheel told BuzzFeed News. "Let’s try to create a system like the ones we use now in the military to help improve the system we use for construction."

With Rhumbix, workers clock in and out at the beginning and end of each work day. While they’re on the clock, the app tracks their movements, both in terms of motion (moving or stationary?) and location (on the job or out to lunch?). This data is presented to managers in two ways: as a live safety snapshot, which shows where workers are at any given time, and as aggregated and anonymized labor time data that can help the bosses figure out how much is being spent on different activities. This tracking can benefit the worker — for example, a worker who had passed out on a hot roof due to sunstroke was discovered when the Rhumbix app alerted his foreman that he wasn't moving. But the app can also be used to, say, prove that workers who claim they worked through lunch actually didn't.

At present the Rhumbix data is anonymised and aggregated when presented on the dashboard for managers. But how long can this last? As a general rule, if a weakly held moral commitment is the only thing preventing a service-provider from offering a much demanded service to existing customers, it’s unlikely to provide durable in the face of, say, declining sales or a difficulty raising further venture capital. Charmingly, their take on this question is to say “You’re going to have to trust us a little bit”.

It’s worth considering this in terms of what was until recently established practice within the construction industry. Given the existence of a UK industry wide blacklist has been conclusively established, ruining the lives of many who had the temerity to demand basic safety obligations be met on site, you’d have to be painfully naive to imagine these new technologies won’t be used for work place repression. For instance, if a manager wanted to rid a site of a ‘trouble maker’, use their Rhumbix data to demonstrate an unacceptable amount of 'idle time' as grounds for dismissal. Furthermore, it’s easy to imagine how Rhumbix could end up tracking collective organisation on site. Even if the data is aggregated, surely it would represent a grouping of the work force for a face-to-face meeting? It doesn’t take much imagination to see how this technology can be used for workplace repression and I fear we’re on a slippery slope.

4. https://wordery.com/blacklisted-dave-smith-9781780262574?currency=GBP&gtrck=aERxUHRHNUsyTUVuem1Xb11DZGUwVTNbdOF1QnNXTGhNRXdtzK0pPTEoweDZJW04YI1ReDhRL1hnNDN1

[...] new apps will construction companies increase efficiency and smooth operations, but there are some workplace repression

[...]

Environment and Human Health – Social Perspectives (2016-01-27 08:46)

BSA Climate Change, Environment & Health, and London Medical Sociology study groups present

Environment and Human Health – Social Perspectives

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Keppel St, London

Friday 19 February 2016, 10am – 4.30pm

Keynote speaker: Professor Hilary Graham, University of York

We invite you to this day workshop event, to explore perspectives on current research and theory into the environment and human health.

The interactions between the natural environment and human health have become increasingly the focus of social analyses and scrutiny. Social research has shown how human health may be threatened by environmental factors, such as air or water pollution and by climate change impacts, such as flooding and heat waves. Meanwhile, improvements in health threaten the environment through population growth, greater longevity of life, and health technology developments.

Research further indicates how improving the environment can enhance human health, for instance through clean water and food security, while initiatives can also reduce the environmental impact of health care, such as preventing run-off from pharmaceutical production.

This wide-ranging research area thus presents an important agenda for social analysis across the multi-disciplinary areas of environment and human health.

Submissions for this event are now closed and a detailed event programme will be available shortly.

Provisional Programme

10.00 a.m. Coffee and Welcome from the organisers

10.30 a.m. Keynote: Professor Hilary Graham

11.30 a.m. Short papers

1.00 p.m. Lunch

2.00 p.m. Short papers

3.30 p.m. Panel discussion and next steps
4.30 p.m. Close

Registration


BSA Members £20; Non-members £25; BSA Concessionary members and full-time


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20% off Social Media for Academics (2016-01-27 19:48)
Social media is an increasingly important part of academic life that can be a fantastic medium for promoting your work, networking with colleagues and for demonstrating impact. However, alongside the opportunities it also poses challenging questions about how to engage online, and how to represent yourself professionally.

This practical book provides clear guidance on effectively and intelligently using social media for academic purposes across disciplines, from publicising your work and building networks to engaging the public with your research. It is supported by real life examples and underpinned by principles of good practice to ensure you have the skills to make the most of this exciting medium.

You'll find advice on:

- Using social media to publicise your work
- Potential pitfalls and how to avoid them
- The evolving role of social media in higher education
- Defining digital scholarship
- Managing your identity online
- Finding time for social media
- Near-future trends in academia.

Endorsements for the book:

Mark Carrigan understands academic engagement with social media to require more than enthusiastic exhortations or dumbed down lists of rapidly out-of-date apps. Social Media for Academics offers a rich mix of research, scholarly commentary, discussion of key debates and potential pitfalls, personal experience and practical guidance which focuses not just on the how, but also the why of digital scholarship.

Pat Thomson, Professor of Education
University of Nottingham @ThomsonPat patthomson.net.

Carrigan has achieved what I thought to be impossible - produced a clear cut, incisive guide for the contemporary academic who is confused (as most of us are) about how to engage fruitfully with
social media. One of the most difficult things about social media is finding a way to be true to your own personal style, while projecting an appropriate academic identity. Carrigan manages this by organising the types of social media options in what I think is a way that won’t date quickly. I highly recommend this book to my colleagues and to PhD students contemplating an academic career in a world that increasingly values public engagement and impact.

Inger Mewburn
The Australian National University

If you’d asked me in 2009 what the future would be in academia for a messaging/micro-blogging system limited to 140 characters, I’d have said - zilch. Yet Twitter + blogs and many other social media have transformed science and academic practice in the interim. Mark Carrigan gives the first book-length and in-depth advice on the many ways in which scientists and academics are developing new paradigms of collective thought, writing and scholarly practice using social media. If you’re still hesitating, get involved by starting here.

Patrick Dunleavy
Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, London School of Economics

There is no one in the world better placed than Mark Carrigan to offer advice to academics on how to operate in the new informational environment. This book is brimming with ideas and practical tips for how academics might communicate better in the Twitter age. Brilliant, thoughtful and entertaining.

Les Back
Goldsmiths, University of London


The Language of Donald Trump (2016-01-28 08:00)

An entertaining (and accurate) video [1] via Phil BC:
The Hypnotic Inanity of Donald Trump

The Sociological Imagination (2016-02-16 08:01:01)

[...] found them weirdly hypnotic, albeit intellectually deadening. Perhaps this explains the strange quality of Trump's [...]
Jonathan Freedland in the Guardian has suggested that Cameron calling Calais a 'bunch of migrants' is 'beneath him'. I don't think so. I think it is him.

It comes from his milieu. There's an 'us' who are normal, right and good. There are people who are loyal to 'us' and they are normal, right and good. They might be inferior but they're good. Then there are the 'other'. The 'other' are suspect, dangerous, surplus to requirements, and a possible or probably threat to the order that 'we' rule and run.

That's why it's a 'bunch of migrants'. If this country were bombed or invaded, Cameron might find his family were a 'bunch of migrants'. But only very rarely in history do the Camerons become the 'other'. It happens but rarely. For now, and for the rest of his life, he'll be OK, I'm sure. He'll go on 'bunching' the 'other'.

926 people like this.
Michael Rosen
27 Jan at 13:59 •

I always call my great-grandparents a 'bunch of migrants' and would love it if other people called them that. Especially if Cameron did #classy

392 likes 28 comments 30 shares

Michael Rosen
27 Jan at 13:53 •

Ah Cameron defenders are coming out of the woodwork defending his use of 'bunch of migrants'. Try some others, guys: 'bunch of blacks', 'bunch of Jews', 'bunch of Scots', 'bunch of Irish'. Nice? OK? Appropriate use of 'bunch'?

851 likes 57 comments 149 shares

Michael Rosen
27 Jan at 13:43 •

Some of Cameron's forebears were a 'bunch of migrants' but he only mentions that when he's not condemning migrants, of course.

Cameron: 'My Jewish ancestry is relatively limited but I do feel just some sense of connection. From the lexicon of my great, great grandfather Emile Levita, a Jewish man who came from Germany to Britain 150 years ago... etc etc

94 likes 9 comments 26 shares

Michael Rosen
27 Jan at 13:35 •

Cameron's got previous on 'bunch of migrants'. Remember his sneer at 'Indian dancing'?  

CAMPAIGN to KEEP THE FLAME ALIVE


4202
Fashion Fusion or Cultural Appropriation (2016-01-28 10:06)

Globalised modern medleys of fashion fusion, or cultural appropriation?

You decide.

[1]

[2]
The Diary of Natty Samuels - 21 December 2015 (2016-01-28 17:30)

by Natty Mark Samuels

As yesterday, I focused on reflection - and the writing of the first installment of the diary - so today, I review the words of the previous day, including fire – nar; field – haql; forest – ghaba, plus the aforementioned night – layla. Got motivated to enter further into nature’s glossary, by watching another adventure, with the great Attenborough. The word for whale reminds me of laughter and the owl, because the word for whale is hoot.

Colette of Dubai says wajh, an Egyptian link says wish. Whose version do I follow, when learning the word for face? I look for other links, searching for general consensus, as I do with other words. In the end, like other multiple choices, I settle for personal preference: I decide on wajh.

My nine year old son Bingy, is a little fed up with me! A temporary loss of patience with his father’s learning, as I attempt to boomerang words back to him in Arabic, that he has said to me. But right now, he wants to hear yes, no and thank you - not na'am, la and shukran. He isn’t in the mood to play with words. But I know that later on, when sounding out the alphabet, he’ll voluntarily join in! Later on, his room will once again, become a den of excited deciphering.

Talking of the alphabet, I still feel unsure about the gh sound - the nineteenth letter of twenty-eight. Hearing words starting with this sound, in different national and regional variations, doesn’t help! But as I said yesterday, great adventures must have challenges within them.

Through my association - poetry and articles published - with the Foundation for Science, Technology and
Civilisation and its affiliate Muslim Heritage, I've taken more interest in the scientific and medical work, of the sub-Saharan scholars. Now, I'm looking forward to one day digging into the university and archival centres of Nigeria, to read the medical works written by the brother of Nana Asam'u, Muhammed Bello. Said to have been the leading scholar on medical issues, in 19th century Central Sudan – Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon. Things he explained in the early 19th century, are what many nutritionists are speaking and writing of now. According to Mukhtar Umar Bunzu, he once healed the Emir of Zaria of kidney trouble - through a mailed diagnosis and prescription.

I go from kitchen, to bathroom, to bedrooms and living room - feeling like Adam, naming the animals! Feels good to be able to name more and more each day. To begin to put a three or four word sentence together!

For an alphabet reminder- a pronunciation top-up - I return to my first learning aid, which I was able to recommend to a Teaching Assistant at Mable Prichard School, where I sometimes work: Madinah Arabic - Learn Arabic Online. This organization is based in Norwood, in south-east London.

I think of Ibrahim al-Kanemi – from Chad - the first known sub-Saharan scholar, to have written in Arabic: in the late 13th century. He was published in Morocco, as Malik Sy (Senegal), was published in Tunisa – and the mathematician Muhammed al-Fulani al-Kishnawi (Nigeria), published in Egypt. Buzzing with the potential, of the knowledge of Arabic. Next month, with a widened vocabulary, I intend to engage Arabic speakers that I know, who reside in Oxford. Following on from this, to help the refugees and migrants, who have no knowledge of English. Be good to go back to work at Open Door – at East Oxford Community Centre - the refugee drop-in, where I worked when it was first set up about twenty years ago! Edyta, Bingy's mother – an archeology student - tells me that my knowledge of Arabic, will prove useful to her in time to come. I can almost imagine the future ecstasy, when conversing with the teachers in Mali - as well as the inhabitants of the Moroccan streets. Natty Mark Samuels is a poet and the founder of African School, a Cultural Education project based in Oxford. This initiative provides teaching in African Studies with a focus on pre-colonial sub-Saharan and Islamic cultures and early Black journalism. Formerly a Visiting Tutor at Ruskin College and other academies, Natty Mark also tutors on the Oxford Study Abroad Programme.

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Special issue of @bigdatasoc on data and agency (2016-01-29 08:00)

Guest Editors:
Helen Kennedy, University of Sheffield
Thomas Poelle, University of Amsterdam
José van Dijck, University of Amsterdam

This special theme explores the location of agency in the massive flows of data circulating between devices, institutions, industries and users. Because Big Data facilitates new regimes of governance, control and discrimination, the special theme creates a space to reflect on alternative forms of Big Data, forms which enable small-scale public organisations and community groups to act with agency in the face of the rising significance of data.

[1]Forensic devices for activism: Metadata tracking and public proof
Lonneke van der Velden
Big Data & Society, Nov 2015, DOI: 10.1177/2053951715612823

[2]Known or knowing publics? Social media data mining and the question of public agency
Helen Kennedy & Giles Moss
Techno-Religions and Silicon Prophets (2016-01-30 08:00)

Interesting talk via the [1]BSA Digital Sociology group:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/g6BK5Q.Dblo
Steve Fuller (@ProfSteveFuller) (2016-02-07 12:10:34)
There is much right about this but around minute 29 it goes wrong. In fact, technology played a very important role in the medieval Christian mentality, even before the Industrial Revolution – and indeed helped to foster capitalism and the Industrial Revolution that way. Here I refer you to David Noble’s greatly underrated The Religion of Technology: https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Religion_of_Technology.html?id=9PXXAAAAMAAJ &redir_esc=y. Communism and Silicon Valley are both piggybacking on this long-standing strand of Christian theology, i.e. ‘making a heaven on earth’.

The ISRF Mid-Career Fellowship Competition (2016-01-31 08:00)

ISRF Mid-Career Fellowship Competition

Launch: 4th January 2016
Deadline: 19th February 2016

The Independent Social Research Foundation wishes to support independent-minded researchers to do interdisciplinary work which is unlikely to be funded by existing funding bodies. It is interested in original research ideas which take new approaches, and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems.

The Foundation intends to make a small number of awards to support original interdisciplinary research, across the range of the social sciences, to be held from a start date no later than the end of December 2017. Scholars from within Europe are eligible to apply.

The award is intended to enable a scholar at the mid-career stage to pursue his/her research full-time, for a period of up to 12 months. The amount will be offered to buy out the costs of replacing all teaching and associated administration in the applicant’s home institution, and will be considered to a maximum of £60,000 per successful applicant. Within that sum, reasonable support for research expenses may be considered on a matched-funding basis with the host institution.

The applicant should normally hold a salaried position at an institution of higher education and research, and be 10 years or more from the year of their PhD award. However, a shorter time from PhD award may exceptionally be considered, if the candidate has other qualifications to be considered as mid-career.

Applicants should consult the Criteria as set out in the Further Particulars and show that they meet them. Applicants should follow the Application procedure and should present their Proposal in the format specified there.
Some thoughts on responsibility (2016-02-01 08:00)

At an event in Liverpool recently, I was asked by Steve Fuller about what I understood responsibility to mean in a sociological sense. He was sceptical that I could support claims of responsibility given my understanding of human agency as situationally performative but biographically continuous. In essence I understood him to be asking: do I think there’s something about the human being in relation to which responsibility can be assigned? This is a question I’d never really thought about explicitly, though once I began to I’ve realised that it actually knits together the full range of my interests.

Part of my difficulty with the question is that I think ‘responsibility’ encompasses a number of different things which we need to unpack:

Responsibility as moral agency: how an individual comes, through internal and/or external conversation, to assume a stance of responsibility towards their own actions. To me it seems obvious that this is a matter of what Charles Taylor calls disengaged agency. It’s a mode of engagement with the world that usually involves stepping back from social encounters in order to reflect on one’s own actions within them, though I do believe sometimes we confront these questions when in the flow of the social situation.

Responsibility as interpersonal ascription: how an individual comes, through social interaction, to be held accountable for their actions. This can, but by no means necessarily does, lead to the first sense of responsibility as moral agency. This is about social judgement, holding someone to account in terms of putatively shared standards in relation to which their behaviour can be evaluated.

Responsibility as structural enforcement: how an individual comes to be formally held responsible for their actions, in relation to codified rules and regulations which are sufficiently durable to be both enforceable and recognised as binding. Legal systems are the obvious example of this but I’d include disciplinary proceedings within workplaces within this category as well. The point is the process is formalised and the rules are codified. It’s not tied to the social situation, a term I use in Goffman’s sense, in the same way as the earlier forms of responsibility.

These are interconnected in complex ways. But by analytically distinguishing between them, we’re able to recognise how they can vary independently. Under contemporary social conditions, I would argue that we have seen the following changes:

People are more likely to over-actively exercise moral agency, often to the point of blaming themselves for personal outcomes that are systemically produced. This individualisation contributes to the fragmentation of normative consensus, as individual reasoning acts as a vector of deviance amplification: the more intensively people think about these things, through the filter provided by their own particularity, the less likely they are to straightforwardly reproduce ‘common sense’.
The interpersonal ascription of responsibility is becoming more contentious because of this fragmentation of normative consensus. If we can’t take ‘common sense’ for granted, interventions of this sort will tend to be experienced as arbitrary impositions of power. This leave them experienced as something inherently contentious, which I’ve written about as the ‘paradox of incivility’: when consensus breaks down, attempts to enforce civility are actually experienced as rude and aggressive.

‘Common sense’ supplies the intuitions upon which enforcement is grounded. In its absence, normativity comes to seem less binding, incentivising alternative penalty-based enforcement that doesn’t attempt to seek grounding in moral agency. Margaret Archer describes this as ‘anormative regulation’ in an upcoming paper.

Having only recently grasped quite how interesting case law is, thanks to the conversation with Steve and Joseph, I’d now like to start to refine the outline I’ve sketched above and apply it to thinking through the challenges posed by emerging technologies.

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**A metro map of Berlin’s rental market (2016-02-02 08:00)**

Call for book proposals: Critical Digital & Social Media Studies OA book series (2016-02-03 08:00)

"Critical Digital & Social Media Studies" is a book series edited by Christian Fuchs on behalf of the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies and published by the University of Westminster Press. It publishes books that critically study the role of the Internet, digital and social media in society and make critical interventions.

We invite submissions of book proposals that fall into the scope of the series.

Deadline: March 1, 2016

The books in the series are published in an open access format available online without payment using a Creative Commons licence (CC-BY-NC-ND) and simultaneously as affordable paperbacks. We are able to publish a number of books in the call without any book processing charges thanks to support by the University of Westminster Library.

Details:

[3]http://www.westminster.ac.uk/wias is a new interdisciplinary institute at the University of Westminster. Its inaugural research theme is critical digital & social media research. Subscription to its newsletter is possible here: [4]http://www.westminster.ac.uk/newsletter The University of Westminster Press is an open access publishing house. Media, communication & cultural studies is one of the academic publishing fields it specialises in:
Speakers: Prof Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick and Linnaeus University, Sweden), Prof Alf Nilsen (University of Bergen), Dr Lisa Palmer (Birmingham City University) Dr Srila Roy (University of the Witwatersrand), Prof Beverley Skeggs (Goldsmiths) and Dr Robbie Shilliam (Queen Mary)

More speakers to be confirmed soon.

If C. Wright Mills was correct in stating that the pivot of the sociological imagination is the imaginative capacity to join the dots between structure and historical process on the one hand and agency and individual biographies on the other hand, it is also correct today to argue that the sociological imagination has to engage the challenge of the global as a process, as a scale, and as an imaginary that is simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by the specific locales, institutions, and phenomena that are the focus of attention in sociological research. This workshop will be dedicated to exploring what it entails to develop a genuinely global sociology - both theoretically and analytically, but also - to invoke Mills once again - in terms of the capacity of the sociological imagination to address urgent public issues.

You can register for a place here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sociology-in-and-through-the-global-south-tickets-20915777654 Please note places are limited.

1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sociology-in-and-through-the-global-south-tickets-20915777654

Plagiarism: Observations on Academia’s Self-Induced Moral Panic (2016-02-04 21:43)

Nowadays whenever students submit essays at my university, it goes through the computerized 'Turnitin' system that surveys the internet for textual overlap with previously published material, resulting in some statistical figure of degree of overlap. If the figure is beyond 20-30 %, a tribunal is set up to adjudicate the matter, in which the student makes some sort of representation. In any case, all essays pass through this system before they are marked. Some of the offending essays would have been spotted by the instructor in the normal course of marking because the student has lifted quite obvious sources - and in combinations that jar in terms of prose style. So, the real issue is the stuff that the marker might not have normally picked up, perhaps because the sources are quite diverse, appropriated with some judgement, and executed in a way that papers over more glaring stylistic differences among the original texts. Turnitin catches this stuff too, and it is often advertised as the great virtue of the system.
My view on plagiarism and other forms of academic fraud has been consistent throughout my career. I think a fixation on such activities speaks poorly to academic self-esteem – and the more mechanized version that we experience these days only makes matters worse. In short, statistically speaking, a confident academic culture would prefer an examination regime that ends up with ‘false negatives’ than ‘false positives’ in matters of fraud.

The arts have had a much healthier attitude to plagiarism, forgery, etc. – namely, to treat it as a game of ‘cat and mouse’. If an experienced practitioner or connoisseur can’t spot the fraud, then the artist gets away with it – though there will always be opportunities for future critics and scholars to return to the ‘scene of the crime’, so to speak. Indeed, the greater public visibility and notoriety enjoyed by the artwork, something that every true artist desires, the more vulnerable it becomes to this treatment. (It is thus easy to see why the great art historian Ernst Gombrich was a fan of Karl Popper.) Indeed, the return visits to an artist’s sources have sometimes served to alter their reputations, as people come to realize that an apparent ‘original’ really got all his or her best ideas from people who had gone unnoticed at the time. But sometimes even this additional knowledge doesn’t seem to matter much. The artist’s reputation remains intact – if only because of the cleverness with which the artist papered over the cracks between the borrowings. Indeed, this is the ‘art’ of the artist. Harold Bloom crafted an interesting psychoanalytic account of artistic creativity on the back of this point when I was a student in the 1970s, under the rubric of ‘the anxiety of influence’.

It is too bad that academia does not adopt this relatively relaxed attitude to plagiarism and fraud, which would effectively leave the uncaught student to dwell productively in his or her guilt. In contrast, our current practices draw attention to just how much academics feel the need to protect their turf from unworthy interlopers. Yet, what is the source of this need? Perhaps academics feel that their insights are so hard won, so naturally scarce, that someone who simply steals them or makes them up whole cloth is doing an injustice to the sense of labour implied by genuine academic achievement. Artists don’t generally have this hang-up. Rightly or wrongly, they believe that they are full of ideas and the real challenge is to harness them together in some coherent fashion. Artists often know the source of their most productive ideas, but they don’t feel the need to assign credit. This is for two quite sensible reasons: (1) under a slight change of circumstances, they might have got those very same ideas from other heads, including their own; (2) the artwork that they create from those sources will speak for itself by doing something significant that the source works did not do. Once again, the intended publicity of the artwork ultimately puts both propositions to the test.

Meanwhile, back on Planet Academia, we continue to live in a world where ideas are scarce, not abundant, and their value is judged in terms of what made them rather than what we make of them. Thus, we fail to appreciate that the most devious forger of original work will have mastered the skills that we would have demanded of them. The key difference is that the forger treats ‘the archive’ (aka ‘the internet’ for today’s generation) as an extended memory store, not as something ontologically distinct from his or her own being. But make no mistake: I am not trying to re-package a crisis of ego identity (‘boundary issues’) as some higher epistemic virtue – or even claim that we are already cyborgs (though there may be something to that). Rather, I am asserting an unconditional right of someone who has been allowed into society’s epistemic sphere to range freely within it, as a ‘commons’, unless specifically stopped by a relevant authority for ‘poaching’ or ‘polluting’. In short, the burden should be placed on academics to demonstrate epistemic trespass among those who they have already admitted as their equals. Moreover, these demonstrations would be cast more in aesthetic than moral terms. In that case, the problem with detected plagiarism is more that it is detected than that it is plagiarised: It was not good enough to pass as original.

One way to shift the normative character of fraud from a moral to an aesthetic basis for would be for a software firm to develop a counter-Turnitin programme aimed at the student market. The programme would alert students to whenever their texts have entered into prohibited fraud territory – and then offer alternative formulations that might take them out of that zone. In effect, the onus of judgement would be put back on the academics, since they would receive the student submission without knowing whether it had undergone this plagiarism-cleansing
process: A higher form of 'cat and mouse'.

Reiner Grundmann (2016-02-04 22:03:13)
Steve, you write it would be good 'to develop a counter-Turnitin programme aimed at the student market. The programme would alert students to whenever their texts have entered into prohibited fraud territory - and then offer alternative formulations that might take them out of that zone.' Many universities already offer students to test their draft essays in that way. Your analogy with art is interesting but the mode is different, it is homage, play, irony. It takes a connoisseur to realise the contexts and allusions. In academia we have the quote, and the creative assemblage of previous work which needs to be acknowledged. What you describe may be the disdain of academics for their colleagues who do not respect this convention. But what about students who lift entire essays from the web, without any creative input?

Steve Fuller (2016-02-05 08:16:29)
Thanks for this! I didn't know about the Counter-Turnitin programmes. Is there a website advertising them? My point is not to get rid of the plagiarism as an offence but to roll the offence into more general considerations of the quality of student essays - i.e. whether they are saying anything inspired. Even before Turnitin, competent teachers could spot or at least suspect more blatant instances of plagiarism (and the internet serves to test the suspicions). But if the teacher doesn't flag the plagiarism, and the student passes the teacher's other evaluative criteria, then the student should be allowed to pass overall: A teacher fooled is a student learned. Suppose you're worried that this might encourage students to game the system. Of course, some students will think in terms of how to craft together sources from elsewhere into something they present as their own 'original' work. However, the skills involved here - especially if the teacher is very competent - will need to be pretty sophisticated, approximating those that the essay-writing exercise is designed to test for. The only thing missing from an excellent forgery is the acknowledgement of the source, But to whom is this fact so important, if the work is brilliant on its face? Well, it is important to academics who see knowledge as operating in a condition of scarcity and hence subject to strict property rules which need to be respected.

Reiner Grundmann (2016-02-05 16:18:38)
Several universities allow students to upload draft essays to turnitin so they can check they are 'safe'. I am surprised you said that 20-30 % similarity triggers a disciplinary hearing. This number is normal in many good essays, indicating quoted material. It is up to the lecturer to check this before any steps are taken against a student. Yes, art and science have many things in common but there are crucial differences as well. I don't agree with this statement of yours: 'The only thing missing from an excellent forgery is the acknowledgement of the source, But to whom is this fact so important, if the work is brilliant on its face?' We have an obligation to teach students the rules of the game. Crafting a paper requires the acknowledgement of sources so claims made can be checked. And I guess we are not so much after brilliance but new ideas and evidence.

Steve Fuller (2016-02-05 18:04:08)
I don't know the similarity figure that triggers a tribunal, but as I said in the article, it is beyond 20-30 % of overlap. In any case, artists are also taught the rules of their game, but the issue here is the spirit of enforcement. Artists are just as interested as academics in determining the sources of works. However, it is less in a spirit of criminality than of gamesmanship. After all, the 'rules of the game' don't have a supernatural existence. They are made by and for humans, and it is humans who judge their efficacy. The fetishizing of plagiarism and fraud ends up alienating academics from their own normative order by turning them into protectors of other people's intellectual property: From gamers to gamekeepers! Not a good look, I'm afraid.

Reiner Grundmann (2016-02-05 20:16:12)
Steve, i have the impression that we are somehow talking past each other. Maybe one last try. There are two points: we teach the craft of proper writing (there is much more freedom in art in comparison), and we want recognition (not only enforcement of property rights). The craft aspect is not be neglected, it helps avoiding making unsubstantiated claims (as we often see in
students' essays, but also in colleagues work, and of course in our own).

**Plagiarism The Sociological Imagination (2016-02-06 17:15:18)**


Ursula (2016-02-06 18:51:04)

Yes, I always allow my students to have a 'review & resubmit' option in Turnitin. Often they can correct it themselves. Especially UGs where it's just a case of naivety. Have you read Vardi's work in this area?

Steve Fuller (2016-02-06 23:07:41)

Ursula, you mean this person, right? https://vardiconsulting.wordpress.com/papers/

“Good research is a messy business...” - The Social Hand Grenade (2016-02-08 21:00:47)

 [...] whether this is coincidence, providence or some breathtaking Google tech that I am unaware of). Here is a link to one that I found super interesting. It says, amongst other things, that plagiarism is [...] 

Plagiarism: Observations on Academia's Self-Induced Moral Panic | teaching knowledge and creativity (2016-02-12 10:15:16)

 [...] Sourced through Scoop.it from: sociologicalimagination.org [...] 

Dr. Mike Reddy (2016-09-24 07:39:58)

I disagree with this on several levels. The 20-30 % originality threshold belies a total misunderstanding of both Turnitin and cut and paste plagiarism. To leave it unchallenged, like a forgotten 'straw man' argument, might denote a lack of clarity; it could show something worse. The analogies to Art doesn't hold water. While I agree we should take a different lesson from the Internet - this generation’s extended phenotype as knowledge carvers, rather than crafters or hunter-gatherers - and the need for assessment to change in light of technological advance, there still is value in declaring provenance. The sources of information matter even more now that anyone can publish anything. Plagiarism isn't a 'crime' because of the copying, it's the taking credit. The reason for citation isn't (or shouldn't be) "because that's how we do it" or "because we (academics) say so". It is to ascribe sources, because the source of knowledge is important in science, etc, where it isn't (necessarily) in Art. Art is a transformative process. In Academia, this transformation requires both a foundation - to justify its significance and relevance - and context, because the product AND the process are important. If I say Drug A is safe, it matters if I'm an online seller of said drug, or the person who did the double blind ten year clinical trial. That is why referencing is important, not the taking/giving credit. The explicit explanation of the process of gathering or creation of knowledge requires the method or origin to be recognised.

Writing as an act of love | Academic Emergence (2017-01-19 13:47:17)

 [...] would be far less need for law enforcement strategies if universities took a bit more responsibility for how their sector approaches the representation of knowledge. I urge students to speak out about [...] 

**The Pessimistic Turn in Modern French Thought (2016-02-05 08:00)**

A really interesting lecture about the pessimistic turn in modern French thought: the roots of a transition to be found in an intellectual culture "haunted by the universal".
A reading list of critical research on self-tracking (2016-02-06 08:00)

A really useful resource curated by Deborah Lupton: [1]https://simplysociology.wordpress.com/2016/01/12/critical-social-research-on-self-tracking-a-reading-list/

Plagiarism (2016-02-06 17:15)

[1]by Michael Palkowski
Professor Steve Fuller, an eminent sociologist at the University of Warwick recently published a provocative blog post on the ways in which academia deals with plagiarism, titled "Plagiarism: Observations on Academia’s Self-Induced Moral Panic". In this article, I will discuss the main arguments he outlines and explain why I believe they are misguided.

The central argument of the piece is concerned with moving from what Fuller (2016) describes as a 'moral' view of plagiarism, to an 'aesthetic' view. I believe that plagiarism is a moral issue and believe that the "aesthetic view" of plagiarism is ineffective at maintaining academic standards. Fuller in the blog notes that we should take lessons from the art world when trying to deal with plagiarism issues and that a fixation on issues such as forgery and fraud merely reflects low academic self esteem. To quote him directly:

"It is too bad that academia does not adopt this relatively relaxed attitude to plagiarism and fraud[...]

According to Fuller, having an institutional fixation on checking for plagiarism merely "draw[s] attention to just how much academics feel the need to protect their turf from unworthy interlopers." Having an interest in maintaining rigorous academic standards, is somehow the same as prohibiting particular voices from being heard. The idea that is contentious here, is that the fraudulent contribution is somehow not unworthy. At the end of his blog, he states the following:

"I am asserting an unconditional right of someone who has been allowed into society's epistemic sphere to range freely within it, as a 'commons', unless specifically stopped by a relevant authority for 'poaching' or 'polluting'."

A major point of contention is the notion between privately owned and publicly owned knowledge, what Professor Fuller refers to in his article as a 'commons'. Students already have the 'unconditional right' to enter into the epistemic space he describes. Fuller in saying these points wants to highlight the fact that all knowledge is free reign for the student. However, it is not within the student's right to be cavalier with that knowledge and to treat it with disrespect and to ultimately present it as a product of their own, without reference. Forgery is not qualitatively the same thing as an original, even if it passes as a genuine piece of work. However according to Fuller, if they bypass detection, then it is as good as the original. Passing as genuine is somehow sufficient, even if the material is ultimately an uncredited patchwork. That is why programs like Turnitin are so important for detecting counterfeits.

Fuller suggests an alternative program, one which in essence would protect and guard those willing to submit forgeries. The program would alert students to when their material was in the 'danger zone', and offer alternatives in order to prevent work from being regarded as plagiarism.

Fuller will be aware that Turnitin is already used in this manner, often tutors encourage their students to submit 'drafts' in order for their original content score to be amended. However, Fuller is advancing something different here. His hypothetical program would offer clear suggestions to students on how they can cover up their misdemeanours. It is not the case that plagiarism should be discouraged, it is simply that we should hide that it even happens by playing elaborate games of "cat and mouse". Fuller seems eager to dismantle the very academic standards that got him to a position of relative authority as a professor.

Plagiarism was openly advocated and celebrated by writers such as Guy Debord (1994) [1970] and his situationist international colleagues, for precisely the same reasons that Professor Fuller wants plagiarism to be a "cat and mouse game" in the academy. The plagiariser was to reproduce material in an aesthetic fashion. It was a way of initiating 'progress', a way of 'erasing false ideas' with the 'right ideas'. This was entirely abstract as is Fuller's notion of an aesthetic approach to plagiarism. Regardless, Debord and his ilk were appropriating the artistic principles that Fuller describes so glowingly in his blogpost. The problem that this amounts to is comparing apples with oranges. Despite this, it is always convenient to justify stealing other people's work.
In the Society of the Spectacle, Debord directly highlights the aesthetic approach to plagiarism:

"Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It embraces an author’s phrase, makes use of his expressions, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea."

Professor Bauman was outed in 2014, when it became apparent that he had reproduced content directly from Wikipedia without citing it (Jump 2014). In doing so, he replicated many of the errors that were present in these publicly available articles. When a PhD student at the University of Cambridge highlighted these claims in depth, Bauman rebuffed these serious claims by suggesting that high quality scholarship did not require ‘obedience’ to ‘technical’ rules of referencing. It caused a controversy and rightly so. Many realised that there are different standards at different levels of the ivory tower. There is a sense that eminence leads to an insistence on different rules to be applied at different times. A PhD student could not wilfully disregard referencing content and especially could not defend to other academics that citing is merely being obedient to archaic rules that insist on maintaining academic integrity and standards. It cannot be argued that there is a level playing field when it comes to being lackadaisical with referencing and writing with integrity. Hence why academic articles stressing the need to be less anal about technical rules of referencing, are inevitably articles from people who have nothing to lose in such a change. They can hide behind their positions of authority.

It sends the wrong message to place forgery on the same level as scholarship. Forgery that "passes for an original" is not an original, regardless of the aesthetic tricks that the writer took. Forgery can be interesting in the way that a found poem can be interesting. I think this is what Fuller has in mind when he thinks about aesthetic plagiarism of academic texts. Autoethnographic writers like Stacy Holman Jones, Tony Adams and Carolyn Ellis (see Adams et al 2015) sometimes use a technique called text spinning where passages from academic writing are juxtaposed together in order to stimulate new ideas. Often the purpose of this exercise is to help the researcher’s own experiences come out and ‘spin’ with the theoretical canvas. The difference is apparent, the citations are clearly marked. The original contribution to knowledge is not fabricated. The process is often the starting point for the researcher, in beginning to think creatively and critically about a subject.

Mary Ruefle’s (2006) ‘found poetry’ is often about taking a pre-existing text such as a Victorian novel and eliminating words with white out until a coherent message is found in the novel, that is ‘found’, that is new. This is not however on the same level as a poem that was written without the aid of the Victorian novel as a canvas. Further, it is not copying exact passages, it is using the book as a impetus for stimulating original thought. Another suggestion made by Fuller is that the aesthetic plagiariser uses the ‘archive’ (the internet) as an extended memory store. To quote him directly:

"The key difference is that the forger treats ‘the archive’ (aka ‘the internet’ for today’s generation) as an extended memory store, not as something ontologically distinct from his or her own being."

The internet is a resource and as a resource, it must be used ethically when appropriating content. It is patently absurd to make such a claim in order to defend what is an indefensible outcome. Students plagiarise using the internet because they understand the internet as an extended memory bank, so therefore it is fine? Fuller apparently holds charlatans to high praise as is demonstrated here:

"Thus, we fail to appreciate that the most devious forger of original work will have mastered the skills that we would have demanded of them"

The forger has not mastered anything, other than stealing other people’s work. The present quote gets at the heart of what is wrong with the aesthetic approach to stealing people’s ideas. As Fuller notes himself:
"The problem with detected plagiarism is more that it is detected than that it is plagiarised: It was not good enough to pass as original."

Fuller presents an incredibly negative view of what it means to be a teacher in this passage. This is what happens when we apply the principles of postmodernism to integrity in the academy. Students who play elaborate games of trickery in reproducing others work, who might not even understand any of the words that are pasted together, are somehow on the same level as the student trying hard to understand and write coherent, thoughtful and powerful essays that come from their own study and their own understanding of concepts, theory and experience. Why should students even bother in such a toxic environment, if their friends could skilfully juxtapose a bunch of academic texts together and get a better grade?

Academia can be regarded as a mental bricolage, in the sense that we wrestle with ideas and attempt to establish a coherent picture of many different parts. It is like a puzzle and you want to get the right pieces to make your picture look right. Qualitative researchers are quick to say research is messy and it is. There is an argument to have that ideas are not original, that our interpretation of ideas are hardly novel. This however does not mean that all ideas are aesthetically plagiarised, or that written material is in essence copied. The process of the forgery and the progress of the genuine article have different antecedents that are important. Scholarship that takes years to complete, with research strategies that collect data that is meaningful and reflexive of a particular community for example, is qualitatively different from someone going on the internet and copy and pasting passages from that piece of work and then "aesthetically" copy and pasting it within passages of Jane Eyre and then claiming credit.

Fuller wants us to remove the very tools we have in place to try and reduce fraud in our institutions, by putting the onus of plagiarism detection entirely on stressed out, overworked and overburdened academic markers. We should be helping our academics with every tool possible to help detect forgeries. We do not read everything. We are not infallible.

Fuller in wanting to remove or undermine the tools we use to detect plagiarism also states that doing so would "leave the uncaught student to dwell productively in his or her guilt". This makes about as much sense as deregulating the banks and expecting them to do the right thing every time. Why undermine tools that can assist this process?

It is easy to see why Fuller is making these sort of arguments. It is in the very heart and soul of sociological inquiry to stand up for the underdog, as Howard Becker (1967) famously pointed out. Fuller might see the plagiarising student as being someone who is victimised, or someone who does not fit into a prescriptivist academic climate. It is clear however that if we want to have an academic discipline that people take seriously, we need to defend integrity and make sure we are doing our best to combat corruption. Fuller in his aesthetic approach to plagiarism showcases a very negative view of intellectual labor and the intellectual process. Intellectual ideas are there for everyone to come and take, if they can get away with it. Fuller wants the average student to turn into Shia LaBeouf and it is in everyone’s interest that this does not happen.

References


Michael Palkowski is a PhD student at Edinburgh Napier University. He is interested in sociological understandings of hospitality, public space and urban theory. He is also interested in the sociology of the body and has published a book with Palgrave, (co-authored with Dr Kathy Charles) looking at Feederism from a sociological and psychological perspective.

1. https://twitter.com/degarmot
2. https://twitter.com/degarmot

Baslan Shev'la (2016-02-06 17:43:11)
I knew Fuller’s post bothered me, and I think you’ve articulated why beyond my stubbornly nonacademic "I worked my ass off on that shit, and this is a GD knowledge economy. BETTER give credit where it’s due!"

Steve Fuller (2016-02-06 18:35:38)
This is an interesting, if slightly sad piece. It seems to want to force academics into a position of defending the distinctiveness of their profession in terms of its capacity to protect intellectual property – something which in the future may be done better by a machine than by the academics themselves. We have reached a sorry state when the ‘teaching’ side of our profession has become so preoccupied with evaluating work, rather than demonstrating why such work might be worth undertaking in the first place. I actually don’t think of myself as a postmodernist, and most people who think of themselves as postmodernists don’t see me as one of their number. However, I do believe that there are some deep lessons in postmodernism – and maybe they are informing my argument. The difference between art and scholarship is that the artist sees plagiarism on a sliding scale, and hence the ‘anxiety of influence’, whereas the scholar often makes an arbitrary cut. That cut takes place when words are appropriated without formal attribution; hence, Turnitin looms largely in current academic practice. However, more thoughtful scholars think more like artists: They don’t rate people – students or scholars – who abide by the rules yet manage to say things that depend so much on properly acknowledged sources that their pieces could have been generated by a computer programme that was given a set of references as input data. Much of what passes for academic work in this period of mass publishing has exactly this character. Such work plays by the rules and does so competently, and we generally reward it, even if we do not declare them works of genius. But to my mind, these works sit closer to a kind of ‘plagiarism’ that is worth worrying about: The ‘Plagiarism Plus’ that constitutes what Kuhn called ‘normal science’. There are only two things that students learn when they learn how to reference academic sources properly: (1) They learn how to communicate in a way that their scholarly audience will easily understand; (2) they learn how to think about academic work as intellectual property that they can rent for their own purposes through proper citation. However, the connection between mastery of these two points and mastery of a domain of scholarship is by no means obvious. Surely, I’m not the only reader of well-placed sociology journal articles who often wonders whether an author has understood the impressive list of cited works, given how the works are featured in the author’s text. My point here is that by fetishizing plagiarism to such an extent that we see it as qualitatively ‘Other’ to proper scholarship,
we are demystifying academic work to such an extent that it will be eventually reduced to computer-programmed articles evaluated by computer-programmed markers. Palkowski bemoans the plagiarist’s tendency to make life easy for him/herself by avoiding the hard graft of scholarship. Yet, if the history of technology is any indication, defenders of the ‘craft of scholarship’ will need to do more than extol sheer energy expenditure as a virtue. The plagiarist already has efficiency on his/her side.

rogan (2016-02-12 11:29:26)

Essentially, what Fuller is saying as I understand it is that he dislikes how people own knowledge and defend their right to it’s use because it was their idea - which does seem very egotistical and non-conducive to human knowledge development. But this negative view could not be more short-sighted. The fundamental function of any assignment for the student varies depending on the skills needed to complete the task. However, it is always true that the assignment is a test of the student’s understanding of the topic, ability to bring together ideas from various locations and come to a logical, reasonable conclusion on their findings... and not a test of their ability to ‘hack’ the system (although hacking is a skill of it’s own, it’s not the point of academia). Where this point becomes even more potent, is when a professional academic plagiarises. The academic is not there to get a degree so that they can leave university and start telling people what to do in a hipster marketing apartment; they are there to teach, and to pursue the advancement of human knowledge. And to that effect, they should share, collaborate, and combine knowledge. They should be proud of the fact that they read and expanded on the work of another human with whom they share that same goal, for it underpins their work as an extension of previous well-founded discoveries and assuages doubt and inaccuracies in their findings. Knowledge is not art, nor is art knowledge.

**The Art of the Steal (2016-02-07 08:00)**

A really interesting film via [1]Dan Silver:

>This is a fascinating documentary film about the longstanding financial problems of the Barnes Foundation, a $25-billion collection of mostly Modernist and post-Impressionist artworks, and the foundation officers’ successful effort to break Albert C. Barnes’s will and move the collection from Lower Merion to downtown Philadelphia. The emphasis of the film is on the breaking of Barnes’ will.

![X](https://twitter.com/dansilversarf)

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/-dxj9q2snl4

1. [https://twitter.com/dansilversarf](https://twitter.com/dansilversarf)
2. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/-dxj9q2snl4](https://www.youtube.com/embed/-dxj9q2snl4)

**BSA Work, Employment and Society Conference 2016 - Call for Papers (2016-02-08 08:00)**

Abstract submission closes at midnight on Monday 7 March

**Work, Employment and Society Conference 2016**

4220
Work in Crisis

Dates: Tuesday 6 – Thursday 8 September 2016 (Postgraduate Workshop: 5 September 2016)

Venue: University of Leeds

The BSA and the Work, employment and society Editorial Board are pleased to announce that the WES Conference 2016 will be hosted by the University of Leeds. Like the journal, the conference is internationally focused and sociologically oriented, though it welcomes contributions from related fields.

The conference comes at a critical time for the study of work internationally. The impact of the global financial crisis has not only been profound, but enduring. The crisis has not led to any fundamental reappraisal of the nature of capitalism, or how to 'govern' it. For the majority in work conditions have deteriorated, while those without employment have been subject to ever more punitive sanctions. Inequalities are increasing and working lives becoming more precarious. The WES 2016 conference will bring together sociologists of work from across the globe to consider the crisis within, and the possibility of moving beyond, capitalist work relations.

The full Call for Papers can be viewed at: [1]http://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/93221/WES2016_conference_CFP_070316.pdf?1448377582546


Collaborative Work and Social Media: Responding to the rapid spread of provocative content (2016-02-08 14:01)

Special issue call for the Journal of Computer Supported Cooperative work

Deadline for submissions March 7th 2016

These call details are also available online at [1]https://sites.google.com/site/digitalwildfiresrc/jcscw

Special issue editors

Marina Jirotka – University of Oxford

William Housley – Cardiff University

Rob Procter- University of Warwick

Helena Webb - University of Oxford

The rapid spread of provocative content on social media

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr etc. create new spaces in which users...
can 'meet', interact and exchange content. This content is often then forwarded on through shares, retweets etc. so that single posts can be seen and responded to by multiple others. Our modern status of hyperconnectivity means that social media content can spread spontaneously across the globe in a very short period of time. As social media platforms have gained in popularity over the last ten years they have become particularly associated with the posting and rapid spread of provocative content. This provocative content may take various forms including: extreme or inflammatory sentiment - in particular relating to politics, class, race, sexuality or gender; inflammatory or incendiary comments directed towards particular individuals or groups; commentary and speculation regarding unfolding social events and crises; political debates and campaigns; and humanitarian and solidarity messages and campaigns.

Provocative content on social media can undoubtedly take constructive forms – for instance in the galvanising of a clean-up effort after the London riots of 2011 and the spread of solidarity messages such as #JeSuisCharlie #BlackLivesMatter. However much public and political attention has focused on the prevalence and rapid spread of more negative content such as hate speech, harassment and unverified rumour. Concerns have been expressed over the harms this content can cause to individuals, groups and populations, and questions have been raised over how social media can and should be regulated. Provocative content at times overlaps with illegal content and in some countries may be actioned under civil or criminal codes in relation to defamation, hate crime etc. However many kinds of provocative content do not breach any legal codes. Similarly, most social media platforms adopt terms of use that enable them to remove certain kinds of offensive or harmful material where necessary but allow users to post provocative content of various kinds. Indeed, many of these platforms are run on principles supporting freedom of expression and actively uphold the right for posts and posters to be provoking and/or inflammatory.

A 2013 report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) characterises contemporary concerns over the spread of provocative content across social media. The report highlights the global risk factor of ‘digital wildfires’: scenarios in which provocative content involving multiple users spreads widely and rapidly across social media and results in serious negative offline consequences. For example the massive spread of misinformation can harm the reputation of individuals, organisations and markets before there is a chance to correct it. Alternatively, abusive and incendiary messages can cause considerable harm to individuals and generate social tension during critical events such as civil disturbances, health scares and natural disasters. The WEF report argues that the risks posed by digital wildfires prompt re-evaluation of the current governance of digital social spaces. This may take the form of new legal or technological restrictions on content balanced against the principle of freedom of speech. Alternatively, there is scope to promote a ‘global digital ethos’ by encouraging social media users to behave responsibly in the monitoring and regulation of their own and others’ online behaviours.

CSCW and social media

Work conducted within the framework of computer supported cooperative work offers to greatly advance understanding of the rapid spread of provocative content on social media. In the first instance, CSCW perspectives can shed light on the role of collaboration in the occurrence of these socio-digital phenomena. Relevant research questions include: how does the rapid spread of different kinds of provocative content occur in real time? How do social media users, who may not even know each other, collude and collaborate to enable to spread this content? How might these users collaborate to adopt responsible online behaviours and what forms would these behaviours take? How can the online and offline consequences of provocative online content be identified, assessed, replicated and understood? What roles can different forms of regulation play in the management of the spread of provocative content and the pursuit of a global digital ethos?

In addition, CSCW approaches also support collaborative interdisciplinary research on the prevalence of provocative content on social media. For instance, opportunities exist in: collaborative and crowd source coding for phenomena such as the spread of rumour or hate speech; the co-design of digital tools or platforms capable of scoping and analysing the propagation of provocative content; and collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to ethics and responsible innovation with regard to social media.
Journal special issue

The special issue takes up these research opportunities by exploring the relationships between collaborative work and social media in the context of the rapid spread of provocative content. For this special issue we welcome contributions including, but not limited to:

- Case studies or comparative analyses of social media phenomena involving the rapid spread of provocative content.
- Papers that report on the ‘collaborative work’ of digital agents in propagating, responding to and regulating the content and diffusion of provocative content on social media. This may include: the design and use of digital tools/platforms to scope and assess online content; crowd-source coding for provocative content; or qualitative examinations of the lived orderliness and practical accomplishment of social media interactions.
- Examinations of governance practices relating to the regulation of digital social spaces. For example, work based ethnographic studies of social media regulation and response to the spread of provocative content during critical events such as disasters, civil emergencies or public health scares.
- Papers that report on collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to ethics and responsible innovation for the governance of digital social spaces.
- Papers that report on the opportunities and challenges presented by the collaborative interdisciplinary study of the spread and prevalence of provocative content on social media.

We seek contributions from a range of disciplinary backgrounds that can advance theoretical, practical, technical and/or social understandings in CSCW and related fields.

Submission details and further information

Please submit your paper by **March 7th 2016**. Round 1 notifications will be sent in mid-June 2016.

Manuscripts must follow the journal's format standards [2]Instructions for Authors (pdf, 366 kB).

Submit manuscripts to [3]http://www.editorialmanager.com/cosu/ and indicate in your cover letter that the submission is for the special issue.

For questions and queries please contact coordinating guest editor [4]helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk

The special issue forms part of the ongoing research project ‘Digital Wildfire: (mis)information flows, propagation and responsible governance’. To find out more about the project, visit our website [5]www.digitalwildfire.org or contact [6]helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk.

1. https://sites.google.com/site/digitalwildfiresrc/jcscw
4. mailto:helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk
A soft apartheid towards Muslims is emerging in Britain (2016-02-09 08:00)

Submissions to Association of Internet Researchers 2016 (5-8 October, Berlin) now open (2016-02-10 08:00)

Dear colleague,

We are pleased to open submissions for proposals for AoIR 2016: Internet Rules! (Berlin, Germany, 5 - 8 October, 2016). To re-familiarize yourself with the call for proposals and types of submissions solicited, please see here: [1]http://aoir.org/aoir2016/call-for-proposals/.

Accepted paper and panel submissions will be included in our open access
conference paper archive, Selected Papers of Internet Research (SPIR). SPIR helps us further publicize the work of our members and introduce our research to a wider audience. All submissions should follow our SPIR formatting requirements, which includes a consistent header and style format for the papers that will enable people to easily locate author and title information, identify the papers as part of the AoIR conference. This format is only intended to bring consistency to basic elements (such as typeface and spacing), not to impose any disciplinary constraints. You can download a Word template here:


Please note that if you submitted a proposal to the conference through ConfTool last year, you will need to re-register. If you have recently received an email invitation to register as a reviewer, your account will also allow you to submit contributions. When submitting, please take the time to read the submission categories and topics carefully. You may enter a total of four submissions for the conference (understood broadly as presenting a paper to speaking as part of a fishbowl or panel).

If you have any questions about the submission process, please email [3]aoir2016@aoir.org. We look forward to seeing your proposals.

Click below to go o the submission site:


We look forward to your proposals, and to a vibrant and stimulating conference in Berlin!

Sincerely,

Cornelius Puschmann, AoIR 2016 program chair

3. mailto:aoir2016@aoir.org

Towards Digital Social Ontology (2016-02-11 08:00)

This is a brief write up of a talk I gave at the first meeting of the Digital Social Science Forum in January 2016. Digital Social Ontology should be an important part of how we approach Digital Social Science given the ISRF’s commitment towards a “better understanding of social entities and processes” that can be used to solve “subject
specific problems”.

Part of the problem facing the Digital Social Sciences is the vast array of disciplines and approaches being subsumed under this term: Digital Sociology, Digital Anthropology, Digital Geography, Social Informatics, Human-Computer Interaction, Web Science, The Digital Humanities, Data Science, Critical Data Studies, Platform Studies, Software Studies. As a whole these represent a profound restructuring of knowledge production and even academic labour, if we see the ascendancy of Data Science through the lens of the Sociology of Work.

This is why a Digital Ontology to accompany the Digital Social Sciences holds such promise. I would understand Ontology quite straightforwardly as the study of what exists and what existent things have in common. But I think [2]Tony Lawson’s distinction between Ontology in this sense and Ontographology is very useful: the former being the study of things and the latter the study of how those things are theorised.

Given their rapid proliferation, comparative Ontographology could be an important exercise in clarifying the internal structuring of the Digital Social Sciences, as well as identifying convergences and divergences in how they conceive of their often overlapping objects. But it could also be a tool of productive criticism, for instance drawing out contradictions between implicit and explicit ontological commitments.

This would be a matter of mapping ontological issues being confronted across disciplines and fields, asking fundamental questions of philosophical ontology informed by the questions of regional or scientific ontology already being asked within specific disciplines and fields. The concern here would therefore be taxonomic: bringing clarity across fields of study and elucidating key issues where the impulse towards clarification is contentious.

Part of the ambition here would be meta-theoretical: mapping the diversity of different approaches to these questions and bringing them into the same argumentative space. Rather than their current existence as incommensurable paradigms, not permitting of intellectual advancement through dialogue with alternative understandings.

2. [http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/A_Conception_of_Ontology.pdf](http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/A_Conception_of_Ontology.pdf)

**Relating to data through visualisation: three funded PhD studentships in the UK (2016-02-12 08:00)**

*Deadline for applications: 5th March 2016.*

Start date: October 2016.*

Relating To Data: understanding data through visualisation* is a network of three funded PhD studentships which focuses on how people relate to data through their visualisation, the narratives and meanings people attach to visualisations and the potential understanding produced by them. The successful candidates will be located at one of the universities of Leeds, Sheffield or York, depending on the studentship for which they apply (see below). The network brings together supervisors with expertise in data
visualisation, big data/data power and user-centred digital design with two
world-leading and award-winning data visualisation agencies, Clever-Franke (1)[https://www.cleverfranke.com/] and Visualising Data (2)[http://www.visualisingdata.com/]. As such it provides exciting
opportunities for three PhD students interested in the social scientific
study of data in society.

The network is funded by the UK’s ESRC (Economic and Social Research
Council) WRDTC (White Rose Doctoral Training Centre). As such, it is only
open to UK and EU nationals. Applicants who have been resident in the UK
for three years prior to the start date will be eligible for a fees +
maintenance award; applicants not resident in the UK for the three years
prior to the start date will be eligible for a fees only award.

Studentship topic 1: **Developing Visualisation Literacy.**

- Principal Supervisor: Helen Kennedy, Department of Sociological
  Studies, University of Sheffield.
- Co-Supervisor: Alex Hall, Department of Politics, University of York

To apply: *(3)[https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/postgradapplication/]

Studentship topic 2: **Engaging Diverse Users in Visualisation Production
and Evaluation**.

- Principal Supervisor: David Beer, Department of Sociology, University
  of York.
- Co-Supervisor: Rosemary Lucy Hill, Department of Sociology and Social
  Policy, University of Leeds

To apply: *
[4]https://www.york.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/fees-funding/research/esrc/

Studentship topic 3: **Measuring Visualisation Engagement.**

- Principal Supervisor: Christopher Birchall, School of Media and
  Communications, University of Leeds.
- Co-Supervisor: Paul Clough, Information School, University of
  Sheffield

To apply: *

For more information about the network and the studentships, visit
contact the academic lead, Helen Kennedy, for more information.

1. https://www.cleverfranke.com/
On ‘disruption’ and ‘innovation’ (2016-02-13 08:00)

Even though I believe the concepts of ‘innovation’ and ‘disruption’ refer to sociologically significant phenomena, I cringe slightly whenever I hear someone use the terms. Particularly in the case of the latter, a whole theory of social change at the meso level is implicit within it: it’s deeply ideological and we need to unpack it, rather than reinforce it by invoking the concept of ‘disruption’.

Part of the problem here is analytically distinguishing between the trends these concepts invoke and the discursive resources they provide for managers to give an account of their organisation. On this note, the following infographic was interesting to come across, even if the appropriate resolution leaves it so small as to be difficult to read:

A search of annual and quarterly reports filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission shows companies mentioned some form of the word “innovation” 33,528 times last year, which was a 64% increase from five years before that.

More than 250 books with "innovation" in the title have been published in the last three months, most of them dealing with business, according to a search of [1]Amazon.com.


As a descriptive term, used to refer to what Eric Schmidt defines as items that are both surprising and offer new
functionality (*How Google Works* loc 2909), I have no problem with the notion of 'innovation'. The difficulty comes in how it’s drawn upon as a matter of reflex to aggrandise things that are lacking on one count and/or the other. Interestingly, this isn’t something confined to technology firms:


And inevitably, where there is bullshit, there is an army of consultants whose fortunes are tied to upholding the perceived intellectual legitimacy of this bullshit in order that they can continue to peddle it:

The innovation trend has given birth to an attendant consulting industry, and Fortune 100 companies pay innovation consultants $300,000 to $1 million for work on a single project, which can amount to $1 million to $10 million a year, estimates Booz & Co. innovation strategy consultant Alex Kandybin. In addition, four in 10 executives say their company now has a chief innovation officer, according to a recent study of the phenomenon released last month by Capgemini Consulting.


But as the WSJ article goes on to note, of the 4 in 10 global corporations which now have a chief innovation officer, "an online survey of 260 global executives and 25 in-depth interviews, suggest that such titles may be mainly ‘for appearances.’" The slippage between the two uses of the term has material consequences: invoking ‘innovation’ to account for what we are *already* doing in more positive terms leads to an apparatus of innovation emerging within the organisation. In other words, ‘disruption’ and ‘innovation’ talk aren’t just window dressing, in the sense that the entrenchment of this discourse has intra-organisational implications. Note: I’m not saying these changes have any capacity to produce disruption or innovation in the *descriptive sense*, only that these are real changes rather than mere talk.


__________________________
Should academics blog? (2016-02-15 08:00)

In this video from a workshop I did in Hull last year, I rather unsurprisingly say 'yes' to the question 'should academics blog?'
I just surprised myself by sitting through this entire 40 minute compilation of Donald Trump's insults during the Republican primaries:
I found them weirdly hypnotic, albeit intellectually deadening. Perhaps [2]this explains the strange quality of Trump's speech?

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/eGzxLb0drUQ

Podcasts: Towards a Digital Social Ontology (2016-02-17 08:00)

Podcasts from the [1]Centre for Social Ontology's symposium last year:
International Summer School: Social Studies of Algorithms (2016-02-18 07:15)

Call for applicants: Summer School of the International Algorithm Studies NetworkPlease disseminate widely

Date: 4-8 July, 2106 Place: Stockholm, Sweden

Algorithms are everywhere! This international summer school explores the increasing importance of algorithms in society and the socio-cultural transformations that this tendency implies. The point of departure is that algorithms become implicated in society and culture: for example in media narratives, in mundane artefacts, or in organizations. Through their output and functioning, algorithms come to classify, hierarchize, value and shape different social phenomena, often well beyond their initial purpose.

The aim of this summer school is to address algorithms through a number of themes that shine light on different aspects of algorithms in society and culture: in big data, music, law, surveillance and medicine. The summer school takes place at a few thematically chosen venues in Stockholm: at some government agencies and private organizations. How do these organisations work with algorithms and how can we as scholars understand their omnipresence?

Themes

Algorithms and Music
Algorithms and Law
Algorithms and Surveillance
Algorithms and Big Data
Algorithms and Medicine

Confirmed Teachers
Baki Cakici (Goldsmiths, University of London) Bill Maurer (University of California, Irvine) CF Helgesson (Linköping University) Dennis Broeders (Erasmus University Rotterdam) Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths, University of London) Nick Seaver (Tufts University) Pelle Snickars (Umeå University) Philip Roscoe (University of St. Andrews)

Where
The summer school will take place in beautiful summer Stockholm: the home town of Spotify, Dice, Paradox Interactive, Minecraft, the Pirate Bay, Candy Crush, and countless other digital actors and phenomena. The school is hosted by the Department of Thematic Studies: Technology and Social Change at Linköping University, Sweden.

Who should apply?
The summer school invites doctoral students from the social sciences and the humanities.

Application and Deadline
Fill in the application form below as well as a 500 word motivation on how the issues addressed in this summer school is relevant for your research. Attach your CV.
Send applications to: [1]algorithmnetwork@gmail.com.

Deadline: Friday, 18 March 2016. Participants will be notified no later than March 31. Reading lists and more information will be sent out in the beginning of June.

The summer school is free to attend. Participants will pay for and arrange their own accommodation and most
meals. Some accommodation with fellow participants will be available, but we welcome your own arrangements.

In the application please note: full name, affiliation, address, dietary restrictions. Please also note if you are interested in staying with a fellow participant.

[2] Call for Applicants feb 17

1. mailto:algorithmnetwork@gmail.com

Call for Abstracts: Themed Issue on Body Weight and Digital Media (2016-02-18 08:00)

This themed issue, to be edited by Deborah Lupton, focuses on the ways in which digital media and technologies are used to represent and manage body weight and size. It will be published in the journal [1]Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society. Fat Studies is the first academic journal that critically examines theory, research, practices, and programs related to body weight and appearance.

If you are interested in contributing to this themed issue, please send Deborah ([2]deborah.lupton@canberra.edu.au) an article title and an abstract of 200-250 words outlining what you would propose to cover by 29 February 2016. Final submissions should be no longer than 7,000 words, including the abstract, all notes and references.

In keeping with the journal’s emphasis on ‘body weight and society’, the themed issue will include contributions that address the following and related topics from a critical sociocultural perspective:

- representations of body weight and size in the digital news media (and also how readers may comment on news reports online)
- apps and wearable devices for weight control, physical fitness and energy expenditure
- selfies and body size
- the discussion and portrayal of such issues as weight loss, body size, fat activism, thinspo, fitspo, pro-ana, pro-mia and fat pornography and erotica in blogs, social media platforms and other websites
- big data and body weight

If your abstract is accepted, the following deadlines apply:

- Full papers by 31 May 2016
- Revised final versions by 30 August 2016
Contribute to the Warwick Sociology Journal (2016-02-18 08:00)
Warwick Sociology Journal is a student-founded and led sociological journal seeking to publish high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate work. We are currently accepting student submissions for our Spring issue and would love to receive any essays, articles or reviews you have produced.

Please send papers for our consideration to [sociologyjournal@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:sociologyjournal@warwick.ac.uk). The submission deadline for our Spring issue is midnight on Friday 26th February, 2016. We welcome contributions from students from any discipline, so long as the work in question has clear sociological relevance. Please note we require submissions to be Harvard referenced and at a maximum of 7,500 words. Please don't hesitate to get in touch with any queries.

We look forward to hearing from you!
Feel free to follow us on twitter @sociojournal

1. [mailto:sociologyjournal@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:sociologyjournal@warwick.ac.uk)

A brief introduction to Niklas Luhmann's concept of society (2016-02-18 18:45)

There's a definite lack of English language resources online related to Luhmann. Does anyone have suggestions we could add to the attached?
By knowing more about society as a concept, we can see that society relates to and shapes people and populations. It can act as a set of rules and can constrain people in important ways.

Public health practice might seek to act on the overarching concepts that sustain society, for example by defining and building on concepts of health and illness, social justice, public health, and the underpinning mechanisms that produce inequalities. Society is also constructed out of multiple realities and by knowing about these we can see that each public health problem may in fact be composed of many different dimensions.

But in order to deal with this chaos, we create th
Special Issue of Discover Society on Digital Futures (2016-02-19 08:00)

Co-edited by Mark Carrigan and William Housley

Social media is conventionally located within a commercial narrative that theorises an array of emerging ‘disruptive technologies’ that includes big data, additive manufacture and robotics. These and related technologies are underpinned by computational developments that are networked, distributed, digital and data driven. It has been argued that these technologies not only disrupt markets; but also wider social and economic relations and organization. These include social institutions such as the family, work, health care delivery, education, relationships and the ‘self’.

Social media is one of the first waves of digital disruptive technologies whose mass global take-up via multiple platforms is still being assessed and understood, as a social force in it’s own right. Standardly, ‘social media as data’ has provided a plethora of studies and projects that have examined the big and broad social data opportunities provided by the social media for understanding populations on the move 'in real time'.

In some cases this has led certain commentators to enthusiastically claim that the analysis of social media as data offers opportunities for prediction and the forecasting of behavior at the population level although this rhetoric is not without it’s skeptics and critics. Furthermore, these methodological opportunities and oracular imaginaries are being accompanied by an ‘ontological velocity’ generated by the social and economic implications of social media as data, practice and a globalizing networked communicative force that is shaping being and becoming in the digital age. A key issue here is the relationship between social media, society, time and the ‘future making’ capacities and affordances of these and allied technologies.

Yet little work has been carried out on the temporal ramifications of social media (and other disruptive technologies) in relation to emerging digital ‘timescapes’. To this extent the study of the relationship between social media and society remains under conceptualized especially in relation to our understanding of late modernity at the beginning of the 21st century. The relationship between social media and the social generation of risk, it’s contributions to new digital timescapes and the trajectory of the self and identity alongside empirical concerns is sociological work in waiting. In addition to this social media as a mass networked ‘digital agora’ can also be understood as a reflexive space in and through which different agents and actors are imagining the future in a variety of ways. In temporal terms the networked character of social media is characterized by instantaneity, commodification, time space compression, temporal colonization and social control. This is inclusive of a digital discursive terrain where different agents promote specific framings of the future, inclusive of the social imagining of new technologies and ‘social futures’ more generally, via social media platforms and communications. Thus, it is in this context that this proposed panel aims to consider the role of time, temporality and digital futures in relation to social media and society. For this special issue of Discover Society we welcome short articles (1500 words) that relate to the above and the following topics:

- Social Media, Timescapes and Futures
- Social Media, Prediction and Critical Data Imaginaries
• Visioneering, ‘Futures’ and Social Media

• Tracing Emerging Technologies in the Digital Agora

• The Future of Social Networks: Social Organization, Data and Engineering

• Digital Afterlives? Social Media, Time, Traces and Accountability

See the Discover Society website for more details about [1]formatting requirements. The final articles will be required by December 1st 2016. If you intend to submit an article, please contact [2]Mark Carrigan to discuss your contribution.

2. mailto:mark@markcarrigan.net

Deadline TOMORROW: Digital Methodologies – Beyond Big & Small Data (2016-02-20 08:00)

Digital Methodologies: Beyond Big & Small Data
9th International Conference on Social Science Methodology (RC33)
September 11th – 16th, 2016, University of Leicester ([1]http://www.le.ac.uk/)

Session Organizer
Christian Bokhove, University of Southampton, United Kingdom,[2]C.Bokhove@soton.ac.uk
Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick, United Kingdom, [3]mark@markcarrigan.net
Sarah Lewthwaite, University of Southampton, United Kingdom,[4]s.e.lewthwaite@southampton.ac.uk[5] Richard Wiggins, Institute of Education, United Kingdom [6]r.wiggins@ioe.ac.uk Session Abstract In recent years the challenge of Big Data has become a dominant theme within discussions of social science methodology. But these debates have too often been played out within a limited methodological frame of reference, in which the virtues and vices of Big Data are counterpoised or the call is made to supplement Big Data with Small Data. This stream will critically analyse this methodological framing of Big Data, its strengths and limitations, with a view to developing digital methodologies which move beyond Big Data and Small Data. In doing so, we hope the stream will also addressed a broad range of related issues, such as:

• The methodological challenge of big data and digital social research
• The practical challenges of mixed methods approaches to digital social research
• The role of theoretical ideas in digital methodologies
• The relationship between Virtual Methods, Digital Methods, Technology Enhanced Methods etc.
• The methodological utility of data mining and the dangers of data fishing
• The continued utility of sampling in digital social research, for example with regard to collection methods involving Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and Twitter streams.
• What are the ethical and social implications of linking and accessing administrative data?
• What are the implications for epistemologies, data collection and analysis of the pace of change in which social life is increasingly played out online?

The stream seeks to incorporate technical issues pertaining to digital methods into a broader discussion of the impact of digital methodologies. We are particularly keen to receive papers that reflect upon and bridge existing methods and draw out a vision for the future of social science research and practice. The session is organised jointly between the Independent Social Research Foundation’s Digital Social Science Forum and the International Journal of Social Research Methodology. **DEADLINE: 21st February, 2016 Submission Instructions:**

1. To submit a paper abstract for the RC33 9th International Conference on Social Science Methodology, you should visit: [7]http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/sociology/research/rc33-conference After landing on the homepage, navigate to 'Abstract Submission', which appears in the top left hand column of the webpage, see image below:

![Abstract Submission](image)

2. Complete the form in full. You may wish to cut and paste your abstract into the Abstract field from another document.

3. Choose the relevant session for your stream. To do so you will need to select the relevant lead session organiser from the drop-down menu highlighted in the image below. To check you are submitting to the correct session, you can view a table of sessions and session convenors by clicking the link entitled ‘View the list of sessions and session convenors’. Once complete, click submit.
Unpicking the political economy of digital cats (2016-02-21 08:00)

Much deserved [1] Guardian coverage of the weird phenomenon that is the internet cat video festival. What grips me about things like this is not the fact that people are trying to make money from their cats, but rather that many others people are trying and failing to make money from their cats. Not unlike the aspiring professional pick up artists, though you'll have to read [2] this brilliant paper to see what I'm getting at.

I'm increasingly convinced that a tendency to '[3]publicize successful outliers to propagate the illusion' can be seen across the web, as a few people who make a living within a novel field wilfully co-operate with platform
providers to promulgate the notion that other people could do this too. The result is inevitably a rather off-putting stampede of aspirants which must be read against the background of contracting structures of opportunity which can be seen across more established sectors within an increasingly low-wage and precarious economy.

There's an interesting BBC programme about the rise of Vloggers which has left me thinking about this:
[4]http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b06zw04s/rise-of-the-supers tar-vloggers It’s very descriptive but it’s interesting to see these people asked about what they’re doing now and how it relates to what they were doing previously.

   g-man

The peak experiences of intensified work (2016-02-22 08:00)

In the Hard Thing About Hard Things, Ben Horowitz recounts his experiences of his company Loudcloud coming close to failure. At a climatic moment, he makes a speech to his staff declaring the commitment they will have to show over the coming months. From pg 48:

“I have some bad news. We are getting our asses kicked by BladeLogic and it’s a product problem. If this continues, I am going to have to sell the company for cheap. There is no way for us to survive if we don’t have the winning product. So, I am going to need every one of you to do something. I need you to go home tonight and have a serious conversation with your wife, husband, significant other, or whoever cares most about you and tell them, ‘Ben needs me for the next six months.’ I need you to come in early and stay late. I will buy you dinner, and I will stay here with you. Make no mistake, we have one bullet left in the gun and we must hit the target

He initially feels guilty about asking them to entirely subordinate their lives to the company during this difficult time. But years later, he discovers that perhaps his staff enjoyed the experience when one says this. From pg 48-49:

Of all the times I think of at Loudcloud and Opsware, the Darwin Project was the most fun and the most hard. I worked seven days a week 8 a.m.–10 p.m. for six months straight. It was full on. Once a week I had a date night with my wife where I gave her my undivided attention from 6 p.m. until midnight. And the next day, even if it was Saturday, I’d be back in the office at 8 a.m. and stay through dinner. I would come home between 10–11 p.m. Every night. And it wasn’t just me. It was everybody in the office. The technical things asked of us were great. We had to brainstorm how to do things and translate those things into an actual product. It was hard, but fun. I don’t remember losing anyone during that time. It was like, “Hey, we gotta get this done, or we will not be here, we’ll have to get another job.” It was a tight-knit group of people. A lot of the really junior people really stepped up. It was a great growing experience for
them to be thrown into the middle of the ocean and told, “Okay, swim.” Six months later we suddenly started winning proofs of concepts we hadn’t before. Ben did a great job, he’d give us feedback, and pat people on the back when we were done.

Can we see this as the pleasures and challenges of acceleration? While it’s important not to assume that because one relatively senior figure enjoyed the experience then all did, it’s nonetheless an experience which I think ought to be treated seriously. As I’ve argued here, there are pleasures to be found in acceleration:

1. Time-pressure can be a symbol of status and flaunting it can represent one of the few socially acceptable forms of conspicuous self-aggrandisement available.
2. Time-pressure can reduce the time available for reflexivity, ‘blotting out’ difficult questions in a way analogous to drink and drugs.
3. Time-pressure can facilitate a unique kind of focus in the face of a multiplicity of distractions. If we accept that priorities are invested with normative significance (i.e. they matter to us in direct and indirect ways) then prioritisation can be pleasurable. This can take the form of people who rely on deadlines to ensure things get done. More prosaically, it can undercut procrastination by leaving one with finite temporal resources to utilise for non-negotiable obligations.
4. Time-pressure can leave us feeling that we are living life most fully. If the good life is now seen as the full life then living fast feels like living fully.


Periods of collective crisis within an organisation represent acceleration of a particular sort: temporally bounded and intensely sociable. I think something of this is conveyed in the way Horowitz elsewhere talks of the distinction between being a ‘wartime CEO’ and ‘peacetime CEO’.

1. http://markcarrigan.net/2014/10/21/the-existential-analytics-of-speed/

Reflecting on Digital Wildfire (2016-02-23 08:00)

Some really interesting videos from [1]the Digital Wildfire project.
1. https://www.cs.ox.ac.uk/projects/Digiw/
2. http://www.youtube.com/embed/S_CpH3vPs0o?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. http://www.youtube.com/embed/29PWcxCww4g?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
4. http://www.youtube.com/embed/GEmRn_Sy-xc?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
The Sociology of Executive Coaching (2016-02-25 08:00)

As you may know, executive coaching is an increasingly common phenomenon, particularly in some sectors like tech. This is how Eric Schmidt and his co-author describe the necessity of it in How Google Works loc 2440:

Whenever you watch a world-class athlete perform, you can be sure that there is a great coach behind her success. It’s not that the coach is better at playing the sport than the player, in fact that is almost never the case. But the coaches have a different skill: They can observe players in action and tell them how to be better. So why is it that in the business world coaches are so unusual? Are we all like Eric when he started at Google, so confident of ourselves that we can’t imagine someone helping us to be better? If so, this is a fallacy.

As a business leader, you need a coach. The first ingredient of a successful coaching relationship is a student who is willing to listen and learn. Just like there are hard-to-coach athletes, there are hard-to-coach executives. But once they get past that initial reticence, they find there are always things to learn. Business coaches, like all coaches, are at heart teachers, and Bill Campbell, the best coach around, tells us he believes that management is a skill that is completely learnable.
This is something which suggests an obvious comparison to sports, not just in terms of the language used to describe this relationship. James Surowiecki, author of Wisdom of Crowds, draws out the connection in an interesting essay about the increasing competitive advantage accrued when performance is already at a top level:

The key part of the "performance revolution" in sports, then, is the story of how organizations, in a systematic way, set about making employees more effective and productive. This, as it happens, is something that other organizations started doing around the same timeline.


But can managerial performance really be measured in these terms? I don't think it can and the belief to the contrary strikes me as a really interesting conceit, reflecting interestingly on the culture of managerialism: a kind of moral athleticism amongst prominent CEOs in which they aspire to be all that they can be.

If we look at the same phenomenon further down the organisational ladder, we get to enforced performance reviews and sanctions ensuing from a failure to meet imposed expectations. We get to sleepless nights and diffuse anxiety saturating into everyday life, all generated by concerns over ‘performance’. Coaching still exists but it becomes a very different phenomenon, as this interview I did about the sociology of work-life coaching suggests:

Coaching usually consists of individual or group meetings that continue for a few months. In the beginning of these meetings, a goal is set for the whole coaching process, and then the process continues with for example personality tests or exercises that the clients do in order to achieve the set goal. The coaches that I interviewed were often a bit vague in their answers when I asked about the specific practices of coaching. They would rather talk about 'realising the inner potential of the individual', though what this means specifically is rather unclear.

In general, it seems that coaching is for most part about discussing one’s hopes and realities with the coach and getting feedback for both the exercises and tests and for the plans that one has and the actions that one takes. The focus on ‘potential’ is telling of how coaching is quite oriented towards the future but at the same time relies on something that is thought to already exist within the self. As it happens, coaching concentrates on the individual. This means that all the work that is done in coaching centers on changing oneself in order to achieve the goals that one wants to achieve.

This is reflected in the practices of coaching in the sense that they demand self-reflexivity and focus on getting to know oneself and reflecting for instance on one’s personality with the help of tests and exercises. In terms of employment, this means that questions that concern wider social structures or even organisational structures are left outside the scope of the things one needs to change. It thus begins to seem that change always starts within the individual self – and also that if there is a need for change it is the self that is at fault. In the case of unemployment then, for example, the structural reasons for unemployment are not accounted for but rather it is thought that if the individual just works hard enough to change themselves then they will also find employment – and if one is unemployed it just means that one has not yet found the ‘true self’ and the right goals that would solve the problem. In other words, if one does not find work, it is implied that this just means that one has not worked hard enough on improving oneself.

As a relational technology of the self, work coaching has to be read against the background of metricisation. It naturalises metrics and their attendant apparatus of control, scrutiny and intervention. The issue becomes a narrow one of 'performance' rather than one's place over time within an organisation.

I’ve nonetheless become a bit obsessed with Bill Campbell. He turns up time and time again in business books about Silicon Valley. It also turns out he was actually a football coach originally:

Son of a local school official, Campbell was born and raised in Homestead, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh. He attended Columbia University where he played football under coach Buff Donelli from 1959 to 1961. In his senior year, he was named to the All-Ivy Team. He graduated in 1962 with a bachelor’s degree in economics. In 1964, he obtained a master’s degree in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.[2] He was head coach of Columbia’s football team, the Columbia Lions from 1974 to 1979. Prior to this he was an assistant at Boston College for six years. He met his first wife, the former Roberta Spagnola, while she was the assistant dean in charge of Columbia’s undergraduate dormitories.

He joined J. Walter Thompson, the advertising agency, then Kodak where he rose to run Kodak’s European film business. Hired by John Sculley he became Apple’s VP of Marketing, then ran Apple’s Claris software division. When Sculley refused to spin Claris off into an independent company, Campbell and much of the Claris leadership left. Since 1997, when Steve Jobs returned to Apple, Campbell has served as a corporate director on Apple’s board of directors.

Campbell became CEO of GO Corporation, a startup pioneering a tablet computer operating system. After successfully selling GO Eo to AT&T Corporation in 1993, Campbell was CEO of Intuit from 1994 to 1998. Campbell announced that he would be retiring as the Chairman of the Board of Directors at Intuit starting January 2016.[3]

Campbell is an adviser to a number of technology companies, and was elected Chairman of the Board of Trustees at Columbia in 2005.

According to CNN Money, he is worth $200 million.[4]

To what extent is it a marker of prestige to be coached by Campbell? Is it still a status symbol for lesser executives to be coached by lesser coaches? Do these celebrity coaches and celebrity clients underwrite the demand elsewhere? Do all these coaches have top level business experience?

SHARE THIS:
The Messianic Zeal of Eric Schmidt (2016-02-26 08:00)

A bit later in [1]Battle of the Titans, Fred Vogelstein transcribes a talk he saw Eric Schmidt give at a technology conference. From loc 1904-1918:

We have a product that allows you to speak to your phone in English and have it come out in the native language of the person you are talking to. To me this is the stuff of science fiction. Imagine a near future where you never forget anything. [Pocket] computers, with your permission, remember everything—where you’ve been, what you did, who you took pictures of. I used to love getting lost, wandering about without knowing where I was. You can’t get lost anymore. You know your position to the foot, and by the way, so do your friends, with your permission. When you travel, you’re never lonely. Your friends travel with you now. There is always someone to speak to or send a picture to. You’re never bored. You’re never out of ideas because all the world’s information is at your fingertips. And this is not just for the elite. Historically, these kinds of technologies have been available only to the elites and not to the common man. If there was a trickle down, it would happen over a generation. This is a vision accessible to every person on the planet. We’re going to be amazed at how smart and capable all those people are who did not have access to our standard of living, our universities, and our culture. When they come, they are going to teach us things. And they are coming. There are about a billion smartphones in the world, and in emerging markets the growth rate is much faster than it is anywhere else. I am very excited about this.

I don’t think it’s hyperbolic to suggest this vision can and should be analysed using the conceptual resources provided by the Sociology of Religion. In fact Schmidt has[2]apparently used that term himself:
But what would such a study look like in practice? I don’t think I’m qualified to do it but I’d love to help someone with a background in this area who is interested in this topic. Given the power wielded by devotees of this nascent religion, with [3]only 5 tech companies sitting on $430 billion in cash between them, it seems urgent to better understand how these new elites interpret their own place within the world and orientate themselves to it.

1. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/Battle-Titans-Transforming-Previously-Published-ebook/dp/B00CW6F060](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Battle-Titans-Transforming-Previously-Published-ebook/dp/B00CW6F060)

Inside America’s For-Profit Bail System (2016-02-27 08:00)

A fascinating documentary by Vice about the $2 billion per year bail bond industry in the US. At present the US and the Philippines are the only countries in the world to commercial bail. But how long until we see it elsewhere?
Have any readers seen this film yet? Was it impressive? I’ve heard good things and I’m trying to track down a copy, as this could be a potential film for our first Sociological Imagination film night in Manchester this summer.
Two upcoming events at the Centre for Social Ontology (2016-02-28 13:30)

A workshop on the morphogenetic approach:

June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.

A workshop on investigating the internal conversation:
Reflexivity Forum  
10am-5pm, May 24th 2016  
R1.04, University of Warwick

Following from a successful initial meeting last year, this event will be the first of a hopefully ongoing series of events aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The ‘internal conversation’ was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediating mechanism that accounts for how society’s objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

The event is free but registration is essential. If you would like to speak at the event, presenting a work in progress, please register by March 31st with a title and 100 word abstract. If you would like to attend then please register by April 30th.

To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net

Early Career Researcher Event @TheSocReview: A Master-Class with Professor Éric Fassin (2016-02-28 13:32)

The Sociological Review Foundation invites applicants to take part in a masterclass with Éric Fassin, who will delivering our [1] Annual Public Lecture on the same day at SOAS at 6pm.

The master-class will explore:

- How are sex, gender and sexuality racialised in contemporary Europe and the world?
- In what ways are nation-states implicated in sexual politics and identities?

If your research involves thinking through the intersections of race, nation, migration, sexualities and gender, this masterclass offers a wonderful opportunity to work through critical issues in your work with Éric Fassin.

Format

- All participants will read Éric’s work (circulated in advance).
• Each participant will prepare a 3 minute presentation about their research – highlighting a particular issue they are struggling for Éric and the group to discuss.

• The masterclass will be 2 hours long. It will begin with some introductory remarks from Éric and then proceed with the presentations and group discussion.

Application

This event is FREE but places are limited to 10 people. To apply for a place, please fill in [2] this online application form by 5pm on 1st March 2016.

Applicants will be notified by 1st April 2016.

Please note: ECR means PhD students or postdocs (within 3 years of award of doctorate)

Any questions may be directed to [3] Brigit McWade: [4] b.mcwade@lancaster.ac.uk

About Professor Éric Fassin

After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member of the new Laboratoire d’études de genre et de sexualité – Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10). His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same-sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left. In English, he has regularly published in French Politics, Culture & Society, French Historical Studies, Public Culture, differences, Contemporary French Civilization.

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2. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/189yiiYqhpRQ2808paKtbaNmtg8FW0kG5iKPP84OFbw7g/viewform
3. mailto:%62.%6d%63%77%61%6e%65%6c%61%6e%63%61%73%74%65%72.%61%63.%75%6b
4. mailto:%62.%6d%63%77%61%64%65%6c%61%6e%63%61%73%74%65%72.%61%63.%75%6b

Foucault at 90 (2016-02-29 08:00)
International Conference

University of the West of Scotland [1]Ayr Campus, Scotland, UK

Call for Papers
This year marks the 90th anniversary of the birth of the French thinker Michel Foucault (1926-84). This interdisciplinary conference aims to reflect on the work of Michel Foucault and in particular on the question of its abiding relevance and value.

Keynote speakers include Stephen Ball, Mark Olssen, and Clare O’Farrell. Based at our attractive [2]Ayr campus, on the scenic west coast of Scotland, this conference promises to be a stimulating and enjoyable event.

My main areas of interest are in education policy analysis and social theory. 1 - Changes in governance and new state modalities. 2 - The Global Education Reform Movement. 3 - The relationships between education and education policy and social class. I bring to bear on these issues the tools and concepts of "policy sociology" and in particular the methods of Michael Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. In 2008, I was involved in launching the BERA Social Theory and Education SIG.

Professor Mark Olssen:[4]http://www.surrey.ac.uk/politics/ people/mark _olssen/

Dr Clare O'Farrell:[5]http://staff.qut.edu.au/staff/o farrell

Clare continues her work on Foucault. She:

- has written [6]two books on Foucault
- edited a [7]large volume on Foucault's work
- was a founding editor of the first four issues of the online international peer-reviewed journal,[8]Foucault Studies
- runs a [9]major website on Foucault
- runs a [10]blog with occasional Foucault content.
runs a [12]reading group dealing with the work of Michel Foucault.

Research paper submissions are now sought on the conference themes listed below. Abstracts should be up to 400 words in length and cover the context of the research, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, significance. Abstracts should be readied for blinded peer review. The conference will run as a series of 90-minute sessions with 3 or 4 papers allocated to each.

Symposia: the conference welcomes submissions for symposium sessions. These should comprise a set of four or more related paper submissions (as above) with an agreed Chairperson and Discussant.

Posters: posters will be displayed throughout the conference, with a set time agreed for presenters to be available to discuss their work with conference delegates. Posters should be submitted in A1/upright form and be accompanied by a 250 word abstract.

Conference/Abstract themes:

The conference seeks papers which deal with the work of Foucault in relation to any of the following themes:

- Education
- Health
- Justice
- Criminology
- Psychiatry/Psychology
- Methodology
- Sexuality
- Culture/aesthetics
- Philosophy
- Politics
Key dates

- Abstract submission opens (papers/posters/symposia) 15th October 2015
- Abstract submission ends March 1st 2016
- Notification of peer review/abstract acceptance March 22nd 2016
- Early Bird Registration commences 15th February 2016
- Presentation times announced 15th April 2016
- Early Bird Registration ends March 22nd 2016

Conference fees

**before 1st May 2016**
**after 1st May 2016**

**Delegate**
£149  
£179

**Postgraduate student**
£99  
£129
Registration fee includes:

- Conference pack and programme booklet (issued at the registration desk)
- Lunch on each day, coffee and snacks during breaks
- Registration fee does not include the cost of evening meals or hotel

Contact

Abstract submissions should be emailed by attachment to: foucaultconference@uws.ac.uk

Please select the option applicable to you below. This will take you to the online shop

- [14] Postgraduate Student Early Bird £99 (before 1st May 2016)
- [15] Postgraduate Student £129 (after 1st May 2016)
- [16] Delegate Early Bird £149 (before 1st May 2016)
- [17] Delegate £179 (after 1st May 2016)

7.3 March

Zygmunt Bauman on the trap of social media (2016-03-01 08:00)

I'm not convinced by Bauman on this topic (increasingly true of all his other topics as well) but some of our readers might find [1]this interview interesting:

The question of identity has changed from being something you are born with to a task: you have to create your own community. But communities aren't created, and you either have one or you don't. What the social networks can create is a substitute. The difference between a community and a network is that you belong to a community, but a network belongs to you. You feel in control. You can add friends if you wish, you can delete them if you wish. You are in control of the important people to whom you relate. People feel a little better as a result, because loneliness, abandonment, is the great fear in our individualist age. But it's so easy to add or remove friends on the internet that people fail to learn the real social skills, which you need when you go to the street, when you go to your workplace, where you find lots of people who you need to enter into sensible interaction with. Pope Francis, who is a great man, gave his first interview after being elected to Eugenio Scalfari, an Italian journalist who is also a self-proclaimed atheist. It was a sign: real dialogue isn't about talking to people who believe the same things as you. Social media don't teach us to dialogue because it is so easy to avoid controversy... But most people use social media not to unite, not to open their horizons wider, but on the contrary, to cut themselves a comfort zone where the only sounds they hear are the echoes of their own voice, where the only things they see are the reflections of their own face. Social media are very useful, they provide pleasure, but they are a trap.

Kieran (2016-03-01 08:44:32)
I'm doing research around users of legal highs and online 'communities' at the moment, and I can see what Bauman is saying - especially in terms of social media 'echo chambers' - but conversely many of my participants simply cannot find a community (offline) to engage with others in their interests (trying novel substances, harm reduction), and so the online community formed 'naturally' online as like-minded individuals with similar interests, out of necessity, came together. I suppose this is the difference between this type of self-sustaining 'organic' community and the social media 'network' which is ready-made for you to recreate (or not) your existing offline or online communities: the latter facilitates existing communities by providing a digital network which you can control, edit and manipulate to your suiting. In a community that control is much less a conscious individual decision and very much a group decision or process. In this sense then, are social media networks both less 'organic' and less democratic than online or traditional offline communities? At any rate this has been an interesting aspect to consider in terms of my research, so thanks!

Call for papers: Legacies of the Tricontinental, 1966-2016: Imperialism, Resistance, Law (2016-03-02 08:00)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Legacies of the Tricontinental, 1966-2016: Imperialism, Resistance, Law

22-24 September 2016
Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal

Deadline for abstracts: 1 May 2016

The conference organisers invite paper proposals for a transdisciplinary conference marking the 50th anniversary of the 1966 Tricontinental Conference. The conference aims to reflect on the Tricontinental’s enduring political, legal and economic importance, while also bringing together academics and activists to reflect on broader issues of imperialism and anti-imperial resistance.

We welcome papers on both the Tricontinental itself and related topics. Topics include, but are not limited to:

- The history and significance of the Tricontinental
- Theoretical and historical legacies of the Tricontinental and ‘tricontinentalism’: Third World Marxisms, Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL), postcolonialism, global subalternity
- Anti-imperialist struggle then and now
We seek contributions from scholars and activists with an interest in imperialism and anti-imperialism, regardless of disciplinary affiliation.

Plenary speakers include Professor Richard Drayton, with more speakers to be confirmed soon.

We welcome both paper and panel proposals. Abstracts of up to 250 words should be sent to tricontinental50@gmail.com by no later than 1 May 2016. For panel proposals, please include a brief description of the proposed panel as well as contact information and abstracts for all participants.

Conference organisers are in contact with publishers and selected papers will be invited for publication in a special journal issue and/or edited collection.

Further information can be found at the conference website: www.tricontinental50.net

Organising committee: Teresa Almeida Cravo (Coimbra), Tor Krever, (LSE/Coimbra), Robert Knox (Liverpool), Christopher Gevers (KwaZulu-Natal), Luis Eslava (Kent), Christine Schwöbel-Patel (Liverpool)

Conference Abstract

The 1966 Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, or Tricontinental Conference as it is better known, remains one of the largest gatherings of anti-imperialists in the world. More than 500 representatives from the national liberation movements, guerrillas and independent governments of some 82 countries gathered in Havana, Cuba to discuss the burning strategic questions confronting the anti-imperialist movement of the day. Amongst the delegates were some of the most important figures in the anti-imperialist movement including Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Salvador Allende and Amilcar Cabral.

Building on the earlier 1955 Bandung Conference and 1964 UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Tricontinental represented the extension, into the Americas, of Afro-Asian solidarity begun at Bandung.
As such, the Tricontinental marked a highpoint in the emergence of a non-aligned movement and the construction of a Third World anti-imperialist project. At the same time, the Tricontinental represented a break with those earlier efforts. Whereas Bandung was a relatively modest affair, in which the various political currents in the Third World came together to articulate a minimum programme, the Tricontinental was avowedly more radical, explicitly attempting to align anti-imperialism with a wider challenge to capitalism. In the words of Mehdi Ben Barka, Moroccan socialist leader and organiser of the Conference, the Tricontinental aimed to 'blend the two great currents of world revolution: that which was born in 1917 with the Russian Revolution, and that which represents the anti-imperialist and national liberation movements of today'. Indeed, the Conference featured leftist guerrillas who were busy fighting against their own Third World governments.

In keeping with this radical orientation, the Conference condemned imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, declaring its solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle against the United States. The Conference called more widely for solidarity amongst the radical currents in the Third World and debated what role they would take in relation to the United Nations. In so doing, the Conference created much controversy in the developed world, becoming the target of numerous attempts at subversion.

The Tricontinental was a large influence on the Non-Aligned Movement. In fact, its legacy includes a whole host of developments. On the legal front, General Assembly Resolutions such as the Friendly Relations Declaration and the Declaration of the New International Economic Order flowed directly from the Conference. Similarly, the ideas of military solidarity which animated the Conference bore fruit in events such as Cuba's 1973 intervention in Angola against Portuguese colonialism.

However, despite this importance, the Tricontinental has received very little attention. Scholarship has tended to focus on the relatively modest demands of the Bandung Conference, and neglected the political cleavage represented by the Tricontinental. This has been especially true in international legal scholarship. Thus, whilst the Third World Approaches to International Law movement has paid close attention to the legal arguments of the Third World during the anti-colonial movement, the Tricontinental has not figured heavily in this account. This is representative of a wider erasure of the radical wing of the Third World movement from international legal histories. Yet this means that a key element of the Third World story has been missed. Indeed, the rich heterodox theoretical and political perspectives put forward by the Tricontinental remain lost to us.

The 50th anniversary of the First Tricontinental is an opportunity to reflect on its enduring political, legal and economic importance. We wish to consider both the historical importance of the Conference and its role as a key site for the Third World project, as well as its legacy, both intellectual and political, today.

1. mailto:tricontinental50@gmail.com
2. http://www.tricontinental50.net/

**Ancient Cultures of Conciet Reloaded (2016-03-03 08:00)**

Roger Burrows talking at [1]the Accelerated Academy in December:
Vertigo: Time and space in the contemporary university (2016-03-03 14:00)

Susan Robertson talking at [1]the Accelerated Academy in December:
'Projectification' in academic knowledge production (2016-03-04 08:00)

Oili-Helena Ylijoki talking at [1] the Accelerated Academy in December:

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/hSbdfsiyz8?list=PLy0oNnO7EBgv1Q6UK2GvAYC_K77AogM7s
The Power, Perils and Pitfalls of Peer Review in Public (2016-03-04 14:00)

Philip Moriarty talking at [1]the Accelerated Academy in December:

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/k5yh0oic1VM
Creating and Exploring Digital Empathy (2016-03-04 17:44)

Creating and Exploring Digital Empathy (CEDE) is an EPSRC-funded research project jointly held between UCL, the University of Sheffield and Lancaster University. The CEDE project had five core aims and objectives:

1. To explore and develop the concept of Digital Empathy and how it can be facilitated via innovative methods;

2. To improve quality of life by enabling a fuller expression of digital personhood;

3. To reduce isolation across communities/groups and individuals;

4. To develop new design principles that can be incorporated into systems design to enable empathy to be effectively communicated across the network;

5. To open up a new domain in digital personhood, applicable across a variety of sectors.

6. To build the Voight-Kampff machine.....
Come along to this symposium to discover what happened


‘Clean for the Queen’: Toryism, Elitism and Austerity (2016-03-04 19:29)

by Laura Clancy

Photo credit: https://twitter.com/CBellUK/status/703552348707233792

Despite appearing to be a sycophantic fantasy, Clean for the Queen is actually a real thing. Launched by (aristocratic-loving) Country Life magazine and Keep Britain Tidy, ‘Clean for the Queen’ is billed as ‘a campaign to clear up Britain in time for Her Majesty the Queen’s 90th birthday’ in June. Britons are encouraged to volunteer their time on the weekend of 4th-6th March to go out and clean the streets, ‘in honour’ of our Queen. Thousands of volunteers have signed up, but the Twitter hashtag #cleanforthequeen has since been hijacked by those who don’t appreciate the campaign’s sentiment. ‘Clean for the Queen’ is everything that’s wrong with Cameron’s Britain. It is elitist, it perpetuates working class stereotypes, and it limits the boundaries of national belonging. It is even sponsored – hilariously – by capitalist monsters such as McDonalds, Costa, Greggs and Wrigley, who are presumably some of the top brands you’ll find in a rubbish pile; evidencing another area of social politics where big corporations
are allowed to run wild under the Tories. In this article, I want to explore how 'Clean for the Queen' works as a tool for the reification of inequalities in contemporary Britain. Although often omitted from a classed analysis, the British royal family is the pinnacle of extreme wealth inequality, and needs to be critically examined as part of academic research on contemporary inequalities. In 'Clean for the Queen' the Queen is politicized as part of Cameron's Big Society, acting as a powerful symbol through which discourses around austerity, and classed/national belonging are conveyed. The biggest irony of the campaign is its introduction amidst George Osborne's announcement of further cuts to public spending to 'boost the economy' under the Conservative's austerity programme: cuts which will no doubt further detriment local councils, who have seen 40 % decreases in funding in two years. As a result, those who were actually employed to clean the streets have often been fired, thus leaving 'grot spots' around the country, as the 'Clean for the Queen' Twitter account so insidiously captions images of waste. Birmingham, one of the places shamed on social media as a 'grot spot', saw 16,000 people visit food banks in the 6 months between April – September 2015. 'Clean for the Queen' is another example of the Tory party's incessant attempts to define poverty as a moral deficiency, as opposed to the result of punitive party politics and aggressive neoliberalism. As Dowling and Harvie suggest, as part of the political economy of the Big Society the state retreats away from social reproduction, 'placing the associated costs onto the unpaid realms of the home and the community' (2014:870). The same people who are reliant on food banks are now being called upon to do the council's work for free, volunteering their time to "help the local community" when the government have done everything in their power to decimate that community. The state can shirk responsibility for the social crisis they have inspired, while reaping the rewards from the "community spirit" that they want to take its place. The framing of the 'Clean for the Queen' campaign chimes with the popular recourse to post-war austerity as a cultural, as well as an economic, model. In The Cultural Politics of Austerity (2013), Rebecca Bramall outlines how vintage and nostalgic iconographies have undergone a contemporary reworking, where 'austerity chic' becomes a source of cultural capital in modern day "austerity Britain". The branding of 'Clean for the Queen' directly reproduces perhaps the best example of 'austerity chic': the ubiquitous 'Keep Calm and Carry On' poster, which has been reproduced so many times with such a range of ironically reassuring messages its become a national institution. Its message – hardiness in the face of adversity – perfectly encapsulates all of the contradictions of Toryism: individualizing responsibility and masking state culpability. 'Clean for the Queen's appropriation of the 'Keep Calm and Carry On' emblem exploits its historical affiliations (even if these meanings might not be historically accurate), and works to present the campaign as part of the fashionable shift to thrift culture and community spirit. This appeal to national sentiment is further achieved through the image of the Queen. Her 90th birthday is being hailed as an historical national event, with a variety of "celebrations" planned around the country. The construction of the Head of State as a national figurehead is not a new phenomenon, but the extraordinary popularity of Elizabeth II, particularly as she gets older, is somewhat harder to account for. Although she has weathered some criticism (the "annus horribilis" of 1992, for example), in recent years particularly she has arisen to somehow above condemnation, and widespread analysis of the monarchy in terms of increasing wealth inequality is virtually non-existent. The implication that the Queen is a worthy recipient of voluntary cleaning work makes assumptions about national sentiment towards her, and the campaign can only mobilize this discourse because of the lack of general critique of the Queen as figurehead. 'Clean for David Cameron', for instance, would not work in the same way, but would achieve the same end goal. The construction of Queen Elizabeth II as the embodiment of Britain allows her to be manipulated as an ideological tool for Big Society aspirations. The particular representations of the Queen within the campaign attempt to draw on commonsense understandings of "Britishness". In the following passage from the 'Clean for the Queen' website, the Queen's coronation is reproduced as a key moment of national history to exemplify the oft-cited Toryism that "society is breaking down":

When she came to the throne litter was not the problem that it is today. Food packaging, plastic bottles, takeaway meals and cigarette butts have all contributed to a growing menace that affects our wildlife, streets, countryside and sense of pride. What better way could we show our gratitude to Her Majesty than to clean up our country?

Litter is positioned as a modern phenomenon: the direct result of contemporary lifestyles reliant on consumerism and material goods (ironic, when this text is sponsored by McDonalds). Wildlife and countryside – some of the key
emblems of traditional Britishness, which we are “proud” of – are under threat from this modern day menace. In order to return to the better life Britons experienced when Elizabeth II was crowned, we must clean the streets. The framing of the excerpt implicitly positions cleaning as a moral choice, which is to be undertaken for the good of the country and the environment. “We” have caused this problem with our consumerist obsessions, so “we” must tidy it up. Furthermore, this excerpt implicitly references working-class stereotypes in its indications towards ‘takeaway meals and cigarette butts’. Unhealthy lifestyle choices have long been coded as evidence of the deficiencies of the “un-deserving poor”, and these references work to construct the littering as a moralistic problem perpetuated primarily by the working-class. This framing also, I would suggest, works towards the persistent Tory objectives of social cleansing against these working-class “scroungers”, as the “good” (middle/upper-class) Britons are encouraged to come together to cleanse the country of the working-class “threat” to respectable society. ‘Clean for the Queen’ explicitly attempts to appeal to a nationalist sentiment, but the framing of the campaign leads to questions around who is allowed to “belong” to this national discourse. Its endorsement by a white, upper-class, heterosexual woman limits the ability for many to identify with British nationalism, and indeed the problems with seeing Britain as a “national family” headed by the royals has been the subject of [8]much historical scholarship. Furthermore, the images of politicians like Boris Johnson and Michael Gove clutching litter-picking equipment has done little to make the campaign more accessible for those outside of the Establishment. As British institutions become [9]increasingly dominated by a small, privileged elite class, campaigns like ‘Clean for the Queen’ can be seen as part of continued efforts to normalize and reproduce this authority, and reinscribe the values of Toryism on the populace. **Laura Clancy is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University.**

2. [https://twitter.com/cleanforqueen](https://twitter.com/cleanforqueen)
4. [http://soc.sagepub.com/content/48/5/869.full.pdf+html](http://soc.sagepub.com/content/48/5/869.full.pdf+html)
7. [http://www.cleanforthequeen.co.uk/home/2365#about](http://www.cleanforthequeen.co.uk/home/2365#about)
8. [http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/1/back.html](http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/1/back.html)
By Sadia Habib


*On Critical Pedagogy* by Henry A. Giroux is a collection of essays providing engaging, confident and hopeful insights, as well as “an important set of theoretical tools” enabling contemporary ways to benefit from critical pedagogies, particularly “in dark times” of neoliberal economics and socio-politics adversely affecting culture and pedagogies (p3). Democracy needs education, and more than that Giroux argues, democratic societies benefit from “citizens who are critical, self-reflective, knowledgeable, and willing to make moral judgements and act in a socially responsible way” (p3).

Critical pedagogy is a “theoretical and political practice”, not just a teaching technique (p3). Critical pedagogy sees social inequalities and injustices as impacting upon the lives of ordinary people, and thus, crucially provides hope and possibility for oppressed and marginalised communities (Freire, 2000, Freire and Freire, 2004, Darder et al., 2009, Apple et al., 2009, Giroux, 2013). Critical pedagogy "represents a transformational educational response to institutional and ideological domination, especially under capitalism" (Gruenewald, 2003:4).

Schools are sites where hegemony is perpetuated through teachers and students (Apple, 2013, Giroux, 2013). Critical pedagogues recognise resistance is possible - students can challenge hegemonic practices through complex modes of agency and resistance (Giroux, 2001, Anyon, 2011). Critiquing of curriculum and pedagogy can disrupt hegemony and challenge the “invisibility... of subjugated knowledges”(Edgeworth, 2014:38).

Educationalists witness growing neoliberal education philosophies producing non-autonomous state subjects, rather than critical citizens (Di Leo et al., 2014). Classrooms and curriculums too frequently serve to “function as modes of social, political and cultural reproduction” by utilising banking methods, rote and transmission teaching, and through instilling “a culture of conformity and the passive absorption of knowledge” (p5). Such passive pedagogies contribute to the construction of a docile and unresisting student, who in turn will become a citizen in the same submissive mould:

Students learn to be passive or cynical in classes that transfer facts, skills, or values without meaningful connection to their needs, interests or community cultures. To teach skills and information without relating them to society and to the students' contexts turns education into an authoritarian transfer of official words, a process that severely limits student development as democratic citizens (Shor, 1992:18).
In pressing need of a radical solution, we seek to enhance our philosophies and practices of education with “an
enobling, imaginative vision” (p5). We can look to critical pedagogues and their philosophies of education: the argu-
ment for the relatively new concept of critical pedagogy, influenced by Paulo Freire, is that it is “ethically responsible
to scrutinize, challenge, and oppose people, structures, and systems that oppress and dehumanize” (Kirylo, 2013:xix),
and to challenge mechanisms of oppression in order to demand equal opportunities to participate in the world.

Giroux’s book highlights the ways critical pedagogy provides essential tools to reflect and act upon social
struggles and social problems in specific contexts with local communities and students inhabiting these local
places. For the educational researcher, critical pedagogy, as a theory, helps us ask necessary questions needed
to better understand the social world (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2002). Teaching and learning “entails judgements
about what knowledge counts, legitimates specific social relations, defines agency in particular ways, and always
presupposes a particular notion of the future” (p6). We can ensure students and teachers become critical agents
if they begin to interrogate commonsense assumptions about the nature of legitimate knowledge, social relations,
and ideologies (Giroux, 2013). Critical pedagogy encourages students to use their counter-narratives to “critique
the world in which they live and, when necessary, to intervene in socially responsible ways in order to change it” (p14).

Section II Pedagogy as Cultural Politics introduces differing views on knowledge production – is it teachers
who are uncritical or is it the system that dominates the ways they teach? Some argue teachers are not engaging in
critical deconstruction of dominant assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning, whilst others state social
control results in policies and practices being imposed upon powerless teachers (Giroux, 2013). We also learn about
the “death of history” (p20) and “depoliticizing education through historical amnesia” (p30).

Giroux outlines how the culture of positivism has greatly impacted upon social studies and classroom pedago-
gies (p31). He then draws upon the works of Gramsci to emphasise connections, in education and wider society,
between cultural hegemony and political ideologies. Giroux provides us with hope and possibility about social trans-
formation and democratization through the “promise of critical pedagogy” (p69) by discussing the “responsibility of
teachers as public intellectuals”, as well as critical pedagogies in the classroom (p73).

Section III Critical Pedagogy and the Politics of Youth brings forth neoliberal ideas about commodification and
disposabley, as well as their impact upon youth identities. We are urged to “reclaim” Higher Education:

“one of the few sites left in which students learn the knowledge and skills that enable them not only
to mediate critically between democratic values and the demands of corporate power and the national
security state, but also to distinguish between identities founded on democratic principles and identi-
ties steeped in forms of competitive , unbridled individualism that celebrate self-interest, profit-making,
militarism, and greed” (p100).

Thus leading us towards a “politics of educated hope” (p120). Section IV Neoliberalism, Public Pedagogy, and the
Legacy of Paulo Freire develops Freirean thought on possibility and hope by outlining his promise of critical pedagogy.
Section V Does Critical Pedagogy Have a Future? is an interview of Giroux by Manuela Guilherme summarising
Giroux’s engaging principles and notions of critical pedagogy possibilities.

Critical pedagogy is “a position that threatens right-wing private advocacy groups, neoconservative politicians,
and conservative extremists” (p158). It may never have occurred to some students, and teachers, to question
the status quo, to interrogate prevailing ideologies that serve to privilege the elite, to challenge media/political
narratives that perpetuate hegemony. Students may need to explicitly explore their situationality through the
problem-posing education, advocated by Freire (2000), developing critical consciousness in order to better grasp
how social institutions control and repress communities.

Education should not be about creating subservient automatons unwilling to rise up to transform social injustices pervading local, national and globalised space. Education needs to inspire and enable students to grow in confidence to critique the social order that subjugates social beings perceiving them as the “other”. Critical pedagogy gives students space to be more than “merely disengaged spectators” (p13) as they come to understand their multiple and diverse relationships with the social world. Critical pedagogy emphasises “critical analysis, moral judgements, and social responsibility”, going “to the very heart of what it means to address real inequalities of power at the social level and to conceive of education as a project for freedom” (p158). Giroux's *On Critical Pedagogy* is highly recommended for all pedagogues who are keen to counter the negativities of neoliberal ideologies in educational sites and practices by guiding their students towards criticality and alterative futures.


Sadia Habib is a Phd candidate in Educational Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The Metric Tide (2016-03-05 08:00)

James Wilsdon talking at [1]the Accelerated Academy in December:

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/-JwrNEGPjbs?list=PLy0oNnO7EBgvIQUk2GwAyc_K77AogM7s
Richard Wright’s “Black Boy” (2000)
by AMANDA E. LEWIS (2004)
Collaborative Work and Social Media: Responding to the rapid spread of provocative content (2016-03-05 21:39)

**Collaborative Work and Social Media: Responding to the rapid spread of provocative content**

*Special issue call for the Journal of Computer Supported Cooperative work*

New extended deadline for submissions March 28th 2016!

These call details are also available online at [1]https://sites.google.com/site/digitalwildfiresrc/jcscw

**Special issue editors**

Marina Jirotka – University of Oxford

William Housley – Cardiff University

Rob Procter - University of Warwick

Helena Webb - University of Oxford

**The rapid spread of provocative content on social media**

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr etc. create new spaces in which users can 'meet', interact and exchange content. This content is often then forwarded on through shares, retweets etc. so that single posts can be seen and responded to by multiple others. Our modern status of hyperconnectivity means that social media content can spread spontaneously across the globe in a very short period of time. As social media platforms have gained in popularity over the last ten years they have become particularly associated with the posting and rapid spread of provocative content. This provocative content may take various forms including: extreme or inflammatory sentiment - in particular relating to politics, class, race, sexuality or gender; inflammatory or incendiary comments directed towards particular individuals or groups; commentary and speculation regarding unfolding social events and crises; political debates and campaigns; and humanitarian and solidarity messages and campaigns.
Provocative content on social media can undoubtedly take constructive forms – for instance in the galvanising of a clean-up effort after the London riots of 2011 and the spread of solidarity messages such as #JeSuisCharlie #BlackLivesMatter. However much public and political attention has focused on the prevalence and rapid spread of more negative content such as hate speech, harassment and unverified rumour. Concerns have been expressed over the harms this content can cause to individuals, groups and populations, and questions have been raised over how social media can and should be regulated. Provocative content at times overlaps with illegal content and in some countries may be actioned under civil or criminal codes in relation to defamation, hate crime etc. However many kinds of provocative content do not breach any legal codes. Similarly, most social media platforms adopt terms of use that enable them to remove certain kinds of offensive or harmful material where necessary but allow users to post provocative content of various kinds. Indeed, many of these platforms are run on principles supporting freedom of expression and actively uphold the right for posts and posters to be provoking and/or inflammatory.

A 2013 report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) characterises contemporary concerns over the spread of provocative content across social media. The report highlights the global risk factor of ‘digital wildfires’: scenarios in which provocative content involving multiple users spreads widely and rapidly across social media and results in serious negative offline consequences. For example the massive spread of misinformation can harm the reputation of individuals, organisations and markets before there is a chance to correct it. Alternatively, abusive and incendiary messages can cause considerable harm to individuals and generate social tension during critical events such as civil disturbances, health scares and natural disasters. The WEF report argues that the risks posed by digital wildfires prompt re-evaluation of the current governance of digital social spaces. This may take the form of new legal or technological restrictions on content balanced against the principle of freedom of speech. Alternatively, there is scope to promote a ‘global digital ethos’ by encouraging social media users to behave responsibly in the monitoring and regulation of their own and others’ online behaviours.

CSCW and social media

Work conducted within the framework of computer supported cooperative work offers to greatly advance understanding of the rapid spread of provocative content on social media. In the first instance, CSCW perspectives can shed light on the role of collaboration in the occurrence of these socio-digital phenomena. Relevant research questions include: how does the rapid spread of different kinds of provocative content occur in real time? How do social media users, who may not even know each other, collude and collaborate to enable the spread this content? How might these users collaborate to adopt responsible online behaviours and what forms would these behaviours take? How can the online and offline consequences of provocative online content be identified, assessed, replicated and understood? What roles can different forms of regulation play in the management of the spread of provocative content and the pursuit of a global digital ethos?

In addition, CSCW approaches also support collaborative interdisciplinary research on the prevalence of provocative content on social media. For instance, opportunities exist in: collaborative and crowd source coding for phenomena such as the spread of rumour or hate speech; the co-design of digital tools or platforms capable of scoping and analysing the propagation of provocative content; and collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to ethics and responsible innovation with regard to social media.

Journal special issue

The special issue takes up these research opportunities by exploring the relationships between collaborative work and social media in the context of the rapid spread of provocative content. For this special issue we welcome contributions including, but not limited to:

- Case studies or comparative analyses of social media phenomena involving the rapid spread of provocative
content.

- Papers that report on the 'collaborative work' of digital agents in propagating, responding to and regulating the content and diffusion of provocative content on social media. This may include: the design and use of digital tools/platforms to scope and assess online content; crowd-source coding for provocative content; or qualitative examinations of the lived orderliness and practical accomplishment of social media interactions.

- Examinations of governance practices relating to the regulation of digital social spaces. For example, work based ethnographic studies of social media regulation and response to the spread of provocative content during critical events such as disasters, civil emergencies or public health scares.

- Papers that report on collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches to ethics and responsible innovation for the governance of digital social spaces.

- Papers that report on the opportunities and challenges presented by the collaborative interdisciplinary study of the spread and prevalence of provocative content on social media.

We seek contributions from a range of disciplinary backgrounds that can advance theoretical, practical, technical and/or social understandings in CSCW and related fields.

**Submission details and further information**

Please submit your paper by **March 7th 2016**. Round 1 notifications will be sent in mid-June 2016.

Manuscripts must follow the journal's format standards [2]Instructions for Authors (pdf, 366 kB).

Submit manuscripts to [3]http://www.editorialmanager.com/cosu/ and indicate in your cover letter that the submission is for the special issue.

For questions and queries please contact coordinating guest editor [4]helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk

The special issue forms part of the ongoing research project 'Digital Wildfire: (mis)information flows, propagation and responsible governance'. To find out more about the project, visit our website [5]www.digitalwildfire.org or contact [6]helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk.

1. [https://sites.google.com/site/digitalwildfiresrc/jcscw](https://sites.google.com/site/digitalwildfiresrc/jcscw)
2. [http://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloaddocument/Instructions+for+Authors+2014-4.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1475303-p35755499](http://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloaddocument/Instructions+for+Authors+2014-4.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1475303-p35755499)
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6. [mailto:helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk](mailto:helena.webb@cs.ox.ac.uk)

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**From Savage to Self: The History of Anthropology (2016-03-06 08:00)**

HT Rachael Kiddey for flagging up this excellent BBC series:
When ITV invited the former leader of the British Union of Fascists onto national TV (2016-03-07 08:00)

With recent debates about no platform that are unfolding in the UK, it’s interesting to stumble across this footage of the (by then former) leader of the British Union of Fascists being interviewed by David Frost:

IFrame: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/rd7LcaXZzUs

The Shifting Plate Tetonics of the Human Sciences (2016-03-08 08:00)

This is a wonderful account by Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald, in their new book on interdisciplinarity, concerning the radical restructuring of academic labour that is currently underway within the university. I’ve come at this from a different angle, specifically the implications of data science for the social sciences, but in the last year or so I’ve begun to understand this as part of a much more all encompassing process with radical implications for what scholarship will mean in the 21st century. They describe it much more incisively, as well as artfully, then I have been able to:

The more we wander down strange interdisciplinary tracks, the more apparent it becomes to us that being disciplined isn’t playing it safe: the truth is that staying within the narrow epistemological confines of –for example –mid-twentieth-century sociology, while it may produce short-term gains, is not, in fact, the best way to guarantee a career in the twenty-first century (and we mean ‘career’ in its most capacious sense here: we are not using it with the assumption that everyone wants a permanent post at a university, but to express an idea that many would like to find some way to advance their projects, ideas, and so on). The plate tectonics of the human sciences are shifting: we here describe our own forays into one small, circumscribed niche between the social and natural sciences, but expand this horizon to epigenetics, to the emergence of the human microbiome, to all kinds of translational research in mental health, to ‘big data’ and the devices that append it, to the breakdown of the barrier between creative practices and research, and to a whole host of other collapsing dichotomies, and it becomes apparent that ‘neuro-social science’ is only one local effect of a much broader reverberation.
A lot is up for grabs under these circumstances. The Digital Social Science Forum is a long term project intended to intervene in and shape this terrain.


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The Feral Interdisciplinary (2016-03-09 08:00)

I find it hard to express quite how drawn I am to this conception offered by Robert Frodeman in Sustainable Knowledge, loc 665:

There is another model possible. It is where the interdisciplinarian goes feral, largely abandoning his or her disciplinary roots. It’s an entrepreneurial approach where one circulates among a changing roster of partners—not too quickly, for experience and trust must be built up—with only occasional visits back to one’s reference community to check in on new insights and to recruit fellow travelers.

He’s contrasting this to a model of interdisciplinarity in which these nascent experts collectively construct the trappings of a new discipline for themselves.

I’m struck by how readily social media affords such feral behaviour. The same medium and long term constraints operate, mediated through the mechanisms of career progression, but the short term ones have loosened profoundly as all manner of new opportunities have opened up.

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Janet Salmons (@einterview) (2016-03-10 15:35:13)

Mark, As someone with a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies, your post struck a chord. The term I would use when someone “leaves disciplinary roots behind” is “transdisciplinary” although “feral” has a nicely wild connotation. See: http://vision2lead.com/what-we-do/e-collaboration for my take. From my view, we need to think bigger to address complex issues, and that means going beyond any single discipline. Its hard, even in the digital age, because our academic departments, professional associations, even journals focus within a specific discipline. Disciplines shape our world view, ways of thinking—and ways of doing research to create new knowledge. Truly integrating ways of thinking (interdisciplinary) or transcending boundaries to create new ways of thinking (transdisciplinary) involves going beyond simply dipping into one another’s conversations. Its not easy and we can feel a bit like homeless orphans at times! Love to chat with others who share this interest in bridging disciplines—especially as related to research and scholarship in the digital age. Find me @einterview.
The Sociological Review Annual Lecture (2016-03-10 08:00)

The Great Divide: Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss

**Keynote:** Professor Éric Fassin (Université Paris-8)

**Discussants:** Professor Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick, UK and Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Dr Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University)

Professor Éric Fassin will bring together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology to demonstrate how the boundaries that were drawn around them were part of an academic struggle for power in which the term 'race' and the politics of decolonization were central to the war of disciplinary position.

Claude Lévi-Strauss published the Elementary Structures of Kinship in 1949 as a sociologist. Only in 1950 was he to appropriate the term "anthropology" in his introduction to the posthumous edited volume of essays by Marcel Mauss, entitled Sociologie et anthropologie.

The French sociological tradition did not distinguish between the two disciplines; on the contrary, Émile Durkheim and his heirs distanced themselves from an "anthropology" that was associated with race during the first half of the century. In order to reclaim this label, and thus institute himself as the founding father of French anthropology, Lévi-Strauss could not merely rely on American cultural anthropology; he had to erase the racial legacy of the French tradition.

This was accomplished in his 1952 UNESCO pamphlet "Race and History". It was a powerful move in the wake of World War Two, especially from one who had to flee Nazi persecutions against Jews. But this was also the eve of decolonization – at a time when Georges Balandier analyzed the "colonial situation" as a sociologist, while Michel Leiris and Aimé Césaire denounced the politics of race in the French empire.

Today's French work on race has to revisit this great divide of the 1950s, not only between anthropology and sociology, but also between the social sciences and race.

**About Éric Fassin:** After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member of the new Laboratoire d'études de genre et de sexualité – Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10).

His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same-sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left.
The Sex Myth (2016-03-11 08:00)

I first encountered the work of Rachel Hills in 2012, when she interviewed me for an essay in the Atlantic exploring asexuality. The conversation itself was incredibly stimulating and the ensuing piece of work was the best thing I’ve read about asexuality in the media. I’ve been waiting since then for her book, The Sex Myth, with high expectations of what it will include. It doesn’t disappoint. It’s an engaging and thoughtful overview of what Rachel calls "the gap between our fantasies and realities". The lived space of ambivalence and anxiety in which so many of us dwell, so much of the time, yet which often resists articulation in a sexual culture that offers us an expansive array of ways to talk about sex acts but far fewer to talk about what sexuality itself means to us.

My own interest in this topic stems in large part from my research on asexuality. More specifically, I remember my bewilderment at the clear patterning that could be seen in how those who weren’t asexual had responded to attempts by participants in my research to explain their asexuality to those around them. The same responses came up time and time again: there must be something wrong with your hormones, you’re just a late bloomer, you must have been abused as a child, maybe you just haven’t met the right person yet. Asexuality often proves incomprehensible, at least initially, to non-asexual people: how can someone live without sex? Yet so many do, for significant swathes of the life course, if not as a permanent feature of existence. This prima facie incomprehensibility of asexuality reveals features of a broader sexual culture which often escape notice, at least if we inhabit them unproblematically much of the time.

Throughout The Sex Myth, Rachel's concern is to understand those experiences when people don't inhabit this sexual culture unproblematically. As she puts it, "The Sex Myth fades into the background when we are secure in our choices" but "it is when our footing is less solid that it is most powerful". The uncertainties and stumblings, the private anxieties and unspoken agonies, so often attached to a part of life which is publicly proclaimed to be an unparalleled locus of human fulfilment. She's a considerate interviewer and engaging writer, never failing to produce a readable pen portrait which nonetheless offers important insights into the wider themes of the book. The prevailing impression I was left with by the book was that everyone suffers under the sex myth, as the space in which one can just be contracts in the face of a creeping pathologization that perpetually leads people to ask “am I normal?” I particularly enjoyed her discussion of the politics of kink to this end. She deftly unravels how our neo-libertine culture often imposes unspoken limits on those drawn to kink and places further burdens on those who lack interest in it.

It's reminded me of what had once been my post-doc plans: continuing my interest in a/sexuality studies by exploring the lived experience of sexuality for other groups for whom sexual normativity creates profound problems. But maybe looking at outlier cases misses the point, even if it could prove methodologically productive. What really interests me are the everyday experiences, private moments of quiet shame for failing to live up to a standard one might neither assent to nor fully understand. I’d like to excavate this baggage, understand it better conceptually but also explore the new vocabularies to talk about sexuality and intimacy which I’m familiar with from the asexual community but which can also be found elsewhere. Anxiety pervades contemporary sexuality and I’ve yet to encounter a convincing reason why this needs to be the case.
Two upcoming events @socialontology @sociowarwick (2016-03-12 08:00)

A workshop on the morphogenetic approach:

June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.

A workshop on investigating the internal conversation:

Reflexivity Forum
10am-5pm, May 24th 2016
R1.04, University of Warwick

Following from a successful initial meeting last year, this event will be the first of a hopefully on-going series of events aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The 'internal conversation' was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society's objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

The event is free but registration is essential. If you would like to speak at the event, presenting a work in progress, please register by March 31st with a title and 100 word abstract. If you would like to attend then please register by April 30th.

To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net
The LSE's remarkable archive of public talks (2016-03-13 12:56)

I just stumbled across the LSE's Digital Archive. It's an absolute goldmine. Here are some of the ones I'm planning to listen to in the near future:


1. http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:dak709yaz
2. http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:noc448tuv
3. http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:jaj525vey
10. http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:nec283vid
11. http://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/objects/lse:dic893san
The Cultural Politics of Automation (2016-03-14 08:00)

The rise of the robots is a recurrent theme of popular culture. Robots are often seen as a threat, heralding the prospect of human beings being replaced by their creations, perhaps to the extent of being deemed useless by them and attacked. Underlying this fear is the reality of automation: technology being more adept at particular tasks and so replacing human beings for this purpose. But automation isn’t new. All manner of what we now consider mundane automated tasks were once undertaken by hand, representing whole categories of employment which have now wholly or largely vanished. For instance, our phone system no longer relies on switchboard operators and withdrawal of money no longer necessitates interaction with a bank clerk. But technological change has often produced new jobs to replace those that have been lost. Human beings are adaptable. As a 1965 NASA report put it, “Man is the lowest-cost, 150-pound, nonlinear, all-purpose computer system which can be mass-produced by unskilled labour”. More often than not, technology has been used alongside human beings to improve their productivity, sometimes as a skilled tool and sometimes as a tool for deskilling, taking a skilled task and breaking it into component elements. In fact, some might argue that the history of scientific management, analysing and dictating workflows to improve economic efficiency, somewhat resembles an attempt to turn human beings into machines: replacing their skilled and situational responses with a pattern imposed by outside experts.

But many are arguing that we are on the cusp of a turning point in automation. This is not a matter of hyper-intelligent robots replicating human capacities but rather of quite specific technological advances facilitating entirely new kinds of automation: what Jerry Kaplan describes as synthetic intellects and forged labourers. The first relies on advances in machine learning and cloud computing to process unprecedented quantities of data at speed, facilitating the rapid development of accumulated expertise in a particular sphere without strictly speaking ‘understanding’ it: the machine can learn from a much greater amount of data than was previously the case and the computational challenge involved in doing so can be distributed through the cloud. The second relies on developments in sensor technology to facilitate much more sophisticated engagements with the environment than has ever previously been possible, moving beyond highly specified tasks under strictly defined circumstances, allowing for entirely new work place designs built around the needs of the robot rather than the humans working alongside it. Rather than organising warehouses in a manner comprehensible to human packers, Amazon warehouses can now order their stock in a manner that seems chaotic to workers because items are located on the basis of imperceptible connections between them (e.g. sales data for this region shows that A and B are frequently shipped together) but allow the robot packers to work ever more efficiently.

One of the most radical developments in the near future is likely to be self-driving cars, such as those currently under development at Google. As Kaplan notes, vehicle accidents cause 4 million injuries and cost over $870 billion annually in the United States alone. Seen in this light, the total switch to self-driving cars looks like common sense. But it will also destroy whole categories of existing jobs upon which millions of people depend, including those such as taxi driver which have traditionally been a reliable open route into the work force for new immigrants.
in many countries. However this has still up till recently be seen as a matter of automating routine jobs. What has seemingly provoked much of the controversy in recent years is the newfound recognition that what are seen to be skilled jobs will themselves be under threat. The most interesting example of this is Narrative Science’s innovative tools to automatically generate stories from structured datasets. Starting with formulaic business stories, they have since moved into sports stories and make a disturbingly convincing case that with enough sophistication about underlying narrative structures, this process can work for any appropriately structured dataset.

This might not lead to all journalists losing their jobs but it certainly does suggest the possibility that much of the routine work of journalism might be automated. On the one hand, this could be seen as unproblematic given the financial challenges newspapers and magazines face at present: if it can be done cheaper, couldn’t this help secure journalism’s future? On the other hand, it’s difficult to see how the journalistic environment won’t suffer if routine entry level jobs are eliminated. Where will the stars of the future, those with sufficient individual expertise to resist automation, get their start? How will they become known? These are questions which have been raised across range of fields even prior to automation, as competitive pressures advantage those with sufficient financial resources and willingness to work for free. But the prospect of automation is likely to intensify this, ratcheting up the already endemic sense of uncertainty under which much of the workforce already labours.

How are people responding to the uncertainty facing occupational futures? Though the basis for his claims is somewhat unclear, I find Zygmunt Bauman’s analysis of this intuitively plausible. He suggests that the spectre of exclusion, the possibility that we won’t make the cut and we will be cast out without hope or prospects, animates a profound need for recognition. We ‘recast ourselves as commodities’ in order to cope under these circumstances, desperately seeking visibility in order to better sell ourselves against a backdrop in which, as the economist Tyler Cowen puts it, average is over. Economic polarisation is becoming the defining feature of the contemporary economy. As Cowen puts it, writing about the United States, "Demand is rising for low-pay, low-skill jobs, and it is rising for high-pay, high-skill jobs, including tech and managerial jobs, but pay is not rising for the jobs in between" (pg 40).

What Bauman is offering constitutes a speculative social psychology of how people respond to this condition of profound polarisation. If we’re aware that opportunities are contracting and that our future security is uncertain
then these fears find expression in a competitive scramble to ensure we are recognised and valued: as commodities, if not necessarily as persons. He suggests that much social media behaviour can be seen as an expression of this impulse (though many, including myself, would object to generalisations about how people in general behave across social media in general). But I nonetheless think it identifies something interesting about the fame-seeking cultures that can be found across many platforms, even if there’s a tendency to "publicize successful outliers to propagate the illusion" in a way that serves the self-interest
Many European Millennials Say Hard Work and Education Do Not Pay Off

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Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey,
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

of platforms. The growing tendency to be fascinated with wealthy Vloggers, in virtue of the fact they are wealthy through vlogging, embodies something of this. Does the fact some people have seemingly secured their own future through social media visibility help propagate the sense that this is a viable strategy for many others? By definition there can only be a handful of celebrities on any platform. What we do know is how many young people see their future as determined by forces outside of their control, insusceptible to change through the avenues of work and education that older generations claim is a pathway to success.

Could fame culture thrive alongside this fatalism? People pray that they will ‘be discovered’ while also despairing about a future that seems beyond their control? What Furlong and Cartmel call the ‘epistemological fallacy of late modernity’ is a recipe for anxiety: the precise way in which opportunities constrain individuals has become more obscure than ever in a culture of competitive individualism which increasingly lacks the cultural resources to make sense of classed experience, while individuals are made to feel responsible for their biographical outcomes as pure expressions of their own talent and exertion.

Talent becomes fetishised under these circumstances. We can see this when Boris Johnson[5] mocks the 16 % ‘of our species’ with an IQ below 85 and praises the 2 % with an IQ over 130. We can see it in the way that Donald Trump repeatedly proclaims that “I’m, like, a really smart person”, while condemning his rivals as not smart, without explaining what this really means or how it qualifies him for office. It’s why the popularisation of developmental neuroscience is so sinister: it heralds a social imaginary in which ‘talent’ can be understood as hardwired, while still acknowledging that circumstances plays a role in how these characteristics are inscribed in the human i.e. it justifies present arrangements while licensing punitive interventions against parents who fail to raise their children in a way
conducive to the genesis of talent. Looking to the more ridiculous forms this fetishisation of talent takes can help us critique the more insidious and sophisticated variants that are increasingly dominant. This case can be made in particular about the most popular forms of self-help in recent years:

And this is the most remarkable feat of The Secret: its ability to defend inequality. While the 99 per cent has become a worldwide slogan questioning the concentration of wealth, the author of The Secret offers an alternative view of the situation. ‘Why do you think that 1 percent of the population earns around 97 percent of all the money that’s being earned?’, Bob Proctor is asked rhetorically in the book, answering, ‘People who have drawn wealth into their lives used The Secret, whether consciously or unconsciously. They think thoughts of abundance and wealth, and they do not allow any contradictory thoughts to take root in their mind.

*The Wellness Syndrome, Carl Cederstrom & Andre Spicer, pg 80*

What makes The Secret so interesting is how nakedly metaphysical it is. The affluent do it ‘unconsciously’ and that is why they are affluent. Those who are not nonetheless have the choice to do it. If they do it correctly then they too will become affluent. If they do not then they deserve their fate. This bizarre concept of “The Secret” fascinates me because it’s easy to see how it holds the whole picture together: this latent faculty, to which we all have access, allows us to succeed. Some people are disposed to access it already (inherited privilege) but this places no restriction on others. We can all access this latent ability to be a success if only we choose to do so and then use it in the proper way. Or to put it more mundanely: “there are plenty of good jobs out there for those who want them, it’s just that people don’t try”. The idea that differential outcomes can be explained away in terms of the moral failings of individuals means we take the existing state of society and the economy for granted: there aren’t questions to be asked about social structures, just more failings to be condemned in individuals. This is something

These are trends we can already see in contemporary society. My depressing question: how might they intensify under circumstances of widespread structural redundancy? What if the low-wage, low-skill jobs into economic polarisation is forcing much of the workforce rapidly begin to vanish? What will happen if 47% of jobs are eventually automated? It’s possible many new categories of job might open up but, as suggested earlier, there are good reasons to be sceptical about the scale and speed of this replacement. Will those who can’t find work be seen as unfortunate victims of unavoidable change or as moral failures placing a burden on the ‘wealth creators’? Will they mobilise themselves to collectively struggle for the transformation of a social order incapable of providing them access to the good life or will they be mobilised by others through potentially surreptitious means to serve the ends of those who are already wealthy and powerful? Popular culture provides us with many dystopian representations of what this might look like. The graphic novel *Lazarus* paints a bleak picture of a world in which nation states have been superseded by corporations and a small number of families dominate the planet. There are those who serve the families and those who are surplus to their needs, with the former group being composed of those who have been ‘elevated’ from the latter category. The possibility of freedom from insecurity and struggle represents a powerful tool to keep the population in line, coupled with private militaries to enforce this order through violence:
There are many other dystopian representations of a possible future in which there is little work or security for the majority of the population. However there are also popular representations of worlds in which scarcity has been conquered and everyone’s needs are met: ones in which some people still strive for work and adventure because of the intrinsic rewards that these provide. These are only representations but they are the resources we inevitably draw upon, deliberately or otherwise, when imagining the possibilities ahead of us for how these trends will unfold. Both of these categories however tie utopian or dystopian outcomes to the technology itself: seeing it as either liberating us or rendering us redundant. How does this suppress the role of politics – i.e. the tension and conflict between groups with different interests – in determining the outcome of these processes? Does it also preclude the possibility that our future might see a turn against technology, as something deemed to be responsible for systematic disenfranchisement? Would a [7]neo-luddite movement be possible? Or are people too wedded to their devices? Would powerful interests allow such a movement, given the centrality of technology firms to the contemporary economy and the new possibilities for surveillance and control which the internet opens up? These are all open questions but they’re ones which sociology can help us think through in a systematic way, even if not necessarily answer.

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Average_is_Over
Let us begin with a story...

A blacksmith is granted three wishes by Jesus and St Peter for his hospitality. The smith had made a previous bargain with the devil, obviously not a great idea! He decided to use his three wishes to get out of the bargain. He wishes that whoever sits in his chair be stuck until he permits them to rise. He wishes that whoever climbs into his tree remains there until he permits them to climb down. He wishes that any persons or things must climb into a sack when he wills it. When the devil comes to fetch the smith those three wishes come in very handy. The smith outwits the devil.
That was a summary of the tale The Smith and the Devil (Hansan 2002). The paper under review proposed that this folktale originated in the Bronze age. The methods used were in relation to folktale archives, archaeological, linguistic and genetic data. Here is an explanation of their terms and methods.

**An explanation of terms**

The paper under review used comparative phylogenetic methods on Indo-European folktales. So let’s look at these terms.

**Indo-European folktales**

Indo-European refers to a family of several hundred related languages and dialects including the major languages of Europe and parts of Western, Central and South Asia. In this instance the study investigated a subsection of folktales: 275 cases of Tales of Magic. This included 50 languages. 275 tales of magic were taken from a larger catalogue of over 2000 folktale types. Basically the heart of this study hinges on whether you agree with the classification and categorisation of these tales from the Aarne Thompson Uther (ATU) Index.

A number of academics have critiqued this Index and in some cases attempted to build and improve on it. The original index was published in 1910. In the 1950s Propp (2015) critiqued the way in which the folktales were categorised. In 1928 Thompson refined the categorisation into 2500 basic plots. Imagine processing so many folktales and plots without a computer. Dundes noted that there were typos, redundancies and censorship in the records (1997: 198). However, the index was, and remains, central to international studies of folklore (Dundes 1997: 200).

The index was finally updated by Uther in 2004. Uther presented several criticisms of the original index. He pointed out that Thompson’s focus on oral tradition neglected older versions of stories, even when written records existed. Uther thought that the distribution of stories was uneven. For instance, Eastern and Southern European, and many other folktale types were underrepresented.

Things to consider: the biases of the index, including gender and ethnic biases as it was invented and revised by White males.

To briefly summarise:

**Aarne** – Finish, White male, folklorist and university lecturer

**Thompson** – American, White male, Harvard graduate


I am also assuming, individuals with enough funds to go to university and be educated in a field like folklore (please share in the discussion any knowledge which contradicts this).

**Comparative phylogenetic methods**

The method could be compared to a cake recipe as follows:

1. Take 275 tales. These can be found in any specialist ‘Tales of Magic’ delicatessen or curiosity shop.
2. Separate the yolks from the whites. In other words the presence or absence of these tales in 50 Indo-European speaking populations.

3. Mix with a smattering of jargon and statistics. I found the paper to be written in a statistical analysis style, therefore not very accessible.

4. While the cake is in the oven draw some language trees. These indicate how populations have historically come into contact over time (population dispersal and the diversification of linguistic lineages).

5. Remove from the oven and cool. Ice the cake by skimming over debates of written versus oral narrative, and the distinctions or overlaps between them.

The written-oral debate acknowledges that there is a difficulty in tracing oral stories because tales are so easily transportable by travellers. There has been interaction of oral and written texts over time, with one informing the other (Bottingheimer 2009, 2014). This basically means that what is an oral folktale, and each tales origins is unclear.

For example, different renditions of Arabian Nights indicated that translators created new stories inspired from oral and literary traditions (Warner 2012: 18). While this demonstrates some of the issues with the paper’s source materials it also illustrates how fearless Graça da Silva and Tehrani (2016) were trying to tackle the complex subject of oral folklore utilising new methodologies.

1. To finish the cake, sprinkle the results with statistics to see whether the 275 tales were more likely to spread generation to generation or across geographical areas due to migration, trade, and encounters between groups of people.

2. Eat the cake.

Findings of the paper

Graça da Silva and Tehrani (2016: 9) proposed that The Smith and the Devil could have arisen in the Bronze Age, further supported by the earliest archaeological evidence we have for metal work. It does them credit that they used a mix of new methods alongside conventional literary-historical, archaeological, ethnography, genetic and linguistic approaches. Mixed and diverse methodology can add unexpected things to our understanding of complex processes. Storytelling research, for example, indicates the challenge of using story to explore social phenomena (Parfitt 2014).

In considering whether or not to accept the results of this paper, here is a quote from The Matrix (Wachowski 1999):

‘it is not the spoon that bends, it is only yourself’

Are the patterns that Graça da Silva and Tehrani (2016) observed real indicators of the oral spread of folktales or was the data set flawed, resulting in a misleading pattern? The paper concluded:
The results of the D analyses suggested that a substantial number of tales (100 of 275) exhibit significant correlations with linguistic relationships that are consistent with vertical processes of cultural inheritance (Graça da Silva and Tehrani 2016: 6-7).

In plain English this means that 36% of the folktales indicated that tales were more likely to be passed from generation to generation than spread geographically. Is this a substantial number? However, in another part of the paper they clarify that only 28% of the folktales were robust enough to suggest this (76 of 275). Thus, I am not surprised that the final results contradict previous findings that geographical spread was higher than generation-generation ‘vertical cultural inheritance’ (Ross et al. 2013). Storytelling traditions might be strengthened through engagement with other cultures and weakened by cultural isolation (Wilson 2014: 129). There are so many tales that demonstrate remarkable similarity in different parts of the world. Cinderella is a well-known example (Cox 2012). We need to ask whether these tales were passed from generation to generation or by the movements of people and stories? It is likely, of course, that both forms of transmission occur. What is interesting is that Graça da Silva and Tehrani (2016) suggest that ‘cultural inheritance’ is more likely than geographical spread.

The validity of their findings will be proven or disproven over time. There are doubts concerning the linguistic categories being correct and unbiased. Especially as with the use of large data, patterns that are perceived might not be accurate. Non mathematicians might expect a larger sample size to make results stronger, this is not the case, after a point it creates the possibility of more error. It does not help that the paper cited the Brothers Grimm, as an example, because of the way the Grimms’ tales of “Germanic origin” were continuously edited to be more German (Ellis 1985, Tatar 1987: 143, Claxton-Oldfield 1988: 52, Zipes 2006: 195). It depends whether we are talking about edited written versions of stories or orality, which also have a complex history with text (briefly mentioned earlier).

It is likely that folktales and their distribution may be related to population histories and geographical proximity (as different groups met and exchanged stories). However, I’m not sure that similarities in word usage described in this paper confirms this without margins of error. An opinion also shared by John Lindow, a folklorist at the University of California, Berkeley (Samoray 2016). Word usage and the way stories are told shift over time in response to a variety of changes: social, technological, political, educational, and so on. I am skeptical of assuming that we
know anything about how stories were exchanged orally as what we can infer from that long ago is largely dependent on written records. The work provides an interesting stepping point for further investigation. A similar analysis has yet to be carried out on all the index to test the robustness of the findings.

Conclusions

If the findings can be replicated then the ancient roots of these 275 tales might be traced to the Bronze Age. Storytelling, folklore, and fairy tale literature suggest that stories have been spread through travel, trade, conquest and literary texts. Dupont (1999) said orality cannot be capture by writing, because ‘all that writing can convey is the absence of a body, a loss of orality.’ Folk and fairy tale texts provide evidence of ‘relationship to writing’ not orality. Thus, basing oral “genetic” research on text may be flawed. The jargon may make it sound professional and scientific, but a little digging reveals that this is not the case. I remain sceptical of the findings. I don’t think the results support their claims, and the claims have been picked up by the press rather quickly without thorough consideration. However, I applaud Graça da Silva and Tehrani’s (2016) use of creative methods. I found it an interesting analysis, and eagerly await being proved wrong!

References


Emma Parfitt is a PhD Researcher in Sociology at the University of Warwick.

Creativity inside and outside universities (2016-03-14 12:02)

by Deborah Talbot

The Alternative Academia Network held its second meeting on the 14th February 2016. The aim is to discuss how creativity works inside and outside universities. The following are notes from the presentation by Deborah Talbot, which explores the benefits and drawbacks of different configurations of creative production.

The model of creative production inside academia goes something like this.

From undergraduate degree to Masters degree creativity means learning the canon, or what is and is not an acceptable mode of discourse. It can vary from lecturer to lecturer, but generally, it takes place within narrow confines. The boundaries of acceptability also applies to the form of production, which takes place within the written word. The visual, and sound, seems largely absent (there are some exceptions, as there always are).

At Ph.D. level, there is greater freedom to make an original contribution, either with method, research insights or conceptual innovation. However, constraints are present in the form of writing, where everything must be evidenced and artistic license not encouraged. Rarely is writing flair explored, though of course the ability to write legibly and correctly is helpful. The Harvard system of referencing is I believe an impediment to both creative expression and creative reading (causing interrupted thought).

Then you get to be an academic (if you can jump through the hoops). Because of the demands of the REF, the cycle of journal article production and funding proposals, mostly from the major research councils and charities, need to be pursued. There is autonomy to think and be intellectually independent, but artistic license gets ever narrower. As we have been debating on AAN's Facebook page, the refereeing process may add more impediments to creative breakthroughs and innovation.

The narrowness of the curriculum is exacerbated by the absence of mental space with which to reflect for the academic. There is a rhythm to academic production, which is increasingly speeded up and continuous (monotonous?). Creative or lifestyle lulls are not encouraged.

The advantage, of course, to this long process of training, is a finer grasp of methodological thinking and, for those in the social sciences, research skills. Conceptual development is encouraged and developed. Theoretical awareness cannot be surpassed anywhere outside the academy. And, as [1]Keniston argued, academia is one of the few places left which can carry the weight of policy and governmental criticism.

Compare this to intellectual production outside the university (which I have recently embraced).

There is an almost unparalleled freedom to produce because of the possibilities of the Internet and social media. For the writer or artist, democratic possibilities are opened up by the fact that being known (as part of an existing elite) does not necessarily preclude a breakthrough.

There is also the potential for using different media to express ideas. The visual, sound and word can be combined in a series of endless possibilities.

Free resources are available to use and shape according to need.

4300
Work wise, as it has been noted, is rapidly changing to ‘insecure’ and precarious freelancing, yet precarity seems more like a state of mind when the possibilities of innovation and diversification are endless.

The potential to transform political and policy discourses through creative activity show in the campaigning of Corbyn and the like. There is an army of bloggers writing well-informed material.

Crowdfunding and apps like Patreon offer routes to develop funding structures. Some bloggers, like ‘Brain Pickings’ get money from Amazon per click, and has been enormously successful, but which unfortunately leads to an escalating series of links in the blogs.

Yet there are some downsides.

Monetising your creative activity is difficult, and most opt for the combinations of freelancing contracts to pay the bills leaving ‘free’ time for creativity (I do this). It takes years to build up a sufficient reputation to be worthy of being financially supported as a writer or an artist, though it does happen.

Access to academic research is limited because of copyright. Open Access may alleviate this, but still much academic research is protected by a firewall. There are reactions to this, for example,[2]Sci-Hub, which has pirated and made freely available 47m research papers.

Academic institutions do not take the creative endeavours of ‘outsiders’ seriously and do not encourage them in. With the exception of governmental policy-making, there is very little integrated discursive development. There is a feeling that academics are suspicious of the way creators have to work with the ‘market’, even though it is pragmatic rather than ideological.

Despite some wonderfully informative efforts of writers, who have superior skills of communication and expression, there is often a methodological lack in intellectual production outside the academy; inevitably so as production of articles takes a day not two or more years of sustained research.

There is of course what has been called ‘content shock’ by marketeers; that there is an oversupply of information on the web, and it is hard for writers and artists to be visible.

What is the solution?

Something to discuss in this session?

My initial thoughts, which may not be well-developed, are...

The boundaries between universities and the outside world should be more porous. This is not the same as ‘public engagement’ or notions of ‘impact,' which only favour evidenced forms of impact and then it is only about a one-way relationship between the academic and the ‘outside world', or is about ‘disciplining’ academic inquiry. Quite rightly academics are wary of this.

I mean that intellectual production inside and outside the academy could both benefit from greater interaction. This can mean: a loosening of notions of academic production; a loosening of the ‘full-time’ academic contract (as opposed to being permissive about short-term and zero hours contracts) which would permit more portfolio working; a loosening of the meaning of academic production: access to the civilising forces of academia for those outside; or an opening up of academic production to outside interrogation.
One final thought. It is interesting that Academia Edu, much maligned by some academics as a corporate machine, actually encourages the interaction of academics and independent scholars. The dislike of AE speaks to the lack of porousness in the academy and perhaps, the problem of taking ‘purity’ too far.

[3]This article was originally posted on Driftmine.

Deborah Talbot is a freelance writer and researcher. She spent twenty years lecturing at universities before running for the hills to do something more creative. She founded Driftmine in June 2015 because she was “itching to use her long experience of political engagement, observation and failure to say something about politics today” and “wondered if there were others who wanted to do the same.” She remains concerned that words are a source of fear, cynicism and rigidity, and that it is possible that we need to combine words, images and sounds to escape the fixity of political language.


Stuck in the mess of life: anticipation and disappointment (2016-03-15 08:00)

In recent papers Ruth Müller has offered what I think is the very important concept of anticipatory acceleration to make sense of how subjects, in this case post-doctoral researchers, wilfully participate in social acceleration. Drawing on the work of James Scott, she outlines an attitude of ‘disregard for the present’:

The present figured not as important in and of itself, but as valuable because of its potential to become the future. Discomfort and sacrifice in the present were hence normatively acceptable and reframed as potentially beneficial. If the present is only a moment of transition towards a golden future, no serious attention needs to be paid to the trials and tribulations of the now. Uneasiness with a new system is recast as a period of adaptation, critique is washed away with the final argument of where we need to go.

This immediately makes me think of Ian Craib’s work on disappointment. Craib argues that we are increasingly unable to live with frustrations, denials or uncertainties. We seek to ‘escape the mess of life’ by looking forward when we meet disappointment, rather than recognising that some element of disappointment is an unavoidable facet of human existence. We turn ourselves to the next person, the next job, the next city as a place where we hope that everything will be ok. But it never is because we can’t transcend the nature of our own being-in-the-world simply by trying really hard to arrange the pieces of our life in a perfect configuration that always exists in potentia. When we actualise it and come face-to-face with its imperfection, we go on looking, assuming that we can make the world as we wish it to be by finding the circumstances in which the representation in our minds can match the reality of our lives.
Under these circumstances, the anticipatory acceleration Müller identifies in higher education becomes remarkably alluring. We bring ourselves closer to this imagined future through an “anticipatory orientation that aims to create future possibilities and tentative certainties, and ensure an ongoing trajectory that is somewhat recognizable as a good (future) life”. Or at least we hope to do so. But within higher education, we find those conditions further in retreat because so many others are chasing them:

VOSTAL (2014) proposes that junior scholars, who often work on temporary contracts and aim at establishing themselves in academia, are particularly exposed to the demand to produce more units per time. “It seems that early career academics are particularly vulnerable to the restructuring of higher education in comparison with more established and tenured/permanently employed senior scholars and professoriate” (p.12f.). This includes a heightened vulnerability to the changing temporal frameworks of academic cultures. Similar to the differences between career stages, the focus on speed appears to be pronounced more or less strongly in different fields. While the imperative to “Speed up!” seems to interpellate a wide range of scholars across the disciplines and faculties, fast growing fields that are receiving high policy attention and investments, often due to hopes of economic return, and that are exhibiting high degrees of internationalization and competition appear to be particularly prone to processes of acceleration. One such field is the life sciences. GARFORTH and CERVINKOVÁ (2009) point out that scholars in this field are faced with a growing standardization of possible career trajectories in the context of increasing international competition. This would result in a “rigid, narrow and increasingly formalised career path […] in the biosciences” (p.172) along which particularly junior scholars must run as fast as possible to outpace a growing number of known and unknown, local and international competitors. The article at hand focuses on a distinct category of junior scholars in the life sciences that are, as the empirical work shows, particularly strongly affected by experiences of competition and hence acceleration: postdoctoral researchers

So how do we respond? By going faster and faster. Wilfully hopping with ever more enthusiasm while management heats up the floor (to use the lovely image Will Davies offers). Or we quit. What’s the excluded middle: collective resistance that becomes ever hard because it entails a social hope about potential shared futures, one grounded in a communal attentiveness to the present which becomes ever more unlikely under prevailing conditions of acceleration.


Celibacies: American Modernism & Sexual Life (2016-03-16 08:00)


There is a degree of difficulty inherent in reviewing texts from outside your discipline and certain risks attached to evaluating research areas other than your own. As a sociologist, rather than a literary theorist, who studies asexuality, rather than celibacy, I approached Celibacies: American Modernism & Sexual Life with caution but also fascination. When celibacy manifests itself within asexuality studies it tends to do so negatively, as something that is mistakenly imputed to asexual people and a notion against which they define themselves i.e. celibacy is a choice,
whereas asexuality is not. However the neatness of this dichotomy does not survive critical scrutiny, suggesting an overlap, or at least adjacency, between asexuality and celibacy that deserves further attention.

Kahan observes that there is a 'slipperiness' to celibacy which engenders a tendency to read it as a symptom of something else. In this sense celibacy sits uneasily in relation to sexuality, complicating what counts as 'sex' and 'sexuality'. So too asexuality, with its capacity, as he puts it, to baffle "the hetero/homo binary though its nonengagement with these economies of desire and pleasure" (p. 147). However while Kahan does explore the relationship between the two, with some particularly insightful work that positions contemporary asexuality in terms of historical celibacy, he does so at the cost of truncating asexuality, explicitly ignoring the sizable population of asexual people who pursue romantic relationships and experience romantic attractions, for no reason other than his own analytical convenience. This problematic move, in which vast swathes of the asexual population are rendered strategically invisible so as to not disrupt the theorist's project, constitutes an unfortunate caveat underlying the perspicacious observations Kahan does make about asexuality and the "possibility of theorizing attraction and love without the interference or noise of sex" (p. 146).

It may be the fact that I could not help but read this book through the prism of asexuality, or it may be the aforementioned 'slipperiness' to celibacy, but it was less clear than it could have been precisely what Kahan takes celibacy to be. While the 'indeterminacy' of celibacy is certainly interesting, the text would have benefited from a more explicit statement of the author's own operationalization of it as a concept. From the outset, Kahan declares his intention to use it in both a contemporary sense of abstaining from sexual acts and a more historical sense of being unmarried. The ambiguous relationship between these two senses, unfolding through history, certainly invites historical exploration. But the author's equally ambiguous use of the term (encompassing social identity, political identity, strategic response to homophobia and mode of existence) renders the specificity of 'celibacy' remarkably elusive given this is a dense and sophisticated text devoted to the topic.

The main body of the text is structured around historical case studies, each illuminating different dimensions of celibacy and its attendant politics. From the perspective of asexuality studies, the first of these case studies is particularly fascinating. It is an engaging discussion of the nineteenth century institution of "Boston Marriages": long-term celibate partnerships between women. Other case studies include Andy Warhol, José Martínez, Father Divine, W.H. Auden and Marianne Moore. While these case studies are productively eclectic, some of the discussion tends to meander in a rather frustrating way. The exercise was presented in a way that perpetually raised my historiographical expectations, only to subsequently dash them. The problem here may very well be my own expectations, though it seems likely that others approaching this book from a similar disciplinary background may share them.

Nonetheless, the book is readable and illuminating throughout, deftly threading conceptual discussion through engagingly idiographic analysis of celibate authors, activists and artists. The aspect of the book I found most powerful was its engagement with the politics of celibacy. Despite its predominately historical focus, Kahan skilfully builds upon his discussion of celibacy and modernism to elucidate often overlooked aspects of the sexual politics of late modernity. His analysis demonstrates, albeit not as comprehensively as he seems to assume, the character of celibacy as a "site of radical politics, of feminist organising, of black activism, queer citizenship, and other leftist interventions" (p. 153). The book concludes with a provocative call for this radical legacy to be reclaimed. In doing so, we would refuse to cede celibacy to the political right, instead rethinking (or perhaps deepening) the sexual politics of the left. What Kahan suggests is that the hegemony of what he terms the 'expressive hypothesis' creates a demand that everyone must express sexuality. He seeks to understand how contemporary sexual mores, though often animated by an emancipatory impulse, can nonetheless stigmatise those who do not engage in sexual acts or those who do not experience attraction at all. In seeking to move beyond this politics of 'recovering sexual expression', in which the emancipatory project of ensuring that "one's sexual identities, desires, and pleasures never fall victim to suppression" (p. 5) imposes a homogeneity on sexual experience, Kahan presents us with a provocative vision of a redrawn terrain for sexual politics.
Untangling the American election: two great podcasts (2016-03-17 08:00)

Two superb LSE podcasts with expert analysis of the astonishing events unfolding in America at the moment:


Kieran (2016-03-17 10:30:21)
I've been following the Primaries on The Young Turks via YouTube. The American nomination process is incredibly complicated, but very interesting.

Janet Salmons (2016-03-17 14:25:22)
"Astonishing" is one way to describe things on this side of the pond. It seems pretty horrifying to everyone I know.

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**YouTube Conference: Call for Papers (2016-03-18 08:00)**

YouTube Conference: Call for Papers


Keynote speaker: Professor Jean Burgess

Please send an abstract of 350 words plus a short bio of 100 words for single papers or 500 words and individual bios for group panels by email attachment to youtube@mdx.ac.uk.

Deadline for receipt of abstracts is 4 April 2016.

YouTube has just passed its tenth birthday and it is timely to review not only how it has changed in that time, but also its wider influence. By focusing on YouTube as a platform we want to draw together research that is distributed across disciplines to help cross-fertilise knowledge about YouTube and its users, and to identify the research questions and methods that best capture its ever-expanding reach, impact and significance. We plan to include a panel of industry insiders to offer insights into possible futures in the light of current developments alongside the academic papers which we now invite you to propose.

**Keynote Address**

Professor Burgess will consider how YouTube and the broader online video environment have changed in the past decade, and what its competing futures look like. She will also discuss how we might learn to recognise such patterns of change empirically, and the key methodological approaches to studying the co-evolution of proprietary digital media platforms and their cultures of use over time.

**Possible questions to address (but not limited to these):**

4306
How has the institutionalisation of YouTube changed its nature?
Has YouTube accelerated processes of media convergence and transformation?
What is the changing relationship of television to YouTube?
How have production techniques and practices developed as the platform matured?
What communities of practice have been influential in the development of YouTube norms?
How has the development of new aesthetic forms been enabled by YouTube?
What innovations in performance and modes of address can be detected on YouTube?
To what degree do YouTube's affordances operate as a social medium?
What new forms of celebrity and fandom have emerged on YouTube and why?
What wider social, cultural and political changes can be attributed to YouTube's influence?
Why do we need to regulate the corporate power of YouTube's owners Google?
Is YouTube a positive space for self realisation and expression of marginalised identities?
How do concerns over data harvesting and privacy apply to YouTube?
How have conflicts over rights affected the monetization of YouTube activities?
What potential does YouTube have as a repository of curated archives?
What are the genres that have thrived on YouTube and what wider significance does this have? (e.g. education, journalism, advertising and marketing, campaigning and propaganda, entertainment, documentary, drama, comedy and parody, how to ...)
Is the development of specific apps for Music, Kids and Gaming a significant new trend?
What research methods are used to study YouTube? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

Conference organisation team:

Professor Jane Arthurs
Dr Alessandro Gandini
Dr Paul Kerr
Nicola Skinner

1. mailto:youtube@mdx.ac.uk
2. mailto:youtube@mdx.ac.uk

Call for Blog Posts: the Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Sociologist (2016-03-19 12:55)

The notion of 'publish or perish' has become something of a cliché. But its reality is starkly confirmed by the sheer quantity of scholarly literature produced each year, with an [1]estimated 28,100 active scholarly peer-reviewed journals publishing around 1.8-1.9 million articles in 2012. How much of this literature is written as a contribution to knowledge and how much of it is written to be counted? How many of these papers provoke serious engagement and how many are largely forgotten? After all, it's [2]estimated that 82 % of papers in the humanities are never cited, 27 % in the natural sciences and 32 % in the social sciences.

Does keeping up with the literature remain feasible when so much is being produced? Graham Scambler suggests we are seeing a ‘compression of the past’ in which many Sociology papers increasingly make reference to "a
handful of ‘reified’ classics from the past century and a flowering profusion of twenty-first century offerings”. His point is that when we have access to a “a bewildering and heterogeneous assembly of up-to-date sources” we tend to combine uncontentious canonical sources with “what we have most recently digested”. He argues that great bodies of work are lost under these conditions, contributing to a situation that Stephen Mugford describes as the *eternal sunshine of the spotless sociologist*: long studied topics and well developed approaches are ‘invented’ afresh, without reference to the originals, such that endless reiteration and forgetting replaces cumulative intellectual progress.

This special section of The Sociological Review's website seeks short blog posts reflecting on the challenge for scholarship under conditions of abundance. This might include topics such as the following:

- Is it becoming more difficult to keep up with the literature within any given field?
- What role does specialisation play in the explosion of scholarly publishing?
- Do our reading practices need to change under these conditions?
- Is the proliferation of journal articles simply a distraction? Do we need a renewed focus on quality rather than quantity?
- How do the demands of career progression contribute to the proliferation of journal articles?
- Should we place more value on review articles because of their capacity to systematise and condense sprawling literatures?
- Do we need new practices of reflection to consolidate what has been established within a field? Could social media help to this end?

Please contact Mark Carrigan with submissions or any questions relating to the special section: mark@markcarrigan.net. The deadline for contributions is March 31st 2016.

approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.

**Investigating the Internal Conversation**

10am-5pm, May 24th 2016

R1.04, University of Warwick

Following from a successful initial meeting last year, this event will be the first of a hopefully ongoing series of events aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The 'internal conversation' was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society's objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

The event is free but registration is essential. If you would like to speak at the event, presenting a work in progress, please register by March 31st with a title and 100 word abstract. If you would like to attend then please register by April 30th.

To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net

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**Writing praxes beyond papers and books (2016-03-20 08:00)**

A really fascinating reflection by Rob Kitchin on ten forms of academic writing beyond scholarly papers and books: fiction, blog posts, newspaper op eds, email correspondence, policy papers, policy consultation, a television documentary script, powerpoint slides, academic papers, and grant application. What makes this so interesting is that all of these were deployed in relation to the same topic, feeding into each other in the process.

1. [http://cgj.sagepub.com/content/21/1/153.abstract](http://cgj.sagepub.com/content/21/1/153.abstract)

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**The Meaning of Donald Trump (2016-03-21 08:00)**

A collection of the best essays and articles I’ve found about the rise of Donald Trump:
Two free workshops at the Centre for Social Ontology (2016-03-21 18:06)

The Morphogenetic Approach
June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

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To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net
CfP: Ethics as Methods in the Era of Big Data (2016-03-22 08:00)

Ethics as method in an era of big data

Special Issue of Social Media + Society

We invite contributions to a special issue of Social Media + Society devoted to a critical examination of the future of Internet research practices in the era of computational or big data analytics, with particular focus on how ethics can be configured through methodological approaches.

Although we are promiscuously catholic as far as theoretical approaches are concerned, we are especially interested in contributions that pay specific attention to the socio-technical and political economic dimensions of "platform politics" and their ethical implications for research practice, as elaborated in the following questions. These questions constitute only some of the possible entry points into the discussion and we welcome other ideas:

Ethics have been traditionally situated as prior to methods; that is, as philosophical groundings that guide practice. If we situate method in the same time/space as ethics, would a different set of practices emerge? This question becomes relevant in an era when ethics are being reconfigured to better meet the contingencies of particular digital situations. For example, in situations wherein algorithms function with similar agency to humans, our methodological choices for deciding what counts as data or what might be considered a participant in a social interaction have ethical consequences. If every method decision is an ethics decision and vice versa, how might we rethink the relationship between the methodological and axiological?

Ethics are a series of activities that follow from a particular ethos. Etymologically, ethos is about emplacement and orientation. If we take this as a starting point, where is the place from which ethics emerge? What are the ethics of abstraction within this broader understanding of ethos as place? What ontological and more particularly, methodological premises currently guide inquiry practices in the beginning of the 21st century? Are these being transformed in some ways? What levels of abstraction and reconfiguration are involved in the collection of humans (and their data) as data?

How do processes of mediation constitute an ethos of methodological emplacement? All social research entails a particular assemblage of media forms and practices that lay the foundation for methodology. In addition, all practices are situated in particular social, economic, institutional, and disciplinary frameworks. All methodologies, therefore, are situated and mediated. How do ethics get played out over multiple layers of mediation? For example, qualitative researchers commonly abstract lived experience in multiple ways, through inscription of observations, recording of interviews, and often qualitative data analysis software. Quantitative social science likewise depends on methods that extract particular data from the context; sample through variable selection, survey instruments and statistical software packages; and so on. Each assemblage of mediation produces different objects and subjects of research, as well as different definitions of validity, reliability, and so on. What kind of mediations and situations envelop social media platforms and big data analytics? What kinds of research subjects and objects do they suppose and/or propose? What ethical practices do these mediations facilitate, constrain, or require?

If social computing research entails a different configuration of epistemology, ontology and methodology than other modes of empirical research in the human sciences, what are the implications for the model of "informed consent" that is currently the litmus test of the ethics of human subject research? How are we to understand the ethical implications of the power relationship between a corporate entity that is legally construed to be a sovereign subject with the rights of a person (in the US) and the "subjects" of research who are disarticulated from their personhood through a cloud of data analytics?

Should we revisit the old epistemological debates between quantitative and qualitative social science? The dis-
Discussion of corporate research ethics, particularly since Facebook's "emotional contagion" experiments of 2014, exposed many rifts between on the one hand social media platforms and the teams that perform analytics on automatically-generated large data sets; and on the other hand, qualitative oriented social scientists in internet studies. One participant in the debates described the latter group as being comprised of 'those whose research is primarily rhetorical,' in contrast to the social computing researchers whose work is more 'objective' because of its reliance on data driven experimentation. To what extent is the popularity of data- and evidence-driven models returning to modernist criteria for quality such as validity, reliability and generalizability? What might be the ethical consequences of privileging certain kinds of validity? Of particular salience here would be the social computing emphasis on the extremely large number of cases afforded by social media platforms. Does the comparatively huge number of 'cases' in big data analytics necessarily entail a higher degree of validity, however defined? Further, does the employment of A/B experimental models also enhance validity and rigour?

Other thematically resonant topics include (by are no means limited to):

Discussion of epistemological sticking points that might help explain the particular, and some might say peculiar, transformation of human activity to data points that can be analyzed separate from the temporal, textural, and emplaced lived experience.

Emergent ideas of ethics and labor practices involved in the exchange of personal data for platform and interface services.

Discussion or problematization of regulatory driven models of ethical practice that create pre-formed boundaries and regulatory norms; privilege particular activities and methods according to specific definitions of such concepts as informed consent, definition of human subjects, and protection of privacy; and fail to address the complexities of contemporary socio-technical relations of social media platforms.

Primary Editors of the Special Issue:

Andrew Herman, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
Annette Markham, Aarhus University, Denmark

Timeline:

Submit 750 word abstract for consideration: May 15, 2016
Receive Invitation to contribute: June 15, 2016
Submit full paper for peer review: November 1, 2016
Receive results of peer review: January 15, 2016
Submit revised manuscript: March 1, 2017

Style/Form of Paper

We encourage a range of style for papers. You might choose to make a position statement, defend a manifesto, or develop new models and tools for thinking. You might choose a creative reporting of an empirical study. We are as promiscuous in style as we are in theory, and seek to make a critical intervention with this special issue. The paper length is somewhat shorter than is typical to compel contributors to make strong but precise arguments.
or critical analyses that might provoke debate and further conversation among readers.

Abstracts (submit by May 15, 2016) should be no longer than 750 words, not including references.

Please submit abstracts via email to ethicasmethod@gmail.com. Attach the submission as a PDF file. Please include proposed title, author name(s), 750 word abstract, and references.

Full papers (submit by November 1, 2016) should be no longer than 6,000 words, including references.

Manuscripts should follow the SM+S guidelines which are available at https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/social-media-society/journal202332 #submission-guidelines

Authors should cite their own work as they would any other author, both in text and in the Reference section, being careful not to indicate that the work they are citing is their own. Manuscripts that use (Author) will be returned.

SM+S uses APA style citation. Guidelines at: http://www.apastyle.org/

Accepted manuscripts will not incur any open access fees.

To submit your manuscript you will need to make an account at https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/smas You will then login to this account, select Author Center, and then under Author Resources, you will click where it says "Click here to submit a new manuscript." This will begin the submission process.

The system will guide you through the submission process, but here are some instructions for specific questions:

It is imperative that in Step One of the submission page you select “SI: Ethics As Method” for submission type.

In Step Four of the submission process, you will answer “No” to the question “Has this manuscript been submitted previously to this journal?”

If you have any questions, ideas, or want to discuss this in advance, please feel free to contact either of the editors: amarkham [at] dac [dot] au {dot} dk or aherman [at] wlu {dot} ca.

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**Paxman Britannica**: Empire, Sociology, and Postcolonial Reconstruction (2016-03-23 08:00)

Gurminder K. Bhambra gave the 2015 Marshall Lecture at the University of Southampton:

[1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/LYmh7jmb9DE
Ontographology Cards: Oblique Strategies for Interdisciplinary Teams (sort of) (2016-03-24 08:00)

This is an early report on a project I'd really welcome feedback on:

This is my first attempt to write up an ongoing project I'm in the early stages of undertaking, as well as solicit much needed feedback on it. It's emerged from the Digital Social Science forum I've put together for the Independent Social Research Foundation. The forum has been setup to develop an interdisciplinary space within which the Digital Social Sciences can thrive. What are the Digital Social Sciences? That's a good question. Part of the problem facing the Digital Social Sciences is the vast array of disciplines and approaches being subsumed under this term: Digital Sociology, Digital Anthropology, Digital Geography, Social Informatics, Human-Computer Interaction, Web Science, The Digital Humanities, Data Science, Critical Data Studies, Platform Studies, Software Studies. The forum is seeking to promote interdisciplinarity in order to bring together varied methodologies from across the social sciences, explore implications and develop innovative approaches to work in the future. In practice this so far involves: a conference stream on Digital Methodologies beyond Big & Small Data, a conference panel on Digital Futures, special issues of various online magazines exploring these themes, an essay competition in Big Data & Society and a workshop on conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary social media research.

Underlying some of this activity has been an interest I've had for some time in the relevance of social ontology to the digital social sciences. I would understand Ontology quite straightforwardly as the study of what exists and what existent things have in common. But I think Tony Lawson's distinction between Ontology in this sense and Ontographology is very useful: the former being the study of things and the latter the study of how those things are theorised. Given their rapid proliferation, comparative Ontographology could be an important exercise in clarifying the internal structuring of the Digital Social Sciences, as well as identifying convergences and divergences in how they conceive of their often overlapping objects. But it could also be a tool of productive criticism, for instance drawing out contradictions between implicit and explicit ontological commitments. This would be a matter of mapping ontological issues being confronted across disciplines and fields, asking fundamental questions of philosophical ontology informed by the questions of regional or scientific ontology already being asked within specific disciplines and fields. The concern here would therefore be taxonomic: bringing clarity across fields of study and elucidating key issues where the impulse towards clarification is contentious. Part of the ambition here would also be meta-theoretical: mapping the diversity of different approaches to these questions and bringing them into the same argumentative space. Rather than their current existence as incommensurable paradigms, not permitting of intellectual advancement through dialogue with alternative understandings.

But what does this look like in practice? I'm not just saying that there are important theoretical questions to be asked about these novel fields of inquiry and the objects the confront. What I'm really interested in is the practical role these questions play in investigation. Many, if not all, affirm the value of interdisciplinary collaboration in social media research, as different disciplinary backgrounds contribute different skills to the analysis of complex socio-technical objects. However such collaborations also entail conceptual challenges, encountered at the level of substantive theoretical commitments but also in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform everyday practice. How can digital social ontology help with the conceptual challenges teams confront when working together in this way? This is what the workshop I mentioned earlier intends to explore, taking place for the first time at Social Media & Society in July, alongside training workshops which have a more familiarly methods orientated focus. There will be a number of speakers (Evelyn Ruppert, Susan Halford, Les Carr and Emma Uprichard) reflecting on their own experiences of
conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary work. But the workshop as a whole will aim both to familiarise participants with common conceptual challenges confronted in interdisciplinary social media research, as well as drawing upon their own experience and understanding to unpack these challenges and explore potential routes beyond them. In doing so, we hope to develop new perspectives on these issues, including the disciplinary origins of these conceptual challenges, which can constitute the basis for further work and the production of practical toolkits to inform interdisciplinary working.

This promise of ‘practical toolkits’ is what has led me to the idea of ontographology cards, though I realise I’ll probably need to give them a catchier name at some point. In essence, I’m thinking of an ontologically inclined version of Oblique Strategies for interdisciplinary teams. For those unfamiliar with this resource, they are one hundred cards created by Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt in which each “contains a phrase or cryptic remark which can be used to break a deadlock or dilemma situation” as Wikipedia\[2\]helpfully summarises. I’m hoping the Ontographology Cards could perform a similar iterative and ad hoc function, being a resource that can be drawn up to mediate between what the [3]philosopher Roy Bhaskar describes as the “new concepts, theories and modes of understanding” required by interdisciplinary work and the “pre-existing cognitive resources drawn from a wide variety of antecedently existing cognitive fields in models, analogies etc”. There’s a positive and negative framing to this: from the problems caused by team members characterising shared objects in different ways to the maximal utilisation of the intellectual resources which each member of a team brings to their work together. The cards aren’t a project I expect to complete any time soon but it’s one which I hope could become something useful, as I develop the system and refine it through interdisciplinary workshops like the one being conducted at Social Media & Society, with the cards themselves hopefully playing an increasingly large role in the content of the workshop itself.

When looking for comparable projects, I came across a really interesting undertaking initially funded by the National Science Foundation in the United States. The Toolbox Project is intended as “philosophical technology” which "abstracts away from specific problems that research teams face" in order to seek common ground across disciplinary divides, understood to be anchored in their shared identity and practice as research scientists. As they describe it, "disciplinary membership is marked by a set of commitments, often unconscious, that condition what one takes the world to be and what one seeks to know about the world" ([4]O’Rourke and Crowley 2013). The intention of the project is to elicit these commitments through an instrument compromising 34 philosophical statements concerning ontology and epistemology, using a Likert scale to record strength of agreement/disagreement with each one. Potentially ambiguous terms are not clarified, with such ambiguities potentially generative of important dialogue in the ensuing workshop. After each collaborator completes the instrument in such workshops, they are invited to discuss their responses beginning anywhere they choose. The workshop lasts for 90 minutes and is lightly facilitated, with the accumulated evidence from its application internationally giving strong grounds to believe there’s much of use to interdisciplinary teams here.

There’s an explicit assumption of disciplinary unity here which I’d take issue with, both in the sense of imputing a artificial homogeneity to disciplines like Sociology and obscuring the excluded heterogeneity of disciplines like Economics. But as I understand their methodology, I don’t think this assumption has practical consequences because the facilitation of the workshop is light touch and any intra-disciplinary heterogeneity obscured by their framing assumptions would likely show up in the open discussion. However I do think there’s an important issue concerning the restructuring of the social sciences, which Felicity Callard and Des Fitzgerald refer to as [5]a shift in the plate tectonics of the human sciences. The social sciences are under external political pressures of varying sorts
across national contexts: the necessity to demonstrate ‘impact’ in the UK, attacks on political sciences in the US, closing social science and humanities departments by ministerial fiat in Japan. Meanwhile, new fields are emerging continuously, often at the intersection of the natural and social sciences: such as “social neuroscience, behavioral economics, evolutionary psychology and social epigenetics” as [6]Nicholas Christakis in a much circulated call to ‘shake up the social sciences’ a couple of years ago. There are both internal and external pressures chipping away at a unity to disciplines which I think the Toolbox Project team have already overstated.

This isn’t so much a critique as an observation about a changing disciplinary environment in which interdisciplinary communication between practitioners from settled disciplines can be assumed to differ in kind from communication between those from unsettled disciplines. It’s communication on these frontiers that interests me, specifically in relation to socio-digital novelty and how we facilitate its investigation across disciplinary boundaries. The novelty of these objects incites their investigation across these boundaries and it also foregrounds the role of their conceptualisation. But in no sense do I think the two approaches are mutually exclusive. One is intended to lay the ground for collaboration in preparation for it, the other is intended to be iterative and ad hoc.

However this is all still rather vague and that’s part of the problem. My concern is with how objects are characterised, implicitly or otherwise, as well as how convergent or divergent characterisations shape practice in ways which help or hinder collaborative endeavours. The obvious thing to do therefore is to start with a focus on objects but this leaves a question of generality. The potential objects are too broad if specified by me in advance and, at least at this stage, they’re likely to reflect my own disciplinary baggage in precisely the manner that I’m suggesting needs to be overcome. Nonetheless for the first workshop, I’m contemplating starting with some generically familiar objects (e.g. Facebook, a tweet, a platform) chosen in a way which will hopefully be jarring for their varying degrees of abstractness or concreteness. At first people will work individually, being asked to draw and/or describe this given object on the Artefact Cards provided:
The limited space afforded by the cards is precisely the point. What are the most essential features? Participants will then be given a list of questions to consider in relation to what they’ve drawn:

1. What is X?
2. What is it similar to?
3. What is it different from?
4. What do we know about it?
5. How do we know this?

Then each group will pool their cards and consider them collectively. Which cards can be grouped together? Which are very different from each other? The idea is to group the cards and discuss why they’re doing this in the process. Each of the smaller groups will then be invited to give an account of why their cards have been categorised in the way that they have, encouraging them to reflect upon the underlying fault lines which find expression in the approach they’ve taken to the same task. The end result of the session will hopefully then be a collection of ‘tweet’ cards, a collection of ‘Facebook’ cards and a collection of ‘platform’ cards, as well as photos taken of how each set of cards have been collated together within the group and an account of the reasons for this.

This is my first sketch of what this part of the session at the workshop will look like. I’m hoping it will provide
a ludic twist on the sequence of speakers and ensuing discussion which constitute the rest of the session. In the meantime, I’m trying to read as much of the literature on interdisciplinarity as I can, particularly that which focuses on the practical reality of day-to-day work across teams. I don’t think I’ll have developed the Ontographology Cards by the workshop, if indeed they ever see the light of day, but I’m hoping that their eventual form will start to take shape through small scale experiments like the one I’m undertaking at the workshop in July.

1. [http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/A_Conception_of_Ontology.pdf](http://www.csog.group.cam.ac.uk/A_Conception_of_Ontology.pdf)
3. [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xE20a2wKQ0YC&lpg=PA5&dq=roy%20bhaskar%20new%20concepts%20theories%20and%20modes%20of%20understanding&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q=r](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xE20a2wKQ0YC&lpg=PA5&dq=roy%20bhaskar%20new%20concepts%20theories%20and%20modes%20of%20understanding&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q=r)
6. [http://sociology.yale.edu/people/nicholas-christakis](http://sociology.yale.edu/people/nicholas-christakis)


The Sociological Review Foundation is delighted to announce that we have commissioned Rowena Murray to deliver a Writing Retreat for sociologists.

Murray has devised and delivered structured writing retreats to support academics by providing dedicated writing time done in a group setting. To find out more about this approach see:[1]http://www.rowenamurray.org/aims/references/

The retreat is for academics at all stages of their career, but we especially encourage early career scholars to apply.

The retreat venue is the Black Bull Hotel in the village of Gartmore, near Aberfoyle, in Scotland. All writing sessions and meals (provided) are in the hotel. Minibus transport will be provided between Glasgow train station and the hotel.

14 places are available. The retreat will be free of charge, and there are a number of travel bursaries available for early career researchers.

As places are limited attendance will be by application. We invite applications via this online form:[2]http://goo.gl/forms/WB2LDFXPa1

Please note that due to the cost of each place, successful applicants will be required to make a refundable deposit of £50 to secure their place. ECR means PhD students or postdocs (within 3 years of award of doctorate)

### Contact

For academic inquiries related to this event, please contact Brigit McWade ([3]b.mcwade@lancaster.ac.uk)
For any other queries, please contact Jenny Thatcher ([events@thesociologicalreview.com](mailto:events@thesociologicalreview.com))

**Important Dates**

- Call for applications: **1st March**
- Applications deadline: **30th April**
- Notify successful candidates: **30th May**

1. [http://www.rowenamurray.org/aims/references/](http://www.rowenamurray.org/aims/references/)
2. [http://goo.gl/forms/WE2LDFXPai](http://goo.gl/forms/WE2LDFXPai)
3. [mailto:%62.%6d%63%77%61%64%65%6c%61%6e%63%61%73%74%65%72.%61%63.%75%6b](mailto:%62.%6d%63%77%61%64%65%6c%61%6e%63%61%73%74%65%72.%61%63.%75%6b)
4. [mailto:%65%76%65%74%73@%74%68%65%73%6f%63%69%6f%6c%6f%67%65%76%65%77.%63%6f%6d](mailto:%65%76%65%74%73@%74%68%65%73%6f%63%69%6f%6c%6f%67%65%76%65%77.%63%6f%6d)

Kieran (2016-03-24 21:45:06)
Having been on one of Rowena’s previous writing retreats I can highly recommend.

**Violence as the expression of Trump’s nascent ideology (2016-03-25 08:00)**

I’m sure I’m not the only person who’s been getting a little bit obsessed with Donald Trump in recent months. There’s certainly a risk of overstating the threat that he poses, such that a preoccupation with the man himself risks obscuring the systemic conditions that have facilitated his emerging status, but I’m increasingly convinced we’re witnessing what might be a culmination of sorts stemming from decades-long trends in American politics. Furthermore, it’s one which might lead to an existential change in the system itself, as an epochal realignment of voters and even the disintegration of the GOP begin to seem like possibilities.

This passage from Ezra Klein captures what I think is the ideological heart of this emerging movement and it’s rather sinister:

This is more than an aside; this is the core of Trump’s ideology. The protesters who interrupted his rally, the political correctness that kept the police from cracking their skulls, the press that takes the hippies’ side — this is why America has stopped being great. We were strong, and we were tough, and we didn’t take this kind of shit from anybody. And now we are weak, and we are scared, and we take this kind of shit from everybody.

35 podcasts about #digitalsociology (2016-03-26 08:00)

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/playlists/194190806" params="color=ff5500 &auto_play=false &hide_related=false &show_comments=true &show_user=true &show_reposts=false" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" />

The Politics of the Platform Society (2016-03-27 08:00)

This is a great talk by José van Dijck. I can't wait for her new book:
There are some excellent responses by Sonia Livingstone, suggesting we need to be critical of an emerging grand narrative of the platform society. It meshes nicely with the observation made by Adrian McKenzie that 'algorithms' have replaced 'discourse' as the master concept of post-structuralism.

**John Oliver on the history of student debt (2016-03-28 08:00)**

Television at its best: extremely funny and genuinely informative:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/P8pjd1QEA0c

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/P8pjd1QEA0c
While this rightly reveals the problem with for-profit schools in the U.S., it doesn’t reveal, as most do not, how the government actually finances those student loans; which is only slightly less grotesque than the United Kingdom. When a student applies for a loan, it is NOT don't through a bank. The application is made directly to the federal government, who approves anyone whose family makes less than $250,000 per year. The government then sends payment directly to the school. After payment is made to the school by the government, the government bundles a group of loans together, and then sells Treasury bonds on the open market to pay for those loans. With the low interest rates, the government currently pays 1.64 % on those bonds. Meanwhile, the government charges 6 % interest to the students. The government makes 4.36 % in pure profit. This was all set up under the Obama administration. The government has produced about $50 Billion in pure profits from student loans using this method since Obama took office. As Oliver pointed out, one way or another, the government always gets its money. In essence, in granting student loans, the government is essentially lending money to itself, to hand out to students, and then making a profit off of it. I say that it’s only slightly less grotesque than the U.K. because in the U.K., they use a similar method; except that they don’t bundle loans into sovereign debt bonds. Student loans in the U.K. are bundled into derivatives, and sold on the London exchange, similar to the way mortgage backed securities were. I wrote about this last year, when the Fed Funds rate was about 2.6 %, and the government was still making a profit. Here I argue, that student loans should NOT be considered student "aid" at this point. https://daveashelman.wordpress.com/2015/06/25/a-student-loan-is-not-student-aid/

Call for Blog Posts: the Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Sociologist (2016-03-29 08:00)

The notion of ‘publish or perish’ has become something of a cliché. But its reality is starkly confirmed by the sheer quantity of scholarly literature produced each year, with an estimated 28,100 active scholarly peer-reviewed journals publishing around 1.8-1.9 million articles in 2012. How much of this literature is written as a contribution to knowledge and how much of it is written to be counted? How many of these papers provoke serious engagement and how many are largely forgotten? After all, it’s estimated that 82 % of papers in the humanities are never cited, 27 % in the natural sciences and 32 % in the social sciences.

Does keeping up with the literature remain feasible when so much is being produced? Graham Scambler suggests we are seeing a ‘compression of the past’ in which many Sociology papers increasingly make reference to “a handful of ‘reified’ classics from the past century and a flowering profusion of twenty-first century offerings”. His point is that when we have access to a “a bewildering and heterogeneous assembly of up-to-date sources” we tend to combine uncontroversial canonical sources with “what we have most recently digested”. He argues that great bodies of work are lost under these conditions, contributing to a situation that Stephen Mugford describes as the eternal sunshine of the spotless sociologist: long studied topics and well developed approaches are ‘invented’ afresh, without reference to the originals, such that endless reiteration and forgetting replaces cumulative intellectual progress.

This special section of The Sociological Review’s website seeks short blog posts reflecting on the challenge for scholarship under conditions of abundance. This might include topics such as the following:

- Is it becoming more difficult to keep up with the literature within any given field?
- What role does specialisation play in the explosion of scholarly publishing?
- Do our reading practices need to change under these conditions?
- Is the proliferation of journal articles simply a distraction? Do we need a renewed focus on quality rather than quantity?
- How do the demands of career progression contribute to the proliferation of journal articles?
Should we place more value on review articles because of their capacity to systematise and condense sprawling literatures?

Do we need new practices of reflection to consolidate what has been established within a field? Could social media help to this end?

Please contact Mark Carrigan with submissions or any questions relating to the special section: mark@markcarrigan.net. The deadline for contributions is March 31st 2016.


Why publish? The politics of communication in perishing times (2016-03-30 08:00)

In her inaugural lecture, Professor Sarah Kember asks how a new generation of independent and university presses can reinvent rather than reinforce what counts in scholarly and artistic practice.

In a context of ongoing crisis and policy reform in publishing, in the humanities, and the academy more widely; when it is no longer possible (if it ever was) to earn a living through commercial publishing while at the same time it is obligatory to earn a living (publish or perish) through academic publishing; when publishing is conservative and regulatory; when it is measured, individualised, competitive and anxiety-provoking; when the forms of academic and commercial publishing have become increasingly standardised and when we are not free to write how we would like to (and have in the past) even if we are still free to write what we would like to, this talk will ask: why publish?

The question will not be entirely facetious. What is at stake is not, or not only the future of the publishing industry, the book or the individual's career but the politics of communication inside the academy and beyond.

In as far as the politics of communication is at once negated and strongly enacted through policies oriented exclusively to commercial innovation, what is the value of revitalising strategies of invention and intervention in writing, scholarship and publishing?

There is a new generation of independent and university presses that are online and open access. This talk will consider what they can do to reinvent rather than reinforce what counts in scholarly and artistic practice.

WHEN Tuesday, 26 April 2016 from 18:00 to 20:00 (BST)

WHERE Ian Gulland Lecture Theatre - Whitehead Building Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross SE14 6AD, United Kingdom
Call for contributions: Lacuna magazine special edition on UK/EU (2016-03-31 08:00)

[1]What has the EU ever done for us?

Lacuna will be looking at the theme of the Europe Union over the next few months. With the In/Out Referendum taking place on 23 June, we want to explore the issues that relate to the [2]themes of the Magazine

You may wish to investigate a particular instance of how the EU operates, to provide commentary, reportage or expert analysis on an EU-connected theme. Or you may wish to review a book, a film, a piece of music, art or theatre relevant to the Union. All forms of writing and visual art will be considered: fiction, non-fiction, poetry, film, animation and photography.

There is no word limit. If you take a look at some of Lacuna’s existing content (follow the links above), you will find submissions of varying lengths which adopt a variety of different styles.

As always we are committed to supporting new writers. This could be students and other people just starting out in their field. We will also support experienced writers who are learning how to write for new audiences; for instance, academics interested in translating their research for a wider audience. Where possible, we will work with prospective authors to help them improve and develop their work.

You can find out more about the call [3]here, and read the concept paper by the editor-in-chief, Prof Andrew Williams, [4]here.

For more information, please contact us [5]here or email Andrew ([6]a.t.williams@warwick.ac.uk) or Alice ([7]a.panepinto@warwick.ac.uk).

2. http://lacuna.org.uk/about/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/centres/chrp/news/?newsItem=094d4345533bbe190153415759a93f5a
5. http://lacuna.org.uk/contact/
6. mailto:a.t.williams@warwick.ac.uk
7. mailto:a.panepinto@warwick.ac.uk
I’m an enthusiast about social media for academics. But for all the examples I see around me of social media enriching and enhancing scholarly practice, it’s hard not to be concerned by the broader context within which this is taking place. These problems are hugely worrying in their own right: the casualization of academic labour, the ceaseless ratcheting up of the expectations placed upon academics and the replacement of professional self-regulation by hierarchical audit all contribute to an environment I’ve talked about elsewhere, with my collaborator Filip Vostal, as the ‘accelerated academy’. But what I’m increasingly preoccupied by is how social media for academics doesn’t just take place within this context but rather influence how academics, individually and collectively, shape this context through resisting or reinforcing these pernicious tendencies.

It’s easy to see how social media for academics might fit into the ‘gig economy’ which we’re seeking to explore through this panel. It’s straightforward to imagine how rootless and nomadic academics would make themselves available through their online presence and mobile technology. What was once loftily conceived of as a vocation, though in reality more often simply a career, instead finds itself reduced to an endless iteration of ‘gigs’. In a way, the only thing I find implausible about [1] this Doonesbury cartoon is the lack of digital technology in the world of employment it represents:
Digital technology further fragmenting the academic workforce, scattering overly earnest scholars who seek only to teach and research across the international system, measuring and scrutinising their activity as they are ranked hierarchically to determine who gets first access to gigs that are ever shrinking in number as MOOCs replace the bulk of university teaching. Is this the future we face?

There’s something dystopically intoxicating about this narrative. In fact that’s what makes me suspicious of it. The polarisation of the academic labour market was not something caused by digital technology and there’s no reason to assume it will be intensified by it. In fact, if we look at how doctoral students and early career researchers are using social media, we can see lots of examples of social media being used to enhance the autonomy of younger academics: raising their visibility, helping them create networks and sustain a sense of professional identity when their working lives are split across many institutions.

My point is not to counterpoise a ‘good news story’ to a ‘bad news story’. For what it’s worth, I do think the
picture is pretty bleak. But if we reduce the uptake of social media by academics to an extension of managerial power then we’ll struggle to understand exactly what influence it is having. If we impute too much to the technology then we fail to do justice to the social processes through which any technological influence is necessarily mediated.

Much depends on how social media is taken up by academics. The potential outgrowths of it are diverse: everything from what I’ve elsewhere described as ‘networked solidarity’ (including, though not limited to, satire) to displays of academic incivility which can only fairly be described as ‘trolling’. The key question for me concerns which of these uses become more likely under present circumstances and how these influence might, in turn, feed back into changing that context or reinforcing its existing characteristics.

I wonder if the key issue might simply be why people are turning to social media. My fear is that we are seeing a growing sense in which people feel they have to use social media. There are many potential reasons why this perception might be becoming widespread:

- how central social media is becoming to debates about impact and public engagement
- the growing frequency with which training is offered in universities
- the message this implies about the desirability of engagement
- people seeking contributions for things like collective blogs
- universities, departments and research centres seeking contributions for such projects obviously has an additional dimension to it
- stories about career success founded on an online presence: a sense that this stuff is crucial for career opportunities, without anyone being able to specify quite why this is the case, perhaps propped up by a few mythical cases
- the anxiety about not missing out on opportunities which inevitably abounds within an unhealthy job market.

My fear is that if ‘social media is the new black’, something which everyone is expected to do, instrumental concerns will come to squeeze out the more nebulous joys and satisfactions which can be found at present.

Social media for academics might provide a framework within which the ‘Uberisation of Higher Education’ becomes entrenched. But it might also provide a bulwark against it, facilitating solidarity and collective action between those who are nonetheless dispersed across many workplaces. We simply don’t know yet. But that’s why we have to be careful about how we conceptualise these platforms, the tools they offer for academics and what it means for them to be taken up within a changing landscape of higher education.


The Sociological Review Annual Sociology Lecture (2016-04-02 08:00)

The Sociological Review Annual Sociology Lecture

Friday May 20th 2016, 17.45-21.00 SOAS, University of London **Keynote:** Professor Éric Fassin (Université Paris-8) **Discussants:** Professor Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick, UK and Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Dr Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University) Professor [1]Éric Fassin will bring together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology to demonstrate how the boundaries that were drawn around them were part of an academic struggle for power in which the term ‘race’ and the politics of decolonization were central to the war of disciplinary position. **The Great Divide:** *Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss* Claude Lévi-Strauss published the
Elementary Structures of Kinship in 1949 as a sociologist. Only in 1950 was he to appropriate the term “anthropology” in his introduction to the posthumous edited volume of essays by Marcel Mauss, entitled Sociologie et anthropologie. The French sociological tradition did not distinguish between the two disciplines; on the contrary, Émile Durkheim and his heirs distanced themselves from an “anthropology” that was associated with race during the first half of the century. In order to reclaim this label, and thus institute himself as the founding father of French anthropology, Lévi-Strauss could not merely rely on American cultural anthropology; he had to erase the racial legacy of the French tradition. This was accomplished in his 1952 UNESCO pamphlet “Race and History”. It was a powerful move in the wake of World War Two, especially from one who had to flee Nazi persecutions against Jews. But this was also the eve of decolonization – at a time when Georges Balandier analyzed the “colonial situation” as a sociologist, while Michel Leiris and Aimé Césaire denounced the politics of race in the French empire. Today’s French work on race has to revisit this great divide of the 1950s, not only between anthropology and sociology, but also between the social sciences and race.

About Éric Fassin After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member of the new Laboratoire d’études de genre et de sexualité - Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10). His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same-sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left.


1. https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-fassin/blog

Using social media to ‘inhabit the attentiveness of another writer’ (2016-04-03 08:00)

There’s a lovely reflection in Les Back’s Academic Diary, [1] released soon by Goldsmiths Press, concerning the role of Twitter in academic life. He suggests that Twitter sometimes facilitates our “inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer” by providing “signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story”. Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of “hunches and tips” which is the “lifeblood of scholarship”.

This is a useful reminder of the value that Twitter can hold for those already using the platforms. But it’s also wise guidance for those who have just started and find the whole thing baffling. No idea what to post? Share what you’re looking at, what you’re reading, what’s gripping you and why. Share the ‘hunches and tips’ which animate you and respond to others when they do the same. These exchanges are the value of Twitter for academics and they’re no different in kind from those which take place within universities each and every day.

Using fiction as a resource for social theorising (2016-04-04 08:00)

I was a bit hesitant when preparing this talk because of the risk that I just end up talking about a couple of novels that I really liked and explaining why I liked them. So I won't actually say all that much about Super Sad True Love Story: it depicts a dystopian near future in which credit scores from 400 to 1600 are displayed publicly on 'credit poles' at shops and on the streets, ‘personality’ and ‘sexiness’ are automatically ranked within any social space and ‘mood + stress indicators’ provide public hierarchical rankings within all work places. As the legal theorist Frank Pasquale [1] describes it, the book depicts how “[i]n an anomic world where social mores are adrift, the characters in the novel scramble to ‘find their place’ in the social pecking order by desperately comparing themselves with each other”. In other words: what happens if self-quantification and metrics come to define the fabric of everyday life, against the backdrop of a crumbling economy, entrenched inequality and mass unemployment? It’s not a very nice place but it is a plausible place; a near future in which one can so clearly see our present reality extended and intensified.

In recent months, I’ve found myself thinking about quite how helpful I found the book. It may have just been that I happened to read it a time when I was at a place in my work that left me very receptive to the ideas contained within it. Reflecting on the book helped me in beginning to develop my own particular take on what Nick Couldry calls ‘social analytics’: the sociological investigation of how metrics operate in relation to the experience of diversely situated actors across the social world. It fed into a paper I co-wrote with Filip Vostal, in which we took issue with what Deborah Lupton calls the ‘quantified academic’ being reduced to the internalisation of audit culture, instead suggesting we need to turn our focus towards how metrics come to matter to academics and how this shapes their orientation towards the systems within which they work and to each other. It’s also feeding into a book project I’m in the early stages of working on, seeking to develop a sociology of digital distraction which I ironically enough keep finding myself too distracted to work on properly. There’s a very precise question about the causal relation between human reflexivity and metricisation which the book helped me come to a conclusion on.

To be clear: I didn’t read the book to help me do social theory in general or to answer this particular question. I suspect if I had then I wouldn’t have found it so richly generative. But it nonetheless helped me think through this issue in a way that I’d like to understand better than I do. It’s also had a huge impact on the work I’ve been doing over the last year and plan to do over the coming years. It isn’t the only novel that’s had this effect: The Circle by Dave Eggers is another which has left me preoccupied by clear themes which were previously fragmented interests or abstract theoretical questions. The core interests of my post-phd research agenda is something that’s been germinating through the fiction and graphic novels I’ve read over recent years, as well as much I’d read long before: themes like ‘disruptive’ technology, the political agenda emerging from Silicon Valley, the threat of automation, the potentially contracting horizons of progressive politics and the long term possibilities of techno-fascism, post-capitalism or civilisational collapse.

If Super Sad True Love Story was one fiction that had a big influence on how I approached one question, I’d like to understand the relationship between all the fictions I find sociologically interesting (for lack of a better phrase) and all the questions I address as a sociologist. I think there are very interesting conceptual and methodological questions to be asked about the role of particular fictions in relation to particular research projects: drawing on the former as vignettes or exemplars for the latter, the role of fiction as what Ken Plummer calls ‘documents of life’, formulating research questions which have fictional inspirations or maybe the assumptions we might bring to a particular project based on relevant fiction that we’ve read. But the question I’m asking is a biographical one: how do we understand the role of a trajectory of reading in relation to a trajectory of research? Is it just the same question multiplied over the lifecourse? Or are there additional dimensions to the question which open up when we consider this issue biographically?

One way into this questions to consider the organising function of a trajectory of reading in relation to our ideational life. In my own case, a rich thematic of Digital Capitalism is starting to serve, in way that feels extremely organic, to tie together the work I’m currently doing and that which I’m planning. It’s the first time I’ve ever felt like...
I have a coherent research agenda rather than an omnimaniacal pursuit of a range of disconnected topics. This is a change in how I’m orientated towards my research that I realise now has been deeply shaped by fiction and graphic novels. I’d like to understand this change for its own intrinsic interest (to me at least) but also because it raises important conceptual questions that have practical implications for research.

As an example: through much of the science fiction I’ve read in my life, it’s possible to see a rich vein of technological determinism permeating it: technology might save us or it might doom us, but what the post-scarcity utopia often shares with the techno-fascist dystopia is that its the inexorable unfolding of the inner logic of technology which brings it about. To varying degrees, depending on the sophistication of the text in question, real politics – in the sense of organised struggle over finite resources – gets pushed out of the picture. This is a point which is easy to recognise in relation to particular fictions but I wonder if this influence is more problematic if we think in terms of a trajectory of engagement over time. If a rich vein of fiction that we draw upon shares a common ontological assumption, is it possible this assumption gets ‘baked into’ any use we make of this ideational material? So the problematic assumption gets smuggled into how we think about and frame a particular issue.

I think it’s an interesting exercise in its own right to try and reconstruct the implicit and/or explicit social ontology of a fiction i.e. what does the social world it portrays consist of and how does this fit together? But I’m also suggesting there could be a useful methodological dimension to such an exercise. I find Charles Taylor’s notion of the ‘social imaginary’ useful to think about this: “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows”. Fiction is an important part of the social imaginary and it seems obvious to me that social researchers will inevitably draw upon it at times and that furthermore they’re right to do so. But even though these influences are diffuse and in the background, it’s important that we cultivate reflexivity about the influences that fiction has had on our research and be open to the questions posed by this. How does the fictional social imaginary frustrate and facilitate researchers and the research they do over time? How do we conceive of it in a way that does justice to its potential as both problem and resource?

These questions feel really important to me at the moment because so many of the issues I’m preoccupied by concern a future which is still open. The hyper-capitalist dystopia of vast unemployment predicated upon robotics is something which haunts popular culture and I think indelibly marks any attempt to approach this possibility in a sociological way. I agree with [2]John Lanchester’s call for moving beyond dystopic imagery in order to flesh out our heretofore entirely speculative understanding of what might happen if 47% of jobs are lost in two decades (even if most Americans don’t think this will happen to their jobs). We should also seek to recover the latent promise that robotics and computation might prove emancipatory, creating new possibilities for human flourishing in a world liberated from mental and physical drudgery. This suggests to me a need for sociological thinkers to help ‘join the dots’: linking together what we know across a range of fields into broader synthetic accounts that accurately convey conceptually opaque aspects of our present situation and highlight potential trajectories. The enormous value of fiction to such an endeavor seems self-evident to me: as a resource to think with and against as we try and unpack the constellation of future possibilities latent in present day reality.

2. http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n05/john-lanchester/the-robots-are-coming
Out Now: Social Media for Academics (2016-04-05 08:00)

You can see endorsements of it [1] here and there's a chapter available online [2] here.

Data, Society and the Self: Digital Sociology in Theory and Practice (2016-04-06 08:00)

A two-day postgraduate workshop that explores, defines and practices digital sociological research

Are you curious about Digital Sociology? Consider, or already conducting, a postgraduate study on the subject? Want to explore the relations between Data, Society and the Self? Want to meet digital sociologists? Come and enjoy two days of roundtables, masterclasses, a research workshop and a keynote, with experts from MMU and further afield.
The workshop is aimed at postgraduate students but is open to all.

**26-27 May 2016, The Shed, Manchester Metropolitan University**  
Organised by Tom Brock, Adi Kuntsman and Esperanza Miyake, Digital Transformations Research Network, MMU

**Keynote:** Prof. Patricia Clough, CUNY

**Speakers:**
- Dr. Tom Brock, Department of Sociology, MMU
- Dr. Mark Carrigan, Centre for Social Ontology, Department of Sociology, Warwick University
- Dr. EJ Gonzales-Polledo, Department of Methodology, LSE
- Dr. Adi Kuntsman, Department of Languages, Information and Communications, MMU
- Dr. Esperanza Miyake, Department of Languages, Information and Communications, MMU

Follow us on Twitter: #SocDataSelf

[1] Conference flyer

1. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8olVFSXcUG3Um9DQ0E4Q3h0dEU/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8olVFSXcUG3Um9DQ0E4Q3h0dEU/view?usp=sharing)

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**Call for Papers: Fieldwork - Doing Ethnographic Research (2016-04-07 08:00)**

*Call for papers*

Fieldwork: Doing Ethnographic Research

Friday 24th June, Birmingham City University

**Confirmed Keynotes:**

Professor Elijah Anderson, Yale University

Professor Karen O’Reilly, Loughborough University

4332
Please send an abstract of no more than 250 words to [1]Kehinde.andrews@bcu.ac.uk by Friday 1st April

The cost to attend the conference will be £50 for full time employed; £30 for part time employed and postgraduate students. [2] Click here to book

Ethnography is one of the oldest methods in social research and provides unparalleled access to social life. The Centre for Critical Social Research is organising a one day conference that will bring together ethnographers to discuss developments, challenges and the future of the ethnographic method. We are delighted to have confirmed Professor Anderson and Professor O’Reilly who have years of experience working in the field; with the aim of the day to explore approaches, difficulties and novel ways to conduct fieldwork. We invite papers from established and early career academics exploring a range of themes in ethnography. The method has been used across a range of disciplines and we welcome papers from any subject area including but not limited to sociology, anthropology, education, health studies, migration, politics and activist research.

1. mailto:Kehinde.andrews@bcu.ac.uk

Beyond the Echo Chamber: a project by the Social Action & Research Foundation (2016-04-08 08:00)

A really interesting project by an inspiring organisation. See more [1]here:

To this end we have built upon the historical tradition of pamphlets and aimed to re-imagine this for a contemporary audience. Pamphlets can provide information and context to a situation, and so present ideas to challenge consensus and open up discussion for alternative futures. Our idea was to make this particularly visual, following Emory Douglas the artist of the Black Panthers, who used graphic design to “inform, enlighten and educate” in order to [2]“create a culture of resistance”.

In order to help shape the content and language of the pamphlet, we held a workshop with a small group of NGO-activists in Manchester and Salford who had experiences that resonated with the report and are involved in developing alternative approaches. The group session created an energy and tone for the content and design of the pamphlet. All participants were direct, honest and fostered a DIY approach in their own way. We tried to reflect that in the design, taking inspiration from the history of hand-made and fanzine publications. We wanted eye grabbing images to back up the sentiment of the words while keeping it positive and accessible with colour and a softer illustrative approach in places. The words and imagery in the pamphlet are not nuanced in the way our full-length report is, but rather designed to provoke an immediate response. In this age of digital, we share the pamphlet online; but the main thing with this particular project is about having these tangible publications that we have made and folded ourselves to be found at community centres in Manchester and Salford and floating around in public places, for people to pick up, feel and think about and maybe do what they have been thinking about for a while.
Theorizing Social Inquiry: Contemporary Debates (2016-04-09 08:00)

Theorizing Social Inquiry: Contemporary Debates

University of Edinburgh, Friday 6th May, 2016, 1-5.30pm

Summary: This symposium will address contemporary theoretical debates about social science as a form of inquiry – as an active, ongoing process of knowledge production. Areas of debate include how the conditions of production shape social scientific knowledge, as well as how to best develop and support inquiry: through the adoption of a dialogic stance, a general framework for research, an innovative writing style, or something else? Some of the issues that will be explored are:

- the external institutional conditions that frame and shape objectivity in inquiry
- the politics of knowledge-production within the academy
- whether innovative writing styles hamper or facilitate inquiry
- how to theorize social inquiry as a dialogic enterprise
- whether or not social theory should try to provide a general framework as the basis for empirical inquiry

Details

- **Date and Time:** Friday 6th May, 2016, 1-5.30pm
- **Venue:** 6th floor staff/common room, Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15A George Square, Edinburgh University, EH8 9LD
- **Entry is free** but please contact Steve Kemp if you are planning to attend on:

  [1]s.kemp@ed.ac.uk

Speakers and Titles

4334
Plenary Speaker: John Holmwood (Nottingham University): "Revisiting Objectivity"

Other Speakers:

Justin Cruickshank (Birmingham University): “Inquiry and the Dialogic Development of Knowledge: From ‘Meta-physics as a Conceptual Science’ in Critical Realism to Gadamer and the Finitude of Being"

Lisa Kalayji (Edinburgh University): "Feminist/Sociology: Knowledge Production under the Spectre of Postfeminism"

Steve Kemp (Edinburgh University): "How important is fallibility to progress in social inquiry?"

Stephen Shirlaw (Independent Scholar): "Bridge-building to create sociocultural theory frameworks: the two challenges of interdisciplinarity and micro-dynamics."

Angelica Thumala (Edinburgh University): "Sociology as literature. Do poetic and other innovative writing styles hamper or advance inquiry?"

1. mailto:s.kemp@ed.ac.uk

Slow Scholarship in Fast and Austere Times (2016-04-10 08:00)


[3] 15:00 -16:30
[4] BPA GO2, Broadcasting Place, City Campus
[5]Leeds Beckett University


Call for chapter abstracts: Digital Technology and Sustainability (2016-04-11 08:00)

Call for Chapter Abstracts
Working Title: Digital Technology and Sustainability: Acknowledging Paradox,
Digital technologies are hailed as revolutionary solutions to the problems of environmental sustainability; smarter homes, more persuasive technologies, and a robust Internet of Things hold the promise for maintaining our lifestyles and sustaining our ecosystems. Yet, deployments of interactive technologies for such purposes often lead to a paradox: the tools algorithmically "optimize" heating and lighting of houses without regard to the dynamics of daily life in the home; they collect and display data that allows us to reflect on energy and emissions, while raising our expectations for comfort and convenience; we can share ideas for sustainable living through social networking and online communities, yet these same systems enable entirely new forms of consumerism. By acknowledging these paradoxes we make room for critical inquiry into digital technology’s longer-term impacts on ideals of sustainability.

This text brings together diverse scholars, researchers and practitioners willing to study, critique, and reorient dominant narratives and approaches to designing interactive digital technologies that support sustainability.

Objectives
- To articulate and address the conundrums (theoretical, methodological, practical) for digital technology, and sustainable HCI in particular, in a single definitive volume;
- To advance an iterative, interactive process (e.g., virtual workshops and one-to-ones) between scholars in the field;
- Create a touchstone that scholars, students and interested members of the broader public can use to develop their understandings of sustainability in a digital future;
- To initiate accessible and engaging modes of broad dissemination to coincide with the release of the book (e.g., video shorts and animations).

A list of possible content areas for which we are seeking chapter contributions are listed below; but topics are not strictly limited to these. For more information on the content, participants, and the unique
Critical Ethical Reflections - Who Are We To Decide What Is Of Value, What Is Worth Sustaining?
Politics/Economics Fundamental To Any New Tool, Yet Rarely Explicitly Addressed
Shifting Orientations: Lengthening Temporal Scales/Accepting The Unknown: With The Uncertainty And Unpredictability Of Effecting Change.
Shifting The Norms Of IT Development/Practice: Developing Ways Of Fundamentally Shifting Current Trajectories Of ICT Development And Education Proxies For Sustainability (Emissions, Energy, Reliance On Natural Resources), And Approaches For Addressing These Infrastructure Considerations
The Role Of Activism In Scholarly Work Tied To Environmental Concerns Relationships Between Sustainability And Social Justice
Criteria of Excellence: Development of a broad set of expectations for future research in sustainable HCI.

1. http://tinyurl.com/jrtvlcz
2. mailto:lisa.nathan@ubc.ca
3. mailto:m.hazas@lancaster.ac.uk

Engines of Knowledge from the First Information Age: Medicine and the Hospital (2016-04-12 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson and Joanne Travaglia

Introduction

While we now live in an era marked by the emergence of big data, this is not the first ‘big’ information age but the [1]second. The first big data information age occurred in the early 19th century, developed exponentially with a rapid increase in the collection, storage and analysis of information from a growing number of primary sources. In particular, traditional and new disciplines emerged that began to adopt strategies of knowledge acquisition. New technologies made new ways of seeing possible and acceptable. New types of data became not only permissible but desirable. This was an age of knowledge factories that preceded our now digital computer age but one which set the scene for these later developments. Matching pace with this earlier surge in analogue data and information was the development of analytical processes associated with quantification in particular, including areas such as applied mathematics and statistics. New forms of abstract and, necessarily, reductive data collection strategies, methods and technologies were created. Many of the professions and disciplines that are now considered the engines of the scientific method developed at this time and were increasingly associated with specific institutional settings such as the university and the research laboratory. This article is the first in series examining some of the 'engines' of knowledge production that developed in this first information period and which continue their relevance into the
present. In this piece we want to explore, using medicine as an example, the argument the knowledge factories did not and do not 'simply' re-present the natural and social worlds but manufacture specific versions of them, versions that could be understood by specific audiences and via approved values systems. **Containing the field** The hospital, the university and the laboratory delineated the acceptable boundaries of knowledge production, by directing focus and resources to particular topics and methods, and especially by claiming the power to authorize what constituted acceptable knowledge in specific fields and what did not. This process can be seen clearly in the field of medicine, for example, which began to take control of both practitioners and practices in order to legitimize and regulate medicine as a field of endeavour. This produced not only a general field of theory and associated praxis, but an extensible basis for claims to authority in society at large and in forms of knowledge production in particular. Newly arising professions and semi-professions began to follow the models of knowledge construction set out by lawyers and the law over the preceding centuries with an emphasis on the empirical and factual. In short, this period was marked by the development of knowledge 'factories' with all the attendant features of formal organisational structures as they are commonly understood today. The rise of hospital as the location for the practice of the science of medicine reflects this shift. What had, in its origins been a place for the care of the slaves and the poor came to, literally and figuratively, 'contain' modern interventional treatment, as well as scientific research and experimentation. In capturing both practice and research, hospitals became an engine of knowledge acquisition as the permissible site for specific activities within specified confines and under particular conditions. In this sense the hospital became a specific territorial claim for and by medicine. The flip side of this was public health where regulatory practices and data collection occurred within the community. Even today public health activities are often located within hospitals and the public health paradigm subordinated to medicine. The hospital also became a replicable, even transportable, locus for the practice of acute and chronic medicine. The quasi-military look of Nightingale wards, the strict hierarchy of and within the professions, and the subordination of the patient to the whole system, reflected both the military concerns and broader Victorian values of the time. Many hospitals sat, where possible, high above the miasmal lowlands (because germ theory was not yet dominant) and assumed a physical presence and prominence in their local communities. Both their architecture and operational activities reinforced this authority. A secular trope of hygiene and risk replaced the theological one of purity and danger that preceded it. Moving knowledge creation and transmission to the university system was yet another technique by which medicine turned itself into a profession, as well as a distinct academic discipline. The Scottish and French universities were pioneers in this regard but English and American medicine quickly pursued similar trajectories. Control of the production, interpretation and transmission of knowledge lay at the heart of these systemic changes and epistemic transformations. **Johansson** and colleagues have argued that medical innovation across the centuries involved a trickle-down effect from the more experimental medicine practiced on the more affluent and prestigious sections of the community. Successful elite medical care gradually became generalized across the profession. **The claims of scientific medicine** Medicine is now considered a science, and historical representations of medicine favour this positioning. However it was not until the 19th century that this representation gained hold, and even then the efficacy and reliability of the 'science' of medicine was tenuous. Medicine did not become 'scientific' in the modern sense until it acquired control not only over the methods of knowledge production, but also over other forms of practice, thereby establishing itself as the authoritative primary form of intervention on the human body. Medical practice which had begun as a highly individual, local and particular art, became increasingly collective and specifically situated expansionary science. These economic and cultural claims to authority (what Bourdieu calls a form of capital) were supported by the adoption of the Hippocratic Oath as the Lydian stone of modern medicine. This association implied that the profession was symbolically aligned with safety, certainty and consistency in practice. Yet as historian [David Wootton](http://www.davidwootton.com) argues, and studies into healthcare quality and safety show, these claims were, and to a significant extent remain, largely aspirational. The addition of technology to the mix brought not new practices but new channels for knowledge production. This was a very gradual strategy, and today we find it hard to imagine just how recently much of this techno-medicine and innovation mantra began to pay off. **The creation of expertise** The accumulation of experts, expertise and information strengthened the characteristic of the hospital as a knowledge factory, one which encompassed numerous smaller engines, including those which generated knowledge about everything from germ theory to the statistical analysis of mortality rates (Florence Nightingale's often forgotten contribution to the field). From infectious disease the hospital gradually extended its
brief to include to chronic diseases, rehabilitation, and innumerable other specialties and subspecialties across disciplines, fields and professional and organizational endeavours. As this shift unfolded, a combined process of clinical specificity (e.g. patient disease progression) and quantitative generalisability emerged (e.g. causes of death). Each specialty became a micro-factory for expert information about cancer, heart disease, neurology and so on. Even the subordinate disciplines like nursing, pharmacy and pathology gradually developed their own specialist knowledge in both tacit and explicit forms. The ability to produce these kinds of specialised knowledge took on a form of self-authorisation. A legitimate discipline was one which was able to generate, disseminate and advocate for this specialist knowledge. Medicine began path re-writing some of its history in favour of prevailing Victorian values (rationality, objectivity, progress, science and management) while aligning the profession to the growing esteem of science in part through the presence of the white lab coat, which denoted a symbolic and practical shift away from the profession’s lineage of the surgeon/barber. The generativity of science and technology were such that they became, and in large part remain, the driving forces of legitimate knowledge production under modernity. The knowledge producing ‘expert’ acquired authority and license through a claim to produce certain kinds of knowledge, through processes that were only rarely open to the purview of the layman. Thus expertise became a close correlate of authorized knowledge and practice as the knowledge produced, and the engines and engineers of knowledge acquired status. Disruptors to the knowledge claims of the profession could be viewed as threats to the collective, so much so that those like Simmelweiss who used scientific methods to collect data to argue against the craft practices of their profession (and gender), were completely ostracized. The objectively excluded Expertise positions the expert as the official gatekeeper to some particular knowledge domain. The 19th century saw the development of a particular discourse around subjectivity and objectivity that has become an enduring trope. [12]Daston and Gallison have charted the journey of ‘objectivity’ to its status as an epistemic virtue, one which is still used to validate and privilege specific forms of scientific knowledge and knowledge creation methods over others. In comparison, medicine’s epistemic virtues continue to coalesce around the doctor-patient relationship, which in its idealized form, is considered as a valid engine of knowledge production in and of itself. [13]William Osler developed the clinical ward round a century ago and, with it, the mechanics and the performativity of this approach to clinical knowledge acquisition and transmission. Medicine made and still makes claims to a special one-to-one relationship between the doctor and patient, a claim that is supported by both structure and regulation in most countries. A patient’s discharge from hospital largely remains in the remit of the medical practitioner. And of course the status of the ‘patient’ – including who is and who is not – becomes a signature power of the medical practitioner and the medical system. This requires the emergence of a form of definitional authority along with its concepts, methods and tools. The medical philosopher Georges Canguilhem, Foucault’s doctoral supervisor, published On the Normal and the Pathological in the mid-1960s, based on his own doctoral research. This explored how medicine’s ideas about what was normal and what was pathological were generated and became modified over time, and more specifically explored whether quantitative knowledge could be reconciled with the individual clinical encounter. Foucault’s own Birth of the Clinic took the large teaching hospital as its platform for examining not only the medical gaze but the broader methodology of knowledge production in and through the clinic. Both showed that the epistemic positions of those who produce and legitimize knowledge can have significant ontological effects. One example of this is the way in which the taxonomic indexation of diseases, operated as a way of codifying and legitimizing knowledge in a way which, by its very structure, seemed to reproduce the scientific methods of their day. Examples include the International Classification of Diseases (ICD, formalised in 1900) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM, first published in 1952), which remain two major contemporary engines of knowledge legitimisation in medicine. One governs the ontological ‘canon’ of physical diseases and the other dictates what is determined a mental illness and what is not. The ICD was preceded by the Bertillon Classification of Causes of Death and the medical statistical research of William Farr and Marc d’Espine. These types of taxonomies with their Linnaean processes of conceptualizing, naming and classifying of organisms acted not only to capture the ontology of diseases, but to create medico-social ‘problems’, as Foucault and Illich argued, as a way of increasing power, prestige and authority invested in medicine. Both taxonomies were and are shaped by and reflect socio-cultural ideologies and mores of their era, in particular, but not solely, in relation to gender and ‘gendered’ behaviour (e.g. hysteria), ethnicity/race (e.g. drapetomania, the pathological desire for freedom shown by slaves in the US) and sexual ‘deviance’ (e.g. homosexuality). Discussions over the blurred social-scientific boundaries of such
classifications continue into the present day. Knowledge production quite clearly legitimizes both actions taken and who is acted upon. **Conclusion** Medicine is created by a series of inter-related engines of knowledge which legitimise both the profession and its accepted practices. While these engines have been deliberately aligned to scientific (read objective, quantitative and therefore 'reliable') forms of knowledge, this positioning is not now, nor ever has been, unproblematic nor uncontested. The use of scientific methods by the profession (and other critics) against itself, would indicate that the social authority and influence built on the 'engines of knowledge' strategy within medicine had one major advantage, in that it could operate in both upwards and downwards. The hospital became and remains as an approved site for the production of knowledge about health, illness, disease and patients. The twin epistemic strategies of the individual patient encounter and the aggregate, quantified data about both patients and their conditions continue to produce medically approved knowledge. The conflict between these has largely been reconciled by favouring a particular version of scientific medicine, but at its inception in the 19th century, this framework proved enormously beneficial for medicine, the medical profession and the social phenomenon of the hospitals. The locus of the hospital became a valuable site for not only data collection (individual and general) but a site for the production of growing volumes of data and its deployment by an expanding system of experts. It seems clear that authority, both then and now, is hugely enhanced by the capacity to establish a knowledge factory, to generate exclusive expert knowledge and to control its application and oversight.

5. https://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=tv65pNmdsgC&oi=fnd&pg=PR8&dq=how+medicine+resisted+science&ots=CkDv1bha14&sig=n56k6MPQf1IHNnMVzH0zRFeibggE#v=onep
12. https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/objectivity

» Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: Botany and the Garden Part 1 The Sociological Imagination (2016-08-25 08:01:10)

[...] is the second in a series of short essays exploring what I have called 'engines of knowledge' in the first quantitative. [...]
So what is ‘networking’? (2016-04-13 08:00)

This is an extract from [1]Social Media for Academics by Mark Carrigan

To talk of ‘networking’ raises the inevitable question of what your ‘network’ is and why it matters. This is a theme which cuts through the book given that the network is so crucial to social media: without a certain critical mass of users, it’s difficult for social media platforms to be useful to anyone. What’s the point of sending 140-character messages, sharing audio clips or self-publishing articles if no one is going to find them? Social media offer endless opportunities to communicate with your network and expand it in the process. But this doesn’t really answer the question of what the value of this actually is. In part, it can simply be a matter of the enjoyment of sharing things you’ve produced, something which the media scholar [2]David Gauntlett (2011) conveys powerfully in his book on creative production, Making is Connecting, which situated this aspect of contemporary digital culture in terms of a much longer history of craft.

One of the difficulties with the notion of ‘networking’ is that it can seem to imply that such an activity is extrinsic to scholarly activity, such that one does one’s real work and then (reluctantly) looks outwards towards their connections. What this leaves out is the vast majority of academic work that involves collaboration in one form or another. Gauntlett expresses this nicely, suggesting three ways in which ‘making is connecting’:

- Making is connecting because you have to connect things together (materials, ideas, or both) to make something
• Making is connecting because acts of creativity usually involve, at some point, a social dimension and connect us with other people

• Making is connecting because through making things and sharing them in the world, we increase our engagement and connection with our social and physical environment

While Gauntlett is talking about creative production in general, the same points can be extended to scholarship. In fact his discussion of ‘craft’, a term not often used to apply to the work that goes on within the academy, offers a useful reminder of the genuinely creative work that is undertaken by academics (albeit frequently within conditions which frustrate that creativity or at least make it difficult to experience it as such). By this he means a process of discovery, often involving new ideas which emerge through acts of creation. This helps bring people together through their shared acts of creation, consolidating bonds between collaborators which take on a life of their own in the outcomes of this work together. This language of craft, which [3]Sennett (2008) talks about in terms of doing things well for their own sake, provides a nice counterweight to some of the instrumentalising tendencies which the contemporary academy can give rise to.

Talk of ‘networks’ and ‘networking’ can be off-putting. I like Gauntlett’s account because it captures how networks are integral to creative work: making is connecting. It follows from this that connecting can be a preliminary to making. As [4]Weller (2011: loc 172) puts it, ‘[n]etworks of peers are important in scholarship – they represent the people who scholars share ideas with, collaborate with on research projects, review papers for, discuss ideas with and get feedback from’. Networks are integral to scholarship. The possibilities which social media open up for networking can have hugely important implications for your scholarship, though they also pose challenges which we’ll discuss. But first, it’s important not to forget your existing network when you begin to engage with social media.


DEADLINE TOMORROW: Sex and Sexualities in Popular Culture: Feminist Perspectives 2016 (2016-04-14 08:00)

Sex and Sexualities in Popular Culture: Feminist Perspectives 2016

Call for Papers for a 1-day postgraduate symposium hosted by the Digital Cultures Research Centre

Abstract deadline: April 15th, 2016

Conference date and location: September 3rd, 2016, Digital Cultures Research Centre, The Watershed, Bristol

Eligibility: Postgraduate students (MA/MSc onwards) and creative practitioners
Send abstracts to: [1]popsex.conference@gmail.com

Keynote speaker: Cheryl Morgan

The second annual Sex and Sexualities in Popular Culture: Feminist Perspectives symposium is returning to the Bristol Watershed in September 2016. Following an exciting inaugural symposium in 2015, this year’s event will continue our tradition of offering a safe, inclusive space for postgraduate students and creative practitioners to meet peers, share work and learn from each other. We are delighted to welcome Cheryl Morgan as the keynote speaker for PopSex16. Cheryl is a Hugo award-winning science fiction critic and publisher. She is the owner of Wizard’s Tower Press and the Wizard’s Tower Books ebook store. Previously she edited the Hugo Award winning magazine, Emerald City (Best Fanzine, 2004). She also won a Hugo for Best Fan Writer in 2009. She is a Co-Chair of Out Stories Bristol and lectures regularly on both trans history and science fiction and fantasy literature. We continue to be interested in how representations of sex and sexualities in popular culture shape feminist – and anti-feminist – issues and discourses. Since our 2015 event, we have seen both the box office success and backlash against films such as Mad Max Fury Road (noted for strong feminist themes and female leads in a traditionally male-dominated franchise) and Star Wars: The Force Awakens (which upset “Men’s Rights Activists” through its failure to feature a straight, white, male hero). MRAs have also made abortive attempts to organise away from the keyboard. Eddie Redmayne, the cisgender male actor cast as the lead in The Danish Girl, has drawn criticism for his claims that the movie has brought trans issues to the mainstream. Fanfiction has received even more mainstream coverage with speculation that pressure from fans may move Disney to make one of the leads in the latest Star Wars trilogy canonically gay. And of course many aspects of sex and sexualities remain silenced and unrepresented in popular culture. We welcome, among others, proposals which examine these trends and take the (mis/under)representations of sex and sexualities in popular culture as a starting point to theorise the links between popular culture and real-world feminist issues and activism. We aim to create a space safe for experimentation – both with new ideas and with presentation formats. We therefore encourage a range of submissions, including workshops, discussions, pecha kucha, as well as the traditional 20-minute paper format. Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Representations of women’s desire and sexualities in popular culture
- Non-cis- and heteronormative sexualities in popular culture, especially beyond “gay and lesbian”
- Representations of sex work
- Infertility and sexual dysfunction
- Sexual intersections, including race, disability, religion, class and socioeconomic status, gender, etc.
- Sex and sexualities in gaming
- Sexual pleasure in popular culture
- Invisibility: (a)sexualities unrepresented
- Sex, sexualities and social media
- Sex and sexualities in fan and transformative works

Please submit a 300-word abstract and a 100-word bio to [2]popsex.conference@gmail.com by April 15th, 2016.
The Aristocracy of the Digital Celebrities and the Magical Thinking That Props It Up (2016-04-15 08:00)

This is possibly the most depressing blog post I've ever read. It's the earnestness with which the author conveys the message that “influencers are rarely the people who move the needle in our life”, as if this was a genuine personal revelation that he now feels the need to convey in as gentle as tone a possible:

After scrolling for several hours, I came to a conclusion.

Some people—including me that night—spend too much time following top influencers.

If only I can get their attention, we think, then I'll make it big.

As I scrolled, I thought about how hopeless some people may feel when they can't catch the attention of that one influencer. I imagined how nervous that person might have felt as they crafted their Instagram pitch to Cuban, Vaynerchuk, or John.

Not everyone feels this way about connecting with influencers, of course.

But many do.

At the end of the day, influencers are rarely the people who move the needle in our life. Our success hardly depends on their attention.

Our success ultimately depends on the attention we give to our work, not the amount of attention our work gets for us.


By definition there can only be a handful of celebrities. As Goffman describes it on pg 68 of Stigma, by 'fame' we “refer to the possibility that the circle of people who know about a given individual, especially in connection with a rare desirable achievement or possession, can become very wide, and at the same time much wider than the circle of those who know him personally”.


The Challenge of Public Engagement Projects and the Role of New Intermediaries Like @Soc_Imagination and @TheSocReview (2016-04-16 08:00)

In a recent article on the LSE Impact Blog, [1]Martha Henson reflects on the challenges which typify digital projects and the implications this has for the uptake of social media in higher education. She highlights a pattern which occurs with depressing frequency, in which “a failure to understanding digital marketing, and a failure to invest any serious time and effort in promotion” lead to otherwise laudable digital initiatives failing. The lesson she takes from this is

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an important one: "stop wasting money on digital projects if you aren't prepared to promote them properly". On one level, it’s hard to argue with the conclusions she has drawn:

Do NOT embark on any digital project if you aren’t going to at least make a decent effort to tell people about it or otherwise figure out how people are going to see it.

If you are going to make an in-gallery app but only have room for a small piece of signage and no budget or space for print promotion, do not bother. If you are going to create a game and put it on your website and think maybe your organisation might be able to muster up a single tweet and facebook post about it, give up now. If you are creating an amazing interactive video experience but the entire budget is going on production and you’ve run out of money to market it, stop.

Furthermore, if you think that a digital experience, be it mobile or online, game, video, or guide, is going to sell itself, and thereby itself be marketing for your TV show or exhibition, you are going to be sorely disappointed. Actually, I suspect this attitude is partly to blame for some of the failures in this area. There seems to be some confusion over whether these digital add-ons are marketing themselves but, by and large, it doesn’t work this way, things just don’t magically "go viral".


But perhaps we need to interrogate these difficulties a little further. I’m sure Henson is correct in her diagnosis that in many cases “these digital projects *are* just seen as add-ons”, with the promotional activity therefore falling to the production team for the project. But in the context of higher education, I think there’s a more diffuse problem of what Oili-Helena Ylijoki calls ‘project time’:

First, project time entails a strict timeframe, defined in the research contract. Every project starts and ends at given dates, and there are milestones in-between. Thus, the project has an internal clock that determines how long research can take, what stages there are and what results need to be gained by certain dates. In this way, project time has fixed, pre-set temporal boundaries, which separate not only different phases within a given project but also one project from another, making it an entity of its own with a logo, an acronym and web pages ([4]Vermeulen 2010).


The dominance of project time within higher education compounds the problem that Henson identifies (as I suspect it also will in other fields where the temporality of projects is dominant) because it means that building an audience falls within the temporal horizons of the project itself. It’s a time consuming task that is unlikely to succeed within the window of a project. Furthermore, it’s one which benefits from activity that engages with multiple audiences in a variety of ways i.e. something to which most projects will be unsuited. It’s labour intensive, iterative and long term.

Obviously, this is why promotional activity of the sort Henson bemoans the absence of is important. But this is also why the new intermediaries of social media for academics become so important: websites like The Sociological Imagination, The LSE Impact Blog, The Sociological Review and Open Democracy (and many more) have pre-aggregated a specialised audience relevant for many of the interesting projects that are emerging all around us. This
leaves them obviously valuable as promotional partners but I’m suggesting we need to see them in a more fundamen-
tal way as platforms for public engagement. Initiatives like these are not something peripheral to the mainstream of 
public engagement but rather are a crucial component of any engagement project which seeks to utilise social media.

1. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/18/stop-wasting-money-on-digital-projects-if-you-are-
   t-prepared-to-promote-them-properly/
2. http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/03/18/stop-wasting-money-on-digital-projects-if-you-are-
   t-prepared-to-promote-them-properly/
   academy/
4. http://www.stis.ed.ac.uk/people/academic_staff/niki_vermeulen
   academy/

Shared Sociology (2016-04-17 08:00)

by Les Back

We all know we are struggling within the institutions in the academy where metrics and audit culture is tied to the hierarchies of a value. Even if you did well in REF 2014, success is followed quickly by an impending sense of falling and failing. ’Pay wall sociology’ is hostage to the prestige of journals that count, status, measured and accu-
mulated quantitatively and individually. More often than not, the ‘impact agenda’ put us on the side of the powerful.

Does the crisis of the academy mean that the sociological imagination has been dealt a fatal blow? Absolutely not! Does creativity endure? Of course it does. There is so much brilliant work being done that can be celebrated and read with a sense of wonder. At the risk of you all laughing at me – and it’s good for intellectuals to be laughed at I think as George Orwell once commented - how about building a sociological future out of foregrounding our best scholarly virtues... of sharing hunches, passing on leads and suggesting ideas. ’You really have to read this book... you would love it.” This will sound weak I am sure but I think one way to survive the current academic conjuncture is to cultivate a kind of intellectual generosity.

I can imagine a few of you might be thinking well that all right for you to say? On some can afford to be gen-
erous. I would argue against this position for I agree with Ros Gill when she argued that institutionalised self-interest is toxic and licenses cruel judgments. Equally you might think: shouldn’t the first principle of generosity be a willingness to reciprocate it? Maybe so.

Two dimensions come to mind. Firstly, to argued for a broadened sense of the space of sociology. John Holmwood (2010) captured something important when he called sociology an “exporter discipline”. Equally, I would say in my mischievous moments, that we have imported things worth celebrating. We have imported Franz Fanon, the most anti-methodological thinker of the 20th century. We have imported Judith Butler and Angela Davies and Paul Gilroy, and of course W.E.B. Du Bois who was in and beyond sociology from the very beginning. I often use John Scott’s book of biographical portraits of contemporary social theorists as an example of what I would like to call a shared sociology. The second point I want to make is about the possibilities sharing and passing on the immaterial things of sociology. There are more opportunities for circulating in sociology through social media and online magazine and publications than ever before. There can be some unpleasant dimensions including the dark arts of academic
impression management too but I would still argue the possibilities are there. It draws into the conversation the non-specialistic, school teachers, GCSE students and sometimes people who are just plain curious (often in more ways than one). It isn't always comfortable but I think it is often vital. Today, by contrast, the atmosphere on university campuses rewards and encourages competitive self-interest. Like many of you I am an avid listener to Laurie Taylor's Radio 4 programme *Thinking Allowed*. Laurie's great gift is his capacity to bring the very best out of his guests. He has cost me a fortune in buying books from a wide variety of fields that I wouldn't have otherwise known about. I am thinking of books like Marek Korczynski's brilliant ethnography *Songs of the Factory* (2014) or Rachel Hurdley's wickedly seditious study of the homing strategies of university office workers (Hurdley 2015). After listening to the programme I often feel compelled to Google the email addresses of the featured sociologists. I email them just to say how amazing their work is, or sometimes to beg a few .pdfs from esoteric journals not available in the Goldsmiths library. I think authors recognize sincere appreciation that isn't a 'networking opportunity'. They almost always reply favorably more often than not with emails loaded with bountiful attachments. It shows a small aspect of what I mean by a shared sociology, or living by the best values of scholarship. **Bibliography**

Do we need to reorientate Sociological thought? Or are perpetual calls to do this part of the problem? (2016-04-17 12:59)

Re-orienting Sociological Thought?

Glamorgan Council Chamber, Glamorgan Building,

Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences

Cardiff University
2pm to 4pm, Wednesday, May 11th 2016

In recent years, we’ve seen the proliferation of calls to reorientate sociological thought around new concerns, 4348
methodologies and approaches that can ground the discipline in changing times. This symposium brings together advocates of prominent approaches with the hope of a dialogue concerning these calls. What do they have in common? How do they differ? Are their proliferation a sign of the discipline’s weakness or of its vitality? Do we need to throw our energies into one, embrace the multitude or somehow synthesise them into a broader project of disciplinary renewal?

Mark Carrigan – Why Public Sociology is Becoming Digital Sociology (and vice versa)

Des Fitzgerald – Lively sociology and the sociology of life

William Housley – Disruptive Technologies and Socio-Digital Transformation

Emilie Whitaker – Between Thanatos and Natality: considering sociological reorientations through trans/post humanist understandings of death


1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/re-orienting-sociological-thought-tickets-24594058491
June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.
Are you coming to @thesocreview’s Annual Lecture? (2016-04-17 13:37)

The Sociological Review Annual Sociology Lecture

Friday May 20th 2016, 17.45-21.00

SOAS, University of London

This event is free but it is essential to register. To reserve a place, please email Jenny Thatcher [events@thesociologicalreview.com].
Keynote: Professor Éric Fassin (Université Paris-8)

Discussants: Professor Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick, UK and Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Dr Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University)

Professor [1]Éric Fassin

will bring together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology to demonstrate how the boundaries that were drawn around them were part of an academic struggle for power in which the term ‘race’ and the politics of decolonization were central to the war of disciplinary position.

The Great Divide:

Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss

Claude Lévi-Strauss published the Elementary Structures of Kinship in 1949 as a sociologist. Only in 1950 was he to appropriate the term “anthropology” in his introduction to the posthumous edited volume of essays by Marcel Mauss, entitled Sociologie et anthropologie. The French sociological tradition did not distinguish between the two disciplines; on the contrary, Émile Durkheim and his heirs distanced themselves from an “anthropology” that was associated with race during the first half of the century. In order to reclaim this label, and thus institute himself as the founding father of French anthropology, Lévi-Strauss could not merely rely on American cultural anthropology; he had to erase the racial legacy of the French tradition. This was accomplished in his 1952 UNESCO pamphlet "Race and History". It was a powerful move in the wake of World War Two, especially from one who had to flee Nazi persecutions against Jews. But this was also the eve of decolonization – at a time when Georges Balandier analyzed the "colonial situation" as a sociologist, while Michel Leiris and Aimé Césaire denounced the politics of race in the French empire. Today’s French work on race has to revisit this great divide of the 1950s, not only between anthropology and sociology, but also between the social sciences and race.

About Éric Fassin

After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member
of the new Laboratoire d’études de genre et de sexualité – Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10). His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same-sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left.


Please note that tickets are strictly limited. Please give sufficient notice of cancellation.
Are you studying the internal conversation? Get in touch soon for a free workshop (2016-04-17 19:12)

Investigating the Internal Conversation

We still have one place left for this workshop. Get in touch very soon if you'd like to take part:

Reflexivity Forum  
10am-5pm, May 24th 2016  
R1.04, University of Warwick

Following from a successful initial meeting last year, this event will be the first of a hopefully ongoing series of events aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The 'internal conversation' was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediating mechanism that accounts for how society’s objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through
a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

The event is free but registration is essential. If you would like to speak at the event, presenting a work in progress, please register by March 31st with a title and 100 word abstract. If you would like to attend then please register by April 30th.

To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net

How to ‘network’ without chipping away at your soul (2016-04-18 08:00)

‘Networking’ is a horrible term. I’m sure I’m not the only person who hates it. It nonetheless refers to something important, albeit perhaps pervasively misunderstood. The usual connotations of the term ‘networking’ are insincerity, instrumentalism and general creepiness. There have been a few occasions when I’ve been conscious of being ‘networked’ by someone else in a way that made me deeply uncomfortable. It’s worse when someone is really good at it, projecting enthusiasm for their encounter with you while nonetheless failing to engage with anything you’re actually saying: smiling plausibly while looking over your shoulder to check if anyone more useful has entered the vicinity.

In fact I think ‘useful’ is the key term to understanding the problem here. If you see ‘networking’ in terms of people being ‘useful’ to you then it will be a soul-destroying activity. You’ll either succeed in building a collection of ‘useful’ people around you (and destroy your soul in the process) or your confidence will be crushed by the feeling you’ve pervasively failed to do things properly (though your soul may very well be intact).

Rather than ‘useful’, we should think in terms of ‘interesting’: arousing curiosity or interest. Who do you find interesting? What do you share with them? What differences and commonalities are there in how you approach a shared interest? Setting out to build a network of people you hope might one day be useful to you is creepy and disturbing. Approaching academic life with the intention of having as many friendly conversations as you can with people who share your interests is incredibly rewarding. Plus social media takes so much of the awkwardness out of it. But that’s an entirely different post.

Using Social Media to Manage Information (2016-04-19 08:00)

From a Culture of Connectivity to a Platform Society (2016-04-20 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/ahEXaHihG2Q

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/ahEXaHihG2Q

Cyberparty: popular politics in digital times - Fri May 13 2016, Centre for Digital Culture, King’s College London (2016-04-21 08:00)

// Cyberparty: Popular Politics in Digital Times //

In recent years - and in particular since the explosion of the financial crisis of 2008 - we have witnessed the rise of an array of new political parties - sometimes described as ‘digital parties’, ‘internet parties’ or ‘network parties’ - that attempt to utilise digital communication technologies as means to construct new forms of political participation and organisation against a background of widespread political disaffection with mainstream politics.

From the 5 Star Movement in Italy, to Podemos in Spain, and the Pirate Party in Iceland, Sweden and Germany, to the municipalist formations that recently won the mayoralties of Barcelona and Madrid, the signs of this surprising revival of the political party in digital times are growing. These new political organisations that are entering the political arena in a number of countries in Europe and beyond make use of the tools and practices that typify the present digital era, from Twitter channels and Facebook pages to Whatsapp groups and decision-making platforms. Furthermore, they embody the new demands that reflect the ways of life, fears and desires of an era of mass digital connectivity: demands for free information, privacy, connectivity and basic income.
What is the meaning and what the implications of these emerging digital parties? How do they reflect and respond to the current phase of economic and political crisis? What are the new issues and policies they bring to the fore? What are their forms of organisation, participation and leadership?

The Cyberparty conference hosted by the newly formed Centre for Digital Culture at King’s College London will explore these issues by bringing together experts and activists from the forefront of political innovation. It will ask what is specific to the emerging ‘digital party-form’ underpinning these formations, how it compares with the mass parties of the industrial era and the electoral-professional parties of the neoliberal era and to what extent it can become a vehicle for social and political change. Furthermore, it will inquire in which ways more traditional political phenomena such as the Labour party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders’ campaign in the US are trying to adopt some of the emerging organisational structures and practices coming from digital parties.

Different aspects of digital parties will be examined: their forms of communication and propaganda; their decision-making platforms; their policy platform and social base, with dedicated panels on these issues.

The conference will also host a special panel on digital activism in Eastern Europe.

// Confirmed speakers include

Birgitta Jonsdottir (Pirate Party), Davide Barillari (5 Star Movement), Bernardo Gutierrez (journalist and activist), Arnau Monerde (Universidad Oberta de Catalunya), Francesca Bria (Nesta), Jodi Dean (Hobart and William Smith Colleges), Andrew Chadwick (Royal Holloway), Sofia de Roa (Podemos), Miguel Ongil Lopez (Podemos), Richard Barbrook (Westminster), Emmy Eklundh (King’s), Emiliano Trere (Autonomous University of Queretaro), Marco Deseris (Northeastern University), Cristian Vaccari (Royal Holloway), Aaron Bastani (Novara Media), Paolo Gerbaudo (King’s), Francisco Jurado (Podemos), Alex Williams (City University), and Alex Clarkson (King’s).

Academic Social Media in the Research Economy (2016-04-22 08:00)

It is increasingly hard to move without encountering the idea that social media is something of value for academics. The reasons offered are probably quite familiar by now. It helps ensure your research is visible, both inside and outside the academy. Many of us might be sceptical of the dominant discourse of impact within which such a concern for visibility tends to be expressed. I certainly am in many ways, worrying that this is irrevocably tied up in the instrumentalisation of research, the declining autonomy of researchers and the marketisation of the Academy within which research takes place. Nonetheless the imperative to make and demonstrate impact is already an entrenched characteristic of the research economy and looks likely to stay that way.

In this short talk, I will make the case that social media in general and blogging in particular represent a way to expand academic autonomy, improve the quality of our scholarship and nonetheless meet the demands of what I have elsewhere called the Accelerated Academy, all at the same time. This might seem implausible, so please bear with me. If it seems overly optimistic, let’s talk about this at the end because my actual view of the research economy is pretty grim and depressing. My enthusiasm for social media comes in large part because I see it as something that can, at least potentially work to ameliorate a whole series of problems that afflict those within the contemporary research economy.
A good way into this is to consider some of the other benefits increasingly held to obtain through academics using social media. I already mentioned visibility, internal to the academy and outside of it. Related to this, is the chance to practice communication with nonspecialist audiences. It’s a faster way to get your research findings out. It allows you to build an audience for future publications, in advance of their actual release. In doing so, it allows you to find people who share your research interests, as connections more or less inevitably form on the basis of what you publish and what you read online.

But the advantage that I’m most interested in and the one that will be key to the argument I’m making here, is that the more you write, the easier writing gets. The more you think, the easier thinking gets. My enthusiasm for social media in general, as well as blogging in particular, stems from the endless occasions they offer for thinking and writing.

But isn’t thinking and writing what we do anyway? Well yes, on one level, it is. Though I think there are important questions to be asked about how the accelerating pace of working life in contemporary universities impacts on the time and energy available for thinking and writing. But talk today is not about that.

It’s this presumably everyday quality to academic thinking and writing which has increasingly left me confused about one of the most common concerns, even objections, to academic social media: isn’t it just one more thing for already busy people to do? On the surface, this makes complete sense. This is certainly true for some people. It’s almost certainly true for everyone at least some of the time. But much of what academics do on social media should not be something extrinsic to their scholarship but instead should be constitutive of it. As the sci-fi author, digital rights activist and blogger Cory Doctorow puts it: blogging is “my major way of thinking through the stuff that matters to me”. This is true of myself as well. I think it’s true of many academics using social media, even if they don’t recognise it. Furthermore, I think much of the value that social media has for academics within the contemporary research economy won’t be actualised until this has become a ubiquitous feature of how we talk about the way we can use social media as researchers.

There’s a lovely extract of [1]the Academic Diary in which Les Back reflects on the life and work of the social theorist Vic Seidler. Remarking on the vast range of topics on which Seidler has written, Les suggests that this deeply committed man “writes not because his academic position expects it but because he has something to say and communicate”. For someone like Seidler, writing is something a person does because they are “trying to work something out”.

This captures what I see as the promise of academic social media. It’s a platform for trying to work things out. More so, doing it in the open grants each of these attempts a social existence, one that comes with undoubted risks but also enormous rewards. Little bits of thought shrapnel, brief attempts to make some sense of the ‘feel of an idea’, come to enjoy their own existence within the world. They’re mostly forgotten or even ignored from the outset. But there’s something quite remarkable about occasions when these fragments resurface as someone sees something of value in them, perhaps when you saw no value in them yourself.

In this way, it attunes you to the impulse to write because you have “something to say and communicate”. This isn’t always the case and I worry that the metricisation of scholarly blogging will prove immensely destructive of it. But there is at least for now something deeply rewarding about seizing on an inchoate idea, developing it and throwing it off into the world to see what others make of it. For no other reason than the pleasure inherent to it. Whether this non-instrumental exploration of ideas remains the norm or could be sustained in the long term is a different question – as I’ll come on to, I think there are reasons to worry that the research economy is inimical to this.

What does this all mean practice? I’m talking about quite straight forward practices which all of those conducting research engage in to differing degrees. I’ve often used the term ‘public notebook’ and the existence of non-public notebooks is the most obvious point of comparison here. Prior to starting a research blog early in my PhD, I use to
scribble notes in a succession of moleskin notebooks – ones I would later struggle to decipher due to my scrawled handwriting. The radical sociologist C Wright Mills wrote a wonderful appendix to his famous The Sociological Imagination about scholarly craft: he argued for the necessity of keeping a ‘file’ in order to ‘keep one’s inner world awake’.

These are activities we all engage in but which, rather interestingly, tend not to feature in public discourse: the daily minutiae of scholarship. Notebooks, filing cabinets, file cards, newspaper clippings, print outs, drawings, marginalia in books, annotated papers, reading lists etc. Modern digital equivalents involve tools like Evernote or OneNote. These have many of the advantages of using social media – they can also of course be integrated with them, for instance by quickly sharing notes from Evernote or automatically clipping content you discover on social media into the appropriate Evernote folder. But as with social media use, they have the advantage of mobility, in so far as that one can use them across devices and across contexts – rather than the careful work of keeping physical files or the necessity of ensuring one always has one’s physical journal and never, under any circumstances, lose it.

The features I discussed earlier might all sound individualistic. But it’s in considering how the use of social media differs from contemporary alternatives like Evernote that it becomes apparent how the benefits of social media are intrinsically social. Later in the book I mentioned earlier, Les Back suggests that Twitter sometimes facilitates our “inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer” by providing “signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story”. Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of “hunches and tips” which is the “lifeblood of scholarship”. These provide pathways through the literature, allowing others to use them as guides into and through often difficult bodies of work.

It’s in this sense that I’m arguing social media increases the autonomy of researchers, both individually and collectively. If we accept the argument that metrics necessarily entail the evisceration of self-governance, with hierarchical regulation replacing horizontal norms, then this new horizontal space of collaboration and cooperation begins to looks exceedingly valuable. It’s a new kind of space and one which could be easily destroyed if we too easily accept that what we do within it should be measured and incorporated into the logic of career advancement.

The kinds of scholarly communities of practice we can see perpetually coming to life online are obviously not confined to the digital sphere. But academic social media is at present profoundly generative of them, whereas the broader research economy is increasingly characterised by a competitive individualism which works to preclude them. However I think this not just important within the academy but also in the relationships between academia and other institutional spheres. For instance, academic social media is changing how journalists and academics interact: it’s easier to identify academics, but it’s also easier to make demands upon them which might be unreasonable or unwelcome, often with only a cursory understanding of what they hope to achieve through such a potential collaboration. It’s also changing the relationships between social scientists and the communities they research, as organised groups increasingly monitor and engage with academic research, in ways that can throw up all such of problems. This is why the nature of the ‘third space’ of academic social media is so important.

There are all sorts of instrumental gains to be had through engaging with social media: increasing your visibility, expanding your network, ensuring your work is widely read, engaging with non-academics publics and making an impact outside of the academy. But there are gains to scholarship which are more important and perhaps more diffuse than this. What increasingly interests me is the tension between them the two tendencies: how the instrumental use of social media, encouraged within the contemporary research economy, might imperil the gains which I’ve suggested can be made on the level of craft and collaboration.

I’ve not spoken much today about the practicalities of academic social media. This is particularly because none of this is very technically demanding & I can happily direct anyone who e-mails me towards whatever ‘how to’ guides they need (or to awkwardly try and self-market... you could buy my book). These broader issues seem much more important to me than the minutiae of how to use particular digital tools. What do we want do and why do we
want to do it. The practical questions of how are secondary. It’s in this sense that I think social media for academics opens up some deeply pressing questions about academic labour, scholarship and the research economy.


A contagion of pivots reveals the hollowness of the sharing economy (2016-04-23 08:00)

Interesting [1] analysis of the difficulties that many platform firms are facing now that venture capital is starting to dry up. I also love the phrase “a contagion of pivots” more than I can express:

A contagion of pivots began happening among other sharing economy startups. Companies like Cherry (car washes), Prim (laundry), SnapGoods (gear rental), Rewinery (wine), HomeJoy (home cleaning) all went bust, some of them quietly and others with more headlines. Historical experience shows that [2] three out of four startups fail, and more than nine out of 10 never earn a return. My favorite example is SnapGoods, which is still cited today by many journalists who are pumping up the sharing economy (and haven’t done their homework) as a fitting example of a cool, hip company that allows people to rent out their spare equipment, like that drill you never use, or your backpack or spare bicycle—even though SnapGoods went out of business in August 2012. It just disappeared, poof, without a trace, yet goes on living in the imagination of sharing economy boosters.


The rather provocative conclusion drawn is that the so-called sharing economy ultimately amounts to nothing more than a series of digitally mediated niche temp agencies:

A pattern has emerged about the “white dwarf” fate of many of these once-luminous sharing startups: after launching with much fanfare and tens of millions of VC capital behind them, vowing to enact a revolution in how people work and how society organizes peer-to-peer economic transactions, in the end many of these companies morphed into the equivalent of old-fashioned temp agencies (and others have simply imploded into black hole nothingness). Market forces have resulted in a convergence of companies on a few services which had been the most used on their platforms. In a real sense, even the startup king itself, Uber, is merely a temp agency, where workers do only one task: drive cars. Rebecca Smith, deputy director of the National Employment Law Project, compares the businesses of the gig economy to old-fashioned labor brokers. Companies like Instacart, Postmates and Uber, she says, talk as if they are different from old-style employers simply because they operate online. “But in fact,” she says, “they are operating just like farm labor contractors, garment jobbers and day labor centers of old.”

Social Research and Intellectual Neglect: The Promise in Explicating the Philosophical Ethics Underpinning Our Research (2016-04-23 15:07)

by John-Paul Smiley

This brief piece is a rallying call of sorts – for researchers to more clearly make explicit the fundamental philosophical ethics underpinning their research. Most research, as [1]Kinsella (2006) points out, ‘...is informed by philosophical underpinnings that originate in unacknowledged and implicit philosophical traditions' (Kinsella: 2006: p. 1). What is often left unstated, however, is that these philosophical underpinnings are of a profoundly ethical nature. For example, social researchers often make recommendations in their research papers, either implicitly or explicitly, suggesting that some course of actions ought or should follow from their work, in order to bring about some form of change deemed desirable. Though arguably present in all research, this is especially the case in researchers whose work is of a more political nature and those which touch upon matters of policy. But comments and suggestions regarding what ought or should be, questions concerning how and why policy takes a particular format, who gets to be involved, what role there is for the public at large, what role government is to play (or should play) – these are fundamentally ethical-normative questions which are contestable and negotiable and so require articulation and explication of criterion for support.

Recognition of this is unfortunately uncommon in much social research, though it is established in policy studies literatures, with scholars such as [2]Fischer (1980), for example, arguing the need for policy analysis studies to have some manner of criterion for arbitration between competing values. This is necessary because ethics, like other areas of human inquiry, are contested – there are numerous differing schools of thought. It is no coincidence that one of the greatest intellectual projects of human philosophy has been the establishment of ethical criterions and systems, from the ancient Chinese and Greek philosophers, through to [3]Kant’s (1797) Deontological ethics, [4]Mill’s (1863) Utilitarianism, and [5]Dewey and Tuft’s (1932) Pragmatic ethics, to name but a few. This is important because in research, ‘Ethics’, ‘theory’, and ‘values’ form a mighty triumvirate underpinning research methodology... [6](Ransome: 2013: viii), with personal notions of value deriving from cultural sources of value, which are inextricably embedded in already-existing, often tacit ethical systems. The ethical presuppositions a researcher has adopted, knowingly or not, influence and shape the sorts of research questions and approaches they deem ‘worthy’, the types of methods they believe ‘appropriate’, and the forms, standards, and types of evidence and proof they are likely to be willing to accept. There are thus very real practical implications for the judging of research, as the perceived ‘value’ accorded to any particular piece will be underpinned by a researcher’s presuppositions. This, though arguably true regardless of the field of study under consideration, holds particularly for the social and political sciences, for,
as Schwandt (1996) has reminded us, ‘...social scientific knowledge is not presuppositionless but is instead shaped by moral and political values and concerns’ (Schwandt: 1996 reprinted in Seale [ed]: 2004: pp. 432 – 433).

The point here is that social researchers cannot assume that other researchers subscribe to their particular branch of ethics and so it is incumbent upon them to make their own position clear. This need not entail a lengthy treatise - it could be as little as a few sentences - but it should be clear, as much for the researcher’s benefit as for any readers’. Such explications could reveal fundamental cleavages and points of difference, and may well lead to a position where an impasse is considered reached, with researchers perhaps believing their position to be incommensurable with others. But even if this is the case, a greater, genuine understanding between all parties involved would have been achieved. The continued failure to do this, however, has led to a situation in academia in which many authors and readers are, in effect, talking past each other, with the potential for meaningful criticism and engagement between differing parties reduced. Genuine intellectual debate, and the possibility of any honest and sincere exchanges of ideas, requires an appreciation of the foundational ethical assumptions underpinning other’s perspectives. Without such, the integrity and substance of academic debate is compromised.

Furthermore, there is additional practical value of such explications in providing greater robustness and transparency in public political discourse. This is important as there are real, practical consequences and implications for political discourse which follow from the adoption of particular ethics. Knoweringly or not, by doing so, social actors are contributing to discourses which in turn either buttress or challenge prevailing social orders. By making the philosophical underpinnings clearer and more visible, more fruitful, nuanced and sophisticated discourse becomes possible, with all parties involved having more sensitive appreciation of the other’s positions and their ethical underpinnings. This in turn offers the potential to reenergize civic engagement with a more informed citizenry. The potential risk of intellectual myopia is also mitigated against with both the individual and the broader social collective benefiting as, through being forced to confront alternative ethical presuppositions, policy-formulation and political debate at large would have to more deeply confront its foundational, tacit assumptions, leading to more robust and self-aware decision-making. It is arguably academic researchers, as members within their polities with more time and resources to allow reflexive consideration of such matters, who have a greater responsibility than other social actors to ensure that due consideration is given to this issue.

The potential prize for explicating our ethical presuppositions is thus great. So, the next time you sit down to write a paper, judge that research, or to prepare that conference presentation, ask yourself ‘What are the philosophical ethics underpinning my thoughts here?’ and ‘How might someone adopting a differing branch of philosophical ethics approach the matter?’. Such questions are extremely challenging and it is understandably far easier to avoid or ignore them, or to pretend that they are irrelevant. But addressing such questions significantly strengthens a researcher’s own intellectual positions, and increases the potential for real and sincere conversation and debate on important matters of social and political dispute. Attention to such philosophical matters is important then, because, in the end, social researchers are also always philosophers, whether they know it or not, and whether they like it or not.

John-Paul Smiley is a PhD Candidate at Loughborough University

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2. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Politics_values_and_public_policy.html?id=6mt8AAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y
3. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Kant_Political_Writings.html?id=xMB7BsT_v4gC
4. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=lyUCAAQAAJ&dq=j%20s%20mill%20utilitarianism&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q=fal
Two free workshops at the Centre for Social Ontology @SocioWarwick (2016-04-24 08:00)

The Morphogenetic Approach
June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.

Investigating the Internal Conversation
10am-5pm, May 24th 2016
R1.04, University of Warwick

Following from a successful initial meeting last year, this event will be the first of a hopefully ongoing series of events aimed at those investigating human reflexivity through empirical research. The 'internal conversation' was developed by Margaret Archer as a solution to the problem of structure and agency: a mediatory mechanism that accounts for how society’s objective features influence its members to reproduce or transform society through their actions. Since initially discussed in Being Human, this account of human reflexivity has been developed through a trilogy of books reporting on empirical studies into the distinct modes through which reflexivity operates. This body of work has been used in projects across a range of disciplines and been the topic of much theoretical and methodological debate.

The event is free but registration is essential. If you would like to speak at the event, presenting a work in progress, please register by March 31st with a title and 100 word abstract. If you would like to attend then please register by April 30th.

To register contact mark@markcarrigan.net
Re-orienting Sociological Thought?

Glamorgan Council Chamber, Glamorgan Building,

Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences

Cardiff University
2pm to 4pm, Wednesday, May 11th 2016

In recent years, we’ve seen the proliferation of calls to reorientate sociological thought around new concerns, methodologies and approaches that can ground the discipline in changing times. This symposium brings together
advocates of prominent approaches with the hope of a dialogue concerning these calls. What do they have in common? How do they differ? Are their proliferation a sign of the discipline’s weakness or of its vitality? Do we need to throw our energies into one, embrace the multitude or somehow synthesise them into a broader project of disciplinary renewal?

Mark Carrigan – Why Public Sociology is Becoming Digital Sociology (and vice versa)

Des Fitzgerald – Lively sociology and the sociology of life

William Housley – Disruptive Technologies and Socio-Digital Transformation

Emilie Whitaker – Between Thanatos and Natality: considering sociological reorientations through trans/post humanist understandings of death

Pre-booking is required by May 4th. Reserve a place via [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/re-orienting-sociological-thought-tickets-24594058491

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The Political Socialisation of Presidents and Politicians (2016-04-25 08:00)

Barack Obama quoted in The Deep State, by Mike Lofgren, pg 63. The demands of fundraising for US politicians are exceptional but I assume a similar process can be found elsewhere, as an elite gradually becomes one’s reference group if this was not already the case. How else to explain the belief of UK MPs that they are poorly paid?

Increasingly I found myself spending time with people of means—law firm partners and investment bankers, hedge fund managers and venture capitalists. . . . I found myself avoiding certain topics during conversations with them, papering over possible differences, anticipating their expectations. . . . I know that as a consequence of my fund-raising I became more like the wealthy donors I met, in the very particular sense that I spent more and more of my time above the fray, outside the world of immediate hunger, disappointment, fear, irrationality, and frequent hardship of the other 99 percent of the population—that is, the people that I’d entered public life to serve.

And intelligence agencies contribute to that socialisation as well. From pg 87 of the same book:

Perhaps the most telling example of the relationship between President Obama and the Deep State comes from a March 2015 interview of John Brennan, his frequently embattled CIA director. Obama has shown Brennan great loyalty through two presidential terms. How did Brennan repay that loyalty—with a humble demonstration of gratitude and respect, perhaps? Obama, he said, did “not have an appreciation” of national security when he came into office, but with tutelage by himself and other experts “he has gone to school and understands the complexities.” The tone of headmasterly condescension is unmistakable, giving the listener ample grounds to wonder who is really in charge, the president or his national security complex. It is the inner workings of that national security complex that we shall turn to next.
Call for Conference Committee Members for the Work, employment and society Conference 2018 (2016-04-25 15:41)

We are seeking 4 committee members to join the Work, employment and society conference committee to serve for two years six months from June 2016 to November 2018. Applications must be submitted by Friday 6 May 2016, 17:00 (GMT).

About the newly formed Conference Committee (CC)

At the September 2015 Board meeting, a new model of WES Conference organization was agreed upon and the method of recruiting its members and the decision making remit of the conference committee agreed.

The Conference Committee will be formed of the following members:

- 4 Editorial Board members
- 2 Associate Board members
- 2 BSA Members (Editor, Associate Board Member, other BSA member)
- 1 co-opted member, connected to the venue that conference is being held in

Members of the CC will make all major decisions about the conference between Board meetings (location, speakers, etc.). The CC will report to the Board at every meeting and may seek Board feedback by email between meetings.

Decisions that should be addressed/discussed with the Editorial Board before action: whether a conference will be internationally based or locally based. The spending of WES conference funds (i.e. what budget from the conference funds is available for a conference). It is anticipated that these questions would be addressed by the CC and the Board in the early planning stages of any particularly conference. For example, for the 2018 conference, these discussions would take place at the January 2017 Board meeting.

The CC should plan to meet four times a year. Successful applicants will be invited to attend the next Editorial Board meeting, at the WES Conference in Leeds September 2016.

In the first round of elections 4 CC members are to be elected and their initial task will be to identify a venue for the 2018 conference. The 4 members will comprise of 2 Board members, 1 associate board member and 1 BSA member.

To apply please complete the downloadable form

You will be asked to provide the following information
Name, affiliation, contact details

Proposer (must be a BSA Member)

Relationship to WES and BSA: (tick those that apply)

1. a) Editorial Board / Associate Board Member
2. b) Attendance at previous WES conferences
3. c) Publications in WES
4. d) WEEL Study group member
5. e) BSA Member

Five research interests

Conference or other events that you have arranged/organised

CC members must maintain BSA membership during their term.

Applicants need not be a BSA member in order to apply.

If you have queries about the role or about your eligibility, please contact Elaine Forester BSA Events Team [events@britsoc.org.uk] and in the title please indicate your e-mail is relating to the WES Conference Committee 2016 - 2018

If you would like to apply please ensure your application arrives no later than Friday 6 May 2016, 17:00 (GMT). The application form is available on the BSA website: [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/publications-vacancies.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/publications-vacancies.aspx)

Would you like to recommend Social Media for Academics to your library? (2016-04-26 08:00)

I’d be ever so grateful if you did :-) There’s an online form which you can use to recommend the book [here]. Get touch if you have any questions or I can help with anything.

The Promise (and Threat) of Algorithmic Accountability (2016-04-27 08:00)

This is a superb talk by what I think are the two top people working on this anywhere:
1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/7_7ffmjOQfo
What does it mean to be a 'data sociologist'? (2016-04-28 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/iwqFRZ0m4x4

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1. [https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/re-orienting-sociological-thought-tickets-24594058491](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/re-orienting-sociological-thought-tickets-24594058491)
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If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.
The Sociological Review Annual Sociology Lecture

Friday May 20th 2016, 17.45-21.00

SOAS, University of London

This event is free but it is essential to register. To reserve a place, please email Jenny Thatcher [events@thesociologicalreview.com]
Keynote: Professor Éric Fassin (Université Paris-8)

Discussants: Professor Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick, UK and Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Dr Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University)

Professor [1]Éric Fassin will bring together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology to demonstrate how the boundaries that were drawn around them were part of an academic struggle for power in which the term 'race' and the politics of decolonization were central to the war of disciplinary position.

The Great Divide:

Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss

Claude Lévi-Strauss published the Elementary Structures of Kinship in 1949 as a sociologist. Only in 1950 was he to appropriate the term “anthropology” in his introduction to the posthumous edited volume of essays by Marcel Mauss, entitled Sociologie et anthropologie. The French sociological tradition did not distinguish between the two disciplines; on the contrary, Émile Durkheim and his heirs distanced themselves from an “anthropology” that was associated with race during the first half of the century. In order to reclaim this label, and thus institute himself as the founding father of French anthropology, Lévi-Strauss could not merely rely on American cultural anthropology; he had to erase the racial legacy of the French tradition. This was accomplished in his 1952 UNESCO pamphlet “Race and History”. It was a powerful move in the wake of World War Two, especially from one who had to flee Nazi persecutions against Jews. But this was also the eve of decolonization – at a time when Georges Balandier analyzed the "colonial situation" as a sociologist, while Michel Leiris and Aimé Césaire denounced the politics of race in the French empire. Today’s French work on race has to revisit this great divide of the 1950s, not only between anthropology and sociology, but also between the social sciences and race.

About Éric Fassin

After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member
of the new Laboratoire d’études de genre et de sexualité – Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10). His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left.


Please note that tickets are strictly limited. Please give sufficient notice of cancellation.

1. https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-fassin/blog
The ‘marketplace of ideas’ is a term I found irritatingly trite when I first heard it. I’ve since come to think it captures something important, namely the environment in which ideas of whatever sort are communicated and received. It is incidental as to whether your share my initial irritation or begrudging acceptance of this terminology, what’s more pressing here is the question of how this environment is changing and how academics could, or should, respond to the new pressures which these changes bring. Academics are far from being the only professionals whose working lives are subject to new pressures. In early 2014 an internal report on digital strategy produced by the New York Times was leaked and became the subject of widespread analysis online. It began with the claim that while the venerable newspaper was ‘winning at journalism’ it was failing at ‘the art and science of getting our journalism to our readers’. What concerned the authors of the report was not the familiar fear about the long-term consequences of digital technology to journalism itself, but rather their capacity to ensure their quality journalism thrives in a marketplace of ideas saturated by digitally native publishers.

This is a much bigger topic than social media alone. But it is nonetheless an important element in it, with implications for how academics utilise social media and the environment they encounter when they do. The key question here is how what [3]van Dijck (2012) calls the popularity principle might influence the behaviour and practices of academics as they embrace social media. As she defines it, the popularity principle holds that ‘the
more contacts you have and make, the more valuable you become, because more people think you are popular and hence want to connect with you’ [4](van Dijck 2012: loc 310). This concept is coded into the architecture of social media platforms in a way that is impossible to avoid, reflecting the broader attention economy in which ‘attention means eyeballs or (unconscious) exposure, and this value is an important part of Internet advertising in the form of banners, pop-ups, and paid ad space on websites’. There’s money to be made from popularity, or rather turning popularity (often, as van Dijck points out, equated with values of truth, trust and objectivity) into a quantifiable commodity [5](van Dijck 2012: loc 1281). It might feel like you would be immune to this, but if you encounter a popular Twitter feed, previously unknown to you, how does the high follower count influence your perceptions of it in the absence of any other information? At the very least, it’s likely to factor into a sense that there’s something authoritative or valuable about the account. After all, surely those followers must have arrived for a reason? The popularity principle is insidious and it is built into social media platforms themselves. Value comes to be quantified in terms of the accumulation of followers, likes, retweets and reblogs. Yet as [6]van Dijck (2012: loc 1360) notes, the ‘concept of “liking” pushes popular ideas or things with a high degree of emotional value … “difficult sociality’, only adds to the pressures inherent in the popularity principle around which social media platforms are structured [7](van Dijck 2012: loc 1391).

The centrality of the popularity principle may be most pronounced in the case of Facebook but it’s far from being unique to it. One of Amazon’s most ground-breaking innovations was the extension of their initial Hot 100 bestseller list to encompass everything on the site, drawing authors into a neurotic fixation with where they ranked on this all-encompassing list [8](Stone 2013: 75). The choices YouTube users make are heavily guided by selection mechanisms, including search engines and ranking algorithms, which inevitably favour some producers over others. Selection of the 'most popular' videos is the most pronounced manifestation of this but the guiding of user choices is built into the interface of the platform itself[9] (van Dijck 2012: loc 2328). In part this can be fairly attributed to the practical challenge of dealing with the sheer scale of the content uploaded to YouTube. Without filtering it would be difficult to find relevant content in the 3000 hours of video that have been uploaded in the ten minutes or so I’ve been writing this paragraph, let alone the entire content of the site’s archive. But contrary to the rhetorical focus on the blurring of boundaries between viewers and producers, evidence suggests that the site’s architecture is designed to favour their official partners, allowing some professionalised amateurs to make a living out of the system and entrenching a sense of possibility that one will be ‘discovered’ through YouTube [10](van Dijck 2012: loc 2396–2610). The most obvious example however is the ranking facilitated by Google, a service which has sought to identify the most popular content from the outset. As [11]Vaidhyanathan (2012) asks, ‘Does anything (or anyone) matter if it (or she) does not show up on the first page of a Google search?’. The simplicity of the interface and the objectivity of its ordering belie the biases (‘valuing popularity over accuracy, established sites over new, and rough rankings over more fluid or multidimensional models of presentation’) that are built into it [12](Vaidhyanathan 2012: 7).

However, perhaps the most pertinent examples for academics using social media can be seen with Twitter. As [13]van Dijck (2012: loc 1569) puts it, ‘[t]he sheer number of followers has become a barometer for measuring popularity and influence, ascribing more power to few users in the twitterverse’. The potential implications of this can be seen by examining what might initially seem to be an extremely obscure feature of the culture emerging around academics using social media. One of the most striking developments in the last year has been the emergence of natively academic viral marketing accounts. I discussed two of these, Nein Quarterly and Shit Academics Say, in terms of their distinctive approach to but important” is not a judgement prompted by social media sites’. In using social media, academics are entering into an attention economy heavily structured around the popularity principle. What are the implications of this attention economy for scholarship? The risk is that, as the political blogger [14]Ezra Klein (2015) puts it, ‘[t]he incentives of the social web make it a threat to the conversational web’. The increasing reliance upon social media to drive traffic to blogs encourages certain ways of writing posts. The most obvious manifestation of this can be seen in the rise of viral content websites but there are more subtle manifestations as well. Klein’s point is that ‘the social web’ encourages an atomisation of content because individual posts circulate...
on their own rather than relying on readers' repeated visits to the author’s blog. He presents this as a negative thing because it mitigates against the intensely conversational style that used to characterise the political blogosphere in which arguments were developed through mutual engagement across whole sequences of blog posts. While he may be undervaluing the conversations which emerge on social media in response to blog posts, he nonetheless makes an important point about the implications of content needing to ‘travel’ in a way that was not formerly the case. Obviously these pressures aren’t inexorable but their influence can be surprisingly effective, as the obvious desire of bloggers to gain an audience for their posts gradually chips away at a principled opposition to changing how they write in order to better solicit a readership. The growing reliance upon social media to drive traffic to blogs, something which is compounded by Facebook's desire to be ‘a gateway to social content, a toll road to a data infrastructure that facilitates all forms of online commercialized communicating visually and what can be learnt from it. The former is inarguably aphoristic in a manner that has a clear philosophical pedigree, utilising social media as part of ‘[a]n aesthetic and intellectual experiment only slightly less pretentious than it sounds’. In contrast, the latter relies upon viral content of a form likely to be familiar from non-academic contexts, though the selection and execution of it is undoubtedly hugely effective. Yet a recent account with a comparable approach, Grad School Elitist, found itself embroiled in controversy at the point I was completing this book. Accused of plagiarising the content on the account, accusations backed up with substantial evidence, the person controlling the account began to block anyone who questioned their authorship of the material they posted (including myself). My point here is not to intervene in this debate, which is likely to be tedious to the overwhelming majority of people who are less immersed in social media than I am, but simply to highlight this trajectory and what it might suggest about the tensions between scholarship and the logic of popularity built into social media platforms.

Each successive academic viral marketing account seems to have less intellec-tual value than the last, relying mechanically upon content likely to have the most impact through retweets and favourites, thus contributing to the progressive growth of its follower counts. Virality can soon become an end in itself. The problem arises because, as [15]van Dijck (2012: loc 1569) notes, users 'quickly learned how to play the system and accumulate a lot of clout on Twitter'. In some cases, discussed further in the next section, this might involve straightforwardly copying and pasting content that can be seen to be popular – a judgement that’s easy to make because each tweet has its metrics incorporated into its own presentation. But the more subtle aspect of this concerns the manner in which popularity accumulates in a winner-takes-all-manner: 'the more people follow someone, the trendier he or she becomes; the more people retweet a quote, the more impact it has in the twitterverse' [16](van Dijck 2012: loc 3227). It’s in the interests of social media platforms to ensure the prominence of those users with a proven capacity to generate engagement on their site. After all, this amounts to more traffic for advertising, more buzz to draw users into the site, and higher statistics with which to appeal to the markets for more capital. These incentives, and the ease with which they can be accommodated within algorithms which serve other more immediately practical purposes, leave some users objectively positioned as more valuable than others within the platform [17](van Dijck 2012: loc 2353).

This doesn’t mean that all roads inevitably lead to BuzzFeed. It also doesn’t mean that academics using social media will inevitably entail the deterioration of

scholarly standards, as a neurotic preoccupation with the accumulation of influence (as measured in follower counts and retweets) increasingly encourages simple communication likely to prove popular at the expense of complex ideas which may not thrive because of their difficulty and ambiguity. Using social media doesn’t mean academics will inevitably come to talk in TED soundbites and forego things of intellectual worth. But the risk of a drift in this direction is there and that’s why it’s important to be aware of this at the outset, not least of all in order to reflect on your motivations if you find yourself engaging online with some regularity. It also helps us to be critical of the rhetoric of democratisation, such that it is assumed social media will ‘disrupt’ the hierarchies of academia. It won’t. It might however make them more complex, as influence and esteem accumulate through a more diverse set of mechanisms than was formerly the case. But, as I discuss later in this chapter, it’s easy to see how academics might
get drawn into the logic of self-evaluation through metrics: if your h-index can be understood as tracking success then is it really a stretch to imagine the same being true of your quantity of Twitter followers? More worryingly, it’s easy to imagine managers embracing such measures as an attempt to evaluate a capacity for impact and engagement.

Emmet Fox (2016-05-02 13:31:09)
"More worryingly, it’s easy to imagine managers embracing such measures as an attempt to evaluate a capacity for impact and engagement“ - I have already seen this occur

Emmet Fox (2016-05-02 13:47:14)
Also reminds me of the emerging external threats to relevant autonomy of university field that Bourdieu talks about in Homo Academicus from journalistic popularity, with some academics latching on to this new principle of legitimacy for the definition of the intellectual. And also the emerging dynamic between intellectual journalists and journalist intellectuals.

Mark Carrigan (2016-05-05 13:31:50)
must read that

What does integrity mean in a digital age? Self-branding, promotion and why Mark Zuckerberg probably doesn’t like you (2016-05-02 08:00)
As a teenager I was captivated by Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. I’d enjoyed fiction prior to this but there was a certain quality to the story that left it lodged in my mind long after I read it. Looking back on this much later, it’s hard to pinpoint exactly what that quality was, though I think one of the features that resonated so strongly with me was the intensely memorable character of Atticus Finch (see below). One particular line that stuck in my mind for years has been Miss Maudie’s praise for Atticus Finch as being ‘the same in his house as he is on the public streets’. The plausibility of the politics underlying this seems less obvious to me in hindsight, but I can easily see how this characterisation captured the attention of my impressionable teenage self. It’s such a clear account of what’s taken to be a virtuous character trait, treating all people the same in all circumstances, and presenting a consistent identity to the world under all conditions. My ageing copy proclaims over 30 million sales, a number which has presumably only grown since I bought it as a high school student. Coupled with the fact that it was required reading in UK high schools, as well as I imagine in the United States, it seems likely there were many others similarly taken with this portrayal of integrity as a matter of being ‘the same in the house as on the public streets’. But was Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook founder and CEO, among them? After all he famously claimed that ‘[h]aving two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity’ when defending Facebook’s restriction of users to their real identities. Leaving aside the evidence that neither Facebook, nor Zuckerberg himself, live up to these lofty standards of integrity, it’s worth contemplating this particular view of identity which has been proving so influential within the digital sphere, to the extent that it is built into many of the platforms themselves.
If ‘having two identities’ constitutes a ‘lack of integrity’, it must be important to act in ways which ensure consistency between your behaviour ‘in your house’ and ‘on the public street’. But in practice this takes work. As the ethnographer Alice Marwick points out in her Status Update, the practical requirement of ‘being authentic’ is emotional labour and a lot of it. As she goes on to write, ‘authenticity is judged over time, in that people’s authenticity is determined by comparing their current actions against their past for consistency’. This already begins to sound rather tiring, not least of all because there are particular qualities of social media (the persistence, visibility and searchability of online content) that make it much easier for people to compare past actions and present behaviour to evaluate your integrity than would have been the case for Atticus Finch. Imagine the same dynamic playing out in the present day and Miss Maudie’s dismay upon, say, discovering that Atticus Finch has an additional existence as a prolific troll on YouTube comments threads.

When considered in personal and political terms, the desirability of Zuckerberg’s ideal soon appears questionable. As the sociologist Nathan Jurgenson observes, ‘we know that anonymity is also used by the most vulnerable and least powerful’. It is easy for people to have integrity in Zuckerberg’s sense when they’re in a position of power and their ‘real’ identity enjoys widespread social acceptance. Particularly when we consider how authoritarian governments around the world are coming to use social media, the peculiarly self-righteous way in which this policy of real identities is enforced begins to look rather unseemly. Even within a more liberal climate, this policy causes profound problems for anyone who needs to keep part of their life from those around them, leading PJ Rey to ask if social media have led us to build a society without closets? As someone who has studied the sociology of sexuality, the implications for queer youth are the most obvious to me, but it’s not hard to think of other groups for whom the need to maintain two identities can be a necessity of getting by as opposed to what Zuckerberg sees as a lack of integrity.

But what about in the professional sphere? Marwick’s wonderful ethnography, Status Update, of the tech scene in Silicon Valley shone a spotlight on the exhausting labour necessary to ensure the appearance of ‘integrity’ in such a media-dominated world. Entire careers and vast libraries have been built to cater to the anxieties created by this demand, with the LinkedIn founder Reed Hoffman’s The Start-Up of You representing one of the most prominent
expressions of this trend. It’s a fascinating and strange book, which I began to read out of a sense of morbid curiosity but was unable to persist with, providing a jarring insight into the developing norms of the professional world within which it has been studied intensively. Unfortunately what was once limited to Silicon Valley has long since spread beyond it – something which Marwick attributes in part to the capacity of social media to facilitate such branding because it simply wasn’t possible in any meaningful sense until there was widespread access to the communicative possibilities it affords. As Marwick writes, ‘[b]efore the internet, a prospective self-brander was limited to putting up fliers at grocery stores, knocking on neighbours’ doors, buying advertisements in the local paper, or attending potentially inaccessible industry-only events’ (pg 185: 185). The other part of the story is the growing armies of freelancers, contractors and consultants for whom this self-promotional activity is a necessary step for winning clients. While some have seen this in an optimistic light, heralding the dawn of a ‘Free Agent Nation’, the reality is considerably more ambivalent. This self-branding activity can involve vast amounts of unpaid work likely motivated by the desire to escape economic redundancy, current or potential.

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/iZkZ36iU4B0

Gender, class and the politics of ‘privacy’ (2016-05-03 08:00)

A [1]wonderful article by Lisa Mckenzie reflecting on the exposures of the Panama Papers in terms of the broader gendered and classed politics of privacy:

Working-class single mums claiming benefits will be asked very personal questions about what for anyone else would be private matters. They have to disclose the name of the child’s father, his address, where he works, so that the Child Support Agency can chase him up. If you cannot answer these questions (without good reason) your benefits are stopped. Benefit officials may look into your garden and check your washing line doesn’t have any men’s clothes on it, or use credit checks to see who may or may not be living at your address.

The moral argument for this treatment is that if you are taking public money you have to be open and accountable, so there can be no privacy if you are a poor woman. But taking public money or depriving the rest of us of public money by creating shell companies in faraway sunny places like the Bahamas or Panama? That’s different – it means you have good “tax management”, aspiration, and you are clearly a high achiever.


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Call for Papers: ‘Consuming Gender’ (2016-05-04 08:00)

Call for Papers: ‘Consuming Gender’

This special issue of Assuming Gender – an online, peer-reviewed academic journal from Cardiff University – seeks to explore the way gender is both presented and consumed through popular media and advertising. As Ann Herrmann points out in the article ‘Shopping for Identities’, commodities ‘are characterised by their dual nature: material composition and symbolic meaning’ (Herrmann 2002: 539). Consumer culture plays a significant role in constructing valid (and normative) identity categories with which consumers are encouraged to identify.

Scholars as diverse as Americus Reed, Laura C. Nelson, and Henry Jenkins have theorised the ways in which identity and consumer culture are intertwined. Reed, for example, claims in ‘Activating the Self-Importance of Consumer Selves’ that ‘[s]ocial identities are mental representations that can become a basic part of how consumers view themselves’ (Reed 2004: 286). In a later article on ‘Identity-Based Consumer Behaviour’, Reed and others use the example of athletics to illustrate their point: ‘if consumers view themselves as “athletes”, they are likely to behave in ways that are consistent with what it means to “be” an athlete’ (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni and Warlop 2002: 310). Consumption thus becomes defined by identity, and identity becomes defined by consumption.

While the construction of identities based on athleticism seems relatively benign, the case quickly becomes more complicated when consumer identities are racially, economically, or sexually coded. In addition to delineating the borders between various interest groups, consumer culture plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining binary identity distinctions (male/female, gay/straight, black/white), undermining the validity of those identifying across or in-between one or more categories, or who refuse categorisation at all. Those identities not classified as valid consumer groups are not seen as valid identities at all.

For this special issue of Assuming Gender, we invite articles that focus specifically on the idea of ‘Consuming Gender’. How has consumer culture constructed (and how has it been constructed by) gender through the ages?

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Consuming gender/gendered consumption
- Historical contexts of gendered consumption
- Feminist/postfeminist approaches to consumption
- Consumption and intersectionality
- Queer consumption
• Media constructions of (gendered) consumer identities

• Post/colonialism and gendered consumption

Please send a proposal of roughly 500 words to Megen de Bruin-Molé, Akira Suwa and Daný van Dam at [gender@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:gender@cardiff.ac.uk) under the subject line 'CFP Consuming Gender', including your name, e-mail institutional affiliation (if any), and a biographical note (100 words maximum). We welcome papers from scholars of all backgrounds, disciplines, and career stages. The deadline for proposals is 16 October, 2016, and completed papers of 5000 to 8000 words will be expected no later than 16 April, 2017. Assuming Gender is an electronic journal dedicated to the timely analysis of constructions of gendered texts, practices, and subjectivities. This journal seeks to continue and shift debates on how gender is problematized in contemporary discourses as well as participate in the dialogue and tensions that maintain the urgency of such conversations. Prior issues can be viewed on [www.assuminggender.com](http://www.assuminggender.com/).
The London Radical Book Fair at Goldsmiths, this Saturday 7th May (2016-05-05 13:40)

Radical booksellers, publishers, artists and activists of all stripes are setting up in the Great Hall at Goldsmiths University to host the 4th London Radical Bookfair.

With over 130 exhibitors and 20 guest speakers, this will be a unique gathering of progressive readers, thinkers and doers, in a celebration of radical publishing and politics.

The free event is organised by the Alliance of Radical Booksellers (ARB), which formed in 2011 to raise awareness of the radical book trade. The fair provides an annual opportunity to bring Britain’s radical booksellers together to meet in person with publishers and the reading public.

And it’s also an opportunity for us to host award ceremonies for the ARB’s two annual book prizes — the Bread and Roses Award for Radical Publishing and the Little Rebels Children’s Book Award. Shortlisted authors from the two
awards will give talks and participate in panel discussions throughout the day.

As in previous years, we’ll be showcasing the depth and breadth of radical publishing. While there are currently other book fairs dedicated to progressive titles, they tend to focus on tightly defined political traditions. The aim of the London Radical Bookfair is to be a broad church that brings together these traditions and make them accessible to a wider audience.

This year’s bookfair is supported by the Centre for Cultural Studies, with the Departments of English and Comparative Literature, Media and Communications, Politics and International Relations, Sociology, Visual Culture, and Goldsmiths Press. Goldsmiths, University of London. [1]http://www.gold.ac.uk/


1. http://www.gold.ac.uk/
2. https://londonradicalbookfair.wordpress.com/about/

Crafting an online identity (2016-05-06 08:00)

The powerful thing about telling a story is that it gets beyond the level of simply listing facts about yourself. Not that there’s anything wrong with this; in a way it’s like a story because you choose which facts you present and the order in which you present them. But telling a story places them in a wider context, giving meaning and direction to things which people come to know about you. Nonetheless, listing facts is important. Yet what sort of facts are likely to be relevant for these purposes? Here are some suggestions:
• Your institutional affiliation
• Your research interests
• Other accounts you’re involved with
• Your personal interests
• Hashtags you contribute to
• An institutional disclaimer
• An additional website

Read more in [1]Social Media for Academics

Sustaining your focus throughout the working day (2016-05-07 08:00)

An extract from [1]Social Media for Academics

In recent years we’ve seen the notion of ‘internet addiction’ enter the popular consciousness. As a self-description it’s sometimes invoked facetiously, sometimes desperately and occasionally in a way which combines the two. It would be silly for me to try and take a stance on such a complex subject here. So I’ll restrict myself to suggesting that we should be cautious about this term given a wider context in which the medicalisation of everyday life is rapidly intensifying. Having got that out of the way, let’s turn to an experience which will be familiar to most: finding yourself lost in a repetitive cycle of clicking from web page to web page, checking your e-mail every couple of minutes or passively skimming through a Twitter feed while paying little attention to what you’re reading in it. These are those times when what social media companies describe as ‘thumb stopping’ (ceasing your endless scroll in order to focus on something you’ve chosen as worthy of attention) becomes unlikely and you just keep on skimming in an increasingly detached way.
The popular comedy Portlandia describes this as a ‘technology loop’ – being caught in a frenzied cycle of overstimulation, unable to drag oneself away from the internet and the torrent of interesting things to do, read and watch which it’s impossible for any one person to keep up with. The political theorist Jodi Dean in *Blog Theory* describes this as getting ‘stuck doing the same thing over and over again because this doing produces enjoyment. Post. Post. Post. Click. Click. Click’. It’s not necessary to accept the psychoanalytic ideas underpinning Dean’s account to recognise the experience she describes. I found myself doing it on Facebook a few minutes ago before a track change on the music I have playing in the background jolted me back into attention and reminded me that I’m supposed to be writing a chapter about sustaining your focus in an age of social media. The more general problem is a distractedness produced by digital technology in an age of informational abundance. The issue here is not only the multiplication of distractions, it’s also the sheer scale of what we’re missing out on and our growing awareness of all the other things we could and perhaps should be doing.

The most obvious way to prevent this is simply to recognise that you’re doing it. Putting a name to the experience makes it easy to identify what you’re doing and so help you drag yourself out of an impending technology loop. If you find yourself drifting into such a state repeatedly, even as you pull yourself out each time, perhaps it’s worth taking a break or at least shifting to a different activity? The website[3]www.donothingfor2minutes.com offers a helpful antidote to the frenzied hyperactivity which characterises the technology loop. There are also more preventative means which can be taken: using tools like Anti-Social and Freedom or switching off the WiFi if you’re having this problem at home (it’s presumably not feasible to do this at a coffee shop or in an office but I must admit I’ve never tried). More indirectly, it can help to minimise distractions by turning off pop-up notifications (pop up e-mail alerts are effectively designed to fracture your focus) and maybe isolating your social media use to another device such as writing on your laptop and only using Twitter on your smart phone. Alex Pang’s *Distraction Addiction* offers a really thorough discussion of the range of tools available for these purposes, as well as a philosophy of ‘contemplative computing’ in terms of which we can understand their utility.

All these suggestions are basically preventative though. This problem can be tackled in a different way by thinking about how you approach your work. Do you have a strategy for managing your time and attention? One
such strategy can be seen in the Pomodoro Technique, a popular working method which is predicated on the understanding that ‘taking short, scheduled breaks while working eliminates the “running on fumes” feeling you get when you’ve pushed yourself too hard’. It involves working on a larger task through small chunks of intense work punctuated by repeated breaks: you work intensively for a set period of time, take a break and then do another chunk of work. Any extraneous tasks, whether connected to your present focus or something else entirely, should be recorded on a piece of paper before you immediately return to the task at hand. Its developer Francesco Cirillo suggests 25 minute-long sessions of work followed by 5 minute-long breaks.

However these are optional really, as is the tomato-shaped timer which he sells via his website (though I must admit writing this has left me tempted to finally buy one of these). There are many apps which can do the same thing and which have the advantage of recording your results in a way that can be useful for measuring your own productivity as well as filling out timesheets if necessary. The idea of this is to minimise task interruption and to ensure frequent breaks to prevent the depletion of attentional energy. This sounds deceptively easy but it’s remarkable how easy it is to get distracted in the space of 25 minutes.

Committing to working for a specific period of time helps heighten your awareness of all the distraction events which intervene and can so chronically drag your attention away from the task at hand: committing to not checking your e-mails for 25 minutes helps you notice those often imperceptible whims arising – ‘I’ll just check my e-mails quickly and see if I’ve got a response from earlier’. This point holds for other forms of distraction as well but it would be a mistake to overlook e-mail given the concerns of this chapter. We don’t tend to think of e-mail as social media. It’s certainly not an example of what used to be called web 2.0 before that term largely gave way to that of social media. But in the broader sense addressed in this book of media that are social then e-mail surely falls into this category. It’s also a pervasive source of stress and concern across the academy, as Ros Gill points out in her insightful account of the ‘hidden injuries’ of the contemporary academy:

‘Addiction’ metaphors suffuse academics’ talk of their relationship to e-mail, even as they report such high levels of anxiety that they feel they have to check e-mail first thing in the morning and last thing at night, and in which time away (on sick leave, on holiday) generates fears of what might be lurking in the inbox when they return. Again, inventive ‘strategies’ abound for keeping such anxiety at bay e.g. putting on your ‘out of office’ reply when you are actually in the office.

However, it is not only the always-on culture of e-mails that has led to the marked intensification of our workloads and the almost constant experience of high levels of stress. In fact it is paradoxical, given how much time we spend on it, that e-mail is mostly experienced as what stops us getting on with our ‘real’ work.

I’ve tried to clear my inbox on a daily basis simply because it largely removes the stress from the process. I recognise this won’t be possible for everyone but I’d also maintain it’s nowhere near as unfeasible for many people as might first seem to be the case. The time spent avoiding e-mail and being stressed out by e-mail is time that could be spent getting it out of the way in one go. I don’t recall it ever taking me more than an hour to entirely clear my inbox, even if this can be quite dispiriting when it immediately leads to a rapid expansion of my to-do list. It works most effectively when I do e-mail first thing in the morning. Replies are the exception rather than the rule before 8am, whereas trying to clear my inbox in the middle of the day can produce despair as replies and new e-mails hurtle into my inbox faster than I can clear the backlog. The description of the ‘stupid e-mail ritual’ offered by the protagonist of Cory Doctorow’s novel Homelandis quite apt: ‘Download download download. Spam spam spam. Delete delete delete’. I find it hard to read about things like e-mail apnoea – breath-holding or shallow breathing associated with checking e-mail – without wondering about the psychosocial costs of our communications system. The stress caused by e-mail is so widely recognised as to make discussion of it a cliché. But it’s something which
crops up time and time again, at least if you make a habit of reading academics blogging about academic life.

One final useful suggestion comes from the social media scholar danah boyd (2011) who describes how she takes an occasional e-mail sabbatical in order to cope with its intrinsically Sisyphean nature. While many people can step back from social media (though not everyone! – see the Potential Pitfalls box above), it’s far more difficult to do this with e-mail. This is getting worse because, as [7]Pat Thompson suggests, the e-mail auto-responder is becoming pretty useless in the contemporary academy. Being ‘out of office’ while retaining internet access means continuing to respond to e-mails or watching them build up in a way which quickly undermines any of the potential benefits of ‘disconnection’. There are other strategies it’s possible to adopt: I recently bought a pay-as-you-go phone for when I really want to get away from the internet, and have sometimes deleted the mail settings on my iPhone when I want to disconnect but nonetheless retain the capacity to consult Google Maps when, as so often happens, I get lost on my way somewhere.

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/Pe-zq4bFPFU?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
6. https://lindastone.net/2014/11/24/are-you-breathing-do-you-have-email-apnea/

juliehankin (2016-05-07 12:15:06)
I found Cal Newport’s book Deep Work extremely thought provoking with regard to this

Kriss (2017-02-21 22:12:02)
Another solution that works for me (but only for certain kinds of work) - print everything out, go and sit in a room without a computer or phone.

The Social Ontology of Law, Politics, and Human Rights (2016-05-07 18:15)

The Social Ontology of Law, Politics, and Human Rights

Friday 20th May, 2016
St. Cross Room, St. Cross College
University of Oxford

Speakers:
Dr. Maria Cahill (UCC)
Prof. Christian List (LSE)
Prof. Andrea Sangiovanni (KCL)
Dr. Laura Valentini (LSE)

For more info contact: samuel.bruce@stx.ox.ac.uk
The 7th ESRC Research Methods Festival (2016-05-07 18:18)

The 7th ESRC Research Methods Festival (RMF) is a great opportunity for everyone interested in understanding the numerous, tangled and ever-changing ways of looking at the world from social science perspectives. Every two years the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) organises this three-day event, full of seminars, activities and lively discussions about established and new methods used in social science research.

Each Festival attracts visitors from academia, government, charity and private sectors, hosts a wide range of speakers and covers interesting methodological themes relevant to both emerging and established researchers. This year the Festival moves from Oxford to another beautiful historical city. The 2016 RMF will be held at the University of Bath from 5th to 7th July 2016. The main themes are: international knowledge exchange, cohort and longitudinal methods, analysis of complex data sets, pedagogy of methods, careers and skills development.

The international knowledge exchange theme sees expert social researchers from Africa, South and North America, Australasia and across Europe joining us at the Festival to discuss cutting-edge methodological developments. World leading international speakers will participate in sessions addressing, amongst other topical subjects: researching comparative urbanism, studying elites in Africa and achieving rigour through face to face surveys.

The cohort and longitudinal methods theme tackles methodological issues in collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data from individuals and households over time. Issues covered include the methodological challenges in administrative data linkage and in comparing data across and within longitudinal studies, combining social science and molecular genetic research to examine inequality and the life course, and the age, period and cohort problem.

Sessions in the analysis of complex data sets theme address a range of methods for tackling complex forms of data with linked and time dependent structures and associated issues. These include projects from the NCRM's own research programme such as methods for the assessment of quality of data collection in sample surveys, working across qualitative longitudinal studies, accounting for informative item nonresponse in biomarkers, and the anatomy of disclosure risk in linked population data.

The pedagogy of methods theme includes sessions that provide insight into the teaching and learning of advanced social science research methods. Find out whether statistics anxiety is a convenient myth, and consider the pedagogical underpinnings of learning about social science research methods.

The career and skills development theme provides opportunities for doctoral, early career and more experienced researchers to find out about new methods, and develop their methods and communication skills. The ever-popular 'What is...?' sessions will cover diary methods, action research, discrete choice experiments, policy evaluation, biosocial research, statistical eBook, mobile methods, big data, and mass observation. Festival participants will also be able work on honing their skills in reading and writing critically, expanding their methodological comfort zone, disseminating their research, and developing effective research proposals, as well as to attend an interactive workshop on making the most of media.

The Festival will also welcome distinguished keynote speakers, setting the tone for the event. Professor Jane Elliott (Chief Executive of ESRC) will talk about bridging the qualitative—quantitative divide in our approaches to ‘big data’. Professor Andrew Gelman (Columbia University) will consider whether statistics can dig its way out of the
paradoxical hole of creating a sense of certainty where none should exist. And Professor Emeritus Aaron Cicourel (University of California) will be in conversation with Professor Malcolm Williams (Cardiff) and other colleagues about the continuing challenges and relevance of arguments he first advanced in his influential book 'Method and Measurement in Sociology' (1964).

The 'festival' mood will be enhanced by a range of social activities such as PhD student poster exhibition, Festival reception, film screening and tours in the city of Bath.

Have a look at the full programme and book your tickets at www.ncrm.ac.uk/RMF2016.

Where Are We Now? Temporalities of Globalisation

Third Annual ACGS Conference

Where Are We Now? Temporalities of Globalisation

Amsterdam, 15-16 December 2016

Confirmed speakers: Amy Allen (Pennsylvania State University), Louise Amoore (Durham University), Rolando Vazquez (Utrecht University)

Extended deadline for abstracts: 1 June 2016

Globalisation is often seen as a single process, unfolding in a single timeframe that serves as a universal measure. This synchronic, or perhaps better still, monochronic conception of globalisation's temporality creates problematic distinctions between the 'contemporary' and the 'archaic', between the 'modern' and the 'traditional' and between globalisation's GMT and cultures, subjects and areas that are seen to remain out of time. Such a vision of the temporality of globalisation, and its underlying 'denial of coevalness' (Johannes Fabian), entails a perpetuation of the dominant narrative of modernisation and modernity as progress and temporal advance, as the integration (or lack thereof) in the universalising timeframe of the contemporary (Amy Allen). Today, we witness many cultural practices that challenge, refute or problematise this narrative: from new forms of cultural translation (including a validation of the untranslatable) and the proliferation of decolonial altermodernities to the emergence of Euro-American populist nostalgia; from accelerationism and hyper-temporalities (such as that of climate change), to renewed appraisals of slowness and reflection on the end of temporality (Fredric Jameson).

The 2016 Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies conference highlights the urgency to reconsider globalisation from the perspective of today's multiple temporalities. We want to explore new conceptualisations of the multiple, differentiated temporalities of globalisation. What if still dominant representations of globalisation as an unfolding process - an agent of sorts that is alternatively embraced, resisted, missed out on; that homogenises or pluralises - are simply inadequate to grasp what we refer to as globalisation today? We call for contributions that investigate globalisation as the simultaneity of different and radically divergent temporalities. Emerging decolonial temporalities (Walter Mignolo), Euro-American populist withdrawal, re-emerging imperialisms (U.S., Europe, Russia, Middle East, China), the project of de-imperialisation, de-Cold War and de-colonisation (Chen Kuan-Hsing), 24/7 neo-capitalism (Jonathan Crary), the hyper-temporality of climate change, imperial ruination (Ann Laura Stoler), the
exclusion of states and regions (i.e. Africa, Greece) from the rhythms of neoliberal capitalism (Maurizio Lazzarato), high-speed financial trading, revelations of global economic warfare, aging workforces (Europe, Japan): all these examples demonstrate that globalisation, in its present, singular tense, no longer covers our fractured and multi-temporal present.

We invite theoretical and empirical interventions to analyse the ways in which globalisation's manifold temporalities – and their problematization – appear in the socio-cultural realm: from decolonial cinema and novels flaunting their untranslatability to the way news and social media 'chase' each other; from the use of extreme duration in theatre and contemporary art and the fashionability of yoga classes and mindfulness to the global boom in plastic surgery and expressions of imperial nostalgia; from the seeming endlessness of crisis to regressive and progressive attempts to find a 'way out of here'.

The 2016 ACGS conference welcomes papers that explore the complexity and radical heterogeneity of today's planetary temporalities. Possible topics include:

- decolonial temporalities
- cultural translation and untranslatability
- out-of-timeness and 'backward' peripheries within globalised economic spheres (i.e. the Greek crisis, North Korea, Belarus)
- differences between and intersections of urban/rural temporalities
- chronotopias, from the Western metropolitan yearning for 'slowness' to dreams of fully automated market transactions
- affective temporalities, i.e. burn-out, exhaustion, YOLO/FOLO, things-to-do-before-you-die/bucket lists
- ecology: the hyper-temporality of climate change
- the temporal dimensions of neo-imperialisms, for example the Ukraine crisis, Euro-American interference in the Middle East
- debris of empire, imperial ruinations
- cycles and crisis: social, financial, personal
- discourses of contemporaneity, i.e. the managerial/neoliberal rhetoric of 'this is no longer of today'
- utopias of timelessness, i.e. the Islamic State, populism, communism
- theories and representations of end times, i.e. biological extinction, the end of capitalism, the end of the welfare state, eschatological imaginaries in popular culture
- temporalities of precarity (flexibility, just-in-time, absent futures)
- the withering away of 'the future' as universal telos in culture and theory
- entropy in culture, economy and ecology
- temporalities of security (pre-emption and precaution)
- uneven development and creative destruction
- homogenisation of time as effect and condition of the logic of capital

Please submit an abstract (200-300 words) and short bio (max. 100 words) by 1 June 2016 to [1]acgs-fgw@uva.nl. Notice of acceptance will be given by 15 June 2016. Conference fee: 50 Euros (25 Euros for PhD students). Conference dinner: 25 Euros.

Organisers: Joost de Bloois, Marieke de Goede, Yolande Jansen, Jeroen de Kloet, Esther Peeren, Kati Röttger.


Warwick University June 13th-14th - [1]abstract submission deadline May 13th

Key Notes:

Kathryn Yusoff (Queen Mary) ‘Geopower: biopolitics and matter after life’
Celia Lury (Warwick) ‘Better than you: a topological imaginary’

Call for Papers:

Biopolitical Matters: What is biopolitics today? What are its discontents? Is there life after biopolitics?

The Authority & Political Technologies (APT) network at Warwick aims to foster and support work in the critical social sciences that is informed by Foucauldian, Deleuzian and cultural-theory perspectives. In particular we are interested in work that carries forwards these traditions, but which takes seriously the arguments concerning their failure to speak to the ethical and political demands of the present; that is to say work that is striving to refigure and reinvent the ethical and political dimension of these perspectives for contemporary problematics.

In this our second biannual symposium we address transformations in what constitutes ‘biopolitical matters’ – including changing practices of how forms of life are understood, measured, hierarchized, produced and controlled - and their relevance in contemporary theoretical and political debate. We invite papers that explore plural and divergent accounts of biopolitics, from its original treatment by Michel Foucault, through its expanded use in an array of settings to address the merging of life and politics, to contemporary approaches that question the ‘bio’ as the frame of politics. This includes new regimes of police and security; environmental catastrophe in the Anthropocene, and new questions about ‘big data’ and its increasingly powerful behaviouralism. We encourage submissions from a range of disciplines including, but not limited to, sociology, politics, philosophy, law, history, geography, cultural
studies and anthropology. In addition to standard conference papers we welcome proposals for panel discussions, films, exhibits and performance.

The deadline to submit proposals is Friday 13th May. Please follow this link to submit an abstract.

For further info and updates please see the symposium website.

Organisers: Illan Wall, Amy Hinterberger & Claire Blencowe.

Supported by the Institute for Advanced Studies, Sociology, Law and the Social Theory Centre University of Warwick.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2016/submission/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2016/submission/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/authorityandpoliticaltechnologies/apt2016/submission/


Digital Health/Digital Capitalism on 4th July 2016 at Leeds Beckett University. Tickets are £20 and can be purchased here:
[1]http://onlinestore.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/browse/extra_info.asp?compid=1&modid=2&deptid=4&catid=2&prodid=490 Details are below. Please contact Chris Till c.till@leedsbeckett for more info. Plenary speakers Nick Fox – Professor of Sociology, The University of Sheffield ‘The micropolitical economy of posthuman health’ Graham Scambler – Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University College London ‘Digital sociology or sociology of the digital? A case study on health.’ Digital technologies have had a profound impact on the ways in which people live their lives, relate to one another and think about themselves and their capacities. This event will bring together scholars who are interested in the impacts of the digital on ideas and practices of health and the workings of capitalist economies and how the two come together. The generation and management of vast amounts of health data has been enabled through digital means. In particular this has enabled fine grained analysis of particular types and groups of people in relation to a diversity of factors. Private and profit making enterprises have become increasingly involved with personal health data through partnerships with health services and the generation of new kinds of data through commercial devices apps and websites. Digital capitalism has produced new approaches to work and profit generation. Human bodies are now intensively digitised due to the (self) tracking and monitoring conducted by commercial enterprises. New digital ways of working have freed some workers from the office while increasing the amount of time and attention they are expected to dedicate to work tasks and the length of time spent sedentary. The productivity and activity levels of some workers are closely monitored leading to increasing physical and psychological stress. Papers ‘Citizen Science in Biomedicine in Midstream’ - Lorenzo Del Savio, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel ‘Integrated Care and Collaborative Competition: exploring the limits of digital healthcare’ - Lynne Pettinger, University of Warwick; Ewen Speed, University of Essex; Andrew Goffey, University of Nottingham ‘In what ways does the drive towards digital health increase the potential for a shift from public to private provision?’ - Caroline Molloy openDemocracy ‘Disruptive innovation in digitally-enabled medical research. Research ethics, privacy and power’ - Tamar Sharon, Maastricht University ‘Autonomy, Automation and Care for the Self: Temporalities of Health in Digital Capitalism’ - Dr David Hill,
Help support @DiscoverSoc (2016-05-08 08:00)

Dear Colleague,

I hope that you have come across Discover Society the online magazine which publishes pieces based on social science research for a wide audience - you may even have written for us - but if not do check it out at [1]discoversociety.org

As Editors we are committed ensuring that the magazine continues to be free at the point of access and to keeping our costs low, but we want to develop the magazine further and need to cover the costs of doing so.

Discover Society is approaching its third anniversary and is definitely a success – with over 25,000 hits on the site every month, close to 9,000 followers on Twitter, and a steady stream of people wanting to write pieces. If you enjoy Discover Society/ think it is useful for getting sociological research out there and you would like to help it to flourish please support it (either individually or as a Department) by becoming a ‘Friend of Discover Society’ and donating a small amount (or larger if you like!).

Your support would mean that we could:

- Fund the increasing costs of hosting and maintaining the website
- Fund the continuation of the Discover Society Internship
- Host Discover Society Lectures and other events to increase the reach of the magazine and the impact of the contributions
- Increase our support for making social science research more accessible

If you would like to help us to do these things, and more, please support the magazine by becoming a Friend of Discover Society via the Donate button on the front page at [2]discoversociety.org.

All good wishes

Sue Scott
John Holmwood
Gurminder K Bhambra
“Please, sir, may I go home?” (2016-05-09 08:00)

An interesting snippet from Losing The Signal, by Jacquie McNish and Sean Silcoff, concerning the lengths to which overzealous managers would go during the early days of Research In Motion. From pg 39:

One RIM manager became so obsessed with deadlines he issued an edict requiring engineers to ask permission before leaving at night. Lazaridis reversed the decree, but his company’s aggressive, need-it-yesterday approach fostered what would become a robust cynicism. “It got to the point that when schedules were made up I didn’t bother to read them,” says Wandel. “They were so made up, a fantasy.”

While it’s nice this wasn’t enforced indefinitely, it’s nonetheless reflective of a peculiar culture of intensified work. The famous office perks of Google et al represent a domestication of this impulse: why would you want to go home when we’ve provided all these nice things for you? Add to that an element of self and social selection, such that only those willing to subordinate themselves in this way are likely to get there in the first place.

But what was once a peripheral phenomenon, confined to the run up to deadlines and struggling start ups, now defines the working culture of much of the tech industry. The managerial culture this breeds can be toxic, as illustrated by this [1]notorious op-ed about the ‘wage-slave attitude’ in game production:

A wage-slave attitude exhibits itself in several tragic ways. I’ve known a lot of stupid self-made millionaires — really, hundreds of them — and they’re usually young as well. I’m talking about kids who made some of the worst games you can imagine and got rich accidentally, working in their parent’s basement in the Florida Everglades. They make their first game, get rich, and they’re gone, never having attended a single networking event at the Game Developers Conference, done. Contrast the dozens and dozens of these kids with the many game industry veterans I know that have long storied resumes listing dozens of triple-A console titles they have “labored” on, who decry the long working hours they are expected to invest in the games they are employed to work on. These people are smarter, more experienced, more talented, better trained to produce amazing games and they’re still working for paychecks and whining about avoiding long crunch hours to finish big titles or about not being paid fairly by some big employer. Listening to them complain about it, you would they think that they are trapped in some disenfranchised third-world country forced to dig for blood diamonds to feed their families.

The Social and Cultural Politics of Debt – A Workshop at Keele University (2016-05-09 12:40)

The Social and Cultural Politics of Debt – A Workshop at Keele University

Wednesday, 18th May, 3pm-5.30pm (CM0.012)


Workshop Schedule

3pm-3.20pm: Mark Featherstone – Ecologies of Indebtedness

3.30pm-4.10pm: Mark Davis - Futureproof: The Cultural Politics of Indebtedness in Neoliberal Societies

4.20pm-5.00pm: Ole Bjerg – Debt Drive and Compulsive Money Creation

5.00-5.30pm: Questions and Answers


Steve Fuller on information overload (2016-05-10 08:00)

An [1] interesting talk by Steve Fuller on information overload. He starts with the academic context in which much of what’s published is not read, much of what’s read is not cited and yet academics are pressured to continually publish more. For whom is this a pathological condition? He argues that the implicit standpoint here is that of a decision maker i.e. this situation is pathological because it precludes the deployment of academic knowledge in informed decision making. Obesity metaphors obtain here, argues Fuller, because it’s a matter of having more information than you know what to do with, as opposed to more energy than you’re able to expand through activity.

The point he ends on is a really important one: is the concern for managing information actually one of managing free expression? Is the unstated problem one of there being too many authors? I assume he’s talking about this in relation solely to natural science, but I’m sure this can be generalised.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/sfuller/media/audio/infobesity_-_edinburgh_napier_-_15_apr_16.mp3
How to write essays for A Level Sociology exams (2016-05-11 08:00)

This is very much geared towards the specific format of A level exams in the United Kingdom but it might be useful for others:

Assess/Evaluate/Discuss the view...
To what extent are .......

On one hand...
For:

On the other hand...
Against

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/GrFLfVsJ578
Part Four: Evaluation

- The key to good evaluation is your ability to formulate critical questions about sociological arguments and perspectives.
- Try to formulate a list of questions/criteria that might help you to evaluate sociological theories.
June 21st, 10am to 5pm
The University of Warwick

This one day workshop is intended for those currently using or planning to use the morphogenetic approach in their research. In the first half of the workshop, Margaret Archer will give an overview of the morphogenetic approach and its development, as well as address conceptual and methodological questions that participants might have. In the second half of the workshop, there will be plenty of time to present work-in-progress or planned projects, get feedback and discuss with others who are doing similar work.

If you'd like to participate then please e-mail mark@markcarrigan.net with a brief biography and description of your project.
The Great Divide: Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss

The Sociological Review Annual Sociology Lecture

Friday May 20th 2016, 17.45-21.00

SOAS, University of London

This event is free but it is essential to register. To reserve a place, please email Jenny Thatcher [events@thesociologicalreview.com]
**Keynote:** Professor Éric Fassin (Université Paris-8)

**Discussants:** Professor Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick, UK and Linnaeus University, Sweden) and Dr Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University)

Professor [1]Éric Fassin will bring together the disciplines of anthropology and sociology to demonstrate how the boundaries that were drawn around them were part of an academic struggle for power in which the term ‘race’ and the politics of decolonization were central to the war of disciplinary position.

**The Great Divide:**

**Sociology, Anthropology, and Race in France since Lévi-Strauss**

Claude Lévi-Strauss published the *Elementary Structures of Kinship* in 1949 as a sociologist. Only in 1950 was he to appropriate the term “anthropology” in his introduction to the posthumous edited volume of essays by Marcel Mauss, entitled *Sociologie et anthropologie*. The French sociological tradition did not distinguish between the two disciplines; on the contrary, Émile Durkheim and his heirs distanced themselves from an “anthropology” that was associated with race during the first half of the century. In order to reclaim this label, and thus institute himself as the founding father of French anthropology, Lévi-Strauss could not merely rely on American cultural anthropology; he had to erase the racial legacy of the French tradition. This was accomplished in his 1952 UNESCO pamphlet "Race and History". It was a powerful move in the wake of World War Two, especially from one who had to flee Nazi persecutions against Jews. But this was also the eve of decolonization – at a time when Georges Balandier analyzed the “colonial situation” as a sociologist, while Michel Leiris and Aimé Césaire denounced the politics of race in the French empire. Today's French work on race has to revisit this great divide of the 1950s, not only between anthropology and sociology, but also between the social sciences and race.

**About Éric Fassin**

After teaching in the United States from 1987 to 1994 (at Brandeis University and New York University), and at the École normale supérieure in Paris from 1994 to 2012, Éric Fassin is now a professor of sociology in the Political Science Department and co-chair of the Gender Studies Department at Paris 8 University. He is a founding member of the new Laboratoire d’études de genre et de sexualité – Research Center on Gender and Sexuality Studies (LEGS, CNRS / Paris 8 / Paris 10). His work focuses on contemporary sexual and racial politics, including immigration issues, in France, in Europe, and in the United States – often in a comparative perspective. He is frequently involved in the
French public debates on issues his work addresses – from same-sex marriage and gender parity to the politics and policies of immigration and race, but also on the evolution of the left.


Please note that tickets are strictly limited. Please give sufficient notice of cancellation.

1. [https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-fassin/blog](https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-fassin/blog)

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**Book Review: Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education (Knowles & Lander, 2011)**

reviewed by Sadia Habib

[1] *Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education*

by Gianna Knowles and Vini Lander (Sage, 2011)

Intentional and unintentional racism is very much still a part of today’s society experienced by people of colour in everyday situations and through structural/institutional inequalities, even if some politicians and media commentators attempt to project an image of a post-racial world. Educational guides are needed now more than ever to help new teachers to reflect and act upon stereotypes, inequalities and discriminations encountered by their students. This book, [2] *Diversity, Equality and Achievement in Education*, focuses on the significance of schools and teachers learning about student diversities, identities and differences in order to ensure students are reaching their potential and progressing in education.
As well as discussing the various old and new racisms relevant to schooling and education - including stereotypes and assumptions about Gypsy, Roma, Traveller students, and refugee and asylum seeker students - the book also usefully provides educationalists with insight into the identities and diversities that matter when teaching looked-after children, also known as Children in Care (CiC), as well as issues of gender, social class and disabilities. The increasing policy emphasis on inclusion in the last two decades, Knowles argues, has brought great benefits to students and schools. Lander highlights that intersectionality means that social categories, for example gender, need to be considered in conjunction with other social differences and social identities, such as class or race/ethnicity.

The chapter on ‘Enabling Equality and Achievement for Children with Disability’ informs the reader about the marginalisation and bullying encountered by disabled young people, and encourages the reader to critically examine school policies regarding students with disabilities and develop ways to ensure learning is personalised to help the students to participate confidently in education: ‘... it can be very tempting to plan and organize something for children that we believe they will find motivating and interesting’, thus it is better and ‘can be a very illuminating experience to talk to children about what they do actually find interesting about their learning and in what ways they think it could be even more stimulating’ (p146).

Particularly poignant is Lander’s chapter on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller students – ‘Living on the Margins’ – which outlines a socio-historical perspective on these distinct social groups who come to be homogenised through policy and political discourses. Lander reveals powerful details about the origins of these groups, and explains more about the stereotypes, assumptions and prejudices that lead to their mistreatment and suffering in contemporary society, thus showing the reader the necessity of representing their voices. Lander has also written a chapter on the significance of hearing the narratives of refugee and asylum seeker children – ‘to develop a nuanced concept of the children that are part of this group and to begin to understand that their individual stories will illuminate their fears, hopes and needs’ (p123). In the further reading list, Lander includes[3] Benjamin Zephaniah’s Refugee Boy, a novel which I found resonated with the multicultural school students I taught in London.[4] I have written at length about the emotional and social benefits of exploring Refugee Boy with school students.

Knowles' chapter on looked-after children, also known as Children in Care (CiC), explores themes of attachment, loss and resilience. Intersectionality matters again, as these young people will have individual and unique experiences according to their gender, and even whether they also have a refugee or asylum seeker status. Thus we can read the chapters in this book in conjunction with one another, for the advice is not discrete, but interweaves through all the chapters to stress the need for educationalists to understand more about students’ intersecting identities. For example, we might also consider the shifting social class experiences of refugee and asylum seeker students who might once have experienced a middle class lifestyle before they embarked upon their extremely difficult and disturbing journeys, eventually arriving in the UK to seek sanctuary. Thus, how would their previous and new encounters impact upon their identities, belongings and achievements in education?

The authors have helpfully provided engaging, detailed and powerful case studies, interesting discussion points and extra activities to allow readers to ponder over key themes. These additional study sections also enable readers to personalise the insights about diversity and inclusion, and make them relevant to their own experiences and observations of education. Some of the activities, in my view, could be modified by trainee teachers to use with their own classes of students when exploring identity and diversity in lessons. The reading lists and website lists in different chapters also provide helpful avenues to explore for those wanting to do further reading.

The reading lists and additional activities are particularly important for student teachers, as my reading and research has shown that they lack sometimes confidence when dealing with diversity and discrimination. Thus, this book is very useful for new/experienced teachers and teacher trainers, as well as sociologists and psychologists of education, who are keen to know more about key connections between identity, diversity, equality and achievement, increase their knowledge and understanding of child development, and interrogate their own personal positionality regarding ethnicities, cultures and religions.
How to do Sociology with ... Music (2016-05-13 08:00)

A lovely video with occasional SI author Les Back (HT Dave Beer):

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/gWXamya7o4Y

Cedric Bongle (2016-05-13 21:30:34)
Great ... but where was the music?
Interested in the internal conversation? Come to this symposium @SocioWarwick on May 24th (2016-05-13 12:00)

Following on from a successful event this time last year, we’re organising another reflexivity forum. We potentially have one more speaking slot available but we’re still keen for others to come along for the discussion. Here’s the programme for the day:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
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<tr>
<td>10am to 10:15am</td>
<td>Welcome and introduction (Mark Carrigan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15am to 11:30am</td>
<td>Relational Reflexivity (Margaret Archer)</td>
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<td>11:30am to 11:45am</td>
<td>Coffee Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:45am to 12:45pm</td>
<td>Michelle Farr: <em>Collective Reflexivity</em></td>
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<td>Julius Elster: <em>The role of reflexivity in the formation of young people's identities: a phenomenological interpretation of reflexive orientations</em></td>
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<td>Rich Moth: <em>Conceptualizing Mental Distress: An Engagement Between the Laminated System and Modes of Reflexivity Approaches</em></td>
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<td>12:45pm to 1:30pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>1:30pm to 2:30pm</td>
<td>Session 2</td>
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<td>Tom Brock: <em>Racialism, Reflexivity and Games Consumer Culture</em></td>
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<td>Lakshman Wimalasena: <em>Entrepreneurial Intentions and Reflexivity: Lessons from Sri Lanka</em></td>
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<td>Additional Speaker TBC</td>
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<td>2:30pm to 2:45pm</td>
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<td>2:45pm to 3:45pm</td>
<td>Session 3</td>
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<td>Mark Carrigan: <em>Conceptualizing Digital Distraction</em></td>
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<td>John Cavener: <em>Sense-Making in Child Protection</em></td>
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<td>Christine Hemingway: <em>The Ethical Nexus Re-visited</em></td>
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<td>3:45pm to 5:00pm</td>
<td>Closing Discussions</td>
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Per talk: **15 minute** talk, 5 minute discussion
E-mail me: mark@markcarrigan.net if you'd let to register – please do so ASAP though as I’ll be placing the catering order soon.

What Nice Men Don’t Say To Nice Women (2016-05-14 08:00)

This video is part of a [1]really interesting series produced by [2]The School of Life.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihSTGqCO52Q

1. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC71cJI8PUf5Z3zKxnZvTBog

Spurious correlations: a wonderful resource for teaching statistics? (2016-05-15 08:00)

Check [1]these out by Tyler Vigen. Both hilarious and an excellent way of teaching a crucial idea:
Sociology 50th Anniversary e-Special Issues and Podcasts (2016-05-16 08:00)

An e-Special and series of podcasts to highlight the 50th anniversary of Sage’s journal Sociology:

Read the e-Special Issues*

Louise Ryan, Middlesex University, UK and Claire Maxwell, UCL Institute of Education, UK

Silke Roth, University of Southampton, UK and Katherine Dashper, Leeds Beckett University, UK

David Skinner, Anglia Ruskin University, UK, Vanessa May, University of Manchester, UK and Nicola Rollock, University of Birmingham, UK

Rana Jawad, University of Bath, UK, Paddy Dolan, Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland and Tracey Skillington, University College Cork, Ireland.

Listen to the Podcasts


Nick Crossley discusses his paper \[7\] **Body Techniques, Agency and Intercorporeality: On Goffman's Relations in Public** with Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson

1. [http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=7&e=2&x=2457880.0](http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=7&e=2&x=2457880.0)
2. [http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=8&e=2&x=2457880.0](http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=8&e=2&x=2457880.0)
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7. [http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=13&e=2&x=2457880.0](http://content.news.sagepub.co.uk/emessageIRS/servlet/IRSL?v=5&a=10050&r=63456&m=484&l=13&e=2&x=2457880.0)

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21st Century Salute to my Heroine Quartet (2016-05-16 10:51)

by Natty Mark Samuels

On this Saturday evening, I sit relaxing in joyful thought, wishing that the next time I go to Ghana, I get to hear Dr. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah speak. I wish I could have been there, at that January 2016 Accra lecture, when she spoke about the end of year national elections, with the hope that the populace, or certain segments of it, would not be used as aids to coercive voting, by the campaigning politicians.

Speaking specifically to the Muslim community, she said "we are people of peace, so we must emulate Prophet Muhammed (SAW) who thrived on peace." I would love to hear her speak at the University of Ghana, where she is a lecturer in Religious Studies (as well as a visiting lecturer worldwide). She has also undertaken research, on behalf of her sisters in faith, looking at issues such as domestic violence and HIV/AIDS. She is part of the great umbrella, FOMWAG - Federation of Muslim Woman Associations Ghana. Many have recognised her wisdom, such as President Mahama, who gave her a place on the Council of State, the body that advises the Presidency and other constitutional bodies.

I salute Dr. Rabiatu Deinyo Ammah.

Last time I went to Ghana, I was content just to be there, but next time, I want to research the pioneering teacher/activists - spiritual descendents of Nana Asma'u of Nigeria and Dada (Grandmother) Masiti of Somalia - because there is a frustrating lack of online access, to biographical information, about these stalwart women of the Black Star country. We have been told of earlier teachers, such as Solomon Bagayogo and Al-Hajj Umar of Kete-Krachie, but not of their later, female counterparts.

It would be good to sit and talk with Hajia Mariam Obeng, to hear about her education, her favourite subjects and teachers; to hear about her work as chairwoman of another essential umbrella, the GMMWF – Ghana Muslim Mission Women's Fellowship. Whether organising leadership workshops, interspersed with skills training – or gathering and donating crucial supplies to a hospital, she is there on the frontline, of empowerment and transformation. I hope that at the end of the day, there is someone to oil and rejuvenate her tired feet. I know of the monumental Yaa Asantewaa: I saw the cell in Kumasi Fort where they held her.

I salute Hajia Mariam Obeng.
Now, I need to know of those in the present, of equal brilliance and potential, such as Deputy Minister for Women and Children’s Affairs, Hajia Hawawu Boya- Gariba. Her clarion call to all, is to upgrade the thinking, funding and facilities, concerning the education of girls. She supports the work of those such as Hajia Mariama Mohammed, Headmistress of the Tamale Girls High School, in Dagomba, northern Ghana. Talking of the sad statistics of female enrolment, at a 2012 speech she gave at the school, she said "This calls for concerted efforts by all stakeholders and meaningful Ghanaians - and for that matter the Northerners, to get involved in getting females enrolled and retained in school".

Other issues she has fought against, include the witch labelling and subsequent societal banishment - to ‘witch camps’, where children are imprisoned also, forced to leave their communities with the accused parent. I remember that the colonial authorities labelled the enslaved - future Jamaican national heroine - Ashanti Maroon called Nanny, a witch, to discredit her. As well as the moral reasoning, she mentions the United Nations decree, which calls for the elimination of all discrimination against women, which Ghana has signed up to. She calls for the closing of the camps as “a national disgrace” - and to community leaders, to facilitate the re-integration of these women and children, back into their home communities.

I salute Hajia Hawawu Boya Gariba.

The other member of my Heroine’s Quartet, is also an eliminator of ignorance – and a reducer of a form of cancer. The Al-Hayaat Foundation, a home grown NGO, was set up by Hajia Hanatu Abubakar. Working with the Ghana Health Service and universities, her self-imposed remit, is to bring widespread awareness – to men, as well as women – about cervical cancer, focusing on aspects, such as forms of transmission and early screening. Thinking back now, to my work in the Kumasi Children’s Home, I wonder how many were there, due to the ignorance of their parents? She advocates for healthier lifestyles, including the avoidance of smoking and multiple partners. She organises, co-ordinates and speaks at seminars nationwide, because cervical cancer is on the increase.

I salute Hajia Hanatu Abubakar.

I feel proud that the country where my roots lie, has produced women such as this, sometimes against all the odds. So it is time we knew, what we should know. Recognise them now, while their physical presence still emanates. After all, they say we shouldn’t put off for tomorrow, what we can do today.

Time to salute.

Natty Mark Samuels is a poet and the founder of African School, a Cultural Education project based in Oxford. This initiative provides teaching in African Studies with a focus on pre-colonial sub-Saharan and Islamic cultures and early Black journalism. Formerly a Visiting Tutor at Ruskin College and other academies, Natty Mark also tutors on the Oxford Study Abroad Programme.
more specific details on the workshop. It will be composed of two main blocks. First, Sanjay Seth and David Martin will lead a workshop on Subaltern Studies. Second, Rosalba Garza and Rolando Vazquez will lead a workshop on the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality project. Bios here: [1]http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/seth/ [2]http://www.gold.ac.uk/politics/staff/martin-david/ [3]http://www.iss.nl/iss_faculty/profiel_metis/1100534/ [4]http://www.ucr.nl/about-ucr/Faculty-and-Staff/Social-Science/Pages/Rolando-V%C3%A1zquez.aspx This will be a fantastic opportunity to workshop with scholars who not only have contributed to IR but who are leading figures within postcolonial/decolonial debates in their own right. *************** PLEASE NOTE: deadline for applying to the workshop is 27th May. Please email Robbie Shilliam: [5]r.shilliam@qmul.ac.uk

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A wonderful event organised by [1]People’s Philosophy, Politics and Economics:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/HN_noUMShas

1. https://peoplesppe.com/
2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/HN_noUMShas
Higher Education & Race Inequalities (2016-05-18 17:04)

Tenure Denied

At Dartmouth, an Asian-American professor receives unanimous English department backing and is rejected at higher levels. The same happened to a black historian at the college. Many see a disturbing pattern.

If you liked this video, you might like [2]these podcasts on the Sociological Review's website about the experience of housing insecurity in the UK.

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/rVX3c_O3RSY?feature=player_embedded

The Rise and Fall of Fantasy (2016-05-20 08:00)

Once we paraded grand visions of the future, now such goals are more typically left to the fanatical fringe. With economic and cultural growth in the East what vision does the West have to offer? Do we need new fantasies to meet the challenges of the 21st century or is our scepticism a sign of wisdom rather than decline?


[2]Watch more videos on iai.tv

1. http://iai.tv/VideoController/EmbeddedVideo/776?width=576&height=324&startTime=00%3A00
2. http://iai.tv/
Using social media to map scholarly literatures (2016-05-21 08:00)

At a time when [1] there are more than 28,100 active scholarly peer-reviewed journals publishing around 1.8-1.9 million articles per year, finding ways to navigate scholarly literatures are more important than ever. This is one of the most exciting ways in which social media can be used to directly enhance scholarly practice.

There are many forms this can take, from the indirect (e.g. writing accessible blog posts which someone else uses as a guide to a literature) to the direct (e.g. tweeting about what you think are the most important papers on a given topic). But perhaps the most useful is sharing comprehensive reading lists.

Here’s a wonderful example of what this could look like, produced by members of the [2] Social Media Collective at Microsoft:


The Accelerative Ethos of Steve Jobs (2016-05-22 08:00)

From the [1] Commencement address Steve Jobs gave on June 12, 2005:

When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like: “If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you’ll most certainly be right.” It made an impression on me, and since then, for the past 33 years, I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?” And whenever the answer has been “No” for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something.

Remembering that I’ll be dead soon is the most important tool I’ve ever encountered to help me
make the big choices in life. Because almost everything — all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart.

Life is short. This is why it's important to fill life with as much of value and interest as possible. The good life is the full life. Don't hesitate or waste your time when you could be living fully.

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/UF8uR6Z6Klc?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Computational Social Science and the Collapse of Sociology (2016-05-23 08:00)

An interesting footnote in On Sociology by John Goldthorpe speculates on the possibility of Sociology's collapse. From pg 9:

Such a collapse could conceivably come about through a series of 'secessions'. For example, some university departments of sociology have already became in effect departments of 'cultural studies', and this
could then prompt sociologists committed to quantitative analysis and ‘theory-for-explanation’ to seek new homes within social-sciences faculties that would allow them to work more closely with economists, political scientists, demographers, or social statisticians. However, what chiefly militates against such a scenario is sociology’s previous institutional success and the very fact that sociology departments do now exist. Changing the disciplinary organization of a university is, as a colleague once remarked, like ‘moving a cemetery’.

Do these conditions still obtain? Yes but I think their influence is waning. We’re currently seeing a shift in the underlying plate tectonics of the disciplinary system, one driven by but not reducible to computational innovation. I suspect that the emergence of computational social science could be the initiating factor which, as the conditions elucidated by Goldthorpe continue to wane in their influence, leads to these ‘secessions’.


Obama’s Best Comebacks and Rebuttals (2016-05-24 08:00)

Imagine a comparable round up for President Trump, produced circa 2020?

iframe: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/2oGMV7H7z4I?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &autohide=2 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent

iframe: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/dByWuNkYaUs?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &autohide=2 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent

iframe: [3]https://www.youtube.com/embed/Wfo0Nl6-qYM?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &autohide=2 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent

And on a similar(ish) note:
IFRAME:  [4]https://www.youtube.com/embed/ER0wkPYkNE?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/2oGMV7H7z4I?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/dByWuNkYaUs?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. https://www.youtube.com/embed/Wfo0Nl6-qYM?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
4. https://www.youtube.com/embed/ER0wkPYkNE?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
What messages can we take from this speech? It's Obama at his most self-consciously inspirational, addressing 'young people' pursuing social change. I think it can also be taken as an attempt to outline a worldview in the broadest terms. Here’s some suggestion about the content of what I’ve come to think of as the ‘liberal imagination’:

- Social decay and fragmentation are partly perceptual. We should understand why people appear to see these trends but we should reject their putative reality.

- The idea we are "gripped by forces we can’t control" is a reflection of an underlying pessimism, rather than an objective assessment of a challenge.

- Things are always improving. Now is the best time to be alive.

- Our capacity to shape the world is unmatched: tools, freedoms, knowledge.

- We must always reject pessimism and cynicism. Progressive is not inevitable and these things are the foremost obstacle to it.

- Pessimism often reflects, at least in part, a failure of generational imagination: just because we can’t see the change doesn’t mean future generations won’t enjoy it.

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/XdFH3ctRC6g?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](https://www.youtube.com/embed/XdFH3ctRC6g?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)
Call for Papers (CfP): VI. International Conference on Critical Education (2016-05-25 17:42)

VI. International Conference on Critical Education

10-13 August 2016,

London, UK

Dialogue, Solidarity and Resistance against Neo-liberalism and Neo-conservatism in Education
The International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE), previously held in Athens (2011, 2012), Ankara (2013), Thessaloniki (2014) and Wroclaw, Poland (2015), is a forum for scholars, educators and activists committed to social and economic justice. The 6th ICCE: Dialogue, Solidarity and Resistance against Neo-liberalism and Neo-conservatism in Education will take place in London at Middlesex University, 10 - 13 August 2016.

At a time of economic crisis, when education is under siege by neoliberal capitalism and by neo-conservatism and aggressive nationalism, when teachers and academics are being proletarianized, youth criminalized, civilised and caring societies being stripped of welfare and benefits and rights, schools and universities turned into commodities, at such a time, critical education, as a theory and as a movement, as praxis, is clearly relevant. International communities of critical educators and activists are working together, and with other movements, to build active resistance to these processes and are engaged in fostering educational and social change leading to a more just, equal and fair society.

The current economic, social, and political crisis, that has been ongoing for 30 years, is manifesting more deeply in education on a global scale.

The crisis- part of, and resulting from, dominant neoliberal and neoconservative politics that are implemented and promoted internationally as 'the only solution', under the slogan 'there is no alternative' (TINA), have substantially redefined the sociopolitical and ideological roles of education. Public education is shrinking. It loses its status as a social right. It is projected as a mere commodity for sale while it becomes less democratic, de-theorised, de-critiqued.

Understanding the causes of the crisis, the particular forms it takes in different countries and the multiple ways in which it influences education, constitute important questions for all those who do not limit their perspectives to the horizon of neoconservative, neoliberal and technocratic dogmas. Moreover, the critical education movement has the responsibility to rethink its views and practices in light of the crisis, and in the light of social, political and educational resistance in different countries- the paths that this crisis opens for challenging and overthrowing capitalist domination worldwide.

The International Conference on Critical Education (ICCE) - regularly attended by between 300 and 400 participants, provides a vibrant and egalitarian, non-elitist, platform for scholars, educators, activists, students and others interested in critical education and in contesting the current neo-liberal/ neo-conservative/ nationalist hegemony, to come together and engage in a free, democratic and productive dialogue. At this time of crisis when public education is under siege by neoliberalism, neo-conservatism and nationalism, we invite you to submit a proposal and to attend the Conference. We especially welcome new and emerging scholars/ scholar-activists.


Contact details for further information:

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4424
PhD student workshop: Collecting and analysing social media data (2016-05-26 08:00)

PhD student workshop: Collecting and analysing social media data

The ESRC-funded "Social Media – Developing Understanding, Infrastructure & Engagement" (ES/M001628/1) award based at the University of Aberdeen is organising a workshop for PhD student researchers in the social sciences to come together to explore the challenges of collecting and analysing social media data. The workshop will run over two days (June 16-17) and will commence at 11am on day 1, and conclude at 5pm on day 2.

The workshop will cover tools, techniques and methods of social media data analysis equipping participants with a toolkit that will allow them to select, obtain, process, analyse and present a social media data set. Activities during the workshop will be grounded in case studies, and hands-on sessions will use data sets from recent research at Aberdeen. Topics will include data collection and transformation, ethics, analysis and visualisation.

The event is targeted at PhD student researchers in Social Science disciplines (i.e. those whose research would be funded by ESRC).

The workshop venue is the MacRobert Building at the University of Aberdeen.

Practical sessions will involve participants obtaining data from different social media platforms, a tour of available software tools (including those developed at Aberdeen), and analysis of real datasets. The sessions are designed to be 'hands on' and will involve active participation from attendees. We are asking participants to bring a laptop with them, if at all possible.

Attending the workshop is free. Funding is available to support travel to Aberdeen, some accommodation costs, all lunches during the event and dinner for all participants on day 1. Due to the source of funding only UK based PhD students are eligible for funding. Applications from non-UK based researchers will be considered if there are places available and they can fund their own travel and subsistence.

An application for funding to attend the workshop is part of the online application form. The deadline for applications is 4pm Thursday 26th May.

Link to the webpage about the workshop: [2]http://www.dotrural.ac.uk/ social-media-data-training-workshops/ Places are limited, so please apply early. If you have any queries relating to the event please contact Dr Jennifer Holden ([3]j.a.holden@abdn.ac.uk, 01224 274238). Please pass this announcement on to colleagues that you think may be interested.
Sociology and Fiction: a @thesocreview Special Feature (2016-05-26 14:16)

I think this is come out really well. Get in touch if you’d like to contribute something further:

- [1]Imagining Futures: From Sociology of the Future to Future Fictions
- [3]Writing Fiction and Writing Social Science
- [4]Life Chances: Co-written re-imagined welfare utopias through a fictional novel
- [5]Patricia Leavy on Social Fictions
- [6]Showing, not telling: some thoughts on social science and (science) fiction
- [7]Liars, Damn Liars, and Sociologists
- [8]You wake up and suddenly, a story is right in front of yo
- [9]Telling stories to help understand what sociology is about
- [10]How to witness a true war story
A special @thesocreview feature on the rise of the Superstar Professor (2016-05-26 14:16)

I’m really pleased with this special feature I just finished for The Sociological Review’s website:

- [1] Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it’s a SUPER PROFESSOR!

1. http://www.thesociologicalreview.com/blog/is-it-a-bird-is-it-a-plane-no-it-s-a-superprofessor.html

Reclaiming 'aspiration' for the left (2016-05-27 08:00)

This is powerful stuff from Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the UK’s Labour Party, in his [1]recent LSE lecture:

I am not talking here about the aspiration of the delusional Del Boys – “This time next year Rodney, we’ll be millionaires” – not the importation of the individualist American Dream. (As an aside, the US comedian George Carlin once said “They call it the American Dream, because you have to be asleep to believe it.”) But real aspiration is the aspiration for a secure home, a secure job, a productive job that satisfies and enriches life, the security of knowing your loved ones will be well cared for when they get old or fall sick, the security of knowing your children, nieces or nephews will attend a good school, the aspiration to know your family, friends and neighbours are getting on OK too, and that you have the time, opportunity and the facilities to enjoy some decent leisure time.

These are the things that make the good life and democratic government has both the responsibility, and the capacity, to guarantee them. A government that runs as little as it can get away with has no industrial strategy, has privatised key parts of the economy necessary for a decent life, has abdicated its social and economic responsibilities.

People will not trust, and will not have faith in a government that abdicates its responsibilities through privatisation, deregulation and neglect. People know that to change things you need power
when government appears powerless to change things. People won’t have faith in it to change things when government gives its powers away. People lose faith in it.


The EU: a flawed democracy whose failures are fuelling the rise of fascism? (2016-05-28 08:00)

A [1]powerful polemic by Paul Mason in the Guardian arguing that the post-democratic character of the EU is intimately connection to the reemergence of fascism across Europe:

All this suggests that those of us who want Brexit in order to reimpose democracy, promote social justice and subordinate companies to the rule of law should bide our time. But here’s the price we will pay. Hungary is one electoral accident away from going fascist; the French conservative elite is one false move away from handing the presidency to the Front National; in Austria the far-right FPÖ swept the first round of the presidential polls. Geert Wilders’s virulently Islamophobic PVV is leading the Dutch opinion polls.

The EU’s economic failure is fuelling racism and the ultra right. Boris Johnson’s comparison of the EU with the Third Reich was facile. The more accurate comparison is with the Weimar Republic: a flawed democracy whose failures fuelled the rise of fascism. And this swing to the far right prompts the more basic dilemma: do I even want to be part of the same electorate as millions of closet Nazis in mainland Europe?

The EU, politically, begins to look more and more like a gerrymandered state, where the politically immature electorates of eastern Europe can be used – as Louis Napoleon used the French peasantry – as a permanent obstacle to liberalism and social justice. If so – even though the political conditions for a left Brexit are absent today – I will want out soon.


____________________________
Harmut Rosa on Public Spaces (2016-05-29 08:00)

A really interesting interview by Harmut Rosa, whose [1]groundbreaking work on acceleration has been developed in recent years into a theory of [2]‘resonance’:


Yanis Varoufakis in conversation with Noam Chomsky (2016-05-30 00:18)

This is a fabulous conversation between two of the most incisive minds currently alive today:

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/NUe-bwvnsbY
The Most Cited Publications in the Social Sciences (2016-05-30 08:00)

A really thought provoking analysis [1] published on the LSE Impact Blog, using Google Scholar data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Date*</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Citations</th>
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<td>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</td>
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<td>Pedagogy of the Oppressed</td>
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<td>1968-1970</td>
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<td>Discipline and Punish</td>
<td>Michel Foucault</td>
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<td>A Theory of Justice</td>
<td>John Rawls</td>
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<td>Social Foundations of Thought and Action</td>
<td>Albert Bandura</td>
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<td>The Interpretation of Cultures</td>
<td>Clifford Geertz</td>
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<td>Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation</td>
<td>Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>The Fifth Discipline</td>
<td>Peter M. Senge</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Management</td>
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<td>Culture’s Consequences</td>
<td>Geert Hofstede</td>
<td>1980</td>
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<td>The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life</td>
<td>Elving Goffman</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
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<td>Das Kapital</td>
<td>Karl Marx</td>
<td>1867-1894</td>
<td>Economics</td>
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<td>The Social Construction of Reality</td>
<td>Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann</td>
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<td>Metaphors We Live By</td>
<td>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Linguistics</td>
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<td>Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
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<td>Etienne Wenger</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>The Economic Institutions of Capitalism</td>
<td>Oliver Williamson</td>
<td>1986</td>
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<td>Abraham Maslow</td>
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<td>John Bowlby</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>37,316</td>
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1. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/12/what-are-the-most-cited-publications-in-the-social-sciences-according-to-google-scholar/?utm_source=fee](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/12/what-are-the-most-cited-publications-in-the-social-sciences-according-to-google-scholar/?utm_source=fee)

2. [http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/12/what-are-the-most-cited-publications-in-the-social-sciences-according-to-google-scholar/?utm_source=fee](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2016/05/12/what-are-the-most-cited-publications-in-the-social-sciences-according-to-google-scholar/?utm_source=fee)

Martyn Everett (2016-05-30 17:32:03)
This is an interesting post, but to be really rigorous, this study should also compare the average number of citations per year since publication.

Astonishingly, in the description of method on the LSE blog, the author seems to have omitted sociology from the realm of social science!
Let’s Talk Vice-Presidents! Steve Fuller’s Guide to the 2016 US Party Conventions (2016-05-31 05:01)

So the 2016 US presidential race will pit Democrat Hillary Clinton against Republican Donald Trump. Who should be their respective running mates for the vice-presidency? To be sure, there’s some grim historical truth to John Garner’s remark that the role wasn’t worth ‘a warm bucket of spit’. (He was FDR’s vice-president for his first two terms, largely to keep Texas on side for the Democrats.) However, some astute politicians have managed to use it as a basis to get into the Oval Office, and even those who haven’t – notably Al Gore in recent times – have used to the office launch successful post-political careers. To be sure, the current vice-president, Joe Biden, is best understood as having earned the post as a crowning achievement for his distinguished career as a Congressional wrangler, a skill that came in handy during Obama’s turbulent attempts to get legislation passed. It’s unlikely that Biden would have got the post in terms of his presidential potential. However, in 2016 the vice-presidency opens up new possibilities which might entice prospective candidates.

Hillary Clinton needs to appease Bernie Sanders' large number of supporters, if not the man himself. In fact, it looks like Sanders will not very gracefully concede defeat to Clinton. Moreover, US politics has form in the history of spoilers which only serve to condemn the winner to ultimate defeat. Think [1]Eugene McCarthy in 1968. (No relation to the Red-baiting Joe McCarthy, but someone whose name you'll find popping up in some of the music of the time: Gene McCarthy was a very righteously charismatic guy, just like Bernie.) I'm surprised that more people have not made the comparison. Like Hillary Clinton today, the 1968 Democratic nominee, [2]Hubert Humphrey, was a decent, very accomplished politician with a strong civil rights record, etc., but as LBJ's vice-president he had been implicated in some of the most disastrous decisions made with regard to US involvement in the Vietnam War. Even though Humphrey's Republican opponent, Richard Nixon, had a lot of negatives of his own, Humphrey couldn't overcome both his association with the war and McCarthy's failure to endorse Humphrey strongly. Humphrey's running mate, Edmund Muskie, was another decent liberal but not the sort of guy who would galvanize the people who voted for McCarthy.

What is the lesson for Hillary? Pick a VP who Bernie Sanders' people could not possibly object to and would be a strong campaigner – strong enough to get Bernie's people to vote. My personal choice is [3]Elizabeth Warren, Senator of Massachusetts, who herself made an early bid for the Democratic nomination. Sanders' social media campaign has been marked by 'Bernie Bros', who are male vocally anti-establishment yet viscerally misogynistic types who one could easily imagine going for Trump if Bernie doesn't give a strong steer otherwise. Now, assuming that Bernie won't give a strong steer – other than say 'Don't vote Trump' – then it's up to Hillary to prevent the dissipation of Sanders' support. Clinton and Sanders disagree more on what counts as feasible means than on ultimate goals. Warren could represent Sanders' position in Hillary's campaign, in which case his supporters would be properly tested on whether they can support two women fronting their common view. And of course, it would be a direct challenge to Trump's even worse gender politics. Could Trump manoeuvre effectively in that space? More generally, of course, one might ask why America has found it so much easier to accept a non-White (Obama) than a non-male (Hillary Clinton) president?

Now, as for Trump, things take a somewhat more bizarre turn. If I were a Trump advisor and I thought Trump had a good shot of winning the election carrying on as he has during the Republican primaries, then I would recommend a running mate crazier than him, simply as an insurance policy against assassination attempts. To be honest, it's amazing that so far no one has tried to take down Trump, but were he to become president, the incentive to do so – especially in the land of the Second Amendment – would be still stronger on the part of aggrieved parties. In that case, if the person lined up to replace Trump would be seen as worse, then the assassination threat might be removed. Think Sarah Palin, or maybe even Ted Cruz. On the other hand, if I didn't know what Trump's advisors were advising but I were an ambitious Republican politician more reasonable than Trump yet relatively close to Trump's policy positions, I would lobby to become the vice-presidential candidate, precisely because there would be a good chance that Trump would be taken out by an assassin and I would then become president! New Jersey Governor [4]Chris Christie would fit the bill perfectly. You may call it cynical, but that's just Realpolitik, which if nothing else I
think Christie understands.

What may put all of these speculations by the wayside is that the cast of characters (minus Palin and Cruz) are all from my home region of the US, the Northeast. Such regional concentration is generally not allowed in American politics. In any case, the vice-presidential choices of both candidates in 2016 may do more than the usual work in determining who wins the election and the character of the presidency that follows.

Data Fetishism (2016-05-31 08:00)

I find this argument from loc 270 of Rob Kitchin’s *The Data Revolution* extremely compelling. It reminds me of Roy Bhaskar’s argument about the fetishisation of facts from his *Reclaiming Reality*. This is what Kitchin says:

Moreover, just as we think of bricks and mortar as simple building blocks rather than elements that are made within factories by companies bound within logistical, financial, legal and market concerns, and are distributed, stored and traded, so we largely do with data. Consequently, when data are the focus of enquiry it is usually to consider, in a largely technical sense, how they should be generated and analysed, or how they can be leveraged into insights and value, rather than to consider the nature of data from a more conceptual and philosophical perspective.

This “conceptual and philosophical perspective” is a necessary, though insufficient, condition for a critical one. Only if we consider the social ontology of digital data does it become possible to reflexively incorporate critique of the originating platforms into the digital social science that those platforms facilitate.

7.6 June

Coping with acceleration: triaging strategies and the new empiricism (2016-06-01 08:00)

My concern in this short talk is not to diagnose the underlying conditions which generate an acceleration of social life, or indeed the various experiences which differently placed actors have of such acceleration. Instead, I’m interested in the novel and deeply reflexive cultural forms arising under these conditions, as what we might think
of as temporal strategies, originally grounded in the lived experience of coping with intensified demands, instead become commodified and take on a relative autonomy vis-a-vis their application.

The most familiar manifestation of this commodification is the self-help industry, estimated as an [1] $11 billion industry in 2013. This is a market that has changed a lot in recent years, as depressing incomes have constrained a previously buoyant market of live events and the challenge of digital media has encouraged many self-help gurus to give away ‘taster’ content online as they attempt to build up a brand. It’s easy to become preoccupied with the highest profile speakers and their global best sellers: for instance The Secret has sold more than 19 million copies and the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People has sold more than 25 million copies. But there’s also a buoyant coaching market ([2]estimated $1.5 billion world wide) and public seminars market (estimated $308 million in the United States) which need to be recognise as part of the broader self-improvement or self-help industry.

My concern is with a more recent addition to this landscape: productivity culture. The most influential text of productivity culture, Getting Things Done by David Allen Green, has sold 1.6 million copies. The category of ‘productivity’ has become a central feature of apps, with many thousands available for the many millions of iPads and iPhones in circulation, as well as comparable availability for other mobile platforms. There’s a whole movement towards what the technologist Alex Pang calls ‘contemplative computing’: designing software that minimises distraction and facilitates immersive productivity. The popular blog Life Hacker reaches over 20 million people each month and has helped spawn a much wider ecosystem of productivity orientated content online.

It’s within this broader ecosystem that we can see a rich flourishing of what I’ve come to think of as triaging strategies: ways of coping with an intensity of demands placed upon the self by calibrating our responses to our environment and establishing new priorities. We have to treat these strategies carefully because they’re being promulgated: some people might simply be reflecting upon their experiences for anyone who happens to take an interest but many are selling books, coaching services and webinars. In fact people can move from one category to the latter, as the fact of having accumulated an audience for one’s musings on these issues holds out an inevitable temptation of ‘monetising’ this audience through the production of a book. In this sense, the promulgation of a triaging strategy can itself be a triaging strategy i.e. it’s a scheme to escape the ‘rat race’ and find a new direction in life, one more satisfying and rewarding than the present reality.

One further methodological caveat. We shouldn’t infer a common outlook from a common action. Just because someone buys a particular book or read a particular website, does not mean that they do so for the same reason or react in the same way to the cultural content they are engaging with. Someone might buy a book for idle curiosity, a deep sense of need, to fill time, to critique or for any number of other reasons. Someone might then devote their life to the principles expounded in the book, react with a disinterested curiosity about the different ways in which one can live life, throw the book away at the first opportunity, forget it all together or any number of other reasons. Recognising this variability of responses is crucial to understanding the phenomenon of triaging strategies: these are cultural resources, usually though not always offered as commodities by those seeking to sustain themselves through this activity, susceptible to being picked up and put down, applied in many different ways or not at all. These are technologies of the self. But we misconstrue them if we fail to consider the diverse range of ways in which differently situated selves might draw upon them, how their characteristics will be inflected through the ensuing context, as well as how such actions will aggregatively lead to the transformation or reproduction of the cultural form e.g. contributing to rising sales figures through word of mouth or changing public perceptions of it.

My suggestion is that the 7 triaging strategies I offer can be usefully analysed in terms of the nexus of work and life. This is the terminology that occurs frequently within the literature but these are also useful analytical categories to understand the lived experience of intensifying demands. We occupy multiple social roles and there are many factors leading to an intensification of demands upon each one of them e.g. constant connectivity at work, rising expectations of parental activity, automation leading to the outsourcing of ‘shadow work’ to consumers etc.
There are many factors, each of which could be a talk in their own right. My concern here is not to elucidate them but rather to consider how intensifying expectations within clusters of social roles that we can loosely categorise as ‘work’ and ‘life’ create problems for the subject. As Margaret Archer puts it, “roles are greedy”. There’s no logical limit to how much of ourselves we can invest in them but there are temporal, physical, psychological and socio-economic constraints on the choices that we make. It requires reflexivity to negotiate between these competing demands, something which itself requires time and space. My argument will be that these 7 triaging strategies can be usefully conceptualised as different solutions to the increasingly problematic relationship between ‘work’ and ‘life’ under digital capitalism. My suggestion is that this is usually experienced as personal life being consumed by working life, the concerns of the self being subordinated to the imperatives of the workplace. But a crucial part of the investigation which I’m still in the early stages of undertaking is to analyse the different ways the underlying dilemmas conceived of and represented in this literature.

1. If personal life is being consumed by working life, one solution is to seek a job that perfectly expresses yourself. Thus I believe we can see the contemporary resurgence of the notion of the vocation as something expressive of an underlying impulse towards finding personal fulfilment in working life by blurring boundaries between the two domains. As well as the macro-economic untenability of this strategy for most under contemporary capitalism, much scholarship in cultural policy and the sociology of work reveals how this discourse of ‘passion’ – doing what you love – goes side-by-side with exploitative and worsening working conditions, growing expectations of unpaid work and spiralling working hours.

2. An equally familiar solution is to instrumentally calibrate the demands of working life and personal life. This is most frequently expressed in terms of the notion of the work/life balance, but in sectors defined by a project based knowledge work we increasingly see the notion of the work/life merge: a wilful collapse of temporal boundaries, using mobile computing to both work and life in a more or less spontaneous sequencing over the course of the day. The extent to which this is chosen or enforced remains a pressing question.

3. Another solution is to minimise the demands of personal life and working life. The most extreme expressions of this lifestyle minimalism represent a form of moral athleticism, in which advocates compete to see who most radically reduce their possessions into a set number of objects. It’s correspondingly hostile to ‘clutter’ and imbues it with almost magical capacities to shape one’s psychic life. It sometimes celebrates nomadism – of a very privileged sort – including a permanent home within the category of ‘stuff’ that constrains our lives. But it is driven by an underlying concern for quality over quantity: reclaiming core experiences by dispensing with that deemed ‘unnecessary’. It’s striking how completely dominated the online discourse of lifestyle minimalism is by childless white men in their 20s to 40s, usually seeming to be without attachments. This is asceticism for a certain demographic rather than a strategy for all.

4. Perhaps the most novel solution is the concept of lifestyle design: instrumentally reducing the demands of working life in order to focus on personal life. Propounded most successfully by Tim Ferris, whose book The Four Hour Work Week has sold well over a million copies, it encourages a strategic mobility: exploiting currency differentials in order to live richly without necessarily being rich, outsourcing as many tasks as possible to virtual assistants operating out of Indian cities and taking ‘mini-retirements’ to focus intensively on certain skills or experiences. It almost represents a kind of hipster neo-colonialism, a strategy utterly dependent on global power relations defining contemporary digitalised and financialised capitalism.

5. A fifth solution is to seek to dispense with working life to the greatest extent possible. A superb recent book by the Cardiff sociologist David Frayne presents interviews with a diverse range of movements sharing a common orientation to the refusal of work: reducing hours to their minimum, giving up work entirely or otherwise seeking to escape from working life.

6. We can see a novel form of temporizing emerging in extreme early retirement: embracing a rigid asceticism for many years, intricately monitoring spending and income, in order to ensure the possibility of retiring by a fixed
point in time. This represents a solution of sequencing: solving the problems of the relation between work and life by working now in order to live later. It’s interesting to consider the assumptions this makes about the future calculability of digital capitalism e.g. if this is reliant on pensions and investments, how will predicted long term declines in average returns lead to a gradual ratcheting up of the early retirement age and how will practitioners of extreme early retirement react to this?

7. Finally, I think self-optimisation can be included here, particularly when it involves open-ended projects of self-improvement using self-tracking technologies. Not all self-tracking practices are concerned with self-optimisation: we need to distinguish here between goal orientated self-tracking, experimental self-tracking and ongoing projects to perpetually optimise oneself. But an ongoing project to become more productive in work and life, to optimise oneself for the conditions in which one lives and works, seeks to solve the dilemma by improving performance on both sides of the dichotomy. The problem arises because demands are not static and learning to be quicker inevitably incites one to do more: choices that might formerly have been made on the basis of practical necessity now become live options, risking an intensification of demands and rendering further self-optimisation necessary in order to cope.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and each of these strategies presented is just a brief outline of a complex phenomenon. My claim is that these need to be recognised in their specificity and that the ‘greedy’ relationship between the role clusters of ‘work’ and ‘life’ represents a useful analytical framework through which to understand the purpose of these strategies and how they can be taken up by subjects struggling to cope with the intensified demands of digital capitalism.

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2. [http://www.slideshare.net/jonlar/the-us-self-improvement-market](http://www.slideshare.net/jonlar/the-us-self-improvement-market)
framework across different disciplines and subfields, but principally within historical studies. Loss and absence are slowly being recognized as significant factors in historical processes, particularly in relation to the material world. Archaeologists, anthropologists, philosophers, literary scholars, sociologists and historians have increasingly come to understand the material world as an active and shaping force. Nevertheless, while significant, such studies have consistently privileged material presence as the basis for understanding how and why the material world has played an increasingly important role in the lives of humans. In contrast, Understanding Material Loss suggests that instances of absence, as much as presence, provide important means of understanding how and why the material world has shaped human life and historical processes. Speculative and exploratory in nature, Understanding Material Loss asserts that in a period marked by ecological destruction, but also economic austerity, large scale migration and increasing resource scarcity, it is important that historians work to better understand the ways in which humans have responded to material loss in the past and how such responses have shaped change. Understanding Material Loss asks: how have humans historically responded to material loss and how has this shaped historical processes? The conference will bring together a range of scholars in an effort more to begin to explore and frame a problem, than provide definitive answers. Confirmed keynote speakers include:

- Professor Pamela Smith, History, Columbia
- Simon Werrett, Science and Technology Studies, UCL
- Professor Maya Jasanoff, History, Harvard
- Professor Jonathan Lamb, English, Vanderbilt
- Professor Anthony Bale, English and Humanities, Birkbeck
- Astrid Swenson, Politics and History, Brunel

Understanding Material Loss seeks to uncover the multiple practices and institutions that emerged in response to different forms of material loss in the past and asks, how has loss shaped (and been shaped by) processes of acquisition, possession, stability, abundance and permanence? By doing so it seeks to gauge the extent to which ‘loss’ can be used as an organizing framework of study across different disciplines and subfields. Understanding Material Loss seeks papers from across a variety of time periods and geographies. Although open and speculative in nature, this conference will focus on three broad topics within the wider rubric of loss, in order to facilitate meaningful conversations and exchanges.

Conceptualising ‘distraction’ (2016-06-04 08:00)

What does it mean to be distracted? For the last year, I’ve been telling people that I’m working on a new project about digital distraction and everyone seems to immediately grasp what I mean by this. But conceptualising precisely what we should take ‘distraction’ to mean is slightly more complex than I realised at the outset of the project. The dictionary offers a good starting point, with two definitions:

1. a thing that prevents someone from concentrating on something else.
2. extreme agitation of the mind

Looking at these definitions, it’s easy to infer a causal relation between the phenomena they designate: we might assume that (1), if encountered to a sufficient degree under conducive circumstances, leads to (2) through sheer accumulation of distraction. In other words: lots of *distractions* lead to *distractedness*.

In a recent piece of work, I tried to analyse the rise of (1) in terms of *constant connectivity*. Interruptions
have always been part of human experience, in so far as that there are always contingencies which might emerge in order to disrupt an activity that’s in process. But the ‘triple revolution’ of mobile computing, wireless internet access and social networks have contributed to a proliferation of interruptions, as have the second order effects when this multiplication of communication channels lead to the qualitative and quantitative escalation of communication e.g. people trying multiple means to contact someone in the absence of governing norms about appropriateness, strategic communication that seek to shock and surprise in order to be heard above the din.

Analysed in this sense, talk of interruptions leads rather inevitably to the consideration of reflexivity. What does it mean to ‘prevent someone from concentrating on something else’? It means there was something else they were trying to do and the external event, which we label as a distraction (1), has interrupted their action towards this end. Distraction needs to be conceived of as relational: there is the distracting object, but it only has this power in relation to an existing activity undertaken under conditions that leave someone conducive to being distracted.

What we’re being distracted from might have been routine action, e.g. I get a phone call when making a cup of coffee, but the very act of interruption engenders an awareness of that from which we were interrupted. Consider a distraction (1) significant enough to completely disrupt our previous action: when we ask ourselves “now what was I doing before he phoned?”, this is an incitement to reflexivity, albeit one that reflects a prior failure thereof. So rather than seeing distraction (1) and reflexivity as antithetical, we have to recognise a more complex relationship between them. Distractions impede reflexivity but also highlight it. Persistent distractions engender reflexivity, when we recognise something as a ‘problem’ and begin to ask what it is we might do about it?

It’s for this reason that I don’t think we should consider distracted people as somehow a-reflexive people. Distracted people are those who live within a socio-technical environment sufficiently productive of distraction (1) that we might talk of them as being characterised by distraction (2): it’s an ‘agitation of the mind’, rather than an absence of reflexivity, a difficulty articulating and sustaining courses of action rather a lack of capacity to reach conclusions about what a desirable course might be. Distraction is something which operates on a number of levels simultaneously:

1. A distracting environment renders time and space for reflexivity unlikely: the conditions for internal conversation are often not in place and where they are, they’re unlikely to last.

2. A distracting environment supplies more stimuli about potential courses of action and potential projects: under these conditions, ‘bounding’ variety becomes increasingly difficult, rendering internal conversation more necessary than ever.

3. A distracting environment militates against sustained trajectories of action, because interruptions to action become more likely (with the cognitive costs they entail) as do interruptions to reflexivity exercised about those actions.

Distracting environments are characterised by the proliferation of distractions but the causality of how this leads to distractedness is more complex than I initially realised & I’m still trying to clarify my views on this.
Becoming a Channel Swimmer (2016-06-05 08:00)

A great video from Karen Throsby, who [1]we interviewed almost 6 years ago, as the first of our many podcasts.

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/h7cvwQDAw00

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/h7cvwQDAw00

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Reporting the General Strike: Contemporary accounts of "The Nine Day Wonder" (2016-06-06 08:00)

A [1]fascinating resource from the University of Warwick's Modern Records Centre:

Contemporary accounts

Read more than 450 documents relating to the 1926 General Strike, including strike bulletins, transcripts of radio broadcasts and internal reports produced by the strike co-ordinator, the Trades Union Congress.

[2]Search the sources
Browse the sources

Find out what has been digitised

The strike in pictures

A General Strike photograph album

25 press photos of the General Strike

Henry Sara’s lantern slides

95 slides for an illustrated talk on the General Strike (compiled in 1930s)

Strike events

The General Strike day-by-day

Key events before, during and after the strike

General Strike map of Britain

Interactive map which links to local strike documents

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/digital/gs
5. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/images/generalstrike/
7. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/digital/gs/timeline/
8. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/mrc/explorefurther/digital/gs/map/

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action A half-day workshop (2016-06-06 08:07)

BSA Sociologists outside Academia, in collaboration with Sage Publishing Ltd and the Sociological Imagination

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action

A half-day workshop
How come – at least in the UK – you don’t come across people with 'sociologist' in their job title working in industry, business, the civil service, or pretty much anywhere outside academia or independent research organisations?

Sociologists seem to all reside in universities, unlike psychologists and economists, who have colonised many kinds of workplaces.

Most sociologists believe our subject is essential for understanding the world around us, or to resolve contemporary problems, from gender violence to climate change. We have the concepts (like 'cultural capital', 'intersectionality) and the theories (social mobility, moral panic). But where are the practical sociologists?

So what would it take to establish a ‘practical sociology’ in the UK and elsewhere, with sociologists employed to use sociology concepts and models to address problems in industry, business, government, education or health? This half-day workshop aims to establish an agenda for practical sociology.

The workshop will explore pressing questions about how a practical sociology may apply its expertise, skills and knowledge to problems at work or in the community.

- What has prevented the emergence of practical sociology in the UK?
- What are the core knowledge and models that are needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public sector face?
- What kinds of skills would be needed to work as a practical sociologist?
- How would a practical sociology career pan out?

This workshop will be of interest to sociologists and others who are keen to see the application of sociological concepts, models and theories in practical settings in the public, private and third sectors. Please come along and help us set an agenda for developing practical sociology.

Registration


BSA Members £5; Non-members £8; BSA Concessionary members and full-time students £3.

Tea and coffee will be provided: please bring your lunch.

On the Militarisation of Everyday Life (2016-06-07 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson

Introduction

We live in a world that increasingly applies military solutions to problems ranging from local ‘threats’ to the geopolitical disruptions as the norm. Across the political spectrum there is an increasing acceptance of the belief that military strategies provide solutions to complex problems. Those who protest this vision of the world gain limited traction. Such is the scope of this vision of the world and so pervasive its effects that we have reached a state that can be described as the militarisation of everyday life. Everywhere we look we can see states, peoples and splinter groups committed to the idea that an adequate military strategy, mainstream or insurgent, will resolve some particular problem of the day, decade or generation, resulting in the progressive encroachment of militarism on daily lives.

So where does this perception come from and why does it persist? What needs to change to ‘demilitarise’ everyday life? This article is a short introduction to and exploration of some of the issues at stake presented in two parts. This exploratory article is in three parts. This, the first, examines the enduring and progressive nature of the militarization of civil and civic life. In the second part, we consider the way in which the modern state co-opts us into its militarized strategies, supported by these historical processes and emerging regulatory and surveillance technologies. The third and final part considers the way in which militarisation becomes hegemonic through its normalization in society and in social institutions once seen as distinct from if not immune to such practices.

The nation state is a relatively recent and frequently unstable construction. It intersects with a variety of both historical and modern concepts of collective governance that are complicated by the fluidity and uncertainty of language, discourse and geography. Calls to ‘ethnic’ states or to ethnus, race, biology, language and history almost always involve a reductionist fiction of sharing enforced at ‘other’s’ expense. One of the features of the 20th century has been the continuing re-invention of the nation state as a singular entity bent on controlling diversity within its boundaries. This has frequently involved the creation of authority through a hyper focus of the threat ‘within’ or closely external to the territorial state.

After a century or more of this dichotomous strategy of inclusion by exclusion, it is possible to map the increased use of militarism as a mechanism for maintaining the fiction of the singular people in the singular nation state. Each new – or old but refurbished for our time - conflict raises the stakes in a discourse increasingly centred on the claimed ‘values’ of the state and the nation. So where does all of this come from and why is it so persistent? Our suggestion is to start with the Victorians, or at least the Victorian period, to reprise the art of governance that we have inherited and its instruments of authority and control.

Scouts, sports, schools and symbols - a very brief context to militarisation

In the 19th century the British state began to expand and extend its model of social conformity for the upper and upper-middle classes to the nation as a whole. Uniformity in education and the rise of quasi-military or military-inspired organisations like the Boy Scouts saw the spread of this concept of uniformity. Team sports expanded in this period, located at the meeting point of growing leisure time (Veblen anyone?) and activities that could keep the masses safely entertained in an orderly fashion and expressing solid bourgeois values. In many boys' schools, both traditional and emergent, cadet systems were introduced, and persist, in various settings but more particularly in many of the more ‘elite’ private schools. The association between masculinity, militarism and social conformity was a central feature of the period and one whose values are still present in part because educational systems (public or private) and the state are mutually constitutive. This issue has recently been taken up by the [Society of Friends](Quakers) in the United Kingdom in what they have termed ‘the new tide of militarisation’ including
the stifling of opposition to wars, and the promotion of the ‘unseen march’, that is the increasing militarisation of education. The First World War saw the refining of a number of these strategies in ways that have proven remarkably persistent over the past century, especially in legitimising military responses to social and civil problems. Indeed, the nation state’s ability to effectively mobilise (i.e. both conscript and militarise) the whole population provided the opportunity for testing methods and processes that continue to illustrate how readily uniformity and indoctrination work together across a variety of social domains, particularly when enforced by the authority of the state. As well as the rise of propaganda and the criminalisation of pacifism and dissent, the end of WW1 saw the emergence of the communist-anticommunist trope of wars which characterised the remainder of the century. Identifying, locating and attacking ideology become a mainstay of some streams of contemporary geopolitics, political and religious discourse. The ability to enforce conscription and to punish resistance to military service on the basis of personal or religious beliefs has proven extremely effective in managing forms of dissent in many contemporary societies. Even the concept of ‘patriotism’ has become intimately tied to support for militarism rather than the more specific notion of the defence of one’s own country. This has the dual aspect of making all war ‘patriotic’, even when deemed illegal by the United Nations, and resistance to any war as a potential or actual unpatriotic act. As a result failure to support the state’s military actions is becomes, by definition unpatriotic. With resistance stigmatized, passive acquiescence becomes a form of support. Universal conscription also operated, and operates, as a strategy for taking young men, and more recently women, and acculturating them to systems that included a coercive hierarchical approach to both behavior and thought. These same systems stand largely outside civil processes when it comes to regulation and punishment, with their own institutional logics. After a century or so of this active process of militarism and militarisation, elements of both these experiences and logics been normalised by individuals in positions of power and influence, and in and through knowledge systems such as science and technology. The symbolism of nation-building, especially in colonial contexts, has often relied on an extension of militarism to establish and validate the origins of the contemporary state. In Australia, for example, these various militaristic and symbolic threads have been linked through the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) mythology. More specifically, this mythos places the founding of the ‘modern’ Australian nation on the shores of Gallipoli in Turkey, in the midst of an extended, bloody and ultimately failed, military campaign. The conflation of symbolic military with civil virtues continues to perpetuate and confuse exactly what a contemporary democratic state is meant to look like and how it is meant to function. The multiple historical exclusions (Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, GLBTI, and women to a large extent) continue to be largely absent in the reification processes of such mythologies. The symbolic birth of the Australian identity, crafted on the beaches of Gallipoli is represented exclusively in both ‘fact’ and fiction, by young, healthy, white, males. Female munitions workers, nurses or Black/Indigenous/minority (take your pick) soldiers are located in parentheses, that is bracketed or presented incidentally, and as incidental, to the main argument. Even the elderly survivors of this and other conflicts are seen in the light of the specific time – specific moment even – of their military engagement. All lives before and after, are lost to the creation of claims to a collective identity based on experiences shared by a relative few for a relatively brief period of time. Representations of valor are tied to those soldiers who, if not killed ‘in the prime of their lives’ while ‘making the ultimate sacrifice’, are discharged by virtue of physical, but not mental, suffering and sacrifice. This almost impenetrable discourse has been refined for a century or more such that its lack of tangible meaning is made even more difficult to expose by the enormous affective symbolism attached to it. A Wider Sociology of Militarisation? It is one thing to have a sociological analysis of these historical elements of what we can call creeping militarisation but perhaps what we also need is an overarching sociological theorisation of the process itself, in addition to the study of its constituent parts. Obviously the process is not the same everywhere but there are similarities that exist across the neoliberal economies and their societies. Militarisation, which has long been transportable and adaptable, is becoming increasingly so under neoliberalism which posits itself not simply as an ideology but as of value to society as a self-evident truth. When the largest weapons traders in the world are at the centre of determining what wars are legitimate or not then clearly we have a need for analysis that goes beyond the atomistic claims of the nation state or that remark on the trouble with the internet being that terrorists can access information that they need to commit atrocities. Perhaps attendant here is a need for a sociology of escalation? The state tells lies about how open and liberal it is, how tolerant and reasonable it is and yet the consequences of defending these claims progress in the opposite direction. We have
been actively sold a discourse linking freedom, innovation and exploitation since the late 1970’s such that several cohorts have grown up with these conditions as the norm. The consequences seem to be escalating, with demands for more security, more uniforms, more regulatory powers, more privatisation and more barriers to designated ‘others’. This pattern requires of us a sociological analysis. Political theory may make a critique but is unlikely to offer either solutions or even alternatives under prevailing conditions. Conclusion This first part of my discussion is aimed very briefly at showing the continued impact of militarization in through what [5]Raymond Williams termed residual (historical symbolism), dominant (normalisation of military logics and actions) forms of culture. In the next part of this series, I will discuss the most current (dominant culture in Williams’ parlance) convergence of state, industry, democracy and military components of our societies through the rise of neoliberalism. Power and practice go together rather nicely as can be seen in the massive growth in ‘think tanks’ under neoliberalism. If we are to re-think the language, practices and outcomes of this everyday militarisation, we need not just alternative ideas but alternative means of distribution for such ideas and discussions.


Martyn Everett (2016-06-07 21:51:11)
This is an old but still relevant sociological appraisal http://historynewsnetwork.org/blog/13413

The School of Life Does Sociology (2016-06-08 08:00)

An interesting series of Sociology videos from [1]The School of Life:

IFRAME: [2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLwxNMb28XmpcoeCDO0VnGUavcLUFiNcAI

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLwxNMb28XmpcoeCDO0VnGUavcLUFiNcAI

The role of militarized science and technology (2016-06-09 08:00)
By Hamish Robertson

Introduction
In the first part of this exploratory essay, I explored some of the links between state power over the past two centuries or so and the rise of militarism as an accepted social norm. In this second part, I want to connect this argument to some of the more overt aspects of militarised science and technology and the assumptions that underpin the extension of military violence into various civil domains, including the surveillance and control of public spaces, and the increasing disassociation with violence and death. In the third and final piece I want to show how the expansion of compulsory military service, the rise of uniforms and uniformity, and the role of increasingly militarised policing has contributed to this general concept of a militarization of everyday life - a term that I did not invent but which seems to helpfully connect so many of these otherwise disparate happenings and trends in the neoliberal regimes.

Science and Technology

The intersection of the techno-scientific with the military paradigm is now so familiar and so extensive that we find it hard to imagine any other version of events, even though this too is largely a product of the last century. This process started with the 'need' for the application of scientific methods to warfare, but the technological innovation spiral that resulted extended outwards in a numerous directions. Today we are surrounded by the civilian versions of technologies that were initially funded through military research and contracting programmes including the increasingly pervasive global positioning systems (GPS) technology and its various applications, ‘tough’ laptops, retail Humvees and all the rest.

The development of not only nuclear weapons but the incipient space programmes following World War II produced the missile technologies to inflict mass death on now legitimate civilian targets (once reviled, now normalised), as well as the computers and computer programmes needed to ‘deliver’ (i.e. effectively navigate) those missiles to civilian targets. The Cold War programme linked notional political ideology, techno-science, militarism and industrial power into one tidy bundle. This reached its apotheosis in the creation of the neutron bomb concept that aimed to kill 'targeted' populations while leaving their physical infrastructure and assets relatively intact.

Currently we can see how governments will privilege the military on the one hand while constraining their civil obligations on the other in a process that re-affirms the military role of the military to an exclusion of other possibilities. This includes advancing certain forms of advocacy for the military and their families, making them beholden at a certain level to executive political, rather than democratic, power. Not only does this create additional forms of recompense including access to integrated healthcare and high quality education, but these privileges are enacted in systems that run parallel but separate to those available to civilian populations.

The differential nature of the split between what ordinary citizens can expect to access and what specific groups of individuals can access that is the interesting point of differentiation. If the rationalization for such privileges is duty in the face of danger then the comparison between the ongoing provision of healthcare to armed service personnel, compared to, for example first responders during the events of 9/11 in the US, such as firefighters, police and the public, must be made. In addition, of course, is the question of how citizens are made to accept and pay for these differential entitlements for specific groups of the population, which in the light of the same dangers and potential consequences (including injury and death) do not extend to them or their families.

The French sociologist Emmanuel Todd has also written of the difficulty of taking an alternative public position on acts of terror in the midst of such events, illustrating how we are increasingly coerced into either agreement with or silence on official responses. These public discourses almost always emphasise some sort of claim to exalted values. The state is acting to protect ‘our’ values by whatever means necessary. And these domestic values that don’t necessarily apply in foreign policy, business practice or other ‘excluded’ contexts. Thus liberal democratic countries with large arms industries dissociate their weapons exports and consequences from their domestic claims to public virtue and judicial process.
The aim, I suggest, is to create classes of people whose actions and behaviors cannot be questioned or, if questioned are excused, and about whom it becomes far riskier to voice such concerns publicly. This in turn makes it harder to question the authorities who direct our military in a process of upward unaccountability – if the base of the pyramid is virtuous then so too is the hierarchical apex. The language of ‘un-[insert nation here]’ illustrates how dissent from these new orthodoxies is increasingly framed as disloyalty and even treasonous behavior in the new neoliberal state, a state that is always at war with someone – often including sections of its own citizenry.

The Surveillance and Control of Public Spaces

One of the correlates we can see with this process is the growing geographic analysis of how public spaces are managed and regulated. The transfer of knowledge between the securitised state and its military, and back again, is hardly surprising but some aspects can get if not ridiculous then at least quite repugnant. Clearly we are increasingly subject to technical surveillance while going about our daily lives by CCTV and related technologies. These can make us safer or perhaps at least make some prosecutions easier to pursue. Police drones are already on the rise so surveillance will be increasingly active, even prospective, rather than passive or reactive. This of course brings its own issues in that prevailing ideas of who is likely to act in a criminal manner is already a deeply socially embedded construct. The people and locations which will be monitored most closely will probably (and probabilistically) come as no surprise.

Public spaces can, [4] once again, be regulated through the design and placement of infrastructure such as seats and benches, gates, fences, wire and even [5] spikes. Many of these are directed at the [6] homeless who inconvenience us by their presence and their need for places to rest and sleep. So the response, yet again, is to address the socially constituted problem by constructing the environment defensively against these groups in what is now called [7] hostile architecture. In addition, the ‘broken windows’ strategy adopted by Giuliani in New York, and elsewhere, saw a massive upswing in police numbers and the implementation of much closer community-level policing than was common at the time. In this context, crime is represented as a distinct [8] ontological entity, completely separate to social context, politics and economy. This justifies not only work for criminologists, psychologists, social workers and the like but it is the preferred authoritarian moral response of politicians to social concerns.

Psycho-Social and Cultural Strategies

Another dimension to this process is the contribution of the media to the familiarisation and even desensitisation of the public to military actions and their consequences. The normalisation of military deaths and also atrocities (by military or civilian personnel) against civilian populations is now an established part of the modern news cycle. The televised horrors of mass killings of civilians were both a commonplace and even integral aspect of the war in Vietnam (running totals of death counts of the ‘enemy’ as though war is a sports event with scores and ‘wins’) and the many wars associated with the decolonisation of African, Middle-Eastern and Asian countries by European powers in the 1960’s and 1970’s and their often equally awful consequences. Even today we see in the extended [9] post-colonial (yet hardly ‘post’) conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, that televising killing of combatants and non-combatants alike, is considered legitimate news material with some additional hand-wringing on the side about the ethics of it all.

This can also be interpreted as being extended through the arming of civilian populations in countries such as the United States, which appears the have one of the worst levels of armed violence against its own citizens by other citizens. This includes attacks on generally unarmed civilians in schools, shopping centres and the like as well as more structured or directed attacks on military bases and government offices. Hinton’s new [10] book discusses how mass incarceration in America was directly linked to so-called ‘progressive’ social polices from the Kennedy era onwards and long preceded its escalation under Regan’s ‘war on drugs’. That the physical and social cost to the population is now accepted as part of an ideology of ‘rights’, ‘security’ and ‘self-protection’ illustrates just how deeply entrenched this particular notion of the militarization of civilian life has become.
Dissociative Violence

One of the features of the contemporary neoliberal state is that it likes to offer its citizens an emotional disconnect between political decisions and their human consequences. Similar to the ‘deniability’ common in American politics, our governments now like to implement violent and inhumane policies at the expense of particular groups while offering citizens a form of deniability – ignorance of the facts being the main strategy. Thus ‘illegal’ immigrants can be placed in quasi-legal incarceration for extended periods or, as is being done in Australia, [11]‘off-shored’ for political convenience. This removes such people from the public gaze and the strategy is usually implemented with the collusion of the media and other supports who effectively operationalise the language of the state and its accomplices. The term ‘illegals’ being an obvious attempt to criminalise people not proven to actually be criminals by a court of law but who are instead defined by a political entity with increasingly limited accountability and the power to change the rules at its own convenience. This pattern is hardly unique in history but the dissonance between the values our governments claim to support and the ones they actually implement seems to be growing.

An expanding feature of this surveillance and dissociative violence can be seen in the implementation of military drone strategies. This technology, like so many, has both military and non-military uses but the military ones tend to combine surveillance and force along with the seemingly inevitable ‘collateral damage’. Now even some drone operators have spoken out about the strategic and individual psychological effects of the United States’ [12]drone strategy in the Middle East and Afghanistan. The logic is that as intelligence systems fail to prevent major terror attacks yet more technology represents a solution to these and various other [13]problems. Drones are another product of the huge development in spatial technologies spurred on by the Cold War and the innovations that occurred in satellites, navigation, diversification (GPS etc.), which have increasingly merged with computer technologies to include miniaturisation and now [14]automation. They too are a direct consequence of our militarizing world.

Conclusion

We can see here that science and technology support and enable, intentionally or not, the kinds of dissociative violence favoured in the emergent neoliberal state. Technology is seen as both compensatory, it adds functionality to systems that often fail, and as extensible, it helps expand surveillance types and parameters. Satellite imagery that enables and supports UAV/drone deployment by remotely located operators has all the appearance of clinical efficiency and detachment that a government PR or communications director could possibly hope for. There is no violence so suitable for the media as violence viewed from several thousand metres. Here, the high definition view, while militarily beneficial, runs the potential risk of making the collateral victims of such strategies a little too real for media consumption. And that is most definitely not a desired aspect of the dissociative strategies discussed here.


This is a semi-personal, semi-professional post from one of our editors:

I keep hearing warnings about how book-chapters are bad for your research career. Well, our current publishing and peer-review system makes so little logical sense that I’m not inclined to be complicit with it. I love reading edited collections because they present multiple facets of a topic in a thoughtfully curated context. I may not read all ten chapters from a collection, but if there are one or two useful ones, I tend to look through the others as well.

I’ve heard concerns about access and quality, which are apparently better for journal articles and worse for chapters, and which apparently underpin the the REF. But these make little sense. Most edited books are now available online, like journal articles, and the names of book editors are public, I see no reason why they should be regarded as inferior to journals. Journals are inaccessible without a subscription anyway, so researchers not attached to universities, and the general public, have a bigger chance to read something on google books (many edited books end up there) than in a journal article. Besides, I put my (decent) stuff out for everyone to read anyway - and hopefully there will be an ArXiv ([1]https://arxiv.org/) for social sciences at some point soon. So, doomsters and edited-book-haters, your advice falls on deaf ears. I’m writing three book chapters at the moment. At least my stuff will be in good company of related themes and I’ll enjoy my own work. If some university doesn’t want me because my texts are printed between the wrong covers, that’s just as silly as judging an academic by their gender or by their clothes, and it is their problem, not mine.

Yours, Idle Ethnographer

Adam Wood (2016-08-10 21:28:16)
Yes, totally agree! Thanks. This is the temporary home at least of SocArXiv.org https://osf.io/view/socarxiv/

On Digital Data (2016-06-10 08:00)

One of my favourite [1] XKCD cartoons ever:

[2]

4448
CfP: Feminist Media Histories, special issue on "Data" (2016-06-11 08:00)

CALL FOR PAPERS
Feminist Media Histories: An International Journal

Special Issue on "Data"

Guest Editors: Miriam Posner (UCLA) and Lauren Klein (Georgia Tech)

"Data" has enormous cultural currency in the world today. Most of us understand that corporations are encoding and analyzing our habits, preferences, and behaviors on a massive scale. Personalized music suggestions, predictive policing, and Amazon recommendations are all part of this pervasive data regime. Discussions of this regime, and of data more generally, tend to focus on the present. But the concept of data also has a history, one embedded in a range of cultural, political, and material contexts. Building upon recent feminist scholarship that has drawn our attention to the various ways data shapes twenty-first-century life—how data affects our experience of gender, how the effects of gendered data are felt differently across racial lines, and what feminist theory might bring to data and its visualization, to name only a few—this issue seeks to model how feminist histories of data might help us chart a range of unexplored futures. We ask not only how gender and identity can be brought to bear on the concept of data and its emergence, but also how theories and methods associated with feminist scholarship might be employed to illuminate the historical and cultural complexities of data.

We seek both scholarly essays and born-digital works on topics including but not limited to:

- Data and media. Is data "media"? If so, what are its features and/or how is it expressed?
- Data and history. How does a renewed attention to certain historical subjects or events enrich our understanding of data, past or present?
• Data and narrative. What are the stories we tell about the history of data, and how can a feminist approach offer an alternative narrative of the concept?

• Data and gender. What are the ways in which gender is, or could be, represented as data? What are the gender effects of its visualization?

• Data and method. How can feminist methods inform a history or critique of data?

• Data as concept. What can the concept of "data" bring to feminist media history? What does the concept of "data" elide?

• Data as politics. How is data complicit in structures of power? How does data become part of how power is practiced, experienced, or expressed?

• Data as agent. How has data-driven decision-making influenced the history of media, particularly as it relates to gender?

• Data in the world. How can an intersectional feminist approach to data allow us to better understand its global impact?

Potential contributors should send short proposals of 300-500 words to the guest editors directly (mposner@humnet.ucla.edu and lauren.klein@lmc.gatech.edu) by no later than June 30th, 2016. Contributors will be notified by July 15th, 2016, with completed articles/projects due October 1st, 2016. All contributions, including digital projects, will be sent out for peer review shortly thereafter. The issue is scheduled for a Summer 2017 release (Feminist Media Histories 3.3). We welcome proposals for nontraditional digital projects, although Feminist Media Histories itself cannot host these projects. Should a digital project be accepted, we will publish a 500-1000-word author’s statement in the volume, which will include a link to the externally-hosted project. Feminist Media Histories is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal devoted to feminist histories of film, video, audio, and digital technologies across a range of periods and global contexts. Intermedial and transnational in approach, Feminist Media Histories examines the historical role gender has played in varied media technologies, and documents women’s engagement with these media as audiences and users, creators and executives, critics and theorists, technicians and laborers, educators and activists. Feminist Media Histories is published by the University of California Press. More information is available here: http://fmh.ucpress.edu/content/submit
The video clip “[2]Eksponat” (showpiece) released by the Russian rock group ‘Leningrad’ became a viral sensation within days. A catchy tune with Leningrad’s trademark obscene language tells the story of a woman who is going to various cultural events like the Mariinsky theatre and a Van Gogh exhibit wearing Chistian Louboutin shoes (‘na Labytenah’) and ‘f****** awesome pants’, where she is supposed to be the exhibit’s ‘showpiece’, at least compared to the rest of the women there. The video clip with more than 30 million views became an instant sensation and even created a minor [3]PR scandal when managers of the actual Van Gogh exhibit in Moscow offered women wearing high heel shoes free tickets. There are different opinions on the video: some consider it anti-feminist, some just tragicomic, but there is no doubt that the creators of the video managed to capture the essence of a number of issues and maladies of Russian post-Soviet society.

The video itself shows a woman who is preparing for a date with a seemingly wealthy man. She vigorously engages in painful beauty procedures, trying to lose wait in two hours before the meeting, screaming at her mother for giving birth to her ‘with such a big ass’, and badgering her female friend to bring her ‘Labuteny’ – a knock-off of an expensive French shoe brand. In order to pass off as a young woman of ‘status’, she applies lots of makeup, fake eyelashes and even paints the soles of the shoes red to pass off as the real deal. In the end pride comes before the fall: after putting on the ‘Labuteny’ the heroine falls, loses consciousness and injures her leg. Despite a bleeding nose and inability to stand on her feet, she fixes her makeup, crawls to the door and answers the caller at the door, while having day dreams of marrying the man she is about to meet for the first time.

No country for feminism

An international audience unfamiliar with Russian social mores might very well be shocked by how shallow...
women are represented in the clip. The heroine seems to care only about the way she will look for her date, lies about her 'rich daddy', strives to marry a wealthy man and doesn’t know anything about art, misnaming pastel colours. The fact that the heroine’s dreams seem to be reduced to a marriage with a seemingly rich man reflects a popular Western stereotype of Russian 'mail order brides' and Russian society’s stigmatization of unmarried women.

The lyrics, even though performed by a female singer, are also quite misogynist. The protagonist calls other women in the Mariinsky theatre 'tyolki' (female cows), which is the way men usually call sexually attractive women. This term is particularly galling because of the recent 'tyolka-gate', when an oppositional and liberal mass media outlet Meduza referred to women using this term. It sparked an intensive debate in Russian-language digital media, with numerous male journalists wondering why women should get offended if they are only referenced through their sexual appeal.

Footage of the heroine’s futile attempts to fit into the ‘f******* awesome pants’ also show that she has a hard time fitting into the beauty standards and the persona that she strives to emulate. At the same time, the language of the heroine and of the song reflect a very poor command of Russian, and the profusion of obscenities combined with shabby accommodation suggest an underprivileged upbringing. In contrast to the female protagonist, who needs more than two hours to become ‘worthy’ of her date, including a number of sadistic beauty procedures and home remedies that even make her throw up, the man she will be meeting doesn’t need to prepare for the date: he is shown at the office, working (the only character in the video to have a job), and one assumes that he will simply pick her up on the way.

Hello, World

The video shows that Russians live in a very westernized and globalized world. A sign of an 'elite' partner is his or her awareness for brands: the most important part of the outfit is the French luxury company. Even the heroine’s idol is Victoria Beckham – a British pop star and designer. Ultimately, the fact the heroine falls from her shoes can also be regarded as a metaphor for a colossus on clay feet: she cannot maintain her status as a rich woman and gets badly hurt in the process. This also shows the fragility of a female construct: just a few years stand between the heroine’s tireless beauty procedures and her becoming a stay at home wife with rollers in her hair – just like her mother.

The heroine’s room is supposed to look stereotypically ‘female’ with many stuffed toys, projecting the heroine’s immaturity and childishness. Moreover, the room is only half renovated: the one that the heroine shows to her ‘future husband’ on Skype looks minimalist and European, while the rest of it shows typical Soviet artefacts and furniture. This could also be seen as a metaphor for Russian society: seemingly reformed, but with a lingering Soviet legacy.

Another passing theme is the heroine’s disgust to bread that made ‘her ass too big’. Her mother’s response is that she won’t tolerate this kind of attitude to bread as her own mother survived the siege of Leningrad. This short interaction shows that even in questions of diet the traumatic memory of the Great Patriotic War comes to the fore. Another lasting effect from the war is the skewed demographics: the shortage of men as a result of the war caused a fierce competition among women. The legacy of this phenomenon is still visible in Leningrad’s video.

Moscow, we have a problem

The most disturbing part of the video is that it is a very convenient tool in inward misogyny, i.e., women shaming women. Being a part of a macho patriarchal culture is hard, so a lot of women side with the desirable and hierarchically higher in-group - men - and re-affirm female objectification and disparagement. Another popular example of women shaming is the LiveJournal blog by Lena Myro, where a supposedly female author constantly engages in rants about ‘inferior’ women, that she calls ‘kuricy’ (hens), who, like the heroine of the Leningrad's video
are intellectually challenged and primarily concerned with marriage. Especially telling in both cases are animal metaphors: women are ranked even lower than primates.

Thus, what this video and its popularity show is that Russian society is rife with patriarchal culture and woman shaming is an acceptable practice. Moreover, even though the video mocks misogynist stereotypes and consumerist values, whereby a person’s worth is based on the type of brands he or she wears, it is still a very common point of view. A glimpse of hope in this video is still present: in order to be an elite partner one has to be a connoisseur of culture. The fact that the protagonist goes to the theatre and art exhibit is an important indicator that wearing ‘Labuteny’ is luckily not enough.

Elizaveta Gaufman received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Tübingen. Her research focuses on the exploration of verbal and visual enemy images through big data analysis, combining international relations theory with media and cultural studies.

Twitter: @lisas_research

2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=et281UHNoOU
5. https://books.google.fr/books/about/Gender_State_and_Society_in_Soviet_and_P.html?id=71h2VamVl2UC&redir_esc=y
7. https://www.academia.edu/12842869/Memory_Media_and_Securitization_Russian_Media_Framing_of_the_Ukrainian_Crisis

Iwan Glasnow (2019-08-05 21:14:11)
"loose wait" this shows the quality of this "scientist". Peinlich, dass sowas finanziert wird. It is a shame that this women calls herself "scientist". She would be more in place with the rainbow press.

Coercion and Co-option in the Militarised Neoliberal State (2016-06-12 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson

Introduction

In this final part of this three part series, I would like to briefly explore some aspects of how our ruling elites and governments help reproduce these intersectionalities to their own advantage. More particularly, I look at how
we are co-opted and coerced into a denial of our participatory role in state violence enacted in our names. I do this by connecting current trends to more established historical ones, including logical connectors to how various racisms have been institutionalised and regulated in favour of established socio-political orders. I then conclude this by suggesting that we need a more incisive sociological imaginary to unpack and, where possible, repudiate the ways in which contemporary states and their servants co-opt us into their regimes of power and dissociative violence. This is perhaps one strategy for beginning the process of civil demilitarisation.

The role of visual authority

The visual authority of the state was once fully uniformed and accessible to all. The soldier was a soldier, the policeman was a policeman, the nurse a nurse and so on. The uniforms were known and familiar to everyone because they were public knowledge but things have become much more complicated in recent decades. In particular, under neoliberal regimes, the state has seen fit to privatise many once public functions, processes and activities. We saw this with the extension of the ‘Gulf War’ into an increasingly global strategy shared by governments of various persuasions. [1]Outsourcing, once an industrial cost-saving strategy that delivered manufacturing jobs from the developed to the developing world (and destabilised established employment patterns), has now become part of the scope of military activities - similar to mercenaries but with more deniability. Prisons have been privatized to a much greater degree as crime and its management have become 'monetizable'. Security businesses abound and operate both onshore and off-shore, including the operation of asylum-seeker facilities and the like. The wicked problems of our age appear to have lost their potential for solution (where's the profit in that?) and instead are treated very like those that supposedly avail themselves of [2]military solutions, and with similar consequences.

What we see then is a gradual privitisation of state violence and its consequences. This often involves the uglier, public relations-unfriendly kind of violence that the state is increasingly committed to – forms that frequently negate the purported values of the liberal democratic state. The argument seems to be that we don't have to hide the nasty stuff quite so much if we privatise it, the corporation will do that for us – that is, on our behalf, because we are still complicit in these processes and their outcomes whether we like it or not. Thus we and our societies are complicit in drone attacks, illegal detention and torture, [3]off-shore ‘processing’ and the fairly appalling geopolitics that seem to be producing and reproducing these circumstances. And of course in many places simply not counting the consequences of state violence and the violence perpetrated by the servants of the state is a sufficient [4]strategy in an equation that is also on the rise and which can best be summarized as ‘no data, no problem'.

Loïc Wacquant has been writing for some years now on how the United States perpetuates the traditional modernist war against the poor through its welfare and [5]prison systems, with the added dimension of ‘race’ being fundamentally central to the whole equation. The regulation of African-Americans was big business under slavery, then [6]after slavery and it remains big business today through poverty, crime, the drug trade and the associated regularisation and regulation of these ‘social’ problems. The institutionalisation of race and racism to justify this regulation is now so deeply a part of the American political fabric that it appears normal to that society. Policing race is a major part of the American judicial system and its associated infrastructure. A less well-known but very interesting aspect of this policing [7]regime is that it emerged shortly after the Civil War (the Black Codes) and has only extended and refined itself since then. Even now prisons are closely associated with entrepreneurial [8]capitalism because they possess a captive labour force that can't go on strike, change jobs or seek welfare.

Outside of the United States, it is also the case that many other colonial settler states have criminalized the remnants of their indigenous peoples and, having waged actual wars of dispossession against them, followed this with social-policy driven strategies that often include physical removal, child theft (acculturation is for their own good), concentration (reserves, ghettos etc.), economic dependency, welfare dependency and then a strategy of self-destruction through alcohol, drug use and suicide. While the patterns are rarely precisely the same, there is a frightening level of similarity across many sovereign states in both the inputs and outputs of such systems. Typically indigenous imprisonment rates, and even deaths in custody, in countries like [9]Australia and [10]New Zealand, are
usually far above those of the settler populations. [11]Private prisons (see above) can have worse death rates than publicly run prisons, assuming that these people actually make it to prison alive in the first place. And this is far from guaranteed because there is a general acceptance of the use of greater state and non-state violence against such populations. One suggestion to consider is that in many settler states indigenous peoples continue to be punished because their presence and their historical treatment negate the founding myths of such states. Or to put it more simply, they are punished for managing to survive colonisation. Here too the modality is often a war without end and no intention of a peaceful resolution.

One odd thing is that we have a tendency in these regimes to criminalise resistance of any kind, from the moderate to the extreme. Thus criminality is almost always disproportionately associated with the colonised. These scenarios can become almost ridiculous in their analysis by certain parties, with [12]genetics even being dragged in (as of course it has in the past) to 'explain' the criminality of the colonised (science yet again explains 'their' deviant behaviour). The same argument is rarely turned back on the colonisers themselves because they are the imposed norm and only occasionally is 'criminality' examined as a toll of socio-political ordering and control. As with militarism and policing we seem to accept the [13]ontology of crime unquestioningly. More problematic still we find the idea that our systems have their own powers of generativity (armies need conflict, police need criminals, prisons need prisoners, hospitals need patients etc.) difficult to accept and continue to portray them as simply reactive to external, independently generated problems. The problem being that while many scientists rightly criticise this type of extrapolation, there is an established history of using race (racism's major tool for heavy lifting) to justify the treatment of marginalised others. Curiously in a kind of inversion of this, these groups are often recognised in the settler societies for their military contributions more than they are for their civil accomplishments. 'Bad' genes may be acceptable in one domain but not in another.

These scenarios also almost always involve similar geographical strategies because the [14]geography of social regulation and exclusion often relies on a quasi-military approach to territorial management and control, with the added dimension of self-regulation that social stigma can bring to the equation. The linking of violence to geography was such that African Americans who needed to travel across the Jim Crow South relied on the [15]Green Book for information about safe places to eat and stay – because they were physically and psychologically at risk in many places. Forced spatial containment on 'reserves' and the like has been a characteristic of historical approaches that have their modern civil [16]equivalents. Such groups were traditionally expected to linger in rural areas and, furthermore, to keep to their own 'spaces' if and when they settled in urban centres. Many public housing projects in many countries still reflect this spatial strategy. Not all policing, it is clear, involves or indeed requires the physical immediacy of a police force. Normalising in-group and dominant group forms of violence serve to reinforce many of these situations to the point where it becomes difficult to visualise an alternative.

**Militarism, Policing and Social Order**

The transfer of knowledge and practices between military and civil domains continues apace. Big data and related predictive analytics are gaining momentum across both domains. Originally linked to military mapping, social mapping emerged in the [17]Victorian era with poverty, disease and crime as the main foci. Crime mapping has become a commonplace in civil policing in recent decades and yet it is frequently dissociated from other congruent social domains such as poverty, unemployment or public health. Now we see both advanced [18]geographic information systems analysis and big data [19]analytics being used to 'predict' where crimes will occur and, increasingly, who (at the group and individual level) will commit them. Policing is increasingly using technology in its extended role as social regulation, and science and technology are seen to make these processes 'objective'. At the same time, facial recognition systems and software fail the application test on a variety of 'minority' groups flagging at the same time the limits of the presumed objectivity and ability of such technology to track 'typical' individuals, and of course, the notion of the embodiment of the archetypical individual.

One of the features of the past few decades that illustrates this rising tide of military and quasi-military sym-
bolism in our societies is the [20]**militarization** of police forces. Traditionally, the military were the model for a variety of [21]**uniformed** civilian services with which we have all become familiar, typically including ambulance staff, fire services, postal workers, public transport workers, immigration personnel (recently rebranded as ‘border forces’ a title worthy of deconstruction in and of themselves) and police. Most of these services were established in the 19th century when the possibility of directing civilians into behaving in a more ‘orderly’ fashion was already, as noted above, gaining rapid [22]**appeal**. Here to we have to accept that the state sees its citizenry as partial (some are in and others are out) while policing has traditionally had and continues to involve some degree of covert surveillance work against selected citizens and other non-state actors. In many places this pattern was well-established prior to the development of the universal franchise and the claims to civil society which we now readily accept because of their unquestioning repetition (we were always democratic apparently). In recent years however, we have frequently seen the role of police become more intensively focused on (a) civil surveillance and (b) para-military tasks associated with gun violence, terrorism and related threats to the state. Their use against organized labour and labour protests was already well-established by the 1980s. This obviously includes armed police services or sections thereof and, in some countries, the acquisition of equipment that makes police look more like a scaled down extension of the military (tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannon, armoured cars, helicopters). Some commentary has emerged on this in the wake of the Ferguson incident in the United States and there is a growing [23]**academic critique** of the use of such weaponry against citizens. While not all countries follow exactly the same trajectory, we can see this general pattern in the neoliberal economies where the eternal trade-off seems to rest between scaling up the physical and moral authority of the state and the associated dilemma, under neoliberal precepts, of paying for all of this security.

**Conclusion** This brief series of pieces is an exploration of a number of growing issues and their possible connections associated with what I see as the continuing, expanding and diversifying encroachment of militarization on society at large. I see the militarisation of everyday life as a creeping form of oppression that relies on tried and tested historical methods in combination with new and emerging techniques and technologies. The discourse around this process is almost always one of **protection** in the neoliberal, notionally democratic societies in which many of us live. And it is ultimately tied to dominant values which can be questioned to a degree but which resistance to is increasingly criminalised. That these processes now draw on new digital as well as conventional analogue methods means that we are subject to an expansion of the entire paradigm. Connecting these seemingly often disconnected parts is a major issue for a more historically nuanced sociology of our times.

5. https://www.dukeupress.edu/punishing-the-poor
17. http://booth.lse.ac.uk/cgi-bin/do.pl?sub=view_booth_and_barth$args=531000,180400,6,large,5
Popular Culture and New Media: The Politics of Circulation (2016-06-13 08:00)

David Beer reads an introduction to his book [1]Popular Culture and New Media:
Let's cut the bullshit! (2016-06-14 08:00)

I [1] study the work of mathematicians. I don't call them informants but participants, because "informants" is a horrible word. Some of my participants enjoy being part of the research and take pains to explain and verbalise stuff to make it clearer to me, in the hope that I can then relay it to other non-mathematicians in an understandable way; and that maybe I can even manage to tell them something INTERESTING and NOT WRONG about themselves. Others are sceptical about what sociology can do. Yet others have rather wrong ideas of what sociology is about, so I have to explain. Yet others know about quantitative sociology, but have no idea what qualitative methods can do and why they have some advantages and how qualitative "data" is collected and used. But all of them, even the most polite ones, basically suspect that sociology tends to overcomplicate things, even when things can be simplified (though they do acknowledge that of course there are some things that are complex and need to be discussed in a complex way). I agree with them. In fact, before I started this project I was very disheartened by all the bullshit. This research has given me some of my lost hope in sociology. It has shown me that I’m not crazy or stupid simply because I don’t like bullshit, and because I am convinced that social scientists must be committed to explaining stuff in a variety of possible ways, from the simple to the nuanced, according to what’s most appropriate, and that we must not use more nuance where less will suffice.

So, I think many of the mathematicians would applaud the spirit of Kieran Healy's article below, called "Fuck Nuance". It is tongue in cheek, but it makes an important point.

(Though the mathematicians probably won’t read the article itself, because it exemplifies the very fault it is criticising, by being very long and full of... let’s be polite and call it "nuance". Here is the place to admit that I also couldn’t read it).


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Call for Papers: The Accelerated Academy (2016-06-15 08:00)

From the 1980s onward, there has been an unprecedented growth of institutions and procedures for auditing and evaluating university research. Quantitative indicators are now widely used from the level of individual researchers to that of entire universities, serving to make academic activities more visible, accountable and amenable to university management and marketing. Further demands for accountability in academia can be related to general societal trends described under the heading of the audit society (Power 1997), and the evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen 2011). As part of broader transformations in research governance, indicators on publications and citations are now permeating academia: from global university rankings to journal-level bibliometrics such as the journal impact factor and individual measures like the h-index. Yet, it is only recently that considerable interest has been directed towards the effects that these measures might have on work practices and knowledge production (c.f. de Rijcke et al. 2015), and the role they might be playing in accelerating academic life more generally (c.f. Vostal 2016).
The Accelerated Academy draws together a number of cross-disciplinary conversations about the effects that acceleration towards metric forms of evaluation is having upon research, and the implications this holds for living and working in contemporary academia (Felt et al. 2009). Building on the successful maiden edition of the Accelerated Academy series in Prague in 2015, this year’s Leiden conference will be especially focussed towards the following questions:

- What does acceleration mean in different research contexts?
- What are the implications of digitally mediated measurement and tools for quantifying scholarly performance?
- What are the knowledge gaps regarding the effects of metrics on scientific quality and societal relevance of research?
- How can we harness the positive and minimize the adverse effects of performance measurement in universities?

Confirmed keynote speakers include Peter Dahler-Larsen (University of Copenhagen), Ulrike Felt (University of Vienna) and Michael Power (LSE).

We invite submissions for presentations of around 20 minutes. The deadline for submitting abstracts will be August 31st 2016. Please send two pages or 800 words describing your contribution including a short biographical note to: [1]a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl.

Conference organisers

[2]Sarah de Rijcke, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University
[3]Björn Hammarfelt, University of Borås, Sweden | Leiden University
[4]Alex Rushforth, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University

Scientific committee

[5]Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick
[6]Tereza Stöckelová, Czech Academy of Sciences
[7]Filip Vostal, Czech Academy of Sciences
[8]Paul Wouters, Leiden University
[9]Milena Kremakova, University of Warwick

Event registration will be free of charge. In addition, a limited number of travel and accommodation support bursaries will be made available for researchers especially inhibited by the costs of travel. Please contact the conference manager [10]Andrea Reyes Elizondo for more information.

1. mailto:a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl
2. https://www.cwts.nl/people/sarah-de-rijcke
3. https://www.cwts.nl/people/bjoumlrn-hammarfelt
4. https://www.cwts.nl/people/alex-rushforth
5. https://markcarrigan.net/the-accelerated-academy/
8. https://www.cwts.nl/people/paul-wouters
Value and Values (2016-06-15 17:24)

“Value and Values”
Saturday December 3rd 2016
9.30-18.30, followed by a wine reception at 18.30
Goldsmiths, University of London

This event is the final symposium for the ESRC Professorial Fellowship project “Value and Values” (ES/K010786/1) conducted between 2013-2016 by Bev Skeggs and Simon Yuill.

Facebook represents a new form of capitalist capture, one based on monopolization and rent that shapes our current connectivity as it monetises us and opens us up to forms of financialization, including increased indebtedness. This form of capitalist capture moves us into a new regime of accumulation, of profit without production, in which the command of surplus value is via the control of surplus information.

Speakers:
Will Davies, Natalie Fenton, Mark Fisher, Matthew Fuller, Olga Goriunova, Sarah Kember, Gholam Khiabany, Costas Lapavitsas, Adrian MacKenzie, Johnna Montgomerie, Alberto Toscano and Joanna Zylinska.

Project website: https://values.doc.gold.ac.uk

This event has been sponsored by the: ESRC, Goldsmiths, University of London and The Sociological Review Foundation.

This event is free but it is essential that you register. To register please go to: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/value-and-values-final-symposium-for-the-esrc-professorial-fellowship-project-tickets-26071878691

For event organisational enquiries, please contact Jenny Thatcher: events@thesociologicalreview.com

1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/value-and-values-final-symposium-for-the-esrc-professorial-fellowship-project-tickets-26071878691

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action (2016-06-16 08:00)

BSA Sociologists outside Academia, in collaboration with Sage Publishing Ltd and the Sociological Imagination
Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action

A half-day workshop

British Psychological Society meeting rooms, Tabernacle St
London EC2A 4UE
Monday 17 October 2016, 12.30 – 4.30pm

How come – at least in the UK – you don’t come across people with ‘sociologist’ in their job title working in industry, business, the civil service, or pretty much anywhere outside academia or independent research organisations?

Sociologists seem to all reside in universities, unlike psychologists and economists, who have colonised many kinds of workplaces.

Most sociologists believe our subject is essential for understanding the world around us, or to resolve contemporary problems, from gender violence to climate change. We have the concepts (like ‘cultural capital’, ‘intersectionality) and the theories (social mobility, moral panic). But where are the practical sociologists?

So what would it take to establish a ‘practical sociology’ in the UK and elsewhere, with sociologists employed to use sociology concepts and models to address problems in industry, business, government, education or health? This half-day workshop aims to establish an agenda for practical sociology.

The workshop will explore pressing questions about how a practical sociology may apply its expertise, skills and knowledge to problems at work or in the community.

- What has prevented the emergence of practical sociology in the UK?
- What are the core knowledge and models that are needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public sector face?
- What kinds of skills would be needed to work as a practical sociologist?
- How would a practical sociology career pan out?

This workshop will be of interest to sociologists and others who are keen to see the application of sociological concepts, models and theories in practical settings in the public, private and third sectors. Please come along and help us set an agenda for developing practical sociology.

Registration


BSA Members £5; Non-members £8; BSA Concessionary members and full-time students £3.

Tea and coffee will be provided: please bring your lunch.

Evan (2016-06-22 16:39:59)
Will there be resources available for one not able to attend? Perhaps a video recording of the event? I’m a US student and would love to attend, but I believe I’ll have class on that day.

Mark Carrigan (2016-06-25 09:31:47)
no idea, sorry

Varoufakis on contemporary capitalism’s preposterous reversal of the truth (2016-06-17 08:00)

This isn’t a new idea but I’ve rarely encountered it [1]expressed so concisely:

The idea that individuals create wealth and that all governments do is come along and tax them is what Varoufakis calls “a preposterous reversal of the truth”.

“There is an amazing myth in our enterprise culture that wealth is created individually and then appropriated by the state to be distributed.

“We are conceptualising what is happening in society as if we are an archipelago of Robinson Crusoes, everybody on an island, creating our own thing individually and then a boat comes along and collects it and redistributes it. It’s not true. We are not individual producers, we produce things collectively.”

He points to an iPhone.

“This machine, inside of it, contains technologies that were created collectively. Not only through collaboration but a lot of public funding. Every single technology in there was created by government grant.”


2. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/25/yanis-varoufakis-australias-negative-gearing-is-scandalous

bbhurdle (2016-06-18 06:10:48)
This seems like a really interesting article and I’d love to read it but the page has expired....Is there any other link I could use?
In the heat of Brexit, it may seem inopportune, if not entirely irrelevant, to recite poetry, when so much “real stuff” hovers over our heads. Yet, there is something about the lyrical outbursts of [1] poets that can alert us to the possibility of thinking beyond and across boundaries, in our last-ditch attempt to decide whether to “leave” or “remain”. A few verses from John Donne’s, [2] ‘No Man is an Island’,

should suffice to convince us that no nation is ‘entire of itself’, but also recognise that ‘if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less’. What could be more pertinent than such [3] devotions (prayers) upon an emergent occasion, which can also be rewritten as a devotion (loyalty) to the UK’s place as a ‘piece of the Continent’, and ‘a part of the main’, especially when we realise that both the EU and the UK will be smaller and weaker if they part ways.

This may seem especially true as we escape the high planes of poetic sensibility, to return to the pedestrian terrain of politics. What greets us on our return is an artificially polarised debate, which shores up multiple scenarios, dilemmas, and confusions, while also revealing the hypocrisy, short-sightedness, and prejudices that inform it. These run into familiar refrains that warn us against weak levels of EU integration among its member states, poor national regimes of (self)regulation (especially the PIIGS), the German dominance of the EU, and the (now visible) destructive consequences and effect of the Eurozone crisis.

These distressing signs of Europe’s ill-health, as it currently stands, translate into three main scenarios that stress decay and stagnation, while also nurturing hopes for the cosmopolitanisation of Europe. The decay scenario laments the EU’s collapse under the weight of its own internal and external contradictions, the stagnation scenario blames jealously guarded national interests for the failure of successful integration, while the cosmopolitanisation scenario envisages a post-national Europe, whose identity lies between rather within European nation states. The latter scenario, developed by [4] Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande
who also came up with the other two, may in fact be Europe’s only hope to reform itself in accordance with its principles and values, but requires more political commitment, and less economistic calculation at a moment when the opposite trend prevails.

In Beck and Grande’s “manifesto” for a (more) cosmopolitan Europe, such initiatives involve strengthening an EU-wide ‘civil society based on universally shared constitutional norms’, and forging a ‘new post-national model of democracy which instead of incapacitating European citizens, accords them an active role in the decision-making process’. This in turn calls for a ‘cosmopolitan approach to integration’ which no longer strives to overcome but rather acknowledge national difference, while simultaneously establishing Europe as ‘the driving force of a global cosmopolitanism, and a member of the new transatlantic security community’. Inspired though all this may sound, it is plagued by its own idealism, unless it becomes applied policy or second nature to the citizens of Europe.

Faced with such recurrent plot lines in “the EU-runs-amok” and “the EU-needs-you” genre, many (rightfully) read them as a dilemma between opting out to escape the clutches of an ill-fated union, and staying put to ensure that the European project has the legs to run with a little help from its members. This sense of ambivalence towards Europe, not as a geographical entity but as a political enterprise, expresses both admiration as well as misgivings, especially in countries, like the UK, who have historically displayed a sense of remove from and reluctance towards the possibility of “an ever closer union” with its European partners. Such discontent with “the Continent” could be described as “the Bolingbroke syndrome”, where much like the character from Shakespeare’s Richard II, anything distinct from the British Isles is treated unenthusiastically at best.

This disjointedness however leads to distortions and confusions, the most important of which being the tendency to blame any political dissatisfaction on the EU and treat it as specific to it, when its roots may be closer to home that we care to admit. Such a sullen attitude reeks of hypocrisy, demonstrates our short-sightedness, and exposes our prejudices, making us rather unpleasant allies. Armed with a pre-packaged suspicion of the EU we appear so eager to nod approvingly at any remark that disparages it, displaying a “me-first” ethos, and a lack of vision for a union of which we are members. In doing so we allow nationalist vendettas to sully our relationship with our fellow-members, clinging to some peculiar notion of exceptionalism which reminds the world how different we are compared to everybody else, without perhaps realising how cocooned we are in our mental fortresses.

Such attitudes do not only encourage divisiveness and polarisation, and cultivate alarmism and escapism, but also turn our attention away from home-grown problems. Faceless bureaucrats do not exclusively reside in Brussels but can be found in Westminster and Whitehall too, political representation and democratic accountability is a problem here as much as it is elsewhere, especially if one thinks of the current electoral system or such hangovers from the past like the unelected House of Lords. Even if these are dismissed as negligible footnotes in comparison to the “European superstate”, concerns about the future of public funding, aggressive anti-immigration policies and tactics, and calls to replace the Human Rights Act with an English Bill of Rights should raise an eyebrow or two, especially when all the above are entrusted to the hands of the present government.

Pursuing national interests sounds sensible, if not the “right” thing to do, but we might be taking a very narrow view of it often mistaking sovereignty for power, and union with uniformity, in a world where wealth creation (via
economic opportunity), social cohesion (via civil society), and political freedom (via legislation) press against the limits of “the nation”. The choice then is between remaining in a union which changes as it develops, or leave when we might be most needed as Brits of the Continent, and parts of the main.

Dr Lambros Fatsis is Lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Southampton. This article was written in preparation for the [8] Free University Brighton’s forthcoming EU referendum discussion at the Brighton Dome


Video interviews with leading critical realists (2016-06-19 08:00)


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqO2bVP5JW

1. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwOibnkDx30zmGnTGVn-bUw
2. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCwOibnkDx30zmGnTGVn-bUw

Corbynism and the Corporation: BBC Bias and the Case for Media Transformation – CCISC (2016-09-13 11:16:01)

[...] then might explain this apparent bias in the BBC’s reporting? After the BBC dismissed the report as nothing more than the product of a ’vested interest group’ (an argument I have already [...] 

Call for Papers: Migration and Crisis in Europe (2016-06-20 08:00)

Dear Colleagues,

Sociology is pleased to announce the theme of its 2018 special issue: Migration and Crisis in Europe. The issue will be guest edited by Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna and Elena Vacchelli, all at Middlesex University, UK.

The editors are currently calling for papers to be submitted to the issue and relevant topics might include the following:
- Response of migrants and migrant organisations to the economic crisis.
- New forms of labour mobility and the transformation of migrant labour markets.
- Border struggles, migration solidarity movements and/or anti-migration politics in light of the current 'humanitarian crisis'.
- Migration and social reproduction in a context of economic crisis and welfare restructuring.
- Interpreting the transformation of EU migration and border management through the perspective of crisis.
- Changing internal and external borders in the light of current migratory flows.
- The politics of humanitarianism and/or securitization.

For more information on the aims and scope of the special issue, please see the full call for papers [1]on the BSA website. To submit your article please visit: [2]http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc. The submission deadline is 13 March 2017.

For any queries regarding the special issue, please contact:
Nick Dines ([3]nick.dines@uniroma3.it)
Nicola Montagna ([4]n.montagna@mdx.ac.uk)
Elena Vacchelli ([5]e.vacchelli@mdx.ac.uk).

1. [http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/publications-vacancies.aspx](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/publications-vacancies.aspx)
2. [http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc](http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc)
3. [mailto:nick.dines@uniroma3.it](mailto:nick.dines@uniroma3.it)
4. [mailto:n.montagna@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:n.montagna@mdx.ac.uk)
5. [mailto:e.vacchelli@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:e.vacchelli@mdx.ac.uk)

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**Can Sociology Make a Difference? Social research and social justice (2016-06-26 19:25)**

How can social research make a difference? This event will showcase examples of exciting research being conducted by Warwick Sociology in partnership with people and organisations who are directly engaged in social justice work.

We want to share our research findings and lessons learnt from conducting collaborative research, and we also want to hear from people who have worked with university researchers in the past, or may do so in the future. What are the advantages of working together? What are the challenges? Can partnerships between universities and social justice organisations be fruitful for all involved, or are there too many competing priorities?

Please join us to discuss these issues and more. All are welcome and the event is free, but please register so we can keep track of numbers.

Speakers include:

[1]Alice Mah, on her research project 'Toxic Expertise: Environmental Justice and the Global Petrochemical Industry'.

Industry' which includes research with participants as diverse as global petrochemical companies and environmental NGOs, and people living in polluted areas.


We hope to see you there. The discussion will be accompanied by wine, juice and snacks.

[10] https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/can-sociology-make-a-difference-social-research-and-social-justice-tickets-25954015158

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/alice_mah
2. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/currentresearch/toxicexpertise/
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/goldieosuri/
4. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/research/themes/tam/thestateofkashmir
6. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/hannahjones/
7. https://mappingimmigrationcontroversy.com/about/researchteam/
8. https://mappingimmigrationcontroversy.com/about/partners/
10. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/can-sociology-make-a-difference-social-research-and-social-justice-tickets-25954015158

Trans/Gender-Nonconforming College Students Project (2016-06-26 20:45)

Trans/Gender-Nonconforming College Students Project

Abbie Goldberg, a Professor of Psychology at Clark University in Worcester MA, is conducting a survey of trans/gender-nonconforming college students (including recent graduates) regarding their perspectives and experiences on a range of topics, including trans advocacy and needed supports/services on college campuses. Students with non-binary gender identities are particularly encouraged to participate, as their experiences are rarely represented in research. Students may participate if they identify as trans, gender-nonconforming, gender questioning, genderqueer, agender, or anywhere on the gender-nonconforming spectrum. The survey, which was informed by focus groups and consultation with trans/gender nonconforming college students, takes about 25-30 minutes to complete. All responses are anonymous. Individuals can elect to be entered in a lottery for one of 10 $50.00 Amazon gift cards; individuals' names and email addresses will not be connected to or traceable to the data that they provide.

Please contact the principal investigator of the study, [1] Abbie Goldberg, with any questions or feedback, or to request to be informed of study findings: [2] agoldberg@clarku.edu. Feel free to learn more about her [3] research on sexuality, gender, and families. Or visit the project Facebook page: [4] www.facebook.com/transgncc.
This study has been approved by the Clark Committee for the Rights of Human Participants in Research and Training Programs (IRB). Any questions about human rights issues should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. James P. Elliott:[5](508) 793-7152 or by e-mail ([6]humansubjects@clarku.edu).

To participate, please follow the link:

[7]https://clarku.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1ZbVuLudzxQyWdn

Digital Health/Digital Capitalism One-day conference 4th July last chance for tickets (2016-06-27 09:31)

The Digital Health/Digital Capitalism event is at Leeds Beckett University on 4th July (blurb below) and tickets are still available [2]here for £20. There are plenaries by Nick Fox ('The micropolitical economy of posthuman health') and Graham Scambler ('Digital sociology or sociology of the digital? A case study on health') and details of the full itinerary [3]here.

Digital technologies have had a profound impact on the ways in which people live their lives, relate to one another and think about themselves and their capacities. This event will bring together scholars who are interested in the impacts of the digital on ideas and practices of health and the workings of capitalist economies and how the two come together.

The generation and management of vast amounts of health data has been enabled through digital means. In particular this has enabled fine grained analysis of particular types and groups of people in relation to a diversity of factors. Private and profit making enterprises have become increasingly involved with personal health data through partnerships with health services and the generation of new kinds of data through commercial devices apps and websites.

Digital capitalism has produced new approaches to work and profit generation. Human bodies are now intensively digitised due to the (self) tracking and monitoring conducted by commercial enterprises. New digital ways of working have freed some workers from the office while increasing the amount of time and attention they are expected to dedicate to work tasks and the length of time spent sedentary. The productivity and activity levels of some workers are closely monitored leading to increasing physical and psychological stress.
The Tourist: Uncalled for observations and gross generalizations - PART 1 (2016-06-27 17:01)

by Jonathan J.B. Mijs

Jonathan J.B. Mijs is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology at Harvard University. When he is not writing about himself in third person, he is studying how (young) people come to see and explain setbacks in their own lives and that of others, which is the topic of his dissertation.
Even at its height, European colonialism had to be rationalised and reified in all manner of different ways to ‘make sense’. Indeed, its contemporary reproductions, which here will collectively and generously be called ‘interventions’, are similarly ‘marketed’ in what we may call the *shifting justificatory discourse of colonialism*. This describes the ability of colonialism to regenerate and attach itself to the current zeitgeist in order to successfully manufacture consent. In addition, belying this shifting discourse is a reductive binary logic which States attempt to naturalise, pretending that alternatives to intervention, other than non-intervention, simply do not exist. The combination of the two begin to illustrate how States have managed to legitimate their expansionist and destabilising wars through the ages, in an effort to (in-)directly exercise influence over regions and help illustrate a lineage from contemporary military interventions to historic colonialism.

Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, a former British colonial statesman and historian demarcated the ‘known world’ into the ‘civilised’ and ‘barbarians’, with the British at the apex of this imaginary intelligentsia spectrum. In his *Minute on Indian Education*, he stated, ‘it is...no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England.’ It was this demarcation or binary, arguably pre-empting Samuel Huntington’s now [1]dismissed ‘Clash of Civilisations’ thesis, that garnered substantial support at home for the British Empire’s ironically barbaric ‘civilising mission’ (what the French called *la mission civilisatrice*), painting the rapaciousness of colonialism with a palatable altruistic overlay.

From the civilising mission came the doctrine of ‘Containment’ in the Cold War, (for the French, *cordon sanitaire*) which employed much the same strategy. According to the former US diplomat George Kennan, *containment* was the US foreign policy to extinguish the ‘Communist threat’, leading to the infamous Truman Doctrine and the formation of NATO. A direct line can be drawn from Macaulay’s demarcation to Truman’s doctrine which he shaped as a fight between ‘totalitarian regimes’ and ‘free peoples’.

‘Democratisation’, underlined by a spirit of universalism was the rationalisation in Iraq’s apocalypse. The US-led invasion of the former intellectual capital of the world, was tied to the categorical imperative of ‘bringing in’ democracy to awaken a dormant Iraqi populace. The only effect was to ‘return’ the country (and similarly Libya) to a ‘state of nature’ where life is now ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. Around about the same time, emerged the popular policy of humanitarian intervention. Its success lay in an impenetrably altruistic guard of human rights rhetoric. Such types of intervention were tough to respond to but was in effect no different from the antiquated ‘civilising’ lines, only the barbarians were now reduced to the Heads of State. Retrospective labelling of interventions of the French in Syria or the US occupation of Haiti are interesting given their clear colonial undertones, but modern day invocations of HI included the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and the British military campaign in Sierra Leone. Of course the often convincing rationalisations of HI have been easily undone by commentators and academics who highlight the fundamental contradictions that blights an intervening nation’s ignorance and unwillingness to intervene in other, more destructive areas of the world. Honesty here is the key.

The most recent reproduction of the *shift and binary* has been for Empire to ‘support revolutions’ (spearheaded from the academy by the likes of Bernard-Henri Levi). Indeed, legitimate grievances in Syria, Libya and elsewhere in the ME have resulted in societies in flux and fluidity that are often exploited by imperial forces with the aim
of creating vacuums to establish proxy or direct power. Thus, revolutions have become the new front of imperial wars.

A line can arguably be traced therefore, from modern day interventions to colonialism. From civilising to containment, humanitarianism to democratisation and assisting revolutions, the marketing discourse has shifted to reflect current popular sentiments and tie itself to a particular historical moment (anti-Communism, human rights etc). In addition, wars and ‘imposed binaries’, which present conflict as either-or choices, supplement this shifting discourse. For us to emerge from this requires breaking the simple binaries that characterise this discourse so that that the contradictions are exposed.

Tanzil Chowdhury is a Doctoral Researcher in the School of Law, University of Manchester, interested in Critical Legal Studies. His current research looks at using temporality as a novel way to distinguish between different forms of adjudication and subjectivity. Twitter: @tchowdhury88


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**Digital capitalism and the imperative to be noticed** *(2016-06-28 08:00)*

In Ross Perlin’s *Intern Nation*, he writes of how interns voluntarily subjugate themselves in order to ‘be noticed’, even if they have little expectation that their internship will lead to a permanent job. From loc 1997:

> There is rarely much reason to believe that internships in the public sector or at nonprofits will convert directly to permanent employment—they seldom do—so the best one can hope for is to make an impression, be noticed, position yourself for something down the road.

This coheres nicely with arguments Bauman has made recently about social media. The imperative to be noticed, the extroverted mirror image of the spectre of uselessness, thrives in an environment when occupational opportunities contract. People find themselves locked in an upward spiral of competitive escalation in their desperation to claim what are correctly felt to be a diminishing number of possibilities to claim the life long security and stability which post war capitalism was able to offer most of their parent’s and grandparent’s generations.

What I mean by ‘contracting opportunities’ is best conveyed by a U.S. treasury official (and former intern) the author quotes on loc 2063: “There’s so much demand for this kind of career path and such a limited supply, so we’re able to dictate how to get into the process.” Internships can be an escape strategy, a desperate attempt to break out of a cycle of precarious work – with the number of job shifts by young people continuing to increase – into the receding upper echelons of secure and rewarding employment. But internships themselves reflect this precarious work, as hopeful interns are increasingly forced to undertaken chains of unpaid or barely paid internships in the hope of breaking into full time work.

Part of the problem with internships is they further intensify this problem, making ensuing jobs more glamorous and exciting by allowing the transfer of administrative functions to the interns, as well as contracting the supply of *entry level* positions as organisations replace permanent staff with interns. Plus, as he succinctly observes
on loc 3035, the internship system as a whole allows privileged children access to opportunities denied to others:

For well-to-do and wealthy families seeking to guarantee their offspring’s future prosperity, internships are a powerful investment vehicle, an instrument of self-preservation in the same category as private tutoring, exclusive schools, and trust funds.

A comparable strategy to internships and social media self-promotion is discussed on loc 2519:

Staking everything on a career-launching internship, as sociologist Mark Granovetter points out, is not unlike working unpaid for shares in a Silicon Valley start-up: “There are a surprising number of people willing to work just for 50 or 60 thousand shares of a company that may never see the light of day ... Unless they think that what the company is doing is the best thing since sliced bread, then they probably have no better alternative.” Interns at start-ups, such as “Nora,” often work for the possibility of getting an equity share in a company.

Something comforting(ish) to watch about #Brexit (2016-06-29 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAgKHSNqa8

Time to call in the clowns (2016-06-30 08:00)

by Ralf Wetzel, Vlerick Business School

Managers going off hands

“Panama papers”. As whether it all would happen in a bad American movie. A law company with a name a bit too clandestine, international politicians feeling a bit too safe, a business network operating a bit too silent, a mass media outcry a bit too loud – and a public audience a bit too shocked. It could be taken simply as a flimsy movie quickly to be forgotten, wouldn’t we just have gone through similar cases like the Volkswagen emission scandal still trying to find its global limits, the LIBOR fraud unveiling how far such limits can be amongst competitors and a global subprime crisis with global economic consequences taking several years to recover. This is just covering the history of
let’s say the last five years we are just experiencing the next moral catastrophe of the modern management. Strikingly, the lessons learned from previous scandals are almost zero, on both, on the public as much as on the corporate side. For an informed observer, both sides surprise by being surprised, since years. This is weird. Corporations don’t want to change behaviour as the public does not want to really react on such a corporate ignorance. Surprise and shock are most convenient for both.

Decline and dilemma of management

This happens during a situation, in which management as a social function has almost completely lost its former myth. The times are truly over in which the most popular courses at universities and business schools have been named “management” and students strongly identified themselves with managing. As much as the big corporation is in a structural reputational crisis, its management is too. One core reason might stem from a role problem. The old role pattern of the hero, who can overlook the problems of the past by his own mind and create a desirable future with his own hands (the masculine notion here is no coincidence) has shifted from the one steering a big corporation, being unavoidably involved in micropolitics and informal alliancing to two contrasting light figures still remaining innocent of ‘dark management’: the entrepreneur (doing all on his own) and the leader (focusing only on vision-building and motivating others). There is no role model for the one doing the dirty daily job anymore, especially not a role model incorporating the conditions of the current situations, including being trapped in insecurities, own weaknesses and insufficiencies. No wonder, that no one wants to become a manager anymore and no wonder that there is either a focus on the past (the old hero) or the future (the leader). There is neither a present for management, nor a presence. Management is absent in the present, and it has lost its innocence.

The instruction of a forgotten stranger

"Clowns are born when society has a need for them. Remember that Chaplin and Keaton were most popular during Depression. And that the Indians say that clowns appear when the leaders get out of hand!"

This quote by the Canadian clown trainer Richard Pochinko comes not by accident. In the midst of the refugee crisis displaying political helplessness and hopelessness, one figure celebrates a comeback – the clown. This figure now enters refugee camps in Lesbos as much as in Berlin and in Anderlecht, spreading joy, laughter and playfulness in the middle of trauma, despair and boredom. It is the clown who is one of the last reliable figures trusted to contain hope, empathy and innocence, after traffickers, border guards and bureaucrats have done their job. After an inexorable decline of the Circus as one of his natural habitats, the Clown is back, probably stronger than ever. And the reasons for that are very simple. First of all, the clown is innocent, he has no interest. Whatever emotion he is driven by, the clown shows it. There is no veil nor hiding. The clown is naked in his emotionality. Second, the clown only exists in the here and now. There is no past, he is bound to and there is no future he longs for. He exists only in the here and now. Third, the magic, he is born by is the connection to the audience, in the here and now. If there is no one watching, the clown just doesn’t exist and disappears. If the clown is unable to connect emotionally to this audience, his performance will be witnessed as a flaw and a fake, the most horrible thing to happen. And finally, much of the charisma of the clown is in his unavoidable confrontation to failure. Whatever he does is always at risk and it is the innocent and unveiled struggle that turns him adorable for the audience. The innocence, emotional connection with the audience, the presence the clown is in and the existential struggle is the essence of what that figure still brings to the world. And he is back at an essential moment.
The desire for something else

There is no role model yet for a management being present, vulnerable, connected and innocent. And I hope that such a role model won't be shaped by the industry of management fashion, residing in an questionable alliance of consulting, business schooling and managing. An exploration needs to take place far away from the beaten tracks of management science and practice. Fortunately enough, there are already sensitive discussions going on, including the instructions from arts and European and Far Eastern philosophy. The managerial crisis won't be solved from within management science and practice. The clown might be a role model for both academics and practitioners to board that journey. By becoming naïve and innocent observers, by desperately searching for a true connection to an audience and by making themselves vulnerable there might be a chance. It’s a hard jump. But not jumping is somehow not an option anymore, if we don’t want to pretend being surprised about the next shabby movie.

Ralf Wetzel began his career as an electrician. He joined Vlerick Business School as a Professor of Organization and Management after extensive work experience in management and organization research and after being a head of a joint research and consulting group. His career path led him from Germany to the UK, via Switzerland to Belgium. He applies art-based research like improvisation principles and theatre play in his work, especially for inquiring into topics like organization theory & behaviour, change management, consulting, leadership, organization & society. Aside of his academic writing, he loves to turn research results into art-based forms like fiction, accessible for non-academic readers. Twitter: @RalfWetzel

7.7 July

RIP Alvin Toffler, sociologist of the future (2016-07-01 09:00)

I first read Alvin Toffler’s books Future Shock (1970), The Third Wave (1980) and Powershift” (1990), the last two co-authored with his wife Heidy Toffler, in an samizdat-type Bulgarian translation in 2000, as a first year student at the Sofia University. The Tofflers may have exaggerated the extent to which people are experiencing a “shock of the future” and the acceleration of a post-industrial society, and some of his claims were controversial, but they were bold, well argued and inspiring. And even though at the turn of the century they were already a bit dated, those were important books and I’m glad to have read them. My course was in European Studies, but the Tofflers' critical discussion of contemporary society was among my first windows onto sociology and contributed to it later becoming my chosen direction. Sadly, Alvin Toffler passed away on 27 June.


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Downtown baby

I sit down next to a young couple. His jeans are ripped and have holes at the knees. He lets his head hang low. She reeks of alcohol, and she’s constantly squinting her eyes. It takes three times for them to notice someone sitting across saying, 'sir, you dropped your wallet', and another two for him to pick it up from the subway floor.

On the next stop, three generations of Middle Eastern women walk in: a young girl, around 7 years old, her mother, and her mother’s mother. The girl carries a baby doll. They look for three seats but have to settle for two. A stranger separates mom from grandma. As they are about to sit down, I notice that the woman next to me has stood up and is moving over to them. 'Take my seat', she says, dragging her boyfriend with her to free up three adjoining seats. The three thankfully take the seats next to me, replacing the young couple.

The girl cheerfully talks to her mom all the while holding the baby doll close to her chest. Grandma watches them, smilingly.

The couple, now seated across from me, are struggling to stay awake. They look like they’re falling apart; going down after a long, druggy, trip. Then the woman notices the baby doll. It triggers something in her. There is a sparkle in her eyes. She recovers somewhat, sits upright. Says to the little girl, 'you have a cute baby there!' A short pause, then, 'I want a baby.' The girl looks at her mom, who smiles back at her. Then she looks to the women, beaming. 'What's her name?', the woman continues. The girl's mother translates. 'What language are you speaking?' asks the woman. 'Arabic, but she understands English.'

'Nathalie,' the girl says, 'Nathalie!' She gets up, walks over to the woman sitting across, hands her the doll, and returns to her seat. The woman is startled for a moment, then says 'thanks, that's a pretty name' and looks at the baby doll. For a moment she disappears into thoughts. When she recovers she pokes her boyfriend. He half-opens his eyes for just a second before closing them again. She smiles and says 'Thank you for letting me hold your baby'. She sighs, inhales deeply, and gets up to return the doll. The girl takes the doll back, but then stands up and again gives the woman her baby.

'For you: pink baby.' The woman sits there in silence looking at the doll for about a minute, then says, 'thanks, but... no, it's yours.' The girl responds, no—you!' pointing at the woman. 'But... you'll miss it.' The girl smiles sagely, and says, 'She will buy me new one,' looking up at her mom. Mother rubs the girl's hair as if to say 'yes, honey, I will.'
The train stops at the next station. The girl, her mother and grandmother get out, leaving behind a seriously startled woman, her drugged out boyfriend, and her plastic newborn. That—and a car full of spectators smiling broadly.

Jonathan J.B. Mijs is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology at Harvard University. When he is not writing about himself in third person, he is studying how (young) people come to see and explain setbacks in their own lives and that of others, which is the topic of his dissertation.

TransForming Research Practice: Towards ‘Best Practice’ in Transgender and Non-binary Inclusive Social Research (2016-07-02 08:00)

by Ellis Morgan and Yvette Taylor, University of Strathclyde

On 9th May 2016, we hosted the cross-sector seminar ‘TransForming Research Practice: Towards ‘Best Practice’ in Transgender and Non-binary Inclusive Social Research’ at Strathclyde University. The seminar was conceived in thinking through issues of access, accountability, practice and ‘publics’ – how to make a difference in ‘transgender and non-binary’ inclusive social research? How to stretch research categories and subjects and implicate everyone in the doing of these, rather than as done by certain researchers for certain researched groups (the perpetually ‘hard to research’).

The event was made possible by joint funding from British Sociological Association and Scottish Transgender Alliance, uniting professional-practice groups. In planning the seminar, we initially paused on questions of ‘best practice’, quickly agreeing to scare quote this phrase. But in an age of ‘impact’ and perpetually making a difference, is such a tentative phrasing appropriate, recognisable or rendered vulnerable and failing – what did you find? What impact did you have?

The seminar brought together over 30 people including academic researchers, voluntary sector professionals, transgender community groups and activists to pool their thinking on shaping the future of transgender and non-binary inclusive social research. Because this is an ongoing future, and a joint effort, it is arguably necessarily incomplete and even ‘failing’, which is not to undermine real efforts but to return again to questions (and to return to and press for resources).
The seminar responded to a social context in which transgender and non-binary people are in the public eye more than ever before but rates of suicides, hate crime and school and workplace bullying leave no doubt that widespread social marginalisation persists. The premise of the event was that this cultural complexity produces important responsibilities for those of us seeking to represent transgender and non-binary people’s experiences in our research and asked how we can best equip ourselves as researchers to meet this responsibility. And how to stretch this research responsibility beyond sexualities and gender studies to wider sociological agendas, and the interface between ‘social science’ and ‘science’ agendas.

In the first half of the event Dr Zowie Davy gave a keynote presentation on ‘Research Assemblages and Epistemological Commitments’. This paper provided a backdrop to the day, focussing on the enduring medicalisation of transgender and the critical need this creates for researchers to pay attention to the ‘social within the scientific’ in the assemblages of our trans and non-binary inclusive data.

Following the keynote a panel of researchers gave insightful presentations on their own experiences of producing research with transgender and non-binary communities. The panel comprised Ben Vincent (Leeds University), Kate Norman (Edinburgh University) and James Morton (Scottish Transgender Alliance). Each of the panellists offered reflections on the methodological challenges they had faced in designing and carrying out research that purposefully avoided reproducing the forms of marginalisation experienced by trans and non-binary individuals in other arenas. With the evoked notion of ‘perfection’ implicit in the very idea of non-marginalising research, our discussion led to how we might move forward in ways that allow for us to take risks and engage in expansive ways of thinking whilst holding ourselves accountable for unknowable outcomes.

In the second half of the event a panel of voluntary sector organisations formed to spark thinking about ways of working collaboratively across sectors. The panel comprised Serge Nicholson (Galop), Michelle Ross (CliniQ), Gemma Rae Moncrief (Non-Binary Scotland) and Vic Valentine (Scottish Transgender Alliance). The panel drew on their collective experiences of providing key services to trans and non-binary communities, often acting as community gatekeepers in relation to research participant requests and frequently depending on trans inclusive research to develop and secure funding for their own services. The panel stimulated discussion in which the ever present notions of insider/outsider statuses shaped questions around constraint and ideological ‘fit’; how do we include ‘our’ work in ‘their’ spaces, and vice versa? What constraints do we accept as part of an explicit agenda to work to the priorities of an ‘impact’ agenda? How do we ensure that preconceived directionals of that impact do not lie untroubled? But alongside these potential hesitancies, what opportunities do we bring each other in melding our interests, approaches and knowledges as we bring ourselves into each others spaces? For after all, whilst a call to perpetually make impact carries within it a necessary future ‘failure’ it also promises the potential of future ‘worth’.

The delegation ended the day by pooling their thinking on practical ways of applying and extending the learning from the day, as a deliberate attempt to move away from ‘closing conference comments’ to something beyond the room. Our discussions made clear important issues that are pressing concerns for many researchers in today’s social climate, where a desire to represent and include trans experiences in research exists alongside a deep concern to ensure an ethical, sensitive and ultimately beneficial approach for trans individuals and communities. Participants at the event made various calls in their closing remarks for the TransForming Research Practice initiative to find ways of continuing to provide a forum for sharing on this topic and take forward the rich potential for facilitating further collaborative working.
As a result of the day Ellis Morgan and Prof. Yvette Taylor have produced a paper offering some foundational thinking on how such ‘Collaborative Foundations in Trans and Non-binary Inclusive Research’ might be taken forward and the paper can be found on the website of the Scottish Transgender Alliance ([1]www.scottishtrans.org/)[2]see here

If you would like to find out more about the TransForming Research Practice initiative then please feel free to get in touch with us at [3]ellis.morgan@strath.ac.uk or [4]yvette.taylor@strath.ac.uk.

by Ellis Morgan and Yvette Taylor, University of Strathclyde

3. mailto:ellis.morgan@strath.ac.uk
4. mailto:yvette.taylor@strath.ac.uk

Brexit Shows That 'Generation' Needs to Be Added to Race, Class and Gender (2016-07-02 10:00)

Shortly after it was announced that those in favour of leaving the European Union had won the UK referendum, I was among the first to pounce on the fact that attachment to the European Union directly varied with age cohort: The older the voter, the lower the attachment. And the fact that (per usual) voter turnout also directly varied with age cohort – the older the voter, the more likely to vote — explained the 'Vote Leave' win: Had voter turnout been consistent across age cohorts, the 'Vote Remain' campaign would have won.

At the time, I argued that it speaks to the need to include ‘generation’ as a foundational category of sociological analysis, alongside race, class and gender. This is not a new idea. It was a cornerstone of Karl Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge, which could be used to explain, for example, why the very old and very young found Hitler an attractive leader, despite the consternation of the middle age population who flourished – however fitfully - under the Weimar Republic.

The basic intuition of generational analysis is that people at the same stage in their lives experience the same public events in similar ways. Of course, this is not meant as an overriding explanation of human behaviour, but it provides an orthogonal slice of the sociological pie from that offered by race, class and gender. The rise of ‘broadcast’ media from the mass circulation newspaper onward has generated a steady stream of such publicly experienced ‘events’ which serve as a common frame of reference in terms of which people’s judgements can be compared. The point is epitomized in the question: ‘Where were you when Kennedy was shot?’

Perhaps the most notable feature of the social media fallout from Brexit with regard to generational analysis has been the antagonism between ‘old’ and ‘young’: The former castigating the latter for shirking their civic duty of voting; the latter accusing the former of selfishness and narrow-mindedness. Whatever one makes of these charges, it points to a real problem that not everyone is equally invested in the outcomes of a democratic process. In the case of irreversible decisions, as Brexit is purported to be, the young who voted against it will live with its consequences much longer than their elders who supported it. What constitutes intergenerational justice under the circumstances?
The fact that proportionally fewer young people voted is an irrelevance when answering this question. The failure of the young to represent themselves adequately is not grounds for exploiting them. It is easy to forget that democratic theory is very much preoccupied with the relationship of age to political participation: age to vote, age to serve in elected office, etc. 2500 years ago Plato famously argued that the then quite old age of fifty should be the threshold for political office because by then you would be impervious to corruption. Friedrich Hayek believed people should vote just once, at a hypothetical halfway point in life, when you had the optimal combination of wisdom from the past and stake in the future. My own view is that votes should be weighted by how long the voter would need to live with the consequences of the electoral outcome. This means that your vote would come to mean less as you grow older, and a premium would be placed on politicians projecting long-term horizons to appeal to the youth, who would always hold the balance of power in each election.

In any case, it’s time to return ‘generation’ to the front line of analytic categories in sociology.

CfP: Cultural studies in the context of object-oriented philosophy and object-oriented ontology (2016-07-03 08:00)

You are encouraged to submit articles for the new issue of “Cultural Studies Review” (“Przegląd Kulturoznawczy”) devoted to cultural studies in the context of object-oriented philosophy and object-oriented ontology (OOP, OOO).

The last decades in critical humanities elapsed under the banner of a return to materiality. The ecological crisis, tensions within the capitalist system, and exhaustion of the energy of poststructuralism have forced a reassessment of the notion of matter. While the twentieth-century critical theory organized the political debate around epistemological issues, the materialistic tendencies, more and more strongly present in the humanities of the twenty-first century, are currently re-introducing metaphysics into the area of political reflection.

It appears that none of the new trends in materialistic reflection have generated as many controversies as speculative realism in its various guises (object-oriented philosophy or object-oriented ontology). The third issue of “Cultural Studies Review” will be an occasion to use the dictionary of object-oriented philosophy in the field of cultural studies. Ever since speculative realism emerged in the area of contemporary philosophy—largely as social ferment on scientific blogs—its findings, insights, and methodological suggestions have been quickly applied to reflections on technology, material culture, and contemporary art. The dOCUMENTA festival (12) has established object-oriented philosophy as one of the most significant trends in contemporary reflections on the aesthetic experience and on the condition of the art market. Jussi Parikka and Levi Bryant find use for OOO/OOP in the archeology of media and in the contemporary studies on technology. OOO/OOP appears as a methodological
basis in reflections on such different phenomena as the ecological crisis, immaterial labor, algorithmization, or post-digital aesthetics. Its emphasis on the study of relationships allows cultural studies to readdress the issue of agency, work, and ideology.

Speculative realism appears to be the most radical and promising attempt at transcending poststructuralism. The sources of this impulse may be sought in works by A. Badiou or Q. Meillasoux, and inspiration may be found in the works of, among others, M. Heidegger and, notably, of K. Twardowski. Speculative realists (including A. Toscano, G. Harman, L. R. Bryant, I. Bogost, R. Brassier) refute the basic relationship that has organized philosophical debates concerning our thinking of reality from the times of Kant: the subject-world relationship. They introduce the concept of the object, which can be man, Pegasus, or an atom. The anti-humanism of speculative realism thus allows us to locate this project within broadly-understood posthumanism, in close proximity to the actor-network theory or STS (science, technology and society studies); however, its (seemingly?) nihilistic provenance generates a number of critical opinions, which, in the anti-humanism of OOP, discern the dangerous anti-critical turn reproducing the spirit of contemporary cognitive capitalism. The criticism of object-oriented philosophy resonates strongly in contemporary feminism, queer theory, new materialism, and psychoanalysis in the context of debates on the political nature of the theories and the concept of agency.

In the next issue of "Cultural Studies Review" we would like to discuss the proposals of object-oriented philosophy in the context of cultural studies. We are interested in the following issues:

— object-oriented philosophy as the super-science of culture?
— object-oriented philosophy and actor-network theory in cultural studies;
— "aesthetics as the first philosophy"—aesthetic experiences in the face of object-oriented philosophy;
— object-oriented philosophy and material culture;
— object-oriented philosophy and immaterial and affective labor;
— criticism of speculative realism—is critical theory possible without a subject?
— object-oriented philosophy and the materialistic theory of media;
— object-oriented philosophy and the philosophy of science and technology;
— object-oriented philosophy in the face of emancipatory projects.

Editors of the issue: Michał Gulik, Samuel Nowak
Deadline for submission of articles: July 31st, 2016*

Date of publication: October/November 2016

S M (2017-06-14 10:31:18)
Very interesting! Is this issue already published, and if so, where could I find it please?

**Why we voted leave: voices from northern England** (2016-07-03 13:51)

HT [1]Lance Dyer:

https://vimeo.com/172932182

1. http://www.twitter.com/Lance63/

Fascinating video. A real insight into the thoughts of people in deprived communities who voted Leave. However, it was also chilling from the point of view of democracy. None of the participants could give a concrete or valid reason why their plight was caused by the EU or how leaving the could improve their situation. The EU is much more redistributive than any Westminster Government and has done a lot to help deprived areas. Access to single market has also encouraged investment in areas such as Sunderland. It feels like the Out vote has been the equivalent of smashing a smug rich person’s window to serve them right. Ironically Brexit will damage these communities the most.

Samuel Shoesmith (2016-07-04 03:10:09)
So refreshing to see this. I concur with her - the media narrative, both mainstream and YouTube-esque has undertones of xenophobia especially when referring to parts of northern England. I think it is a series wholly more complicated and complex issues than this.

**The Emerging Lessons of Brexit for Aspiring Democracies** (2016-07-03 21:41)

The following first appeared on [1]Al Rasub, a Dubai-based news website.

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The recent referendum resulting in a 52-48 vote for the UK to leave the European Union ('Brexit') is causing substantial political and economic ripple effects across the world, which are unlikely to end soon. Although the vote was close in percentage, it was decisive in raw numbers, with 1.3 million votes separating the two sides. Indeed, the 17.4 million
votes in favour of Brexit were the most ever cast for anything or anyone in a British election.

However, writing as someone who wants the UK to remain in the EU, I am struck by the many different levels on which the very idea of democracy has been put to the test by this referendum. Four in particular stand out. I organize them in a list because each is quite striking in its own right, and taken together their interrelations are complex. At the end, I shall make some general remarks about the distinctive nature of British democracy, whose weaknesses the Brexit vote reveals.

1. Immediately after the polls closed, the generational character of the voting demographics became apparent. The older the voter, the likelier to vote. Moreover, the older the voter, the likelier to favour Brexit. Yet, the younger the voter, the longer s/he will need to live with the consequences of the vote. The default UK response has been to blame young people for not voting, especially since Brexit would not have won had the turnout of the young been at the levels of their elders. However, one might also take seriously that in the future votes should be weighted inversely to age, since those who are likely to be around longer have a larger stake in the outcome. As it stands, the Brexit vote manifests a geriatric version of democracy, in which the old have a disproportionate say over matters in which the young are mainly affected.

2. The failure of the party-based system of democracy is striking. No major UK party has called for a second referendum on EU membership since the last (and only) one took place in 1975. However, about twenty years ago, the UK Independence Party (‘UKIP’) was formed expressly with this purpose, scapegoating the EU for various socio-economic problems that continued to plague a seemingly prosperous UK. UKIP gradually gathered support, receiving four million votes in the 2015 general election and coming close to winning seats from both the Tory and Labour Parties. Mindful of UKIP’s rise, Prime Minister David Cameron promised an EU referendum in the 2015 Tory Party manifesto, which he then duly delivered, thinking that the result would defeat the ‘Brexiters’ once and for all. Of course, events proved him wrong. Meanwhile the Labour Party responded to its 2010 general election defeat to Cameron (after three successive wins under Tony Blair) by involving party members more directly in the selection of the leader. This has led to a schism between Labour parliamentarians and ordinary members, as manifested in its current leader, Jeremy Corbyn, a retro-socialist who is much beloved by the party hard core but loathed by his fellow parliamentarians, who are more concerned with winning elections, which involves appealing to ‘floating voters’. The ongoing turmoil meant that Labour failed to mount a coherent campaign against Brexit.

3. The profound failure of expertise to influence voter opinion was striking, even though the referendum campaign was rather long by British standards (four months). 90% of UK academia, all the major business leaders and world politicians wanted the UK to remain in the EU. Moreover, they made their voices heard very clearly. However, their efforts were successfully spun by opponents as ‘Project Fear’, since most of the expert arguments were framed in terms of the benefits that would be lost or put at risk by leaving the EU. In contrast, it would seem that 52% of the British electorate did not feel these ‘benefits’ sufficiently. Their experience of the EU was in terms of migrants taking jobs from natives and the sense that the UK paid too much into the EU without getting enough in return. Both impressions – which really drove the electoral outcome – were false. Indeed, nine of the ten UK regions that benefit the most from the EU’s redistributive style of finance voted for Brexit and now are likely to suffer most in the aftermath. The irony of the situation is captured well in the British expression, ‘Turkeys voting for Christmas’. In effect, the Brexiteers flattered the electorate into thinking that they knew more of the UK’s relationship to the EU than they really did. Indeed, they explicitly asked people to trust their feelings over the opinions of experts far removed from their everyday lives.

4. But most striking of all is the ‘populism’ that has allowed the Brexit vote to trump parliamentary authority. From a strictly constitutional standpoint, the UK is a representative democracy: Parliament, not the people, is sovereign. This means that a referendum has the legal standing of a consultative exercise, the outcome of which Parliament may choose to enact, subject to further deliberation or outright reject. However, during the
campaign, much – too much – was made of the EU referendum as expressing the ‘will of the people’. Indeed, this rhetorical framing helps to explain the unprecedented voter turnout. However, given that roughly three-quarters of current Members of Parliament – across all parties and regions – wanted the UK to remain in the EU, they could easily halt the momentum towards Brexit. They may still do that, but it is telling that they are not yet raising that possibility. One suspects that parliamentarians are eager to enrol ‘the people’ in however they dispose of the Brexit vote because they doubt their own legitimacy to make judgements on behalf of their constituents and the national interest.

The UK is the world’s oldest major democracy – but one without a written constitution. Writing as a US national who has lived and thrived in the UK for the past quarter-century, I find it a marvel to behold. But its luck may have run out. UK parliamentary politics is basically a circulation of elites who are very clever but who treat ‘the people’ as a resource in a long power game. It is to the elites’ collective advantage to keep the rules of the game as loose as possible, which explains the ad hoc character of UK legislation. It is to the great credit of these elites that they have forged a welfare state that exceeds the expectations of what even liberal US politicians normally entertain. However, it was a fatal mistake for David Cameron to ‘break frame’ and voluntarily cede sovereignty from Parliament to ‘the people’ in the EU referendum. A written constitution would have never allowed Cameron to be so reckless on a matter so fundamental to the UK’s parliamentary democracy. What happens next remains to be seen.


Making the Most of Social Media (2016-07-04 08:00)

Social media has changed a lot since I began my PhD. But what’s notable about this is that I didn’t start my PhD particularly long ago. When I began in 2008, my blogging was a personal hobby which I couldn’t possibly conceive of as relevant to my research. But by the time I finished in 2014, social media had come to shape every aspect of my developing research career. It’s possible I’ve been an outlier in this respect, but the same transition can be seen within my discipline. At my first British Sociological Association conference, the event’s hashtag felt like it was dominated by digital tumbleweeds and a few lonely voices speculating about how few sociologists were using Twitter in the UK. By the time of the most recent British Sociological Association conference, the event’s hashtag had become a thriving hub of activity, as scores of sociologists attending the conference live tweeted their way through the event. These are personal experiences, grounded in my own career and my engagements with my discipline in the UK, but they are representative of a broader transition. What was once a fringe pursuit, regarded with disinterest at best or suspicion at worst, increasingly finds itself seen as a central part of what academics are expected to do. What might once have been a curiosity about how a particular academic conducts themselves looks increasingly likely to be incorporated, formally or otherwise, into the expectations to which academics are subject in their professional lives.

This is a recipe for anxiety. Something that moves so fast, as can be seen in the hypnotic resource that is Internet Live Stats for which I’ve only attached a screen shot, can be bewildering. So much happens in what we might call an ‘internet minute’ that it can be hard to make sense of the sheer scale of the activity, let alone determine how to make the most of it. But it’s this speed and scale which has created so much attention because of the sheer size of the audiences which can be found through social media. On paper, the possibilities seem tremendous: free, open,
accessible platforms that allow us to access hundreds of millions of users. In practice, the reality is more complex: how can we actually ensure that we’re heard above all that noise? How do we negotiate the already competing demands upon our time when engaging on social media is added to them? How do we square the requirements of visibility online with the most conventional expectations about how researchers comport themselves offline? In other words: how do we make the most of social media?

Unfortunately, there are no universal right or wrong answers to these questions. There are general tips which apply to all researchers engaging online, as well as common issues that those in the academy face when they use social media. But so much still depends on the individual scholar, what they’re comfortable with, what they hope to achieve and the environment within which they’re working. What I’ll do today is to offer some general tips & address these common issue. But my main focus is on how to address these deeper underlying question of why you want to use social media and what you want to do with it, because I firmly believe that if you address these questions of ‘what’ and ‘why’ then the ‘how’ questions become much clearer. Deciding on which platform is right for you, how you wish to use it and how you wish to combine these as part of a much broader range of activities you’re committed to becomes much easier once you’re animated by a clear understanding of what you’re setting out to achieve and why it matters to you. Ultimately, existing platforms change so fast and new ones spring into being with such rapidity, that a preoccupation with the platforms themselves can just be confusing. Plus remember MySpace as a timely reminder of the capacity of hugely popular social media platforms to die.

Instead, I think it’s useful to think in terms of scholarly activities and the various ways in which different sorts of technologies are used to enact these, helping or hindering them in the process. The radical sociologist C Wright Mills wrote a wonderful appendix to his famous The Sociological Imagination about scholarly craft: he argued for the necessity of keeping a ‘file’ in order to ‘keep one’s inner world awake’. These are activities we all engage in but which, rather interestingly, tend not to feature in public discourse: the daily minutiae of scholarship. Notebooks, filing cabinets, file cards, newspaper clippings, print outs, drawings, marginalia in books, annotated papers, reading lists etc. My favourite example from my own experience is the fixation on Moleskin notebooks which dominated the early stages of my PhD. I loved these notebooks, still do in fact. I would enthusiastically scrawl ideas as I was travelling, record notes of what I was reading and try to develop a research journal to track my engagements over time. I’d then proudly place these notebooks on a shelf, admiring the odd sense of solidity they conveyed when I stacked them up near my computer. In my more pretentious moments, I found myself thinking about the weight of the ideas contained within them and how satisfying this was.

The problem was that I could rarely read my own hand writing, couldn’t search them and as much as I admired them aesthetically, they were pretty useless to me as a research journal. Plus as many people will tell you, they are by definition quite easy to lose if you carry them with you all the time. I never experienced this because I didn’t carry them with me all the time. This in itself caused problems because I’d often find that I had an idea or insight that I wanted to record, but I didn’t have my current notebook with me. I’d sometimes record it on a scrap of paper, hoping that I’d add it into the notebook when I got home but I rarely succeed in this. On other occasions, I’d hope I remembered the thought once I was home. I never did. In contrast, the research blog I soon started, replacing my older blogs filled with rants about politics and song lyrics I liked, could be found wherever I had internet access. The very fact of other people, at least in principle, reading what I wrote forced me to elaborate upon fleeting thoughts in order to make them legible for others. Tagging and categorising these notes, as blogging platforms encourages you to do, quickly built up a living archive of my scholarly engagements that I’ve since got into the habit of frequently tracing back. It enabled me to connect with others that shared my interests, as well as building up an audience for publications long before I’d actually published anything. It became for me how one of my favourite science fiction authors, Cory Doctorow, describes his own blog: “my major way of thinking through the stuff that matters to me”. This is exactly what I hoped my Moleskine notebooks would do but they never quite did.

But this isn’t for everyone and my point in telling this story is not say that you should all use blogs as research journals. Many people, including myself, wouldn’t be comfortable blogging about field work and data in such a
Many people would prefer to fully work out their thoughts before making them public, though I do think the risks entailed by this are overstated because, as the philosopher Daniel Little puts it, people enjoy seeing 'ideas in motion'. Many people would prefer the option to share a note on social media, something which digital journals like Evernote provide very effectively, rather than sharing by default. I think it's a mistake to assume social media platforms and digital tools are necessarily an improvement. In fact, I don't think such a judgement makes sense in the abstract. A particular social media platform is only going to be useful to someone in a particular context for a particular purpose. The key to negotiating the world of social media as an academic is to develop clarity about what you're doing and enough familiarity with social media platforms and digital tools then you can think clearly about how they might help or hinder particular tasks. These tasks are manifold: locating literature, reading literature, analysing data, conducting field work, networking within your field, engaging with publics outside the academy and many more. Social media can be used for all of them, in all manner of ways, but how to do this is likely to be confusing unless we're specific about what we want to do and why we want to do it.

But I think there are other, more hands on, pointers which apply to most if not all:

1. Use the opportunities afforded to you as an ESRC funded researcher. Sign up to their e-mail alerts and engage with the digital opportunities contained within them. Engage with the ESRC on social media platforms. For instance, add your status to your Twitter profile and they'll follow you back. Tag @ESRC when you're discussing your activities and making announcements.

2. Share what you care about online. In a recent book, the Sociologist Les Back suggests that Twitter sometimes facilitates our “inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer” by providing "signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story". Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of “hunches and tips” which is the "lifeblood of scholarship". These provide pathways through the literature, allowing others to use them as guides into and through often difficult bodies of work. If you consistently share what you care about then other people to whom this matter will find you online. It’s in this subtle way that I think everyday use of social media can help mitigate the competitive individualism which dominates the academy.

3. Try not to get hung up on the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to behave on social media platforms. These norms are not so different from the rest of your life, something which the contrived opposition of ‘offline’ and ‘online’ often works to obscure. Are social media platforms ultimately that different to an academic conference, albeit on where the words linger on in the room after being spoken? Each profile is a spot on the internet that’s staked out as yours. What you do with it is up to you. Some people choose to wander over to their podium every now and again, make an announcement and then wander off. Some people give their presentation at the podium and then leave, only returning when they want to give another. Some do their presentation but thrive on the Q &A afterwards. Some might not like the feel of the podium and eschew a formal presentation to go and chat more directly with their audience. Likewise some people just want to listen and ask questions of other speakers. Others would rather ditch the conference and go straight to relaxing at the pub.

4. But if you’re unsure about how to behave, the best thing to do is to seek out exemplars, both positive and negative. Do you like how someone engages on a particular platform? Try and articulate precisely what you like about it and whether it’s right for you. Conversely, if someone frustrates or bothers you, don’t just get irritated. Instead try and clarify exactly what it is you don’t like in order that you’re better able to avoid this. In this way, it becomes easier to develop a deliberate sense of how you feel you ought to behave online, rather than be plagued by a diffuse anxiety that you might be ‘doing it wrong’.

5. When in doubt, connect! The capacity of social media to flatten academic hierarchies is vastly overstated but there’s a kernel of truth to it: unless you’re a remarkably outgoing and talented networker, it’s much easier to approach well known academics online then it is in person. If you find yourself hesitating about whether to make
contact with them, err on the side of connection. At worst they'll ignore you & the architecture of social media is built from the ground up to encourage people to interact as much as possible. Furthermore, use community resources like hashtags to connect with others at a similar stage to you. As well as #PhDChat, which I found almost indescribably comforting at many points during the last year of my PhD, there's #ECRChat and #ESRCPhD as well as many other localised to particular fields of practice. Plus don't forget all the people you already know. Add your social media profiles to your e-mail signature and look for your friends and acquaintances when you try a new platform.

6. Tell a story about yourself using your profile. This can feel narcissistic but in an information saturated world, these snippets of biographical information are key to allowing people to know where you’re coming from. This isn’t just a matter of people within the academy. Social media radically increases the ease with which academics can be found by those within the media, government and civil society. But they need to know who you are and why they might want to talk to you for those conversations to begin.

Much as there are practical tactics which work for most, if not all. There are common issues academics face when they engage online. Social media collapses the boundaries between the different groups which we engage with and poses the question of how to manage overlapping relations between them: for instance, are you ok with your students reading material you’ve shared with your friends? One response to this problem is never to say anything online that you wouldn’t be happy with everyone in your life hearing. Another is to try and mark out particular material as being for different audiences, perhaps even by having separate profiles. My own approach has been to assume everyone in my life realises there are different facets to me and if something I share online seems confusing to them, they probably weren’t my intended audience. But then again, this might be why all my non-academic friends unfollowed me on Twitter a long time ago.

There’s also the more unpleasant side to social media. Sometimes, this might be a matter of getting drawn into pointless arguments. For instance, I’m as enthusiastic about Twitter as one can be, yet I’ve never seen any evidence that meaningful debate is possible within 140 characters, though it’s certainly possible to have constructive discussions amongst people who share things in common. As a general rule, if it feels important to you that someone on the internet is wrong, that’s the time to step away from social media. On the other hand, there’s a much darker world of online harassment, far beyond the simple matter of academic egos and cantankerousness. This is a big topic, one which most social media platforms are failing to do enough about. The only general advice I can offer is to be aware of the issue, particularly if you’re working on a very politicised topic. Also familiarise yourself with the facilities each platform offers to ban and block and don’t hesitate to use them if you feel the need.

There’s the ever present risk of time wasting. I think this issue can be overstated and it’s often framed in terms of an assumption that social media is just ‘one more thing to do’: scholarship is assumed to be something prior to what scholars do on social media. But the more that you’ve embedded social media in your everyday activities, the less this is true because what you’re doing on social media is scholarship. Nonetheless, sometimes it can be a bit compulsive and tools like Anti-Social, Freedom and Rescue Time all provided effect mechanisms for carving out time away from social media to immerse yourself in other things.

But the most important thing is to try and enjoy it. You’re unlikely to make the most of social media if you don’t. My experience has been that the promise of academic social media lies in its use as a platform for trying to work things out. More so, doing it in the open grants each of these attempts a social existence, one that comes with undoubted risks but also enormous rewards. Little bits of thought shrapnel, brief attempts to make some sense of the ‘feel of an idea’, come to enjoy their own existence within the world. They’re mostly forgotten or even ignored from the outset. But there’s something quite remarkable about occasions when these fragments resurface as someone sees something of value in them, perhaps when you saw no value in them yourself.
In this way, it attunes you to the impulse to write because you have "something to say and communicate". This isn't always the case and I worry that the metricisation of scholarly blogging will prove immensely destructive of it. But there is at least for now something deeply rewarding about seizing on an inchoate idea, developing it and throwing it off into the world to see what others make of it. For no other reason than the pleasure inherent to it. Making the most of social media can help develop your career, build your network and make an impact. But more importantly, it can deepen your enjoyment of what you do, keep you connected to the curiosity which animates your research, help you connect with others who care about the same things as you do and build up opportunities to work together enjoyably in an environment otherwise dominated by competitive individualism.

PhD studentships in complexity/policy (2016-07-05 08:00)

A number of PhD studentships are available via the newly established [1]'Centre for the Evaluation of Complexity Across the Nexus' (CECAN), a £3m national research centre hosted by the University of Surrey, and led by Professor Nigel Gilbert, addressing some of the greatest issues in policy making and evaluation.

Please subscribe to the email list and circulate the studentships widely - [2]http://www.cecan.ac.uk/join-us.

1. http://warwick.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=fbf0f239bc484ca1e981875d8&id=867b4df394&e=490180b87f
2. http://www.cecan.ac.uk/join-us

How many neoliberals does it take to screw in a light bulb? (2016-07-05 09:33)

A brilliant joke passed on by Frank Pasquale on Twitter:
But it raises a serious point: why are neoliberals taken so seriously? Does popular opposition sometimes inadvertently buy into neoliberal's self-mythology of hard nosed pragmatism? Do we sometimes need to remind ourselves that the emperor has no clothes?


Among the most striking features of the aftermath of the Brexit vote has been the speed with which the victorious politicians promoting Brexit have rowed back from their more extravagant promises about the extra funds and fewer migrants which would follow from leaving the European Union. For their part, anti-Brexit politicians have been busily mounting legal challenges to show that the referendum is not binding, or at least not the last word on the topic. And indeed, legally speaking, the anti-Brexit politicians may be correct. But had they – specifically, UK Prime Minister
David Cameron – presented matters this way at the outset, it is unlikely that the referendum would have received the highest turnout of any election in British history.

In effect, one bunch of politicians promised the electorate the moon after the other bunch of politicians had persuaded them that the moon was at stake. Little surprise, then, yet another wave of the familiar 'All politicians are liars' sentiment has been unleashed. My lesson here is that when people 'trust' politicians in a parliamentary democracy, they should do just that – that is, trust the politicians not their words.

This judgement sounds harsh, maybe even cynical. But that's only because people, as well as many politicians, don't appreciate that democracy is the ultimate 'work in progress', especially if we think of it as involving 'the masses'. Before the Enlightenment, the only stable democracies were ones whose members were rough cognitive and material equals – i.e. the city-states associated with 'republican' democracy, in which citizenship was an elite privilege. However, the Enlightenment took seriously that the scope of democracy could be extended across the population by sophisticated ideas of 'representation' allied to educational policies designed to trigger people's innate capacities for self-representation. Thus, someone like Wilhelm von Humboldt, the founder of the modern university, envisaged a telos to democracy that started with Parliament's paternalistic representation of its constituents and ended with a general assembly of well-educated equals, for whom 'representation' would amount to a direct administration of their collective will. The famous Marxist expression, 'the withering away of the state', originated in this context.

But exactly where are we on this trajectory?

Some would say that we are still very close to the start of the process because the trajectory itself is a product of wishful thinking: Democracy doesn't scale. To be sure, much of Silicon Valley's interest in politics is precisely about trying to fast forward to Humboldt's end-state through one or another technological fix, something which the journalist Evgeny Morozov has derided as 'solutionism'. Morozov may doubt the purity of Silicon Valley's motives, but the deeper grounds for scepticism are epistemological: Can the mass of people ever be expected to be sufficiently 'trained' to arrive at a sense of self-interest which converges with the national interest, so as to enable collective deliberation to occur within a tolerable range, resulting in only win-win situations? If not, then maybe the second best solution is for the people to trust the judgement of politicians, who without being infallible or blameless nevertheless are – or at least are supposed to be – their epistemic and moral superiors. If not, then of course there is always the next election to replace them.

But once again, to trust politicians need not mean trusting their words – at least in terms of their providing a transparent representation of either the state of the nation or, for that matter, the state of their own mind. Does that make them liars? No, it simply means that politicians don't trade in what philosophers used to call 'ordinary language'. Just as scientists are allowed 'technical usage', and priests and theologians are allowed 'symbolic usage', politicians engage in proleptic usage. 'Prolepsis' is the trope deployed to conjure up the presence of events before they actually happen. In classical culture, it was invoked by prophets to express adumbration, 'the shape of things to come', as H.G. Wells memorably put it in the twentieth century. But politicians – as purveyors of hope and fear – are also in the same business. Thus, their words are always just proxies for what they're really trying to say.

Once this point is appreciated, we can begin to understand Machiavelli's infamous declaration that in politics 'the ends justifies the means'. He was regarded as blasphemous in the early sixteenth century but not because he made politicians look cynical – today's interpretation. Rather, it was because he would arrogate to humans – specifically 'the prince' – a perspective that only God could legitimately command. But what is this perspective which permits one to indulge in proleptic rhetoric?

Suppose we believe in an overarching creative deity whose transcendent status enables it to operate everywhere all the time. This may be a difficult starting point in today's secular world, but it has made perfect sense to
Christians down through the ages. In that case, the deity’s actions will often appear strange or even perverse in terms of human expectations, which admittedly are based on decidedly inferior knowledge. Integral to this cast of mind, which by the early eighteenth century Leibniz called ‘theodicy’, is the belief that such moments of strangeness are resolved in the fullness of time as we come to realize the greater divine ends that they serve. All modern secular utopias have retained features of this sense of what the US historian Carl Becker called ‘the heavenly city’ in the distance – often inspiring both significant sacrifices and significant disappointments.

Now suppose you can imagine yourself as a vehicle of divine agency in the above sense. Moreover, you don’t feel the need to secure the approval of the Pope or any other religious authority purported to have more direct access to the deity than you. In that case, you’re ready to enter politics! So then, what are you doing when you communicate with your constituents? Consider a concrete example.

Suppose you say that your policies will raise income levels. But income levels as such aren’t really the thing that matters. They are simply the means to express some larger sense of the quality of life. So, if your opponents or events beyond your control disable you from delivering on the relevant income levels, you admit this, apportion blame as necessary and carry on with your general vision by appropriating the next most expedient vehicle. Of course, it’s unfortunate if some people actually believed in your quite specific policies for raising incomes on which you failed to deliver. But if these people are politically savvy, they – like you – will be able to roll with the punches and subscribe to the next set of promises you offer, as long as they believe that you’re going in the right general direction.

In short, people – politicians and non-politicians alike – can cope with the world of politics if they can adequately trade off their short term against their long term interests. This requires a capacity to convert one’s immediate ends into means by which some further, and perhaps quite distant, ends might be pursued. Some might regard this move as ‘selling out’, if not a polite admission of outright failure. However, such behaviour simply reflects the long time horizon over which politics is played out. So not surprisingly, politicians will do all they can to keep their vision appear steady, even as they launch and abandon ships with alarming regularity.

Because science operates on a still longer time horizon than politics, we are more forgiving of the shifts in position that diligent scientists invariably make as they pursue the ‘truth’, which once revealed is often profoundly different from what had been initially expected. Perhaps we should extend the same charity to politicians.

Digital Ontology (2016-07-05 19:52)

A really interesting series from [1]Cultural Anthropology:

[2]Is There an Ontology to the Digital?

by Hannah Knox and Antonia Walford

[3]What in/is the World is/of Big Data?

4490
by Allen Abramson

[4] Databasing Danish Schools

by Helene Ratner

[5] Data-Face and Ontologies of Race

by Amade M’charek


by Haidy Geismar


by Carl Hogsden and Amiria Salmond

[8] Digital Ontologies as Productive Process

by Olga Gorinova

[9] The Digital Hydroelectric

by Jamie Cross
1. [Digitality, Analogicity, and Computation](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/820-digital-ontology) by Victor Cova

2. [Search and the Ontological Capacities of the Digital](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/819-is-there-an-ontology-to-the-digital) by Ana Gross

3. [Kittydar: Detecting Edges in the World](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/833-what-in-is-the-world-is-of-big-data) by Adrian Mackenzie

4. [Citizen Sensing: Recasting Digital Ontologies through Proliferating Practices](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/834-databasing-danish-schools) by Jennifer Gabrys

5. [Digitally Different](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/835-data-face-and-ontologies-of-race) by Morten Axel Pedersen

6. [The Digital That Will Be](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/829-a-dissonant-digital-ontology) by Tom Boellstorff

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2. [https://culanth.org/fieldsights/819-is-there-an-ontology-to-the-digital](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/819-is-there-an-ontology-to-the-digital)
4. [https://culanth.org/fieldsights/834-databasing-danish-schools](https://culanth.org/fieldsights/834-databasing-danish-schools)
I’ve been a devoted user of [1]Omnifocus for going on five years. At this point, I struggle to imagine how I could work without it, as I’m so utterly reliant on it to transform the hyperactive clutter within my mind into an ordered archive outside of it. But it’s hard to use. It took me well over a year to get to grips with it. It’s also hard to explain. If you’re nonetheless instinctively curious about it, you should read this [2]great introduction offered by the Thesis Whisperer:

My background in architecture offices has given me a range of time and project management skills that are helpful in my second career as an academic. I think I’m pretty good at working multiple projects with complex dependencies, but moving into a management role at ANU has pushed me to my limit.

For years I’ve been using a simple to-do list system based on [3]Cal Newport’s “How to be a straight A student”. I’ve been coping using this simple pen and paper method (just), but in January I hit crisis point. Two valued staff members left within a couple of months and I temporarily added their work to my already over burdened to-do list. My friend and extreme productivity guru [4]Dr Jason Downs listened to my whingeing and suggested Omnifocus2. I’ll admit that I was initially skeptical. I’ve tried many project management tools, such as [5]Producteev, [6]Freedcamp and [7]Trello, but, after an initial period of enthusiasm, I abandoned each one. Like being on a strict diet, complying with the digital tool made me feel … constricted.

Jason told me Omnifocus2 was different because it is built around the famous [8]‘Getting Things Done’ (GTD) by David Allen. This interested me. I read Getting Things Done years ago and implemented a few of the suggestions to great effect. For example, the folders on my hard drive relate to what I do: administration, writing, researching, teaching, supervising, blogging. My email has a similarly lean file structure, as you can see in the image below. While I have folders for automated feeds, the vast majority of emails end up in one folder called “archive”. If I need to find an email from a person, I just use the search function.
An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy (2016-07-07 08:00)

An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy on the Release of her 20th book and The Rewards of Writing Social Fiction

Ashleigh Watson: Patricia, you’re a best-selling author and award-winning arts-based researcher, you’ve had a remarkable career in sociology and gender studies, you’re the editor of the pioneering Social Fictions series celebrating its fifth anniversary in July, and you’ve just released your twentieth title – an anniversary edition of American Circumstance – so let me ask, why do you write?

Patricia Leavy: I love writing more than anything else. I have since I was a kid. When I’m writing I lose track of time, even forgetting to break to eat. I become completely immersed and engaged. Had I been braver when I was younger, I would have studied creative writing and pursued a career as a novelist or columnist or something. You face so much rejection and critique with that career path, with such slim chances for success, that I didn’t feel emotionally able to handle it. As it turned out, it probably worked out for the best that I pursued an academic career as a sociologist first because it’s given me so much to write about, and a different perspective from which to write. I write because it’s my passion. It’s not like a job, but rather something entirely intrinsic to who I am and that’s always the main motivation.

How do you write? With a pen and a journal in a café? On a laptop in a book-lined home office? A sharp pencil and loose sheets of paper in some warm, sunny, outdoor location?

All of these ways. I always note-take and draft first with a pen and journal or loose sheets of notebook paper. There’s something about the process of writing by hand that’s critical for me. It’s how I get to know what I am writing. Then I usually move to my desktop or laptop. I have a beautiful home office with its own balcony where I do most of my work, but a couple of times a week I grab a notebook and head to a local café for a change of scenery. I live on the coast of southern Maine and in the summer I bring a little lap desk to the beach or a pool and work by hand looking at the sea. While I have my favorite color-coded Moleskin notebooks and those sorts of things, I can work with any materials. I’ve scribbled some of my favorite lines on old napkins and the backs of envelopes. The only thing I find I absolutely need to write is music. I always have my iPod in my bag in case I write outside of the house. I typically listen to female musicians while I work.

How does the process of storytelling come together for you? You’ve written three social fiction novels – Low-Fat Love, American Circumstance, and Blue – was the craft similar for each book or did you find them totally different experiences?
There are constants and yet each experience was also quite unique. In each instance I began with the central characters and getting to know them. My novels are very character-driven and in some ways I think of them as character studies. So I always begin with the surface level of who the character is or appears to be, and from the get-go I start going behind the surface so I can see them in their multi-dimensionality, their true fears, motivations, and positive attributes. Then I start deciding how I will let those aspects of the character slip out. For each book that has been different. For example, in [7] Low-Fat Love we mostly learn about the complexity of the characters from the narrator. In [8] Blue it comes out through character dialogue. Another constant was that I remained open during the process. I didn't create rigid storylines, but rather allowed the plots to evolve naturally, as secondary to who the characters are. I did know the major plot points, including the ending for each book right from the start, but I didn't know each scene in between and how we would get from A to B. I would close my eyes and let each scene unfold like a movie playing out in slow motion in my mind's eye. So I would see someone open a refrigerator and then I would see what was in it, and that would lead me to the next moment and so on.

In other ways the storytelling experiences were quite unique, because I was trying to tell each story in a different way. [9] Low-Fat Love was very challenging, I'm sure largely because it was my first experience writing a novel. I focused a lot on the power of third-person narrator voice coupled with interior dialogue to make micro macro links. I also focused on providing detailed descriptions of scenes, character's homes, and those sorts of things so there is a lot of description in that book. In [10] American Circumstance I really wanted to play with the power of time and interiority for getting to know characters. This brought its own challenges. For example, I had to figure out how to bring a four decade past into the narrative in the beginning, and then bring the reader into the present. I also had to find the balance between third-person narrator voice, showing characters in action and dialogue, and representing their inner thoughts. This was all vital to the subject matter of that book, appearance versus reality. [11] Blue was very relationship-driven and so dialogue drove most of the plot, which was yet another way to try to tell a story. I really loved that approach because I found I got to know the core of the characters through their interactions with others.

That complexity definitely comes through in each story. Once you've settled on a writing style or have found a focus in terms of storytelling, how do you decide what each book 'needs', in terms of research and narrative? Can you reflect on your arts-based research practice and how you actually navigate the doing of reading, writing, and research?

My fiction develops organically. Before writing [12] Low-Fat Love I had already collected interview research with women, and some men as well, about their relationships, identities and body image issues, without the intent to write fiction. Because I was frustrated with traditional academic formats I turned to fiction, armed with my interview data as well as my own cumulative insights into these topics based on my professional and personal experiences. So a bulk of the formal research for that book was "already there" so to speak. I have continued to conduct interview research since, with my questions largely informed by readers’ responses to [13] Low-Fat Love. Both the older and newer interviews have informed my other novels. While I’m writing I immerse myself into the pop culture worlds of the characters. In the case of [14] Blue, there’s a running narrative about 1980s popular culture and art. I was obsessed with all things 80s while working on the book, not only to select appropriate references, but to fully engage with the feel, look and layered meanings I could tease out of the art from that time. I also did extensive research on the color blue and how it appears in art, which is the kind of research any novelist undertakes. Currently I’m collaborating with a visual artist and together we’re working on a collection of first-person short stories with visual art, based directly on new interviews I conducted. For that project I’ve been reading a slew of books by popular feminist scholars about relationships, love and self-esteem, which are all a part of the backdrop for the book. I’ve read several bell hooks books as well as books by Gloria Steinem, Cheryl Dellasega, Mary Pipher and others. It’s all necessary just to write these short little stories. There’s often much more that goes into a project than meets the
Let’s talk about American Circumstance in particular. This June you’re releasing an anniversary edition of the text which includes a brand new epilogue. Can you talk about how you first developed this book, and what it was like to revisit it? What effect has time had on the story and the character’s lives?

American Circumstance explores appearance versus reality – how our lives and relationships appear to others versus how they are experienced. It’s a subject that I’m endlessly fascinated with. I decided to focus on social class, and the ultra-wealthy, because I thought it would be a good way to explore how the front stage and back stage are not always the same. It also allowed me to provide a window into the replication of wealth, power, and privilege in the US, with implications abroad. Given all of the economic changes in the years before I wrote the book, I wanted to look at the complex ways that social class shapes identity, relationships, and even the codes of friendship, such as what we do and do not say to each other.

When I first wrote the novel I wanted to mirror the experience of an impressionist painting which can look very different from a distance than it does close up, where you can see all of the little specks of paint. So I used the style of literary impressionism. Accordingly, the novel is divided into three parts, with the first (and longest) covering moments over an expanse of four decades. The second part unfolds over a period of a few months, and the final part transpires over just a few days. The idea is that you see a more distant view, and then an increasingly close up view, and all of this is enhanced by having a narrator voice dominate the beginning of the novel and increasingly representing the interiority of characters by the end.

This is the second time I’ve revisited a novel to put out a better version and it’s a really interesting experience. I find you really have to let go of your ego and look as objectively as you can at your work. I believe writers always improve and so it makes sense that you’re better equipped to write the story once time has passed. I really took a red pen to the book, in order to tighten it. Beyond improving as a writer, I think what time really does for me is give me insight into readers’ perspectives. I make a point to chat with readers at book events and conferences. I also routinely Skype into book clubs and college classes that use my novels so I learn what resonates with readers, what questions they have, and where they put their emphasis. All of that impacts how I approach revising as well as the new content, in this case an afterword, questions for further engagement and the epilogue.

Without giving away any secrets, what does the new epilogue bring to the story?

The epilogue continues the impressionist theme I developed in the book, going from the longest expanse of time to the shortest. The epilogue carries this through by unfolding over the course of just twenty-four hours. The chapter is called “The Road Trip” and takes place a couple of months after the conclusion of the novel. What I love about it is the glimpse it provides into how cultural biases are experienced across America. The novel as a whole is meant to play with readers assumptions—what we assume about people based on status characteristics like social class or gender. The epilogue takes this further by looking at how these characteristics might be viewed and experienced across the country, and consequently, how place matters. I actually wrote the chapter at the time I originally finished the novel and held on to it to release at a future time. I’m so glad I did that because I look at the transphobia happening in the US right now with these fear-based bathroom laws, and I think, wow, this was really the right time to release this
short story about cultural differences, identity and safety in America. The epilogue is one of my favorite parts of the book.

**What is the most rewarding aspect of writing social fiction from (and as) research? What kinds of spaces, representations, or ways of thinking has this opened up?**

It's been enormously freeing. I can get at things I can't access in any other form. I'm able to create layers of meaning, and tap into something in our humanness, and express those things in ways that affect readers.

This July is the fifth anniversary for the [Social Fictions](#) series. Over the past five years, the series has carved out a very exciting and radical space within academic publishing. What was the biggest challenged you faced when getting the series off the ground?

First I had to find an academic publisher willing to take it on. I spent several months going back and forth with a different publisher who eventually passed on it, afraid he'd lose money. While I was heartbroken at the time it worked out for the best. [Sense Publishers](#) turned out to be the ideal publisher for the series, although they weren't sure about it either, afraid they'd lose money. I actually invested my own funds in the beginning, paying to produce the first book, my novel [Low-Fat Love](#). After that the challenge became marketing, which to some extent remains our biggest challenge. For example, it's been tough to convince professors that the books can both be substantive and well-written. This comes from an assumption that art and scholarship are antagonist. I've worked hard to select books that are intellectually engaging and good pieces of art. They're good reads. As our books have gained legs and received various accolades, those biases have begun to erode. Marketing to general, non-academic audiences is an ongoing challenge as well. This is true for any publisher of fiction, but more so for an academic press not positioned to market to broad audiences. As a goal of the series has always been public scholarship, we've made great efforts in this direction with increasingly optimistic results.

**And what has been the most rewarding part of being Editor of the series?**

Publishing beautiful, innovative, brave books that ought to be published but likely would not be if our series didn’t exist. It’s been especially exciting working with authors for whom this was their first book or first published work of fiction. Seeing the impact on the field, and even the adaptation of my term "social fiction" has also been wonderful. There’s been enormous growth in the field in a short period of time which is very promising and I’m honored to be a part of it.

The series has published many brilliant texts, and I’m sure it’s hard to pick any favourites. Instead, can you tell us a text from the series that surprised you, one that challenged you, and one that really moved you?

[If the Truth Be Told: Accounts in Literary Forms](#) by Ronald Pelias definitely surprised me. His intent was to play with readers’ sense of fact and fiction and to trouble those assumptions. He succeeded. Of all readers, I am well situated to accept the validity of fiction as creating credible, authentic accounts and I read tons on the subject. Yet I was captivated by his unique, beautifully written book and to your question, as I suspect other readers will be, he surprised me more than once.

[Critical Plays: Research for Embodied Change](#) by Anne Harris and Christine Sinclair definitely challenged
me on a personal level. The protagonists are two art education professors, one of whom was an artist first who turned to teaching to earn a stable living, with the hopes of continuing to be an artist. The character struggles and in a brilliant monologue dares to say what many artist-researchers think and fear, in different ways: whether they are living the life they really want to, whether they are true artists, and whether they've sold out. As someone who wanted to be a writer and first became an academic, I was challenged being confronted with some of my own inner thoughts over the years.

When you asked about one that really moved me two immediately sprang to mind. [22] Blackeyed: Plays and Monologues by Mary Weems is a powerful collection of plays and monologues about Black experiences. It’s absolutely gripping. Mary was actually one of the first people to submit a proposal to the series, although at the time I couldn’t publish her work. She sent in a short play called "Meat" about the murders of Black women. It’s so powerful and moving that although I could not publish it at the time for various reasons, I never forgot it. Years later when the series was a success I emailed Mary and offered her a blank contract. That is how Blackeyed came to be. "Meat" is a part of the collection and recently won a Cleveland Arts Prize. I was also deeply moved by [23] Arts-Based Research, Autoethnography, and Music Education: Singing through a Culture of Marginalization by Miroslav Pavle Manovski. I first read it when it was a dissertation up for an arts-based educational research dissertation award given by the American Educational Research Association. I was on the awards committee. It was our unanimous first choice because we were all so moved by it. In short, it’s about the systematic bullying and tormenting the author faced, largely for being gay, and how music and music education provided a path through the pain. I was so moved by it that after he received the AERA award I emailed him and offered him a publishing contract. Amazingly his manuscript had been rejected by several publishers. I believe he is our only author who never had to submit a formal book proposal.

You’re a vocal proponent of public scholarship and public sociology in particular. At its best, what do you believe work like the Social Fictions series has the potential to achieve?

I think it will help us reach the potential of sociology, which you captured beautifully in your recent article about novel writing in sociology. Social fiction is helping to show sociologists what is possible. This is a discipline meant to live outside of the academy, but there's always been a disjuncture between that goal and the reality of how research has been conducted and disseminated. Social fiction raises the bar because it calls on us to engage with new forms, those that have a chance at meeting the promise of our discipline. More people outside of the academy have access to sociological work because of social fiction, and I think there is enormous potential for that to increase as these formats continue to gain legitimacy and students are more empowered to work with them.

What impact do you see work like this having on Sociology in the future, as a professional academic discipline?

In your article you wrote eloquently about a couple of things that I think really speak to this. First, the benefits to those committed to public sociology. Second, the ability to link the micro and macro levels, providing a panoramic and personal viewpoint, and to place readers within those imagined realities. This is the "sociological imagination" realized. I think as more sociologists become aware of this approach and teach with social fictions in their courses, they will understand the real potential of this work and it will help push the discipline forward. We need more publications and more professors teaching with this work in order to have a largescale impact on the field. I hope that happens.

And finally, where do you hope to see Social Fictions in another five years? What are you aiming for your-
I'm not sure. I'm open to what comes next. We surpassed my initial vision long ago and since then I've just remained open. A year ago I was thinking about an ending point for the series and even thought book number twenty might be it. But here we are releasing the twentieth book with several others under contract and coming down the pipeline. Recently we've had some interest in foreign translations. That's very exciting to me and something I'm actively pursuing. As for myself, I want to continue to push myself and to hone my craft. I have plans for more novels, in the genre I've written in as well as other genres. I want to explore what else social fiction might be used for.


[28]Patricia Leavy, Ph.D. is an independent scholar (formerly Associate Professor of Sociology, Chair of Sociology & Criminology and Founding Director of Gender Studies at Stonehill College). She is widely considered an international leader in the fields of arts-based research and qualitative inquiry. Her twenty published books include [29]Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice (first and second editions), [30]The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research, [31]Fiction as Research Practice, [32]Essentials of Transdisciplinary Research and the best-selling novels [33]Low-Fat Love (first and second editions), [34]American Circumstance (first and second editions) and [35]Blue. She is series creator and editor for seven book series with Oxford University Press and Sense Publishers, including the ground-breaking [36]Social Fictions series. Known for her commitment to public scholarship, she is frequently called on by the US national news media and has regular blogs for [37]The Huffington Post, [38]The Creativity Post and [39]We Are the Real Deal. For her work advancing arts-based research she has received numerous awards including the New England Sociological Association 2010 New England Sociologist of the Year Award, the American Creativity Association 2014 Special Achievement Award, the American Educational Research Association Qualitative SIG 2015 Egon Guba Memorial Keynote Lecture Award, and the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2015 Special Career Award (she is the youngest recipient). Please visit [40]www.patricialeavy.com for more information.
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Hip hop culture, philanthrocapitalism and getting shit done (2016-07-08 08:00)

I’ve been fascinated in recent months by the relationship between hip hop and tech. In some cases quite explicitly, senior figures in technology find cultural inspiration for the approach they take to management in contemporary hip hop. I’m interested in the notion of ‘business for punks’ for the same reason.

In essence, I thought this was a product of focusing on ‘disruption’: seeking cultural resources to help motivate oneself to be disruptive. But this fascinating extract from No Such Thing as a Free Gift, by Linsey McGoey, loc 100-118 suggests it might also be a shared concern with ‘getting shit done’:

It took place, reportedly, in New York, where Gates had been hanging out at the back of a bar with Bono and other friends when P. Diddy approached their table. He stood before Gates and nodded. ‘You are a motherfucker’. Gates’s eyes darted at the man. It’s doubtful the world’s most generous philanthropist hears comments like this too often –at least not to his face. Diddy continued his train of argument: ‘You are a motherfucker. What you are doing on immunization in Botswana? Motherfucker’. Gates leaned back in his chair. He realized that Diddy was offering him a high compliment. The encounter is reported by Matthew Bishop and Michael Green in their book Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World. The book has become something of a bible for a new breed of philanthropist vowing to reshape the world by running philanthropic foundations more like for-profit businesses. In this world, Gates is hailed as the ‘MacDaddy’ of the new philanthropy. Bishop and Green offer a quote from Bono on the appeal of Gates’s charitable work: ‘Jay-Z, all of the hip-hop guys, kind of adore him. Because he is not seen as a romantic figure –well, maybe romantic in the sense that Neil Armstrong is romantic, a scientist but not a poet. He gets shit done’. 8

Are exploitative professors breaking the law by recruiting student interns? (2016-07-09 08:00)

Based on the cases I’ve seen in person, I suspect there’s a growing subterranean practice in the UK of exploitative professors recruiting students to work as unpaid research assistants with the promise of a ‘letter of reference’ in lieu of payment. In one case that particularly bothered me, the first year UG student in question explained to me how the ‘research’ was tedious data entry and she felt she learned nothing from the experience.

This is clearly wrong, but is it illegal? Apparently, it depends on whether the student would be classed as a worker rather than a volunteer. This is what Gov.Uk says:

2. Worker

A person is generally classed as a ‘worker’ if:

they have a contract or other arrangement to do work or services personally for a reward (your contract doesn’t have to be written)
their reward is for money or a benefit in kind, eg the promise of a contract or future work
they only have a limited right to send someone else to do the work (subcontract)
they have to turn up for work even if they don’t want to
their employer has to have work for them to do as long as the contract or arrangement lasts
they aren’t doing the work as part of their own limited company in an arrangement where the ‘employer’ is actually a customer or client

Voluntary workers

Workers aren’t entitled to the minimum wage if both of the following apply:

they’re working for a charity, voluntary organisation, associated fund raising body or a statutory body

they don’t get paid, except for limited benefits (eg reasonable travel or lunch expenses)

Could anyone clarify about legality? My impression had been that complaining within academic structures was the best way to curtail this practice. But I wonder if it would be more effective to directly contact HR departments and ask them to confirm the role offered is actually legal.

This is the legal situation in the U.S., detailed on loc 1260 of Intern Nation:

The broad outlines of a broken paradigm are clear. Unless substantial training is involved, an intern is considered to be an employee, however temporary or inexperienced, and entitled to minimum wage and other protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the central piece of federal legislation that addresses the rights of American workers. It doesn’t matter whether it’s at a blue-chip company or a small business, whether it’s full-time or one day a week, whether the goal is academic credit or a midlife career change—by law, there are very few situations where you can ask someone to do real work for free.

Kieran (2016-07-09 10:05:46)
I’ve ended up doing free teaching quite a few times. Usually my PhD supervisors or other academic colleagues will ask for my or my PhD colleague help, but explain they can’t pay us - usually ‘departmental budgets’ are vaguely mentioned as an excuse, and the benefit of ‘experience’ offered up as a secondary prize to actual wages. Unlike other universities we aren’t compensated for teaching via our stipend. In fact for my first year my stipend was about half that of other universities (about £600 a month)
despite being a full-time PhD. I often wonder about the legal basis of this practice.

Social media for academics and the risk of becoming ‘TED heads’ (2016-07-10 08:00)

One of the anxieties I’ve regularly encountered about social media for academics is that it might lead to a devaluing of academic culture. What if I were to tell you that the spectre haunting the imagination of academics is the TED talk?

There’s a lovely expression used by Linsey McGoey in her No Such Thing as a Free Gift, ‘TED Heads’:

> amiable entrepreneurs and executives who congregate at exorbitantly priced TED events around the world, flocking to headline events (‘speaking innovation to power’; ‘branding for good’) with the earnestness of a Grateful Deadhead on his fifth tour.

Vacuous thought leadership, nuggets of easy digestible platitudes, perfect for cultivating vast audiences of overly-influential idiots. It’s a compelling vision, as far as fears go. It’s one founded on a [2]conflation of simplification and being simplistic. But it’s nonetheless something which advocates of social media for academics need to do more to counter substantively, rather than merely dismiss.
Max Weber’s triad – status, class and party – in light of Brexit: A call to party harder (2016-07-10 10:04)

Max Weber famously presented three principles of social ‘stratification’ (‘organization’ would be better): status, class and party. The ongoing saga of Brexit brings to light some interesting features of the last category, which otherwise tends to be neglected or treated as subordinate to the other two.

At the outset, it is worth recalling that Weber conceptualised these three principles as alternative ways in which the law channels power in society. His own presentation stressed the mutually orthogonal character of the three principles, resulting in three distinct dimensions through which power relations can be understood. This way of framing matters enabled Robert Merton to coin the phrase ‘sociological ambivalence’ in the 1970s for conflicts in role-expectations generated by these rather different sources of personal identity.

My own take on Weber’s tripartite conception is that they correspond to the three major lived temporal horizons: past (status), present (class) and future (party). Their grounds for legitimizing power relations are symbolized by, respectively, the hereditary entitlement, the balance sheet, and the public relations campaign. Let me explain each briefly before focusing on the last category.

Status is a principle grounded in the inheritance of acquired traits. Thus, my status is both a privilege and a burden based on the achievements and/or failures of my ancestors. ‘Honour’ is thus the name of the standard that I qua descendant am compelled to meet or exceed by virtue of my status. The strength of a status-based social system may be measured by the extent to which any subsequent failure on my part to uphold this legacy is localized to me or allowed to contaminate the entire lineage’s status.

Class is a principle grounded in ongoing relations to the means of production in society, which are stabilized by the ‘state’, an entity whose very name implies a capacity to hold change in check, thereby establishing a common sense of the present. The ‘egalitarian’ character of Marxism is founded on the idea that all existing classes are equally valuable to society, such that were the proletariat to withdraw its labour the system would collapse. When Marxists speak of a ‘classless society’, they really mean ‘class’ in a sense closer to ‘status’, that is, something into which one is born and cannot change.

Party is a future-oriented principle for organizing social life. Thus, a party system forces conservatives to campaign for the idea that the future should be as much as possible like the past, rather than simply have society take it as the default pattern of existence. In this respect, parties are inherently aspirational. Parties emerge in a world of periodic elections which invite people to reinvent their political affiliation in the name of providing society with a collective direction. The assumption is that people are sufficiently competent and compliant both to represent their own opinions and to execute the electoral outcome. This is a big assumption!

The bigness of the assumption is reflected in the extent to which the sort of objections that were raised against party
politics before its widespread institutionalization have been reinvented in our own time. In the seventeenth century, the objections were grounded in a Christian conception of human fallibility at once moral and epistemic, but in any case resulted in a corruption of judgement: People are both too easily swayed by self-indulging bad arguments and not swayed easily enough by self-limiting good arguments. Nowadays, the same case is made by evolutionary psychologists, decidedly without the original theological spin.

So then, what promotes the party mentality?

The short answer is the belief that people can be other – and typically more – than they have been. Parties enter politics as formally recognised social movements, which aim to get people to alter their sense of self. Even those who promote a status- or class-based social order are forced through the party system to envisage that people might wish to shift position. Thus, parties are incompatible with castes. Indeed, one of the more alarming features of parties for many who value social order is that they prey on the plasticity and fickleness of the electorate. Party politics stagnates if people’s votes become too predictable based on indicators other than the pitches produced in a particular electoral cycle.

More than Weber, his older contemporary Vilfredo Pareto was the master theorist of party-based politics. (For more on Brexit related to this conception, see [1]here.) For Pareto, it was all about the ‘circulation of elites’, which pertains mainly to the speed of circulation and the openness of the process. These two dimensions are orthogonal to each other. Pareto was mainly concerned with the speed of circulation. Following Machiavelli, he posited two party-types: the ‘Lions’ who appeal to authority to maintain an orderly succession, and the ‘Foxes’ who play on intrigue and chance to speed up the process. Generally speaking, Lions rule by default and Foxes in the exception.

However, the modern period’s extension of the vote to the masses introduced a second dimension to party politics, which Pareto only began to explore: It’s the relative openness of the elites to new entrants, who are then brought into the circulation process. Greater democratization has meant greater openness, but there is then the question of whether the masses are incorporated at a steady pace or all at once. The former route is the one preferred by social democratic regimes, which stagger entry into the elites over several generations through education, etc., resulting in the long march known as ‘upward social mobility’. The latter route is the more populist one, which disdains the very idea of meritocracy and would incorporate masses literally en masse.

We might call this general openness to the incorporation of the masses into the elites, ‘Left Paretian’, adherents to which then differ over whether it happens slowly (Lions) or quickly (Foxes). The ‘Right Paretians’ are those who think the difference between the elites and the masses should always be clear. Thus, while some people may manage to migrate from the masses to the elites, there shouldn’t be explicit government policy to encourage such migration. The idea underwriting the Right Paretian position is that the volatility entailed by the circulation elites works best when fewer players are in the mix so the people can be treated as ‘masses’ in the literal sense of relatively inert resources to deployed in the elite power play.

Parliamentary democracy is the modern site for playing out Pareto’s vision. And while the UK is famously known as the home to the oldest major parliamentary democracy, it was founded before the convention of written constitutions. This has meant that the relation between the people and their elected representatives has been always left open. Thus, there is no formal rhetorical space for parliamentarians to exert their superiority over the people who elected them. This means that the exact sense of ‘authority’ which parties can exert over their membership is ambiguous and left to relatively tacit understandings.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Members of Parliament from the UK’s major parties – Tory and Labour – are Left Paretian in their self-understanding and, if the antipathy of most of them to Brexit is an indicator, on the ‘Lion’ side of the Left. But party members seem not to be so inclined, and this has led to increasing internal tensions in both
parties. The members see their elected officials as empowered to administer their collective will, not as exercising judgement in ways that serve the people's interests – which may involve 'sublimating', if not nullifying, the collective will.

If the UK learns nothing else from Brexit, it should be that a parliamentary democracy can work only if it becomes self-consciously Paretian and lays down explicit rules to the game by which Parliament plays – which in turn means a written constitution.

Social media and academic labour (2016-07-11 08:00)

In recent years, we've begun to see social media move from the periphery to the mainstream of academic practice. But what does this mean for academic labour? While much of the discussion concerns the possibilities for scholarly communication, what about the possibilities for an expansion of managerial control? Social media might vastly extend the range of communicative options available to academics, but does it similarly expand the expectations placed upon academics to communicate? What does academic freedom mean in a communications environment where academics can both engage with and potentially be harassed by, larger audience than have ever previously been the case. These are amongst the questions this talk will address, drawing on recent work on the acceleration of higher education to consider the implications of social media for academic labour.

Listen to the podcast from my talk in Leeds a couple of weeks ago [1]here.

"Platform Health" and digital privatisation (2016-07-11 09:15)

A couple of weeks ago I went to a conference about the UK government's new digital strategy which is spearheaded by a department of the civil service called the [1]Government Digital Service. Central to the strategy is a new "platform" system for all public services and one of the key targets of the next 15 years was highlighted as a move towards "platform thinking". Here I will reflect on what I think might be some of the consequences of this for health.

Under this new approach users will be provided with a single digital identity through which they can access all government services. This, we were told, is a response to the reality of the digital world and is necessary in order to keep up with public expectations. It is part of a move from government of the industrial age to government of the
Central to this was the government’s new "[2]verify" and "[3]pay" systems. These are ways of proving your identity and paying for government services or transactions in a secure way online. They were compared at this event to Google and Facebook’s methods of verifying identity which are used across different platforms; this was seen as the model for the government service.

The introduction of this platform system is, however, also a means of stimulating and creating markets. As can be seen in the quotation below from the [4]GDS blog, platforms are seen as being inherently connected to the constitution of markets and competition.

Platforms stimulate markets, and markets drive innovation

Government’s current siloed approach stifles innovation, and leads to various problems such as:

- rent-seeking behaviour from incumbent suppliers
- new suppliers being excluded, even if they have newer, more innovative ideas
- encouraging proprietary activity and technology

If we create platforms based on open standards and interoperability, we automatically create competition and drive innovation. That means more providers and lower costs. We can boost a nascent market of providers, building upon our open services - a market that has, until now, been held back by the contracts that locked us into those closed, proprietary systems. Companies, charities, clubs and co-ops can use the same infrastructure to set up additional services that government can’t justify, or can’t afford. For example: look at [5]GOV.UK Verify, which is stimulating the identity services market. It is setting standards, aggregating demand across government and government services, building a whole new market for identity services in the UK. New identity services are springing up and moving from "clever idea" to "commercial product" very quickly. Programme Director Janet Hughes explains it brilliantly in the [6]presentation she gave recently at the [7]Follow the Entrepreneur conference: without that market influence, if government had tried to procure a solution a few years ago, the specification would already be hopelessly out of date. The market brings innovation, and innovation brings better identity services.
It is clear from the discussion around the introduction of this "platform thinking" that the real target is not technological but cultural. As the Minister for the Cabinet office Matt Hancock stated in his speech to the national digital conference in June 2016:

"... Everyone here knows that digital is the easy part of digital transformation. The hard part is the transformation. It’s easier to write new software than to rewrite an organisational culture. Easier to upgrade to the latest device going to upgrade to the latest skills. Old technology can be replaced but old habits die hard."

Later he stated that "... The most important aspect of business transformation is transforming the way we think about delivery". This platform approach is intended is to be disruptive and to create new markets and opportunities in new methods of procurement of public services.

One of the visions for this platform approach to government was presented at the event I attended by a representative of Nesta (who are a charity who advocate for the expansion of innovation capacity in the UK).

As part of their "connected councils" vision they suggest that within a few years we could be engaging with council services through "personalised portals". Their "[2025 vision] is that "Like the best tech companies future councils will be lean, agile and data driven".

Amongst the benefits of this approach will be greater "market segmentation" and "algorithmic content" enabling "hyperlocal content". This system would work on a similar principle to Amazon's recommendation system with only the most specific local council information being directed towards you based on knowledge of your location and previous interactions with the system.

The digital strategy for healthcare is also clearly built around a commercial model as stated in the "[2020 framework for action]:
"In other parts of our lives, we see the benefits of technology, one on the way we book our travel and holidays, manage our bank accounts and utility bills, buy groceries, connect and communicate with our friends and family."

A recent report by the Nuffield trust bemoaned the fact that the NHS is stuck in the pre-Internet and pre-mobile phone era. But as is also stated in the report

"**Culture change is crucial.** The majority of the issues faced by the journey of transformation of people problems, not technology problems. This means that organisations need to invest least as much into the programmes of organisational change and transformation as they do in the technology itself"

But what is this change they describe? One of the speakers at the event I attended recounted a story they had heard from a nurse which they saw as being instructive of this kind of change.

The nurse told of an incident in which a patient came in to accident and emergency and upon being told there is a significant wait ahead of her asked if the nurse could send her a text message when her turn was coming up so that she could pop across to New Look in the meantime. This was presented by the speaker as indicative of the kinds of demands which the NHS should now welcome and adapt to.

Although I am not an expert on either it seems to me that both the government and the NHS have a somewhat patchy record of implementing large new systems. The extent to which this new "platform" approach seems to ape that of Google, Facebook, Microsoft, et cetera seems to me to open up a potential for a player of their kind to enter this field.

It is certainly conceivable that in a few years time the government will realise that they do not have the capabilities to properly implement this kind of approach and will look to the "experts" in this for help. The emphasis which has been placed so far on changing the culture and organisation of government, and health, services into a form which is similar to that of large tech companies (and crucially one which is focused on markets, disruption and innovation) seems to make this an even more desirable field of intervention for these kinds of companies.
I expressed this concern to a civil servant working for the Department of Health at the event who stated this kind of access for big tech companies was not possible due to the protections on patient data. I mentioned Public Health England's new "One You" initiative a central part of which is the "One You Health Hub" which is hosted on Amazon. I have described on the Cost of Living Blog how this largely consists of bland health advice and links to pages to enable users to buy Fitbits and Wi-Fi enabled bathroom scales.

This seems to me to be consistent with the "platform" approach to health. I also mentioned the access which Google have been granted to over 1.5 million health records in London (I have since learned of access they have got to NHS eye records). They had not heard of either of these cases and expressed disbelief as to how Google were allowed this especially considering how difficult it was for them to move data from one department to another.

While privatisation of health and the NHS has an established history this "platform" approach to public services seems to be producing a different kind of privatisation. The cultural change which is seen as crucial to the implementation of new digital technologies might also be a softening up of the services specifically for the encroachment of digital industries.

1. https://gds.blog.gov.uk/
15. https://johnnyvoid.wordpress.com/2015/12/08/sliding-towards-disaster-how-universal-credit-is-already-a-failure/
20. https://www.amazon.co.uk/b?node=9382662031
7 Propositions about Transformative Horizons (2016-07-12 08:00)

1. Our perception of transformative possibilities is culturally constructed. Certain ranges of possibility are foregrounded and others backgrounded. Our sense of viability is the most cognitive dimension to this, informed by implicit and explicit ontological assumptions about how the social world works. But perceived transformative possibilities are also shaped by much less conscious factors, ranging from the cultural raw materials with which we conceive of the future to the futurity entailed by conditions of our everyday lives.

2. Nonetheless, what concerns us are real possibilities inherent in actually existing states of affairs. The susceptibility of social formations to transformative change reflects a complex constellation of causal factors: some serving to reproduce the existing social order and others latently contributing to its potential transformation.

3. It’s because of this complexity that transformative horizons elude the ambitions of any one corporate agency. The very fact of different socially transformative and reproductive projects means that the social change that does occur is inevitably characterised by unintended consequences.

4. This chaotic character of social change too rarely finds itself considered in the cultural construction of transformative horizons. Instead, we think and dream in terms of collective agents carrying forth projects of change, rather than of change as something resulting chaotically from the clashes between such collective agents in circumstances not of their choosing.

5. Wilful withdrawl from this complexity can be read psychoanalytically as a refusal of the Real. What I’m describing (ontologically) as the chaotic nature of social change has its (epistemic) corollary in the fact that real horizons of possibility elude our capacity to fully symbolise or conceptualise them.

6. This is why dreaming of possible worlds or refusing Utopianism is so psychically charged: we fall into a tendency to over symbolise or under symbolise Real horizons of change because of the affective dilemmas involved in a continual engagement with reality, negotiating between what is and what could be.

7. The materiality of our action means that these negotiations between what is and what could be are themselves contributions to the reproduction or transformation of social formations. The landscape is continually changing as we are orientating ourselves within it.

CfP: Countercultures of Data (2016-07-13 08:00)

Call for Papers for "Philosophy and Technology"’s special issue on Countercultures of Data

Guest Editor
About the Issue
25 years ago, Sandra Harding—in her influential book *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*—detailed and extended critical debates surrounding knowledge production and practices in science and technology. Collectively, these "countercultures of science" confronted the "problematics, agendas, ethics, and consequences" of scientific and technological production head on. Today, these same perspectives offer insight into the realm of data science, as philosophers, scholars, and practitioners alike grapple with ethical questions in a world where discourse, design, and governance increasingly revolve around "big" data and quantifiable knowledge.

This special issue will bring together rigorous conceptual and theoretical perspectives on what might best be called—following Harding—emerging "countercultures of data." In particular, this issue will further critical and philosophical thinking about the theories, methods, institutions, and technological arrangements that underwrite or support data science in various industries and forms. Combined, contributions to the special issue will put forward a more realistic assessment of possible futures for a data driven world.

We invite submissions related (but not limited) to:

- Race and Data Science
- Theories of Property, Labor, and Data
- Political Economies of Data
- Data and Imperialism
- Feminist Perspectives on Data Science
- Data, Bodies, and Disability
- Data, Infrastructure, and the Environment
- Data, Philosophy, and the Law
- Communities and Data
- Data and Queer Subjects
- Data and/as Human Subjects in Research
- Data Science and Epistemic Justice

Timetable for Submissions
October 24, 2016: Deadline for paper submissions
December 21, 2016: Deadline reviews papers
February 6, 2017: Deadline revised papers
2017: Publication of the special issue

Submission Details
To submit a paper for this special issue, authors should go to the journal’s Editorial Manager [1]http://www.editorialmanager.com/phte/ The author (or a corresponding author for each submission in case of co-authored papers) must register into EM. The author must then select the special article type: "COUNTERCULTURES OF DATA" from the selection provided in the submission process. This is needed in order
to assign the submissions to the Guest Editor. Submissions will then be assessed according to the following procedure:
New Submission => Journal Editorial Office => Guest Editor(s) => Reviewers => Reviewers’ Recommendations =>
Guest Editor(s)’ Recommendation => Editor-in-Chief’s Final Decision => Author Notification of the Decision. (The
process will be reiterated in case of requests for revisions.) About the Journal The journal addresses the expanding
scope and unprecedented impact of technologies, in order to improve the critical understanding of the conceptual
nature and practical consequences, and hence provide the conceptual foundations for their fruitful and sustainable
developments. The journal welcomes high-quality submissions, regardless of the tradition, school of thought or
disciplinary background from which they derive. The journal’s Editor-in-Chief is Luciano Floridi (Oxford). Contact For
any further information please contact: Anna Lauren Hoffmann - [2]annalauren@berkeley.edu

Three computational sociologies (2016-07-14 08:00)

An [1]interesting post by Fabio Rojas on the different ways in which the label 'computational sociology' has been used:

• Statistics – for the baby boomer generation of social scientists, "computing in socioal science" meant
  applied statistics. Remember, it requires a lot of knowledge and skill to store data and estimate
  models on computes with limited computing power.

• Agent based models – in the 1980s and 1990s, "computational" meant running simulations.

• Big data/CS techniques – currently, the term seems to refer to either (a) large data generated by
  online behavior and/or (b) using computer science techniques (e.g., topic models or sentiment anal-
  ysis) to study social science data


My concern is that 'computational sociology' of the final sort risks leading to a computational social science that is
not recognisably sociological: though this raises the obvious question of why this is a bad thing and what it means
for something to be 'recognisably sociological'.

A brilliant job for those interested in social media and higher education (2016-07-15 08:00)

The LSE Impact Blog is recruiting for a new editor:

The LSE Impact Blog is an award-winning, highly popular blog aimed at academics, researchers, and HE professionals. It publishes regular blog posts on scholarly publishing, research methods, and maximizing the impact of academic research. Reaching an audience of over 80,000 unique visitors a month, the blog is widely recognised as a world leader in new forms of academic communication.

The post is suitable for someone with experience working with academic writing and a keen interest in the social sciences and academic impact. The individual must be interested in debates around the future of academic communication, measuring academic impact, social media and metrics, non-traditional academic outputs, and knowledge exchange.

The Editor will be responsible for all aspects of the day to day running of the blog. The role involves commissioning blog posts from a wide range of internal and external contributors; editing copy and giving feedback to contributors in a constructive and positive manner; maintaining a regular flow of a minimum of 3 blog posts per week; publishing contributions using WordPress; and utilising social media to disseminate posts and boost engagement.

Part of the role will also involve assisting in an exciting side project which aims to help LSE understand the impact of its public-facing blogs. Working with the project’s Research Assistant and the Social Media Manager, tasks may include event planning, promotion of the project through social media, and working with colleagues to shape project direction.

In addition to a good salary, the benefits that come with this position are a defined benefits pension scheme, generous annual leave and excellent training and development opportunities.

For further information about the post, please see the job description and the person specification.

To apply for this post, please go here or to www.lse.ac.uk/LSEJobs. If you have any queries about applying on the online system, or require an alternative format for the application, please e-mail: hr.jobs@lse.ac.uk quoting reference 1481958.

£27,657 – £32,013 (depending on experience)

This is a fixed term appointment with funding confirmed until 31 July 2017

Closing date for receipt of applications is 13th July 2016 (23:59 UK time). Regrettably, we cannot accept any applications received after this date.

Interviews are envisaged to take place in w/b 18th July 2016.
3. https://jobs.lse.ac.uk/ViewAttachment.aspx?enc=mEgrBL4XQK0+ld8aNkwYmLBC3C4puFrRup0zuLQytSU%3d%3d
4. https://jobs.lse.ac.uk/ViewAttachment.aspx?enc=mEgrBL4XQK0+ld8aNkwYmLBC3C4puFrRup0zuLQytSU%3d%3d
5. https://jobs.lse.ac.uk/ViewVacancyV2.aspx?enc=mEgrBL4XQK0+ld8aNkwYmLBC3C4puFrRup0zuLQytSU%3d%3d

I Daniel Blake (2016-07-16 08:00)

How amazing does Ken Loach’s new film look?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahWgw9E_h4

Know your terrorist credit score! (2016-07-17 08:00)

I can’t recommend this talk highly enough. It was the most thought provoking thing I saw at this year’s re:publica.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vdx4AVfCjCA

Call for blog posts: the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research (2016-07-17 16:06)

Following on from our successful workshop at Social Media & Society 2016, the Digital Social Science Forum is seeking blog posts describing and reflecting on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research. The workshop itself sought to explore conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary social media research, encountered at the level of substantive theoretical commitments but also in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform everyday practice. But our intention for this project is broader, seeking reflections on any aspect of the lived experience of conducting research across and through disciplinary boundaries.
Our primary focus is on digitally orientated research, e.g. social scientists and computer scientists working together, but we warmly welcome contributions from other areas. These might reflect upon things like:

- The role of 'boundary objects' in facilitating work across disciplinary boundaries.
- How a lack of clarity about mutual definitions can both support and hinder interdisciplinary collaboration.
- The importance of reclaiming 'the human' as a shared focus in interdisciplinary research.
- Coping with the challenge of an imperialistic naturalism i.e. forceful assertions of the failure of the social sciences and the necessity of remaking them along the lines of the natural sciences.
- The messy reality of working in interdisciplinary teams.
- What does conceptual development mean in collaborative work across disciplinary boundaries?
- The role of personal relationships in facilitating successful interdisciplinary work.
- Failures and frustrations of interdisciplinarity.
- Getting beyond the motif of the 'attic scholar' and socialising the research process.
- The role of doctoral pedagogy in hindering successful interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Organisational helps and hindrances to working across disciplinary boundaries.

These are just suggestions. Our interest is in how these sometimes obtuse issues are worked out at the level of everyday co-operation: how is the messy reality of interdisciplinarity lived and how should this shape our approach to it? These blog posts will be compiled at the Digital Social Science forum, organised thematically and circulated on social media channels as a public resource.

Contributions should be short (500-1500 words) and will be accepted on a rolling basis. Please send as a word document to mark@markcarrigan.net. Feel free to get in touch to discuss a potential contribution.

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Vintage social media (2016-07-18 08:00)


by Jonathan J.B. Mijs

In service

I saw her today and it was freaking scary A Thursday afternoon at JP Licks She was not even smiling but
Jonathan J.B. Mijs is a Doctoral Candidate in Sociology at Harvard University. When he is not writing about himself in third person, he is studying how (young) people come to see and explain setbacks in their own lives and that of others, which is the topic of his dissertation.

"I am not afraid to speak" - Victims of Violence (2016-07-18 14:07)

by Lisa Gaufman

The Russian and Ukrainian language segments of the Internet are being rocked by hashtags #небоюсьсказать #небоюсьсказать – [1] I am not afraid to speak that were started by a Ukrainian activist [2] Anastasia Melnychenko. Under these hashtags women share their experiences of abuse, be it physical, sexual, moral, or verbal. Most of these stories are simply terrifying: not only because they show how women can be randomly sexually assaulted, but also because these stories are routinely discarded by the women’s bosses, parents or friends. It’s just "boys being boys", "you should be happy that such a prominent man paid attention to you", "it’s your fault anyway – you drank too much". The latter one – victim-blaming – is a particularly common refrain in the comment section to these heart-wrenching posts, and not just from men, with a lot of them seeing an unconscious woman as a legitimate sexual prey – like in the [3] Stanford rape case. It’s also women who think that these stories only happen to you if you behave inappropriately: your skirt is too short, or drink is too long.

The problem is that it happens more frequently than many people think. [4] Statistics of domestic violence in Russia are disturbing: according to Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs, around 12,000 women die annually of domestic abuse, while approximately 60-70% of incidents of abuse never even get reported. A headline for an article on domestic violence in Rossiyskaya Gazeta reads [5] 'If he kills you, then report it’. In other words, law enforcement officials routinely discard the claims of domestic assault brought forward by women. The catchphrase ‘sama vinovata’ - it’s your own fault – is a common refrain on social media. Even women who suffered from domestic violence usually tend to justify it or reconcile with their offenders and continue to tolerate the abuse. This 'normalcy' of violence against women is usually explained by heteronormative culture in Russia, but sexual violence is even
more underreported because of the stigmatization associated with it. Moreover, some men even consider the #Iamnotafraidtospeak campaign a [6]'festival of home-made porn', accusing women of using their genitals for career advancement.

No Woman, No Cry

The Eastern Orthodoxy Russia adopted from the Byzantine Empire equated a female image with Eve, the temptress that led to the Fall and expulsion from Eden. Moreover, the female ideal in Russian culture is associated with motherhood: even the name of mother of God in Russian is "bogoroditsa" – the one who gave birth to God, and not Madonna – my lady. Hence, it has no Troubadour connotations of admiration of a woman in a platonic and/or sexual way. A woman can be either a mother or a sinful temptress, and the latter may be legitimately abused as she is by definition evil and inferior.

There is a whole strand of truisms related to the acceptability of violence towards women. The roots of this concept could be traced to [8]Domostroi, a Russian 16th century collection of household advice, that recommended beating the wife ‘politely’ on her body, avoiding her eyes and face. Domostroi-inspired logic can be seen in a popular saying "byot, znachit lyubit" (if he beats you, it means he loves you) that even justifies violence from a standpoint of a healthy relationship. Another Domostroi-motivated truism even argues that beating a wife improves on her character: “Bey babu molotom — budet baba zolotom” (if you beat your wife with a hammer, she will be golden).

Back to the future What is more, cases of sexual abuse of men were rarely discussed in this campaign, but men get even more stigmatized if they become victims of abuse. In a gender-polarized culture, a person meeting the criteria of "correct masculinity", should always dominate; he can be killed but not humiliated. From this perspective, rape is among other things, humiliation and the establishment of a victim’s inferior status. That is why it will take a lot of time before it will be acceptable for men to speak out about the abuse they endured, especially given how much vitriol the women speaking out now have to deal with. But what is also important, it made many men in Russia think what women next to them have to deal with every day: catcalling, unwanted advances, constant threat of sexual and non-sexual violence that make them carry their keys in their hands or not wearing headsets late at night. Why is there so much victim-blaming that surrounds the #Iamnotafraidtospeak campaign? It may be explained with a belief in a just world: people want to believe that, if they do all the right things, follow the rules, nothing wrong will ever happen to them. Wrong things happen only to wrong people – a variation of “you reap what you sow”.

According to this concept, however, it is the victim that is responsible for the action, and the aggressor is styled as some sort of uncontrollable force. Blaming the victim helps an individual to hide his or her own fear of helplessness in a chaotic world, a compensatory attempt to ensure that you are able to control everything around you. However, despite the “it’s your own fault” camp voices, many men and women realized that being a victim of violence is not a choice, only dismissing the victims of violence is. It is hard not to be afraid, but at least it has become a bit easier not to be afraid to speak. Elizaveta Gaufman received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Tübingen. Her research focuses on the exploration of verbal and visual enemy images through big data analysis, combining international relations theory with media and cultural studies. Twitter: @lisas_research

1. https://www.buzzfeed.com/victorstepanov/women-are-using-the-hashtag-iarnotafraidtosayit-to-share-stoutm_term=.coDVg5zan#.cdvWVQ6jYW
7. http://ru.static.z-dn.net/files/d89/3d08b75206d8091b99860b8d7e4c08b6.pdf
MeToo | Duck of Minerva (2017-10-17 18:35:49)

[...] No, it isn't. But that is what a relatively famous Russian actress Lyubov Tolkalina had to say about the Hollywood scandal. Even though in the same article about Russian movie industry attitudes to Harvey Weinstein there were other opinions, including from men who sympathized with the victims of sexual assault and derided the hypocrisy of the movie industry in Russia and the US, so far the response to the Hollywood revelations in Russia have not necessarily been #MeToo. The underlying issue here is not just the patriarchal culture, but also the internalized misogyny and victim blaming that go with it, or, as Lyubov Tolkalina puts it, "A woman is always guilty in male sexual assault". Being a part of a macho patriarchal culture is hard, so a lot of women side with the desirable and hierarchically higher in-group – men – and re-affirm female objectification and disparagement. Moreover, this kind of responses mirror the pushback against the social media campaign #IamNotAfraidtoSayIt (#янебоюсьсказать) initiated by a Ukrainian activist in 2016 where women in Post-Soviet space shared the horrifying stories of sexual abuse. [...] 

feshop-s1.ru (2018-03-14 17:45:55)

I really did not expect that so many people I know — women and girls — have been victims of violence and harassment, many from a very young age.

Using @IFTTT and Twitter to curate material for research projects (2016-07-19 08:00)

Two new projects I’m in the early stages of working on both necessitate engagement with phenomena that are developing rapidly. This poses an obvious question: how to identify relevant material and then archive it in a useful way? I’ve written a lot about the [1]curation process before and I won’t rehash it here. Instead, I want to explain a new strategy I’m using. Every time I tweet with the hashtag #Distraction or #DigitalElites, the service [2]IFTTT automatically saves the tweet to a text file in my DropBox. For those unfamiliar with it, there’s an explanation of how IFTTT works [3]here.
This lets me share the item I've found, as well as briefly reflect on it. It also facilitates conversation at each stage of the project, adding to my engagement with the item I've shared. In doing so, I hope it will help avoid the 'graveyard of links' problem, where a vast archive of once useful material becomes intractable when it lacks context and hasn't been filtered through prior engagement.


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**Trumpism 101 (2016-07-20 08:00)**

HT to [1]Steve Fuller for this introduction to Trump syllabus put together by the Chronicle of Higher Education:

This course will explore the phenomenon that is Donald Trump's presidential campaign. We will take an interdisciplinary approach, gathering insights from history, literature, philosophy, political science, psychology, and beyond. The course will be taught by Jeremy Adelman, Elizabeth Anderson, Jennifer Burns, Robert Greene II, Hans Hansell, Steven F. Hayward, Marc Hetherington, Philip Jenkins, Michael Kazin, Jill Lepore, Harvey Mansfield, Kevin Mattson, Dan McAdams, Wilfred M. McClay, Kim Phillips-Fein, Nancy Rosenblum, Michael Tesler, and Alan Wolfe.


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Lisa Durff (2016-07-20 23:56:43)
Insights from history - may I suggest Adolf Hitler?

These young adults need an education. Please stop this nonsense

**The Big Data Trap (2016-07-21 08:00)**

A really interesting reflection on the limitations of 'big data' from the FT's Tim Harford:
During a recent PhD upgrade interview at the University of Warwick I was asked to defend my assumption that the study of death, dying and grieving was sociologically based. This took me aback as I had not been expecting to have to justify this aspect of my research. "Of course it belongs in sociology departments" my inner voice was shouting – death happens within society, grief doesn't just affect individuals, it affects wider groups, and is always influenced by the social context within which it happens. The events in Orlando on June 12th bring this sociological context into focus. Public displays of grief have recently become public displays of solidarity, as demonstrated by the worldwide response to the attacks in Orlando and the Paris attacks in 2015.

Social media has played an important part in these social demonstrations of mourning and solidarity: The hashtag #JeSuisCharlie was used over 5 million times in just 3 days following the deadly attack on the offices of Charlie Hebdo, and Facebook introduced a French flag meme for their users to incorporate on their profile page following the Paris attacks. Few would argue that social change is at the heart of the discipline of sociology, and the trending on Twitter of the hashtag #TwoMenKissing, following the atrocity in Orlando, is a clear example of social media being used in an attempt to change negative attitudes – in this instance - toward the LGBT community.

Grief is often viewed as psychological stages to be worked through with the possibility of “getting over” the death of a loved one. However, grief is far more complex than this, it is entwined and embedded within issues of gender, race, class and culture – within a social context. It is not just social grief that is context specific, individual or private grief also happens within a social context that is being made visible by social media.

Grieving is not a purely psychological phenomena to be studied and researched within psychology departments it belongs in sociology department too – I only wished I could have been more eloquent in my defence of my stance during my interview!

Debra Bassett is a PhD Candidate at the University of Warwick. Her research interest lies in whether digital immortality being offered by social media platforms - through the creation of digital messages - will affect how people grieve.
The size of social networks and the size of nation states (2016-07-23 08:00)

A [1]really interesting way of looking at this:

![Diagram showing the size of social networks compared to the size of countries by population](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/facebook-is-bigger-than-the-worlds-largest-country)

1. [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/facebook-is-bigger-than-the-worlds-largest-country](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/facebook-is-bigger-than-the-worlds-largest-country)

Fino (2016-08-02 15:01:44)
What kind(s) of bias can you see in this comparison between a "country" and a "social networks" by looking only at the population raw numbers?
What happens in an internet minute? (2016-07-24 08:00)

1. https://twitter.com/simonlindgren

1. https://twitter.com/simonlindgren
This is quite interesting. I wonder how many blog posts, podcasts, or other sharing of user-generated content occurs outside the major commercial platforms in an Internet minute?

The Accelerated Academy (2016-07-25 08:00)

30th November to 2nd December 2016, Leiden, the Netherlands

From the 1980s onward, there has been an unprecedented growth of institutions and procedures for auditing and evaluating university research. Quantitative indicators are now widely used from the level of individual researchers to that of entire universities, serving to make academic activities more visible, accountable and amenable to university management and marketing. Further demands for accountability in academia can be related to general societal trends described under the heading of the audit society (Power 1997), and the evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen 2011). As part of broader transformations in research governance, indicators on publications and citations are now permeating academia: from global university rankings to journal-level bibliometrics such as the journal impact factor and individual measures like the h-index. Yet, it is only recently that considerable interest has been directed towards the effects that these measures might have on work practices and knowledge production (c.f. de Rijck et al. 2015), and the role they might be playing in accelerating academic life more generally (c.f. Vostal 2016).

The Accelerated Academy draws together a number of cross-disciplinary conversations about the effects that acceleration towards metric forms of evaluation is having upon research, and the implications this holds for living and working in contemporary academia (Felt et al. 2009). Building on the successful maiden edition of the Accelerated Academy series in Prague in 2015, this year’s Leiden conference will be especially focussed towards the following questions:

- What does acceleration mean in different research contexts?
- What are the implications of digitally mediated measurement and tools for quantifying scholarly performance?
- What are the knowledge gaps regarding the effects of metrics on scientific quality and societal relevance of research?
- How can we harness the positive and minimize the adverse effects of performance measurement in universities?

Confirmed keynote speakers include Peter Dahler-Larsen (University of Copenhagen), Ulrike Felt (University of Vienna) and Michael Power (LSE).

We invite submissions for presentations of around 20 minutes. The deadline for submitting abstracts will be August 31st 2016. Please send two pages or 800 words describing your contribution including a short biographical note to: [1]a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl.

Conference organisers

[2]Sarah de Rijcke, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University
Scientific committee

[5] Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick
[6] Tereza Stöckelová, Czech Academy of Sciences
[7] Filip Vostal, Czech Academy of Sciences
[8] Paul Wouters, Leiden University
[9] Milena Kremakova, University of Warwick

Event registration will be free of charge. In addition, a limited number of travel and accommodation support bursaries will be made available for researchers especially inhibited by the costs of travel. Please contact the conference manager [10] Andrea Reyes Elizondo for more information.
In August 2011, 29-year-old Mark Duggan was shot and killed whilst being arrested by armed police in Tottenham, London. This incident ignited a riot that escalated into a week of the worst civil unrest in recent British history. This film explores the life and death of Mark Duggan, and features his childhood friends, Marcus and Kurtis, as they struggle to come to terms with the death of their friend - whilst also waiting to see if the inquest into his shooting will provide them with a satisfactory version of the truth.

"Moving and insightful documentary about the controversial shooting of Mark Duggan " [2]https://film.list.co.uk/


1. https://youtu.be/RbXb0sQQ2is
2. https://www.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Ffilm.list.co.uk%2F&h=bAQE22z9G&enc=AZM0Fk7v6smimcm4SoirUZXdncL9i2ouVb09o5wVXl1QPE3Nh4FKIaQCVRmKa3VaUXs&s=1
Sunspring: a film written by algorithms (2016-07-26 08:00)


It’s weirdly powerful. But it’s interesting to consider how much interpretive effort must have been necessary to turn this raw script into something cogent. This could be taken as a dismissal of algorithmic culture but it could also point towards the power of team work, as algorithmic creations fuel human creativity by offering unpredictable raw material, derived from existing culture but entirely escaping its explicit patterns.


How waking up every day at 4.30am can change your life (2016-07-27 08:00)

This slightly disturbing TED talk speaks volumes about contemporary cultures of sleep:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOEB1Fr0_MM

It’s spirituality for aspirant TED heads. This is a phrase used by Linsey McGoey in her No Such Thing as a Free Gift:

amiable entrepreneurs and executives who congregate at exorbitantly priced TED events around the world, flocking to headline events (‘speaking innovation to power’; ‘branding for good’) with the earnestness of a Grateful Deadhead on his fifth tour.

Murmuration and Complex Systems (2016-07-28 08:00)

Watching this is enough to make me temporarily rethink my long standing hostility to ‘global brain’ speculation. It's remarkable what beautiful order can arise in a purely aggregative way and it’s something I've tended not to recognise in my theorising of collectivity.
The Soyuz Research Network for Postsocialist Cultural Studies announces the opening of its first Article Prize competition for the best article related to the culture, history, politics of postsocialism by a junior scholar. This prize recognizes significant contributions to the advancement of scholarly understandings of postsocialism, broadly defined.
Articles published in 2015 and 2016 by a scholar who has earned a PhD within the past six years (2010 or later) are eligible. Scholars from any discipline with any geographic area of interest are encouraged to apply.

Submissions should be sent electronically to Jennifer Carroll at jennifer_carroll@brown.edu no later than September 1. Please include “Soyuz Article Prize” in the subject line.

Please circulate this announcement to your colleagues!

Best
Jennifer Carroll

SOYUZ Book Review Editor


1. mailto:jennifer_carroll@brown.edu
3. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/

Symposium: Anxiety and Work in the Accelerated Academy (2016-07-29 11:13)

Friday September 23rd at the University of Warwick, 9:30am to 6:00pm
The culture and organisation of knowledge production are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Neo-managerialist models for the management of research and teaching, the expansion of audit and academic rankings, and the recasting of universities as service providers and students as consumers are just several of the main features of the ongoing marketisation of science, higher education and academia. Further important structural changes include the casualisation of academic labour and the "acceleration" of academic life.

These transformations concern the mathematical, natural and social sciences and humanities in equal measure, if perhaps in different ways. The careers, working lives and identities of scholars, researchers and higher education teachers are all affected.

In this symposium, we bring together international and UK-based scholars who study science, higher education and academia. We focus on a particular aspect of neoliberal academia, namely its anxiety-inducing environment - not as an object in itself, but as a symptom of what Ros Gill called "the hidden injuries of neoliberal academia" and of the need for meaningful change. We will discuss what is happening to the work, careers, lives, identities and epistemic communities of scientists, while the scientific institutions are changing.

We invite everyone interested in issues of work, labour and employment in the sciences and academia - scholars, students, practitioners, administrators - to join the symposium and take part in the discussions.

Speakers:

Liz Morrish - *Metrics, Performance Management and the Anxious University*
With responses by Gurminder K. Bhambra & Maria Ivancheva

Maggie O'Neill - *Pace, Space and Well-Being: Containing Anxiety in the University*
With responses by Vik Loveday & TBC

Filip Vostal - *Beyond the dichotomy of slow and fast academia: On temporal multidimensionality of science*
With responses by Mark Carrigan & Milena Kremakova

Each speaker will talk for thirty minutes, with responses of fifteen minutes each, before an hour's open discussion.


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Eileen Hogan (2016-07-29 13:59:09)
Greetings from Ireland! Is this being live-streamed by any chance? I would love to attend, but sadly...
Afraid not sorry, we’ll be stretched to our organisational capacities on the day - will record it though if I’ve worked my way through my backlog of podcasts by then (easy to record, much more time consuming to edit unfortunately) & will definitely be live blogging and tweeting.

**Ford’s Sociological Department (2016-07-30 08:00)**

A fascinating snippet from *No Such Thing as a Free Gift*, by Linsey McGoey, loc 932:

The Ford Motor Company established its own Sociological Department, employing an initial team of fifty and then a total of 160 ‘investigators’ tasked with circulating in the community and paying impromptu visits to the homes of Ford’s workers, each of whom needed to be confirmed as sober, thrifty (through making regular bank deposits), and ‘clean of person’ to qualify for the new five-dollars-a-day remuneration scheme.

**Why I’m not Afraid or Ashamed of Cosmopolitanism (2016-07-30 10:06)**

This piece is another one of my several articles inspired by Brexit. Here I bring together two issues that Brexit has placed in harsh juxtaposition: Cosmopolitanism as a distinct ideology – whose ‘elitism’ [1]Peter Mandler and [2]Ross Douthat have recently cast in an unfairly negative light – and the future of socialism as a coherent ideology.

My own view is that socialism needs to be cosmopolitan. However, this is not as easy as it sounds. To be sure, forty years ago I was taught that ‘national socialism’ (i.e. Nazism) was a contradiction in terms, perhaps even a piece of cynical political rhetoric. But that was at the height of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union – and to a lesser extent China – was seen as ‘exporting’ socialism across the world to match the free market capitalism being somewhat more covertly spread by the US intelligence services. Strange as it may sound, this framing of international politics as a global ideological struggle may have been the best PR that cosmopolitanism has ever received. (Take a bow, James Bond.)

Post-Cold War, geopolitics looks rather different. Successful ‘socialist’ regimes are now generally seen as having had a clear sense of boundaries. Thus, the Scandinavian welfare states from which Hitler took some inspiration are regarded as the best version of ‘national socialism’: i.e. a protectionist domestic policy (including a strong dose of eugenics) coupled with a generous overseas development policy. This would enable other parts of the world to develop their own welfare states, which would in turn discourage endless streams of migration and the de-stabilizing effects they bring to all concerned. Indeed, such an orientation helps to explain the strong Scandinavian presence in the formative years of the United Nations.

Given what I’ve said so far, the European Union clearly operates more like the Cold War adversaries – for better or worse, and for worse if Brexit is any indication. There is no hiding that the European Union aspires to be a
‘federalist superstate’, a ‘United States of Europe’ joined in a common economic and political culture. To be sure, Jürgen Habermas – to his credit – realized early that this ‘culture’ was inherently ‘cosmopolitan’ in the original Kantian sense of the term, more about which below. The signature feature of this cosmopolitanism is the insistence on the free movement of both labour and capital. Brexit happened because British voters decided they wanted the latter without the former.

Cosmopolitanism is premised on the itinerant character of humanity. The modern idea is due to Immanuel Kant, who famously never strayed far from his home town, the Baltic port of Königsberg (today’s Kaliningrad, Russia). But equally famously, he welcomed various luminaries to his home, turning it into a provincial East Prussian version of an Enlightenment salon. For Kant, cosmopolitanism was all about hospitality: i.e. the welcoming of strangers to your home in the spirit of allowing and expecting them to leave at some point – preferably in a better state for having made the visit. It is the ethic that post-Kant has been commodified in the hotel and the airport lounge.

The cosmopolitan sees people as dynamic: People never really belong where they are, but if you allow them a certain freedom – ‘give them space’, as we nowadays say – they will benefit from their estrangement. ‘Tolerance’ is an unduly negative attitude to invoke in this context, as it suggests that the host is burdened by the presence of the guest. On the contrary, whatever inconveniences the cosmopolitan host bears is compensated by whatever (unexpected) benefits s/he receives from the visitor.

The intuition informing the cosmopolitan relation is that it is mutually enriching for people to encounter each other as strangers with an open mind, even granting a certain inevitable failure on both sides to recognize – or even respect – the other’s point of origin or frame of reference. Tellingly, aristocrats and those travelling in their circles have been touted as the original cosmopolitans. The operative phrase here is the double-edged idea of noblesse oblige, which implies both a generosity to others and a relative indifference to how those others respond to that generosity, presumably because one is sufficiently secure in one’s being, regardless of what others make of it.

The interesting philosophical and political question is whether cosmopolitanism can be scaled up to become a universal social ethic. This is quite a tall order because it would mean removing the privilege that people normally accord to familiarity. However, Christianity has form in this matter, most strikingly in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which invites the audience to see God in even the most abject of the strangers they encounter.

The Christian version of love, agape, involves a two-step move which results in a cosmopolitan mentality. On the one hand, Jesus decries the tendency of people to simply take care of their immediate family and friends while neglecting the larger sense of misery in the world. On the other hand, he re-inscribes a deeper notion of ‘family and friends’ in the idea that we are all descended from the same God, in whose image and likeness we are created – regardless of how different we may appear to each other in the initial encounter.

There are two secular residues of this theological horizon in modern cosmopolitanism: a sense of species closure under the ‘human’ and a sense that under the right conditions any individual’s full humanity might be realized. Taken together they constitute the Enlightenment’s conception of ‘human nature’ as a kind of ‘universal brotherhood’ (which was sometimes extended to sisterhood). This conception of human nature, though still in popular usage, lost its scientific basis with the Darwinian revolution in biology, which denies both the natural reality of species and the natural plasticity of organisms. But let’s set aside Darwin’s challenge to this entire way of thinking for the rest of this discussion.

The political home of the cosmopolitan mentality lies in ideas of ‘upward social mobility’, ‘meritocracy’ and ‘aspiration’. All these phrases are associated with the UK-based Fabian style of socialism that at the dawn of the 20th century was in productive dialogue with emerging US Progressivism, European social democracy and what became Leninist socialism in Russia.
It is generally known that Fabian socialism was the ideology of the Liberals who split to form the Labour Party in 1900. What is generally not known – or at least not appreciated – is that the soul of the Labour Party, in keeping with its Fabian origins, has always been closer to Tony Blair than Tony Benn. Whenever the Labour Party has veered to the sort of soft Marxism espoused by Benn, it has been an electoral failure. But this is more than just a point about winning elections. It goes to the soul of socialism itself.

Consider the idea of ‘upward social mobility’. It was invented in a positive spirit: People should always be upwardly mobile. Moreover, the idea wasn’t simply about increasing income or alleviating poverty. It was also about getting ‘better’ jobs. Implied here is that ‘working class’ jobs, while tolerable under the right pay conditions, are not ideal for any self-respecting human being. Thus, a responsible working class parent would want their children to attend university so they can leave their socio-economic background and even their place of birth.

I make this line of thinking so explicit because it suggests where Fabians and Marxists potentially differ over the best way to realize socialism. What I’ve described is the Fabian story, a version of which migrated across the Atlantic – courtesy of Graham Wallas’ *The Great Society* – to make Progressivism the dominant US political ideology for the seventy year period prior to Ronald Reagan’s presidency. The bottom line is that over time a ‘great society’ streamlines if not outright eliminates the livelihoods of blue collar workers. Social progress is marked by successive generations not being employed in jobs which historically have been protected by labour unions.

Fabian socialism is rightly seen as ‘technocratic’. For Fabians, an important job of politics is to eliminate drudgery in the human condition, and the best way is to apply human reason to end wasted effort in tasks which can be automated or otherwise mechanized. Thus, humans are left to do those things – if anything (!) – that only humans can do. (H.G. Wells, a Fabian fellow-traveller, played with the ambivalence of this prospect for most of his career.) Absent here is any sentimental attachment to the ‘guild socialism’ mentality which lingers in those forms of Marxism wedded to a literalist version of the labour theory of value.

From this standpoint, the rise of ‘cultural studies’ in the 1960s can be understood as a quasi-Marxist push-back against the Fabian presumption that working class people need to be provided opportunities to ‘prove’ themselves, as if they weren’t already proving themselves in their normal everyday lives and jobs. In this context, the concept of ‘culture’ was re-appropriated to provide the relevant sense of ‘proof’. (Take a bow, Raymond Williams.)

The Fabians struck back by fetishizing of ‘knowledge’ as a defining feature of the socio-economic order. It was already present in the work of the US sociologist Daniel Bell in the early 1970s but it reached its peak in the UK in the Blair-Brown years. Whatever warm fuzzy feelings the soft Marxists cultivated for locally meaningful forms of labour came to be offset by the urgency with which this new generation of Fabians insisted that people had to ‘scale up’ and ‘scope out’ their epistemic horizons by getting one or more university degrees. The fixation on ‘competitiveness’ – be it with the Soviets or (after the fall of the Berlin Wall) fellow capitalists – was a signature feature of their rhetoric. There is no such thing as ‘standing still’ without losing ground in the process.

What makes this Neo-Fabian move specifically ‘cosmopolitan’? Clearly knowledge is being treated as something akin to capital, indeed, ‘human capital’ as economists put it. Like any other form of capital, it is both mobile and protean – it can be acquired in many different ways and work in many different places. It is not the sort of ‘situated knowledge’ that continues to fascinate sociologists, but rather the ‘credentials’ which confer sufficient value on their possessors to excuse them of any situation-specific failures in their performance. In effect, credentials provide the passport for the free mobility of labour. And this may be a point on which the Brexiteers and the Eurocrats can agree.

It should be clear from the above that cosmopolitanism helps to fill in the background psychology that is needed to sustain a world-view which would have people always trying to move to ‘someplace better’ – whatever that may mean in terms of space-time coordinates. It involves an openness to the strange but also to the transient, which when taken together is palatable. The mistake that critics of cosmopolitanism typically make is to suppose that it
is about some meta-level elite form of authority when in fact it is about establishing the material conditions under which people can be recognized as free agents.

Of course, it does not follow that the cosmopolitan strategy works perfectly. After all, it suggests that if you get the right credentials, you’ll be treated as an equal of others with similar credentials. But this is true only to a limited extent, for reasons that sociologists have explored in lugubrious detail. What this suggests that the devil is in the details when it comes to cosmopolitanism – but it remains an attractive ideal for the human condition.

1. https://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/britains-eu-problem-london-problem

Margaret Archer on the Relational Subject (2016-07-31 08:00)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhXEY2fRzqM

7.8 August

Academic Videos on Asexuality (2016-08-01 08:00)
A really useful playlist put together by the excellent Asexuality Media Archive:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLB2zdATGm9d8nikUAMcyNXPq KjnRp-VVj

Black women in the academy: ‘inclusion’ or erasure from the social sciences? (2016-08-01 12:52)
BSA Regional Postgraduate Event:
Black women in the academy: ‘inclusion’ or erasure from the social sciences?
Date: Tuesday, 20th September 2016, Ballroom, Keele University
Keynote speakers: Professor Claire Alexander (University of Manchester) and Professor Kalwant Bhopal (University of Southampton)

Event Outline
"Much of the Eurocentric masculinist worldview fosters Black women's subordination. But placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview" – Patricia Hill Collins, 1990.

The category 'Black' during the 1980s homogenised the struggles of Caribbean and Asian communities in racist Britain. However, the applicability of this categorisation towards British Asians has been contested (Modood, 1994) and even its use towards African diasporic communities (Kwesi, 2015). Despite these contestations, the UK welcomes a Black Studies degree to Britain at Birmingham City University in September 2017, signalling the importance of disrupting historically White spaces and decolonising knowledge. This conference day will bring together academic scholars who identify as black, to provide an intellectual space to discuss about the impact of 'race' and gender on their academic work. This day is unique in also providing a reflective space for scholars' experiences of survival at the margins (hooks, 1990). Women of colour working within the social sciences in the UK are often still marginalised and face other, intersectional challenges not illuminated under traditional inequalities' discourse. We invite scholars, intellectuals and activist women of colour to contest Eurocentric, male and heterosexual epistemologies. The margins should not solely be seen as a site of disadvantage; rather, this event is shaped by an understanding that black women academics' liminal position in historically White spaces offers the "opportunity/obligation to transcend their either/or way of knowing" (Dunbar, 2008:86).

Confirmed established academics' panelists: Professor Farzana Shain (University of Keele), Dr Denise Noble (Birmingham City University), Dr Lorna Roberts (Manchester Metropolitan University), Dr Shirin Housee (University of Wolverhampton), Dr Lisa Palmer (Birmingham City University, TBC)

Call for papers
We invite paper contributions from doctoral, early career, to established academics writing in the following thematic areas:
-Black academics or students in Higher Education;
-Black cultures in Britain;
-'Race', ethnicity and (black) girl/boyhood;
-Black communities in popular culture;
-Migration and narrative stories from black communities
-Queer studies or trans studies related to black communities

Please email abstracts (up to 250 words) to Nadena Doharty (n.doharty@keele.ac.uk) by Friday, 26th August 2016 indicating any special technological requirements. Each panelist will have a maximum of 15 minutes to present.

Registration
BSA Member registration £10, Non-Member Registration £25
Caribbean lunch provided, though please make sure you indicate any special dietary requirements. Places limited so please book quickly.

Any queries about the event to be sent to Nadena Doharty: n.doharty@keele.ac.uk

4537
Our most popular posts in the last three months (2016-08-03 08:00)

[1] Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing
[3] Public Sociology
[4] An Interview with Sociologist Patricia Leavy
[5] How to write essays for A Level Sociology exams
[8] The Scholastic Fallacy of C. Wright Mills
[10] Computational Social Science and the Collapse of Sociology
[12] Na Labutenah: Russian Society in 6 minutes
[13] A feminist leaves the neoliberal university

Call for papers: Moral Economies of the Digital (2016-08-04 08:00)

Call for papers

Special issue of the European Journal of Social Theory

Moral Economies of the Digital

Digital technologies have opened up new opportunities for novel forms of economic practice and for the economic empowerment of individuals and communities. But what happens when they encounter the mesh of pre-existing social, cultural, and economic relations? We invite papers that explore the moral economies underpinning the use of digital technologies, and examine how they encourage or constrain the use of technologies to renegotiate existing power structures and economic practices. Papers may, for example, address one or more of the following issues:

- To what extent is the digital economy dependent upon ethics, norms, and communicative interaction, and does this open up awareness of different approaches to the economy?

- Can social theory help us to explain the development, operation and consequences of the digital economy?

- Does the ‘new’ sharing economy offer a new type of moral economy and how does it impact existing communities?

- What processes and circumstances allow digital technologies to be incorporated successfully (or not) into the moral economies of subaltern communities?

- How do value propositions associated with the introduction of digital technologies, such as disintermediation, or the death of distance, play out in practice?

While empirically oriented papers are welcome as well as more theoretical papers, empirical papers should employ a theoretical framework, show how it contributes to the analysis of the empirical case(s), and consider the consequences of the analysis for the framework concerned.

Papers should be 6,000-9,000 words in length, and should be submitted via Scholar One by 30 September 2016. The special issue is likely to be published early in 2018. For further details of the submission process and guidelines, see 4539
The Return of the Riot (2016-08-05 08:00)

From Joshua Clover’s [1]Riot. Strike. Riot pg 2. He argues that the return of the riot reverses a long term trend observed by Charles Tilley, in which the riot had given way to the strike as the foremost tactic in socially available repertoires of contention:

As the overdeveloped nations have entered into sustained, if uneven, crisis, the riot has returned as the leading tactic in the repertoire of collective action. This is true both in the popular imaginary and the realm of data (insofar as such matters give of statistical comparison). Regardless of perspective, riots have achieved an intransigent social centrality. Labor struggles have in the main been diminished to ragged defensive actions, while the riot features increasingly as the central figure of political antagonism, a specter leaping from insurrectionary debates to anxious governmental studies to glossy magazine covers.

Kieran (2016-08-13 07:59:46)
I’m a strong believer in the need for riots to remind the government that there are far more of us than there are of them. Civil disobedience is great, but the UK government just ignores it - start burning down police stations, on the other hand... (a joke, sort of).

Call for Papers: The End of the World as We Know It? (2016-08-06 08:00)

The End of the World as We Know It?
CALL FOR PAPERS

The online abstract submission system for the ESS annual meeting is now open at [1]https://www.meetingsavvy.org/ess or through the website at [2]http://essnet.org. The ESS welcomes submissions, drawing on every methodology, addressing any and all issues of interest to sociologists. In addition, ESS president John Torpey (CUNY Graduate Center) has proposed that the 2017 meeting will focus on the theme “The End of the World as We Know It?”. Our world is caught up in rapid but ambiguous change. With improvements in health care and nutrition, global populations are both growing and aging; by 2050, the world is expected to have some 9 billion people or more, perhaps a quarter of whom will be over 60 years of age. More than half of the world’s population lives in cities, a proportion expected to rise to two-thirds by 2050. Interstate violence has been declining for decades. Technology is revolutionizing everyday life: powerful hand-held computers are ubiquitous, communications are much easier, and commercial drones will soon fill the skies. Yet the consequences for social life are contradictory. People can be in touch with many more people, yet they are often not fully present in personal interaction. Racism and class inequality persist or worsen. The life-long career with one employer may be giving way to a “gig economy,” in which people offer their own assets or temporary labor for hire. Social safety nets and public education systems – the bedrock of social citizenship – are under challenge. Climate change threatens global patterns of habitation and livelihood, and indeed life on the planet itself. Sociologists know a lot about these developments, as well as about their dark underside. How are different social groups affected by these changes? What measures should be taken to mitigate the negative effects of these changes and to maximize their usefulness to people? Are we as sociologists paying attention to the right things? What do our analyses of society tell us about where we go from here? We hope that scholars who participate in the meeting will bring a broad range of additional questions and approaches to issues raised by a focus on major social change. Although the ESS particularly encourages submissions related to this year’s theme, we welcome submissions on all sociological topics, drawing on all methods and formats, including:

- Individual papers (please include abstracts of 250 words or less; longer drafts are also welcome via email to the program committee)
- Wholly constituted sessions (with names and affiliations of all presenters)
- Thematic conversations (panels of two or more scholars engaged in debate or exchange)
- Workshops on specific topics and techniques
- Special sessions organized around prominent scholars and their work
- Roundtable and poster session presentations

Proposals for mini-conferences are encouraged by August 15, 2016 and should be sent to easterns2017@gmail.com Paper submissions and session proposals are due by October 15, 2016 and should be submitted through our abstract system,[3]https://www.meetingsavvy.org/ess Questions should be sent to easterns2017@gmail.com Program Committee Chair: Richard E. Ocejo, CUNY, John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Genuine cosmopolitanism is a rare thing. It requires comfort with real difference, with forms of life that are truly exotic relative to one’s own. It takes its cue from a Roman playwright’s line that "nothing human is alien to me," and goes outward ready to be transformed by what it finds.

The people who consider themselves “cosmopolitan” in today’s West, by contrast, are part of a meritorocratic order that transforms difference into similarity, by plucking the best and brightest from everywhere and homogenizing them into the peculiar species that we call "global citizens.”

This species is racially diverse (within limits) and eager to assimilate the fun-seeming bits of foreign cultures — food, a touch of exotic spirituality. But no less than Brexit-voting Cornish villagers, our global citizens think and act as members of a tribe.

They have their own distinctive worldview (basically liberal Christianity without Christ), their own common educational experience, their own shared values and assumptions (social psychologists call these WEIRD — for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic), and of course their own outgroups (evangelicals, Little Englanders) to fear, pity and despise. And like any tribal cohort they seek comfort and familiarity: From London to Paris to New York, each Western “global city” (like each “global university”) is increasingly interchangeable, so that wherever the citizen of the world travels he already feels at home.

The Big Deal about Big Data (2016-08-08 08:00)

A rich and thought-provoking lecture by Gary King about the implications of big data for the social sciences:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5h6MTLybccs &t=3643s

The idiocy of corporations on Twitter (2016-08-09 08:00)

A lovely feature by John Oliver about the idiocy of corporations on Twitter:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gsg7ZtM3NM

For a deeper analysis of corporations on Twitter, see this great essay on weird corporate twitter:

We all know that a corporation’s Twitter account is managed by a social-media worker (despite Denny’s claims on Twitter to be an “egg” rather than a social-media guru). Social media managers for corporate brands tend to be young people steeped in digital culture, who may be junior in status but are tasked with building a newly “hip” brand essence for the social media reading public. So does the frisson of reading these weird corporate tweets happen because we are rating the social-media manager’s performance on Twitter, like an Olympic judge holding up a score at the end of each tweet (and supplying important metrics to the brand at the same time)? Or does the Denny’s brand’s mewling Twitter intimacy make us feel paternal, bound to support and foster our corporate brand children as they speak to us through the web, learning our native medium?

Symposium: Anxiety and Work in the Accelerated Academy (2016-08-10 11:14)

Friday September 23rd at the University of Warwick, 9:30am to 6:00pm

The culture and organisation of knowledge production are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Neo-managerialist models for the management of research and teaching, the expansion of audit and academic rankings, and the recasting of universities as service providers and students as consumers are just several of the main features of the ongoing marketisation of science, higher education and academia. Further important structural changes include the casualisation of academic labour and the “acceleration” of academic life.

These transformations concern the mathematical, natural and social sciences and humanities in equal measure, if perhaps in different ways. The careers, working lives and identities of scholars, researchers and higher education teachers are all affected.

In this symposium, we bring together international and UK-based scholars who study science, higher education and academia. We focus on a particular aspect of neoliberal academia, namely its anxiety-inducing environment - not as an object in itself, but as a symptom of what Ros Gill called "the hidden injuries of neoliberal academia" and of the need for meaningful change. We will discuss what is happening to the work, careers, lives, identities and epistemic communities of scientists, while the scientific institutions are changing.

We invite everyone interested in issues of work, labour and employment in the sciences and academia - scholars, students, practitioners, administrators - to join the symposium and take part in the discussions.

Speakers:

Liz Morrish - Metrics, Performance Management and the Anxious University
With responses by Gurminder K. Bhambra & Maria Ivancheva

Maggie O’Neill - Pace, Space and Well-Being: Containing Anxiety in the University
With responses by Vik Loveday & TBC

Filip Vostal - Beyond the dichotomy of slow and fast academia: On temporal multidimensionality of science
With responses by Mark Carrigan & Milena Kremakova

Each speaker will talk for thirty minutes, with responses of fifteen minutes each, before an hour’s open discussion.

Call for blog posts: the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research (2016-08-11 08:00)

Following on from our successful workshop at Social Media & Society 2016, the [1]Digital Social Science Forum is seeking blog posts describing and reflecting on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research. The workshop itself sought to explore conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary social media research, encountered at the level of substantive theoretical commitments but also in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform everyday practice. But our intention for this project is broader, seeking reflections on any aspect of the lived experience of conducting research across and through disciplinary boundaries.

Our primary focus is on digitally orientated research, e.g. social scientists and computer scientists working together, but we warmly welcome contributions from other areas. These might reflect upon things like:

- The role of ‘boundary objects’ in facilitating work across disciplinary boundaries.
- How a lack of clarity about mutual definitions can both support and hinder interdisciplinary collaboration.
- The importance of reclaiming ‘the human’ as a shared focus in interdisciplinary research.
- Coping with the challenge of an imperialistic naturalism i.e. forceful assertions of the failure of the social sciences and the necessity of remaking them along the lines of the natural sciences.
- The messy reality of working in interdisciplinary teams.
- What does conceptual development mean in collaborative work across disciplinary boundaries?
- The role of personal relationships in facilitating successful interdisciplinary work.
- Failures and frustrations of interdisciplinarity.
- Getting beyond the motif of the ‘attic scholar’ and socialising the research process.
- The role of doctoral pedagogy in hindering successful interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Organisational helps and hindrances to working across disciplinary boundaries.

These are just suggestions. Our interest is in how these sometimes obtuse issues are worked out at the level of everyday co-operation: how is the messy reality of interdisciplinarity lived and how should this shape our approach to it? These blog posts will be compiled at the Digital Social Science forum, organised thematically and circulated on social media channels as a public resource.

Contributions should be short (500-1500 words) and will be accepted on a rolling basis. Please send as a word document to mark@markcarrigan.net. Feel free to get in touch to discuss a potential contribution.
the videos of the opening presentation at this event (online at http://dynamicofvirtualwork.com/darmstadt-programme/) discuss the history of interdisciplinarity in the study of technology and work

A fantastic podcast discussion about social media for academics (2016-08-12 08:00)

This is one of the best discussions about social media for academics I’ve heard: [1]Episode 58 of This Week In Health Law.


Academic video blogs: 5 tips for getting started (2016-08-13 08:00)

A really useful resource produced by jobs.ac.uk:
The tragically incompetent elites of the centre left (2016-08-14 08:00)

This critique by Thomas Frank, on loc 2729 of his *Pity the Billionaire*, applies as well to proponents of the ‘third way’ within the Labour Party as it does to the leaders of the Democratic Party in relation to whom they originally articulated the notion:

Sometimes when I watch the Washington Democrats in action, my mind goes back to the tragically incompetent British general staff of World War I, ordering assault after gigantic assault, only to see their armies annihilated one after another. But still they kept at it, ordering up another round of the exact same thing, playing by the gentlemanly rules of combat, never doing anything remotely clever, and always completely surprised when the other side introduced them to twentieth-century warfare in some brutal new way.
The Washington Democrats will no more acknowledge the possibilities of other tactics than they will abandon Georgetown and move en masse to some burned-out quarter of Baltimore. Instead they deride their liberal critics as impossible dreamers—or as “fucking retarded,” in Rahm Emanuel’s famous phrase—and try what worked for Clinton yet again. That their own habitual deference to expertise leaves them wide open to the decades-long conservative assault on “elites” never occurs to them.

There’s an increasingly zombie-like repetition of strategic impulses whose purchase, if any, relied upon a social and economic conditions that have been in rapid decline for nearly a decade. Yet still they soldier on, professionally socialised into an understanding of politics most, if not all, seem incapable of repudiating. If modernisation meant anything, it meant adapting a party to changing circumstances, yet they seem weirdly incapable of recognising the fact that it’s no longer 1997.

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CfP: The Accelerated Academy (2016-08-15 08:00)

30th November to 2nd December 2016, Leiden, the Netherlands

From the 1980s onward, there has been an unprecedented growth of institutions and procedures for auditing and evaluating university research. Quantitative indicators are now widely used from the level of individual researchers to that of entire universities, serving to make academic activities more visible, accountable and amenable to university management and marketing. Further demands for accountability in academia can be related to general societal trends described under the heading of the audit society (Power 1997), and the evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen 2011). As part of broader transformations in research governance, indicators on publications and citations are now permeating academia: from global university rankings to journal-level bibliometrics such as the journal impact factor and individual measures like the h-index. Yet, it is only recently that considerable interest has been directed towards the effects that these measures might have on work practices and knowledge production (c.f. de Rijcke et al. 2015), and the role they might be playing in accelerating academic life more generally (c.f. Vostal 2016).

The Accelerated Academy draws together a number of cross-disciplinary conversations about the effects that acceleration towards metric forms of evaluation is having upon research, and the implications this holds for living and working in contemporary academia (Felt et al. 2009). Building on the successful maiden edition of the Accelerated Academy series in Prague in 2015, this year’s Leiden conference will be especially focussed towards the following questions:

- What does acceleration mean in different research contexts?
- What are the implications of digitally mediated measurement and tools for quantifying scholarly performance?
- What are the knowledge gaps regarding the effects of metrics on scientific quality and societal relevance of research?
How can we harness the positive and minimize the adverse effects of performance measurement in universities?

Confirmed keynote speakers include Peter Dahler-Larsen (University of Copenhagen), Ulrike Felt (University of Vienna) and Michael Power (LSE).

We invite submissions for presentations of around 20 minutes. The deadline for submitting abstracts will be August 31st 2016. Please send two pages or 800 words describing your contribution including a short biographical note to: [1]a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl.

Conference organisers

[2]Sarah de Rijcke, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University
[3]Björn Hammarfelt, University of Borås, Sweden | Leiden University
[4]Alex Rushforth, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University

Scientific committee

[5]Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick
[6]Tereza Stöckelová, Czech Academy of Sciences
[7]Filip Vostal, Czech Academy of Sciences
[8]Paul Wouters, Leiden University
[9]Milena Kremakova, University of Warwick

Event registration will be free of charge. In addition, a limited number of travel and accommodation support bursaries will be made available for researchers especially inhibited by the costs of travel. Please contact the conference manager [10]Andrea Reyes Elizondo for more information.

1. mailto:a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl
2. https://www.cwts.nl/people/sarah-de-rijcke
3. https://www.cwts.nl/people/bjoumlrn-hammarfelt
4. https://www.cwts.nl/people/alex-rushforth
5. https://markcarrigan.net/the-accelerated-academy/
8. https://www.cwts.nl/people/paul-wouters
9. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/people/mkremakova/
10. https://www.cwts.nl/people/andrea-reyes-elizondo

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Book Review: Social Media for Academics (2016-08-16 08:00)

by Andy Tattersall, [1]originally posted on the LSE Review of Books

Academics engaging in social media as a means to communicate their research and interests have a variety of experiences. There are those who have taken to it like a duck to water and then there are those who are like a
newborn giraffe taking their first steps in the world – awkward and open to prey. In the meantime, the majority of academics have had little or no interaction with what social media has to offer, for a variety of reasons. Therefore a book that sets out its stall as Social Media for Academics has a lot of ground to cover and a huge potential audience.

Attempts to engage academics with anything above a mild interest in social media, whether at institutions, workshops or via the web, have at times felt like applying a big hammer to a very small nervous nut. What Mark Carrigan has set out to do is bring a more relaxed, engaging and easier approach to how academics can engage with social media. Anyone who has seen the author give a talk will no doubt be aware of his keen interest in the data that underpins social media use, and his book sets out by highlighting those ever-changing stats as a sign that change is afoot.

From the start, Carrigan gives the reader an insight into his own world; yet, despite being a social media champion, he is clearly not here to deliver a sermon. This is what makes the book different from many other guides you may come across: less dry but with plenty of academic rigour. Very often social media guides are aimed at the intermediate user; whilst this title will appeal to the most novice, it also adds weight to arguments by experts in the academic community.

The book is structured around two clear themes, those being social media activities and social media challenges. It starts with asking what existing activities could be enhanced by social media? However, the challenges of social media are many, and Carrigan is keen not to shy away from them as he offers an honest appraisal of the technologies and their pitfalls.

Social Media for Academics is very much a book of two halves, the first part being the foundations to practical social media use in academia. Readers are given four practical areas where they can apply social media within their research. Under the chapter heading pretext of 'Using Social Media', the reader can explore how to publicise their work, build their network, ensure public engagement and manage information. Each chapter is broken down into the evidence around each theme, opportunities and, where applicable, the pitfalls. Whilst this is not the step-by-step guide with diagrams that some academics would desire, it explores many of the possibilities in a way that is less fearful for the first-time social media user.

Carrigan explores the opportunities that can be found in creating social networks with a strong focus on Twitter. From conference Tweeting to Twitter Chats, we find out how these can lead to real-life networks. Public engagement is something that is increasingly appearing on academic wavelengths, and Carrigan also covers this theme to include students, the media and policymakers in his definition of the term. Whilst the risks are explained, Carrigan focuses on the idea of proper engagement rather than purely broadcasting messages. Many academics have latched on to the benefits of discourse around their research with the public rather than one-direction communication. Carrigan does point out that some of this can be achieved outside of social media.

The second part of the book is focused more towards the personal and professional challenges that can come with social media. Considering that some readers may be a little dubious or worried about picking up such a title, the author focuses on the positives over the problems, but never shies away from the issues over the course of the book. Being exposed to more information on the web seems almost inevitable for the majority of academics, so the book aims to offer ways to curate that content and turn that information into useful knowledge.

These careful considerations in the second part of the book show the detail of knowledge and expertise underpinning the title as a whole. One area that is often not given enough coverage when talking about academia and social media is the issue of the relationship between the personal and professional identity. All too often little thought is given to how we may appear to different audiences and how this may have negative effects in some of those camps.
Nevertheless, it is an essential discussion to have, as most academics will either have had their own internal chat or one with colleagues about the issue of personal boundaries at some point in their career. Carrigan explores the various dilemmas we have using social media professionally, from our relations with friends and family to those with our students and colleagues. Each one is turned into a case study with practical advice on crafting a good social media profile.

In the final chapter the author explores what lies ahead – again, with more possibilities come more problems. With any book like this it will always have its limitations; technology is moving faster than ever, so is our relationship with it and each other. Future iterations will no doubt be very different, but for today, this book is timely and relevant. Carrigan has set out a clear and concise book on practical things that the reader can do to engage with this ever-changing online landscape. Carrigan’s experience as a hybrid academic who carries out academic work but with a strong professional element positions him in an ideal place to understand the practicalities and problems that social media brings to academia. This is no doubt in part due to his extensive experience as a blogger and podcaster. In that sense, the book is very much the author putting their money where their mouth is.

Social media stirs up an awful lot of anxiety in the academic community and, to a large extent, rightly so. Yet it does offer a world of possibilities that are not without challenges, but Carrigan addresses many of these in a way that has a good balance. His pragmatic approach will hopefully chime with readers who have begun exploring social media as part of their work. For those yet to dip their toe into social media, Carrigan offers plenty of evidence-based advice as to the wheres and whys of how to start, but more importantly, how to avoid getting it wrong in the first place. Social media platforms can be a bit like going to a new restaurant for the first time – if you have a bad experience, you might not go back again. Social Media for Academics is a balanced and thoughtful academic TripAdvisor that shows you the best dishes and the dirty kitchens in one guide.

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**Andy Tattersall** is an Information Specialist at The School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR). He writes and gives talks about digital academia, learning technology, scholarly communications, open research, web tools, altmetrics and social media, particularly their application for research, teaching, learning, knowledge management and collaboration. Andy is a member of The University of Sheffield’s Teaching Senate and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Andy is also Secretary for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals – Multi Media and Information Technology Committee. He has edited a book on Altmetrics for Facet Publishing which is aimed at researchers and librarians. He tweets @Andy_Tattersall


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**We need to understand why it is the beach is full of dying kids (2016-08-16 20:17)**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNqum__SRhY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNqum__SRhY)
His young life was as delicate as the wing of a butterfly
And as fragile as a spider’s web
For him we cry
Because when he dies
We all do

Did Ahmed not deserve a life?
Ahmed never hurt a fly
Ahmed never knew the politicians he was murdered by
Certain times Ahmed wished that he could be a bird and fly
Beyond the sky
Escape the curse of birth that he was burdened by
Ahmed never grew to let your racism internalise
Water poured from every pore in his corpse while the nurses cried
Ahmed was a beautiful person like you or I
But are we?..
Ahmed could have been a doctor, lawyer or an engineer
Could have been a superstar but his life ended here
Guess he was a shooting star burn bright and disappear
To some he seems to represent a menace in this hemisphere
Let me here make the very essence of this message clear
He was precious, many die like him every year
Ahmed was a victim of resentment and relentless fear
Now his soul surfs the waves I wish we could have kept him here

The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed

Ahmed’s ancestors introduced to Europe Greek philosophy
Brought with them irrigation, mathematics and astronomy
Symbolically, irony of this horror isn’t lost on me
Trying to get to Europe via Greece where he’s lost at sea
Ahmed not Achmed, it’s Ahmed
He’s that dead
Toddler lying lifeless on the beach with his back bent
Arms spread, reaching the direction that his dad went
If he made it here would have been bullied for his accent
He was captured by the ocean
Paralysed and frozen
While these parasites sat and typed, analysing clothing
Now for resources we all compete
Beyond the talk of war and peace
And talk of porous border there is corpses on the shore of Greece
They found a teddy next to where his body was found
The sea swallowed him, politics has swallowed him now
And those responsible, Ahmed's ghost will follow them now
To the family all we can say is we are sorry he drowned
Because...

The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed

They say let him drown, let him drown, let him drown, What have you done, don't let him drown, don't let him drown
No what have we become, don't let him drown
No, don't let him drown
And they say
Let him drown, let him drown, let him drown
What have we done, don't let him drown, don't let him drown
No, what have we become, don't let him drown
Please, don't let him drown

Ahmed could of been you, and Ahmed could of been me
We need to understand the policies that put him in the sea
We need to understand why it is the beach is full of dying kids
A colonial Metropole people want to reside in
If he did would he make it or fall to something that's deeper
End up like like Jimmy Mubenga or Khaled Abu Zarifa
A picture by Javier Bauluz on the beaches of Tarifa
Made me see, some would grieve more if Ahmed was a creature, with four legs, then they would consider him legitimate
Those like him braving barbed wire burning off their finger tips
Balfours alien act, that mentality still exists
Is privilege the difference between an ex-pat and an immigrant?
For, Ama Sumani and Osman Rasul Mohamed, when you take others humanity
It’s only yours that’s stunted, not a swarm
They’re our sisters and brothers, that’s the sum of it!
The cockroaches here are in the media and the government
Not the sea
The sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds our secrets (holds our secrets)
The sea, the sea, the sea, it holds his soul (holds his soul)
They call him Ahmed

Ahmed never knew the politicians he was murdered by
Ahmed never knew the politicians he was murdered by
Ahmed never knew the politicians he was murdered by
And they all laugh at him...

The coordinates of the austerity consensus are disintegrating (2016-08-17 08:00)

From Corbyn: Against All Odds, by Richard Seymour, pg 22. There’s a huge opportunity for the Labour left but also a huge risk, as momentum has built for an anti-austerity platform that might no longer be relevant:

“It is not clear what will happen to the debt/speculation economy, or the ‘property-owning democracy’ where large numbers of people supplement their income by borrowing against the rising value of their homes. When even George Osborne gives up his threatened ‘emergency’ austerity budget, abandons his ‘fiscal rule’, and leading Tory candidates openly talk down austerity, one going so far as to propose a massive borrowing and spending programme, the coordinates of the old consensus are clearly disintegrating. This is one of those moments when a degree of political imagination and initiative will make a decisive impact for the next few years at least”

As Seymour goes on to observe, “in the context of a generalised crisis of politics and the established way of doing things, anyone who has some ideas about how to change things can gain a hearing.” The book on the American right I’ve just read, Thomas Frank’s Pity the Billionaire, makes a compelling case that the resurgent free-market right capitalised on precisely this opportunity, despite the fact their ideas were inane and contradictory.

The ideological function of open data (2016-08-18 08:00)

I was at an interesting symposium on Big Data hosted by Sage earlier this year where a number of participants discussed the limitations on implementation of the government’s open data initiative: data is often published in an
unhelpful or even outright unusable format. A number of people suggested that there were structural reasons for this, from a lack of awareness of the data they have through to a lack of expertise in the civil service.

But reading Shadow State, by Alan White, it strikes me that these structural impediments must be read in an ideological context. Open data is bound up in the marketisation of public services under the sign of ‘transparency’. From loc 4050:

> The government will tell you that this is part of an ongoing process to ‘push’ all the data out to the public: the former Cabinet Office minister Francis Maude said he wanted to remove the need for Freedom of Information by using open data. His successor, Matt Hancock, has argued that open data not only gives more transparency and accountability, but can be used to improve the performance of public services, citing the way that publishing contract data allowed one of his officials to spot ‘£4 million in savings in just ten minutes’.

The Importance of Disappointment (2016-08-19 08:00)

There’s a lovely passage by Olivia Lang, quoted in this [1]review of her recent book, which reminds me of what Ian Craib called the importance of disappointment:

> There is a gentrification that is happening to cities, and there is a gentrification that is happening to the emotions too, with a similarly homogenising, whitening, deadening effect. Amidst the glossiness of late capitalism, we are fed the notion that all difficult feelings — depression, anxiety, loneliness, rage — are simply a consequence of unsettled chemistry, a problem to be fixed, rather than a response to structural injustice or, on the other hand, to the native texture of embodiment, of doing time, as David Wojnarowicz memorably put it, in a rented body, with all the attendant grief and frustration that entails.


Craib’s argument extends beyond our relationships with others, but I think it’s here that his analysis is most incisive. Our relationships, particularly romantic ones, involve an “emotional attachment and interlocking that makes ... control difficult” and yet we strive for such control all the more in its experienced absence. An inability to live with the disappointments relationships bring, a reflection of Lang’s ‘emotional gentrification’ in which difficulties and disappointments are seen as problems to be solved rather than an ineradicable feature of the life we share with others, engenders a deep fear of things ‘not being ok’: this self, this relationship, this life. But in doing so, our capacity to sit with experiences of disappointment gradually finds itself hollowed out. Feelings that might otherwise be fleeting come to be seen as inarguable incitements to action. We must act. Now. Because things are not ok. But our capacity to experience things as ‘ok’ is reliant upon our sustained engagement and ability to live with entanglement,
in spite of all the threats to autonomy and constraints on control that implies. The more we habitually feel the need to run in the face of things not being 'ok', the less able we are experience and enjoy precisely that which we are inclined to see ourselves as running towards.

Though Craib makes no allusions to Buddhism, it strikes me his argument has such connotations. The 'powerful self' he describes operates under the illusion that if only we can arrange the pieces of our lives in the right order, we can escape disappointment and enjoy a perpetual sense of contentment. But in doing so, we gradually disfigure ourselves, as what Craib calls "our primitive fantasies of complete satisfaction" come to constitute the plate tectonics of our adult lives. In doing so, we seek "the protection of a fragile self, one that cannot be risked in the reality of a relationship and one that cannot bear to know itself". The possibilities to move beyond that fragility, for it to grow into the simple vulnerability which characterises all of us, relies on our ability to live with disappointment. Not necessarily to live with this disappointment, Craib isn't advocating passivity, but with disappointment as such. To the extent that we do this, relationships with others of whatever sort cease to be experienced as latent threats and drains on the self, instead opening up to the possibility of acts of "love that can actually strengthen the self, reinforce one's own sense of inner goodness and the ability to do good".

This doesn’t entail the endless expression of disappointment. To express it can be another form of escape, avoiding the difficult experience of sitting with disappointment by articulating it, perhaps in a way directed at the object of that disappointment. It robs us of the opportunity to understand the character of the particular disappointment, the possibility of distinguishing between an antipathy to a situation that might have to change and a generalised reluctance to live with any feelings of antipathy. For the fragile self to expel the disappointment through speech can serve the same purpose as fleeing from it through activity. Both reflect what Craib describes as a "desire to get out of the mess of life". We can seek such an escape in others and turn on, or from, them when they fail to provide it. But we’ll never escape disappointment because such ‘mess’ is an ineluctable part of human existence. It resides in those experiences of "being together in the same place, living together in the same home, undergoing the same events together" and, in so far as we flee disappointment, we turn from the possibility of such sharing taking a sustained form. Our fragile selves cannot exist for long in such shared realities and that is why we need to move beyond them.


Biographical Approaches to Studying Digital Capitalism (2016-08-20 08:00)

In the early pages of Douglas Rushkoff’s *Throwing Rocks at the Google Bus*, he offers a cogent analysis of how initial public offerings lock tech companies into a growth imperative which ultimately proves destructive of the value they create. As he puts it on loc 169, "Having taken in this much new capital, however, Twitter now needs to produce. It must grow." Problems emerge because what constitutes enough growth is something now defined by the investors who must justify the amount of money that’s been put into the company.

It’s easy to see this in systemic terms but what intrigues me is the biographical element. The problem arises because, as Rushkoff puts it, shareholders “expect to win back one hundred times their initial $20 billion bet” and to do this “Twitter must grow into a corporation bigger than the economy of many entire nations” (loc 184). Who are these investors and how do they come to be in a situation where they’re both able and inclined to make such an investment, with these sets of expectations? What about the founders themselves, how did they come to occupy
these positions and what commonalities and differences can we find in their motivations?

My suggestion is that what Rushkoff calls “the growth imperative” can be usefully analysed in terms of the biographical entanglement between two distinct groups: aspiring founders and aspiring investors. The social dynamics can’t be reduced to individual biographies but these lived lives are, in an important way, the most basic social unit through which the dynamics become operative and are therefore key to understanding it. This of course entails that we understand the context within which these aspirations develop and each group sets out on this path, but the capacity of such groups to transform that context is something that is activated through the lives of individuals.

An exciting new journal: Frontiers in Sociology (2016-08-21 08:00)

A really exciting launch: [1]Frontiers in Sociology:

Frontiers in Sociology is a new peer-reviewed, open-access journal launched in February 2016.

The first social-sciences journal of the “Frontiers in” series, Frontiers in Sociology will foster cross-disciplinary work as well as fairness, transparency, and objectivity in the review process. Further specialty sections will be added as the journal continues to develop, some of which are already under discussion and include:

- Economic Sociology;
- Political Sociology;
- Medical Sociology;
- Science and Technology Studies;
- The Sociology of Education; and
- The Sociology of Race, Ethnicity and Migration.

The launch of a new journal is always an exciting venture, and we would be happy to hear your thoughts or answer any questions you may have.

Part of a much broader Open Science project which you can hear more about below:
The Sociology of 'Streaming' (2016-08-22 08:00)


The popularity of “streaming” - the practice of broadcasting live gameplay across the internet to an audience - is a rapidly growing social and cultural phenomenon. If any readers are in doubt about the contemporary popularity - and indeed the need for sociological investigation - of streaming, David Pearson’s [3]recent piece is quite an illustration. Discussing his children’s engagement with media through platforms like YouTube, he argues that it “follows them everywhere”. He explains that his two children have “developed a habit of living out their lives as if there’s an imaginary camera trained on them, just like their favorite YouTubers”. For context, the fastest growing audience for digital video is children aged 11 and younger, and many of this new generation are growing up as streaming natives. There has been limited research so far on the phenomenon of internet streaming, whether the more general vlogging, the live unboxing of commodities, or gameplay streaming on platforms like Twitch (which has now recently added social eating as a category), or engaged with more theoretical questions about the implications of this culture form. As Pearson’s daughter often interjects in her imaginary streaming: “Don’t forget to subscribe”, a timely reminder that with growing audiences there are increasingly large sums of advertising money involved.
Our research focuses predominantly upon streaming games and the Twitch.tv platform.

In five years Twitch has grown to become a world leading platform for streaming content, becoming the fourth-highest website in peak Internet traffic in the USA.

The Alexa traffic rank for the website is the 60th most popular in the UK (and 103rd globally).

Last year there were an average of 1.7 million broadcasters streaming each month, creating a total of 459,366 years of content. The highest number of concurrent viewers was over 2 million with an estimated 27 million unique viewers for the ESL One Counter-Strike "eSports" (professional gaming competition) tournament that was live-streamed. The Twitch platform has facilitated the creation of new online celebrities, offers the possibility of new careers paths, has popularised previously-obsolete video games like Rocket League, and has the potential to transform the entertainment and advertising industry. This potential was clearly recognised by Amazon, resulting in the purchase of the Twitch platform for almost $1 billion. A rival bid from Google, which owns YouTube, fell through; for comparison, the average Twitch viewer watches 421.6 minutes per month, whereas YouTube viewers watch to 291.0 minutes. These figures demonstrate how important and integral to the online lives of many users Twitch has quickly become, and this makes it an essential object for digital sociology research.

The astronomic growth of Twitch, now supported as a subsidiary of Amazon, is set to continue.

The individual streams attract viewership through the performative labour of the broadcasters, which involves creating a live dialogue with the viewers while playing a game. Communication is two way as the game footage is streamed along with webcam footage, while viewers respond by text chat. This has resulted in new ways to engage users and players by encouraging a form of co-production in which players and spectators of the game form new communities around their game activities. These new communities, numbering in the millions, are comprised of gamer-spectators, including gamers, game broadcasters, and viewers. An individual may be in all three of those categories or a combination. Those that engage in broadcasting can turn a profit from the activity or even make a living through donations and monthly subscriptions. This interaction between players and viewers through money, commentary, and community is highly distinctive, yet speaks to a range of established sociological questions over the role of the internet in contemporary life, play and sociality, online interaction, and the social impact of interactive broadcast media. This current research project therefore aims to investigate Twitch and the phenomenon of streaming for three key reasons: it is an organisation of exemplary success in the digital economy; the process of co-creating digital content is forging new relationships between content producers, consumers, and companies which requires research attention; and the popularity of streaming has new social and cultural implications which are not understood.

We’re both currently postdoctoral researchers based in the United Kingdom. Mark’s research background is in science & technology studies, and he is especially interested in the relationship between the material aspects of streaming and the communities that emerge around it, and the affordances of systems (such as donating, chatting, webcams, etc) that structure the experience. He is also a former professional gamer and a multiple game world record holder, and consequently has a particular interest in the broadcast of competitive gaming on Twitch, and how Twitch and eSports have become mutually co-constitutive social elements in an emerging and gradually formalizing ecosystem. Jamie’s background is in the sociology of work, with interests in the labour process, digital labour,
and workplace resistance. His research interest in Twitch began as a case study that combines forms of paid and unpaid labour, blurring the lines between work and play. He intends to examine the relationships of co-creation (for example, between the platform, streamers, viewers, and other actors including advertisers) and analyse the political economy of streaming.

Streaming has not just affected how existing games are played: there is even now a game about streaming, entitled *Youtubers Life*, which allows players to simulate the career of a professional streamer. The game allows players to “become the world’s greatest video blogger in history”, in which it is promised you can ”broadcast yourself, edit and publish videos, expand the amount of fans and turn yourself into a wealthy fellow!” . So, in an unusual turn of events, it is now possible as a researcher to watch someone watching another person streaming themselves playing a game about people streaming their gameplay to other people. As represented by this rather labyrinthine Borges-esque example, there is an important phenomenon unravelling, and one that we seek to understand: how is streaming changing the ways content and play is produced, distributed, consumed, and monetised in the digital economy? We aim to produce a number of papers and conference presentations in the coming months and hopefully years on this topic, and for more information, you can visit our homepages at [4] www.ultimaratioregum.co.uk/about-me


We welcome any and all comments on the work and potential future research directions, and look forward to developing this rich emerging area of social research.

2. [http://www.twitter.com/Jamie_woodcock](http://www.twitter.com/Jamie_woodcock)
4. [http://www.ultimaratioregum.co.uk/about-me](http://www.ultimaratioregum.co.uk/about-me)
5. [http://www.jamiewoodcock.net/](http://www.jamiewoodcock.net/)

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[...] Future” (Rock Paper Shotgun) "How to Create Cultures” (Rock Paper Shotgun) "The Sociology of Streaming" (Sociological Imagination) "How Games Can Benefit From Procedurally Generated Lore" (Rock [...] 

**Using micro-podcasts to profile participants at a workshop (2016-08-23 08:00)**

I recently helped out with an event by the [1]Survivor Research Network which was being supported by The Sociological Review. We were keen to profile participants at the event in a way that gave a sense of the range of people involved, as well as how this shaped what people brought to the complex topic of survivor research. To do this we used [2]AudioBoom, a free app which records & publishes up to 10 minutes of audio, to do short interviews with a number of participants at the event:
The Spook Who Sat By The Door (2016-08-24 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson

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This year has seen an extraordinary upswing in revelations about the kinds of violence that are seemingly endemic in American society. In particular, the persistence of an often deadly mixture of readily accessible weapons and prevailing racism, has seen several very high profile killings of unarmed African Americans usually, but not exclusively, young African American men (this is not to ignore the experiences of other groups such as the [1]disabled). The [2]Black Lives Matter movement makes it clear that these events are part of a larger pattern and reflective of other structural issues in American society, including how various systems, such as the judiciary, police and prisons, operate in a prejudicial manner. What seems difficult to understand is, half a century after the civil rights movement gained momentum, that many of these issues seem as bad as or even worse today.

We know these issues have a long, complex and often ugly history and yet we are still asked to see them as singular and unique, which of course they are for each affected individual and their families. But perhaps it is time to revisit the aims and gains of the civil rights era and to reflect on what has not been achieved and what has occurred which should have by now. After endless antiracism, EEO and diversity courses, there is a distinct flavour to much of what we see on the evening news and that is the repetitiveness of the pattern of individual tragedies. This is not the first time that African Americans, and others, have pointed directly at the problems with American society. The endemic problems associated with race and its regulation were addressed in very direct terms by the African American writer Sam Greenlee nearly 50 years ago when this particular tangent on the American Dream was just taking shape.

Sam Greenlee died only two years ago aged 83. His most famous book was [3]The Spook Who Sat By The Door (1968) which was eventually made into a film in 1973. It was largely ignored by the movie industry for 30 years and is now a ‘cult classic’. Greenlee was an extremely interesting man in his own right who travelled widely in the late 1950’s and 1960’s. He condensed many of his domestic and international experiences in the book, which focused on one African American man’s efforts to start a revolution in the United States. And this proposition gives us a reason to read the man’s work and to re-visit the issues he raised at that particular time and place.

The Spook Who Sat By The Door was part satire, with multiple targets, and part a call-to-arms for a better world for African Americans in which they didn’t have to keep trying to become white to get what they wanted, needed or were entitled to. His scathing analysis of mainstream American society was summed up in the priceless phrase “Whitey’s chrome plated shit pile”. He talks about race and racism, coercion and co-option and the sheer magnitude of the role played by various forms of violence in American society – with and without weapons. It can be enjoyed for its anger, its bluntness and his withering view of people who went along to get along, often selling out the very things they claimed to believe in and the communities they claimed to represent. It was a hugely interesting take on things of its time and so many issues that clearly do not appear to have been resolved decades later.

Written against the background of the 1960’s civil rights movement, including the Chicago riots, and his own personal experience of American ‘race relations’, he had a number of targets. In fairness it would have been hard to say enough about the hypocrisy of every group he saw presenting their self-interest as the public good without a much longer and perhaps very different book. And as a result it has in some ways a series of caricatures as characters, voicing the common narratives of the time through these individuals but, even so, his targets still seem highly relevant today. While he positioned the book in relation to the particularly American versions of race and racism, many of his themes were about the universals of power without accountability and the imposition of one groups’ empty stereotypes as societal reality, with the enduring consequences this processes have for everyone.
The central character, Dan Freeman (!), leads a double, even triple, life in which he quietly builds his revolutionary strategy while acting the 'acceptable' black man to whites, but also to other middle-class blacks who have bought into "Whitey's chrome - plated shit pile", now dissociating themselves from their broader community through the merits of social class, education and income (count the ironies, this is real sociology!). Irony exists too in that Freeman gets Chicago councilmen to support weapons training for his 'at risk' youth group because, according to white racist conservatives, weapons training teaches discipline! Of course, the training is part of Freeman's plan to teach his trainee revolutionaries how to start and maintain a revolt in the knowledge that Freeman himself might not survive once the white establishment joins the dots.

It was a manual for a revolution of sorts at the time because it catalogued a long series of continuing injustices of both thought and deed in American society. In the context of recent events in the United States, and elsewhere, it seems as timely now as the day it was published. His concerns were genuine, his targets real and his focus on violence and contempt as the pivotal realities of racist societies seem as relevant now as they were then. Time then, I propose, to read and remember Sam Greenlee and *The Spook Who Sat By The Door* as a memoriam to the author and to a revolution that hasn't happened – yet!


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BestSondra (2019-08-09 20:42:40)
I have noticed you don’t monetize sociologicalimagination.org, don’t waste your traffic, you can earn extra bucks every month with new monetization method. This is the best adsense alternative for any type of website (they approve all sites), for more info simply search in googole: murgrapia's tools

Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: Botany and the Garden Part 1 (2016-08-25 08:00)

by Hamish Robertson

Introduction

This is the second in a [1]series of short essays exploring what I have called ‘engines of knowledge’ in the first quantitative, ‘big data’ information age (there have been [2]others ), which emerged in the early 19th century. The Victorian period is marked by a range, rate, quantity and variety of methods for information production that have fundamentally changed the world as we know it. Many of the knowledge engines that produced this flood of information (such as engineering, manufacturing, metallurgy, chemistry) were themselves part of new and emergent scientific and technological activities, and central to the transformational knowledge that they produced.
Other knowledge engines were embedded in deeper connections to the past and represent a more gradualist perspective to the creation of knowledge. These engines re-examined and re-imagined existing ‘knowns’ to produce new knowledge domains and practices by applying emerging knowledge syntheses. One of these longer established ‘engines’ emerged from the intersection of the historical enterprise of gardening, in its broadest sense, and the emergent science of botany, which itself led to new understandings of the nature of the world in which we live. In this piece I explore some of these connections in an effort to examine how these changing circumstances and the growth in analogue quantification resulted in the recasting of existing information into new forms of knowledge.

Deep History, Nature and the Garden

The garden holds a special place in many cultures in part because it involves a particular and localised form of engagement with nature, especially within the traditional conceptual construct of the microcosm-macrocosm. Christianity and Islam both took the (originally Sumerian) Biblical symbol of the perfect, paradisal garden (also linked to knowledge) and applied their own symbolic and experimental understandings to gardening and the garden. Through the garden these religions came to produce a larger conceptual, informational and experimental base that connected a variety of early scientific activities in highly developmental ways.

Many cultures have a tradition of using gardens for as a site and mechanism for the curing of disease and the creation of health. The garden as a site for cures is recognisable even today, in the deliberate cultivation and utilisation of medicinal herbs. Chinese traditional medicine looked to the ‘medical mountain’ as a supply of medicinal plants and herbs, often differentiated by distinct microclimates associated with altitude, orientation and localised ecosystems. This kind of knowledge is still known and studied in fields such as

[4] ethno-botany

. The origins of numerous modern medications lie in remote communities, localised cultures and their (exploited) ethnobotanical knowledge. It is in the synthesis of such compounds that modern chemistry and pharmacology have expanded what is accessible as both knowledge and product,

Another dimension to the garden as a mechanism for health can be seen in the experience of nature as a healing experience. The garden is not just a place but provides a process of engagement with nature as a therapeutic experience in and of itself (e.g. [5] forest bathing

in Japan). Many European philosophers recommended walking in nature as a contemplative act with therapeutic properties. Indeed, the idea of particular landscapes and locations as [6]therapeutic exists down to the present day and by the mid-Victorian period the idea of cleaner, greener and healthier cities emerged in response to the epidemic cities of [7]Chadwick and Snow.

Knowledge and Power in the Garden

The gardens of the Renaissance took aspects of Roman gardens, the Christian monastic and medical (or [8]physic ) garden tradition, and the Islamic celebratory and symbolic garden, to produce a platform for a variety of scientific practices ranging from botany to applied hydrology. The [9]Villa d’Este in [10] Tivoli
near Rome, is an example of how hydrological engineering, architectural design and artistic creativity were intimately connected in and through the garden during this period. At the same time, it was also a physical statement in relation to contemporary Vatican politics. Gardens could be and often were both religious and political statements. Italian universities at Pisa, Padova, Firenze and Bologna established medical research gardens early in their histories. The gardens of Europe illustrate not just successive aesthetics of landscape but a broad swathe of experimental sciences in the making that paralleled other industrial and artistic developments.

This connection of gardening to state power and symbolism produced its own enduring consequences, including the rapidly developing engineering science of the 18th century. The Canal du Midi and the Versailles Gardens in France, for example, are two significant examples of a trend in state formation through landscape management and control. The emerging modern state began to re-write the very landscape and its connections with both modern capital, as Marx noted, and population. The impact of this process can be seen in the 19th century depopulation of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, which resulted in the production of ahistorical landscapes now often acclaimed for their ‘naturalness’.

Elsewhere an ideology of landscape management and control emerged that was used to justify a variety of colonial practices under incipient capitalism including the draining of wetlands and the ‘proper’ uses of land for agriculture and capital forms of production. This includes the introduction of new species of plants and animals, many of which overwhelmed previously pristine landscapes. To contain the land and to understand it through the manipulation of its elements comes through to us today as an established geography of power. Knowledge therefore gained in and from the garden could also inform ideological developments that had their own consequences. This became more overt under colonialism and as natural philosophy gave way to science and technology.

**Botanic Gardens and Experimental Science**

As the 18th century progressed into the 19th, the botanic garden began to develop as a key site of experimental and academic knowledge about plants and about nature more generally. The utility of the garden, I suggest, lies in its bounded nature, its accessibility and the room it provides for experimentation at varying speeds. The gardener then, as now, can trial and test things in the garden that would be far more difficult in the wider natural world. More importantly such experimental efforts can be documented, repeated and modified over time to assist in building a specific knowledge base about particular plants or techniques, such as grafting or hybridising, or the effects of water, soil and sun on particular plants. The garden is by its very nature a kind of laboratory, potential or actualised, for building our understanding of how nature, biology and botany work in the world. And this makes the botanical garden a form of not only applied laboratory but also a specific engine of knowledge within broader botanical science.
Kew Gardens, in London, was established in 1840 and built on the pre-existing Kew Park exotic gardens. Not only was and is botanical research conducted at Kew but we can also see how the ideas connecting the garden to human health and wellbeing was translated out into more accessible constructs such as the public park or the national park. The more pressure we understood as being placed on nature by human intervention the more some people worked to ameliorate those effects by re-introducing nature to the city. One of the logics of the 19th century information revolutions in particular was that these laboratory efforts could be documented, counted and quantified, making for rapid development in the quantity of data available to researchers and their networks.

Conclusion

In this first part of a two-part essay I have outlined some of the knowledge production issues linked to the garden, gardening and to botany as both an experimental practice and emergent science. The focus has been on briefly exploring the role of the garden as both a long-term cultural paradigm for knowledge production and the development of the garden as a pivotal experimental 'laboratory' in the 19th century. The ideas generated in this period about issues such as human health and disease went on to produce a variety of innovations in urban living (public parks, green belts and so on) but also in the development of deeper understandings of nature and the connections between human society and nature. The garden as a bounded natural laboratory, contained and manageable, set the scene for some very important new engines of knowledge including evolutionary theory and genetics which I describe in part two of this essay.

15. https://www.academia.edu/7485014/The_garden_as_a_laboratory_the_role_of_domestic_gardens_as_places_of_scientific_exploration_in_the_long_18th_century
Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: Botany and the Garden Part 2 (2016-08-26 08:00)

by Hamish Robertson

Introduction

In the first part of this essay I alluded to the garden as a developmental engine of knowledge that canvassed both a deep cultural history and a highly modernist locus for new, innovative knowledge production. In the first instance the symbol of the garden as a place of health and knowledge, exists across many cultures and has long been a means by which the relationships between humanity and nature could be theorised and practically explored. In the second, the religious and medical garden, common until the 19th century, also diversified in variety and form to produce not only public botanical gardens but also private scientific experimental gardens such as those of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel. Thus, I suggest, the garden can be seen as an engine of knowledge at multiple levels with a proven utility that extends down into the present day. In this second part of the essay I explore this idea of the garden as a particular type of engine of knowledge in more detail by pointing to some of the more revolutionary ideas that emerged from gardens and gardening experiments in the 19th century.

Gardens, Gardening and Knowledge Production

We can see then that the garden and the activity of gardening are a locus for knowledge production across time and cultures. As with agriculture more broadly, the garden provided an experimental laboratory in which methods of cultivation, grafting, soil management and other techniques could be tested, refined, documented and recorded visually, with plant illustrators and botanical art coming into their own. The Victorian period in particular saw a huge expansion in both amateur and professional gardeners, botanists and botanical artists, including both men and [1]women of various social backgrounds. The advent of photography added to this capability by expanding and speeding up the capture and transfer of botanical information. In this way technology and knowledge production became mutually constitutive in was that we now consider quite modern.

Other aspects of this botanical knowledge ‘factory’ could be seen, for example, in the rapid rise of seed companies during the late 18th and on into the 19th century. Originally a highly localised practice, seed collection and distribution took on a national and then international scope, with seed distribution going in both directions – from imperial centres to colonial peripheries and back again. Seed companies added to the experimental nature of botanical knowledge as well as its commercialisation. And the format of the seed company became transferable across the [2]British Empire. We can perhaps see the garden and its practices as a particular form of techne is which varieties of practical knowledge inform and generate meta-knowledge, such as theories of classification, evolution and genetics (see below).
I have mentioned Linnaeus in previous work because of his profound influence on the ways in which knowledge began to be accumulated, ordered and analysed in the European tradition. More particularly, the rise and rise of taxonomic practices and the conceptualisation of information as both sortable and splittable/branchable, have influenced various forms of knowledge production down to the present day. This was different from the long-established 'great chain of being' which had been the established norm for centuries.

Linnaeus got his first academic position as a lecturer in Botany at Uppsala University, later becoming a professor of medicine and, for our purposes, affirming the deep historical link between medicine and the botanical garden. In this position he went on field trips to Lapland to collect botanical samples. From there he went on to establish networks of colleagues and collectors who would send samples to him. From these processes he developed the concept of nested hierarchies or groups within groups. This proved profoundly useful in building a structure of knowledge about known plants, and other living things, as well as creating a broader conceptual framework (kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species) within which to place and order new plants as they emerged.

The man whose work came to epitomise this great transformation in our understanding of the natural world was Charles Darwin and his development of a coherent, encompassing evolutionary theory. While his journeys on HMS Beagle are now famous and we know that he was deeply committed to fieldwork, he also utilised gardens in his research and intellectual work. His garden at Down House was known for being a laboratory for work on both plants and animals. However, it seems even this research was long preceded by work at the gardens of Woburn Abbey in the early part of the 19th century, long before the publication of the Origin of Species. What this suggests is that the garden acted as a locus for both practical and intellectual experimentation over the longer term, permitting scientists to test, modify and re-test their ideas and to then develop overarching theories about the natural world.

Mendel and his pea experiments produced another pivotal form of knowledge generation in and through the garden by proving the concept of genetic inheritance. Mendel selected pea plants for his experiments because they had high variability and could be reproduced quickly meaning that both his experiments and also data collection and analysis were accelerated compared to experiments in many other plants or animals. Although Mendel published his work in 1866, it received limited attention and only gained wider notice at the turn of the century as the search for explanations for hereditary became increasingly important. Here too the locus of the garden acting as laboratory and plants as research subjects provided a means of rapid, quantifiable and highly documentable experimentation.

The logic of knowledge production in relation to the garden can be seen as including a well-established tradition of cultivation and land management that episodically encountered new plants, techniques, tools and ideas. By the early 19th century, this flow of new plants, methods of cultivation and experimentation, as well as applied scientific knowledge was becoming a continuous flood of data, information and knowledge - rather than a transitional or episodic process.
The convergence of the known and the new took some resolving and required ongoing processes of not only accommodation but formalisation – in effect, the science concept began to be applied in earnest in this domain.

Conclusion

What I have described here is an example of how deep cultural forms of knowledge (and knowledge practices) have progressed and changed over time emerging as the modern knowledge systems we take for granted today. Gardens and gardening have lost none of their popularity in contemporary culture but they have also led to industrial and scientific specialisms in their own right. The early information age of the 19th century saw a formalisation and differentiation of this broadly shared cultural knowledge into a variety of scientific undertakings. The expert knowledge of the botanist became more overtly separated from the ‘amateur’ or applied knowledge of gardener or botanical enthusiast. Expertise and specialist knowledge gained cultural capital in this period and formalised structures emerged to conduct directed research and produce academic and applied scientific knowledge on botanical matters.

With the high degree of generalist expertise still common in the Victorian period, this knowledge production and its associated processes was also readily dispersed within and between countries. Even today the majority of non-European botanic gardens are in India, the same gardens which were used to produce part of the British imperial knowledge base. This also hopefully illustrates how knowledge production and innovation can originate as readily in what we might call the applied sciences as in the more formalised research and academic models with which we are now familiar. Expertise was readily generated through forms of practice and then theorised outwards from this specific experimental environment. Finally, the garden in its various developmental forms provided a coherent locus for knowledge production that crossed conventional disciplinary boundaries and produced new information, concepts and theories. The garden is in a sense the archetypal knowledge engine, one we still maintain and develop.

1. http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/m/mrs-loudon-victorian-garden/
5. http://science.sciencemag.org/content/295/5555/639.long

Dysology (2016-09-09 12:04:28)
This is interesting. I enjoyed reading it. But: I'm afraid you missed out the most important gardener in the history of scientific discovery. Patrick Matthew - a fruit grower from Scotland - is universally acknowledged by the world's leading evolutionary biologists to have been first into published print 27 years before Darwin's and Wallace's (1858) Linnean Society papers replications and Darwin's (1859) "Origin of Species" without citation of the originator. The latest sociological research (see Sutton's 2014 book "Nullius in verba: Darwin's greatest secret" now newly reveals that the old paradigm of the tri-independent discovery of Matthew's prior published full conception of macro evolution by natural selection is built on the now punctured premise that no one known to Darwin or Wallace read the original ideas in Matthew's (1831) book. However, in fact, they did. Seven naturalists are newly discovered to have cited Matthew's 1831 book pre-1858 - four played major roles at the

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pre-1858 epicentre of influence on Darwin and Wallace and on their acknowledged influencers. Interestingly, Wallace made the astonishing claim to have independently conceived Matthew’s prior-published conception whilst suffering from malarial delirium in the jungles of Malaysia. If true that is the only known example of cognitively enhancing fever in the history of the world. In realist, Wallace’s (1855) Sarawak paper editor (selby) had read and cited Matthew’s (1831) book in 1842. And selby was a friend of Charles Darwin’s father and his Charles’s great friend Jenyns. Hence - if you Google “on knowledge contamination” (be sure to use the speech marks and all three words) you will find out why the sociological concept of knowledge contamination is ore rational than the long- wild imaginations of the scientific establishment, Dr Mike Sutton

Hamish Robertson (2016-09-24 13:26:48)
Thanks for your response, I’ll follow up on your references.

Social Media and Academic Labour (2016-08-27 08:00)

It is increasingly hard to move without encountering the idea that social media is something of value for academics. The reasons offered are probably quite familiar by now. It helps ensure your research is visible, both inside and outside the academy. Many of us might be sceptical of the dominant discourse of impact within which such a concern for visibility tends to be expressed. I certainly am in many ways, worrying that this is irrevocably tied up in the instrumentalisation of research, the declining autonomy of researchers and the marketisation of the Academy within which research takes place. Nonetheless the imperative to make and demonstrate impact is already an entrenched characteristic of the research economy and looks likely to stay that way.

In this short talk, I will make the case that social media in general and blogging in particular represent a way to expand academic autonomy, improve the quality of our scholarship and nonetheless meet the demands of what I have elsewhere called the Accelerated Academy, all at the same time. This might seem implausible, so please bear with me. If it seems overly optimistic, let’s talk about this at the end because my actual view of the research economy is pretty grim and depressing. My enthusiasm for social media comes in large part because I see it as something that can, at least potentially work to ameliorate a whole series of problems that afflict those within the contemporary research economy.

A good way into this is to consider some of the other benefits increasingly held to obtain through academics using social media. I already mentioned visibility, internal to the academy and outside of it. Related to this, is the chance to practice communication with nonspecialist audiences. It’s a faster way to get your research findings out. It allows you to build an audience for future publications, in advance of their actual release. In doing so, it allows you to find people who share your research interests, as connections more or less inevitably form on the basis of what you publish and what you read online.

But the advantage that I’m most interested in and the one that will be key to the argument I’m making here, is that the more you write, the easier writing gets. The more you think, the easier thinking gets. My enthusiasm for social media in general, as well as blogging in particular, stems from the endless occasions they offer for thinking and writing.

But isn’t thinking and writing what we do anyway? Well yes, on one level, it is. Though I think there are important questions to be asked about how the accelerating pace of working life in contemporary universities impacts on the time and energy available for thinking and writing. But talk today is not about that.

It’s this presumably everyday quality to academic thinking and writing which has increasingly left me confused about one of the most common concerns, even objections, to academic social media: isn’t it just one more thing for already busy people to do? On the surface, this makes complete sense. This is certainly true for some people.
It’s almost certainly true for everyone at least some of the time. But much of what academics do on social media should not be something extrinsic to their scholarship but instead should be constitutive of it. As the sci-fi author, digital rights activist and blogger Cory Doctorow puts it: blogging is “my major way of thinking through the stuff that matters to me”. This is true of myself as well. I think it’s true of many academics using social media, even if they don’t recognise it. Furthermore, I think much of the value that social media has for academics within the contemporary research economy won’t be actualised until this has become a ubiquitous feature of how we talk about the way we can use social media as researchers.

There’s a lovely extract of [1]the Academic Diary in which Les Back reflects on the life and work of the social theorist Vic Seidler. Remarking on the vast range of topics on which Seidler has written, Les suggests that this deeply committed man “writes not because his academic position expects it but because he has something to say and communicate”. For someone like Seidler, writing is something a person does because they are “trying to work something out”.

This captures what I see as the promise of academic social media. It’s a platform for trying to work things out. More so, doing it in the open grants each of these attempts a social existence, one that comes with undoubted risks but also enormous rewards. Little bits of thought shrapnel, brief attempts to make some sense of the ‘feel of an idea’, come to enjoy their own existence within the world. They’re mostly forgotten or even ignored from the outset. But there’s something quite remarkable about occasions when these fragments resurface as someone sees something of value in them, perhaps when you saw no value in them yourself.

In this way, it attunes you to the impulse to write because you have “something to say and communicate”. This isn’t always the case and I worry that the metricisation of scholarly blogging will prove immensely destructive of it. But there is at least for now something deeply rewarding about seizing on an inchoate idea, developing it and throwing it off into the world to see what others make of it. For no other reason than the pleasure inherent to it. Whether this non-instrumental exploration of ideas remains the norm or could be sustained in the long term is a different question – as I’ll come on to, I think there are reasons to worry that the research economy is inimical to this.

What does this all mean practice? I’m talking about quite straightforward practices which all of those conducting research engage in to differing degrees. I’ve often used the term ‘public notebook’ and the existence of non-public notebooks is the most obvious point of comparison here. Prior to starting a research blog early in my PhD, I used to scribble notes in a succession of moleskin notebooks – ones I would later struggle to decipher due to my scrawled handwriting. The radical sociologist C Wright Mills wrote a wonderful appendix to his famous The Sociological Imagination about scholarly craft: he argued for the necessity of keeping a ‘file’ in order to ‘keep one’s inner world awake’. These are activities we all engage in but which, rather interestingly, tend not to feature in public discourse: the daily minutiae of scholarship. Notebooks, filing cabinets, file cards, newspaper clippings, print outs, drawings, marginalia in books, annotated papers, reading lists etc. Modern digital equivalents involve tools like Evernote or OneNote. These have many of the advantages of using social media – they can also of course be integrated with them, for instance by quickly sharing notes from Evernote or automatically clipping content you discover on social media into the appropriate Evernote folder. But as with social media use, they have the advantage of mobility, in so far as that one can use them across devices and across contexts – rather than the careful work of keeping physical files or the necessity of ensuring one always has one’s physical journal and never, under any circumstances, lose it.

The features I discussed earlier might all sound individualistic. But it’s in considering how the use of social media differs from contemporary alternatives like Evernote that it becomes apparent how the benefits of social media are intrinsically social. Later in the book I mentioned earlier, Les Back suggests that Twitter sometimes facilitates our “inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer” by providing “signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story”. Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of “hunches and tips” which is the “lifeblood of scholarship”.

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These provide pathways through the literature, allowing others to use them as guides into and through often difficult bodies of work.

It's in this sense that I'm arguing social media increases the autonomy of researchers, both individually and collectively. If we accept the argument that metrics necessarily entail the evisceration of self-governance, with hierarchical regulation replacing horizontal norms, then this new horizontal space of collaboration and cooperation begins to looks exceedingly valuable. It's a new kind of space and one which could be easily destroyed if we too easily accept that what we do within it should be measured and incorporated into the logic of career advancement.

The kinds of scholarly communities of practice we can see perpetually coming to life online are obviously not confined to the digital sphere. But academic social media is at present profoundly generative of them, whereas the broader research economy is increasingly characterised by a competitive individualism which works to preclude them. However, I think this not just important within the academy but also in the relationships between academia and other institutional spheres. For instance, academic social media is changing how journalists and academics interact: it's easier to identify academics, but it's also easier to make demands upon them which might be unreasonable or unwelcome, often with only a cursory understanding of what they hope to achieve through such a potential collaboration. It's also changing the relationships between social scientists and the communities they research, as organised groups increasingly monitor and engage with academic research, in ways that can throw up all such of problems. This is why the nature of the 'third space' of academic social media is so important.

There are all sorts of instrumental gains to be had through engaging with social media: increasing your visibility, expanding your network, ensuring your work is widely read, engaging with non-academics publics and making an impact outside of the academy. But there are gains to scholarship which are more important and perhaps more diffuse than this. What increasingly interests me is the tension between them the two tendencies: how the instrumental use of social media, encouraged within the contemporary research economy, might imperil the gains which I've suggested can be made on the level of craft and collaboration.

I've suggested that the value of social media for academics can be seen in terms of craft and careers. These two dimensions often overlap but I think it's useful to separate them analytically: contributions to individual and collaborative scholarship on the one hand, contributions to the development of careers on the other. Obviously the former usually takes place in the context of the latter – though the rise of the 'alt-academic', pursuing scholarship without pursuing a traditional academic career, can be seen to break this link. But the relationship between them isn't always clear. For instance, in recent work, myself and Filip Vostal have been exploring the manner in which the accelerative pressures found in the contemporary academy militate against good scholarship. If people are asked to do more with the same or less, then what effect does this have? If we construe it in traditional terms, particularly as something conversant with and contributing to 'the literature', then good scholarship becomes structurally difficult. 28,100 journals publishing 2.5 million articles a year. Under such circumstances we come to encounter surface writing rather than depth writing, rearranging ideas rather than developing new ones: scholasticism on the one hand, empiricism on the other. My point is not to explore the accelerated academy here but simply to flag up how institutional changes complicate the link between craft and careers. This is the environment within which the latent value of social media for academics comes to be actualised along either dimension.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm particularly interested in how time pressure figures into the developing discourse about social media for academics. On the one hand, I think the idea of social media being 'just one more thing to do' is straightforwardly a mistaken way of understanding what academics do on social media. On the other hand, I think the temporal pressures to which academics are subject in their institutional lives will inevitably shape the character of their social media use:
1. Time-pressure can be a symbol of status and flaunting it can represent one of the few socially acceptable forms of conspicuous self-aggrandizement available (Ian Price)

2. Time-pressure can reduce the time available for reflexivity, 'blotting out' difficult questions in a way analogous to drink and drugs

3. Time-pressure can facilitate a unique kind of focus in the face of a multiplicity of distractions: past commitments 'choose' for us

4. The accelerative pleasures and creative inducements of 'binge writing' and working to a deadline (Maggie O'Neill)

5. Time-pressure can leave us feeling that we are living life most fully. If the good life is now seen as the full life then living fast feels like living fully (Harmut Rosa)

These all contribute to a broader context in which speed becomes problematic within the academy. It comes to enjoy an immense psychic charge as something which feels like, to paraphrase Homer Simpson, the cause of and solution to all life's problems:

Coupled with intense competition within the academic career structure, as well the broader spectre of redundancy which Bauman argues characterises academic life as a whole in late modernity, it's inevitable that what Ruth Müller theorises as anticipatory acceleration arises as a situationally logical strategy: going faster without specific goal in mind, seeking to outpace competitors given limited positions available for a cohort. As I understand her argument, which I really recommend reading directly, this gives rise to a subjugation of present pleasures to anticipated future rewards, with a contraction of alternative futures envisaged by the subject. The more hyper kinetically you commit yourself to career advancement, pursued through anticipatory acceleration, the more difficult it becomes to climb off the treadmill because your horizons narrow to the next goal. Though her empirical work has focused on post-docs in
the life sciences, the scope of her concepts seem broader than this, both in terms of discipline and career stages. The conditions she describes in the condition from post-doc to faculty surely also obtain in the transition from lecturer to senior lecturer, from senior lecturer to reader and from reader to professor.

The ensuing dynamic of competitive escalation is crucial to understanding labour in the contemporary academy. It is a social mechanism driving the intensification of labour and destroying solidarity, tied up in a life-destroying feedback loop with the systems of audit which work to replace the horizontal regulation of professional standards with the vertical regulation of metrics. The value of social media for academic craft can mitigate these effects by grounding individuals in non-instrumental motivations for their work (curiosity, playfulness, exploration) and facilitating collaboration between such individuals outside the rubric of competitive individualism. But how likely is this to continue? I’m interested in how what Jose Van Dijck calls the popularity principle intersects with the competitive individualism of the accelerated academy: will the metrics of social media become just one more way in which academics can evaluate themselves in relation to others and be evaluated as they proceed through an increasingly rigidly defined career structure? If the logic of careers comes to dominate academic social media, can the logic of craft survive? If not then what does this mean for the broader conditions of academic labour? The institutionalisation of alt-metrics seems likely to be the most important vector through which the answer to these questions will begin to unfold. How will social media activity be measured and how will this new process of measurement intersect with existing processes of measurement? Will alt-metrics unsettle existing hierarchies or simply lead to dual hierarchies that might converge upon the same academic celebrities who dominate the intellectual attention space?

However there are other substantive areas in which these issues are currently being played out: online harassment of academics, social media policies within universities, institutional reaction to online academic speech, regulation of the corporate brand, social media training and support offered by staff. I think the way in which the benefits of social media are coming to be framed is particularly interesting and we’re likely to see this come to be dominated by the language of ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’ on the one hand, ‘academic citizenship’ and ‘academic civility’ on the other. There’s nothing intrinsically wrong with these things but what gets squeezed out in the middle is scholarship. I’ve not really talked about substantive cases in these areas today. There’s a few reasons for this: some of them are very contentious and I’m more comfortable writing about them then speaking about them, doing them justice requires a lot of empirical detail and would take a long time, it’s easy for this reason to get lost in detail and miss the broader picture. After all, it’s this broader picture which interests me. Social media is tied up in all manner of ways with the transformation of the university, as well as the transformation of the universities place within wider social life. There are many other factors, but the institutionalization of social media is a key vector in these unfolding changes. One which, I’ve tried to argue and hope we can discuss further, has important ramifications for academic labour.

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2. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/hUVwR0rw5fk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&xmode=transparent](https://www.youtube.com/embed/hUVwR0rw5fk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&xmode=transparent)

**What are you favourite academic memes?** *(2016-08-28 08:00)*

A great suggestion made by Deborah Lupton on Twitter last month:

[https://twitter.com/DALupton/status/757841671094546432](https://twitter.com/DALupton/status/757841671094546432)
Yemen: Britain’s forgotten conflict (2016-08-29 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc5L519Ko8E

Call for blog posts: the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research (2016-08-30 08:00)

Following on from our successful workshop at Social Media & Society 2016, the [1]Digital Social Science Forum is seeking blog posts describing and reflecting on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research. The workshop itself sought to explore conceptual challenges in interdisciplinary social media research, encountered at the level of substantive theoretical commitments but also in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions that inform everyday practice. But our intention for this project is broader, seeking reflections on any aspect of the lived experience of conducting research across and through disciplinary boundaries.

Our primary focus is on digitally orientated research, e.g. social scientists and computer scientists working together, but we warmly welcome contributions from other areas. These might reflect upon things like:

- The role of ‘boundary objects’ in facilitating work across disciplinary boundaries.
- How a lack of clarity about mutual definitions can both support and hinder interdisciplinary collaboration.
- The importance of reclaiming ‘the human’ as a shared focus in interdisciplinary research.
- Coping with the challenge of an imperialistic naturalism i.e. forceful assertions of the failure of the social sciences and the necessity of remaking them along the lines of the natural sciences.
- The messy reality of working in interdisciplinary teams.
- What does conceptual development mean in collaborative work across disciplinary boundaries?
- The role of personal relationships in facilitating successful interdisciplinary work.
- Failures and frustrations of interdisciplinarity.
- Getting beyond the motif of the ‘attic scholar’ and socialising the research process.
- The role of doctoral pedagogy in hindering successful interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Organisational helps and hindrances to working across disciplinary boundaries.
These are just suggestions. Our interest is in how these sometimes obtuse issues are worked out at the level of everyday co-operation: how is the messy reality of interdisciplinarity lived and how should this shape our approach to it? These blog posts will be compiled at the Digital Social Science forum, organised thematically and circulated on social media channels as a public resource.

Contributions should be short (500-1500 words) and will be accepted on a rolling basis. Please send as a word document to mark@markcarrigan.net. Feel free to get in touch to discuss a potential contribution.


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DEADLINE TODAY: The Accelerated Academy (2016-08-31 08:00)

30th November to 2nd December 2016, Leiden, the Netherlands

From the 1980s onward, there has been an unprecedented growth of institutions and procedures for auditing and evaluating university research. Quantitative indicators are now widely used from the level of individual researchers to that of entire universities, serving to make academic activities more visible, accountable and amenable to university management and marketing. Further demands for accountability in academia can be related to general societal trends described under the heading of the audit society (Power 1997), and the evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen 2011). As part of broader transformations in research governance, indicators on publications and citations are now permeating academia: from global university rankings to journal-level bibliometrics such as the journal impact factor and individual measures like the h-index. Yet, it is only recently that considerable interest has been directed towards the effects that these measures might have on work practices and knowledge production (c.f. de Rijcke et al. 2015), and the role they might be playing in accelerating academic life more generally (c.f. Vostal 2016).

The Accelerated Academy draws together a number of cross-disciplinary conversations about the effects that acceleration towards metric forms of evaluation is having upon research, and the implications this holds for living and working in contemporary academia (Felt et al. 2009). Building on the successful maiden edition of the Accelerated Academy series in Prague in 2015, this year’s Leiden conference will be especially focussed towards the following questions:

• What does acceleration mean in different research contexts?
• What are the implications of digitally mediated measurement and tools for quantifying scholarly performance?
• What are the knowledge gaps regarding the effects of metrics on scientific quality and societal relevance of research?
• How can we harness the positive and minimize the adverse effects of performance measurement in universities?

Confirmed keynote speakers include Peter Dahler-Larsen (University of Copenhagen), Ulrike Felt (University of Vienna) and Michael Power (LSE).
We invite submissions for presentations of around 20 minutes. The deadline for submitting abstracts will be August 31st 2016. Please send two pages or 800 words describing your contribution including a short biographical note to: [1]a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl.

Conference organisers

[2]Sarah de Rijcke, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University
[3]Björn Hammarfelt, University of Borås, Sweden | Leiden University
[4]Alex Rushforth, Centre for Science and Technology Studies, Leiden University

Scientific committee

[5]Mark Carrigan, University of Warwick
[6]Tereza Stöckelová, Czech Academy of Sciences
[7]Filip Vostal, Czech Academy of Sciences
[8]Paul Wouters, Leiden University
[9]Milena Kremakova, University of Warwick

Event registration will be free of charge. In addition, a limited number of travel and accommodation support bursaries will be made available for researchers especially inhibited by the costs of travel. Please contact the conference manager [10]Andrea Reyes Elizondo for more information.

1. mailto:a.e.reyes.elizondo@cwts.leidenuniv.nl
2. https://www.cwts.nl/people/sarah-de-rijcke
3. https://www.cwts.nl/people/bjoumlrn-hammarfelt
4. https://www.cwts.nl/people/alex-rushforth
5. https://markcarrigan.net/the-accelerated-academy/
8. https://www.cwts.nl/people/paul-wouters
9. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/people/mkremakova/
10. https://www.cwts.nl/people/andrea-reyes-elizondo

7.9 September

Cyborgology is looking for new regular contributors! (2016-09-02 08:24)

The excellent blog Cyborgology is looking for new contributors:

For nearly six years Cyborgology has been dedicated to producing thoughtful essays and commentary about society’s relationship to technology. Writers enjoy significant freedom to write essays and stories of varying length, style, and topic. We are now looking for several new contributors to join Cyborgology.
What we are looking for: People willing to write about society, culture, and technology in an accessible but smart way. Contributions can take many forms and we are flexible about writing frequency. Scrolling through the last few months of Cyborgology is the best way to get an idea of the style and frequency of pieces we want to see. We are especially interested in writers from under-represented or marginalized subject positions. You do not need to be affiliated with any institution of higher learning but you do have to be comfortable writing about and through theoretical concepts. Of course writing schedules are very flexible and we are open to whatever work arrangement you can put together. The best way to know what kind of work we want is to read the site and check out our submission guidelines for guest posts.

The benefits of writing for Cyborgology: For better or worse, Cyborgology is a volunteer effort. None of us get paid and we do not anticipate that changing anytime soon. Writing for Cyborgology has, however, been known to open up new opportunities of a monetary nature. We are also proud to have a dedicated, smart audience that likes to share and discuss our ideas. Work on Cyborgology has also been linked to and shared by large media organizations including The New York Times, The Washington Post, Buzzfeed, Huffington Post, Pacific Standard, and many more. All writing on Cyborgology is covered under a Creative Commons attribution license and authors retain full control over their work. We are also a member of an awesome community of blogs and publications under The Society Pages umbrella.

How to apply: As our past and present contributors can attest– writing for Cyborgology is a strange animal. Therefore, we’ve done our best to simulate writing for Cyborgology in the application process. We want three polished writing samples between 500-1000 words, at least two of which need to grapple with a current event between now (July 18, 2016) and the due date which is September 1, 2016. It is totally fine to send us something you’ve published elsewhere or turned in for an assignment. We may also ask if we can run some of your submissions as guest posts before we make any final decisions. Writing samples should be saved as either .doc or .docx and sent as an attachment to david.adam.banks [at] [1]gmail.com. In the email please indicate the best email address to reach you, a short three sentence bio, and any other accomplishments you think we should know about. A full cover letter is not necessary.

1. http://gmail.com/
retrenchment and deepening inequalities, the call focuses on this crisis in terms of precarity experienced by people both in and out of work. Contributions are invited to think critically not only about ‘precarity’, but also about the agency of those within precarious conditions and about how to move beyond them. This Special Issue would therefore welcome papers that investigate or explore:

1. **Theoretical contributions around the concept of precarity and its relation to class**
2. **Patterns of precarisation, and alternative ways of understanding questions of insecurity at work**
3. **The role of the state and other institutions (including unions and employers) in shaping (in)security for workers**
4. **Conflicts over precarious work, including new forms of labour organising**
5. **A future beyond precarity: beyond exploitation, alternative forms of production and circulation beyond the capitalist wage relation**

**Deadline for submissions (full papers): 01 March 2017**

To read the full call for papers and for instructions on how to submit, [1]please visit the BSA website.

The guest editors welcome informal conversations about potential submissions. For further information please contact Gabriella Alberti ([2]g.alberti@leeds.ac.uk) or Charles Umney ([3]C.R.Umney@leeds.ac.uk)

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**We should be very careful about how we construct ‘the public’ in discourses of public engagement**

(2016-09-04 08:00)

I just came across this description of Robert Moses, by the American Sociologist and former Secretary of Labour Frances Perkins, concerning his attitude towards the public. It was quoted in an essay by Jackson Lears in vol 38 number 6 of the London Review of Books:

He loves the public, but not as people. The public is just the public. It's a great amorphous mass to him; it needs to be bathed, it needs to be aired, it needs recreation, but not for personal reasons – just to make it a better public.

And some would say it needs to be *engaged*. We should be very careful about how we construct ‘the public’ in discourses of public engagement. Treating it as axiomatic that public engagement is a good thing can sometimes hide some rather problematic attitudes about who this ‘public’ is.
For those unfamiliar with her, it’s worth finding out more about Frances Perkins. She’s a hugely impressive and important figure. This Democracy Now interview covers a lot of ground:

[1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/L3zRbw-VxJI

[2]https://www.youtube.com/embed/x0jVwmQ2y0w
This new six-week course is designed to help post-docs improve their writing and maximise their chances of publication. The course is run by [1] Dr Helen Kara (UK) and [2] Dr Janet Salmons (US) who, between them, have extensive publication experience and knowledge. The course includes webinars, weekly lessons and exercises, feedback and discussion, and an online peer support group which will continue after the course is finished. By the end of the course each student will have an individually tailored publication strategy covering the next 1-5 years, and will have a plan for implementing their strategy.
Create Your Publication Strategy will enable you to:

- **Assess** the publication potential of your thesis: know which parts to publish and how to develop them for publication
- **Reflect** on scholarly or professional choices in light of your career goals, and know how to use publication to help you move closer to those goals
- **Evaluate** steps to pursue traditional, online, or self-publishing: understand the pros and cons of writing for blogs, academic journals, books and other formats
- **Develop** a clearly defined 1 to 2-year publication strategy that aligns with your career goals
- **Connect** with a writing community in the form of an ongoing online support group for course students and alumni

The course is appropriate for anyone who has completed their thesis within the last five years. All you need is a good standard of written English and the ability to commit to a six-week course.

The initial course runs from 10 October to 18 November 2016, and the registration fee for this first course carries a 20% discount. The course will be run again in February-March 2017 at the full fee. Contact us with any questions or book here.

2. [http://vision2lead.com/](http://vision2lead.com/)
4. [mailto:info@vision2lead.com](mailto:info@vision2lead.com)

3 dystopian visions of the future of gaming (and capitalism) (2016-09-05 08:00)
In a near future America, the world is locked into an inglorious decline while the majority of its population is locked into an intoxicatingly expansive virtual world. Ecological crisis and economic ruin operate hand-in-hand to leave the 99% living in sprawling slums, consisting of endless stacks of trailer parks, around the periphery of the surviving cities within which some economic activity takes place. The game provides an escape from this, offering an endless array of worlds full of wonders in contrast to the grim reality of the singular world the players inhabit in the rest of their lives.

On the surface, Ready Player One might seem to be an inditement of gaming, framing it as the source of widespread acquiescence to social collapse. But it has a much more nuanced approach than this. Firstly, there's a profound nostalgia which suffuses the book, suggesting that what’s of most value in the cutting edge of gaming in this dystopian world inevitably borrows from and looks back to an older age of gaming from the 70s, 80s and 90s. Secondly, the narrative of the book hinges upon the possibility for re-enchantment that gaming offers. The global game into which the world's population has immersed itself might be implicated in this widespread withdrawal from social concern, but it also offers a solution. The game itself opens up the possibility for heroism, for mass collective struggle to change the world, which ultimately makes itself felt back in the ‘real’ world.

In this sense, the book offers a pessimistic vision of the future of capitalism but a qualified optimism about the future of gaming. It’s nonetheless realistic about the relationship between the two, with capitalism having facilitated the worst of what is latent with gaming but also being susceptible to being changed by the best that can be found within the craft of gamers.
The recent film Nerve offers a more straightforwardly moralistic vision. It tells the story of an underground viral game called 'Nerve', which allows participants to be either 'players' or 'watchers'. The former earn rewards for acting on dares offered by the latter, who are encouraged to follow the players around and live stream their daring actions. The first moral of the story rests upon the dangers of celebrity, suggesting that the combination of teenage social pressures and an anonymous crowd can create immense pressure, potentially leading anyone to do things they'll later have reasons to regret. The second moral of the story is more interesting, with a slightly contrived plot being used to explain how some players get locked into a game which, because it relies on the block chain, cannot simply be shut down. This expresses an interesting fear we're perhaps likely to see ever more explorations of: socio-technical novelties that cannot be suppressed or switched off. The moralistic streak in the film undermined the potential power of its story telling here because the valiant and sneaky actions of the protagonists lead them to escape the game and destroy it. I can easily imagine a much bleaker and more interesting film which took the fear it raised seriously.
Traders is a gloriously dark film set in post-crash Dublin, exploring the changing fortunes of young financiers who briefly had everything and now must come to terms with having lost it. Much like Nerve, Traders revolves around a viral game, trading, in which desperate bankers who’ve lost everything can agree to fight to the death for the remaining assets of their opponent. Successful traders soon build up an impressive prize fund, incentivising others to match them and the ‘dark web’ game takes on a life and energy of its own. The logic of the game escapes its creator, whose desperate attempts to regain his hold on it leads to his own downfall, introducing elements into the game which accentuate the worst aspects of its own internal rationality.

Ready Player One, Nerve and Traders are very different works. But what they have in common is a confrontation with the social reality of gaming. Rather than seeing gaming as an individual pursuit, involving a retreat from the social, all these works recognise the intrinsically social nature of contemporary gaming. Gaming is in the world, of the world and acts on the world. But it’s more than this: the liberation of gaming from relatively static hardware which encouraged, though by no means determined, fixture within the home has opened up an entirely new arena of socio-technical novelty.

What Nerve, Traders and Ready Player One explore is gaming-as-social-structure. The most engaging scenes in Nerve are when the logic of the game override normative expectations in social situations: in this sense a game acts as social structure, in a way disruptive of existing social order but also leading to the generation of new forms of order. The prospect of mobile augmented gaming, particularly if it has the massively distributed game dynamics of something like Nerve, heralds a profoundly morphogenetic form of social structure i.e. its operation encourages change in everything it encounters, in unpredictable and often dangerous ways. If we see the massive growth of games like Pokemon Go, as well as their further development, I think this characteristic of games will be an ever more potent object of cultural expectation.
WHAT IS A ZINE?

"Zine" is short for fanzine.

"For all intensive purposes, a zine is a cheaply-made, cheaply-priced publication, often in black and white, which is mass-produced via photocopier and bound with staples.

Most zines revolve around a music scene of some sort, but others are dedicated to artwork, poetry, cartoons, editorials and short stories. Because zines do not have any sort of corporate backing, they are very rugged, individualized, and much more charismatic than larger, more popular magazines whose content is often dictated by their advertisers" - [1]definition taken from Urban Dictionary.

MANCHESTER METROPOLITAN UNI REQUEST FOR ZINES.

"At MMU Special Collections, we already have a small selection of zines that sit alongside our other collections. The DIY methods of production and design of the zine are an often overlooked aspect of the history of printing and represent a legitimate addition to our established collections. Due to their ephemeral nature they can be hard to source, so we are asking for help with finding zines that we might acquire".

For more details:
https://mmuspecialcollections.wordpress.com/2016/08/31/we-need-your-zines/

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2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/AX1BTiHzq-I?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
3. https://www.youtube.com/embed/zE8Y6If3dhg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action (2016-09-05 21:15)

BSA Sociologists outside Academia, in collaboration with Sage Publishing Ltd and the Sociological Imagination

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action

A half-day workshop

British Psychological Society meeting rooms, Tabernacle St
London EC2A 4UE
Monday 17 October 2016, 12.30 – 4.30pm

How come – at least in the UK – you don’t come across people with ‘sociologist’ in their job title working in industry, business, the civil service, or pretty much anywhere outside academia or independent research organisations?

Sociologists seem to all reside in universities, unlike psychologists and economists, who have colonised many kinds of workplaces.

Most sociologists believe our subject is essential for understanding the world around us, or to resolve contemporary problems, from gender violence to climate change. We have the concepts (like ‘cultural capital’, ‘intersectionality) and the theories (social mobility, moral panic). But where are the practical sociologists?

So what would it take to establish a ‘practical sociology’ in the UK and elsewhere, with sociologists employed to use sociology concepts and models to address problems in industry, business, government, education or health? This half-day workshop aims to establish an agenda for practical sociology.

The workshop will explore pressing questions about how a practical sociology may apply its expertise, skills and knowledge to problems at work or in the community.

- What has prevented the emergence of practical sociology in the UK?
- What are the core knowledge and models that are needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public sector face?
- What kinds of skills would be needed to work as a practical sociologist?
- How would a practical sociology career pan out?

This workshop will be of interest to sociologists and others who are keen to see the application of sociological concepts, models and theories in practical settings in the public, private and third sectors. Please come along and help us set an agenda for developing practical sociology.

Registration

**BSA Members £5; Non-members £8; BSA Concessionary members and full-time students £3.**

Tea and coffee will be provided: please bring your lunch.


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**CFP: Hackademia! Activism, Scholarship & the Internet (AoIR satellite event) (2016-09-06 08:00)**

*Call for participants: Hackademia! Activism, Scholarship & the Internet*

Tuesday, October 4, 2016, 2-6pm
Berlin, Germany (location TBA)

**Workshop organizers:**
Nathalie Maréchal, University of Southern California/Ranking Digital Rights
Jillian York, Centre for Internet and Human Rights/Onlinecensorship.org

Many Internet researchers straddle the line between academic Internet research and digital rights advocacy, including hacker communities. This workshop aims to strengthen the ties between these two modes of inquiry, leveraging AoIR 2016’s location in Berlin to invite digital rights activists from outside the academy to engage with the scholarly conversation. While many scholars and activists express interest in cross-sector collaboration, there are a number of barriers to such efforts, including mismatches between the career incentives, funding mechanisms, and timelines prevalent in the academic and NGO worlds. Nevertheless, the organizers of this half-day workshop have found that collaboration between civil society and academia are crucial to both research and to change.

The first portion of the workshop (two hours) aims to:

- Explore what “research” means to scholars and to activists
- Surface the barriers to cross-sector collaboration
- Brainstorm strategies for transcending such barriers
- Provide a networking forum for scholars and activists working on similar or complementary projects

The second portion of the workshop (two hours) will include a dive into the world of commercial content moderation. Using a fishbowl format, we will hear from experts looking at the topic from a variety of angles: as an issue of labor, of free expression, and of information hegemony. Participants will be encouraged to take part in the discussion and share new ideas for research and advocacy.
Interested participants should complete the registration form at [1]https://goo.gl/forms/9isVlduYmkeqMeG43 by Sept 1, 2016. The organizers hope to have roughly equal participation from academia and from civil society, and will use the requested information to plan the details of the workshop. Questions can be addressed to Nathalie Maréchal, [3]marechal@usc.edu, at any time.

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CfP: Social Media and Social Futures – a special issue of @DiscoverSoc (2016-09-06 15:08)

Co-edited by Mark Carrigan and William Housley

Social media is conventionally located within a commercial narrative that theorises an array of emerging ‘disruptive technologies’ that includes big data, additive manufacture and robotics. These and related technologies are underpinned by computational developments that are networked, distributed, digital and data driven. It has been argued that these technologies not only disrupt markets; but also wider social and economic relations and organization. These include social institutions such as the family, work, health care delivery, education, relationships and the ‘self’. But how do we separate the hype from the reality while nonetheless recognising how powerful this rhetoric is on a purely discursive level? What social futures are potentially shaped by social media and how can we talk about them in a way that emphasises our capacity to shape them collectively?

Social media is one of the first waves of digital disruptive technologies whose mass global take-up via multiple platforms is still being assessed and understood, as a social force in it’s own right. Standardly, ‘social media as data’ has provided a plethora of studies and projects that have examined the big and broad social data opportunities provided by the social media for understanding populations on the move ‘in real time’. In some cases this has led certain commentators to enthusiastically claim that the analysis of social media as data offers opportunities for prediction and the forecasting of behavior at the population level although this rhetoric is not without it’s skeptics and critics. Is this a plausible vision of the future? Is it a desirable one? Can we see a longstanding impulse towards addressing social problems finally having the necessary techniques and capacities to achieve its potential? Or are we witnessing a potentially authoritarian turn in which social engineering can operate with an unprecedented degree of granularity?

Furthermore, these methodological opportunities and oracular imaginaries are being accompanied by an ‘ontological velocity’ generated by the social and economic implications of social media as data, practice and a globalizing networked communicative force that is shaping being and becoming in the digital age. A key issue here is the relationship between social media, society, time and the ‘future making’ capacities and affordances of these and allied technologies. Yet little work has been carried out on the temporal ramifications of social media (and other
disruptive technologies) in relation to emerging digital ‘timescapes’. To this extent the study of the relationship between social media and society remains under-conceptualized especially in relation to our understanding of late modernity at the beginning of the 21st century. The relationship between social media and the social generation of risk, it’s contributions to new digital timescapes and the trajectory of the self and identity alongside empirical concerns is sociological work in waiting. How does social media complicate or perhaps confirm existing theories of social change? Or is such epochal thinking itself a problem, ripe to be deployed by social media corporations apt at marketing their own ‘disruptive’ capacity?

For this special issue of Discover Society we welcome short articles (1500 words) that relate to the above and the following topics:

- Social Media, Timescapes and Futures
- Social Media, Prediction and Critical Data Imaginaries
- Visioneering, ‘Futures’ and Social Media
- Tracing Emerging Technologies in the Digital Agora
- The Future of Social Networks: Social Organization, Data and Engineering
- Computational Politics and the challenges facing Democracy
- Social Media and the Transformation of Everyday Life
- Digital Afterlives? Social Media, Time, Traces and Accountability
- Digital Social Science and Social Futures

Please see the Discover Society website for more details about [1]formatting requirements. Articles should be accessible for a general audience, as well as accompanied by a suitable royalty-free image for publication and suggested tweets for @DiscoverSoc.

Timeline for contributions:

**September 30th:** Confirmed intention to submit with title & brief description

**November 20th:** Delivery of final article, with image and tweets

**December 20th:** Return of any requested edits and revisions

**January 4th:** Publication of the special issue

Contact details: Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and William Housley (housleyw@cardiff.ac.uk)

1. [http://discoversociety.org/contribute/](http://discoversociety.org/contribute/)
BSA Sociologists outside Academia, in collaboration with Sage Publishing Ltd and the Sociological Imagination

Practical Sociology: Agenda for Action

British Psychological Society meeting rooms, Tabernacle St
London EC2A 4UE
Monday 17 October 2016, 12.30 - 4.30pm

How come – at least in the UK – you don’t come across people with ‘sociologist’ in their job title working in industry, business, the civil service, or pretty much anywhere outside academia or independent research organisations?

Sociologists seem to all reside in universities, unlike psychologists and economists, who have colonised many kinds of workplaces.
Most sociologists believe our subject is essential for understanding the world around us, or to resolve contemporary problems, from gender violence to climate change. We have the concepts (like ‘cultural capital’, ‘intersectionality) and the theories (social mobility, moral panic). But where are the practical sociologists?

So what would it take to establish a ‘practical sociology’ in the UK and elsewhere, with sociologists employed to use sociology concepts and models to address problems in industry, business, government, education or health? This half-day workshop aims to establish an agenda for practical sociology.

The workshop will explore pressing questions about how a practical sociology may apply its expertise, skills and knowledge to problems at work or in the community.

- What has prevented the emergence of practical sociology in the UK?
- What are the core knowledge and models that are needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public sector face?
- What kinds of skills would be needed to work as a practical sociologist?
- How would a practical sociology career pan out?

This workshop will be of interest to sociologists and others who are keen to see the application of sociological concepts, models and theories in practical settings in the public, private and third sectors. Please come along and help us set an agenda for developing practical sociology.

Registration


BSA Members £5; Non-members £8; BSA Concessionary members and full-time students £3.

Tea and coffee will be provided: please bring your lunch.


Symposium: Anxiety and Work in the Accelerated Academy (2016-09-06 15:32)

Friday September 23rd at the University of Warwick, 9:30am to 6:00pm

The culture and organisation of knowledge production are undergoing dramatic transformations.

Neo-managerialist models for the management of research and teaching, the expansion of audit and academic
rankings, and the recasting of universities as service providers and students as consumers are just several of the main features of the ongoing marketisation of science, higher education and academia. Further important structural changes include the casualisation of academic labour and the “acceleration” of academic life.

These transformations concern the mathematical, natural and social sciences and humanities in equal measure, if perhaps in different ways. The careers, working lives and identities of scholars, researchers and higher education teachers are all affected.

In this symposium, we bring together international and UK-based scholars who study science, higher education and academia. We focus on a particular aspect of neoliberal academia, namely its anxiety-inducing environment - not as an object in itself, but as a symptom of what Ros Gill called “the hidden injuries of neoliberal academia” and of the need for meaningful change. We will discuss what is happening to the work, careers, lives, identities and epistemic communities of scientists, while the scientific institutions are changing.

We invite everyone interested in issues of work, labour and employment in the sciences and academia - scholars, students, practitioners, administrators - to join the symposium and take part in the discussions.

Speakers:

Liz Morrish - Metrics, Performance Management and the Anxious University
With responses by Gurinder K. Bhambra & Maria Ivancheva

Maggie O’Neill - Pace, Space and Well-Being: Containing Anxiety in the University
With responses by Vik Loveday & TBC

Filip Vostal - Beyond the dichotomy of slow and fast academia: On temporal multidimensionality of science
With responses by Mark Carrigan & Milena Kremakova

Each speaker will talk for thirty minutes, with responses of fifteen minutes each, before an hour’s open discussion.


The Dispositions of the Metricised (2016-09-07 08:00)

In our discussion of metrics systems, it’s easy to treat subjectivity as a cipher, regarding people as passively moulded by algorithms or blindly governed by the incentives that operate through the institutionalisation of the metrics. My objection to the former is not the claim that people are shaped by metrics, but rather the assumption that this process is basically passive. My interest is in how metrics come to matter to us. How are people shaped over time? How do their biographically accumulating dispositions and concerns influence the actions they take over time? How
do these feed back into the metrics system and the organisations within which they are institutionalised?

The fictional portrayals that are starting to emerge of this – novels like *Super Sad True Love Story*, the *Circle* and *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, films like *Nerve* – often struggle to represent this engaged subjectivity because the imperatives of effective story telling militate against it. What we really need is a novel or film that explores metricisation through the internal monologue of what I imagine would turn out to be an unreliable narrator.

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/6h4GD2feZ8Q?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](https://www.youtube.com/embed/6h4GD2feZ8Q?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)

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**An Open Access Series of Books on Why We Post (2016-09-08 08:00)**

I’ve just started working my way through this series of books produced by [1]UCL's massive Why We Post project. The past work of the project team is fantastic and I'm hopeful this will prove to be an important series of books, breaking new anthropological ground in our understanding of how and why people use social media. Not all of the books are released yet but these are the ones currently available:

- [2]How the World Changed Social Media
• [3] Social Media in an English Village
• [4] Social Media in Southeast Turkey
• [5] Social Media in Northern Chile
• [6] Social Media in Industrial China
• [7] Social Media in Rural China
• [8] Social Media in Southeast Italy

They’re also freely available in PDF! This is a wonderful innovation from UCL’s Press and one we’ll hopefully see more of in the future.


Call for Papers: Philosophy and Technology special issue on The Governance of Algorithms (2016-09-09 08:00)

Call for Papers for Philosophy and Technology’s special issue on The Governance of Algorithms
GUEST EDITORS
Marcello D’Agostino (University of Milan, Italy) and Massimo Durante (University of Turin, Italy)

INTRODUCTION
In our information societies, we increasingly delegate tasks to automated systems, devices and agents that mediate human relationships by making decisions and acting on the basis of algorithms. Their increased intelligence, autonomous behavior and connectivity are changing crucially the life conditions of human beings as well as altering traditional concepts and ways of understanding reality. Algorithms are directed to solve problems that are not always detectable in their own relevance and timeliness. They are also meant to solve
those problems through procedures that are not always visible and assessable in their own. In addition, technologies based on algorithmic procedures more and more infer personal information from aggregated data, thus profiling human beings and anticipating their expectations, views and behaviors. This may have normative, if not discriminatory, consequences. While algorithmic procedures and applications are meant to serve human needs, they risk to create an environment in which human beings tend to develop adaptive strategies by conforming their behaviour to the expected output of the procedures, with serious distortive effects. Against this backdrop, little room is often left for a process of rational argumentation able to challenge the results of algorithmic procedures by putting into question some of their hidden assumptions or by taking into account some neglected aspects of the problems under consideration. At the same time, it is widely recognized that scientific and social advances crucially depend on such an open and free critical discussion.

TOPICS
The aim of this special issue of Philosophy & Technology is to explore questions about the governance of algorithms in light of the technological dependence of our information societies. We ask how to face theoretical and practical challenges in order to assure that technological innovations go hand in hand with human needs, beliefs and expectations. We solicit the submission of papers from different disciplines (law, ethics, economics, computer science, social studies, epistemology and philosophy of science) to address questions such as:

C2B7 How to deal with the "knowledge problem" (as Franck Pasquale put it), i.e., with the openness, transparency and fairness of algorithmic procedures and applications?
C2B7 How to govern those algorithmic procedures and applications once we delegate them the accomplishment of tasks or the solution of problems?
C2B7 By which standards the relevance and the timeliness of problems as well as the efficiency and the legitimacy of solutions are measured?
C2B7 Is the extensive functioning of automated systems, devices and agents based on algorithms able to impair human freedom and autonomy, free critical discussion and reflexivity?

TIMETABLE
December 19, 16: Deadline for paper submissions
February 13, 17: Deadline reviews papers
March 13, 17: Deadline revised papers
April, 17: Publication of accepted papers

SUBMISSION DETAILS
To submit a paper for this special issue, authors should go to the journal’s Editorial Manager
responding author for each submission in case of co-authored papers) must register into EM. The author must then select the special article type: "The Governance of Algorithms" from the selection provided in the submission process. This is needed in order to assign the submissions to the Guest Editors. Submissions will then be assessed according to the following procedure: New Submission > Journal Editorial Office > Guest Editor(s) > Reviewers > Reviewers' Recommendations > Guest Editor(s) > Editor-in-Chief's Final Decision > Author Notification of the Decision. The process will be reiterated in case of requests for revisions. For any further information please contact: GUEST EDITORS' CONTACT DETAILS Marcello D'Agostino: marcello.dagostino@unimi.it Massimo Durante: massimo.durante@unito.it

3. mailto:marcello.dagostino@unimi.it
4. mailto:marcello.dagostino@unimi.it
5. mailto:massimo.durante@unito.it
6. mailto:massimo.durante@unito.it

The #Brexit Fortune Teller (2016-09-10 08:00)
A fantastic invention by Bob Dickinson! Here’s how to make one:

HOW TO MAKE THE BREXIT FORTUNE TELLER

1 trim the paper to a square, flush with the edges of the artwork

2 artwork face up, fold diagonally, corner to corner

3 unfold. Then fold along the other diagonal, corner to corner.

4 unfold. You should have a square of paper with a cross-shaped diagonal fold.

5 turn over, so artwork is face down. Fold each corner back, from half way along each edge, so all four corners meet in the middle. You should now have a small square shape with the heads of the four
politicians literally at each others’ throats.

6 turn the small square over. Fold each corner back, from half way along each edge, so all four corners meet in the middle, on which you should be seeing triangles with two sets of numbers.

7 turn over. Stick fingers under each politician’s head so that it peaks up into a pyramid shape. You can now start using the fortune teller.

HOW TO USE

1 ask someone to pick a politician.

2 spell out the politician’s name out loud opening the fortune teller one or other direction for every letter.

3 ask your victim to pick a number at the point you finished spelling the politician’s name. Read out the number and the information alongside it.

4 unfold the triangle to read the prediction underneath.

1. https://twitter.com/baskeynell

The Familiarity of the Future: A Look Back from 1999 (2016-09-10 17:56)

In preparation for writing a review of the Unabomber’s new book, I have gone through my files to find all the things I and others had said about this iconic figure when he struck terror in the hearts of technophiles in the 1990s. Along the way, I found this letter written to a UK Channel 4 producer on 26 November 1999 by way of providing material for a television show in which I participated called ‘The Trial of the 21st Century’, which aired on 2 January 2000. I was part of the team which said things were going to get worse in the 21st century. What is interesting about this letter is just how similar ‘The Future’ still looks, even though the examples and perhaps some of the wording are now dated. It suggests that there is a way of living in the present that is indeed ‘future-forward’ in the sense of amplifying certain aspects of today’s world beyond the significance normally given to them. In this respect, the science fiction writer William Gibson quipped that the future is already here, only unevenly distributed. Indeed, it seems to have been here for quite
a while. Dear Matt, Here are the sum of my ideas for the Trial of the 21st Century programme, stressing the downbeat: Although the use of the internet is rapidly spreading throughout the world, it is also spreading at an alarmingly uneven rate, creating class divisions within nations much sharper than before. (Instead of access to the means of production, it is now access to the means of communication that is the cause of these divisions.) A good example is India, where most of the population continues to live in abject poverty (actually getting poorer relative to the rest of the world), while a Silicon Valley style community thrives in Bangalore with close ties to the West and a growing scepticism toward India's survival as a democracy that pretends to incorporate the interests of the entire country. (The BBC world service did a story a couple of years ago after one of the elections, arguing that this emerging techno-middle-class is, despite its Western ties, are amongst those most likely to accept the rule of a dictator who could do a 'Mussolini' and make the trains run on time, and otherwise protect the interests of these nouveaux riches, etc.) In this respect, the spread of the internet to the Third World is actually a politically destabilizing force, creating the possibility of a new round of authoritarian regimes. This tendency is compounded by a general decline of the welfare state mentality, so that these new dictators wouldn't even need to pay lip service to taking care of the masses, as long as the middle classes are given preferential tax rates, etc. But even in the West, the easy access to the internet has political unsavoury consequences. As more people depend on the internet as a provider of goods, information, entertainment, etc., and regulation of the net is devolved into many commercial hands, it will be increasingly tempting for techno-terrorists to strike by: corrupting, stealing and recoding materials stored therein. In other words, we should see a new generation of people who are the spiritual offspring of the Unabomber and average mischievous hacker. Indeed, many of these people may be motivated by a populist, democratic sentiment associated with a particular ethnic or cultural group that otherwise 'info-poor'. Such techno-terrorism is likely to be effective when the offending Western parties are far from those of the offended peoples – one wouldn't need to smuggle people and arms into Heathrow; one could just push the delete button 5000 miles away... I am frankly surprised that the major stock exchanges and the air traffic control system haven't yet been sabotaged, considering how easy it is for major disruptions to occur even without people trying very hard. These two computerized systems are prime candidates because the people most directly affected are likely to be relatively well-heeled. In contrast, sabotaging various military defence systems could lead to the death of millions of already disadvantaged people, so I doubt that they would be the target of techno-terrorists (though they may be the target of a sociopathic hacker...) One seemingly good feature of our emerging networked world is that we can customize our consumption better than ever. However, this customization means that we are providing more of our details to sources capable of exploiting them – not only through marketing, but also through surveillance. In this respect, remarks about the 'interactivity' of the internet should be seen as implying that others may be able to 'see through' you while you are merely 'looking at' them. While this opens up the possibility of government censorship, a bigger threat may be the way in which access to certain materials may be 'implicitly regulated' by the 'invisible hand' of website hits. Thus, if a site gets a consistently large number of hits, it may suddenly start charging a pay-per-view fee, whereas those getting few hits may simply be taken off cyberspace by commercial servers. This could have especially pernicious consequences for the amount and type of news available (think about what sorts of stories would be expensive to access if news coverage were entirely consumer-driven), as well as on-line distance learning courses. Here we see the dark side of the 'user friendliness' of the net: it basically mimics and reinforces what we already do until we get locked in. (In other words: spontaneous preferences are turned into prejudices and perhaps even addictions.) In the past, government and even businesses saw themselves in the role of educating or, in some other way, challenging people to change their habits. But this is no longer necessary, and may be even inconvenient as a means to a docile citizenry. (Aldous Huxley's Brave New World was ahead of the curve here.) There are also some problems arising from advances in biotechnology:

1. As we learn more about people's genetic makeup, that information will become part of the normal ways we account for ourselves – especially in legal settings. For example, you may be guilty of alcohol-related offences even if you are below the 'legal limit', if it's shown that you're genetically predisposed to get drunk easily. (Judges have already made such rulings in the US.) Ironically, then, although we have no say in our genetic makeup, we will be expected not only to know it, but also to take responsibility for it.

2. In addition, while our personal genetic information will be generally available (e.g. used by insurance companies to set premiums), it may also be patented as intellectual property legislation seems to be allowing the patenting
of substances that already exist in nature as long as the means is artificial (e.g. biochemical synthesis of genetic material for medical treatments).

3. This fine-grained genetic information will refuel the fires of the politics of discrimination, both in its negative and positive extremes: i.e. those who want to take a distinctive genetic pattern as the basis of extermination or valorization. (A good case in point is the drive to recognize homosexuality as genetically based: both pro- and anti-gay groups seem to embrace this line, even though it could mean either preventing the birth of gay children or accepting gayness as a normal tendency in humanity)

Finally, there are some general problems with the future of knowledge production:

1. It will become increasingly difficult to find support – both intellectual and financial – for critical work that aims to overturn existing assumptions and open up new lines of inquiry. This is because current lines of research – especially in the experimentally driven side of the natural sciences – have already invested so much money, people and other resources that to suggest that, say, high-energy physics is intellectually bankrupt or that the human genome project isn’t telling us much more than we already know would amount to throwing lots of people out of work, ruining reputations and perhaps even causing a general backlash against science in society at large (since public conceptions of science are so closely tied to these high-profile projects).

2. Traditionally radical ideas have been promoted in science – at least in part — because the research behind the ideas did not cost much to do, and not much was riding on who was ultimately correct. However, this idyllic state of affairs ended with World War II. Indeed, it has gotten so bad – and will get worse in the future – that one can speak of a kind of ‘financial censorship’ in science. For example, Peter Duesberg, who discovered the ‘retrovirus’, lost his grants from the US National Institute of Health because he publicly denied the HIV-AIDS link. One result of this financial censorship is that radical researchers will migrate to private funders who are willing to take some risks: e.g. cold fusion research continues today in this fashion. The big downside of this possibility, though, is that if this radical research does bear fruit, it’s likely to become the intellectual property of the private funder and not necessarily used for the public good.

I hope you find these remarks helpful. Leave a message at ... when you’re able to talk. Yours, Steve


Call for Applications: Work, Employment and Society Editorial Board (2016-09-11 08:00)

Work, employment and society Editorial Board

Call for Applications

Deadline: Wednesday 21 September 2016, 17:00 (GMT)

Work, employment and society is seeking 10 new members to join its Editorial Board and serve for three years from January 2017 to end of December 2019.

The Board welcomes applications involving any areas of methodological, theoretical and empirical expertise, 4604
though all applicants should be able to demonstrate an interest in and understanding of sociology. Candidates with expertise in the following areas are particularly needed:

- Quantitative methods
- Gender, work and employment
- Labour markets
- Knowledge work/the professions
- International and comparative sociology of work and employment
- Unpaid, invisible and 'non-standard' forms of work and employment
- Migration
- Intersectionality
- Creative industries
- Economic/labour geography

WES seeks academics based in the UK for the editorial board, but welcomes members from diverse backgrounds – both cultural and academic – to contribute to the diversity of research published by the journal.

The full call and online application form are available at:


If you have queries about the application process, please contact UK Engage, who are running the election process at: [2]britsoc@uk-engage.org

If you have queries about the role or about your eligibility, please contact the Chair of the Editorial Board, Professor Jackie O'Reilly ([3]J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk)

1. http://www.uk-engage.org/britsocwes
2. mailto:britsoc@uk-engage.org
3. mailto:J.O%27Reilly@brighton.ac.uk

__________________________

Eliminating the first person from ethnography (2016-09-12 08:00)

A powerful argument by Matthew Desmond from the conclusion of his incredible book [1]Evicted. What do you think? Far from being a prerequisite for reflexivity, can writing the "I" into ethnography inadvertently make the text about the author rather than the subject matter?
But first-person narration is not the only technique available to us. In fact, it may be the least well-suited vehicle for capturing the essence of a social world because the "I" filters all. With first-person narration, the subjects and the author are each always held in view, resulting in every observation being trailed by a reaction to the observer. No matter how much care the author takes, the first-person ethnography becomes just as much about the fieldworker as about anything she or he saw. I have sat through countless conversations about a work of ethnography or reportage that have nothing to do with the book’s subject matter and everything to do with its author’s decisions or mistakes or "ethical character." And after almost every academic talk I have given on the material in this book, I have been asked questions like: “How did you feel when you saw that?” “How did you gain this sort of access?” These are fine questions, but there is bigger game afoot.

There is an enormous amount of pain and poverty in this rich land. At a time of rampant inequality and widespread hardship, when hunger and homelessness are found throughout America, I am interested in a different, more urgent conversation. "I" don’t matter. I hope that when you talk about this book, you talk first about Sherrena and Tobin, Arleen and Jori, Lorraine and Scott and Pam, Crystal and Vanetta—and the fact that somewhere in your city, a family has just been evicted from their home, their things piled high on the sidewalk. There are costs to abandoning the first person. In the context of this study, it meant disguising when I intervened in nontrivial ways. There are two such instances in this book. When a “friend” rented Arleen a U-Haul truck to move from Thirteenth Street and when Vanetta borrowed money from a “friend” to buy a stove and refrigerator in anticipation of a visit from Child Protective Services, that was me. It is also important to recognize that none of the tenants in this book had a car. I did, and I sometimes drove people around when they were looking for housing. When I didn’t, people relied on Milwaukee’s irregular bus system or set off on foot. It would have taken families much longer to find subsequent housing if they hadn’t had access to my car (or phone).


alwayslearning7 (2016-09-14 13:04:43)
How do you eliminate the I in ethnography. I have written a case study about my lived experience in a certain environment, linking the experience to relevant theory. How can I do this without being a part of it? My study sounds like a novel rather than an academic piece of writing with myself being the main character. Thanks, I hope my question isn’t too long and makes sense.

Images of the end of capitalism (2016-09-13 08:00)

In various posts over the last few years, I’ve written about my fascination with [1] images of civilisational collapse. Reading Riots and Political Protest, by Steve Hall, Simon Winlow, Daniel Briggs and James Treadwell, I find myself wondering if this fascination is in large part because of how ‘civilisational collapse’ and the ‘end of capitalism’ tend to be conflated under our present circumstances. As they write on pg 18,

The dominant images of the end of capitalism in Western culture are those of absolute economic devastation and crushing hardship, a return to Dark Age repression and poverty. In the popular imagination, capitalism is lively and vivacious, and all alternatives to it are dull, grey and monotonous.
Images of civilisational collapse are so emotive under current conditions because of our much remarked upon inability to imagine a world beyond capitalism. For this reason I think sociological engagements with how these dystopias are represented could provide rewarding. By identifying their questionable assumptions, highlighting what is untenable in accounts of collapse and what might turn out differently in reality, could we open up the space in which to think about a *beyond* rather than merely an *end*?


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**What do you do when people you like act offensively online?** (2016-09-14 08:00)

I’ve been planning how to address this issue much more comprehensively in a second edition of [1]Social Media for Academics. But then [2]Vox helpfully shared this flow chart and I’m not sure I have anything further to add:
Are we dominated by our smart phones and mobile games? (2016-09-15 08:00)

https://twitter.com/_sakanoue/status/759615450497978368
CfP: Social Media and Social Futures – a special issue of @DiscoverSoc (2016-09-15 15:28)

Co-edited by Mark Carrigan and William Housley

Social media is conventionally located within a commercial narrative that theorises an array of emerging ‘disruptive technologies’ that includes big data, additive manufacture and robotics. These and related technologies are underpinned by computational developments that are networked, distributed, digital and data driven. It has been argued that these technologies not only disrupt markets; but also wider social and economic relations and organization. These include social institutions such as the family, work, health care delivery, education, relationships and the ‘self’. But how do we separate the hype from the reality while nonetheless recognising how powerful this rhetoric is on a purely discursive level? What social futures are potentially shaped by social media and how can we talk about them in a way that emphasises our capacity to shape them collectively?

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Furthermore, these methodological opportunities and oracular imaginaries are being accompanied by an ‘ontological velocity’ generated by the social and economic implications of social media as data, practice and a globalizing networked communicative force that is shaping being and becoming in the digital age. A key issue here is the relationship between social media, society, time and the ‘future making’ capacities and affordances of these and allied technologies. Yet little work has been carried out on the temporal ramifications of social media (and other disruptive technologies) in relation to emerging digital ‘timescapes’. To this extent the study of the relationship between social media and society remains under-conceptualized especially in relation to our understanding of late modernity at the beginning of the 21st century. The relationship between social media and the social generation of risk, it’s contributions to new digital timescapes and the trajectory of the self and identity alongside empirical concerns is sociological work in waiting. How does social media complicate or perhaps confirm existing theories of social change? Or is such epochal thinking itself a problem, ripe to be deployed by social media corporations apt at marketing their own ‘disruptive’ capacity? For this special issue of Discover Society we welcome short articles (1500 words) that relate to the above and the following topics:

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• Digital Social Science and Social Futures

Please see the Discover Society website for more details about [1]formatting requirements. Articles should be accessible for a general audience, as well as accompanied by a suitable royalty-free image for publication and suggested tweets for @DiscoverSoc. Timeline for contributions: September 30th: Confirmed intention to submit with title & brief description November 20th: Delivery of final article, with image and tweets December 20th: Return of any requested edits and revisions January 4th: Publication of the special issue Contact details: Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and William Housley (housleyw@cardiff.ac.uk)


Brassed Off (Oldham Coliseum until 1 October) (2016-09-15 20:24)

BRASSED OFF

7 SEP – 1 OCT 2016

“I don’t know anyone who admits to voting Tory but t’buggers keep getting in”.

![Brassed Off Image](image)
Brassed Off film fans will very much enjoy the Oldham Coliseum Theatre production of the hugely successful screenplay by Mark Herman. Local prize-winning brass bands from Saddleworth feature on stage stealing the show with their numbers. Paul Allen’s adaptation transports you to the Yorkshire landscape of 1994 where 10 year old narrator Shane (Thomas Weir) – who dreams of being a world champion at The Crucible - introduces the significant others in his world. These are the days when everyone was either your aunty or uncle. Shane tells us his mum is “mental”: “it’s because we’ve got no money I think”. His mum, Sandra (Natalie Grady) yearns for the merriment and mirth of a carefree night out, to escape her son asking: “Why are we so poor?”

Shane’s parents (Natalie Grady and Paul Barnhill)

“Even the men don’t wear suits around here”. An outsider arrives in Grimley with her flugel horn in tow, hoping to be welcomed and permitted to join the band? Delph and Dobcross and other Saddleworth villages await the marching band. Danny has big dreams beyond marching bands, to play at the Albert Hall but Shane’s dad – Danny’s son – cannot afford food for the family table and the threat of the bailiffs and loan sharks is looming. Will Danny’s dream come true?
The locker room 'Yorkshire man' banter between the miners amuses and saddens the audience. Their wives are dedicated to providing moral support chanting 'coal not dole' and 'say yes to miner's jobs' at the picket line. The women campaign to keep the pits open even though they hate the dangers of the pit. The closure of the pit looms. Anxieties increase as 1200 jobs are to go. Communities, homes and lives will be destroyed. As well as humour and drama, the play offers deep sociological insight about growing up in a close-knit mining community, social class divisions, generational changes, the threat of pit closures and unemployment and gender roles.

The Delph Band

The men worry about idle prospects of watching Richard and Judy with their wives made to seek jobs to feed
the family. Hope prevails for the wives: “the pit ain’t gonna close it is?” The tough men though can barely afford to contribute to the colliery band kitty, but are “shitting bricks” to tell Shane’s grandad Danny (Ged McKenna). The jubilance and joy brought by band practice gives the locals a much needed camaraderie. The band brings the townsfolk together: "The band symbolises pride". And Danny knows ‘music never lets you down’ even if there is frustration, bitterness and resentment brewing because of socio-political changes tearing friends and families apart.

Registration Open: Bourdieu, Aesthetics and the Body (2016-09-16 08:00)

Registration is now open for the forthcoming BSA Bourdieu Study Group Event: Bourdieu, Aesthetics and the Body. You can register here: [1]http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10592 Bourdieu, Aesthetics and the Body. London Monday 28th November, 2016 10.00-18.00 What can Bourdieusian theory add to exploration of the body and its aesthetic and performative capacities? Bourdieu (1984) argued that the body is a socially shaped generator of divisions. The body bears the imprint of divisions as a result of a person’s social location, habitus and taste. The body has long been a bearer of symbolic value and this symbolic value is bestowed to particular bodily forms. With the legitimisation of certain bodily types over others, and unequal opportunities for people to produce symbolically valued bodily forms, the internalisation of images that others form of oneself – even when these are stereotypes – raises questions of self-identity. Bourdieu (1990, p.69) also argued that: ‘Symbolic power works partly through the control of other people’s bodies’. The ‘normalising’ of bodily practices and its cultivating capacities, as well as the commodification of the body in modern society, increases the body’s attachment to pre-existing social inequalities. This event will bring together a range of sociologists who will open up discussions of the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptions of the body to: identity work and performances of self along social lines and gender, the management and appearance of bodies within sport and the health/’beauty’ industry, and the applicability of Bourdieusian theory to the development of disability theory. Timetable 10.00-10.30 Registration and Refreshments 10.30-10.45 Introduction 10.45-12.00 Opening Keynote: Dr Stephanie Lawler (University of York) Disgusted subjects: the making of middle-class identities 12.00-12.20 Refreshments 12.20-13.00 Carl Mallett (University of Warwick) Martial Arts and ‘Habitus’ 13.00-13.40 Dr Nicola Ingram (Lancaster University) Working and middle class undergraduate students’ constructions of masculine identities 13.40-14.40 Lunch 14.40-15.20 Dr Jenny Thatcher Symbolic Violence and the ‘Beauty’ Industry 15.20-16.00 Dr Natalia Slutskaya (University of Sussex) The Body Dances: Carnival Dance and Organization 16.00-16.20 Refreshments 16.20-17.30 Closing Keynote: Professor Rob Imrie (Goldsmiths, University of London) The relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptions of the body to the development of disability theory 17.30-17.45 Closing Remarks and Goodbye This event costs £25 for BSA student members, £35 for BSA-members and £45 for non BSA members. Refreshments and lunch are included. Early booking is recommended as we anticipate this to be a popular event. There will be 35 places available. To Register please go to the BSA Event’s Page: [2]http://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10592

How is that for a Hollywood movie scenario: a young woman starts dating a poor student, but then dumps him for a rich old man, whom she tries to relieve of his treasures before getting arrested. Not too feminist, eh? And yet, it’s a rough sketch of the Manon Lescaut opera that was successfully performed at [2]Salzburg Festival in a breathtaking interpretation of Anna Netrebko. When people listen to classical opera, they don’t necessarily bother deciphering the lyrics. Even if you have subtitles your gaze will be torn between the action on stage and the screen above it. It might be worth while taking a closer look.

Most operas will probably fail the famous [3]Bechdel test: you can hardly find 2 female characters who would talk - correction, sing - about something else other than men or their feelings for the men. In Madama Butterfly there is almost a Bechdel moment when [4]Chio-Chio-San asks Suzuki to decorate the room... to prepare for her husband’s arrival. Il Trovatore’s Leonora and Ines [5]discuss Manrico, Aida’s Amneris and Aida [6]talk about Radames, Turandot’s Liu only tells the princess how [7]love to Calaf will transform her. Even in Evgeny Onegin the famous duet/quartet at the beginning hardly lasts 2 minutes before [8]Tatyana’s mother and nanny reminisce about the former one’s love interests and how the habit of being with someone replaces love. A strong female character, a chief priestess no less, Norma, who encourages druids to take revenge on the conquerors from Rome, only discusses [9]her unfaithful lover with a female co-worker (i.e., a fellow druid priestess, job options for women were rather limited back in the day).
In many European operas a woman's value seems to be only in her (virgin) body and even the agency of often titled female characters is questionable. The above mentioned Norma has to immolate herself because she broke her vow of chastity. Il Barbiere di Sivilla Rosina [10]literally waits for Count Almaviva to rescue her from her uncle not doing anything by herself. It’s the clever barber who shows signs of mental activity. I won’t even mention some of Wagner’s operas, where women [11]sleep and wait to be awoken by “true heroes”. Manon Lescaut, the only female role in Puccini’s beautiful opera shows that women have no self-sufficiency at all. She is first accompanied by her brother who is supposed to put her in a monastery, then taken by Des Grieux (albeit voluntarily), then she becomes a mistress of an old man and revels in the jewels and gifts showered by her benefactor. Afterwards she is arrested and can only be rescued by her lover. Most of them time if women can actually accomplish something, they either kill or offer their body. Tosca, a brave singer who tries to save her lover Cavaradossi [12]kills Scarpia (but only after he sings a stunning aria professing [13]his passion to her). Leonora in Trovatore offers her body to the villain and is [14]instantly rebuked by the man she sacrificed herself for, as though it’s fun for women to be molested by a man they don’t love.

Moreover, women are usually linked with the male protagonists' tribulations. It’s [15]Rigoletto’s anguish at the death of his daughter Gilda that takes center stage and not Gilda's sacrifice or her despair after the Duke leaves her for another woman. Orpheus is [16]miserable when Eurydice dies and has to battle his way to the underworld, where Eurydice ruins his attempt to rescue her. [17]Jealous Marfa (who is also a witch) persuades Prince Andrey to burn on a pyre in Khovanschina, although his misfortunes were caused by the political turmoil in 17th century Russia. Manrico has to save Leonora from a man she doesn’t love; in Arena di Verona version [18]Manrico literally rides in on a white horse. He then is captured and beheaded because his mother was clumsy enough to get caught by Manrico’s nemesis. Onegin is depressed because Tatyana (spoiler alert) refused to be unfaithful to her husband, an act that is a subject of [19]an opera in itself that portrays female treachery. Admittedly, I cherry-picked several popular operas and used them to illustrate my point about representation of female characters in popular culture. [20]Feminist frequency blog takes the issue of female representation seriously and makes a compelling case for combatting misogyny in video games, where women are portrayed by means of distinctive tropes such as ‘damsel in distress’ or ‘women as reward’. In the meantime, however, Kobbe’s Opera Book could really use some disclaimers.

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1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF_7VxjTztA
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF_7VxjTztA
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HF3Fm2j57pQ
5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DxXjyx1Y
6. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRfntHkPeb4
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQxxOqPRDB4
8. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrDvfxKts74
9. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=md6Fqgyf1A
10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46QSWC11BAM
12. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBp9XiXXGk
14. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTR_AL5zEg4
15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63DoPGjukd
16. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEXehAa26tw
17. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhcDhIZLH_s
18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyFb13ML9eE
19. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cos%C3%A0_fan_tutte
Semantic satiation refers to the making strange of words by continual repetition until they become meaningless. Within the discourse surrounding the Fundamental British Values (FBV) since their introduction into schools in 2014 words such as extremism and radicalism recur so frequently they begin to float free from signification. Rather than scouring dictionaries for definitions, an alternative approach is to consider how, using an arts methodology, the words might be enacted through drawing, dancing, or miming. Extreme suggests stretching out, and reaching, poses that extend and expand from the norm. A radical posture would be wide and connected strongly to the ground. Such movements necessitate breathing deeply and are energising. Conversely, the antonyms of extreme and radical suggest the body curling inwards, shrinking and pulling away from the furthest reaches and rootedness to the earth, leading to feeling constrained, small, and defensive.

These contrasts of the expansive against the diminished provide a useful visualization of the problem of FBV in relation to art education in schools. Davies[1] argues that the anti-extremism agenda is reductive and superficial. She uses Sen's term miniaturisation[2] to describe how speaking of ‘groups’ and ‘communities’ minimises individuals making it easier to generalise, stereotype, and assign labels. FBV are not the only reductive policy at play in education and seeing anti-extremist initiatives as separate from the wider situation can mask important criticisms. Sukarieh and Tannock (2015) contest that anti-radicalisation should be seen as part of a wider shift in schools and society ‘leading to the abandonment and undermining of the radical tradition in education at precisely the time it is needed most’[3].

When reading the (highly problematic[4]) [1]signs of ‘radicalisation’ parents and teachers are to look out for, I was struck by the how similar the list was to those found on websites devoted to other [2]teenage hazards (such as eating disorders or addictions). These include the tell-tail signs of becoming withdrawn, changing friends or style of dress, behaving secretly, becoming obsessive, isolation at school, trauma, experience of bullying or discrimination, being a perfectionist. As a parent of teenagers one cannot help but be moved by families broken by the defection of their children to join terrorist groups. These are families as ordinary as those torn apart by a child’s self-harming, anorexia or addiction. All can arrive in a family’s life unannounced and are indicative of the challenges of contemporary teenage experience - growing up in an incredibly complex and alienating world and working out how on earth I’m going to find a feasible life for myself.

The notion of a ‘feasible world’ comes from Martin Buber who produced his life’s work through two world wars and conflict in the Middle East, providing first hand experience of violent extremism and constant threat. For Buber, the discovering of a feasible world was the purpose of education. His understanding of the nature of being was relational taking the form of either the I-Thou or the I-It[5]. If students (or teachers) became ‘Its’ to be made useful, rather than ‘thous’ to be nourished the world created would be less expansive and life-affirming than it might potentially be. His philosophy is pertinent to the problem of ‘radicalisation’ today; individuals resort to unhealthy extremes when the world they inhabit feels unfeasible and they have no creative means to make it so.

Davies suggests the ‘current obsession with excellence and standards may actually be conducive to extremism. This does not teach people to be at comfort with ambiguity or with the notion of a school or pupil being ‘good enough’[6]. School-based initiatives that seek to [3]foster resilience in young people abound. Coppock and
McGovern suggest that linking notions of ‘prevention’ to the well-being, beliefs and behaviour of individuals fails to address cause at a societal level.[7] Davies argues we are not radical enough, the current approach does not go to the root of the problem and the miniaturising language of de-radicalisation increasing the stereotyping and alienation that is known to make young people vulnerable. An alternative is to:

... enhance the resistance to such simple labels and categories, and give children status by showing how original and special each of us is... to celebrate not a bland diversity, but a resistant hybridity and originality in each child...[8]

Yet education policy currently mitigates against the celebration of hybridity and the uniqueness of every child. The shrinking and narrowing and constraining of schools is felt most acutely in those subjects that equip us as human beings to invent and imagine and hope for a feasible world that is uniquely ours. Adams describes how rather than exploring the ways arts practice can assist young people in creatively responding to the challenges they face,

‘... creativity is suppressed by performativity in the form of high-stakes testing and league tables, which makes it far too risky for school managers to contemplate, especially when more compliant and easily assessed activities can readily replace creative ones. This does not necessarily require the removal of arts or creative-designated subjects from the curriculum, rather it entails the extraction of their critical, relational and subjective features, so that what remains is a husk largely devoid of actual creativity. ... Such reductive practices, which may nonetheless be attractive or sumptuously decorative, effectively exclude the learners’ voices, or learners as directors of their own learning’.

In relation to British values this is seen most crudely in the prevalence of paintings of union jacks, portraits of the Queen, and other visual caricatures devoid of creativity and criticality.

The FBV agenda is an opportunity for art educators but it’s a problematic one because it goes against a core belief that teachers should maintain political neutrality. This perhaps leads to the selection of apparently benign imagery rather than a critical engagement with notions of democracy, free speech or tolerance. Buber suggested that teachers can influence the lives of students in two ways, through propaganda (coercion) or education (communion). As .... stated,

"the real choice, does not lie between a teacher's having values and not having them, but between his imposing those values on the student and his allowing them to come to flower in the student in a way which is appropriate to the students personality...'

The Fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and non, are arguably connected with a neoliberal agenda that sees the preservation of the status quo as necessary for the smooth exchange of global capital. Karaba argues that neoliberal education policies are eroding, democratic, progressive education[9]. He emphasises that Hayek’s definition of freedom ‘the state in which a man is not subject to coercion by the arbitrary will of another or others’[10] is both defined negatively (the absence of something) and conceived of individually. This is a notion of freedom defined by ‘tolerance’, where individuals (or groups) exist side by side but do not relate, or change, or grow. Buber suggests the opposite of compulsion or coercion is not freedom but communion[11]. He uses the word Zwischenmenschliche, meaning the space between people, to refer to this in-between place of communion and sharing[12]. Art is crucial
to peaceful and meaningful existence in creating zwischenmenschliche and enabling communion.

Herbert Read, took up Buber’s ideas when, against the backdrop of World War 2 he wrote, ‘Education through Art’ - his manifesto for an education for peace. Read saw the creation of the right environment as essential for learning; one characterized by trust and the absence of fear[13]. It is fear that causes us to retreat into ourselves, to put up defenses, to protect ourselves, to worry we will be misunderstood, to stay silent, to choose not to share who we are or want to be. As the Sufi poet Hafiz wrote,

How
Did the rose
Ever open its heart

And give to this world
All its
Beauty?

It felt the encouragement of light
Against its
Being,

Otherwise,
We all remain

Too

Frightened[14].

Of course, the aim of teachers everywhere is not to miniaturise, or diminish, or cause students to close up but to see students blossoming, expanding and growing. For that they need not to be afraid. This is where art pedagogy has much to offer the anti-extremism agenda. Every day through relation and dialogue, art educators sit, for example, alongside students as they draw and sculpt and create and talk to students about their lives. The process of making together creates the Zwischenmenschliche in ways that other subjects do not. Art teachers choose imagery to share with students that ‘makes the familiar strange’ and encourages them to expand their horizons,
they teach skills that equip students with a language through which to be expressive and communicate their unique perspective to others, they select starting points for projects that enable them to explore their own sense of who they are and what their ‘feasible world’ might be, they communicate one to one and understand the vulnerability of students when they share their ideas with others, and they engage in group crits where the establishing of trust is essential and respectful listening and challenge opens up a space for transformation. Effective art pedagogy is fundamentally about relationships – it opens up the in-between space where communion, or to use another German word, *gemeinschaft* is able to happen.

How does art education respond to the Fundamental British values agenda? – not through reductive displays of the Queen, union jacks, cup cakes and cups of tea but through doing what we do really well – valuing the uniqueness of each individual and encouraging them to imagine a feasible world for themselves. This is not the time to take on reductive pedagogies that miniaturise and stereotype – we need more radicalism, not less in schools. Sukarieh and Tannock point to Freire’s definition of ‘Radicalization’, as a ‘process of liberation’ that is ‘nourished by a critical spirit’ and ‘involves increased commitment to the position one has chosen, and thus ever greater engagement in the effort to transform concrete, objective reality’[15]. We need young people who are brave enough and extreme enough to dream of a better and more equal world – to find feasible solutions to the challenges of today. We need them to be deeply and radically rooted, not swayed by popular opinion or propaganda. We need them to reach out beyond divisions and stereotypes. As educators we need to be the light so that they will not be afraid.


[7] ibid. p.3

[8] ibid. p.189


[10] ibid. p.4


Carol Wild is an arts educationalist at Birmingham City University. [6] The National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) is a professional association and an independent [7] trade union existing to promote and defend art, craft, and design education in the UK. The following is a précis of a presentation given by Carol at a recent annual conference on Inclusion, Innovation, and Diversity, with particular reference to art education and the British Values agenda in schools.

3. http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/academic_resilience/what_schools_can_do
4. http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol24/iss1/1

A wonderful example of how universities can use YouTube (2016-09-17 08:00)

There’s a background to this hugely successful engagement project [1] here:

Mike Featherstone’s unpublished MA thesis on Ecology and the Chicago School (2016-09-18 08:00)

Roger Burrows shared this link to Mike Featherstone’s unpublished MA thesis a few weeks ago. It really is an [1] incredible piece of work:

The development of human ecology is closely associated with the rise of empirical sociological research in the United States. Human ecology played an important part in the programme of research into the city of Chicago which was formulated by Robert Park and carried out by his associates and graduate students in the Sociology Department of the University of Chicago in the inter-war years. As the name of the
sub-discipline suggests, human ecology derived a series of theoretical principles about the sustenance and spatial relations of population aggregates from plant and animal ecology, and applied them to the study of human society. An understanding of the central theoretical assumptions of Chicago human ecology can be gained by an exploration of human ecology's relationship to sociology and general ecology, as well as by examining the sub-discipline's contribution to the Chicago Sociologists' theory of the city. Human ecology's development can also be understood as having been influenced by the empirical studies of the city of Chicago which were carried out by Park's students in the 1920s and early 1930s. These studies, which used human ecology as a frame of reference played a very important part in establishing a tradition of empirical sociological research in the United States.


As Roger explained, this piece of work reflected a very different structure of MA teaching to that found in the UK today:

https://twitter.com/rjburrows/status/771378186760359936

https://twitter.com/rjburrows/status/771428013418446849

The Pseudo-Catharsis of Social Media (2016-09-19 08:00)

From Rethinking Social Exclusion, by Simon Winlow and Steve Hall, pg 73:

Political protests these days are taken not as an indication that something is going wrong and that a significant number of the population are dissatisfied with the nation's political leadership. Rather, they seem to indicate that a healthy and vibrant democracy is in place, one that welcomes political contestation and vigorous public debate about government policy. 'Look at the wonderful world liberalism has created!', our politicians proclaim. 'Political protests like this would never be tolerated in a non-democratic totalitarian regime!' Of course, when the demonstration is complete, nothing has changed. The political protest ends up continuing only for a short time as an online blog or a Twitter post, offering nothing more than a cathartic opportunity to vent one's spleen accompanied by the sad recognition that in all likelihood no one is listening, and no one really cares. It is also worth considering whether the peaceful protest now offers nothing more than an opportunity for the protestor to relinquish their subjective sense of duty to battle injustice. Once the protest is complete, and the world continues unchanged, the subject is allowed the comfort of having registered her dissatisfaction; whatever happens, it does so 'not in my name'.

It's this line I've put in bold which I've been thinking about a lot recently. How much of what is seen to be 'trolling' online represents a frustrated, even mutolated, impulse towards collective action?
In a way Winlow and Hall are too rosey in their framing here, positioning the pseudo-catharsis of social media as something that follows from the frustrations of contemporary public protest. What about when there is no prior collectivity, however frustrating and frustrated? What does the individualised rage we see seeking satisfaction through social media mean for the possibility of collectivity in the future?

What about the experience of mediated collectivity: how does a symbolic sense of ‘us’, others like oneself seeking outlets for ‘our’ rage, leave what might otherwise possibly become a solidaristic impulse locked into this destructive register?

Virtuous, vulnerable and burdened: how feminism is undermined by making everything ‘a feminist issue’

(2016-09-20 08:00)

By Tina Sikka

Language, discourse, and other symbolic forms have real, tangible, material consequences. This is something I tell my students over and over and over (and over) again. It is also something I hope readers keep in mind while reading through this piece. The oft-stated argument that ‘it’s just semantics – why quibble over words?’ just does not hold water. In addition to being empirically false, it also undermines the seriousness with which journalists, novelists, columnists, critics and others go about trying to facilitate social change through their words.

So, to the issue at hand: over the last year or so a flurry of op-eds, columns, academic papers, books, courses and conferences have been organized around the central theme of x, y or z being a ‘feminist issue.’ In the past few weeks even the Brexit vote, fracking, the Panama Papers and high heels have been described by such outlets as.opendemocracy.net, The Guardian, The New York Times, and Salon as ‘feminist issues.’ My argument, in this piece, is that the assumptions and expectations contained in this kind of discourse risks placing even more responsibility, labor, and general onus on women to drive social change, oftentimes as individual actors, in language that is laudatory and venerating.

The most basic definition of something being a ‘feminist issue,’ is that it is of significant cultural, social, political and/or economic concern to women and their interests. More often than not, the subject(s) at hand are also broadly in line with the pursuit of intersectional gender equity, social justice, empowerment, fairness, and recognition. Oftentimes this language of oppression and disproportionality is interlaced with a recognizable liberal feminist rhetoric of personal empowerment and freedom.

What is most significant about this discourse is its foundational logic. For something to be a ‘feminist issue’ it must be grounded in what development and feminist academic Seema Arora-Jonsson has termed the virtue/victimization binary. This is the key characteristic of the ‘feminist issue’ discourse that I find to be most problematic and the characteristic on which I focus. As well, a final characteristic of most of the pieces that deploy this rhetoric is to
include a generalized call for society, but particularly women, to cognitively acknowledge the inequity, condemn it as discriminatory and unjust, and to take action to combat the situation (e.g. to work for tax reform, take off those high heels, demand environmental justice and gun control, refuse the normative policing of our bodies etc.).

The most obvious problem with this discourse, and the kind of objection one might hear in an introductory gender studies course, is that it tends to essentialize women and treat them as a monolithic category where, as in the past, women in positions of power and their interests (often upper middle class, white women and from Western countries) come to represent the interests of all women. Yet, on the other hand (I add this in pursuit of symmetry), proponents of perspectives that embrace treating women as a distinct social group point out that calls for feminist action have the capacity to propel a sense of solidarity amongst diverse groups of women and can stimulate both agential and group activism. I am going to put this particular debate to one side and simply point out that, in this context, if something is a ‘feminist issue’ it is usually something that all women who subscribe to the label feminist, of which I include myself, should pay attention to and, most importantly, act on. Note that this is qualitatively different in tone and effect from calling something gendered or in need of a gendered analysis. More on this later.

As stated, my biggest problem with the ‘feminist issue-ization’ of so many socio-political and economic problems is that it risks diluting the culpability of entrenched structural problems and overloads women by suggesting that the way to for them to overcome vulnerability and/or victimization is through a narrow form of self-empowered and self-propelled political engagement. Ironically, this ‘lean-in’ form of participation, while appearing to valorize and recognize women’s unique contributions, really just puts more responsibility on women as a social group to push for socio-political change and structural reform on their own. By repeating this discourse in a variety of spheres, i.e. in academia, policy, the media, it causes the virtue/victim binary to appear as intuitive normative truth.

Arora Jonsson spells out how precisely this binary works her article “Virtue and vulnerability: Discourses on women, gender and climate change.” Her basic argument, which I have adapted for this piece, focuses on how this gendered binary works to discursively frame women as either virtuous, and worthy of praise, veneration and increased responsibility, or vulnerable and in need of protection. While Jonsson’s focus is on the environment and climate change, what I want to demonstrate is how this binary has made its way into a whole host of social and political spheres. Think of it as the ‘feminization of activism’ – that is, the multiplication of women’s responsibilities from a place of reverence which simply adds even more ‘shifts’ to women’s already demanding lives.

My variation of Johnson’s thesis, taking climate change as an example, goes like this: Women of the global South constitute an especially vulnerable social group. As such, they more likely to suffer the worst consequences of, for example, climate change. Some of the reasons in support for what has become somewhat of a truism can be found in the reports of organizations like the UN and a plethora of NGOs, as well as the pages (web and paper) of such varied news outlets as Vice News, The Guardian and The New York Times. They consist of what are often empirically dubious (see Johnsson on this) and generalizing assertions like: women are more likely to suffer from food insecurity and access to land (which is exacerbated during climate crises); resources like water, most often collected by women, becomes more difficult to procure; women are less likely to survive natural disasters since women tend to put the safety of others before themselves and often cannot swim; they are more susceptible to violence and abuse during periods of forced dislocated; and, finally, women are likely to face more physical challenges when trying to secure shelter for their families.
Johnsson critiques some of the shakiest assumption associated with these assertions including the lack of rigorous statistics, the lack of context, and basic oversimplification and overgeneralizations. She points out that in some cases of natural disasters that involve significant rates of flooding the mortality rates for men outnumber that of women since, as a group, they are more likely to take risks.

Now here is the kicker: at the same time that women are seen as at risk, Johnsson demonstrates how they are also framed as virtuous, as a direct result of their perceived vulnerability, and are fated, or anointed, to be the source of social change. It is at this point that women in the West are incorporated in the debate. Women as a group, it is argued, tend to be more responsive to perceived risk and thus more amenable to adopting behavioral change on a whole host of issues. For instance, they are oftentimes considered to be more environmentally conscious than men (some empirical evidence does bear this out). It is this specific generalization that I think gives epistemological heft to the ‘feminist issue’ phraseology. The logic goes like this: women, as an assemblage are vulnerable and hold less power. Ergo, they are also, as a group but more often as individuals, more likely to push for social justice and political transformation on the ground. Thus we, as a society, should turn to them to take this on.

To be clear, this is distinct, from calling something a gendered issue or ‘gender mainstreaming’ a subject. Analyzing something through a ‘gendered lens,’ as per the academic lingo – which refers to basically the same thing, implies, first, that the subject, structure, policy and/or institution at hand has effects on women that tend to be underrepresented, underreported, or entirely ignored. Second, it also maintains that the way to address what are often violently felt omissions is through structural socio-political, economic and cultural change instigated not just by women but through a kind of coalition politics that is inclusive and burden-sharing.

There is a much less burdening effect from this rhetorical frame – which is to say it calls for concerted action rather than placing the need for mobilization squarely on the shoulder’s of women. A great example of this from can be found in a piece for CityMetric in which Caroline Criado-Perez draws attention to [2] how city-planning decisions can be gendered. She shows how the lack of efficient snow clearing in Sweden, for example, tends to impact women differently since women are more likely to use non-vehicular modes of transportation (e.g. public transit, walking, biking) than men. Another example appears in Quartz’s coverage of the Zika virus in which it criticizes international (WHO) and governmental calls for women to avoid pregnancy and practice safe sex while ignoring both sexual power dynamics and lack of access to contraception – particularly among poor and racialized women.

This is in direct contrast to media examples that draw on the victim/virtue binary. The first, which I feel I have to start with, is on the subject of age and gender wage gap. A recent article in Bustle (“[3]The Gender Wage Gap Gets Worse At Age 32 For Most Women, Proving Once Again That Ageism Is A Feminist Issue”) ties the widely acknowledged phenomenon of entrenched wage discrimination to ageism noting that as women get older, due to systemic sexism, they are less likely to get promotions, thereby exacerbating wage disparities. After fulfilling the victimization portion of the victim/virtue binary (and yes, these are empirical facts), the piece closes with the following statement: “while we’re waiting for things to catch up, we still can — and should — advocate for ourselves. So basically, don’t stop asking for a promotion. You probably deserve one.” Here, women are seen as virtuous instigators of change on an individual level – just lean in!

Another case, from the UK’s arm of The Huffingtonpost (“[4]The Arm’s Trade is a Feminist Issue”), has to do with how to deal with the complicated nexus of arms, war, and women’s rights. In the piece, feminists are encouraged
to reclaim the discourse of women’s rights from governments who have used it to justify liberal interventionism in wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. They are also urged to mobilize against the export of arms by states, and the UK government in particular, to authoritarian regimes – particularly those whose commitment to women’s rights are lacking. To be clear, yes to all of this – yes to the critique of war in the name of women who do suffer irreparably in a myriad of ways, yes to the need to confront the legacy of irresponsible arms deals, and the yes to the requisite need to challenge war in all its forms. But to put this responsibility on women, as I have argued, perpetuates a wider tendency to use the language of empowerment to place the responsibility on women to rectify a state of affairs not of their doing.

The feminist call to arms against high heels in Salon’s post, “[5]High Heel’s are a Feminist Issue,” is a cheeky appeal to heel burning, an homage to bra burning, in response to a celebrity instigated social media backlash against the footwear. While the article is somewhat tongue and cheek, it also raises salient points – yet in a manner that is not always helpful. Specifically, women are constructed simultaneously as the victims of workplace policies that mandate ridiculous criteria around ‘appropriate’ heel size (2-4 inches), while also being the sole source of change (via stories about successful online petitions, court cases – filed individually) in abolishing these rules. While it is laudable that individual women have taken it upon themselves to organize petitions and engage in litigation, it must be said that more onus needs to be placed on a society wide engagement in eradicating the legal sexualization of women in the workplace and the attendant serious questioning of a culture that has taken this long to see it as a problem.

A final international example which does not draw on the ‘feminist issue’ phraseology directly but which I feel I had to include because of its textbook use of the virtue/vulnerability binary, can be seen in the way international conflict and negotiation is framed. In a recent piece for the Council on Foreign Relations titled “[6]Women Around the World,” a case is made that including women in conflict prevention and peace building initiatives are substantially more likely to succeed over a timeframe of at least 15 years. The most notable example given is with respect to violent extremism. It is argued, in a manner completely consistent virtue/vulnerable binary, that women can play a significant role in countering terrorism and terrorist action: “[7]Research finds that women frequently the first targets of fundamentalism, are often the first to stand up against it” by de-escalating tensions, reporting violence, and working to foster socio-political stability. It is also notable that the article states that this would go a long way towards “reducing overall U.S. spending abroad.” Interests indeed. A similar argument was made a few years back in a Huffingtonpost article whose title; “[8]Can Mother’s Stop Terrorism?” says it all. Spoiler, yes they can.

Let me be SUPER clear, my problem with this framing is not that it is inaccurate; women have the capacity to be active agents in all of these areas – particularly in circumstances where they are marginalized and systemically discriminated against. Nor is it a call for women to remain passive in the face of such discrimination. My issue is with a discourse that builds on a foundational construct of women as either (or both) victim and virtuous agents in manner that adds even more responsibility on individual women to change the very prejudiced practices, laws, behaviors and social norms that gave rise to such unfair conditions in the first place. Reframing the discourse as CityMetric and Quartz have done, is one way this can be challenged, while another, of which I am a fan, is by intentionally redistributing responsibility for social change to agents involved in these structures as a generalized social practice. A weighty burden to be carried by all...since these are much more than just ‘feminist issues.’

Tina Sikka is a lecturer in Communication at Fraser International College at Simon Fraser University. She tweets at @[9]tsikka

1. https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwiPs6j37vDOAhUILcAKKawNDtoQFgg
Academics as bullshit detectors (2016-09-21 08:00)

I love this idea from the introduction to Mark Blyth’s book [1]Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea:

Part of what academics do is generate ideas and teach. The other, perhaps more important part, is to play the role of “the Bullshit Police.” Our job is to look at the ideas and plans interested parties put forward to solve our collective problems and see whether or not they pass the sniff test. Austerity as a route to growth and as the correct response to the aftermath of a financial crisis does not pass the sniff test. The arguments given for why we all must be austere do not pass the sniff test.

If you’re unfamiliar with his work, check out this YouTube video on austerity and consider buying his superb book:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go2bVGi0ReE


Doug Hartmann (2016-09-21 18:59:09)

While it is far from the only role we fulfill, that line and characterization of academics is a fun and fairly accurate one. I did a post on The Society Pages a while back that seems related, calling sociologists the “super egos of society:"

https://thesocietypages.org/editors/2013/10/24/sketch-6-societys-super-egos/
A distinction I find rather tenuous, invoked by Ray Brassier in [1]his attack on the self-importance of the speculative realist blogging community:

What is peculiar to them is the claim that this is the first philosophy movement to have been generated and facilitated by the internet: a presumption rooted in the inability to distinguish philosophy from talk about philosophy. The vices so characteristic of their discourse can be traced back directly to the debilities of the medium. Blogging is essentially a journalistic medium, but philosophy is not journalism. Exchanging opinions about philosophy, or even exchanging philosophical opinions, ought not to be equated with philosophical debate. This is not to say that one cannot produce and disseminate valuable philosophical research online. But the most pernicious aspect of this SR/OOO syndrome is its attempt to pass off opining as argument and to substitute self-aggrandizement for actual philosophical achievement.


Given he accepts one can “produce and disseminate valuable philosophical research online”, it’s hard not to wonder about the criteria for distinguishing between philosophy and talk about philosophy. This seemingly narrow debate is one we can expect to see much more of, in other disciplines and in relation to other topics, as social media becomes increasingly mainstream within academic life.


Steve Fuller (2016-09-22 08:16:09)
You’re right about this. In fact, Brassier seems to have a rather inflated conception of philosophical argumentation – and how and where it occurs. The book which first got Ernest Gellner public notoriety – Words and Things – was an expose on how much of analytic philosophy was simply trumped up transcripts of Oxbridge common room chatter. Yet often this ‘chatter’ is taken to be the gold standard of philosophical argument. To be sure, there is interesting work to be done looking at the media environment in which philosophical arguments are made and developed. And here one would include not only the internet and the common room, but also the pub, the coffeehouse, the bistro, etc.
A wonderful archives of videos produced by the American Sociological Association (2016-09-23 08:00)

Thanks to [1]Carol Leach for flagging up this wonderful archive of videos produced by the American Sociological Association: http://videoarchive.asanet.org/

1. https://twitter.com/leachcarol

The Individualisation of Utopia (2016-09-24 08:00)

From Riots and Political Protest, by Simon Winlow, Steve Hall, Daniel Briggs and James Treadwell, pg 42:

Utopianism did not disappear, but it came to address the libidinal dreams of the individual rather than the political dreams of the collective. Utopia was an individual space in which we were free from the encroachments of authority, free to enjoy as much as possible the short time each individual has on Earth. Life ain’t a rehearsal. It’s a short burst of total self-determination in which we can indulge in pleasurable pursuits and choose only those social obligations that suit us. And the beauty of all this was that one didn’t need to overcome capitalism to get there.

I like this idea a lot, ever since I first encountered it in a fascinating ethnography of weight-lifting which talks about ‘utopic body projects’.

What interests me at the moment is how this utopic horizon can recede without vanishing. Subjects can overload themselves with demands, orientated towards a utopic horizon, but doing so in a way which leaves them
spending large tracts of their lived life triaging, attending to immediate demands as temporal horizons contract. What happens to utopia under these circumstances?

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‘Conference Business’ as Usual? Open Letter to European Sociological Association (2016-09-25 08:00)

We’re a bit late posting this, but those concerned with the future of the European Sociological Association should definitely [1]read this open letter and engage with the accompanying website:

As participants of the 12th Conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA), we were disappointed by the discrepancy between the main topic and the actual event. The ESA conference is an important academic meeting that influences European sociology and consequently we feel that it is important to open discussion about its purpose, format, and desirable impacts, issues that seem to have not been questioned in recent debate.

We are well aware that the ESA conference is embedded in the much larger structures of the academic world of which it represents just one small part. Despite this, we believe it is important not to be cynical and accept the view that when things are done in a certain way they cannot be changed. Some scholars are uncomfortable with mass events like the ESA conference, for reasons that we shall outline below. They react by avoiding them, but that will only serve to deepen cleavages within European sociology. We have therefore decided not to remain silent. We hope that the comments and proposals we present in this letter can help make the ESA conferences better and more consistent with the issues they address.


1. https://conferencebusiness.wordpress.com/letter-to-esa/
2. https://conferencebusiness.wordpress.com/letter-to-esa/

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CfP: Social Media and Social Futures – a special issue of @DiscoverSoc (2016-09-25 15:28)

Co-edited by Mark Carrigan and William Housley

Social media is conventionally located within a commercial narrative that theorises an array of emerging ‘disruptive technologies’ that includes big data, additive manufacture and robotics. These and related technologies are underpinned by computational developments that are networked, distributed, digital and data driven. It has been argued that these technologies not only disrupt markets; but also wider social and economic relations and organization. These include social institutions such as the family, work, health care delivery, education, relationships
and the ‘self’. But how do we separate the hype from the reality while nonetheless recognising how powerful this rhetoric is on a purely discursive level? What social futures are potentially shaped by social media and how can we talk about them in a way that emphasises our capacity to shape them collectively?

Social media is one of the first waves of digital disruptive technologies whose mass global take-up via multiple platforms is still being assessed and understood, as a social force in its own right. Standardly, ‘social media as data’ has provided a plethora of studies and projects that have examined the big and broad social data opportunities provided by the social media for understanding populations on the move ‘in real time’. In some cases this has led certain commentators to enthusiastically claim that the analysis of social media as data offers opportunities for prediction and the forecasting of behavior at the population level although this rhetoric is not without it’s skeptics and critics. Is this a plausible vision of the future? Is it a desirable one? Can we see a longstanding impulse towards addressing social problems finally having the necessary techniques and capacities to achieve its potential? Or are we witnessing a potentially authoritarian turn in which social engineering can operate with an unprecedented degree of granularity?

Furthermore, these methodological opportunities and oracular imaginaries are being accompanied by an ‘ontological velocity’ generated by the social and economic implications of social media as data, practice and a globalizing networked communicative force that is shaping being and becoming in the digital age. A key issue here is the relationship between social media, society, time and the ‘future making’ capacities and affordances of these and allied technologies. Yet little work has been carried out on the temporal ramifications of social media (and other disruptive technologies) in relation to emerging digital ‘timescapes’. To this extent the study of the relationship between social media and society remains under-conceptualized especially in relation to our understanding of late modernity at the beginning of the 21st century. The relationship between social media and the social generation of risk, it’s contributions to new digital timescapes and the trajectory of the self and identity alongside empirical concerns is sociological work in waiting. How does social media complicate or perhaps confirm existing theories of social change? Or is such epochal thinking itself a problem, ripe to be deployed by social media corporations apt at marketing their own ‘disruptive’ capacity? For this special issue of Discover Society we welcome short articles (1500 words) that relate to the above and the following topics:

- Social Media, Timescapes and Futures
- Social Media, Prediction and Critical Data Imaginaries
- Visioneering, 'Futures' and Social Media
- Tracing Emerging Technologies in the Digital Agora
- The Future of Social Networks: Social Organization, Data and Engineering
- Computational Politics and the challenges facing Democracy
- Social Media and the Transformation of Everyday Life
- Digital Afterlives? Social Media, Time, Traces and Accountability
- Digital Social Science and Social Futures

Please see the Discover Society website for more details about [1]formatting requirements. Articles should be accessible for a general audience, as well as accompanied by a suitable royalty-free image for publication and suggested tweets for @DiscoverSoc. Timeline for contributions: September 30th: Confirmed intention to submit with title & brief description November 20th: Delivery of final article, with image and tweets December 20th: Return of any requested edits and revisions January 4th: Publication of the special issue Contact details: Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net) and William Housley (housleyw@cardiff.ac.uk)
On a recent [1]Any Answers, there was a call so fascinatingly stupid that I’ve been intermittently thinking back to it for the last few days. In a discussion about the possible reintroduction of grammar schools, a couple who had been to grammar schools but were ‘forced’ to send their children to a comprehensive, explained how there was "no comparison" because the grammar school will be filled with pupils who are “bright and motivated” and come from “homes with very supportive parents who want them to be there”. In comprehensives there are “far more disruptions” and the “very brightest pupils have to lower their standards”. She went on to explain that her daughters both succeeded immensely at A Levels and university “simply because we could afford to give them private tuition” which wouldn’t have happened if they’d been sent to a grammar school. This understanding of the trajectory of her daughters reflected a broader social outlook:

I truly believe that we will never all be equal. Some of us are born beautiful, some of us intelligent, some us not quite as wealthy as others and some from supportive homes. We’re all genetically geared to have different hopes and aspirations. Not everyone wants to go to university. I really think that if a child wants to go and work in a shop, or wants to do marketing, we should teach them a decent work ethic and not tell that they’re second class because they didn’t get into a grammar school.

The presenter raises the possibility that grammar schools intensify inequality because it’s the already privileged who are most likely to gain access to them. But the caller says that the solution is to build more grammar schools so that “the children who are not quite at the top of the tree” get an opportunity.

A later caller offers a spirited defence of grammar schools, explaining how her own experience of grammar schools improved her life: she was able to get any job at work she wanted with just an interview because they could tell she was able & when her husband died, she was able to cope with everything she faced when taking over his business. She then explains how “the legacy went on to my children”, “one went to university and the other could do anything he wanted if he set his mind to it”, and her grandchildren are now “well placed to take advantage of this legacy”. Her experience sounds like an interesting example of Margaret Archer’s (contentious) point that social structures don’t constrain until you formulate a project that runs up against them. There are presumably many jobs this caller wouldn’t have got without an interview, or even with one, but these constraints aren’t experienced and they fade from view for her.

What fascinates me about this is how ‘intelligence’ serves as an umbrella under which a vast array of social, cultural and personal factors are subsumed: aptitude for academic work, supportive parents, stable homes, engagement with institutions, good behaviour at school. The complexity of the social world gets built into the designator ‘intelligent’ in a way that renders it opaque: the concept of ‘intelligence’ stitches together an otherwise untenable individualism. Yet both callers recognise the possibility of inherited privilege and yet this doesn’t undermine their determinedly reductive view of intelligence.

Interestingly, I have come across the same sort of conversations in a few recent Radio 4 discussions of grammar schools in which I noticed a focus on the concept of intelligence in a similarly reductive and woolly manner. Also interestingly, these discussions tacitly linked “intelligence” with “progress”. I think that Radio 4 should take to task these assumptions. Furthermore, when people discuss education and they start talking about vocational pathways and academic routes, despite their best intentions, they end up reinforcing prevalent, reductive ideas about education. Such conversations end up framing education as something that equips people with the bare minimum of knowledge with which to get employed, whether as a “professional” (aren’t we all professionals?) or otherwise. It’s quite depressing.

**Ethnography as being-in-the-world rather than method (2016-09-27 08:00)**

A fascinating discussion by Matthew Desmond in the conclusion of his wonderful book [1]Evicted:

There’s this idea that ethnography is a “method.” When we see it this way, we tend to ask methodological questions about it. How do I get my project approved by the IRB? When should I write field notes? I tend to think of ethnography as a sensibility, a “way of seeing” as the anthropologist Harry Wolcott once put it. This means that ethnography isn’t something we go and do. It’s a fundamental way of being in the world. If we think of ethnography this way, then we begin to ask different questions. How can I get strangers to talk with me? How can I become more observant? If we approach ethnography as a sensibility, then we can begin cultivating a set of skills or disciplines long before we actually enter the field. It is possible to transform yourself into an ethnographer—day in, day out—so that when the time comes for you to set foot in the field, you already are one. (It also helps to get rid of your smartphone.)

As he goes on to write later in the conclusion:

To me, ethnography is what you do when you try to understand people by allowing their lives to mold your own as fully and genuinely as possible. You do this by building rapport with the people you want to know better and following them over a long stretch of time, observing and experiencing what they do, working and playing alongside them, and recording as much action and interaction as you can until you begin to move like they move, talk like they talk, think like they think, and feel something like they feel. In this line of work, living “in the field” helps quite a lot. It’s the only way to have an immersive experience; and practically speaking, you never know when important things are going to happen. Renting a trailer allowed me to meet dozens of people, pick up on rumors, absorb tenants’ concerns and perspectives, and observe everyday life all hours of the day.

Ethnography and science fiction I – notes (2016-10-02 16:11:11)

[...] Desmond, the author of Evicted, talks in his conclusion about ethnography as 'a sensibility, a “way of seeing” ... a fundamental way of [...]

Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: Geography and the Map (2016-09-28 08:00)

by Hamish Robertson

Introduction

The map and hence geographic thinking and cartographic skill are as old as human civilisation. It has been suggested that [1] spatial cognition may even preceed the emergence of both numeracy and literacy. Navigating the world in which we live has been underway at least since humans began their journeys out of Africa. The earliest known maps range from those produced in Babylon to those of China's Qin Dynasty, in a conceptual, artistic and practical device that is almost universal. Map making and navigational skills took the ancient [2] Polynesians from the coasts of what is now Taiwan southwards and eastwards to the eastern edges of the Pacific Ocean and as far [3] south as anyone had been until European explorers arrived. We can even understand spatial thinking (including cartography and astronomy) as a human evolutionary advantage, suggested by Keith Clarke, foundational to our current place in the world.

Geographic perception, theorising, information accumulation and practical application have clearly developed over the millennia, with a primary instrument of such understanding being the map. Maps have their own history, a huge topic, which I will only briefly mention here but for which a variety of detailed [4] free resources exist. The focus here is on the centrality of geographic knowledge to our understanding and interpretation of the world, and the influence our spatial epistemologies, ontologies, methods and instruments have on that understanding. Maps and mapping imply not only an abstract conceptualisation of the 'world' which we cannot understand by other means but also a basis for the measurement and quantification of that world.

Latitude, Longitude and Projections

To know where we are on the planet requires a level of abstraction supported by mathematics and geometry in particular. While we have known for centuries that the world is not flat, it is also not entirely round either being a [5] lumpy mass with water filling in the remaining space (to put it very briefly). Crossing its seas and oceans has always been highly risky so much so that forms of maritime insurance were developed as early as the classical Greek and Roman periods, with fully developed schemes developed in the Renaissance Italian sea-faring states of Genoa and Venice. Travel, transport and the concept of risk have probably been linked since the very earliest times.

Latitude and longitude were theorised long before they could be accurately measured but this also indicates that the idea of a spatial logic emerged very early too. The conceptual and representational limitations of the two-dimensional map become especially apparent in the issue of projection. The earth is 3-dimensional in reality and flattening this onto a piece of paper distorts that shape and its proportions enormously. Historically the Mercator projection has dominated mapping while the more recent Peters projection is technically more accurate if far less familiar. There is
a now famous segment on the television series [6]West Wing that connects these issues of physical representation to our politics and cultural assumptions in a very concise manner. Consequently, we can the map and geographic understanding as possessing both scientific, as we now understand it, and profoundly cultural underpinnings. To know space is to possess a certain kind of power than can be converted in political and social authority.

Cartography and Modernity

If the imperial state dominated the 18th century, the 19th century was characterised by the emergence of nation states in a variety of forms and through a variety of means. More particularly, the demand for, and suppression of, cultural and linguistic self-determination became a refrain across the whole of that century and on into the next. One of the ways of understanding the scope of the nation state was to map it, a process that had emerged from the earlier sovereign's desire to know the extent of their dominion and the people or people's contained within. The discipline of geography developed rapidly in response to this demand for knowledge of the nation, the land and its peoples. Cartography became the applied science that supported both imperial imaginings and nationalist fantasies alike. To draw the map was, at least in miniature, to be able to conceptualise and contain the nation.

The European nation, it has been argued, was often engineered into existence, a process that we see repeated down to the present day. Large scale engineering projects, especially roads and canals, not only connected the centre to the periphery but gradually acted to formalise and aggregate older, looser systems of identification, containment, administration and governance. [7]Mukerji has described how the emergent French state was shaped by early canal-building efforts including the Canal du Midi, while [8]Alder showed how the French Revolution saw a huge effort at standardisation and uniformity in manufacturing, administration, measurement systems and elsewhere. Carroll's work on the [9]colonisation of Ireland has shown a variety of discourses emerged in these environments which proved both highly flexible, and portable, under both nationalistic and imperial frameworks.

In the United Kingdom roads were driven into the previously rebellious Highlands and the growing discourse of [10]improvements justified not only colonial Ireland but much of the British Empire. Mythologies of progress rapidly took shape which persist down to the present day in justifying almost anything that suits dominant interests - with ethnic [11]primitives set against rational modernists. The architecture of the modern state increasingly relied on knowing about the extent of its territories, its physical characteristics and its inhabitants. No surprise then that the first comprehensive statistical survey in the United Kingdom were Sinclair's Statistical Accounts of Scotland first published in the 1790's and modelled on the German concept of statistics as state-istics, that is the counting and calculation of the population as the foundational basis of the modern state.

Quantifying the Physical World

The Victorian era saw a huge expansion in the type and quantity of geographical knowledge being produced. Navigation was increasingly accurate but travel itself was still highly risky and mapping systems emerged to capture and measure data about navigational processes, tides and weather patterns (rainfall, air pressure etc.) in support of
safer maritime navigation. A result of this was a growing quantification of the physical world including not only the production of thousands of maps and the measurements it took to produce them, but also maps at different orders of magnitude or scale.

The use of latitude and longitude coordinates are themselves navigational devices using quantification – the traditional degrees, minutes and seconds approach. Also the accumulation of log books by navigators for military and civilian purposes meant that processes of data accumulation were engaged in with naval log books usually submitted to authorities on a ship's return. Much of this was secret information in the early days of European exploration and colonisation because good data was so scarce but gradually it became part of an increasingly shared knowledge system. Filling in the remaining gaps became, for the most part, more important than holding on to strategic data when such information had been incredibly limited in supply.

In India the British began the Great Trigonometric Survey in 1802, finally completing it in 1871. Exceptions to this growing openness remained including during the Great Game of the 19th century during which British agents, the pundits, secretly helped map Tibet which was largely closed to outsiders. The most famous of these was Nain Singh Rawat who not only learned the Tibetan language and customs to facilitate his mission but was eventually honoured by the Royal Geographical Society. The Society, founded in 1830, was not simply a gathering of armchair geographers but an active promotor of (1) specific expeditions to new locations about which little was known and (2) technical developments that supported the production of improved geographic knowledge. In effect, geography was a discipline heavily engaged in what we know consider geopolitics. Even today the politics and mapping of borders and boundaries are alive and well, and deeply integral to many of the major conflicts of our time.

**Geographical Knowledge and Modernity**

In both empires and emerging nation states, concerns with travel and infrastructural development also meant that transport systems started to develop rapidly for civil and military purposes, often serving both purposes in periods of insurrection. Knowing how far away one town (and also what defined a village, town, city etc.) was located from another grew more important as clock time became the norm and economic systems expanded internally and externally. We can see how speed became both a necessary concept and a driving factor in the 'conquest' of distance which persists even today when we hear business pundits talk about the 'elimination' of distance by technology. From roads to canals and on to steam ships, railways, bicycles, motorcycles, cars and so on – the search for and measurement of accuracy and exactitude became integral in the development of Victorian and now modern logistics and infrastructure. There were supported by additional technologies such as telegraph, facsimile and telephone – all emerging information technologies designed to speed up communication processes. All of these technologies involved a rising tide of calculation and quantification.

Postal systems, for example, relied on the safe, consistent and confidential delivery of the mail and on locational accuracy for its delivery. Mapping towns and cities with the location of public and private buildings became even more important. From traditional medieval towns and cities we see a logic of urbanism emerging in the 19th century with planned cities and suburbs in association with theories of health, safety and a rational basis for modernity. Form became closely wedded to function and knowing where buildings, sewers, roads, footpaths and
public spaces became important mappable information. This conception of the city as space can still be seen to conflict with more social, organic conceptions of the city as place in yet another geographical discourse.

Where and when became intimately connected and this was achieved through measurement and quantification. As quantification fed this emerging knowledge system new variables could be added by definitional agreements and then processes of data collection. Agreement amongst parties could support such processes and did, eventually, in cases such as the Greenwich meridian mentioned above. But other systems such as tidal or weather data became increasingly useful in expanding the ‘systemic’ knowledge base as geographic and related information sciences developed.

**From Analogue to Digital**

The struggle to translate growing volumes of analogue data to a digital format began quite early in the piece including the Jacquard loom, the Babbage machine and a variety of pioneering and precursor efforts in what we now call information science. The logic was clear in that growing data types, data measures and data quantities required new methods for their collection, management, analysis and storage. The earliest computers were individuals trained to calculate and tabulate census results and similar large-system data. As this system expanded with typewriters and calculating machines, that labour process was gradually deskilled and [feminised](http://www.npr.org/2014/01/09/260918293/there-she-blew-volcanic-evidence-of-the-worlds-first-map) in a pattern familiar for decades to come (the male secretary became a female one, the person was replaced by a machine and so on). Despite the recognition of the scope of the problem, its full resolution proved difficult and took a long developmental curve through the likes of mechanical calculators, tide-measuring machines and IBM’s tabulation technology. Electrification and World War Two finally connected the previous steps towards what we understand today as the fully digital data environment. Today the map is increasingly digital, including geographic information systems, and the concept of ‘data visualisation’ more generally is spatial in nature.

**Conclusion**

Spatial conceptualisations are central to the human experience. They are so deeply internalised that we frequently take space and our relations with it completely for granted. We can see this in the way that spatial technologies become incorporated into everyday life without many people even considering how these technologies emerged or their complex and contested histories. Where we now have digital maps integrated into an expanding range of technologies, the possibility of these features of modernity emerged in a previous period, one in which the paper map reigned. The map was not only an epistemic device for reducing and understanding the complexity of the world but produced its own distinct ontologies. The political and modernist ideologies that maps increasingly served relied on data production, collection, analysis and storage. Knowing the world gradually segued from an experiential phenomenon to an abstract, quantified and scientific one (map scales for example). Not only the map itself but the geographic knowledge production processes it supported emerged as an engine of knowledge in their own right.

[13]Hamish Robertson is a geographer at the University of New South Wales with experience in healthcare including a decade in ageing research. He has worked in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors and he has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from ageing, diversity, health informatics, Aboriginal health, patient safety and spatial science to cultural heritage research. Hamish is currently completing his PhD on the geography of Alzheimer’s disease and recently finished editing a book on museums and older people.

NCRM Lectures on Big Data (2016-09-29 08:00)

Part of a much wider series of lecture videos they’ve posted on [1]their YouTube page:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TwkQmYE8MGU

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dp5PZZOTWtw

1. [https://www.youtube.com/user/NCRMUK/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/NCRMUK/videos)


Sufis, Salafis and Islamists: The Contested Ground of British Islamic Activism by Sadek Hamid (2016)

reviewed by Tamim Sadikali
What attracts young Muslims to this type of ephemeral but ferocious activism? One does not have to subscribe to determinist social theories to realise the importance of the almost universal condition of insecurity, which Muslim societies are now experiencing. The Islamic world is passing through a most devastating period of transition. A history of economic and scientific change, which in Europe took five hundred years, is, in the Muslim world, being squeezed into a couple of generations [. . .] Such a transition period, with its centrifugal forces, which allow nothing to remain constant, makes human beings very insecure. They look around for something to hold onto, that will give them an identity. In our case, that something is usually Islam. And because they are being propelled into it with this psychic sense of insecurity, rather than by more normal processes of conversion and faith, they lack some of the natural religious virtues, which are acquired by contact with continuous tradition, and can never be learnt from a book.

Question to the floor – what is a Wahabi? What’s a Salafi? Can an Islamic activist ever be in sync with ‘British values’, or is the idea mere sophistry - camouflage for a wannabe Jihadi? For many, there is no need to unpick warp and weft of the Muslamic landscape – it’s a uniform and featureless desert. And therein lies the rub, because as Sadek Hamid shows us in Sufis, Salafis and Islamists, the major trends in British Islam since the 1990s have all been reactions to the inclement environ in which Muslim youth have found themselves. Alienated from their parents’ culture and unable to find sure footing within a secular milieu, a cornucopia of organic, grassroots movements took form, all self-styled
with cultivating a counter-culture for British Muslim youth. And the body of Hamid’s work is given to analysing four such Islamic trends in Britain: The Young Muslims UK, Hizb ut-Tahrir, Salafism and neo-Sufiism.

Despite personal history as an ex-activist, Hamid’s scholarly approach holds a close but dispassionate lens up to each movement’s trajectory: from their inception and sources of inspiration, drivers, growth, internal and external conflicts, and ultimate transition or demise. For anyone genuinely interested in this field, the insider view which Hamid offers – a result of personal knowledge, painstaking research and scores of interviews with key past and present players - is without doubt a fascinating and robust account. But crucially, the cool, almost detached nature of Hamid’s analysis draws the heat out of the subject matter, allowing the reader to engage with greater objectively. And this last aspect carries a surprising payload – for the detachment afforded via Hamid's academic lens makes these contestations between Islamic trends seem less other-worldly and more mundane; indeed, remarkably similar to the familiar battleground of secular, democratic politics. It strips the esoteric of its mystery, making it seem rather everyday – wherein what are essentially different parties refer to common political totems, and vie for the attention of an increasingly whimsical constituency.

When it comes to British Islamic politics, like in British politics more generally, the tail is most definitely wagging the dog, as Hamid shows us via the changing mission statements of the Young Muslims UK from 1993 to the present day:

The Young Muslims UK, (like its parent movement, The Islamic Society of Britain) is a limb of the global Islamic Movement, sharing its understanding with all the major world-wide movements. Our situation here in Britain reflects the domination of ignorance and the absence of Islam [. . .] Unfortunately for the people of this country, batil (falsehood) reigns. And one of its manifestations is the prevalence of shirk (associating partners with Allah) – the greatest injustice of all. It is our responsibility that Islam should be introduced to the people of this country not as ‘the religion of the Saracens’ nor as ‘the next threat to the West’ but rather as the cure to its many diseases.

YM UK was set up in 1984 to provide a vehicle for committed young British Muslims to combine their knowledge, skills and efforts for the benefit of one another and British society as a whole. We bring together the youth, men and women from all social and ethnic backgrounds, and different schools of thought, for the benefit of all. As such, our membership largely reflects the diversity of the British Muslim landscape. We welcome all Muslims and non-Muslims, helping them understand Islam and live by its teachings and principles. We strongly believe that working for Islam is not just about campaigning for Muslim rights, but also about sharing Islam’s view on God, life and society. We do so as an organised and dedicated group, engaging in sincere and constructive dialogue.

As Hamid correctly explains, understanding the history of British Muslim activism is a vital precursor to engaging with their present and future. And in Sufis, Salafis and Islamists, that recent past is succinctly unpacked, before projections into possible futures are considered. And for such highly-charged subject matter, it’s the perfect sober,
Against the notion of ‘craft’: thoughts on the cultural politics of romanticising exploitation (2016-09-30 08:00)

On pg 106 of their *Rethinking Social Exclusion: The End of the Social?* Simon Winlow and Steve Hall describe the changing realities of work, as more and more jobs become "non-unionised, low paid, short-term, insecure and part time":

> We should also note that few of these jobs enable workers to construct and maintain an image of themselves as socially valuable (Winlow and Hall, 2006, 2009a; Southwood, 2011; Lloyd, 2012); in fact, many of these McJobs (Ritzer, 1997) communicate the exact opposite: the low-level, low-paid service worker is seen as disreputable, exploitable and untrustworthy, the homo sacer of the post-political order, waiting tables, flipping burgers and sweeping rubbish. These are fundamentally insecure and alienating jobs. The people who have these jobs do not want to retain them beyond the obvious and pressing need to earn enough money to pay for their immediate living expenses (Winlow and Hall, 2009a). Most of the positive symbolism associated with traditional work has already been stripped away. They do not cling to and seek to defend an image of themselves as fast food workers, call centre operatives, cleaners, supermarket shelf stackers or factory box-packers.

This is the context in which I’m interested in contemporary discourses of ‘craft’. As anyone who’s followed my work will probably have noticed, I’m drawn to these ideas because they seem to promise a bulwark against alienation. For instance in higher education, I’ve long seen the idea of ‘craft’ as a way of experientially reclaiming the pleasures of scholarship in an institutional context which increasingly hinders, if not outright obliterates, such internal goods.

But are these residual pleasures mere consolation prizes against a background of exploitative precarity and communal diminishment? Increasingly, I wonder if they are but the theoretical challenge as I see it lies in recognising the reality of these internal goods while nonetheless being critical of their cultural deployment in the creation of a new ethos of work.

Can we see the notion of ‘craft’ as something that is developing alongside, indeed implicated in, the stripping away of traditional bases of working identity? On the one hand, for example the elaboration of the role of barista into that of cultural producer able to meaningfully express oneself through latte art (etc), goes hand-in-hand with the normalisation of part-time labour and zero hours contracts in the hospitality sector. On the other hand, craft micro-production and the opportunities for micro-enterprise are being embraced alongside the decline of secure employment, the growth of underemployment and the still expanding phenomenon of forced freelancing.
To explain away the real pleasures people take in these ‘crafts’ is problematic. But we need to avoid a dichotomy in which we take their accounts of craft pleasure at face value or we reject them in the name of being ‘critical’. What interests me is how the discourse of ‘craft’ increasingly organises the pleasures and dissatisfactions of contemporary labour, giving cultural form to “I am” statements about one’s working life in a context where structural trends had made such statements less tenable in precisely the way Winlow and Hall suggest.

The notion of ‘craft’ also finds itself employed as part of a macro-economic narrative in which the harms of structural unemployment, particularly that led by technology into the previously secure professions which are themselves subject to longer-term trends toward depersonalisation, can be offset by the imperative towards craft production. There’s a kernel of truth here but only a kernel. The idea that mass unemployment can be offset by the expanding ranks of Etsy craft sellers is obviously absurd. But it’s another vector through which ‘craft’ can be used to effectively romanticise exploitation and abjection.

So on level, I increasingly find myself opposed to the notion of ‘craft’, despite this being an idea which I’ve gone on about for years to anyone who’ll listen to me. On another level, I’m still drawn to it as a way to organise my own experience, something which I think is ripe for informal autoethnography. There’s also a critical potential in the notion of ‘craft’ which I think shouldn’t be lost and that’s why we need to avoid dispensing with it entirely. What I mean here is captured incredibly forcefully by Akala after his freestyle in this video: ‘the craft’ is something which transcends marketing and commerce, something basically irreducible in any arena of human activity and a site upon which excellence can be achieved:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/J8umCijRdnQ?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&start=642&wmode=transparent

This is an expression I heard on a radio call in show i.e. “I am an X”. I wish I could remember which one because I’d love to cite this properly.

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/J8umCijRdnQ?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&start=642&wmode=transparent
To me, craft means having an intuitive sense, developed through experience, of how to do something well, and taking pride in it. I think that’s entirely compatible with engaging in struggles for job security, good wages, professsionalisation, and control of the means of production. Indeed it could help motivate such engagement, because it offers a conception of work that’s intrinsically worth doing and therefore worth fighting for, work that’s satisfying partly because it involves a degree of autonomy, and therefore requires control over the means of production.

7.10 October

Donna Haraway: "From Cyborgs to Companion Species" (2016-10-01 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q9gis7-Jads

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Graphic ethnography (2016-10-02 08:00)

This is not news, but I found it recently, while playing around with some watercolours in my office, and thought it was exciting that someone had thought of it before me. Graphic ethnography!

http://www.utpteachingculture.com/announcing-ethnographic-a-new-series/

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Please sign the petition against union busting at Coventry (2016-10-03 08:00)

Help support the University and College Union in this important campaign:

Please can everyone sign and circulate throughout their branches this petition against the shameful actions of CU Services Ltd, Coventry University’s subsidiary company.


A Mini-conference on Elites

Studying Up in the 21st Century: Issues & Methods

2017 ESS Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, February 23-26

We live in a world of increasing inequality, in which political, economic, and social elites in the richer parts of the world command more wealth and power that at any other time in the post-World War II era. As elites come to dominate society in new ways, with new means of control, it is imperative that social scientists reconsider old methodologies and categories of distinction. In this mini-conference, we seek a variety of papers that challenge us to rethink how we study elites. The mini-conference will feature three panels (12 papers total), including, but not limited to, the following sets of questions and themes:

Class:

· How do classes reproduce themselves in an age of rapid technological transformation?

· Have recent changes at the global level improved the well-being of those in poorer countries?

· Who are the elites outside the rich world?

· What role do education and notions of meritocracy play in the making of new elites?

· What causes inequality today and how can it be addressed?

· What are the political orientations of new elites?

Race:

· How are racial differences conceptualized, in light of the disparity between white and non-white or light-skinned and dark-skinned individuals among political, economic, and social elites?

· How do elites mobilize racial categories, as a way to sustain existing boundaries?

· Does race carry different relevance or meaning for elites in developing and developed worlds?

· How do legacies of colonialism inform an understanding of race in affected countries or regions?

Gender:
· How do elites "do" gender, as compared to others in working or middle class milieus?

· What are the many layers of gender privilege that appear among elites?

· How is gender mobilized to secure resources and minimize competition?

· What are the different and competing feminisms on display among elites?

· How do women acquire and use power to distinguish themselves?

· What solidarity do elites perceive between themselves and others of shared genders of non-elites?

Research methods:

· How do researchers overcome challenges of access, and what challenges remain if they gain it?

· How do researchers navigate the material and cultural differences between them and informants?

· How do researchers work within competing social networks that invariably form among elites?

· How does proficiency in different languages impede understanding, and even access?

· How do researchers overcome challenges like insider tales and jokes?

We welcome papers that address these themes, specifically, in addition to papers that take up other important topics that challenge us to think deeply about elites in the modern era. Please direct all inquiries to either Hugo Ceron Anaya (hrc209@lehigh.edu) or Patrick Inglis (inglispa@grinnell.edu). Authors must submit their proposals through the ESS online abstract submission system. The deadline is October 15, 2016. In the "Submission Details" window, select “Paper” for “Type of Submission,” and select "miniconference: elites" for "Select the topic area that best describes your submission." Be sure to include a paper title along with your abstract of 250 words or less, your name as it should appear in the ESS program, institutional affiliation, and contact information.

The strange new death of neoliberalism? (2016-10-04 10:00)

Is neoliberalism dying?

Neoliberalism has been a much debated topic in sociology and other disciplines in recent years. It has been applied to a wide array of topics with claims of neo-liberalisation of [1]education, [2]healthcare and [3]young academics.

There is a growing sense, however, that neo-liberalism may be coming to an end. If not yet in practice then at least perhaps in its forebear, political rhetoric. Both of the UK’s major political parties seem to advocating a stronger state. [4]Theresa May presenting a vision of stronger state security and investment and [5]Labour’s shadow
chancellor John McDonnell offering a new "entrepreneurial state" built on intervention and investment with an end to that footsoldier of neo-liberalism, austerity.

The vote to leave the European Union and (at least the perception of) a desire by some sectors of the British public for stronger border controls, less market integration and greater isolation seems to legitimize this new stronger state.

Of course we should be cautious of any grand claims to the death of an economic philosophy which has [6]proved highly resilient in the past.

[7]Jason Cowley writing in the *New Statesman*, in conversation with Martin Jacques, suggests this return of the state is due to the inequalities wrought by globalisation. Donald Trump and Nigel Farage have both played on the insecurity and sense of being "left behind" felt by many people in areas of USA and UK which have seen declines in living standards since their industrial heydays.

Increased fear of terrorist activity in the last two decades has also contributed to an increased appetite for, or acceptance of, stronger state security (or state surveillance and repression).

Neoliberalism was never simply an economic project but was (at least for a time) [8]associated with a more general liberal freedom. However, outside of western Europe, USA, Australia and a few other places this failed pretty quickly. [9]Russia returned to autocratic style leaders, repression of marginalised groups, propaganda and warmongering. Although China embraced a marketisation of some kind it has always been a sort of [10]state capitalism with the retention of strong state controls over economic planning, media, etc.

I wonder how sociologists will react to this. Neoliberalism has become one of the "go to" concepts which sociologists pull out of their bag of tricks to explain all kinds of "bad stuff" in society. [11]Some scholars have dismissed neoliberalism as a useful category partly because it has been applied to so many things that it starts to become meaningless. I do think it retains some analytical power when used in certain ways, at least.

The way I understand neoliberalism is strongly influenced by Michel Foucault and is, I think, fairly straightforward with two main aspects:

- The spread of market principles to previously non-marketised areas - what Foucault referred to as "the application of the economic grid to a field [...] defined in opposition to the economy, or at any rate, as complementary to the economy" (Foucault, 2008: 240)

- Government which is always cautious of governing too much - or what Foucault referred to as "state phobia"(Foucault, 2008: 75-6).

For me these two aspects are intertwined and of equal significance. Neoliberalism is not simply the reduction of state activity and the privatisation of everything. As Foucault made clear, neo-liberalism requires the state in order to enable the spread of market principles and to define the rules of the game.

For instance, it is accurate to discuss a neoliberalisation of UK universities even if most of them are non-profit making charities. They can be considered as becoming more neo-liberal because they are increasingly managed according to market principles.

Within universities the departments are often run as individual services who act as "service users" or "service providers" for one another. Academics are under pressure to compete against one another for research funding and
have the importance of self-promotion thrust upon them. Teaching staff are subject to student feedback which most resembles customer satisfaction surveys rather than meaningful academic engagement with their work.

Universities also compete with one another for higher places in league tables which has become even more important since the government lifted the cap on the amount of students each course could take (when the burden of fees shifted entirely from the state onto the individual). Soon this competition will be intensified when the new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is introduced with a state sanctioned system of measurement and the awarding of Bronze, Silver and Gold medals to universities to indicate their "quality". A similar system of research assessment, the REF, is well-established with departments being required to demonstrate the quantity and quality of their "research outputs" in order to compete for a central pot of money provided by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Much of the money sloshing around the university system is public, either direct funding from central government (HEFCE), via government funded research bodies (eg. ESRC, AHRC), or indirectly through student fees (which are mostly paid for through government loans), so it would be wholly inaccurate to describe this as a privatised system, however, it has been substantially marketised. But this market system has been imposed by government "reform" and is managed and administered by state bodies. Markets are considered, by the government, to be ideologically preferable but they are aware that markets will not develop spontaneously; they must be created.

What some people take issue with, I think, is the use of neoliberal to refer to individual and identity-level phenomena. For instance, some people might consider the kind of self-promotion common to social media to be a kind of neoliberal identity. Perhaps the notion of the 'entrepreneurial self', as extensively outlined and analysed by Ulrich Bröckling, is more useful in this context.

So does this seeming resurgence of the state signal a decline for neoliberalism? I don't think market principles will be disappearing from universities, criminal justice or healthcare and many other areas of public life any time soon. Marketisation is too much of an effective disciplinary tool for it to be given up easily. Nor can I imagine a conservative government (or centre-right Labour government should one re-emerge) giving up its cosy relationship with big business, especially with the notorious "revolving door" between Westminster and the boardroom.

However, it is possible that governments might abandon their hand wringing over "governing too much". They might be less coy about imposing markets, especially given there seems to be a new desire for strong, authoritarian leaders and states. If this is how things spin then would that mean an end to neoliberalism? Perhaps this would be something more along the lines of a "state marketisation"?

How will sociologists respond to this?


COLIN GORDON (2016-10-13 09:49:56)
I think people are rediscovering the wheel - neoliberalism involves a strong state, that is not news. As for Theresa May's Milibandian speeches, I would not get excited just yet. She is the strong state, for sure, but Home Office and hedge funds, not Mazzucato.

J. Britt Holbrook (2017-05-18 15:17:44)
Good stuff. I agree with Cowley (or at least your gloss of Cowley). The one place I do think neoliberalism is still going strong is the EU. In some sense, the EU just IS neoliberalism. With the recent election in France, that's still the case. However, unless Macron is successful, I think France will turn away from the EU, effectively bringing it to an end.

A Trump Presidency and the Militarisation of America (2016-10-05 08:00)

There are many reasons not to take Trump seriously. But given the real possibility he might win the election, we need to think through the stated consequence of his policies, particularly given the evident inability of the Republican establishment to restrain him before he holds political office, let alone when he has it.

To take one example: a former head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement cautions that Trump's stated plan to deport all illegal immigrants is foolish but not impossible. What would it look like in practice?

Julie Myers Wood, who headed Immigration and Customs Enforcement during the Bush Administration, told me that she is appalled by parts of Trump's immigration plan and cautioned critics not to assume that it is impossible. "It's not as binary as some people suggest," she said. "You could think of some very outside-the-box options." A President Trump could permit ICE officers to get access to I.R.S. files that contain home addresses. (Undocumented immigrants who pay taxes often list real addresses, in order to receive tax-refund checks.) He could invoke provision 287(g) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, in order to detail thousands of local and state agents and police officers to the deportation effort. "You'd put people on a train," she said. "Again, I'm not recommending this. You could have a cruise ship."
The American Action Forum, a conservative Washington think tank, ran budget projections of Trump’s plan: raids on farms, restaurants, factories, and construction sites would require more than ninety thousand “apprehension personnel”—six times the number of special agents in the F.B.I. Beds for captured men, women, and children would reach 348,831, nearly triple the detention space required for the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. Thousands of chartered buses (fifty-four seats on average) and planes (which can accommodate a hundred and thirty-five) would carry deportees to the border or to their home countries. The report estimated the total cost at six hundred billion dollars, which it judged financially imprudent.


What would this do to America? A logistical exercise of this scale and cost could perhaps be seen as a dark and fascistic stimulus plan, bringing together vast numbers of Americans into an (evil though nonetheless) collective project. The discord this would sow at all levels of American society would lead to further polarisation, inviting ‘tough measures’ to crack down on opposition to this ‘necessary policy’ of the Trump administration and ‘protect our brave law enforcement’ officers.

Even if Trump’s alleged fascism is opportunistic rather than ideological, I find it very easy to see how this policy alone – let alone the other stuff – could lead to an unprecedented militarisation of America and a very rapid descent into actually existing fascism.

If we consider the second-order and third-order effects, high profile injustices and protests against them and reactions to those protests, it’s worth asking how the structures of repression (digital or otherwise) built up in America over recent years might be leveraged against those seen as hostile to the executive? Furthermore, if American troops and law enforcement are widely perceived by the right to be under threat, could this unite currently anti-Trump figures in the security establishment against him?

Some thoughts on fast and slow science in the accelerated academy (2016-10-06 08:00)

I’ve been thinking a lot recently about how the social sciences are proving too slow in catching up to developments in digital technology. This means that engagements with new possibilities are often piecemeal and ad hoc, pushing the threshold of innovation in methods while methodological and theoretical discussion lags further behind. We see changes at the level of platforms, infrastructures, devices and practices which allow new techniques to be developed but discussion of the implications of these techniques, how we should understand what they’re doing and how they fit with older and more established techniques struggles to catch up.

I’ve argued that the reasons for this are largely to do with the structure of scholarly communication. The proliferation of publications, with an [1]estimated 28,100 journals publishing 2.5 million articles a year, encourages
specialisation in both writing and reading. I’ve watched this happen first hand with the asexuality literature, something which has grown from literally a handful of articles seven or eight years ago to a topic which would have to now be my primary focus to ‘keep up with the literature’. This is a microcosm of a much broader trend which I think it’s important for us to understand.

This is compounded by a norm for much longer articles in many social science disciplines vis-a-vis scientific reports. The imperative to ‘keep up with the literature’ militates against exploration and experimentation, while established forms of social scientific writing make it difficult to get important technical details included in substantive articles in mainstream disciplinary journals. Furthermore, publication is slow and this compounds the inter-journal competition which inculcates intellectual conservatism all around by discouraging epistemic risk taking on behalf of those seeking to be published in the highest status journals and instrumental strategies from lower status journals seeking to raise their impact factors. The more that’s published, the more markers of prestige get fought over in order to ensure that one’s intellectual wares stand out in a crowded market place.

Established structures of scholarly communication engender slowness in catching up with technical developments. Is the solution therefore to find structures which facilitate faster communication? Two obvious examples stand out here: open science practices and social media. It’s surely a positive thing that open science is becoming better established within the social sciences, such as a journal like Big Data & Society requiring authors to publish datasets and self-archiving of pre-prints becoming an established practice now mandated in the UK in the case of papers. Likewise I think it’s a good thing that social media has been taken up by so many social scientists. It reduces the opportunity costs of exploring outside one’s own area e.g. it’s much less onerous to follow a data science blog then it is to keep up with the latest data science papers. As a corollary, it also makes it easier to form connections outside one’s own circles, both by making it easier to have things in common to talk about and also simply making contact with these people in the first place.

But the idea these practices would fix the problems of scholarly communication appears to me to rest on a fallacy: ‘slow’ communication is problematic because it entails friction and lag in what would otherwise be ‘fast’ communication. If we break down the barriers, will everything flow more freely and these seemingly intractable problems might be solved? There’s a rich imagery of ‘fast’ & ‘slow’, ‘open’ and ‘closed’, lurking in the background here which we need to be critical of on a political level. But in a more prosaic sense, I think it straight forwardly distracts from the fact that the problem with slow scholarship isn’t simply a structural matter, such that the established system of scholarly communication (aided and abetted by the incentive structures of the contemporary academy) moulds academics to be ‘slow’ and that if we ‘hack the system’ then it might then mould academics to be ‘fast’.

Under present conditions, I can see how ‘open science’ might lead to all sorts of new pathologies, particularly if the transition from ‘filter then publish’ to ‘publish then filter’ is tied up with the commercial logic of platforms like Academia.Edu, Mendeley and now SSRN. If monetisation of these platforms is dependent on user attention and user data, it stands to reason that engineering strategies serving to maximise both will become a commercial imperative, if they’re not already (and we shouldn’t underestimate how long tech companies can be propped up with capital while making zero profit). The in itself entirely reasonable proposition that non-traditional forms of influence should be incorporated into scholarly metrics is likely to compound such a move, naturalising the algorithmic black boxes of social media and open science platforms and creating new forms of prestige available for fast scholars.

These mechanisms might not dominate the platform, but the idea of fast, free, openscholarly communication allowing a million flowers to bloom away from the disciplinary structures of the contemporary academy is a dangerous illusion. It represents the common sense of the ‘market’, the epistemic superiority of the crowd, creeping into how we view scholarship. We can need to be profoundly critical about how attention, reward and hierarchy work on these new platforms without jettisoning their affordances entirely in our rush to critique. I’m not saying we shouldn’t use social media, only that we shouldn’t culturally embrace it as the superior ‘new’ in relation to the inferior ‘old’. It should be both/and rather than either/or. This is something which I think will be much harder if we
continue to think in terms of ‘fast’ and ‘slow’, at least as an abstract dichotomy we apply to complex systems.

Nonetheless, I do think we need to in some way hack the structures of scholarly communication if the social sciences are going to reliably keep up in anything more than a narrowly technique-driven way to emerging technologies. But rather than ‘fast’ and ‘slow’, we should perhaps see this in terms of ‘collaborative’ and ‘atomised’: resisting the algorithmic incentives of platforms while embracing the affordances they offer for new forms of working together, even within the constraining structures of the accelerated academy.


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Some thoughts on fast and slow science in the accelerated academy | A quem interessar possa... (2017-02-18 13:32:43) [...] Mark Carrigan on October 6, 2016 • ( 0 [...]

CFP - special issue of Qualitative Inquiry on methods/newmedia/intimacies (2016-10-07 08:00)

We hereby invite contributions to a special issue of Qualitative Inquiry to be published 2018, provisionally titled:

RESEARCHING INTIMACIES AND NEW MEDIA: METHODOLOGICAL OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Guest Editors: Katherine Harrison (University of Copenhagen, Denmark & Lund University, Sweden) & Maria Bee Christensen-Strynø (Roskilde University, Denmark)

Deadline for submission: 1 December 2016

New media are increasingly intersecting and intertwined with our daily lives, bodily and intimate practices, and relationships. This special issue will present contributions from researchers who are investigating practices of intimacy mediated either wholly or in part through new media. In particular, it will focus on the methodological issues involved in conducting qualitative research in this flourishing field.

A number of volumes published in the last decade have variously covered affect and methodology (e.g. Fraser and Puwar 2008; Pink 2009; Richardson 2005; Stage and Timm 2015), affect and new media (e.g. Chambers 2013; Garde-Hansen and Gorton 2013; Hillis at al 2015; Karatzogianni and Kuntsman 2012; McGlotten 2013; Paasonen 2011; Payne 2014; van Dijck 2013), or online methodologies (e.g. Hine 2000; Kozinets 2012; Markham and Baym 2009). This special issue builds on this existing body of scholarship and develops it further by narrowing the focus to methodological issues of research conducted on/with/through new media and specifically concerned with practices of intimacy. This special issue will zoom in on questions of method and methodology as they are experienced by researchers working at the cutting-edge of scholarship on intimacies and new media. It will share knowledge and experiences from the field, as well as proposing innovative methodological solutions and ideas on how to enter, survive and exit these highly charged fieldsites. Both personal experiences and reflections on current policies, procedures and paradigms will be welcomed.

Researching intimacies encompasses a wide variety of practices and relationships, including but not limited to kinship, sexual encounters, body and gender, dis/abilities, migration, friendship, birth and death, romantic relationships, non-monogamies, dating or community formation. Each of these finds different forms in its mediatization. Simultaneously “new media” comprises a variety of digital platforms that offer distinctive ways to share, connect and
communicate; differences in hardware and software intersect with situated sociocultural norms about technology use. The combination of intimate practices and new media thus poses challenges to existing methodological paradigms due to the limitations/affordances of the medium intersecting with continuously shifting practices of intimacy. This special issue will present a range of intimate practices as well as a selection of digital sites and apps. In so doing, a variety of different methodological issues will be highlighted and discussed.

Suggestions for topics that contributors may wish to engage with include, but are not limited to:

- Logistical and technical difficulties in collecting ephemeral or unstable personal data
- Intimacy and loneliness of the researcher
- Commercialization of online intimacies
- The blurring of personal/professional lines of conduct as a researcher
- The borderline between “lurking”, voyeurism and participation
- Public intimacies in private spaces – accessing and exiting personal spaces as fieldsites
- Technical glitches in online intimacies
- The illusion of online anonymity or distance
- Negotiating national differences in ethical guidelines for online collection of "intimate" data
- Tracking intimacies over time, space and media
- Capturing and processing vast amounts of intimate data
- Finding participants when the topic provokes shame, anger, or embarrassment
- How multiple understandings of “intimacy” affect methodology
- Sudden changes to fieldsites in response to public outcry/moral outrage
- Adapting old methods to new and slippery fieldsites
- Legal frameworks as intimate practices move between screen and materiality
- Inclusion/exclusion mechanisms and accessibility

We welcome papers from a wide range of disciplines. The editors welcome expressions of interest and are happy to discuss proposals for contributions.

Please send your abstract to: [1]tjx856@hum.ku.dk AND [2]mariabee@ruc.dk. Abstracts should be maximum 500 words long and written in English. Please include your name, title, and affiliation. Deadline for submission of abstracts: 1 December 2016.

If accepted, final versions of papers should follow the Qualitative Inquiry submission guidelines which can be
Out of Data: Launch Event (2016-10-08 08:00)

The Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies is happy to invite you to the launch event of its new annual theme, Out of Data, on October 4th, at The University of Warwick.

4-6 pm, followed by drinks 6-7pm – room MS.03

In a dynamic format of short presentations, each member of staff will respond to these issues through their own work, raising questions, challenges and opportunities. An open discussion will follow, and we will close with drinks.

We hope to see you there, and please stay tuned to our next Out of Data activities ...

The modern world is into data, but what is out and what is coming out of data? Facts and figures, to be sure, but what else? New methods for seeing, acting and shaping our world? New cultural forms, experiences and artefacts?

Some say data is the new oil, so what can we distil out of data? What classifications of people, objects and spaces are produced out of data? What do different analytical methods reveal and leave out of data? Who is overlooked and what remains hidden?

Despite data's new abundance, we can find ourselves out of data. Is being out of data when data are missing, forgotten, or yet to be collected? When signal becomes noise? Or noise is mistaken for signal? When access is denied, not wanted, or the correct technical configuration is lacking? How to respond to being out of data? What if we are out of data and unaware?

Over the next 12 months CIM is getting into out of data at [1]http://blogs.cim.warwick.ac.uk/outofdata/

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/
2. http://campus.warwick.ac.uk/?search=MS.03&slid=29050
3. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/cim/
Ambient intimacy and cultures of overwork (2016-10-09 08:00)

In a recent book about the neoliberal superstar turned aspiring world saviour Jeffrey Sachs, a quote from his wife caught my attention. On loc 2909, she describes how Sachs only sleeps for four hours a night and works constantly throughout his waking hours. Even on a family holiday, he often gave two or three speeches a day in addition to meetings starting anytime from 7 a.m. till late at night. He then spent most nights writing technical papers, articles, memos and proposals, while keeping in daily contact with his colleagues, working with them via phone, fax and email. All this, while consuming about a book a day on topics ranging from ecology through tropical diseases.

How do you feel when you read this? Sachs is obviously an extreme case but the uptake of social media in academia makes it much more likely we’ll be exposed to information about the working routines of people outside our immediate circles.

In some cases, this can be a good thing and such ambient intimacy can be a foundation for solidarity, as people see the possibility of working collectively to ameliorate shared conditions. But it can often be decidedly negative, creating unrealistic perceptions of how much others are working and helping contribute to cultures of overwork.

We need to be careful about how we present our own working habits through social media, as well as how we interpret the self-presentation of others.

2. https://markcarrigan.net/2015/01/03/social-media-and-ambient-intimacy/

Melanie Rimmer (2017-05-03 15:20:02)
My father often told a story about when my grandmother was dying: the doctor made a house call (which dates the story right away) and was shocked to find her scrubbing the kitchen floor. He said to my grandfather "Can’t you make her stop?" to which my grandfather replied "Can you?". I always hated this story, and when I started to study sociology I found a vocabulary to articulate why.

Mark Carrigan (2017-05-06 18:25:15)
That’s a depressing but arresting story.

Searching for Asylum: a film by Jan Haaken and Maggie O’Neill (2016-10-10 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjT5IENga_M

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De/Humanisation and Organization at EGOS (2016-10-11 08:00)

Please consider submitting a short paper to the EGOS2017 sub-theme on 'De/humanisation and Organisation'. The purpose of this sub-theme is to explore the dehumanising effects of contemporary organisations but also the potential of organisations to rehumanise social relations. Deadline: 9 Jan 2017, length: 3,000 words.


In many ways, our current epoch witnesses dehumanized social relations. While alienation (Marx), disenchantment (Weber) and the deficit in social solidarity (Durkheim) are by no means recent phenomena, processes of dehumanization continue to prevail in most spheres of society. In the public sphere, discussions privilege compliance with bureaucratic regulations and quantifiable indicators (such as GDP and its growth) over human needs and flourishing, have the effect of excluding large portions of the electorate from public debate while accelerating the demise of the Welfare State. More recently, Western countries’ securitarian and paranoid responses to terrorist attacks have reinforced a climate of generalized suspicion in which the neighbour is deemed to be a potential enemy (Zizek, 2009).

In the economic sphere, the financialization of the economy and the spread of market ownership privilege economic profitability over human well-being. Corporate Social Responsibility is thus deployed mostly as a rhetorical device whose injunctions are followed as long as they are profitable to corporate shareholders. Yet, any contemporary observer of capitalism witnesses suffering, destitution and ethical corrosion, both in richer and in poorer countries. Equally worryingly, the private sphere also seems to have undergone dehumanization: for instance, impersonal relations are the lot of ever-growing urban centres, whilst familial duties of care are gradually replaced either by indifference or by reliance on salaried transactions with professional carers ([2]Hochschild, 2003).

The dehumanization of society is mirrored, and perhaps intensified, by the exclusion of the notion of ‘human’ and ‘humanity’ from the social sciences and humanities in the second half of the 20th Century. While philosophers such as Foucault, or more recently Butler, have warned against taken for granted conceptions of the human, their warnings seem to have produced effacement, rather than problematization, of the category of ‘human’. This is especially evident in a variety of anti- or post-humanist theorising, which either dissolves human persons into their wider material, discursive or communicative contexts, or alternatively conceptualises humanity only as an aggregate of neurological, psychological or material components.

There exist, however, significant exceptions to this trend. Neo-Aristotelian philosophers such as Sen and Nussbaum have developed political philosophies that place human capabilities at the centre of the stage. In feminist studies, Lawson (2009) advocated ‘minimal humanism’ and in sociology Archer (2000), Sayer (2011) and Smith (2010) have taken stock of the absence of human subjects from social scientific accounts and sketched the contours of a humanist social science. On the post-structuralist front, Butler’s studies of derealization and dehumanization (Butler 2004; 2009) mark a reinstatement of the category of the ‘human’ that remains conscious that norms of humanity can produce violence on those persons who do not fit them.

The major purpose of this sub-theme is to explore the dehumanizing effects of contemporary organizations but also the potential of organizations to rehumanize social relations. We welcome a range of theoretical and empirical contributions on processes of humanization/dehumanization addressing, amongst other issues, the following:

- How do contemporary modes of organizing and organization contribute to dehumanize people? For instance,
to what extent is the largely studied dark side of management amenable to dehumanization? What is gained by doing so? But, equally importantly, which aspects, if any, are not reducible to dehumanizing tendencies?

• Conversely, what contemporary movements and novel modes of organizing might contribute to enhance human flourishing and dignity? For instance, how are social movements centered on human dignity such as the Spanish Indignados readdressing the human side of social relationships? How are cooperatives and alternative organizations of work, care and political involvement developing credible instances of resistance to dehumanizing tendencies?

• Is the concept of the ‘human’ still a useful ethical category when assessing the ‘good’ organization? Does it make sense to wager, with Foucault, that ‘man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’? Is ‘humanity’ merely an empty signifier prone to endless re-appropriation and whose value is at best tactical but never foundational for social and organizational theories and politics? Or is the notion of humanity, and associated ‘powers’, ‘rights’ and ‘flourishing’, a useful standard when assessing and criticizing organizations and societies?

• What are the new struggles arising from the attack on dignity and from the exclusion processes that are largely shaping capitalistic societies?

• Have the boundaries of what people regard as a dehumanizing treatment shifted? Have we become more willing, for instance, to disregard outrage in the name of economic and military security?

• The dehumanization of bureaucratic organizations has been extensively studied since Weber and Gouldner. But is the emergence of hybrid or post-bureaucratic organizations a safeguard against dehumanization? Or do these novel organizational forms merely shift the modalities of dehumanization?

• What is the role of information technologies in processes of dehumanization?

References


The history of data-as-rhetoric (2016-10-12 08:00)

From Daniel Rosenberg’s essay in Raw Data Is An Oxymoron, loc 916. What further developments are we beginning to see in the meaning of ‘data’ in a digitalised context? The author’s point is that data is not associated with veracity, such that inaccurate data is still data, but I wonder if I’ve misunderstood this because it seems so obviously misleading to me.

This observation is supported by the numbers but not generated by them: from the beginning, data was a rhetorical concept. Data means—and has meant for a very long time—that which is given prior to argument. As a consequence, the meaning of data must always shift with argumentative strategy and context—and with the history of both. The rise of modern economics and empirical natural science created new conditions of argument and new assumptions about facts and evidence. And the histories of those terms and others in the same family nicely illustrate the larger epistemological developments.

The history of data is connected to these other histories in very important ways, but in equally important ways, it remains an outlier. Curiously, the preexisting semantic structure of the term “data” made it especially flexible in these shifting epistemological and semantic contexts. Without changing meaning, during the eighteenth century data changed connotation. It went from being reflexively associated with those things that are outside of any possible process of discovery to being the very paradigm of what one seeks through experiment and observation.

I’m interested in how this supports the implicitly critical theory of data scientists: digital data reveals what people really do, rather than what they say they do. The given character of empirical data was formerly localised and now it’s seen to be generalised: given-ness suffuses the social world in a way that seemingly promises total legibility to those with sufficient literacy of the right sort.

Big data, new skills: how the accelerated academy hinders the interdisciplinary collaboration we need (2016-10-13 08:00)

Underlying many of the issues we’re discussing today is the fundamental problem of speed. We’ve seen rapid developments at the level of platforms, devices, practices and methods but this rapidity has made it difficult for
methodological and theoretical deliberation to catch up. As the Geographer Rob Kitchin puts it in his book *The Data Revolution*, such deliberation “is desperately needed in order to catch up with the pace of technical change and the roll-out of ad hoc and pragmatic approaches, and to replace proliferating forms of weak empiricism” (loc 3800-3817).

It’s this empiricism which I think is the long term worry of many, as the empirical in digital social research of this sort is too often exhausted by what registers as digital data on a given platform. If this goes unchallenged, we risk a precipitous collapse in the descriptive and explanatory horizons of the social sciences. All the more so, if it’s coupled with the untenable, yet oddly persistent, idea that big data ‘speaks for itself’ and allows us to leave theory behind.

Innovations in research methods and the new data environment will undoubtedly impact teaching and research in the social sciences. But unless we can make space for methodological and theoretical deliberation to catch up to technical developments, it’s not obvious to me that this impact will be a positive one. This catching up necessitates critical and knowledgeable engagement with technical advances, as well as forms of collaborative and exploratory interdisciplinarity which are inherently challenging.

Unfortunately, the infrastructure of scholarly communication as it presently stands works to hinder this ‘catching up’. The journal system poses a number of problems by discouraging the exploration and experimentation which we need:

- The quantitative increase in publication encourages ever-narrower specialisation, as new journals define themselves in relation to an already crowded intellectual market place.
- With an [1]estimated 28,100 journals publishing 2.5 million articles a year, 'keeping up with the literature' within one's own field becomes an ever more overloading exercise.
- This also intensifies existing access problems, particularly as newer and more specialised journals might not be widely accessible, with the political economy of journal subscriptions currently in a state of flux.
- The slow speed of publication hinders discussion and debate about new developments, albeit at a rate that varies between fields.
- The increasing importance of the established prestigious leaders within a field or discipline, something which manifests both qualitatively and quantitatively, enacts epistemic discipline as ambitious researcher compete for the limited number of slots available within that journal by adapting themselves to what they perceive as its intellectual standards.
- It also creates competition between journals, as lesser ranked journals take instrumental action with the intention of improving their impact factors (and increasingly, orientated towards improving their alt metrics scores as well).
- Existing norms of scholarship also curtail some of the discussions which the ‘catching up’ I’m talking about would necessitate. Is there space and freedom to reflect on the complex considerations involved in working with digital data? Do technical details get excluded from papers about substantive topics submitted to mainstream journals? Does the journal system impose a division of theory, method and data which obscures precisely the complexity of their entanglement in digital social research that we need to investigate?

There’s a risk of overstating the case here: there are existing innovations in journals which could mitigate these problems, such as [2]Big Data & Society’s request that authors publish primary data (or provide detailed instruction about accessing it) or Sociological Science’s [3]streamlining of the peer review process and commitment to
editorial decisions within 30 days of submission. The dynamic of specialisation I'm criticising could also work to encourage the establishment of new journals which meet precisely the needs I'm suggesting are currently unmet. There's also room to be hopeful given that some open science practices are becoming institutionalised within the social sciences, for instance the publication of pre-prints. But there are still nonetheless commercial threats to open science and some degree of conservatism built into structures of career advancement and research assessment.

These problems with the journal system are compounded by disciplinary silos. It too often shapes reading in a way which reinforces a disciplinary focus, as 'keeping up with the literature' necessitates triaging based on past experience. There's little external incentive to read widely outside one's own area, let alone the time or energy to do so when existing workload is unmanageable or unsustainable for many. These same factors militate against attending events outside one's own areas. Even when we do, the technical languages spoken and the skills presupposed by speakers make meaningful engagement inherently difficult, a matter of 'keeping up' rather than contributing.

For digital methodology and digital theory to catch up to digital methods necessitates collaboration between "computationally literate social scientists and socially literate computer scientists" but it's hard to see at present how such relations can reliably take a mutually beneficial shape, though of course this does happen in places. We don't need to be speaking the same language but we do need to be able to understand each other. Even socially literate computer scientists tend only to be socially literate in a narrow sense. More importantly from my point of view, there are still relatively few computationally literate social scientists (and I'm certainly not one of them) and it seems urgent to me that we understand why. In the absence of this reciprocal literacy, collaboration will likely be narrowly instrumental, bringing in a social scientist for their domain expertise or bringing in a data scientist for their computational skills.

However I do think there are practical steps we can take to mitigate these problems. Social media is a powerful tool for crossing disciplinary boundaries, connecting with people in other fields and keeping up to date with developments through things like blogs and twitters feeds. To give an example of how virtual spaces can be used to facilitate the methodological and theoretical 'catching up' I'm advocating: as a joint project between the Independent Social Research Foundation's Digital Social Science Forum and the International Journal of Social Research Methodology, we organised a stream at this conference on 'beyond big and small data'. The intention was to offer a conceptual and methodological framing within which all manner of related issues could be explored. What is 'big data', what is 'small data' and is this opposition a useful one?

But as well as the conference stream itself, we live tweeted the talks and recorded them as podcasts to be released on social media. The participants have been invited to write up their paper as a short article for the LSE Impact Blog, a popular website with an extremely large and diverse international audience, for a special section on Digital Methodologies. These will then be circulated, along with the podcasts from the event, as a call for more contributions to the discussion from those not at the event. Thus we intend to facilitate an ongoing conversation, building from a face-to-face meeting but using social media to extend far beyond it, one which will hopefully lead to more face-to-face meetings at future events if the discussion builds up sufficient momentum.

But even if we can explore new ways of facilitating collaboration outside the limits I've described, there's still the challenge of 'upskilling' the social sciences to expand computational literacy, while resisting the urge to simply reproduce the norms of computer science. There are free digital training tools which can be used to this end, things like Code Academy and some of the more technically orientated MOOC platforms. But the pressures of career advancement to which individuals are subject militate against this upskilling being something which can be pursued as an individual matter. It's extremely time consuming and the institutional incentives aren't there. But these digital tools could be a starting point, supplemented by peer support networks, meeting both face-to-face and digitally.

Ultimately though, we need well funded networks and institutional recognition of the importance of this en-
deavor, as well as long term changes to the structure of graduate education. Only in this way do I think it will be possible to facilitate the meaningful participation of social scientists in shaping how the new data environment impacts research and teaching, as well as the likely transformation of the social sciences themselves.

2. http://bds.sagepub.com/

Deadline in 2 days: Consuming Gender (2016-10-14 08:00)

Call for Papers - Special Issue, 'Consuming Gender' <[1]http://www.assuminggender.com/p/call-for-papers.html> This special issue of Assuming Gender – an online, peer-reviewed academic journal from Cardiff University – seeks to explore the way gender is both presented and consumed through popular media and advertising. As Ann Herrmann points out in the article 'Shopping for Identities', commodities ‘are characterised by their dual nature: material composition and symbolic meaning’ (Herrmann 2002: 539). Consumer culture plays a significant role in constructing valid (and normative) identity categories with which consumers are encouraged to identify. Scholars as diverse as America Reed, Laura C. Nelson, and Henry Jenkins have theorised the ways in which identity and consumer culture are intertwined. Reed, for example, claims in ‘Activating the Self-Importance of Consumer Selves’ that ‘[s]ocial identities are mental representations that can become a basic part of how consumers view themselves’ (Reed 2004: 286). In a later article on ‘Identity-Based Consumer Behaviour’, Reed and others use the example of athletics to illustrate their point: ‘if consumers view themselves as “athletes”, they are likely to behave in ways that are consistent with what it means to “be” an athlete’ (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni and Warlop 2002: 310). Consumption thus becomes defined by identity, and identity becomes defined by consumption. While the construction of identities based on athleticism seems relatively benign, the case quickly becomes more complicated when consumer identities are racially, economically, or sexually coded. In addition to delineating the borders between various interest groups, consumer culture plays a significant role in establishing and maintaining binary identity distinctions (male/female, gay/straight, black/white), undermining the validity of those identifying across or in-between one or more categories, or who refuse categorisation at all. Those identities not classified as valid consumer groups are not seen as valid identities at all. For this special issue of Assuming Gender, we invite articles that focus specifically on the idea of ‘Consuming Gender’. How has consumer culture constructed (and how has it been constructed by) gender through the ages? Suggested topics include, but are not limited to: * Consuming gender/gendered consumption * Historical contexts of gendered consumption * Feminist/postfeminist approaches to consumption * Consumption and intersectionality * Queer consumption * Media constructions of (gendered) consumer identities * Post/colonialism and gendered consumption Please send a proposal of roughly 500 words to Megen de Bruin-Molé, Akira Suwa and Daný van Dam at gender@cardiff.ac.uk<mailto:gender@cardiff.ac.uk> under the subject line ‘CFP Consuming Gender’, including your name, e-mail institutional affiliation (if any), and a biographical note (100 words maximum). We welcome papers from scholars of all backgrounds, disciplines, and career stages. The deadline for proposals is 16 October, 2016, and completed papers of 5000 to 8000 words will be expected no later than 16 April, 2017. (More information available at the link: [4]http://www.assuminggender.com/p/call-for-papers.html)
Fabius’ Delight: When Everyone (If Only in the UK) Benefits by Delaying Brexit (2016-10-14 09:11)

The famed strategy of the Roman general Fabius to defeat Hannibal, the North African general trying to conquer Rome in the 3rd century BC, was simply to wait for Hannibal to get within easy range of his troops and then defeat him by continual guerrilla warfare. So even though Rome and Hannibal’s homeland Carthage (now in Tunisia) were formally at war, one side – Hannibal’s – was doing all the heavy lifting. This was also the strategy that worked during the American Revolution, which is why the commanding general George Washington was nicknamed the ‘American Fabius’. And of course, in the UK we have got the Fabian movement which helped to found the Labour Party in the early 20th century. Its strategy was about playing a long game of propaganda (they invented the ‘think tank’) and small local victories to eventually acquire power for socialist ends by peaceful means.

Now let’s look at Brexit. Suppose you don’t want Brexit to happen at all – No Brexit, even after the referendum. (I put myself in this category.) Then you want to do everything possible to obstruct it, be it through a second referendum, a requirement that the terms of Brexit be confirmed by Parliament or a high court challenge to the constitutionality of the Brexit process.

Now suppose you’re for Soft Brexit. You’ll probably be in favour of some if not all of the previous obstructionist moves. But in addition, you’ll want to let the very prospect of Brexit to unfold over several rounds of economic indicators to demonstrate the precariousness of the UK situation. The longer this delay lasts, the stronger case for the UK to remain in the single market, even if it means ditching border controls.

But now say you’re for Hard Brexit. In that case, you’d want to wait until the French and Germans have their general elections in 2017, by which time a much more Brexit-friendly regime is likely to be in place in France and whatever pressure within the German political ranks there has been to ‘punish’ the UK for leaving the EU would be mitigated by an expected rise in right-wing nationalist support there. So the longer the UK waits, the easier it might be to negotiate terms that permit free trade with the EU and allow for border controls. Of course, that scenario might also spell the beginning of the end of the European Union, as other member nations seek similar arrangements. But then, I doubt Hard Brexiteers will be losing sleep over that!

But the lesson is clear: Fabius regit!
**Historical parallels to the right-wing turn in British politics (2016-10-15 08:00)**

A brilliant rant by James O’Brien on the government’s proposal to force firms to publish lists of foreign workers:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA6XxYepCDs

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I find Brexit an endless source of invention – perhaps that’s my unconscious reason for wanting it drag out as long as possible, what I’ve called ‘[1]Fabius' Delight’. I shall get to the phrase ‘Population Snowflake’ toward the end of this piece. But let’s work our way to it.

There are three faces of Brexit and they mirror the characterization of the early 19th century Romantic poet and Greek freedom fighter, Lord Byron, as ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’. Together they constitute Byronic Brexit:

**Mad** = Brexit aims to do the impossible, to enable the UK engage in free trade with the world while controlling its own borders.

**Bad** = Brexit aims to run the economy into the ground in the name of border controls.

**Dangerous to know** = The terms of our Brexit negotiations with the European Union can’t be divulged, let alone approved by Parliament, because that would destroy our chances of getting a good deal. But these three faces of Brexit don’t quite capture the spirit in which the outcome of the referendum to leave the European Union has been received. The House of Commons was 4 to 1 and the House of Lords 6 to 1 against leaving the EU. Yet most parliamentarians now at least pay lip service to the claim that they need to ‘respect the will of the people’, which means implementing Brexit in some way or other. But is ‘respecting the will of the people’ anything other than treating the people as infallible when it comes to matters relating to their own interests? Certainly this was what Rousseau thought because he imagined that the ‘General Will’ inherited the prerogatives of the absolute monarch, who in turn was presumed to enjoy some divine right. An interesting feature of this sense of ‘infallibility’ is that it’s operationalized as ‘irreversibility’; hence, the taboo on calling a second referendum. Now, what if the people are just wrong and they need another chance to admit it and change their collective mind? A big problem is that this question is normally framed in terms of the people having been duped by both sides during the referendum campaign with false claims, statistics, etc. But this makes it seem as though the people were somehow deceived from believing what they should have – which in turn further assumes that the people had correct beliefs about the EU in the first place. However, this likely to be false. More likely is that the people had no clear views whatsoever about the EU – not to be confused with Europe itself – and so both sides simply supplied views that would be otherwise lacking. This would explain why whenever voters were questioned why they voted one way or the other, they always quoted campaign talking points – no independent research on the part of the voters is ever in evidence. I would say that this was mainly an oversight of the Remain campaign, which should not have taken for granted that residents of relatively impoverished regions in, say, Wales and the North of England would already know that the EU massively subsidizes various projects that keep these places afloat. When commentators speak of ‘Leave’ voters from those areas as ‘Turkeys voting for Christmas’, this is what they mean. The brute fact – which no politician dares utter – is that the people were not sufficiently informed about the European Union to vote meaningfully in the referendum. I don’t mean that the politicians did not sufficiently inform them, but rather that the people did not have enough independent views about the EU prior to the calling of...
the referendum. Thus, they had no baseline in terms of which they could evaluate the various campaign claims, true or false. (This is not to deny that there were people who voted on Brexit who were ‘informed’ in my sense – but they were only a fraction of the overall vote. At least this is what I propose as a hypothesis for further sociological research.) I happen to believe that it was a mistake to have had the referendum, partly because it was a bit like asking the public about whether to accept a proposition in cosmology. (So I was on the side of former Tory Chancellor Ken Clarke, who believed that the referendum defeated the whole purpose of having representative democracy.) No doubt, the people could be informed of various opposing views during a campaign, but they would be coming to the issue largely as blank slates without any independent views. This is not the spirit in which referenda are normally called. Referenda are supposed to be called on rather specific questions where there is good reason to believe that the voters would have first-hand knowledge lacking in politicians – e.g. on whether to raise taxes in general or hypothecate taxes in certain ways. In such cases, there are usually tricky trade-offs the outcomes of which would affect individuals differently. Those of us living in the UK know that the referendum was called largely to enable Prime Minister David Cameron to placate the significant number of Tories clamouring for a referendum to get the country out of the EU. Indeed, it seemed (both in the imagination and in votes) that the UK Independence Party (UKIP) would end up splitting the Tories if a referendum were not given. He also thought he would win the referendum, we’d stay in the EU and UKIP would be vanquished. Well, UKIP may be on its way to being vanquished but largely as a victim of its own success! The fact that no one either in or out of government had prepared a strategy for Brexit speaks to the general scepticism in the political class that a majority would vote for Brexit. Be that as it may, Brexit prevailed. Even if you agree with me that the very calling of the referendum was a mistake, we are stuck with the result as the starting point for further political debate. So what to do? I have come to believe that a second referendum may be necessary to get the people to reconsider whether they really understood what they had voted on in the first place. I don’t mean a literal re-running of the referendum, of course, but a version that puts more flesh on the bones on the proposal to connect more directly with the voters. After all, this is how referenda are supposed to be framed. That this basic point disappeared in the first place is, of course, the downside of the UK’s ‘improvised’ style of constitutionalism. So, I’m not saying anything about when the second referendum should happen – or even the exact wording of the referendum. However, I am saying something about the need for academics and politicians to be more vocal about claiming that the people did not know what they voted for when they voted in the referendum – either for or against Brexit. In other words, the referendum constituted an inappropriate use of direct democracy. It overestimated the population’s ability to judge the matter of Brexit – not because they’re inherently stupid but because they lacked the baseline intellectual resources needed to judge critically the opposing campaigns. At the very least, I would hope my argument persuades people of the need for more secondary school civics education! Finally, the taboo against simply calling the Brexit voting populace ‘ignorant’ (and perhaps blaming PM Cameron for exposing that ignorance) comes from the basic Rousseauian assumption that the ‘general will’ is infallible in a democracy. But is this not to treat the people as Population Snowflake, a phrase I fashion from the leading free speech advocate Claire Fox’s[2]Generation Snowflake, which aims to complain about how young people today feel entitled to have protected spaces from opposing views (and perhaps even truths) that disrupt their world-view. Who could disagree with this premise? All that I’m saying is that the principle should extend to members of an entire society who have been flattered by politicians of various persuasions into thinking that they know more about their society’s existential conditions than they really do. In effect, I am calling for a two-step Popperian solution to the Brexit quandary. First, the politicians admit an error in holding a referendum, and then a referendum is held with people specifically instructed to learn something about the European Union before the campaign formally starts. Even if the first step is unlikely to happen, the second step could happen in some cleverly finessed way (perhaps once a Brexit strategy is available). If the UK’s sense of improvised constitutionalism got us into this mess, it may get us out of it!

I Read Some Marx (And I Liked It) (2016-10-16 08:00)

We posted this a few years ago but it obviously merits reposting:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyqJ9wxZ9L0

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The Death of Yugoslavia (2016-10-17 08:00)

A powerful and comprehensive documentary series:

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLqD5Su3ZJjjbCsgVCE90msl9d4nHdV4Pu

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/videoseries?list=PLqD5Su3ZJjjbCsgVCE90msl9d4nHdV4Pu

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From TINA to TATIANA (2016-10-18 08:00)

A great rebuttal of the neoliberal insistence that There Is No Alternative, from loc 3840 of the [1]recent book by Yanis Varoufakis:

We were not naive enough to think that our blueprint would be implemented on the strength of its rationality. No, its purpose was simpler: to be able to counter official Europe’s doctrine with our own. To respond to Eurocrats insisting, ‘There is no alternative’ (TINA) that respects the treaties and the current rules with, ‘That, astonishingly, there is an alternative’ (TATIANA). Our TATIANA, entitled ‘A Modest Proposal for Resolving the Eurozone Crisis’, is a blueprint for addressing the crisis through Europeanizing its four components –the crises of public debt, banks, underinvestment and the poverty explosion –while decentralizing political power through a reduction in the discretionary power exercised illicitly by the Brussels–Frankfurt–Berlin triangle. Seen from another less politically charged perspective, the proposal’s greatest merit is that it offers a way to abandon the eurozone’s problematic principle of perfectly separable debts and banking sectors and to introduce the missing political surplus recycling mechanism without creating autocratic discretionary power at Europe’s centre and without any immediate need to rewrite the European Union’s existing rules and treaties.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/And_the_Weak_Suffer_What_They_Must.html?id=FyvnCgAAQBAJ&redir_esc=y
The Practice of Public Sociology (2016-10-18 10:23)

The Practice of Public Sociology

Manchester Digital Laboratory

November 24

th

, Manchester, 9.30-18.00

For over a decade public sociology has been a mainstream topic of discussion within the discipline. While practiced prior to the 2004 address by Michael Burawoy to the American Sociological Association, its identification and elaboration on an intellectual level was crucial to its popularisation. But is it possible that the voluminous literature that emerged in the years following has left us with a public sociology that is overly-discursive? While undoubtedly important, is there a risk that theorising about public sociology gets in the way of its practice? This event organised by The Sociological Review’s Early Career Forum takes as its starting point David Mellor’s 2011 argument that “we don’t need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it”. We invite early career researchers who share this aim to join us for a day of workshops, discussion and debate about how we can collectively improve our practice of public sociology.

Confirmed Speakers

- Maddie Breeze, Queen Mary University
- Mark Carrigan, The Sociological Review
- Ipek Demir, University of Leicester
- Lambros Fatsis, University of Southampton
- Ruth Pearce, University of Warwick

Confirmed Workshops/Sessions

- Working with Print and Broadcast Media: Aaron Bastani, Novara Media
• Teaching Public Sociology: Maddie Breeze, Queen Mary University and Karl Johnson, Queen Mary University
• Working with Social Media: Mark Carrigan, The Sociological Review
• Working with Community Groups: Dan Silver, Social Action & Research Foundation
• Working with Photo Archives: Ben Kyneswood, Photo Mining

This event is free, but registration is compulsory. You can register here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-practice-of-public-sociology-sociological-review-early-career-event-tickets-28652394082?utm_campaign=new_event_email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eb_email&utm_term=viewmyevent_button

Places are extremely limited due to the size of the venue. Please do not sign up to this event unless you are sure you can attend. If you can no longer attend, please cancel your ticket asap by emailing Jenny Thatcher events@thesociologicalreview.com

For academic inquiries related to this event, please contact Mark Carrigan mark@markcarrigan.net

For all other inquiries related to this event, please email Jenny Thatcher events@thesociologicalreview.com

ECRs and PGRs Travel Bursaries

Sociological Review’s Early Career Board have a small number of travel bursaries available for early career researchers and postgraduate research student who would require assistant with travel costs. You can apply for by following this link: https://docs.google.com/a/thesociologicalreview.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfsrK7iyKth0WZMf-NJX7gKZ6ZWKnrUpqSZUWo5wLKOead3ZA/viewform

The deadline for travel bursary applications is Sunday 30th October 2016, 00.00 GMT


When YouTube bought Google (2016-10-19 08:00)

A fascinating snippet of tech history. The founders of YouTube talk about their recent sale to Google, back in 2006, back when each were seen as something other than the slightly menacing giants they are today:
Weapons of Math Destruction (2016-10-20 08:00)

A fascinating series of podcasts on this great new book [1]Weapons of Math Destruction:


Malgorzata (2016-10-21 08:13:03)
Have you read the book from Cathy O’Neil? Weapons of math desctruction?

Debate on Debate: Foucault v. Chomsky (1971) and the EU Referendum (2016) (2016-10-21 08:00)

By Rosie Smith

https://youtu.be/7TUD4gfvtDY
In 1971 a Dutch Television company ran a series of discussion panels with noted intellectuals on a wide range of issues both contemporary and philosophical. One of the most famous debates was between French philosopher Michel Foucault and American linguist Noam Chomsky who debated on the condition of human nature, power, and justice. I listened to this debate for the first time in the run up to the UK EU referendum, and have revisited it many times since UK citizens voted to leave the European Union. Watching the debate at a time of significant political uncertainty and widespread public engagement was fascinating. This is because the arguments made by both theorists on human nature, power, and knowledge, acted as lenses through which I observed and analysed the unfolding events. At its heart, the debate contests whether social structures, or free will and creativity, are the determinants of human action. A topic which also helps clarify the tempestuous Brexit vs. Remain campaign.

Let us begin with Foucault. Michel Foucault contends that there is no singular, fixed human nature that exists, and that the social world is made up of multiple schematisms (structures for understanding the world). These schematisms inform individuals on how to behave in different situations. According to Foucault these hidden structures, which dictate social action, are socially constructed. From this approach it is suggested that every aspect of an individuals’ life, and all surrounding social phenomena are products of their social, political, and cultural surroundings.

If we use this theory of human nature to unpack the voting behaviours in the EU referendum, it suggests that individuals interpret the arguments and evidence put to them, according to their position within wider social structures such as social class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age. Accordingly, the politicians who put forward these arguments, evidence, and lobbied for either the ‘in’ or ‘out’ campaign, are also bound up by structural biases; neither individuals nor the knowledge they construct can escape the pull of social structures. Foucault’s structuralist theory, paints a picture of a political climate that is akin to a complex network of interwoven individuals, all trying to understand the ideas and arguments put forward by others, who too occupy a unique place in the social structure. Using this theoretical lens, it is perhaps clear why the debate surrounding the EU referendum was often cryptic and perplexing.

To further explain how knowledge can never be complete or transparent because of structural influences, Foucault draws on a grid metaphor. If one places a square grid on the floor and continues to place grids one on top of the other, then whilst a tower begins to grow (the accumulation of knowledge), each individual grid contains gaps, which instead of being filled, are covered up by those after it. Thus the tower of knowledge is never fully stable. In this case, Foucault’s theory suggests voters must always make a decision based on incomplete knowledge.

Are the foundations of the tower of knowledge under more strain when the stakes are heightened within a turbulent and enigmatic political climate?

However, this is arguably a negative and deterministic view of social action, as it denies individuals the capacity and intellect to act according to free will and make informed decisions. In comparison, Chomsky’s arguments, as put forward in the debate stand defiantly against behavioural determinism, and argues that variations in human nature and conduct (such as voting patterns) are products of creativity and free will, not the product of oppressive social structures:
“Human nature has many of the characteristics of what I think might very well be called creativity” (Chomsky, 1971)

These polarised arguments raise the question: when UK citizens went to the polls on 23 June 2016 did their decision reflect the social structures they are immersed in, (as Foucault purported), or an expression of linguistic and intellectual free-will and creativity, (the Chomskyan ideal), or both?

This is a difficult question to answer, but what is clear is that whether voters acted according to their position in social structures, or because of creativity and free-will, or maybe another factor all together, their decisions were influenced by those who are in power. Those who own the grids of knowledge; those who offer tools for creativity; and those who have the power to define concepts such as 'Britishness', immigration, control, risk, refuge, and austerity.

Chomsky explores this issue and suggests that power in its basic form is not conducive to justice or equality, and that power can be mechanised to enforce subjective rules. Chomsky uses the following, and arguably wonderful, analogy when commenting on the Pentagon Papers:

“If I had stopped my car in front of a traffic light which was red, and then I drove through the red traffic light to prevent somebody from, let’s say, machine-gunning a group of people, of course that’s not an illegal act, it’s an appropriate and proper action; no sane judge would convict you for such an action” (Chomsky. 1971)

Chomsky's traffic light metaphor can be applied to help unpack the EU referendum. If one accepts that the traffic lights represent the current system, in which the UK is a member of the EU. The red light implies that currently the UK cannot move past this status. Then the lights turn green and there is the option to cross the road, without the control of the traffic lights. There is now the option to progress without the supposed safety the traffic light structures offer.

The 51.9 % of voters who voted to leave the EU are representative of those individuals who, according to Foucault, want to overturn existing structures of domination to achieve socio-political change. For Chomsky, the decision to cross the road unaided by traffic lights, is a product of an individual's interpretation of information. In both cases the result is symptomatic of discontent with the structural status quo, and the need for a re-evaluation of those in power, and thus, those institutions which have the power to influence the lives of UK citizens.

Perhaps striving for full transparency of knowledge, and completeness of information is neither possible nor desirable. And so whether the decision to leave the EU is representative of a structural shift or of political free-will, or both, it was a decision for change, a decision for creativity, and a decision for choice.

Rosie Smith is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of York. Her research looks at 'spectacular justice' and challenges the Foucauldian panoptic privatisation theory of justice. She is interested primarily in crime, justice, media, and Foucauldian theory.
CALL FOR ABSTRACTS: ACADEMIC LABOUR, DIGITAL MEDIA AND CAPITALISM
SPECIAL ISSUE OF TRIPLEC: COMMUNICATION, CAPITALISM & CRITIQUE


GUEST EDITORS: Thomas Allmer and Ergin Bulut

Modern universities have always been part of and embedded into capitalism in political, economic and cultural terms. In 1971, at the culmination of the Vietnam War, the Chomsky-Foucault debate reminded us of this fact when a young student pointed a question towards Chomsky: ‘How can you, with your very courageous attitude towards the war in Vietnam, survive in an institution like MIT, which is known here as one of the great war contractors and intellectual makers of this war?’ (Chomsky and Foucault 2006, 63) Chomsky responded dialectically, but also had to admit that the academic institution he is working for is a major organisation of war research and thereby strengthens the political contradictions and inequalities in capitalist societies. Edward P. Thompson, one of the central figures in the early years of British cultural studies, edited the book 'Warwick University Ltd’ in 1970. Thompson was working at the University of Warwick then and published together with colleagues and students a manuscript that discovered, as the title suggests, the close relationship of their university with industry and industrial capitalism. The book also revealed some evidence of secret political surveillance of staff and students by the university uncovered by students occupying the Registry at Warwick at that time. The relationship between state control and global capitalism has intensified in the last decades. With the collapse of the welfare state and the drop of public funds, universities are positioning themselves as active agents of global capital, transforming urban spaces into venues for capital accumulation and competing for international student populations for profit. In this environment, students have to pay significant amounts of tuition for precarious futures. Similarly, teaching and research faculties across the globe have to negotiate their roles that are often strictly defined in an entrepreneurial manner. Increasingly, the value of academic labour is measured in capitalist terms and therefore subject to new forms of control, surveillance and productivity measures. As the recent cases of Steven Salaita (USA), Academics for Peace (Turkey) and the crackdown against students in India reveal, academic labour and academics in general are also facing immense challenges in terms of state control and freedom of speech. Situated in this economic and political context, the overall task of this special issue of tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique is to gather critical contributions examining universities, academic labour, digital media and capitalism. We are thus particularly interested in articles focusing on (1) the context, history and theoretical concepts underlying academic labour, (2) the relationship between academic work and digital media/new information and communication technologies/the Internet/social media and (3) the political potentials and challenges within higher education. We welcome submissions that cover one or more of the following or related questions.

1) Contextualising and Theorising Academic Labour
* What is the historical role of universities and academic labour and how has it changed over time? * What is the role of universities for capitalist development in the age of neoliberalism and post-Fordism (e.g. employability, market-driven and industrial research)? * How far can the neoliberal university be considered as medium and outcome of informational capitalism? * How far can the university expansion be understood as a dialectic development of progress and regress, social achievement and advanced commodification? * What is meant by concepts such as Warwick University Ltd, McUniversity, academic proletarianisation, edu-factory, corporate university, academic capitalism, entrepreneurial university, university gamble, digital diploma mills, global university, DIY university, etc. in the context of academic labour? How are these concepts related to the wider social context and the existing capitalist order? How can a systematic typology of the existing literature be constructed? * What is the role of the concept of value for understanding academic labour? * What is the role of the concepts of the working class and the proletariat for theorising academic labour? * How should we define academic labour; who is included/excluded by this understanding? Where does adjunct labour stand? * What kind of workers are academics and how are they related to knowledge, informational and cultural workers? * How far can the outcomes of academic labour be considered as part of the information and communication commons? * To what extent rests informational capitalism on the commons produced at universities?
What are the important dimensions for constructing a typology of working conditions within higher education (e.g. new managerialism, audit culture, workload, job insecurity)? How do different working contexts and conditions in academia shape feelings of autonomy, flexibility and reputation on the one hand and precariousness, overwork and dissatisfaction on the other?

2) Academic Labour and Digital Media

Given that the academic work process is today strongly mediated through digital media, to what extent can academic workers be considered as digital workers, and academic labour as digital labour? In how far can digital education and online distance learning be understood as a new capital accumulation strategy that aims at attracting international students in a commodified and competitive higher education market? In how far can digital education be regarded as a response to neoliberal conditions within higher education?

How do digital media/new information and communication technologies/the Internet/social media frame the working conditions of academics?

How are the working conditions of academics characterised by intensification and extensification in the realm of the digital university (e.g. the blurring of working space and other spaces of human life, the blurring of labour and free time, fast academia, always-on cultures, deskilling, casualisation, electronic monitoring, digital surveillance, social media use for self-promotion, new forms of intellectual property rights)?

3) Politics, Struggles and Alternatives

How do the broader political realities and potentials in terms of solidarity, participation and democracy at universities look like? What is the relationship between the state and academic labour? What are some of the lessons that we can learn from global crackdowns on academic labour?

What are the challenges in order to reclaim the university as site of struggle for both academics and students? How far can the struggle at universities be connected to the global struggle against capitalism?

How do the political potentials of alternatives within higher education look like (e.g. informal learning processes, co-operative education, open education, open access, copyleft, creative and digital commons, Wikiversity)?

DEADLINES: Abstract submission: 31 October 2016 All abstracts will be reviewed and decisions on acceptance/rejection will be communicated to the authors by the end of November 2016. Full paper submission: 15 April 2017 Please submit article title, author name(s), contact data and abstract of 200-400 words to: Thomas Allmer, thomas.allmer@uti.at and Ergin Bulut, erginb@gmail.com ABOUT THE GUEST EDITORS: Thomas Allmer is Lecturer in Digital Media at the University of Stirling, Scotland, UK, and a member of the Unified Theory of Information Research Group, Austria. His publications include Towards a Critical Theory of Surveillance in Informational Capitalism (Peter Lang, 2012) and Critical Theory and Social Media: Between Emancipation and Commodification (Routledge, 2015). For further information, please see: http://allmer.uti.at Ergin Bulut is Assistant Professor of Media and Visual Arts in Istanbul. His research interests include political economy of media, digital media and politics, and media labor. Together with Michael A. Peters, he edited Cognitive Capitalism, Education and Digital Labor (Peter Lang, 2011). His work has been published in TV & New Media, Critical Studies in Media Communication, Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies, Media, Culture and Society, and Journal of Communication Inquiry. ABOUT THE JOURNAL: tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society.[5]http://www.triple-c.at Editors: Christian Fuchs, University of Westminster, UK, and Marisol Sandoval, City University London, UK tripleC is a journal that focuses on critical studies of communication in and beyond capitalism. Articles in it should employ critical theories and/or empirical research inspired by critical theories and/or philosophy and ethics guided by critical thinking as well as relate the analysis to power structures and inequalities of capitalism, especially forms of stratification such as class, racist and other ideologies and capitalist patriarchy. tripleC is indexed in the databases Communication Source, Scopus and Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index. — Chomsky, Noam and Michel Foucault. 2006. Human Nature: Justice vs. Power (1971): A Debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault. In The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature, edited by Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault, 1-67. New York: New Press. Thompson, Edward, ed. 1970. Warwick University Ltd. London: Penguin Books.
An Introduction to NodeXL for Social Scientists

9 January 2017 (1-4pm)

Leslie Silver Building G28, Leeds Beckett University

Confirmed speakers: Wasim Ahmed

BSA members - £15
Non-members - £20

Visit the BSA events page to register:

https://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events/bsa-digital-sociology-group-workshop/

This workshop will introduce participants to some of the most important concepts, terminology, and methods of analysis for social scientists who want to work with social media data.

Social media have become an increasingly central part of many peoples' lives and now often play a prominent role in social, cultural and political discussion and debate. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and other media are used for everyday interactions by many, some people also use them to build professional networks and to market themselves to potential clients or employers.

Social media are also often used by news services in order to gather opinion and information on stories which in some cases is replacing investigative journalism. Political parties now use social media to target voters with particular messages and to build their electoral strategies.

This session will focus on analyzing Twitter data with a hands-on overview of one of the most widely used software packages, NodeXL. Participants will get the chance to work on conducting some basic analysis of Twitter data with help from an expert in social media analysis. The registration fee for the workshop includes one day access to NodeXL.

No prior knowledge of social media analysis or quantitative research skills is required. A Twitter account is desirable to access some of the tools, but this can be created during the workshop.

The workshop will be delivered by Wasim Ahmed, a PhD researcher in the Information School and a Research Associate at the Management School at The University of Sheffield and also a social media analysis consultant. He has written about social media analysis tools on the [1]LSE Impact of Social Sciences Blog and on [2]his personal blog.

Venue: Leslie Silver Building G28, Leeds Beckett University, City Campus, Leeds, United Kingdom LS1 3HE

Call for papers: archives & traces of the past (2016-10-23 08:00)

A one-day conference will be held at the University of Edinburgh on Friday 13 January 2017, to explore the impact of new technological, conceptual and methodological ideas on how archives and their contents are now being used to 'research the past', and what claims can be made for the result. This call for is for papers regarding all forms of archival research, with 'the archive' cast wide to spread from National Archives, to local archives, to buttonboxes and photograph albums, to radical-archives-in-the-making, to digital collections and more, and how 'the trace' shapes up in relation to them. More information on the conference theme, papers and a registration form is in the attached file.

The idea of 'the trace' concerns the flotsam and jetsam of the things of the past that remain and which necessarily inform or shape present-time investigations of times gone by. Traces can be written, visual, oral, material, musical, digital... Currently 'the trace' is being multiply impacted at ontological, epistemological, methodological and material levels by a succession of developments - including new theory, expanded ideas about archives, innovative methodologies, and new technological developments around digital images and electronic forms of assemblage and representation. There are powerful reverberations resulting. For some, what is 'an archive', what is 'a collection' and what is 'a document' are now all up for grabs. For others, the trace remains at a kaleidoscopic core and has to be reckoned with. So let's stand back and talk about it!

Please send a title and an abstract of not more than 400 words with your offer of a paper as an email attachment to Liz Stanley, Sociology, University of Edinburgh, email address: [liz.stanley@ed.ac.uk]

Closing date for offers: The closing date for offers of papers is Monday 7 November 2016.

Registration for attendance: Registration for the event is open NOW! There is no charge. However, room capacity is limited and therefore early registration is encouraged. There is a registration form in the attached email - please complete and send the form to the email address above. The final date for registration will be 18 December, but numbers will be limited to 40, so please register asap to avoid disappointment.

Marx Reloaded (2016-10-24 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9uYjQgpjOx0

Marx Reloaded is a cultural documentary that examines the relevance of German socialist and philosopher Karl Marx's ideas for understanding the global economic and financial crisis of 2008-09. The crisis triggered the deepest global recession in 70 years and prompted the US government to spend more than 1 trillion dollars in order to rescue its banking system from collapse. Today the full implications of the crisis in Europe and around the world still remain unclear. Nevertheless, should we accept the crisis as an unfortunate side-effect of the free market? Or is there another explanation as to why it happened and its likely effects on our society, our economy and our whole
way of life? Written and directed by Jason Barker - himself an experienced writer, lecturer, translator and doctor of philosophy - Marx Reloaded comprises interviews with the world’s leading philosophers of Marxism, including those at the forefront of a popular revival in Marxist and communist ideas. The film also includes interviews with skeptics of this revival as well as light-hearted animation sequences which follow Marx’s adventures through the matrix of his own ideas.

The exciting future of personal communications (2016-10-25 08:00)

From Fantastic Four #52 (July 1966):
The Shifting Sources of Hostility to the Accelerated Academy (2016-10-25 10:49)

The hostility to speed in the ‘accelerated academy’ predates the current fashion to complain about it and blame it on neo-liberalism. I was already reviewing a book by the Dutch sociologist and public intellectual, Dick Pels, on ‘fast science’ for the British Journal of Sociology in 2004, where he basically advocated ‘slow science’ on the model of ‘slow food’, something nowadays popular with the anti-accelerationists. (Unfortunately Pels used the stilted phrase ‘unhastening science’).
What people complain about – sorry I meant ‘critique’ – as the ‘accelerated academy’ is a personalization of a phenomenon that was already recognized at the aggregate level a half-century ago: namely, that the research frontier moves more rapidly as more people are brought into the knowledge production process. This is an idea that goes back to Condorcet and the Enlightenment and justified the promotion of education to unleash humanity’s hidden potential to build a Heaven on Earth. It was seen as a relatively good thing back then – a less science-fictional version of Ray Kurzweil’s visions of the Singularity today.

By the early 1960s the physicist-turned-historian Derek de Solla Price was charting the various acceleration curves based on citation counts in scientific journals, which had become easy to do with the creation of the Science Citation Index (now ‘Web of Science’). Indeed, Price was the first to use such counts to measure and evaluate knowledge production in general – and draw some interesting policy conclusions. It was the start of the field of ‘scientometrics’. On this basis Price coined the famous little/big science distinction, which continues to frame science policy discourse.

However, the sense of ‘acceleration’ of concern to Price and most policymakers ignored the micro level – that is, what effect it would have on individuals facing an already competitive world opening up to many more competitors. Economists know about this scenario, and reckon that to survive under such market conditions one needs to produce more efficiently. But they’re still looking at it from a macro-level because they imagine that this will drive down prices for existing products which in turn will draw in more consumers, which will enable everyone to live happily ever after.

But at a micro-level this means that you can end up driving yourself and others to ground. Even before neo-liberalism, a gender-based critique of the natural sciences emerged because if you need to spend 24/7 in the lab to get competitive results, then women with child-caring duties are disadvantaged. In any case, complaints about the mentality and lifestyle that it takes to survive in the highly competitive world of the natural sciences predate neo-liberalism.

What’s distinctive now about the ‘accelerated academy’ is less to do with people working more hours than that they need to divide those hours between doing the work and accounting for the work. That places the real psychic burden. In the past, the main regular accounting that academics had to do was in the form of peer reviewed publications, which to be sure can be a real psychic burden! But now add to it the need to write grant proposals – regardless of whether one truly needs them – and the periodic self-reporting of activities and achievements, often to more than one authority.

From Derek Price’s standpoint fifty years ago, this development would appear to be a wastage unleashed as a result of more people having been brought into the knowledge production process. But it’s not clear how he or his peers from the 1960s would have addressed the matter. It’s entirely possible that they would have simply called for the use of more ‘unobtrusive measures’ of accountancy, to use a phrase of the time. Nowadays we call it surveillance.

Postscript: When I reviewed Pels’ book, I observed that the sort of people he classed as ‘slow’ – e.g. Ludwig Wittgenstein – simply did not publish a lot in their lifetime. But after they died, it became clear that they had been writing quite a lot. In other words, the illusion of slowness in someone like Wittgenstein reflected Pels’ implicit association of speed of publication with speed of thought. What Pels valorized and others might abhor as ‘slow science’ was ultimately about slow accounting for science. It’s easy, then, to see how the neo-liberal style of knowledge production starts to get an intuitive hold.
Some recent articles about the accelerated academy The Sociological Imagination (2016-11-05 08:01:07)

[... ] The Shifting Sources of Hostility to the Accelerated Academy by Steve Fuller [...]

Some thoughts on fast and slow science in the accelerated academy | A quem interessar possa... (2017-02-18 13:32:58)

[... ] The Shifting Sources of Hostility to the Accelerated Academy by Steve Fuller [...]

Essay Competition: Crossing Disciplinary Borders and Into the Future (2016-10-26 08:00)


CfP - Contemporary Boys' Literacies / Boys' Literatures (2016-10-26 20:17)

Boyhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal

Special Issue Contemporary Boys' Literacies / Boys' Literatures

For the Fall 2017 issue of Boyhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal (Volume 10), the editors invite original contributions to the wide and dynamic fields of contemporary boys’ literacy and boys’ literature. Especially
welcomed are critical and international perspectives on current, global and digital landscapes of texts as they speak to, and are inhabited by, boys. Manuscripts focusing on boys’ reading/writing attitudes, preferences, practices, or performances, or on gender-focused/gender-critical literacy teaching practices or policy, will be considered as well. The following perspectives fall within the CFP scope but do not exhaust it.

- Boys and multi-media/cross-media multiliteracies
- Mobile/wifi literacies and boys' geographies; boys' literature in a changing landscape of e-books and e-readers; boys and/in the blogosphere
- Understanding literacies and gender gaps
- Boys and contemporary/emergent game literacies
- Contemporary literacy theories and/vs contemporary gender theories
- Boys and/in the (digital) literacy classroom
- A/S/L/P: Texting/sexting/cyberbullying/cyberromancing and young genders/maturities
- Affect/Script/Discourse and readerly/writerly boyhoods
- Boys’ engagement with "content" and news in times/spaces of newsfeeds, walls, timelines, YouTube, NetFlix, and multi-group chat socialities
- Privilege, gender and textual access/opportunities in childhood and adolescence
- Changing intersections and interfaces for boys’ literacy/literature & race, & class, & sexuality, etc.

Authors are encouraged to contact Guest Editor Garth Stahl (garth.stahl@gmail.com) with queries, ideas or abstracts.

Article Submissions

First drafts are due February 1st, 2017

Final accepted drafts are due July 1, 2017. Publication is in Fall 2017.

The standard length of articles is 6,500 words, although shorter or longer manuscripts will be considered. Please follow the Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition.

Authors should submit articles electronically as attachments by e-mail (Microsoft Word file or equivalent).

Formal submissions to: boyhoodstudies@gmail.com

Boyhood Studies (BHS) is published and distributed in print and online by Berghahn Journals

Visit BHS online for further details, including submission guidelines:

http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/boyhood-studies/
This proposed edited collection draws on interdisciplinary perspectives of space and place in order to investigate young people’s identities. The goal is to assemble an international collection which enhances our understanding of the theories employed in the study of youth identity practices as they negotiate a sense of belonging. More specifically, we seek to understand the manner in which the practices, discourses and ethos of a particular locales, spaces and institutions shape the dispositions and ‘ways of being’ for young people (Stahl and Habib, 2016).

How young people’s negotiate belonging in everyday life remains an emerging area of scholarship, with conceptual overlaps in how youth come to understand their positions in fragmented societies (cf. Clayton, 2011;
Identity construction takes place in and through the making of places, defined by Relph (1976, 141) as “directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world” and “fusions of human and natural order [that] are the significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world.” Theories of social change such as those of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) have had a significant impact on the sociology of youth (Woodman 2009). However, as Farrugia argues: “‘The image of a homogeneous modernity must be replaced by a spatialised sociology of youth biographies that is open to the geographies of inequality that structure youth transitions” (2013, 300). Fundamental to research on youth, young people can construct status and meaningful identities for themselves through conceptions of belonging, investment in peer cultures and via relationships with ‘territories’ and places.

This proposed collection seeks theory-driven work on youth and belonging from diverse contexts. Empirical studies are welcomed but the emphasis should be on evaluating theoretical approaches to conceptions of youth and belonging. Submissions might consider: the rural, urban, the Global North/South, the local/national/transnational, and transitions, displacements and mobilities. Chapters could also reference key sites and institutions in young people’s lives: school/college, home, places of worship, community/cultural centres, sport/youth clubs, the street, spaces of consumption, juvenile detentions, refugee camps, the (territorial) army/cadets/scouts etc.

Indicative topics may include, but are not limited to, the following theoretical engagements with:

- The spatial dimensions of established themes in youth studies, such as youth transitions, cultures/subcultures;
- The spatial dimensions of social divisions such as class, gender or race in reference to belonging;
- Spatially informed local, national or international comparisons;
- Mobilities, immobilities and displacement/diaspora;
- Critical pedagogies of place;
- Neoliberalisation, glocalisation and superdiversity.

**Instructions for Submissions**

Authors are invited to discuss proposed chapters with the editors.

Interested scholars are encouraged to submit a 250 word abstract by **15th December 2016** to:
Dr Garth Stahl, University of South Australia - garth.stahl@gmail.com
Dr Sadia Habib - phdsadia@gmail.com
Dr Mike Ward - m.r.m.ward@swansea.ac.uk

We aim to submit full proposal to BSA Sociological Futures on Jan 15th 2017. **At this point in time though we only require abstracts.**
The Practice of Public Sociology (2016-10-27 08:00)

The Practice of Public Sociology

Manchester Digital Laboratory
November 24th, Manchester, 9.30-18.00

For over a decade public sociology has been a mainstream topic of discussion within the discipline. While practiced prior to the 2004 address by Michael Burawoy to the American Sociological Association, its identification and elaboration on an intellectual level was crucial to its popularisation. But is it possible that the voluminous literature that emerged in the years following has left us with a public sociology that is overly-discursive? While undoubtedly important, is there a risk that theorising about public sociology gets in the way of its practice? This event organised by The Sociological Review’s Early Career Forum takes as its starting point David Mellor’s 2011 argument that "we don’t need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it". We invite early career researchers who share this aim to join us for a day of workshops, discussion and debate about how we can collectively improve our practice of public sociology.

Confirmed Speakers

- Maddie Breeze, Queen Mary University
- Mark Carrigan, The Sociological Review
- Ipek Demir, University of Leicester
- Lambros Fatsis, University of Southampton
- Ruth Pearce, University of Warwick

Confirmed Workshops/Sessions

- Working with Print and Broadcast Media: Aaron Bastani, Novara Media
- Teaching Public Sociology: Maddie Breeze, Queen Mary University and Karl Johnson, Queen Mary University
• Working with Social Media: Mark Carrigan, The Sociological Review
• Working with Community Groups: Dan Silver, Social Action & Research Foundation
• Working with Photo Archives: Ben Kyneswood, Photo Mining

This event is free, but registration is compulsory. You can register here:[1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-practice-of-public-sociology-sociological-review-early-career-event-tickets-28652394082?utm_campaign=new_event_email&utm_medium=email&utm_source=eb_email&utm_term=viewmyevent_button

Places are extremely limited due to the size of the venue. Please do not sign up to this event unless you are sure you can attend. If you can no longer attend, please cancel your ticket asap by emailing Jenny Thatcher events@thesociologicalreview.com

For academic inquiries related to this event, please contact Mark Carrigan mark@markcarrigan.net

For all other inquiries related to this event, please email Jenny Thatcher events@thesociologicalreview.com

ECRs and PGRs Travel Bursaries

Sociological Review’s Early Career Board have a small number of travel bursaries available for early career researchers and postgraduate research student who would require assistant with travel costs. You can apply for by following this link: https://docs.google.com/a/thesociologicalreview.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfsrK7iy Kth0WZMf-NJX7gKZ6ZWKnUrppSUWo5wLKOead3ZA/viewform

The deadline for travel bursary applications is Sunday 30th October 2016, 00.00 GMT


BSA Early Career Forum Regional Events 2017 - Call for Proposals (2016-10-28 08:00)

Call for BSA Regional Early Career Event Proposals 2017

Launched in 2009, the BSA Early Career Forum (ECF) recognises the distinct set of challenges facing early career sociologists in the current academic and employment climate and aims to provide support and assistance to meet the specific needs of this community.

We are looking for early career academics willing to co-ordinate with speakers and the BSA to organise a day event at the applicant’s institution. The BSA will provide up to £1,000 support for the event and registration rates should be £10 for BSA members to attend and £25 for non-members.

The grant can be used to pay for room hire, speakers, lunch and refreshments. Organisers are encouraged to seek a contribution from the host institution, such as free meeting room or a financial contribution to refreshments.
The BSA Office will also promote and publicise the event through a number of outlets including flyers in membership packs, the BSA website and member e-newsletters.

Bids for the fund would need to provide a short justification and description of the proposed event, a budget, and an explanation as to how relevant for ECF members the proposed event is. The fund is available only for events outside of London, to support networking and events across the country.

Applications should be no more than 1,000 words. Please include your name, current position and years since awarded PhD or have been working.

Please email your proposal to the [1]BSA Events Team and address all correspondence: BSA ECF REGIONAL EVENT 2017.

All applicants must be a current BSA member. If you would like to become a BSA member visit our [2]website for more information.

The submission deadline for proposals is: 5pm on Wednesday, 10th November 2016. Late applications will not be considered.

Proposals should include the following details:

Name of organiser(s):

Institution(s):

Proposal for Regional Early Career Event:

- Proposed dates
- Proposed theme
- Potential speakers
- Anticipated costs
Please note the following criteria are used to judge applications

All applications will be considered by the membership services directors and an Early Career Forum convenor. A final decision is then made by the Trustees taking into consideration the feedback from the Early Career Forum convenor and based on the following selection criteria:

- Breadth of appeal beyond the organising group
- Centrality to sociological concerns
- Quality of information provided
- Geographical spread
- Distinctiveness from previous events and institutions
- Relevance to early career sociologists

1. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk
2. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/membership/

The Philosophy of Distraction: A Conversation With Damon Young (2016-10-29 08:00)

In this podcast I talk to Damon Young about the nature of distraction, how it changes over history and the existential challenge it poses to human beings.

Read his superb book! [1]www.routledge.com/Distraction/Youn...ok/978 1844652549

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/289034101" params="auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false &visual=true" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" /]

A Digital Capitalism Reading List (2016-10-30 08:00)

An initial compilation of material *explicitly* invoking the concept of 'digital capitalism':

- [1] Understanding Digital Capitalism (series of articles)
- [3] Digital capitalism produces few winners
- [7] Immaterial Value and Scarcity in Digital Capitalism
- [8] Agnatology and Crisis in Digital Capitalism
- [9] Power Under Pressure: Digital Capitalism in Crisis
- [10] Digital Capitalism: Towards a New Manifesto for the left
- [14] Dances with wolves? China’s integration into digital capitalism
- [15] Declaration on Digital Capitalism
- [16] Digital Capitalism and New Transnational Identities
- [17] Collection of Digital Capitalism posts on Information Observatory blog
- [18] Digital Capitalism
- [19] Commodification and language in Digital Capitalism
- [21] On the importance of Labouring capacity for understanding digital capitalism
- [22] Creativity, labour and education in Digital Capitalism
- [23] Critical sociology of critique in the age of digital capitalism
- [24] VR in Digital Capitalism
- [26] Activism on the Web: Everyday Struggles Against Digital Capitalism
- [27] Social movements, critical web practices & the struggle against digital capitalism
• [28] Digital capitalism, red in tooth and claw

• [29] Eugene Brennan on McChesney, Media Democracy and Digital Capitalism

10. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=P61EBqtxYwCkpге=PA151lg=PA151dq=%22digital+capitalism%221source=bl&ots=ot5F-pYNsQ&sig=7HW08HZ9qcF4gayRMggqub5OnHc8h1=en&sa=
15. https://artforum.com/inprint/issue=201408&id=48220
17. http://informationobservatory.info/category/digital-capitalism/

Work, employment and society: join the associate board (2016-10-31 08:00)

Work, employment and society Associate Board
Call for Applications

Deadline: Thursday 10 November 2016, 17:00 (GMT)

Dear colleagues,

Work, employment and society invites applications to join its Associate Board. Successful candidates will become members of the Board from January 2017, for a period of three years.

The WES Associate Board is made up of 30 scholars, both junior and senior academics, who commit themselves to reviewing up to 10 papers a year for the journal. The Associate Board is open to both junior and senior academics with a PhD, or equivalent, in any area covered by the journal or in a relevant subject. International and UK applications will be considered. You do not need to be a member of the BSA to apply for a position on the Associate Board; however successful candidates are required to join the Association.

The Associate Board requires members with a broad range of expertise, although preference will be given to those whose expertise is in demand by the journal. The following areas of expertise are particularly needed:

- Gender, work and employment
- Labour markets
- Knowledge work/the professions
- International and comparative sociology of work and employment
- Unpaid, invisible and ‘non-standard’ forms of work and employment
- Migration
- Intersectionality
- Creative industries
- Economic/labour geography

The online application form and further information about applying to the Editorial Board can be found online at: [1]www.uk-engage.org/britsocwesab If you have queries about the application process, please contact UK Engage, who are running the election process at: [2]britsoc@uk-engage.org

If you would like further information about the role, please contact Professor Jacqueline O'Reilly (Chair of the Editorial Board) at [3]J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk

1. [http://www.uk-engage.org/britsocwesab](http://www.uk-engage.org/britsocwesab)
2. [mailto:britsoc@uk-engage.org](mailto:britsoc@uk-engage.org)
3. [mailto:J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:J.O'Reilly@brighton.ac.uk)
The point of departure of this special issue for the Dutch Journal of Gender Studies (Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies) is the University of Amsterdam's student occupation in the spring of 2015 and the banner hanging from the front of its main administrative building, 'het Maagdenhuis', stating: 'No Democratization without Decolonization'. This local call for a decolonisation of education, the curriculum, and the University system connected contemporary voices and struggles in the city of Amsterdam to other voices in the margins of academic institutions both in the Global South and in Europe and the US asking: 'Why is my curriculum white? Why isn’t my professor black?' These powerful questions also brought to renewed visibility the long-term social political struggles and intellectual traditions within and outside the Dutch University, which have been critically engaging with racism, discrimination, and exclusion (Loewenthal, 1984; Essed, 1991; Essed & Hoving, 2014, Wekker, 2015). In Belgium, student activism is steadily growing, but remains as yet low profile. Nevertheless, universities and university colleges increasingly underwrite the importance of 'diversity' by implementing diversity policies and employing 'diversity officers'. It remains to be seen how such engagements translate into practice and relate to calls for a radical decolonisation of academic institutions.

For the editors of this special issue, these events not only point at the centrality of addressing colonial pasts of our academic institutions, but also present a broader invitation to ask how knowledge is produced and taught at universities and for whose benefits. This special issue seeks contributions that engage creatively with the various intellectual and/or activist traditions that are addressing these questions. Contributions can address the Dutch and Belgium context, but we also welcome articles from and about other countries and regions.

The question of decolonising the university speaks to debates and research on the politics of knowledge and the analysis of power relations, which have been profoundly shaped by critical feminist agendas. Black, Chicana, ‘First nations’/ Indigenous/communitarian, and decolonial feminisms have been at the forefront of the struggle to decolonise the university and the knowledge structures that remain complicit with intersectional forms of domination. To decolonise a modern/colonial institution such as the University and its curricula requires a politics of coalition building (Lugones, 2003, 2008), and a praxis of intersectionality (Bilge & Collins, 2016). While decolonial thought acknowledges gender as a key analytical category, it has also engaged with its coloniality and the need to develop new ways of embodied thought and praxis (Lugones, 2003, 2008; Icaza & Vázquez, 2016). This raises questions about the decolonisation of gender as an axial reflection for the transformation not only of women’s studies but of our practices of knowledge and the university as a whole. Furthermore, this encourages reflection on the invisible norms shaping universities as institutional spaces that assume certain bodies (white/male) as the norm, making the 'others' into 'space invaders', bodies out of place (Ahmed, 2012; Puwar, 2004).

This special issue seeks contributions that speak to one or more of the following agendas:

- reflect on/with movements and initiatives both in the Global South and in the Global North that are seeking to decolonise the University
- consider interventions across the world to decolonise learning and the University and their interconnections
- examine the specificities of local autonomous practices to decolonise knowledge and learning
- share pedagogical experiences with decolonising the curriculum, in gender studies and beyond
- develop conceptual and ethical articulations of decolonisation of learning and the University
- discuss the challenges of building political coalitions supporting the decolonisation of learning and the University

- trace the historical precedents and the local/national/international impulses moving these struggles forward

- reflect on the relevance of the decolonisation of gender as a turning point for the transformation of the University

Research articles are subjected to a double blind peer review process. Articles can be submitted in English or in Dutch.

As well as research articles, the journal welcomes essays, columns (short topical and polemical articles), interviews, and visual essays.

The Dutch Journal of Gender Studies (Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies) is published by Amsterdam University Press:

[1]www.tijdschriftvoorgenderstudies.nl

**Deadlines and timeline publication:**

- Submission of abstracts (+/- 450 words) to: [2]tvgarchief@gmail.com

Deadline submission of abstracts: 15 December 2016

- Notification of acceptance before: Christmas break
- Deadline first version articles (max. 6000 words incl. references and bibliography): 15 April 2017


- Reviews from external reviewers received: 1 June 2017
- Final version from authors (max. 6000 words): 1 July 2017
- Publication: 21 Sept 2017

**Editors:**

Rosalba Icaza: [5]icaza@iss.nl

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8. [mailto:sara.dejong@open.ac.uk](mailto:sara.dejong@open.ac.uk)

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A New World...Out of Nothing (2016-11-02 08:00)

You are cordially invited to the workshop

**A New World... Out of Nothing**

(16th November 2016, University of Warwick, 1pm - 6pm)
A group of experts will guide our journey:

[1] Prof Jeremy Gray (University of Warwick and Open University), Historian of Mathematics

[2] Dr Mairi Walker (University of Edinburgh), Mathematics Engagement Officer

[3] Prof Robert Lambourne (Open University), Professor of Educational Physics


This interactive, interdisciplinary workshop will tell the story of how a Non-Euclidean Geometry was discovered in the 19th century and how this breakthrough has influenced work in the arts, literature and fiction, and is the basis of some fundamental discoveries in physics, such as relativity. There will also be a panel discussion about how to communicate science to non-experts. The workshop is open to everybody, and is ideal for anybody who wants to learn complex concepts in an informal fun way. No prior knowledge of mathematics is required. The event is organised by [6] Dr Francesca Iezzi - a mathematician who works on an interdisciplinary project at the [7] Warwick Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning and is passionate not only about algebraic geometry, but also about communicating mathematics to non-mathematicians. Registration is free but required. Places are limited and allocated on a first come first served basis. For more information and to register visit: [8] www.warwick.ac.uk/iatl/new_world

1. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/maths/people/staff/jeremy_gray/
2. http://www.mairiwalker.co.uk/
4. http://homeweb.unifr.ch/parlierh/pub/
6. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl/about/people/team/iezzi/
7. https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/iatl
8. http://www.warwick.ac.uk/iatl/new_world
Big Data and New Skills (2016-11-03 08:00)

A panel on the challenge of big data which took place at the International Sociological Association’s Logic & Methodologies conference.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N51-LvKXr6g

Bringing together a panel of academic experts, this event calls upon the panelists to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing research and teaching skills in this new world of big data analytics. In this age of Big Data, new paradigms will be needed not only for research methodology, but also for study design and interpretation, cross-disciplinary collaboration, data curation and dissemination, visualization, replication, and research ethics.

This panel explores the various ways in which teaching and research methods are being adapted and influenced by the vast number of new data sources and methodological innovations, as well as the changing demands of the field.

What impact will the changing data environment have on social research?
How are research methods changing because of these influences?
What developments are being seen in qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods teaching as a result?
These topics are explored as panelists debate what the research of the future will look like and what teaching and research skills will be needed to address it.

The expert panelists for the debate include:

Professor Henrietta O'Connor
Professor Barbara Kawulich
Dr Mark Carrigan
Professor Nigel Fielding
Dr Kingsley Purdam
Dr Vera Toepool

The debate was chaired by:

Dr Jerry Coulton

Upcoming @BalanceNetwork events (2016-11-04 08:00)

An update on forthcoming events from this [1]fascinating interdisciplinary research network:
THREE CAFÉS: EXPERIENTIAL ARTISTIC RESEARCH EXPLORING INTER-RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND WELLBEING - 23 November & 28 November, Cambridge

Anglia Ruskin University’s Marina Velez, Davide Natalini, and Debby Lauder are leading a trio of experimental interventions, designed to open up discursive spaces for interactive and experiential research as to how digital technology increasingly serves to shape our perception, determine our communication, frame our identity, inform our self-awareness and underpin our social interactions. The three events will be "Embracing Technology" (23 Nov, 4-6pm, Espresso Library, Cambridge), "Refusal of Technology" (23 Nov, CB2 Cafe, 6-8pm, Cambridge) and "Discussion and Co-production" (28 Nov, 6-8pm, Thirsty, Cambridge). For more information contact [2]Marina.

ICT SKILLS AND ONLINE PLATFORMS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION, workshop and evidence-based paper, workshop: 28 November afternoon, Coventry

Dr Sally-Anne Barnes and Professor Anne Green of University of Warwick and Professor Leela Damodaran of Loughborough University are drafting an evidence-based paper focusing on the skills and attributes needed to successfully gain and sustain work via online platforms. A workshop with experts and local/national policy makers will be held as part of this project. For more information, and if you are interested in contributing, contact [3]Sally-Anne.

THE ROLE OF MICRO BOUNDARIES FOR WORK-LIFE BALANCE, individual diary studies & intervention workshops, workshops: 1, 3 & 5 December, London,

Marta E. Cecchinato, PhD student, and Dr Anna L. Cox of UCL have received funding to gain insight into the use of "microboundaries" by knowledge workers who are experiencing work-life balance challenges. Microboundaries limit the negative effects of work-life cross-overs, such as the interrupting effect of notifications at inopportune moments. The diary studies will be organized in November with the Intervention workshops in December. There are websites set up to learn more about both the [4]diary studies and [5]workshops. For more information, contact [6]Marta.

[7]WORK-LIFE BALANCE WITHIN THE IT PROFESSION, half-day seminar with the British Computer Society, 7 December afternoon, Portsmouth

Dr Penny Hart, Dr Penny Ross and Dr Carl Adams of the School of Computing at University of Portsmouth received funding to attend the World IT project committee meeting in August. They will be running a Balance Network seminar co-hosted by the British Computer Society (BCS) on 7 December. The team will be analysing the World IT project’s extensive survey of IT professionals, which captured cultural and contextual differences across the technology workforce, from a work-life balance perspective. For more information, visit their [8]registration page or contact [9]Penny H.

[10]MANAGING TECHNOLOGY AROUND WORK AND LIFE: DESIGN CHALLENGES, design workshop, 13 December, Sheffield

Dr Luigina Ciolfi and Dr Eleanor Lockley of The Cultural Communication and Computing Research Institute at Sheffield Hallam University will design and lead research and networking activities regarding various strategies of technology appropriation that individuals implement to handle work and life demands. These activities will include a series of interviews followed by a design workshop on 13 December in Sheffield, featuring a keynote presentation by Professor Susanne Bødker (Aarhus University, Denmark). At the workshop participants will help create technology concepts to support work and home lives. Following the event, an interest group on work-life technology design will be established. For more
DIGITAL SCHOLARS IN A MOBILE WORLD, one-day research symposium exploring work-life balance in academic lifeworlds, 14 December, Kingston-upon-Hull

This symposium in early December, led by Josef Ploner & Anastasia Gouseti of the University of Hull, will gather UK-based early career academics from across the disciplines, working in the areas of higher education research, academic mobility and new/digital technologies within professional contexts. Speakers will include: Dr. Aparecido Fabiano Pinatti de Carvalho of Universität Siegen, Dr Jude Fransman of Open University, Dr Emily F. Henderson of University of Warwick and Prof Gail Kinman (University of Bedfordshire). At the event, participants will share current and ongoing research into work-life balance within academic contexts and begin to build a collaborative network in view of future research activities. For more information, contact [12]Josef.

[14]CONVERSATION PIECES, series of two-hour design workshops, 12, 13 or 14 December, 10 am to midday, London

A poster for this activity can be downloaded below. Paulina Yurman, a PhD Student in Goldsmiths Design Department, will be hosting a series of two hour workshops in early December. At each event, novel design proposals will be presented to participants, as semi-working artefacts or as images. The proposals will revolve around the tensions and ambivalences brought by digital devices in families with young children, as they blur the boundaries between work and play. For more information, contact [15]Paulina.

BALANCING WORK AND MILITARY SPOUSE LIFE IN THE DIGITAL AGE, 19 December, Northamptonshire

Dr Lisa Wood of Lancaster Medical School at Lancaster University, will lead a one-day workshop in collaboration with Tracy Hauver, a student at University of Liverpool. The workshop will explore opportunities and barriers in socio-digital support for military spouses and families. The hypermobility of this group provides a valuable site for exploration of new patterns of working and family life, the impacts of hyper mobility and the everyday use of digital technologies in family life. During the workshop, participants will discuss possible digital futures and help generate priorities for future research. After the New Year, Lisa and Tracy will continue the project with on-line focus groups. Spaces are extremely limited, but for more information, contact [16]Lisa.

[17]CO-DESIGNING SMART OBJECTS FOR HEALTHIER OFFICE WORK BEHAVIOURS, half-day workshop on 19 October in Nottingham

A poster for this activity can be downloaded below. Yitong Huang, a PhD student from the Horizon CDT, hosted a half-day workshop on October 19 to engage stakeholders of work health in co-designing novel behaviour change interventions, delivered with smart office objects that are digitally augmented with sensing and computing capabilities and connected to each. She introduced accessible tools for intervention development and rough prototyping techniques (e.g. ideation card, sketches, plug-and-play sensors) to facilitate collaborative thinking and exchange of multidisciplinary perspectives to this issue. For more information, contact [18]Yitong.

Some recent articles about the accelerated academy (2016-11-05 08:00)

2. [2]The Shifting Sources of Hostility to the Accelerated Academy by Steve Fuller
3. [3]One more time with (structures) of feeling by Jana Bacevic
4. [4]Big data, new skills: how the accelerated academy hinders the interdisciplinary collaboration we need by Mark Carrigan
5. [5]Fast and slow science in the Accelerated Academy by Mark Carrigan
6. [6]Social Science and Social Futures by Mark Carrigan and William Housley

Social Media and Open Research: What Does ‘Open’ Mean? (2016-11-06 08:00)

In the not too distant past, the use of social media in higher education was seen as a curiosity at best. Perhaps something to be explained or inquired into but certainly not something deemed relevant to scholarship. Yet it’s now increasingly hard to move without encountering the idea that social media is something of value for academics. The reasons offered are probably quite familiar by now. It helps ensure your research is visible, both inside and outside the academy, helping build an audience for your publications and an impact for their findings. It expands your professional networks. It makes research more open and researchers more accountable to the people who ultimately fund their work.

If not quite at the level of ‘common sense’ yet, I suspect these points soon will be regarded as such, at least by young scholars. On the surface, we seem to have witnessed a fairly significant change, but is it a positive one?

In many ways I think it’s not because so much of this discussion is preoccupied by individuals and how social media can help their careers. It becomes one more facet in the ideal package of academic skills which are seen to be necessary to thrive in the contemporary academy. Bring in your grants. Publish highly cited papers in high impact journals. Get good teaching reports. Build an audience on social media. The unspoken corollary of social media helping build careers is how being unwilling or unable to engage in it might harm your career. Through their social media use, academics signal their orientation towards accumulating visibility for their institution and generating impact through their research.

At least this is how I think research mangers are beginning to see social media: as a signal for impact willingness and a proxy for impact capacity. A demonstrable capacity to build an audience with social media becomes just another characteristics of what Liz Morrish recently described as the upwardly mobile young ‘Trump academic’ liable to thrive under contemporary conditions.

This way of thinking about social media for academics positions it as ‘just one more thing to do’. You do your research and then you spend time ‘networking’, developing your ‘brand’, building an audience and disseminating your research. It’s seen as an additional demand, above and beyond the many other responsibilities people are already subject to. You do it as a means to an end, in order to help meet demands placed upon you at work.

On this level, it’s a clear example of what the anthropologist Melissa Gregg describes as ‘function creep’: the tendency of new technology to increase the demands placed upon people at work without any comparable increase in reimbursement or recognition. Bit by bit, the job gets more demanding, often in subtle ways which escape our notice on a day-to-day level. We have more to do. We feel tired more frequently. The bottom of our to-do list seems further each on each successive day. But the job market is unwelcoming and self-branding of this sort can feel ‘career protection in uncertain times’ as one particularly off-putting social media guru put it a few years ago.

This instrumental approach to social media is one which universities are beginning to encourage through the training they offer, their expectations of staff and the implicit messages which permeate institutions. It’s one which the rise of alt-metrics risks intensifying, as the responsibility increasingly falls to individual researchers to demonstrate that they’re able to win attention for their publications online (and empowers those journals who are able to help ensure this is the case, supplementing the existing hierarchy of ‘impact factor’ with a new hierarchy of ‘alt metric factor’, rather than breaking down these boundaries).
The problem is that winning attention for your work doesn’t take place in a vacuum. As Melissa Gregg puts it, “even uniqueness starts to sound the same when everyone is trying to perform”. If everyone is seeking to build an audience and stand out from the crowd then the challenge of achieving these aims spirals ever upwards, excluding ever more people from the process in gendered and classed ways while this subordination is masked by the powerful rhetoric of openness.

To give one example of trend, George Veletsianos found in a study of educational tweeters that “the top 1 percent of scholars have an average follower base nearly 700 times that of scholars in the bottom 50 percent and nearly 100 times that of scholars in the other 99 percent” ([1]loc 1162-1708). Rather than undermining old hierarchies, social media supplements new ones, with complex emergent effects: sometimes allowing the already celebrated to quickly amass a social media following or to allow those with a big social media following to translate this into academic capital.

The problem is that the encouragement to conflate value with popularity, as demonstrated through the metrics built into the platforms themselves, isn’t something new. It’s an extension of the endless metrics to which academics at UK are subject to in every other aspect of their working lives. This is ‘open’ in the sense of rendering individual workers transparent to their employers. Open in the sense of measuring all aspects of their performance in order to calibrate the precise balance of carrots and sticks they will be subjected to in their workplace. Open in the sense of holding them accountable if any of their actions reflect badly on the university or somehow run contrary to this month’s strategy for the corporate brand.

It’s not a desirable form of openness and we should be critical of it. We should be critical of an account of social media for academics which encourages behaviour that fits with it: using social media to signal your value to your institution, demonstrate your understanding of your employer’s priorities and to accumulate as much prestige for yourself as quickly as you can (obviously to be measured in terms of citation counts, alt metrics scores and follower counts).

But there’s another form of ‘openness’ we can see in how academics use social media. A relational, collaborative and solidaristic mode of engaging across boundaries. This is a mode of engaging which doesn’t see social media as ‘just another thing to do’ but rather as a way to do what we do anyway in a newly open and shared way. While the horizontal regulation of peer review, informal and otherwise, is increasingly being surmounted by the vertical regulation of metrics, there’s a possibility for new forms of shared engagement through social media that shouldn’t be dismissed. They may not change higher education but they can provide a bulwark against some of the more deleterious tendencies we see within it, at least if we resist the pressure to individualise and instrumentalise our use of it.

In a recent book called The Academic Diary, Les Back writes that Twitter sometimes facilitates our “inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer” by providing “signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story”. Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of “hunches and tips” which is the “lifeblood of scholarship”. At risk of ruining a nice metaphor, a truly open approach to social media can help lifeblood of scholarship circulate much more widely and freely than it would otherwise. At a time of ever-increasing managerialism, intensifying demands and ever more granular monitoring this feels like something we need to try and protect.

**Dating on the Left (2016-11-07 08:00)**

A really interesting discussion of emotional labour and power dynamics within communities that regard themselves as politically radical:

https://soundcloud.com/novaramedia/dating-on-the-left

**Critical Realism & the Generative Structuralism of Bourdieu (2016-11-08 08:00)**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2D5J6PamTv

Bourdieu has now become the hegemon in the field of social theory. Everybody knows the concepts of field, habitus, practice and symbolic violence by now. The common language even allows for discussion among colleagues and among disciplines. Commentaries on Bourdieu's critical sociology usually focus on the concept of habitus, but as everything else in his work, it is overdetermined by the field. The notion of field can be disclosed as a form of generative structuralism that is quite akin to critical realism. In this webinar, Frederic Vandenberghe analyzes the more epistemological parts of his work, show the influence of Cassirer and Bachelard with the intent to reclaim Bourdieu for critical realism.

**Inspiring Sociology (2016-11-08 11:58)**

This year I took over convening the Goldsmiths MA in Social Research. This degree has provided the place where we think about the craft of research. Initially, it was a degree set up by David Silverman and focused on qualitative research and provided a space to explore his development of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. With the emergence of the new research training agenda in the 1990s the degree was expanded to include quantitative techniques in order to satisfy the Economic and Social Research Council priorities with regard to PhD Research Training.

Largely due to Aidan Kelly's expertise the degree became acknowledged as an innovative programme for the teaching quantitative methods. Aidan – who retired this year – has bequeathed a brilliant legacy of advanced quantitative methods training. In recent times we have balanced the quantitative courses with equally innovative approaches developed by Michaela Benson to teaching qualitative research including team-based ethnographies, training in qualitative analysis and writing journal articles and also using film reconstructions of fieldwork dramas reenacted by actors to bring research to life.

One of the dangers of teaching research methods is focusing on the practicalities rather than substance what we create in doing research. So this year we decided to ask our new students to choose their favourite pieces of research
and write a short review about it. Mark Carrigan has kindly offered to publish the best reviews of these examples of inspiring sociology included here.

Les Back
Convenor of the MA Social Research, Goldsmiths, University of London

The Extended Case Method by Michael Burawoy

MA Social Research Book Review (September 2016) by Zoe Walshe

In *The Extended Case Method*, Michael Burawoy brings together ethnographic field work that spans decades and continents to examine the intersection between theory and methodology. From his study of Zambian copper mines in the late 1960s, to a Chicago factory in the 1970s, to Hungary in the 1980s and a newly capitalist Russia in the 1990s, Burawoy has used the tools of participant observation to study workplaces during the great transformations of the twentieth century, taking the micro-processes of labour to develop macro-theory. Writing in the Marxist tradition, Burawoy’s case studies have addressed capitalist and socialist work practices, charting the demise of State socialism in eastern Europe, the marketisation of Russia, and decolonisation in Zambia. The methodological tradition of ethnography may not at first appear a conventional fit with the Marxist study of “great transformations”, but in this book Burawoy provides a compelling account of the particular insights that can be gained from the extended case method.

It is this extension from rich ethnographic micro-data to macro-forces, and furthermore, the extension of theory, that Burawoy is occupied with. Rejecting the singular dominance of positivist science, he calls for a dual approach including a reflexive science, where “the goal of research is not directed at establishing a definitive “truth” about an external world but at the continual improvement of existing theory” (2009: 68). Indeed, the constant reconstruction of theory is central to Burawoy’s vision for a sociological practice; “theory exists to be extended in the face of external anomalies and internal contradictions. We don’t start with data, we start with theory. Without theory we are blind - we cannot see the world” (Burawoy, 2009: 13). With Burawoy’s reflexive science, where ethnographic encounters can be extended and brought into dialogue with theory, data from local contexts can be used to support “exploration of broad historical patterns and macrostructures” (2009: 23). There is no need to only accept methods that fulfil the requirements of positivist science (e.g. surveys etc.), or to reject science completely as with postmodern approaches (2009: 23); Burawoy describes his theoretical positioning as “working on the borders of post-modernism, without ever overstepping the boundaries” (2009: 25). As sociologists, we use fieldwork to constantly refocus our lenses, to look at the world afresh, and this in turn is how we further science, “not by being right but by being wrong and obsessing about it” (2009: xiv).

I would recommend this book to other students of social research because it offers a detailed analysis of the meeting point between theory and methodology. Burawoy makes explicit the political implications of our choices as researchers, and in doing so, reminds us to be conscious of hegemonic methodological approaches. Sociology can be a space to challenge, or at least interrogate, dominant narratives but we will fail to do that unless recognise the operations of power and biases built into the tools of our trade. Burawoy’s argument that the extended case method:
In highlighting the ethnographic worlds of the local, it challenges the postulated omnipotence of the global, whether it be international capital, neoliberal politics, space of flows, or mass culture. Reflexive science valorises context, challenges reification, and thereby establishes the limits of positive methods. (Burawoy, 2009: 72)

Within this view, there is great potential in sociological practice, in the ethnographic encounter, and thus sociology is framed as a vital and necessary voice in the dialogues of our global society. Indeed, parts of the book feel like a call to arms to develop the sociological imagination. Burawoy writes boldly of the researchers need for courage:

We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction. If these reconstructions come at too great a cost we may have to abandon our theory altogether and start afresh with a new, interesting theory for which our case is once more an anomaly (Burawoy, 2009: 53).

As we begin on this course of study, these calls for absolute rigour combined with courage and imagination are perhaps a useful statement of intent to move forward with. The reminder of the need to, at times, abandon our theory is a valuable reminder of the importance of ‘getting it wrong’ - our complex, social world is constantly shifting and our methods and practice as researchers need to reflect that.

This book is a look back at how method and theory intertwine, and to his credit, Burawoy does not hesitate from critiquing earlier mistakes, or reflecting on the negative (as well as positive) outcomes of his research. He acknowledges he was “not methodologically self-conscious about theory extension in The Colour of Class”, however, it did underpin it. Elsewhere, he discusses the unforeseen consequences of his research in terms of the political fall out around Zambianization (see for example, pp 58-59, on ‘silencing’). In Chapter Three, Burawoy highlights the value of the “revisit” within the ethnographic process itself.

Out of Burawoy’s many published works, I chose The Extended Case Method to review because I admire its scale. This book in particular, published in 2009, is a culmination of Burawoy thinking and rethinking his work. Some of the chapters were first published as articles in 1989/1998/2003, and the research case studies themselves range from the 1960’s onwards. This perspective over time, the ability to look back and reflect on his earlier research with the benefit of hindsight, and also incorporate his later theoretical developments, is why I think the book may be of interest to other students of social research. Do read it.


Saskia Papadakis, MA Social Research summer assignment, September 2016
Reay's paper is an indictment of the English education system and its role over the past century in maintaining class structures which privilege the middle classes at the expense of the working classes. She takes Beck's (2004) claim that class is a ‘zombie category’ which has ceased to be relevant to current experiences of social stratification, and uses historical evidence and her own research on contemporary English schooling to show that class is a process which continues to shape students’ experiences, attainment, and trajectories.

Drawing on Bourdieu-influenced cultural class analysis expounded by Skeggs (2004), Savage (2000), and others, Reay argues that class is created and given value through cultural processes which result in the normalisation of the middle classes and the pathologisation of the working classes (Reay 2006: 289). She uses historical sources to show that the English education system has been both a product of a middle class concern with subordinating the working classes and a tool for the middle classes to accrue value through the privilging of middle class cultural capital. Reay then examines contemporary educational policy, stating that the extension of credentials to working class students has done little to address this inequality.

In the tradition of Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour*, Reay uses ethnography to research working class experiences of education. As well as providing Reay with access to the natural context in which education takes place, ethnography allows her to privilege the voices of students whose opinions are not usually sought or valued. By combining focus groups, interviews, and class observations, Reay is able to analyse the role of class processes in student-teacher interaction and gain insight into student and teacher perspectives on the ways differing cultural backgrounds shape teaching and learning.

This article is compelling because of the strength of Reay's arguments, and the range and pertinence of the evidence she gathers to support her case. In the first half of the article, she marshals an impressive body of historical evidence to exemplify the influence of class concerns of the formation of the English education system. However, it is in the second half that the article comes into its own. Reay's judicious use of quotes from her data, alongside her own observations, vividly illuminates the pain with which working class students experience the daily inequalities and injustices of the education system. These inequalities may be engendered by education policies which favour the middle classes, but they are compounded by teachers’ inability to recognise class privilege. Reay gives working class students a voice, and in doing so shows that far from passively accepting the discrimination of their teachers, they are articulate, reflective, and critical.

I would recommend this article to anyone wishing to explore the position of class in the English education system, cultural class analysis and the concept of symbolic violence, and the use of ethnography to study institutions. It is an excellent example of how institutions legitimise the cultural values of a particular group, and in doing so position other groups as inferior.


Mitchell Duneier’s Sidewalk (1999) Review

Mary Bartlett MA SR.

Mitchell Duneier’s Sidewalk is a fascinating ethnography of poor ‘unhoused’ men, street vendors and panhandlers that work in the informal economy; which helps them to create their own society that can provide for their daily needs. Duneier writes with a skill that places you directly onto the streets of Greenwich Village, and it is that ability, to be transported into the events of the study that can capture a reader into valuing the informal social life of different groups within cities.

Not only that, ‘Sidewalk’ is complimented with photographs that were taken during the course of the study by the photographer Ovie Carter, and in a way, it is this photography that allows for other senses to be invited into the reading of the study. With Duneier’s prose and Carter’s photos, Sidewalk can additionally be experienced with Ludovico Einaudi’s album ‘I Giorni’. The track ‘Stella del Mattino’ takes you through the chaos of New York city life, and its links to all those that don’t participate in its conventional ways of living. Whilst the track ‘I Giorni’, brings you back to the ordeals of the informal economy; and it pieces Duneier’s theory together so eloquently alongside Carter’s visuals. The simplicity of the piano reminds you that the street vendors are just unordinary ordinary people.

Nevertheless, what’s mainly interesting about the book is Duneier’s use of a range of qualitative methods, which complement the aims of the interpretivist tradition, for the social understanding of Wilson and Kelling’s ‘broken windows’ theory and his own ‘fixed windows’ theory. His theory attempts to advocate for a ‘broken windows’ theory that respects the social actors who have retreated from conventional social norms.

‘Sidewalk’ also benefited from shared data collection responsibilities between the researcher and the participants. The people were able to become the participant observers in their own worlds, and they contributed in a way that makes it possible to analyse the methods of the social researcher. Consequently, one of the most thought provoking examples of this haphazard exchange in data collecting strategies can be found in part four of the book. The events of this section raise questions on research ethics and research methods. What is the right way to conduct research on social life without infringing on certain rights or overstepping on historical and societal tensions?

Is there a valid sociological case, for the differences in how multiple forms of power and historical tensions interacted with the black and white men on an intersectional level on Christmas day? Were the day’s events ones that raise
questions on research ethics and if so, how can social researchers distinguish between the different kinds of power that make up their subjects, and combine them with the nature of everyday intersectionality and rational ethics within sociological research?

The book leaves you asking whether or not Duneier breached experiments as a researcher on Christmas day, by setting up a stall in a vendor’s place and confronting a black police officer about the law that he attempted to enforce. This tense confrontation in the full view of the other participants shows that Duneier, was in part attempting to demonstrate that the informal way of living by the men in the study was justified by the law. But on the other hand, it also shows a situation of racial hierarchy that displaces power on a formal and racial level between the researcher and the researched.

Duneier’s 'Sidewalk' elicits new ways of thinking for approaching research methods and ethics, and it is a beautiful read for all new social researchers who wish to engage with multiple methods within social studies; especially methods that enable forms of “shared sociological authorship” within social research.

Conference Funding for ECRs from @TheSocReview (2016-11-08 16:26)

The Sociological Review
ECR Conference Funding Competition

Up to £1000 per applicant for unfunded PhD students and postdocs (within 3 years of completion) to facilitate their attendance and participation of conferences.

Deadline: January 31st 2017

See [1]here for full information and how to apply

Academia.edu: How to reproduce inequality in several easy steps (2016-11-09 08:00)

A study waiting to be done. Somebody? Here is the trigger:
So: how is academia.edu reproducing and reinforcing inequality?

- By spatially positioning the male academic above;
- By choosing an older male academic and a younger female;
- By listing the male as "faculty member" and the female as "graduate student", i.e. the female is subordinate in any academic hierarchy.
- the male is US, the female is UK. Both belong to the traditional "ivory stronghold" (Harvard, Oxford);
- By playing on the reader’s (un)conscious perception of elitism (see point above) and pandering to some readers’ desire to be accepted into such an elite club;
- By giving the male a generic name (John Smith, could have also been John Doe) but the female a somewhat more distinct and unusual name. While the first names, John and Mary, are both in the top 5 of common names in both the US and the UK, they remain just that: "white" and "Anglo-Saxon" names. However, compare their surnames: I cannot find data about the prevalence of surnames but I bet (on my own, extremely rare, surname) that Smith is more prevalent than Peterson. Peterson, by the way, is also an ironic surname. The son of Peter. The male child of a male person.
- Last but not least, and this bugs me most of all, though on its own it would be the least significant of all: the fictional female comes across as unprofessional. She has paid attention to her hair and necklace, but failed to notice the misspelt word “univeristy” on her profile listing. Which one would get the job? Well, that depends on whether you want someone interested in the history of Rome, or in the earth's magnetic field. Or does it also depend on whether you want a man or a woman? An older or younger person? Someone who can spell or someone sufficiently unfocused (or rushed) to misspell one of the key words on their CV? In the context of otherwise totally rigid adherence to the gender stereotype, the "reversal" of disciplines of each fictional academics’ bookmarked articles is particularly noteworthy. But actually this isn’t even a real reversal. The scholarship on the history of Rome is definitely dominated by the voices of people who look like our John Smith. And there are plenty of doctoral students and postdocs in geology and magnetospherics who look like Mary Peterson. But their post-PhD and post-first-postdoc drop-out rate from academia (known as “the leaky pipeline”) is [1]astounding - and very badly researched.

Perfect example of bias. So subtle it almost doesn’t matter. But every little adds up.
Oh, and don’t get me started on the "demonstrating your impact" thing. I’m fine with impact on its own. Impact is important. Well, positive impact is. Or disruption. Or preventing a negative impact. Generally, doing something worthwhile is important. But this...


CfP: Habit and Experience at the crossroads between Pragmatism, Neurosciences, and Social Ontology

Call For Papers

Conference: The Pragmatist Turn and Embodied Cognition: Habit and Experience at the crossroads between Pragmatism, Neurosciences, and Social Ontology, 6-7 April, 2017, University of Parma, Italy

Invited Speakers:

Vittorio Gallese (University of Parma)
Richard Menary (Macquarie University)
Daniel Hutto (University of Wollongong), TBC
Teed Rockwell (Sonoma State University)
Pierre Steiner (COSTECH/UTC, Paris)
Roberto Frega (IMM-CNRS, Paris)
Corrado Sinigaglia (Università di Milano)
Pentti Määttänen (University of Helsinki)
Arvi Särkelä (University of Luzern)

The aim of this conference is to account for the many facets of the role that pragmatism is nowadays playing as the main alternative to classical cognitive science, and the contribution that an interdisciplinary pragmatist approach could make to the renewal of social theory. The rediscovery of the contemporary relevance of classical pragmatist theories such as Dewey's, Peirce's, James', and Mead's will be a central issue. This topic will be addressed in a broad sense, dealing with the different aspects of the pragmatist turn involved by 4E cognitive science and their consequences for social sciences. A particular focus will be given to the fruitfulness of pragmatist notions such as 'habit' and 'experience' at the crossroads between social theory, neurosciences, and cognitive sciences.

The notion of habit and an understanding of experience as a process of habit formation constitute a major aspect of classical pragmatist approaches to cognition and social action. Still, since the middle of last century,
representational and intentionalist models have hegemonized cognitive sciences, action theory and social ontology. More recently, the importance of the notion of habit as a viable alternative to current paradigms in some of these fields is being rediscovered.

The aim of this conference is to evaluate in particular the contribution that the reconstruction of classical pragmatist approaches to habit and experience such as Dewey's, Mead's, Peirce's, and James' could make to current debates in cognitive sciences and social theory. Which role could pragmatist insights play in overcoming mind/body, mind/world, perception/action dualisms that have dominated research programs of the last decades and only recently are starting to be tackled?

In particular, we would like to explore how a habit based notion of experience inspired by pragmatism, could make it possible to appreciate the continuity between sensory, motor, and social aspects of action, and offer fruitful theoretical tools to embodied approaches to cognition, including mirror neuron-based research on embodied simulation. Could such a habit based understanding of social action offer also an alternative to socio-ontological models of action based on the notion of collective intentionality? And could the pragmatist naturalistic understanding of experience be implemented by experimental approaches to aesthetic perception? In addressing such question, the Parma Conference will gather philosophers, cognitive scientists and social theorists.

The conference is part of a joint research program organized in partnership with the conference Pragmatism, 4E cognitive science, and the sociality of human conduct (Paris, 7-9 december 2016).

Organizers: Fausto Caruana (University of Parma, Department of Neurosciences), Italo Testa (University of Parma, Department of Humanities - Philosophy).

We invite proposals for oral communications. Abstracts of 400 words should be sent to organizers no later than January 20, 2017. Acceptance will be notified before February 1th 2017. There are no registration fees; but selected participants will have to cover their travel and staying costs by themselves.

Any question should be addressed to one of the two organizers, Fausto Caruana ([1]fausto.caruana@unipr.it) or Italo Testa ([2]italo.testa@unipr.it)

Dates:

Call for Papers Deadline: January 20, 2017 (All day)

Acceptance Notification: February 1, 2017

Meeting: April 6, 2017 to April 7 2017

CfP: Theorizing the Web 2017 (2016-11-11 08:00)

Call for Papers

Theorizing the Web 2017*

April 7–8 in New York City*

At the Museum of the Moving Image, in Astoria, Queens

The submission deadline is January 22, 2017 (11:59 p.m. EST)

Started in 2011, Theorizing the Web is an annual event for critical, conceptual conversations about technology and society. Theorizing the Web begins with the assumption that to talk about technology is also to discuss the self and the social world. Debate around digital social technologies too often fails to apply the many relevant literatures of social thought. We do not think “theorizing” is solely the domain of academia, and we value clear and compelling arguments that avoid jargon. Here are some photos from last year’s event if you want to see the vibe of it all.

Theorizing the Web is a home for thinking about technology by people who may not think of themselves primarily as “tech” thinkers. Activists, journalists, technologists, writers, artists, and people who don’t identify as any of the above are all encouraged to submit. We especially invite submissions that engage with issues of social justice, power, inequality, and vulnerability from a diverse range of perspectives.

Submissions on any topic are welcome. Some general topical suggestions include the intersections between technology and identity, privacy, sexuality, the body, power, politics, surveillance, racism, sexism, ableism, harassment, space, code, design, knowledge, images, memes, attention, work, fiction, gaming, globalization, capitalism, and protest.

Submissions should be 300 to 500 words (only the first 500 words will be reviewed). The TtW Selection Committee will blindly review submissions and make decisions in early to mid-February. Space is limited, and our acceptance rate is typically 20-35%. The presentations themselves will be 12-minute talks in a panel setting. You will be speaking to a general audience who may not share your area of expertise.


4707
The 2016 US Presidential Election Was Less about Populism than a Vote against Democracy
(2016-11-11 08:17)

Three facts are striking about the US presidential election:

1. Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, though she lost the Electoral College, which decides the presidency.

2. Voter turnout was much lower than initially expected, and this meant that especially Black voters – who overwhelmingly backed Clinton – came out in smaller numbers.

3. The pollsters got it wrong, and they especially got it wrong in places where the people who live there are most unlike themselves. And those people overwhelmingly voted for Trump. They've been called 'silent voters' in this election. Richard Nixon, following a rather similarly surprising victory in 1968, famously called them the 'silent majority'.

This doesn't look to me like populism but a loss of faith in democracy. And here perhaps the most brilliant move of the Trump campaign was to declare that the vote was rigged before most of the votes had even been cast. This effectively discouraged the people who had most relied on the ballot box as their means to salvation from casting their vote. It also added to the cynical 'politics as usual' attitude that Trump had sown by portraying Clinton as standing for everything that's wrong with the federal government. However, the people who supported Trump weren't necessarily great believers in democracy, given their high tolerance for Trump's anti-democratic statements (even if eventually modified or reversed). What Trump's supporters liked about their man was his resolve – and his seeming ability – to get things done, by whatever means it takes.

The moral of the 2016 election then is that democracy itself – especially in the complex representational form that it takes in the United States – is the big loser. Like Brexit, the Trump phenomenon was made possible by a rage that doesn't add up to a positive plan of action. But much more explicitly than Brexit, which actually was brought about by an opening up of democratic processes (through the use of referendum), the 2016 US presidential election was a vote against the democratic system itself – both in terms of who voted and who didn't vote.

The pollsters got all this wrong perhaps because they mistakenly presumed that the voters shared their own and the political class's belief that their problems can in principle be solved at the ballot box. It will be interesting to see just how much Trump is tempted to fiddle with the US Constitution. Watch out especially for his Supreme
Court nominees, who are capable of doing the most long-term damage to the system. In any case, it should give pause to those of us who still believe in democratic processes about whether much is to be gained by staging mass protests saying ‘Trump is not my president!’ and promising endless resistance to whatever Trump does. It seems to me that this will only reinforce the view of Trump supporters that democracy is a broken system and requires still more radical remedies. But it is not at all clear how true believers in democracy go from there.

Thomas (2016-11-11 11:53:00)
As Wyndham Lewis once put it, it is also a vote against [1]“all the boring and wasteful sham-sciences that have sprung up in support of the great pretences of democracy.”


Steve Fuller (2016-11-11 11:58:08)
That’s sociology told! Eek!

fernandoleanme (2016-11-11 16:09:21)
Sometimes things happen because a butterfly flaps its wings. I believe Hillary lost Florida’s 29 electoral votes because Obama issued an order allowing tourists to bring more cigars and rum from Cuba. This was followed by Trump’s meeting with Bay of Pigs veterans, and his pledge to review what Obama was doing. The Obama order, Trump's reaction, and Hillary’s arrogant attitude towards the Cuban American community caused a 20% swing in their votes, and thus she lost Florida. And you won’t hear it on CNN.

Thomas (2016-11-12 06:52:16)
I think we may have to face the fact that sociology and democracy are incompatible. Sociology is an undemocratic inquiry into society. Democracy is an unscientific way of governing it. It is because psychologists and sociologists have supplanted poets and novelists as experts on who "we" are that we have lost faith in democracy—at a deeper level, we have simply lost faith in each other. Democracy is possible only on a "humanist" foundation.

Thomas (2016-11-12 08:22:23)
It’s time to relearn [1]the liberal arts of being ruled.


**Digital Sociology vs STS (2016-11-11 12:01)**

A joint Digital Sociology Study Group and STS Study Group Event at the Oxford Internet Institute

**Wednesday 13 December 2016, 13:00**

The Oxford Internet Institute 1st Giles Oxford, OX1 3JS The concept of Digital Sociology has been in circulation for around five years now. But if the British Sociological Association's annual conference is anything to go by, ‘the digital’ is still on the periphery of British Sociology. Perhaps problematically, Digital Sociology shares a stream with STS at the conference. We are taking this marriage of convenience as an opportunity for anyone interested in the future of Digital Sociology and STS to get together and discuss the following questions: Why do we need Digital
Sociology when we have STS? What are their affinities and disaffinities? Are digital methods and digital ontologies transformative for STS? What distinguishes Digital Sociology from all the other disciplines that claim to study the relationship between society and social media, the Internet, the Web and digital data? What use is the concept of Digital Sociology? How can we join forces across institutions to progress the project of Digital Sociology? To help us address these questions and similar questions that may arise on the day we are very pleased to have presentations from: Professor Susan Halford, Director of Southampton University’s Web Science Institute; Professor Will Housley, Vincent Wright Chair, Sciences Po & University of Cardiff; Dr Mark Carrigan, Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick and Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review; Dr Karen Gregory and Dr Kate Orton-Johnson Lecturers in Digital Sociology at the University of Edinburgh; Kate and Dr Des Fitzgerald Lecturer in Sociology from the University of Cardiff (with more speakers to be confirmed). Each speaker will talk for around 10-15 minutes before we open-up the discussion to the floor. If you have any thoughts on those questions above or would like to get involved in the study groups please come along. It’s our intention to solicit your input for a plan of action. The meeting will be followed by a free drinks reception. Spaces are very limited please reserve your place as soon as possible. **Booking your place** Booking is essential. Venue numbers are restricted and it is advisable to book early. Registration Fees: BSA member £10 / Non-BSA member £15 Register Online at [https://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10616](https://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10616) For administration enquiries, please contact **events@britsoc.org.uk**

[2]mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk

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### Towards a Pirate Sociology (2016-11-12 08:00)

While this phrase summons up images for me of C. Wright Mills in a pirate costume, it’s important to be clear about the sense of ‘pirate’ invoked. As Gary Hall puts it in his [1]Pirate Philosophy, the etymology predates our cultural figure of ‘the pirate’ such that “the pirate here is someone who makes an attempt, tries, teases, troubles, gets experience of, endeavours, attacks.” (pg 121).

The pirate is someone who forever acts experimentally, narrowing the gap between idea and activity in a radically open-ended way. The point is to intervene and learn from the intervention, growing through doing rather than indefinitely postponing the moment of action in the name of being adequately prepared. The pirate acts as opportunities present themselves, seeing plans as nothing more than navigational aids to be dispensed with when the terrain on which they operate changes.

This orientation may leave the pirate as appearing to accelerate, but only in the sense of their multiplying points of engagement with their environment. The process of developing ideas can be slow, instantiated through the rapidity with which those ideas lead to actions. A constantly expanding repertoire of action can give the appearance of hyperactivity while the purposes underlying their deployment can become steadily more focused with time. The being of the pirate emerges through their doing.

The experimentalism of the pirate leaves them hostile to received wisdom but also to established standards. Institutional obstacles are situational constraints, sometimes to be strategically negotiated but more often to be probed, pushed or attacked. They are concerned to “attempt new economic, legal, and political systems and models for the production, publication, sharing, and diffusion of knowledge and ideas.” (pg 121) The pirate doesn’t care about being ‘productive’ but does want to be effective.
The pirate, I wish to argue, represents a figure who can thrive in the accelerated academy without being beholden to its imperatives.

1. [https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/pirate-philosophy](https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/pirate-philosophy)

Claudia Kowalchyk (2017-01-04 21:56:54)
I find that I was so deeply moved by your piece that I can't express myself properly. Therefore, I hope a mere Thank You will do.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-06 13:34:30)
Nice to hear! You should definitely read Gary's book then!

The Philosophical Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (2016-11-13 08:00)

I’m at an interesting workshop being given by Loic Wacquant on the practical application of Bourdieu’s social theory. An aspect that has really stood out to me so far is Wacquant’s presentation of Bourdieu’s work as a philosophical sociology.

The point is partly biographical, with Bourdieu’s transition into social research being a response to his national service in Algeria. As Wacquant puts it, “What happens if a philosopher of science stops philosophy of science and goes to do empirical research?” His commitment to social research represents an “emotional coping mechanism” in response to what he witnessed in Algeria, leaving him unable to be content with what he saw as the apolitical quietism of the philosopher. This biographical movement shaped his intellectual trajectory because it left him drawing on classical sociology and anthropology as intellectual tools to inform the practice of social research, as opposed to a conceptual fund to be drawn upon in preparation for research. The result was, argues Wacquant, a disregard for the dichotomies and dualisms which loom so large in doctoral pedagogy.

The intellectual consequences of this are what fascinate me though. This is how Wacquant describes the approach that follows from this, uniting the incredible range of his empirical concerns through a shared meta-theoretical impulse:

Take a classical question of philosophy (e.g. where do categories of judgement come from?) and historicise it, by finding a particular setting where that question is raised in terms of the character of that setting and answer it in terms of the character of that setting.

I find this a compelling idea. This is a wonderfully succinct and compelling expression of how the interface between sociology and philosophy can be conceived. This is something I’ve thought about a lot, as someone who came close to doing a philosophy phd before moving into sociology and in some ways has never felt entirely at home on either side of that divide.

It also contrasts with Margaret Archer’s interpretation of the same question. In an interview I did with her recently, in which we discussed her time working with Bourdieu in Paris, she suggests that what unites his corpus is fundamentally methodological: he was a theorist who used empirical research to test and refine the core categories of his thought, a cluster of concepts ultimately centred around the notion of ‘habitus’.

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Regardless of which interpretation is accurate, I like the conception of theorising that Wacquant is offering. Bourdieu was both a philosophical sociologist (though Wacquant does not use this term) while also being an “anti-theoretical theorist”. He argues that people often deploy Bourdieu without using his ideas. If you can strip out the Bourdieusian language from a given paper without effecting the argument then his ideas have been used as a theoretical idiom rather than as conceptual tools. As he puts it, “if nothing has been lost by removing them then nothing has been gained by using them.”

Social Media and Open Research: What Does ‘Open’ Mean? (2016-11-14 08:00)

In the not too distant past, the use of social media in higher education was seen as a curiosity at best. Perhaps something to be explained or inquired into but certainly not something deemed relevant to scholarship. Yet it’s now increasingly hard to move without encountering the idea that social media is something of value for academics. The reasons offered are probably quite familiar by now. It helps ensure your research is visible, both inside and outside the academy, helping build an audience for your publications and an impact for their findings. It expands your professional networks. It makes research more open and researchers more accountable to the people who ultimately fund their work.

If not quite at the level of ‘common sense’ yet, I suspect these points soon will be regarded as such, at least by young scholars. On the surface, we seem to have witnessed a fairly significant change, but is it a positive one?

In many ways I think it’s not because so much of this discussion is preoccupied by individuals and how social media can help their careers. It becomes one more facet in the ideal package of academic skills which are seen to be necessary to thrive in the contemporary academy. Bring in your grants. Publish highly cited papers in high impact journals. Get good teaching reports. Build an audience on social media. The unspoken corollary of social media helping build careers is how being unwilling or unable to engage in it might harm your career. Through their social media use, academics signal their orientation towards accumulating visibility for their institution and generating impact through their research.

At least this is how I think research managers are beginning to see social media: as a signal for impact willingness and a proxy for impact capacity. A demonstrable capacity to build an audience with social media becomes just another characteristics of what Liz Morrish recently described as the upwardly mobile young ‘Trump academic’ liable to thrive under contemporary conditions.

This way of thinking about social media for academics positions it as ‘just one more thing to do’. You do your research and then you spend time ‘networking’, developing your ‘brand’, building an audience and disseminating your research. It’s seen as an additional demand, above and beyond the many other responsibilities people are already subject to. You do it as a means to an end, in order to help meet demands placed upon you at work.

On this level, it’s a clear example of what the anthropologist Melissa Gregg describes as ‘function creep’: the tendency of new technology to increase the demands placed upon people at work without any comparable increase in reimbursement or recognition. Bit by bit, the job gets more demanding, often in subtle ways which escape our notice on a day-to-day level. We have more to do. We feel tired more frequently. The bottom of our to-do list seems further each on each successive day. But the job market is unwelcoming and self-branding of this sort can feel ‘career
protection in uncertain times' as one particularly off-putting social media guru put it a few years ago.

This instrumental approach to social media is one which universities are beginning to encourage through the training they offer, their expectations of staff and the implicit messages which permeate institutions. It's one which the rise of alt-metrics risks intensifying, as the responsibility increasingly falls to individual researchers to demonstrate that they're able to win attention for their publications online (and empowers those journals who are able to help ensure this is the case, supplementing the existing hierarchy of 'impact factor' with a new hierarchy of 'alt metric factor', rather than breaking down these boundaries).

The problem is that winning attention for your work doesn't take place in a vacuum. As Melissa Gregg puts it, "even uniqueness starts to sound the same when everyone is trying to perform". If everyone is seeking to build an audience and stand out from the crowd then the challenge of achieving these aims spirals ever upwards, excluding ever more people from the process in gendered and classed ways while this subordination is masked by the powerful rhetoric of openness.

To give one example of trend, George Veletsianos found in a study of educational tweeters that "the top 1 percent of scholars have an average follower base nearly 700 times that of scholars in the bottom 50 percent and nearly 100 times that of scholars in the other 99 percent" ([1]loc 1162-1708). Rather than undermining old hierarchies, social media supplements new ones, with complex emergent effects: sometimes allowing the already celebrated to quickly amass a social media following or to allow those with a big social media following to translate this into academic capital.

The problem is that the encouragement to conflate value with popularity, as demonstrated through the metrics built into the platforms themselves, isn't something new. It's an extension of the endless metrics to which academics at UK are subject to in every other aspect of their working lives. This is 'open' in the sense of rendering individual workers transparent to their employers. Open in the sense of measuring all aspects of their performance in order to calibrate the precise balance of carrots and sticks they will be subjected to in their workplace. Open in the sense of holding them accountable if any of their actions reflect badly on the university or somehow run contrary to this month's strategy for the corporate brand.

It's not a desirable form of openness and we should be critical of it. We should be critical of an account of social media for academics which encourages behaviour that fits with it: using social media to signal your value to your institution, demonstrate your understanding of your employer's priorities and to accumulate as much prestige for yourself as quickly as you can (obviously to be measured in terms of citation counts, alt metrics scores and follower counts).

But there's another form of 'openness' we can see in how academics use social media. A relational, collaborative and solidaristic mode of engaging across boundaries. This is a mode of engaging which doesn't see social media as 'just another thing to do' but rather as a way to do what we do anyway in a newly open and shared way. While the horizontal regulation of peer review, informal and otherwise, is increasingly being surmounted by the vertical regulation of metrics, there's a possibility for new forms of shared engagement through social media that shouldn't be dismissed. They may not change higher education but they can provide a bulwark against some of the more deleterious tendencies we see within it, at least if we resist the pressure to individualise and instrumentalise our use of it.

In a recent book called The Academic Diary, Les Back writes that Twitter sometimes facilitates our "inhabiting the attentiveness of another writer" by providing "signposts pointing to things going on in the world: a great article, an important book, a breaking story". Through the things that others share, we sometimes enter into their world and participate in an economy of "hunches and tips" which is the "lifeblood of scholarship". At risk of ruining a nice metaphor, a truly open approach to social media can help lifeblood of scholarship circulate much more widely and freely than it would otherwise. At a time of ever-increasing managerialism, intensifying demands and ever more
granular monitoring this feels like something we need to try and protect.


Four year post doc on crowd sourcing #digitalsociology (2016-11-15 08:00)

The Technical University Berlin seeks a:

Research Associate (Post-Doc) – Salary Grade 13 TV-L Berliner Hochschulen
Part-time employment may be possible.

The Institute for Sociology is starting a research group on „Entrepreneurial Group Dynamics“, that is funded in the Freigeist-Programme by VolkswagenFoundation ([1] www.entrepreneurialgroups.org).

A subproject will build a multi-level dataset through crowdsourcing that allows to track changes in the constellation of entrepreneurial groups in the long-run. We are looking for a motivated and engaged individual leading this subproject.

Faculty VI – Institute for Sociology
Reference number: VI-580/16 (starting March 1, 2017 until August 31, 2021, closing dates for applications December 2, 2016)

Working Field: We are looking for post holders that combine passion and skills for the advancement of methods and methodology in organizational and economic sociology and do research on exploring uses of crowdsourcing in academia. The applicant shall develop a quantitative dataset capturing the dynamics of entrepreneurial groups using crowdsourcing. This includes the selection and testing of adequate data sources that shall be used via documentary analysis (such as newspaper articles, industry reports, business registries, websites); the development of a handbook documenting the steps of data collection process for the crowdsourcing process; coordinating the design of a crowdsourcing platform through external partners; and supervising the data collection process through crowdsourcing; validating the emerging dataset and independently analyzing the data using advanced statistical methods. The post holder will communicate the process of and findings of this project through academic presentations and publications as well as public relations. We offer a personal career development plan facilitating career goals within and beyond academia. Solo authored publishing and research is explicitly welcomed. Habilitation and a multi-week exchange with DUKE university may be possible.

Requirements: Successful candidates must have a completed university degree (Master, Diplom or equivalent) and a PhD (Dr.) in social sciences or a related discipline with the focus on methods of social research. You can prove very good skills in collecting, preparing and analyzing standardized data, especially process-oriented data (e.g. public administrative data, business data) and digital methods. You are experienced in the construction and handling of multi-level datasets and panel data and have very good knowledge of multivariate statistics (such as multilevel analysis, sequential analysis) and network analysis. You are academically self-reliant, skilled in the use of statistical
analysis software (such as STATA, R, SPSS), ideally skilled in CMS. Language skills in German and English are required. We welcome team players looking for collegial exchange.

Please email your application with the reference number and the usual documents (in particular letter of motiva-
tion, CV including a list of publications, research profile, credentials) preferably by email in a single pdf-file to [2] silke.kirchhof@tu-berlin.de

or in writing to Technische Universität Berlin – Der Präsident- Fakultät VI, Institut für Soziologie, Dr. Stamm, Skr. FH 9-1, Frauenhoferstrasse 33-36, 10578 Berlin.

To ensure equal opportunities between women and men, applications by women with the required qualifications are explicitly desired. Qualified individuals with disabilities will be favored.

Please send copies only. Original documents will not be returned.

This job posting can also be found online:

http://www.personalabteilung.tu-berlin.de/menue/jobs/

2. mailto:silke.kirchhof@tu-berlin.de

12-month postdoc: digital ethnography of climate change (2016-11-16 08:00)

12-month postdoc position now available on the Making Climate Social project at University of Sheffield. Details are here <[1]https://jobs.shef.ac.uk/sap/bc/webdynpro/sap/hrrcf_a_
posting_apply?PARAM=cG9zdF9pbnN0X2d1aWQ9NTgwODZCRDlCO
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themerooot=/SAP/PUBLIC/BC/UR/ uos #>.

Excellent candidates are sought with a background in sociology, STS or similar disciplines. The role will be focused on ethnographic research, supported by some interviews with key actors. The successful candidate will be a joining a university with a great social science reputation, and with burgeoning research clusters in digital society and STS - come and join us!

1. https://jobs.shef.ac.uk/sap/bc/webdynpro/sap/hrrcf_a_posting_apply?PARAM=cG9zdF9pbnN0X2d1aWQ9NTgwODZCRDlCOTQwMDA4OUUxMDAwMDAwQUMxRTg4NzgmY2FuZ-F90eXBIPVYVA==&sa
How the Pentagon imagines the future of cities (2016-11-17 08:00)

This is [1] absolutely fascinating:

[Video]

2. [video](https://www.youtube.com/embed/gEPdOZbyzbw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)

The Return of the Unabomber (2016-11-18 04:43)

Twenty years ago Theodore Kaczynski, a Harvard-trained maths prodigy obsessed with technology's destruction of nature, was given eight consecutive life sentences for sending letter bombs in the US post which killed three people and injured 23 others. Generally known as the [1]'Unabomber', he remains in a supermax prison in Colorado to this day.
It is perhaps easy to forget the sway that the Unabomber held on American society in the mid-1990s. Kaczynski managed to get a 35,000 word manifesto called [2]'Industrial Society and Its Future' published in both The New York Times and The Washington Post. It is arguably the most famous and influential statement of neo-Luddite philosophy and politics to this day. Now he is back with a new book, [3]Anti-Tech Revolution: Why and How.

Although both Kaczynski's family and the emerging Silicon Valley set were keen to cast the Unabomber as mentally disturbed, the FBI took his words seriously – so much so that they visited the annual meeting of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S) in New Orleans in 1994 to see whether the Unabomber might have received assistance from science & technology studies (STS) scholars. In characteristic STS fashion, we observed at the time (I was a member of the 4S Council) that Kaczynski seemed overly reliant on 1960s-style critiques of technology (by thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse and Jacques Ellul), which were passé in our circles. So we washed our hands of him.

The fairest thing that can be said about Kaczynski's writings, both during his Unabomber period and his subsequent imprisonment, is that his comprehensive critique of modern technological society is recognizable to anyone who follows the more apocalyptic strand of [4]dark green philosophy and politics. It points to an almost inevitable self-destruction of the world as we know it through systemic abuses of nature, which no one currently in power is motivated to stop, let alone reverse. Instead of making a comfortable living as a radical academic, fiddling while Rome burns, Kaczynski took matters into his own hands, first with letter bombs and now – in this book – with a strategy for stopping the global system from collapsing.

Does Kaczynski advocate the violent overthrow of that system? No: he offers a subtler approach that draws on Trotskyite entryism and capitalizes on the opportunities afforded by disruptions that the system in its normal operation is bound to throw up over time.

Kaczynski believes that political do-gooders are pretty useless in themselves. But this is not due to the content of what they say and do – namely, an endless stream of critique and foreboding about a dystopic future. All of this helps to destabilize the system. The problem is that these people and organizations are themselves so heavily invested in the system that when the worst scenarios that they portray happen, they are in no position to capitalize on them. Their big mistake is to assume that the people in power will somehow listen to them before it is too late.

Nevertheless, people inspired by Kaczynski's neo-Luddite politics are advised to infiltrate such organizations because they provide legal cover for their activities and offer privileged access to the information flows needed to judge when the opportunity is ripe for intervention. He is clear that such people need to wear two hats at once. They have got to gain the confidence of the organization through hard work, while at the same time be ready to strike at the appropriate moment.

Kaczynski's model is Lenin's staging of the [5]October Revolution in Russia, which was less violent than both the Soviets and the West usually portrayed it, due to the high level of infiltration by Bolsheviks into key discretionary positions when the opportunity arose to overthrow the system. Kaczynski follows Lenin in thinking that when the moment strikes, ordinary people will simply try to save their skins and spontaneously gravitate toward those who seem to provide a safe haven, at which point any prior political loyalties will simply evaporate.

However, crucially lacking from Kaczynski's vision is a clear sense of which positions should be infiltrated, aside from mainstream environmental movements. The fact that he has been in prison for virtually the entire history of the web and smartphones is evident from these pages, though he has kept up in his own way. Kaczynski cleverly counters transhumanist Ray Kurzweil by arguing that even if computational power accelerates indefinitely, that simply means it is more likely to spin out of control. Yet he fails to provide any specific discussion of computer hacking, which one might have expected to figure prominently in the skillset of a neo-Luddite revolutionary. This is perhaps in keeping with Kaczynski's avowed aim to stay within the law.
My guess is that people reading this book who wish to follow in Kaczynski's footsteps would try to get hired by either private or public organizations associated with the production, distribution or regulation of energy. The point here would not necessarily be to arrest the rise in energy demand and use. Rather, one would be prepared to spring into action on the occasion of a major disturbance to the flow of energy, however it arises. In any case, such [6]'normal accidents' are bound to happen over time. Since this book is just the latest – but most articulate – installment of Kaczynski's strategy, such people may already exist.

None of the above should be understood as condoning in any way the crimes that Kaczynski committed twenty years ago. It is only to say that a rational mind is on display in this book.


enrico pozzi (2016-12-05 14:51:24)
Paranoia is eminently rational

Sociological Imagination & Financial Utopias (2016-11-18 08:00)

'Reclaiming Utopia: Challenging the Financial Imagination'

What types of imagination drive today's dystopian political & economic programmes? Why do counter-utopias lag behind (neo-)liberal and financial utopias?

Come to the Council Room, King's College London at 5pm on the 25th November, and hear provocative reflections from artists and theorists discussing the political imagination of Financial Capitalism, Donald Trump, and their (neo-)liberal intersections.

Panel participants:

Chiara Bottici, Associate Professor of Philosophy, The New School, New York
Max Haiven, Assistant Professor, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Canada
Cassie Thornton, Artist, The Feminist Economics Department

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Johnna Montgomerie, Senior Lecturer in Economics, Goldsmiths, University of London

Followed by a Wine Reception. All welcome - register for free at: [1]https://reclaiming_utopia.eventbrite.co.uk

You can find a fuller description of the talks and a programme here:


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The Practice of Public Sociology, Nov 24th in Manchester (2016-11-18 15:19)

We've recently had some cancellations for the forthcoming event, The Practice of Public Sociology: Sociological Review Early Career Event.

If you would like one of these places, please register here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-practice-of-public-sociology-sociological-review-early-career-event-tickets-28652394082

The Practice of Public Sociology

Manchester Digital Laboratory, November 24th, Manchester

For over a decade public sociology has been a mainstream topic of discussion within the discipline. While practiced prior to the 2004 address by Michael Burawoy to the American Sociological Association, its identification and elaboration on an intellectual level was crucial to its popularisation. But is it possible that the voluminous literature that emerged in the years following has left us with a public sociology that is overly-discursive? While undoubtedly important, is there a risk that theorising about public sociology gets in the way of its practice? This event organised by The Sociological Review's Early Career Forum takes as its starting point David Mellor's 2011 argument that "we don't need to debate public sociology anymore; we need to get good at it". We invite early career researchers who share this aim to join us for a day of workshops, discussion and debate about how we can collectively improve our practice of public sociology.
Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: The Factory and the Machine (2016-11-19 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson

Introduction

In this piece I ask the reader to consider the rise of the factory and its associated processes and systems as not just centres of early capitalist production or engineering and technical development, but as knowledge engines. We know that factories of many kinds, starting quite early on in the 18th century, were aiming for what we now consider quite modern concepts such as mass production and standardisation. These practices, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this series, developed their own conceptual schemata that influenced further developments in not only industry but society at large. The implications of this approach to knowledge...
production, its validation and institutionalisation had a variety of socially significant effects. We can see that these had transformational effects in the 19th century, becoming accepted forms of knowledge and also techniques for understanding the world more generally. The factory and its associated machine metaphors persist today as do many of their tangible effects.

**The Factory as Laboratory**

One of the crucial aspects of the 18th century factory that has become institutionalised as part of modern technology and manufacturing is its experimental nature. The owners of many factories, and many types of factories, were concerned with what we now think of as quite modern ambitions such as innovation, quality control, economies of scale and workplace efficiencies. The factory was often, in a very particular way, a laboratory in its own right because it produced products through people and processes which could all be observed, documented and measured. This pattern long precedes the locus of the university or similar institutional settings for what we now see as research and development activities.

The potter, dissenter and abolitionist Josiah Wedgewood is often credited with industrialising the manufacture of ceramics in the United Kingdom. He regularly introduced new glazes and forms, with his innovations being copied almost as soon as they became available. He also pioneered much of what we now think of as the marketing of luxury goods, by sending packages of new, and more expensive, settings to Europe's elite without prior payment. He also developed a series of show rooms before there were department stores so that potential buyers could view and order the goods they coveted. This was a logical but still innovative strategy in a time of rapid social change and financial expansion because the rich had the money to buy and the growing middle classes were sure to follow the trends set by their social 'betters'. In this we can see the precursor of modern marketing psychology.

Wedgwood researched advances in the emerging sciences and frequently followed his own manufacturing processes for data collection and analysis purposes. His Etruria laboratory was established expressly to permit this kind of flexibility and experimentation. He would run test firings of uniform pottery pieces with different glazes and at different temperature settings to determine the results. This became the norm in the 19th century but we can see here that the idea of experimentation was already forming in the early mass manufacturing sector. He also sought out new clays, both from within the UK and overseas, and would test their properties for use in the manufacturing process. And of course he corresponded with other interested parties about these knowledge development processes and his findings. He effectively used his potteries, design studios and kilns for knowledge production purposes.

**Mass Production and the Factory System**

Ken Alder's work on engineering in the French Revolution illustrates a variety of ways in which the design and manufacturing processes began working towards regulation and uniformity in, firstly, the industrial and then, secondly, the social spheres. Perhaps not surprisingly, a key origin point for this demand for regularity, uniformity
and reliability lay in demand for weapons, as the French Republic fought to defend itself against dynastic European armies and navies. This programme declined in France due to a conflict between different approaches to innovation – one promoting the ancient, established artisanal small-scale manufacture and one the emergent focus on uniformity, massive scale and

The ‘factory system’ emerged more fully formed in the United States because, in part, Thomas Jefferson had observed these French efforts at innovation during his posting to France and took the concepts home with him. The emphasis on measurement and uniformity in complex systems appealed to the ‘modernist’ American view of itself and, of course, because French military innovation was also directed at defending the Revolution against foreign powers. The logic of this form of production also extended to the workers producing the goods and often aimed at a reduction in artisanal or craft skills and an expansion in lower skilled work, and workers, where labour replacement was easier and faster. Many of these developments relied on the rise of engineering and its own instruments of regularisation and calibration.

Here too the maker and the machine metaphors began to converge. We can see this in such notions as defective manufacture, low productivity, inefficiency and so on – all generated from machine processes and subsequently applied to social domains. Prior to this many products were genuinely unique even when manufactured in large numbers. The logic of mass producing, say, swords in a village smithy is of a different order and type than in an industrial furnace environment. Similarities between the two obviously exist but the change in magnitude and scale make for a difference in the logic of production and the knowledge and understanding that logic produces.

We can perhaps more easily see a version of this distinction in the Japanese tradition, a nation that embraced modern industry at a phenomenal speed in the late 19th century (after an earlier attempt that was halted by the authorities), but which also maintained much of its own artisanal aesthetic (e.g. wabi-sabi and kintsugi) which readily accommodated uniqueness, imperfection and even breakage as aesthetic virtues. The virtues of the artisan are not the same virtues as those of the engineer or industrialist.

These processes were in turn supported by a growth in methods of and instruments for increasingly precise measurement. To ensure uniformity required a keener focus on calculation, measurement and active engineering than had been the norm. Armies and navies had previously often had to rely on the weapons they could get access to and not on a guaranteed source of supply producing uniform products with easily replaceable or even interchangeable parts. To ensure bullets were exactly the same calibre or that gun barrels were all rifled correctly requires a high level of acquired precision and consistency. Pivotal in these emergent processes was the idea and practice of quantification. This was a new way of thinking about production and, as with other aspects of the industrial revolution, it produced its own knowledge and, to paraphrase Hacking, ‘styles of reasoning’.

Modern management theory often references the railways as the mythical origin point for mass production manufacturing, standardisation and productive logics. Much of the US railway system was in fact pioneered by West Point graduates whose skills emphasised both civil and military engineering, and related activities, at what was the first engineering school in the United States. The truth also involves an earlier and more involved explanation.
Simplified piece-work, casual labour payment schemes and outwork long preceded the factory and existed alongside it for decades to come. The railway metaphor emphasises the technology of the track and the steam engine at the expense of the interconnections between the workforces that laid the track, excavated the tunnels, dug the cuttings and also who ultimately made the rails, spikes and steam engines themselves.

In the United States, the emergent production system of the slave plantation, especially in its continued [8]westward expansion, and engineering and industrial innovation in factories, created a system in the midst of massive population growth, acquisition of vast lands and natural resources, and a corresponding expansion of international trade. Foreign investors could and did finance various parts of this system, on top of which they participated in it as immigrants in its extension, development and administration.

Technological innovation was central to the expansion and profitability of this system and [9]factory models were increasingly central to its design and operation. As a knowledge factory in its own right, the plantation can be observed as not only a producer of knowledge about certain types of labour relations but also as one in which technology was gradually introduced to replace human tasks where more reliable or profitable.

The Slave as Machine

Even today the phrase ‘master and slave’ is still in common use in technology. The obvious nature of the relationship being expressed has a much longer history and one which is not quite as simple as the image of plantation field hand working under the whip might suggest. The slave was frequently characterised as a machine for work in general or specific tasks if more specialised (such as blacksmithing). This notion of the slave as machine had its own consequences on the plantation, and elsewhere, because it could and often did reduce work to the minimal skill level required to meet quantitative targets. Slaves shared some characteristics with what we now think of as machines: they were property and had owners; they could not leave their work by choice; they were unpaid; and their work could be and was monitored, often in great detail – especially their productivity.

The [10]slave codes actively worked to make slaves ‘things’ – less than people and subordinate to the socio-political system under which they laboured. Of course, slaves could and did resist their place in the plantation machine and elsewhere. This resistance was another managerial problem to be ‘overcome’ by various means and the methods for doing so constitute some of the earlier developments in what we now think of, more abstractly, as ‘workplace relations’ or ‘human resource management’. Fear of revolt drove much of this reaction, indicating that owners knew the repression their system truly involved.

The North American slave plantation system and the United Kingdom and its investors including individuals, banks, shipping companies, mill owners, brokers, and even churches, (many owners were absentee just as in the Caribbean plantations) were deeply enmeshed in the system even after the official cessation of the slave trade in the British Empire. This was promptly replaced, or at least supplemented, by the indentured labour system, which rose again to fill the cheap labour vacuum left by emancipation. The American plantations also introduced the concept of the field hand as an objective, quantifiable and calculable unitised measure of production. Counting and accounting were central to this system including the introduction of directories, periodicals and [11]forms for tracking and improving labour management and production.

Inventing Scientific Management
The appeal of data collection, quantification and experimentation is so marked in modernity that it needs to be remembered that this too was a development during a particular period in time. One outcome of the rise of quantification and related scientific undertakings was the rise of ideologies of production as a virtuous undertaking. The morality and political economy of the 19th century were no less deeply embedded than in our present neoliberal world. Ideas about the production of physical goods and financial surpluses would, as Marx illustrated repeatedly, produce their own particular ideologies because the values inherent in the approach replicate themselves (profit is good, so more profit is better and thus the promotion of profit as a virtue; slavery is highly profitable so slavery is good and so it goes). The process has the capacity to produce its own logic and once established can acquire social and political authority including ideas about the value and worth of different groups of people.

The clock was easily as important as the whip in ensuring measurable outcomes on the slave plantation which traditionally ran as seasonal, quasi-natural system. The introduction clock-time transformed this approach into a system to which both slaves and their owners became increasingly enmeshed. And this idea, linked as it was directly to productivity and profitability, could only expand in importance as society itself became more regulated by clock-time. Factories could operate for longer, workers could be made to work at set times, and the time required for tasks could be calculated, monitored and compared. Many factories had their own clocks towers to ensure conformity to this system. The clock, a product of growing technical experimentation and mass manufacturing, became a regulatory mechanism in its own right extending outwards to all, slaves, workers and management alike. The clock and the uniform time it enabled became central to related industries such as the railways but also a foundational component of modernity.

From Artisan to Worker

The control of the lower social orders was central to the English (and most others) social and political system regardless of historical period but especially in periods of rapid change. Feudalism might have given way to early modernity but social control remained central to both periods and one of the ways of achieving this goal was, and remains, limiting the skills, capacity and value of workers within the system (another is to dismantle alternatives but that is for another discussion). Whig theories aside, competition for available work and reduction in payment rates for skilled labour both served the factory system and its correlates very well indeed. Slavery, as discussed above, was one more laboratory in which theories of value, extraction and ‘motivation” could be trialled and tested. No wonder then that during the industrial revolution, many British factory unions and their members felt more in common with the enslaved than they did with the factory owners. They knew where the cotton came from and they could see for themselves the excesses of the system in their own factories and communities.

Conclusion

Understanding how we came to ‘progress’ through different forms of production and work to the situations we see today requires more than a linear, progressive view of history. The complexity of the past is easily as deep as that of our present time. The factory was a highly versatile creation and produced not only ideas about products, production and its management but transferable ideas that had a wider social, economic and political impact. The sociological perspective requires of us an understanding that the factory and the machine produced more than goods, they
produce social relations and, sooner or later, an increasingly naturalised way of viewing the world. The values of the factory system are obviously beneficial for some and the ideology of the factory has come to assert itself beyond its point of origin. Even now the factory remains a locus for innovation and industrial ‘progress’. It is in this sense, as with the hospital and the garden, that I propose we think of the factory and the machine not only as factual elements and metaphors but as engines of knowledge in their own right.

[16] **Hamish Robertson** is a geographer at the University of New South Wales with experience in healthcare including a decade in ageing research. He has worked in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors and he has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from ageing, diversity, health informatics, Aboriginal health, patient safety and spatial science to cultural heritage research. Hamish is currently completing his PhD on the geography of Alzheimer’s disease and recently finished editing a book on museums and older people.

1. https://www.amazon.com/World-Crucible-Laboratory-Geological-Beginning/dp/081372449X/ref=la_B001KHPTXK_1_1?_encoding=UTF8&%3Es=books&k=percentUTF8&qid=1472208612&sr=1-1
3. http://search.proquest.com/openview/80708d5dd2b42ffec8243e05c73056bee/1?pq-origsite=gscholar
12. https://www.amazon.com/Mastered-Clock-American-Morrison-Southern/dp/0807846937/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&%3fqid=1472209104&sr=1-1&keywords=mastered+by+the+clock

**The Everyday Life of Incipient Fascism (2016-11-20 08:00)**

I’ve long been fascinated by the question of what the descent into fascism feels like for those living through such a transition, how daily life changes (or fails to do so) as the fabric of the old order begins to unweave. There’s an insightful essay in the LA Review of Books which addresses precisely this question as it takes issue with a prevalent misunderstanding of Nazism:

> POPULAR CULTURE IS REPLETE with cartoonish depictions of Nazism. Hitler seems to emerge suddenly, as if he had been waiting in the wings as a *fait accompli*. One moment it’s Weimar decadence, really good art, and Stormtroopers and communists fighting in the streets. The next, Hindenburg is handing Adolf the keys to the kingdom and it’s all torchlight parades, *Triumph of the Will*, and plaintive Itzhak Perlman violins. Hitler rises above a reborn Reich as a kind of totalitarian god. All aspects of life come
under his control through the Nazi party’s complete domination of German life. Of course, this is not really how it worked.

Before Hitler achieved his genocidal powers, there were years of what we would now call "intense partisan bickering," decreasing prosperity, and violence in the streets. In the end, Hitler cobbled together a rickety coalition of business-minded technocrats, traditional conservatives, military interests, and his own radical ethno-nationalists into a plausible government. As the new government consolidated its power, thousands of communists and trade unionists were subjected to harsh suppression and were among the first to be shipped away to what would eventually become the concentration camps. And yet for a time, life for the overwhelming majority of Germans — even briefly for German Jews — went on largely as it had in the Weimar era. There was clearly a new regime in town, but most Germans got up in the mornings in the mid-to-late 1930s and went to work, just as they had in the 1920s. January through March of 1933 was not 1776, 1789, 1791, 1917, or even 1979. Far from the world turning upside down, things were strangely continuous for many Germans as though nothing much had happened at all. For a few Germans, things were astoundingly better.


A similar liminal reality can be seen in the Norwegian drama Occupied. A green-left government’s declaration that the ‘era of oil is over’ leads to a surreptitious occupation of Norway by Russian forces. For many reasons, not least of all the narratological demands of being a ten issue drama series, dramatic changes eventually come to Norway. But what fascinates me is what comes prior to this, as the everyday life of those in Oslo is strikingly unchanged despite the mammoth geopolitical upheavals underneath the surface.

These depictions interest me because they point to an aporia in how we see social change. Our experience of ‘social change’ is by definition retrospective. We may experience social changes in the present but what we grasp as ‘social
change’ is something we look back upon from the reality born through such transformation. We tell stories and sing songs about the most dramatic of these transformations, as collective recognition imbues that-which-has-unfolded with the appearance of inevitability. As [4]Graham Crow puts it:

2.8 Proposition 7: Accounts of change after the event are vulnerable to post-hoc rationalizations in which the confusion and indeterminacy of events as they unfolded is played down and inevitability emphasised. Aron’s remark about how the language of ‘apparent necessity... creates an illusion of fatality’ ([5]1961:178) is pertinent here. Burgoyne and Clarke’s respondents’ accounts of why their previous marriages ended contain a number of such rationalisations that reflected the ‘careful scripting’ ([6]1984: 76) that had gone into their construction. It is instructive that Game and Metcalfe also use the process of becoming divorced to illustrate their point that the beginning of a story ‘can only be seen in retrospect; when it was beginning people were unaware of its full significance... Beginnings are always written from hindsight’ ([7]1996: 70). The sense of predictability that such narratives convey often stands in stark contrast to the lack of certainty that people have while changes are unfolding about the direction in which they are heading.

2.9 Proposition 8: The popular metaphors through which ideas about endings are expressed have a bearing on how people respond to them. The ideas of reaching ‘the end of the line’, ‘the bitter end’, or a ‘point of no return’, ‘flogging a dead horse’, ‘giving something up as a bad job’, being on a ‘sinking ship’, ‘fighting a losing battle’, ‘throwing good money after bad’, ‘cutting one’s losses’, ‘writing something off’, and the proverbial ‘straw that breaks the camel's back’ have different implications from the ideas of a ‘turning of the tide’, ‘calling it a day’, ‘the darkest hour coming before the dawn’, or ‘one door closing and another opening’ which also mark end points but are less linear and more rhythmic in their understanding of time ([8]Young 1988). Modernity’s linear conceptions of time produce more final understandings of endings than the conceptions of ‘cycles of renewal and regeneration’ ([9]Adam 2004: 14) that characterise ancient perspectives on temporal processes.

The individual and collective stock of experiences of change which we draw upon when we imagine our future leave us systematically ill-equipped to elucidate the many potentialities latent with present circumstances. The tendency of fiction, particularly when it considers the macro-social, to explore the social change itself rather than the process through which the change unfolded aggravates this. I want to read stories and watch dramas about liminal transitions because this can sensitise us to the not-so-determined realities latently subsumed into what we call ‘present times’.

3. https://www.youtube.com/embed/yfqRRHaFyJg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
Conference Funding for ECRs from @TheSocReview (2016-11-21 08:00)

The Sociological Review
ECR Conference Funding Competition

Up to £1000 per applicant for unfunded PhD students and postdocs (within 3 years of completion) to facilitate their attendance and participation of conferences.

Deadline: January 31st 2017

See [1]here for full information and how to apply


The Uberficiation of the University (2016-11-22 08:00)

A fascinating short book by [1]Gary Hall, available open access at the Coventry University repository:


1. http://www.garyhall.info/


» The Uberficiation of the University – unicritique (2016-11-22 20:55:16)

[...] via » The Uberficiation of the University The Sociological Imagination [...] 

» The Uberfication of the University: the Digital Studienbuch and the 21st Century Privatdozent The Sociological Imagination (2017-04-06 08:00:19)

[...] this where the Uberfication of the University could lead? I find it easy to imagine a Digital Studienbuch, the killer app of educational [...]
Please see below for the call for papers of the ECPR Joint Sessions Workshop on "Digital Media and the Spatial Transformation of Public Contention". The full description of the workshop can be found here: [1]https://ecpr.eu/Events/PanelDetails.aspx?PanelID=4836&EventID=104

CFP: The proposed workshop explores and theorizes how the rise of online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr, is affecting the spatial configuration of public contention. The goal is to create a cross-disciplinary network of scholars to develop a new dynamic conception of publicness. Rather than simply situating contentious politics within a specific 'sphere' that serves as their container, we are interested in examining how contentious politics unfolds across different geographical, cultural, political and material configurations. The workshop specifically calls for papers that investigate and conceptualize how in contemporary protests relations of publicness are constantly redrawn across the 'local', 'national', and 'transnational'. Moreover, it aims to stimulate research on how the technological infrastructures of the emerging hybrid media system, in which digital platforms, broadcast media, and face-to-face communication are deeply entangled, shape the spatial trajectories of public contention. Finally, the workshop hopes to attract papers that critically examine how the intense use of digital media in public contestation, often in combination with alternative media, further confuses the traditional distinction between 'public' and 'commercial' space. In combination, the papers should enable a lively debate on how to research and theorize public contention in the new communication environment. Do we have to revise or even abandon dominant conceptualizations of publicness, like the public sphere, which are very much predicated on the nation state? And if so, what new concepts do we need to understand how the rapid development of digital platforms is transforming the spaces of public contestation? Joint Session Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) include 15-20 participants and allow in-depth discussion on a specific topic. The 2017 Joint Sessions will take place in Nottingham between 25-30 April 2017. The deadline for submitting paper proposals is on the 1st December 2016. To submit your paper proposal please follow this link:[2]https://ecpr.eu/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fMyEcpr%2fForms%2fPaperProposalForm.aspx%3fEventID%3d104 &EventID=104 For any questions about this workshop please contact Anastasia Kavada (A. [3]Kavada@westminster.ac.uk) and Thomas Poell ([4]Poell@uva.nl)

3. mailto:Kavada@westminster.ac.uk
4. mailto:Poell@uva.nl

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Evgeny Morozov & David Harvey on the end of neoliberalism (2016-11-25 08:00)

A fantastic discussion, [1]via Stuart Elden:
Donald Trump's Words of Power (2016-11-26 08:00)

In an old essay about Heidegger’s conception of language, the philosopher Charles Taylor invokes the notion of ‘words of power’ to explain the power of Hitler’s rhetoric. Once we move away from a sense of language as an expression of individual meanings and purposes, we find ourselves somewhere entirely differently:

The silence is where there are not yet (the right) words but where we are interpellated by entities to disclose them as things. Of course this does not happen before language; it can only happen in its midst. But within a language and because of its telos, we are pushed to find unprecedented words, which we draw out of silence. This stillness contrasts with the noisy Gerede in which we fill the world with expressions of our selves and our purposes. ([1]pg 124)

What Taylor calls ‘words of power’ are words which retrieve the inchoate from this silence, imbuing them with power because they so sharply contrast with the dull forgetfulness of our everyday use of language. To use a term Taylor adopts much later in his career, they resonate. Longings, fears, aspirations and resentments retrieved in this way have a charge because they’ve existed beneath the surface. Words of power give voice to them and, though simply
words, they’re qualitative distinct from the words we use in everyday life. They give reality and shape to something which has been latent within and between us, contrary to the relative superficiality and vacuity of much of our everyday use of language.

This is a power of words which standard theories of language struggle to make sense of. However Heidegger’s theory is oblivious to their dangerous uses because, as Taylor puts it, “Heidegger has no place for the retrieval of evil in his system”. Whereas as Taylor uses this concept to make sense of Hitler’s words of power:

The danger comes from the fact that so much can be retrieved from the gray zone of repression and forgetfulness. There are also resentments and hatreds and dreams of omnipotence and revenge, and they can be released by their own appropriate words of power. Hitler was a world-historical genius in only one respect, but that was in finding dark words of power, sayings that could capture and elevate the fears, longings and hatreds of a people into something demonic. ([2]pg 125)

The inability of liberal commentators to make sense of Trump’s rise necessitates that we take him seriously on a philosophical level. The implausibility of President Trump, I still splutter when I say or type this, reveal the faded frames within which we assess him and with which we must necessarily now dispense. He’s created a new frame and those faculties which render him obscene (the cruelty, the vulgarity and the absurdity) are both an obstacle to understanding him but also the necessary condition. What are Trump’s words of power?

We are led by very very stupid people. We cannot let it continue .... we lose everything, we lose military, we cannot beat ISIS, give me a break ... we can't beat anybody ... it will change. We will have so much winning, if I get elected, that you may get bored with winning ... We are going to turn this country around. We are going to start winning big league ... We are going to have such a strong military that no one is going to mess with us.
Trump speaks the language of individualism and meritocracy so familiar from the last few decades. But he does so in a way that gives voice to latent grievance, as opposed to the dull(ing) language of self-described progressives. There are ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, there are ‘smart’ people and ‘stupid’ people. The culture of meritocracy became manichean over time, while failing to offer the moral resources to interpret the position of the ‘losers’ and the ‘stupid’. This has happened in the UK as well, as I discuss with Will Davies in this podcast:

The idea that there are those ‘left behind’ who feel ‘ignored’ isn’t new. But as Steve Hall, Simon Winlow and co have pointed out in their work on the far right, a left captured by liberal professionals (a case also made powerfully by Thomas Frank about the Democratic party) has proven systematically unable to give voice to these experiences. The closest that the centre-left has come, in the guise of a Clinton or Blair, has been to offer more of the same: a reinforcement of the prevailing culture of meritocracy and a sterile language of opportunity. There is no necessity about how this injuries are expressed, though there is a path-dependency to how they have been articulated.

The darkness we can see emerging in the US and Europe has been growing throughout the seeming moderation, presaged by its easy and partial articulation into a preoccupation with borders or the radical Islamic threat which threatens to destroy us. To put it as straight forwardly as possible: resentments have been accumulating across large swathes of the population, without any cultural framework within which they could be meaningfully articulated. The cultural horizons of our political culture have narrowed precipitously while structural consequences have been germinating.

However it’s important not to reproduce the facile notion of the ‘left behind’ which is now entering into elite
discourse. The claim that the 'losers' of globalisation have been ignored and now must be attended to is a crucial component in the rise of what [7]Malcolm James calls popularist post-welfare capitalism. It imputes a homogeneity to experience, it naturalises the rightist articulation of that experience and it fails to address the underlying foreclosure which has been the creeping post-democratisation of the recent years. It also fails to recognise the role of the relatively affluent, those who do not look like losers, whose experience at the very least needs to be understood.

Rather than a construct like 'left behind', we should accept the descriptive and explanatory void that currently exists while looking to ethnographic and qualitative studies (existing and otherwise) in order to fill it. There are factors in play here which need to be attended to extremely closely, such as the rural character of Trump's working class support.

Meanwhile we need to find leftist words of power. Urgently.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=iqtLaIIEZ2sC&dq=taylor+philosophical+arguments&source=gbs_navlinks_s
2. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=iqtLaIIEZ2sC&dq=taylor+philosophical+arguments&source=gbs_navlinks_s
3. https://www.youtube.com/embed/nMQD6FQGBzw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
5. https://policypress.co.uk/the-rise-of-the-right

Fidel Castro: A Quasi-Personal Perspective (2016-11-26 19:02)

Fidel Castro was one of the political giants of the 20th century. Indeed, he was a 'Great Man' of politics. However, the greatness of politicians can be easily lost if we look at their careers from where they end rather than from where they began. Cuba in 1959 had been a puppet state of the US for sixty years, relatively prosperous by Latin American standards, yet subject to much political corruption, economic exploitation and racial discrimination. US interest in Cuba dated to the mid-19th century as part of the same expansionist strategy that led to the annexation of Texas and California. In fact, the US offered to buy Cuba from Spain on five occasions, but it was only with Spain's final imperial withdrawal from the Americas in 1898 that it fell into US hands. The US military base at Guantanamo Bay dates from this period. My mother, who is Cuban by birth, is the same age as Castro. They share something else as well. Their parents were emigres from Europe (Castro's from Spain, my mother's from Spain and France) as part of the early 20th century policy of [1]Blanqueamiento – or 'whitening'. Inspired by eugenics, this policy aimed to attract relatively poor but aspirational Europeans to settle in various Latin American countries that were in 'danger' of being swamped by non-White peoples. (Incidentally, an interesting feature of the policy – given today's resurgence of 'epigenetic' thinking – is that the reinforcement of European cultural habits and foods on the non-White natives was included as part of the 'Whitening' process.) Whatever else one wishes to say about Castro, he broke with this history and replaced it with a radically egalitarian society which successfully overcame class and race barriers. Most of the million or so Cubans (about 10 % of the island's population) who migrated to Florida after Castro took over were themselves products of the Blanqueamiento process which had brought Castro's and my mother's family to Cuba. They are noticeably richer and Whiter than the people who remained in Cuba. My guess is that this is what these exiled Cubans find most galling about Castro: He was the ultimate class and race traitor – and more power to him for
it! (For what it’s worth, my mother left Cuba permanently in 1952, seven years before Castro’s revolution. She saw no future for herself in an increasingly volatile Cuba as it entered its final corrupt phase. She has always been a Castro sympathiser. My mother’s family left shortly after Castro took over and settled in Miami and were staunch supporters of Nixon and Reagan. We broke relations with them in the late 1980s.) Castro had a very keen sense of Cuba’s strategic political and economic significance on the world stage, and he leveraged that awareness to finance the most enduring welfare state outside of the developed world. We need to realize that Cuba with its natural resources – most famously cane sugar – was positioned like some of the oil rich countries. (Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela comes to mind as an obvious Castro emulator). However, when Cuba was 'liberated' from Spain in 1898 only to become a US protectorate for sixty years, it was prevented from fully developing as an independent nation. Basically, it was forced to give the US highly discounted prices on its resources in exchange for military protection. (We might call that 'extortion'.) While the US heavily invested in Cuba – with Havana becoming a combination of Miami and Las Vegas by the 1930s – it tended to support any regime that could keep the peace, which is to say, not disrupt the flow of trade between Cuba and the US. In short, Cuba had been the sort of place that Iraq would have become had George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld got their way and the US had won the peace in Iraq. The temptation to 'liberate' countries from political oppression simply to place them in perpetual economic debt to the liberators has been very strong over the past hundred years. Castro’s Cuba remains a striking example of how that tendency need not turn into a necessity, which is why it continues to provide hope across the developing world.


The bureaucratic origins of algorithmic authoritarianism (2016-11-27 08:00)

I just came across this remarkable estimate in an [1]Economist feature on surveillance. I knew digitalisation made surveillance cheaper but I didn’t realise quite how much cheaper. How much of the creeping authoritarianism which characterises the contemporary national security apparatus in the UK and US is driven by a familiar impulse towards efficiency?

The agencies not only do more, they also spend less. According to Mr Schneier, to deploy agents on a tail costs $175,000 a month because it takes a lot of manpower. To put a GPS receiver in someone’s car takes $150 a month. But to tag a target’s mobile phone, with the help of a phone company, costs only $30 a month. And whereas paper records soon become unmanageable, electronic storage is so cheap that the agencies can afford to hang on to a lot of data that may one day come in useful.


In reality, it is of course anything but, instead heralding a potentially open ended project to capture the world and achieve the [3]utopia of total social legibility. An ambition which always makes me think of this short story:

The story deals with the development of universe-scale computers called Multivacs and their relationships with [4]humanity through the courses of seven historic settings, beginning in 2061. In each of the first six scenes a different character presents the computer with the same question; namely, how the threat to human existence posed by the [5]heat death of the universe can be averted. The
question was: "How can the net amount of [6]entropy of the universe be massively decreased?" This is equivalent to asking: "Can the workings of the [7]second law of thermodynamics (used in the story as the increase of the entropy of the universe) be reversed?" Multivac's only response after much "thinking" is: "INSUFFICIENT DATA FOR MEANINGFUL ANSWER."

The story jumps forward in time into later eras of human and scientific development. In each of these eras someone decides to ask the ultimate "last question" regarding the reversal and decrease of entropy. Each time, in each new era, Multivac's descendant is asked this question, and finds itself unable to solve the problem. Each time all it can answer is an (increasingly sophisticated, linguistically): "THERE IS AS YET INSUFFICIENT DATA FOR A MEANINGFUL ANSWER."

In the last scene, the [8]god-like descendant of humanity (the unified mental process of over a trillion, trillion, trillion humans that have spread throughout the universe) watches the stars flicker out, one by one, as matter and energy ends, and with it, space and time. Humanity asks AC, Multivac's ultimate descendant, which exists in hyperspace beyond the bounds of gravity or time, the entropy question one last time, before the last of humanity merges with AC and disappears. AC is still unable to answer, but continues to ponder the question even after space and time cease to exist. Eventually AC discovers the answer, but has nobody to report it to; the universe is already dead. It therefore decides to answer by demonstration. The story ends with AC's pronouncement,

And AC said: "[9]LET THERE BE LIGHT!" And there was light


Digital Sociology vs STS (2016-11-28 08:00)

ISRF [1]Digital Social Science Forum participants Susan Halford, Will Housley and Mark Carrigan will be speaking at a joint Digital Sociology Study Group and STS Study Group Event at the Oxford Internet Institute on 8th December 2016.

An opportunity for anyone interested in the future of Digital Sociology and STS to get together and discuss
the following questions:

- Why do we need Digital Sociology when we have STS?
- What are their affinities and disaffinities?
- Are digital methods and digital ontologies transformative for STS?
- What distinguishes Digital Sociology from all the other disciplines that claim to study the relationship between society and social media, the Internet, the Web and digital data?
- What use is the concept of Digital Sociology?
- How can we join forces across institutions to progress the project of Digital Sociology?

Other speakers will include Karen Gregory and Kate Orton-Johnson (Lecturers in Digital Sociology at the University of Edinburgh), and Des Fitzgerald (Lecturer in Sociology from the University of Cardiff).

Booking is essential. Venue numbers are restricted and it is advisable to book early.

Registration Fees: BSA member £10 / Non-BSA member £15


The class politics of innovation and the new digital elite (2016-11-29 08:00)

In his remarkably prescient *Listen Liberal*, Thomas Frank describes the rapid capture of the Democratic Party by the professional class which took place during those decades when economic transition left them ascendent within the country as a whole. This was originally a predominance of financiers within the party but, with a transition marked by the defection of finance to Romney in the 2012 election, it’s more recently been a matter of Silicon Valley.

As a striking example of this, on loc 2742 he describes the innovation mania sweeping a city like Boston,

Back in Boston, meanwhile, there is meaning and exciting purpose wherever you look. When I visited, in the spring of 2015, I found a city in the grip of a collective mania, an enthusiasm for innovation that I can only compare to a religious revival, to the kind of crowd-passion that would periodically sweep through New England back in the days when the purpose of Harvard was to produce clergymen, not startups. The frenzy manifests itself in countless ways. The last mayor of Boston was mourned on his passing as a man who “believed in innovation”; who “brought innovation to Boston.” The state’s Innovation Institute issues annual reports on the “Massachusetts Innovation Economy”; as innovation economies
go, they brag, this one is "the largest in the U.S. when measured as a percent of employment." And of course there are publications that cover this thrumming beehive of novelty: "BostInno," a startup website dedicated to boosting startups, and "Beta Boston," which is a project of the more established but still super-enthusiastic Boston Globe.

Meanwhile those outside these 'innovation hubs' struggle across the state. The self-confident creative class march ever onwards, supported by municipal and state governments for whom subsiding innovation is axiomatic, while inequality soars in a state ranked amongst the most unequal in the United States on common measures. It’s in this schism that we can see what Harris Gruman describes as a “liberalism of the rich” (loc 2928).

If we see this 'innovation liberalism' in terms of its class politics, the growing revolving door between Silicon Valley and government becomes much more than a matter of curiosity. As he describes on loc 2918-2934:

By that time, the place once filled by finance in the Democratic imagination had begun giving way to Silicon Valley, a different "creative-class" industry with billions to give in campaign contributions. Changes in the administration's personnel paralleled the money story: at the beginning of the Obama years, the government’s revolving doors had all connected to Wall Street; within a few years, the people spinning them were either coming from or heading toward the West Coast. In 2014, David Plouffe, the architect of Obama's inspiring first presidential campaign, began to work his political magic for Uber. Jay Carney, the president's former press secretary, hired on at Amazon the following year. Larry Summers, for his part, became an adviser for an outfit called OpenGov. Back in Washington, meanwhile, the president established a special federal unit that used Silicon Valley techniques and personnel to revolutionize the government’s web presence; starstruck tech journalists call it "Obama's stealth startup."

The whole tenth chapter of Listen Liberal explores this issue and I can't recommend it highly enough. I'm increasingly convinced that we can't understand the failings of the contemporary Democratic party without an adequate account of the rise of digital elites within them, as the latest turn in a much long-standing process of capture by professionals. On loc 3184 he describes how talk of 'innovation' serves to prop up this accelerating inequality:

Technological innovation is not the reason all this is happening, just as the atomic bomb was not the cause of World War II: it is the latest weapon in an age-old war. Technological innovation is not what is hammering down working peoples' share of what the country earns; technological innovation is the excuse for this development. Inno is a fable that persuades us to accept economic arrangements we would otherwise regard as unpleasant or intolerable—that convinces us that the very particular configuration of economic power we inhabit is in fact a neutral matter of science, of nature, of the way God wants things to be. Every time we describe the economy as an “ecosystem” we accept this point of view. Every time we write off the situation of workers as a matter of unalterable “reality” we resign ourselves to it.
The pace of critique in a world of accelerating upheaval (2016-11-30 08:00)

There’s a pervasive idea that social critique must be slow, necessitating withdrawal from the world in order to carefully pierce through the veil of appearances. There’s a kernel of truth in this, in so far as that hasty analysis risks both superficiality and the reproduction of dominant frames of reference.

A whole sequence of events have illustrated the necessity of moving beyond these faded frames. The financial crisis, the Arab Spring, Brexit, the rise of the far right in Europe and Trump have all been to various degrees unthinkable within the confines of established frames of reference. The dominant reaction in response to them has been, at least initially, “what on earth is going on?”

There’s a huge opportunity for critical intellectuals here to occupy the civil and political attention space when it is characterised by pervasive bewilderment. Taking it will involve abandoning slow critique and taking up the affordances of digital media to intervene at speed. There are intellectual*, practical, ethical and personal challenges involved in doing this. But it’s necessary we meet them because the pace of frame-breaking events is increasing and there’s a path dependency to their unfolding. There’s a unprecedented opportunity to establish a new salience for critical thought but it will not last for ever.

To what extent do institutionalised practices of ‘critique’ merely reproduce the faded frames we need to move beyond?

The savagery of the political discourse emerging since the EU Referendum vote, in the election of Donald Trump and the explosion of nouveau fascism across Europe has led to a preoccupation that there might be something amiss in our societies on a psychosocial level, something that might be summarized as an absence of empathy. This article explores the social problem posed by sociopaths, why our society struggles with empathy, and what we can do about it.

We think of social conflict as a clash of class, social group or political ideology, rarely as that which occurs between personality or psychological types, embodied in the terms psychopaths, sociopaths and narcissists. It is easy to understand why. We feel discomfort at applying impermeable labels to people, a feeling deeply embedded by anti-psychiatry writers such as Ronald D. Laing and Michael Foucault and sociologists such as Howard Becker and Erving Goffman, whether this was their intention or not.

These writers were part of a broader countercultural movement in the 1960s and 1970s that questioned our tendency to assign character traits to statuses such as gender and race and in doing so, create 'outsiders.' Further,[1] they saw mental illness as no good reason for lifelong incarceration. Across many spheres of society, no one was to be judged irredeemable. The problem of applying labels to personality types has been underpinned by the bewildering array of diagnostic criteria in the ever-growing Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Yet phenomena such as workplace bullying and domestic violence, far from rare, point to the need to develop awareness of the kinds of havoc those with particular kinds of personalities cause. Let’s look at the statistics.

The extent of workplace bullying is hidden, given that people leave or come to a settlement before anything is recorded and shame does the rest of the work. Research estimates of the number of victims show the prevalence of workplace bullying ranges from 1 in 10 people experiencing bullying over the previous six months (with half having witnessed bullying over a period of five years), to 1 in 3 in a survey of city workers. Bullying is reported to be higher in the public sector than the private sector (though there may be a ‘dark’ private sector figure). The extent of domestic abuse is also subject to a high dark figure, though Refuge estimated that one in four women are affected by it in their
lifetime.

Routinely, bullying and domestic violence are discussed as a by-product of a possible personality disorder on the part of the perpetrator, though this does not account for all cases. It is perhaps telling that controlling and coercive behaviour in intimate relationships or families, the hallmark of personality disordered behaviour, has been criminalised in the Serious Crime Act 2015 (though there is no law criminalising workplace bullying).

Meanwhile, books, articles and blogs are written casually mentioning terms such as psychopathy, sociopathy and narcissism as being implicated in these kinds of abuse. Films and other popular media have made the sociopath the stuff of legends and folklore. We have a morbid fascination about these creatures with no conscience.

But in our everyday interactions, we have been slow to catch on. It is almost as if, in our rush to disavow our instincts, feelings and judgments when we encounter others, lest we label them unwittingly, we have left ourselves defenseless when we meet these ‘charming monsters’. Potentially understanding our problem as being caused by a sociopath is almost a whispered secret and a source of silent shame. We blink and go back to the socially acceptable route of self-blame.

But are sociopaths possible to identify, and can we understand their social impact or see them as part of a structure of broader social conflict (as something those interested in social and cultural change should be interested)?

I’m going to argue for a not-so-tentative yes...next I’ll explain why.

Sociopaths and the 'empathy trap'

One of the best accounts of sociopathy I have come across is in a book by Jane and Tim McGregor called, The empathy trap: understanding antisocial personalities, because it focuses on their ‘relationality’ to the two other key personality groups in society – empaths and what they call apaths. I’m going to spend a bit of time outlining these terms because it points to what I would call a major social problem and a possible cultural solution.

It is not clear how many sociopaths walk among us, but the writers suggest it is anything between 1 in a 100 of the population to 1 in 25. They argue that while there is a variety of diagnostic criteria listing their so-called traits, they believe (or hope) that these will be abandoned and redefined as ‘conditions of low or zero empathy’. There are of course a list of traits associated with sociopathy: superficial charm or superciliousness, dishonesty, thrill-seeking or a need for stimulation (because there are no emotions to preoccupy them), egocentricity, absence of guilt, impulsive risk-taking, a lack of emotions, tendency to ‘gaslight,’ cool under pressure, and an inability to respond to punishment (but they do respond behaviourally to rewards).

Some traits can be culturally specific, meaning that different countries or social groups may express low empathy in distinct ways. As a consequence, sociopaths, as McGregor and McGregor note, can be very hard to spot, and the cod checklists you find on the Internet may not be helpful. They can also be hard to spot because sociopaths have an uncanny ability to make others carry their affects, so that, when you meet a person displaying some of the above traits, they may simply be close to a sociopath (but not be one).

Empaths, on the other hand, account for a surprising 40% of the population, they say. They are not people with extraordinary powers, but merely:

"...ordinary people who are highly perceptive and insightful and belong to the 40% of human beings who sense when something's not right (those who respond to their 'gut instinct'). A particular attribute of empaths is that they are sensitive to the emotional distress of others. Conversely they have trouble comprehending a closed
mind and lack of compassion in others."

Empaths are people who are able to grasp what another person is feeling and 'walk a mile in their shoes'. They are much more likely to act on their conscience, which makes them a potential obstacle for the sociopath. Sociopaths also derive pleasure from tormenting and thwarting empaths - it is good sport for the sociopath. Sociopaths also want to take from the empath, take everything that is lacking within them.

Empaths are makers of social change, opening up spaces for experimentation and freedom. But, as the writers note, while our culture superficially celebrates those who do so, the reality is quite different:

"It was interesting to discover, when doing the research for this book, how often people referred to empathetic types as fearful, too sensitive and vulnerable. In other words, many people see empaths in problematical terms."

The authors note that highly empathic people can develop problems, and the reality is that empathic ability is a gift of thorns and a walk of pain. They can be overcome by emotional stimuli and have difficulties in maintaining boundaries between themselves and others. It makes them particularly susceptible to the psychological violence of sociopaths.

Which brings us to apaths, who could help, but must be willing to move...

[2]We all remember (don't we?) those highly controversial experiments by Milgram and Zimbardo, showing us how easy it is to persuade people to collaborate in violence and abuse. Those highly suggestible people are the apaths. Apaths are just normal and perfectly decent people, who nevertheless lack the insight or highly developed conscience to stand up for what is right (though they may do so in particular circumstances). They may simply be so fearful that they collude with practices they know to be wrong, or refuse to believe what they are seeing. The apath, according to the authors, can be persuaded to be the sociopaths ally in destroying the empath, particularly if they have a reason to dislike them (because of envy, for example).

So how are all of these relational? The authors say this:

"For a sociopathic transaction to be effective it requires the following threesome: a sociopath, an empathy, and an apath...The usual set up goes something like this: the empath is forced to make a stand on seeing the sociopath say or do something underhand. The empath challenges the sociopath, who straightaway throws others off the scent and shifts the blame on to the empath. The empath becomes an object of abuse when the apath [who has been thoroughly worked over by flattery, lies and inducements - my words] corroborates the sociopath's perspective. Ultimately the situation usually ends badly for the empath, and sometimes for the apath (if his conscience comes back to haunt him, or subsequently he becomes an object of abuse himself). Frustratingly, however, the sociopath often gets off scot free."

Anyone who has been embroiled in a familial or workplace dispute may find this pattern all too familiar. If so, it is worth reading McGregor and McGregor's book to confirm that you are not going crazy - the dynamic is real. But are there any implications in all of this for society?

Sociopaths in social context

Robert Hare's book, Snakes in suits: when psychopaths go to work, illustrates the interactions between corporate culture and psychopathy. He graphically describes the havoc they cause through their low-conscience and zero-empathy behaviours, such as lying, manipulation and ruthlessly dealing with perceived competitors or obstacles to their power-grab. Will Black, author of the book Psychopathic Cultures and Toxic Empires, points out that groups
and institutions – such as families, paedophile rings and political organisations - can incorporate and perpetrate psychopathic behaviours, such that those behaviours can become permanent, even if there are no psychopaths in the organisation anymore.

Both of these authors illustrate that sociopathy can be supported by prevailing culture and serve to reinforce that culture. Hare shows that there is a strong correlation between sociopathy and the values of corporate culture, so that sociopaths may be able to slide through the door or even celebrated. Black demonstrates that sociopathic values can be transmitted to others through social, political and organisational structures. Indeed, it might be useful to observe that the first task of political and religious cults is to lower the empathy of its members through various means.

So sociopathy is a social and cultural problem. What’s the answer? Lock everyone up who displays sociopathic tendencies? Probably not. Nor is it a good idea to start doing sociopath spotting, because that could have destructive social consequences alongside making the amateur sociopath spotter quite paranoid. It is no surprise that Jon Ronson started questioning his own premise half way through his book The Psychopath Test. It is undeniably useful though to become familiar with some of their key traits, so you have an awareness of who or what you may be dealing with, whether it’s personal or institutional. It’s just that you can’t do anything with that, except run.

There is another way of looking at the problem though; one that doesn’t involve examining everything through the lens of the sociopath. McGregor and McGregor argue that the problem is not so much with sociopaths, who are after all in the minority and unlikely to change (except if you catch them early in their life). The problem is that our society is not supportive enough of empaths, and is too supportive of sociopaths and apaths. Society is supportive of sociopathy because the values of aggressive competitiveness and ruthlessness are mainstream, and those with sociopathic tendencies are sometimes knowingly employed by companies and institutions to shake ‘dead wood’ out. It is supportive of apaths, because fear, capitulation and the denial of reality are viewed as acceptable and normal pathways through life.

Think about how empathic people are treated. Through our schools and workplaces, we train people to buckle down and toughen up. Our favourite phrase is ‘suck it up,’ which must have been invented by a sociopath, because it serves them perfectly. We tease children for being too sensitive or crying when they are hurt, physically or emotionally. We slap down resistance and celebrate ‘going with the flow.’ We turn away when children and adults are bullied, feeling that somehow they deserve it. We don’t teach emotional complexity in schools, colleges or universities. We teach people to value competition rather than cooperation and understanding of ‘the other.’ Intuition is ridiculed and dismissed, which is crazy because we don’t just learn through our intellect and great innovation is born from intuition. In short, we bruise people until they are emotionally numb. We don’t protect empathy, we resent it, and in rejecting the empath, we allow ourselves to become fodder for sociopathic ways of being.

It is possible that creating new alignments where the empath is supported and the apaths move to support them is intimately connected to social structures. Existing in a society that is segregated along class, gender, ethnic and ideological lines does not create the culture of openness, fluidity, and engagement with creative differences in which the empath is likely to thrive.

Also, social change is not just a matter of rational politics, as the counterculture realised. The war between sociopathic and empathetic values speaks to a symbolism of wider social conflicts, and illustrates that social change is an emotional and psychological (in other words, psychosocial) problem. So what would it take to swing the balance, I wonder, and let the empath roam free?

[3] Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative researcher and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things urban. She has recently set up a new blog[4] Interurban Lines.
1. https://www.academia.edu/8542744/Reposing_self_and_other_social_reaction_labelling_and_the_self-fulfilling_prophecy
4. http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/

Sean Corbell (2017-01-29 12:42:43)
Thank you so much for this. Coming late in life to emotional intelligence and involvement, I'd been starting to feel like a crazy person seeing how much the denial of emotional awareness is woven into everything from patriarchal standards of "strength" to the insistence that consumer capitalism is a meritocracy.

Conference Funding for ECRs from @TheSocReview (2016-12-02 08:00)

The Sociological Review
ECR Conference Funding Competition

Up to £1000 per applicant for unfunded PhD students and postdocs (within 3 years of completion) to facilitate their attendance and participation of conferences.

Deadline: January 31st 2017

See [1]here for full information and how to apply
The affinity between enlightened technocrats and digital elites (2016-12-03 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8URYPna1lhw

Critical realism and social science: a series of webinars (2016-12-04 08:00)

The [1]Critical Realism Network project has been running webinars on critical realism and social science for the last year. These are all available on their [2]YouTube channel and they cover a lot of ground. Here's one of the most recent:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmrpEYXi13M

1. http://www.criticalrealismnetwork.org/
2. https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCw0ibnkDxJ0zmGnTGvN-bUw

Next week in Oxford: Digital Sociology v STS (2016-12-04 19:33)

Wednesday 7th December 2016, 13:00
The Oxford Internet Institute 1st Giles Oxford, OX1 3JS

The concept of Digital Sociology has been in circulation for around five years now. But if the British Sociological Association’s annual conference is anything to go by, ‘the digital’ is still on the periphery of British Sociology.
Perhaps problematically, Digital Sociology shares a stream with STS at the conference. We are taking this marriage of convenience as an opportunity for anyone interested in the future of Digital Sociology and STS to get together and discuss the following questions:

Why do we need Digital Sociology when we have STS?

What are their affinities and disaffinities?

Are digital methods and digital ontologies transformative for STS?

What distinguishes Digital Sociology from all the other disciplines that claim to study the relationship between society and social media, the Internet, the Web and digital data?

What use is the concept of Digital Sociology?

How can we join forces across institutions to progress the project of Digital Sociology?

To help us address these questions and similar questions that may arise on the day we are very pleased to have presentations from:

Professor Susan Halford, Director of Southampton University’s Web Science Institute; Professor Will Housley, Vincent Wright Chair, Sciences Po & University of Cardiff; Dr Mark Carrigan, Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick and Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review; Dr Karen Gregory and Dr Kate Orton-Johnson Lecturers in Digital Sociology at the University of Edinburgh; Kate-and Dr Des Fitzgerald Lecturer in Sociology from the University of Cardiff (with more speakers to be confirmed).

Each speaker will talk for around 10-15 minutes before we open-up the discussion to the floor. If you have any thoughts on those questions above or would like to get involved in the study groups please come along. It’s our intention to solicit your input for a plan of action. The meeting will be followed by a free drinks reception.

Spaces are very limited please reserve your place as soon as possible.

**Booking your place**

Booking is essential. Venue numbers are restricted and it is advisable to book early.

Registration Fees: BSA member £10 / Non-BSA member £15

**Register Online at**


For administration enquiries, please contact [2]events@britsoc.org.uk

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2. mailto:events@britsoc.org.uk
The @TheSocReview Seminar Series Competition (2016-12-05 08:00)

See [1]here for more information and how to apply.

Call for Applications: 2017-2018 Research Associate Program - Five College Women’s Studies Research Center (2016-12-06 08:00)

The Five College Women’s Studies Research Center

2017-2018 Research Associate Call for Applications

DEADLINE FEBRUARY 15, 2017

- The Center is located in a geographic area with one of the largest concentrations of scholars dedicated to feminist scholarship in the world.
- As of 2016, the Center has hosted close to 400 researchers from more than forty-four countries and thirty-five states across the United States.
- Given an office with access to extensive consortium resources, Associates gather regularly to discuss their research with each other and local faculty in a variety of settings.

Applicants should complete an online application that includes a project proposal (up to three pages in length), curriculum vitae and contact information for two professional references. Project proposals should include 1) a statement about the contribution to and significance of the project or dissertation for women and gender studies, 2) a detailed description of the project or dissertation and timeline, 3) how a stay in the Five Colleges will advance the project or dissertation.

Travel, housing and living expenses are the responsibility of Associates in this unpaid residency. It is important that Associates remain in residence for the duration. Beyond this requirement for the facilitation of community, Associates define the scope of their research program for the semester or year. The Center’s Director will help identify conversation partners and resources as requested.

To apply: apply.interfolio.com/38611
For more info: https://www.fivecolleges.edu/fcwsrc

Wolfgang Streeck on The Five Disorders of Capitalism (2016-12-07 08:00)

In this talk at Goldsmith PERC, Wolfgang Streeck discusses 'How Will Capitalism End?':

4748
A conversation with Gary Hall about pirate philosophy, academic celebrity and social theory (2016-12-08 08:00)

In this interview, Gary Hall argues that if we are to move to a post-capitalist society, we need to experiment with new ways of being and doing that are based less on ideas of self-centred individualism, competition and celebrity, and more on openness, collaboration and the gift. The university, he suggests, is somewhere we can actualise such alternative modes of thinking and working, as it is one of the few spaces in post-industrial society where the forces of contemporary neoliberalism are still being overtly opposed, to a certain extent at least. A persona he proposes we adopt in order to do so is that of the pirate, this being for him someone who tries, teases and troubles as well as attacks our existing economic, legal and political models.

Pirate Philosophy: [1]https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/pirate-philosophy

Sociological Catalysts and Operationalising Theory in Practice (2016-12-08 16:50)

by Yusef Bakkali

Life as an academic can be a lonely and alienating calling at the best of times; lots of time spent inside one’s own head reflecting on a world playing out someplace beyond the indiscernible turrets and bulwarks of the University. Coming from a less-conventional academic background this almost Cartesian split between thought and reality has had existential implications.

The reality of free school meals, failing comprehensive schools, racial injustice and community violence was a real one during my formative years, yet the most valuable gift my (rather expensive, but fortunately subsidised) post graduate education bestowed upon me was to understand these things in new ways. When given the freedom to ask
questions and exploit university resources in the pursuit of my passions I was able to make sense anew; hybridise abstract ideas with lived experiences. This gave fresh perspective which changed the ways which I felt about my life and situation, although perhaps not relieving me of what I've felt as a 'legitimate rage' (Bourdieu, 1998), but instead politicised it. This has redirected and helped me to work towards forgiveness and empathy in many instances, whilst increasingly feeling the need for commitment to cultivating social conditions which serve the interests of those outside of the elite.

This has helped me understand what I feel is a crucial role for sociology in society, one that does not fit neatly in to our hierarchical understanding of social order. It is one which does not necessitate the sociologist to become a leader but instead act as a **catalyst**. This does not negate the requirement for leaders in our world, or sociology’s role in informing them, but it promotes its role in creating democratic conditions for their production and accountability. This is something which is increasingly crucial in the current conjuncture.

In a time where leaders (such as Trump and Farage) who have little authentic credibility in promoting the interests of the many, have perpetuated and manipulated public anxieties, sociologists must do the opposite. We must offer our services to help provide a catalyst helping to promote informed debate and participation in society. Bringing people, events, ideas and experiences together to help inform our futures; for me this is sociology’s role in the world. So what might this process of ‘catalysation’ look like in practice?

**Doing Things in Practice**

In my work as a student, citizen and educator I have sought to ‘operationalise theory’ and in doing so actively reconnect it with civil society. Coming from academic research backgrounds we must recognise the importance of making sense of the world around us, yet much of the fantastic work going on at universities often seems remote to people who do not inhabit the world of academia.

This gulf between academe and the many, is a real problem. Funding bodies and universities try to address this by demanding that research gives rise to ‘impact’, something that can be hard to make tangible. There is no quick fix for such a broad and problematic issue, however, I advocate for the use of innovative methods in order to help inform and empower people in our communities as an initial step.

My approach has been to use my experience as a researcher to help facilitate groups in the community to create knowledge and encourage people to take ownership of their local understandings. We believe those with lived experience are amongst those best placed to speak on issues facing their communities but to make this possible we need to spend time reflecting on and thinking through these issues –we need theory!

**Thinking with Freire**

The work of celebrated Brazilian educator and intellectual Paulo Freire provides much of the inspiration for this approach. His emphasis on Praxis; the continued reflection on experience, with a view to constantly reconceptualise and improve understanding and practice lies at the heart of this approach. Good theory should be easily operationalised within the framework of everyday experience; meaning that rather than descending from the ivory tower in the form of some kind of curriculum; theory should be utilised, combined and adapted to meet the needs of the community. This synthesis of theory and praxis is what makes such projects unique - but what does this look like in practice?

The first stage in any knowledge creation process is to identify the issues that are of particular importance within the collective we are collaborating with. Proper time and consideration has to be taken to hash these out in order to understand their significance. This Freirian practice is central to the process:
Educators need to know what happens in the world of [students] with whom they work. They need to know the universe of their dreams, the language with which they skilfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it (Freire, 1998: 72).

Operationalising Ideas – Re-tooling

Facilitators also need to find relevant theoretical streams to inform the debate and broaden or define the scope of the discussion. During the course of a previous project; one particularly poignant issue was stigmatisation, with many of the young people participating in the group expressing concern about with the way in which they are depicted in the media. There are many theoretical contributions which can help to explain processes involved in stigmatisation, such as Sticky Identities:

The impressions we have of others, and the impressions left by others are shaped by histories that stick, at the same time as they generate the surfaces and boundaries that allow bodies to appear in the present. The impressions left by others should impress us for sure; it is here, on the skin surface, that histories are made (Ahmed, 2004: 39).

As facilitators we designed activities to help deploy theory in action; one activity used post-it notes to embody the process of stigma utilising Sara Ahmed’s notion of sticky identities. It involved a facilitator first introducing and identifying himself, along the lines of his personal identity. The group then began to attach labels (quite literally) to how he may be perceived by those in power, including the police and educators. The group then stripped him of the identities which those in power would not see or maybe care about. The contrast was telling, he was stripped of his identity as an educator, academic, even brother and son; instead finding labels such as jihadi and IC3 (the code name used by police to describe a black male) attached to him. Though this exercise worked on the group’s perceptions of the attitudes of those in power it also demonstrated the brutal effects stigmatisation can have on personal identities’ well-being.

On the basis of this work we were able to develop a model which explained how ‘indomitable narratives’ come into being, often via the observations and projections of those not immediately involved in events (such as politicians and journalists). We linked these indomitable narratives to the idea of canonical narratives (Bruner, 1990; 2002); showing how they become a part of the ‘stock of stories’ which people use to make meaning. This provided us with a framework to explore and create ‘counter narratives’ that would disrupt and enrich the stock of stories about young people in our communities. Though the chosen topic was education the group seeks to examine it through multiple lenses; stigma, justice and love.

In this way the utilisation of research methodologies, theory and praxis contribute to a powerful strategy for advocacy and empowerment within the community. Our group was not a talking group it was a space where constructive discussion and theoretical reflection took place in order to create new working knowledge. These new understandings are tested and communicated via various mediums including; academic interviews, questionnaires, art, music and prose, among others. I believe that these ‘outputs’ express authentic ideas to the world, challenge pre-existing stereotypes and recommend better practice.

It is my firm belief that people should have access to and be included in the process of active knowledge production. Theory and research can be powerful tools for empowerment, encouraging people to critically reflect on and understand issues which effect themselves and others. Many people speak of apathy amongst the young; what my experience as a facilitator shows me is that if apathy exists it is not among those who are said to be ‘not participating’. If there is a deficit, it is a deficit within the democratic process that fails to capture their voices and imaginations.
It is the job of academics, educators, politicians and journalists to incorporate the voices of young people in our communities in key decisions over the future of our democracy, yet we see too few genuine attempts to empower people to contribute, reflect and be intellectually challenged on their perspectives. It should be our mission as sociologists to help to ‘bring the noise’, as Stuart Hall and Kobina Mercer so eloquently put it. The noise which serves as the lifeblood of a healthy democracy; comprised of a wide array of voices, constantly negotiating and renegotiating meaning in search of a better world.

References


Yusef Bakkali is an ESRC funded PhD candidate at the University of Sussex. His research is on ‘Road Life’ (commonly known as street culture) in the UK. He is strongly committed to exploring and running projects on alternative forms of community based learning. You can contact him on yb35@sussex.ac.uk or yusefbakkali@gmail.com.

Squeezing Us ‘Till It Hurts: Motherhood, Discrimination, and Universities (2016-12-08 17:58)

by Deborah Talbot

4752
The Final Report of the Equalities Review, published by Equalities Commission in 2007, reviewed a range of persistent inequalities including those that affect women. It argued that, ‘...new research reveals clearly that there is one factor that above all leads to women's inequality in the labour market – becoming mothers’.

Employment discrimination is also an austerity problem, reported the Fawcett Society more recently, with women being more likely than men to be made redundant and targeted when pregnant. [1]The processes in which being a working mother are viewed as a burden by employers were outlined well by Madeleine Bunting in the Guardian, shortly after the Equalities Review report was published. They include being on call in case of sickness or problems at the nursery, finding it difficult to work late or do essential networking, and finding travel more difficult.

While employers expect things to change as children get older, the reverse is true. Once children hit school age, the responsibilities of parenthood escalate, as does the difficulties of finding childcare that fits around school times and holidays. [2]A TUC Report called Age Immaterial found that women were more, not less, likely to go part-time, once their children went to school.

The difficulties of sustaining work alongside motherhood is a problem across the class divide, and each has its unique set of tensions. In this article, however, I’m going to focus on the professions, and in particular – largely because I used to be one – the problem of combining motherhood with being an academic.

Until recently, there has been very little written about what happens when women try and, y’know, ‘engage with life’ by having children when they are academics. There has been a smattering of blog posts, more so in the US than the UK. For example, [3]one quite funny blog in the Guardian by an academic at UCL revealed that you need a supportive ‘work at home’ partner, a cleaner, and nearby grandparents, to manage an academic career. She didn’t work on weekends, meaning that her journal and grant production might have been affected (she doesn’t say). [4]Another blog from the US pointed to the ‘vita gap’ that affects tenure progression. The ‘vita gap’ is what happens to your research production when you take a year off to raise your child and over the long-term, produce slower research results and publications. Mothers are often found in much lower status academic work, while academic men who have children and stay at home partners were more likely to find themselves on the tenure track.

However, two relatively recent articles (and I’m sure there are more) have added to the debate in quite important ways. [5]One article in the Times Higher reported on research from Kings College, which explored the problems mid-career women experience with recognition and advancement. Female academics with children said that juggling
the demands of childcare with writing academic papers – the only activity that led to prestige and promotion – was particularly acute:

"That particularly affects mothers with young children...because this is one area where you need to sit down and be able to think," said one academic quoted in the report, who added, "when you're very exhausted, you do the easy tasks".

Another article is by Professor of Sociology Angela McRobbie, who comments eloquently on the clash between the demands of children and the contrary demands of the unsullied intellectual life in which a 70-80 hour week is the norm. As she notes of the rigours and hours of academic life:

"As an academic I could hardly disagree, this is indeed what is required to do the job properly, as a feminist I thought that this working day surely relied on high levels of unseen support to shop, cook, and attend to the various aspects of domestic administration so that bills are paid, food is bought, clothes are collected from the dry cleaners, parents nights are attended and so on...it may seem banal but the ideal career track in the academy especially one which carried all the laurels of prizes, awards, fellowships and a high volume of grants seemed to have been tailored around the image of the brilliant young man untrammelled by any of the fine details of domestic life."

It seems that issues of gender inequality, and work/life balance, have been creeping up on the sector. All while they are busy being awarded 'kite marks' for success in achieving gender and other forms of equity.

As McRobbie rightly points out, the sector has not adjusted or thought about issues of gender and work-life balance in the wake of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and its new iteration, the Research Excellence Framework (REF). It is unlikely to do so in response to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

The RAE/REF have conspired to propel academics to publish in journals or be damned. They "pathologise failure," says McRobbie. Academics who do not keep up on the research publication and grant scorecard, for whatever reason, are being actively discriminated against and sidelined. They find it more difficult to move institutions and remain locked into their current job, while being undervalued and under threat. I was very amused to see that during the last REF, maternity leave meant that you could submit one less publication than the four expected. Now for those existing outside the peculiar world of academia, that might seem reasonable – one less publication for the nine months to a year spent away. Until you factor in the REF's criteria of impact and citations, and the level of networking, research grants, and publishing frenzy you need to achieve the requisite impact and citation score. You just can’t get off the train.

We can add into this mix recent research on the US creative sector by Devon Proudfoot, Aaron Kay, and Christy Koval from the Fuqua School of Business, which found that there was a gender bias in how people perceive creativity. Not surprisingly, in various studies, the researchers identified that women were being assessed as less original, creative and innovative, except in the field of fashion. They conclude that this bias might explain why women were less likely to occupy professions in the upper echelons of the creative sector, science, architecture and mathematics, to name a few. They conclude:

"Our findings complement research examining reasons why women may not want to enter these fields, suggesting that biases about the cognitive processes women adopt can pile up on other impediments."
This bias will be no surprise to academic women.

[8]The university sector is dominated by pernicious administration and management, seeking to impose management systems long since rejected by the most progressive elements of the private sector. Add to this a government, which insists that universities should not be a burden on the ‘public purse’, and you have a recipe for academics in general, and academic mothers, in particular, to be squeezed until it hurts.

McRobbie argues that moving to a new university, with less pressure to do research, was her solution. That solution may not exist now. However, she does point to the need to resist both the claims of the REF and contemporary notions of work:

"Often I have thought surely it should be enough to spend a morning teaching, an afternoon doing supervisions and some marking of essays and then go home and switch off and enjoy the children or indeed grandchildren, and help with home-work rather than feeling the need to return late night to the computer and to the completion of yet another peer-reviewed journal article."

This writer can’t disagree with that portrayal, though I’m not sure the majority of academics would buy it, as the culture of the REF is too engrained. It’s as though everyone is suffering from the Stockholm Syndrome and is just lovin’ their chains. There’s moaning, for sure, but moaning is not the same as resistance. The reality is of course that the REF works well for many, allowing them to beat back competition for promotion.

Until the system of assessed and competitive research activity is abolished, there will never be an appropriate balance between teaching and scholarship, work/life balance. Those with family responsibilities will be disproportionately affected.

The problems don’t begin and end with research and teaching assessment. There are other issues to consider.

Universities have been very bad at offering permanent part-time contracts or assessing appropriate career paths for those who are part-time. The lack of permanent part-time options matters, not just to parents, but also to carers and those who want to combine academia with other intellectual and creative pursuits. Too often, institutions, like universities, see flexible working as a burden, rather than an opportunity to build a diverse workforce with a range of skills and social connections.

Universities have also been slow to encourage and professionalise new forms of intellectual representation, including the digital, which ironically can help women network when they can’t be there in person (ever wonder why digital start-ups are so intertwined with employment for mums?). Finally, universities must simply get past the myth that they are good at managing discrimination. Kite marks look great on the marketing materials, but the reality is that they are just a slick layer of corporate advertising hiding a wealth of problems and discriminatory processes.

Universities should be places of intellectual and social innovation, at the forefront of tackling workplace discrimination. Sadly, they are trailing behind the hipster private sector, which has experimented with alternative systems of networking, female networks and collaborations, and flexible working.

Time for an employment revolution, ye scholars.

Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative research and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things
urban. She has recently set up a new blog [9]Interurban Lines.

5. https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/neglected-mid-career-women-need-more-recognition

The @ISRF Early Career Fellowship Competition (2016-12-09 08:00)

The Independent Social Research Foundation wishes to support independent-minded researchers to explore and present original research ideas which take new approaches, and suggest new solutions, to real world social problems.


The Sociological Review’s coverage of #Election2016 (2016-12-10 08:00)


[2]
4756
Call for papers: Research Methods for Digital Work (2016-12-11 08:00)


Call for participation
As digital technologies have matured, various forms of distributed working have become commonplace. The contemporary workforce includes many people who move between different sites during the course of a working day or week, and who switch between offline working and diverse forms of online work and mediated communication. Virtual teams coordinate activities across geographic locations, using multiple channels of communication to organize their work and to build identity as a team. Organizationally-sanctioned online communications and digital repositories are used alongside extra-organizational resources such as social media and informal face-to-face conversations. Professional and personal activities share communication channels, and boundaries between work and non-work can become blurred. Work is thus both spatially and temporally complex. This complexity provides many challenges for the researcher aiming to capture and understand these practices, tracking activities - and their meanings for participants - across multiple formats connected in an unpredictable fashion. This meeting focuses on a key question for studies of contemporary work across disciplines: how can we combine methods or devise new methods to capitalise on diverse forms of data to build rich and theoretically-fruitful understandings of digitally-suffused working life?

This meeting focuses on methods to study distributed and multi-modal working practices drawing on expertise across a range of disciplines, including management and organization studies, sociology, anthropology, Science and Technology Studies, work psychology, design informatics and HCI. Each of these disciplines has a theoretically-motivated need for detailed insight into what people do in their working lives and a distinctive set of methodological expertise in capturing working practice. By focusing on innovative methods for the study of work across disciplines, we aim to promote cross-fertilization of approaches across disciplines and to instigate conversations on the theoretical purchase offered by different ways of studying work.

We are inviting contributions that present innovative methods for the study of working practices, particularly those that present the method in the context of successful use within a research project. We welcome papers that involve practical demonstration of an approach to data capture or an analytic technique.

Key themes at the meeting are likely to include:

- capturing transitions between modes of work: what methods can we use to explore how, when and why people switch between online and offline?

- capturing experiences of fluid, unpredictable work: how can we employ observational and diary-based techniques effectively under such circumstances?
· quantitative approaches and logging across media: how can we build approaches that exploit the richness of data provided by individual media but also recognise the complexity of transitions between media? Where are "Big Data" approaches helpful?

· how to research screen-work: what new methods for understanding what is happening when a worker engages with a screen have become available?

· private and professional social media: how can our research methods enable us to understand transitions between formal work-spaces and personal online interactions?

· mixing methods for study of work: what challenges and opportunities emerge when we attempt to combine different methods for capturing the experience of work?

Extended abstracts of no more than 1500 words should be submitted by 31st January 2017 using the online submission form at http://www.ias.surrey.ac.uk/workshops/workpractices/cfp.php Following the meeting we anticipate production of an edited volume drawing on papers presented at the meeting. Contributions from international scholars and early career researchers are particularly welcomed. Participation will be limited to 50 attendees. Registration fees are £60 (£40 for students/unwaged). Attendees will be responsible for their own travel and accommodation – links to local accommodation will be available at the time of registration via the event website http://www.ias.surrey.ac.uk/workshops/workpractices/ The meeting is being organized by Christine Hine (University of Surrey), Katrina Pritchard (Open University) and Gillian Symon (Royal Holloway, University of London) in association with the Digital World Research Centre at the University of Surrey. The meeting has received funding from the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Surrey and the RCUK-funded NEMODE Network Plus.

Understanding Brexit: Inequality, Inclusion & Social Justice (2016-12-13 08:00)

THURSDAY 26th JANUARY, 6-8pm

Impact Hub Birmingham,
An open town hall event to understand 'Brexit' in terms of issues of inequality, inclusion and social justice.

Panellists:
Kehinde Andrews (Birmingham City University)
Gurminder K Bhambra (University of Warwick)
Omar Khan (Runnymede Trust)
Karen Rowlingson (University of Birmingham)
Richard Seymour (Salvage)

Chairs:
John Holmwood (University of Nottingham)
Robbie Shilliam (Queen Mary University of London)

Entry is free, but please register here:


Living with theoretical pluralism (2016-12-14 08:00)

How do we live with theoretical pluralism? It’s too often a matter of ‘peace treaties’, avoiding fights by moving disagreements off-stage. But if we do this then are we really occupying the same argumentative space? I don’t think
we are and the intellectual value of theoretical pluralism is lost if we find ourselves in such a situation.

But this intellectual value challenges us to engage across boundaries, recognising differences as a resource for dialogue rather than simply a constraint. It necessitates a sense of the other’s motivations, avoiding getting hung up on the wider network of disagreements by focusing only on those that are relevant to the topic at hand. Not objecting to the fact someone’s starting points are different to ours but rather trying to understand how our different routes to overlapping topics can be mutually enriching.

This requires a sensibility which seems far too rare in the academy. Pablo Boczkowski and Ignacio Siles describe the danger as "a sort of intellectual insularity (or provincialism) that privileges a certain inwards-looking commitment to a particular paradigm, set of ideas, or mode of inquiry without considering work done in other fields that might significantly enrich or transform it". Instead they argue for an intellectual cosmopolitanism that "promotes the crossing of territorial scholarly quadrants in the study of media technologies to rethink assumptions and normalized processes" (pg. 58).

Social theory has generated widespread intellectual provincialism and we urgently need to move beyond it. The poverty of meta-theory plays a role by robbing us of higher level languages in which disagreements could be negotiated. But there's also a sensibility engendered by the ensuing fragmentation which I find deeply problematic.

Steve Harris (2017-08-20 06:07:58)
Interesting I am currently endeavouring to avoid pluralism within my data by analysing indentity through a range of different lenses, each are either Venn diagrams or a continuum with added complexity, ala Bourdieu and Stanley's (2014) 'fractured foundationalism'. These lenses and associated research questions were drawn from the data, which in turn informed my 'movement of thought' chapter.

Steve Harris (2017-08-20 06:08:50)
Oops identity 🕵

No longer praying at the altar of virality (2016-12-15 08:00)

An important idea offered by [1]Mike Caulfield. The embrace of frictionless sharing and the relentless pursuit of engagement have created the problems which are now being naturalised by the emerging 'did Facebook lead to Trump' discourse:

We have prayed at the altar of virality a long time, and I'm not sure it's working out for us as a society. If reliance on virality is creating the incentives to create a culture of disinformation, then consider dialing down virality.

We know how to do this. Slow people down. Incentivize them to read. Increase friction, instead of relentlessly removing it.

Facebook is a viral sharing platform, and has spent hundreds of millions getting you to share virally. And here we are.
What if Facebook saw itself as a **deep reading** platform? What if it spent hundreds of millions of dollars getting you read articles carefully rather than sharing them thoughtlessly?

What if Facebook saw itself as a **deep research** platform? What if it spent its hundreds of millions of dollars of R & D building tools to help you research what you read?


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**Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism. The 6th ICTs and Society Conference (2016-12-16 08:00)**

Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism

The 6th ICTs and Society Conference

[1]http://www.icts-and-society.net May 20-21, 2017 University of Westminster, London Hosted by the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies, [2]http://www.westminster.ac.uk/wias Pre-announcement. More info to follow. Sign up to the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies’ newsletter to receive further info: [3]https://www.westminster.ac.uk/newsletter Conference location: University of Westminster, 4-12 Little Titchfield Street, London W1W, UK. Map: [4]https://www.westminster.ac.uk/about-us/our-locations/maps-and-directions/little-titchfield-street Conference Co-Convenors and Chairs: Christian Fuchs, University of Westminster, Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies & Communication and Media Research Institute David Chandler, University of Westminster, Department of Politics and International Relations, Centre for the Study of Democracy Many claims have been made about the emergence of a digital turn that is said to have radically transformed the possibilities for politics through undermining traditional modernist binaries of subject/object, state/society, politics/economics, public/private, consumption/production, time/space, mind/body, labour/leisure, culture/nature, human/posthuman. This turn has run through several phases, including cybernetics, automation technologies, mainframe computers, databases, artificial intelligence, personal computers, the World Wide Web, smart phones, geographical information systems, social media, targeted digital advertising, self-quantification, big data analytics, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things. This conference will develop interdisciplinary assessments of the digital’s impact on society. It will interrogate the claims of both digital optimism and digital pessimism. Digital optimists assert that digital technologies have radically transformed the world; promising new forms of community, alternative ways of knowing and sensing, creative innovation, participatory culture, networked activism, and distributed democracy. Digital pessimists argue that digital technologies have not brought about positive change, but have rather deepened and extended domination through new forms of control. They speak of networked authoritarianism, digital de-humanisation, alienation 2.0, networked exploitation, or the rise of the surveillance society. Presenters at the symposium will engage with questions of the digital in respect to activism, research and critique. The conference will engage with the possibilities, potentials, pitfalls, limits, and ideologies of digital activism. It will reflect on whether computational social science, the digital humanities and ubiquitous datafication enable new research approaches or result in a digital positivism that...
threatens the independence of critical research and brings about the death of the social sciences and humanities. The conference will explore the futures, places and possibilities of critique in the age of digital subjects and digital objects.

2. http://www.westminster.ac.uk/wias
3. https://www.westminster.ac.uk/newsletter

The Return of School Discipline - why children should be free. (2016-12-16 16:25)

by Deborah Talbot

No, not canes and shouting, but something altogether more subtle and certainly troubling. [1]It has been reported that St George the Martyr Primary School in London has a policy whereby children, when they walk in corridors, have to clasp their hands behind their backs. The headteacher, whose inspiration it was, calls in the 'university walk', which is odd because these are children and students at university don't walk in this way. It has about as much logic (that is, none) as hearing a teacher shout at a five-year-old for having his hands in his pockets. What is it all about?

It has long been an observation of theorists of social control – I’m thinking here of people like Stan Cohen, David Garland, Loic Wacquant - that social insecurity breeds punitivity. In our society, after the most recent slump, insecurity has been rife, fear set loose, and under these conditions rationality and liberality slip away.

In our schools, currently, there is a creeping normativity afoot. I’m not talking about the endless testing and
exams, although these set the frame for what happens in schools. Nor am I talking about the seeming endless desire
to make former army personnel teachers, although I’m sure that is simply a symbolic expression of the normative
environment. [2]This is not a reference to the bizarre and punitive performance management systems that seem to
be the vehicle for bullying and eradicating talented and independent teachers.

What I’m talking about is the weird behavioural modification techniques being applied to very young children,
without so much as a half-hearted assessment of their impact. The paraphernalia of control includes the traffic light
system, rainbows, clouds and thunderclouds, and other forms of reward and shaming systems that get dangled
in front of primary school children. [3]There is also the ‘habits of mind’, the kind of panorama of psychological
management that would make Foucault turn in his grave. Then there are a series of low-level inducements – taking
home the teddy bear if you did something good, certificates, stickers, and even sweets.

The traffic light cum sun and thunderclouds system was an offshoot of the Golden Time method of behaviour
management. Predicated on the idea that children need visual clues to understand ‘good’ behaviour, it shows a sun
and clouds, and children stay in the sun if they are good, and start moving to the clouds if they aren’t following the
rules. There is much about this on the net,[4] but this example shows its intent:

>This behaviour chart encourages consistency of sanctions. The behaviour is noted and immediately dealt
with. There is an opportunity to correct and reverse and we start afresh every day with all the children in
the sun section. The children can see their decision visually and do something about it. The responsibility
is theirs and they strive to stay near the sun. Over the six weeks the change in behaviour during input
time has been measurable. The children are much more engaged and we do not have to spend lots of
time with interruptions as simply walking towards the chart with your eyes looking at a particular child is
sometimes enough!

Teachers often argue that they need these forms of behaviour management to control behaviour in large class sizes,
particularly in inner city areas (the ‘problem’ kids and their ‘problem’ families). However, it is a system based on
public shaming, fear and competitive rewards. The charts and the children’s names are pinned up on a wall for
everyone to see. The kids fear dropping down to a cloud, particularly if they have no behaviour problems to start
with, and the impending fear of public shaming can, in my view, produce anxiety and other emotional difficulties. We
might argue that competition is good, but it also stresses people out, including and perhaps particularly so, young
children. Finally, the rules are often uncertain, meaning that children are constantly reaching for the ‘out of reach’
(hmm, much like the consumer society?). I also guess it’s pretty time-consuming for teachers to work out when to re-
ward behaviour or not, and what kinds of behaviour, and for whom. Perhaps that’s why it’s so inconsistently applied?

It is also necessary to ask, why all the fear about ‘bad’ behaviour? Behaviour is partly a developmental issue
and partly about social values as to what constitutes ‘normal’. It carries constructions about societies fears about
itself, which are then put on our children. It is also about parent’s time, and it is easy enough, as a stressed parent,
to reach for a reward system when things seem out of control, as they so often do with very young children (as well
as older ones). It sometimes seems as if children’s ‘bad’ behaviour is more about how much time we have to invest
in them and their rhythms than anything being intrinsically amiss.

Most fundamentally, however, I would argue that such behaviour management systems are about creating
one form of model citizen for advanced capitalist economies. A reflection can be found in performance management
for teachers in school, where compliance is valued over competence. Increasingly, it seems our society values
above all else a standard of normativity that is about non-resistant, passive consumerism. It wants us to be suitable
and prepared for a world of work that aims at obedience, not ingenuity and critical thinking. And while this
pattern of compliance rolls itself out through all our institutions of society, it ironically is self-defeating, because
it stands in direct contradiction to everything advanced capitalist societies are supposed to excel at – creativity, innovation, entrepreneurism, all of which requires critical thinking and risk taking. Put simply, a certain amount of acting up and general cheekiness is a symptom of a lively and free mind. Perhaps our anxiety is getting the better of us? Or maybe it is simply a reflection of inequality, with compliance for the ‘plebs’ and critical thinking for the elite?

I recently read a book called *Nurture Shock* by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman. It had the rather off-putting subtitle of ‘Why everything we think about raising our children is wrong’, although I assume that was the marketing people talking, because it was a fairly good review of recent research in child development and neuroscience. It made a pretty convincing case for thinking that education needs to be orientated around self-motivated systems of effort. It argues that children need more sleep. That aggression is often expressed by very socialised kids and is just their way of making it in the world (so why stymie their efforts?). It explains why programmes for gifted students are pointless (because they haven't finished developing yet). Finally, that if kids are self-directed in their learning they are less disruptive (the authors site the TOOLS programme, but it is much like the Montessori system, which eschews behavioural modification systems). [5]Or, as AA Gill argues, we could just leave children alone.

I don't know if the research in Nurture Shock is right, but if it is, we are on an odd track in education policy currently, along with some of the ideas that seem to dominate within it, almost by default and contingency. Ideology aside, our schooling system seems beset with panic. Perhaps we all need to relax, not worry quite so much about behaviour, focus instead on engaging children with stuff they are interested in, and give them freedom. The evidence supports this approach, it seems, and it is one that seems best calculated to meet the social challenges of a changing world.

Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative research and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things urban. She has recently set up a new blog [6]Interurban Lines.

1. [http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/nov/05/parents-defend-schools-hands-behind-back-walking-policy](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/nov/05/parents-defend-schools-hands-behind-back-walking-policy)
6. [http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/](http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/)

How to improve school discipline? | Learning Flourishes in an Environment Free of Racism (2017-04-11 03:44:00)
[...] The Return of School Discipline – why children should be free. [...]
even bother to engage with Peter’s [3]published paper (co-written with David Lehmann) detailing his findings.

It’s always seemed obvious to me that this was interesting work in the sociology of intellectual life, motivated by a genuine curiosity concerning the figure of the ‘academic celebrity’ and what it means for the future of social theory. Furthermore, I remain convinced this is an important conversation for us to have and it is not, as yet, being had in any meaningful way.

Therefore I recorded a podcast with Peter about these issues. Apologies for the sound quality, I hadn’t expected that a light wind could cause such problems for a discussion we recorded outside.


1. http://www.sociology.cam.ac.uk/people/graduate-students/pwalsh
3. http://www.academia.edu/15031047/Problematic_Elements_in_the_Scholarship_of_Zygmunt_Bauman
Towards a sociology of Pikettyville (2016-12-18 08:00)

From this fascinating paper by Roger Burrows, Richard Webber and Rowland Atkinson:

To talk of 'Pikettyville' is then to conjure up an image of an urban system that has become hardwired to adopting, channelling and inviting excesses of social and economic capital in search of a space in which the rich not only find safe haven but are also privileged by the kind of property and income tax regimes and wider economic climate that allows them to thrive on their capital investments, while the wider city experiences some of the most challenging economic conditions since the early 20th century (Atkinson et al., 2016b).


Call for Abstracts: Research Impact and the Early Career Researcher (2016-12-19 08:00)

The incorporation of impact into the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) has led to a step change in the way in which much research is now approached in the UK.

With a focus on demonstrating the cultural, economic, and social benefits of research, academics face the challenge of not only delivering high quality research but connecting this with lay beneficiaries and demonstrating non-academic effects. Research impact is characterised by unique paths and varied outcomes, highlighting how impact may not be easily defined, described, or evidenced. This complex impact landscape can be intimidating for new and early-career researchers, who may question how they can meaningfully contribute to the impact agenda, how they develop realistic yet ambitious pathways to impact, how they can build capacity and skills in research impact and how this can be aligned with academic career progression.
Post-REF

2014

, there is an opportunity to rethink our approach to research impact and, in particular, to question what impact means for the new or early-career researcher and how to support the development of research capability in this area. For this edited collection, we are hoping to bring together two types of content. The first is a series of reflective narratives and think-pieces on research impact written by new and early career researchers to capture the diverse experiences, concerns, challenges, and opportunities research impact presents. The second is a series of critical and research-informed essays from all those working in the area that interrogate, question, and discuss research impact in connection to new and/or early career researchers. Chapters may focus on, but are not limited to, the below list of topics:

1. Career development and capability development for early career researchers
2. Promotion and developmental frameworks
3. International and transnational perspectives on research impact
4. Interdisciplinarity and liminal spaces for impact
5. Critical mass and the weight and depth of evidence
6. Cross-institutional impact
7. Conceptual impact and the impact of ideas
8. Negative impact and detrimental impact
9. Team and collaborative impact
10. Doctoral research and impact
11. Impact, policy, and politics
12. Ownership and management of impact
13. The ethics of impact
14. Impact and infrastructures
15. Discipline specific issues pertaining to research impact on early-career researchers.

If you are interested in submitting an essay or a new/early-career researcher narrative or reflection, please send an abstract of 200-300 words to researchimpact2016@gmail.com by Monday 28th November.

It is estimated that narratives will be no more than 3000 words and essays no more than 6000 words. Once we have all the abstracts after 28 th

, the editorial team will review submissions to determine the strongest content for the book. We expect this to be a period of feedback and discussion with potential authors to finalise the types of pieces for inclusion. We anticipate
then a period of 6 months to complete contributions.

The book will be edited by:


[3] Emma Heywood – Lecturer in French (Coventry University) and Researcher in Media and Conflict-affected Areas

[4] Kate Walker – Research Associate in Psychology at the Centre for Psychology, Behaviour, and Achievement (Coventry University)

1. https://twitter.com/JulieEBayley
2. https://twitter.com/DrKFenbyHulse
3. https://twitter.com/EmmaHeywood7
4. https://twitter.com/DrKWalker

The Affectivity of the Nascent Tyrant (2016-12-20 08:00)

By far the best film I’ve seen this year was The Childhood of a Leader. It recounts a number of episodes in the life of a nascent tyrant, exploring the emergence of what is hinted to be a boundless rage that might one day transform the world:
I’ve been thinking about this film since encountering Auden’s *Epitaph on a Tyrant* yesterday:

Perfection, of a kind, was what he was after,
And the poetry he invented was easy to understand;
He knew human folly like the back of his hand,
And was greatly interested in armies and fleets;
When he laughed, respectable senators burst with laughter,
And when he cried the little children died in the streets.

What makes a potential tyrant? It’s the most obvious question to ask when history presents us with towering, pathological and destructive figures who have seemingly remade the world in their image. It’s one sociology is instinctively sceptical towards, given the risk that we uncritically adopt a ‘great men’ theory of history and obscure the social and cultural forces which allowed any such figure to assume the power that they did. But it’s one which I think can be legitimately asked, from a *psychosocial perspective*, without lapsing into reductive individualism.

This must surely involve resisting simplistic applications of labels. As Jon Ronson points out in his new book on Trump, there's something that could be seen as a tad psychopathic about arm-chair diagnoses of psychopathy from afar. From loc 538:

A FEW WEEKS BEFORE I flew to Cleveland, I sat in the Green Room at the Pasadena Convention Center. I was there to give a talk entitled “Is Donald Trump A Psychopath?” All year, people had been asking me my opinion on that topic. (This wasn’t random: I had written a book about psychopaths.) I consider it somewhat psychopathic to label someone from afar as a psychopath. We love nothing more than to declare other people insane, especially people we don’t like. Diagnosing people as psychopaths from
afar, I'd say, speaks to Items 2, 8 and 15 on the Psychopath Checklist —Grandiose Self-Worth, Lack of Empathy and Irresponsibility. You might even add Item 9, Parasitic Lifestyle, if you consider diagnosing Donald Trump from afar as a psychopath to be a parasitic lifestyle.

But can we nonetheless try and imaginatively enter into the affectivity of nascent tyrants? I have no idea of how to begin this process in a systematic way but there are cultural resources which might offer us hints. Two songs I've always liked came immediately to mind when I had this thought:

One concerns rejection and the other mastery. In the first case, we can imagine a refusal to accept rejection and an absolute mythologisation of self that emerges from this. In the second case, a preoccupation with the pleasures of mastery and where this might ultimately lead someone in how they orientate themselves to the opportunities they see in the world to assume further control.

They both suggest the sheer potentiality inherent in raw emotion, how this is usually canalised in predictable patterns but the terrifyingly open-ended possibility of where certain individuals might under certain conditions be led in their coming-to-terms with what they confront.

Has anyone got suggestions of further pieces of music that explore these themes?

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/CDSxIEo2vxU?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
4. https://www.youtube.com/embed/ZOP2NUbG2iY?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
5. https://www.youtube.com/embed/HLUX0y4EptA?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Martyn Everett (2016-12-20 23:58:26)
What makes a tyrant? - the complicity of the 'followers'. The Discourse on Voluntary Servitude
https://mises.org/system/tdf/Politics %20of %20Obedience.pdf?file=1&type=document
Essay Competition: Crossing Disciplinary Borders and Into the Future (2016-12-21 08:00)

The Sociological Review is running an essay competition for early career researchers. See [1] here for more details.

Integration, British Values and the Genealogy of Norms (2016-12-21 10:41)

by Tanzil Chowdhury
Dame Louise Casey’s recent independent [1]review ‘into integration and opportunity in our most isolated and deprived communities’ has been [2]widely criticised, primarily for focussing its lens on Muslim ‘immiscibility’ rather than [3]structural racism and regurgitating old orientalist-stereotypes of hostile diaspora communities. Off the back of the report, the Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, proposed an oath for civil servants and others holding public office that would commit them to ‘British Values.’ Relatedly, a central tenet of the Government’s Prevent Strategy and the [4]problematic ‘conveyor belt’ theory (which presupposes ‘extremism’ as the exclusive cause of terrorism) defines extremism as the ‘vocal or active opposition to fundamental British Values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.’ Ignoring the Tory MPs whom [5]voted against same-sex marriage, the very real problem of [6]white-flight from multi-racial communities, and the many on social media aligning British Values with war, imperialism and colonialism, integration through submission to these values (widely, and thus problematically, defined) is hailed as the antidote to Britain’s social malaise.

Integration (or assimilation) presupposes a hegemonic or dominant normativity. A norm governs the behaviour or thinking of an individual, collection of individuals or society. At one end, you may have a norm amongst your friends that dictates you go to the cinema each Saturday evening, wherein non-compliance may invite derision from your friends. At the other end, other types of norms, such as prohibitions against murder or how to establish a contractual relationship with someone, would invite stronger recriminations (or invalidations as would be the case for contracts) if there is deviation from the norm. Norms therefore can be developed on both macro- and micro- levels; within society at larger, or within workplaces, teams or groups of friends. Integration requires subsumption by individuals, groups of individuals or society to that norm. The question then becomes how are these norms created and/or determined?

Unlike what we may think, norms do not exist in nature which are then transcendentally adduced; nor are they discovered through reason. Norms are socially constructed. In other words, as well as constituting beings, norms are also constituted by them. Importantly however, just because norms are contingent upon the societies that create them, their constitution is not democratically determined as we may hastily (and optimistically) think. In fact, norms are subject to the maldistributions of power within society. In other words, norms will often be constituted by those that are privileged with power in society. This means that they are not static but dynamic. This also means that norms will favour those that are in power or who identify (and are able to) with those in power. History therefore, or more accurately genealogy, is important in understanding the content of norms and integration more generally.
Michel Foucault's genealogical approach rejects history as a chronological pattern of events emanating from a determinate point of departure and attempts to identify underlying 'discontinuous systematics'. These discontinuous systematics highlight the contingency of systems of thought which are the product of 'the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us' (Foucault, 1949). Genealogy attempts to ascertain the power relations operating in particular events and historical developments, identifying and analysing these and the ideas they give rise to. The rules (or norms) that emerge from 'rituals of power' are passed into laws, moral or social conventions and these sustain particular configurations of power and their diffusion within society.

Genealogy demonstrates the interplay of power which necessary shapes norms. Far from 'developing' as a norm, the implication being that norms 'improve' or 'get better' (as a product of reason and rationality) as time goes on, the dynamic construction of norms is in fact contingent on the formulations and re-formulations of power. Contrary to a conventional 'historical analysis' therefore, the genealogical approach observes the interplay between power and the norms which are contingent upon them. In displacing the presumption that norms are the product of rational individuals, a genealogical analysis demonstrates how power constitutes and is constituted by the engagement of power of the prevailing group.

Norms, and by extension integration, are both politically expedient and constituted by the prevailing distribution of power. Rather than being determined through intersubjectivity, as is more likely to be the case among friends (or the micro-level), norms at the macro-level will often favour one group of people above another. Values, norms and integration therefore, illustrate a pathological problem with the way that Britain has always had with difference. In the eyes of the hegemon, difference is understood as deviation from the norm and therefore subversive to its power. This underwrites many different discourses which have existed throughout history, from the 'civilising mission' of European colonialism to the 'Clash of Civilisations' thesis popularised by the likes of Samuel Huntington.

Integration can therefore be understood as a form of social control - what has earlier been referred to as subsumption - or specifically subsumption of the other. The problem therefore is less to do with minority communities but those that define the dominant normativity (or identify with it) and the collective hostility toward difference.

Tanzil Chowdhury recently completed his doctorate and lectures at the School of Law, University of Manchester. His research centres around the UK's legal power to declare war and commit troops abroad. He also co-founded the Northern Police Monitoring Project and help set up the Greater Manchester Law Centre. Twitter: @Tchowdhury88

See [1]here for full information and how to apply

1. [https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/early-career-researchers/conference-funding.html](https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/early-career-researchers/conference-funding.html)

**Social Media and Public Sociology** *(2016-12-23 08:00)*

It can seem obvious that there’s some relationship between social media and public sociology. After all, these are platforms which offer free, instantaneous and immediate access to audiences ranging from the tens of millions to the billions. However unpacking the relationship between social media and public sociology requires we be careful about exactly what we see social media as allowing us to do. Social media platforms allow us to publish in a way that bypasses traditional intermediaries. It facilitates new forms of multimedia engagement. It allows us to do this with an immediacy which couldn’t be further removed from the time-consuming process of traditional scholarly publishing.

However this isn’t necessarily doing public sociology. Communicating sociological ideas doesn’t entail that anyone hear or responds to them. We can publish work without necessarily making it public. Being clear about the sense in which we’re trying to do public sociology is crucial if we’re going to take advantages of the opportunities
it offers us. In our current climate, universities are expecting academics to embrace social media to indicate their capacity for impact, creating a risk that we embrace these platforms without any clear purpose in mind. Without serious thought, there's a real possibility that, as Bourdieu once put it, we confuse “verbal sparring at conferences for ‘interventions’ in the affairs of the polis”.

An obvious question then: for what sort of purposes might we use social media as public sociologists?

- As an extension of traditional public sociology: using social media to try and enter into public conversations, increase the influence of sociological ideas and ensuring sociological findings are prominent within public debates. I paraphrased John Holmwood's keynote at the BSA a few years ago as advocating that we “occupy debate and make inequality matter”. This has traditionally been through writing books for a wider audience, opinion columns in newspapers and making appearances on national media. Social media can support this activity by making sociologists more easily discoverable by journalists and producers. It’s also extending the range of online outlets, with newspapers and magazines having large digital sections and new online-only publications opening up which specialise in academic content. But it creates new opportunities for narrow-casting rather than broad-casting, connecting with specific audiences who might previously have been marginalised within mainstream media. For this reason, writing for specialised blogs and engaging with niche social media forums can be an effective form of traditional public sociology if the publics you want to engage with are pre-constituted and specific.

- As an extension of organic public sociology: working in a scholar-activist capacity with groups, organisations, campaigns and movements. Social media offers new ways of identifying and beginning to engage with groups, it offers new ways of supporting groups (albeit ones that might often blur into the category of traditional public sociology) and it offers new ways of making this activity visible within the academy in a way that might draw others into their remit. Social media is changing how such groups can come together, particularly in their initial stages, by offering new opportunities and challenges for assembling similarly-concerned people in time and space. But the very fact of these changes also transforms the relationality of how digital public sociologists engage with them over time. Though we should of course be wary of overstating the point, with the risk that we license a lapse into slacktavism.

There are important new challenges public sociologists face in both cases. **Traditional public sociology** may be easier than ever but it creates the problem of being heard above the noise. How do we ensure that our attempted interventions have an effect? Existing academic platforms like The Conversation, The Sociological Review, Discover Society and the LSE Blogs serve a purpose here by pre-assembling a public and mediating engagements with them. It can be difficult to assemble your own audience, unless you invest a lot of time and energy in regularly engaging on social media, have a pre-existing reputation to leverage or are seeking to communicate with a very specialised public. Learning about platforms like these helps you identify which, if any, seem right for your purposes. They all offer clear guidelines about how to submit material and are edited by people who are used to working with academics in this capacity.

**Organic public sociology** may be more visible but with this too comes hazards. When it is informed by our own research, the gap between researcher and researched narrows precipitously. For instance, my own experience of researching asexuality was that I very readily got drawn into doing media and campaigning work as an ally. But this also meant that many people in the asexual community were reading and engaging with material I was sharing online, as well as sometimes criticising it. In one case, this was a really informative critique that changed my mind on a specific issue. In another, it was a quote taken out of context which got circulated widely on Tumblr. These are examples of new challenges which we’re not trained for and we need to consider carefully

There’s a risk that the style of communication we’ve all been traded in proves utterly ineffective for digital
public sociology. One of my favourite passages by C Wright Mills concerns the tendency of academics to “slip so readily into unintelligibility”. An “elaborate vocabulary” and “involved manner of speaking and writing” become props for a professional self-image which defines itself, in part, through the inaccessibility of the work being produced. If that work is now accessible then it holds this writing up to scrutiny. It may seem absurd, it may provoke offence but it’s perhaps much more likely to simply fail to gain any purchase and leave us talking amongst ourselves.

We also need to be careful about the climate within which we’re trying to do digital public sociology because it’s so dominated by a competitive individualism in which people are seeking to win attention for their work. The problem is that winning attention for your work doesn’t take place in a vacuum. As the digital anthropologist Melissa Gregg puts it, “even uniqueness starts to sound the same when everyone is trying to perform”. If everyone is seeking to build an audience and stand out from the crowd then the challenge of achieving these aims spirals ever upwards, excluding ever more people from the process in gendered and classed ways while this subordination is masked by the powerful rhetoric of openness.

To give one example of trend, George Veletsianos found in a study of educational tweeters that “the top 1 percent of scholars have an average follower base nearly 700 times that of scholars in the bottom 50 percent and nearly 100 times that of scholars in the other 99 percent” ([1]loc 1162-1708). Rather than undermining old hierarchies, social media supplements new ones, with complex emergent effects: sometimes allowing the already celebrated to quickly amass a social media following or to allow those with a big social media following to translate this into academic capital. This is part of the reason why I think community-orientated platforms such as The Sociological Review and Discover Society are likely to prove so important in mitigating the ‘celebrity’-generating effects of social media.

But hopefully if we focus our discussion of digital public sociology on specific aspirations, projects and publics then we can negotiate these institutional difficulties. There are real opportunities here but also profound challenges.


What is ‘the literature’? (2016-12-24 08:00)

My experience of watching the literature on asexuality spiral from a handful of papers ever through to new ones each month has left me fascinated by how quickly ‘the literature’ can become unmanageable. Within a relatively small and nascent field, it’s possible to grasp ‘the literature’ as a totality. But past a certain point, circumscribing it becomes an inevitability for purely practical reasons: focusing on this, ignoring that, excluding material from different disciplines.

At what point does it become impossible to represent ‘the literature’ as a totality? The impulse to do this doesn’t cease but with its growth these depictions are increasingly performative rather than representational. Demonstrating mastery of ‘the literature’ entails authoritatively circumscribing large chunks of the total knowledge stock within the field, naturalising these occlusion in a way liable to influence others.

Furthermore, ‘the literature’ as a totality necessarily eludes depictions of it because each of these claimed attempts to represent the object in fact contribute to that object’s spiralling complexity.
The way we talk and think about ‘the literature’ is unsuited to the realities of publishing in the accelerated academy.

Benny Goodman (2017-04-14 07:58:23)
An important question, and one which will only become more salient. Perhaps there needs to be research stream that focuses only what is currently published to produce ironically one more paper. A systematic review and synthesis? It would be a hard task. We also have the issue of quality given multiple platforms for knowledge dissemination. Some of us may have to stop writing new papers and instead garner resources to sift the current, if a reference to ‘the literature’ is going to have validity. Or we accept the claim of ‘the literature’ is flawed from the outset. In my own field of interest, health illness and nursing the ‘literature’ is so vast that it would probably take a research team to revisit and review.

Chronosolidarity (2016-12-25 08:00)

In *Work’s Intimacy*, Melissa Gregg pays much attention to the challenge faced by part-time workers in knowledge industries. Many of her participants within this category reported regularly finding themselves checking e-mail outside of their paid hours, something they saw as necessary to ensure they were ‘prepared’. In this way, ‘catch up days’ become an unpaid accompaniment to the hours part-time workers are actually paid for. These activities were often explained in terms of personal autonomy and choice, sacrificing free time in the name of professional performance on work days. But as Gregg writes on loc 1273:

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Even though their language speaks of personal preference and exceptionalism, their consistent stories point to a clear problem in the way part-time work is recognized in information and communication jobs. No formal policies existed for them to manage online obligations; nor were there guidelines for appropriate response times. Employees operated on the basis of vague and self-imposed ideas about what management would or wouldn’t expect. In each case, there was simply no framework for discussing how part-time work was repositioned in light of the widespread reliance on online technologies in team-based office cultures (see chapter 4). Technology served to confirm, when it did not also accelerate the temporality of the workplace. Improvised and makeshift arrangements left many part-timers feeling apologetic for their so-called “flexible” positions.
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I agree this is a failure of management. But it’s also a failure of colleagues, in terms of what we might call *chronoimagination* (recognising that someone else’s temporal experience might be different to yours) and *chronosolidarity* (identifying a common interest in sustainable temporalities of work in spite of these differences). Chronosolidarity is easy when people are obviously in a similar position to yourself, though small communicative acts of reassurance and understanding are no less valuable for the fact they come easily. But the challenge comes when temporal positions work rather differently, too easily giving rise to the assumption someone else’s working life is easier or perhaps not giving rise to thought at all.

Under working conditions which are informal, flexible/precarious and desynchronised, chronoimagination and chronosolidarity should be regarded as important factors in shaping the experience of work. Doing so should not blind us to the structural origins of these problems, such that they are reproduced to interpersonal challenges susceptible to a technical fix. But we need to recognise the imagination relating to converging/diverging experiences
of time which we bring to bear, or fail to, in our dealings with others who are differently placed in relation to organisational hierarchies.

Anthony J Hammond (2016-12-26 23:08:41)
I saw an article on a European court case a few months ago. It related to a company dismissing an employee for reading personal email during working hours and on company property, i.e. desktop. In light of this, should companies be invoiced for works completed at home in order to 'professionalise' the job done during the part time hours?

Mark Carrigan (2016-12-28 10:02:37)
I love the idea, can see little hope of it being implemented though :-(

Five propositions about #publicsociology (2016-12-26 08:00)

1. The meaning of 'public sociology' is not always self-evident and the enthusiasm of the impulse expressed through the term can cloud its meaning yet further. We need to be clear about what we are doing and why.

2. This clarity can help us negotiate the ambivalent spaces for public sociology created within institutions that speak the language of 'impact', 'public engagement', 'knowledge exchange', 'enterprise' and 'outreach'. There are opportunities for public sociology here but also dangers.

3. The competitive individualism of the academy risks being reproduced in a discourse of 'public sociology' dominated by white, male professorial public sociologists. We need to celebrate the practice of public sociology, rather than the academic brands of the most prominent public sociologists. [[1]thanks to the res-sisters and Lambros Fatsis for making this point so clearly, in slightly different ways]

4. Our prevailing systems of scholarly communication risk canalising the impulse towards 'public sociology' into abstract reflection upon what should ultimately be a practical activity. Sustaining employment in the academy necessitates 'outputs' of a certain restricted kind but we must avoid letting these define what we take public sociology to be.

5. We can take these limitations of existing systems as an inspiration to build new systems. How do we create platforms for public sociology that facilitate and encourage it as a collective endeavour, rather than the lone pursuit of isolated individuals within an accelerated academy?

*Call for Papers: The Politics of Gender*

Accepted for the Teaching Gender Series at Sense Publishing.  

Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, Ph.D., editor.*

This book will serve as a primary or supplementary text for courses focused on the ways gender and politics intersect. Each essay will address the ways gender has become embedded in politics, often to the detriment of women who are in pursuit of power. Essays for the book will be academic in terms of structure but contributors will be encouraged to write them with a more "reader friendly" perspective in mind. In other words, shorter, less academic essays will be considered. Each chapter will end with pedagogical tools such as classroom discussion topics and supplemental reading. Chapters will address gendered politics by covering areas such as:

· The place of gender in U.S. politics

· The place of gender in international politics

· Relationships between social movements, gender and politics

· Social inequality and gendered political institutions (particularly intersectional inequality)

· Intersectional perspectives on the political

· The role of technology

· The effect of media

· Body politics (particularly as it relates to gender, race, class, sexuality, age, disability etc.)

· Transgender rights

· Local politics

Other potential topics will be considered.

The collection will be guided by two overarching questions:

1. How do political institutions reinforce gendered approaches to politics?

2. What role does intersectionality play in politicizing gender?

I am looking for highly student-friendly writing (jargon-free whenever
possible). To this end, essays which follow less traditional academic formats will be considered. (For example, essays and stories in which authors share personal experiences or observations, and then apply these experiences to theoretical perspectives, data, terminology etc.)

Please email submissions to Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, Ph.D. at [1]Adrienne.mtb@gmail.com by February 15, 2017. Proposed chapters should be at least 500 words in length, full-length submissions are preferred but not required. Final chapter drafts will need to be between 5000-8000 words, depending on the number of chapters accepted.

1. mailto:Adrienne.mtb@gmail.com

'Transhumanism and the Future of Capitalism' (2016-12-29 08:00)

On Wednesday 11th January 2017 the [1]Contemporary Philosophy of Technology Research Group are hosting the following event:

'Transhumanism and the Future of Capitalism'

[2]Prof. Steve Fuller (Warwick University)

4 - 6pm, Wed. 11th January 2017, 112 Muirhead Tower,

University of Birmingham.

Abstract:

There is more than a grain of truth to the claim that transhumanism is somehow complicit in today’s advanced form of capitalism. Taken on its own terms, ‘transhumanism’ is about extending human capacities indefinitely, typically by biological and/or technological means. There is good reason to think that this ideology will acquire greater prominence in the coming years, as it tracks the increasing proportion of wealth being generated by bio- and information technologies. In this respect, transhumanism is to Silicon Valley as classical liberalism was to Manchester 200 years ago, which provided the backdrop for Marx’s original critique of capitalism. But what would Marx 2.0 look like vis-à-vis today’s high-tech Capitalism 2.0 and its Humanity 2.0 ideological offspring?
Visit our website at:


We are also on Twitter at:


1. http://t.sidekickopen68.com/e1t/c/5/f18dQhb0S71C8dDM35Bw2m0x612B9nM7t5XX48p_4TvVfdw85wf2RTW5v6HK56dNf1f7trHFS02?t=https%3A%2F%2Fphiloftech.wordpress.com%2F
2. http://t.sidekickopen68.com/e1t/c/5/f18dQhb0S71C8dDM35Bw2m0x612B9nM7t5XX48p_4TvVfdw85wf2RTW5v6HK56dNf1f7trHFS02?t=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.warwick.ac.uk%2Ffac%2Fsoc
3. https://philoftech.wordpress.com/
4. https://twitter.com/philoftechbrum

Chris Cooper (2017-01-03 14:10:06)
Hi, How do I register for this conference, if that’s necessary?

Ioana Cerasella Chis (2017-01-06 14:50:11)
Hi Chris, You don’t need to register for the event - just turn up! Best, Ioana (CPT committee member)

Queering Social Media Research - ICWSM Workshop (2016-12-30 08:00)

***CALL FOR PARTICIPATION***

In occasion of the International Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM), we invite position papers and statements of interest for the workshop QUEERING SOCIAL MEDIA RESEARCH – ENGAGING WITH SEXUAL, GENDER, AND RELATIONAL DIVERSITY.

This full-day workshop will take place on May 15, 2017 in Montreal, Canada.

The deadline for application is March 4, 2017.

For more information, please visit the workshop webpage: [1]http://queeringsocialmediaresearch.blogspot.ca/2016/12/workshop-queering-social-mediaresearch.html Please send papers and questions at this address: [2]qsmr2017@gmail.com For more information about the ICWSM, please visit: [3]http://www.icwsm.org/2017/index.php We hope to see you in Montreal this Spring! The organizing committee: Mélanie Millette, Université du Québec à Montréal David Myles, Université de Montréal Anna Lauren Hoffmann, University of California, Berkeley

2.mailto:qsmr2017@gmail.com
The Joy of Data (2016-12-31 08:00)

An engaging, accessible and long overdue documentary recently shown on the BBC:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xgp7BIbPhk
2017

8.1 January

Digital Capitalism and Guard Labour (2017-01-01 08:00)

An interesting thread I’m following up from Four Futures: Life After Capitalism. This is [1]Samuel Bowles and Arjun Jayadev on ‘guard labour’:

Another dubious first for America: We now employ as many private security guards as high school teachers — over one million of them, or nearly double their number in 1980.

And that’s just a small fraction of what we call “guard labor.” In addition to private security guards, that means police officers, members of the armed forces, prison and court officials, civilian employees of the military, and those producing weapons: a total of 5.2 million workers in 2011. That is a far larger number than we have of teachers at all levels.

What is happening in America today is both unprecedented in our history, and virtually unique among Western democratic nations. The share of our labor force devoted to guard labor has risen fivefold since 1890 — a year when, in case you were wondering, the homicide rate was much higher than today. [2]http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/02/15/one-nation-under-guard/?_r=0

How widespread could this become in the event of mass technologically-induced unemployment? One of my favourite dystopian fictions, Lazarus, imagines a world in which great status accrues to a warrior-class of guards amongst a population of citizens, living besides a vast population of non-persons:
I find this interesting because it suggests Guard Labour could (does?) serve a socio-cultural function, as well as a structural one. It inculcates a mentality of guarding ‘us’ against ‘them’, offering opportunities to achieve status within the social order to those who might otherwise struggle to do so. But how would this intersect with the practical reality of actually guarding the wealthy elites? After all, military robotics is advancing at a remarkable pace:
Bernard Marszalek (2017-01-01 20:12:45)
New Year's Greetings! I just happened upon your site via Naked Capitalism (but not directly!) You may be interested in my review of Four Futures. http://newpol.org/content/our-postwork-future-prospect-win-or-lose

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-08 12:11:44)
I am and don't think I knew new pol either, thanks!

Bounded autonomy in the workplace (2017-01-02 08:00)

In John Thompson's Merchants of Culture, he describes what might be termed the bounded autonomy enjoyed by some editorial teams within publishing houses. From pg 128:

the devolution of editorial decision-making to small editorial teams operating with a high degree of autonomy within certain financial parameters is the best way to maximize your chances of success. As one senior manager in a large corporation put it, 'We're giving somebody a playing field and we're putting fences around the edge of it and saying, "If you want to cross one of those fences, you have to ask a question. But if you're playing in the field you can do what you like." You give people a lot of scope, but you provide a framework within which they operate.'
I was struck by how absent this seems in (British) academia, with the possible exception of some business schools. Rather than seek to return to a full system of collegial self-regulation, does this provide a model for arguing for autonomy within managerial structures? E.g. Scholarship is something which needs autonomy to flourish but this can be bounded in terms of outcomes and rules?

It’s worth noting that there’s a brutally instrumental attitude which underwrites this bounded autonomy. From pg 131:

‘There is an unspoken rule,’ explains one senior editor who has worked at Star for some 30 years, ‘put one toe out of the elevator to interfere with us and we will cut you off at the knees. And the only thing that enables us to take that attitude is profitability. As long as we make the money, we can tell them to go fuck themselves. It’s as simple and as old-fashioned as that. The second that goes wrong, we’ve had it. If we stop being profitable, the incursions will start.’

And underlying this dynamic is a certain ineffable trait, a resistance to quantification amidst demonstrable sources of profit and gain to the organisation. From pg 131-132:

This is part of the mystique of the imprint, ‘and the one thing corporate owners are scared shitless of is messing with mystique,’ said another senior editor. ‘Mystique is what they don’t understand. All they know is, if it works, don’t break it.’

Thompson later offers counter-examples to this. I’m intrigued by the analogy between high prestige imprints and successful research groups. How does the negotiation of bounded autonomy empower group leaders? The figure Milena Kremakova calls ‘the troll on the bridge’ could become very powerful here: mediating pressures towards granular control within the group and negotiating bounded autonomy for the group as a whole.

John McCreery (2017-01-02 20:55:34)
I am reminded of Kimoto Kazuhiko, the Japanese Senior Creative Director who hired me as an English-language copywriter at one of the two largest Japanese ad agencies. A day came when the agency was going through one of its periodic attempts to enforce rules requiring creatives to adhere to a 9-to-5 workday. I asked Kimoto-San about what was going on. He replied, “In our business there is only one rule. If the clients give the agency business because you are here, you can ignore the other rules.” The implicit alternative was, of course, that if you weren’t a rainmaker, if you didn’t bring in business, then you had to follow the rules.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-08 12:12:37)
That’s a really nice account - could I quote if/when I write formally about this?

John McCreery (2017-01-08 16:33:57)
Of course. I would be tickled pink. Please let me know if you do.
2017 Denver CFP: Where is the Journalist in Social Media? (2017-01-03 08:00)

Centre for Ecological, Social, and Informatics Cognitive Research (ESI.CORE)
Inaugural International Conference
Moving Forward: Where is the Journalist in Social Media?
SpringHill Suites Downtown Denver
Metropolitan State University of Denver
Denver, Colorado USA
June 23-24, 2017

Call for Papers:

In the current political climate, the constructions of celebrity leaders and popular forms of mediated truths, especially with the recent "fake" internet news, have raised questions about journalism. Tabloid and other forms of popular journalism use narrative devices of gossip, rumor and scandals while many news media have abandoned facts and intelligent analysis in favor of spectacular outrage and incivility, both situations acting as testaments to the lack of informed opinions. Although scholars and journalists work together during news reporting, investigations/documentaries, and on other issues that are covered by news media, scholars are often confined to academic research and disconnected from the realities faced by journalists. Can citizen journalists and journalism scholars help move forward with progressive research and practice? What are the qualifications and definitions of a 'journalist?' Is this someone who is employed professionally - or someone who has received an academic certification (degree) to be qualified? Or can anyone today be a journalist?

Citizen participation has been seen as essential in the democratic processes of production, distribution, and reception of news. Online participatory media such as blogs, comments and videos offer a democratic platform for the expression of alternative ideas that may otherwise be filtered by traditional journalism. Yet, citizen journalists need critical media literacy that is often lost in the lure of visibility. How can journalism scholars creatively and critically engage citizen journalists in the dissemination of their research, informed opinions and cultural productions?

The Centre for Ecological, Social, and Informatics Cognitive Research (ESI.CORE), in association with sponsors Centre for Media and Celebrity
Studies (CMCS) and WaterHill Publishing, invites academics, journalists, publicists, producers and guests to attend, speak and collaborate at the inaugural international conference Moving Forward: Where is the Journalist in Social Media? Join us in Denver, Colorado where the conference will uniquely combine vibrant roundtable and media workshop panels in a collaborative network.

The format of the conference aims at being open and inclusive ranging from interdisciplinary academic scholars to practitioners involved in all areas of print, broadcast and online journalism. Working papers and media productions will be considered for the conference.

Extended versions of selected best papers will be published in an edited book.

Registration includes: Your printed package for the complete conference, professional development workshops, coffee / tea breaks, access to evening receptions, complimentary evening drinks, consideration for publication.

Submission guidelines:

250-word abstract or workshop / roundtable proposal
Include a title, your name, e-mail address, and affiliation if applicable
Submit to conference Chair Dr William Huddy at email address:
|submit@esi.core.org
Deadline for abstract submission: February 15, 2017
Notification of acceptance: March 15, 2017
Early bird registration deadline: April 30, 2017
Full registration deadline: May 30, 2017
Conference reception and presentations: June 23-24, 2017
Topics include but are not limited to:
Communication
Media
Journalism
Photojournalism
Television and Radio
Social Media
Informed Opinions
Infomercials
Advertisement
Publicity and Promotion
News
Interviews
Audience
Race
Gender
Environment and species
Class
Fiction
Genre
Biography
Theory and Methods
Ethics and Morality
Cognition
Media Literacy
Education and Advocacy
International Relations
Business and Community Partnerships


1. mailto:submit@esi.core.org
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The Impact Agenda as Paradigm Shift (2017-01-04 08:00)

In advance of running my first impact and social media workshop on Tuesday in Ghent, I've been working through some of the literature on impact. One book that's proving more thought-provoking than I expected is [1]Achieving Impact in Research by Pam Denicolo. It's an edited collection that emerged from a symposium in Warwick in 2012 that I wish I'd attended.

In the first chapter Colin Chandler makes a case that the impact agenda is part of a paradigm shift in how research is viewed:

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BOX 1.1 CHANGES IN THE WAY RESEARCH IS VIEWED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From</th>
<th>To</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research – an end in its own right</td>
<td>Focused and forward-looking research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity driven</td>
<td>Targeted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic freedom</td>
<td>Constrained</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-regulated</td>
<td>Governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serendipity</td>
<td>Investment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic excellence</td>
<td>Excellence with impact</td>
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I have many problems with this account. Viewed by whom? How does the perception match up with the reality? How has this been contested? Are all these points of transition part of the same process? In reality, it's obviously the case that many factors are at work here.

But as a sensitising device, I find this table extremely useful. Much of the work I've been doing in the last year (distraction about my distraction book notwithstanding) has been about trying to understand how social media
is implicated in the changing character of research and academic labour.


The Gender Pay Gap (2017-01-04 15:05)

by Deborah Talbot

In the last half-century, advanced industrial nations have seen immense changes in the position of women in society. They have caught up or overtaken boys in educational achievement. They have joined the labour force and all other facets of public life.

As analysts, we have a tendency to focus on the negative. Sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence and general objectification still go on and are mostly unpunished. Women are thrown out of work easier than men. They take the lion’s share of domestic work and childcare compared to men. But compared to women around the globe, and our recent ancestors, we have unprecedented freedoms.

So the question becomes, with all this freedom and advancement, why do women still end up earning less than men and occupying positions of less prominence in public life and corporations? The answer to that can be found in the process by which women are converted into ‘lesser mortals’ once they have children. When women give birth, they are ‘mummy-tracked’. They can’t put in the hours needed to keep up high-profile careers, and they are gradually sidelined. When that happens, they then become the main carers for children, and later, even elderly relatives. A woman could start off at the peak of her career, have children, and then, within a few years, find herself living the life of her mother.

Some argue, like the Women’s Equality Party, that the problem is men. Indeed, when I wrote about how women balance childcare and work, I was criticised by one of their leaders for not mentioning men. It’s true, men
have some part to play, but, unfortunately, people tend to adapt their behaviours to their context, not the other way around. Men will change when ‘the conditions of life’ change, though we do have some outliers.

Some argue we need more legislation to enforce equality. Sure, that helps, but mostly it’s symbolic and difficult to enforce, as the grim statistics that emerge from workplace tribunals suggest. I’d like to see some legislation on discrimination against women because they are mothers, as they have in the States, if only to make a point (“ah ha, see”, I’d say). But as yet it doesn’t seem to have done American mothers much good.

So I found reading the research and writing of Claudia Goldin, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, pretty much a eureka moment. In her paper [1]A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter she argues that the problem is not so much men or a lack of law. The problem is the way the labour market is structured, which is what I’ve been arguing for a while...but she does it much, much better.

Her analysis illustrates that men and women have experienced a historic ‘gender convergence’ in pay. This is a controversial point to make, given the slogan ‘77 cents on the dollar’ seems to summarise women’s position so well. However, Goldin argues that there is very little difference in pay (although still some) between men and childless women in equivalent professions. The pay gap emerges when there is a demand for workplace flexibility and, therefore, availability and the pay gap with childbirth varies across occupations. It is important, Goldin argues, to look at the features of particular occupations as a human resources problem, and whether they negatively punish a need for flexibility.

Goldin looks at the particular characteristics of jobs and what they mean for pay parity. Some jobs place a high value on workplace involvement, which is a detriment to flexibility, while others do not. Science and technology jobs are examples where flexibility does not engender huge pay inequalities:

“...in comparison with business occupations those in technology and science have far greater time flexibility, fewer client and worker contacts, fewer working relationships with others, more independence in determining tasks, and more specific projects with less discretion over them. Each of these characteristics should produce a more linear relationship between hours and earnings and the greater linearity should produce a lower residual difference in earnings by sex.”

She argues that there is a link between occupations that tag earnings to the number of hours worked, such as business and law...."Individuals who work long hours in these occupations receive a disproportionate increase in earnings."

But, the employer might say, our job demands that you be present. How can you, as a solicitor, barrister, MP, CEO, and so forth, clock off at 5pm? They say they need certain tasks done as part of the job, and the employee needs to be around for these. In a position where one individual holds complete responsibility for the fulfillment of certain tasks, a demand for flexibility will lower the value of that employee. However, some professions or workplaces enable substitutes for particular tasks, so that any qualified person can do this. In these positions, flexibility is not punished, and pay parity is greater. The pharmacy industry in the US is one positive example of a profession that has greater equality of pay along with flexibility, and it was a change that occurred as a result of other structural changes in the profession, rather than as a result of demand for flexibility.

She concludes:

“A gender gap in earnings exists today that greatly expands with age, to some point, and differs significantly by occupation. The gap is much lower than it had once been and the decline has been largely
due to an increase in the productive human capital of women relative to men. Education at all levels increased for women relative to men and the fields that women pursue in college and beyond shifted to the more remunerative and career-oriented ones. Job experience of women also expanded with increased labor force participation. The portion of the difference in earnings by gender that was once due to differences in productive characteristics has largely been eliminated...What, then, is the cause of the remaining pay gap? Quite simply the gap exists because hours of work in many occupations are worth more when given at particular moments and when the hours are more continuous. That is, in many occupations earnings have a nonlinear relationship with respect to hours. A flexible schedule often comes at a high price, particularly in the corporate, financial, and legal worlds."

In short, women are penalised in the workplace for having children (or indeed, anyone demanding flexibility, but it is still mostly women) because of the way that employment is structured in particular professions and workplaces. If professional success is decoupled from the amount of hours worked, and employers can find ways to allow employees to act as substitutes for each other, then we might go some way to alleviating the pay gap. We could also, in theory, advise men and women much earlier on the professions most likely to accommodate lifestyle changes and needs. Interesting stuff.

Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative research and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things urban. She has recently set up a new blog [2]Interurban Lines.

2. http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/

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The challenge of writing in the accelerated academy (2017-01-05 08:00)

In the nine years since I first entered a Sociology department, I’ve had a deep interest in academic writing that has only increased with time. In my past life as a philosophy student, writing had never occurred to me as a topic of intellectual interest. Despite having once aspired to be a writer before concluding that I wasn’t good enough at writing political polemics to stand much chance of joining that small class of people who write them for a living. This self-critical concern with the quality (or otherwise) of my writing has perhaps been more of an animating force than I’ve tended to admit to myself. But the other driver was the inspiration I derived from [1]’On Intellectual Craftsmanship’, the appendix to The Sociological Imagination, the first book I read as a Sociology postgraduate. As Mills puts it on pg 217-218:

I know you will agree that you should present your work in as clear and simple language as your subject and your thought about it permit. But as you may have noticed, a turgid and polysyllabic prose does seem to prevail in the social sciences ... Such lack of ready intelligibility, I believe, usually has little or nothing to do with the complexity of subject matter, and nothing at all with profundity of thought. It has to do almost entirely with certain confusions of the academic writer about his own status.
I'm fascinated by what sociological writing can reveal because of where it sits at the intersection between sociologists, sociology, higher education and the wider world. In such writing we find an (often unintended) disclosure of sociologists, the discipline they have been socialised into, its status within the wider academy and their conditions of labour within it. All while purporting to be an examination of the world 'out there'. In fact, it's through concern for how we can produce knowledge of this world, as well as put it to work in changing that world, that it becomes imperative to address writing in a diagnostic mode. How does actually existing sociological writing impede knowledge production? Can we strive to ameliorate these pernicious effects? As [2]Andrew Sayer has put it, the alienated writing of social scientists reflects their own alienation. In addressing one, we unavoidably encounter the other.

One of the most striking things about contemporary scholarly writing is how obviously rushed some of it is. We can read this back from quantitative measures, looking at the increasing rate at which individuals publish, as well as the aggregate growth of publications as a whole. Though there are other factors at work (e.g. digital technology offering time savings in the writing and research process) the basic trend is clearly one of acceleration. We can recognise it qualitatively in a lack of innovation across publications and the well-recognised tendency towards 'salami slicing'. But as Michael Billig points out in his [3]Learn to Write Badly, we can also recognise it in the texts themselves. From pg 133:

The trouble is that the specialists do not handle their big nouns with care, but they rush to use them, knocking over verbs in their haste and barging other parts of speech out of the way. In their rush, they fail to tie the big words firmly to the grounds of human actions, leave them flapping loosely, but flamboyantly, in the wind.

Rushing does not create this tendency towards vague, grandiose and depersonalised language. As [4]this interview with Howard Becker rather beautifully illustrates, we can find intellectual roots for these tendencies in the world views of prominent and influential theorists:

“Bourdieu’s big idea was the champs, field, and mine was monde, world—what’s the difference?” Becker asks rhetorically. “Bourdieu’s idea of field is kind of mystical. It’s a metaphor from physics. I always imagined it as a zero-sum game being played in a box. The box is full of little things that zing around. And he doesn’t speak about forces. He just speaks about forces. There aren’t any people doing anything.” People in Bourdieu’s field are merely atom-like entities. (It was Bourdieu’s vision that helped inspire Michel Houellebecq’s nihilistic novel of the meaningless collisions of modern life, “The Elementary Particles.”) ...

As Becker has written elsewhere, enlarging the end-credits metaphor, “A ‘world’ as I understand it consists of real people who are trying to get things done, largely by getting other people to do things that will assist them in their project. . . . The resulting collective activity is something that perhaps no one wanted, but is the best everyone could get out of this situation and therefore what they all, in effect, agreed to.”

But we can find the conditions within which these ways of writing and speaking propagate in the academy itself (as a corollary, in the work of the great theorists themselves). One thing I’d like to explore much further with the [5]Accelerated Academy project is how we can use tempo as a way to understand the organisational influences upon scholarly writing. Billig rather persuasively diagnoses how the intensification of academic labour, particularly in relation to securing a position when facing competition on all sides, incentivises self-promotional writing. This is how I do things, it’s better than how they do things, join my club. But in reality, most of us are likely to join someone’s
else club... taking shelter from the cold winds of an organisation undergoing rapid deprofessionalisation by huddling together around a camp fire of shared certainties (not to mention opportunities for networking, publication and engagement). I was struck by the contrast Billig draws between how a figure like Foucault innovated and the contemporary realities of scholarship. From pg 148:

There is something very old-fashioned about Foucault’s lectures to the Collège de France. It is not just that he cites obscure writers from the early modern period and that he presents no 'literature reviews', in which he positions his own work in relation to the approaches of his contemporaries. His lectures were lectures: he did not seem eager to rush them into print to boost his tally of publications. Nor did he place key lectures –such as that on ‘governmentality’ –in influential sociological journals. Instead, he addressed his audience directly. And most importantly, he addressed them as individuals, who might be interested in his ideas, rather than as potential academic producers whom he wishes to recruit to a new mode of enquiry. In this regard, Foucault was not a Foucauldian, spreading the Foucauldian message and seeking to promote a Foucauldian subdiscipline.

It reminded me of David Graeber’s argument about the dead zones of the imagination in higher education. Has rampant scholasticism coupled with inane managerialism destroyed the conditions under which the objects of that scholastic zeal were able to thrive?

The explosion of paperwork, in turn, is a direct result of the introduction of corporate management techniques, which are always justified as ways of increasing efficiency, by introducing competition at every level. What these management techniques invariably end up meaning in practice is that everyone winds up spending most of their time trying to sell each other things: grant proposals; book proposals; assessments of our students’ job and grant applications; assessments of our colleagues; prospectuses for new interdisciplinary majors, institutes, conference workshops, and universities themselves, which have now become brands to be marketed to prospective students or contributors. Marketing and PR thus come to engulf every aspect of university life.

The result is a sea of documents about the fostering of “imagination” and “creativity,” set in an environment that might as well have been designed to strangle any actual manifestations of imagination and creativity in the cradle. I am not a scientist. I work in social theory. But I have seen the results in my own field of endeavour. No major new works of social theory have emerged in the United States in the last thirty years. We have, instead, been largely reduced to the equivalent of Medieval scholastics, scribbling endless annotations on French theory from the 1970s, despite the guilty awareness that if contemporary incarnations of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, or even Pierre Bourdieu were to appear in the U.S. academy, they would be unlikely to even make it through grad school, and if they somehow did make it, they would almost certainly be denied tenure.

The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy pg 134

In what I’ve discussed so far, there are a number of distinct (overlapping?) factors which these thinkers have diagnosed as harmful to academic writing:

- Status insecurity of social scientists, particularly vis-a-vis natural scientists.
• The time pressures of the accelerated academy and increasing tempos of expected publication.
• Competition in the academic labour market and the imperative to achieve security through publication.
• Managerialism and metricisation creating an organisational environment within which marketing and PR have engulfed even scholarship.

At the risk of stating the obvious, what each of these factors have in common is the scholar. Note that when I write 'the scholar', I abstract from actually existing embodied persons. This carries the same cost that Billig notes of 'the subject':

It sounds much grander, more official, and less personal. The definite article – the 'the' – adds cachet. By using 'the subject', the authors turn 'people' into another theoretical thing. (pg 158)

I'm not trying to write about a category. I'm trying to write about the people who occupy that category. The living, breathing, hoping, despairing, finite beings for whom 'academic' is one social role amongst others occupied in their lives. Furthermore, within the confines of that role, they might aspire to 'scholar' and feel constrained by the realities of the organisations within which they work. Writing offers an interesting route into 'the scholar'. A way to diagnose what troubles them so. Another way of exploring the 'deep somatic crisis' that critics like Roger Burrows and Ros Gill have claimed afflicts the contemporary academy. But this is a much bigger project than one blog post can contain.


John McCreery (2017-01-05 22:35:07)
Mark, I like very much what you have written here, but I have a disagreement with one of the sources you cite. While myself a great admirer of Howard Becker, I would argue that his reading of Bourdieu's "field" is mistaken. Bourdieu's primary reference for field is not physics but (I learned this reading Louis Wacquant) football, the game called soccer in the USA. His actors are not particles, they are players. Their "habitus" is the dispositions that allow them to respond instantly to the state of play and the movements of other players and the ball, to which they must respond without time for rational calculation of costs and benefits.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-08 12:14:06)
I think it's totally fair and you're certainly correct about the source of the metaphor. But is it unfair to say Bourdieu thought in terms of forces?

John McCreery (2017-01-10 20:40:53)
First, a confession. I am not a deep scholar of Bourdieu. That said, in my shallow reading, all in English translation, I have never seen him use "forces" in a well-defined technical, as opposed to metaphorical, sense. Imagining that human behavior is shaped by economic, political, social or cultural "forces" is commonplace and in no way implies conformity...
with mathematicall laws like \( f=ma \) or the ability to calculate the result of converging vectors. Neither is it equivalent to a tally of the troops and equipment available to a nation about to go to war. That is why I see it as so important to pay close attention to the root metaphor. In football, there is no equivalent of turning a dial to increase electrical current and strengthen a magnetic field in a precisely predictable manner. The perspectives of players, coaches and umpires attending to the state of play and disposed to respond in one way or another cannot be comprehended in any simple mechanical way.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-13 14:50:44)

Hi John, I agree it’s commonplace to talk in this way, but that’s exactly what Becker is getting at I think. His argument about Bourdieu might not be genealogically accurate, as a statement about the origins of his ideas, but it might still be conceptually fair. It reduces the complexity of human beings to see them as players of the game and nothing more. This is what I think Becker’s critique shares with those of people like Andrew Sayer, Margaret Archer and Jeffrey Alexander.


[...] via » The challenge of writing in the accelerated academy The Sociological Imagination [...]  

**On Academic Productivity** (2017-01-06 08:00)

Some great ideas about academic productivity offered by Fabio Rojas at OrgTheory, based on conversations he has had with ultra-productive academics. Read it [1]in full here:

- **Team work**: Almost every star I’ve asked works in large groups. If you look at the CV’s, they have tons of co-authors.
- **Division of Labor**: A lot of them have told me that they are very good at assigning tasks. One of them told me he *never* does fund raising. He works with another prof who in a medical school who has access to funds.
- **Shamelessness**: Most academics sulk over rejections. These folks don’t. Soon as a paper gets rejected, they send it out ASAP.
- **Recognizing diminishing marginal returns**: A paper will improve between first and second drafts. These folks understand that obsession over the 20th and 21st version is pointless.
- **Attitude**: Sounds corny, but every single one of these folks has an amazing forward looking attitude. They love what they do and they see the future as bright.
- **Minimizing junk work**: Some probably shirk teaching or admin work, but what I have observed is that they are ruthlessly efficient. They reuse course materials, borrow syllabi, and use teaching to deepen their knowledge of a topic.
- **Recognizing the randomness of reviews**: Most people complain about the randomness of reviewers. The star publishers draw the logical conclusion. If you can get random negatives, you get random positives. So just keep submitting until it you randomly pull positive reviews. [2]https://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2016/12/21/notes-on-academic-productivity/
Burnham (2017-01-07 13:01:38)
This is very dangerous and unreflective advice. Lethal especially for early careers. It has neo-liberal subject written all over it, rather disgusting, to be honest

The Silicon Valley of Hardware (2017-01-07 08:00)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGJ5cZnoodY

Future Cities, a full-length documentary strand from WIRED Video, takes us inside the bustling Chinese city of Shenzhen.

We examine the unique manufacturing ecosystem that has emerged, gaining access to the world’s leading hardware-prototyping culture whilst challenging misconceptions from the west. The film looks at how the evolution of "Shanzhai" – or copycat manufacturing – has transformed traditional models of business, distribution and innovation, and asks what the rest of the world can learn from this so-called "Silicon Valley of hardware".

The Reality of Homelessness in Cardiff (2017-01-08 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYA2oE5yj_U &t=7s
Metrics and the death of imagination (2017-01-09 08:00)

In John Thompson's *Merchants of Culture*, there's an interesting remark about the structural position of first time authors which I think has wider purchase. From pg 200:

Ironically, in a world preoccupied by numbers, the author with no track is in some ways in a strong position, considerably stronger than the author who has published one or two books with modest success and muted acclaim, simply because there are no hard data to constrain the imagination, no disappointing sales figures to dampen hopes and temper expectations. The absence of sales figures sets the imagination free. The first-time author is the true tabula rasa of trade publishing, because his or her creation is the book for which it is still possible to imagine anything and everything.

A world where metrics are ubiquitous is a world where imagination has died. When everyone has a track record, the space to imagine someone's future as radically different from their past collapses.


[...] was recently reading a blog post from Mark Carrigan at The Sociological Imagination about how data can hold back imagination. He uses a quote from John Thompson's Merchants of[...]

Open Access Archive SocArXiv Launches (2017-01-10 08:00)

A very exciting [1]announcement:

[2]SocArXiv, the open archive of social science, has just launched in beta version. Led by a steering committee of [3]sociologists and librarians, SocArXiv is a free, open access repository for prepublication versions of papers. Created as a not-for-profit alternative to sites like Academia.edu, ResearchGate, and SSRN, SocArXiv is built in collaboration with the [4]Center for Open Science and supported by the Open Society Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.


1. https://oowsection.org/2016/12/13/open-access-archive-socarxiv-launches/
2. https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv
3. https://socopen.org/welcome/
5. https://oowsection.org/2016/12/13/open-access-archive-socarxiv-launches/
“Brassing off” Against Post-Democratic Non-Citizenship. Or, What to Learn from the Second Line Culture of New Orleans (2017-01-11 08:00)

By Lambros Fatsis

Following the Brexit referendum and the recent US presidential election, our current political and socio-cultural climate has often been described as quintessentially ‘[1] post-truth’. This newly coined term, much like the phenomenon it describes, rapidly gained traction as a warning about the danger of sacrificing facts on the altar of opinion, or simply preferring emotiveness to judgement. As its usage spread, its popularity grew and post-truth politics soon became a cipher for the populist campaigning tactics of [2] Brexiteers and [3] Trumpists alike, due to their blatant disregard for the validity and consequences of their deceitful, divisive, irresponsible, and often toxic rhetoric. Transcending its inauspicious origins as a fanciful neologism, however, ‘[4] truthiness’ gradually became something more alarming than a mere descriptive term; it raised unsettling questions about our relationship with and attitude towards political engagement and democratic citizenship altogether.

What is citizenship made of?

The casualty of such a shift is not simply "truth" itself as a process in which we, emulating Aristotle, say ‘[5] of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not’. We were also painfully reminded that we have yet to learn how to counter and encounter each other’s arguments in a nuanced, moderate, cautious, and evidence-based manner; thereby allowing political deliberation and civic engagement to happen in an atmosphere of considered dialogue, where finding common ground through disagreement is crucial. Following this logic, truth becomes something more than the property of our worldview, but rather depends on the outcome of our exchange with our fellow citizens. What both citizenship and the pursuit of truth require from us, however, are more than ideological reflexes or emotional reactions to issues we feel strongly about. Truthful democratic citizenship involves the capacity to speak as equals (isigoria), but also candidly and freely (parrhesia); provided that we do so from a desire to act towards the common public good, rather than as an exorcism ceremony in which we curse our political opponents away, having learned nothing from our interaction with others (un)like us.

Are we all post-democratic non-citizens now?

What this unflattering picture of our public selves reveals is a gradual process of what Albert O. Hirschman called ‘[6] shifting involvements’; where private interests, convictions, and wants replace public participation as an exercise of tuning into collective needs. But to prioritise what we deem desirable at the expense of what is essential to all is to choose 'absolutes' over 'imperatives', as "the Father" of the Harlem Renaissance [7] Alain Locke would have it. Such complete withdrawal into and interaction only with whatever/whomever we agree with, however, is a form of retreatism not democratic advancement. To make matters worse, this silo mentality corrodes what public life and democratic citizenship are all about: a combination of conflict and dissensus with a recognition that, as democrats, we are responsible for and accountable to each other whether we like it or not. To shy away from this fact, is to prolong a process in which disagreement begets dislike, dislike begets social distance, social distance
begets polarisation, and polarisation eventually causes the break-up of politics as a form of exchange, transforming it instead into an empty shell where incomprehension and separation reign supreme.

As [8] W.E.B. Du Bois put it a century ago, 'herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,—all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,—who is good? not that men are ignorant,—what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men'. What the reality of "post-truthpolitik" confronted us with was the painful realisation that we have strayed away from truthfulness because we refuse to engage (with) each other as citizens, preferring instead to stereotype, patronise, browbeat and call each other names from encamped positions. Yet, between "liberal elites" who are hated for their social advantage and "frustrated" outsiders who are derided for serving as populism's pawns lies a greater divide; between citizens and non-citizens, and that's the one that really matters. For all our righteous rage against "others" who know and understand nothing, we are all guilty for using the tools of and forums for democracy against its content. Voting has recently become little more than a charade where the electorate can have its say by throwing a tantrum without due regard for what happens when any action is separated from its consequences, not just for oneself but for the entire political community in which we all ostensibly participate. Ironically, this sets off a process where irresponsible non-citizens install the architects of post-truth theatrical trumpery as the guardians of democracy within parliament. The tragedy of it all is that those who have insulted democracy by lying their way into power will now betray their voters too, given that in representative democracies like ours, the voice of "the people" resonates through parliament rather than residing in a populist bubble where the electorate's vice is entertained with no holds barred.

**Becoming citizens again**

Democracy is more than the servant of our little foibles or our individual will. In fact, it is a form of government which protects us from ourselves by educating us on how to tolerate each other in the process of negotiating collective needs though persuasive argument and evidence. Democracy, therefore, needs our involvement to survive, and that requires more than casting a vote and letting a government "rule" until the next election is announced. To do so is to fulfil only a tiny fraction of our civic duties. We do not become citizens by merely deploying an "X" in the ballot box or by dutifully paying tax, but by being attentive to and communicative towards each other; drawing on truth and logic as the basis for making rational decisions, while practising openness and civility as the moral prerequisite for our encounters. The more we keep to ourselves and talk only to people who we like and/or agree with, the more "post-democratic" and "non-citizen-like" we become; extricating ourselves from difficult encounters with others, in favour of the comfortable, the predictable, and the self-referential. Such a mentality does not augur well for the flourishing of democracy, given that the latter draws its strength partly from its formal institutions and partly from the informal exercise of citizenship as a form of '[9] communicative action', rather than a ritual of civic inattention (not to be confused with Goffman's '[10] civil inattention').

**What has New Orleans' Second Line Culture got to do with democratic citizenship?**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJ_fXelisi8 &feature=youtu.be

Although it may seem odd at first to enlist parading jazz ensembles as instruments of civil society or introduce music as a technology for assembling people for a common purpose, it would be foolish to dismiss them outright as irrelevant forms of public expression, interaction and involvement without facing accusations of [11] intellectualist bias.
especially when the dream of social media as assembling devices has lost much of its gleam. In our trying times where fragmentation, individualism, retreatism, and withdrawal patrol our public interactions, often replacing dialogic exchange with a flurry of angry social media posts, more sociable forms of public exchange are urgently needed as 'cooling devices' in a 'hot climate' as [12] Loader and Sparks rightly insist. The parading brass bands of New Orleans, which accompany various Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs (SA &P), serve as an embodiment of how to use public space for creating opportunities for social interaction between citizens.

With their roots in the early 19th century, SA &Ps developed in the Black communities of New Orleans to pool resources and provide financial assistance for their members in the form of medical insurance, funeral costs, disaster relief, and other difficulties. But they also offered "pleasure" in the form of street parades which snake through the neighbourhoods where club members live. On any Sunday afternoon from September to June, SA &P clubs dance their way through the city; performing not just their allegiance to their respective club, but acting out citizenship in a live(d), grounded manner which is so sorely missing in our "connected" but essentially fragmented times. On a recent visit to New Orleans, in the immediate aftermath of the Trump victory, I was fortunate enough to witness the joyous, creative, and publicly-situated riot that second line parades are, while at the same time feeling brassed off about how much of that spirit of public culture is lacking as a regular, not an episodic, feature of everyday social life in our part of the world. To try to embed ourselves firmly and deeply in the public realm however, we have to learn how to turn sociability into what [13] Georg Simmel called the 'art or play form of association', as the ferment out of which active democratic citizenship can emerge.

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4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCQtDkuHGRc
10. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Relations_in_public.html?id=dpBAAAAIAAJ
12. http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/research/conferences/bsc2010/special-sessions/authorsmeetcritics

sylvia hammond (2017-01-11 09:09:38)
In South Africa, relevant comparisons are the Kaapse Klopse marching bands through the streets of Cape Town - arising from slave heritage, and also the large football clubs, which provide similar benefits of association, and particularly in the Johannesburg area represent a meeting point for migrant mining workers.
All the open culture you could ever need (2017-01-12 08:00)

A fabulous roundup from the always brilliant Open Culture project:

1. [1]Free eBooks


Is democracy incoherent? (2017-01-13 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://iai.tv/VideoController/EmbeddedVideo/794?width=576 &height=324 &startTime=00 %3A00

[2]Watch more videos on iai.tv

1. https://iai.tv/VideoController/EmbeddedVideo/794?width=576&height=324&startTime=00%3A00
2. https://iai.tv/

The Association of Internet Researchers now has a YouTube channel (2017-01-14 08:00)

Something likely to become a great resource for those interested in internet studies:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLV5SuNigyjRtNR94MO2DQA
CfP: Migration and Crisis in Europe (2017-01-15 08:00)

Sociology 2018 Special Issue — Still time to submit!

Sociology’s 2018 special issue will be on the theme of Migration and Crisis in Europe. The issue will be guest edited by Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna and Elena Vacchelli, all at Middlesex University, UK.

The editors are currently calling for papers to be submitted to the issue and relevant topics might include the following:

- Response of migrants and migrant organisations to the economic crisis.
- New forms of labour mobility and the transformation of migrant labour markets.
- Border struggles, migration solidarity movements and/or anti-migration politics in light of the current ‘humanitarian crisis’.
- Migration and social reproduction in a context of economic crisis and welfare restructuring.
- Interpreting the transformation of EU migration and border management through the perspective of crisis.
- Changing internal and external borders in the light of current migratory flows.
- The politics of humanitarianism and/or securitization.

For more information on the aims and scope of the special issue, please see the full call for papers [1]on the BSA website. To submit your article please visit: [2]http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc. The submission deadline is 13 March 2017.

1. https://britsoc.co.uk/opportunities/publications-opportunities/

China’s Millionaire Migration (2017-01-16 08:00)

An interesting documentary about the migration of wealthy Chinese to Vancouver:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Izs2i3Bpxx4
With the success of the Ford Model T after its introduction in 1908, Ford Motor Company became the leading manufacturer of automobiles in the world. By 1914, the integration of the progressive assembly line made high-volume and efficient production at Ford Motor Company plants an exemplary model for mass production. Ford’s demand for cheap labor and the lure of high wages—with the $5 day profit sharing plan—drew thousands of immigrants and migrants to Detroit.

In order to manage and control such a large and diverse workforce, John R. Lee, Head of Personnel, created the Sociological Department in 1914. The Sociological Department established a system of rules and codes of behavior for Ford employees that they had to meet, in order to qualify for the $5 day pay rate. The Sociological Department monitored employees at home, as well as on the job. Investigators made unannounced visits to employees’ homes and evaluated the cleanliness of the home, noted if the family had renters, checked with school attendance offices to determine if children were attending school and monitored bank records to verify that employees made regular deposits. Sociological Department investigators also assisted workers' families by teaching wives about home care, cooking and hygiene.


Mark Corbett Wilson (2017-01-17 18:29:27)
I can’t imagine the mindset of the non-profit directors and managers at the Henry Ford Museum. How could they approve this explanatory text from the same webpage: “Students dressed in costumes reminiscent of their native homes stepped into a massive stage-prop cauldron that had a banner across the front identifying it as the AMERICAN MELTING POT. Seconds later, after a quick change out of sight of the audience, students emerged wearing “American” suits and hats, waving American flags, having undergone a spiritual smelting process where the impurities of foreignness were burnt off as slag to be tossed away leaving a new 100 % American.”? From the Digital Collections: https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research.digital-collections/artif act/254569

The turn to end all turns (2017-01-18 08:00)

The upwards trajectory of publication poses an obvious problem for the aspiring academic. It is one familiar from other fields of cultural production. How to be [1]heard above the din? If ever more publications are being produced each year, commanding ever less attention from a peer group increasingly consumed by the imperative
to publish, vast rewards are liable to be gained by those able to capture the intellectual attention space. This situation can incite great aspirations, something Liz Morrish has written about in terms of the rise of the 'Trump academic':

Equally, in a world where academics are obliged to offer up each piece of work to be evaluated as internationally significant, world leading etc., they will seek to signal such a rating discursively. A study by [2]Vinkers et al. in the British Medical Journal uncovered a new tendency towards hyperbole in scientific reports. They found the absolute frequency of positive words increased from 2.0 % (1974-80) to 17.5 % (2014), which amounts to a relative increase of 880 % over four decades. 25 individual positive words contributed to the increase, particularly the words “robust,” “novel,” “innovative,” and “unprecedented,” which increased in relative frequency up to 15 000 %”). The authors comment upon an apparent evolution in scientific writing to ‘look on the bright side of life’.


Bullshit proliferates under these circumstances. Metricised evaluation demands the performance of ‘excellence’, something to be enacted through the ritualistic assertion of innovation and the sustained quest to ensure it is demonstrable in narrow metricised terms. Capturing the attention of one’s peers demands big, bold and memorable claims, preferably ones that break with what has gone before and position oneself as the start of something new. Each innovation heralds the recruitment of potential followers. After all, each piece of work holds the promise of being the start of something big.

But as Randall Collins has convincingly argued, there can only be so many viable positions within the intellectual attention space. Most innovations, in the entrepreneurial sense undertaken by the Trump academic, remain doomed to fail. For the self-confident and upwardly mobile aspiring star this failure is nothing but a challenge. After all, failure
is in keeping with the spirit of the age. Move fast and break things. If today's innovation doesn't catch hold, throw something else against the wall and continue to do so until it finally sticks.

One of the most frequently used devices in the humanities and social sciences to perform such 'innovation' is the invocation of the turn. When I went counting a few years ago, I found 47, but there are certainly more:

1. the linguistic turn
2. the cultural turn
3. the affective turn
4. the sensory turn
5. the reflexive turn
6. the digital turn
7. the participatory turn
8. the narrative turn
9. the biographical turn
10. the spatial turn
11. the social turn
12. the interpretive turn
13. the ontological turn
14. the postmodern turn
15. the practice turn
16. the pragmatic turn
17. the historical turn
18. the discursive turn
19. the cognitive turn
20. the critical turn
21. the computational turn
22. the transnational turn
23. the emotional turn
24. the practical turn
25. the neuroscientific turn
26. the complexity turn
27. the nonhuman turn
28. the ethical turn
29. the argumentative turn
30. the action turn
31. the animal turn
32. the gender turn
A turn is a claim about orientation. To invoke a turn plays off the authority of others while positioning oneself as leading the group in a new direction. But the limitations of the attention space obtain here as well. Most turns are doomed to failure. Likely to be ignored, rather than even marginalised. Or perhaps to be reiterated endlessly, with each new ‘turn’ largely or entirely ignorant of that which has gone before.

These discursive strategies for career advancement would merely be annoying if they didn’t have such harmful aggregative consequences. The discipline beset by turns is the discipline which is in chaos. Turn! Turn! Turn! Constantly spinning round and round, called forth in all directions while being vaguely aware of countless others calling for one’s attention if only they could cut through the thickets of busyness and anxiety, the outlines of the knowledge system become ever more foggy. What are we doing? Why are we doing it? For the trump academics, the answer is simple: we/I are promoting ourselves and trying to ensure our upwards mobility by capturing the intellectual attention space as efficiently as possible while performing in a way that meets the ever changing demands placed upon us by managers and their metrics.

What about for everyone else? It becomes decreasingly possible to undertake serious intellectual work outside of often insular communities of practice. A self-serving conservatism afflicts the major journals which are the cyphers of established quality in so far as anything remains conclusively ‘established’ beyond the brute facts of institutional power and well-honed networks. A pragmatic eclecticism afflicts the minor journals, as they provide shelter for those seeking some kind of communal focus from the incessant attempts to claim the spotlight that proliferate throughout ever more disorganised disciplines. This system of scholarly communication intensifies the trend towards our working in what Billig (pg 5) describes as “smaller and smaller circles”. When this happens, we lose any sense of the centre. Perhaps the centre was always in some sense imagined. But relations with proximate rivals to our own academic tribes take on the appearance of existential disputes over the soul of a shared project. Our imaginations contract and this invariably finds reflection in thought and expression.

If the career strategies of the Trump academics are at the root of this. If they represent what I’ve elsewhere
taken to calling ‘distraction engines’, socio-technical mechanisms actively serving to hinder the capacity for sustained focus of other actors, we need to delegitimise them. We need to stop taking ‘turn’ talk seriously. But we also need to recognise how we ourselves are implicated in this process. See what I did earlier in the paragraph? I’ve introduced a concept, ‘distraction engines’, on one level useful to me but on another one offered in the hope it might prove catchy. The same criticism can be directed at the notion of the ‘accelerated academy’ itself. I find it disturbingly hard not to do this and the reflexive challenge it poses for me is to justify it. In these cases, because the new term performs some function that alternatives might not. A claim I’m willing to defend about ‘accelerated academy’ but not, perhaps, about ‘distraction engines’.

1. https://pure.york.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/open-access-and-academic-publishing(35aea030-e22e-4fe1-87b4-4b317910217e)/export.html
2. http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h6467
4. https://www.youtube.com/embed/05pU6l4PEJw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Deadline soon! @TheSocReview ECR Essay Competition (2017-01-18 14:39)

We invite essays exploring the future of sociology in its relationships with other cognate disciplines such as anthropology and geography. Echoing The Sociological Review’s Manifesto, we seek to encourage reflections on ‘what could be thought differently, and how that creates possibilities for what could and should be done next’. We are particularly interested in contributions from graduate and early career researchers working with novel theoretical and methodological approaches, oriented towards understanding emerging issues through an interdisciplinary lens.

The theme invites discussions that look at research objects from new angles or at research objects that have absconded from more conventional modes of inquiry. It encourages reflections that challenge taken for granted theoretical or methodological assumptions, hoping to draw essays that push the boundaries of sociology as a discipline and that open new avenues for creative and critical inquiries. Thinking about the future also asks that we think about the contributions that early career researchers are bringing to sociological disciplines, and the challenges they face in doing so.

One essay will be selected for the quality and the creativity of its argument. The prize awarded to this essay will be £500. The same criteria of quality and creativity will be used to select an additional 10 essays, which will be published by The Sociological Review on its Website, Blog, and through a specially prepared zine distributed by the end of 2017.

Participation is limited to early career researchers who are currently writing their thesis and those who were awarded their PhDs in the last 3 years. Submissions should not exceed 1200 words. The deadline to submit an essay is February 10th, 2017.

Essays should be submitted online through the following Google Form: [1]https://goo.gl/forms/hqfwRfdUZbDkZZHp2

Questions regarding this call for essays can be sent to AH.Truong@gold.ac.uk.
Incidentally, there are almost as many horses today as there were in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, but they have all been reassigned. They are almost all leisure horses, hardly any workhorses nowadays. Isn’t it an odd comment on today’s society that only horses have achieved emancipation? Humans are still work animals just as they always were, even if they are miserable jobless people, but the horses standing in German paddocks today are all horses of pleasure, post-historic horses. Children stroke them and adults admire them, and we feel very sorry for the last workhorses we see now and then at the circus and at racecourses. Some are used in psychotherapy for children with behavioural problems, but they are treated well and respectfully. All the other European horses have managed to do what humans still dream of – horses are the only ones for whom historical philosophy’s dream of a good end to history has become reality. They are the happy unemployed that evolution seemed to be moving towards. For them, the realm of freedom has been reached, they stand in their paddock, are fed, have completely forgotten the old drudgery and live out their natural mobility.

Sharon (2017-01-19 20:51:38)
Hi Mark, The 'happy unemployed' horses that have achieved emancipation must be the lucky privileged and well resourced ones as there are currently an estimated 7,000 horses and ponies in the UK suffering from neglect or abuse. The picture is much worse worldwide. Please see: http://media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/736x/be/8e/cd/be8ecd9a82a0b0159e8eaf47805a78f2.jpg http://www.all-creatures.org/anex/horse-abuse-08.jpg Best wishes, A horse lover

On Teaching Theory (2017-01-20 08:00)

This short exchange with Michael Burawoy offers some thought-provoking reflections on teaching social theory. He identifies the major traditions of teaching theory within American sociology, before outlining his own ethnographic approach:

1. **The Survey**: surveying extracts from a comprehensive range of social theorists, each one treated as an instance of a broader category. Essentially disconnected and decontextualised. Teaching theory in an essentially general way.
2. **The Interpretative**: placing theory and theorist in their life and times, seeing the specificity of their work as a response to equally specific circumstances. Teaching theory in a essentially *particular* way.

3. **The Synthesis**: selecting extracts based on a distinctive theoretical vision, using those selections to articulate a theoretical approach which presents itself as grounded in the classics. Teaching theory in an *closed but generative* way.

4. **The Ethnographic**: using shorter extracts from a selected range of limited texts in order to facilitate reconstructive critique. The students are gradually encouraged to situate themselves in relation to the theory, criticise it from the inside-out, learn to apply it to the world around them and relate it to other such theories.

There are interesting critiques that can be made of how this approach works in practice (see the response from Alan Sica in the attached article) but I love the exercise he uses:

Apart from the classroom discussion, there are also discussion sections, 20 students in size, led and organized by brilliant, devoted and above all creative teaching assistants who have collaborated with me in developing this approach to theory. Along with one-page reading memos due every week, each semester we assign a “theory in action” paper (no more than a thousand words) that requires students to choose current events or their own experiences to illustrate a theorist of their choice. In addition mid-term and final exams consist of three short 750-word take-home papers (once again less is more) that assume the form of an exegesis of a given theorist, a comparison of theorists, or an application of theory to real live situations as defined by an article from a newspaper or magazine.

The course culminates in a 20-minute oral examination with their teaching assistant in which each student has to reconstruct the entire course as a conversation among the theorists, again in answer to a specific question given ahead of time. They are encouraged to include images, pictures, drawings, in what essentially is a poster presentation. The posters they produce amply demonstrate to what extent the various theorists have become part of them, whether theorists have become different mindsets that they will take with them into their future lives.

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1. [http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Biography/Living%20Theory.CS.pdf](http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Biography/Living%20Theory.CS.pdf)

[...] as férias do blog, deparei-me com este interessante post no Sociological Imagination, de autoria do Mark Carrigan (de longe, o melhor blog [...]
An overview of creative research methods (2017-01-21 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PgWTVL92RM


1. https://helenkara.com/
2. https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0ahUKEwiQsfS3gMLRAhWE5xoKHThvDgEQFggMAE&url=https%3A%2F%2Fpolicypress.co.uk%2Fcreative-re

Lost governments of fragile reason (2017-01-21 12:31)

by Deborah Talbot

In the eve of the US election result in which Senator John Kerry lost to George Bush in 2004, Jonathan Raban wrote the following in his essay America's Reality Check:

"More than any other election in recent history, this one has become a referendum on what it means to be American, and half of the country detests the idea of living in the other half’s America."

Prophetic words, and ones that define our political landscape. Raban was referring to the battle between evidence and ideology. The Democrats represented long-winded 'Aristotelianism' seeking to evidence policy and social change. The Republicans, were they 'Platonists'? Well, he cites an article published in the New York Times Magazine on October 17th, which quotes comments made by a Bush aide to Ron Suskind, author of the article. The aide says the following:
“The aide said that guys like me were “in what we would call the reality-based community,” which he defined as people who “believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality.” I nodded and muttered something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. “That’s not the way the world works anymore,” he continued. “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out.”

Wondering why we continually go to war without any evidence that it will work? Wonder no more. Perplexed that governments continue with welfare cuts when there is no evidence it makes any difference to the ‘deficit’? Confusion over. Alarmed that the government is attacking education, quite against everything we know about why it’s important? Alarmed by the post-truth reality of Brexit and Trump?

Now you know. The right has become revolutionary, aiming to overthrow reason itself in the name of power. The truth is irrelevant. Facts are a product of a forgotten world. Bush won the election in 2004. The UK Leave vote won in 2016. Trump won the American election in 2016.

We currently have a government that is no friend to fact and evidence. Read one of its policy documents, and it resembles the ramblings of an unpleasant undereducated relative who corners us drunkenly at weddings, who hasn’t bothered reading anything for years. Fiction is alluring, and the Tories continue to make strides? Why? Perhaps it is because large portions of the political scene never liked the slow drift towards realism and reason that symbolised the 1990s. Early New Labour, then in power, was the face of the modernising state, the purveyor of evidence-based policy and one-nation Labourism, and they were hated for it. Elements of old England affective politics despised them way before Iraq.

Like any movement, however, New Labour too moved toward ossification and the canonisation of their mobile perspectives. In declaring the ‘end of history,’ they fell victim to hubris. While proclaiming the need to evidence policy change, the frequently disregarded evidence when it suited them, most spectacularly in the example of the ‘Dodgy Dossier’ which justified the case for the war against Iraq. And so they too become pushers of ideology rather than evidence, one that says that spin is everything and that anything is justified, as long as it appeals to a fictional public seeking ‘centrism’.

So now we have it, a resurgent populist right seeking to remake reality, amidst a world slowly descending into blood and guts violent fantasy. There has never been a time when we are so desperately in need of the slowing hand of reason. As Raban said, just before anyone knew who had won the 2004 US election:

“One can only pray that on Monday morning sobriety will return, and, with it, a regard for the grim facts of the case - and that the chastened mood will last through Tuesday. Fingers crossed.”

Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative research and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things urban. She has recently set up a new blog [1]Interurban Lines.

1. http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/
Engines of Knowledge: The Museum and the Exhibit (2017-01-22 08:00)

by Hamish Robertson

My focus is on what I have termed, after Ian Hacking’s idea, engines of knowledge. This notion of engines includes not just tools and methods but institutions and processes that we have come to take for granted, even, in sociological terms, naturalised. The machine metaphor refers to the capacity of these things, singularly or taken together, to produce new practices, concepts and ideas. Amongst these knowledge factories were the institutional formats of the university, museum, library, the hospital and, in organisational formats, the many associations and societies that emerged to formalize, authorize and regulate knowledge development and outputs. In this piece I look at the museum as an archetypal knowledge factory of the Victorian era that formalised, institutionalised and then diversified itself on the basis of a range of earlier prototypes. The normalization of the museum and its role in modern state formation have become so commonplace that it was only with the emergence of museological theory from the 1970’s onwards that the sector began to unpack its own forms of knowledge production and validation.

From Curiosity Cabinet to Knowledge Factory

The museum is both an ancient idea and a relatively modern institutional form. The original museum in classical thought referred more to a place for philosophical contemplation and discussion, more university than a collection of artifacts or exhibit space. Early modern examples include Ole Worm’s (1588 –1654) scientific curiosity collection in Copenhagen or the opening of the Ashmolean art museum in Oxford (1683). The British Museum was established in the 1750’s based on Hans Sloane’s collection of curiosities. Diderot proposed a national museum for France in his *Encyclopédie* in the 1760’s. This 18th century developmental phase became an increasingly international phenomenon in the 19th century as the growth of knowledge expanded at a phenomenal rate, and the instruments and methods for knowledge production were increasingly universalised. We also need to consider the variety of museums that has emerged since this time with a small number of types expanding into dozens of variations and thousands of institutions worldwide. The International Council of Museums ([2]ICOM) currently lists 20,000 formal members and many more institutions qualify as informal museums. People are familiar with the *wunderkammer* or curiosity cabinets that preceded what we now think of as the modern museum. These were often collections of interesting objects that had their own story but did not follow what we now think of as a modern taxonomical logic. While some debate exists on this transition from curiosity cabinet to museum, what I suggest here is that a formalization, even regularisation, of the entity known as the museum began to take place during the 19th century, and with that formalization, a specific understanding emerged of the kind of knowledge produced in and through museums and their activities, including the individuals who produced and authorized that knowledge. In addition, the formalisation of the purpose or role of the museum as a producer and authorizer of specific knowledge types emerged at this time. The idea that nature and society could not only be captured and inventoried but that they could be scientifically classified, ordered and divided into every finer sub-domains was central to the structure and operation of museums, and especially science and natural history museums, as we now know them. These ideas of classification, taxonomies and specialization within discrete domains were central features in the rapid development of human knowledge generally and the sciences more specifically, right down to the present day. The rapid growth in museums and in the size and scope of museum collections also fed into the processes of taxonomy, themselves based on the practice of expert judgement rather than quantitative analysis. Expert judgement obviously requires experts who do the judging and this was another feature of emerging specialization and forms of expertise in the 19th century. One of the features of the museum as an institution was that the basic archetype rapidly diversified to include a wide, and still increasing, variety of institutional types based on the general format. This diversification initially followed the development of the sciences and associated cultural domains – the natural history museum, the art gallery, the ethnographic museum, the science museum and so on. Characterised by an almost unbelievable scale of collection and associated indexing practices, the museum was focused on material objects as its fundamental cultural currency. If the library has books and the archive has documents, the museum has objects and it has them in abundance, so
much so that often only a small fraction is (or even can be) on display at any one time. One of the issues here is that there is an assumption, as [3]Nélia Dias has remarked, that the objects collected are (a) scientifically neutral and that (b) they tell us things about themselves. This position becomes more problematic in the human cultural domain and especially so when we consider the role of the museum in the context of the emergence of the modern state. State Formation and the Museum Museums have acted as formalizing institutions for a great deal of social and cultural knowledge, and the period in which their expansion accelerated was that of the rise of nationalist state ideology - the singular people with a single language (often the dominant group’s dialect), a national anthem and a flag – so beloved by Europeans and others. To produce this kind of uniformity of identity and processes of identification requires institutions to promulgate the illusion of sameness, to historicise it, and to develop a neat linear narrative arc from the messiness of normal human societies and their complicated histories. For a long period of time the museum, like the school, was a key focus for the articulation of the nation-state mythos. The [4]national museum, for example, is usually located in a nation’s capital and its near neighbours are often institutions with a similarly emblematic role. It is no surprise then that museum visits for school children were and still are almost mandatory in many societies, because they are not only ‘educational’, they also affirm membership and participation in a particular vision of the nation state and a commitment to a particular narrative presented as historical fact. Problematic in some of these scenarios was the implicit and even explicit hierarchies that social and material taxonomies tended to produce. One of the areas where this was most complicated and also had major implications was in the area of ethnographic museums which undertook the emerging scientific study of human beings and their societies. The ethnographic museum emerged at a time when anthropology and the other social sciences were in a formative state. In addition, technical developments such as photography, and more dubious constructs such as [5]phrenology and [6]eugenics, emerged and were frequently applied to ethnographic work. The results included extensive collections and displays of purportedly primitive cultures (and classes, once transferred from the colonial periphery to the metropole) often including not only their material artifacts but even their skeletal remains. The varied racisms of this period became scientific and were harbingers of much of the racial violence of the 20th century, from [7]Namibia and beyond. The emergence of “[8]human zoos” tended to place cultural and ethnic minorities on a similar footing to carnival freak shows and wildlife exhibits. What we have seen as a consequence, especially since the late 1970’s has been a series of renegotiations between museums and various marginalised groups, particularly indigenous peoples in colonial settings. This includes the return of some artifacts and more particularly bodily remainders. Some of the knowledge domains and curatorial processes of the 19th century museum are gradually being renegotiated and rewritten. An enduring problem is the idea that it is sameness that defines us (religion, state, language etc.) and here of course it has to be someone's version of sameness, singular and dominant. Critical museology, beginning in the 1970’s and gaining momentum through the 1980's and 1990's, has revised much of the 'givenness' of the traditional institutional museum in its wider social and political role. In addition, the establishment of alternative types of museums and cultural institutions has opened up the authoritative nature of the ‘museum’ in a singular sense to the variety of alternatives that exist in any society, especially for more marginalized groups and their histories. The newly opened [9]National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC illustrates how powerful the symbolism of the institution itself remains in modern society and the enormous effort it can take to have alternative views authorized in the cultural spaces of the nation state. So while the museum itself has undergone considerable change as an institution it remains that many of these changes are very recent. Indexing the World One of the roles of the museum has been to help index both the natural and social worlds. The sheer scale of biological, zoological and geological data emerging from the new sciences was so great during this time that more than mere taxonomies were required. One of the problems in this first information age was the volume of data (artifacts, samples etc.) being collected and the availability of categories with which to meaningfully index them, since so much material was so utterly new. In addition, the diversity of human cultures and their artifacts has also challenged the museum to produce meaningful understandings that do not entirely abstract the knowledge of those groups that actually produced the collected artifacts. The classic knowledge problem of over-generalisation versus extreme particularisation (every artifact is after all genuinely unique) proved a challenge then and still does. And part of this problem resolves to two issues – adequate physical space and the contemporary shift to digital or virtual environments. Supply rapidly exceeded ready display space in a problem which, even with contemporary digital methods, remains a significant issue – there is usually not enough space for the display of complete collections even
where there is sufficient room for storage. While contemporary digitization makes virtual versions of the original objects more accessible in theory, there is still the issue of knowing what to look for and where and how to find it. In this sense the epistemic versus the ontological distinction remains a persistent problem for us even as we cross from the analogue to the digital domain. The claim to a space of knowledge and the processes developed in the museum were co-productive, generating a place, a profession and a discipline. The museum is not only an active agent in knowledge production but its activities generate new problems for it to resolve. The massive analogue collections of the 19th and 20th centuries will necessarily become supplemented by their digital versions in the 21st century. **Conclusion** As the 19th century progressed a broad repertoire of techniques and technologies emerged, often mutually constitutive, that formalised a variety of organisations and institutions as places for the production of particular forms of knowledge. Institutions were central to these processes and their related outcomes providing both focus and legitimacy. In this piece I have begun the process of exploring some of the foundational engines of knowledge that the 19th produced. The concept here is not simply to identify the ‘factories’ themselves but also their corresponding intellectual and physical technologies, many of which persist into the present day. It is these inheritances that interest us in particular. In a time when ‘big data’ is increasingly pervasive as a concept, a marketing slogan and an increasingly formalised set of practices, it is even more important to examine those things we are carrying forward from the past. To identify those factories, to examine the engines of knowledge they gave rise to and to critically review their tangible and intangible products all help us in critiquing and unpacking the conceptual heuristics we live by. Institutions formalize their authority by circumscribing not just their knowledge products but their right to authorize knowledge within their domains of activity. The museum’s knowledge claims are as various as there are types of museum and as a result we are now in the fourth century of expansion and diversification in the knowledge claims of the museum. Our present information age is a product of these early knowledge factories including their concepts and methods for understanding the world. **Hamish Robertson is a geographer at the University of New South Wales with experience in healthcare including a decade in ageing research. He has worked in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors and he has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from ageing, diversity, health informatics, Aboriginal health, patient safety and spatial science to cultural heritage research. Hamish is currently completing his PhD on the geography of Alzheimer’s disease and recently finished editing a book on museums and older people.**

11. http://unsw.academia.edu/HamishRobertson

» Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: The Laboratory and the Experiment The Sociological Imagination (2017-03-08 08:00:30)

 [...] archetypal dualisms. Early laboratories often started as adjuncts to museums (discussed in a previous piece) and experimentalism had been gaining ground as a virtuous form of knowledge production since [...]
The ontology of data, the ideology of data (2017-01-23 08:00)

In a recent post, I expressed my discomfort with how Nick Srnicek invokes the notion of data as a raw material in his *Platform Capitalism*. In a footnote on loc 1102-1121, he offers a Marxist justification for this use:

I draw here upon Marx's definition of raw material: ‘The land (and this, economically speaking, includes water) in the virgin state in which it supplies man with necessaries or the means of subsistence ready to hand, exists independently of him, and is the universal subject of human labour. All those things which labour merely separates from immediate connexion with their environment, are subjects of labour spontaneously provided by Nature. Such are fish which we catch and take from their element, water, timber which we fell in the virgin forest, and ores which we extract from their veins. If, on the other hand, the subject of labour has, so to say, been filtered through previous labour, we call it raw material; such is ore already extracted and ready for washing’ (Marx, 1990: 284–5, emphasis added).

The distinction between *natural* and *processed* helps address the charge that data-as-raw-material naturalises data but it doesn’t avoid it all together. It recognises that *usable* data is always processed and cleaned prior to use, ‘filtered through previous labour’ both directly (wrangling etc) and indirectly (socio-technical systems of generation, capture, storage and analysis).

But does it obscure the character of its applications? The original sources of this ‘raw material’ are intensely social, unlike that extracted from nature, arising from the digitalisation of action and transaction within a market economy. The applications of this ‘raw material’ are intensely variable, with data sometimes being a direct source of value that can be realised through a linear activity, other times being an informational good that can be used to coordinate and calibrate and perhaps more often being a source of confusion and speculation.

It would take constructionism too far to deny the ontology of data. Indeed, I think a concern for the ontology of data is a crucial vector through which we can understand the ideology of data. But we nonetheless need to carefully unpick the way ‘data’ is represented by social actors, the interests served by this and the discursive architecture through which these interests are advanced in different organisational settings.

There’s a fascinating example of this ideology which Srnicek quotes on loc 1296:

If collecting and analysing this raw material is the primary revenue source for these companies and gives them competitive advantages, there is an imperative to collect more and more. As one report notes, echoing colonialist ventures: ‘From a data-production perspective, activities are like lands waiting to be discovered. Whoever gets there first and holds them gets their resources –in this case, their data riches.’ For many of these platforms, the quality of the data is of less interest than their quantity and diversity. Every action performed by a user, no matter how minute, is useful for reconfiguring algorithms and optimising processes. Such is the importance of data that many companies could make all of their software open-source and still maintain their dominant position due to their data. Unsurprisingly, then, these companies have been prolific purchasers and developers of assets that enable them to expand their capacity for gaining information. Mergers relating to big data, for instance, have doubled between 2008 and 2013.

How seriously should we take this? My instinct is to say ‘not very’. The notion that *all* data is of potential value is licensing massive investment and expansion, entrenching the position of precisely those who are speaking most authoritatively in relation to this transition. To be sceptical of a gold rush doesn’t mean you’re denying the existence...
of gold, it just means you’re sceptical about the exuberance surrounding the search and how it is being deployed by some to benefit their own self-interest. The distinction between the ontology of data and the ideology of data matters.

CfP: Social Media Technology Conference & Workshop (2017-01-24 08:00)

*Social Media Technology Conference & Workshop*

Call for Papers, Workshops and Panels

October 5-6, 2017

Howard University Washington, D.C.

Social Media: Culture and Identity*

The 7th Annual Social Media Technology Conference & Workshop is a two-day intensive conference combining panel discussions, paper presentations and workshops designed to enlighten attendees about new scholarship, professional practices and pedagogical approaches to teaching social media. Interested individuals can send in papers, workshop ideas and panel proposals that address a myriad of topics surrounding the theme - Social Media: Culture and Identity. This year’s theme focuses on dissecting how social media work to celebrate and heighten cultural differences and practices as well as provide a space for individuals to shape or have their identities shaped by social media usage. The goal is to bring scholars and professionals together to share their perspectives on how social media are utilized by various individuals, groups, cultures or entities to create agency, share voices and impact cultures and identities.

Paper Submissions*

Respondents should submit a 3- to 5-page proposal that includes an overview of the study as well as research design that includes brief review of the literature, methodology and findings, if possible. All respondents in this category should clearly identify the submission type on their proposal and send the proposal through EasyChair by June 30, 2017 at the following site: [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=smtc2017. In addition to the proposal, a file should be uploaded with a 100-word abstract of the proposed paper as well as a 100-word biography for each author. Submission without the biography will be rejected. Presenters will be notified by mid-July of the status of their submissions and should register to attend the conference by September 1, 2017. *Panel Submissions* Respondents should submit a 3- to 5-page proposal addressing the purpose of the panel and specific issue(s) to be covered. The proposal should include a list of the confirmed guests or those who will be solicited for the panel as well as their brief biographies. All respondents in this category should send the proposal through EasyChair by June 30, 2017 at the following site:
The lost socio-technical architecture of qualitative research (2017-01-25 08:00)

I’ve long been fascinated by how rarely qualitative researchers talk about the equipment they use in their research. I love it when I see exceptions to these trend, such as Les Back’s [1]chapter in this volume, because they highlight the tools of the trade in a way conducive to discussions about craft. However if we have accumulated methodological discourse over many decades, it’s hard to reverse prevailing trends through isolated acts of critical reflection. The socio-technical architecture of qualitative research gets lost, while concepts conditioned by it nonetheless circulate, floating free of the technological affordance and constraints which shaped their emergence.

For this reason I think technological innovations offer opportunities for broader projects of methodological reclamation. The risk is that we become preoccupied with shiny new technologies, leaving us so enamoured with new techniques that we circumscribe the ‘new’ from the ‘old’. But if we can get beyond this tendency, changes in this socio-technical architecture offer us opportunities for a renewed reflexivity about the purposes, techniques and tools of research.

What does this mean in practice? We need to reflect seriously on the fact there’s much more to digital qualitative research than digital qualitative research methods. The tendency of the former to be crowded out by the latter reflects what Rob Kitchin describes in the Data Revolution as “the pace of technical change and the roll-out of ad hoc and pragmatic approaches”. But conceptualisation, operationalisation and analysis should be treated as a unified whole alongside methods, using the opportunity of technological change to rethink qualitative research as a
whole, rather than restricting this activity to new methods.

1. http://inventive%20methods/

Rachael Kiddey (2017-01-26 11:54:33)
Interesting post, Mark. I agree that there's more to qualitative research than just the methods we use to collect data. I also think it's easy to overlook and take for granted the ongoing usefulness of traditional ways that we've been collecting data for hundreds of years. Most of us also still write notes, even if on a computer, we doodle, draw, take photo's etc. Here's a link to an article I published recently about cultural heritage methodologies as tools for empowerment. Simple stuff, but effective, inexpensive and accessible. http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/9QAedy3sAnVunqy5PVlv/full

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-29 18:06:20)
this looks great, thanks Rachael (nice it's open access too)

The self-importance of researchers (2017-01-25 08:00)

This interesting aside in Jamie Woodcock's superb Working The Phones is worthy of further discussion. From loc 2698:

Researchers often attribute a level of importance to their own research that is not shared by others, assuming that because they spend so much time on it others will want to know all about it too.

How does this attitude develop? How widespread is it? How is it connected to how people see their occupational roles?

My hunch is that it's absolutely central to academic exceptionalism: the notion that academic labour is intrinsically different to other forms of labour. The (self) importance of the scholarship goes hand-in-hand with a mystification of the conditions under which their scholarship is enacted.

Stephen (2017-01-25 12:20:58)
Maybe some answers in "The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New" Andreas Reckwitz, 5 May 2017.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-25 12:49:48)
that looks really interesting thanks

I posted this on Steve Blank's blog post celebrating recent legislation, the American Innovation and Competitiveness Act, to help researchers monetize their results: "The next step is to use evidence based research and agile development to identify and promote academic research projects that benefit 'we the people' that fund them, not just for corporations that benefit from
bringing new technologies to market." https://steveblank.com/2017/01/15/23047/ #comment-433560 A self described 'spook' (intelligence officer) that arrived in Silicon Valley in 1978, he "moved from being an entrepreneur to teaching entrepreneurship to both undergraduate and graduate students at U.C. Berkeley, Stanford University, Columbia University, NYU and UCSF." He has promoted Lean and Agile development strategies to the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health and Imperial College in London. His insight? Stop building the next new thing. Get out of your office and ask people (customers) what they need. I think this could work for academics too, after they get over their delusion of being exceptional.

BREAKING NEWS: Social Science Faculty at Humboldt-University Berlin occupied! (2017-01-25 12:00)

Well, this is not breaking news. The occupation of the Social Science Faculty of the HU-Berlin started last Wednesday, 18 January, but I only found out about it today.

Although I work in an institute which is part of the HU, no one mentioned it. I have not read anything in the news.

So today at noon I wandered into the main building of the University to a attend a seminar given as part of the Science and Education Policy Masters programme.

The students are protesting against the university president's decision to dismiss of[1] Andrej Holm, lecturer of urban and regional sociology, and well-known political activist who has protested against the gentrification of Berlin. He was recently appointed Minister for urban development and housing for the State of Berlin, but it turned out that he had been linked to the Stasi, the East German Secret Police, as a teenager. He resigned as Minister, but the university also decided to dismiss him, citing as a reason the fact that when he applied for the position of lecturer in 2005 he had lied by omission, by not mentioning his involvement with the Stasi in his application form. He - and the students, as well as over 350 academics and housing campaigners - argue that this dismissal is a political decision.

The few English newsitems talk about the scandal but the occupation of the university is very oddly not mentioned anywhere that Google can find!


[3]Here is a link to the alternative curriculum. The occupation is going to continue indefinitely.

Links to news in German:

- Holm's [7]university page

4824
#notmyuniversity
Georg Simmel
Think & Drink-Kolloquium
am Lehrbereich Stadt- und Regionalsociologie

Prof. Marisol García Cabeza
Universität de Barcelona

Social innovation in Spanish cities in a time of crisis
Überlass die Reinigung der Zellen
kein - bitte nicht dem
Ausschussteam -
nicht nur Deutschland
liebt ein meres Stück Schweiz.
HOLM BLEIBT
CfP: The Digital Everyday Conference (2017-01-26 08:00)

The Digital Everyday: Exploration or Alienation?
Centre for Digital Culture at King’s College London
CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

This international conference aims at exploring the digital everyday, understood as the transformation of everyday life practices brought about by digital technology. From how we buy, walk around, get a cab, love, break up, go to bed, meet new people and sexual partners to the way we rate services, turn on the fridge, exercise and eat, social media, apps, and Big Data are reshaping some of the most basic activities in our lives.

The conference will explore these digitally enabled transformations by looking at a number of domains affected by these shifts, for instance: of work and leisure, of friendship and love, of habits and routines. We will also explore a number of overarching dynamics and trends in the digital world that contribute to these transformations, including: processes of digital individualisation and aggregation; the elisions of spatial and temporal barriers; trends towards quantification and datafication; and the dialectic between control and alienation.

We invite participants from various intellectual traditions and streams of research including media studies, sociology, psychology, information science, computing and anthropology. Together, we will explore a number of key questions. How, for example, is digital transformation affecting everyday life? To what extent is this process one of increasing individualisation of social experience? Or might there be something more complex happening? What are the new psychological and social pathologies that result from the digital transformation of everyday life and from processes of datafication and quantification? Is digital technology allowing for new forms of control over our everyday life or is it increasing alienation, making us overly dependent on infrastructures beyond our grasp? Is digital technology contributing to extending our freedom to choose, or is it stifling us with an overabundance of options? Is it guiding us towards who we ‘really’ are or want to be, or is it plunging us into a hall of mirrors that only reinforces our isolation and narcissism? Is it facilitating exploration, serendipity and curiosity, or is it installing us into a pre-programmed and predictable world, into a filter bubble where choices can be more easily measured and manipulated?
Proposed paper abstracts may address the following topics: transformations of work patterns; changes in everyday life routine (sleep, meals, etc.); fitness and sport activity; love and sexual interactions; friendship and acquaintanceship; consumption and entertainment; sense of place and time; transportation and tourism; play and leisure.

The conference will comprise two plenary sessions and 4 breakout panels, and will host internationally acclaimed scholars as keynote speakers.

The conference will take on Saturday, 6th May 2017.

Abstract are due by 31 January 2017.

Abstracts should be 250 words maximum, and include the author(s) name and position, and a short title. They should be submitted via EasyChair [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=digitaleveryday17 Acceptance notices will be given on 28 February 2017. Extended abstracts of 1,500 words are due on 15 April 2017 to be sent [3]digitalculture@kcl.ac.uk

1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf= digitaleveryday17
2. https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Feasychair.org%2Fconferences%2F%3Conf%3Ddigitaleveryday17&h=6AQHIIF_zAQF5f96V60kPgE-Au5AyzZQjg2PFYcyqEjy4OQ&enc=AZP8YtbElwzmlo4WWMQYu7LpGu22c9p3W4BC91uSOu38980kxVxjw7Ayixk8q15ENaer9stlRZ - 224dQqiRBRsvh2Bxdj8lE7aCVGnN4DStalFxPNkg08 _DOl0FRodsqRzX6Rw3FRnhlgWdO- rhbAggtDZjp_wEnqkTaFUti2UMNw5StuWd3gp4X5bEAYFttxkKhbfQO-HDPan2DNQq &s=1
3. mailto:digitalculture@kcl.ac.uk

(1)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities (2017-01-27 08:00)

"(1)Making Europe: Capitalism, Solidarities, Subjectivities"
13th European Sociological Conference
European Sociological Association
Athens, Greece, 29 August to 1 September 2017
Solidarities, Subjectivities" Europe can be made or unmade, and this is especially true since the 'Great Recession' of 2008. European society, and even the very idea of Europe, is under threat. First, the inherent contradictions of capitalism are obviously stronger than we thought: Greece, where the emphatic idea of "Europe" originated, has experienced severe austerity measures; Europe has seen a deepening of neo-liberal politics, threats to what remains of the welfare state and increasing inequality. Second, solidarities are fragmented in and between societies across Europe. The new world economic crisis formed a context for both the constitution and the undermining of solidarities. On the one hand, from the Arab Uprisings to the various Occupy and Indignados movements and their manifestations at the level of political parties we have seen rebellions by citizens demanding political change. On the other hand, refugees fleeing wars have been denied human rights and their lives have been threatened by the closure of borders and the lack of a coordinated European strategy. Third, subjectivities are formed that do not only result in resistance and protest, but also in apathy, despair, depression, and anxiety. Authoritarianism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, right-wing extremism, spirals of violence, and ideological fundamentalisms have proliferated throughout the world, including in Europe. As a result, the promise of Europe and the geographical, political, and social borders of Europe have been unmade and this 'unmaking' poses a profound challenge for sociology and the social sciences more generally. It is in this context that the European Sociological Association's 2017 Conference takes place in Athens at the epicentre of the European crisis. The underlying question for the conference is: How and where to should a sociology that matters evolve? How can sociology's analyses, theories and methods, across the whole spectrum of ESA's 37 research networks and various countries, be advanced in order to explain and understand capitalism, solidarities and subjectivities in the processes of the making, unmaking and remaking of Europe?


An interview with Jamie Woodcock about Working the Phones (2017-01-28 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yu7KgDP-ABg

Find out more about the book [1]here

How did call centre emerge and proliferate? Would it be a mistake to see this as solely a matter of technological feasibility?

The growth of call centres in the UK is a result of two factors. The first are the technological possibilities offered by the combination of computers and telephones. The meshing of the two allows for an extraordinary level of electronic surveillance and control, along with the automation of the pace of work through the automatic dialling software. These make the call centres an appealing way for capital to organise communication, particularly in relation to sales. However, before the technology allowed this phone rooms (with workers dialling the calls themselves) were widespread. It is therefore important to see what kind of roles (and therefore labour processes) call centres are replacing, because there is not only one type of call centre.

The second is the set of broader political economic factors that have developed since the 1980s. The privatisation of British Telecom and the deregulation of financial services in the 1980s were important catalysing changes.
The use of call centres in these new sectors provided examples of low-cost and highly profitable use of new technology. This was followed by a rush from others under competitive pressure to copy the organisation and techniques of call centres, both within these sectors and more broadly in the economy. The problem here is identifying exactly what is meant by a call centre. The book focuses on high-volume sales call centres, but there are a wide range of other inbound and outbound applications, from local government, advice lines, to booking services. The intense pressure of sales means that these are the first to adopt new technologies and management strategies that then become used more broadly.

How has the spread of call centres changed the internal operations of corporations?

Call centres have allowed a centralisation of particular internal operations of corporations. Rather than having people to contact across various sites, the call centre format allows for communication to be routed through a single site. This provides opportunities for greatly reducing costs and increasing pressure on individual workers. Alongside the broader competitive pressures of reducing backroom costs, call centres have therefore become one way to reduce or outsource parts of a corporation. This is most often represented in the tropes about Indian call centres, although in reality a comparatively small amount of call centre operations have been outsourced to this degree. Large organisations have consolidated their call centres, while many choose to outsource parts or all of this. Charity fundraising provides an interesting example, with a new industry emerging of separate companies that provide fundraising as a service to charities – while not having anything to do with charity themselves. This is mirrored by many insurance sales call centres that simply repackage insurance products from existing companies – they sell them to consumers and then any issues with the policy or potential pay-outs are handled by the insurance company. This is a sign of the sclerotic nature of contemporary capitalism: using call centres to try and further reduce costs or to realise profits from other company’s products and services through cold calling.

Work in a call centre is often presented as akin to work in a factory? Is this analogy accurate?

The factory analogy for the call centre is useful, particularly as across the UK many call centres have been established in areas that used to have heavy industry. This decline in manufacturing has been replaced for many people with low paid work in the service industry, of which call centres have become emblematic. However, there are important differences. Unlike the assembly line with its physical demands, the requirements of a call centre are quite different. It is not the same repetitive movement, but the demand to repeat an ephemeral performance that tries to part customers from their money of the phone. Workers are required to do more than just go through the motions at work. Instead a complex package of affects is required to make sales, bringing with it further pressures and stresses for workers. Call centres are therefore a new kind of work, different to the factory in many respects – but still subject to regimented work, technologies of control and managerial supervision.

How many people work in call centres in the UK? How does this compare internationally? How do pay and conditions vary?

There are estimates of over a million people working in call centres in the UK. It is difficult to gain exact figures for total numbers or pay and conditions because they are not a single industry, but often attached to an integrated into others. It is certainly true that conditions vary inside the UK, with some inbound types of work having comparatively better pay or conditions. The global spread of call centres involves similar forms of organisation, use of technology, and management techniques. Unlike manufacturing, the spread of call centres follows lines of imperialism and common language, resulting in geographically specific patterns. This means that call centres take on national characteristics, but like the UK are shaped by low pay, precarious conditions, and features like high turnover.

You’ve talked about this electronic surveillance and control as "computerised taylorism". How does this differ from older forms of Taylorism? Is it continuing to develop and mutate? For instance the role of gamification in call centres seems sinister and interesting in equal measure.
Call centres are particularly susceptible to the introduction of digital technologies for surveillance as the labour process is organised over telephones integrated with computers. This produces easily quantifiable outputs that can easily be collected, stored, and analysed. There are clear similarities here with Taylor’s desire to eliminate ‘soldiering’ (slow-down from workers) by understanding, measuring, and controlling the labour process. However, unlike the figure of the technician with the white coat and stopwatch, the computerised methods automate much of the process. This strict monitoring of exactly what workers are doing provides a powerful way for managers to deal with the indeterminacy of labour power, the difference between what capital (the purchaser of labour power) expects and the worker selling their labour power is prepared to do.

It is important to remember that technology is only one response to this. The collection of data alone is not enough, it needs to be parsed and acted upon by human agents (at least for now). This addresses the quantitative demands of the labour process (the number of sales), but creates problems for the qualitative demands (the customer experience and so on). In addition to these monitoring methods, other approaches like buzz sessions were used to motivate workers at the start of a shift, various incentives were offered, and the introduction of gamification. The gamification starts early on in the call centre, and is pushed through the targets and incentives. Above the call centre floor hung a large TV that displayed live sales statistics, comparing the performance of every worker in the shift. This approach of gamification is an attempt to take elements of play – or at least game design – to convince workers to motivate themselves. Another form of gamification took place in the call centre from the workers themselves, seeking to make the work fun – or at least less onerous – by playing word games while on calls, for example. The persuasiveness of the former, along with the existence of the latter, makes gamification a far from straightforward phenomenon. We should celebrate the moments of gamification-from-below (those used by workers as a practice of resistance), but further critiques are required of managements attempts to co-opt these impulse to exploit workers, particularly when it starts from neo-Taylorist and technofascist impulses.

Could we imagine the digital technologies of performance monitoring and surveillance seen in call centres spreading to other forms of work? Would it be overstating matters to see the call centre as a testing ground for new ways of exploiting the minds of workers as a productive resource?

It is interesting to see how quickly technological methods of performance monitoring and surveillance have been taken up in call centres across the world. In this context it is attractive and relatively cost effective for management to employ these methods, despite the ramifications it has for worker’s experience of the labour process and the high turnover. Call centres are particularly well suited to this kind of performance monitoring as the labour process has a clear and quantifiable output. The conceptualisation of this mode of surveillance and control as an electronic Panopticon is an important way of understanding this and call centres have proven successful testing grounds for this method. In increasingly broader contexts, new methods of management to control and exploit labour are being experimented with, often including the introduction of metrics. However, unlike call centres, examples of digital labour, teaching (in both schools and universities), care work, and so on are much harder to boil down to comparable metrics. This comes back to the key problematic of management, the indeterminacy of labour power discussed earlier. Increasingly, the demands of new performance management systems are brought in by layers of bureaucracy that are removed from the work and the labour process. This represents an attack on the autonomy of workers as performance is reduced to metrics which remove the complexities and nuances of cognitive, emotional, or affective labour. These kinds of measurements need to be contested and opposed, something which so far has not been successful in call centres.

You find methodological innovation for your study in Marx’s early work, as well as the autonomist tradition. Could you say a little about these influences and how it shaped your approach?

The study draws on a methodological approach of workers’ inquiry, a disparate tradition of researching work. This starts with Marx’s call for a workers’ inquiry, published after – and possibly a corrective to the one-sidedness of
The ideas of connecting a process of knowledge production to one of workplace organising was taken up by the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the USA, Socialisme ou Barbarie in France, and then later by the Italian Workerists and Autonomists. This approach gives primacy to the experience of workers, situating them as able to both provide an understanding of the work and conditions, but also capable of transforming these. This involves a focus on the labour process and resistance, or examining class composition at different points. The development in the Italian tradition involved conceptualising the inquiry as a kind of co-research, breaking down the distinction between activist researchers and workers. This takes the moment of organising at the factory gates and seeks to develop it into a longer project of organisation. In an ideal situation, this co-research unfolds into an inquiry-from-below, but this requires existing contacts and workers that are self-organising. In other contexts, it is suggested that sociological tools can be adapted in an inquiry-from-above, gaining access and contacts in the workplace with the intention to move into a -from-above approach. Although now the factory gates are no longer so easy to find, I took up these inspirations and combined them with examples from the sociology of work to undertake a study of call centre work.

Was the decision to do an undercover ethnography a difficult one to make? How did this shape your approach to the research? It sounds like your PhD experience was perhaps atypical in some respects.

The decision to go undercover was not a difficult decision at first, because there would be no other way to gain access to the workplace in this way. There is a long and rich tradition of undercover research into work in sociology (and more broadly) that has justified this approach, and contemporary analysis has suffered from this becoming less common. It is important to note that this is more the result of the institutional fear of litigation than a concern for research methodology. I had very supportive supervisors and a department, without whom it would have been very difficult to carry out a project like this. The experience of going undercover did shape the experience in particular ways, however I was very clear that I would not lie to people I met during the research. It may come as a surprise (although perhaps not) that no one in the call centre was particularly interested when I said I was doing a PhD, particularly as many people had other projects they would rather be doing. The only question I was asked was what discipline the PhD was in, and this was more than a month in. As we began to organise in the call centre – something that I was careful not to lead, but engaged in as part of the research intervention – I discussed the project with some of my co-workers. This was met with disbelief at first: why would someone choose to study call centres? I offered to send parts of my writing with other workers, but no one wanted to read about call centres after a shift. Instead, we discussed ideas and arguments that later went into the book, along with the writing up our collective experiences. The approach of workers’ inquiry has always been about more than just producing knowledge of workplaces or the experiences of workers. I positioned the project from the beginning as an intervention, understanding work, practises of resistance, and forms of organisation. The book is a thorough re-write of the PhD, trying to make it accessible outside of academia. I also hope that the PhD and the book shows the importance of this kind of method and can act as a call for more workers’ inquiries, both inside and outside of the university.

Do we know who works in call centres in demographic terms and what does this tell us about contemporary capitalism? It was striking how prominently the employer in your study seemed to accept the extremely high turn over rates for the job.

The focus of my research was call centres in London, which have different demographic characteristics to other call centres across the UK. In particular, the workforce was young and predominantly female. As with many low-paid and casualised jobs in London, many were current students, recent graduates, or had moved to London from either the UK or other countries. The main requirement for working in the call centre was a high level of spoken English, and while this was not necessarily with English as a first language, there were certain accents that were valorised as being particularly suited to sales. The high turnover is a problem across high sales call centres, again like with many low-paid and casualised jobs. What was particularly remarkable in this call centre was that the high turnover was not only accepted, but turned into a motivating incentive. Supervisors would let workers leave early once they had reached their sales targets. This was the most popular incentive, proving far more motivating than shopping vouchers or anything else. This created problems with the management in the call centre when
they discovered that only 79% of paid time was actually spent on the phones. This a clear indication of how many people feel about the stressful, low quality, and emotionally draining work, supervisors included. This widespread refusal in the workplace signals the need for a broader discussion, which is starting to begin, about the future of work.


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**Was Sloterdijk an early originator of contemporary right populism? (2017-01-29 08:00)**

Reading the excellent *Selected Exaggerations*, a book of interviews with Peter Sloterdijk, I was struck by his remarks about taxation and the state in an interview from 2001. He bemoans the punitive taxation he claims exists in Germany, arguing that it reflects a broader domination of society by the state. German citizens are “punished for success” and the trust society is based on gradually finds itself eroded. On loc 1798-1813 he goes on to call for a ‘social movement of entrepreneurs’:

SLOTERDIJK: Precisely. There are countless areas of redistribution that could be organized much more intelligently and efficiently by alternative means. I am thinking of unemployment benefits, of the whole welfare state that should be organized more in terms of incentives, much more in terms of entrepreneurship and less in terms of the consumer state.

METHFESSEL/ RAMTHUN: Are you saying that entrepreneurial thinking is supposed to save the welfare state?

SLOTERDIJK: Yes, entrepreneurs will raise the banners of hope again. Without a movement of entrepreneurs, as there was once a workers’ movement, the economy can no longer explain itself adequately to society.

METHFESSEL/ RAMTHUN: And what will be written on the banners?

SLOTERDIJK: ‘Entrepreneurs of the world, unite’—what else? At the moment only entrepreneurs can convincingly represent the interests of the industries and services that produce the hardware, that is, the real value of productive industry, against the phantom superstructure of speculative finance economy. Only an entrepreneurs’ movement can act in the anti-capitalist way that is needed now. It is time for entrepreneurial anti-capitalism.

METHFESSEL/ RAMTHUN: The entrepreneur as alternative to the distorted picture of globalization, of the anonymous flow of money around the globe?

SLOTERDIJK: Entrepreneurs must show that an operative economy, not the dictatorship of the lottery bosses, is the foundation of the market economy. Entrepreneurs are the social democracy of tomorrow.

METHFESSEL/ RAMTHUN: Are you serious?

SLOTERDIJK: Of course. At the moment entrepreneurs may describe themselves in neoliberal terms, but
this is becoming increasingly false as the years go by, because in the end they can only justify themselves as producers of the net value that serves the other side of redistribution.

It’s a fascinating interview, filled with remarks I object to deeply. What struck me was the parallel to the themes (though not their articulation) of the contemporary populist right, both in the US and the UK. The awkward combination of populism and capital, [1]fulminating against the 47 % while framing it as a progressive revolt in the universal interests against a overweaning state captured by dependents. Genealogically speaking, it’s obvious that Sloterdijk was not a progenitor of the Anglo-American populist right. But philosophically speaking, it’s perhaps meaningful to suggest that he was. At least in so far as what he’s doing here can be classified as philosophy, though that’s perhaps a topic for another post.

1. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2gvY2wqI7M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2gvY2wqI7M)

Daniel Schut (2017-01-29 08:10:43)
I find myself touched by this post. Negatively, to be sure. Sloterdijk explicitly rejects ‘neoliberalism’, and gives a pretty reasoned explanation of ‘entrepreneurship’. Your knee-jerk reaction: "oh bah! He’s saying something the NeoMarxian Orthodoxy would disagree with - Therefore he’s a...wait for it.... gasp: POPULIST!" That’s not the level of academic reasoning you should expect for yourself - in fact, I’m not even sure whether it’s reasoning at all.

Mark Carrigan (2017-01-29 08:22:21)
Hi Daniel, engage with what I actually said and I’m happy to talk to you.

Steve Fuller’s Guide for Teaching Social Theory (2017-01-29 19:04)

January seems to bring out the social theorist in me. My last direct contribution to this topic was around this time last year, when a conversation with a graduate student at Warwick inspired me to propose [1]a guide to reading social theory. A couple of days ago I returned from Edinburgh, where in just under a day I had several conversations with staff and students about different aspects of social theory. It led me to think about the best way to teach the topic, since I learned theory quite differently from how it seems to be taught today.

When I first studied what we now call ‘social theory’ at Columbia in 1976, the phrase had no clear meaning, other than perhaps a synonym of ‘sociological theory’. A standard reference work of the period that I remember consulting was A History of Sociological Analysis, edited by Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet, one of my teachers at Columbia. We would now say that this was a book of social theory.

However, I associate the popularisation, if not coinage, of ‘social theory’ in its current usage with Anthony Giddens, who (I think) first dubbed Habermas a ‘social theorist’ because of the way he straddled philosophy and sociology, especially after The Theory of Communicative Action.

Of course, most of what is now called ‘social theory’ has this character too, but it also has another, less admirable feature: scholasticism. Habermas’ magnum opus is basically a replay of what Talcott Parsons did in The Structure of Social Action and which Giddens would do throughout the 1980-90s in his ‘structuration’ period. All
these works basically construct social theory by a ‘syncretistic’ reading of a few so-called classic texts.

Syncretism is a medieval approach to knowledge that involves presuming that there are some master thinkers who nevertheless contradict each other in ways that require some sort of textual harmonization. Thomas Aquinas was the great master of syncretism in the Middle Ages. Parsons’ syncretism provided sociology with its first proper disciplinary foundation, the basis for all subsequent alternative theoretical foundations, including those of Habermas and Giddens. The debates associated with ‘structure-agency’ and ‘micro-macro’ are artefacts of this approach that persist to this day.

An interesting feature of sociology as a discipline is the extent to which the empirical side of the discipline has simply seceded from this scholastic project. Indeed, the various breaks with Parsons that one already sees in the 1960s – be it Robert Merton’s call for testable ‘middle range’ theories, Alvin Gouldner’s refashioning of Marx as a ‘critical sociologist’ or Harold Garfinkel’s radically bottom-up ethnomethodology – were basically against the very idea of sociology needing to have theoretical foundations in the Parsonian sense. For all these thinkers, ‘sociology’ was more about adopting a certain attitude to the social world than building an edifice of knowledge from a secure set of master concepts.

Nevertheless, even social theorists who would never think of themselves as ‘Parsonian’ still teach the subject in the scholastic mould. They organize the course around a set of ‘master theorists’, each of whom is presented as possessing a coherent world-view, the mastery of which will partially unlock the secrets of the social universe. In that case, The Grand Prize for the student is to mix and match these world-views in a way that opens up new insights. And indeed, sometimes ‘new insights’ are generated. Unfortunately they probably could have been generated more straightforwardly, had the student greater knowledge of empirical social reality and not had to circumnavigate around the twists and turns of the master theorists’ reading habits.

Luckily I wasn’t taught social theory this way, which simply mystifies the so-called master theorists, turning them into celebrities, the secular equivalent of saints. Instead the emphasis was placed on looking at how a range of thinkers with overlapping lifetimes responded to events that would have been common to their existential horizon. This was the original context in which ‘modernity’ was presented to me as a focal point for sociology.

Thus, people like Marx, Durkheim and Weber were 1-2 generations removed from the Industrial Revolution’s take-off and were living in the midst of rapid urbanisation, legalisation, capitalisation, etc. There were also particular events, associated with, say, 1789, 1848, etc. Theorists responded differently to these things, and their distinctive concepts and theories were presented as grounded in their interpretation of this history. A brilliant book from my university days in this vein was Lewis Coser’s Masters of Sociological Thought, which treated each of the ‘masters’ as a case study in how one might abstract from personal biography to true sociological insight – a potential model for the student to adopt vis-à-vis his or her own position in history.

What the student of theory learns is how to articulate different attitudes to the world one inhabits. Unsurprisingly, my former teacher Robert Nisbet – nowadays remembered as a founder of modern neo-conservatism – was perhaps the first to stress the cognitive significance of style in sociological writing: Is the author approving, disapproving, ironic or indifferent to what s/he is writing about? To become a good social theorist is thus to adopt a style appropriate to the manner in which one encounters the social world. Knowledge of the literary humanities becomes an essential component of the sociological imagination.

This pedagogical approach of social theory proved to be short-lived. It was partly spurred by the inclusion of Georg Simmel in the sociological canon during the 1970s. Simmel first presented much of his notable work as popular talks, which in writing retained much of his arch presentational style. Perhaps the most interesting work in this vein was Richard Harvey Brown’s A Poetic for Sociology, which was originally a Ph.D. written under Herbert Marcuse. In more recent years the German sociologist Wolf Lepenies has probably carried the torch for this approach most

In practice, then, social theory should be taught first by setting down some common historical touchstones, which students would try to grasp comprehensively but in some relatively theory-neutral way – typically by reading historians’ accounts of the relevant events and movements. Then, the student would look at various theorists who developed their thinking in relation to these touchstones. When I was a student, it was common to focus on the French or Industrial Revolution, since virtually every classical sociologist had something to say about them. Nowadays we might focus on the end of the Cold War, the decline of social democracy, the rise of neo-liberalism, and so forth. Students should compare what theorists say about them: which features do they take as salient for their thinking, which do they downplay if not ignore, etc.

Again, all of this would be in the spirit of getting the student to cultivate their own original theoretical imagination rather than simply acquire a facility in mixing and matching texts, which in the future we might happily assign to an artificial intelligence programme.

**Postscript (2 July 2017):** The death of Peter Berger reminds me that he authored the first sociology textbook I read, in high school. I still recommend [2]*Sociology: A Biographical Approach*.

2. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sociology-Biographical-Approach-Penguin-education/dp/0140809686/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1498976614&sr=1-1-fkmr0&keywords=p](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sociology-Biographical-Approach-Penguin-education/dp/0140809686/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1498976614&sr=1-1-fkmr0&keywords=p)

Karl (2017-02-09 22:27:21)
Regards for helping out, excellent info. I really like your writing style, excellent info, regards for putting up : D

Ed (2017-03-23 19:56:05)
Does grounded theory present an example of an empirical approach that does retain associations with the scholastic project?
The methodological scrutiny applied to grounded theory (an edifice of concepts) seems to have something of the tone of social theorizing. Its foundations were also provided by master thinkers who later diverged...so synthesis can now be pursued by others.

Sylvester (2018-05-15 05:15:48)
Quality content is the secret to attract the viewers to pay a quick visit the website, that’s what this web page is providing.

**Academic exceptionalism and the black-boxing of academic labour (2017-01-30 08:00)**

This introduction to *Conflict in the Academy*, by Marcus Morgan and Patrick Baert, nicely captures something I’ve been preoccupied by recently. From loc 63:

> we would like to suggest that tired clichés of ‘ivory towers’ and ‘dreaming spires’, or even more self-complementary myths of universities as platonic institutions directed towards disinterested enlightenment lead to an unhelpful black-boxing of these zones of social life from attentive sociological enquiry,

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usually on the odd assumption that the 'real world' is somehow always going on elsewhere. This book intends to contribute toward a growing literature that refuses to content itself with such popular accounts of academia as a withdrawn and therefore somehow asocial zone, and which instead takes the reflexive academic analysis of the social processes of academic life seriously.

What comparable myths are there? I’m interested in how these notions of academic exceptionalism inculcate a blindness about the character of academic labour.

It’s an argument that needs to be made carefully, but I suspect entrenched stereotypes prop up this exceptionalism. From loc 933:

a fusty character, whose eccentricities depend upon the removal from practical necessity that his (the classical stereotype remains almost invariably the unmarried male) cloistered archaic existence affords him, and who treats any prospect of ‘progressive development’ in the running of university or college affairs with the utmost suspicion. Again, whether or not it bears any resemblance to reality, the popular cynical image of the Oxbridge don (much of which seems to have arisen from a period prior to the reforms of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Roach, 1959: 235–6) is of an individual comfortable in his sinecure, perhaps more interested in the quality of the college claret than in the quality of their own research, let alone the quality of an undergraduate’s education (e.g. Rose & Ziman, 1964).

Margaret S. Archer: The Role of Reflexivity in Sociological Explanation (2017-01-31 08:00)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRBZCxNguGc

8.2 February

The MOOC as a trojan horse (2017-02-01 08:00)

I’ve long had an ambivalent relationship to MOOCs. In principle, I don’t see anything wrong with the idea of distance learning of this sort and they are something that I’ve personally enjoyed in the past. This is far from a ringing endorsement, in fact MOOCs leave me lukewarm in many respects, but I think it’s important to be clear about what exactly we’re opposed to when we oppose the MOOC.

The hype surrounding them is a good place to start. The absurd overstatement of their implications, as well
as the wilful disregard for history which critics like Audrey Watters have ceaselessly pulled apart. These ‘groundbreaking innovations’ can only be constructed as *groundbreaking* and *innovative* by systematically obscuring a longer and messier history of educational technology which there is value in our recovering. But as Aaron Bady [1] points out, what’s offensive about the hype is the way it gives voice to speculative interests seeking to ‘disrupt’ higher education:

In the last year, MOOCs have gotten a tremendous amount of publicity. Last November, the New York Times decided that 2012 was “the Year of the MOOC,” and columnists like David Brooks and Thomas Friedman have proclaimed ad nauseam that the MOOC “revolution” is a “tsunami” that will soon transform higher education. As a Time cover article on MOOCs put it—in a rhetorical flourish that has become a truly dead cliche—“College is Dead. Long Live College!”

Where is the hype coming from? On the one hand, higher education is ripe for “disruption”—to use Clayton Christensen’s theory of “disruptive innovation”—because there is a real, systemic crisis in higher education, one that offers no apparent or immanent solution. It’s hard to imagine how the status quo can survive if you extend current trends forward into the future: how does higher education as we know it continue if tuition fees and student debt continue to skyrocket while state funding continues to plunge? At what point does the system simply break down? Something has to give.

At the same time, the speed at which an obscure form of non-credit-based online pedagogy has gone so massively mainstream demonstrates the level of investment that a variety of powerful people and institutions have made in it. The MOOC revolution, if it comes, will not be the result of a groundswell of dissatisfaction felicitously finding a technology that naturally solves problems, nor some version of the market’s invisible hand. It’s a tsunami powered by the interested speculation of interested parties in a particular industry. MOOCs are, and will be, big business, and the way that their makers see profitability at the end of the tunnel is what gives them their particular shape.


The ideology of innovation obscures the interests vested in what is deemed to be innovative. Not only is it dishonest, shutting down debate through the breathless invocation of technological inevitability, it also crowds out earlier and worthier experiments in digitally mediated distance learning. These communal and collaborative projects were focused on empowering networks rather than facilitating individuals. As Bady goes on to compare:

The MOOCs that emerged in 2012 look very different, starting with their central narratives of “disruption” and “un-bundling.” Instead of building networks, the neoliberal MOOC is driven by a desire to liberate and empower the individual, breaking apart actually-existing academic communities and refocusing on the individual’s acquisition of knowledge.


These connective technologies have been pushed out by what Audrey Watters describes as a ‘content-delivery model’. On loc 2256 of her *The Monsters of Educational Technology*, she describes what it is like to be on the receiving end of such a model, having content delivered to you as a distance learner:

Receiving this box of materials in the mail was a literalization of the idea that education involves “content delivery.” That is, the courseware for Intro to Statistics was quite literally delivered to my doorstep. I’d
insert the videotapes into the VCR, and the content would be delivered to my living room and purportedly into my brain. “Content delivery” is not always quite so literally enacted, of course, but it’s still the paradigm education largely operates within. This is not a new paradigm, of course. But for me this was the moment —looking with frustration at this this box of videotapes —in which I realized that that’s what education privileges. Whether it’s in a textbook or in a video-taped lecture, it’s long been the content that matters most in school. The content is central. It’s what you go to school to be exposed to. Content. The student must study it, comprehend it, and demonstrate that in turn for the teacher. That is what we expect an education to do, to be: the acquisition of content that becomes transmogrified into knowledge. (The focus is certain content, of course and thus certain knowledge —that which has been decreed significant by a host of institutional, cultural, historical, political, intellectual forces.)

The MOOC dresses up the most uninspiring and uninspired aspects of actually existing educational initiatives in the cloak of technological progress. As Bady puts it, these start-ups “aim to do exactly the same thing that traditional courses have always done—transfer course content from expert to student—only to do so massively more cheaply and on a much larger scale”. These are technologies of modernisation rather than progress, intended to lock in existing arrangements in a way that disempowers those who might impede their smooth operation. They are technologies of scale and control, masquerading as tools of liberation. They represent, as Audrey Watters puts it on loc 3443, a trojan horse which we need to resist:

Education technology is the Trojan Horse poised to dismantle public education, to outsource and unbundle and disrupt and destroy. Those who tell you that education technology promises personalization don’t actually care about student autonomy or agency. They want surveillance and standardization and control. You have been warned. Education technology is full of monsters. We’ve given birth to some of them. We’ve given birth to the “everyone should learn to code” narrative. We’ve given birth to the “everyone should be online” story too. We’ve demanded that everyone have their own device. Education technology requires our love and our care so as to not become even more monstrous, so that it can become marvelous instead. It demands we resist and we fight and we build and tell a different story. Folks like Seymour Papert started a powerful storytelling for us. We just need to pick up that tale.

But doing so effectively necessitates unpacking the technology, the interests expressed through it and the context within which these are being pursued. We can still reclaim educational technology, but doing so necessitates that we don’t condemn technology by the uses to which it is being put.


Online Harassment (2017-02-02 08:00)

In the last few months, I’ve been thinking a lot about online harassment. Even writing that sentence, I come face-to-face with my own privilege, as ‘online harassment’ is something I’m able to elect to think about rather than
an unavoidable feature of my use of the internet. But the evidence is clear that online harassment is ubiquitous. A 2014 Pew Study found that [1]73 % of adult internet users have seen someone be harassed in some way online and 40 % have personally experienced it:

- 60 % of internet users said they had witnessed someone being called offensive names
- 53 % had seen efforts to purposefully embarrass someone
- 25 % had seen someone being physically threatened
- 24 % witnessed someone being harassed for a sustained period of time
- 19 % said they witnessed someone being sexually harassed
- 18 % said they had seen someone be stalked


The witnessing figure from this US study interests me because it suggests that most internet users must be aware of the reality of online harassment, even if they seek to explain it away to whatever extent. The study makes a distinction between two categories of online harassment:

In Pew Research Center’s first survey devoted to the subject, two distinct but overlapping categories of online harassment occur to internet users. [3]The first set of experiences is somewhat less severe: it includes name-calling and embarrassment. It is a layer of annoyance so common that those who see or experience it say they often ignore it.

The [4]second category of harassment targets a smaller segment of the online public, but involves more severe experiences such as being the target of physical threats, harassment over a sustained period of time, stalking, and sexual harassment.


The Pew study found the distribution of these experiences to be structured by gender and age. Young adults (18-29) as a whole are more likely to experience either category of harassment but young women (18-24) are overwhelmingly the targets of the more extreme behaviours:
But the gendering of these experiences, shouldn’t lead us to dismiss the ‘lesser’ category of harassment. This too can be gendered, in its cumulative and ubiquitous character, as Audrey Watters conveys on loc 1771 of her *Monsters of Educational Technology*:

I speak from experience. On Twitter, I have over 26,000 followers, most of whom follow me, I’d wager, because from time to time I say smart things about education technology. Yet regularly, men –strangers, typically, but not always –jump into my "@-mentions" to explain education technology to me. To explain open source licenses or open data or open education or MOOCs to me. Men explain learning management systems to me. Men explain the history of education technology to me. Men explain privacy and education data to me. Men explain venture capital funding of education startups to me. Men explain online harassment to me. Men explain blogging to me. Men explain, they explain, they explain. It’s exhausting. It’s insidious. It doesn’t quite elevate to the level of harassment, to be sure; but these microaggressions often mean that when harassment or threats do occur, women like me are already worn down. Yet this is all part of my experiences online. My experiences. Women's experiences. My friends' experiences.

There’s a complexity to this behaviour which the Pew study doesn’t capture. It recognises that these behaviours are much more common on such platforms than others, but it doesn’t attempt to look at these divergences demographically in terms of use of platforms. It’s important to recognise that certain online environments are what we might think of as ‘harrasogenic’ in a way that’s susceptible to explanation, including though not limited to deliberate choices by the companies in question to calibrate the architecture of their platforms to maximise attention, engagement, return etc in line with commercial incentives:
66% of internet users who have experienced online harassment said their most recent incident occurred on a social networking site or app
22% mentioned the comments section of a website
16% said online gaming
16% said in a personal email account
10% mentioned a discussion site such as reddit
6% said on an online dating website or app[6]http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/

The mechanisms available within a platform to respond to harassment are a clear function of those choices, as well as shaping the character of the platform through parameterization of harassment and responses to it. The Pew study found that low-level harassment tended to lead to single-step responses and high-level harassment tended to lead to multi-step responses. Surprisingly, 75% of those who responded thought their decision made the situation better, though it raises an obvious question of the distribution of this experience between the two categories.

47% of those who responded to their most recent incident with online harassment confronted the person online
44% unfriended or blocked the person responsible
22% reported the person responsible to the website or online service
18% discussed the problem online to draw support for themselves
13% changed their username or deleted their profile
10% withdrew from an online forum
8% stopped attending certain offline events or places
5% reported the problem to law enforcement http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/

When seen against this background, the drive within universities to incite academics to engage online can seem rather problematic. As Tressie McMillan Cottom[7] puts it “the risks and rewards of presenting oneself to others over the Web using tools typically associated with celebrity promotion” (Barone 2009) are not the same for all academics in the neo-liberal “public” square of private media.” The increasing levels of political polarisation, as well as the specific problem of organised conservative and alt-right groups seeking to highlight what they deem to be problematic academic speech online, reveal how this issue is intensifying. Given, as Tressie observes, universities use “engaged academics as an empirical measure of a university’s reputational currency” online harassment must be seen as a central issue of academic freedom and academic labour.
We need to understand this issue in terms of broader structures of oppression, while also recognising the specific characteristics of digital environments that set the parameters of its online manifestations. From loc 1677 of The Monsters of Educational Technology by Audrey Watters:

Harassment – of women, people of color, and other marginalized groups – is pervasive online. It's a reflection of offline harassment, to be sure. But there are mechanics of the Internet –its architecture, affordances, infrastructure, its culture –that can alter, even exacerbate what that harassment looks like and how it is experienced.

From loc 1843-1865 she takes apart some of the facile responses this issue can receive:

The answer can’t simply be to tell women to not use their real name online. If part of the argument for participating in the open Web is that students and educators are building a digital portfolio, are building a professional network, are contributing to scholarship, then we have to really think about whether or not promoting pseudonyms is a sufficient or an equitable solution. The answer can’t be simply be “don’t blog on the open Web.” Or “keep everything inside the ‘safety’ of the walled garden, the learning management system.” If nothing else, this presumes that what happens inside siloed, online spaces is necessarily “safe.” I’ve seen plenty of horrible behavior on closed forums, for example, from professors and students alike. I’ve seen heavy-handed moderation, where marginalized voices find their input is deleted. I’ve seen zero moderation, where marginalized voices are mobbed. The answer can’t simply be “just don’t read the comments.” I would say that it might be worth rethinking “comments” on student blogs altogether –or at least questioning the expectation that students host them, moderate them, respond to them. See, if we give students the opportunity to “own their own domain,” to have their own websites, their own space on the Web, we really shouldn’t require them to let anyone that can create a user account into that space. It’s perfectly acceptable to say to someone who wants to comment on a blog post, “Respond on your own site. Link to me. But I am under no obligation to host your thoughts in my domain.”

1. https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://pewrsr.ch/OnlineHarass&text=73%25%20of%20internet%20users%20have%20seen%20someone%20harassed%20online%20and%2040%25
3. https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://pewrsr.ch/OnlineHarass&text=60%25%20of%20internet%20users%20have%20witnessed%20offensive%20name%20calling%3B%2053%20
4. https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://pewrsr.ch/OnlineHarass&text=8%25%20of%20internet%20users%20have%20been%20physically%20threatened%20online%3B%208%20
5. http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/10/22/online-harassment/
‘Disruption’ as the last refuge of the Third Way (2017-02-03 08:00)

A couple of months ago, The New Statesman carried an interview with Tony Blair for the first time in a long time. Leaving aside how haunted the man looked in the portrait accompanying it, what stood out to me about it was how readily he had incorporated techno-speak into the language of the third way. Here are some examples:

One advantage of today’s social media is that you can build networks. Movements can begin at scale and build speed quickly. You’re not going to relate the answers to the challenges that we face by a Twitter exchange, so what I’m interested in doing is asking: what are the types of ideas that we should be taking forward? How do we provide a service to people who are in the front line of politics, so that we can provide some thinking and some ideas? The thing that’s really tragic about politics today is that the best ideas about politics aren’t in politics. I find the ideas are much more interesting in the technology sector, much more interesting ideas about how you change the world.-

I know we talk about this as a new thing, but many of us grew up with Enoch Powell. I mean, you remember the "rivers of blood" [speech], and black people were welcomed into the country and weren’t expelled, and that Britain was going to fall apart as a nation. I mean, these people are always on the wrong side of history, they always are, because that’s not the way the world is today. The world’s going to integrate more. It may integrate fast or slow, but it will integrate. Because technology, travel, migration, trade are bringing the world closer together. If you take a step back and you look at the broad sweep of history, this is actually a great time for humanity in many ways. You’ve had more people out of poverty than ever before in human history.-

I think what the Leave campaign created was a really interesting machine. You should learn from that. One of the things you have got to be able to do in modern politics is to build that platform of connections and networks. On the other hand, never ever forget that it starts with the right policies.

Open v closed is a really important debate today, because in a curious way the populism of the left and the populism of the right – at a certain point they meet each other. They tend to be isolationist. OK, the left is more anti-business, the right is more anti-immigrant, but they tend to be protectionist and they have an attitude to the process of globalisation that says this is a policy that is given by government and we can stop it and should stop it. Whereas my view about globalisation is that it’s a force essentially driven by people, by technological change, by the way the world has opened up. You’re not going to reverse that. The question is: how do we make that just and fair? That is the big question of our times. The centre left does not provide an answer to that, and we can and should.
This reflects something I've been noticing for some time: the similarity of 90s globalisation discourse to contemporary technology discourse. In fact, in many cases you can replace the word 'globalisation', from these 90s accounts, with 'technology' and there's no semantic loss whatsoever. This is why we need to be deeply sceptical about, for instance, the automation debate. There's clearly a real change underway, but it's framed in a manner which sees the unfolding of technology as an inexorable process, one which offers the possibility of adaptation or displacement. What Morozov calls \[2\] solutionism ("The belief that all difficulties have benign solutions, often of a technocratic nature") can be seen as a particular kind of cultural response to this view of technology.

Amongst political actors, we should understand this rhetoric as emerging against a long-term trend towards depoliticisation. It discursively unites the 'centre ground' of career politicians, members of what George Osborne calls 'the guild', concerned with winning power in order to manage the unfolding of technological change. Amongst economic actors, we should understand this rhetoric as a way of legitimising one's own work, deployed to win venture capital and to narrate the increasingly hegemonic character of the technology sector within capitalism as a whole. In the interaction between politics and economics, we should see this as a class project, as Thomas Frank argues in his Listen Liberal. From loc 2918-2934:

By that time, the place once filled by finance in the Democratic imagination had begun giving way to Silicon Valley, a different "creative-class" industry with billions to give in campaign contributions. Changes in the administration's personnel paralleled the money story: at the beginning of the Obama years, the government's revolving doors had all connected to Wall Street; within a few years, the people spinning them were either coming from or heading toward the West Coast. In 2014, David Plouffe, the architect of Obama's inspiring first presidential campaign, began to work his political magic for Uber. Jay Carney, the president's former press secretary, hired on at Amazon the following year. Larry Summers, for his part, became an adviser for an outfit called OpenGov. Back in Washington, meanwhile, the president established a special federal unit that used Silicon Valley techniques and personnel to revolutionize the government's web presence; starstruck tech journalists call it "Obama's stealth startup."

My argument is that we need to see the rhetoric of 'disruption' and 'innovation' in systemic terms. We need to historicise these cultural forms and \[3\] link their claims to the core questions of sociology inquiry. We need to update our theories of social change to better take account of socio-technical 'innovation'. For instance, if we accept the construct of 'late modernity', are we seeing a radicalisation of it or are we in the process of transcending it? Should we dispense with 'modernity' talk altogether, however qualified, instead moving to talk of 'platform capitalism' or 'digital capitalism'? These are key questions for social theory and ones which I'm increasingly gripped by.

A useful way to approach these is to scale down from the system level and look at particular spheres of life in which innovation talk is at its most pronounced. I'm currently reading a \[4\] book of keynotes by the education writer \[5\] Audrey Watters which reflects on these issues in terms of educational technology. One of her foremost concerns is the tendency of educational technology start-ups to exhibit a studied ignorance of the history of educational technology. Each putative innovation is presented as ungrounded, emerging from outside education to disrupt a fundamentally broken system, with only the recalcitrance of educators standing in its way:

And okay, in fairness, these folks are not historians. They're computer scientists, artificial intelligence experts, software engineers. They're entrepreneurs. But their lack of knowledge about the history of education and the history of education technology matters. It matters because it supports a prevailing narrative about innovation – where innovation comes from (according to this narrative, it comes from private industry, and not from public institutions; from Silicon Valley, that is, not from elsewhere in the
world) and when it comes (there’s this fiercely myopic fixation on the future). The lack of knowledge about history matters too because it reflects and even enables a powerful strain in American ideology and in the ideology of the technology industry: that the past is irrelevant, that the past is a monolithic block of brokenness—unchanged and unchanging until it’s disrupted by technological innovation, or by the promise of technological innovation, by the future itself. (loc 326)

However, as she argues, this isn’t simply a forgetting of the history of education or the history of educational technology. Rather “It’s a rewriting of history, whether you see it as activist or accidental” (loc 351) and one which serves private interests. When history is reluctantly allowed on stage, it is inevitably couched in narrowly technological terms. Reflecting on the failure of the largely forgotten AllLearn initiative, opened in 2001 and closed in 2006, the economist Richard Levin, ascribed the problem to a lack of bandwidth:

It was too early. Bandwidth wasn’t adequate to support the video. But we gained a lot of experience of how to create courses, and then we used it starting in 2007 to create very high quality videos, now supported by adequate bandwidth in many parts of the world, with the Open Yale courses. We’ve released over 40 of them, and they gained a wide audience. (loc 471)

The reality is that broadband penetration had only increased by 8% between the end of AllLearn and the time of this interview. It was also the case that AllLearn sought to distribute materials via CD, as well as allowing users to switch off streaming video content that might be overly-testing for their internet connections. Given he was now speaking as Coursera’s CEO, presiding over a comparable initiative which had failed under his stewardship as Chair, we could perhaps see this as simply self-serving. Not unlike the erasure from history of past educational technology initiatives by start-up founders eagerly touting the ‘next big thing’. But I think Watters is right that this reflects something deeper about contemporary ideologies of ‘innovation’ and ‘disruption’.

Could we build up a systemic account of ‘disruption’ and ‘innovation’ by looking at the particular discursive strategies used across a number of domains, as well as the material implications of their use. What would these other domains be?


A Bleak Social Theory For Bleak Times (2017-02-04 08:00)

Given the number of times I’ve argued with him on Twitter, it was a surprise to discover quite how much I like Steve Hall’s work. There’s an unapologetic bleakness to it which I find appealing, not as a matter of aesthetics but rather because it serves an important conceptual function. As he recounts [1]here,
‘The growth and concentration of a shared sense of suffering and dissatisfaction has throughout history driven progressive politics, and it can do so again. However, these same sentiments have often been perverted and knocked off course to descend into regressive nationalism. There are already signs throughout Europe of strange, postmodern nationalisms developing as post-political populations experience a profound sense of social anxiety and loss.’ (Winlow and Hall, 2013: 110)

This was written in 2013. It’s fair to say the argument in Rethinking Social Exclusion has proved rather prescient. He and his co-authors developed this approach in a number of books, including Riots and Political Protest and Rise of the Right. The latter books are every bit as bleak, presenting the results of an ethnography which illustrate the arguments they’d earlier made on a more abstract level. The bleakness, I think, helps unsettle the conceptual comforts which afflict contemporary sociology. I largely agree with his account of how recent events have wrong-footed the discipline:

Over the years social science has made a lot of noise about its ability to shatter the myths that constitute popular common sense. It has been a little quieter, however, about shattering the myths that have come to constitute its own common sense. Across Europe and the USA social scientists looked on horrified as the Brexit drama unfolded, Marvel-comic villain Donald Trump – resplendent in his very own urban tower with its gold-plated elevator and other tasteful soupsçons of interior design – was elected to the White House, and far-right parties increased their popular support in Europe. Social media was full of perplexed liberals firing off missives to scold the Brexit voters for their senseless decision. It was like watching irate 1950s schoolmasters using morning assembly to tell off the kids who had had a food-fight in the dinner hall the day before. Over the past thirty years social scientists have been highlighting creativity, resilience, resistance, progress and so on. Looks like something went badly wrong.

I don’t agree with all aspects of their diagnosis, but this disagreement is as much a matter of emphasis as fundamental difference. They’re doing social theory with a hammer. I don’t agree with all their targets or all their arguments, but I agree with the intention. Bleakness can be a tool and a resource. It can be what motivates us to question what is settled, reconsider the ends which our activity serves and to look back out towards a world beyond the fog of words and concepts which sociology spews forth on a daily basis.


CfP: Manchester Social Movements Conference (2017-02-05 08:00)

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS CONFERENCE - FINAL CALL FOR PAPERS

Dates: Conference 10th-12 April Abstracts by Monday 20th March Papers by Friday 31st March From 1995 to 2016, Manchester Metropolitan University hosted a series of very successful annual international conferences on ‘ALTERNATIVE FUTURES and POPULAR PROTEST’. We’re very happy to announce that the Twenty Second AF &PP
Conference will be held between Monday 10th and Wednesday 12th April 2017. The Conference rubric will remain as in previous years. The aim is to explore the dynamics of popular movements, along with the ideas which animate their activists and supporters and which contribute to shaping their fate. Reflecting the inherent cross-disciplinary nature of the issues, previous participants (from over 60 countries) have come from such specialisms as sociology, politics, cultural studies, social psychology, economics, history and geography. The Manchester conferences have been notable for discovering a fruitful and friendly meeting ground between activism and academia. **PRELIMINARY CALL FOR PAPERS**

We invite offers of papers relevant to the conference themes. Papers should address such matters as: * contemporary and historical social movements and popular protests * social movement theory * utopias and experiments * ideologies of collective action * etc. **To offer a paper**, please contact either of the conference convenors with a brief abstract:

**EITHER** Colin Barker, email: [1]c.barker@mmu.ac.uk OR Mike Tyldesley, Politics Section, HPP, Manchester Metropolitan University Geoffrey Manton Building, Rosamond Street West Manchester M15 6LL, England Tel: M. Tyldesley 0161 247 3460 email: [2]m.tyldesley@mmu.ac.uk Fax: 0161 247 6769 [3](+44 161 247 6769) *(Wherever possible, please use email, especially as Colin Barker is a retired gent. Surface mail and faxes should only be addressed to Mike Tyldesley)*

**CONFERENCE PAPERS**

One way we organise this particular conference is that we ask those giving papers to supply them in advance, for inclusion in a Dropbox folder of the complete papers which will be available to all delegates from the conference opening.

**Preferred method:** send the paper to Colin Barker as an email attachment in MS Word or .pdf format. Any separate illustrations etc. should be sent separately, in .jpg format. * if this is impossible, post a copy of the text to Mike Tyldesley on a CD disk in MS Word or .pdf format * Final date for receipt of abstracts: Monday 20th March 2017 * Final date for receipt of actual papers: Friday 31st March 2017 * Final date for receipt of abstracts: Monday 20th March 2017 * Final date for receipt of actual papers: Friday 31st March 2017 These are final dates. The earlier we receive abstracts, and actual papers, the better.

**CONFERENCE ARRANGEMENTS AND COSTS**

The conference will run from lunch-time Monday 10th April until after lunch on Wednesday 12th April 2017. The conference cost will be inclusive of three lunches, teas/coffees. The full cost is £145.00, with a cost of £85.00 for students and the unwaged. Please register online at [4]https://www.kxregistration.mmu.ac.uk/alternativefutures2017 Hotels, hostels and dining out We can supply information about relatively cheap local hotels and hostels. Let us know if you would like this information. We cannot do hotel or hostel bookings for you. Conference participants will be invited to dine together at two local (and not too expensive) restaurants on the two conference evenings. Payment for dinners should not be made in advance, but directly to the restaurants on the night. Please feel free to circulate this to anyone who might be interested.

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4. https://outlook.mmu.ac.uk/owa/redir.aspx?SURL=NikAiWOGCuNqK7P_lcRHxh1SxmvhhR7hJfcvK_fyX55WPQWPv7CGdAdBOARAAbwA6ACBAhB3AHcAdwAuAGsAeABAGUAzWbPAMMAdABByAGEAdA

The ontology of data, the ideology of data (2017-02-06 08:00)

In a post yesterday, I expressed my discomfort with how Nick Srnicek invokes the notion of data as a raw material in his Platform Capitalism. In a footnote on loc 1102-1121, he offers a Marxist justification for this use:

I draw here upon Marx’s definition of raw material: ‘The land (and this, economically speaking, includes water) in the virgin state in which it supplies man with necessaries or the means of subsistence ready to hand, exists independently of him, and is the universal subject of human labour. All those things which labour merely separates from immediate connexion with their environment, are subjects of labour spontaneously provided by Nature. Such are fish which we catch and take from their element, water,
timber which we fell in the virgin forest, and ores which we extract from their veins. If, on the other hand, the subject of labour has, so to say, been filtered through previous labour, we call it raw material; such is ore already extracted and ready for washing’ (Marx, 1990: 284–5, emphasis added).

The distinction between natural and processed helps address the charge that data-as-raw-material naturalises data but it doesn’t avoid it all together. It recognises that usable data is always processed and cleaned prior to use, ‘filtered through previous labour’ both directly (wrangling etc) and indirectly (socio-technical systems of generation, capture, storage and analysis).

But does it obscure the character of its applications? The original sources of this ‘raw material’ are intensely social, unlike that extracted from nature, arising from the digitalisation of action and transaction within a market economy. The applications of this ‘raw material’ are intensely variable, with data sometimes being a direct source of value that can be realised through a linear activity, other times being an informational good that can be used to coordinate and calibrate and perhaps more often being a source of confusion and speculation.

It would take constructionism too far to deny the ontology of data. Indeed, I think a concern for the ontology of data is a crucial vector through which we can understand the ideology of data. But we nonetheless need to carefully unpick the way ‘data’ is represented by social actors, the interests served by this and the discursive architecture through which these interests are advanced in different organisational settings.

There’s a fascinating example of this ideology which Srnicek quotes on loc 1296:

If collecting and analysing this raw material is the primary revenue source for these companies and gives them competitive advantages, there is an imperative to collect more and more. As one report notes, echoing colonialist ventures: ‘From a data-production perspective, activities are like lands waiting to be discovered. Whoever gets there first and holds them gets their resources –in this case, their data riches.’ For many of these platforms, the quality of the data is of less interest than their quantity and diversity. Every action performed by a user, no matter how minute, is useful for reconfiguring algorithms and optimising processes. Such is the importance of data that many companies could make all of their software open-source and still maintain their dominant position due to their data. Unsurprisingly, then, these companies have been prolific purchasers and developers of assets that enable them to expand their capacity for gaining information. Mergers relating to big data, for instance, have doubled between 2008 and 2013.

How seriously should we take this? My instinct is to say ‘not very’. The notion that all data is of potential value is licensing massive investment and expansion, entrenching the position of precisely those who are speaking most authoritatively in relation to this transition. To be sceptical of a gold rush doesn’t mean you’re denying the existence of gold, it just means you’re sceptical about the exuberance surrounding the search and how it is being deployed by some to benefit their own self-interest. The distinction between the ontology of data and the ideology of data matters.
Public sociology and the role of the researcher: engagement, communication and academic activism (2017-02-07 08:00)

29 March 2017
De Montfort University, Leicester - [1]FULL DETAILS & PROGRAMME

What is the role of the researcher outside the academy? This event invites Postgraduate and Early Career Researchers to innovate and critically reflect on three related areas of public sociology: academic activism, public engagement, and participation and co-production. It encourages researchers to articulate and address diverse challenges, such as neutrality, networking, and whether activism can be considered a form of public engagement.

This event includes a keynote lecture from distinguished speaker Dr Mark Carrigan, Digital Fellow, The Sociological Review, presentations by invited speakers, a film created using participatory methods, a participatory session, and the chance to network and discuss work with fellow researchers. The aim is to provide an environment in which participants have the space to be questioning, to have a lively exchange of ideas, and to be inspired to explore the potential of these ideas in their own research.

Call for Abstracts and Posters

We would like to invite Postgraduates to take part in a five-minute PechaKucha presentation and/or a poster presentation: the call for abstracts is now open. Given the brevity of the presentations, abstract submissions should be no longer than 200 words. Abstracts for presentations are due on 24 February 2017 and poster confirmation is needed by 1 March 2017. There are small prizes for the best poster and the best presentation.

Oral presentations and posters may cover any aspect of Public Sociology, including, but not limited to:

- dissemination of knowledge beyond academia;
- participatory research methods and challenges;
- positionality of the researcher and relationships of power;
- approaches and practice in the co-production of knowledge;
- academic activism.

Competitions

4854
Participants are encouraged to submit a poster for a poster competition, which will be judged by the conference organisers. All posters will be accepted. Please contact the organiser for details.

There will also be a small prize for the best PechaKucha/Standup presentation, selected by a ballot of the conference participants.

Getting to De Montfort University

The venue is the Queen’s Building room 0.15, on the ground floor (LE2 7DR). It is building 29 on the campus map, and is situated in the centre of campus, next to the Kimberlin Library on Mill Lane, and opposite the Food Village.

- Directions to Leicester and to De Montfort University
- Information about the accessibility of the building

For further information, please contact Sasha Loyal P11238742@my365.dmu.ac.uk

Out trolling the trolls (2017-02-08 08:00)

I've just finished reading the excellent This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things by Whitney Phillips. It offers fascinating insights into the evolution of 'trolling' as a practice, leading from its original form of sub-cultural self-identification to the diffusion of the label across the entire spectrum of online activities deemed to be anti-social. Her overarching thesis is that trolling is framed as an aberration relative to the mainstream culture, when in fact it represents the logic of that culture taken to its extreme. Trolling only makes sense against a background that facilitates it, such that trolls should be read as an indictment of contemporary culture rather than a threat to it. This diagnosis is most acute when it comes to broadcast media, with trolls expertly hacking the media for their own amusement in a way that takes advantage of the media's propensity for those very things (misleading information, lack of understanding, morbid preoccupations and a deep need for attention) which trolls are seen as embodiments of.

Her operationalisation of 'troll' as a self-identity is an important part of the book. The problem I have with the contemporary use of troll is that it subsumes a wide range of behaviours into a singular pathologised description. To point this out is not to defend any of these behaviours, only to remind that we should not assume people do similar,
or even the same, things for the same reasons. The diversity of trolling behaviours gets obliterated by the seemingly straight-forward designation of ‘troll’, something which I suspect many people now think they unproblematically recognise when they see it. But underlying ‘trolling’ we might find the urge to incite and manipulate for amusement (i.e. ‘troll’ in the self-identifying sense), online activists who see themselves as fighting a culture war through their keyboards, outpouring of hatred reflecting a generalised contempt for other human beings, the desperate externalisations of someone unable to cope or any number of other things. We need to recognise this variety at an ontological level while nonetheless remaining attentive to the epistemological and methodological problem of how, if at all, we are able to read back ‘offline’ motivations from ‘online’ behaviour.

Towards the end of the book, Phillips talks about her experience of out-trolling trolls. She recognises that this runs contrary to familiar advice “don’t feed the trolls”, something which I’ve always found to work just as well as face-to-face as on the internet:

This strategy—of actively trolling trolls—runs directly counter to the common imperative “don’t feed the trolls,” a statement predicated on the logic that trolls can only troll if their targets allow themselves to be trolled. Given that the fun of trolling inheres in the game of trolling—a game only the troll can win, and whose rules only the troll can modify—this is sound advice. If the target doesn’t react, then neither can the troll. But even this decision buys into the trolls’ game. The troll still sets the terms of their target’s engagement; the troll still controls the timeline and the outcome. (pg. 160)

I don’t quite follow the reasoning here. A refusal to engage only leaves the troll in control in a formal sense of the term. In practice, there isn’t a timeline or an outcome, with an enormous caveat I will get to later in the post. Instead, she details a strategy of out-trolling the trolls, performing an earnest response to their attempts at engagement in a way which reveals their own investment in trolling.

The dynamic shifts considerably if the target counters with a second game, one that collapses the boundary between target and troll. In this new game, the troll can lose and, by taking umbrage at the possibility, falls victim to his or her own rigid rules. After all, it’s emotion—particularly frustration or distress—that trips the troll’s wire. In most cases, the troll’s shame over having lost, or merely the possibility that he or she could lose, will often send the troll searching for more exploitable pastures. I frequently utilized this strategy in my own dealings with random anonymous trolls, particularly on my quasi-academic blog. (pg. 160)

I’d like to have seen more example of what she means here but I find it an intriguing idea. As I understand it, her notion of ‘trolling rhetoric’ entails seeking to provoke another person to express their concerns in a way deemed to be excessive, revealing what is taken to be their over-investment in their online activity. Underlying this is a belief that “nothing should be taken seriously, and therefore ... public displays of sentimentality, political conviction, and/or ideological rigidity” are seen as a “call to trolling arms”, with the ensuing trolling often understood in an explicitly pedagogical way. The lulz enjoyed through this represent a "pushback against any and all forms of attachment" but, as she notes, trolls themselves are deeply attached to lulz (p. 25). There’s a power in revealing this attachment, inciting trolls to perform it through the very rhetorical strategies through which they seek to dominate others. Ignoring them leaves the troll unmoved, engaging in this way reveals the deep paradox at the heart of their behaviour.

Phillips recognises how contentious such a strategy can appear, honestly recounting her own ambivalence about the possibility. It nonetheless has a certain appeal though, specifically the idea that we might [2]“troll better, and to smash better those who troll us”. But there are two huge caveats to its employment in the academic context
within which and for which I’m writing. Firstly, how would university departments and communications offices respond to examples of ‘out trolling’? The evidence we have suggests not very well. Secondly, do we have any reason to assume that those who are increasingly targeting academics online represents trolls in this self-identified sense? I think the argument offered by Phillips is deeply plausible but suspect it only holds true for those who share this sub-cultural identity. Those who, for instance, see what they do as activism are much less likely to be moved by it and engagements of this could be deeply counter-productive.

1. https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/why-we-cant-have-nice-things

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Social Media For Academics: Things To Try (2017-02-09 08:00)

https://twitter.com/i/moments/823131942279331840?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw

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Quit social media! (2017-02-10 08:00)

A provocative argument put forward by someone who’s built a [1]high-profile secondary career through blogging:
In the last few months, I've begun to seriously plan a much more sophisticated follow-up to Social Media for Academics, investigating the implications of social media for academic labour. A crucial aspect of this, which seems likely to become much more so with each passing year, concerns the toxicity of many of the online environments in which academics are participating. If academics increasingly find themselves expected to use social media as a means of demonstrating engagement or at least signalling engagement-willingness then the toxicity of these environments will become an increasingly central labour issue.

My fear is that we will have the worst of both worlds. Academics will be coerced outwards into these online environments under the sign of 'impact', while finding themselves blamed if anything they do online attracts disapproval for their employer. It's easy to imagine how the moralism we see lurking beneath the impact agenda (those who claim not to 'get it' should be 'ashamed' as I recently heard an extremely senior person say) could find similar expression in managerial expectation of social media use. On our present trajectory, the likely outcome will be an individualised one: take responsibility for your own engagement and take the blame if you bring about any perceived damage to the corporate brand. This problem is compounded because, as Tressie McMillan Cottom [2] puts it "the risks and rewards of presenting oneself "to others over the Web using tools typically associated with celebrity promotion" (Barone 2009) are not the same for all academics in the neo-liberal "public" square of private media." Far from counteracting exclusion in higher education, social media for academics is amplifying the risks for those already marginalised.

As an example of how this is developing, consider this dispiriting reflection on being an academic video blogger on YouTube which Philip Moriarty passed on to me:

One of the main reasons why I think the promise of YT as a place where intelligent life might flourish is failing is the well-documented level of trolling and hatred that permeates the site, and which threatens
to silence any but the most obnoxious or innocuous voices. I stopped making regular videos a couple of years ago when the vitriol I was receiving for having the temerity to make unpopular content spilled over into my personal life. In addition to receiving the usual grammatically-challenged insults and thinly-veiled threats the university I was working at was also contacted several times by folk demanding my removal. Eventually these ‘downsides’ to being an academic on Youtube outweighed the benefits and I gave up making public videos entirely.

And it isn’t just me. Over the past three years I have known four other academics leave Youtube for reasons very similar to my own. These were folk who were similarly motivated to bridge the gap between ‘town and gown’, between universities (which are often seen as elitist) and the wider world represented on social media. These people wanted to contribute their knowledge and also to learn from the contributions of others. They wanted to find ways to speak and to listen in ways which were more inclusive, and which the diverse communities on Youtube seemed to be able to offer. These fine people, like myself, became disheartened by the inability of YT to foster anything but the lowest common denominator, the most clickbaity, the most provocative, the most crudely entertaining, and the failure of the platform to support those who wanted to raise the bar.

Some might say (and indeed have said) that this toxicity is just a natural part of the online ecology and we should grow a thicker skin, or not feed the trolls, or any of the other platitudes that are trotted out to excuse bad behaviour, but I don’t think that’s good enough. When the comment section under a video is two thirds insult or threat then the value of that comment section drops to zero. No one with anything to contribute wants to be part of it. When you have to wonder if your latest video will prompt some faceless anti-intellectual gonk to contact your employer then the chilling effect takes hold and you censor yourself, (God forbid you should talk positively about feminism, or BLM, or the representation of women in video games). The number of eyeballs on the site might increase but the I.Q. of the site goes down.


The architecture of these platforms militates against their sustained pedagogical use. It might be that, as [4]Pausé and Russell put it, “Social media enables scholarship to be publicised more widely within the academy, and in addition to that, it enables scholarship to become part of broader social conversations”. The problem is that the incentives of these platforms have over time proved to be generative of a dialogical toxicity which tends to be obscured by the high-minded rhetoric of public engagement. The promise that social media might “bridge the gap between ‘town and gown’” is proving to be rather misleading. A large part of my new project will be exploring the implications of this at the level of the institutional politics of the university, with a particular focus on what it means for academic labour.

The role of social media for academics discourse in obscuring these issues, mystifying the complex politics of social media in the university through breathless reiteration of the individual benefits to be accrued through engagement, means it will be a central object of critique for the project. But I want to avoid slipping into utopian/dystopian, pro/anti framings of social media for academics. I still believe in its scholarly importance and it’s capacity to inculcate solidarity and (in limited ways) flatten hierarchies. There’s a great example of the latter in this paper by [5]Pausé and Russell which I’m otherwise pretty critical of:

Accessibility means individuals who are not academically trained are able to learn about a field of research and contribute to it, bringing their own ideas and experiences to the table.† And accountability has enabled greater criticism of the process of scholarship and research. Through connecting on social media, marginalised people have been able to gather sufficient force to challenge the conventions of research; to insist on an intersectional perspective. The lived experience of a Māori woman living in Aotearoa
New Zealand can challenge the theorised understanding of an academic.‡ People have objected to being studied, and have demanded the right to participate in framing the discussion. For example, the Health at Every Size® (HAES) movement has largely been led by advocates from within what is known as the Fatosphere (Harding, 2007), prompting research that questions the basic assumptions made about the relationship between body size and health by health scholars and those working in the health field. This both challenges and enriches scholars' research. There is now a rich empirical literature on the efficacy of HAES (Burgard, 2014).


Karen Price (2017-02-11 11:11:11)
Really interesting discussion Mark. Thank you for those perspectives. The capacity for both the common community good and for disheartening soul-destroying trolling is a wide pendulum of possible responses. Even in professional closed spaces on social media there is a capacity for horrendous misunderstanding and conflict riven discussion. The ability to slip into tribal discussions and ad hominem attacks is not limited to the wider public but even in moderated professional groups. I am constantly reflecting upon the capacity for this and have wondered about the use of largely text. The anonymity and protected virtual space from the usual social modifiers. We are safer from the consequences of our less than honourable behaviour than in the face to face setting. It’s almost like a giant Stanford Prison experiment. Not sure how to best manage it and so far in my online community Gender has been the most difficult compared with race or religion. This could reflect the nuances of my local context of course but I am still ruminating on that. I’m not sure if it is fair that we expect the world online to be any different from the real world tension and divisions that simmer. Perhaps the medium just allows what is ever present to be made more visible to more witnesses. Interesting times.

Mark Carrigan (2017-02-14 16:09:53)
I like the idea of the giant Stanford prison experiment!

Denial and the Antinomies of (Post)Truth (2017-02-12 08:00)

Rarely can a film have been as timely as Denial. It tells the story of the libel action the holocaust denying historian David Irving took against [1]Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher, alleging that she had damaged his professional reputation as a historian by claiming he had wilfully distorted evidence. The film recounts the events leading up to the trial, before focusing on the trial itself and ending with the judge’s ruling that:

Irving has for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence; that for the same reasons he has portrayed Hitler in an unwarrantedly favourable light, principally in relation to his attitude towards and responsibility for the treatment of the Jews; that he is an active Holocaust denier; that he is anti-Semitic and racist, and that he associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism...[2][4][3][65] therefore the defence of justification succeeds...[4][5] It follows that there must be judgment for the Defendants.[5][66]
The film seems remarkably salient at a time when the liberal punditry seems to have uniformly endorsed the notion that we have entered a post-truth era, concisely [6]defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief". The importance of truth, the urgency of fighting for it, runs through the film and is explicitly invoked in the framing of it as a cultural product, as Rachel Weisz makes clear here: "It's a true story, it's a fight for truth and justice".

The writer David Hare expands on this point in the same clip, explaining how "it's not based on a true story, it is a true story ... the words from the trial are the exact words. I don't attribute to David Irving any line that he is not on record as having said, everything he says, we know he said". It was great to discover this because I found the trial scenes riveting, though found it hard to wonder if the whole thing would have worked better on stage. The film seems to have underwhelmed critics, rather unfairly from my point of view, perhaps suggesting it was motivated by a commitment to realism of a sort liable to prove underwhelming on the big screen. However what struck me most about the film was the epistemological confusion underlying it, something which I think reflects a lot about the contemporary discourse of ‘post-truth’ and its limitations.

The avowed realism of the film obscures the inevitable cuts that the constraints of story telling necessitate. Irving had [8]sued another historian at the same time, though the case did not go to court. He threatened a further historian with libel if passages concerning him weren’t removed from an upcoming book, prompting an American edition to be published with them but their erasure from the British edition. My point is not to criticise the film for excluding these details, despite their obvious relevance to the story, as much as to highlight the exclusions inherent in narrative. Likewise, with the court case itself, where the selection of a few incidents from a long trial were expertly used to dramatic effect. Again, these aren’t criticisms, just a reminder that even factual narratives (a term I prefer to ‘true story’) inevitably entail selecting from the pool of available facts, within the (media and genre specific) constraints of effective story-telling.

Much of the film can be read in terms of rallying forces for a defence of truth. The drama of the film rests on
success in this endeavour, after overcoming much initial adversity. But framing the hard-drinking, hard-thinking Scottish barrister as a hero sits oddly with the commitment to truth in the film. After all, he’s lionised for his rhetorical skills, his capacity to pick apart the authority of Irving in a performatively compelling way. His most successful tactics have nothing to do with the presentation of evidence, but rather involve getting under Irving’s skin in order to unsettle and undermine him. The concern here is not truth but persuasion. Specifically, the persuasion of a solitary judge, after Irving the litigant was persuaded to dispense with the jury because both sides agreed that the common folk could not be trusted to adjudicate on the truth when the relevant facts were as complex as they were in this case. Furthermore, the only thing that ensures the barrister is not cast as a mercenary is his deep commitment to this truth. This is slowly established over the course of the film, with Lipstadt eventually discovering that this is not just ‘another brief’ for him after all.

What made this film impressive to me was the way in which it explored the mechanics of persuasion in court, specifically how it was established convincingly that Irving had wilfully misrepresented evidence in order to establish the case for holocaust denial. In other words, it concerned the discursive machinery through which facts are consecrated and rendered socially efficacious. The apparent narratological inevitably of this being accompanied by a paean to truth speaks volumes about what has come to be accepted as ‘post-truth’. We might speak more accurately of post-fact. This is how Will Davies framed it in a New York times essay:

Facts hold a sacred place in Western liberal democracies. Whenever democracy seems to be going awry, when voters are manipulated or politicians are ducking questions, we turn to facts for salvation.

But they seem to be losing their ability to support consensus. [9]Politifact has found that about 70 percent of Donald Trump’s “factual” statements actually fall into the categories of “mostly false,” “false” and “pants on fire” untruth.

For the Brexit referendum, Leave argued that European Union membership costs Britain 350 million pounds a week, but failed to account for the money received in return.

The sense is widespread: We have entered an age of post-truth politics.

As politics becomes more adversarial and dominated by television performances, the status of facts in public debate rises too high. We place expectations on statistics and expert testimony that strains them to breaking point. Rather than sit coolly outside the fray of political argument, facts are now one of the main rhetorical weapons within it.


The declining efficacy of facts is understood to be problematic because it undermines appreciation of truth. But reality always permits of multiple characterisations. As Roy Bhaskar put it on pg 55 of Reclaiming Reality, “facts are things, but they are social not natural things, belonging to the transitive world of science, not the intransitive world of nature”. Facts are produced through interventions in the world, drawing on the labour of others and applying conceptual tools we rarely built ourselves. This is why a serious discussion of someone like Irving cannot avoid interrogating his proclaimed status as a professional historian, what this means and how it should shape our assessment of his capacity to marshal facts in authoritative ways. Indeed, this was crucial to making the case against
him.

But if we see facts as self-grounded things, already made and waiting in the world to be discovered, it becomes difficult to acknowledge this. This might not matter when ‘our’ facts are socially efficacious, happily endorsed by all those we encounter and reflected back to us as common sense in the culture we engage with. But when these start to break down, the construction of ‘truth’ faces a fundamental tension: if facts are given then conflict over them must in some way reflect non-factual considerations, but if non-factual considerations consistently influence ‘matters of fact’ then facts cannot be given. This creates a crisis when we reach a situation in which facts have been ubiquitously weaponised. As Davies put it, “If you really want to find an expert willing to endorse a fact, and have sufficient money or political clout behind you, you probably can”.

This inconvenient truth could be ignored as long as there was a consensus in place. One which has now broken down, with the apparent mystery of our ‘post-truth’ era going hand-in-hand with a profound mystification of the political dimensions to how the consensual era of ‘truth’ preceding it was established. My point in writing this isn’t to preach constructionism. I share the ethos of Bhaskar’s book, one of the most powerful works of philosophy I’ve read: reclaim reality. Reclaiming reality involves recognising the reality of social construction, but resisting the dissolution of ‘truth’ into this. Figures like Irving thrive in the space opened up by the antinomies of (post)truth. If we reclaim reality, we can starve them at an epistemological level, before defeating them at a political level.

7. https://www.youtube.com/embed/tTZnDXVKC9A?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
Ten years ago, the so-called 'Invisible Committee' urged that 'It is useless to wait…. To go on waiting is madness. The catastrophe is not coming, it is here. We are already situated within the collapse of a civilization. It is within this reality that we must choose sides.' Over a decade before, Leonard Cohen had written; ‘This is the darkness, this is the flood. The catastrophe has already happened and the question we now face is what is the appropriate behaviour.’ The 2017 Critical Legal Conference thus calls for streams, panels and papers that reflect upon ‘catastrophe’; on the catastrophes of our time and upon their interrelations; upon the questions of appropriate behaviours that might emerge and sides that might be taken. In particular we hope to encourage streams on:

- Increasing brutality and violence of the carceral and security state;
- War, migration, and refugee crises;
- Racism, xenophobia, misogyny, transphobia, homophobia and countless forms of day to day violence;
- On the atmospheres of violence under regimes of Modi, Temer, Trump, Brexit or Erdogan
- Natural disasters and the effects of climate change in the anthropocene;
- Forms of colonialism, neocolonialism and economic imperialism driven by capitalism and neoliberal ideologies;
• Crises of care and depletion of the social reproductive capacities under global capitalism;
• Rampant fear-mongering and the political exploitation of deprivation.
• Catastrophe, disaster and crisis as modes of biopolitics, governance or accumulation

However, these catastrophes are only the most obvious effecting us today. Catastrophe does not necessarily imply a sudden fright or a grand world-historical moment that is evident to all. We also want to emphasise: the slow violence of catastrophe; the gradual and often imperceptible disintegration that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous; the ‘human catastrophes’ fostered by capitalism in its crises of social reproduction; intimate catastrophes, moments of collapse and calamity that concern the subject and the psyche, as well as the domestic.

Taking a cue from Bonnie Honig, we might identify the genre of this mode of critique as containing something of the dark romantics. The catastrophe is that chasmatic void into which we are about to fall (or perhaps we have already fallen). We are pervaded by a sense of the coming (or already arrived) doom. But despite this, catastrophe also suggests an opening to something beyond. It creates new spaces for resistance and solidarity, while potentially strengthening old ones. Catastrophe names the end in ancient Greek music and theatre, an unravelling and return to context. It was coupled with ana
crousis – a sonorous explosion that was played at the beginning of a performance to clear the ears and so make space for a cosmos to be created. Catastrophe announced the overturning of that world and prepared the listeners to leave the theatre, to return to the street and to the context of popular life. Tolkien coins the term Eucatastrophe to signify the sudden positive resolution of a seemingly impossible situation. Thus, continuing from the hugely successful 2016 CLC focus on ‘turning points’, the theme of catastrophe asks us to consider the day after the moment of rupture, the period after the turning point.

What are the traps of thinking through ‘catastrophe’? Does catastrophe require redemption? Certainly modes of Christian theology imagine the katechon – the worldly suspension of the end times in which we are situated – as the holding-off of the justice of the end of the world. But by thinking our situation in other cosmologies, does the question of the catastrophe disappear, or appear differently? Or in a more profane sense, what are the problems of thinking through the lens of the catastrophe – is there a catastrophe (for us) in thinking catastrophe? Should we move away from the thought of the catastrophe and think more hopefully or joyfully?

Finally, we hope the question of catastrophe also invites a certain critical self-reflection. In liberal accounts, law seems to stand out against the catastrophe: the catastrophe is the perversion of legal rationality or the inability of pure legal norms to reach their proper context. Critical fields seek to undermine this claim, but to what extent and what effect? And what of the left’s own catastrophes, what of the co-option of resistance in human rights or development, or of the various collapses or exhaustions of left political and legal projects?

So we invite participants to the coming Catastrophe of the 2017 Critical Legal Conference at the Warwick Law School and in conjunction with the Social Theory Centre. It will take place on the 1st-3rd of September. Further details can be found on the [1]conference webpage (Link). Please send your [2]stream proposals to [3]clcwarwick@gmail.com. The closing date for streams will be the 28th of February, the call for papers will open after that.

1. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/newsandevents/events/critical_legal_conference/
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/newsandevents/events/critical_legal_conference/streams/
3. mailto:clcwarwick@gmail.com
**Writing prompts for a PhD journal (2017-02-14 08:00)**

http://gty.im/56172327

I'm a big advocate of the research journal as a key part of doing a PhD. I think blogs are wonderful for this but I realise this might not be for everyone. The important thing is uniting reflection and engagement as an habitual part of the research process. Patter has some great ideas here about topics and prompts to help get this process started in the early stages.

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**The Unreality of Reality TV: From "After Dark" towards Twitter, Big Data, and "Big Brother" (2017-02-14 15:10)**

The Unreality of Reality TV: From "After Dark" towards Twitter, Big Data, and "Big Brother"
Organised by the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies and Open Media
Fri, March 3, 17:00
309 Regent Street
Boardroom (RS117)
W1B 2HW London

Registration:

High-velocity media, superficial news and sound bite-driven debates are increasingly shaping our public discourse. The Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. election are cases in point. In the age of social media and digital television, what potentials and limits are there for strengthening constructive public debate? What are the roots of the present crisis and what can be done to fight back? Sebastian Cody (Open Media) and Christian Fuchs (University of Westminster) will discuss transformations of television and digital media and how they impact the possibilities for public debate. Sebastian Cody will focus on the technical and historical context as a practitioner; Christian Fuchs will discuss the acceleration of the public sphere and its impacts on society. Alternatives to superficial television are possible. The series "After Dark" – described in the television trade press as defining "the first 10 years of Channel 4, just as "Big Brother" did the second" – ran between 1987 and 2003. Based on principles developed for "Club 2", a debate programme broadcast by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF, "After Dark" was unique in the history of British television. The programme's ground rules of absolute live broadcasting (no editing or delay) and open-ended intimate discussion meant that guests' utterances were uncensorable. Roly Keating, former BBC controller and current Chief Executive of the British Library, described it as "one of the great television talk formats of all time". The subjects discussed ranged widely across national and international news events, while also exploring personal and private matters. As the programme faced challenges from broadcasters, government, the legal system and various vested interests, it was often a source of controversy. Later iterations of 'reality TV' have shaped the current media culture, which is dominated by commercial logic. News and debate are served up as fast-paced entertainment on social media, and big data exacerbates the speed and superficiality of news, undermining possibilities.
for controversy and fruitful communication. Sebastian Cody has been responsible for the production of “After Dark” throughout its history. As CEO of the production company Open Media, he has made many dozens of network television programmes, from game shows to investigative documentaries. In 2010 his company launched an online social history of Britain for the academic community alongside the BFI, BBC, The National Archive and others. He acts as a consultant for companies and NGO’s and has been attached to the University of Oxford since 2001. Christian Fuchs is Professor at the University of Westminster, Director of the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies, and Director of the Communication and Media Research Institute. His research focuses on critical theory of society and the critical study of the media, communication(s), and digital media’s role in society. His most recent publications are the monographs “Critical Theory of Communication” (University of Westminster Press, 2016) and “Social Media: A Critical Introduction” (Sage, 2017; 2nd edition, forthcoming). – Forthcoming conference: The 6th ICTs and Society Conference: Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism [2]http://icts-and-society.net/events/digital-objects-digital-subjects-a-symposium-on-activism-research-critique-in-the-age-of-big-data-capitalism-the-6th-icts-society-conference/ With Antonio Negri, Antoinette Rouvroy, Christian Fuchs, David Chandler, Etienne Turpin, Jack Linchuan Qiu, Jodi Dean, Kylie Jarrett, Orit Halpern, Paolo Gerbaudo


The Sociology of Predatory Publishing (2017-02-15 08:00)

In a recent article on [1]Derivace, Luděk Brož, Tereza Stöckelová and Filip Vostal reflect on the case of Wadim Strielkowski, whose over-enthusiastic game playing was the subject of extensive debate within the Czech academy. There are many factors which have, as a whole, led his prolific rate of publication to be regarded with deep suspicion, such as the self-publication of his monographs, typos in his journal articles, extensive recycling between papers and a continuously rotating cast of co-authors:

Strielkowski, then a junior lecturer at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague, first attracted the attention of colleagues in early 2015, when it was discovered that he had published 17 monographs and more than 60 journal articles in just three years. It is probably not surprising that a number of these texts were published in a rather unconventional way: Strielkowski’s monographs, with one exception, were in fact self-published and self-illustrated, even though each appeared to have been published by [2]the Faculty of Social Sciences. A substantial amount of his articles were published in journals that could be described, following Beall’s terminology, as “[3]potentially, possibly or probably predatory”. Since many of his articles were skilfully placed in dubious journals that were featured in SCOPUS or even in the Web of Science’s databases, they were recognised by the Czech evaluation system as research outputs. As a result, Strielkowski’s employer was awarded the appropriate amount of funding, and Strielkowski himself, [4]according to the Czech media, received bonuses to his salary as a result.


What makes his case interesting is how skilfully these articles were placed. As the authors note, a substantial number

4867
of his articles were placed in journals that could be described as “[6]potentially, possibly or probably predatory” while nonetheless being included in relevant indexes which meant they counted as research outputs for formal evaluation, with all the advantages that entails. Not only was he skilfully navigating the publishing environment to facilitate his own rapid ascent, he made a business out of helping others do the same thing:

In addition to being a prolific author, Strielkowski also happens to be a globetrotting entrepreneur. [7] Through his companies, he has offered courses on how to publish in academic journals, with special emphasis on SCOPUS and the Web of Science. Participants primarily hailed from the countries of the former USSR; if they paid conference fees, they were [8] guaranteed publication of their text(s) in one of the journals that Strielkowski himself (used to) publish and which Beall monitored until January 2017 (such as Czech Journal of Social Sciences, Business and Economics, and International Economics Letters). For those ready to pay €3,000, Strielkowski, referring to himself as “professor” and “[9]Vice-Chancellor”, even offered academic degrees. His Prague University of Social Sciences and Humanities Ltd. offered not only MBAs (apparently without an accreditation in the Czech Republic) and postdoctoral positions one had to pay for, but also a [10] “MAW” degree, which stood for “Master of Academic Writing”.


The case is a fascinating one because it illustrates how metricised evaluation and predatory publishing cannot simply be regarded as imposed from outside, leaving academic victims with no choice but to adapt or be left behind. Strielkowski is an extreme example but his case illustrates how the opportunities these systems create for advancement are drawn upon and engaged with knowingly by scholars, in a way that is always implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) orientated to the others embedded within them.

We do not simply ’internalise’ these imperatives or find ourselves moulded to become ‘neoliberal subjects’. The exercise of agency to be found here is varied, complex and confusing. Denunciations of individual cases, which I don’t think Luděk et al are doing in this case, doesn’t help matters. I’d argue that what often understands itself to be theorisations of such cases, invoking the idea of the neoliberal subject etc, in reality more often represents a thematisation of them.

How do we counter this though? At one point, the authors write of Strielkowski’s papers that “they have hardly any readership to speak of to notice such a statement in the first place”. Similarly, when I read this article, the second thing I looked at after Strielkowski’s personal website was his Google Scholar profile, immediately noting that he has relatively few citations for someone who has published so prolifically, with a majority seeming to be self-citations. I wonder if there is an element of bad faith in finding reassurance in such things, an invocation of readership and citation as a quality threshold, when we know that the systemic problems preclude the reliability of such standards? I wonder if this represents a unacknowledged attempt to evade the vertigo of the accelerated academy:

I feel like I am drowning in knowledge, and the idea of further production is daunting. Libraries and bookstores produce a sense of anxiety: the number of books and journals to read is overwhelming, with tens of thousands more issuing from the presses each day. Moreover, there is no real criterion other than whim for selecting one book or article over another. To dive into one area rather than another becomes a willful act of blindness, when other areas are just as worthwhile and when every topic connects to others in any number of ways. The continual press of new knowledge becomes an invitation to forgetfulness, to lose the forest for the trees.

From Sustainable Knowledge by Robert Frodeman, loc 1257:
We have more room for manoeuvre then we acknowledge. Strielkowski’s game playing represents what Ruth Müller calls [12] anticipatory acceleration taken to an unprecedented extreme: mindlessly speeding up the rate of publication in pursuit of competitive advantage within an overcrowded field. But if [13] Trump academics are in the ascendancy, we’re liable to see more of this. The system is fucked and all the evidence suggests it is becoming more so with each passing year.

We need a honest account of our investments within the system of scholarly communication, building from the basic constraints which the requirements of pursuing an academic career impose. Looking at extreme cases like Strielkowski can help us doing this, by providing prompts to elucidate our assumptions and concerns about scholarly publishing that we might not otherwise feel the need to put into words.

1. https://derivace.wordpress.com/
10. https://derivace.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/puni41.jpg

Laura Servage (2017-05-27 16:42:13)
Love the Frodeman quote. Resonates. Not sure if I follow the final proposition here though: does honesty within constraints mean accepting the constraints? What is it we’re to be honest about? Our varying degrees of complicity in a perverse system?

Mark Carrigan (2017-05-28 16:26:41)
Recognising the nature of that constraint & why we’re liable to continue acting within them, rather than endlessly regurgitating the same ‘critique’ while continuing to act in more or less the same way we always have.
In Platform Capitalism, [1]Nick Srnicek seeks to address what he sees as a profound oversight in the existing literature on digital capitalism. One set of contributions focuses on emerging technologies and their implications for privacy and surveillance but ignores the economic analysis of ownership and profitability. Another set critically analyses the values embodied in corporate behaviour but neglects the broader context of a capitalist system. A further set addresses the ills of the ‘sharing economy’ but fails to situate these in terms of broader economic trends. Finally, there are those which analyse the emerging economic trends in the technology sector but treat them in a way which is decontextualised from wider historical changes.

In contrast, he intends to offer "an economic history of capitalism and digital technology, while recognising the diversity of economic forms and the competitive tensions inherent in the contemporary economy" (loc 155). This involves "abstracting from them as cultural actors defined by the values of the Californian ideology, or as political actors seeking to wield power" (loc 166) and instead simply taking "major tech companies" as "economic actors within a capitalist mode of production". Such an undertaking requires that we distinguish the technology sector from the digital economy. The former is relatively small, employing around 2.5 % of the US labour force and contributing around 6.8 % of the value added by private companies (loc 157). In contrast, the digital economy has taken on a systemic importance that is obscured if we analyse it on a sectoral basis:

we can say that the digital economy refers to those businesses that increasingly rely upon information technology, data, and the internet for their business models. This is an area that cuts across traditional sectors –including manufacturing, services, transportation, mining, and telecommunications –and is in fact becoming essential to much of the economy today. Understood in this way, the digital economy is far more important than a simple sectoral analysis might suggest. In the first place, it appears to be
the most dynamic sector of the contemporary economy—an area from which constant innovation is purportedly emerging and that seems to be guiding economic growth forward. The digital economy appears to be a leading light in an otherwise rather stagnant economic context. Secondly, digital technology is becoming systematically important, much in the same way as finance. As the digital economy is an increasingly pervasive infrastructure for the contemporary economy, its collapse would be economically devastating. Lastly, because of its dynamism, the digital economy is presented as an ideal that can legitimate contemporary capitalism more broadly. The digital economy is becoming a hegemonic model: cities are to become smart, businesses must be disruptive, workers are to become flexible, and governments must be lean and intelligent.

Loc 157-178

His analysis locates the nascent importance of the digital economy against a backdrop of a "long decline in manufacturing probability" across a "sluggish production sector". Digitalisation has been seized upon a set of mechanisms through which these problems might be ameliorated, leading to the growth of the platform as the business model best able to ensure returns from these emerging opportunities (loc 178). This represents a historicisation of the platform, drawing out the linkages between the contemporary platforms which dominate the breathless discourse of 'disruption' and earlier upheavals in capitalism which digitalisation played an (often under-acknowledged) part in. For instance, consider the technological prerequisites which allowed a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, driven by a crisis of overcapacity and overproduction in global markets:

Companies were increasingly told by shareholders and management consultants to cut back to their core competencies, any excess workers being laid off and inventories kept to a minimum. This was mandated and enabled by the rise of increasingly sophisticated supply chain software, as manufacturers would demand and expect supplies to arrive as needed. And there was a move away from the mass production of homogeneous goods and towards increasingly customised goods that responded to consumer demand.

Loc 294

The point is not that technology was the agent of these changes but rather that it facilitated new ways of organising production in time and space. Recognising the political agency involved in the onset of neoliberal 'reforms' shouldn't detract from an appreciation of the role technology played in allowing the reorganisation of production. Historicising the digital economy necessitates that we understand this interplay between digitalisation and financialisation from the outset, something which of course came to the fore with the dot com boom.

Astonishingly, nearly 1 % of US GDP consisted of VC invested in tech companies at the height of the sector in the late 1990s, with 50,000 companies formed and over $256 billion invested in them. This influx of capital facilitated a 'growth before profits' model which is still familiar today, licensed by the expectations of immense wealth to be generated if enough market share was captured in a still hazily envisioned digital economy. This speculative boom led to a vast investment in digital infrastructure through which our contemporary digital economy was able to emerge:

This excitement about the new industry translated into a massive injection of capital into the fixed assets of the internet. While investment in computers and information technology had been going on for decades, the level of investment in the period between 1995 and 2000 remains unprecedented to this day. In 1980 the level of annual investment in computers and peripheral equipment was $ 50.1
billion; by 1990 it had reached $154.6 billion; and at the height of the bubble, in 2000, it reached an
unsurpassed peak of $412.8 billion. 16 This was a global shift as well: in the low-income economies,
telecommunications was the largest sector for foreign direct investment in the 1990s –with over $331
billion invested in it. Companies began spending extraordinary amounts to modernise their computing
infrastructure and, in conjunction with a series of regulatory changes introduced by the US government,
18 this laid the basis for the mainstreaming of the internet in the early years of the new millennium.
Concretely, this investment meant that millions of miles of fibre-optic and submarine cables were
laid out, major advances in software and network design were established, and large investments in
databases and servers were made.

Loc 314-333

Coping with the eventual crash through lowering mortgage rates in turn sowed the seeds of the future housing bubble. The story is one of a continued ‘asset-price Keynesianism’ where interest rate reductions were used to encourage continued rises in asset prices, seeking to encourage investment and consumption in the absence of deficit financed stimulus or any resurgence in the manufacturing sector. This low interest rate environment within the global economy has, argues Srnicek, provided “a key enabling condition for parts of today’s digital economy to arise” (loc 377) by reducing returns on a range of assets and encouraging investors to seek higher yields elsewhere. This is the context within which platforms emerged and were readily able to find vast investment, even in the absence of profitability. But what are platforms?

What are platforms? At the most general level, platforms are digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact. They therefore position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects. More often than not, these platforms also come with a series of tools that enable their users to build their own products, services, and marketplaces. Microsoft’s Windows operating system enables software developers to create applications for it and sell them to consumers; Apple’s App Store and its associated ecosystem (XCode and the iOS SDK) enable developers to build and sell new apps to users; Google’s search engine provides a platform for advertisers and content providers to target people searching for information; and Uber’s taxi app enables drivers and passengers to exchange rides for cash. Rather than having to build a marketplace from the ground up, a platform provides the basic infrastructure to mediate between different groups. This is the key to its advantage over traditional business models when it comes to data, since a platform positions itself between users, and as the ground upon which their activities occur, which thus gives it privileged access to record them.

Loc 596-618

He identifies three key characteristics of platforms which are interconnected:

1. Platforms mediate interaction between groups, providing an epistemic privilege in relation such interactions (and their potential monetisation). They are a mechanism for producing and extracting data from interactions.

2. Platforms are reliant on network effects, such that their value to users grows in line with the number of such users. This leads to a ‘winner-takes-all’ or ‘winner-takes-most’ dynamic. The more a platform grows, the easier it is for it to grow more and the potential value of its epistemic privilege increases in line with this.
Platforms often use cross-subsidisation to encourage more users on to the network, exhibiting a dynamic pricing structure often entailing free products and services because of the gains that can be made elsewhere. This helps encourage more users on to the platform.

The mediating character of platforms means they "gain not only access to more data but also control and governance over the rules of the game" (loc 636). With this comes the challenge of facilitating continued growth within a competitive environment, using cross-subsidisation and leveraging network effects to position oneself as the central platform within a domain of activity. However in spite of these shared characteristics, different types of platform have emerged within different spheres of social life. Srnicek identifies 5 types:

The first type is that of advertising platforms (e.g. Google, Facebook), which extract information on users, undertake a labour of analysis, and then use the products of that process to sell ad space. The second type is that of cloud platforms (e.g. AWS, Salesforce), which own the hardware and software of digital-dependent businesses and are renting them out as needed. The third type is that of industrial platforms (e.g. GE, Siemens), which build the hardware and software necessary to transform traditional manufacturing into internet-connected processes that lower the costs of production and transform goods into services. The fourth type is that of product platforms (e.g. Rolls Royce, Spotify), which generate revenue by using other platforms to transform a traditional good into a service and by collecting rent or subscription fees on them. Finally, the fifth type is that of lean platforms (e.g. Uber, Airbnb), which attempt to reduce their ownership of assets to a minimum and to profit by reducing costs as much as possible.

Much of his subsequent analysis concerns the competitive conditions under which each type of platform operates, as well as how this is shaping the emerging field and platform capitalism as a whole. I don’t agree with all of it but it’s definitely worth reading in full. I understand his core points to be the following:

1. The necessity of ‘data extraction’ has a basis in a longer term crisis of profitability within capitalism. These are, in effect, technical fixes for a systemic deterioration afflicting manufacturing and platforms represent a formalisation of these into a new emergent form.

2. The financial conditions under which this platform economy has been able to emerge were historically specific and should not be assumed to continue indefinitely. The infrastructure through which ‘data extraction’ become technically viable, as well as the emergence of platforms as operating businesses were deeply dependent upon this.

3. Platforms as emergent forms exhibit characteristics which shape competition between them, as well as guiding the unfolding of the digital economy as a whole. The fierce competition between them, the competitive challenges specific to categories of platforms, the dynamics of network effects and the affordances of their cash hoarding are leading to platform isomorphism. They have an inevitable drive towards monopoly, further incentivised by the dynamics of accruing investment, which leaves them orientated towards becoming owners of the infrastructure of society.

The analysis of platform tendencies is probably my favourite part of the book. He talks about expansion of extraction,
positioning as a gatekeeper, convergence of markets and enclosure of ecosystems. These are analysed in the final chapter in some detail and offer a convincing meso-level account of the claimed macro tendency towards monopoly or oligopoly.

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1. https://twitter.com/n_srnck

Lavoro del futuro. Oggi una puntata sul gioco di squadra - Luca De Biase (2017-09-03 13:51:02)


Al Jazeera's 'The Crusades: An Arab Perspective' (2017-02-16 21:36)

by Dr Z.A.

In the West, one of the most decisive battles ever fought is the Battle of Tours, in 732 France. This moment is considered the turning point where Arab expansion into western Europe was forever halted. It is commemorated in books and mythology to this day as the moment Europe was saved.

For the Arab chroniclers, however, this moment is barely mentioned. It was at best a small raid gone wrong. Such is the power of historical perspective.

As someone with an amateur interest in history, I was looking forward to the [1]Al Jazeera documentary "The Crusades: An Arab perspective" for this very reason.

I thought for a moment that I would see an insightful challenge to the traditional modern Western centric view of the Crusades.
Instead what I saw was for the large part a disappointing rehashing of what is a well trodden path albeit with more Arab "talking heads".

Let me explain.

History is ultimately dependent upon one's frame of reference. So when Al Jazeera talked about the Crusades, so the western narrative is referenced by certain events. That is the first crusade and the conquest of Jerusalem, Richard the Lionheart and Saladin, the sacking of Constantinople and Baibars and the final Mamluk push that recaptured the coast of Palestine from the Crusaders.

The documentary essentially repeated all those events in its description (only partly saved by the final episode’s insight) but by adding a few stories from the Arab perspective and including a few Arab analysts.

What they were saying in essence was that they agree with this western narrative of what is important in that era, but disagree with which talking heads they used and which modern parallels they wishes to invoke.

What they should have done was to emphasise how the Crusades were seen as a major but peripheral conflict in the Muslim world of that era. What was bigger was the rivalry between the Turkish dynasties and the Fatmids, how the Mongol threat was seen as more existential, how barely any of the Crusader leaders registered in Arab chronicles accounts, also how the last calls for Crusades were done against the Ottoman Turks as late as the 17th century. More importantly the truth was that the Crusades were for forgotten for centuries by both sides.

The West's rediscovery of it was used to boast their empire's historical roots. A vague and difficult point to prove in reality.

What should have happened amongst Muslim and Arab historians is that the Crusades longer term impact should've been shown, but the focus should have been about the broader story of Muslim history.

With this programme, all that we saw in the end was the same story with a different storyteller and a different set of biases.

Dr Z.A. is a GP, and a passionate amateur Historian, with a BA in Islamic History and a Masters in International Relations.


As an amateur student of medieval history, I really enjoyed it. You’re right, it could have been a LOT more, but with the current offerings on the topic available to the English speaking world, this was pretty refreshing. You’re correct that it’s just different storytellers and biases, but as someone who has heard this story so many time, I appreciate that we’re moving towards a more comprehensive understanding of the events of the crusades. I study medieval history in order to recreate it in the SCA. I found this documentary very illuminating. As our society grows we have many Arab personas in our ranks, as well as Eastern Orthodox personas. Documentaries like these will help us better understand how those cultures interacted and how our various personas could feel about each other. I thought it was very interesting that they shied away from portraying the really shocking things Latin crusaders may have engaged in, including cannibalizing fallen enemies. Those things make it into many of the ‘English-speakers for English-speakers’ programs, so their absence was noticeable I feel like, for all the flaws, I’m still
hungry for the dialogue and appreciative that it’s starting to take shape. Especially in light of current events, I think we could all use better understanding of the past.

Ravi Mathew (2018-01-12 08:54:27)
It’s a pretty shoddy documentary which doesn’t mention battles that the Muslim sources have also mentioned. Jaffa, Arsuf & Dorylaeum aren’t mentioned at all. The armor and characterisation are utterly amateurish.

Creative Dark Matter Rising? Struggling Over the Future of Alternative Cultural Spaces in the City of Geneva (2017-02-16 22:02)

by Robert Hollands

When I recently mentioned to some friends that I was going to Geneva, Switzerland to conduct some sociological research into alternative cultural spaces, most shook their heads in disbelief. ‘All I think of when I hear the word Geneva’, one of them exclaimed, ‘is rich people, watch-making, non-tax paying corporations, and the Red Cross’. I think this is probably a fairly popular stereotypical view of the city. However, underneath its multinational headquarters and gentrified ‘picture postcard’ exterior, lies an impressive counter-cultural legacy. Once described as the most squatted city in Europe in the mid-90s, Geneva is currently in the midst of a battle to retain its autonomous cultural heritage, and in doing so, is simultaneously challenging the dominant neo-liberal urban development model.

From nightlife to declining alternative cultural spaces

I initially encountered the city of Geneva in 2011 when I was asked to give a keynote presentation on my research into nightlife in the UK. It was at a high profile event, sponsored by the department of culture, entitled ‘Etats Généraux de la Nuit’ (which translates as ‘General State of the Night’). Nightlife had become a significant political issue in 2010 with the production of an important research report ‘Journey to the End of the Night’ which suggested, amongst other things, a lack of diverse and affordable nightlife venues in the city. Street protests also erupted when the closure of two mainstream nightclubs, over supposed health and safety issues, led to one of Geneva’s alternative cultural venues, L’Usine, to go on strike in response to the overcrowding of its premises. Over the course of two weekends, these ‘night strikes’, involving around 5000 young people, took the form of carnivalesque late night street parties, complete with sound systems, dancing and protest banners, with the aim of demanding more varied and affordable nightlife venues. Subsequently, I, together with some activist-colleagues from Geneva,[3] have written a forthcoming book chapter, trying to theorise and make sense of these events through ideas associated with urban social movements.

During this time, I also learned a lot about Geneva’s impressive counter-cultural history and the ongoing struggles of artists, musicians, and alternative cultural organisations to survive in the city. This work linked up with my new research project entitled ‘Urban Cultural Movements and the Struggle for Alternative Creative Space’, a two-year Major Research Fellowship funded by the Leverhulme Trust, whose aim is to see how alternative cultural production can begin to challenge how we live, work and play in the neo-liberal city. The term ‘alternative’ remains a difficult concept to define, due to its pliability and tendency to get incorporated into the mainstream. I use it here to signal cultural forms that attempt to remain autonomous and self-managed, and which oppose or challenge the market-based domination of culture (below I use the term interchangeably with ‘autonomous’ and ‘independent’ cultural producers).

Geneva forms an excellent case study for such research. For instance, in 1995, it was a heavily squatted city, with an estimated 120 buildings occupied by some 2800 inhabitants. In the last twenty years, however, its vibrant
artistic counterculture, like many other global cities, has been challenged by corporate and entrepreneurial urban development, including soaring property prices-rents, increased gentrification of cultural life, and draconian legislation preventing the illegal occupation of buildings. Iconic buildings like Artamis (literally meaning 'friends of art'), an emblematic occupied industrial space that was home to over 200 artist/ artisans, and Rhino, primarily a housing squat opened in 1989 (although it also provided space for independent cinema, music, and a bar and restaurant), were forced to close, despite significant protests, in 2008 and 2007 respectively.

Some resisters began to talk of the 'cultural sterilisation' of alternative Geneva. In many cities, property-led urban speculation and housing shortages may have signalled the end of the autonomous cultural sector altogether as it relies heavily on the availability of unused buildings. However, a number of factors have mitigated against this happening in the city. First, it appears that numerous state and city councillors either were former squatters or were people who understood the contribution such spaces made to the city, in terms of cultural activities and affordability, diversity, and accessibility. Second, the Genevan state appears wealthy enough not to be forced to sell off all its public assets to 'balance the books', unlike Greece, Spain, the UK, and even Germany to some extent. It has meant that, in some cases, public buildings and land have not necessarily been auctioned off to the highest private bidder or developer, but rather at least can be considered as spaces for local independent cultural producers. Third, many artists and cultural actors have maintained squatting traditions like self-management (autogestion as it’s referred to in Switzerland) and collective decision-making within their organisation, and have mostly been in solidarity with one another when conflictual issues have arisen (see below for example). Finally, through a combination of its own resistant ethos (for example, most venues and festivals seem relatively immune to private sponsorship), and due to the city of Geneva’s lack of interest, or need, to target bohemian types of tourism (like Berlin does), the alternative cultural sector has been relative immune to incorporation into urban branding strategies.

**Alternative Geneva fights back**

Returning to the city four years later, it was evident that there were new seeds of dissent and organisation
happening amongst the autonomous cultural sector. For example, I was pleasantly surprised to see that a handy map of alternative cultural spaces in Geneva had been produced on the occasion of the first [4]Biennial of Independent Art Spaces (BIG), entitled 'Carte Des Lieux Culturels Independants A Geneve' - complete with a short write up of forty-four venues across the city. How many cities its size (population 200,000) can boast this array of alternative places? I was also lucky enough to be able to visit some of those spaces and talk to various people in this movement, and what I found, was indeed, quite inspiring.

For example, I spent a day in Theatre du Galpon (which was formally housed in the squat Artamis), a wonderful (but apparently temporary) theatre space constructed in a wooded area of natural beauty. They, in conjunction with a new group of activists/artists/academics calling themselves G.R.E.C. (ironically translated as Greece, but standing for Groupe de Reflexion sur l'Economie de la Culture or Think Tank on the Economy of Culture), were hosting a debate about the future of alternative cultural space in the city. Some two-hundred and fifty people showed up to participate in a four-hour debate. It included an inspiring presentation by the Berlin-based collective Stadt von Unten (translated as City From Below), [5]a group of radical architects, artists, tenant and community groups, who recently successfully blocked a gentrified urban development in Kreuzberg. The panel consisted of an array of speakers such as numerous state politicians in urban development and culture planning, artists, academics, and ex-squatters. [6]While it was reported in the press that the politicians in attendance were generally supportive of the cause, there was, in fact, quite a 'lively' debate around who should be responsible for making the case for more alternative space, and whether there really was the political will to support such demands.
The evening also included its own ‘mini-protest’ over who was responsible for, and how to resolve, a new political conflict over alcohol and food licensing affecting the alternative sector. Not surprisingly, L’Usine was again at the sharp end of this protest. In response to State demands that they comply with licensing laws by having an alcohol license for each of the different venues within the cultural centre (including the theatre, cinema, nightclub and bar), L’Usine has stood firm by striking once again, this time concerning the ‘over-regulation’ of the alternative sector. They argue that as a collective of collectives, they should only be required to have one alcohol license, and that it is the collective, not named individuals, that should be held responsible for when the terms of the licence are breeched. While in private I heard differing views about the situation from other independent cultural producers, in public all were in solidarity with L’Usine’s stance as it represented a potential threat to the entire alternative sector. In an interview with one of their employees, it was clear that the dispute was taking its toll on people working in alternative cultural venues; they admitted they might have to leave the sector in the future because ‘we spend more time fighting with the state to comply with bureaucratic regulations, then we do creating an alternative cultural experience’.
In addition to Theatre du Galpon and L’Usine, I also was able to visit two other venues in the city. One was the intriguingly titled Embassy of Foreign Artists, a lovely state-funded space for artists outside of the country to experience a residency in Geneva, and Le Velodrome, a public housing block with artistic and industrial spaces in the basement of the building. Both spaces represent some of the other challenges facing the alternative cultural sector – namely the temporary nature of the spaces and the contradiction of being either state-funded or state dependent (in terms of space granted). For instance, the future of the Embassy was clearly dependent on future funding and whether the state might require the building for some other purpose. Additionally, an artist at Le Velodrome said to me that they might just be viewed simply as ‘state tenants rather than alternative cultural producers’, despite the fact that this cultural space was run largely on a self-managed basis. Both places reveal the problem of how to create an enduring and lasting autonomous cultural infrastructure when this sector is unable to have permanent control or ownership of their premises.

Artistic ‘dark matter’ and urban creative struggles

These kinds of debates and issues are currently being mooted academically in fields like Geography, Sociology, and Cultural Studies, particularly in discussions around the political role cultural producers might play in the re-making of urban space. For instance, the well-known [7]Marxist Geographer David Harvey, in his book Rebel Cities, has argued that the contradictions of the current neo-liberal city for the artistic community means that the struggle to distinguish places through specific reference to ‘symbolic forms of culture’ can open up new spaces for alternative activities and political struggle. He suggests that: ‘...there are plenty of dissident sub-currents and discontents to be detected among cultural producers’ (p. 89).

Similarly, [8]Margit Mayer in a seminal article in 2013 ‘First World Urban Activism’ has suggestively written that the current struggle over the creative city, and who is included in it, is helping to form significant new movements and sites of protest. These, in combination with anti-austerity movements, will likely form an important part
of future urban struggles. Finally, I have been intrigued by a book I have recently come across by Gregory Sholette, in which he argues that ‘creative dark matter’ (essentially the activities of the alternative sector) that undergirds the art world, is beginning to ‘seep out’ of its historically hidden archive. He calls for artists (via Walter Benjamin) to not only create, but to begin to transform ‘...the very means of their artistic production’ itself (p. 5). For me, that includes challenging the current urban fabric and the way in which our current capitalist cities do not work well for many cultural producers.

So, despite the problems and dilemmas faced by alternative cultural producers in Geneva, I was heartened by the sheer talent and tenacity of this ‘post-squat’ movement. Despite the odds, their activities and fighting spirit gives one pause for hope for the beginnings of a different kind of city to the corporate neo-liberal model that appears to be dominant everywhere. Let us hope that ten years from now, that my friend, and many others, will know Geneva as a vibrant city of alternative urban culture, rather than just a repository for global capital and one of the most expensive cities in the world.

Robert Hollands is a Professor of Sociology at Newcastle University, and his most recent research project is on urban cultural movements and the struggle for alternative creative space in cities.

3. http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/staff/profile/robert.hollands#tab_profile

The Eschatology of Technology (2017-02-17 08:00)

In the last couple of days, I’ve been reading this book of talks by the ed-tech writer Audrey Watters. There are many things to recommend about it but the one that interests me most is its focus on the narrative of innovation. Perhaps reflecting her academic background in folklore, her interpretations of the mythical character of the stories that circulate within technology are really acute. These are forms of story-telling which urgently need to be identified and critiqued. As she writes on loc 1969:

Ed-tech now, particularly that which is intertwined with venture capital, is boosted by a powerful forms of storytelling: a disruptive innovation mythology, entrepreneurs’ hagiography, design fiction, fantasy. A fantasy that wants to extend its reach into the material world. Society has been handed a map, if you will, by the technology industry in which we are shown how these brave ed-tech explorers have and will
conquer and carve up virtual and physical space. Fantasy. We are warned of the dragons in dangerous places, the unexplored places, the over explored places, the stagnant, the lands of outmoded ideas—all the places where we should no longer venture. Hic Sunt Dracones. There be dragons.

We can see expressions of this when reading and listening to corporate speeches within the sector. Leaders of technology firms tell stories about the battles they fought, how they rallied their troops and sought to smite their enemies. But these are the more individualised narratives. On loc 951, Watters discusses the narratives of social transformation in which technology and its putative capacity for ‘innovation’ and ‘disruption’ has become embedded:

What interests me are the stories that the businesses tell about “disruptive innovation” because this has become a near sacred story to the tech sector. It’s a story of the coming apocalypse—destruction and transformation and redemption, brought to you by technology. Again, these cultural remnants of an older meaning of “innovation,” a process of transformation or renewal that has religious implications. Perhaps the salvation. Perhaps deception by false prophets. The Battles of the End Times, and you must decide which side you’re on.

Should the sociology of religion treat this seriously as a religious form that’s arisen amongst a particular powerful group within extremely specific conditions? As Emilie Whitaker pointed out in a recent essay for The Sociological Review, “there is significant scope to explore the being/becoming of the transhumanist” through ethnographic and anthropological means. Perhaps these represent the leading edge of a broader-based religious form arising under nascent digital capitalism. What Audrey Watters writes on loc 975 could easily be the starting-point for an empirical study:

The structure to many of these narratives about disruptive innovation is well-known and oft-told, echoed in tales of both a religious and secular sort: Doom. Suffering. Change. Then paradise. People do love the “end of the world as we know it” stories, for reasons that have to do with both the horrors of the now and the promise of a better future. Many cultures—and Silicon Valley is, despite its embrace of science and technology, no different here—tell a story that predicts some sort of cataclysmic event that will bring about a radical cultural (economic, political) transformation and, perhaps eventually for some folks at least, some sort of salvation. The Book of Revelations. The Mayan Calendar. The Shakers. The Ghost Dance. Nuclear holocaust. Skynet. The Singularity.


Steve Fuller (2017-02-24 19:38:21)
In the last few weeks, I’ve written a few times about the epistemological questions posed by post-democracy. This notion put forward by Colin Crouch sees transitions within mature democracies as involving a hollowing out of democratic structures rather than a dramatic shift to non-democracy. As he described it in a [1]recent interview I did with him:

I defined post-democracy as a situation where all the institutions of democracy – elections, changes of government, free debate, rule of law – continue, but they become a charade, because democratic institutions have been surpassed as major decision-making entities by small groups of financial and political elites. I argued, not that we had reached such a situation in most western countries – there is far too much lively politics for that – but that we were on the road towards it.

This runs contrary to many folk theories of democracy’s death, tending as they do to associate the end of democracy with a sudden seizure of power. It would be foolish to deny this as a possibility, not least of all because political scientists have ably theorised this as ‘authoritarian reversion’:

We think that comparative experience demonstrates that there are two distinct forms of backsliding, each with its own mechanisms and modal end-states. We call these authoritarian reversion and constitutional retrogression. The basic difference between reversion and retrogression as we use the terms is how fast and how far backsliding goes. Authoritarian reversion is a wholesale, rapid collapse into authoritarianism. Such a wholesale movement away from democracy most often occurs through the mechanism of a military coup d’état or via the use of emergency powers.

[2]https://balkin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/what-is-shadow-on-democracy.html ?m=1

One of the reasons conversations about post-democracy have entered the mainstream is the number of unfolding cases we can see at present. The authors of the aforementioned blog post cite Hungary and Poland but we could just as easily point to Brazil or Turkey:

Examples of retrogression abound. In both Hungary and Poland, for example, elected governments have recently hastened to enact a suite of legal and institutional changes that simultaneously squeeze out electoral competition, undermine liberal rights of democratic participation, and emasculate legal stability and predictability. In Venezuela between 1999 and 2013, the regime established by Hugo Chávez has aggregated executive power, limited political opposition, attacked academia, and stifled independent
media. Crucially, across these examples and others, democratic decay is catalyzed incrementally and under the "mask of law": It is a death by a thousand cuts, rather than the clean slice of the coup maker.

The extent to which our democratic imaginary is dominated by examples of such authoritarian reversion works to squeeze out constitutional regression. This is further compounded by what I've argued are pronounced tendencies in how we conceive of social continuity:

1. We tend towards a generic assumption of the durability of social structures.
2. We tend even more strongly towards a generic assumption of the durability of social formations (i.e. assemblages of social structures)
3. We tend to miss the origins of social formations in the intended and unintended consequences of deliberate action, as well as the interactions between them.
4. We tend to reason inductively and, in doing so, miss the possibility that the future will be radically distinct from the past.
5. Even if we deny it intellectually, we tend towards exceptionalism in how we see social formations which are deeply familiar to us.

What capacity we have to recognise the possibility of large scale change reduces it epochal transitions. We have one social formation then we have another, with a detailed conception of the process of change being subsumed into the (inflated sense of the) agency of some macro-actor whose machinations account for the real or imagined transition. This is why a gradual process of retrogression struggles to register at the level of political experience:

Retrogression, on the other hand, is a more subtle and insidious process. It involves a more incremental, but still ultimately substantial, decay in the three basic predicates of democracy, namely competitive elections, liberal rights to speech and association, and the rule of law necessary for democratic choice to thrive.

One of our core claims is that scholars have largely focused on the possibility of swift autocratic reversions such as a coup d'etat (as in Thailand, Mali, and Mauritania) or via the use of emergency powers (most famously, in Weimar Germany). But we think that threat of constitutional retrogression—a more insidious form of institutional erosion—is more substantial.

The threat is indeed more substantial and our awareness of it is limited by many factors. But some of these, I wish argue, should be understood as epistemological. A process of this sort is harder to conceive of because many of the
ways in which we tend to think of social change militate against it.

What I have written so far is prospective, concerning how we imaginatively orientate ourselves to a future possibility. But the same issue confronts attempts to conceive of what is ongoing because such a retrogression is, as these authors describe it, “a death by a thousand cuts, rather than the clean slice of the coup maker”:

Each of the individual changes may be innocuous (or even) defensible in isolation. But a sufficient quantity of even incremental derogations from the democratic baseline, in our view, can precipitate a qualitative change that merits a shift in regime classification. Understanding where, how, and whether that happens in the United States, we think, is furthered by a close study of experience of other countries.

A sufficient quantity of isolated occurrences across the system can cumulatively constitute a qualitative change in the system itself. Democracy can unravel around us, without any grand announcements of its death. Recognising the epistemological obstacles to acknowledging this unraveling can help us appreciate the urgency of the situation we are beginning to face.

2. https://balkin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/what-is-shadow-on-democracy.html?m=1
3. https://balkin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/what-is-shadow-on-democracy.html?m=1
4. https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/markcarrigan.net/2014/03/20/the-epistemology-of-civilizational-collapse/amp/?client=safari
5. https://balkin.blogspot.co.uk/2017/01/what-is-shadow-on-democracy.html?m=1

The Banal Reality of Democracy’s Death (2017-02-19 08:00)

There are two issues which have long fascinated me that seem more salient with each passing day. Our [1]struggle to conceptualise long term social change from within (particularly the [2]possibility of civilisational collapse) and the [3]transition away from democratic government. Cinematic spectacle dominates the imaginary through we conceive of either, whether this is our imagery of what a collapsed social order would look like or our bleak authoritarian dystopias. As Thomas Pepinsky observes in this [4]excellent article:

The mental image that most Americans harbor of what actual authoritarianism looks like is fantastical and cartoonish. This vision has jackbooted thugs, all-powerful elites acting with impunity, poverty and desperate hardship for everyone else, strict controls on political expression and mobilization, and a dictator who spends his time ordering the murder or disappearance of his opponents using an effective and wholly compliant security apparatus. This image of authoritarianism comes from the popular media (dictators in movies are never constrained by anything but open insurrection), from American mythmaking about the Founding (free men throwing off the yoke of British tyranny), and from a kind of “imaginary othering” in which the opposite of democracy is the absence of everything that characterizes the one democracy that one knows.

Our images of collapse are perhaps no more veridical. We imagine post-apocalyptic scenarios where we entirely descend into chaos while stuck on an earth we have ruined. Or finding salvation through technology in an escape to space. But as Peter Frase argues in Four Futures, the substantive questions posed by crises of this severity are much more complex. From loc 1103:

The real question is not whether human civilization can survive ecological crises, but whether all of us can survive it together, in some reasonably egalitarian way. Although the extinction of humanity as a result of climate change is possible, it is highly unlikely. Only somewhat more plausible is the collapse of society and a return to some kind of premodern new Dark Ages. Maintaining a complex, technologically advanced society no doubt requires a large number of people. But it does not necessarily require all 7 billion of us, and the premise of this book is that the number of people required is on the decline because of the technical developments outlined in Chapter 1.

Our social imaginaries of crisis and collapse are depoliticising. They obscure questions of distribution, interest and power. They embody what the late Mark Fisher called capitalist realism: a putatively gritty look at the ‘reality’ of a situation, real or imagined, which in actual fact mythologises the system within which this representation is constructed. This is perhaps not surprising because much of the explosion of social representation has taken place roughly alongside the onset of post-democracy. We’re now seeing a deepening of the post-democratic tendency at a time of social crisis. This is why it’s crucial that we begin to think more deeply about how we represent crisis and the implications this has for our politics.

One way of doing this is to look at examples of systemic change that are presently taking place. Owen Jones has an excellent (in a depressing way) report from time he’s spent in Turkey recently:

Turkey’s regime is fast degenerating into outright dictatorship, emboldened by the imminent ascent of Donald Trump to the most powerful position on Earth. I spent last week with Turkey’s beleaguered opposition parties, newspapers and activists. Their courage is inspiring, their plight distressing.

Last July an attempted military coup failed to dislodge the autocratic president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The backlash was swift. As Human Rights Watch reported, the regime took advantage of the moment “to crack down on human rights and dismantle basic democratic safeguards”. More than 120,000 Turks have been sacked, nearly 90,000 detained, and more than 40,000 have been arrested, 144 of them journalists. Turkey is a world leader in jailing media workers, with some 160 outlets closed.

The human rights situation is appalling. Those journalists and opposition activists not arrested are harassed en masse. The opposition is accused of terrorist links and subject to furious marginalisation. It’s becoming a crime to ‘insult’ the President. And something akin to an enabling act is on its way. As Jones goes on to argue, there are obvious affinities to other national contexts:

The west is largely silent. And Erdoğan is triumphalist. Last July Trump praised Erdoğan for “turning it around” after the attempted coup. And Erdoğan cheered Trump’s car-crash press conference
last week: Trump, who told a CNN reporter that the organisation he worked for produced fake news, had – according to Erdoğan – put the reporter "in his place" because media organisations such as CNN "undermine national unity".

Turkey’s fragile democracy is being bled to death. It is dusk for democracy in Poland and Hungary too, as populist rightwing governments keep the superficial trappings of democracy for appearance’s sake but hollow it out in practice. Now that the demagogue Trump is about to become the world’s most powerful man, the authoritarians believe history is on their side.

Turkey is a warning: democracy is precious but fragile. It underlines how rights and freedoms are often won at great cost and sacrifice but can be stripped away by regimes exploiting national crises. The danger is that Turkey won’t be an exception, but a template of how to rid countries of democracy. That is reason enough to stand by Turkey. Who knows which country could be next?

But how seriously do we take that possibility? We need to be careful of what Cory Robin describes as the ‘politics of fear’ reaching the left: “a politics that is grounded on fear, that takes inspiration and meaning from fear, that sees in fear a wealth of experience and a layer of profundity that cannot be found in other experience”. Such a politics of fear denies agency as well. The point is not that these changes are inexorable but that the window of opportunity, given the prevailing balance of forces, might be contracting precipitously as darkness looms on the horizon. If we conflate non-democracy with totalitarianism, we’re liable to entrench this lack of sensitivity to the possibilities now ahead of us. The reality of Democracy’s death would be banal for the majority, at least most of the time:

The reality is that everyday life under the kinds of authoritarianism that exist today is very familiar to most Americans. You go to work, you eat your lunch, you go home to your family. There are schools and businesses, and some people “make it” through hard work and luck. Most people worry about making sure their kids get into good schools. The military is in the barracks, and the police mostly investigate crimes and solve cases. There is political dissent, if rarely open protest, but in general people are free to complain to one another. There are even elections. This is Malaysia, and many countries like it.

Everyday life in the modern authoritarian regime is, in this sense, boring and tolerable. It is not outrageous. Most critics, even vocal ones, are not going to be murdered, as Anna Politkovskaya was in Russia; they are going to be frustrated. Most not-vervocal critics will live their lives completely unmolested by the security forces. They will enjoy it when the trains run on time, blame the government when they do not, gripe about their taxes, and save for vacation. Elections, when they happen, will serve the "anesthetic function" that Philippe Schmitter attributed — in the greatly underappreciated 1978 volume Elections without Choice — to elections in Portugal under Salazar.

The point is that, as Pepinsky puts it, “Life under authoritarian rule in such situations looks a lot like life in a democracy”. The sooner we realise that, the easier it is to acknowledge that people can tolerate non-democracy because democratic governance can become a low priority. This has important implications for our political orientation to the apparent fragility of democratic structures, as Pepinsky argues in the culmination of his essay:
It is possible to read what I've written here as a defense of authoritarianism, or as a dismissal of democracy. But my message is the exact opposite. The fantasy of authoritarianism distracts Americans from the mundane ways in which the mechanisms of political competition and checks and balances can erode. Democracy has not survived because the alternatives are acutely horrible, and if it ends, it will not end in a bang.

It is more likely that democracy ends with a whimper, when the case for supporting it — the case, that is, for everyday democracy — is no longer compelling.


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7. http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49124/1/__Libfile_repository_Content_LSE%20EUROPP_2013_February%202013_TO_DO_blogs_lse.ac.uk-Five_minutes_with_Colin_Crouch_A_postdemoc
18. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/18/the-guardian-view-on-polands-turn-to-the-right-europe-is-correct-to-be-concerned
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4888
CfP: Forced Migrants in Higher Education (2017-02-20 08:00)

Please distribute in your networks

Forced Migrants in Higher Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Visibility and Participation

A one day conference on 6th September 2017 at The University of Warwick, UK

With increasing attention being paid to refugee reception, especially within Europe in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis, higher education institutions around the world have been turning their attention to the contribution that they might make to welcoming and supporting sanctuary seekers. The past two years have consequently seen a proliferation of 'sanctuary scholarships', and in turn researchers have started to turn their attention to the experiences of forced migrants in higher education as well as institutional responses to the refugee challenge. This one day conference at the University of Warwick, part of the annual Article 26 conference, will bring together researchers working in this burgeoning field to present and discuss new work on asylum seekers and refugees in higher education. To submit an abstract please send a 200 word (max) abstract plus a short bio to Rebecca Murray ([1]remurray1@sheffield.ac.uk) by March 1st 2017. Topics of interest may include, but are not limited to:

- The experiences of asylum seekers and refugees in higher education institutions in different host country contexts

- Institutional responses to the refugee challenge –are they adequate to the task?

- Universities of Sanctuary

- Sanctuary scholarships, widening participation and broadening access

- Hospitality and cultures of welcome

- Xenophobia, racism and feeling unwelcome on campus

- Immigration status and the experience of deportability while studying at university

The Article 26 conference will cover 3 days 4th-6th September 2017. Day one will be for sanctuary scholars to get together and discuss the challenges that they face at university, as well as take part in training workshops focussed on their needs; day two will be for administrators supporting sanctuary scholars and will be focussed on the particular challenges that they face; day three will be an academic conference where research expertise in this area will be shared. This call for papers it intended as an invitation for researchers to attend day 3 only. The fee for this one day conference will be £50. Information on the location of Warwick University can be found here:[2]http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/. More information will follow on organisational arrangements and how to book your place at the conference. In the meantime, do contact Lucy Mayblin ([3]l.mayblin@warwick.ac.uk) at the University of Warwick with any logistical questions.

1. remurray1@sheffield.ac.uk
2. http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/visiting/directions/
3. l.mayblin@warwick.ac.uk
The Founder (2017-02-20 10:18)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX2uz2XYkbo

The Founder tells the story of Ray Kroc, the driven yet craven man who was the first owner of McDonalds. Not the founder, the first owner. The distinction is a crucial one and the plot of the film hinges on how it became possible for Kroc to be one but my the other. While side stepping the question of whether a historically accurate description can constitute a spoiler, I don’t want to ruin the plot of the film. Suffice to say, it revolves around the relationship between the dour though respectable McDonald brothers and the aggressively upwardly mobile Kroc who eventually elbows them out. He neither invents nor builds anything. The innovations are all theirs, from the abolition of at-car service to the carnivorous choreography of the burger assembly line. Yet it is Kroc who initiates the franchising system, bringing about a McDonalds in every state while getting rich off the speedee system developed by the two brothers.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSduLFWWnJQ

It’s in this way that The Founder is a film of the moment, a dark fable about the triumph of aggression and acquisitiveness over creativity and graft. It would have been easy to play the McDonalds brother for comic effect, reducing them to superficial anachronisms to be pushed around by the aspirational Kroc on his trajectory to being a man of the future America. But the portrayal of them is complex and multifaceted, even if it is perhaps too prone to positioning them in a way which avoids engaging with the complexities inherent in the labour relations of capitalism. Small business owners are still nonetheless business owners, even when they’re being cast in a narrative of opposition against the coming corruption that Kroc represents.

It would also have been too easy to cast them as forerunners of rationalisation, initiating a process which it took the over-weening ambition of Kroc to bring to fruition. But the reality is more complex, with their commitment to their initial project being a moral one: a commitment to rationalist choreography, the excellence that becomes possible through careful practice of a collective activity until it is as elaborately routinised as can possibly be. The reality is mundane, involving stop watches and clipboards. But they believe in what they are doing. Unlike Croc who merely sees it as a route away from his own inadequacies, an escape from the turgid rhythms of life as a traveling salesman and the possibility to win the esteem he has always craved.

It’s this representation of upwards mobility that I found really powerful. A willingness to dispense with everyone and everything on the way to the top. His job, his collaborators and his wife are all pieces of furniture to be cast off when attempting to rearrange them has grown tiresome. Slights and insults are fuel to this fire, underscoring the promise that one day he will have accumulated enough power and status to show everyone. One day no one will ever mock or deride him again. It’s a fragile self, driven by what the psychoanalyst and social theorist Ian Craib describes as fantasies of omnipotence: the inevitable disappointments of life do not give cause for reflection but rather fuels the drive towards accumulation. This self denies limits, it denies boundaries, it denies reality. All that ultimately exists is ‘I’ and woe betide those insubstantial players upon the stage of the world which happens to get in its way.

4890
The Unreality of Reality TV: From "After Dark" towards Twitter, Big Data, and "Big Brother" (2017-02-21 08:00)

The Unreality of Reality TV: From "After Dark" towards Twitter, Big Data, and "Big Brother"
Organised by the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies and Open Media
Fri, March 3, 17:00
309 Regent Street
Boardroom (RS117)
W1B 2HW London

Registration:

High-velocity media, superficial news and sound bite-driven debates are increasingly shaping our public discourse. The Brexit referendum and the 2016 U.S. election are cases in point. In the age of social media and digital television, what potentials and limits are there for strengthening constructive public debate? What are the roots of the present crisis and what can be done to fight back? Sebastian Cody (Open Media) and Christian Fuchs (University of Westminster) will discuss transformations of television and digital media and how they impact the possibilities for public debate. Sebastian Cody will focus on the technical and historical context as a practitioner; Christian Fuchs will discuss the acceleration of the public sphere and its impacts on society. Alternatives to superficial television are possible. The series "After Dark" – described in the television trade press as defining "the first 10 years of Channel 4, just as "Big Brother" did the second" – ran between 1987 and 2003. Based on principles developed for "Club 2", a debate programme broadcast by the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF, "After Dark" was unique in the history of British television. The programme's ground rules of absolute live broadcasting (no editing or delay) and open-ended intimate discussion meant that guests’ utterances were uncensorable. Roly Keating, former BBC controller and current Chief Executive of the British Library, described it as "one of the great television talk formats of all time". The subjects discussed ranged widely across national and international news events, while also exploring personal and private matters. As the programme faced challenges from broadcasters, government, the legal system and various vested interests, it was often a source of controversy. Later iterations of 'reality TV' have shaped the current media culture, which is dominated by commercial logic. News and debate are served up as fast-paced entertainment on social media, and big data exacerbates the speed and superficiality of news, undermining possibilities for controversy and fruitful communication. Sebastian Cody has been responsible for the production of "After Dark" throughout its history. As CEO of the production company Open Media, he has made many dozens of network television programmes, from game shows to investigative documentaries. In 2010 his company launched an online social history of Britain for the academic community alongside the BFI, BBC, The National Archive and others. He acts as a consultant for companies and NGO's and has been attached to the University of Oxford since 2001. Christian Fuchs is Professor at the University of Westminster, Director of the Westminster Institute for Advanced Studies, and Director of the Communication and Media Research Institute. His research focuses on critical theory of society and the critical study of the media, communication(s), and digital media's role in society. His most recent publications are the monographs “Critical Theory of Communication” (University of Westminster Press, 2016) and "Social Media: A Critical Introduction" (Sage, 2017; 2nd edition, forthcoming). – Forthcoming conference: The 6th ICTs and Society Conference: Digital Objects, Digital Subjects: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Activism, Research & Critique in the Age of Big Data Capitalism [2]http://icts-and-society.net/events/digital-objects-digital-subjects-a-symposium-on-activism-research-critique-in-the-age-of-big-data-capitalism-the-6th-icts-society-conference/ With Antonio Negri, Antoinette Rouvroy, Christian Fuchs, David Chandler, Etienne Turpin, Jack Linchuan Qiu, Jodi Dean, Kylie Jarrett, Orit Halpern, Paolo Gerbaudo

Migration and Crisis in Europe Special Issue - Last Call for Papers (2017-02-22 08:00)

Sociology 2018 Special Issue — Last Call for Submissions!

Sociology’s 2018 special issue will be on the theme of Migration and Crisis in Europe. The issue will be guest edited by Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna, both at Middlesex University, UK and Elena Vacchelli, University of Greenwich, UK.

The editors are currently calling for papers to be submitted to the issue and relevant topics might include the following areas:

- Response of migrants and migrant organisations to the economic crisis.
- New forms of labour mobility and the transformation of migrant labour markets.
- Border struggles, migration solidarity movements and/or anti-migration politics in light of the current ‘humanitarian crisis’.
- Migration and social reproduction in a context of economic crisis and welfare restructuring.
- Interpreting the transformation of EU migration and border management through the perspective of crisis.
- Changing internal and external borders in the light of current migratory flows.
- The politics of humanitarianism and/or securitization.

For more information on the aims and scope of the special issue, please see the full call for papers [1]on the BSA website. To submit your article please visit: [2]http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/soc. The submission deadline is 13 March 2017.

For any queries regarding the special issue, please contact:
Nick Dines ([3]nick.dines@uniroma3.it)
Nicola Montagna ([4]n.montagna@mdx.ac.uk)
Elena Vacchelli ([5]E.Vacchelli@gre.ac.uk).

1. https://britsoc.co.uk/opportunities/publications-opportunities/
3. mailto:nick.dines@uniroma3.it
4. mailto:n.montagna@mdx.ac.uk
5. mailto:E.Vacchelli@gre.ac.uk
Could Corbyn Learn from President Trump’s Patriotic Populism? (2017-02-23 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEU_ewH1Twc &feature=youtu.be %20Blogging %20&amp; %20Twitter %20x


The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher Event: Senior Seminar with Rivke Jaffe

The Manchester Museum
Friday 28th April 2017
10.00-17.00

The Sociological Review Foundation invite applicants to take part in a workshop with Rivke Jaffe (University of Amsterdam) taking place in advance of our Annual Lecture.

If your research involves thinking and dealing with ethical, political, positionality issues in ethnographic writing while focusing on ‘sensational’ topics, such as crime, violence, homelessness, this workshop offers a fantastic opportunity to work through critical issues in your work with Rivke Jaffe.

Rivke Jaffe is Professor of Cities, Politics and Culture in the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses primarily on intersections of the urban and the political, and includes an interest in topics such as organized crime, popular culture and environmental pollution, drawing on fieldwork in Jamaica, Curacao and Suriname. She is currently leading a major research program on public-private security assemblages in Kingston, Jerusalem, Miami, Nairobi and Recife, studying transformations in governance and citizenship in relation to hybrid forms of security provision. Her publications include Concrete Jungles: Urban Pollution and the Politics of Difference in the Caribbean (Oxford, 2016) and Introducing Urban Anthropology (with Anouk de Koning, Routledge, 2016).

Successful participants will also have the opportunity to talk about publishing from your thesis with our managing editor, Michaela Benson and senior commissioning editor for social sciences at Manchester University Press, Tom Dark is a senior commissioning editor at Manchester University Press (MUP).

Format
The day is organised so as to allow discussion between delegates and workshop leaders. All participants will be supplied with preparatory reading, and will be expected to contribute actively towards discussion and we expect successful applicants to attend the whole day. Places for delegates will also be reserved at our Annual Lecture following the workshop.

Application
This event is FREE but places are limited to 18 people. To apply for a place, please fill in this online application form by 17.00 on 24th February 2017: [1]https://docs.google.com/a/thesociologicalreview.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSde0IC_tAT-agCcApOE8_6c9_ckrNyiEu6ia98i5ewwGYDyw/viewform Applicants will be notified by 13th March 2017. All inquiries about this event should be directed to Jenny Thatcher: [2]events@thesociologicalreview.com This Early Career Researcher event will be followed by The Sociological Review Annual Public Lecture: ‘Cities and
the Political Imagination’ which will be delivered by Rivke Jaffe. You can register for the Annual Lecture here: [3]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cities-and-the-political-imagination-the-sociological-review-annual-lecture-2017-with-rivke-jaffe-tickets-31372245230

1. https://docs.google.com/a/thesociologicalreview.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSde0IC_tAT-agCcAp0E8_6c9_ckrNryE6inwG//viewform
2. mailto:events@thesociologicalreview.com

Reflective Practice and Interdisciplinary Approaches to ‘Digital Social Research’ (2017-02-23 15:34)

By William Housley

Reflecting on interdisciplinarity in the context of digital social research is a worthwhile exercise. There is a significant discrepancy between the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity and its actual practice and accomplishment. Sociology, as a global disciplinary enterprise, has participated in and studied interdisciplinarity and collaboration across a number of fields, through a number of topics, in a variety of ways and in relation to a range of problems. One field that has routinely confronted matters of interdisciplinarity and collaboration is computer supported co-operative work, which has turned these and other practices into research problems and topics of inquiry in their own right alongside other concerns and preoccupations.

In recent years sociologists (and social scientists in general) have been working alongside computer scientists in what has been assumed to be in increasing numbers, or at least greater regularity, than previously. This is explained in part by the explosion of interest in social media-as-data (Housley et al, 2014, Edwards et al, 2013) and a cross-disciplinary interest in the emerging contours of digital, networked and automated societies as a key aspect of social change and transformation at the beginning of the C21st. It is often assumed that an interdisciplinary approach is required, due to the need to scope and understand these changes and related phenomena through a range of methods, theories and data and in ways that synthesize a firmer grasp of current social and computational realities. Consequently, interdisciplinarity is conceived as an epistemological enterprise, but, as I will attempt to tentatively outline in this blog, it is also has ontological features and consequences.

Questions of interdisciplinarity within digital social research contexts have recently identified language as a key area through which collaboration can be hindered and the realization of interdisciplinary working between sociologists, say, and computer scientists impeded. Of course language, as a communicative practice, is key. As are the practical means through which theorization, methodological strategies and the collection and curation of data are accomplished; in ways that can answer jointly identified problems and questions e.g. whether social media data can be used to augment traditional social scientific methods for understanding public reaction to signal events? However, the tools and framework for interdisciplinary working require reflection and work by those who wish to participate. The problems and challenges associated with interdisciplinary collaboration are not merely those associated with translation and are therefore not reducible to a single fix. There is no interdisciplinary Babel Fish; and no single solution that stands outside a range of practices that are built through interaction in interdisciplinary settings and contexts.

For example, we might wish to consider the ways in which teams are organized, how the choice architecture of collaborative tools that we develop or use are shaped, how we foster the ability to take another disciplines ‘point
of view' and how we participate in and attend to the negotiation and accomplishment of both a shared perspective and our own disciplinary awareness at one and the same time.

A key issue here is the ways in which core disciplinary concerns and questions coalesce and shape how, for example, an interdisciplinary research group may approach a specific research problem. This is more than language and more akin to a requirement to spend some time immersing oneself or at least systematically reflecting on different disciplinary forms of life and the social life of paradigms. Whilst I am looking at a problem or phenomenon in terms of prosaic questions such as social organization my computer scientist friend maybe viewing these through the lens of information and dreams of automation.

A useful resource here can be found in Schön's ideas surrounding 'the reflective practitioner' (1983). This was a popular trope in the late 1980's and 1990's for developing the knowledge capacity of key professional groups such as nurses, social workers, engineers, architects and teachers as they confronted new problems, institutional structures and the reorganization of working life around teams and inter-professional working and delivery. I re-introduce it now as it might be an effective starting point for thinking about how we might promote reflective engagement by participants within interdisciplinary contexts such as 'digital social research', 'computational social science' and related fields such as 'social media analytics'; betwixt and between different academic groups and aligned 'knowledge agents' often collaborating and competing, working and fighting, in liminal, status poor spaces.

Schön (1991:269) in his discussion of reflective practice argues that variations between professions (as the modern 'knowledge agent' ideal type) can be contrasted with specific constants. He argues that these constants provide for a means of considering the variation of practice between different professions. Members of disciplinary cultures are readily socialised into patterned forms of knowledge, interpretation and practice. The academic tribes of 'sociologists', 'computer scientists' or 'discourse analysts' and 'social statisticians' are anthropologically consistent in this regard. Whilst wider institutional and socio-technical forces are revolutionising knowledge work in ways not anticipated twenty to thirty years ago, distinct 'professional groups' remain with new ones emerging on the horizon e.g. the data scientist.

According to Schön (1983:270) these constants or 'patterns' associated with knowledge groups and agents can be described in terms of the following:

- The media, languages, and repertoires that practitioners use to describe reality and conduct experiments
- The appreciative systems they bring to problem setting, to the evaluation of inquiry, and to reflective conversation
- The overarching theories by which they make sense of phenomena
- The role frames within which they set their tasks and through which they bound their institutional settings

Perhaps these four phenomenological constants could form a matrix through which we can begin to link reflection with a more mindful form of reflective practice within interdisciplinary research contexts. In terms of the case being considered, perhaps collaboration between computer scientists and sociologists (and other social scientists) might benefit from some form of systematic training for those embarking on cross-disciplinary engagement in the hope of charting new territory and understanding new things through innovative theoretical, methodological and data driven interdisciplinary strategies. At the very least it is worth thinking about as a means of informing the process through which we become practical interdisciplinarians.

References:
Interdisciplinarity defines us as medical educators (2017-02-23 15:36)

By Mairead Corrigan, Jenny Johnston and Helen Reid

We are a small research group working in medical education ( #meded), a job which entails embracing and challenging subject, epistemological and methodological boundaries. One of us is a sociologist and two of us are academic GPs. We are fortunate to benefit from institutional support and wonderful colleagues. Even so, we still find ourselves frequently engaging in explanations of our research methods and epistemology to someone’s polite bafflement. Medical education is a broad church, drawing its membership from a diverse band of (among others) psychologists, sociologists, ethicists, clinicians/healthcare professionals and educational scientists. Each subgroup of medical educators brings their own understandings and cultural traditions to play. Even within the subset of clinical academics, there is a great variety of cultural norms and social practices, with identity based on specialty background. For two of us (H and J), our clinical background as GPs forms the bedrock of our educational work.

This polyglot mix makes the field of med ed research something of a patchwork, but also allows those within to draw great strength from its diversity. Coming together as a research group, we have realised that we work in a young and highly contested field. We are constantly learning to locate ourselves, and our relationships to each other, within competing epistemic traditions. We have begun to appreciate tensions and synergies, and to identify key assumptions in the literature which sometimes made no sense at all because they were written in an opposing tradition. Epistemological divisions are written large in our field, becoming a deeply personal matter of identity as people choose to embrace social scientific roles, or to align themselves with the world of clinical medicine. The dominant paradigm in biomedical research is strongly positivist. Medicine itself, in theory and practice, still builds on strongly dualist foundations. What Foucault termed ‘the clinical gaze’ is still highly influential; that is, a highly rational scientific and technological practice. Power is afforded to the clinician and the patient narrative is suppressed in
favour of objectively elicited signs of illness.

For both of us who are clinicians, there is a deep tension between this worldview and our lived experiences of life and work as general practitioners. Such experiences inevitably raise questions about the constructed nature of illness, stigma and healthcare provision which inform our practice, teaching and research in medical education. A constructive dialogue is created between educational work and our similarly vocational clinical practice, deepening and enhancing both. For M, the sociologist amongst us, the strong emphasis on reliability and standardisation within medical education work against a lived understanding of illness experience. Here there is no right or wrong answer, only multiple shades of grey. In our experience, students sometimes may regard the sociology of health and illness and public health as of lower status than anatomy, physiology and clinical skills. As a sociologist, M works hard to keep the patient voice alive by exposing students to patient narratives.

It is clear that medicine’s positivist hegemony translates into medical education. Our constructionist research perspective jostles for position with an influential post-positivist psychology based on measurable traits and behaviours. This is not in any way to demean the large contribution of these scholars; rather, we want to highlight that benefits accruing from different epistemological perspectives have not always been well recognised. Journals often reflect these tensions. A reviewer from an alternate tradition can easily result in paradigm misunderstanding and friction. Existing as a boundary object between academic disciplines is a challenging situation for a researcher. There is a serious risk that neither tradition takes your work seriously. Interdisciplinarity is hard. Yet as educationalists, we believe our own careers are about lifelong learning, and we have a lot to learn from each other. As a team, we have all travelled on an epistemological journey. Ultimately, we have to produce work which can be translated into hard educational or patient outcomes, and as a group, we currently occupy a strongly constructionist and critical position.

Challenging a dualist, Foucauldian view of medicine is a prime concern for all three of us. Embodied illness experience and patient voice are powerful teachers, and critical perspectives have much to offer the developing doctor. Given that we train doctors, it is not surprising that discourses of accountability and technical practice are dominant. Sometimes our work counters these assumptions. More subtly, sometimes we choose instead to work with this dialectic to push two paradigms closer together, and so create new possibilities through symbiosis. We use the dialogue between our different experiences and perspectives to better use the cultural affordances of our field. Interdisciplinarity is a dynamic process of co-construction, of negotiation with diverse colleagues, of creating useful dialogues which benefit patients and doctors, of challenging cultural boundaries. Medical education is a grounded, pragmatic social science. We are critical researchers. We do things for the betterment of patient care and patient experience, and to improve the work and wellbeing of doctors.

Margaret Cupples (2017-02-27 20:47:32)
Very interesting and thought-provoking discussion - demonstration of super interdisciplinary work. I look forward to reading/hearing about the real world impact of interdisciplinary working on patient care and experience, and the work and wellbeing of doctors.
The lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research

By Murray Goulden

My first experience of interdisciplinarity was genuinely exciting to be a part of. To some degree of course the quality of the experience was shaped by the particular focus of research, and the characters of those on the team. But fundamentally, the work of attempting to understand a shared problem, and enact a shared solution, was deeply satisfying, often surprising, very difficult in usually a good way, and only on occasion terrifyingly overwhelming.

As the talk of ‘solution’ suggests, this was interventionary project, tasked with achieving ‘impact’. Public Access Wi-Fi Service (PAWS) was an Internet access model by which existing domestic broadband connections could securely share a small slice of connectivity (2mb) with others living close by. In doing so it would address one barrier to online access, that of cost (and/or credit worthiness). It was never intended to address absences of relevant skills or positive meanings, but previous work suggested that cost was a big enough hindrance for enough of those categorised as ‘digitally excluded’ that it was worthwhile to tackle on its own.

At the time, and still today, this struck me as a noble goal to pursue. We cited a UN report that spoke of digital access as a human right, and whilst acknowledging the limitations imposed by today’s privatised market orthodoxy, spoke of the possibilities of a National Broadband Service. To be genuinely invested in the social value in your project is enormously beguiling, perhaps dangerously so in hindsight.

Our approach felt resolutely socio-technical. Computer scientists would create the software which carried this transformational potential; two sociologists (of which I was one) would study its deployment in a real world setting. We would do it at scale - up to 50 installations - and at the margins – a socio-economically troubled inner city estate. This was ‘in-the-wild’ research of a kind that simply isn’t done (perhaps with good reason given what followed). The ‘wild’ of technology deployments is often rather tame – it is outside the lab, but it’s a world conterminous with the white, middle class and educated inside. By necessity of seeking out the digitally excluded, we had to go further, venturing “across the parking lot” (Kjeldskov & Skov 2014) and beyond.

In hindsight it is easy to disassemble this endeavour and critique the techno-utopianism which lay at the heart of it. That though is not what I want to write about, certainly not directly, not least because PAWS still feels to me to have been genuinely brave, and if it was flawed, it tried. The detachment of side-line critique is easy by comparison.

What I do want to write about is the experience of doing PAWS. Judged by its starting goals, PAWS ultimately failed. We – the sociologists – never really got to study PAWS in its intended setting. Instead, we worked, endlessly, at embedding it in the setting. We rarely got to step back and observe. The work of embedding a research technology in a setting is little spoken of. Rare exceptions include Peneff’s (1988) study of French fieldworkers carving out the necessary agency to adapt formalised, large scale survey instruments to localised conditions, and Tolmie et al. (2009) on ‘digital plumbing’, that is of reconciling deployed technologies with the social worlds in which they are to be set loose. Here I want to highlight three challenges that emerged from this work of embedding. These are discussed in detail in our paper ( [1] Goulden et al 2016

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Problems of time: When, as sociologists, we approached this collaboration with computer scientists, we were aware of a long history of ethnographic work within CS, primarily in the form of the subdiscipline of Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). We failed to appreciate that PAWS was different from the canonical CSCW study, in which an existing or novel technology is studied within an organisational setting. Perhaps the single most important difference was this question of embedding – in the typical CSCW study, the embedding is being done by the organisation, and the ethnographer is there to study it. We were attempting to do both, simultaneously. Furthermore, our setting – a marginalised inner city estate – was significantly more socially 'distant' from us, as middle class white-collar professionals, than any typical office might be. The result of these differences was that the work was slow. There was not prospect here of 'quick and dirty' ethnography of the kind which is commonplace is traditional technology-led projects.

The cadence of the work was entirely out of kilter with that of computer science. This is a field in which talk of iterative, "agile" development abounds, where ‘Moore’s Law’ dictates that the capacity of the underlying technology doubles every 18 months, where Mark Zuckerberg extols the mantra of “move fast and break things”. As strangers, and guests, in a foreign land, we could not afford to break anything. It wasn’t that the computer science work was constantly ahead of us. Rather that the development cycles of the two disciplines were rarely in sync, which greatly complicated everything else.

Digital plumbing: in turning attention to the work of installing deployed research tech in homes and other non-lab settings, Tolmie et al. (2009) were drawing attention to how fundamentally socio-technical this work is. This was all the more so in PAWS, where the division of the work into lab-based ‘technical’ labour, and real world ‘social’ labour was split cleanly between technologists and sociologists. The work of doing the embedding of technology was all our own then. The task did not appear overly complicated – plugging-in additional routers in the houses of those ‘sharing’ their signal, and installing software on the devices of those making use of this signal. The latter commonly threw up all kinds of errors and snags which slowed us down, but in and of itself was rarely insurmountable.

What was more so was the range of the Wi-Fi which underpinned the entire system. Huge amounts of additional labour were generated by the fact that Wi-Fi signal strength was highly unpredictable. Sometimes, due to the specific local material circumstances – the positioning of walls, trees, inclines etcetera – it travelled far further than anticipated. More often it didn’t come close. We had been caught out here not by the labour which falls between disciplines, but by the knowledge. It turns out that real world Wi-Fi performance is a poorly understood phenomenon, beyond perhaps very specific niches. As one of the computer scientists on the team summarised:

Radio physicists know what the answer is in theory; the lab engineers know what the answer is by simulation; computer scientists don’t care what the range is, they care what the throughput or latency is.

The greatest challenge for our fieldwork came when this technical labour combined with the demand for emotional labour. Peneff (1988) speaks of the means by which fieldworkers “cope” with the many ambiguities and tensions of fieldwork, in a setting in which they must execute a formalised task in manner naturalistic enough that the human participant might engage as if it was a conversation with a trusted acquaintance. Trying to deduce why an iPad was refusing to connect to PAWS – instead complaining of an ‘Out of date security certificate’ – whilst simultaneously presenting the required attention and sympathy towards a participant met five minutes earlier, who was now relating her recent ordeal at the local hospital following a heart scare, it was difficult for us not to look on Peneff’s fieldworkers with envy. This simultaneous performance of emotional and technical labour, orientating to both
human and non-human, is a challenge particular to this form of fieldwork.

**Going native:** Doing interdisciplinarity means stepping outside traditional discipline boundaries and making a commitment to meaningful engagement with what may be very different logics of enquiry. There is a balancing act to be done here. As social scientists we should maintain a critical appraisal of the technological programme and its conception of the setting. Perhaps too enamoured by the laudable goals of PAWS, we did not always do this, becoming too close to the project’s “technical boosterism” (Savage 2015).

Within PAWS this was realised in how our original plan constituted its participants. During these initial stages, the greatest concern amongst the project team was that PAWS might fail to find enough residents willing to act as sharers. It was easy to adopt the computer scientists’ concerns that the notion of sharing a resource with strangers would be rejected by many, or that security fears might prove insurmountable. Those using the system were less of a concern: it was thought that the combination of free access to the Internet and a £50 voucher for participating in the research would be sufficiently compelling for those with limited resources.

In hindsight it became clear that in buying into PAWS’ technological programme we had been insufficiently sensitive to the social orientations of those we were seeking out. We were appraising the project through the eyes of the technologists not the members of the setting. Those using the system were liable to be amongst the most marginalised of a marginalised community. The implications of this for the door-to-door recruitment we conducted are made clear in McKenzie’s (2015) ethnography of life on inner city estates (actually conducted on another Nottingham estate just 3 miles away from ours). She writes

> it was actually very impolite to turn up unannounced. This practice was always about risk management - there was a lot of fear and suspicion on the estate, fear of the unannounced visitor, which meant the police, the ‘social’, the TV licensing people. It always meant problems, and doors would not be opened if they didn’t know who was on the other side of it. (p. 89)

Our experience of going door-to-door seemed to support McKenzie’s account: potential users of the system were hard to find, and many properties never answered the door, despite knocking on more than one occasion, and often when it was clear someone was home. The result was that we never recruited anything like as many users as we hoped for, and this was ultimately where the project failed to achieve its original goals.

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Where PAWS succeed was in demonstrating some of the challenges to be overcome if we are to become serious about doing ‘in the wild’ research. In turning increasingly towards applied, technology-led research, directed towards specific ‘social problems’, we overlook at our peril the work of embedding, both as a task in itself, and in what it implies for interdisciplinary collaboration.

A few years ago I would confidently have said that I am a sociologist, and nobody would have been able to tell me otherwise. My BA in sociology was followed by an MA in Social and Cultural Geography (after a year of dabbling in the “real-world” of course). I was fascinated by the engaging work done in critical geography, and the potential to mix sociological perspectives on social practice within the gamut/realm of space. This distanced me a little from Sociology, but I thought nothing of it seeing as the work I hoped to do was often covered by ‘Development studies’ and other such departments employing sociological frameworks. At the moment, I am based in a Physics department, exploring the practices and motivations of students in undertaking employability development opportunities.

My current project is supported by the department in which I function alongside supervision in the university’s education department. The aim of funding such a project was to enquire into factors that influence the employment prospects of physics graduates. There is a considerable amount of the literature that suggests that disparities in engagement with employability development prospects and in employment can be understood through a Bourdian understanding of the reproduction of class privilege. To take this further, I attempt to argue that in order to understand whether employability truly can be developed is by understanding motivation, practice, values and in combination, presentation (of self). It is safe to say that my project is largely within the realm of the social sciences.
Of late, there has been a keen interest in the work done in social science by those in the natural sciences, particularly within the context of Higher Education increasingly stressing on the need to consider “Learning, Teaching and Assessment excellence”. Physics has been relatively late to the party, but they are making considerable strides in the ‘pedagogy’ direction. Being a researcher within 'Physics Education Research' (PER) groups, I find myself in a situation that can be liberating yet at times particularly challenging. It is liberating because it permits me to explore and almost re-discover Sociology and the social sciences. In having to explain sociological concepts the fears of my education serving no particular purpose (a Sociology degree is often wrongly seen as ‘the easy way out’) are eliminated. I am confident in who I am as a social scientist. This does not give me a free pass however. It motivates me to maintain the importance of being rigorous and critical in research, and thus I take it on myself to improve my understanding where needed.

The challenges I have faced have been both personal as well as external. Personally, I wonder if my dabbling in different disciplines has left me homeless in academia. When interacting with some social scientists who have taken a relatively consistent disciplinary trajectory, I have had to respond to reactions of surprise and sometimes condescending irritation expressed for my having ‘gone to the dark side’. But I have not changed. I am a social scientist. Simultaneously, when conversing about my project on student motivation and practice in Higher Education, I must endure expressions of a preference for quantifiable truths from natural scientists whom themselves undertake pedagogic research. There are no truths. Neither in the social sciences, nor in the natural sciences. There are only ideas and speculations – the best probable explanation. It is for these reasons that I find interdisciplinarity both an enrichening and frustrating experience.

Another observation I have made from my work thus far is the appropriation of social science terminology. I suspect that much of what we do today in the knowledge society requires some amount of sophistication; at least we hope to present ourselves thus. To this end, we adopt scientific terminology be it from the social sciences and/or natural sciences. However, these terms when flowing in daily parlance may lose their essence. When they are reproduced in this way an academic environment, semi-detached from its originating conceptual framework, this becomes problematic. Take my area of study for example. Certain forms of presentation that become acceptable and normalised when apparently "developing” employability skills are really a reflection of cultural capital developed through social reproduction of privilege. I have heard (and sometimes read) propositions that students need to embrace their social and cultural capital to help them become employable. Others have suggested that there be a measure for cultural capital. It becomes fairly challenging to respond to these perceptions because the concept of cultural capital emerged as an explanation of how class reproduces itself through 'cultured' practice, sustaining social stratification. Further, to an extent the concept tends to explain non-quantifiable aspects of self that sustain said stratification.

The topic of methods can also be a double-ended sword sometimes. Inclusion of a social scientist in discussions around methods to explore education practice is helpful; it is a fact that we have dedicated years to studying social phenomena and behaviour. Yet, when suggestions are made to adopt qualitative research to enquire into persistent problems, an automatic dismissal of such suggestions because the "efficacy of the tool" is not quantifiable does little to support interdisciplinary research. True, methods need to be adopted where appropriate to get the best possible explanation for our questions. Therefore, while on the topic of methods, statistics is not a solution to problems – whether through questionnaires or surveys or through the quantifying of qualitative data. However, it is also wrong to presume that statistics do not have a place in social science research. Unless we are willing to learn from each other, progress in interdisciplinary work will be slow.
In everyday life, from my experience as a PhD researcher I have found that being persistent in negotiating your own space is integral to ensuring your project does not face threatening challenges. At the start of my project, I found it surprisingly difficult to explain (or perhaps to have my explanation understood) that my background made some of the required training and procedures in Physics irrelevant to me, such as with teaching assistance training. In this case, although the department offers training, I could not possibly support teaching – unless of course I could lead a tutorial on phenomenological understandings of perceptions of star formation. Yet other social science departments too did not know how to react to my situation. I have yet not received training for reasons that relate to structural changes as well as the time at which I began my research. However, I have found it particularly helpful that my supervisor is supportive and proactive. Further, by taking the time to explain my position, and taking my concern to a higher level when relevant/indicated, I have found myself in a fairly comfortable niche, only 8 months in.

Relevant to this, it would appear to me, is the role of process-establishment. Very often, the interdisciplinary researcher may find themselves in situations that do not have straightforward answers. Here, we must ask the right questions and eventually come to a mutually-beneficial conclusion. For example, as there have been no social science-driven postgraduate research in my department in Physics previously, those of Education have been adopted – the department with which my project is collaboratively supervised. Often overlooked however is the role of the individual in this process – how does their background and sense of (academic) self interact with the processes with which they are expected to engage? I find myself in tense moments of conflict owing to my prior experience in other departments – why should I not be stressing on my conceptual framework when that is what I would do otherwise? – and having a limited understanding of what I do need to do was a concern that was fortunately addressed early on in my course.

I suspect some of these experience may seem disjointed, but the problems that interdisciplinary researchers face can range from mundane, everyday bureaucratic processes to essential philosophical praxis. There are challenges that exist and some that lie ahead. All the while, we need to also consider the purpose of the research that we do, without presuming that interdisciplinary enquiry is inherently less than or better than straightforward trajectories of enquiry into knowledge.

» A new project on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity The Sociological Imagination (2017-02-23 15:48:44) 
[...] Negotiating spaces of interdisciplinarity by Sinead D'Silva [...]

Afra (2017-02-23 16:52:29)  
This could not have been written at a better time! I am going through a similar yet more complex dilemma. In Fairclough’s terms, the “transdisciplinary” nature of my work within Discourse Analysis has created an endless struggle for me since the beginning of my PhD journey! My initial proposal was referred to the School of Education, since the domain of my interest is higher education and have since been battling my way back into linguistics! What makes things more complicated is that different schools within different universities approach ‘fields of knowledge’ or ‘disciplines’ in different ways. Thus, in my case, I am a ‘proper linguist’ in some places and a very ‘odd linguist’ in others!! Basically, a homeless linguist at the moment until I find myself a school that appreciates the kind of work I am doing! :(  

Sinead (2017-02-24 14:31:02)  
Hi Afra, I actually met someone in a similar situation as you the other day - they consider themselves a linguist, but has been put in an Education department! I have personally come to terms with being based in Physics as a Sociologist (I’m now 14
months into my PhD), but I do feel homeless in academia. I suspect the only thing we can do is rely on our own resilience, which is a little grim as I would have expected academia to be more understanding of non-normative realities!

Afra (2017-03-01 11:00:07)
Yeah, resilience is key. I’m afraid though that I would have to take a detour to achieve resilience! I’ve decided to transfer for the second time; this time to another institution.. hopefully I’ll get to call it home and conclude my PhD in a more a stronger stance! Good luck with your studies and I really hope you’ll get to feel more at home.

A new project on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity (2017-02-23 15:48)
We’ve launched a new project on the lived experience of interdisciplinarity with these four pieces:

- [1]Negotiating spaces of interdisciplinarity by Sinead D’Silva
- [2]The lived experience of interdisciplinarity in social research by Murray Goulden
- [4]Interdisciplinarity defines us as medical educators by Mairead Corrigan, Jenny Johnston and Helen Reid

[5]Get in touch if you’d be interested in writing one.

5. https://markcarrigan.net/get-in-touch/

Doing Social Media Analysis with Free Tools (2017-02-24 08:00)

Doing Social Media Analysis with Free Tools

A Digital Sociology Study Group Event

28 April 2017, 10:00-13:00
Leeds Beckett University, UK

[1]https://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events/doing-social-media-analysis-with-free-tools/ Analysing Data from Twitter, Youtube, Facebook and Smartphones Social media are now a central part of many people’s lives. When we send messages, comment, upload photographs and make connections with others we are creating new kinds of networks. This creates vast amounts of data which hide valuable insights. This workshop will introduce a range of free tools which can help you to collect and analyse these data. It will also help you to tackle the even
thornier issue of how to interpret these data as a sociologist. We will engage in hands-on workshop activities on data-driven digital methods and their research applications in relation to people’s lives. The aim is to introduce critical engagement with the digital tools as well as the application of these tools to research questions. The workshops will be conceptually grounded in the problems of public communication and privacy, digital media production and consumption, and the ethical issues associated with big/social data and digital methods in the context of digital media environments. Outline of the event Tools to be introduced will enable researchers to collect data from Smartphones; Twitter; Youtube; Facebook as well as visualise and export the data for publication without any programming skills required. Asking questions regarding every decision in these processes is a necessary component of thinking sociologically while archiving, visualising and interpreting the data being collected. We will work through four main themes: - Social Media Data Collection - Social Media Data Analysis - Visualisation and Presentation - Ethics of Mapping Social Media Convened by Dr Steven McDermott <[2]http://www.arts.ac.uk/lcc/people/school-of-media-teaching-staff/dr-steven-mcdermott/> who lectures on contemporary developments in media and communications at the University of the Arts London. Booking Open BSA Member: £5 Student: £7 Non-Member: £10 Book now! <[3]https://portal.britsoc.co.uk/public/event/eventBooking.aspx?id=EVT10625>

Digital Methodologies: Beyond Big & Small Data (2017-02-25 08:00)

Podcasts from a stream at the ISA Logic and Methodologies conference in September 2016:


https://soundcloud.com/mark-carrigan/netnography-forum-discussion-and-focus-group


1. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events/doing-social-media-analysis-with-free-tools/

4905
The Sociological Review Foundation is delighted to announce that after the success of last year ECR writing retreat we have commissioned Rowena Murray to deliver another Writing Retreat for social scientists in 2017. We anticipate that this will become an annual feature of our offer for ECRs. You can find out more about Strictly Come Writing [1]here.

Murray has devised and delivered structured writing retreats to support academics by providing dedicated writing time done in a group setting. To find out more about this approach see [2]here.

[3]Apply Here
Applications Deadline: Thursday 30th March 2017

3. http://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=a1491b7321&e=789a4573bc

On Social Acceleration (2017-02-27 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/VHk1iPvujic?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &autohide=2 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent
Earlier on this month, Hartmut Rosa gave a fascinating lecture at the LSE, marking the launch of this new book on the Sociology of Speed. It’s a great overview of his theory of acceleration, but it also included some things I hadn’t encountered before:

1. His intellectual trajectory was shaped by encountering Charles Taylor’s work while at the LSE for two terms at the age of 23. I knew Taylor was a huge influence, given Rosa’s PhD was devoted to his work, but I hadn’t realised how linked to speed his interest was. As he describes it in the lecture, he was fascinated by Taylor’s focus on the role of strong evaluations in structuring how people orientate themselves to their lives but felt it lacked an important temporal dimension. Evidently, people often address the urgent rather than the important, suggesting temporal constraints subordinate ultimate concerns to practical considerations. My reaction to reading Taylor as a philosophy student was an overwhelming desire to sociologize his work, something Rosa does with an astonishing degree of systematicity, though of course there are alternative ways we could approach this task. Consider Doug Porpora’s wonderful Landscapes of the Soul.

2. I recall the ‘contraction of the present’ from Social Acceleration but I’m unsure if it is the framing that has changed or my response to it. Rosa’s argument is that patterns of association and social practices change at an increasing rate. This means that the “decay rates of knowledge increase”: the purchase of our knowledge about the world and how it works degrades at an increasing rate because the reality of that world and how it works undergoes change at an increasing rate. The period of stability when “you know how the world works, who is where and how one does things” is contracting. If one accepts this claim, it has huge ramifications for how we engage with the idea of “information overload”. There’s a temporal dynamic to the overproduction of facts which is too little analysed.

3. I like his description of the subjective side of the accelerating pace of life as mysterious. We respond to this challenge by attempting to speed up life, seeking more episodes of action per unit of time. We multi-task, speed up each action and try to eliminate pauses and intervals. I like his example of taking the last possible train to an event, in order to avoid waiting once there. This is something I do entirely habitually, such that I rarely even consider allowing for contingencies unless there’s some reason to expect them. But when it goes wrong, the time saving action gets revealed as a false efficiency. There are so many examples like this, where what feels like saving time in fact costs us more time at some unpredictable point in the future. I’d like to hear more from Rosa on the ‘mysterious’ character of the subjective side of the accelerating pace of life because I think it suggests something important about chronoreflexivity: the limited scope of how we orientate ourselves to time & the way in which habitual orientations circumscribe considered decision making about efficiencies.

4. He offers the useful trajectory of the downwards escalator which I don’t recall encountering before. This is a metaphor for how we find ourselves compelled to “run faster and faster to keep pace with the world”. Rosa suggests we stand on a downward escalator relative to every system we’re embedded within and that we stand on many overlapping escalators. Furthermore, “functional differentiation increases the number of escalators on which we stand”, proposing that this issue can be placed at the heart of sociological analysis. Every change within each system necessitates action from us in order to cope. As Rosa puts it “we have to run faster and faster, on more and more escalators, just to stay in place” and the “feeling that time is scare commodity” leads us to seek faster technologies. What Ruth Müller describes as [4]anticipatory acceleration in the context of careers could be extended into a general theory of the relative autonomy of agency vis-a-vis temporal structures i.e. when the necessity of ‘running faster and faster’ becomes sufficiently engrained, we begin to accelerate in an open-ended way as a taken for granted approach to life. I’m very interested in the cultural role played by productivity discourse, life hacking etc in encouraging and consolidating such a response to the world. Plus technology is embedded in this discourse at the cultural level (it’s a central focus of discussion) and the agential level (the solutions offered are often technological).
5. He stresses that we are not just victims of the speed logic, identifying how it is tied to our notion of freedom. Drawing on Blumenberg, he stresses how death comes too early, before we have completed the world and the possibilities it offers for us. The fast life on this view represents the full life. This is a familiar argument of Rosa’s but I’d previously read it as an inditement of acceleration, rather than an analysis that is appreciative of the promise while remaining sceptical about its viability.

6. He has a greater emphasis upon what has not speeded up than has previously been the case. He talks about five dimensions of deceleration: natural and anthropological limits, cultural practices that could speed up but haven’t, territorial zones insulated from speed up, segmental pockets of deceleration under pressure to speed up and intentional deceleration. This latter category is one which fascinates me and am writing about as ‘triaging strategies’ used to cope with acceleration. As Rosa describes it, these strategies pursue “slow down in order to keep up the high pace of life”. They are ways to cope with acceleration rather than challenges to the temporal structures of digital capitalism. He also recounts being told that the average speed of traffic in London has been going down for decades, representing an example of collective slow down as individuals seek to go fast. He claims that these five dimensions of deceleration are either residual or reactions. He argues there’s an asymmetry between deceleration and acceleration, grounded in the different mechanisms producing each.

These ideas made me think of one of my favourite genres of YouTube videos:
 Alternatives to neoliberalism: towards equality and democracy  (2017-02-27 21:32)

PUBLICATION LAUNCH

--- ALTERNATIVES TO NEOLIBERALISM: TOWARDS EQUALITY AND DEMOCRACY
This is a book aimed at researchers, commentators, activists and left politicians looking for new ideas to challenge and replace neoliberal political economy and neo-populist politics.

LAUNCH DETAILS: Tuesday 14th March 2017. Room USG 19, University of East London, Stratford E15 1NF

Full details attached or on Eventbrite:


Hope you can make it.

Bryn Jones and Mike O'Donnell Co-editors

Contributors include: Ted Benton, Anna Coote, Colin Crouch, Andy Cumbers, Jeremy Gilbert, Zoe Irving, Grahaame Thompson, Karel Williams

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NEW Publication

Alternatives to Neoliberalism.
Social media and populism (2017-02-28 08:00)

This excellent essay by Jan-Werner Müller in the London Review of Books raises an important issue about the forms of political mobilisation facilitated by social media:

Trump has called himself the Hemingway of the 140 characters. He has ‘the best words’. He loves Twitter, he says, because it’s like having one’s own newspaper, but without the losses. Twitter shares something of the echo-chamber effect of Facebook, but it also makes possible a form of direct identification between the individual citizen and the supposedly sole authentic representative of the people. It is hard to see how this might have been possible before, at least as a matter of daily experience: perhaps going to a party rally and feeling a direct connection with the leader while surrounded by others who feel exactly the same thing. Now, that sense of a direct link is just a click away, day and night: ‘Hey, I’m up at 3 a.m., and so is he, and he’s thinking exactly what I was just thinking!’

This is an illusion, but it is a powerful one. Media-savvy politicians can exploit it in unprecedented ways. For instance, in Italy the anti-establishment Five Star movement emerged from Beppe Grillo’s blog. ‘Hey folks, it works like this: you tell me what’s going on and I will play the amplifier,’ he’d written to his followers. Grillo had been a well-known comedian before entering politics. He has never merely amplified the concerns of ordinary people; the way il popolo speaks is decisively shaped by his leadership even though he has no official position of authority. Trump of course had also been a TV star, someone partly famous for being famous. But the peculiarity of Trump is that he seems the equivalent of Grillo and Silvio Berlusconi merged into one person. Whenever he was accused during the campaign of being just an entertainer, he could point to his competence as a businessman; whenever it was pointed out that his ventures mostly went bankrupt, he could respond that he was primarily a media star.

What forms of political organisation emerge from such a dynamic? Fleeting and fragile ones, predicated on imagined links with the leader rather than relational bonds between the followers. This gives reason to be hopeful but it also creates dangerous incentives for the leader, inviting them to escalate their rhetoric in order to mobilise a base over whom, at least as a collective, their hold remains unreliable. The problem is, as he puts it later in the essay, “The supply of enemies is inexhaustible.”

This is why it’s so important to refuse the story such populists tell about their own success. They ascribe an outcome with complex origins to their own quasi-magical powers to connect with ‘the people’:

Liberals have been wringing their hands at their seeming inability to reach citizens with ‘fact-checks’ and incontrovertible demonstrations of Trump’s continual self-contradictions. It’s curious that in their despair they have resurrected some of the clichés of 19th-century mass psychology. While disputing virtually every claim made by populists – especially their supposedly simplistic policy solutions – they buy without question the story that populists sell about their own successes. When Arron Banks proclaims that ‘Facts don’t work ... You’ve got to connect with people emotionally,’ they just nod. But it isn't true that ‘the masses’ are emotional basket-cases ready to be seduced by a charismatic demagogue. For a start, the neat distinction between reason and emotion is misleading. People are angry for a reason, and usually they can articulate that reason, as part of a larger story about what went wrong in their lives. Trump gained some trust as an outsider and, even more, as a credible exemplar of what it means to be unprofessional in politics. Some trusted him because he told it like it is; but in other cases the trust came first, and led them to believe that he was telling them the real story.

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8.3 March

The embedded digital economy (2017-03-01 08:00)

One of the things that I liked about _Platform Capitalism_, by Nick Srineck, was its concern to avoid analysing the tech sector as sui generis. By situating it in social and economic history, we are left with a much richer account of where it came from, why it is the way it is and where it is going. The myth of exceptionalism concerning technology militates against this, as the protagonists of grand disruptive projects don't take kindly to being regarded as mundane organisations driven by environmental constraints and enablements like all others.

The consequences of this exceptionalism aren't just analytical though. Exceptionalism licenses a view of the digital economy as disembedded, obscuring the manifold ways in which it is dependent on the wider context. This section from _Uberpaid and Underworked_, by Trebor Scholz, loc 1014 illustrates this powerfully:

Rarely acknowledged are also the networks of care that sustain contingent workers. Just for one moment, think about the families that are paying the price for just-in-time scheduling of work hours. Who is caring for their children when they face unpredictable work schedules, often decided only days or hours in advance? And let’s not forget that government programs like the Food Stamp Act of 1964, introduced by President Lyndon B. Johnson, are essential in providing subsistence for crowdworkers and Walmart ”associates” alike. In this way, personal networks of care, global supply chains, American taxpayers, academia, and the military sustain the digital economy.

Recognising this context makes it easier to see the grim reality underlying the lofty rhetoric of the sharing economy. From loc 1290:
What if the engine of the "sharing economy" is not the instinct to share, but rather economic desperation? Just consider the 8–10 million Americans who are unemployed and the almost eight million who are working part-time because they cannot find full-time work, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They are piecing together a living wage by working with companies like Uber but only few make a good living in the Hunger Games.

John McCreery (2017-03-02 03:28:22)
Re Uber. My wife and I are immensely satisfied customers after using Uber several times in and around Washington, D. C. From a customer perspective the pricing and service were excellent. What about drivers? In every case our driver was not attempting to make a living working for Uber. They were, instead, using their cars, otherwise an idle asset, to supplement incomes from other sources. One was a restaurant owner driving full time while in the process of shifting his business to the West Coast. Would our drivers like to earn more? Of course. Were they engaged in Hunger Games? No.

UCU from Cradle to Grave (2017-03-02 08:00)
An interesting video from this year’s conference:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yx6EQi6ZTE

Alistair (2017-03-02 10:22:12)
Well, tongue in cheek, there's been one or two times when I've thought it's sending me to my grave! :-)

Feminist Reflections On Law, Society and Care (2017-03-03 08:00)
Call for Papers

Date: 21 July 2017

Venue: Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester UK

Contributions are invited to the event, "Feminist Reflections On Law Society and Care", to be held on Friday 21st July 2017 at Manchester Law School.

We are pleased to announce the following speakers:

Donna Dickenson, presenting on, “Property in the Body: Feminist Perspectives”; Alison Jaggar, presenting on, “Gendered Perspectives on Global Justice”; and Marian Verkerk, presenting on “Family Ethics of Care".
This event aims to bring together individuals working within feminist frameworks to address contemporary societal issues. This could include (but is not limited to) contributions in the areas of:

Ethics of Care
Technologies
(Global) Justice
Community / Activism
Health Care
Feminist Methodologies
Law Reform

Categories of submission
Submissions can be made in the following categories:

Panel Session Papers: speakers will be allocated 15 minutes for presentation, leaving time for discussion. Please submit a 200 word abstract of your presentation, specifying your area of interest.

Emerging Perspectives Session: the afternoon will have space for individuals stepping into the academy, to workshop their current research ideas in the form of a PechaKucha style presentation, with time for Q&A and discussion following. Please submit a 200 word abstract of your PechaKucha presentation, specifying Emerging Perspectives Session. [1]http://www.pechakucha.org/

Poster session: posters will be displayed during the day, with prizes awarded for the best of these. Poster presenters should be available to talk briefly about their research.

Submission of abstracts and posters should be made to [2]feministreflections@gmail.com

Deadline for submission of abstracts and posters: Friday 31st March 2017.

Programme and venue details will follow.
Queries about the event should be made to [3]feministreflections@gmail.com

We look forward to seeing you all there! Thanks from the team – Melanie Latham, Kelly Dannielle, Aysha Mazhar.

2. [mailto:feministreflections@gmail.com](mailto:feministreflections@gmail.com)
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Liberating discretionary effort by robbing your staff of a personal life (2017-03-04 08:00)

There's an interesting extract in The Upstarts, by Brad Stone, concerning discretionary effort: what could your employees do if they were properly motivated? I'm fascinated by this concept because of its open-ended character. Once one begins to think like this, it's always possible to imagine your employees doing more. The full actualisation of discretionary effort is a vanishing point and this creates a space in which bullshit thrives: lionising managers for
Kalanick simply directed his team to work harder. “Never ask the question ‘Can it be done?’” he was fond of saying at the time, recalls one employee. “Only question how it can be done.” Kalanick left for LeWeb but stayed in touch from his hotel room over Skype video chat, his disembodied head still a loud, demanding presence in the office. Everyone was working around the clock, on little sleep and ebbing patience. “Someone turn Travis off!” yelled the new chief of product, a former Google manager named Mina Radhakrishnan, when Kalanick berated them for not having the service ready in Paris on time. Conrad Whelan, the company’s first engineer, recalls spending every day in the office, from 7:30 a.m. to midnight, including weekends, for three weeks straight before the Paris launch. “This is the biggest thing I will say about Travis,” he told me years later. “He came to us and said, ‘Look, we are internationalizing and launching in Paris,’ and every single engineer was saying, ‘That is not possible, there is so much work, we will never be able to do it.’ But we got it done. It wasn’t perfect. But that was one of those moments where I was like, ‘This Travis guy, he is really showing us what is possible.’”

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/r8miwsWtzRw?version=3 &rel=1 &fs=1 &autohide=2 &showsearch=0 &showinfo=1 &iv_load_policy=1 &wmode=transparent
Scholars have warned that there is an uncertain chance of runaway climate change that could devastate the planet. At least since Hans Jonas’s The Imperative of Responsibility, some have argued that even low-probability existential risks should be treated in a fundamentally different way. How should we act when we believe that there is a chance of a catastrophe, but cannot make reliable probability estimates? How much should we worry about worst-case scenarios? What should we do when experts disagree about whether catastrophe is possible?

These are some of the questions we will be posing at the fifth of six ESRC-funded workshops exploring issues where the ethics and economics of climate change intersect. It will be held at the University of Cambridge’s Centre for the Study of Existential Risk.

We are seeking both paper givers and discussants from philosophy, economics and other disciplines. Funds

CfP: Workshop on Climate Ethics and Climate Economics (2017-03-05 08:00)

1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/r8miwsWtzRw?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/xsbad8GEW78?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
are available to cover accommodation and internal travel expenses for up to three research students and early-career researchers. Papers, where available, will be circulated before the workshop.

Those wishing to present a paper should submit a 500-word abstract by 24th March to Simon Beard ([1]sjb316@cam.ac.uk).

Anyone interested in serving as a discussant should send an expression of interest by the same date. If applying for funding, please indicate that you are a student, or the year that you received the PhD.

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Claudia (2017-03-05 09:44:31)
When will the workshop take place? Thank you.

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**TODAY: Teach-in on Violence in Universities in India at Columbia University (2017-03-05 15:51)**

**Teach-in on Violence in Universities in India**

**In Solidarity with Delhi University**

**Room 227, Mudd Building, Columbia University**

**Sunday, March 5, 2017**

**3:00 – 4:30 PM**

On February 22, the teachers and students of Ramjas College in Delhi University were beaten up by the right-wing student group Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for organizing a conference on ‘Culture of Protest’. In the last three years, there has been an escalation in violence carried out by right-wing student groups on other students, faculty members and workers in universities across India. This escalation has been enabled by violence outside universities as well, that target especially gender, caste and religious minorities. The clamp down in HCU following the death of Rohith Vemula, arrest of students in JNU, silencing and suspension of faculty members in JNVU Jodhpur, and most recently the sheer violence on students and faculty members in Delhi University indicate a pattern of organized violence in university spaces. The silencing of dissent is orchestrated through right-wing student groups, thereby obfuscating the responsibility of the state in protecting the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. The police remain a mute spectator. The regime in power has either remained silent or actively endorsed the hooliganism. We have seen the emergence of the ‘ideal nationalist’ as a new norm of doing politics. The words ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ have become a tool to control and censor critical discourse across the country.

In defiance, the academic community in India has come together under a common cause of reclaiming their right to debate. With every stifling of dissent, new cultures of protest have emerged. Students, faculty, workers of universities and concerned citizens are coming out on the streets in huge numbers vociferously asserting their right to critical thought. Voices from different countries are pouring in against the violence. They are not just reclaiming
their right to the university space, but also re-imagining the idea of the university in India. We are congregating to express support, to contribute to this critical moment in Indian history, and to explore the idea of academics in the university space. Do participate, spread the word, and join us in large numbers for discussions and posters.

Program:

3:00 PM - Introduction

3:10 PM - Talk by Dr. Rohit, Prof. Anupama Rao, and open session for speakers from fellow friends and comrades, followed by discussion.

4:00 PM - Show of Solidarity with #FightBackDU Campaign in India - posters, songs, slogans. We have posters, but please feel free to bring in your creative posters as well!

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The Future of the REF (2017-03-06 08:00)


Uber as a moral project (2017-03-07 08:00)

When the Uber co-founders recount the story of their project, they stress the importance of the consumer to it. This might seem like familiar rhetoric but I want to suggest it reflects a deep (and problematic) commitment. In The Upstarts, by Brad Stone, we see how the early idea for Uber came to Garrett Camp when he was a young multi-millionaire living in San Francisco. After StumbleUpon was acquired by eBay, he found himself young, free and wealthy. From loc 617-632:

Camp continued to work at eBay after the sale, and he was now young, wealthy, and single, with a taste for getting out of the house more often. This is when he ran headlong into San Francisco’s feeble taxi industry.
For decades, San Francisco had deliberately kept the number of taxi medallions capped at around fifteen hundred. Medallions in the city were relatively inexpensive and couldn’t be resold, and owners could keep the permit as long as they liked if they logged a minimum number of hours on the road every year. So new permits usually became available only when drivers died, and anyone who applied for one had to wait years to receive it. Stories abounded about a driver waiting for three decades to get a medallion, only to die soon after. The system guaranteed a healthy availability of passengers for the taxi companies even during slow times and ensured that full-time drivers could earn a living wage. But demand for cars greatly exceeded supply and so taxi service in San Francisco, famously, sucked. Trying to hail a cab in the outer neighborhoods near the ocean, or even downtown on a weekend night, was an exercise in futility. Getting a cab to take you to the airport was a stomach-churning gamble that could easily result in a missed flight.

He was, as Brad Stone puts it, "habitually restless, frustrated by inefficiencies, and armed with a willingness to challenge authority". He contrived an initial solution of calling all yellow taxi companies when he needed a cab, in order to take the first one that arrived. He quickly found himself blacklisted (loc 647). He further explored how to game the existing system, learning about the mechanisms which frustrated him in the process. He developed an extensive working knowledge of how the collective interests of taxi drivers frustrated his interests as a wealthy young consumer. This generic propensity of the taxi industry to frustrate was coupled with the capacity of individual taxi drivers to fail to show such young consumers the respect they felt they deserved. From loc 771-786:

On a separate night in Paris, the group went for drinks on the Champs-Élysées and then to an elegant late-night dinner that included wine and foie gras. At 2:00 a.m., somewhat intoxicated after a night of revelry, they hailed a cab on the street. Apparently they were speaking too boisterously, because halfway through the ride home, the driver started yelling at them. McCloskey was sitting in the middle of the backseat, and, at five feet ten inches tall, she’d had to prop her high heels on the cushion between the two front seats. The driver cursed at them in French and threatened to kick them out of the car if they didn’t quiet down and if McCloskey didn’t move her feet. She spoke French and translated; Kalanick reacted furiously and suggested they get out of the car. The experience seemed to harden their resolve. "It definitely lit a fire," McCloskey says. "When you are put in a situation where you feel like there's an injustice, that pisses Travis off more than anything. He couldn't get over it. People shouldn't have to sit in urine-filled cabs after a wonderful night and be yelled at." That cantankerous Paris taxicab driver may have left an indelible mark on transportation history.

The instinct here is framed in terms of ‘disruption’ and ‘innovation’ when it is articulated. But the basic moral sentiment is how dare they put their interests over ours? It’s a consumerist entitlement rooted in the extremely specific experience of affluent young consumers. Once embedded, every attempt to preserve the status quo can be experienced as an extension of this basic affront to self-importance. What appears to regulators as an incomprehensible disregard for legality ("You can’t just open a restaurant and say you are going to ignore the health department" as they were told in an early clash, reported on loc 1693) is experienced by ‘the upstarts’ as a commendable failure to be bullied, a refusal to take shit from anyone, whether it’s haughty French taxi drivers or municipal bureaucrats serving their interests. Their professed concern for regulation can be explained away as an allegiance to taxi drivers who don’t know their place. From loc 2348:

Still embittered by his experience with Christiane Hayashi and the SFMTA, Kalanick instructed Kochman to ignore New York’s Taxi and Limousine Commission and its rules, reasoning that its regulations, under the guise of consumer safety, were really there to protect entrenched taxi interests.
What I’m describing as a moral project operates on two levels: an intellectual critique of entrenched interests and their failure to adequately serve consumers, as well as an underlying affectivity generated when entrenched privilege meets perceived wrong-doing. The former derives its shoving power from the latter. This is why I suspect the Uber co-founders might not simply be driving towards automation out of economic interest, but rather actually be able to take some perverse delight in rendering taxi drivers redundant as a category. As the Uber CEO excitedly put it when presented with a self-driving car for the first time: “The minute your car becomes real, I can take the dude out of the front seat” (loc 3657).

And this moral project is one it’s demonstrably possible to enlist others into. From loc 2467:

After Tusk joined as a consultant, Uber executives started meeting regularly with Ashwini Chhabra and his boss, David Yassky, chairman of the TLC. Officials in Bloomberg’s business-friendly administration, it turned out, were inclined to look favorably on a technology startup trying to change New York’s crusty taxi industry, which had resisted modernizing its vehicles and installing electronic credit card readers. But Uber first needed to play by the rules. To truly appeal to New York drivers, Uber was going to have to register as a base.

Pity those who find themselves on the wrong side of the great disruptive project:

When asked about driverless cars, he said that he was excited for the technology because it could bring prices down, but he didn’t express concern about unemployment for drivers. “The reason Uber could be expensive is because you’re not just paying for the car, you’re paying for the other dude in the car,” Kalanick said. As for the tens of thousands of drivers who relied on his company to support their families, he shrugged. “This is the way of the world,” he said, “and the world isn’t always great. We all have to find ways to change.”

Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: The Laboratory and the Experiment (2017-03-08 08:00)

by Hamish Robertson

This series of pieces has focused on the concept of exploring a number of ‘engines of knowledge’ that emerged in the first ‘big data’ information age of the 19th century, which have since gradually institutionalised themselves into the forms we recognise today. One of the consequences of the developments that emerged from 18th
The 18th century experimentalism was the idea of the laboratory. I have already suggested that many engines of knowledge, such as the scientific garden, supported the development of the idea of ‘natural’ experimentation and that the loci for such experiments became increasingly seen as laboratories in their own right. From the pottery factories of Josiah Wedgwood, the slave plantations of the American South and on to Darwin and Mendel’s experimental gardens – the early laboratories of experimentation were numerous and varied.

One thing they had in common was the development of relatively closed systems or micro-systems within which experimentation became possible, usually involving some form of separation from the natural world and its totalising complexity. The documentation of the elements under observation and the ability to manipulate the ingredients or resources needed for experimental approaches all supported the production of new knowledge, its theorisation and testing. From this emerged much of what we now think of as modern scientific knowledge and its methods of production. In particular, the idea of experimentation as an epistemic virtue also gradually entered not only the practice of science but the broader culture of modernity. It has remained a virtuous form of knowledge production ever since. Esteemed to the point where some scientists will, even now, \[1\] knowing fake their own results in order to (appear to) meet their experimental goals in the approved manner.

This piece examines the laboratory and the experiment as one of modernity’s archetypal dualisms. Early laboratories often started as adjuncts to museums (discussed in a \[2\] previous piece) and experimentalism had been gaining ground as a virtuous form of knowledge production since at least the 18th century. But in the 19th century the variety and scale of laboratories took on a much greater momentum, driven by the expansion of tertiary education and the mix of rise of chemistry and medical teaching laboratories, to be followed by physics and physiology laboratories. These were often paralleled by \[3\] industrial laboratories associated with the development of modern manufacturing methods. Huge growth in the university systems of Europe and North America saw not only the rise of bourgeois values (formal education and qualifications, including the PhD, as a social differentiator) but a rapid growth in university-trained scientists of various kinds. The laboratory became a central part of the training aspect of universities, such that not only the social sciences copied it but that it has endured as a teaching format into the 21st century.

**Calculable Spaces**

The logic of experimentation, sacred or secular, requires a special location – some specific space set aside for its undertaking. Human beings have always invested in the design and construction of special places for the manufacture of particular kinds of knowledge. This series is essentially focused on a set of such places. Processes of calculation almost always require not only methods and technologies but dedicated sites for the collection of what we now think of as ‘primary data’. The astronomical monuments of the Middle East or the \[4\] Americas were both symbolic and practical places for the collection of observational data, its recording, calculation and subsequent theorisation. The early laboratories of the alchemist or the apothecary were also built around the idea of locating specialist knowledge production in special places. Such places often took on an aura of their own, separating them from the mundane world of everyday life.
Early modern medical practitioners were highly likely to provide their patient’s with an astrology reading in conjunction with their diagnosis and treatment schedule. Isaac Newton was as interested in the occult as he was in what we now think of as science. The separation of ‘magic’ and science was as much an epistemic break as a practical or evidence-based one, with the break from organised religion taking even longer to achieve due, in part, to its much greater social authority. New concepts and explanations replaced old (consider phlogiston in chemistry, Galenic theory in medicine or miasmal theory in public health) in science, while many cultural residuals persisted. And we live with the consequences of the way in which these processes took place, with claims to truth still often hinging on the epistemic commitments of the claimant.

In the context of this discussion, the idea of calculable spaces took on a new and highly dynamic character in the 19th century in particular. There was a temporal geography to laboratory science, with the focus shifting from country to country (France, Britain, Germany etc.) as developments gained momentum and the sciences expanded. This idea emerged especially in the knowledge contexts of the chemist’s laboratory and the hospital (and its allied laboratories – anatomy, phlebotomy etc.). These became, and largely remain, places in which specific types of replicable experimentation could be conducted. The laboratory became its own kind of knowledge factory because it not only formalised processes of knowledge production but in effect, developed a culture around the related practices, processes and outcomes of experimentation. In both of these locations, the esteem in which experimentation was held has endured down to the present day. Laboratory experimentation is the fieldwork equivalent for disciplines that need to partition their slice of nature in order to better understand it.

Geographer David Livingstone has identified that it is not only the process of sequestered space that defines many scientific undertakings but that this spatial manifestation extends even to the location of equipment, activities and staff within such spaces. The arrangement of such spaces and the activities within them also have their own consequences for the types of knowledge able to be produced. Ordering space, in this sense, helps to order both practice and process, and consequently, the boundaries of what is both possible and acceptable in such spaces. More recently still, geographers have begun to develop and extend a theoretical approach to information geographies . The fundamental concept being that information, analogue or digital, exhibits a variety of geographical characteristics. These include features such as particular points of origin, specific destinations, temporal and spatial degrees of mobility (diffusion, transmission etc.), networks by which such transmission occurs and so on. So, even here, we can see the concept of the laboratory as a space-place nexus for particular kinds of knowledge production and as points in a network for its distribution.

In addition to this, many early laboratories were established in quite mundane environments such as people’s homes, businesses or even local pubs . Wealthy or middle class researchers, professional or amateur, male or female (often couples), could build on to or convert part of their properties to become laboratories. Many did just this, making the laboratory a far more varied space than the ‘cathedrals’ of science model that gradually infused the culture as the 19th century segued into the 20th
and the large university and industrial laboratories became the dominant form. Even Marie Curie’s laboratory annex was housed in a perfectly ordinary domestic building in Arcueil to the south of Paris where many of her possessions remain radioactive. And radium was promoted as a medical cure-all (science and medicine continued a secular version of the Christian miracle tradition) before its potential effects were fully understood. It also needs to be remembered that active self-promotion and fund-seeking from governments and sponsors are not unique to modern research institutes, with many Victorian researchers, including the likes of Charles Babbage, actively engaged in these processes as advocates for their research programmes. The rise of the laboratory was not simply a ‘natural’ consequence of the success of the science being practiced but directly connected to the active promotion of those sciences by emerging science professionals and their supporters.

Abstracting Nature

One of the successes and limitations of the experimental approach championed in the laboratory has involved a need to abstract from the inherent complexity of nature. This involved segmenting out the biological or chemical experiments from their natural contexts and the attempt to isolate their processes and results in laboratory environments. Chemistry in particular was the first science to take this to the levels we typically associated with the experimental laboratory science. This changed not only the European university education systems but also the definition of the laboratory itself. In close association with rapid industrial developments, it became increasingly common for industrial plants and complexes to set aside spaces for experimentation. Edison did this, for example, by differentiating between paying and non-paying research activities, with some projects part of the immediate commerce of applied science and others done for their own sake or with the potential of future reward.

Measurement and quantification proved to be essential aspects of the new laboratory science. In order to create replicable experiments, much more precise levels of measurement were required for not only the elements that went into chemical and related experiments but also in quantifying the results. And if other laboratories were to copy or replicate such activities, then they too needed to share the same approach to the experimental processes and protocols. Being able to abstract from nature and to, in effect, isolate various complex naturally occurring processes (as well as to attempt new or novel ones) provided a basis for a new and expanding approach to scientific knowledge production as the 19th century progressed. At the same time, the sciences of measurement themselves, including mathematics, statistics and engineering all grew rapidly too. Measurement precision, quantification and replicability became mutually reinforcing touchstones of modern science and technology.

Of Facts and Fetishes

The currency of laboratories and a variety of other sites of scientific inquiry rapidly emerged as ‘facts’. In the English language in particular, the ‘fact’ and its emergence as a virtuous epistemic base point has a long and somewhat convoluted history. Mary Poovey, for example, has written on the development of the fact as the common currency of an increasingly inductive knowledge system. While Barbara Shapiro points to the legal tradition as a source for the conceptual origins and growing social authority of the ‘fact’ as modernity progressed. The sciences, in separating themselves form more traditional forms of knowledge and its production, began to use the ‘fact’ as an authorising currency of knowledge. To do this, measurement became an increasingly important concern. If the fact was to be a bedrock concept, then it had to rest on verifiable evidence and this called for the rise of and in precision measurement. This in its turn led to the production of many new and improved measuring instruments in science and
technology, with a growing concern over standardisation. [14] Hasok Chang has written extensively about the effort involved, sometimes even required, in attempting to replicate the processes and results of a number of classic 19th century scientific experiments. His work indicates that some scientific certainties were manufactured out of complexity rather than fully resolving the problems they examined.

**Laboratory Facts and Fictions**

The trope of the laboratory entered the literature very early in the 19th century including, amongst others, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, or the Modern Prometheus in 1818, Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* in 1886 and, of course, Bram Stoker’s [15]*Dracula* in 1897. The genre only continued to grow and diversify as science itself gained momentum. This was partly because the image of the laboratory was already long familiar from the early modern period alchemists and apothecaries but also because 18th century industry had given rise to a variety of applied laboratory contexts, such as those mentioned earlier. Many representations were negative, railing against the unnaturalness of the laboratory and what was perceived to take place within its confines. Others, such as H. G. Wells loathed the laboratory teaching model that gained ascendancy by the latter part of the 19th century.

Older constructs, such as the monster, found new forms in what we now think of as the science fiction genre, shifting from the social to the scientific domains for their inspiration. Wells’ morlocks in *The Time Machine* are a later example of this intersection of the monster with science and emerging anthropology. Science fiction became a social and literary parallel of techno-science in a time of phenomenal change and development with its many associated human costs. The Enlightenment and ‘age of reason’ were paralleled by the rococo, romanticism and Victorian gothic with corresponding new ideas about ‘nature’ and the natural. The traditional laboratory has remained a powerful image in this domain while science and industry have moved on into more varied and digital environments. The sociological study of laboratories flourished in the 1970’s and 1980’s with [16]*Latour* and the Scottish STS programme but this initial interest has since waned somewhat.

**Conclusion**

Obviously there is neither laboratory nor experiment without the scientists themselves. Their commitments to the laboratory and its processes are a key part of the continuing validity of the knowledge produced in such places. Deviations from this formalised script are quite naturally seen as undermining science itself since all scientists cannot personally witness every experiment – the early modern ‘gentleman’s agreement’ endures in the sciences. Success, however, is so greatly valued that forging results is sometimes seen as better than experimental ‘failure’, potentially compromising the reliability of the knowledge produced in the laboratory. This is a problem for science that [17]*Ioannidis* has commented on in a paper that was almost as contentious as [18]*McKeown* ’s assessment of medicine’s role in rising life expectancies. The culture of science produces its forms of logic and its own epistemic
values but popular versions and historiographies emerge which cannot always be entirely validated. In this piece, the focus has been on the varied development of what has become an iconic ‘factory’ of scientific knowledge production, the laboratory. It remains a remarkably enduring, if malleable, institution.

[19]Hamish Robertson is a geographer at the University of New South Wales with experience in healthcare including a decade in ageing research. He has worked in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors and he has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from ageing, diversity, health informatics, Aboriginal health, patient safety and spatial science to cultural heritage research. Hamish is currently completing his PhD on the geography of Alzheimer’s disease and recently finished editing a book on museums and older people.

5. http://www.magicandmedicine.hps.cam.ac.uk/
7. https://www.amazon.com/Putting-Science-Its-Place-science-culture/dp/022610284X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1482813167&sr=1-1&keywords=putting+science+in+its+
17. http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.0020124
18. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1447153/
19. http://unsw.academia.edu/HamishRobertson

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**Epocchal theorising and business bullshit (2017-03-08 08:00)**

I've always had an ambivalent relationship to the idea of *late modernity*. It was the work of Bauman, Beck and Giddens which drew me into Sociology, presenting a till then cynical philosophy student with the possibility that one could meaningfully engage with the world and diagnose the times in a philosophical register. But coming to recognise the conceptual and empirical limitations of these accounts, as well as the methodological dangers which flow from them, profoundly shaped my subsequent trajectory as a sociologist. The [1]first article I ever had published in a journal was a critique of a particularly weak instance of such theorising, suggesting that it was interesting because its ostentatious failings revealed problems that were more deeply concealed in more sophisticated examples of this approach. The broader tendency at work here has been incisively critiqued by Mike Savage as *epocchal theorising*:
The social sciences, and especially sociology, abound with epochalist thinking (see generally Savage 2009). We are seen to have moved, variously, to a globalised, post-modern, neo-liberal, informationalised, cosmopolitan, (and so forth) world order. Such thinking saturates debates about social change and incites an almost constant agitation for detecting new kinds of epochal change and transformation which makes our contemporary times different from anything that comes before.

This is how I address the issues in my PhD, arguing that the canonisation of this work is something which invites explanation. Why have so many statements of epochal change emerged within British sociology? What was it about Britain and its sociology which engendered this tendency? Why have they proved so influential? Why have these accounts proved so mobile, circulating across fields and subdisciplines which would likely otherwise prove disconnected? As I put it in the thesis, it "serves as a conduit linking a range of sociological sub-disciplines, ensuring that they can, at least in principle, be reincorporated in a substantive way into the same intellectual typology":

To this end it takes the work on late modernity by Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992) as its foil, treating it as emblematic of a broader trend within contemporary social theory. Metaphors abound readily within this now canonical literature (Archer 2013a, Outwaite 2009) as all manner of empirical phenomena are incorporated into a dazzlingly panoramic frame of reference and presented as manifestations of the leading edge of social change. However for all its preoccupation with the new, there is something oddly dated about such work, with its apparent prospectiveness belying underlying continuities with long-standing traditions within British sociology (Savage 2010a, Savage and Burrows 2007). In spite of its self-styled epochal novelty, it can easily be read as a peculiarly a priori manifestation of a much broader preoccupation with ' endings' within contemporary sociology (Crow 2005). On such a view, the popularity of this work constitutes a puzzle which demands explanation and the opening chapter of this thesis aims to provide precisely this.

In an earlier article, Savage and Burrows describe this as a “kind of sociology which does not seek to define its expertise in terms of it empirical research skills, but in terms of its ability to provide an overview of a kind that is not intended to be tested by empirical research”. This claim is one which can be explored at the level of individual careers: how does a practice with such an obviously rhetorical dimension, in terms of offering panoramic visions of social change that prove persuasive, become a viable career strategy? It’s an argument for another blog post, but I believe the success of epochal theorising can be explained in terms of the incentive to monopolise the intellectual attention space that emerges within the accelerated academy. These attention-grabbing, non-empirical accounts constitute ascension strategies through which theorists ensure their incorporation into the intellectual landscape in a sustained way. Epochal theorising is a way to make yourself a reference point.

When we see it in these terms, the comparison to management literature comes to seem less unfair than might otherwise be the case. This is a summary of one such management theorist offered in One Market Under God, by Thomas Frank, loc 4595:

In 1989, Handy was already comparing the “change” of our time to the experiences of the Incas when the conquistadors showed up. The One to One Future, a 1993 book by consultants Don Peppers and Martha Rogers that hails the rise of individualized marketing through fax machines and direct mail, begins by declaring that “we are passing through a technological discontinuity of epic proportions,” a "paradigm shift" that will unleash "cataclysmic changes." In 1994, Competing for the Future held that we are on the
verge of "a revolution as profound as that which gave birth to modern industry." In more recent years, of course, the rhetoric has only escalated. The Dance of Change, a 1999 compendium of big thoughts on the subject, has by its fifteenth page referred to "change agents," "change agendas," "change initiatives," "change programs," "top-down change" (which is bogus change indeed), "inner" and "outer change," "deep change processes," "significant change," and has settled on one term as more meaningful than all others: "profound change." To illustrate the failure of rival theorists' "change programs," the book's authors offer what may be the most pointless graph in the entire history of business thought: Without benefit of notation, figures, or sources we are shown how an arrow marked "Time" bucks and subsides on its way to the future while another marked "Potential (unrealized)" ascends tragically to the heavens.32

My provocative claim is that the epochal theorising which dominated British sociology in the 1990s and 2000s could be construed as nothing more than management theory. In fact perhaps it could even be regarded as less than management theory, in so far as that management theory enjoys a great degree of influence over the wider world. It could be said that British epochal theorising exercised such an influence over party politics, but I'm reminded of Tony Benn describing in his penultimate diaries how "Anthony Giddens just hovers round trying to put an ideological cloak around whatever is being discussed". Is epochal theorising often just business bullshit without the social influence?

2. https://stratificationandculture.wordpress.com/2014/07/01/sociological-ruminations-on-piketty/

“Open, good. Closed, bad. Tattoo it on your forehead”: Placing the technology sector in social and economic history (2017-03-09 08:00)

I'm currently reading Thomas Frank's One Market Under God, a remarkably prescient book published in 2000 which has a lot of insight into contemporary cultures of technological evangelism. The book is concerned with what Frank sees as a transition in American life from a form of populism predicated on cultural reaction to one grounded in the worship of the market. It's possible I'm primed to see this analysis as prescient because I'm working my way backwards through his books and One Market Under God contains the seeds of an analysis that he developed over the next sixteen years.

Nonetheless, I think we can learn much about our present circumstances by looking back to this transitional point in the roaring 90s which saw the origin of the rightward turn of social democratic parties, mass digitalisation and the first Silicon Valley gold-rush. What I'm increasingly preoccupied by is how these events were intimately connected. In other words: how do we place the ascendancy of the technology sector in social and economic history? To my surprise, Thomas Frank's book actually addresses this question more straight-forwardly than any other I can think of apart from Platform Capitalism, though of course many accounts address these issues without systematically investigating them.

Despite the 1990s being hailed as an era of democratisation driven by a booming economy, Frank insists that we recognise that "The booming stock market of the nineties did not democratize wealth; it concentrated wealth" (loc 1973). But this chimera of continually ascending stock prices, grounded in the rampant speculation of the dot com boom, helped license an ideological transition that Frank describes on loc 2027:
both parties came around to this curious notion, imagining that we had somehow wandered into a sort of free-market magic kingdom, where ever-ascending stock prices could be relied upon to solve just about any social problem. Now we could have it all: We could slash away at the welfare state, hobble the unions, downsize the workforce, send the factories to Mexico—and no one would get hurt!

The ideological work involved in maintaining we had entered a new era of perpetual growth, beyond boom and bust, relied upon the mystique of the internet. It heralded the dawn of a new world, the end of old certainties and a constant horizon of possibility to be invoked in the face of those exhibiting an anachronistic scepticism. From loc 1659:

And yet, since the moment the Internet was noticed by the mainstream media in 1995, it has filled a single and exclusive position in political economy: a sort of cosmic affirmation of the principles of market populism. “Think of the Internet as an economic-freedom metaphor for our time,” wrote bull-market economist Lawrence Kudlow in August 1999.45 “The Internet empowers ordinary people and disempowers government.” And we were only too glad to do as Kudlow instructed us, to think of it in precisely this way. In fact, so closely did the Internet and market populism become linked in the public mind that whenever a pundit or journalist mentioned the Web, one braced oneself for some windy pontification about flexibility, or the infinite mobility of capital, or the total and unappealable obsolescence of labor, government, and any other enemy of the free-market enterprise.

Somewhat more prosaically, the companies of Silicon Valley became emblems of a new anti-elitism, with the old formalities of corporate life being replaced by a hierarchical ethos that lionised the entrepreneur for their authentic living, often expressed in 'working hard and living hard'. The practice of paying stock options in lieu of wages became a cypher for shareholder democracy, an idea which was seized upon as legitimating what were in reality vicious attacks upon the security of labour. However as Frank points out on loc 2063, the reality of this in Silicon Valley was presented misleadingly as a sign of a brave new workplace culture rather than a familiar self-interest:

It may have been fun to imagine what these enchanted options could do in the service of economic democracy, but in point of fact their powers were almost always directed the other way. Options did not bring about some sort of “New Economy” egalitarianism; they were one of the greatest causes of the ever widening income gap. It was options that inflated the take-home pay of CEOs to a staggering 475 times what their average line-worker made; it was options that made downsizing, outsourcing, and union-busting so profitable. When options were given out to employees—a common enough practice in Silicon Valley by decade’s end—they often came in lieu of wages, thus permitting firms to conceal their payroll expenses and artificially inflate the price of their shares, pumping the bubble still further.17 Options were a tool of wealth concentration, a bridge straight to the nineteenth century.

What seems hugely important to me here is the recognition that the vast concentration of wealth that took place in the 1990s was deeply tied up, structurally and culturally, with the first wave of mass digitalisation brought about by the dot com bubble. The nature of that entanglement still isn’t as clear to me as I would like, but I’m increasingly confident in my claim that the analysis of digitalisation needs to be an integral part of the analysis of capitalism from the 1970s onwards.

As important as economic history is though, it’s crucial that we also understand the cultural dimensions to this process. What I really like about Thomas Frank is his commitment to taking business bullshit seriously. From loc 1787:
It is worth examining the way business talk about itself, the fantasies it spins, the role it writes for itself in our lives. It is important to pay attention when CEOs tell the world they would rather surf than pray, show up at work in Speedos rather than suits, hang out in Goa rather than Newport, listen to Stone Temple Pilots rather than Sibelius. It is not important, however, in the way they imagine it is, and for many Americans it is understandably difficult to care very much whether the guy who owns their company is a defender of family values or a rave kid. But culture isn’t set off from life in a realm all its own, and the culture of business in particular has massive consequences for the way the rest of us live.

Our contemporary discourse of ‘disruption’ and ‘innovation’ was nurtured in the business commentary of the late 1990s. By examining its origins, we can see the political context of this way of thinking and speaking about technology much more transparently than is the case if we examine contemporary instances of it. To close with a quote from Peter Schwartz, quoted on loc 1321:

Open, good. Closed, bad. Tattoo it on your forehead. Apply it to technology standards, to business strategies, to philosophies of life. It’s the winning concept for individuals, for nations, for the global community in the years ahead.


The ‘Sharing Economy’ as Disembedding Mechanism (2017-03-10 08:00)

As some reading this may be aware, I’m fairly critical of the account Giddens gives of late modernity, seeing it as a wrong-turning for many qualitative researchers who sought to situate their findings in a socio-historical context. Nonetheless, I’ve been thinking recently about the concept of the disembedding mechanism and how it might allow us to theorising the ‘sharing economy’. This is how Rob Stones summarises the concept in the abstract for an encyclopaedia entry:

Disembedding refers to the way in which contemporary social practices can no longer be primarily defined by their grounding, or embeddedness, in the local context of a restricted place and time. Social practices are now, in large part, removed from the immediacies of context, with the relations they involve typically being stretched over large tracts of time and space. Local experiences and events are shaped by processes taking place on the other side of the world, and vice versa. These are processes, moreover, that are primarily impersonal and abstract.

What Giddens describes as “the ‘lifting out’ of social relations from local contexts and their rearticulation across indefinite tracts of time-space” give rise to a “tremendous acceleration in time-space distanciation” which he sees as characterising modernity. He identifies two types of disembedding mechanism, symbolic tokens and expert systems. The former are mediums of exchange which have a standard value across contexts, thus disembedding valuation from a local context and fixing it in terms of much broader processes, as well as disembedding obligation from
temporal unfolding within that context by facilitating credit. The latter are forms of expert knowledge and technical capacity which have validity independently of those who make use of them, leaving situated interaction shaped by processes of knowledge production and specialisation far away from it.

It strikes me that the ‘sharing economy’ represents a new form of disembedding mechanism. The business model here seems reasonably clear: find a social interaction which already is or could be monetised, develop a digital platform which can be inserted as an intermediary within that interaction and rely on network dynamics to scale the new model in a way that will ultimately squeeze out any instances of the interaction which are unmediated or reliant on an older form of mediation e.g. local taxi dispatchers. With the growth of the ‘sharing economy’, larger tracts of human interaction are governed by the technical architecture and social imperative of large corporations based many thousands of mile away, whose local operations are concerned at most with recruiting new workers & safeguarding the platform against regulatory pushback.

It’s useful to consider the ‘sharing economy’ in these terms because it takes us away from a fixation on technological possibility. Certainly, we could not have had Uber and Airbnb without a particular configuration of mobile computing, cloud computing and ubiquitous social networking. But we also need to consider why these platforms are capable of scaling in the way they do. Part of the issue is undoubtedly about coordination, with a technical capacity to identify resources and make them accessible in an unprecedentedly precise way. However the more interesting issue concerns trust, or rather its decline in late modernity. Trust in the platform becomes plausible when trust in each other begins to break down. What will the political consequences be of the radicalisation of disembedding which the sharing economy represents & the new orientation towards trust which participation in it begins to engender?

Social media didn’t create the ambition to rethink scholarly communication, it gave us the tools to do it effectively (2017-03-11 08:00)

When we talk about the possibilities which social media offer for rethinking scholarly communication, it’s easy to slip into the trap of thinking this ambition is a new one. We counterpoise the ‘new’ and the ‘old’, the innovative and the traditional, the digital and the analogue. In doing so, we obscure past projects which sought to rethink how scholarly ideas are disseminated. These are projects from which we could learn much. The Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales, created by Pierre Bourdieu in 1975, is one such project:

We shall present here, side by side, texts differing very greatly in their style and function: ‘finished’ texts, on the one hand, as they are called by academics journals, but also short notes, accounts of oral presentations, work in progress such as interim research projects and reports, in which theoretical intentions, empirical procedures of verification, and the data on which these are based, are all that much more visible. The desire to provide access to the workshop, which has different rules from those of method, and to present archives of a work still under way, implies a rejection of the most clearly ritual formalisms: justified typography, standard rhetoric, articles and issues of similar length, and more generally, everything that leads to the standardisation and ‘normalisation’ of the products of scholarship. Recognising no other imperative than those imposed by the rigour of demonstration, and secondarily by the aim of visibility, will mean freedom from the censorships, artificial devices and perversions generated by a concern to conform to the established customs and good manners of the university field:
a rhetoric of caution or false prediction, with the apparatus and panoply of celebrity discussion that is never more than self-celebration, the ostentatious displays of signs of belonging to the most selective and select groups in the intellectual universe.

**Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action, pg 90**

The ambitions here are familiar ones from discussions about what social media means for scholarly communication:

- Diversifying the types of scholarly output in circulation.
- Sharing work-in-progress, revealing the scaffolding that lies behind the carefully crafted reality of journal articles and monographs.
- Rejecting scholarly formalities where these operate as rituals, marking inclusion and exclusion, rather than contributing to the intellectual endeavour.
- Rethinking the norms of scholarly communication with an aim of improving visibility, overcoming self-serving control of ideas (and the evaluative practices which constitute their proxies) in order to liberate scholarly communication.

The ambition was to “make visible, sometimes by a simple graphic effect, what is generally hidden” (p. 91) and doing this was seen to involve manifesting in its own representational activity the demystification which was its ambition in relation to the social world. If I’ve understood correctly, Bourdieu’s point was that sociological reflexivity has to extent to the communication of sociological knowledge, as well as to its production, if its critical value isn’t to be lost at the point of dissemination.

The value of social media lies in the tools it offers to these ends, understood in terms of their practical utility in specific organisational contexts, particularly in the absence of significant resources. But in overcoming the trite distinction between analogue and digital, between traditional publication and contemporary innovation, we need to be alive to the myths of social media which are in circulation, particularly as they manifest themselves in the academy.

John McCreery (2017-03-12 02:09:43)

These are admirable aims, but one question remains. “Rejecting scholarly formalities where these operate as rituals, marking inclusion and exclusion, rather than contributing to the intellectual endeavour” leaves open the question of scholarly formalities that do contribute to the intellectual endeavour. In an era when a Google search may produce millions of hits for any give topic and misinformation is rampant, filtering and assessment functions are, if anything, more important than ever.

Mark Carrigan (2017-03-19 17:35:11)

I agree but how effective are academics at performing that role?

John McCreery (2017-03-19 22:41:29)

“How effective?” may be the wrong question. Suppose we take as our premise Sturgeon’s law, that most of what gets published is crap. In school we are taught to look for flaws and take what are, at the end of the day, cheap shots. Suppose, instead, we adopted Japanese advertising critic Amano Yukichi’s approach, in which the critic’s most essential role is to
Margaret Archer and Bernard Lahire as post-Bourdieuian social theorists (2017-03-12 08:00)

In an interesting chapter Frederic Vandenberghe explores the role of the individual in Bourdieu’s Sociology, as well as the critiques which Margaret Archer and Bernard Lahire make of it. His intention is to respond to a sociology he sees as *hegemonic* by developing a post-Bourdieuian theory of the social world that is not anti-Bourdieuian. His project, as I understand it, derives from a sense that Bourdieu’s sheer influence is distortive, polarising debate in a way that steers it away from concern with *better or worse sociology* to *more or less accurate interpretations of the master*.

How accurate is Vandenberghe’s account of Bourdieu’s influence? His 536,230 citations certainly offer quantitative evidence of this influence, but the claim that Bourdieu’s sociology is hegemonic seems more contentious to me. Nonetheless, he’s surely correct that the combination of its influence, diffusion and systematicity make it a force to be reckoned with. Or rather a force that *must* be reckoned with, a reference point that is difficult, if not impossible, to ignore.

Both Archer and Lahire were deeply influenced by Bourdieu. My interview with her in here explores his influence on her thinking, as well as her time working with him as a post-doc in the early 60s. While, as Vandenberghe puts it, Lahire’s sociology is so “thoroughly Bourdieusian that he could well be considered the heterodox successor to the master (Loïc Wacquant being the official one)”. Both have worked at the intersection of sociology and psychology in recent years, with Lahire taking inspiration from Durkheim while Archer has looked to American pragmatism for intellectual resources. Vandenberghe argues that their work represents a *social psychology of a new kind*: orientated to “how groups, large and small, behave within in the individual mind” rather than “how individuals behave in small groups”. Their shared unit of analysis is *the life*, understood biographically, as a movement through the world constituted through choices. But the dissimilarity arises because Archer’s focus concerns how future projects shape present actions, whereas Lahire explains the present and the future in terms of past “dispositions and their activation in particular contexts in the present”. As he puts it, “His actors are pushed by their dispositions, while hers are pulled forward by their projects”.

From Vandenberghe’s exposition, it seems that Lahire’s critique of the concept of habitus resembles Archer’s in some ways: he “accuses Bourdieu of abusively generalising a particular model that only holds in exceptional situation (such as traditional societies and total institutions)”. But he make the same critique of the concept of field, “accusing Bourdieu of transforming a regional model into a general theory of the social world”. Instead he offers an account of the individual as “like a crumpled sheet or a rumpled rag”, with social space in all its dimensions unevenly folded up inside of them. Not unlike Archer, he sees what Bourdieu regarded as a marginal condition ([4] the cleavage of the habitus) to instead be a general characteristic, at least under certain social and cultural conditions.

His exposition of Archer is excellent, rather unsurprisingly as one of the theorists most deeply conversant with her body of work as a whole. The slight exception to this is the latent teleology he reads into the concept of reflexivity, ignoring the extent to which we *all* practice each of these modes to varying degrees in everyday life. Oddly, he offers precisely this recognition as a suggestion of how her account of reflexivity can be improved, with his accusation of a “kind of disguised personality test” being an incisive critique of how her work on reflexivity is chronically misread, even by its advocates.

I agree with him however that Archer downplays the role of cultural structures, seeing them as something which “structures the situation from outside, not from inside in the form of subconscious schemes of perception, judgement and interpretation that prestructure the world and canalize action, excluding some options even before the actor becomes conscious of the situation”. His suggestion that we investigate empirically how the relative...
balance of reflexivity and disposition operates in particular action situations is one I find extremely plausible, perhaps demanding that we need methods other than the interview, as well as overcoming the relative neglect of situated embodied action within Archer's work.

It's an interesting chapter which I highly recommend. It's left me wanting to return to my PhD, as well as investigating Lahire in greater depth. It strikes me that I've actually done something akin to what Vandenberghe advocates, synthesising Archer and Lahire, without actually having read Lahire. My curiosity demands that I establish whether or not this is the case.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=YLwiDgAAQBAJ&lr=&source=gbs_navlinks_s
2. https://scholar.google.co.uk/citations?user=d_lp40IAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao

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Public sociology and the role of the researcher: engagement, communication and academic activism (2017-03-13 08:00)

A Postgraduate Forum Regional Event

29 March 2017
De Montfort University, Leicester - [1]FULL DETAILS & PROGRAMME

What is the role of the researcher outside the academy? This event invites Postgraduate and Early Career Researchers to innovate and critically reflect on three related areas of public sociology: academic activism, public engagement, and participation and co-production. It encourages researchers to articulate and address diverse challenges, such as neutrality, networking, and whether activism can be considered a form of public engagement.

This event includes a keynote lecture from distinguished speaker Dr Mark Carrigan, Digital Fellow, The Sociological Review, presentations by invited speakers, a film created using participatory methods, a participatory session, and the chance to network and discuss work with fellow researchers. The aim is to provide an environment in which participants have the space to be questioning, to have a lively exchange of ideas, and to be inspired to explore the potential of these ideas in their own research.

1. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24208/pg_aa_study_day_290317.pdf

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CfP: Watchful Citizens: Policing from Below and Digital Vigilantism Université de Montréal, 2-3 November 2017 (2017-03-14 08:00)

CfP: Watchful Citizens: Policing from Below and Digital Vigilantism
Université de Montréal, 2-3 November 2017

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works have focused on vigilante practices and activities on the field (Favarel-Garrigues & Gayer, 2016; Pratten &
with classical forms of citizens' involvement in denunciation, law enforcement and vigilante justice. One of the most
wrongdoing by other citizens. Digital media cultures facilitate the sharing of evidence of offensive acts, but also the
(Walsh, 2008). Autonomization also refers here to a context in which an ideal-typical state claims to monopolize law
vigilantism represents an outgrowth of state activity” (2014: 249). According to Walsh, “while operating without
official authorization, the organizations do not perceive their actions as overriding or transgressing the local order but construct themselves as self-anointed guardians rescuing national sovereignty, citizenship and the law’s moral sanctity, from cultural elites, moneyed interests, inept bureaucrats and a sclerotic state” (2014: 249). According to Favarel-Garrigues and Gayer, vigilantism may be defined as “collective coercive practices undertaken by non-state actors in order to enforce norms (social or judicial) and/or to take the law in their own hands – a term that mostly refers to punishing, but also to societal ideals. In targeting the offenders that are external to their community, but also their own offenders, vigilantes are both involved in the fight against crime and social control. Their activities are known because they either are conducted in public, in the name of a community of reference, or because the witnesses to more secretly conducted punishing expeditions spread the information and nourish the group’s reputation” (Favarel-Garrigues & Gayer, 2016: 17). If pioneers’ work established a first definition of vigilantism based on history (Brown, 1975; Abrahams, 1998; Johnston, 1996), more recent sociological and anthropological works have focused on vigilante practices and activities on the field (Favarel-Garrigues & Gayer, 2016; Pratten & Sen, 2007). More specifically, and considering the recent developments in media and communication, we want to focus on the impacts and interactions between vigilantism and the digital sphere. On this matter, Daniel Trottier defines digital vigilantism as "a process where citizens are collectively offended by other citizen activity, and respond through coordinated retaliation on digital media platforms, including mobile devices and social media platforms. The offending acts range from mild breaches of social protocol to terrorist acts and participation in riots. These offensive acts are not meant as a provocation in the context in which vigilantism is situated. Therefore, the targets of digital vigilantism are typically unaware of the conflict in which they have been enrolled" (Trottier, 2015: 218). Digital vigilantism refers, but is not limited, to a basic principle of “naming and shaming”, or through a ‘weaponisation of visibility’, that is sharing the target’s personal details by publishing/distributing them on public sites (‘doxing’). According to Trottier: “The visibility produced through digital vigilantism is unwanted (the target is typically not soliciting publicity) intense (content like blog posts, photos and videos evidence circulate to hundreds of thousands or even millions of users within a few days) and enduring (the vigilantism campaign may be the first item to appear
when searching the individual's name online, and may become a cultural reference in its own right)" (Trottier, 2015: 219). He then argues that: "the emergence of social, geolocated, ubiquitous media has led to a dissolution to any such barrier, to the extent that digital media activity can have lasting consequences in both a local and global context" (Trottier, 2015: 220). Digital vigilantism implies a paradigm shift with regard to the context in which digital media are used, pointing to the end of a yet well-established distinction between online activity and offline consequences (Trottier, 2015; 2016; Reagle, 2015). Digital communication comes with "context collapse", where the "lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts" (boyd, 2008: 34). As Reagle puts it: "Comment's reactivity, shortness, and asynchronicity mean that it is especially contextual but that its context also is easily lost as it is forwarded and retweeted" (Reagle, 2015: 79). The coming workshop, which will launch the International Center for Comparative Criminology's 2017-2018 scientific season, will focus on digital vigilantism. Considering both the raising of the autonomization paradigm and the digital sphere, we will address the impacts of such dimensions on the practices, activities and dynamics of vigilantism, but also how vigilantism and the autonomization of societal practices with regard to gatekeeping and social control impacts vigilantism. As examples of communications, we would welcome propositions addressing (but not limited to) the following issues: - How do vigilantes promote and enforce their norms and/or values in practice using digital media? - How do digital media help, transform and contribute to the coordination of embodied activities in the context of vigilante activities? - How do digital media contribute to the renegotiation and reassertion of collective (ex: nationalist) identities in the context of vigilante activities? - How can scholarship contribute to a better understanding of the relation between on- and offline in the context of vigilante activities? - What link can we draw between digital vigilantism and the social, political and economic discourses of the vigilantes? - Aside from mediated visibility as social harm, what other outcomes might targets or participants of digital vigilantism face in consequence? - How can we (re)imagine relations between states (broadly defined to include law enforcement agencies) and vigilant(e) citizens beyond frameworks of contestation/substitution/complementarity? - How are digital vigilantism initiatives related to official law-enforcement institutions (cooperation/challenge/conflict)? - How is mediated visibility understood by vigilantes (but also other relevant social actors such as states, journalists and digital media platforms) as a means to combat criminal and otherwise offensive acts? - How are specific mediated acts such as online shaming and 'doxing' both leveraged and rendered meaningful in the context of vigilante activities? - How can we articulate social control (low crime) and societal control (high crime) with regard to digital vigilantism? - What do we know about the commercial dimension of digital vigilantism? - How are digital vigilantism initiatives related to existing political parties, social movements, associations, lobbying or private firms? - How do the vigilantes communicate about their activity on the web? How do they show their campaigns on Youtube? How do they edit the videos they post? - What do vigilantes defend? Legal norms, moral prescriptions, own values and interests? Practical information The workshop will take place at Université de Montréal, 2-3 November 2017. Proposals should include a title, a clear identification of the author(s), as well as an affiliation and should be no longer than 500-600 words. Proposals may be grounded in different academic and disciplinary perspectives including, but not limited to sociology, political science, anthropology, criminology, media studies, history. They should be sent to [2]samuel.tanner@umontreal.ca by 22nd May 2017. Authors will receive an answer by 1st July 2017. Organizers Gilles Favarel- Garrigues (SciencesPo – CERI) Daniel Trottier (Erasmus University Rotterdam) Samuel Tanner (Université de Montréal – International Center for Comparative Criminology)
International Journal of Social Research Methodology Seminar Competition (2017-03-15 08:00)

The Board of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology (IJSRM) is pleased to announce the launch of the 2017 Seminar Competition. Our aim is to support the development of critical and innovative approaches to on-going and emerging methodological debates across a range of approaches, both qualitative and quantitative, and including mixed and comparative methods, as these relate to philosophical, theoretical, ethical, political and practice issues. Seminars may consist of single or multiple day events. Topics can include any area of social research methodology.

• Available funding £3500

Guidelines for Applicants

We are seeking proposals that are concerned with debate and critical development of original cutting edge work of methodological significance. Seminars may bring together established and new researchers. They should be collaborative in approach across different institutions and disciplines and may include colleagues from relevant, non-HE, organisations.

Proposals should have clear goals and outcomes with evident concern to the methodological contribution of the Seminar. In addition, a core purpose of the Seminar series is to engage with, and contribute to the development of an international community of social researchers. Accordingly, proposers may consider how their events can be recorded for non-participants and posted on the IJSRM multimedia site. Proposers should also consider the development of a paper (papers) or a special issue for IJSRM. These would then be subject to the normal refereeing process.

Format

We are open to suggestions for format either in the form of a single day seminar or in the form of multiple days across the academic year 2017-18. Applicants may find it advantageous to organise their event adjacent to another similar event (conference, seminar).

It is expected that the funding will be used towards meeting the cost of room and equipment hire, hospitality, consumables and travel for speakers. It is expected that there are no costs for delegate attendance.

How to Apply

Further details and an application form can be obtained from Alice Edwards, Journal Administrator, tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk.

Closing date for applications: 30th April 2017

Assessment Criteria

All submissions will be reviewed by a Committee drawn from the Board of IJSRM and will be assessed against the following criteria:

• Contribution to the development of methodological innovation and debate;
• Relevance to the aims and scope of IJSRM;
• Projected outputs and impact;
• Value for Money
Notes

- All successful seminars will have a named Principal Organiser and named Co-Organiser. The Principal Organiser will be responsible for all promotion and management of the programme of work, including arrangements for the venue, rooms, facilities, dealing with expense forms, submitting claim forms for event costs to IJSRM.
- Travel, at standard return rail fare rates and reasonable subsistence for speakers is permissible. Fees will not be paid to speakers.
- Delegates will not be paid expenses for attendance.
- Seminars would be expected to take place during the 2017 – 18 academic year.
- The events will be promoted by the Principal Organiser and co-organisers through their research networks, institutions and departments. All communications with participants and publicity of events will acknowledge sponsorship by the International Journal of Social Research Methodology.
- Further promotion will be undertaken by Taylor & Francis as appropriate.

Social Media Training Workshop (2017-03-16 08:00)

Social Media Training Workshop

Led by Holly Powell Jones

City University, London EC1V 0HB

Monday 8 May 2017, 12.30 – 4.00 pm
This workshop will be of interest and assistance if you wish to use social media to disseminate your work, identify and share relevant opportunities, communicate a cause, or promote an organisation, charity, or business services.


Call for Applications: Visiting Postdoctoral Fellowships “Algorithmed Public Spheres” (2017-03-17 08:00)

***Visiting Postdoctoral Fellowships “Algorithmed Public Spheres”
(Deadline: April 1st)***

SUMMARY:
The Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research in Hamburg, Germany, invites applications for international postdoctoral research fellows who will conduct innovative research on the social and cultural impact of algorithms during stays of 3-12 months in Hamburg in the academic year 2017/2018.

DESCRIPTION:
The Hans Bredow Institute for Media Research is a publicly funded research institute that focuses on the study of mediated public communication. Its research encompasses both broadcast and digital communication from an interdisciplinary and comparative perspective.

The postdoctoral research network Algorithmed Public Spheres was established to study the relevance of algorithms for the constitution of the public sphere. We emphasize in particular the importance of algorithms for filtering, ranking and selecting media content and for structuring digital communication. In contrast to the use of data mining in areas such as healthcare, credit scoring and general business analytics, where such techniques have a long tradition, the impact of algorithms on the public sphere poses novel challenges. How are communication, media, and public discourse impacted by transferring the dominant logics of consumption from other industries to news, information, and political deliberation,
implemented in social media platforms, search engines, and on news websites?

Research in this area could include:
- Measurement of algorithmic bias and discrimination
- Feedback effects in recommender systems
- Assessment of potential filter bubbles
- Algorithms in news production, distribution and consumption processes
- User interaction with and rationalization of algorithms

We invite applications for international postdoctoral research fellows from fields including, but not restricted to, computer and information science, communication and media studies, law, sociology and philosophy, who will conduct innovative research on the social and cultural impact of algorithms during stays of 3-12 months in Hamburg in the academic year 2017/2018. We particularly welcome cross-cutting research proposals that integrate technical and social perspectives and result in concrete outcomes, for example in the form of peer-reviewed research articles or proposals for externally funded projects.

Up to two funded fellowships will be awarded as result of this call. The fellowships cover airfare and a contribution to the accommodation and subsistence in Hamburg. In specific cases, we may offer a temporary employment contract instead of a scholarship.

To apply, please send a cover letter (one page), a project proposal (up to three pages) and your CV (up to four pages), including a list of your most relevant publications (maximum of five), to Cornelius Puschmann (c.puschmann@hans-bredow-institut.de). Please note that applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered. IMPORTANT DATES: Application deadline: April 1, 2017 Announcement of 2017/2018 Fellows: May 1, 2017

1. mailto:c.puschmann@hans-bredow-institut.de

Donald Trump: Everyday Tactics of Post-Truth (2017-03-18 08:00)

In *The Making of Donald Trump*, David Johnston identifies the tactics used by Trump to deflect inquiries into his many shady dealings and questionable decisions. Sometimes this is a matter of outright threats, with an enthusiasm for litigation ([1]1,900 suits as plaintiffs) coupled with an explicitly articulated philosophy of vengeance proving a dangerous combination for any who dare to cross him. But somewhat contrary to his public image as a blundering fool, he is often much more subtle than this, engaging in strategies of deflection and misdirection with all the deftness of the most accomplished public relations manager. In other cases, it just becomes weird, with Trump willing to publicly deny that a recording he had previously admitted to be of his own voice was anything other than a hoax:
This combination of viciousness, skilfulness and brazenness has left him insulated from meaningful scrutiny. But what has he averted in this way? What might have happened but hasn't? On page 154 Johnston offers a description which has caught my imagination:

Together, these strategies – muddying the facts and deflecting inquiries into past conduct – help ensure that Trump's carefully crafted public persona will not be unmade. He will not suffer the curtain to be pulled back to reveal a man who tricked society into thinking he was all wise and all powerful.

This public persona which has been crafted, sometimes deliberately while at other times impulsively, remains intact. I'm interested in what such a 'pulling back of the curtain' requires to be effective: the sustained attention of an audience, a sufficient familiarity with the person(a) in question, a prolonged campaign to sort fact from fiction and a lack of contestation concerning this process of sorting.

What is being framed somewhat unhelpfully as a 'post-truth era' are the conditions under which this ceases to be possible. There's lots of ways in which we could try and explain them, not all of which are necessarily mutually exclusive. The collapse of authority in late modernity. The acceleration of communication. The weakening of journalism and the dominance of public relations. Theories of social change should be able to account for the specifics of such cases, rather than simply allowing them to be rendered thematically.

In his *InfoGlut*, Mark Andrejevic takes issue with the assumption that fostering 'disbelief' or 'challenge' is necessarily subversive. As he puts it, "strategies of debunkery and information proliferation can work to reinforce, rather than threaten, relations of power and control" (loc 293). Recognising this in the abstract is important but I intend to read more about the specific cases in which these tactics are used regressively, as I'm increasingly fascinated by the extent to which these tactics are informed (or not) by epistemological and ontological understandings (even if these words are not used).
Under these conditions, what Andrejevic describes as the ‘big data divide’ seems ever more prescient by the day. From loc 464:

The dystopian version of information glut anticipates a world in which control over the tremendous amount of information generated by interactive devices is concentrated in the hands of the few who use it to sort, manage, and manipulate. Those without access to the database are left with the "poor person's" strategies for cutting through the clutter: gut instinct, affective response, and “thin-slicing” (making a snap decision based on a tiny fraction of the evidence). The asymmetric strategies for using data highlight an all-too-often overlooked truth of the digital era: infrastructure matters. Behind the airy rhetoric of "the cloud," the factories of the big data era are sprouting up across the landscape: huge server farms that consume as much energy as a small city. Here is where data is put to work – generating correlations and patterns, shaping decisions and sorting people into categories for marketers, employers, intelligence agencies, healthcare providers, financial institutions, the police, and so on. Herein resides an important dimension of the knowledge asymmetry of the big data era – the divide between those who generate the data and those who put it to use by turning it back upon the population. This divide is, at least in part, an infrastructural one shaped by ownership and control of the material resources for data storage and mining. But it is also an epistemological one – a difference in the forms of practical knowledge available to those with access to the database, in the way they think about and use information.

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/pTgOJEHWSVQ?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

Pierre Bourdieu, post-war Algeria and the existential conditions for collective action (2017-03-19 08:00)

In an early essay on post-war Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu reflected on the existential experience of the urban sub-proletariat and its political significance. This is reproduced on pg 16 of Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action:

Habituation to prolonged unemployment and the most casual and poorly paid work, along with the lack of any regular employment, prevent the development of a coherent organisation either now or in future of a system of expectations towards which all activity and existence can be orientated. For want of possessing this minimum grasp on the present that is the precondition for a deliberate and rational effort to grasp the future, all these people are prey to incoherent resentment, rather than inspired by a genuine revolutionary consciousness; the lack of work, or its instability, go together with the absence of perspective on hopes and opinions, the absence of a system of rational projects and forecasts of which the will to revolution is an aspect. Enclosed in a condition marked by insecurity and incoherence, their own vision is generally itself uncertain and incoherent.
I’m immediately struck by the parallel between the experience he describes and what I write about as distraction in digital capitalism. As he puts it on pg 17, “Everyday life is experienced as the result of a kind of systematic plan dreamed up by a malign will”. People become objects to which things happen. Life becomes episodic, lacking in continuity. What narrative unity people experience is one of frustration, recurrent attempts to exercise agency being denied by forces that are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. The tempo of life undermines the capacity to gain purchase upon the conditions of existence, impeding any capacity to reliably pursue a change in them, let alone overcome the obstacles inevitably encountered in such a pursuit. From pg 17:

With steady work and a regular age, with the appearance of real perspectives of social advance, an open and rational awareness of temporality can develop. At that point, the contradictions between over-ambitious expectation and available possibilities, between opinions offered on an imaginary level and real attitudes, disappear. Action, judgements and aspirations arrange themselves as a function of a plan of life. It is then, and then only, that the revolutionary attitude takes the place of escape into dreams, fatalist resignation, or a raging resentment.

Could anyone recommend material I could read which explores this issue in greater depth? I’m immediately struck by how Archerian this Bourdieu seems. Or perhaps how much Archer was influenced by the Bourdieu of this period. But my broader interest is in how "disintegration and disarray supply a favourable soil for ideologies of passion, and possibly retrograde ones" (pg 19). How can distracted people be mobilised?

What I take Bourdieu to be saying is that collective action, if it is to be sustainable, necessitates a grounding in a degree of regularity within everyday life. The existential conditions of individual life, in a way shaped by but irreducible to the material conditions, provide a basis upon which different forms of collective action become more or less feasible.

University College London, Institute of Advanced Studies

Conveners: Aris Komnopoulos-Atanasiu (University College London) and Chiara Bortoli (New School for Social Research, New York)

Keynote Speakers:
Professor Jens Beckert (Director of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne)
Professor Ruth Leavas (Department of Sociology, University of Bristol)

More Speakers TBC

How do the fictitious operations of financial markets shape our perception of the future? Are they opening up or rather foreclosing radical imagination? How is debt shaping individual as well as state imaginable trajectories? How do contemporary technologies of the future proliferate through real-estate imaginations? What futures are inscribed by the merger of financial and populist imaginaries in the West?

We welcome contributions that engage with the following themes, among others:
- the social production of financial futures
- economics & science fiction
- microcredits and neoliberal imagination
- state debt and development
- fictional expectations
- real-estate utopias
- feminist finance and economics
- utopian realism and realist utopias

Please email your abstract (up to 300 words) to reclaimingutopia@gmail.com by 1 May 2017.

The conference organisers will publish a selection of the papers as a Special Issue in Public Seminar (www.publicseminar.org) and other prominent peer-reviewed journals.

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CfP: A dialogue between STS and Political Communication (2017-03-19 19:36)

CfP: Panel: Automated social-media bots and the non-human: opening a dialogue between Political Communication and Science and Technology Studies

CfP now open for the 11th Annual Science in Public Conference, 10th-12th July, at the University of Sheffield.
Call for Panel Papers

The social and political effects of new media, social networks and technological innovation are important and pressing areas of academic inquiry for both Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Political Communication scholarship. However, interdisciplinary work between these two fields of study is uncommon, despite many confluences in theoretical and methodological approaches. This panel seeks to open a dialogue between STS and Political Communication scholarship. We offer to do so in the context of an emergent area of inquiry in Political Communication: the rise of automated social-media bots and algorithmically-controlled communication.

In recent years, Political Communication scholarship has responded to some of the empirical challenges it has faced by adopting conceptual themes and approaches from STS (in particular from Actor-Network Theory), such as in Chadwick’s *Hybrid Media System* (2013) and Kleis Nielsen’s *Ground Wars* (2012). As a sub-field of Political Science, Political Communication theory opens up new opportunities to engage with STS’s desire to “promote conversation of the conceptions of politics that animate social studies of science and technology” (Brown, 2015,p.3) and speaks to the ‘engaged program’ of STS that is “converging on the democratisation of technoscience” (Sismondo, 2008, p.21).

We invite papers on topics including, but not limited to:

- Understanding the conceptual applicability of STS to other fields, and in particular the success of ANT
- How ‘social-media bots’ can be and/or are understood by STS scholars, especially as non-human actors?
- What it means for communication to be ‘political’ – how can this be challenged?
- Likewise, what are the predominant conceptions of politics in STS, and how can they be challenged?
- Why do both STS and Political Communication place such normative value on democracy?
- The conceptual, methodological, and empirical horizon of STS – what’s coming next?

CfP: Third International Cultural Political Economy Conference, University of Lancaster, 6-8 September 2017 (2017-03-20 08:00)

Third International Cultural Political Economy Conference

Call for Papers

Taking Issues In/With Cultural Political Economy: Neoliberalism, Democracy and Crises

6-8 September 2017 at Lancaster University, UK

Plenaries: Jonathan Joseph (Sheffield), Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum (Lancaster)

Cultural Political Economy (CPE) is an emerging approach with post-disciplinary horizons. It engages with ‘cultural turns’ in the study of political economy to enhance its interpretive and explanatory power. Intellectually it arose from a synthesis of critical discourse analysis, critical political economy, neo-Gramscian state theory, neo-Gramscian International Political Economy, feminism, post-colonialism, governmentality and governance studies. This three-day conference and associated workshop gives researchers and post-graduate students an opportunity to take issues in/with CPE in philosophical, methodological and empirical terms. It invites discussions at the interface of ‘cultural turns’, critical realism, critical discourse analysis and political economy. Specifically, it focuses on the cultural (and semiotic) dimensions of political economy considered both as a field of inquiry and as an ensemble of social relations. In the light of multiple crises at many sites and scales in the global economic, political, and social order, the organizers invite papers that address theoretical or substantive aspects of the changing nature and dynamic of neoliberalism and democracy.

Potential topics might include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Cultural Turns and Critical Realism
- Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Economy
- Cultural Political Economy and Critical Policy Studies
- Marx, Gramsci and Foucault
- Social Relations, Everyday Life and Subjectivities
- Intersectionalism and Political Economy
- State, Governance and Governmentality
- Discourse, Power and Space
- Global Capitalism, Crises and New Imaginaries
Abstracts of 200-250 words should be sent to n.sum@lancaster.ac.uk on 30th June 2017 (Friday)


1. n.sum@lancaster.ac.uk
2. http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/cperc-conf/

Work, Employment and Society Journal - Seeking New Editors (2017-03-21 08:00)

Invitation to edit BSA Journal Work, Employment and Society 2018-2020

Dear colleagues,

Work, Employment and Society (WES) is reopening the call for Editors and invites applications from individuals
(who would be prepared to work as part of a team) as well as Editorial Teams interested in editing the journal, for a 3-year period from January 2018 to December 2020.

WES is currently in its 30th successful year and is a highly respected journal with an international profile. The journal is very strongly grounded in the sociological tradition, drawing upon adjacent disciplines to make an original contribution to issues and debates in the sociology of work and employment in all countries. It receives approximately 400 submissions a year, has an Impact Factor of 2.153 and is ranked 4 in the Chartered Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Guide.

The BSA is looking for a strong, diverse team of Editors to shape and sustain the journal’s leading position in the field. We particularly welcome expressions of interest from individuals, multi-institutional teams and those in sociology departments in partnership with business schools. Applicants must be based in the UK.

Individuals or teams who wish register an Expression of Interest should complete a short proforma application, accompanied by a 2-page CV, which will be considered by the Recruitment Committee.

To read the full Call for Editors and to download the application forms, please visit: [1]https://www.britsoc.co.uk/opportunities/publications-opportunities/

Interested teams and individuals are encouraged to contact Tracey Warren (chair of the Recruitment Committee) and Alison Danforth at the BSA to discuss details of the role: [2]tracey.warren@nottingham.ac.uk and [3]alison.danforth@britsoc.org.uk

Deadline for Expressions of Interest: 6 April 2017, 5pm GMT

Deadline for Full Proposals: 15 May 2017, 5pm GMT

1. https://www.britsoc.co.uk/opportunities/publications-opportunities/
2. mailto:tracey.warren@nottingham.ac.uk
3. mailto:alison.danforth@britsoc.org.uk

The Technology of Intellectual Work (2017-03-22 08:00)

In 1988 Pierre Bourdieu chaired a commission reviewing the curriculum at the behest of the minister of national education. The scope of the review was broad, encompassing a revision of subjects taught in order to strengthen the coherence and unity of the curriculum as a whole. In order to inform this work, the commission early on formulated principles to guide their endeavour, each of which were then expanded into more substantive observations concerning their implications.

One of these stood out to me as of great contemporary relevance for the social sciences in the digital university. Their principle considers those “ways of thinking or fundamental know-how that, assumed to be taught by everyone, end up not being taught by anyone”. In other words, what are the elements of educational practice which are integral to it and how can we assure their succesful transmission in training? These include “fundamental ways of thinking” such as “deduction, experiment, and the historical approach, as well as reflective and critical thinking which should always be combined with the foregoing” and “the specific character of the experimental way of thinking”,
"a resolute valuation of qualitative reasoning", a clear recognition of the provisional nature of explanatory models" and "ongoing training in the practical work of research". It extends this discussion to the technologies used in practice:

Finally, care must be taken to give major place to a whole series of techniques that, despite being tacitly required by all teaching, are rarely the object of methodical transmission: use of dictionaries and abbreviations, rhetoric of communication, establishment of files, creation of an index, use of records and data banks, preparation of a manuscript, documentary research, use of computerised instruments, interpretation of tables and graphs, etc.

*Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action, pg 175*

This concern for the "technology of intellectual work" is one from which we could learn a lot, as well as the importance placed upon "rational working methods (such as how to choose between tasks imposed, or to distribute them in time)". It maps nicely onto what [1]C. Wright Mills described as *intellectual craftsmanship*. When we consider the technologies of scholarly production – things like notebooks, word processors, index cards, post it notes, print outs, diagrams and marginalia – our interest is in their *use-in-intellectual-work*. The technologies become something quite specific when bound up in intellectual activity:

But how is this file – which so far must seem to you more like a curious sort of 'literary' journal – used in intellectual production? The maintenance of such a file "is" intellectual production. It is a continually growing store of facts and ideas, from the most vague to the most finished.

*The Sociological Imagination, pg 199-200*

If we recognise this, we overcome the distinction between theory and practice. The distinction between 'rational working methods', 'technology of intellectual work' and 'fundamental ways of thinking' is overcome in *scholarly craft*. The role of the technology is crucial here: if we suppress or forget the technological, transmission of these practices is abstracted from their application, leaving their practical unfolding to be something which has to be discovered individually and privately ("ways of thinking or fundamental know-how that, assumed to be taught by everyone, end up not being taught by anyone"). But places for discussion of craft in this substantive sense have been the exception rather than the rule within the academy.

Perhaps social media is changing this. It is facilitating a recovery of technology, now finding itself as one of the first things social scientists discuss when they enter into dialogues through social networks and blogs. But it also facilitates what Pat Thompson has described as a [2]feral doctoral pedagogy:

Doctoral researchers can now access a range of websites such as [3]LitReviewHQ, [4]PhD2Published and [5]The Three Month Thesis youtube channel. They can read blogs written by researchers and academic developers e.g. [6]Thesis Whisperer, [7]Doctoral Writing SIG, [8]Explorations of Style, and of course this one. They can synchronously chat on social media about research via general hashtags #phdchat #phdforum and #acwri, or discipline specific hashtags such as #twitterstorians or #socphd. They can buy webinars, coaching and courses in almost all aspects of doctoral research. Doctoral researchers are also themselves increasingly blogging about their own experiences and some are also offering advice to others. Much of this socially mediated DIY activity is international, cross-disciplinary and all day/all night.

[9]https://patthomson.net/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/Doctoral researchers
There can be problematic aspects to this. But when it’s valuable, it’s at the level of precisely the unity of thinking, technology and activity which the commission advocated. Social media is helping us recover the technology of intellectual work and it’s an extremely positive development for the social sciences.

2. https://patthomson.net/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/
5. https://www.youtube.com/user/threemonththesis
9. https://patthomson.net/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/Doctoral%20researchers

dmf (2017-03-22 13:42:32)
anyone beta testing these technologies?

The Ontology of Fateful Moments (2017-03-22 08:00)

In his On the Ontological Mystery, Gabriel Marcel describes the experience of “an irresistible appeal which over turns the habitual perspectives just as a gust of wind might tumble down the panels of a stage set”. He is talking of a chance meeting with a stranger, but the image is a powerful one which characterises many episodes of what I think of as personal morphogenesis. Fateful moments, turning points and critical junctures often involve profound changes in the scenery of our lives. Things which we thought were solid fall apart. Suddenly what was fixed is revealed to be malleable. We realise that the background to our lives is not immutable, rather it was simply what had faded into the background. It is a sudden, dramatic and painful overturning of the strangely subtle process through which we ‘die a thousand deaths’, to use Roberto Unger’s phrase, as congealing layers of habit obscure our own agency.

I’m fascinated by these fateful moments because they are central to understanding agency. Their mysterious dynamics hold the secrets of our dual nature, free but always constrained, capable of choice but driven by automaticity. To adequately address the ontology of such fateful moments entails that we are careful about their epistemology. The mere fact of a moment being deemed fateful by a subject does not make it so. The poetics of ‘turning points’ often blind us to the mundane realities that preceded them, as the dramatic moment when the sense of our life ‘tumbles down like the panels of a stage set’ only came about because of many unnoticed gusts of wind that gradually eroded the foundations of this experienced order.

It might sound voluntaristic to be concerned with these sudden dizzying encounters with freedom, but it’s precisely in such moments when we can be face to face with the recalcitrance of reality. Best laid plans go awry, people and things resist our demands and the order we sought to impose on the world proves to be a hope, rather than a blueprint. An adequate phenomenology of ‘fateful moments’ must be orientated to the past, as well as the future. What renders these moments fateful is being torn between the two, rather than habitually chugging along as past
investments propel us through present circumstances and into an expected future.

Investigating fateful moments can help elucidate this strained character of agency, forever caught between past and future, blind to the full range of opportunities and constraints confronted in the present. But fateful moments aren't reducible to agency. They are something relational, multifaceted and dynamic. For this reason, they can also be profoundly macro-sociological in origin. Reading Sarah Bakewell's wonderful *At the Existential Cafe*, which incidentally introduced me to the Marcel text I opened this discussion with, offers a wonderful account of how the grand sweep of historical events can reshape the lives of those caught within them. At risk of stating the obvious, wars are amongst many other things a terrifying social machinery for generating fateful moments. A concern for fateful moments does not represent a personalist myopia, but rather an ambition to stitch together the tapestry of social explanation from the most intimate aspects of personal experience through to the most dramatic instances of systemic change.

The Porous University – A critical exploration of openness, space and place in Higher Education

(2017-03-22 18:17)

Call for participation Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th May 2017 University of the Highlands and Islands, Inverness Campus

This two-day symposium arose out of a series of conversations and reflections on the nature of openness within Higher Education. It started with the observation that openness is increasingly seen as a technical question, whose solution lies in employing the low transaction costs associated with digital technologies with open licences to open up academic content to new groups of learners.

Where critical voices have engaged this partial reading they have often rightly critiqued the degree to which this is truly open, for example, drawing on older traditions of open to question the freedoms free content allows for those already distanced from education.

However, other questions also arise in a critical reading of open, and these include:

- What does open mean beyond releasing content?
- What is the role of open academics in dealing with problems 'in the world'?
- How should staff and students become learners within community contexts, developing and negotiating the curriculum based on those contexts?
- What would it mean for openness as a way to allow new voices into the academy, to acknowledge knowing and ways of knowing outside the academy, and where can and should our open spaces – both digital and physical – intersect?
- If we are to advocate allowing learners' experiences and organisations to inform the academy how open should academics be to the influence of private capital?
These are the kinds of questions, amongst others, that we want to explore in this symposium.


CfP: Queer Studies Conference (2017-03-22 19:49)

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Friday 30th June 2017, University of Surrey, Guildford

BSA Early Career Forum Regional Event

Contemporary queer studies increasingly focus on broad areas of sociological concern. It is therefore common to find early career researchers working on issues relating to sexuality across the humanities and social sciences. This interdisciplinarity leads to exciting new areas of research. However, early career researchers can often find it difficult to connect with other researchers.

This one-day workshop event will provide a forum for discussing the past, present and future of queer research, with an emphasis on the challenges and opportunities faced by early career researchers. This broad theme will allow for discussions to take in theoretical issues, methodological problems and structural challenges that face the early career researcher working in areas of queer and sexuality studies.

We are delighted to announce our keynote speakers:

Dr Zowie Davy, De Montfort University

Dr Yiu-Tung Suen, Chinese University of Hong Kong

Call for papers

4952
The event is limited to 20-30 people, and is structured as a participatory workshop with sessions designed to foster discussion and networking.

Attendees at the event will have the opportunity to present research in a "lightning" session of a limited number of short, 5 minute presentations. This will allow you to briefly present your research with the emphasis on meeting and networking with other researchers. We also invite applications for poster presentations at the event.

We want to focus on your research and interests. We therefore welcome the participation of all our fellow early career researchers in queer and sexualities research to this exciting event. We hope to bring together a wide range of perspectives in order to create a community of innovative research.

We invite early-career and postgraduate researchers who would like to present at the event to submit titles and abstracts of 100-150 words, to queers@surrey.ac.uk by 28th April 2017. Please specify talk and/or poster in your email application.

**Registration Costs:**

- BSA Members £10
- Non Members £25

There will be a limited number of free spaces for unwaged or unaffiliated individuals. Please contact queers@surrey.ac.uk for more details.

**Organising committee:** Kirsty Lohman, Katherine Hubbard, Andrew King

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**Cities and the Political Imagination (2017-03-23 08:00)**

*The Sociological Review Annual Lecture 2017*

How can we recognize the political in the city? How might social scientists engage with forms of politics outside of
established sites of research such as those associated with representative democracy or collective mobilizations?

This presentation suggests that new perspectives on urban politics might be enabled by revisiting the connections between sociology and cultural studies, and specifically by combining long-term urban ethnography and cultural analysis. Reading forms of creative expression in relation to power struggles in and over urban space can direct our attention towards negotiations of authority and political belonging that are often overlooked within the social sciences. I explore the possibilities of such an approach by focusing on the idea of the political imagination, and in particular on how everyday practices are informed by imaginations of urban rule and citizenship.

Expressive culture generates both analytical and normative frames, guiding everyday understandings of how power works, where and in whose hands it is concentrated, and whether we see this as just or unjust. Such frames can legitimize or delegitimize specific distributions of resources and risks, and can normalize or denaturalize specific structures of decision-making.

Through a discussion of popular music (hiphop, reggae and dancehall) and visual culture, I consider how these forms of the imagination allow new political subjectivities and actions to emerge and consolidate.

**Time:** 5:45pm - 9:00pm, Friday 28th April, 2017

**Location:** Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

[1]Click here to book now

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**Pierre Bourdieu, liberal thought and the ontology of collectives (2017-03-24 08:00)**

Well over a decade ago, I was due to start a PhD in Political Philosophy looking at ideas of the individual within liberal thought. There are many reasons why I ultimately moved into a Sociology department instead, though my lack of regrets about this choice hasn’t stopped me occasionally wondering what might this thesis might have looked like. It occurred this morning when reading a collection of Bourdieu’s political writings (Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action) that one likely outcome would have been a subsequent study on liberalism’s difficulty with *collectives*. As Bourdieu writes, reproduced on pg 58:

> Liberal philosophy identifies political action with solitary action, even silent and secret action, its paradigm being the vote ‘acquired’ by a party in the secret of the polling booth. In this way, by reducing group to series, the mobilised opinion of an organised or solidaristic collective is reduced to a statical aggregation of individually expressed opinions.

The difficulty posed by *collectives* concerns the empirical refutation of this often unstated principle. Actually existing collectives, with all their emergent mess, make it difficult to *reduce group to series* by methodological slight of hand. The noise and assertion which characterise them challenge us to treat them as *collectives*. But the broader edifice of
liberal thought is dependent on melting collectives into aggregates:

Political action is thus reduced to a kind of economic action. The logic of the market or of the vote, in other words, the aggregation of individual strategies, imposes itself each time that groups are reduced to the state of aggregates – or, if you prefer, demobilised. When, in effect, a group is reduced to impotence (or to individual strategies of subversion, sabotage, wastefulness, go-slows, isolated protest, absenteeism, etc.), because it lacks power over itself, the common problem of each of its members remains in a state of unease and cannot be expressed as a political problem.

How should we conceive of the relationship between individuals and collectives? Much of what I’ve done in the last ten years is ultimately motivated by this question. This paper last year explored the biographical constitution of social movements under digital capitalism, arguing that ‘distracted people’ have much more inconsistent trajectories of participation, with implications for the emergent characteristics of social movements themselves:

Social movements often make an important contribution to the normative order within social life but how are their dynamics changing under conditions of social morphogenesis? It is clear that the emergence and normalisation of social media entail affordances for mobilisation that have important implications for social movements. However there is little agreement upon precisely what these implications are and whether they can or should be evaluated in general terms. This chapter takes a novel approach to this question, exploring the technological dimensions of social morphogenesis and their consequences for the ‘distracted people’ who comprise social movements. Using the relational realist theory developed by Margaret Archer and Pierpaolo Donati, I offer a novel account of the constitution of social movements that invites us to ask questions about the emergence and durability of new movements that are obscured by alternative theoretical approaches which fail to recognise both the emergent and relational constitution of collectives.

At some point I’d also like to pursue these issues at the level of cultural representation. For instance in the representation of mindless hoards posing a threat to the liberal order:
The relation between individuals and collectives plays out at many levels. My concern is to reclaim it as a meta-categorical feature of discourse, such that the connections between these different levels can be explored. I'm still rather far away from doing this, but at least the ambition is relatively clear to me now.

1. [link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-28439-2_9](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-3-319-28439-2_9)
2. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/HcwTxRuq-uk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent](https://www.youtube.com/embed/HcwTxRuq-uk?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent)

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**To understand social media for academics, we have to kill the idea of social media for academics**

(2017-03-25 08:00)

In the 30+ talks I have done about social media in the last year, I have discussed many things. But the one theme that has been most prominent is the extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, complexity of the subject matter. There is nothing inherently challenging about how to use social media. Any practical or technical difficulties are well within the realm of what has become habitual for most within late modernity. What creates the challenge is negotiating the novelty of its enablements and constraints within a particular context.

However it is this novelty which also makes it difficult to exercise our reflexivity in the way we would about any comparable matter. This novelty gives rise to a species of what [1]Jacob Silverman describes as ‘internet exceptionalism’:

> What we call the Internet—and what web writers so lazily draw on for their work—is less a hive mind or a throng or a gathering place and more a personalized set of online maneuvers guided by algorithmic
recommendations. When we look at our browser windows, we see our own particular interests, social networks, and purchasing histories scrambled up to stare back at us. But because we haven’t found a shared discourse to talk about this complex arrangement of competing influences and relationships, we reach for a term to contain it all. Enter “the Internet.”

The Internet is a linguistic trope but also an ideology and even a business plan. If your job is to create content out of (mostly) nothing, then you can always turn to something/someone that “the Internet” is mad or excited about. And you don’t have to worry about alienating readers because “the Internet” is so general, so vast and all-encompassing, that it always has room. This form of writing is widely adaptable. Now it’s common to see stories where “Facebook” or “Twitter” stands in for the Internet, offering approval or judgment on the latest viral schlock. Choose your (anec)data carefully, and Twitter can tell any story you want.

Much as “the Internet” gives us “a rhetorical life raft to hang onto” when discussing a subject that is vastly overhyped and invested with all manner of hopes and fears, so too does “social media” become a semantic crutch when making sense of the complex changes being brought about by digital communications within a particular institutional sphere. It’s similarly “easy, a convenient reference point” through which we gloss a complex set of changes in which technological possibilities are only one causal factor. By exceptionalising social media in this way, we “fail to relate this communication system, and everything that happens through it, to the society around us”.

This tendency seems even more pronounced when we talk about something as specific as the academy. The more we talk about “social media” as something which all academics should (or shouldn’t do) the more we obscure the changes it entails for academic labour and the organisations which academics work within. My ambition as someone who has written a book called Social Media for Academics? To get academics to stop talking about social media.

A fabulous talk about a subject that has always fascinated me. Perhaps there should be a word for the pleasure that comes from remembering that not all TED talks are overhyped nonsense? There's much more here on [2]The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows. There's a book coming later this year and I can't wait to read it.

What is ‘Post-Truth’? What Can We Do About It? (2017-03-27 08:00)

IFRAME: [1]https://www.youtube.com/embed/B62O0CTmHvA?ecver=1


1. https://www.youtube.com/embed/B62O0CTmHvA?ecver=1

Youth employment in the ‘gig’ economy, isolation and @youthloneliness (2017-03-27 10:40)

Isolation at the beginning of working lives

As part of the @YouthLoneliness project ([1]Twitter/[2]Tumblr), we are interested to find out more about young people’s working lives, their casual employment, their experience of self-employment and their involvement in the ‘gig economy.’

The Co-op Movement (like the Trade Union movement) was a movement that brought people facing harsh conditions together in search of ways of improving lives. What networks of connection can we imagine that will do that today?

We are offering 3 workshops on Wednesdays 1.00pm to 3pm (with a Tuesday evening option too) in May
based at the People's History Museum and will be looking at archive material in the museum to inspire print making, documentary work and photography and ideas for today.

There is also the option for the same sessions to run on the preceding evenings at The Space, Great Ancoats Street, from 5.00-7.00pm.

The workshops will run on the following dates: May 3rd; May 17th; May 24th They will have the following format:

Workshop One: Starting a documentary process. Focussing on issues facing young people in employment and using the Museum archive to prompt ideas, this session will share learning about audio, photographic and video collection using a smartphone, all these things can be used to document youth employment over the following two weeks.

Workshop Two: This session will draw together what has been collected and involve the production of a multi-media, mixed art form, collage or mosaic piece based on the research done in the previous 2 weeks.

Workshop Three: A panel lead discussion and debate about isolation, loneliness and young people in the workplace.

To book your place, register here. Priority booking will be given to people aged between 16 and 25 but the events are open to all.

1. https://twitter.com/YouthLoneliness
2. https://youthloneliness.tumblr.com/

Chris Yuill (2017-04-03 21:59:03)
Hi, this may be of interest. My speculative comments on gig-economy and health: http://www.cost-ofliving.net/gig-economy-gig-health/

The Future of ‘Impact’ in the UK (2017-03-28 08:00)

I'm reading through the Stern review in preparation for various impact related things I'm doing in the next few weeks. It takes the view that the 6,975 impact case studies produced and £55 million estimated to have been spent on the impact element of the last REF has clearly contributed to "an evolving culture of wider engagement, enhancing delivery of the benefits arising from research". These costs could be mitigated in future because "participating institutions now have processes in place to capture the information required". Or perhaps they might expand, as the infrastructure surrounding the assessment described here by Les Back seems likely to grow, even if the number of case studies does not increase much as per Stern's recommendations.

Offering institutions more flexibility in the distribution of case studies (as opposed to requiring a certain number of case studies proportionally to the number of staff submitted to a unit of assessment) could have interesting
results. As will the recommendation for ‘institutional level’ impact case studies, both in terms of identifying cross-disciplinary impacts which might otherwise fall between the cracks and perhaps justifying institutional level investments in impact capacity:

Some of these aspects of environment reflect the strategy, support and actions of the institution as a whole. This has not been assessed in REF2014 and we recommend that this should be captured in a new Institutional Environment Statement, which complements the Unit of Assessment Environment Statement.

Environment and impact are mutually supportive and should be seen together. The strategy and support of impact are closely linked to the environment for research at both Unit of Assessment and institutional level. Therefore, it is also recommended that the aspects captured by the Impact template of REF2014 should be incorporated into both the Unit of Assessment and Institutional level Environment statement.

This will involve recognising:

- the features of the research environment that are the product of institutional level activity, including steps taken to promote interdisciplinary and other joint working internally and externally and to support engagement and impact, beyond that which is just the aggregate of individual units of assessment
- the future research and knowledge exchange strategy of the HEI, as well as the individual Units of Assessment, and the extent to which both have delivered on the strategies set out in the previous REF
- the individualism of the HEI and the eclecticism of academic life within it
- the contribution that its academics make to the wider academy (‘academic citizenship’).

Each statement would focus on how the institution or Unit of Assessment enhances the development of research capability within it, how it provides opportunities for high quality research and related activities, how it motivates and rewards researchers, and the contributions made to the wider academic community.

Additionally, weakening the link between impact and research outputs could have interesting implications for social media activity, expanding the range of activity which can be measured and argued to lead to impact.

The review suggests that the potential range of impacts possible to record was made narrower by the assessment process. It also advocates emphasising cultural impact and now recognising impact internal to higher education, including though hopefully not limited to teaching:

We recommend that impacts on public engagement and understanding are emphasised and that impacts on cultural life be specifically included. Better to align the REF with the TEF, we also recommend that
research leading to major impacts on curricula and/or pedagogy within or across disciplines should be included; and in order to encourage long-term, interdisciplinary research endeavours, we recommend that groundbreaking academic impacts such as research leading to the creation of new disciplines should be included.


The Sociological Review Annual Lecture 2017
Friday 28th April, 2017
Time: 5:45pm - 8:00pm, followed by wine reception

Location: Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL

Cities and the Political Imagination
Keynote Speaker: Professor Rivke Jaffe
Responses by Professor Claire Alexander Dr. Emma Jackson

How can we recognize the political in the city? How might social scientists engage with forms of politics outside of established sites of research such as those associated with representative democracy or collective mobilizations? This presentation suggests that new perspectives on urban politics might be enabled by revisiting the connections between sociology and cultural studies, and specifically by combining long-term urban ethnography and cultural analysis. Reading forms of creative expression in relation to power struggles in and over urban space can direct our attention towards negotiations of authority and political belonging that are often overlooked within the social sciences. I explore the possibilities of such an approach by focusing on the idea of the political imagination, and in particular on how everyday practices are informed by imaginations of urban rule and citizenship. Expressive culture generates both analytical and normative frames, guiding everyday understandings of how power works, where and in whose hands it is concentrated, and whether we see this as just or unjust. Such frames can legitimate or delegitimize specific distributions of resources and risks, and can normalize or denaturalize specific structures of decision-making. Through a discussion of popular music (hiphop, reggae and dancehall) and visual culture, I consider how these forms of the imagination allow new political subjectivities and actions to emerge and consolidate.

Rivke Jaffe is Professor of Cities, Politics and Culture in the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses primarily on intersections of the urban and the political, and includes an interest in topics such as organized crime, popular culture and environmental pollution, drawing on fieldwork in Jamaica, Curacao and Suriname. She is currently leading a major research program on public-private security assemblages in Kingston, Jerusalem, Miami, Nairobi and Recife, studying transformations in governance and citizenship in relation to hybrid forms of security provision. Her publications include Concrete Jungles: Urban Pollution and the Politics of Difference in the Caribbean (Oxford, 2016) and
Introducing Urban Anthropology (with Anouk de Koning, Routledge, 2016).

This event is free, but registration is required. Click here to book now: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cities-and-the-political-imagination-the-sociological-review-annual-lecture-2017-with-rivke-jaffe-tickets-31372245230

For general event and booking related queries, please contact: Jenny Thatcher ([2]events@thesociologicalreview.com)

2. mailto:events@thesociologicalreview.com

The ambivalent promise of higher education (2017-03-29 08:00)

In the latest collection of talks from Audrey Watters, The Curse of the Monsters of Educational Technology, she addresses an uncomfortable issue in higher education: the unrealistic claims made about the transformative aspect of university attendance. From loc 397-413:

These questions get at what is an uncomfortable and largely unspoken truth about education. That is, education, for its own part, makes all sorts of claims—sometimes, let’s be honest, fairly wild and unsubstantiated claims—about amazement, achievement, and transformation. These promises may well reveal that our field is full of Sea Monkeys—colorful promises of becoming that we might not actually be able to or even intend to honor. As we reconstitute technology-enhanced learning, are we simply reconstituting Sea Monkeys?

This is one of those issues that fascinates me because I can’t help but see it in ambivalent terms. On the one hand, the relative advantage of a university degree is manifestly in decline due to credential inflation and opportunity hoarding, such that to deny this would be fundamentally dishonest. On the other hand, this point is often made in a way that reduces the value of higher education to instrumental advantage accrued by individuals. On the one hand, the interventions of the Competition and Markets Authority within higher education further the commodification of universities in a way which corrodes the intrinsic value that can be found through participating in them. On the other hand, it seems absurd to suggest that students don’t have a right to expect that the understanding upon which they took a university place is accurate, particularly as participation becomes ever more financially and personally onerous.

The more diffuse promises of education are even more thorny. My PhD was a study of personal change (and stasis) in the lives of 18 undergraduate students across a range of disciplines, during their first two years of university. One of the most important findings I took from this research was how rapidly the evaluation of our own lives and aspirations can change, particularly as we enter a new environment into which we have invested our hopes. My point is not to say that ‘false promises’ made concerning the university experience is necessarily a problematic category, only that it becomes ontologically rather messy once we move beyond the straight-forward level of what students were told about courses, facilities and workload etc.
But it is nonetheless crucial that we have these conversations. What is the value of an undergraduate degree? What expectations do students have of it? What qualitative and quantitative evidence is there to support those expectations? If expectations are inflated, can we identify particular groups who are perpetuating these and the interests at work in their doing so? I can’t help but feel that Watters is correct, higher education is full of “colorful promises of becoming that we might not actually be able to or even intend to honor”. We urgently need to learn how to counteract this while still resisting the commodification and bureaucratisation which action taken in the interests of the consumer will likely entail.

The centralisation of the web and the constraints on academic speech (2017-03-30 08:00)

A great essay by Ethan Zuckerman, which raises the crucial question of infrastructural dependency within the digital university. We can overcome this partly through cultural change (e.g. the importance of a domain of one’s own and boycotting companies like academia.edu) but there are institutional factors limiting the potential reach of these strategies. To what extent is mandated engagement expected to proceed through these channels? How do procurement and provision decisions made at an institutional level lock scholars into these systems?

Early proponents of the power of digital publishing celebrated the ways in which the Internet, and in particular the world wide web, democratized both access to information and the ability to disseminate knowledge to wide audiences. News organizations might evade government controls of the press by publishing on servers outside their nations’ borders. Dissidents could organize in the digital public sphere, evading controls that prevented freedom of assembly in the physical world. Scholars could disseminate work in progress directly to the web either outside of the process of peer review or under the aegis of new types of online journals.

It’s possible this utopian vision reigned for at least the early years of the consumer web, when independent online publishing was common. It’s also arguable that this has always been a fantasy, and that chokepoints like the domain name system and large internet service providers have always had the power to control speech. But since 2010, publishing online has centralized on a few commercial platforms, notably Amazon Web Services (which provides hosting and backend for over a million different websites, including those for publishers like Netflix, Instagram, and [GitHub]); Facebook, which hosts content produced by over 1.7 billion people; Google, whose YouTube service hosts a significant portion of the web’s video content; as well as smaller players like WordPress and Wikimedia.

These platforms have immense power over what speech is possible, and their decisions are opaque and not subject to external review. When Facebook decided to prohibit Nick Ut’s Pulitzer-winning photo of Kim Phúc running from a napalm attack, public shaming was the only option Norwegian newspaper Aftenposten found for appealing the decision. Publishing platforms face intense pressure from governments to block controversial content, from Israeli government pressure to remove critical content from Facebook to the “blockade” against Wikileaks that caused the leaks organization to lose web hosting, domain name services, and services to accept donations. Examples abound of Google’s power to discriminate through indexing of information, and the results merit close study. Far more subtle forms of content control happen every day, from organized campaigns to “flag” and demand removal of content a group of coordinated individuals find offensive, from Buddhist Burmese flagging
pro-Rohingya content to Palestinian and Israeli activists attempting to silence each other.


There are many ways to publish without these centralised systems but we remain dependent upon them for discovery. Unfortunately, as he puts it, “the ability to publish without the ability to be discovered is an empty promise” and “In a world of scarce attention, those who control curation and discovery systems control what we encounter and what we know.” This is bringing about a radical transformation of the knowledge system:

As we consider the transformations in the production, publication, and archiving of social research under digital conditions, it is essential that we understand that scholarly publishing and discovery, a space traditionally controlled by university presses and scholarly peers, is now centralizing around a small number of technically sophisticated commercial firms. The good news in this development is that we have the opportunity to make collective cause with those seeking to ensure online publishing and discovery systems are transparent, fair, auditable, and distributed. The bad news is that we find ourselves joining a profoundly uphill battle, where many of our goals are merely infeasible and others may be technically impossible.


Social Imaginaries: The re-invention of social research (2017-03-30 11:21)

Social Imaginaries: The re-invention of social research

Panel discussion and book launch of Digital Sociology by Noortje Marres
Date and Time: 9 May, 5-7pm
Location: Central Saint Martins, Granary Building, Granary Square, London N1C 4AA

Hosted by:

- Innovation Insights Hub, University of the Arts London
- Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies, University of Warwick
- Warwick in London.

With: Les Back (Goldsmiths), Lucy Kimbell (UAL), Hannah Knox (UCL), Noortje Marres (Warwick), Mike Savage (LSE), and Amanda Windle (UAL)

The digital makes possible new ways of monitoring, analysing and intervening in social life. Critics have pointed at the new forms of surveillance and control that this makes possible, and to new types of data economies. But the creation of new forms of knowledge about social life is central to efforts to implement digital infrastructures: they enable the introduction of new kinds of actionable insight into society. At the same time, however, the liking-and-sharing economy has recently been exposed to serve power more than truth. In this context, how can we communicate the constructive potential of the insight that knowing is a social process? What can be the role of social research in digital societies? This is the issue that Digital Sociology (Marres, 2017) examines, and one that this event will explore by way of a panel discussion about the following proposition: in a digital age, "knowing society" becomes an inherently interdisciplinary undertaking, one that requires mutual engagement, and thrives on creative exchange, between computing, social sciences, and the arts.

Places are limited, so please register at [1]digitalsociologylaunch@gmail.com
The (Coming) Crisis of Free Speech in the Digital University (2017-03-31 08:00)

In the last couple of years, prominent commentators have increasingly claimed there is a crisis of free speech in higher education. Well meaning participants in reasoned debate are apparently unable to move without being accosted by left-wing activists keen to shut them down or move them on. As I [1]wrote a couple of years ago, the timing of this putative crisis is interesting, given it coincides with what I think are unprecedented intrusions of the state into university life in the United Kingdom:

We've already seen the police ask a university for [2]attendees of a fracking debate. The president of the Lancaster Student's Union was warned by police, [3]who she discovered taking photos of her office, that she may have been committing a public order offence by displaying a poster in her office window. Police used CS gas and pulled a taser on Warwick students who were screaming in terror. They launch [4]secret operations to spy on peaceful student protestors. University staff are increasingly expected to function as [5]proxy border guards. Police violence is increasingly an expectation at student protests, including some astonishing and egregious instances of brutality. Punitive bail conditions are becoming the norm for student activists and some university managements have gone out of their way to exclude and persecute 'trouble makers'.

Where could it lead? In Turkey, we've seen a purge of the academy, with [6]over 7000 academics dismissed. There's little sign of any comparable action on the horizon in the United Kingdom, though it's a salutary reminder of how far such intrusions can go and an obvious incitement to international solidarity. The more salient comparison is with the United States, where Donald Trump's recent threat to Berkeley neatly illustrates how attacks on the public university and opposition to the gains made by 'political correctness' are being linked by contemporary conservatism:

https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/827112633224544256

The notion of political balance is being used as a (superficially liberal) stick to impinge upon the intellectual autonomy of the academy, something already in a state of disrepair after many years of the culture wars and managerial attacks on pay and conditions. It seems likely that attempts to enforce this legislatively are going to become a recurrent feature of the policy landscape.

https://twitter.com/RaleighReporter/status/833848109071474688

When we look at the situation in America, it becomes easy to see the parallels to how the 'crisis in free speech' is being presented in the United Kingdom. Take for instance, this morning's Times article about a meeting which took place at the University of Sussex:
Academics were accused of intellectual vandalism yesterday after it was revealed that lecturers at a university advertised a seminar on how to respond to right-wing attitudes among students.

Researchers and lecturers at the University of Sussex held a departmental meeting entitled "dealing with right-wing attitudes and politics in the classroom". Critics accused them of seeking to suppress free speech and said that the episode reflected a climate on university campuses where student unions, and increasingly universities themselves, were curbing free expression.

Who are these critics? What's their stake in this debate? Their position remains fascinatingly opaque. The ideological character of universities is changing, with anything that can be construed as a left-wing bias being a potential basis for attack. But attempts to manage that change, to find ways to sustain existing practices in the face of disruption, are vulnerable to attack as well. This [8]thread by Alison Phipps is worth reading in full:

https://twitter.com/alisonphipps/status/834079901640699908

There are multiple things going on here. The crisis of free speech in higher education is overdetermined. For instance we can identify a [9]managerial interest in curbing the freedoms of academic labour, a concern for crisis management as university communications change, a long-term agenda to shift the ideological tenor of the university system, an intrusion of the surveillance state licensed by Prevent, a broader hardening of protest policing, the politicisation of foreign student numbers and the expanding frontiers of Border Force, a more grass roots upsurge in far-right activism on university campuses and many others factors besides.

We need to be careful not to fall into a simplistic analysis which sees this as a right-wing plot in the face of which we must immediately defend ourselves. But we urgently need to reject the idea that the crisis of free speech is a matter of censorious millennials undermining the institutional culture of the university. This is such obvious nonsense as an account of the change underway in our universities that it wouldn't even be worth engaging with, if it were not promulgated with such vigour by so many influential outlets.

My particular professional interest in this concerns social media. Firstly, the digital university is a transparent ivory tower, such that it has become inordinately more susceptible to (low cost) surveillance while failing to have undergone the democratisation which digital communications was expected to bring. It’s a toxic brew, which leaves those within it naive about the tendency of those outside it to scrutinise and intervene, as well as poorly equipped to respond effectively. Secondly, the intense politicisation of academic speech we’re seeing is only inadequately recognised at best in invocations to public engagement and impact. We need to recover public speech as a labour issue, particularly if the tendency of universities to force people into the public square is going to increase.
These problems are manageable but the prevailing language of social media for academics, in which ‘social media’ is seen as something everyone ‘should use’ (or shouldn't) does nothing but hinder us in this endeavour. There’s a great field of conceptual detritus concerning ‘impact’, ‘engagement’, ‘social media’, ‘academic freedom’ and ‘free speech’ which we need to clear, if we want to have any hope of recognising the complexity of our present circumstances or responding adequately to them.

8. https://twitter.com/alisonphipps/status/834079901640699908
Max Haiven, Canada Research Chair in Culture, Media and Social Justice, Lakehead University 'Financial Utopias and the Colonization of the Imagination'

Cassie Thornton, Artist, The Feminist Economics Department 'The Dreams, Risks and Benefits of Working Very High, in Finance'

Creative Methods for Research and Community Engagement Summer School (2017-04-01 15:47)

Creative Methods for Research and Community Engagement Summer School

6-8 July 2017, Keele University

PhD students and Early Career Researchers are welcome at this event organised by the Community Animation and Social Innovation Centre ([1]CASIC) at Keele University.

The Summer School will be held in central England at the [2]New Vic Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme (6-7 July) and [3]Keele University campus (8 July), where you will experience the KAVE ([4]https://www.keele.ac.uk/pharmacy/digital/kave/) and our Makerspace facilities ([5]https://www.keele.ac.uk/make/).

The facilitator will be Dr Helen Kara, author of Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide. Speakers will include:

- Professor Mihaela Kelemen – CASIC Director
- Dr Lindsay Hamilton – Keele Management School, Keele University
- Véronique Jochum – Research Manager, National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- Dr Emma Surman – Keele Management School, Keele University
- Dr Ceri Morgan – School of Humanities, Keele University
- Professor Rajmil Fischman – School of Music, Keele University
- Sue Moffat – Director of New Vic Borderlines, New Vic Theatre

The Summer School will enlighten, inspire and guide ECRs and students at all stages of scholarly or professional doctorates. Each day will be packed with interactive hands-on sessions addressing six broad topics:

- Arts-based research
- Transformative research frameworks
We are offering an "early bird" price of £230 for bookings received and paid by 21 April. After that date the price will be £270. The cost includes refreshments and lunches and a complimentary copy of Dr Kara's book on creative research methods.

There will be a dinner and performance of 'Around the world in 80 Days' at the New Vic Theatre on July 6th, at an extra cost of £20.

For more information go to [6]https://www.keele.ac.uk/casic/summerschool2017/

Please follow #CRMSS17 on Twitter for pre-event updates.

Does Sociology need more systematic review? (2017-04-02 08:00)

A really [1]interesting discussion here from Patrick Dunleavy:

There are also now some very specific and increasingly influential methods for re-aggregating and re-understanding what whole literatures tell us. '[2]Systematic review' is an especially key approach now across the social sciences, spreading in from medicine and the health sciences. It starts by the reviewer clearly delineating (i) the subject, focus and boundaries of the review; and (ii) explicit criteria to be applied in evaluating sources and texts as being high value, medium value or low value. The review begins by considering the full pool of sources, leaving nothing out. The reviewer then systematically applies the criteria already set out, filtering down the studies progressively to focus on the higher value materials. Within the high value studies alone, those with the best evidence or methods employed, the systematic review considers what exactly are the strength of any evidential connections made and tries to reconcile as far as possible any divergences in estimating effects across the high value studies. Finally the conclusions (a) sum up the central findings; (b) make clear and assess the level of evidence and weight of the materials underpinning the findings; (c) give a sensitivity analysis of how far the conclusions might differ if the assessment criteria used for focusing down on key studies had been different.
We face a problem here though. The disciplines which would benefit most from systematic review are the ones least likely to have clearly agreed upon standards about what constitutes 'better' or 'worse' scholarship. Without this, the systematic review then starts to involve precisely the contentious implicit judgements which it’s intended to address. Nonetheless, I find it hard to deny the value here. How could we encourage more systematic review in Sociology?


Pedro Alemán (2018-12-08 19:39:54)
Doing them, I think it’s the only way. And we have to go through it, because maybe we are working with the same content saying different things and in the end it harms our discipline.

**Metaphysical matters in post-truth cultures (2017-04-02 21:55)**

by Joshua Stein

In the early months of the Trump administration, and even the late months of the Presidential campaign, social theorists and commentators started to write Jeremiads on the death of truth and its relata, knowledge and disagreement and accuracy. Most of these characterizations focus on a range of questions about the status of knowledge and disagreement. [1][2][3] I do not want to disparage these sorts of characterizations, but many of them (as well as conversations with my colleagues and friends) has led me to suspect people are missing the point in disagreements about the important questions, though often they rub elbows in the course of the analysis.

My colleague Aaron Thomas-Bolduc made the following observations in his discussion of the issue. “… facts are true things or facthood is a property of truth things.” [4, emphasis in original] Those who think that this is a sort of naïve, arcane metaphysical claim detached from the modern intellectual realization of the importance of context and contingency, I’ll have words for that in a bit. But the goal here is just to lay out a foundation for the discussion of a standard metaphysical view. Thomas-Bolduc’s observation is supposed to be a triviality about the relationship a fact and a statement being true. A sentence is made true by its disquotation. If I say, “it’s raining outside,” then that sentence is true if and only if it is, in fact, raining outside. These sorts of straightforward observations will seem boring to the philosophically uninitiated, but they get important quickly when we dive into the modern conventions around truth.

Consider the fascinating and oft repeated claim, recently crystalized by Hugh Hewitt, “[The Affordable Care Act] is in a death spiral.” [5] The category “death spiral” describes a set of conditions; the claim is true or false if the Affordable Care Act meets those conditions. It doesn’t seem that complicated. It can be complicated, of course. Perhaps it meets some conditions and not others; perhaps there are borderline cases, or interpretations of “death spiral” that allow for the statement to be, or at least be read as, not straightforwardly true or false. In the case of Hewitt’s statement, it seems to be straightforwardly false, but there are others that are not so straightforward.

Historically, it is so-called “postmodern” or “continental” critics who are taken to advance this sort of claim, sometimes to the celebration or lament of academics. [6][7] It has a place in Anglophone metaphysics as well. There is a doctrine, that still has its defenders, that every sentence (barring, perhaps, a few exceptions) is either true or
false; a number of prominent philosophers have suggested that this can’t possibly be right, that certain statements can be more or less true than others, either by more or less accurately tracking the facts or by getting more of a compound set of facts right.

In his seminal paper “Vagueness, Truth and Logic,” the British philosopher Kit Fine proposes an account where interpretations of a sentence can determine an intermediate truth-value for that sentence. Consider the sentence, “Trump was surveilled by the Obama Administration.” On many, even most, interpretations of this sentence, it seems to be false; interpreting the sentence as a direct action, where Trump was targeted, or where the behavior was intentionally directed at Trump, seems to be false. There are some very minimal interpretations, though, where the sentence counts as true. If “was surveilled by the Obama administration” simply describes some parts of the intelligence community gaining some information about the subject in the course of general surveillance efforts, then it is true. On Fine’s view (though his views have evolved considerably since this paper) we might represent a truth-value as a number between (1) and (0), where (1) is true on all interpretations and (0) is false on all interpretations. The closer the truth value of the statement “Trump was surveilled by the Obama Administration” is to (1), the truer it is.

Sociologists and anthropologists, as well as social critics, are fascinated by the term “ontology,” though they rarely use it all that well. Here’s the simple series of moves that get from the ontological (properly, metaphysical, though that word is scarier) claim to the epistemological claim; the rapid-chess version, if you will. For any sentence, there are a range of possible interpretations of that sentence, and for each interpretation there are facts in virtue of which that interpretation is true, false, or some value in between. The sentence, then, gets to be true or false based on the aggregation of the value of those interpretations. We evaluate a sentence as true or false based on whether the range of possible interpretations tends to be true or false. A sentence where all of the interpretations come back true is a sentence we know to be true, and the same for falsity.

I’ve become fond of a particular locution in the Trump era. “There is no interpretation of that statement that’s true.” This is how I regard Hewitt’s “death spiral” claim, and those relevantly similar. Similarly, “that’s mostly false” approximates my evaluation of the surveillance claim; there are some minimal interpretations that come back true, but for the most part, the sentence is false.

One of the hot takes around this issue is that we live in a world where critics have made void the notion of truth, that “it is all relative” now, and that is responsible for the inexorable tide of bullshit filling our living rooms through television sets and facebook feeds. This is only true for those with un-nuanced stories about truth and facts. Relativism, post-modernism, or whatever label the hot taker sticks on the perceived destroyer of facticity is this evil culprit; but, in reality, it is hard to find well-interpreted versions of the account offensive. The problem isn’t a particular philosophically salient ideology, but the combination of lazy interpretations of an ideology with political inclinations, malice, ignorance, greed, or some combination.

This is not to say that the philosophically oriented writing dog-eared as “relativism,” “post-modernism,” or whatever reapropriated academic term is dredge up in these commentaries is particularly good, or even benign. (Surely, there are a lot of writers with philosophical predilections who are quite bad along nearly every imaginable axis of evaluation, but that is another tangent.) That said, the hot takes are, themselves, illustrations of the same intellectually lazy claims about truth and relata that are getting us here. Reductive analyses of anything are weak; even the expedited analysis of truth I’ve offered is only a preface to a much longer set of interlocking discussions. There are lots of reasons we’ve wound up in the political and moral vacuum, but clawing our way out requires more work, rather than less.

Citations
The seventh annual Theorizing the Web is April 7 & 8 at the Museum of the Moving Image. That’s in almost two weeks! We hope to see old friends and new faces so if you think you’ll be in the NYC please stop by! Register and pay our whatever-you-want registration fee by April 5 to attend the conference and get full access to the Museum of the Moving Image: [1]http://theorizingtheweb.tumblr.com/2017/registration

If you don’t think you can attend in NYC there’s always the internet! To join us remotely, visit [2]http://theorizingtheweb.tumblr.com/2017/livestream during the conference and you’ll see all the streams. Ask the panelists questions and contact other attendees through the conference hashtag #TtW17. Each panel has its own dedicated hashtag too, so you can interact with specific panel sessions. If you’re a part of a watch party, cool! Please drop us a line and let us know.

Thank you and hope to see lots of you next month!

-David Banks / @da_bank / co-chair

About Theorizing the Web:

Theorizing the Web is an inter- and non-disciplinary annual conference that brings together scholars, journalists, artists, activists, and technology practitioners to think conceptually and critically about the interrelationships between the Web and society. We deeply value public engagement, and consider insights from academics, non-academics, and non-"tech theorists" alike to be equally valuable.

The first Theorizing the Web conference was held in 2011 at the University of Maryland, as was the second in 2012. In 2013, the conference moved to New York, where it was hosted by the CUNY Graduate Center in Manhattan. In 2014 we moved outside of institutional settings into a Windmill Studios warehouse in Brooklyn and expanded to two full days of programming. The 2015 event moved back to Manhattan, on the Bowery, to the then-unfinished new International Center of Photography space. In 2016 and 2017, we're at our third borough, in the beautiful spaces within the Museum of the Moving Image in Queens.

The Friday and Saturday daytime sessions feature 18 panels created largely from the competitive submissions we received at the beginning of the year, and the evenings conclude with four keynotes that will take place in the museum's Redstone Theater. Keynote panelists include Adrian Chen, Jay Rosen, Zeynep Tufekçi, Sharon Zukin, and many more.


CfP: Digital Culture meets data: Critical approaches (2017-04-04 08:00)

CALL FOR PAPERS
Digital Culture meets data: Critical approaches

ECREA Digital Culture and Communication Section Conference.

6th 7th November 2017, University of Brighton, UK

Abstract deadline: 20 May 2017
Keynote speakers:

€ Rob Kitchin, Maynooth University, Republic of Ireland  
€ Helen Thornham, University of Leeds, UK

Conference theme:

Algorithms and big data are today shaping our sociocultural and technical relations and our everyday experiences. Digital culture and communication are inevitably changing as media infrastructures, media practices and social environments become increasingly ‘datafied’. We may think of surveillance, algorithmic profiling and self-tracking for example. Wearable technologies such as fitness trackers allow people to understand the body as a data-producing object. Our use of commonplace media technologies is mediated by data in ways that we do not ask for, nor even necessarily know about or consent to. Data interpellate us. Yet data are obscure and enigmatic.

But what does this turn to data mean for our research, scholarship and pedagogic practice? Has the data paradigm arrived as an unquestionable unifying concept for studies of digital culture and digital media, communication, technology? It may be that a shift of focus on algorithms and data is fundamentally disruptive to the ways in which we see our research and disciplines. It may even appear to limit the theoretical and methodological tools through which we increasingly try to understand mediation, the formation of identity, social life, politics and the creative industries. To others, the ‘datalogical turn’ may be plainly repeating the processes of earlier instances of technological innovation. And for some, it may provide an opportunity to frame new theoretical concepts and methodological tools for a whole new set of social, cultural and political phenomena.

The ECREA DCC Conference ³Digital Culture meets data: Critical approaches² asks the question: what theoretical and empirical perspectives on data and the digital can be used to augment and diversify our research and educational approaches? And how might we challenge data paradigms or aim to show alternative or complementary ways to address digital culture and communication? We invite empirical and theoretical research papers and panels that address themes such as:

- Media studies and datafication
- Researching media and culture using data methods
- Data visualisation, art and design
- Data and the role of the imaginary, fantasy and myth
- Data cultures and neoliberalism
- Data activism and citizen engagement
- Data and critical literacy
- Data and gender, race, class inequalities
- Datafication and the creative industries

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The Conference will also host a YECREA Workshop entitled: The ambitious early-career scholar in an age of precarity: questions, challenges, opportunities (Organised by Ysabel Gerrard, University of Leeds). This workshop will facilitate open discussion between academics at various stages in their careers about some of the issues confronting ambitious early-career scholars in an increasingly competitive international job market.

Submission details, individual papers:

Please submit abstracts of 250-350 words, written in English. Abstracts should contain a clear outline of the argument, the theoretical framework, methodology and results (if applicable), and how this links to the theme and topics of this conference, or to the general concerns of digital culture and communication. Please include 3-5 keywords that describe your work, and a Bio note (max 100 words, stating affiliation).

Submission details, panels:

We welcome panel submissions, numbering 4 speakers. Please submit abstracts of 250-350 words per paper, plus a 250-350 word rationale for the panel. Individual abstracts should contain a clear outline of the argument, the theoretical framework, methodology and results (if applicable), and how this links to the theme and topics of this conference, or to the general concerns of digital culture and communication. Please include 3-5 keywords that describe each individual abstracts, plus 3-5 keywords that describe the panel, and Bio note for each individual abstract (max 100 words, stating affiliation).

All abstracts and rationale should be sent together as a single document by the panel proposer.

Details for abstract submission:

Please provide abstracts as .PDF, .DOC or .DOCX file types. Abstracts should be emailed to brightondcc@gmail.com. Deadline for paper and panel submissions is May 20, 2017. Notification of acceptance: June 20th, 2017.

You do not need to be an ECREA or DCC section member to apply.

For updates, please visit https://dccecrea.wordpress.com
For CFP http://dccecrea.wordpress.com/call-for-papers-2017-conference/
The [1]Central European University (CEU) is an English-speaking, postgraduate private university in Budapest, Hungary, specialising in the humanities and social sciences. It was established in 1991 by, among others, George Soros, its most important donor. The university is accredited in both Hungary and the USA.

On March 28th, on the pro-Hungarian government website Origo an article appeared, alleging that the CEU was in violation of Hungarian laws regulating higher education. The article referred to a Law Proposal submitted by the Minister of Human Resources, Zoltan Balogh. The Proposal would amend Hungary higher education law in a way which would make it impossible for CEU to operate within the country independently.
March in support of the CEU in Budapest, 2 April 2017

The day after Michael Ignatieff, the University rector, issued a statement declaring the Proposal an attack to free and independent higher education not only in Hungary but around the world. Over the last days, around 40,000 people signed an international petition calling upon the Hungarian Parliament to reject the Proposal. In addition, tens of Universities around the world, from Princeton to Oxford and the European University Institute, as well as international academic associations including the American Sociological Association, have expressed their solidarity with CEU and condemnation of the Hungarian Law Proposal.

It is today, 4 April 2017, in these hours, that the Proposal, dubbed as "lex CEU" by the media, is being voted upon in the Parliament. Disregarding a massive international uprising in only 7 days, MPs will likely vote in favour of the proposal.


Giovanni Picker is a Marie-Skłodowska Curie Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham School of Social Policy, UK. He recently published the book "Racial Cities: Governance and the Segregation of Romani People in Urban Europe".
Kieran Hamilton (2017-04-05 08:02:42)
I attended a course at the CEU in Budapest a few years ago. It’s a great institution, I don’t understand why the Hungarian parliament would do this, other than the critical thinking of the CEU possibly coming into conflict with current discourses in Hungary around welfare etc. and right wing policies that the government has enacted in recent years. Such a shame, hopefully the parliament sees sense.

The Impact of Social Theory (2017-04-05 08:00)

The Sociological Review has just published a thought-provoking review of Doug Porpora’s Reconstructing Sociology: The Critical Realist Approach. It gives a lucid, though brief, overview of the book’s core arguments: seven myths which afflict American sociology and seven philosophical counter-points. But what caught my attention was the account of how theoretical work can increase the discipline’s capacity for impact:

Porpora shows how critical realism adjudicates across the plethora of sociological paradigms to create new consistency, which can strengthen the validity and usefulness of our discipline. Imagine governments redefining obesity or poor mental health from medical problems into social problems, to be tackled by wide-ranging interdisciplinary research coordinated through a coherent framework of sociology and covering, for example, the related economics and politics, industries and services, healthcare and urban planning, with studies of the complex everyday life of the groups and individuals concerned.


The point is overstated but it’s nonetheless important: the internal dissensus of sociology militates against policy impact. The meta-theoretical (dis)orderliness of disciplines underpins the inarguable reality that “economists and psychologists are introduced as self-evidently respected scientists, whereas sociologists, if they are included at all, seem more likely to evoke scepticism than respect”. Rather than theoretical work being a distraction from aspiring
to this status, it is in actual fact a condition for it:

One defence of our discipline's diversity is that its adaptable rich variety can embrace numerous theories, methods and topics. However, variety does not preclude coherence, and coherence does not demand narrow uniformity - like the neoclassical mantras that now monopolise economics. Medicine is a hugely varied discipline yet, fortunately for society's healthcare, it is unified by powerful common values and theories about causal realities. By contrast, and unfortunately for society's wellbeing, sociology is split not only by disagreements but, more seriously, by basic contradictions: positivism accepts pristine independent social facts and aims to discover general laws, whereas interpretivism sees only local contingent variety; statistics and experiments are set against ethnography; sociology is variously taken to be value-free, relativist or a moral endeavour.

Bringing meta-theoretical order to sociology doesn't entail imposition of a unified paradigm on the discipline. It simply necessitates that we "position its many valuable insights and methods in relation to one another, showing how they connect and interact within larger relations, to be more like a coherent jigsaw puzzle in progress, rather than a heap of pieces". Can we find unifying principles, providing standards by which we might draw out connections between otherwise isolated outputs of the discipline, which respect the intellectual diversity of the sociological enterprise? Can we begin to agree on standards about what constitutes 'better' and 'worse' sociology?

The problem is that disciplines most in need of such standards, in order to provide a centripetal mechanism, prove least able to establish them. Calling for such standards doesn't entail a final resolution of theoretical questions, as if we all have to agree on the same answers in order to move forward as a collective project. But it does entail clarity about why we are asking the questions to which we are offering different answers.


The Uberfication of the University: the Digital Studienbuch and the 21st Century Privatdozent (2017-04-06 08:00)

In my copy of *The Vocation Lectures*, edited by David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, the editors helpfully annotate Weber's description of the occupational realities of the German academic. From pg 2:

German students used to have a *Studienbuch*, a notebook in which they registered the courses they were taking in their field. They then had to pay a fixed fee for each course. For staff on a full salary - that is, professors - these tuition fees were a welcome extra. For the unsalaried *Privatdozent*, these fees were the sole source of income. *Science as a Vocation, pg 2.*
Is this where the Uberfication of the University could lead? I find it easy to imagine a Digital Studienbuch, the killer app of educational disrupters, dispersed throughout the university system. Universities would still exist to manage the 'student experience', control the academics and provide infrastructure. Perhaps there would still be paid professors to replenish the knowledge system and train the Privatdozent. But the university wouldn't be the platform, instead it would be a whole series of arenas (with declining influence as the system became embedded), facilitating extraction from a relationship between teacher and taught on the part of a distant technology company.

Weber's description of the academic career in Germany, "generally based on plutocratic premises", seems eerily familiar from a contemporary vantage point:

For it is extremely risky for a young scholar without private means to expose himself to the conditions of an academic career. He must be able to survive at least for a number of years without knowing whether he has any prospects of obtaining a position that will enable him to support himself. Science as a Vocation, pg 2.

The Technology of Intellectual Work (2017-04-07 08:00)

In 1988 Pierre Bourdieu chaired a commission reviewing the curriculum at the behest of the minister of national education. The scope of the review was broad, encompassing a revision of subjects taught in order to strengthen the coherence and unity of the curriculum as a whole. In order to inform this work, the commission early on formulated principles to guide their endeavour, each of which were then expanded into more substantive observations concerning their implications.

One of these stood out to me as of great contemporary relevance for the social sciences in the digital university. Their principle considers those “ways of thinking or fundamental know-how that, assumed to be taught by everyone, end up not being taught by anyone”. In other words, what are the elements of educational practice which are integral to it and how can we assure their successful transmission in training? These include “fundamental ways of thinking” such as “deduction, experiment, and the historical approach, as well as reflective and critical thinking which should always be combined with the foregoing” and “the specific character of the experimental way of thinking”, “a resolute valuation of qualitative reasoning”, a clear recognition of the provisional nature of explanatory models” and “ongoing training in the practical work of research”. It extends this discussion to the technologies used in practice:

Finally, care must be taken to give major place to a whole series of techniques that, despite being tacitly required by all teaching, are rarely the object of methodical transmission: use of dictionaries and abbreviations, rhetoric of communication, establishment of files, creation of an index, use of records and data banks, preparation of a manuscript, documentary research, use of computerised instruments, interpretation of tables and graphs, etc.

Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action, pg 175
This concern for the “technology of intellectual work” is one from which we could learn a lot, as well as the importance placed upon “rational working methods (such as how to choose between tasks imposed, or to distribute them in time)”. It maps nicely onto what [1]C. Wright Mills described as intellectual craftsmanship. When we consider the technologies of scholarly production – things like notebooks, word processors, index cards, post it notes, print outs, diagrams and marginalia – our interest is in their use-in-intellectual-work. The technologies become something quite specific when bound up in intellectual activity:

But how is this file – which so far must seem to you more like a curious sort of ‘literary’ journal – used in intellectual production? The maintenance of such a file *is* intellectual production. It is a continually growing store of facts and ideas, from the most vague to the most finished.

_The Sociological Imagination, pg 199-200_

If we recognise this, we overcome the distinction between theory and practice. The distinction between ‘rational working methods’, ‘technology of intellectual work’ and ‘fundamental ways of thinking’ is overcome in scholarly craft. The role of the technology is crucial here: if we suppress or forget the technological, transmission of these practices is abstracted from their application, leaving their practical unfolding to be something which has to be discovered individually and privately (“ways of thinking or fundamental know-how that, assumed to be taught by everyone, end up not being taught by anyone”). But places for discussion of craft in this substantive sense have been the exception rather than the rule within the academy.

Perhaps social media is changing this. It is facilitating a recovery of technology, now finding itself as one of the first things social scientists discuss when they enter into dialogues through social networks and blogs. But it also facilitates what Pat Thompson has described as a [2]feral doctoral pedagogy:

Doctoral researchers can now access a range of websites such as [3]LitReviewHQ, [4]PhD2Published and [5]The Three Month Thesis youtube channel. They can read blogs written by researchers and academic developers e.g. [6]Thesis Whisperer, [7]Doctoral Writing SIG, [8]Explorations of Style, and of course this one. They can synchronously chat on social media about research via general hashtags #phdchat #phdforum and #acwri, or discipline specific hashtags such as #twitterstorians or #socphd. They can buy webinars, coaching and courses in almost all aspects of doctoral research. Doctoral researchers are also themselves increasingly blogging about their own experiences and some are also offering advice to others. Much of this socially mediated DIY activity is international, cross-disciplinary and all day/all night.

[9]https://patthomson.net/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/Doctoral researchers

There can be problematic aspects to this. But when it’s valuable, it’s at the level of precisely the unity of thinking, technology and activity which the commission advocated. Social media is helping us recover the technology of intellectual work and it’s an extremely positive development for the social sciences.

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2. https://patthomson.net/2014/06/16/are-we-heading-for-a-diy-phd/
The Porous University - A critical exploration of openness, space and place in Higher Education
(2017-04-08 08:00)

Call for participation Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th May 2017 University of the Highlands and Islands, Inverness Campus

This two-day symposium arose out of a series of conversations and reflections on the nature of openness within Higher Education. It started with the observation that openness is increasingly seen as a technical question, whose solution lies in employing the low transaction costs associated with digital technologies with open licences to open up academic content to new groups of learners.

Where critical voices have engaged this partial reading they have often rightly critiqued the degree to which this is truly open, for example, drawing on older traditions of open to question the freedoms free content allows for those already distanced from education.

However, other questions also arise in a critical reading of open, and these include:

- What does open mean beyond releasing content?
- What is the role of open academics in dealing with problems 'in the world'
- How should staff and students become learners within community contexts, developing and negotiating the curriculum based on those contexts?
- What would it mean for openness as a way to allow new voices into the academy, to acknowledge knowing and ways of knowing outside the academy, and where can and should our open spaces – both digital and physical – intersect?
- If we are to advocate allowing learners’ experiences and organisations to inform the academy how open should academics be to the influence of private capital?

These are the kinds of questions, amongst others, that we want to explore in this symposium.

Public engagement, social media and university boundaries (2017-04-09 08:00)

In her wonderful *Lower Ed*, Tressie Cottom describes how her public profile led to her being in contact with someone who was enormously relevant to her ongoing research. From pg 103:

Aaron found me through my public writing and blogging and social media and decided that speaking to me might be interesting. He emailed me and kept emailing me over the course of a year. Eventually, I was giving a lecture in the same state where he lived, and he invited me to have coffee.

One of the most fascinating conversations I ever had while doing asexuality research was with a woman in her 80s who found out about me through an interview in a newspaper. She was unwillingly to be formally interviewed but an extensive phone conversation was enormously useful to my attempts to understand the changing social conditions in which being asexual is rendered problematic or otherwise. In both cases, we can see visibility facilitating people coming to us, creating opportunities if we are open to them but also complicating habitual expectations about how we manage relationships with groups external to the academy.

I'd love to hear other people's experiences of such encounters. It strikes me that this is an advantage to public engagement which is rarely recognised. I suspect it's a relatively common experience amongst people who engage in a lot of this activity and it's one we should recognise and explore in a systematic way. The focus of a lot of what I'm doing over the next few months will be university boundaries and how they're being changed by new technology. The role of public engagement in narrowing the gap between researchers and the researched is an important aspect of this. But there's a theoretical complexity to how we conceptualise these boundaries which [1] engaging with the work of Jana Bacevic has left me newly aware of.

Recognising such a benefit is interesting if we frame public engagement in terms of academic labour. It's often cast as another thing to do, adding additional items to already over long to do lists. This implicitly conceives of it as something extrinsic to the research process, as if everything else about the professional practice of those involved remains fixed, only to be supplemented by these additional activities. But in reality public engagement is something relational, both in terms of the working patterns of the engaged and [2] their relationship to the wider community of their research and 'wider society'. It changes both in a way which complicates the initial comparison one made in which a working life without public engagement is compared to one which includes such activity.

My discussion so far has been about public engagement in general rather than social media in particular. However the opportunities and problems of the former are increasingly being forced as an issue by the widespread adoption of the latter. The boundary between the researcher and wider society is being changed by the uptake of new communications technology, making it more likely that the people we research and write about will talk back to us about what we say. Embracing this relationality can bring great benefits to the research process, with the the potential for important new connections being just one example of this. But there are liable to problems created if we ignore it. My suggestion is that what at present seem like outliers (people who are extremely visible through public engagement activity) represent the future normal, one which researchers will urgently need to adapt themselves too.

Keeping the conversation going in an age of scholarly abundance (2017-04-10 08:00)

In the last few years, I've become increasingly preoccupied with the notion of 'the literature' and how it is invoked by scholars. I'm now rather sceptical of the way in which many people talk about 'the literature' and the role it plays in scholarship. It's not that I don't think it’s important to identify, engage with and record the existing work that has been done on a topic you're working on. Rather I'm concerned that the invocation of its necessity serves a disciplinary function when scholarly literature proliferates at the speed which it now does, with an [1]estimated 28,100 journals publishing 2.5 million articles a year. The problems which those who enthusiastically invoke the importance of 'the literature' are concerned with, such as perpetual reinvention of the wheel and a failure to recognise relevant work taking place in adjacent fields, have such [2]obviously structural roots that to frame the solution in terms of personal practice seems to accord almost magical powers to the intellectual discipline of individual scholars.

My concern is that invoking 'the literature' increasingly functions as a conversation-stopper: it’s a disciplinary action which serves to curtail, though rarely halt, a line of inquiry. If we are inclined, as Richard Rorty once put, “to keep the conversation going” then we need to “protest against attempts to close off conversation by proposals for universal commensuration through the hypostatisation of some privileged set of descriptions” ([3]377). Or in other words, we need to reject the idea that there’s only one way to talk about the topic in question. This is what the invocation of 'the literature' does, usually implicitly though sometimes explicitly. It implies a unified body of work which must be the reference point for scholarship on a given topic, even if the intention is to break away from it. In many cases, there's perhaps no such unity in the first place, with its apparent coherence being underwritten by the most influential figures within the field have talked about 'the literature' in a way which performatively brings it into being by justifying the implication that much (potentially relevant) material exists 'outside'. Judgements of salience aren't written into the fabric of the knowledge system, they're suffused with epistemic relativism: made from a particular standpoint, by a person with their own interests, reliant upon their own conceptual apparatus. Instead, behind apparent coherence, we have a complex network of citation cartels, [4]'unread and unloved' publications and influential beneficiaries of Matthew effects.

My point is not to dispute the value of reading and engaging with literature. I only want to situate invocations of 'the literature': made by people struggling with the problems of scholarly abundance, in relation to others similarly struggling with these problems. The idea of one definitive point of orientation becomes fetishistic when we all suffer from the vertigo of the accelerated academy. From Sustainable Knowledge by Robert Frodeman, loc 1257:

I feel like I am drowning in knowledge, and the idea of further production is daunting. Libraries and bookstores produce a sense of anxiety: the number of books and journals to read is overwhelming, with tens of thousands more issuing from the presses each day. Moreover, there is no real criterion other than whim for selecting one book or article over another. To dive into one area rather than another becomes a willful act of blindness, when other areas are just as worthwhile and when every topic connects to others in any number of ways. The continual press of new knowledge becomes an invitation to forgetfulness, to lose the forest for the trees.

Under these circumstances, our concern shouldn’t be to ensure everyone pays allegiance to 'the literature'. We can
assume this will continue to grow continuously while everyone feels compelled to write hyperactively, continually churning out publications with more hope that they are counted rather than that they are read. Instead, we should be asking how do we sustain the conversation under these circumstances? What kinds of conversations should we be having? What purposes do they serve? The well known problems of scholarly publishing mean traditional exchange in journals is becoming progressively less amenable to productive conversations, particularly across boundaries of field and discipline. How do we have conversations which serve, as Nicos Mouzelis puts it, to build bridges?

To be specific, there is little satisfaction with the present status quo where the boundaries between economics, political science, sociology and anthropology have become solid blinkers preventing interdisciplinary studies of social phenomena. But such compartmentalization will not be transcended by the facile and mindless abolition of the existing division of labour between disciplines.

[Instead we need] a painstaking process of theoretical labour that aims at building bridges between the various specializations. Such a strategy does not abolish social science boundaries: it simply aims at transforming them from impregnable bulwarks to transmission belts facilitating interdisciplinary research ... what is badly needed today are more systematic efforts towards the creation of a theoretical discourse that would be able to translate the language of one discipline into that of another. Such an interdisciplinary language would not only facilitate communication among the social science disciplines, it would also make it possible to incorporate effectively into the social sciences insights achieved in philosophy, psychoanalysis or semiotics.

Sociological Theory: What went Wrong?: Diagnosis and Remedies, By Nicos Mouzelis

A large part of my enthusiasm for social media comes from the possibilities it offers for having these kinds of conversations. But trying to resolve the problems of the accelerated academy through an invocation of the need for disciplined practice is taking us in the wrong direction.

There's a powerful counter-argument that can be found [5]here by Patrick Dunleavy, concerning the importance of citation. I want to think carefully about this but my instinct would be to add two additional columns: "how scholarly abundance complicates this role" and "how might this lead us to change practice".
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining attributes of academic work</th>
<th>What the attribute means</th>
<th>The related role of citations and referencing is</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formally stated</td>
<td>Premises and assumptions are explicit, and arguments are precisely expressed.</td>
<td>To specify sources for assumptions and their contextual legitimacy, and to contextualize arguments within a defined field.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part of an advanced conversation</td>
<td>Academic work expresses a lot of content in a brief space, using specialist terminology or notations.</td>
<td>To set up a specialist discourse in an economical and highly-focused manner and to show how the relevant literature defines concepts, terms or notations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative</td>
<td>Arguments are built up layer by layer.</td>
<td>To show that the author has read the relevant literature and has a good understanding of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tackling difficult issues</td>
<td>Academic work goes beyond common sense understandings and (generally) seeks theory-based and non-obvious explanations of complex, hard-to-understand phenomena.</td>
<td>To guide readers seeking to follow the author’s extended chain of reasoning. Readers should be able to understand and ‘replay’ the intellectual journey involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial</td>
<td>Professionals carefully accord credit to other authors where it is due. STEM disciplines assign special emphasis to those who are first in discovering or correctly understanding phenomena (primacy).</td>
<td>To accurately assign credit to other researchers for key innovations and relevant prior findings or arguments, so that readers can also access this work for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence-based</td>
<td>Arguments are grounded in proofs, recorded facts or other auditable supporting tokens. The provenance of all claims should be checkable.</td>
<td>To allow readers to quickly find and precisely check sources of evidence or other tokens for themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirically consistent</td>
<td>Evidence and arguments are related to other views or findings, and divergences are explained. In STEM subjects, there is a general premium on considering all scientific evidence on the exact-same topic, carried through most strongly in ‘systematic review’. Elsewhere this criterion is often more loosely interpreted.</td>
<td>To show that the author has comprehensively surveyed work that is relevant in scope, approach and recency, and to specifically point out consistencies and inconsistencies between other work and the author’s own findings.</td>
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3. [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NAcxfRIh7sMC&dq=rorty&source=gbs_navlinks_s](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=NAcxfRIh7sMC&dq=rorty&source=gbs_navlinks_s)
5. [https://medium.com/@write4research/why-are-citations-important-in-research-writing-97fb6d854b47#.x9qgxxhsz](https://medium.com/@write4research/why-are-citations-important-in-research-writing-97fb6d854b47#.x9qgxxhsz)

Benny Goodman (2017-04-10 08:46:33)

If you add related issues of publication bias, and non replicability to the mix, the picture becomes fuzzier. Graham Scambler I believe argued recently that we already have enough of a body a literature already that requires careful, critical immersion.

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Not that this was a call for a halt on producing more, rather that we have a rich seam to mine. Your interdisciplinary point is vital, as the problems of the world require interdisciplinary systems thinking. The facilitating of conversation in ‘the paraversity’ is a political project requiring the support for encouragement of early years academics to challenge the corporate university agendas. Social media does indeed connect and allows the conversation, as this post testifies, but we will need robust structures to defend against accepted practices for recognition which include certain uses and invocations of ‘the literature’.

Mark Carrigan (2017-04-12 13:28:42)
Really interesting take - fancy writing it up into a blog post for us?

benny Goodman (2017-04-12 14:16:30)
...and why not? :)

On Irritation, Or, How Social Networks Tend To Make Us Slightly More Assholic (2017-04-11 08:00)

In the last couple of months, I’ve found myself reflecting on irritation. What is it? It’s one of our most recognisable reactions to the world, yet it’s hard to be precise about what it is. Is it an emotion? Is it a state of mind? Is it a reaction to the world? This is the definition which Wikipedia offers:

Annoyance is an unpleasant mental state that is characterized by such effects as irritation and distraction from one’s conscious thinking. It can lead to emotions such as frustration and anger. The property of being easily annoyed is called irritability.

There’s a whole model of the person implicit within this which I’m sceptical of. The idea that mental states manifests themselves in effects with implications for cognition, generated by propensities and generating emotions. It’s an individualised account, even if a multifaceted one, concerning something that’s deeply relational.

The most straight forward definition of irritation would be ‘something which irritates’. In one sense it’s circular, telling us nothing about what irritation is, but it captures the relationality of the reaction. We are irritated by something. We find something irritating. It involves an evaluative relation to the world, but one which, as it were, goes wrong. Far from the smoothly hermeneutic world of the post-Aristotelian philosophers, we have the Goffmanian reality of living together (in a world which frustrates our purposes).

So if irritation is being irritated by something, what is it to be irritated? To be " angered, provoked,
or annoyed" or "inflamed or made raw, as a part of the body". The second definition concerns the resolutely physical but I think it captures something important. We are irritated when we are inflamed by the world, made raw by its recalcitrance. People or circumstances irritates us when they impede our routine movement through the world. Things are not as we expect. We’re forced to calibrate ourselves in relation to the world, pushed back into ourselves confronted with a world that resists us, rather than easily making or way through it.

We get irritated by others when they do not act as we expect them to. We get irritated by others when they
do not act as we think they ought to. In this sense, I would argue that irritation tracks declining social integration: the less agreement there is about how we ought to comport ourselves, the more likely we are to experience irritation in daily life.

What interests me is how we respond to this. If we simply make internal allowances for the fact that others may have different expectations and aspirations to ourselves, it’s easy for the irritation to dissipate. A trivial example: I find it irritating when people talk loudly in the steam room at my gym. But I also recognise that some people go there to socialise, whereas for me it’s a resolutely individual activity. Reminding myself of that fact usually leads the irritation to subside.

On the other hand, if I seek external confirmation for my reaction, it’s unlikely to subside. This is where social media comes in: the imagined interlocutor (what Danny Miller calls the 'meta best friend') can serve as a outlet, without the possibility for censure that arises when you share with a concrete individual who’s liable to tell you to stop obsessing and let other people be. It’s even more effective when an agent of this imagined interlocutor, someone who emerges from the background to respond definitively before fading back into it and propping up an imagined consensus, confirms that they too find this behaviour irritating.

Sharing irritation through social networks can facilitate an extreme form of what critical realists call communicative reflexivity. We find confirmation of our immediate reactions in others, rather than further interrogating our reaction internally, leading to a hardening of our reaction and a disposition to act similarly in future. I don’t think digital technology straight forwardly causes a decline in social integration but I do think social networks can amplify personal reactions which entrench the decline by, as it were, depleting the reserves of tolerance we have for others who think about and approach life in a different way to us. This is connected to the [10]paradox of incivility and it’s something I'd like to come back to in greater depth.

2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mood_(psychology)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mood_(psychology))
10. [https://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/01/the-paradox-of-civility-or-why-is-this-place-filled-with-such-rude-assholes/](https://markcarrigan.net/2014/03/01/the-paradox-of-civility-or-why-is-this-place-filled-with-such-rude-assholes/)

Social Media Training Workshop (2017-04-11 11:49)

Social Media Training Workshop
Led by Holly Powell Jones

City University, London EC1V 0HB

Monday 8 May 2017, 12.30 – 4.00 pm

This workshop will be of interest and assistance if you wish to use social media to disseminate your work, identify and share relevant opportunities, communicate a cause, or promote an organisation, charity, or business services.


Marketing the Digital University (2017-04-12 08:00)

In the excellent *Lower Ed*, Tressie McMillan Cottom reflects on the market-orientation of for-profit colleges, tending to seek a continual growth in student numbers. This growth imperative can manifest itself in marketing and recruitment outstripping teaching in institutional spending. From pg 20:

> If budgets are moral documents, the fact that some financialized for-profit colleges reportedly spent 22.4 percent of all revenue on marketing, advertising, recruiting, and admissions staffing compared with 17.7 percent of all revenue, on instruction speaks to the morals of financialization.

Since the previous Labour government [1] kicked off the radical changes in higher education in the UK, I’ve been interested in the transformation of university marketing. The reforms created a pressure to differentiate but to what extent did that incentivise the growth of marketing and communications at the (potential) expense of investment elsewhere? I hadn’t thought about this issue for a while but it occurs to me that the extreme end of the US for-profit sector represents an exemplar of where the market logic now taking hold in the UK could lead, in so far as that linking financial performance to student numbers increases the structural importance of marketing and communication functions. How this logic plays out in practice depends on many organisational and sectoral factors which I’d like to understand better than I currently do.

How do we characterise the broader change in the sector? Cynics would see it as a distraction from the core functions of the university, with increasing resources being directed to marketing exercises with a possibly uncertain payoff in terms of recruitment. What concerns me is the competitive escalation that can arise in a (relatively) undifferentiated sector where actors compete for scarce attention: how can universities be heard above the din? One way is to accelerate the investment in marketing and communications, expanding into new arenas and further investing in staffing and systems. This is something which those staff are liable applaud, a message that might have particular force when their function is on the ascendency within the university and they can speak with authority gleamed from work outside the sector.

But others would argue that any uncertainty could be overcome by instilling a “marketing culture” in which “return on investment of each activity is carefully weighed up”. This is how Communications Management, ‘the education specialists’ report on findings of a project they were involved on:

**Key findings**

- Over two-thirds (69%) of UK marketing directors have seen an increased investment in marketing over the past three years
- Branding is often still not understood within the higher education sector
- Modern students are ‘demanding customers’ looking for a response 24/7, meaning that a shift in marketing techniques is crucial
- Social media must be handled in the right way to avoid “pushy communications” and encroaching on student space
- Increase in senior strategic marketing appointments in Higher Education Institutions

However survey respondents – a third of the UK’s HE marketing directors – also stated that though
budgets still rarely approach those in the private sector, they consider short term funding to be less important than moving to such a "marketing culture," in which return on investment of each activity is carefully weighed up.

[2]http://www.communicationsmanagement.co.uk/blog/he-marketing-has-become-more-credible/

There are many things to explore here. What particularly interests me is the role of professionalisation (within the sector) and external agencies (from outside the sector) in shaping the new common-sense concerning marketing in the digital university.


2. http://www.communicationsmanagement.co.uk/blog/he-marketing-has-become-more-credible/

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Digital labour and the epistemic fallacy (2017-04-13 08:00)

One of the arguments which pervades Uberworked and Underpaid, by Trebor Scholz, concerns the materiality of digital labour. As someone whose back and neck start to ache if I spend too much time at a computer, I’ve always found the tendency to assume there is something mysteriously immaterial about using computers to be rather absurd. But there’s more to Scholz’s argument then this generic tendency to fail to recognise the embodied character of digital engagement. From Loc 4103

It’s worth remembering that whether a worker toils in an Amazon warehouse or works for crowdSPRING, her body will get tired and hungry. She’ll have to take care of car payments, medical bills for her children, and student debts, not to mention saving for retirement. Digital work makes the body of the worker invisible but no less real or expendable.

It strikes me that what we are talking about here is the epistemic fallacy: taking what we know to exhaust what is. The mediation involved in digital labour impedes or entirely prevents knowledge of the material circumstances of the worker. The disaggregation and workflows facilitated by data infrastructures similarly obscure knowledge of the many workers whose efforts combine, in enormously complex way, to produce discernible outcomes. The political economy and social-technical infrastructure of digital labour is certainly complex, but it’s nonetheless useful to recognise the underlying epistemological issue at work here.

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The cultural significance of blogging (2017-04-14 08:00)

In his *Uberworked and Underpaid*, Trebor Scholz offers an important reflection on the cultural significance of blogging. While its uptake has been exaggerated, dependent upon questionable assumptions concerning the relationship between users and blogs, it nonetheless represents a transformation of and expansion of cultural agency which needs to be taken seriously. From loc 3825:

Web 2.0, to be fair, was incredibly successful as an ideology, a meme, and a marketing ploy with global effects. Already by 2004, the industry claimed that there were some 100 million weblogs. One didn’t have to be a skeptic of numerical reasoning to understand that the claim that everybody on this planet was blogging was based on shaky statistics. Clearly, some of these projections were blind to the digital divide, and overlooked the fact that many weblogs were set up but then never used again. But still, we need to acknowledge that more than a decade after its emergence, blogging had roped millions into a daily writing practice; it made them walk through their lives with the eyes of a participant, somebody who could potentially participate or insert her own perspective.

This is reminiscent of the appendix to *The Sociological Imagination*, in which C Wright Mills offers practical advice about ‘keeping one’s inner world awake’. It would be overstating matters to claim blogging is intrinsically tied to the sociological imagination, but the propensity to “insert her own perspective” in a life more likely to be lived “with the eyes of a participant” is something we should take seriously, while refraining from assuming that this flows inexorably from the adoption of blogging as a regular activity.

John McCreery (2017-04-16 02:17:23)

We should all become what business anthropologists call “observant participants” in life. The trick is moving from blogging as venting to blogging as offering, at least we hope, insight.

Call for special issue proposals: International Journal of Social Research Methodology (2017-04-15 08:00)

The *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* publishes up to two guest-edited Special Issues per volume. The *IJSRM* editorial board welcomes proposals for Special Issues for volume 18, to be submitted to the Journal editors by Friday 14th July 2017 for consideration at the September editorial board meeting. Proposals should be submitted via email to [tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk](mailto:tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk). Potential guest editors should submit a proposal of no longer than 3 pages covering:

- Rationale. The timeliness, importance and international interest of the methodological topic and methods addressed.

- Fit with the *IJSRM* remit. See the Journal’s statement of aims and scope on its website: [http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/tf/13645 579.html](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/tf/13645 579.html), or on the back inside cover of hard copies of *IJSRM*.

- Indicative contents. Indicative titles, authors and abstracts should be provided, including an editorial. Contents should demonstrate an international orientation, including through the range of contributors. If this is not the case, then a rationale should be provided.
• Reviews. IJSRM publishes review articles of several publications from a single reviewer, or multiple reviews of a single publication by several reviewers. If you would like to include book reviews in your special issue, they should be of this type of format.

Each Special Issue should amount to 45,000 words in total, which includes the editorial, abstracts, papers, references and reviews. The editorial should provide a ‘state of play’ introduction to methodological issues and methods addressed. **Responsibilities of guest editors:**

• ensure manuscripts are in keeping with IJSRM guidelines (see website)
• ensure articles are peer refereed (such as by setting up a refereeing panel), with a list of reviewers either provided to the Journal editors or thanked in the editors’ introduction
• deal with all correspondence with the contributors, Journal editors and Routledge production editor
• provide a ‘state of play’ editorial
• liaise with the editors and, if required, the reviews editors
• ensure timely delivery of the final manuscript to the editors

**Responsibilities of Journal editors:**

• facilitate the preparation of the Special Issue
• provide final quality control for the Issue
• forward the Special Issue to the Journal’s production editor

Rosalind Edwards, Emma Uprichard and Malcolm Williams Co-editors International Journal of Social Research Methodology

1. mailto:tsrm-editor@tandf.co.uk
2. http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/tf/13645579.html

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**Do academics write badly because they’re rushing? (2017-04-16 08:00)**

I saw the science journalist [1] Simon Makin give an excellent talk yesterday on how social and natural scientists can make their writing clearer. He offered some excellent tips to this end, including assuming your reader is exactly as intelligent as you are, but has absolutely none of your knowledge. For this reason, clarity isn’t about being simplistic: aim to clarify without simplifying.

What struck me in the discussion of **drafting and redrafting** was how likely this is to fall by the wayside when rushing. If you’re working to a deadline, particularly when other deadlines immediately follow them, it’s unlikely you’ll invest the time needed to do this. His description of drafting involved careful tinkering, picking and poking at a text in a way which leads to incremental improvement. As opposed to simply trying to get it out of the door so you can move onto the next demand.
This isn’t simply a matter of time. It also reflects the moral psychology of rushing. When we rush, we close down our engagement with the objects of our attention. Things that might have been deeply meaningful to us instead become obstacles to surmount. We simply can’t care about the clarity of our writing in the same way when we’re rushing.


Alicia (2017-04-16 12:32:47)
I totally agree. I sometimes find that with procrastination comes the adrenalin pressure thrill, yet the rush produces poor writing. I a mature aged undergraduate student, and I have recently submitted a research essay. It was the first time I rushed with an essay, I sat up until 2.30am writing and felt so disappointed. I await the results.

John McCreery (2017-04-17 04:23:31)
For those who wish to pursue these thoughts further. https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Learn-Write-Clearly-Subject/dp/B000OEVVL4

Stephen Norrie (2017-04-20 01:40:21)
I agree to an extent, but I also think it’s important not to imagine that academics should ideally be writing like journalists, or in imitation of ordinary speech. Especially in sociology the complexity of processes seems to demand a level of qualification that is only possible through multi-clause "long sentences". At least, I can’t imagine writing what I want to write without them.

Mark Carrigan (2017-04-26 09:31:51)
I take your basic point but don’t understand why it means long sentences are necessary. The very fact some manage without them without lapsing into platitudes surely illustrates it’s possible.

Madelon van Oostrom (2017-05-14 22:03:32)
So surprised to hear that from an English scholar. I work in Spain where I fight every day against my acquired (national) academic habits: endless sentences everywhere. Especially in sociology it seems practitioners and scholars are in need to convert every sentence into a paragraph.

**Rethinking Digital Media and Citizenship: Conditions, Contexts, and Consequences** (2017-04-17 08:00)

American Behavioral Scientist (ABS)

Special Issue Call for Papers (CFPs)

Rethinking Digital Media and Citizenship:

Conditions, Contexts, and Consequences

Guest Editors:

Seungahn Nah (University of Kentucky)

4996
Masahiro Yamamoto (University at Albany, State University of New York)

Description:*

A substantial body of scholarship has long tackled how traditional and newly emerging information and communication technologies (ICTs) foster an informed, efficacious, and engaged citizenry. Despite prolific literature on digital media and citizenship, theoretical approaches and conceptual and operational definitions still diverge in different disciplines and schools. What seems particularly missing in the literature is an examination of structural conditions and/or contexts that may facilitate or hinder the role of digital media in civic engagement. Therefore, the goal of this special issue is to call for theoretically and methodologically sound scholarship that examines causes, components, and civic consequences of digital media use. Such an examination presents important practical implications and policy applications.

This special issue addresses the following major questions:

1) How can digital media use and civic engagement be conceptualized, operationalized, and theorized across various theoretical perspectives in the convergence and divergence of digital media environment?

2) To what extent do digital media (social and mobile), along with traditional media, influence civic engagement and how such an influence varies across communities of places, interests, practices, and beyond, as well as different ethnic groups and those who hold different socio-economic status?

3) How do social contexts and conditions promote or impede the role of digital media in civic, political, and community life at multiple levels?

The special issue editors would welcome submissions addressing the following topics:

1) Theoretical advancement on digital media and civic engagement in offline and online communication environments;

2) Integrated theoretical framework concerning digital media and citizenship

3) Innovative conceptual and operational definitions (measurements) of digital media across various platforms;

4) Social structural contexts and conditions (e.g., race, class, gender, family, school, organization, neighborhood, etc.) that affect digital media use and its effects on civic engagement;

5) Linkage between online and offline civic engagement from networked community perspectives.
Submission Guidelines:

Submitted manuscripts must be in MS Word (.doc) format with a title page that includes the title of the paper, full names, affiliations, email addresses, telephone numbers, complete addresses, and biographical sketches of all authors.

Manuscripts must adhere to the APA (6th ed.) style and should contain between 6,000 and 8,000 words, including a 250-worlds abstract with 5-6 key words, all references, and notes.

Manuscripts must contain original material which has not been previously published elsewhere or is not currently under consideration by another journal.

All manuscripts should go through a blind, peer-reviewed process so no indicators of authorship should appear in the texts.

Manuscripts should be submitted directly via email to seungahn.nah@uky.edu

Timeline:

- Submission deadline: April 30, 2017
- Editorial decision: June 30, 2017
- Anticipated publication date: January/February 2018

1. seungahn.nah@uky.edu
Using graphic novels to communicate your research (2017-04-17 18:32)

Manchester Digital Laboratory
Thursday 8th June 2017
09.00-17.00

The Sociological Review Foundation is delighted to announce our forthcoming workshop using graphic novel methods to present social research.

We invite applications to take part in a Graphic Novel Workshop with Tony Lee. If your research involves incorporating graphic methods or you are simply interested in doing this to present future research, this workshop will be of interest to you.

**Workshop Format**
- Introduction on graphic novels: how the medium works, different genres, how they’ve changed and the design & production process
- Story telling through graphic novels: how to develop the story, what works and what doesn’t, constraints of the medium etc
- Delegates introduce their ideas for graphic novels and get feedback
- General discussion & advice about next steps

This event is FREE but places are limited to 25 people.

This event is brought to you by The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher Board. We welcome applica-
tions for this workshop from people in all stages of their careers. However, should we receive significantly more applications than available places – priority will be given to ECRs and PGRs.

Application deadline is 17.00 GMT, Monday 2nd May 2017. Please ensure to outline your research interests in the relevant section.


Sine Anahita (2017-04-18 01:22:05)
Awesome! Wish this workshop would be live-streamed!

Queer Circuits in Archival Times (2017-04-18 08:00)

*QUEER CIRCUITS IN ARCHIVAL TIMES: PERFORMANCE, NETWORKED DATA, DIGITAL CULTURE* *[1](https://www.womenandperformance.org/submit/current-cfps/)* *Guest Editors*: *Benjamin Haber*, PhD Candidate Sociology, Graduate Center, CUNY + *Daniel J Sander*, PhD Candidate Performance Studies, NYU

*Submission Deadline: June 1st 2017* *We live in an increasingly digital world, where conflicts over control, violence, and centralization play out in computational landscapes. The conscious and unconscious activities of queerly entangled bodies are archived for speculative monetization by a variety of proprietary digital networks, whose central motivation is to serve advertisements and measure populations rather than to promote vibrant and just social life. Racialized and gendered violence operates at queer timescales, distributing life chances outside of representational frames. At the same time, queer digital culture is providing new openings for Donna Haraway’s vision of “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities.” Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, technology, and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century” remains one of the most influential predecessors for the lines of thought animating this special issue. It is important to remember that in articulating her vision of a thoroughly postmodern feminism, Haraway was primarily drawing on two bodies of work — feminist science fiction and women of color feminism in the work of Octavia E. Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Audre Lorde, and Cherrie Moraga, for example. That is, the cyborg is an inherently intersectional figure. If queer culture is to self-critically engage with the digital, then it will have to take into account the much vaster and more complicated gridlock of identity and affiliation, in which sexual practices and orientations are but one factor. While “Queer Circuits in Archival Times” builds on this lineage and the groundbreaking work of Sandy Stone, Patricia Clough, Jasbir Puar, Kara Keeling and many others, we recognize that these abnormal times require queer departures from the limits of form, history, and epistemology. As new media studies and the digital humanities continue to be established as academic disciplines, we look to inf(l)ect this scholarship with the insights of feminist and queer knowledge production. We are interested in digital performance and inventive critique to theorize LGBTQ lives in a strikingly fluid legal, media, and political landscape. Just as important, however, we see queer thought playing an essential role in analyzing digital life beyond marginalized sexual cultures. How might we queer these digital networks that are increasingly constitutive of how we understand and witness the social? How can we reflexively and critically engage with queer social formations that seem to resonate with data capitalism? What archival practices and performances can help reinvigorate the queer histories forgotten in the linear narratives of gay progress? This special issue was inspired by the conference “Queer Circuits in Archival Times: Experimentation and Critique of Networked Data” *[2](http://queercircuits.com/)*, co-sponsored by “Women & Performance”, which took place across CUNY, the NYPL, and Kilroy Metal Ceiling in 5000
May of 2016. This special issue looks to expand on these interdisciplinary conversations while inspiring new creative and critical interventions. “Queer Circuits in Archival Times” aims to bring together an array of both established and emerging scholars and artists working at the intersections of new media studies, performance studies, queer theory, feminist theory, and aesthetics. “Topics of consideration and points of departure may include, but are not limited to: * - Affect, identity, and representation after the internet - Critical reflections on queer theory in light of the digital - Digital performance of/and gender and sexuality - Hacked software and dubious hardware - Haptic reorganizations of boundaries between body/world and body/mind - Intimacy and alienation and/of (queer) digital culture - Monstrous digital assemblages across space/time/identity/species - Online queer collectivity, alternative kinship, and activism - Quantification of sex/sexuality/self - Queer race/Racialized queerness online - Queer (social) media - Queer theoretical frames and uses of digital media and archiving - The queer biodigital/ data and the queer inhuman/nonhuman


Social Morphogenesis: Five Years of Inquiring Into Social Change (2017-04-18 14:41)

Postmodernity. Second modernity. Network Society. Late modernity. Liquid modernity. Such concepts have dominated social thought in recent decades, with a bewildering array of claims about social change and its implications. But what do we mean by ‘social change’? How do we establish that such change is taking place? What does it mean to say that it is intensifying? These are some of the questions which the Social Morphogenesis project has
sought to answer in the last five years, through an inquiry orientated around the speculative notion of 'morphogenic society'.

In this launch event, contributors to the project discuss their work over the last five years and the questions it has addressed concerning social change. The day begins with an introductory lecture by the convenor of the project, Margaret S. Archer, before a series of thematic panels presenting different stands of the project. It concludes with a closing session in which participants share three issues the project raised for them, as well as a general discussion.

At the end of the day, there will be a wine reception to which all participants are invited. There will also be an opportunity to purchase discounted copies of the books from Springer.


Participants:
Ismael Al-Amoudi
Margaret S. Archer
Mark Carrigan
Pierpaolo Donati
Emmanuel Lazega
Andrea M. Maccarini
Jamie Morgan
Graham Scambler (Chair)

More speakers to be confirmed.

The Social Morphogenesis project was funded by the [2]Independent Social Research Foundation through six years of support for the Centre for Social Ontology. This support was generously extended to enable this book launch.


The Morphology of Public Engagement (2017-04-19 08:00)

In recent weeks I’ve become fascinated by what I’ve thought of as the [1]poetics of impact and engagement. What linguistic techniques can we identify in how ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’ are written about? What work do they do in terms of foregrounding and backgrounding the issues entailed by this [2]paradigm shift within the university? This [3]fabulous essay by Audrey Watters has left me thinking about the morphology of impact and engagement: the “functions” we can identify within these narratives and the "pieces that moved the stories forward".

This is the [4]wikipedia overview of the meaning of morphology within the study of folklore:

5002
Antti Aarne’s theories, enlarged and expanded by American folklorist Stith Thompson in 1961 and by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004, look at motifs rather than actions – for example, “a soldier makes a deal with the devil” or “a soldier marries the youngest of three sisters.” More than 2500 folk and fairy tales have been cataloged under this taxonomy; the AaTh or Aarne–Thompson number is as well-known to folklorists as Francis James Child’s identification of ballads are to scholars of folk songs.

Vladimir Propp was a Russian structuralist scholar. He criticized Aarne’s work for ignoring what motifs did in a tale, and analysed the basic plot, or action, components of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements. His *Morphology of the Folk Tale* was published in Russian in 1928 and influenced Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, though it received little attention from Western scholars until it was translated into English in the 1950s.

In the Afanasyev’s collection of Russian fairy tales, Propp found a limited number of plot elements or “functions” that constructed all. These elements occurred in a standard, consistent sequence. He derived thirty-one generic functions, such as “a difficult task is proposed” or “donor tests the hero” or “a magical agent is directly transferred.”

In this way, we can identify an emerging morphology to impact and engagement. The engaged academic who lives for their public, prospering as both scholar and public figure. The recalcitrant stick-in-the-mud who refuses to recognise the necessity of change. The earnest research managers who must shepherd such folk along as the environment changes around us all. These are just some initial speculative thoughts but I’d like to pursue this idea in a systematic way.

Why it’s fine to broadcast on Twitter (2017-04-20 08:00)

Foremost amongst the guidance offered about Twitter is the claim that it is fundamentally a conversational platform. One shouldn’t simply ‘broadcast’. It’s for discussion and engagement. There’s an element of truth in this but it’s one which can be lost through repetition, as the status of received wisdom stops us from thinking critically about why everyone agreed with it in first place.

Rather than seeing Twitter as conversational, we should perhaps see it as connective. Connectivity in this sense in something automated, it’s a technology for sorting people in a way that encourages interaction between them. Connectivity in this sense is, as Jose van Dijck puts it, “a quantifiable value, also known as the popularity principle: the more contacts you have and make, the more valuable you become, because more people think you are popular and hence want to connect with you.”

Connectivity presupposes interaction. Unless people interact on platforms, connectivity is thwarted. In this limited sense, it is true to say that someone is not using Twitter correctly if they are not interacting. The value in the platform simply won’t be realised by them because they won’t make new contacts, they won’t increase the visibility of their action on it and they won’t accumulate ‘popularity’. But why does popularity matter? Unless there’s a clear answer to this question, one possibility for which is simply that “it doesn’t”, it’s likely the platform incentives are substituting for the reflexivity of the user.

My concern is that invocations of Twitter as conversational help naturalise this architecture. They promulgate the idea that one is ‘doing it wrong’ unless they are tweeting hyperactively, precluding the possibility of each user coming to their own assessment about the utility or otherwise of the platform for them. This is important because there are some really profound limitations to Twitter as a platform, as Richard Seymour usefully recounts:

Of course, it is established by now that the ambiguities of language are always exaggerated in the 140 character format. Polysemy catches people out all the time on Twitter, something we all have to be on guard about. But it does so all the more because quite a large number of people are only paying attention to the extent that it enables them to say something in turn, however inventively disingenuous, which will generate ‘likes’ and ‘retweets’. [1]This is how the Twittering machine works, and people use it at their own peril. Nonetheless, unless we make some fairly authoritarian/paranoid assumptions, users also have to be responsible for their own readings.

The ritual incantation that Twitter is for conversation functions as the faith which keeps the great Twittering machine in operation. Unless we’re willing to abandon it entirely, we need to have serious discussions about what Seymour calls ‘coping strategies’ to obviate its more undesirable characteristics from creating problems. Part of this involves recognising [3]pseudo-catharsis and trying to distinguish ranting at someone from something which can provide the basis for a productive discussion, in spite of the profound channel constraints. Otherwise, I think we’ll ultimately be pushed towards something more akin to Seymour’s approach, which is pretty much as far as I think you can go before you’re effectively giving up on the platform.

I don’t want to tell Jacobin what to do about all this but, in general, it seems to me that the only sensible policy with regard to Twitter is one of disciplined refusal to debate, argue, or even engage beyond at most light conversation or minor clarifications. It can be used for narrowcasting, advertising events, and sharing links, but if people lose their shit, they should simply be ruthlessly ignored, as difficult as that is.
If mistakes are genuinely made, they should be deleted and briefly acknowledged. If longer responses are called for, they should be written later, and not published in the form of a Twitter thread, on a separate ‘timeline’. But the ‘mentions’ column should be ignored, and no one should be treated as if they’re entitled to a response. People should be told in the bio line that if they want a response on a substantive issue, they have to email — meaning, they have to put some effort and thought into what they say. This is not a long-term solution, but a coping strategy.


1. http://www.leninology.co.uk/2017/02/on-forgetting-yourself.html
2. http://www.leninology.co.uk/2017/03/smash-twittering-machine.html?m=1
4. http://www.leninology.co.uk/2017/03/smash-twittering-machine.html?m=1

Glen Cochrane (2017-04-20 16:02:54)
This is a great post, I tend to agree with it from a personal perspective. Yet, an additional hurdle I’ve noticed in using Twitter is that it’s extremely difficult and unfair to use the pronoun "we" when referring to Twitter use (as in the "we’ll" of your last sentence here before the final quote). Twitter for me seems to break down when users start having expectations about how their followers should be, about how others should respond to their tweets, about what others should tweet about, about who should respond, about how the platform should be used, etc. Twitter space is an intersection of public and private space, like someone's front yard - some people maintain a yard, some people play all over it, some people pave it and put down turf, some people have yard sales. There are limits to what we can do with our yard, yet it would be impossible to tell a neighborhood "ok, we all have to use our yard in this specific way." (Admittedly, yards are less connective than twitter, although connective potential doesn’t mean that potential needs to be fulfilled to the utmost). Thanks for posting this.

Mark Carrigan (2017-04-26 09:29:31)
I’ve used exactly that analogy to describe a blog and why how people respond to a blog can feel oddly intrusive sometimes - perhaps Twitter is the patch on the pavement immediately outside the front yard? I completely agree about the intersection of public and private, plus really like the application of that analogy to telling other how to use the space

Glen (2017-04-26 15:04:26)
Another useful metaphor I just remembered is the 'engawa' (sorry, long): "The Japanese house has another important feature that intermediates between inside and outside - the engawa verandah. The engawa runs around the house as a projecting platform under the eaves. It is different from the terrace in Western architecture in that it serves as an exterior corridor...But in addition to that, the engawa possesses its own meaning as a third type of space, an intermediary space, in addition to interior and exterior space. In that it is beneath the eaves, the engawa is interior space; but in that it is open, it is part of the exterior space, the garden. In the country house that I lived in during the war, special and formal guests would be received in the guest room, but local merchants and neighborhood friends would come cooling to the engawa, sit down there, and have a cup of tea and chat. Thus the way of receiving guests wad distinguished spatially according to the meaning and the role of the guest." (http://www.kisho.co.jp/page/305.html)

Mark Carrigan (2017-04-30 14:17:44)
Ah, whenever I’ve seen representations of those, they’ve always instinctively appealed to me but I had no idea of the word for them! Would you fancy writing a short blog post about how this could be applied to making sense of social media?
Call for Proposals: Netflix at the Nexus: Content, Practice, and Production in the Age of Streaming Television (2017-04-21 08:00)

Call for Proposals
Netflix at the Nexus:
Content, Practice, and Production in the Age of Streaming Television

Netflix’s meteoric rise as an online content provider has been well documented and much debated in the popular press and in academic circles. It has been praised as the future of television (Auletta, 2014) and as “the most feared force in Hollywood” (Villarreal & James, 2016), while also decried as the end of “TV’s Golden Age” and blamed for ushering in an era where “TV shows may be briefer, lower-budget and filled with the kind of product-placement ads that audiences hate and advertisers pay for” (Thielman, 2016). Interestingly though, amongst the academic inquiry thus far, much of this research has dealt primarily with the algorithmic culture and nature of Netflix (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016; Gomez-Uruibe & Hunt, 2016; Amatriain, 2013), binge watching (Jenner, 2015, 2016; Pittman, & Sheehan, 2015), engagement, (Groshek, & Krongard, 2016; Matrix, 2014); and the future of television, (Auletta, 2014).

The editors seek contributions to this collection that will broaden this discussion greatly, focusing on Netflix in three specific ways:

• platform - How does the nature of Netflix streaming change our relationship to media? How does Netflix’s interface design impact media consumption? How does Netflix change our media consumption in mobile contexts? What are the cultural implications of Netflix’s business model?

• content – What kind of content does Netflix privilege? How does the streaming model change serialized programming? What are these effects on narrative? Does Netflix’s streaming model prelude a more diverse offering for consumers interested in “quality TV?” Do representations in Netflix offerings differ from traditional broadcast programming? Is there a “Netflix genre,” shows produced by Netflix can be recognized as such?

• viewer practices – What kind of viewing practices does Netflix encourage? What is the nature of viewer discourse surrounding bingeing and other streaming viewing practices? How do fans discuss and build community around Netflix programs? How do fans incorporate social media into their viewing habits? Do users utilize social media as a second screen when discussing their favorite programs?

Submission Process:
Interested authors should submit an initial proposal of 500 words (exc. references) by July 15, 2017. This should be sent as a Word or PDF document to editors Theo Plothe ([1]tplothe@walsh.edu) and Amber M. Buck ([2]ambuck@ua.edu) for consideration.
What is 'Fake News'? (2017-04-22 08:00)

What we are seeing with the growth of ‘fake news’ is perhaps the weaponisation of epistemology. In other words, ‘fake news’ as a construct is becoming a discursive component of our repertoire of contention. Far from entering a post-truth era, we are seeing truth becoming a mobilising device in a new way, encouraging ‘us’ to defend ourselves from ‘them’ predicated on the absolute falsity of their worldview. It’s the playing out in an epistemic register of what Chantal Mouffe, drawing on Carl Schmitt, describes as a friend/enemy distinction. Rather than the political other being an adversary to be struggled against, nonetheless regarded as legitimate, they are cast as an enemy to be destroyed. Rush Limbaugh offered a pure expression of the epistemological logic of the friend/enemy distinction in this 2009 rant:

What this fraud, what the uncovering of this hoax, exposes," he said, "is the corruption that exists between government and academia and science and the media. Science has been corrupted. We know the media has been corrupted for a long time. Academia has been corrupted. None of what they do is real. It’s all lies!

We live in two universes. One universe is a lie. One universe is an entire lie. Everything run, dominated, and controlled by the left here and around the world is a lie. The other universe is where we are, and that’s where reality reigns supreme and we deal with it. And seldom do these two universes ever overlap.


The origins of this can be understood [2]agnotologically: [3]neo-sophists, with corporate funding, seeking to manufacture doubt where none previously existed. What’s being described as post-truth emerges at the intersection between corporate agnotology, political polarisation and post-democracy. The possibility to weaponise epistemology emerges coterminously with the breakdown of social solidarity. Agnotology contributes to the erosion of shared certainties in cumulative ways. It creates the conditions for what David Roberts calls [4]tribal epistemology:

Over time, this leads to what you might call tribal epistemology: Information is evaluated based not on conformity to common standards of evidence or correspondence to a common understanding of the world, but on whether it supports the tribe’s values and goals and is vouchsafed by tribal leaders. "Good for our side" and “true” begin to blur into one.

Now tribal epistemology has found its way to the White House. 
What I’m suggesting is that at this point we see epistemology move from being an elite weapon of war to part of the repertoire of contention. Once Trump begins to seriously struggle, how easy is it to imagine Whitehouse statements being dismissed as ‘fake news’ by the grassroots they used this notion to mobilise? How effectively could a nascent leader use this epistemic playbook against those who have brought it into the mainstream? As Roberts points out, this is a cultural tendency which has been present in American politics for quite some time:

That is the classic, some might say naive, view. But there has always been a powerful strain in conservatism (think the [6]John Birch Society) that resists seeing itself as a participant in the game at all. It sees the game itself, its rules and referees, as captured by the other side, operating for the other side’s benefit. Any claim of transpartisan authority is viewed with skepticism, as a kind of ruse or tool through which one tribe seeks to dominate another.

That’s the view Limbaugh and others in right-wing media have consistently articulated. And it has found an increasingly receptive audience. Over time, the right’s base — unlike the left’s fractious and heterogeneous coalition of interest groups — has become increasingly homogeneous (mostly white, non-urban, and Christian) and like-minded (traditionalist, zero-sum values).


The friend/enemy distinction is, for lack of a better term, viral. At least under current conditions. Once people begin to think in these terms, it’s hard to counter it. Not least of all because reluctantly accepting the ‘rules of the game’ inevitably comes to be coded as either giving up or buying in. The reason for this is in part epistemological because tribal epistemology destroys the possibility for syncretism: people can no longer see A and B as elements that can be combined, even if unstable and contested ways. Instead A and B become an absolute disjunction. One sees the social world in terms that allow for no choice other than to choose between positions. The playing out of this, in the digital capitalism of 2017, rather terrifies me.


After Positivism (2017-04-23 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fvp6HAWA19k

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In this talk where he discusses previous presentations, Professor Daniel Little talks about what should come after positivism for social sciences. He argues that social sciences have suffered heavily from the twin pillars of positivism and naturalism. The question that we face now, Professor Little claims, is what should be our new direction.

The discussion is from History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences Symposium that took place at University of Michigan on September 29, 2016. The symposium examined the history and philosophy of the social sciences, bringing together lines of inquiry that often exist separately. Symposium participants included philosophers, historians, and sociologists. What is shared by the disciplines and methods represented in the symposium was a turn inward, to treat intellectuals, disciplines, institutions, and systems of ideas in the social sciences as objects of research in themselves.

In defence of ‘curation’ (2017-04-24 08:00)

The term ‘curation’ has got a bad press in recent years. Or rather the use of the term beyond the art world has. To a certain extent I understand this but I nonetheless always feel the need to defend the term. There are a few reasons for this:

• In a context of cultural abundance, selection from variety becomes important within a whole range of contexts. Inevitably, it is something most people within these contexts will do most of the times. But ‘curation’ is becoming a specialised activity, even if detached from a specific social role.

• I’m prone to thinking of what I do, at least some of the time, as curation. I spend quite a lot of time each week sorting through mailing lists, newsletters, websites, blogs and social media to identify relevant content for The Sociological Review’s Twitter and Facebook feeds. This is 46 social media posts per day. I’ve also shared something on Sociological Imagination daily for almost seven years. I don’t particularly care what anyone else calls it but, as far as I’m concerned, doing it effectively is a skilled activity and ‘curation’ is the term I’ve taken to using.

• The modern sense of the word ‘curation’ rests on a specific set of institutional arrangements which are themselves relatively recent. The word has a longer history, emerging from the Latin curator (“overseer, manager, guardian”) and what many construe as a misapplication could just as easily be taken as a further shift in its use. Language is dynamic and the anti-‘curation’ rhetoric is an attempt to police its change, albeit not a particularly significant or pernicious one.

Ultimately, I don’t care if people reject this use of the term ‘curation’. I do care if people reject what the term ‘curation’ comes to designate. I don’t dispute it is often used in a vacuous way, but it is not always used this way. It is nebulous and modish but the terms which emerge in relation to socio-cultural transformations often are.

It’s the socio-cultural changes which interest me, the abundance digitalisation is giving rise to and the epistemic fog which emerges as a result. To talk of ‘curation’ is a facet of that conversation and if people want to reject
its use, I hope they’ll offer an alternative language for talking about selection from abundance as an institutionalised function within digital capitalism.

1. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-49469-2_8

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**A Nobel Peace Prize for Sublimation** (2017-04-24 23:03)

*I originally wrote the following in October 2012, just after the European Union was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.*

Awarding the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union makes the most sense when you consider the front-runners, which included Julian Assange. No sensible person can deny that the European Union has done more on the ground for peace than whatever Assange’s cyber-gestures are supposed to point toward. Still, it does make you wonder what ‘peace’ means these days. After all, a not unreasonable interpretation of the postwar European project has been to sublimate military conflict into economic struggle. Put that way, we are presented with a neo-liberal wet dream of world peace, which continues to make life difficult for people but without explicitly destroying the ‘human capital’ contained in their bodies. Indeed, with a bit of luck, these subtly tortured bodies – through loss of welfare benefits or endless demands for ‘upskilling’ – might actually enhance the value of their capital through some mysterious feat of ‘entrepreneurship.’

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**“A new kind of intellectual”: Pierre Bourdieu’s tribute to Michel Foucault** (2017-04-25 08:00)

After Michel Foucault died in 1984 at the age of fifty-seven, Pierre Bourdieu wrote a tribute in *Le Monde*, reflecting on his life and what could be learned from it. Bourdieu attributed to his former colleague at the Collège de France a great consistency in his intellectual work, much more than is often assumed:

The consistency of an intellectual project, and of a way of living the intellectual life. Starting with the desire to break – which explains and excuses some of his famous apothegms on the death of man – to break with the totalizing ambition of what he called the ‘universal intellectual’, often identified with the project of philosophy; but to do so in the sense of escaping the alternative between saying nothing about everything or else everything about nothing.

*Political Interventions: Social Sciences and Political Action, Pg 138*

To become what Foucault described as the ‘specific intellectual’ required foregoing the temptation to speak on behalf of others. What Bourdieu admired was his ambition to “substitute for the absolutism of the universal intellectual, specific works drawing on actual sources ... without abandoning the broadest ambitions of thought”
The point was not to counterpoise a neutral expertise, content only to make claims comprehensively licensed by agreement within the community of inquirers, against the sweeping grandiosity which characterised the pronouncements of a figure like Sartre.

The specific intellectual existed in a new space, beyond this dichotomy between the epistemically timid expert working in obscurity and grandiose celebrity forever on an epistemic rampage in the name of truth and justice. As Bourdieu put it, Foucault “always stubbornly rejected the division between intellectual investment and political commitment that is so common and convenient” (p. 138). In this he represented a new kind of intellectual:

For him, the critical vision was applicable first of all to his own practice, and in this respect he was the purest representative of a new kind of intellectual who has no need to mystify himself as to the motives and themes of intellectual acts, nor to foster illusions about their effect, in order to practice them in full knowledge of their cause.

Political Interventions: Social Sciences and Political Action, Pg 139

This entailed a remarkable humility, at least relative to the general intellectuals of the previous generation. His political action, "conducted with passion and rigour, sometimes with a kind of rational fury, owed nothing to the sentiment of possessing ultimate truths and values" (p. 138). He embodied the possibility of commitment without dogmatism, action without certainty. Bourdieu described how Foucault not only "rejected the grand airs of the great moral conscience" but also found them a "favourite object of laughter" (p. 138).

This was a repudiation of the universal intellectual in terms of both politics and intellectualism. The specific intellectual rejected lofty rhetoric of truth and justice for the contingent realities of situated struggles. The specific intellectual rejected generality for specificity, forsaking an assumed right to speak for a methodologically grounded sense of what one can bring to the conversation. But crucially this was done while sustaining commitment, pushing against the boundaries of received wisdom. The specific intellectual remains orientated towards the universal, while always remaining embedded within the specific.

This Week: Cities and the Political Imagination (2017-04-25 11:18)

Keynote Speaker: Rivke Jaffe (University of Amsterdam)
The Manchester Museum
Friday 28th April 2017
17.45-20.00, followed by wine reception at 20.00


Cities and the Political Imagination

How can we recognize the political in the city? How might social scientists engage with forms of politics outside of
established sites of research such as those associated with representative democracy or collective mobilizations? This presentation suggests that new perspectives on urban politics might be enabled by revisiting the connections between sociology and cultural studies, and specifically by combining long-term urban ethnography and cultural analysis. Reading forms of creative expression in relation to power struggles in and over urban space can direct our attention towards negotiations of authority and political belonging that are often overlooked within the social sciences. I explore the possibilities of such an approach by focusing on the idea of the political imagination, and in particular on how everyday practices are informed by imaginations of urban rule and citizenship. Expressive culture generates both analytical and normative frames, guiding everyday understandings of how power works, where and in whose hands it is concentrated, and whether we see this as just or unjust. Such frames can legitimize or delegitimize specific distributions of resources and risks, and can normalize or denaturalize specific structures of decision-making. Through a discussion of popular music (hiphop, reggae and dancehall) and visual culture, I consider how these forms of the imagination allow new political subjectivities and actions to emerge and consolidate.

Rivke Jaffe

Rivke Jaffe is Professor of Cities, Politics and Culture in the Department of Human Geography, Planning and International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses primarily on intersections of the urban and the political, and includes an interest in topics such as organized crime, popular culture and environmental pollution, drawing on fieldwork in Jamaica, Curaçao and Suriname. She is currently leading a major research program on public-private security assemblages in Kingston, Jerusalem, Miami, Nairobi and Recife, studying transformations in governance and citizenship in relation to hybrid forms of security provision. Her publications include Concrete Jungles: Urban Pollution and the Politics of Difference in the Caribbean (Oxford, 2016) and Introducing Urban Anthropology (with Anouk de Koning, Routledge, 2016).

Using graphic novels to communicate your research (2017-04-25 12:09)

Graphic Novel Workshop
A Sociological Review Event

Manchester Digital Laboratory
Thursday 8th June 2017
09.00-17.00

The Sociological Review Foundation is delighted to announce our forthcoming workshop using graphic novel methods to present social research.

We invite applications to take part in a Graphic Novel Workshop with Tony Lee. If your research involves incorporating graphic methods or you are simply interested in doing this to present future research, this workshop will be of interest to you.

**Workshop Format**
- Introduction on graphic novels: how the medium works, different genres, how they’ve changed and the design & production process
- Story telling through graphic novels: how to develop the story, what works and what doesn’t, constraints of the medium etc
- Delegates introduce their ideas for graphic novels and get feedback
- General discussion & advice about next steps

This event is FREE but places are limited to 25 people.

This event is brought to you by The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher Board. We welcome applications for this workshop from people in all stages of their careers. However, should we receive significantly more applications than available places – priority will be given to ECRs and PGRs.
Social Morphogenesis: Five Years of Inquiring Into Social Change (2017-04-25 12:10)

Postmodernity. Second modernity. Network Society. Late modernity. Liquid modernity. Such concepts have dominated social thought in recent decades, with a bewildering array of claims about social change and its implications. But what do we mean by ‘social change’? How do we establish that such change is taking place? What does it mean to say that it is intensifying? These are some of the questions which the Social Morphogenesis project has sought to answer in the last five years, through an inquiry orientated around the speculative notion of ‘morphogenic society’.

In this launch event, contributors to the project discuss their work over the last five years and the questions it has addressed concerning social change. The day begins with an introductory lecture by the convenor of the project,
Margaret S. Archer, before a series of thematic panels presenting different stands of the project. It concludes with a closing session in which participants share three issues the project raised for them, as well as a general discussion.

At the end of the day, there will be a wine reception to which all participants are invited. There will also be an opportunity to purchase discounted copies of the books from Springer.


Participants:
Ismael Al-Amoudi
Margaret S. Archer
Mark Carrigan
Pierpaolo Donati
Emmanuel Lazega
Andrea M. Maccarini
Jamie Morgan
Graham Scambler (Chair)

More speakers to be confirmed.

The Social Morphogenesis project was funded by the [2]Independent Social Research Foundation through six years of support for the Centre for Social Ontology. This support was generously extended to enable this book launch.


How should we attribute authorship on our blog? (2017-04-26 08:00)

I just came across this [1]student essay in which a blog post written by Les Back was attributed to me. This isn’t the first time it’s happened and I’m unsure how to respond to it. The backlist of posts on [2]Sociological Imagination is sprawling by this point, numbering in the low thousands. Most of these were written by me, though they vary between simple sharing of material elsewhere and substantive writing.

Regular guest-writers all have their own accounts so their authorship has been clearly marked. Our settled practice for irregular guest writer has been to have “by x x” in bold at the top of the piece, followed by a biography in bold at the bottom.
Unfortunately, it still indicates the name of the person who published the guest post on the blog, in this case Sadia Habib. Does this attribute authorship clearly enough? I'm starting to wonder if we need a different system. But I'm reluctant to create a new account for each guest author, both because it would add to the time demands of a website I already don't have enough time for and I really don't want to have to go back and manually add these for every previous guest post. Any alternative ideas would be much appreciated.

1. http://7%20of%2011%20%20%20%20%20print%20all%20in%20new%20window%20https//researchingsocietyblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/16/the-art-of-listening/

Fuck virality, I want my ideas to be radioactive (2017-04-27 08:00)

There’s a fascinating footnote in [1]Radio Benjamin, loc 395-410, discussing Adorno’s description of Benjamin’s ideas as ‘radioactive’:

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The full sentence reads, "Everything which fell under the scrutiny of his words was transformed, as though it had become radioactive," ... Although Adorno’s metaphor uses a different register of boundary crossing, the German radioaktiv, like the English radioactive, shares with Rundfunk, or radio, a connotation of atmospheric spreading, dispersal, and uncontrolled movement across and within borders and lines of containment; the airwaves, like the air or the atmosphere, represent a quasi-invisible scene or medium of transmission. While the German does not directly imply the coincidence of these two (roughly contemporary) modes of radiality, the notion of Benjamin’s gaze, and from there his work, effecting a radioactive transformation suggests the potentially dangerous, if also exciting and new, power of radio and its power to broadcast.

Radioactive ideas effect a transformation. Viral ideas simply pass through. The logic of social media platforms too easily inclines us towards a concern for virality. What we should aim for is to use their affordances to ensure radioactivity, even if this registers much less impressively on a numerical level.


What does it mean to be a public sociologist in an age of Donald Trump? (2017-04-28 08:00)

From the [1]Public sociology and the role of the researcher: engagement, communication and academic activism postgraduate conference a couple of weeks ago:

Social Morphogenesis: Five Years of Inquiring Into Social Change (2017-04-29 08:00)

Postmodernity. Second modernity. Network Society. Late modernity. Liquid modernity. Such concepts have dominated social thought in recent decades, with a bewildering array of claims about social change and its implications. But what do we mean by ‘social change’? How do we establish that such change is taking place? What does it mean to say that it is intensifying? These are some of the questions which the Social Morphogenesis project has sought to answer in the last five years, through an inquiry orientated around the speculative notion of ‘morphogenic society’.

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Conservatism eats itself: An irreverent look at the conservative mind by Deborah Talbot (2017-04-29 09:10)

by Deborah Talbot

Conservative politics are everywhere, but what is it, and what are they really like?

In the cities, you don’t notice conservatism. It’s there, for sure, but is pretty quiet about itself. Political parties of a more left persuasion don’t get a chance to do a bit of intense political ethnography, so we assume that everyone is pretty much on the same page, despite differences of opinion over issues.

It was only when I moved to one of England’s Southern regions that my immersion in political and social conservatism began. And I realised then what the Brexit culture wars were all about. Forget Cameron, Johnson, and Osborne. They are just metro decadents and a bit like us – conjured up to lull us into thinking the socially liberal consensus was here to stay.

Because real conservatism is not just a difference of opinion about issues (I support welfare; you think the poor should be made to work in chain gangs, kind of thing). It’s embedded in who they are – their psychology and identity. Which then dictates how they respond to issues.
So I thought it would be helpful to employ my ethnographic skills and do an eight-month investigation into the conservative mind - as it really is, not how it likes to portray itself in the media. Here are my results.

*Conservatism is more than party politics*

Conservatism is pretty wide ranging, though sometimes it does settle on a political party or perspective, like at the moment with the Conservatives, UKIP and Brexit.

But it doesn’t have to. People that have stayed in the same place for decades, haven’t experienced the significant changes over the past 40-50 years occurring in cities or just don’t get out much, tend towards the conservative. Being creates consciousness, and all that.

Even if they may have traditionally voted Labour for years, their prevailing attitudes to women, immigrants or any local thing they don’t like, makes them easy prey for the right-wing sociopaths.

*They don’t like change*

That’s right. Any change is met with a wall of muttering and complaint. It could be a good change, like a new building, or trying to sort out a failing transport system.

And despite having acres of space around them, they definitely don’t like change that involves new housing. Or immigrants coming in. Or Londoners. Or the post office down the road changing its sign. Or temporary road works. Or a new cycle lane.

It’s all the same. Change is bad.

*Keeping it simple*

There’s the sketch that Stewart Lee does about UKIP’s anti-immigration policy, where he says, for racists, ‘reality is too full, isn’t it....’

It’s truer than Lee knows. Conservative people just don’t get complexity, whether this is multi-causal chains of reasoning, evidence-based policy or large conurbations.

I guess it’s why change confuses them...because it adds a new variable.

*Despite what they say, they don’t like community*

Conservatives will make a song and dance about community, but mostly what they mean is that they want to keep it for people exactly like themselves, and to act with impunity.

Because contrary to what they say, conservatives are more likely to engage in anti-social acts, like leaving dog poo in the streets and speeding. Because it’s all about them - hang everyone else.

*They parade family like a banner but don’t like children*

You’d think conservatives, being all family, nation and work, would like children. But they don’t. Children, in their eyes, need to know their place. Be quiet, stop crying, man up.

Teenagers and even worse, youths, for your average conservative, are evil and it would be better if they were 5020
all locked up or forced to join the army (same thing).

Conservatives provide nothing for children and particularly teenagers to do and then castigate them for taking the initiative. Conservative areas are high on vandalism and street drinking (and even so, 99 % of young people are lovely). Do they see the relationship? Not at all.

They do love babies though, probably because they are helpless and can’t talk back, which is just how conservatives like ’em.

They never experienced identity politics

Conservatives of all hues just never went through the identity revolution that hit most cities in the UK and beyond. Because they never experienced it, they don’t understand it, and believe the Daily Mail when they are told it’s ‘political correctness gone mad’ and a ‘threat to the social order’.

The idea that it’s about giving people equality and respect, and not being abusive to people who aren’t like you, seems to have passed them by. Conservatives lack basic good manners, except when it comes to people just like them. Which brings me to...

Patriarchy reigns

Both men and women in conservative areas support a set of social practices and policies that perpetuate the oppression of women. In conservative areas, it’s not sexist to bully and troll women on social media, fail to provide job flexibility and childcare and shut women out of work and professional networks.

‘Her indoors’ gets to stay indoors.

I once innocently asked a local male politician from the ‘Independents’ (closet conservatives) how he could attend so many meetings when he has small children. He said, without batting an eyelid, “My wife does all of that.” There was no shame or irony.

Little provision is made for women who have small children and who want to go to work or meetings. In The Patriarchy, women need to know their place, which is firmly latched to the kitchen sink.

Call attention to it, and it’s very much a case of ‘calm down dear’, or you are called a raging fantasist.

Dislike of the arts and psychological sensitivity

Offered a choice between, say, an art gallery and a bus station, conservatives will opt for the bus station.

The arts are a threat to their narrow social order and need to be marginalised or if possible, crushed. They aren’t beguiled by the success of the creative industries; that’s just a liberal plot to shake them out of their boring shires and give it to young people and immigrants.

And you can’t have a world with things in it, remember?

Similarly, conservatives are very anti-emotion. Sensitivity is tortured out of children by bullying at schools and general ostracism. Because emotion is pinko stuff and real men don’t cry. But, and here’s a big but, some of them invite social media abuse. They are less comfortable with understanding and empathy. Hmm...
**Difference, what difference?**

Conservatives lack empathy. They simply can’t feel the presence of other humans and assume that those objects moving close to them (people) are simply inanimate or just an extension of them.

I think this is why in conservative areas people lack spatial awareness. Despite all the space they have around them, they simply don’t hear you coming or bump into you because they haven’t seen you. Weird right?

**Aggression, anxiety and fear**

Road rage, tailgating, noisy neighbours, train noise – the list of things people in conservative areas find annoying and anger provoking is extensive. One gets the impression if they moved to a city they’d have an aneurysm within a year. Or chill the hell out.

Beneath this lies a deep anxiety and fear. The world is a scary place for conservatives. Whatever bad things happen, the government had better do it to someone else rather than them. This is probably why they are so enthusiastic about folk devils and punitive policies.

“Do it to them, not me” should be the conservative motto.

**Dislike of public anything**

Public transport, public sector, public housing – these all strike fear into the heart of your average conservative. Because they are scared of what they’ll find in public spaces (they might stumble across, say, a person unknown to them personally), they want to destroy it for everyone else.

Conservatives are all about private spaces, first class carriages on trains, cars and roads, where they can pay to keep themselves separate - anything to avoid having an unpredictable encounter with another human.

**Obedience is safer**

I had a strange conversation with a conservative type who said that they’d voted for Brexit and now they had to go along with whatever May wanted. Anything she wanted, because they had to agree with it (sold their soul, was my interpretation). Conservatives love obedience because they are too scared to be independent. Rather than face that, they try and force everyone else to be obedient too.

But get this, conservatives. Some of us have gone and grown up and can cope with ambiguity and freedom. And do it with other people. We’re not pretending. We really can.

The love of obedience makes their pretend notion of taking back control completely fatuous. What they mean, of course, is hand control to their leader. And then shut your mouth, because the exercising of your democratic rights is making them uncomfortable.

**It’s not the economy, stupid**

Walking around a small local town with an avid conservative, he looked at all the shops and small business, and sneered, “It’s a bit commercial, isn’t it?”

And here’s the shocker. Your average conservative type doesn’t like economic growth and commercial activity.
They don’t. They just pretend to in their manifestos and propaganda.

That’s because they are either retired, independently wealthy, employing other people to run things for them, living off rent, or unemployed. They are not even that keen on volunteering anymore, though remnants of an older conservatism are still out there. Working, volunteering or building a business requires engagement with human normality. Moreover, you need a functioning economy to thrive.

I bet if anyone did a calculation they could correlate declining economic participation with the rise in conservatism.

Think about Brexit. It’ll by all accounts tank the economy and push the UK into long-term shrinkage. Do Brexiteers care? No, because they don’t need an economy. So they believe. Obviously their savings would tank too, but that’s a while off. And remember, they can’t handle a multi-causal chain of reasoning - it’s all about that direct relationship between them and their personal pot of gold.

Their lack of caring about the economy and their dead-eyed love of authority is expressed in the continued conservative support for a hard Brexit. And no wonder they don’t like immigrants, who are generally entrepreneurial and energetic.

Conservatives are more like to say, “Where’s my deckchair?” than “This great new café has opened; let’s go.”

It’s Labour that has become the party of enterprise, which is all over the cities. Conservatives are disengaged. Surprising, eh?

More than any of the other self-defeating psychological dispositions I’ve talked about, the lack of enthusiasm for economic issues shows us that conservatism is eating itself.

*Pea sized imaginations*

Anyone that wants to hand this lot the reins of power needs to think again. They are myopic, careless and stuck firmly in a past that more suited their narrow-minded fear-obsessed world.

They don’t want to lead us into a new productive and democratic reality. They want to shrink the world, so it fits their pea-sized imaginations.

So if you are thinking about voting Conservative, but you don’t want people in power who have these traits, have another think. Conservatism is eating itself. Let’s just let it die.

**Deborah Talbot is a freelance qualitative research and journalist, writing about society, culture and all things urban. Read more of her work on her blog [1]Interurban Lines.**

1. [http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/](http://interurbanlines.blogspot.co.uk/)

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Benny Goodman (2017-04-29 10:50:23)  
I need to read David Goodhart’s book on ‘somewheres-anywheres’ which this seems to resonate with. There’s also an implied nod to Haidt’s moral foundation theory as well. A great read, and although irreverent (good) I’m going to use this as discussion
with my students.

Deborah (2017-05-01 08:05:30)
Thank you for your comments. I'd love to see how that goes. This is definitely just one of my contributions to the election battle out there, so I hope it gets circulated. I've used some of these ideas to inform political debates, and it does work.

The Colonel (2017-04-30 20:30:45)
What utter nonsense. Self indulgent echo-chamber liberal elitist bull crap.

Deborah (2017-05-11 12:08:49)
Why thank you sir.

Conservatism eats itself – Deborah Talbot – Politics and Insights (2017-05-14 18:02:54)
[...] This article is also published on The Sociological Imagination. [...]
The Sociological Review Foundation is delighted to announce our forthcoming workshop using graphic novel methods to present social research.

We invite applications to take part in a Graphic Novel Workshop with Tony Lee. If your research involves incorporating graphic methods or you are simply interested in doing this to present future research, this workshop will be of interest to you.

**Workshop Format**
- Introduction on graphic novels: how the medium works, different genres, how they've changed and the design & production process
- Story telling through graphic novels: how to develop the story, what works and what doesn’t, constraints of the medium etc
- Delegates introduce their ideas for graphic novels and get feedback
- General discussion & advice about next steps

This event is FREE but places are limited to 25 people.

This event is brought to you by The Sociological Review Early Career Researcher Board. We welcome applications for this workshop from people in all stages of their careers. However, should we receive significantly more applications than available places – priority will be given to ECRs and PGRs.

Application deadline is 17.00 GMT, Monday 2nd May 2017. Please ensure to outline your research interests in the relevant section.

Apply here: [1](https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/events/using-graphic-novels-to-communicate-your-research.html)

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8.5 May

**Slavoj Žižek presents (2017-05-01 08:00)**

It was only a matter of time really. A new front has just been opened in the Žižek publishing machine:
Speaking and listening on social media (2017-05-01 08:00)

What does it mean to speak and listen on social media? It’s a question which might seem to invite a platitudinous response but it’s one which increasingly concerns me. In the last couple of years, I’ve found myself increasingly sceptical that a platform like Twitter facilitates meaningful debate given the constraints it imposes on expression. I largely avoid comments discussions on blogs and websites. I won’t go anywhere near YouTube comments threads, even though I sometimes find myself drawn uncontrollably to read them, like a moth to the flame. In short, I’ve largely lost what faith I had in social media as a means to facilitate debate. The constraints of these channels multiply misunderstandings while the culture they have given rise to encourages intemperate reactions.

However debate doesn’t exhaust speaking and listening. I’m aware that much as I increasingly avoid debate, I also spend less time listening on social media than I used to. In part this is down to abundance. When I dip into my Twitter feed, I can usually find 10 strands I want to follow up within a few minutes. When I do follow these up, I immediately find even more strands to follow. The escalation dynamics of social media, if your use is calibrated to maximise access to variety, constitute a recipe for productive distraction that can at times be overwhelming. My means of processing this productive distraction is largely through writing, hence social media sends me from listening to speaking.
There’s more to it than this though. The architecture of social media rewards speaking but doesn’t reward listening. To speak and win attention for those speech acts, either positively or negatively, increases the visibility of subsequent speech acts. To listen carefully can be akin to invisibility. Hence perhaps the almost apologetic tones in which people who prefer to listen describe themselves as lurking. But what happens if ever fewer people are listening? My increasing fear is that social media too often facilitates only the pseudo-catharsis described by Winlow and Hall:

The political protest ends up continuing only for a short time as an online blog or a Twitter post, offering nothing more than a cathartic opportunity to vent one’s spleen accompanied by the sad recognition that in all likelihood no one is listening, and no one really cares.

Rethinking Social Exclusion, Pg 73

What does this mean in the context of the university? In a [1]thoughtful essay, Jana Bacevic argues that by “sticking to critique on social media, intellectuals are, essentially, doing what they have always been good at – engaging with audiences and in ways they feel comfortable with.” But to what extent are those audiences imagined? To what extent are they ‘external’ or ‘internal’? They register numerically as ‘followers’ but the metrics of engagement often tell another story. Is this even engagement? To what extent is anyone listening? Are we simply talking amongst ourselves? Or even simply talking to ourselves and occasionally overhearing each other’s chatter?

There are many responses to these concerns. One might be to call for more organisation of this space, to provide platforms for robust and productive debate. This would be a mistake. But we do need to think seriously about what the public expression of academics and intellectuals means in an age of social media. I found this section of [2]Lambros Fatis’ PhD thesis rather inspiring (pg 246):

The fourth precondition here offered for the rejuvenation of public-spirited citizenship, as opposed to self-interested demagoguery, rests on a fundamental change of approach in the way we understand public expression, suggesting that a shift from the acclamation and assertiveness of speaking to the compromise and attentiveness of listening is as vital, as it is systematically sidelined. Making our thoughts known and conveying them successfully in conversation so that they come to mean something to us depends not only on what and how something is being said, but also on what and how something is being heard, listened to and understood. Public expression therefore does not rely solely on speaking our minds, but also involves the manner in which information is taken in, and it is precisely the balance between those two communicative faculties that allows for dialogic negotiation as opposed to monologic recitation.

If we move away from ‘speaking our minds’, seeing social media as a window to the world through which we can channel our many discontents into an imagined public sphere, we can begin to preserve social media as a space for speaking and listening. It encourages us to examine our assumptions about our audience, something which can be done quantitatively (through metrics provided by platforms) and qualitatively (through assumptions we make about them and its congruence with our prior knowledge).

In fact, it can move us away from thinking in terms of ‘audience’ at all, rejecting a view of social media as a platform for speech in which we ‘earn’ visibility, instead seeking technologies for interlocution. Such technologies offer powerful affordances for what Lambros describes as a shift from intellectuals-as-speakers (“an exclusive class
of spokespeople who give voice to our grievances and concerns”) to intellectuals-as-listeners.

2. http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/51588/

"Let no thought pass incognito, and keep your notebook as strictly as the authorities keep their register of aliens" (2017-05-02 08:00)

This is the fifth of Walter Benjamin’s thirteen rules for writing. I would love to know more about what this meant in practice to him. How often did he record his ideas? Where did he record them? How did their quantity and quality wax and wane in different circumstances? My conviction that blogging constitutes a technology of scholarly attentiveness rests on its capacity to habituate this practice.


“Let no thought pass incognito, and keep your notebook as strictly as the authorities keep their register of aliens” – always be aware of sth (2017-05-03 07:22:27)

 [...] from the post by Mark Carrigan (http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/19290) [...] 

Call for Papers: The Journal of Repressive Social Theory (2017-05-03 08:00)

In recent years, calls for a reconsideration of critique, its place and value, have multiplied. The proposition that critique has run out of steam took on a new urgency with the vote for Brexit and the election of Donald Trump. The doxa of progressive academia has found itself repudiated by these events, as conceptions of the social world universally assented to within the left-liberal academy have been revealed as phantasmic remainders from an older period of capitalist development.

This new journal calls for a reorientation of social theory towards the reality we now reluctantly confront. Regressive times call for a repressive social theory, attuned to the contracting horizons of public life and the death of progressive futures into which we once invested so much. Contributions for this inaugural issue might include:

- Nationalist populism and the challenge it poses for democracy
- The inadequacy of leftist critique in the face of reactionary class politics
- The difficulty of persuading people they should listen to when we say things
- How irritating we find it when people don’t agree with the things we say
- The professional anxieties lurking behind the twists and turns of our run-on sentences

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• The necessity that our words become more obscure and our run-on sentences longer to cope with the spiralling complexity of late neoliberalism

• The value of critique as the temporal horizon of viable employment within the critical social sciences contracts

• The performativity of criticality and how it no longer makes us feel better about the world or ourselves

At this stage, we invite titles and abstracts from potential contributors to the first issue. Final contributions should be between 8000 and 10000 words, articulated in a suitably dense and impenetrable style. Please e-mail [1]TheFutureIsNotWhatItUsedToBe@Gmail.com to informally discuss a contribution.

1. TheFutureIsNotWhatItUsedToBe@Gmail.com

Purple Peppercorn (2017-05-03 09:41:53)
well......if you are serious........

Digital Scholarship and Why It Matters (2017-05-04 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5qfKfdWy70

In a world where so many aspects of our lives are becoming increasingly digital, it is not surprising that academia has also been influenced. University of Canberra Centenary Research Professors Patrick Dunleavy and Deborah Lupton join Swinburne University of Technology’s Professor Lisa Given, and Roxanne Missingham from ANU to discuss how modern scholars are adopting and adapting to new technologies.

CFA Postgraduate Conference - Digital Communities: interdisciplinary perspective (2017-05-05 08:00)

Post-Graduate Conference

Digital Communities: interdisciplinary perspective

Monday 3rd July 2017, Cardiff

We look forward to welcoming you to our first Postgraduate Interdisciplinary Conference!
"Digital Communities: interdisciplinary perspectives" postgraduate conference will be organised by PhD students from the schools of Social Science, Computer Science, Law and Politics in Cardiff University, supported by the ESRC Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP). It will bring together PhD students and academics from different disciplines interested in studying the implications of the digital on society.

The principal aim of "Digital Communities" is to encourage doctoral researchers to consider how the concept of digital communities is applied inside and outside of their own subject areas.

Overview

How are digital technologies impacting upon, and affecting the lives and relationships of people and things? How are communities developed and maintained in these contexts? How are they, and how could they be, governed and threatened? How can they be researched? Through this conference we will provide a space for discussion around emerging and pertinent issues faced by people and communities in their interactions with the digital, as well as the opportunities and barriers that face researchers studying the digital.

Students at all levels of postgraduate study, as well as early career researchers, are invited to give presentations on their own research (ongoing or completed) as well as various aspects of their study and experience, including but not limited to: complete and preliminary findings, insights and observations, theoretical/methodological/ethical issues and approaches, problems and challenges, personal/professional interests and experiences related to the digital, and so on. Given this open and inclusive scope, we especially welcome contributions that have relevance across different academic and professional disciplines. Keynote Speakers Presentation groups will be bookended by two academic keynote speakers: Dr Athina Karatzogianni, Associate Professor in Media and Communication at the University of Leicester: "The Problem of Trading Discursive for Affective Power in Digital Political Communities". Dr Suzy Moat, Associate Professor of Behavioural Science at Warwick Business School, co-director of Data Science Lab: "Sensing human behaviour with online data". Call for Abstracts Presentations will be 15-20 minutes, organised into three topical blocks, with Q & A sessions at the end of each block, and extensive networking and discussion opportunities later in the day. We encourage a wide range of submissions involving, but not limited to, the following thematic topics: Identity, subjectivity and digital communities: What kind of human subject is enabled by the digital? How does this affect people’s lives within and outside of their digital communities? How are interactions and expressions mediated by the digital? How are forms of activity and organisation privileged and stifled? Topics appropriate for submission include but are not limited to: “old and new” communities, community development and digital technologies, urban and rural communities, migrants, refugees, LGBTQ, activism and social movements on social media, influence on media and policies). Threats, antagonism and digital communities: How is problematic activity and speech (un)regulated? What old and new antagonisms propagate online? How are technologies used to disrupt, manipulate and antagonise digital communities and individuals? Topics appropriate for submission include but are not limited to: developing and supporting digital communities, cyberconflict and digital communities, technological threats, such as phishing/scam/privacy related issues, problems of governance and regulation of online spaces and communities). Study of digital communities: What is the ontological and epistemological status of the digital? To what extent are digital communities "new" or novel? What are the opportunities and affordances of different methods of research into the digital? What is digital data? How do the actions and structure of digital platforms and their operators constrain and influence methodological development? How can digital research draw from micro and macro approaches to research? What are the ethical challenges involved in the study of the digital? Topics appropriate for submission include but are not limited to: methodological and ethical considerations in the study of digital communities, different types of research: participatory approaches, community-centred design, case studies of communities, computational social science (e.g. digital communication dynamics, text analysis and natural language processing of social phenomena, network analysis of social systems, large-scale social experiments and/or phenomena, causal inference and computational methods for social science, novel digital data and/or computational analyses for addressing societal challenges, methods and analyses of biased, selective, or incomplete observational
social data, social news curation and collaborative filtering, methods and analyses for social information). Abstracts should be 300 words, indicating name, institutional affiliation and title of presentation. Abstracts should be submitted no later than 15/05/2017 to this link: [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dc2017 You will have to create an account in EasyChair in order to submit. We will notify you of acceptance by June 7. For further details please visit: website [2]https://digitalstuffcardiff.com/ or write to [3]CardiffDigitalStuff@gmail.com

1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dc2017
2. https://digitalstuffcardiff.com/
3. mailto:CardiffDigitalStuff@gmail.com

How can the social sciences keep up with socio-technical change? (2017-05-06 08:00)

At a recent symposium I saw [1]Ben Williamson give an excellent lecture about the rapidly developing field of educational data science and how it is reshaping educational practice. Some of the material is summarised [2]here for those interested. It was a really broad overview of these developments and the theoretical challenges we face in trying to make sense of them. However what his lecture left me pondering most was the practical challenge of keeping track of these developments. There is so much happening, at such a rapid pace, it becomes hard to see how the critical social sciences can keep up with these developments.

Someone like Ben is doing it successfully within one field but this demands specialisation in a way that sits in tension with theorisation and contextualisation. To put it bluntly: how does collaboration happen when most of your colleagues know much less about these developments than you do? How do you engage with important philosophical, ethical and political questions posed by these developments when you have to spend at least half an hour describing to an audience what is actually happening? How do you have conversations with those working in comparable fields, drawing out connections and identifying similarities and differences between what you are studying?

My point is not that it is impossible. Far from it. Or even that it is new, as it’s clearly a particular manifestation of the broader epistemic challenge of specialisation. Only that it is hard. Furthermore, it is this difficulty which compounds the specialisation dynamic because the people you inevitably find yourself working with face the same practical challenge in relation to the broader disciplinary community, increasing your epistemic reliance upon one another to develop your research in a collaborative way.

One obvious impediment to addressing this problem is the journal system. If it takes six months to write a journal article, another year to get it published and another two years before responses to what you’re written begin to appear (if indeed they ever do) then subsequent developments might well have rendered what you’ve written partially redundant. Factor in the bias towards length within journals that publish critical social science, as well as the low status accorded to descriptive or review pieces, to discover a publication infrastructure that systematically undermines our capacity to cope with the pace of socio-technical change. The fact it’s one most, if not all, find themselves bound into through the logic of career development entrenches the problem only further.

It won’t surprise anyone that I think research blogging can be a partial solution to this problem. It can accelerate scholarly dialogue in a way that mitigates, without overcoming, the decelerative effects of the journal system. So too could more attention to information-searching and information-storage practices within the critical social sciences. But perhaps we need to think more broadly than this. My developing conviction is that we need to create systems
for networked horizon scanning in a way that complement, rather than seek to replace, the existing journal system:

Horizon scanning is a technique for detecting early signs of potentially important developments through a systematic examination of potential threats and opportunities, with emphasis on new technology and its effects on the issue at hand. The method calls for determining what is constant, what changes, and what constantly changes. It explores novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems and trends, including matters at the margins of current thinking that challenge past assumptions.

Horizon scanning is often based on desk research, helping to develop the big picture behind the issues to be examined. Desk research involves a wide variety of sources, such as the Internet, government ministries and agencies, non-governmental organisations, international organisations and companies, research communities, and on-line and off-line databases and journals. Horizon scanning can also be undertaken by small groups of experts who are at the forefront in the area of concern: They share their perspectives and knowledge with each other so as to 'scan' how new phenomena might influence the future.

A solid 'scan of the horizon' can provide the background to develop strategies for anticipating future developments and thereby gain lead time. It can also be a way to assess trends to feed into a scenario development process.


It’s important to recognise that these changes aren’t simply a matter of technical developments. There are a vast array of actors with a vested interest in pursuing these developments, encompassing policy makers, think tanks, foundations, entrepreneurs, data scientists and corporations. They proceed through a dizzying array of projects, intervening in every facet of each sector of social life. Such actors enjoy an obvious epistemic priority over those who seek to (critically) study them, inhabiting a rich web of assumptions, meanings and relations which those from the outside must come to inhabit while retaining distance. They also enjoy a temporal privilege, working in collectives towards these ends, creating a challenge for those who seek to track and analyse their endeavors either individually or within small teams, often while juggling a whole array of other demands.

The challenges we face in researching such developments are continuing to grow while we remain locked into individualising and decelerative modes of working that are wholly inadequate to them.

1. https://www.stir.ac.uk/people/18084

5032
Recently, the British Sociological Association organised a postgraduate and early career researcher regional event - Public sociology and the role of the researcher: Engagement, communication and academic activism on 29th March 2017, at the DeMontfort University, Leicester.

The format of presentation was a five-minute PechaKucha presentation (20 slides-20 seconds each- so 400 seconds). Given the time constraint, I decided to do mine in the form of a poem! I was a bit apprehensive, but the poem was well received by the academic audience and I won the prize for the best presentation.

My research explores the employment challenges for Pakistani men in the UK and why a quarter of them work as taxi drivers? Nestled in a social constructivist paradigm, within the structure agency debate, mine is an ethnographic study drawing upon Bourdieusian concepts- habitus, doxa, illusio and the various capitals.

As a qualitative researcher I have often comes across this call for reflexivity or being reflexive. Michael Buroway calls ethnography to be a ‘reflexive science’; Finlay says its ‘a difficult path’ yet ‘essential for all research’; Some call it ‘elusive and poorly described’; and others see reflexivity as a major strategy for quality control. Baffled with all these propositions, I sometimes find myself at a loss when trying to ‘be reflexive’ and had the same question as Pillow - is reflexivity ‘a reflection, confession or a cathartic outburst?’

The following poem is an expression of real questions I faced while writing my methodology chapter (which I am still struggling with!).

1 in 4 Pakistani men in the UK, drive taxis for a living

Is it a choice or constraint, their fortune’s misgiving?

How free are they to choose a job? do they really have a choice?

Or do their class, religion, and ethnicity take away their own voice?

How does being a Pakistani man in UK, affect their life chance?

What options do they get, in a society of white dominance?

Economists have sought to answer these questions in many ways

Through human capital theories, or the role an ‘ethnic penalty’
plays

Many a studies have pointed to the disadvantage of Pakistanis in this land

Poor education, rural backgrounds, often push them to the lowest band

Discrimination is still rampant, in spite of all the laws,

How fair is Britain, boasting of its equality vows?

But then, these penalties are not the same across all groups that dwell

Indians & Chinese, in the same British labour market have done pretty well!

Is education then the emancipator, the key to success?

Yet, why do some second generation Pakistani boys to taxi driving recess?

Unable to find an answer, I turned to sociology too!

To Giddens, Archer
, and Pierre Bourdieu

I found Bourdieu closest to explaining the reproduction of class

Of habitus,
doxa
and
illusio
, how they affect our life, alas!

A habitus is formed, as a ‘mental structure’ which guides our minds

A perception of only this or that could be done, which a
illusio
binds

The habitus is reproduced generations after generations

Yet, between structure and agency lie man's deliberations!
Or is it the various capitals he says, that create this doxic structure

Social capital?, religious?, symbolic?, or culture?

So our C lass, A ffiliations, G ender, and E thnicity form a certain CAGE, A structure one is born in, as we enter life’s stage.

We do not choose these for ourselves, but they yield their power on us

Reproducing the habitus affecting our long term prospects thus

But man is born free, a rational thinking being!

How does one negotiate this CAGE? when does agency kick in?

Faced with these questions, I took a social justice stance

An ethnographic study, an interpretivist dance

What counts can sometimes not be counted, and what’s counted doesn’t count,

So I am presenting their voices qualitatively, in their own account

But wait, who am I in this entire scheme of things?

What’s my positionality? a question of reflexivity rings!

Am I an insider or outsider here?

What common sense of my participants do I actually bear?

I am a contrast to them in many a way

What role does my own background here play

I am an educated, Hindu, Indian, woman from the middle class

They are taxi drivers, Muslim, Pakistani, men from a working class

So, how does one research these subjective questions of the mind?

How will I unearth the habitus of being a minority in the grind?
How do my own assumptions affect what I say and ask?

How in the glory of my own habitus does my research bask?

Is reflexivity a reflection, confession, or just a cathartic outburst?

If we all affect our research uniquely, then what epistemology do we trust?

Where does the researcher draw the line to remain objective?

Between the study and real people who are subjective?

Whose story is it anyway, mine or theirs?

Am I their true representative as someone who cares?

How will this help policy and practice? what impact will it make?

Finding social justice for the community, I wish to awake

I have more questions than answers at this stage,

Perhaps I am bound unknowingly, by my own CAGE!

But these questions, however painful need to be asked for sure

Only then will I as an impactful & reflexive researcher mature

Email: [1]M.Sarkar@leeds.ac.uk; TWEET: @meenakshisarkar

Currently in her 3rd year of PhD at the University of Leeds, Meenakshi is a Learning and Development professional with over 20 years of experience from India where she worked with various organisations such as Procter & Gamble, Bausch & Lomb, Oriflame, Metlife Insurance and New York Life Insurance as a L &D lead, leadership coach and facilitator for behavioral skills. She came to the UK as a matured student to pursue her second masters in Human resource management (the first being in English Literature) at the University of Leeds in 2012. Her research started from a simple observation that many of the taxi drivers she met during her stay at Leeds, Bradford and Manchester were of Pakistani origin. As per the EHRC (2010), 1 in 4 Pakistani men in the UK drive taxis for a living. Is it a choice or constraint? Meenakshi set out to explore. As she is writing her thesis, she is also exploring issues around reflexivity, role of the researcher in public sociology.

The above poem was presented at a Public Sociology conference in Leicester this March.

1. mailto:M.Sarkar@leeds.ac.uk
Appliances, check if they are part of the house inventory, or if previous tenants left them behind.

Security cameras - Many people are currently quite informed about security cameras because they often see these installations in banks, buildings, malls, groceries, and even in houses. They're Easy To Use While spy gadgets might seem hi-tech and difficult to use, they've become a lot more easy to use within the years. The most advanced universal remotes can even control up to 15 different gadgets.

"Not being a philosopher or a physicist, I'm not planning to learn about that subject in print, but I can let you know that, from your marketing standpoint, the internet marketing effect towards the business stated previously would have been a big fat zero. You feel when you had given your relationship more time and effort it might been employed out. Possible complications include drug reactions, infection, bleeding, or perforation of the digestive system which can require surgery.

Your style is very unique in comparison to other people I have read stuff from. Many thanks for posting when you have the opportunity, Guess I will just bookmark this page.

Urgency in the spirit. They do this in two ways.

Love fashion? It's just realistic to help them out.

Hi, this is Covet Fashion hack generator.

I don't even understand how I stopped up right here, but I thought this put up used to be good. I do not realize who you are but definitely you're going to a well-known blogger should you are not already. Cheers!
Postmodernity. Second modernity. Network Society. Late modernity. Liquid modernity. Such concepts have dominated social thought in recent decades, with a bewildering array of claims about social change and its implications. But what do we mean by ‘social change’? How do we establish that such change is taking place? What does it mean to say that it is intensifying? These are some of the questions which the Social Morphogenesis project has sought to answer in the last five years, through an inquiry orientated around the speculative notion of ‘morphogenic society’.

In this launch event, contributors to the project discuss their work over the last five years and the questions it has addressed concerning social change. The day begins with an introductory lecture by the convenor of the project, Margaret S. Archer, before a series of thematic panels presenting different stands of the project. It concludes with a closing session in which participants share three issues the project raised for them, as well as a general discussion.

At the end of the day, there will be a wine reception to which all participants are invited. There will also be an opportunity to purchase discounted copies of the books from Springer.


Participants:
Ismael Al-Amoudi
Margaret S. Archer
Mark Carrigan
Pierpaolo Donati
The Social Morphogenesis project was funded by the Independent Social Research Foundation through six years of support for the Centre for Social Ontology. This support was generously extended to enable this book launch.

2. [http://isrf.org/](http://isrf.org/)

Public Sociology as Pedagogy, Research and Practice: Threats and Opportunities Today (2017-05-08 08:00)

Public Sociology as Pedagogy, Research and Practice: Threats and Opportunities Today

[1]https://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events/public-sociology-as-pedagogy-research-and-practice-threats-and-opportunities-today/ An Early Career Forum Regional Event 29 June 2017 (10am-4pm) Nottingham Trent University, Department of Sociology, Newton Building, Goldsmith Street, Nottingham This symposium will bring together early career sociologists, postgraduates, undergraduate students, and community partners, to explore the challenges and opportunities of practicing public sociology. Through the course of this one-day event we will discuss and test out the suggestion that public sociology can be a form of critical dialogue that connects teaching, research and practice. The incorporation of public sociology into aspects of teaching and student research is of particular relevance for early career sociologists, many of whom spend a large part of their time in student-related activities. Burawoy (2004) notes that students are academics' 'first public'; they are also sociological practitioners in their own right, and are embedded in a wide range of publics. Public sociology practiced by academics, students and practitioners is often discussed in isolation from one another: this event is distinctive in bringing them together. The event will address the question of what public sociology should mean in Britain today, in a context marked by multiple forms of crisis, including: the global capitalist crisis; crises of the environment, ecology and sustainability; mass forced migration coming up against restrictions imposed by nation states widespread war and terrorism; social crisis within Britain and many other countries involving an increasingly precarious existence for millions of people; deep-rooted political uncertainty about the nature of the British state and its relationship to Europe and the rest of the world in the context of Brexit. We will ask what kind of public sociology we need today, in such an uncertain and rapidly changing context? Learning from past and current examples we will discuss practical visions for a public sociology of the future. The symposium will include a series of interactive sessions, focusing on research, teaching, and practice. Speakers in each session will offer short introductions followed by open group discussions. Confirmed speakers include: Malia Bouattia, National Union of Students Dr Kehinde Andrews, Birmingham City University Daniela Scotece, Prostitution Outreach Workers, Nottingham Service Learning Students, Nottingham Trent University Andrea Lyons-Lewis and Sharon Hutchings, Nottingham Trent University Dr Lucy Mayblin, University of Warwick Bea Giaquinto, Renewal Trust Everybody is invited to join us for drinks and a meal at a nearby establishment following the event, if you would like to join us for food please let us know so we can book enough places (the cost of the evening meal is unfortunately not included in the event booking). Call for Posters Participants are welcome to present
An Interview with Patricia Leavy about Research Design in Contemporary Times (2017-05-08 19:18)

Your main areas of interest are research methodology and public scholarship. How did you become interested in these topics and how, if at all, do you think they’re linked?

When I was a sophomore in college I took a required survey of research methods course. That’s when my passion for research methodology began, and when I started to see the importance of textbooks for influencing the field. I loved the book used in that class, which I think was probably used in just about every methods course in the social sciences at that time. To me, that textbook outlined the ways that knowledge comes to be and how we might each be a part of creating new knowledge. I found that quite profound and I still do. When I tell people I write about research methodology they might think, goodness that sounds boring. But I’m obsessed with it. This is an important subject that impacts the work done in all fields from the social sciences to education to health studies. It’s the invisible framework for all knowledge production. Research methodology is about how we conceive of and carry out research projects including what we study, how we study it, with whom, for what purpose, and with whom we share the potential benefits of that knowledge. It’s in the latter part of that statement that there is a connection to public scholarship.

When I entered the academy I was stunned to learn some of the realities surrounding academic research. Peer-reviewed journal articles are the primary format for publishing academic research. As a result, most academic research is totally inaccessible. It’s inaccessible in two ways. First, no one outside of the academy has access to peer-reviewed journals. Second, they’re loaded with jargon and prohibitive language. So people don’t want to read this stuff, nor can they. As a result, the average peer-reviewed article has an audience of 3-8 readers according to some. That’s astounding. When you consider the human and other resources put into research. I believe there is an ethical, moral, and practical mandate to make research more widely available both inside and outside of the academy. Research should be of some value in real-world contexts. Public scholarship is that which reaches relevant stakeholders outside of the academy.

So let me crystalize the relationships between public scholarship and methodology. Researchers develop a methodology for each study or project. That methodology is a plan for how the research will proceed. If we’re committed to making our research matter to relevant stakeholders, decisions need to be made regarding how we will identify...
and reach them. Audience should be considered as one develops a project, regardless of the design used. Our methodological possibilities impact our ability to contribute effectively to public scholarship. This is one reason methodological innovation matters. The more tools we have available, the greater the possibilities for knowledge production and dissemination.

**What connections do you see to the sociological imagination?**

The sociological imagination centers on understanding the connections between our individual biographies, or micro-level experiences, and the larger socio-historical context, or macro-level. In other words, it's about the link between our own individual lives and the larger contexts in which we live. Research projects can be designed to explicitly explore, describe, explain, or otherwise illuminate those connections. The more methodological options we have at our disposal, the more we can investigate.

**Your new book *Research Design* offers an alternative to the methods literature. How would you describe the book? What was your goal writing it?**

[1] *Research Design* is a step-by-step guide to designing research using the five approaches to research: quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory. It’s a one-stop shop to research design. It’s intended for use as a primary or supplemental textbook. A course could be designed around it. It's also intended to be a resource for individual students and researchers. The first part of the book reviews the different sources from which we gain knowledge in daily life, how social research is a unique form of knowledge-building, the main elements of a research project, ethics, and the nuts-and-bolts of designing a research project from selecting a topic to developing research questions and/or hypotheses, conducting literature reviews, and locating participants for research studies. The second part of the book reviews the five approaches to research, each in their own chapter. The chapters cover what you need to know to develop a research proposal and design a project. Each chapter presents a template for writing a research proposal and then follows a unique format whereby the chapter fills in each section of the proposal. So readers can learn the details of each approach to design and simultaneously learn how to create a research proposal. I would also describe the book as pedagogically rich. There are numerous features intended to make it user-friendly. For example, there are in-chapter "Review Stops" which are quick quizzes intended to test new learning, with end-of-chapter answer keys, tables, graphs, charts, bold terms, research and writing activities for further engagement, suggested resources, and a glossary of key terms.

This book lived in me for many years. It was a major undertaking and I wanted to be ready for it. My goal was to create a highly user-friendly textbook that reviews the five available approaches to research design, instead of the three covered by most texts. I wanted to offer an alternative to the current methods texts. There are many great methods texts, several of which I have taught with over the years and that I regularly pull off my bookcase for personal reference. So I had no desire to attempt to replicate what is already out there. However, I did see the need for a book that offers equal treatment to five approaches, even if some readers choose to omit some of the chapters. I also approached chapters about the standard three approaches differently than other books, again, in order to produce an alternative. For example, the quantitative chapter follows a deductive model and the qualitative chapter follows an inductive model. There’s content that you don’t always find too. For example in the quantitative chapter there's discussion of replication studies, data sharing, and survey question construction. Attention is also paid to contemporary issues, including the role of technology in some research.

That's a long answer so to summarize, the book is meant to be a contemporary one-stop guide to research design across five approaches with pedagogical features. I hope it’s of value to professors, students, and researchers.
The coverage of arts-based research (ABR) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) approaches is unique. Why is it important to include these approaches?

These new approaches have developed at a time when there is more diversity and inclusion in academia and the field of research methods. This makes for a much richer array of perspectives on knowledge-building including philosophical assumptions we have taken for granted for many decades, and corresponding methods practices. Revisiting the methods terrain is vital. If we don't, we continue to work nearly exclusively with ideas and tools created at a time when women and people of color were excluded or radically marginalized. For example, scholars of color routinely engage with community-based and participatory research, and contribute to our methods knowledge in this area. Consider the effect of failure to give equal credence to these methods in our teaching, awards, publishing, and funding practices. Arts-based research has grown over the past couple of decades in concert with the push toward public scholarship. As the academy wrestles with issues of impact, it's prudent to share the tools of ABR and learn from arts practitioners for whom audience has always mattered. It's also important to give equal treatment to all five approaches to design because failure to do so can result in a host of misunderstandings in the literature. For example, when CBPR is reviewed, it's usually in brief in the context of a chapter on qualitative research. However, CBPR can be conducted with quantitative methods or mixed methods, and frequently is. There's a documented history of community surveys in CBPR. Qualitative researchers have greatly advanced the practice of CBPR but that does not mean it is only within the purview of qualitative research. It isn't. This is one example of why each approach needs equal coverage.

What do you think CBPR offers sociology in particular?

Sociologists frequently engage in different kinds of social action research. Meaning, there is the intent to have real-world impact and help foster positive social change. CBPR offers a host of tools for creating projects based on needs identified by relevant stakeholders and then implementing effective strategies to reach goals. It also goes back to the earlier question about the public scholarship. We typically use that term to talk about distributing the products of social research. But what about a public sociology from the ground up, in which relevant publics are involved during all phases and are the beneficiaries of the research process? In short, there's a justice imperative.

Social justice and ethics are strong themes in the book. How are these topics pertinent to research methods education and practice?

Social justice and ethics have a central role in both research methods education and practice. Let's take practice first. Why do we carry out a particular study? For what purpose? Toward what end? With benefits to whom? From the topic we decide to investigate, to how we go about designing and implementing a project, and how and with whom we share our results, social justice imperatives can drive research agendas. Research can be carried out with the intent of, in some way, making the world more just. Whether it's including previously excluded populations and asking new questions in survey research around a particular phenomenon, implementing an arts-based design in order to jar people into self and social reflection around a justice-themed topic, or something else, research can be underscored with, if not explicitly driven by justice goals. Even when this is not the case, social justice values should be present in every research project, even those with other kinds of objectives. Researchers need to engage with these values.

Likewise, ethics are central to research practice. While institutional and regulatory obligations are in place to protect
research participants in some basic ways, such as making sure participation is voluntary, confidential, understood, and can be withdrawn without penalty, there are a host of other issues to consider. Depending on the project a few other issues may include the relationship between the researchers and participants, the use of culturally sensitive language and practices, going into communities in which the researcher isn't otherwise invested, and accounting for one's own role in the project. I always say, ethics are not a checklist only to be dealt with at the beginning of a project. Ethics must be considered throughout the entire research process, including representation and dissemination.

Because social justice and ethics are central to research practice, they must be given sustained attention in our methods education. I actually think the way we choose to teach methods perhaps has the greatest impact of any factor on how we see these principles enacted in actual practice. Emerging researchers need to be sensitized to these issues and provided with strategies for best practices in they are going to be able to successfully design studies. For these reasons, I paid extra attention to ethics and justice issues in Research Design. There's a robust chapter on ethics placed after the introductory chapter, as well as “ethics in practice” notes placed in each of the five design chapters which highlight key moments of ethical decision-making as they occur. I also offer a range of interdisciplinary examples of research studies conducted on justice-related topics, such as racial inequality.

Language is also given attention in the text. Can you explain that?

When using each of the five approaches to research, one tends to use different language. For example, to describe those from whom we learn we may use the word subject, participant, or, collaborator, among other words. These distinctions are important as they speak to larger philosophical differences. When writing a research proposal or final write-up it's necessary to show competence with appropriate language so I model this in each of the five approaches chapters.

There's also discussion of culturally sensitive and culturally competent language. Research may involve those with whom we share differences. Finding effective ways to respectfully communicate with people and to sensitively portray people in their multi-dimensionality in our write-ups is a part of ethical practice. This issue comes up at numerous times in the book. Strategies for determining culturally sensitive language are noted. For example, establishing community advisory boards and how one might do that.

How do you see Research Design impacting the field of research methods?

That will be for others to determine, over time. My hope is that professors will consider the book for their courses and that ultimately it will be a useful resource for students and researchers at various career levels. In the act of writing it, and offering equal guidance in each of the five approaches to research design without privileging any of the approaches, I feel I've made a contribution to the field. It would be wonderful if standard methods teaching expanded to cover four or five approaches in full, instead of the three typically covered. If so, the publication and funding landscapes might also shift over time.

Anything you’d like to add?

I want to thank the entire team at Guilford Press for their outstanding work on Research Design. Authors’ names appear on front covers but books represent the labor of many. I was fortunate
to work with a world-class team. And thank you for the opportunity to talk about this. I know the term research methodology doesn't sound very sexy, and so the subject often goes under the radar. But our methods practices are complicit in knowledge production world-wide with pervasive real-world implications. These issues ought to be brought into the light. Thank you for being a part of that.

About the Patricia Leavy

Patricia Leavy, Ph.D.,

is an independent scholar (formerly Associate Professor of Sociology, Chair of Sociology & Criminology, and Founding Director of Gender Studies at Stonehill College). She is an internationally recognized leader in the fields of research methodology and arts-based research. The author or editor of twenty-two books, she has earned critical and commercial success in both nonfiction and fiction, and her books have been translated into many languages. Her latest book, Research Design, was the number one new release on Amazon in seven categories for eight consecutive weeks. She is also series creator and editor for seven book series with Oxford University Press and Sense Publishers, including the ground-breaking Social Fictions series. Known for her commitment to public scholarship, she is frequently called on by the US national news media and has regular blogs for The Huffington Post, The Creativity Post, and We Are the Real Deal. She has received career awards from the New England Sociological Association, the American Creativity Association, the American Educational Research Association, and the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. In 2016 Mogul, a global women’s empowerment network, named her an “Influencer.” For more information please visit [2] http://www.patricialeavy.com/
or follow Patricia on Facebook at [3] https://www.facebook.com/WomenWhoWrite/

Links to Research Design;

[4] Research Design at Amazon
: [5] https://www.amazon.com/Research-Design-Quantitative-Community-Based-Participatory/dp/1462514383/ref=pd_rhf_gw_p_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=J4D3J4Y92WEMTTBY1QA0

[6] Research Design at Guilford

1. [http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380](http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380)
4. [https://www.amazon.com/Research-Design-Quantitative-Community-Based-Participatory/dp/1462514383/ref=pd_rhf_gw_p_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=J4D3J4Y92WEMTT](https://www.amazon.com/Research-Design-Quantitative-Community-Based-Participatory/dp/1462514383/ref=pd_rhf_gw_p_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=J4D3J4Y92WEMTT)
5. [https://www.amazon.com/Research-Design-Quantitative-Community-Based-Participatory/dp/1462514383/ref=pd_rhf_gw_p_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=J4D3J4Y92WEMTT](https://www.amazon.com/Research-Design-Quantitative-Community-Based-Participatory/dp/1462514383/ref=pd_rhf_gw_p_img_1?_encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=J4D3J4Y92WEMTT)
6. [http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380](http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380)
7. [http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380](http://www.guilford.com/books/Research-Design/Patricia-Leavy/9781462514380)
Web Roundup: A Hack By Any Other Name | Somatosphere (2017-05-31 16:01:16)  
[...] “An Interview with Patricia Leavy about Research Design in Contemporary Times” – The Sociological Imagination [...]  

judi poker online uang asli (2018-05-21 12:06:03)  
Thanks, I’ve recently been searching for information about this subject for a while and yours is the greatest I’ve came upon till now. However, what concerning the bottom line? Are you sure in regards to the source?  

You have remarked very interesting details! ps nice internet site.  

Howdy I am sso excited I found your blog page, I really found you byy accident, while I was searching on Yahoo for something else, Regardless I am here now annd would just like to say cheers ffor a marvelous post and a all round entertaining blog (I also love the theme/design), I don’t have time to browse it all at the minute but I have bookmarked it aand also added your RSS feeds, so when I have time I will be back to read a great deal more, Please do keep up the awesome work.  

newseum (2018-10-16 13:44:44)  
And live inside the arms of this fictitious Adonis that you’ve conjured as your fantasy mate. Think "news" and make certain your site content appear to be news articles with pictures andd all. Thee individual whho I quoted at the outset of these tps have actu-ally done a terrific job during the last year and a half, usin the social networking to construct a large and responsive list for himself.  

jak pozycjonować strony www (2018-10-22 10:05:53)  
I visit every day some web sites and websites to read content, but this blog offers quality based posts.  

knowledge vine (2018-10-24 19:27:02)  
It may seem acceptable forr a government to demand that an internet service provider (ISP) repot any customer who might download child pornography. Every sngle cents that you simply share will come back to you in thousand fold. If you just spend time doing research, it’ll be easier to comprehend a subject.  

gadget change (2018-10-28 13:57:20)  
Yes, they keep getting introduced and people carryy on and replace and build-up huge collections of those accessories. So, in ways gaming can be a teenagers orr anyone's friend behause it entertains there youg brains as long while they are playing good games. With these i - Pad giveaways, the consumers get their hands around the llatest gadgets as the manufacturers can easily get their products tested.  

citywideblog.ir (2018-11-13 17:20:46)  
Can I simply say what a relief to discover an individual who actually knows what they’re talking about on the internet. You certainly realize how to bring a problem to light and make it important. More and more people should read this and understand this side of the story. It’s surprising you’re not more popular because you most certainly have the gift.  

timesblogfa.ir (2018-11-13 17:24:43)  
Very good info. Lucky me I recently found your blog by accident (stumbleupon). I've book marked it for later!  

weblogdivide.ir (2018-11-13 17:56:57)  
Link exchange is nothing else however it is only placing the other person’s blog link on your page at appropriate place and other person will also do similar in favor of you.
Have you ever thought about publishing an ebook or guest authoring on other blogs? I have a blog based on the same subjects you discuss and would really like to have you share some stories/information. I know my subscribers would appreciate your work. If you’re even remotely interested, feel free to send me an email.

Precious (2019-03-13 06:40:29)
I really wanted to compose a brief message to be able to express gratitude to you for the superb tips and hints you are sharing on this site. My extended internet look up has now been rewarded with excellent knowledge to exchange with my friends and family. I would assert that we site visitors actually are very blessed to be in a perfect website with many lovely people with insightful points. I feel really blessed to have used your website page and look forward to tons of more awesome minutes reading here. Thank you again for all the details.

**Darwin's Dilemma (2017-05-09 07:20)**

- Science is the epitome of human achievement, whereby we distinguish ourselves most clearly from other animals.
- Yet, our best science says that our sense of superiority from other animals is false and quite possibly self-deception.
- Either we have misunderstood human nature all along or our best science is bound to be superseded by one more attuned to our true nature.

People of the Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) believe that science is about enabling humanity to make it worthy of its divine origins, but Darwinists deny the premise and so they are left to explain the grandiosity of humanity’s commitment to science. ‘Darwin's bulldog’, Thomas Henry Huxley, first broached the point [1]here.

1. [http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE9/E-E.html](http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/CE9/E-E.html)

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**Feminist Reflections on Law, Society and Care (2017-05-09 08:00)**

21st July 2017

09:30 – 17:30 BST

Room 2.10 Sandra Burslem Building

Manchester Law School, Manchester Metropolitan University

We would like to invite colleagues to this prestigious event who share a keen interest in addressing feminist ethics and feminist frameworks in relation to contemporary societal issues. Your interests might fall into a range of categories, broadly defined, including Ethics of Care; Global Justice; Health Care; Technologies; Community activism and Feminist Methodologies.

This one-day event consists of a mix of keynote speakers, and smaller panel and workshop sessions with brief papers.

Our three keynote speakers comprise of:
• **Donna Dickenson**, Research Associate, HeLEX Centre University of Oxford, Emeritus Professor of Medical Ethics and Humanities, and Honorary Senior Research Fellow at University of Bristol, presenting on *Property in the Body: Feminist Perspectives*.

• **Alison Jaggar**, College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado at Boulder and Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Birmingham, presenting on *Gendered Perspectives on Global Justice*.

• **Marian Verkerk**, Professor of Ethics at the University of Groningen, presenting on *Family Ethics of Care*.

Panel sessions will cover a wide range of topics: Family Law and Ethics, Global perspectives on issues of Gender and Justice, Abortion Law and Reproductive choice, the Female Body, and Constructions of Women.

This event is sponsored by the **Sylvia Pankhurst Gender Research Centre** - here is the URL if you would like to follow the blog: [1]https://mmusylviapankhurstgenderresearch.wordpress.com/

Organisers: Dr Melanie Latham, Kelly Dannielle, and Aysha Mazhar

Any queries please contact: [2]feministreflections@gmail.com or [3]kelly.dannielle@stu.mmu.ac.uk

Register your place using the Eventbrite link: [4]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/feminist-reflections-on-law-society-and-care-tickets-34272828954

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1. [https://mmusylviapankhurstgenderresearch.wordpress.com/](https://mmusylviapankhurstgenderresearch.wordpress.com/)
2. [mailto:feministreflections@gmail.com](mailto:feministreflections@gmail.com)
3. [mailto:kelly.dannielle@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:kelly.dannielle@stu.mmu.ac.uk)
4. [https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/feminist-reflections-on-law-society-and-care-tickets-34272828954](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/feminist-reflections-on-law-society-and-care-tickets-34272828954)
Making an Impact with Social Media, July 5th in Manchester (2017-05-09 14:40)
Many researchers are excited about the potential social media offers for making an impact with their work. However, 500 million tweets per day, 3 million blog posts per day and over a billion websites poses an obvious challenge: how can you ensure you are heard above the din? How can social media be used by busy researchers in an effective and efficient way?

This workshop offers a practical introduction to these challenges, exploring how to use social media to engage with groups beyond the academy and ensure the impact of research. The session will include an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

At the end of the day, participants will have learnt about the opportunities and challenges posed by social media for researcher impact, as well as having designed a bespoke impact strategy relevant to their own projects. Participants also have the option of purchasing five hours of coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.

Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.

The technocratic oath (2017-05-10 08:00)

In his political memoir, *Adults In The Room*, Yanis Varoufakis recounts a meeting with Larry Summer which took place in April 2015. Only months into his tenure as Finance Minister, he looked to this architect of the neoliberal world order for support as hostilities with European leaders over Greece’s fiscal future rapidly intensified. Coming straight from a meeting at the IMF in Washington, Varoufakis was met with an immediate warning from Summers that he had “made a big mistake”. This began a long conversation which ended with a fascinating warning. From loc 1050:

Finally, after agreeing our next steps, and before the combined effects of fatigue and alcohol forced us to call it a night, Summers looked at me intensely and asked a question so well rehearsed that I suspected he had used it to test others before me.

‘There are two kinds of politicians,’ he said: ‘insiders and outsiders. The outsiders prioritize their freedom to speak their version of the truth. The price of their freedom is that they are ignored by the insiders, who make the important decisions. The insiders, for their part, follow a sacrosanct rule: never turn against other insiders and never talk to outsiders about what insiders say or do. Their reward? Access to inside information and a chance, though no guarantee, of influencing powerful people and outcomes.’ With that Summers arrived at his question. ‘So, Yanis,’ he said, ‘which of the two are you?’

When reading of this exchange in a review of the memoir, I immediately thought back to a story Elizabeth Warren had told about an encounter with Summers in a Washington curry restaurant early in her move from academia to politics. Upon purchasing Varoufakis’s book, I found that I wasn’t the only person to notice this parallel and be fascinated by it. As he recounts in an end note to the book:

A few months after I had resigned the ministry, my good friend and academic colleague Tony Aspromourgos, upon hearing about my exchanges with Larry Summers, confirmed my suspicion when he sent me this quotation from Senator Elizabeth Warren, documented in 2014:

*Late in the evening, Larry leaned back in his chair and offered me some advice ... He teed it up this way: I had a choice. I could be an insider or I could be an outsider. Outsiders can say whatever they want. But people on the inside don’t listen to them. Insiders, however, get lots of access and a chance to push their ideas. People – powerful people – listen to what they have to say. But insiders also understand one unbreakable rule: they don’t criticize other insiders. I had been warned. John Cassidy (2014), 'Elizabeth Warren’s Moment’, New York Review of Books, Vol. 61 (no. 9), 22/ 5–4/ 6/ 14, pp. 4–8.*

Could this be seen as the professional socialisation of technocratic elites? Does Summers engage in a particularly practiced and performative example of something which takes a cruder form elsewhere? Does he particularly focus on those like Varoufakis and Warren who have moved from the academy to politics? As he reflects on loc 156, the technocratic oath is something which transcends agreements of strategy and analysis:
We spoke the same economic language, despite different political ideologies, and had no difficulty reaching a quick agreement on what our aims and tactics ought to be. Nevertheless, my answer had clearly bothered him, even if he did not show it. He would have got into his taxi a much happier man, I felt, had I demonstrated some interest in becoming an insider. As this book’s publication confirms, that was never likely to happen.

Benny Goodman (2017-05-10 08:16:59)
Well, I was shocked to read this as it hits home in a visceral way what many already believe we know. That not only do men of wealth buy men of power, but that there is indeed an insider elite? Is this ‘insider group’ also what Margaret Archer called a ‘contextual resource’ - ’similars and familiars’? (Focused) Autonomous reflexives when confronted with this ‘enablement and constraint’ thus really have to choose whether to be in the tent pissing out....? Corbyn of course is an outsider...and if he actually became PM, he would be forced to stay there given his record. I suspect May would be given the same chat...but she may well be ‘on message’ in any case and perhaps not need it.

Anticipatory Urgency (2017-05-11 08:00)

Earlier this morning, I found myself impatiently waiting in my local petrol station to purchase a drink before I went swimming. The woman in front me in the queue was rather slow. Initially seeming surprised that money would be required for the transaction, she proceeded to initiate an entirely different process to locate her coins after handing over the necessary notes. Having completed the exchange, she gathered her things with a similar lack of pace, slowly preparing to leave the shop. It was at that point that she gently chided me for rushing her, suddenly leaving me aware that this was in fact what I was doing by impatiently lingering while effectively pointing towards the cashier with my drink.

With this newfound awareness, my irritation at her transmuted into an irritation with myself. Why was I being so impatient? Why was I being needlessly rude? It immediately occurred to me that this was an example of what I mean by cognitive triage. Having woken up later than planned, I started the day with a vivid sense of all the tasks I had to complete, with one leading in sequence to the next. There were a couple of things that had to be done today but this sense of urgency mostly reflected a desire to be on top of things before I headed off to the midlands for the rest of the week.

It was an anticipatory urgency: a haste animated by the fear of falling behind in the future. This can be distinguished from rushing to meet a deadline. The imminent arrival of a deadline offers a fixed temporal horizon for an activity. One rushes and then ceases to rush. In contrast, anticipatory urgency is potentially open-ended. If an upcoming event is a threat to ‘being on top of things’ then where to draw the line in terms of what is required to be prepared? My suggestion is that anticipatory urgency engenders a peculiarly hasty form of haste. It involves rushing in a rushed way. Not simply speeding up to meet a deadline but trying to speed up one’s speeding up. How much can I get done before I go away? How prepared do I need to be? It’s a reflexive orientation that can bring out the worst in people, as my rudeness in the garage illustrates.

There is a pleasure in speed, as Milan Kundera powerfully captures in his Slowness. There is the possibility of transcendence. On pg 3-4 he describes the inner experience of a man on a motorbike:
the man hunched over his motorcycle can focus only on the present instance of his flight; he is caught in a fragment of time cut off from both the past and the future; he is wrenched from the continuity of time; he is outside time; in other words he is in a state of ecstasy. In that state he is unaware of his age, his wife, his children, his worries, and so he has no fear, because the source of fear is in the future, and a person freed of the future has nothing to fear.

In contrast, I’d argue, anticipatory urgency precludes this. One is not cut off from past and future but profoundly implicated in the relationship between the two. The present is subordinated the future, with the usual texture of temporality being reduced to an endless sequence of moments. Each one is simply a challenge lying in the way of reaching the next. It creates flat time. This suppression of relationality is licensed by the promise that the important events will come and our anticipatory urgency will have left us properly open to them. But the more time we spent in a state of anticipatory urgency, the less likely it is that this promise will ever be realised.

The ennui of the academic celebrity

In Solar, by Ian McEwan, we encounter the weary figure of Michael Beard, the nobel laureate and serial womaniser who has long lived off his early contribution to theoretical physics. By the time he approaches his 60s, he is a chaotic and directionless man, nonetheless ubiquitously affirmed within the academy and beyond:

He held an honorary university post in Geneva and did no teaching there, lent his name, his title, Professor Beard, Nobel laureate, to letterheads, to institutes, signed up to international ‘initiatives’, sat on a Royal Commission on science funding, spoke on the radio in layman’s terms about Einstein or photons or quantum mechanisms, helped out with grant applications, was a consultant editor on three scholarly journals, wrote peer reviews and references, took an interest in the gossip, the politics of science, the positioning, the special pleading, the terrifying nationalism, the tweaking of colossal sums out of ignorant ministers and bureaucrats for one more practical accelerator or rented instrument space on a new satellite, appeared at giant conventions in the US – eleven thousand physicists in one place! – listened to post-docs explain their research, gave with minimal variation the same series of lectures on the calculations underpinning the Beard-Einstein Conflation that had brought him his prize, awarded prizes and medals himself, accepted honorary degrees, and gave after-dinner speeches and eulogies for retiring or about-to-cremated colleagues. (pg. 14)

This is a man who enjoys celebrity, “in an inward, specialised world”, leaving him able to drift “from year to year, vaguely weary of himself, bereft of alternatives” (pg. 14). He remains blissfully ignorant of the post-docs who work with him, neither having the inclination nor the energy to learn to differentiate them. He reasons that it is “better to treat them all the same, somewhat distantly, or as if they were one person” rather than “insult one Mike by resuming a conversation that might have been with the other, or to assume that the fellow with the ponytail and glasses, Scots accent and no wrist string was unique, or was not called Mike” (pg. 20). It was only after half a dozen trips to his research centre that he realised that the same post-doc had acted as driver each time. As he awaits the end of his fifth marriage, he relies on the incoming mail to offer him escape from the peculiar turgidity that privilege has brought to his life:
After morosely clinging to stupid hopes, he began to watch the post and emails for the invitation that would take him far away from Belsize Park and shake some independent life into his sorry frame. About half a dozen a week arrived throughout the year, but so far nothing had interested him among the inducements to give lectures on the shore of a plutocratic north-Italian lake, or in an unexciting German schloss, and he felt too weak and raw to discuss the Conflation before one more colleague-crowded conference in New Delhi or Los Angeles. He had no idea what he wanted, but he thought he would know it when he saw it. (pg. 22-23).

He often felt he had "coasted all his life on an obscure young man’s work, a far cleverer and more devoted theoretical physicist than he could ever hope to be" (pg. 50). Ironically, it was this very talent and devotion which led him to become the middle man plagued by “a certain mental deficiency, an emptiness, a restless boredom” that could only be obscured “by the daily round or sleep” (pg. 49). His intellectual engagement now more often entailed flipping through the Scientific American, perpetually distracted by his "lifetime's habit" of being “inconveniently watchful for his own name” (pg. 49).

Iain MacLaren (2017-05-12 09:29:50)
cheering us up for the weekend, Mark?

Mark Carrigan (2017-05-16 10:27:14)
Yes. Did it work?

nasza strona internetowa (2018-04-17 16:33:20)
It’s a shame you don’t have a donate button! I’d definitely donate to this fantastic blog! I guess for now i’ll settle for bookmarking and adding your RSS feed to my Google account. I look forward to new updates and will talk about this site with my Facebook group. Chat soon!

mabosbet alternatif (2018-05-25 10:31:10)
Thanks in favor of sharing such a pleasant thought, post is nice, thats why i have read it entirely

Spencer (2018-05-31 06:51:26)
Please let me know if you're looking for a writer for your site. You have some really good posts and I believe I would be a good asset. If you ever want to take some of the load off, I'd love to write some content for your blog in exchange for a link back to mine. Please send me an email if interested. Cheers!

Rise, a new mobile app for dieting and health, aims to connect users with their own personalized diet plans and daily feedback from nutrition coaches for a fraction of the usual cost.

taxi services (2018-10-15 12:36:39)
Excellent blog! Do you have any hints for aspiring writers? I'm hoping to start my own website soon but I'm a little lost on everything. Would you suggest starting with a free platform like Wordpress or go for a paid option? There are so many options out there that I'm completely confused .. Any ideas? Many thanks!
And, think about it: by refusing small things in your lifetime, like a compliment or someone holding the entranceway to suit your needs once your arms are packed with packages, actually makes it harder to get even larger gifts that may present themselves. You've likely heard that the roadside assistance plan is recommended, however, if you think that it is just about getting towed, you ought to please take a closer look. Reverse mortgages would be the easy and effective way to have a residence over the last phase of your life.

Fuck (2018-10-19 18:34:38)
You actually make it seem so easy with your presentation but I find this matter to be really something which I think I would never understand. It seems too complex and very broad for me. I am looking forward for your next post, I'll try to get the hang of it! https://adrianbuzan.com/

My family members always say that I am killing my time here at web, except I know I am getting familiarity every day by reading these pleasant articles or reviews.

Drew (2018-12-07 16:37:24)
Oh my goodness! Impressive article dude! Thank you so much. However I am encountering difficulties with your RSS. I don’t understand why I can’t join it. Is there anybody having the same RSS issues? Anyone that knows the answer can you kindly respond? Thanks!!

Terrence (2019-01-21 10:47:19)
Excellent post. I’m facing some of these issues as well..

agen sbobet bonus new member (2019-03-17 19:47:35)
I’ve read several excellent stuff here. Certainly price bookmarking for revisiting. I surprise how much effort you put to create any such fantastic informative website.

https://jpst.it/1ismv (2019-03-17 21:59:34)
Excellent post. I used to be checking continuously this blog and I am impressed! Very helpful info specially the closing section :) I take care of such info much. I was looking for this certain information for a long time. Thanks and good luck.

What is a research technologist? (2017-05-13 08:00)
I described myself as an ‘academic technologist’ for a number of years. During my part-time PhD, I’d drifted into a number of roles which felt connected but which were difficult to summarise: training people to use NVIVO, writing digital scholarship resources, advising on CAQDAS strategy for research projects, running workshops about social media and maintaining social media feeds. Since then I’ve ceased to use the description, in part because I got sufficiently sick of talking about NVIVO that I resolved never to approach the topic again, but also because the term didn’t really seem to have much purchase. I rarely felt people understood what I meant by it. But unlike ‘digital sociologist’, their lack of understanding wasn’t coupled with some degree of interest in finding out.

Perhaps research technologist would have been a better term. This is what Andy Tattersall uses in a [1]thought-provoking essay at the LSE Impact Blog. He identifies a strange lacunae which has also long-fascinated me: a proliferation of digital tools emerging from outside the academy, increasing numbers of technology startups focused on the academy, strategic investment in tools and platforms by institutions but specific features of academic labour which are hindering uptake:
Whilst this work is a great help to those aware of it, the reality is a majority of academics are either unaware of or unwilling to engage with the myriad tools and technologies at their disposal (beyond social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, ResearchGate, etc.). There are several reasons for this: workload and deadline pressures; fear of technology; ethical implications around their use and their application, especially when it comes to third party software; or too much choice.


I'd add to this that their engagement with social networking sites is inevitably shaped by the [3]conditions of academic labour in ways which can prove detrimental. The research technologist, on Tattersall’s account, emerges to mediate between different stakeholders in these transformations and to help academics negotiate these changes in an effective way:

But with so many tools available, how do academics navigate their way through them? How do they make the connection between technology and useful application? And who helps them charter these scary, unpredictable waters?


The parallel he draws is with the learning technologist: “this group of centralised, university-educated professionals help drive teaching innovations that are underpinned by technology”. As he describes the practical activity performed in such a role:

It would support research and its dissemination in the use of video, animation, infographics, social media, online discussion, mobile device use, and social networks, to name just a few technologies. The learning technologist applies pedagogical reasoning for their technology choices, and the research equivalent would need to assess the same considerations. Not only that but good communication skills, information literacy, and an understanding of data protection, ethics, and what constitutes a good technology – and how it can be applied to a specific research setting in a sustainable and timely manner – are all essential. For example, the use of video to disseminate research around speech therapy would potentially be more useful than an infographic. In the same way, an infographic published in a blog post might be a better way of conveying the results of a public health project.


On this understanding, I could easily be described as a research technologist who specialised in disseminating sociology. I have a broad acquaintance with the discipline, understand its different intellectual currents and am very familiar with the sociological sensibility that unites much of them. Someone operating in this role might step in to do the dissemination work on behalf of an individual or a project. But the intellectual familiarity also facilitates their entering into the project, in a relatively narrow capacity, in order to support and guide this activity. The point is
not only to undertake the activity, it’s the capacity to work with researchers as they do this and to understand the practical challenges they face over and above the technology itself:

The reason why in-house support could benefit the practice and dissemination of research is that researchers are very pressured for time, and often don’t know what they need regarding research technologies and especially dissemination. Secondly, when they do know what they want, they often need it "as soon as possible". These two problems are more solvable within the department, especially as researchers often don’t know where to go for specific help. The research technologist would be a designated, focused role, embedded within the department. They’d be a signpost to new ways of working, problem solving and, most importantly, be able to consider all issues of ethics and/or compliance when passing on advice.


This involves a familiarity with the issues encountered in technology use, rather than simply the tool or platform itself. Andy’s example of guiding researchers through the experience of dealing with hostility and abuse on Twitter is an excellent example. I really like his vision of "a kind of 'Swiss Army knife' professional, who can exploit the burgeoning number of opportunities afforded by the many new technologies out there" but I suspect I’ll still continue to call myself a digital sociologist for the time being.

Here’s a really interesting presentation by Matthew Dovey about the emergence of this role and the purpose it serves:

IFRAME: [7]//www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/key/2jIDPARzOulHo

5056
Recognizing Research Technologists in the Research Process  from mdovey

7. file://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/key/2jIDPARzOulHo
8. file://www.slideshare.net/mdovey/recognising-research-technologists-in-the-research-process
9. file://www.slideshare.net/mdovey

The Politics of Race in Contemporary Film and Digital Practice (2017-05-14 08:00)

Thursday 18 May to Friday 19 May 2017

Goldsmiths, University of London (Day One)
Institute of Contemporary Arts (Day Two)
The Sociological Review is pleased to announce that it is supporting the Black Frim British Cinema Conference 2017: The Politics of Race in Contemporary Film and Digital Practice.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Professor Sarita Malik, Brunel University

Dr Kara Keeling, University of Southern California

THEMES

Whether we consider the rise of the concept of diversity, the on-screen representation of identities, the off-screen workforce, the production trends of film institutions, new forms of independent production opened up by new media, or film education and talent development, questions of race and ethnicity remain central to contemporary British film.

This conference will mark nearly 30 years since the original Black Film, British Cinema conference at the ICA and its subsequent publication, which has been a huge influence on scholars exploring race, culture and the politics of representation. Some of its core thinking by Kobena Mercer, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and others remains an excellent point to consider what has, and has not, become of black and Asian film and TV production in the UK.

The aim of this two-day conference is to consider the politics of race in contemporary British cinema and visual practice and reflect on almost 30 years of black film production vis-a-vis the institutional, technological, textual, cultural and political shifts that have occurred during this period. The conference will welcome scholars, early career researchers, postgraduate students and practitioners working at the intersection of film, TV, Moving Image, Media and Communication studies, Sociology, Politics and Cultural Studies.
1. [Register Here](http://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=b7e8d01860&e=789a4573bc)

**Call for Papers: Imagining the Future: Financial Capitalism & the Social Imagination**

Call for Papers: Imagining the Future: Financial Capitalism & the Social Imagination

**UCL Institute of Advanced Studies // 11 July 2017**

**Keynote speakers:**

- Professor Ruth Levitas (Bristol)
- Professor Jens Beckert (Cologne)
We invite abstract submissions (up to 300 words) which explore the various ‘intersections’ between political, economic and social imaginaries of financial capitalism. We are especially interested in theoretically-driven approaches studying the role of different types of imagination in materially mediating currently experienced crises (economic, social, border, migration etc.), through producing and legitimating dominant visions and narratives of the future.


Please email your abstract (up to 300 words) and a short bio to


2. [mailto:reclaimingutopia@gmail.com](mailto:reclaimingutopia@gmail.com)
Many researchers are excited about the potential social media offers for making an impact with their work. However, 500 million tweets per day, 3 million blog posts per day and over a billion websites poses an obvious challenge: how can you ensure you are heard above the din? How can social media be used by busy researchers in an effective and efficient way?

This workshop offers a practical introduction to these challenges, exploring how to use social media to engage with groups beyond the academy and ensure the impact of research. The session will include an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

At the end of the day, participants will have learnt about the opportunities and challenges posed by social media for researcher impact, as well as having designed a bespoke impact strategy relevant to their own projects. Participants also have the option of purchasing five hours of coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.

Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.

by Patrick Alexander

What do you want to be when you finally grow up? In 2014, on a humid September morning, I boarded a crowded subway train to arrive at the New York City public high school where I would spend a whole year exploring this question. I wanted to find out how high school kids make sense of their futures, and to better understand how schooling socialises us to imagine the future in particular ways. I also wanted to know more about the barriers that get in the way of achieving these futures, and how young people manage to overcome these challenges (if they do). I didn’t know then that masculinity would also become one of the more important and evocative themes in the ethnography. Understanding experiences and articulations of masculinity became a way for me to consider how neoliberal framings of aspiration are used to make sense of the future for young people in school.

On that first day of the ethnography, and empty of students before the beginning of term, the school felt like an immense ship being prepared for a familiar but long and arduous journey. Custodial staff sweated around the school, towels tucked in T-shirt necks, and shouted an echoing commentary to one another down shiny corridors as they hammered, painted, and jerry-rigged the school back into shape. Teachers weaved in and out of classrooms and offices, plain-clothed, switching quickly between smiling conversations about summer vacations, tans, or new haircuts, and more serious hushed huddles about school gossip, office supplies, bureaucracy, and the coming storm of teenagers. The ebullient figure of the Principal loomed large in this scene, smiling and stating with happy sincerity that, ‘every day at (this school) is a good day!’ He gathered the teachers together to go through past progress statistics and talk about the year to come – a year that would be bigger and better not only for the students on the sometimes treacherous path towards graduation, but also for the school as an entity with its own collective aspirations and hopes for the future. To me, this moment of caesura – this hurried but confident fixing of costumes before curtains-up – is a fascinating example of how futurity is constructed and reproduced through the mundane processes of schooling. I think that it’s indicative of the ways in which schools help in both subtle and explicit ways to socialise us not only into imagining a horizon upon which we can fix our gaze, but also into constructing a sense of social identity that’s only sensible when framed in this particular future-gazing way.

Throughout the year of research, Bronx High showed itself to be a profoundly future-oriented institution in which students reconcile the privileging of imagined neoliberal futures with the often starkly different realities of their own experiences outside of school. The processes through which constructions of masculinity are fused into constructions of aspiration in the context of schooling emerge in numerous vignettes from the ethnography – for example, in how dominant forms of neoliberal masculinity are reproduced in school discourse at the institutional level, and in the persona of the school’s principal. Drawing on examples from the classroom, I also show in my research how male students negotiate between “tough” performances and narratives of masculinity framed in relation to educational failure, and articulations of masculinity that fit with notions of academic, athletic, and/or economic success. Through these examples I consider how multiple, entangled, concurrent, and often uncertain imaginings of gendered future aspirations are collapsed, made invisible, or rendered tractable under the weight of
a single dominant, taken-for-granted neoliberal reckoning of what the future will look like for young men coming of age through the recession.

Andre, a successful senior student, was a good example of this experience. While he was very strategic in his planning for the future, and had a clear path laid out, he also told me: ‘You know, life is straight improv: you just make it up as you go along. You never know what’s going to happen or what kind of man you’re gonna be. And I wouldn’t want a roadmap for what my life is going to be like – that would be boring. Even when you do have a plan, you never know how you’re going to like it until you’re in it. Life is straight improv!’ Andre may think that "life is straight improv," but he knows not to show this in how he articulates his imagining of the future to teachers, college administrators, and the keepers of scholarship money. As a noticeboard at Bronx High reminds us: “The American Dream Can Be Achieved Through Education! (Pass With Hard Work).”

One useful way to make sense of this complex reckoning of aspiration and masculinity, I argue, is through a quantum metaphor of personhood. I use a metaphor of quantum personhood to suggest that multiple and seemingly mutually exclusive discourses of aspiration and masculinity may in fact intertwine in the everyday lives of young men at Bronx High. This precarious balancing act speaks to the notion that the recent financial crisis represents a potential ideological as well as structural crisis for neoliberalism – in this case, by subtly challenging the extent to which neoliberal framings of aspiration can or should be accepted by young men as the "natural" foundations for particular imaginings of the future framed in relation to masculinity.

Adapted from:


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by Sam Baars
The great meritocracy

When she became British prime Minister in July 2016, the core narrative of Teresa May's premiership was [1]quick to emerge: "I want Britain to be the world's great meritocracy - a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow." According to this notion of meritocracy, a just and fair society is one in which people's outcomes are governed by two things: their skills, and the effort they are willing to exert.

'Rearing aspirations'

Young people's aspirations (their desires for the future) play a key role in this view of society: if meritocracy requires people to work hard and use their talents, then it also requires that they are motivated to do so. Without 'high aspirations' there is no motivation to strive. For this reason, successive governments in the UK have focused on [2]'raising' young people's aspirations, and this approach is key to oiling the wheels of the great meritocracy.

Neoliberal foundations

The policy focus on 'raising aspirations', and the underlying meritocratic ideal that outcomes are governed by hard work and ability, both have their roots in neoliberal thinking. As an ideology, neoliberalism demands that young people take responsibility for their life outcomes, they exercise free choice in governing those outcomes, and are willing to move freely in order to find the best use for their talents. However, despite their ideological unity there are fundamental tensions between each of these tenets of neoliberal meritocracy and the 'raising aspirations' agenda it has given rise to. These tensions are thrown into stark relief when we consider the experiences of white working class boys – a group [3]singled out by Prime Minister May as demanding particular policy attention. My [4]fieldwork with a group of white working class boys in an outer-urban estate in Manchester aimed to directly explore these tensions.

Mobility vs. identity

Firstly, the imperative to 'raise aspirations' often involves overriding young people's place-based identities. For most young people, attending university and engaging with high-status professional, managerial and technical occupations requires some form of movement away from spatial, social, and cultural familiarities such as family, friends and neighbourhood. However, white working class boys often voice a strong attachment to their locality. Despite this, the neoliberal imperative to be 'footloose' is strongest for those in the most deprived contexts: young people attending school in areas with few highly skilled jobs and no nearby university face the greatest pressure to transcend their place-based identities in order to "get out" and "get on".

'High aspirations' vs. individual choice

Secondly, a narrow definition of 'high aspirations' undermines the sanctity of individual choice. The neoliberal meritocracy holds that young people should be free to decide where they want their talents and hard work to take them. However, in reality the aspiration-raising agenda is highly prescriptive, with "high" aspirations defined narrowly in terms of pursuing higher education or high status professional occupations. This delegitimises aspirations that young people might have for local work, or to enter employment as soon as possible after completing compulsory education – a common thread linking the white working class boys that participated in my research.

'Success for all' vs. opportunities for the few

Thirdly, the neoliberal notion of meritocracy puts forward a vision of "success for all" with unlimited space at the top for people to fill, as long as they have sufficiently high aspirations, hold the requisite talents and are willing to work hard enough. However, this underplays the reality that there are finite positions at the top of the educational...
and occupational hierarchy and that ruthless sorting will necessarily take place. This sorting process favours those from middle class backgrounds, who have access to particular forms of social and cultural capital such as unpaid internship experience.

**A harmless discourse with harmful consequences**

The neoliberal meritocracy is based on principles that are, at face value, laudable and uncontroversial: the importance of seeking opportunities wherever they might lie, the sanctity of young people’s individual choices and the belief that all young people can achieve success. However, the ‘aspiration raising’ agenda which lies at the heart of this neoliberal view of meritocracy sits in stark tension with these underlying principles. It also exposes how an outwardly innocuous discourse can impose particularly negative side effects on the most disadvantaged young people. The aspiration-raising agenda opposes key elements of individual identity, discredits aspirations for material security and family life, and paints a mirage of “success for all” even though educational and labour market outcomes continue to be largely dictated by socioeconomic background. These effects are arguably felt most starkly by white working class boys. They are the group who will benefit least, not most, from the neoliberal notion of meritocracy and its aspiration raising agenda.

Adapted from:


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7. [https://twitter.com/LKMco](https://twitter.com/LKMco)
8. [https://twitter.com/sambaars](https://twitter.com/sambaars)

White working class boys in the neoliberal meritocracy: the pitfalls of the ‘aspiration-raising’ agenda | Sam Baars (2017-08-22 11:59:57)

[...] blog was reblogged on The Sociological Imagination, where you can find summaries of the other chapters in the [...]
Will social media lead to the return of the general intellectual? (2017-05-16 08:00)

In his detailed study of Sartre's rise to prominence as an authoritative public intellectual, Patrick Baert argues that the general intellectualism embodied by Sartre depended upon social conditions which no longer obtain. Such intellectuals “address a wide range of subjects without being experts as such” and speak “at, rather than with, their audience” (pg. 185). In doing so, they depend upon a broad support for intellectual life within society alongside a concentration of cultural and intellectual capital within a small elite. Without the hierarchy this gives rise to, one in which enough of the subordinate are invested, it cannot be tenable to pronounce with such perceived authority across such a broad range of subjects. This hierarchy is manifested both in educational institutions but also in the disciplines from which such general intellectuals emerge. However general intellectuals are not dependent upon these institutions, instead being able to leverage their authority into income from the media (non-fiction, print journalism, broadcast media) and often being able to rely on family wealth. The authority invested in their discipline, alongside “the confidence of the right habitus and an elite education” mean “they can speak to a wide range of social and political issues without being criticised for dilettantism” (pg. 185).

What led to their decline? Baert identifies numerous intellectual factors, including the emergence of theoretical movements which “questioned, if not undermined, the erstwhile superiority of philosophy over other vocabularies” (pg. 185). The professionalisation of the social sciences facilitated the challenge of claims by philosophers about the social world which were effectively just bad sociology. Their expansion meant that there were now subject experts in areas upon which philosophers used to make pronouncements, implicitly or explicitly casting such outpourings of opinion as inadequate. Much as the authority of philosophy was undermined from within, so too was educational authority eroded from without as mass higher education contributed to a softening of the disjunction between educational elite and the population at large. As Baert puts it, “with higher education also comes a growing scepticism towards epistemic and moral authority, an increasing recognition of the fallibility of knowledge and of the existence of alternative perspectives” (pg. 186). The declining acceptability of speaking at such public audiences was compounded by the erosion of the deferential attitudes which had previously characterised the media. Indeed, over time the media came to include subject experts who felt competent challenging the lauded experts.

Baert suggests that social media further intensifies this trend. He recognises that gatekeepers still exist online and that most bloggers have little audience. But nonetheless he argues that “the technology has made a difference, once which surely has further lessened the likelihood of authoritative public intellectuals” (pg. 186-187). In the place of such generalists, we see expert public intellectuals who resemble what Foucault described as the specific intellectual. Such figures “draw on their professional knowledge, whether derived from their research in the social and natural sciences, to engage with wider societal or political issues that go beyond their narrow expertise” (pg. 187). Their capacity to exert an influence rests on “intellect and acquired knowledge, and mastery of the inductive technology (observational skill, statistical methods, lab machinery etc.) to acquire or verify that knowledge” (pg 187-188). Dialogical public intellectuals often draw on the affordances of new technology to “get their message across” and position themselves against those who rely on traditional media, “emphasising how the new technologies permit frequent and intense interaction” (pg. 189). In doing so, they embody a prior trend towards more iterative and dialogical forms of engagement, constructing themselves as learning from their public while the public learn from them.

It’s striking how much less detailed Baert’s description of the latter category is compared to the preceding
two. Indeed the only figure named is Michael Burawoy, in relation to his plea for public sociology rather than his performance of it. This intellectual self-presentation is something which investigation might reveal to be a self-marketing strategy for intellectuals seeking to stake out ground within an increasingly competitive marketplace of ideas, within which social media has removed barriers to entry while also generating a whole new arena of interaction through which to cultivate a relationship with one’s hoped for audience. To be fair to him, Baert perhaps recognises this, stressing that “the situation is often more complex than the bloggers themselves tend to acknowledge” and point out they will often continue to write for newspapers and magazines etc (pg. 189). But how seriously this claim to dialogical interaction should be taken is an empirical question. How much does this interaction shape their views? How much of this interaction do they respond substantively to? How long do they spend each week engaging in such interaction? Without substantive interaction, this dialogical relation is in part imagined, a constructed audience reproduced in the mind and reality through limited interaction with a small subset of it.

My suggestion is that social media is far more hospitable to the conditions of the general intellectual than Baert suggests. The intellectual self-presentation of the dialogical scholar, orientated towards extending their network and cultivating their online audience, represents a strategy conducive to success in the attention economy if they can balance this time-demanding pursuit with the exigencies of their day job. The increasing reliance of journalists, particularly freelancers, on social media for networking and research mean such figures will inevitably be invited to contribute to features and discussions beyond their area of expertise. Even if the dialogic public intellectual has a self-understanding grounded in circumscribed expertise, their digital footprint will inevitably push beyond this and lead others to tempt them still further.

In a way, this post is the latest part of an extended conversation with myself about whether to say ‘yes’ when I get asked to contribute to features on subjects I have opinions about but no expertise. To name some recent examples: selfie culture, conspiracy theories, algorithmic culture, hipsters, the meaning of tolerance. With one exception, I’ve always said ‘no’, largely out of caution. It’s possible there has been a misunderstanding, such that someone infers the existence of a trajectory of research from one blog post on a topic whereas actually that single blog post represents the sum total of my engagement. It’s also possible they’re made in relation to a university affiliation, something which I’m certain is the case with those last minute e-mails explaining the journalist has an imminent deadline and needs an expert quote taking an agreed stance to complete a nearly finished article.

But I suspect something more is going on, in which the price of admission to public platforms has changed from expertise to a capacity for cogency, a quickness in response and the willingness to comment. The invitations are there for generalists emerging from the academy, liable only to grow if they pursue even the most basic strategies of visibility and connection through social media. The rewards are there, in so far as such activity can be plausibly glossed as public engagement potentially generative of impact. The costs potentially faced by generalists are weak from within the academy, liable to be restricted to those who have an extremely high profile and thus counteract the anonymity of abundance or those who inadvertently provoke a controversy with ill-thought out statements on controversial topics that lead them to be held to account. Under such conditions, the reflexivity of the individual intellectual becomes key, something unlikely to change when the academy remains as fragmented as is currently the case.

What it means to be an intellectual is changing in an age of social media and we’ve yet to really get to grips with what this means.

1. http://politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9780745685397
The transformation of academic writing and the challenge of ephemera (2017-05-17 08:00)

What does social media mean for academic writing? Most answers to this question focus on how such platforms might constrain or enable the expression of complex ideas. For instance, we might encounter scepticism that one could express conceptual nuance in 140 characters or an enthusiasm for blogging as offering new ways to explore theoretical questions beyond the confines of the journal article. However these discussions only rarely turn to writing in a more biographical sense, as a recurrent activity which is both personally meaningful and professionally necessary.

Social media is certainly offering us more occasions for writing. The most obvious form this takes is the personal blog, providing one with a platform for exploration whenever we are taken by the feel of an idea worth exploring. However I suspect that many academics who sustain a personal blog do so because it serves a purpose prior to writing, serving as a common-place book or ideas garden. In such cases, the time spent blogging serves as a preparation for writing, even if it is sometimes an oblique one. There is no necessary tension here between blogging and writing, even if sometimes the former can hinder the latter, for instance when the familiarity of the blog draws us away from more formal writing that might not be going well.

What about online writing that doesn’t serve this preparatory function? In the last few weeks, I’ve found myself thinking about the challenge of ephemera increasingly confronting academics. I mean ephemera in the literal sense of “things that exist or are used or enjoyed for only a short time”. Long-established examples include book reviews, newsletter articles and short pieces in magazines. With the growth of social media, we are seeing a rapid expansion in opportunities to produce such ephemera. Multi-author blogs and online magazines will often be sources of invitations to write, as well as offering opportunities for this to qualified parties who are seeking them out. Such writing rarely constitutes much of a commitment in its own terms. One of many reasons I enjoy writing of this sort is that the usual temporal horizon rarely exceeds a few hours work. For instance, it might take a while to read a book for review but not to write the review itself.

To call ephemera a ‘challenge’ may be misleading. In many ways, I remain convinced this is an opportunity, for the enjoyment of intellectual richness and diversity at the level of both individual scholars and scholarly communities. But unlike blogging in the preparatory sense discussed above, it can often take away from time and energy available for ‘real’ writing. The number of opportunities can itself prove problematic, as invitations and inclinations lead to over-commitment in the face of this abundance. For instance, in the next couple of weeks, I’m supposed to write an article for a magazine, a book review for a blog symposium, a blog post for a newspaper and a piece of sociological fiction for a zine. If I’m being realistic, it seems unlikely I’ll complete them all and thus the writing that was chosen rather than invited is likely to fall by the wayside. Though I think it’s a shame that I experience this as in some sense a distraction, despite my enthusiasm for the planned pieces. Much of this is related to journal articles, as things I should be writing but feel little inclination to, leaving it hard not to see a distance from academia as involving a gain rather than a loss of intellectual freedom.

A subsequent conversation made me think back to Richard Rorty’s remark about universities enabling one to “read books and report what one thinks about them”. Is the promise of ephemera a matter of keeping in touch with this aspiration within a university system which militates against its realisation?
Where now for the random probability survey? (2017-05-18 08:00)

Face to face survey fieldwork is widely perceived to be in crisis. Do ever-dwindling response rates signal the end for traditional probability methods, and if so can alternatives such as quota sampling or probability panels take their place? This event explores the options available to research commissioners seeking rigorous findings, and identifies the trade-offs in terms of cost, bias, and timeliness.

Several experts will be sharing their insights:

1. The facts about declining response with Patten Smith, Head of Research Methods Centre at Ipsos MORI and SRA Chair, and colleagues
2. The case for quota sampling with Roger Mortimore, Director of Political Analysis, Ipsos MORI
3. Random probability adaptations with Kirby Swales, Director of the Survey Research Centre at NatCen; Alice Fitzpatrick, Research Director and Joel Williams, Head of Survey Methods, both at Kantar Public
4. The scientific assessment with Patrick Sturgis, Director of the National Centre for Research Methods
5. The clients' perspective with Siobhan Campbell, Head of Central Research Team and Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor at the Department for Transport

The chair will be Ed Dunn, Deputy Director of ONS and Head of Social Survey Division.

Following the event you’re invited to a drinks reception and delegates will also have the option to view the Wellcome Collection galleries which are free of charge and open until 10pm.


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In December 2016, China published a gender specific textbook for boys, aiming to help male pupils understand their gender roles in society. It emphasizes the issue of masculinity and addresses the question of effeminate boys and the feminization of schooling. The text for boys is a product of an ongoing debate on boys' schooling and a crisis of masculinity for boys in China with which that our chapter on 'Re)masculinizing “Suzhi Jiaoyu” (Education for Quality): Aspirational Values of Modernity in Neoliberal China' critically engages. We argue that the media-generated discourse of failing boys' and the suggested accompanying feminization of schooling as a threat to the nation can be read as a strategic move to (re)masculinize suzhi education to prepare boys (and girls) for a future neoliberal-based economy and nation. This contemporary move draws upon a historical understanding of gender by attempting to promote and modernize, through notions of aspiration and competition, the wu (military and physical) aspect of Chinese masculinity (Louie 2002), alongside a wider Confucian traditional patriarchal order, in the contemporary educational system.

With the globalization of education, policy borrowing is a common social practice. For example, Madsen (2006) found that the education ministries of Eritrea, Nepal, and Denmark were embracing a northern hemisphere notion of cultivating academic skills to ensure economic and social development. Blackmore (2000) identifies that this policy borrowing has a major impact on the development of gender equality, as one of the features of neoliberalism is that it is an individualizing process. This neoliberal individualizing process, which draws upon a narrow definition of aspiration (Stahl 2012), also erases social and cultural explanations that address the impact of material, symbolic, and psychic dimensions of wider historical, socio-economic, and institutional forces. Within a Western context, this is often particularly significant in relation to working-class and minority ethnic communities, while in a Chinese context, questions of differential access to schooling, cultural capital, student performativity, inequality, and social justice are particularly significant in relation to students from rural communities, working-class students in the context of an emerging new urban middle class, and the children of internal migrants. Meanwhile, public discourse has created a major anxiety focusing on a boy crisis:

"The fall behind and failure of boy's education will have a major impact on the individual and the society....The quality of boys' health has not only created a shadow in the future for themselves, but also planted a risk for the quality of future citizens and directly affect the nation's security and competitiveness." ("Boy Crisis" 2012)

Examples such as the above narratives illustrate that suzhi education is imagined as a key (re)masculinizing process, in which embodied gendered (boy) subjects must be disciplined in developing their current and future entrepreneurial selves, while girls' and young women's selves are erased. The disconnection of the media-led "boy discourse" from wider gender relations serves to mask this erasure. An important critique of these media scripts is that implicitly they are involved in making a series of reductive moves, including: writing out Chinese historical understandings of masculinity; erasing current Chinese educational research on the intersections of multiple social inequalities; underplaying complex subject positions inhabited by young people as students; and disconnecting the concept of masculinity from gender relations. Perhaps one of the most pernicious effects of these moves is the media's allocation of a minor role to female students, who are dismissed on the basis of an ascribed over-aspirational schooling performance in competitive examinations (too much masculinity), within a major media narrative that focuses on underperforming male students (too little masculinity). We have found that it is necessary to open up space for discussions on educating boys and girls within a context of nuanced understandings of reconfiguring gender relations, as they are played out between the local and global tensions of future shifting geo-political domains. Of particular significance for future research in Chinese schools will be a critical
examination of how the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment can be understood as institutional structures that enable spaces for the formation of masculine and feminine subjectivities, placing students at the center of education.

Adapted from:


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2. https://twitter.com/wesxlin

“I Want To Be a Soccer Player or a Mathematician”: Fifth-Grade Black Boys’ Aspirations at a “Neoliberal” Single-Sex School (2017-05-18 20:05)

By Joseph Derrick Nelson

For over a decade, amid widespread neoliberal education reform in the United States, single-sex schools for boys of color have increased in popularity among urban school districts. The growing interest in this school model is generally due to its ability, as perceived by school professionals and policy makers, to ameliorate challenges associated with the socio-emotional development and school success of Black and Latino boys, particularly boys living neighborhoods with concentrated poverty. Rooted in the social and material conditions of urban environments in the U.S., these single-sex learning contexts are more specifically a response to a set of adverse social and academic outcomes associated with boys and men of color (e.g., homicide and incarceration rates, and high school and college retention). In this chapter, I argue that these challenges and outcomes contributed to the onset of a neoliberal education agenda in the United States.

The threat of high social costs tied to urban poverty, specifically for Black and Latino males, has in fact compelled private foundations, community organizations, and school professionals in the U.S. to demand that federal efforts be made to address their distressing school and life outcomes. Fergus, Noguera, and Martin (2014) contend that two neoliberal education policies at the federal level have greatly influenced the expansion of single-sex education for boys of color. First, in 2002, specific amendments to Title IX (i.e., No Child Left Behind Act) were enacted, which explicitly permitted the establishment of single-sex learning contexts (e.g., schools, classrooms, and programs). The second policy, in 2001, was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which introduced a new academic performance measure entitled Adequately Yearly Progress. This measure, in part, called for public records to document academic performance among distinct subgroups of students (e.g., economically and racially marginalized, students with special needs, and by sex and gender). Together, the data
reports associated with these policy changes revealed the high frequency at which boys of color experience academic failure, and struggle socially and emotionally in school.

A seminal longitudinal study of single-sex schools for boys of color in the U.S. (Fergus, et al., 2014) noted that the expressed mission of these institutions was to enhance the educational opportunities for Black and Latino boys, with direct implications for their school performance and life chances. At the root of their mission lies a belief in supporting boys' understandings of "who they are" or "what they believe" is possible in their lives in contrast to their social and academic outcomes, and oftentimes these particular single-sex schools act on this belief through exploring boys' school and life aspirations. This chapter therefore examines the aspirations of low-income fifth-grade Black boys at a single-sex middle school for boys of color in New York City—one of the grade levels at which Black boys in the U.S. tend to make personal decisions related to their long-term school engagement. Many Black boys, for example, eventually succumb to the rigid stereotypes of Black males in the U.S. (i.e., hyper-aggression, anti-intellectualism, and hyper-sexuality) that restricts their academic identities, aspirations, and overall worldview.

In doing so, Black boys' perceptions of their single-sex education and life aspirations were drawn from 45-60 minute interviews with 20, fifth-grade Black boys at the single-sex middle school (4th-8th grade) for Black and Latino boys in New York City. These in-depth interviews were gleaned from a three-year (2013-2016) ethnography of the school site, which is an independent (private) school for academically talented boys of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Iterative analysis of boys' responses unearthed four distinct categories, ordered by salience: (1) "way of being" or "qualities to possess:" (2) profession or career; (3) desired experiences in life; and (4) high school and university of choice. In the chapter, each category will relay the aspirations mentioned, and make explicit connections to Black boys' identities and child development. The goal of this chapter is to showcase boys' school and life aspirations, and explicate how the U.S. neoliberal education agenda influenced boys' aspirations within a distinct single-sex environment in a large urban city. More importantly, the chapter intends to contribute to a "reimagining of Black boyhood" (Dumas & Nelson, 2016) that provides a counter-narrative rooted in asking boys, "who they are, what they think, and what they desire in their lives" (27), and in order to foremost inform "pedagogical and policy interventions that create spaces for Black boys to construct and experience robust childhoods" (27), as well as challenge disparaging discourse associated with Black boys (and men) in the United States. Adapted from: Alexander, P., (2017) "I Want To Be a Soccer Player or a Mathematician": Fifth-Grade Black Boys' Aspirations at a "Neoliberal" Single-Sex School'[1] In Stahl, G., Nelson, D., & Wallace, D. (Eds.), *Masculinity and Aspiration in an Era of Neoliberal Education: International Perspectives*. Routledge, New York. Joseph Derrick Nelson is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Educational Studies at Swarthmore College and University of Pennsylvania.


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**Public Engagement and Social Media (2017-05-19 08:00)**

There’s a really important piece in the [1]LSE Impact Blog by Philip Moriarty describing his experiences using social media for public engagement. In many ways he has been the embodiment of the engaged academic, driven by a sense of responsibility to communicate scientific knowledge and an enthusiasm for engaging with the public about that knowledge. Not only has he been a prolific blogger and video blogger, he has spent countless hours engaging with these visitors and viewers, producing what he estimates as half a million words of comments and responses in the process. He believed passionately in they importance of this activity, the necessity of academics being willing to directly engage with the public and take advantage of the opportunities for this which social media have opened up.
His reflections on these experiences are essential reading for anyone interested in the future of social media for academics. In retrospect, he believes his efforts achieved virtually nothing. Though there have always been productive exchanges which he cited in the face of scepticism by friends and colleagues about the value of what he was doing, Philip argues that the obstacles to the engagement he pursued have their origin in the platforms themselves. The incentive to build a subscriber base, something which can be enormously profitable on YouTube, incentivises behaviour which has created an environment toxic to the reasoned discussion which public engagement presupposes. To approach it in the open-minded way he did, with a commitment to open debate and a refusal to block or ban, has created all manner of difficulties and his article is an important warning about the difficulties that social media can leave academics exposed to.

While it’s essential that we recognise these dangers, the risk is that it generates a backlash against public engagement through social media. Yet as Philip says, “Productive engagement online is possible”. What's urgently needed is a more nuanced discussion about social media platforms, the opportunities and challenges attached to each, before we advocate public engagement be pursued through them. My recent preoccupation has been on how the way in which we talk about social media, as powerful new ways to get our ideas ‘out there’, can preclude such nuance. If we see social media as helping us scale the walls of the ivory tower, allowing us to form connections with a public that has been kept out by our impenetrable language and paywalled journals, we might get an unpleasant surprise when we encounter disinterest, antipathy or outright hostility in response to our efforts.

This shouldn’t lead us to rethink public engagement, it should lead us to question the assumption that ‘the public’ is present on these platforms waiting for us to engage with them. We need to understand how platforms influence who sees our activity, how they interpret it and how they respond to it. We need to be clear about the particular groups we are trying to engage with, how to develop connections with them and why they will be interested in connecting with us. We need to understand how things can go wrong and we need to develop support mechanisms for those who find themselves in such positions. We need to do this urgently, in order to ensure that the increasing visibility of academic life through social media isn't seized upon to fuel the developing backlash against expertise and experts. This new interface between the university and wider society needs to be carefully managed. There are exciting opportunities here but also profound risks if we fail to meet this challenge.

As one who blogs, tweets and uses FB, this is a very pertinent issue. ‘Public Engagement’ is a laudable aim of course and you are right to raise the assumption that the ‘public’ is present and wants to be engaged. From experience, I can vouch for the ‘echo chamber’ effect and the power of algorithms. I do however have a very small number of people who post on my FB timeline views which are, well, ‘different’. I've recently read about the ‘backfire effect’: "given evidence against their beliefs, people can reject the evidence and believe even more strongly" (Brendan Nyhan and Jason Reifler), and if Jonathan Haidt is correct about moral intuitions and George Lakoff is on 'framing', then we need to learn a set of skills that goes beyond transmitting ‘facts’ through reason and data, beyond explaining/discussing the science or theory. Actually, getting to the ‘discussion’ phase would be great! To what degree are ‘academics' prepared for communicating in this way? I find reflexivity useful, and trying to understand why the other person takes their view...how does my message (which might be fact based) come across? What works in seminars, lectures, tutorials with students who least want to be engaged (in theory at least!) as you know will not wash with for example a white supremacist when discussing gun laws or health inequalities. I know that is an extreme example of an exchange on SM, but it is born of experience.
I wonder if that points to scholarly communication necessarily becoming professionalised e.g. as people get training to learn to deal with backfire effects and to think about framing effects?

Help us forge UK applied sociology (2017-05-19 19:58)

by Nick Fox and Marguerite Regan

For the past 18 months, the British Sociological Association (BSA) group Sociologists outside Academia (SOA) has been focusing on the potential for careers working as applied or practical sociologists, beyond the traditional remits of academia. Sociology is essential not only for understanding the big problems that face society, but also the daily issues that need addressing at work, at home or in the community. We believe sociologists have the concepts, the theories and detailed knowledge of organisations and human interactions that can address such everyday situations.

In the US and elsewhere, sociology has already established a profile for solving these kinds of problems, but much less so in the UK. That’s not to say there aren’t UK sociologists already using their skills and knowledge in applied settings. Some call themselves ‘consulting sociologists’, others run businesses that provide sociological expertise to industry, local government and voluntary organisations. There are also many sociologists working in areas where they bring to bear their knowledge and expertise, even if they don’t have the job title ‘sociologist’. But there is a lack of visibility around this application of sociology outside academia.

Last year an SOA workshop kick-started work on developing a field of applied and practical sociology here in the UK. We considered the kinds of knowledge, skills and models needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public-sector face, and started to map out how careers as an applied sociologist could pan out. Doing this kind of applied sociological work required specific skills to explore how social and cultural factors link individual experience to everyday events. Generic skills were also needed, including reasoning, communication and collaborative working.

SOA now wants to evolve this work further, by developing a curriculum in applied sociology for final year undergraduate students. This curriculum can not only be offered to universities as an option they might develop for their students, but will also be a way to really clarify the knowledge, concepts, and subject-specific and generic skills that an applied sociologist will need to work effectively in non-academic organisations and settings.

We invite applications from sociologists who would like to join an SOA task and finish group to work on this development of an applied sociology curriculum. We conceptualise a six-month programme, in which the group will meet virtually. At the end, we will seek funding for a public launch of our curriculum for applied sociology.

If you are a sociologist who works predominantly in a non-academic setting, but use your sociological skills and knowledge to inform your work, we would like to hear from you. We would also welcome one or two current
undergraduate or master’s students to join the team, to provide input in terms of what is needed educationally in an undergraduate applied sociology curriculum.

Unfortunately, we cannot pay any fees for this work, and we do not have a budget for face-to-face meeting expenses. This will be a labour of love, for those wanting to flex their sociological imaginations, and due credit will be given to all those involved.

Please contact Nick Fox, SOA co-convenor (n.j.fox@sheffield.ac.uk) for more information about the project and details of how to apply. Applications will close on 19 June 2017 and successful applicants will be notified shortly thereafter.

The Politics of Agency (2017-05-20 08:00)

Ever since I was a philosophy student, I’ve been interested in how we conceptualise individuals and groups. The two are connected in my mind because, if groups are composed of individuals, our concept of *individuals* is going to condition our concept of *groups* and vice versa. However discussion at this level of abstraction can seem remote from the real world. In fact this is what led me away from philosophy and into sociology when I encountered it as a masters student. But this wasn’t my rejecting a focus on *concepts* as much as a desire to see how those concepts operate in the world.

I was thinking of these issues again when reading Jana Bacevic’s [*From Class To Identity*, a study of education reforms in former Yugoslavia. How we conceptualise agency is a key concern of the book from the outset at the level of its *object* (claims about groups are a crucial factor in educational reform) and its *explanatory framework* (claims about groups are crucial to explaining the link between education and conflict). For instance "linear, one dimensional or causal explanations" such as "educational discourses -> exclusionary identities -> war" make (inadequate) assumptions about agency while being "hardly helpful in the understanding of the dynamics between education and conflict" (pg 7). Agency is often left unexamined in such processes, particularly when researchers are examining trends at the macro-social level. From pg 9:

Consider, for instance, practices of military recruitment: going into the army (in countries without mandatory conscription) is frequently the choice of people who come from poor, discriminated or otherwise marginalized backgrounds. Knowing the ubiquitous (and at least partially causal) connection between education, income and social status, it is both reasonable and empirically sustainable to assume that these people also happen to have lower educational levels. But do they go to war *because* they are not educated? Or do they go to war *because* they are poor and marginalized, so enlisting may give them an opportunity to earn (legally or illegally) wealth, security, and status they could otherwise not hope to attain?
If we fail to recognize the role of agency in such dynamics, we render the political opaque. From pg 17-18:

In other words, instead of the teleological understanding of the political dynamics of the Western Balkans as progress towards European integration and away from the communist past, this book will aim to bring the political back into the analysis of policymaking. In this context, the notion of “political” is closest to the meaning in which theorists such as Chantal Mouffe (2005, 1993), Ernesto Laclau (1994), and Jacques Ranciere (e.g. 2010) utilize it (cf. Ruitenberg 2011, 98). This means understanding politics as a place of, and for, the challenging, contestation, transformation and deliberation of different ideologies related to what constitutes a good society, who should rule it, and how its benefits should be distributed.

Treating agency in the abstract is not a retreat from the political but rather a precondition for its adequate exploration. Claims about individuals and groups are fundamentally contestable, if not necessarily contested, constituting vectors through which political struggle is pursued. The success of such strategies leads their advocates to leave the stage, with the results of their scheming appearing to be self-evident and incontestable. But these deploy particular understandings of individuals and groups which exercise a causal influence through their embedding in policy agendas and organisational processes. From pg 19:

Rather than a self understood and "natural" part either of dealing with the communist legacy, or of European integration of the region, then, policy agendas and particular decisions are seen as fundamentally political, in the sense in which they actively engage in creating, constructing, defining, organizing, using and mobilizing, or, alternatively, suppressing, containing, manipulating and controlling particular political and group identities.

We face a challenge in distinguishing between these various claims about agency, the social processes through which they are rendered natural and the real properties and powers of agents in virtue of which they are able to pursue or contest such claims. Abstraction is crucial to meeting this challenge because it allows us to distinguish between individual/groups and the claims made about them. In part this is a matter of theoretical literacy, ensuring we have the vocabulary we need in order to draw these distinctions, preventing us from getting tied up in the discursive contest and letting the world which is being contested slip away from us. But it’s also concerned with the reality of the agents themselves, their characteristics and capacities, the contexts that have shaped them and how they’ve shaped those contexts.

1. https://janabacevic.net/

The Liberated Mathematician Stands Up to Gender and Race Inequality in Academia (2017-05-21 08:00)

This week, Dr. Piper Harron, mathematics professor based at the University of Hawaii, and a vocal feminist and supporter of under-represented groups in the academic mathematics community, published a provocative [1]blogpost on the website of the AMS (American Mathematical Society), in which she points out some of the glaring gender and
race inequalities in academia. What do you think happens, when a Black female professor at a 21st century university mentions some of her criticisms of gender inequality? You guessed it. Over the last days, her article has stirred a hurricane of angry backlash - not only from mathematicians but also from wider sources. Piper Harron continues to receive a lot of harassment from alt-right media and trolls.

"Remember that you live in a world where people don’t succeed in a vacuum; most success happens on the backs of others who did not consent. You have no idea how successful you would have been if you were still you, but with an additional marginalization (not white, or not male, or not cis gender, or with a disability, etc).

...

"What can we do? When every role model, when every concept you have, is steeped in sexism, what can you do?"

(read the full blogpost [2]here)

Fight back and support others who do! Sociologists: support mathematicians in their struggle for equality in science!


Grant (2017-05-31 18:25:30)
While I admit there are issues with the demographics in mathematics the reason for the backlash was because of the ‘solution’ she presents. Her solution is white cis gendered males giving up their positions and offers no actual solution to what they should do after the fact. Also she completely throws out the concept of meritocracy and is a racist, and sexist herself. Stating that even if the white candidate was more qualified they should still hire the other person because they’re black and not male.

How can Arendt and Heidegger help us think about distraction? (2017-05-22 08:00)

In his *Debating Humanity*, Daniel Chernilo compares the approaches taken by Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt to the question of thinking. Both began with the philosophical tradition’s opposition between thinking and action: in
this sense it implies withdrawal in some sense, relative to a world of activity. However Heidegger saw this thinking as an activity for the chosen few. From pg 80:

For Heidegger, on the contrary, it is defined in terms of the fundamental realisation that thinking is exclusively to do with thinking itself. Thinking is the professional craft of the philosopher; the slow, painful and authoritative listening to the great minds of the past in a process that leads to understand the one idea that a genuine thinker may be able to develop over the course of a lifetime.

This is a radically slow conception of thinking. So slow as to preclude the vast majority of humanity from truly engaging in it. The human disappears in Heidegger’s conception of thought, as the irrelevant site through which thought occurs. His approach to thinking entailed that we leave out the thinker, as thought itself proceeds on a level which is entirely independent of the one who thinks. In contrast, Arendt casts thinking in a thoroughly quotidian frame as “the internal dialogue of a thinking ego that is directed to objects in the world”, ascribing to this “general anthropological capacity of stop and think” the ability of humans “not only to regain some control over their lives but to creatively envisage something that is new” (pg. 80). It is, as Chernilo puts it, "precisely the human quality of thinking that makes thinking worthy of attention" for Ardent (pg. 81).

What caught my imagination about Chernilo’s account is his contrast between the worldliness of Arendt’s conception of thought in contrast to the worldlessness of Heidegger’s. This distinction is one we could usefully apply to contemporary debates on distraction, distinguishing between what I think are two clear tendencies:

- Constructing ‘distraction’ in terms of a lost past, contrasting the attentional commitment presumed to have once been possible with the fragmentation assumed to define the life of the contemporary mind. What was once slow has become fast, what was once quiet has become loud and human beings (or in some cases only ‘millennials’) are seen to have undergone a process of loss.

- Constructing ‘distraction’ as a practical impediment to the capacity to withdraw from the world so as to reflect on it. Distraction is cashed out in terms of specific impediments to thought, inviting us to consider what withdrawal actually means and the socio-temporal conditions which can facilitate it.

If we reject the former in favour of the latter, it no longer seems plausible to frame ‘distraction’ in epochal terms. Perhaps more importantly, we can begin to explore the socio-temporal and socio-technical conditions within which we ‘stop and think’, as well as how we can individually and collectively exercise an influence over them. We must insist on worldliness in how we characterise the life of the mind. Or at the very least I should finally get round to reading [1] this book I’ve intended to for years.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=98_1qCvDoAQ&source=gbs_navlinks_s

Critical Perspectives in the Age of Big Data (2017-05-22 20:29)

Call for Papers ECREA Symposium Digital Democracy: Critical Perspectives in the Age of Big Data
The coordinates of democracy, civic engagement and political participation are being fundamentally reconfigured in the context of digital media, Big Data and algorithmic culture, and so too are the media industries. This joint conference of the ECREA Communication and Democracy and Media Industries and Cultural Production Sections provides the opportunity to analyse and assess these changes.

The constant need to measure and capture our behavior and attitudes has consequences for our political agency and subjectivities. What do big data and algorithmic culture mean in the context of democratic participation and engagement? What are the consequences of ubiquitous surveillance, preemptive policing and social bots for our understanding of democracy and exercise of civic rights? How do current discussions of political agency in the digital age compare to previous moments of disruption in terms of the introduction of media technologies?

Big data and issues related to algorithmic governance have become a major topic of enquiry in the context of media industries as well. ‘Legacy media’ are trying to respond by integrating new digital services with their existing ones and new data-driven journalistic and media production practices emerge. This presents policy challenges, as, for example, public service media need to adapt to a situation in which data is increasingly commercialized. There are implications too for media workers in this new moment. In this context, we wish to explore issues related to the integration of Big Data and the media industries as well as online production, creativity and digital labour.

During this section conference, we aim to engage with questions concerning datafication, media industries and (digital) democracy through addressing topics such as (but not limited to):

- Political subjectivities and political agency in the age of Big Data
- Political consequences of storing, processing and organizing of data
- Civic engagement and political participation in times of Big Data
- Surveillance and preemptive policing
- Materiality and environmental issues of Big Data and algorithmic culture
- New actors and discourses in the context of datafication
- Democratic potential of Big Data and algorithmic culture
• Algorithmic taste management in the media industries
• Archives and archiving of cultural production and civic engagement
• Media work and labour in datafied media industries
• Data Journalism

A YECREA workshop on "Digital methods for studying algorithms: complicating the socio-technical relation" facilitated by Annette Markham will be arranged for doctoral students, post-docs and early career scholars. The workshop will take place in the afternoon of the 9th November. For more details please check [1]www.sh.se/bigdata

Submission details

Please submit a 300-word abstract for individual proposals

Panel proposals should include a 300-word panel rationale plus individual 200 word abstracts from a minimum of four speakers.

All abstracts for individual as well as panel proposals should be submitted through: [2]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ecreadigdem2017

Deadline for submission is 1 June 2017. Notifications of acceptance will be issued by 15 August 2017.

Registration and Fees

Early bird registration €50 (until 1 September 2017)

Early bird reduced student fee €30 (until 1 September)

Full fees €75

Reduced student fee €40

Organising Committee:

Göran Bolin, Hanne Bruun, David Hesmondhalgh, Anne Kaun, Maria Michalis, Maria Kyriakidou, Fredrik Stiernstedt, Julie Uldam, Julia Velkova

1. [http://www.sh.se/bigdata](http://www.sh.se/bigdata)
2. [https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ecreadigdem2017](https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=ecreadigdem2017)

Undisciplined Methods at the University of Brighton (2017-05-22 20:30)

Come and join us down by the seaside for two days of methodical undisciplining.
31st May – 1st June at the University of Brighton. We will be investigating alternative ways of creating and understanding with words, images and bodies through workshops and other interventions in the company of artists, performers and academics. There will also be ample time for participants to share and contribute, including a scratch night on the evening of the 31st of May followed by live performances. We have some wonderful contributors, for more information and programme, please visit: [1]http://bit.ly/undisciplinedevent The event is FREE to attend and lunch and refreshments will be provided on both days, but places are limited, please register to secure your place: [2]http://shop.brighton.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/life-health-physical-sciences/events/undisciplined-methods-31-may-to-1-june-2017

We are really pleased to have the following contributors confirmed.

Prof Harriet Hawkins (professor in Geohumanities at Royal Holloway)

Sarah Eliza Kelly (poet, paper artist and PhD student at the Royal College of Art)

Sarah Grange (multi-disciplinary artist)

Miriam Lorenzo (practitioner in performing arts and PhD student at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos)

Dr Helen Johnson (poet and Senior Lecturer at the University of Brighton)

Dr Philippa Lyon (convenor of the Drawing Research Interest Group at the University of Brighton)

Dr Matt Rudkin (University of Brighton)

Organised with support from TECHNE and the University of Brighton Centre for Research in Spatial, Environmental and Cultural Politics.


Do you want your research to produce more impact? (2017-05-22 20:58)
Do you want your research to produce more impact? Many researchers are excited about the potential social media offers for generating impact but with 500 million tweets per day, 3 million blog posts per day and over a billion websites they face an obvious challenge: how do you ensure you are heard above the din? How can you use social media effectively without spending all your time online? How can you use social media as part of a multi-faceted and cost-effective impact strategy?

This workshop offers a practical introduction to these challenges, exploring how to use social media to engage with groups beyond the academy and ensure the impact of research. The session will include an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

At the end of the day, participants will have learnt about the opportunities and challenges posed by social media for researcher impact, as well as having designed a bespoke impact strategy relevant to their own projects. Participants also have the option of purchasing five hours of coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.

1. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698)
What will Macron be like in government? (2017-05-23 08:00)

I happened to be reading this page of Yanis Varoufakis' political memoir a few moments before Macron’s near certain victory was announced. From loc 3398:

Emmanuel Macron listened actively and engaged directly, his eyes radiant and ready to display his approval or disagreement. The fact that he had good English and a grasp of macroeconomics as well meant we were soon on the same page regarding Europe’s need for a genuine investment programme that would put its trillions of idle savings to work for the collective good. From my first meeting with him, I regretted dearly that it was Sapin who represented France in the Eurogroup and not Macron. Had they swapped roles, things might have ended up differently.

From loc 4308:

only one Frenchman was lending moral support, Emmanuel Macron, the French economy minister. Having no seat in the Eurogroup himself, he had called to wish me well just as I was stepping into the meeting. During the negotiations over the communiqué he sent me regular requests for updates. What was my feeling? How was the meeting going? I replied that I was prepared to bend over backwards to make a decent communiqué possible. 'The first draft was appalling, let’s hope that they will not prove ridiculously stubborn,’ I texted him. At 10.43 Emmanuel responded, advising me to keep cool and seek a compromise but only if they moved in our direction. At 11.02 I texted back, 'They are pushing us out of the door ... They wanted to roll me into a communiqué that not even Samaras would have signed.'

Elections cannot be allowed to change economic policy (2017-05-24 08:00)

What does it mean for policy to be insulated from politics? That’s the question we ultimately confront when investigating the putative depoliticisation of the economy. Matters which should be publicly resolved, through organised processes of contestation, instead get decided privately. We can cite examples of such transitions, consider whether they embody a broader tendency and offer explanations which account for this direction of travel.

However I’ve often wondered about the micro-social aspects of such a transition, specifically how policy makers make sense of this depoliticisation. Is it a naked power grab? Is it a response to the vagaries of the electorate? Is it an attempt to address issues of socio-economic change which are seen as being impossible to raise with the public? Yanis Varoufakis offers a partial answer to these questions in his gripping accounts of Eurogroup negotiations in his political memoir Adults In The Rooms. From loc 4202
As he spoke, Schäuble directed a piercing look at Sapin. ‘Elections cannot be allowed to change economic policy,’ he began. Greece had obligations that could not be reconsidered until the Greek programme had been completed, as per the agreements between my predecessors and the troika. The fact that the Greek programme could not be completed was apparently of no concern to him. What startled me more than Wolfgang Schäuble’s belief that elections are irrelevant was his total lack of compunction in admitting to this view. His reasoning was simple: if every time one of the nineteen member states changed government the Eurogroup was forced to go back to the drawing board, then its overall economic policies would be derailed. Of course he had a point: democracy had indeed died the moment the Eurogroup acquired the authority to dictate economic policy to member states without anything resembling federal democratic sovereignty.


A conversation with Dave Elder-Vass about the Digital Economy (2017-05-25 08:00)

In this podcast I talk to Dave Elder-Vass about his new book, Profit and Gift in the Digital Economy. Find out more about his research [1]here.

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/321606487" params="auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false &visual=true" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" /]

1. http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/dave-elder-vass/

Special Issue on Computational Propaganda and Political Big Data (2017-05-26 08:00)

Call for Papers: Special Issue on Computational Propaganda and Political Big Data

We welcome manuscripts from scholars across the social and computer sciences, and are particularly interested in research from teams of authors from both domains of inquiry. Please submit your papers online to our web-based manuscript submission and peer-review at [1]www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big[2]http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big.


Computational propaganda—the use of information technologies for political purposes—is on the rise. Many different kinds of political actors use a wide range of computational systems, social media platforms, and big data
analytics to understand and manipulate public opinion. The political use of algorithms over platforms like Twitter and Facebook has received much journalistic attention, but it can be difficult to relate the dissemination of content over social networks to changes in public opinion or voter preference. The firms behind these platforms, however, increasingly acknowledge that politically motivated algorithms and automation can have deleterious outcomes for public life. How does big data get used for political purposes? Can the behavioural impact of politically-motivated big data manipulation be measured? How does the structure, function or affordances of computational propaganda vary across platforms, issue areas, or country cases?

This Big Data special issue on Computational Propaganda and Political Big Data, scheduled for publication in December 2017, aims to advance our understanding of how the Internet can be used to spread propaganda, engage with citizens, and influence political outcomes. We welcome submissions that utilize big data or engage with methodological, theoretical, practical, and ethical issues associated with politicized use of big data. The special issue seeks to describe and discuss:

- the effects of computational propaganda, automated social actors and bots on Internet platforms, Internet users and political processes.
- measurement of the distribution and impact of fake news;
- linking, sharing, and citation structures across large numbers of voters or supporters;
- the political economy of big data mining;
- the political inferences that can be made by reverse engineering de-personalized data, analysing relational data, or assembling shadow profiles on people not represented in political data;
- the path from exposure to computational propaganda to behavioural change;
- the use of the drones, smart city sensor networks, the Internet of Things or proprietary device networks for gathering politically valuable big data.

The editors also seek research on the computationally creative ways of mitigating the impact of computational propaganda: alert systems for identifying algorithmically-based political manipulation or high levels of automation over device networks and social media platforms; big data driven systems for source verification or fact checking that might raise trust in computing; ways of detecting the origins of manipulative content on massive social network platforms.

The deadline for manuscript submission is June 1, 2017. We welcome manuscripts from scholars across the social and computer sciences, and are particularly interested in research from teams of authors from both domains of inquiry. Please submit your papers online to our web-based manuscript submission and peer-review at [4]www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big<; [5]http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big>.

1. [http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big](http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big)
2. [http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big](http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big)
3. [http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/2017/01/17/call-for-papers-special-issue-on-computational-propaganda-and-political-big-data/](http://comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/2017/01/17/call-for-papers-special-issue-on-computational-propaganda-and-political-big-data/)
4. [http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big](http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big)
5. [http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big](http://www.liebertpub.com/manuscript/big)
I serve on the editorial board of several journals. In one such journal, the custom is to circulate all the articles that passed the external review process so that the board can officially give its approval for publication. We get to see the final version, the reviewers’ reports and whatever additional statement the author provided in explaining whatever revisions were made. Usually this is little more than a ritual that marks the board’s taking collective ownership for what is published in the journal.

In one recent case, I remarked of an accepted piece that it could have been written thirty years ago – not because of the references (which were up to date) or the argument (which was at the relevant level of technicality and did not miss out any recent relevant data) – but simply because I seemed to recall that the article’s argument was being made thirty years ago, albeit with different references. Sure enough, one of the my fellow board members whipped out an article written thirty years ago, and even published in the same journal, that fit the bill!

Nevertheless, it looks like we will publish the newer piece because it has successfully passed through the peer review process, and those ‘peers’ are supposedly closer to the article’s topic than we sitting on the editorial board.

So what is going on here?

At one level it looks like a failure to take the full measure of past knowledge prior to embarking on new inquiries. [1]This is how I have written about the phenomenon in defence of more epistemically scrupulous literature reviews. But on further reflection, this apparent collective amnesia on the part of academic knowledge producers, whereby we continue to reinvent the wheel, may be based on an empirically false assumption, namely, that academic knowledge production is cumulative and progressive. On the other hand, if we shifted to a more ‘steady state’ model of knowledge production, then the phenomenon becomes one of a (intergenerational) transfer of ownership over a domain of inquiry from one network of people to another network of people, as reflected in the replacement of key authors and an associated shift in their citation patterns. The knowledge domain itself is settled, but it requires the regular reproduction of the settlement, which is to say, a reproduction of the relevant positons and oppositions as well as standard resolutions.

In the more theoretical reaches of the humanities and social sciences, this may even be the standard mode of academic knowledge production, a mark of ‘scholasticism’. To be sure, one can imagine some intellectually interesting variants. In particular, the transfer of intellectual ownership may occur not through an act of conscious succession (e.g. by students replacing teachers) but through one research network seizing ownership of a field that had been previously defined by another research network. (Continental philosophers often complain about analytic philosophers in this manner.)

I’m still against the phenomenon I’m describing, but at least I think I now understand it better.

1. http://items.ssrc.org/what-is-the-problem-for-which-interdisciplinarity-is-the-solution/
The causal powers of media (2017-05-27 08:00)

In The Mediated Construction of Social Reality, Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp take issue with the primacy of face-to-face interaction that has so often been assumed within social thought. Our embodied interaction is taken to be primary, often assumed to be unmediated, with the mediation of interaction through technology seen as additional to it. From loc 697:

Berger and Luckmann, as was common in sociology for a long time, wrote as if there is first face-to-face 'everyday life' and then there is a supplement: what we do, technologically, to mediate that everyday life. This was hardly true through most of human history, at least since the discovery of writing, but today it would simply be bizarre to ignore how the reality of everyday life is inseparably linked with media, when supermarket checkouts read our credit cards with our personal data, when our everyday communication happens to a high degree via mobile devices, platforms and interactive systems, and when children learn to play through the means of internet-connected tablets. Under these circumstances it makes no sense at all to think of everyday reality as a 'pure experience' that can be contrasted with a (somehow secondary) 'mediated experience'. Everyday reality, from the beginning, is in many respects mediated, which means that the complex social world of interconnections constructed from everyday life's foundations is media-tized.

Much rests on how we conceptualise face-to-face interaction. If we demarcate it as a sphere of interaction which is in some sense given, it obscures the role of media in shaping such interactions and how these interactions in turn contribute to the shaping of media. As they write on loc 632:

We cannot analyse the social world via a simple division between 'pure' face-to-face communication and a separate presentation of the world to us 'through' media. Many of the communicative practices by which we construct our social world are media-related ones. Our daily communication comprises much more than direct face-to-face communication: mediated communication –by television, phones, platforms, apps, etc. –is interwoven with our face-to-face communication in manifold ways. Our face-to-face interaction is continuously interwoven with media-related practices: while we talk to someone, we might check something on our mobile phones, get text messages, refer to various media contents.

The challenge lies in conceptualising such interweaving. If we see interaction as constituted through its mediation, it becomes difficult to unpick how particular interactions might be shaped in particular ways by particular media. This is why I think a causal powers approach to media could be so valuable, even if it's currently rather underdeveloped. This is what I think Couldry and Hepp do, albeit using a different terminology, in their analysis of longer term processes of mediatization. Each of these four changes, discussed on loc 918, make specific claims about how the causal powers of media facilitate the emergence of new dynamics in face-to-face interaction:

But, unimaginably for Schutz or anyone writing up to the 1980s, even our mediated communication can have enhancements which make them closer in specific responses to the face-to-face communication; for instance, video calls with simultaneous text messaging and email stream, enabling two parties to share simultaneous focused attention on the same external communicative stream, that is, an email attachment
or website (contrast the simple phone call). A second deepening is the embedding not just of particular communicative streams into everyday life, but of the inputs from past communications (continuous streams of information from both Mitwelt and Umwelt): think of the feedback loop that operates when, while communicating with somebody else face to face, we are also checking information on earlier interactions on our smartphone, involving other communication partners. We are involved in a ‘multi-level’ construction of the social world, acting on various ‘levels’ of communication at the same time. Third, and also unimaginable to Schutz, is the already discussed continuous availability of media as a current resource in face-to-face communication, from showing pictures on one’s digital device to the use of video even in the most intimate of settings. And fourth, we are living through an integration of all these three shifts into the habits and norms of all communicative behaviour, both face to face and mediated. Increasingly we expect that our comments and gestures can be mediated for future commentary, circulation, etc., unless, that is, we insist they should not be re-circulated (Tomlinson, 2007, pp. 94–123).

Making an Impact with Social Media (2017-05-28 08:00)

Many researchers are excited about the potential social media offers for making an impact with their work. However 500 million tweets per day, 3 million blog posts per day and over a billion websites poses an obvious...
challenge: how can you ensure you are heard above the din? How can social media be used by busy researchers in an effective and efficient way?

This workshop offers a practical introduction to these challenges, exploring how to use social media to engage with groups beyond the academy and ensure the impact of research. The session will include an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

At the end of the day, participants will have learnt about the opportunities and challenges posed by social media for researcher impact, as well as having designed a bespoke impact strategy relevant to their own projects. Participants also have the option of purchasing five hours of coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.

Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.


A conversation with Daniel Chernilo about Philosophical Sociology (2017-05-29 08:00)

In this podcast I talk to Daniel Chernilo about philosophical sociology. This is a subject that has long fascinated me as someone who moved from philosophy to sociology as a postgraduate. Find out more in his [1]new book.

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1. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/debating-humanity/FFC72D8410704B44DFE5810B44778EC0
Social media offers exciting opportunities for generating impact and communicating research beyond the academy. However, 500 million tweets and 3 million blog posts that are generated in a single day, as well as over a billion websites, pose an obvious challenge: how do you ensure you are heard above the din? How can you help researchers use social media effectively? How can you use social media as part of a multi-faceted and cost-effective impact strategy?

Aimed at research managers, university leaders, and project administrators, this workshop offers a practical introduction to using social media to engage with groups beyond the academy in a way that generates lasting impact. The session includes an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

Each participant will have the opportunity to learn about the potential of social media in the current research funding environment, as well as draft an impact strategy relevant to their own projects. In addition to this, participants also have the option to purchase five hours of additional coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.


Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.

1. [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698)
CfP: Online Othering: Exploring the Dark Side of the Web (2017-05-29 15:07)

Call for Papers – Edited Collection

**Online Othering: Exploring the Dark Side of the Web**

Editors:

Dr Karen Lumsden (Loughborough University) and Dr Emily Harmer (University of Liverpool)

The Internet plays a vital role in many aspects of our social, political and cultural lives and in the early days of its expansion there was much enthusiasm for its potentially transformative role in providing a space for individuals to construct their identities, communicate with others and share ideas and concerns. A perhaps unanticipated consequence of these developments has been the extent to which some individuals and groups have used this freedom to engage in hateful or discriminatory communicative practices online in these loosely regulated spaces, often hiding behind the cloak of anonymity. For instance, women on Twitter and in the public eye have found themselves subject to online harassment, sexism and trolling, while the aftermath of the Brexit vote saw in a rise in reports of hate speech including racism, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism, in both online and offline contexts.

This edited collection explores the othering and discrimination propagated and encountered by individuals online and in social media contexts and cultures. It problematizes and analyses the dichotomy presented between real and virtual worlds (and spaces) by exploring the motivations behind certain offending and othering behaviours, and the impact this has on the targets of online abuse and hate speech. This includes the extent to which online othering constitutes a new phenomenon and how the motivations for committing forms of cyber-abuse, cyber-hate, and othering relate to the expression of these attitudes and behaviours in the offline context.

It explores the extent to which forms of information and communication technologies facilitate, exacerbate, and/or promote, the enactment of traditional offline offences (such as domestic abuse and stalking). Finally, the collection addresses the role of the police and other agencies in terms of their interventions, and the regulation and governance of virtual space(s).

The edited collection is an output from a one-day conference on **Online Othering** hosted at Loughborough University. We are seeking additional contributions to the volume from scholars and researchers working in disciplines such as sociology, communication and media studies, criminology, political studies and/or gender studies.

Contributions should address the ways in which various groups and identities are subjected to othering in online environments. This can include news websites, social media platforms (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc.), blogs, and forums. We are also interested in contributions which explore othering across multiple contexts.
Potential topics can include, but are not limited to:

- Trolling and gendered online abuse/harassment;
- Cyber-bullying or cyber-stalking;
- Hate crime/speech online;
- Homophobia and/or transphobia;
- Online representations of disability;
- Class bigotry;
- Racism, Islamophobia, or anti-Semitism;
- Sexting and/or revenge pornography;
- Brexit, Trumpism and the rise of the ‘alt-right’.

The edited collection proposal is to be submitted to Palgrave as part of their Cyber-Crime series by Autumn 2017. For accepted submissions, the finalised chapters will need to be received by the end of September 2018.

Submissions:

Interested contributors should email a title, abstract (250 words) and biography (100 words) to both Karen Lumsden [1] K.Lumsden@lboro.ac.uk and Emily Harmer [2] E.Harmer@liverpool.ac.uk by 31 August 2017. Authors will be informed of decisions by 30 September 2017.

1. mailto:K.Lumsden@lboro.ac.uk
2. mailto:E.Harmer@liverpool.ac.uk
First Cambridge summer school in social theory
University of Cambridge, Department of Sociology, 4-6 September 2017
Conveners: Jana Bacevic (University of Cambridge) and Mark Carrigan (The Sociological Review)

Passionate about social theory?

Want to learn more about how it is created?

Interested in seeing theory being made, rather than just read or applied?

Apply to the first Cambridge Summer School in Social Theory, “The Practice of Theory”. Hosted by the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge, the school aims to bring together researchers interested in the practice of social theory and its relationship with reading, writing, and teaching in the social sciences.

We invite applications from early career researchers (PhD students or postgraduates) involved in theoretical work within or independently of their theses.

This summer school involves graduate students and early-career researchers in a series of thematic sessions that address different aspects of social theory (writing, teaching, translating, presenting, engaging), and gives them an opportunity to develop outputs and interactive tools that can be applied to a variety of contexts – from theses and articles, to teaching and public engagement. Besides an enhanced understanding of social theory, the school aims to equip participants with ideas, as well as practical skills, for applying this knowledge in communication with both academic and non-academic audiences.

The participation fee for the school is 75 GBP (this covers teaching materials, coffee and tea breaks, and lunch on 4 and 5 September). Please note that, in order to secure their place, selected participants will be asked to register and pay the participation fee in full via online transfer by 15 July 2017. We regret that we are not able to offer reimbursements (except in outstanding circumstances) nor guarantee your place if you do not register by this date.
Please contact jb906@cam.ac.uk and mark@markcarrigan.net if you have any questions. We'll be releasing the full programme in the near future and we'll be in a position to advise successful applicants on affordable accommodation in the area.

Please complete your application by June 20th 2017. We'll confirm the success of your application by July 1st.

Apply here: [1]https://goo.gl/forms/CBh5RFTCGEi8rf2L2

1. https://goo.gl/forms/CBh5RFTCGEi8rf2L2

What's the difference between academia and politics? (2017-05-30 08:00)

In his wonderful memoir, *Adults In The Room*, Yanis Varoufakis reflects on the frustrations of politics and how they compare to academia. From loc 5504:

Possibly because of my academic background, this was the Brussels experience I least expected and found most frustrating. In academia one gets used to having one's thesis torn apart, sometimes with little decorum; what one never experiences is dead silence, a refusal to engage, a pretence that no thesis has been put forward at all. At a party when you find yourself stuck with a self-centred bore who says what they want to say irrespective of your contribution to the conversation, you can take your glass and disappear to some distant corner of the room. But when your country's recovery depends on the ongoing conversation, when there is no other corner of the room to retreat to, irritation can turn into despair –or fury if you grasp what is really going on: a tactic whose purpose is to nullify anything that is inimical to the troika's power.

I found it fascinating to read this. Since encountering [1]this paper by Richard French a few years ago, I've been interested in the implicit conceptions of politics which animate the publicly-orientated activity of academics. How do they think power works? How do they think problems are solved? How do they think challenges are negotiated? It seems as if Varoufakis's intellectual interests (particularly game theory and political economy) left him well attuned to the dynamics of power but his nostalgia for academia certainly resonates with what French argues here:

Many academics misunderstand public life and the conditions under which policy is made. This article examines misconceptions in three major academic traditions—policy as science (e.g., 'evidence-based policy'), normative political theory, and the mini-public school of deliberative democracy—and argues that the practical implications of each of these traditions are limited by their partial, shallow and etiolated vision of politics. Three constitutive features of public life, competition, publicity and uncertainty, compromise the potential of these traditions to affect in any fundamental way the practice of politics. Dissatisfaction with real existing democracy is not the consequence of some intellectual or moral failure uniquely characteristic of the persona publica, and attempts to reform it are misdirected to the extent that they imagine a better public life modeled on academic ideals.

A BSA Sociology of Education Study Group One-Day Conference in association with the Faculty of Education, Canterbury Christ Church University.

5 July 2017

At
Canterbury Christ Church University, UK

[1]PROGRAMME

This one-day conference, supported by the BSA’s Education Study Group, focuses on current research in the area of white working-class youth’s social mobility, aspirations and education. The conference will explore – and welcomes paper submissions related to - a range of questions, including:

- What are the aspirations of white working-class youth?
- How do educational institutions and practices define, understand and support these?
- What are the perceptions and lived experiences of white working-class youth within education, and how are these shaped by notions of place within and across urban, rural and coastal contexts?
Keynote speakers:

- Dr Nicola Ingram (Lancaster University); and
- Dr Garth Stahl (University of South Australia)

The conference will explore – and welcomes paper submissions related to - a range of questions, including: What are the aspirations of white working-class youth? How do educational institutions and practices define, understand and support these? What are the perceptions and lived experiences of white working-class youth within education, and how are these shaped by notions of place within and across urban, rural and coastal contexts?

We welcome papers from researchers from across the career stage and located in a diverse range of fields. To present, please send an abstract (up to 250 words with your email and institutional affiliation) in Word format to Andrew.Peterson@canterbury.ac.uk. There will be a small registration fee of £55 for attendance (reduced rate of £40 for BSA members). This conference accepts papers in English only.

1. [https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24337/education_prog_july_050717.pdf](https://www.britsoc.co.uk/media/24337/education_prog_july_050717.pdf)

“Gotta get that laziness out of me”: Negotiating masculine aspirational subjectivities in the transition from school to university in Australia (2017-05-30 14:15)

by Sue Nichols and Garth Stahl

Aspiration is centrally concerned with becoming, and inherently frames the present in terms of the future desired self. The moment at which a young person graduates from school is a nexus point for aspirational narratives. Graduation brings to fruition a goal that was aspired to – the attainment of a secondary school qualification – and at the same time makes not only possible, but necessary, new aspirations. The focus of our study is on the experiences in the post-school year of a cohort of 16 young men living in Australia. The post-school year is the very process of disentangling the self from one of society’s strongest institutions (the school), as well as the learner identities associated with it, which is of interest to us and contributes to our understanding of the post-school year as a space in which different aspirations become possible.

Aspirations, self-making and higher education in the context of neoliberalism

In current neoliberal times, aspirations are constituted according to an ‘ideology of performocracy’ whereby performativity is grounded in a market ideology ‘where it is a winning performance that counts’ and where the daily goal is to “achieve a competitive advantage, whether for individuals in the competition for credentials, jobs, or income” (Brown, 2013, p. 687). Individualism is expressed in terms of a ‘moral system’ (Ball and Olmedo, 2012, p. 5096)
where a lack of success in exploiting such opportunities is constituted as a personal failure rather than a failing of the state (Francis, 2006, p. 191).

**The Life After School Project**

What makes the study of gendered aspirations difficult in the current context is the alignment between the neoliberal discourse of aspiration, and a modernist discourse of gender equity. The former emphasizes individual achievement rather than group membership, and the latter represents the current times as the culmination of progress towards a state of equality between women and men. Both are progress narratives. Gender is implicitly woven into the official discourse of university aspiration through its targeting of specific groups who are seen as representing untapped potential in the population. Amongst this group of 'potential aspirees', young men from working-class backgrounds figure largely.

The *Life After School Project*, funded by the Hawke Research Institute, was a longitudinal multiple-case design study, which followed 16 young men across their first post-school year. Participants were recruited from three high schools (two co-ed and one single-sex) and, while the majority was enrolled at the University of South Australia, there were representatives of all three of the major local universities in the cohort. The cohort included young men from a range of cultural backgrounds including Anglo-European, Asian and Middle-Eastern. Amongst the group were those whose parents had attended university as well as some who were the first in their family to attend higher education.

A salient theme in our research on localized Australian masculinities in relation to aspirations was the notion of egalitarianism. Egalitarianism is defined through a disposition toward 'fitting in' and the Australian national meritocratic rhetoric of a 'fair go' where no one is better than anyone else. This is represented in an easy-going nature of going with the flow, being open, waiting to see what happens, not stressing about it, comparing self with others who take things more seriously. As our participants navigate the shift from high school to university, we consider how adhering to an egalitarian disposition is interwoven with the process of renovating their identities.

In understanding Australian masculinities and relation to aspirations we critically consider how presenting an egalitarian – or 'easy-going' subjectivity – plays role in negotiating aspiration, especially aspirations that are neoliberal. As our participants navigate the shift from high school to university, adhering to and disengaging from an egalitarian disposition is interwoven with the process of renovating their identities. In the *Life After School Project* we see a learner identity responding to pressures and undergoing renovation through a process of transition. Our participants are required to manage a situation in which aspects of the 'easy-going' high school identity may not translate easily into a university context which emphasizes individual responsibility. It would appear full abandonment of the 'easy-going' identity would have negative consequences not only for their learner identities, but also their masculine identity formation.

Blog adapted from:


**Sue Nichols** is an Associate Professor in Education at University of South Australia. Twitter: ([2]@suemarynichols). **Garth Stahl** is a Senior Lecturer in Education at University of South Australia. Twitter: ([3]@GarthStahl).
These are particular versions of 'aspiration' that are tailored and performed (cf. Nichols and Stahl, 2017; Goffman, 1956), reducing the messiness of the future into sound-bytes that are often singular, [...]
their social position within gendered, classed, and racialized structures. Therefore, we propose two moves in order to think and rethink masculinities in neoliberal times:

- Embracing intersectional approaches to researching boys’ engagement with education: This means paying attention to how the interplay between social class, gender and ethnicity shape boys’ identities as well as their actual opportunities. We argue that in order to grasp young people’s identity making fully we tease out how neoliberal policies shape and reconfigure constellations of gender, social class, and ethnicity.

- Sensitivity towards everyday cultural practices in reference to how aspirations are shaped, negotiated, and resisted. This means building on existing research which examines the ways in which boys understand and react to the neo-liberal demand to pursue individualized notions of ‘success’. Such an approach would examine how boys navigate potential tensions between their preferences and dominant discourses in imagining their future lives and their actions in everyday educational situations.

Such theorizations allow us to turn our attention to agency, contestation, and resistance, and, perhaps more importantly, unearth a wider field of potentialities in thinking about young people’s future lives. This appears not only important in relation to researching young men’s aspirations in neo-liberal times, but also for developing pedagogical approaches that support young people in developing their future imaginaries.

Blog adapted from:


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2. https://twitter.com/garthstahl

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By Derron O. Wallace
In post-Brexit Britain, who considers the impact of the aspiration agenda on ethnic minority young people – particularly Black boys? What is the role of Black boys in building the ‘aspiration nation’? Better still, what is the role of the ‘aspiration nation’ in building them? In my book chapter, ‘Aspiration Anxieties: Developing Middle Class Masculinities among Black African Boys in London’, I explore these and related questions, noting the complex influences of migration and motherhood on the formation of Black African boys aspirations. The findings suggest that the transmission of neoliberal logics of aspirations across multiple social institutions can inspire “aspiration anxieties” – what I characterize as an unyielding tension between desire for educational advancement and structural disadvantage, between optimism about occupational development and limited work opportunities, between long-held dreams of social mobility and stalled upward mobility.

It is crucial that we consider future of Black African boys in British society. The most recent British census confirms that for the first time in recent British history, Black Africans outnumber their Black Caribbean counterparts. While immigration from the Caribbean has slowed to a trickle, the movement of economic migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe has increased considerably. But Black African migration is not only having an impact on wider British society; it is informing British school as well. Whereas Black Africans accounted for 1.7 % of the primary and secondary school populations (ages 5-16) in 2003, they were noted as 3.3 % of the school population in 2013. With the demographic shift in Britain’s Black population comes the increasing cultural influence of Black Africans—in schools, in neighbourhoods, in civil society institutions and the wider society. Yet, studies of Black Africans immigrants in Britain—and Black African boys in particular—remain sparse. The chapter I provide in the anthology, Masculinity and Aspiration in the Era of Neoliberal Education: International Perspectives, adds to the literature and spotlights the complex formulations of aspiration.

Through the ongoing influence of their immigrant mothers, the participants highlighted in the chapter draw on their aspirations as strained resources for the transformations of three sites—the self, the nation and the homeland. Firstly, they sought to develop themselves as middle class men, earning admission to Russell Group universities, securing leadership positions in corporate and civil society, and privileging the institution of marriage as a marker of status and stability. Secondly, they wished to contribute to the economic and moral character of the nation as ‘worthy migrants’—avoiding ‘the dole’ and becoming men of industry to justify their presence in the nation as a credit to the nation, not a liability. Lastly, despite hardships endured during the ‘Great Recession’ and Britain’s prolonged austerity measures, they desired to aid in the transformation of their homelands by providing strong financial support to families overseas.

These aspirations come at a cost. Participants encounter significant psycho-social burdens, or what I refer to as aspiration anxieties, when they realize that the opportunity structures of British society do not privilege their aspirations as necessary for the future of the nation. They wrestle with their limited capacity to pursue their dreams and their mothers’, and internalize such shortcomings, as a personal problem, not a public issue. When participants realize how institutional racism influences university enrolment at places like Oxford and Cambridge, they grapple with abandoning or amending their aspirations. However, the pressure of their mothers’ aspirations pushes them to declare unrealistic aspirations even if they induce considerable stress.

It would be foolhardy to suggest that Black African boys are the only ones who encounter aspiration anxieties. Multiple young people, from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, struggle with aspiration anxieties. Yet, there is very little attention devoted to understanding the challenges that prohibit young people from living out their aspirations and proving themselves as productive citizens. Politician, pundits and parents stand to benefit from listening more attentively to young people, including Black African boys, about how aspirations can function as an ideological whip that constrains their futures.

This blog is adapted from:

Wallace, D., (2017) ‘Aspiration Anxieties: Developing Middle-Class Masculinities among Black African boys in...
Universities, neoliberalisation, and the (im)possibility of critique (2017-05-31 08:00)

By Jana Bacevic

Last Friday in April, I was at a conference entitled [1]Universities, neoliberalisation and (in)equality at Goldsmiths, University of London. It was an one-day event featuring presentations and interventions from academics who work on understanding, and criticising, the transformation of working conditions in neoliberal academia. Besides sharing these concerns, attending such events is part of my research: I, in fact, study the critique of neoliberalism in UK higher education.

Why study critique, you may ask? At the present moment, it may appear all the more urgent to study the processes of transformation themselves, especially so that we can figure out what can be done about them. This, however, is precisely the reason: critique is essential to how we understand social processes, in part because it entails a social diagnostic – it tells us what is wrong – and, in part, because it allows us to conceptualise our own agency – what is to be done – about this. However, the link between the two is not necessarily straightforward: first you read some Marx, and then you go and start a revolution. Some would argue that the reading of Marx (what we usually think of as consciousness-raising) is essential part of the process, but there are many variables that intervene between awareness of the unfairness of certain conditions – say, knowing that part-time, low paid teaching work is exploitative – and actually doing something about those conditions, such as organising an occupation. In addition, as virtually everyone from the Frankfurt School onwards had noted, linking these two aspects is complicated by the context of mass consumerism, mass media, and – I would add – mass education. Still, the assumption of an almost direct (what Archer dubbed an ‘[2]hydraulic’) link between knowledge and action still haunts the concept of critique, both as theory and as practice.

In the opening remarks to the conference, Vik Loveday actually zeroed in on this, asking: why is it that there seems to be a burgeoning of critique, but very little resistance? For it is a burgeoning indeed: despite it being my job, even I have issues keeping up to speed with the veritable explosion of the writing that seeks to analyse,
explain, or simply mourn the seemingly inevitable capitulation of universities in the face of neoliberalism. By way of illustration, the Palgrave series in "[3]Critical University Studies" boasts eleven new titles, all published in 2016-7; and this is but one publisher, in English language only.

What can explain the relationship between the relative proliferation of critique, and relative paucity of resistance? This question forms the crux of [4]my thesis: less, however, as an invocation for the need to resist, and more as the querying of the relationship between knowledge – especially as forms of critique, including academic critique – and political agency (I do see political agency on a broader spectrum than the seemingly inexhaustible dichotomy between 'compliance' and 'resistance', but that is another story).

So here's a preliminary hypothesis (H, if you wish): the link between critique and resistance is mediated by the existence of and position in of academic hierarchy. Two presentations I had the opportunity to hear at the conference were very informative in this regard: the first is Loveday's analysis of academics' experience of anxiety, the other was Neyland and Milyaeva's research on the [5]experiences of REF panelists. While there is a shared concern among academics about the neoliberalisation of higher education, what struck me was the pronounced difference in the degree to which two groups express doubts about their own worth as academics, future, and relevance (in colloquial parlance, 'impostor syndrome'). While junior* and relatively precarious academics seem to experience high levels of anxiety in relation to their value as academics, senior* academics who sit on REF panels experience it far less. The difference? Level of seniority and position in decision-making.

Well, you may say, this is obvious – the more established academics are, the more confident they are going to be. However, what varies with levels of seniority is not just confidence and trust in one’s own judgements: it’s the sense of entitlement, the degree to which you feel you deserve to be there (Loveday writes about the classed aspects of the sense of entitlement [6]here). I once overheard someone call it the Business Class Test: the moment you start justifying to yourself flying business class on work trips (unless you’re very old, ill, or incapacitated), is the moment when you will have convinced yourself you deserve this. The issue, however, is not how this impacts travel practices: it’s the effect that the differential sense of entitlement has on the relationship between critique and resistance.

So here's another hypothesis (h1, if you wish). The more precarious your position, the more likely you are to perceive the working conditions as unfair – and, thus, to be critical of the structure of academic hierarchy that enables it. Yet, at the same time, the more junior you are, the more risk voicing that critique – that is, translating it into action – entails. Junior academics often point out that they have to shut up and go on ‘playing the game’: churning out publications (because REF), applying for external funding (because grant capture), and teaching ever-growing numbers of students (because students generate income for the institution). Thus, junior academics may well know everything that is wrong with the academia, but will go on conforming to it in ways that reproduce exactly the conditions they are critical of.

What happens once one ascends to the coveted castle of permanent employment/tenure and membership in research evaluation panels and appointment committees? Well, I’ve only ever been tenure track for a relatively short period of time (having left the job before I found myself justifying flying business class) but here’s an assumption based on anecdotal evidence and other people’s data (h2): you still grin and bear it. You do not, under any circumstances, stop participating in the academic ‘game’ – with the added catch that now you actually believe you deserved your position in it. I’m not saying senior academics are blind to the biases and social inequalities reflected in the academic hierarchy: what I am saying is that it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to simultaneously be aware of it and continue participating in it (there’s a nod to Sartre’s notion of ‘bad faith’ here, but I unfortunately do not have the time to get into that now). Ever encounter a professor stand up at a public lecture or committee meeting and say "I recognize that I owe my being here to the combined fortunes of inherited social capital, [white] male privilege, and the fact English is my native language"? I didn’t either. If anything, there are disavowals of social privilege (“I come from a working class background”), which, admirable as they may be, unfortunately only serve to justify the hierarchical nature of academia and its selection procedures (“I definitely deserve to be here, because
look at all the odds I had to beat in order to get here in the first place”).

In practice, this leads to the following. Senior academics stay inside the system, and, if they are critical, believe to work **against the system** – for instance, by fighting for their discipline, or protecting junior colleagues, or aiming to make academia that little bit more diverse. In the longer run, however, their participation keeps the system going – the equivalent of carbon offsetting your business class flight; sure, it may help plant trees in Guinea Bissau, but it does not obfuscate the fact you are **flying** in the first place. Junior academics, on the other hand, **contribute through their competition for positions inside the system** – believing that if only they teach enough (perform low-paid work), publish enough (contribute to abundance), or are visible enough (perform unpaid labour of networking on social media, through conferences etc.) – they will get away from precarity, and **then** they can **really** be critical (there’s a nod to Berlant’s *cruel optimism* here that I also unfortunately cannot expand on). Except that, of course, they end up in the position of senior academics, with an added layer of entitlement (because they fought so hard) and an added layer of fear (because no job is really safe in neoliberalism). Thus, **while everyone knows everything is wrong, everyone still plays along**. This [*gamification*] of research, which seems to be the new **mot du jour** in the academia, becomes a stand-in term for the moral economy of justifying one’s own position while participating in the reproduction of the conditions that contribute to its instability.

**Cui bono critique**, in this regard? It depends. If critique is divorced from its capacity to incite political action, there is no reason why it cannot be appropriated – and, correspondingly, commodified – in the broader framework of neoliberal capitalism. It’s already been pointed out that [8] critique sells – and, perhaps less obviously, the critique of neoliberal academia does too. Even if the ever-expanding number of publications on the crisis of the university do not ‘sell’ in the narrow sense of the term, they still contribute to the symbolic economy via accruing prestige (and citation counts!) for their authors. In other words: the critique of neoliberalism in the academia can become part and parcel of the very processes it sets out to criticise. **There is nothing, absolutely nothing, in the content, act, or performance of critique itself that renders it automatically subversive or dangerous to ‘the system’.** Sorry. (If you want to blame me for being a killjoy, note that Boltanski and Chiapello have noted a long time ago in "[9]The New Spirit of Capitalism" that contemporary capitalism grew through the appropriation of the 1968 artistic critique).

Does this mean critique has, as Latour famously suggested, '[10]run out of steam'? If we take the steam engine as a metaphor for the industrial revolution, then the answer may well be yes, and good riddance. Along with other Messianic visions, this may speed up the departure of the Enlightenment’s legacy of pastoral power, reflected – imperfectly, yet unmistakably – in the figure of (organic or avant-garde) ‘public’ intellectual, destined, as he is (for it is always a he) to lead the ‘masses’ to their ultimate salvation. What we may want to do instead is to examine **what promise critique (with a small c) holds** – especially in the age of post-truth, post-facts, Donald Trump, and so on. In this, I am fully in agreement with Latour that it is important to keep tabs on the **difference between matters of fact, and matters of concern**; and, perhaps most disturbingly, think about whether we want to stake out the claim for defining the latter on the monopoly on producing the former.

For getting rid of the veneer of entitlement to critique does not in any way mean abandoning the project of critical examination altogether – but it does, very much so, mean reexamining the positions and perspectives from which it is made. This is the reason why I believe it is so important to **focus on the foundations of epistemic authority**, including that predicated on the assumption of difference between ‘lay’ and academic forms of reflexivity (I’m writing up a paper on this – meanwhile, my presentation on the topic from this year’s BSA conference is [11]here). In other words, in addition to the analysis of threats to critical scholarship that are unequivocally positioned as coming from ‘the outside’, we need to examine what it is about ‘the inside’ – and, particularly, about the boundaries between ‘out’ and ‘in’ – that helps perpetuate the **status quo**. Often, this is the most difficult task of all.
Here’s a comic for the end. In case you don’t know it already, it’s Pearls Before Swine, by the brilliant Stephan Pastis. This should at least brighten your day.

P.S. People often ask me what my recommendations would be. I’m reluctant to give any – the academia is broken, and I am not sure whether fixing it in this form makes any sense. But here’s a few preliminary thoughts:

(a) Stop fetishising the difference between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. ‘Leaving’ the academia is still framed like some epic sort of failure, which amplifies both the readiness of precarious workforce to sustain truly abominable working conditions just in order to stay “in”, and the anxiety and other mental health issues arising from the possibility of falling “out”. Most people with higher education should be able to do well and thrive in all sorts of jobs; if we didn’t frame tenure as a life-or-death achievement, perhaps fewer would agree to suffer for years in hope of its attainment.

(b) Fight for decent working conditions for contingent faculty. Not everyone needs to have tenure if working part-time (or going in and out) are acceptable career choices that offer a liveable income and a level of social support. This would also help those who want to have children or, god forbid, engage in activities other than the rat race for academic positions.

(c) This doesn’t get emphasised enough, but one of the reasons why people vie for positions in the academia is because at least it offers a degree of intellectual satisfaction, in opposition to what Graeber has termed the ever-growing number of ‘bullshit jobs’. So, one of the ways of making working conditions in the academia more decent is by making working conditions outside of academia more decent – and, perhaps, by decentralising a bit the monopoly on knowledge work that the academia holds. Not, however, in the neoliberal outsourcing/‘creative hubs’ model, which unfortunately mostly serves to generate value for existing centres while further depleting the peripheries.

By "junior" and “senior” I obviously do not mean biological age, but rather status – I am intentionally avoiding denominators such as ‘ECRs’ etc. since I think someone can be in a precarious position whilst not being exactly at the start of their career, and, conversely, someone can be a very early career researcher but have a type of social capital, security, and recognition that are normally associated with ‘later’ career stages.

[12]This was originally posted on Jana’s blog and is reproduced here with permission
Jana Bacevic is a PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge. She tweets at [13]@jana_bacevic.

1. https://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=10647
4. https://janabacevic.net/research/
11. https://janabacevic.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/jbacevic_bsa_2017.pptx
13. https://twitter.com/jana_bacevic
8.6 June

Happy birthday to us (2017-06-01 08:00)

We’re seven years old today

The Future of Esports: Challenging Work and Gender Issues in the UK’s Professional Computer Gaming Industry (2017-06-02 08:00)

Part of the Sociological Review Research Seminar Series

Funded by The Sociological Review Foundation

Wednesday, 16th August 2017
5106
‘Esports’ or electronic sports is the umbrella term for organised, competitive computer gaming usually played by paid professionals. It is an emerging entertainment market worth an estimated $1.5 billion and is comparable in size to many traditional sports, with audiences of tens, even hundreds, of millions of people worldwide. This one-day symposia seeks to build expertise between early career researchers, professional players, and industry experts who are interested in problematising the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of Esports. Sociological research on Esports has begun to highlight the precarious working conditions, such as temporary contracts and exploitative pay practices that characterise professional computer gaming. Similarly, early research into women and Esports suggests that these competitive gaming environments tend to reproduce ‘hegemonic masculinities’ which can leave women isolated and a structural disadvantage in terms of employment opportunities. At this moment, there is the need to launch fruitful and long-term collaborative research agendas to understand the nature of these issues, and establish the networks needed to bring about practical and sustainable social change. Papers and talks will be presented by academics, organisers, and campaigners, addressing a range of issues from exploitative labour practices, gender representation, social inclusion, as well as the challenges of studying player careers, and the complexities of different Esports ecologies.

Registration is free of charge.

Complimentary lunch and refreshments will be provided. Tickets are limited.


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What is it like when interviews go well? (2017-06-03 08:00)

I thought this was a lovely description on pg 8 of [1]Sherry Turkle’s *Reclaiming the Conversation*:

> When things go right, the social scientist’s interview becomes an open, easy exchange. This often happens after trust has been established, when the researcher’s notebook has been closed, when people who only a few minutes earlier had been "participants" in "your study" realize that there is something in this for them. Your question becomes their question as well. A conversation begins.

How would you describe the feeling when interviews go well? Tell us in the comments box and we’ll compile them into another post.

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Alexandra Ridgway (2017-06-03 10:47:08)
When the conversation hits a rhythm and the words just flow like poetry rather than the response to an interrogation. When I don’t need to ask the questions because they understand my topic so well that they answer everything naturally and somehow through their telling they cover everything comprehensively. When I create a space for them to be the true storytellers and where they can take control of the research and really delve into the layers of their own knowledge. As researchers, one of the best things we can do is to let go and see where the interview takes us, rather than trying to control the process.

Mary (2017-06-03 19:29:21)
Well, having just completed the lonely task of transcribing some interviews, can we really say that they ever go well? The feeling of accomplishment first of all is one great thing about interviews. But then there is also that feeling that you encounter half way through transcription, when you realise “Oh No! This is so not going well”; that point where your interviewee rephrases your entire research question and you wonder whether your previous interviews went well at all. The question that I think we should ask is, what happens when the interview that you thought went well actually didn’t go well. What do you do? Do you painfully extract the answer that you are looking for in that interview (if it’s your only one) or do you carry on searching with modifications here and there in the next interviews. In all honesty however, when an interview goes well, I relax and tentatively look forward to the transcription phase, as I am personally only ever present in the interview at that stage.

Fatema (2017-06-03 23:09:25)
I’m a sociology major, and one of my required courses was Research Methods in Sociology. For an assignment, I had to go out and find someone to interview as part of a fake research study, in order to practice interviewing and data coding skills. So I’m talking to this girl - let’s call her Andrea - and initially it was all awkward introductions and stumbling follow-up questions to her abrupt responses (a mistake on my part because I was asking the wrong sort of questions). And then we found that magical question - you know, the kind that makes people pause; maybe wonder precisely what that question means to THEM, not just what it means. The kind of question that, when they find their answer, they get so excited about it they start going off on tangents. And THAT’S when you discover the true depth and meaning of the lived human experience, which was very much an embodied experience in this particular instance because my questions were about nutrition and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Mine and Andrea’s Q &A gradually took on the attributes of a typical conversation between friends. She chattered animatedly at times, while at others she would stop, think a little, talk again but slower. And our silences weren’t at all awkward. They were comfortable silences, where neither of us felt any need to fill it with incessant chatter, but really used it to momentarily retreat within our own thoughts, thinking more deeply, more critically about our own lives. I started sharing my own experiences with food and eating healthy, and she’d comment on something I said, or vice versa. Or I’d say something and she’d go, “Oh my god yes! That’s so true...” and off she went to explain in more detail. I forgot I was supposed to be one critically analyzing her responses as a student researcher. My phone was recording her words (with permission), so I felt no need to take notes. I also put away my interview guide after some time because I no longer needed it. That was euphoric. I felt accomplished, like I’d done something right as a human being, to have been able to connected with this complete stranger on such a personal level that she and I were conversing passionately on the topic of scrutiny, without any probing or prompting on my part. Even when she went off on tangents, or I went off on tangents because I’d quickly adopted her style of speech, they were still somehow related. This I only realized retrospectively, since at the time I wasn’t paying any more attention to the assignment, but rather to the highly intriguing conversation. Alas, she had to soon return to her work, and I too, had to leave. I thanked her and left. Suffice to say I received full points on that assignment. But I learned so much about myself that day. Not as a researcher; rather, as just one human being connecting to another. Simply because we’re human, and due to that commonality I was able to develop such a conversational and open relationship in such a short amount of time.
What is a wonk? (2017-06-04 08:00)

What is a wonk? It’s a deceptively simple question which it’s worth us attending to. This is the answer given in an [1]excellent Baffler essay by Emmett Rensin:

What, after all, is a wonk? It is not the same thing as an expert, although those are tedious as well. In a 2011 interview with Newsweek, Ezra Klein explained that he gave Wonkblog its name (and accepted the moniker himself) in an “effort to denote that we’re doing something a lot different by covering Washington through a policy lens.” This fits well with what Baltimore Sun reporter Jon Morgan meant when he [2]introduced the term into American political vernacular back in 1992 by applying it to then-candidates Bill Clinton and Al Gore: they were politicians, to be sure, but ones with a “preference for arcane policy details over back-slapping and baby-kissing.” Jacobin editor-in-chief Bhaskar Sunkara, in a 2013 essay for In These Times, [3]gave the term a less charitable reading, but the essence is the same. The wonk, he wrote, is a “technocrat, obsessed with policy details, bereft of politics, earnestly searching for solutions to the world’s problems through the dialectic of an Excel spreadsheet.”


The wonk is defined “by his devotion to the churning irrelevant details of a game that ordinary people watch to see who actually wins and loses”. Rensin makes a powerful case that the wonk is an over-privileged super fan who wishes nothing ever change lest they have to learn the rules of their favourite game all over again:

It was better before they tried to make it so accessible to newbies, they were better before they went mainstream, the real game got lost when they made all those stupid changes to the rules. The wonk’s essential function in technocracy is to explain (they are always, always explaining): why History is Over, why justice is not possible, why evil can’t win and you can’t win either, how a little fix here and there is all we can really hope for. The futility of all of this does not discourage the wonk. The point is that they’re interested, that they’re searching. They’re more interested and more searching and more obsessed than you’ll ever be, poser.


What defines the wonk is not their concern but their concern for what is. Where are they situated though? My first reaction when reading this essay was to wonder about differentiation, with the wonk living and breathing the reality of the field within which they work. But there have always been people defined by their occupations.

What’s different about the wonk? Does it reflect an increasing degree of cultural autonomy, such that one can have an identity and lifestyle built solely in terms of the field they work within? Or a newfound inclination to so exhaustively construct a sense of identity around work? Or is it something about the intersection between fields, with wonks existing at the interface between politics, media, think tanks and academia? Is wonkish-ness a form of subcultural capital (to use Sarah Thornton’s concept) operating at this intersection? Who values wonkishness other than the wonks themselves? Finally, what are we to make of the rise of the higher education wonk? What does that say about the university system?

Call for papers: Social Media for Learning in HE Conference 2017 (2017-06-05 08:00)

#SocMedHE17: Making an impact  
Tuesday 19th December 2017  
at Sheffield Hallam University

The third social media for learning in HE conference: #SocMedHE17: Making an impact, considers the role that social media - when used in formal and informal learning contexts - can play in addressing the major challenges currently being faced by Higher Education. This conference is accepting submissions from students, academics and managers from national and international HEIs.

The pressures on universities are hard to ignore. In the UK, the introduction of the Teaching Excellence Framework ([1]TEF) and its core metrics – employability, teaching quality and retention – directly influence the direction of university strategies; while the National Student Survey ([2]NSS) reveals specific contextual challenges that demand attention. Internationally, the titles may be different, but the pressures will be similar.  

#SocMedHE17 encourages submissions (research, practice or discussion papers) that provide evidence of educators and students using social media to make a positive impact on these challenges in formal and informal learning environments. Indicative themes include:

- engaging, stimulating and challenging learners
- reaching and engaging different groups of learners
- innovative ways of meeting learning outcomes and enabling learning gain
- enhancing employability outcomes
- building staff and student digital capability and confidence
- scaling up excellence for broader impact

Please visit the conference site: [4]http://go.shu.ac.uk/socmedhe for the full call, booking and planning information, and outputs from the previous SocMedHE conferences.

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**Intellectual diversity, disciplines and public engagement (2017-06-06 08:00)**

Why do psychologists and economists enjoy more prominence in the public sphere than sociologists? I’ve been thinking a lot in the last couple of days about what seems to me to be a failure of sociology to value or encourage media engagement by sociologists. It should go without saying that these aren’t the only reasons for the difference in visibility. It’s easier for psychologists and economists to talk confidently in terms of an accumulating body of knowledge because of the relative lack of dissensus within these disciplines. This shouldn’t lead us to minimise the methodological and theoretical disputes which occur within them, as much as to ask why these lead to growth outwards rather than fragmentation inwards? As this thoughtful review of Doug Porpora’s [1]Reconstructing Sociology: The Critical Realist Approach by Priscilla Alderson put it,

> One defence of our discipline’s diversity is that its adaptable rich variety can embrace numerous theories, methods and topics. However, variety does not preclude coherence, and coherence does not demand narrow uniformity – like the neoclassical mantras that now monopolise economics. Medicine is a hugely varied discipline yet, fortunately for society’s healthcare, it is unified by powerful common values and theories about causal realities. By contrast, and unfortunately for society’s wellbeing, sociology is split not only by disagreements but, more seriously, by basic contradictions: positivism accepts pristine independent social facts and aims to discover general laws, whereas interpretivism sees only local contingent variety; statistics and experiments are set against ethnography; sociology is variously taken to be value-free, relativist or a moral endeavour.


In this review, Alderson looks to social theory as something that could bring order to this mess. Not in the sense of imposing unity upon diversity but rather bringing divergent perspectives into the same intellectual space. In this sense, I share her aspiration to “position its many valuable insights and methods in relation to one another, showing how they connect and interact within larger relations, to be more like a coherent jigsaw puzzle in progress, rather than a heap of pieces”. But how else could we pursue this other than through social theory? I wonder if the internal diversity of disciplines and how they conduct external engagement are intrinsically linked?

I’d suggest that *communicating sociological knowledge* – as well as public engagement more broadly, though in a somewhat different way –should not be seen as something extrinsic to sociological inquiry. Instead, it can potentially bring order to the discipline, through forcing its practitioners to develop their capacity to contextualise, translate and apply knowledge outside of the academy. Particularly when the practitioner in question is working beyond their area of immediate expertise and talking in terms of the discipline as a whole. This could then be something that feeds back into the core of the discipline, both directly (research and teaching) and indirectly (their broader influence).
The challenge is how to ensure that we **recognise, value and encourage these capacities**. My hunch is that few of these conditions obtain at present. There's certainly a widespread openness to public sociology but a disconnection between the rhetoric and the reality. Furthermore, working with the media and pursuing visibility seems by many to be seen as vaguely suspicious (or worse). What I'd like to understand is how these practical challenges which can easily be construed as being *outside* the discipline, in fact reproduce core intellectual features which many would see as problematic.


The Personal Morphogenesis of Francis Begbie (2017-06-07 08:00)

Which character from the Irvine Welsh novels has the most depth? While Francis Begbie might have counted as the most vivid, particularly as he was brought to life in Robert Carlyle’s unforgettable performance, I’d be surprised if anyone thought of him as the deepest. Yet that’s the impression one is left with after reading Irvine Welsh’s latest novel *The Blade Artist*. I don’t mean depth in terms of the psychological coherence of the characterisation, as much as that Welsh has clearly spent a great deal of time reflecting on Begbie and what makes him who he is.

*The Blade Artist* begins in California. We meet Jim Begbie, successful artist and devoted husband and father, facing down two men on the beach who threaten his wife and daughters. We soon see the remarkable, most of all happy, life he has built for himself across the Atlantic. A balance which is shattered by the news that his son Sean has...
been murdered, prompting Begbie to fly back to Edinburgh in order to attend the funeral.

His transition is explored through his return to Leith and reacquaintance with the familiar figures from his older life. He finds himself sympathising with the police’s lack of interest in his son Sean’s murder, wondering to himself “Why indulge people like that when they would simply take each other out if you left them to their own devices?”. He’s baffled in the face of old rivals, astonished “now to think that he cared enough about this guy to consider doing that”. In the face of the leering optimism of Sean’s mother that they might reconcile, he can only find her grotesque and idiotic.

Finding his way to an old boxing gym when he returns, he suddenly relates to past acquaintances in a new way. Those who had “been keeping him at arm’s length for years” were now suddenly “welcoming him into the ‘he used to be a bam but he’s alright now’ club”. They had joined this club a long time ago but in finding membership in it, he realises there’s still a place for himself in the city and once more feels at home there.

There were two figures integral to his transformation. The first, John Dick, “believed in him, despite Franco being determined to present all the evidence to the contrary” and ran the prison scheme which “brought in the writers, poets and artists, to see if anything would gel” and “Saw a spark ignite in a few, Frank Begbie being the most unlikely. Amongst these was Melanie, the art therapist, now his wife:

But who was she? She was good and strong and I was bad and weak. That’s what hit me most of all from being around her. That I was weak. The notion was ridiculous; it went against everything I’d come to believe about my persona and image, against the way I’d consciously forged myself over the years. Yet who else but a weak man would spend half his life letting others lock him up like an animal?

I was one of the weakest people on the planet. I had zero control over my darker impulses. Therefore I was constant jail fodder. Some mouthy cunt got wide; they had to be decimated on the spot, and I was back in prison. Thus such nonentities were in total command of my destiny. That was my first major epiphany: I was weak because I wasn’t in control of myself. Melanie was in control of herself. In order to be with somebody like her, to live a free life, not in a tenement or scheme on the breadline, or even a suburb and crippled with a lifetime of debt, I needed a free mind. I had to get control of myself.

His work began to receive recognition when he was granted day release to take part in an exhibition in Edinburgh. It soon won celebrity sponsorship, with prominent figures fixating on his portrayal of the life he had denied the man he killed, as well as his wider tendency to mutilate representations of celebrities in the name of art. Social recognition comes to provide a momentum of its own, sweeping him along in changes that are already underway, not least of all through his relationship with Melanie.

Much of all his change involves a changed relation to himself. Throughout the story, we see Begbie respond to situations through self-restraint, in full awareness of his inclination to lash out. This illustrates the continuity of his character, as the old impulses are marginalised rather than annihilated. What has changed is how he relates to himself and the world, with new concerns leading to an eerie distance from the social world which formed him.

To the outside world, such a change is baffling. It comes from nowhere and invites accusations of insubstantiality. An accusation that has a kernel of truth given that he is still the same person, he simply orientates himself to the world in a different way. But there were moments in his past in which he sought change:

Ah’m just no feelin it, he says, recalling slivers of alcohol-fuelled violence, bonhomie and shagging. Then the long periods in between, of being stuck in a cell. Coming out. A fresh start. A new bird. Big plans.
Resolutions made.

Then another wide cunt. Another incident.

Rather than a life time of stasis being followed by a sudden change, we can instead see his life as involving a whole sequence of impeded attempts to change. Frustrated attempts to become something other than he was, lacking both external guidance and the conditions within which he might enjoy success. For all its flaws as a novel, *The Blade Artist* captures the dynamism inherent in becoming who we are, the constant activity at work even when people fail to outwardly change and the possibility of significant transformation which always remains latent within them. In the end do we really change? *The Blade Artist* would suggest not but does so in a way that reminds us of the limitations of treating fictional portrayals as akin to qualitative data.

1. [https://www.youtube.com/embed/_3reLyB6ms?ecver=1](https://www.youtube.com/embed/_3reLyB6ms?ecver=1)

Snapping out of Brexit: An invitation to Sociological Citizenship (2017-06-07 08:59)

As the June 8 snap election approaches and variations on the theme of Brexit creep into competing party pledges, a breath-catching pause that allows us to figure out what Brexit really is, how we have reacted to it so far, and how we might think about and act differently towards it this time may prove to be a fruitful endeavour, especially when so much is currently at stake; from the state of the economy, and everything that hinges on it, to the UK’s direction of travel not just politically, but culturally and socially too. This article will offer some critical reflections on all the above, while also arguing that the forthcoming general election offers an opportunity to (re)democratise ourselves, by breaking the mould of the thinking habits and voting behaviours that bring about or fail to stop phenomena like Brexit. Unsurprisingly, the role of sociology as a valuable resource with which to think about and act towards politics will be celebrated and “exported” as a “technology” for thinking about and (re)acting towards the social world around us.

What Brexit really is

While interpretations of Brexit abound, depending on how we think, who we are, and where we situate ourselves on the social ladder and the ideological map, it is important to offer some definitions so that our discussions of Brexit don’t undermine themselves by a lack of clarity. Brexit is hereby understood as the outcome of last year’s referendum which was held by obscuring its actual advisory (consultative) nature and proclaiming it instead to be binding (legislative). This goes against the relevant legislation, democratic processes, and rules which require parliamentary approval before an advisory/consultative referendum can be implemented. The EU Referendum Act is no exception, which leaves little room for doubt about the government’s intention to wilfully deceive voters by making them believe that their decision amounted to an accomplished fact rather than something to be discussed within parliament as is the case in liberal representative democracies like ours. The electorate, in turn, reacted by making a choice expecting its voice to be heard without any interference from the institutional guardians of parliamentary democracy, be it the Parliament itself or the high court.

Brexit and the rise of post-democratic non-citizenship

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Seen in this light, Brexit could be likened to a political autoimmune which undermined democratic citizenship by allowing the government and the electorate alike to use the tools, forums, and institutions of democracy (publicity campaigns, voting) against its principles and content (referendum legislation, rational argument), to deliver “the will of the people” at the expense of critical citizenship and formal democratic procedure. In doing so, the government’s authoritarian tendencies and the electorate’s majoritarian impulses were allowed free reign without paying heed to the need for constitutional checks and balances, or sufficient reflective, critical thought. To make matters worse, it could be even argued that we have entered a political phase of “post-democratic non-citizenship”; where referendums can be won by peddling lies, obscuring the facts, disrespecting citizens, insulting our intelligence, undermining our critical faculties, and appealing to our desires and prejudice instead of addressing our reason.

Post-democratic citizenship therefore is “post-democratic” because the software of democracy seems to hold scant appeal for us other than as a tool for getting what we want; thereby transforming democracy into a spectacle where voting becomes a superficial, fast-twitch response to real, deep grievances by allowing ourselves to be misled instead of leading ourselves to the wisdom of our own mind. And it is a form of “non-citizenship” because it reveals an estranged, distanced, push-button mentality that only cares for individual preferences rather than the public good. In the Classical Athenian lexicon, we would simply be dismissed as idiōtes who are private, circumspect, and withdrawn when we should be alert, critical, and publicly involved demokrātes. Liberal democracies may indeed be reduced to illiberal bureaucracies when they resemble awkward, dispiriting, and distant institutions that rule from afar but, equally, democracies are not worth being referred to as such if its citizens do not deliberate, participate, or uphold the principles and values of the political arrangements they lead their lives by.

How to fight Brexit with Sociology

Brexit may seem like a foregone conclusion by now, especially as the two main contending parties insist on treating it this way, despite the fact that there is still nothing legally binding about it. [1] Article 50 can be revoked, making it obvious that political cost currently overrides political will. It therefore seems preferable to pretend that the referendum result seals the deal than to admit that the electorate was lied to, that the referendum was never supposed to be binding, and that it might be sensible to ask people to vote again; provided that this time they are given all the information necessary for making an informed decision, and that enough of us vote for the result to matter as the decision of an actual supermajority, [2] as referendum legislation dictates, instead of “the will” of just a fraction of the voting public.

Since there is little indication that the government, the opposition, and the electorate have any appetite for such legalistic pedantry however, it seems like the only way to mitigate the cyclonic consequences of Brexit is to act against it with our vote by withdrawing our support for any party that colluded with and cowed submissively to the government’s dishonest politics of fudge and dodge. This would require us not just to peruse party manifestos but to judge them against the parties’ performance during and after Brexit. If they only bowed to their audience and self-interest then, what makes them reliable now? Voting decisions matter enormously, but what matters most is how we arrive at them. Are we simply toeing the party line as an oath of allegiance or are we sensible enough to vote against our preferences by acting towards the common good?

While it is always admirable to vote for who we believe in, it is infinitely more important to vote for what we truly believe in. This, however, requires us to look beyond the end of our nose when making decisions whose gravity urges
us to sacrifice ideological purity for social justice, by subjecting our will to critical judgement in order to ensure that we defend broader principles and values instead of merely serving parties or nourishing pet dogmas. Sociologists are no strangers to such (self-) reflective, critical thinking harsh though it may seem. In fact, that’s what we (proclaim to) do in our scholarly and public lives. The importance of such an irreverent attitude towards (even) our very own thinking, however, goes beyond mere voting decisions and spells an altogether different way in which we can "do" citizenship, especially in times of Brexit as we shall see in turn.

What has sociology got to do with it all?

Thinking sociologically about Brexit involves understanding Brexit as something more than Brexit, but as the flare-up that resulted from multiple igniting sparks that were overlooked until everything went up in flames. Apart from the result of a referendum, or a barometer of social attitudes towards immigration, the professionalisation of politics, the perceived lack of sovereignty, and the intensifying pressures of social inequality, Brexit can also be seen as a case study in how we think about and how we act towards politics more broadly; signifying, as is argued here, a change in and an affront to citizenship for reasons that have been outlined in previous sections of this article. If this diagnosis is correct, it seems like the best way to fight Brexit is not by fighting Brexit per se but by re-democratising ourselves first. This, however, involves treating democracy not as a conduit of public emotion, but as a form of government by and through discussion, participation, and voting only after due deliberation with our fellow-citizens.

To think with sociology about politics therefore, offers an opportunity to drag ourselves out of the slipstream of populist politics by becoming thoughtful, curious, critical, reflective, and engaged citizens instead of passive consumers of catchy slogans and ideological artefacts. Yet "sociological citizenship" involves even more than that. It invites us not just to think critically but self-subversively too, so that we can be(come) sympathetic citizens of the world who resist their immediate self-interest or punitive passions in favour of the general public good; relying on ‘vigour of thought' and ‘thoughtful deed' as W.E.B Du Bois put it. Sociology, after all, is not merely the study of 'how society is possible’ but of how it can become possible as a great deliberative assembly through the medium of active citizenship. Thinking and acting like sociologists can therefore help us vote in a way that will not just stop Brexit but also challenge the (populist) logic that brought it about with the government and the electorate's blessing.

Above all, thinking, acting and voting sociologically against Brexit teaches us how to listen and debate, thereby reintroducing politics as a quest for finding common ground through conflict but without violence while committing to 'let the ears of a guilty people tingle with truth [...] in this dreary day when human brotherhood is mockery and a snare', as Du Bois urged us to do with characteristic conviction, determination, and grace too. As a sociologist-criminologist and a citizen these are the words I live and work by, leaving me no other choice but to share them with you as a prime example of the gift that sociological citizenship can be, only if we let it ‘spring’ to ‘reap the harvest wonderful'.

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The fortress city scenario (2017-06-08 08:00)

A disturbing scenario from John Urry’s [1]What is the Future? From loc 2996-3045:

The final scenario involves the development of the Fortress City. Rich societies break away from the poorer into fortified enclaves. Those able to live in gated and armed encampments would do so, with much privatizing of what were, in many societies, public or collective functions (Davis 2000; Graham 2011; Leichenko, Thomas, Baines 2010: 142). Outside the enclaves would be ‘wild zones’ which the powerful would pass through as fast as possible. Systems of long-range mobility would only be available for the super-rich. Bauman maintains that one key technique of power is: ‘escape, slippage, elision and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement’ – to have the power to avoid being trapped by
others, to escape into 'sheer inaccessibility' (2000: 11). There are many examples of such elites exiting from where obligations would be extracted. The elite, we can suggest, are increasingly 'absentee landlords' with potential for exit mobility, if and when the 'going gets tough' (Bauman 2000: 13; Urry 2014a).

This future involves 'fortressed' walled cities and an extensive 'security-ization' of populations, similar in some ways to cities in the medieval period which provided protection against raiders, invaders and diseases. Those outside the enclaves would be unable or unwilling to travel far. Long-distance travel would be risky and probably only undertaken if people or machines were armed. The rich would mainly travel in the air in armed helicopters or light aircraft, a pattern already prefigured in contemporary Sao Paulo, as noted above (Budd 2013; Cwerner 2009). Futurists Gallopin, Hammond, Raskin and Swart thus argued: 'the elite retreat to protected enclaves, mostly in historically rich nations, but in favoured enclaves in poor nations, as well ... Pollution is also exported outside the enclaves, contributing to the extreme environmental deterioration induced by the unsustainable practices of the desperately poor and by the extraction of resources for the wealthy' (1997: 34).

Such an energy-and knowledge-starved city would entail falling standards of living, a greater focus upon the 'products' of the increasingly privatized security industry, probable re-localization of mobility patterns, towns and cities built for visitors deteriorating into ghost towns, and an increasing frequency of resource-related 'new wars' (Kaldor, Karl, Said 2007). These would involve private mercenaries as well as statis military forces; de-professionalized armies (sometimes made up of 'boys'); the use of cheap weapons bought through the market/ internet; an asymmetry of military force with no fixed 'fronts' or treaties and peace processes; the military targeting of civilians through, inter alia, suicide bombing and drone attacks; the role of warlords combining entrepreneurial and military skills; and the tendency for such wars to last interminable periods of time. Lives in the Fortress City would be conducted with the continuous spectre of warfare, the militarization of young men and the raping of women and girls as constant threats to a decent life.

This is a 'neo-Mediaevalist' vision of cities of the future. As in the Middle Ages, there would be little democracy, limited state power to govern legitimately, many non-state bodies with a mix of military and ideological powers, much illegal movement of peoples across borders, various empires, many new wars and intense conflict over scarce resources. City lives would be as in Hobbes’ Leviathan: ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. Lovelock points to the 'peaking' of oil, gas and water, as well as 'western life' more generally. Shortages will make economic production and social lives more local than appeared likely during the increasingly mobile twentieth century (see Chapter 3 above).
This chapter analyses how a neoliberal masculine logic permeates discussion of Australia's "education industry" and associated skilled migration program. Indian students play a key role in this. It is generally agreed that the initial phenomenal growth in terms of their enrolment numbers (2002-2009) was fueled by the opportunity to apply for permanent residency after completion of studies. After a series of violent and racist attacks on Indian students in 2009 and the closing of a significant number of substandard colleges which primarily catered to Indian students, enrolments declined rapidly.

In particular the attacks led to a fierce discussion in Australian media whether or not they were in fact racist in nature and whether or not Australia was a racist nation. Within this discussion, the validity of Indian students' claims of racism was gradually mitigated; the attacks were construed as opportunistic as Indian students were considered "soft targets" or "weak prey" whose own behavior (traveling home late at night from poorly paying part-time jobs, drawing attention to themselves by talking loudly on their phones, living in far-off and low-rent neighborhoods) contributed to their vulnerability to violent crime. It was further highlighted that the majority of Indian students were enrolled in so-called "dodgy" colleges that primarily to the desire for PR.

In mainstream media these developments were framed in a particular language that linked the predicaments of (male) Indian students with "industry"-related concerns that spoke to even larger, nation-spanning ones. "Them" being male played a significant factor in this as it allowed their intentions to be contrasted with the inherently neoliberal and deeply masculine logic (and intentions) of the skilled migration program and education industry. The neoliberal logic that underpins this process of othering is fueled by conflicting notions of masculinity that reference and rest on assumptions about the self and the other.

The self here needs to be thought of as a shorthand for the interplay between the Australian economy, its cities and "local" job markets, as well as its skilled migration program (SMP) and "education industry." Australia's SMP is the product of concerns over an ageing population, competitiveness within the (Asia-Pacific) region, and skill shortages locally. The country's SMP directly sources a significant portion of its "new" migrants from the large number of international students who study in Australia. With their ever-growing numbers Indian students then form a highly visible presence in Australian cities, putting pressure on local infrastructure and posing challenges to the multicultural makeup. Meanwhile Australian universities have become highly dependent on the fees brought in by international students and the "education industry" itself has become vitally important source of jobs and revenue for local economies.

The other here is the quintessential international/Indian student who comes to Australia on a temporary basis but might stay on permanently. While the Australian self here references systems or programs that are by and large guided by neoliberal market principles, controlled/adjusted by policy and speak to national interests and concerns, the other is an unpredictable individual (an Indian student migrant) whose intentions might not always run in tandem with what the system or a particular program is supposed to "produce."

Although Indian students were initially welcomed as international students and potential migrants they were gradually reduced to an essentialized unwanted other. "Them" being male played a significant factor in this as it allowed their intentions to be contrasted with the inherently neoliberal and deeply masculine logic (and intentions) of the skilled migration program and education industry. As such Indian students came to stand for the failure of the skilled migration program and education industry to generate the right kind of student migrant and, eventually,
permanent resident or even citizen.

Adapted from:


Michiel Baas, Ph.D. is a Research Fellow with the Asia Research Institute of the National University of Singapore.


Making an Impact with Social Media, July 5th in Manchester (2017-06-09 00:29)
Social media offers for exciting opportunities for generating impact and communicating research beyond the academy. However, 500 million tweets and 3 million blog posts that are generated in a single day, as well as over a billion websites, pose an obvious challenge: how do you ensure you are heard above the din? How can you help researchers use social media effectively? How can you use social media as part of a multi-faceted and cost-effective impact strategy?

Aimed at academic researchers, research managers, university leaders, and project administrators, this workshop offers a practical introduction to using social media to engage with groups beyond the academy in a way that generates lasting impact. The session includes an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

Each participant will have the opportunity to learn about the potential of social media in the current research funding environment, as well as draft an impact strategy relevant to their own projects. In addition to this, participants also have the option to purchase five hours of additional coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.


Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.

1. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698
Call for Participants: The Practice of Social Theory

The Practice of Social Theory

University of Cambridge, Department of Sociology
4-6 September 2017

Conveners: Jana Bacevic (University of Cambridge) and Mark Carrigan (The Sociological Review)
Passionate about social theory? Want to learn more about how it is created? Interested in seeing theory being made, rather than just read or applied?

Apply to the first Cambridge Summer School in Social Theory, "The Practice of Theory". Hosted by the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge, the school aims to bring together researchers interested in the practice of social theory and its relationship with reading, writing, and teaching in the social sciences.

We invite applications from early career researchers (PhD students or postgraduates) involved in theoretical work within or independently of their theses.

This summer school involves graduate students and early-career researchers in a series of thematic sessions that address different aspects of social theory (writing, teaching, translating, presenting, engaging), and gives them an opportunity to develop outputs and interactive tools that can be applied to a variety of contexts – from theses and articles, to teaching and public engagement. Besides an enhanced understanding of social theory, the school aims to equip participants with ideas, as well as practical skills, for applying this knowledge in communication with both academic and non-academic audiences.

*Speakers include Nicholas Gane (Warwick), Linsey McGoey (Essex), and Simon Susen (City).*

The participation fee for the school is 75 GBP (this covers teaching materials, coffee and tea breaks, and lunch on 4 and 5 September). Please note that, in order to secure their place, selected participants will be asked to register and pay the participation fee in full via online transfer by 15 July 2017. We regret that we are not able to offer reimbursements (except in outstanding circumstances) nor guarantee your place if you do not register by this date.

Please contact [1]jb906@cam.ac.uk and [2]mark@markcarrigan.net if you have any questions. We'll be releasing the full programme in the near future and we'll be in a position to advise successful applicants on affordable accommodation in the area.

Please complete your application by June 20th 2017. We'll confirm the success of your application by July 1st.

*Apply here:* [3]https://goo.gl/forms/CBh5RFTCGEi8r f2L2
The Political Economy of Student Housing (2017-06-09 08:00)

In the last few years, I’ve been intrigued by how changes in student housing track a broader transformation of higher education. The obvious change in the UK has been in student numbers, with major implications for the demographics of cities with major universities:

Between 1994 and 2012 the number of undergraduates in Britain grew by 45%, to 1.8m. Until recently, the housing stock changed little to accommodate them. Students clustered in neighbourhoods near universities, typically filling up old terraced houses. In Leeds, they spent much of the 2000s gradually spreading from old back-to-back houses in Hyde Park, which is near the two main universities’ campuses, into Headingley, a more middle-class district farther from the centre.


However since 2007, the number of students living in private halls of residence has more than doubled to 102,000. It has been a sustained area of growth for investors since the financial crisis, at a time when comparable investment categories have decelerated, with private sector investment estimated to have grown from £350m in 2009 to £2.1 billion in 2013. The growth since then has been even more substantial:

The UK purpose-built student accommodation market is estimated by Knight Frank to be worth £46bn and new developments completed this year are expected to total a record £4.7bn.

Last year, £3.1bn worth of student halls were sold – more than double the amount traded in 2013 and 2014. All five of the biggest deals – worth a combined £1.5bn – were sold to overseas investors. The largest transaction was the purchase by the property arm of Temasek, the Singapore state investment fund, of a portfolio of 25 student buildings in several cities including London and Manchester.


There are many factors which seem to be at work here:

- opening up a new category of luxury accommodation for students whose ‘needs’ were unmet by previous housing regimes
- depending on specific factors of the student experience (possible atomisation, relative privilege, informational disadvantage etc) to extract higher rents than would be possible through the wider lettings market
• student numbers increasing faster than universities can invest in infrastructure to house them
• the ‘unbundling’ of the university and the opportunities created for private providers when they lessen their commitment to student services
• the opportunity hoarding of the middle class under conditions of austerity & the transfer of parental resources into ensuring an effective student experience
• the appeal of a relatively buoyant asset class in a wider context of declining returns

However the one which interests me most is what this suggests about the future of higher education. It is being evaluated as one of the most reliable institutional areas in which to invest, in the sense that student numbers are expected to grow. But what are the aggregate consequences of these changes likely to be for higher education? Could this emerging political economy of student housing generate unintended consequences which act back on the sector itself?


Gender, sexuality and digital culture: A half day symposium at City, University of London, 20 June 2017 (2017-06-10 08:00)

GENDER, SEXUALITY AND DIGITAL CULTURE

A half day symposium at City, University of London, University Building B200, Northampton Square, EC1V 0HB

June 20th 2.00-7.30pm /// Wine reception @7.30PM

Keynotes: Winnie M Li and Rowan Ellis

New and established scholars and activists reflect on old questions and new challenges. Please join us for an afternoon of talks and discussion at City, in central London, to be followed by drinks and refreshments.

Sue Jackson (VUW, New Zealand) talks about her work with girls on feminism

Roisin Ryan Flood (Essex) reports on her interviews about internet dating

Josie Reade (RMIT, Australia) opens up new ways of thinking about ‘fitspo’

Maree Martinussen (Auckland, New Zealand) explores practices of intimacy in female friendships.
Anastasia Powell (RMIT, Australia) talks about her new book Sexual Violence in a Digital Age

Laura Thompson (City, London) explores sexual harassment on mobile dating apps

Celiya Koster (activist/student, London) discusses co-founding a new intersectional feminist magazine, Typical Girls

We are delighted that the symposium will be followed by two very special keynote presentations by Winnie M Li and Rowan Ellis (6-7.30PM)

Winnie M Li, author, activist, researcher (LSE) will talk about her extraordinary new novel Dark Chapter, discussing ‘Narrating Lived Experiences of Sexual Violence through Crime Fiction’
@Winniemli

Rowan Ellis (‘queer feminist geek’) will discuss her phenomenal campaign to get YouTube to lift their LGBTQ+ restrictions
@HeyRowanEllis

Followed by a wine reception at 7.30PM

Free and open to all but booking essential. Book here:
[1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/gender-sexuality-and-digital-culture-a-half-day-symposium-tickets-35138951550 Organised by the Gender and Sexuality Research Forum at City and supported by the Department of Sociology [2]https://blogs.city.ac.uk/gsrf/

1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/gender-sexuality-and-digital-culture-a-half-day-symposium-tickets-35138951550
2. https://blogs.city.ac.uk/gsrf/

What would a materialist phenomenology of ‘post-truth’ look like? (2017-06-11 08:00)

That’s the question I’ve been asking myself when reading through two books by NickCouldry in which he develops a materialist phenomenological approach to understanding social reality. The first is The Mediated Construction of Social Reality (with Andreas Hepp) and the second is Media, Society, World. It’s in the latter book that he considers the representational power of media. From loc 683:

Media institutions, indeed all media producers, make representations: they re-present worlds (possible, imaginary, desirable, actual). Media make truth claims, explicit or implicit: the gaps and repetitions in media representations, if systematic enough, can distort people’s sense of what there is to see in the social and political domains.

There is a political economy underpinning this, in terms of the capacity to make such representations and the gains accruing from this capacity. The common reference points which accumulate as a consequence serve a broader economic purpose. From loc 701:
However, if basic consumer demand—for fashion, music, sport—is to be sustained at all, it requires ‘the media’ to provide common reference points towards which we turn to see what’s going on, what’s cool.

The interests and influence in play here have been crucial to the unfolding of late modernity. Media has been a site through which power has consolidated. What we are seeing with ‘post-truth’ is a deconsolidatiob of this apparatus, taking place at a number of different levels. From loc 886:

Representations matter. Representations are a material site for the exercise of, and struggle over, power. Put most simply, our sense of ‘what there is’ is always the result of social and political struggle, always a site where power has been at work. 150 But fully grasping this in relation to media is difficult: because the role of media institutions is to tell us ‘what there is’—or at least what there is that is ‘new’—media’s work involves covering over its daily entanglement in that site of power. Media aim to focus populations’ attention in a particular direction, on common sites of social and political knowledge. Media institutions’ embedding as the central focus of modern societies is the result of a history of institutional struggle that is becoming more, not less, intense in the digital media era. It is essential to deconstruct the apparently natural media ‘order’ of contemporary societies.

Call for Participants: The Practice of Social Theory (2017-06-12 08:00)

First Cambridge summer school in social theory
University of Cambridge, Department of Sociology, 4-6 September 2017
Conveners: Jana Bacevic (University of Cambridge) and Mark Carrigan (The Sociological Review)

Passionate about social theory?

Want to learn more about how it is created?

Interested in seeing theory being made, rather than just read or applied?

Apply to the first Cambridge Summer School in Social Theory, “The Practice of Theory”. Hosted by the Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge, the school aims to bring together researchers interested in the practice of social theory and its relationship with reading, writing, and teaching in the social sciences.

We invite applications from early career researchers (PhD students or postgraduates) involved in theoretical work within or independently of their theses.

This summer school involves graduate students and early-career researchers in a series of thematic sessions that address different aspects of social theory (writing, teaching, translating, presenting, engaging), and gives them an opportunity to develop outputs and interactive tools that can be applied to a variety of contexts—from theses and articles, to teaching and public engagement. Besides an enhanced understanding of social theory, the school
How Democracy Can Generate Progressive Collective Intelligence in Two Steps (2017-06-12 11:23)

First, citizens don’t vote for a representative simply based on who they judge as best matching their interests, but rather on who they judge as best matching their interests given the candidate’s chances of winning in the election.

Second, the successful candidate – the people’s elected representative – doesn’t simply vote for the policy that best matches his/her constituency’s interests, but rather for the policy that best matches the constituency’s interests given the chances of the policy winning in a legislative vote.

If both the people and their elected representatives followed the above strategy, social progress would be made, albeit not at the pace that anyone would find especially desirable yet that all could tolerate. To my mind, that is an optimal outcome for a democracy that respects the judgemental capacity of its individual members.

Note that in both steps, we’re talking about the voter or the representative functioning as a reflexive agent in his/her judgement. You might think of this as a ‘populist’ version of Fabian socialism – given that the original Fabians were technocrats – which works in a society that is at once smart and patient, two qualities normally seen as opposed to each other.
Call for Chapters: Bourdieu, curriculum studies, education policy and reform (2017-06-12 16:32)

Co-editors James Albright (The University of Newcastle, Australia) and Shaun Rawolle (Deakin University)

Revisiting the *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989)

Call for chapters

This proposed book aims to bring together scholars that take as their starting point Bourdieu's (1984) theoretical and empirical contributions to curriculum studies and his pragmatic recommendations for education policy and reform.

In 1984, responding to Mitterrand's (the first socialist president of France's Fifth Republic) commissioned reports on the future of education, Bourdieu led colleagues (comprised of leading College de France professors) to author a set of guiding principles for educational change. First published as *Proposition pour l'enseignement de l'avenir* (College de France, 1985) and later as the *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989), the principles set out a rational basis to restructure the curricular division of knowledge; provide a new definition of the transmission of knowledge; eliminate outdated or outmoded notions; and introduce 'new knowledge that stems from research as well as economic, technical and social changes' (Bourdieu, 1989: 309).

At the core of these recommendations was the call for a curriculum that focused on the 'genealogy of concepts, ways of thinking, mental structures...to give everyone the means to re-appropriate the structures of their own thinking' (Grenfell and James, 2004: 75). Although *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989) may have had little lasting effect on the course of French educational policy, many aspects of Bourdieu's principles for reflecting on the curriculum resonate with contemporary theoretical and pragmatic issues in the fields of curriculum studies and development.

This collection reflects on the relevance of Bourdieu and colleagues' call for a revisioning of the curriculum, amid growing concern around the direction that education reform has subsequently taken. It invites a reconsideration of paths not taken and to draw on a broadened sociological imagination in order to challenge misrecognition of the violence and challenges education faces as a field, nationally, transnationally and globally.

We provisionally envision the collection have 7 chapters and seek potential contributors for each of the following. We are not limited to these and invite additional and alternatively frames submissions.

Chapter 1: Understanding the historical importance of the *Proposition pour l'enseignement de l'avenir* (College de France, 1985) and later the *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989);

Chapter 2: Reassessing their core recommendations in light of current theoretical and pragmatic issues in curriculum studies and development;

Chapter 3: Analysing why the *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989) had little lasting effect on the course of French educational policy and, more broadly, why the academic field has had limited influence in reforming educational policy, generally;

Chapter 4: Analysing how the *Principes pour une réflexion sur les contenus d'enseignement* (Bourdieu, 1989) fits within Bourdieu's empirical studies in education, culture, and economics;
Chapter 5: Debating Bourdieu's contention that across the breadth of the school curriculum, 'techniques or cognitive tools, which are totally indispensible in promoting rigorous and reflective reasoning' (Bourdieu, 1989: 312) should be the focus of curricular theorising and planning;

Chapter 6: Evaluating those aspects of Bourdieu's principles that resonate with the theoretical and practical desires for interdisciplinarity or transdisciplinary education. Bourdieu characterises school subjects as 'interpretations' of disciplines. As such, researchers and teachers must be mindful of the 'logic and traditions of certain specialisms...where they are located in the curriculum' and how each 'contribute[s] to different thought processes' (Bourdieu, 1989: 312). Arguing that the curriculum of the day seldom did this and, when it did, only tacitly, Bourdieu argues that transdisciplinary inquiry where teachers from various subject areas are brought together to collaborate in curriculum design may remedy this absence; and

Chapter 7: Bourdieu's principles reflect the continental tradition of educational didactics. Didactics is broadly theorized as 'not a normative theory...nor is it descriptive but reflective...an explication of how instructional processes in the institutionalized school may be experienced...useful as a thought model and a research model (Uljen, 1997: v). It may be interesting to English-speaking curriculum theorists to note that didactics is often broadly posited by European researchers as a science that focuses on the institutionally bounded 'diffusion' of knowledge (Chevallard, 1991).

For almost four decades American and, to some extent, curriculum theorising in the Anglosphere, with the exception of Bernstein (1999), has been dominated by a reconceptualist theoretical break with institutional focus on schooling and empiricism. Reconceptualism in Anglo–American curriculum has adopted broad perspectives from a wide range of philosophical, psychoanalytical, aesthetical and ethical standpoints, which runs counter to the didactics 'down-to-earth, realistic point of departure' (Bjerg et al. 1995: 33). Criticism has ranged from its need for greater verticality and disciplinarity (Pinar, 2007) to its loss of scientific authority and marginalization in the field of education (Ladwig, 1996). This issue invites historical, theory, and research papers that address this nexus of Anglo and Continental curriculum theorising.

Important dates and submission process

- Deadline for proposal submission: 1 December 2017 (250-500 words)
- Notification of proposal acceptance: 1 February 2018
- Deadline for full manuscript submissions: 1 September 2018
- Manuscripts returned to authors for revision: 1 November 2018
- Final manuscripts due: 1 March 2019 (6,000-8,000 words)
- Publication: 2019

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A free one-day event co-funded by Keele University and Cultural Politics.

Tuesday 27th June, Keele University. Register [1]here.

Schedule

10am – 10.30am: Coffee

10.30am – 11.00am: Mark Featherstone (Keele University, Sociology) – Introduction: ‘The New (Ab)Normal: Sociology in Extremis’

11.00am – 11.30am: Ronnie Lippens (Keele University, Criminology) – ‘Rothko’s Chapel in Houston, Texas (1970): Luciferian Notes on the Age of Light’

11.30am – 12.00pm: Eva Giraud (Keele University, Media) and Sarah-Nicole Aghassi-Isfahani (Keele University, Sociology) – ‘Has Critique run out of Memes? Interrogating the ‘Post-Truth’ Media Landscape’

12.00pm – 1.00pm: Deborah Frizzell (Art, William Patterson University, USA) – ‘Trajectories of Aesthetics and Ethics in the Chthulucene: A Case Study of “Outcast” Women Artists’

1.00pm – 2.00pm: Lunch

2.00pm – 2.30pm: Kirsten Forkert (Media, Birmingham City University) – ‘Austerity, Right Populism and the Public Mood’

2.30pm -3.00pm: Seb Franklin (Kings College, London) and Penny Newell (Kings College, London) – ‘The Economics of Abnormality’

3.00pm – 4.00pm: Steve Hall (Criminology, Teeside University) – ‘System Reboot: Steve Bannon’s Dream as the Restoration of the Pseudo-Pacification Process’

4.00pm – 4.30pm: Coffee

4.30pm – 5.45pm: Doug Kellner (Education, UCLA, USA) – ‘Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism’
Background: Following the financial crash of 2008 and the subsequent tightening of economic conditions resulting from massive bank bail outs many of the major western liberal democracies lurched towards the right politically. The crash created a hole in public finances that increased economic and consequently social and cultural stresses with the result that rightist politics based upon law, order, discipline, hard work, and the policing of borders became more popular. In the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe this hardening of attitudes towards others remained inside the political mainstream and essentially took the form of a militarised version of (neo)liberalism intolerant of weakness and vulnerability.

It is possible to argue that the political objective of this new militarised approach to policy was two-fold. In the European context, where the economic consensus suggested that it was necessary to balance the books, the aim was to claw back the money spent saving the financial system from public services deemed unproductive and too expensive. In order to defend this turn to austerity, the second policy aim of the hardening of the liberal agenda was to justify the move to an austere society and an austere cultural attitude through the denigration of others (the poor, ethnic minorities, immigrants, the disabled) who it was claimed were a drain on squeezed, scarce, resources. While the rich, and particularly the super-rich, remain necessary in this story, because they are seen to grow the economy and effectively keep people in work, various others are represented as redundant, unproductive, useless, and exorbitant. They cost too much and can no longer be afforded. They are the waste product of the stressed, austere, society and in this cultural politics they are effectively dehumanised.

However, the problem with this social and cultural approach, which was designed to maintain the integrity of (neo)liberal consensus that has ruled since the end of the Cold War at the expense of the weakest and most vulnerable, is that it appears to have unleashed social and cultural forces that the mainstream seems no longer able to control. These social and cultural forces, which seem to be based upon the resentment of the old working classes towards a model of globalised society they feel abandoned them long ago and the fear of the middle classes who want to protect what they have managed to build in the good years, are transgressive of the (neo)liberal mainstream because they are organised around ideological coordinates that run counter to those that support the hegemonic global social, economic, political, and cultural order. While the hard language that speaks to those threatened by the effects of increasing economic stress emerged from the mainstream, it appears that it has now been taken over by populist leaders (Farage, Trump, Le Pen) who have advanced the original austerity narrative of the insiders in such a way that the (liberal) ‘system’ is now somehow supportive of the other who threatens normal, ‘hard working’, people and therefore must be replaced by a new social, economic, political, and cultural system based upon meeting the needs of the silent majority.

But is this new narrative, which we are provocatively calling the new (ab)normal, truly revolutionary in its attempt to over-turn the (neo)liberal hegemon which has organised American-led processes of globalisation since the 1980s? If this is, indeed, the case, and we have entered a new cultural sphere of radical (ab)normality, then we wonder what the future holds. In many respects it seems that the new turn to the right is wholly negative, simply because its key figures have no positive programme for change. Instead the turn to a politics of anti-liberal (ab)normality, which have ironically come to the fore in the home countries of neo-liberal globalisation (Britain and America), appear to be based in little more than a violent rejection of otherness in all forms and a valorisation of borders, boundaries, and defensive formations. In this way the new(ab)normal, which we have seen emerge from the rhetoric of Farage, Trump, and Le Pen, seems to be founded upon an ideology of intolerance that recalls the Italian fascism and German national socialism of the 1920s and 1930s. Or perhaps this is hyperbole and there is actually very little that is new about the new situation. Perhaps the idea of anti-liberal (ab)normality is simply about the retrenchment of white, male, power which has effectively dominated the west from the very beginning?

Given the possibility of the rise of these new cultural politics, which appear to legitimate racism and sexism in
the name of a kind of anti-intellectual populism, should we now speak of anew authoritarianism that has been more or less entirely normalised? In the face of the potential rise of this new discourse, which we want to think about in terms of the new(ab)normality, the objectives of this workshop are to (1) try to make sense of the emergence of what appears to be a new form of intolerance, which seems to have very quickly moved from the margins into the mainstream and managed to construct itself in terms of an apparently radical, but also entirely reasonable and pragmatic response to the critical state of the old (neo)liberal hegemon; (2) think about whether academics need to develop new ways to respond to this potentially new cultural politics of violence through the use of knowledge, evidence, theory, and pedagogy in the name of creating a space for a more constructive, positive, inclusive cultural politics able to shape the future for everybody; and finally (3) to develop a proposal for a special issue of Cultural Politics, concerned with these issues, questions, and debates.


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**CfP: Japan in the Digital Age (2017-06-13 08:00)**

Japan in the Digital Age
Call for Papers for a one-day Symposium
Saturday 28th October, 2017
The Shed, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester

Keynote Speakers

Prof. Ian Condry, Professor of Japanese Cultural Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Mr. Kazuhito Gen-I (? ?), award-winning media practitioner, working on 2.5 Dimension project (theatre adaptation of anime, manga and videogame)

Japan has been a place of fascination throughout the years, particularly to those interested in media and popular culture, business, science and technology, and other related areas such as transport and tourism. Yet surprisingly, there is little sustained discussion on how contemporary Japan is situated within the rapidly changing landscape of digital technologies in the New Millennium. How has digitisation changed Japanese aesthetics and values? Have mobile phone technologies altered the way Japanese business language is used? How does 'tradition' shape Japanese digital cultures? Such questions need urgent attention as currently, there are a number of significant and innovative digital initiatives in Japan which have impacted on Japanese culture and arts, technology, business and society, but are little known outside of Japan.

We invite academics, PG students, industry researchers and practitioners for contributions which examine the transformation of Japan in the Digital Age, and the transformation of the Digital Age through Japanese culture, practice, politics, technologies, industries and beyond. The overall aim of the Symposium is to provide a supportive and inspiring environment to encourage cross-disciplinary and cross-sector dialogues, to learn about innovative digital projects in Japan, and to build a network of those engaged with Japan through their work and lives.

Suggested topics include:
Digital technologies and Japanese popular culture (e.g. anime/manga, games, fashion)

Japanese digital identity, politics and society

Digital communications, Japanese language and business

Innovative Japanese digital design and technologies

Please submit a 250-word abstract to [1]e.miyake@mmu.ac.uk by 4th August 2017, using the following format: title + abstract; name of author(s); affiliation; email; key words. For any enquiries, please get in touch with Dr. Esperanza Miyake ([2]e.miyake@mmu.ac.uk)?

1. mailto:e.miyake@mmu.ac.uk
2. mailto:e.miyake@mmu.ac.uk

Political speeches, relational authoriality and fetishising ‘strong leadership’ (2017-06-14 08:00)

The notion of relational authoriality, which consistency demands I acknowledge emerged in conversations with [1]Jana Bacevic, conveys a relational realist perspective on the question of authorship. It rejects the notion of the liberal individual as the origin of a text while continuing to insist that there is a definite causal story to be told about the emergence of any text, encompassing individuals and the relations between them. Relational authoriality stresses how creative production happens through interaction, direct or mediated, between individuals who care about what they discuss. People debate, discuss and digress about things that matter to them. It’s this concern to enter into dialogue, sometimes with the parties involved changing as a result of the process, which provides the relational underpinning to creative production. It might be that a particular individual takes forward this raw material, running with it and placing their mark on it in a way which leads to it being recognised as theirs. But this simple wouldn’t be possible without these prior networks, acting as the creative ecology within which individual authorship becomes feasible. Every completed act of authorship has its own history of emergence and accurate accounts of it will lead back to individuals, interactions and relations.

I was led to think back to this line of thought when reading Shattered: Inside Hilary Clinton’s Doomed Campaign. As is often the case, speeches and speech writing figure prominently in the book. I’ve read a lot of campaign books over the years and I’ve always been gripped by these details. In part this is because political speeches are such a crucial part of the politician’s craft, with their (perceived) success or failure being integral to the fluctuating fortunes of political careers. This isn’t simply an American phenomenon. Consider the acclaim which greeted David Cameron’s 2005 conference speech, delivered without a lectern or notes, widely seen to have tipped the leadership contest in his favour. We can see a parallel in Ed Milliband’s first conference speech as Labour leader. Much of the increasing ‘plausibility’ of Corbyn as a political leader, at least amongst the commentariat, rests on the increasingly polished way in which he delivers speeches.

Why does this matter so much? There are many reasons why accomplished delivery are valued in an age of media-saturated politics. But I wonder if a fetish of delivery reflects a denial of relational authoriality. In reality, all who have considered it must surely recognise that politicians do not straight-forwardly write their own speeches, allowing them to meaningfully claim ownership of them in an individualistic sense. These are team efforts, at best produced through careful collaboration between committed partners and at worst produced mechanically through
committees. We can see the character of politicians, as well as the nature of the organisations they inhabit, reflected in how they approach these challenges. Contrast the dialogical collaboration between Obama and trusted aides with the byzantine, sometimes conflicting, structures which Clinton often established for speech writing. But these are subtle judgements, pointing to relational authoriality rather than individual authorship, which sit uneasily within the individualistic frame of ‘political leadership’. We fetishise delivery of speeches, as well as the perceived strength of the individuals who deliver them, as the spiralling complex of governance ever more outstrips the capacities of the ‘strong leaders’ we praise.

1. http://www.janabacevic.net/

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How do we explain the election of Donald Trump? (2017-06-15 08:00)

How do we explain the election of Donald Trump? Far too much of the media's response to this question has been to take Trump's account of his own powers at face value. This scion of the elite, who never felt at home amongst the elite into which he was born, imagines himself as able to work with kings yet not lose the common touch. His [1]use of Twitter is integral to this fantasy, resting on the [2]illusion of unmediated interaction with everyday Americans. But the biographies I've read of Trump in recent months make me wonder if it goes further than this, reflecting an identification he has cultivated since his early years as a young man who felt out of place, with endless meetings with ‘ordinary people’ facilitated by his work with his father. Either way, as Jan-Werner Müller cautions in this [3]excellent essay, we need to avoid taking the account of figures like Trump at face value:

> While disputing virtually every claim made by populists – especially their supposedly simplistic policy solutions – they buy without question the story that populists sell about their own successes. When Arron Banks proclaims that 'Facts don’t work ... You've got to connect with people emotionally,' they just nod. But it isn't true that ‘the masses’ are emotional basket-cases ready to be seduced by a charismatic demagogue. For a start, the neat distinction between reason and emotion is misleading. People are angry for a reason, and usually they can articulate that reason, as part of a larger story about what went wrong in their lives. Trump gained some trust as an outsider and, even more, as a credible exemplar of what it means to be unprofessional in politics.

There are many features of our political context which remain obscure if we uncritically accept Trump's narrative of his own success. This [4]crucial essay by Mike Davis captures many of them: the results of Republican gerrymandering, voter suppression, flight of funders away from the Presidential race towards House and Senate, investment in state-focused political think tanks, the electoral peculiarity of the American system and the psephological particularity of the result.

However the most important feature is perhaps the weakness of the Clinton campaign. As Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes report in their *Shattered*, the Clinton campaign deliberately sought to avoid substantive engagement with the working-class electorate, so long dormant within American politics, which Trump's campaign successfully mobilised. From pg 193:
One of the lessons Mook and his allies took from Michigan was that Hillary was better off not getting into an all-out war with her opponent in states where non-college-educated whites could be the decisive demographic. In Michigan, they believed, Hillary’s hard campaigning had called attention to an election that many would-be voters weren’t paying attention to, and given Bernie a chance to show that his economic message was more in line with their views. So Mook’s clique looked at the elevation of the Michigan primary—poking the sleeping bear of the white working class—as a mistake that shouldn’t be repeated. “That was a takeaway that we tried to use in the general,” said one high-ranking campaign official.

Their analytics driven campaign was orientated towards tactical advantage in each state during the primaries, leaving them to ignore the large swaths of rural and/or working class voters whose disengagement rarely registered empirically in political models. From pg 130-131:

Bill’s time on the ground only encouraged his skepticism of Mook’s reluctance to send him outside population centers. Having grown up in Arkansas, Bill understood that a major political player—a senator, a governor, or a former president—could bridge ideological divides by just showing up in small towns that never got much attention from elected leaders. He liked to go to small towns in northern New Hampshire, Appalachia, and rural Florida because he believed, from experience, that going to them and acknowledging he knew how they lived their lives, and the way they made decisions, put points on the board. Mook wanted Bill in places where the most Hillary-inclined voters would see him. That meant talking to white liberals and minorities in cities and their close-in suburbs. That was one fault line of a massive generational divide between Bill and Mook that separated old-time political hustling from modern data-driven vote collecting. Bill was like the old manager putting in a pinch hitter he believed would come through in the clutch while the eggheaded general manager in the owner’s box furiously dialed the dugout phone to let him know there was an 82 percent chance that the batter would make an out this time. It’s not that Bill resisted data—he loved poring over political numbers—but he thought of it as both necessary and insufficient for understanding electoral politics.

What engagement took place was largely tone-deaf, reflecting the limitations of public opinion research, the insulated world of political operatives and the limitations of campaign structures which reinforced orthodoxy. Any account of the virtues of Trump’s campaign needs to be supplemented by an account of the weakness of Hilary Clinton’s.

1. https://markcarrigan.net/2017/06/01/the-meaning-of-realdonaldtrump/

When Tweets Turn Sour: Avoiding Legal Pitfalls on Social Media (2017-06-16 08:00)

When Tweets Turn Sour: Avoiding Legal Pitfalls on Social Media
2 hour masterclass, £12-13 per person
When:6-8pm, Wednesday 28th June 2017
5136
Where: NUJ, Headland House, 72 Acton Street, London, WC1X 9NB
Who for: Anyone using Twitter for PR, media/journalism or any kind of professional work

Book your place via Eventbrite: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/when-tweets-turn-sour-tickets-34619598150?aff=erepanelorg
Pressure on journalists to use social media grows daily, but fast-changing criminal and civil case law makes this perilous terrain – as Katie Hopkins, Sally Bercow and George Monbiot have found. Designed for professional communicators, this masterclass covers up-to-date case studies of privacy, libel, contempt, as well as copyright and emerging issues such as information security, and reputation management. Holly Powell-Jones is a journalist, media tutor and researcher who lectures on Media Law and Ethics for Goldsmiths University, London College of Communication and City, University of London. She also trains journalists, businesses, charities and schools on managing the risks of new media and runs a police-funded project in secondary schools on social media law and ethics. She is completing a PhD on youth cyber offending.

1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/when-tweets-turn-

Help us forge UK applied sociology (2017-06-16 08:15)

Help us forge UK applied sociology

by Nick Fox and Marguerite Regan

For the past 18 months, the British Sociological Association (BSA) group Sociologists outside Academia (SOA) has been focusing on the potential for careers working as applied or practical sociologists, beyond the traditional remits of academia. Sociology is essential not only for understanding the big problems that face society, but also the daily issues that need addressing at work, at home or in the community. We believe sociologists have the concepts, the theories and detailed knowledge of organisations and human interactions that can address such everyday situations.
In the US and elsewhere, sociology has already established a profile for solving these kinds of problems, but much less so in the UK. That's not to say there aren't UK sociologists already using their skills and knowledge in applied settings. Some call themselves ‘consulting sociologists’, others run businesses that provide sociological expertise to industry, local government and voluntary organisations. There are also many sociologists working in areas where they bring to bear their knowledge and expertise, even if they don't have the job title 'sociologist'. But there is a lack of visibility around this application of sociology outside academia.

Last year an SOA workshop kick-started work on developing a field of applied and practical sociology here in the UK. We considered the kinds of knowledge, skills and models needed to solve the problems that organisations, businesses and the public-sector face, and started to map out how careers as an applied sociologist could pan out. Doing this kind of applied sociological work required specific skills to explore how social and cultural factors link individual experience to everyday events. Generic skills were also needed, including reasoning, communication and collaborative working.

SOA now wants to evolve this work further, by developing a curriculum in applied sociology for final year undergraduate students. This curriculum can not only be offered to universities as an option they might develop for their students, but will also be a way to really clarify the knowledge, concepts, and subject-specific and generic skills that an applied sociologist will need to work effectively in non-academic organisations and settings.

We invite applications from sociologists who would like to join an SOA task and finish group to work on this development of an applied sociology curriculum. We conceptualise a six-month programme, in which the group will meet virtually. At the end, we will seek funding for a public launch of our curriculum for applied sociology.

If you are a sociologist who works predominantly in a non-academic setting, but use your sociological skills and knowledge to inform your work, we would like to hear from you. We would also welcome one or two current undergraduate or master's students to join the team, to provide input in terms of what is needed educationally in an undergraduate applied sociology curriculum.

Unfortunately, we cannot pay any fees for this work, and we do not have a budget for face-to-face meeting expenses. This will be a labour of love, for those wanting to flex their sociological imaginations, and due credit will be given to all those involved.

Please contact Nick Fox, SOA co-convenor ([1] n.j.fox@sheffield.ac.uk) for more information about the project and details of how to apply. Applications will close on 19 June 2017 and successful applicants will be notified shortly thereafter.
How Corbyn hacked the media (2017-06-17 08:00)

It’s conventional wisdom that Corbyn’s leadership campaign was the target of brutal coverage by the media. I was interested to learn in The Candidate, by Alex Nunns, that this wasn’t quite how the campaign itself saw the situation. Understanding why can help elucidate the surprise that was #Election2017. From loc 4591-4556:

Ask some of Corbyn’s allies about the press coverage they received during the leadership contest and a surprising response comes back. “There are very few campaigns on the left that I’ve been involved in where we’ve had good press,” says Jon Lansman, “but this is one of them.” His definition of “good press” is unconventional, a variation on ‘all publicity is good publicity.’ Of course there was hostility, but the campaign managed to connect with its intended Labour audience in spite of it. “We always made the agenda. The others didn’t get a look in. We were the story throughout.” It was all about Corbyn. Because of the scale of interest, the campaign’s press officers found that along with the dross came greater opportunities to place their stories in the media than would normally be afforded to a left candidate. “The majority of things we tried to land landed, and in the ways we wanted them to land,” says James Mills, who was seconded to the press team from CWU. Whatever was being thrown at them, Team Corbyn pushed on with scheduled policy announcements, getting out a positive message that Mills believes cut through.

This dynamic within the print media played out in turn within the broadcast media. Not only were the campaign setting the agenda, with journalists responding in ever greater numbers to the issues they were raising, it led to increasing television coverage which highlighted the mismatch between the construction of Corbyn as a dangerous radical and the nice bearded chap who no one could really take much of a personal dislike to. From loc 4530:

Broadcast media followed a journalistic agenda that was still largely set by newspapers, despite the precipitous decline in their circulation. But broadcast had an inbuilt corrective missing from print—viewers and listeners could see and hear Corbyn for themselves. “They threw everything at Jeremy and it was so over the top that when he came on TV you expected him to be a combination of all sorts of villains,” says McDonnell. “When he came across as just a nice bloke answering questions honestly, that was it.”

This is something which the media themselves could be drawn into. As Phil BC insightfully pointed out some time ago, professional commentators are prone to confuse an absence of the presentational skills common amongst the political elite with a profound naïveté, as if Corbyn and McDonnell hadn’t spent their entire lives negotiating the political machine with some success from a position of marginality. As he [1] asked in response to media astonishment at McDonnell’s apparent competence in his first speech at a Labour conference as Shadow Chancellor, “Were they really expecting him to commit Labour to a programme legislating for full communism?”

An escalating media campaign against Corbyn brought him endless ‘earned’ media, while offering an opportunity for the public to make up their own mind about the hyperbolic cliches in terms of which such media warfare was inevitably fought. If he got dragged into this, perhaps punching back against the onslaught, he likely would have been torn apart as self-defence would be cast as ‘gaffes’ and replayed endlessly. But by choosing to ignore media
condemnation, in a way analogous to but different from Trump, it could be exploited for the benefit of the campaign. A similar effect was at work with denunciations from within the party. After Blair’s famous speech in which he attacked members drawn towards Corbyn as needing a heart transplant, the campaign saw an immediate influx of donations and volunteers.

I’d like to understand the mechanisms at work here: when do media attacks have their desired effect and when do they simply drive welcome coverage of a candidate? How does social media work to undermine the former and bring about a latter? One clear effect is that fighting back against this media onslaught can provide a way for followers to participate. There are legitimate issues which can be raised around ‘digital activism’ but I find it plausible that this social media activity helped the campaign consolidate, amplified its message and drew people into ‘offline’ participation. Though how, if at all, these effects worked to blunt media attacks is a more complex question. From loc 4530-4545:

Perhaps the most important factor explaining why the press onslaught backfired was the existence of social media. The old press no longer enjoyed a monopoly on having a voice. Through Facebook and Twitter ordinary people could critique and rebut journalists’ output directly. “Every time the mainstream media attacked Jeremy the social media shield would go up around him, bat it off, and get to the truth of the matter,” says Marshajane Thompson. Research carried out by YouGov in August 2015 found that 57 per cent of Corbyn supporters cited social media as “a main source of news,” compared to around 40 per cent for backers of the other candidates. 78 “Part of the reason why they were spending so much time on social media was because they didn’t trust the traditional media any more,” believes Ben Sellers. One of the main functions of the Corbyn For Leader social media operation run by Sellers and Thompson was to circumvent the press, both by publicising the explosion of activity happening all around the country, and by curating the mainstream media to pick out the half-decent reports (“sometimes that was a struggle,” Sellers quips).

There was an [2]interesting finding before the election that there were more Labour tweeters who also tended to tweet more. There is a wide network, retweeting Labour candidates, with a larger and sustained focus on Corbyn than was the case with the Conservatives. Identifying what role this played in the general election will be central to understanding [3]the rise of Corbyn. My suggestion is that the use of social media in the earlier leadership election would be a useful place to begin this inquiry.

Much of the reaction to Labour’s election success last week has been framed in terms of their ‘rewriting the rules’. One particularly explicit example of this can be seen in an article by Jonathan Freedland, an enthusiastic critic of Corbyn, pontificating that Corbyn took “the traditional political rulebook” and “put it through the shedder”. What are these rules that had formerly seemed so influential?

1. Young people don’t vote. Any enthusiasm you create with them will come to nothing because they won’t turn out on election day.

2. UKIP voters are Tories. If UKIP ceases to be viable then most would switch to the Conservatives.

3. Divided parties never win elections. Unless a party can pull together at the local and national level, it can’t achieve success.

4. Economic credibility is crucial. If a party is not perceived as being economically competent then there is no chance voters will trust it.

There are certainly more rules like this. The conventional rulebook wouldn’t have proved so influential if it only had four points in it. But where do these rules come from? How is this conventional wisdom formed? How does it become so influential that the metaphor of the ‘rulebook’, adhered to by all ‘serious’ commentators and operators, can be taken seriously?

Part of the answer lies in the fixation on the ‘political centre ground’ which is embedded in the dominant wisdom of Labour modernisers. The first cohort fought and won against the Labour left in the 1980s. The second cohort grew up in the Labour establishment moulded by these predecessors. The internal struggles of the 1980s cast a long shadow over them all, a fight to drag the party to a political location and then keep it there. As Alex Nunns describes it on loc 4468 of The Candidate:

> The political centre ground, in this view, appears as a clearing in a forest—a fixed location—and politics is a simple orienteering exercise where the parties are given a map and a compass and told to go and find it. Occasionally they inexplicably wander off into the woods and have to be scolded by journalists until they take their navigation task seriously again. The great, unpredictable social and economic forces that constantly sculpt new historical terrain are, in this Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme version of politics, merely gusts of wind that must not blow the parties off course. Nothing changes.

Despite this professed concerned for ‘what works’, adherents of the political rulebook often display a remarkable lack of empirical interest in the political world. This can produce odd juxtapositions, such as the Blairite candidate Liz Kendall being backed by supporters who saw "understanding what it takes to win an election" as the most important characteristic of being a leader while all the available data suggested her chosen tactics for winning the leadership election were heralding no success whatsoever. The invocation of ‘what works’, the celebration of oneself as pragmatist foregoing childish moral indulgence in pursuit of success, licenses a weird disregard for how the world works. This is I think because it’s not pragmatism in any meaningful sense but ideology. The political centre ground is a theory of politics. Furthermore, it’s a painfully simplistic theory of politics unable to adapt to changing circumstances. As Nunns goes on to write on loc 4484,
The trouble with such a static, ahistorical view is that it is unable to account for new phenomena, much less understand people’s motivations for acting in unexpected ways. So when hundreds of thousands of people simultaneously decided they had other priorities than hopelessly trudging around looking for a centre ground that, mysteriously, kept moving further away, these professional political pundits could only dismiss them as either insane or self-indulgent.

Such a theory of politics resists falsification. It in its original context, it reflected a degree of engagement with the world around its progenitors. In a important sense, New Labour started as a psephological analysis of a changing electorate and a tactical case about engagement with the media. Over time, it became folk wisdom, espoused by all ‘serious’ people as a way to demonstrate their seriousness, increasingly cutting it off from any meaningful analysis of the circumstances in which their serious business was being conducted. It might resist falsification but its advocates greedily seized upon confirmation. As Nunns points out, Labour’s continued rightward shift yielded little success at two elections, but the eventual victory of 1997 was taken as a sign that the moderniser’s case was correct all along. They had vanquished their foes on the left and, what is more, no ‘serious’ person could doubt they were right to do so. Perhaps there’s a risk that this hubris be repeated by the Labour left today. Everything I say below stands in my mind as a caution about what is to come, as well as an account of what has passed.

This analysis had become a folk theory, so obviously correct that repudiations of it could no longer be taken seriously. The culmination of this process was the ascendency of Cameron, the heir to Blair, who made the same case in relation to his own party, albeit primarily with regards to social issues rather than economic ones. Much like the Labour modernisers, what become an article of faith originally began as a psephological analysis, developed through the polling of Lord Ashcroft, appointed Deputy Chairman of the Conservatives under David Cameron. The intellectual case these originators assented to became a point of division and contention within the party, as people flocked to join their cause or lashed out against it. What interests me are the subtle changes that occur as groups are led to defend or attack reflective arguments and how this changes how people relate to such arguments. My contention is that a theory of politics that was already relatively immune to falsification becomes a guarded axiom unable to be seriously considered or any longer reflected upon.

This was the process by which a reflective analysis of political change transmuted into a folk theory and ossified even further into the political rule book. How was this reinforced by media commentators? After all, it’s their discursive power which is so crucial to accepted/acceptable accounts of ‘how things are’ in politics. At one level, it can be explained in terms of the patronage networks that exist between senior politicians and senior journalists. As Nunns writes of Andrew Rawnsley’s contempt for Corbny on loc 4406, “Suddenly, the centre of gravity was moving away from the Labour elite to which he had unparalleled access, and from which he had mined the raw materials needed to fashion—with considerable skill—the books and journalism that had won him acclaim”. But there’s a broader process at work, insightfully captured by Phil BC in this post. I’ve quoted the relevant section at length here but please do read the [1]whole thing in full:

Firstly, consider what mainstream commentators observe. They watch the comings and goings, the toings and doings of senior politicians. They see how MPs club together in the Commons, formulate policy, take legislation through the House and involve themselves in massive rows with one another. This, more or less, forms the basis of copy that comes to thousands of hours of broadcasting and millions of words year in, year out. And this is politics. What happens in the chamber matters simply because that’s what appears to matter – it’s where policy is brought forward and enacted into law. What goes on in politics outside, like local council and devolved administration stuff simply isn’t on the radar, because they don’t see it. Likewise, movements that occupy the streets or, indeed, [2]transforming a political party are curiosities but unworthy of real analysis and understanding. It’s all such a sideshow to Parliament’s main event.
A similar sort of process is at work with our professional Westminster watchers, but is ramped up to a higher degree. Firstly, consider what mainstream commentators observe. They watch the comings and goings, the toings and doings of senior politicians. They see how MPs club together in the Commons, formulate policy, take legislation through the House and involve themselves in massive rows with one another. This, more or less, forms the basis of copy that comes to thousands of hours of broadcasting and millions of words year in, year out. And this is politics. What happens in the chamber matters simply because that’s what appears to matter – it’s where policy is brought forward and enacted into law. What goes on in politics outside, like local council and devolved administration stuff simply isn’t on the radar, because they don’t see it. Likewise, movements that occupy the streets or, indeed, [3] transforming a political party are curiosities but unworthy of real analysis and understanding. It’s all such a sideshow to Parliament’s main event.

This focus is also bounded by the media the commentators produce. Famously, the BBC take its lead for what the hot politics stories are from the front pages of the broadsheets. Likewise, hacks in other operations parasite off the BBC and each other to fill the schedules, put stuff out, and meet the insatiable appetite for hot takes. The result is little time for thinking, a scramble for a story or an original angle, and a tendency toward herding thanks to the recursive universe generated from the quantum foam of chatter. It produces a mode of thought that is based entirely on appearance without trying to understand what may lie behind what immediately presents itself. For instance, the Tories are the new party of the working class because minimum wage rises. Labour’s members have foisted the disaster onto the party because atomised members of the public tell focus groups. There is no sense of movement, little idea that parties as expressions of interest evolve and move, nor that the people who support them, actively or passively, have connections with multitudes of normal people that can pull, persuade, cajole masses of them and transform them into a collective that starts making its own history. As none of them regularly go on the doors outside of the capital, they have to rely on what the pollsters tell them and, as we saw last night, only two of the established firms come out of the election with any sort of credit.


Thus we have the ‘political rulebook’, the framework within which political reality is interpreted, adhered to by all serious political figures and commentators. It’s empiricism of a particularly stupid sort, oblivious to its own theoretical underpinnings and all the more dangerous for it. It maps the most superficial contours of political life in order to better navigate one’s way towards the mythical centre ground and for no other purpose. In the next post of this series, I’m going to consider what it is about opinion polling that lends itself to such uses, what the consequences are for political leadership and how economic depoliticisation plays a role in propping the whole thing up.

2. http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2016/07/what-is-happening-to-labour-party.html
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Please complete your application by June 20th 2017. We’ll confirm the success of your application by July 1st.

Apply here: [1]https://goo.gl/forms/CBh5RFTCGEi8rf2L2

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**Trolling, public engagement and the sociology of knowledge (2017-06-20 08:00)**

In recent months, I’ve become preoccupied by how we make sense of the experiences of academics being harassed or trolled when using social media. My initial interest in this was in my capacity as a trainer and consultant. One of my roles is to encourage, train and support academics in their use of social media. The apparent rise of this experience necessitates a response. We need to know how to prepare academics for this experience, as well as be able to advise on potential responses and their likely efficacy.

However as a sociologist I’m dissatisfied with the idea that we leave trolling framed solely as a risk encountered in public engagement through social media. There is something more complex happening here, as a new
media infrastructure changes the real and imagined relationship of academics to the wider public. It would be a mistake to frame this in terms of disintermediation: social media changes the role of previous gatekeepers to publics (e.g. journalists, broadcast researchers, think tank staff) while opening up opportunities to work with them in new ways. Their gatekeeping function becomes less straight forward. But it also empowers platforms themselves as gatekeepers, with mediation now being in large part enacted through the architecture of each social media platform.

This can produce what feel like unmediated meetings with the general public. It is imperative that we realise this is not the case and ensure a wide understanding of how platforms mediate interaction, as well as how we can collectively work to exercise an influence over these processes in order to ensure public engagement has a chance of succeeding. But it also invites us to call into question some of the assumptions about publics and our relation to them which were allowed to develop under the conditions provided by the older media infrastructure. I really like the account Jana Bacevic offers of these assumptions in [1]this recent essay:

In assuming a relatively benevolent reception of scientific knowledge, then, appeals such as Chis and Cruickshank’s to engage with different publics—whether as academics, intellectuals, workers, or activists—remain faithful to Popper’s normative ideal concerning the relationship between reasoning and decision-making: ‘the people’ would see the truth, if only we were allowed to explain it a bit better. Obviously, in arguing for dialogical, co-produced modes of knowledge, we are disavowing the assumption of a privileged position from which to do so; but, all too often, we let in through the back door the implicit assumption of the normative force of our arguments. It rarely, if ever, occurs to us that those we wish to persuade may have nothing to say to us, may be immune or impervious to our logic, or, worse, that we might not want to argue with them.

What fascinates me about these encounters is how unprepared we seem to be for the possibility that ‘the public’ could be disinterested or even actively hostile to what we are doing. I don’t think online harassment can be reduced to such hostility, far from it, but I do think it’s often an important component of it. This is even more the case with trolling, though drawing a principled distinction between the two is a (challenging) topic to another post.

We urgently need to prepare for these encounters, including avoiding the dispiriting trap of drawing too sharp a contrast between old and new. We have not left behind an old world of mediated engagement where we can imagine pliant publics to enter a new world of unmediated engagement where we directly encounter hostile publics. There is still mediation and we still imagine our publics. But we now have the possibility of somewhat random, largely unpredictable interactions which I want to argue have important implications for the sociology of knowledge.


The meaning of @realdonaldtrump (2017-06-21 08:00)

How significant can a tweet can be? We can point to isolated cases of individual tweets going viral, creating controversy and producing material outcomes in the world. But isolated tweets rarely have such significance. Instead, we need to look at a Twitter feed as a unit of analysis, taking someone’s entire output on the platform as a sustained
trajectory of action. This is precisely what Peter Oborne and Tom Roberts do in *How Trump Thinks: His Tweets And the Birth of a New Political Language*. It’s not a systematic analysis and there are clear limits to it e.g. the failure to state any principles upon which selections have been made from Trump’s output. But I found it a thought-provoking book, both in terms of understanding Trump’s self-formation as a political figure and how we might approach Twitter methodologically.

There are trivial though interesting biographical details which can be ascertained about Trump through the examination of the feed. For instance the consistency with which he tweets extremely early in the morning and very late at nights lends credence to his claim about sleeping little. Looking at how these tweets are sequenced raises fascinating questions about how Trump spends his time and the psychological state in which he takes to social media. From loc 4084:

In this extraordinary sequence of Tweets, despatched in less than two hours before dawn on 4 March, Donald Trump accused his predecessor of illegally tapping his phone and of being malevolent or mentally ill; attempted to conflate Obama’s routine meetings with the Russian Ambassador at the White House with Trump’s Attorney General Jeff Sessions’s undeclared discussions during the election with the representative of a foreign power; and poured scorn on Arnold Schwarzenegger for his failure to sustain Trump’s TV franchise.

As they say, “Twitter is the medium which allows Trump to expose these thoughts to the world in real time”. Uses of Twitter which seems ill-judged can reveal much more about the user than their learned capacity to deploy it for personal gain. But the more important features, to which Osborne devotes much of his attention, concern his evolving strategy and relationship to the platform. He offers a plausible narrative of Trump coming to find his voice on Twitter, a process tied up with his developing preoccupation with the power of the platform and the reach it affords him:

My twitter account is now reaching more people than the New York Times-not bad. And we’re only going to get better! 11:14 AM –4 Apr 2012

With almost 1.3 million followers and rising really fast, everyone is asking me to critique things(and people). Finally, I will be a critic. 11:41 AM –11 Jun 2012

Today we just passed 1.4 million twitter followers.. 11:09 AM –23 Aug 2012

Happy to have just passed 1.3M Twitter followers. Love communicating with everyone daily. 3:51 PM –2 Jul 2012

Today we just passed 1.4 million twitter followers.. 11:09 AM –23 Aug 2012

Happy to have just passed 1.5M followers on twitter. We picked up over 14,000 yesterday alone. It’s great to speak to everyone daily. 10:31 AM –4 Oct

My twitter followers will soon be over 2 million- & all the “biggies.” It’s like having your own newspaper. 10:07 AM –17 Oct 2012

Wow, I have just exceeded 2 million followers-and in such a short time! 10:38 AM –14 Jan 2013
Obviously in no sense does he ‘reach’ this headline figure. There is a revealing naïveté about how he treats this follower count, something it is hard to ascribe to a strategy of simply trumpeting his own demonstrable advance in social media status. We can't know that he cares about this stuff. But the evidence suggests that he does. His preoccupation with the size of his following is allied with an irritation that not all the reaction he generates is positive:

It’s okay but why do the haters (& losers) want to follow me on twitter?? Get a life! 1:39 PM –12 Feb 2013

My Twitter has been seriously hacked-and we are looking for the perpetrators. 12:00 PM –21 Feb 2013

Twitter will soon be irrelevant if lowlifes are so easily able to hack into accounts. 1:57 PM –21 Feb 2013

I have many great people but also an amazing number of haters and losers responding to my tweets-why do these lowlifes follow nothing to do! 3:34 AM –24 Apr 2013

Wow, I’m at 2,200,000 followers but I’d love to get rid of the haters & losers—they’re such a waste of time! 11:50 AM –25 Apr 2013

But it ultimately seems to be worth it. On numerous occasions he draws the analogy between his personal platform on social media and owning a newspaper. When he enters the presidential race, he styles social media as facilitating his one-man fight back against a crooked established which is stacked against him. Driven by the value he finds in the platform, he continues to celebrate numerical milestones as his Twitter career continues:

"@Heaveenly: @realDonaldTrump how does it feel to have 2.1 million followers” Great like owning The New York Times without the lo $ $es! . 8:04 PM –7 May 2013

Just hit a million on Facebook-http://t.co/FDv4aLoomz

Wow, honored to just pass 2.5M followers on @twitter. Thanks to all my followers. We are going to have a great year together.

Congrats everyone-we topped 4 million today on Twitter-and heading up fast! 1:41 PM –1 Sep 2015

He writes about his tweeting in terms of a relationship with his followers and a personal capacity he excels it. As he put it in a Tweet from July 2014, ”Many people have said I’m the world’s greatest writer of 140 character sentences”. His professed skill at tweeting is what underwrites his imagined relationship with his followers. Through his skill, he builds a relationship with his followers and through the ever-expanding platform that ensues, he accumulates power. As he declares on 17 Oct 2012, ”My twitter has become so powerful that I can actually make my enemies tell the truth.”

He regularly reflects on the specific practices which lead him to accumulate followers:
Everybody's talking about my doing twitter during the likely very boring debate tonight. @realDonaldTrump #DemDebate 10:09 AM – 13 Oct 2015

#DemDebate was really boring but had a lot of fun live tweeting and picked up by far the most followers. 9:57 AM – 14 Oct 2015

Brian–Thanks dummy–I picked up 70,000 twitter followers yesterday alone. Cable News just passed you in the ratings. 12:14PM -7 Nov 2012

This includes retweeting his followers, selectively landing a platform to those without visibility, resonant of his election rhetoric about the forgotten, at least when they talk in a way congruent with his own ego:

"@redneckgp: All you haters out there, STOP trashing the only candidate @realDonaldTrump that will put ALL OF YOU & AMERICA FIRST #trump" 9:32 PM –8 Apr 2016

Dennis Bryant (Twitter handle “RedneckGP”) at this point had seventy-five Twitter followers. He suddenly found himself retweeted to Trump’s then 8 million followers. Trump loved to lift his supporters from obscurity. This was one way he established an emotional bond with his supporters.

"@phickeyma: When I come home from work my Twitter page is filled with Donald Trump tweets...Love reading them...So Bold & Truthful." 5:36 PM –18 Oct 2013

Trump loved to retweet messages from his followers, thus forging a personal bond with voters. In the election year of 2016 Retweets would come to form approximately half of his Twitter output.

What interests me is his developing relationship with the metrics. As he sustains his engagement on the platform, he reports upon his own ‘progress’ in ever more granular ways. He’s concerned with what ‘works’ and what doesn’t. He has data about his ‘growth’ ready-to-hand. There is a relational biography here concerning himself and the platform, as well as the real and imagined relationship it facilitates to his followers. I’m interested in what this case illustrates about imagination and social media, how numbers become means through which dreams come to seem realisable. I’ll come back to this in a later post but I couldn’t resist ending on this tweet:

With almost 1.3 million followers and rising really fast, everyone is asking me to critique things(and people). Finally, I will be a critic. 1141 AM – 11 Jun 2012
There's an intriguing argument in *The Mediated Construction of Social Reality*, by Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp, concerning our dependence upon digital media and how we respond to its failure. From loc 5527:

We feel the costs viscerally: when ‘our’ media break down –we lose internet connection, our password stops working, we are unable to download the latest version of software required by the device or function we want to use –it is as if the social infrastructure were itself, in some respect, breaking down: recursivity has been interrupted, ontological security becomes threatened.

I take their point to be that our reliance upon digital media isn't simply about specific purposes. For digital media to fail does not frustrate us because it impedes a particular purpose. In an important sense, our purposiveness as such, has come to rely upon digital media. For this reason, there is a latent trauma inherent in its breakdown. We experience its failure in terms of a impeded capacity to act within the world, as opposed to simply frustrating specific actions.

The argument is underdeveloped, as can be seen by the “in some respect” clause within it. It’s nonetheless an important and provocative one. It left me wondering if anyone has done qualitative research about experiences of wifi breaking down in terms of the affective fallout from such a failure? My experience of this has tended to be one of whole categories of action being foreclosed when this happens, as in a real sense I lose the ability to proceed with my work, rather than it simply being a contingent impediment to particular tasks. I imagine there’s a great deal of variability in how people respond to such a situation but I nonetheless think Couldry and Hepp are pointing towards something very interesting.

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I've always been a big supporter of bursaries to 'English' (understood as a transitive verb) the dissertations of students for whom English is a second language. These students often have interesting things to say and deserve to have their ideas taken seriously. So, the cost of grammatical editing is worth the benefit of the ideas that can be thereby expressed. But why limit this policy to language differences? After all, academics even speaking their native languages may need some help to make what they are trying to say worth saying.

The next step is to develop machines/programmes that can deliver papers more effectively than their human authors, especially when the authors also tend to restrict the scope of the Q &A to just what was explicitly said in the paper – and not because of a lack of fluency in the language of presentation. Why should academic conferences routinely tolerate human authors who lip sync their papers and respond to questions in the form or repetition or mild elaboration of what they had just said? A computer should be able to do that sort of thing – including Powerpoints – more efficiently without the need for a flesh-and-blood human presence. As long as the human gets credit for what the machine says, there is hardly cause for objection. Moreover, it would diminish the academic’s carbon footprint! To make the conference experience more visually exciting, a hologram of the author could be projected at the moment of presentation. Imagine a large international conference of academics that hosts concurrent sessions of speakers in the style of a Cineplex!
But you might ask at this point who will physically attend such conferences in which most of the speakers are represented by holograms....

But if we’re willing to go this far, then we should take seriously what I call the Google Test – by analogy with the Turing Test. Can an academic audience distinguish between a human presenter and a holographically enhanced machine presenter that is programmed to access a search engine capable of anticipating and responding engagingly to a wide range of questions related to an academic paper? To be sure, the devil is in the details of what ‘engagingly’ means. But someone who developed a form of AI that passes the Google Test for a swathe of academic researchers would effectively issue a wake-up call to academics to redefine their sense of a vocation in a world where every other form of labour is gradually – sometimes not so gradually – being replaced by intelligent machines.

“Help! Help! Here comes everybody!”: Social Media and Corbynism (2017-06-23 08:00)

How has social media contributed to the growing success of Corbynism? In asking this question, we risk falling into the trap of determinism by constructing ‘social media’ as an independent force bringing about effects in an otherwise unchanged world. This often goes hand-in-hand with what Nick Couldry calls ‘the myth of us’, framing social media in terms of the spontaneous sociality it allegedly liberates as previously isolated people are able to come together through the affordances of these platforms. It’s easy to see how one could slip into seeing digital Corbynism in these terms: the power of social media allowed ordinary labour members to come together and take their party back from the Blairite bureaucrats. Such a view would be profoundly misleading. But social media has been crucial to events of the last few years in the Labour party. The challenge is how we can analyse this influence without allowing ‘social media’ to take centre stage.

It’s useful to see these issue in terms of institutional changes within the Labour party. Membership had declined from 405,000 in 1997 to 156,000 in 2009. The election of Ed Miliband in 2010, with his union-backing and soft-left presentation, led to a surge of 46,000 new members. This stabilised throughout the parliament, with continued new members replacing those who left or lapsed, before another small surge took membership past 200,000 in the run up to the 2015 election ([1]loc 377). The fact this influx of new members took place while social media was on the ascendancy in the UK implies no relationship between the two trends. But it’s interesting to note that substantial numbers of new (or returning) members were coming into the party at precisely the moment when new tools and techniques for interacting with each other and with the party itself were coming to be available.

It is convenient for some to blame social media for how events unfolded. We see this view reflected in the complaints of some on the Labour right that the nomination for Corbyn in the first place represented MPs crumbled under an orchestrated social media onslaught. However as Nunns ably documents, we can see a clear political calculus at work in many cases, with many feeling the need to keep the left onside, within their constituencies and beyond. In some cases, he speculates, such pressure provided an excuse to act on pre-existing concerns. There can be a cynical aspect to attributing causal power to social media, deflecting the assertion of incoming members and refusing to engage with developing trends that might threaten one’s political self-interest.

However what fascinates me is those for whom these events were inexplicable. In a way, it is a flip side of attributing power to social media, even if there might also be a cynical aspect to such a judgement. We account for events we don’t understanding by blaming a mysterious new element (‘social media’) which interrupted something
that was previously harmonious. If these events are seen as inexplicable, what does it say about the person making the judgement? As Nunns observes, it was the subterranean nature of Corbyn’s early campaign which allowed later mass rallies and mass actions to appear as if they were the work of some malign outside agency. The processes through which he gathered support were largely invisible to party insiders and this rendered the eventual outcomes close to inexplicable.

Hence the preponderance of bewildered lashing out, vacuous psychologising and conspiratorial theorising about a planned influx of far-left activists. These tendencies are more pronounced when the activity in question is disorganised. As Corbyn’s press spokesperson described the leadership campaign, this central organisation which sought to direct national activity was often “at the reins of a runaway horse”. To a certain extent these incoming groups were disorganised, sometimes acting in ways which reflected that, striking fear in the heart of some MPs familiar with limited contact with ‘the public’ under strictly defined conditions. These ‘normal people’ might prove baffling to career politicians:

We can see a positive myth of us and a negative myth of us, defined by a shared belief that social media has facilitated a transformation of the Labour party. Where they differ is in whether that involves authentic members taking their party back or outside agitators invading the party with malign intent. If we want to understand the role of social media in bringing about Corbyn’s ascent, we need to reject both and look more deeply into how the new tools and techniques they offered were just one amongst many factors in bringing about a profound transformation in British politics.

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/PJEI7U_wrKg?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent
The precursors to curation (2017-06-24 08:00)

While many see the term ‘curation’ as modish and vague, I see it as an important concept to make sense of how we can orientate ourselves within a changing cultural landscape. However I can sympathise with the thrust of these objections, in so far as they take issue with a sense of curation tied in with the worship of the new. Such a use of the term is possibly dominant, framing the curatorial imperative (selecting from available variety through filtering, commentary and evaluation) as a specialisation which emerges to cope with the late modern world. If we frame curation in this way, we miss out on the opportunity to explore how it has changed over time. See for example Nick Couldry’s *Media, Self, World* loc 1732:

Some literary cultures have been distinguished by the richness of their practices of commentary: the Jewish tradition of cabbala is frequently cited, but the ancient world’s general scarcity of textual objects meant that written manuscripts often reached people with the commentary of previous readers’ (so-called ‘scholiasts’) embedded within them, a tradition which reaches us now via the comments written in medieval versions of Greek texts.

Now we are entering an age of commentary for the opposite reason: because of the almost infinite proliferation of things to read and look at, we need to send signals to help each other select from the flux. At the same time, and for related reasons, our ability to send comments and signals has been massively extended by digital media: we take it for granted that by emailing or uploading a link we can point at something interesting we have just read and so alert someone on the other side of the world. The scope of commentary as a practice has been massively enlarged.

It is important that we can address problems and opportunities created by specific technologies without circumscribing our accounts in a way that limits them to these technologies. If we do so, we fail to recognise the continuities and we are inevitably left with anaemic conceptions of the human and the social which tend to be exhausted by the social-technical. From loc 1534 of Couldry’s book:

From searching, other practices quickly develop: practices of exchanging information by forwarding web-links to family, friends or work colleagues, warehousing sites that collect recommendations from users so other users can narrow down their search practice (Digg, etc.), and tools for pre-ordered searches (RSS feeds and other alerts). These various search-enabling practices are increasingly prominent in everyday life as people seek to optimize their access to the vastly expanded flow of potentially relevant information. Their dispersed agency (anyone can forward a link or signal that they ‘like’ a post) contrasts with earlier centuries’ ways of disseminating interesting material: for example, the ancient and medieval world’s florilegia produced by groups of scholars, often in monasteries, who collected interesting quotes from otherwise obscure books into new volumes. Now not only do individuals (from their computers or phones, wherever they are) make the recommendations, but system interfaces, such as Digg and reddit, enable them to recommend cumulatively. Some commentators hope that ‘collaborative filtering’ and other collective forms of information sorting can challenge the dominance of Google and even create new forms of social bond.

How do we ensure we recognise these contrasts? How can we explore them in a way which allows us to productively theorise continuities and differences? There’s a fascinating meta-theoretical challenge here which I’d like to engage
with seriously in future.

Ten Theses on Liberalism (2017-06-24 16:29)

When I was first exposed to liberalism as a political philosophy, I was told that its founders were Spinoza and Locke, two thinkers who have always struck me as having rather little in common, except some common foes – especially a repressive state, be it based on religious or secular grounds.

Liberalism is less an ideology than a meta-ideology, namely, that the good society allows people as much as possible to decide matters for themselves.

Liberals thus place greater value on independence of mind than the particular positions to which it leads people.

A society of liberals may recognize each other as fellow liberals while disagreeing on most substantive matters.

The proper opposite of 'liberal' is not 'conservative' but 'authoritarian'.

The history of liberalism lacks a substantive focus that is conveyed across time, as each generation faces its own obstacles to the exercise of liberty.

It would be difficult to track liberalism in societies that lack a strong sense of self individuation and ownership because one would not be able to identify the relevant sense of 'independence' that the liberal values in persons.

Tolerance for a liberal is not an end in itself but rather a background virtue against which agreement and disagreement can be openly expressed.

Liberalism's main political challenge is to expand the sphere of tolerable diversity, understood in terms of participants, positions and outcomes.

The sociology of liberalism begins by assuming that individuals spontaneously differ and so various changes of mind are always required to generate any stable social consensus, which is itself always presumed to be temporary.

Modernity places a positive value on liberalism, though history suggests that it is by no means clear that liberalism can be fostered and maintained by purely liberal means.

Dedicated to Carl Gombrich, who queried the nature of liberalism on Twitter.
Lance Goodman (2017-06-24 17:03:08)
...and on the face of it who would quibble with such values and positions? The knowing sociologist would contextualise these and suggest that they are exercised often within a power/knowledge context. Poverty and social exclusion can make positions such as tolerance irrelevant to the everyday misery many endure in liberal societies. That is not argue that we do away with some of those theses but to admit that from certain subject positions they look like comfortable bourgeois theses argued from the safety of the coffee house from which many sprung. A nice summation and useful starting point for discussion,

Steve Fuller (2017-06-25 08:51:28)
Yes, but think of it this way: Critical theorists would be out of a job if liberals weren’t such hypocrites! All of critical theory’s positive normative ideals – such as they are – are parasitic on liberalism, but unfortunately liberals don’t live up to their own hype.

Public intellectuals as guides to the political flux, Or, “who can tell us what the fuck is going on?” (2017-06-25 08:00)

In the last couple of days, I’ve been reading The Candidate by [1]Alex Nunns. It’s a detailed and insightful account of Corbyn’s ascent to the leadership of the Labour party and the conditions which made this possible. After the election, it can also be read as as an analysis of broader conditions which might facilitate Corbyn’s ascendency to government. What both events share is their unsettling of political assumptions, as nascent transformations in political life made themselves felt for the first time in outcomes which professional observers of politics dismissed as impossibilities.

There’s an insightful discussion in The Candidate of this infamous dismissal of Labour members as ‘morons’ by Blairite apparatchik John McTernan. It took place in the run up to the leadership election when the first authoritative poll gave Corbyn a huge advantage over his rivals:

![John McTernan](https://example.com/mcternan.png)
What fascinates Nunns about this is how the bewilderment of the presenters led them to so openly reveal their biases. The underlying assumptions which bind together establishment worlds of politics and the media stand repudiated by these events and the presenters “struggle to keep their journalistic footing for five minutes of balanced analysis, even as the political terrain falls away beneath them” (loc 4070). As he goes on to observe on loc 4086:

In such moments of political flux, when a sudden development cannot be made to fit into the standard patterns of reporting used to depict the world, underlying biases are revealed. The genuine shock evinced in the Newsnight studio was reflected across the media; the shared assumptions and sympathies echoed in the vast bulk of the reporting and commentary that followed.

We have seen a lot of political flux in recent years. It would be absurdly inaccurate to see this uncertainty as something unique to the 21st century. There have been many other periods of world history characterised by a similar degree of uncertainty, as well as the the obvious point that ‘our’ certainty has often been ‘their’ uncertainty e.g. military adventurism during a relatively stable period of British politics. So by ‘political flux’, I mean events which can’t be incorporated into the intellectual frameworks dominant within the media and politics, usually taking place within national politics but sometimes aggregating together like an outflowing of nested bubbles across the globe.

But I believe media saturation represents a turning point because it leaves events unfolding more quickly, due to the affordances of digital communications, as well as folding back bewildered commentary into those events themselves. The political terrain can fall apart much more quickly and we can many more conversations in the period of time in which it is falling apart. There has been a qualitative and quantitative change in how such moments of uncertainty are constituted, as well as how they can generate new events.

Under these circumstances, I’m increasingly convinced there are new openings for public intellectuals. Probably not for hedgehogs but rather for foxes: discursive power falters in these moments of uncertainty and there’s new opportunities for influence available to those who can quickly and plausibly offer sophisticated explanations of events & maps of ways forward while the existing arbiters of political reality are quite openly wondering what the fuck is going on. There is a place opening up for a new kind of intellectual here. Can the established conditions of critical social thought give rise to it?

2. https://www.youtube.com/embed/r9hNQSghYKs?version=3&rel=1&fs=1&autohide=2&showsearch=0&showinfo=1&iv_load_policy=1&wmode=transparent

John McCreery (2017-06-26 01:06:48)
Interesting point. How do we teach new generations of public intellectual wannabes how to be more foxy? Especially when academic disciplines reward specialization?
In political and social theory, the notion of constitution remains a central topic inasmuch as the term articulates a modern predicament with deep historical roots. For constitutions are not merely juridical objects of a superior rank that ground rights, institute law-making capacities, and secure state legitimacy. They attest to the self-constituting capacities of society to produce normative structures and shape life in common. This power of a community (or some of its members) to make and re-make its political form of coexistence manifests itself in the sedimentation of social practices, concepts, institutions, and knowledge. In this sense, a constitution does not represent a static unity of purpose, but rather an open arena of conflicting forces, processes, and strategies. The question of constitution is of special relevance and urgency today, both in the local context of the conference (as Chile has recently embarked on a process of establishing a new constitution) and in the international arena (given the constitutional crisis of the EU, the populist assault on constitutional democracy, and the failure of a number of constitutional projects in post-conflict societies). The conference invites proposals for presentations in English or Spanish that explore the question of constitution and the power to shape forms of life from different disciplines (philosophy, politics, sociology, history, law, anthropology) and approaches (critical theory, deconstruction, feminism, postcolonialism, conceptual and intellectual history, etc.). Possible topics include: – The concept of constitution and constitutional concepts – Constituent and destituent powers – Constituent moments and constitution-making – Constitutional crises and constitutional revolutions – Constitutional learning, progress, and regression – Democratic sovereignty and postdemocratic forms of life – Constitution of political subjects, subjectivities, and subjectivations – Normative struggles and critiques of constitutional norms – Constitutional politics, affects, and imagination – Transnational constitutions – Constitutions beyond constitutionalism We welcome submissions of extended abstracts of around 500 words, or else of complete papers. They should be prepared for blind review and sent to [1]coloquio_constitucion@mail.udp.cl. The deadline for submissions is July 16. Notices of acceptance will be sent by July 30. The conference is hosted by the Instituto de Humanidades and the Núcleo de Teoría Social (Facultad de Ciencias Sociales e Historia) of the Universidad Diego Portales. For additional information, please contact the organizers, Rodrigo Cordero and Wolfhart Totschnig, at the email address above.

1. mailto:coloquio_constitucion@mail.udp.cl
clearly communicating our findings and why they matter; and demonstrating how high standards in design, conduct
and analysis are built in to our research.

At this stage we are looking for up to 500 words to describe and explain what you’d like to present – with a
focus on one or more of these topic areas:

- Getting the message across
- The value of narratives
- Policy evaluation
- Embedding quality assurance
- The value of quality in evidence
- Qualitative innovation
- Quantitative innovation
- Involving research participants
- Dealing with the unexpected

The deadline for submissions is **Monday 7 August**. The SRA Events Group will assess all entries and aim to let you
know the outcome in September/October.

Presentations will be in parallel workshop sessions of 20 minutes (followed by a 10 minute Q &A). One pre-
senter per submission will pay a reduced delegate rate of £55.

Abstracts and other details must be submitted using the **template Word doc** that can be downloaded on our
website here: [1]www.the-sra.org.uk/events

We hope you will consider making a submission for the conference. And of course please feel free to share
this call with colleagues and networks.

1. [http://www.the-sra.org.uk/events](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/events)

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**On the Spiralists (2017-06-28 08:00)**

In a recent editorial in Current Sociology, Michael Burawoy warns about what he describes as the [1] ascent of the
spiralists. He finds these figures throughout the UC Berkeley administration, accusing them of being "people who
spiral in from outside, develop signature projects and then hope to spiral upward and onward, leaving the university
behind to spiral down". There are naive spiralists and experienced spiralists but between them they are transforming
the university system:

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Spiralists enter the university from the outside with little knowledge of its inner workings. They don’t trust the local administration and instead cultivate, promote and protect each other through mutual recruitment, at the same time boosting their corporate-level incomes and contributing to administrative bloat. At UC Berkeley, senior managers have increased five-fold over the last 20 years, rising to 1,256 in 2014, almost equal to the number of faculty, which has barely increased over the same period (from 1,257 to 1,300). While the number of faculty has remained stagnant, student enrollment has increased by 20 percent.

Coming from the outside and concerned more about their future, spiralists are in the business of promoting their image — Dirks employed a firm to do just that at a cost of $200,000 to campus. Branding takes priority over ethics. This last year we have witnessed the cover up of sexual harassment by prominent faculty and administrators and the exoneration of punitive football coaching that led to the death of a football player and a $4.75 million civil suit — all designed to protect the Berkeley brand.

His analysis of the spiralists is heavily focused upon higher education:

Spiralism is not a function of pathological individuals but of an executive class who conceive of themselves as visionary innovators with new financial models, traversing the globe in search of private investors while complaining about recalcitrant legislatures and conservative faculty. They blame everyone but themselves for the plight of the university.

However I think the concept has a broader purchase than this. Reading the recent account of Hilary Clinton’s failed campaign, *Shattered*, I was struck by how many of the key figures could be seen as spiralists in this sense. In their concern for their own advancement, seeing the campaign in terms of opportunities to position themselves for their next job, the possibility for collective purpose amongst the top operatives was fatally undermined.

It’s a descriptively rich concept but it’s also an explanatory one. How does the concentration of spiralists shape organisational outcomes? Under what conditions will spiralists be attracted to organisations? Can certain sorts of organisations ever redeem and transform spiralists? The editorial Burawoy offers doesn’t delve into these questions but the concept he offers is a potentially powerful one.

It could be read superficially as an implied contrast between instrumental rationality and value rationality. But I think it’s more subtle than that. It points to particular intended and actual trajectories through organisations, opening up the relations between spiralists and their unintended consequences for the spiralists themselves and the organisations they work within.

1. [http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Universities/Ascendancy%20of%20Spiralists.pdf](http://burawoy.berkeley.edu/Universities/Ascendancy%20of%20Spiralists.pdf)
‘multi-vocality’ as an example). If, however, real power is vested in a committee, or easily influenced leader, for example, it’s variable expectations may allow various interpretations of roles and outcomes, thereby permitting an outsider to take control of assets and roles for their individual gain. Leadership has a responsibility for the exercise of power particularly as cooperation versus domination, in order that organisations remain logical, and effective.

Making an Impact with Social Media, July 5th in Manchester (2017-06-29 08:00)

Social media offers for exciting opportunities for generating impact and communicating research beyond the academy. However, 500 million tweets and 3 million blog posts that are generated in a single day, as well as over a billion websites, pose an obvious challenge: how do you ensure you are heard above the din? How can you help researchers use social media effectively? How can you use social media as part of a multi-faceted and cost-effective impact strategy?

Aimed at academic researchers, research managers, university leaders, and project administrators, this workshop offers a practical introduction to using social media to engage with groups beyond the academy in a way that generates lasting impact. The session includes an overview of key considerations and group discussion of practical problems. The focus throughout will be on practical and sustainable techniques to build ongoing relations with publics outside the academy.

Each participant will have the opportunity to learn about the potential of social media in the current research funding environment, as well as draft an impact strategy relevant to their own projects. In addition to this, participants also have the option to purchase five hours of additional coaching via Skype to support the implementation of this strategy. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.


Mark Carrigan is a Digital Sociologist and Social Media Consultant. He is Digital Fellow at The Sociological Review and recently completed three years as Research Fellow in the Centre for Social Ontology at the University of Leeds.
of Warwick. He is the author of Social Media for Academics, published by Sage in early 2016. This is the first book length guide to the use of social media within higher education and has been widely praised across a diverse range of reviews.

1. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698

Theory as practice: for a politics of social theory, or how to get out of the theory zoo (2017-06-30 08:00)

By Jana Bacevic

[These are my thoughts/notes for the "[1]Practice of Social Theory", which Mark Carrigan and I are running at the Department of Sociology of the University of Cambridge from 4 to 6 September, 2017].

Revival of theory?

It seems we are witnessing something akin to a revival of theory, or at least of an interest in it. In 2016, the British Journal of Sociology published Swedberg’s “[2]Before theory comes theorizing, or how to make social sciences more interesting”, a longer version of its [3]2015 Annual public lecture, followed by responses from – among others – Krause, Schneiderhan, Tavory, and Karleheden. A string of recent books – including Matt Dawson’s [4]Social Theory for Alternative Societies, Alex Law’s [5]Social Theory for Today, and Craig Browne’s [6]Critical Social Theory, to name but a few – set out to consider the relevance or contribution of social theory to understanding contemporary social problems. This is in addition to the renewal of interest in biography or contemporary relevance of social-philosophical schools such as Existentialism ([7]1, [8]2) and the Frankfurt School ([9]1, [10]2).

To a degree, this revival happens on the back of the [11]challenges posed to the status of theory by the rise of data science, leading [12]Lizardo and [13]Hay to engage in defense of the value and contributions of theory to sociology and international relations, respectively. In broader terms, however, it addresses the question of the status of social sciences – and, by extension, academic knowledge – more generally; and, as such, it brings us back to the [14]justification of expertise, a question of particular relevance in the current political context.

The meaning of theory

Surely enough, theory has many meanings ([15]Abend, 2008), and consequently many forms in which it is practiced. However, one of the characteristics that seem to be shared across the board is that it is part of (under)graduate training, after which it gets bracketed off in the form of “the theory chapter” of dissertations/theses. In this sense, theory is framed as foundational in terms of socialization into a particular discipline, but, at the same time, rarely revisited – at least not explicitly – after the initial demonstration of aptitude. In other words, rather than doing, theory becomes something that is ‘done with’. The exception, of course, are those who decide to make theory the centre of their intellectual pursuits; however, “doing theory” in this sense all too often becomes limited to the exegesis of existing texts (what [16]Krause refers to as ‘theory a’ and Abend as ‘theory 4’) that leads to the
competition among theorists for the best interpretation of “what theorist x really wanted to say”, or, alternatively, the application of existing concepts to new observations or ‘problems’ (‘theory b and c’, in Krause’s terms). Either way, the field of social theory resembles less the groves of Plato’s Academy, and more a zoo in which different species (‘Marxists’, ‘critical realists’, ‘Bourdieusians’, ‘rational-choice theorists’) delve in their respective enclosures or [17]fight with members of the same species for dominance of a circumscribed domain.

Competitive behaviour among social theorists
This [18]summer school started from the ambition to change that: to go beyond rivalries or allegiances to specific schools of thought, and think about what doing theory really means. I often told people that wanting to do social theory was a major reason why I decided to do a second PhD; but what was doing theory about? I did not say ‘learn more’ about social theory (my previous education provided a good foundation), ‘teach’ social theory (though supervising students at Cambridge is really good practice for this), read, or even write social theory (though, obviously, this was going to be a major component). While all of these are essential elements of becoming a theorist, the practice of social theory certainly isn’t reducible to them. Here are some of the other aspects I think we need to bear in mind when we discuss the return, importance, or practice of theory.

Theory is performance

This may appear self-evident once the focus shifts to ‘doing’, but we rarely talk about what practicing theory is meant to convey – that is, about theorising as a performative act. Some elements of this are not difficult to
establish: doing theory usually means identification with a specific group, or form of professional or disciplinary association. Most professional societies have committees, groups, and specific conference sessions devoted to theory - but that does not mean theory is exclusively practiced within them. In addition to belonging, theory also signifies status. In many disciplines, theoretical work has for years been held in high esteem; the flipside, of course, is that ‘theoretical’ is often taken to mean too abstract or divorced from everyday life, something that became a more pressing problem with the decline of funding for social sciences and the concomitant expectation to make them socially relevant. While the status of theory is a longer (and separate) topic, one that has been discussed at length in the history of sociology and other social sciences, it bears repeating that asserting one’s work as theoretical is always a form of [19]positioning: it serves to define the standing of both the speaker, and (sometimes implicitly) others contributors. This brings to mind that...

Theory is power

Not everyone gets to be a theorist: it is also a question of recognition, and thus, a question of political (and other) forms of power. ‘Theoretical’ discussions are usually held between men (mostly, though not exclusively, white men); interventions from women and persons from outside epistemic centres are often interpreted as empirical illustrations, or, at best, contributions to ‘feminist’ or ‘race’ theory*. Raewyn Connell wrote about this in [20]Southern Theory, and initiatives such as [21]Why is my curriculum white? and [22]Decolonizing curriculum in theory and practice have brought it to the forefront of university struggles, but it speaks to the larger point: that the ‘subaltern’ exists only to provide empirical or ethnographic illustrations for the theories developed in the metropolis.

The problem here is not only (or primarily) that of representation, in the sense in which theory thus generated fails to accurately depict the full scope of social reality, or experiences and ideas of different people who participate in it. The problem is in a fundamentally extractive approach to people: when their problems are turned into theoretical, they exist primarily, if not exclusively, in order to be explained. This leads me to the next point, which is that...

Theory is predictive

A good illustration for this is offered by pundits and political commentators’ surprise at events in the last year: the outcome of the Brexit referendum (Leave!), US elections (Donald Trump!), and last but not least, the UK General Election (surge in votes for Corbyn!). Despite differences in how these events are interpreted, they in most cases convey that, as one pundit recently confessed, nobody has a clue about what is going on. Does this mean the rule of experts really is over, and, with it, the need for general theories that explain human behaviour? Two things are worth taking into account.

To begin with, social-scientific theories enter the public sphere in a form that’s not only simplified, but also distilled into ‘soundbites’ or clickbait adapted to the presumed needs and preferences of the audience, usually omitting all the methodological or technical caveats that they normally come with. For instance, the results of opinion polls or surveys are taken to presented clear predictions, rather than reflections of general statistical tendencies; [23]reliability is rarely discussed. Nor are social scientists always innocent victims of this media spin: some actively work on increase their visibility or impact, and thus – perhaps unwittingly – contribute to the sensationalisation of social-scientific discourse. Second, and this can’t be put delicately, some of these theories are just not very good. ‘Nudgery’ and ‘wonkery’ often rest on not particularly sophisticated models of human behaviour; which is not saying that they do not work – they can – but rather that theoretical assumptions underlying these models are rarely accessible to scrutiny.

Of course, it doesn’t take a lot of imagination to figure out why this is the case: it’s easier to believe that selling vegetables in attractive packaging can solve the problem of obesity than to invest in long-term policy planning
and research on decision-making that has consequences for public health. It is also easier to believe that removing
caps to tuition fees is likely to result in individual universities charging fees distributed normally from lowest to
highest, than to bother reading theories of organizational behaviour in different economic and political environments
and try to understand how this maps onto the social structure and demographics of a rapidly changing society. In
other words: theories are often used to inform or predict human behaviour, but often in ways that reinforce
existing divisions of power. So, just in case you didn’t see this coming...

Theory is political

All social theories are about constraints, including those that are self-imposed. From Marx to Freud and
from Durkheim to Weber (and many non-white, non-male theorists who never made it into the canon), theories are
about what humans can and cannot do; they are about how relatively durable relations (structures) limit and enable
how they act (agency). Politics is, fundamentally, about the same thing: things we can and things we cannot change.
We may denounce Bismark’s definition of politics as the art of the possible as insufficiently progressive, but – at the
risk of sounding obvious – understanding how (and why) things stay the same is fundamental to understanding how
to go about changing them. The history of social theory, among other things, can be read as a story about shifting
the boundaries of what was considered fixed and immutable, on the one hand, and constructed – and thus subject
to change – on the other.

In this sense, all social theory is fundamentally political. This isn’t to license bickering over different historical
materialisms, or to stimulate fantasies – so dear to intellectuals – of ‘speaking truth to power’. Nor should theories
be understood as weapons in the ‘war of time’, despite Débord’s poetic formulation: this is but the flipside of intel-
lectuals’ dream of domination, in which their thoughts (i.e. themselves) inspire masses to revolt, usually culminating
in their own ascendance to a position of power (thus conveniently cutting out the middleman in ‘speaking truth to
power’, as they become the prime bearers of both).

Theory is political in a much simpler sense, in which it is about society and elements that constitute it. As
such, it has to be about understanding what is it that those we think of as society think, want, and do, even – and
possibly, especially – when we do not agree with them. Rather than aiming to ‘explain away’ people, or fit their
behaviour into pre-defined social models, social theory needs to learn to listen to – to borrow a term from politics
its constituents. This isn’t to argue for a (not particularly innovative) return to grounded theory, or ethnography
(despite the fact both are relevant and useful). At the risk of sounding pathetic, perhaps the next step in the
development of social theory is to really make it a form of social practice – that is, make it be with the people, rather
than about the people. I am not sure what this would entail, or what it would look like; but I am pretty certain it
would be a welcome element of building a progressive politics. In this sense, doing social theory could become less
of the practice of endlessly revising a blueprint for a social theory zoo, and more of a project of getting out from
behind its bars.

The tendency to interpret women’s interventions as if they are inevitably about ‘feminist theory’ (or, more frequently,
as if they always refer to empirical examples) is a trend I have been increasingly noticing since moving into sociology,
and definitely want to spend more time studying. This is obviously not to say there aren’t any women in the field of
social theory, but rather that gender (and race, ethnicity, and age) influence the level of generality at which one’s
claims are read, thus reflecting the broader tendency to see universality and Truth as coextensive with the figure of
the male and white academic.

[24]This was originally posted on Jana’s blog and is reproduced here with permission

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Jana Bacevic is a PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge. She tweets at [25]@ jana _bacevic .

1. http://www.sociology.cam.ac.uk/Events/summer-school-social-theory
3. http://www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/publicEvents/events/2015/10/20151015t1330vSPT.aspx?from_serp=1
7. https://www.amazon.co.uk/At-Existentialist-Caf%C3%A9-Freedom-Cocktails/dp/0701186585
8. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Existentialist-Moment-Sartre-Public.../dp/0745685404
10. http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming
17. https://twitter.com/jana_bacevic/status/844112710728073216
20. https://www.allenandunwin.com/.../Southern-Theory-Raewyn-Connell-97817417535...
25. https://twitter.com/jana_bacevic
In the contemporary world social theory plays the part that philosophy and religion once did. Theories make things happen; they make connections that were not there; they are becomings. We should acknowledge that theory has a life of its own, it has agency, independent of humans. That idea may be scary but it also allows us to step back and ask ‘what can a theory do?’

8.7 July

The dark future of mediatization (2017-07-01 08:00)

In the last year, Facebook Live has been plagued by occasional headlines reporting on shocking instances of violence being streamed through the platform. The sporadic quality of these reports easily creates an impression that this is exception. There have always been violent crimes, right? Therefore it stands to reason that the spread of the platform would inevitably create occasional incidences in which it featured in such crimes. However as this BuzzFeed analysis makes clear, such incidences have been a regular occurrence on the platform since its inception:

Facebook Live has a violence problem, one far more troubling than national headlines make clear. [1]At least 45 instances of violence — shootings, rapes, murders, child abuse, torture, suicides, and attempted suicides — have been broadcast via Live since its debut in December 2015, a new BuzzFeed News analysis found. That’s an average rate of about two instances per month.

When it launched, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg touted Live as “a great medium for sharing raw and visceral content.” But from its inception and over the many months that followed that became darkly true — to terrible effect. Videos of shootings, murders, suicides, and rapes began to show up on Facebook with alarming regularity.


What should we make of this? There are important issues raised about the accountability of platforms, as Facebook have refused to comment on this trend and instead simply pointed to past statements by Mark Zuckerberg and their committed to hiring new moderators. But there is enough evidence of a relationship between Facebook Live and violence that we should take seriously the possibility that in some cases the platform might be contributing to crime generation rather than merely reflecting it.

The disturbing possibility invoked in the article is that there is a mimetic dynamic at work, as the possibility for immediate notoriety and a growing list of exemplars incline people towards horrific acts which might have remained embryonic without these two conditions:

Some criminologists worry that broadcasts of violent crimes to Facebook Live might lead perpetrators of violent crime to view the platform as a means of gaining infamy, bypassing the traditional filter of the
media. “The most likely impact is that it’s going to be a model of how to distribute and immortalize your act,” Ray Surette, a criminal justice professor at the University of Central Florida, told BuzzFeed News.

Jacqueline Helfgott, chair of the Criminal Justice Department at Seattle University, agreed. "It's making it easier for people to gain notoriety instantly without gatekeepers," she told BuzzFeed News. "I definitely think there’s a mimetic effect."

The mainstream media have previously been gatekeepers to such notoriety. But now it’s possible to achieve it through virality, assuming moderators prove unable to near immediately remove such videos. There’s an incredibly bleak book by Franco Berardi, Heroes: Mass Murder and Suicide, which offers useful resources for making sense of this possibility. He argues that mass murderers are “the extreme manifestation of one of the main trends of our age” involving “people who are suffering themselves, and who become criminals because this is their way both to express their psychopathic need for publicity and also to find a suicidal exit from their present hell” (pg 3).

In such crimes we see a “violent acting out, as disconnected from a conscious elaboration: just do it” (pg. 56) but one licensed by a desire for infamy. It is this fame which motivates the act, offering the possibility of transcending one’s own subordination by living on forever, showing them forever:

Like the large majority of the generation that has grown up in the Neoliberal decades, the young Eric Harris is totally persuaded that the strong have the right to win and predate. It is the natural philosophy that he has absorbed in the social environment in which he was educated, and it also the underlying rationale of the video games that he loved to play. But the young man knew very well that he was not going to be a winner in the social game. Instead, he decides that he will be a winner for a moment; I’ll kill and I’ll win; then I’ll die. The murderous action is conceived as revenge for the humiliation that he has suffered in the daily game of competition. (Pg 50)

The infamy is what ensures that victory will live on. It cannot be reversed. Through their actions they achieve the status they were constantly seeking yet could never receive within life. As with much work of this type, it’s speculative social science of a sort that can be critiqued on empirical grounds. But the underlying thesis is one we should take seriously: the promise of infamy coupled with the release of violently acting out is a socially produced temptation in a profoundly unequal society which valorises ‘winners’ while attacking ‘losers’. These exceptional acts need to be understood as extreme responses to social conditions which are pervasive.

If there is any accuracy to these claims, we ought to be extremely concerned about Facebook Live. The barriers to entry for Berardi’s ‘heroes’ are lowering radically: the pathway to infamy can be found in the everyday object of the smartphone, rather than being reliant on recognition from the mass media. What might seem like exceptional cases, inexplicable in terms of wider social forces, could in fact herald the dark future of mediatization.

From a politics of speed to a political sociology of speed (2017-07-02 08:00)

In the last few years, I've become a little obsessed with speed. It seems this often leaves me coming across like an accelerationist. I occasionally flirt with the idea that I'm a slightly peculiar form of left-accelerationist, but it's more for rhetorical amusement than genuine conviction. In fact I find much of what's written about the politics of speed inadequate, with my interest instead being in a political sociology of speed. By the former, I mean a valorisation or condemnation of speed, exploring the emancipatory potential in speed or seeking salvation through slowdown. By the latter, I mean an analysis of how speed is a vector through which power operates in social life. The concerns of the former often obstruct the analytical imperatives of the latter, though of course accelerationists inevitably address these questions as well.

What made me reflect on this was an interesting example I stumbled across in The Divide: American Injustice in the Age of the Wealth Gap by Matt Taibbi. On pg 127-128 he describes the enforced slowness which results from data-driven policing inspired by a ‘broken windows’ philosophy of crime:

If you’re charged with a crime, and you get notice of a court appearance, you have to show up to a packed room at an appointed time that in reality is only an approximate time. If it says 10:30 a.m. on the notice, you may end up waiting three, four hours for your case to come before the judge. During that time you are permitted to do exactly one thing: sit in court and watch the action. There is no talking, sleeping, eating, or reading in any of the courtrooms like the one on Schermerhorn Street. You must pay attention to the judge at all times. Some of the judges are insanely touchy about these rules, too. Judge Charles Troia, a glowering dark-haired man who runs a courtroom on the eighth floor, has a particular mania for talkers and readers. He has his court officer bark out instructions on the matter repeatedly throughout the morning. “In case you missed the sign,” the officer yells out, “there’s no reading, eating, or sleeping. Listen up! It’s going to be a long night.” The ban on reading is particularly odd, given that some of the judges have literary ambitions. Judge John Wilson, who by the time this book is published will have moved from the Brooklyn courts to the Bronx, is notorious in this courtroom for having authored a children’s book called Hot House Flowers.

This looks like hyperactive activity when considered at the level of the police, with 22,000 people arrested for loitering in a typical year in New York City. But from the perspective of those regularly subject to such nuisance arrests, it’s profoundly decelerative, with one interviewee describing how “you come to court and you’ll sit there all day waiting for your name to be called” and how he had “probably sat ten hours in the three times” he had come to court (pg 125). This is an example of the chronopolitics of speed, something which manifests itself relationally within an institutional context. It’s hard to theorise if we remain on the level of treating speed as what Filip Vostal calls a ‘mega force’. For this reason our starting point needs to be the political sociology of speed rather than the politics of speed.

Practitioners of social philosophy regard what they do as valuable, imbuing it with a sense of importance which is reflected in the often scholastic way in which readers cite and engage with such work. How seriously should we take this judgement? Does social philosophy have intrinsic worth? Or could it be considered a peculiar form of speculative journalism?

Reading a recent book by Matt Taibbi led me to reflect on this question for the first time in a while. After enjoying his account of the Trump election campaign, I’ve been working my way through his previous books. In *The Divide* he explores how rampant income inequality in America has reshaped the criminal justice system, creating a two-tier system which complicates traditional notions of equality before the rule of law. From pg 207:

In other words, there’s a new class of people whose goal is to become above citizenship. Live in America, conduct your trades in the weaker regulatory arena in London, pay your taxes in Antigua or the Isle of Man. Keep the rights but offshore the responsibilities. The flip side is that there is a growing subset of people, like undocumented immigrants, who live below the level of full citizenship. If the first group is stateless by choice, these people are involuntarily stateless and have virtually no rights at all.

What struck me about this argument was how easily I could imagine it being advanced by someone like Zygmunt Bauman. The terminology would be different, the tone would be different and the context would be different. But the argument Taibbi develops in this book is one which converges with the thesis Bauman developed in books like *Globalisation* and *Wasted Lives*. In fact I’m pretty sure I could restate the core argument of Taibbi’s book in persuasively Bauman-esque language.

This is a period of Bauman’s work I really like, something I observe to make clear that this isn’t just another dismissal of the Liquid Modernity cottage industry. But reading Taibbi’s entertaining and informative book, I was left reflecting on whether social philosophy of this sort has intrinsic value over-and-above journalism of the kind Taibbi engages in. What does the abstraction actually contribute? We can easily delude ourselves into thinking that abstraction inevitably brings us closer to the truth beyond appearances, the way things really are. But it can also simply obfuscate, rendering partial judgements with an unclear empirical basis as authoritative statements about epochal change.

This isn’t an argument against social philosophy. It’s an attack on the implicit hierarchies expressed in how we compare it to other ways of telling about society. There’s much we can learn from exploratory investigative journalism that leads to social critique. But doing this requires we have the confidence to laugh in the face of those who might accuse of us of seeking to become “a mere journalist”:

In many academic circles today anyone who tries to write in a widely intelligible way is liable to be condemned as a ‘mere literary man’ or, worse still, ‘a mere journalist.’ Perhaps you have already learned that these phrases, as commonly used, only indicate the spurious inference: superficial because readable. The academic man in America is trying to carry on a serious intellectual life in a context that often seems quite set against it. His prestige must make up for many of the dominant values he has sacrificed by choosing an academic career. His claims for prestige readily become tied to his self-image as a ‘scientist’. To be called a ‘mere journalist’ makes him feel undignified and shallow. It is this situation, I think, that is often at the bottom of the elaborate vocabulary and involved manner of speaking and writing. It is less difficult to learn this manner than not. It has become a convention – those who do not use it are subject to moral disapproval. It may be that it is the result of an academic closing of ranks on the part of the mediocre, who understandably wish to exclude those who win the attention of intelligent
Earlier this month I co-organised an event exploring how graphic novels can be used to communicate research. My interest in research communication and love of the medium had long left me fascinated by this possibility, something which I began to explore more seriously when I attended a weekend masterclass by Tony Lee. This comprehensive introduction to the writing and production process left me newly aware of the difficulty of the medium but even more excited about the possibilities which graphic novels offered for communicating social research.

Therefore I was delighted when The Sociological Review agreed to support a one day workshop, organised with Jenny Thatcher, introducing the medium to social scientists. In the morning, Helen Kara introduced graphic social science and placed it in the context of creative methods, before Katy Vigurs talked about the process of putting together her research-informed comic Higher Fees, Higher Debts: Greater Expectations of Graduate Futures. The bulk of the day was then convened by Tony Lee, introducing the medium and walking us in detail through the process of writing comics, before we discussed potential ways forward for graphic social science in a final session. You can see a compilation of tweets from the day here.

What is Graphic Social Science? (2017-07-04 08:00)
This paper by Ernesto Priego, in which he [9]interviews Katy Vigurs about Higher Fees, Higher Debts, provides a useful overview of how non-fiction comics have been taken up across a range of fields, as well as the reasons for this:


Researchers have turned to comics as valid outputs for displaying research findings in print and online publications that can lead to the wider adoption of such research and can influence public policy. By arguing that comics creation is a 'way of thinking', comics have also become academic outputs in their own right ([22]Sousanis 2015a, [23]2015b; [24]Labarre 2015). According to Erin Polgreen, 'comic book narratives can work across platforms, engage younger, more visually oriented readers, and transcend cultural borders,' ([25]2014: 12). Polgreen cites cognitive scientist Neil Cohn: 'the evidence is fairly clear that sequential images (usually plus text) are an effective teaching tool' ([26]2014: 13). Indeed, it is today almost common-place to state that comics and cartoons are valuable means of teaching multimodal literacy skills ([27]El Refaie and Hörschelmann 2010). As Cohn notes, 'growing research suggests that sequential images combined with text are an effective tool of communication and education (e.g., [28]Nakazawa, 2005; [29]Nalu and Bliss, 2011; [30]Short et al., 2013), beyond just being entertainment' ([31]Cohn 2014).


There are some really exciting possibilities here. While much of the day was a hugely informative introduction to the creative and logistical challenges to putting together a research-informed comic, the final session turned to ideas about how we could support Graphic Social Science as an exercise that sought to produce outputs such as this. Here are some of the ideas we had about features for a web based resource supporting graphical social science:

- Comprehensive bibliography
- Database of research-informed comics
- Listings of conferences and events
- Links to other resources
- A skills bank collecting 'how-to' guides in various formats
- Write-ups of experiences of collaborations
- Reflections on the methodology of graphic social science
- Listings of funders open to graphic social science
- Listings of publishers open to graphic social science

[33]Graphic Medicine was discussed as an example of how such an online resource could function. We discussed other ideas for how the development of Graphic Social Science could be supported:

- Producing a code of ethics
- Producing a web comic to disseminate short-form Graphic Social Science
- Developing an anthology (or series thereof) to disseminate Graphic Social Science
- Hosting further events, hopefully involving a wider non-academic community

In an extensive discussion of the challenges facing Graphic Social Science, I felt six main themes emerged:

- Establishing the academic legitimacy of Graphic Social Science
- Finding places to publish the outputs of Graphic Social Science
- Establishing how peer review can function properly for Graphic Social Science
- Establishing good practice for collaborations
- Clarifying where Graphic Social Science sits within the research process e.g. is it ‘just’dissemination?
- Exploring the potential audiences for Graphic Social Science: are we seeking to communicate ‘internally’, ‘externally’ or both?

Hopefully we can take this forward from here! Join the [34]Facebook Group or get in touch via [35]Twitter if you'd like to be involved.

2. https://markcarrigan.net/2015/03/14/10-interesting-ways-to-communicate-knowledge/
5. https://policypress.co.uk/creative-research-methods-in-the-social-sciences/
6. https://www.derby.ac.uk/staff/drkatyvigurs/
7. http://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/2503/
8. https://twitter.com/i/moments/877557566192197632

5172
Terry Smyth (2017-07-04 09:44:46)
If anyone needs to be convinced of how graphic novel techniques can illuminate complex sociological, psychological and historical topics, I’d urge them to read Art Spiegelman's Maus. It changed my mind totally about the power of text and image combined.

This Week in GraphicMedicine (7/7/17) – The Graphic Librarian (2017-07-07 16:38:54)
[...] What is Graphic Social Science? [...] 

The revenge practices of plutocrats (2017-07-05 08:00)

What do we think of when we imagine elites exercising their power? There are many ways we can approach such a question, with varying degrees of abstraction. But reading The Divide: American Injustice In The Age Of The Wealth Gap, by Matt Taibbi, has left me preoccupied by how they practice revenge. It's easy to imagine our contemporary plutocrats having an impulse towards revenge, as we trundle ever more inexorably towards what appears to be a dark neo-feudal future. The structural constraints upon vengeance are weakening, reflecting the declining accountability of plutocrats, accompanied by a diminishing sense that such figures are part of the social order and bound by the same rules as those within it:
Such considerations can easily fuel a dystopian imagination, powerfully expressed in Peter Frase’s idea of exterminism. His concern is with the growing tendency of the rich to regard themselves as persecuted and seek to withdraw
themselves from wider society. As he writes on loc 1471 of Four Futures:

But the construction of enclaves is not limited to the poorest places. Across the world, the rich are demonstrating their desire to escape from the rest of us. A 2013 article in Forbes magazine reports on the mania, among the rich, for evermore-elaborate home security. 11 An executive for one security company boasts that his Los Angeles house has security “similar to that of the White House.” Others market infrared sensors, facial recognition technologies, and defensive systems that spray noxious smoke or pepper spray. All this for people who, although rich, are largely anonymous and hardly prominent targets for would-be attackers.

Paranoid though they may seem, large numbers of the economic elite appear to regard themselves as a set-upon minority, at war with the rest of society. Silicon Valley is a hotbed of such sentiments, plutocrats talking openly about “secession.” In one widely disseminated speech, Balaji Srinivasan, the cofounder of a San Francisco genetics company, told an audience of start-up entrepreneurs that “we need to build opt-in society, outside the US, run by technology.” 12 For now, that reflects hubris and ignorance of the myriad ways someone like him is supported by the workers who make his life possible. But it demonstrates the impulse to wall off the rich from what are deemed to be surplus populations.

His suggestion is that such defensiveness might over time become offence. Not in the generic sense in which the accumulated privilege of the plutocrats necessarily entails a relationship of offence to wider society. But in the much darker sense of deliberately seeking to eliminate surplus populations. In a speculative but thought-provoking account, he draws together a diverse range of trends which collectively point towards the increasing willingness of elites to sanction intensifying violence against ever greater portions of their populations.

How seriously should we take this? I’m not sure. But I realise my interest in the revenge practices of elites is motivated by a concern to elucidate where our present conjuncture could one day lead. There’s a disturbing story in The Divide which the author summarises on pg 248:

The Fairfax fiasco is a tale of harassment on a grand scale, in which the cream of America’s corporate culture followed executives, burgled information from private bank accounts, researched the Canadians’ sexual preferences for blackmail purposes, broke into hotel rooms and left threatening messages, prank-called a cancer-stricken woman in the middle of the night, and even harassed the pastor of the staid Anglican church where the Canadian CEO worshipped on Sundays. They worked tirelessly to instigate phony criminal investigations in multiple countries, tried relentlessly to scare away investors and convince ratings agencies to denounce the firm, and in general spread so many lies and false rumors to so many people using so many different false names that they needed a spreadsheet to keep track of their aliases.

What’s so grim about this tale is the personal animus which seems to be at work here. As well as their initial financial motivations, they really want to destroy the life of the Fairfax chief for rather indiscernible reasons. The reporting isn’t complete by any means but it’s a fascinating and disturbing account of one of the most extreme examples of revenge by defensive elitists I’ve come across. I’d like to find and study more examples of this to better understand that characteristic defensiveness which I’m beginning to try and theorise, as well as where it might lead us in future.

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wander nunes frota (2017-07-05 14:08:23)
Think of a big country like Brazil and you'll see the terms with which these revenge practices of the elites have worked their way after the latest coup d'État around here. With no otherwise valid excuse to implement "protection against political corruption", the elites now in power have made cuts in public health care and education that had been a touchstone of 13-year left-wing Workers' Party governments (Lula's and Dilma's) that notably aided the poorer segments of society and kept the economy going alright. The Brazilian elites and the media ousted Dilma and put a supid puppet in her place.

CFP: Global Digital Media Cultures and "Extreme Speech" (2017-07-06 08:00)

CFP WORKSHOP
Global Digital Media Cultures and "Extreme Speech"
23-24 February 2018

Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich
Abstracts due: 31 August 2017

Convenors:
Sahana Udupa (LMU Munich)
Matti Pohjonen (Africa's Voices Foundation)

Recent political upheavals in Europe and the US have once again highlighted the paradoxical nature of contemporary digital communication. The celebratory discourse of digital technologies' potential for openness and democracy is now eclipsed by the "dark side" of new media as a platform for promoting hate speech, fake news, terrorism, misogyny and intergroup conflict. Researchers are confronted with a new lexicon of communicative tactics: ecosystems of fake news; disinformation campaigns; coordinated troll attacks; and targeted hacks aimed at influencing elections. Calls to monitor, legislate and remove hateful and violent online speech have also reinvigorated older legal, political and philosophical debates on the boundaries of accepted civility and legitimate forms of political communication. The negative forms of online speech, it is widely argued, threaten the taken-for-granted freedoms commonly associated with digital media cultures across the world and bringing about what some critics have called a "post-truth" society.

Despite this heightened sense of urgency, these concerns are, however, by no means new or limited to the Western world. A cursory glance of many examples from the "global South" reveals a long-standing anxiety about the dangers of unbridled speech in situations where it can provoke ethnic and
religious conflict, mass violence and social unrest. In Ethiopia, for example, following a series of violent protests and killings, the government has declared a state of emergency and made political commenting on Facebook illegal under the pretext of preserving peace. In India, social media is replete with acrimonious abusive exchange in political debates. Legal stipulations to prevent hate speech on grounds of religious harmony and national security are routinely invoked to regulate online media in India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. In Myanmar, social media has been used widely by Buddhist groups to ignite violence against its Muslim minority. In all the cases, digital media have also evolved into vibrant forums for political participation and counter-speech.

The aim of the Global Digital Media Cultures and Extreme Speech workshop is to examine these paradoxes of contemporary digital communication from a critical-comparative perspective rooted in ethnography. By defining online vitriol as "extreme speech", we depart from the dominant legal definitions of "hate speech" and narrowly constructed terrorism talk. As a form of digital culture, "extreme speech" pushes the boundaries of legitimate speech along the twin axes of truth-falsity and civility-incivility, raising critical questions about some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of communication and political participation. "Extreme speech" serves to reinforce differences and hatred between groups on grounds of religion, race, political ideology and gender, often with the overt intent to intimidate and agitate target groups and individuals. Yet, its ambivalent nature in certain contexts could also provoke challenges to established hegemony. "Extreme speech" thus foregrounds an approach to digital cultures as forms of situated practice (i.e. what people do that is related to media within specific cultural contexts) in order to avoid predetermining the effects of online volatile speech as vilifying, polarizing or lethal (Pohjonen and Udupa 2017).

To advance these aims, the workshop invites a selected number of scholars from across the world to discuss the latest empirical findings, methodologies and theoretical frameworks to understand "extreme speech" in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America. We invite scholars engaged in ethnographic research on the topic using the perspectives of anthropology, critical discourse analysis, history or communication studies. Over two days of presentations and discussions, the participants will explore the different mediatized contexts of digital use and circulation and cultures of digital exchange and securitization, to examine what this dramatic rise of volatile speech means for democratic dialogue and participation across the world.

Topics include but are not limited to:

- Ethnographies of production and circulation of online extreme speech
- Ethnographic analysis of ‘hate speech’ discourse as regulatory/state agenda
- Cultural translation of hateful content
- Audience ethnographies and the consumption of extreme speech
- Ethnographically driven mixed method approaches to study online extreme speech (virtual ethnography, data-driven digital ethnography, offline-online multi-sited ethnography, network ethnography)
- Trolling and online aggression
- Extreme speech and gender
- Extreme speech and ethnic conflict
- Political cultures of disinformation and fake news
- Forms of resistance to extreme speech
- Extreme speech and its challenges to communication theory
- Technologies and cultures of extreme speech monitoring

Attendance to this closed workshop is fully funded. Organizers will cover the costs of travel, accommodation and food. Workshop papers will contribute to the proposed edited collections (a special journal issue and an edited volume). The workshop will be held at Frauenchiemsee, a picturesque island about an hour away from Munich.

Please send your extended abstracts (1200 words) with the subject line "Abstract for the Global Workshop on Extreme Speech" to [1]ONLINERPOL@ethnologie.lmu.de before 31 August 2017. We will send notifications of acceptance by 30 September 2017. Abstracts should contain a clear outline of the argument, theoretical framework, methodology and ethnographic material (and findings if applicable), as well as a brief elaboration on how the research links to the overall theme of the workshop. Please also include 3-5 keywords that describe your work, and a Bio note (up to 100 words, stating affiliation).

The workshop is part of Project ONLINERPOL ([2]www.fordigitaldignity.com) funded by the European Research Council Starting Grant and hosted at LMU Munich, Germany.

1. mailto:ONLINERPOL@ethnologie.lmu.de

Social morphogenesis: five years of inquiring into social change (2017-07-07 08:00)

Postmodernity. Second modernity. Network Society. Late modernity. Liquid modernity. Such concepts have dominated social thought in recent decades, with a bewildering array of claims about social change and its implications. But what do we mean by ‘social change’? How do we establish that such change is taking place? What does it mean to say that it is intensifying? These are some of the questions which the Social Morphogenesis project has sought to answer in the last five years, through an inquiry orientated around the speculative notion of ‘morphogenic society’.

In our book launch on May 30th 2017 at the British Library, contributors to the project gathered in order to reflect on their contributions and the project as a whole. Here are podcasts from the talks on the day:
You can see live tweets from the event [6]here.


6. https://twitter.com/i/moments/877124493700976640
Outflanking Platitudes: We should be excited but cautious about Platform Cooperativism (2017-07-08 08:00)

In the first episode of Outflanking Platitudes, Mark Carrigan argues we should be excited but cautious about the promise of Platform Cooperativism. This 2 minute 8 second provocation was recorded at the Centre for Social Ontology Book Launch event on May 30th, 2017.

[soundcloud url="https://api.soundcloud.com/tracks/328988322" params="auto _play=false &hide _related=false &show _comments=true &show _user=true &show _reposts=false &visual=true" width="100 %" height="450" iframe="true" ]

Like the idea? If you're interested in submitting a micro-podcast for Outflanking Platitudes, [1]get in touch.

1. https://markcarrigan.net/get-in-touch/

The University Without Academics, by @johnbrissenden (2017-07-09 08:00)

by John Brissenden

In September 2027, England's first super-universities opened their doors to students. Of course, these doors were as much virtual as physical, since the majority of students studied entirely remotely, from around the world. But the defining feature of the four institutions, all privately owned and operated, was less to do with students, but the almost complete absence of academic staff.

The super-U's (unrelated to the French supermarket chain of the same name) were announced by the government shortly after the Conservatives were re-elected in 2022. Construction of the massive, brand new campuses, in London, Bristol, Liverpool and Leeds, began in 2023 following a closed auction of bids from Pearson and Kaplan.

The function of the campus, like so much else in the super-U, was fundamentally different from that in the old, public sector institutions. It was still the centre of the university, but it was now wholly devoted to the objectives of branding, reputation, employer and brand partner access, and student experience. The new centres dwarfed the priapic rush of university construction projects that followed the 2012 tuition fee increase, and resembled a Dubai shopping mall more than a university.

The super-universities' boundaries were porous, by design. Teaching delivery would now be much more flexible, thanks to the absence of awkward, unhealthy, grumpy academics. Classes were not only delivered remotely, but campus "events" were scheduled year round, at evenings and weekends. Employers and brand partners enjoyed extensive access to the campus, to the students, and to promotional opportunities. Buildings, programmes and students themselves had become the object of sponsorship on a grand scale. Branded satellite experiences had popped up in cities, and at festivals, around the world, months before the first admissions in 2027.

Most teachers were "employed" on Uber-type terms, while a few Premier League superstar teachers commanded massive remuneration as they toured these liberated institutions. Tuition fees were slightly lower than 5182
those charged in the old public sector universities, but not much, so as to sustain brand equity and shareholder value.

Students were issued a smartwatch and other high end hardware so as to enable the harvesting of data and the optimisation of satisfaction and achievement. The data was sold to interested third parties: loan providers, potential employers, brand partners. (The market in student data derivatives was still some years away.)

The universities claimed that they would be exponentially more responsive to students, since their satisfaction was now monitored in real time. However this responsiveness was in the aggregate. As before, the "student" in the "student experience" was imagined and based on data proxies. Actual, individual students had no greater status than Facebook users.

The arrival of the super university was the outcome of several disparate factors. There had been general agreement, following the United Kingdom's messy and inconclusive withdrawal from the European Union in late 2018, and the subsequent vote for Scottish independence, that the higher education industry in England faced an existential crisis. Most administrative, and many junior academic, roles had become obsolete thanks to automation, artificial intelligence and regulatory reforms. Finally, the collapse of national collective bargaining, and the subsequent splintering of the academic staff union, while long predicted, had finally happened at just the right time for the government, university managers and private providers to drive through the mass redundancies on which the super universities' business model would be predicated.

John Brissenden is Senior Lecturer in Public Relations at Bournemouth University

Emotion and affect in datafied worlds - workshop in Helsinki, 1st of Nov (2017-07-10 08:00)

1st of November 2017, University of Helsinki, Finland

Feeling data: emotion and affect in datafied worlds - workshop

Scholars working in the interdisciplinary field of ‘critical data studies’ have begun to address the effects of ‘datafication’ - understood as the conversion of qualitative aspects of life into quantified data – on the economy, public life, and self-understanding. The workshop focuses on the emotional properties and affective forces of datafication with the intent of exploring how these perspectives could operate as a fruitful starting point for thinking about future societal trajectories in terms of datafied power, domination, and agency. The goal is to bring together scholars working with questions of the emotional and the affective with the intent of demonstrating how the two research streams could strengthen each other. With a focus on emotional dimensions of datafication, addressing emotional engineering, emotion tracking, and everyday engagements with data, the goal is to explore the communication of the emotional, but also the various kinds of agencies, both human and non-human, that the focus on the emotional can uncover. The exploration of the affective exposes atmospheres, temporalities, energies and rhythms involved in datafication and living with data. Together these research streams point towards the central role that forces such as the non-human, non-quantified, non-linear and non-cognitive play in datafication, raising questions about inequality, discrimination and data in/justice and how to overcome them.

Confirmed speakers: Helen Kennedy (University of Sheffield) and Deborah Lupton (University of Canberra)
The workshop addresses topics such as:
- emotional effects and consequences of data/fication
- affective dimensions of data/fication
- emotional responses to data/data visualisations/data materialisations
- affective atmospheres of data gathering devices, and services
- emotional topics and patterns uncovered in small/big data
- emotional engineering and emotion tracking
- sensory dimensions of data and data materialisations
- relationship between emotions, trust and truth in data/fication

If you want to participate in the workshop, please submit a 300-word abstract and a short bio to [1]minna.ruckenstein@helsinki.fi.

Deadline for submissions is 8 of September 2017.

The workshop is arranged by the Data, Self & Society group at the Consumer Society Research Centre, University of Helsinki and the Self-tracking and automatised bodies -network, funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond/The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences.

Two modes for becoming who we are (2017-07-11 08:00)

The self as painting: we become who we are through repetition and representation. Encumbered only by our imagination and the culture in which we find ourselves, we craft ourselves through iterated projects of self-representation. We might find the materials available to us limiting, in which case we might seek out a more diverse palette of cultural ideas through which to express that which we are and wish to be. We might also seek to refine our technique, extending the range of our potential selves by expanding our capacities to represent them. But the process is fundamentally repetitive. We begin within constraints but once we start painting, it’s up to us what we do. The freedom exercised through this is one of redescription, in Richard Rorty’s sense, something which Roy Bhaskar once critiqued as relying on a ‘free-wheeling’ conception of freedom: it doesn’t hook on to the world, to the definitive ways in which things are at any given point in time, with all the constraints and limitations which this entails. Its appeal rests on the prospect of everlasting freedom. We can dispense with any one painting once we grow dissatisfied, throwing it away to restart in pursuit of ever richer and more vivid representations of our self. But there is an element of fantasy in this, refining our representation of self potentially at the cost of losing touch with the reality of who we are and where we are at any given moment. To craft the self as painting represents a private project of self-creation. It approaches the challenges of existence in an aesthetic register, one which cuts us off from our selves and from others in an ever-so subtle way, while holding out the (always re-treating) promise of endless freedom in inner life, whatever the world out there holds for us and what we care about.

The self as sculpting: through a sustained engagement with the material we find in our selves and our lives, we gradually produce the person we aim to be through our crafting of self. The process is subtractive, rather than additive. We select, refine and remove in a way that is path-dependent, often finding unexpected limitations which
follow from the whole sequence of past choices we have made. The further we go in this process, the less room for manoeuvre we have because our form becomes progressively more concrete with time. To become who we are depends on what was latent with us, but how this comes to take the form it does depends on the world we have found ourselves in and how we have chose to make our way through it.

We shape the clay but we do not choose it and our understanding of the range of possibilities latent within it will always be constrained by circumstance and experience. When the promise of the protean self is ubiquitous, tempting us with the idea that the only limit on who we can be is our imagination, the limitations of the clay can seem suffocating. But there is a freedom within these constraints. A profound, challenging and subtle freedom which refuses the reduction of existence to aesthetics.

The Personal Stories of a Methodology Study Group: An independent learning and support mechanism for postgrads (2017-07-12 08:00)

by Karen Cooper, Louise Oliver, Mananya Podee & Joanna Thurston

(Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Bournemouth University, UK)

Figure 1 (l. to r.) Louise Oliver, Jo Thurston, Karen Cooper & Mandy Podee

Supervisor’s Notes:
Three postgrad students whom I supervise had varying degrees of difficulties with their Transfer Vivas, and particularly with defending their choice of method, and explaining how they went about choosing it.

Frequently, a research method is chosen for a study (often too early), but when it comes to defending that choice and describing how the method itself has developed over time, responses are found lacking in the students' responses to questioning. I felt that working together to strengthen their methodological expertise might be helpful. For this reason, I suggested that they form a short-term methodological study group.

Here, in a nutshell, are the potential research methods that each of the initial group have under consideration (taken from their Method Chapters work). As you can see, there is much that the initial three have in common in terms of the methodological approaches under consideration:

- Karen Cooper: Qualitative > Case study > focus group > Interviews
- Louise Oliver: Case Study > Biographic Narrative Interpretative Method > Interviews > Reflective Teams
- Mandy Podee: Interpretative Sociology > Qualitative > In-depth interviews and/or focus groups > Narrative Inquiry Approaches

Just before the group formed, I examined a PhD Transfer Viva for Jo Thurston. It was agreed during and then following the Viva that she would explore more fully auto-ethnographic and auto-biographic approaches in her research. Jo agreed, therefore, to join the group.

Below are their responses to questions that I submitted to them after about two months of meeting as a group.

- How did the idea for the Methodology Study come about? Had you been involved in any projects like this previously?
Mandy: My supervisor, Kip Jones, kindly introduced me to the group of postgraduate students who do similar projects in terms of methodology. I attended several workshops regarding methodology in my first year, but those workshops provided only basic knowledge, and I didn’t have much chance to discuss with other students like I do in this Methodology Study group. In this group, we also share reading materials. We learned to think about other members when we find articles that could be useful for their projects.

Karen: Suggested by my supervisor in terms of identifying a few people who were using similar methods but different approaches. Have not been previously involved in any projects specifically focused on one methodology.

Louise: Dr Kip Jones brought the group together; this was a very different group to anything I have been a part of before.

Jo: I was introduced to the idea of the study group by one of my examiners (Jones) for my transfer document. I have never been involved in anything like this and was nervous to be in a situation where I would be ‘comparing’ my methodological knowledge to others! It is always nice to hide behind the written word but to have to talk to others about methods is more exposing, but great practice for the final viva!

- Are there elements of method that you share in common? How does this help the group to move forward?

Mandy: We all do narrative research so it is common for us to share textbooks. We can also share our work with each other and receive advice from each other since we are working in similar fields.

Karen: Yes, in terms of historical background and development of the methodological approach. It has helped us all in terms of sharing not just the stages of our study, but we have also got so much from sharing different literature and resources between us. We have now reached the stage where we are so aware of each other’s work that we recognise sources that may not be specific to our individual research, but know whom in the group it might be helpful for! We have become more open and developed critiquing ability with constructive feedback.

Louise: The elements of the method we share together is the use of narrative and, to some extent, biography within our research methods. Therefore, we are able to talk about the history of narrative research, debate the methodology as well as support one another with the best approach to writing about our methodology and method. It is this commonality which was the initial push forwards in keeping the group together.

Jo: It was so interesting to see how, despite the fact we are all using slightly different approaches, the commonality of our collecting people’s stories united us in our conversations. We agreed early on to all look at the history of biographical methods and the commonalities and divergences that we had found were really interesting points on which to build conversations. We each agreed to read each other’s draft Chapter Three’s and then present our methodologies to each other to practice articulating our approaches and question each other. We all have a common goal of passing our PhDs so we wanted to provide a platform to enable each other to talk through challenges and practice the skills required to defend our work.
• One particularly interesting aspect of the project is the relationship between each other, each other's work and your own thesis. Have links developed?

Mandy: We often discuss about our writing feedback from supervisors, then we come up with some ideas to help others. I personally think that this is one of the best parts, because as I discuss my work with others, it helps me to understand and be more confident about my topic.

Karen: Due to the small number within the group we have developed a true bond with each other in terms of support—both personally and a greater awareness the stages of everyone’s research and understanding. It has helped me is in terms of developing my own knowledge of the methodology and the underpinning philosophies and epistemologies within the approaches used by others within the group. This again, then strengthens the ability the reason and defend our individual approaches, the similarities and differences.

Louise: This to me is not just a methodology group, it is a methodology support group where we help each other out theoretically as well support each other emotionally; this has brought the group to form quickly, and a close relationship between us all has developed. Adding to this, we all know of different academics outside of our group, and have encouraged links that way as well.

Jo: I feel we have really bonded over this experience and keep others in mind when we come across research etc that might be relevant to their study. My personal research has developed because of ideas and questions posed by others in the group. We have also adopted a slightly pastoral role for each other...possibly because we are all women and have naturally nurturing instincts/professional roles. I have only known these women a few months but we are literally rooting for each other to finish our studies and watch each other walk across the stage at graduation. I think it is particularly important for international students to be within a study group such as this to truly integrate them into their study experience and provide another level of support in addition to official university mechanisms.

• What advice would you give to social scientists interested in using a similar study group? How can these help postgrad students particularly to develop methodology?

Mandy: If you aren’t fearful in bringing up your problems with others who do similar things, it will definitely help you in your work. By exchanging study materials and presenting your work, it will lead you to be more efficient in your research and build up self-confidence.

Karen: To start with small numbers - as what was helpful was that has been no sense of competition but more an awareness of what stage everyone is at, individual challenges, and being open and honest about any difficulties and pressures at any given time. This also has been made easier with short focused weekly sessions in the first 2 months. The smaller groups have meant that these sessions have enabled everyone to have enough individual time for expression and their voice being heard. It was helpful to have an initial starting session that was facilitated...
in terms of introduction and potential possibilities of the group formation. It helps in several ways, for example, defending explaining their own research and methodology for their work with a developed understanding.

Louise: I think that the group being quite small has helped. Also, I am aware of the professional backgrounds of the majority of the group, who are in caring professions – which I think may bring in a different dynamic to the group, in the way that we support one another, have a shared ethos in practice and how we approach research. This group has been extremely helpful and I would not have developed my understanding of the methodology as quickly if it were not for the group and how we organised ourselves and set tasks for each week. So, each week we would each present or discuss something new.

Jo: Chapter Three has a fairly mechanistic structure and as such, no matter what the methodology, if you are in a methodology study ('support') group (!) you can support each other through the Chapter development and talk through ideas, etc. We set weekly goals to keep our focus and momentum (You don't just want to waste an hour chatting about how hard everything is!) and this was really important. To be able to research and then talk through your writing on history, for example, helps the student work through their methodological understanding and rehearse the articulation of justification etc.

- **How has working in a study group made it easier to return to working alone and in isolation? Or have you found an answer to this in the group process itself?**

Mandy: Working with the group helps me in terms of having clearer picture for my own work, therefore I find it easier to work on my own project afterward. Also, when I have problems, I know that I can always ask others either by email or at our group meeting.

Karen: I feel that the answer has been in the group process itself. The nature of the small group itself has been informative, motivational and developmental, which is self-evident in the progress and understanding we have all made during this process. After two months, the group has become a key factor in my personal learning and development. We appear to have no desire for the group working process to have an end point and have developed a joint affinity in the journey. We changed the name from Methodology Study Group to Methodology Support Group!

Louise: We have decided not to work alone and in isolation again. When I have been working on my Methodology Chapter, I have kept the others in the group in mind, and sent them research which I felt was relevant to their own individual studies, and they have done the same for me. It has taken the isolation out of what I do and we have decided to continue our group beyond writing our methodology chapters. This is to provide support throughout our research. Not only to support each other emotionally and take away the isolation but to continue the critical debates about research which, I can say, I have found extremely helpful.

Jo: The study group has been such a positive experience for each of us we have arranged to continue to meet to talk through progress and challenges, albeit slightly less frequently than once a week. To meet as a group makes us accountable for progression as you don't want to let down the others and not produce the work that we have all agreed to look at! The setting of small goals for each week enabled a more focused approach and that has continued for me in working on my own. however It is seeing the next group meeting in the diary, however, that helps me maintain momentum and keep progressing to Chapter completion!
**Biographies**

Karen Cooper qualified as a Registered General Nurse in 1978 and worked in clinical practice for 30 years within medicine and care of the older person. Since 2005, she has been involved in nurse education and is currently a lecturer in adult nursing. Her current research interests include practice assessment and mentorship in relation to practitioners personal and professional development, humanised care, qualitative research, group narratives and case study methodology.

Louise Oliver's research is about Child-To-Parent Violence and Abuse. This research was inspired by her experiences of working with families experiencing this form of family violence. In addition to this research, she is also a Social Worker.

Mananya Podee (Mandy) is an international PhD student from Thailand. The aim of her research is to critically evaluate the needs people with dementia toward holiday experiences in order to develop dementia-friendly holiday accommodation.

Joanna Thurston is the Programme Leader for the BSc (Hons) Sports Therapy programme at Bournemouth University and a part-time PhD researcher. Her research uses autobiographical methodology to explore her experience of living with osteoporosis as a young active female.

Mich Page (2017-07-13 07:39:45)

What a lovely idea to create a group that not only support each other academically, but it would seem to be the case that they now feel empowered to progress independently, knowing that they have colleagues who will understand their struggles and dilemmas, emotionally as well as practically. This has also created a fabulous opportunity for group writing or performance, the experience (arduous though it may be) of actually doing research, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and having the courage to step out into the unknown, is in itself an under-researched area, and I’m sure would be of great interest to other students.

ADRC's PhD Student Mananya Podee contributes towards an article | BU Research (2017-11-09 16:10:11)

[...] Mananya Podee & Joanna Thurston), Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, have just published an article in the Sociological Imagination blog. All at similar stages in the PhD [...] 

**The data warriors and the electoral wars they wage** (2017-07-13 08:00)

One of the most interesting issues raised by the rise of data science in party politics is how to untangle corporate rhetoric from social reality. I have much time for the argument that we risk taking the claims of a company like Cambridge Analytica too seriously, accepting at face value what are simply marketing exercises. But the parallel risk is that we fail to take them seriously enough, dismissing important changes in how elections are fought as marketing hype propounded by digital charlatans.

Perhaps we need to focus more on the data scientists themselves. As much as there is something of the
Bond villain about Alexander Nix, CEO of Cambridge Analytica, it’s important that we don’t become preoccupied with corporate leaders. Who are the rank-and-file data scientists working on campaigns? What motivates them? How do they conceive of the work they do? There were interesting hints about this in the recent book *Shattered*, looking at Hilary Clinton’s failed election campaign. Much as was the case with Jeb Bush’s near entirely stalled campaign, there had been much investment in data analytics, with buy-in right from the top of the campaign. From pg 228-229:

These young data warriors, most of whom had grown up in politics during the Obama era, behaved as though the Democratic Party had come up with an inviolable formula for winning presidential elections. It started with the “blue wall”—eighteen states, plus the District of Columbia, that had voted for the Democratic presidential nominee in every election since 1992. They accounted for 242 of the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency. From there, you expanded the playing field of battleground states to provide as many “paths” as possible to get the remaining 28 electoral votes. Adding to their perceived advantage, Democrats believed they’d demonstrated in Obama’s two elections that they were much more sophisticated in bringing data to bear to get their voters to the polls. For all the talk of models and algorithms, the basic thrust of campaign analytics was pretty straightforward when it came to figuring out how to move voters to the polls. The data team would collect as much information as possible about potential voters, including age, race, ethnicity, voting history, and magazine subscriptions, among other things. Each person was given a score, ranging from zero to one hundred, in each of three categories: probability of voting, probability of voting for Hillary, and probability, if they were undecided, that they could be persuaded to vote for her. These scores determined which voters got contacted by the campaign and in which manner—a television spot, an ad on their favorite website, a knock on their door, or a piece of direct mail. "It's a grayscale," said a campaign aide familiar with the operation. "You start with the people who are the best targets and go down until you run out of resources."

Understanding these ‘data warriors’ and the data practices they engage in is crucial to understanding how data science is changing party politics. Perhaps it’s even more important than understanding high profile consultancies and the presentations of their corporate leaders.

CfP: "Truth, facts, and fake: The shifting epistemologies of news in a digital age" (2017-07-14 08:00)

Special issue of New Media & Society and related online workshop

Truth, facts, and fake: The shifting epistemologies of news in a digital age

Co-editors:
Mats Ekström, University of Gothenburg
Seth C. Lewis, University of Oregon
Oscar Westlund, University of Gothenburg

Tentative timeline:
Abstract submission deadline: Monday, October 2, 2017
Notification on submitted abstracts: Friday, October 20, 2017
Online workshop focusing on the special issue theme: in early February 2018
Article submission deadline: Thursday, March 1, 2018
Verified, fact-based information is presumed to be an important feature in society, for citizens individually and for democratic governance as a whole. During much the 20th century, legacy news media enjoyed a prominent position in attempting to fulfill that role, reporting on happenings near and far. Journalists professionalized over time, developing standards, norms, methods, and networks of sources that enabled them to make knowledge claims. Such epistemological practices—presumed to provide factual and reliable public information—have made journalism one of the most influential knowledge-producing institutions in society.

However, both slow and sudden changes are challenging the role of journalism in society. There is an ongoing but gradual shift from legacy media to digital media. On the one hand, this shift has opened new pathways for news access and distribution across an array of platforms—social, mobile, apps, and the like. On the other hand, this shift has generally undercut the business models of legacy news media organizations, resulting in the weakening and downsizing of newsrooms and the fragmenting of collective audiences for news—altogether raising questions about the continued viability of journalism to produce reliable information. Meanwhile, the more sudden change in the information landscape is the rapid expansion of actors that, in some cases, are intent on providing “alternative facts” or otherwise questioning the accounts of news media. This comes at a moment when many people, particularly in developed countries, appear to have little confidence in the press. While some of these sources seek to verify facts in a journalistic fashion, others pursue a deliberate strategy of disinformation for political or financial purposes. The success of such “fake news” has led to widespread debate about what some are calling a “post-truth” era.

Altogether, these developments point to many opportunities for research and theory. A general question concerns how the epistemologies of journalism—knowledge claims, norms, and practices—are shaped by the changes and challenges in digital news production. How do journalists know what they know, and how are their knowledge claims articulated and justified? To understand the destabilization of the epistemic status of journalism articulated in current debates, what is needed are empirical studies, historical explanations, and theoretical developments. Moreover, it is essential to better understand how news consumers perceive news, “fake” or otherwise; e.g., how do they evaluate and act upon such claims? Citizens also need media literacy skills to assess the quality of information; what constitutes such literacy, and how does it respond to the knowledge conditions of the contemporary digital environment? As a response to the rise of fake news, several groups have mobilized to investigate information. The functioning and implications of such mobilizations (such as fact-checking movements), as well as digital media tools that aid citizens and professionals in verifying information, are important to analyze to develop our understanding of the production and consumption of more or less verified and non-verified information in a changing news media landscape.

For this special issue, the guest editors welcome two kinds of article submissions: theoretically informed and empirically rigorous articles (using quantitative, qualitative, computational, and/or mixed methods), as well as conceptualizations involving systematic and relevant literature reviews. Contributors may address issues including, but not limited to, the following:

The epistemology of different forms of journalism—such as data journalism, which conveys news through the analysis and visualization of numerical data, and participatory journalism, which involves audiences and communities in news construction;

Knowledge-oriented norms, values, and practices applied when publishing and distributing news, accordingly to varying socio-cultural, political, organizational, and technological contexts;

The shifting networks of sources on which journalists and other information professionals rely;

The discursive construction of “truth” and “facts” in the context of news production, distribution, and consumption;
Notions of “fake news,” “post-truth,” and related controversies brought to light by the 2016 U.S. presidential election, and which are applicable also in many other countries and contexts;

The knowledge-oriented practices of news consumers as they encounter purportedly “fake news” and propaganda online (and, by extension, questions of and conceptualizations for media literacy);

Verification on/for social media as well as related forms of technologically driven means of information assessment;

Perceptions and practices of professional footage vis-à-vis amateur footage, including issues of authenticity and authority;

The formation, vision, and practices of initiatives, groups or organizations working toward identifying “fake news,” on behalf of professionals, the public or both;

Comparative perspectives on news consumers and their relative trust in different forms of media processes and products;

The development, appropriation, and use of technological systems and tools for verification.

Information about submission:

Proposals should include the following: an abstract of 500-750 words (not including references) as well as background information on the author(s), including an abbreviated bio that describes previous and current research that relates to the special issue theme. Please submit your proposal as a PDF to the e-mail address [1]ekstrom.lewis.westlund@gmail.com[mailto:ekstrom.lewis.westlund@gmail.com] no later than Monday, October 2, 2017. Later that month, by October 20, authors will be notified whether their abstract has been selected, and consequently if they will be encouraged to develop and submit an article for peer review. Please note: Authors whose abstracts are shortlisted for full-paper submission to the special issue also will be committing to take part in an online workshop, hosted by the University of Gothenburg, to be held in early February 2018. This experimental approach will allow for the sharing and commenting on drafts as well as the discussion of more general theoretical issues, future research opportunities, and networking among scholars. Live sessions will be held for portions of two days, in addition to a week period for open commenting and discussion. Further details will be conveyed to shortlisted authors. Finally, full articles will be due Thursday, March 1, 2018, for full blind review, in accordance with the journal’s peer-review procedure.

1. [mailto:ekstrom.lewis.westlund@gmail.com]
2. [mailto:ekstrom.lewis.westlund@gmail.com]

CFP: 'What' and 'How' of Critique: Styles, Issues and Confrontations in Critical Social Theory and Research
(2017-07-15 08:00)

Wednesday, 20th September 2017, Duurham University Keynotes: Professor Peter Fleming (City University London), Dr Ana Cecilia Dinerstein (University of Bath) The way power operates in contemporary societies is changing and critical reflection and action is as relevant now as ever. There exist numerous styles of critique in contemporary social theory and research (Marxism, Frankfurt School, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, constructivism, ANT, etc.).
which often encompass different epistemological, normative, and political commitments and their understanding of critique differs accordingly. Moreover, some scholars argue for a move towards a “post-critical” approach to social research. However, answers to questions of what is critique, how should it be conducted, and how can it contribute to social change often remain implicit and underexplored. This postgraduate symposium will contribute to open and explicit discussion of what it means to be critical in social research practice, what different styles of critique researchers follow and highlight important differences between them. The symposium seeks to encourage students to reflect on what ‘being critical’ means in their academic and research practice. In addition, it offers a forum for discussion of what questions and challenges postgraduate students working in critical tradition face. We invite both theoretical reflections and examinations of these issues in relation to problems addressed in students’ research. We particularly encourage papers that: 1) Reflect on meanings of critique in relation to students’ own research 2) Discuss and compare different styles of critique focusing on their differences, advantages, and disadvantages. Please email abstracts of no more 250 words or questions regarding the symposium to [1]critique.pgbsa@durham.ac.uk. Bookings are now [2]OPEN. Registration Rates: BSA Member £10 Non Member £25 Key dates:

- Abstracts due: 1st August 2017
- Decisions announced: 8th August 2017
- Date of the symposium: 20th September 2017

1. mailto:critique.pgbsa@durham.ac.uk

Amado (2018-05-10 05:45:38)

wonderful points altogether, you just gained a new reader. What would you suggest about your publish that you simply made some days in the past? Any positive?

betberry login alternatif (2018-10-12 02:04:44)

I do accept as true with all of the ideas you’ve presented for your post. They are very convincing and will definitely work. Nonetheless, the posts are too quick for newbies. May just you please extend them a bit from next time? Thank you for the post.

greece ferry (2019-02-25 10:28:31)

Everything composed was actually very logical. But, what about this? what if you typed a catchier post title? I mean, I don't want to tell you how to run your blog, however what if you added a title that makes people want more? I mean » CFP: 'What' and 'How' of Critique: Styles, Issues and Confrontations in Critical Social Theory and Research The Sociological Imagination is kinda boring. You should pek at Yahoo's front page and watch how they create article titles to grab viewers tto click. You might add a related video or a pic or two to get people excited about everything’ve written. In my opinion, it could make your blog a littke livelier.

Politico-environmental crisis (2017-07-16 08:00)

In Naomi Klein’s new book No Is Not Enough, there’s a lucid overview of the intersection between political and environmental crisis. The role of drought in fermenting the conditions for the Syrian civil war was something which [1]Marc Hudson first explained to me last year. From pg 182-183:
The irony is particularly acute because many of the conflicts driving migration today have already been exacerbated by climate change. For instance, before civil war broke out in Syria, the country faced its deepest drought on record—roughly 1.5 million people were internally displaced as a result. A great many displaced farmers moved to the border city of Daraa, which happens to be where the Syrian uprising broke out in 2011. Drought was not the only factor in bringing tensions to a head, but many analysts, including former secretary of state John Kerry, are convinced it was a key contributor.

In fact, if we chart the locations of the most intense conflict spots in the world right now—from the bloodiest battlefields in Afghanistan and Pakistan, to Libya, Yemen, Somalia, and Iraq—what becomes clear is that these also happen to be some of the hottest and driest places on earth. The Israeli architect Eyal Weizman has mapped the targets of Western drone strikes and found an “astounding coincidence.” The strikes are intensely concentrated in regions with an average of just 200 millimeters (7.8 inches) of rainfall per year—so little that even slight climate disruption can push them into drought.

In other words, we are bombing the driest places on the planet, which also happen to be the most destabilized. A frank explanation for this was provided in a US military report published by the Center for Naval Analyses a decade ago: “The Middle East has always been associated with two natural resources, oil (because of its abundance) and water (because of its scarcity).” When it comes to oil, water, and war in the Middle East, certain patterns have become clear over time. First, Western fighter jets follow that abundance of oil in the region, setting off spirals of violence and destabilization. Next come the Western drones, closely tracking water scarcity as drought and conflict mix together. And just as bombs follow oil, and drones follow drought—so, now, boats follow both. Boats filled with refugees fleeing homes ravaged by war and drought in the driest parts of the planet.

Surely these intersections should be at the forefront of how we imagine social processes? I realise there are many reasons why this isn’t the case but the one I’ve been pondering is the sustained hold of the nature/society distinction. If we see nature and society as distinct domains, we’re liable to be blind towards the environmental factors at work in social catastrophe. Only an idiot would deny the relationship in principle but the effects are projected into the future, as an expected horizon in which the natural will impact upon the social. But in doing so, their present entanglement with all the consequences flowing from this, comes to be lost in the analysis of events which are interpreted as narrowly political.

What does public sociology have to say about sociologists who are ‘merchants of doubt’? (2017-07-17 08:00)

What does public sociology have to say about sociologists who are ‘merchants of doubt’? This is the question I’m slightly obsessing over after discovering that Peter Berger, famous for his work on social construction and the sociology of religion, [1] worked as a consultant [2] for the tobacco industry. As Source Watch [3] details, he was tasked with establishing that “anti-smoking activists have a special agenda which serves their own purposes, but not necessarily the majority of nonsmokers”:

He served as a Tobacco Institute consultant. While at Boston College, Berger, (as quoted in tobacco industry newsletter “The Tobacco Observer,”) described tobacco control proponents as “fanatical.”[6][1]
Berger attended Philip Morris executive meetings and participated in the multinational tobacco industry’s Social Costs/Social Values Project, created to refute the social costs theory of smoking and to help reverse declining social acceptability of smoking. He was a contributing author to the industry-financed book Smoking and Society, edited by another tobacco industry consultant, Robert Tollison.


This is critical sociology deployed on behalf of the powerful: pulling back the veil on a group pursuing an ideational agenda and claiming they act out of sectional interests. What other examples are there of prominent sociologists acting in this capacity? How should these cases inform our conception of public sociology?

1. http://montclairsoci.blogspot.co.uk/2017/06/peter-berger.html

Wander Nunes Frota (2017-07-17 14:41:22)
Here in Brazil, our former president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who used to be a leading leftist sociologist responsible for explaining what the so-called “Dependence Theory” meant for Brazilians, i.e. he somehow had helped develop this theory while he was in exile in Chile (at CEPAL) in the mid-1960s, even though he was the son of an old Army General, he turned out to be something of a fraud when he became Brazil’s president in the 1990s; for one thing, he was crazy enough to ask Brazilians to “forget what he had written as a sociologist”... So sincere on his part, isn’t it?

Purple Peppercorn (2017-07-18 02:14:12)
Chilling indeed. Thomas McLaughlin wrote "Street Smarts and Critical Theory" and looked at how it is taken up by right wing activists.

Public Intellectuals and the Shock Doctrine (2017-07-18 08:00)

In the last year, I’ve been preoccupied by the relationship between periods of political flux and public intellectualism. These aren’t longer term processes, in which the coordinates of an established consensus begin to disintegrate, but rather short term periods of intense public confusion e.g. the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote or the shock Labour result in the last election. What happens when the established commentators don’t know what’s going on? What happens when large swathes of the population peer beyond the veneer of governance and realise no one
is really in charge of the system?

It is inevitably the case that order is soon resumed and an account of these events is established. However those interstitial moments where a dominant frame has broken down, without any successfully coming to take its place, represent a failure of interpretation with potential influence to be accrued by public intellectuals who can step into the picture and provide a clear and plausible explanation of what is happening i.e. why is this situation so rather than otherwise? This contrasts with the descriptions which the emerging model of intellectualism-as-punditry offers, as political scientists compete to see who can offer the most compelling hot take on the issue foremost on the media agenda.

It occurs to me when reading Naomi Klein’s new book, No Is Not Enough, what I’ve been calling ‘political flux’ relates to what she characterises as ‘shock’. These failures of interpretation can be brought about deliberately, creating moments in which resistance is untenable because things are moving too fast. But political flux can also emerge as unintended consequences from deliberate shocks, with the shock-architects themselves being taken aback by the consequences of their actions. On pg 6 she describes some of the shocks we are likely to see in the near future, as the Trump administration pursues its agenda:

it’s also a vision that can be counted on to generate wave after wave of crises and shocks. Economic shocks, as market bubbles—infated thanks to deregulation—burst; security shocks, as blowback from anti-Islamic policies and foreign aggression comes home; weather shocks, as our climate is further destabilized; and industrial shocks, as oil pipelines spill and rigs collapse, which they tend to do when the safety and environmental regulations that prevent chaos are slashed. All this is dangerous. Even more so is the way the Trump administration can be relied upon to exploit these shocks to push through the more radical planks of its agenda. A large-scale crisis—whether a terrorist attack or a financial crash—would likely provide the pretext to declare some sort of state of exception or emergency, where the usual rules no longer apply.

What role do public intellectuals have here? In alleviating the disorientation shock gives rise to by interpreting the political flux, it’s possible to stake out a new role for public intellectuals which takes advantages of the affordances of social media*. But this also requires linking these moments of flux together, drawing out the connections between the different shocks and articulating a story about how this all fits together. From pg 8:

we have to tell a different story from the one the shock doctors are peddling, a vision of the world compelling enough to compete head-to-head with theirs. This values-based vision must offer a different path, away from serial shocks—one based on coming together across racial, ethnic, religious, and gender divides, rather than being wrenched further apart, and one based on healing the planet rather than unleashing further destabilizing wars and pollution. Most of all, that vision needs to offer those who are hurting—for lack of jobs, lack of health care, lack of peace, lack of hope—a tangibly better life.

Yes, I realise it’s not as simple as simply getting ideas ‘out there’, but that’s a topic for another post.

Ways of Being in a Digital Age - A Review Conference (2017-07-19 08:00)

Ways of Being in a Digital Age - A Review Conference*

Dates: 10th and 11th of October 2017

Location: University of Liverpool, UK

Key Dates: 300 word abstracts: 21^st July 2017; Acceptance by 25th August 2017;

This conference will close the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) review of "Ways of being in a digital age". The project was commissioned by the ESRC to help identify and prioritise future areas and methods for research on the social, economic, political, psychological and cultural impacts of digital media and technologies. The final report will be published over the summer of 2017.

Click here for details of the project: [1]https://waysofbeingdigital.com/
Click here for details of the conference: [3]https://waysofbeingdigital.com/conference/
Click here for the submission site: [5]https://waysofbeingdigital.com/conference/ Led by the University of Liverpool, the project team consists of academics from eight UK universities and a broader international steering group that represents 18 universities and organisations from across the UK, France, the USA and Singapore. Click here for more information on the people involved in this research: [6]https://waysofbeingdigital.com/people/

To close the project, we are holding an academic conference to present, extend and deepen the work of the project team. We are calling for review papers on topics that address any aspect of the seven project domains: 1. Citizenship and politics 2. Communities and identities 3. Communication and relationships 4. Health and wellbeing 5. Economy and sustainability 6. Data and representation 7. Governance and security We are looking papers that offer systematic, thematic or methodological reviews of existing research on any aspect of the seven project domains. We are particularly interested in papers that build on reviews to offer analysis of research gaps and challenges for social research in the digital age. We intend to include the conference papers in an edited collection developed from the project. Abstract submissions are sought by 21^st July 2017 to: [8]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=wbda2017 For information on the conference or the project contact: [9]simeon.yates@liverpool.ac.uk

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Brand Corbyn and Brand Trump (2017-07-20 08:00)

What do Jeremy Corbyn and Donald Trump have in common? On the face of it, two people could not be more
dissimilar but I'm curious about what might be their analogous position in relation to mainstream political culture.
After all, in a sense Corbyn came from outside party politics, albeit not in the way Trump did, being a life-long back
bencher and consummate constituency MP who never sought power in any sense. Both reject the common sense of
party politics and have in different ways [1]benefitted from a media which is superficially hostile to them.

Perhaps we can make sense of their commonality in terms of their political brands, both of which have formed
quickly in a way that floats free of the manifold pressures which shape self-presentation by those who spent years
seeking power through steady ascent of within a political party. Neither learned to walk the walk and talk the talk
in the way needed to gain respect and cultivate influence amongst their peers, perhaps avoiding the [2]deformation
professionelle to which these colleagues are subject to as a result. They don’t assume that political correspondents
are all powerful because they haven’t spent their professional lives seeking coverage from them, as well as being
judged by their peers on their success or otherwise in doing so.

This is what Naomi Klein says of Trump's political brand on pg 33 of her new book No Is Not Enough:

> It's also why no labor scandal is ever going to stick to him. In the world he has created, he's just acting like
> a "winner"; if someone gets stepped on, they are obviously a loser. And this doesn't only apply to labor
> scandals—virtually every traditional political scandal bounces off Trump. That's because Trump didn't just
> enter politics as a so-called outsider, somebody who doesn't play by the rules. He entered politics playing
> by a completely different set of rules—the rules of branding. According to those rules, you don't need
> to be objectively good or decent; you only need to be true and consistent to the brand you have created.
> That's why brand managers are so obsessed with discipline and repetition: once you have identified what
> your core brand is, your only job is to embody that brand, project that brand, and repeat its message. If
> you stay focused, very little can touch you.

This opens up the possibility that what is seen as electability, strong leadership and plausibility might actually be little
more than weakness in the face of the media. If you've built your political brand on performing in a way that wins
the media's favour, you are inevitably subject to their whims. You are constitutively tied to the cluster of journalists,
much as they are in turn tied to you through their need for access, leaving politics as a deformed game of intellectual
twister taking place on the parliamentary estate. But to be a new brand, emerging quickly in a way external to these
dynamics, involves near complete freedom from such influences if you can only 'stay focused'. Brand Corbyn and
Brand Trump couldn't be more different but there are deep similarities in how and why the media struggle to touch
them.

2. http://deformation%20professionelle/
A playbook for merchandising doubt (2017-07-21 08:00)

I’m currently reading [1]Merchants of Doubt, a fascinating study of the tobacco industry’s deployment of academic experts to cast doubt on the harm caused by cigarettes. Being in the mood to read the book in an ultra-cynical way, here’s my playbook for merchandising doubt, derived from reading these cases through the lens of critical realism:

1. Exploit multiple causation to maximum effect: it might be that X reliably brings about harmful outcomes for society but so do A, B and C. Focusing on these alternate pathways to personal and social pathologies helps relativise the harm caused by X, as well as highlighting the uncertain relationship between it and those outcomes which everyone agrees are undesirable.

2. Attack inferences from populations to individuals: exploit the difficulty of apply population level generalisations to individual cases. Highlight these cases, promote them and promulgate them as emphatically as possible. These cases are your friend! The public don’t think in terms of statistical knowledge, but rather in terms of individuals. The more you can focus on individuals, the easier it will be to discredit statistical claims. Exploiting folk theories of causation and correlation will be key to using this tactic effectively.

3. You need facts to counter facts: it won’t work to simply dismiss research that harms your interests. It’s necessary to find ‘alternative facts’: claims about reality with enough evidence to make them hard to dismiss, but which encourage alternative framings of an issue that might otherwise be a matter of scientific consensus. Even if experts might question the salience of these facts, journalists will feel the need to report ‘both sides’ in interests of fairness or even highlight the novelty of the new framings your alternative facts open up. Plus the more facts the better, at least in so far as you’re trying to encourage the public to withdraw from intellectual engagement with these debates.

4. Create a debate and then swamp your enemy: such alternative facts and their playing out in the media can be a powerful way to create a debate out of something which is actually a matter of scientific consensus. Once this happens, it’s important that you outspend your opponents to the greatest possible extent. Scientists are rarely versed in public engagement, lacking both the disposition and expertise. Find experts at communicating your message and provide them with all the resources they need. Activist groups are slightly better equipped for this communication, but you’ll always be able to out spend them. It’s even better if you can create your own activist groups!

5. Always stress the vested interests of your enemies: behind their protestations of disinterested rationality, scientists are people with careers, employers and aspirations. By definition, their interests are served when they do their job in the way they are expected e.g. by producing knowledge. If you stress the way this work serves their interests, it obscures their cognitive commitment to the production of knowledge. This is even easier with activist groups who are vocal about their ideological commitments: in their case, their failure to perform the disinterestedness of scientists can be used to dismiss them as zealots!

6. Hack science through manipulating the burden of proof: most people don’t understand the way science progresses and uncertainty about peripheral issues can be exploited to cast doubt on what is largely settled. The complications which arise through new studies are your friend! Such a tactic will work even more effectively if you can find scientists prone to scientism, an obsessive commitment to countering claims that are seen to involve ‘over-reaching’; whose zealotry coupled with authority can help make your case.
7. If all else fails, attack the proposals: once the battle is lost, don’t waste time continuing to defend your case. Move on to the consequences of what your enemy advocates: what is the evidence for their proposals? Question the evidence, smear it as non-scientific, fund your own counter studies to discredit it. If their evidence is unimpeachable, invoke the slippery slope and attack the possible consequences of what they are advocating. Invoke democracy: who are they to say what we can or cannot do? Who gave them the right to shape policy? Who is controlling their agenda?


One of the more irritating framings of Donald Trump's rise to power has been to stress his 'disruptive' credentials. Such accounts often focus on the role of Jared Kushner, who has been granted a dizzying array of responsibilities in the Trump Whitehouse, prompting Gary Sernovitz to observe the overlap with recent events in Saudi Arabia:

When Donald Trump travels to Saudi Arabia later this month, the first country he will visit as President, the attention will be on geopolitics and the complicated friendship between Saudi Arabia and the United States. But the trip also highlights, just off center stage, an unremarked-upon similarity between the current Saudi government and the American White House: in both places, unelected men in their thirties have swiftly amassed power.

In Saudi Arabia, the thirty-one-year-old Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the deputy Crown Prince and son of King Salman, is now in charge of the oil industry, the economy, defense policy, a war in Yemen, and various domestic initiatives. In the United States, the national responsibilities of Jared Kushner, the President’s thirty-six-year-old son-in-law, include, according to the Times, “Middle East peace, the opioid epidemic, relations with China and Mexico, and reorganizing the federal government from top to bottom.” Kushner is technically the President’s senior adviser, but you might also call him America’s crown prince.

Both men are presented as "bringing modern and advanced ideas into stodgy government terrain", empowered by ageing rulers in virtue of their “being in touch with the latest in finance and technology”. There is little to justify this veneer of being tech-savvy, but it certainly covers up the role of “family ties and court intrigues” in their respective advancement. In the case of Kushner, such a framing can give a superficial plausibility to his leadership of the Office of American Innovation, arguably entrenching, extending and radicalising Obama’s mission to ‘reboot how government works’.

However I want to argue that Trump is a disrupter. But not in the sense in which the many tech-bros who cautiously applaud his assent are liable to understand the term. As Naomi Klein writes in her new book *No Is Not*
As this has been unfolding, it struck me that what’s happening in Washington is not the usual passing of the baton between parties. It’s a naked corporate takeover, one many decades in the making. It seems that the economic interests that have long since paid off both major parties to do their bidding have decided they’re tired of playing the game. Apparently, all that wining and dining of elected officials, all that cajoling and legalized bribery, insulted their sense of divine entitlement. So now they’re cutting out the middlemen—those needy politicians who are supposed to protect the public interest—and doing what all top dogs do when they want something done right: they are doing it themselves.

In this sense, we can see Trump as disintermediating politics. America has long faced a quasi-oligopolistic situation in which elites rules through strategic influence, near to unopposed in a situation which the political sociologist Colin Crouch characterises as post-democracy. The disruption of the Trump presidency involves the removal of that mediation, directly empowering the most activist and reactionary tier of this plutocratic elite. As she goes on to write, from pg 3-4:

But the Trumps seem unconcerned. A near-impenetrable sense of impunity—of being above the usual rules and laws—is a defining feature of this administration. Anyone who presents a threat to that impunity is summarily fired—just ask former FBI director James Comey. Up to now in US politics there’s been a mask on the corporate state’s White House proxies: the smiling actor’s face of Ronald Reagan or the faux cowboy persona of George W. Bush (with Dick Cheney/Halliburton scowling in the background). Now the mask is gone. And no one is even bothering to pretend otherwise.

The idea of post-democracy conveys a ‘hollowing out’, rather than a negation. What’s so disturbing about recent events in America is that we may be seeing the early stages of a transition from post-democracy to non-democracy.

Incidentally, this always reminds me of an Economist interview in which a reluctant conservative supporter of Trump explained how if you have an infestation of vermin, you call in the exterminator but that doesn’t mean you want the exterminator to run your house after the vermin have gone (or words to that effect). The point being that ‘disruption’ of politics is a culturally specific expression of a broader political sentiment.

CfP: Social Research in a Sceptical Age (2017-07-23 08:00)

Conference title: ‘Social Research in a Sceptical Age’

Conference date: 6 December 2017

Venue: British Library in London

Call deadline: Monday 7 August

The workshop sessions at the conference are a great opportunity to share and discuss your work with practicing social researchers and research users. Last year’s conference attracted over 200 people – from research institutes, commercial agencies, central and local government, the voluntary and independent sectors, academia, and more.

You'll have 20 minutes to present plus 10 more for Q &A, in parallel workshop sessions. What you present may or may not relate to this 'sceptical age', but that's fine – we are looking for examples of innovation, applications of methods, and experiences (rather than simple findings) that this audience will find interesting and useful.

At this stage we’re looking for an abstract of up to 500 words to describe and explain what you’d like to present – with a focus on one or more of these areas:

- Getting the message across
- The value of narratives
- Policy evaluation
- Embedding quality assurance
- The value of quality in evidence
- Qualitative innovation
- Quantitative innovation
- Involving research participants
- Dealing with the unexpected

One presenter per successful entry will pay a reduced delegate rate of £55. The volunteer SRA Events Group will assess all entries and aim to let you know the outcome in September/October.

Please use the template Word doc for your entry, downloadable on our website here: [1]www.the-sra.org.uk/events. You can also see there a detailed flyer about the conference, and the keynote and plenary speakers.
The legacy of Zygmunt Bauman (2017-07-24 08:00)

I've been looking forward to this book for months. The author wrote a fantastic review essay in The Sociological Review. This is the author’s account of his book from the BSA Theory mailing list:

Members of the group may be interested in my new book, the first single-authored critical appraisal of Bauman’s prodigious output. Other single-authored books have been merely exegetical, and given how prolific Bauman was in his later years, are seriously out of date.

As you will see partly from the little blurb that you will find via this link, I critically evaluate, especially, his Holocaust thesis, his conception of 'Liquid Modernity', his simplistic views on consumerism, his Eurocentrism and his debilitating lack of interest in issues of gender and race (apart from ant-Semitism) and his negative perspective on the new social movements: feminism, protests by black youth which he dismissed (as did Thatcher, Cameron and The Daily Mail) as simple acts of criminality (he called them 'flawed consumers' rather than young people protesting against racial discrimination by police and, and so forth. He also regarded the Internet as generally part of the growing lack of civility in social life, thus under-estimating its critical potential, etc, etc.

I also discuss his pessimism and ask whether, politically, that is not a constructive position to adopt in our current fraught times.

This, I hope, gives you enough of a flavour of my interpretation, which is somewhat at odds with the many who—not surprisingly, given his two-books-a-year output—simply gave up reading him after his Holocaust book, but looked upon him favourably for his undoubted championing of the down-trodden more generally.

BTW, I also explore critically his Levinas-based views on ethics, his generalisations on globalisation, identity, his analysis of the state (he over-exaggerated the impotence of the state in the face of globalisation), and much much more—he wrote about many, many social phenomena, and I have put all of them under a critical spotlight.

The Sociological Review will be publishing a review symposium on the book; reviews are planned by Theory, Culture and Society, and the US journal Cultural Politics (co-edited by Douglas Kellner), amongst others.

A book launch will take place in October at City, University of London; the book is available from 1 August 2017.

(Professor) Ali Rattansi
(Now) Visiting Professor of Sociology, City, University of London
The Swedish Theory of Love (2017-07-25 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7GL_HFCXbs

An interesting extract from Swedish documentary The Swedish Theory of Love.

CFP: (Re)producing Insecurities, Uni of Sheffield, 29 September 2017 (2017-07-26 08:00)

Call for Papers: (Re)producing insecurities

The recent EU referendum campaign and resultant vote for the UK to leave the EU is creating new insecurities for EU citizens within and prospective migrants to the UK. At the same time, the European refugee ‘crisis’ was mobilised as a source of fear, insecurity and threat to the UK electorate by the Leave side in the referendum campaign. A collision of fears around intra EU mobility and refugee crisis was manufactured as a central feature of the Brexit vote. Central to such mobilisations are of course the reproduction of older legacies of inequality, precarity as well as white privilege, racism and colonial constructions of self and other. This workshop aims to address this duality within the new politics of insecurity in Europe: the (re)production of new forms of insecurity for migrants and their families, and the mobilisation of migration as an insecurity for resident populations. Here (re)production draws attention to the intimate connectivities of multiple ‘crises’ and the material, intimate, embodied sites and processes through which ‘new’ insecurities are (re)produced.

We particularly invite papers which connect fear of migrants with migrants’ fears. We also encourage consideration of the multiple scales and temporalities through which insecurity is felt, understood, managed, manipulated and ultimately (re)produced: through intimate relationships, within and outside ‘family’ groupings, across and within forms of affiliation, wider social institutions and trans/national polities. Papers are welcomed addressing (but not limited to) the following questions:

- How are connections between the consequences of the Brexit vote and the migrant ‘crisis' reproducing (in)securities?
• How are migration insecurities mobilised politically across Europe?
• What evidence, if any, exists that migration contributes to rising economic and social insecurities of citizens in receiving societies in terms of e.g. labour markets, housing and welfare?
• How might experiences of precarity across groups posited as 'us' or 'them' be connected?
• How are insecurities processed, mediated or challenged through intimate relations?
• How do precarious migrants and their families plan future lives amid 'crisis'?
• What practices of in/visibility are employed in the micro-politics of everyday encounters by EU nationals in response to fears?
• What research methods and approaches capture crisis, emotion, intention and temporality of (re)producing insecurities?
• How do we move forward as a society from these insecurities?

We invite paper proposals (abstracts of 200 words) addressing these and related questions from a theoretical, empirical, and/or normative perspective. PhD students and early career scholars are encouraged to apply.

The workshop is particularly interested in papers that examine the social, political and ethical dynamics of (re)producing insecurities for (and about) mobile subjects within the contemporary 'crisis'.

The workshop keynote lecture will be given by Professor Nicholas De Genova.

Please send abstracts to Hannah Lewis ([1]h.j.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk) by 1 August 2017.

1. mailto:h.j.lewis@sheffield.ac.uk

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Zygmunt Bauman: 'No one is in control. That is the major source of contemporary fear' (2017-07-27 08:00)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73Nmv-4jvSc

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John McCreeru (2017-07-28 03:31:20)
Politics=the ability to decide what must be done Power=the ability to get things done The contemporary world=separation of politics and power leaving no-one in control, the source of our current nightmares. An elegant and thought-provoking formula.
Denaturalising digital capitalism (2017-07-28 08:00)

One of the most pressing issues we confront when analysing the digital economy is a pronounced tendency towards oligopoly which makes a lie of an earlier generation's utopian embrace of the Internet as a sphere of free competition and a driver of disintermediation. There are important lessons we can learn from platform studies about the reasons for this, concerning the architecture of platforms and the logic of their growth. But it’s important we don’t lose sight of how these dynamics are reliant upon existing legal and economic processes which predate the ‘digital revolution’. As Jonathan Taplin points out in Move Fast and Break Things, their competitive advantage was reliant upon a specific regulatory environment that was far from inevitable. From pg 79:

The economist Dean Baker has estimated that Amazon’s tax-free status amounted to a $20 billion tax savings to Bezos’s business. Baker notes, “In a state like New York, where combined state and local sales taxes average over 8.0 percent, Amazon could charge a price that was 1.0 percent below its brick and mortar competition, and still have an additional profit of 7 percent on everything it sold. That is a huge deal in an industry where profits are often just 2–3 percent of revenue.” Bezos, eager to preserve this subsidy, went to work in Washington, DC, and got Republican congressman Christopher Cox and Democratic senator Ron Wyden to author the Internet Tax Freedom Act. The bill passed and was signed by President Bill Clinton on October 21, 1998. Although not barring states from imposing sales taxes on ecommerce, it does prevent any government body from imposing Internet-specific taxes.

This is only one example. An adequate understanding of the digital economy requires that we identify the regulatory environments within which each category of tech firm operates and how this has contributed to their thriving or struggling. When we combine this institutional analysis with platform dynamics, we can begin to account for the level of market concentration which Taplin summarises on pg 119-120:

In antitrust law, an HHI score —according to the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, a commonly accepted measure of market concentration —is calculated by squaring the market share of each firm competing in a given market and then adding the resulting numbers. The antitrust agencies generally consider markets in which the HHI is between 1,500 and 2,500 to be moderately concentrated; markets in which the HHI is in excess of 2,500 are highly concentrated. The HHI in the Internet search market is 7,402. Off the charts.

He goes on to argue on pg 121-122 that this situation helps generate a cash glut with serious systemic consequences:

The problem is that the enormous productivity of these companies, coupled with their oligopolistic pricing, generates a huge and growing surplus of cash that goes beyond the capacity of the economy to absorb through the normal channels of consumption and investment. This is why Apple has $150 billion in cash on its balance sheet and Google has $75 billion. These enterprises cannot find sufficient opportunities to reinvest their cash because there is already overcapacity in many areas and because they are so productive that they are not creating new jobs and finding new consumers who might buy their products. As former treasury secretary Lawrence Summers has put it, “Lack of demand creates lack of supply.” Instead of making investments that could create new jobs, firms are now using their cash to buy back stock, which only increases economic inequality.

In other words: the inequality which digital capitalism generates is only contingently a function of technology.
When wasn’t it so? Take the popular music industry as an example. From the very inception of its recordings, which began having a price as they were planned for sale, i.e. for consumption.

“So you thought about it one day and started the next morning?”

This is a question which Zeynep Tufekci recalls in her Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest, posed to a group of young Turkish activists about 140journos, a crowdsourced citizen journalism project which they started. As she writes on pg 37:

In Turkey, like much of the Mediterranean, there is a tradition of slow, conversational drinking that is the opposite of a loud, hurried bar scene. Such conversational drinking often leads to discussions of politics. The stereotype of these all-night drinking locales in Turkey is that everyone has a plan to “save the nation” after the first glass of raki, a strong aniseed-based drink that is considered the national liquor (it is nearly identical to ouzo, the Greek national drink). In a previous era, an all-night drinking and talking session on the sorry state of news and the extent of censorship might have ended merely in a hangover the next day. Even if it might have gone further—for example, the people might have decided to try to start a journal or a newspaper—a lot of work, resources, and luck would have been required. However, unlike citizens in a previous era for whom frustration with mass-media bias had engendered little more than sour feelings the next day or an uncertain, lengthy, journey, these young men—only four of them—immediately conceived 140journos, a crowdsourced, citizen journalism network on Twitter.

The low costs involved facilitate a particular culture of project work, comfortable with sometimes vague aspirations and working out the details on the fly. But while Tufekci’s interest in this concerns activism, I wonder about the effects in other spheres. What about higher education for instance? What Dave Beer describes as ‘punk sociology’ shares much of the mentality which Tufekci describes.

Agnosticism, Science and Public Engagement

One of the clear themes which emerged for me when reading Merchants of Doubt, a detailed exploration of corporate propaganda by historians of science Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, concerns the politics of public engagement. What might in other circumstances seem like anodyne issues confined to the university, who talks about science in public and the status attached to this activity, become urgent questions of societal importance when seen in terms of the history of doubt merchandising. As they write on pg 263: 5208
The scientific societies have tried to address this by developing formal statements on climate change that reflect the collective wisdom of their members, but these statements tend to be dry at best, and often nearly impossible for a normal person to decipher. Who among us has read the IPCC Summary for Policymakers, much less the thousands of pages of actual reports? Indeed, who on the planet has read all this stuff? What average citizen knows that the American Meteorological Society even exists, much less knows to visit its home page to look for its climate-change statement? Clearly, it’s ridiculous to imagine that anyone would, so someone has to summarize and communicate it. Then another difficulty arises. Scientists are finely honed specialists trained to create new knowledge, but they have little training in how to communicate to broad audiences, even less in how to defend scientific work against determined and well-financed contrarians. They often have little talent or taste for it, either. Until recently, most scientists have not been particularly anxious to take the time to communicate broadly. They consider their "real" work to be the production of knowledge, not its dissemination, and they often view these two activities as mutually exclusive. Some even sneer at colleagues who communicate to broader audiences, dismissing them as "popularizers."

If we talk of 'embedding a culture of public engagement', it can easily feel like a trojan horse for the reconfiguration of academic labour: the centrality of scholarship giving way to viral self-marketing, as universities move ever further away from their traditional mission. I have a lot of time for this critique but I think it misses something important, mistaking contingent features of ‘public engagement’ as it has emerged within a particular context for intrinsic features of any call for more activity like this.

For many years, I've been driven by a sense of an explicitly political public engagement, though it’s hard to articulate this amidst the conceptual detritus of the impact agenda and the sterile conceptual frameworks of so much of the orthodox literature on public engagement. There is a transformation in academic labour underway which we need to resist but this shouldn’t preclude a turning outwards because the capacity of the natural and social sciences to influence post-democratic social life is declining by the day. To the extent we can recognise their current organisation as hindering our attempts to reverse this trend, we confront an exciting challenge to articulate a vision of a ‘culture of engagement’ which is driven by ‘bottom-up’ social concern rather than ‘top-down’ imperatives of university management.

The Data Economy workshop: how online data change economy and business (2017-07-31 08:00)

The organisers of the Data Economy workshop (to be held at the Internet Science Conference 2017) kindly invite you to submit research full papers (10-20 pages) presenting new results and short papers (6-9 pages) with disruptive ideas and work-in-progress, shedding light on how online data change economy and business. Accepted papers will appear in a post-conference proceedings volume to be published by LNCS Springer. Submitted papers should follow the INSCI Paper Submission Guidelines.

Important Dates
Deadline of paper submission: 20/8/2017, 15:00 CET
Notification of Acceptance: 20/9/2017
Description
Big data, data analytics, personal data, open data, linked data, metadata, data journalism, data science, data infrastructures….and still you can add a new “data” phrase!
Data has become a buzzword used in a number of disciplines, by technical and business communities. At the same time, the growing interaction among corporate, governmental and personal information spaces introduces a novel set of opportunities and challenges for the economy.
The DATA ECONOMY workshop will try to engage scholars and professionals from multiple disciplines including economics, management, open governance, data science, computer science and software engineering in discussions related to how digital data, scattered in decentralised information systems and applications and being accessible via the Web, change the economy and the ways we are doing business.
Possible topics for discussion (but not limited to):

● Economic theory and practice related to online data and the Web
● Data infrastructures (and open standards) for the economy (e.g. open banking standard)
● Data and information strategies and policies
● Open data as a tool in economic policy
● Open data for business and economic development
● Financial data transparency (e.g. open ownership, open budgets)
● Business practices and the economic impact of GAFA
● Business intelligence and data analytics
● Business models and value creation in data-oriented environments
● Data and content based e-commerce
● The role of data in the Digital Single Market in Europe
● Open Scientific Data and the European Open Science Cloud
● Computational economy and big data in finance
● Big data in operational research, business intelligence and economic analysis
● Personal data and Personal Information Management systems (PIMS): markets, business models and consumer behaviour
● Economic implications of data transparency and algorithmic (or AI) accountability
● Social media analytics: business models and economic impact
● Measuring the data economy (e.g. open data indices, societal impact etc.)
● Legal issues in the data economy
● Security issues for data economy stakeholders (e.g. in security for data centres, cloud infrastructure, user authentication etc.)
● Privacy as a commodity and privacy-related aspects of monetising user data

Keynote speakers
Daniele Rizzi, EC DG Connect
Nikos Loutas, PwC
The question of the human in philosophy of technology (2017-08-01 08:00)

Over the next few years, I’ll be working on a collaborative project on trans- and post-humanism, building on the Centre for Social Ontology’s previous Social Morphogenesis series. My main contribution to this will be co-editing a volume, Strangers in a Familiar Land, with Doug Porpora and Colin Wight as well as exploring digital technology and what it means for human agency.

This project is giving me a reason to read more widely than I have in a while, with a particular focus likely to be Andy Clark’s work in the philosophy of mind, speculative realism and continental philosophy of technology. There’s a lot of value to be found in the latter but one persistent point which frustrates me is what appears, to me at least, to be a fundamental confusion about the category of the human. This issue became clear to me when reading a [1]thought provoking blog on Social Ecologies:

Why must everything revolve back to a human relation – for-us? This human exceptionalism resides throughout the gamut of philosophical reflection from Plato to Derrida. One will ask as Bradley does: Why, in other words, can something that believes itself to be a critique of anthropologism still be seen as essentially anthropocentric? Can we step outside this temple of man and create a non-anthropocentric discourse that doesn’t find itself reduced to this human relation by some backdoor slippage of conceptuality? Are we condemned to remain human? What or who is this creature that for so long has created a utopian world against its inhuman core? If we were to be released from this prison of the human who or what would emerge? How alien and alienated am I to what I am? How monstrous am I?

[2]https://socialecologies.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/we-were-never-human/
Unless I’ve entirely misunderstood a literature I’m still relatively new to, ‘technicity’ is an abstraction from material culture. It’s an abstraction which serves a purpose, allowing us to isolate the technical so as to inquire into its character, but the empirical referents of the term are technological artefacts i.e. a domain of material culture. In which case, it should not surprise us that the human constantly resurfaces, nor should we impure this tendency to a mysterious stickiness which ‘humanism’ as a doctrine possesses.

Material culture will always imply questions of the human because we are talking about artefacts built by, for, with and against human beings in social contexts which are similarly human saturated. The value in considering ‘technicity’ lies in opening out a space in which we can inquire into the emergent characteristics of the technical as a domain of material culture, considering the logic that guides it and how it can act back upon creators and the social contexts in which they create. But explaining material culture necessarily entails human-centred accounts, even if these have tended to problematically exclude or marginalise non-human elements.

To suggest otherwise strikes me as straight-forward mystification, circumscribing large domains of social life as outside analysis, rather than offering a meaningful competing ‘inhuman’ explanation. It seems like a clear example of what Andrew Sayer calls a ‘PoMo flip’: responding to a problematic dichotomy by inverting it, rather than seeking to transcend the conceptual structure that creates the problem. In this case responding to an exclusion of non-human elements by seeking to exclude the human elements instead.

1. https://socialecologies.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/we-were-never-human/
2. https://socialecologies.wordpress.com/2017/07/17/we-were-never-human/

Steven Hickman (2017-08-01 17:57:35)
Thanks for the thoughts... Technicity names something which can no longer be seen as just a series of prostheses or technical artefacts—which would be merely “supplemental” (or supernumerary) to our nature—but the basic and enabling condition of our life-world. From the watch we wear to the server we log into, we exist prosynthetically, that is to say, by putting ourselves outside ourselves. If the classical opposition and hierarchy between thought and technology can no longer be sustained from this perspective—such that what Plato calls anamnēsis may be nothing other than a complex repertoire of motor functions, cybernetic loops and self-replicating hypomnesic systems—then it is clear that this insight poses a new and urgent task for any philosophy of technology. In other words, the question arises as to whether it is possible to think something that is nothing less than the basic condition of thought itself. As Bradley suggests what impact does this state of technicity have upon our concepts of what it is to be human (rational animal, homo faber, homo sapiens, Dasein, even the so-called “posthuman” cyborg)? What—if anything—constitutes the “essence” of human being today? How might we begin to construct a thought that could do justice to that being? And if the task of “thinking technicity” is less a matter of anamnestically recollecting some immortal past than of entering a radically indeterminate hypomnesic future, then who or what—to go back to where we started—would be the agent—the “ego cogito”—of that thought?1


The Digital Sociology podcast series (2017-08-02 08:00)

An interesting new project by occasional SI contributor Chris Till, following from his Digital Health series:


5212
The fortress city and what it may portend (2017-08-03 08:00)

A couple of months ago, I shared a disturbing extract from John Urry’s final book about what he termed the ‘fortress city scenario’. There’s a powerful section in Naomi Klein’s recent book, No Is Not Enough, which illustrates the basis of this scenario in actually existing conditions & the manner in which contemporary warfare can act as a laboratory for dystopian futures. From pg 130-132:

I watched another such dystopian window open in 2003 in Baghdad, shortly after the invasion. At that time, the US occupation had carved the city in two. At its heart, behind enormous concrete walls and bomb detectors, there was the Green Zone—a little chunk of the United States rebuilt in Iraq, with bars serving hard liquor, fast-food joints, gyms, and a pool where there seemed to be a party 24/7. And then—beyond those walls—there was a city bombed to rubble, where there was often no electricity for hospitals, and where violence, between Iraqi factions and US occupation forces, was spiraling out of control. That was the Red Zone. The Green Zone at the time was the fiefdom of Paul Bremer, former assistant to Henry Kissinger and director of Kissinger’s consulting firm, whom George W. Bush had named as the chief US envoy to Iraq. Since there was no functioning national government, that essentially made him Iraq’s supreme leader. Bremer’s was an entirely privatized empire. Dressed in combat boots and a sharp business suit, Bremer was always protected by a phalanx of black-clad mercenaries working for the now-defunct company Blackwater, and the Green Zone itself was run by Halliburton—one of the largest oil field companies in the world, previously headed by then vice president Dick Cheney—along with a network of other private contractors. When US officials made forays outside the Green Zone (or the “emerald city,” as some journalists called it), they did so in heavily armored convoys, with soldiers and mercenaries pointing machine guns outward in all directions, guided by an ethic of “shoot first, ask questions later.” Regular Iraqis supposedly being liberated by all this weaponry had no protection, except for the kind provided by religious militias in exchange for loyalty. The message broadcast by the convoys was loud and clear: some lives count a hell of a lot more than others. From deep inside his Green Zone fortress, Bremer issued decree after decree about how Iraq should be remade into a model free-market economy. Come to think of it, it was a lot like Donald Trump’s White House. And the edicts were pretty similar too. Bremer ordered, for instance, that Iraq should have a 15 percent flat tax (quite similar to what Trump has proposed), that its state-owned assets should be rapidly auctioned off (under consideration by Trump), and that government should be

1. https://markcarrigan.net/2017/05/15/the-fortress-city-scenario/
Call for Papers: Eastern Sociological Society 2018

2018 ANNUAL MEETING
CALL FOR PAPERS

The Eastern Sociological Society welcomes submission, drawing on every methodology, addressing any and all issues of interest to sociologists. The 2018 meeting will have a special focus on “As Time Goes By: Social and Institutional Change.”

Since its founding in 1909, sociology has addressed issues having to do with the causes and consequences of societal change. At the center of sociology’s agenda is a multi-faceted interest in mechanisms of social and institutional change. What drives the diffusion of rational myths, institutionalized practices and cultural beliefs of advanced industrial economies in an emergent world society? What are the consequences of diffusion of rational capitalism and organizational forms in non-Western countries? Why is human migration an endemic feature of the global economic order and what are the consequences of a world on the move? What accounts for ‘blending’ and ‘negotiating’ social dynamics in heterogeneous populations? How and why do race and gender matter in understanding social inequalities? What mechanisms drive collective action aimed at addressing social problems and inequalities? Where does trust and cooperation come from? What explains counter-narratives aimed at pushing back societal change? What is the role of political actors and the state in social and institutional change?

On a policy panel are Douglas Massey and William Julius Wilson, “As Time Goes By: Immigration and Race in American Society.”

Speakers for presidential panels include Richard Alba, Jeffrey Alexander, Tinaspeed, Nancy Brannen, Dalton Conley, Raul H. Puigcerver, Paul DiMaggio, Martha Derick, Matthew Hughey, Mikael Tamanan, Omar Lizardo, Harvey Mansfield, Alexandra Potter, Lisaian Kenan, Mario Luisi, and Bruce Western, Fred Macrae and Verona Dzulwa.

We look forward to submissions that will fill the meeting Idaho. Although the ESS especially encourages submission related to this year’s theme, we welcome submission on all sociological topics. Potential methods and terms include: individual papers, wholly constituted sessions (with names and affiliations of all presenters); thematic conferences (panels of two or more scholars engaged in debate or exchange); workshops on specific topics and theories; special sessions organized around prominent scholars and their work.

Paper submissions and session proposals are due by October 15, 2017.

Questions should be sent to eastern2018@gmail.com

Victor Tsoi, ESS President; F instituted, Program Chair

AS TIME GOES BY:
SOCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

February 22-25, 2018 Baltimore, MD
In only a matter of years, blogging has become a mainstream part of academic practice. Research projects, networks and centres regularly maintain blogs, with the intention of promoting their work and building their connections. However it can be difficult to ensure this activity is worthwhile, rather than an additional burden in already busy working lives.

This afternoon workshop will help you ensure that blogging contributes to your research project, research network or research centre. It is led by one of the most experienced academic bloggers in the UK: a personal blogger for almost fifteen years, founding editor of The Sociological Imagination, digital fellow at The Sociological Review, former editor of the LSE’s British Politics & Policy Blog and founding member of the editorial board at Discover Society.

This three hour session will address the full range of issues faced by those maintaining blogs for research projects, research networks or research centres:

- How do I find the time for blogging?
- What should I post on our blog?
- How do I increase the audience for our blog?
• How do I assess the success of our blog?
• How can I make our blog more visually appealing?
• How can I integrate our blogging with other social media?
• How can we collaborate effectively on our blog?
• How do we use the blog to promote our publications and events?

There will be plenty of time for general questions, as well as opportunities to network with other academic bloggers. In addition to this, participants also have the option to purchase five hours of additional coaching via Skype to offer ongoing support. This includes a free copy of [1]Social Media for Academics.


1. https://www.amazon.co.uk/Social-Media-Academics-Mark-Carrigan-x/dp/1446298698

The rhetoric and reality of user generated content (2017-08-05 08:00)

On pg 102 of Jonathan Taplin’s Move Fast and Break Things, he highlights email exchanges between YouTube’s founders, released in a court case, which suggest the invocation of ‘user generated content’ might be a matter of branding rather than a meaningful growth strategy for social media platforms:

In another email exchange from 2005, when full-length movies were being posted on YouTube, Steve Chen, a cofounder of the company, wrote to his colleagues Hurley and Jawed Karim, “Steal it!,” and Chad Hurley responded: “Hmm, steal the movies?” Steve Chen replied: “We have to keep in mind that we need to attract traffic. How much traffic will we get from personal videos? Remember, the only reason why our traffic surged was due to a video of this type…. viral videos will tend to be THOSE type of videos."

Much critical literature has focused on how social media platforms ossify existing hierarchies and establish new ones. It is too easy to see this as an unexpected consequence of a new social infrastructure, as opposed to an outcome which was knowingly designed in from the start.
Towards a sociological curatorial journalism (2017-08-06 08:00)

In *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, Zeynep Tufekci discusses the emergence of curatorial journalism and contrasts its function with that of traditional journalism. From pg 41:

Traditional journalism tries to solve a problem of scarcity: lack of cameras at an event. Social media curatorial journalism tries to solve a problem of abundance: telling false or fake reports from real ones and composing a narrative from a seemingly chaotic splash-drip-splash supply of news.

This is something which has often been undertaken by citizens, rather than professional journalists, lacking a commitment to established ways of performing journalism which emerged within a different information environment. Could this also be a model for public engagement by sociologists? We can already see many sociologists performing this function, maintaining Twitter feeds and blogs which select from media sources and filter them through the prism of a research agenda and expertise which has been accumulated over many years.

It occurs to me that "composing a narrative" out of the informational disarray which predominates on social media is a task which sociologists could be well suited for, particularly in terms of complex and peripheral issues which are framed in isolation within the media. It would be interesting to know how sociologists who already perform this role online understand their own activity. Are there differences in how this is theorised by practitioners? Does this have implications for practice? Is this a new frontier of public sociology or merely a digital reiteration of the older traditional public intellectual?

Madelon van Oostrom (2017-08-06 12:03:40)

Interesting topic and very fruitful for active learning, communicative and open minds. I wonder though to what extent this practice is feasible in publish-or-perish academic world. I would love to spend more time on blogging or writing but a day lasts 24 hours and one has to prioritize. For me, curating contents adding the sociological lens, a critical question or issue that’s the content lacks, is a better option. As one of sociology’ key tasks is problematizing taken-for-granted matters, this is a very stimulating challenge.

Mark Carrigan (2017-08-06 22:04:13)

I think that’s very much a reality for most & definitely a constraint on this.

CFP: All Things in Moderation: The People, Practices and Politics of Online Content Review – Human and Machine Dec 6-7 2017, UCLA (2017-08-07 08:00)

It’s my great pleasure to announce the following event and related CFP. On December 6-7 2017, UCLA’s Department of Information Studies, part of the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies, welcomes participants to a two-day conference on commercial content moderation (CCM) of user-generated social media material.

At All Things in Moderation: The People, Practices and Politics of Online Content Review – Human and Machine we will offer a new forum bringing together those interested in the multiple challenges related to CCM, and to content moderation of all kinds. The goal of this foundational event is to map the current landscape from a
number of perspectives. During these two days, scholars, students, journalists, policy makers and CCM workers will share their insights in order to generate a discussion about the challenges, methodologies and frameworks that are necessary to integrate a comprehensive, academic study of commercial content moderation, other kinds of online moderation, and its outcomes and implications into existing paradigms in labor studies, information studies, computing and internet history, public policy, internet governance and media studies, to name but a few.

Beyond analyzing the contemporary case of CCM across the social media and other digital industries, we anticipate that All Things in Moderation will require a look to the past and to other media sectors, as well as a gaze into the future, to anticipate the problems related to CCM and to our social media-reliant world, and to collectively think about solutions. We anticipate a fruitful gathering.

Please join us on the beautiful UCLA campus this December. The conference is _free _ for participants, but space is limited. Please register early ([1]https://atm-ucla2017.net/registration/) and visit the call for participation ([2]https://atm-ucla2017.net/about/) to submit your proposals for papers, sessions and other interventions. We look forward to hosting you at UCLA! Sarah T. Roberts, Ph.D., Conference Convener Patricia Ciccone, Conference Coordinator

1. [https://atm-ucla2017.net/registration/](https://atm-ucla2017.net/registration/)
2. [https://atm-ucla2017.net/about/](https://atm-ucla2017.net/about/)

The Digital University in a Neoliberal Age (2017-08-08 08:00)

The Digital University in a Neoliberal Age

Speakers: Jana Bacevic, Mark Carrigan, Gary Hall, and Liz Morrish

Wednesday 8th November 2017,
1-6 PM

Register (for free) [1]here

1 – 1.30 reception and buffet lunch

1.30 – 2.30 Gary Hall - ‘Data Commonism versus ÜberCapitalism ‘

2.30 – 3.30 Liz Morrish - ‘The accident of accessibility: How the data of the TEF creates neoliberal subjects'
Abstract

Neoliberalism has disrupted higher education by redefining it as a market trading in commodities. In theory, price signals are meant to reflect the worth of a product in a market but neoliberals tend to see the economic success of corporations as the gauge of market success, despite their ability to ‘distort’ market signals. In the UK, higher education uses audit culture in place of an open market of differing price signals. This allows the state, which engineers how the ‘free market’ works, to set the terms of competitive reference. The REF, the NSS, various league tables and ‘rankings’ based on these assessments combined with other data such as data on employment, and now the TEF, provide ways for university brands to compete for students redefined as ‘customers’ purchasing human capital. Information and communication technology (ICT) allows for the intensification of audit culture and marketization. The ‘performance’ of staff can be assessed continuously, often using a traffic light system of staff grading, with management using ICT to check on the ‘impact’ of ‘research outputs’ and customer ‘feedback’ for instance. In place of professional autonomy there is to be ‘transparency’, with academic work continuously monitored for performance in relation to the objectives of brand managers. The purpose of this symposium is to both diagnose the range of problems presented by the neoliberal use of digital technology in higher education and to explore what potentials there are to overcome such problems.

For speaker abstracts and biographies, please click [2] here.

Visit our website at:


We are also on Twitter at:


All welcome!

1. https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-digital-university-in-a-neoliberal-age-tickets-36680107188
3. https://philoftech.wordpress.com/
4. https://twitter.com/philoftechbrum
The content density of a cultural producer (2017-08-09 08:00)

An interesting snippet on pg 164 of Jonathan Taplin’s Move Fast and Break Things suggests a metric of content density which could be extremely interesting to explore:

Digiday looked at the race for what some are calling peak content. What it found was that in 2010 the New York Times, with 1,100 people employed in the newsroom, created 350 pieces of original content per day and attracted 17.4 million page views per day. By contrast, the Huffington Post, with 532 people employed, posted 1,200 pieces of content per day (most of it created by third-party sites) and 400 blog entries (mostly unpaid), receiving 43.4 million page views per day. One can understand why the future of original journalism is threatened.

This quantitative metric raises questions which invite qualitative analysis e.g. to what extent does an increase in content density (less staff producing more content) correlate with content being shorter, derivative and shallow? Are there cultural producers where this isn’t the case? What are the conditions which counteract this seemingly inevitable consequence of asking people to produce more with less?

Benny Goodman (2017-08-09 10:16:51)
These figures are very interesting. As with music, poetry and fiction, content has never been easier to publish widely at such low cost. The obvious inference here is that from the consumer/reader/listener/researcher/student position.....the content is overwhelming and the human capacity for time consuming quiet, critical and thoughtful reflection on material has not, will not, keep pace. I am mindful for example just how long it can take to really get one’s mind around the classic writers....take the work of C Wright Mills just as an example. Will the current contemporary content flooding by digital content crowd out a careful slow reading of the ‘good stuff’ and how will we know what the current good stuff is (a potential tall poppy) if it has to compete with a other poppies, not just in a small field in which it can easily be seen, but in a prairie of poppies in which it is easily overlooked? There are gatekeepers still directing one’s attention, but are we still faced with too much stuff?

Mark Carrigan (2017-08-10 19:40:50)
We are!

CFP: The Will to App: Digitising Public Health (2017-08-10 08:00)

Call For Papers
Media International Australia no. 171 (May 2019)
The Will to App: Digitising Public Health
Theme Editors: Kath Albury, Paul Byron and Frances Shaw
Overview

This themed issue of MIA proposes to engage with the digitisation and mediatisation of health promotion and health communication, particularly the development and delivery of mobile apps, websites and associated platforms by government and non-government health organisations. We offer the term ‘the will to app’ as a play on Foucault’s (1978: 140-144) concept of ‘bio-power’, that is, the process through which external regimes of power and discipline are internalised and normalised, both collectively and individually.

This collection will focus on work that engages with critical data studies and critical media studies literature to examine the dynamics at play in digital health policy and practice. Consequently, we seek contributions that examine apps (and associated platforms) as media objects, whose modes of production, circulation and consumption are open to analysis as forms of situated knowledge. We are particularly interested in the ways that apps can be seen to mediate relationships, including between users and institutions, and between institutions and funding bodies.

Topics that might be considered include:

The datafication and appification of health promotion and health communication services:
How does digitisation assist (or undermine) health service organisations and consumer advocacy groups that seek to promote cultures of community care, engagement and participation? Why might an organisation (or funding body) prioritise stand-alone apps over engagement with health consumers via social media platforms? What counts as meaningful engagement, and how might it be measured?

Data ethics:
How are health organisations engaging with the ethical issues raised by data collection and data retention? The use of mobile sensor data can undermine confidentiality, raising potentials for user-identification and locational awareness. How are practices such as ‘informed consent’ translated in this space? How are health organisations and app developers engaging with data management, and the decision whether or not to act on information provided by app users? Where apps are intended to help users contact healthcare providers, how are responses resourced?

User-centred accounts of health apps, platforms and services:
How are app designers and developers engaging with government, non-government and grassroots health organisations? How are health consumers, public health workers and healthcare providers using apps? How does might this usage differ from official discourses regarding the apps’ stated purpose? What workarounds (or vernacular health data cultures) are emerging in this space?
We also welcome submissions that engage with health data imaginaries, that is, critical reflections and speculations as to what health data, algorithmic calculations and data analytics can or should do in the fields of health communication and health promotion.

Please submit full articles (5,000-8,000 inclusive of notes and references) by 28 February 2018 via the MIA website submission system:

1. https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mia
2. http://journals.sagepub.com/home/mia
3. mailto:kalbury@swin.edu.au

The 'marketplace of ideas' and the future of academic social media (2017-08-11 08:00)
A really interesting Google Hangout discussion. I’ll be taking part in a follow up later this month:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0bWSkknrac

Boundaries and barbarians: ontological (in)security and the [cyber?] war on universities (2017-08-12 08:00)

By Jana Bacevic

Prologue

One Saturday in late January, I go to the PhD office at the Department of Sociology at the University of Cambridge’s New Museums site (yes, PhD students shouldn’t work on Saturdays, and yes, we do). I swipe my card at the main gate of the building. Nothing happens.

I try again, and again, and still nothing. The sensor stays red. An interaction with a security guard who seems to appear from nowhere conveys there is nothing wrong with my card; apparently, there has been a power outage and the whole system has been reset. A rather distraught-looking man from the Department History and Philosophy of Science appears around the corner, insisting to be let back inside the building, where he had left a computer on with, he claims, sensitive data. The very amicable security guard apologises. There’s nothing he can do to let us in. His card doesn’t work, either, and the system has to be manually reset from within the computers inside each departmental building.

You mean the building noone can currently access, I ask.
I walk away (after being assured the issue would be resolved on Monday) plotting sci-fi campus novels in which Skynet is not part of a Ministry of Defense, but of a university; rogue algorithms claim GCSE test results; and classes are rescheduled in a way that sends engineering undergrads to colloquia in feminist theory, and vice versa (the distances one’s mind will go to avoid thinking about impending deadlines)*. Regrettfully pushing prospective pitches to fiction publishers aside (temporarily)**, I find the incident particularly interesting for the perspective it offers on how we think about the university as an institution: its spatiality, its materiality, its boundaries, and the way its existence relates to these categories – in other words, its social ontology.

War on universities?

Critiques of the current transformation of higher education and research in the UK often frame it as an [1]attack, or [2]war, on universities (this is where the first part of the [3]title of my thesis comes from). Exaggeration for rhetorical purposes notwithstanding, being ‘under attack’ suggests is that it is possible to distinguish the University (and the intellectual world more broadly) from its environment, in this case at least in part populated by forces that threaten its very existence. Notably, this distinction remains almost untouched even in policy narratives (including those that seek to promote public engagement and/or impact) that stress the need for universities to engage with the (‘surrounding’) society, which tend to frame this imperative as ‘going beyond the walls of the Ivory Tower’.

The distinction between universities and the society has a long history in the UK: the university’s built environment (buildings, campuses, gates) and rituals (dress, residence requirements/’keeping term’, conventions of language) were developed to reflect the separateness of education from ordinary experience, enshrined in the dichotomies of intellectual vs. manual labour, active life vs. ‘life of the mind’ and, not least, Town vs. Gown. Of course, with the rise of ‘redbrick’, and, later, ‘plateglass’ universities, this distinction became somewhat less pronounced. Rather than in terms of blurring, however, I would like to suggest we need to think of this as a shift in scale: the relationship between ‘Town’ and ‘Gown’, after all, is embedded in the broader framework of distinctions between urban and suburban, urban and rural, regional and national, national and global, and the myriad possible forms of hybridisation between these (recent work by [4]Addie, Keil and Olds, as well as [5]Robertson et al., offers very good insights into issues related to theorising scale in the context of higher education).

Policing the boundaries: relational ontology and ontological (in)security

What I find most interesting, in this setting, is the way in which boundaries between these categories are maintained and negotiated. In sociology, the negotiation of boundaries in the academy has been studied in detail by, among others, Michelle Lamont (in [6]How Professors Think, as well as in an overview by [7]Lamont and Molnár), Thomas Gieryn (both in [8]Cultural Boundaries of Science and few other texts), Andrew Abbott in [9]The Chaos of Disciplines (and, of course, in sociologically-inclined philosophy of science, including Feyerabend’s Against Method, Lakatos’ work on research programmes, and Kuhn’s on scientific revolutions, before that). Social anthropology has an even longer-standing obsession with boundaries, symbolic as well as material – [10]Mary Douglas’ work, in particular, as well as Augé’s [11]Non-Places offer a good entry point, converging with sociology on the ground of neo-Durkheimian reading of the distinction between the sacred and profane.

My interest in the cultural framing of boundaries goes back to my first PhD, which explored the construal of the category of (romantic) relationship through the delineation of its difference from other types of interpersonal relations. The concept resurfaced in research on public engagement in UK higher education: here, the negotiation of boundaries between ‘inside’ (academics) and ‘outside’ (different audiences), as well as between different groups within the university (e.g. administrators vs. academics) becomes evident through [12]practices of engaging in the dissemination and, sometimes, coproduction of knowledge, (some of this is in my contribution to [13]this volume). The thread that runs through these cases is the importance of positioning in relation to a (relatively) specified
Other; in other words, a relational ontology.

It is not difficult to see the role of negotiating boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' in the concept of ontological security (e.g. [14]Giddens, 1991). Recent work in IR (e.g. [15]Ej dus, 2017) has shifted the focus from Giddens’ emphasis on social relations to the importance of stability of material forms, including buildings. I think we can extend this to universities: in this case, however, it is not (only) the building itself that is ‘at risk’ (this can be observed in intensified securitisation of campuses, both through material structure such as gates and cards-only entrances, and modes of surveillance such as Prevent – see e.g. [16]Gearon, 2017), but also the materiality of the institution itself. While the MOOC hype may have (thankfully) [17]subsided (though not [18]dissappeared) there is the ubiquitous [19]social media, which, as quite a few people have argued, tests the salience of the distinction between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ (I’ve written a bit about digital technologies as mediating the boundary between universities and the ‘outside world’ [20]here as well in an upcoming article in Globalisation, Education, Societies special issue that deals with reassembling knowledge production with/out the university).

Barbarians at the gates

In this context, it should not be surprising that many academics fear digital technologies: anything that tests the material/symbolic boundaries of our own existence is bound to be seen as troubling/dirty/dangerous. This brings to mind Kavafy’s poem (and J.M. Coetzee’s novel) [21]Waiting for the Barbarians, in which an outpost of the Empire prepares for the attack of ‘the barbarians’ – that, in fact, never arrives. The trope of the university as a bulwark against and/or at danger of descending into barbarism has been explored by a number of writers, including [22]Thorstein Veblen and, more recently, [23]Roy Coleman. Regardless of the accuracy or historical stretchability of the trope, what I am most interested in is its use as a simultaneously diagnostic and normative narrative that frames and situates the current transformation of higher education and research.

As the last line of Kavafy’s poem suggests, barbarians represent ‘a kind of solution’: a solution for the otherwise unanswered question of the role and purpose of universities in the 21st century, which began to be asked ever more urgently with the post-war expansion of higher education, only to be shut down by the integration/normalization of the soixante-huitards in what [24]Boltanski and Chiapello have recognised as contemporary capitalism’s almost infinite capacity to appropriate critique. Disentangling this dynamic is key to understanding contemporary clashes and conflicts over the nature of knowledge production. Rather than locating dangers to the university firmly beyond the gates, then, perhaps we could use the current crisis to think about how we perceive, negotiate, and preserve the boundaries between ‘in’ and ‘out’. Until we have a space to do that, I believe we will continue building walls only to realise we have been left on the wrong side. (*) I have a strong interest in campus novels, both for PhD-related and unrelated reasons, as well as a long-standing interest in Sci-Fi, but with the exception of DeLillo’s White Noise can think of very few works that straddle both genres; would very much appreciate suggestions in this domain! (**) I have been thinking for a while about a book that would be a spin-off from my current PhD that would combine social theory, literature, and critical cultural political economy, drawing on similarities and differences between critical and magical realism to look at universities. This can be taken as a sketch for one of the chapters, so all thoughts and comments are welcome.

[25]This was originally posted on Jana’s blog and is reproduced here with permission

Jana Bacevic is a PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge. She tweets at [26]@ jana _bacevic.

1. https://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n24/keith-thomas/universities-under-attack
3. https://janabacevic.net/research/

5224
8. https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=xhX1fD2TmdIC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq=thomas+gieryn+boundaries&ots=mr0B7C1vZK&sig=4y9NHZ78NNMsGen1A5dXETOTb4Bk#v=onepage&q=
14. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Modernity_and_Self_identity.html?id=Jujn_YrD6DsC
18. https://markcarrigan.net/2017/01/22/the-mooc-as-a-trojan-horse/
19. https://markcarrigan.net/2017/03/01/to-understand-social-media-for-academics-we-have-to-kill-the-idea-of-social-media-for-academics/
22. https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/content/higher-learning-america-annotated-edition
26. https://twitter.com/jana_bacevic

Julia Hobsbawm (2017-08-12 08:10:26)
What a great post. Lovely breadth and depth. For a good novel - not a campus novel - but one on space and time and being both "inside" and "outside" self and community I recommend the just-published Forest Desk by Nicole Krauss. On the whole over reliance on technology thing, I propose your first piece, I look at this quite a lot in my current book Fully Connected: Surviving and Thriving in an Age of Overload. Anyway thanks, good post to read this rainy morning.

Jana Bacevic (2017-08-14 13:14:26)
Thank you, Julia - and particularly for reading recommendations! Look forward to both. Jana

The Problem of Order on Planes (2017-08-13 08:00)

From pg 24 of Zeynep Tufekci's [1] Twitter and Teargas:

You could not, for example, squeeze more than a hundred chimpanzees into a thin metal tube, sitting knee-to-knee and shoulder-to-shoulder in cramped quarters, close the door, hurl the tube across the sky at great speed, and always expect those disembarking at the other end to have all their body parts intact. But we can travel in airplanes because our social norms and nature are to comply, cooperate, accommodate, and sometimes even be kind to one another.
Call for Participation: Sociology and Social Media, Problems and Prospects (2017-08-13 18:50)

A Sociological Review Foundation Workshop
Goldsmiths, University of London
Saturday 2nd December 2017
09.30-18.00, followed by wine reception

The Sociological Review is delighted to announce the opportunity to take part in a one-day workshop on Sociology and social media. This workshop will be taking place exactly a year after the [1] Value & Values event. It will allow issues to be raised by the sociological community and provide a forum in which they can be discussed, instigating a public debate about the implications of social media for sociology.

Social media has rapidly become a central part of British Sociology, with most academic departments, research centers and journals now maintaining an online presence. Social media has also increasingly been taken up by sociologists as individuals, though perhaps in part as a response to the pressures of an institutional culture demanding ‘impact’. Some sociologists relish intervention in public debates, while others see it as a burden. Some claim that social media offers exciting new forums for scholarly debate, while others see it as a turn away from serious scholarship, driven by the impact agenda and an uncritical embrace of platform capitalism.

We believe that social media offers profound opportunities for the discipline at a time when its institutional presence is imperilled. However, realising these opportunities necessitates that we think systematically about how the discipline and its practitioners embrace social media, working to develop shared standards about online behaviour and shared aspirations about how sociologists can use this space productively. If social media is here to stay, we urgently need to address what this means for the discipline in a way that extends beyond the individualised responses which have heretofore been dominant.

Call for Participation

Sociology and Social Media: Problems and Prospects is an attempt to initiate what we hope will be a much broader conversation. We invite contributions in two forms:

Issues: five-minute talks framing a practical issue social media raises for the discipline. There will be four discussion sessions on the day: trolling and harassment, professional standards, career development, public sociology and miscellaneous. Each issue should be pitched to one of these categories. We hope to record each five-minute question and publish it on our blog for further discussion, including blog posts from those not present at the event.

Proposals: ten-minute talks identifying potential solutions to problems which social media raises, offering proposals about courses of action which individual practitioners or the discipline as a whole should pursue. These talks will also be recorded and published on the blog to facilitate further discussion.
The deadline for call for applications of participation is September 18th 2017, 17.00 BST. We cannot accept any late applications. Decisions will be communicated on 16th October 2017

[2]Applications for Participation

Registration Only

Registration is free, but it is essential that you register.

Please note, places are strictly limited. In the event that you are no longer able to attend this workshop, please email Jenny Thatcher: [3]events@thesociologicalreview.com. Failure to give notice of cancellation or ‘no shows’ may result in rejection of applications to attend future TSRF events.

[4]Registration Only

Travel Bursaries

There are a limited number of travel bursaries available for ECRs and PGRs who have their call for participation accepted. Applications for bursaries should be made during the submission of participation. Bursaries will be capped at £150.00 for UK based applicants and £250.00 for non-UK based applicants.

For academic inquiries about this event please contact Mark Carrigan: mark@markcarrigan.net

All other inquiries about this event including applications, bursaries etc, should be directed to Jenny Thatcher: events@thesociologicalreview.com

1. http://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=abdc7f96c3&e=789a4573bc
3. mailto:events@thesociologicalreview.com
4. http://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=31b0a7b78f&e=789a4573bc

Call for chapter proposals - Different Bodies: Disability and the Media (2017-08-14 08:00)

Book edited by Jacob Johanssen and Diana Garrisi (Communication and Media Research Institute, University of Westminster)

Following on from the conference 'Different Bodies: (Self-) Representation, Disability and the Media' which was held at the University of Westminster in June, we are preparing a book proposal based on some of the themes arising from the conference. The book proposal will be submitted to Peter
Lang, who have already expressed a strong interest in the project.

The collection is intended to offer a comprehensive view of the relationship between disability and the media from a global and multidisciplinary perspective. Building upon existing studies, the book aims to explore if and how the rapidly changing technological means of communication are affecting how the body as strange, shameful, wrong, impaired, wounded, scarred, disabled, lacking, different or ‘other’ is constructed in the media. In particular the book aims to discuss whether the Internet has made it possible to develop new, alternative or more inclusive narratives that challenge long-established mainstream coverage of disability. Some of the questions we would like to address are, for example, whether self-representations of disability on the Internet are contesting or aligning with representations on mainstream media outlets. We would also like to look at issues such as the rise of disability hate crimes online, the relationship between journalism and disability awareness campaigns, online dating and disability, the media coverage of disability rights and employment. One of our aims is to establish the extent to which the media contribute to shape our relation with diversity in the digital era and, ultimately, our relationship with ourselves.

Possible themes include but are not limited to:
- Affective labour of bodies
- Auto-ethnographic accounts of the body in / through digital media
- Celebrity bodies and the spectacles of transformation
- Cinema and disability
- Contemporary coverage of disability in print/online/television/radio
- De-colonizing and de-westernising the mediated body
- Disability and advertising
- Disability and race
- Disability and the media: historical perspectives
- (Dis)Empowerments of the disabled body
- Journalism and practices of othering the body
- Neoliberalism, policy and austerity politics
- Reality television and the body
- Representing wounds and scars
- Researching bodies and the media: frameworks and methodologies
- Stigma and the body
- Posthumanist and non-representational frameworks
- The abject body
- The body and trauma
- The mediated body as spectacle
- The medicalised body in the media
- The objectification of the disabled body in the media

We invite submissions of 200-250 words chapter proposals. Deadline: 30 September 2017.
Submissions should also include:
The poverty of student experience (2017-08-15 08:00)

By Jana Bacevic

One of my favourite texts back from the time when I was writing my Master’s thesis is the Situationist International’s [1]On The Poverty of Student Life ([2]De la misère au milieu étudiant). Written in 1966 and distributed in 10,000 copies at the official ceremony marking the start of the new academic year at the University of Strasbourg, it provoked an outcry and a swift reaction by the university authorities, who closed down UNEF, the student union that printed it. Today, it is recognized as one of the texts that both diagnosed and helped polarize conditions that eventually led to the famous 1968 student rebellions in France. This is how it begins:

“We might very well say, and no one would disagree with us, that the student is the most universally despised creature in France, apart from the priest and the policeman. The licensed and impotent opponents of capitalism repress the obvious—that what is wrong with the students is also what is wrong with them. They convert their unconscious contempt into a blind enthusiasm. The radical intelligentsia prostrates itself before the so-called 'rise of the student' and the declining bureaucracies of the Left bid noisily for his moral and material support.

There are reasons for this sudden enthusiasm, but they are all provided by the present form of capitalism, in its overdeveloped state. We shall use this pamphlet for denunciation. We shall expose these reasons one by one, on the principle that the end of alienation is only reached by the straight and narrow path of alienation itself.

Up to now, studies of student life have ignored the essential issue. The surveys and analyses have all been psychological or sociological or economic: in other words, academic exercises, content with the false categories of one specialization or another. None of them can achieve what is most needed—a view of modern society as a whole.”
This diagnosis is pretty much relevant today: most discussions of tuition fees avoid tackling the bigger question, which is the purpose of education and its role in society, beyond the invocation of the standard slogans related to either economic development or social justice and fairness. However, neither clarity of its analysis nor its resonance with contemporary issues are the main reason why I believe the Situationist pamphlet is worth reading. Instead, I would like to draw attention to the underpinnings of one of its underlying assumptions, reflected in the broader cultural imaginary of the ‘misery’ of student existence, life and social position, and then contrast it with current trends in the provision of student ‘experience’. Last, I want to bring this conversation to the question of tuition fees, which recently re-gained prominence in England, but has been at the back of higher education policy discussions – both in the UK and globally – for at least the last 30 years, and then use it to reflect on the changing role of higher education more generally.

The misery of student life?

There existed a time when being a student was really an exercise in misery. Stories of dank rooms, odd jobs, scraping by on half a baguette and half a pack of cigarettes used to be the staple of ‘the student experience’. Nor were such stories limited to France; I often hear colleagues in the UK complain about not being able to stand cider as they drank way too much of the cheap stuff as undergrads. All of this, as the adage went, was in preparation for a better life to come: stories of nights spent drinking cheap cider only make sense if they are told from a position in which one can afford if not exactly Dom Perignon, then at least decent craft beer.

In fact, these stories are most often told in senior common rooms, at alumni gala dinners, or cheerful reunions of former uni classmates, appropriately decked out in suits. In them, poverty is framed as a rite of passage, serving to justify one’s privileged social and professional position: instituting a myth of meritocracy (look how much I suffered in order to get to where I am now!) as well as the myth of disinterestedness in the material, creature-comforts side of life (I cared about perfecting my intellect so much I was prepared to lead a life of [relative] material deprivation!).

These stories do more than establish the privilege and shared social identity of those who tell them, however. They also support the figure of ‘the student’ as healthy, able-bodied, and – most of all – with little to focus on besides learning. After all, in order to endure between three and eight years on packets of noodle soup, cheap booze, and no sleep, you need to be young, relatively fit, and without caring duties: staying up all night drinking Strongbow and discussing Schopenhauer is kind-of-less-likely if you’ve got to take kids to school or go to work in the morning. This automatically excludes most mature and part-time students; not even to mention that negotiating campus sociality is still more difficult if (for cultural, religious, health or other reasons) you do not drink or do drugs. But, most importantly, it reinforces the idea that scarcity is a choice; the ‘student experience’, in this myth, is a form of poverty tourism or bootcamp from which you emerge strengthened and ready to assume your (obviously advantageous) position in life. This, clearly, excludes everyone without a guaranteed position in the social and economic elite. Poverty is not a rite de passage for those who stay poor throughout their life, and there is no glory in recalling the days of drinking cheap cider if, ten years down the line, you doubt you’ll be able to afford much better. Increasingly, however, that is all of us.

Situationists recognized the connection between the ‘poverty of student life’ and generalised poverty back in 1966:

“At least in consciousness, the student can exist apart from the official truths of ‘economic life’. But for very simple reasons: looked at economically, student life is a hard one. In our ‘society of abundance’, he is still a pauper. 80 % of students come from income groups well above the working class, yet 90 % have less money than the meanest laborer. Student poverty is an anachronism, a throw-back from an earlier age of capitalism; it does not share in the new poverties of the spectacular societies; it has yet to attain
the new poverty of the new proletariat.”

This brings us to the misery of student experience here and now. For the romanticisation of the poverty of student life makes sense only if that poverty is chosen, and temporary. Just like the graduate premium, it is predicated on the idea that you are ‘suffering’ now, in order to benefit later. And, of course, in the era of precarity, unemployment, and what David Graeber famously dubbed ‘bullshit jobs’, it no longer holds.

The gilded cage of student experience

Of course, university degree, in principle, still means your chances on the job market are better than those of someone who hasn’t got a degree. But this data skews the bigger picture, which is that the proportion of bullshit jobs is increasing: it’s not that a university degree guarantees fantastic employment opportunities, it’s that not having one means falling out of the competition for anything but the bottom of the job ladder. Most importantly, talk of graduate premium often omits to take into account the degree to which higher education is still a proxy for something else entirely: class. The effect of a university degree on employment and quality of life is thus a compound of education, social background, cultural capital, and race, gender, age etc., rather than an automatic effect of enduring three to eight years of exam taking, excessive drinking, and excruciating anxiety.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the most visible reflections of the changing socio-economic structure of student existence is the growth of high-end or luxury student housing, and the associated focus on ‘student experience’. Of course, in most cases universities and property developers do this in order to cater to foreign, ‘overseas’ fee-paying students, who are often quite openly framed as the institution’s main source of income (it is particularly interesting to observe otherwise staunch critics of ‘marketization’ and defenders of the ‘public’ status of the university unashamedly treat such students or their parents as cash cows, or at the very least, consumers). But, to a not much lesser degree, it is also a reflection of (if still implicit) recognition that studying no longer guarantees a good and well-paid job. In other words, if you’re not necessarily going to have a better life after university, you may as well live in decent conditions while you’re in it.

The replacement of dank bedsits and instant noodles with ensuite rooms and gluten-free granola, then, is not ‘selling out’ the ideals of education in order to pander to the ‘Snowflake’ generation, as some conservative authors have argued. It is a reflection of a broader socio-economic shift related to the quality of life and life chances, as well as the breaking of the assumption of a direct (if not necessarily causal) link between education, employment, and status. In this sense, Labour’s plan to abolish tuition fees is a good start, but it does not solve the greater question of poverty and precarity, both of which will increasingly impact even those who have previously been relatively shielded from the effects of the crumbling economy – graduates.

Beyond fees

Even with no tuition, graduates will either need loans to cover living costs, or – unless they rely on their parents (and here we are stuck in the vicious cycle of class reproduction) – engage in bullshit work (at least until there is an actual effort to integrate part-time study with decent jobs, something that the Open University used to do well). In the same vein, Graduate Tax only makes sense if the highly educated on the whole actually earn much more than the rest of the population (see an interesting discussion here) – which, if current trends continue, is hardly going to be the case. In the meantime, the graduate premium reflects less the actual ‘earning power’ a degree brings and more the further slide into poverty for those without degrees, coupled with the increasing wealth of those in top-tier jobs, hardly representative of graduates as a whole (in fact, they usually come from a small number of institutions, and, again, from relatively privileged social backgrounds).

Addressing tuition fees in isolation, then, does little to counter the compound effects of deindustrialization,
financialization, and growing public debt. This is not to say that it isn’t a solution – it’s certainly preferable to accruing a lifetime of debt – but it speaks to the need to integrate education policy into broader questions of economic and social justice, rather than treat it as temporary solution for rapid social, technological and demographic change. Meanwhile, we could do something really radical, like, I dunno, tax the rich? Just a thought.

[7] This was originally posted on Jana’s blog and is reproduced here with permission.

Jana Bacevic is a PhD researcher at the University of Cambridge. She tweets at [8]@jana_bacevic.

1. http://library.nothingness.org/articles/S1/en/display/4
7. https://janabacevic.net/2017/07/05/the-poverty-of-student-experience/
8. https://twitter.com/jana_bacevic

____________________________________________________________
(1199) Don’t forget the students | suburban-poverty.com (2017-08-16 19:20:22)
[...] The poverty of student experience sociologicalimagination.org [...]

Computational social science and the promise of a reflexive, empirically robust activist-sociology (2017-08-16 08:00)

By John-Paul Smiley

The failure of the majority of researchers in the discipline to predict and understand both Brexit and the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency indicates the need to rethink the approach taken, in order to contribute more usefully to public political discourses. What I want to suggest here is that a more openly activist approach to sociology is now required, in order to achieve the sort of impact its practitioners desire. But this is to be a more holistic sociology, one which makes much greater use of computational data science in order to provide robust empirical groundings, but that does so in conjunction with more reflexive and conscientious engagements with ethics, history, and philosophy.

It is to be openly activist because social research in general nearly always already is, though it is rarely acknowledged or labelled as such, and recognition of this allows researchers to more honestly, reflexively, and transparently engage with and present their work. For example, a sociologist’s work very often suggests change, of cultural and/or institutional forms, in the service of advancing some implicitly or explicitly desired vision of the ‘good life’. This is an inherently political act. Similarly, suggestions for the need for policy interventions, whether in matters of domestic social policy (for example, welfare cuts) or debates concerning intervention in international matters (for example, military, humanitarian and/or peacekeeping interventions) all aim towards particular normative ends ([3] see Bartram: 2010), and rest on implicit visions of ourselves and others, as humans, and of the duties, freedoms, obligations and rights we believe accompany these conceptions ([4] Chernilo: 2014 [5] ; 2016).

Even in cases where research suggests stasis, this too is a political act as it denotes an articulation of resistance to change and an argument for the status quo to prevail – all based on often tacit philosophical assumptions. Research acts are thus always political acts, regardless of whether the researcher themselves is aware of this. And these political acts are informed by ethical-normative assumptions which are inexorably tied to historically specific visions of ourselves and others. The vision of sociology as a detached, objective discipline is an illusion. It is not how we practise, it is not how we, as humans, live, and so continuing to suggest it as an ideal for the discipline going forward is unhelpful. Far better to be honest and explicit regarding our varying assumptions and biases in order to facilitate quality, genuine, and sincere dialogues ([6] see Smiley: 2016).

In pursuing whatever particular vision of the ‘good life’ a researcher does, however, this is where the activist-sociologist must also become a historian. There must be recognition that such assumptions, beliefs and visions are culturally and historically specific, that they have emerged at a particular point in time, in response to perceived needs that have been negotiated by various social actors, and which are open to constant contestation and revision. There must also be recognition of the history of peoples which are the object of any study ([7] see Fatsis: 2016), especially if the researcher has any explicit intention to inform political decision-making. ‘Peoples’, to the extent that they are meaningful as a category, are historically emergent and specific. And by virtue of this specificity, there will be a tendency for the individual social actors within them to possess prevailing configurations and versions of ‘cultural software’ (Balkin: 1995), which shapes and constrains their social attitudes and behaviours, leading to predominant configurations of ontological security, what Croft (2012) has defined as, ‘...the need to construct biographical continuity, to construct a web of trust relations...’ ([8] Croft: 2012: p.219).

This is what Balkin (1995) meant when he stated that,
‘To exist in history means to be the bearer of a particular type of cultural software...historical existence is not merely existence in time, but existence at a time when one is constituted by a particular form of cultural software’ ([9] Balkin: 1995: p.1229).

It is thus only through the recovery and understanding of any social actors' historical embeddedness, that robust knowledge of them is truly possible, and without such, the capacity for political discussion and persuasion on any topic in the present is reduced, as one lacks a genuine understanding of the social 'others' one is engaging with. In order to think usefully about the future, then, a sociologist must have a rich and nuanced conception of the present, and forming such requires one to look back to the past.

To facilitate such rich, nuanced historical understandings, this activist-sociology should have more robust empirical groundings in computational data science. The promise of such lies in its potential to allow researchers to identify what Bauman (1990) has referred to as the '....social in the individual, the general in the particular...' ([10] Bauman: 1990: p.10).

It will increasingly offer sophisticated background and contextual data to the fundamental foci of sociological inquiry: social constructions, social inequalities, social orders, and social patterns, and will allow researchers to see the numerous figurations and patterns which make up social life in ways previously impossible, and with that, provide new opportunities for re-understanding practices. This is not to suggest that computational social science become the only tool utilised by researchers – there is, and should remain, a place for a variety of research methods. What is does suggest, however, is that these other methods, including those common to qualitative small-n studies such as interviews, be complemented with such data in order to at least provide greater background and context to their studies – this is to be quantitative data utilised with qualitative sensibilities. So, for example, if a researcher intends to carry out ethnographic work with working-class social actors, a richer story will be provided by empirically understanding the historical emergence of the category in the territory under consideration, through which the actors self-identify. A study of such, even with a small sample size, would have increased value by providing a more robust empirical foundation through which to interpret any observational and/or interview data gathered, allowing any results and conclusions to be interpreted in a more holistic context. But it must be recognised that such data will always require interpretation by researchers, both concerning what it supposedly represents in itself, and also with regards its supposed potential to inform any particular political decisions. This critical point is especially important to recognise because, as, Lukács (1923) stated, 'A situation in which the “facts” speak out unmistakably for or against a definite course of action has never existed, and neither can nor will exist' ([11] Lukács: 1971: p.23).

Finally, what does all of this mean for the training provisions for sociology students going forward into the future? The training of doctoral students in sociology should necessarily include greater training in quantitative methods, particularly computational data science. But this must be complemented with training in ethics, history and philosophy. Students should be taught to recognise their own assumptions and biases and to use that knowledge to assist them in producing more robust logical arguments. To this end, mandatory introductory training modules in computational data science, ethics, and political philosophy should be completed (these could be web-based modules, for convenience). Researchers should also have to complete a brief essay by the end of their first year of doctoral study on the historical emergence of their objects of study in comparative perspective (approximately 5000 words should
suffice). Such training would enhance the future relevance of sociological research not only by providing more robust empirical groundings, but by ensuring all researchers could clearly articulate their philosophical presuppositions and are able to locate their research, and present their arguments, in historical perspective. This would represent a significant step towards ensuring quality sociological contributions to more informed contemporary and future public discourses, allowing sociologists to participate more productively in political life going forward in the decades to come.

John-Paul Smiley is an independent social researcher

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2. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14767430.2016.1195569
5. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/debating-humanity/FFC72D8410704B44DFE5810B44778EC0
10. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=Qjd7ngEACAAJ&dq=editions:3sXVF5dSLqECkh1=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiX08fx5O7QAhXIIxAKHRVyyDFwQ6AEILTA
11. https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/History_and_Class_Consciousness.html?id=SfcylisIu4gC&source=kp_cove&redir_esc=y&hl=en

John McCreery (2017-08-17 11:41:50)

This is an eloquent and powerful statement with which I largely agree. One flaw is the cliché that "Research acts are thus always political acts, regardless of whether the researcher themselves is aware of this." The argument that all research is political in the sense that the decision to do apolitical research is itself inherently political is one of those steps too far that obscures an important dimension of difference, i.e., between research like my own current project which combines social network analysis on a large dataset with historical and ethnographic research to better understand the world of award-winning advertising creatives in the period 1981 to 2006 but advocates no policy position whatsoever and, for example, that conducted on behalf of microtargeting voters during political campaigns. Aiming for absolute universality the argument becomes vacuous. P.S. If citations are included in a blog post, said post should be accompanies by a list of references. Otherwise, great job. I have taken the liberty of posting the links in several anthropology-related groups on Facebook.

John-Paul Smiley (2017-08-17 16:50:15)

Thank you, I'm glad you found it of some interest. My aim was simply to highlight the promise of new computational social science methods and to point out that every aspect of the research process rests on certain assumptions which ought to be recovered and made explicit by researchers, as much for their own understanding as for others. If we can begin to marry the advanced computational techniques on the horizon with a greater degree of researcher reflexivity, there is potential going forward for genuine understanding of social phenomena. The reason there is no reference list at the end of this piece is simply a matter of convention for this particular blog site. I have previously published here with a reference list, but have been informed that the preference now is for hyperlinks embedded in the text, rather than a list at the end. Hopefully they're easy enough to follow, should anyone be inclined to do so. And thanks for sharing the piece. I hope your colleagues and/or
students find it useful as well.

dmf (2017-08-30 16:04:55)

Ontology Etc (2017-08-17 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDItGMd2bTY &utm_content=buffer12913 &utm_medium=social &utm_source=twitter.com &utm_campaign=buffer

Philosophy often operates at such a high level of abstraction it is difficult to see how it can be useful to practicing social scientists. The work of Roy Bhaskar is no different. Renowned for its difficulty, its technicality, and its obscurity, while Bhaskar claims to underlabor for social science, his work remains a work for philosophers rather than researchers. Based off a forthcoming book in the Routledge Critical Realism series in this webinar Dr. Timothy Rutzou (Yale University) will discuss Bhaskar’s work focusing upon ontology, epistemology, and methodology, and looking to answer the question, how on earth does one use the work of philosopher Roy Bhaskar to do empirical social science?

Wander Nunes Frota (2017-08-17 12:13:04)
Pierre Bourdieu used it!

Stephen Norrie (2017-08-26 20:36:12)
Did he? Where?

Adrian Brewster (2017-08-18 09:13:02)
Hey Mark, Thanks for the brilliant blog and just to reassure you that real people do read it should point out that mysteriously the webinar video link “has been removed by the user. Sorry about that.” Having seen it before it vanished you aren’t missing much although the book sounds like it could be good. So far the best answer I have found to, "...how on earth does one use the work of philosopher Roy Bhaskar to do empirical social science?" has been Paul K. Edwards et al's book discussed here http://criticalrealismnetwork.org/2016/01/11/putting-critical-realism-into-practice/ and of course the man himself in Enlightened Common Sense (2016) but always on the look out for other suggestions of accessible ways into metareality for the un-academic.

Mark Carrigan (2017-08-20 16:40:28)
Thanks Adrian, I’ve asked Tim what happened to the video but he hasn’t got back to me yet.

Digital Futures and Big Data (2017-08-18 08:00)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdhvZNRbUdg &t=138s
Academic Autism: Its Institutional Presence and Treatment (2017-08-19 17:51)

Over the weekend, Steve Fuller published this blog post which has understandably been the object of many complaints. Steve is one of a number of people who have accounts which enable them to post directly on the site, without the intervention of an editor. For the six years he has been posting on the site, this has been unproblematic until now. But I’m in complete agreement with the criticisms made of this post, through e-mail and Twitter, regretting the fact that it was ever posted. I’ve decided we should continue to host the piece but also carry responses to it, as well as linking to this note. If you’d like to write one, please e-mail me at mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss ideas or with your completed response.

Thorstein Veblen notoriously wrote of the ‘trained incapacity’ of academics, by which he meant the inability of scholars to apply their vast learning to public problems by virtue of the narrowness of their training. In effect, academia had caused them to lose both their grasp on empirical reality and their power of imagination. I believe that Veblen was correct, but the pathology also has an inward expression. It appears as a kind of autism that renders academics incapable of engaging with each other’s arguments if they make claims that transgress one’s own disciplinary norms, ranging from the assertion to facts to the deployment of concepts.

The physicist Alan Sokal triggered a celebration of such ‘academic autism’ in 1996 with his notorious ‘hoax’ article in the pages of the cultural studies journal, Social Text. The article was a pitch-perfect politically correct piece of postmodern theorizing that interlaced references to noted theorists and fake physics. The failure of the editors to spot the fake physics by itself was widely taken to have demonstrated their lack of intellectual integrity. That the article may have contained some interesting claims and arguments – notwithstanding the fake physics that Sokal planted and in spite of what he himself may have intended – was never taken seriously.

Because I draw on many fields in my work, sometimes casually, I am susceptible to autistic treatment by fellow academics. It is epitomized in the following question: ‘How do you expect to be taken seriously if you make these egregious errors in presenting material from my field?’ One might have thought that the simple answer is that one reads to the end and then judge the extent to which the ‘errors’ matter to the argument. (Indeed, there may be some other concept, fact or figure from the interlocutor’s field that actually helps the argument.) But all too often the interlocutor responds that the errors blind her from determining what the argument is. At that point, one might question the interlocutor’s ability to handle semantic ambiguity more generally.

Of course, academia provides an institutionalised way of getting around its self-induced autism. It involves the cultivation of a fan base, aka ‘school’, the job of which is to immunize the chosen transgressive academic from autistic assault. Remember when Rudolf Carnap excoriated Martin Heidegger’s misapplication of the logic of negation? When Lawrence Stone took on Michel Foucault’s sloppy scholarship? When John Searle diagnosed
all of Jacques Derrida's philosophy in terms of a failure to appreciate the difference between cause and effect? When Denis Dutton invented a 'bad writing' prize just to award it to Judith Butler? When Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont charged Bruno Latour with systematically confusing relativity and relativism? Perhaps not – and that’s the point.

The fans come to the rescue, interpreting the offending the texts in a more charitable light or, if that proves to be too great a labour of love, making explicit what the offending author should have said in order not to have cause such great offence. Much of this work, which may constitute the bulk of scholarship in the 'human sciences', is probably best seen as a species of historical fiction. But over time it does the job of keeping the accusers at bay, basically by turning the 'errors' of the accused into 'aporiae' whose depths can be plumbed in perpetuity – or at least over several academic career cycles.

Jacques Derrida understood this point especially well, as he both wrote about and exemplified this process. It enabled him to face the very many detractors in his lifetime with complete equanimity. As someone who came of intellectual age as Derrida was reaching his peak reception in the Anglophone world, his example left a lasting impression on me, which I encapsulated in my first book *Social Epistemology* in the phrase, 'Hobbesian hermeneutician'. Textual interpretation is a war of all against all in semantic space: Your words can mean whatever your readers let you get away with.

Professor Celia Kitzinger (2017-08-21 09:21:47)
As a psychologist and senior academic who values the (cross-disciplinary) research, teaching, and collegiality of academics with autistic diagnoses, I am dismayed to find "autism" used as a slur in this way. It’s insensitive, unkind and untrue to label particular kinds of academic critique “autistic assault”. It is unnecessary - and distracting from your argument - to casually derogate a whole category of people in the course of advancing your claims. Your metaphor reinforces prejudice and discrimination against autistic academics (see #autisticsinacademia). I hope you might want to rework this piece to remove the hurtful language.

Steve Fuller (2017-08-21 11:21:39)
Thank you for your comment. I clearly come to this matter with a different set of lenses from you. First of all, words like 'autism', 'paranoia', 'schizophrenia', 'obsession', 'compulsion', 'sadism', 'masochism', etc. have had relatively fluid transit between ordinary and scientific usage, and it's an open question whether scientific usage should be considered dominant. My article is actually against disciplinary ownership of concepts, which implies a tolerance for the fluidity of concept use. In this particular case, I worry that the scientific colonization of these concepts heightens the difficulty of discussing the normative character of these personality traits without automatically 'pathologising' them in some medical sense. We should be able to say that certain traits are desirable or not under certain circumstances without recourse to 'illness' talk. Placing taboos on the use of the word 'autism' doesn't help matters in this respect. It’s true that ‘autism’ tends to be used pejoratively in public discourse, and my intent was indeed to use the word pejoratively, but not out of disrespect for the people that you’re concerned about. However, it’s worth noting that Thomas Kuhn described the psychological role of paradigms in forming the scientific mind in terms of a great narrowing of vision which at the same time provides insight that could not be got without such a sharp focus. He actually saw this in very positive terms. When people speak of the positive features of ‘autistic’ people, such matters come to the fore. However, I think they can be overvalued – and perhaps they’re overvalued in the academy, where specialisation is still very highly respected and used as a general competence filter. My more general view about ‘autism’ and other such psychiatric terms is that rather than trying to regulate the speech surrounding them, regardless of the context, they should be positively re-appropriated in public discourse, in the manner of ‘queer’. That doesn’t solve all the problems, for sure, but that would make more sense to me.
I would invite you to look at the #autisticsinacademia hashtag on Twitter - firstly, to observe the hurt that your article has caused, and secondly, to engage with the socio-political issues and cultural world of an identity group that you have appropriated and so publicly denigrated here.

The idea that autism is 'over-valued in the academy' is laughable for autistic academics. We are extremely marginalised. Furthermore, there is only one stereotype of autism that you are referring to here. We are nothing like this stereotype.

"It's true that 'autism' tends to be used pejoratively in public discourse, and my intent was indeed to use the word pejoratively, but not out of disrespect for the people that you're concerned about." Okay, well, it is we the actually autistic who actually suffer marginalization and ostracism when people like you help popularize use of the term to denote a set of undesireable character traits rather than the results of a neurodevelopmental condition that affects language, movement, and sensory processing. I DO think we should positively re-appropriate the term....to refer to what it actually means....but you're not doing that here. By your own admission, you are using it as a pejorative.

"My more general view about 'autism' and other such psychiatric terms is that rather than trying to regulate the speech surrounding them, regardless of the context, they should be positively re-appropriated in public discourse, in the manner of 'queer'. That doesn't solve all the problems, for sure, but that would make more sense to me." Yes, OK, but I should imagine (someone correct me if I'm wrong) that the re-appropriation of 'queer' was initiated and led by those belonging to the queer community, not by smarty-pants provocateurs gleefully using the term as a 'pejorative metaphor'.

Oh my God, how did I miss that he'd written that? See, this is what happens when he just can't say something along the lines of "I see now I was wrong, I apologize, and I will do better." Or, failing that, just ignoring this comment section altogether would have been better than what I've read from the follow-ups! Not "I'm sorry for offense caused" or "I'm sorry if anyone was offended." If he's not sorry, he doesn't have to be! But don't give a BS pseudo-apology, then claim you've given an apology, therefore making any more anger about the issue unwarranted. Not only what you said is correct, Jason, that the queer community led the move to claim back the word "queer," and that's how it should be. Along the same lines, many black people have tried to claim the n-word in the same way. That charge is certainly not led by anyone outside the black community, and it’s "definitely" not being led by someone out of it who admits he's using the word in a pejorative manner that relies on stereotypes that would be erased with a decent 15-minute Google search. Here's another thing, not quite related to what you said, Jason, but I hope people read this, including the original author (though he seems to be ignoring my question about what aspects of my being I'm currently ignoring by embracing my autistic identity). What is going on here isn't language policing. No one is going to jail. No one is going to court. What is going on here is that language is being challenged, and it's being challenged vigorously. If someone wants to put on an academic cap and put this crap out, then that person's going to get challenged, and "Whaaa, whaaa, whaaa, my language is being policed" is the cry of a bully. The author had a chance to respond to these very vigorous, tough challenges. The author, if his ideas are valuable, interesting, worthy of consideration, had a chance to respond to these challenges. Now I know he think he has. But when your defense then includes both ideas of "You all embrace this autistic stuff too much" and "Hey, I'm a champion for autistic rights by re-claiming the word," I realize I'm dealing with an intellectual fool. Here's the deal. My diagnosis came in my thirties. I wasn't looking for it. I was looking for help. When I received my diagnosis, I didn’t quite reject it, but I didn't accept it either. But it was a kind of skeleton key–it would unlock all the doors in my mind that had been previously closed. I suddenly had an explanation for why I did things and why I’d done things all my life. I had better control over my life, my mind, my actions. I found a community of people who'd experienced things that I thought were my failures, my quirks, my burden to bear. They thought like I did, feared things I did, and so on and so forth. Some became my dear friends. I joined their communities, and we talk every day. This idea of “maybe ya’ll hold on too much to your autistic identity” is the same NT nit-wittery as
when I heard someone ask me, "So what do you and your autistic friends talk about all the time? Just being autistic?" On the contrary, we talk about movies, literature, politics, science, relationships, and everything else under the sun. And yes, we also talk about our life experiences as autistic people and take solace, get advice, and learn from each other. I lived until my thirties without knowing I was autistic, and after so, so, so many struggles, I have a number of accomplishments and so many "aspects of my being"—that I wear. Realizing I was autistic was like applying some kind of cleaning product to my mind...everything became clearer, and I became more confident for it. I went public with it a few months ago, and people (well, most people) have been nothing but supportive precisely because they don't see me as someone who limits "aspects of my being." This is just one more window by which they can look in on me and understand me. For me, it's a huge, huge, huge part of my identity for reasons I've described and more. What gets me about all of this isn't really the original post. I mean, academics are pretty notorious for taking ideas that I could explain to a five-year-old and making them largely inaccessible with constant jargon and a belabored metaphor. The fact that it's an offensive metaphor doesn't really shock me, especially given the attitude of so many academics. I wasn't even going to say anything until I started reading the author's follow-up comments because in THOSE lies the really horrid insults, in my opinion. At this rate, I hope I've made some sense to anyone reading this. If you're a fan of putting out daring, controversial ideas, don't you dare say or imply your language is being policed when you get push-back, when you get challenged. But really, I'm refusing to engage this professor to any extent until he answers my original question to him, which I will now repeat to him. What, pray tell, "aspects of my being" do you think I'm ignoring by embracing my autistic identity?

Richard Woods (2017-08-22 16:20:12)
A most informative post. Do you think Steve Fuller can answer your question? "What, pray tell, "aspects of my being" do you think I'm ignoring by embracing my autistic identity?" Maybe that is the point of your question is that Steve Fuller can not answer it? He does not know you, so he can not give an informed reply. Therefore Steve Fuller has no right to say what he has said, he even acknowledged it is none of his business.

Brad McKenzie (2017-12-09 03:51:22)
I question your 'heroic crusade' to change current social norms to fit your ego based on historical references. Have you ever been in a minority group? Have you ever suffered the pains of persecution? Have you ever empathised genuinely with others who are sensitive to the structures of present day society? I ask that you stop being so pompous and grandiose and start moving with society instead of trying to speak your way back to the era from whence you came. Trying to reclaim language that as you rightly point out is "fluid" is only contradictory to your argument. Doing so, willingly and knowingly hurting a great many in society, to satiate your own ego, testifies only to your psychopathology as evidenced by your blatant disregard for others. If you would like I would be happy to put that in layman's terms to express it how the majority would, however I have respect for other's as a social value!!

» A note on this weekend's post The Sociological Imagination (2017-08-21 11:30:03)
[...] the weekend, Steve Fuller published a blog post which has understandably been the object of many complaints. Steve is one of a number of people who [...]
in place by disciplinary structures, funding systems and especially audit systems. I think the strength of sociology at its best is that it enables us to see how these systems and structures work, and there is a proper question about the psycho-social consequences of academic disciplinarity. But of course, sometimes if one works across many fields, as I do myself, one may indeed make errors, egregious or otherwise.

Damian Milton (2017-08-21 14:19:30)
The article uses autism as a stereotypical slur and is harmful, stigmatising and ableist.

Damian Milton (2017-08-21 14:22:10)
Perhaps readers would like to know about how autistic academics have been trying to break down the disciplinary silo mentality? Such as the open access journal: Autonomy: The Journal of Critical Interdisciplinary Autism Studies, or the Participatory Autism Research Collective?

Steve Fuller (2017-08-21 14:58:57)
First, I want to thank Damian Milton for the reference to the journal, which looks very interesting. However, contra Gail Loomes, I don’t believe that using a word, especially as a metaphor, is necessarily to appropriate a group’s identity, let alone in some injurious fashion. In fact, my article is not about autistic people in the sense that concerns you. However, I would say that over-identifying oneself with a word such as ‘autistic’ to capture the essence of one’s being is a potential problem, perhaps a pitfall of identity politics, especially in the case of ‘autistic’, whose medical meaning has considerably broadened out in recent years. Nevertheless, I had no intention to cause offence to you or your community. As for Ruth Levitas, I’m happy to see that she’s found a forum to voice some long-standing grievance of which I had not been aware. I’m not sure I quite said what she attributes to me, but I acknowledge that I may have said something that could have been taken that way. However, I must disagree with her substantive point – or at least find it too glib. The fact that disciplinary boundaries have been institutionalised a long time doesn’t mean that they can’t be overturned in shorter time through some determined effort, but that does have a psychological component. Yes, it’s hard and there are many obstacles, but she knows as well as I do that sociologists tend to be in their comfort zones when they diagnose all the ‘structural difficulties’ that prevent things from changing rather than trying to change things themselves. In any case, my apologies to Ruth for any offence I have caused her in the past.

Cos Michael (2017-08-21 15:07:57)
Firstly, the concept of autism used here is wrong: there are many autistic people, academic or otherwise, who are very well able to embrace and debate new ideas. You have misunderstood or misinterpreted what is known about autism, which negates your entire piece. Then you use it in a deliberately perjorative way, which is insulting and discriminatory to autistic people and to right minded non-autistic people, most of whom object to discrimination. Finally, you try to justify your argument: so who is it who is “incapable of engaging with each other’s arguments if they make claims that transgress one’s own disciplinary norms, ranging from the assertion to facts to the deployment of concepts”? What any reasonable person would do, faced with the realisation that they had been offensive, is apologise unreservedly, in the same publication that published their work. Otherwise, I cannot see how the editorial team from that publication could risk accepting material from that individual again, as in law, the publisher is liable for what they publish.

Kate Fox (2017-08-21 15:24:22)
Luckily as Professor Fuller is so deeply committed to a de-siloing of academic disciplines, concepts and language, I am fully hopeful that he will now be acquainting himself with the multiple ways the descriptor “autistic” is now used inside and outside the academy. He will thus find that his use of the word Autism to denote rigidity of thought and isolationism is wrong and outdated. I hold out no hope that he will concede that his usage of it is stigmatising and offensive to autistic people (though many have told him that it is). But surely, surely if he cares about accurate scholarship and precise use of words, then he will search his brain, the thesaurus or the words offered to him on Twitter, for a clearer, sharper way to describe a certain sort of sort of monopomism. (Ooh-there’s another good word).
Steve Fuller (2017-08-21 15:24:57)
To Michael Cos, I have already apologised for having caused any offence. I was indeed using ‘autism’ in a stereotypical way that does not cover the full range of behaviours, etc. now covered by the ‘autistic spectrum’. But in that case, is it even useful to retain the term ‘autism' for scientific purposes given its increasingly wide-ranging character? Moreover, don’t you worry that by identifying so strongly with autism, people are limiting other aspects of their being?

Lauren Hall (2017-08-21 15:30:28)
The way autism is perceived by a very large proportion of the autistic community is that it is inseparable from their being - as our minds are autistic, and this being autistic informs how we understand and perceive the world around us (not just intellectually, but relating, say to sensory perception as well), it informs all aspects of our being and sense of self.

Damian Milton (2017-08-21 15:31:07)
In reply to that comment, not at all. I also consider myself a sociologist, would you have the same concerns there? You may find this debate of interest as it specifically addresses this point https://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/exploringdiagnosis/debates/debate-1/

Cos Michael (2017-08-21 15:52:50)
What sort of academic is proud of using stereotypes? Particularly an outdated one which is debunked by the actual presence of autistic academics, scientists and creatives? At this point, clinging so desperately to your argument speaks more of insularity than an ability to accept that other people may know what they are talking about. For example: I sign myself Cos Michael whereas you mis-assign maleness to me. I know my name. Your response to my first comments is deeply patronising: I am autistic and no - it has never limited any aspect of my being - it is part of my being.

Ann Memmott (2017-08-21 16:08:09)
Autism is not a set of behaviours. It is a neurodiversity. In recent years, the definition of autism has for the most part changed to include fewer characteristics, not more. Intellectual disability has been removed from DSM V. Likewise speech/language conditions. Autism is a brain difference from before birth, staying with us for life. All of us have brains that use different social communication protocols to non-autistic brains. All of us have a need for predictability and logic, in routines and in communication. All of us have passionate interests, some of which may lead to extraordinary specialisation and expertise. And most of us have sensory processing differences that can be either blessing or problem, depending on the environment. It’s really not a huge range of different things. Autism has never limited me, any more than any other aspect of my being. Society’s general attitudes and refusal to build a world that allows us to thrive are what limits. We need fewer articles that are written in a pejorative way, and more engagement with us as fantastic and much loved people.

Doug Waddell (2017-08-21 17:08:19)
I identify very strongly with being autistic. What other aspects of my being do you imagine I'm limiting? When "I'm sorry; I will do better" just won’t cut it, double down, I guess?

Richard Woods (2017-08-21 16:27:14)
It would your last sentence is uncannily prescient: "Textual interpretation is a war of all against all in semantic space: Your words can mean whatever your readers let you get away with." As an autistic academic, the irony is not lost on me. However this question must be asked; are you deliberately trying to bait us?

Catriona Stewart (2017-08-21 16:49:09)
Steve - there is an extraordinary amount of cognitive dissonance going on here. You claim to believe that the term ‘autism’ is effectively defunct, it being too broadly applied to be useful and yet you use it to describe a narrow, cliched - and increasingly and effectively challenged - set of characteristics assumed by the ill-informed to apply to those who are defined as ‘autistic’. You complain about the explicit medicalisation of those to whom the term is applied by academics and scientists and yet see no issue with placing the term 'autism' within a group of terms that includes others such as 'sadism', 'paranoia' and 'obsession'. You tell autistic people they shouldn't define themselves by this medicalised, obsolete, narrow definition while
defending your use of the term as a ‘symbolic’ description of parallel medicalised, narrow, cliched characteristics you claim to identify among academics. You say you don’t intend to offend anyone and yet refuse to listen to the #actuallyautistic people who are telling you your words have offended them - what makes it worse is you really think it’s ok to tell them/us that perhaps they/we have it wrong and shouldn’t identify as autistic, on the basis, it seems, that you feel you have a better handle on what the term means than anyone else. To quote a great line from a great film by Rob Reiner (1987): "You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means." Maybe you could just accept that you’ve got it wrong, that your blog-piece was poorly conceived and offensive, apologise profusely and learn something. Or are you deliberately trying to upset people?

Steve Fuller (2017-08-21 17:50:29)
First of all, to be honest, it never crossed my mind that my post would be baiting autistic people because I hadn’t realized that autistic people claim such a sense of self-ownership over the word ‘autism’. That does reflect ignorance on my part. It’s another matter whether it’s wise for people to identify so strongly with a word like ‘autism’ that they make their identities hang on the latest medical deliverance while meanwhile they police ordinary discourse. You can see that I have my doubts, but in the end it’s none of my business. As for my use of stereotypes, I am not doing it ‘proudly’, I’m simply doing it, and they do illuminate to a certain extent – as stereotypes are designed to do, as Walter Lippmann pointed out many years ago. It’s in the nature of stereotypes that they can be spun both positively and negatively, since they bring out saliences. ‘Autism’ is no different in this respect. And I said early in the Twitter responses, yes, the responses do exemplify part of what my article was about – but that was not my intent! However, I have found some of the links interesting, especially Damian Milton’s debate on whether autism has an essential nature.

Cos Michael (2017-08-21 18:47:04)
Steve, You have just shown the world how personal conceit can lay waste to academic discourse. You may be right or wrong, but it is not a conversation if one side repeatedly insists that they are correct and denigrates anyone who disagrees. I find it incomprehensible that you are so closed to other opinions, when overwhelmingly, responses to your article have found it wanting in factual basis and offensive in its depiction of autism. Not one response has defended your opinion - do you honestly believe that this makes you the only enlightened academic, beset by a multitude of inferior minds? Or might you have simply made a mistake, but are too arrogant to admit it? This is not your finest hour.

Steve Fuller (2017-08-21 19:05:17)
You must not be reading what I’m writing. I’ve conceded lots of points here and apologised at offence caused. The fact that others have not ventured to defend my position may be down to editorial discouragement (I do know of one case) or people just not wishing to get into more trouble than it’s worth. It may also be so far there has been little interest in discussing the substance of the article. The article is not about autism. It uses autism as a metaphor. That choice of metaphor may be wise or unwise, and clearly people here think it’s unwise. And they may be right. But from my standpoint, I need to disentangle identity politics side of this from the semantic side of my argument. I have found what most people have said here helpful and interesting, but I’m not sure what more you’re looking for.

Kate Fox (2017-08-21 20:30:49)
Not sure what more commenters are looking for? I’d suggested considering these comments as-not peer review but review from outside-the-silos and substituting another word for autism. Show-in some way -that you’re listening. This is not only an “identity politics” issue but an accuracy issue. You make a valid point about academic silos-is that not more important than sticking with your use of the wrong word? Does your argument rest on this word? No.

Catriona Stewart (2017-08-21 19:11:48)
Thank you for that - yes, to suggest that autistic people should consider ‘reclaiming’ the word does indeed show how little you are aware of the great amount of work carried out by many autistic people, academics and non-academics, over decades of reclaiming, redefining, and ‘self-owning’. It’s interesting (to me, anyway) that one of the ways in which autistic people are ‘othered’ is through a claim we are incapable of self-awareness and self-insight (apparently one of the defining qualities of a human, and which differentiates us from other mammals) and yet, as you have found, this claim is egregious (in the modern
sense), demeaning, othering. I haven’t seen the Twitter responses so I can’t comment on how the responses fitted into your expectations but you must be aware that the limitations of Twitter include both restrictions on terms of communication (word count) and tendency to elicit ‘knee-jerk’ reactions. Damian - yes, highly respected by us other autistic academics (my own PhD focused on Asperger’s girls and anxiety). Incidentally, my younger daughter, who has just graduated from Cambridge with a degree in Psychology, might well agree with you regarding the academic silo problem, I don’t think she’d agree with you in most other respects, not least your use of the term ‘autistic’. She loved her degree, she loved doing her research (gender id and autism) but she also learnt a great deal about ‘academia’ she wasn’t so enthusiastic about. I would love to see her pursuing research as I think she has so much to contribute but I also understand why she might decide not to. It is an ongoing issue for those who are both intellectually able and ethically driven. ‘Ordinary discourse’. In my mother’s middle-class day, ‘ordinary discourse’ included terms such as ‘nigger’, used often in a casually dismissive, demeaning, othering context, thoughtlessly used, and often indignantly defended in the context of someone who thought of themselves as well-educated, well-meaning, charitable, on the ‘side of right’. Did that make it ok? No of course not. Terms such as ‘spastic’ and ‘retard’ are also of dubious provenance but have also been part of ‘ordinary discourse’. When ‘ordinary discourse’ takes a whole population of people and defines them - as you rightly identified - solely on their differences in a pejorative sense then it is discriminatory and ultimately inhuman.

Mark Corbett Wilson (2017-08-21 19:29:19)
I find it fascinating that a blog post about what "renders academics incapable of engaging with each other’s arguments if they make claims that transgress one’s own disciplinary norms, ranging from the assertion to facts to the deployment of concepts" gathers so many replies that fail to engage with the author’s argument. "‘How do you expect to be taken seriously if you make these egregious errors in presenting material from my field?’ One might have thought that the simple answer is that one reads to the end and then judge the extent to which the ‘errors’ matter to the argument. (Indeed, there may be some other concept, fact or figure from the interlocutor’s field that actually helps the argument.) But all too often the interlocutor responds that the errors blind her from determining what the argument is. At that point, one might question the interlocutor’s ability to handle semantic ambiguity more generally." Apparently Dr. Fuller’s repeated apologies are not enough to prevent this blog from being abandoned. I have learned so much from "The Sociological Imagination" as an undergraduate adult learner, please don't double down on PC censorship and remove this informative (and at times controversial) source of Sociological learning. From the comments I have learned more about the "autistic community" and will also be more circumspect in my use of stereotypes. Including SJW’s. ;-)
definite point in the future with a new purpose & new team behind it”. Editorial oversight does not amount to ‘PC Censorship’.

Damian Milton (2017-08-21 20:35:58)
P.s. We have engaged with the argument both here (see references I posted) and elsewhere on social media. Perhaps you could learn from Prof. Fuller's example here and engage with some of this work?

Damian Milton (2017-08-21 20:36:51)
I don't think Mark was blaming our responses for that.

Olbvn (2017-08-22 03:23:03)
"However, I would say that over-identifying oneself with a word such as ‘autistic’ to capture the essence of one’s being is a potential problem, perhaps a pitfall of identity politics, especially in the case of ‘autistic’, whose medical meaning has considerably broadened out in recent years. Nevertheless, I had no intention to cause offence to you or your community." You have to be joking, Steve Fuller. Are you ignorant, or just a a woeful pedant? Autism is an actual neurotype that affects 1 out of 66 of your fellow humans, regardless of your application of the term, It is indeed harmful and ignorant to use "autism" and its variants in the pejorative, and the fact you would say it’s due to “a pitfall of identity politics” shows how little you understand about what the diagnosis of autism is, or why throwing an entire minority of people under a pejorative bus to prove some poltroonish calumny against fellow academics should be perceived as the cognitive and morally bereft bungle it is. There are other terms you could have used; I suggest a meander through a thesaurus is in order; there are plenty available online.

Sue Fletcher-Watson (2017-08-22 09:28:21)
Steve, I'd like to thank you for providing such an excellent opportunity for some of the sharpest autistic minds working as academics and activists today to showcase their brilliance. The comments thread on the piece profoundly undermines the negative stereotypes you so thoughtlessly peddle. I will be sharing this with my colleagues as a virtuoso example of the arguments around autistic identity. I hope that you may be inching towards a realisation that you do not get to justify your outrageous and offensive statements by claiming an alternative "lens". What a feeble excuse. It is not for you to decide what should or should not be found offensive by a community to which you do not belong. Your writing does you no credit.

Michael Rowlands (2017-08-22 14:54:55)
Why would I even bother reading an article that uses "autistic" as a pejorative? I don't care who you are, if you use terms that further the marginalization of an already marginalized group then you can fuck right off. I expected better from an "academic".

Richard Woods (2017-08-22 16:00:02)
Micheal Rowlands please could you apologise to Steve Fuller for your comments towards him? While I agree Steve Fuller should never have used autism in the way he did, no-one person deserves to be spoken to so disrespectfully. Especially when most of the autistic person's points is that Steve Fuller has been willfully ignorant and done us a great disservice as human beings. It is that thing people are told in school: "treat wish people how you wish to be treated". You are not doing yourself any favours treating Steve Fuller this way. By association you are not doing us any favours by using such language towards Steve Fuller. Maybe in the future you should try to calm down before replying to such charged topics? For Steve Fuller if you want an better understanding of autism, I would recommend the book "Autism and Asperger Syndrome in Adults" by the autistic academic Dr Luke Beardon: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Autism-Asperger-Syndrome-Adults-Beardon/dp/1847094457/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1503413619&sr=8-1&keywords=luke+beardon Luke Beardon does a great job at dispelling most of the present autism myths. Your blog post does highlight why the book's opening sentence is "Never believe anything you read about autism."

Doug Waddell (2017-08-22 20:54:28)
100 % disagree. No one deserves to be talked to so disrespectfully? I can think of a whole host of people who deserve zero respect. While the professor's not quite in that category, if he's going to challenge the positivity of autistic pride, then getting an "eff off" in return should be expected and, I would argue, is warranted given his comments here. If the concern is that
disrespect will make him ignore our push-back, then that’s even more revealing of the professor and isn’t Michael’s problem.

Please justify your comment on you “100 % disagree”? That is not my concern at all. Pay attention to the comments; we (autistic people) are being judged too, that is my concern. While I agree we (autistic persons) should not always be expected to follow social conventions, however sometimes it is beneficial for us to follow them if we can. Such as most replies by individuals like Catriona Stewart, Damian Milton and Gill Loomes have all been respectfully critically engaging with this thread for a reason, because such tactful replies are the social etiquette. There are also more useful conventions to when you disagree with an academic, such as writing journal articles highlighting the perceived errors in the academics work. Taking issue with any academic’s work by writing journal articles is more important to the offending academic, than any blog post you might produce critiquing their work. Which is why I have been writing journal articles recently when I read things that I find antagonistic. This is only my understanding of it. Please enlighten me if you think I am mistaken?

Jojo Bemis (2017-08-22 21:29:29)
I find it disturbing that you are more concerned with a swear word than Mr. Fuller’s smearing a whole disability community to brow beat his colleagues then claims we are too invested in our autistic identity to literally add insult to injury. I say this because given choice of who to side with, you allied with Mr. Fuller over a (rather much deserved) four letter word. Congrats.

Richard Woods (2017-08-22 23:10:11)
I have been clear that agree with the critique applied to Steve Fuller. I am disagreeing with how it has been done in some cases. My point is that we should treat Steve Fuller with dignity and respect while we critique him. He is a human being, just as much as autistic persons are. I disagree with the myth of how we lack empathy and have a theory of mind deficits. If we can not treat Steve Fuller with “empathy”, then it just reinforces negative stereotypes about us. Which is the entire point of the community’s response to Steve Fuller is that he has been propagating negative stereotypes of autism. Maybe I am trying too hard to convey my point?

Doug Waddell (2017-08-23 00:01:35)
Richard, two broad points here. As far as justifying my comment as to why I 100 % disagree, I was responding to the claim that no one deserves to be talked to with such disrespect. Well, let’s do a thought experiment here. Think of the most evil person you can imagine–either historical or perhaps imaginary. (Define “evil” as you like–replace “evil” with objectionable if that helps.) I’m thinking extremes–Nazis, the KKK, etc. Now when a person goes that far, I owe them no respect. In fact, I would disrespect the concept of respect itself in doing so. (At least that’s what I think.) Now the professor here does not fall into one of those extremes. However, what the thought experiment reveals–at least for me–is that some people certainly do not deserve our respect. Therefore, I have to reject the very broad claim that no one deserves to be treated with disrespect. When I reject that claim, then I come to this alternative conclusion–some people can do things to make it so that they do not deserve respect. I’ve chosen to walk that line a bit in this comment section, but I cannot blame anyone who decides that the professor has lost claims to respect, “especially” given the aftermath here in the comment section. That’s the first point. If you disagree, I don’t think I can convince you otherwise. But that brings me to the second broad point. You suggested that traditional academic discourse is the way to combat antagonist ideas like this, not battling it out over a blog post. Here’s the trouble–I’m responding in the format in which I was presented the ideas, and the author of those ideas is also responding in this format. So as far as recommending that I take to scholarly journals is all fine and well–and may be something autistic academics should do–but they should do it in addition to what’s happening here. If someone writes an inflammatory blog post, and then continues to inflame in the comments section of that blog post, and then I respond in said comments section, it’s a bit disingenuous to tell me that I’m showing bad form by not participating in traditional academic discourse with this matter. As far as a larger point goes, you’ve highlighted a HUGE problem with academia–if the ideas mean anything, then they should affect the world outside of academia. Sure, the ideas will get “boiled down” to a general audience, and this may take some time, but if ideas have any merit at all, surely they should have merit for more than a coterie of scholars. I actually “do” admire the efforts on this blog and similar blogs from scholars to present ideas to the public rather than present them exclusively to those with access to a university library. “That’s” a great direction for academia, but it comes with a reality–the
nature of the discourse will change. It will not go through a rigorous peer review process, but that's the nature of discussion outside of academic journals. I'm not saying there's not a place for scholarly work meant for other scholars, of course not, but when it cannot come out of its ivory tower, then it's probably not worth very much at all. The argument that we need to adhere to rigid academic conventions goes against the professor’s own argument, from what I can tell. As for outsiders reading this, if they need 18th-century-salon-type etiquette to go away feeling like ignorance and stereotyping are bad things, then that’s revealing larger issues they probably need to address with themselves and their colleagues.

Richard Woods (2017-08-23 00:59:39)
It is not that I fundamentally disagree with you. There are people I do not give the time of day too because I disagree with them and their actions. It is more I think it is a part of everyone’s human rights to be respected and treated with dignity. I would always prefer to be nice to someone than deny someone their rights of being treated in a polite manner. Maybe I am too idealistic on that one? I suspect it is part of my strong sense of right and wrong. There are open access journals like Autonomy which can be accessed by the general public. Some journals have free online access for some sections, such as Disability and Society. Generally I do accept your points. I think the situation is more nuanced than you say. Sometimes the best response is the academic literature, Especially when critical blogs are ignored and with some literature the peer reviewers are being too lenient. The peer review process has its flaws and is far from perfect. An issue of peer review is that often the reviewers will know of the author and can deduce the author’s identity. Subsequently the paper is "waved" through. I have read some papers of shoddy authorship, where some claims are made without providing references. I think an example I can give is how some of the recent autism articles discussing the neurodiversity movement by non-autistic scholars, often ignores autistic scholarship when discussing the neurodiversity movement leading to some dubious observations. Just as much as I had have a paper rejected by both reviewers and successfully challenged it with the editor, because it looks like the reviewers rejected the paper for political reasons. You are right we should challenge things in blogs and in the literature. I do agree with you knowledge should most definitely be shared with the public in an accessible way. It does not help that some academics produce work that is written in a very unaccessible way. I think if all academic articles were open access it would help a lot more. I do standby my point on treating Steve Fuller with respect and dignity in this thread. We should aim to be the better person in this situation.

Michael Rowlands (2017-08-22 15:00:40)
My apologies. I thought this was the original blog post, as it is not I would change my first sentence to "Why would I even bother reading a blog post that uses "autistic" as a pejorative?" I actually just made a video about this very topic yesterday and then this came to my attention today. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUzILYZJss &lc=z23zepscuevg14it04t1ao9g425g0vcjwif-r10ukk3rk0h00410

Chris Connor (2017-08-22 19:11:43)
The inherent problem of using negative stereotypical autism metaphors, is that it runs the risk of alienating autistics from the core augment. This neuronormative barrier makes it problematic to engage with the core augment of silo mentality in academia. The metaphor serves little propose to the core augment, allistics (non-autistics) don’t have to go thought the trouble of filtering out the metaphor in order to have discourse about the silo mind state in this instance.

chavisory (2017-08-23 00:45:07)
"The inherent problem of using negative stereotypical autism metaphors, is that it runs the risk of alienating autistics from the core augment." I mean, that's certainly one inherent problem, but I'd argue the biggest one is that it runs not the risk but the near certainty of helping perpetuate false and damaging prejudices about autistic people, including that we are inherently self-absorbed or that we lack empathy or the ability to take the perspective of others. These lead directly to our being discriminated against for jobs, being considered a danger to others (especially children), mistreated in relationships and by health care and education professionals, and to being regarded as something less than entirely human.

Shona (2017-08-24 09:43:33)
Steve Fuller, You have provided a good example of the 'double empathy problem' as you fail to see how the language you use has
real life impact on a marginalised group. We all make mistakes but you are choosing not to take on board what autistic people are telling you. The reason it took 37 years for any one (including myself) to notice I was autistic was because of the stereotypes you are reinforcing. This has had a dramatic effect on my life. This is not an academic argument. Real people get hurt by false stereotypes. I have got some reading for you: Beardon, L. (2008). 'Is Autism really a disorder part two - theory of mind? Rethink how we think'. Journal of Inclusive Practice in Further and higher Education, 1: 19 - 21 Milton, D. (2012). On the ontological status of autism: The "double empathy problem". Disability & Society, 27(6), 883-887. doi:10.1080/09687599.2012.710008

"Conservatism is the new Punk Rock". Discuss. – A Guest Post by Philip Moriarty | In the Dark (2017-08-25 14:18:08) [...] caught a lot of flak at this point for his lack of judgement in posting this a couple of days ago: "Academic Autism: Its Institutional presence and Treatment". The use of “autistic” as a perjorative is exceptionally common among those edgy [...] John Spencer might not be my real name (2017-11-12 16:17:11) This thread shows how silly academia is... and it is not Steve's fault. I am just surprised how much rhetoric is nowadays in the sociological discourse. No wonder nobody takes this discipline seriously... So much bias on both sides, but neither of the camps would admit that they are merely perpetuating their own silly discourse. I am just surprised how many people here are experts in autism, all of a sudden. Feeling offended is not sociology, my friends! Using the word "problematic" is not an argument in itself.

Engines of Knowledge in the First Information Age: The Library and the Text (2017-08-20 08:00)

By Hamish Robertson

Introduction

This is the final piece in this series for [1] The Sociological Imagination and it comes full circle by focusing on one of the most obvious, even foundational, 'factories' of knowledge - the library. More specifically, the public library and its associated texts, documents, processes and numerous innovations during the 19th century. This is a very large topic in its own right and one which cannot be addressed in its entirety here. So consider this is a selective exploration of some of the key knowledge formation and 'production' elements of the library as we understand it from the Victorian period.

The library is an ancient institution, and while far from unique to the 19th century, this proved a boom time for libraries, librarians and the emergence of library science – the first information science as we now understand it. The term 'library science' was coined in the by Bavarian librarian [2] Martin Schrettinger.

In the United Kingdom, the Public Libraries Act of 1850 (following the Museums Act of 1845) set the scene for free, public libraries at the municipal level. Many new private, public, subscription and academic libraries emerged as well as a variety of affiliated educational organisations, such as the Mechanics Institutes, reading rooms and a swathe of new universities and schools, promoting reading as never before. Much of this change was reformist in nature and some was associated with the Victorian idea of social uplift through the virtues of 'high' cultural exposure. It was during the 19th century...
th century that the foundations of what we now consider near universal literacy as a pervasive social norm and tangible reality emerged. So too did the various media produced and consumed under that paradigm, which joined up and developed enormous, even industrial, momentum.

**The Rise of the Modern Reader**

For libraries to be patronised by readers, as with writing and publishing, there was a need for a growing literate population with the time and opportunity to read. Just when this process took off in the United Kingdom is still a subject of debate, as are the interconnections between books being available, the rise of educational access, industrialisation and a variety of other factors. In the UK religion is still seen as a factor in the mix driving towards an overarching growth in literacy levels – including not only early developments in general literacy in Scotland, which reformed its university system along the Dutch lines in the 18th century – but also the growth in ‘non-conformist’ schools and academies south of the border and the enormous influence of Quakers and others in the British industrial revolution, its social effects and various charitable responses. The politics of formal education seen in the Victorian era endure to the present day.

Some of the literacy debate seeks a singular ‘generative’ factor, or tipping point, essential in producing a more rather than less literate population. But perhaps this is unrealistic in the Victorian context when so many new and expanding factors need to be considered in explaining a shift from one ‘side’ of the literacy equation to the other. For many people schooling was still minimal and may jobs did not yet require adult literacy as an essential skill, perhaps we need to consider a broader cultural dimension in which many factors actively and passively supported a growing ‘culture’ of literacy. In effect, these component’s added to the whole that made general literacy the norm and the library the engine of knowledge it soon became.

**Text and Image**

It seems perhaps obvious to suggest that there could be no great demand for the printed word without an expanding audience of readers, and this has certainly been the case. Many Gutenberg-centric histories of the rise of literacy, often minimising the Chinese and Japanese contributions to the whole process, supported by paper and paper products, focus on the text and the mechanics of printing, often at the expense of the image. This creates a false dichotomy in that images were meant to be ‘read’ and readers often supported a large audience of listeners, with writing and representative images used in combination. Dickens’ serialised novels in newspapers were still meant to be both read and heard.

Literacy did not mean an automatic turn to silent reading, in the same way that public speaking did not fall away as a skill as literacy and silent reading expanded. And earlier visual methods, such as the plan, map or atlas, became
so important, and even artistic, that map folios were produced for all manner of audiences from early modern times onwards. Some, such as the [8] *Klencke Atlas* now in the British Library, were even produced in 'book' formats that were physically so large they took several people to handle. In the 19th century ['9]infographics’, designed to summarise growing factual and conceptual complexity, were everywhere and have remained with us ever since, gaining a renewed utility in the digital era.

This singular emphasis on the text needs to be reconsidered because both prior to the 19th century and deep at its heart was the idea of the image supplementing and supporting the text. This process expanded during the Victorian period to include the rapid growth of [10] graphical statistics with which we are familiar from William Playfair and Florence Nightingale's efforts. Illustrations supported and enhanced the written word in many domains. But also, the idea of complex information being summarised in visual form was a major feature of this period and utilised for all manner of books, journals, pamphlets and associated products.

It is no surprise that visual advertising, and [11] advertising agencies, gained enormous momentum in this period as general literacy, the media and public education grew rapidly. At the same time, earlier forms of retail such as the department store began to diversify, expand and accelerate in many countries including the UK, the US and Europe. The development of postal services obviously supported these processes which included not only the more commercial formats but the writing of the informal, the intimate thought or feeling and the interior experience that could not always be [12] spoken aloud. We need, therefore, to also consider the psychological element of the visual, the written word, the tactility of paper itself and its dynamic cultural position.

**Technologies of Reading and Vision**

While paper-making is a centuries old craft and commonly attributed to Chinese ingenuity, including a [13] map from the first millennium BC, the manufacture of *continuous* paper proved extremely challenging and was only fully resolved in the 19th century. French technical innovations were covertly transferred to England during the revolutionary period and a successful machine was funded by the [14] Fourdrinier brothers, eventually bankrupting them due to its phenomenal development costs. Yet another talented engineer, Bryan Donkin, then produced a working machine that was replicable, and continuous paper production began to gain momentum. Books, newspapers, periodicals and, of course, book publishers grew rapidly in both number and variety, producing a print culture. Paper itself precedes all this technology and exceeds them still in that it is itself an enormously flexible medium. The sheer diversity if its uses position it differently to the technologies by which it is manufactured, which has been remarked on at least since [15] Innis and even more recently by [16] Gitelman.
As remains the case today, for reading to be learned, accessible and usable in daily life most of us require light, either natural or artificial. Natural light in buildings, including schools and libraries, was facilitated by rapid growth and innovation in glass manufacturing, including Pilkington’s window glass production in the United Kingdom, Corning in the United States as well as many other general and specialist producers across Europe. Indeed, glass increasingly became associated with modernity itself, not only for its qualities of light but in the technical innovation its mastery as a material illustrated. The Great Exhibition of 1851 combined the Victorian technological triumphs of iron and glass in the Crystal Palace (preceded by the Great Conservatory at Syon Park), a ‘temple’ to industrial achievement and a form widely copied in other industries locally, including the railways, and internationally. In the following century glass-fronted skyscrapers would become so commonplace as to barely warrant mention but these too let in the light, while often reducing the available light at street level in a curious equation of internal light versus external shadow.

The 19th century was also the period in which public and then domestic lighting by gas and electricity (and often dangerous combinations of the two) emerged as an increasingly accessible technology. This made reading an increasingly mass activity. The newspapers, journals and periodicals that emerged in the 19th century began to escalate dramatically in the 19th century. This included creating a habit of reading through publishing instalments of longer articles and novels in newspapers and magazines. Publishers were hungry for content and opportunities for writers grew accordingly.

We also need to consider the social order and ordering that (artificial) light made possible. To be able to light a building, town or city at night makes it more policeable. And some early incarnations of street lighting were actually paid for from police budgets. Indeed, many light ‘technologies’ supported social regulation in ways we would recognise today, including not only street lights but photography (commonly used in criminology and eugenics), spot lighting, flood lighting and, towards the end of the 19th century, the electric torch or flashlight. Even the Post Office made surveillance possible in ways that were easier and faster than ever before.

**Beyond the Text**

Over time many libraries have lent not only books but a variety of other cultural artefacts as well. Indeed, linked to the more progressive side of 19th century reformism, many libraries founded in this period were seen as community resources in a much broader sense than simply being a place where one could borrow a book for free or on subscription. Andrew Carnegie founded more
than 2,500 libraries between 1883 and 1929 in more than a dozen countries. Some 1600 were in the United States which by 1919 constituted almost half of all public libraries in the country. Many were framed around the idea of being a central community resource, so, for example, his first American public library was established in Braddock, Pennsylvania in 1889 and operated until 1973. This library was essentially a community centre, as we would now think of it, and included a bathhouse and billiard tables with further extensions adding a swimming pool and bowling alley. The management of these [20] libraries saw a variety of social, technical and governance changes over the period including the increasing feminisation of the role of the librarian.

The other side of the library equation is its more conventional role as a social institution with ordering tendencies. [21] Black's work, for example, has explored the mix of progressive and authoritarian tendencies visible in the development of the public library during the long 19th century. More interesting still, he has remarked on the library as a clinic, after Foucault, aimed at ‘treating’ a variety of social ills arising from massive social, industrial and urban change – including deviance, disorder, drunkenness, political radicalism and the like. The library can be seen then as a site of quite particular forms of knowledge production and a locus for promoting behaviours acceptable to dominant social elites. What perhaps resonates down to the present is, in extending Black’s notion, of engines of knowledge as sites of social ‘treatment’ for the prevailing issues of the time. What happens as these cultural institutions, as they have become, are consolidated, defunded, privatised or closed?

Conclusion

We can see that the library became a locus for social, technological and informational change as well as to maintain order in the context of massive social and technological change. The library is still an engine of knowledge but, as with the topics of most of these pieces, it is also a highly-connected engine, one functioning by connection to and in association with a variety of other engines and processes, including socio-political changes, technological innovations and the emergence of new professions. The library was, in all its complexity, not simply a site for the Victorian social virtue of ‘self-betterment’ or education as a personal virtue but a complex and negotiated space in the growth and development of the engines of knowledge explored in this series. That place of early information science continues to be negotiated in our contemporary digital era.

[22]Hamish Robertson is a geographer at the University of New South Wales with experience in healthcare including a decade in ageing research. He has worked in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors and he has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from ageing, diversity, health informatics, Aboriginal health, patient safety and spatial science to cultural heritage research. Hamish is currently completing his PhD on the geography of Alzheimer’s disease and recently finished editing a book on museums and older people.

1. http://sociologicalimagination.org/
11. https://uwpress.wisc.edu/books/0037.htm
15. https://www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/innis-empire/innis-empire-00-h.html
16. https://www.dukeupress.edu/Paper-Knowledge/
21. https://ischool.illinois.edu/people/faculty/alblack
22. http://unsw.academia.edu/HamishRobertson

The Surplus of Objects (2017-08-20 08:00)

In *Immaterialism*, Graham Harman offers a provocative critique of Latour’s social theory, praising Actor-Network Theory as “the most important philosophical method to emerge since phenomenology in 1900” (pg. 1) while also regarding its account of *objects* as philosophically deficient. While he accepts the ANT thesis that objects mediate human relations, something which chips away at the pervasive anthropocentrism of social theory, it nonetheless reinforces a human-centric world view in a subtle and interesting way. From pg 6:

>To say that objects mediate relations is to make the crucial point that unlike herds of animals, human society is massively stabilized by such nonhuman objects as brick walls, barbed wire, wedding rings, ranks, titles, coins, clothing, tattoos, medallions, and diplomas (Latour 1996). What this still misses is that the vast majority of relations in the universe do not involve human beings, those obscure inhabitants of an average-sized planet near a middling sun, one of 100 billion stars near the fringe of an undistinguished galaxy among at least 100 billion others.

The commitment of ANT to defining actors through actions, itself understood in terms of effects on other actors, “allows objects no surplus of reality beyond whatever they modify, transform, perturb, or create” (pg. 10). Without this surplus, Harman questions how it can be possible for them to change. It is only when we recognise “an object is more than its components” and “less than its current actions” that its capacity to *do otherwise* becomes conceivable (pg. 11). Exactly what the surplus is, as well as how it underwrites this potentiality, might vary. As Harman notes of himself on pg 11:

>The author Harman who currently types these words in the University of Florida Library while wearing a black sweater is far too specific to be the Harman who will leave Florida next Sunday and can remove the sweater whenever he pleases.
These features of the object which aren’t exhausted in its present actions are what account for its future capacities. If my specificity is exhausted in my writing of this blog post, it becomes mysterious how I cooked dinner or planned a trip earlier. There are the facts of these other actions but myself, as a unifying nexus in which these properties and powers converge, becomes emptied out into a frantic existence of constant process.

I couldn’t agree more with Harman’s claim that every object should be considered “as a surplus exceeding its relations, qualities, and actions” (pg. 3-4). Where I part company is with his epistemic pessimism. From pg 17-18:

And whereas naive realism thinks that reality exists outside the mind and we can know it, object-orientated realism holds that reality exists outside the mind and we cannot know it. Therefore, we gain access to it only by indirect, allusive, or vicarious means. Nor does reality exist only “outside the mind,” as if humans were the only entities with an outside. Instead, reality exists as a surplus even beyond the causal interactions of dust and raindrops, never fully expressed in the world of inanimate relations any more than in the human sphere.

This leaves me preoccupied by variance. My issue is not with the claim itself, as much as with it being framed in a way which makes it hard to unpack how this might vary between objects and contexts. How much surplus remains when we consider a given action? It depends on the action, the actor and the context. I don’t for a second believe this can be reduced to calculus but I nonetheless maintain there are differences of degree. I’m not convinced that the surplus of objects is quite as epistemically intractable as Harman makes it sound.

The populist right are demotic, rather than democratic (2017-08-21 08:00)

In an [1]important essay earlier this year, Jan-Werner Müller identifies a dangerous tendency for leftist critics to take the claims of right-populist demagogues at face value. Suddenly vindicated in their struggle with the ‘third way’ that has dominated the centre-left, the claims of nascent populists to speak for a ‘left behind’ majority, created by the neoliberalism which has consumed mainstream social democratic parties, has imbued many leftists with a newfound self-confidence.

This risks simplifying events with a complex array of causes, like the vote for Brexit and Trump’s election, imputing them to the quasi-magical capacity of populists to speak directly to the people. In doing so, it hinders the detailed analysis of these events which we so urgently need: see for instance this [2]important essay by Mike Davis which discusses the American conservative movement’s massive investment in political infrastructure across every state in the country.

However it also lends credence to the populist right, supporting claims of speaking for those left behind which belie the naked class hatred which some of these figures exhibited in the recent past. This is what Angela Nagle argues in her important book Kill All Normies. From pg 101:
Ann Coulter had long drawn upon the elite fear of the hysterical and easily led crowd. In her book Demonic: How the Liberal Mob is Endangering America explaining how ‘the liberal mob is destroying America’ she drew upon Gustave LeBon, the misanthropists’ favorite theorist of the masses. Her writing on overbreeding, overcrowding swarms of immigrants is a direct continuation of this theme, which has been consistent in elite circles since the beginning of industrialized urbanized mass society, first applied to their multiplying native proletariat and later to new waves of immigrants. Before the ‘ordinary people’ narrative became suddenly ubiquitous on the new online right after the election results, Milo could be seen in photo shoots wearing a ‘Stop Being Poor’ T-shirt, a quote from the heiress Paris Hilton, one of his idols. After the election results he was giving talks about the white working class. The hard alt-right had also rejected the idea that the masses were their naturally traditionalist allies any longer, as the conservative establishment had typically believed. Instead, they had argued that the great mass of society had been tainted and indoctrinated by liberal feminist multiculturalism, and were close to beyond redemption. It was no longer ‘five minutes to midnight’ as the anti-immigration right had long claimed but well past midnight. While the Trumpians are busy quickly rewriting history, it is important to remember that behind the ‘populist’ president, the rhetoric of his young online far-right vanguard had long been characterized by an extreme subcultural snobbishness toward the masses and mass culture.

I wonder if Graham Turner’s distinction between the demotic and the democratic, made in the context of reality television, might be useful here. One could be said to involve foregrounding ‘the people’ as an imagined construct, the other involves empowering people as a social reality. The populist right is demotic, not democratic. This is what the leftist critique of mainstream social democracy, which I’m otherwise entirely in agreement with, risks obscuring.

1. https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/markcarrigan.net/2017/02/11/social-media-and-populism/amp/

A note on this weekend’s post and the future of this blog (2017-08-21 11:29)

Over the weekend, Steve Fuller [1]published a blog post which has understandably been the object of many complaints. Steve is one of a number of people who have accounts which enable them to post directly on the site, without the intervention of an editor. For the six years he has been posting on the site, this has been unproblematic until now. But I’m in complete agreement with the criticisms made of this post, through e-mail and Twitter, regretting the fact that it was ever posted. I’ve decided we should continue to host the piece but also carry responses to it, as well as linking to this note. If you’d like to write one, please e-mail me at mark@markcarrigan.net to discuss ideas or with your completed response.

If we had a mandatory review process, requiring any post to be at least looked over by another person, it obviously wouldn’t have happened. But it also reflects my own lack of attentiveness to Sociological Imagination over a number of years now. What was once an enormously fulfilling hobby has long since become a slightly unwelcome commitment which I aim to dispense with as quickly as possible each month. This has felt frustrating to me for a long time but until this morning, it simply hadn’t occurred to me how problematic this could prove in practice. I now realise how irresponsible it is to leave a platform like this effectively running unattended. This seems like a good reason to finally put the site on indefinite hiatus, with the intention of hopefully relaunching it at some indefinite
point in the future with a new purpose & new team behind it.


Sine Anahita (2017-08-21 19:52:03)
I am sorry to see Sociological Imagination go into hiatus, but I support your decision. Thanks for all you have done.

Julianne Higgins (2017-08-23 00:39:53)
I'll keep a look out for the time, if/when you start up again. As an autistic I applaud your sense of responsibility and appreciate the need to put Sociological Imagination on hold. I've only just discovered this site and will read earlier articles.

Pierluigi Richini (2017-08-27 22:41:05)
I just discovered this blog today and browsing it I was excited about the richness of the contents. However I read this post discovering that Sociology Imagination will be suspended... I'm very unlucky! I hope you will find the best solution for the blog's future.

» Announcing a community noticeboard for Sociology The Sociological Imagination (2017-10-29 14:57:07)
[...] to put Sociological Imagination on hiatus after a contributing author posted something which left me unwilling to run a group blog without a proper editorial process. Since then, I've been wondering what, if any, purpose [...]  

8.9 October

Announcing a community noticeboard for Sociology (2017-10-29 14:57)

A couple of months ago, I decided to put Sociological Imagination on hiatus after a contributing author posted something which [1]left me unwilling to run a group blog without a proper editorial process. Since then I've been wondering what, if any, purpose this site could serve.

Unfortunately, none of us have the time nor energy to implement a proper editorial process. I'm open to suggestions from potential editing teams who have ideas about how to take this forward: e-mail using [2]this form with your proposal to discuss.

In the meantime, it seems a waste to leave the site completely derelict. We still get 400-600 hits per day and have 29,000 followers on Twitter. Therefore, for the time being, we're open to using this as a community noticeboard. If you have calls for papers, event announcements or calls for contributors to disseminate then [3]send them in plain text using this form and I'll publish them unless they seem obviously irrelevant to our audience.

In a few months, I'll review the engagement to see if this function proves useful. At that point, we might actually call it a day on the site. There has been some great writing posted here over the years, so I would like to put together a book of highlights if we do take the site offline.

2. https://markcarrigan.net/get-in-touch/
3. https://markcarrigan.net/get-in-touch/
Karen Price (2017-10-29 21:07:32)

I can't quite remember the details of the deal breaker. However I wonder at the response. Most of us would recognise the risks inherent in open access academic social media. So I would not think your very excellent brand or reputation has been broken. If the offending item was removed with explanation and follow up, is that not sufficient? We now see the hidden voices some of which need voice with respect to intersectionality. However others are more questionable. Social media and digital publishing has provided a space for all. Apologies if my assumptions about the issue are not accurate but it would seem a pity given the level of engagement to let your knowledge dissemination go. To quieten your own voice would be a loss. Hope you are okay. Sincerely. Dr Karen Price. MBBS, Fracgp PhD candidate Monash University GPDU forum Admin.

Mark Carrigan (2017-10-30 12:51:32)

Thanks, there's definitely an element of that in my reaction. But it's mostly about being realistic about how much time & energy I have. I hope we can find a good purpose for what we've built but I'm increasingly aware I can't offer enough any more in terms of taking it forward.

SOCIOMETRY GROUP (2017-11-28 08:18:23)

thanks for great information

The most popular posts on sociological imagination (2017-10-29 15:09)

[1] Charles Wright Mills' Sociological Imagination and why we fail to match it today

[2] How to write a good sociology essay (and not panic)

[3] Public Sociology

[4] Making the familiar strange

[5] 40 reasons why you should blog about your research


[8] Is someone you care about involved with post structuralism?

[9] Sociologists and anthropologists reflect on the craft of writing

[10] Bourdie meets Marx, Gramsci, Fanon, Freire, Beauvoir and Mills (in Burawoy's imagination)

[11] 'You either die a hero or live long enough to see yourself become the villain…'

[12] Of Methods and Methodologies in Literary Studies and Humanities

[13] Why Slavoj Zizek is a Waste of Space for the Social Scientifically Literate Left

[14] The private eye's guide to being a plain speaking politician
The busy academic's guide to writing concisely

"A new kind of intellectual": Pierre Bourdieu's tribute to Michel Foucault

The Sociology of Hipsters

Soc 710: Social Theory Through Complaining

The Sociological Imagination Today: The Need for Biology

A Summer of Television Poverty Porn

17. http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/14135

First Global Biophilia Summit (2017-10-30 10:23)

http://biophiliasummit.com

First Global Biophilia Summit

In partnership with www.pandisciplinary.net

Call for Presentations

Dates: May 21, 22 and 23, 2018
Location: Mount Mellary Monastery, County Waterford, Ireland

Conference Fee: From €380 (Includes accommodation, all meals, tea/coffee breaks, and return transport from Dublin to the monastery)

The theory of biophilia proposes that in the earth’s biosphere, all living things – both non-human and human – are inextricably linked and innately motivated to interact with other species. When our motivations demonstrate the characteristics of awe, reverence, respect, and empathy, these inter-species interests and interactions can be mutually beneficial psychologically, biologically, emotionally, and spiritually in ways that encourage the species’ survival, evolution, development, and ability to flourish. We can live in harmony with nature. Conversely, when these inter-species interests and interaction are plagued by egocentrism, self-serving biases, devaluation, and domination of one species by another, the outcomes can be catastrophic across the entire biosphere, resulting in the decimation, destruction, and/or extinction of both known and yet-to-be discovered species.

The biophilia perspective provides a fertile ground (pun intended) for the intersection of theory and praxis. This exciting international Summit will allow access opportunities to a diverse group of individuals who originate from a variety of disciplines and careers yet who share a common interest in, and love for, Nature. Since the survival and well-being of the species who share our biosphere is approaching crisis point, this Summit is designed to facilitate a free exchange of ideas as well as to encourage communication and collaboration among the participants before, during and after the proceedings.

Among the delegates who we would encourage to attend are: conservationists, zoologists, philosophers, botanists, psychologists, climate scientists, NGOs, creative artists, biologists, educators, sociologists, therapists, cultural theorists, counsellors, teachers, musicians, medical professionals, writers, pharmacologists, clergy, neuroscientists, theologians, parents, political scientists, hospitality industry or tourism professionals, public relations and advertising professionals, economists, journalists, researchers, and anyone else who has a contribution to make regarding the biophilia perspective.

As we explore the manifold aspects of the concept of biophilia, we encourage participants to think outside the limits of their own discipline, and to explore the implications for practice of biophilia and the related theories and perspectives that they espouse. In better understanding biophilia, we can establish a more personal one-to-one relationship with Nature, and have a role in raising the awareness of the communities of which we are a part. As Albert Einstein said:

"Look into Nature and you will understand everything else better."
"Not make use of the world, but to understand it ..."

We welcome traditional papers, panels and workshop proposals, as well as other forms of presentation platforms (art, poetry, posters, video submissions, and so on), given the interdisciplinary nature of the Summit, and recognising that different groups express themselves in various formats and mediums.

We would like participants – both from within and from outside academia – to explore the concept of biophilia in ways that include, but are not limited to:

**Expressions or Contexts For Biophilia**

- Visual Arts across various media (drawing, painting in watercolors, acrylics, oils, and so forth)
- Music spanning a variety of styles (classical, folk, blues, and so on)
• Literature (narratives, ancestry, lore, poetry, essay, book review, etc.)

• Film (fiction and non-fiction) with examples, such as *Medicine Man* with Sean Connery or *Avatar* with Sigourney Weaver

• Theatre (mainstream and otherwise)

• Television (series, mini-series, science channel, history channel, and so forth)

• Print (books, magazines, book chapters, and so on)

• Health (physiological, psychological and psychical benefits)

• Philanthropy (individuals and organizations that benefit human and non-human species)

• Volunteering (internal and external motives that motivate volunteering as well as organizations, circumstances, and situations that provide such opportunities)

• Culture (correlations and examples of the relationship between culture and biophilia)

• Spirituality (non-religious and religious examples of the relationship between spirituality and biophilia, such as Buddhism, Druidism, and so forth)

• Sacred Spaces and Sit Spots (the creation and existence of sacred spaces and sit spots in Nature)

• Social Media (blogs, discussions, web pages, and so forth that address biophilia)

• Internet (national and international dissemination of information, news, education, and so on pertaining to biophilia)

**Definitions of Biophilia**

• What does *Biophila* mean to you? How would you define it? How does your definition compare and contrast with that of others?

• Theoretical Perspectives (biological, zoological, botanical, philosophical, theological, anthropological, sociological, psychological, physiological, spiritual, etc.) What theoretical perspective or combination of theoretical perspectives do you favour when addressing biophilia? Why?

• Peak Experiences: awe, reverence, euphoria, epiphanies, the sublime etc. How can Nature elicit such peak experiences? Have you personally experienced one of more of them or some other type of peak experience? How did it manifest itself to you (visually, auditorily or some other way)?

**Wider Implications of Biophilia**

• Historical Implications – How have our perspectives changed over time with regard to biophilia? Are these perspectives generationally oriented?

• Law and Public Policy – How does this relation to natural justice? Legal justice? Differential justice?

• Structural Inequalities (taxonomy, species orientation, human/non-human dichotomy, “civilized things vs. natural things,” and so forth)
• Power Asymmetry (Social Dominance Orientation/SDO, mutualism vs. Amensalism, human domination over all non-human species rather than collaboration between human and non-human species [companion and mutual benefactor approach], and so on)

• Organizations and Associations (Association of Nature and Forest Therapy, Green Peace, Pets for Vets, NGOs, 4H Clubs, Scouts, and so forth)

• Generational Influences (Baby-Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, etc.)

• Morality and Ethics (responsibilities in research, the expansion of the Belmont Report, and so forth)

• Anthropogenic Causes (of pressing problems such as climate change, global warming, sea level rise, species extinction, and so on)

• World Views (economic, political, social psychological, evolutionary, etc)

Barriers to Biophilia

• Resources Perspective (consumerism, mass production, cloning, commodities, and so forth)

• Population growth (industrialized nations, developing nations, and so on)

• Advanced technology (genetic splicing/engineering, etc)

• Industry (agriculture, logging, residential development, real estate, and so forth)

• Education (development of age-appropriate academic courses, adult education courses, CEUs, and so on)

• Personal engagement (strategies to create an immersion in Nature and to establish a one-to-one personal relationship with Nature, and so forth)

• Public awareness (strategies and methods to raise public awareness and its personal investment in Nature, etc.)

What to Submit:

300 word abstracts should be submitted by January 5, 2018. All submissions are minimally double blind peer reviewed. If an abstract is accepted for the conference, a full draft paper should be sent by February 28, 2018. Abstracts should be emailed simultaneously to the Organising Chairs; abstracts should be submitted in a Word format with the following information and in this order:

1. a) author(s), b) affiliation, c) email address, d) title of abstract, e) body of abstract f) up to 10 key words

E-mails should be entitled: Biophilia Summit 1. Abstract Submission.

Please use plain text (Times New Roman 12) and abstain from using footnotes and any special formatting, characters or emphasis (such as bold, italics or underline). We acknowledge receipt and answer all paper proposals submitted. If you do not receive a reply from us in a week you should assume we did not receive your proposal; it might be lost in cyberspace! We suggest, then, to resend it.
Organising Chairs

Mary Ann O’Grady: biophiliasummit1@gmail.com
Lonny Meinecke: biophiliasummit2@gmail.com
Sean Moran: sp.moran@hotmail.com
Michelle Ryan: michelleryan22@gmail.com

This event is an inclusive interdisciplinary research project. It aims to bring together people from different areas and interests to share ideas and explore various innovative and exciting discussions.

All papers accepted for the conference must be in English, and last no more than twenty minutes to present.

We believe that it is a mark of personal courtesy and professional respect to your colleagues that all delegates should attend for the full duration of the conference. If you are unable to make this commitment, please do not submit an abstract for presentation.

Please note: we are not in a position to be able to assist with conference travel or subsistence, but we will provide free return transport from Dublin to the conference venue.

Venue

Our conference will be in a historic monastery, set in the beautiful Irish countryside. It will be an opportunity to escape from the world for a short while, and enjoy some friendly and stimulating discussions in a serene environment. Our goal is to conduct as much of the Summit as possible outdoors and in conjunction with Nature. The monastery website can be found at www.mountmellarayabbey.org

Conference Website


Book Launch: Care and Policy Practices (2017-10-30 12:50)

Care and Policy Practices
The Sociological Review Monograph Launch & Wine Reception

Friday 10th November 2017, 17.45-19.30, followed by wine reception

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The Sociological Review is thrilled to be launching the latest of their 2017 monographs, [1] Care and Policy Practices. For over fifty years, our monograph series has showcased the best and most innovative sociologically informed work, producing intellectually stimulating volumes that promote emerging and established academics. Care and Policy Practices continues this trend, exploring a seemingly currently widespread crisis in care and the relation between policy and care which is under intense scrutiny and contestation.

Care, including an alleged loss of care in public services, has become a focus of increased public concern, political debate and academic research. At the same time, numerous policies have been exposed as ineffective, harmful or deliberately weak. There is a concern that ‘policies’ are not care-full enough and may even promote relations of neglect and suffering. This monograph draws from this context, offering a collection of case studies of locations, relations and heterogeneous entities that make up policy practices in various sites. The contributions explore how policy and care are not separate matters, but are entangled in diverse ways.

The event will include discussion with the guest editors: [2] Vicky Singleton (Lancaster University), [3] Claire Waterton (Lancaster University) and discussant [4] Richard Freeman

(University of Edinburgh).


This event is free, but registration is required. Register here: [6] https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/care-and-policy-practices-the-sociological-review-monograph-launch-tickets-36830146961

1. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=380c6ddd0a&e=789a4573bc
2. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=e506e707c8&e=789a4573bc
3. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=542e239399&e=789a4573bc
4. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=846be8ab4d&e=789a4573bc
5. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=481413e9ad&e=789a4573bc
Identity, belonging and activism in the 21st Century (2017-11-01 23:40)

CALL FOR PAPERS
February 24, 2018
Venue: University of Nottingham
Abstract Deadline: December 8, 2017

How do the pressures of austerity, migration and populism impact on identity and belonging in the 21st century?

What is the emotional cost of maintaining the ‘self’ in circumstances of marginalisation and feelings of ‘unbelonging’?

How are identities challenged by multiple sites of oppression and new threats to community and solidarity?

How does individual and collective action influence policy and bring about social change in this context?

Identity and belonging are dynamic sociological concepts illuminating the ways in which individuals navigate the effects of local and global inequalities. The lived experiences of individuals offer important insights into effects of ‘(un)belonging’ and the maintenance of the ‘self’. Perspectives from social class analysis, identity politics and intersectionality challenge populist notions of division and individualism.

We invite doctoral and early career researchers to present on these and related questions at the 10th Anniversary Enquire Conference. We welcome abstracts on empirical and theoretical research which could be based on, but not limited to, the following areas:

• 'Race' & ethnicity • Disability • Gender • Social class
• Migration • Sexuality • Technology • Place & space
• Political activism • Age • The body • Globalisation
• Social citizenship • Social Policy • Education • Intersectionality

This is a one-day event, costing £10, to be held on Saturday 24th February 2018, with keynote speakers including Professor Anne-Marie Fortier (Lancaster) and Dr Elisabetta Zontini (Nottingham). We welcome abstracts of 250-350 words in length for presentations of 15 minutes, to be submitted to [1]enquire@nottingham.ac.uk by 8th December 2017. We look forward to hearing from you.

1. mailto:enquire@nottingham.ac.uk


The social life of time: power, discrimination and transformation
The 1st Temporal Belongings International Conference
5264
Since 2011 the Temporal Belongings network has brought together scholars from across the arts, humanities and social sciences to investigate the role that time plays in communities. Our first meeting in Manchester set our initial agenda and since then we have explored a range of issues including community futures, the role of power and agency, time in community development and methods for studying social time. We’ve expanded understandings of community to explore time in more-than-human worlds and have also rethought the material infrastructures communities use to keep time in our Temporal Design events. Throughout we have argued for deeper understandings of the ‘social life’ of time (Appadurai 1988, Law 2009, Law & Ruppert 2013) and asked questions not only about the rhythm, pace and directionality of time, but also how particular constructions of time challenge or enact particular forms of relationality. Who belongs in particular accounts of time, and who is excluded? What are the effects and affects of various social understandings of temporality? What are the politics of time? How are power and legitimacy operationalised through temporal frameworks? What might it mean to transform dominant conceptions of time?

Research on the role of time in social life has rejected the notion of time as an inert container in favour of a more complex and contested field of interactive relations (e.g. Sharma 2017, Birth 2014, Huebener 2016). Here time arises from relationships between actors, both human and non-human. Indeed some theorists such as Bruno Latour go as far as to claim that “time is not in itself a primary phenomenon. Time passes or not depending on the alignment of other entities” (2005, 178). The Temporal Belongings network has sought to build on this framework by paying attention to how time is made through relations, but also, and most importantly, to the ways that relations themselves happen through the organisation, conceptualisation and experience of time.

We are now keen to gather up the work we have done so far and launch a larger, international platform for exploring these issues. Thus, in collaboration with the Waiting Times project, led by Lisa Baraitser and Laura Salisbury and funded by the Wellcome Trust, which is investigating the relationship between time and healthcare, we are pleased to announce this call for papers for our first international conference.

The aim of this conference is to share current research on the social nature of time and to collaboratively reflect on key issues, problems and methodological approaches. In keeping with previous Temporal Belongings events, we will include a mixture of presentation styles, and plenty of time for discussion. We are particularly interested in playing with the traditional time of the academic conference and will include collaborative, participant-driven sessions where themes emerging from the presentations can be synthesised and explored in greater depth. Proposals are sought for lightning talks (5 mins), traditional papers (15 mins), collective sessions such as roundtables and world cafe approaches (1.5 hours), or alternative presentation/participatory formats (1.5 hours). Proposals for single panels or streams of multiple panels focusing on a relevant theme or approach are also welcome.

Confirmed keynote speakers for the conference include:

- [3]Charles W. Mills (Philosophy - CUNY)
- [4]Jackie Sumell (Artist and activist)
- [5]Sarah Sharma (Communication - Toronto)
- [6]Paul Huebener (English - Athabasca)

Contributions might address topics such as:
• Time, power and resistance
• Time and care
• Embodied social times
• Representing time, including temporal narratives, stories, visualisations
• Temporal affects
• Methods for studying the social nature of time
• Environments and materials of time
• Organising time
• Critical temporalities, counter-stories and alternatives
• Time and agency
• Cultural concepts and experiences of time


Details on abstract and bio length for individual papers, panels etc can be found by following the submission link.

We will aim to notify of decisions by February 2018. Please send any queries to [8]temporalbelongings@gmail.com

2. http://www.bbk.ac.uk/waitingtimes/
3. https://www.gc.cuny.edu/Faculty/Core-Bios/Charles-W-Mills
5. https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/iccit/sarah-sharma
8. mailto:temporalbelongings@gmail.com

Call for papers: Applying the Capabilities Approach to Media and Communications (2017-11-01 23:41)

CALL FOR PAPERS
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
2018 PRECONFERENCE

Applying the Capabilities Approach to Media and Communications

May 24, 2018
5266
Recent years have seen a growing interest in the concept of justice in media and communication studies. In the more general literature on social justice, an important contribution has come from the capabilities approach developed by Indian economist Amartya Sen and US philosopher Martha Nussbaum. The theory challenges utilitarian narratives and liberal notions of redistributive justice and has become the cornerstone of the United Nations’ Human Development Index. Despite its potentially great relevance for media industries and production studies, information and communication for development, telecommunications and media policy, and digital media research, there has been limited use of the capabilities approach across the media, communication and cultural studies field.

By bringing together for the first time scholars engaged in applying the capabilities approach to media and communications, this ICA preconference advances an agenda to create a new interdisciplinary focus in the field. It aims to build conceptual bridges across emerging frameworks for studying communicative capabilities, media practice, and digital literacies and to engage with normative debates about media justice, creative justice, and data justice. The preconference directly engages with the central theme of the ICA Annual Conference on "Voices" by inviting reflection on the ways we can address inequalities and enhance communicative opportunities for media workers and users in a global context.

The preconference will open with a keynote address by Nick Couldry (London School of Economics) and feature panels from invited speakers applying the capabilities approach to policy debates, development interventions, and normative media theories. We also invite paper submissions from scholars interested in this topic and we will accept a small number of papers from this open call.

CONFIRMED PARTICIPANTS:

Nick Couldry (LSE)
Heather Ford (University of Leeds)
David Hesmondhalgh (University of Leeds)
Tom Jacobson (Temple University)
Krishna Jayakar (Penn State)
Kari Karppinen (University of Helsinki)
Dorothea Klein (Sheffield University)
Robin Mansell (LSE)
Giles Moss (University of Leeds)
Jonathan Corpus Ong (University of Massachusetts Amherst)
Amit Schejter (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev / Penn State)
Noam Tirosh (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)
Thomas Tufte (University of Leicester)

Abstract of up to 500 words and a short bio of the author(s) should be sent to Prof Amit Schejter ([1]pennstateii@psu.edu<mailto:pennstateii@psu.edu>) by December 15, 2017. Please write IIPCAP: YOURNAME in the subject line of the email. Abstracts and bios should be sent as Word attachments, each in a separate document, one saved as YOURNAME:Abstract and the other as YOURNAME:Bio. Abstracts not sent according to the above instructions and not accompanied by a short bio will not be reviewed. Authors will be notified of their acceptance before January 12, 2018. A small number of abstracts will be accepted to the workshop and full papers are expected by May 1, 2018. Authors presenting at the pre-conference will be invited to submit their completed papers for review in a special issue of the Journal of Information Policy ([3]www.jip-online.org<http://www.jip-online.org/>) to be published in 2018. The preconference will take place at the ICA venue on Thursday, May 24, 9AM-5PM. With financial support from the Institute for Information Policy at Penn State, cost per participant

5267
CFP: Death Online Research Symposium (2017-11-03 16:05)

The 4th Symposium of the International Death Online Research Network will take place at The University of Hull, UK, August 15 – 17, 2018.

The symposium will consolidate the links between existing and new members of the network and provide opportunities for the discussion of ongoing and new orientations in the interdisciplinary field of death online. The meeting will explore the ways in which online connectivity is changing how, when and where we engage with death and dying and how we invest death-related practices with meaning in the online environment. We warmly welcome new members to the network as well as old friends.

Opening Keynote Address: Professor Charles Ess, University of Oslo, Norway.

Themes and perspectives of the symposium:
For this 4th Death Online Research Symposium we invite abstracts for oral presentations of new, recently completed, or ongoing research (including ideas for future academic research) on all kinds of death-related online practices. We welcome qualitative and quantitative work which expands our understanding of the current and future trends in death online research from a variety of disciplines, addressing any of the following themes:

Digitally mediated dying and narrative
Digitally mediated grieving and memorialising
Death online and embodied experience
Digital afterlife, post-mortem identity and digital legacy
Technological developments in the death care industry
Digital immortality
Online vs offline experiences
Theorising online life and death
Ethical challenges for studying death online.

The symposium will host a special workshop for participating Post Graduate students and early career researchers. We particularly welcome submissions from these groups. All submissions will be peer-reviewed, and we envisage publication of selected full papers in a special issue of an academic journal in the field as well as a collection of writing from the symposium in an open-access online platform.

Important information ell
Submission format: 300 word abstract

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Call for Participation

The Digital Dissertation: History, Theory, Practice

A Database and eBook Project

Virginia Kuhn, Kathie Gossett (eds.)

Abstract submission: 12 January 2018

Humanities scholars recognize the growing importance of digital media in knowledge production and distribution. However, recognition does not imply acceptance. How does one negotiate digital scholarship in an academy that remains largely print based in its outputs? The most valued scholarship is still the book, monograph, or journal article, and this not only limits the audience for humanities research to university scholars, but also limits its forms of argumentation to a primarily Western, linearly structured way of thinking. That is, relying on one mode of communication limits what can be said and to whom it can be said, making the humanities insular rather than allowing it to take advantage of opportunities to communicate with the broader public. In their study, The Responsive PhD, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, argues that "scholarship is the heart of the doctorate" and that programs need to ask "What encourages adventurous scholarship? What retards and discourages it?" Adventurous scholarship requires "new paradigms," which demand an examination of the often unarticulated philosophies that govern what qualifies as legitimate scholarship.

How do these "new paradigms" play out in the context of the dissertation? While digital dissertations have been around for twenty years or more, the precise processes by which they are defined, created and defended remain something of a mystery. Is an interactive pdf significantly different than its paper-based counterpart? What specific possibilities can a digitally networked environment offer that are impossible without its affordances? How are dissertation committees able to gauge the quality of natively digital work? What support systems and processes do students need to complete these types of projects? How do precedents prove helpful in defending one’s choice to create a digital dissertation? How do digital projects change the ways faculty members advise dissertations?
This project, The Digital Dissertation: History, Theory, Practice, will consist of a definitive database of digital dissertation projects as well as an ebook whose chapters explore the larger implications of digital scholarship across institutional, geographic and disciplinary divides.

There are two ways to participate:

1. Complete this brief survey about the work <[1]https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1PQkSmceYNV8JDoaCH9db_Z2UXujGbaao1ddK8JgzzMM/edit> (which will form a database) by January 12, 2018.

2. Complete this brief survey about the work <[2]https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1PQkSmceYNV8JDoaCH9db_Z2UXujGbaao1ddK8JgzzMM/edit> (which will form a database for others) and submit a 300–500 word proposal by January 12, 2018 for a chapter in the e-book which responds to the most salient issue/s surrounding the digital dissertation and the ways that students and committee members managed the possibilities and obstacles inherent in this type of work. We imagine these chapters as being 3000 to 5000 words in length and due on May 11, 2018. Authors will be notified in early February.

Please send proposals and/or any questions about the project to Kathie Gossett ([3]kegossett@ucdavis.edu) and Virginia Kuhn ([5]vkuhn@cinema.usc.edu).
modernization and development projects, and business endeavours such as the Basque private sector powerhouse Mondragón. With such diversity of histories and practice, what actually links cooperatives to one another? Why have cooperatives, as an organizational form, persisted for such a long time?

There has been considerable and sustained interested in cooperatives across the humanities and social sciences. Yet these approaches, which centre upon their status as economic organizations, political projects, and sites of meaning and value-making, remain largely siloed within specific disciplines. In anthropology, political science, and sociology, much of the debate has centred on whether cooperatives constitute a launch-pad for radical departures from prevailing social and economic conditions, or whether they instead reinforce the status quo. Other work, particularly in economics and development studies, has focused on more explicitly descriptive and applied ends: analysing the structure, efficiency, and successes/failures of particular cooperative projects, often in order to contribute to the progressive development of cooperative entities overall. What can we gain from bringing these two strands of research together? Furthermore, is it possible for us to move discussions of cooperatives beyond a consideration of structural politics and applied approaches, and what are the implications of this? What other (shared) avenues of analysis are open to us as cooperative scholars? As its primary objective, this two-day workshop seeks a more sustained and coherent interdisciplinary theorizing of contemporary and historic cooperative practice.

In particular, the workshop will explore the following questions: why and how have cooperatives endured as a form of social organization? What forms of sociality, politics, morality, and material practice do cooperatives engender? What is the relationship between cooperative form and practice across time and space? What role do cooperatives play in contesting and/or reproducing status quo economics, politics, and associated social forms? How might attentiveness to recent theorising about economics – particularly notions of performativity and the commons – generate new ways of thinking about cooperatives? Finally, how might cooperatives shadow other kinds of communal and collaborative working groups, such as labour unions, collectives, and associations?

Call for Papers

We invite papers from across the social sciences and humanities (anthropology, history, geography, economics, political sciences, development studies) and from emerging and established scholars, to contribute to the workshop.

Participants are welcome to consider the following:

- Theoretical reconsiderations of the cooperative as social form and political potentiality
- History and historiography of cooperatives, the cooperative movement, and cooperative 'experiments'
- The practice of cooperatives as 'total social institutions' and sites of meaning and value-making
- Continuities and frictions between cooperatives, the state, development NGOs, and market actors
- Micro-politics: governance, collective labour, and membership
- Theoretical and analytical connections between cooperatives and other types of communal and collaborative working associations (labour unions, collectives, informal work groups, the sharing economy, mutual and co-owned business, and associations)

Please send a 300-word abstract and short CV to Corinna Howland, cfh39 [at] cam.ac.uk by December 20th, 2017.
Applicants will be notified if they have been accepted by January 5th, 2018.

Successful applicants will then be asked to submit a 3000-word paper by April 20th, 2018 for circulation among the workshop participants. This, together with a fifteen-minute presentation, will form the basis of the workshop discussions.

Accommodation, lunches, and a workshop dinner will be provided for speakers.

Andrea Grant (2017-11-06 11:49:46)
Oh dear, oh dear. I don’t feel comfortable here. When can we stop being observers and actually see ourselves as participants in this conversation! I can’t help feeling frustrated as a sociologist in thinking that I actually exist in this system. How can we shift our research practice from meaningful observation to meaningful participation? Collaboration in our own investigations. Why are we so ‘behind the eight ball’ with this? As an observer I find this remarkably uninspiring. The world is changing, along with our perceptions of it. How can we be involved as sociologists? I hope you don’t publish this, it is just a reaction. No more than a distraction.

CFP|Reimagining the Cooperative: An Interdisciplinary Conversation | SAA Network (2017-11-07 04:16:24)
[... For more please follow the link – http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/19552 [...]

CfP: Good Data book (2017-11-11 14:54)
Call for Proposals for an INC Theory on Demand edited book

Editors: Angela Daly (Queensland University of Technology), Kate Devitt (Queensland University of Technology) & Monique Mann (Queensland University of Technology).

In recent years, there has been an exponential increase in the collection, aggregation and automated analysis of information by government and private actors, and in response to this there has been a significant critique regarding what could be termed ‘bad’ data practices in the globalised digital economy. These include the mass gathering of data about individuals, in opaque, unethical and at times illegal ways, and the increased use of that data in unaccountable and potentially discriminatory forms of algorithmic decision-making by both state agencies and private companies. Issues of data ethics and data justice are only likely to increase in importance given the totalizing datafication of society and the introduction of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and automation.

In order to paint an alternative, more optimistic but still pragmatic picture of the datafied future, this open access edited collection will examine and propose what could be termed ‘good’ and ‘ethical’ data practices, underpinned by values and principles such as (but not limited
to:

· privacy/regulation/information security by design
· due process rights
· procedural legitimacy
· the protection of individual and collective autonomy
· digital sovereignty
· digital anti-discrimination
· data and intersectionality
· ethical labour practices
· environmental sustainability.

Chapters should be short contributions (2500-5000 words) which can take differing forms, for example:

· Manifestos for Good Data
· Position papers
· Traditional academic chapters

Chapters can be theoretical takes or provocations on what Good Data is or should be, or can be case studies of particular Good Data projects and initiatives e.g. Indigenous data sovereignty initiatives, data cooperatives etc. Chapters can also be critiques of initiatives/movements which claim to be ethical but in fact fall short. All chapters, including academic ones, should be written in an accessible way and avoid the excessive use of jargon, etc. Academic chapters will be peer-reviewed. Other contributions will be editor-reviewed.

We encourage contributions from throughout the world and from different disciplinary perspectives: philosophy, media and communications, cultural studies, STS, law, criminology, information systems, computer science etc.

Proposals for chapters (up to 250 words) should be sent to Kayleigh Hodgkinson Murphy ([1]kayleigh.murphy@qut.edu.au) by Friday 15 December 2017. Please include a brief biography (indicating whether you are an academic or practitioner, etc) and signal what kind of chapter you are proposing (manifesto/academic chapter, etc).

If you have an idea for a chapter and want to discuss it before submitting a proposal, please contact Angela Daly ([2]angela.daly@qut.edu.au) as soon as
possible. We may be able to pair, for example, practitioners with academic authors on request.

Decisions on proposals will be made by mid-January 2017, with a first full draft of chapters to be submitted by 31 March 2018. We anticipate the book will be finalized and launched in late 2018, as part of the Institute of Network Cultures’ Theory on Demand series

<http://networkcultures.org/publications/ #tods>

1. mailto:kayleigh.murphy@qut.edu.au
2. mailto:angela.daly@qut.edu.au

Call for papers: Intimacies online, online intimacies (2017-11-11 14:55)

Call for papers: Intimacies online, online intimacies

We are delighted to announce this international conference about intimacy online, digitally mediated intimacies and how intimacies influence (new) mediascapes.

Online media are increasingly intersecting and intertwined with our daily lives, bodily and intimate practices, and relationships. This conference highlights how different digital, social and online media enable and/or produce new intimacies, as well as how practices and understandings of intimacy are both embedded in digitally mediated communication and generate innovative uses or forms of new media.

We invite papers (or other forms of expression) that explore various media sites and forms, including (but not limited to) social media, digital media, online media and mobile devices. And we invite papers investigating various intimacies, including but not limited to intimate and/or affective encounters, relationalities, practices, belongings, desires, proximities, kinships, friendships, or communities, as well as online and /or digital affective intensities, viralities, and connectivities. Papers discussing both methodological and empirical aspects are welcome.

Papers analysing the bodily and intimate doing of technology, and papers questioning the boundaries between body, media, technology and affect are welcome. Also, papers discussing the commercialization and capitalization of intimacies online are of interest. In particular, we welcome papers analyzing the ways in which new mediated intimacies (re)produce, configure and/or challenge power relations and hierachical structures in relation to:

• Sexual cultures, dating and hook-up, sexualities, and sexual identities
• Kinship and new (queer) families and reproduction
• Bodies and bodily markers of difference
• Migration, nation, borders, and surveillance
• Activism, resistance, counter publics, and subcultures

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The confirmed keynotes include Prof. Jack Halberstam (University of Southern California and Columbia University, US), Dr. Debra Ferreday (Lancaster University), and Dr. Sharif Mowlabocus (University of Sussex).

The conference will take place at Roskilde University, Denmark, May 30th–June 1st, 2018. Please send your abstract to newmedianewintimacies@gmail.com. Abstracts should be maximum 200 words long and written in English. Please include your name, title, and affiliation. Deadline of submission of abstract: Jan. 15th, 2018.

CFP - 11th International Critical Theory Conference of Rome (2017-11-11 14:56)

CALL FOR PAPERS

11th INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL THEORY CONFERENCE OF ROME

May 10-12, 2018

John Felice Rome Center of Loyola University Chicago

The John Felice Rome Center of Loyola University Chicago is hosting the 11th international conference on Critical Theory of Rome, which will be held at its campus in Rome, Italy - Via Massimi 114/A.

The conference will examine the importance and the developments of the Frankfurt School by addressing both the philosophical tradition of the early stages of Critical Theory - and in particular the works of Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse - as well as the application of their theories to our contemporary society. The conference will also address the second and third generation of critical theorists, welcoming, among others, papers on Habermas and Honneth.

In order to reflect the wide range of topics addressed by Critical Theory, the conference will cover different aspects of philosophical reflection on justice, politics, aesthetics, sociology, theology, technology, literature and any other field of study related to the Frankfurt School.

The conference will be held at the Rome Center of Loyola University Chicago on May 10-12, 2018. It will begin on Thursday morning and end by Saturday evening (with a welcoming reception on the evening of Wednesday, May 9). During the sessions, each speaker will have 30 minutes (20 minutes for the presentation and 10 for discussion). All presentations will be made in English. We expect to have about 120 speakers.

Coordinator: Stefano Giacchetti Ludovisi, Loyola University Chicago, JFRC

Keynote speakers:

Deborah Cook, University of Windsor
Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Vanderbilt University

Andrew Feenberg, Simon Fraser University

Alessandro Ferrara, University of Rome, Tor Vergata

David Ingram, Loyola University Chicago

Douglas Kellner, University of California, Los Angeles

Stefano Petrucciani, University of Rome, La Sapienza

If you are interested in presenting a paper or organizing a panel (of up to 6 speakers), please submit a 1-2 page abstract by February 28, 2018 (including name, eventual institutional affiliation and mailing address). Abstracts should be submitted by email. Decisions regarding the program will be made by March 2018.

To submit an abstract, or for more information, contact:

Stefano Giacchetti Ludovisi, PhD - [1]sgiacch@luc.edu


Conference fees: Unwaged: 90 Euro; Waged: 130 Euro. (Fees include also the reception of May 9, and breakfasts, lunches and coffee breaks throughout the conference).

1. mailto:sgiacch@luc.edu
2. http://luc.edu/rome/callforpapers/

Call for Submissions: Politicians and Social Media in the Global South (2017-11-11 14:59)

*Call for Submissions*
Politicians and Social Media in the Global South*

A seminar/workshop at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Date: April 14, 2018
2345 North Quad
105 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109

In the last decade, politicians in various parts of the world have invested in social media campaigns, including in settings where a relatively small proportion of the voting public is actually online. Leaders may use social media for a range of reasons such as to actively court constituents, to present a narrative on their political program to the international community, or to use the affordances of social media to frame the agenda on a specific issue.
Social media can also present a means for politicians to bypass the free professional media corps to directly speak to the electorate, and exercise greater control over the story crafted about them. After an early phase of enthusiasm on the scope of social media to bring decentralized power to the people, we increasingly have a balanced view of the potential and risks of online behaviour for democratic societies. Today, we see a social media environment in which a vast majority of major national politicians in countries throughout the world build social media presences for a diverse mix of these reasons. What do these developments mean for the future of political campaigning? What tactics have worked? How is the online strategy impacted by ideology, national economic priorities, or political structure?

To get at these questions, the University of Michigan is organizing a one-day seminar workshop to examine contemporary scholarship on political social media in the Global South. The goals of the workshop are to

1. Track the major trends in the use and spread of social media in election campaigns and in Global South settings

2. Highlight the cases of specific politicians, parties, communities or political issues discussed on social media

3. Enable interdisciplinary conversations to appreciate and incorporate alternate approaches towards studying

The event will feature a mix of talks and small workgroup sessions to explore these topics, with specific attention to politicians and political collectives. We invite contributions that are based on original research on studies of politicians or parties on social media in Global South settings using qualitative or quantitative perspectives including but not limited to data sciences, discourse analysis, digital humanities, and ethnographies.

Topics may include:

- Social media strategies of political accounts
- Political Networks and Affiliation online
- Identity and Political Social Media
- Framing of political issues on social media
- Mainstream media engagement with political social media
- Social media use in e-Governance

We also invite talks on citizen behaviour and issue framing online, so long as the work highlights a connection to party systems or individual politicians
Limited funding support is available to presenting attendees who require funding. Please send abstracts of 1200 words (plus citations) of original work with the subject line "Michigan Politics in the Global South Workshop" on or before December 20, 2017, to joyojeet@umich.edu.

All submissions must include a 250-word bio of the corresponding author. If a specific dataset is being used for the abstract, authors are encouraged to also include a short description of the data.

Organizers:

Joyojeet Pal, University of Michigan School of Information
Ceren Budak, University of Michigan School of Information

Sponsored by:

The University of Michigan International Institute
The University of Michigan School of Information
The University of Michigan Department of Communications
The University of Michigan Center for South Asia Studies

1. mailto:joyojeet@umich.edu

Call for Submissions: Politicians and Social Media in the Global South | SAA Network (2017-11-11 17:32:18)
[... For more follow – http://sociologicalimagination.org/archives/19559 [...] ]

Setting the Scene, Shifting the Lens: Reflections on my Students’ Reflective Narratives on Race and Racism (2017-11-12 18:20)

By Lambros Fatsis

Earlier this year, I taught a module on the sociology of “race” and “ethnicity” with my beloved colleagues Bindi Shah, Pathik Pathak, and Luiz Valério P. Trindade; which was partly assessed by a reflective narrative that my students had to write in response to a fieldtrip that I organised and accompanied them to. The fieldtrip was composed of a visit to two photography exhibitions at Tate 5278
Britain and Goldsmiths College, both of which captured some pivotal moments in the experience of racism as suffered by Black Britons in a place that they could only nominally call or make "a home". Our first stop was the \[5\] 'Stan Firm Inna Inglan': Black Diaspora in London, 1960-70s' exhibition at Tate Britain, before making our way to Vron Ware's \[6\] '13 Dead and Nothing Said' exhibition at Goldsmiths College which featured, previously unseen, archival material from the Black People's Day of Action (March 2, 1981) following the \[7\] 'New Crass Massahkah' earlier that year (January 18, 1981). The fieldtrip proved to be a glittering success, if I may say so, and the three best reflective narratives were selected for publication here; not only to demonstrate the quality of our students' work, but also to encourage us to design our teaching and learning activities in a way that entices and releases our students' imagination from simply scoring high marks and accumulating credits towards their degree.

The thinking behind and the purpose of this choice of assessment, therefore, was hardly instrumental but entirely substantive. In fact, the entire module was designed with the aim of jerking some vitality into the curriculum by engaging and alerting my students to the experiential dimension of racism, while also allowing them to 'come to voice' \[8\] hooks, 1994: 148 and speak their minds about what they saw and thought both as a result of the fieldtrip and in relation to the overall module content. Much of the module itself was in fact organised not just around dusty documents (academic texts), but also stories (personal/literary), records (music), and images (photography, art, video) which narrated racism as a \textit{lived} reality and a form of social exclusion, rather than an abstract (sociological) concept. Making that leap from concept to reality was essential to sensitise ourselves to the processes by which racism is, can be, and has been experienced not as an accident, but an essential ingredient of human societies, whose roots and reality is historically and socio-culturally embedded, (re)produced, and sanctioned despite desperate attempts to deny, whitewash, or wish its legacy away.

In reading my students' work, I can't help but feel not just a sense of foolish (?) pride, but also a deep sense of admiration for the way in which they have engaged with and responded to the module content and the exhibits too. Their acute observations, sensitive perception, robust thinking, and playful imaginations don't just move me to tears, but also remind me of the importance of building, what pioneering educationalist and novelist Beryl Gilroy called \[9\] 1976: 160. 'sensory thresholds' into our teaching in order to transform 'knowledge' into 'human understanding' as John Blacking \[10\] 1977: 5 put it so nicely. What follows is just a selection of the many great narratives I read and was keen to share, as an example of how we can make our teaching and our subject relevant to the human experience, while also working against worrying signs of 'students [who] often do not want to learn and teachers [who] do not want to teach' \[11\] hooks, 1994: 12 in an educational context that often discourages 'the education of desire' to teach and learn \textit{worthily} \[12\] Thompson, 1976: 791,721.

Nikki, Holly, and Ola's contributions hold great promise and call for a certain amount of optimism about the ways in which we can forge a strong relationship between our students and what they study, as well as create a proper, human bond between our students and ourselves. Without creating opportunities for such engagement to happen.
in and out of the lecture room, the way sociology is taught, understood, shared, and talked about will inevitably suffer; especially if and when it is pursued in the instrumental manner that our students and ourselves otherwise rail against. Sitting back and thinking just how much intensity, care, warmth, as well as insight and perspective informs those students' writing, I can't help but feel that these three intelligent young women, as well as their peers, have not simply acquired but also applied and contributed to sociological knowledge through the power of their observations and the immediacy of their writing.

Look how imaginatively Nikki compares and contrasts the racist ‘[13] Keep Britain White’ graffiti with Trump’s pledge to ‘[14] Make America Great Again’, ponder over Ola’s sensitive curiosity about the ‘community feeling’ she saw in Colin Jones’ photographs of [15] The Black House or how she reacts to the sight of the lone skinhead in Syd Shelton’s photo of the [16] Rock Against Racism Carnival in Southall, and see how thoughtfully Holly gives an account of her sociological education, and how skillfully she filters her thoughts on the fieldtrip through that sharp “sociological eye” that pervades her entire narrative. Having read, re-read, and thought about my students’ written work I am convinced that these are not just a few isolated, emotionally-charged moments to live for but the very principles and aims that our teaching practice should continually be infused by.

2. [18]Reflective Narrative Essay of Two Photos observed at Stan Firm Inna Inglan’: Black Diaspora in London, 1960-70s Tate Britain (Nikki Achilleous)
3. [19]A Critical Narrative; A sociological reflection upon two photographic exhibitions in London exploring race within the Black community (Holly Wayman)

Here are links to the two exhibitions discussed in these narratives:


Dr. Lambros Fatsis is Lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Southampton. He tweets @lfatsis

1. https://syllabus.soton.ac.uk/view/syllabus/8931
2. https://www.southampton.ac.uk/sociology/about/staff/bs3e10.page
3. https://www.southampton.ac.uk/sociology/about/staff/pp3g10.page
4. https://www.southampton.ac.uk/sociology/postgraduate/research_students/lvdt1g14.page
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUMYAqAlAXA

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As the end of my undergraduate degree in sociology draws closer I am beginning to realise that although the teaching and endless hours in the library will stop, the outlook that all this has provided me certainly will not. The three-year investment has not only shaped my academic understanding of the society that operates around us, but has more broadly applied a permanent filter, which draws the sociological aspects out of what, at first glance, can seem distinctly ordinary. The exhibitions Stan Frim Inna Inglan': Black Diaspora in London, 1960s-70s and Vron Ware: 13 Dead and Nothing said further confirmed this notion to me as the photographs, whilst being artistically engaging, held strong sociological messages by reflecting upon the role of race and racism within the Black community in recent history. Both exhibitions captured the lived experience of second generation Black Britons living in London from the 60s to the 80s. This draws the two exhibitions together and after exploring both I feel it necessary to touch upon this relationship.

On entering the Tate Britain exhibition, it was evident that through the prism of race, a diverse collection of content was displayed. As a compilation of eight different photographers' work, these pieces could be admired both in relation to one another and alone adding a real sense of dimension. From what had initially seemed like a passing thought, moving around the room I soon realised that this diversity within the display was an apt and potentially purposeful reflection of the multiplicity and complexity of experience within the Black community in London. Looking at the whole collection in this way, taking in photographs of interracial couples, family life, fashions and entertainment alongside more overt depictions of racial exclusion, revealed the thread that I felt was intensely important – the essence of the everyday. The multitude of experiences depicted does not detract from the marginalisation of the Black community, that holds a deep seated historical connection to the group, but rather reminds us that racism is not an outside force but entrenched within the everyday. Racism is not fixed but fluid and does not prevent the living of life but becomes a characteristic of it. It is a restrictive pressure that amalgamates and has effects in sometimes
more subtle but complex ways than it is given credit for. The experience of exclusion was clear without overtly and exclusively depicting racism and I truly appreciated this. The depictions of the Black communities’ experience was not just associated with racism alone. I feel that a simplistic equation of Black culture with racism would have omitted and underappreciated the fact that identity in any community is multifaceted and essentially played out day to day. This multifarious coverage was therefore what took my interest and the breadth of content was insightful for revealing key undercurrents.

Extending upon this, the photographers all used people as the focal point of their photographs and I noticed that the collection represented both men and women at different ages and stages of their lives encapsulating an intersectional element. By placing the attention on the subjects in the frame, the photographs felt intensely personal but by displaying a wide range of demographics it was clear that the meaning was linked to Black identity as a whole not solely to its manifestations on an individualistic level. Nevertheless, at times I felt this intimacy to such an extent that I could imagine the photographs being more suited sitting on someone’s mantelpiece than on the walls of a world-renowned art venue. The work of Colin Jones resonated particularly with me for encapsulating this multiplicity of experiences as seen in his depictions of the lives of young people living in The Black House, a community project and hostel, between 1973-6.

These three powerful stills pictured above, summarise to me the very essence of the exhibition. The first two share a similar strong stance, holding direct eye contact with the camera and in doing so were particularly engaging. They give the fundamentally 'Otherised' group a specific human face and neither exude a sense of weakness. I thought this triggered a greater understanding to the collection’s title which references the poem *It Dread inna Inglan* by Linton Kwesi Johnson which expresses the resilience from the Black community surrounding the desire to stay in Britain despite adversity. I felt the female figure perfectly reflected the interplay between social and economic exclusion associated to the wider group as the gas in the backdrop is clearly lit for warmth and the location within the domestic sphere makes it feel exceptionally authentic. While this photograph alludes to a sense of femininity, the second photograph is distinctly masculine in feel. The oversized collar is an iconic 70s statement and the urban feel translated through the solid brick wall led me to think about how as diasporic citizens, the individuals are not acculturating but are accultured, trying to live in London as anyone else would. I felt the trio added real sentiment, portraying real qualitative depth by also showing the residents living together. This reflects the point that through the commonality of race this exclusion was experienced by many.

The second exhibition displayed at Goldsmiths University consolidated this notion of solidarity within the Black British community. This exhibition of Vron Ware’s previously unseen photographs from the Black People’s Day of Action concerns a pivotal point in Black British history where there was a large demonstration regarding the inadequate response to the New Cross Road fire in 1981, and the media coverage thereafter. I was particularly drawn to one photograph for its poignancy and succinct reflection of the political outcry challenging institutionalised racism.

The sign was used as a key source of political rhetoric within the march, referencing the Stardust fire that broke out at a nightclub in Ireland that resulted in fatalities the same year. Margaret Thatcher, the then prime minister, sent her personal condolences to families involved but ignored the thirteen affected who were a stone’s throw away within the capital, to much controversy. To me, this photograph pertinently raises the question of what it means to be British and what it has meant in the past on a political level. The image manages to simultaneously embody the structural racial divisions directed at the Black community as well as the growth and effect of collective social action. As I looked at the photographs I could hear quite coincidentally someone playing the piano in an adjacent room and

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I found this fitting in a sense. I felt the music helped to build upon the message found within the succession of the pictures that highlights the protest day as a moment born out of devastation but also one of great significance.

It was as I was coming away from the second exhibition that I began to reflect upon the issues that I felt linked the two displays. For me, this fundamentally came from the exploration of citizenship that I felt arose from the photographers' work. Both pieces innovatively raise questions about belonging and entitlement through their pictures by highlighting how racial exclusion infringes upon rights. I noticed ‘Stan Firm Inna Inglan’, depicts citizenship in an individualistic sense by appealing to its everyday incarnation whereas ‘Vron Ware: 13 Dead and Nothing Said’, showcases its operation in terms of collective action. Between the two displays I thought about how this is reflective of the social and political dimensions of citizenship within identities and this strengthened my own understanding about the Black experience by demonstrating the different levels of exclusion. I also felt drawing the two together was useful for providing insight into how the Black communities experience has changed over time. In doing so, it enabled me to identify a shift in the photographs setting from the private to the public sphere that perhaps mimics the progression of the Black movement within the UK.

The similarities between the exhibitions interests can be explained by their support from the archive Autograph ABP. The organisation aims to bring underrepresented groups to the fore within art and explore surrounding issues of cultural identity. Whilst I am certain that the two examples of their work that have been discussed succeed in achieving this, it prompted some further thought within myself regarding the wider art world. I have become far more aware of the fact that artistic depictions of BAME groups are underappreciated and in the minority. I noticed that even when reflecting upon the physical position of the displays demonstrates this fact. To view the exhibition at the Tate Britain you have to navigate through a maze of 15th century paintings and at Goldsmiths the pieces are displayed in a corridor of the University. This means both could quite literally be walked past. But the themes and questions around multiculturalism raised by the photographs are too important to be missed particularly within our current political climate. I feel exhibitions like these hold a vital role within the arts for visually expressing cultural identities in a way that text and other exhibitions have not and I hope to see a growth in work grounded in this.

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Reflective Narrative Essay of Two Photos observed at Stan Firm Inna Inglan’: Black Diaspora in London, 1960-70s Tate Britain (2017-11-12 18:22)

By Nikki Achilleous
I have never sincerely felt a victim of racism; I have never fully been personally exposed to hatred. Whilst looking around the Black Diaspora in London exhibition in Tate Britain, I absorbed the trajectories of the intersecting generations of black immigrant lives. I attempted to mentally place myself amongst this community that was characterized by resistance yet filled with celebration and hope. I tried to imagine the kind of atmosphere and struggle that they would have been exposed to. In doing so, two photos grabbed my attention and, despite all I had learnt about black experience this semester, I could not help but to be shocked by them. These two photos caught my attention for polar opposite, yet also intertwined reasons. Both captured politicized acts of graffiti on the streets of London, the first was explicitly racist, the second explicitly opposed racism.

The initial photo (Kenlock, 1972), captured a smartly dressed black lady pointing to a vandalised door at the International Personnel training centre in Balham. The graffiti slogan “Keep Britain White,” was tarnished with black paint onto the contrasting white door. My own shock reaction to the photo reminded me of how unnatural it is to think that this kind of act would be acceptable today. Yet when reflecting on our own political situation, it occurred to me how the reality of the current far right-wing rhetoric is displaying this same kind of anti-racist message, however does not use such exploitation of public space, nor use such explicitly racist language. Donald Trump’s rhetoric of Make America Great Again, and UKIP’s Brexit argument of Make Britain “Great Again” somewhat characterize an extension to the “Keep Britain White” slogan, yet this time they use blurred and confusing, non-explicitly colour based concepts to spread their message. “Great Again” is not a tangible concept, unless there exists a category of people who are defined as “not Great” for the country, and who must be expelled. It revealed how wrenching it must be for either current political or economic migrants, or anyone depicted as ‘foreign’, such as Muslims, to be placed into the ‘Other’ category of those “not so Great for Britain.” Moreover, it exposed how unsettling it must be to hear the constant discourse on how unwelcome they are as a category, whether in the 1970’s or in 2017. The main difference is that today, society does not generally visualize this hatred through the same kind of freely expressed political acts carried out by local citizens in public spaces, as depicted at the time of the picture.

During the 1970’s and 1980’s immigration bans were being implemented for the first time thus, as it were more politically and socially acceptable, the discourse surrounding anti-immigration was overtly racist (Small and Solomos 2006). In this way, right-wing politicians capitalized on the notions of White preference and purity to gain votes, however gradually, as anti-racist movements gained leverage, explicitly racist language became less commonplace and started to be socially challenged. Immigration, citizenship access and national security were previously problematized and controlled through the notion of ‘biological race’, yet the new rhetoric shifted to a more colour-blind approach which problematized the notion of culture, however distinctively related culture back to a specific skin-colour (Fanon, 1967).

Kenlock’s (1972) photo also reminded me of how the notion of skin-colour, and consequently ‘white purity,’ have been central to the concept of British nationalism since colonial times, and how for some citizens, ‘Whiteness’, and White culture remains one of the key characteristics of their formation of “Britishness” and national identity (Garner, 2012). The slogan in the photo also demonstrates Miles’ (1993:78) extension on Anderson’s argument of the interrelationship between the ideologies of race and nation and how the idea of ‘race’ can be used to “sustain a positive evaluation of a ‘supraclass population’.” According to Miles (1993:79), “the parameters of an imagined community of ‘nation’ can be specified and legitimated by racism...[and] the boundary of the imagined ‘nation’ is equally a boundary of ‘race’.” Through such fascist ideology, members of the non-White race are therefore seen as an ‘eternal contamination’ to the ‘imagined community’, which is exactly the philosophy that this photo captures. Interestingly, the use of coloured graffiti is also central in relaying this message. The fact that black paint
As stated, these boundaries of nation and race that were so openly expressed during the 1970's, and the need to 'manage' immigration continue their presence today. A poll in the recent EU referendum revealed that one of overly exaggerated, yet widely believed issues highlighted by Brexit supports was the lack of national control on immigration (Arnorsson and Zoega, 2016). Their fears expressed that Britain had been 'invaded' by too many foreign workers, and the sentiment that essential 'British' culture and values had been lost due to the presence of foreign communities. When observing the 1970's "Keep Britain White" slogan, similar questions and thoughts came to mind to those that arose when hearing the "Make Britain Great Again" campaign. Below is a brief demonstration of the relationship between the questions and thoughts raised:

Through the photo:

- Since when has Britain been ‘White’?
- What does it mean, culturally speaking, to be a ‘White Britain’?
- It highlights how darker skin-colour is not associated with Britishness.

During the campaign:

- Since when is Britain ‘Great’?
- What does it mean to be ‘Great’? Is this reflected in the skin-tone of the nation?
- Immigrants (of colour or of cultural difference) are not associated with Britishness.

Thus, this comparison between 1972 and today demonstrates how the same type of political rhetoric has been re-moulded decade upon decade, and how the coloured migrant or ‘Other’ is consistently illustrated as incompatible with ‘Britishness’. Although the photo captures the explicitly racist nationalist rhetoric that was actively being expressed in the streets, it re-highlighted not only how this racial tension still exists today, but how it is being communicated specifically through more private spaces, and through other mediums such as the news and social media which are accessed and controlled from the comfort of one’s home.

The second photo (Shelton, 1977) taken a few years later, features a white bald man walking through Jubilee Street in London with his eyes focused on the direct path ahead of him. In the background, there is a black wall tarnished...
with the white slogan of "Smash Racism" which he unnoticingly seem to pass. It was interesting to observe the polarity between the two images and the contrastingly mirrored use of black and white paint. Additionally, it was important to reflect on the way in which the participants in both images interact with equally the camera and their surrounding environment.

The lady in the first photo is actively involved with the racist slogan she confronts; her facial expression can be interpreted as mocking the slogan and she outwardly points to it. She is also looking directly into the camera, and from this we can determine that the viewer is fed a political message. Regardless of the ethnic background of the viewer of the photo, she demands a reaction from the viewer (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996), addressing them to question the graffiti in the place of UK society in the same way that she does. Furthermore, there is a ‘close personal distance’ between both the viewer and the participant, and between the participant and slogan. This helps the viewer to establish a closer connection and awareness with the subject, and also emphasises how the black lady is closely affected by the slogan.

Yet contrastingly in Shelton’s (1977) photo, the participant neither engages with the viewer nor with the anti-racist slogan that is prominent on the wall next to him; instead he un-observingly passes it by on his everyday self-orientated, unaware travels. This represents a wider reflection on race “privilege.” His blind neglect of the slogan re-enforces that he, as a white man, has no strong connection to racism itself, for he cannot be directly affected by it. Both racism and anti-racism efforts then go unnoticed by “privileged” citizens and such citizens do not consciously make an effort to study their surrounding environment. Additionally, the shot is taken from afar, meaning that this ‘far social distance’ that is created does not directly call the viewer for action (Kress and Leeuwen, 1996). In this way, both the first and second images reflect the wider societal reproduction and response to coloured racism, emphasising the role of race privilege and how black communities are consciously and continuously adversely affected. It demonstrates the contrast between both the coloured experience of racism and the fight for anti-racism, which is not just something that the black community can blindly choose to ignore on the street, and the stereotypical white citizen carrying out their daily life without too much disturbance. As the white man in the second image is not consciously involved with anti-racism, it sheds light on the consequential mind-set that could potentially occur: if they do not personally fight for anti-racism, someone else who needs to will.

In short, by studying both photos, it allowed me to more deeply empathize with the black experience in the UK and reflect on the discourse and framing of coloured racism in contemporary society, especially within the context of Brexit. The two photos also shed light on the notions of white purity, privilege and the unheard efforts of anti-racist protests. Overall, the exhibition also highlighted the power of imagery and art as a form of recognition and remembrance of the black struggle and captured how different ethnicities can experience racist and anti-racist graffiti in dissimilar ways depending on their own contexts.

» Setting the Scene, Shifting the Lens: Reflections on my Students’ Reflective Narratives on Race and Racism The Sociological Imagination (2017-11-12 18:27:39)
[...]
Reflective Narrative Essay of Two Photos observed at Stan Firm Inna Inglan’: Black Diaspora in Lon... [...]

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By Ola Dirisu

Tate Britain Millbank, London: Exhibition Title: "Stan Firm Inna Inglan’: Black Diaspora in London, 1960-70s & Goldsmiths, University of London: Exhibition Title: “Vron Ware: 13 Dead and Nothing Said"

Unsure of what to expect or how I would learn something new before going on the field trip to these exhibitions, I started the day feeling apprehensive, as race and ethnicity is something that affects my everyday life. However, after visiting both the Tate Britain and the Goldsmiths College exhibition, my perception changed. The pictures gave a creative look at Black British history, which is something that is often not spoken about, and definitely not taught in schools. It was therefore very interesting to actually see some of the racial history of this country, and not just revisit African American history. It was also important to see and reflect on what I didn’t know about black British history, such as the New Cross Fire, killing 13 black teenagers, but not spoken about in the media, reminding me of how victim sympathy, especially in the media, can be based on racial identity (Christie, 1986).

The exhibition at Goldsmiths in particular left me pondering on many questions, such as; whether or not this would this still have been the case if the victims were of another ‘race’ or background? Would the media still have reported (or not) the incident in the same way? I think it was important to draw on knowledge I already had based on how incidences are depicted in today’s media, it reminded me that although times may have changed, the feelings and institutional powers, still have a powerful effect on perception.

The exhibitions further reminded me that the social construction of race is not about the fact that there are no differences biological or otherwise (Andreasen, 2000: 5653), between different ‘races’, but everything to do with the ability to dominate control and power over other people (Olson, 2005: 118; Barth 1969: 15) which was shown in this photo where the black woman and white man in the are virtually identical looking expect skin colour, sitting with each other. Maybe separation and/or discrimination are not inherent feelings, but rather socialised into us? As if we were not taught to see difference, there would be less hate and exclusion, in 2013-2014 there were over 45,000 racially motivated attacks (IRR Website: 2017).

The saying ‘A picture speaks a thousand words’ was very much so the case when visiting the exhibitions, as many pictures grasped my attention, however, three very striking images really made me think and one in particular changed my outlook.

‘Keep Britain White.’ actually made me quite sad when thinking about it. Often we see, in this day and age, covert forms of racism, where it is not so often easily noticeable, however in the past, it seemed that people were more brazen with their dislike. It initially struck me how sad it is that hate can stem purely from reactions to skin colour and how much energy seemed to go into expressing it. However, what really made me take notice of this picture was that there was somewhat an air of defiance. In this picture she is standing next to the door and taking a photograph with it and although she may really have been terrified about what had actually transpired, the fact that she stays strong and doesn't allow that emotion to show, is somewhat inspiring.

Secondly, in the same Tate Britain exhibition as the previous picture, I was reminded about community. The picture displayed reminds me of Hackney where I grew up visiting family as a younger child. There used to be a square area in the middle of the houses, where everyone outside would often congregate and do many different things together, not because we were related, but because there was a common experience and environment shared amongst all of those that lived there, living in less privileged working class areas.

Similarly, in this picture, there is a feel of community, where they are sitting down together and talking. What were they talking about? The need for a community to discuss life and issues together could be a way that they
got through this time and survived. They could probably relate to each other because they were likely to be in similar wage brackets and situations, and going through similar experiences, living in the same area, just like in Hackney. This shows how poverty, class, race and ethnicity are intertwined, as primarily black working class families dominated Hackney, as is what can be assumed from this picture. Smith (1986: 192) stated that ethnicity was sharing common heritage, traditions and descent and seeing this picture, it made me wonder whether our identity/ethnicity is constructed around our race and/or our shared lived experiences, or actually, whether our shared experiences are only because of race, which has been used to shape and define who we are as people.

Finally, looking at this photograph, the white man is the focus, in and amidst a group of black people, who seem to be joyous and happy, dancing and possibly singing, as well as being quite smartly dressed – almost like at a church or a function. There is a noticeable difference between how they are acting or being perceived and how he is acting. Where they are smiling and happy, he has a straight face and no real emotion. Also, as can be seen, he has a shaved head, which stereotypically at that time, was associated with skinheads and racism (having been adopted by neo-Nazi groups, who, when the picture was taken in 1976 were at the height of their terror) and had very negative connotations. Looking from the outside in at this picture, he looks out of place, which suggests to me, that after this picture was taken, something violent could or might have occurred. Syd Shelton, the photographer, and at the time was taking pictures of the rise of the National Front (a fascist hate-speech organisation) and given the context, and this picture, it would appear that there would have been extreme racial tensions at this time, which is why it is very easy to anticipate violence.

Of everyone in this photograph, it is natural that we would automatically see him as a potential suspect, if anything did actually occur after this. The problem I saw with this, is that it is ‘human nature’ to look at the physical differences between people (Du Bois, 1970: 75) and then question their motives (often pointing them out and cause separation) (Barth 1969: 15). At this event shown in the picture, there is a high chance, that had they been searching people, he would probably have been one of the first to be searched.

Questions such as: Is he there to cause trouble or is he there because he wants to be in support of whatever is happening? Is it simply a case of ‘wrong time, wrong place’? Initially made me stop and think, and I realised that this is the daily reality of many from the black community, who may look ‘out of place’ or look suspicious, singled out and questioned, even though their actions and intentions may not be bad. As there is a hyper vigilance of black people in society (Cohen 2002), when thinking or reflecting on this picture, his demeanour might not actually have been that of violence, but rather out of awkwardness. We assume or create an idea of who we think the person may be and maintain it (Haney-Lopez, 2006:78). This, linked with the racial tensions at the time, his presence at this event and this picture is something that would have sparked controversy and stood out for me. I thought this could also somewhat link with the idea of the criminalisation of minority people. Due to the racial tensions that have been occurring throughout history, black people are stopped and searched five times more than the white counterpart (Data.Police: 2017), and this is mainly to do with how people perceive them. On closer reflection, I found that just as it was easy for me to believe or assume that he might have done, be doing or about to do something wrong, based on prejudicial thoughts and stereotypes (stereotyping the skinhead or the look), can be how black people are viewed by other races, especially those with power such as the police. The same way I believed they would check or search him at the door of the event is quite possibly the same way others may view the need to stop and search ‘out of place’ ethnic minorities.

Overall, as a black Briton, these pictures and this trip resonated with me because this is the history of the UK black diaspora. So often black British history is eradicated and brushed aside in schools so to see it highlighted and focused on, made me quite happy, as it shows a move towards inclusion of excluded groups such as black community.

References


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**Write for @DiscoverSoc (2017-11-12 18:29)**

We welcome contributions that are research-based and meet our guidance for contributors. Potential contributions can be discussed in advance with the editors via a short ‘pitch’ sent to: [1]discoversociety@outlook.com. **Guidance for contributors:** The target audience is the informed, interested general reader, rather than a subject specialist – so avoid writing in the style of journals, and instead write as far as possible in an engaging, accessible way. The first two paragraphs are especially important for capturing the reader, and encouraging them to read on. The first paragraph needs a ‘hook’ that gets the reader’s interest, followed by the ‘angle’ in the second paragraph (approach, preliminary findings, challenge, etc) to show what makes the piece significant and what will be developed in the rest of the article. A brief statement about the study/authority for claims made can come in the second or third paragraphs, with more detail in a paragraph at the end of the article (after the author bio) giving further links to the project or publications. When submitting your piece, use single-spaced 12-point Calibri (without any special formatting) and list any references at the end (don’t use Endnote or other embedded reference systems) if using footnotes, do not embed them with superscript, but use a bracket marker in the text (1), (2), at end of sentence, with the notes at the end of the article. Keep references to a minimum. The preference is to have references with a link (other references / further reading can be put at the end of the article - keep these to a minimum) if putting in links to publications try to link to versions that are outside of paywall protection if you are able to do so. Use hyperlinks where possible for references. Insert them in the text (for example, using CTRL + K) and **bold the hyperlinked part of the text** The word limit is 1500 but we
realise that some research/issues are may be difficult to capture within these limits. We want the majority of pieces to conform so that readers are not daunted by the length of every piece. Most other blog posts are 700-1000 words, so 1500 words is already more than most people are used to reading online. Please provide an illustrative picture (in ‘landscape’ orientation, rather than ‘portrait’) that is copyright enabled, with details of attribution. Note, that google images is not fully reliable, even on advanced search. Use of your own photos is encouraged. You can also usually access free to use images from the following sites: [2]New York Public Library Please provide a brief author bio, together with a hyperlink to your webpage Dissemination – Twitter Each article will be disseminated to the 12K+ followers of Discover Society on a regular basis in the month of the issue your article is published, as well as subsequently. It is also tweeted & retweeted by the Social Policy Association and the British Sociological Association and countless others. We tweet the article’s title and then require a further 5-6 tweets from you which could be catchy quotes or questions from the article. It’s important to have a catchy title for your article of no more than 100 characters (the Tweet limit is 140 characters, including hashtag and space for the inclusion of a partial url in order to indicate the link). Provide your twitter name if you have one or an institutional twitter account (e.g. university department, organisation, etc) for inclusion in the tweets. If you have a twitter account, retweet your own and other DS tweets!

1. mailto:discoversociety@outlook.com
2. http://www.nypl.org/blog/2016/01/05/share-public-domain-collections

Call for speakers: Answering social science questions with social media data (2017-11-13 09:58)

Thursday 8th March 2018, The Wellcome Collection, London, NW1 2BE

After several successful events, we’re pleased to say that the NSMNSS network ([1]http://nsmnss.blogspot.co.uk/) and Social Research Association ([2]www.the-sra.org.uk) are again teaming up to deliver a one-day conference on ‘Answering social science questions with social media data’.

As social media research matures as a discipline, and methodological and ethical concerns are being addressed, focus is increasingly shifting on to the role that it can and should play in the social sciences - what are the questions it can help us to answer?

We are looking for speakers who have completed a piece of social research using social media data to present their findings and discuss how this has made a difference:

• How has it impacted policy, best practice, or understanding?

• How has it answered a question that would have been unfeasible using conventional research methods alone?

This research could be in any substantive area, from health or crime to politics or travel, as long as it is ‘social’ research. It can also include any type of analysis – quantitative or qualitative analysis, big data or small – as long as it involves some form of data collection via a social media platform. We want to encourage a range of different methods and topics to help demonstrate the diversity of the methodology and the role it can play.

Are you interested in presenting?
If you have completed a piece of research using social media research methods, or have any suggestions of who we should contact, then please complete the submissions template and send to nsmnss@natcen.ac.uk by Monday 27th November. Let us know the name and topic of the research study, which social media platform was used, a brief description of methodology, and the findings and impact of this study.

This event is being set up by the SRA and NSMNSS network. We want to keep the event accessible and ticket prices reasonable, but need to cover the costs of the venue hire/refreshments, so we cannot pay presenters – however there will be 1 free place per presentation, and we will be able to cover reasonable ‘within UK’ public transport travel expenses.

The NSMNSS & SRA teams

1. http://nsmnss.blogspot.co.uk/
4. mailto:nsmnss@natcen.ac.uk

CfP 'Data Justice', Cardiff University, 21-22 May 2018 (2017-11-13 14:31)

Date: 21-22 May 2018
Location: Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK
Host: Data Justice Lab, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

Submission deadline: 27 November!

The collection and processing of massive amounts of data has become an increasingly contentious issue. Our financial transactions, communications, movements, relationships, all now generate data that are used to profile and sort groups and individuals. With the platformisation of digital media alongside governmental and corporate uses of citizen data, developments in AI, the Internet of Things, smart homes and smart cities, the systematic collection and analysis of massive data sets across our social life is being normalised and entrenched – what has been described as the ‘datafication’ of society.

With the emergence of this data paradigm comes a new set of power dynamics requiring investigation and critique. Whilst promises of value-neutral information and possibilities for prediction are said to advance better responses to a range of social problems, they may also have serious implications for social and economic inclusion, autonomy, basic freedoms, and established notions of ethics, trust, accountability, governance and citizenship.

What are the implications for social justice? How do we understand social justice in an age of datafication? In what way do initiatives around the globe address questions of data in relation to inequality, discrimination, power and control? What is the role of policy reform, technological design and activism? How do we understand and practice ‘data justice’? How does data justice relate to other justice concerns?
This conference will examine the intricate relationship between datafication and social justice by highlighting
the politics and impacts of data-driven processes and exploring different responses. Hosted by the Data Justice Lab
at Cardiff’s School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (JOMEC), it will bring together international scholars,
practitioners, and activists to engage with data from a social justice perspective. Confirmed speakers include:

Anita Gurumurthy (IT for Change, India)
David Lyon (Queen’s University, Canada)
Evelyn Ruppert (Goldsmiths, UK)
Rob Kitchin (Maynooth University, Ireland)
Sasha Costanza-Chock (Civic Media at MIT, US)
Seeta Peña Gangadharan (London School of Economics, UK)
Solon Barocas (Cornell University, US and FAT/ML)

The conference will combine academic papers with hands-on workshops relating to methods of investigation,
policy and design. We welcome submissions of abstracts for both types of sessions.

Themes of the conference include (but are not limited to):

Social justice and data
Data governance
Data discrimination
Data colonialism
Data sovereignty
Digital labour
Prediction and Preemption
Data scores and dashboards
Data ethics
Data policy and reform
Social justice-informed design
Uses of data by social justice groups
Data activism and advocacy

Submissions:
Submit via EasyChair: [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dj2018 All submissions must include a title, author
name(s), institutional affiliation(s) and full contact information (mailing address, email address). If you propose a
workshop or practical demonstration, please provide a clear statement of purpose and a detailed description of
activities, as well as any infrastructure requirements. Information: Cardiff is a 2-hour train journey west of London
and Heathrow airport. The closest airports are Cardiff and Bristol. 'Data Justice' will take place shortly before the
ICA 2018 conference in Prague, 24-28 May. Flights to Prague take 2 hours from Heathrow. Conference fee: Full fee:
£75 (early bird) / £100 Reduced student fee: £50 (early bird) / £75 Conference organizing committee: Lina Dencik,
Arne Hintz, Joanna Redden (Data Justice Lab, Cardiff University, UK) For information about the Data Justice Lab, see:

1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=dj2018
CfP: Sharing and Storing: Everyday relationships with digital material (2017-11-14 09:20)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Sharing and Storing: Everyday relationships with digital material
Special Issue of New Media & Society

Edited by
Heather A. Horst
The University of Sydney, Australia

Jolynna Sinanan
RMIT University, Australia

Larissa Hjorth
RMIT University, Australia

Abstract Submission Deadline: 15 November 2017
Deadline extended to 25 November 2017
Proposal Selection Notification: 10 December 2017
Initial Article Submission Deadline: 01 March 2018

Contact email: sharingandstoring@gmail.com

Technologies and technological infrastructures are often associated with social and economic change. Airplanes and the shipping containers (Levinson 2008) became mechanisms for the spread of globalisation, reshaping the production processes and the trade and consumption of goods from around the globe. Undersea cables and mobile phone towers are often associated with providing the infrastructure of the digital age, enabling the flow of information, communication, media, technology, commerce and other goods to move at a greater speed than experienced in previous eras. These possibilities continue to expand with the introduction of solid state drives, Bluetooth capabilities, smartphones, ‘the cloud’ and social media platforms that have fundamentally altered the practices of storing, sharing and circulating digital materials. Yet, the increasing capabilities for sharing and storing also have consequences for the ways in which we engage with and/or manage our digital data on a day-to-day basis. Research on digital materials in the home highlight how families and households now grapple with an increasing number of digital photographs, videos and other digital materials that are often stored on a range of outdated or defunct devices, formats and platforms. Memory size in domestic technologies has increased, but so have the number and size of files that host many of the mundane digital materials. These constraints prompt decisions about what digital material should remain, what can be deleted and where certain digital materials should be stored. Such decisions become even more difficult with the increasing infiltration of work into the domestic sphere, syncing and other forms of automation and the increasing number of channels through which digital materials can circulate. For many people the separation of digital materials that move between different domains has become more challenging - and messier - than ever. This special issue examines our everyday relationships with digital materials and the various platforms, devices, spaces and formats through which they are stored and shared. We ask contributors to this special issue to consider: How do people manage the proliferation of digital material in their everyday lives? What strategies and rituals
do they develop to organize, curate or delete digital materials? How are existing cultural practices of sharing and storing in other domains shaping these strategies? What are the broader infrastructures, platforms, programs and devices that are enabling, hindering or changing people’s ability to navigate the ways they store and share digital materials? Papers in this special issue will explore the everyday ways we manage living in a world of digital data and may include the following topics: • Data transfer practices (e.g. moving digital materials from old to new devices) • Manual vs automatic syncing of digital materials • Temporalities of digital materials (e.g. long-term storage vs. transient data storage, changes of storing and sharing practices in relation to life stage) • Routines and practices (e.g. organising, cleaning or curating digital materials) • Non-sharing • Emergent categories of and distinctions between digital materials • Historical comparisons of sharing and storing of non-digital and digital materials • Specific studies of sharing or storing on or across specific platforms (e.g. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Dropbox, iCloud, c-Share, Google Drive, etc.) Please note that the guest editors’ welcome submissions on a wide variety of theoretical and/or empirical contributions to the study of digital material beyond the suggestions identified. Submissions: Proposals should include the author’s name and affiliation, title, an abstract of 250-300 words, and 3 to 5 keywords, and should be sent to the e-mail address no later than 15 November 2017 (Note: Deadline extended to 25 November 2017). Invited paper submissions will be due 1 March 2018 and will be submitted directly to the submission site for /New Media and Society/: [5]https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/nms where they will undergo peer review following the usual procedures of New Media & Society. Approximately 10-12 papers will be sent out for full review. All other papers will be returned to their authors for submission elsewhere. Therefore, the invitation to submit a full article does not guarantee acceptance into the special issue. The special issue will be published in 2019. See also: [6]https://docs.google.com/document/d/1iS-X-7xA411NShBzGmsruuHNcLbF3ieBqfYzzCC7s-I/edit?usp=sharing

1. mailto:sharingandstoring@gmail.com
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Helen Margetts: How social media (and other platforms) can promote equality in 2027 (2017-11-14 20:51)

Thu 16 November 2017, 18:30 - 20:00 GMT
Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge

Professor Helen Margetts, director of the prestigious Oxford Internet Institute, presents her personal, positive vision - and then leads discussion - on how the UK’s social media can be a force for greater equality in the year 2027.

Register online here: [1]https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/helen-margetts-how-social-media-and-other-platforms-can-promote-equality-in-2027-tickets-34398362428

Undisciplining: Conversations at the Edges

The BALTIC, Gateshead, UK; 19-21st June 2018

Call for Participation

In 2018 [1]The Sociological Review will be hosting our largest conference to date! This is a long-overdue cele-
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bration of our renewed commitment to fostering collaborations and dialogues that shape the nature and scope of the sociological, to making the sociological matter. Undisciplining seeks to challenge the presumed mainstream of sociological thought, its geographical assumptions and disciplinary hierarchies. It builds on The Sociological Review's rich history and future ambitions to bring the conversations at the edges into the centre, to unsettle comfortable and convenient understandings of the social world, and to recognise that the potential of sociological thought and understanding exists through debates that extend beyond disciplines and the university.

Confirmed Speakers

Professor Amita Baviskar (Delhi University), Dr Michaela Benson (Goldsmiths, University of London), Professor Ben Carrington (University of Southern California), Dr Ayona Datta (Kings College London), Professor Rosalind Edwards (University of Southampton), Professor Val Gillies (University of Westminster), Dr Nicola Horsley (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), Dr Meritxell Ramirez-i-Ollé (University of Keele), Dr Deana Jovanovic (Keele University), Professor Alice Larkin (Manchester University), Professor Joanna Latimer (University of York), Professor Jenna Loyd (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), Professor Anoop Nayak (Newcastle University), Professor Rachel Pain (Newcastle University), Professor Virgílio Borges Pereira (Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto), Dr João Pedro Luís Queirós (Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto), Dr Ruth Raynor (Newcastle University), Professor Jenny Reardon (University of California, Santa Cruz), Dr Anamik Saha (Goldsmiths University), Professor Bev Skeggs (LSE), Dr Tom Slater (University of Edinburgh), Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones (Newcastle University), Professor Imogen Tyler (Lancaster University), Professor Satnam Virdee (University of Glasgow)

Sociological Walks

Professor Maggie O’Neill (University of York), Dr Stephen Crossley (Northumbria University), Professor Roger Burrows (Newcastle University), Professor Stephen Graham (Newcastle University).

Our keynotes will be given by
The conference will include our Annual Lecture 2018:

Professor Satnam Virdee (University of Glasgow)
Unthinking Sociology and Overcoming its History Deficit

We are working hard to develop a lively programme of events. Rather than a classic conference format, we want to encourage different ways of participating, of communicating ideas and research, and providing space for critical and engaged dialogue.

You can also listen to our Managing Editor, Michaela Benson, introducing our forthcoming conference and explaining the motivations behind the conference here.

If you would like to take part, read on!

Take part

We invite submissions from social scientists at all stages in their academic careers, as well as from sociologically-inclined publics. We encourage submissions across a range of formats including film, workshops, performances, and posters. And if you have an idea that does not seem to fit to any of these formats, get in touch (events@thesociologicalreview.com) to discuss it with a member of the organising committee. Please note that we will only be considering applications submitted through the designated online form. **Deadline: 27th November, 2017 at 17.00 GMT**

1. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=5de787a696&e=05e52db521
2. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=0d9d42a07b&e=05e52db521
3. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=25f238bb2d&e=05e52db521
4. https://thesociologicalreview.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=13f3ba09fc9454bf79b17ad38&id=24d1d5adb3&e=05e52db521
CFP: 8th Annual What is...? Conference (2017-11-19 16:05)

WHAT IS UNIVERSE? COMMUNICATION • COMPLEXITY • COHERENCE
April 19-21, 2018 * University of Oregon in Portland, USA

The _WHAT IS UNIVERSE?_ [1] (2018) conference-experience examines communication, complexity/simplicity, coherence/incoherence and, how they may or may not contribute to "a pluralistic universe." This conference marks the third collaboration among scholars from the natural and social sciences, communication, media, law, design, and art. We invite proposals for scholarly papers, panels, exhibits and installations on a wide variety of issues and topics. Please see [1]{WHATIS.UOREGON.EDU for more details [2].

Participants will explore universes–from reality bubbles, immersive virtual environments, and alternate histories, to agential realism, media genealogy and archaeology, to bio-inspired, urban and ecological design, to universal rights, disabilities studies, multicultural communities, networks, and cosmologies.

PROPOSALS MAY ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS (AS WELL AS OTHERS):

What are communication, science, media, design, and philosophy universes today, and how are they syncretizing? How can universities and disciplines be understood as universes?

How are citizens increasingly being drawn into alternate, fictional, cinematic, and comic book universes, social networks, immersive worlds, and augmented realities?

In an age of increasing communicative complexities and oversimplifications, what is truth and what is reality? How do real/virtual and analogue/digital universes overlap/separate?

How is journalism overcoming vernaculars of real/fake news in a "post-truth" era, while still actively seeking solutions?

What constitute material universes in antiquity and contemporary culture?

How do technological and cosmological universes transform theory-practice?

In this context, what is posthumanism and how are speculative futures already integrating into (re)generative medicine, music, law, and other...
disciplines?

How are emerging systems, environments, architectures, the sciences and the arts converging/diverging into societies and universes? What are universes of values?

With the definitions of "universe" continuing to multiply, important questions abound as we address a sweeping range of issues next April in Portland, Oregon.

CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS:
Janet Wasko and Jeremy Swartz (University of Oregon)

Send 100-150 word abstracts or installations by DECEMBER 31, 2017 to:
Janet Wasko * [2]jwasko@uoregon.edu

School of Journalism and Communication * University of Oregon * Eugene, OR 97403-1275

1. http://whatis.uoregon.edu/
2. mailto:jwasko@uoregon.edu

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The 10th conference DIAGRAMS will take place in Edinburgh on 18-22 June 2018.
It will include presentations of refereed Papers, Abstracts, and Posters, alongside tutorials, workshop sessions, and a graduate symposium.
It provides a united forum for all areas concerned with the study of diagrams.

We invite submissions for peer review that focus on any issue pertaining to diagrams.
In particular, we welcome papers on the visualization of information, internet and social media.

Submissions can be:
- Long Papers (16 pages max.)
- Short Papers (8 pages max.)
- Posters (4 pages, min. and max.)
- Abstracts (3 pages max.)
Long Papers and Short Papers categories should report on original research contributions.
Abstracts category should report on significant research contributions, which may have been published elsewhere (such submissions must clearly cite prior work) or are intended to be published elsewhere.
Poster submission category should be used for work-in-progress.

How to Submit*
For all categories, the new deadlines are:
- Pre-submission of a title and a short descriptive abstract (200 words) due by 30th November 2017.
- Submission of full versions due by 7th December 2017


1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=diagrams2018

Book launch with Dr Sadia Habib and Dr Julia Hope (2017-11-22 23:17)

![Image of book covers](image)

You are invited to join us for the launch of our new books: "Learning and Teaching British Values" by Dr Sadia Habib and "Children's Literature about Refugees" by Dr Julia Hope.

Two Goldsmiths alumni are holding a joint book launch:

"Learning and Teaching British Values: Policies and Perspectives on British Identities" by Sadia Habib
This book engages with important debates about multicultural British identities at a time when schools are expected to promote Fundamental British Values. It provides valuable insight into the need to investigate fluid and evolving identities in the classroom. What are the implications of Britishness exploration on young people’s relationships with and within multicultural Britain? What are the complexities of teaching and learning Britishness?

"Children’s Literature about Refugees: A catalyst in the classroom" by Julia Hope

In this book, Julia Hope explores ways of engaging in class with children’s books about refugees. Using Beverley Naidoo’s novel 'The Other Side of Truth' along with a book aimed at younger children - Mary Hoffman’s 'The Colour of Home' - Hope offers concrete case studies on how children’s literature about refugees can be used productively in the classroom.

Date: Thursday 30 Nov 2017, 4:30pm - 6:30pm
Venue: Rooms 109 & 110, Ground Floor, Margaret McMillan Building, Goldsmiths, University of London


Four lessons offered by Ann Oakley in her [1]Father and Daughter: Patriarchy, Gender and Social Science. This is a wonderful, thought-provoking and deeply human series of essays on the unfolding of her life in relationship to her father Richard Titmuss, the social science he advocated and web of

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relations which connected them all:

The first is the lesson about how lateral thinking is much more productive than stubborn disciplinary allegiances. It matters not at all (or only in an ‘academic’ sense) whether what we’re doing counts as social policy or social administration or sociology, whether it belongs in the field of education or health or welfare or in the more amorphous land of public policy. The questions override territorial enclosures. Richard Titmuss specialised in seeing that. Secondly, I understood that what I would later encounter as ‘the crisis in epistemology’ of Western culture – the suspension of belief in any kind of stable objective reality – is simply a trick of the mind invented by theorists who’ve got nothing better to do. Reality does exist, and so does the real stress and pain that derive from a completely non-random (unfair) distribution of life-chances. Thirdly, I learnt that one way to make a difference is to argue on the basis of evidence rather than opinion about the need for change (which is not to say that evidence plus opinion, in the kind of clever networking Richard Titmuss and his disciples were so good at on ‘their Holborn stage’, 73 isn’t the most effective option of all). Lastly, you don’t need to hold all this in your head so long as you know where to find it. Back in the 1950s we really did have door-to-door salesmen who tried to offload copies of the 32-volume Encyclopaedia Britannica on us. I was a sucker for their sales technique, but my financially prudent social accounting father was not. He told me to get on a bus and go to the library. Richard Titmuss would have loved the democratic epistemology of the internet (although his wife would probably have needed to operate the computer for him).

1. [https://policypress.co.uk/father-and-daughter](https://policypress.co.uk/father-and-daughter)

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8.11 December

**CfP: Accelerated Academy (2017-12-10 18:05)**

Accelerated Academy #4  
*Academic Timescapes: Perspectives, Reflections, Responsibilities*

May 24-25, Villa Lanna, Prague, Czech Academy of Sciences

After meetings in Prague, Warwick and Leiden, the fourth Accelerated Academy conference calls for a more nuanced perspective in order to advance our understanding of academic temporalities as experienced, understood, controlled, managed, imagined and contested across different institutional contexts. The question of temporality – the human perception and social organization of time – in and of the academy has been attracting considerable attention across the social sciences in recent decades. Notable accounts have demonstrated that time is an important research object potentially offering new insights into the complex and shifting nature of the contemporary academy and its future. Existing studies tend to stress how pressures intrinsic to the imperatives of the knowledge economy and academic/epistemic capitalism co-shape policies and subsequently impact how time is perceived and experienced on the level of individuals and institutions, leading to concerns over their temporal relation to wider society. Taking the cue from the long tradition of sociology of time the conference aims to tackle various pressing
question in the emerging field of the social studies of academic time. The conference will address the following themes but the organizers welcome other cognate problematics:

- Theorizations and different disciplinary takes on temporality in academia
- (Possible) methods of inquiring into academic temporalities
- Temporal design(s), temporal policies
- Temporal justice vs/and temporal autonomy
- The promises and limits of ‘the slow’ in academia
- Temporalities in/of teaching; temporalities in/of research – tensions, complementarities, (in)compatibilities
- Temporal interfaces with wider society and its implications for science communication
- Temporality of science communication via social media
- Digitalization, temporal intersections and emerging temporalities in academia
- Temporality, metrics, evaluations

Please submit short abstract (250 words) and bio to vostal@flu.cas.cz by 28 February 2018. We intend to generate an edited volume from the conference so please indicate whether you’d be interested in contributing to the volume.

Organized by Centre for Science, Technology, and Society Studies, Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences & University of Minho, Research Centre on Communication Studies (CECS)

Funded by Czech Science Foundation, Czech Academy of Sciences (Strategie AV21) & Portuguese Science Foundation, CECS, University of Minho.

Call for blog posts: the value of graphic social science (2017-12-10 20:29)

The Graphic Social Science Network blog is calling for contributions. Each month, we would like to open the floor to discuss issues relating to producing social science research in comics form.

Comics offer scholars a unique opportunity to communicate their research in two distinct but interwoven levels — words and pictures. While anyone who is already enamoured with comics can readily see the genius of graphic scholarship (of course!), the value of producing research in a traditionally derided medium may not be so obvious to everyone else.
In the inaugural Graphic Social Science blog debate, we would like to know how you would make a case for the value of graphic social science to your colleagues, students and publishers. We would like to hear both sides of the argument. Blog posts, podcasts, vlogs, and of course webcomics are welcome.

The deadline is **January 31st 2018**. Please send your submissions to Can Yalcinkaya (can.yalcinkaya@mq.edu.au) and Mark Carrigan (mark@markcarrigan.net).

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**CfP New Research Network: 'Alternatives to Capitalism' (2017-12-18 14:47)**

Dear colleagues,

Attached you find the call for papers for the annual conference of our newly established research network on 'Alternatives to Capitalism', which is part of the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics (SASE) and will run for five years (2018-2022).

Next year it will be held on June 23rd-25th at the University of Dashisa, Kyoto (Japan).

Alternatives to Capitalism Research Network I: [1]https://sase.org/about/networks/ Deadline for Abstract Submissions and Sessions Proposals (max 500 words): January 8, 2018 Please note that several Early Career scholar awards are available to cover the costs of traveling, accommodation, and fees. For information on how to apply, please visit the website at [2]https://sase.org/events/conference-submission-and-award-guidelines/ You are very welcome to contact the research network chairs to discuss paper and panel submissions or any questions you may have: Dr. Lara Monticelli ([3]mailto:lara.monticelli@sns.it); Dr. Torsten Geelan ([4]mailto:tkg22@cam.ac.uk); Prof. Katherine Chen ([5]mailto:kchen@ccny.cuny.edu). Feel free to circulate the CfP to your networks and to potentially interested researchers. We look forward to receiving your abstracts and session proposals! With our best wishes for 2018, The research network chairs, Lara, Torsten & Katherine – Dr Torsten Geelan Affiliated Researcher, Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge [6]https://research.sociology.cam.ac.uk/profile/dr-torsten-geelan

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1. https://sase.org/about/networks/
3. mailto:lara.monticelli@sns.it
4. mailto:tkg22@cam.ac.uk
5. mailto:kchen@ccny.cuny.edu
6. https://research.sociology.cam.ac.uk/profile/dr-torsten-geelan
In a recent [1] article for the *British Journal of Sociology* I offered a critical, and for the most part sympathetic, engagement with Actor Network Theory (ANT) in which I focused particularly on Bruno Latour’s provocative critique of sociology. The thrust of Latour’s argument is that what he calls ‘the sociology of the social’ fallaciously ascribes agency to a non-existent entity called ‘society’ or to a non-existent substance: ‘the social’. But society, Latour convincingly argues in his occasionally insightful and occasionally irritating polemics, does not exist, and neither does ‘the social’ (Latour 2005). Sociologists, therefore, should abandon their antiquated conceptual vocabulary (society, power, classes, capitalism etc) and focus instead on researching complex, hybrid networks of humans, concepts, objects, machines and molluscs.

I won’t go into much further detail, but my argument in that article is that whilst Latour identifies a real weakness in much sociological theory, the analytical payoffs promised by Latourian metaphysics can best be found in a sociological realism rooted in the philosophy of critical realism.

One impressively lucid alternative has been offered by Dave Elder-Vass, who has himself engaged critically with Actor Network Theory (Elder-Vass 2008) and who kindly offered some feedback on a draft of my article. Elder-Vass rejects the reification of society and ‘the social’ for similar reasons to Latour, but argues nevertheless that the intellectual resources of sociology can be effectively utilised if we attribute *causal powers* not to society as such, but to a myriad of social institutions he calls norm circles (Elder-Vass 2010, 115-143). This, he argues, allows us to speak of a social structure above and beyond the beliefs and actions of individuals; something which sociologist have always done, but without sufficient precision or clarity.

In Elder-Vass’s theory, norm circles are understood as overlapping social collectives that encourage, endorse and enforce particular practices. In doing so, these ‘circles’ are more than the sum of their parts and give rise to a tendency for particular outcomes via each member’s understanding of their own normative environment. There are said to be different types of norm circles that relate to different types of norms, and understood within norm circle theory any identifiable social groups will likely be associated with numerous overlapping norm circles (described in terms of ‘clustered’ circles). There are, for example, epistemological and epistemic circles. Epistemological circles are collectives that validate beliefs as *knowledge* by upholding and enforcing particular epistemological standards, whilst epistemic circles are groups which uphold and enforce particular knowledge claims (Elder-Vass 2012).
What I think is particularly useful in the idea of norm circles – and the thing that makes it distinct from many other contemporary sociological models – is that it is fundamentally concerned with people and practices, rather than ideas or discourses. In this respect, a potentially interesting point of comparison is Bourdieu's concept of the social field, which is another significant attempt to conceive of an objective social structure above and beyond individual human agents – and one which is similarly more concerned with practices than ideas and discourses. In An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology, Bourdieu who was certainly gifted, but not with concision, defined a social field as a network, or a configuration, of objective relation between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (Bourdieu 1993, 97)

Social fields, Bourdieu goes on to say, are a 'structured social space, a field of forces, a force field' (Ibid). Part of the difficulty here is that the concept of 'field' is tied up with Bourdieu's other sociological concepts. But in more conventional terms we can understand social fields as 'relatively autonomous social microcosms' that emerge historically and are characterised by unique forms of competitive and strategic relations between the agents and institutions that populate them. Bourdieu's fields are hierarchically structured, and their agents possess differential resources with which they pursue distinct strategies in 'struggle[s] for the transformation or preservation of the field' (Bourdieu 1998, 40). As Thomson emphasises (2008, 72), the concept of a social field, like all of Bourdieu's concepts, should be seen as 'an epistemological and methodological heuristic' to be put to use in empirical research. Doing so, according to Bourdieu, should involve (1) establishing where a field stands in relation to what he calls the 'field of power' (meaning the field of the ruling class, the elite, or the dominant classes in society) (Wacquant 1993); (2) mapping out the relations between the positions within the field occupied by agents and institutions; and (3) examining the internalised dispositions (habitus) of its agents. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 104-5) Bourdieu himself used the concept to research education, culture, academia, housing, television journalism and the state.

How might a Bourdieusian social fields relate to norm circles? Are they compatible epistemological and methodological heuristics? In broad terms, I think they are. Were we to overlay a social field with norm circles, I think we might consider it as comprising of overlapping 'circles' that together produce and reproduce its particular dynamics. In a given field there will likely be a set of norms that undergird the terms of competition within it (described by Bourdieu in terms of a field's illusio and doxa), as well as norm circles associated with particular locations within the field and the distinct norms that predominate there.

In the academic field, for example, there are more or less universal norms relating to certain pedagogical and scholastic practices (relating for example to lecturing, plagiarism and peer review) as well as distinct norms associated with particular disciplines and competing subfields, each with their own epistemologies, political commitments (tacit or explicit) and scholastic practices. In the case of sociology, for example, we could point to Burawoy's influential typology of professional, policy, critical and public approaches (Burawoy 2005), or Williams, Sloan and Brookfield's (2017) more recent description of analytical and critical approaches in UK sociology. In Bourdieu's somewhat
idiosyncratic schema, the sorts of strategies and dispositions associated with these different sociological practices would be regarded as forms of the position taking, *illusio* and *doxa* that characterise social fields, but they can at the same time be understood as practices undergirded by clusters of overlapping norm circles – clusters which together give rise to the social field’s relational dynamics and emergent properties.

**Tom Mills** is Lecturer in Sociology at Aston University. He is the author of ‘The BBC: The Myth of a Public Service’ (Verso, 2016) and the co-editor of ‘What is Islamophobia?’ (Pluto, 2017). His monograph, ‘The Politics of Terrorism Expertise’, co-authored with David Miller, will be published in 2018.

The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature
, Columbia University Press.

On Television

An invitation to reflexive sociology
, University of Chicago press.


The causal power of social structures: Emergence, structure and agency
, Cambridge University Press.

The reality of social construction
, Cambridge University Press.

Elder

Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory

British Journal of Sociology Advance online publication, DOI: 10.1111/1468-4446.12306.

Pierre Bourdieu: key concepts

Theory, Culture & Society 10 (3): 19-44.


CfP: Articulating Voice (2018-01-03 11:56)
The Philosophy, Theory and Critique (PTC) Division of the International Communication Association

Event date: 24 May 2018, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Prague, Czech Republic
Deadline for proposals: 10 January 2018 (300-500 words abstract)
Location: Main Conference Hotel
Organizers: Christian Pentzold (University of Bremen), Kenzie Burchell (University of Toronto), Olivier Driessens 5310
"Media matter most when they seem not to matter at all." (Wendy Chun) But how can we understand the practices through which innovations in media and digital data move from being unexpected, novel, and impactful to the negotiated, embedded, and habitual?

The pre-conference takes issue with the mundane yet pervasive nature of media habits, rituals, and customs. It assesses the purchase of practice-based approaches in order to see under what conditions and with what consequences they enter studies in communication and media. In particular, we invite participants to consider the expressive and performative dimension of what people actually do and say in relation to media and to the wider communication ecologies in which these articulations take place. We are especially interested in contributions that examine how voices are expressed, represented, or muted and that study the ways practices of voice combine, overlap, or collide with other mediated activities in contemporary societies. With this, we strive for an explanation and critical appreciation of media practices whose accomplishment is a perennial exercise in which we find ourselves immersed.

We welcome theoretical and/or empirical contributions on questions including:

How can we theorize and study the interplay between media-related practices and technologies, discourses, or institutions? How are these constellations created, maintained, and transformed? How do praxeological approaches correspond to other inquiries into speech acts, media rituals, or media habits?
What resources and skills are mobilized in order to perform voices? What is the meaning of the work that goes into activities of voicing? How do they contribute to or undermine the constitution of public spheres, privacy, and civic life in past and contemporary societies?
How do we grasp media practices empirically, and how do we analyze them across modes of expression, across cultures, different times, and ages? How can we challenge and advance the kinds of translation and transformation happening in-between the situated enactment of media practices and the descriptions and stories of scholarly accounts?
How can we understand the ways through which media practices are accomplished in social fields? How are they deployed in struggles for gaining voice and visibility as in political communication and journalism, participation and mobilization, health communication, or science communication? How have media practices changed over time and in relation to innovations in digitization and datafication?

Responses to the contributions will be given by Elisenda Ardèvol (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya); Maria Bakardjieva (University of Calgary), S. Elizabeth Bird (University of Southern Florida); Nick Couldry (London School of Economics and Political Science).

Please email a 300-500 words proposal to Christian Pentzold (christian.pentzold[at][1]uni-bremen.de) by January 10, 2018.

Authors will be notified of their acceptance before January 31, 2018.

Please direct any questions to: Alice Mattoni (alice.mattoni[at][2]sns.it) or Christian Pentzold (christian.pentzold[at][3]uni-bremen.de).

How do we imagine our collective future? A series of public events in the UK (2018-01-03 13:17)
Looks fascinating. Presumably, though a tad presumptuous (albeit implicitly) to suggest that there is still a unitary 'Britain' in 2027, rather than a rump UK whilst progressive radicals in Scotland have come to their senses and taken democratic control of their own future, and Ireland is at last undivided. ;-)

What an uplifting response it undoubtedly true though

Answering social science questions with social media data (2018-01-22 10:37)

What role can social media research play in the social sciences? What are the questions it can help us to answer? Speakers from a range of backgrounds will talk about their experiences of using social media in their research, providing real examples of use to those interested in seeing how the promises of social media research can be actualised.

Press the 'Register' button for more information and to book your place.

After last year’s successful 'Introduction to tools for social media research', the SRA and #NSMNSS are teaming up again to deliver a one-day conference on 'Answering social science questions with social media data'.

As social media research matures as a discipline, and methodological and ethical concerns are being addressed, focus is increasingly shifting on to the role that it can and should play in the social sciences.

The packed event will include keynote presentations from Steven McDermott and Suzy Moat, and examples from eight expert speakers of how social media research can provide insight into research questions in novel ways. It is aimed at social researchers who want to find out more about what this new methodology can offer, and see how the promises of social media research can be actualised.

Our speakers come from a range of backgrounds, including government and academia, presenting examples on topics such as politics and health, with data from Twitter, Facebook, blog sites and other platforms. What role can social media research play in the social sciences? What are the questions it can help us to answer? Speakers from a range of backgrounds will talk about their experiences of using social media in their research, providing real examples of use to those interested in seeing how the promises of social media research can be actualised.


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1. http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=626

The Sage Research Methods Open House, with @einterview (2018-01-24 15:24)

Visit SRM during the Virtual Open House to discover research articles, chapters and books, cases and videos about qualitative, quantitative & mixed methods.

Log in
http://methods.sagepub.com
Username: SRMbundle
Password: winter2018

Visit Mentorspace to learn about SRM community features and instructional uses for SAGE resources.

• Scaffold Assignments with SAGE Research Methods Readings
• Read & View: Videos by Methods Experts
• Use Reading Lists to Build Research Community
• Chart Your Research Path with Methods Maps
• Put the Pieces Together with SAGE Research Cases
• Discover New Ways to Disseminate Your Research
• Organize Your Research Project with the Planner

Stuart B Hill (2018-01-26 04:42:04)
Some General Guidelines for Deep (vs. Shallow) Research – Prof Stuart B Hill - 2003 1. Don’t postpone (I repeat: DON’T POSTPONE!): live and conduct your research fully in the present (learn from the past and, with others, vision and work to bring
about improved futures). 2. First clarify (and continue to clarify) your passion(s) (along with your values and worldviews) to be able to: a) access your full potential; b) to be most contextually relevant; and c) be at your best for imagining, creating, planning and deciding (including choosing methodologies), and acting, i.e., methodologies must serve your passion and ‘higher’ values, and not vice versa (in everything be clear and take charge of ‘what’s in the service of what’). 3. Resist the distractions of: a) deceptive simplicity; b) ease (especially of securing funding, uncritical acceptance, retaining positional power, a job etc.); c) being stuck in describing, measuring, monitoring, accommodating and seeking only curative ‘solutions’ to problems; d) only efficiency and substitution strategies for problem solving (focus on design and redesign, i.e., ‘focus on ‘front-end’ [healthy system creation and maintenance: problem-proofing systems] over ‘back-end’ approaches to problems/issues); e) over-emphasis on short-term, direct, high-powered, purchased, expert-dependent, single-discipline, imposed, technology-intensive, ‘solutions’ to problems. 4. Seek understandings that are consistent with your highest values (e.g., re equity, respect of, and collaboration across, difference/diversity, mutualism and autonomy, meaning and service, sustainability and psychosocial co-evolution and developmental and ‘progressive’ change), and that are emergent from embodied experiences, relational, enabling and life-affirming. 5. Act from, and only work with (and therefore only validate, collaborate with and support), your and others’ ‘soulful person/essence/core being’ – and not your or their ‘adapted, patterned, distressed, fearful, unaware, disempowered, needy, ego-driven, disembodied, acting-out, withdrawn (etc.) selves’. In this connection, reflect on ways to act anonymously (helped by collaborating, over long timeframes, on projects that emphasise indirect and contextual approaches to change), and do it (i.e., don’t postpone)! 6. Be open to wild ideas, paradox, lateral thinking, contributions from the margins and borderlands, divergent and neglected areas, ‘other’ and unfamiliar disciplines, ways of knowing and languages, synchronicity, synergy and mutualism, obscure dreams, imaginings and interpretations; and risk working at your and others’ edges (where we are all most alive; and the locus of most meaningful innovations). 7. Include considerations of the personal (particularly the psychological), the socio-cultural (particularly institutional structures and processes), the ecological (and all of nature, from subatomic to cosmic expressions) and the ‘spiritual’ (the vast mysterious unknown – and resist letting your fears of this area result in imprisoning it in ‘domesticating’ structures and processes (as is common in most religions). 8. Map (and continue to re-map) and reflect on your processes, your learning and development (especially your evolving missions and agendas), ‘progress’, relationships, ‘gifts’ given and received (especially in relation to our psychosocial evolution as a species, to peace and social justice, to personal, community and ecosystem health/wellbeing and sustainability). 9. Develop and use your own personally- and contextually-relevant early ‘integrator indicators’, of the appropriateness of states, structures, processes, and ‘progressive’ and regressive/degenerative change. 10. Learn your way into the future by alternating between knowing/acting and unknowing/learning – don’t dwell for too long in either. January, 2003 (revised April, 2005) Emeritus Professor Stuart B. Hill, Foundation Chair of Social Ecology, School of Education Western Sydney University (Kingswood Campus), Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751, AUSTRALIA Location: Building K1, Room K-2-19A, WSU-Kingswood Campus, Penrith, NSW Tel: 61(0)2-4736-0799; Fax: -0400: Email: s.hill@westernsydney.edu.au; Web: www.stuartbhill.com

[1]Buy game accounts cheap

1. https://cyberia.plati.market/

CfP: Marketization and the digital economy (2018-01-24 15:26)

Submissions are now open for SASE’s 30th annual conference, [1]Global Reordering: Prospects for Equality, Democracy and Justice, hosted by [2]Doshisha University from 23-25 June 2018. This is for a special section on digitalisation:

Global reordering in the economy is occurring at many levels – between geographical regions, within geographical regions, between economic sectors, between different players in the same sector, and between market and non-market models of economic provisioning. The digital economy is at the forefront of these processes of reordering.
For this miniconference we invite papers on all aspects of the socio-economic changes related to marketization and the contemporary digital economy, in all regions and sectors. Topics may include, for example:

**Collaborative forms of digital economy**

Digital technology has created new spaces for non-market and non-profit forms of economy, whether we call them collaborative, sharing, gift, or collective economies – from Wikipedia to Couchsurfing, from the open source software communities to Freecycle. How are these faring in their continuing competition with market forms? How do they combine or collide with more commercial forms? Are they able to deliver more equal and democratic forms of work and consumption?

**Marketization processes**

On the other hand, many practices previously considered as recreational or domestic are increasingly becoming marketized. Web platforms such as Airbnb.com, Craigslist.org, Etsy.com or Vizeat.com, encourage ordinary people to commodify their personal possessions as well as their common domestic or leisure practices. Human bodies and personal data are becoming commodified. Ordinary people are encouraged to turn themselves into entrepreneurs, changing forms of work-life articulation and generating altered social recognition. What are the causes and effects of these extensions of the market? How do market and domestic orders of worth combine? What are the consequences for the regulation of professions and the new challengers?

**The platform economy**

Platform sites like Amazon and Alibaba are well established, but the platform model is now breaking into vast new areas, most notoriously through taxi services like Uber and Didi. How do these new intermediaries benefit or harm competitors, states, workers and consumers? How can, and how should, they be regulated? Can those harmed by them find new ways to organize in response? Do the participants in the platform economy bring new values or moral economies to the markets that they impact? How do algorithm-based orderings, filterings and decisions fit with online platforms and their participants?

**Digital market processes**

The new economic sociology was largely defined by its account of embeddedness. Are digital commodity transactions and business models embedded in the social in different ways? How have the means of qualifying and valuing commodities changed, and who do these changes favour? Does digitalization favour specific forms of industrial organization? How does the massive collection of data on consumers affect the balance of power in and across markets and what risks does this generate? To what extent does digital automation (through algorithms, “artificial intelligence”) redistribute agencies and the balance of power within markets? What are the prospects for a digital transformation of the monetary form of commodity transactions?

**Systemic consequences**

What is the overall effect of these changes on macrosocial variables such as inequality, governance capacities,
systemic risk, environmental change, and political engagement with economic issues? Does digital technology offer a prospect of greater economic and financial inclusion or is it systematically stacked against the poorest and most marginalized?

Deadline extended to January 29th. Submit online here:

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Answering social science questions with social media data, March 8th in London (2018-01-30 19:10)

After last year’s successful 'Introduction to tools for social media research', the SRA and [1] #NSMNSS network are teaming up again on 8 March to deliver a one-day conference in London on 'Answering social science questions with social media data'.

What role can social media research play in the social sciences? What are the questions it can help us to answer? Speakers from a range of backgrounds will talk about their experiences of using social media in their research, providing real examples of use to those interested in seeing how the promises of social media research can be actualised.

The packed event will include keynote presentations from Steven McDermott, Qualitative Analysis and Social Media Lead with HMRC and Suzy Moat, Associate Professor of Behavioural Science at Warwick Business School, and examples from eight expert speakers of how social media research can provide insight into research questions in novel ways. It is aimed at social researchers who want to find out more about what this new methodology can offer, and see how the promises of social media research can be actualised.

Our speakers come from a range of backgrounds, including government and academia, presenting examples on topics such as politics and health, with data from Twitter, Facebook, blog sites and other platforms.

To book and for the full programme, please see the [2] SRA website

Date & time: Thursday 8 March 2018, 9.40am to 5pm
Venue: Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London, NW1 2BE

Price: £115 (£95 for SRA members) includes lunch and refreshments

Delegate places: 100
9.2 February

Understanding the political economy of digital technology (2018-02-10 16:27)

A BSA Digital Sociology Study Group event hosted by the Web Science conference at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam May 27th 2018

In more optimistic times we thought of ourselves as masters of digital technology: we told ourselves it was empowering, liberating, and democratising. Today, there is growing concern that we have ceded control of digital technology to digital capitalism's rapacious market monopolisers whose former insiders, in their epiphanies, tell us have '[1]ripped apart the fabric of society'. All corporate algorithms are [2]black-boxed – [3]protected by intellectual property law. Concepts that describe them such as AI and machine learning are problematically slippery and esoteric. So we are told algorithms that we can't see or understand are to blame for digital capitalism's social and political effects. This is a particular concern for sociologists because those who suffer material and social inequality are increasingly having their life chances defined by these algorithms (see for example [4]Eubanks (2018)). Perhaps the tech companies aren’t "anymore equipped to self-regulate any more than the fossil fuel industry" ([5]Umoja Noble, 2018): it would seem the best we can hope for is to judge them by their results, attempt to legislate, or petition technology’s plutocrats to stop ‘doing evil’.

All these issues, however, share an overarching theme: technologies are made and deployed within a political economy that incentivises, allows, enables or rewards actions that draw us away from visions of digital technology – particularly the Web – as a transporter for the Enlightenment’s values. Driven by the logic of extracting the maximum amount of the surplus value from our social and economic transactions and our (often very personal) data, these companies have ruthlessly and relentlessly pursued economies of scale to leverage their platform’s network effects: whatever the social cost. Interpreted through the political economy, problems with fake news, the attention economy, surveillance, the power of Silicon Valley etc. all demonstrate that politics, economics and digital technology are now indivisible. Addressing the political economy of digital technology more explicitly will help explain who are the ‘we’ in this instance, how have ‘we’ lost control and what do ‘we’ have to do to get it back?

This event will showcase some of the scholarship that is currently tackling these issues under the banner of Digital Sociology. As this event forms part of the 10th ACM Conference on Web Science speakers and delegates will have the opportunity to share insights with a broad community from a diverse range of academic and professional backgrounds. We also invite contributions from members of all disciplinary fields that provide insights into the relationship between digital technology and the political economy. How does the political economy affect your area of expertise? What needs to change and how can it be changed?

This is only a brief list of suggestions: we welcome contributions on any topic that addresses the day’s theme.

- Fake news, propaganda and public (dis)information
The digital public sphere: reconsidering democracy
Digital surveillance, high volume data and governance
Changing and emerging industries
Digital labour
Digital inequalities
Digital wellbeing
Education

Provisional schedule for the day:

Besides the traditional papers presentations, the event organisers will experiment with other formats, such as the fishbowl, that will allow speakers to engage their audiences in more active ways.

- 9.30 – 10.30 panel with crowdsourced questions from the Digital Sociology & Web Science communities (panellists TBC)
- 10.30 - 13.00 paper session 1
- 13.00 - 14.30 lunch (including networking events)
- 14.30 - 16.00 paper session 2
- 16.30 – 18.00 fish bowl – a moderated interactive session where attendees can have the floor to discuss the burning issues (including what a bigger Digital Sociology event should look like and how it could be organised).

To present your paper please submit an extended abstract (up to 750 words) to our easychair page [6]here by midnight GMT on Friday the 2nd of March 2018. This should include an indication of the substantive issues and how they relate to the day's central theme. Decisions on abstract submissions will be communicated by midnight GMT on the 23rd of March 2018.

Successful submissions will be put forward for journal special issue (details to follow shortly).

A breakdown for the registration fees for the day (and the full conference, which includes keynotes from Prof. José van Dijck, and Sir Tim Berners-Lee) can be found [7]here.

5. https://logicmag.io/03-engine-failure/
6. https://easychair.org/my/conference.cgi?a=13958663;welcome=1;conf=upedt18
‘Social Listening’ Workshop: building qualitative skills in social media research (2018-02-15 09:53)

10am – 4pm, Saturday 24 February 2018

Palmer 101, Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading

‘Social Listening’ Workshop

Following the interdisciplinary showcase conference ‘“Social Listening’ in the past, present and future’ in November 2017, we are pleased to announce a British Academy funded follow-up workshop. Taking place at the University of Reading on 24 February 2018, this one-day event is targeted at postgraduates and early-career researchers designing or developing qualitative research projects in this new and exciting field.

Led by [1] Carl Miller from DEMOS and [2] Jai Seamen from SAGE Publishing, this skills-based workshop will provide a practical guide to: designing novel social-media-based research projects; collecting and classifying social media data; qualitative tools used to analyse and extract meaning from big data. Showcasing a innovative internal tool developed in collaboration between DEMOS and SAGE to optimise qualitative research methods, this workshop aims to bring to academia cutting-edge developments in this ground-breaking area in current and future scholarship.

Registration instructions:

The deadline for registration is [Monday 19 February]. Attendance to the workshop is free, and refreshments and lunch are included. We are also offering travel bursaries to postgraduate students, but these are limited and will be offered on a first-come, first served basis.

To register, email Dr Dina Rezk ( [d.rezk@reading.ac.uk] ).

Further information

More about the project can be found on our University of Reading [4] webpages, and on our pages on the University of Reading’s Department of History [5] blog.

Follow us on Twitter [6] @SocListening.
Catch up with videos from November’s ‘Social Listening’ conference, including the keynote by Carl Miller, over on the Department of History’s [7] YouTube channel.

1. https://www.demos.co.uk/people/carl-miller/
3. mailto:d.rezk@reading.ac.uk
7. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXGljoOk7Ow&list=PLKg9O9_qb92I+5hiEAcFgikUrQjvKE9vD

science student (2018-04-26 05:24:07)
im glad to read

greater delhi (2018-04-26 05:25:07)
thank you so much


6th Annual CPERI Workshop, 29-30 July 2018
Institute for Social Futures, Lancaster University, UK

We cordially invite submissions to the 6th workshop on the Changing Political Economy of Research & Innovation (CPERI), following previous events at Lancaster (2012), Toronto (2013), San Diego (2015), Liège (2016) and Boston (2017). CPERI is a unique global forum for the exploration of scholarship regarding the political economy of research & innovation (R &I), and hence at the intersection of STS, political economy and multiple other cognate disciplines, including geography, sociology, politics, law, education, medicine, engineering, computing & philosophy. The workshop series is dedicated to cultivating a growing community of committed and engaged international scholars of the political economy of R &I who will continue to build on their CPERI connections at subsequent workshops and conferences, and through collaboration on research. We aim to bring this crucial but neglected issue more centrally to major conferences in adjacent fields, where it remains overlooked. With these goals in mind, and to assist attendance from as diverse a group as possible, the workshop is also being held directly after the EASST Conference 2018, also in Lancaster. Attendance is free.

Our theme for 2018 is:

Making & Doing Technoscientific Futures Better

Keynote speakers:
Professor Susan Robertson (Cambridge) on “the University in an age of platform capitalism”
Dr Mark Carrigan (Cambridge) on “Securing public knowledge amidst the epistemic chaos of platform capitalism?”

Abstracts should be no more than 300 words, and should include the author’s name, institutional affiliation, and contact information. Questions and abstracts should be sent via email to CPERIWorkshop2018@gmail.com by 30 March.

Organizers:
After last year’s successful 'Introduction to tools for social media research', the SRA and #NSMNSS are teaming up again to deliver this one-day conference.

As social media research matures as a discipline, and methodological and ethical concerns are being addressed, focus is increasingly shifting on to the role that it can and should play in the social sciences.

The packed event will include keynote presentations from Steven McDermott and Suzy Moat, and examples from eight expert speakers of how social media research can provide insight into research questions in novel ways. It is aimed at social researchers who want to find out more about what this new methodology can offer, and see how the promises of social media research can be actualised.

Our speakers come from a range of backgrounds, including government and academia, presenting examples on topics such as politics and health, with data from Twitter, Facebook, blog sites and other platforms.

Register online here: [1]http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=626
CfP: Using Creative & Visual Methods in Comparative Research (2018-02-20 07:54)

A one-day seminar funded by the International Journal for Social Research Methodology

Friday, 15th June, University of Surrey

CALL FOR PAPERS

Keynote speakers: Agata Lisiak (Bard College, Berlin) and Rita Chawla-Duggan (University of Bath)

Increasing use is made of both creative and visual methods in social research. Nevertheless, to date there has been very little discussion of the extent to which such methods can be used in comparative research. This seminar will explore some of the challenges of using these methods cross-nationally, examining the different cultural associations that may be brought to bear in different national contexts, and how these are accounted for in research design, data collection and analysis. It will also draw on the experiences of researchers working in this area, to explore how such challenges can most effectively be addressed. We welcome papers that address any aspect of using creative and/or visual methods in comparative research, or across spaces of difference more broadly defined (e.g. with groups from different ethnic or social class backgrounds).

Abstract Submission: Please send abstracts of up to 250 words by 14th April 2018 to Rachel Brooks at the University of Surrey: [1]r.brooks@surrey.ac.uk. (There will be no charge for attending the seminar as all costs are kindly being covered by the International Journal for Social Research Methodology.)

Seminar Organisers: The seminar is organised by the Eurostudents research team at the University of Surrey (Rachel Brooks, Jessie Abrahams, Predrag Lazetic and Anu Lainio). Further details about the Eurostudents project can be found at: [2]www.eurostudents.net.
Digital Cultures: Knowledge / Culture / Technology (2018-02-21 13:23)

International Conference / Leuphana University of Lüneburg

19–22 September 2018, Lüneburg, Germany

co-hosted by the Centre for Digital Cultures (CDC), Leuphana University of Lüneburg, and the Institute for Culture and Society (ICS), Western Sydney University, as part of the [1]Knowledge/Culture Series

(initiated by Armin Beverungen (CDC / University of Siegen) and Ned Rossiter (ICS))

Call for Papers
The advent and ubiquity of digital media technologies precipitate a profound transformation of the spheres of knowledge and circuits of culture. Simultaneously, the background operation of digital systems in routines of daily life increasingly obscures the materiality and meaning of technologically induced change. Computational architectures of algorithmic governance prevail across a vast and differentiated range of institutional settings and organizational practices. Car assembly plants, warehousing, shipping ports, sensor cities, agriculture, government agencies, university campuses. These are just some of the infrastructural sites overseen by software operations designed to extract value, coordinate practices and manage populations in real-time. While Silicon Valley ideology prevails over the design and production of the artefacts, practices and institutions that mark digital cultures, the architectures and infrastructures of its operations are continually rebuilt, hacked, broken and maintained within a proliferation of sites across the globe.

To analytically grasp the emerging transformations requires media and cultural studies to inquire into the epochal changes taking place with the proliferation of digital media technologies. While in many ways the digital turn has long been in process, its cultural features and effects are far from even or comprehensively known. Research needs to attend to the infrastructural and environmental registrations of the digital. Critical historiographies attend to the world-making capacities of digital cultures, situating the massive diversity of practices within specific technical systems, geocultural dynamics and geopolitical forces. At the same time the contemporaneity of digital cultures invites new methods that draw on digital media technologies as tools, and, more importantly, that engage the intersection between media technologies, cultural practices and institutional settings. New organizational forms in digital economies, new forms of association and sociality, and new subjectivizations generated from changing human-machine configurations are among the primary manifestations of the digital that challenge disciplinary capacities in terms of method. The empirics of the digital, in other words, signals a transversality at the level of disciplinarity, methods and knowledge production.

This conference brings together research concerned with studying digital cultures and the ways that digital media technologies transform contemporary culture, society and economy. The hosts specifically encourage approaches to digital cultures emerging from media and cultural theory, along with transnational currents of communications, science and technology studies. We also explicitly invite researchers from digital humanities, digital anthropology, digital sociology, gender studies, postcolonial studies, urban studies, architecture, organization studies, environmental studies, geography and computer science to engage in this endeavor to develop a critical humanities and cultural studies alert to the operations, materialities and politics of digital cultures.
Further information on themes, speakers, submissions and the preceding summer school on historiographies of digital cultures can be found at [2]digitalculturesconference.org.


CfP - Digital Economy: Ubercapitalism or Post-Capitalism? Conference, London, 11 May 2018
(2018-02-21 13:26)

The Digital Economy: Ubercapitalism or Post-Capitalism?
King’s College London, 11 May 2018

This international conference aims at exploring the digital economy, understood as the new forms of production, work, consumption, distribution, and finance ushered in by the diffusion of digital technology. From the way we work, to the way we consume and pay for products and services, to the rise of new platforms for consumption and collaboration, the economic field is being revolutionised by digital media. Yet, the jury is still out on whether these changes point to an even more exploitative or rather towards an alternative and fairer economic model.

The conference will explore these processes of transformation of the economy and their relationship with culture and society focusing on a number of specific phenomena that have been the object of intense debate in recent years and questioning the suitability of future trends and innovations: automation and its positive and negative repercussions on working conditions; crypto-currencies and whether they are freeing us from state control or reproducing neoliberal dynamics; universal basic income as a possible new form of welfare befitting the transformation of the economy in a digital era; the rise of digital giants such as Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon and the consequences of their oligopolistic position in the market; the new models of value formation connected to data mining and analytics; and many more.

We invite participants from various disciplines and streams of research including media studies, sociology, economics, consumer research, management, information and computer science. Together, we will address a set of recurring questions. How, for example, is digital technology restructuring the economy? Are crypto-currencies really alternative to established financial regimes or are they rather at the very forefront of new forms of financial speculation? How do managerial practices evolve with the aid of digital resources? How do transformations in the mobile environment correlate to changes in the field of logistics? What are the features of the new forms of precarisation/casualisation of work that are described as “gig economy”? How does digital technology serve to enforce new forms of surveillance and measurement in the workplace? Can technological advancement promote alternative economic models as implied by references to terms such as “big data socialism” or “luxury communism”? Can digital media serve the construction of new forms of workers’ representation and trade-unionism?
The conference will comprise two plenary sessions and 4 breakout panels, and will host internationally acclaimed scholars as keynote speakers.

The conference will take place on Friday, 11 May 2018
Abstract of 250 words are due by 7 March 2018.
Submission lin: [1]https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf= digitalcapitalism201 Abstracts should be 250 words maximum, and include the author(s) name and position, and a short title. Acceptance notices will be given on 20 March 2018

1. https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=digitalcapitalism201

9.3 March

FUTURESEX 2018: University of Surrey, 27th-28th June (2018-03-20 13:49)

We seek to interrogate the shifting norms of sex, gender and sexuality, while questioning how research methodologies can properly attend to these shifts. The conference's focus straddles historical, contemporary and future imaginations, and thus encourages interdisciplinary contributions. The conference will be an inclusive and welcoming event for those interested in sex, gender and sexuality. We welcome submissions from early career academics, students and academic-activists as well as those established in academic careers.

We are delighted to welcome 2 exciting keynote speakers: [1]Dr Kate Lister (Leeds Trinity University) and [2]Prof Katherine Johnson (Brighton University).

We invite proposals relating to any aspect of sex, gender and/or sexuality in the past/present and/or future, topics may include but are not limited to:

- Intersectionalities of sex, gender and sexuality
- Sex in art, history and literature
- Integrating and interrogating sex in psychology and the social sciences
- The politics of voice and silence in sexual stories
- The sexed and gendered past: real and imagined
- The sexual futures of humans and machines
- The (re)production of stereotypes
- Sexual communities beyond LGBT
- Past and future of queer theories
- Work, sex and diversity
- Archiving and preserving sexualities
- New approaches and methodologies
- Sex, gender and sexuality activism

Presentations will take the format of either:
- 15 minute presentation
- 5 minute lightning talks

Please submit abstracts of no more than 250 words [3]here by the 23rd March.
The event will include networking and development opportunities for PGRs and ECRs.

Cost: £60. This includes lunch and refreshments on both days. A very limited number of small travel bursaries and free spaces are available for unwaged/unaffiliated individuals. Please contact us for more information

Any queries, please email [4]futuresex2018@gmail.com

2. https://www.brighton.ac.uk/staff/katherine-johnson.aspx
3. https://surreyfahs.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0DJDkCo1JXn09nL
4. mailto:futuresex2018@gmail.com

Crowd Sourcing the Advertising of the Accelerated Academy (2018-03-22 11:05)

I’m currently trying to collate a wide selection of examples of university advertising in the UK at the [1]Accelerated Academy Instagram feed. Would you like to take part? Just ping me an e-mail with a photo of advertising for UK universities (mark AT markcarrigan.net) and I’ll post it on the feed with details of your contribution.
Bourdieusian Field Analysis Training: Theoretical Basis and Empirical Applications (2018-03-26 16:10)

7th and 8th June 2018, Aston University, Birmingham, UK.

Bourdieusian field analysis continues to make a key contribution to both the theory and methodology of cultural sociology. The approach not only utilizes a relational sociological analysis of complex cultural patterns of cultural participation, it also enables researchers to develop national and cross-national analyses of power dynamics among different actors and institutions. Bourdieu defines fields as ‘structured spaces of positions’ and ‘the network of objective relations between positions’. Field analysis offers an alternative to ‘variable based’ approaches to social life and helps researchers to illustrate the links between actors’ volume and composition of capital and their interests, strategies and beliefs.

This course offers an introduction to Bourdieusian Field Analysis. Different from ‘hypothesis testing’ and regression modelling, field analysis uses multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), a geometric analysis to inspect and visualize the main cleavages, coalitions and clusters within the sample. This method allows researchers to observe horizontal and hierarchical patterns of oppositions within a field and to analyze topics such as culture and consumption, political and economic power, the academic field or dynamics of internationalization. The first day of the course will give you a general introduction to fields and multiple correspondence analysis, the second is dedicated to the practical application of the method to your own data (or data that will be made available to you) with the statistical software R.

This course is useful for:

- PhD students, post-doctoral researchers and academic staff in the social sciences,
- Those interested in learning about the methods used by Pierre Bourdieu for the analysis of cultural fields and social relations
- Those interested in elite networks, power in the political, economic or academic domain and dynamics of internationalization in these fields
- Market researchers, other commercial researchers, and public sector professionals wishing to learn MCA as a means of clustering complex data sets, and presenting attractive and intuitive visualisations.

Course Schedule

**Day 1: Introduction to Field Analysis and MCA**

The first day of the course will provide you with a theoretical and historical introduction of field analyses, illustrated by a series of examples from cultural sociology, sociology of professions, sociology of elites and the field of power. In the second part of the day, we will focus on multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) as a method, by showing its heuristic principles, its functionalities and requirements (in comparison with other statistical techniques such as
regression modelling) with exercises dedicated to practical application of the method.

**Day 2:** The second day of the course is dedicated to a more practical application of the method. The goal is to show you, on the basis of a simple data-set (or based on your own data), how MCA works and how it can be used practically in the framework of the R package soc.ca. All important steps of an MCA will be demonstrated and the main analytical decisions will be discussed.

**Location:**
Centre for Critical Inquiry into Society and Culture (CCISC), Aston University, Birmingham-UK.

**Teaching faculty:**
Dr. Felix.Bühlmann (University of Lausanne)

For further information please send an email to both emails:

Dr. Ebru Soytemel (CCISC-Sociology and Policy, Aston University- Birmingham)
e.soytemel@aston.ac.uk
John Pollard (Research Administrator, CCISC- Aston University- Birmingham)
j.pollard2@aston.ac.uk

**Course Fees:**
The course will run for two days. Participants can attend only Day 1 or alternatively Day 1 and Day 2.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided on both day.

1 day course
2 day course

Student
£100
£150
Academic
£125
£250

Industry/other
£175
£350

To register for this event, please visit this [1]link.


After eight years, we are closing down the blog (2018-03-26 16:12)

We're going to be taking our blog offline within the next couple of months. We'll be compiling an eBook of highlights over the eight years we were active but please take this opportunity to save anything more ephemeral which you would like to keep from the site.

Oh no!

Why Mark?

Shivi (2018-04-02 17:31:39)
Why oh why???????
9.4 April

Platform Capitalism Reading Group at the University of Cambridge (2018-04-04 11:28)

In recent discussions of capitalist transformation, the notion of the ‘platform’ has come to play a prominent role.
role in conceptualising our present circumstances and imagining our potential futures. There are many criticisms which can be raised of the platform metaphor, however we believe it provides a useful hook through which to make sense of how social, economic, political, cultural and technological factors are collectively contributing to systemic transformation.

This intensive five week reading group explores platform capitalism, the growing focus on the platform and its implications for sociological and educational research. Each session will be an informal discussion of two papers, chapters, essays or talks:

- **May 9th, 4pm to 6pm** [3] *Engineering the Public: Big Data, Surveillance and Computational Politics* by Zeynep Tufekci [4] *The Anxieties of Big Data* by Kate Crawford
- **May 16th, 4pm to 6pm** [5] *Social Media Platforms and Education* by José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell [6] *Evaluative infrastructures: Accounting for Platform Organization* by Martin Kornberger, Dane Pflueger and Jan Mouritsens
- **May 23rd, 4pm to 6pm** [7] *Two Narratives of Platform Capitalism* by Frank Pasquale [8] *The Radicalization of Utopian Dreams* by danah boyd
- **May 30th, 4pm to 6pm** [9] *The Politics of Platforms* by Tarleton Gillespie [10] *Democracy is dead: long live democracy!* by Helen Margetts

The meetings will take place from 4pm to 6pm in DMB 2S5 in [11] The Donald McIntyre Building in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. This is a fifteen minutes walk from Cambridge train station and we welcome all attendees. We would appreciate if you could e-mail your intention to attend to mac228@cam.ac.uk so we can update you with further details.

1. https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=3yrJDQAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ1W5_OQZLA
8. https://points.datasociety.net/the-radicalization-of-utopian-dreams-e1b785a0cb5d
10. https://www.opendemocracy.net/helen-margetts/democracy-is-dead-long-live-democracy
11. http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/about/reachus/
about in WW Chinese or Vietnamese Prisoner camps - but in this case using the digital platform to disrupt services while in real life complement those with coercion & crime-terror junks. A very basic delegitimizing already. Second, is their rank criminal status as a state that is privatized by its various crime-terror groups that actually double up as it's political parties but without exception. With the digital platform already so severely compromised, one doubts their existence as purely service platforms or capacity to do so. While India is a medieval third world state that barely is away from the medieval peasantry in self-awareness or capacities - this fear only magnifies itself. Given its much touted self-status riding hard military power linked to its purchases of military hardware - it is a dangerous situation.

9.5 May

Undisciplining: Conversations from the Edges (2018-05-30 11:16)

The Sociological Review are organising a conference unlike any other next month in Gateshead, UK. There will be sociological walks, a film festival, art work, participatory workshops, a diverse array of plenary sessions and much more. It will be preceded by an ECR day organised by the journal’s early career editorial board. Thanks to the support of the foundation, the conference only costs £100 (standard) and £50 (concessionary).

Only a week left to get your tickets: [5]register here and don’t miss out!

1. https://undisciplining.org/sociological-walks/
Critique and Agency in the Accelerated Academy, June 8th @CPGJC

June 8th, 12pm to 2pm, [1]DMB 2S4
Faculty of Education, Hills Road, Cambridge

In the fifth event in the [2]Accelerated Academy series, the Cultural Politics and Global Justice cluster at the University of Cambridge’s Faculty of Education hosts an afternoon seminar on critique and agency in the accelerated academy. How is temporality changing within the academy? What does this mean for our capacity to individually and collectively shape our working lives? Is there still space for critique within an academy where time pressure has become the norm?

- **Time present and academic futures** - [3]Jana Bacevic (Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge)

Each speaker will talk for around 20 minutes, with time for questions. We will then open out for a broader discussion of the themes raised during the talks. For information about the Accelerated Academy project, see the [6]website or [7]special section of the LSE Impact Blog.
